



Tire Pressure at 140

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Rolling out of bed at 4:30 after a week of 20 hour days, miles of walking and countless meetings at SEMA, is really hard. I think the only reason I could drag myself out the door was the rush of thinking about what we were about to participate in on this beautiful day in southern Nevada in November ; The Optima Batteries Ultimate Street Car Invitational at Spring Mountain Park in Pahrump, Nevada. Have you ever seen the sunrise over the desert? Add this to your bucket list.

The track opened at 6:30 for the 52 participants, haulers, chase cars and spectators. Nothing like the smell of 114 octane early in the am to get you moving. After a tech inspection, each participant is challenged in four areas: Styling, Road course, Fast Autocross and 0-60-0 Speed Stop challenge. The rules this year were tight. The styling was judged by renowned car stylist Murray Pfaff. The 0-60-0 Speed Stop Challenge was exactly what it sounds like. Each car is timed in a straight line using a G-tech windshield mounted wonder tool. You get three runs; when the red light on the G-tech illuminates indicating you have reached 60mph, hit the brakes. The autocross was a really fast course that included room to drift if you dare including a circular finish line! The circular finish line was a very small diameter turn- about that you must exit after doing a tire smoking 360. Three runs, no practice. Finally, the 2.2 mile, very technical (ask me how I know) road course. The field of cars were broken up so multiple events happened simultaneously. Remember I said the rules were tight? If you put up any dust on the road course with your tires (remember this is the desert) at the edge of the track, you instantly get a 3 minute lap time! Cars were given 10 minutes at about 9:30 to make a couple 60 mph laps for practice. The road course competition consisted of one warm up lap, three timed laps and one cool down lap. No pressure here for a bunch of mostly amateurs competing. For exhibition, Paul Tracey was there driving a new specially prepared Camaro and Tanner Foust was driving the Magnaflo Mustang designed by Foose that you may have seen on MuscleCar TV recently. But with the exception of 2 semi pro and one ex-pro drivers, it was all amateurs. During one of the early morning timed runs, David Frieberger, editor of Hot Rod magazine earned the nickname "Cupcake" by wadding up the new Factory Five 33 coupe you've seen them building in Hot Rod over the last few months. They needed a flatbed for that one. It delayed things an hour. It's a very technical track, his misfortune was proof. My palms are starting to sweat now.

Our Gateway team has spent the last few months designing and manufacturing a new line of suspension components for vintage Fords. 3 link rears, coil over strut front suspensions, steering racks, braking etc. This was the first time out for our 68 Mustang with "hot off the CNC machine" prototype spindles and coil over struts, Baer brakes, Eibach springs and a new rear sway bar set up. Not to mention, I had never driven our car at speed. So 10 minutes to practice on a new track, in a new car and prototype suspension components ...before representing the team while being filmed for Speed TV, was nerve racking for an amateur like me. No pressure.

Our team at Gateway has the good fortune of some really terrific relationships with our vendor partners like Mothers Polishes Waxes Cleaners. It just so happens that Jim Holloway (whose father was the

founder of Mothers) is driving the chase car complete with video camera ...all day. I begged for a ride in his factory fresh, unmodified ZR1 with 6700 miles on it. It still has that new leather smell. Nice.



At the starting line, I get instructions from Bud Brutsman's production crew on how and when to turn the in-car camera on and off. It's my first time in a ZR1. She starts gently singing to me as we head off the starting line. We are chasing Corpalla. A 63 Impala built on Vette suspension components and power. During our warm up lap Jim explains that in addition to his Mothers job he drives a turbo charged Mazda RX8 for Robert Davis Racing in NASA and SCCA. Jim further explains he has thousands of miles behind the wheel...at Pahrump alone. This could be fun. Using my watch I time the first couple laps behind the Corpalla at 2:20 and 2:15. Good times for an amateur I am told. "So Jim," I ask (hollering through our helmets)" what's a good lap time on this course?" "1:50 or so is really good with some seat time" he informs me. "What about you and the ZR1?" I ask. Very humbly he replies, "With good tires, I can do low 1:40's in the ZR1." "Holy Crap!" I think, because following the Corpalla seems fast. Corpalla has finished now; we pull back to the starting grid. Jim wants to wait for the car that is on the track on its warm up lap to come by. It's a car I have not heard of but everyone seems to know all about it. It's driven by a GM engineer and (I am told) a Nuremburg Ring record holder and designer of some of the C6 elements. It's a yellow 69 Camaro called "Jackass". Jim knows Mark Stielow pretty well apparently.



