

How we spent our 2003 Summer Vacation
or
Should a Saturn with 130,000 miles on it be passing all these racecars?
Dale Seeley and Jamin Cummings

It took a year to get ready for the 20th Anniversary Tire Rack One Lap of America presented by Car and Driver, but our story will begin on Friday, set aside for registration and technical inspection. I (Dale) flew into Rochester, New York at 11am with a dead cell phone and promises to make several updates a day using said dead cell phone. One Lap is about adapting to adversity, so we decided to deal with it later and head over to the nitrous oxide fill station to pick up the 6 bottles that were dropped off a week ago.

Even though we'd called ahead several times a day for the past week, the bottles weren't yet serviced when we arrived; it's so hard to find good help these days. After pointing out that we were already late for registration and offering to run the fill station ourselves, the bottles finally hit the scale. Strangely enough, we needed more juice than they had on hand, 70 pounds to be more specific. They called around for more and we agreed to head down to registration then stop back after hours to pick up the unfilled bottles. Bad luck usually happens in 3's at One Lap and the third time is usually expensive, so we just couldn't wait for that third shoe to drop.

An hour and a half later we were in Painted Post where we signed in, applied the required decals, and passed inspection without any issues at all. Where was the third issue and why was it waiting until it was probably too late to fix? We returned to Rochester immediately, Jamin dropped me off at the Cingular Service Center to get the phone fixed and headed off to recover our (hopefully) refilled nitrous bottles. I figured this was going to be the third issue even though it was technically the first. The people at Cingular Wireless rallied behind my tale of woe, "It worked when I got on the plane, it didn't work when I got off, and I need it to work for at least one more week." My phone was beyond repair, and soon I had a completely new service hooked up with the promise that we'd be able to fix it all later, after the race was over. During the final bit of paperwork, Jamin returned with full nitrous bottles and we were ready to go. Many thanks go out to Summer and Andrea at Cingular in Rochester, NY. We love you guys and will never consider changing providers because of your commitment to customer service. If you ever get into the nitrous refill business, let us know.

From there, we visited with previous One Lap codriver, Alan Smith, to practice packing the car and to mooch dinner and a bed. That's when Bad Luck #3 decided to drop the hammer. We had decided to relocate the bottle location from "certain death" if anything goes wrong to "merely maimed" and suddenly we didn't have a long enough nitrous supply line. Jamin completely underestimated Alan's determination and resourcefulness with a drill and turned him loose on his previously unmolested car. Alan re-routed the line, installed the mounts, and apologized for ensuring the car would fill entirely with water in about 5 minutes if we submerged it in a pond. We made a pact to not submerge the car without removing the bags carrying the clean underwear and rescuing the Trunk

Monkey. We figured that because a Trunk Monkey cannot survive out of captivity, we'd be fine, a sort of One Lap insurance.

Saturday morning came quickly and we began our week by making the two-hour trip to Watkins Glen International where the first time trials would take place. The first event is always the most stressful. It really sets the tone for the rest of the event and sorts out the cars in each class. Ah yes, the cars in our class, it's time to introduce them. Our #1 worry is Jack and his Ford Festiva Shogun, number 2 of 8, sporting a 400 hp supercharged SHO engine in the backseat, and tires that require a fender flares that make the car almost as wide as it is short. The next three cars produced a different sort of worry, we knew nothing about them, a dangerous thought in an event that does not regulate modifications. The VW Jetta, Chevy Citation, and Ford Focus could all be spoilers in our quest for a class win, and we'd have no clue until the day was over. The sixth car in the class was the Mike Roberts entry, affectionately known as "The Death Honda". Jamin co-drove the car last year and came with only one true goal. Under no circumstances would we lose to the Death Honda. If it started looking bad, I'm pretty sure he had an accident planned involving 70 pounds of nitrous and a really deep pond.

To take my mind off our class, I began looking around the rest of the cars and soon found the new Dodge SRT-4 that I'd promised to keep people updated on. The car looked fast, but they all do before that first time trial. Before long, the cars and trucks were on the track and scoring had begun. We were seeded in 77th with the rest of the Economy class, somewhat of an insult, but when you're driving a 1997 Saturn coupe you get used to being underestimated. Soon enough, we were on grid behind the Festiva on my home track and being sent out for the recon lap. My goal was to run as hard as I could with a 50hp shot of nitrous to evaluate how far behind the Festiva we would be. Then we would make decisions as a team about future nitrous jetting and driver selection. Also, if the car was going to die, it was going to die there, where I was within a seven-day walk of the airport to get home.

