



# The CAR Enthusiast

October 2003

## *The President's Post*

By Christian LeHew

One of my favorite magazine articles was one written by Ken Gross in *Automobile* magazine back in 1987. In the article, Gross described the driving experience of his silver 1966 Ferrari 275 GTB (long nose, alloy body for you Ferraristi). He described it so well, you felt like you were in the passenger seat with him. The starting procedure is still stuck into my head. And although I've never been in the car, I can close my eyes and smell the heavy crankcase oil. It's an amazing automobile, but I remember that one of the things he mentions is that the car never feels happy unless it's running at over 90mph.

90mph? Sure, we've all hit it at some point in our driving experience. But that's pretty fast for a street car to finally feel at home. My boss' supercharged Viper feels the same way. 650hp feels great out on the highway, but the car was grumpy, drove terribly, and was ready to shake itself apart while I was driving it through city traffic. Same with another friend's pro-streets, Chrysler Hemi powered '34 Ford roadster. It'll run a quarter mile around 10 seconds flat, but then it's usability is done. You're forced to either run it at full bore, or turn it off.

Sure the Ferrari, the Viper and the Ford are in a totally different class than the Miata. But I was recently talking with a friend about cars, and the subject of performance versus driveability came up. And how much power really is too much?

It all got me thinking about the Miata and how much performance and good manners they provide, even though they're relatively underpowered in stock form. But even Miatas with forced induction and the latest and greatest suspension will tool around town all day. They handle well, have decent acceleration, and the fun factor is off the scale.

So while the supercharged Viper will run to 100mph in something like 5 seconds, I've admitted to many people that, given the choice, I'd really prefer some lesser cars for the pure driving experience. Including a Miata.

Anyone have the spare cash for a vintage Ferrari?

## *Top of the heap - or a top on the heap...*

I guess it's just how things age in the Miata world, but I've recently received a lot of questions from early M1 owners about replacement soft tops for their worn out or damaged OEM tops. Rather than a tech how-to article, I figured I'd pass on some information based on personal experience of mine and others to help answer some questions to help you make a more informed decision when the time comes for a new soft top for your Miata.

There are several different options for top replacement, especially for the M1 owner. The prices range from just a few hundred dollars to nearly \$1,000, depending on features and quality. The basic replacement top is made of vinyl and includes a plastic rear window. Up through the range is vinyl tops with glass rear windows, and even further still are cloth tops with either glass or plastic windows. I've also seen 3-window style tops (like what you used to see on British sports cars and Mercedes-Benz SL models), and while they do improve visibility, I've heard the side windows tend to scratch and crack easily since they flex so much during top operation.

I ended up replacing the OEM top on my 1991 about 4 years ago when a kid decided to slice through it just for fun. At the time, there wasn't much in the way of aftermarket tops, and even fewer local amateur mechanics who had done a top change. After shopping around a little, I decided to upgrade to a black vinyl top with a zip-out glass rear window made by Johnson-Robbins Co., and since the top frame was in good shape, I decided to reuse it.

In addition to Johnson-Robbins, you can also get new tops from such vendors as Cabrioworld, Duetto, and AA Best as well as a used top from a Mazda recycler or race car builder. However, if you decide, for example, to put an M2 top on an M1 Miata, you will need to retrofit the newer top frame.

From an installation standpoint, I've been able to swap a used top already attached to a frame into a Miata in about an hour. However, if you intend to reuse the existing frame, the job becomes exponentially more difficult, including drilling out and replacing a great deal of rivets, screws and bolts. When I did my top, it took me about 8 hours to get the job finished. If I were to do it again, I could do it faster, but it's still not a job for the novice mechanic.

An important part to consider with a new top is the installation of a rain rail. This is a plastic channel that is supposed to be riveted to the bottom edge of the top fabric (though I've never seen one attached that way), which catches all the water runoff from the top, and channels it to those two drain holes behind the seatbelt towers. These can crack if they're not removed carefully, so it's good to have a spare on hand. However, it's pretty likely that you can reuse the old one. You can check the condition of yours by pulling back the outer perimeter of the carpeting on the package shelf. The rain rail can be seen below a series of black metal brackets, and is molded in black plastic.

