



August 2017

As our cars were going through tech inspection for the March 2017 Sebring HSR race, Jack Woehrle HSR's Technical Director, asked if George Calfo and I would be interested in participating in an August vintage race in Put-in-Bay, Ohio. In addition to his duties as HSR's technical director, Jack is also the organizer of the Road Races Reunion at Put-in-Bay. When asked if we were interested I said, "sure." After saying yes, I had to ask Jack where the heck Put-in-Bay was and told him I would bring my 1969 HTA (Historic Trans-Am) Camaro. He smiled, said Put-in-Bay is on an island in Lake Erie just off the Ohio mainland and that the Camaro wasn't eligible to race in the event. The only cars eligible are those manufactured before 1967 and with an engine no larger than 2.0 liters. As we walked away from tech, George and I talked about the race and thought it may be a worthwhile trip. The problem was, I didn't have a car that qualified. Being a good friend, George offered to let me drive one of his 2.0 Liter cars. While that sounded like a great idea, I didn't want to be "the guy" that wrecked one of his very historic and expensive Porsches. We have shared cars over the years, but usually at an event where we shared driving duties. With no car of my own, I put running Put-in-Bay out of my mind.

When I again talked to Jack at Road Atlanta during the Mitty in April, he asked if I was coming to Put-in-Bay. I told him I doubted it because I didn't have a car that qualified. He said he understood but asked that I not rule out attending just yet as he was considering extending an invitation to a few big bore cars.

Sure enough, in late June I received an e-mail from Jack with a picture of a 1957 Thunderbird racing a 1957 Corvette taken back in the day. The short message said, "we want to replicate this photo at Put-in-Bay this year". When I saw Jack in July at Road America, he told me they had decided to invite a few V-8 powered cars from the 50's and my Vette was one of those.

The two weekends before going to Put-in-Bay, George and I spent 11 incredible days on the Monterey Peninsula. Six of those days were spent at the legendary Laguna Seca Mazda Raceway participating in the 60th running of the Rolex Reunion. Along with 548 other vintage car enthusiasts, George was racing his 1957 Porsche Speedster and I was racing my 1956 Corvette at both Reunion race weekends. Between the two weekends, we displayed our cars at the Concours on the Avenue in Carmel, attended Porsche Werks, visited Canepa's museum and race shop, watched the cars being unloaded and prepped for the Pebble Beach Concours 'de Elegance and attended a Ferrari Concours. There were other events that we took in during the week, but this seems to cover the highlights. 11 days of non-stop exotic and historic cars called Car Week.

Now one week after leaving Monterey, we find ourselves sitting on a ferry dock in Sandusky Ohio with South Bass Island looming 3 miles out in Lake Erie. We are on our way to participate in the 9th Annual Road Race Reunion at Put-in-Bay, where George will be racing his 1967 King-Hedinger 911S and I will be racing my 1956 Corvette.

The Corvette is the same car I raced at the Monterey Reunion a week ago. When I left the Bay Area, the Vette was 2,506.2 miles west of Put-in-Bay sitting under the Heritage Motorsports hauler canopy. I was a bit concerned about it getting back to my garage in Carmel, Indiana in time to meet the CRP Hauler that was taking it to Put-in-Bay. The driver of the Heritage Motorsports truck wasn't leaving until Monday afternoon because the truck couldn't be loaded until late Sunday night. The Reunion requires all cars attending the event to remain on display in the paddock or on track until the event closes on Sunday evening.

Monterey Car Week activities are very expensive and spectators who buy tickets expect cars to be sitting in the paddock or on track until the event ends. I think it is a good policy. I have attended vintage races and seen the paddock half empty by noon on Sunday, which never seems fair to the paying public.

The CRP Racing hauler arrived on Friday evening. George's 67 911S was already on the truck and once the Vette was loaded, the truck was on its way. Arriving in Sandusky Saturday afternoon, the hauler made the journey to South Bass Island via ferry.

