

A Tribute to Phil

by Randy Richardson

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American racing legend Phil Hill passed away yesterday at 10:45 AM in Monterey due to complications from Parkinson's disease. Much has been written about Phil's accomplishments as a race car driver and as an individual, and, especially close to our hearts, his accomplishments racing for Carroll Shelby and Ford Motor Company.

Phil was the first driver Ford hired to race the Ford GT in its inaugural season. He was the best choice they could have had, because he was very communicative and could tell the engineers exactly what needed to be done. Phil left Ford after the 1965 season and signed on with Jim Hall's Chaparral team. His last race was in 1967 in a Chaparral at Brands Hatch. He pulled into the pits after winning the race, peeled off his gloves and crash helmet and quit racing on the spot. He was only 40 years old.

Phil returned to Santa Monica, married Alma, started a car restoration business and fathered three children. That is when I met Phil Hill. I was still in high school in Santa Monica and hanging out at Frank Knox's Union 76 Gas Station on Montana Avenue, somewhere around 20th Street. Phil would come into the station to buy gas and we were in awe, fully understanding that he was the World Champion. A few years later Frank's Union 76 moved to 11th and Montana Avenue and the 76 station became the local hot rodder hang out; everyone who had a fast car, or just wanted one, hung out at Frank's. Later John Beal and Todd Holt bought the station that became known as John's Union. The hot rodder milieu increased substantially because John and Todd built the fastest cars in Santa Monica. John used to date Al Dowd's (Shelby American) daughter and Al would come by John's house with a freshly built Competition 427 Cobra with dealer plates tied to the back to challenge John to a drag race against his 1930 Model A street rod powered by a dual quad tunnel ram equipped Hi-Po 289.

During the 70's Phil would come to John's Union to get assistance from some of the want-to-be hot rodders to help him pick up car parts that were too heavy to lift on his own. Phil would drive up in his VW pick up truck with a bulky ring filled with keys and a long list of single car garages he was renting throughout Santa Monica. His list had the location of specific car parts that he had stored and the corresponding key. I would leap into the back of his pick up and off Phil would drive to pick up car parts. I can still remember how fortunate I was to be able to

help the World Champion. Phil would try to compensate us, but I'm sure it was because he didn't understand how privileged we felt to help him.

Another hot rodder in the making was Bob Mosier, who lived across the street from John Beal on Alta Avenue and 12th Street. Todd Holt installed a Hi-Po 289 in a 1965 Ford Falcon and sold the Falcon to Bob. I owned a 1964 Ford Falcon and Bob and I would drive down to Lion's Drag Strip in Long Beach and bracket race our Falcon's. Phil's first employee in the car restoration business was Bob Mosier. As I recall, Bob didn't know much at all about cars, certainly nothing about restoring classic cars. Phil was Bob's mentor and taught Bob the fine art of antique and classic car restoration. Phil then became a partner in the world-renowned Hill & Vaughn restoration business. I would go over to Phil's house north of Montana Ave and visit with Bob in Phil's nine car garage. I believe Phil still owns the Packard that his mother drove.

Years passed by, careers developed, higher education prevailed, and John's Union 76 was leveled for prosperity. Several years later my path crossed Phil's again, this time at vintage automobile races. I was fortunate to attend the Southern California vintage racing events as a photojournalist and part-time writer for Victory Lane Magazine. I would photograph Phil over the years during these events and have many treasured photographs of Phil both in and out of the driver's seat. A couple of my favorites are Phil and Carroll Shelby together and another with Dan Gurney and Phil Remington standing next to a Ford GT40.

I mailed copies of my photographs to Phil, hoping that he would also appreciate these memoirs. Much to my surprise, the first time I mailed Phil some photographs he called my home to personally thank me for my efforts. The first time Phil called, I was not home, and he told my wife that he would call back when I was available. It was not enough for this amazing person to leave a message recognizing the small thing that I did; he was going to personally take his time to thank me. When I did talk to him on the phone I was astounded. I can recall holding the phone thinking that the World Champion, a consummate sportsman who accomplished so much in his life, was personally thanking me for my photographs. Over the years I would continue to mail photographs I took of Phil during various events, including some photographs I took of his son Derek racing a Saleen S7 at Fontana Raceway, each time Phil would call me to thank me for my photographs.

That has left an everlasting impression on me; this was the Phil Hill that I knew, a kind, personable "California car guy" who represented the sport of auto racing with

dignity and respect throughout the world. Over the next ten years I saw Phil at various car related events around Southern California and Phil was always approachable and gracious.

Over the years Bob Mosier cultivated his own business specializing in ultra-high-end collector cars of the 20's and 30's and continued to assist Phil in maintaining his personal collection of over a dozen antique automobiles. During the last few years Bob would drive Phil on New Years Day during a gathering of unique automobiles to Pepperdine University in Malibu for an informal car rally in the Malibu Hills overlooking the Pacific Ocean. I was witness to the unfortunate decline of Phil's health as my heart went out to him.

I was privileged to attend the Racing Legends of Los Angeles 2008 Cars & Stars Gala on May 8, 2008 at the Petersen Automobile Museum honoring Dan Gurney, Parnelli Jones, Carroll Shelby and Phil Hill. I helped Phil hold the beautiful trophy in his hands that was presented to him. I looked into his eyes and saw a glistening sparkle that reflected his spectacular personality and exceptional accomplishments, that amazing World Champion, who could find the time to call me on the phone to personally thank me for some photographs. I find it hard to articulate the profound influence Phil had on me over the years; it is just too hard to find the words, I am thankful for the good fortune to know him.

On behalf of the entire Los Angeles Shelby American Automobile Club family; our condolences go out to Phil's wife, Alma and all of their family members.

Sincerely,

Randy Richardson