

Days 61-77

I gave Lorrie a ride from lunch to her next meeting in the cobra, which she enjoyed. Called a guy I used to work with 20 years ago, and he came right over to the parking lot where we had dropped off Lorrie. Charles is one of those guys who hasn't gained a single pound or changed one bit as he got older. Only a little gray in his close cropped hair is a give-away. So, had a really enjoyable chat with a very gregarious guy for about a half hour, catching up on each other's last two decades. Great fun! Ron and I returned to paradise and spent some time chilling in his pool, before heading off for a new type of dinner/movie theater. Wide reclining leather chairs with triple row space and a movable table. A waiter takes your order and serves a full blown meal during the movie. We saw the "Jobs" movie, both having read the authorized biography, and it was interesting. Both of us would have preferred more time spent on the total Apple resurgence since his return to the top spot, rather than the time leading up to that, but it was still good. Guess that leaves room for "Jobs II", coming to a theater near you in two years (JK). Before the movie, Ron took me to his nearby Marina Del Rey gym. Holy tight spaces batman. Unbelievably densely populated array of machines - you essentially share elbow space with your neighbor. On the other hand, there was a LOT higher percentage of tightly suited hotties displaying pneumatically enhanced attributes, so at least there's more to look at than in my Baltimore gym.

The next morning, Ron and I went into the San Fernando Valley to visit with our friend Dan (goes back to my motorcycle racing days and the group of friends that came out of that). Dan is 63 but looks at least 15 years younger. Just left military duty several years ago after decades of service as a Green Beret, with recent tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan in a training role (at his age????). He now runs a small RPV shop, manufacturing small land and air vehicles. We got to play around with these little 4 prop helicopter like RC flying machines (X1 2.4g Syma Copter) in his big bay and had a blast. They're available for mid \$30s on Amazon and I'll be getting one. We then went over to Van Nuys airport for lunch, after which I learned that desert sun and heat in August is not for me-almost got burned when I buckled up. Hence my decision to head north ASAP. We stopped at the Peterson Automobile Museum on Wilshire on the way back to Mar Vista. It's a good museum, but what was I thinking after spending the prior weekend in Monterey, seeing every car under the sun (and perhaps other stars)? I'm officially OD'd on cars for now, having seen and done it all in the past several months. That night, met up for dinner with two couples I used to do a lot of stuff with. The three guys rode bicycles every Sunday morning, up to 70 miles worth along the beach, climbing to the top of Palos Verdes, and then back home. The highlight of each ride was meeting up with the "Ladies Auxiliary" (wives) for brunch afterwards. Over time, the rides got shorter and the brunches got longer, as is the way of things. Anyhow, we all met at the Redondo Beach pier at a semi-high end restaurant, and for a change I did not eat Mexican food. Once again, slipped into immediate rapport with folks I hadn't seen for years and we had a great time. I took several of them for laps around the parking structure in the cobra and they were suitably impressed. We drove back up to Ron's along Vista Del Mar (5 ish mile long road above the beach) in the dark of night, campfires visible down by the water and an endless array of airplane landing and navigation lights lined up on their way into LAX.

After another morning spent leisurely swimming and spa-ing, met friend Cheryl (Constance's and my once and future decorator friend) at her house in Manhattan Beach. She took me out to lunch at a place of my choice (El Torasco's again!!), and then we went to visit her husband Bill at his FBO shop at the Torrance Airport. Bill told me that there are millions of dollars of cars located within the airport grounds, and he escorted me to one of them. It's called McCluskey's, and they were in the midst of scratch

building aluminum bodied cobra roadsters and Daytona coupes (the latter are sometimes built for real cobra owners, who swap the Daytona body for that of their roadster). Awesome! One of the guys took me to the warehouse in the front of the building, where a bunch of wealthy men keep their numerous Ferraris, Lambos, Bentleys, Jags, etc., and vintage race cars. It was like a mini-Monterey event. Nice. Dropped Cheryl off after having had a fun afternoon, then drove back up Vista Del Mar again. I parked at the beach and went for a nice swim in the Pacific, body surfing in the late afternoon sun. Drove back to Ron's in my bathing suit and sandals (and 5 point safety harness) feeling free as a bird. Ron and Susan took me out to one of their favorite local restaurants for my good-bye meal (non-Mexican again!), during which we taste tested some wines so they could decide what to buy for a forthcoming party they were going to host.

