

Spring Thing 2021

By Lee Fowler

I quit writing trip reports a couple years ago after my irreverent sense of humor got a negative reaction from some folks. Also, in regard to Spring Thing, I've exhausted my line of jokes about Jamie Parton being related to Dolly. I kept asking him to put the touch on her (figuratively speaking) for tickets to Dollywood. I still can't believe that two people from Tennessee with the same last name ain't related. But no more trip reports!

Then Suzanne showed me the Smoky Mountain region web site where there was a post about my trip reports. Well, Jamie sure knows how to play to my ego. But I could have easily ignored that. I'm the Supreme Curmudgeon! I have no ego! Then Suzanne found a Facebook post by Matt Fischer that also mentions my Spring Thing trip reports. What can I do? They're making me into a celebrity. I can't disappoint my fans, so I reluctantly agreed to write a trip report for Spring Thing 2021 scheduled for the end of April. Jamie and Rich, you owe me!

It's late February and there's no point in waiting so I'll just go ahead and start writing this trip report. If it doesn't play out how I write it then we'll do some editing. Or maybe I'll try to influence Jamie Parton and Rich McGowen to change the events to match what I write. They are the two who volunteered to organize and run Spring Thing 2021. However, I suspect that two people named Rebekah and Wendy put in just as much or more effort planning the weekend.

So, what is Spring Thing? It's one of several weekend events hosted by other PCA regions. The activities may or may not include a Concours, Autocross, Tours, Rally, Tech Quiz, and of course social gatherings. Winterfest is hosted by the Tennessee Region, usually in February. Spring Thing is in April, and Peachstate's Rennfest is over the Labor Day weekend. There are other weekend events in Zone 3, but these are the three Suzanne and I try to attend every year. All the scheduled activities are optional, so you can choose to participate in all of them or just have a relaxing weekend with PCA folks from all around the Southeast. As of early April, the registration list showed attendees coming from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Maryland, and Ohio.

Matt Fischer first attended Spring Thing in 2016 as a new member of Smoky Mountain region. He jumped right in and was in charge of Spring Thing in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and did a great job of organizing and managing the well-run events. When I asked him about his involvement in Spring Thing 2021 his reply was, *“I just get to sit back and relax this time!”* I was expecting Matt to say, *“And obviously it takes two people to replace me.”*, but he didn't say that.

Suzanne and I had lots of conversations about traveling. At our age the concern about COVID is a high priority. Then we realized that mostly old people like us attend these types of events and have probably been vaccinated. Well, not that old, but close.

We found out that Dave and Ann Schroetter were planning to attend with their new (old) 928. We hadn't decided on which car we would take but we realized that if we took the '65 356 or the '67 912, we would be in the same Concours class as them. Suzanne said, *“Let's take the Carrera,”* *“Are you kidding?”* I replied! We'll take one of the old cars and compete against Dave and Ann. Dave was a naval officer, and I was a naval enlisted man. I can't resist the temptation to best a former naval officer.

Then I found out that Bill and Mary Caldwell from Clearwater, Florida, are attending. Nobody is going to beat them in a Concours, and I certainly don't want to be in the same class as them, which I would be with the Carrera. Dave told me that he didn't expect to win a Concours trophy. Having just had hip replacement, he didn't feel that he could do a proper job of cleaning the 928. I told him to just let Ann do the Concours prep. His response, *“Like I said, no chance for a trophy!”* Ann will help with the cleaning, but she'd rather take walks and look for antique stores. In the end Dave, decided not to concours at the event.

Rich and Nancy Corbeille also plan on attending with Rich's brand new 2021 911 Turbo S. They got really close to winning a Concours trophy at Winterfest last year with their blue Turbo S. I guess that Rich figured they could do less cleaning and have a better chance for a trophy if he acquired a brand-new car. Some people will do anything to win a trophy. We'll see how that goes.

We decided to take the '65 356C, and we signed up for one of the mountain tours. Upon learning this, Dave suggested that I wouldn't be able to make it up the mountain. *“Heck!”* says I. Told Dave that I would just make sure I was first in

line. That way nobody would be able to get to the top of the mountain before me. Most everybody these days orders those sissy automatic transmissions. They can just let their four-hundred-plus horsepower cars decide to stay in a lower gear waiting for me to struggle through that mountainous terrain in our eighty-eight-horsepower machine.

