

The "Audi Doody" from Reeves Import Motor Cars (Tampa, Florida) came second in SSB at Nelson Ledges Longest Day. (John Rorquist)



# Born Again Showroom Stock!

by Bill Sparks

If it's true he who laughs last laughs best, Showroom Stock racers across the country are now enjoying some hearty guffaws. Of all the SCCA racing classes, oft maligned Showroom Stock, in its endurance racing format, is the one class which has gained enough grassroots support to generate its own professional National Championship Series, which began in midyear.

In 1985 the Showroom Stock Endurance Cup Series will be even bigger and better. There will be a minimum of six races, a major series sponsor, contingency awards, and a year-end points fund to be split among the top finishers in each of the four classes. The SCCA Endurance Cup is generating real excitement. At least 30 teams are expected to contest the entire series, and big support should be forthcoming from auto, tire and accessory manufacturers. Celebrity drivers are queuing up to buy rides and professional teams are preparing to do battle, with some teams budgeting \$20,000 per race as a minimum figure. 1985 should see whatever is left of Showroom Stock's "economy car" stigma blown away for good—Showroom Stock really has moved uptown.

The SCCA announced a new Showroom Stock Endurance Manufacturer's Cup Series for the 1984 season on August 12, 1984 at the Mid-Ohio Escort Happening 24 Hours Showroom Stock race. It was revealed a championship trophy would be awarded to winning manufacturers in each of the four recognized SCCA Showroom Stock classes (GT, A, B and C) based on points scored in the endurance races at Nelson Ledges, Mid-Ohio, Lime Rock and Willow Springs.

## A Preview Of The New Rules

Showroom Stock was originally created as a class for stock, low-power economy cars to provide SCCA members a low-cost way to go racing. Today, the hotter Showroom Stock rides carry some budget-busting numbers on their window stickers and are capable of top speeds in the 120mph to 130mph range. But there are still those who view SS as a low-rent class for people who can't afford

**Showroom Stock Endurance Racing  
Is a Marriage Made In Heaven**



*Quaker State's Longest Day at Nelson Ledges attracted a crowd. Next year will be even bigger as more drivers, manufacturers, sponsors and media jump on the six-race National Championship bandwagon. (Jeff Fisher)*



*End of a long night at Willow. The winning Guldstrand Corvette crosses the finish line at high noon in formation with the second team car. After it was all over the main topic of conversation was "Can we make it 24 hours next year?" (Steve Schnabel)*





"real" race cars. The big money and serious effort being put into the Showroom Stock Enduro series will drown out any laughter when the "Slowroom" Stockers take to the race course.

The SCCA has released a preliminary draft of the supplementary regulations for the 1985 Showroom Stock Endurance Cup Series. The proposed rules are subject to change based on membership feedback, but they still lay out the basic form the professional series will take. The regulations spell out the procedural matters of how the series and the individual races will be run as well as the differences between amateur and professional Showroom Stock rules. Some of the differences between the amateur and pro rules have to do with increasing the SS Enduro cars' safety and reliability, and some have to do with attracting manufacturer and sponsor support.

One change from the amateur Showroom Stock rules was made to accommodate manufacturers and importers who would like to see their current year models compete in the Endurance Cup Series. In club racing current year cars are only allowed in SSGT, but teams wishing to enter current models of already classified cars in the pro series may apply to the SCCA to have current year cars with no performance updates approved for SSA, B or C. New models not otherwise classified and current year models with performance updates must still apply to compete in SSGT.

The Showroom Stock Endurance Series regulations will also allow certain modifications to cars to increase safety and

reliability. Auxiliary lighting can be added to the cars and alternate brake pad and/or shoe material may be substituted for the original units. Original shock absorbers may be replaced with aftermarket heavy-duty units. Custom or racing seats may be added, as well as auxiliary instrumentation and two-way radios. Catalytic converters can be removed, but the rest of the exhaust system must remain stock. Aftermarket wheels of the same diameter and width as the original units may be installed. The SCCA is also seeking a way to make refueling safer without permanent alterations to the cars. It is hoped allowing these modifications will also help attract aftermarket sponsor support.

