Automobile Racing Club of Florida | ARCF.net

Issue 002 - Fall 2024

Sebring Museum Update

The Sebring Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) has acquired the former Bank of America building located at the entrance to Sebring's downtown business district. The two-story, 30,000 square foot building, constructed in the 1960's, was acquired by the CRA in late June, 2024 at a cost of \$1.2 million.

The CRA is currently in the RFP stage of requesting proposals from the public to repurpose the building. The building will be awarded at little or no-cost to the party who's proposal best suits the city's

Redevelopment Master Plan. Our interview with CRA officials indicated that a race museum component would very desirable. The CRA hopes to select the winning proposal in early November and to complete the awarding process by the end of 2024.

The Sebring Hall of Fame is intending to partner with a local developer who will provide the ground floor to be used as a Sebring Race Museum.

Hopefully, there will be additional news to share in the next issue of the ARCF Starting Line.



Astronauts at Sebring

By Doug Morton, ARCF Historian

In the Spring of 1961, many Americans were very excited for the upcoming space flight of Alan Shepard, one of the Mercury 7 astronauts. America was lagging behind the USSR in the space race, and we needed to get one of our own in space to get back on track, and Shepard was the one chosen to go first. The astronauts were undergoing intensive training to get ready for their flights



and any time off was usually brief. Shepard and the rest of the astronauts had similar characteristics to race car drivers. They were adrenalin junkies who liked to go fast on land and in the air. Most had a penchant for fast cars, typically Corvettes leased for \$1 from Jim Rathmann Chevrolet in Melbourne.

On Friday March 24, 1961, Alan Shepard flew down to Sebring with Bill France and Bernard Kahn, a "Daytona Beach News-Journal" reporter. They stayed the night at the Kenilworth Lodge in Sebring. Shepard told Kahn "You know I still can't believe it. Here I am in Sebring. I've always wanted to see this race but I never thought I'd make it." Shepard didn't just stay in his room and hide out from curious onlookers. He hung out downstairs and answered continued on p3

Join ARCF to **Learn About Sebring History**

By Ford Heacock III

A Legacy of Racing Tradition

The ARCF was originally founded by Alec Ulmann in 1956 out of necessity. Following the tragic accident at Le Mans in 1955, where 85 people lost their lives, the American Automobile Association (AAA) withdrew from sanctioning international-style auto racing. Without a sanctioning body, the famous Sebring race could not be listed on the international racing calendar. In the summer of 1956, Ulmann traveled to France and successfully petitioned the FIA to form the Automobile Racing Club of Florida, allowing Sebring to continue as an international event. From 1957 until Ulmann's retirement in 1972, the ARCF oversaw and promoted the race during what are often called Sebring's "glory years."



Reviving ARCF for a New Generation

Today, the ARCF has been revived to carry on the mission of keeping Sebring's history alive. A passionate group of Sebring enthusiasts have brought ARCF back to life with the goal of creating a community where members can learn about Sebring's storied past and connect with others who share the same continued on p2



Early Days of the Sebring Races By Reggie Smith

Crowing up around the early days of the Sebring racetrack was incredibly exciting. In the early 1950s, my father, Reg Smith, helped Alec Ulmann organize races at Watkins Glen, New York.

Back then, sports car racing in America was a small community. It felt like everyone pitched in, working together to make things happen. My father and a few others shared a vision that became the foundation of what would later grow into an international sport. They were instrumental in supporting the early years of the 12 Hours of Sebring race.

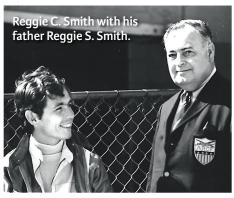
Their goal was to create an exclusive club for enthusiasts who loved the atmosphere of sports car racing but didn't necessarily compete themselves. Over time, this community grew, and by 1957, the ARCF (Automobile Racing Club of Florida) was founded. My father, Reg Smith, even designed the ARCF logo.

As the Race Secretary, my father introduced me to the world of racing. As a child, while we lived in Maryland, I was lucky enough to spend three months each year in Sebring, where my father prepared for the race. My journey into racing began when I was just seven years old.

