

1997 September

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The lineup this month reads like the Who's Who of horsepower. Pick your poison: a lightly disguised endurance-racing Porsche for the street, the 911 GT1 Strasseversion; the cat-quick, astonishingly agile Lotus Elise; the timeless, rejuvenated Lotus Esprit V8; or the convertible version of America's sports car, the fifth-generation Corvette. Elsewhere in the issue, read about Mercedes' new Alabama-built sport ute, the ML320, and the new Pontiac Firebird, now with Corvette power. And if it's competition that truly quickens your pulse, turn to Derek Daly's CART/IRL car comparison, "Into the 1-Mile Bullrings."

ROAD TESTS

- 68 Chevrolet Corvette Convertible**—a folding top adds an appealing new wrinkle to the C5 Corvette, the latest, quickest iteration of America's sports car
- 86 Lotus Elise**—...and for something altogether lighter and more nimble, Lotus presents the Elise, a car that would have Colin Chapman beaming in approval
- 94 Lotus Esprit V8**—now with twice the number of cylinders and turbos, this timeless, exotic wedge strengthens its considerable grip on supercar status

FIRST DRIVES

- 54 Pontiac Firebird**—subtly, thy name is *not* Firebird. With the Corvette's engine and bold new bodywork, Pontiac's F-car is more in-your-face than ever
- 58 Mercedes-Benz ML320**—into uncharted waters, Mercedes sets sail (or is that "sale"?) with a \$35,000 Alabama-built independently suspended SUV
- 62 Subaru Impreza 2.5 RS**—a dash of international rally flair makes for an awd Subaru with attitude; too bad there's no boost to back up the boast
- 66 Nissan Altima SE**—the *second* time around, the Altima loses its baby fat, outgrows its original sheet metal and gains a significant price advantage

FEATURES

- 78 Porsche 911 GT1 Strasseversion**—McLaren F1, move over; there's a new sheriff in town. Paul Frère drives and analyzes the ultimate road-going 911
- 90 The Lotus Position**—from its uncertain days with Artoli to its current, seemingly stable position with Malaysian owners, the fabled marque forges ahead
- 101 Owner Survey: 1993-1996 Nissan Altima**—despite some dissatisfaction with Nissan dealers and fuel mileage, Altima owners are a contented lot
- 128 AVUS 1954**—Dennis Hoyt's stunning depiction of a Mercedes-Benz W196 on the banking at AVUS puts a positive spin on the term "wooden expression"
- 130 Salon: Pierson Brothers' Coupe**—it was an era when flat-tops and flat-heads ruled; speed was king. We return to visit the definitive dry-lakes hot rod
- 138 Long-Term Wrapup: Porsche 911 Carrera**—parting is such sweet sorrow—especially when it involves our beloved long-term 911
- 142 Where Everyone Knows Your Name**—walls can't talk. Fortunately, Sam Posey can, with tales of camaraderie and competition from the Indy motel

COMPETITION

- 106 Into the 1-Mile Bullrings**—just how different—or how alike—are the open-wheel cars from CART and IRL? Derek Daly offers this seat-of-the-pants report

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- 43 Ampersand**—Riley & Scott crafts a carbon-fiber road rocket; our first official photos of the upcoming Porsche 911; and life with Honda's electric EV Plus
- 147 About the Sport**—Moore and Blundell go to the winner's circle in CART; Foyt and Luyendyk go to the mat in IRL; and Schuey shines in Formula 1



