



# HELL FREEZES OVER!

*The Evil Beast is leading Hagerty's Mini Cooper!*

**BUTTONWILLOW RACEWAY**  
**Double National**  
**April 22-23, 2006**

**Friday, April 21st**  
**Test Day, 8:00AM – 3:00PM**

This weekend we're scheduled to run the longest configuration at Buttonwillow Raceway Park which produces a lap that is 3.1 miles long. This course is called Configuration #1A counter clockwise. Several years ago we ran a similar course, but this is the first time we're having a national event on #1A.

What makes it unique is the lack of straightaways. Instead of running the back straightaway that is almost a ½ mile long, we start the back straight and in the middle the course jogs and goes over 'Lost Hill', a blind curve going over a hill and finishes off camber. This is my kind of track. The Minis have been out accelerating the Evil Beast all season. This is an opportunity to close the gap. The word 'opportunity' will be the key word all weekend.

Because the course is so long, it's important to get as much time on the track as possible to learn over twenty turns that make up #1A.

### Test Day (Continued)

We will also be using the new paved turns called 'Off Ramp'. These are two quick and extremely difficult left hand turns that are very tight and hard to pick a line through. The track has scheduled a partial day of testing for those that want additional practice on the track. This was a no-brainer, because I'm sure the extra practice would pay off for the weekend.

Lynn and I arrived at the track at 7:00 to register and get the car ready to go. All the cars running today will be placed into one of three groups: Sport Racers, Open Wheel and Sedans. We had a brief driver's meeting and we were warned about the 'Off Ramp' turns, 'off' being a critical word. Many of the driver's were struggling with this section and there had been plenty of 'offs' from Thursday's Test Day. The officials let us have the chance to drive the track in our Jeep to get the lay of the land. I thought this was a good opportunity for Lynn to get the feel of the course, so I threw her the keys and off we went. She had autocrossed the east loop of Buttonwillow once, but this would be her first drive around the west loop. Nick Esayian and his street car, a BMW M5, were behind us also getting the feel of the track.

Since the races at Thunderhill, I haven't done anything to the car other than clean it up for a Honda import meet at Super Autobacs. All the So Cal Honda clubs met at the parking lot of Autobacs and they took over the entire lot. It was a chance for the clubs to see a Honda road racer and my chance to see what the street racers were doing. They were quite enamored with my Kumho race tires and wanted to know where to buy them.

The car worked great at Thunderhill and in many ways Buttonwillow is very similar. Both tracks are pure road racing tracks. As I went out for my first session my goal was to just learn the track and to stay on the 'black stuff'. About half way through, I can see Bill Hagerty's Mini Cooper in my mirror. He follows me around to see how I'm tackling the course. My times aren't stellar, but that wasn't the goal.



*Bill's Mini cornering through the 'Off Ramp'.*

With each session, I'm able to go a bit quicker and I'm learning the best air pressures for the tires. My fastest lap time is 2m 23s. I'm surprised that the car isn't tearing up tires. For the entire day, I was able to use only one set of used race rubber.

Just as I was about to leave our paddock space for the last test session of the morning, Nick pulls up in his M5 and asks Lynn if she would like a ride at speed on the course. She agrees to ride in Nick's chick magnet and off they went to go find a helmet for her. Nick is a pro driver running with the Realtime Racing Team in an Acura in SCCA's World Challenge Series. Lynn would be in good hands.



*Lynn with Nick's BMW M5.*

### **Test Day (Continued)**

For the last test session, the car is absolutely perfect. I'm able to put it into a drift on command and it's a blast to drive. Towards the end, I see Nick's M5 in my mirrors; so I slow up to wave to Lynn and they passed me. As soon as they went by, I noticed only one head in the car. I'm thinking she's either bent over throwing up or she fell out. It turns out that Nick gave her about three thrill laps and was finishing the rest of the session solo.

### **Race No. 1 Practice, 3:30PM**

For this weekend, our race group will include the Vipers and Corvettes in Touring 1, Mustangs and Camaros in T2 and the Mazda RX-8 in T3. We will also be on course with the Showroom Stock 'B' class of Mazda Miatas, newer Honda Civic and BMW Z4. For our specific Showroom Stock 'C' class, Russ McHugh has brought down his Mazda Protégé from up north. Bill Hagerty and Jeff Gerkin have shown up in their Mini Coopers.

Laura Olson has brought out her newest toy: a 2006 Mazda Miata in 'Winning Blue'. Laura has been working hard to get it prepped for its inaugural debut. She'll be running it in Showroom Stock 'B' against Sean Ewing in her old Miata, Richard Crites in his new Honda Civic Si and Tim Brecht in his dominant BMW Z4 coupe.

