



Euroclassic--visit to the Swedish dudes!

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Hi guys,

It's been awhile since my last road trip report. I spent the better part of the winter flying for the Air Force Reserve in an attempt to rebuild my bank account, which took a pretty serious shelling during last year's prolonged European adventures. In this, I was only moderately successful, but I wasn't about to let that stop me from playing cars again this year!

My season actually began with a drive in my 427 Cobra replica to the annual Pantera Owners Club of America Las Vegas Fun Rally back in April. After months of preparation, the car was in tip-top shape as I left the house, but then slowly fell apart like a soup sandwich during the course of the weekend, and I only made it home after replacing a busted pushrod and rocker arm. So, with the Cobra now looking very tired and decrepit and demanding attention to the engine, clutch, exhaust, windshield, electrical system, and steering systems, I decided that the prudent thing to do would be to turn my back on it and go on another vacation!

And so it was that after flying a quick trip with the Air Force (gotta earn some bread to try to pay for all of that), I returned home to do laundry and answer the mail, then packed my bags and headed for England.

Some of you may recall my description of the Euroclassic, the classic car rally that I ran last year in my GT-350 clone with my British friend, George Gordon-Smith. The route took us through France, Switzerland, Monaco and ended up in Italy, and featured spectacular driving on deserted roads combined with tours of auto museums and the opportunity to drive on various racetracks.

This year's Euroclassic was moved from the fall to the spring, as the organizers are also responsible for staging the British Formula 1 Grand Prix and the British round of the World Rally Championship, and thus their plate gets pretty full later in the season.

Their credentials should be obvious to see, and one of the principal reasons I like to participate in this event is the extreme professionalism of the entire thing. From a comprehensive route book that even a child could follow, to the excellent accommodations, and the supreme talent of the dozen or so mechanics who follow along and try to fix any cars that happen to have issues, the event is truly a marvel to behold, much less participate in.

This year's route covered uncharted territory, aiming for Denmark and Sweden. Now, those might not seem like obvious locations for driving enthusiasts, but with Volvo Cars coming on board as an event sponsor, a trip to Sweden was more or less preordained.

Anyway, I flew to London a few days early, both to ensure that I would in fact make it there in time for the event's start (as I fly standby, and thus can't be assured of a seat on a given flight), and also to enable me to help my Mustang's host with his ongoing Pantera restoration.

Upon my arrival early in the morning, I was picked up by Geoff in his daily driver Bentley (they are surprisingly cheap over there, secondhand, and deliver the most bang for the buck of any car on the road), and soon found myself back at his house and hard at work. My first job was to install the reconditioned brake calipers--except that new caliper mounting bolts had been



forgotten and the old ones were buried in a giant pile of trash hardware. Eventually it was all sorted out, but it took substantially longer than we'd planned.

On the second day, John Woods was wiring up the dash and Geoff was working on the MSD ignition system. He broke one of the studs off his coil, so he had to rob a coil from his Rover V-8 powered MG drophead. By late in the evening, we were ready for the big moment.

Turn the key, pump the gas and VAROOM followed immediately by expensive grinding noises and SMOKE coming from the bellhousing.

Hmm. That doesn't sound right.

We shut everything down, scratched our heads and pondered the situation. Clearly, something was broken, but what?

We gave up in disgust and called it a night. The next morning, John and I took it upon ourselves to yank the transmission back out to see what was wrong. Expecting carnage, instead we found everything looking pristine.

George Gordon-Smith had arrived by now, and it was time to leave, so I left John to the project and we headed down the road (it was later discovered that the starter was defective or incorrect, and wasn't disengaging after the engine started. Thankfully the ring gear was unhurt but the starter took a bit of a beating). Throughout the event, George and I would take turns driving and navigating, and also share the track-driving duties.

George and I drove in a very light rain to the coastal town of Harwich, which I was pointedly informed is not pronounced "Harwich" as you might imagine, but instead is called "Harrich" for reasons that were never adequately explained.

It is there that we were scheduled for an overnight ferry which would deposit us in Esberg, Denmark. When we arrived, the dock was already filled with classic cars of every description--fellow participants all. We reacquainted ourselves with several people we remembered from last year's event, and one new team as well. Imagine my surprise as I pulled into the lot and looked in my mirror and found an Ivy Green '67 Mustang fastback behind me! This more-or-less Bullit clone was being driven by a pair of British gents, and was equipped with a moderately pumped up 289, five-speed, and Total Control power rack and pinion steering.

Once loaded on the ferry, we enjoyed a light dinner and then retired to our inboard cabin. The berths were exquisitely comfortable, and we slept soundly for almost 12 hours!

We were awakened by a loud announcement over the ship's PA system that Breakfast Was Served. After an absolutely dynamite all-you-can-eat buffet, we waddled down to the car and soon found ourselves on the Danish motorway, destined for the starting location, the town of Århus.

Annoyingly, both Denmark and Sweden have ridiculous traffic laws that mandate the full-time use of headlights, we had to constantly remind ourselves to turn the damn things on, and then turn them off when we stopped so we didn't drain the battery.

Along the way, I discovered that my horn button, which had failed on me on last year's rally but had been patched together in Geneva by Thierry Monney, had conked out again. Upon arrival and check-in at Århus, we were subjected



to a moderate technical inspection, consisting of a test of turn signals, lights, and the horn. All went well until I was asked to sound the horn; as spontaneously but as if on cue, both George and I leaned our heads out the window and shouted "BEEP!"

The inspectors laughed, and then waved us on.

I noted that the clutch pedal was high and had zero free play, this despite the fact that I had adjusted it not that long ago. I steered my way to the RAC mechanics, and asked if they'd take a look at it. Within five minutes, the car was in the air, the adjuster adjusted, and I once again had free play at the clutch. Gotta love those guys.

