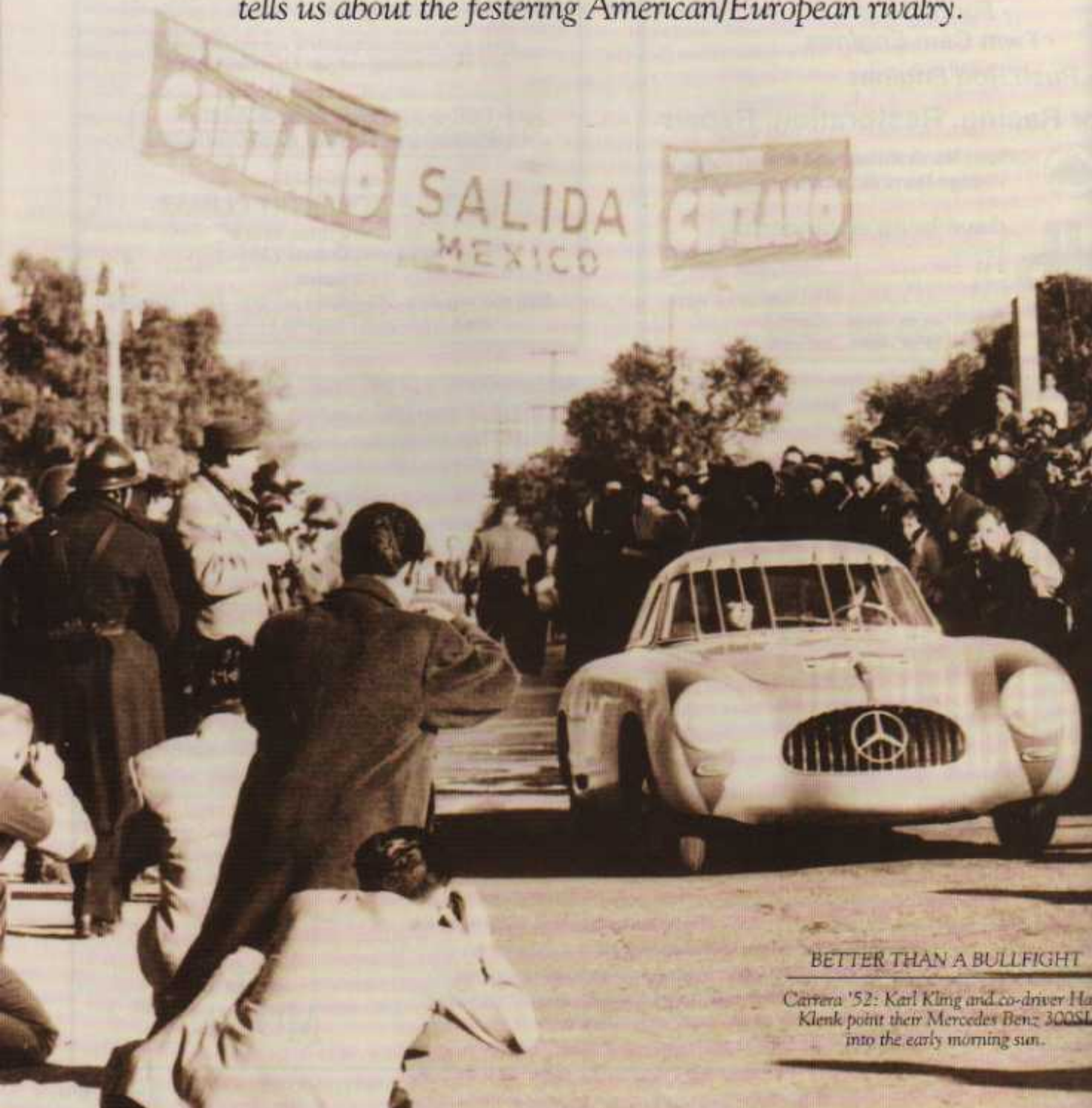


# BIG HUEVOS

— PART TWO 1951 - 1952 —

*After the success of La Carrera Panamericana in 1950, racers were ready once again to take up its incredible challenge. John M. Burns tells us about the festering American/European rivalry.*



## BETTER THAN A BULLFIGHT

*Carrera '52: Karl Kling and co-driver Hans Klenk point their Mercedes Benz 300SL into the early morning sun.*



PHOTO COURTESY: WISZ ARCHIVE

**W**ith the decision to make La Carrera Panamericana an annual event, the 1951 running featured a number of revisions.

Most notably was a route direction change that meant the race would run from south to north, locating the finish near the American border. That made the logistics of the event far more palatable. Additionally, organizers decided to allow a number of modifications to the vehicles in the interest of safety and to increase the odds of teams being able to make it to the finish.

Upon hearing about the new rules which allowed them to beef up their cars, American teams couldn't have been more pleased, because they knew the foreign competition was only going to get tougher.

Kiekhäfer, the Wisconsin-based marine-racing firm, fielded one of the new Chrysler hemis, reportedly putting out 310 horsepower, for Indianapolis driver Tony Bettenhausen. Noted stock car racer Marshall Teague came with his factory-backed Hudson Hornet sporting the Twin-H Power two-carburetor manifold, a racing head, and polished ports. Al Rogers, third-place finisher in the 1950 race, brought a Cadillac equipped with a two-carburetor manifold and rumored to have Cadillac's new 1952 cylinder head. Also, the Tupman Brothers of Pomona entered an interesting 1948 Mercury modified to full racing specifications by mechanical wizard Clay Smith, and piloted by a 21-year-old West Coast hotshoe, Troy Ruttman.

