



The CAR Enthusiast

August 2003

The President's Post

By Christian LeHew

I was recently standing in front of the mirror admiring the sunburn I'd received from two 12-hour days of standing outside. I had just returned from the first (annual, hopefully) Mazda Rev It Up event/expo at FedEx Field outside Washington DC. I was dirty. I was sweaty. I was tired. But it was great.

Thinly disguised as a marketing tool to help promote Mazda's new models, the Mazda Rev It Up event consisted of 3 days of ram-it-down-your-throat Mazda enthusiasm and, well, giddy fun.

Why? Because for three days, Mazda enthusiasts got to bask in everything Mazda. Vintage race cars. New race cars. High-tech prototypes. Driving test models. Pushing a MAZDA6 to its limits. And I got to talk about Miatas until I was hoarse.

In case you didn't make it, the CAR club had a nice-sized tent with several familiar Miatas on display, and there was definitely no lack of enthusiasm (or water) as we all took turns talking with current and potential Miata owners alike about the cars we all love so much. I'm sure if we took a survey, we would discover that between us, we answered every conceivable question about the Miata, and then some. I even got questions ranging from getting a price list for Falken wheels to the best way to autocross a 1987 Honda Civic wagon to fuel pressure regulators on an Escort GT.

And while Mazda and Falken Tires made sure everyone went home with a bag of goodies, I think we all went home with some great memories as well. For me, it was being able to meet a lot of new people and to get them excited about Mazdas. For others, it was piling six of us in a Mazda MPV minivan, and chasing cones through the slalom course. Or maybe the heated wheel-to-wheel go-kart racing, done in true CAR club style.

Despite the heat, I think everyone had a great time, and made some new friends. I only hope these club memories and friendships don't fade as fast as my sunburn.

The Accidental Tourist

I recently received a note from Mike Gregory, a member of Master's Miata Club in South Carolina, with his reflections on a recent trip to Japan. After reading it over, I thought it was a really cool perspective on the Miata, as well as the similarity of Miata owners around the world. It just speaks so well of not only the car, but the enthusiasm it's owners share that even though barriers such as distance and language exist, that the love we share for these cars seems to transcend all of that. So instead of a tech article this month, put the wrenches away and enjoy the ride, er, read. - Christian

As a charter member of the Old Fart's Club, one of the principal truths I have learned is that the best things happen by accident. (The other principal truth is that the older I get, the less I know.) This past Fall, I had a marvelous "Miata accident."

A month before Lois and I were to leave on a long-saved-up-for five week vacation in Japan, the September 2002 issue of "Miata Magazine" arrived. This was the Special International Issue and contained an enticing write-up on the Kanazawa Roadster Club (the "KRC") - that was accident number 1.

It just so happened that Kanazawa, on the western coast of Honshu, was the hometown of Masumi Takata, a Japanese exchange teacher who had lived with us a couple of years ago. We had a very kind invitation from Masumi to visit her during our trip. And here I see that there is an active Roadster (the Japanese version of the Miata) Club right in the same town - that was accident number 2.

I thought that it might be interesting to meet up with some kindred car spirits in a foreign land, so I sent an e-mail message to the address given for the KRC in that September 2002 issue - that was accident number 3.

Almost immediately, I received a pleasant reply from Makoto Nakamura, president of the KRC, saying: "Please visit and join us for your Kanazawa days. We'll do our best for you anything you like." Little did I appreciate what this note meant. This was to be the end of the accidents since, as I was to learn, NOTHING happens by accident in Japan.

Fast forward now to more than three weeks into our Japan trip, after we had wandered throughout Tohoku (the far north of the main island of Honshu, a delightful corner unknown to most tourists) and then spent 10 days in Kyoto (the historical nexus of Japan). At last it was time for our long weekend in Kanazawa.

On that Saturday at 9AM, Makoto was to pick me up at the hotel to spend the day with some KRC members (the details were still a bit vague). Meanwhile Lois would be given a pass on all the gear-head stuff in order to spend the day with Masumi in downtown Kanazawa.

We all met in the lobby on time (this is Japan), and then Makoto directed me into the wrong side (hey, this is Japan) of his top-down, 1994 white Roadster with blue racing stripes. I shouted one of the three Japanese phrases that I had learned: "Ikimasho - let's go!" And we were off to join the other KRC

members at a central meeting point. Little did I suspect that this would be one of the more memorable days of my life.

At the meeting point, we were joined by seven other Roadsters/Miatas and drivers. One orange M2, with the rest being M1s, reds, whites, and one black. There were the formal introductions and halting greetings. I was ceremoniously presented with a wonderful delPrado 1/43-scale die cast model of a blue LHD MX-5. This IS Japan. To bow or to shake hands? After the initial awkwardness, what the Japanese call “heart-to-heart communication” kicked in, and all language/generational barriers were transcended. Hey, we’re all similar car nuts. This is universal.

