

## MEMBER PROFILE:

## CHRIS MACHA

I have the good fortune to have known Chris Macha, his wife, Shawn, and their son, Collin, for at least ten years. During this time I have had the opportunity to see Chris's enthusiasm and energy at work in multiple ways, from stepping up to help out at a variety of events to his ability to prepare his cars to the highest level. Follow along as we profile Los Angeles Chapter member Chris Macha.

**Roundel:** Where did you grow up?

**Chris Macha:** I was born in Santa Monica and grew up in the South Bay area of Southern California.

**Roundel:** What was your first car? Tell us a little about this car.

**Macha:** Growing up in the late '50s and early '60s, I could name every American car I saw by year and model—but I was drawn to European sports cars. My first car was a 1960 Fiat 600D—okay, it's not a sports car!—that I bought with my own money in 1968 for \$100 from an elderly couple that could no longer drive. I quickly started to improve its looks by having it painted a chocolate-brown color. The top speed was probably 60 mph, and my buddies in high school would each pick up a corner and place it over the parking-lot island.

I soon decided that I needed a sportier car, so I sold the Fiat and bought a '57 Austin Healey 100-6. It was on this car that I started to do my own repairs; I learned how to pull the head and do a valve job, after I had bought a new tonneau cover and luggage rack for the trunk, of course. It wasn't the most dependable vehicle, so I bought



a 1958 Jag XK-150 coupe for \$650 that I drove to college my first year. My friends had an MGA, a TR-3A, and a Fiat 1200, and that influence kept me on the track of owning and driving European sports cars.

**Roundel:** What was it about BMWs that sparked your interest and convinced you to buy one? What model was the first BMW you owned?

**Macha:** When I graduated from college and started working, I decided that it was time to finance my own new-car purchase. At the time, I read *Road & Track* religiously, and I was keenly interested in the BMW

At the May 2018 San Diego Chapter's Jack Cavanaugh Memorial Clean Car event, Chris Macha enjoys judging a contestant's entry—in this case an E9 2800CS owned by friend Paul Cain.

2002 that always received such glowing reviews. I also wanted a car that would accommodate my height, and take my gear and me on adventures with friends to go skiing and backpacking in the Sierra Nevada mountains. The 2002 fit the bill perfectly, so I drove to the local dealership, Vasek Polak BMW in Hermosa Beach, and bought a 1974 2002. After trading in my VW Beetle and promising to return with a loan from my credit union, I drove home in my Chamonix 2002. It cost a total of \$6,900—including taxes—and had a sunroof, but no a/c and no radio, as those seemed to be luxuries beyond my means at



## MEET THE LA CHAPTER GUY FAMOUS FOR HIS LOVE OF E9 COUPES.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
**FRED LARIMER**

the time. On Monday, I went to my credit union to secure the loan, but was told I had only been employed for 60 days, and their minimum was 90 days. I returned to VP and they said no problem; they would hold the note for 30 days at no charge. It was a different environment from today! That BMW served me well for eight years and over 150,000 miles, and it even towed my Hobie catamaran all over the state.

**Roundel:** List the cars that you have owned—first car to most recent.

**Macha:** 1960 Fiat 600D, 1957 AH 100-6, 1958 Jaguar XK-150 FHC, 1971 VW Beetle, 1974 BMW 2002, 1959 Jag XK-150 DHC, 1958 Jag XK-150 FHC, 1960 M-B 190SL, 1982 Volvo 244GLT Turbo, 1976 BMW 2002A, 1967 M-B 230SL, 1960 M-B 190B sedan, 1973 BMW 3.0CS coupe, 2005 Lexus RX330, 2001 BMW 525i sedan, 1969 BMW 2002, 1967 BMW R50/2, 1990 BMW 325iC, 1969 BMW 2000 *Neue Klasse* sedan, 1970 BMW 2800, 1975 BMW 2002A, and just recently a 2011 BMW 328i.

