

The Mo-Hud

Knockoff



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

January 2018

The REport

Happy New Year! 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. Sorry you had to call in sick EJ!

See pictures and a list of the award winners in this issue.

Mohawk-Hudson region Annual Meeting minutes/notes:

2018 officers elected. The officers for 2018 are:

- Regional Executive- Jim Bucci
- Assistant Regional Executive- Eric Smith
- Secretary- Ron Bass
- Treasurer- Paul Malecki
- Director at Large- Dick Stewart
- Director at Large- Bruce Kosakoski
- Activities chairperson- Jack Hanifan



Newly elected treasurer, Paul Malecki, gave a financial report for the region. Our treasury is healthy although some of our business practices need some fine tuning.

Membership chairperson, Jim Garry, gave a report on SCCA membership trends at both the regional and national level.



For the good of the sport...

Jim Bucci

Regional Executive

Attention club racing drivers:

If you sent me your 2017 racing results or requested a MoHud club racing t-shirt, I will have your shirt at the January and February general membership meetings.

Coming Events: January and...

- **January 3:** Wednesday, 7:30pm. MoHud Membership Meeting. Orchard Tavern, 68 North Manning Boulevard, Albany. While the formal meeting starts at 7:30pm, we start gathering around 6pm to share time with our fellow members. Contact: Jim Bucci hdjimbu@gmail.com
- **January:** Could be ice racing season, depending on whether la Nina or El Nino dominates. Check out the Adirondack Motor Enthusiast Club's website < icerace.com > to follow plans for several races and perhaps a time trial or two in '18.
- **January 29:** Monday. February issue of the KnockOff appears online; the Solo edition, featuring 2017 recap, and more.
- **February 7:** Wednesday, 7:30pm. MoHud Membership Meeting. Orchard Tavern, 68 North Manning Boulevard, Albany. While the formal meeting starts at 7:30pm, we start gathering around 6pm to share time with our fellow members. Contact: Jim Bucci hdjimbu@gmail.com
- **February 9-10:** Saturday. VSCCA's traditional Nutmeg Rally runs up and down the Hudson on Saturday, starting from the historic Beekman Arms in Rhinebeck (Washington ate there often). Banquet Friday night. Contact Jim Donick (845) 635-2373 or go to < vscca.org >
- **June 8-10:** Friday - Sunday. SCCA Solo Championship Tour. Sampson/ Seneca Depot, Romulus, NY. MoHud solo drivers nestled snug in their beds, visions of low PAX times dancing in their heads.

Note: NeDiv website still does not have their 2018 calendar posted, but Jim Bucci has a large spreadsheet with provisional dates. E-mail him at < hdjimbu@gmail.com >



Santa and administrative assistant recently spotted at Bob Karl's showroom trying out a Pontiac Solstice for possible business travel during late December and running C-Street Solo in off-season.

Special Awards for 2017

Lewis-McClumpha Trophy

Worker Appreciation

Riggi Award

Lewis-McClumpha

The Mohawk-Hudson region's highest honor is the Lewis Trophy, known more recently as the Lewis-McClumpha Trophy, and is awarded to the member who has contributed greatly in time and effort to the sport and to the region. The 2017 recipient worked as a flagger at race events, instructed at Tire Rack Street Survival events and put in time working at Solo events. This member steps up in other capacities as well, chairing committees, organizing participants for the annual car show at the Saratoga Auto Museum, managing the region's website, and he is also the assistant regional executive.

Congratulations to **Eric Smith!** - *Trish Bucci*

Worker Appreciation

For the last several years, MoHud worker appreciation awards haven't been given out at the annual meeting and awards banquet. In an effort to bring back that tradition, Jack Hanifan and I volunteered to be the committee to accumulate points and give awards. - *Trish*

2017 Mohawk Hudson worker appreciation awards go to:

Connie McIntyre and
Wayne Green

David Riggi Mechanic Award

On a recent visit to **Bob Karl's** Sales and Service, I had the honor of presenting Bob with the David Riggi Mechanic Award. Bob is a true friend to the region and is always willing to help MoHud members with the repair and maintenance of their street cars and competition vehicles. On a personal note: I know I would not have been on track this year without Bob's effort and dedication to get our racecar repaired in time for the 2017 season. - *Jim Bucci*



The plaque reads as follows:

David Riggi Mechanic Award

Presented to the Mohawk-Hudson region member
who personifies the memory of David Riggi.

