

PANORAMA

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M.S.H. RACING LTD.



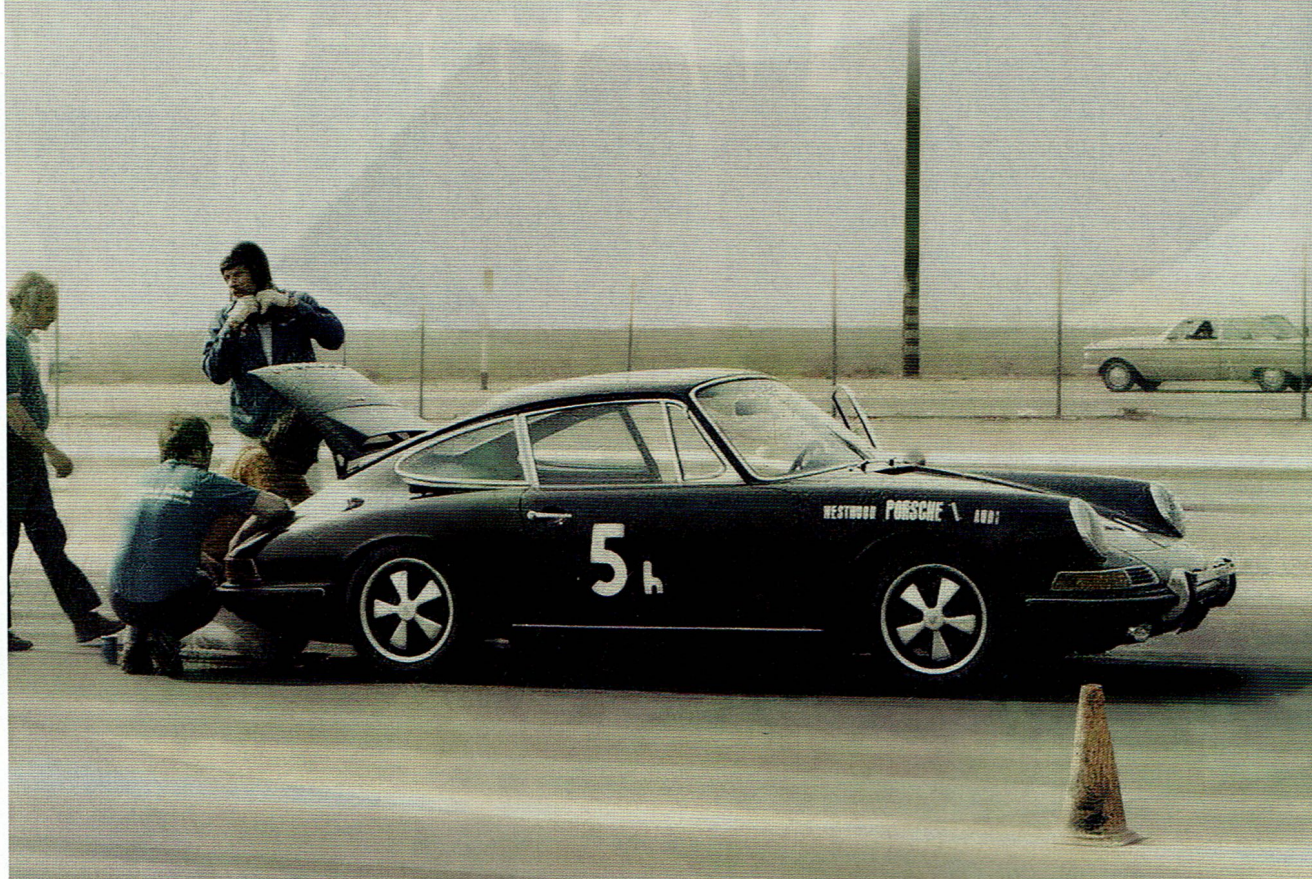
Long May YOU RUN

A 1967 911S
THAT'S STILL RACING
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RANDY WELLS

IT'S 1967.

