

**North Carolina's Race to the Clouds and
The Evolution of a Motorsports Event:
A History of the Chimney Rock Hillclimb 1956 to 1995**

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On April 29, 1956, 41 drivers competed in the inaugural Chimney Rock Hillclimb at Chimney Rock Park, North Carolina. While the emerging southern auto-racing norm was the fledgling NASCAR organization, this first hillclimb was the chrysalis of an enduring amateur racing tradition in the highlands of North Carolina that continued until the 1995.¹ Similar to NASCAR, its purpose was to provide a way to drive competitively; nevertheless, the Chimney Rock Hillclimb was distinctly different in its origin, regulation, and rewards. These differences created a racing institution that stood alone in its topography, technology, and types of champions. A yearly gathering of racing enthusiasts that began as "gentlemen racing gentlemen" evolved into a motorsports event that included women drivers and officials. Throughout the course of the 39 years of the Hillclimb these differences led to a type of acculturation that was distinct in southern motorsports.

The history of the automobile and the historiography of auto racing began almost in unison. The principal early writings about auto racing pertained to the culture of the car and the manufacturer's desire to prove the automobile was a replacement for the horse and carriage. William Boddy in his book *The History of Motor racing* supplies the opinion that the purpose of the autorace was not only to compete, but also to demonstrate a vehicle's abilities "... under normal road-going conditions, having to contend with hills, conventional corners, cambered road surfaces ... dust and other hazards of the kinds encountered by travelers."² For that reason, racing served the early purpose of demonstrating confidence in the car as replacement for the horse and carriage.

As an area of public interest and historical inquiry, auto racing has grown considerably in recent years. A side effect of this interest is a growth in books that discuss the historical and cultural impact of auto racing both in the United States of America and in other countries around the world. In Europe there have been examinations of Formula 1³, specific events such as the history of the Monaco Grand Prix, and the supremacy of British engineering on the world stage of motorsports.⁴ In the United States, the historiography has evolved along a distinctly different

¹ The event has also continued into the 21st century as the Beech Mountain Hillclimb in Beech Mountain, North Carolina. Beech Mountain hosted it's sixth hillclimb in May 18, 19 and 20, 2001.

² William Boddy, *The History of Motor Racing*, revised edition (London: Orbis 1980), 4.

³ Formula 1 is the title of the premier road racing series that is run around the world and has been an established class of competition since the early 1970s. It is on the same level of prestige as NASCAR is in America.

⁴ For further information see: David Hodges, *The Monaco Grand Prix*, (London: Temple Press Books, 1964); Martin Beck-Burridge and Jeremy Walton, *Britain's Winning Formula: Achieving World Leadership in Motorsports*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) ; Russell Hotten *Formula 1*, (London: Orion, 1998).

path, specifically with authoritative works written about the birth and growth of auto racing in the American south, namely NASCAR.⁵

The scholarship about NASCAR is well founded. Mark Howell, professor of American Studies at Michigan State University, states that since its inception NASCAR has traversed the American cultural landscape from "Moonshine to Madison Avenue." Howell's work is an excellent treatise on the birth and growth of NASCAR as a southern cultural norm.⁶ Other authors have historical data as diverse as oral histories, statistical compilations of NASCAR's race winners and written a business history of NASCAR as a corporation.⁷

However, the historiography and scholarship of non-NASCAR motorsports in America is difficult to find at best especially concerning the last half of the 20th century. There are extensive pictorial histories such as Dave Friedman's *Pro Sportscar Racing in America: 1958 to 1974* and, while rich in photos, it offers no analysis of the reasons that sportscar racing flourished regionally and nationally in this time frame. Michael Keyser authored *The Speed Merchants* after covering the 1967 through 1970 seasons of the professional sportscar-racing scene in the United States as a sports reporter.⁸ This book offers some analysis, but of limited scholarly value. These books could be excellent sources of information for the historian, with first person accounts and photos, they have the potential to be excellent sources. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of historiography available in the field of amateur auto racing that is directly applicable to my area of historical inquiry.

In establishing the historical impact of the Chimney Rock Hillclimb, it is necessary to first establish the history of the park itself. The name of the park comes from the "Chimney Rock," a monolithic granite outcropping worn out of the Blue Ridge Mountains over millennia. Located 24 miles south of what is present day Asheville, North Carolina, Chimney Rock has been established as a high volume tourist destination in the latter half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century.⁹ The Morse brothers Hiram, Lucius, and Asahel of St. Louis, Missouri, purchased the natural wonder from Jerome B. Freeman in 1902 with the idea of building it into a greater tourist attraction.¹⁰

⁵ Greg Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vols. 1*, revised edition, (Surfside Beach: Galfield, 1992) 5; Greg Fielden states that on 2/21/48, NASCAR was adopted as the acronym for the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing. This acronym has been in use ever since and has become the term by which American stock car racing has become synonymous. For more information see also: Mark Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1997) ; Greg Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vols. 1-4*, revised edition, (Surfside Beach: Galfield, 1992) ; Peter Golenbock, *American Zoom: Stock Car Racing – From the Dirt Tracks to Daytona*, (New York: McMillan, 1993) ; Jerry Bledsoe, *The World's Number One, Flat out, All-Time Great Stock Car Racing Book*, reprint (Asheboro, Down Home Press, 1995).

⁶ Howell, ix.

⁷ Robert G. Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way: The Business That Drives the Sport*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1998) see also note number 5.

⁸ Micheal Keyser, *The Speed Merchants*, (New York: Ridge Press, 1973). also Dave Friedman. *Pro Sports Car Racing in America, 1958-1974*. (Osceola: MBI, 1999).

⁹ Mary Yaeger-Gaele, Vice President of Marketing, Chimney Rock Park, interview by author 14 September, 2001. Mary offered that the park had received over 290,00 visitors in 2000.

¹⁰ William A. Allhands, "How Chimney Rock Was Developed," *The State*, vol 13, no 6 (1945) : 6.

The trio's visions went beyond creating a simple tourist attraction. Todd Morse, current president of Chimney Rock Park and the fourth generation Morse to hold the title, stated in a 1995 interview, "Dr. [Lucius] Morse was the dreamer – He saw the property and just went nuts about it. His grand plan in the early 1900s called for nothing less than converting the entire [Hickory Nut] gorge into a world class resort . . ."¹¹

The advanced thinking of Dr. Morse was the principle concept behind the 1925 founding of Chimney Rock Mountains Inc. The company's stock prospectus, A New Empire in Western North Carolina, speaks of Dr. Morse's "twenty-year dream" that grew as increased numbers of tourists visited Chimney Rock. The prospectus offered an illustration that the area of Lake Lure, established by the completion of a dam, would allow sources of income including: marketing of hydroelectric power, real estate development, and resort sites that are within "24 hours travel of half the population of the United States." Dr. Morse had already had successes in increasing tourism in the area around the Park as 43,000 visitors came to the Park in 1924.¹² This tourism was due in part, because of the increased acceptance of the automobile.