An individual who demonstrates his mechanical
ability on race cars and does not hesitate to share
that ability with his fellow competitors

Club Racing Report- 2017 Wrapup

Jack Hanifan/ Jim Bucci

MoHud Driver's Regional Club Racing Championship

We had a very good response this year from our club racing drivers. The points have been tallied and here are the winners:

3rd place, driving the Touring 4, J&T Racing Honda Civic Si **Jim Bucci**

2nd place, in the Ten Eyke Group Insurance Spec Racer Ford **Chris Brassard**

1st place with 206 points, driving the BK Motorsports Spec Miata, **Evan Karl**

New York State Road Racing Championship (NYSRRC)

Traditionally, we have recognized NYSRRC champions from our region here at the MoHud awards banquet. This year our region had 2 drivers earn class championships in the NYSRRC series. **Jim Bucci** in Touring 4 and, piloting the AM&O Racing Support Services Crossle 62F Formula F, **Chip VanSlyke**.

Rookie of the Year

When we looked at our crop of rookies this year, one driver really stood out. It made our decision easy. He is someone who doesn't lack enthusiasm. Last year he struggled with focusing on his racecraft, but this year he excelled. He went from finishing towards the back of the field to finishing toward the front. He raced his way to two top five finishes this year and he was on the podium at the July Sprints at Watkins Glen. He should be proud that all his hard work of building his car and focusing on his racecraft is really starting to pay off.

Driving the number 77 Amsterdam Truck Center/Van Kleeck's Tire STL class Mazda Miata, the 2017 MoHud region rookie of the year is **Chad Mulhall**

The Mohawk-Hudson Region Driver of the Year.

Like a lot of successful drivers, this year's winner got his start in racing by driving Go Karts. After a year in karts he moved on to Skip Barber's Eastern Regional series finishing the year 10th out of 136 drivers.

He was invited to run in the Skip Barber National series the following year.

In addition, he raced Sprint Cars for a few years on the east coast, in PA, and in Canada.

Since 2014 he has been very successful racing in the Prototype1 class with the Sports Car Club of America. And this year, he won the P1 national championship at Indy in his very first try. Our 2017 Mohawk-Hudson region Driver of the Year, piloting the Greene Trucking/SevenE Leasing Stohr WF1, from Northville, NY, **Jonathan Eriksen**.

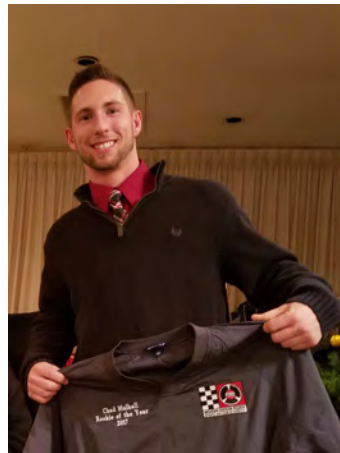


Club Racers Honored at the Banquet

...photos by Trish Bucci



Jim Bucci
Re-elected as RE
<<



Chad Mulhall
Rookie of the Year
<<



MoHud's
Club Racing Band of Brothers

Jim Bucci
Jack Hanifan
John Sheridan
Tom Cambell
<<



Jim Bucci prizes his championship golf shirt; Jack congratulates Chip VanSlyke on his tie.

2017 Membership Report

- Jim Garry - jdgarry10@gmail.com

As we begin the new year, here are some membership numbers for you to ponder:

Mohawk Hudson Region Membership Retention 2016 versus 2017

Year Joined	Remaining as of December 2016	Remaining as of December 2017	Change for 2017
1958 through 1979	22	23	+1
1980 through 1999	91	83	-8
2000 through 2004	76	69	-7
2005 through 2016	385	306	-79
TOTAL	574	481	-93

The first thing you may notice is that the oldest segment of our membership actually gained a member. The reason for this is not because of some sort of SCCA immaculate conception. An older SCCA member from Oklahoma joined our region, although he still lives in Oklahoma.

