

# Wild On the Streets



1 | Grabbing a lead at the start of the Sports Cars 1.5-2L (Pre-1975) group race, Stefan Vapaa has the right pedal down in his '68 Saab Sonett V4.

2 | Two tiny cars well suited to this tight circuit, the '58 Austin A35 of Nial McCabe (909) and Joe Parlanti's '59 Abarth Zagato 750 GT.

3 | Race-prepped and honkin', Michael Barstow's '53 MG TD looks like fun.

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Celebrating its 40th anniversary, the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix kept thousands cheering

**T**HE LONG-RUNNING PITTSBURGH VINTAGE GRAND PRIX wrapped up its 40th year at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's Schenley Park July 23-24. The PVGP began as one-day race in 1983 and has evolved into a 10-day celebration of the automobile—one of the largest automotive festivals in the region. The races at Schenley Park remain the week's signature event and no other vintage race in the country is like it. Racing 2.8 miles a lap between stone walls, along twisting public roads (19 corners) and across an art deco bridge at Panther Hollow make this truly a one-of-kind event.

The fun kicks off on Friday evening with the "Forbes Avenue of Speed" race car parade when they leave the paddock in Schenley Park and parade through Squirrel Hill before parking on Forbes Avenue, giving the public

a chance to view the cars and chat with drivers and crew. After a driver's reception at a local jeweler, the cars and drivers parade back under the big shade trees of Prospect Drive, a most unique race paddock.

Saturday morning begins early with literally thousands of cars filing onto the golf course that overlooks the vintage race course for the International Car Show. The show is arranged by geographic location and tagged with names like "German Hill," and is open to any type of car with car clubs welcome. The American Car Show located next to the clubhouse and the "Cortile della Corsa" (Italian racing courtyard) was located beside the Pittsburgh Golf Club and featured every Italian marque.

Porsche was this year's honored brand, and the event drew more than 300 classic examples to the show field and the track at Schenley. Ray Schaffer, Porsche Classic



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1 | Like a wild carnival ride is Lauren Licht's '67 Autodynamics Formula Vee D4-A.

2 | Ray Schaffer, Porsche Classic Market Development Manager at Porsche Classic North America, was the PVGP Grand Marshal.

3 | John Iorio sets up for a tight right-hander in his '60 Austin-Healey Sprite.

4 | Alan R Patterson III keeps up the PVGP tradition of his father, racing this 1934 Lagonda Rapier.

5 | One of the faster cars competing in the PVGP was Michael Schindel's '74 Porsche 911.

6 | Christopher Turner looks ahead to the next corner racing his '60 Porsche 356 Coupe.



***"The course has every textbook element taught in driver school, surrounded by the natural beauty of a historical city park."***

Market Development Manager at Porsche Classic North America, was the Grand Marshal, the PVGP stoking his interest in motorsport by a chance meeting (as a teen) with Bob Akin at the 1986 PVGP. Akin was a business executive and sports car racer who had just won his 2nd 12-Hour endurance race at Sebring in a Porsche and was attending the PVGP to support his son, who was racing a vintage Formula Junior. Shaffer said, "The

PVGP opened my youthful eyes to an exciting world of automobiles!"

Roy "Father Viper" Sjoberg was named Honorary Race Director. The first chief engineer for Viper inspired Chrysler to produce a fire-breathing 10-cylinder sports car—a company with a brand identity producing boring 4-cylinder K-Cars in 1989. Sjoberg was recruited from General Motors in 1985, after 25 years of being the right-hand of Zora Arkus-Duntov, who gave Roy the name "Father Viper!" Today, he remains active in the automotive world as a notable speaker on engineering, technical and team building.

Practice sessions took place on Saturday morning followed by qualifying sessions. It was one of the hottest





weekends in recent memory and severe weather roared in late Saturday afternoon, bringing down trees on the course and delaying the first race of the weekend—the Donna Mae Mims Memorial Spridget race, until Sunday morning. The Memorial race honored Pittsburgh's own “Pink Lady” of racing. Mims was the first woman to win an SCCA Championship in 1963, racing an Austin-Healey Sprite. She worked at the famed Canonsburg, PA, Chevrolet dealership of Don Yenke, the legendary race car builder. She raced for the Yenke Hi-Performance Racing Team—capturing her first win at Cumberland in 1961. In her later years, she was a driving instructor and a long-time PVGP volunteer, until her passing in 2009. The race drew strong support from the VSDCA Spridget racers, and the small-bore cars really do well on the tight park circuit.