Finally at the start line, I scanned the gauges and armed the Nitrous system, breathing deeply and slowly to try to maintain a less than redline heart rate. The Festiva left first, hitting the brake zone for turn one about fifteen seconds before I was set free. I launched at less than full throttle to avoid engaging the nitrous in first gear, got to second gear quickly and fired off the nitrous. Well, that was the plan anyway.... We had adjusted the WOT switch relay box without the engine running and it was fluttering between "on" and "off". I chose to deal with it rather than adjust the relay box while driving, figuring 'working a little bit' is better than 'done blowed up' and made a mental note to figure out how to adjust it during the recon lap on the next run. This is my first opportunity to drive the car with the new suspension, nitrous, and huge brake kit, so entering turn 2 wide open (like you should) was a moment of concern that is easily overcome by considering the results of lifting. Given a choice between "might" pinball between the Armco up the Esses, and "definitely" pack it in, I left my foot on the floor, nitrous surge and all, and hoped we'd guessed right with the swaybar adjustments. I exited the Esses without lifting and reached for fifth gear at an indicated 107 mph feeling pretty good because I could already see the Festiva entering the Inner Loop chicane. Unfortunately Jamin

wasn't kidding when he said that Fifth gear was useless on the track, effectively zero acceleration over 100mph with it.

Being limited to about 110mph gave me a lot of time to think about the HyeDraCyl (www.hyedracyl.com) brake kit we'd just installed. Featuring four piston calipers and 12.2" diameter rotors that are over an inch thick, the car would stop pretty quickly. However, we didn't spring for the rear kit, opting to install the OEM rear disks to save money, but ran out of time and figured we'd make do with the OEM drum brakes. Suddenly, that rationalization seemed less than wise, but it was too late now. With no idea what was going to happen, I hit the brakes as if they were stock and had to go to throttle for at least 50 feet before getting to the turn-in point. The brakes had worked so well that I made a mental note to go at least 100 feet deeper into the brake zone before lifting the next time through. What we were going to lose in horsepower, we were going to more than make up for under braking.

Exiting the Inner Loop and starting down the Outer Loop, I caught sight of the Festiva again, and made an effort to wait a little longer before braking into the ankle of the boot, which again brought the Festiva into view on the much shorter straight chute. The toe of the boot is no fun in an underpowered car, but the Trunk Monkey came through and convinced the nitrous to flow freely up the hill. [insert image of Trunk Monkey riding the nitrous bottle] The Festiva was much closer now, by the time I got to the off-camber left back onto the NASCAR course, the chase was on and I was hoping for a passing signal on the front straight. Jack was exiting turn 11 onto the front straight as I was entering it, and his 400 horsepower meant I wasn't going to run him down there. I made up a lot of time under braking for Turn One, and was on his bumper at Turn Two. His horsepower kept him safely ahead, meaning even with the nitrous coming on and off, I didn't need to feather back the throttle to wait for the back straight. We entered the back straight with me in his draft, and he towed me up to about 120 before breaking away about halfway down the straight. Somewhat irked by not getting the pass signal, I chose my brake point much deeper than previously and planned to test out the dent resistant plastic panels in the Outer Loop. Jack was really out braked going into the chicane, and I drifted from one of his mirrors to the other in the chicane, refusing to lift until I was past him. Jack stayed wide for me entering the Outer Loop, making the pass effortless and painless for both of us and followed me down into the boot. I continued to make time under braking and with corner exit speed, which would put us in a decision process that we hadn't expected. I left Jamin to make the decisions about nitrous jetting and driver assignments. We didn't expect to be faster than Jack, and thought some other cars in the class would be closer to our time. I knew what I wanted to do, I suppose there are worse situations and decisions to be made.

We soon learned that Jack was having trouble with the brakes on his ShoGun and Jamin decided that we couldn't pass up the opportunity to take advantage of the situation and put me back in the driver seat. Gridded behind a BMW M3 this time, I expected to get some clean laps and a better opportunity to use the nitrous. With the wide-open throttle switch better adjusted, the nitrous system worked a lot better and I reeled in the M3 at the beginning of the third lap. Again, taking advantage of our better brakes, I nearly rear-

ended the M3 at Turn One, hounded him up through the Esses, and he let me by at the entrance to the back straight. We improved our position from 36th overall to 33rd in the second session, and a car that wasn't even on our radar screens, the turbocharged Jetta, beat Jack during the second run. I know it seems like I'm making a big deal about the brakes on this car, but it is a big deal when you are still running wide open long after the 'faster' car has gone to brakes.