After a final swim/spa session the next morning, Ron and I hugged it out and I took off for points south. Stopped in to have lunch at Lorrie's house in Los Alamitos (she laid out a sumptuous deli spread for 6, and force fed me until I couldn't fit any more - 4 brownies is my limit!). Husband Don came home and we watched a bunch of my iPhone trip pics through their apple TV device. Very handy. Another hug out and I continued on my way to Newport Beach. There, I showed up at my friend Bruce's law office. He's a labor law attorney, partner in a Newport Beach law firm, lives 6 minutes from the office in a high end Newport Beach gated community, and drives an S class Mercedes. Lovely wife Joan has to make do with just a late model Jag. On the other hand, she truly looks two decades younger than her actual age (I'm not exaggerating), so we'll call it a wash. Bruce and I took the cobra out to visit with Ron's boss Tom, who lives in one of the more rarefied Newport Beach enclaves. There sure are lots of pretty places in California. Back to the house to meet up with Joan, they treated me to dinner at a new restaurant they wanted to try in Laguna Beach (guess what kind; yep, Mexican). Great sleep in a bedroom equivalent to a 5 star hotel, but had to get up at 6AM so we could follow Bruce's next store neighbor Mike, in his new Ferrari California, to the weekly Saturday morning Irvine Cars & Coffee meet-up. Getting there at 6:45 or so, we only just made it into the main parking lot-only 5 parking spaces were left. Huge batch of cars, many really interesting. But, kind of ho-hum for me: proof that I've officially OD'd on cars. Bruce and I left after a while, and headed to the Newport Beach peninsula, where we had breakfast at a beachside restaurant where the outdoor seating was at picnic tables in the sand. Nice. After several hours spent walking the cliffs and chatting back at the house, it was time to head for Escondido. Yet another hug out with great folks, and I was on my way.

It was such a gorgeously sunny day, decided to dawdle by going down Pacific Coast Highway a bit before jumping on the freeway. Drove through a succession of cute little beach communities, each teeming with beach goers and café diners. Just a normal Sunday in paradise (except for the obscene utility costs, hundreds of hillside homes doomed to slide into the ocean – it's just a matter of time, extended drought, raging forest fires, endless traffic...). Eventually met up with the 5 freeway for one of its nicest sections, the area near San Onofre and Camp Pendleton. Near the intersection of route 78 towards Escondido, pulled off in a view point to get a final view of the pacific before turning back east. There I had an amusing "that guy" incident (as Tennessee Tim labeled it), my first of the trip. Leaning on my car, getting a last look at the glistening Pacific before starting my trek east, I hear a grumbly crotchety growl from the Mercedes SL parked next to me. "That thing got a 427 side oiler cross-bolt-main engine in it?" asks Mr. Crotchety. "No, I went modern" I answered. "Bet you wish you had a 427 side oiler cross-bolt-main engine in it", says Mr. Grumpy. "Not really, my 4.6 DOHC is lighter and makes for a balanced car, both weight and power wise". "How fast will it go?" asks Mr. Scornful. "Well, I've had it up to 135 mph

when I ran out of racetrack, but I suspect that with enough road it will go a little faster”, I replied. “You know, I’m a 4 time world champion”, says Mr. Nonsequitor. “Oh yeah, in what discipline?” says me. “Mechanic for the Unser team” says Mr. Braggart. “Wow, Indy cars or Pikes Peak?” says me. “INDY CARS” he says with disdain, as if it was obvious. “Cool. You know, I hope to climb Pikes Peak when I get to Colorado”. “In that?” with more disdain. “Yeah, they finished paving it to the top last year”, I informed him. “Well, I wouldn’t even have to get my other car to beat that thing” says the reappearing Mr. Nonsequitor. “This car is an AMG and will do 200 mph. The other car in my garage is a Ferrari Testarossa and will do 220 mph”. “Cool, and you have a nice day” I said as I got in my car and belted up before nodding to him and taking off. “You’re probably full of crap and definitely a douche” I thought, chuckling as I got back on 5 south.

