



DRAGWAY RETROSPECT

by Dewey Ketner

Ramchargers Reunion Is One for the History Books

The SAE Mid-Michigan Section hosted a reunion of sorts of Chrysler's old Ramchargers race team on April 30 at the Walter P. Chrysler Museum in Auburn Hills, and what a night it turned out to be!

Over 200 people showed up for the formal presentation in the Museum's theater, which holds 100 people, so they had to repeat the program at 6 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. alike.

Overall, it was a dandy event, well organized, cars from the Ramchargers' past and all of those great stories from the original Chrysler drivers and engineers.

Many of these guys I'd met over 50 years ago, so it was certainly a day to remember.

Let me explain.

Over 50 years ago, this writer, owner of a Jackson, Mich., hot rod car shop, was in the process of converting an old air field into a drag racing facility at Onondaga, Mich., and was otherwise drag racing in Stanton – the only such dragstrip in all of Michigan operating at that time.

(A little-known fact is that Stanton held drag races on dirt two or three times before laying down an asphalt strip. The dirt was not good, neither was the strip, which ran east to west – afternoon sun in your eyes. That dirt date was around 1955).

So I get a call from an attorney friend in Detroit, that a few Chrysler engineers and technicians are building a 1949 Plymouth coupe for the C/Altered class to run at Detroit Dragway for the 1959 Hot Rod Nationals and would I like to meet them? Of course!

On the way to a 1.5- or 2-car garage off some alley, he confided that this group of Chrysler employees and students from the Highland Park tech center were doing this on the q.t. as Chrysler Corp. was then not into drag racing.

We entered their shop with Al giving the instructions and I immediately felt uneasy. So I told them about my circle track and drag racing background and the drag strip I was involved in constructing and that their project was safe with me.

When I told them about my work in the El Paso hot rod shop on cars for the Mexican road race, Pike's Peak hill climbs and some exciting street cars such as Jags, Alards and Guy Maybe's Chrysler-powered Fiberglass, blowing MGs and other street cars, they decided I would be okay to look over their creation-in-process.

Having run A-Gas coupe and an A-Gas Dragster, I was very interested in their program. As I finished looking, I said I think your project is very worthy – perhaps ahead of its time, but keep at it and you will find success. And be sure to come out to Onondaga for testing and competition when it's completed.

By now, memory fails me as to who these young guys were (eventually the Ramchargers) that evening but my few years around the racing programs told me that these young guys were going places.

I told Eckstrand on the way



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Guest columnist and former Onondaga Dragway owner Dewey Ketner attended the SAE Mid-Michigan region's reunion of the 1960s Ramchargers race team at the Walter P. Chrysler Museum.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Bob Marshall, one of the original local Detroit-area drag racers, brought his 1970 Dodge Material race car to the gathering.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

John Dinkel with his Stage III / Plymouth Barracuda drag racer.

back to his home, that group has the cohesive necessities to be winners: they plan, they implement and they make do, they have faith in the team effort and I bet they will make their mark in history.

Little did I know how far, how fast and how famous this group would become in the near future. Volunteer effort becomes a healthy force to accomplish a team's goals.

Meanwhile, for the 1959 Nationals at Detroit Dragway, I took six of my handpicked young men from my dragway project at Onondaga to observe, learn and understand how drag racing works. It was a great instruction for these young scholars because this event drew racers from possibly every state in the U.S. back then, in every class offered, there was all levels of construction, which was then tech-inspected by well-trained NHRA officials at the track.

I talked my drag crew into keeping back from the inspectors but to look and listen. I was especially interested to see what the NHRA officials thought of the Ramchargers

car, the High and Mighty (which was on display at the SAE event last week).

I remember that they spent a lot of time looking, measuring and talking over many motorsports points of interest.

I believe that safety issues were their main concern – particularly with the really high mounting of the heavy Hemi engine in the High and Mighty. But they passed inspection and were allowed to run that day.

And how it did run and run and run. They were finally beat but the next day they could run for records. And it did run and finally set a record of 109.75 mph. It was a payback by the High and Mighty coupe for the Ramchargers' long nights and weekends, loss of sleep and meals on the run.

