

My visit to the chaparral cars and chaparral museum essay samples

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Jim Hall, my host at the Chaparral Cars Facility, graced the races for the last time in the mid-1990s and, in 1999, to honor his achievement alongside others in the Chaparral facility, a wing was added to the Petroleum Museum in Midland (Wikipedia). This was meant to be the permanent home to the Chaparral legend. I had the privilege of visiting this museum last year, and was enthralled by what it has to offer. In the Chaparral Gallery, I encountered six of the seven existing Chaparrals; (1) the Chaparral 2 USRRC racer, (2) 2D endurance racer, (3) 2E Can-Am car, (4) 2J Can-Am “ sucker car,” (5) 2H “ White Whale” Can-Am car, and (6) 2K “ Yellow Submarine” which won the Indy 500 (ChaparralCars). All these cars are kept in operating condition so that should Hall decide to drive one to a vintage event, he need not call a mechanic. There is also a mock 2E which is positioned for the public to have their pictures taken. And also took a few photos. More interestingly, there is a section where I viewed past videos of the Chaparral in action. There are also interactive displays that demonstrate the initial concepts of the Chaparral. Here, learnt a lot about the physics of aerodynamics and racing in general. There are also photos from the past, information about past employees and drivers of the Chaparral. Numerous bits of Chaparral memorabilia are also on display. All these left me in utter amazement at the ingenuity of the engineers behind this success.

Between 2010 and 2013, I also had an opportunity to visit the Chaparral Cars facility that became famous in its heydays for pioneering innovations in aerodynamics physics of sports cars for at least five occasions. The “ man from Midland” Jim Hall proved to be a pleasant and easy to work with. For someone who is regarded by many as the pioneer in the design of sports

cars, and aerodynamics intelligence, his easy charm makes it unbelievable that he was able to achieve such fete from his small compound in then-rural Midland. Some of his concepts and ideas are still in use today, and are now looked at with amazement for he was way ahead of his time.

The Chaparral Cars, Inc. facilities and the Rattlesnake Raceway are never open to the public. It is only a few miles from the Petroleum Museum. Jim Hill is still in charge, just like he did in the 60s. It is amazing that after so many years, and the long history of the automobile industry and in the United States, this small facility has remained largely the same. The whole set up is nondescript and one would walk right past it without prior knowledge of its existence and location. It consists of four one-story buildings situated around a paved courtyard. Within one of these buildings is the dynometer that was hardy to the team during the heydays. The next structure is home to two non-Chaparral race cars that were not allowed in the museum. These are a Formula 1 Lotus which was driven at one time by Hall. The other is a Reynard which was used by the team in CART for Gil de Ferran. The walls of the buildings are dotted with trophies won by Hall and his team for the time when Chaparral was active.

Driven along the Rattlesnake Raceway by Hill himself, I could not fail to notice that the track looks pretty much as it did years ago. Largely, it has been the same as depicted on the photos from the 60s, save for grass that had grown back to the edges and the slight wear. Hall did not tire from regaling me with stories of the great racing years and about the idea of preserving the facility to date. Largely I was impressed with the views he held about Gurney, a nemesis turned friend for back then he had nothing to

do with the team but race them. I also learnt about others in the Chaparral team including mechanic Franz Weis, drivers Redman (F5000 Lola), Elford (2J and Camaro), Ronnie Hisson (1 and 2A), Robert Donner (1 and 2A) and Gil de Ferran (CART Reynard). I equally got lessons on how to handle the track and how the now-famous wing system was used.

In my opinion, the high potential shown by the Texas based Chaparral came as a result of the engineering genius of Jim Hall and Hap Sharp. Hall's construction was a mixture of composite technology drawing inspiration from the airplane industry. Thanks to the fiberglass used in improved models, the Chaparral's chassis is very compact and rigid while still extremely light at the same time. The engineer also adapted a two speed automatic gearbox from the GM Corvette which gives the car better transmission. But most interestingly, the 1967 version of the Chaparral 2F has an aero-foil wing mounted on the rear. This is high above the height of the car and can be controlled by the driver's left foot pedal.

While my visit remains largely memorable in every aspect, I will point out that I was very impressed by two Chaparrals: the 2J and the 2E. A look at the 2J gives an impression of a postmodern race car that one remains baffled by the fact that it was designed and produced in the 1960s. The oddity of its shape, with the wild air suction mechanism is totally unconventional in comparison to the cars of its time. This one remains my all-time favorite after the Tyrell P34. The 2E is also amazing on its own right. This car's simplicity and elegance is of a rare kind. Looking at the videos in the museum, it looks like a swan gliding in the air. For those who appreciate the elegance of simplicity, this car would be up there with the top contenders.

Works Cited

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