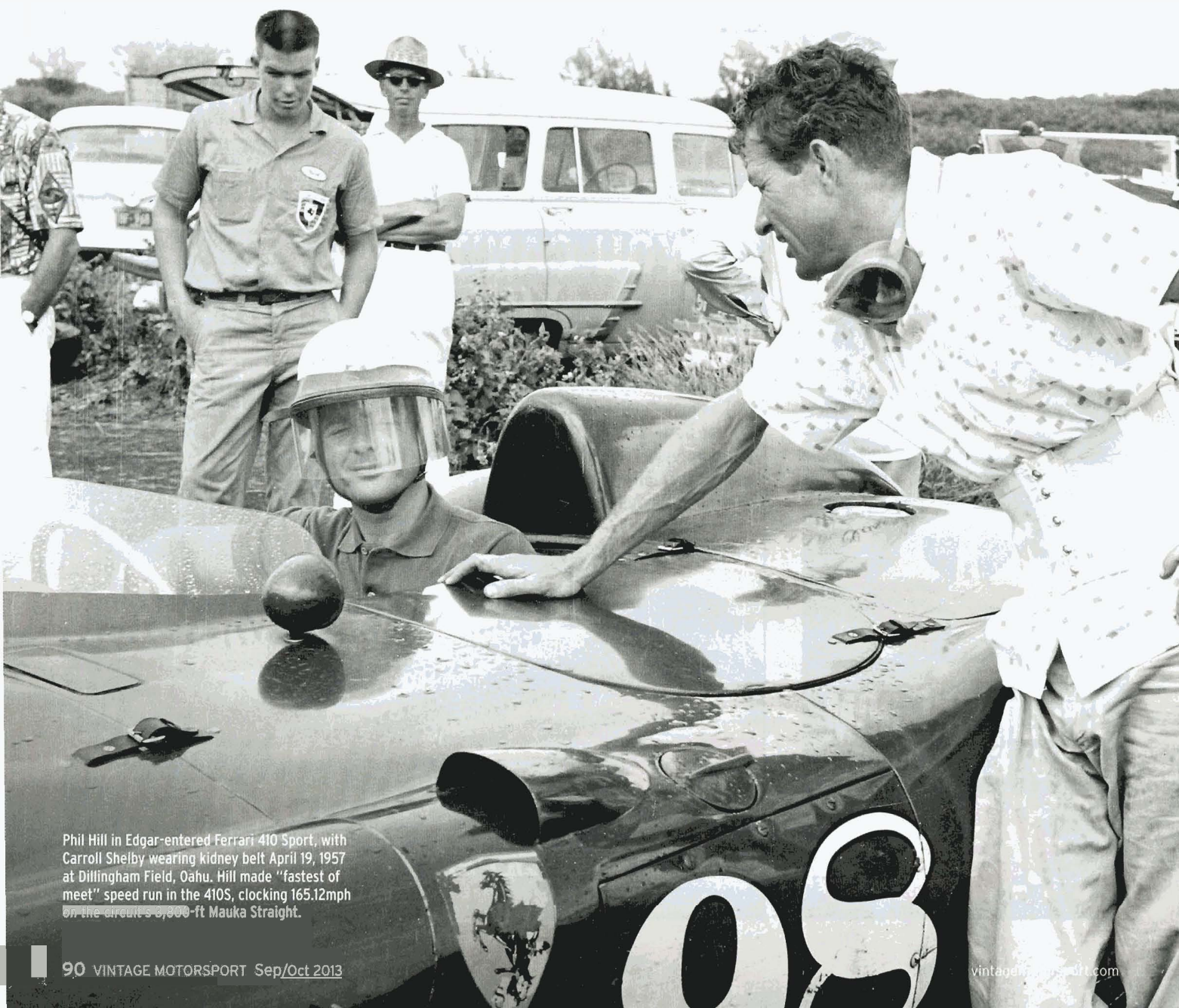


# HAWAII

Near the end of the 1950s, offshore sports car racing tried to make a go of it, and an organized incorporated territory of the United States seemed like a winning venue. By William Edgar | Photography Edgar Motorsport Archive



Phil Hill in Edgar-entered Ferrari 410 Sport, with Carroll Shelby wearing kidney belt April 19, 1957 at Dillingham Field, Oahu. Hill made "fastest of meet" speed run in the 410S, clocking 165.12mph on the circuit's 3,800-ft Mauka Straight.



