



# The Criterion

NEWSLETTER of the NORTHEAST CHAPTER of the PROFESSIONAL CAR SOCIETY  
[www.geocities.com/MotorCity/Garage/1074](http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/Garage/1074)

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## MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Hopefully everyone had a happy and safe holiday season. Before we all know it, the show season will be starting up and we'll have much to look forward to.

As you all know by now, the Northeast Chapter will be hosting the 32nd Annual PCS International Meet at the Wyndham Hotel in Mount Laurel, N.J. from August 5th through 9th. The meet committee has been working hard to make the event a success, and is planning bonus activities on top of the events already listed in the registration packet. The dash plaques and T-shirt design have also been finished, but there is still much to be done and the meet committee can use help getting various things ready. We'll also need assistance during meet week to make everything run smoothly, so please call or e-mail me if you want to volunteer.

In addition to the International Meet, the Chapter will be hosting its annual car & truck show at Peddlers Village in Lahaska, Pennsylvania for the seventh time on Sunday, May 25th, 2008. Previous Chapter President Bill Marcy is running the event again, which is open to all years and types of vehicles in addition to pro-cars.

For the convenience of our readers, registration forms for both the International Meet and the Lahaska Car Show are found in this issue. If any member knows of any car show or other event coming up that we could participate in, please get in touch with me or Fred Goerlitz so we can get the word out.

I look forward to seeing everyone in Lahaska and at the International Meet.



The PCS delegation to the 2007 Hilton Head Concours in South Carolina included (clockwise from right) Danny Ryder's 1970 Miller-Meteor hearse/ambulance "combination" from Tate, GA; Mike Barruzza's 1977 Superior Cadillac from Bristol, PA; and the 1971 Superior and 1976 Miller-Meteor high-top ambulances shown by Jamie Boles of Southern Pines, N.C.

## PCS TURNS HEADS IN HILTON HEAD

Invited to exhibit ambulances at the Sixth Annual Hilton Head Concours d'Elegance & Motoring Festival, PCS people had an extremely strong incentive to be in South Carolina from November 3rd-4th, 2007. The invite had been arranged by Jamie Christie, a Virginia-based motoring journalist and advisor to the Concours who covered the 2006 PCS International Meet in Kingsport, Tennessee and came away deeply impressed with the PCS' focus on authentic preservation. Hilton Head Concours Chairman Paul L. Doerring Ph.D. called the special "Quest for Speed and Style" display in which the PCS entrants, joined by antique fire trucks and police cruisers, took part "our experimental venue, where we can try things on the public. In the past, we've had the history of stock cars, various sports cars and General Motors concept cars. We call it the 'buffet,' where you get to sample what you like."

Defying the odds, Jamie Boles' 1976 Miller-Meteor Cadillac Lifeliner from Southern Pines, N.C. edged out hundreds of other equally-interesting entrants at the Honey Horn Plantation to represent the Concours on the front page of *The Island Packet's* Sunday edition. This Omaha Orange and Cotillion White high-top, which served the Martinsville and Passaic Township, N.J. rescue squads before passing through the hands of Mike Barruzza, Craig Stewart and M. David Hall, was joined on exhibit by a red-and-white 1971 Superior Cadillac that Boles purchased about a year ago from Matthews, N.C. PCS member Rob Johnson. Mike & Vicky Barruzza drove nearly 800 miles south from Bristol, Pennsylvania in the 1977 Superior high-top used for their wedding ceremony at the 2004 PCS International in Daytona. As the first of only thirty ambulances constructed by Superior on the newly "downsized" Cadillac Commercial Chassis through the 1979 model year, Hilton Head spectators were immediately intrigued by its compact proportions and eventful history, which included the melting of its original roof cap in an intense fire at the Cheesequake Volunteer First Aid Squad HQ in Old Bridge, NJ on the night of August 16th, 1981. Though another ambulance was a total loss in the blaze, the '77 was refurbished by its original sellers at the Wolfington Body Co. in Exton, PA and remained in service until April, 1994.

Though the original invitation mentioned ambulances exclusively, the Hilton Head Car



Vintage fire trucks in the "Quest for Speed and Style" exhibit at the 2007 Hilton Head Concours included this company-owned 1928 American LaFrance 1,000 G.P.M. pumper originally used in Irwin, PA.

