

The Mo-Hud

Knockoff



NEWSLETTER OF THE MOHAWK-HUDSON REGION SPORTS CAR CLUB OF AMERICA (Mo-Hud)

January 2017

The REport

Happy New Year! Not much of a report this month. The competition season is over. Points have been tallied and awards presented. Thank you once again to Eric Smith for all his work in organizing our annual meeting and awards banquet. The one piece of business that we did conduct at the annual meeting was the confirmation of officers for 2017.

The officers for 2017 are:

Regional executive- Jim Bucci
Assistant regional executive- Eric Smith
Secretary- Ron Bass
Treasurer- Vince DePaul
Director at large- Dick Stewart
Director at large- Bruce Kosakoski
Activities chairperson- Jack Hanifan

For the good of the sport,

-Jim Bucci-
Regional Executive

Calendar

- **January 4:** Wednesday, 7:30pm. MoHud Membership Meeting. Orchard Tavern, 68 North Manning Boulevard, Albany.
Our next membership meeting will be held in the back room at [The Orchard Tavern](#), in Albany on Wednesday, January 4th. While the formal meeting starts at 7:30pm, we start gathering around 6pm to share some food and drink with our fellow members.
Contact: Jim Bucci hdjimbu@gmail.com

SOLO Report: the 2016 Season

- Russ Burckhard -

I hope everyone enjoyed the holidays and received those special car parts under the Christmas tree. Before you know it the new season will be upon us and we will be back at the lot trying to improve from what we did in 2016.

During the year we had two *Test and Tunes*, six *Points Events*, and helped with two *Street Survival* events at SPAC. Our average attendance increased 7 this year from last year to an average of 58 participants at each event. We had about 136 different people all together. This is up 24 from last year. This year we had 18 drivers that made all of the events. This is 1 more than last year and 2 more than the year before. We had another thirteen that only missed one event. This is the same as last year. At the other end 65 only made it to one event. This is 11 more than last year, but 9 of these were novices at the final event. A few of the added novices at the last event can be contributed to a bachelor party that was held, in part, at our event.

I would like to thank our McCarty Avenue site owner, the New York State Office of General Services (OGS). We had all six of our *Points Events* there plus both of our *Test and Tunes*. Just after our last event, the lot was repaved. That will make the off-season a lot longer, as we cannot wait to go back and try out the new surfaces.

There are a lot of people I need to thank; Our Safety Stewards are Bruce Kosakoski, Aashish Vemulapalli, Tom Moeller, Phil Redington, Scot Carpenter, and Tracey Burckhard. Miguel Tiexeira took care of registration with help from Skylar Weisenburger. Course design was great this year; Jon Kirschman started strong and improved at each event. Eric Smith and Tom Moeller continue to do a great job with scoring and timing at the events. Eric handled the scoring part of it, doing a great job getting results up quickly. Carmine Russo did a great job again as Chief of Tech. Lyndon Peck kept the events staffed as the Worker Chief. Also, thanks to everyone else that has helped out with the events. I would like to thank my fellow Solo Advisory Committee members Andy Furlong, Aashish Venamapali, Skyler Weisenburger, Bruce Kosakoski, Tom Moeller, Eric Smith, Lyndon Peck, Tom Moeller, Arne Beebe, and Phil Shoemaker for planning the season and deciding who gets what awards. A special thanks to all of the competitor/workers at every event. We couldn't do it without you.

We also need to thank the Board of Directors and all of our members. At the end of last season the club purchased a bus to carry the Solo equipment. That turned out to be a great investment. It was *so nice* getting equipment in and out of the bus; and the interior was also big enough to set timing up inside when the weather got a little cooler, enabling the crew to keep warm. We were fortunate to not have any wet events, but if we do, we can go into the bus.

On a personal note, I must thank my car owner, my wife, Tracey. It continues to be a pleasure to co-drive with her. As she continues to improve, it pushes me to drive better to stay ahead. Both of us will have to watch out though. Johnathon will be turning 16 next season and he has already showed his driving skills by beating our times a few times this year in his go kart.

