

AMERICA'S AUTOMOTIVE *Trust*

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OPENROAD



From Concept to Concours

AAT's Master Craftsman Jason Wenig's mission to bring automotive elegance to South Florida



This past January, the inaugural Motorcar Cavalcade took place in Miami, co-founded by Jason Wenig of The Creative Workshop and Floyd Rag of the Warren Henry Automotive Group. The result was a unique lifestyle event that combined fine classic and modern automobiles, epicurean food and drink, and high fashion wrapped in glorious Florida sunshine. OpenRoad spoke with Jason about the inspiration for the event.

OR: What made you think of creating this event, and taking such a unique approach?

It all started with Warren Zinn, CEO of the Warren-Henry Auto Group. They specialize in high-end vehicles, selling in all of Florida – they deal with remarkable clients and cars. Warren said, “I love Pebble Beach. I love major concours events. I’d like to start a world-class concours here in Miami.”

That began a long conversation. In my position, after 20 years of restoring cars, I get calls almost every single week about the next concours: “Can you bring a car? Can you bring a car?” As I relay these messages to my clients, the response is almost always the same. “I’ve already asked my wife for as many favors as I can this year - to go to as many concours as I can – why would I want to go to *this one*?” We all know the reason we go to Pebble and Amelia, why we go to the big events – because the awards, the prestige, the provenance of being there means a great deal to us.

And so, what I said was, “Warren, if you’re thinking we’re just going to put our flag in the ground and compete with a true, traditional concours – point blank, it’s a failed idea. It’s already saturated. People are coming out with these events every single day, there’s no real reason to believe you can create a similar event when the true pillars of the concours world are well established. But what I believe is dramatically

underserved, and where I feel the energy is flowing to, is what I consider ‘lifestyle car events.’”

Using “The Quail, A Motorsports Gathering” as a perfect example of that, I said, “What’s missing are the women-led events, where it’s not a favor being asked. It’s where the gals want to be there as much as the men do. Where the men can relax and have a great time and share the brotherhood of our love affair of the automobile. Not in a formally judged state, not in a stressful state, but in a social state.”

Another component of this mix is that Warren’s company is primarily based around modern supercars and hypercars. So how do we pay tribute to these cars and their owners? You know, usually, the old cars and the new cars don’t mix very well on the same field.

Again, here was an opportunity to be unique. If we can focus on the *art form of the automobile*, the celebration of what we love about cars, we can put modern cars next to classics and let these owners have an opportunity for the classic car guys to see and appreciate how their burgeoning or fledgling technologies evolved into today’s remarkable advances...and for these classic car guys that may not love moderns, perhaps learn to respect how unbelievable these spaceships on wheels are.

What a wonderful way to get people together and to try to mix a little bit of oil and water to make a



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wonderful vinaigrette!

OR: In order to accomplish this, you came up with an ingenious list of classes based on features, which addressed the challenge of how to combine old cars with new cars.

