

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOW FOUNDER KJELL QVALE CELEBRATES SIX DECADES IN AUTO INDUSTRY**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (November 18, 2008) — San Francisco businessman Kjell Qvale has been a big wheel in the automotive industry for more than six decades.

Qvale, 89, founder and chairman of British Motor Cars Ltd., introduced "foreign cars to the West Coast in 1948, when American-made vehicles were unrivaled in the United States and foreign competition was considered a joke. His vision in bucking the establishment made him legendary, but Qvale takes no pleasure in the current financial crisis facing Ford, General Motors and Chrysler and he believes they will survive, albeit with some changes.

"The oil companies have made a ton of money, charging more than they should in my opinion and it has just about destroyed the 'Big Three', Qvale said. "Damage has been done and they may need help right now, but I see them making smaller, more fuel-efficient cars."

When Qvale began selling British imports with exotic names like Jaguar in 1948, the American manufacturers were in the driver's seat, even excluding him from exhibiting in the San Francisco Auto Show. Qvale fought back and founded an alternate show in 1958 that featured only imported vehicles. Eventually, his show outdrew the Detroit-sponsored event.

"The Big Three went to Kjell and asked to be allowed to exhibit in his show, which became the International Auto Show," said show director Kevin Diamond. When this year's International Auto Show opens its doors on November 22 at the Moscone Convention Center, over 40 major manufacturers from around the world will display their products.

Qvale has made a career out of taking risks and meeting the challenges. Born in Norway, Kjell Qvale, (pronounced Shell Kev-all-ee), immigrated to the United States in 1929. The 10-year-old brought with him an infatuation for anything fast on a track---cars, horses and people---and that has not changed. Though he earned a track scholarship to the University of Washington in 1939, his college career was cut short by World War II, in which he served as U.S. Navy pilot. Qvale settled in California after the war with \$8,000 in his pocket and the drive to open his own business, selling Jeeps with partner and future wife, Kay. The couple began selling MGs and Jaguars in 1947 and later added Bentley and Rolls Royce to his marquee inventory. They also acquired sole Northern California distributor rights for Volkswagen. When the Qvales opened their showroom on Van Ness Avenue in 1949, it certainly was no competition for the palatial showrooms on San Francisco's Auto Row.

"It was a tiny little space at 214 Van Ness Ave., Qvale said. "Since then, I have owned most of the big showrooms on Auto Row at one time or another."Over the years, Qvale's infatuation with speed grew into a full-blown love affair. He was instrumental in creating local auto races, including one in Golden Gate Park and had a hand in convincing the U.S. Army to set aside a portion of Fort Ord near Monterey for a race track that became the fabled Laguna Seca Raceway.

But what's a track without a car? Qvale bought a Lister Jaguar to race. But what's the point if you don't win? When he lost to Joe Huffaker, Qvale wasted no time in hiring him. Over the next few years, they raced British-built cars throughout the West Coast and at Indianapolis, driven by racing greats A.J. Foyt and Bobby Unser. Although never a winner at Indy, Qvale popularized British cars in the most important race in the United States.

Qvale's influence was also felt internationally. Never one to rest on his laurels, he began looking around for new conquests---and in 1970 he bought the Jensen car factory in Great Britain. Under his ownership, 14,000 Jensen Healey's were built, but Qvale closed the factory when a coal strike forced the factory to limit production to three days a week.

"I was losing \$100,000 a week and that was a lot of money in 1975, Qvale said. "It was either stop production or go broke. I stopped."

At the time, he swore he would never build another car, but changed his mind when he saw plans for the Bigua, a car under development in Italy. Qvale bought the development rights, renamed it the Qvale Mangusta, manufactured 280+ of them and took a financial bath.

"I lost about \$1 million making 14,000 Jensens, but I lost more than \$28 million making 284 Mangustas, Qvale said. "It cost me \$8 million just to get it qualified to sell worldwide. I finally realized I wouldn't make it making cars. But, you know, if you don't fail at a few things, you don't appreciate the successes."

Qvale has had more than his share of successes, some against all the odds. In the late 1960s, he was approached by the legendary Billie Jean King and her husband, Larry, who urged him to sponsor tennis tournaments in San Francisco and Los Angeles for women only. He backed the tournaments that eventually put women's tennis on the front pages of sports sections around the world.

Qvale's fondness for winners is not confined to the two-legged kind. A race horse enthusiast, he bought the renowned Silky Sullivan to put out to stud and now his ranch in Sebastopol, CA, stables more than 50 horses. But he still spends his days on Van Ness Avenue tending to the business that put his on the road to success in the automotive industry.

The San Francisco Chronicle|SFGate.com 51st Annual International Auto Show presented by AutoTrader.com, runs November 22 through November 29, at the Moscone Center and is supported by the California Motor Car Dealers Association. The show will feature the 2009 model cars, SUV's, trucks and vans representing the work of over 40 manufacturers. It is premier auto exposition in northern California and the only auto show held regionally that lures the dazzling high-tech displays from the world's major manufacturers. The show will fill the 1.2 million sq. ft. Moscone Center and is expected to draw over 400,000 spectators making it the largest exhibition of any kind in the greater Bay Area and the second largest auto show in the western United States.

Show hours are:

Saturday, November 22 — Friday, November 28: 10:00 a.m. — 10:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 29: 10:00 a.m. — 9:00 p.m.

Admission is \$8 for adults with children 12-years and under free when accompanied by an adult.

Tickets can be purchased at the door. For more information visit [www.sfautoshow.com](http://www.sfautoshow.com).