



Have you ever had the fantasy of racing a NASCAR stock car on a banked oval or road race circuit? If so, here is the way to follow your dream, and it is an absolute GASS! The Great American Stockcar Series (GASS) is a new racing series which puts you behind the wheel of a 400-plus horsepower V-8 stockcar with none of the usual problems associated with race car ownership, logistics and race car maintenance.

Chris Evans, a veteran stockcar builder and race driver, currently has a fleet of 14 rent-a-ride stockcars and he has 13 more under construction. The race cars are similar to NASCAR Southwest Tour series cars, but they are fitted with two racing seats so a profes-

sional race driving instructor can ride with you. The cars are prepared identically and they race amongst themselves on oval tracks. However, on road race circuits, racing with the NASA organization, you also get to run with Porsches and Corvettes.

Evans' crack team of mechanics, fabricators and driving instructors do it all for you. They prepare the race cars and transport them to the track. Once there, the crew tunes the chassis, maintains the cars and helps you get up to speed. All you need to do is reserve the car, cut the check, then "arrive and drive."

At different tracks under NASA and NASCAR sanction, the GASS machines will run on either an oval track or a road race circuit. This season, Evans' three

18-wheel NASCAR haulers will be at such celebrated road race circuits as Phoenix International Raceway, Portland International Raceway, Infineon Raceway in Sonoma and the new Miller Motorsports Park in Utah. If you prefer oval tracks, the GASS cars will run this year at Iowa Speedway and Roseberg Speedway in Oregon.

A day with the GASS guys at PIR

Upon arriving in the pits at Phoenix International Raceway, it was easy to find Chris Evans' impressive operation. Three giant NASCAR haulers support the Great American Stockcar Series. The first rig has a state-of-the-art shop, a luxurious drivers' lounge and a rooftop observation deck. The second hauler

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Racing Stockcars is a GASS!

Story and photos by H.R. Driver





has auto transport rails and an inside service hoist. The third rig is all business, with double-decked rails capable of hauling a half dozen race cars plus spare parts and tools.

The rows of pristine GASS race cars were the next thing to catch our attention—a dozen race cars with dual racing seats, massive internal roll cages and on-board fire systems. Upon closer examination, each car also sported massive 6-piston Willwood front brake calipers and 4-piston rears. The GASS cars are fast, but they also must slow down in a instant. Each car is also fitted with NASCAR-style 4-speed Jerico transmission and the driver's choice of either Goodyear or Hoosier slicks. Yes, these cars are the real deal.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about Chris Evans' operation, however, was his six-man pit crew. When a GASS race car was towed into the pits with right-front crash damage, the crew descended upon the machine like a swarm of purposeful killer bees. In less than an hour, the crew repaired the bent fender, replaced a broken brake rotor and a tie rod. The car was mended, realigned and sent out for qualifying.

Later, we listened to a conversation between Spencer Sharp (NASA FFR West Series Champion and one of Evans' professional driving instructors), as he explained the proper braking technique and racing line through a corner. During practice, Sharp rode with, led and followed many of the GASS series drivers. Obviously, the GASS organization has thought of everything, including providing their own pro instructors for their clients. Ross Thompson, TransAm and GrandAm series star, is Evans' other pro instructor.

Of course, extensive personal driver tutoring is a tad extra, but well worth it. Do you want to learn how to cut through traffic like a knife through hot butter? You need to learn this from a pro. Do you want to learn how to diagnose the racing line at every new track you go to? You should learn this from a professional as well.

Who competes in GASS?

While GASS has several young "development drivers" in their series, most of the clients are successful businessmen

over the age of 40. Yes, you can begin racing cars after 40 and be quite successful. Actor Paul Newman proved this many times over as he won countless national road races during his 25-year racing career. The personality traits which made P.L. Newman successful in racing were his phenomenal focus and his coachability.

