

FUBAR PERSPECTIVE JUNE 2011

By Tony Foster

It's been quite a while since I've tried to put one of these columns together. When BIR was closed to SCCA racing from 2002 through July of last year, local interest in road racing took a major hit, club membership fell off and interest in our TONNEAU declined. I remained active in Formula F(ord) racing into the 2005 season and did participate in the non-SCCA event at BIR in 2004. My last submission to our publication dates back to June '05 following a Regional race weekend at Grattan. In August of that season I suffered a catastrophic crash at Road America's turn one which severely damaged my car, wallet and legs and put my Swift FF out of commission for some time. Now with BIR back in business for SCCA, it must be time to hit the keys again.

The plan for a 40 year celebration of FF at Road America

set for 2009 finally got my car rebuild into top gear. After borrowing frame jigs from Prince Engineering I had a local fabrication shop weld in fresh tubes for the left front Swift suspension and bought a box full of suspension parts from an east coast racer in 2008. From there it was a long process to piece the car together but after a couple test runs at local Raceway Park I was back on track at Road America at the end of May '09 for a pair of Regionals; then back to Blackhawk for their July event.

The 40th FF reunion at Road America was incredible

as almost 400 cars from virtually all over the world were in attendance. Over 130 cars were on the course for Regional "open" class practice and it felt more like I-494 at rush hour than a race track. Fortunately everyone pretty much kept their heads and incidents were relatively minor. Over a hundred cars posted times for the Regional split start for FF/CFF and I was squarely in the middle of the FF group with a poor time as I seemed short on power. Other local participants included *Steve Barkley*, *Tom Stillwell* and *Bill Bergeron* in FF while *Marty Handberg* and *Bruce Drenth* ran CFF. The split start took the green shortly before noon on Sunday under sunny skies and on the third lap the inevitable occurred with a multi car pileup in turn one bringing out a red flag for a 15 minute cleanup. The restart put all cars together and it didn't take long for some of the quickest CFF cars to start working up through the field. *David Livingston's* Swift out-dueled *Tom Schwietz's* Piper for the overall win with *Niki Coello* first CFF and 9th overall. I found myself getting passed by CFF cars on the straight with minimal power and finished 25th. Barkley was also down on power and 31st at the checker with Handberg 34th, Stillwell 53, Bergeron 57 and Drenth out at mid race with a broken car.

About 80 cars wound up finishing under their own power as incidents were frequent.

Later in the day the National race saw over 80 starters but was marred by heavy rain in the closing laps with many cars off course and one driver in the hospital with leg injuries. For whatever reason SPORTSCAR elected to give very minimal coverage to the event with a simple results sheet thrown in with their CAT National coverage. I later determined that a leaking head gasket caused my power problems but put the car back on stands for the rest of the '09 season.

The big news in 2010 was the re-certification of BIR's new 13 turn 2.5 mile road course on July 4

weekend with a four race Jack Pine Sprints revival. For someone who started his road racing career in a 1975 BIR driver school, this was to be a must attend. I was unable to come up with any good ideas for gearing at the new layout so wound up keeping the Road America setup in the box and made it up to the new track by mid-day on Friday test day. I was able to talk my way into a half day test and got cranked up and on course shortly after lunch. Probably on my second lap I came steaming into the old turn 7-8 chicane without thinking and had to slam on the brakes late and pulled a complete 360 nut kept it on the asphalt. I don't think I really got the entry into the new carousel turn right from then through the weekend. From there the next challenge was the high speed sweeping turn 10 with a blind entry and apex in the middle of the new pit entry. Then there was the very tight left 90 leading under the bridge to setup for what is probably the most important turn 13 leading onto the straightaway. Asphalt on the "old" course has held up reasonably well although turn 2 is taken at considerably slower speed but still gets your attention. Overall it is definitely a new challenge and a lot busier than the old long straightaway.

Back when 30 or more FFs would show up for a regional the drafting battles on that straight would keep you busy, but with today's smaller fields it's good to have some new challenging corners. There are several new opportunities to get things wrong and find concrete barriers and several drivers had that expensive experience during the weekend. Our group 2 races for the weekend proved to be anticlimactic. *Chris Orr* had his fully sorted Van Diemen ahead of everyone as he turned in a flawless driving performance. In the first race *Steve Barkley's* best efforts to chase Chris down (setting a track record in the process) resulted in his smacking the concrete at the outside of turn 8 resulting in serious damage to his quick EuroSwift and putting him out for the rest of the season while he worked to repair the car. *Brad Ellingson* made the tow up from Illinois and gave Orr a battle in Sunday's first race in challenging damp conditions but both he and *Alan Murray* finished a tick behind Chris. Ellingsen suffered engine problems in Sunday's "feature" 12 lap race and parked while I along with Murray were well off the pace in a 2-3 finish. *Marty Handberg* hung in with our group for much of the race and set a CFF lap record to wind up 4th overall.

