

Royal Road Rally

“**R**ALLYING BEHIND A CAUSE is good for the soul,” says Benjamin Kwitek, founder of *El Camino Real 1000* (www.elcaminoreal1000.com), a three-day driving excursion from San Diego to Sonoma. Kwitek may mean “rallying” in the classic car sense of the word, and as any automotive aficionado will affirm, a vintage car rally is a rite of passage into an anointed realm of spirited car collectors.

That’s because not just *any* car is eligible, Kwitek explains. “Participation in the *El Camino Real 1000*—what we will affectionately call the ‘Conquistadores Club’—is limited to 21 inaugural entrants,” he says. The rally will be historic not only in terms of the cars that will be accepted, but also in the nature of the roads they traverse. *El Camino Real*—“The Royal Road” or “King’s Highway” in Spanish—refers to the 600-mile-long (or roughly 1,000 kilometers, hence the event’s name) California Mission Trail, which connects 21 missions, four presidios, and several pueblos. To reach their destination, the cars will need to travel approximately 200 miles per day across some of the most picturesque scenery California has to offer.

The journey begins at San Diego’s Keating Hotel by Pininfarina, a renowned designer shared with many of the likely automotive assemblage. After leaving the red-tile-and-adobe architecture of Mission San Diego de Alcalá, the rally moves north along the trail-cum-California-highway-system: through the hills of Malibu, the ranchlands of Santa Barbara, the heart of San Francisco, and finally on to Mission San Francisco Solano in Sonoma. Along the way, travelers will stop only for refreshments, mission tours, the occasional time trial, and four nights of accommodation in five-star hotels.

Like Italy’s Mille Miglia, points will be awarded along the route, and a winner will be declared, though Kwitek maintains that this is more a competition of style than speed. “It’s basically a moving concours, where the underlying idea is just to have fun,” Kwitek says. “We’ve asked Patrick Dempsey to be the grand marshal,” he adds, and a few other notables, including Kwitek’s friend Captain Kirk—William Shatner—will be among the invited guests.

In the spirit of living long and prospering, the *El Camino Real 1000* supports its namesake trail by donating a portion of the \$50,000 entrance fee to the California Missions Foundation—an organization dedicated to the preservation of these historical monuments—among other charities. Those who give shall also receive. Each team will obtain an appropriate timepiece to commemorate their founding status: Wyler Genève’s latest limited edition, the *El Camino Real Chronograph* (see page 30) is one of many souvenirs participants will take home.



The rally is set to take place in late May or early June of 2009, and admittance is on a first-come, first-serve basis. Interested parties should first race to sign up online at www.elcaminoreal1000.com. Then peruse some of the other goodies this issue has to offer—from Les Ateliers Ruby helmets (page 68), to Lamborghini driving gloves (page 76), to Michael Toschi driving shoes (page 80), we have you covered from head to toe.

GREGORY ANDERSON
EDITOR

Designed by Pininfarina and located in San Diego’s Gaslamp District, the Keating Hotel is the first stop on the El Camino Real 1000.