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When is the 2008 Pan Am Race?

**Welcome! This will be 21st year for the “modern” Pan Am, La Carrera Panamericana. The Organizing Committee in Mexico promises another exciting event. They invite you to “Live the Legend” of the Pan Am!**

The race will start at 8:00 AM, Friday, Oct. 24, in Tuxtla Gutierrez. The race will end seven days later, on Thursday, Oct. 30 in Nuevo Laredo -- across the river from Laredo, Texas. It will cover approximately 2000 miles of paved roads mostly through the central, mountainous part of the country. A “pre-qualification” or time trial is scheduled for Oct. 23 in the afternoon to determine the starting order.

What is the official status of the Pan Am Race?

The Pan Am is sponsored by the Government of Mexico’s Department of Tourism and supported by the Mexican Federal Highway Patrol. Several Federal Highway Patrol members, including senior officers, travel with the race. They coordinate with local police to close the roads for our speed stages and to provide security for the race participants and support crews.

The Mexican Federation of Auto Sports (FMAD) sanctions the event. The Federation issues mandatory Mexican racing licenses to all competitors for an additional \$280. Local car clubs provide volunteer workers in their areas.

How much is the entry fee and what do you get for it?

For information about the entry fee and costs please e-mail [gbleldso@aol.com](mailto:gbleldso@aol.com) or call 650-867-9488. The fee covers one car in the race (driver and co-driver) and:

- (1) the administrative expenses of the race
- (2) one first class hotel room for eight nights for the driver and co-driver
- (3) receptions, some evening meals, and entertainment
- (4) event souvenirs
- (5) decals and route books for the race car and service vehicle.

The registration fee is non-refundable. If you cancel in writing by June 1, the entire amount minus \$500 will be rolled over as credit toward 2009. If you cancel before Sept. 1, half credit for 2009 will be granted. After Sept. 1, there will be no refund nor credit. The registration fee will be refunded, of course, if your entry or car is refused entry by the Organizing Committee, but not if it fails inspection.

Please read “[Entry Process](#)” for details about paying the entry fee. Also note that any car or entry may be refused by the Organizers. In this event, all deposits and fees will be refunded.

You should also understand that the Pan Am is an auto race and it dangerous for all competitors. It is great fun, but it requires close attention to safety features in the car and safe driving at high speed. It is highly recommended that all competitors who have never held a racing license enroll in one of the several racing schools in the US for their multi-day course leading to a SCCA or vintage racing license.

### What's involved in a typical Pan Am day?

The race starts most days at 8:00 AM and ends around 4:00 PM at the final destination city. A mid-day break for lunch and servicing the cars is included in the daily schedule. There is a Drivers' Meeting each night around 9:00 PM, and usually some form of social activity. Many crews find it necessary to work on their cars in the evening.

Overnight stops are in major cities (most with airport access) and the hotels are usually first class. You won't forget the hospitality of Mexico and its people!

Along the way you will stop in larger towns to show off your car, meet local car club members, sign autographs, and hoist a few Coronas. A few Pan Am cars may make the front page of the local paper. This may be your promised fifteen minutes of fame! Enjoy! Bring a small camera to take your own snapshots. The locals do not seem to mind, because they will be taking your picture!

### What kind of road race or rally is the Pan Am?

The Pan Am operates in a time-to-distance (T/D), pro-rally format. Each car is given a detailed Route Book for the seven days. The route is divided into "transit" and "special stages." The special stages are the speed sections. The transit stages lead the cars from one special stage to another through regular traffic. All sections are run on paved roads. There is no racing through towns and cities.

Before the special stages the cars check-in at a control station, line up in proper order, and start in 30 intervals. The fastest cars start first each day. Occasionally, one car will pass another car during a speed section, but all cars are running against the clock.

At the end of the week, the cars with the lowest elapsed time in the special stages, plus any penalty (time) points, will be awarded trophies by class and overall. There are no cash prizes, only bragging rights. Over the seven days, your car will run from three to four hours at racing speed. The rest of your driving time will be spent in transit sections averaging 60-70 MPH.

Time penalties are imposed for arriving too early or too late for the speed sections and other infractions. The penalty is much less for being a little late than being early. You may be up to one minute (59 seconds) late to a speed section before incurring a time penalty.

Each speed section has a stated maximum amount of time allocated for it in the Route Book. If a car fails to start or complete a speed section, the crew is given the maximum time allotted. Many cars miss one or two speed sections or fail to complete a section within the allotted time during the race, so this limit helps to keep them competitive.

No race can be won without crossing the finish line. Completing the Pan Am is a significant accomplishment. When you reach the finish line in Nuevo Laredo, regardless of your rank in the standings, you will know that you have succeeded where many others have failed.

During these seven days you will enjoy racing your car at high speeds over a closed road with thousands of spectators (and cops) along the way urging you to go faster. There are no "county Mounties" with radar guns lying in wait. It's you, you co-driver, and the car. The only limit is your good sense and understanding that you must finish the race first, before you can claim success or victory!

### What are the "transit" sections like?

The transit sections can be long stretches of road between the speed stages. You will be in traffic with large trucks and "civilian" cars. In towns along the way the local police facilitate getting the Pan Am cars through quickly. But watch out for spectators. You do not want to hit a spectator, a local's car, or donkey!