Although Ruttman's Mercury was probably the cheapest car in the field, the modifications it received were representative of the level of preparation of the top American teams. Its engine was bored out .125 and carried Edelbrock heads, an Edmunds two-carb manifold, split exhaust headers, and a Kong distributor with manual spark control to compensate for the low-octane gasoline and varying altitude. Smith also increased its oil capacity and improved its cooling system. The Mercury's handling was improved by reworking of the springs, the addition of a second shock absorber at each wheel, and the installation of what Ruttman called a "Gyro Skid Control," essentially an anti-sway bar, which the technical committee made the team remove. Finally, vents were added to the backing plates of the Mercury's brakes to reduce the fade experienced by so many of the competitors in the initial race.

Against this array of race-prepared American iron, totaling 96 of the 104 entrants, only eight European cars made an appearance—one Alfa Romeo, one Delahaye, two Jaguars, two Lancias, and two Ferraris. Given the great disparity in numbers and the outcome of the race the year before, pre-race opinion was that none of the European cars would be factors in

the race. In fact, none would—except, of course, the Ferraris.

By 1951, Ferrari was beginning to export cars to North America, but its racing successes in the United States had been confined to the small-time amateur competitions being held on either coast. Ferrari's United States distributor, Luigi Chinetti, believed that success in the American market was vital to Ferrari's future and that a victory in the Carrera would provide the public attention necessary to assure that success. At his behest, Scuderia Guastalia fielded two 212 Export berlinettas for Piero Taruffi and Alberto Ascari, the runner-up in the 1951 Grand Prix Championship. These tiny coupes—Taruffi's in red and white and Ascari's in blue and white, each powered by 2.6-liter V12 engines producing 170 horsepower—weighed barely a ton, had huge brakes by American standards, a low center of gravity and a small frontal area. Nevertheless, they were largely ignored by the American contingent.

Nor did the Americans have any reason to take notice of the Ferraris after the first leg of Carrera II. Over the 329 miles of twisting asphalt from Tuxtla Gutierrez to Oaxaca, American cars filled the first ten places. Frenchman Jean Trevoux in a Packard was first, leading Troy Ruttman's Mercury by nearly seven minutes, but that was not surprising. After all, he was a three-time winner of the Monte Carlo Rally, a Le Mans and Spa veteran and a sixth-place finisher in the 1950 Carrera—very experienced on roads such as this.

The real surprise of the first day was the poor showing of Tony Bettenhausen in the Kiekhaefer-prepared Chrysler. He was nearly eliminated from the competition for exceeding the maximum time. As he confided to Troy Ruttman later, the type of driving required in the Carrera was totally new to him and it took him the first two days to figure out how to handle the huge car through the mountains. If that weren't trouble enough, his brakes faded to nothing on the first leg. On reaching Oaxaca, he could only stop his car by repeatedly scuffing its front tires against a curb to scrub off speed while his pit crew tried to tackle it to bring it to a stop. As for the Ferraris, they were nowhere to be seen. Taruffi was in 15th place with Ascari even further back—the abrasive asphalt had simply chewed their Pirelli tires to pieces.

#### A Proclamation

Day one also saw the Carrera begin to earn the reputation that would follow it for the next four years and ultimately lead to its demise. Before the start, Jose Estrada Menocal, a prosperous Mexico City auto dealer and veteran racer, announced, "I will win, or die trying." On the first leg, he made good on his vow when his 1951 Packard left the road at speed and tumbled 630 feet down a ravine. He died in an Oaxaca hospital that afternoon along with



*Against this array of race-prepared American iron, only eight European cars made an appearance.*

co-driver Miguel Gonzalez.

The second day of competition dawned with 65 cars leaving Oaxaca on the climbing, 253-mile, roller-coaster ride to Puebla. Then, after a 30-minute break, they covered the 80-mile leg to Mexico City, descending from an altitude of 10,486 feet in a series of switchbacks down the side of a volcano. It was the day some Americans would begin to notice the little cars from Italy. Piero Taruffi, the man the Italians called "the Mountain King," won the first leg and vaulted from 15th to third in the overall standings. Alberto Ascari won the short leg from Puebla to Mexico City to climb to 12th place overall. And while Troy Ruttman took over the race lead by virtue of a second-place finish on the Puebla leg and a sixth-place finish on the

Mexico City leg, he knew the handwriting was on the wall—and it was written in Italian. As Ruttman reported in *Motor Trend* after the race, "Over the 81-mile leg from Puebla to Mexico City, which consists pretty much of an endless series of hairpin turns, I led Ascari all the way—until we reached the four-mile straight before the finish line. Then the Ferrari came alongside in fourth gear, the driver gave me a friendly wave, dropped into fifth and reached the line a half-mile ahead of our Mercury."

