

By JIM MOURNING

# A Lesson in Limits

## PEBBLE BEACH 1956

**B**ERMUDA shorts, shooting sticks and similar sundry accoutrements have earned Pebble Beach a reputation for being road racing's Ivy League event. Its twisting, tree-lined circuit and exclusive entry list, hand culled from the best cars and drivers on the West Coast, have placed it among the nation's top racing attractions. This year's event scored again on both counts.

Organization was far superior to certain internationally recognized events run on these shores and officials showed that courtesy and control can go hand in hand.

For weeks preceding the event, interest was the keenest manifested in several years. And not without reason. Back to take another crack at the 2.1-mile circuit was Bill Pollack, whose 1951 and 1952 wins in the Tom Carstens Allard have already assumed the status of folklore. This time he was mounted in a Carstens owned HWM, originally built for Stirling Moss and used in the picture "The Racers." Power was supplied by a highly modified Chevrolet V-8. (*Details next month; don't miss it!—Ed.*)

Opposing him was a field that contained 1950-53-55 victor Phil Hill, in the 3.5 Ferrari that Juan Fangio and Eugenio

Castellotti drove to a win at Sebring, and Sterling Edwards, 1954 winner, in a 3-liter Ferrari.

Also considered prime contenders were Pearce Woods' D-Jag, which had been lovingly set up under the supervision of Jaguar team manager "Lofty" England; the 4.4 Ferrari of the late Ernie McAfee, the 3.5 driven by Jack McAfee and the Kurtis of Louis Brero. About the time the smart money boys had their odds on this field figured down to the decimal points, sponsoring officials announced that Carroll Shelby, reportedly on the coast to discuss driving in Europe for Tony Parravano, was entered in a Ferrari Monza, as was Bill Murphy with his newly fuel injected Buick Kurtis.

When official starter Bob Cooper lifted the lid, things began to happen fast. While the track announcer was still emphasizing that the course record was 1:43 and speculating on the possibilities of a new mark, Hill, who had literally bulled into the lead, turned unofficial laps of 1:42 and 1:41.6. Within the next few minutes, the old record was repeatedly and apparently effortlessly matched or shattered by Hill, Shelby and Ernie McAfee.

For the first eleven laps, Pollack kept the HWM, dubbed the Stovebolt Special, in second spot, despite obvious handling problems inherent in the rugged little machine. Then Shelby, who had started ninth, moved the Ferrari Monza into second, trailed by Pollack, Woods' D-Jaguar and the 3.5 Ferrari driven beautifully by Jack McAfee, who has apparently regained his form of two seasons ago.

On the 16th lap, Ernie McAfee began moving up through the pack, using the same strategy that had proved successful for him in the earlier small bore event. By the 27th loop, the running order was Hill, Shelby, Ernie McAfee, Jack McAfee and Pollack. Woods' D-Jaguar was out of contention and destined to pull out on the 30th lap with locked brakes.

Then, screaming into turn six on the 28th lap, Ernie McAfee's car spun at nearly 100 mph, sideswiped a hay bale, skidded into a tree. Ernie was killed instantly. This marked the first fatality in the seven Pebble Beach meetings and forty other races sponsored by the Northern Region of the Sports Car Club of America.

Those close to the Northern California racing picture



Photos by Rolofson, Borgeson, Christy



The under-1500 modified event was swept by Porsche Spyderys. Johnny Kunstle, above, led but lost to Jack McAfee.



Aston Martin DB3S, one of two entered, was driven by Rod Carveth. Strangely, neither car placed in class.



Crosley "Porsche Duster" driven, built by Harry Eyerly was tossed into corners like a sprint car. He won his class.



The pack, led by John Barneson in the Hagemann Chrysler special, charges into the Esses at the start of the main event. Winner Shelby lies fifth.

Carroll Shelby was the eventual winner in a 3-liter Monza, formerly driven by Phil Hill. Here he takes the fateful sixth turn closely.



