

July-August, 1999
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HORIZONS

The Official Newsletter of the SunRiders Miata Club of Tampa Bay

Vince Tidwell is the president of the Miata Club of America. Having been involved with the Miata since its introduction, Vince is perhaps the car's most ardent admirer. Vince graciously agreed to answer a few of my questions about the club and about him personally. – *Kevin Morrison*

KM: How did you get involved with MCA? Were you there from the start?

VT: I was finishing grad school in the late '80's and Norman [Garret] called me from California. He had recently been hired by Mazda and was working on an "off hours" project that would turn out to be the Miata. We exchanged drawings and microcassette tapes often as to what the perfect sports car should be (something we discussed at length at Georgia Tech as roommates). After flying out to see the project, we just wanted to build one for ourselves but Mazda took the chance and produced it.

In 1987, I had been active in the BMW Car Club of America at various offices, both local and national. I did a stint as national librarian, a great place to do research on car clubs. When Norman and I knew the car would be produced, he flew back to Atlanta and the whole beginning was just a conversation between two guys walking down a pleasant Atlanta neighborhood. I had my car club background, Mechanical Engineering degree and MBA. Norman had the inside line on the Miata and Mazda. We believed we could do anything as Tech taught us how to solve problems. So in the Fall of 1989 we went for broke (literally) and produced the first issue of MIATA MAGAZINE.

KM: When did you know MCA was going to be a success?

VT: We always knew we would accomplish our original

objective: a "small" car club with perhaps enough money left over to pay for out of pocket costs. When the Miata was overwhelmed with incredibly positive press by the Media (every manufacturer's dream) the initial membership of 500 shot up to 5,000 just within two months. I had studied growth management in grad school but nothing can prepare you for it. We knew then that if we continued to think professionally and treat our efforts as a business that the MCA could last an incredibly long time.

KM: How many members does MCA currently have?

VT: Including a few complimentary (Mazda officials/dealers) and those members up for renewal, about 23,600.

KM: When did you first become a Miata owner?

VT: Ironically, not until mid-fall of 1989. The money I saved for the down payment of a Miata had to be used to purchase an IBM PS 80 computer and printer to run the business and database. Fortunately, I had quick access to Miatas through Mazda and dealers.

KM: What do you think is the greatest success of MCA?

VT: The initial strategic management. There were hundreds of things we could have done differently, but research and consultation with other car clubs led to what is the optimal balance between operations/publishing/chapters.

The magazine has always been superb, both with Norman at the helm and now Barbara. Contracting

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NEW MEMBERS!!!

GALE SANTACREU
EUGENE SINGLEY
VINCENT CAMPELL, JR.
JANNA FRANKLIN
ANGELA WALL
KRISTIN COHN
TODD BLACKWOOD
NANETTE ANDERSON
EVELYN KEENAN
MARK MIEKLOW
JAY & POLLY BARNETT
ERIC & LORNA SMITH
PAM & JOHN BARKER
JAMES BRENING
KATHY MITCHELL
WAYNE SCHWEIKERT
RON COPPINGER

WELCOME ABOARD!

ATTENTION!

It's renewal time for a few of you. If we've put a yellow membership app in with your newsletter, it means your membership is expiring. Dues are still \$30 for a year.

We'll be sending out membership cards a few at a time as we print them in batches, so if you don't have one, be patient, you'll get it soon. If you need a rush job so you can get your discount at one of our sponsors, let us know and we'll print yours individually and send it to you. Finally, *in the last issue we included a two-sided promotional flyer* for the club. The idea was for you to make copies and give them to people with Miatas that you see around town every day. There are thousands of Miata owners around who don't even know we exist. *Make a bunch of copies and give them to every person you see driving a Miata (if you can catch them).* Leave them on windshields. This is your chance to help the club grow. These flyers get results, and every new member we can get will help us do more great things that benefit all of us.

Sponsors!

A Word for Our Sponsors

This month's Sponsor of the Month is **Mazda Village** in Clearwater. Mazda Village is where a lot of our club members bought their Miatas, because they always have a **BIG** selection of used Miatas. Their parts department is awesome and they have always had a good reputation with our club for their service department.

