

SUCCESSFUL DEBUT FOR SVO



By Michael White

Photos by Mark Windecker

SVO on grid before start of race

Have you ever considered taking your street car and driving it flat out for 24 hours?

Well, that's exactly what 48 teams did June 25 and 26 in the Longest Day of Nelson '83 at Nelson Ledges, Ohio. Sponsored by Quaker State and sanctioned by the Sports Car Club of America, the Longest Day is fast becoming an increasingly important event as more auto manufacturers become involved. This year the entries included cars officially and unofficially sponsored by Ford, Lincoln-Mercury, Chevrolet, Mazda, Peugeot, Avanti, Pontiac, Porsche-Audi, Saab, Volvo and Mitsubishi.

Besides the major auto manufacturers Goodyear, B.F. Goodrich and Firestone were all on hand as well as many other sponsors, both large and small. Sponsors are necessary, even in Showroom stock, to race competitively.

The fastest qualifier in this impressive field of factory cars, national-

ly and internationally known drivers, was the Ford Mustang SVO prototype entered by RPS Racing.

Ron Smaldone, the team leader, was optimistic about winning. He said "We plan on going 1000 laps."

To assure the best results possible, Smaldone's co-drivers were all well

seasoned. Larry Campbell, Tom Kersey, D.J. Fazekas, and reserve driver Larry Rehagen all current or national and regional champions, got plenty of practice before the race.

When the 2.3 liter turbo won the pole, the Porsche teams were stunned. How could a Ford beat a



Porsche?

When the green flag fell Smalldone moved into the lead, beginning a busy 24 hours.

The RPS crew performed with amazing speed. During one pit stop, they changed front tires, filled the gas tank, and changed front brake pads in 2 minutes 9 seconds. Amos Johnson, an IMSA competitor, could not believe an amateur crew could do such fast work.

The Mustang SVO never missed a beat, hitting 120 MPH on the back straightaway, leading a pack of Europe's best.

Suddenly, near disaster. One of the Starions was hit by a Saab 900 Turbo. The Saab was launched into the air and came down on the right fender of the Mustang SVO, damaging the air-box for the inter cooler.

Despite the accident which would have crippled a lesser car, the Mustang SVO's performance did not diminish. The crew continued its quick work as other crews floundered, often taking twice as long to do less work.

Then in the early morning hours an Audi coupe spun directly in front of the

overtaking Mustang SVO.

Tom Kersey came into the pits, the body work on the car severely bent.

Despite two accidents that eliminated three other cars, the Mustang SVO continued to lead in the 23rd hour as it had in the first.

Smalldone started the last hour of the race. Many competitors were now running at reduced speed, but the Mustang SVO was not any slower, continuing to hit 120 MPH on the back straight.

As Smalldone was passing a slower car, the car moved over, hitting the Mustang SVO and causing it to lose the fan belt. The car overheated and yet the RPS team never gave up, even though the series of stops to correct the problem prevented the car from winning.

In the final count the Mustang SVO used 300 gallons of gas, 31 tires, and 7 sets of brake pads while traveling 1914 miles. Until the 3rd accident that lost the fan belt, the Mustang SVO ran flawlessly, leading 21 of the 24 hours and finishing 2nd overall. This Mustang SVO was truly "Built Ford Tough". Reprinted with permission from Dealer World.



Battered Mustang during last hour

SVO debut



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