

Miata

MOTORING

ISSUE 2, 2023



*No
Regrets*



"Well-loved" Miatas deserve the limelight, too. There are several inside including this one on page 7

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SEE CENTER SECTION FOR DETAILS

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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!

WORD WRANGLERS & GARAGE GURUS

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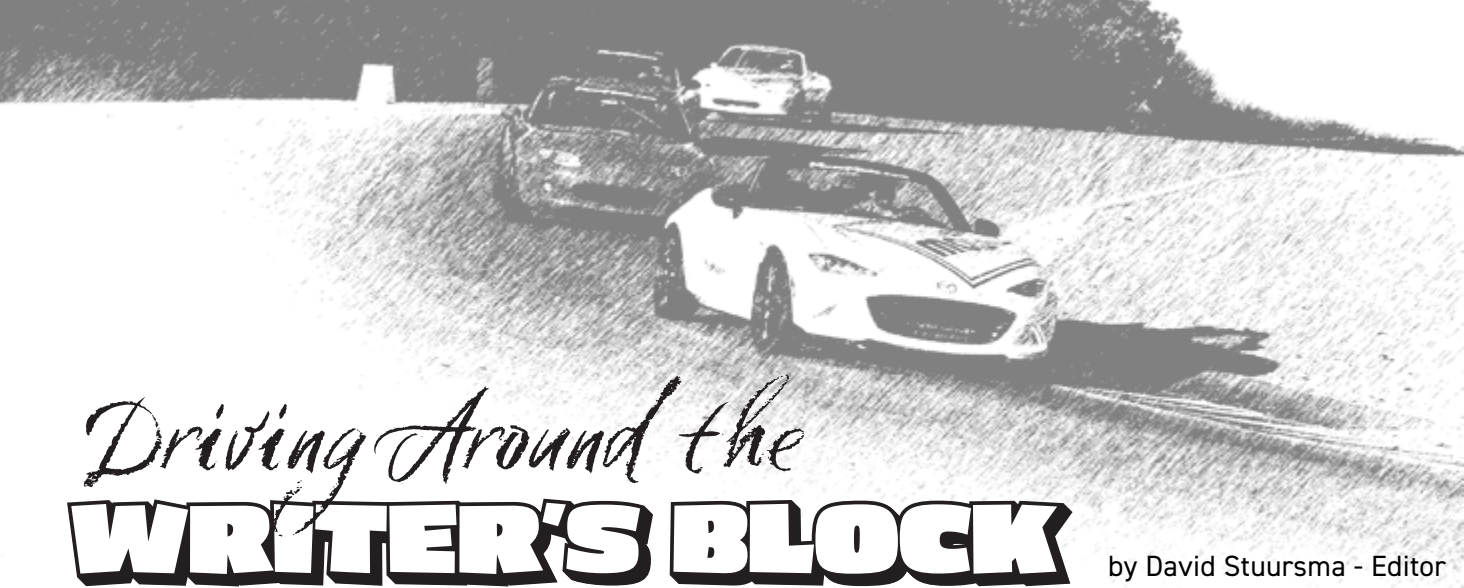
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Cover and main feature photography, general interest stories or medium-length tech articles. Tech tips, cartoons, illustrations, humorous anecdotes and other odds-n-ends that help make Miata Motoring great.



Driving Around the **WRITER'S BLOCK**

by David Stuursma - Editor

What's your Miata version of a guilty pleasure? With a car that's so forgiving and fun-loving, that's kind of a trick question. You don't need to feel guilty about taking corners like a loony or of revving the daylights out of the motor on the downhill slope of the freeway on-ramp. Miatas were built to perform. The guilty side of it, for me, was all about the lack of performance on my part. The pleasure of having a cheap, fun car that didn't complain revealed my own flaws. I didn't respond adequately to the needs of my Miata. I knew it, but rather than changing who I was, I let my car down by convincing myself I drove a borderline beater and not a classic.

Some of the stories in this issue hammered that point home for me. But since I'm not a fan of the concept of carrying guilt, I read with a sense of hope. The examples of old, well-loved Miatas are many. It's up to us to make sure these cars continue winning hearts for decades to come. Years ago I remember reading—I think it was in *Grassroots Motorsports* magazine—a solid word of advice. It went something like: "Don't let more than three things on your car go into disrepair. Any more than that and you risk resenting your car." Now of course this was a guidepost, not a written-in-stone law, but it makes sense. The more you let things get away from you, the harder it gets to put things right.

But will you really resent your car? Isn't that taking it a bit far? Nope. Not really. Whether we like it or not, our possessions, especially our cars, are a reflection of ourselves. When the things in our life start falling apart, it's only natural for our spirit, our stress levels, our self image to take a hit. But the opposite is true,

too. Let's move this thought exercise into a more positive light.

I know I'm not the only person who was convinced my NA Miata drove better after I waxed it. It ran smoother, felt lighter on its toes, obviously slipped through the air more easily, and I swear its guppy mouth grinned a bigger smile. Am I that sensitive of a person to distinguish the changes in the friction of air molecules flowing over my car?

Yes. Yes I am. Thanks in part to the hour I spent waxing my car. Who takes an hour to put a coat of wax on a Miata, you ask? What can I say? I like to take breaks. It's a 30 minute job, really. Aren't tiny cars the greatest!

I'm the last guy who's going to throw shade on anyone whose car is less than pristine. For me, for example, washing a car includes within its definition wiping the morning dew off with a squeegee, but that's life in water-thirsty California for you. I do, however, want to shower praise on Miata owners who are taking a deep breath and attempting projects on their cars that are outside their comfort zones. When experience is short, then self confidence is low, and the task of popping the hood or unscrewing the center console or disconnecting the battery to do who-knows-what's next is a big step. With a Miata, early models especially, taking first steps is doable, enjoyable even. It's a car that novice mechanics can learn on. Working on a Miata with zero experience means you'll likely make mistakes as you learn along the way. Now, if that becomes your guilty pleasure—if you find joy in fumbling along developing mechanical skills on a car that doesn't like to complain—I think you're on to something beautiful.