Another important part to replace is the tensioner cables. These are wire cables that attach to springs behind the top frame at the back edge of the side windows. The cables run through pockets in the top and attach to the frame near the windshield. These are in place to keep the edges over the windows tight to keep out wind and water, and prevent the top itself from shrinking. I made the mistake of not replacing these, and I'm getting a lot of wear and cracking on the top around the perimeter of the side windows.

If you're considering a roll bar, this will limit your options somewhat. M1 Miatas with a plastic rear window will fit pretty much any roll bar. If you have a zip-out glass window, this will limit you considerably. Any Miata with an M2 top will need to use a M2-specific roll bar. But before you buy, check with your roll bar and top manufacturers for compatibility.

## *Democracy in action*

As you may have realized, 2003 will be ending soon, and with it also ends the terms of the current club officers. However, since this club is an equal opportunity democracy, if you're a member in good standing and you'd like to run for an officer position, or would like to nominate someone, then we urge you to consider it. It's a small commitment, and a really great opportunity to not only meet other Miata enthusiasts, but to help make the club that much better.

For your reference, below is a list of the officer positions and their functions. If you have any specific questions, please feel free to contact any of the current officers listed below.

Christian LeHew, President  
hotroddesigner@hotmail.com  
410.377.8434

Thomas Kirchner, Vice President  
teegeek1976@yahoo.com

Brad Albert, Treasurer  
balbert@g-and-o.com

Elaine Farrell, Secretary  
silvermiata@comcast.net

### OFFICER DUTIES:

*1. The President shall preside at all Executive Board meetings, shall enforce these bylaws, shall sign and enforce contracts, shall sign checks (co-signed with Treasurer), shall appoint committees, shall assign duties to members, shall vote in the event of a tie and shall be responsible for carrying out the decisions of the membership. Upon completion of term of office, the Past President shall remain a member of the Executive Board for one year.*

*2. The Vice President shall preside and perform all duties of the President in his/her absence, shall have check-signing authority in the absence of the President and must co-sign all contracts. In the event of an absence of any elected officer, the Vice President assumes the duties of that officer until the absent officer resumes their duties or until a new officer is appointed for that office and confirmed by the Executive Board.*

*3. The Secretary shall keep minutes of the General Membership and Executive Board meetings, shall keep records of the membership, shall maintain a record of attendance for all meetings, shall be responsible for the preparation and mailing of all meeting notices and other club literature, shall furnish each member with a copy of these bylaws and their amendments as they occur, and shall maintain a file of minutes and records of past years. At the last meeting of his or her term, shall turn over to the new Secretary all minutes and records for club files.*

*4. The Treasurer shall issue and sign checks. Pay approved bills, collect all dues and other moneys from any and all sources and issue receipts, shall keep books of accounts and make a financial report at all club meetings, shall further make an annual financial report showing all income and disbursements at the last meeting of his or her term. At the last meeting of his or her term, shall turn over the records of the past year for the club files.*

Elections will be held at the Annual Membership Meeting in December, so please feel free to drop any of us a line or ask questions, and please consider running for office.

## *Visit our newest sponsor!*

We're very proud to announce the addition of our newest CAR club sponsor, Congressional Mazda in Rockville. They're offering a 15% discount on parts exclusively to CAR members, just make sure to tell the parts consultants to use code #40. Plus, I'm sure they'd give you a great deal on a new Mazda.

So stop by the dealership at 801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, call them at 301-424-7800 or check them out online at [congressionalmazda.com](http://congressionalmazda.com).

## *Monthly Miata Meetings*

We're starting up monthly meetings every third Thursday at 7:30pm to not only grab something to eat, but to discuss everything from club business to Formula One racing to whatever. This is a great opportunity for anyone who would like to come out and meet some of the members in a casual environment, and you don't even need to wash the car. Plus, it'll give you a chance to talk directly to the club administrators with your input or questions. So bring a friend, a family member, or a new Miata owner, but most importantly, bring yourself out to one of our monthly membership meetings! See the upcoming events section below for this month's location.