During those years, I met many famous drivers and collected their autographs. I still remember names like Jim Hall, Peter Collins, Mike Hawthorn, Briggs Cunningham, and Stirling Moss. As I got older, I was able to help my father hand out trophies to the race winners.

One of the most enjoyable parts of this





experience was the friendships formed through the event. We often had house guests during the races, including Stirling Moss, who became a bridge between the



familiar world of American racing and the stars from England and Europe. These connections made the racing world feel both global and personal.

JOIN ARCF TO LEARN ABOUT SEBRING HISTORY continued from pt

passion. This newsletter marks just one small step in those efforts. Together, we can celebrate and preserve the legacy of this iconic race.

Our mission is simple -

"Preserving Sebring Race History"

We have two key objectives:

- 1) **Social Activities** Hosting events for Sebring Alumni to engage with one another and share their knowledge of Sebring history.
- 2) **Education** Support efforts to preserve Sebring Race History such as creating a

Sebring Race Museum in connection with the Sebring Hall of Fame.

Get Involved

As we prepare for the upcoming 2025 Sebring 12 Hours of Endurance, we've been working hard to make ARCF even more appealing to the motorsports community. In the coming months, you'll see our website transformed into a hub for membership, social media, club-hosted activities, historical information, and exclusive ARCF merchandise. Whether you're a longtime Sebring fan or new to

the world of motorsports, ARCF has something for everyone.

By joining ARCF, you'll be part of a unique effort to preserve and celebrate Sebring's past while contributing to its future. Membership is easy—just visit our website at ARCF.net for more details and to submit your application.

Today ARCF operates as a division of the Sebring Hall of Fame, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, meaning that your membership dues and special gifts to ARCF are tax-deductible. ■



The Pits at Night By Harry Hurst

f all the photographic elements of racing in the glory days, I loved the pits at Sebring at night the best. At Sebring, the night was the climax of the event. All sorts of dramatic things happened in the waning hours of the 12-hour. Here is a series of shots from the 1970 Sebring of the McQueen/Revson Porsche at the last pitstop before taking the checkered flag. The decision has been made to send Revson back out for another stint since Mario is now in the 2nd place Ferrari 512 and is closing quickly. Peter is the only one who has a chance to hold him off, but he is totally spent. McQueen, a talented amateur, has his clutch foot in a cast and is easily 15 seconds a lap slower than Revson. But the actor has held up his side, driving at least 5 hours of the race and not handicapping them so much that at this

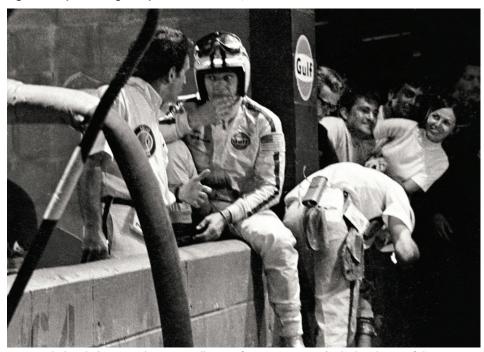


Peter Revson anxiously waits to takeover prior to the last pit stop before the checkered flag.

juncture the little 3-liter car is in the lead against the bigger 5-liter 917s and 512s. The race would come down to the last few laps, with Mario winning by a scant 23 seconds after 12 hours of grueling driving. As a technical note, this was shot with Tri-X that had been boosted to 1600 ASA with Accufine, a special developer. This was the only way we could shoot in the pits since the lighting was usually just a few naked lightbulbs. And, flash photography was strictly forbidden anywhere on the track at night. Something else that has changed significantly in racing today.



A late race pit stop for the Porsche 908 piloted by Steve McQueen and Peter Revson. The team would finish second overall in one of the most exciting races in Sebring history.



A young lady admirer stretches to get glimpse of Steve McQueen in the late hours of the 1970 race. His broken left foot is still in a cast.

ASTRONAUTS AT SEBRING

continued from p1

people's questions about his upcoming trip to space. Shepard was at the track for the start of the race and watched it well into the afternoon before catching a flight up to Atlanta to catch a NASCAR race on Sunday. Just over a month later, on May 5th, Shepard would become the first American to reach space and set his name in America's history books.