Try to stay with other Pan Am cars in the transit stages, but do your own navigating. The Mexican Carrera crews usually know where they're going. Keep bottled water and some snacks in your car. Also carry at least 2000 pesos (\$186 USD) in small bills and coins for gas, toll roads, food, tips, and repairs. Most gasoline stations do not take credit cards. Carry your passport, driver's license, credit card, etc. in a safe place. If you have special medical needs, wear a medical ID bracelet. Mark it on your helmet and driving suit.

Watch out for the "topes!" Topes (tow-pays) are speed bumps. Every Mexican town has them, and some are immense! This is why you do not want to lower your car. Normally, you can slow down and go across them at an angle. Some cars have skid bars on the front end to slide the car over. The local children will sometimes stand by the topes, because they know you will slow down. So watch for them crossing the road. Most of the topes are listed in the Route Book. However, sometimes they will add and remove them without warning.

Please, do not toss anything out of a moving car window that will attract the children. Someday a kid is going to get hit by a car as he reaches for a card or piece of candy tossed out of a Pan Am car.

### Do I need a real race car?

No. Just about any mechanically sound car made from 1940 through 1965 can compete and finish the Pan Am, if driven wisely. Safety rules and regulations apply to each class of competition car. Please read these rules before you buy a car or especially before you modify it! All cars and modification must comply with the rules and are subject to the approval of the organizers. Cars that run in the event should be "street legal" in most states. The Organizers are not really picky about cars, so come on down!

Any American or European car made from 1940 through 1965 that remains essentially "stock," with the required safety equipment, may enter the race in the Historic classes. Problems start when you install a more modern or larger engine than available in that car in 1965.

### What are the classes of cars?

There are eight classes divided into two big groups: "Competition" and "Historic."

Only cars made from 1940 through 1954 are eligible for the "Competition" group. Some are allowed significant modifications. The fastest class, Turismo Mayor, runs NASCAR level engines (360 c.i.), semi-tubed bodies, modern front suspensions, long trailing-arm rear suspensions, etc. They are hot rods that look like old cars. It will cost \$75,000 to \$175,000 to build a competitive car in this class. In Sports Mayor, you can also install a modern engine.

Cars made from 1955 through 1965 are in the "Historic" classes--a much more stock group. The Historics are subdivided into three groups based on their number of cylinders (4-6-8).

There is also a separate class for Original Pan Am cars--essentially stock cars made from 1940 through 1954. Some later, original cars may also qualify. Replicas should have the same body material and the basic configuration as the original car.

The classes are:

(1) Original Pan Am: cars like those that ran the original race in 1950-1954 – with minimal modifications for safety.

Competition:

(2) Turismo Production – sports sedans, 1930-1954, original engines, 305 c.i. limit, specified performance modifications.

- (3) Turismo Major – sports sedans, 1930-1954 (the “top” class), 360 c.i. limit, specified performance modifications.
- (4) Sports Minor – sports cars, 1930-1954, up to 2001 c.c. specified modifications.
- (5) Sports Major – sports cars, 1930-1954, over 2001 c.c. specified modifications.

Historic:

Cars made from 1955 through 1965, original-era engines bored up to .004.

- (6) Historic A – four cylinders
- (7) Historic B – six cylinders
- (8) Historic C – eight and twelve cylinders

#### What’s required to run a car in the Historic class?

The “Historic” class includes American and European cars made from 1955 through 1965. This is primarily a stock class. All cars must install basic safety equipment, including a full six-point roll cage with a “halo” bar over the drivers’ heads, a bar across the top of the windshield, and at least one across the doors. Five-point seat belts are required. Certain modifications and upgrades in mechanical components are permissible such as disc brakes, modern master cylinders, improved ignition and cooling systems, and "period" speed enhancing options, "export packages," etc. But these cars must maintain the original style engine, and displacement. Alloy heads are not allowed unless factory equipment. Aluminum intake manifolds are allowed. Independent rear suspension cannot be added. Shocks may be modern and adjustable, but they must be in the original location. Suspension and steering arms should be stock pieces. They may be reinforced.

The rules will be applied honestly and fairly. They are designed and administered to level the playing field (race track?). The basic rule for all classes is – one car will not be allowed a significant technical advantage over the other cars in that class. Many of the restrictions on the cars are designed to slow them down and make the Pan Am a safe event. Numerous accidents and serious injuries may threaten the continuation of the race. Good brakes, fresh seat belts, and a strong roll cage are imperative!

If you have any doubt about your car or any modification, please contact the North American Coordinator or the Organizers in Mexico City, since they have the final word.

#### What are the Competition classes?

Competition cars must be manufactured before 1955 and are permitted modifications such as four-wheel disc brakes, larger or later model motors, and 5 speed transmissions. They are divided into four classes: (1) small production sedans: straight 4,6, and 8 cylinder motors, flat-head V8's, and certain OHV V8's up to 305 cu. in.; (2) large production sedans: up to 360 cu. in.; (3) small sports cars: up to 2000cc and (4) “open” sports: over 2000cc. Carburetor sizes are limited for all classes. Read the rules for each class carefully. Special or unique cars (limited production) must be specifically approved.

The organizers may re-classify cars to promote competition. Some “special” cars from the 1940-1955 era may run with the Historic classes.

Certain replicas are also allowed to run in the sport car classes. Normally, they must be made of the same body material as the original and have the same engine displacement. It is also possible to use modern engines in the sports class, as long as the number of cylinders is the same.