Lindell Mazda has also continued their stellar level of support for the club, and we'd like to extend a special thanks to **Sonny Gonzalez** for always being there to help us out and for referring a ton of people to the club. Lindell usually lends us a brand new Miata to play with at our autocrosses, so if you're in the market for a new one, come to the next autocross and see what it can do! (We always take it real easy on the loaners, though!) **Lakeland Auto Mall** continues to be an excellent sponsor with their support through buying memberships for new Miata buyers. Don't forget **Courtesy Mazda** in Tampa. They are a valuable asset to the club as well.



"Tidwell", continued from page 1

Barbara for the magazine, although we have our disagreements as I did with Norman, was a critical, timely move. Our latest issue is our best yet (99 III).

KM: What do you think is the greatest failure or shortcoming of MCA, if any?

VT: I would ensure that the entire fulfillment/publishing/technical staff was all under one roof and conversing over a bagel and coffee three times a week. I prefer eye contact.

Secondly, I truly, truly wish I could get a hold of the large insurance company Miata owner database list to solicit from. Nowhere that I know of can I get access to those 225,000 second and third hand Miata owners. Still, we have the highest percentage membership of any model out there.

KM: What do you envision for the future of MCA?

VT: The Miata is ten years old and has seen one of most successful marketing cycles in the automotive world. The Miata Club of America depends, to some degree, on the continued success of the Miata and Mazda. I am currently lobbying to gas/tire, etc. companies for REAL discounts for members. My first objective for the next ten years is for members to realize such a financial benefit from being a member that the magazine and camaraderie are just icing on the cake.

I am receiving more and more input from chapters, too. There needs to be a balance of cooperation and autonomy between Mazda/MCA/Chapters. Chapters have to be able to stand on their own. I have discussed this over numerous beers with heads of other national organizations. I do want a regional head for chapters and am working towards that right now.

Finally, and for something I have received a bit of discussion, are the events. There are large regional events forming throughout the US and their attendances are as large as a national level just three years ago. These are "open" events that do not limit attendance or turn anyone away if just passing by. I would like for MCA and Mazda to focus more attention on these events and solicit from not only our own databases but from non-members. The objective for the chapters would be new membership and new blood (chapters need this every 3-4 years).

MCA would recruit for new membership and if attendance grows to the scale I see it already doing, Mazda might want to join in on a smaller scale than a national. Mazda's benefit would be to show new product for those with older models that might be considering a current purchase.

The goal of this organization has always been to enthruse the Miata owner about their car. I'd like to know that we've done that with 250,000 Miata owners and that Mazda will always have a reason (market demand) to build Miatas. Much like the 911 and Corvette, it will always have a following, real competitors and periods of low sales. I hope the MCA can bolster those periods so that Mazda can produce numerous generations of Miatas.

KM: What do you see for the future of the Miata?

VT: I'll bet some big cash on a performance version within a year, along with a neat new Mazda sports car to bring attention to it. While Mazda will never convince people to pay \$1,000 each for 8 Mazda badges like BMW does for their Z-3, I would like to see them capitalize on their REAL performance history (they have one and the current market doesn't know it) like Chrysler has with their new models and provide a Miata performance car like that of the BMW M roadster. I believe that one of the reasons the Z-3 currently outsells the Miata is image and a large part of that image is the performance the M roadster exudes. That image falls over into the regular Z-3. I expect some really fantastic product within the next two years. Why? I have dodged pylons with Richard Beattie on a few occasions and he IS a driver. Culture starts from the top.

KM: Since you mentioned that "culture" starts at the top, do you have a feeling for what the influence of Ford has been on Mazda since it now owns a large portion of it?

VT: That's a tough one and particularly difficult to get really good information about. Information being not media quotes, but strategic planning for the next 10 years.

Looking at it from a business point of view, Mazda is first and foremost a car manufacturing machine - a very good one with high efficiencies and flexible manufacturing ability. Ford's plan is to utilize Mazda's manufacturing prowess for their global

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efforts. Ford will satisfy the shareholders first.

