

DAYTONA BEACH OR BUST

Several BCCGC members and their friends recently made their annual trek to The World Center of Speed to take in The Rolex 24 of Daytona. Jim Steputis, his brother-in-law, John Fern, Joe Gerst, Jim Miller, Ron Ramer and his brother-in-law, Tom Lureck flew to Sanford, Florida on Jan. 25 to spend 4 days watching the IMSA Weathertech sports cars practice, qualify and compete for 24 straight hours in the ROLEX 24. Also competing were the sports cars in the Continental Tire Challenge series in a 4 hour endurance race.

After picking up a rental van, the group discovered that a showroom of Gateway Classic Cars was just around the corner. We could not resist stopping for a look see of over 150 classic cars all for sale. In the mix were about 20 British cars, but after checking all the cars out, we decided they were all over priced and if we did buy one, it would not fit in the plane to come home. Noticing a Walmart up the road, we stopped to get some provisions to keep in the van and not pay the high prices for hamburgers at the track. We are a thrifty lot!

Thursday at the track was practice sessions for all classes of cars. After practice, we high-tailed it to our rooms out on the beach and rested before going for dinner at "Racing's North Turn", a very NASCAR(sorry Joe) historic site(might do another story on that at a later time).

Friday was qualifying followed by the 4 hour Continental Tire Challenge. On the way to the track, Ron noticed that "the light's on" at the local Krispy Kreme factory, so that was a must stop for breakfast(gooey and napkins needed). Of course, each day at the track involved exploring the garages of these high tech machines and with a 4 day wrist band, you can go anywhere, even walking into the garages and poking your face up to the hole of the driver's window to say "Hello" to a beckoning driver, ask Jim Miller about that one. Lunch was enjoyed by the tailgate of the van and we even met up with some fellow members and Cincinnati folk attending with member Glenn Wegryn. The 4 hour race was exciting as the cars were piloted by both amateur and pro drivers. First place was claimed by a Porsche Cayman GT4, second a BMW GT 4, and third a Ford Mustang GT4. We dined that evening at our favorite pizza place in the old part of Daytona Beach.

Saturday we discovered a "killer" breakfast stop that took priority over Krispy Kreme, The Cracked Egg, with good old southern breakfast dishes. From there we went to the track to watch final preparations for the BIG race. About 2 hours before the green flag, they open up the gates to the grid where all 50 of the Rolex cars are staged, with flags representing the nationality of the many foreign and US drivers positioned at each machine. The driving teams are then introduced to the throng on humanity on pit road and they make it to their cars to chat with and take "selfies" with those that are lucky enough to get close enough. John and I opted to stay back from the mass of humanity and decided instead to inspect the surprisingly moderately banked front finish-line straight as we "huffed and puffed" to make it up the steep incline into the restful main grandstands. I think the others got lost for a while in the humanity.

The start is very exciting as 50 high-powered, high tech sportscars blast past the green flag and try to out brake each other to get thru the first turn. . We watched for a couple of hours and then walked across the street for dinner at Bahama Breeze. (have you noticed by now, we eat pretty good on these trips). Back to watch a few hours of after dark racing as the multi-colored

LED lights on these cars really make for a good show. We got tired for the day and went back to rest for the night.

Sunday saw breakfast again at The Cracked Egg and back to the track to witness the finish of this "once around the clock" race. After 808 laps and 2,876.48 miles-both race records, the #5 Mustang Sampling Cadillac-powered DPi crossed the line first, another 1 minute and 10.44 seconds later another Cadillac powered DPi was second. An ORECA LMP2 was third. Much excitement was generated by the appearance of Formula 1 star Fernando Alonso in a Ligier, but troubles caused them to fall way back and finished 13th in class and 38 over-all.

The GTLM class was dominated by Chip Ganassi with his two Ford GTs driven by mostly INDY car veterans as they finish 1-2 while leading 98.8 % of the laps. A Corvette C7R was third.

The GTD race saw a lack of Porsche dominance as a Lamborghini Huracan GT3 won, followed by an Acura NSX GT3 and another Lambo was third. This race saw the close of a racing career for a very popular Scott Pruett as he ran his last laps in a Rolex race and will "hang up the gloves". The local (Batavia) Wright Motorsports #58 Porsche crashed on the parade lap on cold tires and did not make it back to the track for another 2 hours. They did pick up a few places, but finished next to last in class.

For dinner we found a new place in the rain, down by the intercoastal and next to a dock in a plastic roofed tent called THE BOONDOCKS. It was Ron's favorite and we will probably return if John can navigate us to the correct road again.

Monday morning saw us return the rental van at Sanford, jump on the bird and landed at CVG safely at about noon. Hope you enjoyed the story.