The classes: This year the Novice class continued to be popular with about 50 entrants. This is more than twice as many as we had last year. The Street (formerly Stock) class shrunk a little this year as we dropped to 25 different competitors this year. The Street Touring class grew by about 10 competitors this year. Street Prepared, Prepared/Modified, and Pro class stayed about the same. This year CAM, Classic American Muscle, was added. It only had 2 competitors this year, but I can see its popularity will grow in the future.

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2016 SOLO Awards

Street

1 st Place, from CS	Tom Taft
2 nd Place, from GS	Jose Martinez
3 rd Place, from HS	Brent Howard
4 th Place, from BS	Jon Kirschman

Novice

1 st Place, from NFS	Christopher Keenan
2 nd Place, from NHS	Ethan Howard
3 rd Place, from NSTX	Jeremy Corriveau

Street Prepared

1 st Place, from CSP	Adam Wright
2 nd Place, from ASP	Joe Cassidy
3 rd place, from CSP	Diane Malecki

Pro

1 st Place, from XSTS	Jon Staude
2 nd Place, from XEP	Andrew Furlong
3 rd Place, from XBS	Phillip Redington
4 th Place, from XHS	Carmine Russo

Street Touring/Modified

1 st Place, from STU	Adam Torrey
2 nd Place, from SMF	Scot Carpenter
3 rd Place, from STX	Tracey Burckhard
4 th Place, from STX	Marc Thompson

Cam

1 st Place, from CAMS	Charles Dickinson
2 nd Place, from CAMS	Stephan Law

Prepared/Modified

1 st Place, from FM	Ian Morse
2 nd Place, from FM	Saul Morse

Kart

1 st Place, from JA	Johnathon Burckhard
2 nd Place, from KM	Moises Samaniego
3 rd Place, from KM	Lou Pirro

Driver of the Year

This year's Driver of the Year had a year to be proud of. He had finished the top of his class in five out of six events. The first event he was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second out of first otherwise he would have swept the season in his class. I can't tell you how much he improved from last year because this is the first year he has competed. While his Pax finishes were not at the top of the list, they were respectable. They were 33rd, 13th, 9th, 11th, 8th, and 11th for an average finish of 14th.

The 2016 Driver of the Year is Adam Torrey.

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2016 SOLO Awards – cont'd

Novice of the year

This year's Novice classes is one of the biggest that we had. We had 3 drivers combine to win all six events. Benjamin Wolfe won the only event he attended. Andrew Nicolella won his first event came in second for his next and then he disappeared. Christopher Keenan struggled a little at his first two events and then won the next four. Making him the class champion. Ethan Howard was second in the Novice class and had a solid year. He had a second, 3 thirds, a sixth and an eighth. This year's winner averaged 31st out of 131 on the Pax list overall beating out many seasoned veterans. In addition to his on track abilities, he also recruited new people to try our sport and even offered up his car to some of his friends so that they could try. Finishing his year as the Novice Champion, *the 2016 Novice Driver of the Year is Christopher Keenan.*

Most Improved Driver

The winner for this year's Most Improved Driver didn't have finishes that were too bad in class last year. With a win, a second place, a third, a fourth and a seventh place finish in his rookie year, he finished third in class. This year he had a first place, a second place, a third place, a fourth place, and a fifth place finish in class in a much tougher class. The Pax list is where we judge and shows that he had a pretty good improvement from last year. Last year he had an average Pax of 27th. This year he did much better. His Pax finishes were 9th, 10th, 5th, 4th, and 6th for an average of 7th. Last year he was a novice, this year he closed out the championship by finishing second in the Street class. *The 2016 Most Improved Driver is Jose Martinez.*

Female Driver of the Year

This year we had a total of 6 women that competed but only 2 ran enough to qualify for yearend trophies: Tracey Burckhard and Diane Malecki. The one had her first full season this year after starting competing at her first event last year, while the other has been pretty much running full schedules since 2011. While both of these women have been improving since they started competing, one of them ran consistently at the top of both class finishes and Pax finishes. Her class finishes were third, fourth, fifth, and 3 more thirds. Her Pax finishes were 22nd, 28th, 27th, 26th, 24th, and 22nd for an average of 24th. This year's *Female driver of the year is Tracey Burckhard.*

Worker of the Year

As always I wish I could give out many of these awards and not to just one person. Many people help out throughout the year and I would like to take a moment to thank everyone that has helped with the Solo program this year. This year's winner has stepped up and has done a great job. He shows up early ready to work his assignment and whatever else is asked of him and stays to help out at the end of the day to load up the bus. *The 2016 Worker of the year is Jon Kirschman*

Thank you all for a great season and I look forward to seeing you all in the coming season.

