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HORIZONS

The Official Newsletter of the SunRiders Miata Club of Tampa Bay

Sun Riders at Sebring and Road Atlanta

by Kevin Morrison

Every year, the third weekend in March marks the running of the 12 Hours of Sebring, one of the world's longest-running road races. This year, Jonathan Skinner, Steve Swiger, Sue Gray from the Peachtree Miata club in Atlanta, and I went down to the track on Friday. Steve was there to serve as crew for the Roadster Rage race team who was entered in the Motorola Cup (a support race to the main 12 hour race). Rob Ebersol and Andy Felker are the two drivers/owners of the Roadster Rage team, and Steve got in touch with them and offered his services. Unfortunately, mechanical problems threw a wrench into their first foray into the Motorola Cup, but they did get some track time and looked pretty good. Jonathan and I had agreed to work a shift at the SCCA membership booth on Saturday, and in return we got free tickets to the race. I also was signed up as a volunteer with SportsCar (the sanctioning organization), along with Sue. We got SportsCar credentials which gave us access to the pits, which was very cool.

On Friday we made our way out to a couple different parts of the track and watched the Formula Mazda race (formula cars powered by Mazda rotary engines), the Ferrari Challenge (a bunch of rich guys racing Ferrari F-355's), and the Motorola Cup (street/sports car). There were 4 or 5 Miatas running in the Motorola Cup in the Compact class. Other cars in the series include Mustangs, Firebirds, RX-7's, Supras, BMW's, Porsche 911 & 944, Mazda MX-6/626's, Hyundai Tiburons (both factory entries), some Lexus GS400's, a Honda Del Sol, and a few other odds and ends. The Motorola Cup was a 3 hour enduro. By the time it was over at a little after 6:00, we were bushed and decided to head back to the motel (40 miles away in Lake Wales) and hit Shoneys for some nourishment.

Saturday morning we hit the road a little after 7:00 to head back to the track, as the big race started at 10:00 and we knew there would be a lot of traffic getting into the track. The 12 hour race is populated with sports cars of basically 2 varieties, with a great many flavors - GT and Prototype (aka Can-Am, WSC). The GT cars are much like the Porsches, BMW's and others that we see on the road, though under the skin they are very much pure race cars, and the Prototype cars are like nothing you've ever seen before. These are some of the most exotic machinery on the planet, and are so fast they make your head spin. (Go to <http://www.professionalsportscar.com> for more information). We finally got into the track, parked, checked in with SCCA and found out when we would be working, and then checked in with SportsCar where Sue and I were immediately "volunteered" into helping drape giant 18-foot national flags over every race car as they gridded up on the track for the start. We and about 20 other volunteers scrambled around, lugging these huge flags out onto the starting grid, weaving in and out among the hundreds of cars, crew members, drivers, and team members, trying to find a car with the same national flag painted on it as the flag we were carrying (i.e., the BMW teams had to get German flags on their cars). We were told that when the French national anthem completed, we were to remove the flags from each car and a truck would come by to pick them up. By the time the French national anthem started, we had gotten flags put on about 70% of the cars, as some were still being pushed out onto the grid at the last minute. Oh well, nothing ever seems to go exactly as planned in racing, even at the very top levels. It was the thrill of a lifetime being able to be a part of such a highly-charged moment. I was standing there next to the cars of some very famous drivers. I draped a US flag over the car that won the GT class at Daytona in the Rolex 24, and even met the crew chief. I was star-struck, for sure. Then the US national anthem was played and a prayer was said, followed by the

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NEW MEMBERS!!!

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**WELCOME ABOARD! WE HOPE TO SEE
YOU ALL AT AN EVENT SOON!**

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. You can either pay \$22.50 for the rest of 1999, or you can pay the full \$30 and you'll be paid up until May 2000. Don't delay!

You new members will be receiving your membership cards soon. We print them in batches of 10, so sometimes it takes a while before we run another batch. 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, *you will also find included in this issue a two-sided promotional flyer* for the club. This is for you to give to other Miata people who are not in the club. *Make a bunch of copies and give them to every person you see driving a Miata.* 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 **Courtesy Mazda** in Tampa. We've been using Courtesy's location as a meeting point for our Sunday morning excursions, and even though they aren't open at the time, we enjoy looking at the Miatas parked on the lot. Courtesy has only been a sponsor for a couple months now, but we're glad to have them on board.

