

New Adventures in Racing

or

Porsches are good for the soul but not for your retirement account

or

“Life’s been good to me I know” (Joe Walsh from the album *The Smoker You Drink*)

by your Faithful Scrivener - Joe Still

After nearly three years of being fortunate enough to race in the PCA Club racing series, I am poised to take another podium finish in the national championship in the mid-level Cup car class known as GTC4.

Before you write me off as a braggart, I should add I am not the fastest in class; fast guys this year failed to challenge due to the following:

- Started new business and couldn’t take time for events
- Totaled car first race of 2019 and took a half-year to get back out
- Totaled car AND got hit with Suspension due to contact at Watkins Glen
- Prefers Sprints and not Enduros as they are three times the cost of tires, fuel and wear and tear for same points
- Upgraded to GTC4 later in year and didn’t run 13 races to count toward year total points

The PCA Club Racing GTC4 class features 997.1-series Cup cars from +/-2006 to 2009. I bought a used 2009 model about 5 years ago and have posted reports a few times a year on: 1) learning to drive it; then 2) learning to drive fast; and finally, 3) race the car.

I ran two years of Driver’s Education (DE’s) to learn to drive the car and found it to be a wonderful package and much easier to service at the track by myself than one would expect of a factory race car. Running tires through 15 heat cycles typical in Driver’s Ed events meant rarely changing tires at the track. Checking pressures and keeping an eye on brake pads and rotors, oil level, and brake fluid are about all it took for track upkeep. And of course, keeping it full of \$10-per-gallon unleaded race fuel. It’s a Porsche, so you pay a lot for robust engineering and construction, but I do not recall a mechanical breakdown ending a track

weekend. The single exception near-miss was losing a clutch on the very last lap of the last session of a weekend event. I was able to get down to first gear and limp to the trailer where I cut the ignition in position to winch the car right into the trailer.

So, I am at the end of my third year of PCA Club racing and my record is:

2017: 2nd place nationally,

2018: 4th place year nationally (and probation we don't discuss),

2019: Tied for 1st place (season ends Nov 1).

I have over the 3 years of actual racing and have had no serious accidents and no treatable injuries. Most smart people would say goodbye at this point...emphasis on most. The joke on me is when I bought this car, I wanted to learn to drive it well enough to run three races. I am now up to about 90 actual races and about 80 more race practice sessions. I guess the trick to exceeding one's goals is set them ridiculously low. I mean, my very first PCA Club Race was at COTA in the rain (rain, not mist) and that was a three-race weekend I swept by virtue that no competitors in class made the finish line in any race. With three first-place finishes my first weekend..... Hmmmm, maybe I meant three EVENTS?

The Goldcrest team who runs my car also takes care of two racers in the top PCA Cup class GTC7, which is the 991.2 car up through the current new car 2019- the last before introduction next year of the 992 series. One of those racers Joe L., has moved up to running successfully in the IMSA GT3 Cup series twice this year, which is a single-make support series for the IMSA Races you likely see on TV. The IMSA main events consist of Le Mans- and Daytona-spec cars from Prototypes back to factory racing sports cars, including the GT3R - the bad-a** big brother of the Cup car - along with GT Daytona group, which has most major manufacturers and features my friend and coach Bryan Sellers.

IMSA Support races each weekend includes a few other series to satisfy the fans need for action, and one of them is for GT3 Cups, holding two each 45-minute sprint races. The cars range in age from 2019 back to 2016 and are divided both by model spec (991.1 vs 991.2) and Masters class for old dudes such as myself over 45 (hell, over 45 was not old when I was 45!?!?!). I think Masters should be over 65 but I don't write the rules. If I wrote them, you would get a one-lap

head start for every year older you are than the next guy. Which if enacted, I would win all the races because the habitual overall winner is Romain DeAngelis, who is about to turn 19. So, I get over a 45-lap head start on a 45-minute race; gotta love my math.

Well, I have been a little jealous of Joe L. getting to try the pro level and since I am not getting younger, I put word out I was interested in moving up to a current IMSA car. My updated fantasy (Ver 8.0, Dave Schroetter) is to run the new car in PCA Club Racing the first 2/3's of 2020 and then race two IMSA events later in the year. Perhaps VIR in September, and the last one would be during Petite Le Mans weekend next year, which just concluded this past weekend. Again, the GT3 Cup cars are a single-make race by themselves and hold two each 45-minute sprints on a typical weekend. We are not on the track with the Prototypes, thankfully.

