

*2020 Wrap-up
and
Carrera Cup First Race, March 17-19 2021
By Joe Still*

Hi folks, long time since my last report. 2020 was a good year racing for me personally, albeit tough on the sport nationally. Due to starting early with races at Sebring in FL and at Circuit of the Americas (COTA) Austin, TX, before the COVID pause, going to a lightly attended Porsche Club of America (*PCA*) race at Mid-Ohio mid-year and winning my first OVERALL victory really padded the points. I built up a points lead that led to a second consecutive national championship with *PCA* (#humble brag 😊), this time in the top Cup Car class made of 991.2 Cup Cars (the factory race cars for those not more familiar with race hardware)—the GTC7 class. Two faster drivers were closing the points gap late in the year and another race or two and I would have been third but you have to run to win.

Irony of irony... the annual championship banquet is held Thursday night before the Sebring race weekend each year. I accepted my first-place championship trophy for 2020 Thursday night and by Friday at lunch I was on probation. I was able to laugh about it as we are targeting the *Carrera Cup* this year and *PCA* races are not this year's focus. The probation lasts 13 months so the likelihood of making another mistake with *PCA* and getting kicked out is remote.

Last October 2020, with the GTC7-class *PCA* national championship in hand, I tried my hand at *IMSA* (International Motorsports Association) racing with the *Cup Challenge* at Road Atlanta. *Cup Challenge* was a support series for the *IMSA Weathertech* races - in this case the Petit Lemans 12-hour event featuring the big guys in prototypes. It bears repeating I was in a SUPPORT series, not on track with the Taylor brothers and other top pros.

Cup Challenge was a somewhat sobering experience. I practiced well and showed mid-pack pace up to qualifying. In the first race however, I showed my over-eagerness and smacked a concrete wall totaling the car and ending up with a short

visit to the ER. Nothing broken but my chest was too sore to cough for two months thanks to the Hans that saved my neck but nearly put a kink in my chest. I cannot say enough about the track safety and rescue teams along with the EMT's along for the ambulance ride. *IMSA* is a first-class, well-run show and it was a privilege to be allowed to take part.

The race is available [here](#) on YouTube for anyone that wants to see how tough the Porsche factory racing Cup car is. The crash is at 37:10 on the video. I snuck in a few post-crash pics as well. I tracked out too far in T12 on cold tires on a restart and dropped the two left side tires in the wet grass. I tried to straighten my hands in hopes of keeping right side tires on track and slowing to recover. There must have been some steering left in the wheel as it lazily spun left across the track and I hit the inside concrete pit wall with the driver's side. I remember clearly the spin and thinking this would hurt. Then I clearly remember the safety lead asking if I could get myself out. I said "sure" like I was in the pits or something. I walked to the ambulance on my own per the TV coverage.

In all candor, I had my "bell rung" and remember nothing between the split second after hitting the wall and a few minutes later telling them I could get myself out of the car. About four minutes gone right there. I have the video, both in-car and TV coverage. While composed up to the hitting the wall a split second later my arms were flying all over the place. The brain blocked that out nicely. My pit chief was right across the track and said he was trying to get me to answer on the radio telling me to cut the ignition as he could hear the car still running. Eventually I did kill the master and popped open the driver's door and stuck my hand out (so the video shows) which is protocol so they will know you are not unconscious. Of course, you stay in the car belted in until rescue gets to the car and clears you to get out (the exception being fire which trumps all other protocols—funny that).

My wife Susan was still at the hotel getting ready to come to the track when I hit the wall; 8:00 AM was a little early for her. Yes, there was dew on the grass and the sun straight in my eyes under the Start/Finish bridge but I hate to resort to the old "sun was in my eyes excuse." Anyway, she thought to watch the first race from the room while getting ready and then attending the second race later that day. She hears from TV "Joe crashed hard" and "unforced error by Joe."

Knowing I was running with buddy Joe Lombardo from Cincinnati she assumed it was the “other” Joe. Then she saw the car livery and flew out the door. My PCA friend and racing buddy Grady Willingham found her and settled her down. The TV coverage did show me getting out and walking to the ambulance if she had watched a few more minutes.