Even as cars became more prevalent in society, auto racing itself was unusual in the southern United States in the early 1900s. The Vanderbilt Cup Races took place from in 1907 through 1937, predominantly on Long Island, New York.¹³ Occasionally held elsewhere, the seventh running of the Vanderbilt Cup was held in Savannah, Georgia in 1911 as part of the "Great Savannah Races."¹⁴ Further evidence of the early roots of southern auto racing can be found in the 1924 to 1927 races that were run on a board track in Pineville, North Carolina. During this time, because of its size, the Charlotte board track was ". . . the ultimate in auto racing in the South."¹⁵ The historical importance of these board tracks in the United States is demonstrated by the fact that they were constructed as racing venues with the emphasis on selling tickets to sports spectators.¹⁶ Not only were these races held on purpose built tracks, they were also held on public roads such as all of the "Great Savannah Races."

America's earliest documented hillclimb held as an auto race, was in 1904 at Mt. Washington in central New Hampshire, becoming commonly referred to as the "Mt. Washington Hillclimb." Recognized as America's oldest motorsports event, the race pre-dates the Indianapolis 500, first held in 1911,¹⁷ and the inaugural Pikes Peak

¹¹ Peter Gregutt, "Rocky Top, Preservation, Ecotourism and Chimney Rock Park," The Mountain Express (June 14, 1995): 14.

¹² Chimney Rock Mountains Incorporated, A New Empire in Western North Carolina, (Asheville: privately printed, 1925) Found in uncatalogued materials at Chimney Rock Park.

¹³ Hal Kiener, Chief Archivist, Biltmore Estate, interview by author 10 October, 2001.

¹⁴ Julian Quattlebaum, The Great Savannah Races (Athens: The University of Georgia Press), 101. These races were conducted nine times between 1908 and 1911 and gained national media attention.

¹⁵ Author unknown, Before NASCAR: The Corporate, Booster origins of Automobile Racing in the American South, original document in the possession of Dr. Daniel Pierce, University of North Carolina – Asheville, page 34, 35. Board track racing was well established in the United States into the 1930s and as such influenced an early organizer of NASCAR William "Bill" France Sr. who first learned to drive at high speed on a board track Laurel, Maryland.

¹⁶ Bugs Barringer, "When Indy Racing Came to Carolina" The State, vol. 47, no. 5. : 11.

¹⁷ Author unknown, History of the Indianapolis 500 available online at: <<http://ims.brickyard.com/history.php>> accessed October 1, 2001.

Hillclimb, now traditionally known as the "Race to the Clouds," run in 1916.¹⁸ Though the existence of hillclimbs that pre-date the inaugural race at Chimney Rock are certainly part of autoracing history, it does not offer an answer as to why races were held at Chimney Rock Park between 1956 and 1995.

Though a complete history of amateur sportscar racing in the United States is clearly beyond the intent of this thesis, its distinction from the more dominant southern auto racing norm of NASCAR can be illustrated by examining an event like the Chimney Rock Hillclimb. With this examination it can be shown that even though limited in its scope, the Chimney Rock Hillclimb was divergent from the standard norm and evolved in its own unique since its inception in 1956 and terminus in 1995.¹⁹

Rewards for competitors in amateur motorsports more often than not came in the form of bragging rights over fellow drivers and, perhaps, a trophy. Prize money, if offered at all, was of a negligible amount and often would not even cover the expenses incurred in running a race.²⁰ Even without the lure of winning money, amateur sportscar racing in the United States took a decided upswing with the founding of the Sports Car Club of America in 1944.²¹ Still in existence in 2001, the SCCA has grown to over 55,000 members who are the participants and the organizers of over 2,000 racing events each year.²² These differences, helped to create a unique, successful organization to govern and regulate amateur sportscar racing.²³

The SCCA was established to provide a similar goal to NASCAR. The commonality of this goal was to establish rules that allowed competitive driving, but differed in the fact that it was an organization that was run not for the profit of the SCCA or its participants, but instead, for the love of the sportscar.²⁴ With NASCAR's focus on a series of annual races, the Sports Car Club of America ran a more diminutive schedule.²⁵ The SCCA's local region (the Central Carolina Region) promoted races in North and South Carolina piedmont, and with the emphasis on the "club" aspect of the sport growth was not profit driven and therefore more casual.²⁶

¹⁸ Stanley L. DeGeer, Pikes Peak is Unser Mountain, (Albuquerque: Peak Publishing Company, 1990), 1.

¹⁹ Buzz McKim, Archivist, International Speedway Corporation and NASCAR, interview by author 14 September, 2001. NASCAR was an effort to create a racing environment that allowed equal competition it also was an effort to shift racing to a point of greater marketability and profitability.

²⁰ Ted Tidwell, Six time Chimney Rock Hillclimb champion, interview by author 3 November, 2001.

²¹ Sue Roethel, SCCA National Member Services Director and 40-year member of the SCCA, interview by author, 31 October, 2001.

²² Author unknown, "What is the SCCA?", n.d., <<http://www.scca.org>>, (17 September, 2001).

²³ John Davison, Online Editor, Speedvison.com, interview by author, 6 September, 2001. Also: Author unknown, "Who is the SCCA?", n.d., <<http://www.scca.org>>, (20 September, 2001).

²⁴ Ibid., Davison offered that the preservation of the culture of pre-WW II models as well as concours were integral to the founding of the SCCA.

²⁵ Between 1948 and 1956, NASCAR's racing efforts expanded greatly from its first season of races as a governing body. With a central governing body and a strict formulaic approach to auto racing, NASCAR was able to increase its schedule from 8 to 56 races. For more information see Greg Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vols. 1*, pages 16, 253.

²⁶ Janet Aycocock, former National Publicity Director SCCA, 22 year veteran of the SCCA, and race car driver, interview by author 15 September, 2001.

