

A HISTORY OF CSRG

By David Love

Although it was almost three years before any real racing events occurred, the CSRG saw its beginning in Gordon Mills' living room in 1968 during a game of "Automotive Remember when". The players were Gordon Mills, Dave Burch and me. The usual "Remember whens" of the participants were suddenly carried one step further. "What ever happened to those great old cars? They must be around somewhere. Why not find them, restore them and drive them like they deserve?"

Cars long in garages came to mind. The list of cars and owners grew. Would there be enough interest to actually hold an event? On that note a date was set for a September event at the old Vaccaville track. Five cars showed up for that first event; an Allard J2x (Don Kerson), Ferrari competition S.W.B. Berlinetta (Joseph DeMartino), Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa (David Love), Huffaker Knoop Special (Larry Maatz), and a Maserati 300S (George West). This first event consisted of rides, laps at speed and exchange of rides. At the end of a full exciting day a meeting was held and our first mailing list compiled. A surprising number of those names still appear on our current mailing list.

1969 1969 was a year of quiet growing. A network of interested people was developed and cars located. I was in England this year and witnessed first hand the cradle of vintage racing. The sight of a grid of old Grand Prix cars made me think of the sports racing cars of the '50's and '60's back home. After all, Watkins Glen, Torrey Pines, Pebble Beach and Golden Gate Park are our Grand Prix. Why not run real events for these great old cars? The idea of, and the interest in, vintage racing had arrived.

1970 Negotiations early this year with the new Sears Point Raceway gave our group their first chance to run a real event on a full time racing track. The track was rented for Sunday, May 31. But the "best laid plans of ... etc.! On 12 May, the San Francisco Chronicle carried the news: "SEARS POINT CLOSED!" End of event. But at the last minute George West contacted the owner of the old Cotati Airport. This was the site of many early S.C.C.A. races but no longer active. A rent of \$100.00 was agreed upon and our event was on again.

Without experience, equipment or personnel, real racing was out of the question. But those who attended enjoyed the sights and sounds of old racing cars. Laps at speed and in close company completed the afternoon. This event was repeated on 26 July and 8 August.

The final event of this year was a demonstration run at the Laguna Seca Can-Am Races held on 18 October. Allard, AC, DB Renault, Ferrari, Fiat Zagato, Jaguar and Porsche ran together for a 20 minute demonstration ride before an enthusiastic crowd. This invitation indicated to us that we had arrived. Up to this time we were just a group of "good old boys". Now more structure seemed in order. At a meeting of the members the name "Classic Sports Racing Group" was adopted.

1971 The activities of 1971 included four \$10.00 Cotati "Mechanical Picnics" with some new innovations. The 4 April meeting brought 12 cars and for the first time lap times were taken. On 27 June only 10 cars showed but the sparse field enjoyed the first two car handicap racing based on the day's practice times. 15 August the previous program was repeated with the addition of three car handicap racing. The last event was held on 12 September. As with the previous events, the entire course had to be swept clear of the glass and miscellaneous leavings of the Cotati Saturday Night Drag Races and Related Activities.

Once again, the now better-known C.S.R.G. was invited to the Can-Am Event. Ten cars again ran in a demonstration race of Allard, Aston Martin, Ferrari, DB Renault, Jaguar and Porsche~Cooper cars. A most successful year! Our group had arrived and was making itself known among the racing fraternities.

1972 Our structure begins to emerge with Michael Denny's suggestion that we hold informal monthly meetings. Michael had spent his early years in England with their "flatter + noggin" style meetings at a local pub. He hoped that the social aspect of the 'local' would bring more interest and entrants. We sorely needed more cars. (We still do.) The teething troubles of beginning a real car club were attacked. A \$20.00 mailing list fee helped defray mailing costs. Entry fees remained at \$10.00. Safety regulations now included seat belts, approved helmet and an onboard fire extinguisher. Then, as now, George Newell and Len Auerbach served as our tech inspectors.

The 16 April meeting at Cotati continued the program of time trials, three car handicap races, and rides. Michael Denny submitted an amusing article on the event to "Autoweek", complete with Jay Weidenfeld's photos, and the first account of the CSRG was in print.