By now, there were over 80 cars gathered in a gravel lot in front of the town's cultural center and museum. Oldest and arguably most significant was a 1928 Bentley race car, of the type which won Le Mans that year. This particular car had been sent to Argentina from new where it enjoyed a successful race history during the pre-war years, and had eventually found its way back to the UK. The car broke on the first day, suffering a starter failure, but they were able to push-start it, and as it had a 100-liter fuel tank, they could drive it all day without shutting it off! Replacement starter bits were flown over and the car was fixed on the third day.

We were treated to a welcome reception and a greeting by a city councilman, then took a Volvo shuttle to our hotel, which was a beautiful creation dating from the early 1800s and located near the city center.

After getting situated, we strolled the cobblestone streets, and sat down at a quiet outdoor cafe in a small square, basking in the sunlight and watching the world go by. I was especially taken by the scenery, in the form of delectable Eurobabes who seemed to travel in packs. Tall, Nordic with blond hair and blue eyes, they seemed to be everywhere. As this is a college town, they are also of an age where flaws are few and far between.

I could get used to this place. :>)

We decided to forego a heavy meal and eventually decided on a bowl of chili, which seems strangely out of place in a small city in Denmark, but it appeared on the menu of virtually every restaurant and bar. I wasn't expecting much and was therefore greatly surprised to discover some of the best chili I'd ever had in my life!

A post-dinner stroll took us to a more populated part of the city, teeming with nightlife, with large outdoor cafes filled with people. We spotted several of our fellow rally participants and settled down to join them for a beer or three.

We were well-entertained by a father-and-son team, a pair of Irishmen from Dublin driving a Jensen CV8 (called a Chinese Eyes Jensen, go ahead, do a Google search on it). Vincent and Rolan O'Reilly had us in stitches all night long. Commenting on the high number of Eurobabes and the seemingly favorable babe-to-guy ratio among the people in the area, Vincent remarked in his thick Lucky Charms brogue, "I tink dey must drown fifty percent of d'boys at birt!"

The next morning, we were away on the first official day of the rally. Our first stop was Legoland, a stop which drew some healthy skepticism among some participants but which was actually greatly enjoyed. Snacks and drinks were waiting for us in our private parking lot, and complimentary admission to the



park allowed us to ride the kiddie roller coaster (we couldn't resist) as well as eyeball the rather comprehensive Lego exhibits.

This was followed by a very rural drive of some 82 miles, over some roads small enough to not warrant any kind of center line; the destination was Egeskov Slott, a castle in the Danish countryside. Besides featuring beautiful grounds and a stately castle complete with moat, the owner of the castle had a rather large collection of cars, trucks and airplanes on display in his private museum.

We spent a good part of the afternoon there, then pressed on via a short 20-mile run to Odense, site of the home of Hans Christian Anderson and featuring a museum of his works. We didn't arrive until after it had closed and missed it not one bit. After getting our route card stamped and sucking down a quick drink, we continued on to our overnight stop at Nyborg Strand, where all the participants were able to share the same hotel (the only time this was true on the whole rally). The traditional end-of-event dinner was thus held on the first night instead of the last, and we enjoyed great conversation with a table full of Irishmen, including a couple who were returning to the event in their Ferrari 330 GTS, having elected to leave the Ferrari Daytona and Maserati Ghibli at home. His daily driver is a Ferrari 456. Must be nice! :>)

The weather had been decent during the day, but during dinner the heavens opened in a hellacious torrent. This was a pattern to be repeated several times during the course of the event.

In the morning the skies were still rather gloomy and we encountered some light drizzle as we crossed a massive suspension bridge to Denmark's main island. The skies cleared as we approached the Koreteknik Institut, a small private race track used for historic and club racing as well as driver training.

The track was open for our use, and after a quick rest, we set out to feel our way around. The track was short enough that it could be circulated in about one minute. It feels decidedly odd bashing around a race track in a car that is loaded to the absolute maximum with a trunk and passenger floorboards filled with luggage, computers, cameras, tools, and a comprehensive array of (heavy) spare parts, while not wearing any helmets, and with no restrictions or rules to speak of. The organizers rely on the instinct for self-preservation as well as traditional British civility to avoid any problems, and in this they are universally successful.

Among the participating cars, by far the fastest one was a genuine 1973 Kremer Porsche 911 RSR. This particular car was the 'mule' given to Kremer to develop their RSR Group 4 race cars, which subsequently proved to dominate in European racing. While boasting no racing history itself, it was nonetheless wicked fast!

Although in terms of speed, and talent, I am most assuredly in the bottom half among the people I normally open-track with in the Nor-Cal Shelby Club, I found that in this particular group I was rather near the top of the heap. I was keen to see how I would do against the '67 Mustang, and was quite chuffed when we took to the track at the same time and I simply drove away from him and left him for dead, eventually catching and passing him again. Whee!

The only drama of the day was when a fellow named Bill spun his big-block 1969 Corvette convertible in a big way coming onto the front straight on his first lap, and wound up in the grass. However, he soon rejoined the fray and



continued to drive around, albeit with a degree of circumspection that might better have been introduced earlier.

This was followed with a short drive to Ledreborg Slott, a privately owned castle which also has one the longest tree-lined avenues in Denmark, over four and a half miles. There we found a luncheon waiting for us, and we enjoyed fine conversation with a husband-and-wife team driving a Sunbeam Tiger, and another couples team in a custom 1951 Bentley set up as a 1930s-style racing car, completely devoid of any weather protection whatsoever.

