



1963 Ferrari 250 GTO

1954 Jaguar D-Type



Stories to tell

2ND ANNUAL WHEELS OF WELLNESS

BY JOHN PRIDDY • PHOTOS: Randall Bohl Photography www.randallbohl.com - John Priddy as noted. HISTORIC PHOTOS courtesy Ford Motor Company, Porsche Cars North America, Inc., and Lyn St. James

On a glorious Sunday afternoon in January, a group of local philanthropists with a common interest in vintage car racing and collecting assembled 26 rare, historic and beautiful race cars on the grounds of a restored 100-year-old home in downtown Phoenix. The purpose of the event was a fund raiser for The Wellness Community, an organization that provides support programs free of charge to anyone whose life is touched by cancer. Wheels of Wellness is a social and fun event for car aficionados and showcased cars representing over 75 years of international racing, from NASCAR to Formula 1, Indianapolis to Le Mans.

John Horsman

Speaking before a VIP drivers' meeting and brunch, Guests of Honor included John Horsman, chief engineer of J.W. Automotive. His rich account of racing history began when John Wyer, as team manager of Aston Martin, helped drivers Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori win the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1959. Wyer left Aston Martin to manage Ford Advanced Vehicles, the automaker's hugely successful GT40 program. John Horsman followed Wyer to Ford and helped manage the team's sensational 1-2-3 finish at Le Mans in 1966. Having proven their point, Ford sold the GT40 program to John Wyer who, with John Willment, formed J.W. Automotive. JWA, partnering with Gulf Oil, continued to campaign the GT40, develop the Ford-derived Mirage and, later, the Gulf-Porsche 917 team.

One of his most famous contributions was the taming of the handling of the early Porsche 917. Porsche enlisted his expertise and with the use of a pair of tin snips he fabricated a reshaped rear body skin that

eliminated its high speed instability.

John detailed how racing legends Jacky Ickx and Jackie Oliver's outstanding driving skills on rain-soaked tracks in Europe led to the title of his recently released autobiography *Driving in the Rain*. His engineering expertise helped establish the Ford GT40 and Porsche 917 as two of the most successful race cars of all time. Porsche 917 #2 shown at lower right is the same car driven by Steve McQueen in the classic film *Le Mans* (though appearing as #20 in the film). At upper right, John is standing in front of #40, a Mirage now rebodied as a GT40, which was the camera car for *Le Mans*, still bearing its camera mounts inside.

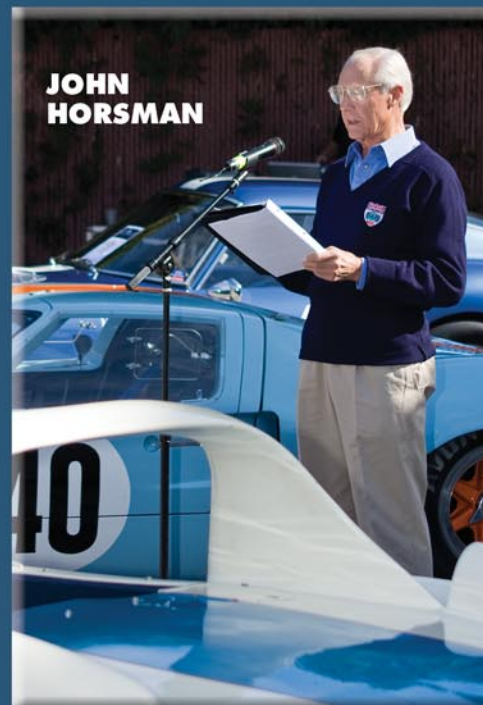
Lyn St. James

Former Indy racer Lyn St. James also talked to the brunch attendees. Her racing experience began with a Showroom Stock racing Pinto in 1974. As her racing career developed, she had wins in the Daytona 24 Hours (twice), Sebring 12 hours, Watkins Glen, competed twice in the 24 Hours of Le Mans, and was Rookie of the Year at Indianapolis in 1992.

