

# Full speed ahead

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## Vintage racers, fans returning to Coronado base for celebration of all things fast

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History takes a whuppin' and comes back screaming like a scalded Jaguar, Javelin or Cheetah in what will be the 10th running of vintage racers at the SRT Coronado Speed Festival Oct. 7-8 at North Island Naval Air Station.

This annual October weekend of all things automotive is a global exhibit of four-wheeled history that gets trucked in every year just for San Diegans as a fundraiser for the Navy's Morale, Welfare and Recreation Division.

There will be more noise and more to do this year, including a high-school auto shop competition, consumer test drives of hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles and test drives of high-performance SRT vehicles by Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep. And watch for the crew of "Car Crazy TV," which is expected to be filming a couple of segments for the weekly broadcast on ESPN.



PEGGY PEATTIE / Union-Tribune

At the SRT Coronado Speed Festival, 225 cars will race in eight groups on the 1.6-mile course, laid out on the runways and taxiways of North Island Naval Air Station.

Among the notable changes is the return of DaimlerChrysler as a title sponsor. Two years ago, Chrysler bowed out to put its money into shoring up the business in Detroit. Now, after hard negotiating and hustling by festival organizers, Chrysler is back and showing off its division of Street and Racing Technology, SRT.

The speed fest has become a Pentagon-sanctioned event, so it's likely to have a place on North Island for years to come. In fact, there will be Navy brass in a Group 8 race car.

Two years ago, Adm. John Nathman was the commander of the western region forces based at North Island. Now he's a four-star admiral based in Washington, D.C., but he'll be racing car No. 135, a '68 BMW 2002ti, owned by Rug Cunningham of Cunningham BMW. This won't be a charity race: Nathman has been in training with the BMW motorsports team on the American LeMans Series.

The racing at North Island will be presented by General Racing Limited, which also puts on the Monterey Historic races in August and other vintage race series.

The cars racing here are restored, or re-created, to the specifications and performance standards of their eras, not made new with modern technology. There will be 225 cars racing in eight groups on the 1.6-mile course, laid out on the runways and taxiways of the airfield. It's a coarse course, hard on tires and not friendly to paint, which gets scoured by sand blown onto the course and bits of blacktop and concrete torn loose from the thundering footprints of high-powered cars.

The race groups range from the late '20s, sports cars from the '50s and '60s, the Formula 1 racers from 1964 to 1974 and the loud Detroit (and European) warhorses of the Trans-Am series from the late '60s to early '70s.

It's great stuff to watch the sparrow-crow dogfight of a 692cc (motorcycle-powered) 1959 Berkeley scoot through the turns to chase a 3000cc 1935 Alfa-Romeo T35 down the front straight. I spend more time on my feet with binoculars pressed to my eyes than I do in a stadium seat.

Race-goers are encouraged to walk the garage area and talk with drivers. Most owners and their support families enjoy talking cars and they all have great stories to tell. There also will be guided tours of the garage area.

And while there is more to do this year, admission prices have not gone up.

Here's what else is going on:

### **Classic Car Collection**

Just inside the paddock or garage area will be a significant gathering of European vehicles in the Classic Car Collection, many of which have racing history, such as the 1952 C-Type Jaguar on view. It is one of 53 made and still in original condition with the battle scars of 178 races.

Also making appearances will be Chuck Jordan, vice president of GM design for 29 years. He'll be available to talk cars, design and show some of his sketches at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. both days.

Consider the grouping a "Parade of Progress," says organizer Chuck Spielman, owner of Only Yesterday classic car repair in Sorrento Valley.

"These are cars from the 1930s to the '60s notable for their design influence," he says. There will be about a dozen cars on view, most provided by the new Scottsdale auto museum. Also among the vehicles will be Spielman's Chevrolet Cameo pickup, a design by Jordan.

### **Auto Shop Alley**

Three, possibly four, high schools will have displays in auto Shop Alley highlighting student automotive projects, troubleshooting skills and alternative fuel technologies.

The schools registered include Poway High, San Dieguito Academy and Clairemont High.

“Visitors will see that today's high school automotive programs are not the auto shop classes they may remember from the '60s and '70s,” says Steve Pinning, Regional Occupation Programs senior director at the San Diego County Office of Education.

“The level of sophistication in today's automobiles requires a high level of academic and technical rigor in the course content,” he says. “These courses help give students a head start into a lucrative career as an automotive service technician.”

The displays are sponsored by the San Diego County New Car Dealers Association, with awards provided by NAPA auto parts and others.

The Regional Occupational Programs are a career preparation curriculum for students 16 years of age and older. For more information online: [www.sdcoe.net/rop/](http://www.sdcoe.net/rop/)

### **Fuel-cell vehicle test drives**

Amid the joys and noise of internal-combustion engines will be a display and ride-and-drive of hydrogen-powered (electric) vehicles.

