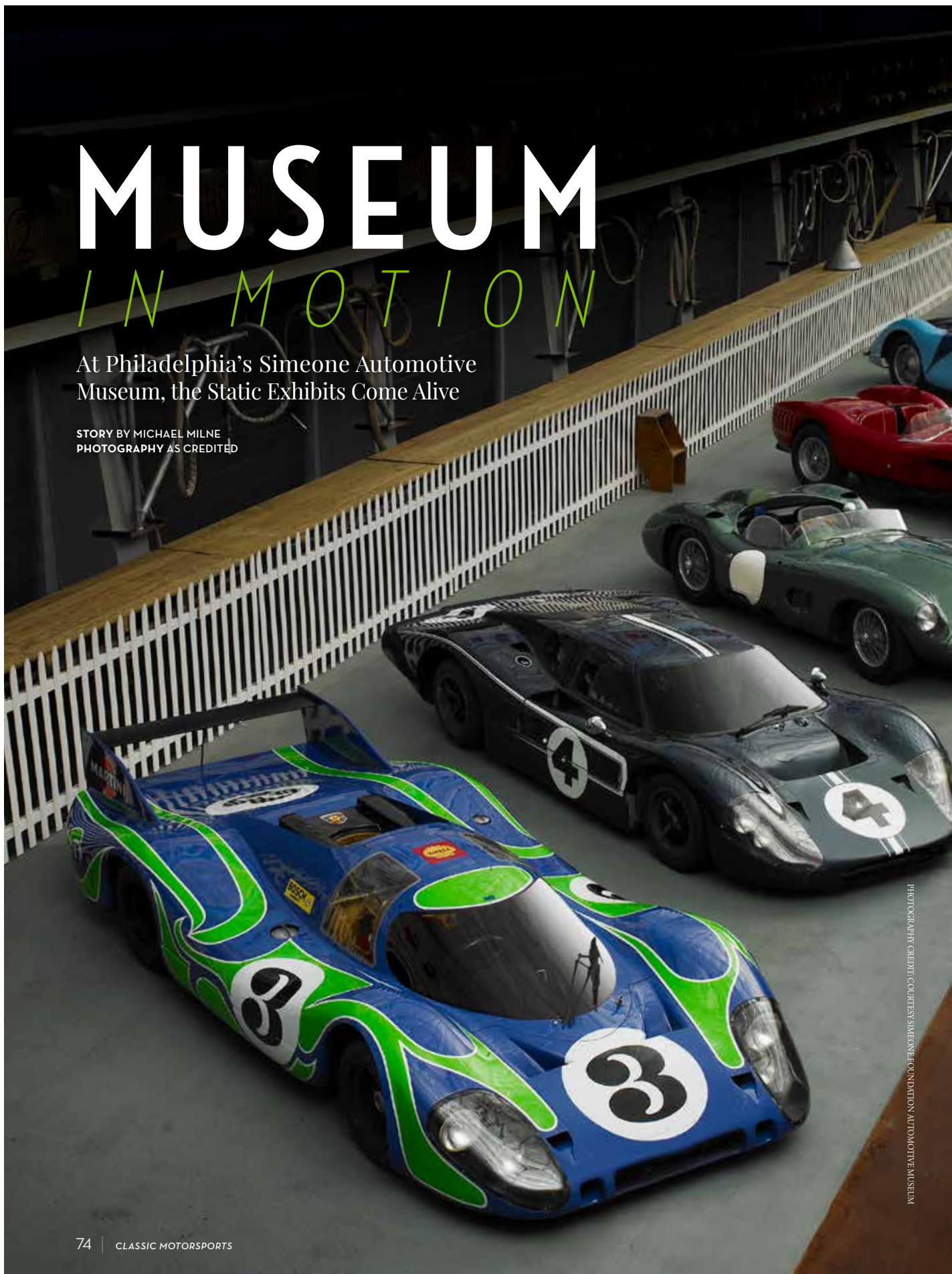


# MUSEUM

## IN MOTION

At Philadelphia's Simeone Automotive Museum, the Static Exhibits Come Alive

STORY BY MICHAEL MILNE  
PHOTOGRAPHY AS CREDITED



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The Simeone Museum contains some of the world's greatest race cars, but they're not always on static display.

What does it take to be ranked one of the most significant classic car collectors in the world? If you're Dr. Fred Simeone, the founder of the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum in Philadelphia, it helps to have a lifelong love of the hobby—along with dedication to making your collection available to educate the public.

The list of the world's top 100 collectors was published in "The Key," a directory released by the Liechtenstein-based Classic Car Trust. The picks were ranked based on criteria like quality of the cars, contribution to the hobby, contribution to society, exposure of the cars to the public, and quality of the library. Simeone crossed the finish line in an impressive second place. (First place went to Miles Collier, founder of South Florida's Revs Institute.)

#### Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum

6825 Norwitch Drive  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
[simeonemuseum.org](http://simeonemuseum.org)

#### Hiding in Plain Sight

On first approach, the Simeone collection appears modest. The 70 or so vehicles, which celebrate the evolution of the racing sports car, are housed in an unassuming former engine-remanufacturing facility just 2 miles from Philadelphia International Airport.

Nestled among car dealerships and long-term parking lots, the building is easy to miss. But, like a rare barn find that yields a perfectly intact engine under the hood, this building rewards the intrepid motor enthusiast with a treasure trove once inside.

