

Welcome to a BowTie Party

Drive Head to Head in the Camaro Mustang Challenge

BY: DENNIS FLAHERTY

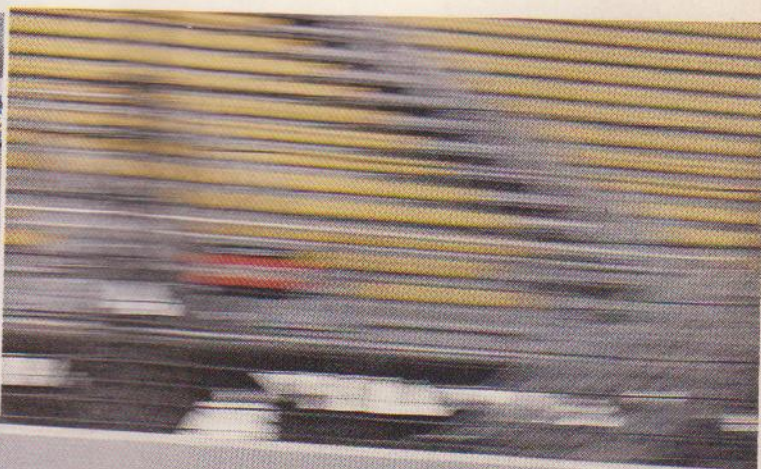
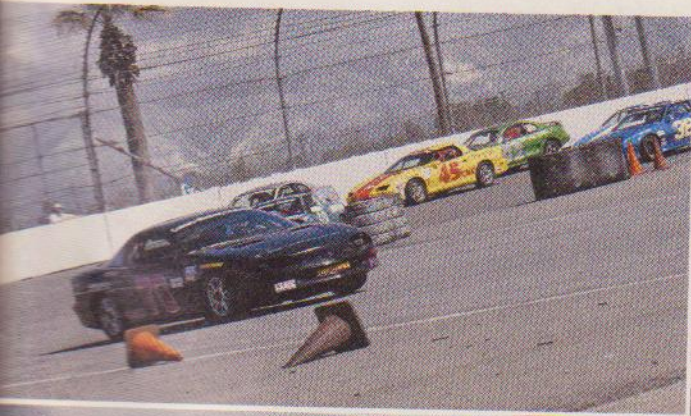
Photos: Mike Harrington

Many of our readers have either heard or read about Matt King's "Budget Road Racer" series in *Hot Rod* magazine. If you haven't yet, here's a short summary: In 2004, Matt purchased a \$500 '84 Mustang and built it to compete in National Auto Sport Association's Camaro-Mustang Challenge Road Racing Series. Over a two-year period, Matt went on to win the 2005 Ohio-Indiana Region Camaro-Mustang Challenge Championship. Congratulations, Matt! Other magazines have featured NASA Mustangs and you may have asked yourself: Where are the Chevys?

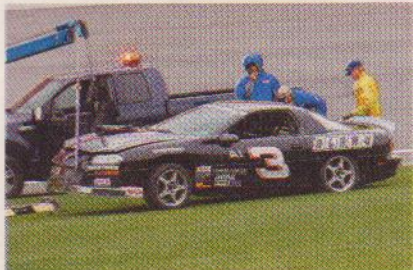
Well, I am here to tell you that Bow-Ties are required vehicles at all Camaro-Mustang Challenge events, and they do very well, thank you! A good example is Brady Flaherty's #70 Camaro. In 2004, Brady took Second Place overall in the Camaro-Mustang Challenge during his rookie year. Last year,

his #70 '93 Camaro took the NASA Camaro-Mustang Challenge Western Championship outright. Five of the top 10 finishers in the West were GM-branded, which has been typical throughout the life of the CMC series.

In March, *Super Chevy* was invited to the NASA 2006 Fontana Speedway opener to check it out and report about this spectacular road racing series. Picture this scenario: Upon entering Fontana Speedway, you park inside the raceway and are surrounded by the massive super speedway racetrack. The next 20 minutes is spent walking through hundreds of race cars with all their equipment, which almost fills the entirety of the super Speedway bowl. All the while, you're looking for the American Iron and Camaro-Mustang Challenge series parking area. Soon, you find the American Iron CMC garage area. This is where all the teams do final preparation on the cars and



hang out As soon as you enter the American Iron area, your senses immediately go on overload as you



experience the sounds, smells, and feelings that only the fierce racing rivalry between these legendary brands can produce. Plenty of Mazdas, BMWs, and Hondas are also in attendance, but they would need to sit on phonebooks to go to this dinner party. The drivers, whether of Chevys or Fords, are all extremely friendly but you have a sense that an Alfa Wolf would recognize these guys as equals.

