

## Smoky Mountain Region Spring Thing – 2017

Lee Fowler

Today is March 27, 2017. I'm out in the garage prepping the 356C for Spring Thing. This year we're going back to Greeneville, Tennessee and the General Morgan Inn. But that's five weeks from now. So "why" I ask myself am I already cleaning the car. For that I have no answer. But as I very carefully work on the fifty-plus year old window rubber my mind wanders off into the hinterlands. "Are there different levels of insanity?" "Have I plunged way deep into the abyss of Concours craziness?" I tell myself, "Don't answer that!"

We spent the weekend with a visit from my two sisters, which prevented us from going on the HOD tour. They came over from Highlands, North Carolina and Kennesaw, Georgia. In April we will be hosting one of Suzanne's brothers and his wife. Plus, one grandson is playing on a "rec" baseball team, and a travel team. So we have plenty of baseball games to attend. "The calendar is filling up fast so I can't wait until the last minute to clean the car", is what I'm telling myself.

Wait! My mind goes back to the first question. Way back when we had another 1965 356C (green of course), we traveled from our home in Northern Virginia to Atlanta to visit family. I let this same brother-in-law take the car out one evening to impress his friends. He was a teenager at the time! Maybe the lunacy issue has been festering for a long time and is now becoming evident with this crazy Concours preparation.

I've preached too much on the need to "deep clean" the car a couple times a year. But this car has a lot of miles on it and has been across this country a number of times and spent time in Europe. Most of it is original. It's not a "matching numbers" car since the original engine was replaced at the factory in Zuffenhausen. It has the European heater system, which is great in these frigid North Alabama winters. I've convinced myself that I haven't gone off the deep end. I'm just giving those old parts the attention they need to keep them functioning for many more years. At least that's what I keep telling myself.

The car is not a "garage queen" and we will drive it the five plus hours to Greeneville. It's a great touring car but that many miles will add a lot of bug splats and maybe a few rock chips. We'll concentrate on a complete cleaning and waxing of the exterior. We'll clean the interior, storage compartment, and engine compartment. Then once we get there all we will have to do is touch up the exterior.

Day two in the garage. There's a lot of rubber that needs attention so I'm back at it the very next day. I'm using some stuff Jim Cambron gave me at Winterfest and it seems to really be doing a good job on the rubber. The directions say to rub it on then wait a half hour before rubbing it in with a dry rag. I can't do all the rubber at once so that means I'll have multiple half hour periods of idle time. Can't go back into the house 'cause there be chores awaiting in there. So I turn my attention to the storage compartment. First the spare tire. Treat the rubber so it looks nice and black but not shiny. Judges don't like shiny tires. Next the chrome wheels! I would normally use Johnson's paste wax but I can't find it. I pull out my bottle of Malm's wax. Cost me a hundred dollars for a bottle of the stuff many years ago. That's why I've still got almost a full bottle. The wheel

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now has a very expensive shine. A jar of the stuff retails for \$250 today. Then I start cleaning the tool bag and tools. That's when I pause and realize that I'm actually cleaning the tools. It's a good thing I don't have a mirror in the garage. If I looked in a mirror I'd see a guy who has a splinter in the windmill of his mind.

Another action on the "to do" list is to claybar the paint. Now is as good a time as any! Amazing how that can pull out more dirt even though the car was washed the day before. The more I write on this trip report the more I'm beginning to sound like Cambron when he goes through the excruciating details on prepping his car. Hopefully, further on down these pages we'll get to something about Spring Thing.

But not yet! We made a trip to Sparta, Georgia to spend the weekend with our son, Brad and his family. Suzanne made Easter dresses for the two girls and we had a great, but short visit with our two youngest grandchildren. The Concours prep got put on hold for a couple weeks. But that's ok since I factored in plenty of time to finish the job. We plan on leaving for Spring Thing on Thursday to extend the weekend. So on Monday we both spent most of the day in the garage. I worked on the outside while Suzanne attended to the interior. She also did a "once over" in the engine compartment and found some areas that I missed. I'm still getting used to this working together after her retirement but it definitely has its advantages. We both felt that we had the car ready until I ran my fingers under the door between the rubber and metal. My hand came away with very dirty fingertips. More cleaning! Late afternoon and we think we're just about done. The next hour is deciding how much cleaning stuff to pack. There's not much room in a 356 so we have to pare down our supplies. Usually, we take along about three bags full of supplies plus half dozen other items. This time it will be two bags and no extra stuff. There's just no room. The next day, Tuesday, we will do a final inspection and declare the car ready.

