

March 1967 - If you're a Sebring fan from the late 60's you might remember what the poster looked like from 1968. After impressing everyone with the 1967 poster artwork, Michael Turner was chosen as the artist for 1968 too. The thing that stands out in the 1968 artwork is the brand-new Lincoln Continental Mark III that takes front and center next to a Ford race car, like the one that won in 1967, in Winner's Circle. I've always wondered why, and I learned that Sebring was selected to be location where the Mark III was officially released to the public. What I didn't realize, however, until a few months ago when I was scanning slides from the 1967 race, was how involved Lincoln-Mercury was in filming at Sebring. Ford Motor Co. purchased the rights to use the Cinerama filming process to announce it's 1968 line of new cars. Crews filmed at Sebring during the 1967 Trans-Am race in which Mercury Cougars were entered. They used a modified GT-40 as the camera car. John Stephans was the chief cameraman at Sebring. He filmed the racing sequences in 'Grand Prix' too. This was the first industrial use of the single lens wide screen motion picture process. It was also filmed in technicolor. The hour-long film was produced by the Tom Thomas Organization, Inc. The film production company also focused on Arnold Palmer during the US Open Golf Tournament, along with other sports-minded activities. They traveled to several countries to film, typically in exotic locales. In September 1967, the Cinerama film was shown in 19 cities around the country where Lincoln-Mercury has district sales offices. From what I understand, the film was made for showing this one time and then put away in their vault. I haven't been able to find a copy of it online but would love to see it one day. I can't imagine what the budget was for this film!

Most of the 1968 car models were made public within the next few weeks. But, to unveil the Mark III, they waited until the 12 Hours, 6 months later. Lincoln-Mercury had a large pavilion (think circular tent) installed in the paddock at Sebring. There, on the evening of March 23rd, with champagne flowing, the 1969 Lincoln Continental Mark III was released.

Doug Morton Collection / ARCF.net



The film production team getting the car ready before the start of the 1967 Trans-Am race.



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Note the Tom Thomas Organization logo on the door of the film car.



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Appears to be in practice running behind, possibly filming, the #37 Porsche 910.

Doug Morton Collection / ARCF.net



Sitting at the start/finish line during early testing.

MARCH 23, 1968



SEBRING

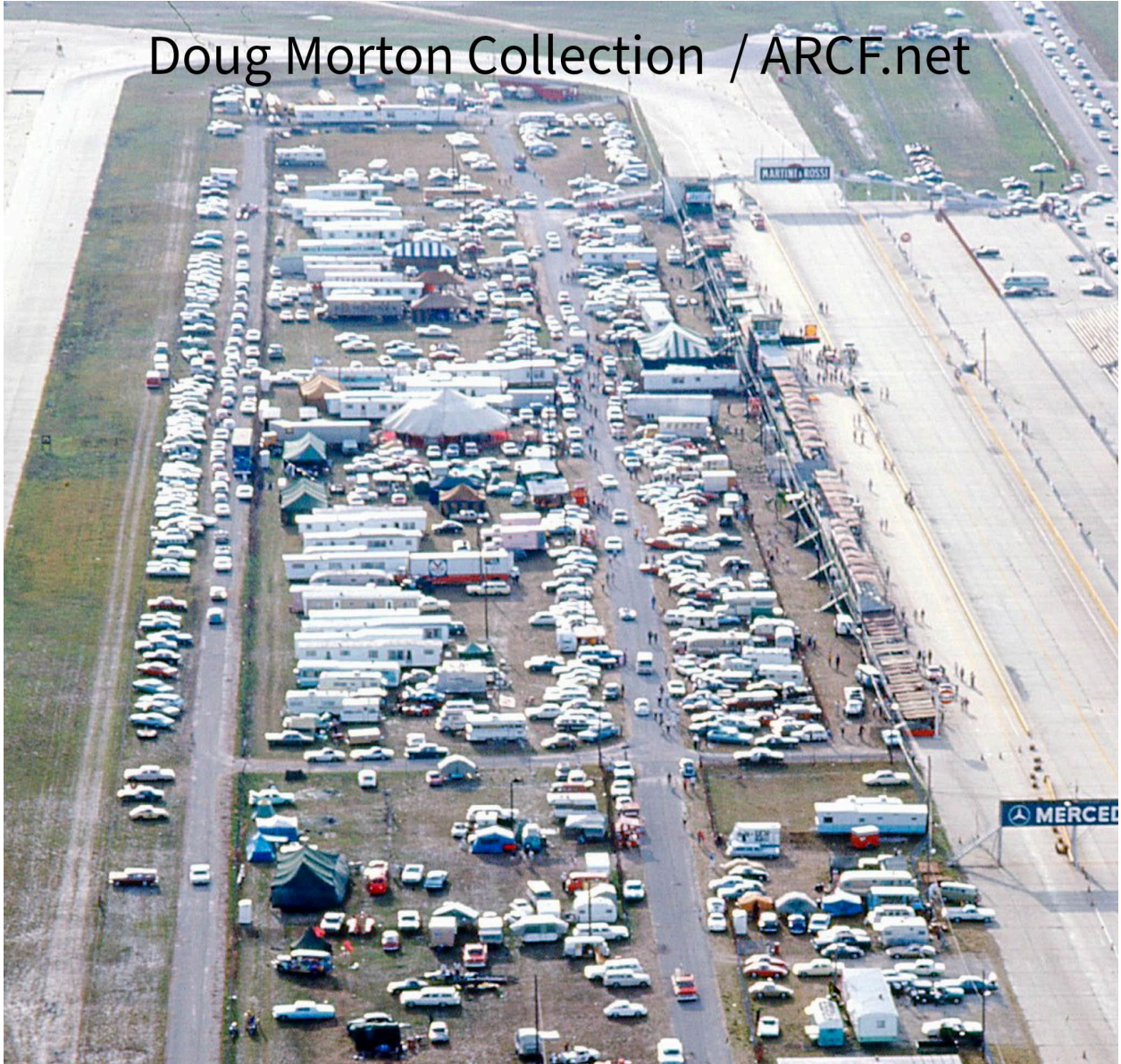
12 HOURS OF ENDURANCE FOR THE ALITALIA AIRLINES TROPHY

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The infamous 1968 poster!

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A nice aerial shot of the paddock in 1968. The larger circular tent just left of center was the Lincoln-Mercury "pavilion" used for the unveiling of the Mark III. Notice how "tight" the paddock was back then! The concrete to the far left was the circuit....now part of the competitors paddock today.

*Lincoln-Mercury cordially
invites you to visit the
Mark III pavillion in the
Paddock to preview the new
Continental Mark III automobile*

*Complimentary champagne served
4-6 P.M. March 23, 1968*

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An official invitation in my collection for the unveiling!