Our other sponsors continue to support the club in a lot of ways. **Lindell Mazda** and **Mazda Village** both offer parts and service discounts (10%) in addition to their financial support. **Lakeland Auto Mall** has been sending us lots of new members, as well.

Also, even though they are not an official sponsor, we'd like to thank **Thornton Mazda** in Palmetto for their hospitality in letting us use their lot as a gathering point for our southern Sunday Runs. On May 2 we had 35 Miatas clogging Thornton's lot, and quite a few of us using their restrooms!



"Sebring", continued from page 1

order to clear the grid. We climbed back over the concrete walls and went back behind the pits and tried to get somewhere we could watch the start from.

The "gentlemen, start your engines" command came at about 10:10 and all the engines roared to life. There's no sound like it in the world. They all take off behind the Viper pace car and do a warm up lap. As they come around again, the pace car pulls off and the sound of 50 cars at wide open throttle, coming down the straight at 150 to 180+ miles per hour, barely 50 feet away, is so loud it hurts.



Soon the realization that there were 12 hours to go before this was finished set in and we made our way to a comfortable spot and just watched for a while. At noon we met back up with Steve and Jonathan at the hairpin and watched from there for a while. There's a lot of action at the hairpin -lots of spins and fender to fender racing, with the occasional off-road excursion or outright crash. There was also a giant video screen there so we could see what was going on at other parts of the track.

A walk around the infield allowed us to see one of the main things people always talk about when they talk about Sebring - the crazy loonies who inhabit the infield in tents, RV's, U-Hauls, wooden crates, cardboard boxes, lean-to's, school buses, cherry picker trucks, cars, vans, and other unidentifiable vehicles for the entire week of practice, qualifying and racing. Many of these people are not even really fans of SportsCar racing per se - they won't be traveling to Road Atlanta for the next race like I will. They just show up at Sebring every year and drink enough beer and liquor to fill a vat the size of the Superdome.

At 3:00 Jonathan and I went to put in our time at the SCCA booth. We helped pass out literature about the SCCA and talked to quite a few people. That's where we saw the SunRiders' own Mark Mackenzie and a few other people we know. We helped take down the SCCA booth at about 4:30. After that, we went to a dinner being put on by HSR (Historic Sportscar Racing) that we somehow managed to get ourselves invited to. We met a couple people who are involved with running that organization, and told them we might be inter-

ested in helping work some races. They had a really nice spread of roast pork, turkey, steamed vegetables, cole slaw and cake for dessert as well as free beer, wine, and sodas. The historic racers really know how to do things first class!

After darkness fell, we spent some time in the pits, watching cars come in for pit stops. We watched as one Porsche 911

RSR got a full brake job in 3 minutes, as well as a full tank of gas and 4 new tires. We also watched from 10 feet away as the Doyle-Risi Ferrari team rushed to replace the entire rear suspension of the car after it was damaged in an on-track incident. They had been running in 3rd place overall, but the job took quite a while and they dropped to 7th place before getting the car back on the track an hour before the

end of the race. We also watched from the hairpin, where we could see the brake rotors glowing bright orange as the drivers hauled the cars down from 150 mph to 40 or so, then accelerating hard out of the turn and into the darkness.

At the end of the race, the factory BMW prototype entry was the victor by only 9 seconds over the second place car, a Riley & Scott Ford run by Dyson Racing - the smallest margin of victory in Sebring's 47-year history. We made our way to the winner's circle where hundreds of crew members and others with pit access were gathering around the winning car. The scene was one of complete mayhem. I have never in my life seen such celebration and joy on the faces of so many people. It was like being in the locker room of the winning team after the superbowl. Champagne was spewing over everyone in the crowd and a hundred photographers were taking a hundred pictures (myself included). I still get a little choked up when I think about it. One thing is for sure - the Sun Riders will be at Sebring in force next year. Plan to be there with us!