The membership losses for the segments from 1980 through 2004 reflect excellent retention, proving that those who have been with SCCA for a long time are here for the duration. They are real enthusiasts and love the club, even though many of us may complain from time to time.

It is that last segment that is of concern, showing a 20% loss. So let's take a closer look at it starting in 2010, below.

Mohawk Hudson Region Membership Retention 2010 to Present

Year Joined	Remaining as Members in 2016	Remaining as Members in 2017	Change for 2017
2010	11	9	-2
2011	22	19	-3
2012	17	14	-3
2013	16	14	-2
2014	22	17	-5
2015	73	27	-46
2016	224	77	-47
2017	N.A.	129	We'll find out in a year

Membership Report – cont'd

Let me know if you see more, but what I see is that we lose a great deal of people initially, most of them obviously because SCCA didn't offer something they were looking for or assumed we are. Then after those initial years of losses, the membership numbers for each category of time level off and hold steady. This all makes perfect sense and seems normal. But you have to wonder if we could possibly hold onto more people if we reached out to them individually.

I also wonder why we picked up 224 new members in 2016 but only 129 in 2017. I have no answer. Perhaps it's a foretelling of the economy? Will great economists in the future rely on "the SCCA trend" to predict economic downturns?

Here are some more numbers, without a table. Between Feb 2015 and 2016 we took in 247 first time members. A year later we had lost all but 53 of them for a retention rate of just 21%. But 85 of them were Tire Rack Street Survival School students. We retained only six of them (7%). That's expected. So let's eliminate those 85 students to get the retention rate for regular SCCA joiners. It goes up to 29%.

I'm told this is more or less the standard for SCCA regions. To that I say foey. We should be able to do better than that, shouldn't we? Finding out why people leave the club so soon may help us convince a few of them to stay longer. We have to find out why these folks joined in the first place. Maybe they just need some TLC to keep them interested.

I plan to send out emails and make telephone calls this winter to folks who quit SCCA after just one year. Would anyone like to help me out and call one or two people? If so, please get in touch with me at mhr.membership@gmail.com.

Next up is a graph that looks like a mountain. It shows our membership numbers over an 20 month period from early 2016 through the present. We had a very productive time where we picked up many members but now it has dropped back to our numbers from the earlier date. What happened in there? I'm sorry but I have nothing intelligent to say on this. I'm going to work on it.



Membership Report – cont'd

One last graphic. It shows our membership trend from mid-2011 to the present, with a few gaps in the data. Despite the recent drop off in our numbers, this is a pretty happy graph. We are doing much better than earlier in the decade.



If anyone has any conjecture or analysis or information to correlate with these numbers, please get in touch with me at mhr.membership@gmail.com. Also, if you've read this far I commend you. *The first 3 people who contact me to confirm they read this get a prize!*

Now on to our regular monthly report.

As of December 14th we had 440 members in the Region. This is holding steady from the past few months.

Just one new member joined between Oct 1 and now: Mark Roverta (11/4), Saratoga. This is normal for this time of year. He checked Solo and Rally as his interests.

Significant Anniversaries for January

5 years

Matthew Wilson, Averill Park NY

15 years

Elaine and Michael Lo, Newton NJ

Anthony Kalkandis, Elizaville NY

Laura Quaile, Mohegan Lake NY



Congratulations!

Mo-Hud Officers and Contacts

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Jack Hanifan jackhanifan@hotmail.com

Rally Chair

Trish Bucci trimar71@gmail.com

SOLO Chair

Russ Burckhard russtduck@gmail.com

Membership Chair

Jim Garry mhr.membership@gmail.com

Chief of Pits

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Scrutineering (Tech)

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NeDiv License Chair

Dick Patullo (NER) patullo@verizon.net

KnockOff

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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...