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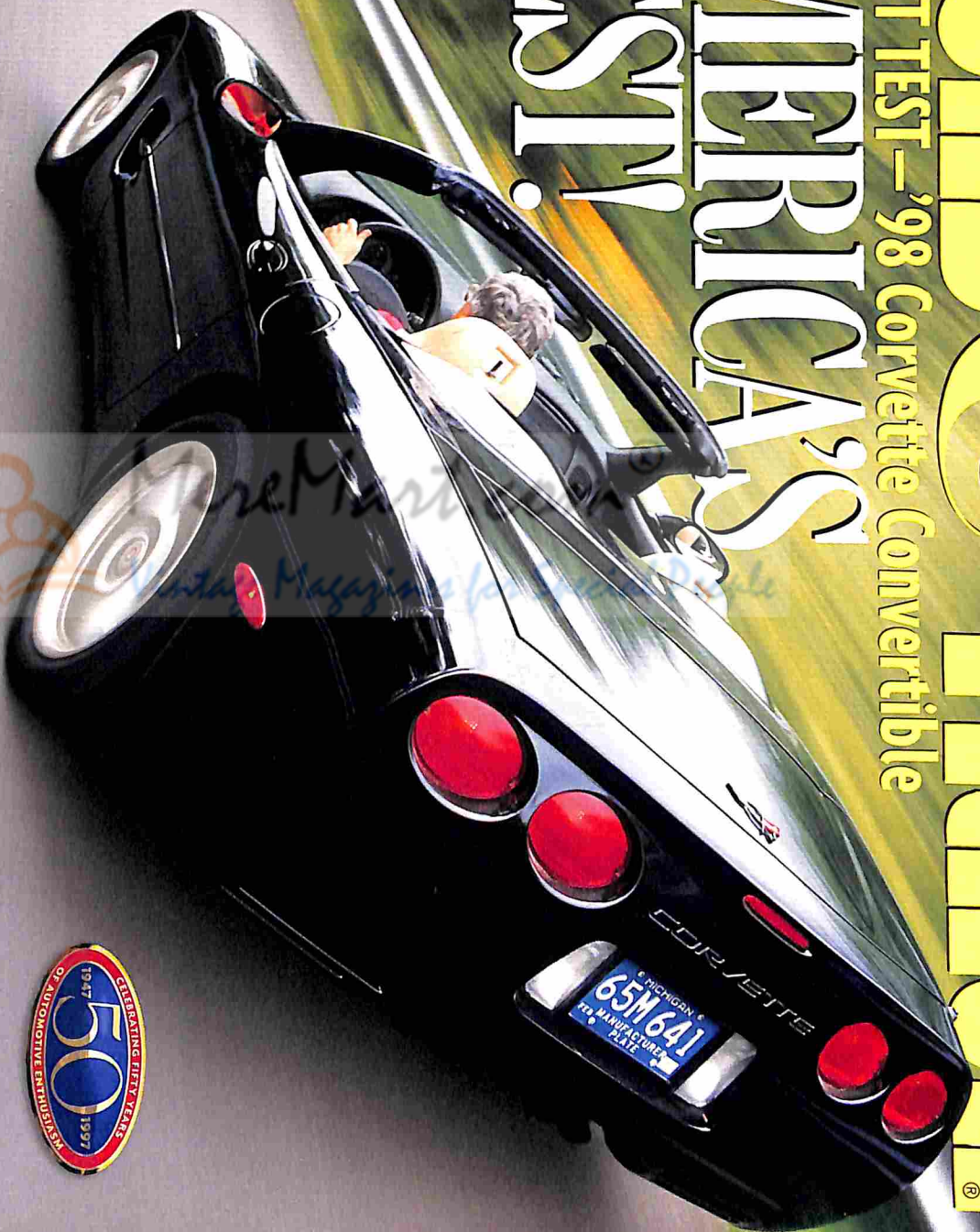
COVER PHOTOS BY RON PERRY, GUY SPANGENBERG AND STEPHANE FOULON
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JOHN LAMM, DON WELLS & MICHAEL C. BROWN

SPECTACULAR **1998** SPORTS CARS

ROAD & TRACK

AMERICA'S BEST!

FIRST TEST—'98 Corvette Convertible



All-New Porsche 911 **UNVEILED!**
First Official Photos



FIRST DRIVE:
Porsche 911 GT1

544 bhp, 190 mph,
\$1,000,000...
and legal for
the street



FIRST U.S. TEST:

Lotus Elise

Lightweight
Masterpiece



1662-01955
3000#
86 SUV
M2
01955 1191D-5 *****PKKX#
489064#6 26605C092
PNN3705C092
MN
CHOMEN CURVE
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