- Russ -

January 2017 Competition Report & 2016 Awards

The Road to Indy-

The qualifying for the 2017 Runoffs at Indianapolis have been finalized and it is very simple.

You qualify if you make a start in a race in three Majors Weekends.

You qualify if you make a start in two Majors Weekends and start in two Regional Races with different sanction numbers.

Note that all Divisional Races are also Regional races.

You can qualify by the Divisional Route: Run a minimum of four Divisional Weekends and finish in the top 3 in your class. In SM, SRF & SRF3 you only have to be in the top 5.

Club Racing Awards – The following awards were presented at the Annual Meeting.

NeDiv Champions- *Greg Pecora T3, Jared Lendrum T4, Jonathan Eriksen P1*

NYSRRC Champions- *BK Karl SM2, Greg Pecora T3, Jim Bucci T4, Dave Ferguson SR3, Jack Hanifan FP*

MoHud Regional Points Champion- There were a lot of high finishers, but **Evan Karl** took 1st by a wide margin. The *John Stim* counted for double points and he won one race with 26 entries to accumulate 92 points in one race.

NARRC Champion- *Evan Karl SM2*

2016 Driver of the Year- two winners :

Charlie Campbell- NE Majors Champion in FP, at the Runoffs he had the early pole and started 5th. He finished 3rd in a shortened race.

Jared Lendrum- NE Divisional Champion in T4, at the Runoffs he started 5th and ran 5th from start to finish.

- Jack Hanifan -

Winter isn't the off Season!

Hone your skills while everyone else is sitting at home

Our friends in the Adirondack Motor Enthusiast Club have reminded us that from January through March they sponsor ice-racing on area lakes while we are inside preparing our cars for warm weather events. AMEC races are scheduled on Algonquin, Tupper, Ballston, Warners and Lake George this coming Winter, subject to ice actually forming!

Depending on what you have in the garage, there is a class for you, with a basic split between studded and non-studded cars. There are a total of 9 classes, ranging from 2wd Street Legal to the Super Modified Open cars that look much the same as modifieds you see on local dirt tracks – but with studs. The street classes run under no-contact rules, so the emphasis is on fun racing.

Each event features practice and three 20-minute races for an entry fee of \$60 (plus AMEC membership). During event lunch breaks, \$20 buys you 20 minutes of trying out your street-legal car on the ice. Put on snow tires, bring your 2000 Snell-rated helmet, wear warm clothes, and stash a mug of hot java.

Go to <http://icerace.com> for the 2017 schedule, rules, and background info. If you have questions for street legal classes, contact Michael Waterhouse (518-810-8831 or wtarehmp@hotmail.com); for modified studded and screw classes, contact Dave Burnham (518-875-6956 or racing48@nyhcapp.rr.com).

Ice-racing - it's what we've always done around here



The MoHud region is ideal for ice-racing, lying in a latitude where lake and river ice forms thick enough to support vehicles, while not having the early and repeated snow that creates a rough surface.

Ice-racing came to the Hudson around 1790, in the form of ice boats modeled on those raced in Holland, an offshoot of the regions' Dutch heritage. Today, restored antique racers are joined by modern DNs and Skeeters.

While there was some automobile racing on Adirondack lakes in the 1930s, interest took off after WWII. The Adirondack Motor Enthusiast Club traces its roots back 61 years, the same time frame that witnessed the forming of our Mohawk-Hudson Region, SCCA.

Membership Report

- Jim Garry -

As of December 15th Mohawk Hudson Region's roster reached 574 members. This is an increase of forty (40) members since this time one month ago. Wow! A big pick up of new folks and now we're threatening the 600 member mark. In my memory we have never had this many members in our region. How did this happen?

All but two of our new members came to us via the *Tire Rack Street Survival School* (TRSSS) we conducted in November. If you aren't familiar with the school refer to the November *KnockOff* or go to <http://streetsurvival.org> and check it out. It's my belief that after this one day of instruction, these very young drivers zoom to at least the 80th percentile of drivers in the United States in terms of ability to avoid accidents and understand how their vehicle can be efficiently and safely driven. This is just a guess of course, but a reasonable one I believe.

