

Spring Thing 2022

By Lee Fowler

Prelude

Don't know who's in charge of Smoky Mountain Region's (SMR) Spring Thing this year. Haven't given it much thought. Suzanne and I are registered, as well as Dave and Ann Schroetter. I'm not aware of any other Heart O' Dixie (HOD) members planning to attend. It's a great weekend event attended by PCAers from all over the Southeast. But it's not big like the PCA Parade. Much more laid back and relaxing.

Last year SMR revealed their new region patch and offered them for sale. We bought one. Why? Haven't a clue! Seemed like the right thing to do. I decided to try and laser etch the patch onto wood. Turned out alright so I made several and offered them to SMR. Fast forward to this year and they plan to auction the plaques at the banquet and use the proceeds for charity. SMR member Mike Ishmael occasionally visits the Huntsville area on business and stopped by the house last year to pick up the plaques. Recently I received an email from Mike saying that he was going to be in Huntsville again and would like for him and Susannah to stop by for a visit.

I readily agreed and said that we could visit a while then go to dinner. I had no idea that it would result in a "Black" day for me. We had a great visit and decided to eat dinner at what is probably the best Mexican restaurant in Huntsville. Mike offered to treat us to dinner, and I forcefully declined. Dutch treat! We had an enjoyable dinner. The food and company were great. Then Mike and I started debating who would pick up the tab. We got the waiter involved in this discussion and I politely informed him that I personally know the owners of the restaurant. Which I do! That, in my mind ended the discussion. Sure enough, the waiter brought checks to us both. I gave him my debit card as did Mike. He brought both back and when I looked at mine there was no place for me to add a tip and sign. The waiter had charged the entire meal to Mike.

Now let me explain something. I've never lost a confrontation. In addition to being a Supreme Curmudgeon (SC) I have deeply seated "devious" DNA. I am totally unscrupulous and devoid of mercy when it comes to besting a competitor. Apparently, Mike had left the table to, what I thought, visit the restroom. Not so!

He left to convince the waiter to give him the check for our meals. That was absolutely a brilliant, though devious maneuver. And I would admire it except that he pulled it on me. To make matters even worse, when we got home Suzanne said, “You have met your match!” Baloney! I just was caught off guard because I was convinced that Mike was an upstanding individual with high moral values. I never anticipated that he would operate down on my level.

Usually, I name the SMR team at the end of my trip report since I don't know who's in charge until we get there. This year I asked ahead of time and was given the names of the event chairs.

We're anticipating another outstanding SMR event since it's again being coordinated by the same folks as last year. Those being Jamie Parton and Rich McGowan. Well, they're the two whose names appear as “co-chairs” for the event. There's another twosome who, in my estimation do most of the work. They're Rebekah Williams and Wendy McGowan, two ladies closely associated with the aforementioned gentlemen.

They also have a great team of people in charge of the individual events. Vic Rola is heading up the Concours. He's been at that game for a long time and I'm sure he will have a well-organized event. He's judged our car so many times I don't need to describe it to the judges. But since he's in charge maybe he won't be judging. Which is good because he always finds something that Suzanne missed.

BTW, the parking deck where the Concours is held is close to a railroad track. When a train goes by it blows the pollen off the trees, which then settles on the cars. I complained about that last year and Jamie Parton promised to have a curtain stretched across the entire rear of the parking deck. But there was no curtain. I suggested that he get his cousin Dolly to spring for the funds. He gave me that “I'm tired of that joke, Lee! You need to come up with something else.” He's right! Okay Jamie. No more Dolly Parton jokes. He didn't actually say that, but I read the look on his face.

Rick and Janis Berry will be putting on the Autocross. They do that every year. Rick and Janis own and operate Eurotech in Knoxville. In addition to providing auto service Rick seems to always be available to help stranded PCAers. Just the other day an HOD member told me about his car breaking down on a “Dragon” tour and Rick was there to get him back on the road. I called him once when the

912 had problems in rural Tennessee a long way from home. He helped talk me through the diagnostics. They always donate something for the goodie bag and this year it was a superb medal token with the SMR patch. It will go on our trophy shelf. Thanks Rick and Janis.