The only problem with taking that car is how to take all our luggage and Concours cleaning gear. For Winterfest and Rennfest we usually take two cars....one for the event plus an equipment car. That also gives us more flexibility if we want to go out for dinner. Since we usually go to these events a day early, it helps to have that extra car. That also works out good because we usually tote some of the Schroetter's stuff since their Boxster Spyder has limited carrying capacity.

But now that they have a 928, they have more room for luggage and equipment. Dave had to explain to Ann that they still had limited carrying capacity. That there is an engine under that front lid and not more trunk space. We can carry some of our stuff on the rear luggage rack but if it rains that becomes a problem. Also, the problem with putting a suitcase on the luggage rack is that I can't see out the back window. The right hand outside mirror can't be seen from the driver's seat so it's non-functional. But that's another story.

We decide that we won't take all of the cleaning gear and we'll try to minimize the amount of clothing we take. We'll need room for Suzanne's craft stuff. She likes to crochet on long trips. I like that too 'cause I don't have to carry on a conversation. It also helps that I can turn off my hearing aid on the right side and pretend that I hear what she's saying. If I grunt occasionally, she actually thinks I'm listening.

Dave suggested that we all meet in Scottsboro and caravan to Johnson City. Then he suggested that I lead the pack to avoid being left behind by a 928 and Turbo S. I told him that I could go just as fast as them. It just takes me a little while to get up to highway speeds. Spring Thing is still two months away and a lot of things can change before we head out to Johnson City, Tennessee.

Mid-April and I haven't started cleaning the car. Still got to get it down off the lift. No sweat! Plenty of time! Then I get an email from Dave Schroetter with a "cc" to Rich Corbeille, pronounced "Cor Bay." "Lee, you organize our caravan to

Johnson City!” My reply was, “You ain’t HOD president no more so you can’t tell me what to do!” Silence! No response!

I’m retired. I don’t need this stress. But I reluctantly started mapping out a travel plan. Interstate most of the way is about five hours driving time. Back roads would be six and a half hours or more. I hate driving on Interstate highways but in this case, we have no choice. With an hour’s time difference, we need to get an early start so as not to arrive too late in Johnson City.

Me leading this caravan has its problems. If either of the other two cars try to call us, we wouldn’t be able to communicate. In the 356, with wind and engine noise it’s absolutely impossible to talk on the telephone. Rich and Nancy will have the only car with a built in Navigation system. At the HOD trip to Fontana Village a couple of years ago we followed Rich from the lodge to the marina, just a mile or so down the road. At least we tried to. He got lost. Not sure we want to follow him all the way to Johnson City, Tennessee. We might wind up in West Virginia. To say that he is “directionally challenged” is an understatement. I reluctantly agreed to be the leader of the pack. But I warned Dave and Rich that those old four-cylinder engines have been known to spew droplets of oil from the tailpipes. I wouldn’t want to be driving behind one.

The plan is set. We’ll meet in Scottsboro at 8:30am on Thursday, the 29th of April. That should get us through Chattanooga after rush hour traffic. We’ll stop at a rest area just north of Knoxville for a picnic lunch and hopefully arrive in Johnson City mid-afternoon.

It’s Friday, April 23, 2021. The car is 99.5 percent Concours ready to drive through a potentially rainy trip to Johnson City. I received an email from Spring Thing organizers. Attached were two documents. One is “*Club Gathering Procedures During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Revision 01.*” The second document is entitled, “*Communicable Disease Exposure and Infection Assumption of Risk, Hold Harmless, Release, Waiver of Liability and Indemnity Agreement.*” The latter to be signed by each participant. I wonder how many PCA lawyers came up with that one. These documents will be required for PCA activities through February 28, 2022. (Editor’s note: PCA has since rescinded this requirement. Effective July 1, 2021, COVID-19 waivers are no longer required for PCA events.)

I guess I've just been around too long. I remember when we joined PCA back in 1966, the club was managed by an Executive Secretary who ran the club out of her home in Alexandria, Virginia. Now it appears to be a major organization that is intent on controlling every facet of local activities. My apologies! The purpose of this document is to report on our participation in Spring Thing. Instead, I have gone off on a tangent like so many sports and entertainment celebrities and spouted off on my opinion. I won't mention it again.

Way too early Thursday morning, April 29th we're cruising up to Scottsboro when I spied way behind us a low wide white car. It had to be the Schroetters! We were all to meet in the Huddle House parking lot. Dave and I pulled into the adjacent gas station to top off the tanks. He said, "I saw Rich go by. He missed the parking lot." Not a good start. But we were able to converge at the same spot in the parking lot.