Since then, the word has subtly spread. An issue of the English magazine "Classic and Thoroughbred Cars" mentions the CSRG in its article of the 1976 Monterey Historic Automobile races.

June 27 turned out to be the last of our Cotati events. In July, Cotati became a trailer park.

Once again, the CSRG appeared for a "demonstration race" at the Can-Am Races at Laguna Seca. The negotiations for this were conducted by Michael Denny from his sickbed. His lifelong battle against a non-curable disease rendered him too weak to drive to Laguna Seca, but he saw the show from behind an oxygen mask. At the beginning of the "race" the sky opened up; raindrops the size of bullets fell and on the track were 15 cars with drivers of widely-varied experience and no practice laps! To add to the confusion a mix-up in communications had not informed the turn workers of our "race". Every lap saw the pickup truck distributing driver observers at a different corner! It was a credit to the participant's judgment and restraint that nothing was bent and no one was injured.

Those attending the October 26 dinner meeting decided to hold an election of a five-seat Board of Directors from among the membership. This maintained the desired informality of individual officers while providing formal management of the increasing responsibilities. The first Board consisted of Sid Colberg, David Love, George Newell, Phil Van Ek and Don Wasserman.

On 6 November, Michael Denny succumbed to Hodgkin's Disease and the CSRG and the Berkeley Community lost a valued and enthusiastic friend. To his memory, the Michael Denny Award was instigated, designed and executed by Leonard Auerbach, to recognize his achievement of "perseverance in the face of adversity" that is Michael's legacy to us all.

1973 This year Felix Brunot took over the Editorship of the newsletter and he continues to spout golden prose to this day. The Board of Directors drew up the first written Car Classification. This is a document that undergoes continuous change and refinement but furnishes the core around which the CSRG functions.

The best news of the year was the agreement reached with the newly reopened Sears Point Raceway. We finally had a real race-course. For insurance reasons no spectators could be admitted and so began the unpleasant necessity of locking the gates after a certain hour. Because of the small number of entrants and the greater expenses, an entry fee of \$50.00 was required. Attending CSRG members and their guests paid \$3.00 each. The proceeds of the Mailing List Subscriptions were used to defray the entry fees of paid-up members by \$10.00.

On 13 May, 10 cars ran the first CSRG event at Sears Point. For safety reasons, a shortened version of the course was used for a day of practice and rides. We may have been the first to run an event using the "long straightaway" configuration at Sears Point. This course was later used very successfully for a series of Pro Formula Ford races.

Twelve cars turned out for the August 26 meeting. The hit of the day was Richie Ginther's drive in Millie and "Pinky" Pinkham's 412 Ferrari. Due to Pinky's illness, they had invited Richie to drive the car he had campaigned in the early years

when it was owned by Fred Knoop. Those present were treated to a spectacle of this great combination of sight and sound. It was duly recorded on film, video tape and tape recorder for Pinky's enjoyment later. Richie Ginther also recounted the very interesting history of the car and this was captured on tape as well. Later in the day two handicap races of five cars each were run.

The 21 October meeting was greeted by a monster thunderstorm and the management kindly offered us a rain date. Since only half a dozen entrants showed up it was gratefully accepted. The next newsletter carried detailed description of the difference between oval track and road racers, suitably punctuated with references to "rubber duckies" and "sugar coated selves". The point was made, and since that date all announcements of appropriate events state "rain or shine".

The final Sears Point Meeting of the season was held on 18 November with the Ferrari Owners Club as guests. The usual program prevailed with the added amusement of the Turn 11 Scene: Sideways Daytonas looming over Formula Jrs. and the like.

The annual Christmas Dinner was combined with the Aston Martin Owners Club Dinner. We were the AMOC's guests at a beautiful old hotel in Pleasanton. The first Michael Denny Award was presented to Pinky and Millie Pinkham and received by Millie.

1974 This year the Board decided to add Nomex driving suits to the required safety equipment and the contract with Sears Point was renewed under the previous year's conditions. Felix Bru not was outraged and put his plus fours in mothballs forever.

