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Through The Esses - Terry Borcheller Looks To A New Path To The Podium

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Those who have followed the career of racing driver Terry Borcheller know that he is a man with a strong record of winning performances in professional sportscar racing. The man has won six series championships. They include:

1998 IMSA Speedvision Cup, Grand Sports class, BMW M3
1998 SCCA SPEED World Challenge, T-1 class, Saleen Mustang
2000 Grand American Rolex Sports Car Series GTO class, Saleen Mustang

2001 IMSA American Le Mans Series champion GTS class, Saleen S7R

2002 Grand Am SRP II class, Lola B2K-Nissan

2003 Grand Am Rolex Sports Car Series - in a Doran-Chevrolet Daytona Prototype.



Borcheller's many fans also know that this deeply devoted man has surely had his faith tested the last few seasons, as he has rarely visited the podium – a place he used to drop in on quite frequently in the past. The pace of competitive advancement within the Grand American Rolex Series Daytona Prototype class – essentially the ongoing development of the Riley and Crawford chassis – have found Borcheller, and car builder/team owner Kevin Doran struggling to keep up. They have worked as hard as or harder than anyone to get up to speed, but sometimes hard work and a strong faith just aren't enough.

Sometimes you just have to walk away and try taking a different path. And that is exactly what Doran and Borcheller have decided to do. After struggling to get the Feeds The Need / Doran Racing Daytona Prototype to a competitive level in the Grand American Rolex Sportscar Series this year, Borcheller and Doran decided it might be best to split up and give each other the freedom to go down different roads in search of the right 'path to the podium',

Borcheller shared his thoughts on the breakup with us, as well as some comments on his life and how his struggle to regain lost success has actually made him a stronger person with a more mature focus on what is most important in life.

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“The season was just not going in the direction either one of us anticipated it would be going. It wasn’t for me as a driver, or for Kevin as a team owner. With that frustration on both sides, we just agreed it would be best if we each went our own way.

“We had quite a bit of development that went into the Doran from the work Kevin did with Dallara. Most of the changes were on the car starting at Mid-Ohio. While it was an improvement, it was not all that we were hoping for. The only testing we did for the most part was during the race weekends because we were headlong into the season. It wasn’t like we could take a few weeks out and go and test what we had changed. In all fairness to Kevin, we really didn’t have the time we needed, or the budget, to perfect the changes that resulted from his collaboration with Dallara.

“Even with the updates, while the car did improve to the point where we would have been more competitive at Daytona at the beginning of the year, none of the front running cars and teams stayed where they were at Daytona. By Mid-Ohio they were all quite a bit faster. I would say that some of the teams improved because they had the time and money to test. But more than that I would say it was because most of the field ran a Riley and Crawford chassis.”

Being alone has sometimes been labeled the devil’s handiwork. In the Grand Am paddock, the Doran chassis was about as alone as alone can be.

“There was only one or two Doran cars running all season, and they ran different motors so you couldn’t really compare them to each other. You really had Kevin as the Lone Ranger out there running against teams with factory deals. He was up against people who not only had their own people who were developing their car but they had the multiplication factor of several other teams running the same chassis and motor combinations. The amount of development information available for those cars and teams was much greater.

“While our situation is not too dissimilar to that of the Brumos team and the Fabcar chassis, the difference, I think, is that despite the up front development work that went into that chassis, I don’t know that the car ever really had what it takes. I think the Doran chassis actually could be competitive in the end, given the right time, money and people.”

But Borcheller won’t be in that car if it ends up on a podium, or if it simply comes to an end. (We seriously doubt that Kevin Doran would let THAT happen!) He is looking to get back into a competitive car for 2007 and he took his first steps in that direction when he joined the Alex Job Racing team for the 2006 season finale at Miller Motorsports Park, in Utah.

“Driving with Alex Job in the Ruby Tuesday Crawford was a great opportunity for me. The timing was really good. There were no hard feelings when Kevin and I split. The whole thought process was to give me an opportunity to be available to other teams for the 2007 season. The 9 hour race at Miller was a great place for me to make a move. I ran several stints. I got in the car when we were in the lead and we were leading when I got out at the four and half hour mark. I was very happy with my performance in the car compared to Rockenfeller, especially given the fact that I had not driven a Crawford before nor did I get very many laps in before the race.”

But an unfortunate circumstance intervened, and the team that had been teased into thinking they could win it all found that even a competitive team can be made to suffer disappointment.

“We had an upper control arm fail close to the sixth hour and we went down three laps. They did an amazing job changing the parts in just eight minutes! It was unbelievable how fast they changed it. But it put us back three laps and that is how we finished, three laps off the race total.”

Borcheller would love to have a second chance to drive the AJR Crawford. Miller marked only the second time that Borcheller had raced for Alex Job.