**Roundel:** Do you wish you still owned any of your cars—BMW or otherwise?

**Macha:** A part of me wishes I still owned an XK-150; it was an *über-cool* and rare car in the '70s, although I had to scrounge through junkyards for parts. I sold my third and last one in 1981. I also enjoyed restoring and driving my 230 SL, but Mercedes owners tend to be older and not as active a community. It is actually how I became an owner of my '73 3.0CS coupe; I was a regular at Cars & Coffee near where I live and met a few of the local BMW coupe and



Chris Macha's son, Collin, helps prepare the *Neue Klasse* 2000 at the 2013 Legends Of The Autobahn concours.

2002 owners. I also met Murray Fowler at one of these gatherings, and he suggested that I sell my 230 SL and find the coupe that I had always longed for. From there I never looked back.

**Roundel:** Which BMWs are on your list of cars you'd like to own?

**Macha:** Of all the BMWs ever produced, one of my favorites has always been the 3200 CS coupe. It was built in very small numbers, and is very rare today—and also very expensive! It is also the progenitor of the E9 coupes, which followed in the late '60s with some very familiar styling cues, such as the Hofmeister kink in the rear

### 1969 2000 *Neue Klasse* sedan, *Atlantikblau*/black:

Produced on 6/13/1969, this 2000 sports a five-speed conversion but is otherwise pretty much original other than the Euro headlights and tii grilles. Typical of a Chris Macha-owned BMW, the 2000 is receiving his special touch—little things are being corrected all of the time. So far Macha has gone through the front and rear suspension, replacing worn bits, and added new tires and rear brakes, along with freshening the engine bay with the correct paint finishes and various nuts and bolts. The new-old-stock wheels made by FPS are very rare and were a dealer-installed option back in the day. The New Class sedan series was introduced in 1963, and all that were imported to the U.S. were European models until 1969, when Max Hoffman imported the 2000 model that was produced for the U.S. from February until August of 1969. These are unique in that they have a 2002-derived front subframe and an E9-style rear subframe with a side-loader differential—but with a 4.10:1 ratio to accommodate the additional weight.

This car was restored by the previous owner—who still gets to see it regularly—and recently participated in the Targa California drive of over 900 miles following single-lane roads in the Central Coast region of California. It also went to Monterey, where it was displayed at Legends Of The Autobahn, so it gets exercised regularly.—Fred Larimer



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quarter window. They were also the top of the BMW lineup in the early '60s. I love the 327/328 series of pre-war BMWs, along with the 600 and 700 cars, but these would probably be way too small to accommodate my very tall frame.

**Roundel:** Of the BMWs you've owned, do you have a particular favorite? In what way is it your favorite?

**Macha:** My favorite BMW has to be my 3.0CS coupe. I bought it in early 2005, sight-unseen on eBay in Seattle—although there were 65 photographs, which showed some of the areas that would need to be addressed. When it arrived in a pouring rainstorm and I pulled it into my garage, I began to question what I had just done: This coupe needed even more work than I had imagined! It was very solid, however, and had been a California car for all of its life, except for the prior two years.

With the support of our local coupe community, I began to work to slowly bring this wonderful coupe back to the stature that it deserved. Murray Fowler, the late owner of the storied Blue Max 2800CS coupe, helped guide me down the path of keeping my coupe as if it had just left the factory. I was also fortunate to be in Southern California, where a fellow known as the Coupe King has a solid reputation for



restoring and upgrading coupes and 2002s; I entrusted much of the heavy restoration work to Peter Sliskovich and his crew. I still did much of the work myself, but I took my time and about five years to get it into the condition it enjoys today. About five years ago I upgraded the engine with a B35 from a 1988 635CSi; it now has boatloads of torque, and I have driven my E9 probably 50,000 miles over the last fifteen years. There are always little things that need to be done, and this has served as much-needed therapy—I could retreat to the garage and tinker on little bits.

One thing that I never

Chris Macha receives the San Diego Chapter's Jack Cavanaugh Memorial award from then-San Diego Chapter president Gordon Anderson.

imagined is that my coupe would be a regular visitor to Monterey for the annual Central California Chapter's concours—now the Legends Of The Autobahn—where it has won several awards. I think my first trip to Monterey was in 2006 with my oldest son Corey. The next year I entered the BMW clean-car contest and took a first-place award. I remember saying to myself, "This is too much work—surely I can't compete with the Super Clean and Concours contestants." But that first event set me on a path to further improve my coupe's appearance and enhance its originality.

