

# Pointless and the Shinyvette

“There really is a jihad for everything.” – Eric Rood

We brought the car home from Arse-Freeze with a damaged rear quarter, dodgy brakes, and a motor that was not sounding quite right. No problem, we had nearly three months to get everything taken care of before the Sears Pointless race. No problem.

Actual work started in the first week of January and was completed on the day of the race. It began with the usual post-race inspection and service (brakes, wheel bearings, fluids, cleaning, etc.) which showed an oily undercar and we had lost a header flange gasket, not a great combination. The gasket would be an easy fix. The oily mess, while fairly typical for us, has to be addressed, somehow. Besides that, one brake pad was very worn, beveled, and cracked. The only thing I could see that hinted at a cause was the rotation of the caliper piston so I rotated it to match the others. Hopefully that would take care of the problem because hell if I could find anything else that was wrong.

For the collision repair, Gil Wesson (Opel GT Source) offered us a



Gil Wesson (Opel GT Source) gave us a battered shell that had a good right-rear quarter.

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE

shell that had a good right rear quarter. The rest of the car was a mess, the victim of a botched repair made long ago in the car's history. Kurt and I borrowed Alan's trailer and went up to get it. The deal was we'd strip the car of all usable parts and bring them back to Gil. We could do what we wanted with the sheet metal.

A few days later we were back at Kurt's place with him sawzalling the roof off and me stripping the car of usable parts. We'd keep the windshield and doors and the chassis, but everything else went in boxes and buckets. The rear end, front suspension, and the remaining glass were set aside. Meanwhile, Kurt was sizing up what we had and where we needed to cut to get the sheet metal we needed. We decided to take everything from the left rear corner to the passenger side door. That would let us finally repair the damage from Buttonwillow.

At this point Eric Beckman, our newest team member, started coming by to help. It was nice to have another helping hand and Eric's wealth of knowledge in design and fabrication was a big plus. Together we cut the rest of the donor car into smaller pieces, tossed them onto the trailer, and hauled it all off as scrap. That was kind of fun, but it also felt a bit criminal, like Opel murder. It felt bad. A few days later I took the doors and glass to my place and the rest of the parts back to Gil's place in Tuolumne.

Cutting into the Tinyvette felt really weird, like doing surgery on



Cutting up an Opel GT felt so wrong, but restoring the Tinyvette to its former glory felt so very right.



## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE



Using various clamps and timber we were able to straighten the rear beam.

one of your own kids, not that I've ever performed surgery, or had kids. Anyway, removing the outer skin involved drilling out spot welds and carefully cutting the sheet metal. Most of the rear section was riveted on, obviously a cheap repair, not original. This car has some history, that's for sure. By the time we were done one-third of the shell would not be original.



It's mid-January here and we are preparing to graft on the donor cars sheet metal.

## TEAM TINYVETTE



The rear beam was bent. Using some boards and big clamps we straightened that.

The end of the right side frame tube was both crushed and rotten and Kurt took care of that by cutting out the bad stuff and welding in some good stuff. The tow hook was reinforced at this time.

Eric and Kurt are cleaning up after installing the new sheet metal. Besides the right-rear, most other dents and insults that had accumulated over the car's long history were taken care of.

After a week the cutting, grinding, and welding the transplant was done. It was now time for bondo, and while we were doing that Kurt took care of a lot of other accumulated damage. In some places it involved just a little hammer and dolly work, on others it was a cave-and-pave operation. When he was done forty years of accumulated street damage and another seven years of race damage had been erased.

It was late January now and it was time for paint. But it was also cold and wet and it would take days before the Rust-Oleum primer



would be ready for a re-coat. Kurt mentioned that he had primer/sealer left over from the Funky Truck project and that it hardens in under an hour, plus it could be sanded. So that's what we did, several times, and the car was looking amazing

By mid-February we were done painting. The car has never looked so good.

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE

just being smooth and in one color, a flat gray.

By February 1 the car was yellow again and in the following weeks it would get sanded and painted two more times. The 50/50 Rust-Oleum/acetone Kurt sprayed went on nicely but was thin. The car probably could have used 5 or more coats, but race car.

Painting took a while due to the cold and humidity. We could not sand until the paint had hardened and we couldn't spray until the temperatures were above 50°F and humidity below 85%. We watched the weather daily and waited for warm afternoons to spray.