#### How should I select and prepare a car to run in the Historic (1955-1965) classes?

Most competitors, especially in their first year, will opt to run in the Historic classes. There are two choices to consider:

1. You can purchase a car that has run the Pan Am before. It probably has the roll bar, etc., and may just need tuning. (See the [Classified Ads](#) on this web site.)

2. Prepare one yourself. You'll need six months, at least. Do not wait to get started.

The car must be manufactured and titled for the 1955-1965 model years and be capable of being driven at 70-80 MPH for about 250 miles daily for seven days. The roads are paved but there are rough sections occasionally. Massive quantities of Loc Tight are recommended!

The car must have a six-point roll cage, five-point seat belts, window nets, plus a fire system. It's that simple.

In a limited number of cases, models of cars made after 1965 are allowed to enter, if they are essentially the same in appearance and performance as a 1965 model. (A 1966 Mustang with a 289 engine, 1967 Corvette with a 327, or 1968 Porsche 912 are three good examples of this "continuation" rule.)

Pick a car that you want to drive on the street after the race or in vintage racing. You might want to take it to car shows or other rallies in the off season. Hemmings, Auto Trader.com, eBay, and your local newspaper are sources of eligible cars.

Four-door cars from this era are a lot cheaper and actually better for the Pan Am than coupes. The rear doors of a sedan allow easy access to the back-seat area for a properly mounted spare tire and gear. The top is stronger and often they weigh less than the coupe.

Body condition -- is not a major priority. Minor rust and dents can be removed with a hammer and filler. Look for one with good glass as windshields for old cars can be expensive. Missing chrome pieces, trim etc., can be added later. This is not a concours, but all cars should be presentable (no primer). Smaller flaws can be covered with racing decals! An Earl Scheib \$199.00 paint job will cover multiple flaws. Just add a few vinyl graphics and you'll have a Panam racer! The names, hometowns, and blood types of the driver and co-driver can be applied with vinyl letters, or painted on the car in Mexico for a few bucks.

The interior-- is not a priority. If the seats are really gross, pick up a set of comfortable buckets from a salvage yard (\$50). Headliner, door panels etc., are up to you. Completely gutted cars may enter. Pull out the back seat to install the roll cage and provide more storage room. Install a couple of hooks behind your seat on the cage to hang your helmets during the transit stages. A small cooler for food and water is useful.

Beverage cup holders are good, along with a cup for change (coins).

Engine-- If you are not doing the work yourself, you can wind up spending a ton of money on an engine. Do not try to build a race motor for this class. Keep it basically stock, as reliability rather than horsepower, is the key. "Hot rodding" it will stress the other components and risk mechanical problems. Because of the mountain roads, good cooling and compression are essential. Gas quality becomes less an issue. Cars that weighed less than 2800 pounds when manufactured must have a 500 CFM two-barrel carb in the Historic C class for V8s, the most popular North American class.

Suspension-- must be a major priority. Shocks, springs, wheel bearings, bushings, tie-rods, ball joints, steering gear, and related components must be checked thoroughly and replaced if necessary. You do NOT want any of these parts to fail while going around a corner in the mountains of Mexico! Do not lower your car, because Mexican speed bumps will knock off your pan, mufflers, or suspension components.

The race is won by your times in the twisty sections of road. Handling is everything. Stiff springs and good shocks are the key. So get some miles on the car. Practice getting around corners fast! Don't worry much about top speed. Remember, finishing the race is most important. Next in importance is good, consistent, and smooth driving. Third is speed. Too much of the latter causes mechanical failure and wrecks.

Brakes-- Replace everything if there is the slightest possibility of failure. A car is only as good as its brakes. A dual master cylinder is encouraged but not mandatory. If it is a drum-brake car and you plan on driving it hard, bring along a couple of extra sets of brake shoes. Have them installed properly. You can have these changed anywhere at a very reasonable cost if you have the parts. Under the rules, front and rear disc brakes can be added to Carrera cars. Disc brakes are a much better coming down mountain roads because they do not fade as fast as drum brakes. Bring an extra set of pads. Consider a harder, more durable pad to provide longer service. Porterfield and other companies sell a pad that is between a street pad and a competition pad. Competition pads often do not work well until they get hot, so sometimes they are not effective in the mornings around town!

Other components to address:

Cooling-- It is harder to cool an engine at high altitude because of the thin air. So boil or re-core that old radiator, or get a new, larger one. Replace the hoses. Got a fan shroud? If the car is prone to overheating, add an electric fan operated by a switch or thermostat.

Electrics-- Replace the old system if possible. Install a new battery and cables, at least. Make sure the alternator is charging properly. A new voltage regulator might be a good idea. If it is a 6-volt system, a spare 12-volt battery and a set of jumper cables are a good idea to fire it up.

Heater-- Not necessary, but try to have one for the defroster.

Windshield wipers-- Necessary. Make sure they work although we usually experience little rain during the event. Consider applying a coat of Rain X, too.

Lights-- Headlights and taillights. Make sure they work. There is no night driving scheduled, but you may have to do some if you have suffered a breakdown and are running late. Directional signals and flashers are very useful.

Horn-- Important. The louder the better! Occasionally, you will need it to scare the horses, cattle, sheep, chickens, and urchins off the road.

