

An Interview With:

Peng Tsu Ying--Singapore's 'Man For All Seasons'

By Carl A. Argila, De La Salle College, Manila, Philippines

ARGILA: Mr. Peng, you must be one of the world's only and surely one of the world's first deaf race car drivers. Tell us, how you ever got interested in auto racing?

PENG: I don't think I am or have been the world's first or only deaf racing driver, but maybe in Asia as far as I know, because when I visited Sweden in 1963 I met several Scandinavian deaf drivers who claimed to have had motor racing experience in their countries.

I started taking part in motor sports in 1958 and quit in 1967 due to financial reasons, but it would be a long story to tell you exactly how I got involved in motor sports. However, I can tell you that my main reason for taking part in motor sports was to prove to the hearing world that being deaf is no handicap to being skillful.

ARGILA: You must have had many experiences in your years of auto racing—which experience was the most interesting or the most unusual?

PENG: The greatest satisfaction I derived from motor racing came in the 1965 Malaysia Grand Prix Sedan Cars Race held in Singapore where about 50,000 spectators witnessed the race. There were about 26 sedan cars which were fully converted for racing, competing in the race. The drivers were from Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan and England. At the finish, after 20 challenging laps, I was only in overall third position and behind two champion drivers, hearing of course, who had more powerful cars (Hong Kong was first and England second). Later I was told that the commentators of Radio Singapore and Television Singapore had been commenting on me more often than the leading drivers, not only because I was the leading Singapore driver, but because I was the only deaf driver. At the prize giving ceremony that night I personally received my silver trophy and a check for \$1000 from the hands of the First Lady of Singapore. To me, that was the most memorable moment in my entire life.

ARGILA: I know that you were born on mainland China. Can

you tell us a little about how you were educated in China? What was it like to be deaf in China?

PENG: Though I was born in Shanghai, I had my early education in Hong Kong. When I became deaf at the age of five years, my parents brought me to Hong Kong. The Hong Kong school for the deaf was an oral school, but sign language was permitted among schoolmates during or outside school hours. After the Japanese occupied Hong Kong in December 1941, at which time my father was in Singapore on business and my mother was visiting her family in China and I was living with my aunt and uncle, I managed to get back to Shanghai. My uncle was able to make arrangements for me to travel alone on a Japanese cargo ship.

After arriving in Shanghai, my relatives sent me to the Chung Wah School for the Deaf for my secondary education. I think, even at that time, the educated deaf people of Shanghai would be considered sophisticated, equivalent to the deaf people of New York City, as they were living in similar circumstances.

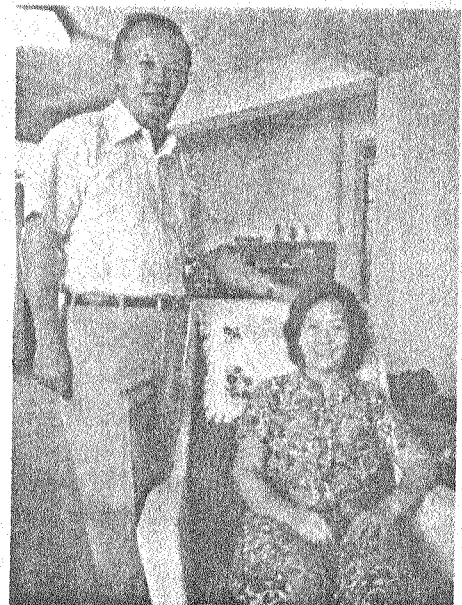
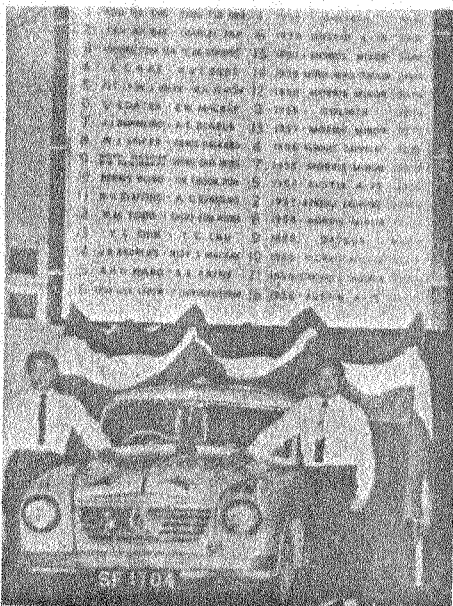
In 1942, there were eight schools for the deaf in Shanghai, only two of them were oral. Shanghai, at that time, was under Japanese occupation, hence there was no government assistance for the education and welfare of the deaf. All the schools were run privately and depended on private donations and income from student fees, etc. There were a number of deaf teachers, but they were, in general, underpaid compared with their hearing colleagues. Due to ignorance and prejudice, many Shanghai employers refused to hire deaf people, regardless of their skills; however, the educated deaf managed to survive throughout the dark years by their own ingenious ways of making a living.

ARGILA: During those turbulent years of revolution in China, how did it affect you, your family and your education?

