

"I Don't Care What You Say, You'll Never Have As Many Cars As Harold E. LeMay"

Harold LeMay was a car guy, just like you and me in a lot of ways. He figured out how to use his day job, owning waste-hauling franchises, to help him build his car collection. Myth has it he paid a spiff to garbage collectors who told him about interesting cars they came across on their route.

But where LeMay differed from you and me, and indeed from every other collector on the planet, was the amount of four-wheeled booty he squirreled away over the years. He didn't stop at one or two cars. Or ten or twenty, or one hundred or two hundred. Or even one thousand or two thousand.

When he died in November 2000, he had more than 3,000 cars in his collection (and 30,000 pieces of automobilia), which, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, made it the largest private antique car collection in the world.

In 1997, thinking of the future, the LeMay family had founded the non-profit Harold E. LeMay Museum and committed themselves to donating their vast collection to it for the benefit of the public. The charter of the museum is to preserve and interpret the history and technology of the automobile and its influence upon American culture.

A 17-ACRE SHOWROOM

Having recently been honored by an appointment to the museum's National Advisory Board, I attended the public unveiling of the architectural design, on November 5, 2003, in Tacoma, WA.

Several hundred people packed the ballroom at the Sheraton hotel. The presentation, by Alan Grant, lead architect of Gensler Architectural Firm, was well done, and the audience enthusiastic. The design of the building is dramatic, as are the plans to have more than 750,000 square feet, more than 17 acres, of display and storage space. And they plan to have more than 1,000 cars on display at one time—visualize the entire entry list for the Barrett-Jackson auction under one roof.

The goals are admirable, and the team of Harold's widow, Nancy LeMay, CEO of LeMay Enterprises; John Barline, chairman of the museum board; and David Madeira, CEO of the museum, is a good one.

But *SCM* has a major concern about the museum and its aspirations. Simply put, its current goals are not ambitious enough.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST MUSEUM

In *SCM's* opinion, the goal of the LeMay Museum should be to become the world's definitive automotive museum. With such an enormous, sophisticated, purpose-built facility, it should strive to present the world's greatest array of automobiles in a stunning yet user-friendly setting.

The LeMay collection, known for its breadth and depth, is really the *Standard Catalog of American Cars* come to life. Among its three

thousand cars is the world's most complete collection of models from the Big Three automakers, from a variety of years. As appealing as this assemblage of everyday cars is, for the LeMay Museum to become world class, it must offer more.



Birre Moiler

We believe that smaller, more focused collections should be created and displayed in adjunct to the core LeMay cars. There should be displays of Indy race cars, of Ferrari competition cars, of supercharged Duesenbergs and more. Visitors to the museum should be able to see, under one roof, everything from four-door 1958 Chevrolet Bel Airs to Bugatti Type 57s.

The LeMay doesn't have to own these additional collections, but merely provide the first-class space to display them properly. There is certainly no shortage of extraordinary cars in the Pacific Northwest that really need to be made available for viewing by the general public.



One hundred fifty cars in the Great Hall, 850 elsewhere.



Striking design, but it's what's inside that will matter.

DON'T MAKE IT TOO FANCY

We caution the architects not to get too caught up in their own fancy drawings. Several times during the evening, comments were made about the "boring presentation of Bugattis at Molsheim," and how the LeMay would be far more "dramatic."

Drama, schmama. For those of us who cut our teeth wandering up and down the seemingly endless aisles of the Harrah collection, there is no better way to spend an afternoon, or a week of afternoons, than just walking around looking at old cars.

WE'LL BE ASKING FOR A CHECK

Of course, all of these things take money. The city of Tacoma jump-started the process by granting the museum \$10,700,000 in land and improvements, and secured a \$1,000,000 planning grant for them. Six to eight million dollars in startup funds will be needed over the next four years to operate

the museum, promote it internationally, and conduct the next stage of the fundraising campaign.

The total campus development of the museum project will cost in excess of \$100 million, with up to \$30 million of this to be realized through partnerships with private investors who can develop retail, dining and entertainment aspects of the nine-acre site. The rest will depend on the philanthropy of foundations and gearheads like you and me.

It's an ambitious goal, yes, but a worthy and achievable one if the board and staff of the museum raise their own bar and set their sights on the creation of the world's definitive car museum.

We'll be coming to *SCM*ers to help fund a portion of this project, so stay tuned for future details. We Americans are good at thinking big, and here's a chance for U.S. car fanatics to help build something world-class that they can call their own, while at the same time benefiting fellow hobbyists everywhere.

(To keep up-to-date on the LeMay Museum, and to be put on their mailing list, go to www.lemaymuseum.org, or call 253.779.8490.)◆