I climbed in the ambulance to take a seat beside the EMTs. They politely pointed out I was to use the stretcher and proceeded to de-garb me. It was too early for a nap but there were two of them so I humored them 😊. I begged them not to cut the drivers firesuit; it is a very expensive one-off from *Stand 21* (Internationally acclaimed firesuit maker from France) from my wife last Christmas. So, they cut the cool shirt and fire shirt and hooked up all the monitors, IV's and stuff with just pulling back the fire suit.

I really don't recall much of the ambulance ride but am sure I was joking with them to convince all of us I was still here. They rolled me in the ER past my buddy Grady and wife Susan so I gave them the big OK sign. Not really, Grady said “Are you ok?” I looked at all the monitors and tubes and replied “Obviously not,” meaning to be clever. After racing together for a few years, he should have known I am always in search of the next smart alec comment!

Anyway because of the racing suit being impossible to remove without cutting, until they could Xray my chest and shoulders where it hurt to see if anything was broken, they just slid the Xray plates inside the suit. Nope, nothing broken, #luckydog.

So, after all the other tests, I was released from the ER. Susan says we go back to the hotel to rest. I say however we go back to the track to show everyone I am OK. It was very nice that half the guys came by to say sorry and a few said it was the worst hit of the year in Cup Challenge. Go big or go home, Joe!

My witty niece complimented me for cleverly getting more name recognition and TV time from the wreck than the winner got, LOL!

I looked over the car with Goldcrest while making my post-crash appearance and they could pretty much tell the tub was bent. That is more common in Cup cars than you might think. The tubs (colloquial term for body shell) are comprised mostly of aluminum and have crush zones built in. The motor and gearbox compromise 2/3 of the cost of the Cup cars, so wrecks are frequently re-tubbed.

Unfortunately, I hit sideways (80 mph per GPS) and the lateral impact thru the left rear wheel/axle cracked the engine block and gear case. Car totaled! And while race insurance is available, I did not have it for Pro events like IMSA. The deck is pretty much stacked against you as to cover IMSA Pro races is about \$60k per year for max coverage, \$150k less a \$35k deductible (\$25k if no recent claim on other track insurance). Selling off the wreck is probably \$40k in salvage. Sigh...





My Goldcrest friend Jeff M. had the same car as mine but wanted a new one. He sold me his old one for the trade-in value and I got over 25% of the value back in salvage, so still a big hit but a lot less than starting over with new. This was to be my big IMSA year but due to COVID I only made the last race of the year. I made a mess of it so I borrowed from my old age “pension” and gave myself one more year AGAIN (Dave Schroetter laughs every time I tell him this is the last year 😊)

IMSA replaced Cup Challenge with Carrera Cup, which is brand new to the US. It is the largest one-make series around the world in about 20 countries. Earlier I mentioned the Cup Challenge I ran at Road Atlanta was basically moved to USAC (United States Auto Club) and runs with Indy Car and some other series. Cup Challenge runs both models of 991 Cup cars (.1 and .2) along with the 718 Cayman Clubsports as the three classes. Either series is available for my car this year but Carrera Cup is more talent-laden given the bulk of the field are pro racers in the latest Cup cars (992). I have come to grips with being the slower of the fast guys and no longer the faster of the slower guys. Gotta reach higher 😊.

Porsche is trying very hard to make this a high-profile series. They even paid for matching driving suits for all of us from *Stand 21*, one of the premiere race garment manufacturers worldwide. Too bad they ignored my sizes on record and used a Munchkin for a garment model. Forming fitting is an understatement. More like Emma Peele (Dame Diana Rigg- teenage crush) body suits from the Avengers. Stream of consciousness here, as I just saw a classic pic of Ms. Peele on Facebook. No wonder I stayed up till midnight in high school to watch that show, snicker).

