

Open Road

Volume 12 Issue 11

The Official Newsletter of the Indy Miata Club

November 2001

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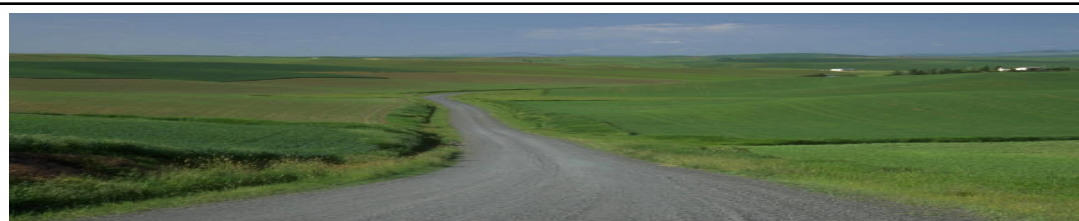
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Slower Traffic, Keep Right!

Steve Jacobson, President, Indy Miata

The Car Is Still Dirty

First of all, thank you Chuck for filling in for me while I was away learning about fatherhood and the many new responsibilities that I now have. I don't mind any of them one bit!

The car is still dirty because my mind has been elsewhere the last two months. In fact all of our cars are dirty. It's getting colder outside so my opportunity for hand-washing them is slipping away and it's time to get the hard-top ready. But that's OK. I don't mind too much. My new role in life and the tragedy of September 11th have really made me take stock in all the blessings I have. You should really do the same.

Fatherhood is great. I love every minute I get to be with Riley. Unfortunately, he's still a bit small for the Miata. But I know someday he's going to ask to borrow it. I'll let him. And maybe we'll go look at the new 2017 model Miatas at the dealership. Are we going to have flying cars by then? Will the Miata even be around? Will it go back to its roots as a cheap, no frills, affordable sportscar? Or will it continue to go up-market with more leather and electronic gizmos to weigh it down? (I'd like to see a stripped down lightweight model myself.) Who knows what Mazda and Ford have up their sleeves?

September 11th didn't motivate me to wash the cars much either. I was shocked and stunned at what I saw. The first moon-walk happened a couple months after I was born. The World Trade Center came down a few days after Riley was born.

Both events in my life make my dirty car seem quite so trivial. As they should. It is after all, just a car. I don't mind having a dirty car too much. And Riley doesn't know it. All he ever sees is the view out the back window of the Cruiser. And he's not usually awake for too long once we get going. I look forward to teaching him how to hand-wash the cars.

So as you gather with your family and friends this holiday season -- let the cars go dirty. It can wait.

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2001 Holiday Party

Clear your calendars! The date and place for our annual Holiday Party have been set! Sunday, December 2nd, at River Glen Country Club in Fishers, 3:30pm.

It's located near 116th & Allisonville Road. The address is 12010 Clubhouse Drive Fishers. The easiest way to get there is to turn left at the first stoplight North of 116th on Allisonville Rd. Follow that straight back. That will take you directly into the club parking lot.

We will once again be doing a "White Elephant" gift exchange so please bring a wrapped gift valued at no more than \$10. Miata themed gifts are always a plus! We'll also be taking nominations for officers and honoring some of the past officers.

We will have a selection of appetizers and a cash bar will be available.

Call Steve or Chuck with any questions

Sunday, December 2nd

3:30pm until ???

River Glenn Country Club at 116th & Evansville in Fishers

The Open Road

Please send all pictures, articles and items for publication to:

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A Wild Ride

By Beth McCoy

Many of you have heard about one of our fellow club members, Jim Barrick. Jim and Georgia Barrick are always the first to finish a rally. We see them take off at the start, and that's the last we see of them. Jim has a reputation for being the fastest. Over the years, we talked about going for a ride. I wanted to see for myself just how fast, and how wild Jim really was. I also wanted some tips on how to improve my driving skills. I tend to drive too fast, and by the seat of my pants. I wanted to gain more control.

