

Under the Hood, February, 2019

**Disturbing trend #1:** As a child did you have a pedal car, or even better a battery powered miniature car? If you did, there is a good chance it was a Mustang, Corvette, or perhaps a Jeep. I have proof positive that children sometimes do follow their parent's example. Costco had a feature for Christmas presents and at the top of the page was as Porsche Macan 6-volt ride-on kiddie vehicle. Apparently, now not even the little ones want a sport, or sporty car. Yes, I can agree that the Macan is an amazing vehicle, but with the high ride height, I don't think of it as a sports car. Call me old-fashioned.

**Disturbing tread #2:** For decades we have been convinced to think of our car's finish as shiny. We spend a fortune on specially formulated car washes, cleaning clay, polishes and waxes to emphasize that shine. The paint companies have contributed by offering metallic paints to reflect the sun's light to provide even more shine. Occasionally we would have some flat black areas where the manufacturer was trying to avoid sun glare, or perhaps trying to be different. My 85 Mustang GT had a large section of the hood that was flat black, so I guess I am guilty of contributing to this trend. Then a few years ago we started to see the entire car painted a flat color, generally black, or in some cases a flat color vinyl wrap installed. I have seen this color treatment on many high dollar autos and it is strange to me.

In a recent issue of Autoweek, I see that the tread is mutating. The article featured a picture of a Range Rover in Italy with a flat fuzzy velvet finish. **This must be a sign that the apocalypse is near.** Final thought. That 85 Mustang is now with the fourth owner and all four of us are friends. It served all of us well, and the fourth owner has it parked waiting for a fitting restoration.

I remember a year or so ago writing about trying to count all the crew members during a F1 race pit stop. There were about 20 people in the photo. Now I understand the pit stop in an Indy car race has only 6 crew members. Part of the reason is the built-in air-jack system that will lift the race car 4" almost instantaneously. This jacking system is fed by a quick connect hose at the pit with over 400 psi of pressure and only adds 6 pounds to the race car weight.

Why is this important? I think there are two main reasons. First, racing has become so expensive that anything that can be safely changed to reduce cost is a plus for the sport. People cost money, so reducing the pit crew size will help. Secondly, all those people around these fast-moving race cars just adds to the risk of injury. It seems that all crew members now wear full fire suits and helmets, but that was not always the case. Judy and I lived in Chicago for a couple of years. We traveled north to the Milwaukee Mile to watch the Indy car races. One year we were right across from the pits and watched a crew member get splashed with fuel, which then ignited, and the crew member was severely burned. There was total confusion trying to extinguish the fire. With fewer crew members present, I suspect this would not have been as severe.

The Milwaukee Mile is a traditional Indy car type of course with a mile-long oval track. It is claimed to be the oldest operating speedway in the world, with events held since 1903. The infield now offers a 1.8 mile road circuit. Little know fact: From 1934 to 1953 the infield was the home of the Green Bay Packers.

Last summer I mentioned seeing the North American Eagle land speed record contender at the Shelton airport where we autocross. Eagle is jet engine powered and certainly all current land speed record

holders are either jet or rocket powered. However, I think there is a special place for piston engine powered land speed contenders, even if they are in a different class.

In 1960 Mickey Thompson became the first American to break the 400-mph barrier in Challenger 1, powered by four supercharged Pontiac engines. Thompson came back in 1968 with Challenger 2, a more aerodynamic vehicle powered by two 427 ci Ford engines. Mechanical problems prevented him from making the mandatory two-way average speed run. By 1969 he had lost his sponsorship and the vehicle sat in storage.

A few years ago, Mickey's son Danny decided to restore Challenger 2 and make a new run for the record. They changed out the Ford engines for two nitro-fueled hemi engines putting out about 2,500 hp each. In 2018 Danny was able to claim a new piston powered land speed record of 448.7 mph, in this restored 50-year old Challenger 2. This was a fitting tribute to his father. Danny commented that the vehicle got a little squirrely at 430 mph. If you watch a video of the run, you will see that he goes almost lock to lock on the steering to keep the vehicle straight. Challenger 2 burns almost 50 gallons of nitro-fuel for each 5-mile speed run. George Poteet had held the former piston powered land speed record, so time will tell whether George comes back to try to re-claim the title.

We expect to see a super rare Cheetah race car at the Puyallup Corvette and High Performance Meet. The Cheetah was a collaboration between Chevrolet and Bill Thomas Race Cars to build a race car to take on the Shelby Cobra. Built between 1963 and 1967, the original Cheetah was built at the same time as the Grand Sport Corvettes. Bill Thomas had been modifying Corvettes for racing and was also known for having built many of the 1962 Bel Air and Biscayne 409 Chevys for drag racing.

The Cheetah was Corvette 327 fuelie powered. In our local area Allan Green Chevrolet in Burien was the place to be in the 1960's and early 70's for high performance Chevys. Green bought 3 of the Cheetahs. One was raced by local legend Jerry Grant. Another went on to be the most successful Cheetah racer. The third was bought for Mrs. Green as her "daily driver". During this time period the racing rules changed, and the most successful race cars were starting to use the mid-engine layout, which made the Cheetah obsolete. A total of only 10 cars were made, although you can still buy well built replicas. During this same time period Van Cleve Motors in Morton, WA was the place to buy the hottest Ford products.

At any Ford meet, you can still find Shelby Mustangs and other hot Fords with Van Cleve license plate frames. The Northwest was a hot bed of high performance cars, both Chevy and Ford. When Judy and I travel I am always on the lookout for "American" cars. On our recent trip to Spain we found one 69-70 Mustang "cruising" the main street in Ronda. A few days later we saw a "gangsta" Chrysler 300 on the very narrow streets of Ubeda. I cannot understand why anyone would want to drive a car that large on those old narrow streets.

Even with three days exploring Madrid, we did not see a single Corvette on the road. We did see a significant number of BMW X5 models, which I have always considered large. Big deal, you might say, as you anticipate the X5 was made in Germany. However, every single BMW X model (X3 to X6) is produced in South Carolina. In 2017, BMW exported 272,000 X models from the USA. With a total value of almost \$9 Billion, BMW is the largest (by value) USA auto exporter. If I think the X5 is large, it is soon going to be usurped by the coming X7 model. BMW is investing another \$600 Million in this plant and it will have 11,000 employees producing BMWs. In 2017, over 70% of all the vehicles produced in BMW's

South Carolina plant were exported to other countries. Yes, auto production is definitely part of a world economy