With regard to design and sharing platforms, of course they will combine as much as possible, but the question on everyone's mind is: Will Mazda still be able to design and build sports cars like the Miata and RX-7?

I believe that Mazda has free reigns for now and we will see more of the Miata and new sports cars. Mazda does have certain abilities and innovativeness that Ford doesn't and finally there must be some show of respect for Mazda, regardless of ownership.

KM: What is your greatest personal success?

VT: I've reached an age where success means something entirely different than it used to. Right before my divorce of 19 years of marriage to someone that I didn't have the courage for about 18 of those years to stand up to, a friend of mine told me I'd have to start a new life. I didn't think I could but I sure have and I don't think I've run off too many of my old friends in the process. I'm looking forward to the rest of my life and its many lessons in store, no matter how much they will hurt. I've finally learned to live now, one day at a time, something my Dad tried his damndest to teach me before he died.

KM: What other cars on the market, or soon to be on the market, do you find interesting, and why?

VT: For looks? To die for Ferrari 360 or 456 for sedan. Domestic? The new Chrysler PT will put the sputter and pick-up market on its ear, IF Chrysler markets it up a bit (not cost, but demographics). Performance sedan? I'd love a BMW M5, dressed as the new Jaguar S. I have always admired the 911, especially the new one (996), but it always seems to look better on someone else. I still truly love my '95 RX-7 and revel in the fact that I know the guys that designed it. I am really intrigued as to Mazda's secret for this coming Tokyo Auto show - it has a rotary. The Mercedes CL coupe is handsome and of course costly. Audi TT is very creative.

KM: If you could drive any car in the world, what would it be?

VT: Truly - A Miata. ✦



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Kevin Byrd



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Lakeland, 800-733-3439

LINDELL **MAZDA**

St. Petersburg, 813-344-3344

Courtesy Mazda
Hillborough Ave., Tampa
813-261-2350





Hang on Sloopy!

As some of you are no doubt aware, several Sun Riders members are currently heavily involved in a unique project. The group, calling themselves Sun Riders Racing, are putting together a race car to compete in Grassroots Motorsports Magazine's \$1500 Challenge. The object of the competition is to set up a car for \$1500 or less, including the cost of the car. The car will compete in a drag race, an autocross, and a concours. The event will be held the last weekend in September on the east coast of Florida. The only prizes involved are a trophy, a mention in the Magazine (maybe a cover shot), and glory.

The team has raised the requisite \$1500 by selling \$20 shares in the car. Some members have bought as many as 15 shares, others are in for 1 or 2. Since a Miata pretty much can't be had for anything near \$1500, the team decided to at least stick with Mazda and enter a first-generation RX-7. After an exhaustive search, a suitable '7' was found for \$800. The car was owned by Andy Felker, who races a '99 Miata in the Motorola Cup series. Andy had bought the '7' a few years ago and had started prepping it to race in SCCA Improved Touring competition, but ended up racing a Miata in that class instead, relegating the '7' to storage for a couple years. Andy did most of the hard work for us, though, stripping everything out of

the interior of the car, installing a 4-point roll bar, removing unnecessary equipment like emissions controls and air conditioning, and painting the car blue with white stripes. The car is a '79 model with an '84 engine in it. Andy also threw into the deal the original '79 engine (not running), a set of used race tires, and a four-point racing harness. The work on the car commenced near the end of June, after Jonathan Skinner and Jim Pøehlman drove to Tallahassee to pick up the car, starting with getting the engine running, which it had not done in quite some time. After getting all the various hoses that were not connected re-connected, the engine fired right up, more or less. An inspection of the brakes revealed that both rear wheel cylinders were in need of a rebuild. A lot of work cleaning, removing additional pieces, and further inspections of the rest of the car went on for two days, and a long list of things yet to do was made. Anyone who is interested can still buy shares in the car. We will likely need a bit more than \$1500 to cover expenses while we develop the car and travel to the competition. After the GRM \$1500 Challenge, the team will collectively make a decision to either sell the car and return some funds to the team members, or keep the car for use as a club racer/autocrosser that could be used by team members to take SCCA driver's schools, etc. The car could also be bought out by a smaller subset of the G-15-C team and some funds returned to the others. Stay tuned as we continue to work on the car over the next 2 months.



