

CLASSIC DRIVER

A Friend's Goodbye to Phil Hill



Wednesday, September 10, was a day of grief and loving fellowship. Phil Hill, America's gifted legend and the world's racing champion, was buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in Santa Monica at noon under a blue California sky.

Tall palms and broad magnolia trees stand near his grave. For the mourners, the time will live forever in that gathering of Phil's family and others who cherished him. Among his many friends there were **Carroll Shelby, Dan Gurney, Jim Hall, Jesse Alexander, Miles Collier, Steve Earle, John Lamm, Michael Lynch, John Morton, Harley Cluxton, Bruce Meyer, Alice Hanks, Pete Brock, Bill Pollack, Tommy Kendall, Tony Adamowicz, David Bull, Bruce McCaw, Ann Bothwell** and **John Mozart**, to list but a few.

From that singular day when we said goodbye to Phil come these lasting memories.



My early morning airline flight south to **Los Angeles** covered an expanse of California softly blanketed white in what looked like a quilter's batting. Beneath it, there was a California I've known from the early 1950s when Phil first raced on the **Monterey Peninsula** over the old **Pebble Beach** road course amidst the pine forest; on a circuit twisting through **San Francisco's Golden Gate Park**; on the ocean-facing devilishly fast runways of the **Santa Barbara Airport**. Phil's places. All of them.

His learning grounds, tricky venues where the eager young driver from **Santa Monica** first honed his name in competition cars that were then, to American enthusiasts, oddly foreign—**MG, Jaguar, Alfa Romeo, Ferrari**. Phil's cars. He, this accurately named "gentle man" with such immense and durable mechanical and driving skills, started something that grew to significantly shape the future of post-War road racing. The pioneers, the best ones, do that. Phil did.



Born in Miami, Florida, on April 20 1927 and, a fortnight after he attended his last ever motor event at **The Quail** during Monterey Week, Phil died peacefully as a result of respiratory problems complicated by Parkinson's disease on August 28.

Philip Toll Hill Jr's funeral was held at the **Saint Monica Catholic Community Church** on a quiet avenue called California. Out front was Phil's stately Pebble Beach Best of Show-winning **1931 Pierce Arrow LeBaron Convertible Town Cabriolet**, a car that Phil's parents owned when new. Parked ahead of it was what Phil himself surely would have chosen for his last ride, a splendid, oh-so-cool **1929 Packard Funeral Coach** specially brought in from northern California.





Inside Saint Monica's vaulted chamber, the family and several hundred listened to personal reflections by Phil's daughters **Vanessa** and **Jennifer**. **Phil** and **Alma Hill's** son **Derek** delivered the eulogy, calling to mind the remarkable wisdom and quick wit of his father. The gathering song *Amazing Grace* was sung by **Helena Buscema** and **Leslie Smith**, and beautifully so.

Helena's soaring *Ave Maria* touched everyone, and with this I saw in my mind—hearing not the race sounds, but only the sacrosanct song—Phil at **Le Mans**, **Daytona**, **Sebring**, at **Monza**, **Reims**, **Silverstone**, **Aintree**, at **Monte Carlo** and **Zandvoort** and **Spa-Franchorchamps**. Reprinted in the church service's program, and woven throughout **Father Brendan's** homily, was some of what Phil's friend and vintage racer **Ernie Nagamatsu** wrote in tribute to him.





"If I could," Ernie's thoughts began, reflecting a life past for Phil, "I would gather my family 'crew' for a team meeting one last time ... If I could, I would visit some race circuits that resonated in my mind forever ... If I could, I would go to **Goodwood** one last time and watch from the start-finish, to see **Derek** drive for me, taking my seat at the **Revival Meeting**, and racing with all his heart to win one for me, a moment that I cherished as much as any win I ever had."

We later congregated at a favorite Italian restaurant of Phil's across the street from the Pacific Ocean and there toasted to husband, father and friend, to the Phil we loved dearly. A few of us then indulged recklessly in one of the myriad pleasures Phil Hill valued in life. We ate ice cream.

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