



Gateway Relay

Vol XI, No. 10

St Louis Sports Car Council

January 2024

Council News & Notes

- Speaking of winter...on the plus side, the calendar's starting to fill up with a variety of events coming up. On the down side, as this issue goes to press, here in greater St Louis we're looking at snow on the ground and high of, oh, 5°? If anyone actually got their car out on this second weekend of January, hopefully you took photos of your "all weather ops."
- Having said that, the Boeing Sports Car Club has published their autocross schedule for this year, all events at Family Arena:

26 May	23 Jun
14 Jul	18 Aug
1 Sept	6 Oct
27 Oct	

We should have the SCCA Solo II/Autocross sked by next issue.
- Otherwise, looking to rally? Get ready now, one's coming up in in about two weeks? Driving event? So far, two in February with more coming as we move into spring.
- In the meantime, have fun clearing that driveway!

Up & Coming

- 15 Jan 24**—MG Club of St Louis **Tech Session – Carbs and Tuning**. At It's Alive Automotive, 11714 Saint Charles Rock Road, 6-8 PM.
- 18-21 Jan 24**—Greater St Louis Auto Dealers annual **St Louis Auto Show**, at America's Center and The Dome downtown. General admission \$12, children 12 and under free, group discounts available. Info at <https://saintlouisautoshow.com>.
- 25 Jan 24**—MG Club of St Louis **RUBCO**, at Letty Lou's Café, 17209 New Colle Ave, Wildwood, 9:30 AM.
- 26 Jan 24**—St Louis Region SCCA **Wolf Moon 2024 Road Rally**. Monte Carlo-style touring format using Richta GPS scoring. Start at the Troy Park & Ride, 809 S Main St, Troy, IL, 5 PM check-in, first car departs at 6:01 PM. Finish at the DeCamp Station Roadhouse on old US 66 in Staunton. \$20 for SCCA teams, \$40 for non-SCCA teams. Registration open at <http://msreg.com/STLWolfMoon24>.
- 10 Feb 24**—**Drive Your Triumph Day**. In honor of Sir John Black. Spread the word, get your photos and email them to event organizer Ryle Livingston, Triumph Travelers Sports Car Club at driveyourtriumph-day@gmail.com.
- 11 Feb 24**—Gateway Miata **Valentines Miata Breakfast**. See <https://gatewaymmiataclub.clubexpress.com>.
- 17 Feb 24**—**Journey to the Center of the Earth Rallye**, hosted by the Jaguar Association of Greater St Louis. Meet at the StL BreadCo on MO 21/Tesson Ferry and Kennerly, two blocks west of I-270, at 9 AM. Drive to the Bonne Terre Mine for a tour, followed by a 1 PM lunch at El Jarochito Tex-Mex. \$30 per person for the tour; at the restaurant, order from menu and pay on your own. Limited to the first 40 people, RSVP by 12 February to either Jim (314)406-2481 jhendrix@curtispack.com or Phil (314)761-5913 ssjagman@aol.com.
- 18 Feb 24**—**Polar Bear Run**, SLTOA's traditional first drive of the season, followed by lunch. Open to all cars and drivers. Meet in Twin Oaks at the southeast corner of Big Bend and MO 141, between Dunkin and Hardee's. Driver's meeting at 10:45, depart at 11 AM, drive back roads to the Big

(Continued on page 2)



Note: Some club events restrict participation to club members only, primarily for national/chapter insurance reasons. If interested in joining in on a drive or other event, we recommend you contact the club's event coordinator in advance for details.

In Print

If you're of the Jaguar persuasion, grab January's *Octane*, which has a lengthy road/track eval of a **XJR-15** ("...Tom Walkinshaw's vision of what the XJ220 should have been"). An update on a staff member's **2004 BMW Z4 3.0i** and another individual's **2023 Morgan Plus 4** are towards the back of the issue.

Car & Driver's January edition is in the annual "10 best" issue; the honorees include the Chevrolet **Corvette**. Also in this issue, a re-



Continued on pg 2

Chief Road House in Wildwood for lunch at noon. Open to all cars/drivers, *really* bad weather date is 25 February.

