

The

# Checkpoint



Official Publication of the Arrowhead Sports Car Club

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Volume 42

April 2001

Number 3

## Skid Marks

----by Bill Taylor



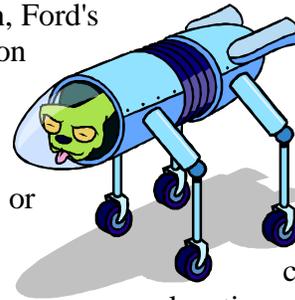
OK, kids, I think that I may have overclocked my paranoia chip; but, I have had another epiphany. Big Brother may not be watching very closely yet, but his vision is getting clearer.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Omaha for a family visit to my mother. Over the weekend, while making sure her car would start and run, Char and I had occasion to drive her 2000 Catera to Lincoln and back. It was a relatively short trip to make sure the battery was charged and all the big parts were working properly. Appealing car; a bit underpowered, but nicely appointed with all the leather and power goodies.

While waiting for it to warm up and get all the systems functioning, I noticed the little "On Star" console glued to the base of the rear view mirror. Here's the ultimate solution to most of your on the road questions. Got an emergency? Push a button and talk to a disembodied savior somewhere in the ether. How about a medical emergency? That disembodied soul can dispatch medical help. Lock yourself out of the car? Call "On Star" and they can remotely unlock it for you. Want theater tickets, dinner or lodging reservations? Yup, "On Star" can take care of it for you while you are enroute. Lost? Push the "On Star" button and they can tell you where (by reading a GPS receiver in your car) you are (within 10 feet, or so) and how to get to where you want to go. Car stolen? Call "On Star" and they can

use the same technology to locate the car for the police. Sort of a cosmic Lo-Jac. Mighty convenient; can make your life so much safer and easier. Yup, what's not to like?

Ford has a similar system available for most of its line. In addition, Ford's system can tell if deceleration exceeded a certain threshold, or if an airbag has deployed or even if the car is on its side or upside down. If so, it can automatically call 911 and give the location of the accident. Terrific if you are injured and can't help yourself. Medical and police help can be on the way almost immediately. Much safer way to drive. Of course, a cell phone is built into the car to make all of this work.



The trend of automatic on-board navigation systems continues to grow in new cars. For the most part, they are still found only in more upscale models and most of them still have some significant problems. But, its clear that we will all be able to have a silicon co-pilot with us. It will tell us just where we are and how to get where we are going. It will probably be able to talk us through the route, maybe even as good as or better than a lot of experienced co-drivers. Yup, much safer!

There is a move afoot by the same people who decided you needed OBD II to put black boxes in all new cars. These, like the boxes in airplanes and some racecars, would record all kinds of parameters in the time immediately preceding an accident. Just think how much safer we could make our vehicles if we had all that information. *(continued on page 3)*

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Periodicals Postage paid at Duluth MN 55801  
*The Checkpoint* is the official newsletter of the Arrowhead Sports Car Club, Inc. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the ASCC, its officers or its members, nor any Checkpoint advertisers. Articles may be edited. Non-original material will be noted as such.

*The Checkpoint* is published monthly except January from 423 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Ave. East, Duluth, MN 55812-2028.

Annual subscriptions are \$11.00 and are included in ASCC membership. Single-issue price is \$1.00 and is included in entry fees for ASCC events. Make checks payable to ASCC, c/o Treasurer.

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## Submissions

Submissions to *The Checkpoint* may be typed, handwritten, composed on diskette or transmitted by e-mail. All submissions should be sent to the editor at the above address

Computer disks with text should be in an IBM compatible format. If material is submitted as an attachment to an e-mail message, notify the editor before submitting. No unknown e-mail attachments will be opened. Deadline for submission is the last Thursday of the month for the following month's issue.

Articles, photographs, drawings and paste-up work submitted to this publication earn ASCC Continental Cup worker points.