“There's no better place to familiarize the public about hydrogen power and that there are fueling stations coming on line in this area,” organizer Meghan Blake of the California Fuel Cell Partnership says.

Fuel-cell vehicles are basically electric vehicles that run on hydrogen. They make very little noise, but they can be made to go very fast.

Testers must be at least 18 with a valid driver's license, but passengers can be any age. The drive loop, outside the Car Corral area, is about a mile long.

There will be eight test vehicles, including the DaimlerChrysler F-Cell (based on the Mercedes-Benz A-Class), Honda FCX and Nissan Xtrail FCZ, a small SUV.

### **SRT test drives**

SRT welcomes guests with a big tent at the entry that groups its performance vehicles, a competition Viper Coupe and displays, including a history of the Hemi engine.

There will be test drives of most SRT vehicles – no Vipers – for licensed drivers, who will drive with an SRT member in the passenger seat. (See the Oct. 7 Wheels for a road test of the Dodge Ram SRT10 pickup.)

## **Military and vintage flyovers**

Each day at noon there will be FA-18 flyovers by the military and vintage FNJ advanced trainers, which were used to get pilots ready for fighter planes and for landings on carriers.

The trainers are part of the Condor Squadron, based at the Van Nuys airport and headed by Richard Sykes, a Navy ace in World War II. Four planes will make four passes each day.

## **Military display**

What Navy open house wouldn't include a display of hardware with sailors and officers to explain how it works?

A Landing Craft Air Cushion, or LCAC, is expected to be piloted down from Camp Pendleton on Thursday to be part of the display. Also on view will be a Coastal Warfare Harbor patrol craft, with weapons; Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle; a C-40A Clipper (the Navy's version of the Boeing 737); and helicopters.

## **Paddock tours**

Get the racers' take on what's unique, fast or most expensive in the paddock. Racers Gerry Layer and Starr Cooke will lead their free tours of history with humor at 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. both days. Meet at the Cunningham BMW garage area in the southwestern corner of the paddock.

## **Car Club Corral**

This gathering of cars by local and regional club members will be the biggest car show in San Diego history, says organizer Les Werling, an instructor for Viper Days Driving School.

“My phone's been going crazy,” he says. With nearly 1,700 corral passes sent out as of last week, Werling expects up to 2,000 cars to be in the corral. As in past years, Sunday will have the biggest turnout.

Among the cars will be a large group of Ferraris and Lamborghinis. The Porsche club will have about 200 cars in the corral and there will be good participation from the Shelby Club.

“The number of Fords is off the chart,” Werling says. And there also will be the (new) Mini Coopers, Miatas, old Hondas and race cars.

Also on site will be dynamometer testing by the Dyno Shop of Santee. For \$50 cash, the testing records horsepower, torque and air-fuel ratio. The customer is given a printout of results with any concerns noted from the testing.

For most users it's to satisfy curiosity, says Derek Suda of the Dyno Shop. "But on a couple of the cars we ran last year it was because they were in a race and were having a problem."

## **Car Show in the Corral**

In addition to the hundreds of cars in the Corral, there will be a show within the show.

"We want to make this the biggest car show annually because there's enough real estate to do it and enough activities at the fest to draw the cars," says organizer Lt. Shannon Corkill, flag aide to Adm. Len Hering, commander of Navy Region Southwest.

The show is open to every category in the corral with 40 first-and second-place trophies awarded each day. Categories include best '50s, '60s and '70s car; People's Choice; and best motor.

Among the cars on view will be the 7,000 horsepower, nitro-powered Chuck Beal funny car, which will be fired up both days; Corkill's 1970 Plymouth Superbird; a 1964 Dodge Dart 170 with the rare Hyper Pack slant-six engine upgrade; and vintage dragsters.

Members of the Over the Hill Gang and Mopar club will lead the Wounded Warriors caravan to the San Diego Naval Medical Center in Balboa Park each day to transport veterans to and from the speed fest.

## **San Diego motorsports**

The Speed Festival has been around for 10 seasons, but only nine years of racing. It was canceled in 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Last year a few dedicated supporters picked up the tab when there was no title sponsor.

Good times are rolling again for all involved, but what about next year?

The crew who puts on this race knows nothing's certain, even contracts.

But that's not new for San Diego.

"Racing was always looking for a home," writes longtime motorsports writer Johnny McDonald in the preface of his new book, "San Diego Motorsports: 100 Racing Years."

"For 100 years San Diego County motorsports have had a glorious yet bumpy ride, he writes."

Amen, Johnny.