"This isn't just a building full of cars, but a building full of stories," Simeone explains. "Each car is here because it has a story to tell with an interesting history." He points to a 1921 Duesenberg 183 race car and continues: "The Duesenberg is an example

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Why race cars? Dr. Simeone explains on the museum's website: "In the competition between the species, the fittest indeed do survive. The same is true with many inanimate objects."

of that. I grew up in a poor part of Philadelphia, and this [car] was inside a garage there when my dad bought it for almost nothing. After he passed away, I painted it and bolted it back together.

"When Jay Leno was here with noted Duesenberg historian Randy Ema, he said, 'You know, what you have there is one of the French Grand Prix race cars.'

"Now, the French Grand Prix of 1921 is very important because it's the only race before World War II that an American car won overseas. There were allegedly no survivors of the four cars

that went [to Europe], but it turns out that this is one of them. It raced there in 1921—dropping out due to a blown piston rod—but followed that up with a second-place finish at Indy in 1922.

"And it was just sitting there inside a garage in Philadelphia. Can you believe that? The car was well known, but it was assumed to be missing."

#### Not Static, but Active

As Simeone speaks, a 1912 National Model 40 Semi-Racing Roadster rumbles and burps on the back lot, its engine





Even before he became a top neurosurgeon, Dr. Fred Simeone loved cars. In the '50s, he watched his dad restore this Cord 812—now part of the collection.



PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS: COURTESY SIMEONE FOUNDATION AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM, MICHAEL MILNE, (DUJESBERG)

clearly audible. He glances happily out the rear of the museum and declares, “The guys are out testing the car. This morning it wouldn’t even start. How about that?” His love of making these cars roadworthy is evident.

Roadworthiness is more important here than at many car museums. Throughout the year, the museum hosts Demonstration Days where a handful of the cars are taken out for a spin on the spacious rear lot. Adoring throngs of car buffs get to glimpse, if only for a lap or two, legendary racers of a bygone era. On any given Saturday they may witness a 1907 Renault Racing Roadster, 1952 Cunningham C-4R or 1956 Maserati 300S. As Simeone says, “This museum is one of the few places you can see, hear and smell famous race cars run.”

#### From the Top

Back inside, visitors start their tour chronologically. The vehicles are displayed in realistic tableaux representing

their racing heritage, like Watkins Glen, Targa Florio and Nürburgring.

One of the oldest vehicles in the collection is a 1909 Underslung Traveler manufactured by American, a car company founded by early motorsports pioneer Harry C. Stutz. The model name was derived from the frame hung below the chassis, which gave the car a lower center of gravity for improved handling but required larger wheels. According to a frank assessment by the museum, “While the car accelerates rather well, its ability to stop can be scary.” Period advertising claimed the \$4000 vehicle—\$110,000 in today’s dollars—was “A Car for the Discriminating Few.”

The museum provides highly detailed descriptions for each car. For example, its 1913 Mercer Raceabout consists of a 1911 chassis mated with a 1913 engine and transmission, producing a more maneuverable race car. Since the car’s provenance can be traced back to 1919, the change must have occurred in its

very early years. This depth of information only comes from extensive research on each vehicle.

A pride of the collection is the 1964 Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe CSX2287, the first of six Daytona Coupes built. It took first in the GT class at Sebring that year, and also set records at Bonneville in 1965 with Craig Breedlove and Bobby Tatroe behind the wheel. In 2014, when America's National Historic Vehicle Association created the National Historic Vehicle Register, this car was the first vehicle to be so recognized.

A car from the same era on display is a 1963 Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport, created by legendary Corvette designer

The museum is all about provenance. Its Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe won at Sebring in 1964. Periodically, like the rest of the collection, this storied racer gets a workout.

Zora Arkus-Duntov to compete with Ford's Cobra at Daytona and Sebring. Unfortunately, the higher-ups at General Motors scuttled the project after only five were built. Roger Penske once owned the Grand Sport found in the museum's collection, a car which has been restored while many details were also painstakingly preserved.

European racing is also well represented. One of Simeone's favorite cars is the 1938 Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B MM Spider that won the 1938 Mille Miglia. It's parked among an exclusive cluster of five cars in "The Winner's Circle," an exhibit representing champion racers from five top competing countries: France, Germany, Italy, the United States and the United Kingdom. The other cars in this select group are a 1927 Mercedes-Benz S-Type Sportwagen,





1936 Bugatti Type 57G "Tank" (the holder of several of the records that the 1964 Shelby Cobra Daytona broke), 1952 Cunningham C-4R Roadster, and 1958 Aston Martin DBR1.

#### Looking Forward While Remembering the Past

Simeone is not satisfied with resting on his laurels, however. "Our long-term plan is to keep developing the museum's themes and continue new programs that are geared towards the education of youngsters. The focus in schools now is on STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics]. An automobile has all those aspects in it."

Along these lines, in 2018 the museum held its first youth summer camps. With activities such as designing cars for wind tunnel efficiency, they proved to be highly popular. Simeone takes seriously his responsibility to educate and pique the interest of the next generation of car collectors.

Thanks to its preservation of the past while simultaneously looking towards the future, the Simeone museum has become a world-class attraction that's worth seeking, even if it's hidden in plain sight.

*Michael Milne is the author of the "Roadster Guide to America's Classic Car Museums & Attractions."*

The museum follows its own automotive Hippocratic Oath: "The balance between originality and perfection could be attained if one realizes that while cosmetic perfection is very difficult to achieve, historic perfection is even more elusive and, therefore, the latter is more desirable."