This is the first official practice session for this weekend's double national races. To make the schedule work our group is practicing with another group to help speed things up. Unfortunately, the other group is the GT cars and all the modified Production cars. There will be over 50 cars on course, with my Honda being in one of the slowest classes.

In the early laps of practice, the larger and faster GT cars are trying to warm up their tires. At about 90% effort on my part, I'm able to keep up with them. This feels cool to be running with the big boys, even just for a few laps. At halfway through the session, Lynn radios me that there is clear track behind me.

I'm able to run some good laps for the rest of the session without much traffic. Many of the cars have returned to the pits early so there's lots of clear space on track. This is a difficult track to learn and I'm surprised that more racers didn't stay on track.



*Laura's new 2006 Miata.*

Somewhere during this session, Russ has lost third gear. He's not sure if it's a linkage or transmission problem or if he can continue tomorrow.

There is one lap where Laura flies by me going into the Bus Stop turn in her new Miata. A quick jab on the brakes and she yanks it right for the turn and she's off. She's looking real good having struggled with steering issues during the day.

## **Saturday, April 22nd**

### **Race No. 1 Qualifying, 9:40 AM**

Dan and Lynne arrived the night before and are able to join us for the rest of the weekend. We give the car a once over and notice that some of the tires need changing. We replace a couple up front and Dan notices that the right front ball joint nut has come loose and the wheel is quite wobbly. We put on some other tires, check fluids and we're good to go.

We've been having radio problems the last few races. Dan was kind enough to take them home for a closer look.

### Race No. 1 Qualifying (Continued)

From all his research, it appears that one of the batteries may have gone bad. During his testing of the radio with the good battery, Dan discovered that channel 5 on the radio is the same frequency as the security channel for the local hospital. In an effort to completely discharge the battery, he listens to Hoag Hospital security for a few evenings. I ordered some new batteries and got the radios back from Dan.

We thought it would be good to completely charge up the batteries and then completely discharge them prior to the weekend. To aid in the discharge, I also turned into Hoag's security channel that's about 12 miles away. Dan and I think there's a future trip to Hoag to see if we can get their security personnel running around in circles. (I'll be writing that diary from prison.) Both Lynn and Lynne are not amused and will probably not post bail.



*The team waiting in impound.*

For qualifying, Sean and I thought it would be best to go out dead last to get some clean laps before we were passed by the faster cars. We used the first partial lap to get some heat in the tires. As we approached the front straight, we started our first hot lap. Going into the Mazda Hairpin left hand turn, my right front tire is making a funny noise. I'm thinking that the ball joint may be loose, but the car feels fine. After a couple of more left hand turns the noise is getting worse and it's getting difficult to turn left.



*Laura, Lynn and Jack.*

I'm close to the front straight so I go for it and post a mediocre time. At least I have one time on the books with a 2m 25s lap. I come into the pits and Dan notices that the right front tire is flat. With this one lap time, we bring the car into impound.

Dan heads for the paddock to get the air tank. Not knowing this, the girls get to the paddock space after Dan has left and bring back a small wagon full of tire changing tools and a good spare. Dan and I are impressed; they found and brought everything that was needed to change the tire. What a team!

The culprit was a leaking valve stem. Every left hand turn put more pressure on the valve and more air was let out each time.

Our race is scheduled for later in the afternoon. Dan and I use this opportunity to sample some of Lynne's cookies. She's brought both the chocolate peanut butter surprise and chocolate chip. Cookie taste test time!

Jack & Carol Craig and their friend Chris Macaulay have come to visit. Jack is looking great and Chris' insightful comments are always entertaining.

We still have several hours to kill. So as we sit in our paddock space where we can see cars going off track at 'Off Ramp' on a regular basis. There's a huge brown dust cloud for every incident at that turn and then the tow trucks going out to retrieve.

### Race No. 1 3:40PM

With my poor qualifying lap time, I'm starting second from last. Russ is behind me at grid. Russ decided not to qualify his Protégé in fear of damaging it more. He needs four race starts to qualify for the national championships in Topeka; so it's important that he starts Saturday and Sunday's races. However, he doesn't need to finish the races to qualify for the Runoffs. He's elects to run this race by using only fourth gear!

As we enter the track, everyone is zigzagging aggressively to warm up their tires. It's cool today and perfect track temperatures for racing. At about third way of this pace lap, Jeff Gerkin pulls off to one side and motions some of us by. He's got a problem. At the half way point of the pace lap, he comes charging back to his position. It looks like he's got the problem solved.

