

2003 Vintage Sports Car Club of America - VSCCA "Turkey Bowl" event at Summit Point racetrack in West Virginia

"You know, with all your trials and tribulations this would be a good one to write about."

That's what Dad says to me while we are driving back along that odd little stretch of US-340 where within about 1 mile you visit West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland. I say it is "odd" because while traversing the wee half mile of Virginia it appears to be a sort of haven for black market seafood or something equally ridiculous. The gas station parking lot has trailers and shacks and tents all proclaiming to have "Fresh Seafood!" "Clams" "Crabs" "Other stuff we want you to believe you can't get 5 minutes into the next state." I just don't get it.

I hope that they all will be events worthy of retelling, but Dad's right I think. This was a good event to write about. You can learn from my errors and even more importantly, maybe I will?

The no-longer-aptly-named VSCCA Turkey Bowl at Summit Point was held earlier than usual this time. That is why it isn't so aptly named now. It is hard to associate the traditional Thanksgiving poultry with your race when it occurs on the 2nd weekend of November instead of the long running Thanksgiving weekend date. But tradition held firm, at least as far as the name went. The weather was clear, sunny and typically brisk. For the first time in my short driving career I was grateful for each of the three layers in my driving suit and even for the additional layer of Nomex underwear I usually try to forget about in the summer months. I wondered more than once what the wind chill factor of freezing temperatures at 100mph might be?

Let's start the report with an interesting list of the various casualties and repair issues from my weekend:

- 1 Tennis ball half (sent into low earth orbit)
- 2 Rags (ingested, digested and ejected)
- Throttle return spring (lost, found and reinstalled)
- 1 Accel SuperCoil (deceased)
- 1 Water pump seal (deceased)
- 1 Bosch coil (sick, very sick)
- 1 Throttle cable (stuck, removed, given a severe talking to and reinstalled)

Saturday morning Dad and I got up at Oh-Dark-Thirty and headed south from Wilmington, DE to Summit Point, WV with the 1930 Miller Ford Sprint Car and the 1964 Quantum Formula "S" SAAB in tow. We arrived with what we thought was plenty of time to get the cars inspected and ready for their first sessions. We only had to check tire pressures, fluids and safety wire a couple things to be ready to go.

Tech inspection complete, we go about setting tire pressures and finishing



up final adjustments before the first morning warm-up. Dad tried to safety wire a throttle return spring on the Quantum while I got suited up. But it got away from him. Springs do that you know. "Boing." In order to retrieve it and get it back in its proper place, we had to remove the rear bodywork... this set us back and so I got un-suited-up and helped Dad with the car. We got it back together and Dad said I could probably get out on track and make a few familiarization laps if I hurried up and got dressed. So I got re-suited-up and jumped in the car and drove out to the track only to see the cars all coming in from the track... Too late. I'll just take a practice lap around the paddock then, thank you.

So when the next warmup comes around Dad takes the Miller Sprinter out to the grid and I take the Quantum. I steer the Formula S down the pit road to enter the track when I realize she isn't running right. The throttle feels sticky and the engine sounds funny. (People tell me it ALWAYS sounds funny, but I don't listen to THOSE people.) Then, as I slow to think about this before going out on the track I see it... Snow? Ack! No, NOT snow... Rags! Rags are falling from the sky in little flaky pieces and I know EXACTLY where they are coming from! Rags are being mixed up with the fuel/air mixture, lunched in my engine, ejected out the expansion-chamber exhaust, and into the sky where they gracefully return to the earth upon the breeze. I slap the ignition toggle switch to "Off" and start quietly swearing, again.

Where did these rags come from you ask? Well, you see... there are no air cleaners on the carburetor. There CAN'T be when you are often called upon to stick your fingers down in the venturi to block off the fuel-dump tubes during the starting procedure. So when we aren't running the engine we stuff rags in the carburetor to keep stuff from falling down in there. Only this time we didn't take them out. I've never forgot before but this time I wasn't thinking straight. Since I knew I was going right back out shortly, I decided not to put the rags in place. Well, it seems Dad was more caring and thought to put them in place for me. But since I knew I did NOT to put them in, I didn't think to check that they WEREN'T there. Normally, I'd have looked anyway, as a part of the pre-flight inspection so to speak. But I was flustered from the morning foul up so... bye bye rags.

