



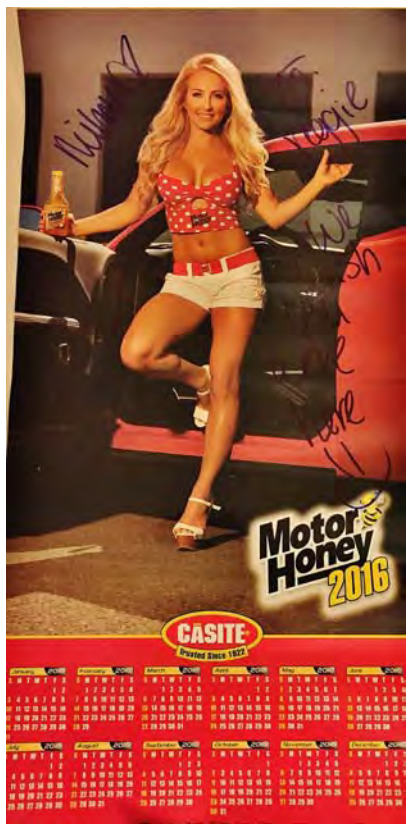
December 2015



Have you ever wondered what going to the SEMA show in Las Vegas is like? Some people liken it to a giant car show, but in reality there are only a couple hundred vehicles. It's definitely a trade show, but much more overwhelming to your senses. I heard someone say that it's like the state fair..... Nope. No animals, no body odor, definitely less food options and almost nothing directly for sale on-site. I think I have come up with a good comparison. It's a lot like going to Disney World in Florida, except it's mainly for the automotive community.

SEMA is held at the Las Vegas Convention Center and uses the majority of its 4 halls and 3.2million square feet (in contrast, the Minneapolis convention center has just 475,000 square feet). It also spills out into the front parking area as well as several other outdoor spaces surrounding the building and into the Westgate Hotel ballrooms. Just like Disney, each hall is a "land" and each area has its own theme.

Even though we focus mainly on the cool restorations and muscle cars there, you will find plenty



of modern performance cars, tons of tuff trucks, and high end exotics too. The South Hall is home to the wheel and tire companies. It has 443,838 square feet in just the lower level, and is right in front of the monorail platform. Eye candy abounds: huge wheels, hot cars, and hot models. This is the first hall I go to every year because it helps get me in the mood and isn't immediately overwhelming. Upstairs (yes, there's another 464,658 square feet on the second floor), you will find the Truck and Power Sports booths. Just about everything you would want to add to your truck is here. You'll also start seeing more celebrities in booths signing posters and taking pictures with fans. After these two halls, I wandered around out front to the performance pavilion and outdoor display area to check out the rest of the Ferraris, GTRs and giant lifted 4x4s. I saw it had rained earlier and heard there was even hail. I can only imagine the panic since those cars can't really be moved anywhere. Surprisingly enough, it's now already almost

Here's just one of the many models "Nicole" who were there signing posters and posing for pictures.

5pm and SEMA is about to close for the day.

Heading back to my room at Bally's, I was already feeling the week would be long. I purposely choose an early flight Wednesdays so I can walk in barely an hour after SEMA opens. I also arranged to get into my room early to avoid the lines later as well as ensure the security of my luggage in my room vs. the bell desk. It's also really nice to just go up, dump your giant bag full of free crap you instinctively grabbed from the booths, and rest your feet. I needed a break because it wasn't even dinner yet, and there was still a long night coming up.

Dinner plans that night were for a place called Battistas, and it happened to be across the street from my hotel. I met Jim Hall from TPIS (see the June 2014 club newsletter), and Jeff Turner from Classics Plus Inc, and had one of the best Italian meals ever. The décor was like Buca, but the food was far better. Free house wine with dinner too, which was a nice plus. After dinner, we headed to the Gran Turismo Awards in the Cosmopolitan. I had been to it once before, but decided to give it another shot. Note to self: show up late, drunk. It opened late (again), there wasn't anything going on for the next hour (again), and a bottle of Corona cost \$9!!! We bailed



after chickening out of stealing some nice GT-branded pillows that were in the "bottle service" areas. The only real highlight was seeing the actor Sung Kang who played the character Han in the Fast & Furious movie series. He had a modified 1973 Datsun 240Z at SEMA, and won Gran Turismo's Best in Show award. I wandered back to my hotel, and thanks to Las Vegas' open bottle laws, grabbed a few walkabout beers on the way, watching people and drinking in the atmosphere and nice weather. Went to bed about 2:30am which meant I was up for almost 24 hours.

