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Team Toaster Almost Ready to Roll

24 Hours of LeMons race brings out the best in beater cars

By Cathy Tyson



Team Toaster members Mike Morse on roof, David Gerson behind the wheel and Phil Gaffney ready with a fire extinguisher as they pose with their sleek race car. Photo Andy Scheck

safety equipment does not count toward the \$500 total. The silver beauty, which survived a front and rear end collision, sports welded-on burnt toast coming out of the roof. Handy team members thought of everything - including smoke to accompany the toast. On race days, the goal is simply "trying to stay alive," said Gerson.

This year they are further modifying the Scion with a heavy-duty head gasket to replace the blown one from last year, and installing a supercharger for a bit more speed, along with an engine found on Craigslist.

While getting the car together is a team effort, Gerson calls local attorney Mike Morse the "MacGyver" of the group. Not just another pretty face, this attorney by day is a serious hobbyist with a natural curiosity interested in taking bikes, cars, and boats apart to see how they work.

Morse took over the former space of the rock shop, Fumble Fingers, and now has the official team headquarters/working garage where the Toaster and their newest addition, a bright red 1971 Datsun 240 Z is stored. Morse calls the Scion "woefully underpowered" and is looking forward to driving the lighter, lower "Z" that boasts twice the horsepower of the Scion.

When asked what brought the team together, he replied, "guys that like to drive fast. Really, it comes down to that." Rounding out Team Toaster are speeders Larry Zulch, Mike Bishopp and Phil Gaffney.

"It's so much fun," says Gerson reminiscing about the feeling of going 85 to 90 miles per hour, while other cars are a mere six inches away, all jockeying for position going into the turns. Gerson describes himself initially as a reluctant driver; on the mean streets of Lamorinda he's not that aggressive, but behind the wheel of the Toaster - watch out.

In case the Toaster is toast, the "Z" is planned as a fall-back car, but it also needs work. A 280 Z engine found on Craigslist is waiting to be installed, and the fellows have plans to customize this car with orange paint and call it "Bondo" in homage to the legendary Bob Bondurant and his famous orange Datsun 240 Z, but their version will have lettering on the back that reads, "caution student driver."

After completing some work on the Toaster last year, the boys took it for a very brief spin on Brown Avenue to see if it was working properly. Unfortunately the car isn't exactly street legal, with no headlights or registration; a Lafayette police officer just happened to be in the neighborhood and pulled it over. They received a warning.

This year, the team will be accepting donations similar to a walk-a-thon, based on the number of laps completed, to support the charitable work of Loaves and Fishes, a non-profit organization that feeds the hungry of Contra Costa County via five dining rooms throughout the county along with meal services at their partner sites. Gerson estimates the maximum number of laps should be approximately 200 to 225, if their car finishes the race.

For more information, contact David@loavesandfishescc.org. To learn more about the race, visit www.24hoursoflemons.com, and for a complete description of the charity visit www.loavesandfishescc.org.

"It's the Burning Man of road racing," said David Gerson, proud Team Toaster member about the annual 24 Hours of LeMons endurance race presented by Car & Driver Magazine at locations across the U.S. Team Toaster will be suiting up for the "Sears Pointless" event at the Sonoma Raceway March 23-24. The beauty of this race is that it's limited to junkers with a maximum value of \$500 - hence the name, spoofing the more high-brow 24 Hours of LeMans in France.

Gerson, the executive director of Loaves and Fishes and Lafayette school board member has partnered with four fellow Lafayette dads to form Team Toaster, a group of friends that came together when their kids were at Springhill Elementary School. They could be playing golf, or in a band, but these gentlemen just enjoy hanging out together, working on cars, plus, of course, the exhilaration of driving a race car - even if it's a customized lemon.

Preparing for the festive and irreverent race that runs for 16 hours over two days takes time, so Team Toaster is already hard at work getting their boxy stripped-out 2005 Scion XB ready to rumble.

While it doesn't look that sexy - it has a wide stance, rather like a go-cart with oversized brakes that make it a serious competitor, along with a required professional full roll cage and mandatory five point harness. Thankfully,



From left, David Gerson, Mike Bishopp, Mike Morse and Phil Gaffney Photo Larry Zulch



From left, David Gerson, Mike Morse (under car) and Phil Gaffney

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