

Wisconsin smörgåsbord

Dozens of the best of the best—on the track, dirt, roads and cones at Road America

Story and photos by Joe Sage

A little inside baseball. We are a regional publication, bringing you news of interest to, as our title suggests, Arizona drivers. But there's a lot that happens in the rest of the country, and the rest of the world, that's of interest to drivers in Arizona, particularly to the vehicle application and purchase decisions we make.

As such, we have long been members of our home base Phoenix Automotive Press Association (PAPA), as well as our sister home base Motor Press Guild (MPG) in Southern California (which actually came first). And we belong to several other associations in the Western states: Rockies, Pacific Northwest, Texas and most recently California's Central Coast. Each has characteristics in common with parts of Arizona, and all share many of the same manufacturer representatives and overlap many of the same writers

and producers we already work with.

One reason sharing common characteristics with the other associations is useful is that they all present drive events, while our Phoenix-based association does not (although one of PAPA's members independently produces the Active Lifestyle Vehicle [ALV] awards).

A couple of years ago, we decided it would be appropriate to join something in Detroit, too. But one colleague after another suggested the Chicago-based Midwest Automotive Media Association (MAMA to our local PAPA), as one of the strongest and most professional in the country and one often anchoring Detroiters—media and manufacturers, both—anyway. And they run an event with one of the most stellar reputations: the MAMA Spring Rally.

First, absorb this benchmark. When we participated in the Northwest Automotive

Press Association's Run to the Sun event in Oregon last fall, there were 25 cars involved (and 25 drivers). That two-day drive event had a predetermined driver sequence for each, which is uncommon but a tremendous timesaver and organizational aid. Nonetheless, that amounted to about 25 minutes per car over two days, with one ongoing mission—one road course, driven simultaneously by all.

The MAMA Spring Rally also runs for two days, but comprises four elements: track driving on the 4.048-mile, 14-turn, 640-acre Road America course in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin; highway driving on the beautiful two-lane roads in the vicinity; an off-road course; and an autocross course.

That's four times the mission, and the vehicle count was staggering: some 90 cars, trucks and utilities—mostly cars—perhaps a few more, with just a few duplicates brought for efficiency's sake. On the first day, some were designated for road use and some for track. On the second day, some were designated for an autocross session on what is most commonly Road America's kart track, and some for an aggressive off-road course on the property. A number of cars were designated for both road and track (with only a few

KEEP RIGHT >>



(2015 models unless noted)

STREET

- Acura ILX Premium A-Spec
- Acura MDX Adv
- Acura RDX
- BMW M235xi Coupe
- BMW 228i Convertible
- BMW M4 Convertible
- Cadillac ATS-V Coupe
- Cadillac ATS-V Sedan
- Chevrolet Trax
- Chevrolet Sonic
- Chevrolet Colorado midsize pickup
- Chevrolet Silverado full-size pickup
- Chrysler 300
- Dodge Challenger Scat Pack
- Dodge Charger Scat Pack
- Dodge Charger SXT
- Fiat 500 Abarth
- Fiat 500 X (two)
- Ford Edge Titanium 2.0L EcoBoost
- Ford Edge Sport 2.7L EcoBoost
- Ford Focus Titanium 2.0L
- Ford Focus Sedan 1.0L EcoBoost
- Ford Mustang 2.3L EcoBoost Convertible
- GMC Canyon midsize pickup
- Honda CR-V AWD Touring
- Hyundai Genesis 3.8 V6 AWD
- Hyundai Veloster Rally Edition
- Infiniti Q50
- Jaguar XJL 3.0L AWD
- Jaguar XF 3.0L AWD
- Jeep Renegade
- Kia Forte5
- Kia Sedona SXL
- Kia Sorento SXL (2016)
- Land Rover Range Rover Sport HSE
- Land Rover Range Rover HSE
- Land Rover Discovery Sport HSE
- Lexus NX 200t
- Lexus NX 300h Hybrid
- Lexus RC 350 F Sport
- Lincoln MKC AWD Black Label 2.3L EcoBoost
- Maserati Quattroporte GTS
- Maserati Ghibli S Q4
- Mazda3 S 5-door Grand Touring
- Mazda6 i Grand Touring
- Mazda CX-5 Grand Touring AWD
- Mercedes-Benz S550 Coupe
- Mercedes-Maybach S600
- MINI Cooper S Hardtop 4-Door
- Mitsubishi Evo MR
- Mitsubishi Outlander Sport 2.4L GT
- Nissan Murano
- Nissan Rogue
- Nissan Altima
- Nissan Juke SL AWD
- Subaru WRX (2016)
- Subaru BRZ Series Blue
- Subaru Outback
- Subaru Impreza
- Toyota Sienna
- Toyota Camry
- Toyota Camry Hybrid
- Toyota 4Runner TRD Pro
- Volkswagen GTI w/ Performance Package
- Volkswagen Golf SportWagen
- Volkswagen Jetta GLI
- Volkswagen Touareg



