

MOTORSPORTS

BY TONY SWAN

A Long Day At Nelson Ledges

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a year makes. In 1988 we took our PM cop car Mustang to the Nelson Ledges 24-hour race with modest expectations and wound up first overall. This year we made the same trip with higher expectations and wound up limping home well off the pace. So it goes.

June marked the tenth renewal of this showroom stock classic, and the hard work of race chairperson Anne McHugh showed to particular advantage with the best field in the past five years. Thirty-seven cars took the green flag, including an excellent group of contenders in the Prototype class.

Our Saleen Mustang held the fourth grid position, while the Archers' Eagles, the Phoenix Racing G-lader Golf and Roger Marble's Team Dayton Camaro, last year's runnerup, ranged behind.

Our driver corps had a couple of new faces—P.D. Cunningham, a young Wisconsin hotshoe who's definitely going places, and Rick Titus, a Saleen Escort Endurance Series regular and 1987 co-champion. In addition to his ability to get from start to finish in impressively short periods of time, Rick gave us a special Mustang anniversary presence. His father, Jerry Titus, another jour-



Mid-race stop for rain tires was one of many that made Nelson Ledges a real Longest Day.

Included under this heading were two Eagle Talon TSi All-Wheel Drive entries fielded by the formidable Archer Brothers Team, a Ford Golf powered by

nalist who doubled in racing, won the first SCCA title for Mustang, driving a G.T. 350 back in 1965.

Rick started the race, and by the end

rear brakes for the balance of the event. Not long after that, the left front wheel bearing went away.

Even so, when darkness fell, we were still contending, swapping the lead with the G-lader Golf, which was being driven very steadily by Bill Pate, Phil Pate, Al Oag, Al Salerno and Herm Johnson, and one of the Talons (Mac DeMere, Mitch Wright, Paul Brand and Don Knowles). But the darker it got, the more apparent it became that our lighting scheme, which we hadn't been able to test before the race, was just a little south of inadequate.

A little past midnight, a torrential rainstorm sent the Mustang slithering off the track where it languished for several laps, helpless on a surface of slick grass and mud.

Although the rain let up about 3:30 am, our lighting situation went from inadequate to impossible, as the lenses got covered with mud thrown up from the verges of the track. Between stops to restore the meager output of our lights, the driving became positively nightmarish.

Dawn of hope

For all this, when dawn solved the lighting situation we found ourselves in third place and running a good two seconds quicker than any car in the race. Hope flowered. But a short time later we experienced the first of two total brake failures. A front brake line had come adrift, necessitating another long stop for repairs.

From this point on, the rear suspension began asserting itself, and we drifted backward through the field. We found later that every bushing in the rear suspension had disappeared, which gave the rear end some very intriguing moves during cornering.

Complicating this was a return of the high-temperature problems we'd had early in the race—it turned out a head gasket was going bad—and a steady loss of braking power thanks to a cracked front rotor and general abuse.

While we were doing all this character-building, the race for first place overall was a real cliff-hanger, with the VW and the Talon nose-to-tail through the 23rd hour. The issue was finally resolved in favor of the Talon when the Phoenix Racing car got embroiled with a back marker and was forced to limp home in second place.

The PM Mustang wound up eighth, a position we hope to improve in future Escort Endurance outings. Meanwhile, we wish to acknowledge our sponsors—Polyshield car care products, General Tire, Walker Dynamax exhaust systems, Saleen Autosport, Monroe shock absorbers, Warner gear, Motul motor oil and, of course, the Ford Motor Company. **PM**

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