While all this was going on Kurt took care of reinforcing the lower a-arms. I replaced the engine cross-member with one from a later model, one that had stops to keep the engine out of the radiator if we broke motor mounts, which we've done several times. We also modified the brake pedal, moving the location of the push bar farther from the pivot. That would mean more brake pedal effort, but less brake pedal travel. The header flange gasket was replaced and a host of other details were taken care of.

In early March painting was done so I started in on the trim paint (black window frames and rear), cleaning and painting the interior, and putting the lights and everything back on the car. Eric took care of the air dam and the new garden supply version of the air dam extension and it was looking really good. This detail work takes longer than you'd expect but in the end, it was all good, maybe too good.

It was early March now and the to-do list had not gotten any shorter, but the big stuff was done and it was time to take the Tinyvette back to Davis. But first, just one more bit of fun. Kurt had just gotten a nice compression tester and leak tester. Why not?

The results were not encouraging. We measured compressions of 110, 120, 110, and 127 psi for cylinders 1 through 4, and leak downs 22%, 48%, 8%, and 9%. Compressions of 120 psi were considered the lowest acceptable pressures and leak downs greater than 10% were cause for concern. We had a sick engine, no spare, and less than a week to go before the race.

Back at home, other small things were taken care of while I gathered race supplies and food. The big job was getting the new decals and on Wednesday Elana and Brent of Underdog Decals came over in



Team Tinyvette, in their new team shirts. From left to right: Mike Meier, Stephanie Stratman, Zep Brattesani, Jon Harlan, Gabriel Harlan, and Gary Murph. Kurt Bainum and Eric Beckman would arrive shortly.

their van to cut and install everything. They did a great job. The transformation from plain but very nice yellow to a race car was striking.

It took most of two days to get the decals cut and installed, but it looked so great we were sure to get penalties for being too pretty for Lemons. Brent and Elana were done late Thursday afternoon, roughly 6:00 o'clock. I had been packing since Wednesday but now I was doing so in earnest. We had a race to run and I wanted to be at the track later that night.

It was very late when I got to the track late, or should I say early morning. I unpacked and set up enough to be ready for the rain that was expected on Friday, and since it was already well into Friday, I needed to get some sleep.

Friday was cold and blowing and wet and I was in Birkenstocks all weekend. Miserable, but we did get some final details taken care of. Because of the rain we decided to not pull the head and inspect. The car ran fine, but not perfect, at the end of the previous race, so it should be good for at least another hour of racing, or fingers crossed, 15 hours.

Soon after Zep and others showed up we did our own final inspection and then started the car to take it to tech. Except the car

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE

would not start. Starting had been difficult lately, sometimes, intermittently. We finally diagnosed this as being a bad coil and swapped in a spare I had been bringing to every race since 2012. The car started right up, ran great, and we got through tech with no issues, although the car's new paint and all did get some attention.

Saturday, Jon made us breakfast so Jon got the first stint. Actually, he hadn't raced with us for a while and I wanted him in the car while we still had a good engine. Everything went really well. Well, most everything. Recently oil temps have been high, 240°F. That has to be a sign of something being not right but we haven't been able to figure it out. Jon had a braking moment early in his stint that we never did figure out. In general, the brakes were good and for the first time in over a year, the car broke straight and true all day. I think the final detail, the rotation of one of the caliper pistons, fixed the last of those problems. We did reinforce the lower a-arms. That might have helped, too.

Gary had the second stint and again, all went well. Later in his stint he reported that the gauges were fine, adding, that he felt like he just had to say something. A little later he reported getting backfire (afterfire, out the exhaust) when he lifted. We told him to stop lifting, while I noted this in my engine longevity concerns file.

By the time Zep got the car we were in 29<sup>th</sup> place overall. Pitting will set you back, and it did, to 37<sup>th</sup> or so, but Zep got us back to 30<sup>th</sup> by the time he was done.

During Zep's stint we fired up a tablet PC or Mac, or whatever it was, and went to the RaceCast website to see what we could see. It was so cool, being able to see what he was doing live. Normally we just sit around waiting for bad news to come in on the radio or for the stint clock to run out. Now we could see everything, and in real-time, too. No mystery, and lots of "Go Zep!" calls, along with "Should we tell him his lap times?" and "Should we tell him his position?" No to both. Just let him drive.

By the time the stint clock had almost run out the track went under full-course caution, so we brought Zep in, refueled, and did a driver change. I was up next and reentered the race while still under full-course caution. That gave me a couple of laps to settle in, which of course I don't need, being a seasoned Lemons pro and all, but it was a



Me getting pinched between the Toyota and Mustang and hitting the brakes to get out of there.

very nice and rare luxury, getting mid-race warm-up laps.