The stark silence of the desert is broken by the high-pitched scream of a Porsche 2.0-liter flat six in full song echoing through the Riverside esses. Not many 911s are on the track that day, and very few are brand-new S models. Leading the way is one particular black 911S. ♦ “It was lowered with early seven-inch-wide Fuchs,” long-time Porsche racer Steve Schmidt remembers. “We were all very active in the Porsche Club of America and Porsche Owners Club back then, and everybody wanted a 911S. There were three that I remember that first year. When this one was not at wide-open throttle on Riverside Raceway, I would see it in Bob Upton’s garage.”



VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY THE MICHAEL HAMMOND COLLECTION



THE FIRST OWNER of the black 911S was Frank Howard of Palm Desert, California. The car was imported in August 1967 to VW Pacific in Culver City and sold by Bert Olander at Vasek Polak's dealership in Hermosa Beach. Frank was the grandson of Charles Howard, renowned Buick dealer and owner of the famous racehorse Seabiscuit, and he could easily afford the car and the optional early 15x7-inch "911R" wheels.

Within a year the black 911S was sold to a singer/songwriter named James Henry Ford. Jim Ford was part of the Hollywood folk/country music crowd and a friend of Dinah Shore's daughter, Melissa. She was an acquaintance of the manager at the Westwood Porsche dealership in Los Angeles, Michael Hammond.

"The singer came in asking if I would be interested in buying his 1967 911S," recalls Michael. "He said he needed cash quickly so he could cut an album [*Harlan County*]. The car was running really poorly, but it was a beautiful black '67 S all tricked out. So I decided to buy it for myself. I was racing a 356 coupe at the time and wanted to move up. It turned out to be a big transition going to the 911."

Michael's history with California Porsches had begun years earlier, when he started hanging out with sports car guys in Santa Monica in 1955. By 1956 he knew he needed a cool car to stay in "the club," so he went down to Competition Motors in Hollywood. When he arrived, Michael uttered, "What are these things they call Porch?" The salesman immedi-

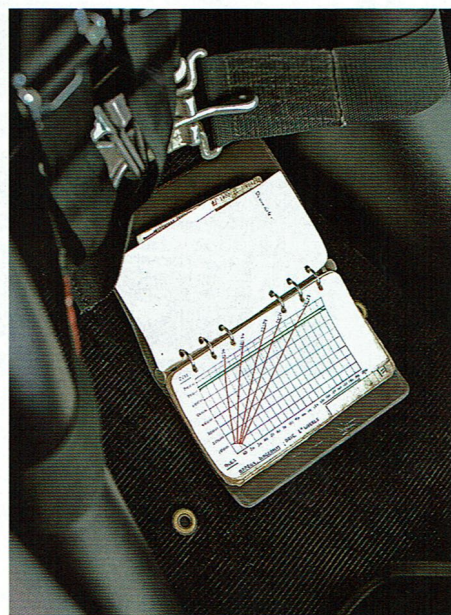
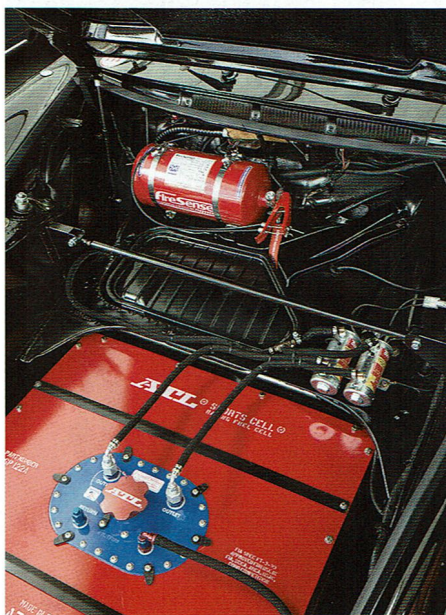
ately turned around and walked away. That was Johnny von Neumann.

The next time Michael visited von Neumann's shop, his approach was different. When Johnny saw him coming he tried to ignore him again, but Michael called after him saying, "I'd like to buy a car, and I have cash!" He bought his first Porsche that day, a white 1500 Super Speedster.

The car didn't have a roll bar or a seatbelt, so Michael went over to Vilem B. Haan Motoring Accessories on Santa Monica Boulevard to get whatever gear he needed. There were no uniforms in those days, so they sold him liquid to put in a bucket and dip coveralls in. That was his fireproof racing suit.

