

July-August, 2005
Volume 11, Issue 4



HORIZONS

The Official Newsletter of the Sun Riders Miata Club of Tampa Bay

Presidential Notes

By LoAn Nguyen, President

Dear Sun Riding Friends,

I hope this message finds you and yours healthy, happy, and faring this year's hurricane season with plenty of foul weather supplies (candles, batteries, chocolates, etc.) Hopefully just a few thunderstorms (top up) afternoons will be the worst weather to be had this season.

Our club has experienced a "slow" couple of months, in terms of events. In addition to folks being away on summer vacations and two of our autocross events being canceled by SPC, and Hurricane Dennis, our Events Calendar is "slim picking." We really need more members who will volunteer time and effort toward organizing events or even just to suggest ideas about the "what/where/when" of something we can do as a group.

Plans are being formed for our club picnic. We are fortunate to have a committee of volunteers for this event who have already begun to get things rolling. Our target date is Saturday October 8th, so please mark your calendar! More details will be announced as the day draws near; in the meantime, for information about location, directions, etc., please contact Jonathan Skinner. Our menu is being planned/organized by Judy Michaels; and Keith Rolleston is planning games and other group activities, so be sure to give him your ideas and suggestions on "how"

to have fun!

As you may know, Bob Bartlett has resigned from the Board, though he assured me that he will continue to attend as many events as he is able to and "keep us in line." The vacant Board Member position was filled by long-time member Ralph Till. (Please give Ralph a warm "thanks for volunteering" the next time you see him.) The board is meeting next on August 7 at Kevin Morrison's house.

See you at the next event! Please stay safe, and don't forget to put the top up... you never know when the next downpour will come.



35 people in 23 cars enjoyed the Mystery Cruise on June 18. A one-hour cruise toured parts of St. Pete and Tampa, including the Weedon Island Preserve and Bayshore Boulevard, ending up at Jackson's at Harbour Island in downtown Tampa. A variety of door prizes were awarded. (Photo courtesy Kathy Davis.)

LUBRICATING MIATA DOOR WINDOWS

A tech tip from Miata.net

Lubricating the door window channels can make the windows roll up and down more easily, and can prevent future problems with the mechanism or cable. It may not be necessary to remove the door panel to do an adequate job. Use white lithium grease that comes in a spray can with a thin straw attachment for the nozzle. This lets you direct the flow into the tracks without getting much grease on the window or paint. After it is sprayed the grease congeals. If you have power windows avoid silicon, as it is an electrical insulator and could drip onto electrical contacts. The following instruction apply to a '90-'97 car, but others are similar.

- a. If you don't have power windows, begin by using a rag under the window crank to remove the C spring that retains the handle. A gentle back-and-forth motion with the rag will cause the spring to pop out, and the handle then comes off easily.
- b. Remove the door armrest (3 brass Phillips head screws). The top screw is under a black plastic cap which is easily removed by using a small screwdriver to gently pry it out.
- c. Pop off the speaker grill by pulling gently away from the door. It has clips and some pins.
- d. Remove the small Phillips head screw in the plastic trim plate behind the door handle latch and slide this plate off the latch.
- e. The door panel is held only with clips and one pin. Gently pry around the edge of the door to pop out the clips; they are the same type as used on the speaker grills so you already will have a feel for how to do it. The clips run around the edge of the the panel except for the top. Pop out all the clips gently so that you don't bend and crease the door panel.
- f. When all the clips are out, the panel is easily lifted upward. There is a pin in it which pokes down into an alignment hole. If you were to pull the panel outward the way you did with the speaker grill you could break this pin, so be sure to pull up.
- g. You now can easily get to the two window tracks and cable pulley without having to remove the plastic rain shield insulation. Lubri-

cate the tracks with the lithium grease.

h. Reverse these steps to reassemble the door panel. Be gentle and patient when re-inserting the C spring under the window handle; if aligned correctly, it pops back in easily.

