

Post-Standard, The (Syracuse, NY)

May 14, 2006

Section: Auto

Edition: Final

Page: G1

GENTLEMEN, START YOUR HYBRIDS! THE SECOND ANNUAL GREEN GRAND PRIX WILL TRAVEL AROUND SENECA LAKE.

Kenn Peters Staff writer

While 200 mph open-wheel race cars are getting in their final practices for the Indy Grand Prix at Watkins Glen, another kind of motor event will be taking place nearby, but at much slower speeds and with the use of far less fuel.

The fact that the second annual Green Grand Prix is being held at the same time as the Indy Racing League event at the race track is no coincidence. The organizers are hoping that the much larger, faster race will draw attention to the smaller, more socially conscious event. And don't get the idea that the Green Grand Prix, featuring hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles, is a protest of any sort. It's not.

The main organizer of the green event is Robert Gillespie, of Penn Yan, a racing fan since the age of 10 who's made a living over the years as an artist.

Much of his portfolio is devoted to scenes of historic race events at Watkins Glen International.

Gillespie's green event is a timed road rally 78 miles around Seneca Lake, through the city of Geneva and the village of Ovid.

"The course represents a combination of highway and city driving. At the end we will get the real miles per gallon averages of some of these cars," he said.

The course will be driven at or below the posted speed limits.

Gillespie's focus is on hybrids and alternative fuel vehicles that will run the event.

Hybrids are well known, but not everybody knows about the AFVs that run on fuels such as ethanol, bio-diesel or compressed natural gas.

Some of the cars will be the so-called "greasers," those that are diesels converted to burn used vegetable oil.

Gillespie doesn't just talk the talk when it comes to high-mileage and alternative fuel vehicles. Gillespie drives a hybrid car that he said gets good mileage, is comfortable and trouble free.

His event, which he believes will attract up to 40 vehicles, is believed to be the first of its kind in the United States.

"This is to bring people together in a setting where they can ask questions about the ways in which personal transportation is changing," he said.

Most of the questions and answers will be exchanged at the International Motor Racing Research Center, in Watkins Glen, following the road rally.

Many experts in the field of hybrids and AFVs will attend the session to explore the issue and talk about the future of transportation.

One of the participants will be Craig Van Batenburg, an expert in hybrid vehicles, and another will be a representative of the Ethanol Promotion and Information Council, Gillespie said.

There also will be a representative of the Indy Racing League on hand.

"Next year, IRL cars will burn 100 percent ethanol, so this is a nice match for them," Gillespie said.

"The beauty of this event is that it brings a lot of experts together, plus we're inviting the public to come and ask questions," he said.

Gillespie said he and many others interested in the issue are trying to help people understand that the country must find alternatives for its energy needs.

They're also trying to make people understand hybrids and AFVs.

"There are a lot of misconceptions about these cars, and my hope is that by holding this event we can share information and show people what a tremendous alternative these vehicles offer," he said.

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Second annual Green Grand Prix

When: 9:30 a.m. June 2

Where: 78-mile course around Seneca Lake

Event: Timed road rally, requires driver, navigator

After: Panel discussion at International Motor Racing Research Center

When: 1-3 p.m.

More information: Robert Gillespie, 536-7185; or www.glenspeed.com; Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association, 781-4398 or 694-0662

Illustration: PHOTO

Courtesy of Robert Gillespie

THIS PAINTING depicting hybrid cars in a road rally at Watkins Glen International raceway is one of many paintings on the subject by Robert Gillespie, of Penn Yan.

MAP: Green Grand Prix route The Post-Standard.

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