

Steve Lyman's 1982 Longest Day Story

I was involved with the NL 24 in '82 while I was still at Ford Vehicle Development X-Garage. My former ride and handling supervisor, Bob Negstad, set up two Mustang SVO prototypes for the scribes at C and D and R&T to drive. You may know that Bob was involved in the suspension design on the Mustang I, Mustang 302/429/351, Shelby GT-350, Cobra 427, Ford GT Mk I, Mk II, and Mk IV. Bob had been recruited early by SVO when it was first formed. I was recruited by Bob to draw suspension parts after hours (control arms, brackets, anti-roll bars, and wheels) using my mechanical drafting tools (old school) for the Mustang SVO since he had no head count at SVO yet (only 4-5 people at that time). As it turned out shortly after, I received a call from Ford Marketing (Mickey Matus) about 4 days before the '82 NL 24 race. I was the special projects engineer for Edsel Ford II so the call from Mickey was not unusual. He wanted us to prepare one of the new Mustang GT's 302-4V (brand new for 82) within the SS rules as they were at the time. He sent over a red pre-production car out of the press fleet. Ford engine engineer Ron Smalldone (former SCCA SSA National Champion) would be the lead driver. We had little time to do anything trick to the car so, as I recall, we bulldozed the springs to reduce the ride heights slightly, slotted the strut towers for more negative camber, installed a TRW high effort rack and pinion gear, revalved the Koni dampers front and rear (the two longitudinal rear dampers for power hop were left as is), changed the front and rear control arm bushings to Fairmont police parts, changed the shifter to a Hurst pistol grip, and got a supply of GY Eagle NCT's 15" (some of the first in the US) to replace the Michelin TRX tire/wheel. Roush installed the roll cage, fire bottle, and electrical cutoff. I did about 20 laps total on the DPG handling road, making minor damper adjustments and one tire pressure change. No other changes were made. Smalldone did not drive the car until just before it went on the trailer. Essentially, we were competing directly with SVO which put me in an awkward position, as well as Guldstrand, Freddy Baker, Gary Witzenberg, and everyone else. There were very few spares for the GT, but that would change as the race wore on. In the race the SVO's ran well early on, outrunning the 944 and trading the lead with the Camaro Z28. Smalldone and his co-driver stayed in striking distance without taxing our limited supply of tires and brake parts. Then the SVO's began to wilt during the night. Several issues popped up, not least of which was the inability to pick up all the fuel in the tank. Our GT media car moved up to 3rd and began trading 2nd with the Z28 during pit stops. The Porsche and Camaro were getting slightly better mileage than the 302 GT, although our pace on track was comparable. When the SVO's fell back, most of the Ford SVO team began helping our crew of two guys when they realized we were still in the hunt. After all, we were all Ford guys

 The results are attached.

This is my only SS foray before I left Ford in the summer of 82 to work for Michelin R&D in South Carolina.