mm

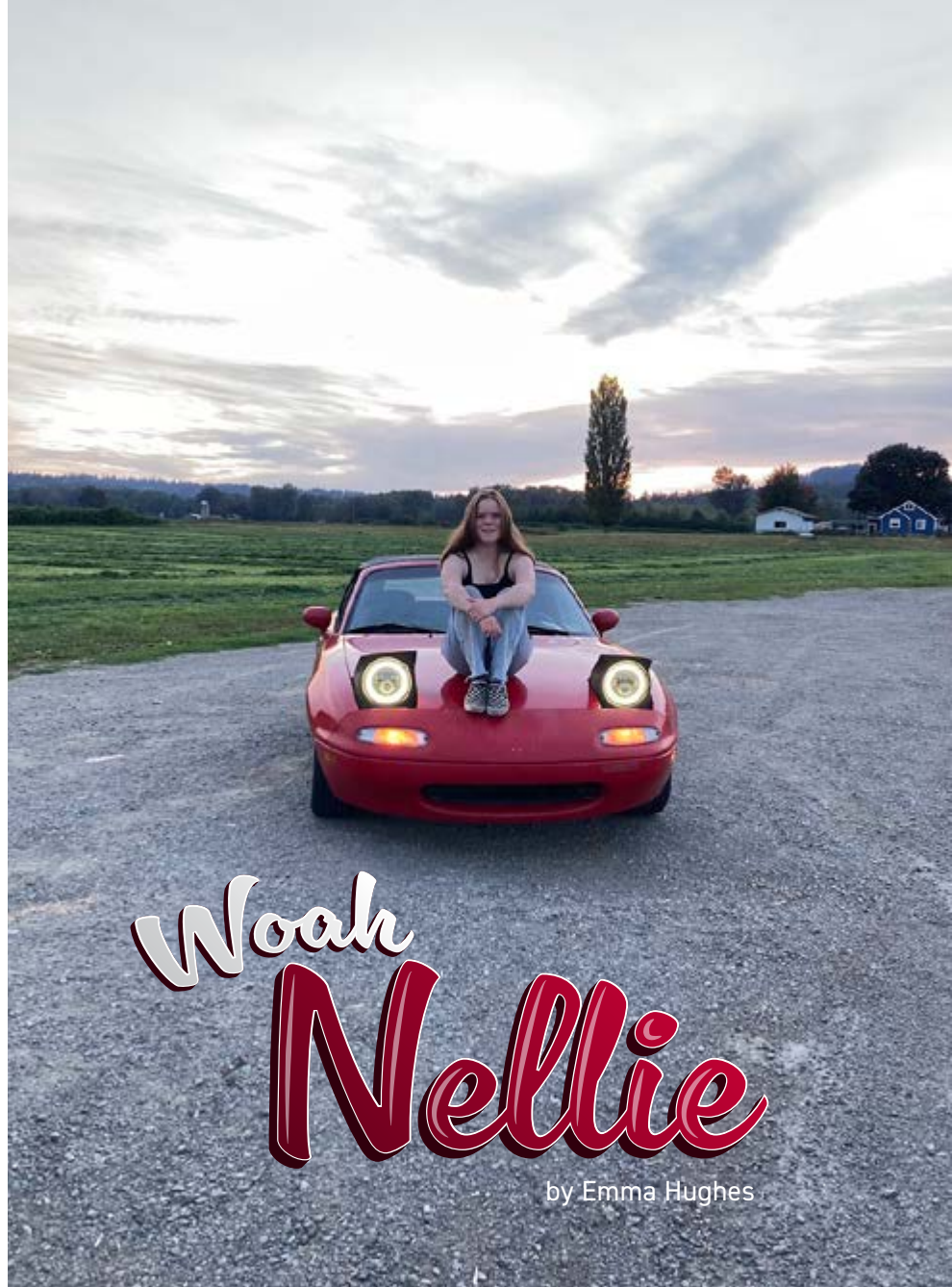
*There's nothing
more freeing
than driving a
terrible car.*

To tell the truth, the NA Miata engine scared me when I first looked at it. I think a lot of people lose sight of just how complicated a car can be. Everything must work at exactly the right time for hours and miles on end. That is incredibly impressive. It's intimidating, too. I'm not here to steer anyone away from owning a car, but I think it's important to respect them. They breathe and move like living creatures, don't they? Kind of?

At some point they will die, too, crumbling slowly, and rotting into the ground. Their paint flaking off, engine parts permanently locking together. Many have already died, in backyards surrounded by weeds, crushed at auto wrecking yards, picked apart by people who take and take until the car is no longer recognizable, until it quietly rusts away.

Unfortunately for everyone everywhere, my Miata has not met that fate.

I come from a long line of backyard mechanics, chop shop dismantlers, and used car dealers. My grandfather once replaced his



Woah Nellie

by Emma Hughes

window wipers at a red light. My father would tote a two-liter 7Up bottle to fill up with water for his overheating MGB. I, however, was never much of a car person. I didn't play with Hot Wheels, never helped out around the garage, and I accepted the fate of getting my license with the most boring car in the world. Whichever bland car you're thinking of is probably correct. I thought I'd be fine with being a typical driver in a gray vehicle, trudging along in traffic.

Until I actually sat in that station wagon.

It was so boring. Column shifter automatic, slow as snails powered windows, and ripped seats. I sat in that car for five minutes and as it coughed to life, I thought to myself, this is it?

I made a promise to myself: It was not to be my future. Enter VW Beetle.

My mom was enough of a pushover that she allowed my dad and me talk her into buying a 50-year-old German rust bucket. My



dad was open-minded enough that he saw past the guarantee that I'd break both my legs if the Beetle was ever hit head-on. I was naive enough to want one in the first place.

I got lucky. I adore that car. It has been taken apart and put together so many times that I've lost count. It's been lowered and tinted and broken and fixed and it looks like a race car. The only problem is that it isn't.

Enter Miata.

High off fumes from pulling Volkswagen engines, I started looking for a Miata. Most of my car friends had one or two, and I was a sucker for pop-up lights. I wasn't ready to get rid of the Beetle, so the Miata was bought under the promise of being sold. "It's a project car," I said convincingly enough. It ran with a loud lifter tick that came back at random times. It would gasp and splutter at stoplights due to a loose throttle cable. Its clutch failed less

than 24 hours into my ownership. The speedo cable squealed when the temperature dropped. My friends would roll to the ground getting out of it because it was so low. I've never done a compression test for fear that I'd cry at what I'd see. My Miata was a 1.6 1990 NA with 314,280 miles on the dirtiest engine I've ever seen in my life. That's enough miles to drive around the planet 12 times. That alone should've killed the car and left it sitting to rot, but it was the first of many examples of how this Miata would not be a normal car.

I was ecstatic. I'd never had a daily driver that could take freeway speeds comfortably. With the prospect of a Miata that I could learn on, I dove right in. Slowly, the Miata came to life. I cleaned every surface, fixed leaks, cleaned plugs, changed oil, and generally guessed my way through the first few months. And along with the help of some

apprehensive friends, it began to look and act like a car.

I called her Nelly. I stuck a radio from a boat into her cracked dash and blasted horrible music so loudly that her windows rattled. I got tailed by cops constantly, despite the fact that I was never doing anything wrong. I had the spring from a carburetor holding up her driver's side headlight. I wasn't used to the narrowness of a five-speed gearbox, and accidentally started in third more than once in the beginning.

Despite the fact that the engine could quite literally blow up at any given time, she ran soundly. There was a time in the first winter in which she was doing about fifty miles a day, and she didn't even blink. She was held together with zip ties and duct tape. I knew that I would forgive her if she broke down and died.



