

WATKINS GLEN – SUNDAY, JUNE 17TH, 2007



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Jim Pace (left), well-known GTP driver and "mentor" together with George Tuma before the start.
[Photo: Author's collection.]

Watkins Glen – Sunday, June 17th, 2007

It's official... I'm back in the Vintage/Historic racing World and loving it! Last week George Tuma kindly invited me to share the driving of his Jagermeister RSR replica, while racing at the HSR organized weekend at Watkins Glen. It doesn't get much better than this – I acted as George's agent when he bought the car.

I've been to Watkins Glen several times and always enjoyed the setting, the countryside, hospitality and general ambience, however, this was the first time I'd ever driven the track; and what a track! Long, with two good straights and lots of elevation changes plus some really good medium speed, 3rd gear corners as well as the infamous "Esses". This is not a track that is learned quickly.



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Myself and George at the start of the weekend. [Photo: Author's collection.]

The Jagermeister RSR was being looked after by our good friends at Predator Performance from Largo, Florida, which is run by Larry Ligas and David Hinton and they did a great job. The RSR, prepared by Scotty Pheil and looked after at the track by "Big Mike", ran faultlessly for seven hours of track time, including two enduros, one of one hour duration and another of two hours. I do have to say that the two hour enduro, on the Sunday afternoon, seemed to be full of GTP/Group C cars and I've never been fond of being in a slower car and having to keep my eyes on the mirrors but it all seemed to go o.k.

I'm afraid U.S. Airways, with whom I'd booked a ticket to get from Tampa to Elmira, NY, really dropped the ball on their scheduling this time and, though I'd gone to the airport on Wednesday morning, I didn't actually get to the track until Thursday evening, in time to find that Jim Pace had been coaching George well and he'd already substantially reduced his lap times in the test sessions held during that day.



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Some of the cars that Predator Performance brought to Watkins Glen for their clients.
[Photo: Author's collection.]

Friday dawned (as did the whole weekend) clear, dry and sunny and it was one of those times when driving to the track in the early morning filled one with confidence that each day was going to be better than the preceding one, if that was at all possible.

Friday was practice day so, when it came to my turn, I slid into the driver's seat, buckled up the belts, turned the key to start the engine and rumbled out to the false grid where, after a few minutes, waving arms told us to start up and follow the car ahead out onto the track.



The Jagermeister RSR in the paddock with Art Woodworth's 911S alongside.
[Photo: Author's collection.]

Turn One is a medium speed, right angled corner taken in 3rd gear and the road plunges sharply downhill into Turn Two, which is taken in 4th gear, once you've got the nerve up to do it! Each time, this bend looks like an "It can't really be that fast, can it?" type of sweep, but it is! Then it's sharply uphill through the Esses, trying to make a neat straight line out of them and brushing the white painted kerbs, which mark the apexes on either side. After this, the road curves gently to the right and it's all flat out onto the main straight until the 600 down to 100 feet marker boards fly by on your left and it's into the "bus stop", which is a right-left, left-right chicane, taken in one sweep in 3rd until you come out on the entrance to Turn Five, a 180 degree sweep into which, believe it or not, you don't slack off on the throttle!



Your author approaches with trepidation. [Photo: Author's collection.]

Very late apex here, and then you're grabbing 4th at the exit and heading into Turn Six, another 180 degree sweeper, again a late apex and then up to Turn Seven, yet another 180 degree late apex turn but one which turns sharply right and climbs steeply, forcing you to keep your foot in it as you follow the line, which is marked out by new, lighter colored pavement.

Turn Eight is over the crest of a hill, more than 90 degrees (more follow the lighter concrete here) and then you're rushing into Turn Nine, which is the only corner on the track with adverse camber. Again, you're looking for a very late apex, slipping, sliding and thinking you must go off when you finally exit the turn, grab 4th, take a gulp and head into Turn Ten, which despite it's forbidding blind exit, really is flat out in 4th with, perhaps a slight confidence lift on the entry.



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"Big Mike" sets up on pit lane ready for our race. [Photo: Author's collection.]



George Tuma driving the RSR in practice. [Photo: Author's collection.]

Turn Eleven leads onto the pit straight and is a "standard" mid-speed bend taken in 3rd, though you can grab every inch of the exit and launch yourself down the straight even faster by using the white concrete kerb on the left and then it's grab 4th and then 5th, stretch your fingers on the wheel, cast an eye over the gauges and brake and take 3rd as you plunge into Turn One and start yet another lap.

So, George and I ran a few races, won our class a couple of times (more by dint of not much opposition in our class than real skill!) and had a truly wonderful time. Next week, I'm off to the Nurburgring to share the driving of George's real RSR in a One Hour Enduro over there. When I come back, I'll let you know how it went!



Say "Aaah". [Photo: Author's collection.]



Jim Pace adjusts the mirror for George Tuma. [Photo: Author's collection.]



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Ready to race. [Photo: Author's collection.]



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Le Mans Bentley. [Photo: Author's collection.]



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Mike Amalfitano's Porsche 962 with the old Bayside Disposal 962 alongside.
[Photo: Author's collection.]



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Two Spice GTP cars. [Photo: Author's collection.]



Spice-Chevrolet GTP car. [Photo: Author's collection.]



Jägermeister RSR. [Photo: Author's collection.]



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Jagermeister RSR. [Photo: Author's collection.]



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Art Woodworth (left) loading up to go home. [Photo: Author's collection.]



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The Jagermeister RSR ready to go home. [Photo: Author's collection.]

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