

History of the "Reading" Meet

by Aredubjay

The History of the "Reading" SVX Meet

In December of 1999, the SVX online community had been established well over a year. Kenetic Concepts, a small automotive specialties manufacturer, had begun a forum, mainly as a vehicle to sell its aftermarket products. Richard Silva, an SVX enthusiast, had fabricated an exhaust system and was in the planning stages of trying to create more aftermarket add-ons for the beloved "wacky-windowed" luxocruiser – in an attempt to make it more race worthy. Meanwhile, in another corner of the net, upstart dot-com company "Yahoo" had begun to offer space for the establishment of "Clubs." In August of 1998, an owner/enthusiast (jester01) decided to take Yahoo up on their offer and started the Subaru SVX Club. While the KC site was more attuned to technical data, the Yahoo site began to take on a "personality" where people gathered, much like folks would gather at the counter of the local diner, to talk about SVX technical matters, family, dogs & cats and life in general. People began to find their way to the Yahoo site, and it grew by leaps and bounds. On its one year anniversary (Aug 19, 1999), the club boasted 611 members and over 10,000 posts. Members posted their congratulations to jester01, and asked him if ever in his wildest dreams, he would've thought the club would be a success. His response reflected the enthusiasm of the SVX online community of the day:

"To answer your question, Preston, no...never in my wildest of dreams (and I've had some pretty wild ones! <GRIN>) I never would have imagined this club becoming what it is today. I'm very very pleased (and surprised) with the club and everyone in it. When I started it, I figured the club would have had a membership of one (me)...but then it took off like mad.

I'm glad that everyone pretty much enjoys the club (even with it's faults) and hope that it continues to grow.

Drive safe and HAPPY BIRTHDAY

-Jester"

By December, 1999, the club had amassed over 16000 posts. That month (New Year's Eve 1999 to be exact), a young fellow by the name of Ben Rowley made an announcement, in post number 16675:

"Hey, all,

I had checked out this club a few months back when I was deciding which used car to buy. I'm happy to say that I've just purchased a '94 dark blue LSi AWD with dark grey interior. Can somebody tell me two things, though? How do I properly set and

disarm the alarm (I keep setting the stupid thing off inadvertently) and does the SVX have component speakers in the front? PO may have removed the tweeters, if so, since I have two 2" holes in my dash next to the a-pillars. Any help from you guys is greatly appreciated. ALSO-anything planned for a meet in the coming months? I'm in the Philadelphia area..."

Like all SVXers, this new owner was enthusiastic. Having been a Toyota MR2 owner/enthusiast, and a veteran of several MR2 meets, Ben was ready to meet with other SVXers. However, his inquiry about a "meet in the coming months" went without response. Yes, there had been meets Olu Davis (svxit), co-founder of the Yahoo Club, had organized meets in Maryland and in the D.C. area. There had been a meet in New Jersey that had drawn 8 or 9 SVXes, but these seemed to be few and far between. Ben was looking for something on a larger scale. Finally, after three days of waiting, Ben stepped out, in message number 16803:

"I know I'm new to the club and all, but I'd like to start arranging a possible meet. I've run several of them now for my MR2 club, and we've had a lot of success (see my webpage at www.angelfire.com/pa/rowleyracing). I was thinking of either an Atlantic City run, with a leisurely sight-seeing cruise down parts of the shore, or a run through the back roads around Reading, PA. I've done both of these rallies with the MR2 people, and they were a blast! Basically, I would say the AC one is better if everyone wants to just meet and schmooze, without a lot of driving. The Reading one is better if you guys want to play around on a few twisties. I was thinking 3/5/99, a Sunday (and the day before my 24th B-day, I might add). Any thoughts, anyone?"

Little did Ben know what he had begun. Response, at first, was "reserved." There was no great outpouring of support. Undaunted, Ben made a follow-up post (#17030) just a few days later, on January 6th, 2000:

"Okay, I've decided to have the rally in Reading, PA. I'll post all the details to my webpage as soon as I get a chance (hopefully this weekend). I know it's a bit of a ways off, so I'll be sure to post reminders every now and then.

Remember, the date is 3/5/00.