Showed up at Tim and Jackie’s house a couple of hours before they were holding a big party. Tim and I worked together at Northrop on the F-18 program. He recently retired and then embarked upon the famous 500 mile Camino De Santiago walking (!) pilgrimage across Spain with his youngest son Jeff. Tim is largely responsible for me being a father. No, not some kind of in vitro experiment in violation all laws of science, but rather a convincing discussion over lunch in 1992 at El Torasco’s. He went on and on extolling the virtues of fatherhood and how proud he was of his sons Jay and Jeff. When I got home that evening, I mentioned this to Constance and that my here-to-fore ironclad “no kids” policy just might need a rethink. I was immediately grabbed by the lapels and dragged into the bedroom. Our son Chris was born in 1993. Back to the present: This party was a welcome home event with about 60 of Tim and Jackie’s closest friends. DJ, catered food, and a lovely view across the valley (hillside home) towards the city of Escondido. They have a number of hummingbird feeders around, and it was very interesting to watch numerous little fella’s jockeying for position and feeding. Several women commented to me about “what a cute little car” I had. After Tim got done speaking to the crowd about his trip, he introduced me as another retired guy on an adventure. I took the opportunity to thank the folks for their “cute car” positive vibes, but informed them that for the record, “it’s a Mean, Bitch’n, Macho machine”, which got a big laugh. Great party, and a good sleep on a couch (numerous visiting family members having taken all the beds).

After morning coffee, said my goodbyes and headed up to Chino airport to see the airplane museum and meet some FFR guys. Nice drive up route 15 and showed up exactly on time to meet with Jeff (roadster in the garage, getting an engine refresh), Dave (coupe in primer and bare metal interior- imagine the heat in that climate), Bill (challenge car in primer with homemade large tube sidepipes), and little Geoffrey (Jeff’s son, still under construction). We had a nice tour of the museum and lucked out being able to meet one of the Planes of Fame principals, Steve Hinton. Winner of numerous Reno air races, father of another winner, and a lucky devil to have been able to fly all the things he’s been able to. We had a nice chat; another very personable “celebrity”. We FFR’rs said our goodbyes, and I headed off into the sauna. As I mentioned in an earlier post, lucked out with the weather and had a comfortable cruise under scattered cloud cover to Phoenix, where I got my engine rebuilt.

Engine rebuilt-whatttt? Well, during a 2 day SCCA PDX track day weekend in early March, felt a mini bang as I let off the throttle at 135 mph at the end of the main straight at Summit Point WV. The car didn’t seem to be affected, so finished out the session. Upon return to the paddock, noticed an uneven stumble at idle. Long story short, ran 7 more sessions over the rest of the weekend, and another couple hundred miles before investigating and finding the spark plug gap closed on one cylinder. Fixing the gap, the stumble went away. “Mr. Pollyanna” here concluded that a piece of accumulated carbon must have

come off the piston top and hit the electrode. Several months later, Mark Dougherty convinced me to bring the car to his shop for "Tour de USA" trip prep so we could stick a camera down the affected cylinder. Oh crap-saw a two inch slice off the perimeter of the piston top missing, so we could see the shiny top ring. Pit in stomach/what do I do 2 weeks before I'm supposed to leave? We rationalized that the engine had tolerated a bunch of abuse in the intervening 3 months, so I decided to go for it. I contacted AMP in Phoenix, and they agreed to assemble a replacement short block with a used cylinder and crank, new forged rods and pistons, and have it all machined and ready to add on the rest of the parts from my existing engine. The plan worked like buttah and I showed up on Monday to watch the pistons and rods be put in the new/used short block, the engine pulled and parts transferred on Tuesday, and the car reassembled and complete on Wednesday! Chris and Jessie performed an amazingly quick turnaround. We also fixed the turn signal (blown flasher unit), the data link connection (my bad-incompletely connected connector), which allowed determination that I had a bad O2 sensor, and replaced the grabby clutch (my bad II-improperly torqued, thus warped, during original install). The car ran like a top during the 550 mile jaunt from Phoenix to Santa Fe, which included stops at the Red Rocks nature center, Meteor Crater, Winslow Arizona, and the Unser Museum in Albuquerque, where Big Al was giving a talk to a Corvette group in the midst of a Route 66 adventure. I took Mike Brasfield's suggestion to divert off the main drag for the nice drive through Sedona towards Flagstaff, and it was great. Mike had spent the afternoon with me on Tuesday, driving me over two hours each way down to Tucson to check out the Pima Air Museum, which has a fascinating display of aircraft, many of them rare variants. He, his wife Lorraine, and I shared a nice good-bye meal my last night in Phoenix.

Have now accumulated about 13,000 Cobra and 1,000 Camry miles on the trip so far. Am about to head to Colorado Springs and Pikes Peak, then to Boulder, and then to route 70 which actually terminates about 15 miles from my house. After 2 ½ months, have got a slight case of "barn fever". It's time to be home. Until the next time.....