



Volkswagen GTI Media Challenge

It is rare that a journalist, through direct participation, is able to test his knowledge about the subject on which he reports. After all, a reporter doesn't assume the presidency to write about politics any more than a movie critic stars in a movie. And auto writers don't drive race cars.

As a spectator sport, it is sometimes too easy for a reporter to sit back and critique the driving ability of Danny Sullivan, Mario Andretti, Bill Elliott, etc. But as a participant, can the critics follow their own advice?

"The idea is to get the writers out from behind their pens, and into the action," said Michael Sheridan, president of GP/Publishing, Inc. GP/P is co-producing the Historic Races with Waterford Hills Road Racing, Inc.

Of course, it is also an opportunity for some natural competitors to have some fun.

"For these drivers, it's usually a race against a deadline, or a competition to be first with that Big Story," Sheridan said. "We just thought it would be fun to challenge them to prove who can be first across the finish line."

To be fair, not all of the drivers competing in the Volkswagen GTI Media Challenge regularly report on auto racing, or even the automotive industry. The "Detroit Media" race, for example, is stacked with true auto racing rookies.

Nickie McWhirter, driving for the "Detroit Free Press" writes a column about life for the paper's "Way We Live" section. Her observations about cars more often than not focus on how they can "take their owners for a ride" literally and figuratively. As for experience in auto racing, she will be relying most on her powers of observation today.

One of her competitors, however, has at least been in a race car before — Gary Cubberley, of WJIB-TV (Channel 2). Cubberley went through a Skip Barber Racing School a few years ago. However, his usual role as anchor for "PM Detroit" qualifies him more to be a finalist in a trivia game about the leisure activities of Detroiters than it prepares him for today's race. So Cubberley, like McWhirter, will still be a journalist out of his element here.

HISTORIC RACES

Likewise, Gene Taylor, Feature reporter for "Good Afternoon Detroit," a WXYZ-TV (Channel 7) production, seems to most enjoy getting himself into situations that are totally unfamiliar to him — like driving a race car.

Just about the only thing they all have in common is that none of them claim to be experts about cars.

But if the "Detroit Media" competition is the race of novices, the "Automotive Buff" competition is the race of experience. It is also a race of pride.

Racing is not new to any of these drivers, and because they make their living critiquing and evaluating cars and races, no one wants to be the last one across the finish line in the Volkswagen GTI Media Challenge.

For example, driving for "Road and Track" will be John Dinkell.

Recently, at the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, Dinkell went all out in his quest for victory, but was forced out of the race after a collision with his formidable competitor, Don Sherman, of "Car & Driver." Today Dinkell will challenge another experienced "Car & Driver" driver, Csaba Csere, in a competition that will assuredly be fueled by more than gasoline!

Of course, both men will have to contend with Tony Swan, of "Motor Trend," for that checkered flag — and Swan is no stranger to racing competition either.

But the glossy, monthly magazines will still have to beat the weeklies (something they can't traditionally

do in the "deadline race"). "Autoweek" has long prided itself on its coverage of motorsports, and Dick Hinson, Association Publisher and Editorial Director, will be in the driver's seat today.

Phil Buck, of Automotive News, another Crain's publication, will round out the competition.

Each Volkswagen GTI Media Challenge consists of five laps through Waterford Hills' twisting, turning, 17 mile road course in identically prepared, front-wheel drive Volkswagen GTI race cars.

The GTI, which is produced in the United States, was named Car of the Year by "Motor Trend" magazine earlier this year. It reportedly can reach a top speed of 116 miles per hour, and accelerates from zero to 60 miles per hour in 9.5 seconds.



Danny Sullivan prepares to race the GTI in a recent celebrity race.