

MGA!

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Honey Bee Tackles the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix

A New Course Presents Fresh Challenges for Kahuna Dave and Number 76

This place is crazy. The racetrack is in an old center city park with huge crowns in the road to take rainwater and snow away. The pavement is not even remotely good, and there are light poles, telephone poles, culverts, brick walls, fire hydrants, and every other horrible thing you might toss at a racetrack. But at the same time, it is very cool. This is more a fast exhibition than a race. There are NO runoff areas. If you want to challenge where your braking zone is and you miss, you crash. NO runoff, which means you had best be in control the entire way.

We are in Schenley Park in midtown Pittsburgh. Look it up. Beautiful, big lawns, depression era bridges and stone walls, huge drop offs to certain death, and honest, over 100,000 spectators. This race has been going on for nearly 30 years and the horror stories are plenty. We met a terrific guy who seven years ago had his trans lock up in his Lotus 23, hit a telephone pole, and literally broke the car in half.

We go out tomorrow for our first tour. I walked the course this afternoon and Kevin and Rosemary did as well. I am glad we went because this course demands paying attention every second and, when walking you can see horrible things you would never know when driving. This course is like Aretha Franklin once said, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." Give this circuit no respect and you end up with a crashed car.

There is no paddock. We all park on a cul-de-sac on the pavement or in the grass. Nothing is level. Our new RV, when automatic leveling was selected, bumped and ground, and finally said, "excessive slope" and stopped. So we leveled it as best we could manually and it seem to be okay.



We usually practice on Friday, but not here. The roads are open to traffic, which was heavy during drive time this afternoon. The roads are closed Saturday and Sunday only, so we practice in the morning, qualify in the afternoon, and then race on

Sunday. The best I can compare it to is: think back when you were a teen and took your parents car and beat the crap out of it racing through your home town. That is exactly what racing at Schenley Park is like. Rough streets, racing through traffic lights, and past stop signs over new patches of asphalt the city put in to cover up huge pot holes. There is a series of turns called the Serpentine. If you Google a map of Pittsburgh, look for it- it's amazing. Downhill, some turns are almost 180 degrees, but with an outside stone wall maybe two feet high. Lose it and you go into an abyss at least 100' deep.

From our end, Honey Bee's new clutch seems to be working fine and we are ready to head out at 8:55 a.m. in the morning. Can't wait.

It was the hardest, most satisfying 6th place ever. We started the morning checkup and found the front tires were pretty well shot. I had brand new Hoosiers mounted waiting for Lime Rock, but noticed the Bee was pushing a bit and knowing those stone walls were singing a Siren's Song,

I thought it best to change to stickier skins. Morning warm up resulted in a 2:30 lap, but without pushing hard, and it gave me some good experience as I had to pass a couple cars on a course that has no passing places.

We started in 6th place and the chase was on. Charlie Dolan



and a very fast Turner slowly disappeared up the road, but 3rd through 6th were within a few seconds. I was finally comfortable with where I was on the track and the car was running and stopping beautifully. I quickly got down into the 2:28s and was sure another second or more was available. But consider, I was 6th, with three cars bunched up in front of me and no place to pass. I was content knowing we were flying around and could see the tens of thousands of spectators pressed up against the fences loving it.

Then the Old Nicholas Devil sits on my shoulder and says, "C'mon, let's pass." To give you an idea of how slow parts are, I had to resort to going down into 1st gear in a non-synchro box twice a lap.

Once coming out of the silly hay bale chicane and again in the Serpentine section. I got a good run on 5th place out of the chicane and came flying down the hill going across the bridge flat in 4th thinking I can get a run and get inside at the hard right and take the place away. Except the Sprite was going as fast as I was, and there was no hope I could get inside him and then...hard on the brakes and we go totally

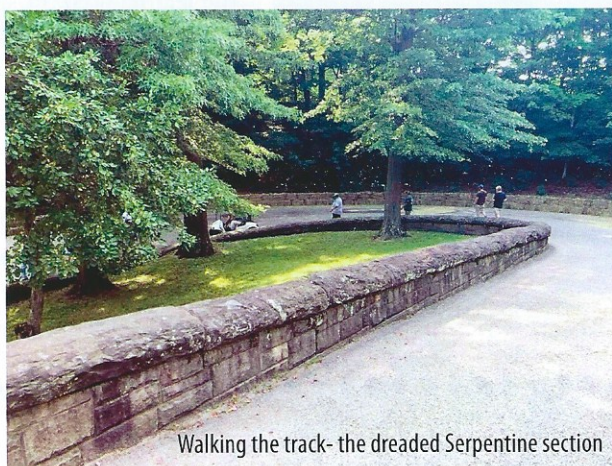
sideways into a right hand spin. On the bridge over the Ohio River! Somehow I catch it and keep her off the wall, but it is far too close for comfort. She starts coming back and I think we're good and she snaps the other way towards the outside wall. Again I catch it and this time for good; roll it back into 1st gear and take off. I can see corner workers giving me a thumbs up and thank goodness for full face helmets, they can't see my face glowing red.