But getting back to all these new members, it's important to note that along with this good news is some not so good news: back in October of this year, our region *lost* 42 members. Most if not all of those good people were also TRSSS students and family, fresh off our October 2015 school.

Clearly, despite reaching out to the class of 2015, most chose to allow their membership to lapse. Did the club not appeal to them? Were they too busy to take part in any of our various activities? Just not their cup of tea?

It's likely that they signed up for the school to learn to become better drivers and simply weren't interested in Rally, Solo, Club Racing, Race Working, and the rest. It's not a bad thing. The students, the instructors, the club, and society in general all benefited by having better drivers on our public roads. And our club and instructors take great personal satisfaction in being part of this.

But if we could keep just ten percent of those students on our club's roster there would be great long term benefit for all. But how can we accomplish this? Earlier this year we offered TRSSS participants a discounted entry to a MoHud Solo event. A few took advantage of this. I don't have records at this time to indicate if any of those members remained with the club but will endeavor to find out.

But what else can we do to entice people to stay with our club? If you have an idea, contact our Regional Executive or anyone on our Board of Directors. Their names and contact numbers are listed in the Contacts section of this publication. Please take a few moments to think about this and perhaps come up with an idea that we can try out.

Significant Anniversaries

Ten Years: Steven Dweck

Five Years: Tyler Ruhle

Congratulations, and we wish you many more SCCA anniversaries.

New members >>>

New Members: November and December 2016

Spencer Adams, Cortlandt Manor
Jim Buckley, Gloversville
Andrea Carroll, Ballston Spa
John Carroll, Ballston Spa
Ramona Carroll, Ballston Spa
Jared Coletta, Ballston Lake
Marie Creighton, Slingerlands
Matthew Creighton, Slingerlands
Aliyah de Jesus, Niskayuna
Jon de Jesus, Niskayuna
Alexis Dean, Schenectady
Joseph Dean, Schenectady
Colby DeMarco, Mechanicville
Joe DeMarco, Mechanicville
Maya DeMarco, Mechanicville
Troy Dinkel, Ballston Spa
Dirk Felton, Esperance
Eleanor Felton, Esperance
Anne Ferrand, Waterford
Madalyn Hammes, Waterford
Brian Harple, Albany
Richard Harple, Albany

Stefan Heinz, Lake Grove
Tyler Heinz, Lake Grove
Ingrid Heinz Adams, Cortlandt Manor
Emily Knapp, Darien CT
Geoffrey Knapp, Darien CT
James Leonard, Albany
Jennifer Loiselle, Cohoes
Isaac Neustadt, Rhinebeck
Mark Neustadt, Rhinebeck
Kristy Pangburn, Schenectady
Anthony Paone, Malta
Joseph Paone, Ballston Spa
Nicholas Paone, Ballston Spa
Weslee Pennington, Schuylerville
Shannon Peterson, Glenville
Wayne Peterson, Glenville
Lukas Riggi, Corinth
Andrea Simmons, Queensbury
Luke Simmons, Queensbury
Jerry Woods, Clifton Park
Samantha Woods, Clifton Park
Kieran Wurl, Saratoga Springs
Kristine Wurl, Saratoga Springs

Welcome everyone! Mohawk Hudson Region hopes you will find one or more of our programs to be fun and interesting to you during 2017!



The Claus Family annual the-toys-are-done party?

No. It's one of many photos from the MoHud annual awards banquet held December 6th.

Look for a gallery of award winners in the February KO!

Mo-Hud Officers and Contacts

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Secretary

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Rally Chair

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For more information about the Mohawk-Hudson Region SCCA, and membership in the Sports Car Club of America, go to < <http://www.mohud-scca.org> >

Membership meetings of the Mohawk-Hudson Region SCCA are held on the 1st Wednesday of the month, excepting July and August, 7:30pm, at the Orchard Tavern, 68 North Manning Boulevard, Albany.



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The KnockOff Journal

This Month...

- Jim Garry's Trip to the Solo Nationals



"It's not the despair I mind. It's the hope." – John Cleese, Clockwise, 1986

Having missed the previous two National Championships, I was really looking forward to getting back onto the national championship courses in 2016. They are so big, so challenging and so unique. Plus the event has over a thousand entrants, lots of cool cars, and friends (some cool) who I get to see only at Nationals.