With this year's season opening Harvey West "Rational" races over Memorial Day weekend

we hoped to lure more cars from out of region for the double event. Unfortunately we were sandwiched into a tight CenDiv schedule with events the preceding two weekends and both Blackhawk and Road America. On top of that there was a National running against us at Grattan so getting cars from Chicago, BVR and Milwaukee was a tough challenge. Our group of mixed open wheel cars drew a total of 14 including a half dozen F500 racers with one towing all the way from the west coast. F500 cars have gained a horsepower to weight ratio advantage over FF and have recently proven faster on many tracks and BIR proved no exception. In Saturday's Regional *Jeff Jorgenson* gridded his Novacar almost two seconds in front of Barkley who was back on track for the first time in his pristine Euroswift. In the race Jeff set a new F500 track record leading a trio including *Steve Jondal* and *Darrel Greening* to the checker. I spent most of the race in trail with Barkley but passed him on a couple laps when he would develop a slight high rpm miss. Young *Jeff Bartz* had towed up from Wisconsin and was running the former *Tony Kester* Runoffs winning Reynard still owned by *John Taylor* of Two Dogg Racing. Jeff's father Tom is a long time open wheel driver I remember from the 70's driving various Lola FFs. Jeff had been running karts for years and apparently Taylor was impressed with his talent and loaned him the Reynard to cut his teeth in SCCA. *Jeff and Dan Murphy* who had bought the Orr Van Diemen were up in the mix for several laps but by the time we got the one lap to go at start/finish Barkley and I had opened a bit of a gap. Then Steve's car missed a beat heading into turn two and I was by to take the checker by a comfortable margin. I left the track about an hour later but received a call from Alan Murray telling me I was classified 2nd FF in the official results. Came back at dinner to discover that apparently there was a mixup in T & S who lost track of the laps run and we had actually raced 13 circuits. Scoring was backed up to the end of lap 12 putting me in second. Probably just as well as Barkley had me covered with the fastest race lap when his engine was running at full song.

Sunday started off with continued good weather

but I elected to cut my qualifying short as I was running out stick with my year old 7 session Hoosiers and didn't want to put more time on my engine. Turned out to be a mistake as Bartz had learned the line quickly and was on FF pole with a new lap record with Murphy less than a second behind. *Mike Mueller* had the overall fast time and a new F500 lap record as well with Jorgenson second. The race was rather predictable from the start with Mueller and Jorgenson pulling away while Mueller set a new lap record on the fourth lap and took a solid lead. Bartz put his head down and walked away from the rest of us with Murphy in second and Barkley and I in tandem but not making much progress. Bartz set a new FF lap record on lap 11 of the scheduled 18 and Murphy had spun out of turn 6 but was back on track behind our two car draft. Then on the 14th lap Mueller was overtaking Alan Murray when the two came together in turn 7 with Alan's car ending up sideways on three wheels at turn 8 exit and Mueller out with a bent left front corner. We had already passed start finish with Barkley in front and another engine miss allowed me to pass again out of turn 1 only to be greeted by waving yellow flags approaching turn 7. We completed that lap with Bartz well ahead and me in second only to start seeing black flags displayed around the course and a red flag directing everyone into the pits to complete lap 15. A wrecker was dispatched to pick up the stricken Murray machine and after about a 10 minute delay the race was called

complete.

Initial results came out listing Mueller as overall winner

despite his wrecked car and Jorgenson leading starting the 14th lap. Various discussions ensued and it was finally decided to call the race complete after 13 laps. Mueller declined to take the win and he was moved back to 9th overall with Jorgenson declared the winner. But once again my 14th lap pass of Barkley went for naught and I was scored 3rd overall while Bartz was a much deserving winner. Again probably just as well as Barkley again was faster than me in the race and had they re-started the event I would have been in trouble as my starter failed when I attempted to drive back into the paddock and I might not have gotten fired up had the race continued after the red flag.

In any event, it was great to be back at the track and see LOL running a road race again.

With drag racing running simultaneously it is sort of disappointing to be considered a supporting event, but a tour of the drag paddock area revealed an incredible array of high buck tow vehicles, trailers and motor homes. I guess the big money is in straight line driving. I was sorry to lose my opportunity for my first class win in what is over a half a decade, but it probably won't affect my potential for a Formula One career. It was a great drive by Jeff Bartz to win his first National race and he went on to finish 5th at the June Sprints several weeks later. He may actually have a chance to make a buck in this racing game.

See you at BIR in July!