# CALLED

Once upon a less media-crazed time there was a little radio broadcast coming live each week from under the spreading banyan tree at the Ala Moana Hotel on Waikiki Beach. It was achingly romantic. Dulcet Hawaiian music and the gentle break of surf crackled via shortwave from Oahu northeastward over the Pacific of what was the quintessence of paradise found on U.S. mainland speakers. It made you wish you were there on those tropical isles in that pre-statehood Territory of Hawaii, where hula hands were indeed lovely and falsetto-sung songs gilded blossomy nights. Still in my heart today is that long-ago radio show, "Hawaii Calls."

Enchanting, right? Of course it was. And road racing enthusiasts, evidently more than most car zealots, were swayed by this and other dreams of Hawaii. Urged through entrepreneurs and potential entrants, surely there would be races on Oahu in only a matter of time. It doggedly got going when the first Hawaiian International Sports Car Speed Week's events were set for April 19-21, 1957.

My story here is a return to that distant time and place, and the races held there.

## Behold the S.S. Lurline

First, think lots of water—more than 2,400 landless miles of ocean. Participating cars would go by sea from the U.S. to Honolulu. And so they did, many in holds aboard Matson Lines' big white passenger liner S.S. Lurline. Five days later and craned onto a dock beneath Honolulu Harbor's Aloha Tower, the alien stateside machines were made ready to drive or trailer 35 miles north to the Speed Week's race circuit at Dillingham Field, a deactivated WWII military air base at Mokuleia close by today's surfing nirvana of Waialua.

A sports car race in the middle of the Pacific? Was the whole idea nuts?

Maybe. But Oahu wouldn't be the first case where U.S. mainlanders had to cross salt water to an offshore circuit. Nassau in the Bahamas was already hosting sports car

races and, in February '57 the first GP in Cuba became a headliner that saw Texan Carroll Shelby drive my father's Ferrari 410 Sport to 2nd place behind Juan Manuel Fangio's winning 300S Maserati.

To organize the counterpart Oahu event came forth Los Angeles oilman Ray Turnbull and the Associated Sports Car Clubs of Hawaii, represented notably by its president George "Pete" Wimberly and Loretta "Tetta" Turnbull Richert, regional executive of the SCCA's Hawaii Region. Also supporting Speed Week were Honolulu's Junior Chamber of Commerce and the MG Car Club of Hawaii. The visionary Turnbull, along with his gutsy 45-year-old speedboat champion sister Tetta, promoted themselves as examples set to race on Dillingham Field's 3.1-mile course—he at the wheel of a Triumph TR-3; she in John Edgar's ex-works Porsche 550 Spyder.

Writing of Turnbull, whose goal was to attract 100 drivers from the mainland and

another 50 locals, *MotoRacing* editor Gus Vignolle propagandized, "Ray just wants everybody to head out to Hawaii and have a roaring good time. No club beefs, no individual beefs, no back-stabbing, just lots of fun and sunshine and swimming and racing and some tall, cool ones in Alohaland." Plenty of tall, cool ones were in store, and a few beefs as well.

Turnbull and Richert were not exactly star-power racing names, hence Speed Week's press blurbs hailed the anticipated likes of Phil Hill, Carroll Shelby, John von Neumann, Bob Drake, Pearce "Pete" Woods, Chuck Daigh, Richie Ginther, Bill Murphy, Jack McAfee, Sterling Edwards, Jerry Austin, Ken Miles, Lance Reventlow, Lou Brero, Sr. and more from the day's talent-rich Fabulous Fifties driver pool. Car-flush Tony Parravano even vowed his Ferrari would be driven by international playboy Alfonso de Portago.