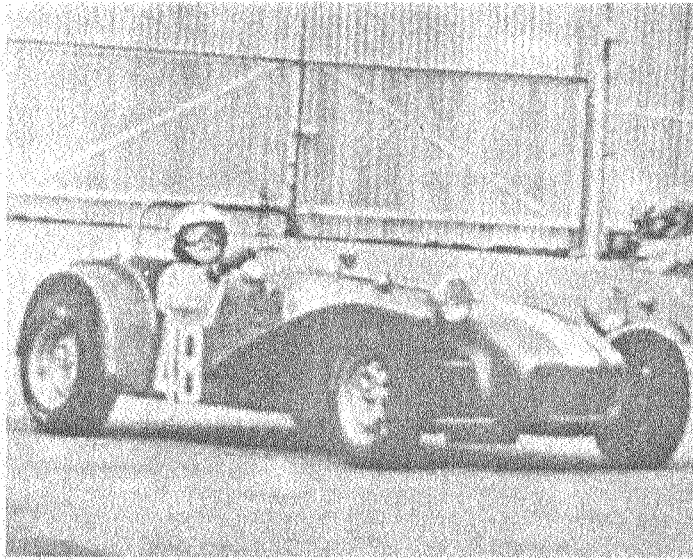
PENG: We were not affected as we had left the mainland before the Communists took over.

ARGILA: How then did you come to live in Singapore?

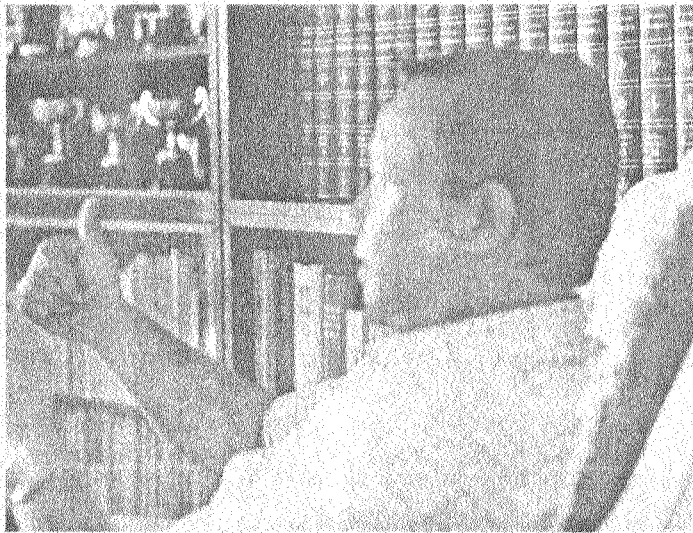
PENG: Since before the Pacific War my father had been liv-



Left: Most DA readers have probably never heard of a "Goliath" automobile, but this 1956 Goliath led Peng and his hearing brother, Peng Tsu Ann, to victory in a field of Austins, Datsuns and Morris Minors! Center: The pride of Mr. Peng's collection is the coveted Malaysia Grand Prix cup presented to him in 1965 by the First Lady of Singapore. Right: Mr. Peng and his wife of 23 years, Mei Soo (also deaf), pose in their new condominium apartment in Singapore's Marine Terrace. The Peng's have three children, all hearing.



Mr. Peng in one of his winning cars—though "too old" for professional racing now, Mr. Peng still maintains an avid interest in motor sports.



"There is a Chinese proverb which says 'To help others is to help yourself,' that seems to be my motive in starting education of the deaf in Singapore."

ing in Singapore for business. As soon as the war ended my father tried hard to get my mother and me to join him, but due to the strict immigration laws of the British Colonial government in Singapore, we had to wait for a long time, until 1950, when we were finally granted entry permits to Singapore. That was how I came to live in Singapore.

ARGILA: When you came to Singapore, what was the situation for the deaf?

PENG: When I came to Singapore in 1950 I couldn't find a single deaf person! Finally, I advertised in a local Chinese newspaper; several parents of deaf children approached me about teaching their children privately.

ARGILA: There was no school for the deaf in Singapore at that time?

PENG: On, no. There was nothing available for the deaf. When I started teaching deaf children in my parent's home that was, as best I know, the first education for the deaf in Singapore.

ARGILA: What motivated you to become such a "pioneer" in education of the deaf?

PENG: I don't think I should be called a "pioneer" in education of the deaf here because about the same time I was teaching in my parent's home there was a British lady who started an oral class for the deaf. There is a Chinese proverb which says "To help others is to help yourself," that seems to be my motive in starting education of the deaf in Singapore.

ARGILA: Did you meet with much opposition from the "oral" educators?

PENG: Only mild opposition due to the fact that education of the deaf was rather new here and besides the oral school could not accept all deaf children. When the oral school moved into a new building our sign school joined them and we share the building.

ARGILA: What are your plans now for education of the deaf in Singapore?

PENG: I intend to develop a standardized Singapore sign language and signed Chinese. Then my colleagues and I can use them as better tools to teach our deaf children. It is hoped that we will get better results academically from the new signed Chinese. In the past our progress was rather slow as our old Chinese sign language was not in accordance with Chinese grammar.

ARGILA: What do you think are the greatest needs, educational or otherwise, of the deaf Singaporeans today?

PENG: Educationally, we need newer and more effective teaching methods, an academic secondary school for the deaf



Peng Tsu Ying (left) is interviewed by the author during the latter's recent trip to Singapore. Mr. Peng is one of the most outstanding deaf persons in Southeast Asia, a noted race car driver, founder of the Singapore Sign School for the Deaf and a widely traveled spokesman for the deaf.



Mr. Peng poses with some of the 36 trophies he accumulated during his years as an auto race driver.

and a teacher training course with sign language interpreters for deaf trainees. Recreationally we need a well-organized club of the deaf and a local theater of the deaf.

back to race car driving?!!

PENG: Well, my enthusiasm in motor sports still has not died, but I'm not as young as I once was—and, unless you're good, you can lose a lot of money.

ARGILA: One last question. Do you think you will ever go

ARGILA: Thank you Mr. Peng.

Author's note: In next month's DEAF AMERICAN we shall tell the story of Mr. Peng's pioneering work in "The Deaf Around The World: Singapore—The Tides of Change."
