

Dave Patten and Drew Young at the SCCA Oak Tree Double National at VIR , Alton, VA on 4/17-19/09

Travel from NH went without a hitch. We arrived at VIR around 5:00PM on Thursday (4/16/09). Todd Walrich had saved us a paddock spot right next to the main straight, just to the turn one side of the garages.

We were race group 6 of 7 for the weekend (actually 7 was the "TransAm" group and they were shuffled in and out of the schedule, making GTL last on Saturday). Friday schedule was a 30 minute practice in the late AM with a 25 minute qualifier for Saturday's race in late PM.

Drew had issues with the 510 before he even got it out of the trailer. The starter wouldn't crank the car and he needed a pull start to get the car running. He'd replaced the 510's starter at home with a Bocshe rebuild. It was cranking the car fine before leaving but once at VIR it started acting just like the one he pulled out. During his Friday AM practice session the 510 spit off the fan belt and the water temp shot up, so he pulled off and was flat towed in at the end of the session. The alternator wasn't charging, the adjustment was fully extended and the belt would slip on start-up, squealing like hell. With the alternator not charging we looked at battery charge being the starting issue, so we used a fresh battery, but nothing helped it crank fast enough to fire the car. Drew chased out all the grounds and after hooking the new battery directly to the starter it made no difference. Drew after getting another pull start ran well in the Friday PM qualifying session after being pull started to grid. His 120# personal weight loss was showing its effect on lap time. He was way faster than I could muster.

So after Todd Walrich on his Monster Golf Cart had dragged the 510 around the paddock all day Friday to start it, a new gear reduction starter was installed Friday evening and all the 510's starting problems were corrected.

My Friday was even more eventful. The MSD box on the crank fire ignition in the 1200 crapped out in the Friday AM practice session. I barely made it back into the paddock on my second lap of the session. I pulled out MSD box, pulled the distributor and swapped it with a spare single point distributor and still couldn't get the car to fire. We suspected the coil was bad as we had no spark and the ballast resistor had cooked itself while cranking the car. So I swapped in an old Mallory coil that came with the car using direct 12V to the points. This coil was bad and leaked its oil all over the car. By this time I had run out of spare parts and needed another coil from the parts store.

My niece Rosemary was in Lynchburg, VA picking up her boy friend. She was already scheduled to pick-up a Nissan gear reduction starter for Drew from Riley Curtis at Lynchburg Nissan (This guy is awesome, he gave me his personal cell number and said call anytime over the weekend if anyone at the track needs Nissan parts. He is a really top notch guy.) I missed Rosemary at the Nissan garage, but she was able to get me a coil at the local parts store in Danville, VA. She picked up one of those chrome Accell units. I got the car running with the new coil, but not in time to make the qualifying session Friday PM.

Saturday's schedule was a 15 minute hardship practice, 2 groups, open wheel and closed wheel. Then the 14 lap races Groups 1-7, followed by a 25 minute qualifying session for Sunday's race, again by race groups 1-6 (Group 7/TransAm was moved up to after Lunch). Hardship Practice is open to everyone, but it requires that you see the Chief Steward to sign-up. Being that I needed to see the Chief Steward to ask for a waiver to start at the back of the grid on Saturday's race because I had no qualifying time the trip killed 2 birds with one stone. Drew had the 510 starting fine. He had a shorter fan belt installed that actually was tight so the alternator would spin and decided to sit out the Saturday AM session.

I took the 1200 out in the hardship practice session and the ignition worked fine. We were ready for the race.

The Saturday GTL race grid was:

- 1) Chad Bacon – Toyota Tercel
- 2) Bobby Lentz Jr – Nissan Sentra
- 3) Brian Downey – Nissan 200SX
- 4) Drew Young – Datsun 510
- 5) Dave Patten – Datsun 1200 (no time)
- 6) Ken Blackburn, Honda Civic SI (no time)

Saturday's race got started mid afternoon with what seemed like a schedule having way too much down time. There were 6 GTL cars in the race. I was first of the "no time starters" at the back of the grid. I got a good start, picking up positions and had bettered my overall race position by 3-4 cars at mid race. I was trying to gain on Drew in the 510, but he was running very well and closely battling with Ken Blackburn in a Honda Civic for position. As the race got past midway the 1200 started skipping, by lap 11 or so the car wouldn't pull past 6500 rpm because it was miss-firing so badly. Drew finished the race in 3rd place with the 510 running well, but still not charging. I took the checkered flag 4 of 6 in GTL after two of the front runners dropped out, Lentz with a broken transmission, the Downey with clutch problems. On the cool down lap the 1200's ignition finally quit on the back straight. I was able to coast the car a good ¾ of a mile back around the track, down pit lane and into the paddock before it stopped. I tried re-starting it but the battery was too low to crank it. All the cranking trying to get the car started yesterday had drained the battery lower than I had anticipated and without any charging system in the 1200 (or me being smart enough to hook up a charger while we had it in the paddock) it didn't have enough charge left to finish the race under fire.