“I would love to see Alex run a second car and I would love to drive with him again. The only other time I drove for him was in 1998 at the six hours at Watkins Glen. I was in another car with another team that had electrical problems and so I didn't get a chance to drive it. Alex came and found me in the paddock and basically said his car was leading the six hour and would I want to drive it. I said 'You are kidding, right?' and he said he was serious!

“Randy Pobst had driven the car the first three hours and I ended up driving the last three hours. Alex had run a two car team and Randy was supposed to be the rabbit hoping to drive hard and fast enough to wear out the BMW's. They didn't think the pace he was running would let the car last, but half way through the race the car was not only still running, it was winning. They didn't want to park the car so I got in and we wound up winning the race.

“When Alex and I got together to run the Crawford at Miller, he asked me if I had ever driven a Crawford before. I told him I hadn't but I was known to get in cars that I had never driven before and go on to win races! Of course we enjoyed a good laugh because of our history at Watkins Glen. It was pretty funny.”

What was not funny for Borcheller this year was the mechanical mayhem that plagued his ride in the Blackforest Mustang in the Grand Am Cup Series.

“The Grand Am Cup season was really frustrating. The Blackforest team is a great bunch of guys but we had a lot of issues primarily dealing with the motor. We had cooling issues, overheating issues and finally Brian (T. Nott, team owner) took the bull by the horns and got us pointed in the right direction. It was frustrating to have so many DNFs. But I did have a couple of opportunities to run with Darren Law, which was something I have always wanted to do. Also Forest Barber and I had a great run at Laguna Seca with a podium finish. We had a car that could win for most of the year but it just seemed like there was one problem after another.

“I am talking with Blackforest again, and I would love to run in the Cup series again, but it really depends on what happens in the Rolex Series. I don't want to tie myself down with a cup ride and miss an opportunity for a competitive ride in the Rolex Series. I would not want to miss the chance for a Rolex ride with a competitive team and chassis.”

We asked why you would have to choose one over the other, when the races are separate and usually run at the same tracks on the same weekend.

“During a race weekend you have a lot of time where you are gone because of the practice sessions. This means you miss some of the debriefing sessions from one car or the other. With the level the Rolex Series is at right now it is becoming more difficult to commit to both. I don't have a problem with running both. I actually think it is better because you get a really good read on the track. Often in the Rolex Series you don't have a lot of green time running, especially since are sharing the car with another driver. Running in the Cup series also gets you that extra track time.

"I am not saying I won't do both series, I'm saying that I don't want that to be a factor. If the Rolex team feels it will interfere with their program then I won't run both. The quality Rolex ride takes precedence. But it would completely depend on the car and the team. I really like the competition in Grand Am and enjoy the cars. I would love to get into an open cockpit prototype in the ALMS as well, because they bring me back to my first love, which was open wheel racing."

Borcheller is a fan of the Grand Am approach to sportscar racing. He supported the idea from the beginning because he knew the stability promised for entrants in the series, and the pledge to keep the racing close, would bring in new teams and new sponsors.

"I think the Grand Am series Daytona Prototypes are great. I had a conversation with Jim France the year before the new class was announced. He was very transparent about what his vision was and what they planned to do. He said they were going to do what they said they would do and it is evident that is what has happened.

"I think that once you have equalization the key is to maintain it. I think we have seen, with the competition in this series the way that it is, that you have different winners almost every weekend. This series has created a lot more 'could-be' winners. Some teams could have finished well if things had only gone differently for them in some of the races. I see it as a series that gives everybody a chance to win and that is a great thing to see."

Early in the year it was announced that Lexus would enter the American Le Mans Series with a pair of new race cars. Borcheller was signed to be one of the lead drivers. But signing a contract and driving a car have only one thing in common; they both require the use of your hands. In this case, all Borcheller could do was sit on those hands and wait. And he is still waiting.

"I was signed as one of the Lexus drivers for the new program that was to roll out this year. That is the only reason I didn't pursue another ALMS ride as I was waiting for the Lexus program to get off the ground. I did run Sebring with Franz Konrad in the Saleen S7R, and after that, Le Mans, also in the Saleen S7R. I've been waiting every race weekend for the cars to make it to the track but it kept getting pushed back and pushed back. Early in the summer I started to wonder if the whole program was going to ever happen. I kept hearing that it would but I was starting to have my doubts. Then I found out that it was not going to happen at all. That was really disappointing because I enjoy the ALMS and I was looking forward to being a part of the series and driving with a major manufacturer like Lexus."

With the vanishing of yet another opportunity to be competitive, many men would think it was simply not in the cards for them to succeed. Borcheller is not one of those men.

