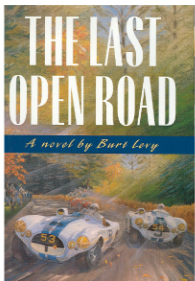


THE LAST OPEN ROAD is the story of 19-year-old gas station mechanic Buddy Palumbo, who works at Finzio's Sinclair in Passaic, New Jersey, and comes of age while being sucked headlong into the upper-crust world of open-road sports car racing during the Eisenhower fifties. "All the history in the book is as accurate as I can make it, only with my fictional characters woven into the real people and events." Burt finally finished the book in 1993 and sent the manuscript off, unheralded and un-agented, to "damn near every fiction publisher in Manhattan." They all rejected it. Some of them said that they liked the story, but felt there was "no market for 'car' fiction." Or, as one particularly snotty and arrogant young New York publishing executive told him: "THOSE people don't read...."



But Burt thought otherwise. "I mean, I had a little bit of a following from my magazine work, and I knew that there were all sorts of different styles, schools of thought, genres, sects and demographics across the motorsports spectrum, while the New York publishing types seemed to lump it all together into one loud, low-brow bunch of knuckle-draggers. And that kind of pissed me off. In fact, my entire business plan amounted to: 'I'll show YOU!'" So Burt and wife Carol took out a second mortgage and published *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* themselves in July of 1994. "Carol really backed me up on this. She was well along on a budding but not exactly lucrative acting career - she'd been in several shows, was working at Second City in Chicago and was very active in their Children's Theater program - but she gave it up and went back to school to get her teaching degree so that I could pursue this dream. I could never have done any of this if it wasn't for her support." With no advertising budget to speak of, most of the project's promotional efforts boiled down to "potty posters" taped up over urinals and inside porta-johns at race-tracks where Burt was racing somebody else's car and hawking and signing books. Fortunately word got around that nit was a good read and *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* received universally glowing reviews in the motorsports and car-enthusiast media, and Burt and Carol sold out two printings (around 12,000 copies) and *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* caught the attention of an editor at St. Martin's Press. "He'd actually read it before in manuscript form, liked it and wanted them to pick it up, but they were lukewarm on the idea and then he left to work for another publisher and it all kind of died. But now he was back at St. Martin's and convinced them that they should re-publish it for the mainstream market. The neat thing is that he wasn't a car guy at all, just someone who really liked the story and characters."

THE BOOKS:

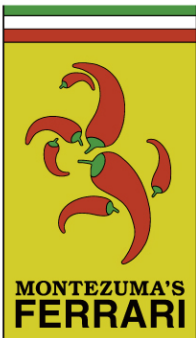
Burt started working on his first racing novel while sitting around the pool with a serious rum hangover during the week-long Grand Bahamas Vintage Grand Prix in 1986. "I'd always dreamed about writing a really good, accurate, *funny* motorsports novel - one that captured the long tows, strange characters, discouragements and disappointments, gallows humor and garage all-nighters as well as the Hero Driver stuff and the on-track *sturm und drang*." It took him eight years to finish *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* "mostly because I didn't really know how to write a novel. I just kind of charged in. And from time to time I'd get discouraged and start thinking: 'Who are you kidding? You'll never get this thing finished.' Plus I'd work on it during the winter and then racing season would roll around and I'd put it up on a shelf until late fall and then I'd take it down again and think: 'I really ought to go back to the beginning just to bring myself up to speed' and so, for the first five years, all I basically did was re-write the first 200 pages five different times! It hadn't occurred to me yet that you really have to get to the end at least once and *then* go back and fix all the things that need fixing."



"It was every aspiring novelist's dream, you know, being picked up by a major publisher. But St. Martin's didn't put a lot of time, money or effort into promoting the book, and it just never did very well in the mainstream bookstore market. In fact, we were selling more copies at racetracks and car shows than they were selling at Borders and Barnes and Noble. In any case, when I got *MONTEZUMA'S FERRARI* finished in late 1998, I was obligated by contract to send the manuscript to St. Martin's. But I sent a cover letter along with it, asking to see a marketing plan and a promotional budget. I mean, if they were just going to sell to the trackside, car show and enthusiast market I'd built up, then I didn't really need them, did I? Not to mention that they'd been bought out by that time and had kind of changed direction. They'd always been known as kind of a highbrow, literary house, but their hot title that season was *THE MONICA LEWINSKY STORY*... 'nuff said! To be fair, *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* had pretty much laid there like a kipper in the mainstream book store market. Then again, after it was off the 'New Releases' tables in the front of the stores, they'd stick it back on the fiction shelves somewhere between Doris Lessing and Sinclair Lewis rather than with the non-fiction automotive and motorsports titles. So if you didn't come into the store specifically looking for *THE LAST OPEN ROAD*, you'd never find it."