Fuel system-- A fuel cell is required for Competition cars and may be mandatory in the Historic and Pan Am classes in 2008. A fuel cell (any material) can be bolted into the trunk of most cars. If so, you will need some sheet metal between the trunk and the passenger compartment. Install new racing fuel filter. A new fuel pump is cheap, so carry a spare.

Exhaust-- You can run headers and straight pipes if you want, but they are loud and the car body acts as an echo chamber. A good dual exhaust system with turbo mufflers works well. Exit them out the back of the car. Side exhausts lower your ground clearance and will get flattened on the speed bumps if mounted too low. Remember -- you must endure the noise for 2000 miles!

Transmission-- Historic cars are limited to four forward gears, unless they came from the factory with five. Some competition cars may have five. A shifter on the floor is great, while "three on the tree" is fine. Automatics are OK, but not as much fun. Automatics can be modified to shift like sticks. Make sure the tranny will help slow the car down as you come down the mountain!

Tuning-- Most of the Pan Am is run at high altitude (over 6000 feet). Carbs tuned at lower altitude pump out too much gasoline for the thin air. If you want to have fun, learn how to adjust your carb for high altitude. Most serious racers change jets or metering rods at least twice.

Tires-- Must be at least DOT approved, with a treadwear of at least 60. No "competition only" tires or shaved tires are allowed. You are also limited to 6"-7"-8" rims depending on your class. Rim width will be measured in tech. This rule is enforced to slow the cars down. The rim must be the stock diameter for your model. Aluminum wheels are allowed, but they tend to break. New steel wheels are best, with beefy lugs and lug nuts.

Limits on the tire's aspect ratio vary by class. Check the official rules. 50 series tires will be allowed in Historic C, for example.

### What about the gasoline in Mexico?

Pan Am cars must use pump gas sold at the state-owned Mexican gasoline stations, PEMEX. PEMEX Premio is 92 octane. No racing fuel should be used. You are not allowed to carry gas in the race car or in a service vehicle. A few small bottles of octane booster are allowed, but 55 gallon drums are not. In 2007 premium gas was around \$2.80 USD a gallon.

Carrera cars are required to buy gas at the Mexican service stations. There are PEMEX gas stations all along the route – no more than 100 miles apart. All stations sell “regular” or Magna unleaded 87 octane gas (green pump) and most sell the higher octane 92 version from the red pump (Premio). At high altitude, however, octane does not make much difference in performance, because you lose about 1/3 of your compression due to the thin air. Most of the race is run above 6000 feet in altitude and up to 10,000 feet!

Mexican gasoline has a reputation it does not deserve. But to be safe, install a good filtration system, and throw in a can of additive occasionally to burn out any water. Gas costs about the same or less than in the States and is sold by the liter. 3.78 liters equals one gallon. It’s customary to tip the state attendants a couple of pesos, especially if they wash your windshield. Most stations have OK bathrooms, and sell food, cokes, bottled water, etc.

Only a few PEMEX stations accept credit cards. Cash only at most of them!

### How should I run the race?

Carefully!

Start cautiously the first day or two even if you have been there a couple of time. The adrenal glands will be pumping, so be extra careful. Do not scare the sh\*t out of your co-driver the first day. It’s hard to get that stench out of his driving suit and car!

As you build confidence, your times will improve. Again, the first rule is – FINISH THE RACE! Too many cars break down or wreck because the driver exceeds the car’s and DRIVER’s capabilities. In racing terms, you should never exceed 80% of the car’s and your combined capacity. Of course, if you are only 20 seconds behind the car just ahead of you on the third day, well.....? But, please remember, you must finish the race for anything to count! Above all, be safe and finish the race!

### Do I need racing experience?

Use your common sense. Do not come to the Pan Am and try to be competitive unless you have a valid road racing or vintage racing license and sufficient experience. Also note that racing in the mountains is much different than driving around the local track at home.

Yet, this race can be great fun for amateur drivers who enjoy a careful, but “spirited” drive down a canyon road. It is highly recommended, however, that you take a three or four day session at a racing school to learn car control.

Practice driving your car “at speed” and around sharp turns for few hundred miles before coming down to the race. Learn how the car handles and how the new parts are holding together. Take it into the mountains if you can! Find out how fast you can stop the car before you lock up the brakes. Practice “panic” stops several times with the brakes hot.

Most accidents in Mexico are caused by excessive speed, followed by locking up the brakes before a curve and going straight into the ditch, rather than around the curve. It is impossible to steer a car with the brakes locked up and the tires sliding.

Another frequent mistake is going into the curve too fast and then lifting off the gas or braking – at the wrong time. This reduces the traction in the rear wheels, often sending the car in a spin. Usually the car stays in the middle of the road, headed the wrong way. The next car is due around that curve in 30 seconds! What are you going to do? Be prepared for this situation. Make sure that the co-driver is prepared to act appropriately. It may be necessary

for the co-driver to get out and push the car off the road. If the car is a danger, the co-driver should get out to signal on-coming cars to slow down with a red flag!

Check to see if the local SCCA or NASA club offers high performance driving instruction. Car clubs – BMW, Porsche, etc. -- offer competitive driving instruction, but usually not for your '64 Dodge Slant Six Dart! Take a course at one of the national racing schools.

