



A Chapter of POCA

news

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Minutes of Meeting 26 January, 2023

The meeting was called to order by the new president, Mark Bailey, at exactly 7:30 p.m. There were 24 members and guests present, plus four more members who attended via Zoom. All officers were present except for Larry Finch, Denny Morse, Bob Benson, and Andrew Duafala. There were no Panteras in the parking lot this month.

New Members/Guests: We welcomed **Jeff Warren** to his first PCNC meeting. He was excited to tell us about his recent purchase of a storage-unit-find time capsule 1971 Pantera, in super rare Bronze Metallic, which came to him with barely 3700 original miles! He's planning a sympathetic mechanical restoration and is looking forward to putting some miles on it finally!

Changes To Last Month's Minutes: The editor goofed and accidentally printed the January 2022 back page in the January 2023 issue, so both the date of the upcoming meeting and the Super Bowl party were wrong.

Club Store Report: Irene Smith made a rare in-person appearance and brought a substantial pile of club store merchandise with her. She and Marcus were sad to have missed the Christmas Party, and figured that this would be a good opportunity to enable people to make Valentine's Day purchases instead! From the looks of it, it seems as though they did some pretty good business at the end of the evening. She reported that she is merchandise-heavy and cash-light, and is looking forward to selling more merchandise to gather funds to produce new, different merchandise in time for the POCA Fun Rally.

Club Treasury Report: Our slow but steady reduction of our club treasury balance continues. We are getting closer to our desired goal but still have greater funds than we would like. However the trend is heading in the right direction.

Club Membership Report: Brent had ambitions of creating the annual club roster this month, but he has been having great difficulty getting data from POCA. Repeated emails and phone messages have gone unanswered, and we have not received a current club membership listing from POCA for quite some time. Once the logjam is broken, he will compile the data (to include the former Capitol Panteras members) and produce and mail the 2023 club roster.

Club Motorsports Report: Checkered Flag Racing Association will be hosting the first club date on the repaved Laguna Seca, in June. Furthermore, it will be a highly desirable 103db date which will render it Pantera-friendly! Watch for more news as the date draws nearer.

Mark Bailey told of his son Chase, whose first track day ever was in Mark's Pantera at Summit Point Raceway. It ended with a spin and a carb fire but otherwise all was well. He just this day purchased a full-race BMW Z4 with a pile of spares and plans to start racing it in SCCA and endurance racing.

Meanwhile, Bob Benson is *still* waiting for his engine which was supposed to be delivered to him many eons ago.

Club Website Report: The website is continuing to operate, and is successfully hosting our newsletters. All back issues going back many years can be viewed there as well.

Club Library Report: The library contents are high and dry and were not subject to any ill effects from the recent winter storms.

Past Events:

PCNC Christmas Party: The party was a great success, and despite our best intentions it managed a small profit for the club. Dennis and Liz took a well-deserved round of applause for their efforts. The management of the hotel expressed their appreciation for us, and Dennis has already booked the same venue for 9 December 2023. The manager apologized for the rather leathery consistency of the pork chops, and it was agreed we would return steak to the menu instead, going forward.

Upcoming Events:

Mozart Collection Tour And Scenic Drive — 8 April: The late and much-missed Bud Millard (who was in both PCNC and the Alfa Romeo club) was working with Scott Pinsky (former PCNC member and owner of the Pantera now owned by Jay Leno, and president of the Alfa club) on a joint event to tour the famed Mozart collection in Mountain View, one of the finest collections of classic cars in the world. With Bud's untimely passing, Mike Drew stepped in to represent PCNC in this endeavor.

Working with Scott, it was agreed that we would tour the facility on Saturday morning, 8 April, from 10 a.m. to noon, followed by a scenic drive up Page Mill Road to Skyline Boulevard, for lunch at the famed Alice's Restaurant.

Each club will pay half the \$750 fee for the tour, and collect \$10 from each attendee with any profits being distributed commensurate with participation, and any shortfalls similarly being made up by the respective clubs.

This event is limited to 100 people, so each club will have 50 slots. Two weeks prior to the event, any unused slots will be opened up to all. Guests are welcome, but everyone **MUST** register in advance, and there will be no walk-ons allowed.

They are quite concerned about security so they don't allow any photographs to be taken inside the facility. This will be an exercise in memorization instead of an opportunity to fill your phone with images!

Following the tour, those who are so inclined are invited to drive up Page Mill Road to Skyline Boulevard, then turn north until reaching Alice's Restaurant, the world-famous road house. There will be no organized lunch, with every man for himself. As the place is so popular it's possible there will be a wait for tables, but the parking lot is almost guaranteed to be filled with terrific cars and motorcycles so there will be plenty to see while waiting.

An RSVP is absolutely required to attend this event. When responding, please indicate if you also intend to participate in the follow-on drive to Alice's Restaurant for lunch. See the flyer elsewhere in this newsletter.

POCA Fun Rally — 7-11 June: By now you will have seen the flyer for the POCA Fun Rally in the POCA newsletter. The nominal cutoff for the \$15 each early registration discount was 1 February, although as of the meeting date it wasn't clear whether that might be extended or not. As the Fun Rally will be in our backyard, and it will be the 40th anniversary of the event, it's hoped that PCNC will be especially well-represented. There will be more information about various convoys traveling to the event on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday.

Some have expressed slight misgivings about the Circus Circus hotel; for those whose tastes run towards the caviar and champagne rather than Doritos and beer, the adjacent Silver Legacy Resort and Eldorado Resort will offer more upscale accommodations at a price commensurate with their upscaledness.

Club Business:

Raffle Chairman Wanted: Erik Kolstoe is having difficulty supplying the raffle with prizes due to his lack of proximity to suitable venues to purchase prizes. Thus we are looking for a regular meeting attendee to take on the role of rafflemaster. If you are interested, please contact Erik or Mark.

Buy/Sell/Swap: There was nothing on offer this month.

News, Clues and Rumors:

Amazing Garage Tour: Mike regaled (bored?) the audience with the story of his visit to a POCA member in Indianapolis named Chris McCallister. He is an extremely accomplished vintage racer, regularly seen at Monterey, Le Mans etc. but he also has a soft spot for De Tomaso cars. He bought a beautiful Mangusta about ten years ago, and even used a Pantera as his wedding car decades ago (that car is long gone). He recently purchased another Pantera to add to his collection. He kindly invited Mike for a visit, and when he arrived the first car he saw was his newly purchased 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO! His spectacular garage was filled with some of the most significant road and racing cars ever made, including original GT40, Gulf Porsche 917, Alfa Romeo 8C Monza, Ferrari T-312, Jaguar D-type, both 289 and 427 Cobras, etc. etc.

Merry Christmas: Brett Santos received a cryptic message from his brother informing him that he would be receiving a late Christmas present; imagine his surprise when a beautiful metal De Tomaso logo plaque arrived! Needless to say, Brett is well-pleased and brought it to show everyone.

Ron Southern at Daytona: The Daytona 24 Hour race was to be held in the days immediately after the club meeting, and Ron was feeling nostalgic, as he actually raced in the 16th iteration of the race, driving a Datsun 240Z entered by Bob Bondurant. He was able to rig up a computer to show a brief retrospective video on YouTube showing him in action.



Raffle Results: Mark Bailey took it upon himself to seed the raffle, and went a bit berserk, with the result that there were tons and tons of prizes this month. Erik and Brett passed the hat with the following results:

White shop rags — Jennifer Sloane
Angle die grinder — Ken Bredlau
Spray gun — Ron Southern
Ford Engines book — Barry Hosier
Pliers set — Jennifer Sloane
Air blow gun — Jennifer Sloane
Pantera keychain — Ron Southern
Impact adapter set — Barry Hosier
Metric socket set — Marcus Smith
JB Weld — Jeff Warren
Air hose — Brent Stewart
Locking chain clamp — Lori Drew
Impact driver extractor set — Brent Stewart
Air tools connector starter set — Brent Stewart
Enginer to Win book — Ron Southern
Ford Parts Interchange book — Barry Hosier
Ford Performance book — Brent Stewart
Rubber tarp straps — Marcus Smith
Work gloves — Steve Dalcino, Brett Santos



The meeting then adjourned at 9:03.

Membership News

New Members for February:

We are pleased to welcome all the members of Capitol Panteras who are now formally part of PCNC! We will be sharing their information over the next several months.

First up is **Rick Carlile** from Sacramento. Rick bought a basket case 1971 Pre-L, #1665, from a farmer in 1988. It had been painted an awful purple by the farmer's son at his Marysville High School auto body shop. They hadn't even washed it before they painted it! When he first saw it, the paint was rolling up off the original yellow like old wallpaper. All the hoses, belts and tires were rotten, but the car was 100% complete and original. He took it for a test-drive on a two-lane road (first time ever in a Pantera), got it up to 90 mph and then discovered there were no brakes! All four calipers were completely seized! He managed to get it slowed down using the gears, turned around and drove back. He made a deal for \$17,500 and picked it up with a trailer a week later. It then underwent a 3 1/2 year restoration back to the original yellow. Rick also has a 1969 TVR that he vintage races up and down the west coast, including Monterey.