When we pulled out of the Huber Winery, I gave my husband, Bob, an uncertain smile while he and Georgia got behind us. That was the last I saw of them until they reached the Barrick's house. Jim sprinted onto SR 135. We were going at a good clip, around 80mph...no big deal, I thought, I can handle this! Jim passed the other cars with ease, not even downshifting. His Miata has a turbo boost. I'm not going to even attempt to turn this into a tech article...mostly because, although I know more than the average person about the mechanics of a car, I don't know more than some of our club members. Let's just say, there are some interesting add-ons sporting Jim's dash, some sort of remote, and, of course, the notorious, TURBO BOOST button. It looks like something that would be on the Bat mobile.

So, we're cruising along, and Jim gets bored and decides to get off 135, and venture out into the winding, hilly roads that make Southern Indiana so fun. Did I say FUN? I think there should be a new ride at King's Island named after Barrick's driving. How 'bout CRAZY JIMMY! The funny thing is, though, I was thrilled by the drive, but not frightened by Jim's driving. He always had full control of his car. Here I am in the passenger seat thanking God that there is an airbag. My legs are stretched out and my feet are reaching for the imaginary clutch and brake. My stomach muscles are so tight that I won't have to do my ab workout for a week.

Then, it dawns on me that Jim is casually driving with one arm on the Momo steering wheel, totally cool, and perfectly calm. I think to myself, pay attention to what he's doing so that I can learn to drive this way! So, Jim went over how to find the apex of a curve, when to slow down, when to speed up, etc.

I have been hitting the apex too late, which, according to Jim is unusual; most people hit it too early. I watched his RPMs. I have never in my life taken sharp curves at 60 + MPH before and I wanted to learn how.

We had one incident where we skidded on some sand around a curve. When the car started to skid, Jim didn't let up on the throttle, like I would have. Jim's reaction kept the car from spinning out, and control was regained quickly. Because Jim used to race motorcycles, his reflexes are much sharper than most drivers. On a few curves, there were cars coming towards us that were over the centerline. My heart was in my throat and I had a good view of all the foliage on the side of the road. I look over at Jim, and he is perfectly calm.

That Saturday, I learned what makes a good driver. A good driver knows his/her car—what it can do, and what it can't. A good driver does not overreact or overcorrect. A good driver is careful when need be, such as going over blind hills. Confidence is so important. The only way to gain confidence is practice, practice, practice. An article Jim wrote while he was president of the club stated that we should take our cars out when the pavement is wet, and drive in a circle, and then, do the same on dry pavement. This exercise teaches how the car handles on curves going at a good speed. It's important NOT to squeal the tires, by the way. I learned a lot driving with "Crazy Jimmy" that day. When we pulled into his driveway to wait for Georgia and Bob to arrive, Exhausted, I realized my jaw had been clenched the entire way, and I was in dire need of a beer. I asked Jim if he was tired, and he just looked at me like I was crazy. I never could understand how Jim's wife, Georgia, falls asleep while Jim is driving. I figured it must be pure faith in him...or the fact that she prefers not to see the "near misses" ahead of them!

You may notice that this month's newsletter is not quite as polished as usual. Our Editor Sara has been out of town on family business, so I've stepped up to the plate to edit and publish this month. Let me just say, this ain't easy, folks. Next time you see Sara, give her a pat on the back for doing such a nice job month after month!!

Thanks Sara!!!

--Chuck

Shopping Trip to Nashville!

November 17
Hosted by the Barricks

Please put 11/17 on the calendar. An early shopping trip to Nashville host by Jim Barrick. We'll meet at the Burger King in Trafalgar at 12 noon for lunch.

First cars off at 1:30.

Jim will lead us through the hills of Southern Indiana, ending in Nashville for some early Christmas shopping.

Directions to Trafalgar: TAKE 465 SOUTH TO 31 SOUTH. TURN RIGHT ONTO COUNTY LINE ROAD (WEST). THEN LEFT ON MERIDIAN OR S.R. 135 (SOUTH).

Election time again....

We promise, no hanging chads or butterfly ballots.

We will hold elections for 2002 Vice President during the Holiday Party on 12/2. Nominations will be made at the party, followed by a secret ballot. Results will be announced at the end of the party.

If you want to nominate someone, please let them know your intentions and make sure they are willing to be nominated.

Nominees may be asked to say a few words so everyone will know who they are voting for.