16 Mar 24—MG Club of St Louis **Annual Terry Fanning Rally**. Details TBA, monitor <https://stlouismclub.com/>.

17 Mar 24—Gateway Miata **St Patrick's Day Breakfast**. Wear your luckiest, bestest and greenest costume. See <https://gatewaymmiataclub.clubexpress.com>.

17 Mar 24—SLTOA **Targa Desoto**. Spirited, scenic drive southwest of St Louis, winding up in Desoto for lunch. Planning underway, more to follow.

31 Mar 24—**XIV MG-Triumph Challenge for the British Leyland Cup**, in association with the Horseless Carriage Club of Missouri annual **Easter Concours**, Forest Park. Details to follow.

14 Apr 24—**Boeing Sports Car Club Autocross No. 1**, Family Arena, St Charles. Show around 9-9:30, \$50 for six runs. For more information or to get on the email list, contact Racer Steve at sshab@yahoo.com.

17-19 May 24—Heartland Vintage Racing/NASA MidAmerica inaugural **race/vintage weekend** at Hedge Hollow Raceway, Adrian, Missouri (~one hour southeast of Kansas City). First vintage event at this brand new track, info at <https://members.drivenasa.com/events/4519> and <https://www.heartlandvintageracing.com/event-info/>.

26 May 24—**Boeing Sports Car Club Autocross No. 2**, Family Arena, St Charles. Show around 9-9:30, \$50 for six runs. For more information or to get on the email list, contact Racer Steve at sshab@yahoo.com.

St Louis Car Shows and Cruises: www.stlouiscoachmen.com/car-shows-special-events

In Print (Continued from page 1)

view/test of the 2024 **BMW 530i xDrive** (which "...returns to its role as aspirational executive transportation") and a one-page summary of the 2024 **Volvo V60 T8 eAWD Polestar** (how's that for a mouthful?). On the back page, the editor's picks for the 10 best investments, including the 2023 **Corvette Z06**, 1995 **BMW M3** and 2000 **BMW M Coupe**.

Classic & Sports Car's December issue includes a review of John Mayhead's book about one of the legends of **MG** record-breaking, LtCol Alfred Thomas "Goldie" Gardner, appropriately titled *Goldie*. Farther along, associate editor John Presnell provides an update on the joys of maintaining and driving his **MG Midget**. Finally, *Hemmings Classic Car* for February has a highly entertaining "Reminiscing" column, written by Don Siegrist concerning the cross-

Roadwork

A Gas Turbine in the SCCA: the Howmet TX

Those of you out there who remember the gas turbine "revolution" of the late 1970s, raise your hands. No, we're not talking the legendary Chrysler turbine, we're talking the famous STP-Paxton gas turbine which, with Parnelli Jones at the wheel, came within four laps of winning the 1967 Indianapolis 500. Lotus and STP followed up in 1968 by entering three Lotus 56B four-wheel-drive turbine cars. None finished the race; this time around, Art Pollard held the lead on lap 192 when his car failed. The Lotus team subsequently ran a Lotus 56B turbine in a number of Formula 1 events in 1971, with negligible results.



Graham Hill in one of the Lotus 56s (photo via Goodwood)

Overseas, Rover and BRM joined forces to put a gas turbine-powered car in the Le Mans 24 hour race. Gra-

ham Hill and Richie Ginther, driving in the experimental class, finished the 1963 but weren't classified due to the experimental designation. The team returned in 1965 with Hill and Jackie Stewart driving and finished 10th overall/2nd in the 2-litre prototype class.



The Rover-BRM (photo via *Classic Cars Journal*)

Then came the American counterpart, as it were; a turbine-powered racing car that made the rounds of a number of SCCA national and regional events, along with appearances in international competition. The car

was the Howmet TX, with the TX standing for “turbine experimental.”

