

The Independent-Racket

The Combined Newsletter of the Twickenham Auto Club and the Tennessee Valley Region SCCA

June 2005

From the Editor:

"Help Wanted"

My work is going to keep me busy for the next few months. I will be out on travel, or just plain busy, for the next few months. To continue to publish newsletters, an interim editor must step-in to help, until I return in October.

-Aaron M.

Inside This Issue...

Events/Announcements.....	2
Skelly Revisited by Jim Burruss.....	3
A Tale of Two Tours by Charles Wright....	4
Skelly Rides Again.....	5



Huntsville was well represented by our gang at the Skelly Time-Trials. See Jim's article on page #

Special thanks to Samir, who takes great photographs of our events, as well as other car-related events around Huntsville. His website can be found at www.huntsvillecarscene.com, and contains a well-filled calendar of events for the Huntsville area.

For the most part, newsletters will now be sent out via e-mail or available for download from the TAC website (www.TeamTAC.org).

Hard copies will only be sent to those who specifically request newsletters to be mailed to them, in addition to those on special distribution lists.

Upcoming Events:

July 7	TAC Meeting
July 14	TVR-SCCA Meeting
July 21	TAC Meeting
July 23-24	TAC Slalom
Aug 7	TAC Slalom
Sept 17-18	TVR Solo

TVR-SCCA holds meetings every 2nd Thursday at 7pm at Ci-Ci's pizza on South Parkway.

TAC holds meetings every 1st and 3rd Thursday at the China Buffet on Madison Blvd, west of Wall-Triana. Meeting starts at 7 pm.

All Solo's and Slaloms are held at **John Hunt Park** ("Old Airport") unless otherwise stated.

"**TAC Slalom**" and "**TVR Solo**" events are driver-training events. Beginners are invited to participate; all you need is a car and a driver's license. For more information, visit www.TeamTAC.org or www.tvrscca.org.

FORUMS

www.TeamTAC.org

Thanks to the efforts of the current TAC Webmaster, Brad Clarke, the discussion forums on teamtac.org are a great way to keep in touch with current happenings, latest changes, and discuss a wide range of issues. The forums are broken down by category and allow the user to email directly from a post to the person that posted a comment.

Tennessee Valley Region, SCCA www.tvrscca.com

TVR meets the 2nd Thursday each month at 7:00 PM at Ci Ci's Pizza 10004 Memorial Parkway SW, Huntsville, AL. Visitors are always welcome!

Regional Executive

Mark Rothermel mrothermel@mindspring.com

Assistant Regional Executive

Tom Turner H:(256) 880-2796
tom.turner@redstone.army.mil

Secretary/Treasurer

Richard Crowell richard.e.crowell@lmco.com

Newsletter Correspondent

Richard Crowell (256) 837-8023
richard.e.crowell@lmco.com

Solo Chairman/Webmaster

John Clarke (256) 859-5070
john@tvrscca.org

Board of Directors

Jim Burruss	(256) 837-2007
John Clarke	(256) 859-5070
Craig Farr	(256) 426-0672
Eddie Jory	(256) 882-1516

Independent-Racket

The *Independent-Racket* is published monthly by the Tennessee Valley Region, SCCA (TVR) and the Twickenham Auto Club (TAC). The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and do not constitute official positions of TVR, TAC, or SCCA.

Address all correspondence, address corrections, ads, or article submissions to Aaron Mosher, editor:

E-mail: Newsletter@TeamTAC.org

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Advertising in the classified ads section of the *Independent-Racket* is free for members of TVR and/or TAC. The rates for other advertisers are posted in the classified ads section of the newsletter.

Twickenham Auto Club www.teamtac.org

TAC meets the 1st and 3rd Thursday each month at 7:00 PM at the China Buffet on Madison Boulevard (old Hwy 20, west of Wall-Triana)

President

Mark York
markyork@hotmail.com

Vice President

Rick Hamby
richamby@hotmail.com

Secretary

Brad Clarke
brad@bradclarke.com

Treasurer

Craig Farr
farrout@knology.net

Slalom Committee Chairman

Charles Wright H:(256) 353-1376
Slowautoxer@aol.com

Rally Committee Chairman

None presently.

SKELLY REVISITED

By Jim Burruss

It had been several years since I had been to Skelly Stage Field, that isolated airfield designed for fixed-wing aircraft and a non-contiguous part of Fort Rucker, the Army's helicopter training base. Located just a few miles east of rattlesnake-country Opp, Alabama, it is still perfectly maintained and completely devoid of aircraft. Said to be used for helicopter power-off autorotation training exercises, the runways were always rich with talcum powder-like aluminum oxide dust that resulted from the fine aluminum particles scraped off the helicopter skids during those exercises. The powder added a further challenge to the already challenging Solo I (now Time Trials) course that the Wiregrass Region folks always set up. The stuff seemed to be as slick as talcum powder, and it clung to competitors' cars like a gray haze.