We get a late green flag and everyone charges for the first turn called 'Sunset'. There's a huge dirt cloud and off to my left I see two of the RX-8's off track and sideways trying to get on track. In all this mess, I find myself alongside Bill Hagerty's Mini and I keep my foot in it. As we head for the esses, I know that only one car can get through at a time. Another RX-8 gets between Bill and I try to go side by side, but after hitting the first curbs and bouncing heavily; I tuck behind the Mazda. Going into the hairpin, there are a few cars nose to tail. Because of the accordion effect, the last of the cars are breaking too soon for the corner. I decide to make an inside pass. I pull it off and pass Bill's Mini. I'm in P1 and life is good. I moved a little to the right to force Bill to stay behind. He's right on my butt.



*Cars in Pregrid: L to R: Crites, Chen, Gerkin, Laura, me and Russ.*



Race #1 Podium. Big smiles all around.

In the last portion of the course the turns are tighter. I seem to have a slight advantage over Bill in this area. As we head for the Start/ Finish line, I'm several car lengths ahead of Bill. He then passes me before the esses. But as we enter the hairpin again, I try my 'now famous inside move' and repass. As we move towards the hill, he repasses. I stay on his tail the best I can.

After a couple more laps Bill is able to pass Richard's Honda and put him between us. I work on Richard for a couple of laps and I'm able to make the pass. Bill is in my sights and I have "Bill Fever". Only the fever translates into too much aggression. As I'm going over 'Lost Hill', an uphill left hander, I loose it. I spin ninety degrees and end up halfway into the dirt, making my own cloud. Fortunately, the clutch was pushed in fast enough and I didn't stall the car. I see a blue flash and its Richard's Honda whizzing by me. I get back in motion and proceed to chance down the Honda. After several hard laps, I'm close to Richard and he's kind enough to let me go by. I see Bill in the distance and I'm starting to turn some of my better lap times.

Somewhere during the early laps, Jeff brings his car into the pits. His Mini is only running on three cylinders. Opportunity knocks and I'm in P2.

**Race No. 1 (Continued)**

Lynn radios that the Scotty's Viper is behind me and charging hard. He is the lead car of the group and when he crosses the Start/ Finish line he'll take the checkered flag. If he passes me before the checkered flag, my race will be over then. If he takes the checkered flag behind me, I will have one more lap to go. I'm thinking long shot here. Russ has lost third gear and Jeff is out of the race. If I can stay ahead of the Viper, I'll get that extra lap. It's another chance to chase Bill. Who knows; Bill can always break. Knowing his crew, this is such a long shot, like Shaq making a free throw. Hey, it's all I've got.

I get that extra lap and in my mirrors I see that the Viper gets the checkered flag. However, he starts to pass me at speed. Later, I found out that he didn't realize that the checkered was waved. The long shot doesn't pay off. Bill doesn't break and he takes the win for our class and I finish second. Much to Russ's surprise; he finishes in third place and is on the podium.

My lap times are almost two seconds faster than yesterday. I owe it to the new Kumhos, the alignment and Lynne's cookies.

After arriving in tech, I noticed that I'm light on fuel and I might be too light to meet minimum weight. It's time for me to start drinking lots of water. I'm fortunate that Tech doesn't want to weigh the car; it was going to be close.

Instead of trophies for this event, the podium finishers receive embroidered pit chairs. I'm told its Marge Binks thinking outside the box. It's a nice touch and we're appreciative of something different.

**Race No. 2 Practice**

The schedule for the day is over an hour late. We don't think there is much to be gained from the extra practice.

The latest rule changes have been posted and 50 pounds of weight was being removed from my Honda. I was able to check the internet and confirm except that the weight reduction wouldn't become effective until May first.

**Race No. 2 Qualifying, 9:40 AM**

Sean and I try our patented qualifying strategy of going out last. Sean's been running great this weekend and was top qualifier for yesterday's race. He's a few seconds faster in the Miata than me and he'll give me something to chase. We use the partial first lap to warm up the tires. As we approach the Start/ Finish, we both step on it for a flying lap. Everything is going well on this lap, I'm going in a little deeper in some places and I'm braver in others. Going into the 'Grapevine' hill, Sean loops it in front of me and I slow to miss him. We throw away that lap, but I'm able to beat my best time from yesterday in the next couple of laps. Dan suggests that I come in to cool the tires and try one more hard charger. This worked at Thunderhill and might work this morning. I come in and sit for a couple of minutes in the pits and then go out again committed to set the lap record to stand the test of time. As I come around to the Start/ Finish line to start my history-making record-setting lap, the checker flag comes out and the session's over.



*Race No. 1 finish: The RX-8 is trying to lap me at the checkered flag.*

Everyone goes faster today. My qualifying lap is 2m 20.7s; which is faster than Bill's track record from yesterday. Russ smartly elects to sit out qualifying once again.