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**WE'D LIKE TO THANK
QUICKSILVER
PRINTING
FOR THEIR SERVICES
AND HELP IN PRODUCING THIS NEWSLETTER**



Calendar of Events

Tuesday, July 13 - 7:00PM - Regular monthly meeting, Landry's Seafood House. Call Jonathan at 727-784-5529 for information or directions.

Saturday, July 24 - 2:30 PM -10:00PM - Autocross. We are planning our fourth autocross of the year at the St. Petersburg Junior College Allstate Campus. Come out and learn how to *really* drive that car you're so proud of. You don't even have to own a Miata, any type of car can come, so bring your friends and challenge them to beat you! Cost will be \$25 and that will include a lunch. Spectators can eat lunch with us for \$5. All cars must pass basic tech inspection. Helmets are required. Call Jonathan Skinner at 727-784-5529 or Kevin Morrison at 813-222-0509 for more details.

The Campus is located at 3200 34th Street South, St. Petersburg.

Directions from I-275 Southbound:

Take Exit #6, which is 22nd Ave. South

Directions from I-275 Northbound:

Take Exit #5, which is also 22nd Ave. South

Head West on 22nd Ave to 34th Street,

take a left at the light onto 34th Street South. (this is also known as US 19)

Head South for about a half-mile, SPJC-Allstate Center will be on your left, across from Florida Power.

Thursday July 29 - Sunday, August 1 - Deal's Gap. If you haven't already made arrangements to join us on the trip to Deal's Gap in Eastern Tennessee, there may still be time. There are now 300 Miatas slated to be there, over twice as many as last year. Call Kevin at 813-222-0509 or Jonathan at 727-784-5529 and we'll help you find accommodations near the Gap (most rooms within a 20 mile radius are booked solid with Miata nuts.) There are two caravans going up from the Tampa area, one on Thursday and one on Friday.

Tuesday, August 10 - 7:00PM - Regular monthly meeting, Landry's Seafood House. Call Kevin at 813-222-0509 for information or directions.

Sunday, August 22 - 9:00AM. Semi Famous Sunday Run. The return of the Southern Route! We will start in Tampa at Courtesy Mazda on Dale Mabry at 9:00, then we'll swing by the SPJC Allstate Campus at 9:45, then we'll make a stop at Thornton Mazda in Palmetto at 10:30. You can meet us at any one of those places. From there we will take a leisurely drive down Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key, ending up at St. Armand's Circle for lunch at Cha-Cha Coconuts around 12:00.

Friday, September 10 - Sunday, September 12 - SunRiders Sizzle on the Beach. Join us for an entire weekend of food, fun, and Miata-stuff at the BillMar Beach Resort in Treasure Island. Cost is \$65 per single or \$99 per couple (covers your meals, organized events, and one T-shirt). Accommodations at the BillMar are extra (800-826-9724), but we have a really good group rate. You should have gotten a registration packet in the mail with the June Update, but if you didn't, contact one of the club officers and we'll get you the information.



Sun Riders Sizzle on the Beach! September 10-12

Make plans now to join us for the return of the Sun Riders Sizzle! Our last Sizzle was almost three years ago, in 1996. This year, we are going to Sizzle on the Beach!

Please plan on spending the weekend of September 10 - 12 at the BilMar Beach Resort located at 10650 Gulf Blvd., on Treasure Island! If you have web access, take a look at their facility at: www.gotampabay.com/bilmar.

We will be having a Friday night reception party, a Saturday picnic at Fort DeSoto Park, A formal Saturday night dinner, a Miata Concours competition, beach drives, a chance to see a Devil Rays game should you desire, or the opportunity to just kick back and soak up some rays!

We have contacted several vendors as well, so you might be able to buy that special Miata part you have been thinking about!

There is excellent deep sea fishing and shopping available nearby, as John's Pass Marina is just five minutes away!