From this point on, I was invited to hop from car to car, into a new passenger’s seat at each scheduled stop. This first leg was in Makoto’s 1994 base car. Since I also have a white 1994 (and you can’t get more base than the R-Package that I have owned since new), this MX-5 seemed very familiar...yet different.

Obviously, his car was RHD. But also, even though it was a 1.8 liter model, it still had the “flat dash” of the earlier 1.6s. I hadn’t realized that in Japan, all the M1s retained the original dash layout, while the US-spec M1s received modified dashes with the 1.8s and their dual air bags. And his car felt really tight, like a brand-new car. Later I would confirm this behind the wheel.

I know what my 8-year old R-Package feels like. Makoto’s car was like from a time warp. Aha, that must be the positive side of Japan’s draconian car re-inspection regime that requires older cars to be virtually rebuilt every three years. By now an M1 owner in Japan is, by definition, a committed enthusiast.

Next was a brief stop for gasoline, and a sharp intake of breath. At about \$4/gal, a day’s outing in even a Roadster is not undertaken lightly. Then it was off on a longer spell of driving, still through a mostly urban environment. After less than an hour came a rest stop at what looked like a Japanese version of a 7/11 (actually, the 7/11 was across the street).

At this stop, another moment of ceremony occurred (this is Japan). I was given the opportunity of selecting a numbered KRC cloisonné medallion from a data sheet of numbers. Hmm – some of the single digit numbers were still available; but I could see that some of the prominent Japanese “fathers of the Miata” had chosen rather high numbers. Mustn’t commit a faux pas. I decided to pick my age, which number was fortunately available, and was presented with the colorful 42-mm diameter medallion (OK, it was number 057).

From here we headed due north, up the Noto Peninsula. For a while we were on a toll road (sort of like driving the 1960s-era Garden State Parkway in NJ, except at each tollbooth you hand out the equivalent of a \$20 bill instead of a quarter). Then we were off onto winding two lane roads, like driving through a Zen scroll painting, with sugar loaf mountains coming right down to the sea. Up into the trees, down to the ocean, up trees, down ocean. Oh, my! Oh, Noto! What gorgeous countryside!

Lunch break was at a restaurant right by the sea at Wajima. But first there was a tour of the Kiriko Museum right next door. The Kiriko are faceted lanterns, carried on immense portable shrines. We are talking about giants, up to 15 meters tall, up to 2 tons in weight, carried in festival processions by several

score men (not unknown to be well-lubricated internally). You have to be committed to carry the Kiriko. Without understanding the Kiriko, you can not understand the Miata.

After lunch was another bit of ceremony: I had the honor of signing the KRC club banner. Probably the only bit of South Carolina graffiti that banner will ever collect.

Space does not allow the recounting of all my copilot experiences that day (OK, my memory is not what it used to be), but two stick in my mind. One was with Haruhiko Sugimoto and his 1989-built red, totally stock, original Roadster. He radiated that special pride of the young owner (well, by this point they are all young to me) in his first Roadster, a red Roadster. Remarkably enough, by being so original, his car was as special as those that had been significantly customized by their owners.

Haruhiko was very interested in how Americans related to their Miatas. More to the point, red Miatas. You see, in Japan, a red sports car is considered a little bit over the top. That person is having a little bit too much fun in life, is straying a little bit outside the social consensus. What an interesting cultural perspective.

The other memorable ride was with Osamu Nakayachi in his heavily modified 1993-built 1.8 liter. Before I got in, Osamu transferred his hardtop (his car was minus the entire soft-top apparatus) to one of the other cars so that we could ride alfresco. Osamu's car was very interesting: the windshield surround was painted gloss black to match the hard-top; the car carried a roll-over bar and chromed mirrors, custom wheels, customized instruments, lightweight racing buckets. He has done a good bit of seat time with a helmet on. But even more interesting was Osamu himself.

Osamu was the Route Master for this day. At one rest stop, I looked over his shoulder as he reviewed the route notes for the other drivers: the instructions were down to 15-minute intervals. Of course, by the middle of the tour, the schedule was totally blown, but it was a valiant effort.

Osamu was also the philosopher of the group, and during the course of my "talking ride" with him, I started to appreciate how shallow my understanding of the Miata had been, even after 8 years of ownership. And how only by riding in an MX-5 on the Noto Peninsula could true understanding be achieved.

You see, the original concept of the Roadster was developed by Toshihiko Hirai, the first product program manager for the car, while he was with Mazda in Kanazawa in 1981/82. The idea came to him while he was thinking deeply and shoveling snow. The backdrop for the concept was the roads of the Noto Peninsula - up into the trees, down to the ocean, up trees, down ocean. Oh, my! In a real sense, Kanazawa was the birthplace of the Miata.

