



300 StarLetter

March 2019



1000 Miles Among Friends

*At the inaugural
300 SL Classic*

By Jerry Rosenstock

When I saw the event announcement I was excited to know there was going to be a 300 SL touring event. I just made an entry like a knee-jerk reaction. I am so used to seeing these cars on some concours lawn, vying for a trophy or two. I only see a few on the vintage rally circuit. I have driven mine on six prior vintage rallies without much MB 300 SL marque company.

My memories go back to Paul O'shea and his racing years in the 1950s. Okay it dates me, but I also had used Paul O'shea as an accident reconstruction expert years later as a young lawyer.

He was a three-time USA champion, twice in Gullwings and the third in a very special lightweight 1957 Roadster.

In west coast vintage racing there have been two primary driver entrants Ted Stroscher and Steve Marx. Steve raced his Gullwing when he first started and I was driving my Healey Silverstone. We had fun together and became friends as well.

I will try to give you a flavor of the event, not a listing of 45 owners and cars. The three musketeers who organized it were John Willot, Craig McLaughlin and Tom Thornhill.

If you have not organized a large moving circus of vintage cars, you have missed out on an extraordinary experience. Think location, hotels, secure parking, three meals a day in changing locations, route book perfection, mechanical support (Thank you Mercedes-Benz Classic Center!), luggage, paraphernalia, awards, print-



PHOTOGRAPHY: WILLBREWSTER.COM

ing and participant pampering as needed. The selection of entrants, and rejection of oversubscription. Think movie credits list after a film.

We gathered in Scottsdale-adjacent Carefree Arizona on November 4th at the Boulders Resort & Spa. Sunday was check-in, registration and socialization including a very nice dinner. The first outing was an afternoon charter bus ride to the Breslow collection, a collection of great variety and broad taste. There were no photographs permitted, if invited, just go and enjoy.

As we exited the shuttle bus at the Breslow collection, Gloria Ross walked up to me with "our last name was supposed to be yours". Now that's a different introduction. Stephen and I exchanged family histories going back at about a hundred years. From information my father told us when growing up, my family came from an area of what was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now part of the Ukraine, which matched what Stephen was told. Canadian immigration just changed the name. It was an unusual coincidence, but it was the way we started to share some time together, even before talking about our 300 SLs.

John Breslow has put together a fine collection, which is best described as wonderfully eclectic. I was able to see several cars on exhibit which were the type I had owned or still own. Everything was just sparkling and tasteful. Many of us talked together about our personal chosen favorites as well, creating a mixing of the experience and breaking the ice of the event.

Our welcome dinner was well received. In events



like this you find some participants you already know, others you will meet along the way and some with whom you will simply never share time. Some members came with other 300 SL friends and it appeared they never expanded their circle. Others went out of their way to meet unfamiliar faces, making some new friends and gaining different experiences.

Monday's drive started with the classic bagpipe departure. Off all 45 of us went. We were equipped with an excellent entrant's event route book with the proper directions, maps and some geographic and historic information.

We were to cover 276 miles for the full day. Our first stop was at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park. We stopped and toured the interesting variety of plants along the several paths provided. In the gift shop we even found very lovely watercolor cards from a local Colorado artist. We used several of them over the following winter holidays.

Our day ended at the rustic and restored La Posada Hotel in Winslow. During that day's drive we had the opportunity to have a bit of a fast drive with several of our fellow participants.

One of those was with Craig Eckberg in his lovely Gullwing. He and Hanne have driven it in numerous rallies and other events over the years, accumulating 80,000 miles. Funny, Craig and I had never met until Monterey Car Week; we were two seats apart at an event we were both invited to by a mutual friend. The curiosity is he was the former owner of what is now my



300 SL Roadster. He and I spent best part of half an hour passing and repassing each other at rather brisk speed in the range of 100 MPH. Ask Craig who passed who the last time. Boys will be boys!

On that same morning I came upon a group of two to three of our event cars. I got in front, and picked up the pace. Two of them stayed with me and we did a bit of chasing each other. At our lunch stop I found out the

A tiny piece of the vast Boyce Thompson Arboretum, above. Craig Eckberg's Gullwing in good company.





From left: Ann and John Willott, Emily and Sam Mann with Matilde and Dick De Luna, and Marianne and David Duthu's weatherproof Roadster.



car directly behind mine was John Willott whose car was first brought into his family by his father.

John came to me with his GPS in hand to show me he had just run slightly shy of 100 MPH, the fastest he would admit to having run his Gullwing. How fun! I got him to drive my car later in the event, to see the difference in the clutch conversion my car had to a diaphragm clutch as opposed to the slower and heavier original finger clutch.

Third in that group was Sam Mann. Sam and I had shared our vintage racing experiences of about 20 years ago at Lime Rock International Raceway a few weeks earlier while participating in the Colorado Grand. Magda and I were so happy to have the time together with Sam and Emily at both events.