Selection Committee was ultimately convinced to consider "combination" coaches of the sort once used by funeral homes to provide ambulance service in many small communities. Joined at Hilton Head by his employee Cynthia Hensley and his parents Fred and Ruby, Danny Ryder responded with a pretty, Astral Blue 1970 Miller-Meteor Cadillac that previously belonged to Chapman's Funeral Home in Jasper, Georgia where he had started working as a teenager in 1979. "Most of the miles on it, I put on it," he explained, elaborating that the odometer showed 55,000 miles then and 136,000 miles now. After being purchased second-hand from its original owners at the Almon Funeral Home of Carrollton, Georgia in 1976 - which had occasionally used it for emergency response including an airliner crash in Dallas, Georgia - Ryder recalled "we ran convalescent ambulance in it until 1992 (and it) has real sentimental value. Most of my family was carried to their funerals in it, and my father used it for follow-up doctor's visits after he broke his leg. I love the fact that the rear A/C and heat still work." He also noted that the car had been treated to only "one paint job around 1996 and got a new windshield in 1985, but the rest is original. My mama did the curtains. She just looked at the old ones and they turned out pretty good."

Since the Hilton Head organizers also sought police vehicles for the exhibit, PCS member Joe DiCorpo came over from Georgia with a 1970 Ford Galaxie 500 sedan he carefully de-trimmed to

Custom level and restored as a black, white and green NYPD radio car from the 68th Precinct. "NYPD used this color scheme from 1939 to 1972," explained the Clarkston, Georgia P.D. lieutenant. "How many police departments had three distinct colors on their cars? Not very many! Luckily, a friend of mine in Texas, Lieutenant Andy Longo, did a '66 NYPD car and he gave me the paint codes." Incredibly, DiCorpo had put more than 4,000 miles on the Ford since finishing the restoration eight months earlier, debuting it at the NYC Police Museum event in lower Manhattan before driving it to the Chicagoland Emergency Vehicle Show. The interior featured a calibrated Borg Warner police speedometer to the left of the glove box, while the carefully-researched roof hardware included fold-up McDermott light bars, a Federal P-220 siren and an urban-specific, Federal 175-H high base Beacon Ray where, Di Corpo noted, "two of the lights have a 10-degree incline versus the 45-degree incline you usually see on a single lens. In New York City, they quickly realized that a 45-degree light would serve no purpose beyond hitting the sixth story in all the apartments." Though they didn't display any cars on the field, former PCS Membership Secretary David Petke (now Editor of the Volunteer Chapter newsletter The Dixie Lifeliner) traveled from Kingsport, Tennessee and M. David Hall of Clinton, N.C. had a nice reunion with the 1976 Lifeliner he sold to Jamie Boles last January.

Aside from an unprecedented - and long-sought - opportunity for the PCS, as Jamie Christie put it, "to be counted in the big picture of car collecting," other inducements of Hilton Head included gloriously cloudless weather - often, an antique biplane was the only thing above the show field - a laid-back, low-key atmosphere (a true rarity at a Concours-level event) and a 450-strong contingent of cheerful, helpful volunteers. "The people here are super nice," asserted Randy Still of Kingsport, Tennessee, who displayed the dark blue 1925 Franklin limousine that earned him Best-in-Show at the 2006 PCS International. "I've never been thanked so much by people for bringing out my car." Master of Ceremonies Ed Lucas was another Hilton Head regular expressing appreciation for the PCS presence, explaining "I have a 2000 Crown Victoria police car of my own and my father and uncle had a funeral home in Port Huron, Michigan."



Hilton Head "Queen of the Concours" Joanna Yarbrough, who appeared in several surfing movies during the 1960s and was married to Max "Jethro" Baer, Jr. of The Beverly Hillbillies, was one of many spectators drawn to Jamie Boles' 1976 Miller-Meteor. "With these heels," she said, "I might just need an ambulance if I fall." Famed for sourcing her elaborate outfits from garage sales and thrift shops, Yarbrough's ensemble cost her just \$6 in total.