The next weekend he entered a race at Palm Springs Airport. Michael

First owned by the grandson of Charles Howard of Seabiscuit fame and later owned by a folk/country singer, this 1967 911S ended up in the hands of Michael Hammond, who raced it continually for 45 years.



This was Michael Hammond's other "office" from 1969 to 2014. Everything was carefully thought out, from seats to fuel cell to shifter to gear ratios.

was intent on keeping up. During the practice session he spun out on every lap. But he got better, and in time he was winning races.

"That was when we had all these tracks at airports. Palm Springs was one; Santa Barbara was another," reports Michael. "When a commercial plane came in, we had to stop the race so they could land. Then there was Torrey Pines, Paramount Ranch, Willow Springs, and Orange County Raceway. We would all go out and race on the weekends for \$15 and buy recapped tires for \$18 apiece. I had a station wagon as a tow rig, and I'd sleep in that."

In 1966, Michael took a job working at the Marina Volkswagen deal-

ership and joined the L.A. Region of PCA. Three years later, Michael opened up the Westwood Porsche branch and decided to move from competing in a 356 to a 911.

After the black 911S wearing #308436S showed up, Michael needed to get it running properly. "I had a mechanic by the name of Peter Mueller who did a wonderful job on that S, but he left to join James Hunt's Formula 1 team," says Michael. Next, he enlisted the help of Don Kravig, who later founded Precision Motion in Riverside in 1973. On one side of his shop he worked on Porsches, and on the other side he worked on outboard engines to make a living. The two men became

close competitors and even closer friends over the years.

Kravig, who passed away in 2001, once said: "Most guys have to change everything all the time. I know I did with my own 1967 911S. I flared the fenders, redid the suspension, went to huge wheels and tires, and pretty soon I had a thundering monster. But Michael was different. It's just amazing that his car is still as original as it is."

In addition to the 15x7 911R Fuchs on all four corners, Hammond's 911S received some subtle modifications. The suspension was stiffened with 23mm front and 26mm rear torsion bars. Alan Johnson Racing 22mm front and 19mm rear anti-roll bars were also enlisted

to suit Michael's driving style, which Kravig called "throttle oversteer." Kravig also modified the front struts, substituted later 911S brakes front and rear, and installed a hoop-style roll bar. A rear deck lid with a unique scoop was also added. For many years, the black 911 retained its original undercoating, carpets, seats, and radio.

BY MAY 1972, Michael was thinking about switching from managing a car dealership to starting his own business. In the meantime, one of the salesmen at the dealership

asked him to go to Parker, Arizona to check out his race boat.

"It wasn't running very well," recalls Michael. "So I started working on it when all of a sudden the motor blew up. I was conscious but badly burned. There were no doctors around, so an old Indian came by and gave me a shot. I was wrapped in ice and transferred to the best burn unit at the time, Maricopa County Hospital in Phoenix. I stayed there for three months."

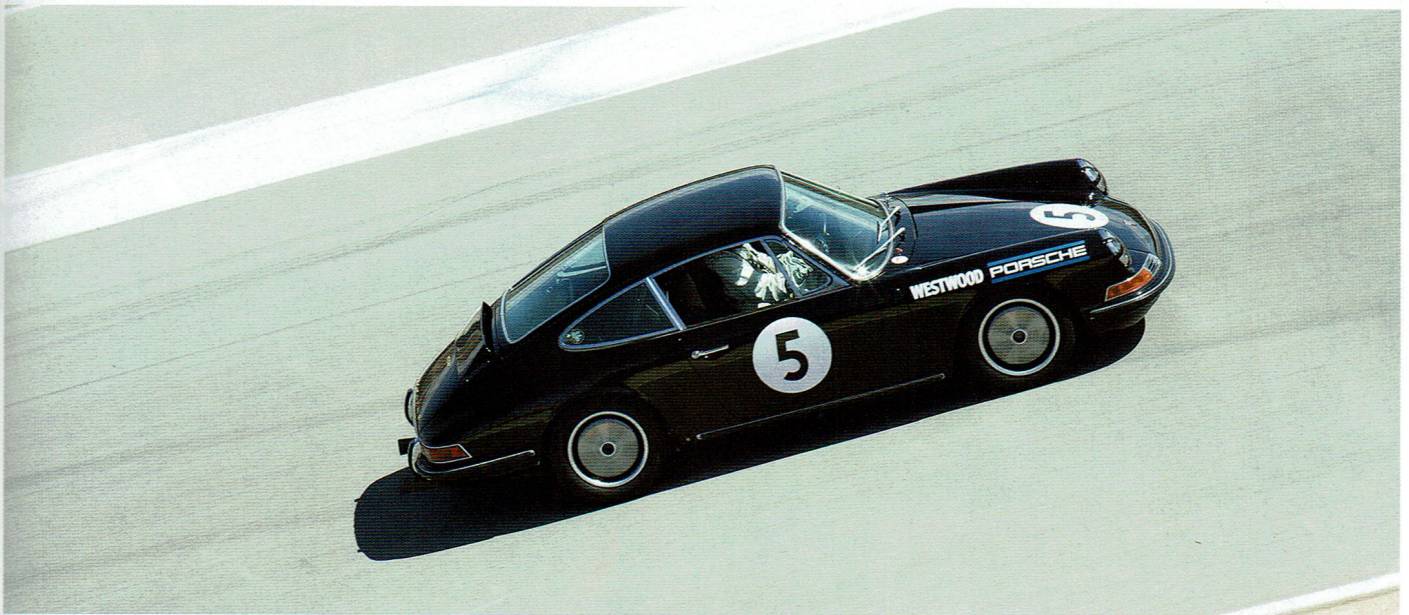
After Michael recovered, he never went back to Westwood Porsche. Instead he started an automotive