Jeff Smith would be considered one of the young guns of the GASS racing series—fast, smooth and talented. Gary Bennett, Vice President of Barrett-Jackson Auctions, would be more representative of the competitive group of 40-plus drivers who compete in the Great American Stockcar Series. Successful businessmen often become good race drivers because of their competitiveness, attention to detail and ability to focus.

During the GASS race at PIR, Jeff Smith qualified first in the GASS group and won his class. Robert Gritten finished second and Gary Bockman earned the final step on the podium. Kevin Culver finished fourth.

However, racing is not always about winning. What we found refreshing about racing in the GASS series is that regardless of their age differences, all of the drivers seemed to get along and enjoy the racing experience. After the race, each had a story to share. This is largely because within each race there are many individual battles for position.

However, there were other reasons why the GASS drivers enjoyed the race so much. They did not have to prepare the race cars, to transport them or wrench on them at the track. Evans' crew did all of this for the drivers. This let the drivers focus on racing.

How much does it cost to run?

Racing is not inexpensive, but racing a GASS stockcar is a good value. Especially when you consider that you do not need to purchase a race car, to prepare it, to buy a race transporter or the fuel needed to get it to and from the race track. Moreover, in the GASS series, you never need to turn a wrench. As a former pro driver, we really like this.

Chris Evans charges \$2,000 per race day or \$6,000 for a typical 3-day race

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weekend. Pricey? Not really. Not when you consider what it would cost to run your own used or vintage NASCAR Cup series machine.

Consider the following scenario: You buy an ex-Mark Martin NASCAR rolling chassis (no engine) at a Scottsdale classic car auction for \$26,000. A good deal, right? You pay the commission and shipping to your home, and you are now into the car for about \$30,000.

You park your ex-Mark Martin race car in the garage in your wife's Lexus parking spot (hey, you can't park your Corvette Z06 outside, can you?!). Assuming your wife has not yet filed for divorce, you still have a motorless race car in your garage.

Next, you buy a strong rebuilt NASCAR engine for \$40,000, have it installed and dynoed for another \$5,000. Now you are in your race car \$75,000. Still not too bad when you consider your race car was actually raced by Mark Martin at Infineon and Watkins Glen. How many race cars like this could there be? Trust me, you really don't want to know.

You are lucky because a friend has a dually you can borrow. Unfortunately, you need to buy a used 24-foot enclosed trailer to haul your race car, tools and spares. Cha-ching! Another \$5,000. Now you are in the entire package \$80K...before you hit the track.

Since you've never raced on a real race track, you decide to take your collectable NASCAR Cup Car to NASA HPDE track day (practice day). Unfortunately, since you have never raced before, you don't know how to match the revs of your engine with your rear wheels when you downshift. The result is: a) You spin the car, b) You tag the wall, c) You blow the motor due to over-revving, or d) The worse case scenario, "all of the above." Not to worry, another \$25,000 and you are ready to do it all again.

Bottom line, even if you have a historic NASCAR Cup Car in your garage, you are better off renting a race car from Chris Evans. The GASS race cars have disposable fiberglass body panels, which are cheap to replace. The NASCAR Cup Cars have steel bodies which are far more expensive to repair. The 400 HP GASS engines are designed for longevity and economical repair. NASCAR Cup engines are price and last one fourth as long as a GASS series engine. Most importantly, the GASS series has professional driving instructors who can teach you how to drive a race car properly in the first place.

First things first

If you are just beginning to race, it is better to rent than to buy a race car. It is better to make mistakes in an inexpensive race car rather than in an expensive one. It is better to have someone who really knows what they are doing wrench on your race car than you. It is better to have a professional teach you how to race drive than to learn by trial and error.

If you want to race sports cars or formula cars, go to Bob Bondurant's racing school first. If you want to race NASCAR cars or historic NASCAR cars, call Chris Evans and reserve one of his GASS race cars. Evans can be contacted via e-mail at chrisevans@evansmetalfab.com, or call him at 503-228-0194.

Driving a fast race car in a fun, competitive series is an absolute gas! Why not begin your racing venture with a group of professionals who can make it even more enjoyable? ■