We then set out on a short 10-mile drive to Roskilde, the seaside town which has a fantastic Viking museum featuring five original Viking ships which had been sunk in the mud and thus preserved for thousands of years, and recently unearthed and preserved. It was here that the problems started.

Well, to be honest, the problems really started years ago. I had the engine in my car rebuilt in 1997 and it was supposed to be fitted with a new clutch at the time, but instead a cheaper rebuilt stock-style clutch was installed. It was never really satisfactory, and always had a fair bit of chatter. But now, suddenly, it was markedly worse, requiring brutal slipping in order to avoid tooth-jarring shudder which seemed to want to tear the driveshaft out of the car.

Not good.

We blew off the museum and struggled to make it to Copenhagen, a further 20 miles away. We made it into the town square and parked in front of City Hall, then sought out professional help.

The RAC mechanics had already been busy that day, changing out the entire back axle on a Fiat 124 after the differential blew out. They were not pleased at the prospects of pulling the transmission and changing the clutch on my car, at night, on their backs with the car on jackstands -- and this presumed that a replacement clutch could even be found. Things were looking grim.

Fortunately, the RAC had a Danish opposite number in their midst, and they conferred with him. He suddenly got the big A-ha!, snapped his fingers and whipped out his cell phone.

I soon found myself speaking with a fellow named Bryan Stoltze, who runs an outfit called B&S Auto just outside of town. As my considerable good luck would have it, Bryan runs a shop that deals exclusively with vintage Mustangs! (His website is www.b-s-auto.dk, check it out). Furthermore, he had a replacement clutch disc, pressure plate and flywheel just sitting on his shelf (used, but like new), and said that if we got there in an hour he could do the work right that night!

The RAC boys all had GPS nav systems so two of them piled into one of their trucks and led us through a driving rainstorm to the shop. We encountered heavy traffic which did the clutch no good at all.

George and I were a bit skeptical as we approached, expecting to find a backwoods shade-tree joint. Instead we were pleased when we pulled into the industrial park to find five 60s Mustangs parked in front of the shop, including a fully race-prepared GT-350 clone on a trailer, and inside found a totally immaculate shop jammed with more Mustangs, including a '67 coupe that was being turned into a killer dedicated race car.



The '67 had been brought over from the USA a few months earlier, and had recently been fitted with a new clutch. As part of its race preparation, it had been replaced by a Tilton multi-disc setup, leaving the stock clutch surplus to the cause.

My car was wheeled onto the lift, and up we went. Bryan showed himself to be a fellow of uncommonly good humor, and made it a point to laugh in hysterics at my car, which was both filthy and suffering from unpardonable (in his view) mechanical sins such as rubber motor mounts, stock (but in good shape) suspension bushings, etc.

Initially we thought the RAC boys were going to turn around and head for home once they'd led us to the shop, but they couldn't help themselves and soon they were in there spinning ratchets alongside Bryan. That left no room for me, so I stood aside and made gentle suggestions or pointed out various mechanical idiosyncrasies unique to my car.

Down with the parking brake, out with the driveshaft and starter, off with the exhaust, disconnect the shifter, and heave-ho, the gearbox was out. Then the bellhousing had to be removed. It wouldn't quite clear the exhaust until a big piece of steel was introduced to one of the collectors and suitable influence brought to bear, at which point it popped free.

"This clutch is history" Brian said, as a cloud of debris fell from the junction between the bellhousing and block. The pressure plate was removed, and dropped straight into a well-positioned trash can, along with the disc. The pressure plate and flywheel were both blue and cracked from severe overheating. The disc was pretty well worn-out, but the problem immediately became apparent when we turned it over. Half the friction material had broken away completely, leading to metal-on-metal between the clutch disc and the flywheel, never a good thing!

Once it was determined that the 'new' clutch was identical to the old one and repairs could continue, suddenly the spanners hit the floor, for now it was 7:00 p.m. and time for the Danish equivalent of a traditional British tea break. We all gathered in a conference room and enjoyed coffee, soda, and a cake that Bryan's wife baked for us upon learning of our pending arrival, and ordered dinner from a local take-out joint. After an hour of story telling (Bryan is a singularly entertaining fellow), dinner arrived and we spent another 45 minutes chowing on cheap but delicious steaks. Bryan has won the FIA Historic Touring Car championship for the last ten straight years behind the wheel of his self-prepared 1966 Mustang coupe, and also prepares the cars for a good percentage of his competitors.

He said that his business strategy was to build their cars faster than his, visibly faster, but then beat them anyway!

Once dinner was through, we continued with installing the new clutch and screwing the car back together, finishing up just before 10:00 p.m. For this, I was charged 2000 Danish Kroner for the parts and 2000 for labor, something on the order of \$700 or so. Under the circumstances, I couldn't have been happier, and of course the car was transformed!

We drove back to the town square and parked the car, then walked to the Tivoli Gardens across the street just in time to have the gates slammed in our faces. Oh well, we wandered to an Irish pub instead and found Bill the Corvette Guy lamenting the sorry state of his car following his first-lap off-track excursion. Talk of worn-out shocks and crappy tires ensued, although my gentle suggestion was that going full throttle in the middle of a



turn after four corners in a big-block ANYTHING was a sure-fire recipe for disaster!

A hoped-for early evening failed to materialize, and we plopped into our hotel room well after midnight. The next morning we had a short, clutch-chatter-free urban drive to the Sommers Automobil Museum, a small and tidy collection of cars with a nice emphasis on Jaguars, including both C- and D-types, as well as a rocketship TVR Griffith which itself won the 2003 FIA European Historic Sports Car championship.

