

## Wandering At Three Ayem

You wander the pits in the early ayem hours. There's nothing else to do. The generators drone in the deep-shadowed glare of the floodlights. Any driver who claims to sleep soundly between stints is either a liar or inhuman.

Inevitably, you run into drivers you've met at Nationals or the Runoffs. Invariably, the conversation rolls around to "Which do you like best, the 30-minute National sprint, or the grinding hours of the enduros?"

### BANZAI RUSH

Most drivers have very similar answers. The banzai rush to the checker at the Runoffs is more exciting. You can let out all the stops because there's literally no tomorrow. It's pure effort and pure fun.

Enduros require pacing and judgment, particularly in traffic. Screw up at a sprint race, and you have to face yourself in the mirror the next morning. Screw up at an enduro, and you've got to face the other drivers, along with 15 crew people. . . just as soon as you get back to the pits.

There is a certain, special, team-oriented feeling that takes over at an enduro. Instead of racing your teammates to see who can go fastest, you



JEFFREY HEWITT

*At night, time distends like gooey taffy.*

compete to get the best fuel mileage. . . go easiest on the brakes. . . and to bring the car back in just as fresh as it went out.

There are two rules in endurance racing: Don't hurt the car and don't hurt the car.

There are times in an enduro, when you have an open bit of track and the car is running right, that you may go 10/10ths. We are talking about the *driver* going at 10/10ths. The car should be at 8/10ths or 9/10ths. Running at the limit of your ability without burning up the brakes or running the tach into the ultra-thirsty zone is a very specialized, controlled skill. So is pacing. When you slide into that damp, clammy seat at 3:30 a.m., you've got to be able to produce. And not screw up.

Night racing in the wee hours is lonely and weary. Time gets distended like a gooey lump of taffy. But you pound on

in the freight train of headlamp glare and luminescent markers, check your gauges, find your braking points, do your job.

Finally, you see the first dark purple outlines of trees against the sky. The black fades to gray and the light comes up pink and orange in the east. The fuel needle goes down to "E." You radio the pits, take one more lap and bring her in. There's a flurry of activity. You help the next driver get strapped in. Hook up his radio. Fasten the window-net. Warn him about the dirt and gravel on Turn Five and the stationary yellow at 11. The car moans away into the early sunlight.

You're standing alone in the pits feeling like a pile of old oatmeal rolled in sawdust. Somebody puts a hand on your shoulder and gives you a grim smile. You know you've done all right.

When it's all over, when the checkered flag comes down and you look around at your team, at the dull reddened eyes and beard-stubbed faces, you get a unique sense of camaraderie, of belonging, of accomplishment. You have done this thing together, and you have done it alone as well.

Sure, there's more of a rush in sprint racing. But there's more satisfaction when the checker comes down after 24 hours. —Burt Levy