Sunbeam Tiger

B/P Race Car

History

In 1998, Norman Miller, then proprietor of Rootes Group Depot, located a 1966 Tiger ready for restoration. The Tiger was a "roller", but only in the sense that the car could be moved. The car had been stripped and, for almost a decade, had been stored in a garage. Mr. Miller relayed news of the find to a potential buyer, who purchased the Tiger.

The new owner restored the Tiger to a point in time of 1966. As such, it is prepared in a manner consistent with the General Competition Rules (GCR) and Production Car Specification (PCS) of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) for 1966. In 1966, the Sunbeam Tiger was classified by the SCCA as a B Production (B/P) race car. The SCCA B/P class also included Shelby GT-350's and Chevrolet Corvettes (with small block engines only), among others. In later years, as the rules for B/P were relaxed, the Tiger would be reclassified by the SCCA as a C Production (C/P) car.



In 1999, the restoration was complete, and the Tiger was ready to be sorted out at the track. On April 9, 1999, the Tiger ran a test day at Thunderhill. The shifter needed some adjustment, and rain prevented testing the limits of the suspension. However, the car ran well, and was ready to be sorted out.



Sorting out the Tiger at the track. Working until dusk, Dan and Steve adjusted both the front and rear suspension. Buttonwillow Raceway. September 17, 1999. Photo: SRS



Dan and Lori fabricating a screen to protect the radiator and oil cooler from a summer "bug storm" at Thunderhill Park. HMSA Formula Junior Event. June 27, 1999. Photo: SRS

Insects not withstanding, the Tiger was bug free at the HMSA event at Thunderhill.

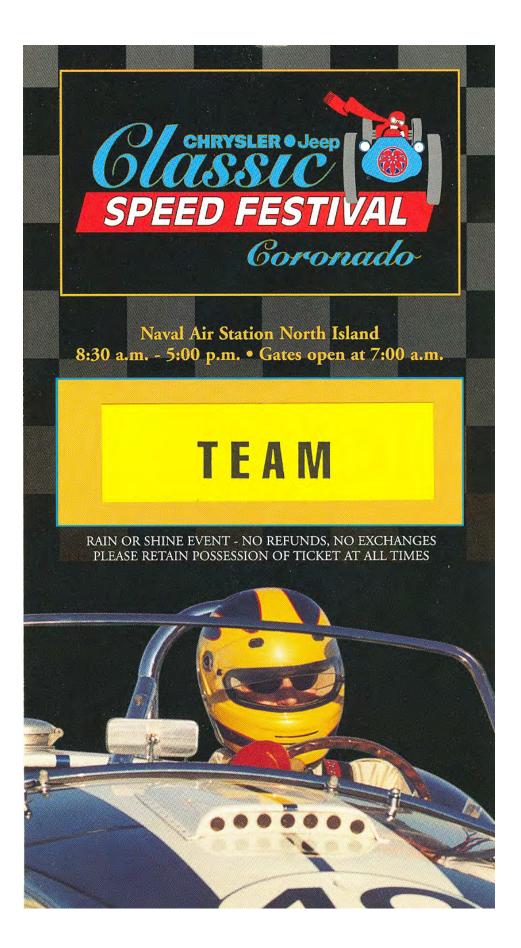


Thunderhill Park Raceway. Willows, CA. Aerial Photo: LHS

The sorting out begins to pay off. By the fall of 1999, the Tiger handled well at the Coronado Speed Festival.



The Tiger at General Racing's Coronado Speed Festival. October 25, 1999. Photo: LHS





The Tiger trying to stay ahead of Lynn Park in his Cobra. HMSA Spring event at Laguna Seca. April 2, 2000. Photo: LHS



The Tiger between turn 4 and turn 5. HMSA Spring Event at Laguna Seca. April 2, 2000. Photo: LHS

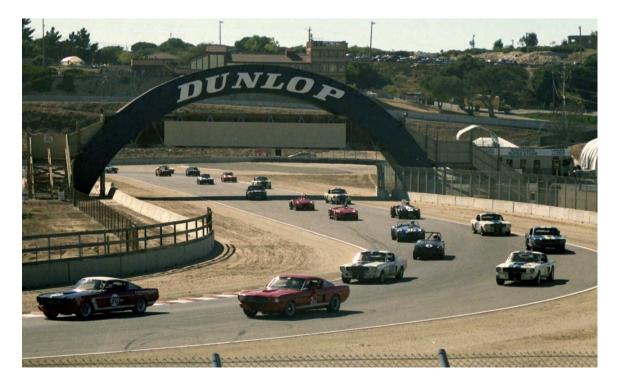
The Tiger continued to improve in 2000. On April 16, 2000, at CSRG event at Thunderhill Raceway, the Tiger earned its first podium finish.