We had a brief drive to a ferry, where we then sailed for about 30 minutes across a channel to Sweden. A short road section took us to Knutstorf Circuit, a small club racing track. When we pulled into the paddock George and I were greatly surprised to see a white Pantera sitting there, with Mats Gorski, president of the Svenska De Tomaso Klübben waiting for us!

Apparently word had spread around among the Swedish De Tomaso community that we were coming to town, and Mats fired up the 351 Cleveland-powered welcome wagon and drove almost 100 miles to come see us!

Mats, who is well into his 70s, had been racing at this track for many years, so I asked him if he wouldn't mind showing me 'the line'. He strapped in and we took off. Mats speaks seven languages fluently, but all of them exceedingly slowly (including his native Swedish). Thus when he was giving directions, by the time he had finished we were already to and through the corner!

The track featured some really interesting elevation changes, leading to blind brows. He would stick his open hand out in front of us and point, saying (slowly), "Lefffft" or "Righhhht." The thing is, I thought he was telling me which direction to turn, but in fact he was simply telling me which side of the track to be on. Thus after exiting a very slow 2nd gear uphill corner and seeing a blind crest ahead of me with cornering berms on the right, as he said, "Righhhht" I set myself up for a right turn, only to find upon cresting the brow and turning right that the track in fact went to the left! I narrowly avoided the grass, and undoubtedly Mats wondered what the hell I was doing???

I soon cracked his code, and he then became extremely helpful. After a few laps I pulled in and turned the car over to George, and he took the car on a few laps, while I sat in the right seat and said, (rather more quickly) "Lefft" and "Rightt".

I then took over again and bashed the car by myself while George and Mats enjoyed conversation in the paddock. A section of the track is configured exactly like the Esses at Sears Point, although on a smaller scale, so I was able to really fly through there. Another corner featured a steep, 45-degree descent into the braking zone, which took a great leap of faith since there were no corner workers anywhere! (The event organizers did have a doctor at each of the circuits as part of the organizational team).

Eventually I pulled in and the three of us had coffee while Mats briefed us on his upcoming trip to Modena, where he was part of a small delegation travelling to the De Tomaso factory to formally say goodbye for about the tenth time, as the company continues to devolve.

We were one of the last cars to leave the track as we continued on for 65 miles to Bäckaskog Slott (castle) where a nice luncheon awaited. 70 more back roads miles led us to the town of Växjö, our next overnight stop.



I should mention that Sweden was completely different from what I had expected. Somehow I had it in my mind that it would be rather like Iceland-- cold, windswept and rocky. Nothing could be further from the truth, as in fact it is heavily forested, and equipped with rather wide and fast roads. Oddly, Sweden was recently struck with a hurricane (who knew they had hurricanes in Scandinavia?) which had knocked down 20% of the trees throughout the country. So everywhere we went, we saw signs of the recent devastation, and logging companies were busy scooping up the fallen trees and trying to salvage something.

We pulled into Växjö and parked in the town square, then attended another reception with a welcome from the town's mayor. Soon a familiar rumble could be heard, and over the tops of the other cars a white wing could be seen. Björn Carlsson had arrived behind the wheel of his 1986 Pantera GT5-S. We exchanged greetings, then set out to head back to his house for dinner.

He lives out in the country, in a small village about 45 miles from the city. Now, in previous international meetings the Swedes had earned a reputation for overly conservative driving, tooling along in groups in the slow lane going 5 mph under the speed limit, etc. So when George piled into the Pantera and I followed along in the GT-350 I had a leisurely drive in mind.

But as soon as we got to the city limits, suddenly there was a puff of smoke from the quad tailpipes, the rear suspension squatted down and the Pantera simply took off! I grabbed third gear and stood on it, then banged into 4th and did it again, and soon was sailing along at over 100 mph in an effort to keep up! There was a bit of a rubber band effect as we would get slowed up by a logging truck, then Björn would make it around him but I couldn't due to traffic. So at the next opportunity I had to really fly to catch up. It was a fantastic, life-affirming drive, and when we turned onto a slightly bumpy road, my suspension bottomed a few times as we hurtled along, now completely devoid of traffic.

We got to Björn's house, situated alongside a beautiful lake, and spent a good hour admiring his garage, which he had expanded a few years ago. Besides his white GT5-S Pantera and his daily driver something-or-other, it also contained a beautiful red 1971 Pantera (only the 14th car made), and a blue De Tomaso Longchamp GTS couple (think Mercedes 450SL) undergoing restoration, two motorcycles, and a fully-equipped underground machine shop!

His wife fired up the BBQ and we enjoyed a terrific steak dinner, along with his parents, who were equally charming (and in fact who we had met at a De Tomaso event in Austria three years ago).

Eventually George and I headed back to town, at a slightly reduced pace (!), but we could still hustle along since it was still light out, even at 10:30 p.m.

The next morning we arose early, and lined up for our departure. Vincent, our Irish friend in the Jensen was ready to pull out, and George yielded to him, waving and saying, "After you!"

Vincent waved back and said, "Tanks, yer a gentleman" to which George replied, "Why thank you, nobody has called me that in quite some time." Quick as a flash, with a twinkling smile, as he pulled away Vincent said over his shoulder, "Well, most people'r honest...."

HAHAHAHA!!!



We cruised to a glassworks (the seemingly obligatory shopping stop for the gentler participants) and blew right through the checkpoint after a quick bite to eat, then enjoyed a very rural section through typical Swedish villages to Eksjö, a charming 600-year-old town, where we were greeted by a wonderful array of local car enthusiasts who had brought their own classic cars out to display them alongside ours. We were once again allowed to park right in the city square and were greeted by the mayor, before wandering through the old wooden buildings and finding a place to eat.