Saturday's GTL Race Results (Finishing Gap):

- 1 – Chad Bacon, Toyota Tercel
- 2 – Ken Blackburn, Honda Civic SI (1 lap)
- 3 – Drew Young, Datsun 510 (1.307 sec)
- 4 – Dave Patten, Datsun 1200 (56.334)
- DNF – Brian Downey, Nissan 200SX (9 laps)
- DNF – Bobby Lentz Jr, Nissan Sentra (13 laps)

Well, Saturday still had a qualifying session left for Sunday's race. Both Drew and I started charging our batteries to prepare to go out (finally some smarts were being applied). The schedule was running way behind at this point. The qualifying sessions were being shortened with some unique rules interpretations as to when the green flag actually started the session. The traditional interpretation is when the first car crosses the Start/Finish line; today it was when the track was ready to accept cars, making the sessions roughly 3 minutes shorter. I guess bending the rules is not just for racers.

Drew and I are in the last group to take the track and rolled over to grid at close to 6:30 PM. It was late enough that the paddock lights are starting to come on. This is the latest I have ever seen an SCCA event schedule stretch out to. It made it a very, very long day for the workers.

Sunday's GTL Race Grid was:

- 1) Brian Downey – Nissan 200SX
- 2) Chad Bacon – Toyota Tercel
- 3) Ken Blackburn, Honda Civic Si
- 4) Dave Patten – Datsun 1200
- 5) Drew Young – Datsun 510
- 6) Bobby Lentz Jr – Nissan Sentra (no time)

Sunday's schedule had another open/close wheel hardship practice first thing in the morning with the races following, split up with an 11:00 to 12:00 quiet time. Both Drew and I opted to sit out hardship practice. Bobby Lentz Jr had his transmission fixed in his Nissan Sentra and took advantage of the session. Lentz after missing the qualifying session would start the race at the back of the grid and should move up quickly.

The green flag drops on our race with the 3rd thru 5th place GTL cars lined up nose to tail in the left lane. I get a decent run on Ken Blackburn's 3rd place Honda going into turn one and make a move to go inside him. As I make my move on the Honda a VW Golf pulls to my inside cutting off the lane. We go three wide into turn one, my 1200 becoming the meat in the sandwich and I make slight contact, the 1200's left front to the Honda's right rear, he wiggles a little and we all continue on. Eventually I pull the 1200 past the Honda into 3rd in class, but that was short lived as Bobby Lentz comes flying past on his way to the front from his last place on grid starting position. The 1200 is running good as I start pulling some distance on Blackburn's Honda and Drew in the 510.

As the race goes on the 1200 starts having ignition issues again and starts slowing as miss-firing returns. Blackburn's Honda and Drew in the 510 are now spaced apart from each other after an off by Drew at NASCAR ending in contact with the tire wall (he claimed to be trying to left foot brake while still on the throttle or some kind of excuse like that) Drew gathers himself, quickly re-entering the track and both the Honda and 510 come past me pushing me back 2 positions in class. I stay on track as the 1200 continues to keep running worse and worse and they pull away with the 510 trying to close in on the Honda. Now I'm running 6th in class and the race leaders have lapped me by now. As I exit turn one heading for NASCAR (the track does a 180 right at turn one) I can see the leaders in GTL entering turn one. Bacon has Downey, but not by more than a few car lengths. These guys are full on racing for the lead in lockstep, neither giving the other an inch.

I run up thru the esses (slowly) and these guys come past me entering the last left, a fall away downhill run that leads into the tight decreasing right hander at Oak Tree. They are sailing. I watch as they pull away down the back straight and disappear over the crest heading for Rollercoaster. I continue on until I see the one lap to go sign come out. I am now 2 laps down and continue around the track pulling into the pits on the next lap, before taking the checkered flag fearing the car wouldn't make the cool down lap. I finish 6th place in GTL, 3 laps down to the leader.

Sunday's GTL Race Results (Finishing Gap):

- 1 – Chad Bacon, Toyota Tercel
- 2 – Brian Downey, Nissan 200SX (.082 sec) Very close and a great race!
- 3 – Bobby Lentz Jr, Nissan Sentra (35.740 sec)
- 4 – Ken Blackburn, Honda Civic SI (1 lap)
- 5 – Drew Young, Datsun 510 (2 laps)
- 6 – Dave Patten, Datsun 1200 (3 laps)

We loaded the cars and pulled out of the track at 5:00PM hitting the road making it to the Virginia/West Virginia state line on I81 at 10:30PM to spend the night. We arrived home Monday night at 6:30PM after another 11.5 hrs on the road, driving thru the rain until we reached Connecticut.

All in all the weekend was a good time. The 4.62 gears were too tall; I need to be at 4.88 or maybe 5.12. The ignition will be thrown out by next event in entirety and replaced with something way more reliable and I have new tires on order for NHMS in Loudon, NH on May 2-3, 2009.

And this is my story,
Dave Patten, Datsun 1200, #88 GTL (at VIR)