

The Collier



Part of the Collier Collection includes many racecars previously owned by Briggs Cunningham, such as this 1952 Cunningham C4-R.



Driver Brian Redman at the wheel of the Collier Collections Ford GT40, at Daytona. This car was originally driven by Jacky Ickx and Dick Thompson to 6th overall in the 1967 Daytona 24 Hours.

Florida Alfa Clubs Find a Hidden Shangri-La

Almost every Alfisti and sports car aficionado knows who Briggs Cunningham was and that he had a magnificent car collection. But what happened to it? The rumor has been that it was moved to Florida and named the Collier Museum. Google, however, has no link for that museum nor is there a listed phone number. Armando Paredes, president of the South Florida Alfa Romeo Owner's Club, put on his gum shoes and found out.

Briggs Cunningham (1907-2003) was born into wealth. His father was president of the Citizen's National Bank, a director of the Pennsylvania Railroad and a prime venture capitalist funding the Proctor & Gamble start up. He died when Briggs was only five, leaving his son and daughter half of his



estate. During his two years at Yale, Briggs drove a lightweight, straight-eight, Packard roadster he purchased from Packard's experimental department, and had a special "speedster" body made for it by a shop in Bridgeport, Connecticut. In 1930 he married Lucy Bedford, the granddaughter of a co-founder of Standard Oil. During their honeymoon he saw his first motor car race, the Monaco Grand Prix, and was smitten.

While at Yale, Briggs became friends with Miles and Sam Collier. Their father, Baron Collier, was an American advertising entrepreneur, owner of a chain of hotels, bus lines, banks, newspapers and a telephone company and steamship line. He also became the largest land owner and developer in Florida where he bought over 1,000,000 acres. In 1923 it was

Collection

BY HARMON HEED

One of the crown jewels of the Collier Collection is this 1938 Alfa 8C 2900B Touring Berlinetta, which won the 1947 Mille Miglia. In recent years, this stunning example has won Best of Show at the prestigious Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.



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The collection also includes a number of significant racing Porsches, including this 1969 908LH.



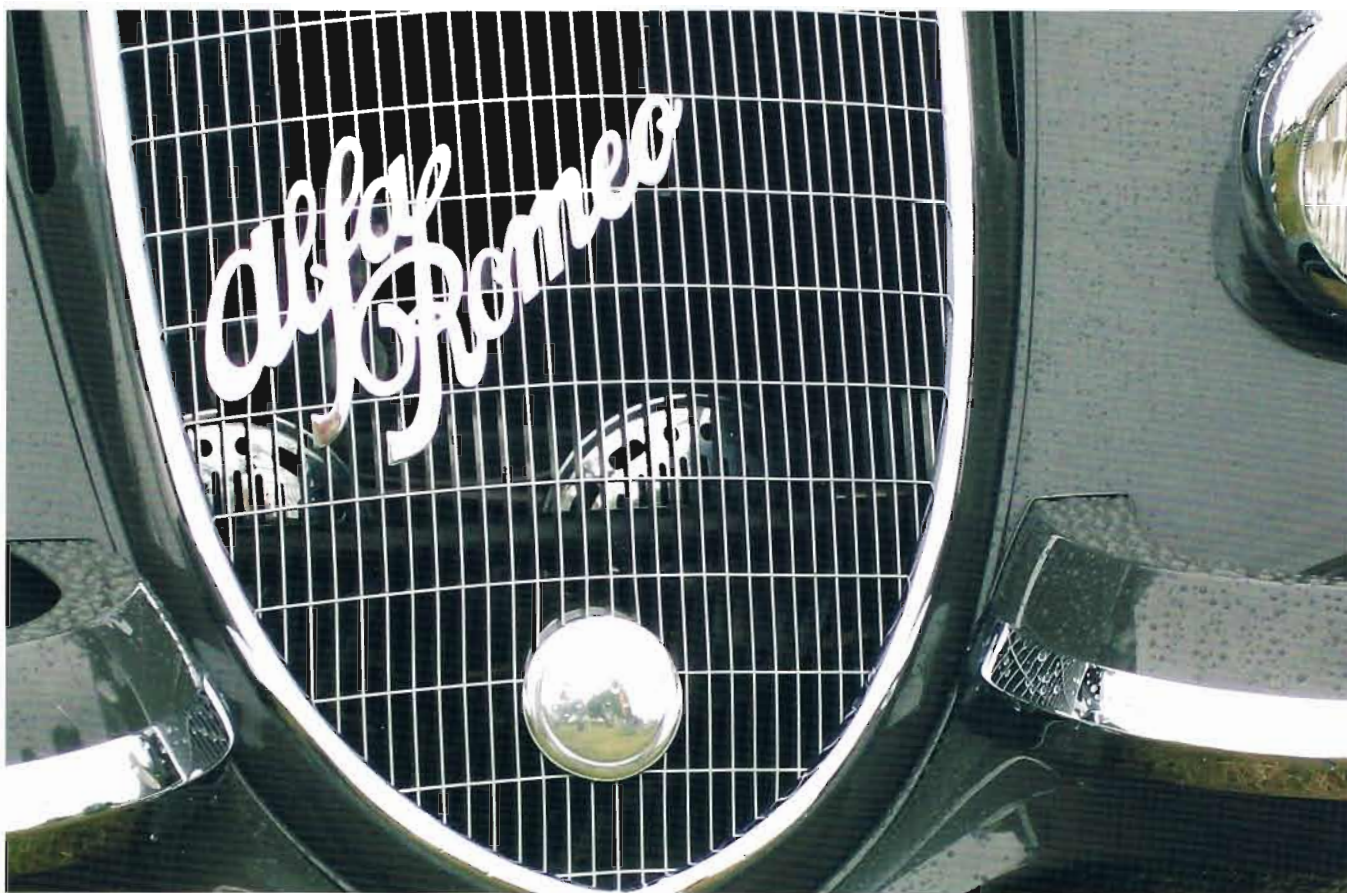
In addition to the Collection's Touring-bodied 8C 2900B, other Alfas include a 1934 8C 2300 and a 1964 TZ2.