Additional input on Step h.:

Putting the handle back on is easy, if you put the C spring back on the window handle first. Now, just take the handle and push it onto the post. You will hear it snap into place. Clean your windows from overspray, which is unavoidable. White grease cleans off easily with 1 part Windex and 2 parts elbow grease. Avoid black grease when spraying around the windows.

Little Things...

By Loren Williams

You know, it's the little things that can make the difference between "a drive" and a "really great drive".

Alex and I took a road-trip in his 1990 Miata with 260k miles on it. In preparation for that, I replaced the "floaty" old stock shocks. Not quite a "little" thing, but it made a big difference in how the car felt. Today, I finally got around to doing some of the simple and truly little things that I'd been putting off since we bought the car 3 months ago, and WOW! The car is a hoot to drive now!

What did I do, you ask? Well, first I set the timing and idle speed. No, I didn't do it the "right" way because the idle speed control valve on this car isn't working. Instead, I did the best I could by turning on ALL of the accessories and then setting the idle (with the diagnostic plug jumpered) at about normal. This resulted in an indicated 800-900 rpm with the AC and lights on, and 1200-1500 with them off. A bit high for normal circumstances, but at least I can confidently use all of the accessories!

Once I was satisfied with that (after a few test drives and some tweaking), I took the slack out of the throttle cable. All done under the hood... but the clutch pedal never has felt right on this car...

The clutch release point felt good, but there

Little Things...Continued From page 2

was just too much slack on top of it and the pedal itself was too high at rest. Nothing that a quick adjustment of the pedal stop won't take care of. So, I cranked the stop down until I had a little less than 1/4" of free play. (spec is 3/8" or something, but I like things tight) Cool.

Another thing that has always bothered/puzzled me about this car is that when transitioning from gas to brake, I'd often catch the side of my shoe on the edge of the brake pedal (rather disconcerting at times!) So, I adjusted the brake pedal stop down to put the brake pedal close to the same level as the clutch pedal. This had the pleasant side-effect of eliminating some brake pedal free-play (dunno what the spec is there, but again, I like it kinda tight) and making the brakes feel better.

So, after about an hour's worth of tweaking, this Miata that was always a pleasant ride feels downright FUN to drive!

Having a proper idle speed (one that doesn't dip so low that it stumbles) makes upshifts feel much more brisk. Less slack in the throttle cable gives more immediate throttle response. A properly adjusted clutch pedal makes smooth downshifts a breeze, and getting the brake pedal in the right place made me feel much more comfortable behind the wheel.

It's the little things that make all the difference.



Mazda Announces Pricing for the 3rd Generation 2006 MX-5

All-New Version of World's Best-Selling Roadster Hits Showrooms This Fall

IRVINE, Calif., June 24 /PRNewswire/ — Mazda North American Operations (MNAO) today announced the 2006 Mazda MX-5 two-seat roadster, equipped with a five-speed manual transmission, will be priced from \$20,435 when it hits showrooms this fall.

MSRP of the Mazda MX-5 with six-speed manual transmission begins at \$22,935 and tops out at \$26,700 for the 3rd Generation Limited version — only 3500 will be available worldwide (750 of them in North America). The MX-5 3rd Generation Limited, with its exclusive Velocity Red Mica exterior, dynamic 17-inch alloy wheels with silver finish and eye-catching trim allow onlookers and owners to recognize it as a truly exceptional — and collectable — vehicle.

The heart of the 2006 MX-5 is a highly responsive MZR-series 2.0-liter, 170-horsepower (at 6,700 rpm) powerplant, newly developed from the unit used in both MAZDA3 and MAZDA6. Mazda's success in creating a dynamic two-seat roadster is evident from the large number of Miatas sold since its introduction — more than 700,000 — and the over 100 consumer and industry awards won, including more than 10 prestigious Automobile magazine "All Star" awards. Over 320,000 Miatas have been sold in the United States alone, and there are still more than 280,000 on the road — a true testament to the car's "cult" following.

