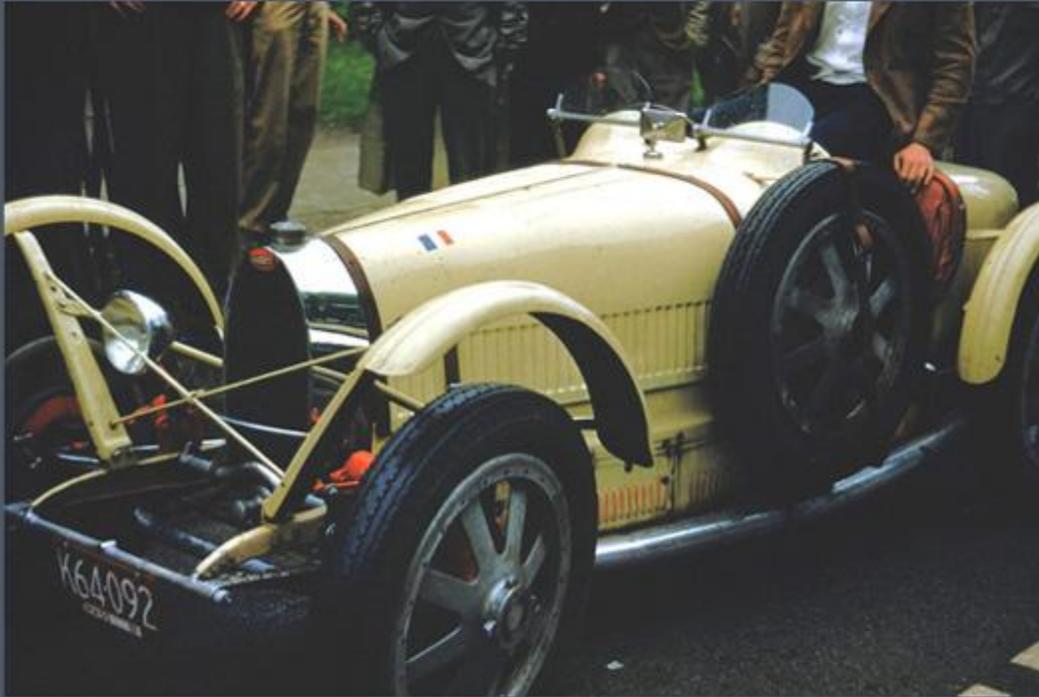


Watkins Glen Memoirs



1951
By Eric Davison

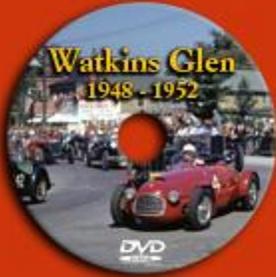
Within a few weeks Dad was contacted by the person who had left the note on our SS100. He was serious about wanting the car. While Dad had not contemplated selling, he was bitterly disappointed by the fact that he did not get to race at the Glen. He named a price, one that covered the purchase price, the paint job and a small profit. The car was sold and one Saturday a mechanic showed up and with Dad's help, replaced the rod bearing and drove off.

Fortunately I had convinced Dad to do a painting of the car and I was the recipient of a magnificent rendition of DWU 834, a lasting memento of the car and of his talents.



The Simca 8 was a popular car with a very attractive body similar to the Cisitalia 202. This photo was taken at the Glen in 1950 by Frank Shaffer and is much like the Davison Simca.

All was quiet for a while but seller's remorse was beginning to set in. While attending the SCCA national convention in New York in January, Dad met a man from Connecticut who claimed to have an SS100 that he would be happy to sell. It was, for the most part, in pieces but if Dad wanted the car he would assemble it all for review and inspection. Dad set a date and one Friday after school we loaded into Mom's Ford and set off for Greenwich, Ct. We drove all night and paid a visit to an illustrator friend of his for freshening up and breakfast before setting off to look at our next potential sports car.



