

# Enduro trip worthwhile

## *Jim Walsh helps Greg Fordahl take first, second in class at Laguna Seca*

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MONTEREY, Calif. — After the Runoffs (see the November issue of Northwest Sports Car News), I hadn't really planned on doing any more events. But I had a great time last year at Laguna Seca for the last SCCA Regional event of the season, and of course at the 4-hour RDC Illgen Enduro, which Greg Fordahl and I won last year by five laps in class, and 2.7 seconds overall against the CSR of Zadig and Hatfield, with a Lola another .8 seconds back.

So Laguna and the SCCA and RDC events kept calling my name, and I finally answered (at the last minute), and hit the road on Thursday evening for the tow down to Laguna. My normal crewman Dave Welch already had plans for the weekend (imagine that!), so I headed down by myself, with some phone calls in to some folks down in L.A. and San Francisco, and a backup plan of making do with the one crewman (ex-Fordahl mechanic John Tate) that Greg Fordahl and Steve Haywood were using in their run with Greg's Porsche 944. We'd basically have a similar plan to last year — I'd start the race in my car, Greg would start in the other car, Steve would swap with Greg at a pit stop, and Greg would take a breather then get into mine for the last stint of the race.

With the late start, I missed practice and qualifying on Friday for the SCCA event. I did hit the track for the 11 a.m. enduro practice on Saturday, so I had a chance to make sure that the car was working well, and liked the newly paved track. I got out on track late, and only got a couple of slow laps in before I was called in for a sound violation, 1dB over the limit. I called Greg Fordahl over the radio and he dug around in the trailer to find my "redirecting" exhaust tips while I drove back to the paddock, and we got the tips on the car, but by the time I strapped back in the session was over. I hadn't done any particularly fast laps (in fact only did four in total), but the

Runoffs setup felt good, with no obvious changes needed.

The SCCA race grid was on Saturday afternoon. Having missed qualifying, I started from the back of the 21-car grid, after explaining to the confused grid workers why I wasn't on their qualifying sheets. It was a mixed grid of fast production and tubeframe cars — GT1, GT2, GTA, GTL and SP (Super Production). There were some interesting cars on grid, the monster GT1 ground thumpers, and the even more monster SP cars, that don't have to bother with the silly GT1 rules. Basically SP allows any car that sorta-kind looks like a production car if you squint hard enough. Think NASCAR, but a lot lighter. There were two other GT2 cars, a pretty small field, both were older Porsches that I hadn't raced against before.

I had a decent start, but it was tough slogging getting past a lot of slower cars, but I was up from 21st to 13th overall, and to second in GT2, after the first lap. I got by the next GT2 car on the next lap, then slowly kept working my way through the field, every car getting harder and harder to pass, as my speed difference was lessening.

I had the white No. 54 of Steve Schmalz in my sights as I passed start-finish with one lap to go, and got beside him braking into turn 2, but he wasn't going to go gently into the good night, and "didn't see me" as he came across me at the apex. I distinctly recall realizing that I had two decisions here: Allow him to hit me side to side, I'm sure it would be minor contact, and I'd keep the position, or let him have the corner and try to get him later in the lap. Given that I already had the lead in GT2, and I doubted one more position would result in my replacing Alonso at McLaren next year, I decided to keep the car pretty. He was pretty aggressively blocking me the rest of the lap, I stayed with him in case he messed up, but I didn't want to take a chance of messing up the car before the Enduro, so I finished in fourth overall, .8 seconds behind Schmalz and 13.1 seconds behind the leader

([www.mylaps.com/results/newResults.jsp?id=693512&highlight=4&ShowPer-Class=0](http://www.mylaps.com/results/newResults.jsp?id=693512&highlight=4&ShowPer-Class=0)). Not too shabby, I was faster than the overall winner in eight of the 19 overall laps, even with all the traffic I needed to get by from the back of the grid. I was also a couple of seconds quicker than my lap times a year earlier, as I'd had an entire year to think about how I was messing things up in my first visit last year.

For the Enduro on Sunday, I let Greg run the car during the morning practice as he hadn't been in the car for a year, and he very quickly got up to speed and comfortable with the car, had no problems with the seating position or setup, so we were good to go for the race with no changes. Steve Haywood ran Greg's 944 in the warmup, and John Tate and I were running around like chickens with our heads cut off, getting our shared pit spot (our assigned spots were on complete opposite ends of pit lane, so we decided to share one spot) ready for the race, get the fuel cans filled, get nitrogen and regulators and airhoses and tires ready for any tire changes, get the radios sorted out so that John could talk to both cars, etc.

It was a busy morning. I was still getting my gear ready when we heard last call to grid, so John took the car to grid while I got changed. After a break in my walk to grid for the national anthem, I got in the car right at the five-minute warning. We were gridded third, but the grid people didn't leave space on the grid between the Sports Racers, so they held me off to the side to let the leaders out and actually started me fourth.

Whatever — it's a four-hour race, being on the outside versus the inside of the second row at the start wasn't going to make or break the result. The next Production car was in fifth position, the other top spots were all Sports Racers, which were a little quicker than the production cars, but didn't always have the reliability to finish the race without problems. We were only .2 seconds off of pole, but knew that at the limit, the Sports Racers should be a good 4 or 5 seconds a lap quicker than we were, with better acceleration down the straights, significantly better cornering given their downforce and ground effects, and brakes at least equal to the