

HITCHING
A RIDE WITH

DUNCAN Rabagliati

what it's like. You start **collecting** and you've got **more** than you can **handle**. But this has gone **way** over the top. We **checked** out just before the **ultimate** garage clearance

Stewart

Photography: Philip Lee Harvey

Duncan Rabagliati casually confesses: "I've only ever sold one car – it was a Mini, sometime back in the late '60s, but the chap ate it off."

This isn't a particularly rare collection, until you learn that he's bought, given or taken a car and a body there, a hundred cars – all of which, he still owns.

In neither controls the car industry nor is he the son of an oil-rich state. He's living in the suburbs who's dared himself to admit that the task of properly looking after hardware is more than an average man can adequately deal with.

He's got to hang onto my '59 Alfa Junior racer, the '79 and the '67 Austin Healey everything else is up for sale. 12,000 mile Cavalier SRi cars to take it; it's a lot, he confides.

Maybe you're wondering why a man from a wealthy kleptocracy, could ever possibly have a hundred-odd cars spanned, especially when the majority of his collection wear wheels few of us have ever even seen. Well, to be honest, have you ever seen a Batten, Deep Sanderson round your way? Course not. But we have to probe a little to even partially appreciate

this extraordinary automotive assortment and the rationale lying behind it.

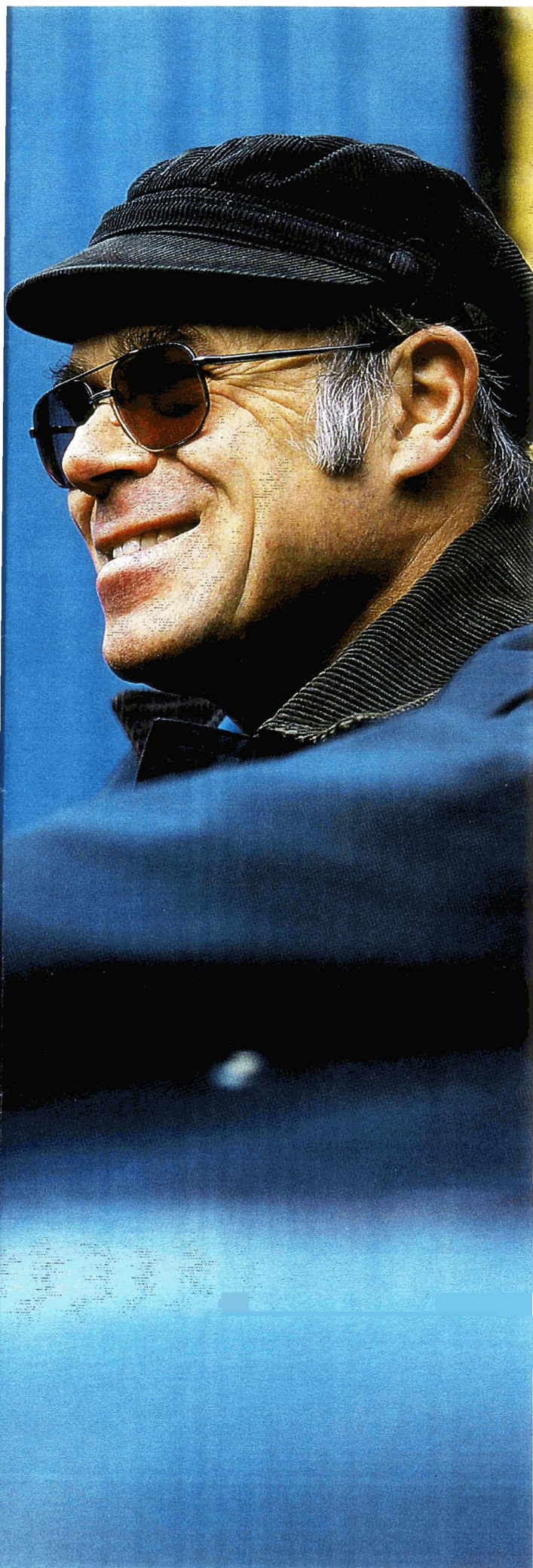
Over a hot cuppa at Rabagliati Towers, he opens two drawers of a large chest to reveal a hoard of '50s and '60s Dinky cars, many of them in their original boxes: "My brother and I used to brumm these about when we were kids." And behind a small snooker table there's a pedal-car-sized, battery-powered KN single-seater which, I learn, is a scaled-down replica of the pre-war KN racer, whatever that was.

