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THE PREMIER MAGAZINE FOR COLLECTORS

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## THE CREATIVE Workshop

Photos by TCW

Jason Wenig and his wife Kim have a lot going for themselves. They are young and own their own business. They do what they want, and love what they do. Most importantly, they both possess a seemingly inexhaustible amount of courage. Nothing seems to scare these two. In 1999, they were both senior executives with high-profile jobs in Mid-Town Manhattan. Next thing you know, they've turned in their resignations, sold everything they own, pointed the front of their car south, started driving, and didn't stop until they'd reached Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

Using the funds raised by the sale of their belongings, the Wenigs bought a barn, and not just any barn mind you, but a 70-year-old, dilapidated, train-wreck of a building that was home to any number of assorted rodents. Besides the mice, however, this barn contained history. This was the Barn where great cars used to be restored. After it was shut



down as a granary, the 10,000 square foot structure became home to an automotive repair and restoration shop. There wasn't much left of the shop when Jason and Kim bought the building, but remember, these two have courage, and more than a little vision to go with it. They also had a dream to reclaim the barn from the mice, and re-establish The Automotive Workshop as one of the premier motorcar restoration facilities in America.

Now the barn is charming to be sure. With its original hard wood floors and exposed beam ceiling, it looks a lot like the turn-of-the-century facilities where the likes of Ettore Bugatti and the Duesenberg

brothers built their earliest automotive masterpieces. It is the cars that come to life inside the barn that make this place special. Jason and his team of craftsman work on everything from classic Delahayes and Cords to all variety of Mopar Muscle Cars. Got a Stanguellini that needs a tune-up? Not a problem for The Creative Workshop. Itching to add some zip and zing to your Setra, Citroen, or Studebaker? Jason's the man you need to call.

Two cars that epitomize the unique work of The Creative Workshop are the 1953 MG TD Sport Speciale that debuted at the 2005 Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance and the 1951 Connaught



L3/SR that will be at this year's Amelia Island event. Both cars are extremely rare, and both could easily be overlooked on a printed list of Concours entrants. They are, nevertheless, captivating cars in person, and represent the kind of exciting work that has earned TCW awards at events as prestigious and diverse as The Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and the Rod and Custom Hot Rod Show.

### The 1953 MG TD Sport Speciale

In the early Fifties, The Morris Garage cars were coming up short against the Oscas and Porsche Spyders of the day. They didn't lack for power, but they didn't have the sleek, light-weight bodies that were necessary to translate that power into speed. Determined to demonstrate the true racing capability of the TD's 1250cc inline four-cylinder engine, MG driver Dave Ash turned to the Carrozzeria Motto Coachworks in Torino, Italy. Ash wanted race-ready aluminum coachwork to replace the "aerodynamically challenged" body that came on most of the 30,000 MG TDs that were produced between 1950 and 1953.

The result that Rocco Motto delivered is a close cousin of the famed Ferrari 166 Barchetta. The long bonnet, capped with its small air intake, falls gracefully into a wide-mouth front end with inset driving lights at the front of each wing. With its fold-down Le Mans windscreens, and short overhangs fore and aft, the Sport Speciale is the best of classic Italian racing design.

Only three MGs received the special Motto bodywork. One was lost to a racetrack wreck in the late Fifties, and only recently was the second traced to a private collection in Japan. When the third of the three Motto MGs arrived at barn of The Creative Workshop, Jason and his team knew exactly what they wanted to do.

"The first time I saw the car, I fell in love. It's an absolutely exquisite, gorgeous automobile. But it's not a Ferrari or one of the other Italian thoroughbreds. The car needed a personality. It needed something that would make people stop and look and not merely pass it by thinking it was 'just an MG'. The "something" that Jason added was a stunning yellow/green color scheme to go with the 100-point restoration that has transformed this British/Italian hybrid into a show winner and show stopper.

The bright yellow exterior of the car perfectly suits the sensuous Italian lines of the body, while the British Racing Green interior is appropriate and very "Britishly" understated. Add in the exposed aluminum panels that dominate the cockpit of the car, and the result is an MG that just won't let you look away.

When I discovered the car at the Amelia Concours last year, it was parked on the show field between a three-wheeled Morgan and another MG wearing elegant Tickford coachwork. It was the Motto-bodied car that was getting all the attention, however, and at the end of the day, it was the creative and courageous eye of The Creative Workshop that took home the top class honors.

