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August 31, 1998 2.50 USA 3.50 Canada



Porsche

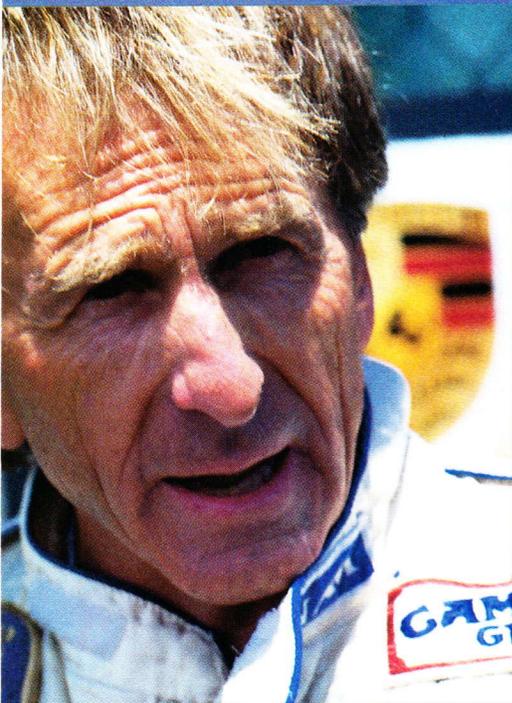
TURNS GOLDEN

Five decades of excellence come together at Laguna Seca • By Mark Vaughn

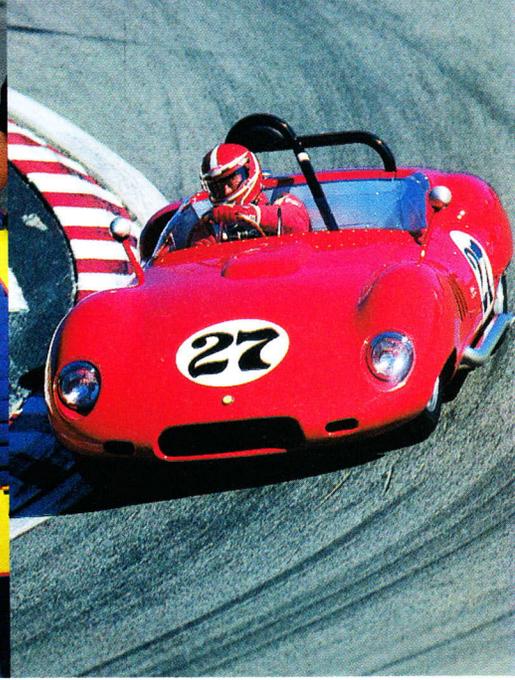
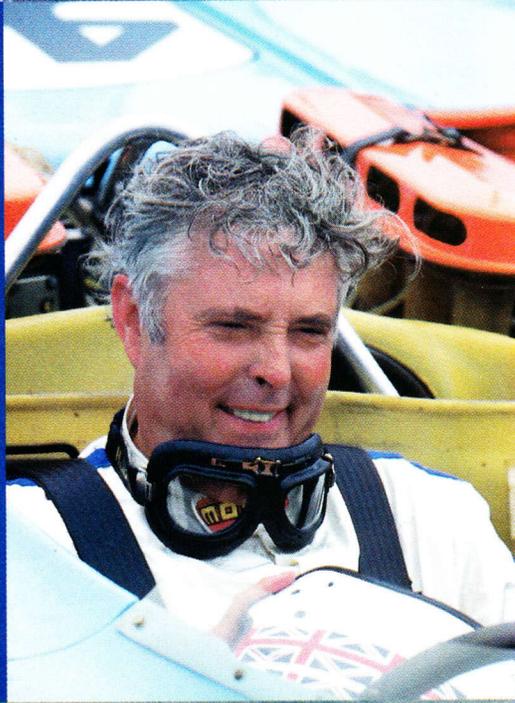
Photography by Bill Delaney, Peter Brock, Ron Kimball, David Newhardt and Nina Padgett







Porsches, Porsches everywhere. . . and no one complained, especially not Porsche CEO Dr. Wendelin Wiedeking, above. Rob Walton's '57 Scarab Mk1, top right, snakes through Laguna's corkscrew as it did nearly 40 years ago. Porsche factory drivers Derek Bell, left, and Brian Redman, right, wowed crowds with classic duels and classy behavior. Could the 1973 Mark Donohue Porsche 917/30, below, be the ultimate sports car? Some say it was so fast it killed the Can-Am Series. Longtime racer Vic Edelbrock, bottom right, muscles and hustles a bright red '59 Lister Corvette.