Mazda North American Operations is responsible for the sales and marketing, customer service and parts support of Mazda vehicles in the United States. Headquartered in Irvine, Calif., MNAO has more than 700 dealerships nationwide.

Product Review: Jackson Racing Header

By Kevin Morrison

I recently installed Jackson Racing's stainless steel ceramic coated header on my '94. The build quality of the unit is first-rate. It's really a beautiful piece of hardware. CNC machined flanges are an accurate fit, and ceramic coating on the tubing helps keep the heat levels down in the engine compartment. Installation was pretty easy, with the removal of the old system being the hardest part. The JR unit fits exactly right, needing just a bit of a push to go into place. Once there everything bolts up perfectly and it looks great in the engine bay. Performance gains are surprisingly good, but I already have a high-flow cat and cat-back exhaust. By itself, it would likely not be as effective. I'd estimate 3 to 5 hp gained, across the entire rev band, not just at the peak. The exhaust note gained just a hint of raspyness, but it's a welcome sound that sounds sporty, not grating on the nerves. Cost is \$449, but can often be found on sale for \$399, which is what I paid. See photo on page 5.

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MiataPower! Options for Giving Your Miata More Juice!

By Kevin Morrison

As a Miata owner for the last 9 years, I have always known that the Miata is not exactly a fire-breathing monster when it comes to power. I've done a few things to try to get the most out of what power the car does have, and for the most part I've been happy with the performance of the car. After building two Spec Miata race cars, which have a little more power than a street Miata, and weigh considerably less, I came to know that more power in the Miata's fine chassis is a very good thing. So, of late I have been seriously contemplating the latest technologies and products available to get more power from the Miata, with an eye toward souping up my '94. What follows is a brief overview of the most common power upgrades in use today.

Intake/Header/Exhaust. This is usually the first thing that everybody tries. If you do all three, modest gains are achieved. Each one alone is considerably less effective. Intake mods range from a simple cone filter, to cold-air induction which eliminates most of the stock intake tract, to individual throttle-bodies (ITBs) that replace the entire intake manifold with a custom-made manifold with individual intakes for each cylinder. Prices range from \$25 for a cone filter on eBay, to \$350 for a cold air induction, to thousands of dollars for a custom individual throttle body setup with a stand-alone engine computer to control fuel and timing. Horsepower returns range from 2 or 3 horsepower for a filter, to as much as 20 or 30 hp from an ITB system with computer management. Personally, I had a cold air induction system on my car and found it not worth the money. I went back to the stock intake with a K&N panel filter. There are several good headers on the market. Racing Beat and Jackson Racing make stainless steel units for around \$400, and some lower priced brands are available at places like eBay (www.eBay.com) for \$250 or so, but quality and fitment are sometimes not quite at the highest level.

There is a vast array of exhaust systems available for the Miata. Most give an easy 4 or 5 horsepower increase, and can be anywhere from a little louder to a LOT louder than the factory exhaust. Jackson Racing, Racing Beat,

Borla, Bosal, and many others make high-quality systems for around \$300-\$500.

Forced induction. When it comes to getting power out of an engine, nothing can beat forced induction in bang-for-the-buck. Supercharging and turbocharging are the technologies used, and both do the same thing in slightly different ways. On the low-price end of the spectrum is an entry-level turbo system. The most common system is only available for the 1.6 Miata engine ('90-'93) and is made by Greddy in Japan. It's a very minimal system, but \$1200 or so will get you about 30 easy horsepower and it's completely upgradeable to truly scary power levels. Next on the price scale is the Jackson Racing supercharger (www.jacksonracing.com). Based on an industry-standard Eaton supercharger unit, the Jackson Racing system was formerly known as the Sebring Supercharger, and has been available for the Miata since the early 1990's. Prices start around \$2395 for a fairly complete system that is good for about 40 horsepower, and it can be upgraded somewhat. In the \$3000 to \$4000 price range, there are both turbo and supercharger options available. BR Performance (www.brperformance.com) and Flyin' Miata (www.flyinmiata.com) offer turbo systems and superchargers that will add somewhere around 70 to 80 percent more power, and for around \$5000 you can buy a system that will add more than a 100% increase in power and torque. These power levels require that many other parts of the car be upgraded, however. The cooling system, clutch, exhaust, transmission, and differential are all placed under a lot more stress than they were designed for, so judicious upgrades are called for, pushing the final price tag considerably higher.

