

PEBBLE BEACH CONCOURS d'ELEGANCE®

INSIDER

CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF THE AUTOMOBILE



A Legacy of Coachbuilding

GIOVANNI BIANCHI ANDERLON

ENDURING MEXICO'S
DISTANCE RALL

LA CARRERA
PANAMERICANA

MY LIFE IN CARS
LORD MONTAGU
of BEAULIEU



FROM
CUNNINGHAM
TO COLLIER

THE EVOLUTION OF A COLLECTION

THE EVOLUTION OF A COLLECTION

FROM CUNNINGHAM to COLLIER

BY MILES COLLIER



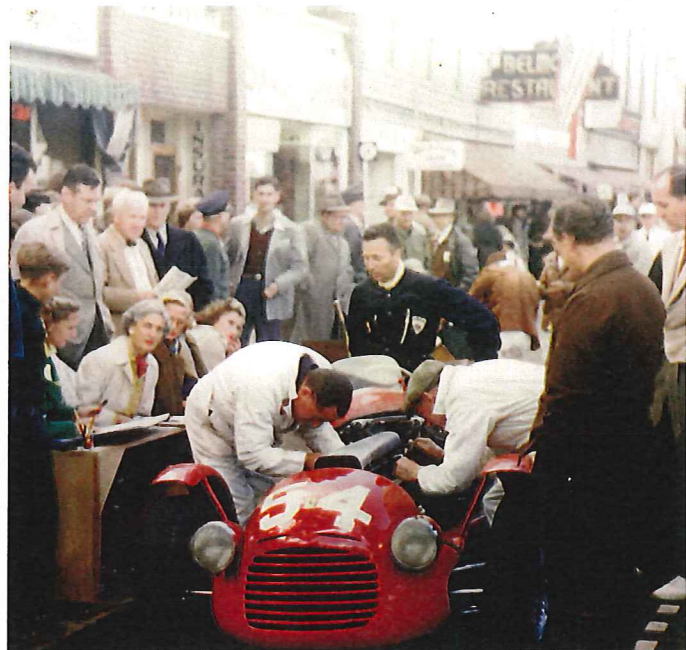
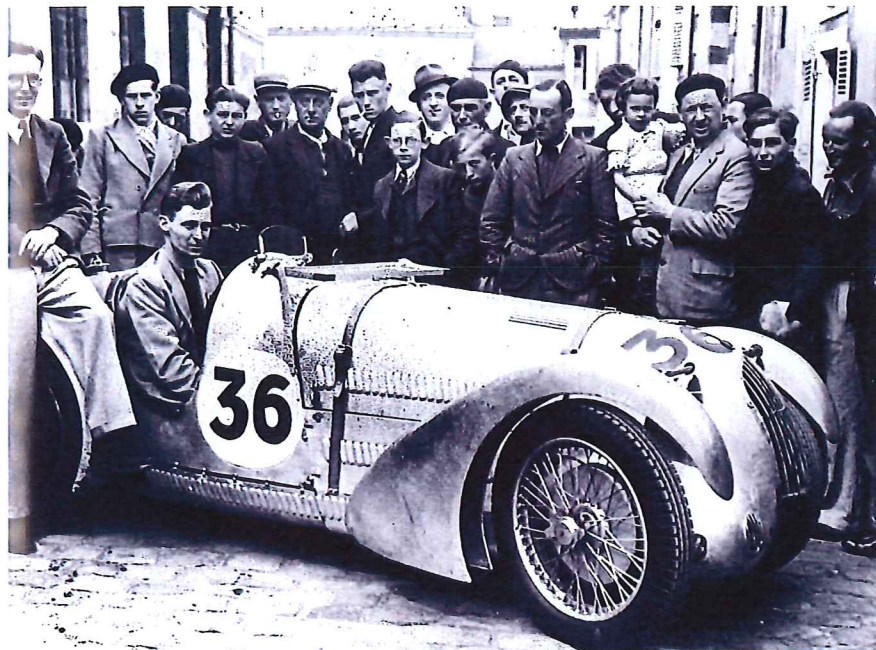
From left: The three Cunningham C-2Rs and the prototype C-1 assembled outside the facility in West Palm Beach before leaving for Le Mans in 1951; Briggs at the wheel of the Cunningham C-4R (chassis 5216), with the Vignale-bodied C-3 Coupe (5208) behind. The cars are outside the New York premises of Cunningham's great friend and racing manager Alfred Momo.

