



Friday Morning Paddock Patter At Lime Rock Park (Part of our race weekend coverage on TheRaceSite.com)

05/25/07 - © Andrew S. Hartwell

We walked the paddock this morning and talked with some of the racers and support people here at Lime Rock Park this weekend. We learned a bit about tires, about the differences in setting up a prototype and a GT car for this track, and we got a feel for how one team is approaching this race.

First up we talked with Bill Smith, a crewman on the Blackforest Motorsports team. He was sorting out tires when we caught up to him to ask what task he was addressing.

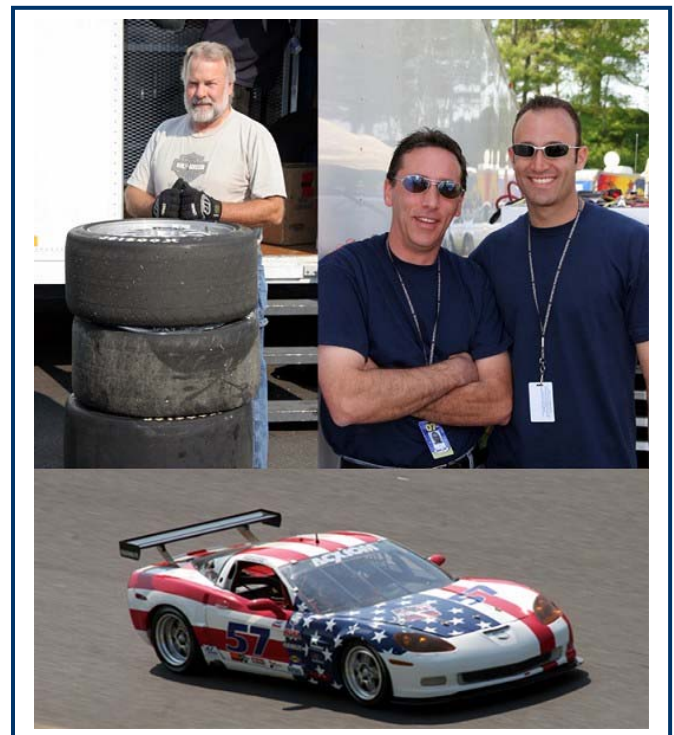
"What I do is check the tires for wear and then deflate the ones that can't be used again. I also remove the weights off the back of the wheels and any hard rubber that might be caught in there. Then I take them over to the Hoosier tire guys and they pull the old rubber off and mount new tires. Then I bring them back here and put aluminum tape on the weights to keep them from falling off. Next I let all the air out of the tires and then I purge it with nitrogen and refill them with nitrogen.

"As the tires build heat on the race track they expand and contract differently with air in them then they do with the nitrogen. The nitrogen holds a more consistent pressure."

Tires are an expense every team can't avoid. We wondered how many tires Blackforest would need for the four cars they are running this weekend.

"We figure we are going to need - for practice, qualifying and the race, plus a couple extra sets in case we have a puncture - about 32 tires, or 8 sets per car."

In the DP class there are limits on the number of tires a team can have access to. Blackforest Motorsports owner Tom Nastasi told us that there is no limit for the GT cars. *"Grand Am says that if you want to spend all your money on tires go ahead and do it!"*



ash "Through The Esses" - Copyright Andrew S. Hartwell

Talking With Mike Johnson

Mike Johnson is here shepherding the Stevenson Motorsports crew with preparations for the #57 Chevrolet Corvette running in the Rolex GT race. We asked him to tell us what sort of preparations were necessary for running a big Corvette on such a small track.

"The track is so bumpy what we are trying to do is soften the car up a bit and make it more compliant with the bumps. The bumps really upset the balance of the Brakes and we can't stop the car as well, so we are working on the brakes and making sure the car is stable as it turns into the corners. We also need to make sure the back end is stable so they can apply the power and come off the corner quickly.

"Also the local guys have a real advantage. The guys that have been driving here a long time are usually fast and Marc Bunting is great at driving here. I think we are going to do real well."