Two years later, in 1963, Shepard was back at Sebring, this time with his fellow astronaut, Gordon Cooper. Cooper was up for his first space flight, which would take

place in May of 1963. They both got to take a ride on the Goodyear blimp, Mayflower, as it cruised around the Sebring circuit giving the passengers a bird's eye view of the race. Shepard was allowed to fly the blimp for a while under the guidance of its pilot. After hitting 4,500mph on top of a rocket two years prior, he was quite content with the



1971 Sebring entry: #29 Porsche 914/6 that Pete Conrad co-drove with Steve Behr and John Buffum.

blimp's top speed of 32mph.

Gordon Cooper would go on to earn his SCCA license along with another astronaut, Pete Conrad. While Cooper was limited by NASA on racing cars, they relaxed their restrictions for Conrad, who had fun for many years driving in all kinds of car races. He would visit Sebring in 1971, not as a spectator, but as a driver in the 12 Hours of Sebring. Conrad would help pilot the #29 Porsche 914/6, along with Steve Behr and John Buffum. They would DNF after 112 laps but Conrad showed he had skill while driving his stints behind the wheel.



1949 Crosley Hot Shot to be on Display at 2025 12 Hours of Sebring



cebring's first race took place on New Year's Eve in 1950. It was a 6-hour event known as the Sam Collier Memorial, honoring the beloved driver who had tragically died earlier that year in a racing accident at Watkins Glen. The race followed the FIA Index of Performance formula—a handicapping system designed to level the playing field regardless of engine size.

Vic Sharpe from Tampa, FL, arrived with a 1949 Crosley Hot, a car powered by a tiny

44-cubic-inch engine. Initially skeptical, Sharpe was persuaded by friends to enter the race. To everyone's astonishment, the little Crosley-driven by Fritz Koster and Ralph Deshon—prevailed over much faster cars from both the U.S. and Europe, securing victory in Sebring's inaugural race.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of this historic triumph, the Crosley will be displayed in the Sebring Hall of Fame building during the 2025 edition of the 12 Hours of Sebring. ■

FORGHIERI IN PITS



I think this shot from 1970 Sebring really captures the color and atmosphere of the day, and shows the "calm before the storm." Ferrari Team Manager Mauro Forghieri seems to be saying, "Don't worry - Mario has this!" Andretti has just left in the second place Ferrari 512 to chase down the Revson/McQueen Porsche in the closing minutes and take the victory for Ferrari. A mad spash-and-dash pitstop still awaits when Andretti's reserve fuel light comes on with two laps to go! He still won by 23 seconds over the Porsche after racing for 12 hours. As a note, we also pushed the color slide film to be able to get shots in the dim lighting at Sebring. This was High-Speed Extachrome that had an ASA of 160 which you could boost to 400 with "Special Processing" you could buy from Kodak – Harry Hurst. ■



tech inspection for the 1962 support race which McLaren won.





Missed Opportunity

Frank Mabry Jr., the first African American driver at Sebring, receiving his physical exam. He drove in the Formula Junior race in 1961.



This picture is from 1962 when he was scheduled to drive in the support race and the 12 Hours too. He wrecked his Speedwell Sprite

driving to the track and was injured so he never drove in the race. It would be over 20 years later when Willy T. Ribbs became the first black driver in the 12 Hours.

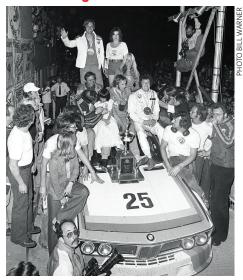
Rodriguez in Pits

Pedro Rodriguez waits for his Gulf Porsche to come in at the 1970 Sebring. The pit areas at Sebring would be crowded when the cars came in for fuel and a driver change, but



before that happened there wasn't anyone around so you could get shots like this. At this point in the race, the #15 Porsche Pedro, Leo Kinnunen and at the end Jo Siffert share is in the lead, but you can see the doubt in his eyes that the car will last - they already know the front hub bearings may not last the remaining two hours. They didn't and the car finished in 4th place.