Now I hesitate to describe all this work 'cause I'm trying to convince Ann Schroetter that attending Concours events is a lot of fun. Unfortunately, her one experience was at Parade where she was aghast that people were actually cleaning their cars with Q-Tips. I told her that we didn't clean the car with Q-Tips for the type of Concours that we attend. Darn if I didn't look in the car and see Suzanne doing just that. I admonished her and told her about my conversation with Ann. I said, "I told Ann Schroetter that we never used Q-Tips for cleaning the car and now you're doing just that!" Now you all know that Suzanne is a kind, gentle soul with never a harsh word for anybody. So I was taken aback when she said, "Quit bothering me and get back to work on the exterior! We've got a Concours to get ready for!" Maybe I should suggest that she give up retirement and go back to work.

If the car has floor mats the judges can lift them up and look underneath. With these older cars the only thing under the rubber mat is sound deadening material. Can you imagine what fifty-two year old sound deadening looks like? It looks black with specks of brown dirt that are impossible to get out. If you can't get it out then what can you do to avoid points being deducted? Camouflage,

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that's what! An application of black shoe polish makes it look good as new again. Here she is with the Q-Tip and shoe polish.



As for me, I didn't complain anymore about how she was cleaning the interior. I just meekly went back to my arduous task of cleaning the front bumper. When I had Suzanne do her usual editing on my trip reports she said, "You sure are getting thin on top!" I told her, "That's a solar collector for a sex machine." She still hasn't stopped laughing. FYI, that's not a can of polish in my left hand.

We're a day ahead of schedule. It's amazing to me how much easier it is cleaning the car when we both work on it. I'm still having to get used to this "team work" business but I can tell it has its advantages. We'll pack the car on Wednesday and depart early Thursday. These old bones, and other parts, can't make a trip that long without a few stops. What should be about a five-hour trip will more likely be six hours or more.

It's Tuesday and we should be ready to go. Suzanne elected to do some sewing for grandson number two so I went out to the garage just to put away the extra cleaning stuff. Decided to run my fingers around the inside of the engine lid and came away with some very dirty fingertips. No matter how many times we review our checklist and look the car over we still find places where the judges can find dirt. But that makes it a challenge and adds to the fun.



It should be a fun weekend with people coming from all over. Got the attendee list today and here is the PCA Regions represented. Subject to last minute changes.

Smoky Mountain – 31 cars, 58 people  
Peachstate – 7 cars, 14 people

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Tennessee – 3 cars, 6 people  
Heart O' Dixie – 2 cars, 4 people  
Carolinas – 3 cars, 6 people  
Hurricane – 2 cars, 4 people  
Wilderness Trail – 2 cars, 4 people  
Alabama – 1 car, 2 people

Total 51 cars, 98 attendees.

Last year we didn't go back to the City Garage Museum for lunch. I sure hope they have the garage planned for the Saturday lunch this year. I've flirted with this gal during several Spring Thing events with no response. I don't understand how she can resist my considerable charms. I would like to have an opportunity this year to see if I can get her to respond to my overtures.



Wednesday evening. The car is packed with only one bag with last minute essentials left to put in the car in the morning. I am a planner and organizer. My brain analyzes all permutations and combinations to ensure that everything is accounted for and packed as efficiently as possible. Everything is good. We're ready to start our trip. The little 356C is crammed to the gills (rear pop out windows) with luggage and Concours materials. We sit down to a leisurely dinner and I'm feeling good. Suzanne then says, "Are you sure we have all the cleaning materials that we need?" Why does she do that to me?

The trip up to Greeneville was thankfully uneventful. Believe it or not the 356 is more comfortable to travel in than the 2009 Carrera. Well, when I said "uneventful" we did run into a deluge on I81 north of Knoxville. Visibility was greatly reduced and I had to drop my speed down to about sixty-five mph. We exited I81 onto 11E and a couple miles down the road it was dry as a bone. We had hoped to get there with the car fairly clean and didn't know what the rainstorm had done to the car.

