

A New Motorsport

This article is scheduled to appear in Rolling, the Magazine of the Volvo Club of America (VCOA)

I recently had the chance to interview Tim Winker about a new motorsport he is involved in.

John Werner: First, Tim, let me thank you for taking the time to this interview. I understand your time is important, and I appreciate your willingness to help me make my April 1st deadline.

Before we did into the meat of this new winter motorsport, let's start with a little background on yourself. I understand from reading your website, <http://www.winktimber.com>, that you have been around motorsports and media for a long time. I see that you work includes that for a Volvo Turbo powered rally team.

What first got you interested in motorsports?

Tim Winker: A high school buddy who had a couple of 544s. He was an SCCA tech inspector and invited me to be his guest at the Donybrooke Trans Am race in 1969. I started working SCCA races as well as local rallies and autocrosses (we called them gymkhanas in those days) later that year.

I suppose I should really give my dad credit. He used to take me to the stock car races at the Minnesota State Fair, and on those rare occasions when there was racing on TV, he would be one of the few watching. He wasn't much for ball-and-stick sports, though I did follow the Minnesota Twins for a few years because my cousins followed the team.

By the way, that high school buddy later owned a VW bug and a BMW 1600, drove domestic family sedans for many years, but has re-joined the Volvo clan with the purchase of a 740 wagon.

JW: How does Wink Timber Media Agency fit in this?

TW: There are many amateur race and rally teams who don't have the money to hire a full-service P.R. firm. Since I work from my home, I can provide News Releases, Press Kits, and other promotional ideas at about half the cost of a fancy agency with a fancy address.

That was how I got involved with Carl Jardevall and his rally Volvo. I provided news releases for the team, and now maintain his web site,

<http://rally.nordicmotors.com>.

JW: I also understand that you were a former publisher of NINES magazine, and you currently have a 200 series Volvo. What got you into Swedish cars?

TW: Once again, I have to blame that high school pal. While working a race at Donnybrooke, another of the Tech Inspectors had a 1960 SAAB 93F for sale. It was my present to myself for my 18th birthday. I was intrigued because of the aerodynamic styling, front-wheel drive and two-cycle engine. It turned out to be fun to drive as well. The Saabs also had a reputation of being good for ice racing, with only the Austin Minis as real competition. And while others my age were driving V8s that would allegedly turn the quarter-mile in 15 seconds, my little SAAB was getting over 30 mpg every day.

JW: Let's move on to this new winter motorsport I been reading so much about. I understand is done on ice, but it is not the typical ice racing we have come to think of. Could you give us a brief overview of the sport?

TW: As with the best ideas, it started with beer. Several of us motorheads were making sure that Jake Leinenkugel stays in business and we got to thinking about other possible winter motorsports. Tire rules in the International Ice Racing Association (IIRA) had changed so that horsepower became more important than driving finesse, and we had all dropped out of the sport because of it. We preferred the limited traction provided by racing on street tires with street studs, or even rubber-to-ice.

Curling is big in our area of the country, with curling rinks in most towns, so someone came up with the idea of a bigger rink and using cars instead of granite rocks. It only made sense to call it Carling.

JW: How is the winner determined?

TW: Like in curling, it is based on how close you can land your vehicle to the target. Those familiar with curling know that it is sort of a cross between bowling and shuffleboard, but played on ice. Like any sport, we came up with our own terminology.... In curling, the target is called the house, so in carling it is the garage. In curling the object used is called the stone; in carling it is the Buick (pronounced "bwick", like a three-year-old would pronounce "brick"). The team captain in curling is the Skip; in carling it is the Gilligan. Since the driver has steering and brakes, there is no need for Sweeps to polish the ice, but if there were we would have to call them "fools".

JW: It sounds like a basic knowledge of physics and car dynamics would be helpful. Is that really true?

TW: Absolutely! It boils down to understanding how much friction you have between the vehicle and the surface. The vehicle must be a full-sized American car with rear-wheel drive and brakes only on the rear wheels. The tires must have minimal tread. Consequently you're dealing with a heavy object that has minimal traction. You don't want to get going too fast, otherwise you'll have no control when you get to the garage. And with brakes only on the rear wheels, they are more likely to lock up and send the Buick into oversteer, especially if the front wheels are turned a little.

Once the Buick comes to a stop, the driver must exit because the next Buick can bump the earlier ones out of the garage, just like in curling. One of the other rules is that the bumpers must be replaced with full width 2x8s covered with carpeting or tire tread to minimize damage from bumping.

JW: Many people don't believe winter and motorsport can be used in the same sentence, yet this seems to embody both. How did it get started?

TW: Over beer, of course. What better way to get out of the house in the winter. There are always little home improvement jobs to avoid. One more bit of terminology... instead of the term "bonspiel" for a curling match, we use the term "choir practice" so the women in our lives think we're doing something productive. Of course there are those who like snowmobiling or skiing or ice fishing, but those are tame for real motorheads.

JW: Could you tell me a little about what it takes to compete in these events?

TW: Not much. Just a big car on bald tires and a sense of humor. And beer.

JW: Who sanctions this?

TW: Sanction? You mean like someone to make the rules and allow it to happen? Nobody really. Well, since it is made up of a group of former ice racers and rally drivers, I suppose the Vintage Ice and Gravel Rally Racing Association (V.I.A.G.R.R.A.) might be up to it.

JW: If I was interested in getting involved, how to go about it?

TW: Buy a case of beer and invite some friends over. It helps to have a frozen lake nearby, and some big old cars, though talking about doing it is nearly as much

fun as doing it.

JW: I usually like to close my interviews with an anecdotal (sp?) story. Do you have one you could share with us?

TW: Ummm... like something that has happened at one of these events? Well... (looking down and blushing a bit)... we've never actually carled. We've just talked about doing it while drinking beer.

(BTW, lest anyone think it's just an excuse to get drunk, we don't get drunk. We get together once a week or so after work, have two or three beers apiece, and only good beer. We drink for quality, not quantity.)

Tim Winker is the publisher of "The Flying Finns," which is dedicated to exceptional Finnish Rally Drivers. The site is located at <http://www.FlyingFinns.com>. He holds a FIA Land Speed Record, set in 1996 at Talladega Speedway in a Saab 900. (Well him and 11 other guys. He was the last driver on the 12-hour record, but he set the fastest lap during the 12 hours.) He has also built a Saab 99 for SCCA Improved Touring and ran that car in a few ProRallys. He has raced mostly at Brainerd International Raceway with the "Duluth Area Motorsports Network - Improved Touring" (DAMN-IT). (See web site: www.arrowheadscc.org/damnit/ and click on my name for more bio) His other credentials include:

- Ice racing: 1977 St. Paul Winter Carnival, Saab 93F, 1st class B
- Raced and PRO Rallyed a Datsun 510 (1978-1981).
- Rallying since 1969.
 - 1990 & 1992 One Lap of America
 - 1991 & 1994 Alcan 5000 Rally
 - 1992 Downeast 3000 (1st in Stock Class)
 - 2002 Targa Newfoundland

John Werner resides with his wife and two children outside of Rochester, NY. He owns and actively competes in a modified 1965 Volvo 122S and a 1991 Mitsubishi Galant VR-4.



In his free time, John edits the Internet's oldest FAQ (Frequently Asked Question) website on Snow Tires, The Snow Tire FAQ, <http://www.snowtire.info>, and writes for the Volvo Club of America's bi-monthly magazine, *Rolling* (<http://www.vcoa.org>).

By day, John works full time writing embedded software for fire and security alarm systems, and has US Patents ranging from Automotive Ignition Systems to Ink Jet Printers.

- November 5, 2003