

MCA Marathon 2011

Quest for the Coveted Grille Medallion



Text and Photos by Rusty Welch

It took five years to be able to participate in only five judged MCA National shows at which I was awarded five 1st Place trophies. Having spent the previous five years converting the 88hp 4-cylinder, 1987 LX Convertible, that my wife Ann bought new in '87 as her daily driver, to a 5.0L V8; these five results produced a feeling of great satisfaction. (The numerous MCA "factory correct" classes award Gold/Silver/Bronze trophies rather than 1st/2nd/3rd place as will be referred to in this article.)



Fortunately, I had joined MCA and attended several National/Grand National/Anniversary shows as a spectator during the five years I worked on my conversion. It was at these shows that I got many ideas and much support from MCA members for my project and was introduced to show protocol. I also accepted invitations to help with judging of Mustangs in my anticipated show class where I learned much more about what judges look for than would have otherwise been possible.

After my '87 LX conversion was drivable, but before it was "finished" (Are our projects ever truly "finished"?), I entered it to be judged at a National show held in Johnson City, TN, in May, 2006. I knew the judges would find a "laundry list" of things on the car needing work ... but that was exactly what I wanted in order to improve my car sooner than I might otherwise be able to do.

To my great surprise, at the Awards Ceremony I was called to receive a 3rd Place plaque. What a thrill! After the show, as directed on the back of my windshield entry card, I requested my Judging Sheets and was rewarded with the laundry list I had anticipated. That comprehensive list enabled me to finish my project over the following winter as a 1st Place winner for all shows thereafter.



Each subsequent showing gave me the same opportunity to make further improvements suggested by each of those Judging Sheets. Every deficiency identified at each showing was corrected for the next show. As a result, my 1st Place award scores continued to improve.

Somewhere along the way during those initial five years of showing, I learned about and became attracted to the MCA Grille Medallion Program. Each 1st Place award at a judged National show (Judging and awards at Anniversary Shows don't count.) had earned me two points (a 2nd Place earns one point) for a total of 10 toward the 20 needed to qualify for the Grille Medallion ... I was half-way there!

However, there was one big problem! It had taken five years to get half-way. Since my '87 LX Convertible is a driven Mustang, and judged in a driven class (Class MC: '64 ½ - 2011, Driven, Undercarriage Judged), it was accumulating more and more "dings" with each passing year. Even I was accumulating more and more "dings" with each passing year! I wasn't sure that both of us could hold together in a 1st Place condition for five more years!

Thus evolved, at the beginning of the 2011 show season, my solution to this dilemma—an "MCA Marathon"—a commitment to participate in all five judged shows for the 2011 season. Fortunately, all five shows were scheduled to be held in the eastern half of the country—a bit more convenient to my central Shenandoah Valley of Virginia home: Mesquite (Dallas), TX, in April; Jacksonville, FL, in May; Sands Point (Long Island), NY, in June; Des Moines, IA, in August; and Waldorf (Washington DC), MD, in September.

WELCOME TO TEXAS

The Mesquite Show was hosted by the North Texas Mustang Club. It was laid out on the parking lot of the Mesquite Memorial Stadium—a collegiate-quality facility used as their home field by five local high schools. About 300 beautiful Mustangs from all across the country were judged.



As a native Texan I expected the warm temperatures and stiff breeze ("Don't walk away without foldin' up and layin' down that canvas chair!"). The show's Host Committee, which included Chairman Ralph Perkins, NTMC President Phil Sweeney, and Co-Chairman Jerry Flowers was well organized and extended gracious Texas hospitality to all participants and spectators. The show trophy was the most unique of the season with a well-represented Texas theme.



Gratefully, my Mustang was given a 1st Place award; giving me an accumulation of 12 Grille Medallion qualification points and leaving eight more to still be earned.

WELCOME TO FLORIDA

The Jacksonville Show was conveniently located near I-95 in the middle of the HUGE (125 acres!) River City Market Place shopping complex. The showfield was a large section of the parking lots that otherwise served Wal-Mart and Lowes. With those and many dozen other major and boutique stores and restaurants nearby, the show was amply blessed with non-participant spectators.



