

---

## The Perennial Racer: Parnelli Jones

19 October 2006 | Classic Driver



**Parnelli Jones is a name we all remember, and keep on seeing today. The enduring epitome of an all-around race driver, owner and constructor, he was recently at the Goodwood Festival of Speed driving one of his open-wheel cars that won the Indianapolis 500 in the hands of Al Unser, Sr. Further in his continuing presence, his new 2007 Saleen/Parnelli Jones Limited Edition Mustang, of which 500 units will be built, is going into production this month of October.**

The stunning orange and black street car's normally-aspirated 4.9 liter Saleen-tuned Ford V8 delivers over 400 horsepower and an exhaust note to thrill muscle car aficionados everywhere. Plus, there's a certain-to-be-memorable Parnelli Jones event coming up very soon. The Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles will salute him on November 9, 2006, in its "An Evening with Parnelli Jones" gala where hundreds of Jones' guests and friends will honor this icon of American motor racing.



In a recent meeting with Parnelli in Torrance, California, he took me on a tour of his race car collection that occupies an entire museum floor of his office building. The cars there range from dirt track roadster to off-road winner, to Indy and Formula 1 machines. The walls are covered with photos, posters and other motor racing relics. Showcases gleam with trophies and scale models. It's a trip into Parnelli's past that keeps the story of this man's achievements forever in the present.



He speaks of himself as “kind of the guy that likes to see what’s on the other side of the hill”—a quest that has led him through four decades of racing everything from jalopies on Monday nights to winning the Indy 500, Trans-Am series crown, sports car grand prix, stock car and off-road marathons, to eventually become a constructor in Formula 1. Over the years he’s proven himself as a self-taught, no-nonsense entrepreneur of excellence, seeing the name “Parnelli” become a world renowned motorsport legend.

No one has done the broad sport of motor racing quite like Jones has. He’s been both team owner and driver, tasting victory as well as fire and final laps defeat. He’s known fame and feud, accolades and scorn. Through it all, he’s remained a man of principle, a tough but fair competitor to admire and respect. Parnelli defines himself best in his own candid way. Referring to the new rear-engine race cars after his 1963 Indianapolis win in the famed AJ Watson front-engine roadster, Old Calhoun, Jones says, “Colin Chapman wanted me to come and do Formula 1, but he kind of hinted around that I’d be number two driver to Jimmy Clark. I didn’t think I was number two to anybody.”



Of his urge to win, Parnelli insists he's "kind of like that quarter horse—I don't know any better. I've had races where I was fast qualifier and I'd say 'I'm going to go out and take it easy,' and when they drop the green flag I'm trying to put a lap on 'em!" Born in 1933 in Texarkana, Arkansas, it's been a long and colorful road from his learning to drive on the back streets and vacant lots of Torrance, California. And there's no end in sight for this tireless champion who's in his office every day and raring to go after a morning of exercise. "I've got to stay in the loop," he vows. "I'm not through yet!"

Continuing the Petersen Museum's annual tradition of honoring motorsport greats, the Parnelli Jones dinner and program featuring eminent personality interviews and exciting racing footage—including an auction of prized memorabilia—will be hosted by master of ceremonies Dave McClelland.



Invited pals of Parnelli and his family include **Mario Andretti, George Follmer, Shav Glick, Andy Granatelli, Dan Gurney, Joe Leonard, Les Richter, Steve Saleen, Carroll Shelby, Al Unser Sr., Bobby Unser, Linda Vaughn, and JC Agajanian's and Vel Miletich's** family, among many more. A variety of race cars made famous by Jones will be on display, along with the latest achievement in his long career—the new Saleen/Parnelli Jones Mustang that echoes its namesake Number 15 Boss 302 that Jones muscled to victory on America's race tracks during 1970 for that year's TransAm Championship title.

For admission to its November 9th activities honoring Parnelli, the Petersen Museum suggests contacting its Checkered Flag 200 office in California at +1-323-964-6306 for reserved ticket purchase at \$100 per person. Ticket price includes dinner, program and parking, and a cash bar will be available.

The Petersen Automotive Museum is located at 6060 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90036-3605, with enclosed parking and Museum entrance just south of Wilshire on Fairfax Avenue. "An Evening with Parnelli Jones" is sponsored by Saleen, Inc., and Ford Motor Company.

Every bit like Parnelli's own racing career, the Petersen event will be a winner that's long remembered.

**Text:** William Edgar

**Photos:** The Author, Ford Motor Company, Saleen -**Strictly Copyright**

---

---

**ClassicInside - The Classic Driver Newsletter**

Free Subscription!

---

<https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/perennial-racer-parnelli-jones>

© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.