We chose a place called the Balkan Pizzeria, which we learned (after we had ordered) was in fact a Chinese restaurant! So instead of Balkan or Italian food, we enjoyed Chinese beef, pork and noodles with rice.

Our next leg took us some 60 miles along deserted roads to Mantorp Park, Sweden's main race track.

Until now, the circuits we had been driving on had been small and tight, and thus very easy on the brakes. But Mantorp Park has a single, long straight that ends in a tight 2nd gear hairpin right hand turn, and soon after taking to the track, I began to doubt the wisdom of continuing without changing brake pads.

My car is equipped with Porterfield R4-S pads, which are excellent dual-purpose pads but which most decidedly will not tolerate full-on racetrack abuse for long. Knowing this I carry a set of slightly used R4 race-compound pads among my piles of spare parts. The smart thing to do would have been to fit them right away, but I was seeing the red mist, and having fitted brake cooling ducts I thought that perhaps I could get away with it.

Actually, no. After about 45 minutes of blasting around (George and I took turns), reaching speeds in excess of 110 mph on the back straight, I pulled in to give a ride to a fellow in a Triumph TR6, and on my next lap heard a somewhat familiar sound--the sound of backing plates lightly kissing rotors.

I pulled in and wheeled up to the RAC van, and asked to borrow a jack so that I could remove my now-destroyed street pads and fit my race pads. Instead I was kindly shoved out of the way and the RAC men promptly changed the pads for me! We still had some time left, so I grabbed the owner of the green Mustang and took him out for a ride.

What a revelation! I had forgotten how much more effective these race-compound pads are at racing speeds, since I hadn't used them since 2003. I could now reach eye-popping velocities (well, for my passengers anyway) on the back straight before absolutely standing on the brakes, heel-and-toeing down into 3rd then 2nd and pitching the car into the corner for a nice, controlled slide all the way around. Whee!!!!

As I mentioned before the Porsche RSR was without a doubt the fastest car present, but oddly enough the owner would normally only take a few laps, blitz everybody, and then disappear down the road. George and I, on the other hand, fully exploited the opportunities to drive on the track, and I in particular would go around and around and around, pulling in to switch passengers, then go around and around and around some more....

The other Mustang owner was quite surprised to see how well my car handled and braked compared to his. His is equipped with exceedingly crappy street tires while mine enjoys quality Z-rated Firestones, and that undoubtedly makes a big difference; the Shelby handling package also goes a long way. My car is seriously hobbled by over-tall gearing (3.25 rear end) and a general lack of power, at least by USA Mustang standards. So it is very much a back-



of-the-pack kind of car at US track events, and thus my little ego was greatly inflated by my near-top-of-the-heap status here. A well-driven Sunbeam Tiger was closely matched with me; I could out-corner him easily but his superior power and lighter weight and better gearing allowed him to just drive away from me in the straights. There was also a Ferrari 246 Dino running with us, and depending on the track layout, either car might enjoy the advantage. Once again cornering seemed to be my strong suit, and he seemed to enjoy a bit of a speed advantage on the straights.

Another improbable contender was a bone-stock Triumph Stag. This is a car that, although equipped with a V-8, should have quickly receded into my wake, were it not for the fact that the driver knows the car intimately and is, to put it mildly, a complete wild man. Following behind him was highly entertaining, for he danced on the absolute limit of adhesion in every corner, with the car rolling over on its soft suspension, lifting the inside front tire off the ground, and generally sliding and slithering around as he sawed at the wheel. I prefer to keep a rather healthy margin of error as the Armco barriers typically found at European tracks tend to be rather unforgiving of errors in judgment, but he seemed rather less concerned.

In one instance I got the Red Mist and out-powered him down the back straight. He waved me past and I pulled a good car length ahead of him, but as I was still on my street brake pads I braked rather early and cautiously, at which point he out-braked me and took the corner back from me!

In any case, George and I drove the car literally until the gas tank was empty, and I limped into the pits with the engine sputtering from fuel starvation. The other Mustang offered up five liters of fuel and I made my way to another fuel stop (one of countless, and countlessly expensive fuel stops along the way) before arriving in Linköping.

Another Swedish Pantera owner named Yngve Pettersson lived in this town, but he was in Milan on business and couldn't meet us for dinner, so instead we joined a half-dozen other rally participants and enjoyed a feast in an outdoor cafe on the main square, right next to all the cars. Literally thousands of people turned up to look at the cars, as in fact they had at virtually all our lunch and overnight stops.

As it had almost every night, the heavens opened up after we had parked, but we had enjoyed dry driving all day long.

A local TV station ran a five-minute feature on the event on the news that night. They had set up their camera along the shorter straight, and on two separate occasions, they were panning a particular car (1961 Corvette in one instance, Jaguar 140 in the other) as it accelerated down the straight, when VAROOM out of nowhere a red and white GT-350 clone roared past and absolutely blew the other car's doors off.

Hee hee...:>)

The next day dawned overcast and chilly. We drove to our first stop, the castle and fortress at Karlsborg, some 80 miles distant. Yngve had come in late the night before, but got up early and drove down in his Pantera to see us off; sadly we only had about ten minutes to chat because we were running late due to a problem with the hotel shuttle bus driver, who apparently didn't understand that once his bus was full, he was supposed to drive us back to the cars!

Along the drive, we enjoyed mostly twisty roads at elevated speeds although occasionally we'd get backed up behind a truck or bus for a few miles.



Rounding a corner I saw a red sports car in front of us, nearing the bottom of a long downhill straight followed by an uphill. Believing it was an MGA which historically had been running quite slowly, I was determined to pass him before he reached the twisties at the top of the hill, for afterwards it might be miles before another opportunity presented itself.