Day two also saw another fatality. Carlos Panini, the wealthy Italian-born founder of Mexico's first commercial airline, was killed when his Alfa Romeo left the road on a fast curve, skidded into a field and rolled over. Inexplicably, the Mexican papers blamed epileptic seizure for the accident, while the *New York Times* claimed his daughter had been driving. The deaths of three Mexicans, two of them prominent sportsmen, in the first two days of the race brought reactions of horror and indignation. A government official branded the race "an imitation of North American customs not suited to Mexican characteristics." The press also came out against the Carrera, the influential Mexico City newspaper *El Universal* declaring that it was a "crime" and stating that "The second Pan-American race should be the last." *El Universal* went on to say that the race neither qualified as a sport, nor as a satisfactory public spectacle and should be abandoned. It was a sentiment that would haunt the Carrera for the remainder of its days.

Despite the Ferrari victories of day two, there was little to inform the casual observer



PHOTO: DAN AYER/REPRODUCTION PUBLICATIONS

PHOTO: PETER BERLIN FOR MOTORSPORT



#### DANCE PARTNERS

Left: Looking dapper are Piero Taruffi (left) and Luigi Chinetti (right) during 1951 Carrera socializing.

Above: Cars line up for the start of leg two of the 1951 Carrera at Oaxaca. Winning #34 Ferrari of Taruffi is on left, Ray Crawford's Lincoln on right.

of the dominance of the Italian machines. Ruttman maintained a six-minute lead over Douglas Ehlinger's second-place Packard, with Taruffi's Ferrari nearly another five minutes in arrears. The remainder of the top ten was filled with American cars. To the average fan, the Carrera was unfolding as expected. After all, wasn't the performance of the Ferraris in the mountains merely a repetition of the events of the first Carrera, where the smaller European cars had made up time? Wouldn't the big-engined American cars simply pull away when they reached the long straights and open plains of the north? Day three would provide the answer that Ruttman, and others, who had witnessed the Ferrari's performance firsthand, knew was coming. The answer was an emphatic, "No."

On the third day, the Highway began to open out. On the legs to Leon and Durango, the racers left the mountains and descended through a series of increasingly fast bends to the high desert plains of the north. Through this topography, the Ferraris took control of the race. Ascari broke the record for the 267-mile morning leg to Leon by 15 minutes. He followed that up by breaking the record for the 335-mile afternoon leg to Durango by 21 minutes, averaging 98.5 mph for the day and vaulting himself into third place in the overall standings. Taruffi's Ferrari finished the two legs nearly ten minutes behind his teammates. Nevertheless, he took over the race lead, bettering Ruttman's Mercury by more than 15 minutes, and turning Ruttman's 11-minute lead at the beginning of the day into a four-minute deficit. Worse yet from Ruttman's point of view, Ascari's Ferrari was now less than seven minutes behind. With two days of racing left, he had no hope of keeping the Italian behind him. For the American contingent, the only bright spot of day three was the performance of Tony Bettenhausen's Chrysler. He was second to Ascari on the Leon to Durango leg and his Chrysler seemed to be a match for the Ferraris in top speed. Unfortunately, he was just too far back in the standings to be a

factor. Despite his day-three showing, he was still mired back in 31st position.

Friday, 23 November, 1951, was an off day for the race. During that time, the Americans tried to come up with a strategy to beat the Ferraris that now seemed so dominant. Marshall Teague, lying in sixth place after a series of mishaps had befallen his Hudson, including a broken fuel line on the first leg and a crash on the way from the finish line to his garage in Mexico City, predicted an Italian victory if the Ferrari engines stayed together. He noted that the Ferraris "can do 130 miles an hour—they have a 20 mile [per hour] advantage over the American cars." Lincoln driver Ray Crawford, then lying in eighth place, echoed that sentiment, saying, "I don't believe we can catch them, but their engines are wound up too tight." Fourth-place Chrysler driver Bill Sterling succinctly stated the strategy of the entire American contingent. "[All] Rogers and I are going to push the Italians on the straightaways and see if they have engine trouble before we do," he said. "I can tell Ruttman is going to do it too." While the knowledgeable among the Americans understood the reasons behind the Ferrari's outstanding performance, many onlookers were simply astounded. Some even went so far as to accuse the Italians of using doped



fuel. They simply couldn't believe that an engine displacing a mere 156 cubic inches, less than half the size of the 331-cubic-inch Chrysler hemi, could produce so much power and speed.

Ascari's pace over day three had cut the field to 39 cars, so day four of Carrera II began with the two Ferraris playing the part of the fox to a pack of 36 American hounds (a solitary Jaguar soldiered on well back in the pack, but it would not complete the first leg of day four). The object was simply to push the Italian cars until they broke. If they didn't, they would win. It was that simple. Over the morning leg from Durango to Párral, Tony Bettenhausen picked up where he had left off on Thursday afternoon, finishing second to Ascari's Ferrari. On the afternoon leg Bettenhausen pushed even harder. Reaching speeds of 130 mph, his Chrysler beat the Italian to Chihuahua by more than three and a half minutes. It was the first victory for an American driver on any leg of the race. Still it was not enough. The Ferraris ran flawlessly, with Taruffi maintaining his overall lead and Ascari moving into second place ahead of Ruttman, whose Mercury was beginning to show the effects of the protracted high speeds on the sections north of Mexico City. At day's end, Taruffi maintained a nine-minute lead over his teammate, with Ruttman's Mercury a further seven minutes back, holding a three-minute lead over the

fourth-place Chrysler of Bill Sterling.

The final 230-mile leg from Chihuahua to Juárez was also the fastest, and again the Chryslers showed their speed.