- What Could Go Wrong?

*Ed's note: Jim's article is long, really long.
But it provides a warm read on a cold winter's night, so it is here uninterrupted.
Next month we will return with some earlier-promised items.*



What Could Go Wrong?

Jim Garry's 2017 autocross season and trip to the Solo National Championships

It was March, and Mike and I were closing in on the end of another winter of working on the Cheetah.

A neighbor stood in my garage listening to my tale of a snapped transmission output shaft at the 2016 Nationals followed by a blown engine three weeks later at a local event. He looked at the shiny Suzuki 1000 engine sitting in the engine bay of the Cheetah and told me I was going to have a great 2017 of autocrossing. "With this new engine", he said, "what could go wrong?"

Ahem.

The irony of my 2016 and 2017 seasons is that after 4 or 5 years of ownership the car was finally handling superbly but also providing countless mechanical headaches. In contrast, during the earlier years of ownership the thing was nearly bullet-proof but horribly set up for my driving style.

The 2017 Local Season

At our first event of the season at Fort Devens there were electrical problems and the car would idle, but that was all. Happily, New England Region's Alex Jackson lent my co-driver Mike McMullen and I his Street Touring Miata and we had a fun day anyway. Autocrossers are among the greatest people on the planet. Thanks Alex!

Our next event was a Mohud affair at the McCarty Avenue lot. The car not only started but got underway, leaving the start line with lots of neck-snapping acceleration. "Waaaaaaaaa". But within a few seconds the acceleration would change to a stomach turning "bwuhhhhhhhhhhh" as the revs dropped down toward idle. We tried a few lost-in-the-woods attempts at fixes during the next few runs but eventually gave up on the day in the middle of a run, pulling off the course where it conveniently looped close to my trailer.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

Over the next week, with lots of friendly advice it appeared the problem was resolved but it needed to be tested before heading out to an event. In stepped former MoHudder Matt Runyon who convinced his boss to give me permission to test at Atlantic British in Clifton Park. Thanks Matt! I asked my former co-driver Will Shambaugh, who lives not far away, to be my safety buddy so someone could witness the potential fiery crash and call the fire department.

Having this testing opportunity saved us from a wasted trip to an event because the test proved that the problem remained. On the drive home I caught myself thinking about my old Formula Ford with its reliable 50 year-old engine design and no electronics.

Thirty minutes later I was back in my driveway unloading the Cheetah for the third time that day. The thought occurred to me to put it away for a month or two, but I overcame that dark impulse and called the engine builder for ideas. On the speaker phone he'd tell me which thingamabob to tug on and I'd tell him the result. He was stumped until finally, in passing, I mentioned that there was an 18-gauge white wire with brown stripe in the wiring harness that was cut.

Long pause.

"Why'd you cut that?", he asked very quietly. This was the calmest he'd been on the entire phone call. It was ominous and scared me.

I said I had needed to slice open the harness to take a look at it and accidentally cut the wire but it was OK because the manual showed the wire to be part of the headlight circuit from the Suzuki motorcycle it came from.

Long pause. I sensed extreme annoyance on his end.

"Do you think I take time and energy to wire up headlights in my race engine harnesses?"

Now on my back foot and stammering I replied, "well, um, I, uh, thought it was, you know, a vestige from the original loom."

"A vestige? There are no vestiges in my race engine wiring harnesses."

"Got it."

Within a few minutes the little white wire with brown stripe was repaired and the secondary throttles were working fine.

Problem fixed!



Mechanical confidence destroyed.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

Driving It

Now it was finally time to have fun and drive the car again. Yes, driving a B Modified car is incredible. It's a visceral experience. Even before it was set up the way I needed it to be, it was an awesome experience to drive the Cheetah. The acceleration is beyond anything I have ever experienced. And braking an 870 lb car is exhilarating. In the beginning you keep trying to brake later and later but when you think you've finally braked too late the brakes just haul you down to a speed that lets you negotiate the corner with no problem.