New for this year will be a Gimmick Rally. SMR has tapped Matt and Teresa Fischer for this event. We're certainly looking forward to what kind of "gimmicks" they're going to come up with.

Leo Nascimento is setting up a tour, with Carl Justice assisting. They're with the Wilderness Trail Region. Putting on an event like Spring Thing is a major effort so it's nice to get help from a neighboring region.

Getting Ready

Last year we took the 356C so this year it's the 912's turn. It's no stranger to Spring Thing. It's attended many times before. Since it's only March as of this writing I'll just spend the next month or so "thinking" about cleaning it for the Concours.

Okay, fast forward to May. Still thinking about getting ready for Spring Thing. Now it's May 13th. A week to go before heading for Johnson City so I figure I might as well get the cases for the cleaning stuff out of the garage attic. That's step one. Step two is deciding what to take to clean the car once we get there. I could have undertaken step two, but my philosophy is "Don't do today what you can put off to tomorrow!"

Looking forward to seeing friends that we only see about once a year. Steve and Dottie Kidd are coming up from Florida. They were in Potomac region the same time that we were, but our paths never crossed. Bill and Mary Caldwell will also be traveling up from Florida. Suzanne and I have learned from them a ton of tricks for prepping a car for concours. They never hesitate to share their knowledge. I once told Bill how much I appreciated his advice. Bill said, "I've learned a lot from you also. But nothing good!" What can you expect from a lawyer? Looking forward to seeing them again.

As of this writing Spring Thing registrations (cars) by state are:

Alabama – 2

Florida - 4

Georgia – 2
North Carolina – 3
Ohio - 1
Tennessee – 35
Virginia - 4

These numbers are from the registration web site and are the number of cars registered and not the actual number of attendees.

Three days left before departure and I'm thinking that I ought to gather the cleaning supplies that we want to take with us and clean the car. Usually, we take two bags of cleaning stuff but this time I stuffed it all into one. The 912 trunk is long and shallow so not good for suitcases. And I don't want to put the roof rack on. That's just one more thing for the Concours judges to find fault with.

Speaking of Concours judges, Dave Schroetter volunteered to be a judge. Not good! We usually argue about who is going to take the lead driving up to Johnson City. I hate leading but usually agree to swap off. I'm not going to argue with Dave about leading the caravan this time. Think about it! He might be assigned to judge our car. That means I've got to be nice to Dave at least until noon Saturday. But that problem is for another day. The cleaning supplies are packed so now I can work on the car. Nah! I got two more days before we leave. I can do this tomorrow!

Well, tomorrow never came. It was easy to convince myself that we had plenty of time on Friday to do a thorough cleaning.

Travel To Johnson City

It's a one-hour drive to Scottsboro where we plan to meet up with the Schroetters. We get there early and top off the gas tank. When they pulled into the parking lot the first thing Dave says is, "I brought a tow strap so I could help you keep up with us." A lightning quick nasty response came to mind but then the mental disk brakes locked up, followed by a mental reminder. "You got to be nice to him. He's a Concours judge." Sigh!

Ninety percent of the trip to Johnson City is via Interstate. Lots of traffic and idiots driving way too fast and cutting in and out makes for tense traveling. But we stopped at two rest areas to loosen up the aging joints. Before setting off, Dave

informed me that he usually drives five miles per hour over the posted speed limit. For a good portion of the trip the 912 speedometer was registering north of eighty. There's a cable that is attached on one end to the transmission and on the other end to the speedometer. The speed is indicated by this little pointy thing that points to some numbers on a circular instrument. No digital readout!

I figured that I should not challenge Dave on his speed in their electronically encumbered Boxster Spyder. So instead, I checked the speedometer readings against the mileage markers on the Interstate. The 912 speedometer is less than a tenth off from the posted mileages. Not bad for a fifty-five-year-old car.

Normally, in our travels I plug in a memory stick with music and listen to that. Suzanne crochets to occupy her time. Our number three son is the "Mouth of the South", and I don't have to say where he gets it from. But with her crocheting and me listening to Hank Williams, we don't have to talk. But the older cars don't have USB ports to plug in the memory stick. Problem solved! Roll down the windows. With the wind and engine noise a conversation is impossible.