Located approximately equal distance between Toledo and Cleveland, are the three islands that comprise the chain of Bass Islands. The largest is South Bass Island which is 4 miles long and 1 ½ miles wide. It is sitting in the southern part of Lake Erie, 3 miles from the Ohio mainland. The town of Put-in-Bay is on South Bass Island and according to the 2010 census, the island had a registered population of 138 people. It is a collection of bars, restaurants, hotels and a public airport large enough to handle small prop aircraft, or bug smashers as jet jockeys call them. The airport will be our race track on Monday and Tuesday.

George and I found ourselves sitting in our rental cars waiting to make the same ferry trip as the hauler did a day earlier. The ferry ride takes approximately 15 minutes to cover 3 miles of the dark, cold waters of Lake Erie. It is Sunday and the ferry is running every half hour. It is busy with traffic coming off the Island as South Bass Island is a summer weekend get-away location for young Ohioan's and Michigander's who want to leave their daily routine behind for a few days. During the week, Put-in-Bay is not a terribly exciting place, but when Friday rolls around, father's lock up your daughters and "Katie bar the door" because South Bass Island turns into party central. The Island attracts young people who come to the Island with one objective in mind, consume a large quantity of liquified hops and grains over a two-day period. We learn from the locals that South Bass Island has developed a Fort Lauderdale spring break reputation. A few local residents told us they would like to stop "the craziness" but they know it could kill the businesses on the Island.

As we waited for the ferry, the loading lanes were filling with race cars in addition to family sedans and SUV's. Usually for a vintage race, there is a preponderance of Porsches entered in the field. As we sit in the loading lanes it is evident that either the Porsches are already on the Island or they are coming later as most of the cars going over are British. MG's, Triumphs and Healey's fill the lanes and many are being driven onto the ferry. This is unusual, as today's vintage events are dominated by semi-trailers labeled with names like Vintage Motorsports, Cobra Engineering, 901 Shop, Duntov Motor Company, Klub Sport and our very own CRP Racing. Their trailers are normally loaded with cars that the shops will be supporting during a race weekend.

As we waited for the next ferry to unload and load cars for another trip to the island, George and I talked to a few Put-in-Bay regulars. We learned that the reason there were so many British cars is that the original Put-in-Bay races were dominated by British cars. Consequently, the British Car Clubs of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Pennsylvania, plus other nearby states have supported the vintage race over the eight years the race has been held.

Once loaded, the ferry put off for South Bass Island. Landing on the south side of the Island, the loading gate dropped and the cars quickly disperse up a steep ramp to Langram Rd. Turning right allows you to drive to downtown Put-in-Bay.

George and I turned right and headed to the house that will be our home for the next few nights. The rental house, is no more than a half mile from the ferry dock and walking distance to the track if you want to jump the fence and jog across the runway. Probably not advisable but doable. The house sits on lake front property and while not the spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean from the bluffs of the Monterey Peninsula we had last week, it was a great view of Lake Erie and the Ohio shoreline.

We dropped our bags, jumped into George's rental car, turned right onto Langram Road, the main east/west street, and headed toward town for dinner. Immediately after we turned out of our driveway, we saw the CRP hauler sitting in the paddock which was a grassy field between the main street and the airport. Seeing how close it was to Langram Road we stopped to talk to the driver, Darrell.

Darrell had arrived late Saturday afternoon and took the ferry to South Bass Island so he could get the hauler situated in the paddock. When we walked up to



the truck, he was unloading gear that the team would need to support us for the weekend. He hadn't unloaded the cars because there was a chance of rain. As we talked to Darrell about his trip from Charlotte and Indy he opened a photo album on his phone and showed us a picture of the hauler coming off the

ferry. It was the picture from the front page of the Put-in-Bay Gazette that morning.

While talking to Darrell, we noticed that the runway of the airport was still operational and actually busy with air traffic as weekender's headed home. The runway is to be the main part of the track, but can't be set-up until air traffic is shut down tomorrow morning. The runway was approximately 100 yards from Langram and single engine planes are ferrying passengers back to the mainland, a Sunday evening ritual.

A couple hundred yards to the east of our paddock was race registration. As we bid Darrell good night, we decided to register before going to dinner. With the number of people leaving the island, we felt we would have no problem getting a seat in a restaurant. After registration, we ate dinner and headed back to our rental house to retire for the evening.

