

2018 SSCC a Winner

Written by Administrator

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The 2018 running of the Silver State Classic Challenge (SSCC) is in the history books with four Panteras participating and two finishing, one with a second-place trophy in the 120 MPH class. Despite hardships encountered by all Pantera drivers, the event was still a great time to get together and bask in the glow of Pantera ownership, camaraderie and serious racing. Mark Skwarek, Gerry Romack, John Bentley and Dennis Antenucci all brought their Panteras to run in this year's race, and each has a story to take home.



Mark Skwarek travels the longest distance of any Pantera racer, all the way from Connecticut. To prepare for this year's race, Mark had his engine removed to find cracked pistons, broken rocker arms, broken lifter links and other smaller issues. After having his engine builder sort it all out, he came to SSCC to take on the 160 MPH class in his Orange and Black Pantera. Mark has participated in many Sandhills Open Road Challenge (SORC) races and sports a personalized license plate with "SORC" on it. The Tech inspectors at SSCC were hesitant to let him pass tech unless he took the license plate off, but eventually let him through, in a bit of competitive ribbing. Mark was pretty much ensured a trophy since there were only three cars in his class. Unfortunately, Mark noticed problems with how the engine was running at speed, apparently from a fuel problem and he decided to terminate his run at about 25 miles into the course. After the race was over, he drove the Pantera toward the finish line at the posted speed limit without issues and met up with Peter Menyhart who was driving Mark's trailer to pick him

up. Disappointed in the early withdrawal from the race, Mark is nonetheless excited to come back and make the challenge again.

Gerry Romack, the current President of the Pantera Owners Club of America is the Pantera driver with the second longest distance driven, hailing from Illinois. For this year's race, Gerry worked on repairs to his brake system along with some engine changes for smoother operation on the street without sacrificing much on the top end. He also added a new set of 5-point racing harnesses so he could enter the 120 MPH class. Everything was going Gerry's way until he got to the start line, where the green flag was waved and immediately got the red flag in a burst of steam from the radiator. In his later forensic analysis, Gerry found the fan controller appeared to have failed, leading to excessive heat build-up in the cooling system, which let go at the start line.

Since Gerry's trailer was at the finish line, he found a ride on an empty trailer belonging to one of the unlimited drivers. They brought his car to the finish where it was transferred to his trailer. Later at the SSCC banquet, Gerry was honored with the SSCC Hard Luck award, a bit to his embarrassment, but it showed the determination of open road racers to prepare and get to the start line, even if they don't manage to finish. The team would like to encourage Gerry to keep the faith and perhaps come back next year to challenge the 120 MPH class for a trophy.

Dennis Antenucci used his off-season time to have his engine completely checked-out, the fuel injection system re-tuned, new harnesses put in, completely new brake system installed, and get a fender fixed. The fender incident occurred when his Pantera was being offloaded from its trailer just a few weeks prior to the race. Undaunted as he always is, the Mad Dog in him simply scheduled time with his bodyman to do a quick repair making the Pantera look whole, with a post-SSCC follow-up appointment to smooth it all out properly along with a repaint. In year's past, the oil pressure and temperature in Dennis' Pantera had been running right where he wants it, but in the race just prior, he felt it was running too hot. With the help of David Adin and Asa Jay Laughton in person with Dennis' Pantera, and Russ Fulps (Dennis' engine builder) remotely via email, the team check the placement of the temperature sending unit as well as the oil pressure unit. All seemed fine.

During the race this year, Dennis noted the temperatures ran between 220 and 230 the entire time, with the occasional peak near 240 at higher speeds. This range was comfortable to Dennis and allowed him to finish the race fastest in his class again this year. His Pantera ran beautifully for the race, unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for his trailer, which blew a hub on the way from Ely to the finish line. With the help of other racers, Dennis was able to limp the trailer to Las Vegas where repairs we made Monday afternoon prior to heading home. Despite

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that expensive setback, Dennis had a great time at SSCC this year and will of course be encouraging others to again come next year. He may also show up for the Nevada Open Road Challenge (NORC) in May, which has been turned into a two-way race. It's Dennis' fiery brand of leadership that keeps Panteras coming to this event year after year. Soon, the Pantera will be one of few brands older than 45 years old showing up to these races, turning heads, and making waves.

In 2014, John Bentley experienced an on-course loss of oil pressure and exceeding high oil temps that forced him to terminate his run about 30 miles in. From that moment, he dedicated himself to finding a new 351C engine block and building a new and stronger engine. He nearly made the 2017 race until a broken stud prevented him from replacing the starter just a week prior. John took that opportunity to use the next year to double-check, re-tune and get his Pantera as ready as possible for the SSCC race in 2018. As the team anxiously waited for his arrival in Ely, John experienced a flat tire on his trailer coming in. After quickly changing to a spare, he met up with the team just a little later than expected. John later had the tire replaced in Ely, giving him two spare tires for the return home. Come race day, John was the star as the team later found he had managed to take second place in the 120 MPH class with a time variance of 0.4318 seconds.

Unfortunately, John wasn't at the awards banquet in Las Vegas, electing to drive back to Ely, load his trailer and drive home to be back to work on Monday. In a "double-unfortunately" bit of bad luck, John would need those two spare trailer tires. Somewhere outside of Ely on his way home at about 2 pm, John's borrowed trailer had it's second flat tire of the trip. He quickly changed out one of the spares and was back on the road. Later that same night, still on the road home, the trailer blew tire number three for the trip at about 10 pm. This used up the final spare tire he had available. After changing it out, John made it safely home. Dennis will deliver the second-place Trophy to John the next time he sees him.

The team would also like to recognize Paul Katchadourian who again offered a level of sponsorship to Team Pantera Racing, as well as taking part racing his own Viper and coming in fastest in his class. Also in attendance this year was Laure Basile who acted as a team photographer throughout the event and posted many of them to various forums or facebook pages. The team extends its thanks to Laurie for helping spread the word about Panteras in open road race events. David Adin also came over from Durango to lend his experience, assistance and take photos of the team at the start line of the race. Peter Menyhart came as usual to lend an experienced hand and let the team know he's shooting to have his Pantera ready for next year; he's closer than ever.

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All Pantera drivers put out an extraordinary effort to make the SSCC race this year, especially Mark and Gerry for travelling the longest distance only to come short of finishing the race. The extraordinary trailer failures experienced by both John and Dennis are also hurdles that had to be overcome both to get to the race and to get home. In terms of time spent, efforts expended, and obstacles overcome, each of these drivers exemplified the spirit of the Iron Man in open road racing and are deserving of Team Pantera Racing's highest honor.