#### **An Unscientific Telephone Poll**

As with any new rules proposal, this one has attracted a variety of reactions—most surprisingly positive considering the variety of interests and opinions represented in the SCCA.

An unscientific telephone poll of Showroom Stock Enduro competitors revealed a general satisfaction with the proposed rules and the way in which the series is to be conducted. However, there are areas of concern and controversy that will probably require some thought and debate to work out.

One of the biggest discussions could be over whether or not there should be a "Prototype" class (SSP) for cars not currently for sale in the U.S. in their "as raced" form. The SSP class was created to allow developmental prototype cars scheduled for introduction in the U.S. market within a year the opportunity to "test" in endurance races. As it turned out though, the SSP cars usually ended up winning overall and it was quickly realized anyone interested in claiming an overall victory had to run a hot "Prototype" machine. This has led to some alleged abuses of the rather ill-defined "Prototype" class.

The Prototype class has been written into the preliminary draft of the SCCA Endurance Cup rules, and in an attempt to eliminate potential abuses of the SSP classification there is a strict definition of what will be considered a "Prototype" car. Prototype cars will be assumed to be entered by manufacturers for testing purposes only, so entries will only be accepted from factories or private teams designated by the manufacturer as an official factory-supported team. Prototype entries will compete for prize and contingency money at individual events; but since prototypes are assumed to be fully factory-supported, these teams will not participate in the Series Points Funds, nor will there be a "Manufacturers Cup" awarded in the Prototype category.

The Prototype definition goes on to say the cars must be a new model the manufacturer intends to include in its U.S. model line within a year or next year's model of a currently recognized SCCA Showroom Stock car. The car must be raced in the exact configuration in which the manufacturer intends to sell it in the U.S. market. A manufacturer who fails to introduce a Prototype car for sale in the U.S. within a year will be barred from entering Prototype cars in the Enduro series for up to a year unless it can be shown the car was not introduced for good business reasons. However, no car will be allowed to compete in the Prototype category for more than one year without becoming a part of the manufacturer's U.S. product line.

#### **Arguments For And Against**

Despite the strict SSP definition there are still SCCA officials and competitors who don't think there should even be a "Prototype" class. Dave Wolin, a successful SSA competitor in a Mitsubishi Starion Turbo, says some of the SSP cars are "all-out racers" and doesn't think it is fair to have them winning all the races and grabbing attention from the real production cars. Even with the →

"good business reasons" for not introducing the car in the U.S. market than you can count. Even Dick Guldstrand, who runs Prototype Chevrolet Camaros and Corvettes in the endurance series, admits, "There is some flagrant abuse of the Prototype class that must be controlled," but he believes the SCCA's proposed Prototype rules will do just that and he strongly supports the class.

Another argument against the class is made by SCCA Club Racing PR Manager Bill King: "It's going to be very difficult for a manufacturer to support the series by encouraging individual teams and dealerships to enter autos if the manufacturer is going to enter a Prototype and win overall." King believes manufacturers would like to support the Endurance Cup Series by encouraging entries from individual teams and dealerships, but if there is a "Prototype" class manufacturers will want to go for overall wins and it will cost a lot of money not all of them want to spend.

aspect is also really helpful. In SSGT or A, B and C there is no latitude for development or showcasing of advanced models — but it is this (aspect) which is very interesting to manufacturers. There have been some tremendous improvements made in American cars through knowledge gained in Showroom Stock enduro racing. Showroom Stock endurance racing is high intensity advanced development, so it is absolutely worth it to the manufacturers to do this type of thing." The fate of the Prototype class will not be known until the final Endurance Series rules are released late this year.