Monday morning, we were up early and ready to go to the track, but first headed to downtown Put-in-Bay to find a restaurant for breakfast. The traffic in the town was a stark contrast to Sunday evening. The streets were empty and the only people stirring were those headed to the track. We had a driver's meeting at 9:00 am, but the track wasn't available until 10:00 am. There was one last plane to land before we could use the airport, the mail plane. It lands at 9:00 am every morning and the hay bales used to outline the track can't be placed until the plane has landed, dropped the mail and departed.

Sure enough, as 9:00 approaches, the mail plane lands, spends approximately 30 minutes on the tarmac and then departs. Once the plane is gone, Jack along with a few volunteers, drove his personal car, towing a trailer loaded with hay bales, onto the runway and taxiways to lay out the track. The track used the runway plus the north and south taxiways. When we arrived that morning, George said, "it looks like we are at an auto cross event". His description was fairly accurate. The track was longer than an auto cross track but similar in that it had tight turns and narrow lanes.

One of our fellow competitors described the track as "very Pittsburg Vintage Grand Prix-esque" during the driver's meeting. The track has seen some small changes from its early beginnings to "make it more raceable", but it is nearly the same that has been used the last eight years. The number of cars racing has grown every year, with this year's field 40% larger than last. Jack has been trying to gain national recognition for the race and it appears he is moving in the right direction. In fact, a week after the race, Auto Week published a two-page article about the event.

With the conclusion of Driver's Meeting, George and I walked back to the hauler, got dressed in our driver's gear and waited for 10:00 am. We were the first Group out and anxious to see the track from the driver's seat. At 10:00 am, we rolled out for our first and only practice session. The field entered the track near the air control tower and drove onto the north taxiway, crossed the starting line then to a slight left-hand kink, which is turn 1. From there we went around the 180-degree horseshoe of turn 2 which put us on the east end of the runway. Up the nice wide runway for about a ¼ of a mile to turn 3. This was one of the wider sections of track but it narrowed very quickly as you approached turn 3. It reminded me of a construction zone that goes from four lanes to one. The difference was, in a construction zone you are given some warning of the road narrowing like a large blinking arrow pointing you in the direction you are to go. Not the case here. As you approach turn 3, it appears to be a wide sweeping turn to the apex which would make it very fast. On my first lap, I stayed wide only to realize that a number of hay bales were sitting in the spot where I was headed. I needed to be far left and I was far right. I reigned in the Vette, which is not always easy and got through 3 without incident. Turn 4 was a tight and narrow right hander onto the south taxiway. After driving on the south taxiway for approximately a ¼ of a mile you reach turn 5, another right hander identical to 4. The taxiway to turn 5 will provide a nice passing zone. Turn 5 puts the field on another short straightaway of approximately 50 yards to the left-handed turn 6. Taking turn 6 puts the car and driver on the west end of the runway. Here the track is very wide and allows a driver to make a wide sweeping arc into 7, the

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taxiway heading eastward. Out of turn 7 and down the short taxiway you find another 90-degree right hand, turn 8 and then an almost immediate left-hand turn, 9 onto the middle section of the runway. If your car has straightaway speed, this will be a terrific passing zone as you head to turn 10, a sweeping left hander. Just as you start to make the sweeping left-hand turn 10 off of the runway you cross the finish line. Because of the track's configuration, the start and finish lines are in two different locations.

With my reconnaissance lap complete and having seen the track layout first hand, I set about to learn the track and increase my speed. For the Corvette, this is a second and occasional third gear race track. I get to third gear after turn 2, between turns 4 and 5 and between turns 9 and 10, but just briefly. The Vette had straightaway speed but that wasn't much of an advantage with the short straightaways. The small nimble cars could easily out brake and out corner me. At Monterey the week before, I heard a fellow Vette driver describe these smaller cars as ankle biters. At Put-in-Bay, I knew exactly what he meant. There always were smaller displacement, lighter cars hanging around in the braking zones and corners. After my first lap, it was apparent that the track was even shorter and tighter than it appeared from the paddock. I couldn't rely on the torque and horsepower of the V-8 engine to cover up for bad driving techniques.