*The Checkpoint*  
(USPS) 006-510

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## Skid Marks

(continued from page 1)

Freeze frame! In some parts of the country, you can automatically pay your highway tolls with the help of a little radio transmitter placed in your car. Drive under a receiving antenna and the system knows you have entered the toll road. When you exit the toll road, you drive under another antenna. The system can then automatically determine the amount you owe and deduct it from a prepaid account. Very convenient. No more having to slow to toss quarters at the little wire basket. Yup, very convenient.

In some cities, remotely operated cameras monitor intersections. Run a red light, the camera can record your license plate number and you will get a ticket in the mail. Ticket for a moving violation. Pay up or get arrested. Mighty convenient for the local government. No costly policemen to pay. These are very common in Europe.

For over thirty years, in some parts of Europe, unoccupied vehicles by the side of the road have been



able to automatically zap your car with radar, determine that you are speeding and take a picture of your car, face and license plate for proof. You then get a speeding ticket in the mail, complete with your picture. Pay up, or else. The violation is included automatically on your record. Again, no costly policeman to pay.

From the May 2001 edition of *Road & Track* magazine, page 24, column 5:

**"SNAPPED:** In Tagmersheim, Germany, east of Ingolstadt, motorists don't take kindly to traffic-control cameras. Upon being photographed at speed, one 31-year-old driver was so outraged that he stopped, dismantled

the camera and drove off with it. He was caught, however and charged with theft--as well as speeding."

Thirty years ago, the photo rigs for the unmanned radar cars were pretty ungainly. They used a flash unit the size of a small billboard bolted to the bumper of the vehicle. That was a pretty good hint as to what its function was. Still, they made sufficient money with the system make a "profit."

How about the gadget on MAAT's favorite fire truck! One push of a button and he can turn lights at intersections in Eagan red so that the fire truck can safely pass through. Now that is something I wouldn't mind having in the Rally Fox, or the Ford, for that matter.

High speed chases are dangerous for all involved. Everybody acknowledges that. Folks are working on a system with which the police can remotely lobotomize the computer of a car and immediately immobilize it. Mighty safe! Yes sir, mighty safe!

Hey, how about those dangerous roads and the unpredictably dangerous traffic. We now have the technology to let our cars sniff out a "smart" lane on the highway and the computing power to have the car automatically follow the smart lane and maintain safe distances with auto-steering, acceleration and braking. Yes, sir, that's mighty safe! Just try not to think about what happens when a \$.25 diode fails in the lead car.

Because human beings are notoriously sloppy with their throttle in-puts, braking efforts, and steering abilities, a lot of new cars are being built with drive-by-wire, brake-by-wire and correct-your-steering-by-wire. Yep, improved safety with all those computer-controlled systems, ABS, ASC, DSC, et and cetera ad infinitum, ad nauseum. All integrated, communicating and tied into the car's own distributed network.

Freeze frame and change subjects for a minute. How about those satellite pictures from space? Have you seen those on the Discovery Channel? Really good systems can identify objects and features on the ground as small as small as a Lazy-Boy. Those are the commercial systems. Bet the really secret ones can do a lot better. Could they read your license plate? Can they tell you when your tabs expire?

(continued on page 4)

## Skidmarks

(continued from page 3)



The FBI has a system that is supposed to be able to filter through all of the phone calls (landline and cellular) made in the US and screen them for key words and phrases that might indicate possible terrorist activities.

The National Security Agency is rumored to have systems that capable of doing that same thing for all radio-based communications around the world. Cell phones, microwave communications, radars, etc.

Does it sound like maybe I'm getting a bit carried away? Read on. The following was downloaded from the FIA's web site. It describes a system that the World Rally Championship has been using since 1995.

*In low orbit 21,000 km above the Earth, 24 satellites silently keep watch over the World Championship rallies day and night. No wheel may be turned, no direction changed, no bonnet opened without immediate detection by these eyes in the sky. A few tenths of a second later, their antennae relay the information back to the FIA helicopter and rally control, inside which sits the FIA Technical Delegate in front of a computer screen. The position of the competitors and various details concerning their cars are permanently displayed on digitised maps of the area covered by the rally.*

Hey, been keeping up with the glamorous world of high-tech over the last year? Lots of those mercurial dot-com companies have folded faster than they flourished; leaving thousands of very bright people out of work.