#### Consistent And Serious Enforcement

Another area of concern in Showroom Stock has always been cheating. Now that Showroom Stock will be going pro, the question is will it be possible to control the problem enough for the series to maintain credibility. Bill King admits enforcement of car preparation and tire rules at past enduros has been "casual," →



*Pit action is half the fascination of endurance racing. It is the acid test for strategic decisions, carefully laid plans and coping with the unexpected. This the winning Guldstrand team in action at the Willow Springs 12 Hour. (Bill Sparks)*



*Tenting under the desert sun, Larry Cress' and Donna Sue Langdon's late afternoon attire tells why the Willow Springs race starts at midnight. (Steve Schnabel) Along with Bruce Short they had their fuel-injected 96hp Honda CRX prototype running third overall (!) until a bash in the side pinched the fuel filler line, making pit stops a losing proposition as gas dribbled oh so slowly into the tank. (Sparks)*



but states next year things will be very different. The Showroom Stock Endurance Cup Series will have a series chief steward and chief scrutineer exactly like other SCCA professional series. This will ensure the Endurance events will have consistent and serious rules enforcement all across the country. Power increasing engine modifications will also be policed sufficiently to discourage blatant cheating.

On the subject of cheating, Dick Guldstrand believes there could be some big problems created by permitting the removal of catalytic converters. He feels doing an emissions compliance test on a car after a race is a good way to detect cheating. On a car without a catalytic converter Guldstrand said, "I could use racing gas and do all kinds of terrible things to that motor you'd never catch . . . but I don't want that to happen." Bill King says, however, removal of catalytic converters is being permitted because they are a safety hazard in an endurance race. They get so hot they can ignite spilled fuel [as happened to—who else?—the Guldstrand Camaro at Nelson Ledges this year] or even dry grass if a car has to pull off course.

Bill King says the potential for cheating in the area of engine control electronics is what concerns him the most. Can the ubiquitous black boxes be reprogrammed to give someone an advantage in an endurance race, and if so, is there any way to detect it? It's a question the SCCA doesn't have an answer for yet.

### Very Serious About Winning

Just the fact that rules makers and competitors are concerned with areas as esoteric as engine electronics and prototype tire compounds shows how serious Showroom Stock endurance racing has become. Since the first 24-hour Showroom Stock race at Nelson Ledges five years ago the top teams and their sponsors have become very serious about winning. Auto, tire and accessory manufacturers are especially interested in the development and marketing aspects of the Showroom Stock marathons. The financial support sponsors are willing to give to Showroom Stock



Showroom Stock endurance racing sees cars with different speed and handling potentials mixing it up on the track, making overtaking, passing and battling for position a constant challenge. Shown at the Nelson Ledges 24 Hours are a Porsche 944 Turbo from Brumos Porsche-Audi, a Corvette from Dave Heinz Motors in front of an unidentified Volkswagen Rabbit GTi, and a Saab Turbo from Reinertsen Motors. (Jeff Fisher photos)



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endurance racers has been well demonstrated.

The Guldstrand team gets technical information and parts on consignment from Chevrolet. Guldstrand's Chevys also carry sponsorship from Mobil, Goodyear, Flying Tigers and Pyrotec. Dave Wolin gets technical help and contingency awards from Mitsubishi and has sponsorship from Earl's Performance Products, Yokohama, Pyrotec and K-C Hylites. Several competitors had deals on cars or tires they did not want to discuss, so there are evidently a good number of free tire and low-priced car "arrangements" to be had for those who have proven they can be competitive.

Although only about 10% of the players are in the game at the top level, Dick Guldstrand believes there will also be plenty of support from manufacturers and local sponsors for drivers who may not be contesting the entire series, but are capable of making a good showing in their local events. Guldstrand speaks from personal experience when he says, "The money is there... there are sponsors that will support this series in a big way."

So, SCCA Showroom Stock Endurance racing has arrived. On reflection, the combination is a natural. While the big money teams are competing for the glory (and the ad campaigns), those with smaller operations will find SS Enduro still cheap enough to participate in, make a respectable showing and produce great stories when it's all over. After all, any racer worth calling the name has sooner or later thought about what it would be like to take a crack at Le Mans and 180mph down the Mulsanne, but it is a long boat ride and they do speak funny over there. Willow Springs or Nelson Ledges is a lot more realistic, and (properly managed) retains that epic nature of the endurance contest, which captures the imagination of competitors, promoters, fans and sponsors alike.

The only question is, now that SS Enduro has attracted money, media attention and pro racers, what will the guys with the loud machinery and "Slowroom Stock" jokes do now? Based on the growing Enduro entry lists, we have a pretty good idea. □

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