Speaking to the group she asked "What does it take to be a race car driver? Passion. Desire to be the best. And commitment." She went on to explain that "Yes, you need good eye and hand coordination and the ability to anticipate what will happen next," and "Money—that's the hard part." She went on to talk about the public's perception of racing drivers. "People think we're brave, but bravery is reserved for those who fight for freedom and those who fight cancer" she said.

Lyn founded and is personally involved with the Driving Develop-

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JOHN HORSMAN



Ford GT40: Sebring 1966



Ford Mirage: Le Mans 1975



Porsche 917: Rennsport Reunion Daytona 2004



LYN ST. JAMES



Indianapolis 500
Last race: 2000



Cosworth Vega



Showroom
Stock
Pinto

ment Academy, which specializes in mental, physical and emotional training, education in the business side of racing, and professional responsibility. The Academy's success in developing race winners is evidenced by former student Danica Patrick.

We talked to Lyn afterward while standing next to her favorite pick of the cars in attendance: Peter Revson's 1969 Boss 302 Trans Am car.

We asked her what her first thought was once her engine was started in her first Indy race in 1992, knowing that 32 male drivers were determined to beat her to the finish. She replied: "There is no thought going through your mind at that moment. If you're thinking, you're not in the zone. You need to be completely clear and not distracted by thoughts in your head. We started moving around the track, and on the third pace lap Roberto Guerrero spun out. Then I thought: what the hell will happen next? and to be ready for it."

When we asked how she got involved with Indy racing, Lyn explained: "In 1988 I was living in Florida and had never driven an Indy car, and of course you can't drive at Indy if you've never driven an Indy car. So I spoke to Dick Simon (of Dick Simon Racing) and expressed an interest in driving one, after I had finished driving a race one day. Dick called me at my home in Ft. Lauderdale and said to be in Memphis tomorrow. Somehow I found a flight to Memphis the next day and grabbed a taxi to the track. He had a car there that still had some miles left on it (before its next scheduled overhaul). And that began my Indy driving experience and eventually seven races there."

Wheels of Wellness display cars

1958 Joe Hunt Magneto Special

Built by Lujie Lesovsky in 1958 and powered by a 4-cylinder Offenhauser engine, the Joe Hunt Magneto Special #99 is a rare survivor. Driven for years on rough-and-tumble one-mile dirt tracks by some of the greatest names in racing—Bobby and Al Unser, Joe Leonard, Carl Williams, Gary Bettenhausen, Johnny Parsons and others—it was the last dirt champ car entered in the Indy 500. Although it ultimately was withdrawn before the race, it did turn 149+ mph laps on the brick oval in 1968.

Joe Hunt was a TWA flight engineer who

made a business of building his well-known ignition systems used in high performance motorsports. He bought the car in 1959 and was the owner for nearly 30 years. It still has the one-off experimental Meyer-Drake Offy engine that was installed in the mid-'60's. Although there were changes made during its racing career, #99 has retained the configuration when last raced by Joe Hunt. The huge chromed injection intake air horns and exhaust headers are masterly crafted works of art that contrast with the brute strength it took to drive this racing icon.

1962 and 1963 Ferrari 250 GTO

Often referred to as the ultimate street-legal race car, the original Ferrari 250 GTO is one of the most beautiful designs to come out of Ferrari's Maranello factory in northern Italy. The aluminum-bodied coupes were the last of the front-engine V-12 Ferraris to be raced, but are easily the most famous. Only 36 were produced and were only sold to drivers meeting the approval of 'Il Commendatore' Enzo Ferrari.

Phil Hill and Oliver Gendebien drove the second GTO produced (now painted a brilliant red) to a first in GT class and second overall win at the Twelve Hours of Sebring in 1962, the first race in which it was entered. It continued to be raced in Europe and the US through 1964.

The blue car, the 9th GTO built, also had an extensive racing career that lasted through 1966. Both cars are valued well in excess of \$1 million and are sought by buyers from around the world whenever one is offered for sale.