Johnson has done real well here at Lime Rock before. As the head of the Archangel Motorsports team campaigning a Lola open-top prototype in the pre-Daytona Prototype days of Grand Am, his team went on to win a season championship in their class.

"I was here with my Archangel Lola team and we won in the prototype. I think it was 2001. But the set up for the prototype and the GT cars are complete opposites. The prototype is so based on downforce. If you run the car too soft it runs itself into the ground. You can run it soft but you have to put a lot of packer on it or stiffen it up to run it low to the ground so you can get downforce. A packer is something you stick in the shock so it can only come down so far. In the GT series the rules call for a minimum ride height of 3.5 inches. With that you can actually run the car as soft as possible and then let the thing take down to the ground a little bit. Since the prototypes back then didn't have a minimum ride height you would be scraping the ground anyway.

"Of course, the conditions here are the same for everybody so you just try to make the car go as fast as you can!"

The #57 car debuted at the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona in January. The Crawford built chassis is still a work in process, in terms of nailing the set up, and Johnson would like to learn more, sooner, about the car and what it will take to 'make it go as fast as it can'.

"We have done some testing since Daytona and have been working with Crawford (Race Cars, the builder of the #57 chassis) to learn what this car needs but our problem is we just haven't yet done enough testing or racing to really be strong. It will take us a little longer to get to where we want to be."

Mike Fonte On Prepping For The Weekend

Mike Fonte heads up Fountain Motorsports, a team that is running a pair of BMW330Is in the KONI Challenge ST Class this weekend. Car # 126 is being driven by Seth Thomas and Sam Schultz while car #127 will pair Guy Cosmo and David Tuaty. We caught Mike just as he was pulling into the paddock where his crew was already hard at work prepping the twin Bimmers for the first practice session.

"We feel we came into this weekend pretty well prepared. We are going through the cars one more time and checking the suspension setup. This is our second time here and Guy (Cosmo) has been a big help as he has so much track time here. We think the cars are dialed in pretty good.

"We have two awesome talents in Guy and Seth. I can't say enough about the two of them."

Cosmo returned the compliment when he told us, *"The team is growing and getting better in every aspect. The efficiency and the teamwork are there but we always have time for laughs and this is a great family of people to work with. When we can get out on track, be competitive and win races, for me as a driver you couldn't ask for a better scenario to be in. You always want to be with a competitive program but you never get to have this much fun when you are racing!"*

"I think we are probably going to keep this going for a long, long time."

Fonte: *"We are still a new team and we have had a good first season so far (A second place finish at Laguna Seca and a win at Iowa). To come out on top was tremendous. It normally takes a lot of teams much longer to get there so we hope it wasn't a fluke. We would love to get back on the podium again and again but every week and every race is a new one so we take it as is."*

Members Of The Military Offered Free Admission This Weekend

LRP has opened the doors to all active military personnel to *"come and enjoy the excitement of automotive racing at no charge. If you are military personnel, show a valid Military I.D. at the gate on any of the four days during the event and receive free admission into the track for you and your immediate family."*

A fitting gesture for a Memorial Day weekend, and what better place to relax away from military life than to be amongst a sea of race fans sitting on the sloping, grass covered hill overlooking Big Bend (turn one) and the Esses? Everyone planning to come out to LRP this weekend is reminded that *"Lime Rock Park is unlike any other race track in that we don't have grandstands. So make sure to bring your lawn chairs, coolers, picnic blankets and sunblock."*

And an umbrella?

An Eye On The Weather

The weather for Saturday calls for more sunshine but temperatures should be about 10 degrees below the 90+ degree heat we experienced here today. Sunday is an off day for on-track activities- no engines are allowed to be started. There is a Hemmings Sports and Exotic Car Show planned (details can be found here: <http://www.hemmings.com/events/limerock.html>) Unfortunately the forecast for late Sunday and all day Monday is scattered thunderstorms. Our hot, sweaty fingers are crossed in the hope that this time the weatherman's got it wrong.