A historical distinction that needs to be to be firmly established is that the evolution of autoracing in United States takes a separate path between stock car racing and sports car racing. The NASCAR approach was to take the average American family sedan with a strictly limited set of modifications, and race against similar cars. Founded as a money making, professional series, Bill France and the other founding members at NASCAR also were concerned with driver safety, (mandating the use of seat belts for instance), the guarantee of prize purses for races, and equality between competitors.²⁷ Competition regulations were adopted, and NASCAR appointed a technical committee that would set "standards for engine size, safety, and fair competition."²⁸

The SCCA approach to regulation of competition was one that classed cars by the manufacturer, model, and extent of modifications. The SCCA's General Competition Rules (GCR) for 1954 classifies cars into three divisions: Sport, Production, and Unrestricted. Further classifications within those primary classifications were in varying engine displacements from 350 c.c.s to greater than 5,500 c.c.s. This variety of makes and models can be clearly demonstrated by the SCCA approved entry listing for the inaugural Chimney Rock Hillclimb: Austin Healy, MG, Siata and Glasspar were all dissimilar makes and models. Furthermore, they are all names that did not appear on entry lists at any time on a NASCAR roster of entries in 1956.²⁹

In the Spring of 1956, Herschel Harkins approached Norman Greig, President of Chimney Rock Park and a fellow SCCA member with the idea of holding a competitive driving event at the Park utilizing the three-mile long access road to the base of the monolith as the "track."³⁰ Greig agreed, and on April 29, 1956 Phil Styles of Barnardville, North Carolina drove his "Glasspar Special" to a victory in 4 minutes sixteen seconds.³¹ Styles competed that day against drivers from North and South Carolina and also Tennessee.³² Although a limited schedule of events was run in the fall from 1956 to 1964 and again in 1974, Style's initial victory was the beginning of an annual event in the Spring, which remained a regional tradition until 1995.³³

²⁷ Buzz Mckim, Chief Archivist, International Speedway Corporation and NASCAR, interview by author 17 September, 2001.

²⁸ Robert G. Hagstrom, The NASCAR Way: The Business That Drives the Sport, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1998), 29.

²⁹ Bill Center, The Ultimate Stock Car, (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2000), 51. Center's book states that NASCAR had only had one foreign car win a race between 1948 and 2000. Greg Fielden's compilation of race results for the 1956 season show nothing but American made cars entered in NASCAR races that year.

³⁰ Author unknown, Exhaust Notes, Central Carolina Region, Sports Car Club of America Newsletter, Christmas Issue, 1958.

³¹ Author unknown, Race Results, Central Carolina Region, Sportscar Club of America, uncatalogued materials. Copies in possession the author. Styles built his 1953 Glasspar Special himself. It was what is referred to in the automotive world as a "kit car." In this case Styles created the car from a set of commonly available plans purchased from a supplier along with a glass fiber body. Powered by an Mercury eight cylinder power plant, the car was intended to be more competitive against the modern sports cars offered by Austin-Healey, Jensen, Porsche and the like.

³² Race Results April 29, 1956. From the files of Janet Aycock.

³³ Ibid.

In interviews with both Ted Tidwell, 6 time Hillclimb overall champion and Mary Yaeger-Gaele, marketing director for Chimney Rock Park 1981 until present, they concurred that the race was born not only out of a desire to drive competitively but also as a way for the park to gain some publicity.³⁴ Because past president of Chimney Rock Park Norman Greig died in the 1970s and “father of the Hillclimb” Herschel Harkins passed away in the 1960s, the exact story of the arrangement to establish the Hillclimb is still somewhat of a mystery. Buck Muse, Chief Steward of the Hillclimb from 1970 until 1995 and Bill Bright, Chief of Timing and Scoring for the event from 1966 till 1980, both offered the opinion that Harkins felt that it was an interesting place to have a race. “[It was] a very simple arrangement [even in the 1960s],”³⁵ stated Bright by phone in October of 2001, an opinion that Muse mirrored. This simple arrangement created a unique and enduring aspect of regional motorsports.

During the 39 years that the Hillclimb was held as the competition evolved, so did the racecourse. The topography of Chimney Rock is difficult to compare to other races in the south during the time it was in existence. When the starters flag sent the first car up the hill in 1956, the course was over almost three miles long, and beginning on the bridge over the Rocky Broad River that served as the entrance to the Park as it still does today. The format however, was the same: one car on the course, for an uphill run, against the clock with the best time in the respective class winning.³⁶

With the technology available in the early years of the race the times were not that fast. Phil Styles was the first “King of the Hill” with a time of just over 4 minutes and 16 seconds. The original course incorporated a “stop box,” designated by two parallel lines of paint across the roadway at the end of a particularly long straight section. This section, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile into the competition run allowed the cars to maintain to much peed to negotiate the following curve safely. This was an original concession to the safety of the driver as there was a particularly “dangerous” corner (as described by Bill Bright and Ted Tidwell) just past the stopping area.³⁷ With almost all of the cars being raced there, the brakes were suspect even when they were in their newest condition. The concerns for driver safety were apparent in this measure. Along with this concern part of the original technical inspection for the racecars was a brake test performed at the Lake Lure Inn in the town of Lake Lure.³⁸ Safety and access to the park continued to play a role in the course changes over the 39 years of the Hillclimb.

With the early evolution of the Hillclimb and the increasing speeds of the cars, the original course was shortened to 1.9 miles from 2.7 in the Spring of 1960. This restricted length helped accommodate an increasing number of contestants, as well as allowing easier entrance to and exit from the park by moving the start of the race from the bridge at the entrance to the park.³⁹ Fan access to the track was also an issue in the last shortening of the

³⁴ Tidwell interview, Yaeger-Gaele interview.

³⁵ Bill Bright SCCA Central Carolina Region Chief of Timing and Scoring, interview by author 31 October, 2001.

³⁶ Ibid., Tidwell interview.

³⁷ This particular corner was called a “blue sky” corner because if a car were to go off the outside of the corner they would see “a lot of blue sky” before hitting the ground. The drop off on the outside of the corner was several hundred feet.

³⁸ Central Carolina Region of the SCCA and Chimney Rock Park, The Grand Finale! 50th SCCA Hillclimb, Chimney Rock 1995 Commemorative Program (publisher unknown), 12. From verbal interviews Ted Tidwell and Janet Aycock both contributed information to the program.

³⁹ Ibid., 7, also Sylvia Wilkinson, Promoter of the Chimney Rock Hillclimb, 1966 to 1970, interview by author 31 October, 2001. In her interview Wilkinson concurred. The event had already grown so much in the early

course in 1977. According to Buck Muse, Chief Steward of the Hillclimb from 1970 until 1995. This 1.9 mile course length -by 1976- was beginning to cause problems due to the close proximity between the starting point and main parking areas for spectators.⁴⁰ The course was then re-configured and the final length of 1.8 miles was used until the end of the event in 1995.⁴¹ With this final change in length the course had 19 turns overall, 13 of which were hairpins.⁴² In the case of the Chimney Rock Hillclimb, the racing community adapted to it, rather than the other way around. Because of the topography of the mountainous "track" and the Park, Chimney Rock dictated the evolution of the event.

