



AMERICAN MUSCLE ON THE 2014 COPPERSTATE 1000

STRANGERS

in their own land

THERE IS A RUMOR THAT MY COBRA SAW 6,600 RPM IN 4TH GEAR MORE THAN ONCE, BUT I CAN NEITHER CONFIRM NOR DENY THAT



Only 22 of 86 cars entered this year were American, despite better parts availability and service support

I've written a few columns here about optimizing your American car for reliable (and safer) high-speed operation on today's roads. And the best way to enjoy a properly dialed-in performance car is to truly put it to the test on any number of the long-distance vintage car rallies and tours available to us today.

One of my favorites is the Copperstate 1000, which is held every April and, as the name implies, entails 1,000 miles of fantastic driving throughout, and sometimes a bit outside of, Arizona over four days. The CS1000 is open to select pre-1973 cars, and about 75 participate every year. 2014 was the 24th year of the rally, and my 10th consecutive year as a participant.

This year's event saw my wife, Cana, and me back behind the wheel of our 427 Cobra — the third time we've taken this particular car. Now, we're both fair-skinned, so riding in a black-on-black car with no top and an 11.8:1 compression 427 throwing off insane BTUs between (and under) us may make the Cobra seem like a poor choice. But trading a little sun and wind burn to have the ability to literally leap around traffic as needed makes it seem perfectly logical. To one of us. The other, well, she tolerates it because I let her drive as well.

One of the few

Now, here's the statistic that's interesting to me: Just 22 of the 86 cars entered were American. Of those, only 17 were post-1963 cars.

It seems odd considering how capable and tough most mid-1960s to 1972 American cars are, especially the performance variants. At worst you're a set of radial tires and a highway-friendly ring and pinion away from running with any of the European cars, at least in a straight line, and AutoZone typically doesn't stock as many parts to get them back on the road if component failure becomes an issue.

I've always looked at the roster for these types of events to see which cars people enjoy traveling this many miles in. For example, you always see a lot of Mercedes 300SL Roadsters and Gullwings, Ferrari 275 GTBs and Daytonas, Jaguar E-types and Porsches — with good reason. All are capable, comfortable high-speed touring cars.

This year's CS1000 list had a similar phenomenon with American cars. Out of the 17 1963-up cars, there were two 1967 'Vettes, two Panteras, four 1965-67 Shelby GT350s, and three 289 Cobras (okay, eventually four 289 Cobras when somebody's — we'll call him

Chris Andrews, well, because that is his name — fancy European rally car failed to proceed and his Comp Cobra was pressed into service.) Even more telling is that all but one completed the rally, and that was only because of an electronic distributor pickup failure, not oily bits exiting an engine block or something similarly tragic.

2015 Copperstate 1000

When: April 19-22, 2015

Entry fee: \$5,950

Open to: Pre-1973 and older sports, racing, and grand touring cars

More: www.copperstate1000.com

High-speed muscle

One of the more interesting cars on the rally this year was my good friend Bob Rubens' 1969 Charger R/T. Bob has owned his menacing jet-black R/T for 43 years, and after being hounded by me for a large number of those to do a damn rally with one of his old cars, he, predictably, picked the largest one he owns. Prior to the rally, he installed a 2.76:1 gear, 149-mph rated radial competition tires, and packed what appeared to be a second, completely disassembled 1969 Charger in his trunk. The Charger was perfectly content chasing Cobras with its a/c on and God-knows-what horrible music on the 8-track.

Stuart Shoen, of event sponsor U-Haul, decided it would be good to bring his ex-U-Haul-sponsored 1970 Torino Grand National stock car on the rally. Yes, boys and girls, a real-life 1970 NASCAR on public roads. The doors don't operate, there are no mufflers, but it did have the latest in magnetic U-Haul trailer lights stuck to the back of it. For safety's sake, y'all. Oh, and a 3.00:1 rear gear behind a "full house" 427 race motor.

True story: Since the rally ran near the U.S./Mexico border this year, all participants had to stop at a few Border Patrol checkpoints during the event. At one of them another participant rolled up shortly after the U-Haul stock car had passed through. When the Border Patrol officer asked the other driver what kind of "race" we were having, he said, "Oh no, it isn't a race, strictly a 1,000-mile tour through Arizona." The Border Patrol officer quickly replied, "Tour, my ass. A (expletive deleted) NASCAR just rolled through here!"


Now, not to be one-upped by a stock car, Michael Hammer brought his 2005 class-winning La Carrera Panamericana 1954 Lincoln Capri race car, still wearing its full La Carrera livery, and still in search of some mufflers. Hammer showed us all what beautiful four-wheeled drifts a 1954 Lincoln could execute on twisty mountain roads. Of course, boys being boys, one night in the parking lot when the Lincoln was parked



Stuart Shoen's 1970 Torino Grand National stock car

near the stock car, somebody decided there should be a rev-off to see which one was louder. The Torino won.

As for us, our little Cobra did not disappoint. In spite of some very hot weather and very spirited driving, it never missed a beat. In 1,000 miles it used just under one quart of oil, but we did consume over 120 gallons of fuel, 8.5 hats, roughly 80 bottles of drinking water and just under one gallon of SPF100 sunscreen. There is a rumor that it saw 6,600 rpm in 4th gear more than once, but I can neither confirm nor deny that.

So was it worth it? Absolutely! We'll be on the Copperstate 1000 again next April, and I hope after reading this you'll consider getting your pre-1972 American car ready to join us. I don't care if it is a 1940 Ford, a 6-cylinder 1967 Camaro or a RAIV Trans Am, there is no better way to enjoy and bond with your car than a week on the road with 150-plus other folks having just as much fun as you. You won't regret it! 

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