NASA breaks this American V-8 racing series into three classes. The

Camaro Mustang Challenge is the lowest class. At the same time, it is the largest race group within the series. The next group is the American Iron Series. The American Iron (AI) class goes up to 435 rear-wheel horsepower, with bigger brakes and suspension—in short, the works. These cars are generally worth about \$25,000 or more. The highest class is American Iron Extreme (AIX), in which the word “extreme” is a direct translation. About 200 cars compete in the CMC series throughout the U.S. plus another 100 in AI. The rules for these can be found at www.nasaproracing.com. The essential difference between these classes is dollars. A race-ready CMC car can be built for as little as \$5,000; the average is probably about \$10,000. By comparison, the suspension package on an American Iron car can cost that much.

In his first article, Matt King states “What CMC offers in spades is competitive, driver-oriented wheel-to-wheel racing among closely matched V-8-powered Pony cars.” At Fontana Speedway this was a sight to see. The CMC cars start off using one half of the super speedway to get up to speed—a little over 150 mph—the cars immediately go into two banked turns at speed and then make a 90-degree left-hand turn off the track into the flat road-racing circuit. The road-race circuit has numerous turns and bends which slow the cars speed but at the same time all the drivers are absolutely thrashing transmission, brakes, and engines to the outer limits of their potential. They then go back on the speedway and start the process all over again. At Fontana, CMC cars are about five seconds slower than the fastest AI car. The fastest CMC cars are faster than some AI cars. Currently, Flaherty’s CMC Camaro would be in Fourth Place in AI. Fontana is a 2.8-mile combined speedway road-racing track that is traversed in less than two minutes. A typical race goes on for about 35 minutes, which is enough to settle things out for the time being. At the end of one of these race sessions, Pat Stone, a Camaro driver, said it all as he got out of his car “This party just ended...but there will be another in about 90 minutes.”

In CMC, the cars are limited to 230 hp and a 300 lb-ft torque rating at the

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rear wheels. The racers must present a verified dyno sheet once a year. Cheating is discouraged since the series is all about competitive driving skills. The top three cars of each race goes into the impound area where the cars are inspected for compliance. Still, these seemingly "stock" cars get faster each year with Nick Steels' Camaro breaking last years Fontana Speedway track record by two full seconds. Last year's lap record was also held by a Camaro.

It's "R-E-S-P-E-C-T," as Aretha Franklin sang it, and it is the glue that makes this series such a success. The driving abilities of a group of drivers whose day jobs range from computer programmers, master techs, skirt chasers, and cattlemen all come into question when this diverse group of people have started a race together and hit 150 mph. Seconds later, they are all going into a 90-degree left-hand turn together. Truly, this is togetherness at 150 mph. The only way this kind of racing can be relatively accident-free is for each driver to go through an intense high-performance driving program before competing within the CMC series. In NASA this is called "HPDE"—High Performance Driving Events, a school where your driving skills grow through a staged program of HPDE 1, HPDE 2, HPDE 3, and HPDE 4. After satisfactory completion of all these schools—or other equivalent ones—you can then join CMC and become a CMC Rookie driver. Cole Trickle, Tom Cruise's character in *Days of Thunder*, wouldn't quite make it into CMC because the drivers have to demonstrate their understanding and not just "feel" what's going on. The trust in other drivers and their cars, is enforced by Tony Ganglion, the CMC series national director. With his board of directors, Al Fernandez and Mike Plum—both Camaro drivers—plug in Gregg Robinson a Mustang driver; it is his job to enforce the racing rules. At the track or on the CMC bulletin board Tony is the Bill France (i.e. the BOSS of the Camaro Mustang Challenge Series).

The week after the Fontana race, Super Chevy's editorial staff decided to be a part of NASA CMC series. A stripped-down Camaro was delivered to Richard Radcliff, automotive technology instructor at Norco High School in Norco, California. Over the next few months, we will build a CMC Camaro that Matt King should have built. We will

share with you all the build information just as Matt did with his car, except that we will have the correct car. In the meantime, Matt King has until the end of September, where at Mid Ohio Racetrack, NASA will host the American Iron Camaro Mustang National Challenge. At Mid Ohio, all the CMC cars from around the nation will meet. We think the California CMC Camaro Contingent of Flaherty, Steel, Stone Plum, Fernandez, Morin, Simpson, Varon plus Pontiacs from Bergman and

Sheller are going to make the Matt Kings late-September weekend into a Bow-Tie Party. 



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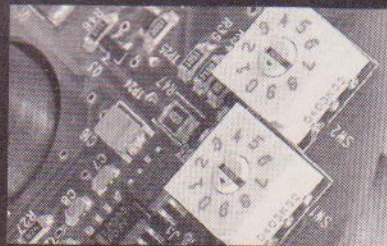
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