

Underground Miata Network—The First 30 years

Birth of a club (1995-96)

It takes one person to start something. That one person was Bruce Murphy, the something was the Underground Miata Network (UMN or the Club), and the year was 1995. Bruce was (and still is) a dentist. In 1995, Bruce had dental practices in both Toronto and Ottawa and it would not be unreasonable to think that Bruce, a Miata owner, might have joined Trillium Miata Club (Trillium), the existing Miata club centered in Toronto. Instead Bruce decided to start a new Miata club and locate it in Ottawa.



Bruce Murphy being Bruce Murphy, circa 1996.

The website for Bruce's dental practice in 2015 mentioned that his passions include racing performance cars and teaching performance driving. And so, it might be safe to assume that Bruce would have looked for a performance-oriented Miata club to join. He did not find it in Trillium and so needed to create another club—a Miata club unlike Trillium. UMN was formed, essentially in protest, to be unlike the established club in Ontario and operate separate from the sanctioning body of the time—the Miata Club of America (MCA).

The kick off meeting for the new Club was August 31, 1995. In addition to Bruce, attendees included Keith Tanner (later of Flyin' Miata fame), J.P. Sylvestre, John Fry, and David Allen. And yes, the meeting was in a dark basement—essentially underground and somewhat clandestine—but no, this is not central to the story.

But an interesting aspect to this story was Bruce's association, as keyboard player and guitarist, with the Canadian new wave rock and techno-pop group, "Men Without Hats" (recall "Safety Dance" and "Pop Goes the World").

As Keith Tanner recounts his recollection of the story as told later by David Allen:

The name "Underground Miata Network" was chosen not because the founding meeting took place underground (i.e., in the basement of that house) nor because the club, once formed, "sort of went underground." Rather, the name was put forward, then and there, by the same guy who had belonged to another oddly named group ("Men Without Hats") and in the same spirit of ironic

irreverence. I think he just found the predictable name of, say, the "Ottawa Miata Club" too ordinary and boring. The word "underground" appealed to his moderate outlaw perspective and the word "network" probably appealed more to his penchant for informality and his slightly anarchic dislike of hierarchical structures. Whatever the rationale, the mentality of those who were there that evening was enough in sync with his outlook that we found the name Underground Miata Network to have enough funny appeal that there was no real argument over it.

Much later (in 2003), consideration was given to ditching our Club name for something a little more pedestrian. But the membership voted and the moniker Underground Miata Network won out. Apparently, our rebel roots run deep.

However, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In 2022, the possibility of a name change was once more floated by the membership. It sunk like a rock. One commenter (among many) suggested: "The name is part of its (UMN's (Ed.)) history. There's no reason to change it to something uninteresting." The majority of those who shared their opinion held that, we are the Underground Miata Network, and there should be "no real argument over it".

Keith Tanner remembers from the early days that Bruce had a real sense of humour, so the titles given to the Club's executive officers poked fun at their expected duties such as: "Scribe", "Dictator for Life" (Bruce) and "Disseminator of Propaganda" (the latter title reserved for Keith). Humour would be a key characteristic of the Club. In fact, the new Club web site made no pretense about its importance: "A sense of humour is a membership requirement." The only other characteristic deemed worthy of note, UMN was: "...dedicated to the pursuit of driving enjoyment. Our focus is on driving and driving well."

While the first meeting was in August 1995, Club activities didn't really get going until the following spring. The first UMN event was a tour held in early 1996 to a destination that has unfortunately been forgotten to the passage of time. Befitting our Ottawa base, which is home to the world's largest tulip festival, our second tour (May 20, 1996) was to smell the tulips. The tour started at Bate Island (midway between Ottawa and Gatineau on the Champlain Bridge) and finishing at Dow's Lake, the epicenter for tulips. Supper followed at Mexicali Rosa's in the Dow's Lake Pavilion.



Likely the start of the 2nd UMN tour. Silver Miata believed to be Gilles Charlebois'. Next to it is Keith Tanner's (Keith still owns this 1990). Bruce Murphy's car has the yellow roll bar. Bate Island, May 1996.

Early days of the Club were described as both informal and relaxed. Members would just show up for an event suggested by any member. After the rain cancellation of one such casual run to Gatineau Park, Keith Tanner met up with Dell Smith. Dell's impression of that first encounter was that there was "not really" a Club. In fairness there was a club, in the early summer of 1996, albeit one whose operating style was very "loose".

Then, in July 1996, Trillium hosted Miata 96, a convention in Toronto attended by 427 Miata enthusiasts from across North America. (Coincidentally, 427 is an iconic number for many car enthusiasts. The Chevy "Big Block" was a V8 engine, displacing 427 cubic inches powering many "muscle cars" of the era. Ironically, a muscle car is the very antithesis of what a Miata is all about.)

An enthusiastic Dell Smith was there with the intention of joining the club sponsoring the event. From UMN were David Allen, Gilles Lavergne, and Bruce Murphy. Bruce's interest only lay in seeing the cars which included some concept cars and a Miata Coupe (only 179 were ever made). Keith Tanner was there too, representing Miata.net. At the time he was selling wind blockers online. Keith brought a few samples with him and set up shop in the convention parking lot. One of Keith's first customers was Dell Smith.

Dell's recollection of the conversation that ensued was that Keith identified that a Miata club did in fact exist in Ottawa, but that it did not yet have a name and Bruce Murphy was sort of its president. Perhaps salesman Keith felt the name "Underground Miata Network" and title of "Dictator for Life" might scare away young insurance broker Dell. Regardless of the actual motivation behind the conversation, Dell returned to Ottawa with a wind blocker and without a membership in Trillium.

A few days later (July 9) Dell attended his first UMN meeting at the James Street Feed Company. Later meetings were held in a coffee shop off Beechwood. All meetings were very informal. Dell recounts that he was a little skeptical about the Club's name at first but after meeting Club originators he was happy to go along with it thinking it was "unique, different and catchy". He also recalls there were a few younger members in the Club who definitely enjoyed spirited driving and events.

