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June 2002

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Four Wheel Drift... by Chuck Wills, President

As you read this, several of us are driving westward across this great land on our way to the Monterey Grand Prix in California. We're not just going as spectators, mind you, we are racing! The Grand Prix should be quite special for Mazda fans, as it takes place at the Mazda Laguna Seca Raceway, one of the most beautiful and challenging race courses in the west. There are several races featured at the event: The Toyota Atlantics Championship race, Barber Dodge Pro Series Race, the CART Shell 300 Championship Race, and our favorite, the Mazdaspeed Cup Spec Miata Race!

The Miatas will race right after the CART Shell 300 race. This should be a fantastic event to watch, as it will be the largest starting grid ever fielded at Laguna Seca. The original plan was to race 58 cars, but there were so many entrants they have decided to let everyone run. This means there will be at least 72 Spec Miata cars running when the green flag drops. It should truly be a sight to behold. Speed Channel is supposed to cover the race, so check your local listings and set the VCR.

As with most great events, it all started with a dream and some beer. A few months ago Shane Benson mentioned that he would love to drive in the Mazdaspeed Cup Race, if only there was a way to make it happen. Monterey California seemed a long way away.

Question: How do you get a race car and team all the way to the other side of the world anyway?

Answer: Get a few Miata Club members together with some other gear-heads at Union Jacks Pub and mix well with a few drinks.

It suddenly seemed like a good idea to borrow a truck and trailer and drive cross-country. Within about 10 minutes we had our "road crew" assembled. Mike Selvy, Chris Poglitch and myself would team drive to California and deliver the race car to the track. Then Chris came up with the brilliant idea of using his bountiful frequent flyer miles to fly the "talent" (our Driver/Team Owner Shane Benson) and a few other key personnel out to meet us for the race. With the help of our friends at Anheiser-Bush and Jack Daniels Distillery, a 5000 mile drive, tow vehicle, plane tickets and a race entry came together with amazing ease. It also made me wake up the next morning saying "What have we done? Am I really driving to Cali!?!?"

This has become a true team event. Between AIM Tuning and the Indy Miata Club we have everything we need. Our team includes the following personnel:

Shane Benson: Spec Miata Owner/Driver, Owner of AIM Tuning and Ring Leader. Shane is a very talented race driver, holding 2 class wins and a track record for Spec Miata. He is also known for beating cars in faster classes and has a driving style that's often compared to Juan Manuel Fangio, Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumaker. I can't think of anyone I'd rather have at the wheel of a race car (other than myself, he added modestly).

Mike Selvy: Cross-country driver and race crew in charge of RC cola, moon pies and the CB radio. Mike's background in pulling 28' double trailers (total length 65') for UPS will be invaluable on this trip. He's also the only one that knows how to work the CB. Mike's wicked sense of humor should come in handy as the driving hours get long and we hit the white-knuckle down-hill sections of highway in the Rocky Mountains.

Chris Poglitch: Cross-country driver and race crew in charge of No-Doze, beef jerky, and map reading. Chris used to pull a 36' trailer with his drum and bugle corps, so he knows a thing or two about cross-country trailer trips. He also laughs at my jokes, so he had to come along.

Chuck Wills: Cross-country driver and race crew in charge of track-side alignments, tire swapping and bad jokes. I'm the only one that knows how to run the computerized mapping program, so I insisted on coming along. If we get lost, I'll blame it all on Bill Gates and Windows 98 (watch for that article in July).