So down the hammer went, and the speedo needle quickly climbed, but oddly we weren't catching him nearly as quickly as I thought we would. As we continued to accelerate, to and through 100 mph, I realized that the car in question was in fact a well-driven Triumph TR4, which was probably going 80 mph himself. At this point I was morally committed, so kept my foot in it, and right as we got to the bottom of the hill, I glanced down and saw the speedo going through 120 mph. At the bottom there was an irregularity in the road, which bottomed the suspension and caused it to lurch to one side, inspiring an "OH!" from my intrepid passenger. Nevertheless, we swept past the Triumph and powered up the hill, lifting to whiz through the corner at a more sedate speed, although we soon left the Triumph in the dust.

A few minutes later, George quietly said, "That was a little fast for me..." to which I replied, "Me too!"

After yet another greeting by a local politician, we blew through the castle and then continued on to the Kinnekulle-Ring circuit. This is another smallish club racing track, but one for which my car seemed rather well-suited. George took a few exploratory laps and pressed the car a bit, and then I took over and, having gone to school while George was driving, pressed it a bit further. Knowing that this was our last track opportunity, and with the racing brake pads still in place, I felt more comfortable pushing the car harder, and longer. I would periodically pull in to drop off a passenger and give a ride to somebody else. I gave a ride to the tirelessly working RAC mechanic who had worked on my clutch; they had a rather easier time of it on this trip than in years past and found themselves with free time on this last day. He really seemed to enjoy his ride.

I also gave a ride to the driver of the '51 Bentley Special. He had seen me running on the track, and my car was noticeably faster than his, but he was literally shocked and astounded when he rode with me and saw how neutral the handling was, how powerful the brakes were, and how much cornering grip the car had, even running on street tires.

In fact, three or four people came up to me during the course of the event having been astounded that an American car could not only run with, but run away from most of the European sports cars, and now several of them are seriously contemplating adding a well-prepared 60's Mustang to their stables!

Duncan was back out in his green '67 fastback, and we ran together for awhile. He seriously held me up in the corners, but then slowly, due to gearing and power again, pulled away from me on the straight. Lap after lap we circled, until he finally let me by, and then I pulled away from him. The Triumph Stag appeared in my mirrors, and deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, I waved him by and then chased him for awhile, laughing out loud as I watched his car careening and sliding all over the track.

This track was unusually hard on my car though. From the second corner all the way back around to the front straight, I NEVER got below 5000 rpm. I'd scream through the right-hand turn two in 2nd gear, bang into third just before the exit, but only for a moment, then heel-and-toe back into second for the left-hand turn 3. Hard on the gas for a moment, then tap the brake to settle the nose as the car went over a rise into the next right-hand corner, taken at about 3/4 throttle, 5000 rpm in second. Up to 5500 or so,



then tap the brake and turn in to the left, again going from 5000 to 6000 through the corner, then hard on the brake, and a tight right-hand corner, short straight and another right-hand corner leading onto the front straight, where I'd see 4th gear for a short time.

Lap after lap, and then I started thinking about the fact that at most tracks I was spending a lot less time at those elevated rpms. My motor has a completely stock crank with stock rods and bolts, and I'm sure it just doesn't like spinning that high, that long, so eventually I decided to call it a day. I had still driven 50 or 60 laps, easily twice as many as anybody else though. Mine is the Energizer Bunny of track cars. :>)

I let the car cool down for awhile and shot some photos of the other cars on the track before changing to a third set of (new) generic street brake pads that I had with me. After a quick stop at a Scottish restaurant (McDonald's) for a very late lunch, we went on to Trollhättan, home of Saab, where we toured the small but very tidy Saab museum, then continued on to Gothenburg, the last stop on the rally.

Upon entering the city and parking in the city square, we were presented with finisher's medals, and then enjoyed another fine meal in an outdoor bistro.

Although the event had nominally finished, in fact it hadn't. For the next morning, we all got up and drove to the Volvo headquarters, where we were to be treated to a morning of corporate hospitality. After a brief audio/visual presentation and an address by one of the Big Kahunas of the company, we were split into three groups and boarded buses.

My group's first stop was a small meeting center in a manufactured garden environment on the water. There we were briefed by a pair of female designers on the development of the YCC, which stands for Your Concept Car. This was a concept unveiled last year that was entirely designed and engineered by women, for women. There was a small bit of derision from the male chauvinist pig section of the gallery but most people seemed impressed with its innovative and chick-friendly features. :>)

Our next stop was the Volvo museum, which was much larger and more comprehensive than the Saab museum had been. Volvos weren't imported to the USA until the 50s so most Americans don't realize that they had been producing cars since the 20s, cars which were almost exact copies of American designs of the day, looking very much like the full-size Chevrolets, Pontiacs and Fords which trolled our highways back then.

Our next stop was a small, one-lane test track, where about 20-25 current Volvo cars and trucks were parked. Here we were afforded the opportunity to test-drive anything we wanted, taking two laps before pulling in and switching cars. Although we hadn't thought this would be overly interesting, in fact it was surprisingly enjoyable, as we leapt out of an SUV and into a sedan, then back into a coupe, and then a wagon, and so on and so forth, and drove them like rental cars when out of sight of their minders. ABS working? Check. Stability control working? Whoops, not installed on this car, mind the gravel trap!

Predictably enough, we were the very last to leave and the others were all patiently waiting on the tour bus as we pulled in, parked and ran to join them.

The event finally drew to a close with a giganto buffet luncheon, where it was announced that the 2006 version of the event would again feature Volvo sponsorship, and would concentrate on Sweden and Norway.



Most people were planning on spending the afternoon enjoying the town, then heading for home in the morning, but George and I had other, more ambitious plans. For the Swedish De Tomaso club had several members who had invited us to pay them a visit in various other parts of the country.

