

FOCNER at Pocono Raceway

Article and photos by Tom Cirillo

I just returned from a fantastic event, sponsored by FOC's Northeast Region, at Pocono Raceway on May 4. This was the first time I'd been to Pocono, let alone experienced the track in my new 360 Modena! Also, this was my first time on slicks.

The night before the track event, many of us congregated at one the Powerhouse Restaurant for food, drink and good catching up with Ferrari tales thrown in. This gave us the proper level of testosterone flow for the next day. The next morning, at 6:30 or so, a group of us rolled into the infield to take it all in. It reminded me, at that hour, of the feeling on a golf course, early, before a competitive round. Here, though, the grandstands and signage evoke memories of the great wins and heartbreaks experienced by name drivers. Donohue, Petty, Allison, ...and now FOC NER! The ambience was added to by the smells and sounds of prep work, tech inspection, and the chatter of guys catching up with friends while trying to figure out where to be and when. That part was made a pleasure by the well organized structure of the event.

Jamie Ross, Jay Johanas, Jeff Menachem, and Barry Smith (our chief instructor) deserve a lot of credit for putting on a spirited but safe driver's ed. Oh, did I mention the non-Ferrari's? This was a multi-marque event! From my perspective, this added a great new dimension as we were out there with Vipers, Corvettes, Porsche's driven mostly by guys who had very little experience with the exotic Italian machinas around them.

With safety in mind, we began with a driver's meeting, mandatory for all. In addition, there was a special meeting for newcomers (white run group). The weather was perfect. We had, by my measure, 87 degree air temperature, so, the track was, at it's hottest, probably about 100. Not bad.

In the course of the day, 6 sessions were run for each of the 3 run groups! So, from about 8:30 till 6:00pm, with only a break for lunch, over 80 cars got to enjoy this fabulous track. And fabulous it was. Configured as a 2.5 mile course with two long straights, banking in between, and a five turn technical section, it presented a wide rang of challenges.

I enjoyed four runs of about 30 mins each. That's about 125 miles altogether. I also eventually ran out of gas. But fortunately, the gas problem surfaced when I became tired and decided to pass on the remaining run sessions.

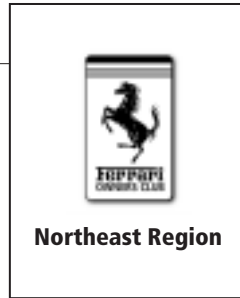
I can't say enough about the spirit and comraderie at this event. My friend Rich Heyderman came with his beautiful full trailer and 550 Marenello, but unfortunately suffered a mechanical problem. Rich offered gasoline (I took it), tools, and help throughout the day.

I met (and chased) a very fast PCA (Porsche Club of America) member in a Porsche RS America and caught up on Porsche going's on. The Vipers were awesome. They certainly had speed on the straights. But with slicks on the 360, the incredible, balanced handling of this car made the infield an opportunity to gain the edge. To some extent, the same was true for the Corvette's. I've since checked out the Viper club forum <http://207.36.65.11/ViperUBB/Forum14/HTML/003477.html>) to see the great comments about how enjoyable this FOC event was for our Viper friends (along with a slightly different perspective about the relative performance of the vehicles <G>.).

My friend Tony Marinello (yeah, Marinello spelled wrong) made it up in the afternoon in his 308, managing to get some time in before the day came to an end. Our group also included Jeff Ferrari (yup). You can't make this stuff up.

I hope we do it again next year. I'll have more seat time by then; and I'm already thinking of ways to rationalize a Challenge car. Next, I'm looking forward to the HSR Glen event, and then, the annual FOCNER event at the Glen in June.

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This is a picture of a man trying to be comfortable in a three layer Nomex racing suit in 100° heat.



The front door of famous Pocono International Raceway.



The scale of the raceway is imposing with very solid concrete walls surrounding the oval section.



A 360 Modena is a great handling Ferrari, slicks make it stick.



The infield portion of Pocono offer an opportunity to gain the edge on the fast Vipers.



Our Ferraris, Vipers and Porsche's stayed in the Pocono International Raceway's garages, where many racing champions have prepared their machines for battle.

tom c. journal - a day at pocono

at 6:30-7:00 a.m. I roll into the infield to take it all in. it reminds me, at that hour, of the feeling on a golf course before rounds; early. Here, though, the grandstands and signage remind me of the great wins and heartbreaks experienced by dedicated drivers over the years.

the only thing missing is the music that cbs plays at augusta! then, the smells and sounds of prep work. cars rolling in. getting ready for tech inspections. the feeling of wanting to do well; of wanting a safe day. wanting to learn and to experience the excitement of a legendary track.

there's a smell to the place. the quiet, methodical, tense beginning of a roaring, all out, hell be damned day.

I did four runs. 25 mins ea. I did 125 miles altogether. I also did 6 mpg!! and ultimately ran out of gas. But fortunately, the gas problem surface when i was getting tired and decided to pass on the last run group.

I improved with each run group. The slicks are simply amazing, as is the car. I feel at one with the car now. I feel i can be good on a tight course, only limited by my own fear on the straights.

This is an unusual course for me. The banking, of course. I've never done that before. You enter it at (at least i did) about 150mph. And you wonder how fast to drop down to the apex. You want to go down. But speed requires that you stay up and make your way to the apex more leisurely. Full throttle if you can, and track out on the banking to a remarkable dead left 90 degree turn that is the entry to the infield. The infield is a blast. 5 turns, good speed, but before you know it, it's back the the main straight carrying as much speed as possible.

Another interesting element of this outing was the multi-marque aspect of the event. i was chased by vipers, porsches, and corvettes. I could stay with (but not pass) a porsche (highly modified RS America- a race car really), but handling the Vipers and Corvettes pretty easily!! We had some interesting conversations after each run.

At one point, very unfortunately, someone laid oil on the track throughout the infield. They put stuff down that soaks this up, but for 5 turns, it is hairy.

I had no "off tracks" at all. My friend did, unfortunately. Another friend had to bail out after the back straight in his 550 marenello (same car as my other ferrari) when he lost brakes and gear change at once! We pulled him off the track in a van. And (too bad) his day was over. I hope his event proves inexpensive.

My speed at the end of the main straight was about 150. This was the fastest i've ever driven. The car was capable of more, but i didn't have the xxxx to push it. I think it would do 160, changing the way the subsequent sections would "play." That's a lot of speed, 3 feet from a concrete wall, not knowing, really, how far to carry it before "falling" into the banking.

i'm sure i've left much out but i hope i gave you a good sense of the experience. It was a good group. Very few mishaps. An amazing Nascar track. Full circuit (2.5 miles).