Ann, Suzanne, and Nancy were off in their own world while us guys debated about who should lead the caravan. I lost! We pulled out just after 8:30am. The first stop would be the rest area just west of Chattanooga. I led the way. Dave then took over the lead position until we reached the rest area just north of Knoxville. The plan was to stop there for a picnic lunch.

As we got ready to depart the rest area Dave turned to Rich and said, "You lead!" Rich said, "Why?" "Because it's your turn!" Dave replied. Rich then wanted to know how to get to the hotel and Dave just told him to enter the address into his navigation system. Rich said, "How do I do that?" I'm standing there thinking, here is a guy who doesn't wear a wristwatch and doesn't own a cell phone, and Dave wants him to lead the final leg of this journey. Dave just said, "Let Nancy do it!"

Back on the highway and we're again cruising at about seventy-five miles per hour. The tachometer is reading about four thousand RPM. I can't help but think about it. Those pistons are getting hit with an explosion in the cylinder about sixteen times a second. Mile after mile. And those little buggers just keep on doing it. That engine doesn't loaf along at highway speeds like those six- or eight-cylinder engines. It works hard for every mile. But like the Energizer Bunny, it keeps going, and going, and going...

We arrived at the Carnegie Hotel okay, except that Rich almost drove past the entrance. And to think that he was an engineer for a major helicopter manufacturer. When I asked him what exactly he did, he said something about aircraft reliability. But he was obviously being modest because it appears that he allowed Igor to put his name on the helicopter.

The little 356 made the trip on three-fourths of a tank of gas. Rich said that his Turbo S did about the same. Dave told us that his 928 only used about a half a tank of gas. Must have a heck of a big gas tank. He was running on two more cylinders than Rich and twice the number of cylinders than the 356 has.

We checked in then drove our car to the fifth floor of the parking garage. It has six floors, with the top floor reserved for the Concours. We were supposed to park on the fourth floor but I mis-read the instructions, or the instructions weren't clear. Since that happened several times during the weekend, Suzanne decided that maybe she should be reading the instructions. She said that they were perfectly understandable.

After unpacking our suitcases, we went down to the lobby to see who else might be showing up a day early. Lo and behold, there was Jamie Parton sitting there watching the front door. Now that's dedication. After all the work planning this event with Rich, Jamie positions himself at the front door to welcome all the participants.

Thursday night it was dinner at the hotel restaurant with the HOD crowd. We had the three ladies at one end of the table and us gentlemen at the other end. Two completely different sets of conversations. Us menfolk mostly talked about how we were going to clean all the bugs splatters off the cars. The ladies probably talked about the same thing except for Ann. I kept hearing her say, "Where's the antique shops?"

Our friends Bill and Mary Caldwell drove up from Clearwater, Florida. They know more about cleaning cars for Concours than anybody. And they're always willing to share their expertise. I said to them, "Bill, I've learned a lot about cleaning cars from you." He replied, "I've learned a lot from you too, Lee. Except nothing good." At least I know I'm consistent. Bill and Mary are always the first to start cleaning their car and the last to leave. Which is why they always win.

So early Friday morning we walk across to the garage to start cleaning the car. Bill and Mary are already there, of course. They're parked next to us. All the cars are covered with pollen. We were concerned about the bug guts on the paint and windshield but didn't expect to have to deal with pollen. There are no trees around this six-level parking garage and we're not even on the top level. So how in the world can all the cars be covered with pollen? Didn't matter since everybody had the same problem as us. We spent until mid-afternoon cleaning the car and checking every little nook and cranny...several times. Suzanne works on the inside and I take care of the outside. Then we swap and check each other's work. You get to the point where there is really nothing else you can do. Plus, you know that you're going to do it again after staging the car the next morning.

Registration start time is 3:00 PM Friday afternoon. That's about the time we were ready to stop cleaning the car, so we walked back to the hotel to see if we could find the registration table. Wasn't hard at all. Just had to find the Four Amigos, masks on and ready to work.



From left to right: John McDermott, club treasurer, Rich McGowen, Jamie Parton, and Bob Baugh, club president. We handed over our signed "we won't sue PCA" forms but what I wanted to know was, where's the "goodie" bags? Right down the hall was the answer I got. Sure 'nuff, Wendy and Rebekah were waiting with smiling faces.



Their job was to sign us up for tours and give out the goodie bags. So, who would you rather deal with? Four masked men or two smiling ladies?