Go to www.angelfire.com/pa/rowleyracing for details (as they become available). *Check out pics from the MR2 rallies I've had in the same area on the webpage, and you'll get an idea of what a good time we'll all have..."

Weeks went by with little mention of the rally. Some members posted their interest. Others committed to be there. It was a small number, comparable to previous meets. 10 cars, at best. But, Ben was determined. On February 1st, 2000. He posted his intentions:

"Planning is in the final stages, and my website will be updated with all details by

the end of next week. Hope you guys pining away for a club in the Philly area can make it!

BEN"

It didn't take him long to update. February 3, 2000:

"Here's the scoop so far...I'm going to run this in a similar fashion to the rally I've run twice now for my MR2 club. Basically, we get together just off of exit 21 or 22 (I can never remember) of the PA Turnpike. We meet in the parking lot of this McDonald's, schmooze for a little while and take some photo ops, then go for a little joyride through some of the back countryside. I can plan the route for as long or as short as anyone can take. ;^) I've done poker rallies and 'treasure hunt' rallies on/around this location before, but I think I'll stick with a basic countryside cruise for my very first SVX meet. I'm figuring on late morning/early afternoon, maybe grab some early dinner, then get everyone on their way back home by around 5 p.m. Remember, this is all on Sunday 3/5/00. Details and much more specific directions will be up on my webpage (www.angelfire.com/pa/rowleyracing) by the end of next week (2/11 at latest).

BEN"

At this point, people began to wake up. They were realizing that a large meet was a genuine possibility. People from as far away as Vermont, Kentucky and Wisconsin had discussed attending. This was no longer just a "get together." The meet had gone "regional," basically covering the entire northeaster quadrant of the united states, and beyond.

The excitement, however, had no sooner set in when the balloon was suddenly and sadly deflated. This post came on the afternoon of February 10th, 2000:

"Sorry, guys, but I'm going to have to cancel my anticipated 3/5/00 Reading, PA Rally. Some jerk off broke into my car two nights back and cut out the radio, doing some damage in the process. My mechanic says it's going to take 1-3 weeks for SOA to *make* the upper driver's side glass piece, so the new baby's out of commission for a bit. First time I've gotten jacked...I was probably due, but I'm not liking it one bit! I was more upset that they stole my bag of tools out of the trunk than I was about the lost radio...

BEN"

Those who had planned on attending, were crushed. But, if there is one "constant" among SVXers, it has always been their sense of closeness. Ben's tragedy was the entire community's tragedy. The outpouring of encouragement and offers of help came from around the country. People offered to help find parts (after all the upper SVX glass on a driver's or passenger's door was hard to find), SVXers urged Ben to

"hang in there" and let him know that they were behind him. His post, in response, was emotional:

Valentine's Day, 2000:

"I've stayed offline for a couple of days now, kind of nursing my wounded, violated pride. I just checked all the messages and wanted to thank everyone for their condolences. I also want to thank those of you who are trying your best to help me locate a used window...I'm going to check out those options as soon as I get off-line today. Also, I feel very bad about simply canceling the meet, so why don't we reschedule it instead? Howzabout doing it on Saturday, 4/1/00 (I know, I know, April Fool's Day, but I am serious!)? This'll allow anyone who needs to come in from far away (aredubjay!) to make the trip. Also, if any such people need a place to crash (forgive the pun) for a night or two, mi casa es su casa (or something like that). So, I'm keeping my chin up and setting things up for April Fool's Day! Thanks again, everybody...

BEN"

The next day, Ben, in order to express the fact that he was truly serious about the meet, repeated his plan to hold it on April 1st, 2000:

"For you guys that might've missed it, here it is again...

Reading, PA, 4/1/00!

(Why do I feel like I should be shouting 'saturday, Saturday, SATURDAY!!! MONSTER TRUCK SHOW!!!'?)

Probably meet up at a local McDonald's I've used before around 11-12, schmooze, take pics, then jump in the cars for a lively (but safe) drive around the southeast PA countryside. There are some great roads back there. Probably be done around 5 p.m., grab some dinner at a local establishment (nothing too pricey, since I'm a poor, broke graduate student who recently was pilfered of his car's stereo and window), then head back to our respective homes.