Cost of the event will be only \$65.00 per person, or \$99.00 per couple. This will include the Friday reception, Saturday Picnic, Saturday Dinner and one event T-shirt. Additional T-shirts will be available for purchase. Your accommodations at the BilMar Beach Resort are of course additional, but we have negotiated a group rate of \$70.00 a night for up to four people in a gulf front room, or \$78.00 a night for up to four people for a gulf front efficiency. Call the Resort directly at 727-360-5531 or toll free at 1-800-826-9724 and make sure to tell them you are with the Sun Riders Group!

An optional (\$30) driving school will be held on Sunday, September 12. It's only open to 30 drivers, so reserve your spot right away!

YOU MUST REGISTER BY AUGUST 27



quicksilver ad here

Clutch Basics

by Stuart Thompson

The Miata is a great car. It hardly needs repair. Just service it and drive it. The only frequent repair to make is replacing the clutch slave cylinder every three years. I can lift the hood of any Miata that is over three years old and just about predict that the clutch fluid reservoir will be low. If the fluid level is below the maximum mark I also know for a fact where the missing fluid is going. It is seeping past an o-ring type seal in the clutch slave cylinder, also known as the clutch release cylinder.

Your slave cylinder goes to work when you press the clutch pedal in. The slave puts your clutch pedal inputs into direct action on the clutch when you decide to change gears. The slave cylinder is about the size and shape of a fat roll of Lifesavers, and is located down on the right hand side of the transmission. If you turn your wheels all the way to the right, you can see it at the back of the right front tire. Oddly the more you drive your Miata the longer they will last, but when this little part goes bad it will leave you stranded.

A cut-away view of your transmission would illustrate that it has two distinct sections, the bell housing and the gearbox. The bell housing is the part of your transmission that is closest to your engine. It's shaped like a bell and it houses your clutch, keeping it dry and oil free. Your Miata's slave cylinder is located just outside this bell housing. The gearbox is located on the rear portion of the transmission and contains the actual gears that you change while driving. When you renew your transmission fluid every 60,000 miles, you're actually changing the fluid that's in the gearbox, not the bell housing.

Attached to your clutch pedal just above your foot is another small cylinder called the clutch master cylinder. When you press your clutch pedal in, the master cylinder drives a rather small amount of hydraulic fluid down to the slave cylinder through four feet of very small tubing. The fluid that is pushed forward by the master cylinder pushes on the slave cylinder and a cigarette sized pin. That pin pushes on a spatula shaped arm that protrudes half way out of the bell housing of the transmission. The arm is called the clutch arm and it acts as a lever to press down on, and lift the pressure plate off of the clutch disc. The clutch disc is the size of a dinner plate and about a three eighths of an inch thick. It is attached to the gearbox by a long shaft extending from the gearbox into the bell housing.

The pressure plate is a big strong circular clamp that traps the clutch disc against the flywheel of the engine when you let your clutch out. It frees the clutch disc when

you push the clutch in. Think of the engine and flywheel as being one unit and the gearbox and clutch disc being another. The pressure plate bonds the two units together or it separates the two. When the two are separated, you change the gears because the gearbox is free from the engine. You literally and physically pry your engine away from your gearbox and separate your powertrain into two pieces using the clutch. When you let your clutch out you make the powertrain whole again.

The slave cylinder is historically the weak link in the operation. It has an o-ring that fails under the tremendous pressure that your foot creates by pushing your clutch in time after time. By fails, I mean that the fluid you're pushing forward seeps past the o-ring and exchanges itself with air. Air in the hydraulic system is bad. When making this repair, both the slave and master cylinders have to be replaced. The unequal pressure created by replacing just one cylinder will cause the other older cylinder to fail. The parts are \$138 and labor is \$75. This is the most common Miata repair I make. Remember too, that the slave cylinder can leave you stranded with no way to change gears, however there is a way to change gears without your clutch that could get you out of a bad situation. That's for next time.

Stuart Thompson
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While it certainly is good practice to replace or rebuild both the slave and master cylinder together, we have replaced two slave cylinders in Miatas without ever having the master cylinder fail. If you do your own work on your car, it's a judgement call whether you want to replace parts that haven't failed yet. Those of us who are really anal sometimes do it, just to be safe. - ed. ■



CLUB MERCHANDISE!