And more to the point of their status – the national record was set by a group of non-official Chrysler drag racing team members. Their effort was taken to the Plymouth Division to get some sponsorship but it still didn't fly. Instead, their effort was recognized by Dodge.

Focus ST Hatchback Becomes Ford's First Such Global Performance Car

DEARBORN – Drivers in the U.S. can now place their order for the new Ford Focus ST, a high-performance hatchback that will offer exhilarating performance and handling, a distinctive interior and muscular exterior design.

Focus ST, Ford's first global performance car, will integrate a collection of advanced and sport-oriented technologies previously unavailable to North American customers. The combination of these technologies into a refined yet high-performance sport compact will elevate the category and further cement Focus as the most complete compact car range sold in North America.

Among the more visible options will be the Tangerine Scream metallic color that will be offered exclusively on the Focus ST as well as race-inspired Recaro seats with matching color accents.

Ford is offering drivers who preorder a 2013 Focus ST the GoPro® HD Hero2 Motorsports Edition camera pack upon delivery. Already a staple in the motorsports and action sport communities, a GoPro is the ideal camera to capture a spirited drive or Focus ST track day.

The first 1000 Pre-sale orders placed between May 1st and August 20th are eligible for the GoPro HD Hero2 Camera System. Cameras will be sent after vehicle delivery.

"We recognize Focus ST customers are very social in nature and will love having the right tool to share their amazing drive experiences," said Lisa Schoder, Ford Focus ST Marketing manager. "I look forward to seeing videos of the Focus ST taking on some great roads across the U.S."

"Some cars in this category are entertaining on the track, but much less practical for daily driving," Schoder added. "We think we've hit the perfect balance between pure driving exhilaration and everyday livability with this car."

"In terms of athletics, the



Ordinarily a hatchback isn't a performance car, but look at the Focus ST of late.

Focus ST is a gold-medal decathlete," she said. "You can easily live with the car every day; when the time comes to really drive it; very few will be left wanting."

Performance EcoBoost

The heart of the Focus ST is a reworked EcoBoost® 2.0-liter engine massaged for very sporting throttle input responsiveness, strong off-idle power and a broad torque curve. The engine produces 252 horsepower and 270 lb.-ft. of torque.

"The power delivery has no weak spots, there's no way to be left flat-footed," Schoder said. "At the same time, drivers wanting to spin this motor into the upper octaves will be rewarded."

To enhance the full experience for the driver, Focus ST is equipped with a sound symposer box that enriches the natural sounds of the motor by capturing internal engine oscillations and piping them through the interior under-throttle.

In part-throttle driving, the car's power is felt more than heard; under full throttle, the engine music is naturally amplified through the symposer box.

Power, torque and engine notes are even more impressive in the context of its efficiency. Official EPA figures are not yet available, but Schoder said she expects exceptional fuel economy for Focus ST, especially for this class.

The unique sport suspension combines several technologies never before seen. Designed to give drivers enhanced agility on winding



Ford is marketing the 2013 Focus ST hatchback to the high-performance, tuner crowd. The ST version of the Focus includes Recaro racing seats.

roads while still inspiring high-speed confidence, the variable-ratio steering rack makes steering less sensitive on the straightaways but increases sensitivity at the corners. It can also help drivers at slow speeds, like when maneuvering into a tight parking spot.

The electric power-assisted steering (EPAS) on Focus ST is enhanced with torque steer compensation. More aggressive tuning of the torque steer compensation allows drivers to accelerate while still maintaining grip on roads with uneven surfaces. The system detects the torque steer those conditions can create and counteracts the effect to help the driver feel in complete control.

Focus ST will offer Recaro sport seats, unique 18-inch Y-spoke ST wheels, dual-zone climate control, Xenon headlights and leather appointments throughout the cabin. Its superior chassis rigidity aids the suspension in providing a firm, but quiet and controlled ride. The instrument cluster features ST-unique sport gauges with red needle pointers to monitor turbo boost, oil pressure and oil temperature levels.

Advanced technology such as available SYNC with MyFord Touch will also be available for Focus ST, along with a Sony Audio System, HD Radio and 10-speaker surround sound.

The Focus has wide consumer acceptance, so it was a natural to become a performance car, Ford officials said.

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