Then Duncan points to another equally large cabinet across the room, similarly brimming with Dinkys, but mentions that the majority of his toy cars are stored upstairs. Realising we could easily lose a full week brumming away on the carpet, I steer Duncan back to his lifetime items.

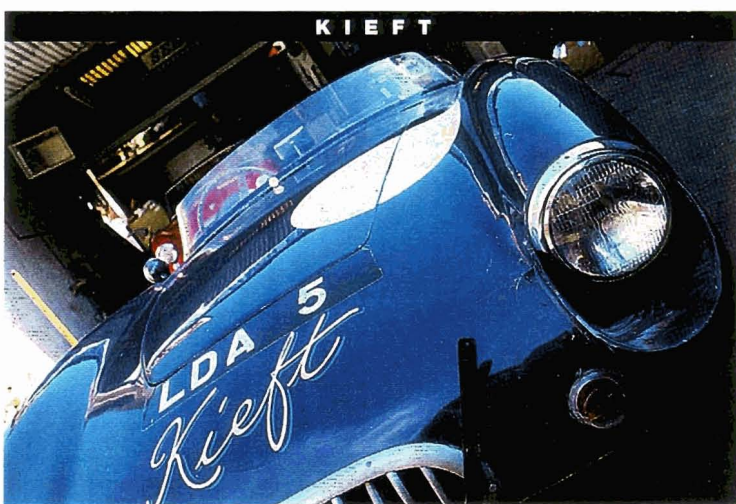
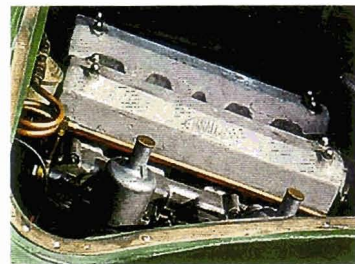
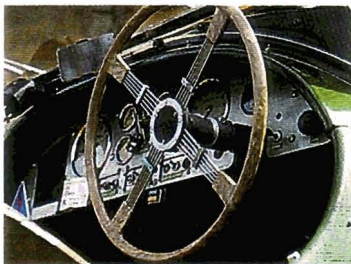
He has acquired no less than 20 Alexis racing and trials cars ("If I hadn't bought them, the trials cars would certainly all have disappeared, absolutely nobody wanted them") and 14 Swallow Doretts. Based on the mechanics and running gear of the popular Triumph TR2, just 276 Doretts were made, but Duncan has never even sought to own a TR2.

Now here's where I speak with some personal interest and experience. In '64 my parents bought an immaculate one-owner Doretta and kept it for over 20 years. PEL 589 was the first car I took out on the public road. It was the car I learnt to drive in, and during those two decades if we ever saw, heard about or

