September / October 2017

Pacific Tiger Club Newsletter

Rootes of the Pacific Northwest

President's Corner

BY
ED ERIKSON

Hello again. As we wind down the 2017 driving season I would like say that I've enjoyed my short term of office. The weather for driving our Rootes vehicles couldn't have been better this summer.

Our last meeting happened to be one day prior to the first rainy day in three months. The Whidbey Island meeting was set up by Budd Bennion and Susan Pray, featuring a visit to the workshops of Jim Simpson's Simpson Design studios. Jim was a former designer for Mazda and has since struck out on his own, designing and upgrading various vehicles. We were quite amazed seeing the cars he is working on in different stages of completion. He does just about everything that can be done to a vehicle except the drive train which he farms out.

Our next event is the season-ending AGM to be held in Tacoma at Griot's Garage. The date is Saturday, October 21 from 10 am to 1 pm. Pizza, salads, drinks, and other snacks will be served. There will be door prizes and Dick Sanders' usual "Boxes of Mystery" contest.

Since my partner, Marguerite, and I will become "snowbirds" this fall and winter, I can no longer be a fulltime President of our club. Therefore, a deal has been worked out. I will resume duties as president when I return in May. Budd Bennion will be president and take over the duties from November to April. All other offices will be staffed by the same great people who have served us this past year. We all should be thinking of ideas and things our club can do in the coming year. Budd will offer his home for the January 2018 meeting for the yearly planning session.

A few of the custom and classic cars for sale or awaiting repairs at Simpson Design. Budd Bennion photo

Lastly, Craig Burlingame has offered to lead a "Last Dash Splash" on the Saturday following the AGM. There will be more information on this by email and at the AGM.

See you there!

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Renewing your membership?

Members are asked to send all membership checks and correspondence to:

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Annual Membership Dues: *$32.00 (US funds).*
Make checks payable to: Pacific Tiger Club.

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PTC Club Events

October 21 – Annual General Meeting (AGM) Griot's Garage in Tacoma 10am-1pm.

3333 So. 38th St. [Just a mile west of the 38th St exit from I-5] 253-922-2200.
This is when we celebrate the end of PTC's fiscal year and the events we've taken part in, as well as welcoming new officers for the coming year.

We'll have some nifty door prizes and a return of our game called Boxes of Mystery (known in England as "Feel the Bit."). Tables will also be available for members to display their favorite Tiger, Alpine & Hillman memorabilia.

October 28 – Last Rash Dash Splash Tour.

We'll depart at 11 am from the XXX restaurant in Issaquah.

Tour organizer Craig Burlingame continues to amaze after many "Splashes," finding new roads off the beaten path, the road less traveled, etc as we wind our way around scenic east King County for an hour-and-a-half tour. We've had tremendous luck with the weather on previous tours, but if Mother Nature doesn't cooperate, by all means bring the SUV and leave the Sunbeam snug in the garage. We'll finish the tour around 12:45 at the Black Diamond Bakery.