We were the first out of town arrivals but shortly after we got there the Saxtons and Kjellsens from Peachstate Region showed up. They had volunteered to check the rally route on Friday. Clyde Peery was the Rallymaster and always puts on a great rally but every rally needs checking. Two thirty was a little early to check into our room so we decided to walk around and explore the town. A lot of the buildings in downtown Greeneville date back to the 1800's and maybe earlier. They still have the original red brick exterior walls. Many still have the high ceilings prevalent in those days. During a time years ago when preservation was not a priority many of the windows and doors were "bricked in". There was one building where you could see the outline of an outside staircase leading to

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what was a doorway at the second level. It would be interesting to see what these old buildings looked like in their original form.

Friday morning we started on the car. We had taken the collapsible wash bucket but the car wasn't all that dirty so we just used spray-on car wash to clean it a little bit. We spent a goodly portion of the day going over everything we had cleaned before, inside and out. There wasn't a spot on the car that we hadn't cleaned. Or so we thought!

After spending time cleaning the car we cleaned ourselves up and joined other attendees in the hotel lobby for renewing friendships and making new ones. That is Suzanne's forte so I just hung around for the liquid refreshments. The Cambrons and Fowlers were the only Heart O' Dixie attendees but we did spend time with some ex-HOD members. You might recognize these two who, last year, snuck out of town without saying goodbye. Steve and Liz Baum sold their Smith Lake estate and relocated to Greensboro, Georgia in a ritzy neighborhood on Lake Oconee. Having gotten rid of their blue BMW Steve now putters around in a golf cart. And speaking of "puttering" he now plays golf two or three times a week at a palatial country club. Liz, as a retired schoolteacher, at least uses her time productively as a volunteer. But we had a great time with Steve and Liz and are hoping they find some time to get back over to Huntsville in the near future.



Also Friday we helped stuff the "goodie" bags that are given out to all attendees. This was Matt Fischer's first time at organizing a Spring Thing but you would never know it. Everything was well organized. Matt gave a lot of credit to Peter and Paula Lepir who ran the last two events but we think he was way too modest.

Spring Thing has three major activities in addition to the socializing. The Concours on Saturday morning, rally Saturday afternoon, and autocross on Sunday. Plus the Saturday lunch and banquet.



Jim and Steve swapping tales about their superb autocross skills.

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The reason for getting to the General Morgan early is to get the car into the garage. They always block it off for Porsches but space is limited. Also, lighting is not the best for detailed cleaning. Some of us improvise with portable lighting devices. Gives all new meaning to the term “headlights”. The city barricades the street right next to the General Morgan Inn for the Concours. Saturday morning we moved the car into it’s assigned slot and continued with some last minute cleaning. There was absolutely no place on the car that hadn’t been cleaned. We were in the same class as the 914’s, 912’s, and all 356’s. Suzanne said, “We’re in trouble. We’re in the same class as Greg Dubord’s 914 and a 1955 356 Continental.” I agreed! Greg restored the 914 himself. Did all the work! It’s a consistent Concours winner. We’ve spent a considerable amount of effort cleaning the car but the competition this go around is formidable.



We had pretty much finished up with cleaning the car and I was taking a much-needed break when Greg walked up. “Hi Greg, where’s your 914?” says I. Greg replied, “I injured my shoulder and couldn’t really get it prepped for the Concours. Besides, I was concerned about being in the same class as you and Suzanne.” Greg and I both had a good laugh that we were worrying about competing against each other.