Friday night was the Welcome Reception. Jamie and Rich...or more likely Rebekah and Wendy had the hotel lay out a sumptuous array of light **hors d'oeuvres**, or what I would call "finger food." It was a great evening of seeing friends that we haven't seen in well over a year. Spring Thing and Rennfest were cancelled last year and Winterfest this year, so the last event we attended was Winterfest in February of 2020.

Saturday morning the schedule called for the Concours participants to take their cars to the sixth floor of the garage. I got up way too early 'cause I read that we were supposed to position our cars between 7:00 and 7:30. Should have asked Suzanne to read the darn instructions. We got out there and doggone if the cars weren't covered in pollen again. I looked around and there were still no trees anywhere near the garage. This was perplexing and I set out to find out why. Truthfully, I didn't set out to do anything.

While talking to one of the local Smoky Mountain participants he explained it to me. There is a railroad track not too far behind the garage. Trains go by numerous times during the day. There are lines of tall trees along both sides of the track. Every time a train goes by it blows the pollen off the trees which then floats over to the garage and lands on the cars. So, Jamie and Rich, next year please put curtains on the back side of the garage.

There were so many cars up there they spilled over onto the ramp coming up to the sixth level. Many were there just for show. My understanding is that there were a lot of first-time Concours entries and that was good. These regional events are more low-key than Parade so there's a lot less stress. Even though we have the "serious" and "not-so-serious" participants, everybody has a chance for a trophy. And as with every Concours we enter, we always learn something new. Everybody is willing to share their knowledge. There's more socializing going on during the Concours than anything else. There were a lot of very nice cars on display and a wide variety of models. Our own HOD member, Dave Schroetter, was one of the judges. Smoky Mountain region hosted its first Spring Thing in 1974 and it continues to be a premier event for PCA members and one of our favorite Concours competitions.

Saturday afternoon was set aside for touring. Several tours had been laid out and participants could choose which tour they wanted to go on. Instead of going on one of the tours, Suzanne and I decided to explore the inner layer of our eyelids. The Schroetters and Corbeilles both went on tours and said that they were great. The roads were fun and the scenery fantastic. I told them that I spent the afternoon confirming that my eyelids will actually keep the light out.

Saturday evening is banquet and awards time. Another feast was laid out but before we could eat, we were subjected to the usual speeches. Well, they put a lot of work into this event, so they have a right to talk about it. And rightfully so. They all should be recognized for their efforts. The awards went well for the HOD group. Suzanne and I took First in Class with a score of 139.6 out of a possible 140. We also were awarded the Peoples' Choice trophy, with 24 of the 80 Peoples' Choice ballots going to the 356. Much thanks to all of those who voted for our car. Rich and Nancy won First in Class, also with a score of 139.6. It was only their third Concours. I guess getting that new car paid off. Allan Cox was awarded the Judges' Choice trophy and it was well deserved. Here is Nancy Frye saying to Jeff, "Why did you sell that car to the Fowlers?"



Sunday is Autocross Day, but I can't report on that since we elected to head for home. The Corbeilles cut out early. We departed about 8:45 Eastern Time. The Schroetters 928 was still in the garage when we left. They all elected to return via the Interstate highway route. Suzanne and I decided to travel home on back roads and avoid most of the Interstate travel.

But before we got out of Johnson City, we had to make one stop. Our favorite restaurant for breakfast when traveling is Bob Evans. We saw one as we were heading into Johnson City and there was no way we were going to leave without eating there. I had my usual “Homestead Breakfast.” They even gave me a discount for serving in the military over fifty years ago.



Our route home took us through several towns which lengthened the trip, but it also took us through some outstanding mountain scenery and fun roads. We did have to get onto I75 at Cleveland, Tennessee. We were on it less than a mile when we encountered “Interstate Maniacs.” Four of them, with two on motorcycles. Speeding and weaving in and out of traffic. And as usual, the traffic in Chattanooga on I24 eastbound was backed up for miles and miles. Westbound traffic was routed off the Interstate onto a secondary road. Road construction in Chattanooga is a year-round activity.

We pulled into the garage almost nine hours after we left the hotel. About twice the time as driving on the Interstate. However, I was a lot less stressed. The gas gauge was pointing to “reserve.” Used a full tank of gas on the return trip.



Can't emphasize how much fun the weekend was thanks to Jamie, Rich, and the rest of the Smoky Mountain team. Jamie is all smiles since the weekend is almost over and Spring Thing has been a roaring success.

Our only regrets! Never enough time to talk to people we only occasionally see. We'll pick up where we left off at Rennfest in September and Spring Thing next year.