Bettenhausen won the leg, averaging in excess of 113 mph. But despite his strong showing from Leon north, with two first and two second place finishes over the final four legs, he would finish no better than 16th overall. His troubles in the mountains had simply put him too far behind. Bill Sterling was second into Juárez, fully five minutes behind Bettenhausen, but two minutes ahead of Ascari and three ahead of Taruffi. It was enough to move him into third place overall, ahead of Ruttman's Mercury. Hampered by a top speed of only 115 mph, Ruttman could do no better than 14th for the final leg and finished fourth overall.

With control of the race firmly in hand, the Ferrari drivers took it easy over the final leg, conserving their cars. They merely drove fast enough to keep Sterling's Chrysler, their nearest competitor, behind them. By coincidence, this strategy provided a rousing finish for the 50,000 fans at Juárez' Acoraves Airport. The first three cars arrived at the finish line together with Taruffi's Ferrari a split second ahead of Ascari's, the two small cars with their shrieking V12s closely pursued by Sterling's massive Chrysler, its V8 bellowing—two prancing horses chased by a large angry

#### ALL'S FAIR IN RACING AND WAR

*Above: Lancia Aurelia GT B-20 was an extremely desirable street car in its day, driven here by Giovanni Bracco.*

*Right: Cigar-chewing Clay Smith in his glory, tuning Troy Ruttman's '48 Mercury for the '51 race.*

bull. In fact, Sterling remained over 15 minutes behind Taruffi on overall time, but to many in the crowd it seemed that if only Sterling's Chrysler could have gotten by the two flying Ferraris, he could have won.

After his victory, the white-haired Taruffi expressed his sorrow over the deaths early in the race, but went on to call the Carrera "the most wonderful race in the world." He praised the treacherous curves of the southern legs, calling them a true test of a driver's skill, and said the long straight stretches of the north provided a challenge to the speed of the car. That sentiment was echoed by Troy Ruttman, who reported in *Motor Trend* that "Given somewhat modified regulations—the Carrera Panamericana can outshine our great classic, the 500 at the Indianapolis Speedway!"

#### Crying Foul, or Just Plain Crying

The modified regulations to which Ruttman referred were the main item of discussion among the Americans in the

wake of the Ferrari victory. The Italian cars, which had initially been ignored and had been widely believed to be too fragile to handle the grueling test imposed by the Carrera, were now claimed to have had an unfair advantage over the Americans by virtue of their high price. "It simply wasn't fair to have cars costing as much as \$17,000 (In fact, Chinetti said he would sell an identical 212 Export for \$11,000) competing with much lower priced American iron." Never mind the fact that the Ferraris were ordinary series-built cars, as opposed to ones specially prepared for racing, or the fact that Kiekhaefer's much-modified Chryslers were reported to represent an investment of \$59,000.

The bottom line was that American manufacturers had no interest in having their cars compete in a race against foreign competition—unless, of course, they could beat the foreign competition handily. In 1951, they did not see the small European marques as competitors on the sales front, and they certainly weren't going to spend outrageous sums of money just to beat them in some crazy race held in a banana republic like Mexico. True, the Carrera did provide good publicity, which, in turn, meant enhanced sales. But the good publicity only came from winning, not from finishing third behind some Italian cars nobody had ever heard of. In short order, the Americans made their position clear—if the Ferraris were not excluded or put into their own separate class, they would boycott the race.

Faced with this ultimatum, and yet wanting to attract both American and European competitors, the ANA, doing a dance that has since become commonplace among race organizers, again changed the race rules. For 1952 the race would be divided into two classes, stock and modified. But a car wouldn't necessarily have to be modified to



*The racer made good on his vow of winning or dying when his car left the road and tumbled 630 feet down a ravine.*

end up in the modified division—all cars produced in lots of less than 5,000 would be relegated to that category—and that was 5,000 units of the particular model being raced. Never mind the fact that the AAA, the governing body for racing in the United States, set their minimum production number for stock cars at 500, some European manufacturer might have been able to meet that figure. With the minimum production requirement set at 5,000, not even Jaguar, let alone the small Italian marques, could possibly field a car in the stock division.

With the division of the field into stock and modified classes, the regulations covering the stock classification were again tightened, being limited to safety modifications. Brake, suspension, wheel and tire alterations were permitted, as was the removal of the rear seats and the installation of extra fuel tanks, but modifications to engine performance were limited to an .020 overbore and the installation of an electric fuel pump. While well intended, these regulations

would prove woefully inadequate to render the "stock cars" stock. However, in comparison to the regulations for the modified division they were strict indeed. In the modified category, the only restrictions were two seats, a complete electrical system, and a requirement that each car finish the race with its original engine. Despite the fact that the new race regulations deprived the fans of a chance to witness actual competition between American cars and their European counterparts, they ultimately achieved their objective. They satisfied the Americans while still permitting European entries. In any event, it was competition among the Europeans, rather than competition between the Europeans and Americans that would provide the main attraction for the 1952 affair.

After the Ferrari win in Carrera II, Enzo Ferrari began to fully realize the potential of the North American market for his cars and the impact of the Carrera on that market. He decided to go all-out for the 1952 race. Since the Carrera involved longer distances and higher speeds than most European circuits, he reasoned that a special purpose-built car would be necessary if Ferrari hoped to stay on top in the face of increasingly stiff competition.

