

Miata

M O T O R I N G

ISSUE 1, 2024



THE Matchmaker

For some, it's love at first sight. For others, the chemistry of an NB wins over a heart in due time. The Crystal Blue Persuasion happens on Pg. 12.

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Because Racecar

Some people learn the hard way, maybe not intentionally, but that can be fun, too!

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WORD WRANGLERS & GARAGE GURUS

WE WANT YOU!

Share your experience, wisdom and talent with Miata enthusiasts across the country. Contributors whose work is selected for use in the magazine will receive credit on their Moss Miata accounts! Now, since there is no way to print all the terrific stories and tech articles that are sent to us, we will place relevant and first-rate submissions on MossMiata.com/miatamotoring.com. We may choose to share your story in social media or in a Moss Miata email for all to enjoy. Sorry, submissions that are published online are not eligible for Moss credit.

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Three- to four-page stories and articles (approx. 1200 to 2000+ words). This includes: technical/restoration articles, personal or historic accounts, Club and Event experiences and anything that will inspire or entertain. Please include pictures for us to choose from—the more, the better.

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Cover and main feature photography, general interest stories or medium-length tech articles. Tech tips, cartoons, illustrations, humorous anecdotes and other odds-n-ends that help make Miata Motoring great.

THERE'S MORE ONLINE!

From YouTube to Facebook to Instagram and more, Moss Miata news and fun are just clicks away. We're also working on developing a dedicated *Miata Motoring* website for stories and tech articles to be permanently stored and easily accessed. Stay tuned!



Driving Around the **WRITER'S BLOCK**

by David Stuursma - Editor

I'm a big fan of metaphors and similes. They're very handy with helping to describe and explain life, taking the roundabout approach. For instance, if I were to say that I worship at the Church of Miata, even though she'd give me a side-eyed glare, I know my saintly mother would realize I'm not talking about some questionable non-profit. I'm not a church goer myself, but I understand the draw. The potential benefits to having a shared place of community are many. Now, if more pews were shaped like bucket seats with a bit of lumbar support... you'd be on to something.

But back to community. It's not surprising that Miata's got one. And a dang good one at that. There are clubs around the country, small groups of friends with their own cars, entire racing divisions, specialty shops, parts suppliers, YouTube channels—all for the love of a car. Did I mention that this car has its own magazine, too? Heh heh. These pages are as much about the Miata community as they are about the car. Sometimes more so. In this and future issues, look for stories by Miata club members about the good times they're

enjoying and creating. I would love for this magazine to inspire other clubs or individuals to seek great adventures, fun encounters, personal (perhaps mechanical) challenges and hurdles, and to find that special something within this community. Stories don't write themselves, so please help fill these pages!

Life is bigger in a small sports car. Highway speeds feel illegal, bags of groceries are giant puzzle pieces, and having a passenger for a road trip is a serious test of your #RelationshipGoals. The tight confines of a Miata cockpit bring out the most epic and intimate conversations, and this is magnified tenfold when the top is up. There are so many ways that the little Miata is a natural at being a community building vehicle, but my favorite way is its fun-size component. There are lots of fun cars on the road that catch my eye. I have a long list of cars that I'd one day like to own or, if I'm lucky, get to drive once. But when I see Miatas on the road, I do something a little different. Quite often I also find myself taking a look at the driver. Part of this is a small car

thing: people are relatively bigger in a small car. But more than that, I think, my mind knows there's a good chance I'll see a driver enjoying themselves, soaking up the small car life. Living top down is good for the soul. Hallelujah.

mm

If you have a gift for writing and/or an eye for photography, this magazine is one way to give back to the Miata community. Miata Motoring is just starting out, and so the word is still spreading that this is a project by the Miata community for the Miata community. Let's make these pages as fun and entertaining and as spirited as [insert Miata simile here].

Share your gift at MossMiata.com/miata-motoring

IMPERFECTLY PERFECT



by Sean Regan

I didn't lust after a Miata. It was never my dream car. In fact, I never had a "dream car" when I was young. I just loved cars, and just wanted to own one, no matter the car. For someone who never dreamed about owning a small roadster, these cars have become so much more than "just a car" to me.

My first exposure to these vehicles was in 2011 when my father purchased a fresh-off-the-boat 2011 NC Miata GT. He made the switch from being a lifelong motorcyclist to the safer, four-wheeled lifestyle. He *loved* that car and would regularly go on 300+ mile "butt-buster" drives into the winding back roads of Maryland and West Virginia for pure driving fun. It was an excuse to burn gasoline in the best way: smiles per gallon! I accompanied him on a few of these back-road blasts and caught the bug. I wanted one of these street-legal go karts for myself.

When I began my search for my own Miata in 2015, I learned about the three generations that existed at that time: the NA, NB, and NC. I was immediately drawn

to the generation that started it all. To be honest, it was the pop-up headlights that did it for me. Don't believe anyone who says that wasn't part of their reasoning for buying one. A few weeks of Craigslist searching yielded a seemingly mint 1992 B package located in Pennsylvania, and three days later my dad and I were leaving the questionable used car dealership in a Classic Red NA that was built the same year I was born.

My girlfriend at the time (who is now my wife) was happy for me but didn't understand the need for me to have *two* cars (I had a Honda Civic as my daily driver). As we finished college together, we attended many car shows and took numerous back road detours, and she too began to love the car for the experience it could provide. The evolution of her love for the Miata life was much like my own revelation with my Dad's NC, leading her to assist with and take pride in the work it took to get the car to its current condition.