Day 2 starts early: 7am. I'm smart enough to know that this is a big event and I want to maximize my time while I'm here. The New Products Showcase in the Westgate hotel open an hour earlier than the main show, so I hop on the monorail and head over before the crowds start building again. The Westgate hotel offers another 150,000 square feet of booths ranging from tools to accessories to logistics support as well as parts themselves. Since the Westgate is a separate building, SEMA was smart enough to bridge the outdoor gap to keep the flow going. On my way back through, I stopped and looked at all the Optima Batteries competition vehicles staged outside. There are some serious competitors out there. Since this isn't your typical car show, the owners aren't just sitting there waiting to answer questions, so you'll have to read the specifics when they come out in the magazines.



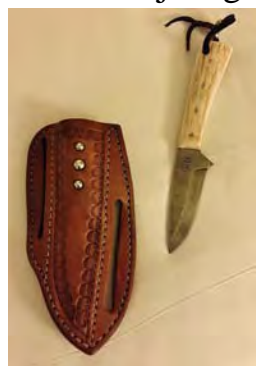
When the main SEMA doors opened at 9, I was positioned right at the North Hall, which is home to your collision repair, mobile electronics, accessories, vehicle restylers (think wraps and films) and tool vendors. Since the North hall is “only” 409,000 square feet, I breezed through it in just a couple hours. As I was grabbing lunch, I happened upon Dennis Pittensbarger from Cars Illustrated Magazine and formerly of the show “Highway to Sell” (which I hadn’t seen). He was in between show times while hosting SEMA Central Stage at the show. We talked, we laughed, and we bonded. No, not really. I just said hello and told him how much I liked what he’s been doing. We chatted briefly and I headed outside, making my way towards to AAPEX shuttle busses.

Part of the SEMA show is another trade show called AAPEX which stands for Automotive Aftermarket Products Expo. AAPEX is geared towards the daily driver repair business down at the local garage or dealership. Held at the Sands Expo, AAPEX encompasses another million or so square feet of space and is divided into 2 levels. The International floor is mostly factory-direct and importers, mainly from the Asian area of the world. I stayed in the other area which isn’t necessarily exclusive to the domestic companies, but I wasn’t looking for any specific factories, importers, or hard-core parts. I mainly went to AAPEX because of my real job, which is wholesale parts supply to independent repair shops outside my dealership and I wanted to keep up on the competition and keep my eyes open for anything we could bring in as well. I also wanted to stop by the Plasti-Dip booth and personally thank them for helping sponsor Cruise for Troops 2016. They’re headquartered in Blaine if you didn’t know.

It was late afternoon, and I had 2 options: take the shuttle back to SEMA and ride the monorail back with the herd, or walk back to my hotel. I chose walk, only because it would be faster and I could grab something to eat on the way. Something most people might not know about me is that I don’t typically eat much when I’m at car shows or large events like this. It’s because I just get too wrapped up in the day and eating doesn’t occur to me. I skip real food, hit



Vehicles are everywhere. This one was in the lobby/vestibule outside a display hall. Notice the headlight bezels.



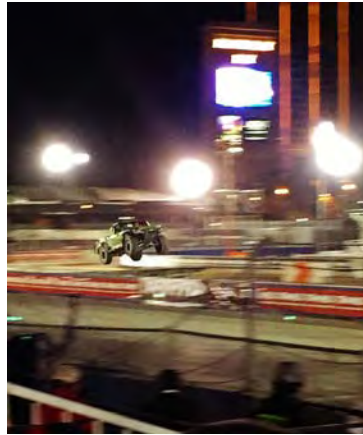
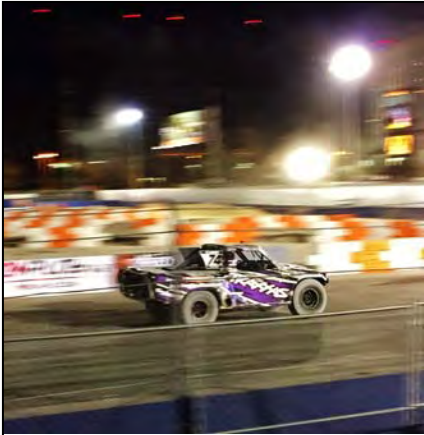
Free knife!

the convenience store next to my hotel and grab a 2 liter of soda and a bag of chips to hold me over until dinner. Back at my room, I start sorting through the past 2 day’s piles of stuff. I never think to take a picture of it all, but it’s like Halloween for car dudes. By the way, I don’t grab anywhere near the volume of things available at the booths. I was