My wife, Shawn, who has also



**1970 2800:** Macha and Mike Burger rescued this 2800 sedan from its Riverside, California, garage where it had been sleeping for 34 years; when the head cracked, the owner parked it. Surprisingly, the interior was in perfect shape, other than needing a good cleaning. The paint? Well, that's another story. Burger and Macha have freshened the suspension and brakes and rebuilt the 2.8-liter engine. The car now gets driven on a regular basis.—Fred Larimer



been a regular attendee, has helped to prepare the car for judging. Each year five or six fellow BMW friends make the drive together up the California coast, while exploring empty two-lane roads and byways. Again, it is the journey that makes this annual event what it is: a gathering of like-minded, dedicated BMW enthusiasts who share their knowledge and extend their friendship to all who participate.

Many of us also serve as volunteers at Legends Of The Autobahn, which gives a chance to give a little something back. I have also met some great BMW owners there; it is one of those bucket-list events, along with the historic races at Laguna Seca and the Pebble Beach Concours, that make up Car Week on the Monterey Peninsula. We have also started a Clean Car Contest (now supported by the LA Chapter) as part of the Huntington Beach Concours, which has grown to 50 BMWs over the last five years.

**Roundel:** Tell us about the BMWs that you currently own.

**Macha:** Five years ago I bought a 1969 *Neue Klasse* 2000 sedan in *Atlantikkblau* from a good friend. It replaced a 1969 Manila 2002 that I had restored over five years, which I sold to another local BMW enthusiast. The 2000 is special to me, because Murray's Blue Max was



this same color, and Atlantic Blue has always been one of my all-time favorite BMW colors. Murray had a profound impact on many of us, and I consider our friendship to hold a very special place in my life.

My most recent project has been the refurbishment of a 1970 2800 sedan that languished in a garage in Riverside for 34 years with a cracked head and seized pistons. I bought it with my good friend Mike Burger, and took it to Legends last year.

I no longer have my cars judged; it is much more appropriate, at least to me, that contests and awards feature other worthy examples brought to share by their owners—people who have the same passion for the marque that I have. **R**

**1973 3.0CS coupe:** As Macha notes in his profile, his E9 started out in Southern California and then migrated to the Great Northwest prior to his acquiring it in 2005. A May 1973 build, it was one of the last small-chrome-bumper coupes built for the U.S. market. The coupe has been treated to a comprehensive restoration, with the bodywork and paint in the original Malaga color having been done by the crew at the Coupe King in Wilmington, California. Originally an automatic, it now has a five-speed overdrive transmission—one of the best upgrades that can be made to a coupe. Other than that, strict originality was the focus of its restoration, down to the color of the air cleaner and the correct decals—and even hose clamps. While not original, the staggered sixteen-inch Alpina wheels really complete the look.

Macha's coupe continues to evolve, and will soon see a freshening of the M30 engine, which was replaced sometime in the 1980s with a BMW long block. Soon it will get a 3.5-liter M30B35 engine with Motronic fuel injection, ported intake manifolds, and larger intake runners, which should boost horsepower to around 240 from the original 170 found in U.S. coupes—nothing radical, but this will provide gobs of enjoyable torque, and make for an even more enjoyable ride long into the future.—*Fred Larimer*

**1990 325iC convertible:** Acquired by Macha early in 2013 as a "thank you" to his wife, Shawn. A 12/89 build, the cabriolet is essentially stock except for a C43 radio conversion, the addition of fifteen-inch Nogaro silver basketweave wheels, and an M-Tech steering wheel installed by the prior owner. A five-speed with manual top and heated seats, this is one of the nicest E30s around—and the nicest one I ever owned.

Yes, I'm the one who sold them the car! After Macha parted with his 1960 Ponton Mercedes sedan and a BMW motorcycle, I half-jokingly said something to the effect that Shawn would look great in a convertible. Macha asked if I was kidding, and I said I wasn't—so we made arrangements for them to borrow the cabrio for the weekend, and they decided to keep it. I do get visitation rights, though!—*Fred Larimer*