But handling? After a years-long search to find the handling balance that suits my driving style, the car now provides mind expanding cornering forces that take time for your brain to accept. A new reality so to speak.

You can drive the car tidy and competently and feel very fast. But you'd be slow. To get the car to its potential you must push well into your personal zone of discomfort. It is necessary to drive hard, resist braking much or at all sometimes (lifting is often more than enough), and push yourself to go faster into the corners. The old "slow in/fast out" doesn't work. If you're not mentally wincing when you turn into a corner you're probably not going fast enough. You have to be aggressive and committed.

But all that must be done while driving the way you'd drive a Miata ... always being on the right line, setting up correctly, maintaining momentum, being patient, looking ahead.

Ack. Looking ahead.

I have always had a bit of a problem looking ahead consistently. It doesn't come naturally. I've quizzed many talented drivers about this, including "the master" Mark Daddio who has supplied me with many thoughtful insights over the years on various autocross driving topics. I was starting to get good at looking ahead in my Formula Ford ten years ago. But when I got into the Cheetah my looking ahead skills faltered because in this car what's ahead of you is going to be behind you much more quickly than in most other cars.

This means you must look way ahead. Way, way ahead. Just this past October at Meadowlands the Cheetah and I arrived at a set of cones and I imagined I had gone off course. But I hadn't. It was just that I got to that gate so quickly that I couldn't remember where I had come from and therefore assumed I was off course. Mind boggled.

More Troubles

With the secondary throttle and battery issues behind me, the late spring and early to mid-summer was spent tracking down an over-heating problem. For years the car had no problems with overheating. But after mounting a front wing, the air flow to the intake was compromised. The addition of a fan was all that was needed to counter the problem until this new engine came along. I'm assuming the issue comes down to more horsepower means more heat.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

It was still springtime and Russ Gorman was my co-driver one day, Mike being away for something trivial. I can't remember what. Oh yeah, he was getting married. The onboard video shows Russ at the start line, waiting for the starter's signal to go. Just as she raised her hand the heavy duty plastic overflow tank literally blew up with a very impressive BANG and Russ, uh, flinched. The video shows he jumped out pretty fast not knowing what the explosion was all about. Kudos to him for leaving behind a clean driver's seat. No stains!

This issue convinced me to re-plumb some of the cooling system and exchange the water pump for one with more capacity. Went to an event expecting success in the heat department. No help. Next we tried a bigger, better radiator. Went to an event but surprisingly, it too was of no help. Please don't misunderstand the situation. We were taking our runs, having fun, and getting seat time. But seeing how hot the engine got after every run was very distracting to our driving.

Finally one Saturday morning I summoned up my courage, steadied my hand, and cut a hole in the Cheetah's nice pretty fiberglass hood. Mike and I created ductwork to direct the hot air from the radiator out of the car rather than just having it dump under the bodywork. This was the improvement we were looking for. Water temperatures dropped by 15 degrees. We also hoped it would improve front downforce by lowering the air pressure under the hood but if it did it wasn't enough for the likes of us to feel it.

Jim's Cheetah:

Before...
During...
and After...
Plastic Surgery



Still, on 90 degree days with courses that required a lot of full throttle the engine temps would climb more than in previous seasons. This necessitated another call to the engine builder whose sage advice was to ignore the temp gauge! "As long it isn't blowing any water out of the system, you're fine." Who am I to question a genius?

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

August arrived and things were going smoothly now. Finally relieved of the huge distraction of watching the temperature gauge climb inexorably upward, Mike and I were having fun and improving our driving over last year's efforts. But wait, a new distraction began. The engine would occasionally cut out briefly at high rpms when fuel was lower than half tank. This was the new mystery concern that we could not get a handle on. But keeping the tank full solved the problem although we knew it wasn't a permanent solution.

A New Obstacle

Two weeks prior to leaving for our trip to Lincoln and the National Championships, the engine forced us to address that temporary solution mentioned above. At this event the car began to cut out a lot. Very frustrating and I knew I was going to have to get to the bottom of this prior to leaving for Lincoln. Then during my last run of the day the engine cut out for a very long period. Then a clanking sound commenced from the back of the car. I coasted in wondering if the engine was cooked. There was good news and bad.