One of the newer members of POCA is **Matt Longo**, also of Sacramento. He's got a small collection of classic cars including a 1963 Jeep CJ, and a 1965 Fastback Mustang. He was itching to buy a Pantera during the Covid lockdown, and eventually ran across an orange car in Larry Stock's shop, none other than Kent and Sandi Snyder's



1973L #5844. He bought it in December of 2021, and after bringing it home, he put some 17-inch Campagnolo replica wheels and tires on it, along with period side graphics. He considers it to be the perfect blend of Ford power and classic Italian exotic car styling.

George Potiras of Sacramento has been around for quite awhile. With the aid of Forest

Goodhart, he bought his 1973L #4720 in May of 1990. It was a fairly solid original driver at the time; it has since received a bare metal

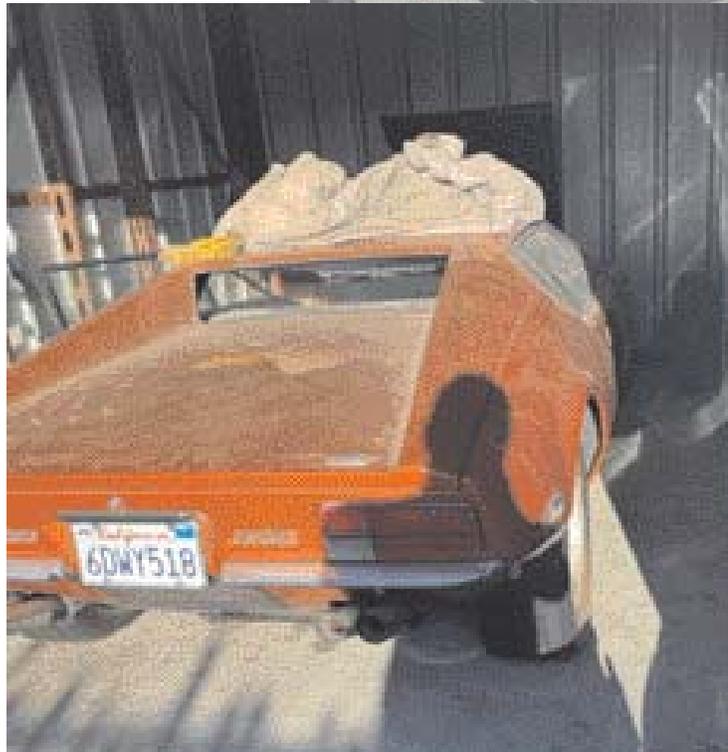


respray. George is committed to using his cars (he also has a beautiful early Jaguar E-type roadster), and drives his Pantera at least once a week, all year long. He's taken it to the POCA Fun Rally in Las Vegas twice, done a track event at Laguna Seca and taken a few other road trips besides. He's been president of Capitol Panteras on two different occasions. He's looking forward to attending the POCA Fun Rally in Reno this year, as well as attending some PCNC events.



Besides those who joined from Capitol Panteras, we have

also had some organic growth recently. We would like to welcome **Jeff and Alice Warren** of Orinda. Originally from Iowa, after living in several east coast cities he moved here in 2008. He grew up around cars and his father always had a Corvette of some sort in the garage, but he started his driving with a 1992 5.0 Mustang. He is currently restoring a 1968 Corvette. A close friend's father in southern California bought and sold several hundred cars in the 1960s and 1970s, but in the mid-1970s he purchased a bronze 1971 Pantera #1425 (one of only 28 made) with only 3500 miles on it. After driving it briefly, he put it into long-term storage, choosing



to preserve it as a low-mileage investment. He finally decided to sell it to Jeff in November of last year, now with 3726 miles on it! It is 100% stock and original, but hasn't run in decades. Jeff's plan is (with Garry Choate's help) to give it a sympathetic mechanical restoration while keeping it as original as possible, and then drive it and enjoy it as it was meant to be!



February Membership Anniversaries:

We congratulate the following people for the indicated years of continuous membership in the Pantera Club of Northern California:

James Dursi and Lyn Murray: 33 years
Charles and Nancy Rosebrook: 14 years
Robert Gutierrez: 6 years
John Mowry: 5 years

Larry Laino: 29 years
Tom and Kathy Leonard: 6 years
Clayton Engstrom: 6 years
Doug Abadie and Kay Schwartz: 3 years



The Le Mans Classic Tour

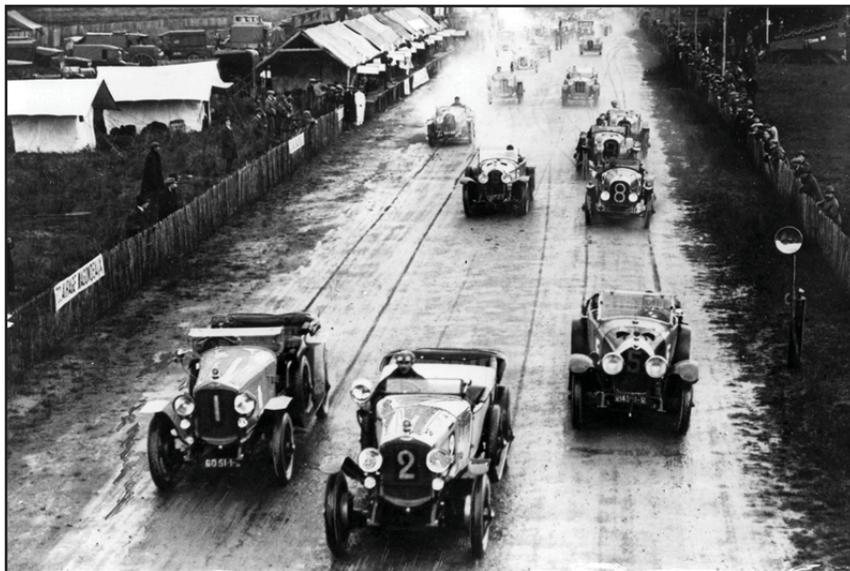
Story by Mike Drew

Photos by Mike Drew, Lori Drew, Julian Kift, Kjeld Pederson, and Peter Auto

As the rains continue to heave down, blocking any possible thought of a Pantera drive, I like to look back and reflect on the most significant events of the previous year, and chief among them is the Le Mans Classic tour.

The 24 Hours of Le Mans is arguably the largest and most important motor race in history. First held in 1923, it followed the then-common tradition of road racing, by racing on real roads on the outskirts of a medium-sized city in the Sarthe region of France, called Le Mans. However, unlike Grand Prix motor racing, it was designed to present a different test. Instead of focusing on the ability of a car company to build machines with the highest outright speed, Le Mans would concentrate on the ability of manufacturers to build cars that were both fast and reliable. To that end, instead of racing a fixed distance in the shortest possible time, the cars would race for a fixed amount of time and attempt to achieve the greatest possible distance. In this manner, both speed and reliability would be measured equally.

In an effort to make the challenge as, well, challenging as possible, it was decided that the race would run continuously over a 24-hour period. When one considers the low state of development of automobiles at the time, just running at all for 24 hours represents a prodigious feat. When you also recognize that the event was held over closed, unpaved public roads, rather than a manicured race track, just the achievement of finish-



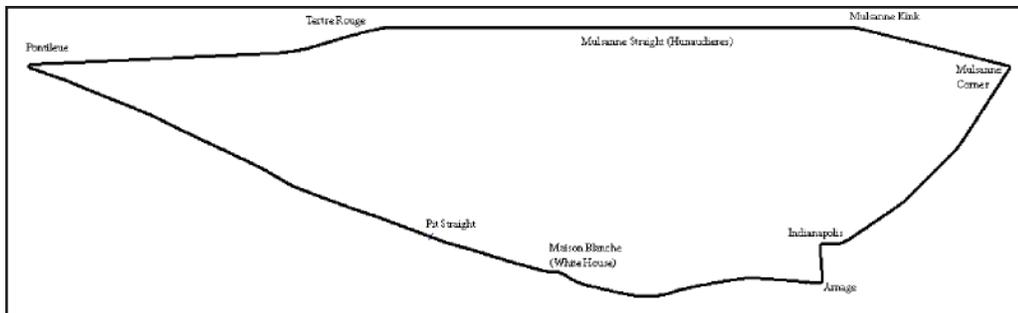
The start of the very first 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1923 sees the #2 Excelsior Adex C leading the #1 Excelsior off the line, with the #9 Chenard-Walcker just alongside. Although the #9 car completed the most laps, curiously there was no formal winner announced, as this was only the first of what was supposed to be three annual races, with the car that exceeded their nominated target distance by the greatest margin over the course of three years. Retrospectively, the #9 car was designated as the race winner

ing is that much more unlikely. Victory would therefore go to a truly extraordinary machine, driven and managed in an expert manner. Manufacturers of fine automobiles all lined up for the opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of their products, and while the well-known phrase, “Win on Sunday, sell on Monday” had yet to be coined, the concept was very much in the forefront of the minds of the executives at the various companies. Too, there was room for starry-eyed dreamers with little more

than an idea and a shed within which to work, and amateur designs routinely took the grid alongside highly developed works entries.