Turns out that seemingly "mint" NA was not what it seemed. In





the eight years I have owned the car, some major repair jobs have been necessary. Some of the more significant ones included fixing the massive coolant leak after driving it home that first day, repairing the typical rust in three of the corners after crafty Bondo and paint fooled me on the day I bought it, getting the reverse lights to work properly, and installing a new clutch. Some fun projects have included Koni Yellow shocks, Dunlop Direzza II's, Magnaflo Street Series Catback exhaust, and custom gauges and sill plates from Revlimiter, which got my wife involved in the search for Miata parts. While the AC has never worked (a fact my wife reminds me of all the time), this perfectly imperfect car was the start of something truly special. So special, in fact, that we had to make room in our garage for a 2021 Soul Red GT RF ND.

This year, I undertook the largest automotive project of my life so far: replacing the clutch on the NA. I did plenty of research prior, and by

research I mean hours of watching YouTube how-to videos (shout out to TheCarPassionChannel). Someone who has done this before would probably be able to do it in a day comfortably. However, I am not that guy. It took me two months. Luckily the two (seemingly endless) months my NA was out of commission up on a set of QuickJacks were during the winter. I had my new ND to drive while the NA was down, and my wife fell in love with the Apple CarPlay, heated seats, and retractable hard top on the occasional unseasonably warm day when we went for a spin and were able to have it down.

I was determined going into this repair that I was NOT going to break any bolts, a bold undertaking with the inevitable rust of a 31-year-old car. My rule with myself was to stop working whenever I got frustrated, which happened often, and would hopefully guard against my tendency to "just send it" when butting up against obstacles such as stuck bolts. I'm proud to say that plan worked!

Though I did not break any bolts in the end, I was unable to break loose the penultimate Power Plant Frame bolt, the one going through the differential. This meant I was unable to swing the PPF out of the way when dropping and reinstalling the transmission, and I instead had to flex it while pressing the transmission into the transmission tunnel by placing it on my chest and thrusting it towards the car. It can be done in a pinch, but make sure there are no children around in case some "adult language" escapes your mouth. While I was under the car I also figured it would be a good idea to replace the clutch master cylinder and hydraulic lines. It was the hardest repair job I have ever done myself, but the feeling when it was done was unbeatable.

Amazingly, after bolting everything back up, bleeding fluids, turning the key for the first time in months while still suspended the on QuickJacks, and putting it into gear, the rear wheels turned! There were zero metallic grinding noises or weird





drives to local breweries, wineries, racetracks, and restaurants have become a tried-and-true formula that makes my wife happy to go for a ride and makes me the envy of all the other Miata guys I meet!

These experiences together have really transformed my wife's appreciation for Miatas. The woman who didn't understand why I needed an NA in 2015 now dreams of owning a Crystal Blue Metallic NB. It will inevitably join the family fleet someday, but with our first baby on the way, we started adding to the Mazda family with a 2015 Liquid Silver Metallic CX-5 (we even put a sticker on the rear window designating it the Maryland Miata Club Support Vehicle).

When I first learned what a Miata was, I never knew how big of a role these small cars would play in my life. But almost a decade later, with all the memories we've made and will make in the future, I cannot imagine my family life any other way. I cannot wait to inspire my future son's love for not "just a car" as he experiences these Miatas growing up. **mm**

smells, which was nothing short of miraculous. I was shocked to say the least. A quick test drive with it back on the ground confirmed it: the NA was back in action, just in time for the start of the driving season. My first Miata was better than ever, and the experience fostered a sense of pride in me being a Miata owner. It wasn't "just a car," it was *my* car.

Point Raceway in West Virginia for some parade laps during a Spec Miata race day, which was an absolute blast and really showed us both what the ND was capable of.

Something I get asked frequently by guys in the Maryland Miata Club is, "How do you get your wife to come with you on drives?" My answer is simple. Folks, if you want your significant other to make use of your superbly designed passenger seat, have a nice dinner at the destination! Our twisty

It wasn't "just a car," it was *my* car.

This NA has become a member of the family. It was the getaway car that brought my wife and me home from our wedding. It was the subject of a carnival caricature hanging on our wall. It was even the inspiration for a batch of homemade red wine—Regan Red, Always the Answer! As our love for the NA increased, so did the number of memories we've made in the ND. We joined the Maryland Miata Club where we attend monthly meets, drives, and have met a host of new friends for life. Through our club membership, we recently were invited to Summit





THE YEAR ^{OF THE} MIATA

by Joe McCarthy

Artemis was at my aunt's apartment. I put the key in and gave it a partial twist to the "on" position. No dash lights, no juice. One Uber ride and a new battery later and the gauges came to life along with the headlights that had been left on for five years. The odometer said 56k miles, the tank said halfway full. I knew I had bad gas and it wasn't from the local deep dish.

I got some vinyl tubing, a 5-gallon gas tank, bungee cords and my electric skateboard. I siphoned as much as I could out of the tank, strapped the bad gas to the skateboard, and rode with it between my legs over to the recycling center here in Chicago. The stopping distance was pretty bad but doable. I just had to go slow in the bike lanes.

That night around 10pm, after charging the skateboard up again, I went to the gas station down the street from Wrigley Field and rode my makeshift tanker back to my aunt's as carefully as possible. After fueling

up, I gave it some time to dilute the remaining old fuel and investigated the body.

