

“The Flagmen Say Car 9’s Stereo Is Too Loud”



They laughed when we sat down to race a Boss 302 Mustang—complete with vinyl interior and stereo radio.

But when we drove out of Watkins Glen with a second place trophy sitting in the back seat of our slightly battered street car/racer, all the laughter was ours.

BROCK YATES

It was so good on the road, it had to be good on the track. Rushing along through the pre-dawn darkness with its great Firestones hissing against the pavement and its engine chortling ominously, this white and black coupe exuded competence and authority. A proper car, hurrying over humped, tree thick ridges on its way to a weekend at Watkins Glen—a weekend in which it would be rolled onto a race track and be expected to behave like an outright competition machine.

So far it had been perfect. It had covered the 300 miles of level, nondescript Lake Erie shore country between Detroit and the Niagara Frontier with ease, and now, as it plunged into the hills that surround Watkins Glen, it seemed to gain strength. But, as an orange morning sun began to burn away a light frost, doubts started to gnaw at me. Surely the Boss 302 was an extraordinary road car, but would our experiment work? By merely unbolting the exhaust pipes and changing the spark plugs, could the car be made competitive in amateur road racing? If it was possible then it might open an entirely new avenue for the enthusiast to obtain a low-cost, dual-purpose sports car for daily transport and for occasional forays into racing. If, on the other hand, the Boss 302—with its full insulation, heater, defroster, AM-FM stereo radio and other baubles making it over 400 lbs. heavier than the legal minimum—turned out to be a mule among the thoroughbreds, we would be making nothing more than another foray into the land of four-wheeled fantasy—in public.

We rolled down Franklin Street in Wat-

kins Glen, a hallowed roadway over which a toolmaker from Pennsylvania named Frank Griswold had raced an 8C 2900B Alfa-Romeo coupe to victory in the first Glen Grand Prix 21 years earlier. He too had driven his car to the race. A few competition cars, chained down on trailers, were parked along the curbs, but otherwise there was little evidence that a race was being held. Sensible people have long since given up trying to attract crowds to Regional Sports Car Club of America events, and they are now run for the sole pleasure of the competitors. Paying spectators are not invited, so the premiums for crowd insurance are eliminated, cutting costs and complication simultaneously. This particular Glen race, organized by the devoted, able membership of the Finger Lakes Region of the SCCA, has a reputation for being a well-run, rollicking close-out—a final chance for the amateurs to thrash around before locking their cars away against the cold, dark northeastern winter. It seemed like a good place to test our theory. After all, our 302 was specifically intended for this brand of racing—as a casual competitor’s machine and not as a chopped-down, fire-belching monster for the Trans-Am professional.

Three weeks had passed since the United States Grand Prix had brought 100,000 people into the Glen race circuit, but its infield was still glazed with litter; tons of shining beer cans, rain-soaked newspapers and programs and the blackened scabs of dead campfires. It was a scene of vast desolation except for a small collection of cars and people clustered around the tech-



nical inspection building. A line of Sprites, Corvettes, small modified cars, Triumphs and MGs, attended by young men in ski jackets and lean women holding clipboards, were waiting to be examined by the safety committee. We parked the Mustang behind a tiny Cooper formula car and waited for skeptical heads to turn.

Krueger arrived and I felt better. A long-time racing friend and maybe the best mechanic I’d ever met, we’d started banging around in Formula Juniors together and went through the frustrating first year of the Trans-Am Series in a tough, beloved old Dodge Dart. Known and respected among the area’s hard-core racers, Chuck Krueger lent the Boss 302 a certain local credibility, and it was good to know the car would be well-tended and well-driven on its first outing. My own tardiness in renewing my competition license left the driving to Chuck, but that would be all

right. He was quick and smooth and easy on machinery, and he would translate the car’s behavior to us as well as anybody.

The car, its doors now pasted with numbers and its headlights taped over, passed inspection easily except for the request that we remove the radio antenna (2 min.) and install an oil catch tank to collect any lubricant that might belch out of the breathers at speed. Krueger and I jumped into the 302 and drove down the long hill overlooking slate-gray Seneca Lake and into the village. The local Ford dealer had a windshield washer reservoir that would work perfectly as a catch tank, and as we thundered back up the hill, the Boss 302 was beginning to feel harsher and tougher. It was turning into a race car. It took twenty minutes to unbolt the mufflers and install the stubby racing pipes while Pat Bedard, who was along to help, screwed in

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PHOTOGRAPHY: HUMPHREY SUTTON

THE FLAGMEN SAY . . .

