



Ah, the sounds of spring are everywhere, but no place more so than at Chateau Walrich. Hear it? Keplunk-hack-hack-ppssts-baroooooom! Yes the MASS is waking up from its hibernation. Music to my TH's ears. This is my call to arms: I begin the annual process of assessing blame. After all, there is absolutely nothing in my genetic makeup to explain a propensity for nomex haute apparel or a padded, full-faced chapeau. It's time to fess up. It's all Jack Swanson's fault.

In a previous lifetime I resided in Sarasota, Florida disguised as an elementary physical education teacher. This was your basic semi-exciting, pre-yuppie experience, consisting of a little work and a lot of play. It was the age of hawks and doves, a time when I assumed an identity more like a homing pigeon. In 1968, living in Florida tended to allow one to postpone serious life or career decisions in favor of things less stressful. My roommate, Sharon, also disguised as a teacher, and I had an informal pecking order of priorities: did we have a date during the weekend? What time was our appointment at the beauty parlor? Would we play golf, tennis or go to the beach? Whose turn was it to do the food shopping? OK, you say, but who is Jack Swanson? I'm getting to that.

Early first semester, Sharon had judiciously salted away enough money to buy a new car. She had her heart and mind set on a particular model, a specific color and a hearty list of those things we today know as "extras." She placed her order and waited. And waited, and waited and waited. Finally, the call came announcing the arrival of her very special buggy. All we had to do was figure out how we would push her almost deceased ride into the parking lot. This was easily solved since we had accomplished it on numerous occasions during the interminable wait. After signing her life away, the keys were handed to her, a five minute instructional session was conducted and off she went in her brand new pale yellow TR-6 convertible with spoke rims and brown leather interior. This was a cute car, Sharon was a cute girl. It was all too cute. It stayed that way for about six months. That's when the Lucas electrical system became possessed of a slippery and sinister demon. After the third tow back to the dealership and threats of court action, it was obvious a specialist was needed.

Enter (it's about time) Jack Swanson, proprietor of Swanson's Import Service, lover of the Mini-Cooper and genuinely gifted linguist. Jack spoke the language of the Belzebug Lucas. After some initial

testing to determine the dialect being used, Jack was finally successful in getting the vermin's attention via a direct zap with a test cable. He asked why the horn would blast when the right directional signal was activated. It responded, "Because I don't like the right direction signal."

Jack was on a roll. He inquired why the headlights would work only when the transmission was in fourth gear. The demon countered, "anything under fourth is too slow to need lights." Finally, Jack asked what possible rationale there was to the radio turning itself on and off. Belzebug Lucas responded, "figure it out for yourself. I'm busy eating the bushings out of the alternator."

Establishing detente with the Belzebug Lucas was a long drawn out affair, interrupted only long enough for Jack to replace the blown water pump out of my not-so-cute Camaro. Finally a tentative treaty was arranged and the cute TR-6 was back on the road.

Now, You're probably asking yourself what all this has to do with me assigning blame for my rallying career to Jack Swanson. Well, languages was just one of his talents (this is where the Mini-Cooper comes in too). Jack was an experienced and award winning autocrosser. He talked Sharon and I into entering an event one Sunday out at the Publix Supermarket parking lot; she in her cute TR-6 and I in my not-so-cute Camaro. Because this was the pre-yuppie period and we did not routinely evaluate all possible consequences of our behaviors, we agreed enthusiastically and showed up at the appointed parking lot on time and smiling. Ignorance is indeed bliss. After passing tech and paying a few bucks entry fee, we were given a copy of the course and instructed to go walk it. The paper version looked like a Rorschach Ink Blot. You know the one that looks like a garbage pail pizza. S turns looked like anchovies, 360's like pepperoni, etc. We walked the course, we walked it again and I had every confidence that after my first run they would be resetting a bunch of pylons.

Jack and his Mini were Car #1 and he earned a stirring round of applause plus the oohs and aahs of the crowd when his time was announced. Sharon was Car #21 and her now demonless effort was more than

respectable for a first timer. I was Car #36 so as I patiently waited my turn, it occurred to me that my not-so-cute Camaro was the biggest car in the field. The only modification the Tech Inspector had required was that I remove my hub caps; something I accomplished without too much confusion after being showed how. Understand, if you've never had a flat tire there is no reason to know this art.

Finally my number was called. I rolled up to the starting line, got some last minute encouragement from Jack and Sharon and off I went at a break-neck 7 miles per hour. The last thing Jack had told me was to just complete the course and not worry about time. I could do that until I got rattled. You see, there was this THUMP-SWISH-THUMP coming from the rear of the car with every twist and turn. I was convinced that Jack had merely transferred the Belzebug Lucas from Sharon's car to mine (THUMP DE THUMP) and it had assumed the new identity of Belzebug Fisher. I was equally sure that its diet consisted of all sections of body work (THUMP-SWISH-THUMP).

By the time I had finished my run, the Tech Inspectors, Jack and Sharon ran over to my car en masse, half of them yelling and half of them laughing hysterically. I was so rattled by then that I pulled the car back into the parking spot assigned to me and promptly ran over my own hubcaps. Before I could warn them the Tech Inspector had relieved my of my keys and opened the trunk. There it was in full view. A Demon? NO! The Pac-Man of bodywork? NO! It was my bowling ball!

It should be very obvious now why I took up rallying. Pro Rallying Tech Inspectors don't require you to remove your hub caps and know how to look for unnecessary baggage like bowling balls. See, it's all Jack Swanson's fault.