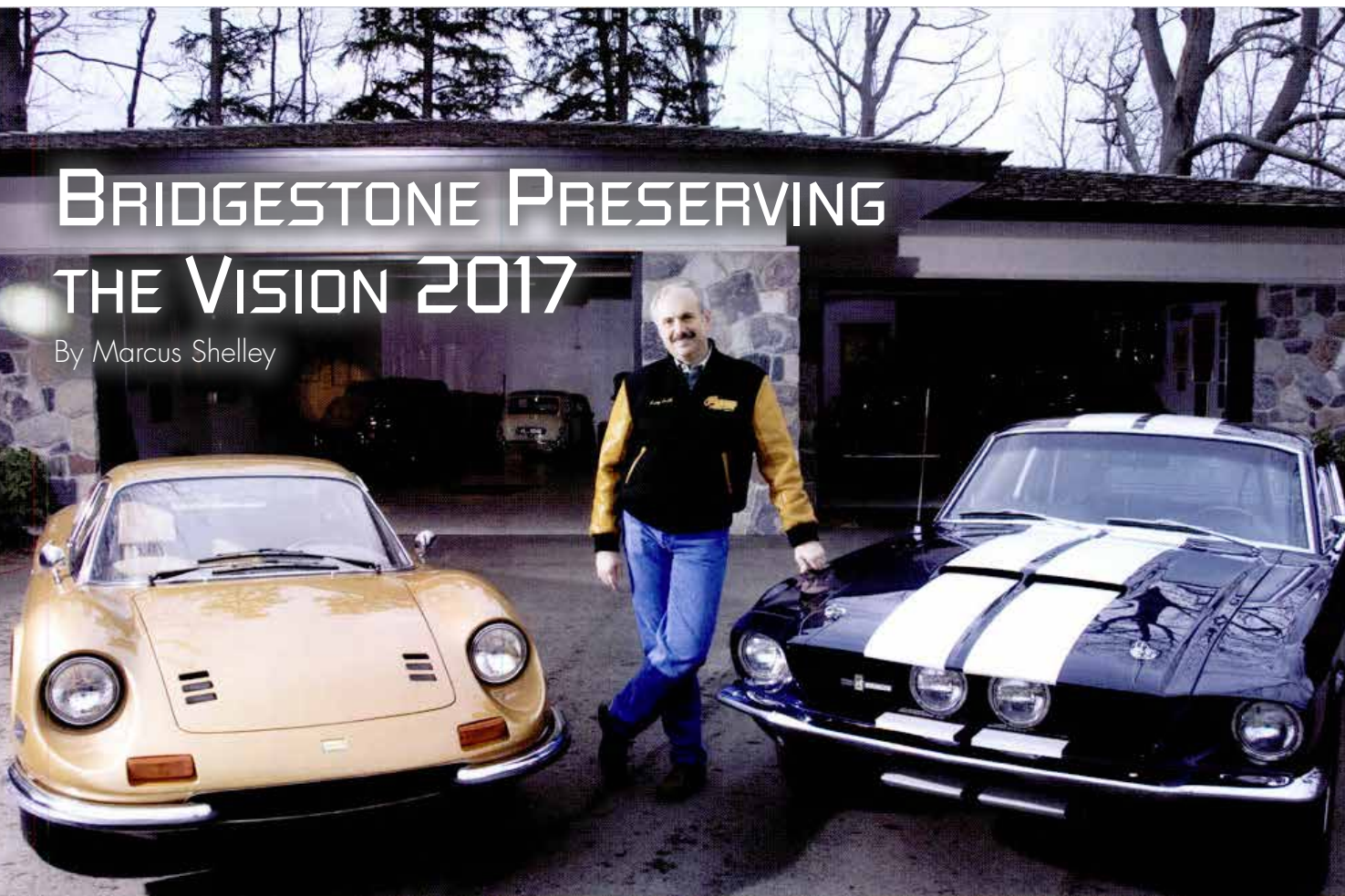


BRIDGESTONE PRESERVING THE VISION 2017

By Marcus Shelley



Thirty years ago this year, a group of car designers came together to assist Dr. Hessburg in raising money to assist the visually impaired. They created a show that became EyesOn Design and has raised more than four million dollars. This remarkable accomplishment occurred because of the support of the automotive community. Many facets make up this community. There are the car designers,

car manufacturers, parts manufacturers, car collectors, medical services, consumer goods, professional services and volunteers, all coming together to make this possible.

