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The Gumpert Apollo is a deeply controversial [automobile](#). Ask random people on the street what they think of the Gumpert Apollo, and you'll get a wide range of answers. One person might say, "What did you call me?" while the next will say, "Oh, I loved him in Rocky III." So when I told the editors of this fine publication that I was going to drive the Gumpert Apollo, they replied, "Isn't he the fat kid in that cartoon?" Gumpert Apollo, you've had quite enough cake!

Pat yourself on the back if you know that the Gumpert Apollo is, in fact, a mid-engine, 650-hp, \$600,000 German monster of a car. And when I got the invite to drive it at the Monticello Motor Club in New York, I knew what I was getting into, since I subscribe to *Obscure Supercar Magazine*. Only fifty Apollos exist worldwide, and the car at Monticello is one of no more than three in the United States. Just the thing for the guy who's sick of seeing himself coming and going in his Koenigsegg CCX.

I set out from Boston with my friend Dennis in a Porsche Boxster S. I've never been to Monticello, so I figure I can use the Porsche to recon the track while other people are getting their yucks in the Gumpert. I also recruit my friend Steve. He just got a steal on a leftover Chevrolet Corvette Z06, and soon after he bought it, he called me and said, "There's a problem with this car. You can't use it. Anywhere." Au contraire. At the glorious fantasyland of Monticello, the road is empty and speed limits are nonexistent.

Monticello is a modern track with generous runoff areas, but that doesn't mean it's benign. This point is underscored when one of the first drivers of the day spins the Apollo. He doesn't hit anything, but the next guy does, introducing Mr. Gumpert to Mr. Tire Wall. To its credit, the

Gumpert wins that battle. But it'll need a little TLC back at the garage, sitting up on its integral air jacks while technicians inspect the front end. By this time, both the Boxster and the Z06 are on fumes, so we head to a nearby gas station to refuel. Only one of us makes it.

The Z06 runs out of gas and rolls to a stop at an Orthodox Jewish summer camp. We'd noticed the camp on the way to the track, because evidently the

Honda Odyssey is its official vehicle. You've never seen so many Honda Odysseys, outside of an auto mall. Rows of them are parked next to the cabins. So a red Corvette Z06 is a bit of an attraction. By the time we return with a miniature can of gas, Steve and his lifeless Vette have drawn quite a crowd, with adults and kids milling about and ogling the car.

They're curious about us; I'm curious about the Odysseys. As Jerry Seinfeld might say -- what's the deal with all the Odysseys? "It's a good, solid [family vehicle](#)," replies a guy checking out the Boxster. Speaking of Seinfeld, there are questions about him. "Is he there?" asks a woman on her way past with a group of campers. "We heard he's a member at the track. If you see him there, tell him to stop by and we'll have a cold glass of lemonade for him." I agree to pass along the message.

Back at the track, the Apollo has had its nose reattached, now with a rattle-can paint job on the front splitter. It's good to go, except for one minor issue - goober drivers have been stalling it all day, and the battery is toast. Thus, my first interaction with the Gumpert comes not from [behind the wheel](#) but from behind the rear deck, where Steve and I are pushing. If you ever find yourself push-starting a stranded Gumpert, be sure to mind the rear diffuser, which juts out far beyond the rear bumper, like some sort of carbon-fiber farm implement. "Boy, you go get in the Gumpert and plow that field, ya heah?"

Finally, near the end of the day, I get a chance to strap myself into the Apollo. The seats are pieces of padding attached to the tub, but the pedals and the steering wheel are adjustable. I'm reasonably comfortable, but I notice that my passenger, a driving instructor, is sitting with his knees on the same plane as his *** Is it a bad sign that he's already in the crash position?

Having observed Stallfest 2010 all day long, I use plenty of revs to get out of the garage. The clutch is actually pretty progressive. The shifter, though, is my nemesis. The Gumpert uses a sequential racing transmission, and the shifter demands a belligerent shove. "Hit the shifter like you're trying to break it off," recommends the instructor. This I do. And I still end up in the neutral no-man's land between gears.

Once I bludgeon the thing into third gear, though, it's business time. Pointing down the long straight, I slowly squeeze the throttle to the floor. The Audi 4.2-liter V-8 snorts and wheezes, and I think that something's wrong; maybe I broke it. Then the turbos spool up. Charting the Apollo's power curve would be like charting a punch in the face from UFC heavyweight champion Brock Lesnar. You're either being punched in the face or you're not. There's no middle ground.

When the Apollo's turbos aren't blowing, you've got a grumpy Gumpert on your hands. When they're lit up, though...well, I can see how the off-track shenanigans happened earlier today. When that giant turbocharged on/off switch gets flicked, you'd better be pointed straight.

I get into fourth gear, flub the downshift at the end of the straight, and complete a very ugly lap. But I don't stall and I don't crash. Which, in a car like this, counts as something like success. I make no Apollo-gies.

The Gumpert Apollo is what I imagine old-school exotics to be like -- it can't tolerate loafing and is probably happiest when it's being absolutely thrashed. It's a car that will make valets cry. Also, it's possibly cursed. Heading away from the track that night, the Gumpert's transporter hit an overpass. The trailer was totaled. The Gumpert, though, was miraculously unscathed, like a sinister, track-ready Christine.

It's a magnet for calamity, this car. And some well-heeled drivers are gonna dig that. But if Jerry Seinfeld does someday get a crack at a Gumpert at Monticello, I might recommend that he head down the street and go for the glass of cold lemonade instead.

*Written by Ezra Dyer
Illustration by Tim Marrs*

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