The judges for our car were Danny Saxton, storage compartment; Rick Berry, engine, Suzan Bowman, interior, and Jim Cambron, exterior. Danny, Suzan, and Jim are all national judges and Rick in a regional judge. This was a good team of judges. We were not concerned since we were confident of our thorough job of cleaning. Danny found dirt under a rubber hood seal that I know I cleaned several times. I accused him of rubbing his hand on the pavement to get that black smudge on his finger. Suzan found dirty grease under the dash on the steering column. Believe it or not there’s a difference between dirty grease and clean grease, according to what the Concours “experts” told me at the school we attended. Rick found problems in the engine compartment, mainly with gas on the carbs. Okay, I can accept that. Those old engines leak gas and oil and are difficult to keep clean. Zenith carburetors are habitual leakers. But they’re easier to keep in adjustment than the Solexs that were put on the 912’s. Jim found some dust on the driver’s door, which I claim was a result of spectators getting too close to the car. He also dinged us for a long scratch on the passenger’s side door window. Suzan told him there was also a scratch on the driver’s side window. I told him that he couldn’t deduct points for that since he didn’t see it. Also told him that the darn car was fifty-two years old and bet that he didn’t look that good at age fifty-two. I think he dinged me some

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points for that comment. Here's Mike Parker giving Jim's car the once over. Mike is also I a national judge with years of experience. I kept trying to point out flaws in Jim's car but Mike totally ignored me.



Next on the schedule was the rally drivers/navigators meeting. This was conducted by Clyde Peery and Allan Cox. Alan was our previous Zone 3

Representative. During this time we were given information about the course and checkpoints. Suzanne and I elected to register for the "Tour" category versus "Seat of the Pants". Our instructions would include mileages for turns and Course Markers. Trust me, that won't keep us from missing turns and getting off course. Especially with a speedometer needle that oscillates by a few miles per hour! We have to reset the odometer at the beginning of the rally and at each checkpoint. Clyde's instructions reminded us to do that. Easy for him to say! I had to reach under the dash with my arthritic fingers, thread through some wires, then by feel, find and turn a knob on the back of the speedometer several times until it zeroed the trip meter.

Suzanne and I ran many rallies back in the old days. Even won a trophy a couple times. But in our declining years we prefer to avoid the stress of running a "Seat of the Pants" rally. You would think that by running in "Tour" class we could avoid an argument. A couple years ago at this very same location we were in line to start and had a heated argument about the placement of our car number on the windshield. This time we made it past the third turn on the ODO leg before we started disagreeing about the instructions. I usually back off because, as I've mentioned in past trip reports, Suzanne is left-handed and from the passenger seat she can wield a wicked backhand.

As it turned out the temperatures got a little high on Saturday. There were aftermarket air conditioner units offered for 356's and, in fact, we had one many years ago. But this 356 is strictly air-cooled in both the engine and passenger compartments. The problem is, even at speed the air coming in through the windows is still hot. We were running with all four vent windows and the door windows open. We pulled into the second checkpoint and opened both doors to try and get some circulation. We were hot and drenched in sweat. Peter and Paula Lepir pulled in and stopped beside us.

They were the next car behind us on the rally. While Paula went to the scoring table to get their in and out times, Peter rolled down his window and said, "It's ninety-one degrees." Thanks Peter! We really needed that. But then he suggested that Paula and I switch cars and I could ride in air-conditioned comfort. So when Paula got back to the car I told her what Peter said. Now Paula is about



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as sweet a gentlewoman as you would ever want to meet. She turned to me and politely said, "No way in hell". I took that for a definite "NO".

Clyde had promised us some really good "Porsche" roads and he wasn't kidding. He also has a sense of humor. Some of the speeds dictated that we drive twenty-three and forty-three miles per hour. Try doing that with a mechanical speedometer. The route traversed the back mountain roads of Greene County. It was really fun trying to maintain a required speed of twenty-three mph on switchbacks that even a Porsche had a hard time navigating. Thanks Clyde for the challenging rally route.

After the last checkpoint the instructions took us back to the General Morgan Inn. Just our luck to run through a localized rain shower, which meant the windows, and the temperature in the car went up. We lucked out though. We talked to another couple who drove though the same storm and sustained hail damage. Ouch!

The awards banquet Saturday evening was, once again, a pleasant occasion with excellent food served buffet style. The General Morgan Inn puts a lot of emphasis on customer care. The entire staff, from the manager to the maintenance crew are courteous and provide excellent service. In addition to the usual awards speeches, Matt Fischer gave our current Zone 3 Representative, Vic Rola an opportunity to give us an update on PCA National plans.



Vic on the left and Matt on the right.