The Club held its first track day (autocross) at the Corel Centre (now known as the Canadian Tire Centre) a few days after the July meeting. The official announcement follows:

It's official – July 21 from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. Cost will be about \$20. We will be doing a Gym Kana (fun races), driving instruction and some real Solo II. We can go to dinner at the Hard Rock Café afterward. Participants are reminded to increase tire pressure to 40 lb. and empty their trunk.



Prior to the first UMN autocross on July 21, 1996, Club members participated in SOLO II events hosted by the Motorsport Club of Ottawa. Here Keith Tanner takes a hot lap at the Corel Centre (now Canadian Tire Centre), likely May 19, 1996.

In these early days the cost for track days (usually involving setting up an autocross course using pylons in a parking lot) were shared among the drivers who showed up to compete.

One of Dell's first tasks with the Club was to try to source cheap insurance. His analysis suggested that costs: "...could be prohibitive and could eat up all of our membership fees." An alternative was suggested that UMN might become a chapter of the Trillium Club and in the process benefit from cheaper group insurance.

Baby steps (the early years 1997-2000)

Dell was voted in as President of UMN on June 1, 1997. Bruce became Past President, following the "Trillium format". (Apparently, UMN was serious enough in its "courtship" of Trillium to forgo naming Bruce's potential title, "Former Dictator for Life".)

A little later UMN joined Trillium, as Trillium East. Bruce Murphy and Del Smith travelled together to Toronto for Trillium's monthly Sunday meetings. Dell notes the drives were: "...always a delight with his (Bruce's) enthusiasm for life."

As mentioned, the goal behind UMN's association with Trillium was to benefit from group insurance coverage that the young UMN did not feel it could afford on its own. But the two parted ways amicably, after only a few months, when it was discovered membership fees were not being used for insurance coverage.

In fairness to Trillium, regular and Executive members were likely unaware of an apparent "falling out" between the then Trillium President and Ontario's governing body for motor sports, the Canadian Automobile Sport Clubs—Ontario Region (CASC—OR). The disagreement led to funds not being transferred and insurance lapsing.

So, UMN severed its ties with Trillium and became (and still is) a member of CASC—OR. Through that affiliation, and work credited to Gilles Lavergne by Dell Smith, UMN

was able to obtain insurance coverage for its activities and maintains this coverage to this day.

Keith Tanner picks up the story again. In his recollection, Dell brought greater focus to the Club. He was an MCA (Motor Club of America) member from near the start and had a more traditional view of what a club should be like.

With Dell at the helm, things became a little more formalized through insurance coverage (as noted earlier) and the development and adoption of By-laws and Touring Directives. As a result, the Club started looking more and more like Trillium, which Keith adds: "is the life cycle of clubs". Dell suggests the documents were put together after an incident in which a non-member joined a UMN tour to Stowe Vermont. The non-member's Miata did not have brake lights and the non-member was not interested in a fix. To help the Club avoid finding itself in similar situations in the future, Club documents were adopted outlining expectations.

On September 28, 1999, the Underground Miata Network Association Inc., was incorporated as a non-profit organization, governed by the laws of the Province of Ontario. UMN was taking its first steps as a recognizable "club".



Picture of an early UMN Driving School printed in Road & Ster (Japanese magazine) circa 1998.

In the early days, membership dues were the primary source of revenue for the Club. Sponsors (Nostalgia Road, Mondial Racing, Robson Racing, Talon Tire, Best-Price Auto Parts, and Metro) offered discounts to members, but direct support to the Club was both infrequent and limited. Everything was done on a shoestring budget. Driving events (tours and driving schools) were heavily subsidized or offered free-of-charge to participating members.

Every year in which UMN held one or more driving school, the line item constituted the largest expense on the year-end statement. And for a period of time, driving schools fell by the wayside when the Club lost access to affordable parking lot rentals and could not afford the often exorbitant fees being charged to rent wide open asphalt, whether government- or privately-owned. (The same is true today. UMN now offers bi-annual driving schools as a cost-saving measure and in such years the parking lot rental is the Club's largest expense.)

In such a financially constrained climate, every expenditure by the club's Executive Committee was scrutinized by the membership (and in a few specific instances, voted on by the members) to make sure the expenditure was either necessary or justifiable. There were no contingency funds sitting in the bank. Throughout the early years, the Club's operations could best be described as 'fiscally lean'.

Nevertheless, increases to the annual membership fees were rare and constrained when they did occur. Fees in 2003 were \$60 per couple with a single driver and ranged from \$50 to \$100 per household depending on its composition. In contrast, fees in recent years have been frozen at \$60 per family regardless of its size. And on three recent occasions the Club has chosen to give a "free year" to existing members—once after an unexpected profit from an event and twice during the pandemic to reflect our reduced level of activity due to COVID-19.

Over time, the Club's focus changed from seeing how fast individual drivers could negotiate a course laid out with traffic cones in a parking lot ("Solo 1 racing" or "Autocross") to discovering what interesting places could be visited while choosing the most scenic and twisty routes possible (tours). Most years featured treasure/scavenger hunts and there were often social events.

The Club had monthly "Tech Nights" almost from its earliest days – an opportunity for members to get their hands dirty doing basic (and some not-so-basic) mechanical work on their own cars, with more technically-savvy members on hand to advise and assist. The first Tech Nights occurred in 2000 and were held in the driveway of Larry and Linda Hall's house in Carp. In 2003, tech sessions moved to Al Zarama's shop at 77 Auriga Drive on condition that members not spin their tires on the shop floor. Al bought a tool box, metric socket set, and wrenches from Canadian Tire. Tools were for the use of members and were gold plated, to distinguish them from SAE tools, using his shop's plating line. Al's shop also had a lift that could be used by members. Tech Nights took on some ambitious projects including the installation

of two superchargers and 10 sets (a group purchase through the Club) of stainless-steel dual exhausts. There were also more mundane projects like clearing drains in roof wells and adding raisers to elevate seats.

