

The Evolution of the NEQ

As the original owner of my 1986 Audi 4000CS Quattro, I was receiving the occasional modest newsletter entitled "The Quattro Quarterly". Each issue featured stories about members and their beloved Audis sharing adventures including track events at Brainerd International raceway. "Wow!" I thought, "this sounds like too much fun to be legal!" Alas, as I savored the tales of these adventures I also wistfully realized that traveling halfway across the U.S. to attend one of these Audi love fests just wasn't feasible for me.

Then the day arrived when I received my Quattro Quarterly where lo and behold there was a front page article (written by Bill Bremner who currently maintains the Ur-quattro Registry) inquiring if anyone was interested in attending an event on the East Coast -- at Lime Rock Park in fact, practically in my backyard! I wasted no time in sending him a postcard with my simple 3 word answer - "YES, YES, YES!" Bill still says that this postcard was a great encouragement for him to proceed with the first Audi event at LRP in 1991.

That first event was a great success with the crew from Minnesota running the event and instructing. There was a fairly loose schedule, and students were not assigned to an instructor - if you wanted or needed one you had to grab someone - sort of like filling your dance card. Soloing was a matter of someone saying, "Yeah, you're OK to go alone - have fun". Funny as it sounds now, it worked very well and everyone had a good time.

After a few years it had become obvious that there were many dedicated enthusiastic people from the East Coast area. After working with National for a while, Steve Earley and Rick Williams decided that they could run an event more suited to the needs of the drivers in the Northeast and offer more support to would-be instructors. Steve approached some car enthusiasts and asked to "borrow" the down payment for Lime Rock Park. Gary Palumbo and Bill Bremner joined Steve in the venture. Steve then applied to become a chapter of the Quattro Club USA. Glenn Lawton, Art Mayhew, Gary Palumbo, Dave Rhineland, Thompson Smith, Art Sobel, Wendy Bellavance, Greg Haymann were among the 22 original signers of the petition and it was accepted by the executive secretary of The Audi Club of America, Karen Chadwick.

The next big step was organizing a driving school at Watkins Glen, N.Y. Art Mayhew and Steve started this event with Art Mayhew as the sponsor. The following winter the NEQ sponsored its first winter driving school at the Franconia, N.H. Airport with the help of the world renowned rally driver Tim O'Neill. The winter school started in a field but with the support of the NEQ pre-signing contracts for upcoming winter schools, Tim was able to get bank financing and purchase his current site which has evolved into a rally school on a par with the best in the U.S.

To handle the expansion of the driving events, the NEQ purchased a trailer to transport helmets, exercise equipment,

paperwork. This was made possible through the efforts of Mike Caleo, Gary Palumbo and Art Mayhew. The club continued to expand its offerings through Steve's contacts with the New York and Patroon Chapters of BMW. The NEQ co-sponsored the first Mt. Tremblant event in 2000. This led to Alan Bellavance taking the reins and master-minding the first full-fledged NEQ/Quebec BMW event at Mt. Tremblant in 2001. Alan continues to expand club offerings at Mt. Tremblant leading directly to the current National event being held here this weekend.

To keep the membership informed, Tom Ciesla started the first *Gripster* followed by the editorship of Thompson Smith and Jim Trevitt. The club website started at about the same time under the stewardship of webmaster Mike Claco. During all of this expansion the NEQ also hosted social events at the Mt. Washington Hill Climb facilitated by Paul Royal.

Currently the season at NEQ includes track events at NHIS, Lime Rock Park, Watkins Glen I and II, 2 winter driving schools, Mt. Tremblant National Event, LRP Memorial Day (Mike Caleo), and the Ralph Laren exhibit (Rachel Fath).

One unique feature of the NEQ driving schools is the quality of the instructors. This has been made possible by annual instructor training sessions. These included such instructors as Rick Pocock, Larry Boyer, Bob Greene and Derek Hanson.

Another strong feature of the NEQ events is the mandatory classroom instruction for all participants. These sessions focus on the idiosyncrasies of each individual track as well as the physics of car control. Classroom instruction is led by Steve Earley with assistance from Tom Ciesla, Glenn Lawton, Mike Collier, Bonnie Royal, Alan Bellavance and Giovanni Tomasi.

The instructor training procedure has evolved into a formal apprenticeship overseen by the instructor evaluation committee headed by Alan Bellavance.

The Audi Club of America continues to support the growth of the NEQ chapter by offering financial support for the National Event as well as urging many of the "original" movers and shakers of the organization to attend the National Event. The NEQ is appreciative of the support of Karen Chadwick, Keith, Susan and Kent Anderson, Craig Leichty and Larry Boyer.

Wendy Bellavance (with background
information provided by Clare Earley)