



# NEWSLETTER

Vol 38 #4 August 2020



## Live Large at Blackhawk Farms



# From The Editor :

Racing is stumbling back to life. But many other car gatherings are cancelled and hopefully will return in 2021. One week we're partially back and we can go to a restaurant and have a meal, the next everything is shut down and you're lucky if you can get a take out order from your favorite eatery. There has been nothing even remotely like this in my 78 years. Let's hope we can all say "remember when" soon.

## INSIDE

**MIDNIGHT RALLY:** Not so long ago nor that far away, some Tennessee MG folks decided a full out rally held at the witching hour was something that needed to be done. The never told story, revealed by those who are still consuming oxygen, is presented.

**FOR SALE:** Dan Leonard reports his stash of MGVR gear is available again and a valuable cylinder head is yours at a bargain price.

**NIGHTHAWK:** How did a Buick V8 find its way into an MGA? Mark Barnhart explains it.

**RACE REPORTS:** Dan Leonard and Todd Stevenson report from Blackhawk Farms and Honey Bee races at Mid Ohio.



This TD is more interested in reaching the summit of Mt. Equinox than heading back down



## Saga of the Midnight Rallye

Into the deathly darkness, rode the 600 ( well, maybe 25). These were the men and women of the "Mid-Tenn T's," in their funny little cars with tall, skinny tires, and an octagon symbol on their bonnets, and everywhere else. Thus, was the start of this zany club's infamous Midnight Rallye.

Whomever originated this idea to run a Rallye at night, nobody ever knew, and nobody ever admitted to. The cars gathered in a Walmart parking lot on the southeast side of Nashville. The route was pretty straightforward,

with the first move required going east, until coming to Murfreesboro Road, and turning RIGHT. A nice couple in a pretty TC were in the lead and headed out. However, when they got to said Murfreesboro Road, they turned LEFT, and have never been seen again. By then, darkness had engulfed them all, and the haunting words of Joseph Lucas came at them loud and clear - DON'T DRIVE AT NIGHT! But, in true MG fashion, they pushed on, regardless.

They did have the foresight to provide a "sweep car," and this was manned by Bob Coleman and his two daughters. Coleman was from the area to be traveled, and was familiar with such exotic places as Lascassas, Auburntown, Kittrell and Beech Grove. But, he failed to impart any of this information to the participants; hence, he never saw any of the cars that had a head start. They were either too far ahead, or lost, mostly the latter. In fact, one of the nice ladies in the club, and her female friend got so hopelessly lost, they had to get a motel somewhere, near Chattanooga. And, a search party, headed by Dr. Bill Parish was sent out the next morning to try and locate them, and escort them home, and they were successful. Other than being quite ashen and stressed, the two ladies were ok.

All made it back to Nashville, some way, but Bill Davis' old TA dropped a valve near Franklin. Franklin is a typical Southern town, with a Square and 4 roads coming into it. After he negotiated Arno Road, which he misread to be 'Are No Road', they all came plowing into the square at the same time. Being Saturday night, the local gendarmes were sitting around the square. The quick-thinking drivers spotted the cops, and all took a different road out, leaving the lawmen wondering what they had just seen, and where did they go. Most got home by around 3:00 A.M. Needless to say, many wives were not too happy at this late arrival, and threatened the men with the one, dreaded weapon all women possess - if it every happened again. There was an ill- fated effort for an encore the next year, and several of the Michigan MG cult came down, after hearing about the first event. But it rained and stormed so badly, it had to be cancelled, with everyone going back to the Davis household to drink some beer. We hated this for the Michigan bunch, especially their ringleader, Malcom Castle, and his sidekick, Oilslick, who got his name having once jumped into a nice pool, leaving a serious oil slick that had to be cleaned up. The nickname stuck, and we never knew his real name. Those were the days, when we truly knew the meaning of: God is great, beer is good, and people are crazy!

As a final note, the work to put on a GOF such as this became too much work, and the ladies rebelled, and for good reason. The club ceased to exist, and out of its ashes Zapata Racing emerged. Bill Parish was the leader, supported by Bob Coleman, "Chief" Carl George, Bill Davis, John Reed, Fred Leib, and Mike ( Spatula) Buhl. The rest, they say, is history.