#### Do I need a rally computer?

No, not really. An electronic digital wristwatch is about the only instrument you must have. A stopwatch might be useful if you want to time your speed runs. This rally is not about hundreds of a second. It's scored in 10ths. Many more competitive cars, however, will have Terra Trip or other rally computers. The primary advantage of a rally computer is telling you where you are in the speed sections, so you can find and read the correct instruction in the Route Book. Rally computers are difficult to install and they fail often. It is probably better to spend your money on upgrading the brakes, steering, suspension, or ignition.

Practice adding and subtracting hours and minutes, too.

#### What licenses are needed?

A valid US or European driver's license and FMAD (Mexican Racing Federation) license are required. The cost of the FMAD license is approximately \$280.00 for each member of the crew (driver and co-driver). It provides you with liability insurance while racing and limited medical expenses for 10 days. There is usually a deductible associated with the liability insurance, too.

You may start the process of obtaining your license by downloading the FMAD application from [www.femadac.org.mx](http://www.femadac.org.mx).

#### How many drivers are allowed in each car?

Each car must have a licensed driver and co-driver while in competition. But any number of drivers and co-drivers may be signed up, and rotated during the race. Anyone who rides in the car during the race must have the FMAD license – no exceptions. Only two licensed competitors may be in the car at one time during the week of competition. Cars may be disqualified or heavily penalized for violating these rules.

#### How many cars are allowed in the Pan Am?

The limit is 100 cars--counting all classes. Occasionally, a car or two will be allowed to run in "exhibition." There is a limit of 30 cars from North America (the US and Canada), 10 from Europe and the rest of the world, and 30 from Mexico. 10 modern cars run in the Unlimited Class.

#### Is a support crew necessary?

No. Some entrants drive down to the start of the Pan Am and stop along the way to take in the sights. Others have their car transported by truck to the start, and after the race, drive it home from the border. Most of what you need for the race (tools and baggage) will fit in the trunk of an old American car. A service truck and crew create another series of problems and expenses.

#### What if my car breaks down during the race?

You get it fixed and rejoin the race. After each speed section, a sweeper car and the police try to check on all missing cars. Tow trucks are generally available, or another service vehicle with a trailer will get you to the next town. Mexican mechanics will fix it. That is part of their culture. Repair – not replace – is a way of life south of the border.

Please note, however, that if your car breaks down, it is your sole responsibility to have it transported to the nearest town for repair. A list of Carrera-friendly auto repair shops in each town is usually included in the Route Book.

If the car cannot be repaired (rare), then the local officials will help make alternate travel arrangements for you.

A rescue squad, doctor, and ambulance also follow the race. Local emergency services are also present to render assistance.

#### What if my spouse, significant other, or her friends want to come along?

Arrangements can be made for spouses, significant others, and friends. Be aware, however, that the Pan Am is a difficult race to watch because the roads are closed before and immediately after the special speed sections. In other words, your friend can usually watch only one speed section each morning and each afternoon, because she/he will get trapped in front of, or behind, the race. The race really snarls up traffic during the first two days or so, so it's difficult to get ahead of it.

#### What about extra hotel rooms?

An additional hotel room for your crew members costs around \$1200.00 for the eight nights of the event. These are usually nice rooms with two double beds. The hotels sometimes charge more for more than two people. To arrange rooms for your crew (so they will be at the same hotel as you), try to decide your needs as soon as possible and place your order with the event director.

Check the [Contacts](#) page for information about reserving extra rooms in Carrera hotels.

#### How do I get my car there?

You may drive, tow, trailer, or ship your car to the start of the race. It takes about two or three days to drive from Laredo, Texas to the start of the race, assuming you get an early start the first day.

The car must be "imported" into Mexico when you cross the border. Most competitors get a tourist permit and sticker for \$30.

If you drive or tow down, avoid Mexico City during week days. They only allow you to drive four days during the workweek. On Monday, if your license plate ends with 5/6 you can't drive it, 7/8 Tues., 3/4 Wed., 1/2 Thurs., 9/0 Friday. It is a \$400.00 USD "fine" and the local police see it as a "big pay off" if they catch you. Saturday and Sunday are unrestricted days. Early Sunday morning is a good time to navigate Mexico City (a.k.a. Mexico or the Federal District). The road signs say only "Mexico" for Mexico City. OK, some say Mexico Ciudad or Mexico cd.

For the past six years we have operated the Coyote Convoy from Laredo to the start of the race. Strength in numbers!

You also must avoid towing a car on expressways through town anywhere in Mexico. Trailers are supposed to be used on the service roads. Again, it's a big "fine" if caught! One driver paid a \$400 "fine" and got a police escort to the outskirts of town! Some drivers circumnavigate the whole city. Study a map carefully, and you can see a route that runs around the northern part of this huge city.

You may also have your car shipped by commercial truck to the start of the race. The Pan Am organizers and North American coordinator will make announcements about these plans during the summer. Your car should be ready to load on the truck anywhere in the States by October 1 to ensure a timely arrival in Mexico. The cost will range from \$4500-5000, down to the start and back from Laredo. The cost of shipping a car to Laredo, Texas from points in the USA will vary enormously. You may also ship a service truck, like a Tahoe, down with your racecar for about the same price as the car.

Mechanical support can also be arranged in Mexico.

## What about the border crossing?

It is highly recommended that you cross into Mexico at Nuevo Laredo, across from Laredo, Texas. The race is well known in Nuevo Laredo and the Pan Am has friends among the Mexican Custom officials there. The road from Nuevo Laredo to Mexico City is also excellent--the best available.

