

MONTICELLO MOTOR CLUB

"Call our concierge and your car will be waiting with the engine warmed, fluids checked and tire pressures set by the time you complete the 20-minute helicopter ride in from Manhattan." That pretty much summarized the Monticello Motor Club pitch as presented at their upscale Manhattan kickoff party in the fall of 2007 and repeated at their lavish grand opening on site in the Catskills in July of 2008. And what an event it was, with featured luminaries Brian Redman and Mario Andretti mingling with the crowd and demonstrating the Porsche 908/3 and Lotus 79 they drove to major championships, Chris Economaki, MC Bob Varsha, a state senator, the usual freeloaders from the motoring press, film and TV types pointing cameras all over the place (including shooting from low-flying helicopters), slinky models in even slinkier black dresses showing you where to park your Roller, Bentley, Ferrari, Maserati, Aston, AMG Mercedes, GT3, Z06, Ducati, Exige or whatever and advising you gently that the second floor of the large and impressive Monticello clubhouse was "For Members Only." There were beautifully laid-out tables of truly amazing food, attentive wait staff and a selection of pro drivers in sport-setting Cadillac CTS V8s waiting to whisk you around the racetrack. There was even karting for the kiddies. It was honestly spectacular. And, who would have guessed there were crews scrambling to put sod in and guardrails up far into the night before?

What a fantastic accomplishment!

What a bold, original concept!

What absolutely lousy timing!

Through no fault of its own, the grand opening of Monticello's chic new motorsports club rode the wake of the tsunami economic meltdown that shook the New York financial community (and, by either direct or indirect association, Monticello's precise target market) to its very core. Even those who came through the crisis unscathed were chary about throwing money around frivolously or anything that smacked of self-indulgent excess. Now Monticello is hardly the only motorsports country club to feel the pinch, but their singular vision of a dedicated, top-of-the-line, full-time, full-service, access and amenities-oriented driving club with a spa, top-class restaurant and catering facilities, game room, family activities, accomplished "house pro" coaches and track time available whenever the fancy may strike you has made their path a bit narrower than most. But you have to admire their dedication and determination, as well as the results they've already managed to achieve.

With various membership options from "Resident" (\$125,000 initiation fee, unlimited

Top of the Line by Design

driving, 46-year terms, annual dues of \$9450) to "National" (\$50,000 initiation fee, 15 driving days/year, 10-year terms, annual dues of \$3675) to "Corporate" (\$80,000 initiation fee, 15 driving days shared by four principles or employees of the company, 10 year terms, annual dues of \$10,000) Monticello doesn't come cheap. But the service, opportunities, amenities and personal attention provided are likewise top-of-the-line. And Monticello is just 90 minutes by car from downtown Manhattan.

More importantly, Monticello is one hell of a fabulous racetrack. It has the elevation changes, scenery, flow and feel of a true, "natural" road circuit and is nothing less than a revelation compared to the flat, fiddly, artificial, "technical" twists and turns and parking-lot ambience of many country club tracks. My redoubtable friend and hero Brian Redman had a lot of input as to the final configuration, and the end result stands out like Pebble Beach and

Augusta stand out compared to city-park golf courses. Not only is the scale grand, the topography undulating and the landscaping magnificent, Monticello is also a fantastic—and challenging!—place to drive.

There's an uphill set of esses that will absolutely take your breath away a long, fast back straight with a daunting little kink in it, a climbing sweeper at the end reminiscent of Turn 1 at Road Atlanta followed immediately by a blind, tricky, Euro-style over-the-curbs chicane at the very top and a fake-you-out (but with plenty of smooth runoff room) humpbacked left-hander that will really get your attention.

As Mario Andretti put it after his first taste of Monticello, "this isn't a place you can master in a day or two." There's also plenty of variety, as the beautifully paved, 4.1-mile "full" track can be broken down into no less than 12 different configurations, three of which can be run simultaneously. Suffice to say that pro teams like Dyson Racing have taken to testing at Monticello, and all the drivers rate it highly. On the corporate side, Absolut Vodka held a reward experience at Monticello for 50 high-profile/best-customer New York City restaurant owners, and rated it as the best event they'd ever delivered. They've already booked return dates for this year.

And there's more. Construction has begun on the new South Pavilion, on-site "Autoium" condo/garage complexes are in the works, there's a fleet of rental race cars and one-on-one instruction available, an in-house race series with occasional pro/celebrity guest drivers and even club-provided ladder links to professional racing teams for those who wish to take their love of the sport to a higher level.

Monticello may cost a lot, but you get a lot. —B.S.L.

LOCATION: Monticello, New York

MEMBERSHIP COST: See text.

TRACK AVAILABILITY TO MEMBERS:

ACCESSIBILITY: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

AMBIENCE: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

AMENITIES: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

SAFETY: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

DIFFICULTY: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

ELEVATION CHANGES: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

FUN FACTOR: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

PUCKER FACTOR: Ⓛ Ⓛ Ⓛ

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