# Profiles



## MGVR DOMINATES CLASS OF 2020

### WATKINS GLEN WALK OF FAME

The virus has cancelled this years induction and celebration, but that nasty bug will not stop the Newsletter from feting the new honorees, Dave Smith and Kent Prather.

**Kent Prather is a racer.** After college and marrying his College sweetheart and starting a business in Auto repair and service, he bought a 1962 MGA race car that was built and raced in 1963 by a fellow named Bill Davis. He had the car for 10 years and sold it to a guy named Joe Gass. Joe then sold the car to Kent in 1979. The car went to drivers school and then was refurbished over the winter to start the season in 1980. Kent went on to race for 3 years and learned the trade of racing from Col. Joe Hauser, Randy Canfield, Jim Miller, Chris Fox and Wally Hicks, all Champions of that period. Prather went on to win the Washington DC Region Championship and the NORRDIC Championship before diving into National Racing.



He was told that an MGA would never win at the Runoffs!! Never tell Prather Never. The Prather Racing team went on to win 6 National Championships in the MGA! 32 consecutive Runoff appearances and 15 podium finishes. While racing in SCCA competition he started to get into Vintage racing with the MG in 2009. Kent developed and raced a Mazda Miata from 2006 to 2014. His son Jesse won 3 championships in that car before selling it back to Kent who raced it from 2009 to 2014, adding 2 of his 8 Championships using this car.

Passion for excellence and paying attention to detail turned out to be the key to success. Every year something new and faster would be developed for the MGA and the MG 3 main engine. After the first Runoffs win in 1986, orders

for engines started coming in until the auto repair side of business went over to Racing. There are Prather Racing engines in MGA, MGB, and Elva Couriers race cars all across the USA. The MGA is always the main concern. At Watkins Glen, the home of the Collier Cup races and the Bucher/Decker Cup, all but one of the winners on that cup since its inception, (for the winning MGA race car at the event), were running Kent Prather engines. The sole non-Prather winning MGA was powered by a Twin Cam engine.

Other notable awards are the Kimberly Cup and the Presidents Cup. The SCCA Kimberly was awarded to the Most Outstanding Driver in SCCA Club Racing for 1986. The Presidents Cup is the highest honor any SCCA driver can be awarded and was recognized by President George W. Bush and Laura Bush in 2005.

**From Kent:** It certainly means a lot to be included in the Glen Walk of Fame. I have raced all of the Watkins Glen course configurations. My first trip to the Glen was in the early 80's before any amenities existed at all. It still had the Scheckter chicane and the long back straight. Finally they removed the asphalt of the chicane and we were there that weekend. I ran the short course many times and still have the lap record. We went many times over the next 10 years and saw several changes. Later I came back and ran the new course with the chicane at the end of the back straight. I enjoyed racing all the configurations over the years, even the old one through town at a Vintage event. I am honored to be included on the Walk of Fame because my racing life has been dedicated to the MGA and sportscar racing and a large part of that was racing at the Glen. It has been a highlight over all these years.



# Dave Smith

The magic of Watkins Glen: My first trip to Watkins Glen was with Fellow Michigan Rowdies in my Dad's Pick-up Camper. Chari and I had met Joe and Bridget Tierno earlier that race season. The Tierno's loaned us an Austin Healy 100-4 to drive the track in the Noon activity. Once on the track, I was impressed with the smooth surface and the great layout. I knew that racing here would be an incredible experience. Walking downtown that year and reading the names on the granite blocks was a special time. As a young man, I had read about those drivers in the 1950's magazines. To see these names again made history really close at hand. Looking at Franklin Street and the turn to head uphill was special. To hear the stories from Joe Tierno and Gordy Ruston as they experienced those early races only made it better. I bought a Brick at the IMRRC museum to further support area history. Chari's first memory was driving down the Grade alongside Seneca Lake into the Glen. This was her first experience with the beauty of the glacier made finger lakes.