Heading into August, autocrossing the B Mod Cheetah had been a lot of fun despite some annoying small mechanical problems. The car was handling great and improving with continuing tweaks. I was learning to drive it better with each event, and I had a lot of seat time under my belt.



Co-driver Mike McMullen at a Test & Tune Early in the Season

Then the paddle shifter kit happened. With help from Tom Hansen, first the electronics were expertly installed in July while I continued to autocross using the old shifter. But when we installed the mechanical part of the system all hell broke loose. Leaving out the gruesome details the bottom line is that the transmission sustained damage during the set up of the part of the system that mechanically completes the shift.

So out came the engine (*Engine Removal #1*). It took about 5 hours to remove the engine and disassemble the transmission. The damaged \$10 part was replaced in about 15 seconds. Then hours more of transmission reassembly and engine reinstallation. By the time that was all done I had missed four critical events between the end of July and most of August, just when you'd want your driving skills to be close to peaking for the Nationals.

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But we did get to do an NER event at Devens (Mass.) the last weekend of August during which the shifter demanded more adjustments. This was tentatively accomplished in my garage with no testing before packing up for the 1300 mile drive to Lincoln, Nebraska.



Devens -- View from the Taxiway

My regular co-driver, Mike McMullen, couldn't take this trip so Ken Hurd, my co-driver from my C Mod days, was my partner for this adventure. Ken and I go back to 1984 when we met at a New England Region autocross during our Mazda RX-7 days.



**Ken in his First Run at Devens...
About to Destroy a Cone...
The Wing Survived**

Saturday, September 3rd

After 21 hours of mostly nice scenery interrupted often by distracted texting, telephone talking, sleepy, or just plain clueless drivers, we arrived in Lincoln late Saturday afternoon. We quickly found our assigned paddock spot next to fellow MoHudder Arn Beebe in the New England Region paddock area and began sight-seeing and looking for familiar faces.

Sunday, September 4th We arrived early, got the Cheetah warmed up and drove over to the north end of this huge site to drive on the dedicated test and tune course. The car was handling well, the shifter was working fine, and our times were solid. But on my 4th run of the morning I blipped for a downshift, added some throttle, and ... nothing happened except for the tach freely winding to the right side of the gauge. There were no gears to find!

Uh oh.

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We towed the car back to our paddock spot and began taking things apart. The CV joints were fine as were the axles. We took the first of dozens of parts runs into town and bought a sawsall in order to cut a chassis tube that was preventing us from accessing the clutch. We discovered that the clutch plates (all 16 of them) were burned out. If it's just the clutch, that's an easy job!

Hope!



Working in Our Paddock Space

But this was only a symptom and not the cause of the problem. We needed to pull the engine. Again.

Despair!

Not wanting to do this in the open, windy, sometimes rainy conditions of paddock, I made my way back to the test and tune course. Run by the Nebraska Region, I was hoping a local member might be able to let me use a garage. I went to the Region's registration trailer, looked into the open window and found head honcho Mark Walker sitting in his control center. I said, "I'm looking for some information".

Mark replied: "A long time ago the earth was molten. Then it cooled and hardened and oceans formed. Mountains rose. Anything else".

Me: "Actually I know that already. I'm a geologist."

Mark, with big smile: "REALLY?"

Me: "Yes."

Mark and his crew pointed out a course worker, telling me that Jim McNeal was my man. He had helped other folks in similar troubles before. I just had to wait until lunchtime when he got his break.

By the time Jim's lunch break came he had been working for 5 hours straight. I was hesitant to trouble him after such a long stint but I approached him and introduced myself. I said I was really sorry to ask him for help after he had been working so long and hard but ... He interrupted me right there, looked at me very seriously and said, "tell me what you need".

This is something I love about autocrossers (and racers in general). They are always willing to help and are very ardent about it. I explained my situation and Jim revealed that he rents a commercial garage for himself about 20 minutes away. He whipped out his cell phone and called his adult son. "Shawn, we have a guy from Albany New York who needs to pull his engine. Make a hole!"

Hope!