The events of 5 May and 23 June followed the same form as the year before.

The Aston Martin Owners Club joined us for the June meeting. Bob Bondurant had taken over management of the course and continued to offer the CSRG the same hospitable conditions as the year before.

August witnessed the greatest shot in the arm to Vintage racing that the West Coast could imagine. The first annual Monterey Historic Automobile Races were conceived, engineered, and at the last moment, sponsored by Steven Earle. Steve had been attending CSRG events; often driving his GTO up from Los Angeles to run with us. He put his organizational genius to work to produce a Heaven on Earth for our kind of enthusiast.

The last CSRG event of 1974 was the 20 October Historic Automobile Day At Sears Point, jointly sponsored by the Bondurant School of High Performance Driving and the El Verano Inn of Sonoma. Saturday was the Tech Inspection and Garden Party at the Inn — a unique event in motor sports. Where else would you find a Tech Inspector pulled dripping from the swimming pool to cast his learned eye over a Cooper F III? (Some suggested throwing the Cooper to him, but the idea was considered the product of too much wine and discarded.)

On Sunday morning, Bob Bondurant gave the entrants a great condensed school on driving in general and the course in particular. The afternoon was filled with events for the 42 entrants by far the best grid to that date. At this event Bob Green began donating his humorous "old car parts" Trophies. These little sculptures are highly prized by their recipients. The Bondurant Award to the most improved driver went to Len Auerbach. The El Verano Cup, to the car and driver that most exemplified the spirit of the day, went to Tom Hart and his OSCA MT4: driven to the meeting, of course.

The 1974 Christmas Dinner was held at the El Verano Inn. Bob Bondurant and Bill Benck of Sears Point were our guests and were instrumental in keeping the bar open for late evening amusements. The second Michael Denny Award was presented to Steven Earle, the father of the Monterey Historic Automobile Races.

1975 An election for Board of Directors was held early in 1975. Due to one resignation it was decided to hold two seats for incumbents only and three for new candidates, thereby keeping a continuity and luring new blood into the management of things. The newly elected board was composed of George Newell and David Love, incumbents, and new members Leonard Auerbach, Gordon Mills and Dean Watts.

The big news of 1975 was the arrangement with Sears Point and their insurance company to allow spectators at the CSRG Events. Our organization and the support and cooperation of all of the participants at the events made this possible. Now, entry fees could be reduced to \$35.00 and the rest of the expenses could be met mostly through the charge for spectators. Because of increased grids and more races, the per person charge was raised to \$4.00.

On 9 March Bob Bondurant produced a special school for our kind of cars and drivers. Twenty people attended and greatly benefited. 360 degrees in a Datsun sedan is quite an experience and learning how to control it is useful besides. The next two events invited guest clubs; 18 May for the Aston Martin Owners Club and 6 July for the Ferrari Owners Club.

The Second Annual Monterey Historic Automobile Races, featuring a salute to Alfa Romeo, was bigger than before and every bit as much fun. Steve Earle had done it again.

Our last Sears Point meeting of 1975 occurred on 14 September. Owners of vintage and classic motorcycles were asked to participate. Ten bikes of various kinds demonstrated another brand of mechanical fun.

The Christmas Dinner was held in the hospitable atmosphere of the Graf Zeppelin Restaurant in San Francisco. The decor was like an aircraft museum, the food was good and the management seemed to like our act. They stopped by to watch the slides and the movies.

This year the decision was made to incorporate the CSRG as a California Non-profit Corporation. This was felt necessary because of the mounting responsibilities and the increased scope of activities. The Board resolved not to allow this move to subvert the policy of low-pressure, fun events. As required by

Corporation By-Laws, the Board elected club officers. They were: President, Leonard Auerbach; Vice-president, Gordon Mills; Secretary-Treasurer, David Love.

After much soul-searching of aesthetics vs. safety and because of one previous incident, the Board added the requirement of roll bars in post-war open cars to the safety requirements. No specifications were written, but the Tech Inspectors were left to appraise each installation individually and assist or offer suggestions, if the owner requested advice.

