

The Pursuit of a Championship



By Josh Koropchak

Why do you race a Volvo?" is a question I get asked repeatedly by fans, media and competitors. It's rather simple actually.

My roots to the Volvo brand go back nearly two decades. I was introduced to Volvo at a very young age by my father, who was a Master Technician at Volvo of Princeton. Growing up, the only cars in our driveway were Volvos. As a child I went to the dealership more than most people do in a lifetime and when my father gave me gifts it was almost always Volvo memorabilia.

Every year I looked forward to traveling with my parents to Volvo headquarters in Rockleigh, New Jersey where my father attended his technician courses. On one of

these trips, I even had the opportunity to watch Volvo 850s being crash-tested.

One of my fondest memories is of the day my father brought home a brand new 850R that displayed the TWR BTCC livery decal package. It was then I became aware that Volvo was competing in a racing environment and my future was set.

Fast forward to 2008. I am sitting in the driver seat of my unmodified S60R awaiting my first-ever experience on a racetrack. Dark clouds are rolling through the skies of Lexington, Ohio and droplets of water are starting to form on my windshield. As I was proceeding to the track, I felt completely calm rather than the nervousness I was expecting. I realized I was there for two main reasons: 1) to advance my skills

beyond my prior karting experience and 2) to show the public that a Volvo could perform just as well in a racing environment as it does on the street protecting its passengers in a collision. After driving the S60R far beyond its limits at multiple racing circuits, conversation around the paddock seemed to have a common theme: "Wow, that Volvo is fast! You were passing everyone! I had no idea a Volvo could do that!" That's when I knew it was time for a full-out Volvo race car and campaign.

The search via the internet for a Volvo race car got underway. After many hours, I stumbled upon a classified advertisement for a factory-built, Volvo S60 Challenge race car that was located in The Hague, Netherlands. The car was originally campaigned in the Volvo S60 Challenge series from 2001–2007 by Brink Motorsport where it won the Championship in 2007.

It was then purchased by Brax Racing and raced in the Dutch Supercar Challenge for two years. First, we exchanged a myriad of e-mails with Brax Racing that included detailed photos, information with specifications and spare parts package, and lastly payment options. Next, we contacted Olle Odsell, Director of Volvo Motorsport from 2000–2003, to obtain documentation on the car. We then sent payment and arranged shipping via Matt Bonaime of Exim-Cars in the U.S. A friend

Josh Koropchak at a young age in an 850R with the TWR BTCC livery package.



in Holland made sure the car was loaded in the shipping container and approximately four weeks later it arrived at Port Newark, New Jersey. It was time to put the car through rigorous testing.

The date is May 1, 2009 and we have finally arrived at the beautiful Carolina Motorsports Park in South Carolina. The sun is shining strongly, heating the air to a comfortable 80 degrees F. Excitement and adrenaline quickly begin to pump as I strap on my helmet. I get in the car and ease the car around the track for the first couple of laps. Progressively I get the engine, brakes, and tires up to temperature and begin to increase strain on the vehicle by pushing braking zones further back and applying more cornering g-force loads. The braking system needs more bias toward the front calipers, the alignment setup needs more camber in the front and less camber in the rear wheels, and the gearbox fluid needs to be inspected as it isn't shifting as smoothly as I like.

Within the course of a few hours we were packing up and on our way back to New Jersey due to gearbox failure. Over the course of the 2009 testing year, we faced a multitude of obstacles that included multiple gearbox and suspension failures combined with overheating fuel pumps and drive axles to name just a few. Sleepless nights trackside, and hours upon hours of overhauling in the workshop were common. Racing was becoming a lifestyle. With our notebooks filled with data at the conclusion of the season, it was time to strip the chassis and rebuild for competition in 2010.

Some might say, "Car racing. How hard can it be?" Auto racing is a never-ending strain that takes its toll on the car, the driver, and the team. Only those that remain strong and disciplined enough to push through will prevail in the end. In late 2009, we were granted a waiver to compete a Swedish car in the 2010 NASA Pro Racing German Touring Series 3. Our competition: BMW M3s and Porsche 911s. Our first test day in March 2010 was right around the corner and there was a tremendous amount of work to be completed on both the car and the team. It was time to get our game face on.

The team grew to ten members: me as team principal and driver; Ricky Marrero as team strategist; Tom Koropchak, Jonathan Aguila, and Dave Lipkins as team mechanics; Chris Rhom as engineer; Mary Ann Hoffmann as team administrator and hospitality; James Russo as logistics; and Mike Ratini and Nick Pro as photographers and journalists. With a combined experience of over 80 years in the racing industry, including Grand-AM Team and Manufacturer Championships, I knew we had the unique combination of skills and



experience needed to win. The only thing missing was the important close relationships with marketing partners we needed to expand TKi. This was achieved when we partnered with VolvoCountry.com, ipd, Exim-Cars, Swedespeed, and GT Planet. Lastly, we wanted to reach out to Volvo enthusiasts beyond the large presence we already maintained on multiple internet forums. We did this by working with Swedespeed to incorporate Volvo car corrals at a few of our racing venues.

The 2010 season was officially underway on March 27 as we rolled into Lime Rock Park in Connecticut for the first test day. Despite the chilly, 35-degree air, an aura of enthusiasm filled the paddock. Our refinements and improvements to the S60 over the winter months quickly became apparent on the first lap as the car performed flawlessly. That outstanding weekend set the tone for each and every one of our race weekends, mainly because of the performance of our efficient and enthusiastic crew both on and off the track. It all paid off on April 17, which marked the maiden race for 2010 where we were able to clinch a podium finish. And it was only the first. Our hard work was beginning to pay off with numerous podiums.

It's August 14 and we are at my favorite track, Lime Rock Park, for Round 4 races, joined by over 40 of our Volvo fans. I gath-

ered pole position for the race by nearly 0.01 second. As we exit Big Bend (turn 2) on the formation lap, I glance into the paddock and see the Volvo fans cheering and taking photos. I say to myself "I need to win this." I cannot explain the exact feeling when I crossed the finish line in first place, however, I can tell you I was ecstatic to be able to win it for the fans, team and sponsors. This victory earned enough points for our team to take the championship lead and we never looked back for the rest of the season.

Standing on top of the S60, spraying enough champagne to soak the crew and car, I'll never forget the overjoyed smiles on the faces of the crew as they surrounded the car. We did it. We pulled off the 2010 German Touring Series 3 Championship. The combination of our initial passion for the Volvo brand as well as our ability to remain strong and push through translated into the championship title. We were able to show the public that a Volvo cannot only perform both competitively and consistently in the highly competitive world of racing, but can win. And we intend to continue to win and to showcase Volvo's abilities on the circuit for years to come. Stay tuned for 2011 plans at www.tkimotorsport.com.

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