

California dreamin'

Upward Curve speaks to the Englishwoman in charge of California's Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca ahead of 60th anniversary celebrations at the 2017 Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion in August

It was a time when the Frisbee joined the Slinky and Hula Hoop scene, the average U.S. house price was \$12,220 and Elvis had just purchased Graceland (for significantly more than \$12,220). It was 1957 and the new Laguna Seca Raceway opened in Monterey, just inland from California's rugged central coastline.

With \$1.5m invested by local businesses and wealthy individuals, the track was a symbol that The Great Depression and John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* were but

a speck of dust in the wake of an auspicious new era.

Pete Lovely, a Washington businessman – and Formula One driver – won the first race on the track, fittingly in a Ferrari. Inextricably linked forever, the Raceway and Ferrari are both celebrating milestone anniversaries this year. The 2017 Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion will honour Enzo Ferrari, and the first time he fired up the 125S in 1947, as well as rolling out Pete Lovely's Ferrari 500TR that won here 60 years ago. ▶



"It's a facility that gets your heart," explains CEO Gill Campbell, an Englishwoman who travelled to Monterey for two months 15 years ago and immediately fell in love with the circuit.

"It is infused with passion; perhaps one of the most iconic racing circuits in the world. Monterey is paradise. It is a beautiful place and the people here are among the best in the industry."

Even Pope John Paul II visited the circuit 30 years ago, with 72,000 people gathering for mass.

Home to America's golden years of sports car racing, the track now hosts one of the two great events (along with England's Goodwood Festival). Attendance could go close to 100,000 over the four days to rival, or surpass the professional racing events hosted at Laguna Seca. The Reunion is part of Monterey Car Week,



which features the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance (considered the most prestigious of automotive charitable events) and a wealth of other must-attend events.

Campbell and event organisers wade through more than 1,000 applications from around the world to invite approximately 550 cars to race – not just to look at. The Reunion itself will celebrate racing through the decades with a time capsule to bring the great years back to life as many models share a 60th anniversary with the track.

In honour of the 60th anniversary of the Chevy Corvette, in 2013, a display of Corvette Heritage was arranged at the Raceway, and a Corvette Club Corral was cordoned off, resulting in an astounding impromptu gathering of over 350 Corvettes from every era. Chevy rolled out several rare prototype Corvettes, including the Mako Shark and Manta Ray concepts for a display on 'Stingray Island'.

The special race group for 2017 will be Formula Junior, divided into 1958-60 and 1961-63 groups. The former features front-engined cars with drum brakes and the latter features cars with disc brakes, commemorating the 'Diamond Jubilee' of Formula Jr.

Among other highlights in 2017, former World Champion Jenson Button will drive a McLaren M23

and fans can meet the drivers and attend Q&A sessions. (A multi-purpose Hospitality Pavilion is nestled above the circuit with breathtaking views.) The partnership with Rolex ensures that this NFP has the pulling power to attract such figures of notoriety. "Rolex is such a prestigious brand and over the last decade this event has become one of the jewels in their crown," said Campbell.

"The standards that they bring to an event are wonderful. It's there for us all to aim for. We are in the process of finalising another five year renewal agreement and we are looking forward to many more years as part of the Rolex family."

The track itself has undergone significant changes over the past two decades to meet the safety requirements of associated sanctioning bodies. The famous Turn 8 and 8A combination, devilishly nicknamed 'The Corkscrew', is considered one of the most daunting turns in motorsport. Those brave enough

Left: The 2009 British Formula One World Champion Jenson Button will drive a McLaren M23 at the 2017 Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion
Below: Classic race cars tackle the famous 'Corkscrew' turns at the Laguna Seca Raceway in California

Eight miles from Monterey Jet Center, the Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca shares a telephone area code with some of the world's most stunning peninsula coastal walks, the famous 'Lone Cypress' and the remarkable Pebble Beach Golf Links. The Raceway kicks off Monterey Car Week with a classic car show in Old Monterey, followed by the two-day 'Pre-Reunion' from 12 August. Expos, classics and auctions will keep enthusiasts busy all week long; be sure to keep an eye for the concours on Carmel-by-the-Sea's world-famous Ocean Avenue. The week closes with the famous Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance on 20 August. mazdaraceway.com

to take on the challenge hit a blind crest and apex before plunging the equivalent of five-and-a-half storeys in just 137m at a gradient of 18%.

"The Sports Car Racing Association of the Monterey Peninsula (operators for 60 years) is a not-for-profit organisation," explains Campbell.

"In 2001, the agreement with Monterey County was restricted to five major sports events a year with no other revenue sources. Now we run seven events and we can host events outside of motorsports like concerts and festivals." ■