They aren't designing new games or new versions of MP3 any more. Lots of those folks are systems integration specialists and are looking for work.

All of these sound like wonderful developments which can make our daily driving chores so much safer and more convenient.

Am I the only one who sees a potential problem with all of this? In some European cities, Rome and Athens (Greece, not Georgia) come to mind, it is

illegal to drive a car into the center of the oldest parts of town on certain days of the week. What happens when some bureaucrat decides to "turn off" all of the cars within 20 kilometers of city-center on Sunday? Or at bar-closing time.

Do we really want some computer deciding that, in addition to the toll from East Orange to Trenton, we were speeding when we did it and assessing us a \$300 fine and 4 to 6 points on our license. Let your imagination work on some the possibilities. I'm afraid that mine has been working overtime on it. By the way, only a couple of the systems I've mentioned are government controlled and classified. The rest are commercial and available to anyone.

All of a sudden, my rather low-tech VW Fox looks pretty inviting. At least it doesn't volunteer to be tracked!!! It can be relatively inexpensively equipped with mild window tint and covers for the license plates that prevent them from being read from more than just a few degrees off-axis.

I might just have to back up another state of the art or two and re-learn how to gap points and static time a distributor all over again. I sure don't mind rolling up my own windows. And there's a reasonably good chance that my car won't be watching me.

Sleep well. Trust me!

--Nuff Sed



Inquiries Accepted

## Race Breaks Out At F-1 Grand Prix Held at Sao Palo, Brazil!

### Thousands Panic!

### Motoring World Stunned!

Did you happen to catch the F-1 Grand Prix of Brazil in Sao Palo? It turned into a race on the first lap!

Over the last few years, F1 races have largely been determined at the start. Whoever grabbed the lead when the red lights went out generally lead the parade and, unless there was a screw up during a pit stop or a major mechanical boo-boo, won the race.



In Sao Palo, the early commentary centered around the rather sad state of repair of the Interlagos circuit. However, as soon as the red lights blinked off, a real race broke out. Juan Montoya, showing off what he'd learned in CART leaped into second place by the first turn. By lap 4 he stuck his nose inside Michael Schumacher, threatened to punt Schuey into the weeds, and took the lead away.

Proving, once again, that no good deed goes unpunished, Montoya was later literally whupped in the butt, tearing off the wing of his Williams. It effectively ended his day at about Lap 27.

Later in the race, most of the regular F-1 drivers had been secretly replaced, during pit stops, by World of Outlaws and ASA drivers on their Sunday off. They was a puntin' and a nerfin' and a spinnin' all over the place, especially after the rains came. Not only did they swap paint, they traded carbon fiber, bits of titanium, plexiglass, large chunks of rubber, perhaps some hair and teeth and strong invective.

It's obvious that Montoya came to play. Schuey can get rattled. Williams-BMW can field a competitive car. Cars painted other than red or silver/black can win. Nick Heidenfeld can get a podium finish. Keep watching. This could be an interesting year for F-1.

## **SPEEDVISION = Better coverage for SCCA PRO-Rally Events.**

This year, Speedvision (the real reason YHE has cable), is providing tape-delayed coverage of the SCCA's PRO-Rally series. Coverage has been expanded from last year and there is a real familiar voice doing the voice-over.

Yes, kids, it's the voice of our very own Tim Winker. Now, let's see, just how bad is life for Timmy? He gets to go to all of the PRO-Rallies, doing PR work for some of the teams and doing camera work for Speedvision and shooting stills for his Wink Timber Media Agency. Then, when he comes home, he has to do a voice-over for the edited tape of the rally. An ugly existence, very ugly. Don't throw me into that briar patch, Brer Bear!

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## **Back to the '60's Rally**

Keep an open spot on your calendar. There is a "retro-rally" in the offing. Put away the Terra-trip and the laptop. Disconnect your super-go-fast rally-'puter. The plan now is for use of nothing more sophisticated than your stock odo and an analog watch/clock.



Tentative date for this event is

**June 23, 2001.**

Keep your eyes here and on the website --

**[arrowheadsc.org](http://arrowheadsc.org) --**

for more information.