

Some thoughts on...

by David Blumlein

A DB3 Coupé

When it became clear in the early Fifties that the 'prototype' sports-racers, intended initially as a stop-gap while manufacturers got themselves back in production after the austerities of the post-war era, were to be a permanent fixture at Le Mans and in serious sports car racing, Aston Martin was obliged to join in the trend if the famous marque were to have any aspirations of outright wins. The admirable DB2, basically a competitive production car, was being outpaced all too quickly despite a worthy record of success in the 3-litre class of international competition.

Enter the DB3. This was Aston's first attempt at an outright sports-racer and was the brainchild of Professor Robert Eberan von Eberhorst, a Viennese engineer who had made his reputation while working on the D-Type Auto Union Grand Prix car in 1938-39. At the start of the war he gained academic recognition at the Dresden Technical University and was involved in work on the Tiger tank and even the initial testing of the V1 and V2 rockets. After hostilities he worked for Pierre Dusio on the Cisitalia Grand Prix project before joining, in May 1949, Leslie Johnson's E.R.A. concern in Dunstable. Here he developed the chassis for what was to become the Jowett Jupiter sports car but by December 1950 he was lured to David Brown's Aston Martin works at Feltham with the express purpose of creating the DB3.

Not surprisingly the basis of this car reflected much of what he had developed for the Auto Union. The Aston Martin as of course front-engined but its chassis was made up of a ladder frame of two tubular members as in the German racer and torsion bars mounted transversely front and rear looked after the suspension. Initially the car, clothed in a straightforward open body by Frank Feeley, used the W.O. Bentley developed 2.6 litre straight-six twin-cam engine from the post-war Lagonda, this unit being the main justification for David Brown's acquisition of Lagonda after the war.

Rather optimistically the Aston management hoped that the new car would be ready for the 1951 Le Mans race in June but it was asking a great deal of such a relatively small organisation to design, build and develop a whole new concept in just six months or so. Furthermore, Eberan was very much a perfectionist not inclined to rush his work, a characteristic which

increasingly irritated Team Manager John Wyer who took the initiative to have some lightweight DB2s constructed to give the company something with which to tide over the lack of a really competitive car for the season's main races.

The DB3 eventually appeared in the Tourist Trophy race at Dundrod on September 15th 1951 in the hands of Lance Macklin. He managed to take the car up to second on handicap before a bearing failed, although the official reason published was the breakage of the exhaust! Early 1952 testing at Montlhéry revealed a design fault in the chassis when a de Dion tube broke but, with such faults ironed out, five works cars were laid down. By the time of the Monaco Grand Prix, which was for sports cars that year, the engine had been stretched to 2.9 litres but this was not enough to keep pace with the opposition and the DB3's only noteworthy success came in August in the first of the three Goodwood Nine-hour races when Peter Collins and Pat Griffith beat the Jaguars despite one of the Aston team cars retiring with a dangerous conflagration in the pits.

Aston Martin constructed five more DB3 chassis for sale to private owners and one of these, DB3/7, was delivered with an enclosed coupé body for Tom Meyer to use in endurance racing. The car carried the registration number NXY 23 and had a rather ugly square radiator grille consisting of vertical and horizontal rods. The car was raced by him in 1953 and ran in the Spa 24 Hour race, a championship round that year, but retired after 81 laps with valve trouble. The Pescara 12 Hours yielded a third in class (apparently) when Meyer was teamed with Australian Tony Gaze. British race-goers of that era will remember the car running well in the Goodwood Nine-hours when Philip Fotheringham-Parker co-drove with Meyer to finish twelfth overall and seventh in class. In 1954 the car crashed in the Mille Miglia and some minor results were recorded in two Scandinavian events. It has to be said that DB3 owners can not have been too pleased to find that in mid-1953, as they were taking delivery of their cars, that the works Aston Martin team had switched in May to the new lighter DB3S model, the work of ex-Invicta designer W.G. Watson on his own initiative, which did not go down too well with Eberan who consequently left Aston that year to rejoin



Spark 'die-cast' SPK0263
Lotus 62 - BOAC 500 1969

the revived Auto Union organisation.