1975 Sebring Winners



Sam Posey (waving on roof) Jochen Neerpasch (team manager), Allan Moffat (with young girl) Hans Stuck, Brian Redman in victory lane.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 1978

A Day Never to Be Forgotten

Bv Charles Mendez

t last, race morning. Just before my At last, lace morning, ,...

departure from Harder Hall, I took a quick walk to the rear of the property for one last look at the weeping willow at the edge of the small lake on the east side of the hotel. On this morning her motionless branches awaited dawn when the gentle breeze would breathe life into her arms to begin her daily dance. I would often take my time to savor this awakening, but on this morning, the urgency to get on with it was palpable. I worked my way to the front of the hotel to collect my car, ready as I had requested the evening before,

knowing that I would be anxious to leave for the track. I had repeated my personal ritual several times, but today was different.

My good friend and codriver Dave Cowart and I raced the 12 Hours of Sebring twice before, but today we were not only there to race, though in

different cars, but as the new promoters. We would soon learn whether our effort to restore Sebring to its prominence as the most prestigious sportscar endurance race, second only to the 24 Hours of Le Mans, would be a success.

After leaving the hotel, I passed Lake Jackson and turned on Kenilworth Blvd. The sweet fragrance of the orange blossoms began to permeate the still, warm morning air. "Ah. This is Sebring," I thought to myself feeling the excitement and trepidation beginning to well up inside. Suddenly, as though I was awakening from a trance, it began to truly set in that not only had we put a considerable amount of time, money, and energy into the promotion of the race, our personal credibility was to be tested today.

There was more. The week prior to the race during the traditional pre-race press tour with Dick Barbour and Brian Redman, Dick, learned that the third seat in his second Porsche 935 was open, and

he offered it to me. This would be my first opportunity to get behind the wheel of a 935, no less with one of the top teams and contenders for an overall victory. There was simply one answer...YES!

Approaching the track now, I could see dawn's gray sky brightening into a soft blue as the fiery orange sun began to emerge from the horizon. One by one the sound of engines began to displace the quiet of the morning as a prelude to the roar of the 1978 12 Hours of Sebring race soon to transform this sleepy airport into an endurance racing battleground.

As I reached the entrance gate, the

line of eager spectators was growing. I began to feel somewhat relieved that we would hit our marks, and the race promotion would be successful. From the parking area and on my way to our pit, I made one last stop at the hospitality tent for an update from our manager

and to thank sponsors and other special quests. Finally, it was off to the grid and a few words with Joe Hoppen, manager of Porsche Racing in the US and the Porsche executives in from Germany all anxiously awaiting the successful resurrection of the Sebring Tradition and, of course, another Porsche victory.

Now, in the car, tightly belted in with the engine idling softly I could enjoy a brief respite from the crowded grid. With a few words of encouragement from Brian, I was soon off for the pace lap and start never expecting that in 12 hours we would be in victory circle. ■





My First Sebring By Bill Warner

The year was 1960, and I was a car-crazy 16-year-old who wanted desperately to go to Sebring, the only truly world-class sports car race in America. My pal, Wyatt Wilkins, had an MGA coupe, as I was car-less, and we decided to head out to Sebring on Friday after school. Today, it takes me a little over three hours to drive from Jacksonville to Sebring, but back then, before the interstates and Disney, it was about a six-hour grind through a sleepy Orlando and down US 27.

We knew exactly nada about the town or the track. Back then, there were really only two places to stay—Harder Hall (built in the '20s—we referred to it as Hard-Up Hall) and the Kenilworth (also built in the '20s—we called it the Worthy Kennel). Not having a place to stay and no room to sleep in an MG, we arrived at about 9:00 PM with a couple of inflatable mattresses. We had no idea how the course was laid out.

so we camped on the main entry road by the hot dog stands. Upon inflating my air mattress, I laid down for a nap before the big event, only to roll over and hear the puncture that deflated my comfort for the evening. It was about this time that I realized I had forgotten the one item we really needed: a roll of toilet paper.

Dawn broke, and we figured out we had picked the wrong place to camp. Picking up stakes, we discovered the hairpin, the Webster turn, turn 1, and an area north of the MG Bridge. Back then, snow fences

(something rare in Florida) were the barriers between the race cars and the spectators. In addition, the barriers were pretty close to the track in some areas. I had a Yashica D twin-lens reflex camera that my parents had given me for Christmas, and with that \$46.00 camera, I roamed, looking for vantage points where I could capture the action with an 80mm lens. Surprisingly, there were several.

