

The Hartford Courant

MOTORING

Endurance races test workbench skill



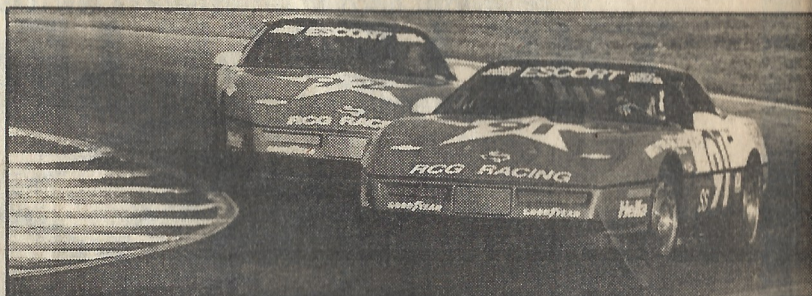
Gary Witzenburg

It was a couple minutes past 9 Saturday night when Scott Lagasse in our No. 91 RCG Racing Corvette out-braked Bill Cooper's R/A Motorsports Corvette into Mid-Ohio's fast first turn. They were racing for the lead at the time.

Lagasse slid sideways off the outside of the track, across the wet grass and into the guardrail ... blam! The impact smashed the Corvette's right-rear corner, broke its transverse rear spring, shattered the glass in its big rear hatch and destroyed a whole section of Armco barrier and three supporting posts.

Lagasse eased his battered Corvette back on course, completed the lap and pulled it into the pits, where the crack RCG crew set to work on it. Just then, incredibly, our other team car — the No. 92 Corvette I was sharing with former racing great George Follmer and current IMSA stars Doc Bundy and Sarel van der Merwe — was hit hard nearly head-on.

"I was tapped by someone in turn



Thom Cannell / Special to The Courant

Matching RCG Racing Corvette No. 91 pulls in front of No. 92 at Mid-Ohio 24-Hour's 1986 endurance race.

two and spun off to the left," an uninjured Bundy explained later. "I recovered and was on course when I got hit off to the right, spun and came to a stop. I was still in good shape, though, and waiting for traffic to pass to return to the course, when a Triumph TR-8 came flying off sideways and completely wiped out the front of my car!"

That was the kind of wild and woolly race last year's Escort Mid-Ohio 24-Hour was. It began at 3:20 Saturday afternoon, Sept. 27, in a torrential downpour and saw countless off-course excursions and fender-benders, a few more serious incidents (like ours) and a total of 22 full-course yellow caution flags before the checkered flag finally fell 24

hours later. The final event in the six-race SCCA/Escort Endurance Championship, it also was another that we wouldn't win.

"No. 92 is definitely out of the race," reported the corner workers at the scene. "It looks like one of our crash test cars after a barrier hit," observed Corvette chief engineer Dave McLellan when they towed our severely shortened Vette back on a hook. A lot of crews would have loaded up and headed home. Not ours.

"We'll fix it," said team manager Bill Hagee and crew chief Danny Kettlemeier as crewmen tore into the broken bodywork with power saws.

Less than four hours later, Hagee,

Kettlemeier and the SCCA tech chief pronounced the car functional, sound and safe. I looked it over. There was no bodywork from the windshield forward. The naked radiator hung from its twisted supports at a cock-eyed angle.

Pro showroom stock endurance racing on twisty "road" courses has come a long way since the original 1980 24-hour at the Nelson Ledges course near Warren, Ohio. I co-drove a Porsche 924 that year, which led early but failed to finish, and the race was won by a Saab 900 Turbo.

Showroom stock, incidentally, means pretty much what it implies. The cars are production models, and the only modifications allowed — besides installation of roll bars, harnesses, fire extinguishers and other required safety equipment — are the addition of racing seats and instruments and substitution of such replaceables as tires, wheels, shocks and brake pads. A wide variety of cars ranging from baby Hondas to 150-mph Corvettes compete in four different classes.

The competition gets tougher every year — more factory teams, more name drivers, more prestige and money at stake. From humble beginnings, this production-car endurance business has evolved into really serious racing.

Letting brakes = complaint may C



Duncan Haimeri

AUTO ANSWERS

Q. About a year ago, The Courant ran a news item about a personalized brake light manufactured in California on which one could program messages. I tried writing but my letters were returned "no longer at that address." I am very desirous of securing this item. C.S., West Hartford.

A. Those items usually show up only at electronic trade shows, but a Danbury computer dealer, Softown Inc., has a programmable, illuminated message board that might be close to what you want. The asking price is \$499.95 and Softown's toll-free number is 1-800-797-8080.

Be advised, however, that new federal communications rules may not allow you to use blatantly offensive words to describe obnoxious tailgating drivers.

Q. I have a fuel-injected 1985 LTD Crown Victoria and had a tuneup at 24,000 miles even though there was nothing wrong. Now she bucks on and off at 30 to 35 mph until I go faster.

I brought it back to the service station, not a Ford dealer, that had changed plugs, rotor, PCV valve

A. lines to a F check day's tuneup. The p fix it, the cu

Q. Bure gaske Chey and call f settle me. D

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GM, Chrysler lose market share as mid-April sales rise

Associated Press

DETROIT — U.S. automakers

bined sales for the period were 308,240, up from 279,753 a year ago.

percent, to 59,916 from 46,557, and Ford's share of the car market

Chrysler, the No. 3 automaker, sold 24,074 U.S.-made cars during