



...AND STILL CHAMPION

Not Porsche, Nor Lotus Nor Even Ferrari Will Beat Corvette In The Super Class

The real interest in any race is the overall winner, right? Well SOCA has spiced things up in the Endurance Championship, blowing the lid off previous price restrictions and inviting some of the world's purebred GT cars to take a crack at the plastic clamshell from Bowling Green.

The smart ones will decline the invitation. Essentially, the Corvette and Porsche 944 Turbo have been kicked upstairs, out of SSGT... not that they weren't already in a class by themselves. Particularly, the Chevy. The new class is called Super Sports and includes cars from Audi, BMW, Ferrari, Lotus, Mercedes and Porsche... as well as the Corvette.

The Corvette was the only winner last year. The top teams have developed killer 'Vettes that are considerably faster than what rolls off the assembly line. Even more important, the best Corvette teams are well drilled in preparation, logistics, strategy and pitwork.

If you managed to find a faster car, you would still be a long way from winning at the end of 24 hours.

TOP CHEVY CHASER

Still, the contenders make for some interesting speculation. First on the list is the 944 Turbo, the top Chevy-chaser from last year. The rumor mill is abuzz with tales of a new "S-package" to cure last year's understeer woes. Bob Carlson from Porsche Motorsport says there is no such package currently, but there "probably will be one in the near future." "Near future" is one of those difficult-to-grasp concepts like "infinity." It usually means sometime between yesterday and never.

There are other horses in the Porsche barn, like the venerable, venerated 911 an

BY BURT LEVY

the big grunt 928. The 928 is fast enough to challenge the Corvette at Bonneville, but it is probably too heavy, soft and thirsty to be a good endurance weapon.

The 911, despite its fabulous racing history, doesn't look promising. The 911's successes were a triumph of development over initial design. In off-the-shelf form, the 911 is not the best in Porsche's arsenal. And that's according to Bob Snodgrass of Brumos Porsche, who brought a 911 and a 944T to Road Atlanta for a serious look-see, with Joe Cogbill at the controls. The 944T dusted the 911 handily, particularly in exit speed and top speed. Heading into "The Dip," the blown car was as much as 10 percent faster.

So, if it's going to be Porsche in the Endurance Championship, it's going to be a 944T. And the only 944T that's going to get the job done is the "S-car," when and if it arrives. To underline the whole thing, Brumos has sold its 944Ts and is going racing elsewhere this year.

FERRARI

The Ferrari 328 Quattrovalve is the most interesting newcomer to the series. Ferrari's long and envied experience at endurance racing, plus the proven potency of the car, make it a significant dark horse... dark prancing horse.

The Fazzaz has a 20-gal. fuel capacity, which has to rank as an advantage. But it's going to cost a billion lire (probably literally)



Unless the "S" version of the 944 Turbo makes it to the market, don't expect the Porsche to win races.

At left, the Morrison-Cook steamroller rides again.

to field one of these little gems.

GETTIN' COMPETITIVE

Next up with an outside shot is the Lotus Esprit Turbo. Unlike Ferrari, the Lotus factory has much to gain by doing well in the series. It would certainly establish the car as a serious alternative to some of the others, instead of its usual perception as a "fringe" car. But, since GM owns Lotus, would The General beat himself? The specifications of the car look good on paper. The Twincam engine is probably more "massagable" than many in the series and it has an exemplary suspension layout. Again, the

problem is money and development. A Lotus team would have one under-the-table advantage in that very few trackside mavens know the stock configuration of a Lotus. "Gettin' competitive," they call it down south, "attention to detail" in Formula 1.

From there, the list of likely contenders drops right off a cliff. The BMW 635 is in the same boat as the Porsche 928: too much of a heavyweight cruiser for an athletic event, and a little short on ponies, to boot, Jaguar declined to be included in the series as they don't import a stickshift HS-E. Just as well.

A sleeper is the Audi Quattro. If the SCCA schedules a race for Anchorage, watch out. The four-wheel-drive Audi could have a real

