

# Angels and D-Types

Home to Hollywood, Venice Beach and a 2024 Olympic Games bid, Los Angeles will forever be driven by its love for cars. **Upward Curve** visits California's engine room, the distinguished Vault underneath the Petersen Automobile Museum

**R**acing is life. Anything before or after is just waiting," said Steve McQueen in the 1971 classic *Le Mans*. McQueen's love affair with the automobile was not just scripted. He owned – and raced – the Porsche 908 that he drove in *Le Mans*, along with a Porsche 917, Porsche 356, Ferrari 512, a 1963 Ferrari 250, 1962 Cobra, Ford GT40 and a very rare right-hand drive British Racing Green Jaguar D-Type XKSS.

The 'Green Rat', as McQueen affectionately named it, is currently exhibited in 'The Vault' at the extraordinary Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. The Vault is home to cars representing more than 100 years of automotive history, some of which have rarely been seen by the public. Symbolic of LA's car-obsessed culture, it is the epilogue



to the Petersen narrative that explains why four wheels continue to impact and pervade daily life across the globe: "We have cars that are able to tell so many stories about LA culture, creativity and consumption," says Petersen Museum Curator Leslie Kendall.

**Above: The museum façade is wrapped in stainless-steel ribbons over a 'hot-rod' skin**

"It is incredibly rewarding for me to be able to bring these cars together and tell people stories about a collection that is so much more than just transportation and engineering. These cars represent art, fashion, politics, religion, industry, business and conservation. They mark a time in history. I feel extremely fortunate to work with objects that have such deep meaning."

Only 70-80 of the 300-piece collection (in addition to the 70-80 borrowed from private collectors) can be on display in the Petersen Museum at one time. Friends of the Foundation agree that in order to protect the vehicles – and the prestige that surrounds them – the ultra-secure Vault is a worthy treasure trove.

Off limits to general admission ticket-holders, pre-arranged visits to the 'visible storage' collection are escorted, with strict no-photography rules to retain the mystique of the wealthiest parking lot on earth.

Select visitors have access to early-twentieth-century cars, head-of-state vehicles, hot rods belonging to Hollywood legends, award-winning rides, exotics, muscle cars, motorcycles and automobiles that pushed the boundaries of innovation.



Among them, a 1952/56 Chrysler Imperial Parade Phaeton used by Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon; a 1923 Rolls-Royce owned by legendary actor Fred Astaire; the gold-plated, two-time AMBR (America's Most Beautiful Roadster) winning 'Golden Star';

**Left: 1949 Delahaye Type 175 Drophead Coupe Above: 2012 Fisker Karma (Art Center alumnus design) Below: 1979 Volkswagen Transport T2 (from the 2006 film Little Miss Sunshine starring Steve Carell) Right: A table at the annual gala**

and the 30th of only 50 innovative Tuckers ever built.

Other vehicles currently located in the Vault include the spectacular one-of-one 1925/34 'Round Door' Rolls-Royce Phantom I Aerodynamic Coupe, a Ferrari given to Henry Ford II by Enzo Ferrari, a Mercedes used by Saddam Hussein and a 1939 Bugatti given to the Shah of Iran as a wedding present. There is even a Popemobile.

The Vault reopened in January 2016, a month after the museum resumed business as usual following a dramatic 14-month

\$90m facelift. With a façade wrapped in stainless-steel ribbons over a 'hot-rod red' skin, museum boosters set out to join the league of such revered institutions as the Ferrari and Maserati museums in Italy; the Porsche, BMW and Mercedes-Benz museums in Germany; the Musée D'Orsay in Paris and Washington DC's National Air and Space Museum.

Founded on June 11, 1994 by magazine publisher Robert E. Petersen, and his wife Margie, the world-class institution finds itself in good company on the Miracle Mile stretch, neighbouring

the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Page Museum, La Brea Tar Pits and the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures (set to open next year). All in a US State at the leading edge of transportation and alternative-fuel technology.

Contrary to an article in the *Los Angeles Times* in the wake of LA's \$2bn upgrade to public transport in 2014, the city's love affair with the car is far from over – it's contagious. [petersen.org](http://petersen.org) ■

*The 23rd annual Petersen Gala will take place in October 2017 with the red carpet rolled out for friends of the Foundation; old and new. James Corden hosted the glamorous event in 2016 with dinner by the Drago brothers and live performances. (Seats from \$1,500 and tables priced at \$15,000, \$25,000 or \$50,000.) Function rooms – or the whole museum – can also be hired out for corporate parties, conferences or product launches, including a fourth-floor glass penthouse with a pavilion and terrace.*

