

<< The GT40 MkIV is Reborn

by Andrew Komosa >>

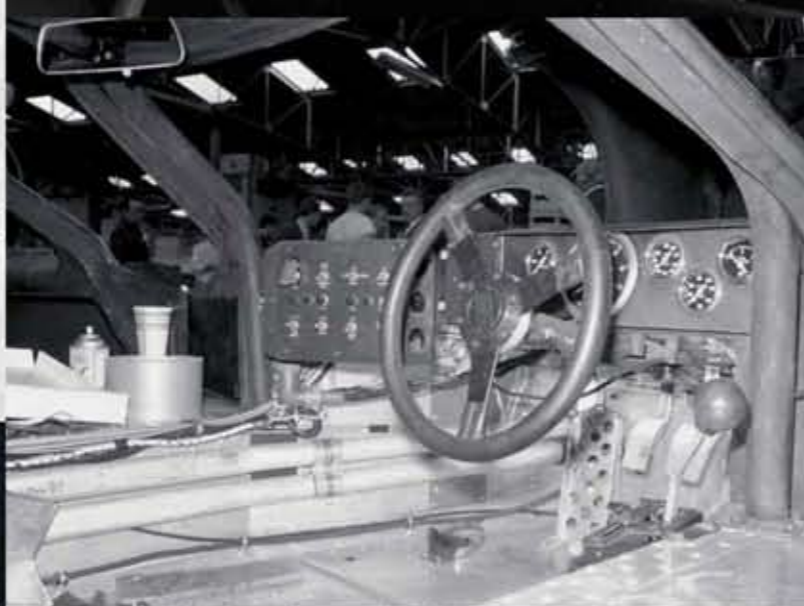
forming Can-Am series. At the same time, Chuck searched various technologies and found Brunswick Corporation, which was manufacturing honeycomb dashboards for fighter jets.

The other talented engineer in the J-Car history is Ed Hull. Ed was given the job of Concept Engineer for the J-Car. Ed had been involved with the Advance Concept Team since the Mustang I days, and had created the layout for the T-44 manual shift transaxle used in the 7 litre cars in his own time at home, as he felt the automatic transaxles would be unreliable (which turned out to be true). Ed put the J-Car concept on paper (pencil and ruler in those days). Then the package was finalised at Ford Styling, where Gene Bordinat led the design team to make the clay model and fibreglass moulds. By spring of 1966, J-1 was completed in time for the Le Mans test days. By that time, though, Homer Perry had done his job well and had led the development of the MkII to a point where there was little willpower inside Ford to change course at such a late date. The die was set - it would be the MkII that would go into the history books with the Le Mans 1966 1-2-3 finish.

After the win, most of the exhausted management in SVA wanted to rest on their laurels, but Henry Ford II's edict was that for 1967, Ford would win Le Mans again, but with an all American racer. This quickly changed everyone's mind. The J-Car development continued in the summer of 1966, but suffered a tragic setback with the death of Ken Miles at the wheel of J-2 in August 1966. It was not until the spring of 1967 that Chuck Mountain, with Phil Remington (Shelby American's Chief Engineer) and Homer Perry, redesigned the J-Car in a wind tunnel into the now-famous MkIV shape.



Front suspension detail J-5 at LeMans, 1967



J-8 in the Peugeot garage during preparation for the 1967 race



1967 Le Mans line up

Chaparral and a MkIIIB driven by A J Foyt. Ferrari was not in attendance though, so there was still some well-founded concern. To further the effort, J-3 was used at the rainy Le Mans test days to dial in the final set-up, but was still not a good competition comparison with Ferrari. For Le Mans 1967, 3 MkIIIBs and 4 new MkIVs showed up for the famous start.

The result is history and for the first time a car that was conceived, delivered and nurtured in America won the Le Mans 24 Hour race. Chassis J-5, in its red livery and roundel (intuitively emblazoned with #1), soundly defeated the competition with Dan Gurney and A J Foyt at the helm. J-5 not only survived the gruelling, accident-prone race by coming in first place overall for distance, but it also won the FIA Index of Performance award for the most fuel efficient car. The MkIV was so domineering in winning both titles that the FIA just gave up - the rules were rewritten in a way to make these earthbound jet fighters illegal. The change was needed in order to let the rest of the automotive world compete amongst themselves on a lower, but leveller, playing field. The GT programme that had taken so much time and energy to develop to this point was cancelled. Ford was instantly out of competing directly in sports car racing - quitting while on top.

Enough history - this story is about what we call the

Kar-Kraft MkIVs (for lack of a better title; this betrays the fact that the project is the compilation of a truly impressive cadre of Ford enthusiasts and a project that has been formulating for many years). Fast forward from 1967 to 1989 - by this time the thought of seeing, touching, riding in and driving the MkIV was food for long daydreams. All of the 12 original chassis existed, in some form or another (10 as complete vehicles, and the last 2 as a handful of parts). Since there were so few of the original cars built, they would qualify for coverage under the Endangered Species Act. These cars are so precious and cosseted by their owners that they are rarely let out of their protective cages. Most enthusiasts are lucky ever to have seen one and have to settle for a picture or video.

Just as the roots of the sequoia can be traced back to a certain, specific time and place where they really began to take hold, so can the roots of the Kar-Kraft MkIV project. The time is 1989 and the place is Watkins Glen, NY, where possibly the greatest gathering of GT40s ever before or since took place. The roots of this project took firm hold during a casual conversation between GT40 enthusiast Mike Teske and Edsel Ford. Mike Teske is a long-time Ford racing enthusiast, archivist for the Ford Motor Company's original documentation from the Total Performance Programme, a published author - *The Ford Racing Century* - and long time fabricator of racing parts for vintage GT40s. His enthusiasm for GT40s resulted from his first sighting on the streets of Pittsburgh, PA where GT40 P/1054 (previously owned by Fran Kress) was being driven at speed with a resounding roar. At Watkins Glen in 1989, by chance, Mike asked Mr Ford (honoured guest and speaker at the reunion) to pose with GT40 P/1046, the 1966 Le Mans winner. After the obligatory 'Mr Ford with Ford' photo, Edsel and Teske talked GT40s for quite a while, walking and talking about the various versions at the show. Towards the end of the conversation, Edsel asked which one of the fabulous original cars was Mike's. The response was what most enthusiasts would say, 'None, I can't afford one'. However, Mike went on to say, 'But I intend to build one'.

A smile of disbelief came across Edsel's face (perhaps that 'sure, kid, whatever you say' look) but the conver-



J-Car transformed into the MkIV at Ford's wind tunnel

The first outing for the new look car was at Sebring in 1967, where Mario Andretti and Bruce McLaren (now realising his dream that a lightweight would be competitive) won in a thrilling 12-hour race against the



Two winners



Le Mans 1966 Edsel Ford with his father, Henry II