As accommodations in the racecourse were made throughout the thirty-nine years of the Hillclimb, the equipment used to conquer the course changed as well. This is the main historical distinction between the SCCA's regulation of competition and NASCAR's. The cars involved in NASCAR from its origin in the 1940's were all American made, save for a singular race in 1954 which was promoted by NASCAR specifically for sports cars.⁴³ Specialization in racing cars at the Hillclimb began at the very first event and at that point, the General Competition Rules did not even classify the common models used in stock car racing.⁴⁴

In 1956, the first car to win the Hillclimb was a home built "Glasspar Special" constructed by the cars driver and owner, Phil Styles. A fiberglass bodied, 2-seat sports car powered by an 8-cylinder engine, the "Glasspar Special" was the first salvo in a long line of cars constructed specifically to work well in Hillclimb and sportscar competitions.⁴⁵ From photos in the Chimney Rock Archives, the story of the early Hillclimbs is illustrated well with small black and white snapshots and larger glossy prints all showing amateur racing as described in interviews with early contestants. The archival photos at Chimney Rock further emphasize the fact that the cars shown racing up the mountain are not the standard American family car that you would see racing at a NASCAR event in the same era.⁴⁶

At Chimney Rock the racing was approached with a different formula more conducive to the terrain and the topography of the course. Cars were divided into categories by model and engine size into various classes constructed and endorsed by the national offices of the SCCA. These rules were published in the General

1960s that a shuttle bus was used to bring in spectators that had parked at the Lake Lure Inn. As the event changed, the cars grew quicker, and the number of drivers expanded the course was revised to accommodate these influences.

⁴⁰ Buck Muse Chief Steward, Chimney Rock Hillclimb, 1970 until 1995 interview by author 1 November, 2001.

⁴¹ The Grand Finale! 50th SCCA Hillclimb, Chimney Rock 1995 Commemorative Program, 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴³ Greg Fielden, Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vols. 1, pages 16, 253.

⁴⁴ For more information see www.scca.org, or the SCCA's General Competition Rules. The rules could have allowed a NASCAR type race car to compete but even in 1962 the GCR did not have any entries in its rule book for Ford Fairlanes, Chevy Impalas and Chrysler 300s which were all popular stock cars at that time.

⁴⁵ Aycock, interview.

⁴⁶ Chimney Rock Archives, uncatalogued photos. In an extensive series of photos dated "1960" shows that of all the competition cars pictured not one is an American car. When comparing the first Hillclimb against its NASCAR counterpart on the same date April 29, 1956, NASCAR ran a Grand National Race in Richmond, Virginia in which every competing car was an American made sedan. This is indicative of the dichotomy between competition cars in the 2 sanctioning bodies.

Competition Rules (GCR),⁴⁷ an extensive rulebook used throughout the years of the SCCA that was used at every one of the Hillclimbs. The evolution of rules was implemented due to the sheer number of applicable makes and models needing to be classified for competition, as well as other concerns, such as safety issues and new technologies that became available to the race drivers and mechanics. The rules for a specific model would cover the type of engine, the dimensions of the car, types of brakes, and all the specifications that the car had when it was produced by the factory. An additional category was installed to allow competitors to build cars that did not neatly fit into any one category. This gave rise to the most enduring and exciting class to race at the Hillclimb. They were all at first loosely called "Modifieds" at first or "Specials."⁴⁸

These "Specials" were allowed to have the chassis of one car manufacturer and the engine of another, to be built from scratch, or be a standard car modified outside of the accepted classes that the original car had been placed in under the GCR. In a June 1958 Wautauga Democrat interview, Bob Davis offered that his "Davis Special" which was driven to an overall win four times, was constructed to meet competition [SCCA] rules, but from very disparate parts. The frame was from a 1941 Ford (heavily modified and shortened), the engine from a 1947 Ford truck, but used internal engine parts from 1951 Mercury (this was only a part of the list of modifications).⁴⁹ "Specials" continued to have an enduring impact on the Hillclimb until its end in 1995. In the 51 events held at Chimney Rock Park it was only won overall by road legal cars 11 times. Though the slower classes were mostly populated with cars that were, or could easily be registered for use on the road.⁵⁰ Specifically, you needed a purpose built car to win by the ending years of the event.

Even considering the street legal cars that were driven at the Hillclimb, the evolution of the fastest class is a major part of the lore of Chimney Rock. Former champions Ted Tidwell, Mike Green, Harry Ingle and John Finger all won the Hillclimb in purpose built racecars. John Finger recounted that, as the driver, you had to build, or have built, a car to compete specifically at the Hillclimb. Though he started out racing a road legal car, he moved quickly to classes that allowed the use of purpose built racecars.⁵¹ The increasing emphasis on the fastest class led to the creation of a racing category that was simply named "Specials" by 1987.⁵²

⁴⁷ SCCA Club Racing, Vintage and Historic General Competition Rules and Specification: 1954, '59, '62, '65, '67, '72 (Englewood: publisher unknown). In the 1962 GCR in excess of 20 manufacturers and 60 models are listed with specifications of what each car was supposed to have as original equipment, engine size, and so on. The 1954 rules amounted to 8 pages, the 1959 rules were 13 pages and in the 1962 the rules were more than 60 pages. The intent within these rules was to make sure that the cars were classed against cars with similar engine capacity and capability. The benefit for these types of classifications is that greater variety of cars could compete. On the other hand NASCAR concentrated on full sized 2 door American cars with V8 motors.

⁴⁸ Modified cars and specials were somewhat interchangeable term. If a car fell into class "F" but was being driven with tires that were not of original specification the it would be re-classed in "F Modified." The term "Special" was more often used to describe a classed car such as above but one that was specially constructed for racing. For more information see SCCA General Competition rules 1954, 1959, and 1962.

⁴⁹ Joe C. Minor, "Sports Car Enthusiast Assembled Own Race Car," Wautauga Democrat, June 1958.

⁵⁰ Sylvia Wilkinson recounted that in 1964 her first time going to the Hillclimb she loaned her Morgan (a British convertible) to a friend for the race. It was simply "my road car, with some safety equipment fitted such as seat belts and a roll bar"

⁵¹ Finger, interview. Finger, as well as Ingle contested the Hillclimb in Formula Super V cars in the late sixties through the early seventies. While Ingle retired from racing shortly after winning the Super V National Championship in 1971, Finger continued with his love affair with the Hillclimb through its end in 1995. Harry Ingle

The anatomy of the "Specials" class is a cornerstone of the culture that surrounded the cars that contested the Hillclimb. From the inaugural Hillclimb in April of 1956, it was conquered 40 out of 51 times by purpose built racing cars. Names like "Davis Special," Zink, "Bobsey" Porsche, Mazda Elden, and Royale Formula V are only a few of the constructor's names that graced the winner's circle.⁵³ As mentioned previously the "Davis Special" was a Hillclimb winner created specifically to win races like the Hillclimb. This is thread of a specially built, racing oriented car winning the Hillclimb continued until the ultimate running of the event.