I rode with Mark Rothermel in the lead car of a short caravan that also included Craig Farr, George Bugg and Ron Wicks. We had met at the Cracker Barrel restaurant in Cullman for a late breakfast and then proceeded leisurely to Lower Alabama. More Huntsville-area drivers would be along later in the day. It had been decided by our small group to go first to Skelly in hopes that the field would be open to the event participants for paddock set-up.

There was no sign of preparation for the event as we approached, but we found the gate standing wide open. Leary of entering this federal facility without permission, especially in these security-conscious times, our small caravan paused on the entrance road at the warning signs and pondered what to do. Two civilian vehicles could be seen at the building on the opposite side of the field, so three of us bravely (or foolishly) decided to walk across and see if anyone there could tell us if the field was now accessible to us. There was no sign of life at the building, but the chartreuse-colored fire truck coming down the county access road told us that we probably shouldn't have blocked the field's entrance with our vehicles. Fortunately, these civilian Army employees were friendly and told us that we could proceed onto the field.

With amazing efficiency borne of teamwork, the first three units of the modular "Huntsville Towers" – our tongue-in-cheek term for the multiple canopies used to provide life-sustaining shade on the treeless expanse of airfield – were erected. The arrival of Mike Chandler added another canopy to the row, and all were lashed together so that none would blow away – or so that all would blow away together, take your pick. Soon the cluster of canopies was providing shelter for Mark's and

Mike's Formula Vees, George's Formula Continental, and Craig's CSP Miata, plus the variety of equipment that accompanies our sport. The arrival of Walt and Ann Wurzbach, who would remain at the site in their motorhome, provided the area security that would permit the rest of us to go on to Enterprise, Alabama, to the event headquarters motel.

As Mark Rothermel checked in at the front desk, we were greeted by Ron Gillman, a long-time member of the Wiregrass Region and the fellow who bought my original *Rotus*, my first rotary-powered formula car, longer ago than either of us care to admit. A moment later, Kristian Tinkler, Maurice Tinkler's young son, ambled into the lobby to say hello. In the small conference room where the event registration was being conducted, Maurice said they had been there most of the day helping to get the event site ready. The Tinklers now live in Bonifay, Florida, only about a half-hour drive from Enterprise.

The rest of the evening saw Mark Rothermel and Ron Gillman performing tech inspections in the motel parking lot, along with many casual conversations among participants. Our evening was capped with a very enjoyable dinner where we were joined by Alabama Region's Mike Wenning and Alan Branch. It was a pleasant start to a full weekend.

Saturday morning dawned cool and humid. The coolness wouldn't last, but the humidity would. Four more Huntsville-area drivers – Mark York with his CSP Miata, Tim Boyett with his SM Civic, John Barnett with his rally Scirocco (declared in Specials class), and Eddie Jory with his ITB GTI – filled out the "Towers" and brought our total to nine drivers. After many years of being represented at Solo I events by only one or two drivers, this enthusiastic group surpassed the seven drivers that represented us at the Atlanta Region Solo I at Road Atlanta more than twenty years ago. This year, the Tennessee Valley Region provided more than one-fourth of the Skelly Time Trials field. Our tight-knit compound was identified with two Twickenham Auto Club/Huntsville, Alabama, banners and a certain pirate flag. It was a great showing!

After course familiarization tours, the timed runs began. Every competition driver suffers various frustrations from equipment or personal performance – frequently both – with event administration difficulties sometimes contributing. It is all to be expected, becoming a part of the drama of the weekend. Mark Rothermel, George Bugg and Eddie Jory suffered some car problems, but they weren't showstoppers. Tires worn down to the cord plagued some, but the traction-robbing dust was a much smaller problem than in years past. There were some frustrations with the order in which competitors were released onto the course from the hot,

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

multilane grid; and more order could be imposed on that system, but only with additional workers. In the final analysis, it was really all about the adrenalin-filled driving, always trying to go a little faster, always trying for that elusive one run in which every part of the course was driven exactly right.

By late afternoon on Saturday, the predicted thunderstorms had failed to arrive and the heat reigned supreme, particularly on the pavement. Drivers' run times tended to suffer as the runways grew hotter. Virtually every driver admitted to being tired, and the motel pool and cool showers began to seem more attractive than another hot lap on the track. Some additional tie-downs were added to the "Towers" in case a thunderstorm passed through overnight. Sunday would be another day.

