

eThoughts© from Challenger Consulting. First Quarter, 2008

eThoughts is an outlet for my thoughts and observations – usually on the automotive and motorsports markets – and the occasional shameless self-promotion. I maintain the list personally and will not use it for any other purpose nor will I provide it to anyone. If you aren't interested in *eThoughts*, simply send me a note. If you do like it, forward it to someone else.

- Wanna buy a car? How about DaimlerChrysler's modern version of American Motors' AMX – the Crossfire? My 07 Crossfire lease runs out in May and the car should be available some time in June. It's a little two-place sport coupe that's so wildly impractical it's decadent. And a ball to drive.

As a Chrysler corporate lease car, it will be available through the resale program at a mileage-determined price. With maybe 5,000 miles, the price won't be bargain basement, but it should be more attractive than what you'll find in a car lot. AND, because it is Chrysler owned, the full new car warranty (minus the actual mileage) goes with it. PLUS, it's never been out of my hands, so I can verify that it's never been abused (driven hard, yes) or hit by anything other than bugs. Sticker was \$34,685.

The car is Blaze Red, with slate gray leather trimmed seats, V-6, 6-speed manual, performance tires (hardly any wear) and all the usual accoutrements. Highway mileage is impressive – 25 on the sticker, but higher on cruise control at 70 mph. It has a healthy sounding exhaust note and it certainly *isn't* underpowered.

I'm gonna miss this one (even after having an SRT-6 version). If you're interested, call or send an e-mail. The sale and delivery must be processed by a dealer of your choice.

- So, you're just starting out (actually, not even out of college) and want a business card that will get – and keep – the attention of prospective employers. You could have a high speed, double throw down agency create an expensive, air-buffed "professional aura" for you. Or, you could use your imagination.

A card I brought back from the SEMA Show caught my eye. It was from an Indiana State University student and SEMA Show Intern I'd met. No title or position (a forgivable oversight for a student), just his name, address and two images. I hadn't looked closely at those images, but now they had – and kept – my attention.

One was a head-on line drawing of a P-51 Mustang. The other was an engineering cross section of a V-style engine, with a crank, rods, pistons, etc. But it was like no engine I could recall. For hours, over the next few days, I looked at the card and thought, "All right, just *what* is this engine and *why* is it on the card with a P-51?" Hours. I sent copies to engineer friends... couldn't come up with a solution. Finally, I caved in and contacted Stephen Castor.

His thought process behind the card was impressive. The obscure engine design, and its "first glance" resemblance to an auto engine, fascinated him. So it became the focal point to represent his passion for automotive engineering. He reasoned that professional engineers (the "targets" of his card) would also find it fascinating, especially upon noticing the peculiar design. The longer the image was studied, the longer Stephen's name would be seen. And, if baffled by the engine's identity, a call to the convenient number on the card would reveal what this kid is about and how he

found a two cylinder V-style steam engine from a 1941 German locomotive – one that used *four* of the engines.

And the P-51? That's his favorite airplane and it represents his other passion, aircraft engineering. Not as compelling an image as the steam engine, but the disparity begs questioning.

There is a bit more to the story. Stephen's explanation of the card, along with an image of the card and a link to the locomotive engine story, is on my website, at <http://challengerconsultingllc.com/media/footnotetoethoughts.pdf>

His may not be a prime example of a "good" business card, but it is very subtle, very effective and home grown. Of the cards I've collected, over thirty-some years, this is the first to hold my attention in such a compelling manner.

- One of my favorite hangouts, Arrow Racing Engines, has been purchased by Power-Tech, a division of Cyltech. Arrow has been the development source for many Mopar Performance parts and engine combinations, over the past twenty-nine years. All the current Arrow employees have been retained and will be relocating to a brand new, nearby facility. Bill will assist the new company as a consultant during the transition to the new facility.

Arrow was formed and, until last week, owned by Bill Hancock, a former member of the Chrysler Race Group – engineers who spent most of their company time on drag racing, NASCAR and multi-carbureted cubic muscle production cars, then squandered any remaining time in the office.

