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WEST COLUMBIA—Panic Motorsports' #90 Spec Miata claimed victory last Saturday, 30 Oct., at Virginia International Raceway (VIR) in the 13 Hour Charge of the Headlight Brigade.

Company co-owner and driver, Steve Bertok of Lexington, along with teammates Alex Gaines, Jason Owenby, and Dan Tiley, all of North Carolina, finished first in class by more than six laps and finished eighth overall, out of 65 cars.

"I think we're still coming to terms with what we did," said Bertok. "We had a good plan going in, but having simply won hands-down still surprised us all. It was an amazing effort by our drivers and crew."

The preparation for this year's 13 hour race began about five minutes after the end of last year's event, during which Panic Motorsports sponsored another car owner's Spec Miata. The car had a number of mechanical failures which left the team mid-pack. Bertok, Gaines, and Owenby, who also ran in last year's event, enlisted Tiley's help and among them, put together a rock solid car.

"As drivers, we had a parts guy who builds Spec Miatas for a living, a former BMX racer, a Mazda transmission and engine builder, and a vehicle dynamics engineer," said Becca Bertok, Steve's wife and Panic's co-owner. "How could we go wrong? The drivers get all the credit, but our crew really sealed the deal. There were times that our pit stops were so fast that we still had to hold the car for the required two minute stops!"

The Bertoks opened Panic Motorsports, located in West Columbia, in 2006. The company offers salvage and after market parts for Mazda Miatas and RX-7's, as well as street-car service, racecar prep, and racecar rental. They have begun to expand their parts lines, but Mazdas are still their main focus.

"We watched the Sports Car Club of America's (SCCA) Spec Miata class grow rapidly a few years ago and decided that would be a good jumping point for us," Bertok said. "The Miatas are also the most popular Mazda on the road. So far, it's been a good decision for us. Now, we're just looking to where we can go next."

Panic Motorsports runs races throughout the Southeast, including at Carolina Motorsports Park, outside of Camden. However, the team runs four or five races at VIR each year.

"It's definitely one of our favorite tracks," Bertok said.

Located in Alton, VA, 12 miles east of Danville, the course boasts 17 turns and over three miles of paved racing surface. Utilized by the SCCA, the American Le Mans Series, AMA World Superbike, and others, VIR is one of the U.S.'s premier road courses.

The 13 hour endurance win came at a good time. The added publicity will be a bonus to this small local, company. Racing is Panic's number one form of advertising. Although the company services a number of Mazdas in the Midlands and supplies several local body shops, the racing community has provided the largest amount of return business, and Panic's growth has largely been due to word-of-mouth advertising among