Sunday morning presented haze and high clouds, but the only weather threat that arose was heat – again. After the drivers meeting, our local contingent of nine drivers was quickly assembled for a group photo. Then it was every driver for himself as each made his way to the staging lanes for a hot, shadeless wait to run. Generally, the morning's first runs do not match the previous day's best, but there were some surprisingly good laps turned by some, usually on the second of the three laps granted per run, after the tires warmed up. Then, as the heat increased, it seemed progressively more difficult to improve run times. Some of us began to realize that we had not fully recovered from our previous day's fatigue, and more and more entrants began to pack it in and head for home.

Every one of our group will tell you they had a great time running the Skelly Time Trials, despite mechanical problems, personal frustrations and the heat. The event results have been discussed elsewhere; suffice it to say that our group claimed no track records (despite getting close) and, more importantly, no disastrous equipment failures or accidents. The thrill of fast driving coupled with the quest for perfection made the weekend worthwhile.

Tiny Wiregrass Region did their always-impressive job of conducting their event with a mere handful of workers. There was outside help from the Wurzbachs and the Tinklers, and a few others as well. Everyone staffed their posts for two hot and humid days, and no calls went out for additional volunteers. They've done it for years, and they still do it well.

(Editor's Note: See Jim's accompanying photo on the front page)

(Editor's Note: due to an oversight in last month's newsletter, this article from Charles Wright was omitted. Thanks, Charles, for writing this article; sorry I let it get stale)

A Tale of Two Tours by Charles Wright

The autocross season opened with a bang for 2005. Right off the bat 2 big events were scheduled: a Tour in Walnut Ridge on 3/19-20 and a Tour in Atlanta on 4/9-10. Clay and I and our sons planned to take both of them in. The car of choice was Clay's '99 Miata. Clay had revised the car a bit to make it faster and we were on fresh Kumho V710's. Shelton's kart was revised over the winter as well. He received a motor refresh and some harder spec type tires.

Walnut Ridge is in Arkansas just north of Jonesboro. The tow out there and back was absolutely great. Flat land, 4 lanes, no traffic. The town folks of Walnut Ridge were great as well. It's kind of refreshing to go to a venue where we were wanted and the town folks were interested in what we were doing. The event was well publicized with 600 posters posted locally. The event site is large. It's also concrete but the concrete was made with river gravel. The course itself was a bit abrasive and not as grippy as I you would think.

The course basically consisted of some transitional stuff with a big sweeping 180 at the far end followed by more transitional stuff. I coned my 1st run and the time was actually fairly quick. I had brain fade on the 2nd run - I coned again. The time was still good though in relationship to the rest of the field. The pressure was on for my 3rd run to get clean. I got my clean run and it also happened to be my fastest run. In raw time it was marginally quicker than my 1st run. I was very surprised to be in 3rd place and not that far behind the leader.

The 2nd day the course was the same except that the course was run backwards with slight modifications at the start and finish. I had a decent enough time on the 1st run but apparently hit 2 cones. I made a concerted effort to make a good clean 2nd run. The run was clean and the time was good enough. I went brain dead on my 3rd run and as a result I went slower. I was 3rd for the day again.

These two day events are cool though. You add your best time for each day to get your overall time. This time 2 3rd's worked out to a 1st for me :-)

Clay made a tactical error on Saturday that put him back in the results. He ran fast on Sunday but couldn't run clean and fast. Shelton and James were the only ones entered in FJ4. Both of them duked it out and posted times that were very quick overall. Shelton

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

wound up with the win. Debby Eley drove the car in CSL and after a slow start, picked up the pace and won her class as well. Mike Cavanaugh entered his 350Z in BS. He had made some changes to his already fast car over the winter. He achieved his goal for this event and I'm sure he walked away with some experience on what it takes to run fast at a big event.

I relearned something this past weekend. When I was walking the course there were some areas that you absolutely had to get right and the best way to accomplish that is by looking ahead. Way ahead. In no way did I have any flawless runs. But on my fast runs - the ones in which I was actually thinking - I hit my key points right. I know I'm not that fast of a driver. I'm probably B-class at best. This whole weekend I kept expecting the fast guys to step up and put me where I belong. I don't know what happened. But I hope it happens more often. The RTP/PAX results were posted couple of days later and both Shelton and I scored in the top 10.

The venue in Atlanta is nice as well with the exception of the bumps in the asphalt. The surface is asphalt and is very easy on tires. There is elevation change as well which can always be a challenge. The course was layed out with basically 90 degree turns and sweeping 180 degree turns with very minimal transitional type features. Other than a couple of the extremely tight turns, it reminded me of a Nationals South course.