Thankfully, we survived the Interstate chaos and pulled into the Carnegie Hotel at about 3:30 PM. Plenty of time to relax, enjoy an afternoon glass of wine and excellent dinner. The hard part will start tomorrow. Suzanne said, rewrite that sentence. "The "fun" part will start tomorrow." Whatever!

Spring Thing 2022

Friday morning came early. Way too early, so we didn't get out to the garage until about ten. The Schroetters were already at the wash station washing the Boxster. After they finished, we brought the 912 down from the garage and washed off the travel grime and bug guts. Then the cleaning began. This is good for the car. There are lots of nooks and crannies in a car that gather dirt and grime that we never pay attention to. "Wash and Wax" is the norm. But with that approach the rubber trim and parts of the vinyl/leather get ignored. A "deep cleaning" for a Concours helps to keep the car in excellent condition. We only spent about four hours getting the car ready. If the judges find something we missed well, "so be it!" I'll blame it on Suzanne.

Speaking of missed things. Objects appear in our car from out of nowhere. A while back at Winterfest a red Christmas light bulb was found in the back of the Carrera. At another event Concours judge Rose Cox found a sliver of wood under

the passenger seat. I laminated it and sent it back to her. Didn't belong to me. And this time Suzanne found a medal luggage zipper tag under the passenger seat. It was bent as if the seat mechanism had run over it. We never carry anything in the 912 so how that thing got under the seat is a mystery. Maybe that's a good reason to continue entering Concours events. Never know what we'll find in the car.

About 2:15 PM we called it quits with the cleaning. The car is perfect, especially the exterior since that was my responsibility. After a few minutes relaxing we headed down to the Lower Lobby where Jamie and Rich along with John McDermott had set up registration. We got our packet and then moved on to the room where Becky, Wendy and Linda McDermott handed out the "goodie" bags. More time to relax before the 6:00 PM social. We agreed to meet the Schroetters at the bar at five for a cocktail. Earlier, whilst we were busy cleaning the cars, Ann offered to walk to a nearby food place to pick up lunch. Usually, she looks for an antique store to get out of having to clean the car. But I thought it was a nice gesture. Later, when we met for drinks I said, "Y'all bought lunch so I'll buy the drinks!" Then it hit me! The drinks are going to cost a lot more than those hot dogs and salad Ann brought back. I'll chalk that up to being exhausted from the several hours of cleaning the car. Supreme Curmudgeons don't voluntarily offer more than given. If possible, even less.

The Friday night social is where the attendees finally come together. Food and drink and socializing with folks we only see once a year. I told somebody that when we were in Potomac region back in the late sixties and early seventies, we only interfaced with Potomac members. Spring Thing allows us to develop friendships with PCA folks from all over the Southeast. This Supreme Curmudgeon doesn't interact well with others, but his "social butterfly" wife makes friends with everybody. Some of it rubs off.

I have several shirts that display messages about me. The first day I wore my "Supreme Curmudgeon" shirt. People ask Suzanne, "How can you be with such a grouchy old man?" She tells them, "Opposites attract!" The next day saw my "To Save Time, Assume I'm Always Right!" That cuts down the comments about whether or not I know what I'm doing when cleaning the car. For the banquet I wore my "Mr. Wonderful" shirt. Again, people asked Suzanne about it. Her

response was, “He’s delusional but he’s harmless.” She only lets me wear it every now and then. So, I was asked, “Do you feel dominated by Suzanne?” She replied, “No, he doesn’t.”

I’ve decided there are two ways of arguing with a woman. Neither one works. Suzanne and I have a secret to making our fifty-six-year marriage last. Two times a week we go to a nice restaurant to have a little wine and good food. She goes Tuesdays, I go Fridays.

Concours

Staging the cars for the Concours was scheduled for 7:30 AM Saturday. That’s way too early! Got up, looked in the mirror and thought, “This can’t be accurate!” I’m at the time of my life when even my birthday suit needs pressing. So why do I get out of the bed that early? My bladder mostly.

Had to move the car from Level 2 in the parking garage to the very top. Those not entering the Concours were encouraged to park their cars on the ramp coming up. That way everybody’s car could be on display. Dave and Ann jumped the gun and moved their car at 7:00. I ain’t getting up that early on a Saturday.

