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The 1954 Austin-Healey 100 of John Shirley leads Dean Meiling's '54 Maserati A6G. DAVID L. KATZ zoom

Speed Festival at Coronado
Ten years of vintage racing the hard way—on concrete runways, postwar-style

By DAVID L. KATZ

AutoWeek | Published 05/07/07, 2:11 pm et

Why would vintage-car racers return to a "lousy" track? Why would they claim it's one of the best events in the United States?

For starters, it's in San Diego, which has perpetually great weather and attractions to keep families entertained for days. Then there's the prerace party at an admiral's house, a postrace awards ceremony aboard the newest nuclear aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. Reagan, and the chance to see both historic and brand-new aircraft taking off and landing next to the track.

The Coronado Speed Festival, held the first week in October 2006, was the 10th at North Island Naval Air Station on the island of Coronado. Thanks to vintage-racing impresario Steve Earle, the first race, in 1996, drew top-flight cars. The problem that year was that the airstrip used for the track was very rough, and it shredded tires. But starting in 1997, the Navy made a main jet runway available for the 1.6-mile, 11-turn flat course. With turns marked by orange traffic cones, it resembles an autocross course and can be very tricky—especially for larger, heavier cars. While the lighter, lower cars can thread their way through the cones, bigger cars often can regain the lead on the two long straights.

The festival is part of San Diego's Fleet Week, the country's largest annual tribute to the military. Military kids are brought from the base's infirmary to ride in the pace cars, and traffic and security are handled mostly by the Navy. Profits from the event go to a fund for service men and women. Even four-star admiral John Nathman, commander of U.S. Fleet Forces in Norfolk, Virginia, and instrumental in making this event happen, got into the act in 2006, racing a '68 BMW 2002ti Trans-Am car.

The field of cars, arranged in eight classes, was selected by Earle for authenticity and historical significance. The sound of 225 vintage race cars sent shivers down the spines of 15,000 gearheads.

This year's Coronado Speed Festival is Oct. 6-7.

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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	1	2	3	4

Michigan
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Tue 07/10

>> **Walter P. Chrysler
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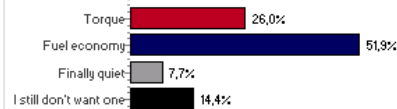
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