

## Racing With And Against PLN

Contributed by Lee Raskin  
 Sunday, 31 August 2008  
 Last Updated Sunday, 26 October 2008

Lee Raskin, a Porsche historian and a co-author of Porsche Speedster Typ 540: Quintessential Sports Car, interviewed Paul Newman in 2004 about his role as Lew Harper, a Los Angeles private detective who drove a very tired looking light blue/primer colored 356 Speedster in the 1966 movie, Harper. Newman said that he had hand-picked the Speedster from a group of sports cars on the set, feeling that the Speedster best suited the character of Lew Harper.

Newman recalled, "That Porsche sure had lots of oversteer!" Newman agreed with Raskin that this Speedster was the first ever to be featured in a full-length Hollywood film, long before a Speedster appeared in Jane Fonda and Jon Voight's Coming Home (1978), Harry Hamlin's King of the Mountain (1981), Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte's 48 Hours (1982), or Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis's Top Gun (1986). It was Paul Newman's first experience driving a 356 Porsche Speedster as well.

Raskin continued that Newman said he didn't get involved with sports car racing until the mid-1970's, when he began racing Bob Sharp's Datsun 240Z during 1976. Newman distinguished himself as a "pretty good" driver — winning the National SCCA C-Production driving championship!

Paul Newman's first Porsche racing experience came in 1977 at Sebring, where he was co-driving Bill Freeman's Beverly Hills Porsche 911S in GTU. Raskin recalled his meeting Newman while crewing for Bruce Jennings's Porsche 2.5-litre 911S. Jennings was a SCCA three-time C Production champion and a former Porsche factory pilot, who was making his 14th appearance at Sebring with co-driver Bill Bean.

Raskin recalled, "After the first day's practice, Paul Newman still wasn't familiar with Sebring's 5.2-mile, 10-turn course. Bruce offered to give him advice on how to drive Sebring consistently for 12 hours — four of which would be in the dark. Newman brought some popcorn and we supplied the beer for the "chalk talk" session."

Raskin continued, "We qualified 38th on the grid. Freeman/Newman was right behind us, in the 40th slot." Many of the spectators may not have been aware that Paul Newman was racing at Sebring. He was listed in the program simply as, P.L. Newman.

Up front, George Dyer/Brad Frisselle qualified on the pole, followed by Diego Febles/Hiram Cruz, and Jim Busby/Peter Gregg, all in Porsche 3.0 Carreras and 934s. Other notable drivers in the race were Danny Ongais, Hurley Haywood, John Gunn, Ted Field, Don Yenke, John and Burt Greenwood, John Morton, Dick Smothers, Milt Minter, Bob Bondurant, Michael Keyser, Preston Henn, and John Paul, Sr.

Raskin recalled, "Jennings/Bean got off to a fantastic start moving up to 14th overall and second in the GTU class after two hours. Halfway into the race, they were eighth overall and first in GTU. Freeman/Newman was half dozen positions behind. Twenty-six cars had already dropped out and the pits were clogged with crippled cars. In the seventh hour, the Jennings Porsche came into the pits with a burned up transaxle and became a DNF at 123 laps.

Raskin continued, "The Freeman/Newman Porsche also had its share of problems and it spent precious laps being repaired. For the final hours of the race, Newman drove the Porsche with two of three steering wheel spokes broken. They finished 30th overall and 11th in GTU, completing 150 laps."

George Dyer and Brad Frisselle won the 25th Sebring in their Porsche Carrera completing 234 laps, five laps ahead of the second-place Febles/Cruz, and third place Busby/Gregg Porsches.

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Perhaps Lee Raskin's most memorable Paul Newman anecdote took place 24 years later at Lime Rock Park, during Brian Redman's Rennsport all-Porsche event in 2001. Paul Newman was racing a Brumos-owned 914-6 in the under 2.0-liter historic race, where he qualified on the pole. Raskin also was competing in that race in his 1957 Porsche 356A Sebring replica coupe. Raskin qualified 17th.

"I remember on lap seven, the leaders were beginning to lap the field. I was holding my own still mid-way in the pack when the distinctive Brumos Porsche with Newman appeared in my mirrors. I was just coming out of the downhill onto the front straight and pointed him by. He passed so quickly -- like I was tied to a post! Newman gave me a wave of

appreciation. It was thrill to be passed by Paul Newman!"

Later that evening at the Lime Rock Rennsport banquet held under a huge tent, all of the Stuttgart factory officials, notable historic Porsche racers and everyone else just like me were able to meet and to take photos and get autographs. Raskin recalls, "You are never, ever too old to get autographs from your heroes." I decided not to get another book or race poster autographed. I unbolted a flat panel that covers the master cylinder in my 356 coupe and took it with me to the banquet.

Everyone thought that my autographed master cylinder cover was unique and they enjoyed finding a special spot for their signature. Paul Newman was sitting around the big banquet table and asked if he could sign it. I had never asked him for an autograph previously. He took my Sharpie and distinctively signed the cover plate. A fellow Porsche racer/historian, Weldon Scroggins, suddenly said, "I bet \$5 that Paul doesn't know what that cover plate is from? Newman looked up and smiled. "It's the cover for the master cylinder off of a 356." Everyone roared. Scroggins threw his \$5 on the table. I reached to pick it up. Newman put his hand on top of mine and said, "Just a minute, I think I'm entitled to at least half of the money."

I replied, "You're right, Paul." I then tore the bill in half and said, "Which half do you want?" Everyone roared again with laughter . . . including Paul Newman. He took one half of the bill and autographed it for me. I carry both halves in my wallet . . . and what a great story to tell over and over for my motorsports friends and new acquaintances.

"Paul Newman is and always will be a great guy . . . and certainly one of my motorsport heroes."

Lee Raskin is an early Porsche historian and authority on James Dean and his two-wheel and four-wheel motorsports endeavors. He has contributed to many James Dean TV documentaries as a consultant and producer, and has also written an acclaimed photo narrative, James Dean: At Speed, published by David Bull Publishing. His website is [www.leeraskin.com](http://www.leeraskin.com).