named Collier County and is where Thomas Edison and Henry Ford established their winter retreats.

In 1933 Briggs, Miles, Sam and other friends founded the Automobile Racing Club of America, ARCA, (not to be confused with the later stock car series of the same name). It was dissolved in 1941 with the outbreak of WWII. In 1944 they helped form the Sports Car Club of America, SCCA, which began sanctioning road racing, and in 1948 Miles, Briggs and Cameron Argetsinger were instrumental in founding the inaugural Watkins Glen Grand Prix near their summer retreats. Those early races were driven on public roads. In 1950, Sam Collier was killed while leading the Watkins Glen race in a Ferrari. Miles died four years later of tuberculosis.

Briggs continued racing and began collecting. He owned, raced and kept Jags, Ferraris, Corvettes, Listers, OSCAs and Abarths. In the 1950s he built cars with Cadillac and Chrysler Hemi engines with the goal of winning the 24 Hours of Le Mans. In 1950 he entered two Cadillacs, one with stock Coupe de Ville body driven by the Collier brothers wearing suits ties and another with a body so primitive and monstrous looking that the French named it, "Le Monstre." They didn't win but they both finished, 10th and 11th, which in itself was quite a feat.

During the '50s Briggs continued on his quest to win at LeMans by building his own race cars, the Cunningham C-2R, C-4R, C-5R and C-6R. He never won, but his heavy



cars did finish 3rd (1953-54), 4th (1952) and 5th (1954). And, during that time his team, including drivers like Dan Gurney, Sherwood Johnston, Phil Walters and Walt Hansgen, did win a lot of races at Sebring, Elkhart Lake, Bridgehampton and other tracks. Briggs kept many of those cars and continued to buy others for his collection.

Briggs' last race was the 12 Hours at Sebring in March, 1966, where he drove a Porsche 904. After that he retired to build and manage his Briggs Cunningham Automotive Museum in Costa Mesa, California. By then his collection was quite extensive. The museum had 30,000 square feet of display and 5,000 square feet of restoration area, but it wasn't in an easy-access area and it never drew enough people to make it pay. Through the years it took quite a toll on Briggs' fortune and energy.

In 1985 Briggs decided to sell his very rare and prized Kellner-bodied Bugatti 41 Royale, reasoning that the proceeds would keep the museum going for at least the rest of his life. Miles C. Collier, the nephew of Briggs' college and early racing buddy, Sam, flew to California and met with Briggs. By the time Miles returned to Florida he had purchased the entire collection.