Part of what makes a hillclimb distinctly different is that the racecourse was contested only a few times in a day, and maybe a dozen times in a year by each driver. Competition runs were against the timer's clock, and the fastest time in each car's class won. That was the only way to win. This brevity of the drivers association with the racecourse offered a unique equation for the drivers of the Hillclimb to solve. It took ingenuity, perseverance, and a commitment to the Hillclimb to win the overall title.

The dedication and knowledge needed to create a winning car for the Hillclimb is exemplified in Mike Green's five victories at Chimney Rock. Green stated in a recent interview that he purchased a used race car chassis in "the early 80s" from Jean Myers (a fellow Hillclimb driver) of Asheville, North Carolina. The car's chassis was considered obsolete at that point in time and only cost \$ 1,500. Having an idea on what was needed to win the Hillclimb, and consultation from two friends -both engineers for Michelin Tire Corporation- Green shortened the chassis by cutting about a foot out of the center of the car. He also added aerodynamic devices called "wings" to help force the car onto the road.⁵⁴ Termed a "typical last minute thrash" to prepare the car for competition, Green suffered several years of seconds third and fourth places with the car, until winning the overall title at Chimney Rock in 1984, and used the same car to win four more times in the 1980's.⁵⁵

Racing the "Specials" class created not only the most overall titles but also created two distinct champions: Mike Green, now an automobile wholesaler in South Carolina and John Finger, owner of Finger Motors in South Carolina. Between these two drivers, they accounted for 17 out of 24 overall titles between 1972 and 1995.⁵⁶ Finger won his first title in 1972 after nine years of running in the slower classes. "Learning the mountain was a slow process [laughs]. You could not make mistakes because the road had trees on one side or rock and concrete walls on

walked away from auto racing during his "Rookie Test" for first year drivers at the Indianapolis 500. He offered that he no longer saw the benefits of racing outweighing the risks.

⁵² Chimney Rock Hillclimb 1987 CARolinas NEWSletter News and Views of the Central Carolinas Region Vol. 32, No. 5, (1987).

⁵³ The Grand Finale! 50th SCCA Hillclimb, Chimney Rock 1995 Commemorative Program 10, The term "constructor" is a key concept to understand in regards to the history of the hillclimb. This term constructor is used currently in racing series for instance to denote the specialist that built the car's chassis usually in a very limited production run. Zink, Elden and Royale were constructors that produced a series of chassis that were used not only in road racing, but also at the Hillclimb with some modification. Bobsey Porche was a car created for the Hillclimb as were the Davis Special, Mazda Bandit and others.

⁵⁴ "Wings" on racecars operate in the same manner as airplane wings. The airfoil is run inverted and the resulting airflow "pushes" the car onto the road rather than lifting it up into the air.

⁵⁵ Green, interview.

⁵⁶ Central Carolina Region SCCA race results found in un-catalogued materials at the Chimney Rock Archives, also the files of Janet Aycock. Copies in possession of the author.

the other.”⁵⁷ This is a distinction from non-Hillclimb racing events in the southern United States during the same years.⁵⁸ As Green echoed previously, because the Hillclimb was so unique, you had to be “fast right off the starting line,” having little chance to gather speed in the less than 2 minutes that it takes to get to the top.⁵⁹

Purpose built racecars, a “track” used at the most biannually, and a dedication from the drivers to become overall champion, was a formula that worked well at Chimney Rock. Other equations involving natural talent and a great deal of money were attempted, but none met with any overall wins. Of particular interest are two examples: one a SCCA National Champion, the other a manufacturers factory race team and their two professional drivers. Neither combination could manage to claim the overall win.

Skip Barber, current driver training school owner and operator, attempted to race the Hillclimb in 1970.⁶⁰ He learned the course on a motorcycle, and once he got in his car for a competition run (with the increased speeds) could not remember the layout of the course. The result was a bruised and defeated Barber reading about his rookie “debut” at the Hillclimb while flying home to Massachusetts the day before the race.⁶¹ In a press release just prior to the 1970 event, recounts that Barber won 8 races during the 1969 SCCA season including the national championship at Daytona. The cards were all in Barber’s favor at the Hillclimb that year as well. His team’s timing and scoring person was Sylvia Wilkinson, the promoter of that years Hillclimb, his car was prepared by Asheville native Pete Feistman, who had extensive experience at Chimney Rock.⁶² Yet Barber was not alone in leaving North Carolina with a battered ego. In the history of the Hillclimb, no first year driver ever won the overall title.

As pure talent was never enough to win the overall title, neither were paid, factory supported, professional drivers. Audi of North America was originally contacted in 1986 by the SCCA to consider the idea of racing the Pikes Peak International Hillclimb overall championship-winning car from 1986 in the 1987 Hillclimb. Though a conflict with another race did not allow Audi of North America to participate in 1987, they did arrive in 1988. Mary Yaeger-Gaele described it as the most elaborately equipped race team that had ever contested the event.⁶³ Drivers John Buffum and Bruno Kriebach had participated in SCCA events before, and Buffum had won national championship in the ProRally division prior to attempting the Hillclimb.⁶⁴ This was the same car and company that

⁵⁷ Finger, interview.

⁵⁸ Autor unknown, Online statistical information available at: <<http://www.daytonainternationalspeedway.com/>> accessed 10/31/2001, Author unknown, Online information available at <<http://www.roadatlanta.com/home.html>>, accessed 11/1/2001. Road races with ones that have left and right turns have been successful at Braselton, Georgia’s “Road Atlanta” since the early 1970s, Daytona International Raceway hosts numerous races including the legendary “24 hours of Daytona” and the legendary Daytona 500.

⁵⁹ Green, interview.

⁶⁰ Of note is the information available at <http://www.skipbarber.com/company/index.htm>: “Skip” Barber is one of the few Americans to ever contest Formula One. Barber started racing in 1958 while studying at Harvard University. In the mid-1960s, he won three SCCA National Championships in a row and finished third in the 1967 United States Road Racing Championship. Later, Barber went on to win consecutive Formula Ford National Championships (1969 and 1970), a record tied only recently.

⁶¹ Wilkinson, interview.

⁶² Sylvia Wilkinson, News: Chimney Rock Hillclimb press release 4/27/70.

