

LA CARRERA PANAMERICANA – OCTOBER 2008



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The following is reproduced with the kind permission of David Hinton, of Predator Performance in Largo, Florida. David was driving a Jaguar XK 150 with Byron deFoor and sent back dispatches from the field.

Dear All,

For those who don't know, I am in Mexico competing in La Carrera PanAmericana with Byron deFoor, in a 1958 Jaguar XK 150 that we just finished building a month ago at Predator, our home base in Largo, Florida.

La Carrera is a 2000 mile road rally through the heart of Mexico. It started three days ago in Tuxtla, which is approximately 100 miles from Guatemala and we will finish on Thursday afternoon in the border town of Laredo, if all goes well. We have brought four cars down with us in our transporter; Gary Jones has two Mustangs, Jeff McKain has his Mustang and we have the XK.

Update:

After two days of tech and other BS it was time to do a pre-qualifying run on Thursday afternoon to determine the starting order for the 106 cars entered. This was a 6 km run down a road closed to the public with 40 turns. The fastest cars are the Studebaker Hawks followed by the American muscle cars of the mid 60s. Jeff McKain never made the pre-run due to a last minute engine change. Gary qualified 38th, I qualified Byron's Jag 44th and Bob Summerour was 55th with his Mustang. Jeff will have to start at the rear of the field.



Day 1:

The rally is broken up into two stages: Transit and Velocity. Transit is from point A to B in a certain amount of time; you have a 59 second window to make the checkpoint. Show up early or late and you are penalised. The Velocity is closed paved roads as fast as you can go from point A to B. The one with the fastest time gets maximum point and that works down to the slowest time.

The first day went really well for all of us. We all took it easy to get used to the mountain roads and just to be a finisher at the end of the day. I have done the event a couple of times before so kind of had an idea of what to expect. We were all just real pleased to reach the city of Oaxaca in one piece. Out of the 106 starters, I think 20 cars were missing at the end of the first day.

Gary and Jerry Loftin moved up 8 places, Byron and I moved up to 34th (1st in class) and Bob was up a few spots. Fireball McKain went from 102 to 28th!

Day 2:

We started the day with a couple of fast mountain speed sections; I drove the first velocity stage and Byron wanted to drive the second. After about 3 km into the stage we came upon Jeff McKain's heavily damaged Mustang embedded into a wall. It was an horrific sight. Jeff was out of the car and pointing us by. The organizers told us in the drivers meeting that they would only stop the stage if it was a life threatening accident, broken bones, etc. They just keep things going! Jeff is okay as of Sunday night, broken arm, stitches, etc. His son John was taken to hospital and has been released. They still have not located the car though.

Gary Jones and Jerry also had bad luck when a front hub bearing failed on the '65 Mustang. Gary had a spare in the trunk but it didn't fit his brake rotor, so he just left the caliper and rotor off and finished the day on three brakes; poor Jerry had to endure that for the rest of the day.

Bob had a very good day, moving up the ranks into the top 50. He knocked the rear brake line off his Mustang on a rock and had to drive the afternoon on just front brakes.

Byron and I had a trouble-free day apart from the horn quit working. We thought we had moved up the standings quite a bit but when we looked at the result sheet we had dropped down to 74th place. Have not worked that one out yet.



Day 3:

It was our turn with the bad luck today. Byron drove the first stage and said the brakes were pulling to the right. I had a chance to look it over before the velocity stage but could not find anything wrong. Byron wanted me to drive the next couple of stages! Needless to say this is when the wheel fell off the cart. About 6 corners in to the stage, the right front steering broke entering a sharp left-hander. Fortunately, there was a rock wall to stop the car from going down the mountain. Very scary moment. Managed to get the car pieced back together and turned around to find Larry and English Mike at the service center. We fixed the steering but had to run the rest of today with just one shock on the front.

Gary, Jerry and Bob all had trouble-free days and should be moving up the leader board. Find out in the morning.

Day 4:

A good day for everyone finally.

Great speed sections through forest and fast sweeping corners leading to downhill straights.

I did most of the driving today – Byron is getting pretty good at reading the pace notes.

We started a speed run after lunch when we came across a beer delivery truck on the same road; thank goodness he was heading in the same direction as the race. After that section we are on our way down the mountain at normal speed when we meet a donkey in the road.

Everyone did well today in the results.

Bob and Bud moved up to 3rd in class and 19th overall.

Byron and I got a 1st in class and are 24th overall.

Gary and Jerry 7th in class are 28th overall.

Day 5: (OH SHIT DAY!)

