The Great Race roars into town

Tom McRae is a man in a

Tom McRae is a man in a harry.

This day, he's barreling up woodward Avenue in Birmingham—at the wheel of a 1938 Buick race car _ hand made and levingly restored _ speed limits and yellow lights be dammed.

This is a car," McRae exclaims, geaturing to the passing Nissans, Chevys and BMWs. Those people don't know what they're missing.

Fart car lover, part adventurer, McRae is executive director and chief spokesman for The Great Race, an automotive event coming to Southfield on Thursday, Judy and the seek of the promote the event, a cross country auto race featuring some 200 autos of 1910-43 vintage.

The Texan's own life story, told in the race program, is one of spiritual rebirth, of kicking alrohol and drugs through a strong faith in God.

But the thrill of the open road holds a quasi-religious appeal of its own.

"I was always a car guy," he said, specunting the bours.

its own.
"I was always a car guy," he "I was always a car guy," he said, recounting the hours he whiled away in calls as a young boy, peering at automotive brochures instead of school books.

Make that an old car guy.

"New cars might be better, but they're a cocoon of leather and

The rush of cold air around

gleaming aluminum and chrome vehicle around him explain his feelings better than words.

Southfield will be one of 14 overnight stops for this year's Tacuma-to-Toronto race.

Since its inception 16 years ago, racers have stopped in a number of cities both humble and great.

"We were the only moving traffic on south Manihattan Island the day of the Statue of Liberty Centennial. We were also the first outside event on Main Street in Disneyland," an event McRae likens to "getting on the Vatican grounds.

Crowdis have ranged from 50,000 or more at big city overnight stops to "about 1,000-everybody in town" in some of the short daily pit stops that allow racers to refuel and repair their cars.

Being in metro Detroit to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the American automobile is a special treat, McRae acknowledges.

The Great Race has passed through Michigan before, stopping in Flint a few years back when Buick was a chief sponsor. But this is its first ever stop in the American automobile's ancestral home.

For the record, car lover McRae is a little miffed more inn't being made nationwide of the anniversary.

"Just look at the impact the automobile has had on American life and how important it's been to us," he said. "We talk."

automobile has had on American life and how important it's been to us," he said. "We talk about freedom, but look at the freedom the automobile has pre-

vided."

It's that freedom, and the thrill of the open road, that motivates race participants who'll travel along back roads and

vates race participants who'll travel along back roads and without maps.

The \$250,001 in prize money to top finishers ian't bad motivation, either. Competitors vie for cash and trophies in categories for pre-1920 vehicles and cars specifically built for racing. There is also a prize for first-time participants.

It costs race participants amuch as \$12,000 to compete, McRae said, but the payoff is great for winners and losers alike.

If you can show your car made it through the Grat Race, immediately its price shoot right up." McRae said. "You can tell the world your car rows."

McRae and his Dallas-based staff of 10 work year-tound to plan the race route, line up sponsors and call attention to the race. This year's signature sponsor is Corel Corp., a Canadian computer software company. Cheyy Trucks is its main Michigan-based sponsor.

Drivers themselves come from all over the world. Cara come from makers both familiar and forgotten.

Expected entries in this year's race include a last-of-its-breed 1910 Knox race car, built to perform at a then-unheard of 90 miles per hour with the best pre-WWI technology America had to

The rush of cold air around the Buick's open cockpit, the speed, power and roar of the speed, power and roar of the engine, the look and feel of the recedent the automobile has pro- Run planned 'For the Health of It'

Botsford Center for Health in Novi. Improvement and the city of Novi are sponsoring the sixth annual "Run for the Health of it" course to

Sunds.

The race, featuring an 8K run, 5K walk and 8K wheelchair event encourages participation by bon competitive and noncompositie athletes.

Held on a rolling, out and back course through the Novi Town Center, race day highlights also include corporate team predic-tion relays, awards and many participant giveaways.

by one competitive and noncompetitive and near pointing at their cases. The entry fees are \$14 for the SK and wheelchair roces, \$10 for at the center, 39750 Grand River the 5K, \$50 for the four-person

team relay, and \$10 for the kids half-mile run (8-12) and 200-yard dashes (5-7).

T-shirts are subject to availability and race proceeds will benefit Novi Youth Assistance.

For more information, call 473-5600.

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