

The closest race of the weekend!



Story and Photos by Ken Schwoerer

If tradition runs true to form, the closest race of this weekend at Mosport will be the Rabbit/Bilstein Cup Race featuring competition in identically prepared, near show-room stock Volkswagen Rabbit sedans.

Those of you who saw last year's race will attest to the fact that some six or seven cars contested for the lead before veteran Horst Kwech from Gurnee, Illinois finally won by about three feet over his teammate Eddie Wachs of Round Lake, Illinois and three-time defending series champion Gary Benson of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Sanctioned by the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA), the Rabbit/Bilstein Cup has been labelled America's closest professional road racing series. This marks the third time these racing Rabbits have run at Mosport and the winner has been decided each time in the last turn of the last lap.

The series in 1981 is again co-sponsored by Volkswagen of America and Bilstein shock absorbers with additional support coming from the Robert Bosch Corporation and Goodyear tires. The drivers will be competing for a purse of \$10,000 this weekend with the winner taking home a check for \$2,000.

Gary Benson of Minneapolis will again be the man to beat this weekend as he has been the series' most consistent driver, winning seven races and never falling to finish below fourth before wrapping up the championships.

Joining Benson this year in forming a strong two-car team is Bill Deters from Deephaven, Minnesota. They run under sponsorship of West Side VW in the Twin Cities area. Deters is a former champion of the Scirocco/Bilstein Cup, the predecessor to the Rabbit series. He opened the

1981 season with a fourth-place finish at Charlotte and is always a threat to win.

Perhaps Benson's major adversary this weekend will be two-time SCCA Showroom Stock National Champion Don Knowles of Springfield, Virginia, who returns to the series after a one-race hiatus driving the GMP Performance Rabbit out of Charlotte, North Carolina. Knowles nipped young Karl Hacker from Castleton, New York for the win in the series opener this season in mid-May.

Knowles has now run three Bilstein Cup races in the last two years taking two wins and second-place finish. He is expected to run the remaining six races on the schedule in pursuit of the championship. His teammate, Peter Schwartzott of Niagara Falls, New York, is one of the most experienced drivers in the series, in a second GMP Performance car.

These racing Rabbits seem to travel in pairs as most of the top competitors in 1981 are running in two-car teams. In addition to those mentioned above, Paul Hacker joins his brother Karl in a two-car team backed by Synthoil. Paul was the series runner-up last year and is a consistent performer finishing every race but one over the past five years of competition.

Another strong two-car team to watch is the duo of Kwech, who finished fourth in points last year, and Eddie Wachs from Round Lake, Illinois. Their matching black Rabbits run under the banner of Ausca and Union Oil.

Driving veteran Jack Ryan of Griffin, Georgia and Snyder, New York's Randy Zimmer will also bear watching. Series returnees Ed Mautner of Madison, Connecticut, Ken Williams from Austin, Texas, Mark Behm of Apple-

ton, Wisconsin and Mike Delaney of Harper's Ferry, West Virginia are also contenders. Newcomer Steve Ball of Anaheim, California was also impressive in Charlotte running up front before a qualifying race shunt slowed his effort.

The close competition of this series is evident by the fact that the starting grid usually finds the first eight to ten cars within a second of each other. There were seven different winners in the nine races last year and six of nine were decided by under half a second which translates to less than one car length.

The cars in this series are basically showroom stock VW Rabbit sedans with only slight modifications. Aside from

the SCCA's required safety harness belts, these cars are equipped with Bilstein gas pressure shock absorbers, an open exhaust along with front strut support and anti-sway bars. Additional gauges such as oil pressure, oil temperature and a tachometer are also permitted; a racing seat is optional. Engine modifications are limited to the use of a baffled oil pan and addition of Bosch spark plugs. These cars are running on race-shaved Goodyear NCT street radial tires.

If you have not seen these racing Rabbits run before, get ready for an event full of close nose-to-tail and doorhandle-to-doorhandle action that you won't soon forget.