The event was sanctioned and organized by the Automobile Club d’Oest (Automobile Club of the West), which is somewhat akin to our AAA, or the Royal Automobile Club of Great Britain. The course was initially laid out completely on unpaved public roads. It measured some 10.7 miles long, running along a general north-south axis in a large

clockwise oval, with the northern terminus being a hairpin in the Le Mans suburb of Pontlieue, followed by an extremely long straight called Les Hunaudières (which translates to “the top-sails”), which ended with a 90-degree corner at the village of



The original course layout was rather unimaginative, but the essential elements of this course remain in use today. (North is to the left in this drawing)

Mulsanne. The road continued west to the adjoining village of Arnage, where another 90-degree turn saw the cars turning north once more. The run back to Pontlieu described a wide, gentle arc of some miles, with a single (and treacherous) right-left kink called Maison Blanche (White House), where the road deviated around a lone farmhouse that was, you guessed it, white.

Grand Prix cars were highly specialized, typically featuring extremely lightweight bodies and open wheels. Le Mans cars, on the other hand, were initially little more than standard examples of the finest road cars of the day. They were heavier, made stronger to endure the strains of a full 24 hours of racing, and equipped with conventional bodywork and weather protection for both driver and riding mechanic.

The first race saw 37 cars entered in four classes based on engine size (ranging from under 1.5 litre to over 3 litre), and amazingly 30 of them finished, with the winner being a 3.0 liter Chernard-Walker entry from France.

As the Roaring Twenties gave way to the depression-era 1930s, the industrial design world became infatuated with futuristic streamlining, in all things mechanical, whether they were aeroplanes, trains, or even buildings (the famed Chrysler Building in New York City is a fine example of 1930s futuristic style). This trend was reflected in the

cars at Le Mans, with open cars finding themselves competing against fully enclosed streamliners. The aerodynamic advantages of the closed cars were often offset by practical considerations, to include driver discomfort, and there was no commonly agreed upon superior solution to the problem of circumnavigating the course for 24 hours.

As automobile development progressed, the course underwent modifications (some extreme, others subtle) in an effort to increase safety. First to go was the Pontlieu hairpin; initially a link road was chosen that bypassed the town, but by 1932, bowing to complaints from the locals, the ACO bought up some farm land and built a dedicated strip from the pits and start-finish area to Tertre Rouge (Red Hillock), which incorporated the famed Dunlop curve and Dunlop Esses. Too, the road to Mulsanne was now asphalted.

The Second World War proved to be a bit of a nuisance, and the race suffered a hiatus from 1940 to 1949, as Europe worked to put itself back together. During the war, the Germans had taken over the circuit and used the adjacent airfield for their enterprises. This attracted undue attention from Allied bombers, who thoroughly transformed not only the airstrip, but also the grandstands, pit buildings and shops into unrecognizable piles of rubble.

But once European economies

started a real recovery, racing cars again appeared at La Sarthe. All-new grandstands and associated buildings were constructed, and the entire length of the circuit was paved. With each passing year, the race gained in international prestige and notoriety.

A massive accident took place in 1955, when a magnesium-bodied Mercedes 300 SLR driven by Pierre Levegh rear-ended a slope-backed Austin-Healey in front of the pits, launching the Mercedes into the air and into the crowd, where it exploded and killed not only the driver, but also 83 helpless spectators and officials, and injured countless more. Changes were immediately implemented for the 1956 race, with the pits moved further from the track, and spectator enclosures moved back and protected by rudimentary safety barriers.

In 1968, flush on their run of victories, Ford spent a bunch of money to have naming rights to the new chicane intended to dramatically slow the cars just prior to their arrival in front of the pits, and in 1971-72, the decision was taken to replace the narrow public road section from Arnage with a wider series of flowing curves, to which Porsche eagerly affixed their name.

Minor changes continued to take place as roundabouts were introduced on the roads at Tertre Rouge and Mulsanne, which required the track to



The start of the ill-fated 1955 race, showing the pits completely exposed to the racing surface, and only a rudimentary sand bank protecting the spectators opposite the pits. This lack of judgement was to prove deadly

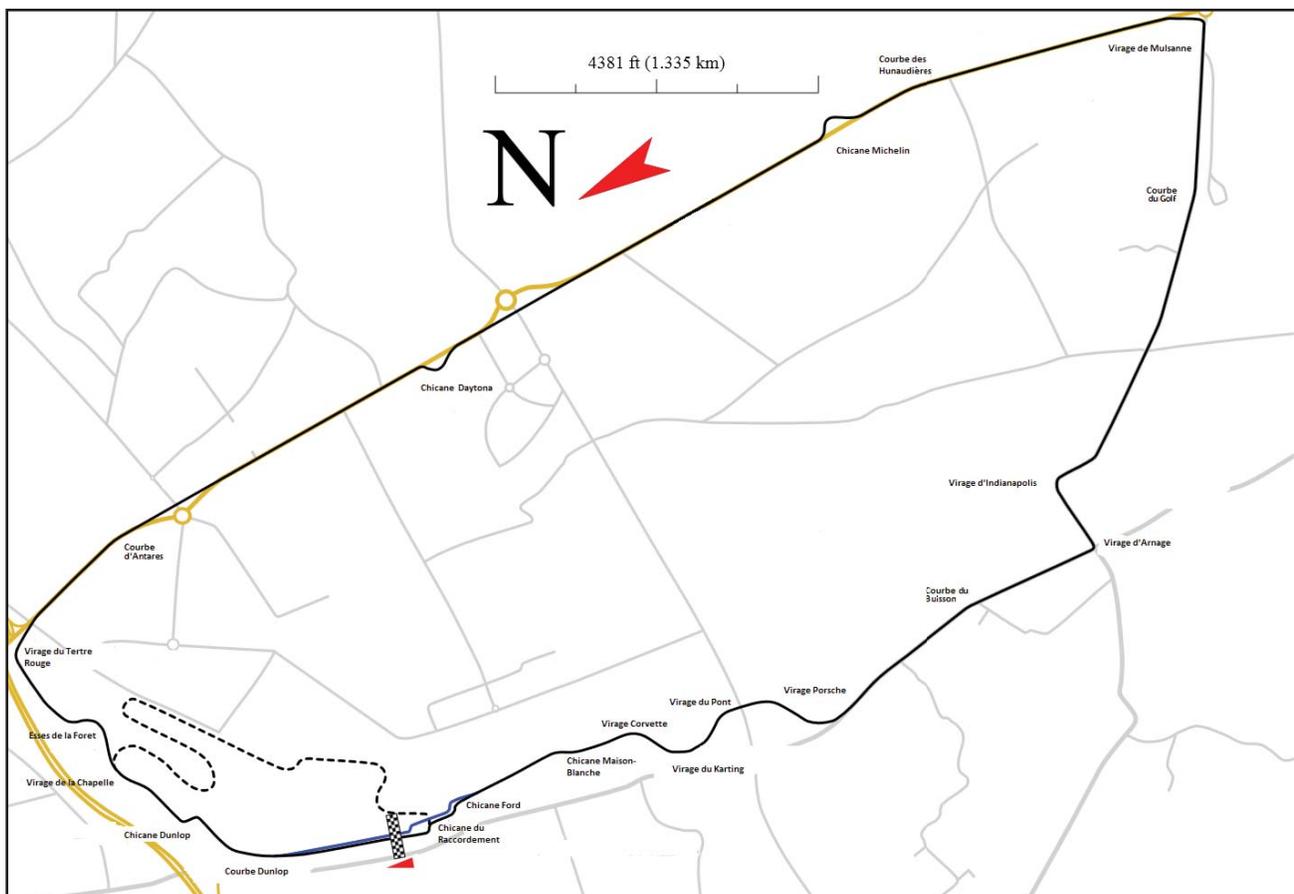
deviate slightly to the right immediately before them. In the late 1980s a chicane was introduced immediately before the Dunlop Bridge, while the famed Mulsanne straight finally succumbed to chicanes in 1990, effectively turning the 3.7-mile straight into three shorter blasts. Cars had been arriving at the Mulsanne corner at over 230 mph,

and were forced to slow to only about 45 mph. The potential for catastrophe in the event of brake failure as speeds continued to increase convinced the FIA to mandate that no track would be sanctioned with a straight longer than 2 km (1.2 miles). This meant that the subsequent straight from Mulsanne to Arnage, which boasts a pronounced kink, is now the fastest part of the circuit.