When agreeing to the agenda, I didn't take into account that Sweden is an improbably large country, considering that it's in Europe. We typically think of European nations as little dinky things, but Sweden is bigger than California (although with only nine million people, has a population smaller than Los Angeles). So when we set off for the Stockholm area, we faced a drive of some 325 miles or so.

Initially we were on a motorway, but this soon turned into a strange two-lane road. Strange because it was unusually wide, with a paved hard shoulder. And unlike virtually any other country I've ever seen (and I've seen a bunch), the drivers here treat the shoulder as a driving surface. Much of the traffic would drive along straddling the line with two and sometimes all four wheels on the shoulder, to enable faster traffic to overtake without actually crossing the center line. Lane-sharing, if you will. It was a very odd sensation to pass cars on a two-lane road with oncoming traffic, but everybody seems to cooperate, and indeed oncoming cars would move over to the shoulder to allow you enough room to cross the centerline into their lane and effect a pass!

We waited for a 'rabbit' to appear, somebody with local knowledge who could lead us at an elevated pace, and after not too long, we tucked in behind a fast Audi sedan and hustled right along. When he suddenly slowed, we did too, and soon a police car materialized. He led us for a few miles before turning off, at which point the hammer came down and away we went again.

Our destination was actually the city of Uppsala, perhaps 40-50 miles north of Stockholm. When we reached the town, we were met by Tomas Gunnarsson, behind the wheel of his Mercedes since his Pantera is scattered about his workshop, as he bravely tackles an overhaul of the fiendishly complicated ZF gearbox. He led us through the town to the home of Thomas Törnblom, our host for the upcoming weekend, and there we enjoyed a huge feast with his wife and three children.

The next morning, we piled into an Audi wagon, gathered up Tomas and set off for a big car show and swap meet. Nothing could have prepared us for what we saw when we got to the big farm about 30 minutes outside of town.

Simply put, Sweden is absolutely CRAWLING with American cars! No lie, the car show probably had 2000-2500 cars, and at least 85% of them were American! And there weren't many dogs here--these were NICE American cars! Big 50s boats, street rods, pickup trucks, and on and on. We were just knocked out at the whole scene.

The Mustang Club of Sweden had a nice display (significantly, the Mustang Club of Sweden calls itself just that, not Svenska Mustang Klubben; in fact every single person we met in Sweden spoke excellent English, making us both feel rather ignorant and lame), as did the Cadillac, Jaguar and several other clubs.

Yngve Pettersson had driven up from Linköping accompanied by his wife Inga in their black Pantera; another Pantera was also parked but we never managed to link up with the owner.



The swap meet was filled with all sorts of car parts, much of them American, as well as a bunch of other flotsam and jetsam. One of the most impressive cars in the parking lot was a huge 1931 Cadillac V-16. Very few of these cars were made and they are enormously valuable, the kind of thing that you normally only see at Pebble Beach or Amelia Island. Yet this one was street-driven and ENJOYED, and we got to see the owners pile in and drive off late in the afternoon.

There was a short aerial display as three pre-war biplanes circled overhead in formation, and then suddenly and surprisingly just plopped down and landed at the edge of the parking area!!!

After spending all day at the show, we left and drove a few short miles to a local auto museum, which was small but boasted an impressive variety of cars and even a few airplanes. From there, we drove to the home of Ulf Larsson, where we enjoyed afternoon coffee and (surprise) talked about Panteras.

Then it was back to Thomas' house for another dynamite dinner! Sunday morning, we again collected Tomas and then set off for Stockholm. Our first visit was the home of Goran Malmberg, the well-known chassis engineer and custom guitar builder whose e-mail handle HemiPantera refers to the fact that his totally re-engineered Pantera is powered by an all-aluminum 8.1 liter Hemi! The motor is absolutely huge, and even with silencing discs in his Supertrapp mufflers, it literally shakes the ground when he starts it up!

The neighbors don't like him. :>)

Ulf's Pantera was in his shop having new high-dollar shocks and springs fitted; Goran pointed out to us that the car was absolutely riddled with serious chassis rust! So certainly fitting expensive suspension to this car is a big waste of money, as the car itself is basically one big oxide undamped spring! :<(

From there, we drove another 40 minutes or so to the home of Kjell Jansson, who owns not only a 1985 Pantera GT5-S, but also a 1990 Pantera Si (one of only about 29 built) and a '98 De Tomaso Guara. He and his wife have a beautiful cottage overlooking a lake, and she knocked out another dynamite lunch. Kjell had been with Mats on the trip to visit the De Tomaso factory earlier in the week, and so he briefed us on the latest goings-on there. It's difficult to predict just exactly what will happen to the company, but all the employees will be leaving within the next two weeks, since under Italian law, if they don't depart within a year of the announced liquidation, they render themselves ineligible for the (generous) governmental financial support that accompanies a liquidation.

So now the company will have a warehouse full of parts, but nobody will be left who knows where each part can be found???

We then returned to Tomas Gunnarsson's workshop and checked out his gearbox. He had all the parts, both old and new, carefully laid out on workbenches, and he explained to us the many variations and intricacies of his less-common 5/DS25-1 transmission when compared to the more common 5/DS25-2 variant.

We left him behind, as this was Swedish Mother's Day and he was going to make an appearance at his mom's house, and instead returned to Thomas's house where we took him and his wife out to dinner at a restaurant downtown.

Strangely, we had been in Sweden for a week and hadn't actually had any Swedish food yet???. And so we found ourselves in a Thai restaurant, which was nonetheless excellent!