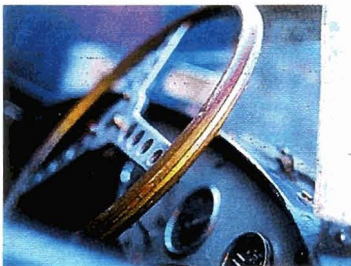


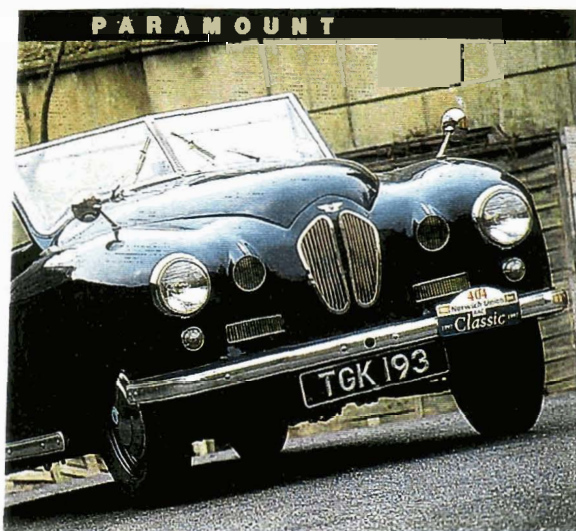


This '49 example is one of 14 L2s built with various bodies, just six of them identical to this. Under the bonnet there's a rorty 1.767cc four-cylinder dohc Lea Francis motor. Connaught was founded by Rodney Clarke and MPH 996 was his personal team car which he raced at the '51 Dundrod TT. Backed by the construction entrepreneur Kenneth McAlpine, the company kicked off by making sports cars but later progressed into single-seater formula racers. In '55 a Connaught driven by Tony Brooks gave Britain its first Grand Prix victory in over 30 years, but despite that, production ended in '57



This Wolverhampton firm started up in 1950 and, in addition to single-seaters, built six Climax-engined sports racers. A seventh, this one, was once powered by a Turner engine but now has its original 1.5-litre MGA-based engine fitted. Built at the end of '54 it competed in the '55 Monthéry 24-hour race where it apparently spent more time in the pits than on the track. It also competed in the Le Mans 24-hour, the Goodwood 9-hour and the Dundrod Tourist Trophy race that same year. Kieft intended this model to go into proper production but the company was sold off and, in Duncan's words, "the notion fizzled". Duncan has owned his Kieft for sixteen years

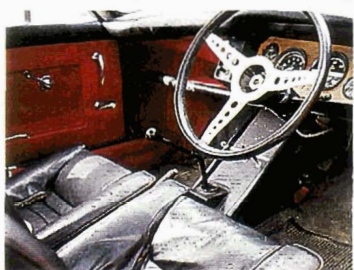
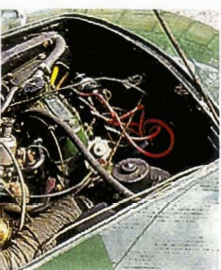




An independent maker based at various sites from Leighton Buzzard to Swadlingcote, Paramount produced cars from '50 to '56. This is the last of about 80 four-seater open tourers built by the company, although Duncan says three more were assembled by the company's powered by a 1.5-litre Ford engine, the Paramount doesn't deliver the ultimate: its twin petrol tanks – one in each front wing – were a novel feature



formed in 1960 and based in Letchworth, Ogle built 65 of these monocoques, featuring Mini Cooper running gear, between '61 and '63. Tragically, the company's founder David Ogle was killed in a road accident while driving one of them, but at the request of the company's MD, John Ogier, a final one, chassis number 66, was made in '65 – and this is it. Among other numerous and widely varied projects, Ogle also designed the Bond Bug, and another Ogle (the SX250) – the Reliant Scimitar. The company still exists today as a design consultancy



even spotted a picture of another it was a rare but major family event. And Duncan's got 14! Coincidentally, just like Duncan's Mini, the person who bought mine also smashed it up.

But you'll also raise your eyebrows when I tell you that he doesn't consider himself a collector. Though he'd be too polite to admit it, I gained the impression that in Duncan's eyes collectors buy mainstream Bentleys and Bugattis and their like for little reason other than mere pride of ownership.

"I'm not a collector, I'm an historian," he asserts. "I've bought these cars over the years because in many cases they would have been lost, destroyed or simply forgotten, and I seem to have made it my duty to research and preserve their history."

To lend weight to this historian status he has co-researched, written and published 29 volumes (so far) of *A Record of Grand Prix and Voiturette Racing* – weighty, sombre tomes which document every single entry, car, driver, grid, lap, retirement and more of every GP, F1, F2 and F3 race held anywhere in the world from 1900 to the present day. Ask him about one of his cars and rather than respond with the usual 'double overhead cam with two twin choke DCOEs and a four-

branch manifold,' he's more likely to recite the full address of the factory, the registration and chassis numbers of any sister cars and then chip in with the odd educational anecdote or two.