TRACK

- Alfa Romeo 4C
- BMW X6M
- Buick Regal GS
- Cadillac ATS-V Coupe
- Cadillac ATS-V Sedan
- Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Coupe Z51
- Chrysler 200 S
- Dodge Challenger Hellcat
- Dodge Challenger Scat Pack
- Dodge Charger Hellcat
- Dodge Charger Scat Pack
- Dodge Viper
- Ford Focus ST 2.0L EcoBoost
- Ford Mustang GT Coupe Premium 5.0L
- Hyundai Genesis 5.0 V8
- Kia Forte5
- Lexus RC F
- Mazda3 S 5-door Grand Touring
- Mazda6 i Grand Touring
- Mazda CX-5 Grand Touring AWD
- Mercedes-AMG GT-S
- MINI 2-Door John Cooper Works Hardtop (2016)
- Mitsubishi Evo MR
- Nissan 370 Z NISMO
- Subaru WRX (2016)
- Subaru WRX STI (2016)
- Subaru BRZ Series Blue
- Volkswagen Golf R
- Volkswagen GTI w/ Performance Package
- Volkswagen Jetta GLI

AUTOCROSS

- BMW M235xi Coupe
- BMW M4 Convertible
- Buick Regal GS
- Chevrolet Sonic
- Hyundai Veloster Rally Edition
- Lexus RC F
- Mitsubishi Evo MR
- Volkswagen Golf R
- Volkswagen GTI w/ Performance Package
- Volkswagen Jetta GLI

OFF-ROAD

- Chevrolet Colorado midsize pickup
- Chevrolet Silverado full-size pickup
- GMC Canyon midsize pickup
- Jeep Renegade Trailhawk
- Jeep Wrangler
- Kia Sorento SXL (2016)
- Land Rover Range Rover Sport HSE
- Land Rover Range Rover HSE
- Land Rover Discovery Sport HSE
- Subaru Outback
- Toyota 4Runner TRD Pro
- Volkswagen Touareg

STATIC DISPLAY / REVEAL

- Alfa Romeo 4C Spider
- Dodge Viper ACR (2016)



instances of multiple hardware provided); a number were designated for either track or street, plus autocross; and a number were designed for street and also off-road. Only two Volkswagen entries (GTI and Jetta) were designated for all three paved courses: track, road and autocross. (There were none that shared racetrack and off-road designations.) There were about 100 media participants driving.

Chart it all out, and there were some 125 different driving opportunities, five times as many as that Oregon run, but still in just two days. And selections were random, which leads to some lost time, and also to longer waits at the starting line for the hottest of the track machines—often a good cue to try another road car.

It was a chilly and wet couple of spring days in Wisconsin, with highs in the 50s or 60s and lows around 30. We had been to San Diego just a couple of days earlier and were reminded the hard way that 65 is colder than it sounds, especially when it's drizzly. That was a good thing, as it ensured we packed jackets for Wisconsin, but we should have also packed gloves.

None of this dampened anyone's spirits, nor did it keep a few convertible tops from being lowered by eager Midwesterners just coming out of hibernation.

The track was damp at first, but some orientation laps warmed up the pavement, and it was soon fairly dry.

A first-come first-served approach dictated a lot of juggling between wish lists and next-availables. If you skim the vehicle list, you can guess which ones were in the most demand for track time, although there was not a bad egg in the carton.

Some decisions were made by what we've driven before, which could play out either way: gotta do that again, or been there done that. We did some of each.

In one instance, we had a great experience by not driving. For the Viper, the list was long, but we found one of the (required) right seat pro drivers cooling her heels, waiting for her next few people to appear. She said, hey, I could drive you on a lap and be back in about a minute and 40 seconds, and nobody would even miss me. We jumped on it, grabbing our own right seat time with this champion driver at the helm. That may sound like an opportunity lost, but the day might have been over before that list cleared, and hot

laps with a real pro are always worth it. When the track list was too deep, we'd take one of the road cars. What seemed at first like a complex route turned out to be the simplest circumnavigation of the Road America track facility, and we quickly learned how to do short, medium and long versions of that. Thus we ended up driving significantly more road cars than track cars on the first day.