specialty boutique named Hamlain Limited. The name was a combination of his and that of a fellow salesman named Bob Chamberlain. The goal was to make enough money to spend more time racing cars.

From 1969 through 1990, the 911S was campaigned in SCCA, PCA, and POC races in F and HP classes. In 1973, John Thomas of Bozzani Porsche sold Hammond an RSR replica whale tail, which went with a new engine that was rebuilt after the original destroyed itself.

Over the years, the car had picked up countless rock chips,

At Rennsport Reunion V, current owner Don Ahearn put the '67 911S through its paces on Laguna Seca's main straight. Bump flares, rear deck lid scoop, and external ignition switch are just some of the unique features.



and Michael finally had it repainted at Jack's Body Works in Cathedral City. "It came out beautifully," says Michael. "Then I had Dwain Dement of Vision Motorsports pinstripe the whole thing and put my No. 5 on it, which I've had forever."

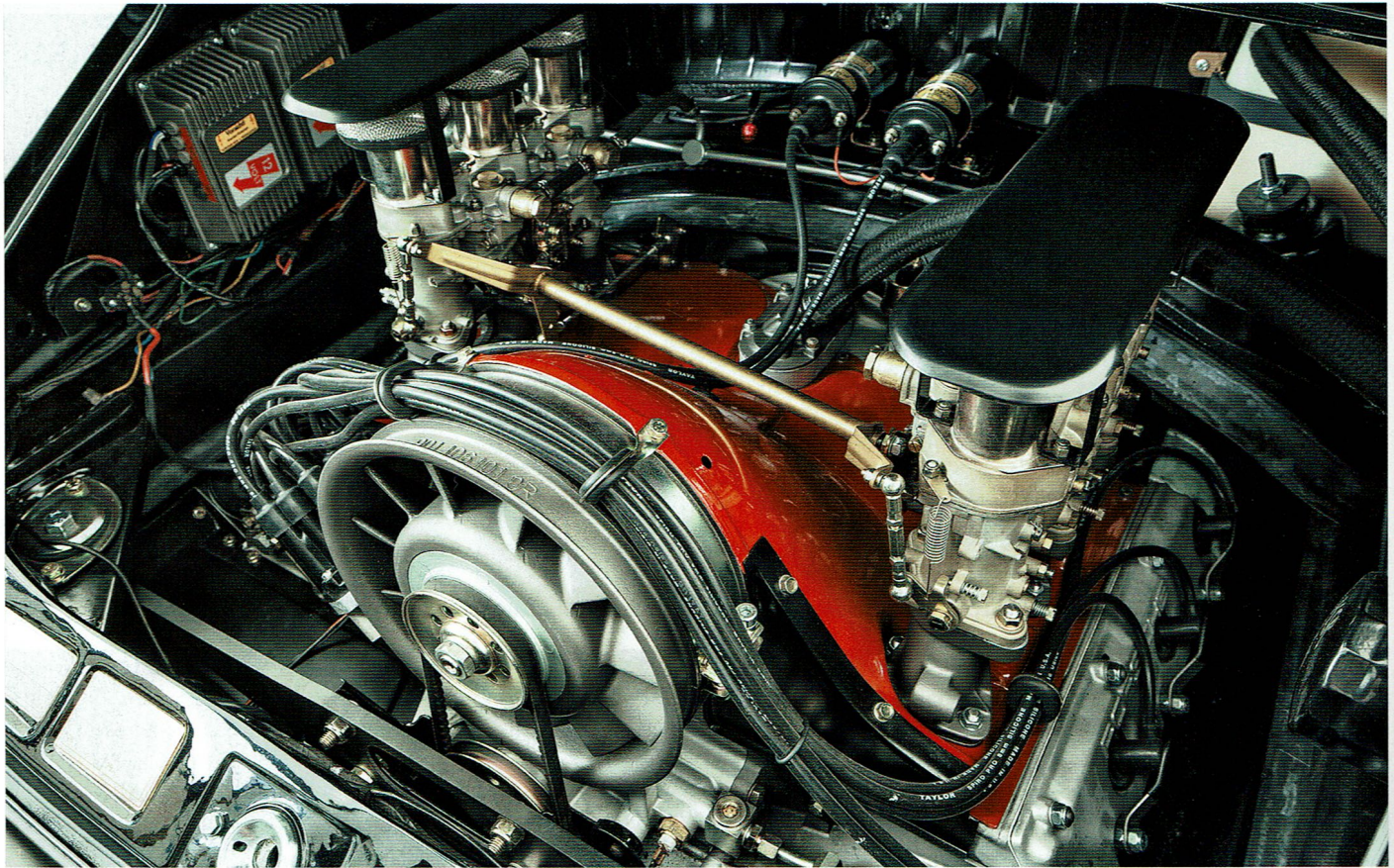
Michael's exploits in racing are legendary. Following are just a few examples. In 1976 at Sears Point Raceway, the Golden Gate Region of PCA organized its first ever time trial event. There, Michael was fastest overall, setting a time of 2:02.65. He had never even seen the track before that event.

