

SOME THINGS NEVER GET OLD

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SCCA VINTAGE RACE AT PIR BENEFITS PHOENIX CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
RUSSO AND STEELE TEAM SHAKES DOWN ITS TRANS AM RACER

The Arizona Region SCCA winter season included seven events for regional racers, in the Saguaro Series, and three events for the Vintage Class, in the Desert Vintage Series, held at Phoenix International Raceway in December, February and March. March 20-21 marked the AZ-SCCA's 10th annual charity race for Phoenix Children's Hospital. The Desert Vintage Series was presented by Russo and Steele Collector Automobile Auctions—specialists in European sports, American muscle, hot rods and customs, a perfect fit.

Russo and Steele co-owner Drew Alcazar brought two race-ready Mustangs to the event. One, a 1969 Boss 302 Mustang, has powerful provenance and powerful track presence. The other, a 1965 Mustang fastback, is more conventionally-bred but just as fun. They are known to the Russo and Steele race team as Big Red and Little Blue. We catch up with Drew in the paddock, for some background on the cars and the event.

Drew has been heavily involved in the vintage automobile hobby and collector auction business for years, but he's relatively new to racing. He first became involved through the Shelby American Club. "The hot shoes at Laguna, Sonoma and the other big tracks are 2-4 seconds faster than anybody else," he says. "So you go to those big events, and it can be pretty overwhelming. The best place to get your feet wet is with marquee club events. Go out with the Porsche Club, go out with the Shelby Club." Nonetheless, before he even went, Drew bought his Trans Am car, the Boss 302.

Alcazar has found some vintage races too crowded, citing the long-running Monterey Historic Races as having had too many classes overall. He's headed to the Sonoma Historics in June, which has a Trans Am Class.

Drew finds any West Coast vintage racing to be the best. "These cars are really authentic. With Big Red or Little Blue, we have to go back to narrower tires and all the rest. You'll find no 700-800-hp big beasts, just period stickers. We're not even allowed to have a Russo and Steele license plate," he says. "That's the biggest difference with West Coast guys, because West Coast cars are correct and pretty simple: if the car's not period, you're not allowed to run." For example, there are no multi-carbs allowed for a '70, but he gets away with two duals on his because it's a '69, so it's in period.

"But you'll have no Jericho trans or anything like that in there," he continues. "East Coast vintage race cars aren't vintage... they're NASCAR cars they make look like old cars, with wrappers. West Coast guys have 150-250 less horsepower than they do, and get the crap kicked out of them if they compete." That's why he thinks "West Coast events are so cool and everybody's so good: they are really, really authentic. In the Trans Am Class, all cars have the same rim size. B Production, 7" rims. On the East Coast, you need 8.5" rims or you're in the back spectating."

And that brings us back to Big Red. "It's a '69 Boss 302, built for the '69 Trans Am season," Drew says. "It was originally campaigned by Warren Tope. His father, Donald Tope, was head of Transmission and Drivetrain at Ford Motor Company, so this was an intracompany car that was actually delivered from the assembly line

Russo and Steele auction co-owner Drew Alcazar gives Big Red—his high-pedigree 1969 Boss 302—a morning run during practice laps (left). He races this Trans Am car and a '65 Mustang fastback, Little Blue.

The Townsend Typhoon Mk 2 (top right), dubbed by many as the "Purple People Eater," had a successful racing career throughout the Southwest. Then 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 a vintage 425-hp Olds Golden Rocket export engine with magnesium rockers and 6-deuce carbs.

Husband and wife team Jim Malone and Delaney Sturgeon race his Triumph TR6 and her Porsche 944 (five pix, right) regularly. Malone is on the board of directors for the Arizona Region SCCA.

directly over to Transmission and Drivetrain. So it's been a race car its whole life. With Donald's connections, it went down to Kar Kraft and was built right alongside Bud Moore cars for Parnelli Jones and George Follmer. So all of the Kar Kraft Bud Moore stuff that got done basically got done out the back door at midnight, on this car as well, for Donald's son Warren.

"The fun thing about the build sheet," Drew continues, "is it actually says 'sold to Ford Motor Company, Transmission and Drivetrain Division.' So you can tell from the build sheet that it actually went directly from the assembly line over to Transmission and Drivetrain with Warren's dad, Donald. The interesting thing is that all the early Trans Am cars started off as 351 Mach Is. This is a Boss 302, but they all started off as 351 cars.

"So if you look at the car, a lot of the ways, how the exhaust system is routed, a lot of the way the suspension sets are done, all of the experimental stuff, the dual 4-barrel Dominator intake manifold, the carburetors, the offset distributor, all of those experimental bits and pieces are on this car. So, although it was an independent car, it was sort of the 'ghost rider factory team car,' kind of out the back door to help Ford put another car on the Trans Am circuit, in addition to the Parnelli Jones and George Follmer cars.

"Warren Tope won the SCCA Championship in this car. He was actually racing George Follmer's car, but that car went out and he had to bring in this car as a backup, and he actually won the Championship in '71 in this car. It has a lot of fun history," says Alcazar.

Drew's history with the Tope car is more recent. "I've had the car for about two years. John McClintock out of Washington was the owner of the car for a long time, and he was the one who sort of oversaw the final stages of the restoration and race prep. So I was very fortunate: I was able to buy a front-running car, that was already race-prepped, and now I'm a back marker driver, so I'm hoping to catch up with the car someday."

This is not the only Mustang the Russo and Steele team has brought today. Meet Little Blue. "Little Blue's not much of a story," says Alcazar. "It's just a fun little Mustang, it's a go-find-the-line car, hang out and have some fun type thing. So on a track like this, the little '65 Mustang—we've nicknamed them Little Blue and Big Red—is probably a little more suited. The Trans Am car

KEEP RIGHT >>

AZ-SCCA DESERT VINTAGE SERIES AT PIR





Drew Alcazar (near left) warms up Big Red, his 1969 Boss 302 Mustang Trans Am car, while his tech, Nick Schrage of The Mustang Shop, warms up Little Blue (far left). The cars are further prepped in the Russo and Steele paddock area, then hit the track. The Russo and Steele Auction is known for its hospitality and cuisine, and co-owner Josephine Alcazar brought that to the race participants.

Tom Surrency owns the Morgan at upper right, while the other Morgan is owned by Rob Uhl, who has had it since 1964. During college, he headed to San Francisco for the '67 Summer of Love. He parked the car and spent the summer there on foot. Come fall, he'd forgotten where he parked. ("If you remember the '60s....") Ultimately, they found the car exactly where he had parked it three months prior. Untouched. Covered with dirt, but untouched.

is a little big for this track, even with its big outside loop. Each has a niche and a personality, and Drew races them both. "I'm going to practice in Big Red. You know, we've got the season just starting for Trans Am. Our first event's going to be Wine Country at Sears Point (see page 26). So I've got a lot of practice during May, getting ready for that. That's the first weekend of June. So we're going to get a little seat time in her."

Drew says the event at PIR was an "absolutely epic weekend. This was Phoenix, Arizona, at prime time."

He's looking forward to the Sonoma Historics in early June with a large dose of humility. "They say they can teach you to do this," he says, "but God knows I'm still learning. All seat time is good time for us, the back markers. I'm trying to do a reasonable job of not being a moving chicane for everybody else." This is a man who knows his stuff. We think he'll do just fine. ■

AZ-SCCA DESERT VINTAGE SERIES AT PHOENIX INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY



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