The clanking wasn't the engine. It was the left trailing arm that had lost a bolt and was dragging on the ground. How did this happen? I specifically remembered tightening that bolt in the spring. Bill Gendron of Small Fortune Racing happened by, looked it over, and asked me if I had done as he suggested back in April, namely keeping track of the torque on the rear wheel bearings, which he had told me were prone to loosening.

"Hmmm", thought the scarecrow deeply. "I, uh ... yeah, I guess ... I guess I forgot". Another engineer. Another annoyed look. The wobbly bearing had vibrated the bolt loose. But both were easily repaired. It also explained a handling problem I had felt that day.

The more serious problem was the green gunk accumulating on the floor of the engine bay. "What the ...?", we all said. Then I connected some dots. Back in the spring the engine builder had suggested a specific Sunoco unleaded race fuel. But it was not available at the time. "Buy THIS stuff", the helpful race fuel attendant had suggested. "It's the SAME thing".

It attacked my fuel cell, which was "only" 19 years old. OK, I should have updated it earlier. But hey, I've got SCCA T shirts older than that. And up until now the fuel cell wasn't broken and I didn't have the time to fix it. You've got to prioritize stuff. This is how things are for most of us autocrossers; we're low budget and have a full-time jobs.

With some pondering we realized the reason a high fuel level had helped the engine to not stumble was because the gunky stuff floated on the top of the fuel and didn't get sucked into the engine. But by August the gunk finally got to be too thick. Now the engine was sucking it down on a regular basis and it was coming out of the fuel cell all over the place. We were going to have to replace the fuel cell. And with Nationals coming up we had to do it fast.

Did you know that most fuel cell fabricators require a month lead-time to make a new cell? I didn't.

I asked Bill to source one. The east coast cell fabricators said they couldn't meet my schedule. But Bill used his "professional voice", as he put it, and talked Fuel Safe on the west coast into building it fast. He also called them every day to keep them on target. To my great relief the cell arrived two days before Mike and I were scheduled to depart for Lincoln.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

The fuel-cell replacement job had been made more difficult because the Cheetah's chassis is monocoque and getting at the cell requires removing zillions of big rivets. Well, dozens anyway. Then re-riveting them. And put out of your mind the image of those hardware store pop rivets. These are aircraft grade rivets that don't come out easily and are installed via the "bucking" process.

Add to that the need to clean the fuel injectors and flush the fuel system and there was a lot of work in a short period. The fuel injector specialist who received my injectors took one look at the green gunk oozing from them and telephoned in wonderment asking what kind of fuel we run. The answer was "race fuel, ethanol, fuel cell foam, and glue".

It all came good though. With Small Fortune Racing stepping in to help, Mike and I were loaded and heading west at the appointed hour.

The Road to Lincoln

It's about 22 hours towing to Lincoln from Albany and I've always enjoyed the drive. You understand that no matter how long you drive on the first day (within reason) you're not going to get there that night. That makes the drive relaxing and cathartic.

The highlight of the journey came while passing an airshow at Cleveland's Burke Lakefront Airport, former site of many superb IndyCar races. As we lumbered down I-90 in downtown Cleveland, I thought I saw what appeared to be a slowly moving, oddly shaped bird. But we soon realized it was an F-18 about 200' off the ground going extremely slowly, straight up. Suddenly, with full afterburners it shot out of view over and behind the van. Mike and I were still shouting at each other about how cool that was when from behind us we heard a noise like the end of the world and the F-18 reappeared streaking very low past the windshield. In a moment it was a half mile away, climbed rapidly, rolled, and then kept rolling as it headed over downtown Cleveland. That woke us up. We considered stopping to watch the rest of the show but we were on a mission.

We arrived in Lincoln late in the afternoon Sunday, found our paddock spot with New England Region next to MoHud's Arn Beebe and his co-driver from NER Jeff Seeger. The Pro Solo finale was finishing up and you could hear screaming engines coming from the southern part of the site.