During De Tomaso's relatively short competition history, various attempts were made to capture victory at Le Mans. The first, and most serious attempt took place in 1972, when four special lightweight Panteras constructed to FIA Group 4 specification were entered by the De Tomaso distributors from France (Société Franco-Britannique), Belgium (Team Claude Dubois), and Spain (Escuderia Montjuich). For reasons not quite clear, the fourth entry which had a pair of Swiss drivers, and which appeared to be an Italian fac-



Frenchman Pierre Levegh's smoldering body lies on the ground next to the burning magnesium chassis of his Mercedes 300 SLR. The engine and hood were both stripped from the wreckage and sent hurtling through the crowd standing at the foot of the grandstands, killing 83 people and injuring hundreds



The current layout of the track incorporates all the lessons learned in the past 100 years, and includes numerous chicanes and kinks to force the cars to slow down. While this has the desired effect of reducing the top speeds, ironically the drivers report that they are no longer afforded the opportunity to relax on the long straights as they once wore. In acknowledgement of this, the rules were changed to mandate at least three drivers rather than two



The De Tomaso factory entry (campaigning under the Escuderia Montjuich banner) looking pristine before the start of the 1972 24 Hours of Le Mans

tory effort, was nominally also entered under the Spanish team's banner. The Spanish team's entries wore car #30, chassis #2823, riven by famed English

driver Mike Parkes and Herbert Muller from Switzerland, and #31 was #2859, driven by Cox-Kocher and also nominally driven by Herbert Muller. Team

Claude Dubois was assigned #32, and his car was #2860, driven by Jean-Maris Jacquemin and Yves Deprez. The French entry wore #33 and was driven by Guy Chasseuil and Jean Vinatier.

Although the cars were extremely competitive and were certainly poised to achieve a class win, improper engine preparation by the NASCAR engine builder, Bud Moore, saw three of the four cars go out with engine failure. The Team Claude Dubois entry blew up their Bud Moore engine on the dyno just days before the race, and hastily fitted a well-worn, bone-stock engine from a rather tired standard Pantera demonstrator car, and although they lost a lot of horsepower,



The #30 Pantera had a strong start, and like all the Panteras, was notably faster than the Group 4 Ferrari Daytonas. However the Panteras failed to bring longevity to the race....

they gained enough endurance to finish in 16th position. (This same car was once again entered by Team Claude Dubois for the 1975 race, where it again finished 16th, and it now resides in Simpsonville, South Carolina, owned by Guy Trigaux, who was the head of Dubois' service department at his Brussels De Tomaso dealership for decades).

Various privateer efforts to run Panteras in both Group 3, Group 4 and eventually Group 5 mostly led to nothing, and the De Tomaso marque slipped from sight at Le Sarthe until 1994, when a British team called ADA engineering bought a complete 1991 Pantera Si off the De Tomaso showroom floor, stripped it, and comprehensively re-engineered it with modern chassis components including front suspension from a Group C Jaguar, and rear suspension from a Porsche 962. Although the car finished the race, because it spent too much time in the pits undergoing gearbox maintenance after an unfortunate spin into the gravel and a subsequent fit of pique by an immature driver, it was not classified as a finisher. That was the last time De Tomaso appeared at La Sarthe....

...until now. The New De Tomaso Automobili, a very Italian-sounding company with not a single speck of Italian lineage anywhere, has decided to make a big splash on the world stage in an effort to garner attention for their new P72 supercar, and to that end, they opened their checkbooks and agreed to (presumably) a fairly generous sponsorship package which saw the new De Tomaso name and logo emblazoned all over the circuit, which is definitely a first. More on that later....

Since 2004, on a biannual basis, Patrick Peter, a French enthusiast and organizer of vintage racing events throughout France, has staged what has to be the very most ambitious vintage race event in the world. Known as Le Mans Classic, it follows the regular 24 hours race three weeks later, and utilizes the same circuit and facilities. The sheer logistics of staging a vintage race on a circuit of this size are staggering. Entrants pay a hefty premium for the privilege of campaigning their cars, with the entry fee cresting 10,000 Euros!

In an effort to celebrate the long



The #32 Pantera was fitted with a very tired, bone-stock street Pantera engine just prior to the race as its race motor blew up on the dyno thanks to a balancing weight falling out of the crankshaft counterweight at high RPM, destroying the block. It was notably slower than the other Panteras, but finished the race. The mechanics of the #31 car behind are investigating the chronic overheating that was later determined to be caused by a blown head gasket

heritage of the race, only cars of the type originally campaigned are allowed to enter, and despite the high entry fee, there are no shortage of applicants, with over 2000 entries that are carefully screened and curated and whittled down to about 500 cars, divided chronologically into six groups (called Plateaus).

Since the onset of this event, the De Tomaso community has benefited from the efforts of Charlie McCall. For those who aren't aware of the name, Charlie is quite a special member of the fraternity of Pantera owners. Originally from upstate New York, decades ago he emigrated to France, and brought his very rusty 1972 Pantera with him. After getting to know some of his fellow European owners, he was afforded the opportunity to buy the very first factory GT5-S from Franz Krump in Austria, #9375, and leapt at it. (His crusty Pre-L was eventually repatriated to the USA where it was sold, and hopefully restored). Charlie later moved to Spain, where he thoroughly went native, meeting and eventually marrying the lovely Amaya, whose last name would stretch until the middle of next week, so let's just agree to call her Amaya!

When Le Mans Classic was an-

nounced, he and I had already made several trips to the regular 24 Hours race together, and we both knew that Le Mans Classic was really more of our cup of tea. He took it upon himself to organize (with absolutely zero help from me, it must be said) a gentle, bourgeois tour of the French countryside, which would terminate at Le Mans on the Thursday of the Le Mans Classic weekend. He almost offhandedly inquired if perhaps anybody else would like to accompany him, and was genuinely surprised at the positive response.

And so it has been that each time Le Mans Classic is held (it is held only during even-numbered years), Charlie and Amaya spend long hours conjuring up an entertaining itinerary, and arranging lodging for what turns out to be a sort of United Nations gathering of De Tomaso owners. The event has grown and shrunk in size over the years, with anywhere from 35 to 70 participants.

The 2020 iteration of the event was rather unfortunately cancelled due to the Covid pandemic, and shifted one year to the right, to be held in 2021, an off year. The French government prohibited that one too, and so we found ourselves finally able to meet once more in late

June of 2022. In the meantime, Charlie's job in Spain had gone up in smoke, and he was given an offer he couldn't refuse to move to Chennai, India! So his Pantera had been placed in storage in Barcelona (and a minor oil leak rectified by having an all new 408 stroker built), while he spent the next few years planning and organizing a tour of France from his new home in India.

It was with much anticipation that Lori and I again trooped to the airport for the long flight to Paris. Normally we try to arrive a few days early to visit with Stephane and Michele Bergeron and get acclimated to the environment, but my newly acquired restrictive work schedule precluded that this time, so we showed up on the first day of the tour, many hours from the start.

At the rental car counter we coinci-

dentally bumped into Bill and Suzanne Moore from Calgary, and Julian Kift, the expat Brit who now resides in Reno. We thus had a short two-car convoy until their GPS said to zig and ours said to zag, whereupon we split up, not to

see one another until we arrived at the hotel. (While it's true that they beat us, we stopped for lunch and they didn't, so who's to say whose route was better?)

Charlie has an almost uncanny knack of finding spectacular lodging for us. No Holiday Inn Express for us, no sir! France is absolutely thick with old chateaus that have been converted to modern-ish hotels, and it is this that he seeks out. Our GPS had us turning into a grand gateway under a stone arch into the Chateau de la Bourdaisie, a 14th to 16th century chateau converted into a hotel in the 20th century. As we looked upon the hill at the imposing structures, we noted a handful of De Tomaso cars parked out front, coincidentally encompassing much of the range, consisting of a Pantera, Mangusta, Deauville and Longchamp. Of greater interest were the tables set out front populated by friends old and new, from nine different countries, enjoying *apéritifs* and *digestifs*. We had arrived at the right place!

(Unfortunately, Charlie and Amaya's luggage had taken a detour between Copenhagen and Barcelona, leaving them high and dry with only a handful



Historically Charlie McCall has done a great job of picking spectacular yet very reasonably priced hotels, and this year was no different! After passing through giant stone gates and entering the expansive grounds, this is what we saw waiting for us at the top of the hill



Seeing Ian Nichols' Iso Grifo, Hartwig Asshauer's Pantera, John Braithwaite's Mangusta, Charlie McCall's Pantera GT5-S, and Mikael Hass' Longchamp, we knew we had arrived at the right place!

of clothes to their name. They made a quick trip to a Carrefour (French Walmart equivalent), and a few others on the tour volunteered spare Pantera shirts, and all was reasonably right with their world)

After the obligatory bag drag, we settled in and began reestablishing friendships with people we hadn't seen for years. Too, while there were numerous people who were unable to attend this year, there were several new folks, primarily from England, and it was wonderful getting to know them as well.

As the event took place very near the summer solstice, the day remained light well into the evening, and thus it was 8:00 p.m. before we made our way into a banquet hall for the first of what



After flying halfway around the world, then driving several hours to the Loire river valley, we were all ready for relaxing aperitifs in front of the chateau



Ian Nichols left his Pantera GT5 home in England and instead drove his freshly restored Series 2 Iso Grifo. Here he is describing how much the restoration cost!



Coincidentally, a local in town owned this immaculate Deauville. Work commitments precluded him from joining in the tour but he stayed for dinner



The first of what was to be many fine dinners awaited us!

would be an uninterrupted string of spectacular meals. Course after course appeared, accompanied by wine of course, and the conversation stretched well into the evening. However, those of us who had just arrived from halfway around the world had to call time early, and made our way to our rooms.