⁶³ Yaeger-Gaele, interview.

⁶⁴ Pro Rally is a competition division of the SCCA and consists of races run on unimproved roads through wilderness settings. For more information see <<http://www.scca.org>>.

had decimated a similar class At Pikes Peak more than once in the preceding three years. Oddly enough the combination of corporate support, professional drivers and manufacturer's money could do no better than 6th overall.⁶⁵ Talent or money, even talent and money alone were never able to win the Chimney Rock Hillclimb. Regional drivers persevered at the Hillclimb a great deal more than drivers from outside of the area.

John Finger, 12-time Chimney Rock overall champion from Greenville, South Carolina, first drove an Austin-Healey Sprite (a small British convertible) at the Hillclimb in 1964. The Sprite was his first racecar, and was actively road raced as well as run in the Hillclimb. Though not the fastest car on the hill, it was "a good learning tool" and was relatively inexpensive to run, due to his employment at an Austin-Healy dealership at the time. With twelve overall titles, Finger has the most illustrious career in the history of the Hillclimb and in other events as well.⁶⁶ In discussing the Hillclimb with former champions Tidwell and Green, neither had ever won a National Championship in any racing organization they competed in. But the Hillclimb had easily defeated champions from those racing groups that came to "their" little piece of North Carolina.

Mike Green, four time Hillclimb champion, stated that the structure of the Hillclimb did not allow a driver to "come up to speed" and that it took experience to do well at Chimney Rock. The first run of the day had to be driven hard from the moment the timer's clock started ticking. He offered that, in a road race (which he also has done extensively), drivers can gradually drive faster as the race progressed and maintain a chance of finishing well.⁶⁷ At Chimney Rock, if you did not run well on every attempt, you might not finish at all. This "run hard" philosophy was even more important beginning in 1985 when the event schedule was switched to 3 days.⁶⁸ This expanded schedule instituted a qualification system that would allow a driver to race on Sunday (out of a three-day weekend) only if the driver had qualified in their class with one of the better times. The growth in the number of participants was a direct cause of this change in format.⁶⁹

According to most of the Hillclimb champions interviewed, learning to race on a road course or oval track lends itself to a different type learning curve. Road and oval track races could be as many as 500 laps in succession with a driver running many more races in any given racing season. Conversely, the Chimney Rock Hillclimb participants might get 8 "laps" annually. This lack of learning opportunities for the Hillclimb and the resulting domination by only a few drivers was summed up by past Hillclimb Chairman Dean Furr that "you just had to be[come] good at it."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Glenn Marston, "Chimney Rock: The Hillclimb Audi Didn't Conquer." Auto-X: The Grass Roots Motorsports Magazine, August 1988 46-48. Of note: the cars that Audi based their racecars on originally sold for \$75,000 in street legal trim (without any race preparation). They were the most expensive cars ever driven at the Hillclimb.

⁶⁶ Finger, interview. John Finger did win the 1972 Formula Super V National Championship. Finger's involvement in racing has taken him to many SCCA National Championships in the 1970s and 1980s although he never won. He started a relationship with Mazda Motorsports for factory support for his race team, (currently he owns a Mazda dealership), and is still actively racing sports cars and stock cars in 2001.

⁶⁷ Green, interview.

⁶⁸ Ibid., also Finger, interview.

⁶⁹ Jan Davis, Chairperson Beech Mountain Hillclimb 2001, interviewed by the author 19 May, 2001. Davis owns and operates his own automobile tire store and repair facility in Asheville, North Carolina which is a "more than full time job."

⁷⁰ Dean Furr, Chimney Rock Hillclimb Chairman, 1992-1995, interview by author 10 October, 2001.

The growth in prestige and acclaim that The Chimney Rock Hillclimb garnered over the almost four decades was born out of a culture that was about the adulation of the sportscar. John Davison of Speedvision.com offered that the beginning of the SCCA was as much about the preservation of the prewar sports car culture and makes like Mercer and Bugatti, as it was about the business of putting on races. Social events such as car shows were as much a part of it all as was the actual racing.⁷¹ Augie Pabst, who became involved in SCCA racing in 1954, stated in his foreword to Pro Sportscar Racing in America that "[In 1954] sports car racing in America was strictly a gentleman's amateur sport."⁷² While Pabst's experiences may have backed up this claim, it was not the case at Chimney Rock. Women competed with men with equality on the racecourse.

Participation of women in motorsports at a national level such as NASCAR has not been prevalent in the history of motorsports. Julie Christian placed fifth overall in a NASCAR race in 1948 and this was the highest placing for a woman in any NASCAR race ever.⁷³ In a conversation with Dr. Daniel Pierce of the University of North Carolina, Asheville, Pierce offered that the greatest female icon in the history of NASCAR had to be Linda Vaughn who served as a frequent race "Queen" and most notably was "Miss Hurst Golden Shifter."⁷⁴ One good finish and a beauty queen aside, the principle distinction between the southern norm that NASCAR was rapidly becoming in the 1950s and 1960s and the Hillclimb, could be seen on the entry lists for period. Women were well represented on the entry rosters for many Hillclimbs starting when Julie Cooke of Weaverville, North Carolina was the first woman to drive the Hillclimb in 1957. In 1962 Smokey Drolet placed second overall in the fall event to teammate and co-driver J. Frank Harrison (a four-time champion).⁷⁵ Wanda Cecil (who competed along with her husband) was the only woman prior to 1994 who had broken the two-minute barrier for overall time. These are not isolated incidents in the history of the event.⁷⁶ The Chimney Rock Park's press release of driver's names for the Spring 1984 race show seventy-seven entries, seven of which were women. Out of the seventy-seven drivers only one is a relative of another male driver. Moreover, they listed occupations as diverse as "electronics assembler," "housewife," and "salvage yard owner, and autobody repair woman."⁷⁷ Not only was the impact of the female race driver apparent at the Hillclimb but this equality was integral to the administration of the event as well.⁷⁸ Administration of the Hillclimb evolved throughout the many races held there. The Park's offices had to deal with

⁷¹ Davison, interview.

⁷² Dave Friedman, Pro Sports Car Racing in America 1958 – 1974. (Osceola: MBI Publishing), 7.

⁷³ Howell, 94. Pierce, interview. Dan Pierce recounted how Sara Christian placed 5th in a race held in 1948. Howell offered only two other examples of women drivers: Shauna, Robinson and Patty Moise. Neither placed as well as Christian.

⁷⁴ Daniel Pierce in conversation with author October 2001. Linda Vaughn was a "trophy girl" and raceway queen beginning in 1961. For more information see Sylvia Wilkinson's Dirt Tracks to Glory.