Mark Stielow's "Jackass" '69 Camaro

The Camaro flies by on the front straight. Jim puts the hammer down. Jackass has already pushed out of sight into turn 2 of the 10 turn course. Holy Crap! Comes to mind again as Jim hits turn one and the



helmet bag from the back of the car hits my helmet and distracts Jim for a split second. Ladies and gentlemen, we are now in the marbles at about 100 and in a frantic 4 wheel drift. Jim never flinches. Down shift, tap the brakes, set the front end, rotate left into turn 2. We're all gathered up now. Traction control is in "sport" mode. The street Michelin's are starting to howl at us. Turn 2 is a double apex with a long second exit. Barrump! Great, he's using the rumble strips now. I can see Jackass again. I've managed to get the helmet bag under my left foot and stand on it. No more distractions. Jim's line is perfect (not that I would know mind you, but we are hauling the mail for sure). A couple more turns, a short straight and I can now read the tag on Jackass. I have never seen a 69 Camaro run like this. Man, that guy can drive! 1850 Foot back stretch, I glance at the speedo as it rapidly passes 140. Downshift; set the front end, hard right, we're now on Jackass's beautiful chrome bumper. That thing sounds good. Two more quick left rights and we're crossing the start finish heading to where "Cupcake" wadded up the 33 this morning. I hit my stopwatch as we cross the start finish. Into turn one, full four wheel drift. I love that feeling. Jim is really driving now. He sets the front end for turn 2 and we have another distraction. The car cover he was also storing in the back is now beating us both in the helmet. Jim goes deep into turn 2 and hoses up the double apex but still manages to come out on top of Jackass. I now have to let go of the seat bracket I've been holding on to with my left arm so I can keep the cover in the back where it belongs. It's now that I see the real wisdom in Jim's line. It's a little different than Jackass but it works really well and the ZR1 is not even working hard yet. We cross the start finish. I hit the stop watch. As near as I can tell in all the commotion, we just did a 1:50 lap. I tell myself to study his line. I'll need this later when it's our turn. Jackass has picked up the pace it would appear. Jim's hitting all his marks and Jackass is getting away. Jim starts pushing the buttons on the dash scrolling through the display on the speedo. Oh, I see. He just turned off the traction control between turns three and four. That yellow picture of a tire cross section is glaring at us now from the middle of the speedo indicating traction control is off. This should be interesting. We start gaining on the Camaro. That's why he turned off the traction control, now Jim's in complete control. Cross the finish line, last lap, hit my stop watch. This is a beautiful experience for a car guy. I'm in love with this ZR1. Now Jim starts using the rest of the track while we are all tucked up behind the 69. These will be great camera shots. Turn 8, Jim starts screwing with the dash again. Now what's he doing? I see...checking the tire pressure of all things. We're on the back stretch passing 140 mph again. Jim casually informs me the tires have gained 5 psi since we turned off the traction control. We hit the finish line in what feels like a really fast lap. Hit the stop watch before we do the cool down lap (yea right!). It looks like a 1:48 lap to me as I enjoy the "cool down" lap. Jim pulls back into the pits. The brakes aren't even warm yet on the ZR1.

The Challenge drivers are limited to the builders /owners of each car to keep teams from hiring pros like Jim to spank the rest of us. For our team, that is Jason, Lonny and myself. So we divide up the driving. Jason did an awesome job on the Autocross posting a 45 second pass, as I recall. You would have thought Lonny was a pro bracket racer with his 8.6 time in all three runs in 0-60-0 Speed Stop Challenge. I suppose it helps that Jason and Lonny used to race monster trucks. Jason drove Grave Digger and Lonny drove Bigfoot for several years before they started Gateway. Both of them are talented drivers for sure. Since I have the most road track experience, I get to drive the big course. No pressure.