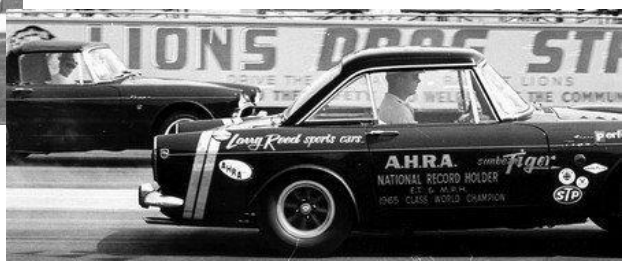
OBSCURE(D) NO LONGER

The Frezza Tiger

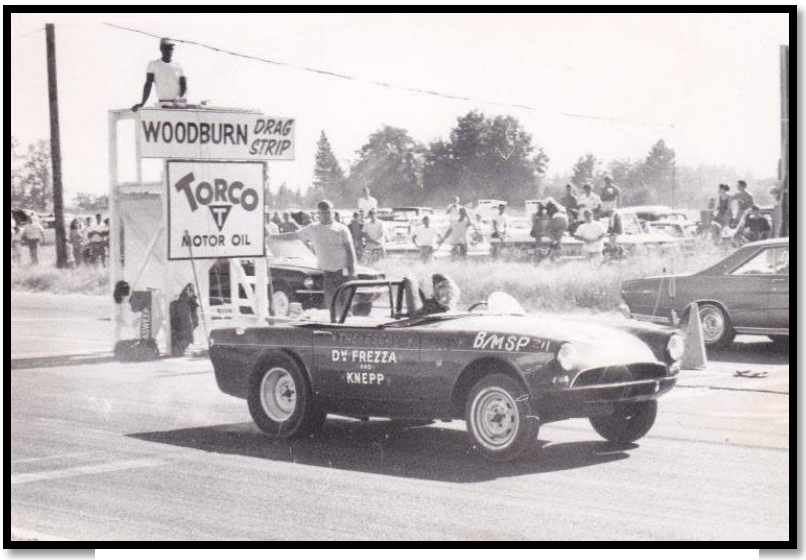
You might remember a few issues ago we ran a 2016 photo of an Idaho owner launching his Tiger at a Spokane drag strip. It was a vivid reminder of the Tiger's heyday, when boy racers literally drove their new Sunbeams straight from the showroom floor to the local race track. Autoslaloms, road racing and drag racing all saw their share of Tiger entrants.

In drag racing, there were two well-known Tigers that held their own against all comers in the mid-1960s, both racing out of California. The **Stan Peterson Tiger** was an NHRA record-holder. In AHRA racing, **Gordon Chittenden** piloted the **"Super Tiger,"** sponsored by Larry Reed Sports Cars, and once turned a top time of 12.95 seconds at 108mph.

Meanwhile, up in our corner of the country, another drag racer competed in virtual obscurity compared to his California rivals. Yet Portland's **Dave Frezza** turned times on par with the Californians and won just as many trophies and division titles in three years of racing. When Frezza finally moved on to other vehicles to drag race, he sold his Tiger. It then largely disappeared from sight for over three decades.



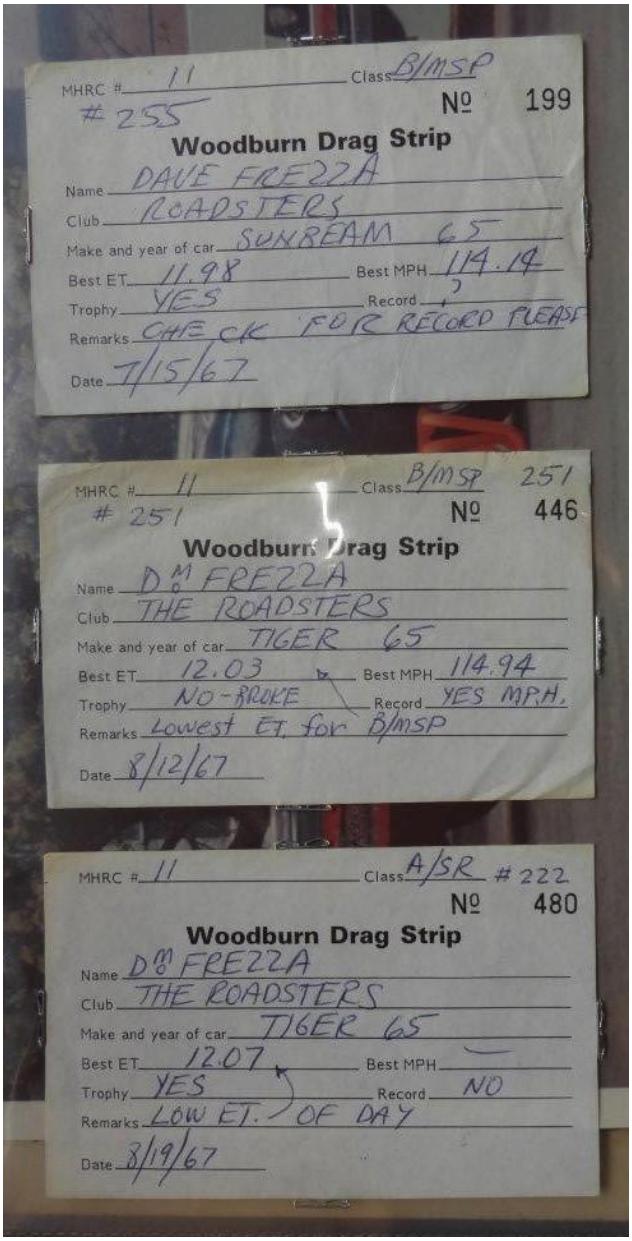
The well-known photo at left appeared in Performance Tuning the Sunbeam Tiger by Gordon Chittenden. Taken at Lions Drag Strip in L.A., in the foreground is the "Super Tiger" driven by Chittenden. His competition in the background was only recently positively identified from the re-cropped original photo (above), appearing in Hemmings, as Dave Frezza. He was then running in I-Stock. Chittenden supported Frezza's racing efforts by locating performance parts for him.