While at Al's shop, the association between UMN Tech Nights and BBQing was established. Rami Famili was chief cook with assistants Barb Clark and Barb Dugal using two little camping BBQs to cook up burgers for hungry members. The "two Barb's" did a lot of baking as well. Al had a coffee maker and there was always a pot brewing. On hot nights there was watermelon. Attendance doubled as spouses of gear heads soon learned of the availability of a good meal and others to share it with. Clearly, working on cars and socializing, particularly when it involves food, is part of the DNA of the Club.

Later the lift was moved to Al's home (a rarity for a private residence at the time) and Tech Nights followed. This was like coming home, literally, as Al's house had previously been the location for the first "tech session" (note not the first Tech Night) for the Club. This session replaced the normal August 1997 monthly meeting.

From Al's home, the venue switched to Nepean (Bentley Avenue), where Tech Nights stayed for a few years. Next, they moved to Docteur K.I.T. Auto, a two-bay Quonset hut garage on Rue Saint-Louis in Gatineau. From there, Tech Nights moved back to Nepean, staying at Precision Auto Tech between 2010 and 2024. At Precision Auto, the BBQ part of Tech Nights reached its zenith under the watchful eye and skillful flipper of Louis-Phillipe Coulombe with sous chef Pauline. L-P turned UMN barbeques into an art form. His BBQs became so popular that more Miatas turned up at Tech Nights for the "grub" than the "garage". The Embury's (Merv and Peggy), took up the BBQ challenge after the Coulombes. The tradition has continued with Dave and Lynn Pearen taking up the spatula for the past number of years. Starting in 2025, Tech Nights moved to a new home in Nepean at M&M Quality Auto Care.

The Club also went through its fair share of venues for its monthly meetings. After initially bouncing between locations, the Club settled for a time into the Aylmer Marina. Later, regular sites included: Louis Steak House on Cyrville Road; Cheshire Cat Pub in Carp; TIFOSI Lounge (a venue specifically created for car clubs in the basement of the St. Anthony Italian Community Centre on Preston Street); the restaurant on Bate Island; Robbie's on St. Laurent Boulevard; Perkin's Family Restaurant opposite St. Laurent Shopping Mall; and the Carlingwood Family Restaurant. More recently the Club has used KS on the Keys.



Miatas lined up at the Aylmer Marina, circa 1996.



More shots of Miatas at the Alymer Marina, circa 1996. The gentleman in the hat is Dell Smith.

In 2000, the Club was joined by three new members: Roland (Rolly) Beaulne; Colin Carson; and Louis-Phillipe (L-P) Coulombe (aka Tech Night BBQ master). Each of these new members would play pivotal roles in the next phase of the Club's development.

Becoming an adolescent (2001 to 2009)

In the early years of the new decade the Club had a lot of impromptu events. Someone would have an idea for a tour and soon the computers were screeching their dialup song. (This was the early days of the Internet when you used telephone lines and would call a number for Internet access. The noise was part squeal, part screech.) Tours in this period involved simple routes, and had no more than eight cars playing follow the leader.

A few members had Citizen's Band (CB) radios but their use was not widespread. That was until a car, mid-pack, missed a turn, and the rest followed. The solution was for Club members to get CB radios. Thus, began our Club's reliance on CBs, helping participants stay together and stay safe on our tours. Interestingly Dell had made a presentation on CB radios to the Club as early as September 1996. Wakid Radio (remember them?) was identified as the best CB source. (Merv Embury has been our Club's CB guru since joining in 2013 and has helped members, both within UMN and other clubs, with their CB issues.)

The highlight of the Miata season for many years was a treasure hunt. Competition was fierce among teams. Within teams, many couples found themselves no longer on speaking terms by the end of the event. The problem was significant enough that consideration was given to banning cohabiting couples from being on the same treasure hunt team.

Oddly enough the goal for most in the treasure hunt was to place second. The Steen Jensen Memorial Trophy, awarded to the second-place team, was designed by occasional driving instructor, Johni Keyworth. It was judged to be far nicer than the “Bat Out of Heck” award for placing first.

More recently, Funkhana (fun parking lot activities with cars) events, organized by Jim and Louise Charlton, create similar tests of relationships in the Club. Funkhana involves challenges, like negotiating a slalom course and backing up into a parking space, both while the driver is blindfolded and aided only by instruction from his/her spouse. How couldn't this challenge a relationship? A new tradition, Cardle—think of Wordle using a Miata—created by Colin and Nancy Carson, also creates ample business opportunities for marriage counselors.)



UMN Tour to Quebec City, 2003.



Maybe on the same tour, Louis-Phillip Coulombe meets UMN wannabee Guy Lafleur, May 7, 2003.

In addition to burgers, Louis-Phillipe would help “round out” our Club by starting a new tradition. He took the idea of the occasional tour involving an ice cream stop to the next level with an entire schedule built around Ice Cream Runs (ICRs). Every Wednesday (weather permitted) throughout the Miata season, he organized tours involving interesting towns in our area that just happened to have great places to buy ice cream. And he made sure the final tour of the year would lead to the Coulombe home. Pauline would bake lots of home-made pies to complement the last scoops of ice cream for the season.



The reward after a fun drive, ice cream run 2015.



Miatas in pursuit of ice cream, ice cream run 2015.

Before the official start to our 2006 season (that means snow was on the ground), Jim Charlton held a photo contest for members. Winning entries featured different aspects of our 2005 touring year. The winning entry in the "People" category featured members having a picnic during a day-trip to the Long Sault Parkway.



Clockwise from left--Rolly Beaulne, Klaus Ruhland, Tom Granger (non-member guest), Ruth Smith and Dell Smith on picnic along Long Sault Parkway, 2005.



Clockwise from left, Claude Vachon's 10AE (10th Anniversary Edition) NB and Dell Smith's NB parked part way through Smugglers' Notch in Vermont, 2005.

In the "Miata" category, two Miatas were captured resting by a mountain pass during a multi-day trip to Smugglers' Notch Vermont. (Similar variety exists in our more recent touring schedules.)