THE GUY FERRYING AUTOGRAPHS back and forth for fans at the Porsche compound certainly didn't *have* to be so helpful. Yet there he went, taking programs, T-shirts, fenders and everything else that would accept a permanent-marker, and handing them to the great Porsche drivers. He'd get an autograph, return the item to the owner, then pick up something else, smiling all the way. Hans Herrman signed a checkered flag, Joe Buzzetta autographed a program and Bob Wollek wrote his name on a big aluminum fender. There were plenty of others, and he saw to it they all got what they wanted.

"Did you want anything signed?" the cheerful fellow asked us.

No thank you, we told five-time Le Mans winner Derek Bell. So Bell stopped ferrying autographs and went back to eating his lunch.

This was going to be some weekend.

"FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARIES happen only once in a lifetime," said Fred Schwab, head of Porsche Cars North America. "It's really important that you do it right."

Right in this case means big, HUGE. And it ain't cheap. While Schwab wouldn't quote a figure, a Porsche source told us the tab was "more than seven figures, less than eight."

It started as early as the Amelia Island Concours in April, when the first Porsche museum cars showed up. It picked up steam at Meadow Brook, with a good-sized gathering of Porsche cars, drivers and fans of the marque, including the Porsche Club's annual Eastern meet. It ends after the race cars mass at Watkins Glen, Aug. 28-30, for Brian Redman's Double-50 vintage event, celebrating Porsche's anniversary as well as the track's.

But the biggest Porsche celebration was at Laguna Seca, done in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of the Monterey Historic Automobile Races.

Porsche AG sent 14 race cars from its museum in Stuttgart. Monterey Historics organizer Steve Earle admitted 124 for the races. Over 400 crammed the corral between Turns Two and Five (which had sold out in mere days after the announcement ran in the club magazine, *Porsche Panorama*, back in February), and hundreds, probably thousands of Porsches prowled the Monterey Peninsula throughout the weekend.

"I'm confident that on the Monterey Peninsula right now there are more Porsches than anywhere else in the world," said Schwab. A Porsche anywhere else in North

America this particular weekend could be justifiably labeled a stray, missing from the flock.

At 1 p.m. on Saturday track officials weren't even letting people turn off the highway unless they already had tickets. In 1994, when Ferrari was the honored marque, the track hosted 42,000 fans over three days. Estimates of the Porsche crowd were between 50,000 and 60,000 Saturday alone, the second-largest single-day draw in the history of the track. What event out-drew Porsche? The Pope.

Why this enthusiasm? Why do Porsches hold as much of a draw for those who have owned one as they do for those who can never hope to?

"It's because they keep people dreaming," said Wollek, who has raced Porsches for 25 years. "People seem to need to dream. To dream about things they cannot

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do, things they would like to do. To own a Porsche is a dream for many people. Porsche is something unique. The Germans would say it's a mythos."

"The handling, the chassis, these are mechanical things, but they speak of something larger," Herrman said.

"Porsche only has one word in its vocabulary," said Vic Elford, who drove 917s at just about every track a 917 ever drove on. "Perfection."

ON JUNE 8, 1948, DR. FERRY PORSCHE rolled a small two-seat sports car out the doors of an old saw mill in Gmund, Austria, and one of the greatest sports car legends was born. While it would go on to become one of the greatest marques in history, Porsche was an anomaly in a late-'40s

Europe struggling to rebuild itself from the ravages of war.

"What people in 1948 certainly did not need was a small sporting two-seater built just for fun," said Wolfgang Porsche, Ferry Porsche's eldest son, who was on hand for the celebration. "It was a ludicrous product nobody could conceive. But my father and grandfather were individuals who would not give up. They gave people the dreams to see beyond the suffering that was around them. To see what could be next."

Porsche AG, a company highly aware of its past, still has that very first 1948-model sporting two-seater built just for fun. The car was on its way to the celebration when it was damaged in transport, dropped smack on its nose as it was being unloaded from a cargo plane. The damage was too much for a quick fix, so Porsche Nr. 1 was sent back to Stuttgart for repair. But almost every other

Porsche model ever made was represented at the 50th anniversary fete, most in racing trim, lined up under a monstrous air-conditioned tent that looked like an auto-show display only much, much bigger.