A little after racing resumed I realized the guys were watching me, on Julian's live stream, my every move, and critiquing every one of them. Crap, I had better do a good job out here.

The engine ran pretty strong and sounded just like it did at the end of Arse-Freeze. I still had no idea what was going on and the compression and leak test results still worried me. But what could I do now except just race on?

Towards the end of my stint I was getting more backfire (out the back), plus there were now new noises. I was pretty sure we had lost the header flange gasket again, that, or we had burned a hole in the header. The first was bad enough, the second could be catastrophic. Also, gear whine was very noticeable when I was engine braking under yellow flag conditions. Maybe we've used up this little Getrag. And there was another noise, a tick-tick-tick when on light throttle and not loading the engine. Rod knock? It was not a heavy knock. Maybe it was in the top end. With 5 minutes to go and under caution for half of each lap I kept going.

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE

After the day's racing was done we started in on Saturday night's inspection and maintenance. Tire and brake wear were perfect. We hadn't had that in a year. Under the car was "unusually clean", an utterance the guys would quote me on for the rest of the weekend. Shocks looked good (had not squirted out their oil, like last summer), fuel lines were good and the pump was not leaking (like at Arse-Freeze), the coolant level was good and the overflow bottle was only half full. Oil was down only half a quart. So far it looked like we had a perfect car.

We had lost one bolt for the header flange and with no replacement gasket Kurt suggested I just goop it up with RTV. He found a replacement bolt while I squirted goop onto the header flange, as well as into my ear and hair. In the morning we'd tighten everything more and add a jam nut to the new bolt.

During my stint Kurt had gone home to get his fancy new compression and leak testers and was eager to use them again. Compression on all four cylinders was up to 130-133 psi, from a previous 110-127. Maybe the engine was still breaking in. The leak test result on #1 was good while on #2 it was 100%, as in 100% leakage. While checking #2 we also noticed we had no lash on the exhaust valve, so we adjusted that and turned the motor and again #2 had no lash. I then noticed the lifter was not all the way down and part of its shoulder was missing. We pulled the lifter and the top was smashed, the side cracked. It had probably been that way since December's race. Zep ran to my place in Davis to pick up a box of old lifters. The next morning we'd pick the best and put it in. It was too late now to run the engine (paddock rules), which was fine because now we were cold and hungry.

The first thing the next morning we picked the nicest looking lifter from the lot and dropped it in, fired up the car, and it sounded perfect. Did we finally have a good motor? There was no time for another leak test. Gary was suited and in the car now and we were getting ready to send him out.

Things could not be better. The engine seemed to be 100%, finally, and we were in 30<sup>th</sup> overall at the start of Sunday's racing. I don't think we've ever been that high at the start of Sunday's racing. I figured we had a good chance of running an issue-free race and getting a top-20

finish.

Gary was circulating. The green flag would drop soon. Watching the car go around... it sure was pretty. And that yellow! There's something about it that makes it stand out. It's really easy to see our car all the way at the other end of the track, nearly a mile away. Kurt had done an awesome job on the paint. Our goal had been to stitch on a replacement rear quarter and just roller the whole car. The weather at the time made it look like we'd be waiting a week between coats of primer and even more for paint, but Kurt had primer/sealer left over from the Funky Truck project and it would be ready within hours. The whole process still took over a month, but man were the results spectacular. Then the vinyl went on... way too pretty to race.

Well, going to extremes of pointless excess is what this was all about, so we'd race the Shinyvette. Sure, I didn't want it to get hit, but that's racing, sometimes. I had a talk with our team and told them the meme for the weekend was 100%. Everything we did on track had to be 100% sure of success. Passing, getting passed, braking, cornering, all 100%. Be like Cerveza Racing. Clean and fast and 100%. And for me, it really was about more than scratching our paint. I have two working principles for this team, the first of which is, we race an Opel. No engine swaps, RX-7 rear ends, none of that. We want to win with an Opel that, while not 100% Opel, is not unlike what our Opel friends drive. Second, and just as central to my idea of racing, is that we do not ever hit another car. Not a tap, a scratch, a tiny bump, nothing, ever, never, and recently we've done that, three times in the past two races. It felt like a trend to me and we had to end that nonsense. I've got good, smart, patient drivers. We talked about this. I knew we'd be okay.

