HITCHING A RIDE WITH

abagliati

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

Stewart

Photography: Philip Lee Harvey

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

this isn't a particularly tration, until you learn has bought, give or take the and a body there, dred cars – all of which, writing, he still owns.

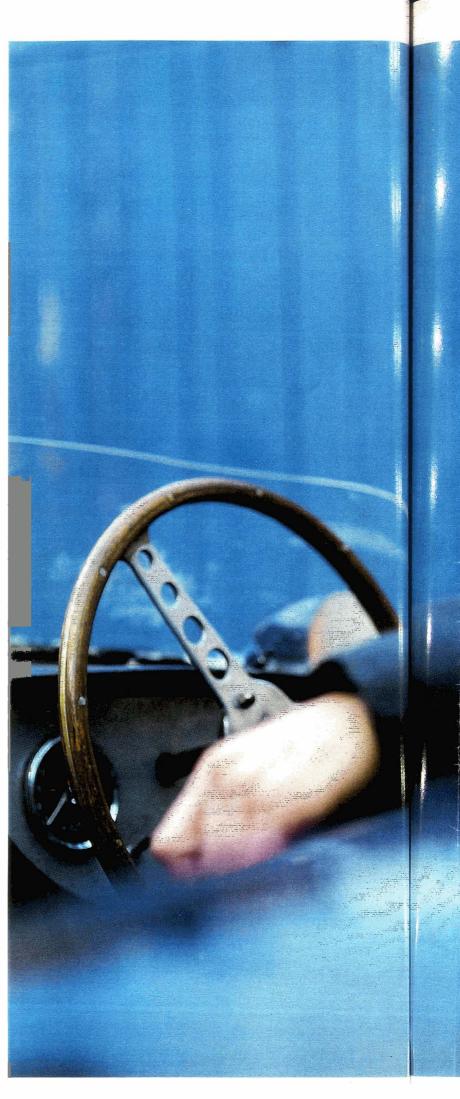
n neither controls the re industry nor is he the of an oil-rich state. He's ng in the suburbs who's d himself to admit that task of properly looking tardware is more than an can adequately deal with. to hang onto my '59 tha Junior racer, the '79 nd the '67 Austin Healey erything else is up for sale 02,000 mile Cavalier SRi cares to take it; it's a he confides.

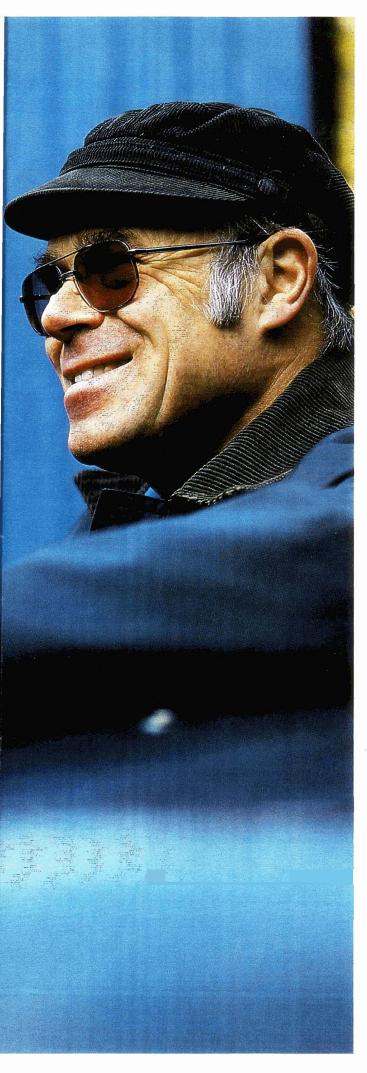
may be wondering why e from a wealthy kleptoccase, could ever possibly a hundred-odd cars spanades, especially when the y of his collection wear few of us have ever even nean, be honest, have you a Batten, Deep Sanderson round your way? Course But we have to probe a to even partially appreciate this 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, batterypowered 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 lifesize 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 Dorettis. Based on the mechanics and running gear of the popular Triumph TR2, just 276 Dorettis 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 oneowner Doretti 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



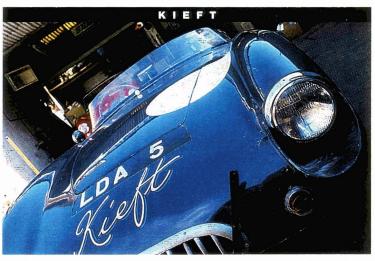




This '49 example is one of 14 L2s built with various bodies, just six of them identical to this. Under the bonnet there's a rorty 1.767cc four-cylinder dohc Lea Francis motor. Connaught was founded by Rodney Clarke and MPH 996 was his personal team car which he raced at the '51 Dundrod TT. Backed by 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 tirct Grand Prix victory in over 30 years, but despite that, production ended in '57





