

RACE NOTES

OUR FIRST TRANS-AM

The 1970 Schaefer Trans-Am at Lime Rock Park, CT was our first TransAm event. Lime Rock would not have been my first choice for our introduction to Trans-Am racing. On this tight course, our 1966 Shelby and its rookie driver were up against the likes of Mark Donohue, Dan Gurney, Parnelli Jones, Ed Leslie, Peter Revson, Swede Savage, Jerry Titus, George Follmer, Sam Posey, and Jim Hall (which was the order of the first 10 cars on the starting grid) in heavily backed factory machines. Jan qualified 21st with a time of 1:09.7 for an average speed of 79.02 mph. Mark Donohue took the pole in his Javelin with a 58:8.8, for a 93.67 mph average speed.



As the race began we started experiencing overheating problems. This was something we never had trouble with before. As it turned out we failed to add a coolant additive and we were running plain water. After just 16 laps we retired the car, a disappointing DNF - 23rd in our first TransAm. Winner - Parnelli Jones.

FIRE AT BRYAR

The May 31, 1970, Bryar Motorsport Park, Loudon New Hampshire, Herald Travler Trans-Am was the scene of our second event for 1970.



Peter Revson, winner of six points for Javelin in the manufacturer's series at Bryar, passes Jim Hall's Camaro with Jan Nelson in the Ray Cuomo Racing '66 Mustang picking up the draft
(Steve Annis Photo - Autoweek)

During practice we lost a clevis pin from the shift linkage. Since the car was across from the pits, SCCA officials allowed me to go to the car - a paper clip got us back into action. Awhile later we lost the clutch. That night was spent out in the grass changing the clutch with an alignment tool borrowed from the Bud Moore team. A local club was running time trials on the oval that night. It was fun watching these drivers in all types of cars.

Raceday - we started 23rd with a qualifying time of 1:25.8 for an average speed of 67.104 mph. Swede Savage took the pole with a 1:12.8 which translates to 79.120 mph. After only 12 laps we had a fire in the engine compartment. It seems when we replaced the scattershield the night before, which was the rubber type which went around the bellhousing, a portion of the rubber was laying against the exhaust pipe and caught fire. The corner workers dumped Purple K down the carbureator as well as the bellhousing area which prevented us from getting back into the race - better safe than sorry I guess. DNF 21st. Winner - George Follmer.

A much more serious fire occurred when the car pitting directly behind us came in for fuel, it backfired and the flame ignited some of the splashed gas. The fire was extinguished quickly, however one of their crew members was taken away in an ambulance with severe burns.

MID-OHIO TRANS-AM

Jan made the trip to the June 7, 1970 Mid-Ohio Trans-Am with John Gimbel as crew, I could not make the trip. Jan qualified 29th with a 2:01.2 for a 71.29 mph average speed. Mark Donohue and Ed Leslie tied for pole with a time of 1:40.0 for an average speed of 85.54 mph. The 3rd and 4th positions on the grid was also a tie between the Bud Moore Mustangs of Parnelli Jones and George Follmer with 1:41.3 laps.

Autoweek headlined the event as "Moore Mustangs Survive Rough Mid-Ohio Trans-Am Race" During the race Swede Savage could not seem to pass us without contact, although other drivers could. SCCA officials urged us to "retire". So we developed a loose spoiler we never had! Another disappointing DNF - 26th after only 24 laps. Winner - Parnelli Jones.

HOME SWEET HOME

Would a change of color change our luck? Leaving the car Silver and Black, the same color scheme as in the Daytona 24 Hour race in which it finished 2nd in class in February of this year, did not rub off. For the June 21, 1970 Marlboro Trans-Am at Bridgehampton, NY (our "home" track) #6 debuted in Orange and Black. This was the same color scheme as the other Ray Cuomo Racing Mustang entered in the race, the former Malcolm Starr 1968 car now owned and driven by John Gimbel. The same John Gimbel from whom we bought Number 6.



Rain began at lap 10 of the 70 lap event.

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Practice and qualifying at our home track were without problems. A 2:02.5 found us 26th on the grid at 84.0 mph. Swede Savage took the pole at 100.1 mph with a 1:43.0 lap time. Unfortunately for the Dan Gurney AAR Barracuda team, the driveline once again was not up to the task the engine demanded, and the Barracuda DNF'd. Ray started the race and Jan took over around lap 20. We had one unscheduled stop for a small oil pan leak. Our home track was good to us, and to Mark Donohue with Javelins first win of the season.



Ray and Gene Cuomo congratulating Jan after the race. Note John Gimbels '68 (former Malcolm Starr) car in the background.

OUR FIRST FINISH 18th!
LONG LIVE "THE BRIDGE"

NORTH TO CANADA

Our next Trans-Am event for 1970 was the August 2, St. Jovite Trans-Am at le Circuit Mont Tremblant, Quebec, Canada. When we stopped at the border the Canadian Customs Officials would not let us bring in our spare tires and wheels. We had to leave these expensive items at a gas station on the U.S. side of the border and hoped we did not need them.

We qualified with a time of 2:10.1, good for 35th on the grid with an average speed of 73.33 mph. Parnelli Jones took the pole with a 1:47.3 translating to 88.91 mph. We retired after 12 laps. DNF - 31st. Winner - Mark Donohue.

1970 WATKINS GLEN TRANS-AM

We experienced our first DNQ at the Glen August 16th. Qualifying saw 46 cars vie for the 35 starting positions. We qualified 43rd with a 1:31.29 lap. Parnelli Jones took the pole with a 1:13.7.