For most Pan Am crews, there are two separate procedures to endure at the border: entering the country as tourists and importing the racecar, tow truck, and trailer.

Entering as tourists. This is the fun part. Entering and exiting Mexico as a tourist does not require a passport, if you are a US citizen but it is recommended since 9/11. But if you do not have a passport, everyone must have a photo I.D. and an official copy of their birth certificate. Other forms of I.D. will sometimes suffice: voter registration card, generic photo ID, naturalization papers, notarized affidavit of citizenship, etc. If a member of your crew does not have at least one of these documents and a driver's license, your crossing could be delayed. (You will also need proof of citizenship or green card to re-enter the U.S.)

Obtain your tourist visa after you cross the border. (Look for the "migration" office.) After you fill out the form and have it stamped, you will actually pay \$22 for it at any local bank. Get your tourist visa first, before trying to import your vehicles. (A visa is necessary to travel more than 15 miles into Mexico, except in Baja.)

After you get you visa, wandered down the hall to the office marked "Banjercito" to get your automobile permits.

Importing the race car, truck, and trailer. This can be tricky, so be patient. Because you will be driving your racecar and truck more than 15 miles south of the border, the vehicles must be officially imported. Be well prepared. This process is necessary to prevent the smuggling of stolen cars and to protect the Mexican auto industry. Currently you have two options:

- (1) import the race car, tow truck, and trailer yourself--with a trusted friend, or
- (2) use the services of the Mexican Federation of Auto Sports (FMAD) and a customs broker.

## DOING IT YOURSELF--THE MOST COMMON METHOD

.. Make absolutely sure you have the original title and original registration document for each vehicle, including your trailer. Do not show up at the border with only a copy of these documents.

.. Get your personal tourist visa first. Make a copy of it (there's a booth nearby), and go to the Banjercito window. Be calm. Plan on two hours to complete the process.

.. Make two photocopies of everything: title, registration, driver's license, credit card, passport, etc. A credit card in the car owner's name is needed to post a \$200-500 bond to ensure that you that you will bring the vehicles out of the country. This amount is not charged against your credit card until you fail to take the vehicle out of Mexico.

.. Currently, one person may import only one motor vehicle a year into Mexico. So, if the racecar and tow vehicle are titled in one person's name, you need to have one of them re-titled and registered in another person's name who will be at the border crossing—with the proper documents, too. (You cannot use an affidavit for this purpose.)

.. The cost for this will be around \$30 for each motor vehicle.

.. Trailers are imported as part of the truck. No separate bond is required or fee is required. You will need its title and registration. The trailer information will be written on your truck's import permit.

.. Don't fight the process. Stand in line, be patient, and you will eventually get your papers. Think DMV. Screaming at them does absolutely no good. The offer of a racing cap, t-shirt, or other non-monetary token of your

appreciation will be far more effective. Eventually, you will be given a sticker for your racecar and truck. Put them on your front windshield behind the rearview mirror. They will be checked along the way.

.. You may pre-register for importing your car and truck via the internet at [www.banjercito.com](http://www.banjercito.com).

You may also obtain a tourist visa and vehicle permits at several Mexican consulate offices in the USA, primarily in California, Arizona, and Texas.

Please note: getting your car across the border is your responsibility. Officials of the race will help, but they cannot guarantee that your car and truck and documents will be accepted.

## THE OTHER OPTION--THE FMAD-BROKER PROCESS

The use of the FMAD (Mexican auto racing federation)-broker process is recommended when the vehicles are owned by a company or arriving in Vera Cruz. First, you must obtain and complete the FMAD import forms, and send them back to FMAD in Mexico City. FMAD will process these forms that authorize your car and truck to be imported for racing purposes. This service costs approximately \$170 per vehicle. FMAD will send the forms to a customs broker in Laredo or other port of entry and will send a copy to you. The form may be downloaded via internet at [www.fedemac.org.mx](http://www.fedemac.org.mx). Their fax number is 011 52 55 5254-0157.

Second, you will pay the designated customs broker between \$300-500 (negotiable) for importing your racecar and tow rig. This service is available only during the regular workweek. A list of brokers will be made available.

It is highly recommended that entries arriving in large trucks (more than 10,000 lbs), many spare parts, and/or a lack of key documents use the services of a customs broker. Please note that the customs broker does not usually work on Saturday and Sunday.

### What about car insurance in Mexico?

North American and European car insurance is not valid in Mexico. You must buy Mexican insurance to cover your race car and tow truck. Buy liability, collision, and comprehensive based on the combined value of your tow truck and trailer. Buying insurance on the race car is required. AAA offices have access to Mexican insurance or inquire with your Northern American carrier. You can also buy it on the US or Mexican sides of the border -- at several shops along the highway, or on the Internet. When racing only, liability on your race car is covered by the FMAD policy, subject to a deductible.

Most regular insurance companies will never insure a race car, even for the trip down on a trailer. Never tell them why you are driving your '65 Shelby Mustang to Oaxaca for any reason other than to see the Mayan ruins! As you know, no regular car insurance covers it while its being used in competition. Insurance for two weeks on a 1999 Suburban and trailer for max liability and valued at \$15,000 for comprehensive cost around \$180 in 2005. Many insurance companies will not cover old cars. (Try [www.bajabound.com](http://www.bajabound.com).)