It was rough. The front fenders had major rust, side skirts were see-through, rear fenders corroded all the way around. I was concerned about the undercarriage but that would have to wait until I could get this thing on a lift to see. The tires were flat, a bit cracked, and would need replacing asap.

Enough time had passed that the new fuel should have mixed well enough. I got in and fired her up. She chugged a bit from the bad gas, and I pressed on the pedal to try and clear the line out a bit more, but it was working. Artemis was *alive*. I made an appointment at a tire shop nearby for the next day.

The next morning, I pulled the car out and down the ramp of my aunt's apartment. The brakes were dangerously mushy, and the garage door was narrowly spared. It was a hairy ride to go get the tires replaced



I'm a big fan of Greek mythology, so I gave the Miata the name Artemis after the god of hunting and wild animals. The name also means, "safe journey," and because of the shape she was in when I got her, calling her Artemis was a bit of a hail Mary.

and brake fluid topped off. While Artemis was on the lift, I was able to take a look at the damage Chicago winters inflict on cars.

Here's what I found: Rust EVERYWHERE. It should have been a lost cause, but since it was my first project car, I shrugged and viewed this as a learning experience and a platform to try out new things.

A number of years ago I started a personal tradition; I decided to try and live each year around a theme. For 2023 the theme was "the year of festivals." And around the time Artemis entered my life, I had discovered an intriguing one called "Wasteland Weekend," and it inspired some big ideas. Yes, I was going to put a lift kit on the car and make it unique. And now I also had a deadline and a goal to make this rusted-out Miata able to survive a trip around the USA. I knew with larger tires I'd need minor performance enhancements beyond turning off the AC, too.

Major Modifications

Looking at the engine, right off the bat I could see a few things that didn't look so hot. The valve cover was leaking oil in multiple locations. So, I ordered a new valve cover gasket and a Cobalt cat-back performance exhaust from Moss Miata. While waiting for those to arrive, it seemed like a good time to make my first mark on the engine with a fresh looking white-with-black-accent valve cover paint job. I was very pleased with how it turned out, but putting it back on didn't go so well. I over-tightened a bolt and broke it by using a torque wrench that wasn't spec'd for low torque. One minor panic attack later, and with help from my dad, we were able to back the bolt out. Once the valve cover was back on, it looked amazing to me, being a first-time painter.

The original plan was to wrap the whole car white and accent with black and red. Wasteland altered that





My dad, myself and my friend Brian hard at work, with Buddy the dog supervising.



The right torque wrench would have made all the difference.

plan. There was now a lot less to do since the car was already “Wasted.” I attempted to tackle the muffler by trying to loosen bolts using a torch, some liquid wrench, and a few other hacks, but nothing would make the rusted-solid hardware budge. I had a vacation coming up, so I used that as an excuse to let a mechanic do what I could not while I was away. In the middle of my vacation, I ordered the Paco Motorsports lift kit.

When I got home, the new muffler was on and the mechanic replaced the leaky brake pump, too. He also pointed out that the suspension was shot and the shocks/struts did not want to continue life on this planet. A weekend later and my friends and I were able to get the old rear suspension out and a new setup (not OEM) bolted in. Driving around the following week, the car displayed a prominent Carolina squat, just dragging its booty all over the road.

Next, we replaced the front suspension and swapped out the control arms at the same time. Once this was done, the project went into a freeze. The lift kit had arrived, but it sat collecting dust. My work was put on hold when I broke a rib riding the electric skateboard. I wasn't even

doing anything interesting, just riding like normal, going out to get coffee.

So far the absolute easiest mod was a K&N cold air intake, and man was it bitter cold outside when I installed it. Spring of last year brought the arrival of the front bash bar from True Focus Fabrication and a light kit that my Dad was able to hook up for me. It was getting down to crunch time, and there was no way I would wait another year to make it to Wasteland. I fabricated some of my own mounts for the lower LEDs to fit along the bash bar and additional mounts for the side reflectors to keep things street legal.

The next large item was offroad tires. I did a ton of research into the sizing, what would work with which rim. The front and rear fenders needed to be cut and bashed. This was expected, and my good friend Brian came over to help. We got the rear tires on just fine with an angle grinder—no bashing needed. Then we went to work on the front tires. The amount of bashing that needed to be done was insane. The driver's side went easily, it only felt like hammering eight hours, in reality it was just an hour. The passenger side, though, was a swing and a

miss—literally. I cut a deep gash into my hand while bashing it in on the rusted metal. I could see through the skin down to the muscle and bone. One ER visit, some hot glue and a tetanus shot later, and I found my dad outside doing a temporary fix to the car so my cousin and I wouldn't need to go to the ER during our upcoming trip to the Summer Camp festival. The rust spot at the corner of the doors was perfectly located where you could cut your leg if you weren't wearing long pants, but so far no one else has had to go to the hospital because of this car.

Most of the major car projects had been squared away. My cousin came to town, and we had a two-hour trip ahead of us to Chillicothe, Illinois, for the Summer Camp festival. I got her amped to see Andy Frasco there, and she introduced me to Freakbass. We tried staying up until 3am just to experience everything. (Go purple team!) But anyway, we drove home taking the backroads, passing by all the old farmland, listening to each

other's music the whole way, going down some bendy roads.

Finally, after almost a year of preparation, all Arte needed was another radio and some dirt.

