

M3 SIG Fest



Tap into a CCA Special Interest Group when you want to find the true fanatic—and the most ardent of all may be the M3 brigades.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS
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E30 M3 owners are a strange breed indeed: Any time you meet a person overly committed to this Far Right, you might conclude that they've just drunk a bit too much of the Kool-Aid. It's a strange crowd, convinced they've discovered something unique. How many people do you know who've sold their newer 5 Series because they concluded that the older E28 is just a better car? Likely few to none. Yet the E30 M3 Special Interest Group (SIG) has so many ex-E36 M3 owners that the Far Right must be doing well and good.

In the spirit of celebration for one of the most unique sports cars ever built by BMW, the current E30 M3 SIG (www.bimmers.com/m3) began in 1996 with twenty or so friends and E30 M3 owners—those of us who understood the manifest destiny which



SIGFest chairman Tony Rausch (center) and John Henriquez (left) greet members at registration.

drove BMW to design a unique car and homologate it for one purpose only: to kick butt in touring-car racing series throughout Europe. When BMW was done, more championships and national titles had been won with the E30 M3 than any other sedan in history; approximately 30 major titles in touring car and rally competition were won over a mere five years. Over 100 E30 M3 race chassis were built by BMW Motorsport to achieve such record wins. Today about 900 members worldwide share the passion for these purpose-built cars through the E30 M3 SIG.

The E30 M3 SIGFest takes place each year on both the East and West coasts, chaired by SIG members Tony Rausch in the east Coast and Paul DaCruz on the west coast. This year's fifth annual East Coast event drew

over 100 people to the North Jersey Shore for the three-day event, including tech session, concours, picnic, and autocross. Undoubtedly the single largest gathering of E30 M3s, SIGFest East saw over 50 cars in the concours. Since only 5,000 E30 M3s were imported into the USA between 1988 and 1991, 50 in one place is intoxicating. Especially if you thrive in the Far Right.

Are you wondering about that Far Right, what it's like to live there, and who these fanatics really are? Sometimes it is easier to understand the psyche of the group by observing the actions of the few: Charley Terhune, a SIG member from Ohio, has the Far Right affliction. He owns a few E30 M3s. But the one he was planning to drive to New Jersey for SIGFest was in pieces, needing major suspension work. But like most of us swimming in a sea of optimism, Charley figured he could get the car together in time for the ten-hour Friday trek East.

last minute struggles, he still vows he's coming back every year.

Many SIG members seem to have the Multiple E30 M3 Affliction. Take SIG member Jimmy Pettinato, with a stock 50,000-mile street car, an M3 he converted for Club racing, and an ex-Prodrive BTCC M3. Since the symptoms are obvious, the cause has never let Jimmy make SIGFest—he's in the music industry and always on tour during summer months. But this year he was going to have the afternoon off within a couple of hundred miles of SIGFest. That's when determination set in: After a Friday-night concert in North Carolina, Jimmy headed north overnight on a 410-mile trip to Philadelphia. "First thought was renting a car... I figured we would get into Philly about 10:00 a.m. I could shower, take a cab to some downtown rental-car location, and drive myself out and back. This was a good plan, except it was time consuming which would make me pretty



Ralph Angerbach (left), Todd Crossley, and Phil Cataldi look over Crossley's Best-In-Show E30 M3 turbo conversion.

Then he had to help his girlfriend move on Monday through Wednesday of that week.

Charley arrived home Wednesday night. Reality and the Far Right sometimes don't mix; with axles sitting on the floor, Charley began assembling the car and worked until about 4:00 a.m. With the car in one piece, more or less, Charley's trip to the alignment shop yielded no results. Thankfully a last-minute call to a friend's body shop produced alignment equipment, and by 3:00 a.m. Friday morning, the car was ready to go. This kind of dedication can pay off; in Charley's case, it won the SIGFest Long Distance Award trophy: a polished S14 M3 piston engraved with the E30 M3 SIG logo. How do you know Charley is on the Far Right? Because after all his

late—and the prospect of showing up to SIGFest in some crappy rental car was not too appealing." As it turns out, Pettinato's wife was able to leave their NE Pennsylvania home and meet Jimmy in Philly for the 90-minute drive to the SIGFest picnic. But the concert-crew check-in at the hotel really slowed things down, what with 44 rooms reserved. Jimmy arrived at Thompson Park around 3:00 p.m. on Saturday afternoon, just as the concours judging had finished. Finally, after five years, he'd made it to SIGFest—even though no sooner had he arrived than the event started to break up. But Pettinato was undaunted. "I'm such a M3 geek," he says, "even getting a taste of it was great."

All that effort just for a taste? That's the Far Right for you. ♦