The rooms were amazing. Rather than the anodyne fare one would normally encounter at a high-end hotel in the USA, these rooms were all unique, and reflective of their origin. Those in the main chateau enjoyed beautiful bedrooms with fireplaces and high ceilings. The large barn and stables had also been converted, and the hotel rooms were formed in the upstairs haylofts, complete with huge exposed wooden beams, all secured not with nails but instead with

wooden pegs. The floors were uneven, the rooms large, and opportunities to bump your head or tumble headlong down a narrow staircase were waiting at every turn. It was fantastic.

The next day we made our way into the breakfast lounge for a large continental breakfast, before making our way to the cars. Although historically there has been a substantial majority of De Tomaso cars on the tour, this year *force majeure* reared its ugly head,

and quite a few people who had every intention of arriving behind the wheel of a De Tomaso (all of them British, it must be said) instead found themselves rocking up in other cars. Mind you, they weren't suffering, as they ranged from new Porsche 911 to Audi A8 and even a stunning second series Iso Grifo. George and Sue Gordon-Smith sold their Mangusta ages ago, and instead were in their beautiful 1966 Shelby GT350 clone, which is arguably the perfect sort of car for continental touring.



The classic cars enjoyed pride of place in the main courtyard of the Chateau de Villandry

With Charlie and Amaya taking pride of place at the head of the convoy in their GT5-S, the rest of the proper cars tucked neatly in behind, followed by the humble rental cars of the North Americans, and a fully loaded camper van brought by a Danish family, whose setup would later prove to be the social headquarters of our campsite once we reached Le Mans.

After an admittedly uninspiring drive of an hour or so, we arrived at the Chateau de Villandry, which

was built during the Renaissance and had been home to various famous people throughout history, including Napoleon's brother. After some obligatory arm-waving, the proper cars were introduced by way of an iron gate and a narrow track to the central courtyard of the chateau while the rest of us made do in a highly conventional (yet delightfully arbored) car park.

We then proceeded to enjoy a leisurely self-paced tour through the well-preserved and/or restored chateau, and the spectacular gardens adjoining them. Although the original structure dated from medieval times, all but the castle keep were razed by the then-owner, Jean La Breton (who was the Minister of Finance for King Francois I) in 1532, and a spectacular renaissance residence was erected on the site of the former fortress. The keep was the site of the signing of the Peace of Colombiers treaty, signed by King Henry II of England in 1189, so evidently he thought it might be a bit rude to just knock it down, and so he incorporated it into the new design instead.

Those who were well-heeled enough to afford such extravagant domiciles were typically well-versed in the arts and other cultural pursuits, not the least of which were gardens. Incredibly rich and diverse gardens were planned and constructed, and those at Villandry



Les jardins at Villandry are reputed to be among Europe's finest

are widely considered to be among the best. The lovely summer weather made for a perfect noontime stroll alongside a mirror-shaped lake, along terraced gardens, and through a large maze constructed with elaborate hedgeries.

At 1:00 p.m. we made our way to a pavilion erected in front of the chateau, where lunch awaited. Eating is a Very Big Deal in France, and most of us didn't push away until well after 3:00 p.m. We then wandered back to our cars for the drive back to our own personal chateau.

There, more *apéritifs* and *digestifs* awaited, and we continued talking about any manner of things (occasionally including cars, if that is to be believed) before once again making our way into the banquet room for dinner. This time, everyone stuck around and it was close to (or after) midnight before the last footfalls were heard on the stairs.

As a leisurely departure was planned in the morning, we had some time to explore the grounds, which included an extensive network of caverns running underneath the chateau. Although it wasn't explicitly stated as such, my supposition is that the miners extracted the limestone from underneath in order to build the formidable



John Braithwaite has probably put more miles on a Mangusta in the 20th century than anybody else on earth. Fully fettled by Johnny Woods, it proved to be absolutely on the button every day. The hotel at Amboise is built right into the limestone cliffs, with large wine storage rooms carved out of the rock

structures above, leaving giant caverns suitable for keeping your wine cool, or any number of other things. There was

a bizarre art exhibit contained within, featuring references to *The Little Prince*, the fantastical children's book written by expatriate French patriot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in New York in 1942. Any connection this work had with the chateau was never explained either, leaving all of us quite puzzled.

After checking out of the hotel, we set off on another drive to our next destination, the village of Amboise on the banks of the river Loire, for which the valley is named. Forgoing motorways, we instead traveled along the banks of the broad, shallow river along substantial

levees. The route inexplicably crossed the river several times before we finally arrived at our destination.

This next hotel was thoroughly different in character from the first, but no less appealing. Rather than a grandiose chateau, instead this was a 19th century resort perched atop the bank of the river, just a few hundred yards from the main entrance to Amboise. Although we arrived in time to do a bit of exploring, Lori and I chose to take advantage of the downtime and take a bit of a nap. This was highly uncharacteristic, and perhaps foretelling....

When we awoke, our numbers had gone up by three, as we were joined by Geoff Peters (who some of you may remember as the best man at our wedding) and his girlfriend Helen. They had unfortunately been stricken with Covid in the days leading up to the event and had to miss the start, but upon testing clean, they made a dash to Portsmouth from their home on the outskirts of London for the ferry to France. Progress was a bit uneven as their Pantera's clutch master cylinder withered, leading



Freshly recovered from Covid, Geoff Peters and Helen charged across France to catch up to the tour. The fact that he has only one leg doesn't prevent him from driving a car with a clutch, but the fact that he had no clutch made it far more challenging!

to some interesting driving techniques needed to cross over several hours of rural France!

Also making his first appearance was Stephen Burke from Dublin, who has owned a series of Panteras and other spectacular cars (such as Ford GT and Lamborghini Murcielago) over the years. This year he surprised us by driving up in a spectacular Pantera GT/4, converted by a factory Gr3 race car by Roland Jackel (Roland drove this car on the previous iteration of the tour and was much-missed this year).

Arisen once more, we enjoyed the obligatory *apéritifs* and *digestifs* on the hotel patio before establishing ourselves in the dining room, overlooking the river through grand floor-to-ceiling glass. The sun slowly set as one course after another appeared, followed by a trek downstairs to the small, cozy bar, where the libations flowed as freely as the stories.

Charlie has learned a thing or two after crafting many of these tours, and one of the lessons he took away was that not every minute of every day needed to be comprehensively planned. Thus, he declared an open day the next day, and offered a variety of options. There was a bit of tension in the morning, however, as it was somberly announced that one of the Brits had just tested positive for Covid. As they were planning on visiting their country home in the French

Alps following the tour and the race (as one does!), they made the executive decision to beat a hasty retreat, and exit stage left to curl up and recuperate in the fresh Alpine air. The rest of us all looked at one another with equal amounts of consternation and resignation, then determined to enjoy the rest of our holiday.

While some were greatly ambitious, and drove and hiked all up and down the river, most of us enjoyed a big, fat breakfast

and then waddled down the road into the village, whereupon we planted ourselves in various sidewalk cafés where we would ultimately enjoy similarly big, fat lunches. Amboise has a truly spectacular chateau that anchors the town, but as we had visited there on a previous tour in 2008 we decided to give it a miss, instead choosing to wander the streets, looking for other sidewalk cafés to occupy. At one point there was



The entire Loire valley has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Among the most significant sites is the village of Amboise, once home of the French royal court, and later the home of Leonardo Davinci. The old part of the village has structures that are well over a thousand years old, still serving in their original capacities. The tradition of the sidewalk café is deeply imbued in French culture and we took every opportunity to patronize them

a bit of a revolution, as a large gang of women announced their intention to conduct some Serious Shopping. That suited the guys right down to the ground, and we planted our flag at a particularly inviting café and enjoyed the local beer until they returned, well-burdened with shopping bags.

We were completely unaware that the town rolled up the sidewalks mid-afternoon and we were just able to get in under the wire at a decent-looking café for lunch before they flipped the sign around to read *Ferme*. We sat on the sidewalk under impossibly small and insufficient umbrellas, enjoying a rather modest yet delicious lunch. Many of us chose steak-frites, which is a thin, marbelled steak accompanied by what we call French fries. In Belgium, steak-frites is practically one word, and a steak without a mountain of Belgian fries and a pint of beer is unthinkable. This tradition has traveled to France, and it is now a favored lunchtime fare.

We eventually made our way back to the hotel, for another uncharacteristic nap, which we hopefully attributed to simple jet lag from having failed to recuperate following our transatlantic journey of a few days prior. Then it was back to the patio, followed by a



The farewell banquet was held in a room overlooking the Loire river

grand farewell banquet. This, then, represented the formal end of the tour. From here, the next morning some would proceed straight to Le Mans to erect our respective fabric chateaus in the verdurous plains alongside the track, while some of the Brits made their way to a spectacular 20,000 square foot private chateau with associated gardens that they had rented for the weekend (and for a laughably reasonable price it must be said), or to a small country hotel where a dozen or more fellow De Tomaso-owning Brits would join them, or to various Air B&Bs in the Le Mans region. Others who had little interest in stomping around a hot racetrack at all hours of the day and night chose to bid us all farewell, and make for different corners of France before they ultimately returned home.

