

The StarDust

November 2008 | Desert Stars Section | Arizona



StarFest at Thunderhill Racetrack

For StarFest this year Dick Sharp and I decided to only attend the racing events and to bypass the concourse and Rally events. After weeks of preparing our cars and with his 65 250SE loaded on a trailer, we were off on the 850 mile trip to Willows California.

After checking in at the hotel Sunday afternoon we were excited to take the short trip to Thunderhill and get a preview of the track. At 3 miles long, 36 feet wide and 15 turns with two high speed straights (100 mph +), we definitely had our work cut out for us!

Monday's schedule was packed with things to do, technical inspection of all cars, drivers meeting, defensive driving, auto cross and acceleration runs. We were informed of what class we would be in only to find out Walt Anderson a MBCA driving instructor and a national points leader in autocross and racing was in my class. Second place in any event was the best I could hope for.

Dick didn't fare very well either. Because his car had V8 in it he was put into the Modified Class. The two other cars in that class were a 7.4 liter V12 (yes I said 7.4!) and an E 55 AMG with a supercharger installed! I guess I didn't have it all that bad as there isn't any third place, when only three cars are in a class.

We bypassed the defensive driving and went straight to the autocross. That gave us time to assist the officials that were coordinating the autocross event. After the 1/4 mile time trials we headed back to the hotel for some much needed rest.

Tuesday we arrived at the track to the usual tech inspection and drivers meeting. Inspections were given every morning to make sure any safety or mechanical problems that developed from the previous days racing were found. Each driver received over 20 minutes of on track for practice with an instructor. This happened four times throughout the day and we learned the fastest way to make the best of the track. With

about two hours of instruction we felt confident we had what it takes to go solo in the next day's timed events.

Wednesday morning after a very detailed drivers meeting Frank Cozza, National Event Coordinator for StarFest, told us to go out and have fun and that this is not a race. On our way out to the racecourse, I think every one, including Frank knew

different. As I was in group #1 I was to be one of the first on the track. Every driver got one warm up lap, three timed laps and one cool down lap. And because we were spaced one mile apart the chances of having contact with another car was almost impossible. Having completed my runs early I had plenty of time to watch, take photographs, and do some video of the other members racing. I got to see Dick leave the track on turn seven at about 70 mph to take an unexpected tour of the infield. After dusting himself and the car off,



he went on to finish the race.

By the end of the three days the race track had had its way with only two cars, a 600SL with cooling system problems and a 500 SEC with a severely damaged engine. At the awards banquet the fine food that was served was not what was on our minds. When the awards were handed out, Dick received second place in auto cross and I received third place in time trials on the racetrack. I also accepted on behalf of Chuck and Ava Stanford, the second place award for the StarFest Rallye Event.

The long drive home was some what a blur after the week's events. Now being home and looking back on things, I think that showing up for the clubs defensive driving course a few years back is what led me to do this in the first place. I hope to see you in January for defensive driving and maybe it will lead you to a StarFest in the future.

Bud Cloninger