The issue was she didn't. She ran on disgustingly shabby coilovers and old tires and on a frame that had never really been checked by me or anyone professional. She kept moving forward and so did I. She braved snow and ice as my designated winter vehicle. Her soft top leaked, but so what? I taped it up and kept driving. A small fire extinguisher rolled around the passenger's footwell in preparation for what seemed inevitable.

Along with Nelly came some of my best friends. Many were people that'd been working on JDM cars—mostly Miatas—for a while. People with shiny air intakes and black high-gloss wheels and racing rollbars. People who kindly looked past Nelly's six rock chips in the windshield and the two cracks on each turn signal. People who carved out a space beside them in the vast world of Mazda for Nelly and me to fill, despite the fact that we ran only on luck and Sea Foam.

I knew I was head over heels when I asked for Moss Miata floor mats for Christmas. Nelly was finally given something that she didn't desperately need. The obsession slowly snowballed. When I'd see stickers and think, "This would be perfect for Nelly!" When I started to take the Miata to car meets instead of the Beetle. When I changed my Instagram handle to include the Miata. When I planned to take



Guinevere is a five-year-old Ameraucana chicken. She lays eggs with blue shells! Gwenny is always hopping in and out of the cars, and I suspect that she's trying to lay an egg in them—particularly on the Beetle's rear seat. When she's not digging up the garden, Gwenny often accompanies me in the garage, where she pecks at my 10mm sockets and stands on my stacks of clean rags.

the Daisies off. When I started researching how to bring a hardtop back from my trip to England.

I was the owner of a truly terrible car, and I loved it.

But I think that's the Mazda Miata way. There are good reasons why these cars are lifted onto a pedestal. First of all, the Miata is attainable, and that is very important. With patience and a willingness to overlook some flaws, one can buy a Miata for less than their family's soccer wagon. I firmly think that the Miata deserves its rise to fame. It deserves to be bought and loved and traded and raced because it has been a bold staple in the car community for such a long time now.

To be given every opportunity to break but to still run soundly is the mark of an excellent machine. This

is a machine that knows the apex of a corner. One that has lived through an endless rotation of brake work done by a girl who uses Google as a car manual. A car that has taught my friends how to drive stick. One that has literally crossed borders to drive up mountains and look out over the ocean. A car that has yet to see the inside of a professional garage. My Miata has not been dealt the kindest hand, but she has yet to give up.

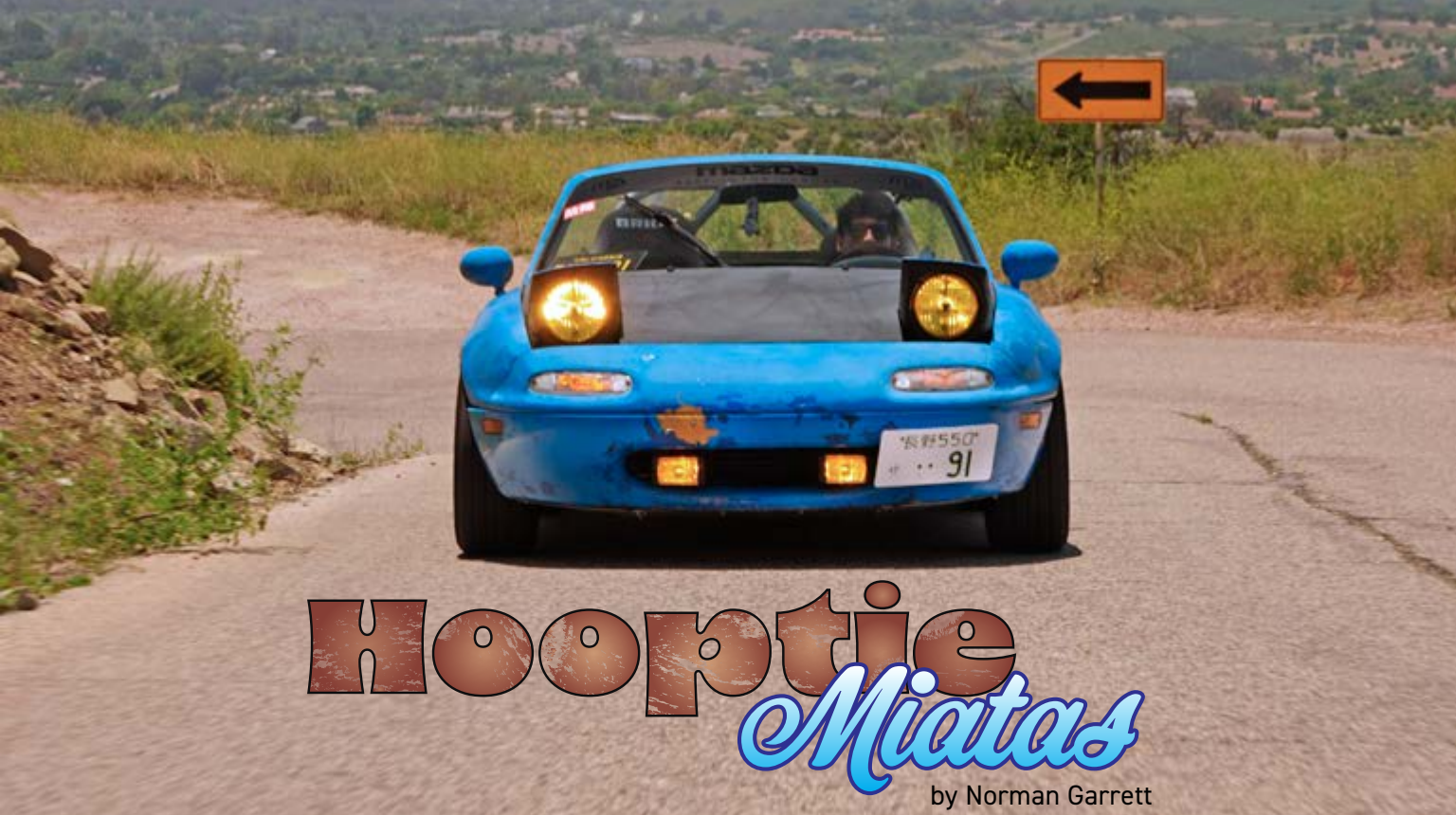
These cars have defied the modern age. The Miata doesn't fit in the twenty-first century with its huge headlights and manual transmission and peeling paint. They're so small that my friends can't see me when they look out of their rearview mirror. These are convertible cars that are driven in rain and snow,

only visible because of their vibrant paint (who buys bright red cars anymore?). The two-seater Miata has been getting its drivers out of carpooling duties for decades.

But we still drive them, don't we? Thousands of Miata owners will walk out to their car tomorrow morning, start it up, and drive it. And they'll be in love, just like me.

So, here's to Nelly. A car that has trusted her drivers for over 300,000 miles, and hopefully this driver for a few miles more. **mm**





The photos accompanying Norman's article were taken by Andrew Chenovick, and the Miata belongs to Nick Murillo-Perez, both of whom are Moss employees. Nick's story begins on the next page.