Like most denizens of the old race group, Bill is the teller, and subject, many stories, some of which I tenuously believe. Those denizens are also often referred to as legends and I truly believe in Bill's. I can't possibly even condense Bill's legend here. Besides, it wouldn't sound right unless his signature "hillbilly from Vanderbilt" persona told it. The best I can do is to relate two of my own stories that, hopefully, illustrate the respect and awe that I and many others have for Bill Hancock.

I knew Bill for some time, before seeing him in action, at Daytona, in the late 80s. Direct Connection had a display at the old Circle Track Trade Show and Bill came down to "help y'all out" (and write-off a couple of days at the races). He had pit passes for the two Thursday qualifying races and asked who wanted to go. The others wanted to sit in some wussy suite, but I jumped. "You *fools*," I thought, "you're going to pass up a guided pilgrimage to the promised land, just to have chips and dip in a *suite*?"

I had previously been in the Daytona pits (courtesy of a family connection), but always on my own. Walking through the pits with Bill was a NASCAR *immersion*. I suddenly understood southern grammar. I felt a hankerin' for grits, ham biscuits and sweet tea – stuff you don't get in no wussy suite.

We found a good spot on the pit wall for the first race. A few laps in, right after the lead pack of twenty cars roared by, Bill leaned up close to my ear. "Next time they come 'round, listen to the 22 car. He's fixin' to lose his motor." Right. Bill has no small measure of talents, but hearing isn't one of them. The boy is deaf as a post, or aurally challenged, to be politically correct. For him to pick out a single embryonic engine failure, from a group of twenty cars, had to be akin to hearing a penny drop during the launch of a top fuel race.

I smiled, politely nodded and put on my best “Ah know whut Ah’m doin’” face. Hell, merely picking out the car by number would be a feat, since the pack would blow through our field of view in under two seconds. I focused on the pack, as it roared into view, knowing Bill was watching me. I leaned forward, as if being six inches closer would help. It worked! Picking out the 22 car was no trick at all. Of course, it helped that he was belching a cloud of smoke, confirming the prophet’s prediction.

The race went under yellow with my jaw hanging open. “What? But... But... How...?” Bill merely said, “Starter failure.” My mind double clutched into overdrive, trying to piece together a logical string of events that could relate a starter motor and a blown engine. Finally, the clutch hooked up, connecting my mind and mouth. “How does a starter fail like *that*?”

“It gets hit by a connecting rod.”

Years later, and after many other experiences with Bill, I was fortunate to have him prepare the engines for my race cars. He explained the dyno charts, why an engine would perform best under specific conditions and why my shift points should be here or there. I so trusted the “gospel according to Hancock,” that I never touched his engines. If the timing needed to be checked, I’d pull the engine and take it to Arrow Racing Engines (true story). Adhering to the letter of his advice enabled a slew of track records and wins against identically prepared engines and cars. I didn’t know then (and still don’t, today) how he foresaw the 22 car’s engine failure – or its cause. But the experience hermetically sealed my faith in his knowledge.

Creeping malls and urbanization pretty much closed the book on Arrow Racing Engines. The shop used to be in a rural area with nothing for the dynos to bother but groundhogs. Now, from Arrow’s loading dock, a ten-year old can hit a Petsmart superstore with a bowling ball. Rather than pack up and move the operation himself, Bill is taking the opportunity to step aside, yet keep his legacy going. Maybe now he’ll retire. Nah. Too many stories left to create.

- Mark Thursday, August 28, 2008 on your calendar. The Motorsports Industry Association will conduct its highly regarded “Sustainable Motorsport Conference,” in conjunction with the Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix. This worldwide series of conferences showcase successful energy efficient programs from virtually all major race series. By highlighting the successes, which result from close technical partnerships among teams, suppliers and sponsors, the MIA fosters new technology, new partnerships and an energy efficient future for motorsports.

Details may be found at <http://challengerconsultingllc.com/media/crsdetroit.pdf>

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