

Racing at the Edge of the Earth

*By Bruce MacInnes**

From the beginning of Time, Mankind has been faced with tremendous personal challenges... Hannibal had the Alps, Napoleon had Russia, Samson had Delilah – and I had Turns One and Two at Bridgehampton. There are very few places in this world that could get your attention like “The Downhill” at The Bridge. All who raced there knew that the earth was flat and ended on the outside of Turn Two in the sand. Now, tragically, it’s a golf course... Only Road America’s “Kink”, the fast Esses at Moroso, and Mosport’s Turn Two required as much commitment as this daunting series of corners. The emotional rewards of driving these turns “flat out” were just as intense as the physical consequences of blowing them.

In the early days of Formula Ford and flat-bottomed Atlantic cars there was a commonly held belief that each time you took the Downhill flat you had 1/10th of a heart attack – Twelve lap races were very exciting. Bridgehampton was one of the only tracks in the world where one’s talent had to be matched by an equal measure of Testicular Fortitude – You Had to be Brave at this Place.

From a personal standpoint, this old girl gave me tremendous rewards. She also exacted the biggest retributions that I have ever experienced anywhere in Racing. During all my years in competition, two of the three flips I’ve experienced were at “The Bridge”. During one, the roll bar hit going backwards, folded flat against the chassis, and the car ended up spinning inverted with all four wheels touching the ground. Believe-it-or-not, my head collapsed the steering wheel, the gearshift went right past my eye, and I was unhurt. Anyone who has ever seen my head knows it was a bad hair day...

My then-new Zink Z-10 also mowed down several small trees on the outside of The Downhill when the left rear suspension suffered coil-bind at the apex of Turn Two. I’m told that the hang time and style points were great, but I couldn’t step off a curb for a month. Zink gave me a new car after that (and if you ever see me in person, remind me to tell you about the “Special Gift” I gave my crew after that magic moment).

All these memorable occasions have led to the two Basic Rules of Flipping, (both of which were invented at Bridgehampton):

1. Don’t close your eyes; you’ll miss the best part.
2. If it gets quiet during the crash, don’t release your seatbelts – You may still be airborne.

Simple spins in the sand have also exacted dramatic personal consequences. Many drivers have experienced several personality changes in the eternity it took to stop without flipping. Some even lowered the center of gravity in their underwear. There were likely several interim stages of terror and relief if one ever tempted fate and spun at the Edge of the Earth in the sand.

An added element of excitement, as if driving at this place wasn't exciting enough, were the natural road hazards; namely the deer, snakes, turtles, and other critters wandering around. During nighttime anti-terrorist training in a stretch-limo, I happened upon a Bambi Convention at turn 8. They missed us. Thankfully, there was a bar in the back to aid in the recovery (although it did little for the student who literally needed Pampers in the back seat).

Danny Sullivan helped teach this program and our armaments expert from Guards Mark managed to blow the dashboard out of our chase car with a shotgun when one of our Instructors hit a bump approaching "The Light Bulb". Neither of them could hear for a week and our instructor (Carl Lopez- The author of *Going Faster*) still has a funny look in his eyes.

Blowing sand could also change traction from lap-to-lap, not to mention rain. Now, don't get me wrong, I Love Rain – But this place was paved with polished sea-rock so it was absolutely treacherous in the wet. Only the truly talented were able to consistently go quick and gifted enough to survive a rain race at The Bridge.

When all is said and done, Bridgehampton will be remembered as one of the greatest racetracks in the world. The experience it generated for the thousands of Stimulus Addicts who had the honor of being worked over by her was unequaled. Although she could exploit the full range of one's emotions in a Heartbeat, I will always love and remember her.

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