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New Racetrack, Great Cars, and Nostalgia

by Mike Covello

Have you ever had one of those days when everything goes your way? Well almost everything...

When Bruce Wennnerstrom of the Madison Avenue Sportscar Driving and Chowder Society sent me an invitation to try the hottest Cadillacs at the newest racetrack in the Northeast, I could hardly wait to hit reply. Sunday morning dawned crisp and cold as I headed out in a bright red 2009 Audi A4. The sporty sedan made for a nice partner on the over 320-mile roundtrip. I was impressed that I was able to squeeze over 28-mpg from the 2.0-liter four despite a sometimes heavy foot.

As I drove, I recalled my exciting "date" with a Cadillac CTS-V a few weeks ago at GM's full-line introduction. I have never experienced such an intoxicating blend of sumptuous luxury and seductive performance prowess. If I had had so much fun driving it on

the street, what would it be like to explore this now-performance-icon on an unrestricted racetrack?

The drive out I-84 to NY route 17 brought back a lot of memories. For decades, I would make the pilgrimage out to Watkins Glen Speedway. My initial trips were as a spectator, then for one glorious opportunity, I was a part of the Luigi Chinetti Motors Ferrari North American Racing Team. A few years later, a day of Keith Code's California Superbike school prepared me for lapping Germany's Nurburgring a week later and finally as a reveler in the glorious nostalgia of the vintage racing weekends.

But enough with the past, the Monticello Motor Club opened up their fabulous road racing course this summer, and it truly is state of the art. One of my racecar driving heroes, Brian Redman, had a hand in designing the 4.1 miles of twisting asphalt. The 22 turns, 450 feet of ups & downs, and



XLR-V
Covello Photos



CTS-V
Covello Photos

the 1.5 miles of straights can be configured into 22 different sections.

A phone call to the track (1-877-578-RACE) had tipped me off that we would be driving the Cadillac CTS-V, two-seat XLR-V and the normally-aspirated CTS sedans on small sections of the track. So after registration I asked for the track's public relations officer. I was lucky enough to then be introduced to William H. McMichael, the president and part owner of the track.

I inquired if there was some way I could get a ride around the whole track. After a moment's contemplation Bill picked up his radio and snapped, "Bring my

car around." Now, if we were 90 minutes away in Manhattan, Bill's car would have most likely been some sort of limo, but Bill rolls a bit differently.

The snarling sound preceded the sight of Bill's car. It was way better than an STS. Heck, it was better than a Batmobile. A sinister looking 2009 Ferrari F430 Scuderia pulled up in front of the door. This is the coupe version of the "entry-level", hardtop street car that comes from the factory ready to hit the track.

As we strapped into the carbon fiber buckets and awaited the lunch break that would afford us a two-lap-window-of-opportunity, Bill filled me in on some details. The Monticello Motor Club is designed to be a first-class country club race resort for those rich guys and girls who want a challenging

place to exercise their high-powered toys. Membership costs an initial \$125,000 to join plus a \$7,500 annual dues fee. For 200 track days a year. There are no public races held at this venue.

The radio crackled that we were good to go. With a tug of the right-side paddle shifter, Bill selected first and we rocketed out onto the track. I've driven at over a dozen tracks from Lime Rock to the Nurburgring. Only the latter's 14-miles of "Green Hell" could come close to preparing me for the experience.

On the track's opening day, Mario Andretti came back in after his inaugural laps and shook his head. Mario commented that the track was so technical that it would take him a year to learn the right line around the course. Rather than be discouraged, Bill was happy that his members would not get easily bored with what Redman et. al. had wrought.

I was happy that my first experience with a fellow who flirts with holding the fastest lap record. Cold tires prohibited any attempt at 10/10ths laps, but the Ferrari's screaming V8 made short work of the 3/4 mile long back straight. The second time around, the speedometer zipped past 140-mph before the carbon ceramic discs hauled us down for the tight corner. I'm sure the sight and sound of this supercar screaming around the track whet the appetite of the assembled group for some serious need for speed.

The CTS sedans were equipped with the 304-hp direct injection version of the 3.6-liter V6. Four of us piled into the luxury sedan and as we followed our instructor around the south end course I was immediately impressed with how the car responded with a full load. rode comfortably, but

could power slide through the corners with just a bit of effort.

The Corvette-based XLR-V two-seater provided more power and more of a sportscar feel. A bit longer straight meant slightly higher velocities were achieved. Overall the car felt much more comfortable on the track than the four-door CTS. But the capper was the 556-horsepower CTS-V. They had the fastest car on hand that set the fastest production sedan record for a lap around the Nurburgring at just under eight minutes.

I got behind the sensuous suede-covered wheel of a car equipped with a six-speed manual, but there is also a six-speed automatic. The 6.2-liter supercharged V8 is an amazing and refined at the same time. The enormous Brembo brakes are shared with the track version of the Ferrari Enzo, and the handling can be adjusted for Sport or Comfort. While behind the wheel of this modern marvel I came to realize exactly why Cadillac has been known as the Standard of the World.

The car's ability to put down the rear wheels was impressive. The handling in both Comfort and Sport mode was so good, it would take a long time to find the limits. And when it came time to stand on the brakes, speed was shed from 100-30-mph in the blink of an eye.

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All too soon my time was over and I headed back home with dreams of GM's bright future dancing in my head. The disappointment? By the time I reached the track the sun had gone behind the gathering clouds and the temperature was a blustery 42 degrees. All in all it was a near perfect day, my thanks to all involved who helped make it happen.



Craig Gates
Owner



Chris Messier
General Mgr.

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