The growth of a grass roots race team is an interesting situation. Mark Barnhart and my first goal was to share our love for road racing with members of the Michigan Rowdies. Looking back, it is an extreme honor to be included with our driver hero's, such as Bob Bucher, Spanky Smith and Walt Hansgen and so many others in the Watkins Glen Walk of Fame. This achievement was NOT on our radar screen when Rowdie Racing was created.

September 3, 1997 was our first WGI race weekend, in our freshly prepared 1962 MGA Mk II. The car was a "Rowdies" club build. We had to name the team Rowdie Racing to show appreciation to our Michigan club members for their many hours building the MGA. I only had three prior vintage races to this weekend but had the incredibly good fortune to have Bobby Rahal as my track and driving coach the previous month.

September 8, 2016 was our final WGI race weekend in our MGA racer. In the interim we had raced here on 12 occasions. Many more races than any other track in the US or Canada. Over those years we had met many of the early Glen Racers. Denver Cornett II, Jim Carson, Ted Rounds, Frank Mount, and others.

We celebrated our three Glen Trophy wins over the years at Seneca Lodge. The Tiernos, The Rustons, The Powers, Don

Robinson, The Cornetts and Crew Chief Mark Barnhart were part of those great parties. The



Downtown Festival drives were done on Three occasions. To be part of that great assemblage of race fans really made the Glen racing experience something special.

What this nomination means to me: In 1996 the team's first goal was to experience as many historic race venues as possible. History has always been particularly important to Chari and me. We learned that the MGA was not only allowing for those experiences but was a surprisingly good racecar. SVRA must have thought so too, as I was bumped from competing against other MGA in F/Production (3F). Moved into E/Production(3E) against Porsche 356 and some other historically good race cars. On 10/10/1997 We won the SVRA 3E Vintage National Championship.

In 1998 we added a second team goal of a consistent Podium Finish. Not as easy as our first goal. Thanks to Bob Vitrikas for helping with the new goal. Bob was a very experienced racer and had developed a check list before departing the home garage. The list also had Track notes, lap times etc. Those notes were fantastic on repeat visits to the Glen. I was impressed how Bob and others supported all the Vintage teams with parts loans, driving tips and more.

In June Bill Green called about my nomination for the IMRRC walk of fame. I was speechless (that does not happen often). Bill told me that the process included a granite block in the sidewalks of Watkins Glen. Recalling how I had first looked at the historic drivers' names in their granite blocks made this a very emotional moment. Bill said Chari had written the nomination request. That made the nomination even more special to me.

I am overwhelmed and honored to be a recipient of a stone in the Watkins Glen Walk of Fame.



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Ladies White Polo	\$25.00
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Embroidered Patch	\$4.00
<b><i>New Item</i></b> MGVR Trailer Stickers Octagon 11-1/4”	\$10.00*
Small MGVR stickers Octagon 5 1/2”	\$2.50*
<b><i>MGVR Challenge Coin</i></b> ‘don’t leave home without it’	\$10.00
Twill Button Down Shirt, Blue, or Putty	\$32.00

## FOR SALE

bare cylinder head for sale, 1965 MGB casting 12H432, Cleaned, crack and pressure tested with documentation from machine shop. Good high HP head for 1622 motor. \$400 plus shipping, Mark Barnhart <[rowdie92@charter.net](mailto:rowdie92@charter.net)>

## LETTERS

Hi Dave,

First, as a newsletter editor myself, I appreciate the effort you take to put out each month. My wife and I have been editing the Vintage MG Club newsletter for forty years. I also raced my **MG NE** for about twenty three years....almost exclusively on the west coast. We did bring it east for a couple of fall series....Watkins Glen, Lime Rock and Elkhart Lake. But what I really wanted to comment on is the Sebring Twin Cam article by Mike Eaton.

He mentioned Gus Ehrman, Gough Industries and Hambro. I did not realize that Gus had driven at Sebring as well. He not only won one of the initial Watkins Lake races in a TD, he played a part in the history of the NE. His Gough Industries owned it in the 1960s and it was passed on to Hambro when Kjell Qvale acquired Gough. I had the privilege of meeting him at Watkins Glen in 2004 and took him for the tour of the old course...photos attached

The MG CT Motoring Guild had a tour out to Lompoc several years ago where we visited John Wright's collection, including one of the Sebring Coupes.