Longtime SCCA racer and auto salesman Ray Heppenstall headed the TX project. He sold and raced a wide variety of vehicles over the years, starting with a Siata 300BC in 1955 and following with drives in the Heppenstall Special (a heavily modified Crosley), Lotus, Corvettes and others. Heppenstall won the 1958 SCCA H Production national championship in a Deutsch Bonnet Panhard HBR5. In 1967, he and Bill Selley finished 12th in the 24 Hours of Daytona, driving a Ford Falcon sponsored by the Howmet Corporation.



Ray Heppenstall (right) with Tom Fleming (photo via *Daily Sports Car*)

After seeing the Hill/Stewart Rover-BRM in the 1965 Le Mans race, Heppenstall decided it was time for an American gas turbine-powered sports-racer. He talked it over with Tom Fleming, his contact at Howmet and after discussions, the corporation approved the project.

Can Am/US Road Race of Champions (USRRC) car builder

Bob McKee of Palatine, Illinois, built the cars; the first one used the chassis and other components of a McKee Mk6 with double wishbone suspension at both ends and four wheel disc brakes.



McKee Mk6 at Laguna Seca, 2005 Monterey Historics (photo via *Ultimate Car Page*)

Per the *Ultimate Car Page* writeup on the TX,

McKee had a Porsche 906 windshield lying around that was used to form the Howmet's body around. Heppenstall mounted it on the rolling chassis and with welding wire and masking tape he mocked up the final coupe shape. Not surprisingly bare aluminium was used for several of the most prominent body-panels like the roof and rear deck. Other bits like the fenders were constructed from the fibreglass.

For the powerplant, McKee emplaced a Continental TS325-1 gas turbine, driving through a single speed transmission; a separate electric motor was used for backing the car. The engine weighed about 170 pounds and developed something north of 320 bhp and 650 ft lbs of torque. The *Fédération Internationale de l'Auto-*

mobile (FIA) determined the jet engine displaced the equivalent of 2958ccs and therefore, the Howmet TX fit neatly into the Group 6 Prototype/sports car class for international competition.



Via *Racing Sports Cars*

While McKee worked on vehicles numbers two and three – built from scratch and two inches longer than car number one - Heppenstall and the team took the TX to Daytona in late 1967 for testing. They returned the first week of February for the annual 24 Hours of Daytona, with Heppenstall, Ed Lowther and Dr Dick Thompson handling the driving chores. The gas turbine TX drew a lot of attention and was even featured front and center on the cover of the event program.

At one point during the race, the car ran in third place but unfortunately on lap 34, with Lowther at the wheel, the waste gate stuck in the closed position. Lowther couldn't reduce power and slow down, spun and hit a retaining wall, ending the effort. The Porsche team scored a sweep, with 907s taking the first three spots.



The Howmet TX in the pits, most likely Daytona (photo via *The Back Roads*)

Roughly six weeks later, on 23 March 1968, the TX ran in the Sebring 12 Hours of Endurance for the Alitalia Airlines Trophy, same drivers. The car qualified third on the grid and ran great for six hours, but in the seventh hour one of the engine mounts broke, sidelining the car. Porsche also won this race, with Joe Siffert and Hans Hermann placing first in a 907.

Still looking to finish a race, the team went overseas. Dick Thompson and Brit Hugh Dibley drove the Howmet in the Brands Hatch 6-Hour race on 7 April 1968, but DNF'd due to accident. Jackie Ickx and Brian Redmond won in a JW Automotive Ford GT40. Five days later, Dibley drove the turbine in the Oulton Park 100-mile race. This time a starter motor wiring failure during a pit stop took the turbine out of the race; Brian Redman won in a Lola T70 Mk3. Plans to run the car in the 1000 km di Monza, Italy, on 25 April didn't come to fruition and the Howmet team returned to the states...and with the return came success.