Real World Handling For Your Miata

By Jim Barrick

I know there are many members who autocross and spend time running their Miatas on the various tracks in the area. This article is not for those who want their cars to handle like it's on rails at the expense of every thing else. For those folks there are a bazillion articles written on the subject. Because Georgia and I use the Miata on the street and take long trips, ride comfort and dependability are high on our list. That doesn't, however, mean that you can't improve the handling of any Miata at lot.

What prompted this article was all the folks who have ridden with me say how well the car rides and how flat and tight it feels under hard cornering. Since the development of our car was so gradual I took these comments with a grain of salt. I didn't realize how much I had improved our Miata until I drove a bone stock 1995 (same year as ours and the owner will be kept anonymous). To be blunt, it rode rough and felt like it had a hinge in the middle under moderately hard cornering. The brakes felt squishy and not very confidence inspiring. I actually had to sit down and think of the sequence of modifications, due to budgetary constraints.

Probably the most important and the first thing I did was replace the shocks and springs. I am very very opinionated on this subject. I didn't want to change the ride height of our car because we load it with luggage and everything else we can think of, at least once a year. If you put springs that will lower the ride height of your car you will lower the center of gravity and improve the feel of your car a modicum amount. You will also induce "bump steer". That is a condition created by tie rods that are no longer within the arc of your suspension as it travels up and down. Frankly, it's annoying and undesirable. Every time your car hits a bump the steering wheel will move left or right. You will also increase the harshness of ride because most after market springs are not only shorter but stiffer. Progressive wound springs don't help either. Particularly if you want to load your Miata and take trip. Your spine will find the rubber bump stops that limit the travel of your suspension. At the time I replaced the springs the Spec Miata was using the springs from a 1995 M edition automatic transmission model. These springs keep the stock ride height with about a 20lb. increase in spring rate (per wheel).

I am absolutely convinced that Bilstein shocks are the best bet for a street Miata. They have a lifetime warranty and have the internal valving that really works. They are relatively inexpensive for a high performance shock. About \$100 bucks each. Keep in mind the lifetime warranty. The stock Miata shock has only rebound dampening and rely on the springs for compression dampening.

The Bilsteins have progressive compression rebounding. This means that you get a really good soft ride under normal driving conditions. As soon as you turn hard at speed with high g forces the dampening increases proportionally and significantly. You won't believe how much flatter the car is under hard cornering. For you part time autocrossers, etc. I have never had a Bilstein fail due to prolonged high heat conditions (driving very aggressive for long periods of time).

If you have a Miata 7 years or older I highly recommend you change your rubber bushings in your A arms and sway bars when you replace your shocks. They aren't too expensive and are a piece of cake to change if you have access to a good bench vise. You will be impressed with the improvement this will make. Every thing in the suspension will feel tighter and the ride will be less "crashy" and noisy. It may get rid of some of those squeaks and rattles your Miata has acquired over the years. Do this even if you have low mileage on an older Miata. These rubber bushings deteriorate regardless of use.

The next modification I made was a cross-tower brace on the front suspension. The new Miatas come with them. This should give you a wake up call. What prompted me to add the brace was I noticed my hood and fender gap was opening and closing under hard cornering. Something was flexing and wheel alignment was NOT where it should be under the conditions. The tower brace tightened up the front end considerably with no decrease in ride comfort. I could actually feel a tire slip a bit as it hit the smoother and slicker centerline of the road. It's a fact; if you have good feel of the road you can safely and with greater confidence push your Miata to higher levels of cornering performance.

To further enhance the feel of the car you must have tires and wheel that are capable of transferring this feel to the steering wheel. As you probably know the lightweight of the Miata becomes a handicap in a downpour. I can't tell you how many times I had to white knuckle my drive under these conditions with all season tires. Even at very slow speeds the control of your Miata goes to almost nil in the rain. I did a lot of research before I choose the tire wheel combination. Although the dry performance may suffer a bit the obvious first consideration was wet performance. I also didn't want to increase the weight of the tire and wheel. Without going into research detail I choose the Speed Star Racing five spoke aluminum wheel and the Dunlop SP9000 205/45/16 tire. At the time this was the lightest combination. There may now be other tire wheel combinations that are lighter than this one. I can attest to the strength of this package. It has survived Potholes curbs, etc that would bend other rims.