This closed down the factory's activities with the DB3 which suffered from coming too late, being too big and heavy and being all in a disappointment. But our DB3/7 coupé was not forgotten and it was offered for sale in October 1954 at H.W. Motors for £2,250. It was purchased by Angela Brown, daughter of David, and she had the front of the car changed to a much more attractive oval air intake without a grille; the rest of the body remained unchanged. She ran the car in a number of club events in 1955, scoring a notable win in a 5 lap race at Snetterton in June, making also fastest lap. Then she offered the car for sale in the December when it became the property of Charles Sgonina until 1989.

The car still exists, happily in good condition and in the colour and style of Angela Brown.

Lotus 62

Lotus was involved in GT racing from the late Fifties when the category was achieving international status. The Elite, Lotus's first proper road-going production car, first appeared at Le Mans in 1959 and proceeded to win its class six times in a row! The Elan, which succeeded it in 1962, won numerous minor events but when the mid-engined Ginetta G12 started to give this Lotus a harder time on the circuits, Colin Chapman developed the mid-engined Europa (Type 46) as a successor. This was launched in December 1966 and it quickly spawned a racing version, the Type 47.

This car used a lighter version of the Europa's backbone chassis but boasted the fuel-injected 165 b.h.p. version of the Lotus-Ford twin-cam engine. A 5-speed Hewland gearbox was used and the rear suspension was strengthened with new uprights, a single top link and radius arms to cope with the extra power. Two of these new cars appeared at the Brands Hatch Boxing Day meeting in 1966 and John Miles led from start to finish. Jackie Oliver's car wouldn't start and received a push which relegated its final finishing order but on the road he caught up to finish second. It was a traditional Lotus début and the 47 went on to numerous successes in 1967: Miles and Oliver won the prototype 2-litre class in the BOAC 500 championship race, coming ninth overall and Miles went on to record eight more successes that year.

A Type 47 also ran at Le Mans that year, entered by Team Elite whose record at the Sarthe with the Elite was outstanding. But the new car succumbed to engine maladies and it retired in the fifth hour.

In 1968, bedecked in the red and white Gold Leaf colours of its Formula 1 stablemates, the 47 went on to further successes, Miles taking a class win in the John Players Trophy at Silverstone and a second in that circuit's International Trophy. Oliver claimed a class win at the Guards Trophy at Brands Hatch and another category win at Croft.

This Europa background dictated the general layout and appearance of a completely new successor to the 47, the Type 62 for 1969. Lotus wanted to experiment with the design of its forthcoming four-cylinder D.O.H.C. slanted engine (which became the 907) and which was aimed at the new range of road cars for the Seventies. It was found that the dimensions of the current Vauxhall Victor 1995 c.c. coincided with the work Lotus had been doing and the new Lotus cylinder head was initially grafted on to a Vauxhall bottom end to make the LV220. Like the original Vauxhall unit, Lotus used a rubber belt to drive the camshafts which operated 16 valves while Tecalmit-Jackson fuel injection helped to give an output of 220 b.h.p.

This engine was mid-mounted in a look-alike Europa but it was quite different under the bodywork. There lay a tubular space-frame chassis equipped with wishbone front suspension but at the rear Lotus Formula 1 suspension was used as in the Type 49. Even Formula 1 size tyres and wheels were fitted, the power for these driving through a ZF 5-speed gearbox.

Designed by Martin Wade of Lotus Components division, just two of these potent cars were constructed, mainly to develop the new Lotus engine. The car made its début, like its forerunner, in the BOAC 500 mile race at Brands Hatch where, in the hands of Miles and Brian Muir, it won its class and finished thirteenth overall. Highlights of the season include Miles taking third place in the Tourist Trophy at Oulton park, a fourth and class win at Zandvoort with Muir in sixth and a first and third in the Guards Trophy at Brands Hatch, Miles this time supported by Roy Pike.

Once the season was over Lotus did not race the cars any more; they had done their job and the racing revealed a weakness in the block which was resolved for future production. One of the cars was sold in 1971 to Jazz musician Chris Barber who had already run a private Type 47 in previous seasons and who had a Piper GTR briefly as well. The Barber-run Type 62 gained two fourteenth places, driven by Dave Brodie, in the Nurburgring 500km and Interserie race at Hockenheim in October, and there the brief chapter of this rare Lotus concludes.



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Aston Martin DB3/7