One of the track-workers comes over to check on what is wrong. I ask if they can see a rag down in the carburetor. "Yes" they can. I ask if they can get it out. "No" they don't think they can. So I unbuckle and hop out to take a look. One rag is completely gone. The other is stuck on the butterfly and pretty deep in there. The worker remembers that they have a multi-tool on their belt and so hands it to me. I am able to remove the guiltless rag and when I hop back in the car the worker confirms that I have control of the throttle butterflies again. "Yay." Fire her back up "Pop, bang, ring-ding-ding" and head out on track for my first look at Summit Point Raceway.

I make about 3 laps and as I am coming out of the Carousel turn the car flat dies. It was as if I'd switched off the ignition. So, coasting I drive onto the bbbumpy grass, well off the track to get out of the way and try to restart. No amount of starter whirring and sailor swearing would bring it back to life. Much as I tried. I received my first rope-tow of the weekend.

When we get to the pits and I describe the issue to Dad we decide to check spark, since we can see we are getting fuel... and air sure as heck isn't a problem. There's no spark at the #1 plug. Or any plug for that matter. The coil died. "But but..." Dad repeats. "It's a brand new coil." he complains. "It is a brand new dead coil." I quip. We dig out a spare old Bosch coil we carry around just for this situation and install it.

Sometime during all this I realized that I'd lost the ½ of a tennis ball that we use as a cap on the exhaust to keep things from falling down in there. This is an actual concern when your "tailpipe" sticks up at the angle that the Formula S's does. I can only assume that I forgot to take it off the last time I started the car and as such it was turned into a projectile and ended up somewhere in the woods on the far side of the paddock. See, I've done this before and I've seen how far it can travel. Impressive really.

But it was clear there was another problem, totally separate from the brand new dead coil issue and the rag lurching that I hadn't exactly mentioned to anyone yet. When I pulled the coolant header tank cap off to check the water level I hear this trickle of liquid like a babbling brook... under the car.

Sure enuff the water pump seal is shot. I mean SHOT. Water is just pouring out around the shaft. So I extract the water pump/generator housing (no generator in there, we run a total loss electrical system, so it is just a "housing") from the engine bay and replace it with a spare one Dad had in the parts box. Fixed and ready to go.

The practice session comes around and we start the Quantum up and head out for a second try. Immediately it is obvious that the spare coil is pretty pathetic. The car won't rev above 4000 rpm. So there I am stuck with a car that won't hardly go since this particular 2-stroke makes most of its power in the 4500 rpm to 5500 rpm range. But at least it is running and I am getting some laps in and learning the line. My 3 laps before the coil died in the morning just hadn't given me enough seat time to feel comfy. But I was starting to get used to it now, as I'd made 5 or so laps with the car running like an electric wheel chair... slow but steady. I found that with only 4000 rpm at the end of the main straight and the excessive brakes the Quantum carries around... I didn't have to hit the brakes until the last marker. That really is very late! I was about 100 yards along the main straight when I looked in my mirrors and saw Jim Freeman's Aston Martin DB4GT come out of the last turn and start eating up the pavement the way Aston Martin DB4GTs do... FAST. I point him by and he passes me on the right going about 60 mph faster than poor sick 2-stroke me. Shortly thereafter he hits the brakes to slow for the first turn. He starts to come over in front of me to pick up the "good" line. Even though he's hard on the brakes, and I have the gas pedal flat on the floor, he's STILL pulling away from me. Good thing too, since when I finally lift off the throttle at that last marker... nothing of significance happens.

The gas pedal stays flat on the floor! I've got my left foot on the brake pedal and my right foot is pounding away at the gas pedal but it won't lift! The front wheels lock up (rears are still pushing) when I reach over and slap the ignition off just before careening off the edge of the road. The sound of the two-stroke winding down is mixed with the sound of a fiberglass and steel and Stefan projectile bouncing over and through a thick layer of groomed gravel. !@#% More unproductive colorful language. Another rope tow back to the pits.

How about that? My first visit to an honest to goodness big time racing gravel trap! I must say... that gravel really slows you down fast. I also have to say there is no possibly way to look suave and cool while stumbling through a gravel trap to safety. Not only does the big helmet look out of place and vaguely spaceman-like when away from the racecar, but the consistency of the gravel makes you stumble and appear confused. It is as if a racecar driver that just drove his racecar deep into a pile of gravel can't recall what "feet" are good for. But hey, the car is in one piece and it could have easily been otherwise. Also, I sure am glad I missed the rear bumper of that Aston Martin. Geez. That would have sucked.

When I get back Dad and my friends all want to know what happened? "Throttle stuck at the end of the straightaway!" I say. "Oh, that's not nearly as bad as what we were thinking." they say. Um, what WERE they thinking?