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Driving VIR

Sept. 5, 2001

By Paul D'Angelo

It's been three days since I left Danville, VA. It has taken me all this time to sit down and reflect on the fantastic weekend, which has passed. During the said weekend I was wondering why more individuals from Indiana were not in attendance. The event I am speaking of is the 7th annual MSCW (Mazda Sportscar Club or Washington) run MADS (Mazda Driving Seminar) along side the Rotary & Roadsters exposition. It is a premier event as far as Mazda lovers are concerned.

At the forefront of the weekend is a two-day driving seminar at VIR (Virginia International Raceway). 80% of the vehicles on track are rotary powered or Miatas. What more could a Mazda enthusiast ask for? This is my main reason for attending the event, especially since we would be utilizing VIR's full course. Within two years of it reopening, VIR has become one of the most liked tracks on the east coast. It is all renovated, with modern facilities and three different track configurations.

The three configurations consist of the north course at 2.3 miles, the south course at 1.8 miles and the full course, which is 3.3 miles. All three tracks offer excitement and a challenge for even the most veteran of drivers. The entire track surface is pristine since it is only years old. The entire complex is well thought out. VIR resides in the Virginia hills nestled within a forest. Just walking around the facility puts one at ease, with rolling hills and green fields.

Back to reality, I recall arriving at the hotel to be greeted by a parking lot full of RX-7's and Miatas. At any given time you could count up to 30 RX-7s and 20 Miatas. Where else in the world can you see this? Many people are milling about admiring each other's vehicles. For me it was an opportunity to meet up with old friends and build my anticipation for tomorrow.

Saturday morning was a bit bleak with rain coming down at a fair clip. We dedicated individuals never falter despite weather conditions. The paddock at VIR was already filling with RX-7s, Miatas and a variety of other marques as well.

I decided to run my street tires during the morning downpour. I make the best of the situation by reacquainting myself to the full course, which I drove a year ago.

Other notables on Saturday were a hand full of rotary powered racecars including a four rotor powered Kudzu driven by Jim Downing himself. There was also a Miata bodied GT car with a fuel injected 13B rotary for a power plant. The sight and sounds of purebred racecars gets the blood flowing for sure.

At around noon the clouds disperse and the track tires are installed on my car. I get to driving at a brisk but comfortable pace. The real beauty of VIR becomes apparent when you actually drive the course. The elevation changes alone make the course a blast to drive not to mention areas like the ascending esses and corners named roller coaster and hog pen. I wish this track was as close as Putnam Park is. I would be there much more often.

Saturday evening is spent at the Texas Steakhouse with 40 other Mazda enthusiasts talking about the day's events. The camaraderie is worth the 600-mile drive.

Sunday morning is thankfully dry and the long list of activities begins. On the agenda is an autocross, a car show for Miatas and rotary powered vehicles, and question and answer sessions with industry experts and racing legends. This all happens with the sounds of cars navigating the road course as part of the driving school.

I decided to take a walk up to the car rotary and roadsters expo to see what was on display. A few notables here were an RX-4, a pristine '85 RX-7 with a turbo kit and Electromotive engine management. There was also a Miata chassis sporting a body kit, which made it appear to be an Opal of days past. The first place trophies were actual rotors and pistons from RX-7s and Miatas respectively, a surefire incentive to win.

At the end of the day's festivities, there is the dinner banquet. Keynote speakers were Barbara Beach of Miata Magazine, Jim Downing co-inventor of the HANS device, and Roger Mandeville. Barbara showed a bunch of videos about Miata gatherings around the country. Imagine my surprise when I saw a clip from a local Indianapolis TV news station with a segment about the Indy Miata club.

All in all I must say that spending a weekend at VIR with fellow Mazda owners is one of the best times I have had since buying my car 6 years ago. I highly recommend one and all Mazda owners to make plans to attend next year. You will not regret it. For further information and a recap of the events past, go to www.mscw.com.

