

# Day in the life of **BURT LEVY**

Racing driver and motor sports journalist Burt Levy published his first novel about 1950s US sports car racing, *The Last Open Road*, in 1994 – and the series has now grown to four well-received books  
Author photograph: Kathy Cosgrove-Jones

**M**Y DAYS VARY a lot depending on whether I'm home writing or off signing books and giving speeches or driving somebody else's car on a race weekend. I used to be known as a bit of a party animal on those weekends, but I'm 63 now and my snap-back time has extended from overnight to several days, so I try to avoid those excesses.

My home days generally start around 5am. It's the best time to write because the house is quiet and my head hasn't filled up yet with the detail mush of everyday life. I'll do three or four hours and as many large cups of coffee but I've learned you have to keep at it even when nothing but crap is coming out. Writing requires a regimen just like an exercise programme. I'm big on those these days, too.

I get to drive a lot of famous old cars and my novels are supposedly historically accurate so I spend a lot of time doing research. But it's like every time you turn a rock over, you find something interesting underneath. And that makes you want to turn over another rock. And then another. The problem, of course, is that there are an infinite number of rocks! At some point, you've got to stop yourself and get on with the writing.

Weather permitting, I ride my bicycle to the office when I'm finished writing (about six or seven miles, depending on the route) and I like to think it squares things a little for the hydrocarbons I spew into the atmosphere on race weekends. My regular route takes me through a couple cemeteries, and sometimes I'll get ideas for new story characters from the names on the tombstones.

My office is located in Oak Park, a lovely and leafy suburb just west of Chicago. After work I often meet my long-suffering wife Carol at the health club. Carol's a lapsed comedy actress (she once worked for Chicago's famous Second City group) who took up teaching so our son could go to college if my brilliant self-publishing idea fell on its ass. I can honestly say that the books

“ EVERY PUBLISHER REJECTED MY NOVEL. WE PUBLISHED IT OURSELVES AND IT'S NOW INTO ITS SEVENTH PRINTING ”


never would have been written if not for her.

I started working on my first Buddy Palumbo novel while I was sitting around the hotel pool nursing a bad rum hangover during the 1984 Grand Bahama Vintage Grand Prix, and after eight years of poking at it, giving up in hopeless disgust and starting in again, I had the original manuscript for *The Last Open Road*. I thought it was pretty good. So I sent it off to just about every damn fiction publisher in Manhattan. They all rejected it. In the end, Carol and I took out a second mortgage and published it ourselves in 1994.

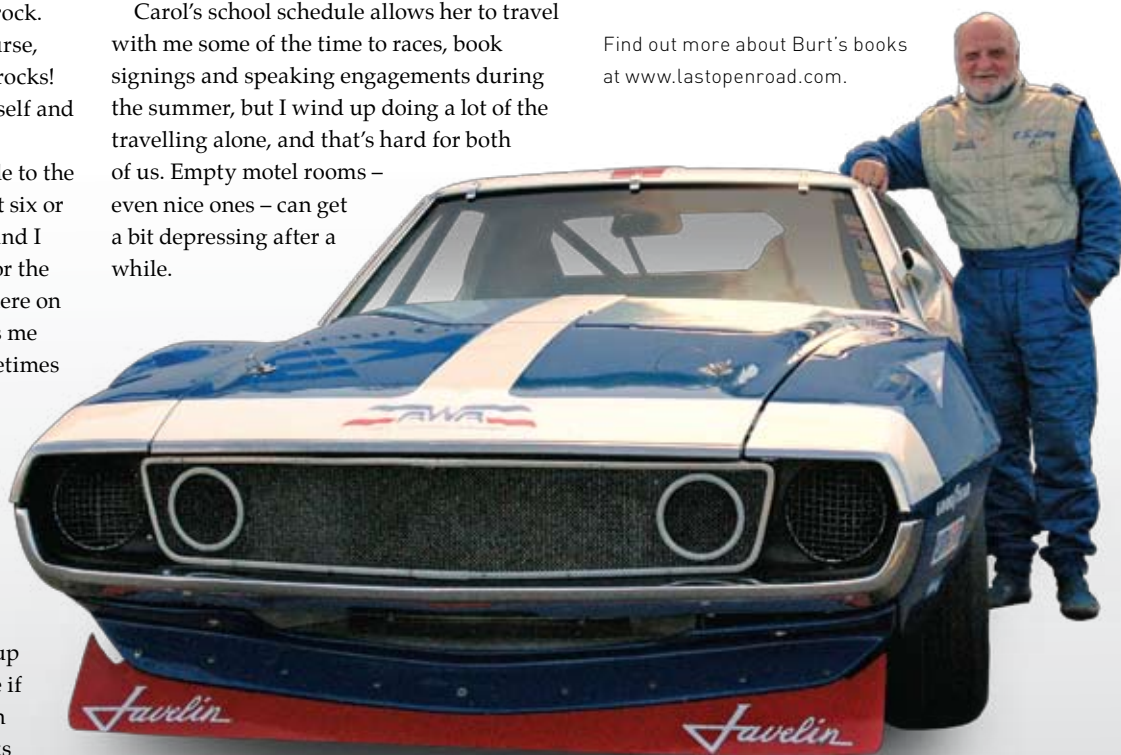
There are now four novels in my *Last Open Road* series plus a short story anthology. Best of all, the first book is heading into its seventh printing with over 40,000 copies sold. It's actually become a nice little business!

Carol's school schedule allows her to travel with me some of the time to races, book signings and speaking engagements during the summer, but I wind up doing a lot of the travelling alone, and that's hard for both of us. Empty motel rooms – even nice ones – can get a bit depressing after a while.

I started out writing about motor sports as a way to get my racing fix for free. I did a few pieces for Joe Marchetti's Road America programme, and in return he gave me a Short Wheelbase Berlinetta to race. I wrote my first-ever 'ride mooch' story about that car for *AutoWeek* and that led to other drives. Since then I've been invited to drive and race everything from Grand Prix Bugattis to Bugeye Sprites (all in the line of serious journalistic duty, of course!).

Although we both love to cook, there usually isn't time and so we get a lot of take-out on weekdays. Carol's very particular about eating healthy, but I make up for that and then some. We usually eat in front of the TV and we're generally in bed by 9 or 9.30 and asleep before the 10 o'clock news is over. 

Find out more about Burt's books at [www.lastopenroad.com](http://www.lastopenroad.com).



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