Also in 2006, Colin Carson would join the Executive as the Vice-President (V-P). Around this time there was a well-established succession path. A member elected into the V-P slot in year one would automatically become the President in year two and then the Past President in year three. Colin, a military lawyer in the Office of the Judge Advocate General, had concerns related to the Club's "liability, legality, and safety" and so he used his three-year tenure with the Executive to draft a new set of club governance documents, while Bill Lenton, a retired senior RCMP officer, who followed Colin by one year in the V-P, President, Past-President track, proof-read and critiqued drafts. The job of crafting club documents would involve the work of both Colin and Bill throughout their full terms. The results of this effort were:

- A UMN Constitution;
- A substantially revised and expanded set of By-laws (the previous by-laws had mainly dealt with the role of the Executive and how elections should occur);
- Expanded Touring Directives with a safe driving focus (Jim Charlton and Barrie Thomas deserve credit for much of the subsequent revisions to the Touring Directives that would see them become the current UMN Touring Information and Guidelines. These have been updated to reflect distracted driving laws and the twelve-car rule (discussed later));
- A Waiver of Liability and Sign-In Sheet for drivers and passengers participating on tours and other driving events (these too have been modified over time); and
- Emergency kits (fire extinguisher, hazard marker, blanket and first aid kit) to be carried in the sweep car on UMN tours.

Reading between the lines, the documents provide glimpses of a club, in the aftermath of its first serious motor vehicle accident (fortunately, no serious injuries), putting in place rules to enhance safety and limit the potential liability of the Club, its Executive Officers, and the members. A careful reading also suggests the Club was trying to avoid some rather unsavoury driving behaviour by at least one member. (The Club's governance documents would undergo a slight rework in 2019 to keep them up-to-date and again in 2020 to allow for elections by electronic means during the COVID years.)

But it was not all work and no play for the Club. In 2008, Toshihiko Hirai contacted Miata clubs across Canada with an offer to visit. While the response from most clubs was lack luster, UMN saw the offer for what it was—a great opportunity to meet a key figure in the story of our beloved Miatas.

Toshihiko Hirai is recognized as the father of the first-generation Miata in such authoritative sources as MIATA MX-5 by Jack Yamaguchi and John Dinkel. Bob Hall—another key actor in the birth of the Miata—calls the MX-5, "Hirai's car", in his Foreword in the Thomas L. Bryant's book Mazda MX-5 Miata Twenty-Five Years.

Meeting the man in charge of the small team responsible for bringing the first Miata to production was certainly a big deal. To the Club's honour, UMN was able to host Mr. Hirai for almost one week in late May and early June, 2008.

While under the wing of UMN, Mr. Hirai was introduced to all things Canadian. He "cottaged", drove a boat, saw the RCMP Musical Ride, and had ice cream—all of which Mr. Hirai seemed to enjoy immensely. While with UMN, he rode as navigator and occasional driver, in Gilles Charlebois' pristine red 1990—the car Hirai thought was the purest and best Miata. In contrast, Mr. Hirai was not a fan of Miatas with paddle shifters, describing them as not a real Miata, when asked.

In appreciation of the hospitality shown him by UMN, Mr. Hirai signed members' trunks, adding the Japanese four-character compound Jinba ittai. Miata lovers will recognize this as the design influence for their cars—roughly rider (jin) and horse (ba) as one body (ittai). While we hope Mr. Hirai left with many fond memories from his stay with us, lucky members have a lasting symbol of the visit in the form of a personal blessing from the father of Miatas.



Mr. Hirai signing member's trunk lid, 2008.

Rolly Beaulne played a big role in the Hirai visit. It was his riverside home on the Rideau and boat that helped introduce our visitor to these very Canadian moments. Rolly had become Treasurer in the second half of the first decade of the new millennium. He then moved to roles as Vice-President, President, and Past President serving for a total of nine years—three of them as President.

It is during this period that the Club's financial house started to take shape. (In truth, the Club operations would remain fiscally tight throughout its first 20 years. It would be the regular annual contributions from Mazda Canada, starting with our hosting of Canada's Capital Miata Meet (C2M2), that allowed the Club to experience its first financial breathing room.) But it is also in the Beaulne years that the Club faced its biggest test.



Rolly Beaulne (left) and Mr. Hirai enjoying a Rideau River cruise, 2008.

While we understandably focus on sunny motoring there have been some cloudy days for UMN. Most notable was a challenge of the Club's policy on the use of CB radios before the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) in 2013. Groups such as ours: "...have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities who are adversely affected by a requirement, rule or standard." (OHRC, *Policy on Ableism and Discrimination based on Disability*, revised June 27, 2016.) A member claimed the UMN policy on CB use discriminated against her because of her hearing impairment.

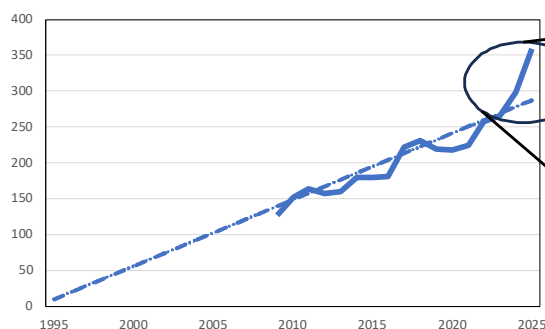
The full-day proceeding before the Commission heard evidence from the complainant. In UMN's defense, President Roland Beaulne offered a binder filled with e-mail correspondence on the actions taken by UMN and brief testimony by fellow member Dell Smith, who also incidentally, had a hearing impairment.

The Adjudicator ruled in UMN's favour and in the process complimented UMN on their efforts to fully discharge their "duty to accommodate". In fact, the case is now an integral part of case law and is cited in the revised OHRC policy which states: "...human rights case law (Ed. the UMN case) makes it clear that the purpose of the Code is to accommodate a person's needs, not their preferences." (*Ibid.*)

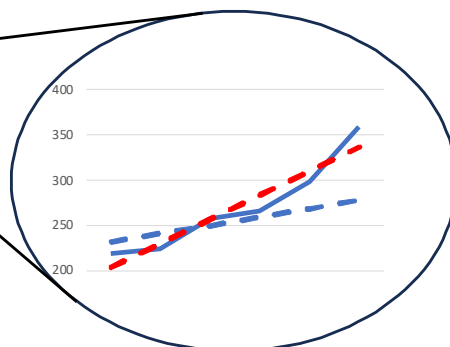
While the human rights challenge was the biggest test for our Club, the process of growing and maturing as a club has also not been without its challenges. As the Club's direction evolved, there have been members who have found the change unsettling. As the emphasis shifted from a performance-based to a touring-based club, some early founding members drifted away. Geographic relocation also played a role. Other moves, this time by the Club to more formal structures involving a Constitution, By-laws and Driving Directives, were not welcomed by all. More recently, splitting tours across multiple groups, each with a maximum of 12 cars had its distractors. But the overall effect has been to improve how our tours run and most probably increase safety.