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Real World Handling For Your Miata

The last modification was the addition of a Hard Dog roll bar. I did this more at the insistence of Georgia than anything else. Plus it looks cool. However, I was unprepared for the tremendous stiffening of the chassis this modification accomplished. Our Miata came with a behind the seat brace, so I thought no other modifications were needed here. As dumb as this sounds, with the addition of the roll bar, it feels like I can lift on the steering wheel and lift the front wheels off the ground and put them down where I want them. (Motorcyclist know what this means).

The handling package is complete. The car has an excellent ride, corners flat at speed, feels tight and goes through water like a land yacht. What more could you want from a car driven on the street. If you make some or all of these changes you may want to consider going to a driving school so that you can use the added performance with confidence. My g meter now goes to 1.2 g's before breaking loose. I believe a stock 1995 Miata was able to reach .86 g's. That translates to a 28% increase in lateral force!!! Which means you can go 28% faster through your favorite set of turns with the same degree of control.

Huber Winery Tour 2001

By Chuck Wills

I'm pleased to report that the Huber Winery Tour was successful again this year. We had a record attendance of 25 cars. I think that just goes to show that all it takes for a successful event is a little planning and a lot of participation!

We decided to change the event this year to make it a little more "user friendly". We started with a brunch at The Seasons Inn in Nashville, where we had a Southern-Indiana style breakfast buffet. After filling up on biscuits and gravy we attacked the hills of Brown County by heading south on Highway 135.

I had originally been concerned that we would have a rainy day for the tour, but the weather broke, giving us blue skies and sunshine. It was still a little cool, but most folks were brave enough to drive top-down.

135 is one of my favorite roads ever, and I was looking forward to driving it a little more rapidly than the typical Brown County tourist. Unfortunately we got stuck behind a couple in a Chrysler Sebring all the way from Nashville to Story. They crept along at a leisurely 30mph.... With a line of 8 Miata's behind them! Normally, I would have passed them in a heartbeat with a blast of supercharged power, but my blower was broken and I was running normally aspirated for this trip. Pity, I would have loved to have seen their faces as "Super Miata" blasted past, sucking the windshield out of their car. (*NOTE* the Indy Miata Club does not condone speeding, reckless driving or frightening our elderly citizens. Please drive responsibly!) Finally, the Sebring pulled off the road in Story and we could get back to business.

I think that the best term for the local traffic in these small towns is "colorful". Examples are:

- The mid 70's Oldsmobile that came at us around a corner IN OUR LANE! I could tell by their hand signals that it was MY fault he was in our lane.
- The Ford F150 that actually kept up with us for several miles through the twisties. This driver was good! He hit every apex and never even crossed the center line. I can't imagine how fast he would have been with a proper sports car. When we finally went by him I noticed he had dirt-track racing stickers all over his truck, so I think he had some racing experience.
- Harley Riders Everywhere! The Hogs would do pretty well in the straight sections of road, but they're just not built for the corners. There was one Hog that kept up pretty well in the corners and stayed with us for several miles. We exchanged waves when he turned off of 135. See, even Harley guys like Miatas!

When we got to the Huber Winery we pulled into the special Miata Only parking area by the pond. It was quite a sight to see 25 Miatas lined up together. There were a lot of other Huber visitors that came through to look at our "Miata Car Show". After everyone arrived at the Winery we had a drawing for prizes. We gave away 5 bottles of wine, a Miata model, a map light and two Miata-trunk-size folding chairs. Congratulations to all the winners!

After the drawing some folks went to sample the goodies at the farmers market, while others lounged on blankets and sampled the locally made wine.

Overall I think everyone had a great time and got to enjoy the fall colors and twisty roads. I think we'll do the event again in 2002, but look for a few changes again – a slightly different route with more twisty and less traveled roads.

Thanks to all who came and we'll see you next time!



Upcoming Events

November 17

Shopping trip to Nashville
Led by Jim Barrick

December 2

Holiday Party in Fishers

January ????

Now is the time to start planning your rally or mingle for the 2002 season. We would love to have some new rally masters come up with new events for the club. We will have the 2002 calendar at the holiday party, so be ready to pick the date you want for your event.

Indy Miata events can't happen without YOU!

2002 calendar is open!!

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