About a month later, April 17-18, I flew up to Atlanta to attend the Grand Prix of Atlanta, the second round of the American LeMans Series. I arrived at Road Atlanta Saturday morning, checked in with the SCCA volunteer coordinator, and was immediately put to work in the pits with some other SCCA volunteers. We helped the SportsCar people grid up the cars for the Star Mazda race and then for the Motorola Cup 3-hour race. Getting 50+ race cars parked on the grid in the right order is

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a tough job!

Rob Ebersol and Andy Felker were on hand with their #88 Miata to run in the Motorola Cup race and our Steve Swiger made the drive up to serve as crew for the team once more. This time (unlike Sebring) the car was running fine and they ran the race from flag to flag. With the exception of a couple black flag penalties for speeding in the pit lane, they did very well for such a new team with such a new car. I could tell by the size of the smile on Steve's face that he had the time of his life. The overall winner was a Pontiac Firebird sponsored by Sunoco. The compact class was won by a Hyundai Tiburon, followed by a couple Del Sols. We're hoping the Miatas will get more competitive as the series goes on.



There I am on the grid at Sebring in front of the Doran Racing Ferrari 333SP

Sunday was a fun day, too. I didn't work in the pits at all, and instead spectated all day. First was the Women's Global GT series. This is a series where all the drivers are women and they are all driving Panoz-built race cars (tube frame, fiberglass body, 350hp Ford V-8). It was a good race and those ladies really go for it out there! I think it's a great idea and it's getting Don Panoz a lot of publicity. Finally, the main event for the weekend got underway at 2:00. Unfortunately, the factory BMW LMP cars that won at Sebring were not on hand as they are busy preparing for LeMans, but Dyson Racing (winner at Daytona and runner-up at Sebring) brought both of their cars, and all the regular Ferraris were in attendance. The new Panoz Spyder debuted in amazing fashion, qualifying second a mere few days after it turned its first wheel (despite being a truly strange looking car), while the venerable Panoz GTR-1 failed to complete the first pace lap and spent the race parked on the back straight just past turn 7. The star of the weekend, though, was Team Rafanelli with their Judd V10-powered Riley & Scott chassis. The Judd is a F1 derived engine and it was clearly the engine to have for this race. Qualifying first, the car was bumped to the bottom of the field due to a rules infraction. Within the first 4 laps, the car, with Eric van de Poele at the wheel, had gained roughly 20

positions, and soon took over the lead. The lead changed a couple times as cars went in for pit stops, but the Rafanelli car was able to retake the lead almost effortlessly each time, clearly due to having a lot more horsepower. The race ended all too soon and my second weekend at the races in a month came to an end.

I must mention that I had the pleasure on Saturday night of meeting up with Cathy Thompson (FootHills Miata Club), Kat Bryce (Southwest Florida Miata), and Morris Friedman (Peachtree Miata) at Chateau Elan for a nice dinner of Fish & Chips in the Irish Pub. I also managed to bump into John Starke and Bob Frantz of the Southwest Florida Miata Club at the track and they joined us for dinner as well. That's probably it for me for sportscar racing until the Petit LeMans at Road Atlanta in September, though I'm toying with the idea of flying to Laguna Seca for the Visa SportsCar Championship race in October. Steve will be doing more crew work for the #88 car this summer as they continue on in the Motorola Cup. ●

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR
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Back To Basics

By Jonathan Skinner

Not everyone is comfortable working on their Miata. If the thought of changing your own oil has you a little intimidated, let alone doing your own timing belt or switching out shocks and springs, perhaps you just need to start with the small things, like:

How To Clean your Floor Mats!

Step one: Carefully remove floor mats by removing the Mats from the floor.

Step Two: while carefully holding the floor mat with both hands, slowly let one end of the mat dangle lower than the other.

Step Three: While grasping the mat with both hands at the top, shake vigorously to allow loose foreign matter on the mat to drop away. (Note, do NOT do this in the direction the wind is blowing!)

Step Four: If you have access to a shop vac, use this to vigorously vacuum the mats. If you do NOT have a shop vacuum, but you do have a vacuum in the house, carefully make sure your spouse is not around, and use that vacuum VERY QUICKLY!! This is for two reasons, your spouse may not appreciate your using the vacuum in this way, or even worse may now expect you to vacuum the rest of the house as long as you've got the vacuum out anyway!