Pittsburgh's own Andrew Moore set the fast time and took the checker in his '64 Sprite over Toby Yurko in his '67 model. Moore is no stranger to the podium and described the Schenley circuit: “The course has every textbook element taught in driver school, surrounded by the natural beauty of a historical city park. You have increasing radius turns, decreasing radius turns, esses that require momentum, a chicane, fast straight(ish) sections, blind curves, on and off camber turns and elevation changes—it is what every driver wants in a track!”

The all-Porsche Marque race saw a variety of Stuttgart's finest including Chris Duerr's 1956 Porsche 356 entry—the oldest car in the field. But it was a pair of 914s battling for the top spot with K.C. Kowalyk taking the win in his '70 914 with Todd Hahn taking runner-up honors in his '71 914. Kowalyk also took the win in the over 2.0-liter race and shared how his father, SCCA and endurance racer Bob Nikel, got him into racing 24 years ago. He said, “It really felt like he was in the car with me today.”

The Group 4 under 2.0 Liter race was a hotly contested affair and arguably the best race of the weekend. Stefan Vapaa and his familiar '68 Saab Sonett set fast time in Saturday's qualifying. Darren Mann ('63 Lotus Elan) swapped the lead with Vapaa throughout the race, but the 20-minute event allowed Brian Dolan time to race his way to the win in a '71 Triumph GT6. Dolan credited his competitors with safe, clean racing and watching their mirrors, enabling his victory at Schenley. Runner-up Vapaa, a frequent winner at PVGP says “I absolutely love this track, it has a fabulous rhythm, better than many dedicated tracks I've raced on...and my car loves it, too!”

One of the most fascinating facets of the event is that it is volunteer driven. The lone employee, executive director Dan DelBianco explained, “This one-of-a-kind event would not be possible without the support of over 1,000 volunteers and a partnership with the Steel Cities Region of the SCCA. This army of dedicated individuals work year-round to plan and host two weekends of racing. The PVGP has always been a charity event and has raised over \$6 million since 1983 for Autism-Pittsburgh and the Merakey-Allegheny Valley School.”

## PICK OF THE LITER

### 1981 Gemini 81C Formula Ford

**BROTHERS PAUL AND JEFF RIEFFLE** began racing Formula Fords in the late '70s, and frustrated with the cost and parts that were only produced in the UK, they decided to design and build their own cars on Pittsburgh's South Side. With limited funds and experience, they rented space in the repurposed “Duquesne Brewery” building. They had plenty of space to work on the 5th floor, but the partially assembled cars had to be stood straight up in a freight elevator to get them out of the building!

The goal was to produce every Formula Ford part or have a readily available source at reasonable cost. The brothers worked on machining, fabricating frames, suspension, jigs, fixtures, and casting patterns, etc. They wanted the cars to be safe, reliable, and competitive. With very limited resources, they enlisted help and expertise from others. Cliff Mikesell turned their sketches into drawings, Dave Bruce helped them with the bodywork and Henry Paskorz was a welding wizard. A one-piece design cockpit/engine cover bodywork with a separate nose cone proved too cumbersome. Better aero was achieved with an out of the air stream “up and over” exhaust system and new 4-piece bodywork with an integrated carburetor air scoop and exhaust air duct in the engine cover. They also included a tail cone to “clean up” the rear of the car.

The early “C-car” (conventional) with outboard suspension, raced with moderate success, but when the aerodynamically superior Reynard and Swift cars came along, it was a scramble to build a new “I-car” using inboard suspension. Looking back, Paul says they should have taken a year off to “do it right.” A few of the cars were returned to the original “C-Car” design (conventional.) The Gemini project ended in 1985, parts and spares were sold off, with some of the unfinished chassis completed by others and raced as Club Fords.

Originally Paul Rieffle's '81 Gemini, chassis #1 was raced at the PVGP by Jan McCoy, owned by Bob Albert.