Once again, I can offer a place to shack up in Philly for probably up to 2-3 people both the night before and the night after the event, just so long as you guys don't mind sleeping on the floor (sleeping bags, anyone?).

Hope that clears it up...

BEN ROWLEY"

It had definitely cleared things up. The buzz began, and people began planning. Some committed right away. Some were reluctant. Some were scurrying to schedule vacation time to drive hundreds of miles, just to meet people who owned

the same kind of car they did. People were driven to see if they were the only "weirdos" in the universe, or, if the others who owned SVXes were just as weird. Plans continued, chatter ensued and people began to get fired up about the meet. There were cheerleaders, hawking to draw in attendees. Guilt was used, on occasion, by those who would be traveling long distances, to shame those who lived in closer proximity, to attend. Ben was about to go on a trip, so, would be out of commission for a while. Before he left, he posted, once more, about the Reading Rally:

Feb. 15, 2000

Whoa...I am downright amazed! I had no idea the response would be so good for this event! Imagine, hauling in people from Ky to Vt! This gives me all the motivation I need to get the details finalized this weekend and up ASAFP (think about it a sec...). I'm heading out on Friday afternoon in 'the Green Bomber' (aka my '76 Datsun B210, aka the daily driver, aka the Official Pimpmobile) to map out the route, get finalized directions, check hotels/pricing, etc. I will have my webpage updated by Sunday night come hell or high water!

BEN ROWLEY"

Once he returned from his trip, Ben made sure he kept the excitement alive.

Feb. 29, 2000

"Hey, everybody...

Sorry for the extreme delay, but I finally have the info up on my webpage for the Reading, PA Rally on 4/1/00. The website is www.angelfire.com/pa/rowleyracing. If anyone has any questions about specific details, please feel free to email me, and I'll do my best to answer them. The drive should be spirited but safe...we're sticking mostly to 2-lane back roads with no shoulders, but nice and twisty with some rolling hills. Then we come back into civilization to head off to dinner. I found an incredible spot for a group photo, and I'm really starting to look forward to this event. Also, if anyone from the local Philly area would like to caravan over for the event, I'm up for it. We can 'talk' more as the event gets closer. Hope to see many of you out there!

BTW, all, I've been just too busy with both jobs and all the traveling involved to stay as 'up' as I should be...I am VERY happy to see the interest in the meet. Me personally, I'm happy when at least 5 cars show up...I consider anything else to be 'gravy,' the more the merrier. Just a sidebar, though...at some of the MR2 rallies, we've gotten more than 50-60 cars. Makes staying together through stoplights pretty difficult. ;^) We even caused an accident when some schmoe in a Honduh was gawking and collided with the rear-end of the car in front of him. I doubt we'll have that, but I actually prefer a more intimate gathering of 5-10 cars for logistical and conversational reasons. Also, we usually get an intense interest generated, but

come the day of the event, you're lucky if half the people do show up. Let's face it, we all lead very busy lives, and sometimes the fun factor goes by the wayside. That's also why I like planning the events...that means I HAVE to be there! Let me know if anyone has any concerns questions...looking forward to 4/1!!

BEN ROWLEY"

The tone was set, and in some cases, the gauntlet had been thrown. Surely, if 50-60 MR2's could come together, we could amass 20 SVXes. It was a tall order, but, the cry went out. 20 became a magic number. There were barely 20, what could be called "active" members on the Yahoo board – and they were scattered all across the United States and in Canada. Nonetheless, members began to rally to the cause. Finally, the preliminary list of attendees was posted, on March 18, 2000:

"Hey, everyone...

Just a quick update. Here are the people that have emailed me back as being definite attendees:

- 1 Aredubjay (and wife)
- 2 Gary (GT4595) and wife
- 3 SJLWEL and wife
- 4 Subarueast
- 5 Larry III and wife
- 6 John Graf
- 7 Leon Nelson+wife
- 8 Chris Ponzini and possible passenger

Maybes include:

- 9 Brian Harkins
- 10 10Zoltan Kiraly

Not bad, if I do say so myself! Just in case anyone still needs details, check out the website at www.angelfire.com/pa/rowleyracing. I'm going to be bringing along a close friend who is a pretty good photographer, so weather willing we'll get some really good shots of the group. See you guys all soon...