The Journey - failures, successes

Two weeks before Wasteland was a major crunch time. The week before, I had just moved back to my parents' house while the housing market cools down. I was taking guitar lessons twice a week and sword training for 10 weeks beforehand. Just in case, I found a good spot in the left side of the passenger footwell for a small HAM radio. I also mounted a CB radio in the glove box and popped the antenna on the right side of the car, which pulled the whole look together.

I left Chicago for Wasteland a few days early to account for any breakdowns or other issues. I was in no rush and honestly preferred driving a bit slow. Once you cross the Mississippi River, it's straight and flat for about 15 hours, nothing too exciting. But when you're halfway

through Colorado, the mountains rising up from the horizon are a sight to see. I hit Denver around 7pm and I still needed to make it to the other side of the Rockies. Man, adding a couple hundred pounds of equipment and larger tires did not help with going up mountains. 45 mph on the inclines just kept up with the big rig truckers. But once I crested the peaks, going down was insanely fun. Even though the car is lifted, the handling is still really good. The added light bar came in clutch many times throughout the trip, too, especially when going through forests or to light up entire mountainsides when going through the canyons.

I'm not a gambler but the next unscheduled stop on the trip would be Las Vegas, as Arte started making some strange noises. When I arrived in Vegas it was a Sunday. Wasteland started on a Wednesday, so there was time. Monday morning, the mechanic opened up and was able to confirm I needed a new water pump that would arrive the next day. Tuesday, they discovered the rear left CV axle





was broken. Wednesday arrived, Wasteland had begun, I was three hours away with no way of getting there. Sure, I could rent a car, but so much time and effort was put into this thing that I wasn't about to give up. Thursday morning I got the call the car would be ready at around noon.

I stopped at Walmart for some supplies before heading back on the road. More water, more food. The car sounded much better. Did you know California has agricultural checkpoints? They basically just ask if you have any fruits or vegetables in your car and dispose of them if you do. The one between Vegas and my final destination was unwisely placed at the bottom of a valley. Going full stop to about 45 mph on a hill in the desert when temps were reaching 100°F and having the AC on leads to some cooling problems.

About halfway up the hill, I looked down and saw the temperature gauge climbing *fast*. I pulled over immediately, shut off the engine and could hear the coolant boiling. It's now around 4pm, I'm in the desert with an overheating engine, and it's HOT. I got on AAA's app, plugged in my

location, and waited in the sun. I had water and shade if I needed it, so to pass the time, I did what made sense. I practiced my guitar on the side of the highway. Playing Andy Frasco, Ghost, Samurai, figuring out my own thing for about an hour before I ended up calling AAA for an update about the status of the tow. It was kind of fun in a surreal sense, seeing people pointing, RVs and trucks honking while I played. I saw more smiles in one hour than a dental office sees in a day. The breakdown was worth it for that memory. Someone out there has a photo of the one-man jam session.

The repair shop I got towed to took a look, told me to not run AC, refilled some of the coolant, and didn't charge anything. Shocker for Vegas in my experience. I got back on the highway around 9pm, eyeing the temp gauge harder than a Karen eyes an HOA violation. I was free from the clutches of Las Vegas. Wasteland, here I come.

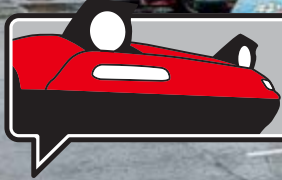
I followed the GPS to the indicated entry point the organizers specified. It was around 1am, in the middle of the desert, and I need to turn right onto a sand road. There was no indication that people had been this way in a

while, no signs of Wasteland. I drive down the road, and after a mile or two I spot a small sign: "Wasteland ahead" Heck yeah. I punch it. Tires and suspension chewing up the bumps and potholes on the road. A few minutes later, another sign: "88.3 Wasteland Radio." Of course I tuned in. "Crazy he calls me" by Billie Holiday plays as I pull up to the gates. Some time between 2 and 3am I had my camp spot set up.

I messaged my boss who, during this entire project thought I was going to get myself killed, with a photo and a text: "I survived." That was the last message I was able to get out before the connection dropped for the remaining few days.

My neighbors came over to introduce themselves and we all shared a few drinks before turning in for the night.

To be continued... **mm**



CLUB PROFILE

RIDGERUNNER MIATA CLUB

of Western North Carolina by Les Casterline

Our club was initially formed over 20 years ago, and I've been a member for more than 16 of them. We have about 60 members in our club, and we meet monthly on the second Saturday at the Fields Mazda dealership in West Asheville. The meeting is always followed by an hour-plus drive on Miata friendly roads—we have a lot of them in this area—and ends at a restaurant for lunch, always a different one each time. Oftentimes we'll host a second drive during the month, and on occasion we'll plan an overnighter. Our drives have anywhere from 10 to 30 cars, and we break up into groups with each having a leader and a tailgunner. We follow printed directions and communicate with CB radios.

Miata engineers must have had our roads in mind when they created the car. We have ready access to the Tail of the Dragon, the Snake, Cherohalla Skyway, and other less known but no less wonderful backroads. On our longer drives we explore roads that wind around the hills and mountains of western North Carolina and the Piedmont area of upstate South Carolina, encountering waterfalls, lush foliage, granite outcroppings, deer, elk, and an occasional black bear. Of course, in the fall there is nothing better than the colorful drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Some events are so good they deserve repeating year after year. We do a short drive in January to nearby Sierra Nevada Brewery, despite the

possibility of snow. In July we host an annual picnic to celebrate the election of new club officers. The picnic may be held at the lake home of a member with catered BBQ, or at the estate of our founder with a fish fry. We've even had our own Soobie BBQ chef who smokes chicken and pork at his facility. We have an annual Oktoberfest drive with a gathering at one of several nearby German restaurants. In November we host a Marine Corps representative and



present him with gifts for children of all ages. And of course, the end of year holiday party is not to be missed.