While such well-intentioned measures did not meet with universal acceptance, on balance they appear to have helped the Club in its continued growth and development. While the current focus of the Club is arguably touring (day and multi-day tours and ICRs) the Club offers a variety of other pursuits for the enjoyment of its members (Tech Nights, driving school, sponsor discounts, and a variety of social activities). While changing tastes will no doubt affect Club activities in the future, the current offering may have achieved a "sweet spot" for its members. Total membership has grown steadily in recent years. In 2025, we celebrated both our 30th year as a Miata club and our membership surpassing 300 for the first time. We finished the year with 359 members. (Membership typically drops at the start of each new year and builds to its peak at year end.)

Details on our recent membership numbers are provided below (bolded blue line). Since COVID we have added an average of 27 new members annually (dashed red line) compared to about one-third this number historically (dashed blue line). While 2025 was a record year in terms of our anniversary and member growth (with over 60 new members) we expect more moderate growth in the years ahead.



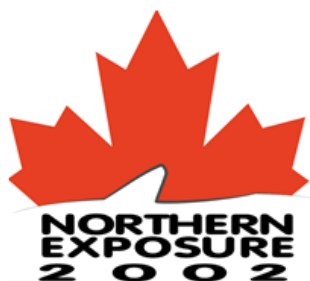
Total membership by year 1995-2025.



Membership detail for years 2020-2025.

Maturing through some milestone events

As the focus shifted toward touring, a number of notable driving events highlight our Club history.



In 2002, Keith Tanner, and Gary Fischman, both representing Miata.net, and J-P Sylvestre, organized an event called Northern Exposure. Participants came from as far away as Belgium, Germany and England. Over 200 cars, almost 80% from the U.S., were involved in tours running from the Chateau Cartier, in Alymer Quebec to Mount Tremblant. There was also a golf tournament for participants.

UMN was not officially involved through concerns that the financial risk of the event was too great for the young club to absorb. But with J-P ("without whom the event could not have happened" according to Keith Tanner) handling local organization, and with a number of other UMN members helping out, the event was an enormous success.



Promotional material provided to participants of Northern Exposure, July 2002.



Members Alec Lumsden and Gilles Charlebois (in car) at Northern Exposure, July 7, 2002.



MIATA INVITATIONAL WEEKEND

JULY 31 - AUGUST 3

TOUR DETAILS

**JEAN LAVIGNE'S
"ST JOVITE TOUR"**

Discover the adventure of some of Quebec's most charming secondary roads on your way to the picturesque village of Saint-Jovite, lying at the foot of Lac Beauport. This six-hour tour takes you through magnificent Gatineau Hills renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and lakes. While in Saint-Jovite, you will have two hours to search out your preferred restaurant or cafe for lunch and to browse the shops. Your return to Ottawa will be on a mix of interesting and scenic secondary roads lined with trees, lakes and farmland. On Sunday, we will finish at a restaurant in Gatineau before the boat cruise.

Departure Point: Assembly Time: Departure Time: Driving Distance: Driving Time: Finish Time: Finish Location:	Comfort Inn, 222 Hearst Way, Kanata Saturday - 8:15 a.m., Sunday - 8:10 a.m. Saturday - 8:30 a.m., Sunday - 8:25 a.m. 200 km 5 1/2 hours 4:30 p.m. Saturday - Downtown Ottawa or #17 Sunday - Restaurant, Gatineau
--	--



**ANTHONY PEARSON'S
"WESTPORT SURPRISE TOUR"**

This tour takes us beyond the agrarian flatlands of the Ottawa Valley into the rugged lakes region. It involves a wide variety of landscapes and secondary roadways through farmland and lakeshore, featuring two single-lane water crossings. Our mid-day destination is the scenic village of Westport at the head of Upper Rideau Lake, which takes us by surprise as we swing left and drop several hundred feet over the escarpment. In addition, we will make a mid-morning stop in the picturesque village of Meriville, and pass through Perth and Richmond on the return journey. On the Sunday, before arriving at the restaurant (prior to the boat cruise), we will take a relaxed roll along the Ottawa River Parkway to complete the tour.

Departure Point: Assembly Time: Departure Time: Driving Distance: Driving Time: Finish Time: Finish Location:	OC Transport Park & Ride, Hearst Way, Kanata (a few hundred yards east of the Comfort Inn) Saturday - 8:50 a.m., Sunday - 8:20 a.m. Saturday - 8:00 a.m., Sunday - 8:30 a.m. Saturday - 250 km, Sunday - 275 km Saturday - 5 1/2 hours, Sunday - 6 hours Saturday - 4:30 p.m., Sunday - 5:00 p.m. Sunday - Restaurant, Gatineau
--	--



**DELL SMITH'S
"NORTHERN ROUTE TOUR"**

On this tour along the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, we will start out with a scenic drive up the Gatineau Parkway with stops at the Mackenzie King Estate and the Champlain Lookout, renowned for its breathtaking view of the Ottawa River Valley. The drive will continue along the base of the Gatineau Hills on Chemin de la Montagne and on into the Pontiac County Region. We will stop for lunch in Portage du Forge. After crossing into Ontario at Portage du Forge, the return trip will take us along scenic rural routes 4 and 1, a visit to Arnprior and a run along The Twenties around Catolago. On Sunday, before arriving at the restaurant (prior to the boat cruise), we will extend the drive along the Ottawa River Parkway to complete the tour.