## *'Parts Department' closed, maybe*

Due to a recent policy change at our supplier, we've been forced to temporarily close the Parts Department. We're currently looking for a new vendor for all your CAR-logo'd needs, so once we find one that will give us great quality at an even better price, we'll be sure to let everyone know.

## *Become a published author!*

Have you just completed a cool project on your Miata that you want to share with other club members? Did you attend an event that was so cool you want to write an article about it? Find a new road that seems like it was designed *just for* Miatas? Got an idea for a future event or article? Then drop us a line and we'll put it in next month's issue. Deadline for submissions is October 27th. All submissions can be sent to Christian LeHew at [hotroddesigner@hotmail.com](mailto:hotroddesigner@hotmail.com).

## *Playin' with the neighbor's kids*

The idea has been brought up to see about doing an event or two with another car club. Not necessarily another Miata club, but perhaps a Triumph club, Jaguar club, etc. As you can probably assume, there are quite a few car clubs in the area, so if you're a member of one, know someone who is, or just think of one that would be cool to spend the day with (I'm leaning towards Ferrari, myself!), then feel free to drop us a line with the contact info, and we'll take it from there.

## *A place for the race*

If you've gone to any autocrossing events this year, you've probably heard one of us (or someone else) griping about the lack of racing sites in the area. "So what can I do?" Glad you asked.

The autocross community is always on the lookout for new venues where we can race. In a perfect world, they'd be smooth, flat, free of traffic islands, and about 20 miles away from a residential area. Event organizers realize not all these parameters can always be met, but there's been a plea to the community to help find some new sites where we can go racing. Maybe it's the parking lot at work. Or a big school parking lot. Or your friend's airfield.

So if you know of an area that you think might be a possibility, PLEASE let one of us know, and we'll have one of the local officials check it out.

## *Past Events & Happenings*

### **Charity Car Show – September 20th**

Hurricane Isabel blew through two days earlier, but the weather that Saturday was gorgeous. Eight Miatas turned out for the second annual MOSpeed Car Show at Mt. Oak Fellowship Church in Bowie. Heck, I think there were more Miatas than Civics! The cars were polished up, and drew a crowd, especially when the hoods were opened up. The CAR group not only took a place of prominence at one end of the field, but Mike (GoKart) and Sunhak (VoID) took home second and third place in the Show & Go category, but got beat out by a tastefully customized Civic hatchback with an engine swap and turbo. Kirk's car was deemed too low for judging.

### **Tech Day - September 27th**

Fourteen Miatas, a lowered S-10 pickup, and a sweet 100th Anniversary Harley-Davidson Dyna came out to Mike's for CAR's usual blend of Miata wrenching, good grillin', and general party antics. JD debuted the new paint job on his 1990 that looked amazing. His friend Jim even drove all the way down from Connecticut in his rare '93 LE while new guy Chris showed off his even more rare '00 Evolution Orange that has since been autocrossed. And speaking of new members, it was also great to see Mark and his M1 again, and Wally and his son pulled up in their new '99. Kirk and Christian took turns riding the moped waaaaay faster than it was designed for, and Mike's potato gun was even brought out under the cover of night. There's nothing like the smell of fresh french fries moving at about 500 feet per second...

## *Upcoming Events*

*Please RSVP where indicated. For full details, check out the Events section of the CAR forum at <http://www.chesapeakeadsters.com>. If you have an idea for a future event, please drop a line to our Events Coordinator, Christian LeHew, at [hotrod designer@hotmail.com](mailto:hotrod designer@hotmail.com) or call 410.377.8434.*

### **Sunday, October 5th – TARA/MWCSCC Autocross - CANCELLED**

Unfortunately, the TARA group has decided to cancel this session.

