

MAINstreet

MAGAZINE



LET'S TRANSPORT OUR LIFE

Well, well, well! May has arrived and with it so has our annual "Transportation" issue! This seems to be a fan favorite amongst our *Main Street* readers, and that always makes us feel extra happy to put this issue together. For those of our readers out there who are familiar with this issue, we hope that you find something right up your alley and fun in this one. For those readers not familiar with this theme, we of course hope that you find something of interest and that's fun, but additionally we hope that you enjoy our definition of "transportation" and how we brush that term with a wide stroke! We've done that from the beginning when we started with this theme some seven years ago. And let me take this moment for self-reflection because I just can't believe we've been creating content under this themed umbrella in the month of May for seven years! That just goes to show, there's a lot to talk about when it comes to transportation in our neck of the woods.

With that said, there are indeed many angles and many stories that we can and do tackle when it comes to transportation. We've had everything from cars to trains to airplanes and boats, but we've also had stories about horses and air gliders. We've had current and historic stories – and just about everything in between! And you know what? It's so fun!

I am so lucky to have such a talented group of writers who come up with these great stories that we're able to share with you. My team is of course incredibly talented, full of great ideas, but further – they're able to put pen to paper... errr, I mean, finger to keyboard, and craft stories that are fun, interesting, and informative. So this hat-nod is to all of my team that help bring so many stories alive on the pages of this magazine, all for your enjoyment.

I would also like to take a minute to thank all of our advertisers and sponsors. You are all incredible! Thank you for your continued support, you are the reason that we are able to create and publish this very magazine and offer it for free to all of our readers. So dear reader, if you're a fan of ours, you are a fan of our advertisers! So the next time you need an insurance agent, a landscaper, a bank, to buy antiques, or want to go out to eat (to name just a very few), please flip through our many amazing advertisers' ads and help support them – and please let them know that you learned about them right here! They will appreciate it, and so will we.

We're here to help spread the good word, to share good stories, and spread positive. We're all about the love. Happy May, and happy reading!

– Thorunn Kristjansdottir



MAY 2022

Who doesn't love a good old fashioned choo-choo train?

Cover photo by
Olivia Valentine

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TRUE BELIEVER: Torsten Gross & the Just Hands Racing Foundation

By CB Wismar
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One can hear the energy and the excitement when Torsten Gross talks about his newest adventure. The Just Hands Racing Foundation is the latest in a string of challenging endeavors that has marked the very full life of Torsten. He is a true believer, 100% committed to this intriguing venture.

The foundation emerged from a wedding anniversary gift his wife, Maggie, gave him just over a year ago. She gave him a “track day” at Lime Rock Park in Lakeville, CT. It was a chance for him to take his car on the track and experience what it’s like to tour the mile and a half circuit at speed accompanied by a seasoned race instructor.

One day on the track, and he was hooked. The fact that his car was not really prepared for racetrack conditions only heightened his ambition. “I didn’t realize the strain track driving puts on the brakes. On my 15th lap, I came sailing down Sam Posey Straight and hit the brakes for the hairpin. Nothing. Fortunately, the instructor riding with me barked ‘Turn!’ and talked me through the experience. When I recovered, I had to do it again. It was mesmerizing.”

Enter the M3

Not only did he recover, he went out and bought a new car to have it fitted for the track – A BMW M3 Lime Rock Park Edition. That took a while, but in the interim, Torsten was letting his imagination run wild ... as he had done so many times before in his career, with great result.

The delay in getting his new ride was part of the story that, in newspaper talk, would be called “burying the lede.” Although it has clearly not stopped him in his rich and varied

career, Torsten Gross is a C6 Quadriplegic. The BMW that he was having prepared for more track adventures needed to be converted from “a pedal car” as Torsten would refer to it, to a race car fully controlled by the driver’s hands. Hence the Just Hands Racing Foundation and an adventure that can be added to Torsten’s growing list of accomplishments.

He realized that if he could compete on the race track, the odds versus his competitors were suddenly even. He would not need to compete in wheelchair basketball or have a uniquely made mono ski. “In the car, we’re all in the same class.” In a racecar, Torsten Gross would be 100% independent ... not limited to a special handicapped class, but competing turn for turn with equals.

A complete change of life

A vibrant, active young man, 15 year-old Torsten was diving with his family in the Bahamas when a horrific accident shattered his spinal column, injuring him so severely that he was technically dead for over two minutes. “It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It gave me a life perspective that totally changed.” Strong words from a 6 ft 5 in athlete who has refused to let his life in a wheel chair blunt his absolute passion for adventure.