Back in the 1980s I used to travel to Orange County in the course of old car business with the likes of Dick Troutman, or to Hermosa Beach to see Carl Thompson at Vasek Polak's. Inevitably, each trip west called for a stop at the Cunningham Automotive Museum on Baker Street in Costa Mesa. There was to be found quite simply the best automobile collection in the world. Briggs Cunningham, its genial doyen, was often in evidence and it came about that he and I would fall into conversation about the various cars he had on display.

The Colliers and Mr. Cunningham had a relationship that went back to the '30s with the activities of the ARCA (Automobile Racing Club of America). My dad had driven Briggs's early road-racing hot rod, the Bu-Merc, at the

New York World's Fair ARCA race in 1940, albeit stuffing it into a lamppost when the brakes failed shortly after snatching the lead. After the war, in 1950, when Briggs embarked on his quest for victory at Le Mans, both my father and my uncle Sam served as his guides and advisors due to their "vast" international racing experience (among his other European automotive exploits, my dad had raced at Le Mans in 1939 with his special-bodied MG). Tasked with chauffeuring the stock-bodied Cadillac coupe named "Petit Pataud," perhaps after a comic French hippopotamus, they brought the car home in 10th place—just in front of the massive, Grumman Aircraft-bodied Cadillac roadster driven by Briggs and Phil Walters and named, for obvious reasons, "Le Monstre."

The relative success of this first foray well and truly set Briggs down the path for which he became so famous—chasing a



Clockwise from top left: C. Miles Collier at the wheel of his 1935 MG PA/PB "Leonides" in 1949; Briggs gets ready to drive his stint in the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1952; Sam Collier at the wheel of the Cunningham-owned Ferrari 166 Corsa Spyder on the Franklin Street start line of the fateful 1950 Watkins Glen races; C. Miles Collier at the wheel of "Leonides" just before participating in the 24 Hours of Le Mans back in 1939—he was the first American to do so in a decade.

Le Mans victory with American equipment. Tangentially, it also established Sam Collier as one of Briggs's regular guest drivers—and, sadly, Sam was killed at the wheel of Briggs's Ferrari 166 Corsa Spyder at Watkins Glen that fall. My father stopped racing thereafter until just before his death from polio in 1954, when he had made plans to participate in European Formula 1 races.

So there was a lot of backstory underlying my visits to Baker Street in the '80s.

Under the Collier genetic imperative to fool with cars, I had raced with the SCCA (Sports Car Club of America) after graduating from Yale in the late '60s, and some years later began collecting and competing in old Porsche race

cars—from which ensued my periodic trips to California on old car business. Being the rather focused character that I am, my collecting strategy had centered exclusively on Porsche race cars from that company's inception. In my early collecting days, Spyderys and tube-frame plastic prototypes were available for 20 or 30 thousand dollars. Consequently, with the able guidance of my friend Gerry Sutterfield of Lake Park, Florida, I was able to assemble a pretty nice and comprehensive collection that, as time passed, further benefited from the collaboration of Kevin Jeannette, now owner of Gunnar Porsche. So successful was this collecting effort that by the mid-1980s I was thinking about collecting "after Porsche." Not only did I have most of the cars that represented Porsche's competition efforts from 1950 to 1971 (the end of the 5-liter sports car era) but, through sheer chance, had acquired cars with some of the best race history as well.



Among the many cars retained by Miles Collier after acquiring the Cunningham Collection were this 1914 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost Colonial model, featuring a chassis developed for sale in India and coachwork by Kellner of Paris, and this 1932 Bentley 8 Litre, one of two Corsica-bodied 8 Litres with speed-enhancing modifications by the legendary Bentley specialist L. C. "Mac" McKenzie.