### **Saturday, October 11th– Tech Day - Owings, MD**

One of our newest members, Wally Simpkins, is a proud new owner not only of a '99 Miata, but of a new 2-bay garage! Well, Wally's one heck of a nice guy, and is so happy to meet a bunch of Miata nuts like us, that he's invited us down to his home for a tech day. On the list so far is a roll bar install, a suspension swap, and several clutch & brake fluid bleedings. The pool will be closed for the winter, but Wally said we

were welcome to come by anyway. His wife is making up some Mexican delicacies, and we'll also have some burgers and hotdogs. As always, if there's a side dish, chips, cookies, sodas, etc. that you'd like to bring, they'll be more than welcome. Make sure you mark calendar and take a ride out to this event.

**DIRECTIONS TO THE TECH DAY:**  
9185 Nana Russell Rd, Owings, MD 20736

From the Annapolis area:  
South on Rt.2 heading toward Prince Frederick in Calvert Co.  
Right at the Calvert/Anne Arundle Co border is Rt. 260. Take a left at the light heading east toward Chesapeake Beach. About 8/10th of a mile on the left you'll see Nana Russell RD...turn left and go straight down the hill. At the bottom of the hill you'll see 3 parallel driveways...Wally's is the one on the right.

From the DC Beltway:  
Take Rt. 4 (Pennsylvania Ave) south toward Prince Frederick in Calvert Co. Continue south until you see the exit for Rt. 260 toward Chesapeake Beach. Continue east crossing Rt 2 (light). About 8/10th of a mile past the Rt. 2/260 intersection on the left you'll see Nana Russell Rd....turn left and go straight down the hill. At the bottom of the hill you'll see 3 parallel driveways...Wally's is the one on the right.

If you end up in the Bay you've gone too far ☐

#### **Thursday, October 16th – Monthly membership meeting**

This month's meeting will be held at 7:30 at Rocky Run restaurant in Columbia. It's located near the intersection of Dobbin Road and Rt. 175 (Little Patuxent Parkway) and just off 95. Follow 95 to the exit for Rt. 175 towards Columbia. Go about three lights, and make a left onto Dobbin Road. Make a right at the first light (you'll see the Rocky Run and a Mr. Tire on your right), and follow the driveway back to the sharp right turn, and turn right into the parking lot. Ask the hostess for the Miata club table.

#### **Saturday, October 18th – Scenic Drive**

If you're up for spending the day putting some mileage on the car and driving on some of the twistiest, hilliest roads outside of Deals Gap, NC, then mark Saturday, October 18th on your calendars.

We'll be meeting at the Mars Supermarket on the corner of Harford Road and Joppa Road just north of Baltimore at 10:15am for a 10:30am departure. From there, we'll head north through Bel Air, across Conowingo Dam and the Susquehanna River, and on towards Kennett Square and through some twisty roads in the woods of SE Pennsylvania and northern Delaware. We'll stop for lunch at the Brandywine Brewing Company, then make our way back towards Baltimore. It should be a lot of fun, and the roads are great, so bring a friend, and your Miata, and come out for a fantastic drive! **Please RSVP to Christian by October 15th so we can tell the restaurant how many to expect.**

**DIRECTIONS TO THE MARS SUPERMARKET:**  
Take the Baltimore Beltway (route 695) north of Baltimore to exit 31B (Harford Road north). At the first light, you'll see the shopping center on the corner on your right. We'll be parked out in the lot towards the road.

#### **Saturday, November 8th – Tech Day**

It may be the last one of the season (unless anyone wants to volunteer their heated garage), so grab your tools, and head over to Brad's for CAR's usual brand of wrenching, eating, and general shenanigans.

**DIRECTIONS TO BRAD'S (FROM THE NORTH):**

RT. 3 South through Crofton

Make a right on Rt. 450

Follow 450 through Bowie, Past HS. etc..

Cross Rt. 197 then your next light is Church Road.

Make a left onto Church Road (look for the Shell station)

Church road will wind through some S turns then make a hard right.

Don't get to excited about the hard right because right at the apex of it you will need to make a left on to Old Stage Road!

Make you second Right on to pleasant View Drive. Follow that to Heatherstone.