Following dinner we took a walk through the historic and exceedingly quiet old section of town. While walking alongside a river, we heard an incredible shriek. A guy in a Ferrari 355 was doing drag-race starts on the road alongside the canal, using the paddle shift to accelerate from a standing start to perhaps 80 mph before honking on the brakes and coming almost to a stop, then doing it again. The car was fitted with a Tubi exhaust, and although it's certainly nothing compared to a well-tuned Ford, it still sounded lovely bouncing off the old stone buildings. :>)

The next morning we bid them farewell, and headed back south, this time aiming at the home of Kjell Iseborn, who lives on a farm about 80 km south of Gotenburg. We got there by mid-afternoon, and after a tour of his HUGE workshop in an old barn, containing his Pantera GT5-S as well as his Longchamp GTS, like Björn's undergoing restoration and in fact being painted the same color ("I was first, and he copied me, the bxxxxxd!" he said with a big grin) and an assortment of De Tomaso-themed murals and flags on the walls, he and his wife took us on a windshield tour of the neighboring town, including a stop at an old hotel that he had remodelled (complete with large swimming pool placed on the sixth floor!)

After a walk around the outside of a large 14th century fortress and a stop for ice cream, we returned to the farm for what would prove to be an excellent traditional Swedish dinner. Unfortunately something had gotten the better of me, some kind of ear infection I think, and I wound up crawling into bed and napping through dinner, so I missed it. :<(

The next morning, we blasted off at 5:30 a.m. to make the 7:30 a.m. ferry from Gotenburg back to Denmark. Traffic was light and we got to the town much earlier than anticipated, which was a good thing. While sitting stopped at a red light, a Volvo police car crossed in front of us, then suddenly the front bumper almost hit the ground as he slammed on the brakes, stopped dead in the road, then zipped around the block to pull behind us and light us up. :<(

This was the obligatory police stop, similar to one I've had on virtually every other trip to Europe thus far. My car has no front license plate, which sends up red flags, and the rear plate is an American plate, which is enough to clinch the deal and inspire the light show.

After the requisite display of documents, all was forgiven and we were on our way. We loaded up on the ferry, and noted a couple of other classic cars getting on as well. They were bound for England to participate in the Three Castles tour, an event roughly similar to ours, but lacking any sort of track driving, being mostly an organized low-speed tour through the countryside.

After three hours we disembarked in Denmark, and then had to drive back to Esberg in order to catch the overnight ferry back to the UK. By now it was absolutely pouring with rain, as a big storm swept in from the North Sea and lashed the countryside. With howling winds and driving rain, we elected to forego the motorways (since we had time to kill) and take the secondary roads instead. Unfortunately they were polluted with big trucks and other slow-moving traffic, so after a quick map check we pulled onto even smaller tertiary roads, which were devoid of traffic and thus enabled us to move along at a much faster clip, albeit not exactly in the direction we might have intended.

This was nevertheless a very enjoyable drive, for we could go quickly in the wrong direction, enjoying the scenery even as we got pounded by the rain, and normally not having to deal with other traffic, then emerge at a crossroads,



consult our map, and make a correction to continue on in a slightly less wrong direction. We got to Esberg with plenty of time to spare, and not feeling like being particularly adventurous (not to mention spendy, as restaurants in Denmark cost an absolute fortune, a decent lunch costing at least \$25), we again opted for Scottish food in preparation for our sea journey.

We loaded up on the same ferry we had crossed over on, and skipped dinner in lieu of an early turn-in, after watching Jeremy Clarkson hosting Top Gear on the BBC. After an 11-hour sleep and a monster breakfast, we arrived back at Harwich. At this point a funny thing happened--we basically got stuck on the ferry. The ramp was lowered, but the gate meant to keep people from walking on the ramp got stuck. It was a simple affair, just a big metal garden gate secured with a one-inch-diameter pin. But the ship was tweaked, and the pin was stuck.

Loads of people standing around looking helpless, waiting for 'somebody else' to fix the problem. The ship's workers were powerless to do anything. Finally I got disgusted, walked the full length of the ship back to my car, reached into my tool bag and got a big hammer, then walked all the way back to the front. People parted as I approached, I nudged one of the ship's workers out of the way, and went WHAM! and busted that pin free with one good whack!

There was a muted round of golf applause from the assembled masses as the gates swung open, and as I walked back to my car triumphantly, I thought to myself, "THIS is why we were the ones who walked on the moon!" :>) We then disembarked onto a moderately sunny England, and drove back to Geoff's house.

We had made it. I forget how many miles we had driven, and I shudder to think of how much money we spent on gas (but unquestionably it was a lot--a whole lot). The car is absolutely filthy, and will remain so until I return to England to drive it again--after all, what's the point of washing it if it's pouring rain the next time I show up to drive it? We made a bunch of new friends, got to visit numerous old friends in their homes (previously we had only met at club meetings), learned a lot about countries that we knew absolutely nothing about, drove some superlative roads, flogged the car on four different race tracks, and generally had an absolutely fantastic time!

I'd especially like to thank our Swedish friends and hosts for making us feel so welcome and making our trip that much more special!

I didn't feel nearly as compelled to document this event with photographs as I have in previous runnings, but nevertheless I did get off a few happy snaps, which can be found here:

<http://members.aol.com/mikeldrew/Euroclassic2005.jpg>

Now I am sitting in an American Airlines Boeing 777, enjoying the hospitality of Business Class (with a very nominal increase in cost since as an employee I only pay the taxes; the ticket itself is basically free), heading back to California.

But not to work--no, of course not! For tomorrow is the first day of the Wine Country Classic, the vintage races at Sears Point raceway. And Lord knows I haven't spent nearly enough time around old cars lately, so you can guess where I'll be all weekend!

See you at the races! Mike