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When we arrived it was as though the SCCA convention conversation had never happened. There was a car in there somewhere but it was buried under a ton of 'stuff.' There was no apology, no explanation, no nothing. Dad was justifiably fuming. We bid a terse goodbye and drove home arriving in time for dinner.



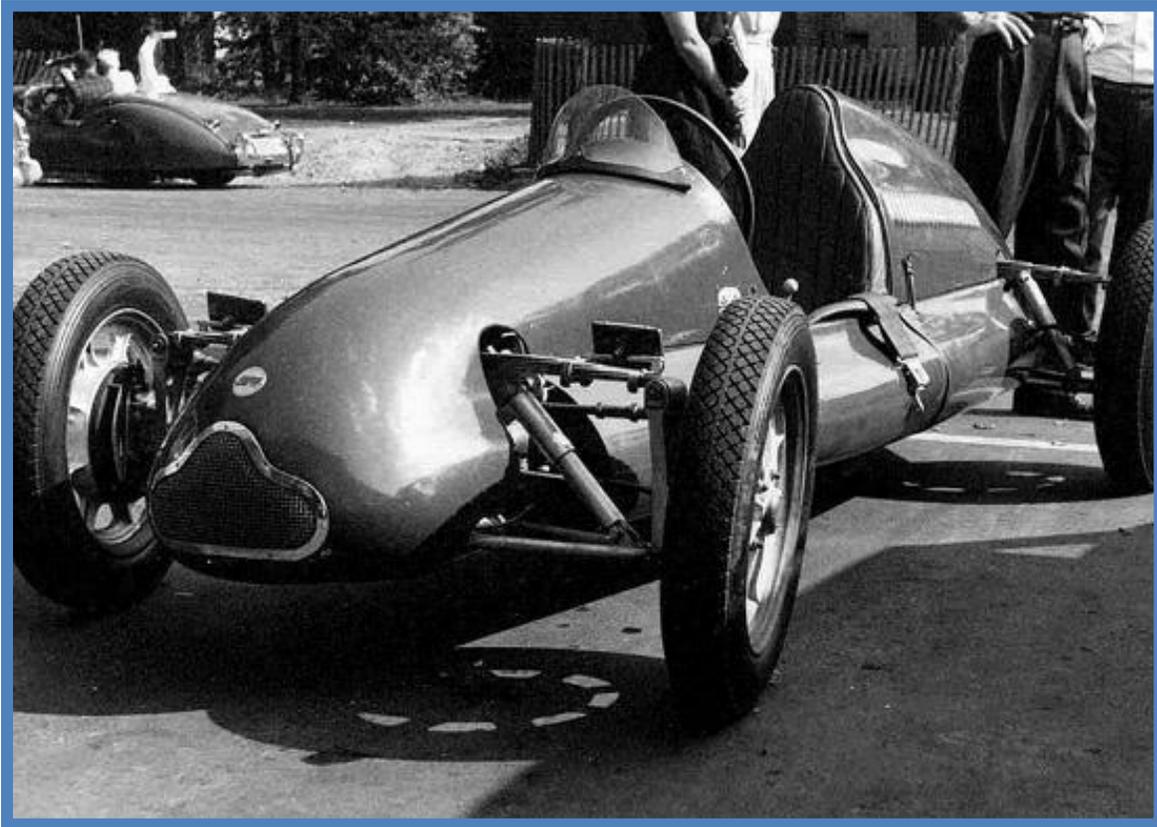
Charlie Davison next to the car that replaced the SS100. It just didn't measure up, even though it was a pleasant and attractive car. The SS100 was a sports car in every sense of the word and Davison missed it. Eric Davison photo.

That trip took a bit of the wind out of Dad's sails and all was quiet for a short time until a friend pointed out that he knew of a Simca 8 Sport for sale at a bargain price. While the Simca was not much of a sports car, more sporty car, it was beautiful, a nice comfortable diversion and we made the 1951 race in the little Simca.

