

## Pro Racing Previews



# THE FACTORY FACTOR

By Mac DeMere

**W**ell before the end of last season, one of the hot topics in the Escort Endurance paddock was "What car should we run next year?" My standard answer: "One with some level of factory support or, at the least, factory interest."

Depending on the car and class, it's not absolutely necessary to have cash dollar factory support (though it is very helpful). However, to have much hope of winning—and any aspirations of contending for the championship—at least technical and parts support seems vital.

The proof? In the last two years, only one team without factory support has won an Escort race. (Answer to this trivia quiz at the end of this article.) Though it's hard to track (some are shy about revealing their backing), in the four-year history of the Endurance series barely more than a half-dozen class wins (out of a possible 100) have gone to entries with absolutely no factory support or interest.

*Manufacturer Support—Or At Least Interest—Remains The Key To Success In The Escort Endurance Championship*



*Morrison-Cook Motorsports intends to defend the GT Class Manufacturers Championship it won for Chevrolet last season with a batch of new Camaros (TOP). Ford's effort for the crown will again take the shape of Saleen Mustangs (ABOVE).*



There are some cars that could be winners in the hands of a well-funded (and well-driven) independent effort, but with enough factory money and technical support, the right team could be competitive with almost any car. [Tell me that, with big-time factory backing, Bakeracing—with the Archers driving—wouldn't win at least one race for Hyundai.] Conversely, cars that won championships when factory backed become uncompetitive tire burners in the hands of under-funded independents (witness former champions Porsche 944, Mitsubishi Starion, Dodge Shelby Turbo and Nissan 200SX).

The preceding goes to support my prediction for the 1989 SCCA Escort Endurance Championship: Teams with at least some factory support will win the championship in every class. [Considering there are at least a couple of factory-backed teams in every class, the "haves" may well win all the

the AWE Motorsports Mazda RX-7s in close pursuit.

**B** Possibly an all-Honda show for '89. The Honda CRX Sis of John Torok's defending champion Team GRR, along with the other Honda supported teams of Wizard Racing, Petdorf and Autosport South are clearly the favorites. However, with the right rules breaks, '87 champion Phoenix Racing could be a force in its familiar Volkswagen GTI 16V or, less likely, the Corrado.

## GT CLASS

On paper, the Porsche 944 S2, Mazda RX-7 Turbo or Pontiac Firebird could challenge in GT. Certainly the BMW 325is, Ford Probe, Mitsubishi Starion, Dodge Daytona Shelby and Shelby CSX have already been proven competitive in A. The Peugeot 505 is always a challenger in B and a Chevy Spectrum Turbo or Beretta GTU (especially if prepared by Morrison-Cook)



Pombo Racing will defend its A Class championship, again relying on Nissan's 300ZX.

could be tough in B. Unless the respective factory quickly takes a big-time interest, however, none of these cars will see victory circle in '89.

Here are the favorites in the 1989 Escort Endurance Championship:

**GT** This class will go to either defending champion Morrison-Cook with its Chevrolet Camaros, or the Saleen Mustangs of 1987 champion Saleen Autosport. The Kaufmann Racing Mustangs and the non-factory-backed Cartech Sports Nissan 300ZX Turbo team will be ready to take over should either of these fumble.

**A** The old crystal ball remains a little bit cloudy here, awaiting final resolution of the Volkswagen Corrado's eligibility and Phoenix Racing's plans to race one of the new supercharged machines beginning mid-year. Whether or not Phoenix joins in, the top teams will include the Archer Brothers' all-new Eagle Talon, the Nissan 300ZX of defending champion Pombo Racing and the factory Oldsmobile Calais LGO, with the Autosport South Acura Legend Coupe and

could be tough in B. Unless the respective factory quickly takes a big-time interest, however, none of these cars will see victory circle in '89.

"You have to have at least technical input from a factory," says Rick Titus, who will head the Saleen Autosport effort. "(Support) could save millions of dollars of experimentation."

Titus predicts Saleen Autosport will be more competitive than in '88 when it only won one race.

"We've undergone a renewal," said Titus. "There's a 'Let's go get it' attitude about the team. Last year, we were flat, kind of like Pepsi that's been left out too long." Regular drivers for the General Tire-backed team will be Titus, Calvin Fish, Kees Nierop and Paul Dallenbach. Joining them for the long races will be Steve Saleen (at least when his Indy Car races don't conflict), Lisa Caceres, George Follmer, Skeeter McKitterick and, likely, others.