I had some advance notice the rear tires were about gone when braking hard into the last turn, I would get a neat big slide, but it was easily caught. When it happened on lap four at the bridge we were going about 90 and the slide was violent.

The pack was gone. Rosemary was super nervous when the pack came by the

first turn and Honey Bee I were not there, but she heard on the PA we had spun and sure enough, about ten seconds later here I come. This illustrates how much faster the first six were from the rest of the field. I never got passed. When I realized there was no catching the cars in front, plus knowing the rear tires were tired, I settled down into some 2:32s, as nobody was behind me. On the last lap coming across the bridge I checked the mirror and damn - there was a car coming fast. I put my head down and went as quickly as I thought safe and beat him to the finish by one full second.

So we were well and truly humbled, yet proud that we learned the course well enough to be 25 seconds a lap faster than when we started. It is also a lesson in reality. When we do finish up front, we should appreciate it because those victories are never guaranteed. We got spanked, and spanked hard, in Pittsburgh. Charlie Dolan and the others deserve our applause for a race well run.



Walking the track- the dreaded Serpentine section

To show how easy it would have been to make a mistake and bring Honey Bee home damaged, our good friend Ford Heacock was here for the first time in his gorgeous Porsche 1600 coupe. A totally original gold medallion car with drum brakes, and Ford drives it well. He came over the crest of the fastest part of the course, headed down into the hay bale chicane, and found the car in front slowing earlier than expected. Ford went hard on those drums, but knew it was not enough. He made the perfect split second decision to not tail end that racer

going into the chicane and crash them both, but moved right and went through the hay bales head on. Damage was limited on the Porsche, but the hay bale chicane became part of the lore of Schenley. It was gone.

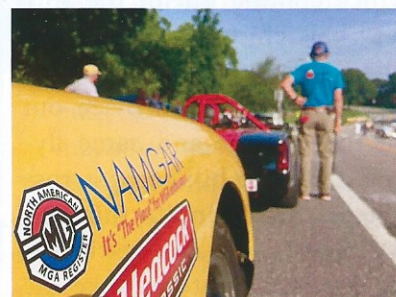
Ford accepted the shunt gracefully and remarked, "I've always wanted to take that damn clear mask off the front and paint it." A racer through and through. (See PVGP, p.32)





(From PVGP, p.31) We put Honey Bee back into the trailer in no worse shape than when we arrived. This is a circuit that is totally unforgiving and I feel fortunate that I either skillfully kept her off the walls or simply got lucky. I don't care which. We had a great battle with three other cars, turned some fast laps and enjoyed the experience.

The new motorhome worked wonderfully. We had the generator running hours each day with the A/C blasting. It was so odd; after the morning session we were inside watching *Greatest American Hero* re-runs, Kevin was in the recliner working his phone, I was prone on the leather sofa, Rosie was busy, and we were in perfect 74 degrees when outside it was 88 and 80 percent humidity. Kev and I looked at each other and simply started laughing. Were we racing or at some park on vacation? •



PVGP MGAs: The Bigger Picture

A Report from Dave Nicholas

The weekend featured seven MGAs in Group 2 and one in Group 1. The difference being the Group 1 car was essentially stock with safety equipment. The fastest of all, as for the past several years, was young Charlie Dolan (57). He has intimate knowledge of this course, has a great car, and drives the heck out of it. Frankly, it was no contest. Canada brought two of its best down south with Dave Good (37) and Dave Holmes (137). Dave Good finished a great 4th pushing an Elva Courier with an MGB engine all the way to the finish. Holmes ran very quick in the first three sessions, but did not start the feature as he and the legendary John Burgess had to get back to Canada.

Len McCue* brought his gorgeous white coupe and Andrew Vitek (90) a sparkling green 1500 and both ran in practice and qualifying, but did not race. Bob Finkle (58) was racing the ex-Richard Schnabel MGA and was good when it was running well. Kevin helped all he could with overheating problems and we got him out and racing; but his speed was not what I expect it will be when he gets it right. We hadn't seen Tom Dick (147) in his red Mk II in a while and he was out for all the sessions, drove well, and finished 13th overall. A great showing of MGAs and the fans loved coming by and saying hello. Truly, our cars are the stuff of memories for many. (Photos by Nial McCabe) •

* Ed Note- Too fast to catch in an unblurred image.