There was something very special about the aura that surrounded Sebring at that time. There were my heroes—Stirling Moss, Phil Hill, Olivier Gendebien, Dan Gurney, Graham Hill, Wolfgang von Trips, Richie Ginther—all the drivers I had read about in Road & Track, and a couple who would end up as friends years later: Jack Nethercutt, Roger Penske, Ed Hugus, and Jim Hall. WOW!! Was this cool or what? There was that Sebring sunset, which bathed the front straight in a fabulous warm glow, but what

really sticks in my mind was the aroma of orange blossoms mixed with castor bean (Castrol) oil. Someone should really bottle that for men's cologne. Add to that the scream of an unmuffled Ferrari V12. A 246 Dino was being driven by the Rodríguez brothers, Pedro and Ricardo. At the time, they were one year older

and one year younger than I was. How I envied them. I don't now, as I am still alive.

After sunset, Wyatt and I wormed our way over the Amoco Bridge to the paddock. We had no passes, just a couple of brazen kids



This image of Paddock activity in 1960 includes Porsche 718 RSK (#46) and two of the Corvettes (#3 & #4) entered by Camoradi Team USA from Miami.

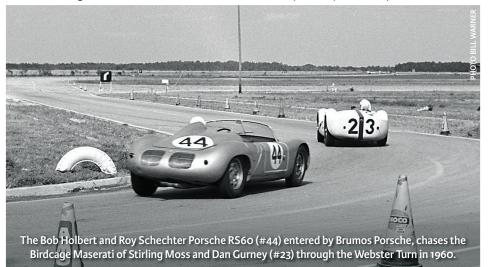


Unfortunately the Maserati Birdcage of Carroll Shelby was a DNF after 2 laps.

with attitude. We climbed up the stairs to an empty pit box and watched the night action. The Ferraris were still running drum brakes, and they would glow red as they braked for the last turn leading onto the front straight. In the end, it was the Porsche RS6os of Hans Herrmann and Olivier Gendebien in first, and Bob Holbert and Roy Schechter in second (in the Brumos car—hooray for the hometown Jacksonville team). They were victorious—the first major win on the world racing stage for Porsche. My friend Jack Nethercutt and Pete Lovely were third in a Ferrari 250 TR.

All in all, it was a very memorable experience. I went back in 1961, which was equally enjoyable. In late 1961, it was off to The Citadel for an education, but I did return in 1967 as a photographer for Sports Car Graphic magazine, but that is another story for another time. Remind me to tell you about escorting the Penthouse Pet of the Year in 1976—another memorable year.

Everyone should go to Sebring at least once—but bring toilet paper. ■



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MY FAVORITE CAR - 1952

Siata 1400 Gran Sport **Bv Dan Andrews**

ontinuing my series on favorite cars from each year, I'm excited to explore the 1952 12 Hours of Sebring. This event marked the first time Sebring became a 12-hour race and featured one of my family friends, Bob Fergus, a key figure in vintage racing whom I admired from my youth. Bob, along with his business partner Don Marsh, were regular participants during SVRA race weekends at Sebring in the early 1980s. It was through these events that I first became exposed to Sebring's rich history and had the opportunity to meet many of the people involved in its early years.

The standout car of the 1952 race was the remarkable 1952 Siata 1400 Gran Sport. Despite competing against formidable powerhouses like Jaguar and

Ferrari, the Italian-made Siata secured first place in its class and an impressive third overall. Out of 32 starters, only 17 cars managed to finish the grueling race, and the Siata's performance on the extended 5.2-mile circuit highlighted its resilience and capability.

The Siata 1400 Gran Sport, driven by Bob Fergus and Dick Irish, stands out as my favorite from that historic event. Completing 139 laps on the challenging track, their achievement epitomizes the essence of motorsport: a blend of skill, passion, and the joy of competition. This victory not only cemented the Siata's place in history but also



The Fergus/Irish Siata bested many of the more powerful cars to finish 3rd overall and 1st in class at the 1952 12 Hours of Sebring.

marked a turning point Bob Fergus' racing career, eventually leading to his invitation to the esteemed Road Racing Drivers Club in 1954. Known as a "gentleman driver," Bob's legacy in vintage racing endures to this day, with his "Big Fun" award celebrating the joy of racing.

