

**Auction
Coverage**

Next Mercedes SL550
Collectible

Exclusive Interview
Edsel Ford II

June 2007

CAR COLLECTOR

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE FOR COLLECTORS

Celebrating
75 Years
Ford V8



**Amelia Island
Concours**

As good as it gets!

\$4.99US \$6.99CAN

06>



7 25274 02438 4

By Gary Witzenburg



1954 Cadillac La Carrera Panamericana

The Ultimate Ride-and-Drive



We're sittin' around a big table in Junior Johnson's garage, scarfin' down a home-cooked southern lunch of fall-off-the-bone pork ribs, tater salad, slaw and beans in a thick brown sauce. Ol' Junior's tellin' what life was like as one of "stock-car" racin's best-ever drivers in the good ol' days between careers as an ace moonshiner, outrunnin' revenuers through the woods at night, and a NASCAR team owner employing other all-time greats. He talks softly in a slow North Carolina drawl. We're hangin' on every word, askin' questions when we can.

Junior relates that "doin' stuff" to your car (finding creative ways around the rules, aka "cheatin'") was easier when you weren't winnin' too much, because NASCAR's enforcers looked more closely at the cars that regularly ran up front than the ones that snuck up from behind. "You'd do four or five things," he says with a conspiratorial smile, "and they'd catch maybe two or three."

Our handful of seasoned scribes, who know well who he is and what he's done, were at Junior's giant farm north of Charlotte, NC because our hosts from Cadillac and GM's Heritage center thought it would be fun to drive their 1954 Cadillac La Carrera Panamericana replica racer from there to the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance, just south of the Georgia border, where it would be on display with other La Carrera cars. Before we depart, Junior laps the farm in it a couple of times. When he stops and cranks down the window, someone asks how it's handlin'. "Like a cruise ship," he says with a grin. "She's a little loose!"



The Race

Sponsored by the Mexican government, La Carrera Panamericana showcased Mexico's portion of the Panamerican Highway, which was intended eventually to stretch from Alaska to the tip of South America. Running north to south for 2,135 miles in 1950, including 400 unpaved miles that ended at the Guatemalan border, it was won by Herschel McGriff in a 1950 Oldsmobile. Hoping to witness wrecks, locals lined the route while some reversed or removed warning signs, "When I saw a

lot of people," McGriff related, "I figured it was a bad corner."

This "Mexican Road Race," as it was known north of the border, reversed direction for 1951 and was shortened to 1,912 mostly paved miles ending at Ciudad Jaurez, across the border from El Paso, Texas. By 1952, La Carrera's fame and importance had grown to where it was added to the world manufacturers' championship circuit, and super-fast works Porsches, Mercedes, and Ferraris joined the high-speed party, most piloted by Grand Prix drivers.

For 1954 – which would turn out to be La Carrera's final flat-year due to the growing numbers of participant and spectator fatalities – "ordinary guys" Keith Andrews and Blu Plemons talked Colorado Springs independent car dealer Barry Motor Sales into loaning them a new '54 Cadillac Series 62 coupe to run the race. With little modification to the car, they took on the pro teams and a lot of better-funded, more-experienced amateurs and finished an astounding third in the stock sedan class behind a pair of factory Lincolns.

The Lincoln works team boasted four cars and drivers, 28 mechanics, a doctor, a cook, a PR man and two photographers. The Andrews/Plemons crew was three Colorado buddies. Their Cadillac completed the race over treacherous mountain and foot-to-the-floor stretches in less than 21 hours, averaging over 115mph for the final 410 miles to win the two final stages.

The Car

This replica of that surprisingly competitive La Carrera racer is a "frame-on" restoration of a '54 Cadillac Series 62 coupe that had been in storage at GM's Milford, Mich., Proving Ground. When Heritage Center manager Greg Wallace found it, it was identical in specifications and even colors. Its 270 (gross) horsepower 331 cid OHV V8 was replaced by a '62-vintage 375-horsepower 398 V8 with boosted compression and cooling, its vintage four-speed Hydra-Matic by a newer electronically-controlled automatic, its front drum brakes by off-the-shelf discs, its steering and suspension bushings by fresh ones and its bias-ply tires by modern radials. Otherwise, it's relatively stock and original. GM's Performance Division did the work.

"We made updates that would enhance the vehicle and occupant safety but maintain the original design intent," says GMPD concept vehicle engineering director Al Oppenheiser. "For example, the instrument panel is as



Above and top left: At Amelia Island

Top right: Gas stop in South Carolina.