Though the special exhibits at the 2008 Hilton Head Concours, taking place October 30th through November 2nd, will be moving on to vintage trucks, the PCS has been invited to enter 1965-and-earlier Cadillac, Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, GMC and Chevrolet pro-cars in the "Unique Look at 100 Years of General Motors" display at the similarly-prestigious Glenmoor Gathering of Significant Automobiles in Canton, Ohio this September 12th-14th. Carved-panel hearses from the pre-World War II era are especially being sought. For further info, call Executive Director David Schultz or his administrative assistant Sue Kirby at (330) 966-3600, e-mail [skirby@glenmoorcc.com](mailto:skirby@glenmoorcc.com), or download an entry application at [www.GlenmoorGathering.com](http://www.GlenmoorGathering.com).



Dave Petke, Mike Barruzza and Danny Ryder stand beside Barruzza's 1977 Superior Cadillac as the PCS promotes serious ambulance collecting at the 2007 Hilton Head Concours.

six-cylinder engine, same as the hearses," he also recalled, adding that company founder "Maurice Wolfe got to thinking of low cost boats around December, 1928, had his prototype in the Miami River by mid-January, and was in the New York boat show by the end of the month."

As might be expected, the Reunion's first order of business was a pilgrimage to the old Clark Street plant where Miller-Meteor production took place from 1961 to 1979. Axis Machine & Tool Co., a three-man operation that manufactures machine parts for auto



**Miller-Meteor 2007 Reunion Co-Chair Tony Karsnia (center) poses outside the Piqua plant with former employees (L-to-R) Gary "Flippo" Phlipot, his father Dorvan Phlipot, Charles Bernardi & Gary Crosby.**

and aerospace applications, now occupies the old showroom and delivery area after moving from the old Gulf station on the corner. Partners Jason Rhoades & Joe Symons (joined on the job by Joe's son Kurt Phelps) may have put only 4,000 of the 500,000 square feet available back to work, but they were quite excited to see the PCS arrive for the official photo shoot. "We had no idea you were coming until you were standing out there," Rhoades declared. "It

blew us away when your hearses pulled up, because we knew the history of the building." Symons, who was born in Piqua in 1969 and sometimes uses the cavernous assembly halls to fly remote-controlled helicopters indoors, added that he "grew up on Downing Street, right around the corner. I remember the hearses being here. The frames used to sit across the street with their tires on them."

After Tom Caserta gathered the group inside a huge, dark room that was entirely empty except for an RV-sized box compactor, he said that John Scarborough, the building's current owner and the man who kindly called the cops to toss us out ASAP, paid just \$125,000 for the property in the 1980s but is seeking a million dollars for it currently. Prior to the plant's closure, the space that the attendees stood in was used for final touchups, with the nearly-complete

"drive-away" cars situated closest to the showroom in the north end of the building. The older brick building to the east, whose interior was visible beyond a plastic-sheeted opening in the wall, was used to finish special body vehicles like flower cars and hearses equipped with 3-way tables and vinyl tops. "The last time I was here was in April, 1972," Walt McCall remembered, and "it was a lot busier than it is today. The final assembly area was humming, literally. Back then, factories had a hum you don't have anymore. I remember cars were in here bumper-to-bumper, and there was not much room to move around." Jeremy Ledford thought it was "just sad" to see the space so empty, "but think of all the equipment that went through this very room."

With so much left to imagination, the detailed reminiscences of former M-M employees were much appreciated during the factory tour. Charles Bernardi, who "started sweeping the floor out of high school in 1960 and became a group leader by the time I finished up in 1979," also felt "sort of sad looking at the front of this plant today. There used to be a flower garden up front that you could see from the street." Even though he swept up lead, fiberglass and asbestos on the job, he added "I'm 65 and still feel pretty good. If they called me tomorrow, I'd come back to work here." Gary "Flippo" Phlipot, a 54-year-old who spent five years in the assembly department, agreed that Miller-Meteor "was a good place to work. You worked hard but you had fun. It wasn't as fast-paced as people work today. Five (cars) a day was the most they'd ever run." His 81-year-old father Dorvan Phlipot, a former Group Leader with 19 years' experience, elaborated that "each car spent one-to-one-and-a-half hours in each station. You worked 7 am to 4 pm with an hour for lunch. I often took a nap in the back of a hearse." During the annual model year changes, however, he added "we worked as much as 18 hours a day." Asked by Tony Karsnia if there were any specific cars that former employees remembered especially-fondly, Bernardi cited a 1968 Cadillac Duplex "that we made for a lady out of New York who had show dogs" she wanted to transport in style. "It had a wood floor with stainless steel over it in the cargo area." Doris McMillan, who spent twenty years in the payroll & personnel department ("that's why I knew so many men"), recalled that her father

Herman West played an important role in building the Divco milk trucks that were also produced under Wayne Works' corporate umbrella. "My dad was small," she explained, "so they had him stand in a mockup of the truck body and welded it all around him."