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I wasn't sure about that last bit regarding making a hole but I was grateful. Jim told me to meet him back at the test and tune course at 5 pm. Ken and I returned to the Cheetah to pull as much stuff off the engine as we could to get the engine ready to be pulled. We also changed our class from B Mod to A Mod. Although we'd be uncompetitive, we'd at least get to compete on these great courses because A Mod ran on Thursday/Friday as opposed to B Mod's Tuesday/Wednesday schedule. When we finally arrived at Jim's garage on Sunday evening I could see what he meant when he told his son to "make a hole". Have you ever seen an episode of "Hoarders"? This garage was about 30 feet wide by 120 feet deep and was packed full with all manner of automotive parts, boxes, an old stripped down car or two (it was hard to tell), paint, hand tools, power tools, machine tools, chairs, equipment, drums of unknown liquids, sheet metal, tubing, and whatever else you'd expect to find in such a place.

But his son Shawn had made a hole. It was just big enough to fit the Cheetah with a path to walk around it. It was lit, out of the wind (and the rain which was to come), and had an engine hoist. Wow! We had really lucked out.

Hope!

We pulled the engine (*Engine Removal #2*) and it was clear that the transmission output shaft was broken. Not wanting to work on the transmission ourselves, we put the engine in the van and got back to the hotel before midnight. Our plan was to find a motorcycle shop and also get some transmission parts shipped to us. With the next day being Labor Day, work on the Cheetah came to a tense stand still.

Despair!



**Ken in the McNeal Garage,
Engine Out**



**Sunnier days:
Mike getting familiar with a cone earlier in the season**

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Monday, September 5th

My favorite day at Nationals is Monday, the day after the Pro Solo and the day before the start of Nationals. I truly enjoy Monday. The Nationals courses are all set up and everyone is laid back, walking the courses, finding friends, maybe driving the test and tune course, fiddling with their cars. Some people go play golf or head downtown. With nothing more we could do on the Cheetah, Ken and I walked the courses. A lot. And we found time to relax and had a pretty good free dinner at the event site as part of the planned activities. Chatted it up with old and new friends. This was the only day of the trip that we spent appreciable time at the event site.

Tuesday, September 6th

We began the day by getting to the event site to watch B Mod run in first heat, starting at 8am. Seeing these guys excited, wound up and on the edge was a very disconnected experience since I felt like nothing more than a casual spectator. When the class was finished we called Bill Gendron of Small Fortune Racing in Massachusetts who put together a package of parts for us and would ship it overnight to our hotel to arrive first thing on Wednesday ... we hoped. Timing would be critical.

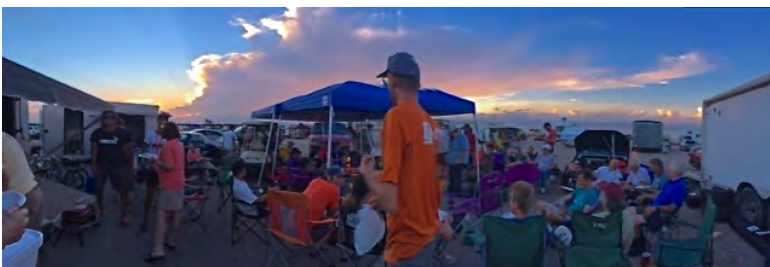
Then we drove to the largest bike shop in town. They were not friendly at all but grudgingly agreed to take on the job with no promise of when it might be finished. We did not leave the engine with them but instead went to another shop that Shawn McNeal had recommended.

The guys at HVC Motorcycle were friendly, supportive and excited to help. One had even been an autocrosser. We dragged the engine out of the van and they started in on it right away, tearing it apart with gusto. Soon the snapped output shaft was laying on the work bench and we were all standing around ogling it.

With nothing else to do until the parts arrived, we went back to the event site for more course watching and our spirits lifted. At one point while sitting in the stands watching cars being tossed around on course I turned to my partner and said, "Ken if we can get the Cheetah running in time for Thursday this could be epic. We might even have a chance at grabbing the last trophy in A Mod". Things were actually looking up.

Hope!

For dinner we dined on the concrete with the New England Region contingent. Good food and good company. An old friend who is very wizened in the ways of Solo and Racing pulled me aside and gave me a warm compliment for my perseverance. Made my day.