Townsend Typhoon Mk 2

Frank Townsend was another one of those dreamers who wanted to build a car of his own design. Much like carbon fiber is today, fiberglass was a new and wondrous material in the '50s that lent itself to almost any shape imaginable. Better yet, it was relatively inexpensive and didn't require the services of skilled Italian craftsmen. Using balsa wood and masonite to form a mold, Frank and his high school buddies fabricated a prototype roadster body on a Plymouth frame and named it "Typhoon."

The third Typhoon, the Mk 2, used a tubular frame built from scaffolds used to service WWII aircraft. A Kurtis Kraft 500C

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Joe Hunt
Magneto
Special



1962
Ferrari
250 GTO

Photo: John Priddy



Townsend
Typhoon
Mk2

race car provided the inspiration for the frame design, suspended by a 1955 Chevy front end and an Olds rear axle. A fuel injected Pontiac V-8 made it go fast. Dubbed the "Purple People Eater" by the press and competitors, the Townsend Typhoon Mk2 was successfully raced throughout the Southwest.

Frank Townsend moved on to eventually be inducted into the Drag Racing Hall of Fame. The Townsend Typhoon Mk 2 did not. It was sold, forgotten, and languished in a field in Southern Arizona for 40 years. Owen Gibson spotted it and spent five years restoring it. It now runs with a vintage 425-hp Olds Golden Rocket export engine with magnesium rockers and 6-deuce carbs. Today it's a

regular at vintage racing events.

1954 Jaguar D-Type

Jaguar, the British car manufacturer whose roots go back to motorcycle side-car production in the 1920s, was a regular at the 24 hours of Le Mans in the '50s, winning five 1st place finishes. In 1954, this factory team D-Type was driven by Peter Walker and racing legend Stirling Moss. With Moss at the wheel, it set a new record speed of 172.97 mph down the three-mile-long Mulsanne Straight. Its monocoque chassis incorporates a curvaceous aluminum alloy body with a huge stabilizer fin and is powered by a 250-hp 3.4-liter dual overhead cam 6-cylinder engine and 4-speed transmission. One of

only 71 D-Types built during its four year production run, it's owned by Jaguar collector and expert Terry Larson, and is often seen in historic races and tours.

1958 Echidna Special

In 1958, three experienced amateur racing enthusiasts in Minnesota—John Staver, Ed Grierson and Bill Larson—put their heads together to build their own race team. Using everyday, well-proven production parts that were reliable, inexpensive and easily available was their objective. Starting with a shortened and narrowed 1956 Chevrolet sedan chassis, a fuel-injected 283 and fiberglass Devin body, the "spiny anteater" took shape. Staver's first-year successes on the track caught the attention of Corvette creator Zora Arkus-Duntov. This was, of course, during the American car manufacturer's ban on racing. Although Chevrolet did not officially participate in racing, the next year Staver showed up with aluminum heads on an engine bored and stroked to 339 cubic inches and won the SCCA national championship in B-Modified against professionally driven Ferraris and Maseratis.

Two more Echidnas were built in 1959 with 283 c.i. engines and were raced in C-Modified by Grierson and Larson. In three seasons, the Echidnas started 35 races, took 25 class wins, of which 8 were overall wins, making the Echidna one of the most successful specials.

Each of the cars displayed had a story to tell, from the owners, the drivers and the cars themselves. Standing next to these racing legends it's easy to imagine the sights and sounds and smells of a golden era of motorsports. It's difficult to predict the future—whether auto racing one day will be fueled by batteries or some other form of propulsion. But one thing's for certain: it's human nature to engage in competitive sports racing. From chariots to Ferraris, we've always had some form of motorsports and will for the foreseeable future. And Wheels of Wellness was a great way to spend a day observing a portion of it, all for the benefit a very worthy cause. ■

JOHN PRIDDY is a Phoenix area 'near-native' automotive writer, photographer and artist. When not working on his classic vehicles, he's apt to be painting an auto-themed portrait or attending a vintage race, swapmeet, or classic car auction. John co-writes a regular column for LeftLaneNews.Com.



1954
Jaguar
D-Type



1958
Echidna
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