Step Five: Carefully reverse the extraction procedure outlined in

Step One and reinsert the floor mats in their correct orientation and positions. Step Six: Congratulate yourself on a job well done! And best of all, you did it yourself! Who knows, maybe you will even come out and join us at the next Tech Session! ☺

-join us next issue when Jonathan tells us how to pump our own gas! - ed.



EVENT REPORT - MIATAS, BREAKFAST, AND WINE

On May 2, 35 Miatas of every variety descended on the Terra Ceia Bay Country Club for a wonderful brunch. The unprecedented number of attendees for this Sunday Run can be attributed to the boundless enthusiasm of Susan and Gary Humphreys, who organized the whole thing. From the club, we proceeded in a LONG line through some county back roads (as curvy as it gets in Manatee county) and finally ended up at the Rosa Fiorelli Winery near Bradenton. Breaking up into three groups, we took a tour of the winery operation and vineyard, followed by wine and cheese under the shade of some trees. A quick game of horseshoes was enjoyed by a few, and the afternoon was well spent, eating, talking, and laughing. A large contingent from the Southwest Florida Miata Club swelled our ranks to nearly 60 people, setting an all-time record for a Sun Riders Sunday Run! Susan and Gary, anytime you want to do it again, we're there!

SUNRIDERS MIATA CLUB OF TAMPA BAY

**CO-PRESIDENT/
WEBMASTER/NEWSLETTER
EDITOR:
KEVIN MORRISON
(KEVIN@SUNRIDERS.COM)**

**CO-PRESIDENT/
DIRECTOR OF MOTORSPORTS:
JONATHAN SKINNER
(JONATHAN@SUNRIDERS.COM)**

**BOARD MEMBER/EVENTS
PLANNING/TOOL MEISTER:
STEVE SWIGER
(STEVE@SUNRIDERS.COM)**

**BOARD MEMBERS
PAUL SHAFFER & ANDREA
GAMBILL
(PAUL@SUNRIDERS.COM)**

**P.O. BOX 26071
TAMPA, FL 33623-6071**

EVENT LINE: 813-225-4240

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



Calendar of Events

Saturday, May 29 - 9:00 AM - Autocross. We are planning our third 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. 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.

Sunday, June 6, 8:00AM. Semi Famous Sunday Run. The return of the Northern Route! We will start in North Tampa (Lutz) at the McDonalds located at U.S. 41 and SR54, and drive north through Brooksville, and run some of our favorite back roads. This is traditionally a "brisk" run, so don't bother trying to photograph the scenery - you won't have time. We'll then eat breakfast at The Country Diner. After breakfast, we will caravan to Ed Simon's house (it's on the way) and enjoy his hospitality watching some event videos on his 60" projection screen TV, and maybe take a dip in his pool! This event is limited to the first 12 cars to RSVP due to the limited capacity of the Country Diner. Call Kevin Morrison at 813-222-0509 or email kevin@sunriders.com to RSVP or for more information. This run is for drivers with advanced skills.

June 12-13- Miata World (a Miata-specific vendor in the Ft. Lauderdale area) is sponsoring a meet for at least 5 of the Florida clubs on Sanibel June 12-13. The participating clubs anticipated are: Space Coast, Gold Coast, Central Florida, Southwest Florida, and SunRiders. Events will stage at the Outrigger Resort on Sanibel Island. A Special Room rate of \$68 a night is available for participants. Reservations may be made by contacting the Outrigger at 800-211-8441. For more information call Steve Swiger at 813-239-9224 or email steve@sunriders.com

Saturday July 24 - Fourth Autocross of the season, Second Annual Night Race! This will be an evening autocross. We'll start around 3:00 and go 'til about 10:00, with fun runs by headlights! We did this last summer and it was a blast - and a great way to avoid the hottest part of the day.

Friday, July 30 - Sunday, August 1 - Miatas at the Gap '99! More details in the next issue.



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!

We'll begin taking registrations for this event in the next few weeks.

Stay tuned for much more details in the June Update!



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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.



P.O. Box 26071
Tampa, FL 33623-6071