When we were creating the Miata concept 40 years ago, we actually were thinking about the fifth owners that might be buying these cars decades later. This was a key part of how we thought about how owners would be interacting with the Light Weight Sports (LWS) car we were creating—not all of them would be buying new cars, some would be getting them used, for a variety of reasons. This was probably more out of nostalgia as it was clever foresight for many of us on the design team.

At the start of the concept, we asked ourselves what cars are being restored by enthusiasts. Out came the list of European sports cars from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Moss Motors was established to supply parts to this growing hobby. Moss grew quickly due to poor parts availability through the dealers despite a true affection for the cars themselves. The act of restoring a car requires both interest and investment, plus a ton of labor. What new car would inspire this sort of love and devotion? Well,

a small sports car would do the trick, it appeared to us. So, a LWS concept started to take shape to fit under the upscaling RX7.

Most of us at Mazda's SoCal Design Studio had purchased our first sports cars through a specific set of circumstances that made ownership possible. The first of which would be that the car was in such terrible shape that it had little value in the mainstream used car market. This typically meant that any little roadster that caught our eye was either in need of paint and/or bodywork, or in urgent need of hefty mechanical repair and oftentimes not running at all. Another requirement would be that the car was old (aka depreciated) enough and could be purchased with what might be called "high school money," meaning cash earned from cleaning gutters, mowing lawns, or from a part-time job at a local burger joint. So, we cut our automotive teeth on old, dilapidated European sports cars that the mainstream market had little interest in. In the 1970s and '80s, only a high schooler (with no regular job



I was in high school when I determined there were two cars I knew I would HAVE to own at some point in my life. I loved tiny cars so naturally my first choice was a classic Mini. They are well out of my budget, but one day I'll have one of those magnificent little machines. I started to search for something similar. Something affordable, small, and nimble, and I also wanted to be able to work on it myself. I landed on the mighty little roadster that is the Mazda Miata.

Once I was out of high school and working, eventually I had enough saved to start shopping. Finding a Miata that I could not only afford, but was also in good enough condition to daily drive was challenging. And after looking through Craigslist and Facebook marketplace every day for months, I finally stumbled across a beautiful 1991 Silverstone Miata for \$1600. It was a salvage title, but the body was straight, and the interior and exterior were in near mint condition. Most importantly, it ran perfectly, and the pop ups worked! This little car was my first, and with it I learned to drive stick, and I taught myself basic maintenance. I took automotive classes in college and was able to perform my own alignments on it.

I had a blast with that car, but sadly that story was short lived. After about eight months of ownership, while stopped at a red light, I was rear ended. I didn't think the damage was too bad, but insurance decided to call it a complete loss. This story has a bit of a happy ending, however. I wish I could say I bought the car back from auction, but I didn't. The payout was more than twice what I initially paid for the car, and with it I bought a 1991 Mariner blue for sale on Facebook. It had aftermarket wheels, Megan Racing coilovers, and a cat-back exhaust—a nice little head start on a modified Miata. Plus, having just started my job at Moss Motors,

hours to keep, and a bus system as a back-up for getting to school) could possibly have interest in a “foreign job” sports car. And boy, did we have interest in them.

The beauty of these two aforementioned conditions meant that we had to learn how to fix these cars up ourselves and do so with access to very little money. Thus began a series of lessons in car repair stemming from various intimate encounters with mysterious sub systems of European cars, such as metric-fastened powertrain components and rat's-nested wiring looms. Since few cars had service manuals available, most of what we learned was trial -> error -> error -> minimally functional success. But along the way, we fell

in love with the machines we were wrestling with. We'd lurk around dealerships, buying parts (or more often ordering and waiting for parts), hoping to get a moment to ask a technician a question about our particular problem.

We saw these jalopies as race cars compared to the behemoth Cadillacs and Lincolns that roamed the freshly-minted interstates crisscrossing the county. MGs, Triumphs, Alfas, Austin-Healeys, and even Jaguars could be picked up for a few hundred dollars. As a point of reference, my first drivable car was a 1964 Spitfire I bought from a Datsun dealership. This Triumph was abandoned in a field out back, a trade-in that had refused to start and was forgotten by the used

car manager. I paid \$150 in 1973 for the nine-year-old Spit (that's \$1070 in today's money, still in the “high school bucks” range). I had to figure out the ignition system a bit, and then it ran like a charm. Some recycled oil from the local Hudson service station, a set of retread bias ply tires, and a \$29.95 Earl Scheib paint job later, and I was in teenage heaven. This car was marginal from the get-go, and frankly not that well built from the factory. But it was mine, and I kept it running through sheer determination and resourcefulness.

For a further comparison, that Spitfire had depreciated to just 10% of its cost when new in just ten years. Contrast that to a ten-year-old NC Miata today which has a value of 33%

pulling and or packing customer orders, the decision to buy another Miata made complete sense.

Three years and that same little Miata is still in my possession, and I'm still with Moss, but now in the Quality Assurance department. Although the car is still quite rough around the edges, and now sports what some might consider to be too many stickers, she's still an absolute blast to drive when she isn't sitting in the garage waiting to be fixed. I have learned so much with this little car thanks to the magic of the internet. Nothing beats going for a drive after doing your own repair work.

I've mostly focused on ensuring the car is mechanically in good shape and ignored the cosmetics. My goal is to track the car, too, so naturally there is a decent amount of suspension work done. Fortunately, Moss sells a lot of the parts that have helped get this car to where it is now—a full Cobalt exhaust system from the headers back, Racing Beat front and rear anti-roll bars, Cobalt strut bars, and pads and rotors for the sport package big brakes that I swapped over from an NB Miata. My personal favorite upgrade is the Jackson racing cold air intake. The induction sound that comes from the relocated airbox lights up a huge smile on my face.

I'm grateful to be in the position I'm in, working at Moss and owning a Miata. During my time here, more Miatas have appeared in the employee parking lot, each one sporting a different character from the next one. And every time I see a Miata on the road, regardless of its condition or generation, I can't help but feel proud to be part of this community.

Nicolas Murillo-Perez

Moss Miata Quality Assurance



of its cost when new—a higher quality car with less depreciation. Recent growth in interest in first generation Miatas has them trading for 50% of their MSRP after thirty years on the road, but that's another story.

So, today, when I see a Miata on the road driven by a young gal or guy, with mis-matched fenders, a torn top, and ratty upholstery, I am not offended. Rather, I am taken back to my youth and the dozens of \$500 claptrops that I dragged home and put back on the road. I have put most of my kids into a Miata, and a few we have purchased for less than \$500. We find them at insurance auctions, neglected in driveways, and posted as "a project" on Craigslist.

This gives me great satisfaction. A whole new generation of enthusiasts are getting their sports car experience with a car that is typically a much better foundation for repair or restoration than the European sports cars of the past. With companies like Moss offering restoration parts (not ironically, the same company I purchased most of my MG/Triumph/Austin-Healey/Jaguar parts from in the '80s), keeping these cars on the road is pretty easy. Add to that the knowledgebase that is on miata.net and other sites, and there is nothing on a Miata that can't be fixed by someone with average skills or at least the desire to learn. Thanks, YouTube.