"St. Martin's had 60 days to make an offer and 90 days to sign a deal, and we wound up pretty far apart. So I told Carol we were going to go back to doing it ourselves. Only I had an idea. Why not fund a book project the same way motorsports is financed, with sponsorships and advertising? It was just one of those nutty ideas you have in the middle of the night and then you wake up the next morning and say to yourself 'nah, that'll never work...it's too SIMPLE.'" So Burt got on the phone and started pitching. And within seven-and-a-half weeks raised enough money to not only publish *MONTEZUMA'S FERRARI* but also to buy back the rights and remaining copies of *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* from St. Martin's Press! "We got tremendous support from all sorts of people and companies. And it was an easy sell because we knew who our readers were and what sort of businesses might want to reach them. And the shelf life compared to a magazine ad was incredible. Plus we made the ad/sponsorship section look like an old sports car magazine from the same era as the story and everything on the cover related to something in the novel itself. Mercedes-Benz took a full page and dug an ad out of their archives that featured the same 300SL racecar mentioned in the story. And we mixed in memorials for racing friends who had passed away and pictures of the cars in the narrative so non-car people could get a visual on them. It was really a brand-new idea and a great alternative to going to New York with your freaking hat in your hand and begging to get published. It earned *MONTEZUMA'S FERRARI* a 2000 Benjamin Franklin "Book of the Year" award for innovation and created a lot of media buzz in the publishing world. And the 'prancing chili peppers' logo that my great friend Art Eastman came up with is just priceless. Ferrari even threatened to sue us over it, so you know it was right on the mark!"



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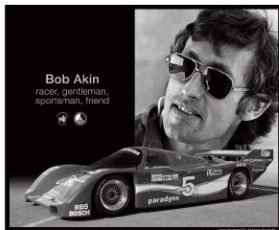
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The story line in *MONTEZUMA'S FERRARI* picks up right where *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* leaves off, and includes a shotgun-seat Ferrari ride with a rich, crazy Mexican in the 1952 *Carrera Panamericana* and a trip to the 1953 12 Hours of Sebring along with many other adventures and growing pains for Buddy. But it was the advertising and sponsorship idea that really turned everything around. All of our sponsors and advertisers got special, leather-bound editions with really nice cloisonne enameled logos on the front. We never offer those up for retail sale, but we do occasionally donate extra copies to charity auctions we want to support. A full set of the special editions went for \$2700 at one auction last year. The advertisers get good value because we've got a proven following and the books get picked up many times and passed on to friends, so the shelf life compared to monthly or bi-monthly periodicals is fantastic. And our sponsors get their names (or the name of a friend, spouse, crew chief or anyone else they want to remember) listed on the sponsorship page in the book. And that lasts pretty much forever. We always have a few memorials to racers who've passed away, and we try to spice it up a little by throwing in some insider gag ads, actual period ads and pictures of some of the cars mentioned in



- Can YOU tell if a sparkplug wire is live by touching it to the end of your tongue?
- Can YOU force a 13mm nut onto a 5/16ths U.S.S. or S.A.E. bolt?
- Can YOU pee a hole in the snow?

If you answered "yes" to any two questions, YOU could be a candidate for Thor Thorson's

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"THOSE WHO
CAN'T DO
...TEACH"

Yes, YOU could be ready for the glamorous, exciting world of bigtime automobile repair! Will you find YOUR "space in the sun" underneath a grease rack? Post-graduate employment opportunities are absolutely **GUARANTEED!** (No let a drop precipitate)

the narrative so non-car types can get a visual image of them. To be honest, it was the sponsorship and advertising idea that turned this into a viable business. Burt explains: "By that time we'd realized that the accepted business model in the publishing world was pretty much horseshit. All your costs are front-loaded, you have to give huge discounts to distributors if you want to be in the mainstream bookstore market or with amazon on the web and you have to take everything that doesn't sell back for full credit and pay freight both ways. Outside of that, it's a wonderful deal..."