My club race friends, who are completely comfortable helping me spend money, found a 2018 in NYC Customs just in from a single race in Europe with 18 total hours. Otherwise said, just broken in. We paid more for like-new instead of some patched up two-year-old beater to have our best chance of trouble-free initial hours. They had wrapped the car before racing in Europe and then took the wrap off to sell it, giving us a perfect white car - no decals, livery, numbers, nothing. #pristine!

After Customs, the car went to Goldcrest for a pre-purchase. I got the car from Isringhausen in Illinois and we race together, so it was a handshake deal. The car had a few issues. Most notably the ABS, which is an IMSA series requirement, was added on and is one version too new for IMSA in 2020. This could jeopardize the IMSA dream in late 2020, but the seller agreed that if need be, he would back-date it at his expense.

Motorsports ABS systems are nothing like the street in that they are a tool, not a safety valve. You have to ramp into super high pressures and let the computer sort you out. You can still overrun a turn or spin the car; you just can't get a long lockup. Our working ploy is by the time we have club-raced much of 2020 and asked to join IMSA for two weekends, they would likely allow a rookie an exemption to use the next year's ABS spec. And I am sure all the drivers will be good sports about it unless I get past one of them and then it will be WWII...such

is a racer mentality: everyone I beat is a great guy; the ones I don't are probably cheating! (Just kidding, but not by a lot.)

So, the initial idea is to wrap up this season with First Place in a 997.1 GTC4 Cup class at Daytona October 27, and then over winter try to find a Sebring event to do transition training. Right, like I could wait that long...NOT!

Well, last weekend Chin was hosting a track event at Road Atlanta which is like a home track for me. I got Blake White of Goldcrest to bring the car and help me run it Saturday and Sunday. (As a side note, Kevin McAbee and I share a Mazda MX5 Cup that we took out as well for the maiden weekend. Kevin ran a bunch of laps and was doing a great job with it!)

I had no idea what to expect of the new Cup car, but can offer a few initial takes:

- Quieter exhaust than other Cup, by a lot. I believe for IMSA we have to run straight exhaust so that won't last.
- Less immediate torque from throttle pedal than 997 Cup. The new ones are throttle-by-wire and I suspect could be reprogrammed to be more abrupt, but Porsche is rarely wrong.
- More headroom than the older Cup.
- Nice seat, good headroom and still has fore-aft adjuster, so shorter coaches can do a data lap. Still a little cramped fore-to-aft for me, but the entire vehicle is homologated together and the Recaro seat is a MUST USE piece of equipment.
- Paddles shift is magical; it is the same basic sequential gearbox (dog gears they are called) but paddle-actuated pneumatic/hydraulic shifts. IF you are thinking PDK, think about 10 times more immediate. The funny little pedal on the left is for getting off from a dead stop and if you have to go to use reverse. Otherwise just don't try to use it for a brake. I believe the brake pedal is a good bit larger than the clutch for obvious reasons.
- Handling was super smooth. Wider track is more stable. Longer wheelbase did not affect or delay turning, to my mind.
- The brakes are monstrous. 380 mm rotors front and rear plus the Motorsports ABS. The idea is to use the ABS not as a warning but as a driver's aid. It took about one 30-minute stint to ruin the non-ABS car for me.

After an in-car briefing about the multitude of controls and switches, I am off for my maiden voyage. Clutch uptake has been improved by a slight electronic throttle manipulation at release to add a tiny bit of throttle so the driver doesn't have to. I have reported (complained) before about racing clutches being like Velcro at idle and turning into Teflon if you breathe on the throttle. I have basically learned to release clutch with no added throttle so no real change for me.

We are off! A few quick upshifts leaving pit land and here we go. My mission was safe 70% to 80% laps. Right! My fourth lap out was a 1:28, which is 3 seconds faster than the old car and fast enough to have had the second-fastest lap in the C7 class at PCA Sprints at Road Atlanta earlier this year. I had no idea, I really thought I was taking it easy. This was of course on stickier tires, but so were the cars at the PCA club race earlier in the year in comparison.

As of this past weekend's IMSA Porsche Cup race as a warm-up act for Petit Le Mans, it would have taken a 1:23 to win the overall, a 1:24 to win the masters in Platinum and a 1:27 to run with most of the mid-pack masters. There is clearly some learning to do.