Departure Point: Assembly Time: Departure Time: Driving Distance: Driving Time: Finish Time: Finish Location:	Comfort Inn, 222 Hearst Way, Kanata Saturday - 8:30 a.m., Sunday - 8:15 a.m. Saturday - 8:45 a.m., Sunday - 8:30 a.m. Saturday - 350 km, Sunday - 375 km Saturday - 4 hours, Sunday - 4 1/2 hours Saturday - 4:30 p.m., Sunday - 5:00 p.m. Saturday - Comfort Inn Kanata, Sunday - Restaurant, Gatineau
--	---



In 2009, UMN hosted the Miata Invitational Weekend. This tour showed some visiting Trillium members what the Ottawa area had to offer. Tours were organized to Saint Jovite, Westport, and a "Northern Route" through Quebec's Gatineau Park, then heading west along the Ottawa River north shore, before crossing into Ontario and returning through Arnprior and Calabogie.

Advertising for Miata Invitational Tour, 2009.

In 2010, the Club celebrated its 15th Anniversary by running a poker run and sharing a great dinner at La Vallée Motel in Chelsea. The day started with a photo shoot of members and their cars. There were loot bags for participants, containing numerous swag items provided by local Miata dealerships, and a commemorative 15-year anniversary pin.



For our 20th Anniversary (2015), UMN hosted Canada's Capital Miata Meet (C2M2) bringing 162 cars (and 293 participants) to our Nation's Capital to experience three full-days of touring. On each day, 12 tours left the parking lot of the Ottawa Convention and Event Centre to experience a variety of destinations in our area.

Social events included a welcoming reception (entertainment provided by fiddlers and step dancers) and closing banquet (entertainment provided by a jazz trio). C2M2 was well received by participants. Typical comments were:

- *Thumbs up and bravo to UMN.*
- *This tour was the greatest tour my husband and I have ever been on and would go back to Canada in a minute.*
- *Your membership! Outstanding job. Tour control, and tours in general very good.*
- *It was very organized, no chaos, especially getting drives out of the parking lots.*
- *We very much enjoyed the people, experience, venue, tours and city.*
- *Everyone was wonderful and very accommodating and friendly.*
- *The friendliness of the organizers, the choice of tours, and especially the efficiency of how the tours were organized to leave the hotel.*
- *I loved meeting UMN members!*



Lining up for group photo at Canada's Capital Miata Meet, August 2015.



Tours meeting during Canada's Capital Miata Meet, August 2015.

2020 began with the exciting promise of a year of planned celebration around UMN's 25th Anniversary. The first C2M2 being such a hit, we set our sights on a second installment (C2M2-2020) and decided to not under-deliver.

But 2020 had its own surprises as the world faced the challenges of dealing with a global pandemic. Our planning window needed to finalize and test tour routes slipped away. Places for bio breaks and lunch stops remaining closed for much of the driving season. Added to this was the threat, turned reality, of a closed U.S./Canada border keeping many of our Miata friends away. Faced with these realities, we opted to postpone C2M2 events until August of 2021. Ultimately the border would remain closed for nearly 19 months and as the pandemic lingered into 2021, we made the painful decision to cancel. Instead, we set our sights on 2025 and the prospect of celebrating our 30th anniversary with our Miata friends.

Canada's Capital Miata Meet—2025 ran August 14 to 17, 2025. There were 160 Miatas, representing 26 Miata Clubs from 5 provinces and 13 states. On each of two days, 14 tours explored the best the National Capital Region could offer. There was an opening session, a closing banquet / dance and Sunday self-directed tours.

Ninety-nine per cent of our guests said they would return to a future C2M2. This success can be directly attributed to the 80+ UMN volunteers that made the event possible—and to their hard work in support of UMN. Comments received from participants echo this truth:

I think everyone did an incredible job and I still don't know how you got so many volunteers, including great sweeps and leads.

Kudos to the UMN team for their hard work to prepare and plan these tours. We are looking forward to 2030 already!

Personally, I feel the Event was extremely well organized from start to finish. The amount of work and long hours the Committee put into this was evident from start to finish.

Thanks for putting it together. A ton of work and time went into it. Congratulations and thanks to everyone for a successful, huge and difficult event!

You all did a fantastic job with logistics, management, entertainment, and we can't wait for the next one!

All I can say is that UMN pulled off an amazing 30th anniversary celebration that will be remembered for a long time.

Your tours were perfectly executed for having so many cars. It went off like clockwork!

It was my first experience and I am still amazed by it. Thank you!!!



Participants lining up for photo. Canada's Capital Miata Meet, August 2025.

Participants on one of fourteen tours offered each day. Canada's Capital Miata Meet, August 2025.



Apparently, Miata/MX-5 owners like to have a good time. Dancing at the closing ceremonies. Canada's Capital Miata Meet, August 2025.



Social distancing in a Miata

During the pandemic our Club did our part to support social distancing and protect the most vulnerable among us. Instead of in-person meetings we held monthly meetings on Zoom. Jason Bronsther and Roger Massie organized and hosted virtual Tech Nights to share their expertise among members. These helped fill the void and resulted in our cars enjoying great TLC. And with Tech Night BBQs and Ice Cream Runs on hold, some of us began to fit a little easier in the seats of our Miatas.

With the green light from health and government officials, we took small cautious steps toward re-starting Club activities. August 30, 2020 saw members gather to celebrate our 25th Anniversary. The setting (the park surrounding the Lost Villages Museum, Long Sault) provided lots of opportunity to socialize at a distance. And while less than our original plan for our C2M2 birthday bash, it was great to see so many members willing and able to come together to share in our achievement as a Club.



Masked members take a stand, albeit at a distance, for our Club, Lost Villages Museum, August 30, 2020.



Even our Miatas were able to social distance for our 25th Anniversary Celebration, Lost Villages Museum, August 30, 2020.

Ultimately both 2020 and 2021 were challenging years for the Club and members were not able to experience a full schedule of activities. The Executive chose to reflect this reality by waiving membership fees. Members responded by remaining dedicated to the Club.