So that was it for Saturday at the races... time to go eat. The club got together at the Wayside Inn in Middletown, VA and were entertained with a talk given by the VERY entertaining creator of Summit Point Raceway (keep an eye out for a book by this guy) Pat Goodman and the celestial spectacle of a lunar eclipse. How nice of the event organizers to arrange such a display for us.



That's me in the blue. Trying to keep warm. Kieth Lawrence is to my left and Chris Morici is in the yellow.

Sunday morning dawned cold and well... cold. The cars had a weak mixture of anti-freeze in them and so were fine but the water bottles waiting in the trailer had ice floating in them. I installed a borrowed "known-good" used Lucas coil (is that a contradiction of terms?) while my Dad and friend Ralph attacked the throttle cable problem.

With the car all buttoned back together in time for the morning warmup I actually experienced the car running well and miracle of miracles... saw a checkered flag! Glee!

The afternoon race was scheduled to be a Time Limited and Handicapped Match Race. That means the race is over at a specified time rather than after a specified number of laps. The handicapped part means the slowest cars are sent out onto the track first, fastest cars last. Based on lap-times from the day before, the slowest car would start say maybe 20 seconds before the next slowest car and then the next slowest car after that might leave 5 seconds later. In vintage racing, there are such widely varying speed potentials between the slowest and fastest cars that the

slowest car in this case had a lap and a half headstart on the fastest car in the 20 minute race. The intention is to have all the cars cross the finish line at the same time. Obviously (and thankfully) that doesn't ever really work out. Now, the final twist is that this was a "match" race. That meant we were supposed to find another car/driver that posted lap-times similar to ours and line up next to them. This "matched couple" would leave the pit-lane together so they could have a nice dice of their own within the scope of the greater race.

Before the race started I decided to start the Quantum and warm it up. For some reason, it sounded sick? It just didn't have that good sharp "pop" sound to the exhaust like it should. You could almost listen to it without hurting your ears and that's not how it is supposed to be. So I quickly checked the sparkplugs... fouled! I threw in a different set. It fouled those too. I threw in half a dozen different sets of plugs and it fouled each and every one of them. Damn coil. I finally settled on the set of plugs I was running in the morning warmup. They fouled again as soon as I put them in but I figured maybe they'd clear out once I got on track.

Well, they didn't clear out on the first lap... but they DID on the second! Whee! I'd already lost contact with my match partner while the car was running sick but now I was flying and everything was working well. I caught and passed my match partner as well as some other cars that started before me. I even managed to NOT get passed by too many of the faster cars behind me. My friends were keeping track of the lap-times and they showed consistent improvement. Each lap was faster than the last.

Here's a typical piece of VSCCA race-weekend humor... Remember that this is a "timed" race? Normally that means that the leader of the race at the end of the scheduled time is the winner... but in VSCCA speak it meant the first car to pass under the checkered flag after the time runs out is the winner! Ha! I could have won if I'd kept track of the time and made sure I was coming onto the finish straight just before time ran out. But my watch is one of those "Turbo" Saab watches made to look like the classic turbo gauge out of a 99 Turbo *with no numbers on it*. So it would have been awfully difficult to glance at while trying to wheel the Quantum around the twisty Summit Point course. It would have been a good trick though, wouldn't it?

I don't know who won. I doubt the winner knew they'd won. Or cared! I saw another checkered flag and was so happy my cheeks hurt from smiling! Either that or my helmet is too tight around the chipmunky part of my face.



Here I lead Mike Cohen in his Elva through the final turn.

The last race was an "all-comers" or "hard luck" race. I certainly felt I'd had some hard luck this weekend so I was all prepared to go out and zip about. I thoroughly enjoyed passing my friend Ralph in the Daimler SP 250 he borrowed from my friend Dr. Sam. I enjoyed driving behind and watching my Dad guest-drive in the 1938 Dreyer Sprint-Car we restored (and sold to another club member a few years ago). The new owner had done a LOT of engine work on it and Dad seemed to be finding it quite the tire-smoking handful, to say the least. After watching him violently remove a few 32nd's from the Dryer's rear Dunlops, I passed him and went on to really feel a rhythm with the course... finally. My shift points were moving up, my braking points were moving deeper, my apexes getting more consistent and better placed, and track-out was closer to the edge. I wish it didn't have to end.

I drove under my third and final waving checker of the weekend!

It ended fantastically. The season was over and I managed to drive through, repair, or tolerate all the bugaboos the little Quantum Saab threw at me to end it with a strong "RipPopRingaDingDing" sounding throughout the paddock! Many thanks to my father for the loan of the car and to all my "pit crew."

-STEFAN Vapaa
VSCCA competition #374
<http://www.at-speed.goof.com>