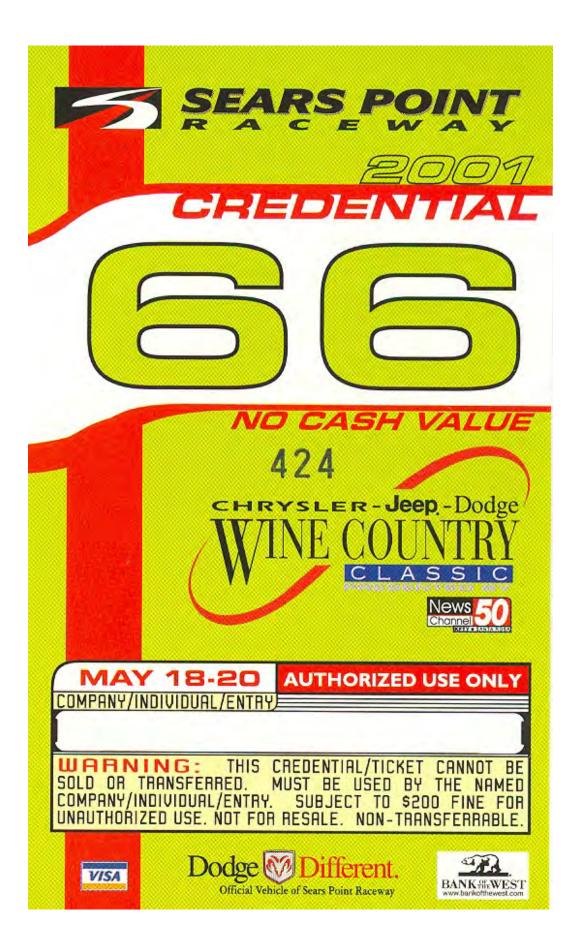
The Tiger coming out of the corkscrew at Laguna Seca. General Racing's Monterey Pre-Historics. August, 13, 2000. Photo: LHS



The Tiger and a Shelby GT 350 approaching turn 9 at Laguna Seca. General Racing's Monterey Pre-Historics. August 13, 2000. Photo: LHS



The B/P field at the start, behind the pace car, in turn four at Laguna Seca. Note Ken Epsman is relaxed about the situation- driving with one arm on the steering wheel, and the other arm out the window opening. General Racing's Monterey Pre-Historics. August 13, 2000. Photo: LHS





Sunbeam Tiger crossing the finish line (which, at that time, was still part of the drag strip, and still named Sears Point) during a practice session at General Racing's Wine Country Classic. Sears Point International Raceway. May 18, 2001. Photo: LHS



The Tiger at Thunderhill Park Raceway. CSRG Spring Fling. April 20, 2002.

The Tiger has been an extraordinarily reliable race car. Since being restored, from 1999 through 2006, the Tiger had been on the track 81 days. In that time, the car has suffered only one DNF. On November 4, 2000, the engine blew a head gasket. The engine had just been freshened and installed. After a couple sessions at Laguna Seca, water leaked from the engine at head gasket. The cause of the leak was below spec torque on the head bolts. The engine builder torqued the head bolts to the spec for Chevrolet engines. (Small block Chevy engines require less torque on head bolts than small block Ford engines.) The engine builder replaced the head gasket and re-torqued the heads.

Shortly thereafter, a new engine was built for the Tiger. Since this engine was installed, the Tiger has finished consistently in the top 10.



The headers fit precisely around the motor mount and next to the Aviaid oil pan. Photo: SRS



Tiger #3 in the paddock at Thunderhill for HMSA's "Return to the Hill". March 7, 2009. Photo: SRS



At speed on the main straight at Thunderhill. March 7, 2009.

In June 2012, the Tiger participated in HMSA's LSR Invitational at Laguna Seca Raceway. The day before the event, a rare June rain storm drenched the track and raised concern among the participants. However, the weather was perfect, cool and clear, for the two-day event. As Cris Vandagriff noted at the driver's meeting, the "Big Bore" field was a test session for the up-coming Monterey Motorsports Reunion (aka the Monterey Historics). The Big Bore field at the LSR event was composed of primarily of those cars accepted to the Historics in August.



A moment of relaxation on pre-grid at Laguna Seca. HMSA's LSR Invitational. June 2012. Photo: LHS.

Entering the track at Laguna requires a sharp U-turn from the pre-grid to the hot pit. Then, after driving through the hot pit, cars merge right on to the track at the Turn One area of main straight.



The hot pit area of Laguna Seca is bordered on the driver's right by a concrete wall with a steel barrier. At Watkins Glen the steel guard rails are painted blue, and have always been so. The blue barriers are a recognizable feature of "The Glen". At Laguna Seca, the new blue paint is reminiscent of ADA blue paint now familiar to everyone who has looked for a place to park. Laguna Seca, June 2012. Photo: LHS.