Now, we need to take a moment to make a distinction between restoration and modification. Seeing a clapped-out Miata warms my heart because it means that we made a car that is reliable enough to make it to an age when it is affordable for a young enthusiast. And, as funds allow, they can slowly restore the car as they wish.

As far as modification goes, I'm all for a bit of tuning and improvement, but it can be taken too far. The "Five Degrees of Negative Camber" crowd is lost on me. As are the wanna-be racers who slam their Miatas to the asphalt with 1000 lb/in eBay coil overs, thinking they've made the car better. A good portion of my book "The Mazda Miata Performance Handbook"



Shot on location at the Moss Miata headquarters in Goleta, California.

is dedicated to how not to screw up the brilliant chassis and suspension. What we did in the engineering department at Mazda with the Miata set up is pretty magical, and you can ruin a great thing with changing things just for the sake of change. Think of handing a five-year-old child a guitar and showing them the string adjustment knobs. In short order they can make a mess of what was once a beautiful instrument.

Subtle tuning like slightly stiffer springs, improved shocks (dampers), stiffer sway bars, and good tires can make track days more fun all around. Engine improvements are always useful, but not that many horses were left on the table when Mazda tuned the engine. Certainly headers, exhaust systems, air filters, and cold air intakes apply to many of the generations as improvements. For a number of years turbo and supercharger systems (like the Sebring/Jackson Racing Eaton-based

systems that were sold through Moss) were a great way to find 40% or higher power levels out of the stock engine. Now that the ND Miata pulls a 0-60 mph time of 5.7 seconds, a lot of engine modification has become a moot point. (The 1990 Miata recorded a 0-60 of 8.9 seconds, on-purpose, for insurance reasons at the launch.) The point is: Tune your Miata to suit your needs and desires—concours restoration or track day demon. There is a great knowledge base and supply chain to help you do either. Just keep the spirit of the car in mind and learn which parts make the car better, not just different.

Mazda has sold over 1.3 million Miatas worldwide (so far). All of us on the original project smile at the thought of this. It appears a lot of people like the same kind of car that we wanted to make. I add a different twist: Most NA and NB Miatas have changed hands at least two or three times since the day they were first

sold. By my estimation, we have around three million enthusiasts worldwide that have enjoyed the jewel of a car that is the Miata. That many of these are 200,000+ mile NAs owned by fifth owners and are a bid tatty in appearance closes the Miata's "circle of life" for me—from the concept of an affordable sports car in 1983 to its embodiment in a cheap craigslist special in 2023. **mm**

THE GREAT DEBATE

by Chris Verner

The argument typically erupts on an online forum or Facebook page after some poor soul lets slip that his (or her) beloved Miata is an automatic, or they're contemplating buying a two-pedal Miata, or they have a relative or maybe just a close friend who drives an automatic Miata.

"Heresy!" The response goes. "You're missing the whole point of the car. Snick-snick. Zoom-zoom!"

"Sacilege!" Another chimes in. "It can't be a real sports car unless it's a manual. Says so right here in the Official Sports Car Code Book, Section 4, right after the paragraph about string-back driving gloves and tweed caps. Ever see an automatic MG TC? I rest my case."

Occasionally, some brave respondent will point out that, at least among the latter Miata generations, the acceleration times between stick and auto are comparable. Or someone will have the temerity to point out that the manual transmission is no longer available on many high-performance cars. Eight-speed PDK, anyone?

"It's not about raw numbers," comes the retort. "It's about driver engagement, merging with the mechanical bits, mastering the heel-and-toe magic, the rev-matching downshift."

While I don't often join in these exchanges, I do find them entertaining, if not enlightening. And they always leave me pondering this question: Why such focus on the gearbox? Why insist that a true sports car can't have an automatic transmission but it can, for example, have power-assisted steering, vacuum-assisted anti-lock brakes and on-board tire-pressure

monitoring? A true sports car can't have an auto tranny, yet it can have enough electronic stability, traction and navigation controls to not only compensate for driver stupidity but, presumably, guide the car through earth-orbit re-entry if said driver exceeds his capabilities on a high-altitude hairpin.

I suspect that many of the most diehard stick-shift defenders are driving Miatas with integrated touchscreen technology and a plethora of electronic guard-dogs such as lane-departure warning and blind-spot monitoring. They might even enjoy such creature comforts as heated seats and arctic-like air-conditioning. Don't want to work up a sweat while rowing through the gears! Time was, the idea of putting AC in a proper roadster would have gotten one laughed out of the double-clutch-into-nonsynchro-first-gear club.

Do any of these high-tech devices make the modern Miata any less of a sports car? Not at all. The newest iteration of the Miata retains its essential jinba ittai soul—harmony of horse and rider—regardless of the options package. Even with the heavy demands of safety and emissions regulations and wireless connectivity, the Miata remains light on its feet, an eager and accommodating dance partner whether you're in the mood for a slow waltz or lively tango. In fact, by enhancing its everyday driveability, such amenities may actually encourage owners to drive their Miatas more often—not that they really need that encouragement.

So why this obsessive insistence that manual manipulation is essential for grasping the sports car

experience? If I don't churn my own butter, I can't enjoy a good pound cake? If I don't stomp my own grapes, I can't truly appreciate a fine merlot?

At age 70, I'll admit that I'm cruising deep into the backstretch where I don't mind the car doing more of the work. However, lest you think I'm speaking out of a need to rationalize my own personal tranny transgressions, the 1995 Miata parked at my house is a manual, as are the Z3 coupe and MGB-GT that share the stables. So, yeah, I'm a fan of manuals, and the Miata gearbox is a marvel. But that's just my personal preference, and it has no bearing on the automotive alchemy that others enjoy. I like the tactile engagement of shifting—but not to the exclusion of the Miata's other dynamic charms. Whichever shift lever resides between the snug embrace of those bucket seats, it doesn't change the telekinetic feedback coming through the front tires or distort the workings of the suspension as it takes a set through a decreasing radius turn or mute the ebullient rasp of the exhaust as you nail the exit. Like all great inventions, the Miata is much, much more than the sum of its individual parts.

Matter of fact, lately I've been thinking it may be time to change things up a bit, go for something newer. Maybe it's time to shift into a different driving experience altogether. While I'm not yet ready to make the leap into one of those gorgeous NDs, I'm thinking a gently used NC PRHT Club edition with paddle shifters might be just the ticket. **mm**

The GIFT

by Felipe Rivadeneira



If it's true that every parent hopes for their child's first word to be "momma" or "dada," then my parents must have been quite disappointed. Baby me muttered my first word: "car." Well, it was "carro," to be exact, as I was born into a Spanish speaking family in the heart of Bogota, Colombia. It can't be known why my 11-month-old brain chose "car" as my first word, but it would

impact the rest of my life. From the toys I played with and decorations that adorned my bedroom as a child, to my partial studies and income on the side during college, my life has been saturated with "car" ever since I could talk.

