

Blackhawk auto museum's Saturday lectures a hit

Usual attendance has grown from 20 people to 125

By Lou Fancher
Correspondent

Legends at the Blackhawk Automotive Museum have not only shown lustrous sheen, they've come alive.

No, it's not auto animation — it's the energized 60-minute presentations given by auto industry icons at the museum's Saturday Morning Lecture Series. Begun about five years ago by a devoted member and kicked into high gear when Executive Director Tim McGrane was hired in 2013, the series is attracting a steady stream of top racers, designers, engineers, mechanics, ad agency execs, journalists, writers and others.

"I inherited the program," McGrane said. "At the time, it was basically only promoted to members."

A lot has changed since the museum celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2012 and McGrane arrived. An electronic newsletter sent out by Blackhawk that used to reach 800 people now has about 5,000 names. "Cars and Coffee" gatherings that often bring more than 500 people to sip free coffee and ogle the eclectic, ad hoc mix of vehicles in an outdoor parking lot near the museum on the first Sunday of every month have McGrane saying, "It's a 'be careful what you wish for' reminder, but we're still



BLACKHAWK AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

Lyn St. James, a former IndyCar racer who won the 1992 Indianapolis 500 rookie of the year award, will speak next month at the Blackhawk Automotive Museum.

pleased."

Although the numbers aren't as high, attendance at the Saturday series has grown from a typical 20 people to 125.

"It's a cross-section of ages and a mix of ladies and gentlemen," says McGrane, his British accent and word choice giving away his background. "Most rewarding to see are high school-age kids who are engaged, really listening and not on their iPhones."

A native of England, McGrane has led a life devoted to "machines in motion" and says his favorite part of the Saturday series is one of six questions asked of each guest presenter during a Q&A.

"We ask what car they'd most like to drive coast to coast, either on a luxury

run or a madcap dash," McGrane says.

The answers spark a dialogue with the audience that McGrane says is "unpredictable and fun."

The spring roster on Saturday presents New Zealander Howden Ganley, a former Formula 1 driver who lives in Danville and Lyn St. James, a former IndyCar racer who won the 1992 Indianapolis 500 rookie of the year award, on April 25. McGrane says he's honored to have drivers he watched race as a kid now at the museum.

Howden began his career inauspiciously. A pair of red Ferraris he saw racing in the 1955 New Zealand Grand Prix appealed to his soul. Too poor to plunge into racing directly, he became a car mechanic and

eventually had 41 World Championship Formula One Grand Prix starts. Retiring from the track, he formed a partnership with Grand Prix driver Tim Schenken and established Tiga Race Cars. He lives in Danville, although his schedule and a new book, "The Road to Monaco: My Life in Motor Racing," often have him on the road.

"I became a mechanic because I didn't have any money," Ganley says in an interview. "It helped my driving career to know how a car ticks."

Ganley says a great race car is easy to drive, strong enough to hold up in an accident, has a well laid out cockpit and offers a basic design allowing for fine tuning.

"Drivers turn differently

IF YOU GO

What: Saturday Morning Speaker Series at Blackhawk Automotive Museum

Where: 3700 Blackhawk Plaza Circle in Danville

When: 10:30 a.m. to noon Saturday for Howden Ganley and his book, "The Road to Monaco: My Life in Motor Racing" and 10:30 a.m. to noon April 25 for Lyn St. James, race car driver and speed record holder

Cost: \$15 for adults, \$10 for students (with valid ID), \$10 for seniors (65 and older) and military veterans, free for children younger than 6 (who must be accompanied by a paid adult). Active military personnel and museum members can attend for free. This lecture is included in admission to the museum. For group tour information and rates, please call 925-736-2277, ext. 239.

Contact info: 925-736-2280; museum@blackhawkmuseum.org

into a corner, and you need a range of adjustments to meet those needs," he says. "Understeer, and it's slow. Oversteer, you need an anti-roll bar or spring weights to change the balance."

Safety is "just night and day from what it was," Ganley says, primarily because carbon fiber instead of aluminum and steel tube is used. "Cars were safe up to a point, but the mortality rate will tell you it was remarkably dangerous."

Although he says a driver should never have favorite tracks, he has three.

"The 174-corner Nürburgring in Germany, Belgium's Spa Francorchamp, because average speed is high, about 150 miles-per-hour, and Monaco — if you drive up against the curbs, you get a reward," he says.

St. James was a piano teacher racing in a Ford Pinto at the start of her career and in a separate interview, calls herself, "the most unlikely IndyCar driver you can find."

Unlikely because of her gender as well as her entry age, she says quick hands and feet, a focused mind and exceptional peripheral vision are a driver's best tools, once car comfort is achieved.

"I found my competitive DNA in racing," she says. "What I wasn't taught about racing was handling the media, nutrition, mind-sharpening skills, business skills."

St. James has used her status as "first woman to win rookie of the year" to form a foundation, appear as a motivational speaker for businesses and corporations, author an autobiography and establish exhibits and projects aimed at supporting the next generation of professional female racers. Arriving at the Blackhawk auto museum, she says she will bring a message she learned on the track.

"I'm blessed to have found the things I love to do in this world," she says. "There's more inside us than we're aware of. If you haven't found fulfillment, keep going. With that, you can be empowered."