The Put-in-Bay Reunion was originally organized as a small-bore race. This year, an A Production class was added. AP (A Production) is usually reserved for big block cars like 427 cubic inch Corvettes, but at Put-in-Bay my 283-cubic inch Corvette and the 292-cubic inch Thunderbird were the A Production field. One would assume that the A Production cars would be the fastest cars on the track, but there were a number of 2.0 Liter cars turning faster lap times despite our faster straightaway speed.

The Monday morning practice session was run on a dry track, but rain was forecasted for Monday afternoon and all-day Tuesday. The Monday afternoon practice race was run in a very light drizzle. I started 10th based on my times from the morning session, but was able to drive to 4th by the end of the race. The track remained dry despite the light rain, so the Vette could accelerate off the corner without breaking the tires lose and the braking zones and corners were sticky enough to allow for normal race speeds. The Vette had enough power to pass smaller cars on the straightaways and because the turns were so narrow it was very difficult for them to repass in the braking zones or turns.

Tuesday morning dawned with rain falling more heavily than Monday. There were two races scheduled for Tuesday, one in the morning and the Put-in-Bay Cup Race Tuesday afternoon. As I looked at my phone's weather forecast and gazed into the sky, I decided that I would run the morning session, stay for lunch, watch the start of the second race and then head to the Cleveland Airport. I had to be home early Wednesday morning and couldn't take a chance on missing my flight to Indy.

In the Tuesday morning race, I lined up 8th with George next to me. I told him that he was going to be much faster in the rain, so I wouldn't fight him going into turn 1 and would let him have the corner. When green flag waved, I had an advantage of speed at the start, but I drove side-by-side with George to the turn 1 braking zone. I slowed sooner than normal, allowing him to shoot ahead. When I did, three other cars followed him. So, what had been an 8th place start turned into 12th place coming out of turn 2. I knew I was faster than the cars that passed me, so I got into the throttle and easily passed two cars on the straightaway after turn 2, but as we came down the straight, it started to rain harder. I had to stay off the painted areas of the runway, which were abundant, because they were like ice in the rain. I was doing everything I could to keep the cars I had just passed behind me. Through 3 and out of 4, without too



much tire spin, I headed to 5. I jumped to the inside lane and was determined to pass at least two more cars and not let the leaders get away.

Down the taxiway straight, I passed one car and was side by side with the second. It was a battle of manhood. Who would brake first? An odd question to ask someone with drum brakes in a car that weighs 3000 pounds and was running on Hoosier threaded bias ply tires designed for dry tracks. I quickly realized that I had too much speed to make the corner so rather than wreck a bunch of cars I turned right into the grass, WET GRASS, which never seems to have a high cohesion of friction, but it seemed like a better option than going into the turn and possibly wrecking one or two of my fellow competitor's cars. Once in the grass, the fun began. I found myself sliding diagonally at a 45-degree angle back toward the track just after the right-handed turn 5. This was not the plan. As I looked to where I was headed sideways, who was in that section of track headed to turn 6 but my good friend in his green and gold Porsche. Everything in my mind's eye was now moving in slow motion. As I continued to slide, I hit a couple of hay bales with the side of the car and continued moving sideways back onto the track pushing the hay bales along with me. There was no question I was going to broadside the multi-year 24 Hours in Daytona participant. I just hoped that the hay bales would lessen the damage. Just as I neared the historic 911, George jukeed to the left and the Vette found traction. We ended up next to each other headed to turn 6. The car that was in front of me before I took the detour, plus the cars that were directly behind me all slowed to avoid being collected by the idiot going too fast in the rain. With the Vette under control, I followed George through 6, 7 and 8. As I started to breathe again, I realized that I had gained 3 positions with that bonehead maneuver. I wasn't proud of it, but I was ahead of the three other cars. The cars behind me never tried to pass. My guess is they had a close-up view of my driving skill and decided to stay as far away as they could.