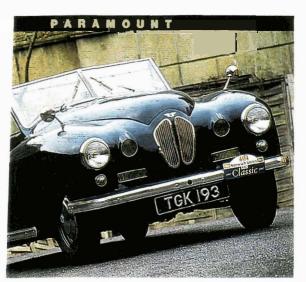


This Wolverhampton firm started up in 1950 and, in addition to single-seaters, built six Climaxengined sports racers. A seventh, this one, was once powered by a Turner engine but now has its original 1.5-litre MGA-based engine fitted. Built at the end of '54 it competed in the '55 Monthéry 24-hour race 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







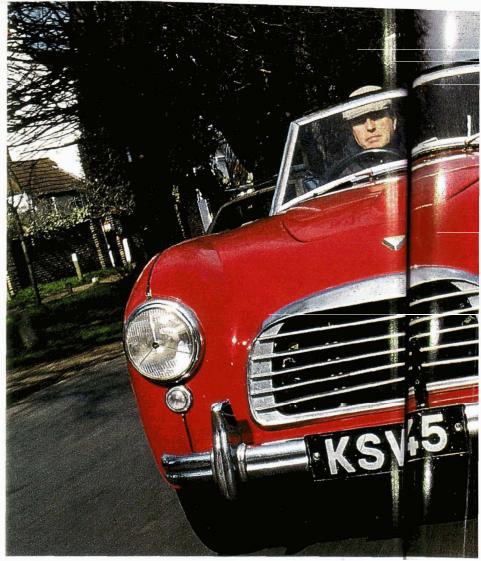
An independent maker based at various sites from Leighton Buzzard to Swadlingcote, Paramount produced cars from '50 to '56. This is the last of about 80 four-seater open tourers built by the company, although Duncan says three more were assembled by the company's wered by a 1.5-litre Ford engine, the Paramount doesn't deliver the ultimate





ormed in 1960 and based in Letchworth, Ogle built 65 of these monocoques, eaturing Mini Cooper running gear, between '61 and '63. Tragically, the company's tounder David Ogle was killed in a road accident while driving one of hem, 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) • 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 fourbranch 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 But no do the s responsit the shar selling sc and wor It's an u the auct shoulder So by t Duncan have coi cars and

DU

Alexis Alexis Alexis Austin Cannon Connau Deep § Fairthc Ginetta Iota Wa Mans, I Monica Raymon Russel Swallo



, it had snowballed a bit and we I a table for 60 at dinner!"

now the time has sadly come to e sensible thing and share the sibility with others. And, as even arpest salesman would concur, so many cars – so many weird onderful cars – is no easy task. undertaking, nonetheless, which action house Brooks agreed to er on April 8 this year.

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

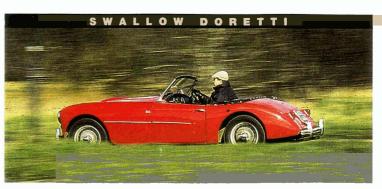
and we (Duncan's retaining all the original paperwork himself) will have dispersed.

Despite the income from the sale, it will have been a sad day for the Rabagliatis. But before that time came we accompanied him and his carrier bags full of keys to some local lock-ups for a random snoop around his cars, and came away with a valuable reminder that there's a great deal more to motoring than market shares, pyrotechnic seatbelts or 'will I pull in it?'

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... \Box

UNCAN'S GARAGE CLEARANCE

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 MkII, 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), aught L3, Cooper-Consul, De Sanctis Formula Junior, De Tomaso Vallelunga, o 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, nond 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 Doretti (fourteen), Turner (engine), US Midget Racer, Vauxhall Cavalier SRi



Originally co-founded in 1922 by William Lyons, the Swallow company built motorcycle sidecars but essentially re-organised into two firms during the '30s. One half, SS Cars, transmuted into Jaguar and the other, backed by Tube Investments (currently the giant TI Group) went on to make 276 Dorettis during

'54 and '55. Primarily conceived for the US market, the name is rumoured to be a snazzy derivation of Dorothy, a daughter of the US importer. Most of the early production went to the States and, although demand remained stable, production was halted due to inter-company political wrangling. About 180 Dorettis are known to survive ~ 14 of them are Duncan's. The hand-built, all-aluminium body covers a Triumph TR2 chassis and two-litre, four-cylinder mechanics. This particular example drives beautifully, having been mechanically rebuilt, Duncan asked us to mention, by Peter Lander of Sigma Engineering in Gillingham, Dorset









lota Racing Cars of Bristol primarily built affordable 500cc single-seater racers but, backed by Joe Fry's chocolate empire, it did build just two road-going two-seater prototypes in around '49 or '50. Strangely there was never any record documenting the existence of the second, the one you see here. Mounted amldships there's a 350, or possibly a 500cc Royal Enfield air-

cooled vertical twin engine with the necessary sequential shift gear lever between the occupant's knees. There's no electric starter but instead there's a huge fold-down kickstart pedal mounted in the middle of the footwell. If the idea had ever caught on, lota Sports drivers would certainly have been recognisable by their hugely over-developed but massively bruised and bloody left legs



