



Robert E. Petersen (1926-2007)

Robert E. Petersen, Founder of Hot Rod, Motor Trend Magazines and Benefactor of the Petersen Automotive Museum Passes On at 80

Robert E. Petersen, an entrepreneur who single-handedly created the largest special-interest publishing company in America, was instrumental in the evolution of the hot-rodding culture, and who, with his wife Margie, realized his dream of establishing an educational museum to pay tribute to the automobile, died on Friday, March 23, at St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, Calif. after a short but valiant battle with neuroendocrine cancer. He was 80.

"Mr. Petersen helped create and feed the American obsession with the automobile, delivering gasoline-powered dreams to the mailboxes of millions," said Dick Messer, Director of the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. "He understood the thrill that an average person could get from seeing and reading about horsepower as an art form."

A native of Southern California, Mr. Petersen's mother passed away when he was 10, leaving him with his Danish-immigrant father, who worked as a truck and equipment mechanic. As a young man he picked up his father's skills, learning to weld, de-coke engines, and hone his fascination with cars.

After graduating from Barstow High School in the mid-1940s, he moved to Los Angeles, working at MGM studios as a messenger boy. Following service in the Army Air Corps toward the end of World War II, Mr. Petersen, now an independent publicist immersed in the burgeoning customized auto culture of California, was instrumental in creating the first hot rod show at the Los Angeles Armory. To help establish the event, in January 1948 he launched Hot Rod Magazine, and hawked the magazine at local speedways for 25 cents a copy. Motor Trend, a more upscale publication for production car enthusiasts, and dozens of other titles aimed at specialty automotive segments, soon followed.

Mr. Petersen spent decades as Chairman of the Board of Petersen Publishing Company, which was at one time America's leading publisher of special-interest consumer magazines and books before its sale to private investors in August 1996. Among its other diverse successful titles were Teen, Sport, Rod & Custom, and Guns & Ammo. He also

headed a wide variety of other businesses including ammunition manufacturing, real estate development and aviation services that each reflected another passion he shared.

Firmly established as an American success story, Mr. Petersen had one lasting vision: an educational museum to pay tribute to the automobile. On June 11, 1994, the lifelong dream of Robert E. Petersen was fulfilled with the opening of a 300,000-square-foot automotive museum named in his honor, made possible by his \$30 million endowment.

Today the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles stands as the nation's premiere automotive museum, serving thousands of visitors each year. Its mission remains to educate and excite generations of auto enthusiasts with the fascinating stories, vehicles and people that have influenced the American love affair with the automobile - a mission that has been a resounding success thanks to the generosity of its main benefactor.

In addition to his noted auto collection, Mr. Petersen also developed a keen interest in sport shooting. He served as Shooting Sports Commissioner for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, where he was responsible for building that venue from an old dairy farm within six months.

Mr. Petersen served as president and chairman of the board of the Boys' and Girls' Club of Hollywood, and was a member of the National Board of Directors for the Boys' and Girls' Club of America. He was active in support of numerous children's charities and also served as a member for the Los Angeles City Library Commission.

Both he and his wife have been major contributors to the Music Center of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Additionally, he was a founding member of the Thalians social society, which raises money for the Mental Health Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. His ongoing contributions to the community earned him numerous special citations from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and Los Angeles City Council.

Mr. Petersen was to be honored with both the 'Automotive Icon' and 'Visionary' awards at the Petersen museum's annual gala on May 10. The ceremony will now be held as a tribute to Mr. Petersen and his contributions to the institution and community.

"What made him so special was that he gave every ounce of his energy and abilities to his dreams. He was a quiet man who truly became an American icon," the Petersen Museum's Messer said. "He made his living doing things he loved and he found success at every turn. The way he lived his life, always looking for ways to give back in return for the success he enjoyed, made you proud to count him as a friend. The museum is now his legacy."

He is survived by his wife, Margie. In lieu of flowers, the family asks donations be made to the Petersen Automotive Museum or the charity of the person's choice in his honor. Funeral mass will be held Thursday, March 29, at Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City.

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Link: <http://www.petersen.org>

Posted Saturday, March 24, 2007