When he went on to racing in IMSA (International Motor Sports Association), he developed a reputation for putting up the fastest times in machinery nobody thought could go that quickly. "In low-speed turns, he's not the smoothest driver," Kravig once said. "But he always drives to the max. In the high-speed turns he's really smooth, because he just keeps his foot in it."

The first time Michael competed in IMSA, he raced Gary Nylander's 911S at the Sebring 12 Hours in 1977. He blew a tire and went straight off the track on the first lap. He recov-

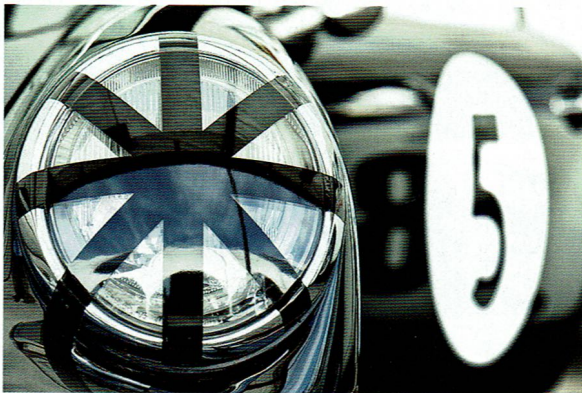
ered, and by the end they were 13th overall and third in the GTU class. Later, Michael teamed up with Tom Marx and Marc Rothman, who had a Porsche shop in West L.A. They formed a team called RSR Racing after they bought one of Paul Newman's RSRs. After that, Michael drove for Rick Borlase's Coin Operated Racing. The name referred to the team having no sponsorship and everyone having to pay their own way.

"I was known as Mr. Refi, because when I needed more money to go racing, I would refinance one of my rent-



Several engines have been implemented over the years: This one is 2.0 liters of early 911S fun driving 15x7-inch 911R rims with the biggest rubber allowed.