It served to do a few rallies and time trials. It was refined enough so that Dad entered Mom in the annual Press On Regardless event. Since I was an accomplished Simca pilot I was assigned to co-pilot with Howard Rzeppa who owned one. Rzeppa was considerably older and I think that my youthful exuberance (recklessness) behind the wheel of his car was not appreciated. Rzeppa was the inventor of the constant velocity joint.

The trip to the Glen in 1951 was, as always, fun but we were without a really neat car and this bugged Dad.

The Seneca Cup race was once again, won by George Weaver in Poison Lil, his fabulous Maserati. John Fitch was second in a gorgeous little 195 S Ferrari berlinetta. For the first time European Formula 3 cars were present, two Coopers and and Effyh. They were fun to watch, little bugs among the real cars.



Roland Keith and Phil Walters both entered F3 Coopers in the Seneca Cup and finished 15 and 16th in these tiny 500cc motorcycle engine cars. Frank Shaffer Photo.

George Weaver switched to a Jowett Jupiter to win the Queen Catherine Cup race. Second was a Lester MG. There were numerous Italian cars entered including a beautiful little Siata Crosley driven by Otto Linton. While it hardly could be defined as a sports car, a Morris Minor was in the field. An extremely unusual entry was a VW Special. VW was not yet a household name in the US and the first Porsches were yet to be seen but here was the future, a rear engine air-cooled roadster.



Otto Linton's beautiful Siata Crosley Spider was the talk of the town. He placed 14th in the Queen Catherine Cup race. Frank Shaffer photo.

Three of the first four places in the main event were taken by Cunningham C-2s. Walters was first, Fitch second and Briggs Cunningham was fourth. The Cunningham string was broken by Bill Spear driving a Ferrari 340 America. Sherwood Johnson and Walt Hansgen finished eighth and ninth in Jaguar XK120s.

It was now becoming obvious that it was serious money and drivers who were more than 'enthusiasts' who were going to dominate road racing.



The Jowett Jupiter and Javelin were flat fours with torsion bar all-independent suspension. Frank Shaffer photographed his friends with the car. Boyd Brickley, an aviator and mechanic, studies the front suspension and flat four while Paul Gehrlein checks out the interior. Note the Leica camera. Frank Shaffer photo.

One of the features of the '51 event was the appearance of the GM LeSabre a, creation of the famed Harley Earl. GM had volunteered it to be the pace car. The car was prominently displayed at the local Chevrolet dealership and on the streets. While it was touted as a sports car it most assuredly was not and the purists had fun deriding it. The styling was reminiscent of the Air Force Sabre jet that was dominating the skies over Korea in 1951. At one point after having difficulty starting the flooded engine, the engine was over revved and shoved into drive. It twisted the drive shaft and rendered the car immobile. While there were many who laughed at GM's predicament, an army of suited GM-types appeared and whisked the car away to the dealership where a crew worked all night to make the car ready for its task as pace car.



The opposite of the Linton Siata might have been the GM LeSabre, Harley Earl's attempt at ground flight.

Legend has it that Earl was impressed by the cars and the enthusiasm of the crowd at Watkins Glen and issued orders for a GM sports car. The Corvette appeared in 1953.

The Simca was nice, but Dad really missed the SS100 and for the 1952 event, he was again determined to find a Jaguar SS100, despite the fact that the XK120s were much faster. What he would find would be a SS100 on steroids. Times were changing though, and in 1952 I was ready to enter college. We didn't know it then, but it would be the last time I would go to the Glen with Dad, and it would be the last of the fabled street races through the tiny town of Watkins Glen.

Note: The car in the lead image box is a Bugatti T35A, s/n 4606 and was owned by cartoonist Charles Addams from 1947 to 1949, when he sold it to Charles Moran. Moran sold it to John and Betty King, here after arriving in Watkins Glen, 1951, having driven from their home in Arlington, Massachusetts. Harold Lance photo.

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