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Four Wheel Drift... by Chuck Wills, President

As many of you read last month, the crew from AIM Tuning and the Indy Miata Club headed to Monterey, California to compete in the Pro Spec Miata race at Laguna Seca. With 74 cars entered, this was the largest field ever at Laguna Seca, and the largest Spec Miata race to date as well.

The trip out for the driving crew was largely uneventful. We found that the only difference between Iowa, Nebraska and Wyoming are different sets of lousy radio stations. We left on Sunday at 2:00 pm and drove all night plus all the next day with only a three hour "cat nap" break. This was hard core road-tripping, to say the least. By the time we got to western Wyoming, the scenery became more interesting with mountains, streams, and antelope - we counted over 200 antelope in all. There were so few vehicles on the road, we couldn't play any license plate games to pass the time, so we resorted to monitoring wildlife.

The part of the team that flew out, didn't have smooth sailing. Due to several weather related flight delays, they were stuck in the Atlanta airport overnight and arrived in Monterey a day late. (If you've got time to spare, go by air!)

Once we all were in California things became quite busy. On Friday and Saturday, there were practice sessions each morning at 8:00 and qualifications at 4:45 in the afternoon. Between those sessions we were busy tweaking the car to try and get the last ounce of speed out of it. You can't imagine what it's like to be in a paddock with 73 other Spec Miatas. Laguna Seca had set up three huge circus tents for us to park under during the weekend, each holding more than 25 cars. Most of the competitors were quite friendly and were always willing to lend a tool or give advice. It really felt like a regular Miata Club get-together, but about three times bigger. One other interesting point is that we were sharing the paddock area with three other racing series: CART, Formula Dodge and Formula Atlantic. All three are open-wheel cars similar looking to the cars that race in the Indy 500. It was very exciting to share the same pavement with folks like Walker Racing and Team Green. I even saw Mario Andretti!

Qualifications went as well as can be expected, considering there were 74 cars on the track. It was difficult to get any open track to wind the car out. Shane qualified 36th out of the 74 cars. Most of the other teams were from California and the bordering states. The only people that had come from further away than our team were from Georgia and Virginia.

On race day we tried to stay relaxed by walking around the vendor booths and looking at other cars. It was tough to control the excitement though. The race started at 4:30, so we had virtually all day to kill. We watched the other races and tried to study the lines taken by the open wheel cars.

Considering the size of the field and high adrenaline level of the drivers, most people expected a huge wreck going into the Andretti Hairpin (turn 2). Much to everyone's surprise, the first lap came off with few problems. There was quite a bit of contact between the cars throughout the race. You could hear them bumping all the way down the straight. Shane's car got a few battle scars, but nothing serious. There were a number of cars that had to be taken away on a wrecker. There was only one full-course yellow in the race, which took nearly 5 minutes to resolve.

Shane had a fierce battle with a few cars and made some brilliant passes to end up 29th overall. It was a proud moment for all of us when he rolled into the paddock after the race. We were so excited you would have thought that we had won.

Things spooled down from there, as everyone started to pack up and head for home. Rather than fight the chaos in the paddock, we went to visit our friends at Walker Racing and unwind with them as everyone else hurried around. After an hour or two things settled down and we loaded the car onto the trailer as the sun was setting on Laguna Seca. Time to head for home.

The trip back was uneventful, save for one moment in the mountains where the trailer brakes went out. That was exciting, but we were able to stop and cool the breaks at Donner Pass. The good news is that we didn't have to eat any of our crew.

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