

SAAC - 48 was Great

– Rick Kopec
saac@saac.com

It's hard to believe that SAAC has been around for two generations. Think about that. The grandchildren of some original SAAC members are passengers in their cars today. And they will probably be owning those cars one of these days.

When the club was started in 1975 we never dreamed it would still be going strong 48 years later. We wish we could tell you that this was all part of some grand plan which has come together exactly the way we envisioned it. We wish. But that would be as far away from the truth as you could get.

Here's the dirty little secret: we have never planned more than a year ahead. Keeping up with the magazine was a full-time job. No sooner was one issue completed than we started working the next one. Each convention took a year's worth of planning. As soon as it was over we were already planning the next one. Both were never-ending treadmills. We were always too consumed by these two activities to sit back and consider the future.

No one was more surprised at the club's continuing success that we were. But it was a double-edged sword. As gratifying as it may have been, there was no time for us to take some time to think about where we



would be ten, five, three or even two years from now. The only thing we understood was that we were providing something that members wanted. It was as simple as that.

As everyone knows by now, there's more to this club than just the cars. Sure, they are the hub. The central point of our focus. But beyond them are the people who breath life into the club. Current owners, past owners and yet-to-be owners. They each bring

something to the party. And that party takes place every summer at the National Convention. It is a demonstration of what makes the club fun, enjoyable, exciting and worthwhile. We've been at this for the past 48 years. There's no reason why it can't continue for another 48 years. We might not all be here in 2071, but the cars will be. They won't be going anywhere. Except maybe to the next convention!

The track was called BeaveRun when we were here at SAAC-34 in 2009. It was 1.6 miles in length. In the past couple of years the track has had more than a name change to Pittsburg International Race Complex. Thanks to a large cash transfusion by its owners it is now twice as long (2.78-miles) and it has been upgraded in almost every aspect. New buildings, more asphalt and more viewing venues. They did their homework and created a very spectator-friendly track.

Our convention started on Thursday, July 13th. One thing we noticed was that in past years when people attending the national convention they came for the entire convention (all three or four days). This year they seemed to attend based on the activities they intended to participate in. Members who were interested in either car show didn't see the need to be there on Thursday when we were using the track for fast laps, vintage race practice, or parade laps. Likewise, many who ran the open track on Thursday or Friday packed up and headed home before Saturday's popular vote car show. Maybe the economy had something to do with that. Simply put, the longer you stay at a convention the more expensive it is.

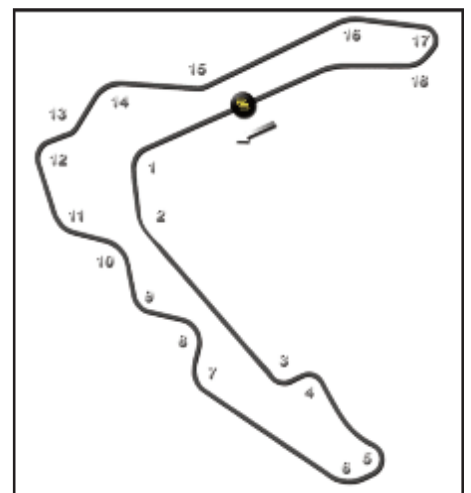
We teamed up with both the PVGP and Team Shelby East Coast because the costs have become too prohibitive to rent the track on our own. With the Pittaburgh Grand Prix weekend going on it always seemed like there was a lot of activity on the track and in the paddock. And Team Shelby's participation brought almost twice the cars! Every permutation of NewGen Shelybs were represented in almost every color you could imagine.



Every convention begins in the hotel parking lot. Early arrivals meet old friends and make new ones. The Marriott was a new facility and was top-shelf. It was less than thirty minutes from the track. Everybody loved it.



It wouldn't be a convention without Kai and Miki Inuma from Honolulu, Hawaii. They park their CSX7000 Cobra at their daughter's place in California but drive it to every convention, no matter where it is. The Hawaii plates on the car are always conversation-starters. They don't just travel from point A to point B and back again. Each convention trek is part of a three or four-week road trip that always provides them with a wealth of stories. Included on past trips were trans rebuilds, suspension repairs and even bodywork and paint. Kai's skill at twisting wrenches is matched only by Mikki's calm patience in awaiting his roadside magic show to get them going again.



Pitt Race International. Track length: 2.78 miles. 19 turns. Lap record: 1.32.7 min.