When I was nine years old and living in the US, my mom—who had studied abroad in Italy—made friends with an elderly Italian man named

Nino. Because Nino lived so close to my school, we often visited him. At this point, my fascination with cars only went as far as my Car City Carpet and vast Hot Wheels collection would allow. However, Nino was the original owner of a 1990 Miata he purchased new on May 31, 1990. This information didn't mean anything to a little kid, but what I did understand was that there was a cool, sleek looking convertible sports car in the driveway. Unfortunately, it didn't look as nice as it should have. Nino suffered from a bad knee, and he hadn't driven his car in years. It sat in his driveway, which, when stagnant less than a mile from the beach, was rotting away. The ever-present salty air accelerated the rust around the chassis in both usual and unusual places. I couldn't drive, of course, so I experienced the car in the only ways I could, including washing it or simply sitting in it, shifting the gears, and pretending I was driving.

Nino realized he wouldn't really get to enjoy the car anymore, and he didn't want to see it falling apart in his driveway. He gave the Miata to my parents as a gift, with the intention of it becoming my first car. Together, my dad and I slowly fixed things to keep it road-worthy and drivable. Our first big project was a new convertible top to replace the duct taped original. Next, we reupholstered the torn seats, installed a new head unit and speakers, and gave the car a cheap re-spray to address the badly chipping and faded paint. Altogether, these minor fixes brought new life to the car, but major issues still lingered below the surface.

Throughout my junior and senior year of high school, with a small but sufficient source of income from working at a pizza parlor, I began to transition from maintenance to modification. I fitted the car with gloss black lightweight wheels and performance tires, a roll bar, hardtop, tow hooks, and other basic handling and track mods. During 2020, I took advantage of my last few college



classes going virtual and spent basically all of my financial savings on a full, frame-up restoration. I found a body shop near to me that was inspired by my dedication and vision towards transforming the car, and the owner let me restore the entire car myself at the shop in exchange for having it painted there. The owner was extraordinarily generous.

I tore the entire car down to a bare frame for media blasting, and over the course of almost six months I slowly rebuilt every single piece of every system in the car. During the rebuild, I took care to upgrade any component I could, including the entire front and rear suspension, to make the car as new and capable as possible. I'd call the restoration highly "OEM-plus," building on what Mazda created while making the car my own.

I finished the restoration by coating the body in Porsche's extremely rare and gorgeous Riviera Blue. Since I live in South Florida, the

bright blue color is very fitting. Mine is a highly track and street orientated build, but it was still a daily driver—bulletproof since I began driving it in 2014, and that's even with seeing more track days recently. In a sense, it feels like my whole life's passion for cars had led me to this moment. I used all the energy from being in love with cars to restore my own. The experience of restoring the car gifted me an unimaginable amount of mechanical knowledge and granted me the opportunity to drive one of the best handling cars ever made on the street and the track with no issues that I couldn't tackle. This journey has introduced me to so many wonderful and like-minded people. And the journey isn't over.

Although Mazda created a near perfect car in 1990, the condition of my car was far from it when I began this project. Many Miatas on the road today are beginning to suffer a similar fate. While routine maintenance is

always important, more involved repairs such as the ones I went through are increasingly necessary to keep these now classic cars in running order. Although a lot of work, it is very satisfying to do, as it builds knowledge and confidence, and teaches resourcefulness, resolve, and commitment.

I'm having so much fun with the car, and I try to document my experiences to share with those who are trying to learn. People of all ages and resources are attempting their own work just as I did as a 14-year-old kid—from things as simple as their first DIY oil change, to out-of-this-world restorations and custom projects. For us car enthusiasts, a car project is about more than fixing a car, it's about building a passion and seeing your dream come to life.

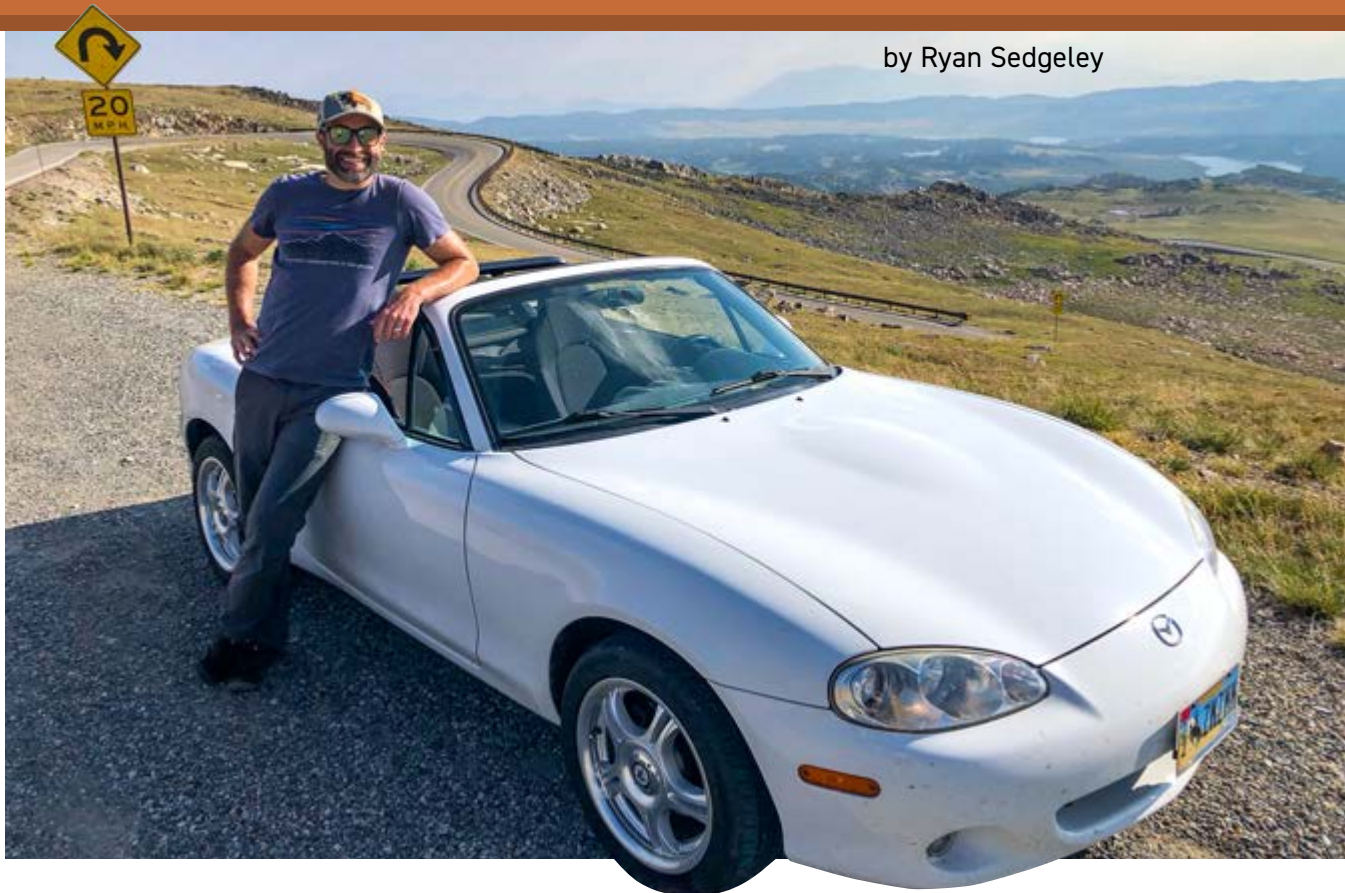
mm

You can see what Felipe and his Miata are up to on Instagram @rb.miata.



