

ANNUAL SUMMER TRAVEL ISSUE

VERMONT

AUGUST 2001

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JIM JEFFORDS **DUMPS** THE GRAND OLD
PARTY: WHAT IT MEANS

Off-Road Warriors

MY FIRST TASTE OF SERIOUS driving was a white-knuckled three laps around the track at Watkin's Glen – and I wasn't even at the wheel. I was a passenger in a car driven by a professional racer, who was teaching at an advanced driving school at the track in upstate New York. His BMW had neither power steering nor power brakes. His hands were constantly in motion, correcting the wheel as his feet drummed the pedals in a furious staccato.

My right hand held onto the door handle as instructed, while my left hand kept a death grip on my right wrist so that my arms wouldn't flail and get in the way of the gearshift. Unfortunately, the fun ended within three laps, after a Porsche wrecked and a black flag called us in.

I was hooked.

To get a better idea of what this subculture had to offer, I joined the Sports Car Club of Vermont (SCCV). My first outing was an autocross, a course lined with orange cones in a big parking lot. The setting, combined with the cones, is meant to eliminate any chance that my car, like the aforementioned Porsche, could turn itself into an accordion. So there I was in my beater '91 Honda Civic, complete with snow and mud tires, and happy to find that I didn't feel intimidated. Along with the super-serious BMW's and outfitted Alpha's, there were a number of unassuming four-door sedans, all ready to compete in this rather relaxed atmosphere. Although it was a timed course, there were

different classes, so I competed against cars similar to my own. Mostly, though, I was competing against my own times. When I asked my many questions, club members were very helpful; dedicated drivers are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic.

This friendly atmosphere has drawn quite a few people from the sidelines. Steve Jones, the president of the club, used to attend the hillclimbs to watch his brother Andy race. Then he began helping out at the events, met lots of people and started driving. His wife Julie came to watch Steve, and club members encouraged her to give it a try. "They finally talked me into it," she said.

Dave Richmond, the secretary, also has a brother and a nephew who are involved in the sport. "It's a family sport, with fathers





**HOW TO DRIVE VERY FAST AND
NOT GET CAUGHT SPEEDING.**

BY ANN DEMUTH



and sons, mothers and daughters, brother against brother and sister against brother," said Richmond. "We often have a large part of our competitors with a relation in the field." One reason the sport attracts so many different types of people, he added, is that, "a person can start with any car as long as it is safe [solid suspension, good brakes] or one can step it up a notch, add wider rims, better tires, stiffer suspension and more power, and do it one step at a time."

THE SCCV WAS FOUNDED IN 1956 by Jim Burbo and Jack DeBrul. According to a brochure, the club now has about 125 members and continues to be a "non-profit organization of automobile enthusiasts and racers who enjoy the friendly competition and camaraderie that the club has to offer." At the monthly meetings, there are refreshments, videos of recent events as well as discussion of upcoming auto-crosses, hillclimbs or ice trials, and a bit of car talk. This year, five percent of the club's revenues will go to the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf.

THE YEAR BEGINS WITH THE ICE Time Trials (ITT). A course is plowed, and on Sunday mornings, drivers show up. Only one driver is on the course at a time, racing against the clock. Each driver's best time of the day is used to compute where that driver ranks in his or her class. There are different classes depending on whether a car is front-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive, all-wheel drive, and whether or not it has studs or super studs.

Having grown up in Virginia, I was intrigued with the concept of driving my car on the ice. I went to some of the courses on Lake Iroquois and Mallet's Bay,

NESCCC 2001 EVENT SCHEDULE

July 7-8

Burke I Hillclimb (KSCC)

July 8

NHIS Autocross (SCCNH)

July 14-15

Okemo I Hillclimb (KSCC)

July 22

Berlin (VT) Autocross (SCCV)

TBA

Burke II Hill Climb (KSCC)

August 4-5

SLMP Autocross (SCCV)

August 19

NHIS Autocross (SCCNH)

August 26

Berlin (VT) Autocross (SCCV)

TBA

Ascutney Hill Climb II (SCCNH)

September 2

Berlin (VT) Autocross (SCCV)

September 15-16

SLMP Autocross (SCCV)

September 30

Berlin (VT) Autocross (SCCV)

October 7

NHIS Autocross (SCCNH)

October 14

Berlin (VT) Autocross (SCCV)

October 20-21

Mt. Philo Hillclimb (SCCV)

NESCCC – New England Sports Car Club
Council

KSCC – Killington Sports Car Club
www.ksc.org

SCCNH – Sports Car Club of NH

SCCV – Sports Car Club of VT
www.sccv.org

NHIS – NH International Speedway

SLMP – St. Lawrence Motorsport Park

NEHA – New England Hillclimb Association
www.hillclimb.org

SCCA – Sports Car Club of America

sped around corners and juggled the wheel on the straightaways. I paid attention to how the car was reacting, so I'd have more of a clue when I hit ice in the real world.