Our drives often take us to and through some quaint North and South Carolina towns such as Brevard, Lake Lure, Chimney Rock, Hot Springs, Highlands, Landrum, Dillard, Dillsboro, and Waynesville. We will venture on occasion to South Carolina, Tennessee, or Georgia. One of our drives started late afternoon with dinner and then onto the Blue Ridge Parkway where our resident professional astronomer set up his large diameter telescope. Fortunately, it was a clear night so we could clearly see Moon craters,

Saturn, and Neptune. That night the Milky Way was gloriously visible to the naked eye.

We've organized Poker Runs (if motorcycles can do it, why not Miatas?), gone white water rafting, strapped ourselves to ziplines, we have traveled to air and auto museums, and to the Tryon Equestrian Center for Saturday Night Lights—all thanks to a great group of people who enjoy the best car there is. At a drivers' meeting I made a comment, "My MX-5 is not a Buick, and I don't drive it like a Buick!" I drive safely, but I drive in a spirited manner and count on the others to keep up. I own a somewhat rare Crystal Blue 2002 NB and a not so rare Soul Red 2017 ND, both are beautiful and have a few mods including aftermarket Cobalt exhausts.

If you find yourself in Western North Carolina, don't be surprised if your Miata gets gifted our club business card on your windshield. And if you're around on the second Saturday of any month feel free to come to our meeting at 10am at the Mazda dealer and join us for a fun lunch drive afterward. If you are not yet a member of a Miata club, you should definitely consider it! As much fun as it is to drive your Miata, it can be even more fun with a like-minded group of enthusiasts. **mm**

For more information about the Ridgerunner Miata Club of Western North Carolina, visit RidgerunnerMiatas.com



THE Matchmaker

by Mae Schneider

Standing in the sun for eight hours really makes you think. Especially when you're running on three hours of sleep and have been able to do nothing about the sunburn that you've felt forming for the past six hours. It makes you think about how you ended up at an event for a car that just two years ago you had zero interest in. But, huddled around a tiny tent, surrounded by a large group of people, all looking just as sweaty and slightly uncomfortable as me, I found myself unwilling to leave. Unwilling to leave after spending all day in the hot sun, wandering around Miatas at the Gap. All for something as small as a shift knob.

Clearly, I must've cracked my head two years ago, because if someone had told me then that one day I'd be driving multiple hours for some car event, I wouldn't have believed them. But almost exactly two years ago, my brother, Grant, bought a Miata. He was sick of driving around in my mom's old SUV, and my parents were tired of letting him borrow the car. Being 18, he didn't have a ton of money, and since we live right next to the Blue Ridge Parkway, he wanted

something suited to the area. Enter: Miata. Naturally, my mom hated the idea. The particular car he'd picked was from 1990, with almost 200,000 miles on it. From a mom's perspective, not a very good option. Overlooking the obvious safety issues and concerns with longevity of the car, I was neutral on the purchase. Sure, the little red car was cute enough, but it wasn't something I'd ever want. But Grant loved it. After some practice driving around in parking lots, he took me for a drive. My first thought? The convertible thing wasn't as great as it seems. You had to yell to have a conversation, it was freezing (maybe don't buy a convertible in October), and I thought I'd never get my hair untangled.

It took me about seven months to warm up to my brother's Miata. And then one late night, Grant took me on a drive in his car to test his new headlights. The road he chose ran down the mountain. The twists and bends in the road tossed my stomach all over the place, but by the time we were at the bottom, I was sold. I loved the car. After that, I started bugging Grant to take me along on drives or to

car events. When he finally gave in, he couldn't have picked a more perfect drive. That night, he introduced me to his new friend, Tommy, who he'd met on the Blue Ridge Parkway just a few days before. The three of us instantly got along, and spent every single night together for weeks, driving around and goofing off. I gradually began to understand how driving meant more than transportation to get from point A to B. It could be a passion. I also started to like Tommy, but there was a problem with that. He was temporarily in Asheville for work, and would be there for another three months, but after that he was going home to Pittsburgh, over 500 miles away from me.

Naturally, with Grant's Miata being a 30+ year old car, it had its issues, not helped by the fact that it was his first car. He skipped some regular maintenance that turns out should not have been ignored. One night, we went out and Grant decided to let his friend try and slide his car around an empty parking lot. Bad idea. The Miata hadn't seen fresh oil in a very long time, and it showed its appreciation by spinning three rod bearings. We got the car towed home to begin a three-month long ordeal.

It took a month to get the Miata up and running again. During that month, Tommy was at my house every day, working on the car or driving Grant and me around. And then he and I started to hang out more without my brother there. By the time the Miata was running, Tommy and I were officially dating. Life was good. The Miata was back, I had a boyfriend, and everything was amazing. Of course, that couldn't last. Late one night, I got a text from a friend. Grant had crashed the Miata.

The next two months passed by in a cycle of fix-and-break the Miata. It seemed like every time Grant would get it zip-tied back together, another problem would pop up. Tommy had gone home, and my life had turned around. I was losing excitement for





the day I would get my license and had no idea what kind of car I'd get. And then on one fortunate evening, when the Miata decided to run properly, Grant and I went to a car meet. I don't remember much about that night other than one thing: I remember seeing this adorable little car and just instantly knew. Sure, I liked Grant's car enough, but I had no intention of buying a Miata until I saw that NB.