His love of the ocean was rekindled and Torsten became the first and only Quadriplegic Rescue SCUBA Diver.

Marathons had a real attraction as he saw others in their wheelchairs competing in the grueling events. “Raising the bar” to challenge himself, Torsten trained, then completed 12 marathon events in 12 months.

Sky diving allowed him to feel the freedom of flight and the adrenaline surge of free-falling thousands of feet.

That was not enough. Auto racing emerged as a clear beacon for Torsten. Not only did he want to master the skills of competitive driving and be



Above: Torsten Gross with his BMW M3.

able to display them in head-to-head competition, he wanted others to experience the same elation ... the same sense of true independence that he discovered on that track day.

In subsequent appearances at Lime Rock Park, Torsten has honed his racing skills at the wheel of his specially prepared car. Clearly a competitive person by nature, Torsten soon got to the point where he gained and honed the skills required to not merely drive ... but race. “I was in a bit of a run with a Ferrari and I managed to prevail. Back in the paddock, I parked my car and slid out into my wheelchair. Sure, I was pumped that I had just bested a \$150,000 car when the driver saw me in the chair and in

Continued on next page ...

disbelief blurted out, “That was you?”

Gross’s accomplishments in business are as formidable as those he has shown in the array of sports he has mastered. The fiery imagination that has led him to create Just Hands Foundation was evident early on as he attended Hofstra University and emerged into the highly competitive world of marketing strategy. The list of professional credentials is impressive, to say the least. Tracy Locke, R/GA, J Walter Thompson, Deutsch, BBDO, and now as Global Head of Advertising and Media at TCS.



Just Hands

Torsten Gross is not a stranger to the elusive concept of “giving back.” He has worked for years with the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, the foundation set up to pursue remedies for spinal injuries named after actor Christopher Reeve. The mandate for the Just Hands Racing Foundation is direct and personally challenging – “Get hand control drivers on a track. Motorsports makes everyone equal, no matter what appendages you use to drive.”

There is an underlying sense of humor in that statement that belies much of Torsten’s personality. There was a time while living in New York that he made appearances on the stand-up comedy circuit. His approach to life is so positive, so engaging, that simply listening to him talk about his experiences and ambitions brings a smile to the face of his audience. This is an immensely capable person who has no time for self-pity or recrimination. What he does find time for is making sure people with physical challenges understand and access the opportunities before them in competitive driving.

Like any foundation, Just Hands is filled with purpose and commitment and eager to get the support and encouragement that come with funding opportunities and avenues that open for the foundation to make driving accessible to a wider audience.

Gross’s first experience in a car speeding around a racetrack came at Lime Rock Park. His affinity for the track has been rewarded with the new ownership of LRP acknowledging the immense value of Torsten’s ambitions and recognizing the Foundation as a select charity for the 2022 racing season. As a result, Just Hands will have a presence and engagement at each of the track’s major event weekends – Trans Am Memorial Day Classic, IMSA Northeast Gran Prix, and Historics Weekend 40.

In addition to high profile presence during well-attended spectator events, Just Hands Racing Foundation is bringing their nascent programs to the track during days that feature HPDE – High Performance Driver Education – where participants bring their own cars to the track to learn performance driving with skilled instructors ... Track Tapas Days where participants experience both the autocross track and the 1.5 mile road racing course mentored by skilled instructors while utilizing the Just Hands racing car.

There’s a second BMW in work – an E92 M3 model that sports wider doors to make access even easier and over 400 horsepower under the hood to make it very fast. With the

cooperation of several organizations that have signed on as sponsors, Just Hands Racing Foundation is poised to deliver a summer program that will be both expansive and informative. Along with Lime Rock Park highlighting the value and importance of Just Hands Racing Foundation and the various programs that will be offered at the track, Sharon Autosport has been instrumental in preparing the foundation cars with additional support provided by Mobility Innovations, HMS Sports, SCCA, Auto-Technic, Bimmerworld, and HPDE Junkie.

As Torsten Gross would say about the support he and the foundation have been given, “We’re fortunate to have people believe in what we’re doing. Without people believing in our mission, we wouldn’t exist.” Strong words from a person who is very clearly a true believer. •

More information about Just Hands Racing Foundation can be found on their website www.justhandsfoundation.org.



Above, top to bottom: Torsten Gross on the track with his BMW M3. Torsten Gross. All images courtesy of Torsten Gross.