Even so, conspicuously female Richert—she'd been a colleague and

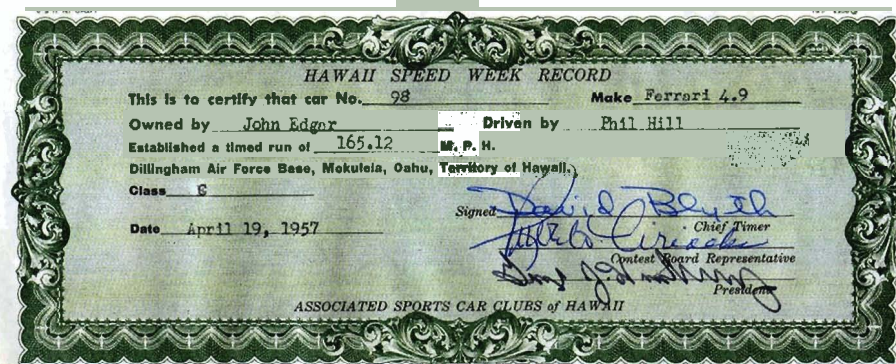


▲ Shelby strums a ukulele, with friend Ralph Eisman, at Honolulu Airport, April 22, 1957, waiting to board Aloha Airlines DC-3 "Vistaliner" for a flight to the big island of Hawaii. They wanted a little vacation before the next races.



credible nautical equivalent of aviatrix Amelia Earhart—proved herself a more than minor media draw. Well known among Islanders, Tetta and her husband, Dr. Thomas Richert, glittered the scene with a splashing pre-race cocktail party. Being the only woman member of the Sports Car Club of Hawaii, Richert had already gamely posed for publicity photos in the Porsche 550 that had won its class the year before at Sebring as a works entry driven by Hans Herrmann and Wolfgang von Trips. John Edgar, this 550's first customer owner was, like Richert, a former outboard hydroplane pilot, and he knew Tetta from old race boat days. Tetta's shoe fit, so to speak, and it would be on the throttle of Edgar's Spyder. "I like to go fast," was her mantra. "I think I will go fast until I die." For certain, Tetta had the ability to turn heads.

So, along with balmy island days and under a beaming tropical moon, pre-race momentum reached a brash crescendo. Then, three days before the start of Speed Week, steamy rains hit Oahu—while Carroll Shelby was being interviewed in Edgar's posh suite at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. Present were my parents, along with the Edgar team's business manager, Steve Mason. Room service had brought in ice and Scotch, a ceiling fan churned the

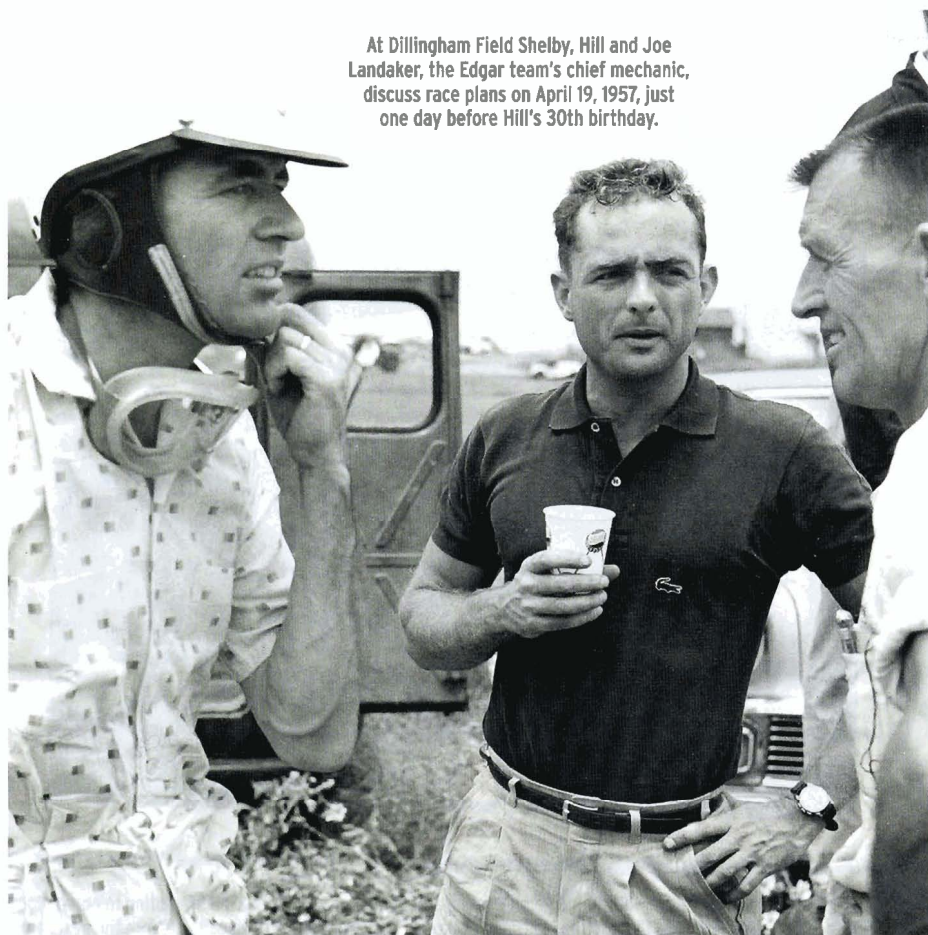


▲ Phil Hill's speed record certificate, dated April 19, 1957. Hill's speed was 165.12 mph.