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the racing spark plugs. Families and friends had arrived by now—Krueger's wife and kids, my wife and kids, pals from the old days—and they surrounded the 302 like a great muff, protecting it from the stares of the uninitiated, who were wondering why so many people were hovering over a single American sporty car.

Tire pressures were upped a few pounds and the kids buffed away the last particle of dust as Krueger climbed in for practice. The engine thundered happily, free of the strictures of muffler baffles and kinked pipes. The amateurs run a different course at Watkins Glen than the pros. The fast, bumpy loop at the south end of the track is interrupted by a chicane for the weekenders in the interest of safety and tighter competition among the smaller cars. The track record for the best Trans-Am type sedans on the slower course stood at about 1:26, and I felt that if we could come within six seconds of that time on this long, horsepower-gobbling track, we might be competitive.

Krueger cruised for two laps then turned a 1:36. A few more times around and the clock said 1:34. "It's so stable, I have trouble breaking the rear end loose in the slow corners," he said when he came in. He had been holding the revs to a conservative 6500, except for the flat-out trip through the dangerous kink at Wedgewood Road where the engine speed rose to 7000 rpm and the speed approached 130 mph.

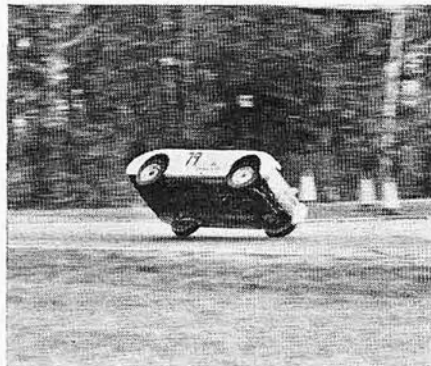
We adjusted the tire pressures slightly and lined up for the first race—an event in which the A-sedans (in amateur competition, Trans-Am type cars are so designated) were to compete with a clutch of faster A- and B-production Class Corvettes. The Boss 302 was second fastest among the A-Sedans—considerably slower than a flawlessly prepared Camaro that had run strongly in several Trans-Am events earlier in the season, but quicker than the rest of the field. Our closest competition would come from a well-driven old Shelby Mustang, now painted green and carrying number thirteen.

The lack of cheering throngs and big purses hardly tempers the competition at a Regional road race. Often ridiculed because they drive low-powered imported machinery, many amateur road racers drive harder and faster than the average dirt track stock car jockey ever imagined in his wildest, most beer-fogged dreams. At Watkins Glen, while we waited for our race, Krueger, Bedard and I watched a normally rational man try to ride an aged yellow Sprite like a motorcycle and saw the yellow caution flags wave time and again as eagerness and courage surpassed the laws of physics. Before the weekend would pass, several cars would be battered and a couple of men run off to the hospital with injuries. Yes, they were racing seriously, and we were given to wonder again if our road-

car cum racer wasn't in over its head.

The big unmuffled V-8s of the Corvettes and the sedans rattled over the vacant grandstands as our race started. Krueger moved up a couple of places on the Corvettes, held second among the sedans and then failed to appear on the fourth lap. I ran down the pits to a nearby communications station and was informed by a worker in white coveralls and headphones that Krueger was off the course with a flat tire. I jumped into a car and thumped across the empty, trash-strewn infield thinking about the consequences. Trying to carry our concept to the limit, we had brought no spare tires, no tow bar or trailer to trundle home a damaged car.

Krueger was standing by the edge of the track with his wounded automobile. He was sore. As he had tried to overtake a trio of slower Corvettes, one had popped a water hose, the second driver had spiked his brakes and the third had thumped him in the tail and spun at the fastest section



on the course. Unfortunately, the driver had a dismal, documented reputation for being long on bravery and short on talent and he tried to steer his bucking Corvette back onto the track without regaining control. He bounced through a ditch and blundered, bull-like, into the side of the Boss 302, bunted Krueger sideways then slammed into a dirt bank. Chuck kept the Mustang from spinning, then guided the car onto the inside apron. The left door and rear fender had been bashed in and the left rear tire slashed in the collision. Had it been a Trans-Am event, he would have driven it into the pits for a tire change, but in a short, unimportant race like this he wisely parked it.