I had just come back from Pittsburgh, but I hadn't told Tommy what I was planning, because I knew he wouldn't like the car. Miatas were just not his thing. The memory of the NB was fresh in my mind, and I searched Facebook to "just look" at what was out there. I remember sitting in my room, scrolling through Marketplace, when I saw this beautiful, Crystal Blue 2002 NB Miata. That was it. That was my car. I showed my brother that night. Less than a week later, I was on my way

to Georgia with a wad of cash for a car that I wouldn't even be able to drive for months. When I saw it in the parking lot, it confirmed everything. My car was perfect. I still hadn't told Tommy, so I just sent him a picture. Naturally, he didn't like it. Miatas were just not his thing.

My car has an interesting history, and we're learning more about it every day. A previous owner had done an engine swap on it at 20,000 miles, due to the old engine being blown from a turbo. Now she had 152,000 miles, a cracked windshield, ripped up seats, and a cracked center console. The first time I sat down and made a list, fixing the windshield was the top priority. Being my first car, I had slightly unrealistic expectations. I thought I'd buy new seats and a windshield within the first six months. My car had other plans.

Within a week of driving my car, after the long wait for my license, my clutch stopped working. I took it to

a shop where it sat, untouched, for a few weeks. It seemed like I would never get my car back, and I'd have to pay a fortune to get it fixed. Tommy decided that he was done waiting. He moved down to North Carolina and took my car out of the shop. After a long process, involving Tommy dropping my transmission three times and buying two new clutches, it was shifting again.

After the clutch, I told myself I'd do the windshield next. I just had to save up a bit of money. Somehow, instead of a windshield, BC Racing Extreme Low coilovers ended up arriving at my house. A month or two later (and a few more suspension and aero additions) and I finally bought a new windshield. I'm still working on the seats.

During those months, Tommy would cycle through cars, buying and selling them faster than anyone was able to keep up. Most of the time, we would have to take my car

everywhere, and little by little, my Miata grew on him. He spent a bit of time without a car, driving mine when he needed to. He was looking for a new car, and as a joke, I told him to buy a Crystal Blue Miata that had just popped up for sale. The joke spread around to a few friends, who seemed to be serious about the idea. The car was nice, under 100k miles, with a ton of recent maintenance done. That week, he went to go look at the car in person and decided that it was good enough for now.

We drove my car to South Carolina a few days later to pick up its twin. Eventually he started admitting that he actually liked his Miata. The plan to sell it went away. We became more involved in the Miata community and heard from a friend about the biggest Miata event of the year—Miatas at the Gap. Both of us were working and unable to get off any earlier than Friday afternoon, so we would miss a big chunk of the event, but we were still determined to go. Tommy had his heart set on getting one of the Moss Miata limited edition wooden shift knobs, and both of us wanted to go on a group drive.

When we got home from work on Friday, we both rushed to pack some clothes and left as soon as we could. The highway was closed, forcing us to take a three-hour long drive on backroads, cutting out our data for the entire drive. We had plans to stay with some friends in an Airbnb, but by the time we arrived, they had texted us hours before telling us that they weren't allowed to bring any more people. And unfortunately, the campsite that friends were at was filled, too. It was almost midnight and time to drive the Tail of the Dragon, which was incredible even though we weren't able to meet up with the group that started out some time ahead of us. By the time we grouped up, sleeping hardly mattered anymore.

Tommy and I were both coming from a full day of work, directly into

driving until two in the morning, so neither of us really wanted to go find another campsite to sleep at. The solution? Sleeping in a Miata. Would not recommend it. By the time we figured out where to park, and said goodnight to everyone, it was three in the morning, and we had plans to go to the vendors at seven. It took all my willpower to set my alarm for six, and we attempted to get a couple hours of sleep.

The next morning, bright and early, we drove our cars to the vendors. The only good thing about getting there that early, turns out, is just a good parking space. The limited edition shift knobs were now in a raffle system, so all Tommy and I could do was put our names in. We spent the day walking around, talking to the vendors, thinking of things we could do to our cars, and taking tons of pictures. It truly was one of the best experiences I've had, even with my lack of sleep (and sunscreen). The number of Miatas was unreal, and everyone was so happy to be there. We ended up spending eight hours and not accomplishing either of our goals. We left without a shift knob, and missed out on the group drive, but we were happy to have gotten to experience this fun event. We're already making plans to return and excited for our future with matching cars. **mm**



Hey Mae, your friends at Moss Miata felt your story needed a little happier ending, so we had these made for the two of you.



Photography @_murkymedia_



NOT HOW TO BUILD A *RACECAR*

by Jordan Fureman



Bumblng idiot. Clueless. Shouldn't be allowed within 100 feet of a socket wrench. All accurate ways to describe my ability to work on cars. So, naturally, I decided that I should turn my 1993 Mazda Miata into a race car. And that is what I did. Or, I should say that's what I'm doing. I've come to find that, even though my Miata has a roll cage, slick tires, the appropriate spec components, and over half a dozen race weekends under its belt, it's a never-ending project. One that regularly reminds me that I might be a little bit stupid.