During my visits to Costa Mesa my attention turned to Briggs's race cars: the exquisite Delage, the iconic Peugeot voiturette, the delicate Maserati Birdcage, the muscular racing Cunninghams. The very atmosphere of the museum vibrated with the aura of Briggs himself. Fortunately for me, I had become involved with the collection's consulting engineer and all-around mechanical wizard, Jim Toensing. Jim was doing the mechanical restoration on the MG PA/PB that my dad had raced at Le Mans in 1939, while Dick Troutman was fettling the body panels and doing the assembly. Jim and I spent considerable time talking about old cars and I received a master class in the subject, centered on the cars of the Cunningham Museum, which served nicely as a study collection. Gradually, I came to the conclusion that "Collecting after Porsche" should be centered around long-distance American race cars such as the Ford GT40s, the Corvette Grand Sports, the FIA Cobras, and, of course, the font of it all, the cars involved in the Cunningham Le Mans effort. Clearly if the project were to be undertaken at the level to which I aspired, it would be

dependent upon nailing down the postwar beginnings—and all those cars were there under that one roof in California.

Being under that roof on an almost daily basis, Jim Toensing had a sense of the undercurrents of the place, and one day in 1985 he told me that right then would not be a bad time to talk to Briggs about acquiring the Cunningham Le Mans racers. He even offered to support the idea. Evidently the collection's famous inviolability to purchase was in question as Laura Cunningham, Briggs's second wife, was pushing Briggs for a resolution to the collection's future. With some trepidation, I broached the subject with Briggs, essentially saying that I would like to make him an offer for the Cunningham race cars. I proposed to buy them then with the idea that they would remain with Briggs as long as he wanted them. Briggs received my offer with impeccable attention and said that he would like time to consider it.

Some weeks later, in October, he called me one evening to say, "I've thought about your offer, and I don't think I want to sell the Cunninghams. However, if you are interested in acquiring the whole collection, I would like to talk further with you. Given the impending changes in the capital gains tax rate for 1986, I'd like to get the sale done this year." Zowie. There was only one possible answer to this proposal, so I replied that I would indeed be pleased to discuss that idea with him at his convenience. Fortunately, as evidence that certain things are destined to be, the Collier family business had just had a major liquidity event so such a transaction was entirely possible.

One evening a few weeks later, I met Briggs and Laura at the museum. Jim Toensing, my CFO, and my attorney rounded out the group. Before we toured the cars, Laura brandished an appraisal of the collection as evidence of the seriousness of their sales intentions. At some later point in the proceedings, Jim took me aside and informed me that Laura had "made a deal" for the whole collection with a Las Vegas-based buyer a day or two earlier, but, to her embarrassment, it had fallen through when good funds couldn't be produced. Capping off the whole rather surreal evening, to my stunned amazement Laura handed me a copy of the appraisal. The question of how to structure an offer had been looming over my team's deliberations. The deal had been dependent on my coming up with an opening offer, which, given the unique and virtually priceless objects in the collection, would have been anybody's guess with all the risk that such uncertainty entails. In one stroke all these difficulties fell away. Clearly Laura was driving the bus of this transaction and none too wisely. With the appraisal in hand, we were down to a simple negotiation. The next day we were easily able to agree upon a highly satisfactory transaction because we knew the upper price boundary set by the appraisal,

the short December 31 time frame for closing, and the poisoned well of the failed transaction. My offer included a backend stub payment based on selling collection cars that didn't meet my collecting goals.

A few weeks later we closed the deal in Laura's attorney's offices in La Jolla. The 75 cars in the collection were now mine. The tour of the collection we took after the closing was an out-of-body experience—at least for me and possibly for the rest of the team as well.

Subsequent to the purchase, a number of issues arose: having to negotiate a two-year lease on the museum premises in Costa Mesa, the need for a manager in California until the premises for the collection being built in Naples could be readied, and the immediate need to commence a planned phase two on the premises in Naples.