We've really just scratched the surface here, but to cover it all would take several books. If you're interested in finding out more, a good place to start is miata.net on the web.



Jackson Racing's header next to a stock '94 header. Quite a difference!

So you want to modify your suspension...

By Loren Williams

Driving one of the best handling sports cars on the planet isn't good enough for you, huh? Maybe something just doesn't feel right? Or maybe you don't think it looks right? Or maybe you want to find out just how much sharper the knife can be? Yes, I've been there. It is a long and perilous road, and even though I've been reading about, discussing and tinkering with Miata suspensions for about 5 years, I'm still learning new things. I'm going to try to explain some of the basic suspension modifications, what they do and why you might (or might not) want them.

Before you commit to modifying your Miata suspension, you need to give yourself plenty of time to get to know the car in its stock form. This is something that a lot of us don't do (I'm guilty), and it's a shame because the Miata really is an awesome handling car right out of the box. However, I'd venture to guess that most of us bought our Miatas used and never even saw the box. Here are some things you should acquaint yourself with. If they need attention, your Miata isn't handling as it was designed to and you won't be able to make a sound judgement of the stock suspension.

- **Shocks** - If your Miata has more than 30-40,000 miles on it, you can bet that the performance of your shocks has degraded. And if those shocks have more than 60,000 miles on them, they are quite dead. (unless they are Bilstein's, more on that later)

- **Bushings** - If the car has considerably more than 120,000 miles, it is likely that the suspension bushings are also degraded and possibly in need of replacement. This includes all of the load-bearing rubber parts such as the control arm bushings, sway bar bushings, and even the bump stops.

- **Tires** - Nothing affects the handling of a car more profoundly than the tires, and it amazes me some of the junky tires I see on some Miatas. Tire rubber hardens with age and exposure to the elements, the better the tire, the faster it degrades. If you don't have a good set of performance tires that are less than 2-3 years old on your Miata... don't waste your time with suspension, it's not going to matter.

- **Alignment** - Even if all of the above is in

great shape (and even on a brand new car), a poor wheel alignment can take a lot of the joy (not to mention safety) out of your driving experience. Don't just go to your local tire shop and ask for an alignment, either. There's no telling what you'll end up with! Find a shop that specializes in sports car alignments, or at least a shop that will meticulously align the car to specs that you provide.

Okay, so you've got the above items taken care of, the car is handling just like a well-tuned stock Miata should... but you're still not happy. What can you do? What should you do? Will you regret it? Let's delve a little deeper into the possibilities by discussing some of the most common reasons that people casually start throwing parts at their Miata suspensions.

My Miata doesn't have enough grip in the turns!

Okay, let's get one thing straight right here and now. A stock Miata needs nothing more than a really good set of shocks, a really good set of tires and a really good alignment to handle amazingly well. Improving any of these items (especially the tires, assuming the shocks and alignment are at least "good") will allow the car to be driven faster through the turns. Anything else you do to the car is only going to very marginally make the car handle better. Anything else you choose to do is mostly a matter of feel and/or aesthetics. Shocks, tires and alignment. Trust me.

I get too much body roll!

This was my complaint. Most of us have been conditioned to see body roll as a bad thing. To some extent, it IS a bad thing, but as you'll hear me say repeatedly, it is part of the compromise that is suspension design. The Miata suspension was designed with that body roll as a part of the package. The suspension deals with the body roll and actually uses it to its advantage. As the suspension compresses, camber goes more negative to counteract most of the positive camber induced by the body roll itself. What does that mean in English? Body roll with no suspension would simply tilt the top of the outside tires (the ones doing most of the work in a turn) to the outside lifting the inside edge of the contact patch of those tires in the process. Less rubber on the road when it counts... a bad thing. The Miata suspension compensates by bringing the top of those outside wheels as the body rolls. More rubber on the road, awesome cornering power.

