

Member Featured Car of the Month July 2010

Tom Davis' "Elva—She goes!"

by Tom Davis



I started lusting after an Elva after Neal Brown bought a street car and set about restoring it to his own special specs at MG Automotive. Before that I had never heard of the car. Unfortunately Neal passed away before completing it, but he certainly had a way of convincing people of the finer points of any subject, and he was a huge fan of the marque. Not too long after that I met an Elva owner (Mk II Courier with MGA 1622 engine) at the racetrack and we quickly became good friends both on

and off the track. He is a bit faster than me in the BGT that I have raced for 9 years, but we have some pretty good dices and once, under the right track conditions, I actually finished ahead of him. But I was inextricably hooked on acquiring my very own Elva.

The name, given by founder Frank Nichols, is a corruption of the French words "elle and va" meaning "she goes" and, from this very humble start in 1955, the name, "Elva" was later to be seen on nearly one thousand racing, sports racing and road going cars. Elva Engineering produced hand built cars of various racing designs and in 1958 the venerable Elva Courier began with a prototype. Elva never manufactured their own engines, instead adapting proven power plants to custom built, tubular frame chassis' and fiberglass bodywork. Engines ranged from the Elva modified Ford side valve, through Climax, Ford DOHC, BMC, DKW, Porsche, and BMW, to the big V8 McLaren-Elva cars in just ten years. The first Couriers were powered by MGA 1500cc units with matching gearboxes. Three early cars were raced in the UK, garnering considerable attention in club races, while most went to satisfy orders from eager customers in the States. By April 1963, there were eighty cars on the order books, and it was not long before the Mk IV roadster was on the drawing board. This new car, with new chassis, different body styling and the option of 'Tru-Track' all-independent suspension, or "T-Type", was offered with either the MGB 1798cc or the Ford 1500GT units. In October 1963, this car was announced as the first 100mph plus sports car with four wheel independent suspension at under £1000 including tax. By then the Trojan manufacturing company had taken over the factory



and records show that Trojan built 210 Couriers, including 62 T-type cars. Later two special "Sebring" versions of the T-Type were built, and this is where my car came into the world with MGB power and serial number 1201. It is one of the two Trojan "team" cars and was shipped to Carl Haas in January 1966 to participate in the two most prestigious endurance events in the states – Daytona 24 Hour and Sebring 12 Hour races. This year was the first at Daytona for the 24 hour format so it was quite an initiation. Co-drivers Fred Opert and Willie McKemie drove in both events finishing 31st and 24th overall. McKemie actually owned the car at that point (Carl Haas was an importer and in that role was responsible for most Elvas coming to the US) and took it home to Austin, Texas to continue its rich racing career with SCCA. The car was raced all over Texas, Arizona and other parts west of the Mississippi until finally landing in the late 90's with veteran racer Craig Chima in Akron, who continued to enrich its history by winning an SCCA national championship in 2002.



I talked to both Fred (now in New Jersey and still involved with racing) and Willie and they were both excited to hear news of the car and my plans to restore it to the way it was when they competed. Of course when they raced it, it was not far from stock with bumpers and windscreen. There are some subtle differences in the car today, but overall it is pretty much intact. They have fond memories of the car and neither hesitated to tell about their adventures in Florida in 1966, including stealing the rear hubs off a corner worker's TR-4 to keep going during the Sebring race. Fred said when they went back to face him after the race he was ecstatic that "his" hubs were actually competing at Sebring!

When I bought the car from Craig it was still in full SCCA form, including several drastic modifications to allow it to compete with newer production cars found in club racing. Unfortunately, most of them are illegal in vintage racing as the specs are based on regs from the late 60's, so I set about returning it to vintage specs. The interior and engine were all in excellent condition but I had to replace the highly efficient rear discs with drums. The biggest hurdle was the bodywork as



Craig had fitted it with extremely lightweight Kevlar components. The original fiberglass pieces had also been heavily modified, and damaged as well, so getting it close to 60's form was definitely the long pole in the tent. After checking with a couple of local body shops, I ended up at Sporty Car Garage in Springfield. Where the other shops seemed to lean towards "cookie cutter" work, owner Steve Emerson and his crew were excited to take on the challenge. Turned out to be the right decision as the finished product was outstanding after they reinvented the look I was after, working strictly from photographs. Plus, after I managed to incur some damage during the first outing, they were able to put it right quickly. It wasn't cheap, but the ribbing I took was worse.

I love the car; it is all I hoped pleased to have put it back to ago. Although they came technology of the Elva far downright, built for speed, IRS, double adjustable coil-weight distribution combine drivable racing machine.

My next outing will be at club I race with is having a the Elva at historic Road cars are expected plus a from England for the event so affair. I'll let you know.



for and more and I am very near the way it was 45 years from the same time frame, the exceeded the B in terms of design. The tubular frame, over Koni shocks, and optimal to make it an extremely

Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin. The 55th anniversary / reunion of America. I hear that at least 20 couple of folks are coming it has promise of quite an

Click on the following link, if you'd like to learn more about Elva cars: <http://www.elva.com>