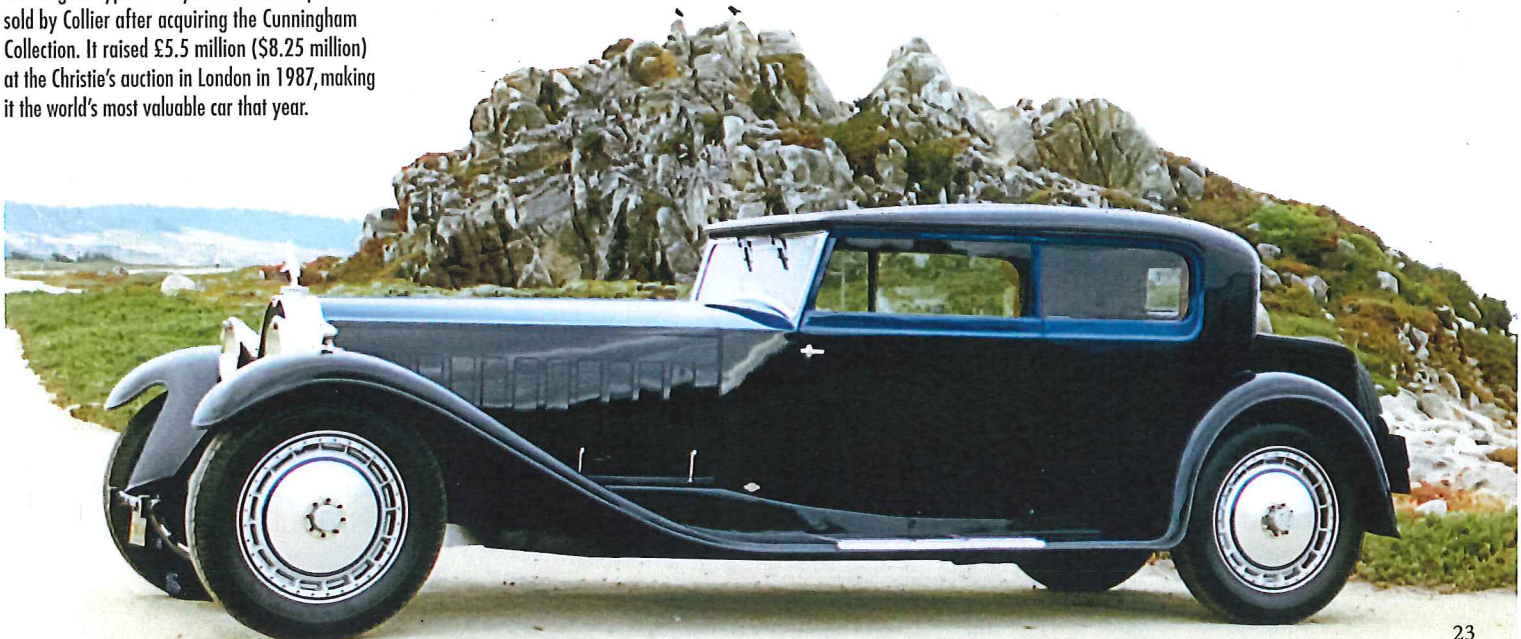
The biggest problem presented by the acquisition of the Cunningham Collection was one of understanding. Of the 75 cars in the deal, which should I retain and which should I sell pursuant to my deal with the Cunninghams? The collection as it came to me was a mixture of cars from Briggs's daily life, say the Wills Sainte Claire and the American Underslung;

from his racing career, say the R Series Cunninghams and the Jaguar D-type; from his study of automotive history, say the 2.3-liter Alfa or the 1.5-liter Delage Grand Prix; and, finally, from those he had acquired to create a comprehensive and balanced museum collection for public consumption. These latter cars were clearly added to the collection as an afterthought as they lacked the fine sensibility that informed the rest of the collection. Here were vehicles such as an Alfa GTV; a Cretors popcorn wagon; a few horse-drawn carriages, albeit with Cunningham family provenance; Laura's pearlescent pink Lamborghini Miura; an Offy-powered midget race car and whatnot.

