

# SEBRING – DECEMBER 5TH TO 8TH, 2013



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There is nothing to beat the visceral thrill of piloting a good racing car, engine blaring at peak revs, as it hurtles around the Daytona banking, unless it's the same sort of kick you get as you drive that same car under the bridge on the fast left hander as you charge into the hairpin at Sebring. Both are equally thrilling, each in their own way.

As readers of this site will know, two months ago, I acquired a 1974 Porsche RSR Replica and Su and I attended the season ending series of races at Sebring, over December 5th to 8th.

Sebring is a track that I like very much. It's fast and demanding despite being a typical old airfield circuit and thus being flat. Turn one takes a deep breath, as does turn seventeen at the end of the back straight. Su and I put Humphrey and Boomer back into the kennels on Wednesday, December 4th and we drove to Sebring early the next morning for test day. Unlike Daytona, the weather was very good all weekend, a steady eighty degrees. Ah, but I do like racing in America!

Upon arrival, we were surprised and happy to find that Jochen Mass was with us again, as at Daytona. He was going to partner George Tuma, my old partner, in his RSR replica. He's a very nice man, completely calm and self-effacing and can talk about seemingly any subject on earth with a lot of insight. Brian Johnson, the irrepressible singer from AC/DC was also with us, making everyone around him laugh. If Brian hadn't succeeded in life as the singer with a Rock Band, he'd certainly have made it as a stand up comedian.

First session went well, though I was very slow, ten seconds off the pace! I asked Jim Pace (no pun intended!) for advice and he showed me an in-car video of the two corners I needed help with. Kevin Wheeler then also confided that you only needed second gear for the hairpin, third being needed where I'd previously been dropping into second and I promptly carved four seconds off my deficit.

During the second test session, I became aware that when I took my foot off the accelerator as I went to change gear, the car's tail was starting to snap to the left and I came back to the pits and then back into the paddock so that the RSR could be jacked up for further investigation. It turned out that a suspension mounting was pulling out at the left rear and a major modification was needed and so I wouldn't be out again until Friday morning.

Friday saw the car ready to go again and with "A.J.", my mechanic for the weekend in tow, I drove down to the pre grid area for qualifying, which all went well in both sessions, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon. That evening, we were treated to a concert in the paddock, plus dinner and then a "star turn" by a vivacious sixteen-year-old who not only could really play the guitar but who has a voice that could shatter glass windows at a hundred yards! I predict we will all hear a lot more from Hannah.

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Next day, I had my first real race in the RSR. This was a one hour enduro and I found myself wondering whether I'd be able to last out an hour's racing after a two year layoff. I needn't have worried, as I only lasted two laps before a Porsche Cayman took a dive at me going into seventeen, hit me on the right hand side and knocked my steering alignment out. Instant retirement. The woes carried on as, after Scotty had re-aligned the suspension, I went out for the race in the afternoon at 4-o'clock. After an interminable wait (the race schedule was running behind), out we went. Four laps in, I was enjoying myself, when I felt the rear end of the RSR beginning to step out again under acceleration. I thought the suspension was failing again and pulled off. Further inspection in the paddock revealed that the left rear had come loose, but fortunately the spring clip had stopped the big center lock nut from coming off completely. "Wind the torque up to 275" instructed Scotty. "Old aluminum stretches!"

And so to Sunday, and one more “dash” (eight laps) race to go in the morning. This time everything worked just fine and I actually managed to win my class, a good ending to a weekend spent “sorting” the RSR. The car handles really well with great brakes and a really torquey engine, which I’m only revving to 7,000 rpm at the moment. I’m not sure if it will go further safely, but there’s so much torque up to there, that there is not much point in revving it further.

One final take on these last two race meetings: 2006/7 GT3RSs are so much faster than the old RSR, it seems untrue. I’d like one but I’m too wedded to 1970s RS/RSRs!

**[PHOTOS COURTESY OF GENE GREENE.]**

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