

MULTI-TIME
Mike Davies holds four National Championship titles in Spec Racers, his last coming in 2004 (MAIN).

SPEC-TACULAR

From Renault to Ford, SCCA's Spec Racer program has become one of amateur racing's great success stories – a story that continues to this day

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The SCCA Spec Racer has been in competition since 1984, and it's been the basis of at least one National Championship racing class each year since 1985. Over 900 cars have been constructed in that time, making the Spec Racer the most widely used purpose-built racing platform in SCCA history.

The Spec Racer was introduced as the Sports Renault, and then transitioned to the Spec Racer name in 1989, still using the original 1.7-liter Renault engine. The Spec Racer Ford with its 1.9-liter Ford engine became a National class in 1993, and both SR and SRF crowned champions through 1996. After that year, the Renault engine was retired to Regional competition. But by the 25th anniversary of the Spec Racer, it was becoming clear that the class needed another new engine package.





Rupert Eberington

LONG TIME COMING

Longtime Spec Racer competitor Todd Harris collected his first SRF National Championship in 2016.

“The difference from the best to the worst [SRF Gen3 motor] is 1.8hp. That’s the whole premise”
MIKE DAVIES

That was also when Mike Davies went to work at SCCA Enterprises. Davies was a four-time National Champion in Sports Renault, Spec Racer, and Spec Racer Ford. As the new Technical Manager, he brought with him both technical expertise and a fierce commitment to the class.

“At the time I got hired, we were doing 150 to 170 of the 1.9-liter engines every year,” Davies recalls. “And we had three or four cylinder heads failing every month. They had been serviced so many times they were becoming unreliable.”

The Enterprises president at the time asked Davies to look for someone to fabricate replacement cylinder heads. “The heads were going to be

\$1,800 to \$2,000, so I said we should look at something else,” Davies remembers. “We needed a replacement.”

As it happened, fate smiled on the project and Davies happened to meet Mike Delahanty and Andy Slacker of Ford Performance at an SCCA event. “They’re great guys,” Davies declares. “Mike said that Ford had a new engine for the Fiesta that might be a good fit, and they sent me a sample. But I also went around to car dealerships with a tape measure and measured engines to try to figure out what engines would fit.”

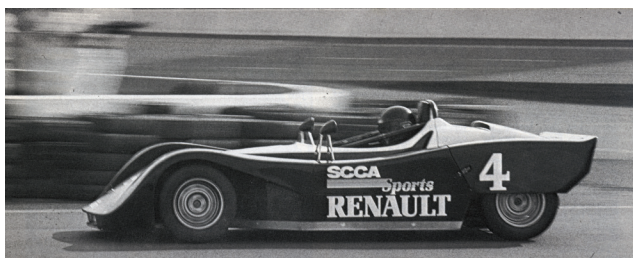
RACE ONE

The first Sports Renault race came in 1984 and featured a number of notable drivers, including then-SCCA President Nick Craw. The winner of the race was Dave Weitzenhof, courtesy of some fancy last lap maneuvers (some things never change).

When the sample engine arrived, Davies fabricated engine mounts and a transmission adapter and installed the Fiesta engine in a Spec Racer chassis to see if it had a hope of working. “It went slowly for about a year, as we asked the CSRs [Customer Service Representatives] if we should move to a new engine,” Davies relates. “Some said we should just fix the 1.9 if we could. But there were some who thought a new engine would be fun. So I worked on it as a side project and, after a while, I had all the pieces to make it run.”

About the time that Davies was ready to start the new engine for the first time, the Enterprises Board of Directors held a meeting at the shop and took a look at Davies’ work. “The very first time it ran was the last day of that Enterprises Board meeting,” Davies said. “We started the engine, ran some tests, and held it wide open at 6,000rpm for 30 to 40 minutes straight, literally moments after we first started it. We decided to see if it would hold up.”

The engine did hold up, better than Davies had expected. “It passed with flying colors,”



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ONE TO BEAT

Mike Miserendino collected four SRF National Championships in a row starting in 2006 (shown), and is still a front runner.

he recalls. "It didn't overheat, and the oil temp didn't go through the roof. So we knew this was really going to be a durable engine."