The great charm and attraction of the Cunningham Collection was the perfect taste with which so many of the cars were chosen. Not only did Mr. Cunningham pick the correct make and model; many times he chose the finest specific example. He had been a conscientious student of the countless motoring magazines and books of his early years. He had the knowledge from both long study and vast personal experience to buy the cars that conformed to his vision of "best." Uniquely among connoisseurs, his own experience as a racer allowed him the direct experience of countless great competition cars.

Mr. Cunningham's racing career as a major front line entrant and competitor was the story of the postwar sports racing and GT car up to the middle '60s. From among the countless race cars he had owned and campaigned, he retained those that to him represented quality, those that earned a place in his affections. From those cars he built his incomparable collection. By retaining only those cars that distinguished themselves to him personally, Mr. Cunningham gave his collection a personality and an individuality that saved it from being one of the sterile "calendar collections" that attempt to have every so-called "important" car of note. He also kept his old race cars in the state and condition they were in when their active careers were over. In so doing, he preserved those machines as original, untouched and historically pristine. Such an attitude toward old cars during much of his custodianship was in contradiction to the general attitude of the collecting community. Consequently, the Cunningham Collection's Cunningham Team cars, from Cadillac to Maserati, represent one of the finest collections of some of the world's most important competition cars in meticulously maintained but original, race-used condition. Sixty years after their time, they are now the very epitome of the "preservation" car movement.

This Bugatti Type 41 Royale Kellner Coupé was sold by Collier after acquiring the Cunningham Collection. It raised £5.5 million (\$8.25 million) at the Christie's auction in London in 1987, making it the world's most valuable car that year.



At the time I bought the collection, I can't say I was filled with understanding. I was deeply respectful of the competition cars and under their spell, but I had only a tenuous sense of their context. The road cars were even more problematic. Headed by the Bugatti Royale Kellner Coupé, my first impressions of these cars were almost wholly visual. Those that had that certain "it" intrigued me and were quickly promoted to the "retain" category. Such was the fate of the Kellner-bodied Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, the Cricklewood Bentleys, the Duesenberg SSJ, and the Mercer Raceabout. These particular cars are still considered by experts to be among the most significant of their kind, due not only to their first class specification, but also their remarkable

904, with which he had won the under-two-liter prototype class at Sebring in 1964. Compared to my very original and straight red 904, the Sebring car was replete with Team Cunningham modifications: a lightened rear deck without side brake scoops, the addition of marker and ID lights, a different steering wheel, and a rather murky and cheesy silver repaint. Nevertheless, that car still inhabits the collection and is now a prized member of the integrated assemblage. Along with the cars came a collection of engines. Among the four-cam Fords and the Cosworth DFX was a Porsche Carrera 6 engine. It was another nice point of connection between the two collections—all the more so as I had also acquired a number of spare Porsche racing engines suitable for display.



Left: The unique Kamm-tailed C-4RK is the only car to have received the personal touch of Dr. Kamm himself, who visited West Palm Beach when the car was being built. Its claustrophobic cockpit dissuaded Briggs from driving the car himself. Phil Walters and Duane Carter drove it at Le Mans in 1952, storming into the lead shortly after the start, but losing valuable time when Carter crashed at Tertre Rouge and spent two hours digging the car out of a sandbank. Right: The C-5R, dubbed the "Smiling Shark" by journalists, was the most successful Cunningham at Le Mans in 1953, finishing in 3rd place driven by Phil Walters and John Fitch. All three Cunninghams finished well that year: Briggs and Bill Spear came in 7th in the C-4R, and Charles Moran and John Gordon Bennett placed 10th in the C-4RK.

originality and integrity. Other cars were less immediately engaging: the Hispano Suiza J12, a rather undistinguished battleship-gray open tourer, a dual-cockpit Stutz in a rather nasty orange and cream livery, an open Rolls-Royce Phantom II and a formal black Phantom III. Over time, given the "profit sharing" agreement with the Cunninghams, these cars were sold. In retrospect, the sales agreement caused me to dispose of some cars that, had I had more time to get to know, would not have been sold. Fortunately, the mistakes were relatively few, but I do regret the Bentley R-Type Continental, the Talbot-Lago Grand Prix, and perhaps the Lagonda V12 Tourer—though I am still of two minds on that one.