Jacksonville temperatures in May well-surpassed those in North Texas in April and exceeded 100 degrees, reaching even higher on the fresh black asphalt pavement. A freak whirlwind gust even enabled an impromptu appearance by "Mary Poppins," whose umbrella still has not been found after soaring out of sight. The incident reinforced the need for MCA's general rule of no pop-up canopies or large shade umbrellas on the showfield where they could easily blow over and damage show entries.

All the nearby stores and restaurants offered convenient relief from the heat with shade, air-conditioning, and refreshments. Almost 300 Mustang owners were served well by the Jacksonville Mustang Club and their Show Committee Chairman Steve Collins, JMC President Diane Norris, and Co-Chairman Terry Gossell.



Fortunately, my Mustang received a 1st Place Award. I now had accumulated 14 of the required 20 Grille Medallion qualification points.

WELCOME TO NEW YORK

The Mustang & Shelby Club of Long Island (Treasurer Bob DiGiamo, Chairman John Dettori, President Carl Vosen, Registration Mike Chudlinski) hosted the Sands Point, NY, Show



on the historic 216-acre Guggenheim Estate. The "heyday" for the estate was the "Roaring 20's," when it was the home to philanthropist Daniel Guggenheim. The showfield was coolly situated on grass with a few scattered shade trees overlooking the beautiful Long Island Sound.



Heavy and continuous rain on Friday morning and a substantial thunderstorm Friday afternoon (the only rain on a show day all season) prevented judging of undercarriages on Saturday afternoon. Approximately 300 Mustangs from the eastern U.S. and Canada graced the picturesque showfield.

My Mustang was blessed with another 1st Place Award; bringing my total Grille Medallion qualification points to 16, with only four more to go.

My wife, Ann, a school teacher, then on summer break, was finally able to participate with me at the Long Island Show. After the show we took an excursion to the beautiful coast of Maine for a couple of delightful days. We put York Harbor, Maine, on our future-travel list for an extended return trip.



WELCOME TO IOWA

The showfield at Des Moines was the most convenient of the season ... the parking lot of the host Holiday Inn-Airport Hotel. Usually, I have to move my driven car from the showfield on Friday evening to get back to my hotel, resulting in a bit of extra cleaning on Saturday morning.

Des Moines is not located near past MCA show sites so very few Mustang Club of Central Iowa members have had many opportunities to participate in previous national shows. Remarkably, the host club Chairman Cecil O'Neal, President Sandy Jennings-Hammond, and Registration Chairman Mila Schwarz had never attended an MCA show. Despite their inexperience they, their Show Committee, and Club Volunteers hosted one of the best organized and conducted shows of the season.



Contrary to dire forecasts, the showfield weather was excellent for the duration of the event. The storm clouds on the horizon caused no distraction for the 300 Mustang-owner participants who came largely from the central U.S. and Canada, but with representatives from as far away as California and Southern Florida.



Not having to spend extra time cleaning due to being able to leave my Mustang on the showfield overnight, I felt I could help fill the ranks of judging volunteers. Even novices can make a valuable contribution to the judging process by carrying a Gold Card or Certified judge's clipboard and writing the judge's comments regarding improvement opportunities on each judging sheet.

Gratefully, my Mustang was again assessed to be in 1st Place Award condition ... giving me a total of 18 Grille Medallion qualification points, with only two more to go.

WELCOME TO MARYLAND

The 2011 MCA Grand National Show in Waldorf was expertly hosted by the National Capital Region Mustang Club. The show site was the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs minor league baseball park and its expansive parking lot.



Just fewer than 500 gorgeous Mustangs from across the entire U.S. and Canada participated. The NCRMC Show Committee and their Chairman Danny Truitt, President Chris Caldwell, and Registration Chairman Pat Porter all worked together effectively to enable participants and spectators to have a rewarding experience. Miraculously, they were able to successfully schedule the show between a 6.3 earthquake, a Category-three hurricane ("Irene") and a subsequent tropical storm ("Lee") in order to host a most enjoyable Grand National Show.