That said, I had four close calls. Following the awesome Rambler through the esses, nosing right up to its bumper as we crested the hill at the final turn, waiting for the first hint if it would go left or right so I could maintain my momentum and go around him, and instead, its brake lights came on. I dove hard left and narrowly avoided him.

A little later there was a similar situation at the crest of the hill at the entrance to the carousel and I dodged right and got on the brakes hard. A few laps later, at the end of the front section, some bright orange box with German lettering passed me near the end of the straight and I guess he thought that was that for me. But I don't lift at

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE

the bottom of turn 2 and often catch people again at the top of the hill. I was still with him at the bottom of the hill and had to abort to avoid being run off track at the fastest part of that turn, something that probably would have sent me up and over the hill and taking a shortcut to the carousel.

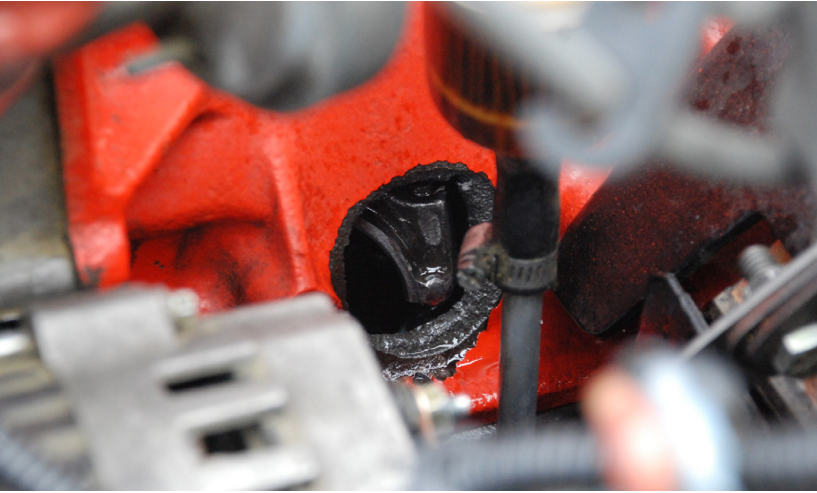
The final incident was shortly after exiting the turn 9 chicane and finally coming up on our pit neighbor's very nice Mad Magazine rally car-themed Toyota Celica on the right and a Mustang on the left. There was a good gap but I hesitated long enough to see if it would stay open. It was, so I went in, then the Celica moved left a little and the Mustang moved right, by a lot, and I got the hell out of there. In one second I could have wiped out all of Kurt's work along the length of both sides of the car and in the process damaged two other cars. This was a very good weekend to have had solid, straight-braking brakes.

The green flag dropped and Sunday's racing began. I watched Gary for a bit and after not much more than a lap could see oil smoke trailing the car. I radioed that to Gary, twice, and headed for our pits to get ready for the car to come in. Before I got there Gary radios in that there was a loud bang in the engine and he shut it down to avoid further damage. We told him about the sign we keep in the door asking for a tow, not a push. He showed it and got a tow.

While waiting for Gary Kurt and I tried to figure out what might have gone wrong. Kurt didn't remember hooking up the valve cover vent hoses. That would certainly cause oil smoke, but not the heavy noise in the engine.

Gary came in and we popped the hood. Those hoses were connected. On the other side of the engine, Zep saw the problem, a hole in the block, and you could see clear through to the pavement. We jacked up the car and saw that the front half of the oil pan had been peeled back. The rod was bent and twisted and stuck in the hole it had punched in the block. The end cap was gone. The rod journal itself looked and felt pretty good. I looked around some more and noted that other than a little oil around the damaged area, the undercar was unusually clean.

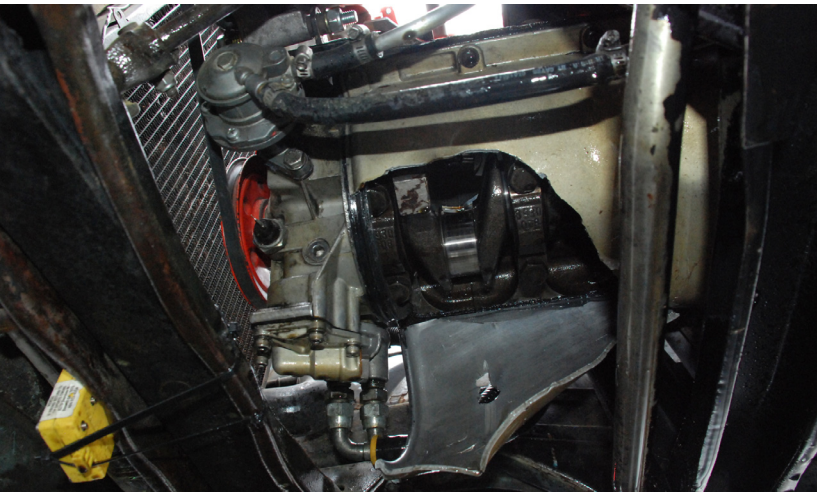
Gary said he was only going about 10 mph when the engine blew. The course was under caution in his section. It was pretty impressive damage for 10 mph.