As Osamu was explaining this, I was thinking – awwww, just a bit of local chauvinism. But the roads of Noto kept intruding. The twisting up and down - the ocean, the trees, the ocean. The premium on sharp turn-in, cornering feel, lightness of control. The irrelevance of brute horsepower. In each of my half-dozen rides, I kept watching the driver carefully. After a while, I DID come to see "jinba ittai", oneness between rider and horse, arise naturally. This oneness is the only way to travel through the Noto Peninsula.

OK, I know all the "explanations" about the Miata. That it is merely an extremely good execution of the

classical British sports car concept. As a Britcar nut of the first water (I've owned two 1960s-era Lotus confections), I had always thought that sounded plausible. I now realize that is total nonsense. In all that the Japanese do, including sports car design, they proceed with "a fullness of intent". No halfway measures. Ever. For all those cranky (but beloved) British cars, this is a totally alien concept.

And I have read about the depth of US involvement in the design of the Miata through the Mazda Southern California design studio. That is so. (What do they say, that failure is an orphan but success has many fathers?) But at its core, at the level of the concept and the execution of that concept, the MX-5 Miata/Roadster is a totally Japanese car.

At its core, the Roadster concept is as spare as a Haiku poem. As Haiku could have arisen in no other culture, so the Roadster could have arisen from nowhere else other than on the roads of the Noto Peninsula.

You may think all this to be clap trap. And I would be the first to acknowledge (repeat after me) that the older I get, the less I know. But still, in the months thereafter that I have been at home, commuting in my daily driver R-Package, I have become utterly convinced that the Noto Peninsula is in the DNA of my Miata.

Anyway, back to that day in Noto. Eventually we wound back south through the Peninsula, back towards Kanazawa. Takeshi Mouri, Yoichi Sakaguchi, and Kazutaka Hirano all provided rides in their objects of pride. Motoki Inami and Miyuki Nakamura, the young (aren't they all) engaged couple were not about to separated for this old dude (but they did carry Osamu's hardtop when I rode with him). All were simply incredibly kind to a stranger.

Dusk was approaching. The KRC had one last treat for me – on the beach. The "Chiri Beach Nagisa Drive" has to be right at the top of any car nut's Must Do List when visiting Japan. Miles of hard packed sand upon which you can legally drive, right alongside the (gentle) surf. Combine that with a technicolored, wispy clouded sunset, and the setting becomes surreal. Where Japan is known as the Land of the Rising Sun, Kanazawa on the West Coast IS the land of the setting sun.

Makoto handed me the keys to his white, blue-striped prize and said: why don't you drive it up and down the beach, solo? He didn't have to ask twice. What a treat! To drive an MX-5 on its home turf (oops, sand). I then continued RHDiving when the column of Roadsters re-formed and drove en masse down the beach to where the paved highway began. At this point I painfully surrendered the keys, and we continued into downtown Kanazawa. The entire KRC entourage delivered me near Masumi's home, where we bid fond farewells in now-total darkness. There I joined Lois with Masumi's extended family for a hilarious, multi-course extravaganza of Japanese cuisine, where sake overcame all language problems (but that is another story).

The entire day was an exercise in over-the-top Japanese hospitality, which turns out to be the norm. Nowhere else (and I have been around the block) is the foreign visitor met with such friendliness, interest, and intensity (remember, fullness of intent!). And when all that is combined with a mutual interest like the Miata, the experience is indeed powerful.

In closing – one last piece of insight gained on the Noto Peninsula. Osamu carefully explained to me (while sliding through a series of esses), that the Miata is like a Japanese Noh mask. In classic Noh

drama, each character holds a carved wooden mask. Depending on the tilt with which the mask is held, the mask shows happiness, horror, violence, concern, love, disgust. The wood changes, but it is all the same mask. The actor becomes the mask, and the mask the actor. The same MX-5 is Japanese, American, French, British, ... Somewhere, I am sure there is even a Bulgarian Miata. And that is because Noto is a universal mask.

If any of this piques your interest, you will have a chance this Fall to discover your own Miata's roots. The KRC is organizing an International Meet for October 24-26, 2003, which includes, yessss, a driving tour of the Noto Peninsula, plus a seminar with Hirai-san. I suspect that I was the guinea pig for this tour. And that was the happiest accident of all. You can find further information on the Meet's website: <http://www.incl.ne.jp/~nakayati/cwoc/>.

Visit our newest sponsor!

We're very proud to announce the addition of our newest CAR club sponsor, MiataNuts. You may have already purchased something from them, or have checked out their site, but now's there's an even better reason to stop by: discounts to club members!