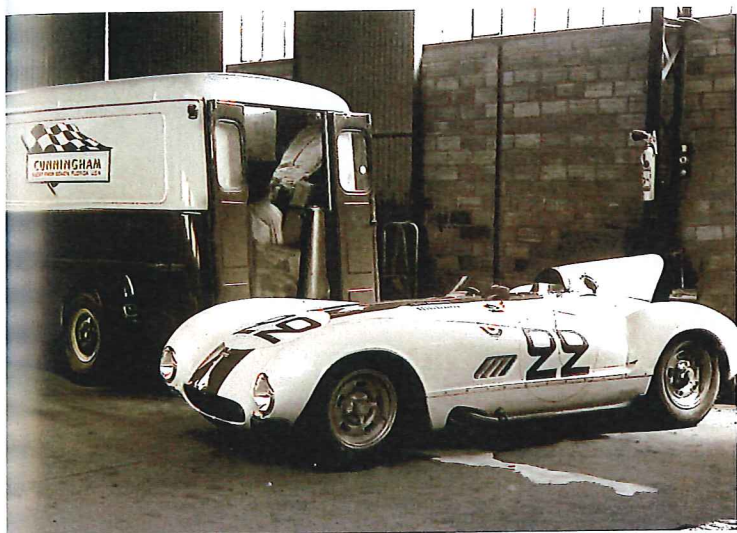
Naturally the assimilation of a large number of new cars in one great and potentially indigestible lump caused me to reconsider the cars I had: How would my twenty-some Porsches sit with the fifty, net of sales, Cunningham cars. Rather happily, there was some overlap. Mr. Cunningham had retained his last race car, the

Integration of the two collections was finally achieved when the Cunningham cars were installed in the brand-new building in Florida in 1988. Ultimately, we chose to present the cars in four groupings: a Porsche study collection of longitudinally ordered cars from 1949 to 1971; The Road, the Car, and Modern Life, the evolution of the modern passenger car; Sports and Sports Racing Cars, the emergence of the high-performance automobile; and Racing Cars and Racing Men, the evolution of the Grand Prix and Indy automobile. Naturally, there were significant gaps in the new expanded collection. As well, the armature on which the collection was now supported required a more cerebral approach to additions than the intuitive but wholly brilliant one of Mr. Cunningham.

Perhaps a year or so later, I came to the realization that I didn't want to sell any more of the collection; I had spent enough time with the cars that they had begun to explain themselves to me. The London auction of the Royale in 1987 had been a highly

satisfactory transaction that, with the earlier sales of other cars, essentially returned all my collection acquisition costs. I was now the owner of 50 great cars for zero out-of-pocket. I flew back out to California and negotiated a liquidation payment for the cars remaining on the sales list. The Cunningham acquisition was now fully complete. In subsequent years I sold a few more Cunningham cars (that regrettable Stutz, a Bentley 3 Litre Speed Model), but always in order to trade up to a better example of the same car.

The history of the American long-distance race car that had started this whole expansion was not to be denied. Ultimately,




In 1955, Cunningham made a last valiant attempt to beat the Europeans at Le Mans with this C-6R. After using big Chrysler V8 hemis for four years, Briggs switched to a 4-cylinder, 3-liter Offenhauser to power the C-6R. Sadly, the car retired after 19 hours.

the Cunningham Museum's loaner Ford GT40 and Scarab sports racing cars that were returned to their owners at the collection's sale were replaced by the ex-Grady Davis Gulf Team Ford GT40 that raced at Daytona and Sebring in 1967; an unrestored Ford GT40 Mark IIB, ex-Holman & Moody, ex-Ford France; and the number three Scarab sports racing car. Sadly, I managed to mess up my one opportunity to acquire a Cobra Daytona Coupe, which now fittingly graces the Simeone Collection. I never found a Cobra FIA Roadster worth buying, and with today's prices and where they are held, I doubt I ever will.

