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Doug Berger phot

Lee Mitchell (No. 46) trails his VP2 cohort Larry Cooper (No. 7) and eventual race winner Ian Wood (No. 8) through Turn 3 at Pacific Raceway when Group 7 was finally able to run on a dry track after two days of rain.

Well, that was wet

A visitor reflects on the 2010 NorPac Vintage Series

BY LEE MITCHELL
Vintage Datsun 240Z No. 46

KENT — This year's Vintage Series launched at Pacific Raceway in Kent, and the Reno Region put three cars on the grid. Larry Cooper in a 240Z, Doug Driver in a Porsche 914 and myself in another 240Z.

The last time I ran at Kent, Jim Gandy and I towed together from Reno, and shared a bit of grass and mud in the Pacific Northwest. I remember sliding under the 240 on the wet grass outside the paddock in the

rain, to bleed the clutch, while Jim worked the pedal. Well, it's been six years and it was still raining!

When Doug and I got to the track on Friday, Larry had already staked out a bit of asphalt that drained the right way. We got through registration and expedited tech thanks to Sherri and Dan and the rest of the NWR and Montana staffs. The folks were great, the weather miserable. Bernie Eccelstone came by and told us "not to worry" as he had ordered in several truckloads of intermediates and full wets. John Dimmer's ELF

Tyrell mechanic got just as wet as we did getting though tech, just to show there was no favoritism for locals.

Saturday morning practice saw 27 vintage cars take the grid, to slip, slide and slosh around the 2.25-mile, undulating, wooded circuit. Lap one had its casualties and local yellows were the norm. Coming up to turn 6 on my first lap, there was a gorgeous Gulf blue Can-Am car off on drivers' right in the mud-tracked grass. He stayed there the entire session.

Visibility was not great in the light rain, and I tried to remember the

gotchas for this circuit, keep the wipers going, watch for the fast boys coming by and hold my line while they deluged me in a torrent of spray. Window nets just sort of filter the heavy stuff.

My old rain tires, which were on narrow rims and up in pressure still left me skating. They had plenty of tread, but the durometer must have been pushing 300. The few laps I got were good info for planning a tire change and how to keep the windscreen clear.

Doug came in with an oil leak in his 914 and spent a lot of time chasing it. Larry had a good run and was snugging up his rear brakes.

Sunday qualifying saw only 20 intrepid drivers take to the track in the continuing light rain. No one was rushing in view of the weather and unavoidable track clean-ups. Dimmer set sail in his Tyrell and managed to get three laps and the pole. Larry Cooper got two laps, the second spot and VP2 pole. I came sixth overall and third in VP2. Doug splashed his way to fifth in VP2.

What with the downpours and off-track foraging, no one got more than three laps. My qualify time was 19 seconds better than my best on Saturday. I made a point of trying to read the wet track surface and stay off the normal well-worn and polished line.

Back in the paddock, there was prep for all, before Sunday's race. Doug was still chasing an oil leak. Larry was set but since he was also running ITS, he was having a busy day just with fuel, brakes and tires. Tim Scott, Doug and Larry all helped me de-mud my duck.

Our Sunday race was gridded at 4:20 and was supposed to be the last race of the day. It was still raining. Sitting on the grid I could see the starter's stand putting out the double yellow and then the red! There were a number of cars involved in an incident just in front of grid on the front straight.

There was the wrecker, the ambulance and several track vehicles spreading soap to clear away oil and a sweeper mixing kitty litter with the soap. After sitting for 35 minutes on the grid with the engine running in the rain, our race was "postponed" until 9:05 Monday morning. So it was back to the pits where we changed, and took a water taxi (Doug's Honda

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to Salty's for dinner.

Monday morning came fresh and wet again. Our 9:05 start was the day's first event. We followed the pace car for a lap in the rain to see where the mud had washed across the track overnight. We were flagged away in a rising rate of spray. It was wet and cold.

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I tried to clear a spot with a chamois that I had between my legs, but I couldn't reach the windscreen. Squirm in the belts and try to ease forward. I tell myself to pay attention, as I drop two wheels into the dancing puddles on driver's left coming onto the front straight. Two cars go by. One is Tim Scott in his Datsun roadster. I manage to clear a baseball-size spot on the inside of the windscreen. OK, I can see a bit.

Now it's left around the horseshoe and drop down into turn 3. One of the wipers parks itself. The driver's side of course. (Later I would find that the weld on the bottom of the wiper mechanism broke.) The rain, spray and fogged screen are taking the fun

out of this race.

I finally see a bright red flashing light ahead. It's Dan Mullin's Lola and he is running one of our SolarOasis rain lights, and it's doing its job. I closed to about 40 feet and set the grappling hook. For the next four laps, I hang onto Dan's flashing LEDs. The checker mercifully eases the tension. Larry tops the VP2 group, I finish behind the Lola, fourth in VP2, and Doug comes fifth. High fives all around just for finishing.

Qualifying for Monday's second race goes down in just an hour and a half, so its refuel, check fluids and brakes, and fit a blower to the windscreen. I change wipers arms but its no help. I RainX everything again. Doug pushed a lot of oil again in the morning race and decided not to lay down any more, and risk losing a new motor. Larry went back to resetting brakes and strategizing about which set of rain tires to use.

For Monday's qualifying, I wanted to be up front on the grid, so I might have a chance to run ahead of the early traffic. Yes, it was *STILL* raining. We rolled out at 11:20. Larry got in two good laps and took the VP2 pole again. I only got one flying lap in the rain and would end up 11th overall; I was 29 seconds off my Sunday times. It was wet and double yellow.

Our second race on Monday was the last event of the weekend. We gridded at 4:50. The rain was light and there were moments of SUN! Larry started third overall behind the Tyrell and stayed there. I got past a few cars as the sun came out, and finished second in VP2. The sun made it a different world. There was still plenty of spray and water draining, but the improved visibility was a real high.

There was a fair amount of collateral damage owing to the weather and the emergency crews probably never had a busier weekend. My helmet's off to the corner workers, the emergency and medical crews and all the NWR and Montana staff who put on this event.

Rain racing can be fun. It certainly teaches and emphasizes smoothness in line, braking and putting the power down. Rain is a great equalizer. It swings the winning pendulum from car to driver.

Don't forget your rain light.