

The 2011 California Mille Goes the Extra Mile --and Then Some--For an Entrant

This year's California Mille went north . But for Richard Mattei of Normandy Park, Washington, the big adventure was all to the south.

His drive started with a 1942 Alfa Romeo, then a 1957 Porsche 356, then a 1956 Austin-Healey---and ended with a '52 Jaguar XK120. In between it was semi-controlled chaos.

"I had a shop in Phoenix completely service my new Austin-Healey and deliver it to Burbank Airport, where I picked it up and headed north," Richard says. "Almost immediately I noticed the clutch wasn't right. I could barely get it in gear, and when I did, I couldn't get it out. Eventually I limped the car to a hotel, and the following day headed north on 101, and then over to 280, to avoid the Friday afternoon traffic.

Highway 280 ends and becomes 19th Avenue in San Francisco just a few miles from the Fairmont Hotel. California Street was packed with traffic, and signals stopped commuters and especially buses at every block. All stopped -- except Richard who yelled to any who would listen: "GET OUT OF THE WAY. I CAN'T STOP!!!"

He made it to the Fairmont Hotel garage where the car quit completely. That night, Mark Ronfeldt worked on the clutch, and by the next morning everything was fixed. Everything--- except for the clutch that failed again on a test drive across the Golden Gate Bridge. "Screw it," said Richard who went to the North Beach Cafe for a dinner that night accepting the fact that the 2011 California Mille would leave without him.

But Plan B was forming. The Alfa wasn't done in time. Neither was the '57 Porsche, and now neither was the '56 Austin Healey. Maybe his '52 Jaguar could make the Mille.

"Who do you know who would go get my Jaguar in Phoenix?" asked Richard of Dan Radowicz, the organizer of the California Mille. "I'll do it," said Rick Hutchings, who contacted the Phoenix garage people, hopped in Richard's truck, headed south, and met them outside of Bakersfield where Mattei's Jaguar XK120 was waiting.

Then without missing a beat Rick turned around and sped north arriving back in San Francisco Sunday morning just before display time for the cars in front of the Fairmont.

Rick was none the worse for his all-night ordeal.. Richard was a nervous wreck, not knowing when or if he'd have a back up car. "The Jaguar performed beautifully. So did Rick Hutchings," said Mattei. "The fun of the Mille is the unexpected. I didn't expect a clutch problem--and I certainly didn't expect the Mille crew to go the extra mile...or 700 miles--to get me a replacement car. That's what I love about this event."

What will Richard Mattei be driving for the 2012 Mille? I think I'll drive my '45 Alfa 6C2500 SS--and make sure I have Rick Hutchings cell number handy *just in case.*"