The Cunningham Grand Prix cars are worth a whole museum just to themselves; the 1913 Peugeot voiturette, the 1914 Mercedes Grand Prix car, the 1919 five-liter Indy Ballot and the 1927 Delage Grand Prix car are essentially unique due to their originality or their sole remaining existence. They presented the biggest challenge to continuing the collection at the Cunningham quality level. Ultimately, I was able to add a 1939

Mercedes W154 Grand Prix car, a Miller 122/91 single-seat board track car, the Spa-winning Gurney Eagle Grand Prix car, a Vanwall Grand Prix car and quite a few other notable pieces, including a 1902 Mors that was a participant in the 1902 Gordon Bennett Paris-Vienna race. I am quite confident that the Cunningham standard of excellence has been maintained.

In the sports and sports racing car arena, the collection as first assimilated was excessively heavy in competition cars. Recall that the postwar road cars that fell under this heading in the Cunningham collection were pretty undistinguished, say the Alfa GTV. As with the Grand Prix cars, additions had to stand up to the superb quality of the Cunningham foundation: the Alfa 2.3 Corto Spider, the Bugatti Type 55, the MG K3, the short wheelbase Bentley Speed Six, the SSK, and so forth. These were cars of the highest aesthetic and engineering quality. After some reflection, I decided a special Ferrari road car would hold up to the challenge. Ultimately, we found Enzo Ferrari's personal 400 Superamerica. It wasn't red, it was the short wheelbase version, it had open headlights as required by Italian law at the time, and it was unrestored. It was perfect. Among other appropriate additions were an Alfa 8C 2900 Berlinetta that won the 1947 Mille Miglia; a Lancia Lambda, with the world's first monocoque chassis; and a rather mundane-sounding 750 series 1958 Alfa Giulietta Sprint Veloce, but a remarkable technical accomplishment by the factory when originally introduced in 1955. As a late-period capstone to the collection, we found the ex-Thomas Bscher McLaren F1. Some additions to the competition side of the sports car group were the Alfa GTZ that won its class at Sebring in 1964; a Ferrari 250 LM; and, because I just liked them, an Abarth Simca 2-liter Corsa Short Nose Coupe, and an Abarth 1000 Berlina Corsa Radiale Group 4 car.

In reflecting on the collection's development, and on the legacy of Mr. Cunningham, I can say that because of the incomparable foundation his collection afforded, I have had the pleasure and the responsibility of selecting cars that bring another layer of considered collecting to what was already an extraordinary group of cars. In examining the great collections in the world, whether of fine art, rare books or decorative arts, say porcelain, many, if not most, are the product of generations of collecting. Each collector pruned as well as added to the collection, and each iteration raised the totality to a higher and more brilliant level of refinement. This certainly has been my intent. Today, of the 105-plus cars in the collection, 50—just under half—owe their provenance to Mr. Cunningham. I like to think that in future years the collection will continue to grow and be refined under the careful stewardship of yet others. I am confident that today, absent having a catalog that gives the provenance of the objects, the informed connoisseur cannot tell where the Cunningham Collection leaves off and the Collier Collection begins. 



Completing the ultimate automotive experience with an international array of exhibitors.

- Rare Collectibles
- Historic Automobilia
- Books and Literature
- Original Poster Art
- Petroliana
- Pebble Beach
- Concours Merchandise
- Luxury Items for the Motoring Lifestyle



PEBBLE BEACH CLASSIC CAR FORUM
PRESENTED BY CREDIT SUISSE

Featuring automotive luminaries discussing pertinent topics of the collector car world. This year's topics include:

