

Pike's Peak:

"It's Got A Lot To Do With Those Cliffs"

By Steve Alexander

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo.—The evening before the 53rd running of the Pikes Peak Hill Climb—July 3, 1975—Bobby Unser had returned to his Colorado Springs birthplace and the race that had made his entire family famous. The following morning he'd be driving the Buick pace car up the hill just before the race cars started their timed ascents up the 12.42-mile course that climbs 4708 feet through 156 turns to the 14,110-foot summit. But that evening the two-time Indy winner and 13-time Pikes Peak champion was holding a press conference and co-hosting a chili dinner along with Mom and Uncle Louie Unser at the plush Four Seasons Motor Inn.

The TV lights went on, Bobby U. was introduced and he contemplated the first question of the session. When would he return to the hill climb as a competitor?

"Well, I'll tell ya," responded Bobby U., "I'd like to come back next year with the Championship car me and my dad built and lay down a record time that people would say was unbeatable. Of course the cars hasn't been run since we set the record in 1968. We'd have to rebuild it and make a few modifications. But I'd like to come back with it and prove that these Volkswagens just don't belong on the hill."

Later that night the Mears Gang had gathered at the Motel X to pass a bottle or two of wine. Two-time hill climb champion Roger Mears wouldn't be racing the following day. His supertrick Newman-Dreager hillclimber had gone off the road just short of the finish line during qualifying, eliminating him from competition. But brother Rick Mears, 1974 rookie of the year in the open-wheel division, had set fastest time in qualifying. He was the favorite to win the "Race to the Clouds" and would be carrying the hopes of the Volkswagen contingent up the hill the following day.

But late in the evening Rick had yet to go to sleep. First there was the problem of rebuilding an engine the night before the race. Needed parts were being airfreighted from California while engine-builder "Uncle Richard" Weaver lay sleeping. Then there was the problem of Rick's new helmet. He'd been wearing it for hours in order to get used to the feel and said he was going to sleep with it on.



Stock division competitor Lee Roy Quayle blasts his Chevy Nova past a pair of brave photographers.

Steve Alexander

The conversation in front of the motel room turned to putting Rick to sleep. Brother Roger was elected to go do the job. Slowly he took a swig from the bottle and walked into Rick's room. A few minutes later he merged, turning off the light as he left.

Race day morning—July 4, 1975. Roger Mears and a reporter had bummed a ride

to the summit from Steve Richardson of Simpson Safety Equipment. Richardson's Baja Bug had been fitted with a leaner carburetor jet in order to make it run better while ascending into altitudes where the oxygen density changes from sparse to sparser to...gasp! On race day morning the little Beetle was taking the two-lane crushed-granite

roadbed in stride.

From the start, the road runs through a fairly level section of high-speed straights and turns bordered by the mountain on one side and a drainage ditch on the other. The race cars can hit speeds of up to 135mph here. But coming into the halfway point at Glen Cove the road begins to climb through a series of high-speed switchbacks that abruptly end at a blind hairpin just short of the Cove. The race drivers must know exactly where they are at all times in order to set up in advance for the oncoming turns—especially the hairpin. This is where Mears had lost it; he pointed to the rocks he'd smashed into as he passed by.

Above Glen Cove the whole world changes. Timberline is passed and the heavy green forest disappears, exposing the bare granite face of the mountain. The road climbs more rapidly, dizzily, in fact, through a series of switchback called the "Ws." The dropoffs from the roadbed fall thousands of feet straight down and the straights leading into the turns end in nothingness. The racers come through with their accelerators floored. They lift at the turns, brake hard and slide through, stomping on the throttles again as they come out the other side, giant rooster tails of dirt and rock billowing from the rear wheels.

At the top of the Ws lies Devil's Playground, a tundra-covered rock cliff in the sky. From an altitude of 12,800 feet you can see most of the race course below. You can follow the dust trails of the cars from the start and then watch them struggle through the Ws. Mears and Richardson took one look down from Devil's Playground and decided to stay for the race, joining a few thousand crazies who had spent the night partying on the hill. Meanwhile the reporter hitched a ride to the top in a Pikes Peak Highway Patrol station wagon.

Only the race cars can outrun the police on Pikes Peak. The cars are well tuned for the atmosphere and the drivers really know the road. The one driving the reporter to the top knew what he was doing. He took the high-speed straights and sweepers above Devil's Playground like a champ and then raced off toward the sky when he reached the final series of switchbacks leading to the summit, leaving a nice trail of dirt and rock

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Group Aims To Improve Car Company Images

DETROIT—As anyone can plainly see, the auto business and related businesses are in an embattled position. Ed Carter, executive vice-president of Firestone, says "it's no secret that the industry, and particularly the service part, is under a blanket indictment today.

"It has reached a point where even those service customers who normally would be pleased with the work done and the price they pay for it have become suspicious that everything may not be right."

Carter notes that "over the years many leaders in the automotive industry had expressed concern with the growing consumer and government criticism of all segments of our industry. All of us were receiving a battering and, while some of it was deserved, much of it was based on improper information or lack of information."