BEN"

This, to some, was unacceptable. After all, the meet was only a couple of weeks away A major push was launched in order to bolster numbers, but. The efforts had paid off. By March 27th, the list had grown considerably. This list was posted at 8:57 that morning:

Well, here's what we're up to so far:

- 1 Nick Owens+1
- 2 Randy (aredubjay)+1
- 3 Gary (GT4595)+1
- 4 Warren (SJLWEL)+1
- 5 Michael (subarueast@yahoo.com)
- 6 Larry Singer III +1
- 7 John Graf (no email or tag)
- 8 Leon Nelson (n31s0ns@excite.com)+1
- 9 Chris Ponzini (cponzini@worldnet.att.net)+1
- 10 Garry Grimes (eggrimes@earthlink.net)
- 11 Alan (alanscouse@aol.com)
- 12 Julius Czarnecki (juliusc@ptd.net)
- 13 Kevin (kvnobrien@att.net)
- 13 Sid Lissner (slissner@avwashington.com)
- 14 Ken (raif@prodigy.net)
- 15 Rory (mgunner21@yahoo.com)+1
- 16 Don Dinero (dondi@ptd.prolog.net)+1

Possibles:

- 17 Brian Harkins (irishpark@hotmail.com)
- 18 Zoltan Kiraly (kiralyz@mbusa.com)

Whew! That's a possibility of 28 people! I know not everyone will actually show up, but I'm going to let the TGI Friday's know to expect between 20-30 for that mid-afternoon 'dinner.' I know, I know, we're acting like senior citizens, eating at 4 in the afternoon, but that was the only way they'd even consider bringing in such a large group. Looking forward to meeting you all!

Yes, it was becoming a full-fledged SVX event. Ben's pessimism, however, would lead to one of his greatest surprises. One last post from Ben before the meet, on March 29, 2000:

Hey,all,

Just wanted to add that Steve Pruitt is going to be attending now (flyinvfr@aol.com). I'm going to go and run the route again tomorrow afternoon, just to make sure everything's kosher. I'm also going to swing by the TGI Friday's and make sure they know what to expect. I'm still not absolutely sure that we'll all be able to get in there, but there are other restaurants in the IMMEDIATE vicinity (it's right next to a large outlet mall, hence the large number of restaurants). Oh, also, I FINALLY got some tunes back in the car! The bad thing is, they're going to have to do a custom install on the thing to make it look right, so they just did a quickie wiring job in the meantime. At least I have tunes, though.Y'all will see what I mean on Saturday...after I get it done up right, I'll take a photo and post it so

that everyone can 'ooh' and 'ahh' over it. ;^) Looking forward to comparing notes with everyone on Saturday!

BEN

On the morning of April 1, 2000, the first SVX at the meet site pulled into the parking lot of the Furniture Outlet Mall in Morgantown, PA, where the SVXes were supposed to gather, however they saw a lone SVX in the parking lot of the Morgantown Holiday Inn. They decided to park next to it, instead of going to the appointed meeting point. One by one, others followed suit. 3, then 5, 12, 16, 17. By 10 a.m., on the morning of April 1st, 17 SVXes were lined up in front of the Morgantown, PA Holiday Inn. People were milling and talking. Faces were put with screen names. Friendships, which were, until now, expressed from keyboard to monitor, could now be sealed with a handshake, or a hug. Even people who had been involved in "heated discussions" on the forum, could set differences aside, and poke fun at each other over "misunderstandings."

Larry III gathered attendees for a group picture, Maria_is_a_Speednut arrived late, with another member. Her car was in the shop. But wait . . . another . . . and another . . . and yet another. When all was said and done, the official count was 23 SVXes. Ben had been wrong. Not only did we NOT lose numbers, we had actually gained. February 19, 2003 It was officially the first mass gathering of SVXes in the history of the united states, and (at the time) the largest in North America (and probably the American Continent, for that matter). A cheer went up, as number 23 pulled into the lot. People were barely ready to be torn apart, when Ben began to line up the cars for the ride around the Pennsylvania Countryside. You could actually hear the gasps of amazement, as a long line of SVXes came together, single file. Finally, Ben took the point, and we headed off, into Amish country. As we pulled through one small town after another, people along the streets would stop and stare. "They're all alike," one person was heard to say. Some people would just stand, stare and smile. It would usually take three cars for a smile to appear, then, the smile would get bigger as each car would pass. You can only imagine the size of the smile after 23 cars would pass. Amish children would stop playing, and press their faces against fences to gape at the sight.