Tom Carstens' HWM-Chev, driven by Bill Pollack, left, cuts through the Ess turns ahead of Hill in the ex-Fangio Sebring Ferrari.



To make the rear wheels stick to the tight course, 100 lb. lead bar was strapped to frame of ex-Fangio Ferrari. Car still broke loose.



constant repetition, the Porsche Spyders dominating the scene after Pete Lovely's Porsche-powered Cooper encountered difficulties.

But the race was notable for underscoring a point long contended by those well versed in road racing. Namely, that the pace has increased markedly during the past season. The 1½-liter cars consistently lapped within one and two seconds of the old lap record for the big bore machinery.

Jean Kunstle immediately took command of the race and held the lead for several laps before disappearing long enough to drop to fourth, having reportedly taken a brisk trip up an escape road.

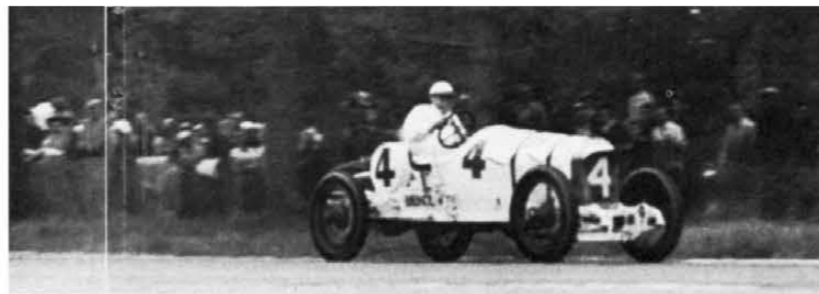
Ernie McAfee, in an OSCA, then took over the lead, only to pop in and out of the pits and finally retire with a damaged distributor. Lovely next moved into top spot, but he too contracted the leader jinx as his throttle linkage snapped late in the race. Jack McAfee then inherited a lead that he held the rest of the way in the Porsche Spyder that Herrmann and von Trips finished sixth over-all and first on index at Sebring.

Despite his trouble, however, Lovely was not through. Pulling off to the side of the road, he made a few necessary adjustments on his rear mounted engine and finished fourth, operating the throttle by hand for the last half-dozen laps. Finishing second and third were Jean Kunstle and Sam Weiss, both in Porsche Spyders.

Although Lovely's feat was roundly applauded, it came close to inspiring several cases of apoplexy before it began. With the crew becoming somewhat livid from shouting for him to get rolling again, Lovely sat calmly in the car for several minutes before even getting out and looking for the trouble. Few spectators ever found out that this wasn't mere nonchalance, but a matter of his inability to move his right leg, which had gone numb from the hip down.

The Cypress Point Handicap for production cars over 1500 cc attracted more than average attention. Pre-race speculation almost automatically handed top spot to Rudy Cleye, who had never been beaten since acquiring his extremely fast, white Mercedes 300SL last season. Only spot of possible contention was figured to come from Tony Settember's Mercedes. But Cleye's car was demolished in a traffic accident a few days prior to the event and race day found him up in the somewhat weary Mercedes that Paul

Vintage car race was taken by Tom Carstens in a 1908 Benz, the oldest car running. Beaten were '13 Peugeot, '15 Hudson and ex-Burman Stutz.



DB3S, driven by Jack Graham, pushes hard behind Fred Woodward's venerable Jaguar special. Woodward finished ninth in field swept by Ferrari.



O'Shea raced heavily last season.

By Sunday morning, everyone's tongue was concerned with a Corvette and a driver named Dick Thompson, who was only vaguely known to even the best informed race followers. Obviously determined, as attested by a pit that contained a dozen spare tires and a complete spare engine, Thompson stunned those assembled for practice by turning laps that bettered the Jaguar's times and equalled those of the Mercedes.

