

Highway 74 is one of California's most beautiful and fun-to-drive routes. Octane takes to the two-lane blacktop with the Ferrari Club of America on its annual Ortega Run
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Run to the Hills

Driving down the Pacific Coast Highway is, on the face of it, everything the myths and legends say it should be. The early-morning sun clammers above the horizon and over the roofs of the beach houses lining the super-fine, super-white sand. There seems to be a Porsche or Bentley in every drive. Palm trees line the no-man's land between beach and blacktop, fronds waving in the cool breeze as out on the ocean surfers walk the board, toes on the nose. A railway track runs parallel to the beach, just behind those fabulous beach houses, and the Pacific Coast Highway itself runs parallel to that, a step further inland and away from the beach. Paradise apparently involves »



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Above Tom Shaughnessy provided 375MM (above and top right, with Tom's 166) for Team Octane from a garageful of early Ferraris (top).

close proximity to both road and rail links. It's a contrast that is hard to ignore, a contrast that is underscored by the small gaggle of men and women who have clearly spent the night out in the open... and not through choice.

This morning our journey has taken us from Laguna Beach, through Dana Point and on to San Clemente. We take a left off the Highway and climb into the hills. The houses here are neat and well cared for, but not ostentatious. On the right about 100 metres up is a '60s Plymouth, faded from a lifetime spent in the Californian sun. Fifty metres further up on the left-hand side is a skip overflowing with old kitchen cabinets. Parked in front of the skip is a 1948 Ferrari 166 Spider Corse, parked behind the skip a 1954 Ferrari 375MM. California: a land of contrasts indeed.

Tom Shaughnessy strolls out of his house, coffee cup in hand and ready for the day to come: our mission is to take part in the Ferrari Club of America's annual Ortega Run – an 80-mile thrash along mountain and canyon roads through some of southern California's most beautiful and breathtaking countryside. Shaughnessy is tense and excited. It's a big day for him because he's organised the

old-timer cars for the run and we are definitely going to be in the minority. Although, judging by the list Tom has assembled, we are more than going to hold our own.

It's a 20-minute run to the start of the rally at LaPata and Highway 74 so it's time we got underway. I pull passenger duty in the 2-litre V12 166. Tom's Spider Corse wears its years with pride, its patina captivating, its originality almost unsurpassed. Squeezing into the snakeskin-covered seats you immediately notice the battered pedals, then the view over the glorious swell of red bodywork. Driver Zac, a friend of Tom's, clambers in next to me, we exchange a warm handshake. 'Great day to learn a car like this for the first time,' he says, flipping his baseball cap round back-to-front before firing up the engine. Behind us the 4.5-litre V12 375MM thumps into life and pulls round the skip and we head for the Pacific Coast Highway.

Where the 357MM is brutal, a belligerent bully of a machine, the 166 is pure fun. It feels fragile next to its broad-shouldered companion, but as we head for the start of the rally the Spider Corse keeps pace with its much faster and more powerful stable mate.



It's easy to forget just how rare Tom's cars are, but with every small town we pass through, on the way to rally start, the smiling and quizzical faces confirm what a great day this is going to be. The people buying their coffee and doughnuts probably have no idea what these two red cars are as we pass by, but nevertheless sidewalks grind to a halt as onlookers relinquish that breakfast bite in favour of a long and lingering look.

All too soon our dash to the Ortega Run startline is over and we pull up to the signing-in area. We are early, and only a couple of other cars are here. I heave myself out of the snakeskin seat with all the grace of a drunken contortionist and metaphorically pick the bugs out of my teeth. This Californian morning still has a chilly edge to it and the 166's screen offers little protection from the wind. The reverse baseball cap, silly as it looks, is the only option for the follicly challenged.

Soon more cars start to roll in, headed by Tom's old-timers. First to show is Steve Tidwell in his Lusso, followed by Wayne Ausbrooks in his 250GTE, Brooke Betz in his 250TDF, father Charles Betz with a 250SWB, David Stewart in a 246GTS, John Gemma in a 365GT 2+2, Malcolm Schmeer in a Daytona Coupé and Roger Groves in his phenomenal 250GT pre-production Boano (left). As the clock ticks





Above

Brooke Betz hustles his 250TdF around yet another curve; these guys aren't afraid to drive their cars hard and fast.

round to the 10.30am start time our select little gathering is joined by wave after wave of more recent metal: F430 Spiders abound in red or yellow; then of course there is a sprinkling of 612s. As the line of modern metal tails off the back of the old-timers it is clear there is some sort of invisible line that separates the new from the old, cars and owners. Like oil and water, the clans don't seem to mix. The enthusiasts versus the conspicuous consumers.

The air-horn sounds, it's 10.30am; ladies and gentlemen, start your engines. I've changed cars and Steve Tidwell has taken me onboard his Lusso. The flag drops and we are off. The old-timers head the charge into Stage One, a 26-mile run along Highway 74 to Lake Elsinore. We immediately start to climb, the gradient steep, the corners tight. Mist lingers in the air as we motor skywards. Cliffs rise to the right of us, steep drops fall away to the left. The 166 tracks surefootedly in front of us, the 375MM a few cars further on... I can still hear it thumping along even though the windows of Steve's Lusso are wound tightly shut. A set of road works brings the convoy to a halt. I take the chance to twist round in my seat and peer out of the rear window at the red and yellow snake of Ferraris coiled out behind us.

After what seems like an age we are released by the road repair crew and continue our climb into the Santa Ana mountains. It's noticeable that there are no guardrails to protect us from the increasingly steep drops, but this is a road Steve has driven many times before and he is unfazed by my vertigo.

We crest the Santa Anas and head down the other side, Lake Elsinore spread out before us. Roadside pull-ins bulge with bikers taking in the view but there is no stopping for us as we keep pace with the 166, which in turn is shadowing a group of 308s and 328s. Then the fun really begins...

Phase two of the run takes in a fabulous selection of canyon roads as we head towards our lunchtime stop at the Thornton Winery, 80 miles from the starting point. The road bucks and bends through endless avocado groves. Seasonal streams sweep water and mud onto the blacktop, our route planner as supplied by the Ferrari Club of America offering a water and mud-free alternative for those who prefer it. Tom's group resists that option to a man, and woman.

The Lusso is a joy in this terrain – fast enough to keep pace with the 166 and nimble enough to flow through the curves. Tom and his 375MM, however, are way off down the road. 'Masochistic. Like a day on horseback. You need earplugs, and goggles, and maybe a hat with a chin strap too,' reports Tom's passenger. I'm happy with my choice of car and driver on the Ortega run.

And then without warning the canyon roads give way to regular two-lane blacktop and we are swinging through the gates of the Thornton Winery. Tom ushers his group of old-timers to a prime position overlooking the the patio where lunch will be served. The 430s and 612s are despatched to a car park some little way away.

Over a well-deserved glass of white and plates of salmon, prime rib, pasta and salad we swap stories of the 80 miles just travelled. No breakdowns, no accidents, just smiles following an adventure shared. Again the owners of contemporary machinery don't mix, don't lean under open bonnets or inhale the vintage interiors. It's a curious stand-off following such a fabulous morning's drive. But then, if just one of them appears on next year's Ortega Run in a Lusso or GTE, all Tom's effort will have been worth it. 