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They are still out there! The Kellison Corvette Special.



I have been fortunate to locate and restore several older racecars and have enjoyed them in various vintage races. My first project was to restore Bart Martin's 1959 Corvette powered Cooper Monaco. Bart was a well know race driver from the San Francisco region of SCCA. I found the remains of the Cooper in 1982 and after a lot of work and money I was able to participate in the 1986 Monterey Historics. This was the car that carried Bart to a national championship in C Modified at the first SCCA runoffs held at Riverside in 1964. I found the car after it was past its prime as a road racer and it was being raced as a rear engine sprint car (wing and all) in the Pacific Northwest.

After purchasing the car I had to convince Bart's original builder, Irv Dickson to help with the restoration. Help turned into almost a full time job for Irv and we did race the car for several years in various West Coast vintage events. Along the way Irv and I developed a friendship and we have done several more projects. Irv did an outstanding job of restoring the Baldwin Mercury Special; a Ford Flathead powered special from the 50's that I have vintage raced for almost 15 years. This car has won its class at the Monterey

Historics and the Wine Country Classics several times. At Monterey it was Judged Best Ford, won the Monterey Cup for an outstanding restoration of a postwar racing car and in 2003 it won the Road and Track award at the Pebble Beach Concours de Elegance for the car the magazine would most like to drive.

In 1959, Irv's wife, Barbara had an accident in her 1956 Triumph TR2 sports car. Irv ended up with the remains and he had a friend in Folsom, Jim Kellison who was beginning to make a name for himself by selling fiberglass sports car bodies, car kits, and later, dune buggies and Formula Vee kits. (<http://www.kellisoncars.com/>) A decision was made to turn the remains of the TR2 into a Kellison bodied sports car, powered by the original TR 2 engine. Jim Kellison, like Bill Devin was making sports car bodies that allowed an MG or a Triumph to be converted to something a little more racy. Irv chose the "baby Kellison roadster" configured for cars with an 86 to 90 inch wheelbase. It is my understanding the this particular body is very rare as Kellison made five bodies then rebuilt the mold to make a small coupe. The car was completed in the spring of 1960. Irv drove it nearly every day on the street and the car was auto crossed with some success in various SCCA events from 1960 to 1962.

A bit about Bart Martin. Bart was a young rancher from Hayward California and was a talented road racer competing in the San Francisco region of SCCA. Bart started his racing career with a 1957 Corvette that he purchased from Bob Bondurant. He had many wins with this car in the early 60's and the car is still actively campaigned in vintage racing by Mickey Swazey. At the end of 1962 Bart decided he wanted to go faster. He had a brother in law, Don Girard working as a mechanical engineer at Aerojet in Sacramento California. Irv Dickson and Jim Payne were also working at Aerojet, and living in Folsom California.

Irv had started a small business, Grizzly Engineering in Folsom California fabricating racecar parts and racecar chassis. His day job was still at Aerojet and he was working closely with Don Girard and Jim Payne. Bart approached Don, Jim and Irv about forming a serious race team and the group decided in late 1962 to form a partnership and put a V8 in the Kellison. About Christmas 1962 they took delivery of a new Fuel Injected 327 cubic inch Corvette engine and transmission and spent the winter squeezing it into the Kellison. The addition of the fuel injected Corvette made the Kellison Triumph more than a little racy – it was quick!



The team had some excellent members. Bart was an accomplished driver. The rest of the team was team was working at Aerojet to build rocket engines for various government projects. Jim Payne, a Corvette owner took care of the fuel injected engine and the Corvette sintered metallic brakes. Irv Dickson was a model maker at Aerojet and a skilled machinist and fabricator. Bart's brother in law, Don Girard, was a mechanical design engineer and developed a very unique rear suspension that Irv fabricated. This suspension was one of the inspirations that made this car so unique. It is a zero roll, low roll center solid axle design that really worked. A transverse rear spring is mounted on a central pivot, allowing the spring to rotate with no resistance as the car rolls in a turn. A sliding pillar under the differential is located by a large monoball and this defines a very low rear roll center, about four inches off the ground. This approach addressed the two big problems with solid rear axles, reducing roll stiffness and lowering the rear roll center. It worked like a charm, no doubt contributing to the excellent results Bart had with the car. The team probably should have listed Aerojet as a sponsor as many hours were spent around the water cooler and in the machine shop helping the Kellison along.



Bart after one of his many wins with the Kellison Corvette

Bart raced the Kellison Corvette in 63 with great success. He had wins at Laguna Seca, Salt Lake City, Cotati, Stockton, Candlestick Park and Vacaville among others. As fast as he was, Bart could see the handwriting on the wall and he wanted to join the move to mid engine race cars. Late in 1963 The Cooper project was born. The Kellison was disassembled at the end of the 63 season and the engine ended up in the middle a 1959 Cooper Monaco. The transmission ended up being converted into a Halibrand/T10

quick-change transaxel. As discussed above, the Cooper carried Bart to a national championship in C modified in 1964 and years later gave me a few thrills in vintage racing.

In 1965 Bart went on to build a 289 Cobra powered Brabham BT8 and unfortunately lost his life in a tragic accident and fire at Candlestick Park in 1965.

Several years ago Irv mentioned that he still had the remains of the Kellison Corvette. The frame had been rusting away against the side of his garage, the brakes were somewhere under a workbench and the body was in the attic. He still had the seats, the headers, the rear suspension and a few other bits. I had a broken fuel injected 327 and a Warner T10 four speed. All we needed was a few hundred dollars and a few hours and the Kellison would run again. Don't we wish. We budgeted about \$25,000 for the restoration and Irv committed about 1000 hours of his time. In the end it was over \$35,000 and 2000 hours but the results were worth it. The car debuted at the Monterey Historics this year. US built specials from the 40, 50 and 60's were featured. The Kellison Corvette certainly qualifies as a special and it does have a bit of history in West Coast racing. It showed well at Monterey and while there were the usual new car teething problems it did finish it's race. It is an exhilarating car to drive. With the short wheelbase and over 400 hp it is a handful. Now we have to learn to make it turn and stop and it will return to its former competitive performance.

The Kellison as presented at the Monterey Historics in August of 2005



Specifications:

Chassis 1956 Triumph TR2

Engine 1963 327 Cu In Fuel Injected Corvette. Approximately 400 HP

Transmission 1963 Warner T10 Four speed

Rear End 1957 Chevrolet – Narrowed

Brakes 1963 Corvette Sintered Metallic Drums

Wheelbase – 88 Inches, tread 48 Inches

Weight – 1650 pounds dry

Top speed – about 145 mph if you are brave enough

¼ mile time - Estimated at 125 mph in 11 seconds



Restoration

Fabrication

Body and Paint

Electrical

Plating

Engine

Aluminum Work

Major Contributors

Irv Dickson

Irv and Ken Dickson, Chuck Rulofson

Paul Murray

Chuck Rulofson and Jim Gomes

San Joaquin Chrome Works Lodi. CA

Bud Walmer's Automotive Machine Orangevale CA

Kevin Pharis

Roger Hartgraves

Dave Herlinger

Dickson Machine, Folsom

Paul's Place St. Marie ID

Orangevale CA

Folsom Ca.

RoadRunner, Yuba City

Herlinger Corvette Repair

Mt. View CA

Owners Irv Dickson and Jim Herlinger

Driver Jim Herlinger [jherlinger@sp3inc.com](mailto:jherlinger@sp3inc.com)

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