Peter Brock and Chuck Cantwell were the notables at SAAC-48. Most other former Shelby American employees have either taken the checkered flag or are not healthy enough to travel great distances to conventions. Seeing them is a special treat.



Thursday's schedule out at the track consisted of tech inspection, open track running, and parade laps. The evening activity was dinner and a tour of SAAC member Al Geisler's stunning collection of 75 Ford vehicles. When he learned that the convention would be taking place only about twelve miles from him, he generously invited SAAC to include a tour of his collection in our schedule. We included a menu of finger-foods so participants wouldn't have to fend for themselves. About 200 conventioners were interested in seeing Geisler's cars and drove from the track to his place in McKees Rocks at the end of the day.

Once there they were met by an astounding group of Ford performance



Scott Fritz' '69 Mustang Trans-Am replica is one of the best tribute cars you will ever see. It won a Celebrity Award. This car is so accurate it would fool Bud Moore!



Genuine R-Models have appreciated to the point where most of them are hidden away in museums or private collections. Except for one. 5R095. Howard Pardee is dedicated to bringing it to every convention so attendees won't forget what a real one looks like.

Can you pick out the one that doesn't fit?



It all began a few years ago. A couple of guys showed up at the convention evening program wearing identical Shelby Hawaiian shirts. Each subsequent year more and more of these shirts showed up. The wearers were apparently untroubled that the shirts made them look like bellhops at a cheesy gay resort on Waikiki. What are the chances that someday everyone at the dinner will be wearing one of these shirts? Not likely as long as there is one contrarian in the house.





cars. Most were from the 1960s. About 95% were Shelby, NewGen Shelby, and Fords and Mercurys – and most of those were powered by big blocks with dual quads and four-speeds. The cars were all accurately restored to showroom or better condition. Each car had a specific history that Geisler could recite. He knew where and when he had bought each one and who performed the restoration. Every car gets driven over the course of the calendar year. It is an example of one man's dream collection.

On Friday it was back to the track. Open track and parade laps consumed most of the day with the vintage race taking place in the afternoon. That's always exciting. The concours car show also took place on Friday but with a low number of entries the judging didn't take the entire day. The downside to that was that judging was likely a little more rigorous than usual, when the judges had a half-dozen or more cars to contend with in each class. With more time available they were able to look a little closer at each entry.

The dinner and evening program on Friday evening was attended by about 280 people. Peter Brock gave a presentation reciting an insider's history of the Cobra, from the first car through the World Manufacturer's Championship. History is one thing but when it is told by someone who was there and privy to a lot of the insider details, it is something special. The story took almost an hour and a half to tell. It was so compelling that we transcribed his comments and included the transcript elsewhere in this issue.

Also speaking were Aaron Shelby and Gary Patterson, who is no stranger to SAAC conventions. They spoke about Shelby American and the company's latest plans. Trucks now play a large role in their product line. A special treat was Ford GT designer Camilo Pardo who provided a large illustration of a Daytona Coupe, 427 Cobra and GT40 that he did. It was auctioned off, with proceeds going to the Carroll Shelby Foundation. The high bidder donated \$2,500 to own the piece. It was autographed by Pardo and Peter Brock.



Kopec provided a solid introduction for Peter Brock before he spoke. Brock wasn't expecting it to include a story about his first job at a local zoo.



SAAC's newest Board member David Maffucci takes the podium while the program's MC, Ron Richards, hovers and provides a steadying influence [left]. Shelby American's heavy hitters were on hand. They attended Thursday night's Team Shelby program for dinner aboard a riverboat and also caught SAAC's wingding on Friday night. Pictured [left to right] are: Public Relations Director Scott Black, Carol Blackwood Krisanda, Carroll Shelby International Co-President Aaron Shelby, VP/Licensing & Media Relations Tracey Smith, Shelby American President Gary Patterson and Ford GT Designer Camilo Pardo.









Things began to wrap up on Saturday. The car show results were announced at 2:30 p.m. and the trophies were awarded to the eager winners. All in all, another successful convention.

Thanks to convention photographers: Jeff Burgy, Jim Dolan, Colleen Kopeck, Peter Larkin, Brian Littlefield, David Maffucci, Dave Redman, Mike Shally, Curt Vogt, Brian Walshe.



The swap meet went on for all three days. If there was something you just couldn't live without, you could probably find it there.



SAAC's 2023 Sweepstakes Car was there for the potential winner to dream about driving. By the time you read this we will probably know who the lucky winner is.



SAAC's Maryland Region is one of the club's oldest and most active regions.