We spent the next three and a half days getting registered and teched, walking the mammoth courses, taking practice runs on the Warm Up Course (where the output shaft did NOT snap this time), visiting friends, watching the action on course, tweaking the Cheetah, and taking part in various SCCA sponsored activities mostly relating to food.



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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

My work assignment was working for SportsCar magazine as a writer. My beat was C Mod, C Mod Ladies, and the two kids karts classes. It's an interesting job, and for someone still dealing with Lyme disease it's a good strategy to fulfill your work assignment on non-driving days and not having to run in the sun after cones. In fact, making sure I pace myself has been an important consideration in the years I've had Lyme. In the past at Nationals I'd always be on the move, watching cars on course, helping wrench on cars, running around looking for people, getting into trouble. Now I take breaks, look for shade, or retire to the quiet air-conditioned comfort of the van. Always drinking water.

National Competition, Finally

Thursday morning arrived with perfect weather, sunny and 70 degrees. In the previous four Nationals B Mod had run in the first heat three times. That led to a lot of lobbying and this year the class didn't get stuck with first heat again. This year we ran second heat. It was an improvement.

Over 1,300 people were to compete at this Nationals, a record. Largest motorsport event in the world in terms of competitors. One of the smallest in terms of spectators. The courses were the usual very large and quick affairs full of elements that caused much debate among the drivers during walkthroughs. But the courses weren't any faster in terms of top speed than any other course I ran this year at Fort Devens or Meadowlands. A bit quicker than McCarty Avenue though. Indeed, the second real corner on Thursday's East Course was a very long 180-degree sweeper. I'd say this one corner would probably not fit into the entirety of the McCarty lot.

Mike took his first run and said the car felt good. But on my run the new lightweight muffler fell off just a couple of corners into the run. Without a muffler a Suzuki GSXR 1000 gets exceptionally loud at 12,000 rpm. But the event officials figured out my situation. The muffler had tumbled and slid to a stop at the feet of the dB meter operator!

Again?!

That first run netted me second place despite a very passive exploration of the course. I felt like there was a real chance to finish well. But then what's this? Mike pulled into our grid spot after his second run and reported that the car was cutting out again. With much alarm I considered options. What was wrong? Could this be something due to the fuel cell installation? Was some gunk left somewhere?

With two-driver cars there's not much time to think between runs. I got into the car for my second run and ... it was just like the early part of the season. "Bwwwwaaaaaaaaa ... bhuuuuuuuuuh, foot flat the whole time. Bwwwwaaaaaaaaa ... bhuuuuuuuuuh." I couldn't believe it. What? How? I came across the finish line in full swear mode, several seconds off the pace. That video has been erased.

We checked the wiring harness and the 18 gauge white wire with brown stripe was still in place. We shook some stuff around. But it was to no avail. Mike and I took our 3rd runs with the engine just not cooperating, seconds off the pace.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

Seconds off the pace, we both felt gutted. After impound we brought the car back to our paddock spot and pulled the bodywork off. Everything in the harness looked OK. I changed the fuel filter and then lacking any better ideas drove to downtown Lincoln to the famous Speedway Motors to purchase a new fuel pump. It was a clone of the Bosch unit I was using and when I got back and tried to install it I found the fittings were all different (German vs American). So back to Speedway where I stayed for an hour past closing while they cast about searching for the right adapters. I made a mental note that I was on vacation.

Back to the site, install the pump, run the engine. Shrug. Eat dinner at 9 pm, go to bed thinking "what could go wrong".

One good thing ... the leaded race fuel we switched back to using was making the engine run cooler than the other fuel.

Friday morning we were back on grid for our attempts at the West Course. This course was more technical in nature than the East Course but was still pretty quick. Both courses required driving lines that provided shortest distance versus the traditional "setting up" lines. On these courses if you didn't drive the short lines, you could execute perfectly and be 2 seconds off the fast time. I thought I had understood the East Course well but obviously hadn't been able to show it. Maybe we'd get to go fast on the West and somehow climb up into the bottom of the trophies.