So, with that in mind, some people associated with the industry got together a few years ago to see what could be done and out of it came an organization called the Automotive Information Council (AIC).

Carter said it was formed with goal of "improving communication between the motor vehicle industry and its many audiences." But he said "we are not trying to a whitewash."

Carter has just completed a term as chairman of the council's board of directors. The board is composed of top officers from many of the major businesses in the industry, such as General Motors Vice Chairman Oscar A. Lundin.

The council operates out of a New York office on a budget of something under \$500,000 a year. It is financed by contributions from 1100 companies associated with the industry.

Carter stresses the council does not

lobby but does provide, as its name suggests, automotive information. It has a reference library and Carter said in April and May it handled written 175 inquiries varying from consumer grievances to consultation on marketing projects.

"This doesn't include the hundreds of phone calls or visits by people to our library," Carter said. He added the council supplies information on any auto subject at hand without charge to journalists or government officials.

"But if a student is writing a masters

thesis we have to charge him for the data we send," Carter said. The council can be contacted at 666 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019, phone 212 JU 6-2600.

Carter says the council performs a useful service in this fashion and he has organized meetings around the country to set up chapters in various cities.

These sessions enable various segments of the industry to sit down and talk about their problems, he said, and consumer groups and government officials also take part as well.

The council puts out a weekly newspaper column giving advice on something like buying tires or telling people how to keep from falling asleep at the wheel. The council produces similar television and radio announcements.

All this, Carter says, "is not a whitewash job but an effort to talk positive and correct some of our ills as we see them and talk about our problems together."

He thinks the program is working. "I think there are signs we are getting through. Where we deserve criticism, so be it. But as an industry I don't think we should sit back and take all the darts thrown at us. There are some positive things."

A list of the subjects the AIC library has at hand shows it should be a treasure trove of background material on everything from accidents to warranties.

GM Wary About Vauxhall Introduction

Economic uncertainty in Britain has made General Motors wary about the introduction of a new Vauxhall model.

The car, a British Vauxhall version of the GM international 1.2 to 1.9 liter family car range, will now be built at Antwerp in Belgium instead of in the UK.

Vauxhall claims the news is speculation since General Motors never comments on new model policy. "The new strategy of general Motors in Europe is the increasing integration of Opel and Vauxhall to use its European plants to best advantage, for the company and employees, yet retaining the two separate car identities." Vauxhall has made a profit only once in the last six years, and strikes

in 1974 cost the UK subsidiary 21,174 vehicles, although only 2,909 of these losses were due to internal disputes compared with 24,113 in 1973. Output per worker is 50 higher at GM's West German Opel subsidiary than at Vauxhall.

But it's not all bad news at Vauxhall. The company made a big comeback on the British market in May when it took 11.18 per cent of total domestic car sales—almost 5 better than the previous month, and Vauxhall's highest share for more than four years. Sales were boosted by the launch of the new Chevette hatchback small car, plus renewed interest in the economy Viva which was the third best selling car in the UK for the month.

Pikes Peak

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behind. The last turn before the finish is a sharp right-hander with a 6000-foot dropoff on the outside. The reporter gasped as the big wagon slid through the turn and then sighed when it came to a halt on the summit.

From a rocky ledge just below the summit you can see most of the track from the rise above Devil's Playground—1000 feet below and four miles away. But you can't see the cars. First you hear them—a dull roar filtering its way up to the top of the world. Then you see their dirt trails snaking down the road that winds across the tundra. The roar gets louder and finally you can see the car—a tiny dark speck in front of a rooster tail of dirt.

First man up the hill was Ralph Bruning, 1973 stock car champ and this year's low qualifier on the run to Glen Cove. His blue-and-yellow Camaro could be heard roaring as Bruning maneuvered it through the sweepers below the summit. But then it went sour. Fans could hear it sputter and cough when Bruning nailed it coming out of the corners. Just below the summit it nearly died but then revived and sputtered across the finish in a time of 13 minutes and 57 seconds.

Larry Carnes followed Bruning up the hill after a two-minute wait at the start. Carnes, also driving a Camaro, had a much better run, recording a 13:45.

But the third man up the hill, also in a Camaro, had them both beaten (as well as the entire 25-car starting field of USAC-legal stockers). Ted Foltz made a solid run up the hill—no mistakes and with a healthy motor all the way. His 13:39 was the second-quickest clocking ever for a stocker. Only the 13:13 Bobby Unser turned last year in a Dodge was better.

The open-wheelers followed, with favorite Rick Mears the first one off the line. But the transmission seized in the Volkswagen-powered hillclimber before Mears even made it halfway up the hill. He pulled over and watched as the Chevy-powered Sprints had a field day.