Carrera Cup is based on the new 992 Cup cars, of which 15 were earmarked for the US but only if you agreed to race *Carrera Cup*. Then Porsche Motorsports North America (PMNA) got 7 more for a total of 22 for the first year. Those 22 are grouped as Pro (over 22 y/o) and Young Pro (22 and under) and so Porsche decided (to fill the field I surmise) for this one year only to allow us older guys to join use our last season 991.2 as “Masters.” All of us are over 45 (which is not Masters category in my opinion, try 65?). Or better yet, spot me a lap for every year over 45 I am 😊. At Sebring, politics got Masters dropped to 40 years old to add one more runner. The entry list had 33 cars with 32 on the grid at Sebring.

Sebring Carrera Cup First Event 2021 Logistics Travel

Flights were Delta and well done as usual, except they, as have other service industries, used COVID-19 as a reason to offer less and less service. No beverage service even in first class? Just a baggie with water and Goldfish crackers, really? Just like hotel/motels are now proud to let you know they will NOT come in your rooms. Some even require the used towels be brought down to the front desk to swap for fresh ones; that is too much for my taste. If nothing else, place a basket inside the front door for linen exchange or something.

Living Arrangements

I rented house about 10 minutes away from the track on a backwater to Lake Istokpoga. Looks like an old fishing camp upgraded with modern-looking materials in places that made it photograph really well for Airbnb. Actually, it was funky and looked like it had been cleaned haphazardly. The trash was empty but all the surfaces had streaks from poor cleaning. I shared the house with Grady W. who gave up his Seven Suite for his Mom and Dad so they could watch races from the balcony. We only used the fish camp for sleeping, so it worked out fine. The actual bedrooms each had TWO King beds, which is unusual. I guess it's primarily for fishing excursions and those guys must not mind sharing a room. Not me. I like to be the only snorer in the room.

The landlord instructions said be cautious walking outside at night as there are gators in the area - YIKES. I am pro-mammal but decidedly anti-reptile. We never saw a single gator but not for lack of looking. We is city boys!

The Motel Seven on premises at Sebring is usually \$130/night. But they had a real “special” for the 5 days of the 12-hour Race weekend. \$4,500 paid in full, up front, no cancellations. What a bargain---NOT!

Food

Carrera provided a hospitality tent which we LOVED! The food was terrific and the service was exceptional. Usually, you get a short order cook and helper serving the same old BBQ or pizza for lunch only—not this group. They are out of Charleston, SC and the hostesses were terrific! All you had to do was show your driver’s badge and you were in. Breakfast, lunch and dinner! On-site prepared Veal Piccata was particularly memorable, along with grilled salmon and other treats! Fingers crossed they do not change vendors!

Tires

Carrera Cup is linked exclusively to not just Michelin but the Michelin vendor with the contract. You only get a fixed number of tires for the weekend (three sets after Event 1) but since this was our first outing, we got two extra sets for the practices - presumably you will use race tires from one race for practice at the next event so you can make it on THREE new sets of tires total for each subsequent event. Presumably 1 set for Quali, 1 set Race 1 and third set for Race 2. Those tires will all have 30 to 45 minutes on them and should suffice for practice at the next event, COTA in Austin, TX the first week of May.

Now the tire guy actually scans bar codes on the tires on the grid and you must have the tires from this vendor for this event or be disqualified. And you typically use the Qualifying tires for Race 1 but that was waived, this time at least.

Starts

One of the unique features of *Carrera Cup* worldwide is standing starts. We were supposed to have standing-start practice at the Sebring test two weeks before the first race, but for various reasons it never got scheduled. I am hopeful we resort to standing starts soon, as I made a mess of the rolling starts in both races.

While we still use *Carrera Cup* rolling starts, we are supposed to “stay in our lane” until WE pass Start/Finish (S/F). When the pole sitter accelerates on the green flag everyone can move ahead but (supposedly) only as far as the car in front until you cross start finish. No moving along side or splitting the lanes. I tried to behave twice and it appears no one else go the memo. I had people seemingly 4-wide across S/F. I totally blew both starts by following car in front of me.