And this year, I discovered super studs! At an event held at Tudhope's Sailing Center in North Hero, I hit the ice with my snow and mud tires. Then I asked Dave Richmond for a ride while he drove his '77 Honda, complete with super studs! Richmond uses snowmobile screws, while some people use regular bolts that screw into the tires.

I harnessed myself into the seat, tightened my helmet strap, held onto the door pull with my right hand, grabbed my right wrist with my left hand, held on for dear life, and off we flew. Because he had more super studs in the front tires than in the rear, the back of the car automatically swung out when we sped around corners at amazingly high speeds.

Afterwards, I took his car for a spin. With him telling me when to ease up on the gas and when to hit it, I actually found myself going ridiculously fast, and when I hit the corners, sure enough, the front end hugged the inside corner, the back end swung out and I could zoom on. Then I hopped back into my Honda and hit the course again. I felt like I was going obscenely slow, and when I hit the first corner, I kept waiting and waiting for the rear of the car to swing out. It never happened. I ended up off-course in the snow and

limped back to the finish line.

ONCE THE INTEGRITY OF THE ICE becomes questionable, the SCCV sponsors the Annual Performance Car Show in South Burlington. Then, when the snow melts, the autocross season gets underway. The cones are set up and the course laid out in a big parking lot or open area. During the season, there is a Novice Driving School where participants learn about the apexes and the lines of the course and what an autocross is all about. They get to try the course a few times to prepare for the actual autocross event. I went last year, walked the course, learned the lines, hopped into my car, and feeling fast and confident, sped through the course. I quickly realized that learning the lines and hitting them just right are two different matters.

Another chance to drive fast, at slightly higher risk, is the hillclimb, winding up a mountain road. "At an autocross," remarked Steve Jones, "the only thing you truly hit is a traffic cone. The only thing that could happen is that you run off-course or go over a cone. Off-course at a hillclimb is an off-course. It's not just two seconds; it's your whole car."

Area hillclimbs (see schedule at left) are usually two-day events. Cars speed up the hill on Saturday to get familiar with the course. On Sunday, each person's best time is counted for the class ranking. Due

CHRIS LEEPER



In the parking lot atop Mt. Philo before the October Hillclimb.

to the unforgiving nature of hillclimbs, Jones continued, "you obviously have to really back up and take a look at what you're doing going up the hill, and take it easy, and learn the hill... Okemo and Ascutey are 3 miles... 30 turns you need to memorize - which ones you have to slow down for, which ones you can go faster through... Philo... because it's only one mile, is easier to memorize, but it's not very forgiving."

I've helped out at the Mt. Philo Hillclimb, co-sponsored by the SCCV and Killington Sports Car Club, blocking the cars at the start and swinging my arm to start cars, yelling "3, 2, 1, GO," over the sound of the engines. I've also been a corner worker, assigned to radio to the control person at the bottom of the hill when a car passes, "one-five-one by three." (Car number 151 has gone by corner 3.) The radio person keeps the control booth informed of where the car is, the condition of the track and if there's been an "incident."

Some members also participate in Time Speed Distance and/or stage rallies. A TSD rally is run on roads with street legal speeds. The driver and navigator are given directions that don't include where the checkpoints are. At each checkpoint, they are given a time-in and a time-out. If they've covered the distance too quickly or too slowly, they get points added. In a TSD rally, the goal is to get zero points.

In a stage rally, you're going for pure speed on closed dirt roads. For the most part, Chris says, you're "flat out as fast as you could possibly drive. The co-driver will read to you, '90 right two-tenths triple caution,' meaning that there's an exposure on the left which means that there might be a cliff that drops off into the valley, and as you come blasting around the corner the earth looks like it drops off and you just don't concentrate on that, you just concentrate on what you're doing."

The SCCV is planning a TSD rally this summer, leading to a BBQ in the Champlain Islands. There's also a rally cross in the works, an autocross on a dirt track. So there's no shortage of events for every type of car and every type of driver. In an old newsletter, Steve Jones bemoaned his time on the sidelines, "What did I learn? I wasted two years watching instead of driving... The fastest time is the one across the finish line." **V**

Visit the Sports Car Club of Vermont web site: www.sccv.org. E-mail: SCCVermont@aol.com.

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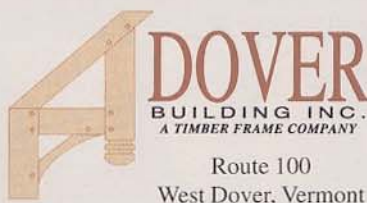


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