My 1st run was decent enough except I ran over a cone. The course was proving a little slow as well. One particular turn required a shift back to 1st gear. My subsequent runs were clean but I was never able to match the time of my 1st run. At the end of the day I was in 8th spot and not that close to the lead group. Clay ran good all day and was in 3rd right on the leaders. Shelton had about a 1/2 second lead in his class of 4. James spun the kart on every one of his runs.

Sunday was particularly frustrating for me as I got slower with each run resulting in a 10th place finish overall. Clay was fast enough but slipped to 5th to collect the final trophy spot. In FJ4 Shelton had the class win after 2 runs and then really stretched it out on his 3rd run improving his time by over a second. James kept the kart straight and moved up to 3rd. Debby drove the car again in CSL and was plenty fast to win the class. The RTP/PAX results were posted a couple of days later and Shelton scored in the top 10 again.

So all is back to normal. The spot that I should have been in Walnut Ridge I found in Atlanta. Walnut Ridge was fun. Atlanta was fun. Obviously I need more practice. When's the next event?

Skelly Rides Again

By Craig Farr

For the 25th year or something equally memorable, Wiregrass Region put on the Skelly Time Trials event again on May 28-29. The event is held at Skelly Airfield at Ft. Rucker Alabama. This is a helicopter landing facility so there is a lot of aluminum dust from the landing skids and the painted runway markings are slick. Wiregrass is a small region so other regions were there to help out.

Selly is a HOT, HOT, HOT, HOT event. The sun is fierce, the temperatures are in the high 80's, and the glare off the concrete is awesome. There is no shade, no water, and the portapotties are the only thing to use for the necessary activities. Huntsville Towers was in full swing with 3 10x20 canopies and some 10x10 tents. The newly acquired TAC/TVR Honda generator provided power for the air compressor, battery chargers, and the large shop fan brought by Tim Boyett. John Barnett was supposed to bring the refrigerator but ran out of room.

Walt Wurzbach handled the timing and Ann Wurzbach was the Safety Steward. "Crotchcheck Annie" was in full swing, making sure we were all safely snug in our seats. No PA was required with Annie belting out the calls to meetings. Mark Rothermel was the Tech assistant and gave out a few Time Trial Logbooks. Craig Farr was the Assistant Safety Steward. Jim Burruss came down to pit crew for us all. An extra special THANX to the workers because without this type of dedication, we the drivers would not have these events.

This TT saw the first ever running of the newly acquired ITB GTI by Eddie Jory. In the pits, Eddie was boasting that he would beat the Miatas but he was more hot air than hot speed. Cutting Eddie some slack (but not too much), he was running on old tyres that came with the car and without brakes most of the time. Mark York actually made the event and proved that Azenis are just not competitive in TT. One could always tell where Mark was on course by the tyre squeal. Nonetheless, Mark had fun at his first TT event and continually improved his times over the weekend. With some real tyres, I figure he would have moved up to 3rd in class. Craig Farr continued his march thru the CSP class this year, gathering another win. 30 runs were sufficient this year for him. Tim Boyett put his horsepower to good use on the 4 straights and finally got ahead of the Miatas. John Barnett ran his Scirocco Rallycrosser instead of the Van Cleef Celica. Mark Rothermel avenged his whipping at TGPR by besting Mike Chandler in the local battle of the FV class. Mark

Continued on Page 6

"Skelly Rides Again" continued from page 5

also got squeaky close to the track FV record. George Bugg got edged out for FTD by a DSR but continued his domination of Topper Jones' Swift. Ron Wicks improved his times all weekend but fell to Marianne Jones in the Swift. Alas, Ron suffered a broken leg when he got home Sunday evening and is out for the rest of the year. GET BETTER FAST RON.

Name	Class	Car	Place	Time	Remarks
Ron Wicks	CFC	Van Diemen	2 nd	92.684	
Craig Farr	CSP	Miata	1 st	96.508	
Mark York	CSP	Miata	6 th	104.030	
Eddie Jory	ITB	Rabbit GTI	1 st	97.702	
George Bugg	FC	Van Diemen	1 st	83.866	
Mike Chandler	FV	Predator	2 nd	94.104	
Mark Rothermel	FV	Caldwell	1 st	93.923	
Tim Boyett	SM	Civic	4 th	95.843	
John Barnett	Spec	Scirocco	2 nd	102.834	

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Aaron Mosher
TAC/TVR Newsletter Editor
222 Nancy Rd
Madison, AL 35758