The winner of the 25-car open-wheel division was Orville Nance, who turned a 12:36.65 in a Chevy-Sprint. Nance's time barely beat Wes Vandervoort's 12:36.81, also in a Chevy-Sprint. Bob Herring was

just a second down, running third-best in another Chevy-Sprint. The best-placed Volkswagen was Bud Whitfields Funco, which turned a 12:39 for fourth place and had its motor blow in the finish line beams on his drag race to the summit. Defending champ Errol Kobilan was timed at 12:52 to take fifth place in his Chevy Sprint.

Finishing out the show were the motorcycles, which really race their way up the hill in heats of 30 bikes at a time. Rick Deane won the open division on a 750 Triumph, turning a 13:54, which means he was putting his bike into the sky turns as fast as the drivers were racing their four-wheelers.

The Summit cafe and souvenir shop is closed for an afternoon break. The old cog railway that brings thousands of tourists to the top of Pikes Peak daily is also shut down. The staff of the cafe is out at the finish line, eating lunches from brown paper bags and watching the last of the race cars come up the hill. But if you're a race driver you can come in the back door

of the cafe, sit at the counter and help yourself to doughnuts and coffee.

Ted Foltz is in the cafe, drinking a cup of coffee and grinning widely. Foltz, a grandfather in his forties, lives in Colorado Springs, where he runs a plastering service and races occasionally. Once a year for the previous 19 years he's made the race up Pikes Peak. Before they changed the rules this year Foltz would often drive two cars (his stocker and a Chevy-Sprint) on race day, utilizing a helicopter to pick him up at the top one and take him to the start to drive the other. Foltz had won once before, running fastest time of the day in winning the old Championship division during the 1970 hillclimb. He also had second- and third-place finishes in the stock class.

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The victory dinner had ended. The trophies had been handed out and the purses paid. Crews, drivers, families and friends were headed home to California and Florida as well as Colorado Springs. Only hillclimb director Jack Vaeth and

racing promoter J.C. Agajanian remained.

Vaeth posed the perennial question to Aggie. "When are the big-name USAC drivers gonna return to the hill?"

Aggie talked about the new deal a Pocono, in which the big 500-miler has been run on the Sundays preceding July 4th for the past two years. This eliminated the date conflict between the two races and cleared the way for Bobby Unser to drive the pace car this year as well as actually race up the hill the year before. Aggie suggested that more USAC drivers would follow Bobby's return.

Then I remembered something Bobby U. had said at his press conference the night before the race. In response to a similar question about the return of the super-stars, Bobby had said, "There's a reason why a lot of them aren't here right now...and, I'll tell ya, it has a lot to do with those 6000-foot cliffs up there on the race course. I remember taking Roger McCluskey for a ride up there once—he'll never be back."

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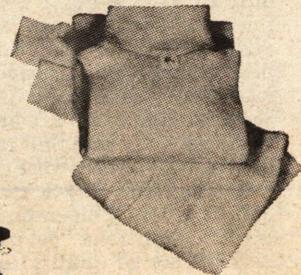
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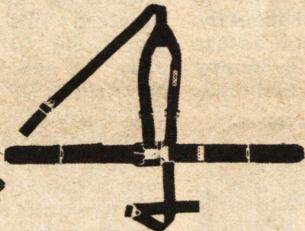
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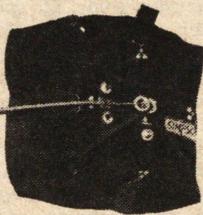


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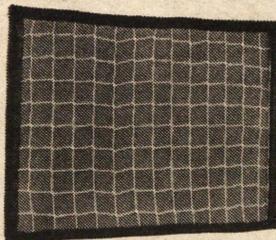


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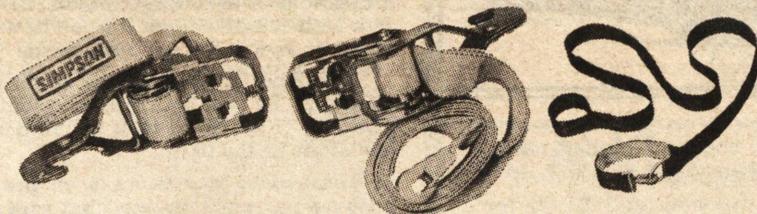
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Petty Hits 55mph Limit

One of the world's fastest drivers says the 55 mph speed limit can work against highway safety if motorists become bored or overly relaxed.

Richard Petty cited government statistics showing that highway fatalities declined nearly 19% last February from the same month in 1973.

"But 2,864 people killed last February is still way too high," said Petty, leading NASCAR Grand National race driver. "I believe many of them were caused by drivers who became lulled by the slower legal speed."

Petty noted that test drivers, who drive 2000 miles a week at legal speeds, use several methods to fight boredom.

"One way the drivers do it is to keep their heads and eyes moving, never just staring straight ahead," he explained. "They check the rearview mirror, glance out the side window, check the instrument panel—anything, just so they keep their heads and eyes moving every so often."

Petty said the test drivers also change driving positions by moving the seat forward or backward just a bit, they flex their hands on the steering wheel—or anything that keeps the blood circulating and helps them stay alert.

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