



# Monterey Car Week on a Budget

All cars raced on the track. It was fun to watch at different points all around the track.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TIM ASHCROFT

If you don't know what Monterey Car Week is all about, then as a car enthusiast, let me enlighten you. This is Mecca, the holy city for all things automotive, the world's premium automotive event staged in the middle week of August, where car enthusiasts from all over the world convene to view, touch, race, and of course buy, all things automotive.

Laguna Seca replica garage with racing cars of the 'teens and 20's.

Originally there were three main events:

## 1. The Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance:

This is sited on an idyllic golf course overlooking Monterey Bay where the best of the best cars are "invited" to appear on the lawn of the 18th hole, opposite the clubhouse, for the opportunity to be judged by the best judges and pronounced car of the year! Admission is prohibitively expensive for us commoners.

**2. The Auctions:** They have grown and now there are so many auction houses offering multimillion-dollar cars, from restorations to barn finds, in a party atmosphere under the lights of massive tents and plenty of alcohol available to help loosen those buyers' wallets.

**3. Laguna Seca:** A phenomenal race track to drive on, with massive elevation changes and home to the famous "Corkscrew" turn. Not only can you







A four-place BMW Isetta, one of the quirky cars at the Smallest Car Show.



Famous race cars in the pits included this IMSA Group 44 Jag XJR-5 from the mid-1980s.

watch historic race cars in many staged races over two weekends of racing, but you can walk the pits, meet the drivers and mechanics, and get up close at the cars.

These three premier events have become bigger and bigger over the years (read more and more expensive as well). Pebble Beach was started in 1950. It attracts many automotive stars of TV and international fame. For example, Jay Leno has hosted the event many times. This event is usually the official end of car week on the Sunday.

Over the years many supporting events specializing in specific marques like Ferrari, and Porsche have started and flourished. These events include phenomenal experiences combining cars, private jets, food, wine, and top musicians. These have been noticed by the automotive industry especially when they include “announcements” of new cars or special cars. Prices for these events have skyrocketed for the experiences and some of these events start at \$500 and go to \$1,000 for admission.

All things in Monterey have also sought to cash in on this popular event including hotels with prices usually at least triple the normal rates!

So, how to have fun and do it on a budget? This was my ninth year attending car week and I have enjoyed it every time. This year was no exception and perhaps one of the very best! To

start with, I make a decision to attend early and book a hotel early. This will save you hundreds of dollars. I usually stay in Monterey or Seaside (just next door) and since we are going to be busy all day, the hotel is just a bed and a shower. We aim for cheap with a “Motel 6” style. However, if you leave it too late, even these low-end hotels, if they still have availability, can cost over \$500.00 per night! Next, do your research, there are so many free events that are wonderful and I love! For example, this year’s itinerary: We started on Wednesday, August 14th by attending “the Smallest Car show” on the streets of Pacific Grove – limited to all cars under 1.600cc’s. The show is free to viewers and this is an excellent start to the main events. The



Gorgeous Lamborghini Miura lined up to drive Pebble Rally. The red car is an Iso Grifo.



A fabulous 1964 Jag E-Type racing coupe first driven to victory by Graham Hill.



There were many 60's muscle cars but this is one of the most famous Shelby Mustang GT350Rs.

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cars are either funny, quirky, junky, gorgeous or a combination of those, but the atmosphere is infectious and intoxicating! Thursday, we arrived at Pebble Beach at 7:30am, in time to park, take a shuttle and see many of the Pebble Beach Concours entries lined up to drive a rally route around the area – offering many viewing opportunities on the route, if you don't make it into Pebble Beach in time. It's completely free and so much fun to see the cars - these rolling works of art - start and actually drive under their own power, be it steam or gasoline - with many owners dressed in period. Hagerty sponsored free coffee and donuts and we mingled with the throng who, like us, had never seen such phenomenal machines. Many of the owners/drivers were happy to discuss their pride and joy! We then made it to Carmel where the streets were closed (took a while to find parking) for two separate car shows – both completely free to view: The “Woman's Car Show” where there was a huge diversity of cars displayed from the mundane, to the phenomenal “one-off” specials. The second show was from the local Ferrari club where members parked and displayed their cars on the

street. Most were more modern Ferraris, but there were examples of most cars from the last 40 years on display! We chatted with several owners that were happy to discuss their beasts!

Friday, we attended an all-Porsche event called “Werks Reunion”. This was a huge event; did I mention it was free! All things Porsche represented by Porsche, PCA, aftermarket companies selling and displaying their wares and several high-end custom Porsche manufacturers displaying one-off cars. Every Porsche model was represented and you were also encouraged to walk the parking lot (it was all on a beautiful golf course) where Porsches were parked by year and model. There is also a similar event staged the day before for all things Mercedes, Audi and BMW called “Legends of the Autobahn”, also free!

Saturday, we went to the Laguna Seca track and spent all day watching the cars race. Yes, we had to pay but it is worth the attendance fee. For Saturday, the final day, we paid \$120. The cars are grouped in classes and really race against each other. This year the track celebrated 50 years of vintage racing. There was a model garage from the 1920s that showed how blacksmiths



became garage mechanics. We saw 1930's cars race on track. My favorite races were the 60's muscle cars, Trans Am style, and the Formula 1 cars from the 60's, 70's and 80's. There were many celebrities racing and walking around the pits. They were as fascinated with the cars as we were. There were displays in the pits of racing cars and some "daily drivers". Just as amazing were the huge truck car-haulers. Laguna is a fantastic event... the cars, the variety of "stuff" to buy, the racing, and the camaraderie. Some of the food is good and they do have an English pub at the top of the hill by the famous "corkscrew" where you can eat, drink and watch the racing.

We didn't attend Pebble Beach this year, but I did attend the "anti-Pebble" show last year. On Saturday they host the Concours d'Lemons where the outrageous, the terrible, the custom and the poor taste cars go to be displayed. It's wonderful and I'm so happy that I attended and guess what – it's also free!

I went to many great restaurants, pubs, a winery and special car themed restaurants. I even had a magical moment at the Inn at Spanish Bay, sitting outside sipping a Martini amongst all car people when we saw whale plumes over the bay. It was truly spectacular. Dining and drinking is a whole other chapter but if you find out where the locals eat, like me, you will have a great watering hole with some fun people to share new experiences and inexpensive!

Don't be put off by the cost. Make the pilgrimage to Car Week. Put it on your calendar, book early and you can do it on a budget. See you there....

Here are some photos from this year. ■



F1 race car driven on this occasion by Zak Brown, CEO of McLaren cars and he won!



A Lotus JPS is one of the most famous F1 race cars in this livery, originally driven by Mario Andretti.



The view of the famous Corkscrew – F1 cars on full song!