⁷⁵ Author unknown. "Harrison's Lola Captures Climb," Charlotte Observer, 26 November, 1962, sec. B, 6.

⁷⁶ The Grand Finale! 50th SCCA Hillclimb, Chimney Rock 1995 Commemorative Program, 27, also Aycock, interview.

⁷⁷ Chimney Rock Park, Drivers Entered in the 1984, 39th Annual Chimney Rock Hillclimb (By State), Phone Numbers for interesting Interviews, Profession of Driver, Car Number and Type of Car Listed. Found in uncatalogued materials at Chimney Rock Park.

⁷⁸ Aycock, interview.

changes in the cost of running the event and the SCCA's drivers, workers and officials had to accommodate the growth and increased size and stature of the event.

Historically, the constraints around hosting this type of event were not limited to the SCCA chapter involved. The considerations and accommodations for Chimney Rock Park were extensive as well. As the host of the event for 39 years, the Park, in conjunction with the SCCA, instituted many changes to insure the viability of the event as well as the continuation of the racing during the 51 Hillclimbs at the Park.

As stated earlier, the exact arrangement between Herschel Harkins, and Norman Grieg for having the Hillclimb is unknown. In examining the entry lists for number of cars, it is clear that as the event evolved through the years, it grew as well. With this growth a significant departure from the races run between 1956 and 1981 was implemented when Mary Yaeger-Gaele became Vice President of Marketing for Chimney Rock Park in the fall of 1981. The first thing that she did regarding the Hillclimb, was to establish title and secondary sponsors for the race. The simple reason for this was economics. Mary Yaeger-Gaele recently stated: "The increase in racers and spectators required more of everything! More port-a-johns, more safety equipment, [and] more staff to clean up during and after race weekends."⁷⁹ All of these changes necessitated the need for more money to offset the costs. SCCA events traditionally charge an entry fee to drive at races, but the fees are used to cover event liability insurance, registration forms and to offsetting the costs of equipment needed to run the race, keep time, and control the racecourse.⁸⁰ This new relationship between the Park and event sponsors offset the costs while allowing a more aggressive plan to publicize the event.⁸¹ As part of the increased marketing of the event, Coors Light Beer, Pirelli Tires and Yokahama Tires were title sponsors during the closing years of the event. As partnerships grew between the Park and the sponsors, the sportscar community that ran the event evolved as well.

A sense of fraternity is a frequently raised point when discussing the reasons to participate in races promoted by the SCCA. It is important to realize is that the work done to insure the smooth running of an event such as a hillclimb, is very time consuming and for the most part, the persons doing the work are unpaid volunteers. Paid positions are often only at the national level, such as at the SCCA's corporate offices in Englewood, Colorado.⁸² The sport is clearly staffed not only by its drivers, but also by its safety and event stewards, technical inspectors and regional executives that are all in volunteer or elected positions.⁸³ This sense of volunteerism is what makes the Hillclimb unique in its regards to motivation of its participants. There is little or no money to be made in working these races for the majority of the people involved.⁸⁴

Rebecca Melton was the Worker Coordinator for the 6th Annual Beech Mountain Hillclimb in May of 2001. This Hillclimb, which has replaced the event at Chimney Rock Park, is run in the same manner. On the days of

⁷⁹ Yaeger-Gaele, interview.

⁸⁰ At the Beech Mountain Hillclimb this equipment included two emergency response trucks manned by trained paramedics, all the course workers had radios, flags and fire extinguishers. Additional medical coverage was provided by local fire departments that were compensated for their presence. Similar equipment requirements were filled at Chimney Rock.

⁸¹ Yaeger-Gaele, interview.

⁸² Roethel, interview.

⁸³ For more information please see www.scca.org.

⁸⁴ At times during periods of extended travel for races workers will be compensated for lodging or an occasional meal will be provided at no charge.

actual practice and competition there are courseworkers controlling access to the course, keeping the public behind safety barriers, and people on every corner to act as “flaggers” utilizing a series of colored flags to communicate with drivers during competitive runs. Rebecca is a second generation SCCA volunteer, as her father was a starter for races at Chimney Rock in the early 1960s, which she attended often as a child.⁸⁵

The race itself is only a small part of the culture of volunteerism that is apparent with a more in depth analysis of any SCCA event. In a conversation with Jan Davis, chairperson of the 6th annual Beech Mountain Hillclimb, he offered that the amount of work that goes into the event is “incredible and that it is best not to keep track of it all.”⁸⁶ In talking with him and others involved, both at Beech Mountain and Chimney Rock, it became clear that the amount of work required was in the hundreds of labor hours the weekend of the race, requiring many more in the weeks months before the actual race weekend. Some of the logistical considerations at Beech Mountain included: coordination the event with the town, arranging for ambulances to be available in case of injury, police presence for traffic control, coordination of timing and scoring, and someone to recruit workers to assist in these areas.⁸⁷ Buck Muse, Bill Bright, and Mary Yeager-Gaele mirrored all of these concerns regarding the events at Chimney Rock.⁸⁸ Though the Beech Mountain Hillclimb is certainly not the same as the Chimney Rock Hillclimb the work required to manage the event has changed very little since the end of racing at the Park.

Sylvia Wilkinson, Hillclimb promoter from 1966 till 1970 offered that in the 1960’s, the event was attaining an amount of acclaim so great that one of her desires was to “keep it [the Hillclimb] from becoming something that it was not.” In explaining what she meant, Wilkinson offered that the attraction of the event was its uniqueness: the [small] community of regular drivers, workers, and spectators. She and Bill Bright agreed that part of the allure of Chimney Rock was the ability to see SCCA drivers and workers that you might not see more than once or twice a year.⁸⁹ With the growth of the event and its resulting acclaim, people and their families traveled from as far away as Central Florida and Ohio to compete in this mostly once a year event.

Whether real or imagined, family ties run deep in the history of the Chimney Rock Hillclimb. Jack Baumgardner of Mansfield, Ohio raced at the Hillclimb from 1965 until 1995, maintaining the longest continuous streak for competing of any driver in the history of the race. By the 1980’s, his son was also competing at the Hillclimb. Sue Coleman, Communications Chief for the 50th Hillclimb and multi-year veteran of SCCA racing, passed her love of racing to her son Heyward Wagner, a long time courseworker and driver at the most recent Beech Mountain Hillclimb. Rebecca Melton’s father, as mentioned before, was a starter at Hillclimb in the 1960’s, with her stepping into his shoes and continuing in with the family legacy at the final Hillclimb as the Flagging Chief.⁹⁰

Repeated comments from the likes of Buck Muse, Sue Roethel, and John Davison about the origins of the SCCA put the emphasis on the “country club” aspect of the organization. This was true to the extent that the SCCA is still considered even now, to be somewhat “snobbish.” In the early years of the SCCA, it was required that an existing member sign a prospective member’s application to join and the potential member had to present

⁸⁵ Rebecca Melton, second generation course worker and Worker Coordinator for the 6th Annual Beech Mountain Hillclimb interview by author, 18-19 May, 2001.