From its museum, Porsche brought a 1951 356 Aluminum Coupe and a 1954 550 Panamericana Spyder, a 1960 RS 60 and a 1960 718 F2. A 1970 908/3 shared space with the very 917 Herrman drove to Porsche's first overall victory at Le Mans, and the 935 Moby Dick was right there along with a pair of the legendary 962s that ruled endurance racing around the world for a decade. All were in working order, and all of them were actually driven around Laguna Seca that weekend, some by Porsche racing heroes past and present, and some by journalists.

Among the 124 Porsches entered in the Historics was almost every model a Porschephile could ask for. There were 356s of all stripes, from a 1949 SL and a 1951 Prototype to a '55 Continental and four 1960 Porsche Abarth Carreras. 550 Spydres were everywhere, gleaming silver in the California sun: RSs and RSKs. There were beautiful 904/6s, a 904 GTS, 906s, 907s, 908s, 908/2s and /3s, 910s, 911s galore, a squadron of 917s, 917Ks, some 914 racers, 934s, '35s and '36s, and a brace of RSRs from the '70s. Prefer single-seater racing? There was the F1 Porsche 804 in which Dan Gurney won the 1962 French Grand Prix and even the 1988-89 Quaker State March Indy Car.

Any one of these, seen alone at a track or on the street, would constitute an event. Together, it was Porschepalooza, total

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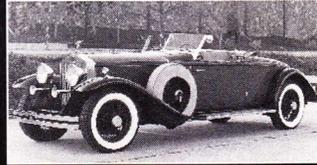
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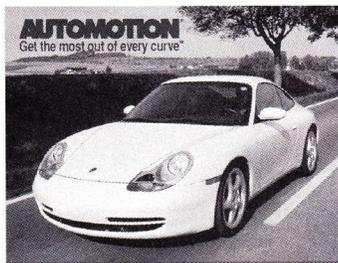
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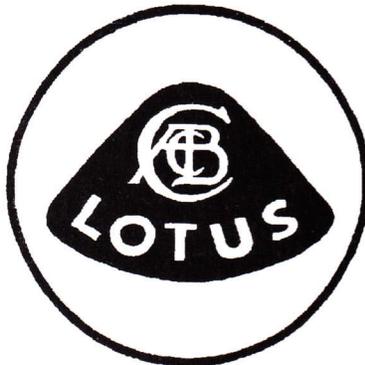


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Stuttgart overload.

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FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, THOSE who could tell the difference knew there was something special about these cars.

"It was a Porsche, there was nothing wrong with it," said Herrman of his first time driving one in 1952. "You had more control, more power—this gives a driver confidence."

"They've always been exceptionally well-engineered cars," said vintage racer Tom Davidson, who has owned 17 Porsches and was driving his own Spyder at Monterey. "They've always been more concerned with functionality over form. The first car I ever bought because of looks was this 550A."

"It's such a consistent company," said Porsche collector Jerry Seinfeld. "You can look at everything they've done in 50 years and not be ashamed."

Jack McAfee raced 550 Rs, RSs and RSKs in the late '50s and early '60s after many years driving other European sports cars.

"It had everything that these other cars didn't have," said McAfee. "The Ferraris were like trucks. If you missed a shift you were through. You had to wear gloves or your hands were bleeding. The Porsche, it was like heaven. My first race in a 550 I forgot my gloves. I was worried. But my mother could have driven that car."

"The 550 was an absolute dream," said Stirling Moss. Moss said he drove 16 races in Porsches, won half of them and set lap records in 11. "Some clever journalist once said that the 550's center of gravity seemed to be underground."

Those were the early Porsches. They just kept getting better.

"When I had my first win I realized I could go back again and again because Porsche always gave you cars you could win in," said Bell.

And it did win: 14 World Endurance Championships, 16 wins at Le Mans, 17 at Sebring and 19 at Daytona. Schwab pointed out. That's a long way from an old saw mill in Austria.

"We've come such a long way in such a short time, quite literally the span of one man's life," said Schwab. "Being aware of our past assures us that we have a future. This celebration is aimed at letting the people who don't understand know what Porsche is, and at letting those who do, know that we understand, too."