Before we pulled out of Watkins Glen, Gavin, the host of the TV show being filmed, hitched a ride with us and we made the short trip to Indianapolis Raceway Park with a short stop at a checkpoint in the Summit Racing retail store in Ohio. The 'Service Engine Soon' light came on, a standing yellow that meant something might be amiss with the emissions system. A quick check of the tailpipe confirmed we were emitting just fine. Perhaps the computer had figured out that we had installed the header and ultra-lightweight catalytic converter. Unfortunately, Summit Racing couldn't be bothered to remain open for the One Lap cars, but always looking on the bright side, Jamin pointed out how much money we saved by not being able to buy all the stuff we had planned on.

All of our transit drives were very uneventful. We earned no speeding tickets, didn't run out of gas, didn't run over any tire slashing debris or animals, and rarely got lost. Most importantly, the recycled engine and transmission we picked up from <http://www.6thplanetusedparts.com/> showed no signs of wear or weakness during the entire trip. With 130,000 miles on the odometer and a plan to consume about 15 pounds of nitrous during each time trial, we were pleased with our decision to install much younger parts to avoid needing a replacement during the event. So, rather than bore you with endless tales about running without a passenger seat, co-driver sleeping on the floor, and how bad the roads are in many states, I'll stick to the more colorful stories about how the little Saturn that could, did.

Indianapolis Raceway Park is a great roadcourse with a dragstrip that doubles as the front straight. We arrived early to find Saturn Performance Club member, and most excellent drag racer, Christina Snowden parked right next to where we had already planned to pit. She brought us nitrous, snacks, and plenty of encouragement. While moving the car to grid, Mike Stimic wandered by to offer even more encouragement. Mike was on the Factory Saturn winning team the previous year and wasn't able to make it out for the entire event this time.

As soon as I received my grid assignment, reality came into focus. Yesterday's runs had caused us to be placed between Lance Mallet in his Mallet Corvette and Woody Hair in his BMW M Coupe. With a maximum crank horsepower (with nitrous) of 170, I had a lot of pedaling to do to avoid being overtaken by the BMW. During the recon lap I played with sliding the car around to see what to expect later on when I overcooked a corner. The car felt great, it was predictable and felt balanced and light. Before my green flag dropped, the Corvette was about a quarter-mile away, entering Turn One, and I didn't expect to see him again before the cool-down lap. By the end of the first lap I had closed on the Corvette, but not enough to be able to switch my mind from 'time trial' mode to 'chase and pass' mode. Checking my mirrors on the front straight, I realized that

the M Coupe wasn't going to catch me and would probably fall back. Unable to get close enough to the Corvette to catch a draft off him on the front straight during the third lap, I watched him pull away as our Saturn reached its maximum speed of 107mph. I finally got through most of the corners on the backside of the course smoothly and had made up a lot of time on the Corvette. I figured that I would be able to catch him in the last few turns and he'd tow me in, but those plans were put to rest when we came upon a standing yellow flag for an errant WRX that overcooked a right hander and ended up in a tire wall. We both slowed for incident, but a lack of torque compared to the Corvette ruined any slight chance I had of catching and drafting him down the front straight. It still wasn't a bad run, 6 seconds faster than the Mallet Corvette and 11 seconds faster than BMW. In class, we were 12 seconds faster than the ShoGun and 19 seconds faster than the Jetta.

The second run went well, although I admit that I had lost focus on the job at hand. The car had instilled quite a bit of confidence in me and I was enjoying sliding it around on the backside of the course and trying to maintain oversteer in a carousel type corner. The time did improve by 3.5 seconds, but the Jetta had improved to within 7.5 seconds of us. The car that we did not consider a threat coming into the event now seemed to be within striking distance. Unfortunately, we wouldn't realize how close he was until we reached Road America the next day.

