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FEATURE

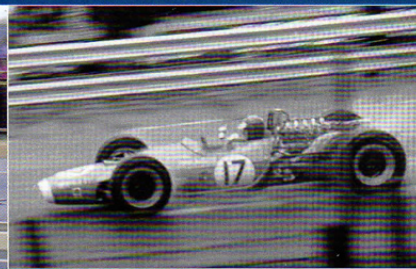
Decade of Change: Le Mans in the '60s

HEROES

Jochen Mass

INTERVIEW

Jean-Pierre Beltoise



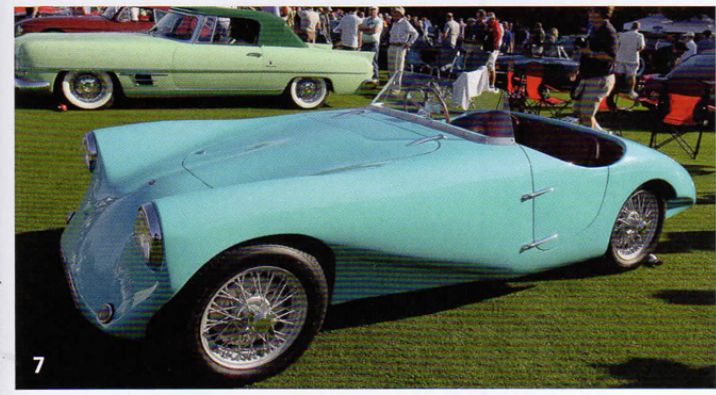
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1956 Arnott Climax (#AT 114)

By Mark R. Brinker



Hundreds of small automobile manufacturers sprouted from the ruins of World War II. Energized by peace and engineering skills acquired during the war, new post-war constructors opened their doors from here to there offering all manner of vehicles, including those intended for motorsports.

Arnott's Garages of Harlesden, London (United Kingdom) was one such racecar builder and was thoroughly emblematic of what was happening at the time with one glaring exception... ovaries. Yes that's right. Arnott was Daphne, a woman, and perhaps the first of her gender to birth an automobile manufacturing company. Arnott's family had deep roots in the racing scene and Daphne's childhood was filled with performance machinery, racing drivers and mechanics. During the war she honed her

skills at Hawker Aircraft. Then, in 1953, she built a wind-cheating Formula Three racer on a round-tube ladder frame with torsion bar suspension. Racing veteran John Brise posted a number of international speed records at Montlhéry behind the wheel of this wee F3 rocket and this success pressed Daphne to dream big.

Two years later, Arnott convened a team with the goal of racing at the 1955 Le Mans 24-hour event. With an all-new two-seat sports racer known as the Arnott Climax, powered by a 1098-cc Coventry Climax mill, and with capable pilots Peter Taylor and Jim Russell behind the wheel, Daphne's entry was looking formidable. Sadly, the car was crashed during practice and that was it for Le Mans '55. Arnott made another appearance at Le Mans two years later without much success and the company folded shortly thereafter.

To the best knowledge available, only three Arnott Climax racers were built in period. These nifty roadsters were constructed on a tubular steel ladder frame with a wheelbase of 93.5 inches and a track of 53.5 inches. Front suspension was by

unequal A-arms with kingpins and coil-over shocks and the cars were fitted with a front anti-roll bar. Rear suspension was also independent, with unequal A-arms with torsion bar and coilover shocks. Front and rear brakes were drums based on Morris Minor components that measured 10 by 2.25 inches up front and 10 by 1.75 inches at the rear. The roadster shell was formed from woven gauze and cloth saturated in resin. Go-power came from a Coventry Climax FWA 4-cylinder breathing through twin sidedraft carburetors and producing 71 horsepower shifting through an MGTC box.

Rob Adams of St. Petersburg, Florida, has an expanding collection of racing missiles from the 1950s and 1960s, including Coopers, Porsches and an Arnott. Adams said, "Arnott Climax chassis #ATT 114 was owned by my uncle, and last year he approached me to see if I had any interest in adding it to my collection. At that time I'd never heard of Arnott and didn't know anyone who had—other than my uncle. Being a lover of exotic and unusual cars (and wine), my uncle filled me in on the Arnott's racing history and other unique



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characteristics. The car was owned and raced by Jack Perkins who campaigned it in various hill climbs in '56 and '57. Perkins recorded a time of 55.63 seconds at the National Speed Hill Climb on June 15-16 of 1956, and competed at the Westbrook Hay National Speed Hill Climb on July 21, 1956. The next outing was at the Great Auclum National Speed Hill Climb on August 4, 1956, followed by an appearance at the 13th International Prescott Hill Climb on September 8, 1956. Perkins and the Arnott then raced at the Speed Trial at Staverton Airfield on September 30, 1956, and the following year raced at the Prescott National Open Hill Climb on May 5, 1957."

Adams continued, "I was very taken by the car's rich history and quickly made a deal with my uncle in August of 2013. When you couple the car's provenance with its early composite body and the fact

that the Arnott remains what may well be the only racecar ever manufactured by a woman, I had to have it. When I bought the car it wasn't in the best of shape, but the original chassis, body and engine (#6298) were all there. The engine was in poor shape and the rest of the car was in need of a full-blown, ground-up restoration. The passenger door had been glassed in and during the course of nearly 60 years of life, layer upon layer of fiberglass and resin had been added to the body."

Adams is still trying to unravel the chain of ownership of #ATT 114. After racing the car, Perkins sold it to a Brit whose name remains uncertain at this time. At some point the car was owned by John Peskett in England. The chain is incomplete until Adams' uncle bought the car from a Japanese collector through a European broker several years back.

But just who is Adams' uncle, and what

does he really do? The answers to these riddles are relatively simple: "Mr. Vino" and imbibe. Those unfamiliar with Vino should refer to the January 2015 installment of "Hidden Treasures." Vino is a collector with a sophisticated automotive palate and substantial resources in the mold of Bruce Wayne. And, like Batman, Vino prefers to savor life's treasures anonymously.

At the time of this writing #AT 114 is undergoing a complete cosmetic and mechanical restoration at a high-quality professional shop. After that Adams plans to show the car and perhaps put it back on the track where he says it belongs. As for Mr. Vino, he could not be reached for comment, which means he's either fighting crime or swigging pricey Bordeaux. ~~██████~~

Do you know of a Hidden Treasure? If so, send your photos and stories to Mark at mbrinker@vintageracecar.com