This Land is Your Land

by Ryan Sedgeley



As the sun drops low in the sky on a summer evening, the light glistens off the Firehole River. Trout rise to suck in abundant mayflies emerging from the water's surface. Along its banks the grass grows green and sweet. I'm sitting quietly stopped on the shoulder with the top down in my 2001 Miata. I live in Yellowstone National Park, and I am having one of the most exhilarating experiences you can have at zero MPH. A small herd of bison are passing by. Their hooves clacking on the asphalt as they lumber down the road with new calves—affectionately known as “red dogs” due to their size, shape, and color—in tow. Sitting in the Miata offers an exposed view of these incredible animals, narrowly

saved from the brink of extinction in Yellowstone. Sitting low in the Miata, they also tower above you, and they look into you with their large brown eyes possessing an ancient and patient wisdom that we humans must re-learn as we re-form our relationship with them.

After the bison move past, it is time to drive! The speed limits are set low in Yellowstone, 45 MPH max. And while this seems painfully slow at first, it is actually a perfect speed for cruising in the Miata. At 45 the wind and road noise are minimal. You can take your time, enjoy the grandeur of the canyon walls towering above, the geysers bubbling just off the road. You can drive and see bald eagles literally flying next to the car

or overhead, spot grizzly bears and all other assortments of wildlife. Importantly, you are also driving slow enough to stop in time to not hit these local residents or the distracted tourists here to see them.

At this speed you are encouraged to pull off the road, which in the end is why you are in Yellowstone. One of my favorite stopping spots is in the world famous Lamar Valley. It's here that you can see all the big wildlife including the incredible Grey Wolves (*Canis lupus*), Bison (*Bison bison*), and Grizzly Bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*). It was right here that bison were brought back from extinction, and grey wolves were reintroduced, connecting a vital missing link in the ecosystem. Looking across the

valley there are beautiful views of the Absaroka Mountains. And, if you look closely, you can often spot mountain goats (*Oreamnos americanus*) up on the cliffs of Barronette Peak.

While you are out in the northeast part of Yellowstone, it must be mentioned that outside of the park's entrance is the legendary Beartooth Pass. This exciting drive wanders up and over a 10,964-foot mountain pass and is a delightful series of switchbacks and hair pin turns. There are lots of signs suggesting speeds of 15 MPH, sure to induce ear-to-ear smiles from Miata drivers. From up here, way above the tree line, glacial lakes shine among the smooth, towering glacial worn granite peaks and shadowy canyons. If you do it right, a perk of this drive is being able to enjoy the amazing food offered in Red Lodge, Montana, before heading back over the pass or onto I-90.

If you end up making the journey back after sundown (which is not recommended), you will be rewarded for the risk with glorious views of the Milky Way. Up here the stars shine with clarity and abundance seen few other places. It is cold though, even mid-summer. This exact scenario is what inspired me to install seat heaters from Moss Motors as part of some major maintenance this winter when the roads were closed.

The Beartooth Pass isn't the only one you'll want to explore. There are three passes that are actually in Yellowstone offering incredible views and fun driving: Dunraven Pass, Sylvan Pass and Craig Pass. Dunraven takes you up and over Mount Washburn for long views of beautiful alpine scenery and amazing rock formations. This road has the hairpin turns that Miatas are built for. Up here, the alpine air is crisp and

fresh with wildflowers that decorate the hillsides with a carpet of color that is buzzing with pollinators. You birders keep an eye out for the gregarious and chatty Clark's Nutcrackers (*Nucifraga columbiana*) up here. Heading West towards Cody, Wyoming, Sylvan pass offers some of the best curves in Yellowstone accompanied by roadside waterfalls, steaming fumaroles, and views of Yellowstone Lake, mountains, and the incredible geologic formations along the Shoshone Canyon. Craig Pass is currently under construction and so I can't recommend it just yet.

As I'm writing this, I'm getting restless, and I can't wait to get out and see what Yellowstone has in store for me today. I hope you can visit and enjoy this wondrous place in your Miata. Remember, these are your public lands, too! **mm**





CLASS ACT & RISING STAR

by Mike Trimpe

In July of 2022, I read an article about a 15-year-old kid who swept the MX-5 Cup at Road America in Elkhart Lake, and I knew I had to learn more. I packed my camera gear, a cooler and some sunscreen, and set out to see the legendary Virginia International Raceway (VIR) for the first time.

The drive out to the track is peaceful, beautiful, and full of tobacco farms. Two-lane roads wind through verdant, rolling hills where the morning mist hangs in the valleys, and you'd never know you're ten miles away from a battalion of visceral steel machines.

VIR is set in beautifully manicured, wide-open green spaces lined with deciduous forest, and peppered with uniform, elegant-looking hotels and restaurants. It's known as a challenging track

among drivers, and I can tell you it takes a long time to walk it.

I met Connor during his autograph session. I expected an intense, no-holds-barred competitor. Instead, I met a (now) 16-year-old who was calm, friendly, patient, and quietly confident. And that's exactly how he drives.

On a summer Sunday in southern Virginia (say that three times fast), the sun is blistering, and there are few places to hide. I had already walked the course multiple times, so when the Miatas fired up, I had a game plan.

As someone who's attended a fair share of races, I can tell you that MX-5 Cup is probably the most consistently exciting series, because it's always close, and there's plenty of jostling for position.



I snapped away as Connor avoided a collision in his red and black Hixon Motor Sports car. I watched him hang around in P2 until the time was right. He seemed unflappable, calculated, and content to follow the leader until it was clear he could make a move safely.

When he won the race that day, I was fist-pumping the air Judd-Nelson-Breakfast-Club style, because it felt like I'd won, too, even though I mostly just walked around and ate Triscuits that day. I was happy to capture the podium moment, and to see Connor celebrating with his friends.

On the seven-hour drive home, I thought about how amazing it would be to have that much focus at sixteen; to have the racing community supporting you in your everyday life; and how remote schooling would have been pretty cool, too.

I followed up with Connor recently with some additional questions. Here's how it went:

Do recall the moment you realized you wanted to race professionally?