Timeline

Monday

Registration is set for Tuesday from 7 AM to 4 PM EDT. Since my flight arrived in Orlando at 2 PM, I knew I would not make it to the track by 4 PM if I came in on Tuesday, so I moved the flight to Monday. By the way, heading south out of Orlando is not too much better than I-285 on the north side of Atlanta on Friday evening - yikes!

So, I was able to arrive at the track just after 4 PM and get in and look around. IMSA has strict load-in times for the teams, so the haulers are still outside the fence. I found the rental house, picked up a few items at the convenience store and went looking for friendly faces.

Tuesday

Tuesday Registration and load-in began for team haulers right after lunch. They usually let the trucks in at 1 PM for *Carrera Cup* teams. You are not allowed to open up the trailers until ALL trailers are in place, and that is enforced. *IMSA* officials park you where assigned - no freelancing. Also, they do not allow privateer “Tag” trailers (Tag-along type). Grady brought his Tag trailer as a driver’s lounge for us and after everyone else was set up we were able to sneak his trailer closer to the crew tent in the paddock.

Carrera Cup has inspections for several items, some first-come and some by appointment. Safety inspection was for safety equipment, roll cage, fire suppression, and lights. Another tech inspection round was for minimum weight and ride heights. Separate inspections were required for helmets. All this is not to mention the COVID hoops; will cover that later.

We got registered for attendance and then went through another line for parking passes. We went thru the COVID temperature check tent every day for a daily sticker on our picture ID badges. And every day you had to do another COVID waiver and get a QR code on your phone to show at the temp check tent. As we get closer to round two at COTA in Austin, TX in two weeks, it sounds like the same protocols even with the rising vax rate. *IMSA* spread the word if you are caught without a mask, you were in trouble. Alas, you cannot possibly get that many Type A's to comply all the time. We would mask up at checkpoints and Hospitality, otherwise...

Oh, by the way all you DE'ers, *IMSA* will lose their minds if they see open beverage containers in the paddock while the track is hot. Most track events have this in the fine print but it is rarely enforced, but our coach and *IMSA* pro Bryan Sellers was clear about not violating that one. Also, he cautioned us about pit lane protocols. In pit lane, stay at the pit speed limit (35 mph/58kph) and move far left as able. Do not move right until just before pit box. Two of the brand-new 992's managed to get into it on pit lane, so it is not without some peril.

Wednesday

Wednesday, we kicked tires and looked at video until our first actual on-track practice at 3 PM. I had left Huntsville early the past Monday morning and over half a week later I am just getting on track. If you are looking at track time vs. cost, this series will not compare favorably with open-track events like David Murry or the occasional Chin event.

One wrinkle not used in *PCA* is that the race tech takes the cars to the grid and you just hang around outside the car, helmet off, until about five minutes before roll off. Makes you feel like a big shot!

Dinner at the track was great (Veal and Salmon!) and we headed home about 8 PM as our second track session and busiest day was Thursday at 8 AM. I do not like the early sessions as you have to get there by 6:30 AM or so to get thru Health checks, suited up and in the car on grid with 15 minutes to spare.

Thursday

Thursday was our busy day, so after the early 8 AM practice, we ran qualifying at noon. Bear in mind there are three other series using the track and the big boys in *IMSA Weathertech* split the prototypes from the sports cars, so really five groups using the track overall.

During the morning practice I had a rare experience. Going into Turn 3 a few laps into practice, the gearbox refused to take a downshift from 5th gear. I tried repeatedly while hard on the brakes but it would not downshift. Well, it turns out the throttle was hung open and the paddle-shifted gearbox will not take a downshift under hard throttle. So, it was not a gearbox issue; the gearbox thought I was trying to accelerate.

Surprisingly, with heavy brake pressure (I currently own the brake pressure record at Goldcrest with 1,300 psi) I managed to kill the motor with brakes...that was a surprise to me. I restarted the car after I came to a stop and the RPM went straight to the rev limiter so I killed the ignition and waited for a tow back to the paddock. Goldcrest discovered a first-time ever problem of the rubber air induction boot tearing and jamming the throttle butterfly wide open. They preemptively replaced everyone's rubber boot...had to be me 😞.