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The autocross is held Sunday morning at the local airport. Suzanne and I decided to skip this event and head home since the forecast called for bad weather in Huntsville later in the day. The autocross was sponsored by Eurotech Knoxville. Rick and Janis Berry, who own and operate Eurotech are always generous sponsors for Spring Thing.



We planned to eat breakfast at the General Morgan. There is a little shop located in the corner of the building called the Catalyst Coffee Company. In addition to coffee they serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Nothing heavy duty but enough to satisfy our food requirements and tasty to boot. The establishment is run by a church and is non-profit. All proceeds are funneled back to the community. They're not normally open on Sunday but Matt talked them into opening for the Spring Thing crowd. We wanted to eat breakfast there mainly to support a good cause. Got us a chance to say goodbye to the Dubords and to meet another couple, Bruce and Catherine Wachter from Maryville, Tennessee. This was their first time at Spring Thing. It was interesting because one of our daughter-in-law's family is from the Maryville area. I asked them if they knew any Bolings. They said that they knew a lot of Bolings and in fact, their son was coming up to watch the autocross and was bringing a friend whose last name is Boling. The Boling's migrated from North Carolina to Blount County in the late 1700's or early 1800's. Small world!

You might recognize the fellow in this picture. He was featured in my Winterfest Trip Report. He was in charge of Winterfest and I've already written about what a great time we had at that event. He's Deems Riddle and was a good friend for a number of years. One year I drove his race 911 from Young Harris to his home in Chattanooga as a favor only to have my feet scorched because I couldn't turn the heater off. Deems came to me during one of the social times and said, "Lee, I know we're friends but I've got to tell you something. I've already laid out my soul to Suzanne and now I'm coming to talk to you." Now Deems is one great guy so I'm really paying attention. He's got my curiosity up. He continued, "Lee, in forty years of attending events like this I've absolutely never, ever voted for a 356 for the Peoples Choice trophy. Never! But I did this time. I actually voted for a 356 for People's Choice. But I didn't vote for yours!" I still like Vicki, his wife.



Sunday morning the weather map showed a massive storm system extending from the gulf up to the northern states. The bulk of the storm was headed straight towards Tennessee. When we left Geneville, the part of the storm that would hit Huntsville was in Mississippi. It was a race to see who would get to Huntsville first. Us or the storm!

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We were content to keep a steady pace and let all the crazies go past us at eighty-plus miles per hour. Seventy miles per hour in the 356 is about 3,600 rpm. It was interesting to find out while talking to a lot of other Porsche owners at the Concours how little they know about the older cars. A fair number had to ask what model it was. So I'll add a bit of info. It only has eighty-eight horsepower but it can cruise at high speeds all day long. Just takes a while to get there. I set the cruise control at seventy hoping to get home before the storm. BTW, cruise control in that car is a steady right foot.

We stopped at our son's house long enough to pick up our Miniature Schnauzer and got home just a few minutes before the storm hit us. Didn't last long but dropped a lot of water. The wind lasted long into the night.

I settled into my Lazy Boy and opened the laptop to catch up on the news. Didn't take long before the lights went out. No, we didn't lose the electricity because of the storm. My eyelids closed and suddenly there was darkness. Several hours later I woke up wondering why I was so tired. There was a good reason for that. The 356 weighs in at a little over two thousand pounds. At speed it's a lot lighter. And rear engine cars are susceptible to winds. We had very strong winds most of the trip home and I was constantly working to keep the car in the middle of the lane. Good thing there were no police cars behind me otherwise I would probably have been pulled over and checked to see if I could walk a straight line. That little car is a heck of a lot of fun to drive but on windy interstate highways it can wear you out.

Finally, we want to thank Matt Fischer and all the Smoky Mountain members who put on this weekend event every year. It's a small region just like HOD but the members still manage to stage this event year after year. No doubt we'll be back next year, "God willing and the creek don't rise". You think I'm being folksy? The route from our house to a main artery from Huntsville takes us on Little Cove Road, which crosses the small Flint river. It's more the size of a creek but it floods the road during major rainstorms. So I'll change that phrase to "God willing and the Flint don't rise" we'll be at Spring Thing 2018.