There are companies that will issue umbrella insurance (liability) policies on you and your race car. The cost is around \$1000.

When you are racing, you and your racecar are covered by a limited amount of third-party liability insurance. You may be required to pay a large deductible or post a bond, upwards to \$10,000 USD, if you have an accident and cause damage or injure someone.

### How much will traveling in Mexico cost me?

An estimate of overall expenses is:

- Gas for transport from Texas to Tuxtla Gutierrez 1,700 miles at \$2.80 per gallon. Add \$200-300 for tolls. The latter amount really depends on which route that you take. If you are towing a car or trailer, the tolls double. You can buy pesos at the border. Keep the toll receipts.

- Hotels on way down for crew: one or two night's @ \$100. All good clean places with inside security parking. Use a good tourist guide, AAA, or book them on the Internet. Most American hotel/motel chains have properties in Mexico. Also try Best Western. If you arrive early in Oaxaca, before Thursday night, you will also have to pay for the extra nights. The Carrera race "package" starts Thursday night before the race starts and ends the next Thursday night in Nuevo Laredo (eight nights). Rooms for extra nights usually cost around \$150.
- Budget \$50.00 per day per person pocket/food money during the race. Sometimes there's a Mexican meal provided at the driver's meeting each night. Not always, but usually. You'll pay for breakfast and lunch most days, plus snacks, bottled water, etc. Professional "companionship" is not included in these estimates!

#### What are some tips for traveling south of the border?

Money. Exchange your money after you arrive in Mexico at a bank or exchange shop since the rate of exchange is better. Most of the hotels will also change money. Most cities have ATMs but sometimes they severely limit the amount of pesos that can be withdrawn. Use the ATMS inside the lobby of the bank. The exchange rate will be posted in the hotel lobby and at the banks. Usually it is around 10.7 pesos to the dollar and it has been as high as 12. Sometimes the locals will accept American dollars for gas or an item. Carry a small calculator with you to calculate the cost in dollars. Hand it to the person selling the item and let them figure it out for you. Don't hurry. (Divide the amount of pesos by the exchange rate.) You won't have any problems if you take your time. US dollar bills can be used widely in northern Mexico, especially at the gas stations and toll booths, but the exchange rate is not good. But when you get down south, they will accept only pesos.

Please note: normally, you cannot buy gas on a credit card. Otherwise, credit cards (VISA/MC) are widely accepted, especially at better restaurants and stores.

Inspections. There are drugs and weapons (anti-terrorist) inspections and army roadblocks throughout Mexico. Most soldiers have machine guns, but don't be intimidated or scared. They are there for your protection. They will ask to see your passport and car importation documents. They tend to be officious but polite. Keep smiling. Agricultural inspections are normally waived.

Illegal fines and fees. Keep a \$100 bill on hand at all times. Eventually everyone that drives south of the border will commit a traffic "infraction" of some sort. Normally, you will be pulled over by a local traffic cop. If the officer asks you to pay the fine to him on the spot, this is the practice of "mordida," taking a "bite" (bribe). He will ask a gringo for \$200. Sometimes, you can negotiate the "fine" down, if you are persistent and patient. The Mexican Government is running a new campaign to stop "mordida," but it will take a few more years (decades?) to eradicate this unsettling custom. But the option is to go down to the police station and pay the fine.

It's a great adventure just getting to the start of the race. Be cool, take your time, don't panic, kick back, and enjoy yourself. Mexico is a wonderful place, just about everyone in the country is happy to see you, and they love the Pan Am race. If you need something, just ask for it. The locals will try to accommodate you. Most young people speak some English. As long as you can smile and say "gracias," they will bend over backwards to help you, even old gringos!

#### What about our hotels in Mexico?

Usually there are three or four hotels for the Pan Am people in each city. One will be designated as the HQ hotel. It is possible to find out your hotel assignment ahead of time, but you may not find out until you arrive. The organizers will attempt to supply the phone and fax numbers of your hotels before the race. The hotels are usually first class or luxury – with purified water systems. Maps of the cities with the locations of the hotels are normally provided to each Pan Am and service vehicle. Check this web site under [Travel Info](#).

#### Can I drink the water and eat the food?

Yes, mostly. The water in the hotels is filtered and purified for tourists. And you do not have to worry about their food. Outside of the hotels and better restaurants, follow these simple rules:

- (1) drink only water, cokes, juices, etc. out of sealed bottles or cans that you open yourself.

(2) eat only hot, prepared food and never eat cold seafood dishes.

(3) eat no salads (greens) and only fruit that you peel. Or wash it first with bottled water.

If you get sick, go to the drug store (farmacia) and ask for stomach medicine for "la turista." They will give you an antibiotic to stop it fast. Keep drinking water. But follow the directions on the label. Most pharmacists speak English. Some people take two Pepto-Bismol tablets in the AM and PM, and drink lots of lime juice to ward off illness. Vast quantities of tequila also seem to contribute to "the runs." If you get the "typical" illness, it is critical that you get the right medication and drink lots of fluid. Just the change in altitude will make some people feel really bad.

Drinking to excess at night and trying to race the next day is not a good plan.

#### What should I do when I arrive in Tuxtla Gutierrez?

First, go to the race headquarters hotel. Find the Carrera desk. You will receive hotel info for eight nights, if you do not have this info already. They can also give you directions to where the cars are being prepared. If you arrive one or two days early, you will need to pay for the extra nights in the hotel, if you have not paid already.