On the second stint, I start to pit (the Paddock pits, not the pro pits inside the track) and if you know Road Atlanta, you move left under the bridge and pop a hill before joining the pit lane. Well, I popped the hill and hit a beaver in the pit lane. I tried to miss him and only clipped the little guy. I saved the front of the car but not Buckie beaver. At the point I hit him, gravel was 12 feet to the right and concrete wall was 12 feet to the left, so you just can't really crank the wheel to avoid much. I was a bit depressed about the little thing but could not afford to lose focus.

In the third run, I was getting more comfortable, but the tires were wearing down - the rears mostly. I got loose in T6 and T10A, not super high-speed sections but cup-car training likes slip angle (less than 10% lateral vector), not slide angle (over 10% lateral vector). The new cars have a tough reputation for being seat-numb about when they are about to turn loose and are therefore easy to spin. So, I thought pushing worn tires and having to catch a few low-speed slides was productive. Other than not giving much warning when approaching the limit, I was able to catch each slide well enough to avoid flat spotted tires or other high

drama. You know how they preach “eyes up?” The further out you look the faster your brain detects rotation.

I gave the last stint Saturday up to my Club Race friend, Grady Willingham. He was pretty rocked by how easy the car is to drive; he runs a C5 Cup which is mostly like my old one but with 25 more horsepower and bigger front tires.

Grady is a big believer in making adjustments and wanted to make sway bar changes and wing changes to loosen up the front and to help stick the rear. I agreed to the wing adjustment because the car was actually running out of revs on the Road Atlanta back straight at about 170 mph +, and more wing would trade a little straight-line speed for better braking in T10A. But I did not want the bars changed yet. By the way, the next morning was cool and humid and the car made more horsepower and still got close to running out of revs before braking into T10 A.

I feel learning to deal with fall-off is important and better to have experienced before race time. As a side note, I am told the Yokohama tires that are mandated by IMSA have a steeper fall-off in the 45-minute IMSA sprints so we will do some practices at PCA with those well before the plunge. I truly hope the fall-off can be minimized by not abusing tires; I feel like I am OK at keeping rubber under me.

Sunday morning dawned wet but was drying by track time, so I was able to go out. We did not bring rain tires. I will wait until we need wets to buy a set as fresher is better. Most people buy rain tires and keep them a few years and I think they get hard and lose a ton of grip. My success in my first Club Race and first wet race both at the same time in 2017 at COTA taught me that, as I had never had rain tires and bought them fresh that day and was amazed!

Case in point, my 2017 COTA rains are now 2 ½ years old and, other than tread to sipe water, are likely not all that grippy anymore. Plus, I ran them dry last year at Watkins Glen for 15 laps waiting on rain that wouldn't come. A blunder in strategy #amateur.

Sunday, I ran two sessions with similar results. I kept the same worn-out tires on the premise I wanted to learn how the car and tires fall-off on longer stints. When traffic was not a factor, I continued to see 1:28's, which by that point with stickier tires should have been at minimum 1:27, if not better.

We got in two runs on Sunday. Near the end of the second session, I was fooling around in T1 and hung the rear out climbing the hill at full throttle. I caught it but that was a wakeup call that I was about to exceed my abilities (run out of talent before I ran out of car, is the track saying). This even with the serious aero advances on this car, so I called “no more.” And as if to reinforce a wise choice, “black flag all” came out as I turned into the pit lane with everyone else.

With the car gathered up and loaded, we bid farewell to Road Atlanta and my newest track Toy! We added 3.5 hrs. to engine and transmission. Got a dent in hood from something (gravel?) and a small chip in the windshield. By Daytona, we will have the windshield chip filled and tear-offs in place. And we will clear-wrap the front end and add thick protection to the headlights.

As it stands, I have entered both cars for the Daytona race in hopes of not needing to run the C4 car if the driver in second place does not show up for last race of the year. If he does, I will need the C4 to defend my points lead. If he doesn't attend, (he is from the NE and rarely comes to Daytona) I will run the new C7 car for practice, two sprints and probably 30 minutes of the Enduro to gain experience going into next year.

After Daytona, I will provide a year-end report with results and a synopsis of each weekend of 2019:

- Sebring
- COTA
- Road Atlanta
- Watkins Glen
- VIR
- Road America
- Daytona

For now, to repeat this year's motto, “stay clean and finish.” I am off to Daytona while everyone else in HOD is at Fontana Dam, so be careful and have fun. I will be going a lot faster, but you will be sharing the road with oncoming traffic that is juggling cell phones and cans of beer (I hope no one on track is texting!!) Til later...Joe A. Still