

## Whole Life Ownership

by Desmond Finnan >>

Desmond's early motoring days



When I was a kid I watched motor racing on the Curragh in Ireland. This was in the days of Walker, Whitehead, and Duncan Hamilton in Jaguars. My uncle, Basil Davenport, was the hill climb champion at Shelsley Walsh many times in a GN Spyder, built and developed by him. In fact he was turned away from Prescott because his car was a bit scruffy, never forgave them and refused to compete there again! His give-away line was he only respected those who built and drove their own cars. Once he was informed he could protest Hans Stuck's time up Shelsley Walsh hill climb and thereby win. His reply was, 'if I cannot beat him fair and square I am not interested'.

Basil Davenport in the Spyder in the mid-1920s



I was quite surprised how crudely some of the cars were made - in particular a Panhard, which I think started life as a Dyna Z of the mid-1950s. I imagined that I could do at least as well as the Panhard by

lowering a Morris Minor bulkhead and steering column, getting rid of the front seat and driving from the back seat. What a pipe dream!

In my affluent youth I took up club rallying around England and Wales for 4 seasons. The cars were a Humber Sceptre, MGB, Triumph 2000 and a 1275 Mini Cooper. My navigator was Peter Rushforth and together we won a few awards. I retired because I found it very hard to adjust to driving all Saturday night, sleeping all day Sunday and not recovering on Monday.

Rallying the MGB



Later in life, when the kids grew up and had left home, I decide to build a car. I thought of building a Caterham, but was put off because it didn't have a roof. I nearly bought a Lotus Elise and, on bad days during the build, I wish I had bought one.

My research included buying all the magazines involved with kit cars; I fancied a GT40. The chaps sharing an office with me had been involved with the ill-fated Token F1, and latterly with Ron Tauranac. They encouraged me to go for the GT40.

At that time there appeared to be only 2 GT40 replica manufacturers - GTD and Tornado. I opted for the latter as their manual was easy to read and the car could be built by the chapter. I found Andy Sheldon to be very helpful, and the parts supplied by Tornado fitted together easily.

I had been building for a few months when I joined the GT40 Replica Club. At the AGM, I met Ian O'Reilly who owned a beautiful red GT40. He took both Shonagh and I for a spin round the car park separately. I knew I was on the right track. It gave me immense confidence to finish my build, and Shonagh was impressed and encouraged me also.

I got the car finished to the best of my ability and decided to send it to a specialist to check it and get it through SVA. He did nothing except get the car painted. As you may know, to paint a GT40 all the body panels come off as well as other bits. The paint job was fantastic, though I found it's better to get the car through SVA and then paint it, in case the SVA requires bits to be moved. The expert, however, was reluctant to put the car back together because of lethargy. The petrol caps wouldn't fit properly, the aircon radiator wouldn't fit and the shut lines left a lot to be desired. I got a low loader and grabbed the car back and as many bits as possible. It's surprising

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how many were missing. Problem solved thanks to Roy Snook and Brian Magee.

A friend of mine got the engine started, gave the car an MOT and lent me their trade plates so I could drive it home. Disaster struck - the gearbox seized half a mile from home because there was no oil in it! A brief moment of glory, and then total depression.

The car was put through SVA for me by Brian Magee and Roy Snook. It was a great relief and like everyone in a similar position, I drove it everywhere and went to dozens of car shows. Then I did an afternoon on track at Goodwood, courtesy of the GTD car Club and Frank Catt and became hooked; this is what I have pursued ever since. I have participated at Goodwood, Brands Hatch, Fay de Bretagne, Donington, Blyton, Spa and Cadwell many times. I have also participated at Abbeville, Silverstone GP and Castle Combe and have done parade laps at Le Mans and Brands Hatch GP. I've enjoyed hill climb schools at Shelsley Walsh, Prescott and Gurston Down. All have been great fun.



truly great start to our GT40 experience. The radiator was changed for a Docking aluminium one; this helped with keeping the car cool.

I went on a tour in Spain in the GT40, accompanied by Tony Hunt in his immaculate GTD, finishing up at Angoulême. It was the wettest experience I have ever had, even though the tour was well arranged and the vintage racing at Angoulême was interesting. Finally we visited the Loire valley and many of its vineyards and châteaux. What better holiday than cars and wine?

On the down side, the Holleys refused to work and I have had the misfortune to break a front wish bone twice. Also, I had a nearly-new MSD unit fail on the way to Blyton - it would have been better if it had failed after some time on track. All these incidents meant a trip home on a low loader. Overall the car has been great fun, very exciting and I've enjoyed the experience especially on the track. I have always driven to track days and have driven home from all except 2. The camaraderie of the GT40 Enthusiasts Club has made it a great experience, not to be forgotten.

On the way to the Classic Le Mans in 2008, I burnt out the starter motor in Rouen in a traffic jam, when 4 lanes merged into one due to an accident. The car was cutting out due to heat soak and static traffic, but feel sorry for Ian Anderson and his brother-in-law, Mike, who willingly push started us. This included getting to La Fleche and the circuit each day and finally back home. It only took 5' to get started, but thanks, guys. On return home a new starter was purchased, but this gave up the ghost at Circuit de Bretagne. Shonagh and Colin Webb helped us get to Caen and Brittany Ferries gave us a good shove in Portsmouth. Because they said the car would never start, they threatened to get one of their tractors to pull us off the boat.

Over the years the car has appeared many times in Complete Kit Car, Total Kit Car, and Sorted. It has also been seen in Performance Ford, Octane, Porsche Club Magazine, The Horsleys Magazine and on the My Chums Club web site.



The car has been made track day-friendly for me over the years by Spirit Automotive and Wealden Engineering. This included changing to rose-jointed front suspension, helped by anti roll bars, enabling the suspension geometry to be fully adjusted so that the handling is now very well sorted. I have had the car dyno'd and the Holleys serviced by Power Engineering of Uxbridge. This gave the car more oomph, and, coupled with the suspension modifications made it awesome on track and gave me great confidence. This was also helped by instruction from Doctor John.

Our first serious journey, after the car was finished, was to Newcastle. It rained furiously and the car leaked. So Shonagh wore a rain coat and a sou'wester. I've been informed that all GT40s leak except Bob MacDonald's. At my father in law's home, I hit the gate stop with the radiator and a leak developed. This was sorted by a dose of Radweld - a