Qualifying was 12 noon for us, lasting 30 minutes. Qualifying was not great for me, for whatever reason I have never really mastered Sebring. Could be the bumps which are legendary, or it could be the fact I have hit walls in two different places there. Either way I usually am mid-pack there at best.

Side note: Just before race day, *Carrera Cup* issues a schedule described as MxM. That means minute by minute and it is highly specific. It gives exact times related to actions, down to closing the driver's doors in unison and firing up the motors in unison. Fortunately, *IMSA* radio broadcasts real-time instructions to all teams and your race tech gives you verbal instructions. When they say roll off at 8:00 AM they do NOT mean 8:01.

Race 1

Wrapping up our busiest day Thursday was a Race 1 from 5:30 to 6:15 PM. Race 1 was a total blast other than my "lane" being slow to S/F losing me a spot or two. I was gridded up to the inside, which is a recipe for a road block in T1 at most tracks. I held on thru T3 and things loosened up a little. But the first few turns are always my favorite part of the race! The nearness to the point of "rubbing" at times and sometimes bumping I thrive on. It is like three-dimensional speed chess and I am addicted to it!

Opening lap there was a big traffic jam in T7 with a rear-facing pro car parked in the middle of the track. Everyone missed him somehow. During the race I was able to pick off a few guys but most of my passes were while guys in front of me ran off the track.

So, I had some good luck in Race 1, finishing 4th in class and top 20 overall. Remember there were 22 each 992 model Cups which are said to be 1.5 seconds faster per minute of lap time. Interestingly I had to breathe the throttle on the straights to let the newer cars by. I think the enhanced aero adds drag to them on straights but allows deeper braking and higher apex speeds.

They tech inspect the top 4 post-race (I assume in case P1, P2 or P3 flunks tech inspection they still have the podium). They make you give a fuel sample and defuel the car for another weight check and ride-height check.

Race 1 was undisciplined by some measures but it was EVERYONE'S first *Carrera Cup* race. Lots of contact and spins as well as some hits. And there was one pretty remarkable "launch" that emulated the *space shuttle* when a car ran off

and hit a dirt bank. He went at least 6' airborne before landing (thankfully) right side up. Keep in mind this series is televised live on NBC Sports Gold so lots of friends saw more of the action than I did 😊 in Race 1.

After the field strings out, the lonesome laps by oneself can be a bit boring and my loss of aggression typically serves me poorly. I need to find a motivator to keep on pace, but mental fatigue is sneaky. I sometimes start to think how much time can I afford to lose rather how much time can I make up - the power of negative thinking I suppose.

Friday

Race 2, 10.30 to 11.15

Race 2, I made a poor start again 😞. On the outlap a car died and we moved around him. I failed to catch that meant everyone moved up a spot and consequently changes side of the track and I lost another position there on Race 2, even before S/F. While pushing hard to regain spots lost on the start, I was chasing a former Goldcrest stablemate hard and spun in T5. "In a spin both feet in." The car slewed across track and finally stopped in the grass five feet or less from the tire wall. Motor was still running so I clicked down to 2nd and eased back on track. After a quick shake of steering wheel looking for trouble, all seems well. What I would find out later is the curb had taken off half of the front splitter, causing some anxiety in the high-speed bends. I just put it down to tires going off but it was too early for that. In spite of my best time ever at Sebring (mid 2.07), the unforced error in T5 spinning and tearing off most of the front splitter dug a deep hole. I later learned there was oil dropped in that turn and a few others went off there in race 2. No consolidation, that.

I thought briefly about dropping out after the spin since there was no way to catch back up 20 secs in 30 minutes, but then I remembered that a full-course caution could park me on the rear bumper of the guy in front of me so I got back after it. I passed another guy or two when they ran off track but started getting lapped. I began accommodating everyone coming up behind me to avoid jeopardizing the

Pro battles, but this proved to be a mistake. One guy misread my intentions and ended up going two off just to hit me in the rear, breaking the rear fascia and bending something under there. We need a new rear fascia but can repair the old one for future emergency use.

