

WATKINS GLEN – JUNE 7TH TO 10TH, 2012



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Many years ago in England, I raced a Jaguar E Type coupe for a few (can't remember how many, now) races at Mallory, Oulton Park and Silverstone. I had bought her, as a racer, from someone in London and she was a natural follow on (after a few years' gap!) from an XK120 I had raced a few times also.

I remember that the E Type (it was a coupe) was a pretty good performer but, due to my inexperience, I never visited a podium in that car. Little change there!

March on to the very recent present: A very kind man, Mr. Don Norby, owner of a 1967 E Type racer, built by Predator Performance of Largo, Florida, promised me a few laps in his E Type on Thursday's testing day, preceding the SVRA meeting recently held at Watkins Glen.

Su and I traveled up to Watkins on Wednesday, intending to make the test part of a long weekend away, so our dogs, Humphrey and Boomer, were packed off to “Paws in Paradise” kennels www.pawsinnparadise.com www.facebook.com/PawsInnParadise and we were up bright and early and off to the race track, with helmet and gear, on Thursday morning. I was due to take the car out in the first test session, about eleven o'clock.



Lord, but I'd forgotten how cramped an E Type's cockpit is, particularly with the side bars of a cage installed and having to get in in full racing gear, with helmet and Hans device too. I drove down to pit lane and saw that the second line of cars was very short and decided to join that, only to be told by the pits marshal that was reserved for Sports prototype and GTP cars and I'd have to reverse back and join the other line! Luckily, Mike Harris, who was looking after the car, had pointed out that reverse was a “push down and pull across” affair and so, almost miraculously, I selected reverse and, following the Marshal's directions, reversed back behind a NASCAR stock car which, when the time came to go, stalled, leaving me to have to pull around him to get out on to the track.

So, first gear selected and off we went. I love Watkins Glen; it's truly one of the finest tracks in the US, with a very challenging set of Esses after turn one which really test your skill. Toby Bean, who drives an Intrepid GTP car told me that he takes these curves flat in fifth gear and that must be a heart-pounding affair!



The other really exciting part about Watkins Glen (IMO!) is after the Chicane on the main straight, where you turn tightly around a one hundred and eighty degree corner before plunging down into what is colloquially known as “the boot”. Not only do you plunge down into it, you also have to climb back out of it through another one eighty degree bend and you need to enter this bend considerably faster than you think, in order to keep your speed up through it and carry that onto the straight following.



In all, I got just two laps in the E Type before the session got black flagged, due to someone going off somewhere and then got possibly another lap before the session ended. That was enough to tell me that the E Type has a formidable engine, some 340 horsepower, and a lot of torque. The gearbox, a modern Jericho design, is also bulletproof with a great, easily managed shift. The Jaguar exhibited slight understeer, entering the slower corners which I'm sure is easily cancelled out by use of the throttle and all in all, a very impressive racing GT car, in the true expression of the words. Thanks Don, I really appreciated that!

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