He ordered the construction and development of three berlinettas specifically for the 1952 race to be driven by Alberto Ascari, Luigi Villorosi and Luigi Chinetti (A spider version was also built for American Bill Spear, but it was never entered in the race). The Ferrari Mexicos, as they were called, featured a longer wheelbase and were powered by the newer and larger, Lampredi-designed, 4.1-liter V12 rated at 280 horsepower, and had drivetrains from the 340 America. Their frames were constructed for Ferrari by Gilco Autotelaio and, while they were not true space frames, they were composed of smaller diameter tubes than was then usual practice for Ferrari. They weighed only 2200 lbs.

The Ferrari Mexicos also made significant use of aerodynamics in an effort to reduce drag and provide stability at speed. Their windshields were moved back behind the midpoint of the wheelbase and they carried small fins atop their rear fenders. They also carried a BLAC (boundary layer air control) device on each door in an effort to improve the airflow to the scoops in the rear fenders that directed cooling air to the rear brakes. (In point of fact, the BLAC devices, like many aerodynamic aids in that era before the use of wind tunnels, were of little or no effect because they were positioned in dead air, but their incorporation into the design demonstrates the amount of thought and commitment Ferrari put into the cars.)

Ferrari's main competition would come from Mercedes-Benz. Only seven years after Daimler-Benz' Unterturkheim facility had been shut down by occupying Allied forces, it had designed and built a sports car to





*Although the Lincolns were "stock cars" within meaning of the rules, they were not stock by any stretch of the imagination.*

American competitor.

By 1952 the Carrera had truly become a major race on the international calendar. With that status, Carrera III saw a significant increase in the size of the teams and their level of organization and preparation. Mercedes-Benz followed in the footsteps of Bill Stroppe and Carl Kiekhaefer, who each were known for turning their participation in the Carrera into something akin to a military campaign. The Mercedes-Benz team arrived in Mexico in the latter part of October, despite the fact that the race was not scheduled to start until 19 November. In addition to its legendary team manager Alfred Neubauer, and drivers Karl Kling, Hermann Lang, and John Fitch, Mercedes brought 24 mechanics, two 300SL coupes, two 300SL roadsters, and 27 tons of equipment, enough to completely rebuild all four cars.

Knowing that the Highway had a reputation for being hard on tires, Mercedes brought 180 tires already mounted on

wheels, which were distributed along the entire race distance. Beginning on 25 October, they began their trial runs over the Highway with co-drivers making notes of the route and its hazards. During this pre-race practice, the team rolled up 6,820 miles on the spare roadster. In doing so, they also gained valuable information regarding their car's ability to withstand the rigors of the Carrera in time to remedy any potential weaknesses. In demonstration of this fact, the 300SLs appeared in Tuxtla Gutierrez for day one of the race sporting special vents for rear brake cooling recommended by John Fitch that amounted to large vents cut into the inner fenders, plus "view holes" that allowed the co-driver to watch tire wear without stopping.

While Mercedes, in a style reminiscent of their vaunted "Silver Arrows" of the late 1930s, set a standard of organization that no other European team could match, smaller competitors also engaged in more pre-race preparation than had been seen in earlier Carreras. The French marque Gordini, a newcomer to both the Carrera and the European racing scene, also engaged in extensive pre-race testing.

Finding that they were experiencing extraordinary rear tire wear from contact between fender and tire when the rear suspension compressed over bumps, the Gordini mechanics cut holes into the tops of the rear fenders to allow for clearance. In a similar vein, 1951 Carrera competitor and 1952 Mille Miglia winner Giovanni Bracco, traveled to Mexico with the Mercedes team and spent the ensuing month developing his own system of course notes. He painted symbols on rocks, curbs, and even on the roadway to warn himself of particular hazards.

As day one approached, the duel in the modified division, now more frequently referred to as the sports car division,

### Lincoln, Lincoln, I've Been Thinkin'.

On the American front, the stock division, factory involvement was not what had been hoped for. Only Lincoln made an actual factory commitment to the race, but a serious commitment it was. Working through Bob Estes, Tupman Motors and Ruppert Motors, the factory-sponsored Lincolns had engines prepared by Clay Smith with chassis' by Bill Stroppe. Smith-prepared cars had also won the 1952 Indianapolis 500, with Troy Ruttman driving, and the Mobilgas Economy Run, with Bill Stroppe in the winning car.

Although the Lincolns were "stock cars" within the meaning of the rules, they were not stock by any stretch of the imagination. They were 1953 models arriving ahead of the official announcement date, equipped with 205-horsepower engines, up 45 horsepower from the year before. They were also equipped with Ford truck camshafts, solid valve lifters, special front spindles and hubs and a choice of two optional rear ends. Lincoln was able to incorporate these modifications by making them part of a special kit available as an option in their catalogue. The rear axle ratios were terrifically high, allowing road speeds of 130 miles per hour. The Lincolns used Houdaille shock absorbers with Air Lift air bags inside each coil spring. Air Lifts were also used at the rear in conjunction with oversized tubular shocks. Ventilating fans taken from the heating and ventilation system were mounted in the trunk with ducts to the rear brakes for cooling. Ducting was also routed to the front brakes. The end result was a car built to cope with the worst the Carrera had to offer and powered by an engine with a 15-horsepower advantage over Cadillac, its main



