

SPORTSCAR



STORM TROOPERS

Competitors flood to the Tire Rack Solo National Championships for a record-breaking performance



PROSOLO FINALE
The ProSolo season comes to a wet and wild conclusion

SOMETHING
Targa Southland rockets to success at its inaugural event

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POBST POSITION



In 2002, I was racing a street-stock Porsche 911 at Virginia International Raceway and I knew it had psychotic brakes. The wet track was drying and we had aggressively gone to dry early when pitting for fuel, gambling the rain would quit. The race was coming to us as we moved up fast - even more so knowing the other cars needed to pit to change tires. We were going to win this thing!

But there was some electrical gremlin lurking deep in the bowels of the brake system. Maybe the drier patches overtaxed a faulty ABS controller. As we came screaming into Turn 11, the one before Oak Tree, I went to the brakes and was rewarded with nothing but nothing: hard pedal, no stopping. I actually think maybe one or two instantly locked, couldn't tell. All I knew for sure was that the psycho ghost was back and we were going off at a very high car-and-maybe-driver-ending rate of speed, straight on, with just a bit of yaw. 100mph on wet grass into a tire wall - yikes!

I knew the car was about to be destroyed, and I had real concern I could end up in a hospital. Then a strange thing happened. The impact felt like driving into thick pudding. Didn't hurt a bit! If it wasn't for the fragile radiators Porsche hangs in the front corners of the 911, I'm pretty sure I could have downshifted and driven it right back out of there. OK, maybe with a little tire rub. What I'm getting at is the fenders and door were bent, but the suspension looked almost fine.

I unbuckled and climbed out, amazed. My old friend and Mazda teammate at the time,

BETTER BARF

RANDY POBST 4 TIME WORLD CHALLENGE CHAMP; 2 TIME RUNOFFS CHAMP;
2 TIME SOLO AND 4 TIME PROSOLO CHAMP; 2 TIME ROLEX 24 GT WINNER

Jeff Altenburg, saw the TV broadcast and gave me some parental lecturing about appearing callous and irresponsible for laughing and smiling in such a situation. "Shoot, Jeff," I countered, "I was just happy to be alive!"

It was a huge off, but I wasn't hurt and even the car wasn't bad. VIR had placed two long freestanding tire walls in front of the Armco, all attached and banded together, so when I came sailing in, they stopped me gradually. But assembling such an arrangement requires a lot of work and money, and tires are neither scientific nor designed for the job. After I hit them, could they be used again as effectively? Who knows?

At a street race in Toronto, tire walls improved upon the brutal concrete, but when a car bounced off them, a flood of water was released on the otherwise dry track, causing another crash the very next lap. There's a better way, people. It's a new century.

I read a groundbreaking article about track barriers in a recent issue of *SportsCar* that piqued my attention, especially following my own recent column about buying guardrail. It was there I first learned of a new product from an old racing buddy of mine, Impact Safety Systems' ProLink Barriers (www.impactssafetybarriers.com). Owner R.J. Valentine saw and lived the same crash environment I did all these years, and took the bull by the horns to make something better for everyone involved. I really admire that.

Racers don't like to think about crashes. I never did, especially in my eager days as a

young lion. When I'm at speed on track, my focus is too narrow to include the impact zones outside the racing line. I can still remember the first time I rode a bicycle around Road Atlanta, in the early 1990s. Quite honestly, it was the first time I had ever had much of a look at the walls in the famous Esses. They were much closer and harder than I ever dreamed; not that I had ever dreamed about that.

Even late in my career, after hundreds of races, I never commented or complained about the barriers lining the tracks. My passion for the sport overruled my poorly developed survival instinct. And most of us drivers prefer not to offend tracks, teams, and sanctioning bodies anyway. Well, now I see a better way, and I'm doing what I can to make drivers and tracks aware of the tremendous benefits that are possible.

Whenever I hear of a new racetrack being built, I give a little fist pump and say *yeah!* More chances to feed my speed addiction! More options and interest added to the great classic road courses. Hooray! I *love* racetracks! I know it takes a lot of money to keep these wonderful places alive. I believe this modern hi-tech cushioning barrier is so efficient and effective that it actually saves cash as it saves our necks and our four-wheeled investments of blood, sweat, and tears. With a significant reduction in the blood and tears part being my goal.

Many of the new circuits are in the membership motorsport country club style, a splendid concept. While these are, by nature, as luxurious as possible, as businesses, the

costs must make sense in order to survive. The modern ISS ProLink walls are actually less expensive when considering the labor and maintenance necessary with old school tire walls, and so far superior to rock-hard jersey barriers that it seems a no brainer. And these ProLink barriers look as good as they work, and can be easily covered in sponsor logos.

A track can be fully equipped for far less than the price of just one smashed Ferrari, not to mention the precious human cargo on board. Softer, smarter constraints are a boon to the long-term prospects for the success of a racetrack. It won't take too many hospital visits and total losses of high-dollar exotics to disenchant members who are only after a good time. Word gets around quickly.

Another valuable factor to consider is insurance. You think those track insurance companies look at damage potential for each facility? Do Corvettes smell like tranny fluid late in a race? A call to a friend with years in the business brought an emphatic yes. Safer, friendlier walls mean lower insurance rates, for tracks, drivers, and organizers. No insurance, no track - that's the bottom line.

I have felt the sting and stiff neck of concrete contact. Imagine a baseball bat against your head. Any bare concrete leaves the door open to serious injury. It's time we move beyond Armco, Jersey barriers, and tire walls into the 21st century of specifically and scientifically designed and tested systems to protect our bodies and our beloved driving machines. The best news is, it makes perfect financial sense. ●

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CUSHION THE BLOW

An off-track excursion is often an unpleasant experience for both car and driver. Anything that softens the impact is appreciated.