The first order of business was the suspension, which I am proud to report was one of the things I got correct, mainly because I wasn't the one who picked it out. Enter the late Matthew Yip. Matt was a legend in the Washington D.C. Region (WDCR) of the SCCA, driving in various classes over the years. Matt had a strong influence in getting new people into racing by mentoring them, which is what he did for me. Matt took the liberty of picking up for my car some junkyard Bilsteins, swaybars, a bright blue hardtop with the name "Jeff" stuck to the side of it (which I left on), and a Hard Dog roll bar.

While I got to work on the suspension, Matt and my dad did the rollbar and the hardtop. Because the suspension components had been yanked out of a recently destroyed race car, they didn't exactly come with directions. Thankfully, Matt Yip's watchful eyes made sure I didn't accidentally dig a hole deeper than I could fill. The job that probably should have only taken about four hours became a two-day event, but I was determined to see it through.

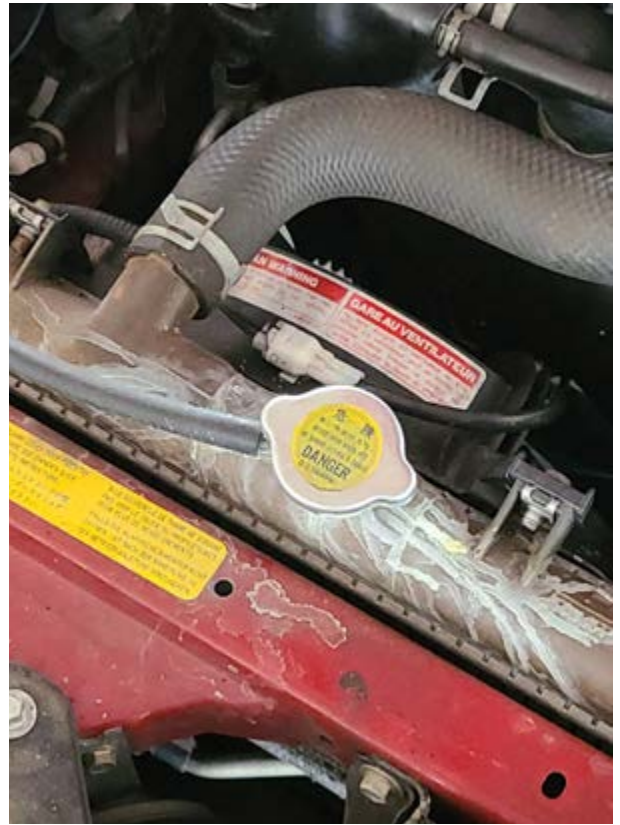
And really, other than confusing my lefts and rights and tightening a bolt until it snapped, the operation went smoothly. When finished, I had a slightly lower and slightly safer-for-the-track NA Miata. In the months leading up to my first track day at Watkins Glen International, I had my nose buried in my college studies. My ever-helpful dad took the liberty of installing new OMP racing buckets as well as some snazzy new 5-point harnesses. When I got home from school, I hurriedly put on my borrowed helmet and HANS and jumped into the car. To my dismay, I did not fit.

The job that should have only taken about four hours became a two-day event.

Turns out, the seat mounts we chose added significant height to the seat, making the car difficult for people with heads to operate. I distinctly remember my Eastern European instructor, Oleg, exclaiming with disgust as he sat in the passenger seat with a crooked neck, "This is car for baby." Thankfully, one of the 30 other Miatas in the paddock had a passenger seat they could spare, so I could drive comfortably for the weekend.

The minute I returned home, I removed the foam from the bucket seat. This gave me an extra inch





but, unfortunately, I was born with a spine and sitting in a steel bucket with no padding was not ideal. So, the foam went back in. The next solution, which ultimately did the trick, was to go postal with a drill and a Sawzall to "custom" fit the seat mount. After The Glen came a series of other track days. Each one further intensifying my urge to race. The Miata ran rock solid. Until I got to Pitt Race.

I was becoming pretty quick behind the wheel. Running in the advanced groups, I was sometimes even keeping up with Vettes if I drove like a maniac. I flew down the circuit, chasing down an elderly man in a C7 Corvette, closing in more and more each lap. Sweat dripped down my forehead as I gave everything to "win" this High Performance Driver Education (HPDE) session.

15 minutes into the session, I finally got the "point-by" passing signal I had been desperately craving. I dove down the inside of the penultimate corner, rev-matching into

3rd gear, when suddenly it sounded like someone had detonated a pipe bomb in my transmission. I put my foot on the gas. No drive.

As I coasted to a stop, I cursed the day, fearing that I had killed my little Miata. With my weekend over, we loaded the car onto the trailer.

Once home, it didn't take long to see what happened. My 1993 Miata, with 120,000 miles on it, was still on the original clutch. Said clutch was paper thin and self-destructed. It was a much easier fix than my gloomy imagination had feared. We threw a 4-puck clutch in and moved on.

At this point, I had done enough track days to feel ready to take the next step. So, in the off-season, we began to prep the car for SCCA competition. That means it was roll cage time, and while I am eager to try new things, I decided that the roll cage was probably something I should entrust to a professional. I enlisted the help of another friend, Shane. One winter later, the car

was revealed. It had a fancy new Advanced Autosports cage with a drop floor plan. Now I finally fit in the car properly. After shaking it down at Lime Rock, I booked my spot in the SCCA Competition school.