Before going to Road America, the event stopped at The Tire Rack in Indiana for a skidpad challenge. I adjusted the rear swaybar to allow for more oversteer in hopes of making the car more likely to spin than to push hopelessly away from the inside line. When Jamin returned from the skidpad, he was much quieter than I expected, and soon there was a new rule for Onelap. In the past, I've made several near disastrous decisions including Taco Bell in the desert and White Castle hamburgers on a road without rest areas. Blunders like these exempt me from being allowed to choose dinner for the remainder of my Onelap days. Adjusting the rear swaybar in the completely wrong direction, causing massive understeer, means I will probably never be allowed to wield a wrench during competition again. The only cars we beat on the skidpad were the ones that never showed up to run it. Last place points meant that we were now tied with the Jetta and we had some work to do the next few days.

Day three found us in Wisconsin at Road America on a cold and wet day. Standing water on the track caused One Lap officials to cancel the second event, extending the first to 4 laps. Additionally, a 'stop and go' box was placed on track before a very high speed corner that was sure to consume at least half of the cars if we had been allowed to our own devices. The decision to run BFG G-Force KD tires, dry weather tires, didn't seem like such a good idea anymore. The first three run groups had three of the top drivers in the gravel pits and I made the conscious decision to not worry about staying ahead of the class and merely survive the run without a DNF. To describe the track as slippery is a gross understatement, I believe I could have walked some of the corners faster than I was able to push through them. Describing the track as less than world class in level of difficulty and beauty would also be inaccurate. Being able to leave without taking part of the gravel pits with us made up for the less than stellar finishing position. Roy Hopkins, eventual winner in the Luxury Sedan Class (M5) put it into perspective with just a few

words, “It’s only one of 19 events, don’t worry about it.” Of course, two poor showings that now left us second in class behind the Jetta would weigh on my mind all the way to Hallett, Oklahoma, nearly 900 miles later. Blame couldn’t even be placed on the dry weather tires, Paul Gerrard piloted his RUF 911 Turbo to first overall on G-Force KD’s. The big surprise of the day was Erich Hueschele running 3rd overall in the new Dodge SRT-4.

Hallett Motorsports Park features a lot of elevation changes (big hills), blind corners, and abbreviated braking zones. It’s also the perfect track to act as an equalizer between cars. We arrived early and while Jamin unpacked the car and prepared the nitrous bottles, I hit the track with the Dahon folding bicycle we carry with us. While others labored to complete just one lap on foot, I turned four laps on the bike, gaining yet another unfair advantage. By this time of the week, the grid is self-policing and teams look for groups that they are comfortable with. We settled in with a Mitsubishi Eclipse GSX, a WRX and a couple of the new Evolution 8 cars. I hadn’t noticed until it was nearly time to go out on track that a Porsche 911 turbo was stalking us on grid. The production crew had placed two cameras in the 911 and he’d promised them film of a pass during this session. Of course, like any hunter who needed a guaranteed kill, he looked for the weakest car of the bunch to victimize. Bypassing all the other cars in the group, he moved in behind the Saturn, surely full of confidence that he’d easily pass me on the front straight after the first lap. As we waited to be sent out on the recon lap, I tried to convince myself that that it was no big deal, the sponsors would still enjoy the TV time and that I should be focusing on the cars in my class, not the GT1 car that was planning to run me over. Well, those thoughts never crossed my mind. He might make time on me, but he wasn’t going to be able to read my decals if I could help it. The green flag dropped, his film shows my taillights getting smaller, then disappearing during the first lap. During the second lap, I stopped watching for him and went back to enjoying a well-balanced car with a nitrous bottle to help get up the hills. I couldn’t resist popping my head inside the Porsche as he parked in the paddock, “Hey, I’m so sorry!” “Why?” “I forgot the script, I was supposed to let you pass me...” What I really wanted to say was “Don’t ever underestimate an Economy car again, you would have had much better luck behind one of the Evolutions”