Jump in the jag early this morning to head to the start. The steering column bolt brakes as we pull out of the parking lot. (Here's your sign.)

We make it to the first speed section a little late to find a downpour and warnings of heavy fog on the mountain. Byron lets me take the wheel for this one. Very scary is all I can say. Driving down a mountain as fast as you dare in the fog and rain hoping no-one has crashed in front of you.

Next Stage!

Head off on an 8 km stage, pretty flat but very fast. About half way through we see people waving to slow us down before a blind curve, get half way around the curve to find Gary and Jerry sitting on top of a Studebaker. The Studebaker had spun and Gary came around the corner and hit him, rolled over up an earth bank and then rolled down on top of the Studebaker. Very scary crash.



If that's not bad enough, Bob (in the other Mustang) had gone straight on at the same corner up the earth bank, airborne over the spectators, through a fence and stopped 150 feet away. Everyone is okay. I think the co-driver of the Studebaker may have broken her leg.

Byron and I broke on the next stage due to a failed Mallory condenser. Missed the rest of the day. We were just happy to be in one piece.

Day 6: Aguasalintees to Zacatecus

I had been looking forward to this part of the race all week. All the speed sections leading up to Zacatecus were semi-fast through hills instead of mountain switchbacks, which made a nice change. We arrived in the city of Zacatecus mid-afternoon for the service stop. Larry, Mike and Bruno gave the Jaguar XK 150 a quick check over before we headed to the famed La Bufa mountain run.

For those of you who have watched the 1992 Pink Floyd movie about La Carrera PanAmericana, La Bufa is where David Gilmore crashed his C-type Jag and Alain deCadenet drove his Jag into a tree. Byron wanted me to do all the speed sections, as he was not feeling 100%. We had a good run up and down the mountain and were pretty confident that we had moved up the overall standings.

Zacatecus probably throws the best party of the whole La Carrera. Everyone meets at 8 o'clock in front of the hotel, and the organizers hand out little china shot glasses, which hang around your neck. The mariachi band starts playing and you start walking until you come to the first intersection. The Tequila man comes around and fills up your cup and when everyone has done a shot you move on to the next intersection where you do it all over again. As you can imagine there are some pretty messed up people at the end.

The Tequila walk ends up at a 300-year-old bullring that has been converted into a 5 star hotel. This is probably the most beautiful place we visited on the whole trip.

We ended up 2nd in class for the day and moved up to 34th overall.

Day 7: Zacatecus to Nuevo Laredo. (FINAL DAY!)

The first stage was a final run up La Bufa and then a transit section of 150 miles north towards Monterey. The next few speed sections were pretty unique. Basically, they closed a section of straight highway for about 5 miles. You leave the start, get it into top gear as soon as you can and keep your foot on the floor until you cross the finish line. We were cruising at 5200 rpm for about 4 miles, never lifting. I think our top speed on the Jag was around 130 mph.

We finally reached the finish of La Carrera 2008 around 6 pm in Nuevo Laredo. After we crossed the finish line we were directed into a compound to be weighed. We think someone must have protested us for being under weight. After the second time on the scales we met the minimum weight of 3100 lbs. They were also pumping motors and checking carburetors of other competitors.

We ended up finishing 2nd in class and 28th out of 106 starters.

Favorite stories of the week:

Bob and Bud on the third day ran out of gas coming down the mountain on a speed stage, so they coasted to get their finish time. They sat in the car trying to figure out how to get to the gas station some 20 miles away. Up pulls one of the Federale's in his Dodge Charger patrol car and they explain the problem to him. He then backs up his cop car, comes up

behind the Mustang his front bumper to their back bumper and starts to push them down the road. Bob said he pushed them the full distance to the gas station at speeds of 70/80 mph. Unfortunately, Bob was too scared to take his hands off the wheel to shoot any video.

On the last day, I was cruising down the interstate around 100 mph, as you do! The head Federale pulls up behind us doing the same speed. We started filming him behind us thinking how cool it would look. The Chief thought for better effects he would turn on his sirens and lights. Try and picture Byron and I speeding well over 100 mph with the Chief about 5 ft behind us, lights and sirens going – we could barely keep the car on the road we were laughing so hard.

We went and thanked the Chief for a great week at the final nights banquet. He told us to hold on one minute... He then took his badge off his shirt and handed it to Byron.



I would like to thank Byron for choosing me to be his co-driver; Larry; English Mike and Bruno for their fantastic support during the race. Denise and Brooke, friends and family, for all the support during the race back home and everyone at Predator for building a great car.

We are already planning next years trip!

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