Proof of membership in the “Hole in the Block Gang”. And what a nice round hole it is, too.

Video showed that Gary exited the chicane slowly, in first gear, and got on the throttle to get going again. He might have gotten to 5,000 rpm before lifting to shift, and that’s when the motor went boom. Not a boom actually, something a lot less dramatic, and with the sound of small parts bouncing off the bottom of the car. But no matter, it was bad. The oil smoke I saw happened after the boom.

Gary drove offline, to the left edge of the track, and coasted past



The hole in the bottom was a little bigger.

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE



Jon indicating that “He did it!” The team took this in stride and still had a lot of fun.

turn 11 where he stopped. The tow truck was there pretty quickly but the crew focused on cleaning up the oil mess before bringing Gary in. All four quarts of oil got dumped in one place. When that was done Zep was there to meet the tow vehicle when it entered the paddock and guided them back to where we were dug in.

Maybe that tic-tic I heard on Saturday was something after all. Oil pressure was good so I didn't think it would be a bearing failure and since the crank looked good it probably wasn't. At this time I suspect a rod bolt problem. Either one came loose (not torqued properly), or broke, or stretched and came loose and broke. I was using stock and original rod bolts. After 45 years, seven of them racing, I suppose it is about time for them to start breaking.

In a few days I'll start work on the car. I almost started on it when I got back home on Sunday night but by the time I finished unloading, I was done, tired, and hungry. Plus, I needed to get some real work done first then I'd get on that engine. Job #1 of course will be cleaning up the mangled oil pan, mounting it on a walnut base with a brass plaque, and sending it to Gary to display on his mantle.

So our day ended early on Sunday, but the guys were in great spirits. We had fun showing people the damage and I got to talk to a number of people about Opels, including one guy from Ireland who was surprised to see an Opel in the US. Jon returned our transponder

### Race Results

Event:	Sears Pointless
Date:	March 25-26, 2017
Track:	Sonoma Raceway
Lap Distance:	2.65 miles
Laps Completed:	149
Distance Raced:	395 miles
Finish:	118 <sup>th</sup> of 151, 77%, DNF
Class:	56 <sup>th</sup> of 71 in class B, 77%
Best Lap:	2:10.682, 96 <sup>th</sup> fastest
IoDSR:	81%
eRTOT:	37%
Penalties:	None
Crew:	Kurt Bainum, Zep Brattesani, Jon Harlan, Gary Murph, Mike Meier

and came back with a sweet story about how the woman taking the transponder said that was really sad and got up and gave him a hug. She went on to say that what was really sad was the people who returned their transponders on Saturday.

We hung out in the motor home and Jon made us lunch. It was a great chance to bond as a team. After an hour or so we started packing up. Rain was expected in a couple of hours and Zep was hoping to beat the HWY-101 traffic headed back into San Francisco.

I stuck around until the end of the race. The rain held off until just after the cars came in so there wasn't all the crashing during the closing laps we were expecting.

Eyesore won first place. It's been a while since they have. It was nice to see them succeed again. The 122 Volvo Amazon took first in C-class. We had a good dice with them at Thunderhill last summer and back then they were on a B18 or B20 motor with dual side drafts, comparable to our setup. This time they were running a 240-series Volvo motor with fuel injection. I doubt we'll be able to keep up with them in the future. Well, maybe Zep will be able to.

Restart Racing (April, Gene, and friends) won the IOE, their first-ever trophy, a long time coming, and I think, well deserved.

I talked to Jay a bit after the race, about our paint job, our motor,

## POINTLESS AND THE SHINEYVETTE

and such. He said something about the perils of running on such old technology. I told him we are trying to win B-class on Opel gear. He said he admired our dedication to that cause, and he was being sincere.