The day had been set aside for what many of us had looked forward to the most—a karting battle of the champions to be held at a world-class karting facility. Previous iterations of the tour had seen titanic battles raged between Ian Nichols of the UK, Mikael Hass of Denmark, Roland Jackel of Germany, and Your Humble Scribe representing the USA, and we were all itching for a rematch. Alas, it was not to be, as our wonderful weather had turned overnight, and a persistent rain fell from the sky. With the karting having been cancelled,



Tomas Gunnarsson considers the borrowed wheels and tires that were going to get him through his vacation and back home to Denmark



Kristian Poulsen of Denmark left his beautiful green pushbutton Pantera #1267 at home and instead rode nonstop on this big beast of a motorcycle. Speaking of beasts, in the background-check out the formidable ex-military truck turned into an RV!

we instead slept in a bit, and then ambled along country roads until we arrived at the track.

After securing our tickets, we then made our way to the designated campsite, where Charlie had arranged for a group of plots. Thankfully the skies parted and the sun came out. The minor drenching had been quickly soaked up by the dry earth (yes they have drought there too), and rather than a muddy swamp, instead we were left with a nice, soft bed of grass that would happily accommodate tent stakes that normally need to be installed with a pile-driver.

Besides those who had taken part on the tour, we were joined by a couple of Danish Pantera owners, one of whom had driven down in a work van (and who had stopped to visit Patrick Hals in Belgium and scoop up a pair of doors from a pushbutton Pantera), and the other who had blitzed down on his new KTM motorcycle, which was quite a substantial rig indeed.

With our little backpacker's tent (barely six feet long and four feet wide) lost deep in the shadows of Erling and Lonne Neilsen's massive nylon condominium, we had a quick wander around the paddock, and then set off for the nearby village of Arnage. Tomas Gunnarsson had driven his Pantera from Sweden (which is a very, very long way indeed) where he would then share the car with Julian Kift, and upon arrival in France, he discovered that his brand new 20-year-old junk Yokohama rear



Kjeld Pederson knew that Charlie and Amaya like to decorate their campsite with knomes, and pink flamingos. He hit it out of the park with this one!

tires had delaminated, and there was very real doubt that he would make it home. I made a quick phone call to Saint Bergeron which resulted in a plan, whereby he would remove the 10-inch Campagnolo wheels and new tires from one of his Panteras and deposit them in the back of Michele's regular car, then bring them three hours to Arnage for a bit of a swaparoo. I would put them in my rental car and bring them back to the campsite, Tomas would install them, and place his old wheels in the Nielsen's large camper for them to bring to their home in northern Denmark after the race. After the weekend was done, Tomas was going to take a tour of Germany, before swinging by Denmark to pick up his old wheels, one of which would go in the passenger seat and other on his roof (!), at which point he would then drive back home, install new tires on his wheels, and ship Stephane's wheels and tires back to him in France.

So, that all happened....

We then went for dinner, where we sat along the roadway and watched any number of fantastic cars go by, followed by an early turn-in, which led to a surprisingly deep and peaceful slumber.

The next day we headed to the track, in an attempt to see all the competitor's cars before the crowds became too much to bear. The depth and breadth of the entries almost defies description. Individual cars that would stop you in your tracks were they seen in another context, such as a Ford GT40,

soon almost blended into the scenery, as there were probably a dozen or more of them! Everything one might imagine, from pre-war Bentleys, to Porsches of every description, to delectable prototype race cars could be found, all nestled under extremely simple tents. In an effort to celebrate the spirit of the event, no trailers or race transporters are allowed to be in view. Instead, cars are unloaded and dispatched to designated (and very small) parking spaces, where even the most well-equipped teams position barely a spare set of tires and a modest toolbox. If



The exceptionally well-prepared factory Gr4 Pantera #2858 was the class of the field

they are truly extravagant, they will have a folding table, and maybe even a chair. It's a far, far cry from what we are accustomed to seeing in places like Monterey, where multi-million-dollar luxu 18-wheelers are parked nose-to-tail, with complete machine shops within and enough spare parts available to build a complete second car from scratch! No, this is vintage racing with a decidedly amateur feel, even though some of the

cars are worth upwards of \$40 or \$50 million!

Although the first Pantera didn't race at Le Mans until 1972, inexplicably one was inserted in Plateau 5, for 1966-1971 cars. This was a road car converted to Gr4 specification, and prepared by Willie Braun. Meanwhile, where they belonged, there were two more Panteras in Plateau 6. Significantly, both of them were factory Group 4 lightweight race

cars. The first was #2858, which was sold new to Achilli Motors in Milano. It raced with moderate success mostly in Italian events, and eventually the fiberglass flares were replaced by smooth steel flares, somewhat reminiscent of a GT5-S. It had several Italian owners and is now owned by a Swiss fellow and prepared by a race team in the south of France, and was repainted in French blue (colors it wore briefly in period,



Years of pent-up demand meant the crowds were unbelievable. Each of the six classes was segregated in their own enclosure, surrounded by vendor booths, with a massive stand-alone vendor marketplace located further up the hill



The sun sets late in France in the summertime. This was the parking lot outside the restaurant at about 8:30 p.m., long before dinner started. The GT5-S on the left had just arrived after a non-stop drive from Rome

in between various appearances in the traditional red and black scheme). The other was #2343, the De Tomaso press car, which had an extensive race history in Italy before being brutally hacked and converted to Group 5 configuration in 1976, and painted a somewhat uninspiring shade of yellow, which is how it appears today. That car is pictured, partially wrecked, on the cover of the De Tomaso racing book (a decidedly odd choice until you realize the author owned the car and was trying to sell it at the time!)

The vendor row can barely be described. Each year it seems to grow, and there were probably over 200 different

vendors offering everything from books, to automobilia, to hard-to-find parts, to art, to haircuts! Too, there were various restaurants offering a Gaullic spin on track chow, which is decidedly a cut above the hot dogs and burgers and burned chicken sandwiches we are subjected to here.

Eventually we made our way back to the campsite for a quick change of clothes. We rolled up an errant Dane and then headed to a nearby village, where Stephane and Michele Bergeron, the spark plugs behind the Pantera French Connection

(a loose affiliation of French Pantera owners) had rented a hall to host a De Tomaso dinner. We were

told to be there before 7 p.m., but almost nobody arrived for almost an hour. I wasn't worried though, because I knew that 76 people (!) had committed to attending.

The acoustics of the hall were terrible, meaning it was extraordinarily loud inside, requiring one to holler to be heard. 76 people hollering all at once makes for quite



Stephane and Michelle Bergeron gave opening remarks in English and French to the almost 80 Pantera owners from a multitude of countries



Michelle Bergeron and Ian Nichols had a surprise for Phil Stebbings and the other members of the De Tomaso Drivers Club of Great Britain, in the form of pyrotechnic birthday cakes to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the club

a cacophony, but the food was now-typically terrific, and the company was great. We got to meet lots of people who had not been on the tour and had instead just arrived in the region, as well as even more Panteras (including one unaffiliated British Pantera driver that was completely unassociated, and just happened to be wandering past and spotted a parking lot filled with a dozen Panteras and spun around to see what the fuss was all about!).

This year was the 40th anniversary of the De Tomaso Driver's Club of Great Britain, and club founder Phil Stebbings (who had in recent years

successfully conquered both cancer and a rather substantial heart attack, not to mention Covid) was in attendance. He was quite surprised when at the end of the evening (nearing midnight!), three rather incendiary cakes emerged in his honor! He graciously accepted the accolades and gave a tearful and heartfelt speech to sign the night off.

We awoke after a good nine hours of sleep and set off for the track once more. We were more than a bit surprised to see how prominent the De Tomaso signage was. It was *everywhere*, right alongside the more customarily found signage from big-name outfits like Richard Mille, Motul, BMW, Aston Martin etc. Clearly the new De Tomaso gang is determined to convey the notion that they are a big-time player with a lot of money behind them.

But it wasn't just signs. Oh, no, De Tomaso pulled out all the stops. They erected a two-story *palace* on the inside of the track, at the Ford Chicane, representing the ultimate level of corporate hospitality. Intended to solicit and caress the customers who had already, or would hopefully soon plunk down upwards of \$800,000 for a new De Tomaso, the hosts graciously invited a select few of us *hoi polloi* to rub shoulders with the rich and famous. When we finally figured out how to get to the place (it seemed to require crossing a number of impossible

fences and barriers, and the path was finally determined to be a tunnel used by the teams to make their way to their trailers etc.), we were awestruck at the opulence inside.

White tablecloths, hyper-attentive staff, and all the free gourmet food and drink you could stand were all on offer, all as a gesture of thanks to their customers. They were more than willing to extend this courtesy to us, and while *fois gras* and *confit de canard* sounded appealing, by this point we were filled to bursting with fine food, plus I felt a bit self-conscious accepting such grandiose hospitality on what were arguably dubious pretenses. Thus I limited myself to a bowl of popcorn and a couple of Kit Kat cars tossed into my backpack!