Frezza, about to light 'em up at the Woodburn drag strip.

The Frezza Tiger might have just maintained its mythical status if not for the efforts of **Mark Sorsdahl**. Also a Portland native, Sorsdahl has long been a Tiger enthusiast. He worked at Charley Heitz's Allen Foreign auto wrecking (aka "Charley's" – see July/Aug PTC Newsletter) after high school. While taking time off from college, he spent a winter living in a Thames commercial van parked in the wrecking yard, earning enough to afford his next ski lift ticket.

Mark has extensively researched the history of the Frezza Tiger. He recently spent several



Original timing slips. How's that for documentation?

hours with Dave Frezza, now 75, at his Portland area home, filling in some of the blanks in the history and admiring Frezza's collection of period trophies and other racing memorabilia. Mark's knowledge of this Tiger is encyclopedic and he could probably write a book on the subject, but PTC was lucky enough to pick his brain for a condensed history. Accompanying his narrative are never before seen photos, all from the **Dave Frezza Collection** unless otherwise noted.

Mark tells us how he got involved with Sunbeams and ultimately the Frezza Tiger:

I first visited the wrecking yard of Charley Heitz in 1978 to purchase Tiger parts. I remember seeing the Frezza Tiger inside a shop building at Charley's wrecking yard in about 1980. A couple of years later when I was living and working at the wrecking yard, Charley informed me of the car's championship history and insisted the car would not be sold to anyone as it was destined for a museum. At my request, Dave Frezza was contacted by telephone one night from the wrecking yard office with Charley Heitz, Bill "Smokey" Ramel and myself present. Dave Frezza described his racing efforts with the Tiger and confirmed the championship stories.

Mark was obviously smitten with the former drag racer Tiger from the get-go. He continues with Frezza's racing history:

The Frezza Tiger, 1964 model B9470528, was a race car from new. Dave Frezza began road racing at Delta Park (now called Portland cont.

Frezza waiting in a staging line at the Woodburn, Oregon drag strip. Per Sorsdahl: ***Back in the day, almost all drag cars had nicknames i.e. The Snake, The Mongoose, etc. Frezza's Tiger was no exception. "The Escape Artist" [along top of door] phrase playfully refers to a particular drag car's ability to get away (from the starting line) fast. Brian Knepp was an interested party / friend of Dave Frezza who participated in the drag racing efforts by providing garage space for engine changes, etc.***

International Raceway) in early 1965. He participated in two full SCCA road racing events in B-Production class; practice, qualifying and racing, which was enough to earn his SCCA Regional Competition License.

Due to road racing costs (Frezza sold programs at Portland's Memorial Coliseum to support his hobby), he decided to begin drag racing, competing at Oregon tracks including Woodburn, McMinnville and Madras, also Pacific Raceways in Kent, Washington. By 1965 season-end, Frezza became the I-Stock Champion in NHRA Division 6.

In 1966, Frezza continued to race I-Stock in the northwest and was Champion of the NHRA Division 6 Championship Series. Frezza also competed in the 1966 NHRA Pomona Winter Nationals and an AHRA race at Lions Drag Strip during the same trip.

By 1967, NHRA Division 6 became NHRA Division 7, covering Oregon, Washington, northern California, Idaho, parts of Montana and western Canada. Frezza started the season running I-Stock, later changing to B-Modified Sports class where he was competitive. Later in 1967, Frezza moved to C-Modified class where he became the 1967 NHRA Division 7 Champion. In C-Modified form, the Frezza Tiger utilized a Ford High Performance 289 engine with a Crane camshaft and Weber 48 IDA induction.

In 1968, Frezza acquired a 1967 Shelby GT350 which he drag raced for some years in various classes, running the High Performance 289 with the 48 IDA down-draft Weber carburetors. He later returned to road racing, piloting other cars.