Here's what they're offering:

- 10% OFF ALL Jackson Racing Products
- 1/2 PRICE SHIPPING ON HARD DOG ROLL BARS (savings of between \$25 & \$32.50/ bar)
- 20% OFF All Apparel (polos, tees, fleece pullovers, vests, jackets)

They also still may have a set or two of Fidanza adjustable cam gears that they're offering exclusively to CAR club members for \$200/set. List price is \$340/set.

If there is something else that you may be interested in, contact them about that specific item and they'll work with you the best they can. They even sell BMW and MINI parts too!

So stop by their site at <http://www.miatanuts.com>, click the web banner at the top of the CAR forum, or call them toll-free at 866-642-8268.

Shop at the 'Parts Department'!

We got t-shirts. We got mugs. We got BBQ aprons (hey, our BBQ's are nearly as famous as our tech days). And they all have the CAR logo emblazoned on them. They're affordable, make great gifts and all proceeds go towards the CAR club and future activities. Check out the online site at <http://www.cafeshops.com/chesroadsters>.

Cure Writer's Block!

Have you just completed a cool project on your Miata that you want to share with other club members? Did you attend an event that moved you so much you want to write an article about it? Find a new road that seems like it was engineered *just for* Miatas? Got an idea for a future event or article? Then drop us a line and we'll put it in next month's issue. Deadline for submissions is August 25th. All submissions can be sent to Christian LeHew at hotroddesigner@hotmail.com.

Playin' with the neighbor's kids

The idea has been brought up to see about doing an event or two with another car club. Not necessarily

another Miata club, but perhaps a Triumph club, Jaguar club, etc. We've made a few contacts with a local British car club from the Baltimore area, as well as to the local Honda S2000 club. As you can probably assume, there are quite a few car clubs in the area, so if you're a member of one, know someone who is, or just think of one that would be cool to spend the day with (I'm leaning towards Ferrari, myself!), then feel free to drop us a line with the contact info, and we'll take it from there.

Check your mailbox...

If you have been to a recent event, you may have already received a window decal. If you haven't, don't worry, we're having more printed up. We'll also be issuing official CAR club membership cards for discounts at area vendors or for making cool motorcycle sounds in the spokes of your bicycle. Due to some production issues, we got a little behind schedule on them, but rest assured, it's all on the way. If you have questions regarding your membership packages, please drop a line to the club Secretary and membership coordinator, Elaine Farrell, at silvermiata@comcast.net.

Wanna go racing?

If you've gone to any autocrossing events this year, you've probably heard one of us (or someone else) griping about the lack of racing sites in the area. "So what can I do?" Glad you asked.

The autocross community is always on the lookout for new venues where we can race. In a perfect world, they'd be smooth, flat, free of traffic islands, and about 20 miles away from a residential area. Event coordinators realize not all these parameters can always be met, but there's been a recent plea to the community to help find some new sites where we can go racing. Maybe it's the parking lot at work. Or a big school parking lot. Or your friend's airfield.

So if you know of an area that you think might be a possibility, PLEASE let one of us know, and we'll have one of the local officials check it out.

Past Events & Happenings

Crabs or Cones Weekend – July 20th

With great weather on our side, five of us (with SEMX5 meeting up with us there) headed across the Chesapeake for the annual Crab Run with the Del Val, PACE, & MDMC Miata clubs at The Waterman's in Rock Hall, MD. In all, nearly 70 Miatas showed for the event, with nearly every model represented. And as if the makeshift Miata show in the parking lot wasn't great enough, I was told the crabs were even better. (Not being much of a crab aficionado myself, I will vouch that the pulled pork BBQ sandwich was excellent.)

Meanwhile, a group of our die-hard autocrossers headed to the SCCA event at FedEx Field in DC to defend points, tear up the track, and race for class wins in CS, CSP, and SM2. I know there was a couple newbies, but by the time of this writing, I think they've been successfully hooked, and are now approaching professional status. I have a feeling Nationals will be on the list next year!

Photos (and movies!) can be seen in the Past Events section on the main CAR site.

Mazda Rev It Up competition/expo - July 25-27th

Please read this month's *The President's Post* for coverage of this great event.

Upcoming Events

Please RSVP if indicated. For full details, check out the Events section of the CAR forum at <http://www.chesapeakeroadsters.com>. If you have an idea for a future event, please drop a line to our Events Coordinator Christian LeHew at hotroddesigner@hotmail.com.

- August 16th – Scenic drive to Frederick Air Show - Frederick, MD
- August 2003 - Tech day (date pending) - Fort Washington, MD
- August/September 2003 - Mazda RX8 launch party/Miata show at Rich Morton Mazda (date pending) - Pasadena, MD
- September 20th – Charity Car Show – Bowie, MD
- September 2003 - Tech day (date pending) - Crownsville, MD
- October 2003 - Scenic drive/tour to Linganore Winery & Vineyard - Mt. Airy, MD