We were able to watch from the second-floor terrace as three new De



Everywhere we looked, signage advertising the new De Tomaso corporation was prominently on display

Tomaso P72s gave demonstration laps, accompanied by one of the Group 4 Panteras that had campaigned the race in 1972, as well as the one and only Group 5 Pantera, which was a dismal failure when new, then converted to a Group C car which was laughably uncompetitive, before being allowed to languish and rot and rust away to practically nothing. Owned for years by the Adlers, it was eventually purchased by a wealthy German enthusiast who submitted it for a cost-no-object restoration to Group 5 specification by marque specialist Willi Braun.

Later on, we entered the parking corral for Plateau 5 (1966-1971), where De Tomaso had the cars on display. This was the first opportunity that most people had to get up close and personal to the P72. The three cars on display were all slightly different, as they are all engineering prototypes. Two of them were propelled by the original AMG Mercedes V12 (the car was initially based on the underpinnings of the existing Apollo Intense Emizione, a super-radical cost-no-object autobahn-burner supercar), while the third one has the 'production' powerplant, a Roush-



De Tomaso paid an enormous sum to have this corporate hospitality pavilion erected right next to the Ford Chicane

engineered supercharged Ford Coyote V-8. The latter car wore Michigan manufacturer plates, as befits its role as the development mule that Roush is using to dial in the new engine.

The exterior of the car met with universal praise, even though it is arguably a bit derivative not of a De Tomaso, but instead of a Ferrari 3/4 prototype racer from the late 1960s. The interior is not quite so successful. Intended to appeal primarily to the Chinese and middle eastern markets, one person remarked that it looked like nothing so much as Liberace's bathroom!

De Tomaso CEO Norman Choi was on hand to speak with people about



Willi Braun stands alongside the Group 5 Pantera that he comprehensively restored from an unrecognizable, rusted-out hulk



Norman Choi proudly showed off the De Tomaso P72 prototypes



Patrick Hals and the stricken ADA Pantera Si

the car and the project. A thoroughly engaging fellow, he acknowledged the fact that the interior had gone well past the boundaries of good taste, and reassured anyone within earshot that they were well underway designing a more modest and classical interior that would be available as an option for western buyers.

Besides the fully restored Group 4 Pantera, and the unbelievable Group 5 car, was the famous ADA Pantera Si of Patrick Hals. This car was the last De Tomaso to race at Le Mans in 1994, before winning the British Racing Driver's Championship outright in 1995. After languishing for years, then undergoing a stop-start-stop-start restoration, it was finally completed, and while it was not entered in the racing (which I found odd, as there was a class added for more modern cars), it was set to take parade laps along with the new De Tomasos.

Patrick has always suffered with second- and third-rate mechanics, and he himself confesses that he only knows how to put gas in the car, and steer. When he experienced the slightest bit of overheating, his 'mechanic' proposed completely re-engineering the cooling system in the paddock. The stupid idea he implemented immediately resulted in two blown head gaskets, and the car was on the trailer for the weekend, which was a great disappointment to all of us, most especially Patrick, who was fit to be tied. However, he retained his characteristic ebullient demeanor and was happy to show the car and answer questions from one and all.

De Tomaso's hospitality wasn't limited to the one facility on the edge of the track. They had also rented a luxu skybox overlooking the front straight, and said that all De Tomaso owners were welcome to enjoy it. It offered two commodities in short supply at Le Mans, namely electrical power and air conditioning, so it



De Tomaso was the named sponsor of Plateau 5, and had three P72 prototypes on display

promised to be extremely popular with our crew.

Norman Choi's right-hand-man is an English fellow named Jake Hamilton, who has been in communication with me over the past few months on various items. He was clearly filled with enthusiasm for his job and appreciation for the owners of classic De Tomaso cars. I had a mental image of a silver-haired gentleman in a Saville Row suit, and was quite surprised when I was finally introduced and discovered that he's only 17 years old!

Well, not really, but he certainly appeared that way at first glance. Realistically he's probably in his early 20s, a recent college graduate, and he informed me that he had been working for De Tomaso for all of three months.

He confessed that he's found himself stuck right in the deep end and he is learning the job as he goes, rather like flying an airplane and building it at the same time! He was unbelievably gracious and generous, and was more than a bit embarrassed when he discovered he had failed to read the fine print and the luxu sky box he had rented came with no tables or chairs, as those were extra! We didn't mind of course, but he was determined to bring at least an element of hospitality to the hospitality suite, and at one point came in with a cardboard box filled with sodas and drinks for us.

Besides the six Plateaus of racing cars that comprise the meat of the racing, this year they added several extra groups that raced throughout the Saturday

afternoon, included dedicated Porsche and Jaguar grids, a Legends of Le Mans group (basically comprising Le Mans cars from the 1990s and 2000s), and the finest group of 1980s Group C cars ever gathered in one spot. In between races, enthusiasts could pay to take pace-car-controlled laps of the complete circuit. While the pace car may have traveled at a moderate pace, the accordion effect meant that the cars in the back could drop back and then really nail it, resulting in Bugeye Sprites toodling along at 50 mph and being passed by Lamborghini Aventadors at 200!

At precisely exactly almost sort of 4:00 p.m. the conventional racing started. While traditionally the Plateaus run in order, this year they mixed things up and started with Plateau 4. Each of



The barren skybox offered a terrific view from above the pits, along with power to charge our phones. What more could we ask for?



Jake Hamilton went out of his way to accomodate all the Pantera owners

the six groups was offered three, one-hour run sessions, meaning that each group would run both in the daytime and at night. Doing some quick finger math, you will calculate that six groups times three runs per group times one hour per run equals only 18 hours of the 24. The rest of the time was wisely set aside to overhead needed to get the cars off track and next group on track, plus time to recover any cars which might have either experienced a Failure to Proceed, or perhaps became One with the Armco barrier.

This year, Lori and I suffered an embarrassment of riches, as we had so many comfortable places to go at the track. Besides the two De Tomaso enclosures, we also had access to the media suite and we also purchased grandstand tickets. We had no idea De Tomaso was going to be so generous, and we (meaning Lori!) decided that having actual seats that were protected from both sun and rain would be a good thing. The fact that the grandstand had its own private bathrooms, showers, and restaurant was an incredible bonus!

It's worth mentioning that the event organizers are extremely accommodating to car clubs, and there were over 150 (!) different club enclosures on the inside



The racing started with a traditional Le Mans start. The cars took a ceremonial lap of the track, then stopped to let the drivers get belted in, after which they started conventionally

of the track, with over 8,000 collector cars parked there! The Porsche clubs alone had over 1000 cars. Basically it's the mother of all Cars and Coffees!

At 5:30 p.m., even as Plateau 5 was on track, there was a small reception at the De Tomaso corral. Attendance was down somewhat from previous years, due in no small part to the aforementioned problems that various people

had in the months leading up to the event, but it was still a fun gathering, including several more who had not yet been seen.

We watched some more racing before uncharacteristically leaving the circuit for a bite of dinner in the village of Arnage with Charlie and Amaya McCall, Julian Kift and Thomas Gunnerson. When we came back, Lori was flaming

out, and Julian seemed eager, so he and I set off on our own for Arnage corner.

There is quite simply nothing like Arnage at night. We arrived there at about midnight, and perched ourselves on the bank watching the cars exit the Indianapolis corner for the short straight leading to Arnage, the tightest corner on the circuit, where most cars get all the way down into first gear, before zooming off through the straight leading to the Porsche curves. We timed it just right and were able to watch some of the fastest groups, Plateaus 4



Pantera French Connection had a small marque parking area inside the track



The Maserati club parked the classic 1950s and 1960s models in front of the modern cars

and 5. Cobras, Jaguars, GT40s, Ferraris, and various Porsches, plus untold other cars would come hurtling down towards the corner, brake discs glowing and occasionally fire spitting from the exhausts. The silver Pantera put on quite a show, as it was evidently jetted much, much too rich, such that a huge fireball would emanate from the 180-degree exhausts each time the driver would decelerate, enough to light up the night sky.

We decided to move closer to home for Plateau 6, where the other two Panteras were scheduled to run.

We made our way along back roads to a parking lot and then scrambled up on the bank alongside the Porsche curves. Unfortunately, on the first lap of racing, there was an incident serious enough to warrant a full course yellow, and the cars trundled around slowly behind the pace car, again and again. Eventually we gave up and decided to call it a night; just as we got to the car they got one green flag lap in before the checkered flag flew. Mysteriously, the extensively modified Group 4 Pantera was nowhere to be seen (evidently they broke during their first run, which we had missed) but the blue car was soldiering along.

We crawled into our tents at about

3:30 a.m., anxious to return to the action as soon as possible.

We woke up to clear skies just a few hours later, and after saying our goodbyes to some of the group, including Charlie and Amaya, who wouldn't



This car started life as a factory Group 4 Pantera, before it was brutalized and converted to Group 5 specification in the mid-1970s. It ran in practice but fell out during its first session



Dinner at an outdoor cafe in Arnage, with steak frites all around!



