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“What am I doing here?” I asked myself as I stepped off the O’Hare-Rockford bus into the clear sunlight of beautiful downtown Rockford, Illinois. For one thing, I really didn’t have the day to spare. For another, I’d succeeded in avoiding Blackhawk Farms Raceway since the last 1972 National there.

But the editor wanted a Dulon test and this was the only day and track available, so there I was.

Motorsport president Joe Harris’ pretty wife Patti met me at the bus stop and off we went to see if nasty old Blackhawk still had my number. Harris and crew and CenDiv drivers Gary Hackbarth and Dick Pyzinski were already there, working out the shiny new MP19 and Pyzinski’s MP17 (newly converted to MP19 specs). CenDiv leadfoot Tony Kester drove in behind us, anxious to try out the new car.

Hackbarth, the current CenDiv points leader, was out in the new Dulon as I pulled on my suit and socks. “It sure stops in a hurry,” said he on returning to the pits. “It’s got good handling and it’s easier to get used to than the Lola.” You may recall that Hackbarth has driven a Lola to his current esteemed standing.

But he didn’t care for the top-hinged gas pedal, he added, and was experiencing some problems because the car was set up for a taller driver. He also mentioned some oversteer (“controllable”) in right-hand turns and some front-end traction problems in left turns.

Since our test took place during the darkest depths of the tire strike, much of the traction trouble was directly traceable to a pretty sorry set of skins, which looked to be about as fresh as the famous Blackhawk Farms silo. Harris also pointed out that the car was newly assembled and had not yet been “dialed in”. These factors, combined with too-tall gears and the somewhat deteriorated condition of the track itself, made Hackbarth’s 1:18 times look pretty good.

Kester then tried some laps and got quickly into the ‘18s, then into the ‘17s as the poor old tires scratched for traction. He reported that the back end was looser than he liked but it otherwise felt very good.

Then it was my turn and I quickly found that my feet were too long to work the gas pedal. It’s pivoted on top to allow

easy heel-and-toeing, but a big foot will end up pushing on the area just below the pivot, which is not conducive to getting much useful movement. The cable also seemed to be binding a bit, compounding the problem.

I also discovered I had forgotten which way the course went in the four years since I had been there and that the car’s looseness (front and rear) was worse than anything I had ever experienced short of ice racing. It looked like old Blackhawk was after me again.

But Harris and mechanic George Cichon made some adjustments and I tried again, circulating at a rather pitiful 1:22.

Meanwhile, we had been joined by some other drivers. Rick Prather tried the car and reported that it felt “dartier” than his Titan, but that it reacted quicker to steering inputs. Kester recommended a sway bar adjustment, since the front seemed to have more bite than the rear.

Pyzinski then brought his own car in and decided to put it away since the engine was tired and seemed to be threatening self-destruction. This prompted a gear switch from his car to the MP19 so we would have the proper Blackhawk ratios in the test machine. We also switched some tires around, but they were all so worn that it didn’t make a whole lot of difference.

John Berget tried the car and came back smiling: “Love the brakes,” he said. “Fantastic! But it is too loose; there’s way too much oversteer.” Hackbarth, who likes his car loose, went out again with the new gear ratios and got down to a 1:17 flat. “Love the handling,” he enthused, “but the oversteer is a bit too much.”

I got a second turn and couldn’t get below 1:20. No excuses, except unfamiliarity with the track — and I’m not used to skating around on worn-out tires. Unfortunately, no amount of sway bar fiddling could dial out the effect of the fast-fading rubber and when the air started showing through on the rears, our test was over.

“The main difference between the MP19 and the 17,” he explained, “is that the new car has a six-inch narrower rear track and a four-inch narrower front track, which clears up the understeer problems we’ve had in the past. The chassis is the same as the successful European Dulon FF 2000, meaning it was designed around racing slicks instead of the radial street tires used in European Formula Ford competition. That will definitely benefit us here in the States.”

Harris continued, “I think the car has two really strong points . . . the brakes

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A Track Test DULON

By Gary Witzenburg

MP19

and the frame. The frame is very strong, similar to the Crossle and the Merlyn. It's also very easy to work on and the factory workmanship is excellent... chassis welds, fiberglass and everything else. We haven't had any aluminum tanks spring a leak, or any other quality-related problems."

Technically the new Dulon is fairly conventional in layout, with unequal A-arm front suspension and trailing-arm rear geometry on Bilstein coil-over gas shocks. It's fully adjustable and the pieces are nickel and cadmium plated. The chassis has both square and round tubes, looking impressive and substantial in stove grey enamel. The high-ratio steering rack is alloy cased, and the column is adjustable for rake as well as fore-and-aft.

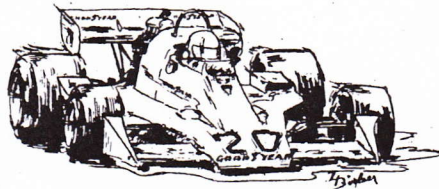
Rear uprights are magnesium, with tapered roller bearings, and brakes are lightweight Lockheed inboard units on the Hewland MK9 in back and large Girlings in front. The pedal assembly is fully adjustable, there's sufficient room for size 12s and the top-pivoted throttle works fine when properly adjusted for the driver's foot size.

Dimensionally, the MP19 measures 131.5" (nose to transmission) on a 90.5" wheelbase, has a 50.5" front and a 52.5" rear track, and stands just 34.5" high at the top of the roll bar. Widths are 61" overall, 23.5" across the cockpit, and either 23.5" or 37.4" at the nose, depending on

which nose-piece you prefer. The body is color impregnated fiberglass in six parts, including a cold-air ram intake scoop and both wide and narrow nose sections, and it's available in 12 standard colors. The fuel tank holds six gallons, while oil and water capacities are five quarts and 2.5 gallons respectively. With all options the car weighs in at 861 pounds.

Because of the chassis strength, front radiator and super brakes, it reminded me of both the Zink and the Winkelmann we tested earlier this year. It doesn't have the Zink's aerodynamic inboard front shocks — but it does have angled front A-arms for anti-dive under braking, which the Zink does not. As an example of serviceability, Harris says the clutch can be changed without removing the engine, and the engine and transmission lift out when necessary.

Price of the MP19 is \$7995 race ready, while a roller goes for \$6595. ○



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