A NEW SEASON - A NEW LOOK



1971 saw our "New Look". Number 6 was now blue with "Ray Cuomo Racing" in white letters along the front fenders. We even sported uniforms.



Our opening event for the 1971 season was back at Lime Rock Park for the Schaefer Trans-Am on May 8.



Jan and the New Look of Number 6

During practice we lost a wheel going into the esses and spun out in front of the big hill. I don't think Ray Cuomo Racing was looking for that type of exposure. The wheel lugs had loosened up on the left rear and the damage to the axle studs as well as the rim were to plague us the entire weekend. With our limited practice and problems keeping the left rear wheel tight we qualified 29th.



Two of the Ray Cuomo Racing Mustangs, left: Leo Tomczyk in the ex-Starr/Gimbel '68 car and Jan in Number 6.

The race itself was just as disappointing and wet. As in practice, we had trouble keeping the left rear wheel lugs tight. After many pit stops to re-tighten the lugs, the studs finally gave up after 84 laps and we retired the car to DNF - 22nd. Winner - Mark Donohue.

1971 BRYAR TRANS-AM

Unfortunately an accident on the way to the race prevented us from making the event. Fortunately however, there were no injuries or major damage except to about 60 feet of guardrail along the Connecticut Turnpike. Our first DNA.

1971 PLAYER'S QUEBEC TRANS-AM

August 1, 1971 we returned to le Circuit Mont Tremblant. We qualified 20th with a time of 2:03.6, 15 positions higher than our 1970 start! 13 laps into the race we were spectators once again. Jan came into the pits with a bad vibration in the right front, the spindle had snapped. DNF - 31st. Fastest Qualifier (1:46.1) and eventual Winner - Mark Donohue.



On the grid at St. Jovite.

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1971 SUMMIT POINT IMSA CAMEL GT

September 19, 1971 we were in Summit Point, West Virginia for the Summit Point 250. This was our first IMSA event. Jan started 17th in the consolation race and finished 3rd to get us into the main event. I had the opportunity to co-drive with Jan in this event and we brought Number 6 home 5th in Class. The Johnson/Young/Pratt Camaro finished on the same lap ahead of us. Jan was running in the low 1:40s and I in the low 1:50s, were it not for my slower times we could have finished 4th in Class. Still, had a great fun filled weekend. Hurley Haywood and Peter Gregg won the race in a Porsche 914/6.

1972 SCHAEFER TRANS-AM

We qualified 31st, finished 16! George Follmers Javelin took the pole with a 0:59.185 for an average speed of 93.04 mph and led flag to flag. We were the 13th car running at the finish. The rules credit finishing positions based upon laps completed and 3 cars, not running at the finish, had completed more laps than we did. We did spend 27 minutes in the pits to correct a fuel problem. With the approximately 23 laps lost in the pits we could have finished 13th. "The road back from the races..."



Ray Cuomo watching the action.

1972 BRYAR 200 TRANS-AM

May 29th we were back at Bryar after missing last years event. We qualified 29th with a time of 1:22.9, faster than our 1970 time of 1:25.8 however we were 23rd on the grid in 1970. We completed only 48 laps for a 23rd place finishing position.

1972 BRIDGEHAMPTON NARRC NY 400

Home Sweet Home - Bridgehampton was good to us again for the SCCA North American Road Racing Championship event, the New York 400 on August 12-13. Jan and I brought our 6 year old #6 home 1st in class, 3rd O/A and 4th on Index.

1973 POCONO IMSA CAMEL GT

Definitely a "Low Light". On the tech line a short burned up most of the alternator wiring harness. Spent most of the first practice session re-wiring the harness. We were experiencing ignition problems and dropped the oil pump drive shaft when we pulled the distributor just before qualifying. We hoped it fell to the bottom of the oil pan so just replaced it with a spare and went out to qualify - no such luck! The drive must have hung up on the pump or oil pan baffels and during qualifying found its way into some of the moving parts and destroyed the engine. With only a few laps we still managed to qualify 43rd of the 59 qualifiers. Without a spare engine we experience our first DNS.



l. to r. Jan Nelson, Cathy Fulton (the Judy Stropus of Ray Cuomo Racing and Mrs. Jan Nelson to be) and Frank Dobias

1974 SCHEAFER TRANS-AM

Our hopes were high for the 1974 season. Rule changes permitted us to prepare a 302ci engine. We purchased a set of 351 Windsor Heads from Holman and Moody along with one of their cams, Crane roller rockers, special pistons, Ford TransAm rods and a dual quad manifold.



Ray Cuomo installing "the grenade" at Ray Cuomo Racing in Glen Cove, Long Island

When practice began the engine sounded great and we had more power than we ever had. Our jubilation was short (very short) lived. After only a few laps Jan came in with high water temperature and low oil pressure. We pulled the pan and found #8 rod bearing pounded out and the rod end blued. We did not have enough time to replace the engine so chalked up our second DNS.

1976 GLEN 6 HOUR / TRANS-AM

Looking for reliability we opted for the fairly stock 271 HiPo engine instead of the 302. Qualifying against Porsche, BMW and Monza GP cars as well as our TransAm class we failed to qualify within the 120% rule. Another DNQ at the Glen. When the race started the leading pack of Porsches and BMWs started lapping cars by the 8th lap - so much for the 120% rule.

1978 EMRA BRYAR ENDURO

The Eastern Motor Racing Association 1978 Enduro at Bryar was held on August 26-27. Jans 1:21.8 put us 2nd on the grid. We experienced some overheating problems during the race however a broken left rear axle put us out of the race on lap 62.