(Continued on page 4)



The TX at Brands Hatch (Chris Beach photo via *Racing Sports Cars*)

On 12 May 1968, Ray Heppenstall placed second in the Cumberland 200, in the process setting a new record on the airport course in western Maryland (the airport/track was actually across the north branch of the Potomac in West Virginia). Ironically, Bob Nagel won the race in a McKee Mk7-Ford. The car DNF'd at the 2 June 1968 SCCA race at Grattan, Michigan; however, on 8 June 1968, in the Heart of Dixie SCCA regional at Huntsville, Alabama, Heppenstall finally achieved the TX's first victory. Dick Thompson rang up win number two a week later at the SCCA Regional at Marlboro, Maryland, dominating the A/B/C/D SR race. The next day, Heppenstall and Thompson won the Marlboro 300.

A return to international competition took place on 14 July, when Howmet entered two cars in the Watkins Glen 6 Hour race. The TXs qualified eighth and ninth and ran in third and fourth place for much of the event. In the end, Heppenstall and Thompson in third, while the second car – driven by Bob Tullius and Hugh Dibley – dropped to 12th due to transmission problems. Two JW Automotive Ford GT40s finished first and second, driven by Lucien Bianchi/Jackie Ickx and Paul Hawkins/David Hobbs.

Back to the SCCA, one more time, at Donnybrook International Raceway in northern Minnesota. Ray Heppenstall placed third in the ASR event, trailing winner (and regional legend) Jerry Hansen and Roy Kumnick



The Tullius/Dibley TX at the Glen (photo by Gerald Melton via *Racing Sports Cars*)

in Lola T70 Mk3s (**NOTE:** The author was at the event and remembers being enthralled by the Howmet TX as it wooshed around the track, sounding like a fighter in max AB at zero-feet altitude).

At the end of September 1968, the Howmet turbine team made it to the BIG one, the 24 Heures du Mans, held on the 28th-29th. With sponsorship by a French

corporation, two TXs qualified for the race, driven by Heppenstall and Thompson with Dibley and Tullius in the other car. Unfortunately, both cars ran into trouble, in part due to the rules which specified engines had to be shut down for refueling. The Continentals were difficult to restart once they reached full operating temperature; the mechanics attempted to cool the engines during pit stops by piling bags of ice on them...which apparently did damage. The Dibley/Tullius car then sustained a wheel bearing failure and spent three hours in the pits. They were disqualified on the 60th lap by the event officials, due to lack of distance covered.

As for the Heppenstall/Thompson car, the engine damage reduced turbine power by 30 percent and as a result the Howmet could barely make 100 mph down the Mulsanne Strait. Finally, on lap 84, Thompson rolled the TX at the Indianapolis Corner/Arnage Esses, ending the



The Heppenstall/Thompson Howmet TX at the 1968 Le Mans 24 hour race (photo by Michel Guiloux via *Racing Sports Cars*)

Howmet team's one and only appearance at Le Mans. Pedro Rodriguez and Lucien Bianchi, driving a JW GT40, finished first in advance of two Porsches.

And that was it for the bold experiment in prototype sports car design. Howmet declined to finance a second year in competition in 1969 and sold two of the TXs to Heppenstall, reportedly for \$1. After repairing the wrecked Le Mans car – in the process, making it an open-top vehicle – he set six land speed records for gas turbine cars, including 104.37 mph in the 1 kilometer standing start, 500-1000 kg class. After ballasting the car into the 1000+ kg class, Heppenstall set a record of 93.52 mph.

Afterwards the cars went through a series of owners, including Can Am Cars Ltd here in St Louis. Their car made an appearance at the annual European Auto





The “mystery” Howmet TX MkII model (photo via eBay)

Show at Plaza Frontenac in 2009; it created quite a stir when they lit off the TX and drove it around the parking lot. At least one of the TXs makes regular appearances at vintage events, including Elkhart Lake in 1996 and 2023 and the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2009.

Afterword: As mentioned above, one of the Howmet TXs was converted to a “convertible” (roadster?) sans roof before being restored to its original configuration. Back in the late 1960s, model builder MPC offered up a 1/25 scale kit of the car, with the words “MKII Can Am car!” on the box. Did Howmet, Ray Heppenstall and the team consider racing in the SCCA’s Can Am series, possibly starting

in 1969? There’s no solid documentation, but it’s entirely possible.