muggy air while rain lashed royal palms. It was evocative of a Tennessee Williams play. Tan from racing at Palm Springs two weeks before where he managed only 2nd to Phil Hill, Shelby told newspaper reporter Bob Cole of Honolulu's *Star-Bulletin* that he'd be driving the same 300S Maserati, not a Ferrari, at Dillingham Field, because of an exclusive contract he and Edgar had recently signed with Maserati in Italy. And what if it keeps raining? "We'd race regardless," Shelby told Cole. "Sport cars'll go rain or shine."

Oddly enough, Edgar had also invited Hill to Oahu to race one of his cars—the potent Ferrari 410 Sport in which Shelby had beaten Hill five months earlier.

At Dillingham Field Shelby, Hill and Joe Landaker, the Edgar team's chief mechanic, discuss race plans on April 19, 1957, just one day before Hill's 30th birthday.



## Big-Time Racing in Hawaii

Over at Speed Week's headquarters in the Waikiki Biltmore, event organizer Ray Turnbull, underwriting the event, talked to the same newspaper's sports editor, Tom Hopkins. Turnbull recounted he'd been on his way to California from Tahiti last year when he stopped to visit sister Tetta and meet with some Island sports car people. "We got to talking about getting big time racing in Hawaii," he said, adding that his first drive in a race car was only three weeks ago during track testing. "Up to that time," Turnbull confessed, "I had no interest whatsoever in sports cars." But he'd been "bitten" and had just now bought himself a Porsche 550 Spyder from Jean-Pierre Kunstle to race in the novice class at Dillingham Field.

"Last November," Turnbull continued, "Joe Tanner brought over an Alfa Romeo and raced it at Kahuku. He was sold on the idea of a big race here, and so was I. He talked it up in the San Francisco area, and I did the same in southern California. It caught on like wildfire." Hopkins, impressed, urged Turnbull to tell more. "I have invited the head of the sports car division of the International Automobile Racing Federation to come here from his headquarters in Paris at my expense," obliged Turnbull, whose dream—if and when the FIA actually got behind it—was to attract as many as 200 race cars to Hawaii.

## Colossal Plans

Turnbull was convinced, once that transpired, the world's top drivers would flock to Oahu to race for points toward international championships. "It would be a great thing for Hawaii," he stated for Hopkins' readers. Turnbull's plans were colossal and the chips were on the table.

Oahu's other newspaper, *The Honolulu Advertiser*, declared with blunt naiveté that the 8-turn race circuit was "smoother than a city street, and much faster." Its sports editor, Red McQueen, wrote that the cars were "all slicked up and ready to roar" at



Dillingham, which was “no place for the faint of heart.” You bet.

Meanwhile, smothered in flower leis, blinded by photographers’ flash bulbs, John von Neumann arrived to pilot the former factory Sebring-winning 3.5-liter Ferrari Monza alongside California Sports Car Club president Ken Miles, set to drive Johnny’s 1500cc Porsche Spyder. The race circuit, drivers were assured, was ready to host the best. Extra pavement had been added to Dillingham’s existing runways, and the 3,800-ft. “Mauka” straight would serve top-speed time trials on Friday afternoon. The weekend card featured Saturday’s novice and preliminaries, plus Sunday’s mains and an All-Islanders race.

Jan Harrison, event queen at Palm Springs a couple of weeks earlier, was there, as well as the desert spa’s party-loving promoter, George Cary, Jr. Cary threw a kick-off luau where everybody

dressed Hawaiian—Shelby wore a kimono and cowboy hat. In that age of pre-jet service to the Islands, propeller flights from California were packed with sports-car racing aficionados. Legendary sports car news hound Dusty Brandel, still a cub reporter then, remembers a Trans Ocean Airlines charter by way of Burbank and Oakland that, horror of horrors, offered no alcohol. “All the drivers brought shoe boxes full of booze on board,” she tells me of the 10-hour prop flight, “and we later had to pour them off. We were out of all the mix, with only a little water left when we landed on Oahu.”