A tow truck came out in the gathering darkness and pulled the Boss 302 into the garage area. Nothing but the tire and the sheet metal had suffered and we had been lucky. The Camaro driver, who easily won the class, offered us a spare tire and we knew we would race again the next day. But the debut had been something less than a success and the rumped panels—which would cost \$400 to repair—graphically pointed out the hazards of racing on a budget. Our only consolation lay in the fact that Krueger had cut another two seconds off his lap time which put us within our hoped-for limit.

Somehow, in the stark autumn light of the next day, the scarred side of the Mustang didn't look as bad. It was as if the car had its first battle scar; its nose was bloodied. We raced again, late in the afternoon when low gray clouds were sliding across the sky from the northwest and a cold wind was rasping across hands and faces. At the start it began to drizzle but suddenly stopped. If the pavement had gotten damp, our intermediate rain tires—chosen as a compromise between highway and track applications—might have given us an advantage. Nevertheless, Krueger worked from his spot on the back of the grid (because of his non-finish the day before) into second place in the sedan class after a rousing battle with the green Mustang that lasted until the final lap.

When he finished, the oil pressure was as high and the engine temperatures as low as when I'd picked up the car in Detroit. It had behaved perfectly in over 100 miles of racing and practice and, as we hitched up the street mufflers and changed back to street plugs, we felt we had proven at least part of our point. The car was driven home in a cold, pelting rain. The driver's window had been shattered in the crash, but the cockpit was as hospitable as any I'd ever been in. Such is the warmth of satisfaction.

Discussions of true dual-purpose sports cars inevitably conjure up other clouds of nostalgia about the Bentley Boys at Le Mans and ale-swilling with the Frazer-Nash Chain Gang. The days of trundling off to the races in a cart-sprung roadster and competition with it lingered through the early Fifties, when a few souls used MG-TCs, etc. for road and track (what's in a name?) but ended when a steady escalation in competition and more rigid safety regulations forced people to seriously prepare tough, highly-tuned machinery for road racing.

Today the odd Porsche, Lotus Elan or Corvette that its owner drives regularly on the street, can be found in low-key amateur sports car racing, but they are nearly as rare as Brooklands steering wheels and baggy pajama driving suits. To run competitively in even the most relaxed echelons of Sports Car Club of America events, one is forced to lighten and modify his production sports car to a point where it is simply unusable as a passenger machine. And yet there are thousands of enthusiasts across the nation who yearn for a crack at competition—not as big-league, full-bore racers, but as weekend amateurs. Surely this is one of the great attractions of drag racing; where one can easily compete in the stock classes with a car that is regularly driven to and from work. But to road race on a similar plane is nearly impossible. Deciding to commit thousands of dollars to an automobile that will spend most of its adult life languishing in a garage is simply unfeasible for many men who want to race on a limited scale, so the dual-purpose

sports car concept does have validity if the right car can be found.

We think we have found the right car. The exact genesis of the idea to create a Boss 302 dual-purpose car is hazy now, but it arose sometime during the endless conversations that took place about the C/D "Blue Maxi" Camaro. We thought for a while how much fun it would be to bolt a roll bar in the Maxi and go racing, but its 350 cubic inch engine, in the face of the SCCA limit of 305 cubic inches for sedans, removed it from consideration. At roughly the same time the Boss 302 arrived on the scene and we were smitten by the machine from the first moment we drove it. As Ford's counterpart to the Z/28 and the basis for their potent Trans-Am racers, it seemed possible that enough bolt-on pieces would be available to create an American version of the dual-purpose sports car—in sedan form.

A few preliminary calls to the guys at Ford indicated that we might be able to pull it off. The idea was to create a car that would be completely roadable, inexpensive and quick enough to run with the leaders at the Regional race level. Again, we were not looking for a Trans-Am racer, but for something more competitive than a newcomer might expect if he was to enter his \$3000-\$5000 imported sports car. Our Boss 302 was to have full road equipment and a minimum of specially made parts, permitting the part-time competitor to have himself a tractable street car and a reasonably competitive racer for something in the neighborhood of \$6000.