*Race No. 2: My Honda, Bill's Silver Mini and Jeff's Red Mini Cooper on the front straight.*

### **Race No. 2 Qualifying (Continued)**

Just to have some fun, we put the code reader on Chris' Jaguar V8. Yesterday, he told me about the electronic woes he had on that car. Sure enough, the reader finds a P1111 code. I have no idea what this is, but I assure Chris that it's extremely serious and he probably shouldn't drive the car. Within the hour, Chris was able to contact his mechanic who told him this was the code showing that the engine had completed its diagnostic checks and all was running well. It was fun for a little while.

### **Race No. 2, 2:40PM**

Bill has qualified first in our class. On grid, Sean is in a Mini sandwich as he's between Bill's and Jeff's Mini. I'm right behind Jeff and Laura & Richard are behind me. At the start, Sean needs to make tracks or get out of the way.

As we get the green flag, I seem to hesitate for an instant and the pack moves forward. Laura passes me to the right and Richard to the left. Somehow I come out of the first turn ahead of them and behind Jeff's Mini. In front of Jeff are Bill and Sean. I'm trying hard to stay on Jeff's bumper and I think he's a little surprised that I'm there. Bill and Jeff keep trading positions which slows them both up, this keeps me in the hunt.

As we exit the esses there's a dirt cloud from Sean. He's learned that cutting the last corner in the esses is the fastest way around the course. Unfortunately, the cloud is so thick that you can't see through it. Sean pulls this trick every lap. It's quite annoying.

Bill and Jeff are starting to pull away slightly, but I keep charging. Going into the first turn, I see another dirt cloud and one of the two Minis sideways and the other is pushing him. I can't recall who did what to whom, but I hear opportunity knocking again. I come around and I'm Jeff's bumper. Whatever happened looked terrible and I assume that one or both are damaged and should slow up. Well that doesn't happen and they are still moving pretty damn fast.

On lap 14 going towards 'Lost Hill', Jeff is in front and pulls to the right. Bill goes past. Jeff is slowing and then I pull pass him. I grab the radio and shout, "P2, P2". I'm in second place on Bill's tail.

I try and hang on the best I can. He's got a little more than me and he's able to pull away a bit. But I hear opportunity knocking again when Lynn radios that the leaders are approaching. I get passed in an area on the track that allows me to not loose much time.

## Race No. 2 (Continued)

Going into the last lap, an RX-8 is trying to pass me. He makes his move at the 'Grapevine' hill and is now between Bill and me. There is no one for him to catch and I don't appreciate him getting into the middle of our fight. As he and Bill are heading to the 'Off Ramp' the RX-8 attempts to pass Bill on the inside. This is an extremely tight turn. I try to take advantage and tuck behind the Mazda. He moves Bill to the outside and almost into the dirt. I'm faster than the Mazda in these tight turns and come close to hitting his bumper. I'm almost alongside Bill. Tire smoke is coming from Bill's Mini front tires and he is spinning them to move forward. He's able launch well and stays ahead of me. He hangs on for one more turn and is able to take the checkered flag. I finish in second 0.7 seconds behind Bill. The fastest laps of Bill, Jeff and I are all within one second. That's mighty close.

As it turns out, Jeff was running out of gas. He was able to finish the race at a slower pace and finish third in front of Russ. Russ was able to complete the race again using only fourth gear.

To add insult to injury, Tech requests a fuel sample from Jeff's Mini. He's required to fill a small bottle with fuel for testing. He's so empty that he can't fill the bottle normally. His crew gets a jack to move what little fuel is left towards the pick-up point in the tank.

Fortunately, I have enough fuel on board and should make weight easily, but Tech doesn't weigh the Evil Beast.

Lynn and I leave Buttonwillow with two second place embroidered chairs. It's a nice day!



*Jeff's Mini is on jacks trying to get that last drop of fuel out of the tanks. The Mini has two tanks.*

## SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks to:

- Lynn for a great job on the radio and for her work on the 'spare tire specialty team'.
- Dan for his help with the radios, noticing the bad ball joint, and torquing lug nuts on grid.
- Lynne for her batches of chocolate peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies. And also for her efforts as photographer and 'spare tire specialty team member.'
- Jack, Carol and Chris for coming out to visit.
- Laura for not taking me out at the start of Race No. 2.
- Russ McHugh, for helping to remove 50 pounds from the Honda and for an inspirational drive.
- Nick Esayian for Lynn's thrill ride in his M5.
- Bill Hagerty and Jeff Gerkin for keeping it clean. (At least with me!).
- Sean for the dust baths every lap.
- All the Cal Club workers.

Next Race  
**CALIFORNIA SPEEDWAY, FONTANA**  
2-4 June 2006