

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

A classic car love story for the ages

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

When you hear the name "Apollo" you might think of the Greek god, or even the spacecraft, but you probably don't think of a classic car. That is not surprising, as only a very small number of the vehicles were ever produced (42 were sold by International Motor Cars and later some others were sold by Vetta Ventura) and even fewer still exist today, but you will have the opportunity to see one at the Orinda Classic Car Show on Saturday, Sept. 8.

The car was the brainchild of Milt Brown of Oakland. Sleek aluminum bodies were produced in Turin, Italy and shipped to the United States where they were finished in Oakland with Buick V-8 engines. The blue Apollo 5000 GT Coupe that will be on display is owned by Orinda resident Meg Mowry Evans. The car was one of two Apollos that belonged to her husband, Bill Evans. When Bill died, Meg decided the best way to honor his memory was to restore his beloved car. So \$50,000 of restoration later, the Apollo can be spotted at classic car shows, and, occasionally, zooming around local freeways, attracting admiring double-takes with driver Meg, or her son-in-law Ben Speelman, behind the wheel.

When Meg Evans talks about her husband Bill, her eyes sparkle. He was the love of her life, father of her two daughters, and quite the character, it appears. In addition to his business ventures, Bill Evans also sang in the San Francisco Opera as a supernumerative and with the San Francisco Choral. "He sang all the time," Meg Evans remembers. "He was a saint, a renaissance man," she adds. "His soul was music and cars." Before racing the Apollo, Bill worked on the Porsche race team. At one time he lived in Wales, working for the Welsh Railway. In his early 20s, he purchased not one but two Apollo 5000 GT Coupes, one in red and another in blue. The red one was a race car, and Bill raced it at Sears Point and Laguna Seca. The red Apollo was later sold, but the blue one is still in the hands of Meg Evans.

Born in Oakland and raised in Montclair, Bill Evans attended Oakland Tech High School. When

he was 23 years old and working as a roofing contractor, he bought the two Apollos, to join his beloved old Jeep. A great businessman, he later joined two partners in purchasing an apartment building in Berkeley. They bought it for \$13,000; it is now worth over \$1 million. Evans later owned a bullet-proof vest company. A full set of medieval armor stands sentry in Meg Evans' home as a reminder of that venture.

Meg met Bill Evans around 1978 at a Sierra Club singles hike. He would take her for dates in the Apollo, and they had fun zooming around the Bay Area hills in the sleek car. Evans admits that she's gotten the sports car up to 120 mph. The Apollo can't be missed on the road. In addition to its elegant good looks, the car sounds like an airplane – with its quad exhausts, it produces quite a few decibels.

In 1980, Meg and Bill Evans got married, and moved into their gorgeous home in the Orinda hills. He was 32; she was 30. Their first daughter, Laura, was born in 1982, Marion was born four years later. Bill died of a brain tumor just after Thanksgiving in 2008. Meg recalls sadly that it fell to her to walk her two daughters down the aisle when they married. Laura will inherit the Apollo, and her husband Ben works hard to keep it going, driving it every other weekend. Evans says that the car is tough to drive, difficult to steer and hard to brake. Milt Brown helped her refurbish the car, including re-leathering the interior and rebuilding the engine. "It's a first class job," Evans says. The car has been shown in a number of classic car shows, including the Concorso Italiano in Monterey. The Blackhawk Auto Museum wanted the car for their collection, and Evans was tempted, but her children wanted her to keep it. When they were younger, she had made them take the car on dates or when they went for nice lunches, enjoying happy days with their dad's memory.

The Apollo will be on display from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 8 at the 14th Annual Classic Car Show in Orinda. The free event benefits the "Seniors Around Town" transportation service, an Orinda Association program, The

Educational Foundation of Orinda and other fine causes. For information visit www.orindacarshow.com.

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