One of the essential pieces of the puzzle is car collecting. Around 20 years ago, this show began to recognize the people and institutions that made car shows possible. These individuals have invested

in and brought remarkable vehicles to the show for all to enjoy. To recognize the importance of these individuals we created the Bridgestone Preserving the Vision award. The Preserving the Vision award is given each year by the Vehicle Selection Committee to a person or persons who have made an exceptional impact on the restoring and showing of vehicles at EyesOn Design. Some past recipients

are, John McMullen, Ed Meuer, Bill Parfet, Marvin Tamaroff, Joe Bortz, Jim Schmidt, Ted Stahl, Don Sommer, Ken Lingenfelter, Michael Spezia, Terry & Rita Ernest, Diran Yazejian and Keith Crain.

Just as the vehicle displays at EyesOn Design highlight the beauty and complexity of automotive design, the awards presented are exquisite examples of crystal design. Twenty years ago we commissioned distinguished American crystal designer Steven Correia to create a crystal sculpture to reflect both the artistry of the automotive design process and the importance of the work done by the Detroit Institute of Ophthalmology to improve the lives of the visually impaired. The result of Correia's work is stunning. Each sculpture captures the elements of precision, clarity and reflectivity symbolizing the relationship between automotive design and the gift of sight. Each crystal is made of optical glass with nearly perfect purity. This high purity and the special cuts designed by Correia create a sculpture that reflects light as a prism. This unique patented design continues to be displayed in the top awards at EyesOn Design, including the Bridgestone Preserving the Vision award.

This year's recipient of the Preserving the Vision award is Larry Smith. Anyone who has been around car shows in Michigan for very long knows Larry. He has been active at the Meadowbrook Concours d' Elegance over its long history, eventually becoming the chairperson. He has remained on the board of the new show now called Concours d' Elegance of America at St. John's. He began his relationship with car shows as an advertiser in the early 1980's and has continued to



increase his involvement over time.

Larry moved to Michigan from Illinois with his family when he was 6 months old. At that time his parents chose to locate in Grosse Pointe partly because of Grosse Pointe's acclaimed schools. However, Larry didn't have much interest in academics and it showed in his grades. "For me, high school was a place to look at girls and think about cars," he says. In his early teens, Smith had graduated from drawing cars to building plastic models, foreshadowing his future career. "I'd heat them up and push a couple together to simulate car crashes," he says. "The models gave way to mini bikes and go carts, all of which I either built or modified." **

Smith was 16 when he dragged home a 1957 Triumph TR3. "It was an old piece of junk," he says. "I took it apart and rebuilt the engine. But it never ran until I became friends with Dan Hill, the mechanic at Eastern Sports Cars." With Hill's help, Smith secured a part-time position as a porter at the local dealership, although he was still fixing up old cars at home.

He soon turned to body repairs, which he claims were "pretty ugly" until his boss, Ken Becker, took the time to teach him the proper techniques.

After high school, Smith attended junior college for two years and went on to study anthropology at Wayne State University in Detroit. "After a year, I realized I'd never be happy unless I was doing something with cars," Smith says. Before long he was back at Eastern Sports Cars as a mechanic, soon transitioning to a full-fledged body technician. Realizing that there was no future for him at a family-run shop, Smith made a bold move. In September 1975, he rented an old service station in Center Line, Michigan. With just his tools and \$2,000, the 24-year-old opened a body repair shop for foreign cars, naming it Autometric Collision. **

For years, Smith worked 16 to 18 hours, seven days a week. "My dog didn't even recognize me because I was never home," he says. Customers were lining up for Smith's services, with some even waiting seven weeks. He opened additional shops



to reduce waiting times and make room for Autometric's best employees to grow within the company. Smith eventually left the shop floor and, with the help of many courses and the right advisors, most met through the business, he learned how to manage what became a multimillion-dollar company. **

As a result of his success, Larry's car collection now numbers more than 35. His collection includes great marks like Bugatti, Ferrari, Alfa and Porsche, but also Willys, Chevrolet, Ford, Fiat and Triumph. Drivability and proportion strongly influence his choices. He is as much at home at a Hot Rod show, at a Concours d' Elegance, or at an Italian car event or a sports car event. Larry has never hesitated to send a car to EyesOn Design and showing cars takes a lot of work. A car owner must not only buy a car, they must maintain it, clean

it, wax it and transport it to the show for us to see and enjoy.

His support of so many types of car collecting is the reason he was selected this year to receive the Bridgestone Preserving the Vision award. In addition to bringing vehicles to our show, on June 3rd of this year Larry opened his rarely seen collection as a fund raiser for the Detroit Institute of Ophthalmology. We cannot thank Larry enough. Through the support of collectors like Larry, who has shown cars at this show multiple times, this show now enjoys its 30th year of assisting the visually impaired. From all of us at EyesOn Design, thank you for your support, advice and friendship.

** Source; *Nice Guys Always Finish First*; By: Jonathan A. Stein; *Hagerty Magazine, Summer 2009*; Used with permission.