

DAYTONA 14 HOURS – 2012



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I haven't had so much fun for years. That's the summation of having raced at the Chump Cars "Daytona Fourteen Hours" (no cars costing over \$500!) that we just finished.

Admirably organized, this race started with a driver's meeting at 7.00 am, yes, really! That meant a 6 am alarm on Sunday morning. The race itself started at 8 am and finished at 10 pm, over half the race being run in driving rain. Tropical Storm Beryl struck the eastern Florida coast on Sunday morning with the first rain arriving about four hours after we started.

I was sharing a 1990 Mazda RX7 with over 200,000 miles on it, with David Hinton, Mike Harris and Larry Ligas. The car was owned by Danny Stewart, who also owned the other RX7 in the "Predaturd" (yes, you read that right!) team. Driving that car were Carl Jensen, Doug Sokolowski and Sam Viviano.



As a "guest" driver, I took second stint after Mike and re-acquainted myself with the Daytona banking. Around the turns, it feels as if you're about to slide down into the infield but, of course, that doesn't actually happen. We'd been told a rev limit of 6500 and to use fifth gear on the banking but the fastest I could get the car up to was just 121 mph (the Mazda has a speedo) and a lot of faster cars came flying by, which was frustrating. Still, I found I could take the chicane in fourth gear to keep momentum up and even tried fifth at one point but that didn't work!

After my first stint, Larry climbed in and, when he returned reported that by using 7000 rpm before shifting to fifth, he could get the Mazda up to 128 mph on the banking. This I tried during the next stint and, sure enough, Larry was right so now we were going faster and I wasn't being overtaken quite so readily.

It started raining as Tropical Storm "Beryl" arrived around midday and I've never liked racing in the rain but the Mazda changed me. That little car was so controllable, you could just go flat out around the banking and then outbrake and out-corner nearly everyone else in the infield, so a great deal of satisfactory passing took place. One memory stands out vividly; as I came down the back chute towards the chicane on dry tarmac, there was a wall of rain in front of me. I backed off and the car that was following me overtook me on the inside, arrived at the chicane going much too fast and promptly spun off. One down... The showers were intermittent so that as the track dried, all those cars I'd overtaken came hurtling past again. D'oh!





My last stint was in the evening, as the sun was setting over the Speedway and, despite the fact that it was almost blinding on one part of the banking, was another very enjoyable turn at the wheel. I handed over to Larry with one and three quarter hours to go and he then gave it back to David Hinton for the last hour. It poured again during the last two hours and we were willing the flagman to end it early but he didn't. Came 10 pm and both our cars crossed the line running just as well as when they started. Both were on the same set of tires and brake pads as at the beginning and, apart from fuel, I think we added less than a quart of oil, just to be on the safe side.

We finished twenty-ninth out of one hundred and twenty-one cars entered, so that's victory as far as I'm concerned!



















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