But when the race started, it looked as though it might be just a slightly different version of an oft told tale, as Cleye shot into an immediate lead. This was not to be. By the sixth turn, both Settember and Thompson were ahead of him, the Corvette finally grabbing top spot.

At the end of the second lap, the cockpit of Cleye's car was filled with blue smoke that bellowed from his engine compartment. On the sixth lap, Cleye shot down the escape road at the end of the front straight, flames licking along both sides of his car.

Seconds later, Settember moved into the lead. Although the Corvette was inching the gap closed in the final minutes of the race, it was not able to catch the Mercedes. Jim

PEBBLE BEACH  
RESULTS  
April 22, 1955

RACE I: Class F and Overall: Dale Johnson, Porsche Carrera; Skip Hudson, Porsche Speedster; Don Dickey, Porsche Carrera; George Gartung, Porsche Speedster; Robert Domito, Porsche Speedster. Class G: Robert Brigham, MG TF (disqualified); Gordon Wilson, MG TD (disqualified); Morrow Decker, MG TD.

RACE II: Overall: Anthony Settember, Mercedes 300SL; Dick Thompson, Corvette; Jim Peterson, Jaguar; Ces Critchlow, Jaguar; Cloyd Gray, Jaguar. Class C: Thompson, Corvette; Peterson, Jaguar; Critchlow, Jaguar. Class D: Settember, Mercedes; Jack Dalton, Austin-Healey; Roy Jackson-Moore, Austin-Healey. Class E: Bob Oker, Morgan; G. Scott Baxter, Arnolt Bristol; Lou Keller, Siata.

RACE III: Jack McAfee, Porsche Spyder; Jean Kunstle, Porsche Spyder; Sam Weiss, Porsche Spyder; Pete Lovely, Porsche-Cooper; John Porter, Porsche Spyder; Wm. Eschrich, Lotus (Porsche-Lotus); Joe Hudson, Porsche Spyder; Jack Duncan, MG Special; Eldon Beagle, Porsche Spyder; Troy McHenry, Porsche Spyder. Class G: John Fox, Cooper Climax; Harry Banta, Cooper Climax; Edward Boyd, MG Special. Class H: Harry Eyerly, Crosley Special; Don Miller, Crosley Special; R. K. Holbrook, Crosley Special.

RACE IV: Carroll Shelby, Ferrari Monza; Phil Hill, Ferrari; Jack McAfee, Ferrari; Louis Brero, Kurtis; Sterling Edwards, Ferrari; Bill Pollack, HWM; Dabny Collins, Ferrari; Robert Gillespie, Maserati; Fred Woodward, Jaguar Special; John von Neumann, Ferrari. Class B: Louis Brero, Kurtis; John Barneson, Hagemann Special. Class C: Hill, Ferrari; Edwards, Ferrari; Collins, Ferrari. Class E: Marion Lowe, Frazier-Nash; William Pickford, Bristol Special; Russell May, Porsche. #

Peterson, who started his Jaguar in fifteenth place, finished third.

Following the race, the accepted racing experts unanimously labeled Thompson "a natural." Though not wishing to detract unnecessarily from the performance of the Corvette, they pointed out that Thompson managed to stay with the Mercedes, overcoming its four mph speed edge through the traps, by cornering his Corvette faster.

A large part of the Cypress Point Handicap for production cars under 1500 cc was run in the hay, but without serious damage either to cars or drivers.

Coming off the grid, it was an MG-A in one of E. Forbes-Robinson's famous starts, but by turn one it had dropped back to fourth spot, the Porsches of Dale Johnson and Skip Hudson battling for a clean hold on first. Following was Don Dickey in a Porsche Carrera.

Then Johnson ran out of road and dropped back, giving Hudson an advantage that he lost on the tenth lap when he joined the parade of cars ricocheting off the hay bales on turn one. Wheeling back onto the track, Hudson gave chase to the leading Johnson, but was unable to catch him before time ran out. Third was Dickey in the Porsche Carrera. #