So, body roll isn't necessarily all bad, at least for a well-engineered sports car. BUT, that

NEW MEMBERS!

Please extend a warm welcome/welcome back to our newest members:

Jack Sevier

John Woessner

Remember, new members to join as of January 1st of this year receive a complimentary name badge. Please contact LoAn (topless@sunriders.com) to place your order. Additional name badges can be ordered at only \$3.00 each.

If you have not received your New Member Welcoming Packet, please contact membership@sunriders.com

Visit us on the Web!
At www.sunriders.com you can see the latest event schedule, update your member information, and participate in our web forum where you can get answers to tech questions or just chat about your car. Not yet a member? You can join and pay online!



Sun Rider Birthdays

July

7/2 Rudy Kriebel
7/4 Keith Rolleston
7/9 Ilona Wessling
7/9 Debora Oster
7/15 Cathy Scola
7/19 Tammy Ware
7/20 Bob Bartlett
7/21 Jack Mortimer
7/27 Barbara Appleby
7/27 Judy McCormick
7/29 Rosemary Fleishman

August

8/10 Susie Beach
8/12 Linda Pappalardo
8/18 Bill Colleran
8/22 Kevin Morrison
8/23 Jonathan Vielhaber

Happy Birthday, Y'all.



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Calendar of Events

Sunday, August 7 - Board meeting. Contact LoAn for details.

Saturday, August 13- Autocross at St. Pete College, Allstate Campus. See www.sunridersmotorsports.com for details.

Wednesday, August 17 - Monthly meeting. 7:00PM, Molly Goodhead's in Ozona. Tire kicking in the parking lot at 6:30.

Sunday, September 11 - Members-only autocross, St. Pete College Allstate Campus. This one is an "endurocross" format where each run consists of several laps. See www.sunridersmotorsports.com for details.

Wednesday, September 21 - Monthly meeting. 7:00PM, Location TBA.

Saturday, October 8 - Picnic at Picnic Shelter No. 9, at Anderson Park in northern Pinellas County, Noon to 6 pm. The club will provide hamburgers and hotdogs, along with condiments, ice, drinks, paper products, etc. We will ask participants to bring a side dish or dessert. Please contact Judy Michaels (Picnic Menu Coordinator) to sign up your dish!! More details in the next newsletter!

Sunday, October 31 - Sunday brunch run. An old tradition returns. We'll meet at St. Pete College Allstate Campus at 10am and head south to Siesta Key for an early lunch. Expect about a 90 minute drive and \$10-\$15 for lunch.

Suspension, Continued from page 6.

body roll needs to be well-controlled. That's where shocks come in. If you have really good shocks your body roll will happen at a slower rate and you won't notice it so much. If your car "flops" when you dive into a turn, your shocks need attention. Don't try to fix the problem by upgrading anything else... replace your shocks first!

Besides fitting stiffer shocks, the most common weapons used to combat body roll are stiffer swaybars (technically, "anti-sway bars" or "stabilizer bars").

First, understand that the primary purpose of swaybars is fine tuning. By choosing the wrong bars or the wrong combination of bar settings (most aftermarket bars are adjustable), you can easily make your car understeer or oversteer much more than is desirable. Another more subtle effect is that really stiff bars sort of tie the two sides of your suspension together, negating a lot of the "independency" in our wonderful four-wheel independent suspension. Instead of a bump or pothole being neatly absorbed by one corner of the suspension, a lot of that force gets transferred to the other side of the car and you feel it as ride harshness. Lastly, just like anything else you do to stiffen your suspension, stiffer swaybars will make the suspension less compliant and potentially more difficult to drive aggressively on real roads. Any irregularities in the road surface in the middle of a turn could cause a loss of traction sending your car in a direction other than the one you intended!

My Miata isn't low enough!

