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The Mini team that could

Auburn race team wins Sports Car Club of America National Championship

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The No. 11 Fortech Mini Cooper sits in the Auburn shop of Seven Enterprises Ltd. The Mini won the Sports Car Club of America GT 5 National Championship in September.

In a world of supersized meals, huge Hummers and monster motors, it is nice to hear about the "little guy" making good.

That's exactly what happened in September when Seven Enterprises Ltd. of Auburn and the Fortech Racing team took their Austin Mini Cooper to the Sports Car Club of America GT5 National Championships. The Fortech team had a great showing and went home with the top trophy in their class.

Held at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, the event has been called the "Super Bowl of amateur road racing," and named as one of the Top 10 racing events in motor sports by Car and Driver magazine.

After three days of qualifying, the Fortech Mini, piloted by driver Doug Peterson of Rescue, in El Dorado County, started in the front row of the championship race and pulled into second position quickly, trailing another Mini driven by Joe Huffker. Peterson and Huffaker pulled away from the pack and Peterson got a break when Huffaker's throttle linkage suddenly broke at the start of the seventh lap. Peterson continued unchallenged by the rest of pack of 29 cars that included Hondas, Nissans, Alfa-Romeos, Toyotas, Mazdas and a Renault. He cruised to a win with a 12-second lead over second place.

And this wasn't the first time the Fortech Mini has crossed the finish line a SCCA National Champion. The team has been competing in SCCA since 1970 and won in 1984, 1986 and 1989 in addition to its 2003 victory.

Michael Kearney, 55, Fortech team owner, said that winning the event makes the hard work and sacrifices worth it.

"The last SCCA Championship we won was in 1989," Kearney said. "We had a 13 year break to win it all again. In that time we had five 2nd place finishes, but it took a long time to get back on top. It's a good feeling."

Seven Enterprises, a parts and accessory shop for British Minis, relocated to Auburn in

2002 from its long-time location in Newport News, Virginia. "I've been into Minis since 1970 and Seven Enterprises has always been a good sponsor," Kearney said. "We are continuing the trend of working to serve the needs of the classic Mini owners."

While the Fortech Mini has been a staple around SCCA racing for many years, Kearney said that it might have raced its last race.

"Our car is one of the most famous cars in SCCA. It's commonly referred to as just the Fortech Mini," Kearney said. This is the fourth version of this car that has raced. BMW wants us to build a 2004 version for racing, so this might have been the last race for this car."

Kearney said its not cheap to build one of these vehicles either.

"It costs \$50,000 to \$100,000 to build a SCCA car," he said. "A lot of drivers build at their own individual economic pace. We're lucky to have good sponsors."

The Fortech Mini is sponsored by Redline Oil, Goodyear Tires, MiniUSA.com as well as Seven Enterprises.

Doug Peterson not only serves as driver of the Fortech Mini, but his company Comptech Machine built the chassis.

"There's not much original Mini on it," Kearney said. "It's pretty different from stock. It has a full-tube frame and fiberglass body. It's also unusual in that it is a right hand drive vehicle. There are only a couple of right-hand drive cars in SCCA, and actually the rules have changed so that they are not allowed any more. So, if we go to a newer Mini it will be left-drive."

Kearney said that the team races six to 10 times a season from January through September. If you are interested in seeing what a Mini can do on the racetrack, Kearney invites everyone to head out to Laguna Seca Raceway in Monterey on Oct. 25 to see the Vintage Mini Challenge sponsored by Seven Enterprises and Heritage Garage. Admission is only \$5, a good price for the opportunity to check out the Fortech Mini firsthand.

"Top speed for the Fortech Mini is about 118 mph," Kearney said. "At Laguna Seca we'll hit the high 80s."

That should be slow enough for you get a pretty good glance at one of the biggest little things on the track.

For more information on Seven Enterprises, visit www.7ent.com.

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