

MAN BEHIND THE WHEEL

Paul Doerring has helped steer Concours d'Elegance for 10 years

The idea for the car show that would eventually become the Hilton Head Island Motoring Festival & Concours d'Elegance came not from a chrome-filled showroom or a fuel-injected corporate boardroom but, rather, Mother Nature herself.

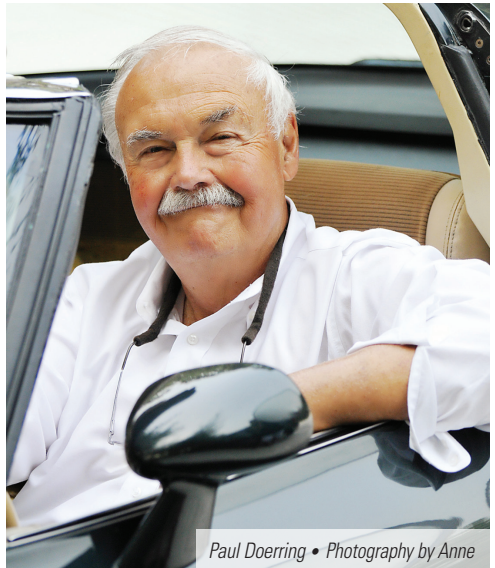
"I always took my morning walks in Moss Creek, and I had just come back from Detroit where I was a volunteer at a rather large Concours," Paul Doerring said. "It just hit me as I made a turn. I said, 'Wait a minute. We ought to put on a Concours here.'"

Doerring took that simple idea and turned it into a display of collectible cars called Cars at the Creek. He raised money for the first show by going to six local car dealers and asking for \$500-\$600 in exchange for the dealers each being allowed to showcase a couple of cars.

Doerring moved to Hilton Head Island in 1979, leaving behind a successful psychology career in Michigan to establish a practice on the island. He also taught at USC-Beaufort as an adjunct professor for 15 years. Although he loved teaching, he resigned to focus on his newfound Concours duties.

After three years of Cars at the Creek, Doerring was approached to join the board of Concours, which was still in its planning stages, and serve as co-event director. That first Concours, in 2001, dwarfed his previous Cars at the Creek show, and it was bigger than even the planners had imagined.

"We had to work very hard," he said. "I can't think of how many phone calls, how many automobile shows, how many Concours I attended to buttonhole people. By the time it was all said and done, I think we had about 120 cars on Sunday, and we ended up with a two-day event, which we hadn't planned on."



Paul Doerring • Photography by Anne

Ten years later, the festival has morphed into a five-day affair with three distinct exhibits. This year's Concours kicks off with the Savannah Speed Classic Oct. 28-Oct. 30 at the Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa on Hutchinson Island, Ga.

The show moves to the Coastal Discovery Museum Nov. 5-6. The Motoring Midway: Memory Lane to the Fast Lane highlights vehicles of today and technology of tomorrow; Car Club Jamboree (Nov. 5 only) offers an eclectic mix of 150 cars; and the Concours d'Elegance (Nov. 6), the centerpiece of the Motoring Festival, showcases 150 vintage vehicles.

"I always sort of had a vision that we could establish something that would have sustainability and could be built upon," Doerring, the festival's Chairman Emeritus, said. "Did I visualize it as it is today? Not quite!"

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