With 500 Mustangs to judge in less than five hours, many judging volunteers were needed. Having Ann available to assist with cleaning my Mustang enabled me to help. Participating as a judging assistant at National MCA Shows has always enabled me to gain valuable information and insights from the experienced judges with whom I work, which I can subsequently use to further improve my own Mustang.

At the Awards Ceremony, held in the stadium along the third base line, I was fortunate to receive my 10th consecutive 1st Place Award ... my fifth such award for the current season. A 1st Place at a Grand National earns three Grille Medallion points (a 2nd Place earns two points), giving me the 20 points needed to apply for a Grille Medallion with one point to spare.

Coincidentally, I had learned along the way toward the completion of my Grille Medallion points about another MCA award opportunity ... the "Pinnacle Award." This special award is sponsored by Mustangs Plus.

The Mustang in each of the four modified classes with the most "Pinnacle points" is recognized for its achievement. Pinnacle points are awarded based on the number of 1st and 2nd Place wins in one season. The Pinnacle Award is presented each year at the Grand National Show.

Because I had captured a 1st Place at all five of the 2011 shows, my '87 LX Convertible, which grew from quite humble 4-cylinder, 88hp beginnings, was recognized by the Mustang Club of America as the "Best Modified Mustang for 2011 in Class MC: 1964 1/2 - 2011, Driven, Including Undercarriage." The unique plaque was presented at the Grand National in Waldorf by MCA Awards Chairman and Head Judge Allen Stewart and MCA National President Steve Prewitt.



Modified Class Mustang owners need not think that they have to attend all five shows to have a shot at the Pinnacle Award. In the past, Mustangs have been named a Pinnacle Award winner with as few as two or three wins. A modified Mustang owner who has won at two shows might well achieve Best Modified Mustang in their class if they attend just one more show that season.

So, was this "Marathon" worth it? A total of 8,880 miles driven without incident in my '87 LX Convertible through a total of 36 different states, consuming 19 tanks of gasoline (I consistently average 25-26 mpg in my EFI 302!) ... spending 25 nights in a hotel; without hesitation or qualification, YES!

Not only did I achieve my goal ... my dream ... and earn two awards that I would not have otherwise and will display proudly for years to come, but I also got to visit with lots of previous MCA friends and make many more new ones. "Within MCA there are no strangers—only friends we haven't met yet."

I am just an "average member" with an "average income"

from "rural Virginia" with just an "average Mustang" that I have made very special to me. Yet, everywhere I went within MCA, the show host leaders and MCA national leaders made me feel welcome, supported and encouraged.

That same special experience is, no doubt, available to every other "average MCA member" reading this, who would like to have and enjoy it. I encourage them to just "go do it!" As the Eagles band lyricized: "So often times it happens ... that we live our lives in chains ... and we never even know we have the key." We are our own greatest limiting factor.

The MCA Grille Medallion is not easy to earn. In its 15-year history, only 211 have been awarded. When you consider that several thousand Mustangs have been part-way toward qualification, with one or more MCA wins, 211 is a very small percentage.

Earning one does involve some expense. It's not cheap to travel to shows these days with the prices of gasoline, hotels and time off work what they are.

Earning one does take some work. It's not easy to prepare and maintain a 1st or Gold Award-quality Mustang.

Earning one does take a period of years. It's not convenient getting to and from at least 10 MCA judged shows. With shows scheduled in locations all across the country, most members might be able to attend only one or two each season.

The most significant factor needed, however, to earn a Grille Medallion is determination. It is the determination to earn one that can minimize or eliminate the effects of the other limiting factors mentioned above.

Thank you MCA friends for helping me all along this journey—all the tips, suggestions, advice, encouragement, support and FUN together!

Thank you MCA officers, national judges, and leaders who give your volunteer time to create and sustain a positive environment where such rewarding experiences can be enjoyed by so many who wish to avail themselves of the opportunity. **MT**



★ MCA SHOWS ATTENDED