**NER paddock dinner,
Tuesday evening**

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Your Transmission Lesson for the Day:

Hard steel + twisting torque ... Sometimes the steel loses

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Wednesday, September 7th

At 8:30 AM we got a call from the front desk informing us that a big box had arrived. Wow, was I pleased! And relieved!

More hope!!!

We grabbed it and sped to HVC. The boys took the box, smiling, and got to work. Ken and I left to buy parts and a few tools and to eat something.

We returned to the bike shop in the early afternoon and the engine was almost ready. We stopped long enough to take a photo with our heros and then set off for the McNeal's garage.

By 5 pm the engine was bolted into the car, awaiting fuel lines and the wiring harness. I recall telling Ken that things were going so well we'd even be able to make tech inspection before it closed at 7.

High hopes!!



HVC heroes

With the oil and gas lines connected and filled, the wiring harness hooked up, and all the bolts (probably) tightened we hit the starter button and heard ... a single, sickly "tick" followed by silence. Ken and I stared at the engine. Hoping it was just a dead battery we jump started it. "Tick". Maybe it's the starter. We swapped it out. "Tick". We hit the button again. "Tick".

We put the car in gear and tried to push it. It was locked up. Something was wrong.

Despair!

Aw damn. Let's go back to the hotel room and pack. Nope. I couldn't. Let's open up the clutch cover and take a look. Maybe we'd still make tech. If we didn't, there was still 7 am tech tomorrow (A Mod, like B Mod, was running first heat.)

Hope!!

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We pulled out the clutch and could see nothing wrong. We pulled out more stuff, looked at it dumbly, and then put it back in. It was 9 pm, tech closed two hours ago and the motor was still all locked up. I was sitting in front of the clutch, cross legged on the filthy, oily floor and put my sweaty head in my dirty hands. Driving the car tomorrow was not going to happen. Epic was not going to happen.

Despair!

Forget it. Let's get some sleep, come back tomorrow morning, pack it up and head home. I walked out of the garage into the night and stumbled around in the dark for a gloomy walk. Hungry, tired, filthy. But wait. Yes let's pack it up and load the car into the trailer but we'll bring it back to HVC tomorrow morning. OK, we'll miss Thursday's runs but maybe they can figure it out and we can run on Friday! We got back to our hotel around 11 pm.

Hope. Epic-ness might await us still.

Thursday, September 8th

We arrived at HVC first thing in the morning while A Mod drivers were taking their runs on the East Course. The HVC guys were disappointed to hear the news but they tore into the car giving it all they could. Alas, after a couple of hours they were scratching their heads and almost as disappointed as we were. Well, not really. But they were disappointed.

Despair.

Well, not quite despair at this point. More like acceptance. It just wasn't going to happen this year. But we had given it everything we had. The Cheetah was reloaded into the trailer, we said our goodbyes, and hit the road for the 1,300 mile ride home.

This is racing. Though it's "just" autocrossing, it's still racing and even without the specter of crashing or injury it can be a cruel sport. We had expended tremendous effort, taken a week of vacation, brought lots of hope and energy and excitement, but we were driving home without having turned a wheel on a National course. We weren't even counted in the final event entry total. And it was the oddest feeling Nationals I've ever been to. We were in Lincoln for over 5 days but hardly spent any time at the event site. Did you notice the lack of photos of cars scooting through National Championship course cones or sunset shots of walking the course?

On the long ride home I considered not autocrossing again this season. Just stay home and lick the wounds. Several friends texted to suggest I garage the Cheetah and not bother with it until January. But not wanting to end the season on such a low note, I instead pulled the engine out yet again (*Engine Removal # 3*) and with the help of Small Fortune Racing discovered the problem. The HVC boys had installed the oil pump gear by the book. That was the right way but only if the oil pump was stock. Although it looked stock, it wasn't. So I can't blame them for anything. Once the transmission was apart on the bench and after lots of measurements, scratching of heads, and comparing of various spare parts, the problem was figured out.

The fix took zero dollars and three seconds to flip the gear over!

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September 24th

Late September found Mike and I back in the van towing the Cheetah down the highway for a Northern New Jersey Region SCCA event at the Meadowlands. The car ran spectacularly. Handling was fabulous. I improved on every run. People remarked how fast the car looked on course. What a great day! Until the motor spun a bearing. Or two. It was later to be diagnosed as a bent crankshaft which in turn was due to the transmission trauma.

