

**“PUSHING BATEMAN,  
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—STEVE SALEEN**

“We went into the race and the Archer Brothers had brought Al Unser Sr. in for that event as their guest driver,” Saleen says. “Also, Jason Bateman, the actor, was on the Mitsubishi team for that event. I remember after the first lap going around, we’re going into turn one and the Archer brothers are basically rubbing my door handle, and then I’m looking through their window net at the Nissan team. None of us were going to lift going into turn one.”

The trucks were all short-wheelbase, and none of them were set up for high-speed racing. The result was punishing.

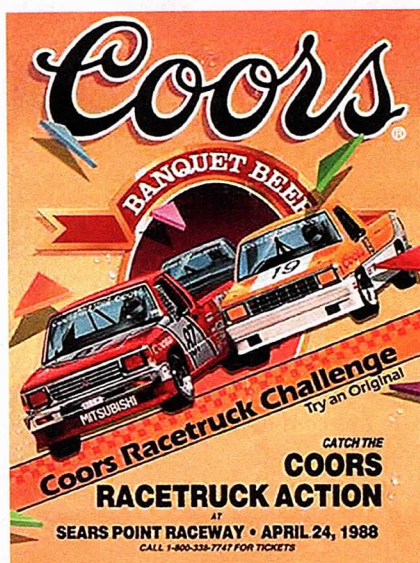
“On the second or third lap, pushing Bateman, he went upside down,” Saleen says. “I think it was his first and only race. The roll cage actually collapsed when he was upside down. The *National Enquirer* had the picture on the front of their newspaper with him cheating death. After the race, Unser said, ‘Well, I’m never doing that again.’”

Unser may have had his fill, but the RaceTruck Challenge continued to draw competitors from every corner of motorsport. Peter Cunningham, who founded RealTime Racing in 1987, spent some time at the wheel of a Mazda B2000 in 1990. He’d just come from winning the Escort Endurance Championship in a CRX Si, but the trucks were different animals.

“The first time I ever drove the Mazda truck was at Sears Point at the opening weekend,” he says. “When I went out of the pit lane and I was driving around for the first few laps, I was like, ‘Jesus, these things are slow.’ But once we were out there together in the race, it was total fun. You didn’t do a lot of slowing down. The only race I won in that whole series was at Laguna Seca on my 27th birthday, even though we had the eighth-fastest lap.”

It may have been his only race win, but he walked away with the points championship that year. Saleen would do the same in ’91.

“I’ve driven everything from sports racers, sports cars, supercars, formula cars, Indycar,” Saleen says. “I’ve been in a wider



range of cars than most people have, both street and on the track. I will say I’ve had the most fun in truck racing by far.”

“It was crash and bang them,” Schilke says. “They tried everything. They were trying to develop a show, so it turned into a lot of body work and Bondo every race.”

While drivers were bashing off of each other, manufacturers were busy raiding their cupboards for go-fast parts. Schilke’s rules were generous on that front. Suspension modifications were nearly wide open, but there was no changing a vehicle’s wheelbase. Wheels and tires were also unlimited, but the engines were supposed to be sealed units. But one line in the rule book made things more interesting than all the others: you could use any part on a vehicle so long as it had a manufacturer part number.

For most manufacturers, that meant plucking larger brakes from four-wheel drive or V-6 models for use on the track, or larger sway bars from tow packages. But Schilke got a little more creative.

“The electric Ranger was using those composite beds, and they were 125 or 130 pounds lighter,” he says. “So it’s got a Ford part number. What the heck? I was the head of Ranger Vehicle Engineering by that time, so we just got a bunch of composite boxes and gave them to the teams.”

“No one knew about it,” Saleen says. “It all became a known entity during a race at St. Petersburg, Florida. I was rammed by one of the trucks during the heat of the race, and instead of bending the sheetmetal, it poked a major hole in the composite.”

“When SCCA saw it, they came unglued,” Schilke says. “The next thing I know, I’m in race control and they said, ‘You’re going to step next door to the sanctioning office and we’re going to ream your ass out on this one.’ I said, ‘I’ve got a Ford part number. It’s right here. Your rules say anything that has a Ford part number is valid, so case closed.’”

It was a spectacle that stank of people having too much fun on a racetrack. The SCCA got its show, manufacturers got to have a go at each other for reasonable money, and the drivers got to have a good time. Racing at its best, even if no one stuck around to watch it. By 1991, the Challenge ground to a halt. There just wasn’t enough cash to keep it going. Drivers headed off to other series, and the trucks, most of them, went the way all old race cars go: to scrap.

“If we’re talking legacy,” Pruett says, “there really was none. It broke the mold, and showed that if you feel there’s value and you’ve got a couple of people who join you in that belief, it’s okay to do something that isn’t truly expected in motor racing. It’s been a little while since I really felt that heavy sensation. I wish more folks knew about it. Hopefully, more folks will start to think, ‘What kind of other weird stuff might we ponder?’”