Michael Hammond (with current owner Don Ahearn in the passenger seat) took one last drive in his favorite Porsche at Laguna Seca. Michael, his #5 warhorse, and the life they led together are a shining example of the connection between Porsches and their owners.

al houses," says Michael. "We ended up running two Daytona 24 Hour races, eight 12 Hours of Sebring, as well as races at Mid-Ohio, Road America, Laguna Seca, Riverside, and Portland International Raceway." In 1984, the team recorded its best finish in IMSA, earning second in class and 14th overall at Riverside. Later, Michael set an outright lap record of 1:28 in a 934 at Willow Springs that remained unbroken for nine years.

"After I stopped running IMSA, I would come right back home and race my '67 911S," he states. "Some-

times I was running 20 or more races a year with POC and PCA, going all the way to Colorado, up to Utah, and then the rest of the western U.S."

IN THE 1990s, Michael started competing in the La Carrera Panamericana Classic in Mexico, enlisting the help of fellow Porsche friend Jim Corbeil. "I drove the 911S, and Jim was my navigator, as he knew the roads," remembers Michael. "[Our] first race went from San Felipe to Ensenada. It was tough because they didn't close any of the routes.

We didn't know what we might come across—a donkey, a horse, anything. We had to pass cars through the mountains where we couldn't see traffic coming the other way."

Michael would end up driving the black S in each of six La Carrera Classics from 1990 to 1995, finishing third overall in 1991. He did especially well on the 3.0-mile hill climb special stage near Ensenada, winning that section of the race in 1990. "One time there was a gentleman with a Porsche that would block me every place he possibly could,"

recalls Michael. "Finally, I got by on the straightaway. We parked, and I went down to have a little talk with him. I said, 'You know, if I wasn't such a nice guy, I would have knocked you off the road.' It turned out there was a camera crew from ESPN standing right behind me. Fortunately, they didn't show my face, but later while watching TV I saw that it showed my helmet, so of course everyone knew it was me."

Jim accompanied Michael one other time in the 911S, the very first Nevada Silver State Classic Challenge in 1988. Jim reports, "Michael ran full speed everywhere. He used the whole road and once passed a Shelby GT350 though a double curve section flat out in fifth gear." Rick Borlase said that Michael was the only driver who didn't lift through the canyon in the tricky esses called the Narrows.

They won their class by posting an average speed of 145 mph, finishing first in Vintage Class and 12th overall. Then on September 18, 2010 Michael broke the track record for his class at

the Auto Club Speedway in Fontana. "That track reminds me of Daytona and makes me think of my idol, Juan Manuel Fangio. I always had a picture of Fangio on my pit board."

AFTER 45 YEARS of racing his 1967 911S, Michael sold the car to Don Ahearn of New York in 2014. Thanks to 50,000 track miles and decades of metal fatigue, the car needed a full mechanical replacement and lots of chassis welding. Everything that moved was replaced at KlubSport in Florida. That included the suspension, steering rack, engine, and transmission. A 2.0-liter aluminum case with 46mm Webers was used, along with Koni shocks and 22/28mm torsion bars.

"We did a partial cosmetic restoration, too," reports Don. "The front and rear of the car were repainted, and the headliner and carpet were replaced. The original rear scoop lid that Michael had purchased back in 1970 was reinstalled, as well as the standard bumpers and trim, bringing the car back to how it looked

when it first raced."

One of the oldest continuously raced 911s around, #308436S was a participant in 2015's Rennsport Reunion V in Monterey. There, Michael took the restored car out for one last time during the parade laps, much to the delight of the crowd. Don raced well in the black S at RRV and was a podium finisher in class at the 2015 Classic 24 of Daytona.

"We hope to continue Michael's legacy of racing in this great old Porsche for decades to come," Don says reassuringly. At the 2016 Sebring Classic, the motor "chain-sawed itself in half." But that hasn't stopped Don from building a new engine that will sing along with "Long May You Run" for many years.

At age 84, Michael is grateful to know that his favorite trusty S will be cared for appropriately. In true unrelenting style, he says, "With help from its current owner, it's goin' to go right back and keep doin' what it's been doin'. Breakin' track records, screamin' through the esses, and surprisin' lots of folks." 🌀

Michael earned the respect of his fellow racers in PCA, POC and IMSA by breaking track records while staying true to the ethos "run what you brung."