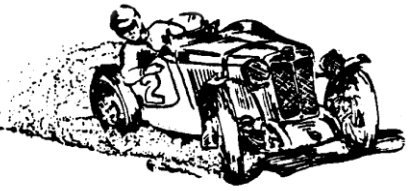
All very interesting.

Pete Thelander



PETE AND GUS EHRLMAN AT WATKINS GLEN IN 2004

# Competition



Todd Stevenson MG-TD



Dan Leonard MG-TC special

## BLACKHAWK FARMS VINTAGE RACE Jane Abendroth & Dan Leonard

Who says there ain't no noise in Illinois? That certainly was not the case when VSCDA members hit the track at Blackhawk farms in June. The weather was beautiful sunny and in the 80s. The race track grounds were impeccably maintained and there certainly was enough acreage for social distancing. There was no formal paddock, so everyone picked their spot under a tree or in large fields around the grounds. More than adequate electrical hookups for RV's that needed them were available for the nominal fee of \$25

90 racers registered for the event. Dan Leonard brought his 49 TC Special, and Todd Stevenson had his 53 TD. Scott Foreman was on the entry list but was never seen on the track. There were only 5 Group One racers including Edson McCord from Wisconsin with his 52 TD, Doug Stuart from Illinois with a 35 Riley special and Lester Nidell from Oklahoma with a 33 Plymouth.

Unfortunately, Todd's car broke down during the first practice session and Dan's car was out of the race by the third session on Friday as well. (Anyone who races a vintage car is well aware of the fragility of these old beauties and can relate.) Still, after 3 days of travel, it was a bit disappointing, however, the camaraderie of the other racers mixed in with the helpful and friendly staff made it all worthwhile.

Blackhawk farms was a very nice venue for a race and we all hope to revisit the track next year with hopefully more track time!

## MID-OHIO VINTAGE GRAND PRIX

Our Mid-Ohio race was a tale of two results. Saturday, I made a great start and going into the 180° corner called the keyhole, in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, I was hit from behind and ended up dead last in 30<sup>th</sup>. I got the old girl fired up and went out hard. Honey Bee is back to her old self after the fixes we made at Sebring and she was flying. I crawled back up to 19<sup>th</sup> in the last 5 laps and it was a blast.

Sunday, my start was solid again. Honey Bee really accelerates quickly in 1st gear and the transmission has finally broken in and is shifting quick and smooth. I was able to move left going into turn 1 and we went in 3 wide. The last thing I needed was another smashed fender, but I had the speed and momentum and simply drove over the inside curb and passed (I think) two cars. The engine was pulling strongly, and I was able to keep the hounds behind going into the very tight keyhole (where I got punted yesterday). I kept my head down, made the corner smooth and nailed it coming out. One of the Porsche's I had gotten past was close to me at the end of the long straight, but I braked much later and had a clear shot going over The Hump. I was totally focused (for a change) and moved up and through the pack. Not easy mind you. Derrick Chima and Rick Fraser are good drivers with great cars. It took some clever and firm commitments to get past them and then to stay in front as both had a bit more straight-line speed



HoneyBee hunting Derrick Chima & Rick Fraser

Once clear I saw an orange apparition in the distance and a dark green car near it. I realized I was going so quickly that I was catching Todd Crews and Pete Uzdavinas. Todd's green car slowed and I zoomed past him easily. Lap after lap I was catching Pete and praying we would have enough time left to fight him. You must understand Pete and I hound each other at every race. We are very tight



Finally got past Pete

buddies and have a ball at the races. But he wants to beat me, and I love to finish in front of him. Today was my day. I was able to get really close coming out of the very fast turn 1 and slip streamed him down the front straight. I was hoping to harass him into a mistake, but he stayed calm. I got a run on him out of the keyhole and was able to hang right on his tail for most of the long straight. I knew from following him the previous laps where he braked at the end of the straight. I waited and waited until his brake lights came on, darted right and got under him. Now I had a hungry, pissed off bear chasing me so I never looked in the mirror but hit every apex and drove as hard as I could. I was able to keep him at bay and

never let up even when the LL (last lap) sign was out. We got so quick that my fast lap was only .4 off the winner Scott Fraser and his NASCAR Sprite. It appears now that Honey Bee is back to where she was prior to the wreck at Watkins Glen, which means the MGA is not quite history yet. More in September from The Glen.

## THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE MG NIGHT HAWK

I worked at General Motors Institute, a technical college in Flint Michigan. A friend I worked with a student who was co-oping out of Buick Engineering. We all owned MGA's and were all members of the North Eastern Michigan Region of the SCCA and active in racing. When the Cobras started running circles around the Vettes we thought GM needed something that would change that. We formed a company and modified our own 3 cars into something we thought could run with the Fords.

It was our student who discovered the crankshaft switch that was a stroker mod and gave the 215 CID motor its 260 cubes. There was very little machine work to accomplish the change.

When approached, Buick loved the idea and came up with the name Night Hawk. They designed an emblem with the Buick Triple Shield Inside the MG octagon. We had contacted MG about supplying us 110 MGA frames and bodies as they still had the MGA line even though BMC were now making the MGB. When they found out what we were doing they said if we could give them prints for the mods on the frame they would build them to our specs. We pointed out to Buick that with the price we got from MG we could sell the cars for \$200 less than the Fords.

GM had the cars for 3 weeks and when we got them back, they had obviously been driven hard. We got a call from Buick to come in for a meeting. A very frustrated Buick General Manager read us a letter from Corporate informing us that they felt the traditional Buick customers saw the brand as a luxury vehicle and would be offended if they built a sports car. The letter was then thrown onto his desk and he said, "They are afraid you will hurt the sales of their plastic pig"

Car number one was later radically modified to look like a Cobra snout with a tip up front body and a large flat spoiler rear end, so from the back it looked like a Ferrari. The car was eventually scrapped, and the running gear put in an MGB.

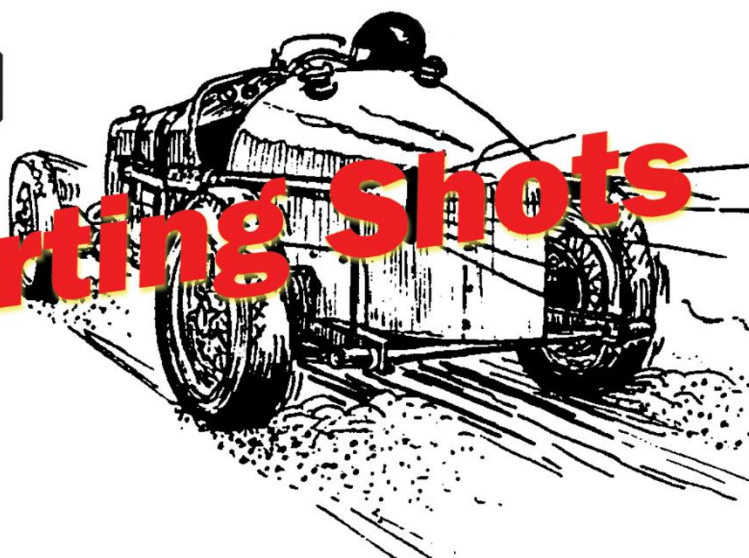
Car number two was later made into a Bonneville land speed racer with a blown injected 90-degree Chevy V-6 and now holds a record at 243.9 MPH in its class set in 1998.

Car number three was mine and I sold it years ago and after the buyer blew the motor and parked the car in a field for 6 years I found it and now have it in an enclosed trailer waiting for a restoration.





# Parting Shots



SUMMER 1960, LIME ROCK PARK, CT

The fantastic Sherm Decker waves to the photographer on his cool down lap after beating the Porsche Carrera's at Lime Rock in his twin cam

**DON'T FORGET WE NEED YOUR MG STORIES, LETTERS AND ITEMS FOR SALE**