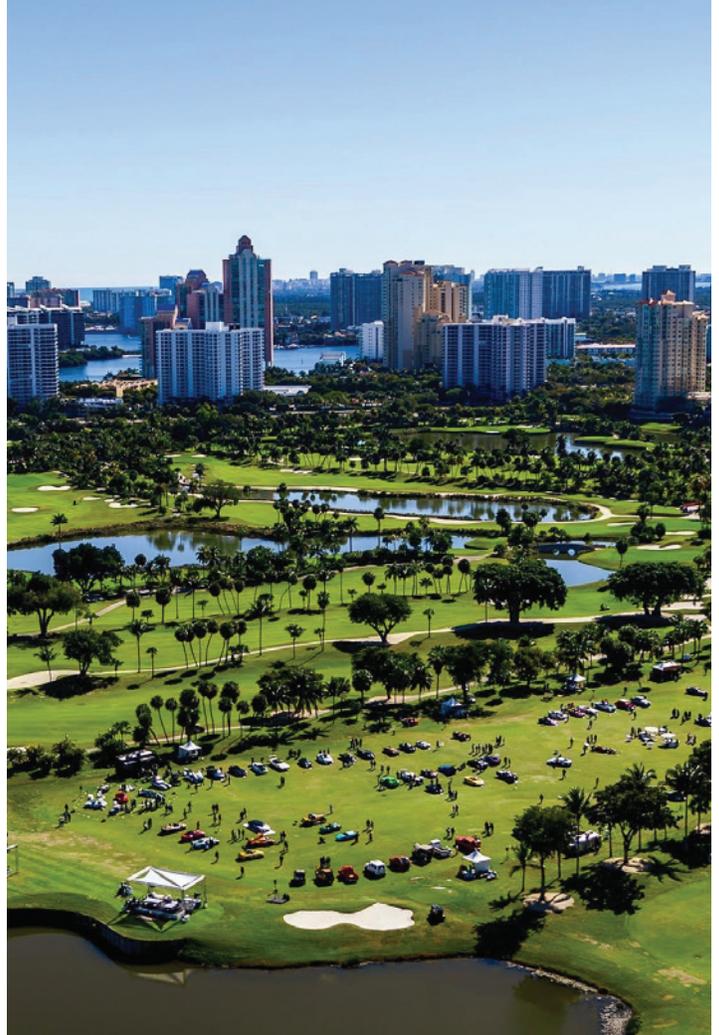
Exactly. How do we break away from traditional categories like Post-War, Italian, Open, Sports Cars, Coachbuilt, Pre-War, etc.? Can we break away from convention, and identify selected attributes of cars that are shared amongst the broadest lineage?

We focused on really dynamic attributes of the automobile, and really interesting elements. It's not necessarily what people think. For instance, normally, if we use the term "Power," which was one of the classes, the first reaction most car people are going to have is "horsepower," as in the most energy that you can put through a car in a given moment. But in this case, "Power" could also be a 5-horsepower Citroen, and the remarkable power-to-weight ratio that someone felt was appropriate back in 1920. But it also encompasses and allows us to incorporate factors like steam power, electric power, hybrids, diesels, etc. So, the eclectic openness of these classes allows us to evaluate very different cars. We can challenge convention, and lower barriers. When we feature classes like Glass, or Doors, or Power, or Engines, we can compare seemingly disparate vehicles.

It's fun, very challenging, and a little irreverent. But it allows us to appreciate the many wonderful variations and peculiarities of cars that enamor us all.

OR: But how in the world do you judge that?

Under normal circumstances a concours would have incredibly knowledgeable historians judging – people who know all about cars. But in some respects, this brings a bit of baggage. That is, the more you know, the more trouble you can get yourself into! For instance, if you've got a perceived "lesser" car, up against a more significant provenanced car, even though the "lesser" car is more beautiful or interesting, for instance,



it's the requirement of a judge to acknowledge the provenance. I understand that.

And so, when you're trying to compare a modern to a classic, how do you compare a car that someone bought new, to someone who spent fifteen or twenty years finding the car, three years restoring it, researching the metallurgy of the chassis to make sure it's authentic, and so on – are these equal attributes to compare? They're not. And so, to try and remove some of this potential "baggage," so to speak, we looked for individuals whose resumes, philosophies, backgrounds and experiences are not necessarily tied to cars, but instead are more aligned with the theoretical and practical attributes of the nature of the classes the cars reside in.

One of our classes was Sound, so if we have a steam car that goes *chugga-chugga hissss*, or a hypercar with a high-pitched *vroom-vroom*, we have judges who are composers and musicians who might not know anything about cars, but obviously in their soul

understand music. They understand sound and how these elements emote and move people. Standing on a concours field, listening to entrants light up their cars one at a time –with no convention, no background and no baggage –how does that car make that person who is deeply engaged emotionally with sound react to those cars at that moment? Pretty incredible, I think!

