

Young Racing Driver Has ***THE RIGHT STUFF***

By Bill Vanderford

With the gas pedal to the floor, I was trying to nurse every last mile per hour out of my race car as I sped down the back straight at Road Atlanta at over 100 miles per hour during a qualifying lap. It was then that I felt a slight bump at the rear of my car and saw the revs on my tach increase as my car speeded up slightly. An instant smile spread over my face as I recognized the happy eyes of the young driver behind me. It was my friend, Mark Pombo, taking the time to give me a push that could mean another couple of tenths to my qualifying speed.

As always, Mark had already qualified his Miata on the pole for the coming race, but he knew that my old, stock Miata needed a little help. It was not the first time this extremely accomplished, young champion had tried to help his elderly friend. Like his father, Pepe, and his older brother, Matthew, Mark Pombo brings much more to the racing community than his pure, God given talents. He is a young man that anyone in America would be more than proud to call their son! In fact, even the U.S Army has made a poster of

Mark that is seen on the walls of military bases that depicts him as the Modern Day soldier for the Iraqi war. This same artwork can be seen as mural entitled, "We Know the Price of Freedom" at Camp Robinson near Little Rock, Arkansas.

Despite his love for racing and his close commitment to his family, Mark began his service to our country as a drilling Reservist in 2002, and during 2003 and 2004, he served a thirteen-month tour in Iraq. He was stationed at Log Base Seitz, west of the Green Zone, and logged over 15,000 accident free miles through hostile territories in Iraq.

Just doing his normal duties in Iraq wasn't enough for Mark Pombo, so throughout his tour of duty, he always went the extra mile, which included volunteering for 10 dangerous missions to deliver water and gas to our troops in the field. He was also on numerous humanitarian missions that logged more than 600 miles into hostile territory to transport 30,000 gallons of water to Iraqi civilians.



Mark Pombo leads going into Turn 5 at Road Atlanta. Photo by Bill Vanderford.

During his stint in Iraq, Mark Pombo was twice named "Soldier of the Month" and while on loan to the 82nd Airborne for 2 months, he received 3 Army Achievement Medals. Despite his busy work and racing schedule today, Mark continues to serve in the Army Reserve by reporting one weekend a month to his Reserve Unit in Athens, Georgia, and has 1 year of active Army Reserve duty and then 2 more years of inactive service until his 8-year commitment is fulfilled in 2010. He could still be called back to active duty at any time.

Between the military and racing, Mark Pombo has also been "hitting the books" very hard. He Graduated in May, 2007, as an Accounting major at Georgia State University with a 3.2 GPA, and is now traveling all over the country for the Ryan & Co. as a Fuel Tax Consultant.

Racing, however, has always been one of Mark Pombo's passions in life, and even during those tough days in Iraq, he remained involved with his father and brother in SCCA racing. Mathew was racing in Spec Miata, and throughout the year Mark would call during each race weekend (staying up all night) to check on Mathew and how his car was handling. He was also very interested in what Mathew and his Dad were going to do to help Mathew's handling for each upcoming session. During each race that year Mark would call at the beginning of the race and Pepe would hold the phone so Mark could hear the radio communication between Mathew and his Dad during the race. When the race was over, Mark was the first person Mathew spoke to on the phone, usually in victory circle.

Despite being a little rusty when he returned from Iraq in 2004, Mark won the SARRC Spec Miata Championship in 2005, but 2007 has been Mark's best year. He easily won the Sport Car Club of America's 2007 Southeast Division Championship with four 1st place finishes at Kershaw in South Carolina, twice at Road Atlanta, and at Roebing Road near Savannah, Georgia. Mark also had one 2nd place finish and one 3rd place finish. In addition, he holds the track records in Spec Miata at Roebing Road, Road Atlanta, and Kershaw.

During October, Mark and his brother Matthew will be representing the Southeast in the SCCA National Championships in Topeka, Kansas. With the help of Cumming-based, OPM Autosports, and North Carolina-based, Race Engineering, and all of the well wishes of everyone in the Atlanta Region of SCCA, the Pombos should do very well.

My poor penmanship could never begin to do justice to the pride and admiration felt by everyone who has ever had the opportunity to be around or become friends with Mark Pombo. This one young man represents all of the wonderful qualities that our founding fathers had intended for everyone when they established this great nation. It is so very refreshing to know that through families like the Pombos, there is still hope for future generations. And, at least in motorsports, the good guys can still win!

Bill Vanderford has won numerous awards for his writing and photography, and has been inducted into the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame as a Legendary Guide. He can be reached at 770-289-1543, at JFish51@aol.com, or at his web site: www.fishinglanier.com

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