These were all the decals I didn’t already have. I’ll show their purpose in the future.

given 2 t-shirts: one from Dickies which has a cool SEMA design on it, and one from Chevrolet which was made just for the SEMA event. I also got 2 hats, which I don't remember ever getting that day, and a pretty cool knife which I wore on me the rest of the trip, then shipped home. I genuinely tried to take only what I was interested in and/or was specifically given, except decals. I grabbed every stinking decal I could (that I didn't already have) because I have some cabinets that are getting the full decal treatment. I sift through the free magazines, catalogs, and stuff wondering what the housekeeping staff will think once I check out.



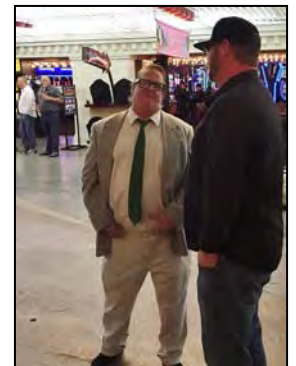
A really cool thing about Vegas is that there's always something going on. Tonight I met Jim and Jeff at the Las Vegas Village, down near the Luxor, to watch the TRAXXAS



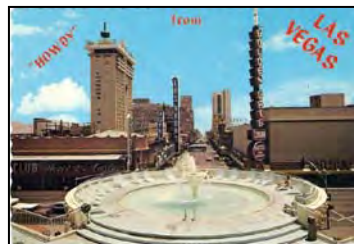
Robby Gordon

Stadium Super Truck race. These trucks are identically set up (yep, uh-huh) so the racers compete against each other based on skills alone. Robby Gordon created this event back in 2013 as a series of events in different cities. Loud music, race engines, and spinning tires along with jumps make this a pretty cool event.

After getting our fill, we left to make our late dinner plans downtown. Dinner tonight was at the Plaza Hotel. The Plaza once had a round, open air second floor pool deck that looked straight down the center of Fremont Street, but has since been transformed into Oscar's. Keeping the round shape, a glass dome and walls were added, leaving the fantastic view and Vegas atmosphere intact. I got a salad, the "small" prime rib, and mac and cheese. We're not going to talk about cost, but it was well worth it. Best meal I may have ever had. We strolled down Fremont Street, saw Batman, several Supermen, dominatrixes, and a guy who lived in a van down by the river. If you haven't been to Fremont Street, it's sensory overload. Closed streets, loud music,



an overhead LED light show, and street performers combine with plenty of alcohol to make this a giant Mardi Gras style night.



The original pool, and what Oscar's looks like now.

Tableside view. People wondered who we were to get this table. The zipline platform blocks the view.

Friday came, and with it, the last day of SEMA. Again, I got there early, but this time it was to check out the outdoor area. Ford takes over the entire area in front of the Convention center and re-blackens the asphalt using only tires and throttle. There's a nonstop line to ride in a Mustang or Raptor while it drifts or hits the jumps. The area is lined with vendors including Foose, Meguiars, Mothers, and more-each bringing a nice assortment of vehicles to drool over.

Don't worry, I haven't forgotten about the performance and restoration area. The Central hall is 623,056 square feet full of everything you typically see about SEMA. This is where I refer you to Google and search for everyone else's pictures.



There are just too many people in the way, too much to see, and too little space here to do it justice. I wander through the endless aisles of parts, celebrities, models, and awesome cars for several hours, then take off back to my hotel about 2. This is where you all say WHAT??!! Early??? You know me, I have a plan.

SEMA has a roll-out of all the participating vehicles on Friday nights, and I wanted to drop my bag, grab a sweatshirt, and get ready for another long night. The parade of vehicles started with the builder of the year competitors and was followed by every display vehicle in and outside of the building. It's apparently as much of a thrill for the drivers as the crowd, because I saw tons of them recording us as we recorded them. This is where I took the brunt of my pictures, which I will put on our forum in the near future.



SEMA Ignited is something they started last year to help bring the show to the public. The vehicles leaving SEMA parade over to an adjacent parking lot where it is open to the public. It's like a big party with music, drifting, celebrities, and more. After a quick walk-through (since it's pretty well the stuff I have already seen), I head out to get ready for dinner.



Note the lighter areas of asphalt. They're the only areas that weren't touched by drifting.



Look for all my pics on our web forum. There's just too many to include here!