Two nights before school started, my racecar peed a puddle of coolant on the ground. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the stock radiator was A) not ideal for racing and B) not supposed to be brown, brittle, and broken. Luckily, Matt had a spare aluminum radiator that I could swap in the night before the school. With the hastily installed radiator and some sketchy used Hoosiers fitted, I passed the school and now had a Novice Permit of my own. I also learned that Matt Yip had all along been stealthily setting my car up for a specific race class: SSM.

SSM is, in the opinion of many, the crown jewel of the WDCR of the SCCA. It is consistently the largest regional class, with fields as big as 50 cars. SSM is essentially Spec

Miata in a time machine. It is only 1.6-liter NA Miatas, all with the old Bilstein SM suspension components. Each car is limited to a maximum of 107 horsepower, and everyone is required to be a minimum of 2,275 pounds. SSM provides fierce competition, and its strict rules keep it inexpensive, which is perfect for a broke college student. That said, there was still money to be spent. Like, my aftermarket exhaust and intake had to be replaced with compliant parts, so out they went.

My first race was, well, a race. With all my HPDE experience, I expected to walk up and put my car straight into the top ten. Imagine my shock when I finished qualifying to find I placed 42nd out of 44 cars. A much-needed reality check was handed to me that day.

There were a handful of reasons for my poor performance (in addition to my incompetence). Firstly, I left the paddock for qualifying with a full tank of fuel, meaning I was essentially

carrying another person in weight. When I realized this blunder, I went to remove the fuel using the test port I had installed the night before, only to discover that it was on the wrong fuel line, meaning, it was useless. My power steering, while very helpful for my forearms, also needed to go, which it later did with the help of a Sawzall (and a small fire).

An eye-opening realization I had that weekend had to do with my tires. To save a few bucks, I was running used rubber. Yes, I know, but they were free! I'd lurk around after a race weekend and find folks who were getting rid of tires and take them. While they were the spec tires, they weren't exactly good. I often found myself locking up my brakes even when barely touching them. At my second event, I was pulled aside by my friend's dad, who lectured me on my frugality. He loaned me a set of good tires on the condition that I must have my own for the next event.

I also now knew that everyone else in the paddock had a limited-slip differential. So the wheel spin I was periodically hearing was not because I was going so fast around corners, it was because my open diff was spinning the inside wheel. I did my last novice races with the open diff, opting to get my beginner stripes off before I started worrying about being fast. Once the stripes came off, I began my search for an LSD. This search led me to what I can only describe as a "Miata Graveyard." Dozens of Miatas sat ransacked, each missing more components than the last. The graveyard housed what I thought was my ticket to glory, a Torsen 4.3 differential out of an NB Miata.

Armed with YouTube tutorial knowledge, I got to work swapping the diffs. Surprisingly, other than a few phone-a-friend moments, I was able to get it in without much difficulty. The Torsen made a big difference on track. I was now fighting



Used, free tires are not always the best option on the track.



closer to the top 20 rather than the top 30. I was thrilled with this improvement until I discovered a steady stream of water spewing out of the front of my radiator. A rock had flown up, hitting my radiator just right and cracked it. I came to find out that everyone, except for me, puts chicken wire over their grille to prevent this. After hot swapping in another junkyard radiator on the side of the track, which later broke from another rock, I was back at it.

In the subsequent races, I became more and more competitive but began to notice yet another glaring issue. My car was (and still is) slow. Looking at the data and footage, it was clear that I was down on power. A test confirmed this, with my motor having 22% leakdown in two of the cylinders.

Today, with a few more races under my belt, I still have issues to sort out. My motor is tired and in desperate need of a head rebuild, my car is obese, and I still have much improving to do on my own driving skills. But I have a top 15 under my belt, and I can feel a top 10 coming.

The great thing about racing in SSM, or any Miata racing class for

that matter, is that you always have people to race against and battle with. Whether I start in 40th place or 15th place, I am always battling with my friends from the green to the checkered flags. Sure, I could have bought an already-built car, spent a lot less, and probably have been more competitive, but it wouldn't be my car, and I wouldn't have learned anything. I would just be a dumb idiot driving a race car... Well, more of an idiot than now. I also wouldn't have made memories with the amazing people who helped me build the car. Like my dad and the late, great Matthew Yip.

So, if you want to go racing, but are afraid of working on your car or looking silly on the track. Don't worry. A big part of the fun is being dumb and slow at first. And if I can do it, anyone can. **mm**

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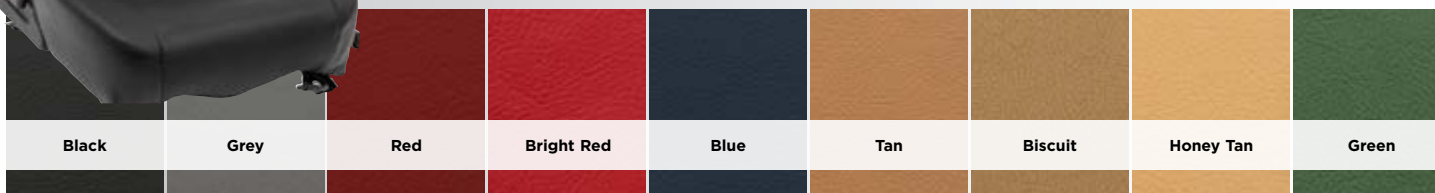


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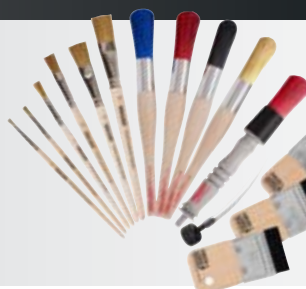
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