"The plan is to win the championship again," says Morrison-Cook team leader Tommy Morrison. "Of course that's

everybody else's plan, too. We hope to be better prepared than we were in '88. There's always a tenth of a second to be gained somewhere."

The Saleen outfit won its only race of 1988, the Mosport 24 Hour, thanks in part to the rear end problems suffered by the Morrison-Cook Camaros. Morrison says the team, with help from Chevrolet engineers, is focusing extra attention on the rear end, experimenting with new Mobil 1 lubricants designed to reduce failure-producing heat.

Morrison-Cook will again field two Camaros. Don Knowles and John Heinrich will drive the No. 97, with the lead drivers for the No. 98 to be chosen from among Stuart Hayner, Bobby Carradine, Bob McConnell, Boris Said and John O'Steen. Backing for the effort comes from Mobil 1, Goodyear, Delco Suspension Systems, Delco-Moraine, PBR, Hella, Dynamax Mufflers and Borg-Warner.

Though Chris Kaufmann knows his team faces an uphill battle, he's optimistic.

"We're like the little train in the children's story: 'I think I can, I think I can,'" said Kaufmann. Kaufmann Racing will run a two-car team with support from Goodyear, Ford, Motorcraft, Koni and two Ford dealers (Van Cleve of Morton, Wash., and Frontier Ford of Santa Clara, Calif.). Pete Halsmer will assist the team in testing and setup and, if his schedule permits, co-drive in the longer races. Other drivers include Kaufmann, Bill Cooper, pro golfers Danny Edwards and Bob Gilder, 21-year-old kart champion Matt Melby and Bob Peurifoy. Edwards plans to host special golf tournaments in conjunction with several Escort events.

At the beginning of 1988, the Cartech Nissan 300ZX Turbo was barely able to stay ahead of the A cars. By the last race of the season, the team came within a lap of winning—without factory support.

"It's very difficult without factory support," said Cartech Sports' Jim Ray. "This is a very difficult series for independents, but we don't mind the underdog role. It will just make victory that much sweeter."

Last year, the team was comprised mainly of volunteers, many from Corky Bell's Cartech automotive engineering firm. This year, the crew will have two full-time, paid mechanics—in addition to volunteers—to prepare two cars for Ray, John Schneider,

## Appropriate

Considering the nature of the Escort Endurance series, it's only appropriate that factory-backed teams dominate. Unlike most pro series, which exist to entertain spectators, one of the main purposes of the Escort series is to provide manufacturers (automobile, tire, shocks, mufflers and more) with a basis for advertising. "Our car/tire/shocks/mufflers/etc won/survived the 24 hours of Mosport/12 Hours of Road Atlanta/etc."





John Torok's Oscar Jackson-prepared Team GRR Hondas should be the class of B.

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Ron Nelson and Alan Freed.

Other GT cars expected to show up at least occasionally: the Bert and Ernie's Camaro; the Longest Day of Nelson-winning *Popular Mechanics* Mustang of Tony Swan, Mike Allen and friends; Mike Mavrigan's Birchwood Racing Mustang; and Charlie Spira's Wrightwood Racing Porsche 944S. Unless funding materializes soon, Bill Mitchell will not return with the Special Vehicle Developments Camaro that Scott and Shawn Hendricks challenged with last year.

### CLASS A

Six weeks before the season opener the big questions in A were "Can the Archer Brothers put together a deal with Jeep-Eagle?" and "Will the new Volkswagen Corrado be classified in A and, if so, will Phoenix Racing run one and, if so, when will it be eligible?"

As March faded away, the Archers were putting the finishing touches on their program to run the new turbocharged, 195hp, four-wheel-drive Eagle Talon. It seems a difficult task, but the brothers—tied with each other as the winningest driver in Escort history—remain undeterred.

"The first year of the truck series, we didn't see the Jeeps until three weeks before the first race," said Bobby Archer. "We went from nothing to running in the first race in three weeks. From nothing to winning in five weeks."

Phoenix Racing had hoped to run the new supercharged (actually VW's unique G-Lader), 150hp Corrado G 60. However, it won't be introduced to the public until sometime in August, according to Phoenix Racing's Bill Pate, and SCCA Pro Racing officials admit the Corrado wasn't likely to be added to the eligible car list for '89.

Because the new Nissan 300ZX will likely be classified as a GT car, Pombo Racing will

stick with the cars that gave it the '88 championship.