Our Tuesday was Winslow to Sedona for two nights. We were treated to some excellent roads and the final stop at the really unusual colors of scenic Sedona. Sedona and surrounds is where the chemical composition of the hills, mountains and soil is a rich deep red. The formations are so very dramatic. We stayed the two nights in a row at the Enchantment Resort. We were fortunate enough to run late during that first day so we arrived in very dramatic late light, which was sparkling. One of the things which was so special is staying at a place that is so large you were shuttled to and from your rooms, all in a natural setting of glorious scenery. Thank you John, Craig and Tom for your hotel selections.

Early on in the event David Duthu approached me,



recognizing me from racing together at Lime Rock, many years ago. He was running a Bugatti at the time and I had my Alfa Romeo TZ1 back there at the time. We shared memories and mutual friends from those years. Magda and I were fortunate enough to share a dinner on this event with David. David's lovely black Roadster was the only one running a factory hardtop.

He and his wife had used their Roadster extensively in tours and touring in Europe. He related they were very well received in much of Italy during that time with the 300 SL Roadster.

Our third day was a loop to and from Sedona. I want to mention a couple of highlights during that day. Our lunch stop was at the Grand Canyon. While on the way to the canyon, there were two areas with large parking lots where there were weathered plywood stands where the Navajo Indians were selling their wares. We stopped at the first one out of curiosity. Only three of probably 20 plus stalls were open. We walked up to a very pretty young lady and viewed her jewelry. We noticed about 20 feet away a pickup truck with a shell and an older woman sitting on the open tailgate. The older woman had a pink blanket bundle in her



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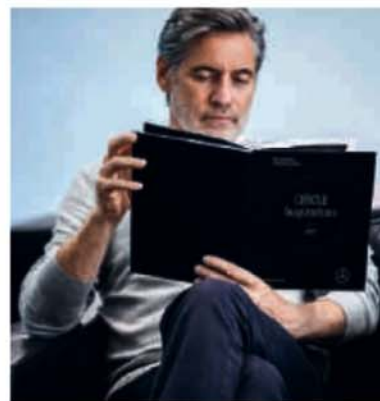
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From the top: Wupatki Pueblo iron-rich stonework. Sharon and Tom Malloy on the apex.

arms. We then saw what was in the bundle, it was the young lady's baby, in a homemade cradle. I purchased a necklace for Magda from the young Navajo girl. Then walked further down the row of closed stalls to find a middle-aged woman stringing beads and making necklaces. She was the mother of the young Navajo girl. We had just engaged four generations of Navajo women. It was a very special experience for us.

We also drove by some 12th century ruins, located along the road leading us to Grand Canyon. We had earlier that morning gone through Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument. This area is so special with great and important historical and natural sites. The ruins were red, similar to the colors in Sedona. It was the Wupatki Pueblo or Village ruins. It too is a National Monument. The ruins were clearly visible from the road. We spent a half hour there. We learned this group – probably Navajo ancestors – lived in a group of about 1000.

We could see the many rooms and an outdoor amphitheater in the ruins. The building material was Moenkopi Sandstone, which had been cut and then

piled on itself like loosely laid bricks. There are several sets of similar ruins in the area. Those Indians lived what was probably an agricultural life and I am guessing at some point the population became so great they had to start another set of structures in order to be able to support themselves.

One night at dinner, we had the pleasure of sitting down with Tom & Sharon Malloy. Although our paths had crossed several times, this was the first we had spent engaged in meaningful conversation. Tom, as many of you know, was a moving force in the Vintage Automobile Racing Association until just recently when he too retired from track events. Our connection was that I founded VARA and stopped running those events just as he became so very active in VARA. It was so nice to spend the time sharing our joint organization, event experiences and the cars we love. Tom and Sharon brought their dark blue over tan Gullwing on the event. What a subtle striking color combination.

After four days of driving we returned on Thursday evening to the Boulders Resort in Carefree. All the cars got there on their own power with the exception of Don Rose's Gullwing. Although his car was running there was something unhealthy about it continuing on. Many thanks to the crew from the Mercedes Classic Center, who solved problems with our event cars as they arose.

The concluding night's dinner and auction was filled with the opportunity to help support the event charity Laureus whose mission is supporting youngsters in need. Much of the effort is directed to participation in sports, learning related team work as well as self-respect.

Think of the 300 SL Classic as an opportunity. Imagine you were in high school, new in town. You did not know many of your classmates. It was the big school dance on the basketball court.

You are unsure, you may be the guy who won't get to dance with that cute girl, because you are too shy to ask. You maybe the new girl who is hesitant about going, because she may spend the night on the edge of the dance floor waiting for the cool guy to ask her to dance.

We had a great time, we took the chance to seek out new faces and share experiences. By coincidences we also reconnected with other participants from years ago. Let's be honest, when you get home you remember the people, what you shared together and maybe a little about their rides. It was a great dance, and the music was very cool too. When the next 300 SL Classic announcement comes, have a knee jerk reaction, sign up.