After a second, half-mile convoy to Meteor Motor Car's original office building on the southeast corner of Roosevelt and Clark Avenues - the property was later taken over by a tool maker that constructed the adjacent factory and produced huge quantities of trench shovels during World War II - Tom Caserta led the Reunion attendees up South Roosevelt Avenue to the tavern opened by his father Charles in 1916, about five years after he emigrated from Messina, Sicily. Now run by his nephews Randy & Tom, the place had a wonderful, old-time small town feel with bargain prices, real wood tables, a 1950 class photo from the



**Followed by six-limousines transporting veteran Miller-Meteor employees, Gene Smith's 1973 Cotner-Bevington Oldsmobile ambulance parades past Piqua, Ohio's main post office.**

During Friday evening's downtown car show, Lorna Swisher of Main Street Piqua brought out giant period photos from the Meteor factory floor and leaned them against the participating PCS vehicles. At the nearby corner of Ash and Main Streets, the front window of Knobby's tobacco shop displayed other vintage images of a huge open house held at the Van Decker Packing Company on April 30th, 1933; the parking field was full with 6,500 people counted in attendance, though it's unrecorded if they ever ate burgers or sausages again! A tent was also erected close by to offer entertainment that included Mills Brothers Music from the Very Large Quartet; the Mountain Dulcimer Society of Dayton; and living history performer Hank Fincken as Thomas Edison, an Ohio native who installed Piqua's first electric lights in 1884.

In addition to the PCS' Miller-Meteors, Saturday's

Bicentennial Parade touted a Model J Duesenberg that once appeared at the Pebble Beach Concours, a 1967 Pontiac convertible used to carry Piqua's Mayor, and a horse-drawn mosque deck hearse (likely built by James Cunningham, Son & Co. of Rochester, N.Y.) belonging to the Melcher-Sowers Funeral Home (the firm could trace its history to 1898, when the Groven undertaking firm set up a



**In addition to the PCS pro-cars, Saturday's bicentennial parade offered this mosque deck horse-drawn hearse belonging to the Melcher-Sowers Funeral Home of Piqua. It may have been built in Rochester, NY by James Cunningham, Son & Co.**

Streets to examine the modern truck-based ambulances currently in service. With a GMC delivered since the Reunion, the newest unit eyed that afternoon was a 2004 Road Rescue Ultramedic mounted on an International chassis with a 20,000-pound Gross Vehicle Weight Rating, which shared garage space with a 1999 McCoy-Miller ambulance on a Freightliner FL50 chassis and three fire trucks powered by Cummins diesel engines. McCoy-Miller patient modules were also mounted on the 1996 Freightliner and a 1990 Ford Econoline 350 housed in the facility's rear annex.

Following the lead of Brady Smith's Clipper, the Reunion was by no means limited to Piqua-built vehicles. Though he couldn't stay for Saturday's parade, 1999-2000 PCS President Tom Hoczyk turned plenty of heads on Friday with his 1953 Eureka Cadillac flower car. Gene Smith also came from Indiana with a white 1973 Cotner-Bevington Oldsmobile high-top ambulance built by Miller-Meteor's sister coachbuilder in Blytheville, Arkansas. En route to Carl Woerner's dealership in Cincinnati, Tim A. Fantin also stopped by briefly with a 1993 Superior Cadillac Sovereign recently retired by the Brown Funeral Home of Dalton, Illinois ("1990s cars can still rust, especially in

combination furniture store in the present Piqua Elks building at the corner of Ash and Wayne Streets). After the last Shriner go-kart and antique farm tractor had passed by, Your Editor headed to Piqua's central fire station at the corner of Water and Downing