The club now has in stock a selection of apparel, emblazoned with the Sun Riders official logo.

Here's what's available and the prices:

POLO SHIRTS - \$25. These attractive Polos are made by Jerzees and are professionally embroidered with the logo on the left breast. Colors: White, Gray, Red, Green, Blue, others may be available as special order. Sizes S-XL

T-SHIRTS - \$15. Hanes Beefy-T, 100% Cotton, logo on left breast. Colors: white, red, others special order. S-XL

TANK TOPS - White, small or large only - clearance, \$5 each.

DUFFEL BAG - \$20 Black, nylon construction, real nice! Two left.

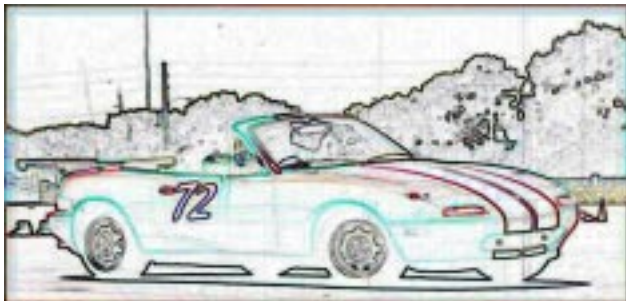
WORKOUT SHORTS - black, elastic wasteband, large, one pair only - \$10

CAPS - \$15 - this is the popular low-profile cotton cap. Colors: white, Khaki/green, Khaki/grey. One size fits all.

MEMBER BUTTONS - \$2 - Big, round button with your name and a likeness of your car in the correct color. Contact Ed Simon at an event to order one.

CLUB PINS - \$4 - this unique pin is made in Colorado by Joe Portas, the "Knobmeister" on his Laser-engraver. It's an exact likeness of the Sun Riders' logo carved from real cherry wood. Approx. 5/8 inch square. Buy several to trade with other clubs at regional and national events.

Contact Jonathan Skinner at an event, or at 727-784-5529, or jonathan@sunriders.com to order apparel or club pins.



Sun Riders At The Strip

by Jim Poehlman

Where can you find a guy straddling a bottle of nitrous on wheels and running the quarter mile in 7 seconds? You can see this spectacle at The DeSoto Speedway in Manatee County. The Chevy SS Club invited the Sun Riders for a little racetrack revenge last Tuesday night. In May, the SS club participated in our Autocross at the St. Pete J.C. Allstate Center in St. Pete. The heavy Chevys tore up the course trying to beat the time of the turn gripping Miata roadster to no avail. Well, on the straight track, we were nothing more than a speck in the rear view mirror of the Chevys.

Located among numerous cow pastures and a small wine vineyard just east of Bradenton, DeSoto Speedway plays host to everyone from mopeds to top fuel dragsters on Tuesday and Friday nights. For 15 bucks you can drive, push, or pull anything to the strip to see how quick you can make it down the quarter mile strip... and it's legal too! These "test-and-tune" nights are geared toward amateur and professional race teams who are fine tuning their machines for the real thing. This week, however, the "rice crunchers and kraut burners" (terms used by the track announcer/comedian) nearly out numbered the dragsters, hotrods, and crotch rockets.

Among the import contingent of Nissans, Integras, and Bimmers, Don Reese, Glen Ellingson and I were the only Miataphiles. This was the first time I saw a BMW M-Roadster Hardtop up close. I think it looks like a VW fastback on steroids. Anyway, we made between 6 and 8 runs each averaging just under 17 seconds at roughly 81 mph. Not the quickest, but not the slowest either. It certainly was fun and everyone should try it. I think forced air induction just moved up a couple notches on my wish list. ●

HORIZONS

Sun Riders Miata Club of Tampa Bay

Visit the club's web page at <http://www.sunriders.com>

Features at the site include "Miatas of the Net"; "There and Back Again" - a trip across the country in a Miata; Photos from SunRiders Events; the Calendar of Events, and links to other Miata-related web sites.

Call the Event Hotline at 813-225-4240 for the latest event information.



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