### Who’s the Fastest?

Friday, April 19th, arrived tropically wet as rain sprinkled race cars and spectators on Dillingham’s opening day. Conspicuously missing was Portago—the IRS had come down on “Fon’s” Ferrari owner for back taxes,

and Scuderia Parravano’s race stable was impounded. Also, there weren’t Turnbull’s projected 100 entries from the mainland. On hand were only about 30 from beyond the sea, plus 12 locals, as morning practice led to the day’s more populated afternoon speed runs. Wearing the era’s driving gear—typically khakis and polo shirt—Phil Hill stepped into Edgar’s 410 Sport and blitzed the Mauka Straight timing traps. Four years shy of his World Drivers’ title, the future F1 Champion from Santa Monica clocked 165.12mph, the contest’s quickest.

Hill expected more. Not necessarily extra speed, but rather firm consent to drive the same Ferrari in anger for Sunday’s main. Edgar’s contract with Officine Alfieri Maserati in Modena specifically barred Shelby from driving anything other than Maserati, and Shel was okay with that. Then why shouldn’t obligation-free Hill race Edgar’s 400-hp V12 Ferrari? Truth be told, the 4.9-liter 410 could very likely win on Dillingham’s flat, fast circuit.

So, was it because of my father’s loyalty to his prime driver, Shelby, that Hill ultimately would be sidelined in Hawaii, and not due to the contract’s fine print? We’ll never know for sure. “I would have gladly driven that race,” Phil Hill told me several years before his death. Personally, I’ve thought often about that, and Phil did drive my father’s Ferrari 410 Sport at Santa Barbara only a month after Dillingham—a California race where Carroll was not entered.



▲ Dillingham Field, April 21, 1957. L to R: Shelby, Lou Brero Sr., Lou Brero Jr. Lou Sr. has broken a rod in his D-Type Jaguar and will not be able to drive it in the main.



▲ Lance Reventlow sits in Edgar-entered No. 7 Porsche 550 Spyder with John von Neumann’s No. 11 Ferrari 860 Monza in the background.



On the practice grid, April 19, 1957. Shelby in Edgar-entered Maserati 300S smiles at race queen Liz Hughes as Lance Reventlow takes in the scenery. In the background is Rod Carveth’s No. 54 Aston Martin.

### Yet Another Kerfuffle

That was one kerfuffle in Hawaii’s Speed Week, with another on the way. Tetta Richert, after already having the Edgar 550 on loan for months, suddenly found she might be out of the Porsche Spyder’s seat and Lance Reventlow possibly in it. My father had been having last-minute thoughts about Tetta driving the class-winning Sebring car in Sunday’s Gold Cup Challenge, so Lance was allowed an audition in the Edgar Porsche during Friday’s speed trials—making a certified pass of 129.49mph. Richert’s best run in the same Spyder was 127.87, giving Reventlow an auspicious edge.

Meanwhile, Reventlow’s mom, Woolworth dime stores heiress Barbara “Babs” Hutton, had been staying at the Royal Hawaiian, where she was into her cups. John Edgar, imbibing as well, was also holed up at the Royal. In their blasé haze he and Babs had become room-to-room telephone pals, and one thing after another led to her son, Lance, getting the Edgar Porsche’s seat instead of Tetta. Richert was livid, as was her brother. She



told the *Saturday Star-Bulletin*, "I had my heart set on racing against the top mainland drivers, but I'll be there anyway—I'll drive my beat-up Triumph."

Ray Turnbull had done 126.76mph through the traps in his own new 550 Spyder, while Pete Woods, in the same speed run class as the 410 Ferrari driven by Hill, scored 162mph in a D-Type Jaguar. Lou Brero Sr. was also fast with his D-Type. John von Neumann revved his Monza to 136, and Ken Miles chalked 124 in the von Neumann 550. Chuck Daigh reached 142 in the Troutman-Barnes Special, and 128 was had from a local Corvette driven by James Castle—father of today's familiar car collector/vintage racer, Jimmy Castle, Jr.