Frezza won many single event and series trophies, plus year-end, track, class, region and division championship awards including twenty-some for his Tiger drag racing efforts.

The Frezza Tiger is the only existing Tiger known to have documented in-period SCCA B-Production and NHRA / AHRA history.

Sorsdahl relates a little of the Tiger's post-racing history:

Dave Frezza sold the car directly to Charley Heitz in July of 1969. Dave Frezza placed an ad in the Oregonian newspaper for the car. Charley Heitz responded and purchased the car for the $2,495 asking price. He does not remember if the car was picked up by Charley Heitz from his Portland home or the site of his automotive business, called Enginewity.
The Frezza Tiger was acquired by me on September 8, 2000.

Since then, Mark has been slowly but surely restoring the Frezza Tiger to its former glory, collecting

Despite a healthy diet of road-racing, followed by a championship year of drag racing, 24-year-old Frezza nicely polished up the Tiger for an appearance at the sponsoring Rootes dealership in Portland, Jim Fisher Motors.

Mark Sorsdahl photo

period parts to complement the Tiger's original racing components. He displayed the partially-restored car at the 2010 Portland All-British Field Meet, with Dave Frezza himself on hand, enjoying the show and providing additional insight on the project. Tom Black's Garage recently finished painting the Tiger in its original Rootes color code #86 Forest Green. Perhaps a debut in 2018?

– by Mark Sorsdahl and Dick Sanders

Dave Frezza poses with his former racer, then in the early stages of restoration, at the 2010 Portland ABFM. Note the customized firewall. Sorsdahl said: "*Frezza was the northwest distributor for Holman Moody and specialized in exotic high performance Ford racing parts. His business was located upstairs, above the Portland shop of world-class race car designer Rolla Vollstedt, who fielded numerous cars for the Indianapolis 500."* When Frezza switched to C-Modified class in 1967, Vollstedt's legendary chief fabricator Harold Sperb hammer-welded the custom firewall to fit a full-Weber setup. Another Frezza Tiger researcher, the late Gary Christensen, often told Sorsdahl the firewall *should* have looked like this from the factory.

Bonus Pic: The side-by-side photo of Chittenden vs. Frezza was taken at Lions Drag Strip in L.A. It was also at this race that Frezza shot what are believed by prominent Tiger historians to be the only known photos of a second entry sponsored by Larry Reed Sports Cars. Super Tiger number two?

Ben Carscallen photo.

Mark Sorsdahl lives in Portland, Oregon and has been a private investigator since 1982. When he's not restoring the Frezza Tiger, he can often be found vintage racing another of his four Tigers at events around the Pacific Northwest.

Veep! Beep!

by Dick Sanders

Roughly 20 years ago, my good friend and long-time PTC member Jim Leach twice got me track time at S.I.R. (since reverted to its original name, Pacific Raceways). The local vintage club, SOVREN, regularly rented the track for playdays. Club members like Jim were allowed to invite select, non-race-licensed friends to participate if they could be counted on not to screw up and jeopardize SOVREN's insurance. And I'm sure it helped pay the track rental. I gladly threw my cash in the pot and strapped on a helmet.

Driving the same yellow Series V Alpine I have today, it was all about cornering. Back then, cars exited the last turn onto the front straight of S.I.R. much earlier, near the drag racers' starting line. I remember running at my limit, a little over six grand at about 95mph, with lots of straightaway left. So going into the high speed turns I had lots of time to gauge my ideal line through the corners and how late I could brake. It was a total kick. By the end of a few 20-minute sessions, I thought I had a good feel for most of the course. My only regret was not having a few more horses at my disposal.

Skip ahead twenty years to a few weekends ago. My two sisters got together late last year and got me a very special present for my 60th birthday: three laps around Pacific Raceways behind the wheel of a Ferrari 458 Italia.

Nine months went by waiting for Xtreme Xperience to bring their show to town. At the drives meeting, consisting of about 75 people of varied experience, we got the low-down. None of the half-dozen various exotic cars were detuned or limited in any way. The ride-along instructors had no brake pedal of their own, just hand signs telling us when to go, where to go, and when to Brake! Brake! Brake! To keep the potentially over-exuberant drivers in check, there were several monetary penalties. Go off the track into the grass? $700! There were cones set up along the edge of the track to identify ideal cornering lines, plus acceleration back-off and braking zones. In autocrossing, I could live with the usual 2-second penalties for hitting a cone. The slight bump-up here to $500 per cone definitely got my attention.