Again, our first runs resulted in middling times but the engine was strong. I hit a cone after getting late on the very fast final offset element but it didn't worry me because I knew I could go faster.

But then Mike came in after his second run looking dejected and reported that the power loss had reared its nasty, ugly head again. The bottom fell out of my stomach. Now it was clear that something was heating up and failing.

We pulled off the rear bodywork and let the engine air out. I stood over the back of the open engine bay staring at the engine with a mean look, then a dumbfounded look, and finally a pleading look.

Grid told us to get ready, but I declared a ten-minute mechanical delay as is a driver's right.

Finally we buttoned it all up and off I went. The engine was fine.



I was relieved we'd found a way to get around the problem temporarily. Crossing the finish line and seeing my time, I was surprised it was several tenths slower than my first run. After a bewildered pause I realized I hadn't spent even a moment thinking about the course or my previous run and how to improve it. I was only thinking about a solution to the engine problem.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - cont'd

We pulled the bodywork for Mike's third run to let whatever was cooking in the engine cool off again. But Mike was anxious to get going and the engine didn't cool as long. He reported a slight stumbling at the end of his run.

So off went the bodywork again. Only this time I walked over to the course to watch runs and think. Upon returning to the car I scanned the grid and realized that with all our previous mechanical delays we were way out of order in the heat. If I took another ten-minute delay, all the other drivers would be finished except me. Course workers would be standing around waiting for my mechanical time to tick down. At that moment the Chief of Grid walked up and asked if I was going to take another mechanical.

"I'd like to", I said, "but I don't want to delay the end of the heat and make everybody wait."

"Do you need the mechanical?", she asked.

"Absolutely."

"Then take it. It's a Modified class. Things happen. Don't worry about it".

That's how an experienced official reasons. It was very reassuring and let me relax a bit. We buttoned up the car for the last time and I drove to the start line. But wait. One more issue. The engine had cooled down to well below 180 degrees. Below that temperature the second row of fuel injectors don't pump fuel. Damn! So I took a slow drive to the line with my feet on the throttle and brake to load the engine. I counted on my launch to pick up the last few degrees.

My run was pretty good. But not stellar. There was one major problem though. The shifter sometimes balks when going down a gear and it happened for the first time of these Nationals on this last run at the slowest corner. I throttled out in third gear rather than second. The corner led onto a long curved flat-out section. As I slowed down and headed to the scales I was calculating how much time I had lost. Probably a second.

Seeing my time on the display I knew it was very close to what I needed to pick up the last trophy in class but I wasn't sure what was needed beyond the first decimal. Getting out of the car people were telling me "good job". But did I get the trophy?

Missed it by 0.080!

I just had to shrug it off. What else you gonna do?

I was left with the memory of one perfect turn, a beautiful, subtle rotation during my third run on the East Course while going through the "showcase" sweeper in front of the spectator area. After the event, I congratulated the champ and he consoled me and said "your car looked good". Yeah, maybe next year.

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Jim Garry's Solo Season - epilogue

On the ride home, I did some thinking and realized my problem was due to the secondary throttles again. If I had been able to think it through that first day of competition I could've jury-rigged it in grid. So once back home I disconnected the sensor and the little electric motor that drives the secondaries and wired open the butterflies.

In later September and October I got the car to 5 events and the engine ran perfectly. I had a great deal of fun driving the car. Trying to come to terms with its potential and trying to improve my skills is a genuine challenge. And fun. But at every event I managed to do something that always slid me down the order in the Pax results. This was a learning year for sure!

This winter there will be no big expenditures, just lots of work and modestly priced improvements and maintenance items. My list is already up to five pages. One of the tasks is repairing the secondary throttle because the engine builder tells me it really helps the mid-range, just what is needed for autocrossing. The wiring harness is already on its way to him along with the sensor.

Why the sensor decided to fail at Nationals can't be explained with rational thinking. It's just an issue of luck. But I know that it is never smart to tempt the gods of racing with the words, "what could go wrong."

- Jim