Despair?

Nope. Surprisingly that wasn't the emotion. Just another day at the races. Load 'er up and bring 'er home. But man the car had felt great. Too bad about that upside down tanker truck causing a 90 minute delay heading north on the Thruway. Now THAT guy had a bad day.

Hope for next year!



Jim at the Meadowlands, about 20 minutes before the engine said "no mas". You can see Andy Furlong's Atomic Rabbit at the left rear.

Jim's view of the
2016 season...



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>>>

October

OK, NOW hang it up! But I couldn't. Still not wanting to end the season on a negative I accepted an offer to drive Jason Fair's H Street Category Fiesta at a New England Region event at Devens on October 2nd. I had not driven a Street car in years and certainly not a front wheel drive hatchback. But there I was at Devens on a rainy track, driving a Fiesta as if it was a B Mod car ... otherwise known as "incorrectly". I should have spun multiple times on my first run but somehow didn't, which was a thrill and satisfying all in itself. To top it off, at one point during the day I was actually the leader of the 12 car class. But I finished in 6th, well off the pace. In retrospect I realize that my goal, which was to not underdrive the car, was all wrong. Of course I overdrove it instead ... an easy way to lose a couple of seconds on a long one minute course. But it was fun and educational.

My season finally came to a close at a good ol' MoHud event at the McCarty Avenue lot on October 9th. My friend Aashish allowed me to drive his STR Honda S2000. MoHud events are the friendliest, most fun events around and I really miss not being able to drive at my home site. But my car is just not suited to the small lot. And I feel it's potentially unsafe.

I enjoyed the day immensely. The banter and socializing was great. The small course was well set up and fun to drive. Listening to DJ insult everyone on the PA system, including myself, was entertaining. Wish he and I could be at more events together. Driving Aashish's car was a great experience. And when he rode along with me on my first run, he helped finish off my season on a high note. About two thirds the way through the run he suddenly started clapping and laughing. "What's going on", I thought. As we crossed the finish line he enthusiastically complimented me on smooth hands and always being on the correct line. He made me smile. I hope my driving tips to him will help him for next season. It would be wonderful if the region can find a second, larger site for 2017.

Shortly afterward I had to lay low for five weeks due to contracting pneumonia! Stress related? But in mid-November I pulled the engine once again (*Engine Removal Number 4*).

Hope!

- Jim Garry -

So, you've been wondering:
what's a Cheetah ? >>>

Cheetah: two very different approaches...



< Cheetah by Bill Thomas
c. 1964



Cheetah by Bruce Sunseri >
c. 1998

If you were on the sports car scene in the halcyon '60s, Cheetahs were loud, bad-a__ cars, designed by Don Edmunds and built by Californian Bill Thomas with covert support from Chevrolet. Tube frame with a 327 cu.in. Chevy mounted almost amidships, the gearbox was directly coupled to the differential in what was a novel approach to weight balance.

The 10 original cars were raced with modest success in SCCA and FIA events '64 - '68, with chassis #10 running in NRHA drags. Did I mention that they were loud? And squirrely. Reputation alone made them a popular prototype for 1/32 slot car racers.

Today, two outfits claim they have exclusive rights to continuation models of the original cars. Lots of back-and-forth sniping.

At the other end of the engineering finesse scale, some thirty years after the swan song of the original Cheetahs, another Californian, Bruce Sunseri, developed a mid-engined Cheetah racer that could use large motorcycle engines (1,000cc) or small automobile engines (1,300 cc). Some 20 or 30 Cheetahs have been built. Chassis # 12 is now Jim Garry's steed of choice.

Jim's car was built from a Sunseri-provided chassis by Charlie Smith, a helicopter mechanic in Missouri. Originally powered by a Nissan engine, a 1-liter Suzuki GSXR motorcycle engine was swapped in after several years.

Jim bought the car in September of 2011. With him in the driver's seat, weight is 1,080 lbs, pushed by 185 hp^(+/-). Runs in B Modified solo.

Jim's chassis # 12 is actually his second Cheetah, as he has also owned and raced a slot car version of the Bill Thomas original.