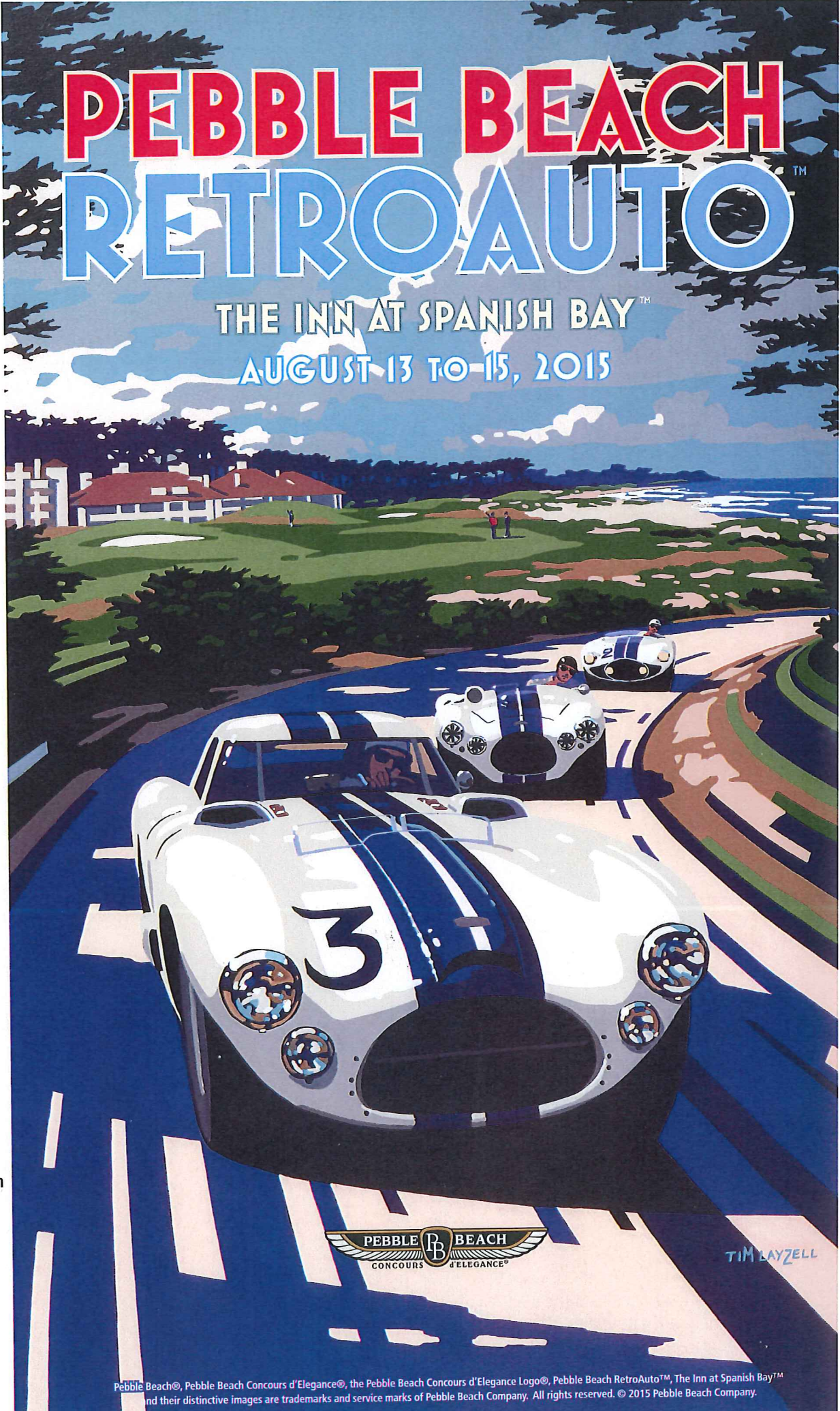
- Cunningham; The Passion, The Cars, The Legacy
- Mercury Customs and the Men Who Built Them
- Fred Simeone on Preservation
- Ian and Moray Callum on Automotive Design
- Gordon Murray on His Years at McLaren
- Restoring Fabric-Bodied Vintage Bentleys

All events are open to the public at no charge.

PEBBLE BEACH RETROAUTO™

THE INN AT SPANISH BAY™

AUGUST 13 TO 15, 2015



TIM LAZZELL