'Round the twisties, and through the straightaways we went, stopping for a photo op at Johanna Forge. People crowded on a hill to get the best shot of the historic group of 23 SVXes. Some of the owners just stood in amazement at the top of the hill, drinking in the awesome spectacle. It was a beautiful location, a great drive, Ben had done a great job. The activities wrapped up, and we were back on the road again. This time, heading for nourishment. TGI Friday's was our next stop, after a few more miles of enjoyable, leisurely driving. When we arrived at the restaurant, we were early. Not only that, we had many more people than were expected. We had to wait while they made accommodations. No problem. We talked and even had a short seminar on programming your remote key fob. Some of the ladies decided to go next door to the factory outlet stores.

Finally, we were ready for dinner. Due to the large crowd, we were scattered throughout the restaurant. You could hear laughter coming from all around. People were getting to know each other. "Inside jokes" were being created that would endure to present day, as well as the friendships that were formed.

Dinner was over. People trickled back into the parking lot. The sun began to set, but, no one wanted to leave. Slowly, one by one, cars began to pull out. The number dwindled until there were only three cars in the lot, then, reluctantly, the remaining stragglers said their goodbyes. The first Reading meet had come to an end.

The next day, those who had remained at the Holiday Inn, had breakfast and bid each other farewell. Long distance travelers embarked on their long journeys home. All were amazed, amused and happy. It was good to be a part of "history."

Impressions began to be posted on the Yahoo club as early as Sunday evening. Notes of accolade and virtual "high fives" were being passed around. Those who were unable to attend expressed their jealousy and the ones who were, expressed their joy.

On Monday, April 3rd, 2000, an amazed Ben Rowley posted his impression:

"Well, I think the general consensus is that it was a good time...I ran out of time to read through all the posts, though! Glad to discover that everyone was pleased. I was very pleased myself, with the turnout, the quality of cars and people there, the drive, the restaurant, and especially the dedication of the owners. I must say that, while I'd love to take all of the credit for this meet, it just wouldn't have happened without a lot of people 'cheerleading' along the way (Randy 'aredubjay' and good ol' Gary 'noclass' Grimes).And even beyond that, the overall type of owners that turned out were excellent. All different types, all different backgrounds, but all with a love (and sometimes common hatred) for these cars. We all did a phenomenal job of staying together on the drive, too. I appreciated that the conversation over dinner wasn't all about 0-60 times as well...too often, that's all car owners seem to care about. In conclusion, thanks to all of the people who made it out-I STILL just can't BELIEVE that some of you came from as far away as Milwaukee, Kentucky, Indiana and Vermont! You guys are the greatest! I'm going to put up the pics that were taken on my webpage by Wednesday night, so I'll put out a little announcement blurb then. Thanks again, everyone!

BEN

"

Ben Rowley would not be in attendance at the second Reading Meet. Within the next year or so, Ben would sell his SVX. But, the "Reading" meet would live on. Although never held at Reading, PA (Held in Morgantown, PA, in '00, '01, '02 on the first weekend in April, each year and moved to Lancaster, and the second weekend in April, in 2003), the original name has never been changed. The number of

attendees had dropped by the second year, but has steadily grown since. To this day, it is the most enduring and holds the record for the largest gathering of SVXes in North America (outside the 10th Anniversary Meet held in July, 2002), drawing attendees from as far as Vancouver, British Columbia.

If you are an SVX owner/enthusiast, this is one gathering you should try to attend, at least once, in your lifetime.

Randy Johnson

3rd Registered Member 02-21-2001

First Member to Reach 10,000 Posts

Hers - 1992 Black/Pearl LS-L

His - 1992 Black/Pearl LS-L 227k+ miles

SVX -- it's "All We'll Drive!!!"