Tonight was going to be something simple: hamburgers. It turned into hamburgers at Gordon Ramsay's BurGR because, well, Vegas. Jeff, Jim, and I tried the Roasted Jalapeno Poppers which is a Russian Roulette style serving of 5 signature poppers and a sixth which still contains the pepper's seeds for heat. Jeff lost. Noticeably. We also got the Fury Chicken Wings aka the Hellfire wings. Nummy. My burger had duck breast "bacon" and a fried egg and was spectacular. Fries come with both curry and chipotle ketchup too.

After dinner, we split up and I headed down the strip to get some souvenirs for my family. Nice thing about Las Vegas: everything on the strip is open until at least Midnight. Nothing like hitting the M&M's store at 10:45pm and it's still busy. I got back to my hotel late knowing I could still sleep in and spent a couple hours flipping through catalogs taking only the pages I needed and recycling the rest.

True to real-life, I was up way too early, so I headed out for some sight-seeing after leaving my now overstuffed bags with the bell desk. Checkout is at 11, but my flight was leaving at 6, so I had plenty of time. I intended to make my way to In-N-Out burger, but it was out of walking distance for me. I did find another option: Fatburger. I heard about it in Fast and the Furious 1, so I gave it a shot. It was big. It was sloppy. It was OK. A positive side was seeing lots of the display cars taking a trip up or down the strip before they went back to their homes or companies. After a long wait at the airport and a seemingly quick flight home. SEMA 2015 was over.

If you get the opportunity, here are some tips for getting the most out of SEMA:

- Register early. Not only will your ticket be cheap (\$25 vs. \$75), you then get access to discounted hotel rates and more. One ticket is good for the whole show, not just daily.
- Make a plan. Research any booths you want to specifically visit, celebrities you want to stand in line to meet, and manage your time as efficiently as possible. SEMA provides a lot of info to help do this.
- Try to walk the aisles in a grid pattern. It's quite easy to start wandering and miss entire ballrooms or adjacent areas full of cool stuff, or figure you have time to come back..... and never do.
- Plan for the evenings too. SEMA closes at 5 every day, which means there's still plenty of time to enjoy the night life. Make dinner reservations since there's a ton of additional people there besides the normal vacationers.
- You better think budget, even if you don't need one. Sure, there are deals on stuff, but you'll want to have a pretty good idea of your base expenses. Since I stay on the strip, I use the monorail which is a cheap way to get around. The Super Truck races cost \$34 to get in, and a beer there was \$9. Concession lunch at SEMA will run you \$10-15 each day. It's easy to underestimate and get caught without enough cash on hand.
- Don't forget: Since SEMA is a trade show, it is only open to the industry, that means it is work related. That also means you can claim it on your taxes, assuming you're actually there for work. I kept all my receipts.
- Talk to everyone and keep your ears open. You never know who you will meet, what you will learn, and maybe see something you might have otherwise missed like a custom builder in line next to you, or a movie star right over there.
- Free stuff: there's plenty. It's OK to be picky. Without even trying, I ended up with 2 cool shirts. I also got 2 hats which I don't remember ever picking up, a couple antenna balls for the garage, and a pretty nice fixed blade knife and sheath. There are tons of pens, flyers, catalogs, brochures and stuff too. One note: You don't get the really good stuff just for showing up, that's typically reserved for existing customers, placing orders, becoming a qualified buyer, etc. The stuff does cost these companies money and they expect some sort of return on the nicer things. At minimum you'll be put on their customer list and most likely hounded a few times after the show.
- Bags-take them, use them, fill them. When you get back to your room, realize that there's a luggage weight limit for checked bags, and your carry-on space might be limited. I don't check a bag, and I pack a laptop bag in my carry-on just so I can use the "carry-on plus one personal bag" rule on flights. Even then, I tear out only the pages I want to keep from catalogs and minimize the amount of stuff I take back home.
- Ship stuff home. I sent a box home with posters and the knife I got (can't take it on the plane, and I was carry-on only) for under \$15. Both UPS and FEDEX are on-site. I saw guys sending state-fair sized bags full of catalogs and stuff home which had to be expensive. Take the time at night to sift through and maximize what you keep and recycle.
- I walked nearly 48 miles in those 4 days there, 40 of those were in the first 3 days. Wear comfortable shoes and thick socks. I like having 2 pairs of shoes to give my feet a break. Everything in Vegas looks close, but the scale plays tricks on your brain. That hotel right there is really about a mile away. The strip is just over 4 miles long, FYI.