And what of the Club today

In the years post-COVID, we have seen a return to full schedules of events, a significant engagement by members in all our activities, and a growth in membership as presented earlier.

Our membership is as diverse as the population of the National Capital Region (Ottawa and Gatineau) and includes those from as far afield as Colorado, Alberta, and Newfoundland and Labrador. We all share a love for the Mazda Miata/MX5, and

for driving these fun little cars either in convoy or just on some of the delightfully twisty roads that surround us.

While 2025 was an anomaly, due to our preparations for C2M2-2025 and our 30th anniversary, 2024 is more typical. In that year we went on 20 tours; two of them multi-day tours and two of them to the United States. There were 16 ice cream runs to fun destinations offering this frozen confectionary. Given the popularity of events many involved multiple convoys in keeping with our 12-car limit. Totals for 2024 reflect 433 Miata trips, involving 743 drivers and passengers, covering 7,350 km driven in touring/ICR events.

Members participated in seven monthly meetings not including our Christmas party, brunch, picnic, Annual General Meeting and a tour planning session; five Tech nights including a session to remove dents from our beauties; and three information sessions for route planning tools and lead/sweep training sessions. The later sessions help build the skill set of our members, better equipping them to take on the planning and delivery of the tours/ICRs that are the life-blood of our group.

But it is not only fun and games. Over the years our Club has chosen, as its mission, "Giving Back" to those in need in our community. During the pandemic, when Mazda Canada offered to match charitable contributions, our Club stepped up, leading to a joint \$4000 contribution to First Responders United, a group supporting members who developed work-related PTSD. In recent years our giving has tended to focus on Food Banks and those who are struggling in our communities.

Epilogue

At the very core of the Underground Miata Network and perhaps its unofficial motto is the notion that while we came together because of our Miatas we stay together because of the friends we make in the Club. Miatas just seem to draw good people together. And those good people, in turn, give back.

Like any volunteer organization, UMN would be nothing without the hard work of its members. In looking at the Club over its first thirty years it is apparent that the Club has been blessed by members who have freely given their time and talents for the benefit of UMN. And through their contribution, the experience of every Club member has been enhanced.

Our Club thrives through the efforts and talents of its many volunteers. Members offer their time on our Executive (See Appendix A), C2M2 Planning Committee, and Social Committee and 50:50 Committee; or as co-ordinators for our Web Site, Tech Night, BBQ, and Photography; or as those who plan, lead or sweep our tours/ICRs; or who offer their expertise in other areas such as CB radios or GPS. It is through these members' work that we can offer such a diverse suite of activities to satisfy the diverse interests of our membership.

In appreciation of those who contribute to Club life, David Waung initiated the Volunteer Appreciation BBQ to recognize those who gave their time and talents for our first C2M2. Every year since, an annual Volunteer Appreciation BBQ has celebrated those who have given to the Club. This commitment by so many speaks to the strength of our Club.

Prior to this annual tradition, long and distinguished service to our Club was recognized for only a relative few who were made Lifetime Members. The list of notables follows:

- Prudence Au and Richard Loke
- Roland Beaulne.
- Colin and Nancy Carson.
- Louis-Philippe and Pauline Coulombe.
- Merv and Peggy Embury.
- John Fry.
- Bob and Mimi Gauthier.
- Claude and Louise Gelinas.
- Dell Smith.
- Jean-Pierre Sylvestre.
- Keith Tanner.
- David and Iris Waung.

This article is dedicated to those mentioned and to all the others (too numerous to single out here) who have contributed their time and efforts over the past 30 years. You have helped UMN achieve this milestone, and in the process, have made UMN the great club it has become.

And now for the next 30.

Appendix A

UMN Executive Officers

2025

President	Mike Bernier
Vice-President	Barry Rowsome
C2M2 Coordinator	David Waung
Membership	Ron Buck
Treasurer	John Lutes
Secretary	Tony Pickett
Tour Director	Steven Leu
Social Committee	Linda Lafromboise/ Leah Henry-Leu/ Debbie Myers
Communications	Keith Vodden
Sponsorship	Aydin Suatac
Dir. at Large	Chris Powell

2023

President	David Waung
Vice-President	vacant
Past President	Keith Vodden
Membership	Ron Buck
Treasurer	Bob Gauthier
Secretary	George Butts
Tour Director	Steven Leu
Social Director	vacant
Communications	Joanne Lauterbach
Sponsorship	Craig Cosgrove

2021

President	Keith Vodden
Vice-President	Bob Gauthier
Past President	vacant
Membership	Bob Gauthier
Treasurer	Bob Gauthier
Secretary	George Butts
Tour Director	Colin Carson
Social Director	Debbie Myers
Communications	Joanne Lauterbach
Sponsorship	vacant

2024

President	Mike Bernier
Vice-President	Barry Rowsome
C2M2 Coordinator	David Waung
Membership	Ron Buck
Treasurer	Bob Gauthier
Secretary	George Butts
Tour Director	Steven Leu
Social Director	Vacant
Communications	Keith Vodden
Sponsorship	Craig Cosgrove
Dir. at Large	Chris Powell

2022

President	David Waung
Vice-President	vacant
Past President	Keith Vodden
Membership	Ron Buck
Treasurer	Bob Gauthier
Secretary	George Butts
Tour Director	Colin Carson
Social Director	Debbie Myers
Communications	Joanne Lauterbach
Sponsorship	vacant

2020

President	Keith Vodden
Vice-President	Bob Gauthier
C2M2 Co-ordinator	David Waung
Membership	Vacant
Treasurer	Bob Gauthier
Secretary	George Butts
Tour Director	Mike Bernier
Social Director	Debbie Myers
Communications	Danny Kelly
Sponsorship	Barry Rowsome

2019

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Communications
 Sponsorship

Keith Vodden
 Bob Gauthier
 David Waung
 Andrew McGregor
 Bob Gauthier
 George Butts
 Mike Bernier
 Debbie Myers
 Danny Kelly
 Barry Rowsome

2017

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Henry-Leu
 Communications

David Waung
 Bob Gauthier
 vacant
 Andrew McGregor
 Bob Gauthier
 vacant
 Mike Bernier
 Debbie Myers/ Leah
 Keith Vodden