⁸⁶ Davis, interview.

⁸⁷ Melton, interview.

⁸⁸ Bright, Yeager-Gaele, Muse, interview.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Melton, interview.

themselves to the group (in their region) to gain acceptance.⁹¹ The observations of Augie Pabst describing SCCA racing in the 1950s as “gentlemen racing gentlemen” might be well reflected in Ted Tidwell’s recollection of the fall 1958 trophy ceremony: “[It looked] more like something you might see at a yacht club.” What is important to keep in mind is Herschel Harkin’s wife ran the trophy presentation as part of the event’s organization, not as the “trophy girl.”⁹² Janet Aycock a 22 year veteran of the SCCA, race car driver, and former National Public Relations Administrator for the SCCA’s corporate offices recounted that her acceptance as a woman in motorsports was mostly without conditions, though her status as an equal increased when she became a race driver herself.⁹³

This more consistent structure of equality between the sexes behind the wheel and in the administration of an event is directly dissimilar to NASCAR and can largely be attributed to the non-profit and volunteer nature of the sport. Though both the SCCA and NASCAR were established on similar principles, the origins of the sanctioning bodies and their missions were not the same. NASCAR was created as a for-profit business to promote racing by men, and has been largely administered by men since its inception. Historian Daniel Pierce has equated the evolution of NASCAR as a sanctioning body to a southern milltown in its labor practices and treatment of its drivers. His recent article in Southern Cultures “The Most Southern Sport on Earth: NASCAR and the Unions” describes the less than driver friendly labor practices of the founding father of NASCAR, Bill France Sr..⁹⁴ On the other side of the equation, the SCCA was centered on the sportscar as communal interest, and was exemplified in the 39 years of the Chimney Rock Hillclimb. Furthermore, the regulation of the SCCA was done by committee, in an open forum, accessible to all members of the club.⁹⁵

This communal interest in car but with differing ideals was responsible for the differences in the types of cars raced by both racing organizations along with the classification of them as well. NASCAR chose, as Dan Pierce related, in a “ . . . stroke of genius, a “strictly stock” division that was centered on racing new cars right off the showroom floor.” This “strictly stock” class evolved into the Winston Cup series beginning in 1971.⁹⁶ The idea behind “strictly stock” was to promote the spectator’s identification with the cars being raced and it tied the manufacturers more closely to this emerging sport as well. The SCCA, on the other hand, was interested in competition within the category of “sportscars” and allowed many more makes and models to compete; a practice that was exemplified in the cars raced at the Hillclimb. Both were created because of a passion for cars and racing, but NASCAR was also interested primarily in being a for profit business as well.

The Hillclimb not only drew upon the more casual nature of sportscar racing to set itself apart from NASCAR, but the unique setting of the Hickory Nut Gorge and Chimney rock Park as well. The Spring 1975 Hillclimb Program stated:

⁹¹ Muse, Roethel, and Davison interview. See also Mark Donohue, Paul Van Valkenburgh, The Unfair Advantage 8-9.

⁹² Tidwell interview.

⁹³ Aycock interview.

⁹⁴ Dan Pierce, “ The Most Southern Sport on Earth: NASCAR and the Unions,” Southern Cultures v7 no2 (summer 2001): 8-33,

⁹⁵ For more information see www.scca.org.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

It's hillclimbing—wrestling [sic] an automobile up a road that goes not as the crow flies, but as the snake crawls. It's roller coasting up a small slip of pavement where the only guard rails are gorges, boulders and Carolina Pines.⁹⁷

This distinction in racing venues and the topography of the event, allowed a specialization in racing cars and champions at the Hillclimb. Experience and preparation were crucial to win the race. The unique southern facet of the overall champions at Chimney Rock was demonstrated not only by Mike Green and John Finger hailing from the Carolina Piedmont, but also in the 51 Hillclimbs, 45 overall champions were from North or South Carolina, Tennessee, Florida, or Georgia.⁹⁸

The Chimney Rock Hillclimb was run for the last time on the weekend of April 28, 1995. One hundred and fifty-six drivers entered the event and almost all of the 16 previous champions were present for the final race and closing ceremonies. Over 6,000 spectators showed up for the race and were entertained by the largest field of drivers ever to compete at the Hillclimb.⁹⁹ The final Hillclimb's entrants hailed mostly from the Central Carolinas Region but Ohio, Colorado, New Hampshire, Alabama and New Jersey were represented as well.¹⁰⁰ The Hillclimb made its own final run up the hill into history of the SCCA, sportscar racing in America, and the small village of Chimney Rock in Western North Carolina.

However, the enduring cultural legacy of the Hillclimb lives on. Jack Baumgardner placed 3rd at the SCCA's 2001 Valvoline Runoffs®.¹⁰¹ John Finger, along with Mike Green as his crew chief won his first professional stock car race in October of 2001.¹⁰² Sue Coleman, her son Heyward Wagner and Rebecca Melton were all present and involved in the 6th Annual Beech Mountain Hillclimb in May of 2001.¹⁰³ Many of the same cars and drivers from Chimney Rock showed up as well. The family that was established over the 39 years of racing at Chimney Rock and the culture of volunteerism that surrounded the sport is still intact after the end of the Hillclimb. All of these various and enduring components have combined to establish a historical legacy that is singular to autoracing in the American South.

⁹⁷ Author unknown, "Of Time and the Rock," Spring 1975 Chimney Rock Hillclimb Program (publisher unknown).

⁹⁸ The Grand Finale! 50th SCCA Hillclimb. Chimney Rock 1995 Commemorative Program, 6-9.

⁹⁹ Yaeger-Gaele interview.

¹⁰⁰ Central Carolina Region SCCA Driver Entry List final running of the Hillclimb. In the possession of Jan Davis, Jan Davis Tire, Asheville, North Carolina.

¹⁰¹ Author unknown, "2001 Valvoline Runoffs Results n.d. accessed at <<http://www.scca.org>> 31 October, 2001.

¹⁰² Author unknown, "Watkins Glenn Race Results" ARCA Online, n.d., <http://www.arcaracing.com/Remax/results070701.html> 4 November, 2001.

¹⁰³ Melton, Coleman, Kenyon interviews.

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