RESULTS MATTER

By the time the SRF3 kit was released, it had been tested and observed around the country, and drivers were excited about the extra performance and improved demeanor of the car.

"The R&D car program helped iron out most of the bugs before the kit was released to the public," says four-time SRF National Champion Mike Miserendino. "Enterprises, and mainly Mike

Davies, did such a good job of making sure everything was in place with the kit."

The sentiment is echoed from CSRs around the Club. "I was around for the SR-to-SRF conversion," says Mike O'Callaghan of Flat Out Racing. "I felt that one was a bit more difficult mechanically because engine mounts had to be cut out and new ones welded in, which isn't required this time. We have found the Gen3 conversion to be pretty straightforward and fairly easy."

From the Enterprises perspective, the new package is doing exactly what was needed.

"I think the last third-generation engine off the dyno was number 436 or 438," Davies estimates. "The difference from the best to the worst of them is 1.8hp. That's the whole premise of the Spec Racer; the fact that everyone has the same drivetrain to keep the competition as tight as possible."

COMPARING SRF TO SRF3

This year's SRF and SRF3 National Champions both weighed in with comments on the new third-generation Spec Racer compared to the prior package. "I started racing Spec Racer with a Renault back in

1993," says current SRF3 National Champion John Black. "I think Davies has done a great job, a hundred times better than the first conversion. The car feels the same but with a bit more power."

Todd Harris is the reigning National Champ in SRF, which is scheduled to make its final appearance at the National Championship Runoffs in Indianapolis later this year. Although he won the championship in SRF, he's a big fan of the new package.

"The balance is better, so it's easier and more fun to drive," Harris explains. "The rear end is

IN THE PRESS

(LEFT TO RIGHT) Spec Racers have dominated the cover of *SportsCar* many times, starting as early as January 1985. The first Sports Renault ad in *SportsCar* boasted a \$9,995 sale price. By 1987, Enterprises advertised chassis 489 had been sold. The March 1994 issue featured new Ford-powered SRFs. In 2004, SRF was as strong as ever at the Runoffs.





Rupert Eberington

CAN'T GET ENOUGH

2016 SRF Gen3 National Champion John Black (ABOVE) started racing in the class in 1993. (BELOW) At the 2017 Sebring Hoosier Super Tour, 70 Spec Racers took the green flag.

“The level of competition is what brought me to Spec Racer Ford. The...Gen3 has made it even better”

JOHN BLACK

lighter, so you can catch it easier and bring it back.”

One thing everyone agreed upon is that the new generation of SRF will draw more top drivers to the class. “If other drivers understood how well developed the SRF is, they’d be amazed,” Davies argues. “They’ve been around so long that every trick is well-known now. The front 10 at any event are very close, as well as other groups throughout the field.”

“A big draw was the quantity and ability of the drivers,” Black says. “The level of competition is what brought me to Spec Racer

Ford. The new Gen3 has made it even better.”

Harris sees the new package as an attractive option to bring new racers to SCCA. “I think the Gen3 is a much more viable alternative for a young go-karter looking for the next step,” he says.

For all his work to bring the SRF3 to fruition, Davies is far

from finished - but he’s happy with the results so far. “I wouldn’t say I’m finished with the tune, but it’s really good,” he admits. “We don’t break engines and they drive very well. I tell people that each one of these kits is my kid. I want to see them run properly. They’re not really mine, but as far as I’m concerned, they’re mine.”



Dave Green

A NEW TIRE

SRF and SRF3 both changed to a new tire in 2016, adopting the Hoosier brand for both dry and wet conditions. “Our class is looking for a tire that is durable, affordable, and forgiving to our broad range of driver ability,” John Black says.

“The Hoosier tire is definitely an upgrade,” Todd Harris believes. “The tire lasts longer, it’s faster, and you don’t have to put on a set of stickers to get a fast qualifying time. With the Hoosier, you have to run them a couple of sessions to get them worn in and really fast. The Hoosier at Mid-Ohio got faster with every lap in qualifying.”

That’s not just an opinion. Harris’ race results stand as proof. “I set the fast race lap and the SRF lap record at the Runoffs in the second to the last lap of the race,” he points out. “The Gen3 car and these tires have made us so much faster, and it’s just more fun to drive. It’s as simple as that.”