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Monterey's Festival, Rich in Tradition

By LEO LEVINE

The birth of this country's classic-car Olympics took place at Pebble Beach, Calif., on the scenic Monterey Peninsula, in the simpler, quieter time of November 1950.

Harry S. Truman was president, the Yankees had just embarrassed the Phillies in the World Series, and college football was far more important than the professional version.

On the first of the month, the Dow Jones industrials closed at 225.60; the greens fees at the Pebble Beach Golf Links, where judging for the prestigious concours d'élégance will take place in two weeks, were \$5, a long way from today's \$495 (caddie not included).

American awareness of foreign cars was, on a percentage basis, somewhere to the right of the decimal point. Hardly more than a few thousand people, mostly on the East and West Coasts, knew that Ferrari was a car, not a pizza joint. Most had never seen one, or a [Porsche](#) either. In Detroit, the Chevrolet small-block V-8 that would dethrone the Flathead Ford as the American racers' engine of choice was still a few years from introduction.

Genesis, in this instance, was a small sports-car meeting, advertised as "European road races," that took place on a 1.8-mile makeshift circuit in the Del Monte Forest, admission \$1. More or less as an afterthought, a car show, given the French title of concours d'élégance to maintain the European theme, attracted 32 entries, most of them new models owned by Forest residents, was added. Admission was free.

A college dropout from Santa Monica with ambitions to be a racing driver won the main event in a Jaguar XK120, despite an uncooperative clutch. In later years he would win at Pebble again and also win the concours' Best of Show award with a 1931 Pierce-Arrow

that he and his brother had restored. The erstwhile student was Phil Hill, who would ascend to the title of World Driving Champion in 1961.

Since that modest beginning, the Pebble Beach meet has grown to become America's classic-car extravaganza, a gathering of magnificent machinery that includes no fewer than eight concours, five auctions, three days of racing for 550 cars at the Laguna Seca road circuit as well as various tours, sales of automobilia and, increasingly, promotional events by automakers.

Most of the action happens during the third week of this month, with the climax being the 63rd Pebble Beach Concours d'Élégance, which can lay claim to being the world's most important, on Sunday, Aug. 18. Over the years, activity has spread from the Del Monte Forest to 16 locations in the Monterey area, including Carmel's main thoroughfare, Ocean Avenue, where more than 200 cars are expected at the seventh annual Concours on the Avenue on Aug. 13.

Admission to this event is free, but free is a seldom-used term on the Monterey Peninsula during the week. A three-day ticket to the races at Laguna Seca goes for \$130 in advance, \$150 at the gate and \$510 for a Premier Pit Row seat, which includes breakfast, lunch and drinks.

That \$510 won't even buy a ticket to the Quail, which is the concours-cum-cocktail party at Quail Lodge in Carmel Valley, a few miles inland from the peninsula, held the Friday before the Pebble concours. That event is limited to 3,500 people, at \$550 each, and it is sold out.

Also on the agenda for well-heeled attendees is the Wednesday night McCall's Motorworks Revival, a 2,800-person cocktail party among the private planes at the Monterey Jet Center; joining the festivities carries a \$395 entry fee (\$330 in advance). Taking in the Concorso Italiano on Friday costs \$150 in advance, \$175 at the gate. Admission to the Pebble Beach concours is \$225 in advance, \$275 at the gate.

Perhaps the best bargain of the gathering is a roadside seat — free — on Thursday to watch the Pebble Beach Tour d'Élégance, in which most of the entries in Sunday's concours will be taking a 70-mile drive that ends on Carmel's Ocean Avenue at noon for lunch. The total value of the cars can only be guessed at, but a safe estimate will fall near 10 figures.

The Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau lists 300 hotels on the peninsula, and a recent Internet check found, with only a handful of exceptions, rates that were considerably higher than other times of the year.

If this collection of events is viewed as a solar system, then the Pebble Beach concours is the sun around which all others orbit. It draws the biggest international crowd (the event program listed cars from 16 countries in 2012), has the largest number of commercial sponsors (71 in 2012) and never fails to attract rare and elegant automobiles. This year, an exhibition of 25 to 30 prewar 8C-model Alfa Romeos, among the most desirable of classic cars, will be a special feature. There will be 230 cars in the 30 other classes.

The races at the 2.2-mile Laguna Seca circuit attracted more than 800 entries, which were trimmed to 550 for traffic management purposes; 60,000 spectators are expected for the Friday through Sunday run. Competing this year will be the four-time world motorcycle champion Eddie Lawson, who will be driving a 1978 Formula II March against a number of 1970s Formula One cars handled by their amateur owners.

The drawing power of all this is best demonstrated by the Concorso Italiano, now in its 28th year. Staged at the Laguna Seca Golf Ranch, it has nearly 1,100 entries. About 800 of the Concorso entries will be Italian makes, and this year's event celebrates the 50th anniversary of Lamborghini.

Just what has propelled Monterey automobile week — there is no formal name — to its current proportions is open to conjecture. Clearly it has fed on its own success, on its ever-increasing publicity and on the attractiveness of Pebble Beach as a tourist destination.

The crowds at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in southern England, which made its debut in 1993, were estimated at 150,000 for last month's three-day run. There is no official estimate of attendance at the Monterey events because there is no overall coordination, but in recent years just about everything that could be sold out was — except for the Pebble Beach Golf Links, which has to give way to the Concours for the day.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: August 9, 2013

An earlier version of this article misstated the price of attending McCall's Motorworks Revival. Admission is \$330 in advance or \$395 at the event; it is not free for insiders and \$330 for others.