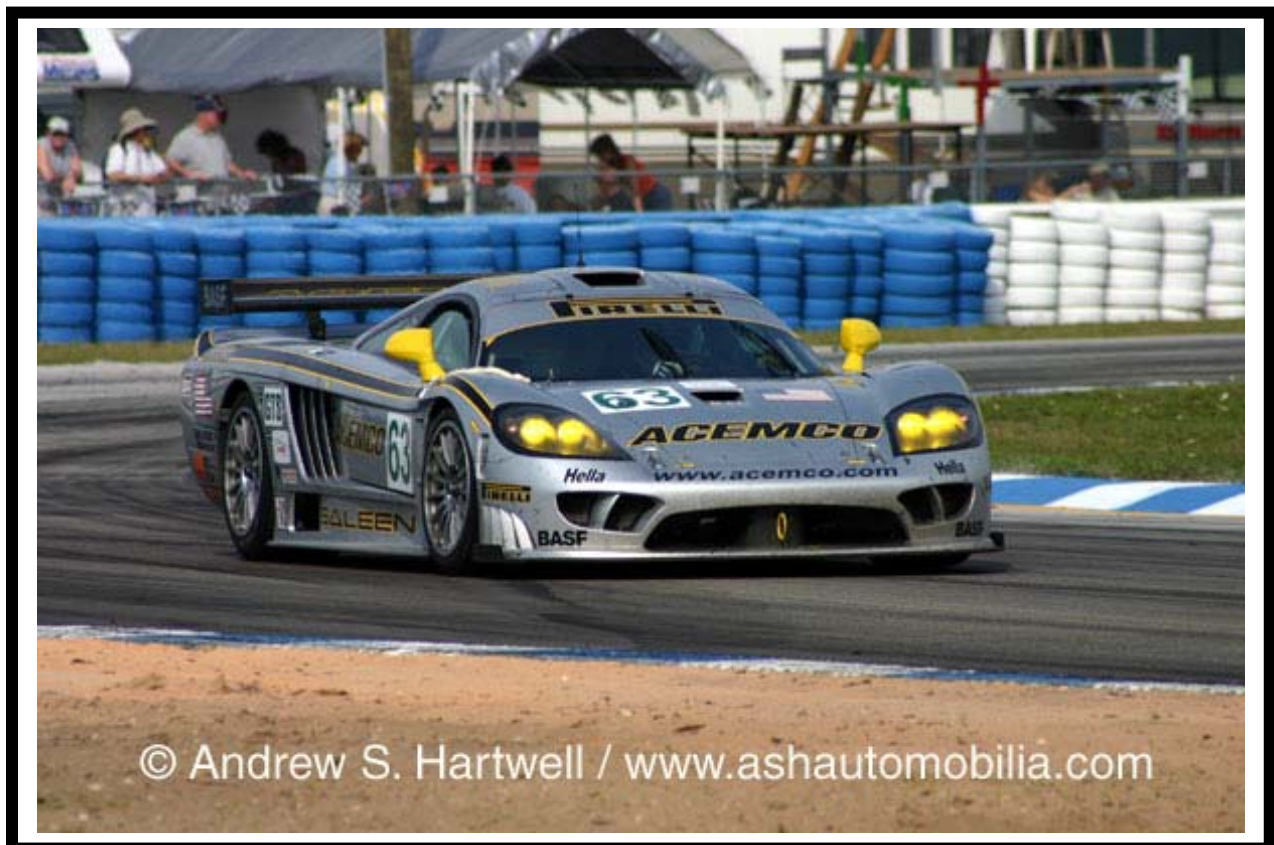
"The thing that has been very cool for me is that win at the 2004 Rolex 24 hours. It was a miraculous ending. (The Howard-Boss Crawford suffered a suspension failure minutes from the end of the race, with driver Tony Stewart spinning out and having the rear end of the suspension break off just laps away from an overall win.) That absolutely had a divine intervention tied to it, for whatever reason. I wanted to win that race ever since I got into sportscars.

"Ever since that race, except for maybe a cup race or two, I don't think I've won a single race or even been on the podium very often. Professionally, since that win, it has pretty much been a nightmare. The cars just haven't been competitive. I feel I have driven well, making only my share of mistakes, as any driver would. But I feel I have grown quite a lot since that win at

Daytona. My stand in regards to my faith and my walk with GOD has not been phased a bit. As a matter of fact it has been strengthened. It has been a good time for me to grow and mature.

“You know, it is very easy to raise your hands and say praise the Lord when things are going good or going your way. But it is another story to be able to look back over the way the last few years have been and say praise him and thank him for a good day, when the racing’s been bad. It has caused me to focus in on what is important. My walk with Christ, my health, the health of my family, and having a good marriage are some of the things I am most thankful for.”

Having followed Borcheller’s career for some time now, we are confident his talent will not go unrewarded. He has demonstrated that talent time and again, squeezing as much speed out of a car as there is in the car to give. Despite his recent battles against the evil that is disappointment, we believe his career in racing is on the cusp of resurrection. Terry Borcheller believes it too.



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