But where had racing idol Carroll Shelby been during Dillingham's speed trials? Shucks!—out yonder in the paddock saving Edgar's 300S, though Shelby did turn a few Friday practice laps—countless ticket-buyers had come just to see the bib-overall Texan on-track. And—back at Waikiki, his Maserati's "Pappy" was still on the horn with Hutton, while downstairs in the Royal's Pacific-facing cocktail bar drinks fueled talk among regulars that the weekend's sports car races up at Mokuleia warranted a firsthand look. The entry list by then had come back up to 85 cars, and serious track combat would commence with Saturday's qualifying races to determine Sunday's starting grids.

### Cruising Kalakaua Avenue

Friday night in Honolulu was jumping. Aloha-shirted car owners, drivers and disciples crammed a Waikiki hot-spot called Don the Beachcomber where Navy Grogs and Zombies were rum potions of choice to chase Don's classic island food. Steel guitars backed Hawaiian singers and plumeria leis perfumed the sultry night. Out front, sports cars cruised Kalakaua Avenue, motors revving, horns honking. From all appearances, Speed Week was even now a smash.

Saturday's program brought a surge of 10,000 spectators to watch the class-qualifying preliminary races at Dillingham. Lou Brero, Jr.—son of the Arcata, California lumberman and much-admired mainland driver, Lou Brero, Sr.—won the novice race driving Bob Gillespie's A6GCS Maserati implanted with Chevrolet power, followed by 2nd place Ray Turnbull's Porsche Spyder. Ken Miles won a combined smaller-bore event in von Neumann's Porsche 550, with Reventlow second in Edgar's 550.

My father, at last abandoning The Royal and his telephone, was at the track to see Reventlow do well and watch Shelby in the 300S Maser start Saturday's big-bore



Lou Brero Jr., in Bob Gillespie's red No. 99 Maserati A6GCS-Chevrolet, waits on Saturday's Novice Race start grid at Dillingham Field. Young Brero won this all-classes 15-minute dash to the checkered flag.

THE PHIL HILL COLLECTION

prelim. Winner Pete Woods got the Sunday pole driving a D-Jaguar owned by Los Angeles industrialist Ronnie Milosevich. Shelby could only score third behind Chuck Daigh's Troutman-Barnes V8 Special, followed by von Neumann's fourth place Ferrari Monza. In a production car qualifier, Bob Oker smacked his AC Bristol against a tire barrier, and a Corvette took an All-Islanders race that included fourth finisher Turnbull, with Speed Week's promoter further improving competition skills in his recently-bought Porsche.

Saturday afternoon, and an evening quieter than the night before, were soon history. Tomorrow was race day for the main events at Dillingham Field. Lei-stringers along Waikiki's Kalakaua Avenue were making flowered hats and bonnets, Hawaiian-style, ready for sale at sun-up. The weather dawned perfect to the ringing of church bells. It was Easter Sunday 56 years ago.

### Ending On a Solemn Note

Dillingham's spectator gate, as well as could be counted, was 20,000 on Speed Week's final day, April 21—double Saturday's attendance. One press wag speculated that many had freely hacked their way in with machetes. My father took a picture of my mother in her extravagant Easter bonnet, posed smiling with Olympian Duke Kahanamoku, and Edgar team chief mechanic Joe Landaker took Duke for a spin in the 410 Sport. Sunday was starting the way everybody hoped it would.

Speed Week's final Day 4 one-hour races began with Leon Miller's Lotus winning the Class F/G/H event ahead of runner-up Paul Nau's Alfa Romeo and 3rd-place Jim Parkinson's MGA.

Sunday's second race, another production affair for larger Class E cars, had already started when Lou Brero, Sr., whose D-Type had thrown a rod and would not be ready for the big race, entered the field in progress, driving his friend Bob Gillespie's Chevrolet-powered Maserati—the same "backyard special" Lou Jr. had won with in Saturday's Novice. Lou Sr. had never driven Gillespie's car and needed practice laps. Shortly into the production group, gaining on cars at 135mph and gearing down for Turn 1, the Chevy-Maser's U-joint snapped. Whipping and sparking against track pavement, the broken driveshaft punctured the car's 30-gallon aluminum fuel tank, turning Brero's ride into a speeding fireball. Lou stayed with it, steering to avoid a fence lined with spectators, aiming toward the open infield. Slowing to 40mph, Lou jumped out, his clothes in flames. The car rumbled on, stopped, and burned to the ground.

