



DRAGWAY RETROSPECT

by Dewey Ketner

Musings from the Back Seat of a 1915 Saxton Runabout to Hot Roush 'Stang

Yes, I want to go for a ride in your race car.

Well, it looked like a race car – no body, no fenders or running boards – just a seat for the driver and riding mechanic, not even a hood.

This “thing” sat out behind my grandfather’s barn ever since I could remember. For several years, we young kids at the family reunion would crawl over this skeleton, pretending we were the driver or mechanic making motor and horn noises, even lifting the canvas cover over the engine, getting a peek at whatever that big glob of metal was.

We knew it made lots of strange noises but had never heard it run. Just looking at it, though, we knew this was a “bad machine.”

Then it happened: in 1936, my Uncle Oscar asked if I wanted to go for a ride in his 1915 Saxton Runabout. Do birds fly? Of course – yes – as he lifted me into the right seat, right next to the driver. Wow, was I ever in hog heaven. I had dreamed many times of just such a miracle.

Then Uncle set levers, turned knobs adjusting this and that. Finally he started whipping that crank round and round, the engine coughed, sputtered and stopped several times but with constant adjustment of levers and such, it finally started purring. I use that word loosely as I doubt this creature of steel ever ran smooth.

After what seemed like a half-hour (remember, a kid’s clock either runs at double speed or is stopped) – more likely, five minutes – Uncle drove the miserable acting and sounding jalopy out on the gravel road (they were all gravel in those days), turned to the south and gave it the

gas. Down the country road we flew, seemed like 100 mph but was maybe 25 or 30 mph, dust and stones flying everywhere, the dust choking our breathing, but we were really moving.

Uncle Oscar pulled into one of his hayfields going round and round, then he cut some great Figure-8s. Now back on the road, we went around the one-mile square for four miles of real racing, I thought. Finally, I crawled down and just stood there pondering how old or big do I have to be to command one of these vehicles that was as fast as lightning? That was my introduction to the auto business, too, and my lifelong “need for speed.”

Fast-forward to July 30 at the Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn. Gerald Scott, our news director, and I were invited to be part of the Visit Michigan office’s promotion interviewing George Zimmerman, their V.P. from Lansing who has the 2012 Roush Stage One Mustang being used as part of a Pure Michigan 400 promotion.

The state’s Travel Michigan office runs the Pure Michigan ad campaign that people are familiar with.

Suffice to say it’s beautiful, it’s fast and to say it’s an exciting ride is way short of what happens when you strap yourself in and ignite this Roush Mustang powerhouse.

Ask me, from a standing start to 80 mph, it nails you to the seat and defies you to try and lean forward. This vehicle will be given away on Aug. 19 at the Pure Michigan 400 NASCAR race at MIS. That explains the car’s “PURE 400” license plate as well. This is being done, all in the name of promoting tourism in the

state.

While test-driving the hot Mustang, I couldn’t help noticing that we also planted the need for speed in the son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick Albin of Greenville, Mich., who happen to live near and drive by the Shiloh School where I first attended in 1936. This is great country living, away from all the hustle of big cities with down-to-earth living that brings you and Mother Nature together.

The Albins’ 3-year-old son Grady will never forget the thrill of riding in this modern hot rod as Travel Michigan’s Michelle Begnoche took young Grady for the ride of his, so-far, young lifetime.

When the door opened and he stepped out, Grady’s eyes said it all – like I have just had “the experience to talk about the rest of my life” kind of look.

To cap off the great afternoon, we were introduced to Roger Curtis, president of Michigan International Speedway, who was on hand for the Roush Mustang Stage One ride-and-drive.

Is he too young to be at the

DoD Will Fund Supplier Class

The Macomb-Oakland University INCubator in Sterling Hts. will host a training class on Aug. 8 to help small technology entrepreneurs and businesses prepare winning proposals for Small Business Research funding through the Dept. of Defense.

The full-day training session will be led by BBC Entrepreneurial Training & Consulting based in Ann Arbor.

The INCubator is located on 18 Mile Road, near Mound, in Sterling Heights.



Columnist Dewey Ketner.

Jimmy Johnson Inducts Johnson To Hall of Fame

DETROIT – The list of motorsports stars set to usher in this year’s inductees into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America on Weds., Aug. 29, is as accomplished as the Class of 2012 itself with champion driver Jimmie Johnson and Hall of Famers Don “The Snake” Prudhomme and Bobby Allison scheduled to be among the presenters at the black-tie event at the Fillmore Theater in Detroit.

NASCAR driver Johnson will present AMA Supercross and Motocross legend Ricky Johnson for induction in the Motorcycle category.

Although unrelated, the two Johnsons were competitors and remain close friends today from their youthful California off-road racing days that launched both to stardom.

Prudhomme is scheduled to present Ed Pink from the Drag Racing category.

steering wheel of such an exciting organization? Absolutely not. As the conversation started, you knew this ball of fire is right on for the position, responsibility, plans and results he will achieve.

And Curtis is dead-center with his inspirational thoughts about racing’s future. This writer, born on a farm during the Depression,

has been up and down the road of life and race tracks with a pretty keen idea of what it takes to make the ball not just roll, but to bounce forward to success.

Watch the smoke come off this guy. He is visionary. A Hezekiah of today. Michigan International Speedway is on a roll because of him. All happening now.

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