The second session wasn’t quite as exciting, with a surprise four laps, up one from the previous run, we went out without enough nitrous to last the entire session. A full bottle was emptied during the second lap. Without nitrous to help get up the hills, I started playing with turn-in points to get the most out of the momentum that I had. The final turn is a 180-degree turn that works best with an inside line. Trying to maximize the straights, I waited a little longer to brake, then turn in, each lap looking for that ‘perfect’ compromise. At the end of the third lap, I found out where ‘too far’ was and ended up plowing through the marbles on the outside of the turn. I had a choice, slow down, repoint the car, and not do so well on the straight, or drift off the track, stay in the throttle, and look for a smooth place to get back on the track before hitting the timing equipment at the Start/Finish line. With everyone watching, there was only one choice, and I went agricultural. Once back on the track, I figured I should ease back, let the car behind me catch up and pass, then follow him in at a reasonably safe pace. I’d forgotten that the Porsche from the first session had lined up behind me again. I forced the pass to

happen at the exit of Three, practically parking the car off line, then followed him in, expecting him to run away from me. Even without nitrous, the Saturn crawled all over the bumper of the 911 because of the trouble he was having exiting turns without throttle-induced oversteer. I regretted assuming my off-track blunder cost enough time to make me a problem for the car behind me. Luckily, the run was still good enough for first in class points. Once again, I doubt anybody had any more fun than I did that day.

We left Hallett and made the very short trip to Tulsa where a 3/8-mile dirt oval waited for us. Up until this point, we were really enjoying ourselves. We'd been very lucky, the car was working great, and we were managing to stay very well rested. Neither of us had ever been on a dirt oval before and I was really hoping Jamin would take the wheel. It was my opinion that nothing good would come of running here and all previous confidence had drained away. I'd watched a lot of dirt racing on TV, and none of those cars were front wheel drive. I moved the car as far forward on grid as I could, figuring it was best to just get it over with, accept the pain, and get an early start to Memphis. As I sat next in line to enter the track, Brock Yates Jr. made his ritual driver check before sending cars out on course. He advised me to stay low, take the short line around, and to stay off the walls encircling the track. As he waved me onto the track for the single "figure it out yourself" lap, I realized that I probably should pick a plan and since Brock's was the only one offered, it was "Plan A". Approaching the first banked, dirt balled, and completely unknown turn at a pretty conservative pace, I understood that there was going to be no "Plan B" unless "Plan B" was going to involve a tow truck.

I only knew one thing, learned from watching World Rally Championship racing on television, I needed to get the rearend to hang out, and that was just a survival instinct anyway. If I was going to the wall, I was going in backwards. Approaching Turn One on the recon lap, at only about 40 mph, I attempted my first ever Scandinavian Flick, a quick right and left motion with the steering wheel, with a lift throttle to induce oversteer during the left. Luckily I was only going about 40 mph and I was able to gather the car up with throttle. Richard Burns, WRC points leader would have nothing to fear about me coming up through the ranks to challenge him. Having avoided a spin, learning that the front wheels grip pretty well considering, and that oversteer can be over-induced, I flat-footed the back straight managing to near the top of second gear before doing a brake tap to load the front wheels, turn in, and then remaining off the throttle to allow the oversteer to develop by itself, then going to throttle to draw the car around the turns onto the front straight. I stopped at the Start/Finish line to wait for the green flag and reminded myself that surviving two turns on a recon lap doesn't mean that I'm fully prepared for three hot laps for time, and that like Road America, finishing with a mediocre time is better than not finishing at all.

Green Flag drops, Saturn scrambles for traction, Turn One approaches. I lift, point the car at the apron of the corner, get very little oversteer, go to throttle, greet understeer with a lift, go back to throttle, stare down Turn Three as it approaches at the top of second gear. Tap the brake for timing, turn in toward the bottom of the track, gather up oversteer with throttle, realize that I'm really low in the turn where the dirtballs roll off the banking. As I head down the front straight I considered entering a little higher where the

dirt is better packed, but fear of being any closer to the concrete wall leaves me at the bottom of the track again. With a better exit speed off the turn, I'm forced to shift into third, adding a downshift to the mix of trying to get the car around the corner. Having survived two laps without even drifting up to the racing line, I began the third lap with renewed confidence. Just after passing the beginning of Turn Two, halfway around one end of the 180 degree turns, the rear came around a little further than needed and I was soon pointed into the infield. Two choices, let the car spin and lose a lot of time, or stand on the throttle, hope the markers separating the track from the infield were soft, and avoid "Plan B" at all costs. With nothing to hit in the infield, the car went extremely agricultural and I began to think the other choice might have prudent. Reentering the racing surface on the back straight, I was in the classic "borrowed mom's car without permission to practice fishtails on a dirtroad, do you think she'll believe it was stolen" scenario. Opposite steering lock right, then left, then right again, I was getting awful close to the final turns and it looked like I was going to be pointed the wrong way to turn left. Thinking back a couple weeks to a skidpad session at Summit Point in the rain that I thought was useless because I was in an old Caprice with no air in the rear tires, I remembered what the guy having way too much fun in the passenger seat told me. "Your reactions are way too slow to drive this car." and I went for full opposite lock left while the car was still pointed at the infield. It was a last ditch effort, it would either work, or set me up for a nice counter-clockwise spin that would end long before concrete met plastic.

