

# GUEST COMMENT

by Bill King

## LONG (AND EXPENSIVE) DAY AT NELSON LEDGES



Bill King found he liked his first taste of endurance racing in "The Audi Doody" at Nelson Ledges' Longest Day. (Sport Graphics)

Bill King is the SCCA's Club Racing PR man, but besides being good at getting the word out, he is also a pretty fair hand at herding race cars. He spent a number of years as a chief instructor at an SCCA driving school. Given that background it is understandable that given the slightest provocation he sneaks off to go racing, which is how he wound up at the annual 24-hour event at Nelson Ledges, where we are happy to say he conducted himself admirably. His comments follow. -Ed.

Every year we read in one or more of the popular automotive journals about their effort in the Quaker State Oil Longest Day of Nelson. Having just done the fifth edition of the QSOLDN, I now see why no one ever really covers the race but rather concentrates on their team's story. It's tough enough keeping your own act together for 24 hours without worrying about the other guys.

There were several little mysteries to be solved at Nelson, mostly having to do with adjustments to a sprint racer's mentality. For one, I'm not really a jock and had never attempted such a feat of endurance. How would I handle long stints behind the wheel; racing at night; using a radio; being

lapped so frequently; maintaining a good pace without using up the car; overcoming fatigue; routine pit stops; resting/sleeping between driving stints; being a part of a large team.

### The Adrenaline Spigot

Although I'm certainly no expert after one weekend, I now have a much better understanding of endurance racing. It all boils down to establishing your own pace, a pace that's adequate to the needs of the team and still allows you to function for 24 hours. The level of driving intensity is just a notch below ten-tenths. It will amaze you how fast and consistent you can be for hours at a time when you do not have to open that red mist adrenaline spigot that wins sprint races. You can talk on the radio, pay close attention to the car's performance, deal with traffic, acknowledge flags, note course conditions, plan upcoming pit stops . . . all without fatigue or brain fade.

Traffic was something of a revelation. In a sprint race, the overall race leaders expect some relief from lapped traffic and have been known to nudge offending parties. Endurance race etiquette allows



you the line despite the relatively rapid closing speeds of overtaking cars. The fast guys are really good about waiting to pass until the next straight. In return, you can often shade them a tad entering and exiting turns without actually bailing out and screwing up your lap.

Night racing requires major adjustments. →

# Delta is ready when you are...



## Special Air Fare to Road Atlanta CSPRRC AND THESE OTHER SCCA EVENTS:

- All Nationals & Road Races
- National & Divisional Rallies
- Pro Solo—All Except Los Angeles



CALL:

**(800) 255-RACE**  
**(805) 687-0721**

Nationwide  
Except  
California



Call between  
8:30 a.m. and  
5:30 p.m. PST

California Collect

Arrangements made by SCCA and

### THE TRAVEL GALLERY

3887 State St., Suite 1 □ Santa Barbara, CA 93105

## GUEST COMMENT

You simply have to function with less visual information than you're used to and certainly with much more visual interference. As your driving lights play over rises and dips in the road, areas of shadow are created that can mask braking and turning-in points. Most of the Nelson race cars ran from four to six driving lights, which will set your wink mirror ablaze. Nonetheless, you still need to know what's overtaking you and will gradually become adept at recognizing the headlamp configurations of the faster cars. The glare is surprisingly not distracting until the overtaking car is on your trail. At this point, you can duck your head slightly to avoid the wink mirror reflection but must often use one hand to shield your eyes from the side mirror or otherwise be nearly blinded in a corner. Glare resistant glasses are highly recommended.

### "The Audi Doodys"

While you are making all of these personal adjustments, the team rolls on. Our particular team from Reeves Import Motor Cars was dubbed "The Audi Doodys," a Tampa area bunch as new to endurance racing as your scribe. But they had thought about it and put in a lot of long, hard practice. The crew led by Ron Corbett and Derek Robbins could change front pads and tires, gas up, clean the windshield, check the vital fluids, and send off the next driver in a minute and a half. The drivers were Michael Cheung, John Petrick, Don Wallace and me . . . all of us going through the mental gyrations described above. Vernon Maddox and Bryan Horne handled the refueling and gofering for new tires and gas. Trish Petrick did much of the radio work and timed every lap we were on the track. BFGoodrich tire engineers Dave Grutzmacher and Tari Hinds, both volunteers for the weekend, stuck with us for the whole 24 hours. Every member of the team had to pace himself, for it was surely the longest day.

The one great truth that arose from the weekend, however, was not simply the triumph of the human spirit. Racers are a tough breed. What was truly amazing was the amount of money it took to field this effort. The next time you hear a racer thanking his sponsors, bear with him. Without those generous folks, racing could not exist.

In our case, it would be tough to handle any new sponsors . . . no more advertising space left on the Audi. Here's the list, everyone of which represents cold, hard cash: Reeves Import Motor Cars, American Aviation, BFGoodrich, Audi Sport, the Robert Bosch Corporation, Quaker State Oil, Cibie, Sun Instruments, Ron Hunter Racing and good old *SportsCar*® Magazine.

Oh yeah, before I forget . . . we took second in SSB. □



## TEAM UP WITH SCCA & UNITED

### FOR DISCOUNT AIR FARES TO YOUR NEXT SCCA PRO EVENT!

These special discount air fares are not available to the general public. For reservations to most SCCA Pro Races, call **1-800-521-4041** and ask for SCCA Account #433M, Monday thru Friday, 8:30 AM-8:00 PM EDT.

Special fares are available on United flights only in the Continental U.S. United specialists will arrange to mail the tickets to your home or office, or call your local travel agency and be sure you give them the United phone number and account number.

**No advance reservation or minimum stay is required.** Seats are limited, so call early for best availability.