Critically injured, Brero was taken to the pits where he stood wrapped in a blanket. Four decades later, Phil Hill told me Lou wanted a cigarette. "I lit one and handed it to him as he was getting into the ambulance," said Hill. It was actually a station wagon serving as an ambulance that took him away. In the emergency, Tetta's doctor husband attended to Brero at Waialua Hospital before he was rushed to Queen's Hospital in Honolulu.

After a half hour's race delay, the production event at Dillingham Field resumed. Corvettes were 1st and 2nd ahead of an AC Bristol.

Race 3 for Islanders only, all-classes, belonged to by then a well-versed Ray Turnbull in his Porsche 550 Spyder. Second went to a Corvette; 3rd a Siata. Tetta, again



in my father's Porsche 550—for just this one Islanders race—finished 25th among the 26 cars still running at the checkered flag.

Then came Sunday's Silver Cup Challenge for Under-1500cc Modifieds combined with the Gold Cup Challenge for Over-1500cc Modifieds, a mix of all 20 cars competing in the same 1-hour race.

Pole-sitter Woods in a D-Jag and Daigh driving the Ford Thunderbird-powered Troutman-Barnes Special went at each other right off of starter Leo Rankin's flag. Daigh led the first lap before Woods caught him to lead for five laps until Daigh got the lead back for another five laps. By lap 12, Woods was out front again and stayed there. He won the Gold Cup Challenge's big-bore half of the main 7.4 seconds ahead of Daigh. Shelby finished a snug third in the Edgar-entered 300S Maserati, a scant 1.2 seconds behind the Troutman-Barnes car.

Miles in von Neumann's 550 Spyder came 5th overall and 1st in the Under-1500cc Silver Cup Challenge field ahead of classmates E. Forbes Robinson's Lotus and Reventlow (7th overall, 3rd in class) driving the Edgar-entered Porsche Spyder, the same car Richert drove in Saturday's All-Islanders race. So, as the game played out, the John Edgar entries drew a pair of threes. Of the one guy who might have had a royal flush with the 4.9 Ferrari that instead sat idle in Dillingham's paddock, *MotoRacing's* Vignolle metaphorically quipped, "Phil Hill stood around with his



▲ John Edgar (left) with Shelby reaching across the 300S Maserati's cockpit to make an adjustment.

finger in his ear." Going even further, he wrote, "Edgar didn't want Shelby beaten."

The victory luau at Queen's Surf Hotel was without Lou Brero, Sr., badly burned and in grave condition at the nearby hospital. The presenting of trophies and making of speeches was somber. Lou died at 10 that night. Hawaii Speed Week's inaugural ended on a solemn note shrouded with serious questions about safety, the future of off-shore sports car competition, and racing team etiquette.

Forty years later while tape-recording Shelby at his home in Bel Air, California, Carroll said to me, "I should have told them [Did he mean Maserati, or my father and Mason?] to go fuck themselves there in Hawaii. I wish they'd let Phil drive the Ferrari." So—what did or didn't Shelby know, and the same for Hill? What don't I



▲ Dillingham Field, April 20, 1957. Lou Brero Jr. (left) and Lou Brero Sr. with Sr.'s No. 108 Jaguar D-Type. Lou Sr. was pointing out an escape route in Turn 1.

know, even to this day?

The truth of why Phil Hill didn't drive the Edgar Ferrari 410 Sport seems to have been lost out there in the Pacific decades ago, as if the trade winds blew it away.

Hawaii's Speed Week races were held again the following year, in May of '58, with John von Neumann returning to win Sunday's feature overall in a Ferrari Testa Rossa ahead of local driver James Pflueger piloting the aging Troutman-Barnes Special, with 3rd-place Richie Ginther driving another von Neumann Testa Rossa. Since then sports car racing in Hawaii, to varying degrees, has continued. But for its fusion of sheer romance and startling drama, nothing has ever matched the April 1957 event at Dillingham Field.

Hawaii called, and the answer, though marred with tragedy, was historic. 🏁



Driver Ken Miles gets into John von Neumann's No. 50 Porsche 550 at Dillingham Field. This photo, and the one on pg. 95, both shot by Phil Hill, are samplings of his work soon to be seen in a book of Hill's photography, edited by Doug Nye, titled "Inside Track."