

BROADMOOR LIVING

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VOLUME 26



SAVOR

The Penrose Room blends tradition, global flavor, and modern tastes to redefine exceptional dining.

PAGE 55

PLAY

Course upgrades at The Broadmoor welcome a new generation of golfers while preserving the challenges of championship play.

PAGE 67

EXPLORE

Celebrate our country's 250th birthday and Colorado's 150th with a visit to America's Mountain.

PAGE 83

PLUS

YOUR GUIDE TO EVERYTHING TO DO, SEE, EAT, AND EXPERIENCE AT THE WORLD'S MOST EXTRAORDINARY RESORT.

PAGE 27



When the Mountain Roars

During The Broadmoor Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, America's Mountain transforms from quiet icon to high-altitude proving ground for the world's fastest drivers.

By Sean Cridland

Pikes Peak, the majestic “purple mountain” above Colorado Springs, has inspired poems, paintings, and songs, including “America the Beautiful,” written by Katharine Lee Bates after a visit in 1893. For 11 months of the year, it's a monument to nature that stands tall and, mostly, silent. But every June, that quiet is shattered by revving engines and squealing tires.

For one electrifying day — and in the weeks leading up to the main event — the mountain becomes the stage for one of motorsport's singular spectacles: The Broadmoor Pikes Peak International Hill Climb. Known as the “Race to the Clouds,” it draws some of the planet's most daring drivers and advanced racing machines to a narrow ribbon of road climbing to 14,115 feet.

An international field will take on a 12.42-mile course packed with 156 turns, racing against the clock to claim the coveted “King of the Mountain” trophy. There are no head-to-head duels, no safety nets, and no margin for error — just one timed run and a mountain that exacts its toll for even the smallest mistake.

A Race Unlike Any Other

The challenges on Pikes Peak are unmatched in motorsport. The race begins at roughly 9,500 feet and finishes more than a mile higher, where oxygen levels are about 40 percent lower than at sea level. Many drivers use supplemental oxygen during practice and race runs, while engineers wrestle with the effects of thin air on engines, aerodynamics, and cooling systems.

Then there's the mental challenge of memorizing the course. Unlike an oval track or on closed street circuits, where drivers repeat the same handful of corners dozens of times with no significant elevation changes or obstructed sightlines, Pikes Peak offers no repetition and no respite. Competitors practice only portions of the mountain in the days leading up to the race. Then they get one shot at a flawless run.

Pikes Peak Hill Climb fans line the course before dawn, camping the night before or hiking or driving to designated viewing areas to claim a spot to watch cars blast past at astonishing speeds, often just feet away.

The setting amplifies everything. Weather can change in minutes, with sunshine at the starting line and snow near the summit. Engines scream and tires howl as officials, photographers, and fans track the action. When a run goes wrong — and sometimes it does — the collective gasp of the crowd is palpable.

Behind the scenes, the scale of the event is immense. A full-time executive staff works year-round coordinating logistics, media, sponsors, and safety. Hundreds of volunteers handle on-mountain operations in the weeks leading up to race day. For them, the Hill Climb is not just an event but a tradition.

Roughly 70 teams invest months or years preparing their cars, spending millions to optimize power, aerodynamics, tire grip, and driver conditioning. Simulator sessions, data analysis, and painstaking testing all aim toward a single goal: reaching the summit faster than anyone else.

At the Edge of Innovation

The race has evolved through several eras of mechanical innovation. In the early days, it was all about power and weight. Then came aerodynamics with the addition of wings and ground effects. In recent years, electric vehicles have emerged as a dominant force. Unlike internal combustion engines, electric powertrains don't suffer from oxygen deprivation at high altitude, giving them a decisive advantage.

Until 2010, much of the road was gravel, and spectators watched cars slide spectacularly through corners, shooting up rooster tails of dust and stone. When the highway was fully paved in 2011, driving styles — and speeds — changed dramatically.

THE BROADMOOR PIKES PEAK INTERNATIONAL HILL CLIMB

Watch drivers battle for the title “King of the Mountain” at America's second-oldest motorsport event, behind only the Indianapolis 500.

WHEN: June 21, 2026

MORE INFORMATION:
ppihc.org

DON'T MISS: The Pikes Peak Hill Climb exhibit at the Penrose Heritage Museum, next to Broadmoor Hall and with complimentary admission. Hours: 9 a.m. –4 p.m., Tuesday–Saturday (closed noon–1 p.m.; hours subject to change).

Cars at The Broadmoor Pikes Peak International Hill Climb have evolved from raw power and light weight to advanced aerodynamics and, more recently, the rise of electric power.



Today competitors slice through the asphalt labyrinth with surgical precision, chasing ever-faster times.

The course has three distinct sections. The lower third winds through forest, where rocks and trees can obscure sightlines and disorient even veteran drivers. Many have thought they were in one corner when they were actually in another, often resulting in broken cars and bruised egos.

The middle section is defined by steep climbs and sheer drop-offs. A mistake here can send a car sailing into open space, sometimes tumbling hundreds of feet down a slope. The upper third is faster and more exposed, with top cars exceeding 150 mph while dodging buckled stretches of pavement caused by constant freeze-thaw cycles. Reaching the summit intact brings equal parts relief and pride.

A Century-Old Challenge

In the 1800s, reaching the summit of Pikes Peak was an arduous, days-long journey. That changed when Broadmoor founder Spencer Penrose commissioned a road to the top in 1915, opening the mountain to automobiles.

To promote the new toll road, the first Pikes Peak Hill Climb was held the following year. Starting several miles above the mountain's entrance gate on a narrow, graveled path, Rea Lentz drove a Romano Demon Special to the summit in 20 minutes, 55.6 seconds. His average speed of 36 mph earned him the Penrose Trophy, a six-foot-tall silver-and-gold cup that rivaled any of the great sporting prizes of America's Gilded Age.

That may not sound fast, but consider that it takes a modern motorist about an hour to reach the summit, averaging about 10 mph and stopping for a few snapshots along the way. Over the decades, manufacturers and custom builders have relentlessly pushed racing's limits. In 2018, French driver Romain Dumas, driving an all-electric Volkswagen I.D.R., blazed to the summit in an unbelievable 7:57.148, averaging nearly 95 mph and setting a new overall record.

The Hill Climb's mythology is also shaped by family legacies. For decades, Pikes Peak was known as “Unser Mountain,” thanks to the dominance of the legendary Unser clan. Bobby Unser alone claimed nine King of the Mountain titles, matching his uncle Louis, with additional victories from brother Al, son Robby, and nephew Al Jr. Today, grand-niece Loni Unser continues that lineage, chasing her own place in the race's storied history. Though she hasn't won yet, her development program is taking her closer to victory with each passing year.



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