2015

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Communications

Rolly Beaulne
 Rob Staples
 vacant
 Bob Gauthier
 Kevin Germann
 Pauline Coulombe
 Barry Thomas
 Lucie Quinn
 Prudence Au

2013

President
 Vice-President
 Past-President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Communications

Rolly Beaulne
 Rob Staples
 Henry Cousens
 Bob Gauthier
 Dominique Perron
 Gloria Bartlett
 Barry Thomas
 Lucie Quinn
 Prudence Au

2018

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Communications
 Sponsorship

David Waung
 Bob Gauthier
 vacant
 Andrew McGregor
 Bob Gauthier
 vacant
 Mike Bernier
 Debbie Myers
 Keith Vodden
 Barry Rowsome

2016

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Bernier
 Social Director

David Waung
 Bob Gauthier
 Rolly Beaulne
 Andrew McGregor
 Ben Loiselle
 vacant
 Chris Savage/Mike
 Bernier
 Fran Cosgrove/Leah
 Henry-Leu/ Debbie
 Myers
 Keith Vodden

Communications

2014

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Pauline Coulombe
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Communications

Rolly Beaulne
 Rob Staples
 vacant
 Bob Gauthier
 Kevin Germann
 Gloria Bartlett/
 Barry Thomas
 Lucie Quinn
 Prudence Au

2012

President
 Vice-President
 Past President
 Membership
 Treasurer
 Secretary
 Tour Director
 Social Director
 Communications

Henry Cousens
 Rolly Beaulne
 vacant
 Louise Charlton
 Dominique Perron
 Gloria Bartlett
 Barry Thomas
 Lucie Quinn
 Prudence Au

2011

President Henry Cousens
 Vice-President Rami Famili
 Past President Claude Gélinas
 Membership Louise Charlton
 Treasurer Rolly Beaulne
 Secretary Donna Graham/
 Gloria Bartlett
 Tour Director Barry Thomas
 Social Director Lucie Quinn
 Communications Mark Baker

2009

President: Claude Gélina
 Vice- President: Jan van Zyll de Jong
 Past President: Bill Lenton
 Membership: Louise Charlton
 Treasurer: Roland Beaulne
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Jim Charlton
 Social Director: Lucie Quinn
 Web Site: Terri Worthington

2007

President: Colin Carson
 Vice- President: Bill Lenton
 Past President: Gilles Charlebois
 Membership: Lucie Quinn
 Treasurer: Roland Beaulne
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Jim Charlton
 Web Site: Terri Worthington
 Member-at-Large: Johni Keyworth

2005

President: Steen Jensen
 Vice-President: Gilles Charlebois
 Past President: Alec Lumsden
 Membership: Lucie Quinn
 Treasurer: Roland Beaulne
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Johni Keyworth
 Web Site: Ray Tsui
 Member-at-Large: Dell Smith

2010

President: Claude Gélinas
 Vice- President: Henry Cousens
 Past President: vacant
 Membership: Louise Charlton
 Treasurer: Roland Beaulne
 Secretary: Pauline Coulombe
 Tour Director: Jim Charlton
 Social Director: Lucie Quinn
 Communications: Mark Baker

2008

President: Bill Lenton
 Vice- President: Claude Gélinas
 Past President: Colin Carson
 Membership: Lucie Quinn
 Treasurer: Roland Beaulne
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Jim Charlton
 Web Site: Terri Worthington
 Member-at-Large: Johni Keyworth

2006

President: Gilles Charlebois
 Vice- President: Colin Carson
 Past President: Steen Jensen
 Membership: Lucie Quinn
 Treasurer: Roland Beaulne
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Johni Keyworth
 Web Site: Terri Worthington
 Member-at-Large: Dell Smith

2004

President: Alec Lumsden
 Vice-President: Steen Jensen
 Past President: Larry Hall
 Membership: Jeff Linton
 Treasurer: Sonny Lapointe
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Johni Keyworth
 Web Site: Ray Tsui
 Member-at-Large: Dell Smith

2003

President: Alec Lumsden
 Vice-President: Peter Hoffman
 Past President: Larry Hall
 Membership: Jeff Linton
 Treasurer: Sonny Lapointe
 Secretary: Barbara Clark
 Tour Director: Johni Keyworth
 Web Site: John Ellis
 Social: Ramin Famili

2001

President: Larry Hall
 Vice-President: Alec Lumsden
 Past President: vacant
 Membership: Jeff Linton
 Secretary: Linda Hall
 Treasurer: Sonny Lapointe /
 Jean-Pierre Sylvestre
 Tour Director: Johni Keyworth
 Web Site: John Ellis

1999

President: John Fry
 Vice-President: Matt Elgin
 Past President: Dell Smith
 Membership: Jeff Linton
 Treasurer: Jean-Pierre
 Sylvestre
 Secretary: Diana Trask
 Tour Director: Gerry Proulx
 Solo and Driving
 School: J.R. Fortin

1995 to May 1997

Dictator for Life: Bruce Murphy
 Disseminator of
 Propaganda: Keith Tanner
 Scribe: Unknown
 Others: Unknown

2002

President: Larry Hall
 Vice-President: Alec Lumsden
 Ex President: Dell Smith
 Membership: Jeff Linton
 Secretary: Lori Lapointe
 Treasurer: Sonny Lapointe
 Tour Director: Johni Keyworth
 Web Site: John Ellis

2000

President: Diana Gurd-Trask
 Vice-President: Larry Hall
 Past President: John Fry
 Membership: Jeff Linton
 Treasurer: Jean-Pierre
 Sylvestre
 Secretary: Linda Hall
 Tour Director: Dell Smith
 Solo II: Brad Merkel

1997 (June 1) to 1998

President: Dell Smith
 Vice-President: John Fry
 Past President: Bruce "No Miata"
 Murphy
 Membership: Lois Thompson
 Treasurer: Jean-Pierre
 Sylvestre
 Secretary: Keith Tanner
 Tour Director: Bob Smith
 Solo II: Alain Raymond
 Solo II: John Fortin