We had an hour and a half to go over the car again. I concentrated on the exterior while Suzanne worked on the interior. Even though I had spent a lot of time Friday on the wheels and tires I gave them another once over. Judges like to run their fingers over the tire sidewall and especially the joint between the wheel and rubber. You’re hoping they don’t get a dark smudge on their fingers. To make sure that didn’t happen I focused on getting the wheels/tires clean. Two judges are assigned to inspect the car. One for the interior and one for the exterior. Plus, there is a “Timer” to let the judges know when to start and when to stop. Each car was allocated four minutes for judging.

About 8:50 we decided that we had done enough. Time to sit back and wait for the judges. Dave Schroetter came over to see us before the judging started. Naturally, I thought he was coming over to wish us well. After all, that’s what friends do. No, he smiled and said, “I’m judging your car!” Well, I’m darn glad I decided to be nice to him over the last several days. Not that I would try to influence Dave, but I did enter into the conversation the fact that I had bought the drinks the previous afternoon.

When our time came Dave announced that he would judge the exterior and Dan Engel the interior. They didn't have a Timer, so they asked me to do it. Sure! I set the countdown clock on my iPhone to four minutes, clicked "start", and said "Go!" I announced the passing of each minute. It occurred to me that I could tell them the times earlier than the clock and that would cut down the amount of time they had to find something wrong. But I noticed Dave occasionally glancing at his watch, so I decided to play it straight.

We were fairly confident that there was not much for the judges to find. But after they finished Dave motioned for me to come over to where he was standing near the right front wheel. He showed me a large dirt smudge on the chrome wheel. Drat! I would have bet Suzanne's next retirement check that I did a thorough job of cleaning those wheels.

Tour/Rally

Saturday afternoon was set aside for the Gimmick Rally and Guided tour. We had signed up for the tour, just as we did last year. But we did the same thing as we did last year. We went back to our room and took a nap. So, I can't report on those two events. Comments from some who attended those two events said that they both were very enjoyable.

Banquet

The banquet has food, of course. But the main reason for attending is the door prizes and trophies. Smoky Mountain Region went all out with the door prizes. Lots of good stuff! We won an O'Reilly's five-gallon bucket filled with car cleaning goods. Dave and Ann won a \$75 gift certificate from a local Knoxville establishment. Dave gave it to a local SMR member.

Rod Johnson, our PCA Zone 3 representative stepped in to conduct the charity auction. He shouldn't give up his day job, but we can't complain about how much money he brought in. Don't have the actual figure but by my calculation the charity auction brought in over \$6,000. SMR has two children's charities that they donate to, so the auction is always a fitting end to Spring Thing.

Last year we returned to Huntsville via secondary roads. It took us nine hours, but we saw some great scenery. I was asked why I just didn't take the Interstate back. I said that it was too dangerous with today's drivers. "So, you don't like being in

dangerous situations?” I replied, “Sure! I do it all the time when I disagree with Suzanne.”

One of the reasons we wanted to return via Interstate is because there is a Bob Evans restaurant on I26 west of Johnson City. There ain't no Bob Evans restaurants in the whole state of Alabama. They got them in Florida, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, and everywhere in the eastern U.S. except Alabama. Best breakfast anywhere. So, it's worth risking driving with the Interstate maniacs to eat at Bob Evans.

In conclusion, Heart O' Dixie region had a pretty good showing. Both the Fowlers and Schroetters brought home “first in class” trophies. But the conclusion didn't have a totally happy ending. Coming into Chattanooga, traffic was slowed due to road construction. Naturally, without air conditioning it got a little warm in the car. I drove the whole trip with my window down so Suzanne rolled down hers to get a little more air in the car. That caused a lot of turbulence in the back of the car which blew my \$90 Tilly hat right out the window. I wanted to pull over and have her retrieve it from the middle of I75 but she refused.

Jamie and Rich will be turning over the reins for Spring Thing 2023. They will be a tough act to follow. We've attended Spring Thing every year since 2010 and each one has been a successful event. The activities are fun and...well, I have to use the PCA slogan. “It's the people!” That's why we attend. We'll be there again next year.