PICTURE COURTESY OF THE FERRARI CLUB



### FLYING FERRARIS

*Left: Luigi Chinetti's Ferrari 340 Mexico was one of three built with long wheelbase specifically for the Carrera. The car finished third in 1952.*

*Above: Jack McAfee's Ferrari 340 America was powered by a 4.1-liter V12. Car was owned by Tony Parravano, a real estate developer who mysteriously disappeared in 1960.*

*Right: Poster from the 1952 Carrera.*

seemed likely to be between Ferrari and Mercedes-Benz. The only other major competitor, Gordini, didn't seem to have much of a chance. They were too new, too light, and while they featured fully independent suspensions, their 2.3-liter six-cylinder engines were only rated at 160 horsepower. On paper, the edge had to go to Ferrari. Despite the Mexico's lack of an independent rear suspension, its power

advantage over the 300SL, at least 50 horsepower even taking into account Ferrari's reputation for inflated claims and Mercedes' conservatism, coupled with its extra gear in the gearbox (five-speed vs. four-speed), seemed to give it a significant advantage over the long straight stretches which comprised the last half of the race. That advantage only seemed more significant when Herr Neubauer announced Mercedes' race strategy. The 300SLs would not try to build up an insurmountable lead in the mountainous southern sections, where their handling appeared to give them an advantage. Instead, they would merely hound the Ferraris, keeping after them and pushing them to the limit in the hope that they would drop out from mechanical failure or driver error. Wasn't this the same strategy that had failed the Americans in 1951? Wouldn't the Ferraris simply cruise to victory again, using their unmatched power and speed to outrun everything over the last half of the race? It



seemed so—but then again Alfred Neubauer was seldom wrong.

#### On a Kling and a Prayer

Ninety cars took the flag to start day one. It would be a tough day for many of the competitors. The lead Ferrari Mexico, piloted by 1952 Grand Prix Champion Alberto Ascari, crashed when Ascari hit loose gravel in the middle of a curve and piled into an embankment. Neither he, nor



PHOTO: MERCEDES-BENZ ARCHIVES



PHOTO: MERCEDES-BENZ ARCHIVES

### RUNNING A TIGHT SHIP

*Top: Karl Kling and Hans Klenk regain composure after hitting a buzzard while traveling at well over 100 mph.*

*Above: The Mercedes-Benz team celebrates their 1-2 victory in the 1952 Carrera, with (from left to right) Kling, Neubauer, Hermann Lang, Dr. Nallinger and Mrs. Kling.*

*Right: At John Fitch's suggestion, a mechanic chisels a brake cooling duct into the rear fender of Kling's Mercedes 300SL.*

*Far Right: Klenk climbs from the Mercedes at finish, showing some wear and tear.*



PHOTO: MERCEDES-BENZ ARCHIVES

co-driver Giuseppe Scotuzzi, was injured, but the car was out of the race. A low-flying buzzard smashed the windshield of the Mercedes driven by Karl Kling, sending shards of broken glass flying through the cockpit, and cutting co-driver Hans Klenk's face in several places. Despite the incident, the 300SL would finish the leg.

In the stock division, Bob Korf's Lincoln lost valuable time when his co-driver, Philip Gow, removed his belts to check the gas tanks behind the seat and was thrown out of the car as it rounded a sharp bend. Korf stopped and picked him up, then drove on to Oaxaca where Gow was given medical treatment. His injuries were limited to cuts and bruises.

And then there was Tommy Francis—if there had been a Mantz-Bettenhausen Memorial Trophy for getting a broken car home, he would have won it. As he explained, "After 50 kilometers, I lost a front wheel. Then after we changed that, I lost the clutch and brakes. I've been driving the last 450 miles without brakes or clutch." As Francis' Packard approached the finish line in Oaxaca, he and his co-driver held their front doors open to increase wind resistance and slow the car. He finished 42nd.

At day's end the leader in the sports car division was neither Ferrari nor Mercedes. It was the Gordini driven by French motorcycle and grand prix star, Jean Behra. Behra was a national hero in France, having recently whipped the Ferrari team at Rheims in his Gordini, and Mexico's large French colony were beside themselves over his performance. While the second Gordini had fulfilled the predictions of the pre-race pun-



### *A low-flying buzzard smashed the windshield of the Mercedes driven by Kling, sending shards of broken glass flying through the cockpit.*

ditions, dropping out after only 25 miles, Behra had simply streaked through the mountains, averaging 88.8 mph and breaking Jean Trevoux's 1951 record by nearly half an hour. His time put him five and a half minutes in front of Giovanni Bracco's second-place Ferrari and eight minutes ahead of Karl Kling, who finished third despite the buzzard incident. The pre-race favorite Ferrari Mexicos were well off the pace, with Luigi Chinetti in sixth place, 17 minutes in arrears, and Luigi Villorosi out of the top ten.

In the stock division, Lincoln owned five of the first six places, with the first four all finishing within little more than a minute of each other. Only Pat Kirkwood's Chrysler

could match the speed of the Lincolns, but his challenge was formidable. He finished the leg in second place, just five seconds behind leader Walt Faulkner. Remarkably, Bob Korf finished third despite his unscheduled pit stop to retrieve his errant co-driver.