Ah, yes... everyone thinks that lower is better. If not for theoretical better handling, then for purely aesthetic reasons. In reality, the handling benefits are quite over-rated... at least for a Miata. The Miata is already low, and was designed from the ground up for outstanding handling. So, what are your options? One of the potentially cheapest routes to take is to build a Frankenstein suspension using factory Mazda parts. There is at least one kit available (the NoPro "Shock Dumper kit") that allows the use of 99+ Miata upper shock mounts on a 90-97 Miata providing about 3/4" of lowering without changing the springs. Similarly, fitting certain very early Miata springs to a later model (like 90-91 springs into a 97) can net some lowering. Cutting the stock springs by half a coil or so is also an option, but be sure you know what you're doing before you try that! Generally speaking, anything using stock parts is a pretty safe bet. You won't have to worry about going too low or getting too stiff.

The most popular lowering option is to simply replace the stock springs with aftermarket springs. If your goal is the "slammed" look with ride and handling being less of a priority for you, this can be a very cost-effective way to go. The problem with most aftermarket spring sets is that they lower the car too much. The problem you run into when your Miata is too low (other than scraping driveways and speedbumps) is that you end up riding on the bump stops.

The hardcore option for lowering is to install a "coil-over" kit. The Miata suspension is actually a coil-over-shock arrangement from the factory, the aftermarket kits are mostly just a replacement of the lower spring perches with a threaded height-adjustment mechanism and a set of standard race springs. This



Well the last two months of autocross have been really quiet. We were bumped from our scheduled slot in June and the close proximity of hurricane Dennis in July prompted a cancellation for safety reasons. But we do have events scheduled on the horizon. Please plan to come out if you can.

August 13th: Autocross at SPC with members of the Mustang club attending.

September 11th: Members Only Endurocross. Lots of seat time for Sunriders members!

October 15th: Autocross at SPC. Note that this is a revised date for October.

November 13th: Autocross at SPC.

December 3rd: Autocross at SPC

I also received word that our new timing equipment and display have finally been completed and we are looking forward to delivery in July (fingers crossed). Assuming this shipping date holds true we should be using the new equipment at the August event.

Everybody drive safe,

Chad Sutton
Motorsports Chairman



Suspension, continued from page 8

gives you the freedom to set the ride height exactly where you want it and even choose your own spring rates. Ultra-stiff for racing (Spec Miatas run 700 lb/in in the front... about 6 times stiffer than stock!), or softer for street use. Of course, any stiffer spring will require improved damping, which means better-than-stock shocks.

Stiffer springs and swaybars and bushings will make my Miata handle better!

Yes (up to a point) and no. It's all about compromises. The average stock Miata is compromised more toward what the general public wants, it's true. That's why it has a relatively soft ride, but it's also why it's easy and "fun" to drive instead of being a "challenge" to drive fast, like an old Porsche 911. If you want a little more, consider the factory R package, or the later Sport models. The changes are subtle, very slightly stiffer springs and bars, and the key to it all... stiffer Bilstein shocks. Take a cue from the Mazda engineers there... good shocks can make a HUGE difference. Just keep in mind that "too stiff" is a very real concept. Any part of the suspension can be made too stiff and have negative effects. The point of "too stiff" for a race car will be higher than that of a street car because a) the race driver doesn't care about comfort, and b) race tracks are usually kept fairly smooth. For street driving, most of us will make at least SOME compromise toward comfort, and we all know that the roads we drive on are far from smooth. For optimum handling, your suspension needs to be compliant enough to deal with those rough roads and keep the tires in contact with the pavement.

In conclusion...

Sure, a Miata can be made to handle somewhat better depending on your wallet and where you draw the line for comfort. Just don't jump in without doing some careful research and don't be surprised if your first attempt at "the perfect suspension" is not your last. Have fun and drive safely!

HORIZONS

Sun Riders Miata Club of Tampa Bay

Visit the club's web page at www.sunriders.com

Participate in the forums: www.sunriders.com/forums/

Renew or join online: www.sunriders.com/membership.html



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