Don Eichstaedt is a spare, brush-cut project engineer with Kar Kraft, the Ford subsidiary whose sole mission is to turn Ford products into great racing cars. Their greatest achievement involved the design and fabrication of the legendary, Le Mans winning MK II and MK IV prototype coupes, and they continue to turn out the Ford Trans-Am Mustangs and other wild machinery for all types of competition applications. An amateur racer himself (with an old McLaren-Ford Group 7 car), Eichstaedt immediately grasped the dual-purpose concept and set out to help us put together a car that could be duplicated by the average enthusiast. With the resources at hand, Kar Kraft could easily have built a custom machine that would have fitted our needs, but the challenge centered on doing the job from the Ford parts bins.

This is the way it went together: The engine was kept stock except for the installation of a 12-quart baffled Trans-Am oil pan, a Cobra Jet oil cooler from the big 429 engine and a set of tuned Bee-Line exhaust headers manufactured in Hillsdale, Michigan. The stock electronic rpm governor, which holds revs to 6150, was removed. A Schiefer lightweight flywheel was installed with the stock clutch. A Hurst shifter with Rev-Lok and Lakewood blanket-type bell-housing scatter shield were employed.

Eichstaedt and his group at Kar Kraft

worked hardest on the suspension. Koni double adjustable shock absorbers were fitted all around, along with horizontal Koni spring-damper units on the rear suspension to limit axle tramp. The production Boss 302 springs were retained. The largest available front stabilizer bar (.92 inches) was employed, while a smaller bar (.62 inches) was used at the rear. This suspension combination was used with a set of 520 x 10.20 Firestone intermediate race tires that have excellent adhesion on both wet and dry surfaces. The tires were mounted on 7.0 x 15 wheels with spacers at the front. A total of 1° negative camber was screwed into the front suspension, giving the car a flat, pliant ride with great stability. Neutral steer prevails to the outer limits of adhesion, when oversteer takes over, and the only drawback to the entire setup is the arm-busting manual steering.

The brakes are stock power-boosted units, with Raybestos competition pads on the front and Velvetouch linings on the rear drums. The proportioning valve that balances braking effort between front and back remains unchanged.

The body is unmodified, although the hood release mechanism was removed and replaced with hood pins. An export yoke-type brace that runs from the cowl forward to the front suspension mounting was installed to increase rigidity. The rear stabilizer wing, which is adjustable and will be used on the '70 Trans-Am team cars, was retained.

Internally, an Auto-Power roll bar kit, pre-fabricated, was mounted, along with a 3.0-in. wide racing-type inertia reel seat belt, shoulder harness. Two instruments were added; Stewart-Warner oil pressure and oil temperature gauges, but the stock tachometer—which is large and readable—was kept in the interest of economy.

The rear axle was fitted with a Detroit "locker" differential that ratchets and clanks noisily in slow corners but is tremendously effective, and a 3.91-to-one final drive ratio. A vent catch can for the axle breather was also fitted—an available Ford part.

Three-inch open exhaust pipes attachable to the headers, were fabricated and designed to be carried to the races in the car's trunk, along with a small B & B fiberglass bucket seat for the driver. Ready to go, the car weighs 3286 pounds, hardly a lightweight, but certainly one of the neatest handling American automobiles ever to hit the road. Only the heavy steering could be described as a drawback, and one becomes so involved in the visceral, buoyant behavior of the car so quickly that it is quickly forgotten.

We are absolutely delighted with our Boss 302 and at this moment are devising all sorts of outrageous products for the car, including a hotter Stage II version. In the near future we'll be publishing a detailed outline of the mechanical bits and pieces, including their exact cost, in the event you might want to be the first one on your block with a dual-purpose sedan. As Marshall McLuhan might say, we'll be in touch. ●



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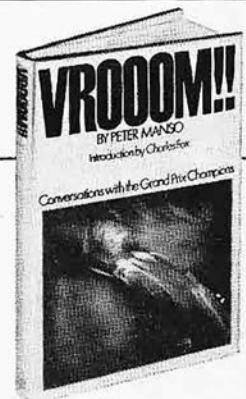
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