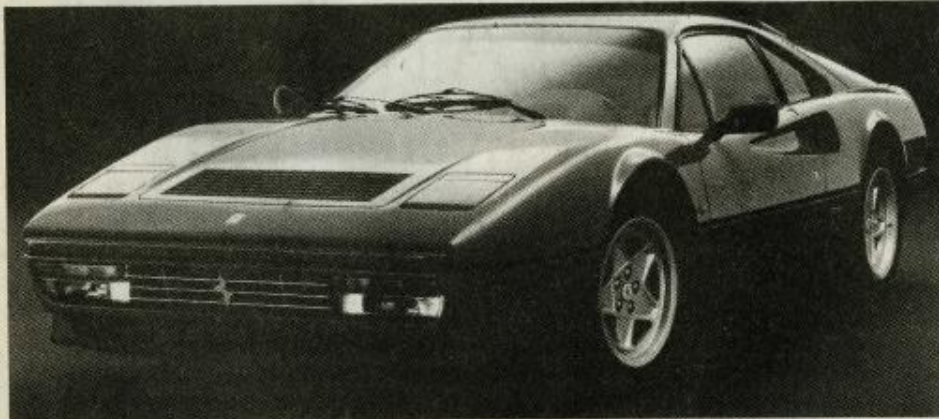
advantage in the rain...or in short cuts across muddy ground. In the dry, however, it comes up quite a bit short in horsepower.

The Mercedes-Benz 2.3-liter 16-valve sedan is a wonderful little car, but it belongs in SSA or SSB, not the "Super Class."

So, here you have it: I put the Corvette as better than even money to sweep again this year. I give Porsche about a 5:1 shot at picking up a first-place trophy with the new "S" 944T, and make the Ferrari and Lotus models the longest of longshots. Everybody else has two chances: slim and none.

All of this opens up the way for some other cars in the "old" SSGT class, particularly the Nissan 300ZX Turbo with its

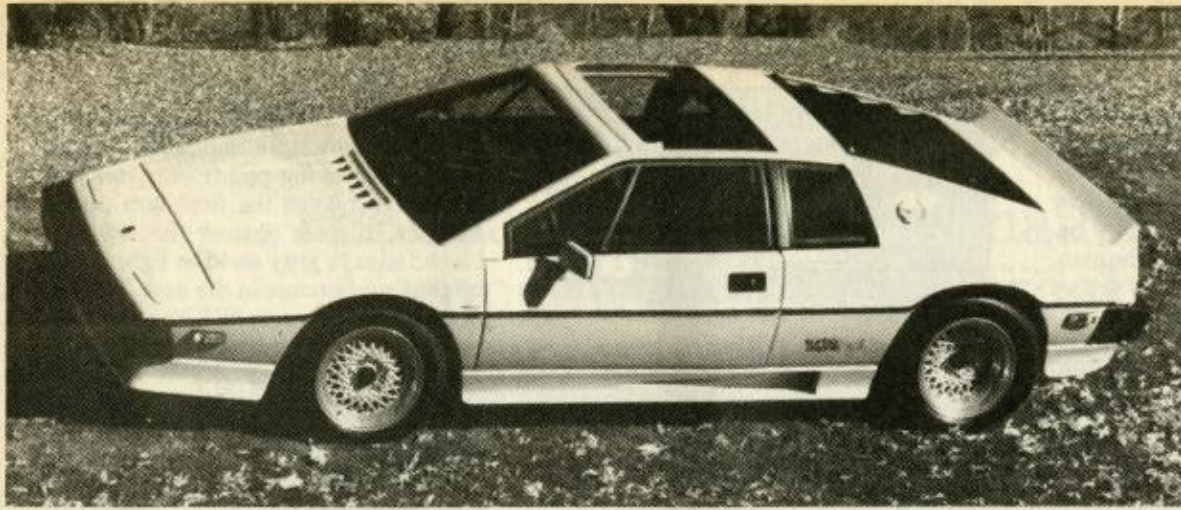
CONTINUED ON PAGE 39



How much is one billion lire? It might take that much to win in a Ferrari 328 GTB, despite its 32 valves.



The Beiser Quattro will attract paparazzi with its star drivers.



Quick. What are the stock specifications for a Lotus Turbo Esprit? If a team pays Attention To Detail, the Esprit (left) may Get Competitive in Super Sports. The Volvo 740 Turbo Wagon (below) runs in SSB. The wagon shape may be an aerodynamic advantage, the boat will offset much of that, however. Required Golden Retriever must wear approved canine safety gear and be on a one-meter (± 1 cm) leash.

AND STILL . . .

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

big, powerful engine, and the Porsche 944 mitout kompressor. With its smaller, less powerful engine which sips gas out of a mammoth 21-gal. gas tank, Look for the little 944s to make four less pit stops than the Nissan in a 24-hour race.

There is an outside shot for one of the Ford Mustang variants, but nobody has really fielded a complete effort to date.

CHARLIE MANSON EYES

Even if you pick the absolute, no-questions-asked, best-car-for your class, have it prepped by a wizard who's half engineering genius and half loophole expert, and hire the Elliott brothers for pit crew, you've still got to get the right warm bodies behind the wheel. And that doesn't necessarily mean the guys with lightning reflexes, grim smiles, and Charlie Manson eyes. Enduros are something different...□