Not only does that theoretically provide a pure palate from which to judge classes, but when the winner is decided, it's because the judge is just reacting to their own emotional moment. Hopefully, people can respect that subjective opinion and a different approach. Shoulders drop, glasses of champagne get poured, and we move on appreciating and loving automobiles. And that is the theory, concept and execution of how we brought our cars together and judged them in these classes.

OR: How does fashion play a role in the event?

We strive to give Motorcar Cavalcade a glamorous atmosphere. Certainly, if someone wants to dress up in era fashion, I love that. But what I really want is fashion to be pervasive and ingrained in the presentation of us along with our cars.

Our cars are going to be putting on their best, and so should we. And by default, all of us on the field sharing in that moment – and we all know this, when we have an affair that we're going to and we take out our best tuxedo, or best shoes, or best sport jacket or whatever it is – it creates a certain mental state. This is important to me, this is important to the people around me, and

I want it to be there, and in some respect selfishly as human beings, to see and to be seen. Right? And so that is a critical component of this event, and an increasingly rare aspect of public gatherings.

When you go to a Concours d'Elegance, aren't we all a little bit on display? The cars are on display, we're showing off our best, we're all on our best behavior so to speak. I'm a Broadway fan. I love that moment of the curtain opening up, and so I want us all to feel like that. I don't want to put a specific person on display for the fashion, I want us all to be on display, for the fashion element.

OR: Are there other elements of this event that are different and interesting?

What I'm working on now is to add depth to the weekend. To add, wherever we can, more reasons to believe. And so, when we commit to a concours weekend, all of us, the time is dedicated. And the more things we can fill in that time, the richer the weekend becomes, and the more memorable it can be. Sunday (concours) is set, and now we're working on Saturday and potentially even Friday night. This first year, Friday night was a gathering point with a small cocktail hour, and the hospitality suite opened up.

We have the traditional Saturday driving tour – a wonderful drive through Miami, seeing the ocean and the beautiful skyline and all that fun stuff. But it might actually evolve into a rally to the Formula 1 track which is being built here in Miami, and that will give us the ability to put our cars on the track, and we'll be hosted by the F1



committee with a wonderful luncheon at the facility. We are in conversations with the Formula 1 folks now.

Down the road, I am seeing the Motorcar Cavalcade as almost a Davos, Switzerland-style summit meeting of thought leaders and interesting people coming together to rethink and reshape our car culture now and into the future.

OR: You've mentioned that this type of automotive event is "accessible". Please explain.

One of the visions for the event is camaraderie. But the idea of bringing remarkable people together using cars as our catalyst, as our cohesive moment, is the intent. We all know that when we get together on a concours field, we see old friends year-in and year-out,



event after event, but we don't necessarily see others – people who simply love wonderful things, and people who love grandeur. These "other" people may not necessarily feel welcome at a car show. But we want to share that moment with those people. We love showing off our cars! Most of us go to car shows not necessarily to see the same cars over and over –we attend these events to share our love of cars with others.

If we can bring together people who are not necessarily car people or judges, then that openness invites other people into our wonderful world to experience the automobile with us. Now, we're spreading the love! The idea of non-car person judges, mixed with experienced car judges or experts in a certain field mixed up together – it all adds to that energy. It adds to that spread of love.



I use the example of the Kentucky Derby. If you get invited to the Kentucky Derby, you might not know a thing about horses. Dressed up, big hats, everyone's having a great time, and oh yeah, there's horses back there! And you know what? By immersion you walk away with a different appreciation of that environment and passion than if you've never been to the race before. The majesty of these incredible animals, the thunder of the hooves, the roar of the crowd. It's intoxicating.

Well, what about us? What about car people? We've got that, we've got the smell of high-octane fuel, we've got the roar of engines, we've got the energy of an awe-inspiring car earning a just award. We've got all these wonderful things and I want to share that with people. On a very esoteric, a very philosophical level, I want that same phenomenon to happen.

Make plans to attend Motorcar Cavalcade the weekend of January 29th, 2023 and take advantage of exclusive AAT member discount packages. ●