I really realized that I wanted to become a racecar driver when I was 11 and won the karting world championship in Italy. That was a turning point and my most memorable race. I was racing against over 160 kids my age from over 30 countries.

Racing is a family affair for you. In what ways have your parents helped you grow as a competitor (and as a human being) over the past few years?

My parents have been on this journey with me the whole way. My dad travels to every race with me, and my mom will sometimes come with me, but she watches every race whether it is from home or in person. They

are my support system, and I would be nowhere without them. My two older brothers sacrificed a lot for me, too. My dad is not home as much as he would be because of me, and my brothers have accepted that and are supportive of me and my dreams.

Who has helped you grow the most as a driver?

Gary Willis. He was my karting coach from when I was eight to 14. He has been through a lot with me. He took me to Europe to race go karts when I was eleven, and my dad couldn't come with me. He has taught me so much, not only about racing, but about life. I'll always be grateful to him.

You caught my attention after your performance at Road America last summer. After that, you seemed to be on fire. Did something click into place for you that weekend?



Road America was a big momentum swing for me. I had been struggling to get my first win in the series, and to get two in the same weekend changed how I saw things. After that I had the idea that I was there to win, and that mind-set is everything in racing. Confidence and where your head is at changes how you perform.

You're an incredibly patient driver. I've seen you hold back and wait for the perfect opportunity. Is that a skill you've always had, or did you have to work at it?

Teaching patience is tough, and it's something I have learned over time. It isn't easy to be patient in racing because everything around you is moving so fast, so telling yourself to slow down is really difficult. I am fortunate that I have been able to learn that skill, and it's definitely helped me win races.

It must have been tough to miss 1st place that weekend due to a technicality. You also missed winning the series by such a small margin. How do you react to those crushing defeats?

In racing, you're going to lose a lot more than you're going to win, and that's hard to swallow as a kid coming through the ranks of racing, sometimes with what feels like your career/life on the line. Over time, accepting that has done so much for me as a driver. I have learned to always have an open mind-set, rather than getting caught up in the moment when things don't go well. If a race doesn't go my way, I don't sit there and stress about it, I reflect to understand what I need to do differently next time.

You're racing in other series as well. How is MX-5 unique?

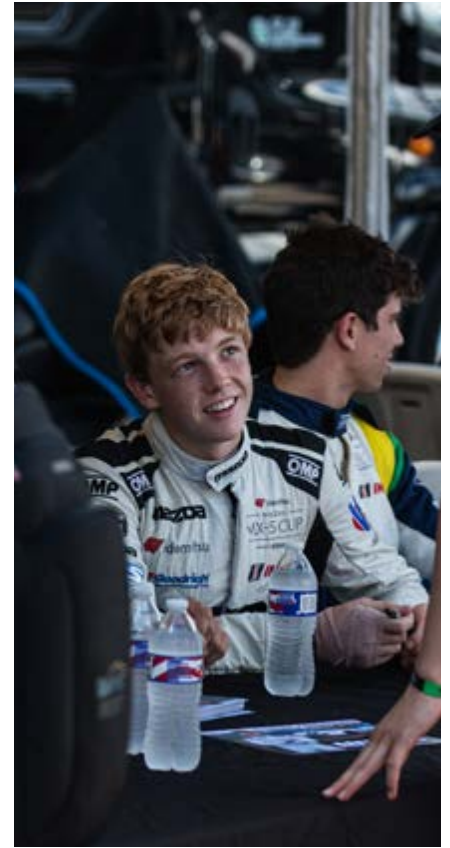
The main thing that differentiates the MX-5 Cup from other cars and series

is the amount of draft there is, and the close racing. There is absolutely no other series like it. You will never be alone in a race, there will always be someone close in your mirror, or right out your windshield. I've noticed how aware this has made me as a driver in other series. I feel like I avoid wrecks and always know where other cars are around me.

How do you prepare mentally before a race? I'm sure there are always some nerves.

Nerves are one of the toughest things to deal with before a race, but honestly, as soon as your car starts, they disappear. It's crazy how that works, but there really is a sense of tunnel vision and hyperfocus in the car, that makes all other thoughts go away.

What do you do with your downtime between races?



Whenever I am not at the track, I live the somewhat normal life of a 16-year-old. I do online school as an 11th grader, and I spend as much time with my friends and family as I can. I am not home a lot, so I really prioritize that time when I can get it.

Miata Motoring readers will want to nerd out on technique and specs a bit. What have you changed from the 2022 season in terms of your approach to driving, and the specs on the car itself?

I've done a few things differently with my driving style this year that have helped benefit me as a driver. Some of those include how I critique myself. I am a data nerd, more so than a lot of drivers out there. I sometimes think that I over-analyze it, but it is so beneficial, and it is free to use. I will download data to my computer and look at it for hours after practice, comparing myself to my teammates, trying to find tenths of a second in my

driving. I feel this has really helped me become better, and I can also help my teammates.

Car setup wise, in the MX-5 Cup I have reached the point where I know what I want out of the car, and can almost tell the team what needs to change on it. We mostly change suspension settings, including compression, rebound, and ride heights. I personally like a lot of rake in my car, which lifts the rear, and makes it pivot off the nose more. It can make the car loose, but I would rather drive a loose car than a tight handling car. We also often make toe adjustments which mainly changes how twitchy the car is. We race the cars with upwards of 5mm of total toe out at some tracks.

What are the roles on your team? What does it take to create and maintain a successful racing team for an entire season?

As a driver, you are nothing without the team surrounding you, and I take a lot of pride in that. I always make sure my relationship with my team is strong and I treat them like family. We spend a lot of time together, and we all share the same end goal. Another thing I really encourage is having fun. If we're not having fun, we're doing something wrong.

What your personal long term goals?

I just want to make a career in this sport. It doesn't matter where I land, I just want to be a racecar driver.

As of this writing, Connor is leading the MX-5 Cup Series for 2023. I'm not surprised. **mm**

Mike Trimpe is an automotive writer and photographer based in Cincinnati, Ohio. His work and ongoing car projects can be found at CoachlightPhoto.com, or on Instagram: @coachlightphoto.

GEAR BOX

NEW!



Miata Camper Hat & Roadster Shirt

The Neon Camper Hat features colorful line art of an NA Miata on a low-fitting 5 panel cap. The hat is unstructured and made of black 100% polyester canvas with a hook and loop closure for adjustability. Perfect for the trail or the beach, and anywhere in between. Also new from Moss Miata, is the new Roadster design in Red and Blue. This Roadster t-shirt is a great way to add some Miata flare to your wardrobe without over doing it. Silkscreen printed on a 50/50 cotton polyester blend, this design features line art of an NA Miata with calligraphy script and our Moss Miata logo on the back.



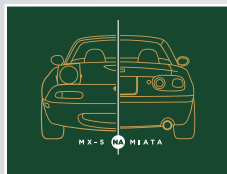
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