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A Short History Of FCCA

By Walter Gould

Organized sports car activities in the United States date back to just prior to World War II. Those activities then underway were almost, if not totally destroyed by the wartime restrictions on petroleum products, rubber, and entertainment.

However, it didn't take long after the cessation of hostilities for men and machines to begin meeting again in various locations around the country, to compete and to improve the sport of motoring.

In the East, Westport, Connecticut saw the birth of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA), which has grown to be the largest sports car club in the United States. Its activities, however, are primarily devoted to racing.

In the early months of 1948, in and around Hollywood, California, certain "individualists", who owned "funny little sporty cars", used to meet while having these peculiar "gadgets" serviced. They'd discuss the relative merits of the "breed", and in many ways conducted themselves much like a bunch of race horse owners around the clubhouse.

But, by the time early '49 rolled around, they had pretty much decided to meet on a semi-regular basis to "bench race" and, no doubt, to "tinker" a little. As a group, they had no formal organization. One of them, a lanky "Englishman", John E. Foster, seemed always in the forefront.

Watching the "quarter midgets" race at Hollywood's Gilmore Stadium, they persuaded the management to allow them to drive their "sporty cars" around the track on a Saturday night, between races. This may well have been the first FCCA event, although at the time, they certainly weren't known by that name.

John often describes the old days in extremely colorful language, which loses something in its translation (into print). But, his description of this "first" and "last" event, both at the same time, can't help but leave you in stitches. Apparently, the "black flag" was prominently displayed that evening in numerous and frenzied attempts to stop the lap, which "became a race".

By June of 1949, Foster and a partner had an agency in Glendale (a Los Angeles suburb), which rapidly became a popular spot for people with imported cars to obtain service. Having become familiar with them, around the first of that month, he approached some with the thought of conducting an event . . . a rally. So, the following Sunday, June 7th, 1949, to be exact, this little foothill town became the launching point for FCCA.

It soon turned out that there were more "enthusiasts" than opportunities for them to become "enthusiastic". By mid-1950, it was apparent that the Four Cylinder Club of America, as it was no known, could endure, at the very least in its "association" status. Activities were fun, and plenty.

The "founding fathers" of FCCA came to the realization that liabilities, far in excess of individual responsibility, could be incurred . . . unless the group became a corporation. With the assistance of a local attorney, Phil Curry, incorporation papers were drawn up. By July 9th, 1951, they had become a non-profit corporation, duly registered with the Secretary of State of California.

The emblem of the Club, designed by John Foster, was submitted to the Commissioner of Patents for the United States, and was awarded a number as a "Registered Service Mark", much similar to a trade mark. During the same period of time, the Club applied for, and was granted "tax-exempt status" by the Internal Revenue Service.

At this time, there was only one group, meeting monthly in Glendale, and drawing attendance from as far away as Santa Barbara, a hundred miles to the North. To some, the distance was too far to travel . . . to others, there was enough interest locally to form a group. The Glendale group then amended the corporate by-laws and created "National Headquarters" as an autonomous body, with the Directors of the corporation being appointed from the "Chapters" which they then began to charter, with Glendale the first.

Starting with Glendale, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica, San Fernando Valley, and a host of others, the Charters were issued rapidly during the 1950's. Each of these groups seemed to do things a little differently, but under the policy of the "National Headquarters", this really didn't matter. What did matter was that all of the groups were reporting that they were having fun.

During the late fifties, a new trend developed. An already-formed group in the Santa Clara valley, near San Francisco, applied for a Charter. The new trend stuck, and more and more groups applied for affiliation.

The early 1960's continued the trend. Charters were issued to groups far and wide, throughout the country, in such locations as Chicago, Miami, New York, Boston, and even Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Since many individuals did not live close enough to

regularly attend meetings or participate in FCCA events, the National Board of Directors created a "National Member" program. This Member received some of the benefits normally received, and in addition, receives support and assistance through the National Headquarters, in developing the FCCA movement in their locale.

A suggestion for a radical change in the structure of the Club . . . "regionalization" . . . came from the Arizona Chapters. At this time, the National body, the Board of Directors, met monthly in Hollywood, with representatives appointed locally to represent the outlying groups.

For more than two years, until 1965, these groups insisted that if FCCA were to continue, it was logical that some organizational body must be formed to provide governmental services, more geographically situated. Thus the "Region" came into being. The National Board of Directors continued to meet monthly in Hollywood, but now the representation was for the Region. Locally, each Region had its own Board consisting of a Representative from each of its constituent Chapters.

During 1966 and 1967, emphasis at "National" has been placed on streamlining the "National" facet of the Club's operation, and to divert more and more of the operational and policy making decisions to Region. During this period also, the "monthly" meeting of the National Board in Hollywood underwent change. Starting in April, the Board began quarterly meetings, with the first being held in Phoenix.

The Board also turned its direction toward providing more membership services, services which could best be provided "Club-wide", rather than to delve into Regional problems. This brought about new membership forms and procedures, and significantly, the FCCA MASTER INSURANCE PLAN.

The forecast for the future is along these lines. It is anticipated that "National" will evolve into a small paid staff to provide the services now offered or planned, while Region will become the true center of the Club. Chapters, of course, would continue along their merry way, conducting and enjoying those events best suited to their local needs.

Rapidly approaching it's 20th year as an association of enthusiasts, the Four Cylinder Club of America is well on it's way toward becoming "the" non-racing sports car club for America.