

CORONADO EAGLE & JOURNAL

Published with integrity for the people and City of Coronado.

Race At The Base Returns To NASNI Sept. 26 - 27

by Jared Cohen

The Coronado Speed Festival returns to the runways of Naval Air Station North Island (NASNI) Sept. 26 - 27, with historic racing, drifting exhibitions and the only Navy open house on the West Coast.

Last year, fans gathered for historic races with classic cars from the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s. This year there will be historic races and a stock car race group, eight categories in all, filled with the most famous cars of the past 60 years.

"We work really hard," said Jim Phillion, one of the founders of the festival. "It's worthwhile." He said that all the planning has left him a little weary, but it was a good feeling. "Every year we keep growing this thing," Phillion said.

This year will see the return of some old favorites at the festival, as well as some new arrivals.

"We shuffled around the categories of cars," Phillion said. Categories this year will be Formula Ford, Sports Racing Cars, FIA World Manufacture Cars, Historic Trans-Am, Historic Formula Atlantic, Stock Cars,

IMSA GTO and Production Cars.

"We're really excited about the cars we have this year," said Larry Blumberg, one of the founders.

On the modern side of the event will be a drifting exhibition by San Diego racing team Drift Circuit and 30 stock cars, all of them veterans of the NASCAR series, Phillion said. The stock cars will have their own racing category this year.

In addition to the historic races, the speed festival is the only chance the public has to visit NASNI and tour some of the Navy's facilities. On display will be an Landing Craft, Air Cushion (LCAC) hovercraft, which is capable of transporting land vehicles and heavy equipment considerable distances.

Several different types of Navy aircraft were on display last year. This year, tours will be given of two Navy ships, the not-yet-commissioned Makin Island, and the USS Princeton. The Makin Island is scheduled to be commissioned in San Diego in October.

Last year guests also browsed vendors' tents, took a

look at racing parts and enjoyed the food court and beer garden. Overnight RV camping is allowed on the Navy base for this event.

The new producer of the race, the Historic Motor Sports Association (HMSA,) is well-spoken for by Phil Capon, who said that great effort is made to ensure that historic races in HMSA's hands emphasize "preservation and proper use" of the historic cars.

The HMSA has been steward of many historic races since *Speed Fest, Continued on Page 20.*



Pictured is one of the cars in last year's drifting exhibition at the Coronado Speed Festival. The popular event will return with this year's festival, scheduled for Sept. 26 - 27.

Photo courtesy of Strategy Communications

Speed Fest, Continued from Page 1.

its inception in 1977. Strict controls are imposed on the cars, and no modern modifications are allowed aside from seat belts, for safety's sake. "We try and keep them honest," Capon said.

The owners of the cars have restored them "to the condition of the era," he said. For example, limited modifications are allowed in the FIA World Manufacture Car class. Many of the cars that will be at NASNI in September are the exact same

cars that burned up storied racing grounds all over the world like Le Mans, Nürburgring, Daytona and Watkins Glen.

However, in the IMSA GTO class, race fans will see turbocharged engines, aerodynamic aids and fuel injection V-8s. That class has historically been heavily modified, so Capon said those rules are more lenient.

There are eight race categories planned, organized by engine size, brake type and a few

other factors, Capon said. Talent of the individual drivers is also taken into account so that everyone has a good group to race with.

Amy Lewis, spokesperson for the festival, said a pre-race car parade in Coronado has been planned on the Thursday before the weekend of the event (Sept. 24) with a select group of cars from the festival.

Lewis said there will be about 40 cars. "They're going to come down Orange Avenue,

park on Isabella, and the drivers and their crew will be there to visit with residents of Coronado and anybody that wants to come over the bridge," she said. The cars will park in roughly the same area as the city's yearly Motorcars on MainStreet event.

The location doesn't hurt, either. "It's great to be able to put a track on an airbase," Capon said. Set-up takes about a week and he described it as a "big undertaking."

Gina Cunningham Daley, one of the founders of the event, said that the speed festival drivers race at tracks all over the country during the year, but the Coronado festival has special appeal. "By far (Coronado) is definitely the favorite venue," she said. Capon also mentioned there is a spirit of camaraderie among the drivers and vendors who travel to San Diego for the show.

The speed festival is considered the main event of Fleet Week San Diego, a week-long

celebration that includes the Fleet Week Football Classic at Qualcomm Stadium and the All-Enlisted Golf Tournament at Admiral Baker Golf Course in San Diego.

The event is, at its core, a military appreciation event and everyone involved said the festival is intended to show a deep appreciation for members of the Navy.

Philion said that one vendor, Edelbrock, a racing parts company, gave away 5,000 baseball caps to Navy personnel at last year's event. Lewis said the first question that organizers ask the Navy leadership is, "What do the sailors want?"

"The mission of our foundation is to honor our sailors, Marines and coast guardsmen," she said.

V i s i t
www.fleetweeksandiego.org for more information on the speed festival. General admission tickets to the festival are free for active-duty military and their dependents, with ID.