For instance, both Gordano and Iota were financially backed by Joe Fry of Turkish Delight fame. Or that: "Cars were a sideline for Cyril Kieft – he was a steel magnate but he's still alive today, you know, he's in his 80s." And apparently some of the early '60s 1,600cc De Tomaso Vallelungas have been retro-fitted with V8 engines. "Can you imagine," exclaims Duncan, "as though there weren't enough V8 De Tomasos around already!"

Just a fraction of this stuff could, of course, lead you to conclude that Duncan is duller than an accountants' convention. That is until you realise that most of his cars are racers and sports cars, and although some are in bits, or 'entities' as he describes them, most are sound runners and throughout the summer months he's charging about on circuits and rallies across Europe, having a whale of a time.

For a recent Norwich Union classic rally, Duncan entered a dozen of his cars with friends and family driving, and everyone helping out with the expenses. "Then, by the night before

the off, I needed a

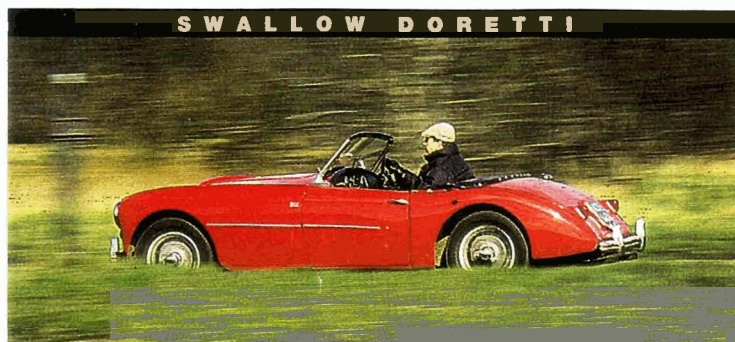
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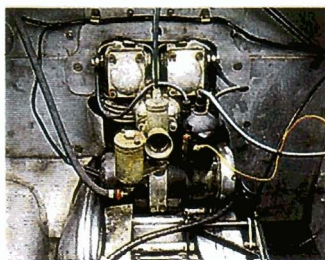
Alexis
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* Not for c



by the time you read this, most of an's unique accumulation will come under the hammer. The and copies of their history files

And in any case, if I'm any judge, Duncan will soon be at it again. "I've got my eye on a couple," he says... □



s CanAm, **Alexis** GT, **Alexis** HF1*, **Alexis** HF1, **Alexis** HF2, **Alexis** HFIII (seven),
s HFIII (chassis only), **Alexis** Mk18/24, **Alexis** Mk14, **Alexis** Mk15, **Alexis** Mk19,
s Mk24B, **Alexis** Mk25, **Alexis** MkIII, **Alta** 1100 Sports, **Alta** GP, **Arnott** 500 (two),
n **Healey** Sprite*, **Austin** Mini, **Batten** V8, **Britannia** GT (two), **BSA** three-wheeler,
on Cotton, **Cannon** GT, **Cannon** Trials, **Connaught** L2 (two), **Connaught** L2 (body),
ught L3, **Cooper-Consul**, **De Sanctis** Formula Junior, **De Tomaso** Vallelunga,
Sanderson 301 (two), **DKR** scooter, **Emeryson** 500 (three), **Emeryson** GP,
horpe Formula Junior, **Fletcher Ogle** SX1000, **Ford** 10 Dellos, **Ford** Special,
ta G3, **Gordano**, **Grenfell** 500, **Grenfell** Sports, **Hillman** Avenger GLS, **Iota** Sports,
Wasp 500, **Jaguar** XK150 (chassis), **Kieft** 1100 Climax Sports (two), **Kieft** MG Le
KN racer (battery model), **Lea Francis** (three), **Longburton** Austin, **MG** Midget,
ca, **Morgan** 4/4*, **Ogle** 1.5, **Ogle** SX1000 (two), **Opus**, **Paramount** (four), **PRA** 500,
ond **Mays Zephyr** (engine), **Riley** 1.5, **Rochdale** GT (two), **Rochdale** Mk6 (body),
ell **Alexis** Mk14, **Scotch Air** Connaught, **Sinclair** C5, **Skoda** 1100 ohc, **Squire**,
low Doretta (fourteen), **Turner** (engine), **US Midget** Racer, **Vauxhall** Cavalier SRi