The car straightened itself out before the back straight was over. Not yet ready to breathe, I took a quick inventory of the situation. Apparently I hadn't significantly lifted, somewhere in there I had upshifted to third, and I really, really wanted to see that checkered flag. The final turns went really well and we had posted our best finish of the entire event, 21st overall, first in class. Success has it's price though, the car sounded like I had broken the header, a known problem for the version we had installed. Ever vigilant, Jamin inspected the weak point of the header and declared it unbroken, but did find an exhaust flange with only one of three original fasteners intact. We let it cool while packing the car for the trip to Memphis, then poured a couple bottles of water that was too warm to drink over the flange to make it a little safer to touch. Prior to leaving on this journey, I had sorted through everything Jamin intended to bring along. Some of the things I chose to leave behind included a jackstand, spare nitrous lines, and an assortment of bolts. Of course, I never bothered to tell Jamin until he asked for his bucket of spare bolts that he had carefully picked to bring along. Left with no alternative, I ransacked the belongings of the team parked next to us, the eventual SSGT2 class winner and representative of our sponsor (HyeDraCyl) Greg Hagopian. Greg's bucket of bolts was well stocked and we were soon on the road again. As we pulled out of the paddock, Jamin asked me if I had noticed when the 'Service Engine Soon' light had upgraded itself from a standing yellow to blinking.

Next up for us was the last track we had previous experience with, Memphis Motorsports Park. The roadcourse at Memphis incorporates the quarter-mile NHRA dragstrip and the entire shutdown area as a front straight. The rest of the course involves getting you back to the beginning of the front straight using as little real estate as possible. There are a

couple full throttle turns followed by the “M’s”, an offset slalom that requires a second gear entry speed and careful car placement. After the M’s, a short straight leading to a left/right combo that slows your entry into the drag race staging area that includes a narrow entry back onto the front straight.

Heavy rains that morning made the dragstrip too dangerous to run and caused officials to route the roadcourse traffic through Pit Road at full speed, avoiding the slippery, changing surfaces on the dragstrip launching pads. Canceling the dragracing events was another bit of good luck for us, we would have received a sound beating by the Festiva and Jetta. While prepping the car for the track event, Jamin found a failed fitting on the nitrous supply line. Luckily, he thought, he’d brought two spares. After admitting that I’d pulled the spares out of his kit, I went looking for a team that did have a spare. We didn’t find one, but did manage to contact a speedshop about ten miles away that could crimp a new fitting on our line for short money. We removed the broken line and Jamin left with the producer of the show in the Car and Driver Long Term Test Saturn ION to look for the shop.

Cars were called to grid, with a warning that not running in the proper order would guarantee a 10 second penalty. Because the track was wet, with standing water in the left/right combo, everyone wanted to run last. As I pulled the Saturn into line, preparing to go out without nitrous, Jamin made it back with the repaired line. We didn’t have time to route the line properly, while I adjusted the seatbelts and put on my helmet, Jamin attached the line to the nitrous solenoid in the engine compartment. As I put on my gloves, Jamin routed the line between the hood and the windshield, in the driverside window, and threw the excess into the backseat area. While someone tie-wrapped the line to the door handle and window crank, Jamin attached the line to the bottle, and opened the valve.

As Brock Jr waved me onto the track for the first session, Jamin climbed out of the car and Fred (Mitsu GSX driver) finished the impromptu tie-wrap job. I was sent out as the last car in the group, behind a red E30 BMW M3. Start/Finish had been moved to Pit Road for safety reasons, but general consensus was that the lane change maneuver required to transition from Pit Road to the drag strip at over a hundred miles per hour might not be the lesser of two evils. The faster a car ‘shot the gap’, the straighter the car had to be traveling to avoid a high-speed slide. The straighter a car went through the gap in the wall, the narrower the gap became. The guys who were traveling in excess of 130 mph were coming really close to removing the mirrors from both sides of the car. Once again, luck was on our side, we were gear limited to about 107mph, which meant there would be no need to ‘hope’ I’d be able to get through the hole without lifting.