It would be misleading to list our drives or to give meaningful impressions, as there were such random and rapid availability factors in play. But we'll refer back to them over time. Every drive is useful to our always developing matrix of familiarity with a wide range of machinery.

Day two goes even faster, as it's officially over by midday. In fact, it's quite definitely over by midday, as an army of transporters from Reliable Carriers is in place by midmorning, and their load-out job will take all afternoon.

The vehicle lists for off-road and autocross were considerably shorter than for track and street. The off-road portion was run in a wooded area of Road America's property and contained some serious challenges. There was very little mud, but a great deal of steep terrain, tightly packed between the trees. Timing was such that three or four people would team up in one vehicle and do quick driver swaps when, if and as they could. We broadened our experience with some of the same vehicles as at Mudfest in the Pacific Northwest and at the Texas Truck Rodeo, while adding a few new ones.

Autocross had a self-generating paddock, in which gathered media drivers would grab what they could as cars reentered the staging area. Drivers swapped, as crews helped thread the next occupied cars to the front of the pack and reset the timing equipment. The track was a custom utilization of Road America's complex and hilly kart course, coned off to specifically challenge these vehicles.

There are a lot of events in life where the next day is when you realize just how much you did *not* get around to. This event may take the trophy for that. But knowing that doing it all is humanly and mathematically impossible, we are plenty happy with the overall experience, and we look forward to spring 2016. ■



ELKHART LAKE, WISCONSIN

We've known about Elkhart Lake for years, but this was our first visit. Road America is at its core, in the automotive realm, but its history is more complex.

Native tribes valued the deep lake for curative powers said to emanate from thousands of springs that feed it—and which keep it still one of the cleanest bodies of water in America.

When the railroad arrived in 1860, the frontier town became a destination, with its first hotel opening in 1867. By 1886, German immigrants Otto and Paulina Osthoff had built their own grand hotel, which remains today as the must-stay lodging choice in Elkhart Lake—and was headquarters for the MAMA Spring Rally.

Elkhart Lake is about 70 miles north of Milwaukee (or 135 miles north of O'Hare Airport in Chicago). We found more than enough flights to Milwaukee, at fares about the same as O'Hare, and opted for that, on US Airways.

Our dinner was at the famous small-town Lake Street Café, where Road America's race drivers have convened for some 60 years. Famed drivers came and went that night, revisiting their own roots and haunts—and surprised to find dozens of us filling the place to its rafters that night.

The Milwaukee Airport gave us one last highlight on our way out: the Mitchell Gallery of Flight, a free museum inside the terminal. Displays and memorabilia cover everything from Major General Billy Mitchell's famous B-25 bomber (displayed at the airport entrance) to the space program, all with Milwaukee heritage.

The entire trip is highly recommended. •

Osthoff Resort (1)

Street legal

SPRING RALLY BONUS: FCA REVEALS FASTEST STREET-LEGAL VIPER EVER



Fiat Chrysler (FCA USA) had brought plenty of noteworthy hardware to the MAMA Spring Rally in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin—some 16 vehicles in all—including both flavors of Hellcat (Challenger/Charger), both flavors of Scat Pack, the Fiat 500 Abarth, the carbon fiber Alfa Romeo 4C, the current Dodge Viper and more. But it turns out they had something else up their sleeves.

Back at event headquarters after a day at the track, they pulled the wraps off the 2016 Dodge Viper ACR. This highly enhanced club racer was first introduced in 1999 and last produced in 2010, when Viper went briefly dormant. Viper gen five returned as a 2013 model, and at the SEMA show in Las Vegas last November, FCA showed a Viper ACR concept—to predictable acclaim.

The production model includes a wide range of exclusive engineering: unprecedented brake fade resistance from exclusive carbon ceramic matrix two-piece 15-inch rotors and six-piston Brembo front calipers; double-adjustable Bilstein coil-over racing shocks with ten settings and three inches of height adjustment; and huge Kumho tires (295/25/19 front, 355/30/19 rear) for 1.5-second better lap times than prior track-only tires. The cabin is stripped for weight, yet has three-speaker audio. The ACR's hand-built 8.4-liter V10 puts out 645 hp and 600 lb-ft of torque—the highest of any naturally aspirated sports car engine in the world. Cornering grip is 1.5 g, and weight distribution is 50/50.

“One of one” customization is available for ultimate personalization. An Extreme Aero Package joins the option list later, for almost one ton of downforce through a combination of a huge adjustable dual-element carbon fiber rear wing, rear carbon fiber diffuser, unique SRT hood with removable louvers, detachable front splitter extension and additional dive planes. Pricing was not announced. ■