At the starting line on day two, Karl Kling's 300SL appeared with "buzzard bars," steel tubing mounted in front of the windshield to protect it from another incident such as the one from the day before.

On the first leg of day two, the tortuous, climbing run to Puebla, Behra again set a blistering pace until he reached the town of Molinos, 50 miles from the finish. There, he lost control of his Gordini on a tight curve. The car spun off the road and plummeted into a deep ditch. Behra was dragged out of the wreck and taken to a hospital in Puebla, where he was initially reported to be suffering from a concussion, but not seriously hurt. Later, he would be reported suffering from compound fractures of nine ribs and severe facial injuries. He did not leave the hospital until 12 December, finally arriving back home in France in January.

With Behra out, Bracco's Ferrari took a three-minute lead over Kling's Mercedes on overall time, but fastest times on both the Puebla leg and the short leg to Mexico City went to Luigi Villorosi's Ferrari Mexico. Also fast over the short leg was Jack McAfee in another 4.1 Ferrari, but his efforts on the day as a whole were not enough to thwart the 300SLs of John Fitch/Eugen Geiger and Hermann Lang/Erwin Grupp, who moved past McAfee, Luigi Chinetti's Mexico and the Umberto Maglioli/Franco Bonfiglia Lancia to take over third and fourth positions. McAfee wound up in fifth after a long battle with the Phil Hill/Arnold Stubbs 212 Vignale coupe.

In the stock division, Pat Kirkwood's Chrysler dropped out with mechanical problems. With Kirkwood out, the Lincolns solidified their stranglehold at the top of the standings, taking the top four places, with Chuck Stevenson finishing first on the day and moving into first overall, ahead of Walt Faulkner, Johnny Mantz and Bob Korf. The quartet, which were still running within two minutes of each other, had opened a twelve and a half minute lead on Marshall Teague's fifth-place Hudson.

At the finish line in Mexico City, a crowd estimated at more than half a million lined the road as far out as 35 miles just to get a glimpse of the cars. Police battled the unruly throng, which tried to mob the course, its holiday spirits owing to the fact that it was the 42nd anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. Despite the near-riot, only one casualty marred the day's events. Santos Letona Dia, a Mexican engineer, was killed when his Jaguar rammed a bridge near his home on the Mexico City leg. It would prove to be the race's only fatality.

In Mexico City, with the serpentine southern legs now behind, Alfred Neubauer felt confident of victory for his Mercedes-



Benz team. The 300SLs were running flawlessly in second, third, and fourth positions while the Ferrari Mexicos of Chinetti and Villoresi were back in seventh and eighth places, respectively, with Chinetti over 24 minutes behind Kling's Mercedes and Villoresi another 11 minutes in arrears. The only thing standing in the way of a Mercedes victory was the Ferrari of Giovanni Bracco, and Neubauer wasn't worried about him, saying, "We are out of the mountains now. When we hit the flat, the race will be all ours."

Perhaps Neubauer should have been more concerned. While Bracco's Ferrari was not one of the vaunted Mexicos, but instead a 250S Berlinetta, it nevertheless carried a 3-liter version of the Colombo-designed V12, topped by three four-barrel Weber carburetors and putting out 220 horsepower. Moreover, while Bracco was said to be given to fits of temper—once reportedly stopping his car in the middle of a long-distance race to punch out his mechanic over some dispute regarding race tactics, then jumping back in the car and speeding on—he could be a fast, tough competitor, given the right car on the right day. He had won the 1952 Mille Miglia in the same Ferrari he was driving in the Carrera, outdistancing the 300SLs of Kling, Hermann Lang, and Rudolf Caracciola in a drive variously characterized as "insane" or "inspired" through driving rain and wind, all the while sipping brandy and chain-smoking cigarettes. He might well prove to be more of a threat to Mercedes than Neubauer ever anticipated.

Villoresi's Mexico posted fastest time on the 267-mile morning leg of the third day, Mexico City to Leon, a record time 21 minutes faster than Ascari's in 1951, but early on in the afternoon leg between Leon and Durango, the pinion bearing of his Ferrari Mexico gave out and his race was finished. With Villoresi out, Kling's Mercedes won the 335-mile Durango leg in a record time some 26 minutes faster than



*Neubauer wasn't worried about Ferrari, saying, "We are out of the mountains now. When we hit the flat, the race will be all ours."*

Ascari's mark of the year before and more than a minute faster than Bracco's Ferrari. Still it was not enough. On the day's first leg, through Toluca and down onto the high cactus plains, Bracco had lengthened his lead to more than eight minutes over Kling's Mercedes, with Hermann Lang and John Fitch nearly half an hour behind. Kling's victory on the afternoon leg had only pared that eight-minute lead to seven.

In the stock car division, the Lincoln train rolled on. Johnny Mantz moved into the overall lead with Walt Faulkner remaining second, Chuck Stevenson falling to third and Bob Korf remaining fourth. Almost miraculously, the top three Lincolns still remained within two minutes of each other—their nearest competitor, Reginald McFee's fifth-place Chrysler, nearly 17 minutes behind.

On the morning leg of day four, the 251-mile run over the level plains from Durango to Parnal, Karl Kling again set fastest time, making up more than two minutes on Bracco's Ferrari. Nevertheless, he remained nearly five minutes behind the Italian with

only two legs left to run. And despite Kling's showing over the last two legs, many observers thought that the Ferrari was still the fastest car in the race. Bracco would be tough to catch on the wide open straightaways of the legs to Chihuahua and Juarez. Herr Neubauer now needed either a spectacular drive from his leader or a Ferrari breakdown to make his Mexico City prophecy come true.

