

David Maher Previews The Monticello Motor Club

Published by Peter July 11th, 2008 (www.gumball144.com)



The Monticello Motor Club near the Catskills is a members-only, high-entry fee club that offers its members 200 track days a year on a road course that Brian Redman had a hand in designing. The following is David's trip to Monticello a couple of weeks ago.

Sunday, June 29. I found myself being handed the keys to a 2007 (Grigio Silverstone over Bordeaux) Ferrari F 430 and the generous owner telling me, "Just drive it like you stole it!" The crazy part was the guy knew all about my driving exploits. So we topped her off with gas and headed up to the Wide World of Cars dealership in Spring Valley, NY. There we would meet up with a lot full of their clientele before rallying up to the Monticello Motor Club in the Catskills. On the way to Wide World I couldn't help but think about how easy and intuitive the 430 was to drive while falling in love with the sounds it makes. The F1 paddles are not something I was used to, that is until I raked up and down the gears but once. I particularly liked easing the car along a 85 mph in 6th gear, standing on the go pedal then pulling twice quickly on the left paddle hearing the motor blip before screaming past 100 in 4th. "Just stand on it, it'll upshift to 5th when it needs to," the owner told me, and, sure enough, when it runs out of revs it drops seamlessly into 5th and keeps pulling. I didn't look down at the speedo to see how

grossly we were violating the limit, but I'm sure it was worthy of at least a misdemeanor. There was one thing I found really distracting while driving the car - the rearview mirror. The shape of the mirror provides a perfect view out of the rear deck, but the rear window reflects an indelible ghosted image of the V8 plant and the red crackle coated valve covers. On far too many occasions I found myself looking at the mirror, not to see what was behind me but just to look at the motor. I have to imagine the engineers in Maranello spent countless hours perfecting this image, and it is great.

We pulled into Wide World of Cars where Ferrari's filled the back lot. I didn't get a good count, but I'd guess there were about 70 or so customer cars there for the rally. They were mostly 430's (a handful of which were Scuderias), a few 355's, 599's, 612's, 1 F40 and the one and only Enzo-based, Glickenhaus P 4/5. We registered for the event, paid a small charitable donation to the Good Samaritan Hospital. Dealer, Mike Mastrangelo thanked everyone for coming out and gave a brief speech on the foundation and its cause. He informed all of us that we would be leaving from WWC in about an hour and head about 100 miles north to the Monticello Motor Club. He also mentioned that they attempted to get a police escort for the rally but failed to do so, and followed that statement by saying that in no way would he or Wide World be at all responsible for anyone's actions on the road and to drive safely. My thoughts at that point went something like... 1.) They have contacted the police let them know 100 or so Ferrari's would be driving 100 miles or so up to Monticello NY. 2.) That they were unwilling to provide police support because it wasn't prudent to condone that sort of thing on a Sunday morning. 3.) As a result they will be waiting with radar and laser guns pointed in joyous anticipation. 4.) Forget the rally with all the other F cars, leave immediately and fly up under the radar before the reports start coming in - maybe get a few laps in at the track before the rush.

So that's what we did. We made a spirited push up to Monticello with one other Rosso Scuderia F430's. Traffic was relatively heavy and only allowed for limited bursts of speed. Then after a couple of wrong turns we arrived at the track only to find a line of cars already there. Turns out our idea to leave early caught on quickly after we departed and our wrong turns cost us valuable time. The cars ahead of us lined up for the drivers and co-drivers to sign the track waivers, and within minutes it seems the rest of the crowd was in line behind us. We later got word three of the cars behind us were pulled over and the patrolman was not taking lightly to the situation.

Once signed in, we pulled into the lot, which was filled with more of the newest and fastest street-going track toys than I have ever seen in one place at one time. Monticello had erected a bi-level structure with outdoor terraces and view of the lot and track which was there to serve as the Events Pavilion. Inside a dozen or so very attractive ladies welcomed us all with bright smiles and dark mascara. Upstairs was reserved for members and employees while the rest of us from the rally were confined to the lower level. However, we were there for one purpose, the Track! The agenda was to listen to a speech from founder, Bill McMichael over a buffet lunch, then go for a few parade laps behind a pace car. That just wasn't going to cut it for us. I wandered upstairs, re-introduced myself to Bill (as we had met at a dinner after the Greenwich Concours where Mr. Roy was called in to do a presentation on The Driver and 31:04) and said I wanted to get on the track and give it a go. Surprisingly, he obliged and said go for it!

To our dismay, they had temporarily blocked off the track while the pleasantries took place. We were forced to try another approach. My friend who had spent some time at the Ferrari Driving School knew some of the instructors (all of whom the Club has on staff are highly accredited) and got us a seat in Cadillac CTS-V with professional driver, Anthony Lazarro for a few hot laps while the rest of the guests ate lunch. Initially disappointed that I wouldn't be behind the wheel of the 430 on the track, I realized that two or three laps of trying to master or even drive quickly around its 4.2 miles of fresh pavement with no curbing would have been pointless if not dangerous. So instead we were able to do it at speed, see the correct line and 4-wheel drift a Cadillac CTS-V.

The track was definitely technical and members of the club will be hard pressed to ever get bored. Its design was the combined effort of former champion, Brian Redman, and Bruce Hawkins and has multiple configurations, good elevation changes, increasing and decreasing radius turns and some long straights. After lapping this track a couple times and seeing a couple 30mph turns and 160+ mph straights, it will prove to be one of the most exciting tracks on the East Coast.

Monticello is not the only Track/Driving Club in the Northeast gaining traction. Other recent additions and enhancements of tracks in the Northeast are taking hold. Lime Rock Park's new configurations and (long overdue) resurfacing have been completed just in time for the ALMS this weekend. New Jersey Motorsports Park has completed one of its two short tracks and Alpine Motorsports Club <http://www.alpinesignature.com/> has been spinning its wheels while it fights to finalize permits before it can get the pavers rolling, but could be an interesting addition.

All of these developments are steps in the right direction for regional motorsports enthusiasts, but in my estimation Monticello will be the club and track of choice. They might not have the history that Lime Rock holds, but you won't be able to lap it in less than a minute and it will definitely be open on Sundays. Watching preview laps of NJ Motorsports Park on YouTube, gives me the impression that their Lightning Loop configuration is less diverse and entertaining than Monticello's. The jury's still out on Alpine as it has yet lay down tarmac.

I guess the only thing that had me a little down on Monticello is that it will probably never make financial sense for myself and many others to become a member. On the other hand, it will stand out as a flawless gem of an establishment and provide the exclusivity that the high-dollar investment ensures. Let's just hope their membership package comes with lots of guest passes!!





