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Jour 5050

*The Last Open Road* by Burt S. Levy

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Book Report 6

 From chapter one I loved this book. Reading fiction is something I take great pleasure in, and reading well written fiction about subjects dear to me is just about my favorite thing to do in the whole world for pleasure. Before reading this book, his first novel attempt, I had not read much of Levy’s work but suffice it to say I am now a lifelong fan of both the man and his writing.

 With the exception of my first book report I really shied away from reading works by motor journalist. While my thought process for doing so was noble, I wanted to read a variety of topics and be well-rounded with my selections, I really should have read more on cars. I love it. It’s like coming home for me. It’s like slipping on your favorite jacket for the first time of the season. When I read good writing about cars it’s like a hug from grandma or seeing a good friend after a long separation. This book was a reaffirmation that I am in the right field and that I really do want to write on cars as a career.

 Burt “The World’s Fastest Novelist” Levy has been a race driver, a racing instructor, a mechanic, a shop owner, a car salesman, and a stunt driver.(Barnes, n.d., p.). Levy Dropped out of college in 1968 after which he bummed around the country doing odd jobs until the yearning for hearth and home caught up with him. When it did he moved back and bought a Triumph TR-3 and was bitten by the racing bug. “Racing was one of two things where the actual realization was better than all the dreaming and anticipation that came before.” (Levy, n.d. p.)

 Early in his career Levy began writing columns for national auto racing magazines covering major races, winning a few journalism awards, and “writing his way behind the wheel” of literally hundreds of famous old racing cars. In 1983 he began work on his first novel which took him ten years to produce. After all this effort he was turned down again and again until he and his wife decided to take out a second mortgage and publish it themselves and went on to sell out two printings before a major publisher picked the book up.(Barnes, n.d., p.)

 In a review of this book in *Library Journal* authors Block and Bryant say of Levy’s protagonist Buddy Polumbo that he “is a living reality from the first paragraph, with a style that is tough, funny, and down to earth. A sports car mechanic in the early days of the sport, the early 1950s, he lovingly dwells on Jaguars and Ferraris and MGs and on the races run on open roads and through small towns.” (Block & Bryant, 1998, p.123)

They go on to describe some aspects of the conflict outlined in the book between the WASPs who own the sport and his background as well as that of his Jewish patron Big Ed. The authors of this review recommend that you buy this book for the car lovers in your life. But they say even readers who aren’t automotive enthusiasts will come away with a better understanding of the passion by the book’s end. (Block & Bryant, 1998, p.123)

 What this rather clumsily written review was driving at was that the author really has a way of conveying his passion to the reader. In what was is some of the best automotive writing I’ve read in some time Levy recounts the first time he ever laid eyes on a Ferrari. Saying it was “the leanest, meanest, reddest, most dangerous looking chunk of metal I had ever seen in my life. It was the color of arterial bleeding and shapely as a young woman’s body, what with smooth graceful fender lines…” (Levy, 2001, p.76)

 It’s this sort of evocative language throughout the book that culled up my own memories of automotive first times. This particular passage had me thinking of the first time I walked into the exotic automotive restoration shop I worked at. I had been a car guy all my life and never heard of practically anything in there. Those sleek beauties with their racing pedigree and ultra-rare status are the things of dreams and there I was working in them, on them, every day was like going to the most excellent museum, only I could touch. I was like an exotic automotive petting zoo.

 The book was fun from beginning to end and I’m not alone in thinking so. Taking a quick look at Goodreads.com will confirm this. The reviews published there are glowing. The average rating of this book is a 4.29 of five, and ratings above four account for eighty-nine percent of ratings. (Goodreads.com, n.d.)

 To conclude I’d just like to restate how much I enjoyed getting back to the comfort of automotive journalism. I don’t think hero is too strong a word to describe how I feel about B. S. Levy. The man has followed his passion to a degree many wouldn’t dare. He gives new meaning to the do-it-yourself mentality. He is living a dream parallel to my own and for that I admire the man, a word smith with equal interest in automobiles.

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