We're at the corner of Heatherstone and Pleasant View drive.

**DIRECTIONS TO BRAD'S (FROM THE SOUTH)**

RT. 3 North through Crofton

Make a left on Rt. 450

Follow 450 through Bowie, Past HS. etc..

Cross Rt. 197 then your next light is Church Road.

Make a left onto Church Road (look for the Shell station)

Church road will wind through some S turns then make a hard right.

Don't get to excited about the hard right because right at the apex of it you will need to make a left on to Old Stage Road!

Make you second Right on to pleasant View Drive. Follow that to Heatherstone.

We're at the corner of Heatherstone and Pleasant View drive.

\*\*Anybody coming via 50 just get off at 197, take that to 450, make a left and follow same as above.

**Sunday, November 9th– Charity Autocross - CANCELLED**

Unfortunately, this has also been canceled due to organizational problems within the Z Car Club.

**Thursday, November 20th – Monthly membership meeting**

Location TBD. Look for details in next month's newsletter or on the forum.

**Sunday, November 23rd - Scenic drive - Mt. Airy, MD**

At the request of several members, we'll be taking a Sunday drive via the scenic route through the fall colors (hopefully) to the Linganore Winery in Mt. Airy. The drive is supposed to be beautiful, and the winery itself is a perfect compliment. We'll be able to tour the winery and see the manufacturing process, and you may be able to do a tasting as well. I'm not much on wine myself, but Linganore wines are really pretty good, not too terribly expensive, and are made locally. Look for more details online and in next month's newsletter.

**Saturday, December 6th – Scenic drive – Frederick County**

We've been invited to join the Mason-Dixon Miata Club and the PACE Miata club for a drive out to Antietam Battlefield (near Hagerstown) for the annual Antietam Battlefield Illumination. This is supposed to be a very moving, yet beautiful, experience. We've also been invited to enjoy some chili at one of the Mason-Dixon members home before heading over. We'll be meeting at the Park & Ride at Rt. 32 and Rt. 70 in Sykesville for a 2pm departure. **Please RSVP to Christian by November 30th if you'll be coming.**

### **December 2003 - Scenic drive (kinda) - Baltimore**

With the holidays near, there's a possibility of an impromptu run over to Hampden (north Baltimore) to check out the famous "Lights on 34th Street". You may remember seeing these on a Maryland Lottery commercial a couple years ago, but for anyone who's not familiar with them, it's an entire neighborhood block that completely decorates the outside of their houses in lights, figurines, model trains, hubcap trees, and music. But it's to the point of needing sunglasses. At night. It's really incredible, and quite a sight to behold if not for it's holiday spirit, then for the sheer amazing absurdity. Afterwards, maybe we'll warm up someplace nearby for a bite to eat and some "holiday cheer". Stay tuned.

### **December 2003 – Annual Membership Meeting**

We're still finalizing a date and location, but as soon as we do, make sure to mark it on your calendar and come out for our Annual Membership Meeting. This is your chance to not only vote on next year's officers, but also to make suggestions, ask questions, and meet the great group of Miata enthusiasts that make up the club.

## *Support your sponsors!*

### **CONGRESSIONAL MAZDA**

<http://www.congressionalmazda.com>

301-424-7800

- 15% discount on all parts

### **ENDLESS ROAD**

<http://www.endlessroad.com>

301-497-0369

- 10% off all in-stock items

\* Be sure to ask about available Miata memorabilia!

### **MIATANUTS**

<http://www.miatanuts.com>

866-642-8268.

- 10% off all Jackson Racing products

- 1/2 price shipping on Hard Dog Roll Bars (savings of between \$25 & \$32.50/ bar)

- 20% off all apparel (polo shirts, tees, fleece pullovers, vests, jackets)

If there is something else that you may be interested in, contact them about that specific item and they'll work with you the best they can. They even sell BMW and MINI parts too!

### **RICH MORTON MAZDA**

<http://www.richmorton.com>

866-260-6028

- Exclusive CAR member discounts on all parts and service