

# WATKINS GLEN WITH SVRA



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## Watkins Glen with SVRA

Carl Jensen and the good people of SVRA (Sportscar Vintage Racing Association) invited me to attend their end of season race meeting at Watkins Glen last weekend. Hell, not only did they invite me, they even paid my air fare! My God, what is the vintage racing World coming to?

Truth to tell, SVRA were putting on the first of a new series that they are promoting, for IMSA spec. GT and GTX category cars up to 1982. I helped them organize a grid and Dave White Racing were kind enough to take my own '67 Porsche racer and add it to their display.



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SVRA had a magnificent turn out. Over fifty cars entered the IMSA feature race, of which some thirty took the green flag after practice and qualifying had worked its usual destructiveness. (Memo – Why do drivers have to wear out their cars before the race proper?) A good dice for the first two positions took place between Steve Cohen in his Dekon Monza and Eric Bretzel in his narrow body Porsche RSR. The race ran out that

way, Cohen being a worthy winner in a car he later told the crowd: "I bought it in the eighties and thought it would come in useful some day!"



Almost five hundred entries graced the meeting, making this one of the best attended vintage race meetings in the country. There was a great race for pre-war cars, won by Peter Giddings in his Bugatti type 35B, definitely the oldest race car and driver in the paddock! Good one Peter.

Drawing spectators' eyes in the paddock was not one but two silver Porsche Carrera GTs lined up together. A selection of Alfa T33s was provided by Joe Nastase and Nick Soprano. Nick has one of the two 4-liter T33 coupes in existence, period. As the meeting was dedicated to the Alfa marque, it was great to see such stunning cars out there.

A word about Watkins Glen. The track is terrific – long and demanding, with several very fast corners and many elevation changes. It is not for the faint of heart.



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I was staying at the Seneca Lodge hotel, an old wooden building dating back to the twenties and the line-up of cars, particularly old British sports cars of the Fifties, would not have disgraced a prominent concours event. A superb black Jaguar XK120 FHC stood out, as did various Allards, Triumphs, MGAs and, of course, from Germany, the usual hordes of Porsche 356s and early 911s.

Watkins Glen town is delightful. Full of charm, nestling at the foot of Seneca Lake, it's like something out of a film set. Any number of good restaurants abound but a couple more breakfast places would be appreciated.

I noticed that three bed, two bathroom houses can still be bought for \$85,000 or less. What a great getaway place. When I inquired as to why the prices were so low, I was told: "No jobs in the neighborhood and the snow starts in October and lasts till April!" Prices that low can't last, can they?

On the Friday evening at six p.m., a "re-enactment" of the first Watkins Glen Grand Prix, held in the early fifties, takes place around the open roads surrounding Watkins Glen. It's over the old course and led by a Police operated pace car, so there's little chance of really having a go. Nevertheless, it attracted a whole host of cars from the race entry and from enthusiasts, particularly those who owned cars of the type that raced back then in the original Grand Prix, such as Allards, Jaguar XK120s, M.G. TC/TDs and various "Specials" of the period. Great stuff and the local populace, who turned out in droves, loved it too. There's also a local concours as a side attraction.



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And finally, Watkins Glen is home to the Motor Racing Research Institute, inspired and dedicated to John Bishop, the originator and Chairman of IMSA until 1992. They held a well attended auction for charity on Saturday evening. It is situated in a purpose built red brick building near the top of the town and has a wonderful library. I found myself browsing through Simon Moore's incredible three volume history of the Alfa Romeo 8c 2300 for some time. (Memo – must buy a copy!) I highly recommend a visit to their premises.



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A delightful weekend: If you like vintage cars and racing, make room for it in your diary in September next year.



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