Our first "On the Road" event was organized by Stephen Block for 25 April. On that Sunday morning, Stephen and Dale, with their son Adam astride the transmission tunnel of their OSCA MTA, led a merry chase of about fifteen cars through back roads in Marin County. No crashes, no arrests and lots of fun. Several brought their racers. To quote from Felix Brunot: "When you tour with a Lotus XI, the world is full of manhole covers."

1976 Our first Sears Point event this year produced a grid of over 30 cars, including Fritz Duemberger and his wife, Therese, driving their Alfa TZ from British Columbia. The AMOC and the Classic motorcycles joined in for this Mothers' Day meeting and Marnix Dillenius brought his mother.

The 27 June event with the Ferrari Owners' Club as guests was HOT. Despite the thin grid and at least one complaint of unvulcanized tennis shoes, the day was enjoyable.

The third annual Monterey Historic Automobile Races, honoring Jaguar, was its expected success. At this time, the famous CSRG T Shirts were displayed on various glorious CSRG bodies and there were almost enough D-Jaguars to go around.

The 10 October Sears Point event was notable for two firsts. The Hudson-Essex-Terraplane Club made it a club outing, providing many corner workers and a unique noontime sight; more than a dozen Hudsons touring the course. Marshall Teague was invited but did not attend.

Also of note was the simultaneous showing of four Aston Martin DB-3s racing cars. The two roadsters were George Newell's and Len Auerbach's and one of the two remaining coupes piloted by our Eastern-most member, Earl Kelton. The pits looked like LeMans, 1955.

Don Baldocni and Don Wasserman arranged a lively Christmas Dinner at Piero's Restaurant in San Francisco, where the third Michael Denny Award was presented to long-time enthusiast, Phil Van Ek.

1977 The annual meeting, as required by our By-Laws was held at the Griswold Co. Restoration Department and offered those present an opportunity to salivate over many tasty projects, including a beautiful informal buffet arranged by Sandra Griswold. After a short meeting, two Aston Martin racing movies were shown.

A Sunday Morning Contra Costa Drive was organized for March 20 by George Bouthillier and Dean Watts. It began from the Watts house, preceded by a refueling of coffee and pastry, and ended at a sailplane field, with a BBQ. For the adventurous, sailplane rides were offered with Dean or LaVerna Watts at the controls. It looked great from the ground.

A three-event schedule at Sears Point and the Monterey Bash filled out our official year. A select CSRG Group made the trek to Willow Springs in February for an unofficial good time. The June event at Sears Point tried out a new handicap system and a “demonstration” (now they are giving us demonstrations!) run of Manufacturers Prototype cars (e.g. Ferrari 275 LM, Porsche 904, Lola .3.... etc.) organized by Steve Griswold. This also was our most disturbing event so far, due to two accidents. Dean Watts saw the world upside down and sideways for a while and Don Wasserman looked at the ceiling of an ambulance for a while ... Luckily, only the cars were seriously injured.

At the fourth annual Monterey event, the honored car was Bugatti. The CSRG fielded the largest single group of cars. Seventeen of us made this event. Jarl De Boer showed the racing world a sizzling Siata... A Nardi smoked and gave the track a lube job ... Loti, Ferrari and Aston ... such a sight!

The October Sears Point event was one of our largest grids so far. An enjoyable and safe day of racing was enjoyed by all. Our course personnel ran a smooth operation all day.

Our annual Christmas Dinner was arranged by LaVerna Watts at the Fremont Inn. Looking around that huge room it was amazing to realize how much we had grown. Over 90 attended and enjoyed slides and films of —what else? —vintage car racing.

The results of our election were announced; returning the incumbents to office.

1978 This is the history to date of this Classic Sports Racing Group... Born as an idea in the minds of a few people years ago and clinging strongly to the original concepts ten years later. We should note that some of those original members and cars are still with us.

1978 finds us again at Sears Point, Monterey and Willow Springs. Each of us enjoying our car in our own way. The thread that holds us together seems to be a sense of history. The game of “Remember When” has become the reality of driving real historic cars... Using them as they deserve in the world of today.

I hope, as I am sure you do, that we have the privilege to do so for many years.