It was a long afternoon waiting for my turn. A ventilated Rat in a 72 Camaro, transmission pieces from an Infinity and lots of desert dust on several cars that went exploring off track made for a long day. I hate waiting. I don't know how many times I studied the course lines on the paper in my pocket. "It's not helping" I think to myself. Bud's camera crew sticks a camera in my face on the starting line. I can hardly hear them over the idle of our car and the radio that is plugged into both ears. I think he asked me how we're going to do. All I can think to say is what's on my mind. "We're just going to try not to wad it up". Now I love a challenge and I can typically operate well in stressful conditions, but now I know I am nervous, my voice sounded two octaves high. I don't want to hurt our \$150k development car but I need to score well to carry the flag for the team. Time to go. I hit it hard, spinning well through second. Let's heat those tires up. "Try to hit Jim's lines on the practice lap but make it snappy." I tell myself. I realize how crappy I am doing. The team is encouraging me on the radio and I see that red ZR1 in the mirror. Jason is riding shotgun. No pressure. Turn 10, front straight, build some speed; get ahead of the clock. Crap, I can't seem to find 3rd gear. Thanks Autometer for the rev limiter! There it is, third gear, no time for fourth. I'm near 100, coming into turn one. I hit the radio button...I hope no one but the team was listening to what I just said, it was not PC - I'm not happy with myself. Now I proceed to hose-up turn 2, I didn't set the front end well enough, the car didn't rotate. It's pushing. Let up, then hammer it, we're in second. That's more like it, rear wheel steering courtesy of Roush. Thanks Jack. Here come those rumble strips on the short straight between turns two and three, third gear. Oops! Should not have grabbed third. Got a little cocky trying to go fast, gunna miss turn three I think. I call on the 4 wheel 6 piston calipers, they answer instantly via the BFG R1's. The pavement complains now, too much brake, get off 'em stupid and turn right. Nope, not going to work like that today, it's too late. The back end is now going faster than the front. You better get back on those Baer brakes, that gravel will not help things. @\$%%! It swaps ends and I back into the gravel and dust. Now I can't see because of the desert dust and I have pebbles in my pants! I hit the radio button while I restart the small block. "I'm OK" is all I can get out. Lonny (my spotter) tells me later, how much this comment surprised him. They couldn't see this part of the track. I'm rolling now, pebbles everywhere and I can hardly see for the dust on the inside and outside of the windshield and my helmet. 2nd gear, hard acceleration. I hit the Radio: "Car's fine; I looped it". All right I think to myself, get back on the horse. I neglected to remember the now sad condition of my tires. Dust and pebbles imbedded in soft rubber do not make for great traction. I'm back in the groove or so I think. Turn 5B is a tight right hander that if you hit your marks will let you get the car straightened up half way through and gently 4 wheel drift to the left rumble strips; that is, if you hit your marks without too much speed

and clean warm tires. My 4 wheel drift took me back into the desert again. No loop this time, just keep the small block singing. Then I remember we changed the front brake pads before practice and installed Hawk racing compound on the front 6 pistons but not the rears because they sent the wrong pads. We had to keep the street pads on. No wonder the binders are killing me. I need more rear brake bias. Reach over and give the brake bias adjustment a hard clockwise spin. Back stretch, now, 5th gear, 130 mph or so. Lonny is talking me off my adrenalin rush really well. Turn ten, start finish whizzes by. I found third gear that time; feels good. I'm settled back down now. Concentrate. The brakes are dreamy now and this road race prepped close ratio 5 speed is amazing. "Now, use what you learned from Jim". Check the mirror: it's full of Mothers Red ZR1. I tell myself not to look again. Lonny reminds me to be gentle with the steering. He watched me make the car flinch going across the start finish. The steering is set at 1 turn lock to lock: great for the autocross but not at 130 mph. The remaining 2 timed laps went much better. What a feeling and a rush. The announcer has no idea I looped it on lap one. All he says is "I think his first timed lap must have been another warm up lap 'cause he has really put the hammer down on lap 2. Well, at least that comment makes the Gateway team *sound* good!



L-R: Lonny, Daryl (adjusting the suspension) Brian and Jason

In the end, the Jackass Camaro got third place with a 1:49. Second was a 147.9 posted by Ryan Mathews of Detroit Speed in their 69 Camaro. Who won? An 800hp aluminum original 1966 427 cobra driven by an ex pro driver Bruce Cambren. He looked to be about 70 years old. His road course time was 1:46. I didn't see his 0-60-0 but rumor was he barely got off the starting line. His time was 6.7. An amazing car. And how did the out of the box yellow 68 do on the road course? After the spin on the first lap, we posted a 1:58 on lap 2. Our best lap, the last one, was a 1:56, which put us seventh overall out of 52 cars. We're happy with that. I just hope the team will let me drive it again!



As a lifelong gear head, Brian's "fun job" is CEO of Gateway Classic Mustang based in Bourbon Missouri. You have seen their work on Overhulin', Rides, and Hot Rod TV. They manufacture their own line of performance Ford suspension systems and restore and build some of the best Mustangs and Fords on the planet. These include cars for Sammy Hagar, Michael Anthony and Chad McQueen. Brian has funded his car habit through his 26 year career in healthcare. Today he is the Sr. VP with Regents Health Resources Inc., the nations' leading medical imaging consulting firm.