I gave up so much time to faster traffic, a slower guy caught and passed me for position which was sort of a two-way tie for last place. At the end I did chase him down and could have tried a pass but he is a nice guy and he doesn't get too many passes so I let it be. That spot meant less to me and a lot to him so good for him. Alas, however, now that I see the points, I am already worried about giving up a few. With the 4th place in Race 1 I start the season fifth in points in the 991.2 run group in spite of a dismal Race 2 finish.

Live and learn.

Qualifying is hugely important. Your fastest lap in Quali sets the grid for Race 1. The second fastest lap in Quali sets the grid for Race 2. Effective enough but deadly if you are off pace that 30 minutes. Or like me, slow to build pace. Stay on the track and in the moment.

Do not give up. I started to call it quits in Race 2 after my spin and I was 20 seconds back, but a few seconds later it occurred to me a full-course caution and if I run hard in maybe 4 laps I am caught up with the main pack and have several passing opportunities. My tires would be hot and theirs less so based on my pushing to catch up. Regrettably for me, there was no full-course caution in Race 2, but one must be ready to capitalize when good fortune arises.

Fitness of mind is tied to the fitness of the body. I have lost a lot of fitness by missing out on exercise a few times each week with any number of aches and pains. And if you don't work the body the mind will fatigue early.

Value

Carrera Cup is more costly to run than PCA by about 30% over the weekend. The entry fees are close to 4 times PCA and the extra work at the track means we each

pay for one race engineer plus part of three others for data, fuel and tires. There is an endless procession of tires going back and forth to Michelin and the fuel wholesaler. This series gives you less track time than say PCA, which is good in that it reduces hours of wear on the engine and gearbox and uses less fuel and brakes. The downside is guys like me who are slow to pick up pace start well back.

Carrera Cup, as a support race before the Sebring 12-hour, was over by noon Friday and IMSA asked everyone be gone by midnight to dedicate the paddock to the Weathertech cars. Grady and I hung around to watch some later support races, including the Continental tire series. We stood in Bishops Bend and had a beverage or two. This was outside the paddock so beer is not only permitted but recommended 😊. After two hours we got bored and left for good, back to the rental house on gator alley (j/k, never even saw one). Had an early dinner which was wise, given all the people in town for the big race start the next day. Grady and I spent Friday night watching the races on YouTube and had a blast swapping stories about what was happening at those moments. Of course, I got TV time in Race 2 and am told another showing during the highlights during the big race. You can now legitimately say one of your HOD colleagues was shown and named during the 12 hours of Sebring. Now, granted it was the highlights from support series to fill time during the 12 hours and my TV time showed a lazy spin off in the grass, but as they say “no such thing as bad publicity 😊”

Next?

IMSA has *Carrera* next at Watkins Glen, but not until June. Actually, they had a race planned in Montreal in May, but due to Covid and international quarantine restrictions, IMSA is dropping that event and adding COTA in Austin TX where we join our kindreds from Sprint Challenge, the series from IMSA last year moved out to make way for *Carrera Cup*.

The COTA AUSTIN, T event has now offered Monday and Tuesday test days, which they seemingly plan to do before each race. However, we don't have *Carrera Cup* practice until Friday. So, we are supposed to fly in to Austin Sunday, run Monday and Tuesday, sit idle (other than easy stuff like registration and tech

which in IMSA is all handled by the teams, and then run Friday, Saturday and Sunday? I cannot take that much time from work, not to mention the cost of the running the car, coaching, lodging and wear and tear on the car. And the Test registration fees. COTA AUSTIN, TX is not a cheap track to rent and the fees show it.

Hopefully even after missing the test and practice days I can report better success from COTA AUSTIN, TX in May!

Respectfully submitted,
Joe Still

(Editor's Note: You can see an excellent inside-the-cockpit video of Joe racing at COTA [here.](#))