Those few extra horses I had longed for while driving the Alpine? Oh, boy, did I get 'em this time around! The listed specs for the Ferrari 458 are 562 hp, 0-60 in 3.3 seconds.

My general impression on the track was: OMG!! Pressing the throttle, whether from standstill or while at high speed caused the car to simply *launch*. The quick-ratio steering took me whatever direction I wanted to go – NOW.

I wish I could say I was smooth and fast. Compared to the easily maxed-out Alpine which left me with lots of time to plot my best route through the next turn, I found myself through the dogleg Turn 1 and into the hard-braking zone of the wide sweeping-left Turn 2 seemingly before I could *blink*, must less set up for the corner. The instructor pointed several times around the course, urging me to improve my line by getting closer to the marker cones on the edge of the course. Not on *my* dime, pal! I was most comfortable on the tight areas on the back of the course, turns where my Alpine had excelled decades ago and could be roughly duplicated in this fire-breathing monster without danger of pitching it into the weeds.

Just like every amusement park ride I rode on as a kid, it was over much too soon. Big Thank-Yous to my sisters Wendy and Allison.

Gallery of Recent PTC Events

West Seattle Car Show
August 26th
South Seattle
Community College

PTC's Starke Shelby was one of the organizers of this show and the chief inspiration for PTC to take part. Said Starke: "We were aiming for 100 entries. PTC's 8 cars put us five over. Thanks to everyone!"

Below right photo by Bob Bennion. Other photos by Dick Sanders

Tour to Simpson Design on Whidbey Island
September 16th

(Dick Sanders photos)

Jim Simpson, left, facing away, leads us on our informative tour. Who knew that auto designers were such a litigious bunch? Besides Simpson's Mazda-based creations, the shop floor was littered with Japanese and European classics, including Toyota Celicas, a Nissan Skyline, Mazda Cosmo, Alfas, Lancias and others.

Gallery cont.

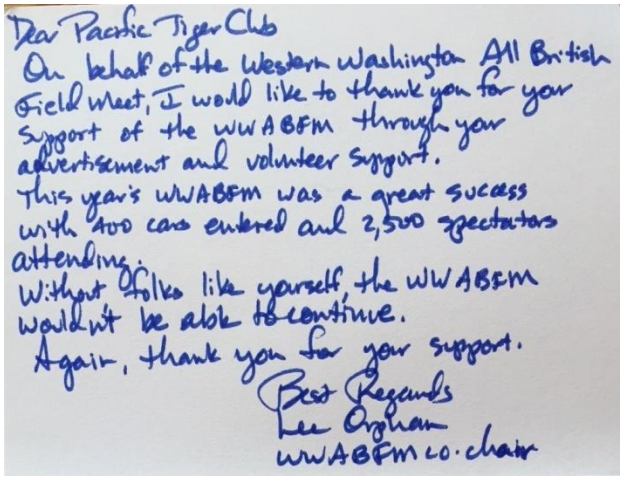
On the lawn next to Simpson Design. A rare sight at far right: two Harrington LeMans.

A RHD Izuzu. Behind it, an early '60s Lancia.

After the tour, a convoy to "Pickles" for some great sandwiches.

And finally, a thank you note to PTC from the organizers of July's All-British Field Meet.

Members look over a U.K-version of the Datsun B210.



Dear Pacific Tiger Club
On behalf of the Western Washington All British Field Meet, I would like to thank you for your support of the WWABFM through your advertisement and volunteer support.
This year's WWABFM was a great success with 400 cars entered and 2,500 spectators attending.
Without folks like yourself, the WWABFM would'nt be able to continue.
Again, thank you for your support.
Best Regards
Lee Orgham
WWABFM co-chair

A LONG-LOST TIGER EMERGES FROM THE FOG . . .

In this 2015 two-page magazine spread from Hot Rod Deluxe, Dave Frezza, driving what became known simply as the Frezza Tiger, rolls through staging at the 1966 Pomona Winter Nationals. See page 3 for the complete history.

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