He got both. Only 15 miles into the 188-mile leg to Chihuahua, Bracco's luck finally ran out. The Ferrari's clutch failed and the Italian watched in helpless rage as Kling's Mercedes roared by. Kling went on to set fastest time for the leg, averaging nearly 127 mph for the day and increasing his lead over Chinetti's Ferrari by nearly two minutes. For his part, Chinetti took the bit in his teeth upon seeing Bracco's Ferrari by the side of the road and clocked an average speed of 126 miles per hour for the leg, good enough to move him into third place in front of Fitch's Mercedes.

In the stock car division, the Lincolns continued to roll, with the factory cars continuing to change places at the front. At the end of the day, it was Chuck Stevenson back in the lead with Johnny Mantz in second place, 47 seconds behind, and Walt Faulkner another 2 minutes and 17 seconds back. Bob Korf remained in fourth, seven and a half minutes behind the leader, while Reginald McFee's Chrysler, the first non-Lincoln, had fallen 22 minutes back in fifth place. Stevenson averaged nearly 110 miles per hour for the afternoon leg and his overall average speed of 88 mph through Chihuahua nearly equalled Piero Taruffi's average speed in the Ferrari the year before.

While the Mercedes team prepared their cars for the final day, relieved that good strategy combined with good fortune had swept them into three of the top four places, they received some bad news. John Fitch, in the fourth-place Mercedes roadster, had been disqualified for returning to



PHOTO BY TERRY P. BRIDGEMAN



### LOS COCHES AMERICANOS

*Above: Akton Miller (waving) and Doug Harrison get in the mood before the start at Tuxtla in 1952, standing between their Oldsmobile 88 and Attilio Cagnasso's Hudson Hornet.*

*Left: Lincoln swept the 1952 race, winning the first four places in its class.*

the starting line in Parral and allowing someone else to work on the car. While not a great blow to the team's overall position, the news was nevertheless unwelcome. Despite suffering from persistent tire trouble and suspension problems which had made his car virtually uncontrollable at speed, Fitch had stayed within striking distance of the leaders, and could possibly have given Mercedes a one-two-three finish.

With Kling enjoying a 32-minute edge over Lang's second-place Mercedes and a 39-minute edge over Chinetti in the sole remaining Mexico, his victory was assured as long as his 300SL held together over the final 230 miles to Juarez. Under such circumstances, he could be expected to take it easy, as Taruffi and Ascari had done the year before. He didn't. Hitting speeds as high as 160 mph, he screamed through the final leg at an average speed of 135 mph, 20 miles per hour faster than Bettenhausen's

record of the year before. His average speed for the entire race was slightly over 102 mph. By comparison, Troy Ruttman's record speed for the 1952 Indianapolis 500 was only 27 mph faster, and the average speed of Hermann Lang's 300SL in his 1952 Le Mans win was slower than Kling's Carrera speed by 5 mph.

Chinetti cut almost a minute off the lead held by Lang for second place, but it was not enough. The deficit had simply been too much to overcome in a single leg. Lang's Mercedes finished in second place, six minutes and 15 seconds ahead on overall time, giving Mercedes a one-two victory. Behind Chinetti, fourth place went to Umberto Maglioli in a supercharged 2.0-liter Lancia Aurelia V6. Almost unnoticed in the standings until the finish, his drive had been consistent, if not spectacular. His drives in Carreras IV and V would be spectacular indeed. Also nearly hidden in the standings was a Porsche driven by Furst Metternich. It finished 25th overall and eighth in the sports car class, but it was the first car under 1500 cc to finish the race and the only one to be classified. It had performed superbly for more than 23 racing hours, a harbinger of things to come.

Lincoln continued to dominate the stock division, coming home first, second, third, and fourth in class and seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth overall, with Chuck Stevenson leading Johnny Mantz,

Walt Faulkner and Bob Korf over the line. As they had throughout the race, the top three Lincolns remained within minutes of each other at the finish, with less than five minutes separating them at the line. They finished with average speeds only 12 mph slower than the winning Mercedes, and Stevenson's 90.9 mph average bettered the 1951 mark of Taruffi's Ferrari by two miles per hour. The fastest non-Lincolns were the fifth- and sixth-place Chryslers driven by Reginald McFee and C. D. Evans, with McFee finishing more than 27 minutes behind Stevenson.

In the end, it was organization and preparation that were the watchwords of Carrera III. Mercedes-Benz with its army of mechanics and truckloads of equipment had simply worn the faster Ferraris into the ground, as Alfred Neubauer had predicted. In the stock division, the factory-backed, Bill Stroppe/Clay Smith-prepared Lincolns were simply in a class by themselves, seemingly maintaining formation as they calmly motored away from the competition. It was the level of organization and preparation represented by these teams, and the hideous expense attendant to the mounting of such an attack on the Carrera, that would occupy the organizers in the months ahead.

*In the Jan/Feb issue of Vintage Motorsport, John M. Burns wraps up the incredible saga of the Mexican Road Race, covering the final two years of the event, 1953 and '54.—Ed. ●*