Back in its day, the MG TD Sport Speciale did exactly what it was designed to do. It showed the world that under the innocuous coachwork of the factory-bodied MG TD, there were the mechanical components of a champion. In the 1954 12-Hour race at Sebring, Fred Allen and Gus Ehrman beat two Oscas and two Porsche 550 Spyders to finish 11th overall. On the track, the car was a force to be reckoned with, thanks to the creative thinking of Dave Ash and Inskip Motors. Off the track, and half a century later, it's still a force to be reckoned with, thanks to Jason Wenig and The Creative Workshop.



### The 1951 CONNAUGHT L3/SR

Connaught was a Formula One constructor from Great Britain. Actually, the term "constructor" is a bit generous, as they never finished constructing most of the cars that they started. In 1951, however, they did complete enough cars to field an F1 team. By 1959, Connaughts had entered in 69 races, and scored points or podium finishes in 19 events. When asked to name prominent Formula One teams from the middle of the twentieth century, most people would probably not put Connaught on their list, but the 1951 L3/SR was both a visually stunning car as well as a champion, having taken the winner's trophy in the 1951 Syracuse Grand Prix.

The car that will sit on the show field at this year's Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance is nothing like the one that showed up at The Creative Workshop's barn 22 months ago. That car was delivered more in boxes than on a flat bed truck. Many of the pieces that were there were incorrect. For example, the headlights were wrong, and the front grille was not even an automotive part. It was chicken wire! So here you have an obscure British racecar, utilizing prewar technology, with ugly duckling looks, and gorgeous swan aspirations; the perfect project for Jason and his team.

"The first order of business was to separate the pieces that were original from the ones that had been

tacked on over the years. Not a lot has been written about these cars, so we really had to dig to get all the research done properly" comments Jason. "By the time we had deconstructed the car and inventoried all the components, the owner and I decided that the Connaught deserved a full-off, nut-and-bolt restoration. Everyone just loved this car. Even though it didn't rewrite the racing history books, it was an important part of automotive history and one that we wanted to bring back to life."

The defining aspect of the Connaught design is the boattail rear end. Not nearly as chiseled as, say, an Auburn Speedster, the Connaught's boot is more rounded, much like the Frua-bodied Alfa 8C's of the 1930's. Ahead of the driver and co-pilot, a deep scuttle separates the cockpit from the engine bay. The classic dual, cut-down windcreens and cycle-fendered body design work together to present an overall effect that is at once graceful and muscular. This car is just as comfortable on the Concours fields today as it was sliding around the curves and tearing down the straights with Maseratis, Ferraris, Porsches,


and Mercedes in hot pursuit 55 years ago.

At nearly 2 liters, the Connaught's "Leaf" engine was capable of 145 horsepower. By comparison, the Ferraris against which it competed had over 175 horsepower at their disposal. The Connaughts were able to compete, and win due to their lightweight construction and wind-cheating aerodynamic contours. Cast magnesium wheels replaced the standard spoke wheels, further lowering the car's unsprung weight. The boattail configuration at the rear, and sculpted but minimalist body designs allowed the Connaughts to extract every last ounce of performance from their comparatively smaller engines.

Best estimates indicate that the Connaught Motorcar Company manufactured about 34 complete cars, and while they enjoyed success on both the Formula One and Formula Two circuits, the Connaughts have mostly been forgotten. Thanks to The Creative Workshop, however, memories will be refreshed at Concours d'Elegance and historic races around the country as their 1951 L3/SR takes to the field as well as the track.

## BACK TO THE BARN

The barn that Jason and Kim bought six years ago is now part of a sprawling auto restoration compound. In addition to the main showroom and restoration shop, there is an upholstery shop, state-of-the-art paint center, a metal shop, and a 10,000-volume automotive library. Looking for Chiltons Manual from 1920? It's in the library. Want to enjoy a fine cigar in a country-club environment of over-stuffed leather chairs? The second floor design studio, complete with a fully stocked humidor, is ready and waiting.

"I love the bizarre stuff; the projects that other shops might otherwise shy away from," says Jason. To hear him tell it, his passion is taking the great cars of yesteryear and bringing them back in a way that surprises people. "My greatest joy comes from watching people develop a love and appreciation for cars that they have never heard of or might never have appreciated." From MGs and Connaughts, to Jaguars, Mustangs, and Cadillacs, The Creative Workshop is doing just that. 

To learn more about Jason and The Creative Workshop, check them out on the web at [www.thecreativeworkshop.com](http://www.thecreativeworkshop.com)