The brakes, suspension, and pit road exit onto the front straight made catching and passing the M3 during the second lap almost too easy. At the top end of the course, being able to remain wide open through a series of connected turns meant gaining a lot of ground on the M3 early in the first lap. Very late braking for the M’s and the left/right combo meant even more distance between us was reduced. I expected to catch the M3 during the 3rd lap, I just hoped it would be a safe place for him to allow me to pass. What

I didn't expect was for the M3 to use the brakes in Pit Road to slow for the transition out onto the front straight. That loss of momentum allowed me to catch him under braking at the entrance to the first turn, a sweeping carousel that led to the wide open connected turns. He allowed me to pass in the short chute following the carousel turn, leaving me off-line and at full throttle for the dogleg left turn just before the M's. I remained off line for the turn and braking, recovering the line in the autocross speed offset slalom of the M's. This is another great example of what great brakes can do for a car on a racetrack. The M3 had to brake before the dogleg left, turn, then finish his braking. I was able to flat-foot the entire complex of turns, and wait for the car to straighten out in the very short chute before the M's to stand on the brakes. Another lap later and I pulled into the paddock where Jamin could properly route the nitrous line for the afternoon event.

We'd had our share of good fortune on the track, public highways, and with the weather. It was time for one of those One Lap defining moments when things go wrong and dare you to make bad decisions. When the green flag dropped for the second event, the launch seemed fine until the tachometer went to redline while the car stopped accelerating. First thought, probably some oil or water on the track and the tires are spinning. I backed out of the throttle, shifted to second to reduce the torque in hopes of hooking the tires up, and the tach went straight for redline again with no acceleration. I lifted off the throttle, eased into it again, still no acceleration. First thought, broke the transmission spinning the tires. Eased back into the throttle and the car moved. Okay, the transmission isn't broken, and the smell of roasted clutch wafted into the car. The car was rolling, and a roasted clutch isn't going to hurt anything else, so I decided to limp it around the course and hope that the clutch disk would cool enough to survive the next couple of laps. At the end of the first lap, the SSGT2 Firebird behind me was ready to be in front of me. As I gave him the 'okay to pass' signal, I realized that it was the first time I had ever been passed on a dry surface at OneLap. Understanding there are worse situations to be passed under, I continued to nurse the car around the track happy that the clutch had stopped slipping, but unwilling to test it with the nitrous. We were very happy to learn we were still 1.5 seconds ahead of the next car in our class, disaster had been narrowly averted.

The trip to South Carolina was filled with anxiety, neither of us was able to sleep until we got to the hotel. Near panic calls to fellow Saturn Enthusiasts helped us locate a couple dealerships in South Carolina that would be able to help us if the clutch began slipping again on the track. We wanted to avoid changing the clutch because of the time required, the expense, and the opportunity to develop other problems during the procedure.

Carolina Motorsports Park presented us with another perfect day for racing. Normally, this wouldn't be cause for notice, but our event had narrowly escaped a lot of deadly weather throughout the week. Tornadoes would cross our path hours before the first cars would pass through, then hours after the last cars left an area, more tornadoes would hit. Missouri, Oklahoma, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, and even Georgia were being turned into disaster zones while we moved throughout the areas looking for racetracks.

CMP is another club racing track that offers many challenges in an extremely safe environment. Described by others as a "fast section over there, and an autocross over

there, connected by a 2000 foot straight”, it provides plenty of excitement and still welcomes the driver who will see it for the first time at full speed. I’d try to give you a ‘turn by turn’ analysis of the track, but I don’t have nearly enough laps there to do it justice. Our goal today was to keep the clutch hooked up and lose as few points as possible.

The first session was going pretty well, punctuated by many minor errors that would have been avoided if I had attended a school there. Correction, many minor errors and one big one. During the third lap, I early apex’ed Turn Four and lost control of the rear of the car, pointing left when the car needed to go right. As the rear of the car snapped back around, I hoped to gather it up with me pointing in the correct direction, losing very little time. Instead, the car continued to spin in a clockwise direction and I stopped while pointing into oncoming traffic. The M Coupe that started behind me still hadn’t popped into view so a quick turnaround put me back on course with no injuries other than a bruised ego.