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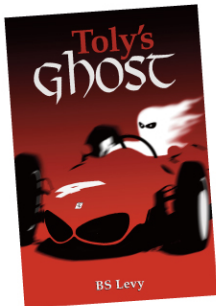
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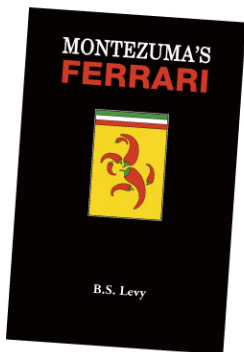
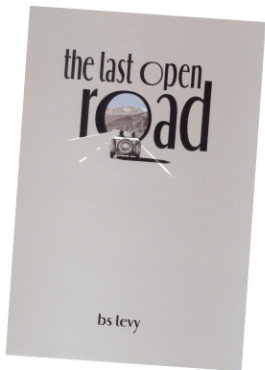
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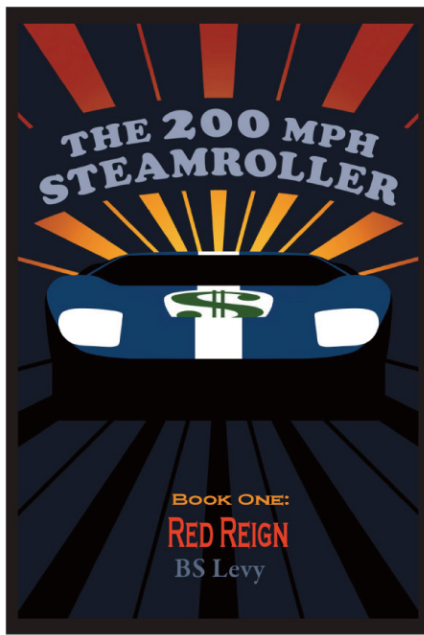




The sponsorship and advertising concept worked so well that Burt was able to press forward with additional books in *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* series, including third entry *THE FABULOUS TRASHWAGON* (Buddy builds a special, experiences the darkest day in motorsports history first-hand at Le Mans in 1955 and takes a run across the Bonneville Salt Flats among other adventures), fourth novel *TOLY'S GHOST* (a little darker, as Buddy's rich-kid-who-never-carries-any-money-in-his-pockets pal and genuine, pro-level driving talent Cal Carrington goes racing in Europe during one of the most dangerous eras in motorsports history, but still a great read) plus the sadly all-true but also utterly hilarious *A POTSDIE COMPANION* short-story anthology.



Burt's stories have achieved a pretty incredible level of success (particularly for books aimed directly at "people [who] don't read") with glowing reviews, genuine cult-classic status among racers, collectors and enthusiasts and an ever-growing fan base world-wide. They're also being used in several high school and college-level English classes and are on the recommended reading lists at many libraries. *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* is currently heading into its eighth hard-cover printing with over 50,000 copies sold, immediate sequel *MONTEZUMA'S FERRARI* is approaching its sixth printing and there have even been a few passing sniffs from Hollywood....



ads and the whole look and feel of everything. The new book was supposed to be dedicated to him as a sort of ‘get well’ card, but I’m not sure he ever got to see a finished copy.”

The finished .pdf files for *THE 200mph STEAMROLLER* left for the printer the very day Burt had to head up to Mosport to serve as Guest Speaker (and mooch drives in a few racecars, of course!) for the VARAC vintage weekend. And so began the ‘preview-edition’ book tour/ride mooching extravaganza of a lifetime:

And now, after entirely too many all-too-typical delays and postponements, the next book in *THE LAST OPEN ROAD* series is finally finished and will be unleashed in the mainstream bookstore market in time for the holidays. “I originally promised to have it done last summer, and then for Christmas, and then planned to launch it with back-to-back debut weekends at the Amelia Island Concours and the 12 Hours of Sebring in Florida this past March. But it just flat wasn’t done. I was up to something like 750 pages and the end still wasn’t in sight, and to be honest I’d kind of painted myself into a corner with this project. I had to skip a lot of events I dearly wanted to do because I simply never would have finished it otherwise. Although I did manage to sneak in the annual, 32-mile “Bike the Drive” charity event on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. I’m an avid rider and bike to work most days whenever the weather’s decent (about 7 miles each way) and I guess it’s my way of evening things up for all the fossil fuel I willingly waste and all the hydrocarbons I spew wantonly into the air on race weekends! Plus it gives me time to think, and that’s how it finally occurred to me that *THE 200mph STEAMROLLER*

really needed to be three separate volumes in a trilogy rather than one book you could hardly lift. Not to mention that I’d get to sell and raise sponsorship for *three* books instead of just one!”



Things came together pretty quickly after that realization, although there was a major, *major* setback when Burt’s dear friend, onetime editor, oftentimes collaborator and traveling companion and moreover go-to graphics guy Art Eastman went in for what was supposed to be a serious but relatively routine operation and ultimately passed away after several ugly, grueling months in the hospital. “It was a terrible loss for everyone who knew him. You just can’t replace a character and a talent like Art. He did almost all of my book covers and was responsible for all the clever logos, sly, stylish