As the race continued, the rain increased in intensity which meant I had practically no chance of improving my finishing position. After another lap or two, I noticed that in turns 1 and 2 a large crowd of spectators had gathered. They

were standing in the rain, applauding and cheering every time I went by. So, being a red-blooded, or maybe that is red-necked, American who grew up with the sound of V-8 engines reverberating in his ears, I decided that the fans needed more to cheer about. With the track very wet and slippery, especially on the painted lines at the head of the runway, breaking the rear tires loose and hanging the tail out had become easy to do. So, each time I went through turn 2, I would hit the throttle, break the tires loose and slide the car through the corner. With each lap, the crowd grew. Like every red-neck, obviously I hadn't learned a thing from my adventure in turn 5 a few laps earlier, but the fans were loving it. The engine would bellow that loud, harsh V-8 sound when I was in the throttle and the crowd was hooting and hollering as the car fish tailed off the corner. I figured it was my job to entertain the fans since they were standing in the rain. Now that I think about it, who stands in the rain to watch old race cars racing on an airport. Perhaps a few of my red-necked brethren?

When the race ended, I entered the paddock and parked the Vette at the hauler. Nick walked up and said the pass in the grass was the best pass he had ever seen. He was dead serious and considering he has worked for AJ Foyt, was the crew chief for Jack Baldwin when Jack won the Trans-Am championship, was a crew chief in NASCAR, has been a team owner with Ron Fellows, Mike Skeen, Patrick Lindsey, Ryan Dalziel and Daniel Morad driving for him, I should have taken it as a compliment, but I couldn't. I told him, it wasn't designed to be a pass, it was just a dumb mistake and that I was elated that I didn't hit or damaged anyone's car, especially George's.

The rain persisted into Tuesday afternoon. A few minutes before 1:00, the fastest eight cars in each run group gathered at the false grid to line up for the Put-in-Bay Cup Race. The Corvette was invited to race, but after the drama of the morning session and the heavy rain, I decided to stick to my original plan, not race and head to the airport.

As George drove to the grid, he elected to start in the last position even though his times would have put him close to the front. George knew his car would be fast in the rain, but he had no visions of winning the race. Starting in the rear was going to be a self-challenge. The Cup race was scheduled for 20 laps, 5 laps longer than the previous races. When the green flag dropped, George started to work his way forward. It was raining hard, but George was driving one of the best races I had seen him drive. By lap 17, he was in second position but a straightaway behind the leader. He continued to push the remaining three laps, got to the leader's bumper coming out of turn 9 but couldn't get past him as the checkered flag fell. George finished second in the Cup Race. It was a thing of beauty. I kept wanting to leave for the airport, but couldn't tear myself away because it was one of the most exciting vintage races I have seen.

It is hard to say the Put-in-Bay Race Reunion was a good weekend, because it was actually held on Monday and Tuesday. It was a good Monday and Tuesday event. Holding a vintage race during the week is unusual, but considering the population change in Put-in-Bay over a weekend it would be nearly impossible to hold the event on a weekend. Other than destroying a few hay bales, I had a good time. I have raced on hay bale lined race courses in the past but it was a long time ago. As a 9 to 13-year-old, just as the Go Karting craze started, I raced on tracks that were lined with hay bales. In fact, the first track I raced on was dirt and hay bales were used to keep us on track. There was no such thing as run-off areas. If you strayed from the track, you destroyed a hay bale and bent the front bumper on your kart. Those soft looking hay bales aren't soft or gentle on a go kart or a car.

Put-in-Bay was another event that makes vintage racing a fabulous sport. The locations and the race are different every weekend. In a period of twelve weeks, I spent two weekends at Monterey racing against multi-million-dollar cars, the next weekend at Put-in-Bay racing against cars that were driven to the track and then halfway around the globe to race 60's and 70's Australian Touring cars up Mount Panorama in Bathurst. Back from Australia, I participated in the Savannah Speed Classic which is one of my favorite events, the Classic 24 Hours in Daytona partnering with Ron Fellows and Ray Evernham and the Classic 12 Hours of

Sebring racing with a talented young Australian named Thomas Randle. The endurance races in Daytona and Sebring pay homage to the professional 12 and 24-hour races which have been held annually since the 50's. Vintage racing is paying homage to my pre-teen and teenage years on race tracks around Chicago. Good times and fun to be had by all.