Opposite page:

Top: Junior Johnson drives the '54 Cadillac La Carrera Panamericana replica on the farm.

Left: Junior thinking about "doin' stuff" to the '54 Cadillac

Junior relates that "doin' stuff" to your car...

"You'd do four or five things," he says with a conspiratorial smile, "and they'd catch maybe two or three."

Specifications: 1954 Cadillac Model 62 Hardtop Coupe

Overview

Model: Series 62

Body style: 2-door coupe

Driveline: Front-engine, rear-drive

Construction: Body on frame

Engine

Type: OHV V-8

Displacement (cu in/cc): 331 cubic inches (stock), 398 cid (as restored)

Block material: Cast iron

Valve train: OHV, 2 valves per cylinder

Ignition: Distributor with coil

Fuel delivery: Mechanical fuel pump, (2) 4-bbl carburetors

Compression ratio: 8.25:1 (stock), 10.50:1 (as restored)

Horsepower (hp @ rpm): 270 HP @ 4400 rpm (stock), — 375 HP (as restored)

Torque (lb-ft @ pm): 330 lb.-ft. @ 2700 rpm stock, — 400 @ 2800 (as restored)

Exhaust: Dual exhaust

Fuel: 87 octane (stock) 93 octane (as restored)

Capacities

Fuel tank (gal/L): 20.0/75.6

Engine oil (qt/L): 5/4.75

Cooling system (qt/L): 22/20.1

Transmission

Type: 4 speed automatic (Hydra Matic Drive)

Gear ratios:

First: 3.82:1

Second: 2.63:1

Third: 1.45:1

Fourth: 1.00:1

Reverse: 4.30:1

Final drive: 3.36:1

Chassis/Suspension

Front: Independent SLA, coil springs, hydraulic tubular shock absorbers and sway bar

Rear: Hotchkiss live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs hydraulic tubular shock absorbers and sway bar

Steering type: Hydraulic, power, bevel gear in rack (Saginaw)

Steering ratio: 21.5:1

Brakes

Type: Bendix, vacuum power-assist 4-wheel drum; with dual master cylinder (stock). Bendix Hydro-boost-assist 4-wheel disk/drum (as restored)

Size (in/mm): Front: 12x2.5, Rear: 12x2.5 (stock)

Front: 12x1 (disc) Rear: 12x2.5 (as restored)

Tires

Wheel size and type: 15x6 inch, stamped steel

Tires: 8.20x15 4-ply bias-ply with tubes

Dimensions — Exterior

Wheelbase (in/mm): 129.0/3076

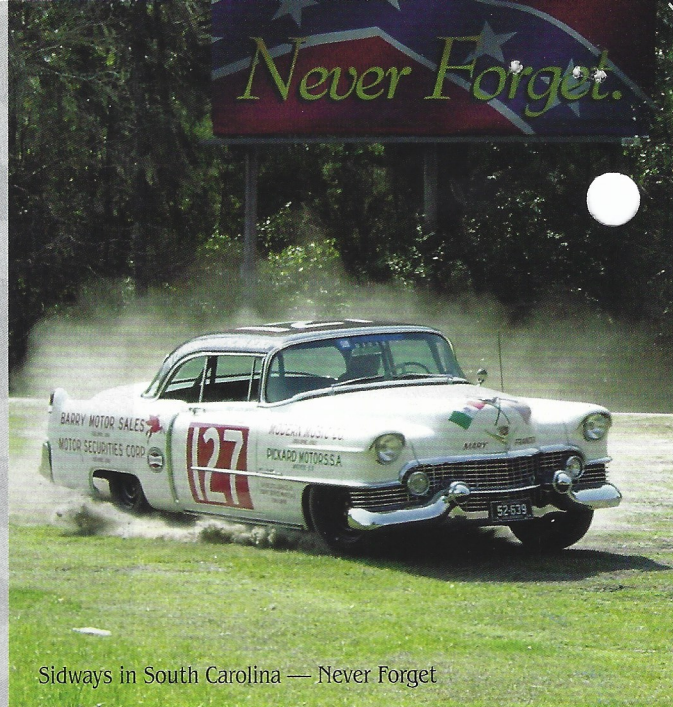
Overall Length (in/mm): 223.2/5664

Overall width (in/mm): 74.0/1880

Overall Height (in/mm): 60.5/1537

Track (in/mm): Front: 60.0/1524; Rear: 63.1/1602

Curb weight (lb/kg): 4340/1882



Sidways in South Carolina — Never Forget

we found it, but the seats and soft trim had to be reupholstered. We kept the project in-house utilizing the Performance Division garage, the pre-production trim shop and the show-car paint team.”