"We're going to have our hands full this year, but I love it," said Pepe Pombo. "To win, we're going to have to rely on the things that gave us the championship last year: our durability and fuel economy." The Pombo Nissan will be driven by Scott Sharp and Ray Kong, with Pombo filling in when his International Sedan schedule permits.

Through Del Markle's Nucleus Enterprises, Oldsmobile will campaign an Olds Calais powered by the 180hp LGO Quad Four.

"How well we do depends upon how well SCCA polices the turbos," said Olds Motorsports Manager Dennis Weglarz.

Driving for the Olds team will be Scott Hoerr (the younger brother of Trans-Am driver Irv Hoerr), Buddy Norton, Ed Manger and, possibly for the long races, Paul and Karl Hacker. The team is building two cars, but plans to campaign only one.

Autosport South, the '88 Class A runner-up, will have a new Acura Legend coupe for Rich Lee and 1984 Formula Ford National Champion Jackson Yonge.

"Unless there's some surprises, we're going to be right in the running," said Lee. "We've got a new car, and General is now building tires to fit the Legend. Last year, we were handicapped because we didn't have the right tire for the car."

AWE Motorsports is planning a very ambitious, lightly factory-backed, four-car Mazda RX-7 effort.

"Last year, we relied strictly on volunteers," said AWE's Brad McAllister. "We'd fly in on Thursday, work on the car all weekend, wreck it on Sunday and fly out Sunday night. This year we'll have paid crew and that should make a big difference." The team will be split into a two-tiered effort, with Steve Pfeiffer running one two-car operation and Bill Artzberger running the other. Drivers include McAllister, Pfeiffer, Artzberger, former Escort Champion Lance Stewart, John Mueller (Lee's son, who will also be crew chief on the Artzberger team), Dan Hillenbrand and Brian Buse. Possibilities to join the team in longer races are Andy Evans, John Fall, Bill Cooper (who's listed as a

driver by two teams), Jeff Arendas and Bill Miller.

Other teams that plan to appear occasionally in A include a Saab 9000 Turbo from Saab-Scania, Dodge Shelby Turbos from Todd Van Der Jagt Racing and MAS Racing and a BMW 325is from KC Racing for Ken McGraw and Clint de Witt.

### CLASS B

Less than six weeks prior to the season opener, the fate of B was up in the air. Phoenix Racing's Bill Pate wasn't sure if '87 champion Volkswagen would return to the series with its trusty GTI 16V or, if it is so classed, the new Corrado—or not play at all.

"Our plans are in a state of flux," said Pate. "For us to return, we'll need something more than the 25lb SCCA put on the car that won six races and six poles. We don't want to come and repeat last year. We want to be someplace in the ballpark as far as being competitive is concerned."

If no factory-supported Volkswagens appear, B will be a Honda benefit, led by John Torok's defending champion Team GRR. Leading the two-car Team GRR charge will be defending champion Peter Cunningham, former Escort champion Scott Gaylord, former Can-Am Two-Liter champ Tim Evans and Ed Conner.

"With the proper effort, there are a lot of cars that could be competitive in B," said Torok. "The Beretta, the Corrado, the Suzuki Swift. Of course, the GTI could have won any race last year. It could have just as easily been Volkswagen six, us two."

"We have an advantage in that our entire crew is returning and Oscar Jackson will again do the preparation. We're like a football team with a crop of returning seniors." Backing for the team comes from General Tire, Montgomery Ward, Monroe, American Racing Wheels, Champion Batteries and One Grand Vehicle Care Products.

Wizard Racing's Eddie Rivera thinks "we can beat Torok."

"When you're on top, you've only got one way to go," said Rivera. Wizard will have a two-car team for Angel Figuero, Richard McGinley, Ron Eaton, Cliff Kelly, Frank Del Vecchio and Dick O'Neill. Former Team Honda wrench Jimmy Bolt will share crew chief duties with Chris Oppelt and Russ Collins' RC Engineering will build the engines for the General Tire-shod team.

Other Honda-backed teams include the two-car Canadian Petdorf Racing team (for Peter Stallybrass, Jock Addison and others) and Autosport South (for Jerry Lustig and drivers to be named).

Other expected B entries include a Chevy Spectrum Turbo for Dave Markquart, Volkswagen GTI 16Vs for Bernd Buchen's GTI Autosport and Kevin Bjerke's Bjerke Racing, a Honda CRX Si for Team Turtle and Pratt Cole's Peugeot 505 Turbo. □

Answer to trivia quiz: T.C. Kline Racing, which won Mid-Ohio last year with a BMW 325is.