The morning times were posted during the lunch break, we had finally been beaten by the Festiva, by .2 seconds. More importantly, the clutch held up fine throughout the event. The nitrous system remained unarmed until after Turn One had been completed and another 10 pounds of nitrous had been fully consumed. Jamin ran the numbers from the past couple days and let me know that finishing third or better for the rest of the event would maintain our first in class finish at the end of the week. We bought lunch trackside, found a soft piece of concrete to lie down on, and took a nap. The second session went much better with the next car in class finishing 43 seconds behind us. An off-course excursion by the Festiva at Turn 5 cause Jack to pit in/DNF because of a front-end shimmy caused by sand packed in the front wheels.

The trip to Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania that night was brutal. It was a short trip, but the previous evenings worries about the clutch had caused us to not maintain our regular sleep schedule and the premature celebration in the car during the early part of this night’s trip would haunt us later on. Once again, the host of the TV show was riding with us so the first couple hours that I should have been sleeping were spent chatting about the past week and plans for next year. We arrived in Beaver Falls around 12:30 am, and spent about half an hour convincing the innkeeper at the Hilltop Inn that we’d be able to scrape up \$63 for a room. Gavin, our host, decided it would be a good idea to go out on the town, when we got back to the room after 3am we hadn’t found a place to buy a beer, but had managed to spend more than a couple bucks on Ariel, who just happens to be a Superstar. As we were finally about to turn in for the evening, the Supra team of Andy Baritchi and Clint Pohler were deciding to begin a headgasket change in the motel parking lot.

The next morning, as we left to go to the track, Andy and Clint were beginning to button up the Supra, having just reinstalled the camshafts. Future automotive enthusiasts will be charged a ‘towel deposit’ that the Hilltop Inn. We arrived at the track, BeaveRun, a nearly new facility that will surely become a favorite of Onelap organizers and participants alike. The roadcourse is not difficult to memorize, but it will be difficult to

master. A heavy rain caused the delay of the start of the first roadcourse event and the entire field lined up for an autocross speed event on a go-kart track. Imagine full size cars with lots of horsepower on a Malibu Grand Prix go-kart track. Now imagine them in the rain, with several puddles of standing water. The first run didn't go so well, I ran in heavy rain, first on the course, and placed fourth in class. No excuses, I didn't do a very good job and earned a 10 second penalty for hitting a cone. Although this wouldn't help our points gap, with the road course events being reported as canceled, we would remain in fine shape. As things are apt to do at Onelap, the days events were rescheduled for later in the day and repeating fourth in class finishes would not be a good idea.

The second autocross event went better. The rain had stopped, the puddles were drying, and we placed second in class, less than a second behind the Jetta. Only the roadcourse remained, my goal was to place third or better in class, and not to risk a DNF. With no idea what to expect on course, Brock Jr. offered some advice about Turn 5 and how it relates to the rest of the course. I had no idea where Turn 5 was on the course. During the recon lap, I counted corners looking for #5 and hoped I had counted correctly. With only 10 pounds of nitrous left, and four laps, momentum would be key to doing well.

It turns out that I had counted correctly, and a downhill right-hander 'non-corner' became a 'hold your breath and get ready to countersteer' slide at the top of third gear for every lap. Perhaps it was because it was the last track of the event, or there was very little pressure to do well, but I believe that BeaverRun was the most enjoyable course of the entire event. It has some very challenging sequences but flows very well and provides all sorts of smiles as the car is tested. The highlight was receiving a passing signal from the 700 horsepower Volvo on the back straight, there had to be something wrong with the car. I finished low in the overall standings, 49th, and second in class, but more importantly, had a great time on a great racetrack.

The 2003 One Lap of America is over now, we finished 44th overall, First in class. We would have like to do better overall, but chose to race against the class instead of the field after damaging the clutch in Memphis and doing so poorly on the skidpad and in the rain at Road America. We ran the event with a 'recycled' engine and transmission, consumed about 160 pounds of nitrous oxide, and traveled over 3900 miles. We entered the event with realistic expectations, capitalized on the misfortune of others, and tried to make intelligent decisions when things weren't going our way. With a top speed that nearly any car could attain on the track, the importance of an excellent suspension and brakes can be credited for the achievement. On the way back to Painted Post to check in and officially complete the event, we made plans for 2004. Oh yeah, that "Service Engine Soon" light? It extinguished itself after we completed the event, not bad for a recycled engine.