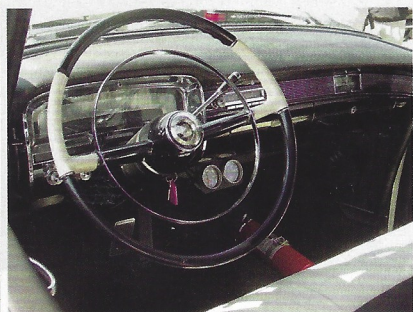
The Drive

I draw the first leg, accompanied by technician Corey, who worked on the car and knows it well. I slide onto the flat bench behind the giant, skinny-rimmed wheel, adjust the four-point harness over my hips and shoulders...and can barely reach the key way up on the dash. My first couple of cranks don't impress the big old V8. Being careful not to flood it, I pedal-pump more gas through its big Holley carb and crank it again. The engine enjoys the fresh shot of fuel and rewards us with a mellow roar. Its mildly muffled, lopey-cammed exhaust note sounds a lot like the rumble of a small-block Chevy.

Leading our modest Cadillac convoy — two presidential black Escalades and a sinister black XLR-V roadster — onto the main two-lane, it is quickly clear that keeping it between the lines of a single lane takes some serious attention. The vintage (recirculating-ball) power steering is as slow and unresponsive as a surly bureaucrat.

I look for a steering rake adjustment to bring the two-foot-across wheel closer to vertical....sorry, not

The instrument panel is as we found it, but the seats and soft trim had to be reupholstered



The original 270 (gross) horsepower 351 cid OHV V8 was replaced by a '62-vintage 375-horsepower 398 V8



there. Once on the freeway, I pick up speed, pass a truck and look for a right-hand mirror to check before maneuvering the big black-on-white Caddie back to the right lane. Sorry...not there. The original temperature gauge is history, but a pair of aftermarket oil pressure and temperature dials are mounted under the dash. The fuel gauge may or may not work, but we won't trust it far. The speedometer needle wobbles around an indicated 60mph when we're pushing 70, Corey says. Later, it would peg at 110-plus and vibrate noisily.

Corey warns that the brakes can be grabby, which we confirm when a soccer-mom minivan cuts into our lane. The wind noise around the poor-fitting side door windows is brutal. Otherwise, herding this 53-year-old Caddie down the southbound super-slab isn't all that bad.

Using the HOV lane through early rush-hour Charlotte, we make good time passing all but the fastest traffic. Some locals notice and, understanding what this sponsor-laden old Caddie represents, flash us smiles and thumbs-up. First time we pit-stop, I hand over to another pilot. We overnight in Columbia, S.C., lunch the next day in un-restored Savannah, Ga., and arrive at the Amelia Island Ritz Carlton, Concours HQ, in time for Friday dinner. At the regal hotel entrance, our massive vintage racer stands in stark contrast to the elegant Rollers, Bentleys, Lamborghinis, Mercedes, BMWs, Jags, and modern Caddies clustered around.

Keith Andrews lost his life in a 1957 practice crash at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, but Blu Plemons still loves to recount their Mexican adventure. The newly created twin of their '54 car (the original was returned to the dealer, stripped of sponsor lettering, sold and forgotten) looked right at home among a good collection '50-'54 La Carrera cars at the magnificent Amelia Island Concours. GM plans to reunite Plemons with it at the fall, 2007 revived La Carrera...and may even enter it in the much tamer modern version of the event.

But there is no truth to the rumor that Junior Johnson will be "doin' stuff" to it.



Since 1976

We have been providing the finest in complete and partial restoration of antique, classic, special interest and muscle cars. Our over three decades of experience will guarantee satisfaction for your next 100-point show car or tour vehicle.

**L & N
OLDE CAR CO.**

9992 Kinsman Road • P.O. Box 378
Newbury, Ohio 44065
(440) 564-7204

www.landnoldecar.com



ORDER NOW AND RECEIVE FREE SHIPPING!
CONTINENTAL U.S. ONLY



PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT AGAINST THE ELEMENTS!




AVAILABLE SIZES: (Indoor and Outdoor Versions)
8' or 12' Motorcycle, 14' or 16' or 18' or 20' or 22' Automotive

Visit us Online or Toll Free:
www.CARCAPSULE.com
Chicago 800.735.2822 Indianapolis 877.735.2822