Next: find the place where the cars are being prepared. Usually, the parc fermé is located nearby. This where your do you (brief) medical exam, get your FMAD license, and numbers and decals for your car. Go through registration first. It's the longer line. Then go through the medical. Finally, get your car and racing gear (suits, helmets) inspected. Car numbers will be assigned sequentially for each class. If you want a specific number, submit a written request with your entry form.

The official vinyl number decal or placard must remain on your car throughout the race. This allows Timing and Scoring to track you daily and to account for missing cars. If you fail to pass through a checkpoint, sweeper crews and the police will be alerted to look for you. You may be disqualified if you lose your numbers.

Make sure that the sides of your car are clean and wet when you affix them. In recent years, the organizers have supplied young men who apply the decals. Use a credit card to get out the air bubbles. They may be trimmed to fit smaller door or spaces. If you have a chrome "spear" down the middle of the door, cut the number decal in half, and affix the halves above and below the spear. Bring along some racer's tape, so you can stick them back on if necessary.

The names of the driver and co-driver, hometowns, and blood types should also be on each side of the car. Your name, blood type, and allergies should also be on your helmet and uniform. Mexican sign painters, who hang out at the fair grounds during this week, will paint this information on your car for a modest fee. They will also add "La Carrera Panamericana" to the roof, and other symbols (flags) and slogans as you desire. They can also paint your name and info on your helmets. Normally, you can have all of this done for around \$100 USD.

You may place your sponsor's decal on your car. Anything written or displayed on your car should be in good taste.

#### How thorough is the technical inspection?

The inspectors check primarily for safety and emergency equipment: full six-point roll cage, belts, fire extinguisher, spare tire, jack, first aid kit, neck braces, red warning flags, etc. They will check your helmet and driving suit. They will also review the car for compliance with the rules of the class.

If you have any doubt about your car or any modification that you have made to it, please contact the North American Coordinator. It would be most unfortunate if you were not allowed to compete after making such a long trip. But it has happened!

Helmets must be at least a SNELL 2005 (SA), or later. No motorcycle helmets. Rally helmets are OK. The driver and co-driver must wear fire resistant suits. You can get them though Racer Wholesale.com for \$100. Crews in open cars must use full-face helmets and arm restraints. Some cars and trucks have CB radio for use within the

144-148 MHz range, the Mexican band. American CBs work, too. They are also checking seatbelt dates. They should be no older than 2001.

Install and use window nets.

Your roll cage will be thoroughly checked, even the density of the metal tubing.

The displacement of your car's engines may be checked with a device at inspection or at any time thereafter. Please conform to the rules for maximum displacement for your class or model car.

#### Will we receive official instructions or orientation?

Before the race there will be a mandatory meetings for drivers and co-drivers. The co-drivers ("co-pilots") or navigators will be given special training on timing and scoring, and especially how to line up for the special stages. There will be a separate sessions conducted in English and Spanish. The night before the race, there will be a mandatory Driver's Meeting. Co-drivers also attend, along with support crew members. If they have not been handed out before, the Route Books will be distributed, time and scoring rules reviewed, and last minute information will be given out. This meeting is mandatory and if you miss it you may be assessed a two-minute penalty. Never misplace your Route Book. You will not get another!

Make absolutely sure that you understand the timing and scoring process before you leave the meeting. You may also be given a set of supplementary rules and changes to the Route Book. Make sure than you review them before the start of the race. A separate route book is given to each service vehicle, as well.

An optional time trial is conducted the day before the start of the Pan Am to determine the starting order. After the first day, the starting order is determined by overall standing.

Each car is given a starting time for each day of the race and a timing sheet. The latter is available at the starting arch in the morning. The start time for each car will also be available at the starting line (arch). Try to get to the arch around 7:00-7:30 AM depending on your overall standing. The faster cars start leaving the arch normally at 8:00 AM. The other cars are dispatched at thirty-second intervals. The start time for subsequent days is based entirely on the car's performance the previous day.

#### How fast do Pan Am cars run the special stages?

Speeds vary significantly with the class of car and the drivers. To keep up with the pack, Historic cars needs to average 60-70 MPH in the special stages—a challenge on mountain roads! Tops speeds will reach 90-110 MPH in most of these stages. Cars in the faster classes will average around 85 MPH and will reach speeds of 170+ MPH on the few straights. The fastest cars have been known to surpass 180 MPH, but such opportunities are rare. Most cars carry "lower" differential gears for pulling the mountains, thus restricting top speed. Over 80% of the special stages are over mountain roads. The long, straight sections have been reduced or eliminated to increase safety. Many dangerous downhill runs have been eliminated. Each curve is rated in the Route Book, so you will know when a dangerous curve is approaching. You will have plenty of time to test your brakes, slow the car down, and avoid the chicken crossing the road!

**Note: The answers to these FAQs do not necessarily represent official policy. They are based as closely as possible on the official rules. In case of any conflict, the actual text of the rules in Spanish govern. These FAQs will be revised as necessary. Please ask if you have other questions or suggest other questions to be answered.**

**Warning: Please understand that any form of auto racing is dangerous and by participating in this race you are solely responsible for any damage or injury. Be careful!**

Gerie Bledsoe  
North American Coordinator  
3/08