A 1954 Jaguar D-type plunges down the hill towards the Esses



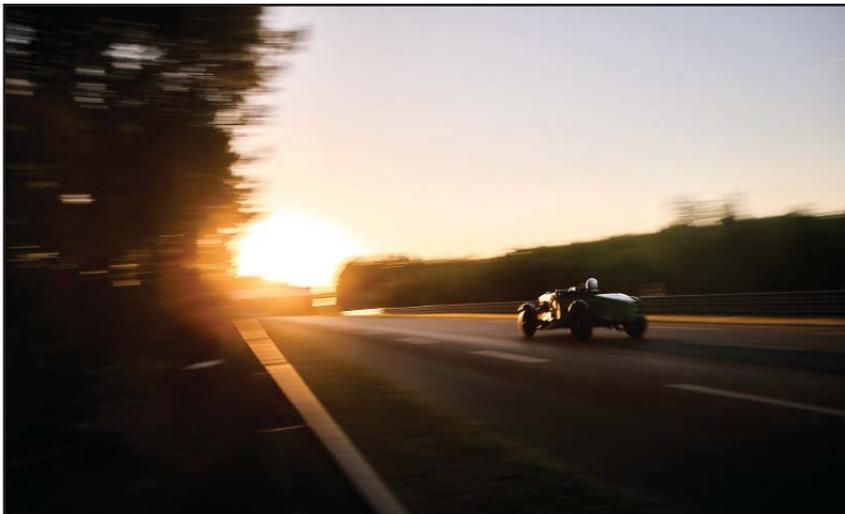
Well after midnight, the bank alongside the Arnage corner was filled with enthusiasts

stay to the end due to various commitments and/or terrible planning on their part, we headed back to the track. We then spent the remainder of the day moving from one location to the next, sometimes watching the racing, sometimes admiring the cars in the paddock, occasionally having a bite to eat, and making pit stops in the De Tomaso hospitality suites and the grandstands. Lori and Suzanne Moore decided to plant themselves in the grandstands and let the boys run off to watch cars on foot, which we did.

We stopped by the enclosure for the blue Group 4 Pantera and found the drivers there, overjoyed, as they had actually come in first in their class! Both of them are club racers of modern Ferraris etc.



A BMW M1 lights up the night sky on the approach to the Dunlop Bridge



A Talbot 105 races towards the breaking dawn



Never drove a vintage car, never saw Le Mans, and won first in class anyway!

and neither one had ever driven an old car of any kind, nor had either of them ever driven at Le Mans! So they got to learn how to drive a Pantera, and got to learn which way the track went, during their qualifying session on the Thursday. Clearly they were good students, quickly coming to terms not only with the car but also with the track, and their driving skill coupled with excellent preparation netted them the class victory!

We continued our walk, passing through the hospitality room above the pits one more time, and taking in a few of the displays in the paddock that we had overlooked before, before eventually making our way across the Dunlop Bridge and up towards the Tetre Rouge corner.

We were feeling a bit peckish so stopped in at a conveniently placed refreshment pavilion, where we decided to give the Saucisson Frites a try. This is basically just a glorified hot dog, arguably much too much for a single person to eat, so we decided to split them between us.

Eventually we found ourselves at Tetre Rouge, one of the best and least-populated viewing spots on the track. The cars emerge from the Esses and brake hard for a double-apex corner that leads onto the Hunaudières straight. It's critical for a good lap time that the drivers carry as much speed through the corner as possible, and the skinny tires meant that most cars were slithering



Not all the Le Mans cars were on the track. Renault had a collection of Matra prototypes on display. These cars were dominant at Le Mans in the mid-1970s



In Plateau 1, this Bentley crew conducts a driver change during the mandatory one-minute pit stop



French track chow is cheap, simple and delicious



The guys relaxing in the shade at Tetre Rouge



Vintage racing is not without its consequences. The one-of-a-kind Ferrari Breadvan (a 1961 250 Short Wheelbase Berlinetta that was jointly developed by engineer Geotto Bizzarrini and body specialist Piero Drogo with a new aerodynamic body in 1962) was running a solid third in class when the driver made a costly mistake in one of the chicanes on the Hunaudières straight and comprehensively restyled it against the tire wall. The car ran flawlessly and the crash happened just moments before the end of the race. Although it looks pretty rough, the fact that it's worth almost \$30 million means that it will certainly be repaired to run again someday....

and sliding all the way through, before roaring off out of sight.

We were then right up until the final checkered flag flew at 4:00 p.m., then we slowly made our way back towards the campsite, swinging by the grandstands to pick up our respective mates.

There is almost nothing as futile as sitting in traffic trying to leave a race track, so instead, after breaking camp, several of us headed back to Arnage where we were joined by Stephane Bergeron and Mike Trusty from Arkansas (who had been visiting the Bergerons along with his wife Louise for the week) for a very relaxing dinner. Afterwards, Julian piled into our car and we drove through the night to deposit him at an airport hotel, before arriving at the Bergeron's house where Michele and Louise were waiting (and Stephane and Mike had yet to arrive). We tumbled into bed at about 1:30 a.m.

The next morning had absolutely no agenda. We admired the extensive garage renovations that Stephane had installed, along with all the Panteras that had somehow found their way to his house. Almost nobody in France knows how to work on an old car, much less an American engine, and Stephane feels pity for Pantera owners. A skilled and adept mechanic who owns three Panteras himself, he generously offers to fix other people's cars, and as a result he had seven (!) under his roof.

He had an especially inviting swimming pool, and we spent quite some time splashing and floating in the cool water as an escape from the summertime heat, before enjoying a last, splendid meal on the patio. The next morning we headed for the airport, for an uneventful flight home.

As a postscript, we felt pretty rough when we walked in the door, and even though it was midnight, we decided to test for Covid before we went to bed. Sure enough, we tested positive. In fact, every single person on the De Tomaso tour, plus most of the English people who had come directly to the track, subsequently tested positive. It turned out that France was the European epicenter for the breakout of the newest, latest, greatest strain of Covid, and Le Mans Classic (which had some 240,000 spectators!) was the ultimate superspreader event. Yet, not a one of us had any regrets. In fact, Covid gave everyone an excuse to put their feet up and relax for a few days



Among the tens of thousands of classic cars parked throughout the area, one of the more improbable was this giant Mercury Colony Park station wagon

after getting home from this grueling, rewarding and unabashedly spectacular week in France.

Although Le Mans Classic is traditionally held only on even-numbered years, 2023 is the 100th anniversary of Le Mans, so the event organizers are planning on holding an off-year event there next year. While it's normally assumed that Charlie and Amaya will organize a tour, they decided to give France a miss and instead organizing a De Tomaso tour of Spain for 2023.

A group of local POCA members headed by Denny Morse are arranging a more stripped-down trip to Le Mans Classic this year, so get in touch with

him if you're interested. Meanwhile, if you have ever had a hankering to travel with a like-minded group of international Pantera friends, staying in magnificent locations and eating unbelievable meals, living the champagne and caviar lifestyle on a beer and pretzels budget, let Charlie know to put you on his list and get yourself an invitation to his next tour!



An endless array of classic and sports cars passed us as we enjoyed our final dinner in Arnage

Alfa Romeo Association

&



present

Mozart Automobile Museum Tour

DATE: APRIL 8, 2023, 10 A.M. - 12 NOON

TOUR FEE: \$10 PER PERSON

LOCATION: MOZART MUSEUM - 1325 PEAR AV., MOUNTAIN VIEW

OPEN TO PCNC MEMBERS + 1 GUEST (LIMIT: 50)

RSVP REQUIRED BY 3/25/23 TO: MIKELDREW@AOL.COM

(UNUSED TICKETS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO OTHERS AFTER RSVP DEADLINE)

PLEASE BRING CASH ON DAY OF EVENT

OPTIONAL LUNCH FOLLOWS: ALICE'S RESTAURANT, WOODSIDE –

>INCLUDE YOUR LUNCH PLANS WHEN YOU RSVP<

PLEASE NOTE:

No photography

No children under age 12

Enjoy a rare opportunity to tour the world class automobile collection of John Mozart. This private collection of automobiles including Bugatti, Alfa Romeo, Duesenberg, Pierce Arrow, Packard, Ferrari, and more is a dream come true for antique, vintage, and classic car enthusiasts. The museum is not open to the public, so it is a unique opportunity to view and learn about some of the world's rarest automobiles.

ARA and POCA are joining forces to present this rare opportunity to visit one of the best private collections in the US. We are limited to 50 attendees per club, so sign up early to assure your spot. One guest is allowed for each club member. Register to Mike and please bring cash to the tour (\$10 per person).





Brent Stewart
1239 Valley Quail Circle
San Jose, CA 95120



NEXT CLUB MEETING

**Thursday, February 23rd, 2023
7:30 P.M.**

**DENNY'S
1001 East Capitol Expressway, San Jose
NEW MEETING LOCATION!**

UPCOMING CLUB EVENTS

8 April — — — Mozart Collection Tour And Skyline Drive Scenic Drive (Mike Drew)