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2004 ONE LAP OF AMERICA: ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

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(continued)

On a racetrack, particularly a tight, technical layout such as Hallett, the Benz isn't happy. A set of Pirelli P Zero Rossos gave us a useful increase in grip over the standard rubber, but even so, understeer is at industrial-strength levels. Even at horsepower-friendly Road America, we couldn't quite match the pace of the Roy Hopkins/Adrienne Hughes/Nancy Becker BMW M5, which scored its second Luxury Sedan win (10th overall) in three years. We finished 18th overall, and if we were called on to make another run to Sonoma tomorrow, the E55 would still be our choice.



One Lap invariably produces press-on-regardless stories, and 2004 was no exception. Besides the hot-rod Lincoln caper (see sidebar), there were a couple other appealing sagas. For example, when Howard LaFever's 1995 Chevy Impala SS developed axle-bearing problems in Topeka, the veteran Lap Dog browsed the local used-car lots and bought an older BMW 325i for \$2700. The Impala went to a local repair shop while LaFever and company set sail for Pikes Peak. They were reunited with their rejuvenated Chevy five days later at Hallett, about the time the bargain Bimmer began its death rattle.

Similarly, when the gearbox packed up in Michael Sokalsky's 1987 Mercedes 190E 2.3-16 on the first day, the New Jersey Lap Puppy had the old Benz towed to a dealer and then rented a Mercury Mountaineer on an unlimited mileage rate to finish up the event. He'll be back, he says.



According to an informal survey conducted by veteran Lapper Linda Cheatham, the '04 One Lap teams spent at least \$60,000 on parts and repairs and thinned the wildlife population to the tune of six birds, one squirrel, one armadillo, eleven rabbits, three possums, and one deer.

Fuel price and economy were also popular topics this year. The highest price reported by any team was \$2.96 a gallon for unleaded premium somewhere in California. We recorded an

average price of \$2.17 per gallon over the 6554 miles we traveled in the Benz. We burned almost 373 gallons, just over \$808, and our average consumption was 18 mpg, which was respectable, considering some of our transit velocities.



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Of the 82 official entrants, 71 were on hand to run the final skidpad event.

Next year . . . well, according to Drew Wikstrom, the Fairfield County Motorsport Porsche savant who co-drove with DaVia, the winning team "will be back next year to defend the title." Beyond that, we'll just have to wait and see.

For complete results, go to www.onelapofamerica.com.

7th Place — 2004 Dodge Ram SRT-10

A stock Ram SRT-10 is far from ordinary, but this one is a little more extraordinary than the ones in the showrooms. Campaigned by DaimlerChrysler engineers Erich Heuschele (right) and Marc Musial, the extra-bad Ram has extra punch—550 horsepower, 575 pound-feet of torque—thanks to a Viper Competition coupe cam, equal-length exhaust headers, a Ram diesel muffler and airbox, and no catalytic converter. This added up to a 13.571-second quarter-mile run, 19th quickest in the field. The front coil springs were trimmed to reduce ride height by an inch, lowering blocks got the rear end down two inches, the front anti-roll bar is a hefty 35mm, there are double-adjustable Bilstein shocks all around, and the 12.0-by-20-inch BBS wheels wear 345/25 Pirelli P Zero Rosso tires. The high-tech g-meter displayed here was designed and fabricated by Musial. He calls it Dale, for NASCAR veteran Dale Jarrett. Jarrett does not drive a Dodge.



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