Bob Fergus' passion for motorsports and dedication to events like the 12 Hours of Sebring continue to inspire fans and racers alike. For enthusiasts like me, these historic races remind us that the magic of motorsport lies in sharing the track with the greatest drivers of all time.

A Chaparral Afternoon in Sebring By Alex J. Sabo

The afternoon began curiously different than other afternoons during the school year of 1966. My mother always came to school to drive me and my younger brother home. Today, however, my father was the one who came to school.

When we got in the car, I asked Dad, "Where is mom?" With an amused look in his eyes and a sly grin, he replied that she was running the restaurant while we were going to do something special together. He drove us to Sebring International Raceway.

When we arrived on the straightaway behind the pit area we saw a very sleek, white race car without a wing. Several men stood around the car wearing coveralls and



The Chaparral crew relocating the car during testing prior to the 1966 12 Hours of Sebring.

one of the men was holding a race helmet. He dropped the helmet in the race car and walked over to where we were standing and shook hands with my father... thanking him for bringing us to the track. He looked at us and with a big grin said, "Good afternoon boys." That was the moment our father introduced us to Hap Sharp who would codrive the Chaparral 2D in the upcoming 12 Hours of Sebring with team owner Jim Hall. The team was in Sebring early to test their new car. We watched as Mr. Sharp drove up and down the back straight at speed. After the test session, my brother James and I got to sit in the car and ask him as many questions as we wanted.

Eventually, my father announced that he needed to get back to the restaurant for the dinner service. As we prepared to depart, Hap said to my father, "Alex, how about cutting me a great big steak about this thick?" He held the thumb and forefinger of his right hand about four inches apart. My father said, "No problem, Mr. Sharp!"

Later that evening, James and I came to



Alex's Circle Bar Restaurant in downtown Sebring was a popular hangout for racers in the 1960's. Here Gregor Grant of Autosport Magazine (Left) appears to be contemplating his next headline as Alex Sabo pulls another draft.

the restaurant with my mother to grab some food to bring home. We saw the crew from the Chaparral team celebrating a successful day at the track. Mr. Sharp was enjoying a very thick steak. My father asked him if he had cooked the steak enough. He replied, "I don't care, this steak is so good that you'd have to wrestle me to take it away."





Start Your Engines...Become A Member Today!

oining ARCF means becoming part of a community dedicated learning about and preserving motorsport history. Whether you're a Sebring veteran or simply someone who loves racing, we invite you to become part of our mission. Let's work together to preserve Sebring's legacy for future generations.

A Non-Profit Organization

The Automobile Racing Club of Florida is run entirely by volunteers as an educational enterprise. As a division of The Sebring Hall of Fame, Inc. ARCF enjoys the same 501(c)3 non-profit status. Contributions made to ARCF are tax deductible.

A Learning Opportunity

ARCF gives you access to an extensive library of photographs and records dating back to the first Sebring race in 1950. Our race historian, Doug Morton, has collected over 20,000 images and artifacts which are used as a research library.

Living History

ARCF members gather annually during Sebring race week for the Alumni Reunion

and a chance stand toe-to-toe with living history. The Reunion is an opportunity to network with like-minded motorsports enthusiasts who come together to celebrate Sebring racing history.

A Future Museum

We are committed to contributing to the establishment of a Sebring Race Museum in connection with the Sebring Hall of Fame, ensuring future generations can experience the history of this legendary race.

Fill out the application to get started!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
ARCF Members receive: The Annual ARCF Lapel Pin Member Newsletters • Invitation to all ARCF Events
First Name Last Name
Street Address
Address Line 2
City State Zip Code
Phone Number Email Address
Payment Information - ARCF Annual Dues: \$150.00
Method of Payment:
Credit Card Number Exp. Date CVV
Mail to: Automobile Racing Club of Florida • P. O. Box 2791 • Lakeland, FL 33806

The Automobile Racing Club of Florida is a division of The Sebring Hall of Fame (a 501c3 organization). Its mission is to host the annual Homecoming Reunion for Sebring Alumni and help raise funds for a future museum which will tell the history of how Sebring, an unlikely little citrus town in central Florida, came to play host to one of the world's most important international automobile races.