

Mini Mania Tackles Pre-Race Preparations for this Weekend's Can-Am Mini Challenge

From Dyno Runs to Playstation Simulations, International Cast of Drivers are Ready to Race

September 25, 2017 (FPRC) -- Preparations are well underway for the team of seven cars and drivers being fielded by Don Racine and Mini Mania, Inc. at this weekend's Can-Am Mini Challenge at California's Sonoma Raceway. Over 30 Mini Cooper vintage racers are expected to take the green flag.

Three of the team's seven drivers are European champions. They were joined by team leader Don Racine last week at the famous Spa-Francorchamps Circuit in Belgium for the Masters Historic Vintage races as a leadup to this weekend's 14th Annual Charity Challenge Vintage Car Road Races, sanctioned by the Classic Sports Racing Group (CSRG).

Don teamed up with Endaf Owens from Carmarthen, Wales, Rene de Vries from Heerde, Netherlands and Jonathan Lewis of Norwich, England. In an ironic twist, Don celebrated his honeymoon at the race in Spa, while Owens will celebrate his this weekend in Sonoma, CA.

"I've never raced in the states before and have just come back from racing at Spa in one of the most competitive European historic championships, where we won," Owens said. "Our main challenge is learning the Sonoma track. I look forward to driving the 1965 Cooper S #17 Ward Barbour SCCA National Champion Cooper S. This Mini will be totally different from my historic and Miglia cars so I have a lot to learn and hopefully won't be too far off the pace of the front guys. I can't wait to meet everyone."

Holland's Rene de Vries is teammate to England's Jonathan Lewis, who tried to familiarize himself with the winding Sonoma circuit. "Jonathan practiced a lot on my son's Playstation during the time he spent at my house in Holland between the Masters race at Zandvoort and Spa. I did some laps as well but it didn't feel very realistic," de Vries explained.

"It looks like a lovely track with a lot of elevation changes. The tires will be the biggest difference as we compete on Dunlop CR65 historic racing tires and our cars are sliding through the corners. If you want to be fast you have to slide. The Hoosier tires for U.S. vintage racing are more sticky so this will require a different driving style, otherwise we will end up on the roof! I look forward to this weekend as it's my first time racing in the USA," de Vries said.

"I was so happy that Don could spend his honeymoon with Shirley and race with us at Spa," Lewis explained. "Don was fast in tough wet race conditions. He finished sixth without even a spin and that shows his class as a driver. I mean, you get to race a classic Mini at Spa at one of the greatest race tracks in the world while on your honeymoon. That is the stuff of legend," Lewis said.

"Since teaming up with Rene we have won the Historic Dutch Touring Car Championship twice and felt that we should both take on the toughest challenge yet, the Masters European Championship, which we won last weekend outright in our first attempt together with three wins and two seconds

out of five rounds,” Lewis explained.

“I have raced cars all over the world and even won a round of the New Zealand Mini 7 Championship,” Lewis added, “but I am sure Sonoma will be a new, daunting challenge. We just want to fit in with you guys, make new friends and above all have some fun after a busy season. We felt the Can-Am Challenge was too good of an opportunity to miss.”

Besides honeymooning in Europe with Shirley and racing at Spa last week, Don Racine has been busy managing the logistics, travel and car preparation for the 7-car team, which is no small feat. As if that were not enough, Don and his company Mini Mania will be providing trackside services to his Mini competitors.

“We will have balance scales, an engine hoist, camber gauges, parts and a dyno on hand for our fellow vintage Mini drivers,” Don explained. He’s raced at Sonoma many times and has competed in prior Can-Am Mini Challenges.

As team leader, Don recognizes the buck stops with him. “Organizing hospitality set-up time, the logistics of getting the fleet of cars to the event with all the spares, having enough tires and parts, and doing this while racing in Belgium has been a major challenge,” Don said.

While Don was in Belgium son Dennis had his #177 1966 Mini Cooper S on the dynamometer tuning the engine in preparation for the race, and helping with car prep for the large team.

“Among the pre-Sonoma challenges were engine problems. We had to get two engines together as my good engine threw a rod in March, and didn't think i'd be able to get it back together. So, we built a spare motor but at the last minute everything came together for the primary motor, so we worked around the clock to get that together and tested,” Dennis said.

He also helps with the Minis of sister Julie and brother-in-law John Burmann when he can. Dennis treasures the many races he’s had with his father, sister and brother-in-law and said, “It will be amazing to have all of us and 30-plus Minis on the track!”

About Mini Mania

Mini Mania is located in the heart of the Gold Country in Northern California's Sierra Nevada Foothills and has been in the business of providing parts and accessories for the original Classic Mini Coopers since 1974. As a result Mini Mania is the largest U.S. supplier of parts for the Classic Mini and developed performance parts for the new BMW MINI Cooper and Cooper 'S' in 2001. This was a year before the car was released in this country. Mini Mania continues as both enthusiasts and leaders in providing parts and accessories for the BMW MINI Coopers. <http://www.MiniMania.com>.

About CSRG

Northern California’s Classic Sports Racing Group, currently celebrating its 50th season, will hold its 14th Annual Charity Challenge at Sonoma Raceway on the weekend of September 29-October 1, 2017. The event includes all the usual CSRG race groups with Vintage and Historic race cars dating from the 1930s to the 1990s running in nine race groups. Featured is the Can-Am Mini Challenge for the original Austin Mini and its variants, as well as the final round of the 2017 Crossflow Cup

celebrating the 50th anniversary of Formula Ford.

In its first thirteen years, the CSRG Charity Challenge Series raised almost a million dollars in contributions to the Sonoma Chapter of the Speedway Children's Charities.

Registration for Mini competitors can be found at:
<https://www.motorsportreg.com/events/14th-csrg-charity-challenge-sonoma-raceway-232502> or by calling 530-866-0771.

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