

STANDARD GUIDE TO

BRITISH

SPORTS CARS



JOHN GUNNELL

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CONNAUGHT



John Wong/The Courier Workshop

1948-1956 Connaught

Known mainly for race cars, the Connaught Engineering (Continental Cars Ltd), was located in Send, Surrey, England. The firm produced a handful of sports roadsters in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Connaughts were actually created by Rodney Clarke, who was well known as a race driver and Bugatti owner. Early examples were raced by Clarke himself, along with Kenneth McAlpine. Chief draftsman C. E. "Johnny" Johnson also played an important role in the Connaught's development.

Building Connaught sports cars was a parallel story of exciting car development and constantly struggling to find financial backing. Lack of corporate support led to the demise of the Connaught. The last Connaughts were built for racing only. By 1957 even that end of the business was abandoned, although the very last car wasn't completed until two years later.

The Connaught used an aluminum alloy body on a tubular steel frame. Like many low-production sports cars, it was available with a choice of engine tunes. Early in its production, Connaught used the "Iron" Lea-Francis four-cylinder engine and later used both the 2.0 litre aluminum Lea-Francis and, later, the 2.5 litre Alta engine late in the Connaught's production lifespan. Lea-Francis engines were extensively modified as they were turned into Connaught power plants.

For example, they were usually converted to dry sump lubrication and used four Amal carburetors. In some cases, Hilborn fuel injection systems were attached instead. When the engines were modified to Connaught specifications, they produced 6,000 rpm.

The Connaught-modified, three-main-bearings, 1767-cc Lea-Francis four-cylinder engine was tuned to deliver much more than its original 70-hp.

The Lea-Francis engine was an overhead-valve, in-line four with solid lifters and a 75 x 100-mm bore and stroke. Connaught's standard-tune job had an 8.5:1 compression ratio. The hottest version of the engine had a 9.5:1 compression ratio and 140 hp – twice its original output.

Connaughts were created by British race car driver Rodney Clark.

The Connaught street cars had traditional front-engine rear-drive chassis layout and a 99-in. wheelbase. They were 147 in. long and 59.5 in. wide and had a maximum tread width of 52.5 in. A 4.55:1 ratio rear axle was used. Early cars had semi-elliptic leaf springs up front, but parallel wishbones and independent torsion bars were used beginning in 1951, when chassis supplier Lea-Francis changed its system. At the rear was a de Dion suspension and driveline system. Hydraulic drum brakes were fitted front and rear. Size: 6.00 x 16 tires were standard.

Some Connaughts, like the L3 and B series had faired-in headlights while many sported cycle fenders. A small horizontal oval grille was used with a trim strip extending back along the hood from the grille's center. The entire front end (hood, fenders, etc.) hinged forward for engine access. The basic car weighed just 2,165 lbs. An unusual design feature of the Connaught A series was the so-called "McGuffin box," an air intake and carburetor enclosure on the right side of the cars.

The Connaught sports/racing car debuted at the Silverstone racecourse in June 1949. The first road-going model appeared in the following year. As reported in *Motor Trend* late in 1950, Connaughts were "hand finished, one at a time." The magazine called the roadster a "thoroughbred machine."

In 1955, Tony Brooks raced a B series Connaught to victory in the Syracuse Grand Prix. It was a first for a British racing team and created a lot of attention, especially since the British beat a team of Maseratis. Even this impressive Grand Prix win couldn't convince corporations to back the Connaught cars.

Approximately 27 Connaughts were produced from 1949-1953. The hottest of these cars had a top speed in excess of 122 mph. Models included the A, B, and L Series as well as the AL, L3/SR, and the AL/SR. The "SR" stood for "Sports Racer."