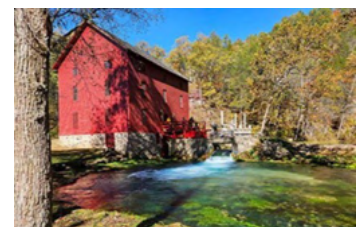
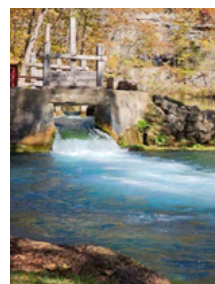
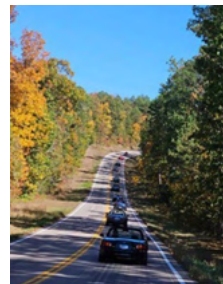
For his part, Ray Heppenstall continued to participate in vintage racing events for several years after the Howmet TXs went out to pasture. He passed in late 2004 at age 73.

Sources: *Racing* *Sports* *Cars*
 (www.racingsportscars.com); “1968 McKee Howmet TX,” *Conceptcarz*, <https://www.conceptcarz.com>; Raphael Orlove, “Meet the Turbine-Powered Howmet TX, the Most Speed Racer Car of All time,” *Jalopnik*, 31 October 2018; Máté Petrány, “This Gorgeous Turbine Racer Is ‘60 Insanity Rocking Ford Cortina Tail Lights,” *Jalopnik*, 3 September 2015; “the Resurgence of a Racing Legend: Howmet TX Returns to Road America,” *Road America*, 28 June 2023; “Howmet TX,” *Ultimatecarpage.com*, n.d.; Jared Hodges, “The Howmet TX: A Brief History of the Sportscar Turbine Age,” *The Back Roads*, 14 December 2019; Casey Annis, “Ray Heppenstall Passes Away,” *Sports Car Digest*, 1 December 2004; Pete Stowe, “Ray Heppenstall (1931-2004),” 2006.

Featured Events

Fall Foliage Weekend

Gateway Miata Club—20-22 Oct 23

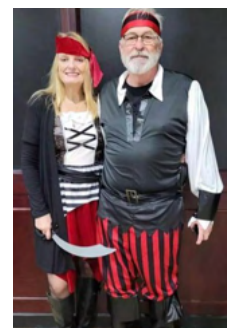
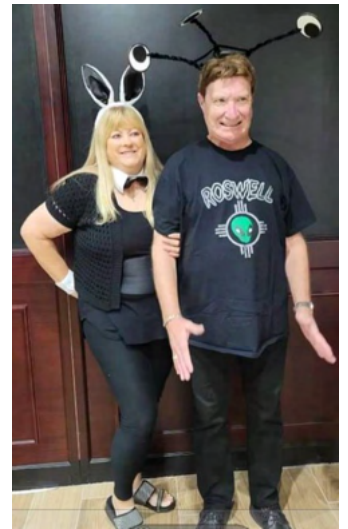


Photos courtesy of the Gateway Miata Club



Featured Events continued

Halloween Costume Breakfast Gateway Miata Club—28 Oct 23



Photos courtesy of the Gateway Miata Club



Each month the editor of the *Metro Gazette*, the newsletter of the MG Club of St Louis, posts a “driving challenge,” in which club members are invited to take photos of their cars at a specified location or event. Here are some of the results from this past December’s challenge; the topic should be pretty evident, eh? (photos courtesy of the MG Club of St Louis)



Featured Events continued



Annual Christmas Party SLTOA—9 Dec 23



RUBCO

MGCStL—14 Dec 23



Photos by Andy Ackerman





Photos by
Paul Summers



Gateway Relay is published monthly for the member clubs of the St Louis Sports Car Council (www.stlsc.org), copyright 2023, all rights reserved. Photos used in this newsletter and the StLSCC web site are the property of their respective clubs. Send electronic articles, photographs, queries and information of interest for the affiliated clubs to the StLSCC Coordinator/Chief Flack/Editor, Mark Morgan, at stlscced@gmail.com.