The Collier Auto Museum opened in Naples in 1988 and closed to the public in 1994. That doesn't mean you can't still get in, it means you have to get a group together and apply well ahead of time for approval for a weekday or weekend tour. That's just what Armando Paredes did. He queried all four Florida clubs, the Florida Alfa Club, the Mid-Florida

Alfa Romeo Owner's Club, the South Florida Alfa Romeo Owner's Club and the South West Florida Alfa Romeo Owner's Club for possible attendees. He coordinated possible dates between the Collection and the Florida Alfa clubs. On April 2, 65 of us were ushered into the hallowed halls of the Collier Collection.

The Collier is a collection of over 110 automobiles built between 1896 and 1995. "The focus of the collection is to preserve those machines defined by their social, technical and aesthetic significance." Early examples are a 1898 Panhard that first introduced positioning the engine in the front of the vehicle followed by the transmission delivering power to the rear wheels. A 1913 Peugeot Voiturette racing car, one of two surviving Peugeots that introduced the twin-cam, four-valve engine design in 1914. And, of course, a Model T with a big back seat. Later examples are the first rear-engined and last front-engined Indy cars.

The cars are arranged in four groupings.

Automobility: The Story of the Road, the Car and Modern Life.

Vitesse: Sports Motoring and Motoring Sports.

Porsche: Designed to Excel, a study collection that traces the engineering thinking of one company over thirty years. (This section is nicknamed, "The Giant Killer.")

Revs: Racing Cars and Racing Men ... from its early inception at the turn of the 20th Century to the mid-1980s.

The restoration room, where ten men diligently restore and maintain the cars under the guidance of Bill Blum, is included in the tour. All cars in the collection are kept operable and

exercised regularly on the racetrack or on local roads. The cars are conserved after each run with a series of preservation and conservation techniques, that include fogging the upper cylinders to prevent rust and draining the fuel tank and fuel bowls to prevent dried fuel residue formation. There are cars being worked on in the room, but everything is so immaculate one wonders how any work gets done. The room has a raised, terazzo, platform that is very level for the final alignment of the cars.

Our group of 65 visitors was broken down into five small groups and rotated around the four car groupings and restoration room. Each group had an extremely knowledgeable docent who made pertinent remarks on almost every car. We saw and heard historic info on such cars as the first Ferrari raced in America, the Tipo 166 Corsa that Sam Collier was killed in; Enzo Ferrari's personal Ferrari 400 Super America; a Porsche 550 with serial number 001; the Porsche 904 Briggs drove in his last race; the Cadillacs he entered in the 24 Hours of Le Mans; all of the Cunningham CR cars and the BuMerc, the first "special" car he built by combining a 1939 Buick Century chassis with a straight eight, 320CI engine and a modified Mercedes Benz SSK body. Miles Collier I drove it at the last ARCA race, the GP held at the New York World's Fair in 1940.

In the collection are four distinguished Alfa Romeos that make the trip especially awesome for we Alfisti. There is a 1958 Giulietta Sprint Veloce that was purchased by Mr. Collier five years ago as an original, low-mileage example. (Of the 110 cars in the collection, 53 are from the original Cunningham collection and the remaining cars have all been purchased by Mr. Collier through his many years of careful choice.) There is a 1934 8C 2300 that looks like it just left the factory. There is the 1938 8C 2900B Touring Berlinetta that Pebble Beach Concours lists as having won Best of Show in 2008, beating out in tie-breaker judging, a 1935 Hispano Suiza K6 Cabriolet and a 1934 Packard 1108 LeBaron Sport Phaeton. More importantly, this car won the Mille Miglia in 1947! On the sculpted stand on the dais centered in the entry room are three red 1964 mighty nights: an Abarth Simca 2000GT; a Porsche Carrera GTS; and an Alfa GTZ that looks like it is ready to roar up onto the second floor!

The tour lasts for two and a half hours, but when it's over you feel as if you have been there all day. And you want to spend many more all days there! Unfortunately, no photographs are allowed, so you can't take home photo memories.

But wait, there's more. In 2009, the building also became the home of The Revs Institute for Automotive Research, an educational organization and research center that advances the scholarly study of automotive history. The Collier Collection also recently acquired the Ludvigsen Library, "a vast collection amassed by award winning automotive historian Karl Ludvigsen." The Revs Institute is now able to utilize the full extent of the Ludvigsen Library materials alongside the many existing Collier Collection library holdings.


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