Entering a braking zone at Laguna Seca. Laguna Seca, June 2012. Photo: LHS. In August 2012, the Tiger participated in the Monterey Motorsports Reunion (the event formerly known as the Monterey Historics). The 2012 Monterey Motorsports Reunion is particularly relevant because the event honors Carroll Shelby. Carroll Shelby designed and built the prototype of the Sunbeam Tiger. During the production run of Tigers, Shelby received a royalty on each Tiger sold. Shelby's shop, in southern California, built the first racing Tiger. In addition, Shelby's shop built the engines for the three Tigers that raced at Le Mans.



The Tiger in the paddock at the 2012 Monterey Motorsport Reunion. Waiting to drive to pre-grid. Photo: LHS

At the Monterey Motorsports Reunion, the Tiger ran in the B/P group composed of 38 entrants. Each car ran in two timed qualifying sessions (on Thursday and Friday) to seed the grid for the races on Saturday. These qualifying sessions produced unexpected disappointing results for the Tiger. Prior to the MMR, a rear sway bar (LAT 40) was installed. The intent of installing the rear anti-roll bar was to eliminate the slight under-steer that characterized the handling of the Tiger. The effort was successful- too successful. The Tiger was wicked loose. It would try to spin on turn in. So, the qualifying sessions were spent tip-toeing around the track trying to maintain traction. The Tiger qualified mid-pack.



Tiger 3 qualifying at the Monterey Motorsports Reunion. 2012. Photo: Gary.

For the race on Saturday morning, the rear sway bar was disconnected. The difference was palpable, instantly palpable. The Tiger had grip! The Tiger moved up to 14th, and confidence was high. The tires went away toward the end of the race, so further advancement would have been folly.

For the afternoon race on Saturday, the Tiger was fitted with new tires, and the rear sway bar remained disconnected. At the drop of the green flag, the Tiger got a good start. Coming out of turn three, the Tiger was in 9th place.



Lap 1, between turn 3 and turn 4, the Tiger is $9^{\rm th}.\,$ Monterey Motorsports Reunion. August 18, 2012. Photo: LHS

The Tiger trailed a blue Corvette, but was quicker in the corners. So, passing attempts were made at corner exits.



The Tiger trying to catch the Vette at the exit of Turn 4. Monterey Motorsports Reunion. August 18, 2012.



The Tiger taking a inside line on turn 8 to set up a pass on the outside of turn 8A.

The Tiger would pass the Vette on exit of Turn 11.



The Tiger now past the Vette into 8th place.

On the lap 4, the Tiger set up the cars running 7th, 6th, and 5th to be passed between turns 4 and 5. Just as the Tiger passed the 7th place car, the engine stumbled and shut off. The fuse to the fuel pump had blown. So, the Tiger retired after working up to 7th place.

Back in the paddock, the fuse to the fuel pump was replaced and the engine fired up instantly.

The 50th Anniversary of the Sunbeam Tiger

Fast forward to 2014, and it is the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Sunbeam Tiger. The staff of SCRAMP and HMSA combined their talents to arrange a celebration of the half century that Tigers have been road racing. A record nine Tigers were invited to participate in the Monterey Motorsports Reunion- all running in the BP group. Astonishingly, eight of the nine Tigers finished the feature race. These eight Tigers put on a good show with Tigers to be seen throughout the grid. In addition to the on-track racing activities, the staff at SCRAMP arranged for the famous aerial photograph, usually reserved for the featured marque, to be taken of the Tigers. The Tigers gathered at the start/finish line of Laguna Seca Raceway. The prototype, built by Shelby, was positioned prominently front-and-center. The Tiger race cars surrounded the prototype.



Tigers gathered for aerial photo on the main straight at Laguna Seca. 2014. Photo: LHS.

All of the invited racing Tigers were grouped together in the paddock. Tigers at vintage races are always fan favorites. With eight Tigers together at the 2014 MMR, the level of interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm reached a new high.



Dan warming up the Tiger in the paddock before a practice session on track. 2014. Photo: LHS.

On the track, the Tigers were well represented throughout the grid, with three Tigers consistently in the top ten. John Morton and Dan ran similar lap times throughout the event and were often seen nose-totail.



John Morton and Dan cresting the hill approaching the cork screw. 2014. Photo: DG



John and Dan showing their skills at the exit of turn 4 at Laguna Seca. 2014.

While Dan and John drove their Tigers to similar lap times, the chassis set ups could not be more different. John Morton's Tiger uses stiff sway bars, front and rear, along with high rate front coil springs to limit (intentionally) body roll. Dan's Tiger uses the stock front sway bar and softer coil springs to encourage body roll. The shock absorbers are adjusted to manage the dynamics. The photo below provides visual testimony to the old adage about skinning cats.



John Morton and Dan putting on a great show for the fans in turn 4 at Laguna Seca. 2014. Photo: LHS.

Throughout the event Dan and Tiger were flawless. The Tiger completed all the laps and never required any repairs. Dan brought the Tiger across the finish line in the feature race in 8th position.



The Tiger back in its cage. 2014. Photo: SRS.