

# Backfire

North West Casual Classics  
Newsletter April 2024



The North West's Leading Classic Vehicle Club,  
Established 1996

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**Next Meeting : Tuesday 14th May 2024**

### DISCLAIMER

Views or opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the club, its officers or committee members. No responsibility can be accepted for inaccurate or misleading information within this newsletter, but every effort will be made to check accuracy before publication



**Kenny's delightful Morris Eight Tourer "Doris" in a Summer setting.**

## CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER



Last month I related the story of the brakes on my Austin. Driving it back from Chris Dickenson's welding shop, all was clearly not well in the stopping department. The brakes were grabbing quite viciously and rocking the car in all directions. I suspected that perhaps one of the shoe liners had become detached and as I have a spare set of shoes re-lined and ready to go, it seemed the only way forward was a brake strip down. My friend Glyn came over to assist with the task. (Actually it was me assisting him...)

Our first job was to refit the running board after the recent welding work and continuing on from there whilst the car was on stands, the strip down began. Drum brakes, ah yes it's been a while, but they're not much different than the ones I had on my 1936 SS Jaguar. The operating system is by rods and as such includes a four wheel handbrake! The driver's side rear was first (fig. 1) and it wasn't giving up without a fight. The drum didn't want to come off, but eventually succumbed to persuasion and was free. You can never be sure how old consumables are on an old car, unless you put them on yourself but these looked ancient. The linings weren't that worn but they were so smooth they

looked like black plastic! With the adjusters backed completely off the new shoes were a little tight and some fettling was required with a file to make them fit beautifully. A small amount of adjustment was made before moving onto the right front. This wasn't as straightforward as it has a self-centring arrangement which is riveted onto the trailing shoe (Fig. 2). I drilled out the rivets and because I didn't have any replacements we employed hex head Allen bolts with locking nuts. A quick wash down with brake cleaner and re-assembly was plain sailing.

The nearside replacement went without drama and it was time for a road test. I decided to stamp on the brakes several times before we left, as this would centre the front brakes and even things up a bit. The handbrake was coming on a lot sooner than before and that felt reassuring. So, out on the road we went with the handbrake partially on, this would take some of the 'newness' off the linings.

The brakes felt good initially, sometimes going right and sometimes going left but settling in at every

application. In a quiet lane at the back of Worsley church we tried an emergency stop, with alarming results so it was back home for adjustment. The second time out was a more serene affair, without the random right and left pulling. I still feel one of the rear brakes needs some more adjustment but I'll run it for a bit to bed in.

So, none of the shoes had thrown a lining but the wear marks on some of the linings showed that contact with the drums had been a little patchy. The car is transformed and the brakes are so much softer in operation.

If anyone needs brakes relining I can recommend:

**SAFTEK, Rawfolds Industrial Estate, Bradford Rd., Rawfolds, Cleckheaton, BD19 5LT. Tel.01274 862666**

They do mail order but if you turn up by appointment they can reline your shoes in a couple of hours.

I hope you all have completed your own list of tasks and are ready for what looks like a full season. Thanks go to Kenny and John for all their hard work and dedication to give us another full calendar of events for 2024.

***Cheers, Nigel***



**Brake work in progress on Nigel's Austin 16. Left, (Fig.1) stubborn drum finally off, and right (Fig.2) riveted self-centring device on trailing shoe.**

## EDITORIAL

A bit of an American flavour this month, with a tipping of the editorial hat to the 52 years that have passed since “American Graffiti” made the careers of George Lucas and his young stars on the silver screen. It also set the template for several iconic hot rods, which have been replicated in their thousands ever since.

Featuring Americana in the magazine comes very naturally, because like many of my generation, I came to classic cars via the custom scene. “Hot Car”, “Custom Car” and “Street Machine” were my choice of reading as a car-mad teenager, and trips to Belle Vue for the Rod and Custom Show were a highlight of my early motoring life, admiring the wonderful craftsmanship of builders such as Richard Wale, John Baldacchino and Nick Butler. I will try and come up with a feature on them in a future issue.

Also in this issue, a look at some of the very best tool room replicas

at the upper end of the classic car marketplace, which are a long way from plastic Cobras.

You may remember an editorial in an earlier issue about the Japanese “Kei” car market, and how this could be a viable way to reduce emissions and congestion here. I was pleased to see that the head of Renault no less, agrees, and thinks driving a two ton EV is doing nothing for the environment! His company will continue offering a choice of power plants. This echoes similar sentiments recently expressed by the head of Toyota. I am not holding my breath, but could common sense finally be making a comeback here, or will our technically illiterate politicians continue in their dogmatic pursuit of net zero?

Finally this month, do try to support Drive it Day if you can. Chris has prepared a detailed route, and if we get out and use our classics, the above mentioned shower who govern us may just have a slightly harder job banning our hobby!

**Steve C**

### **FBHVC DRIVE IT DAY 2024, SUNDAY 21st APRIL**

**Our Drive It Day run to Heskin Hall will start at the Hayloft, Sandy Lane, Bold Heath WA8 3XP at 11 am**

**And take a planned route to Heskin Hall, Chorley**

**PR7 5PA, for 12.30 pm. Please support this event,**

**and register on the club website or at the April 9th club meeting.**



## Diary dates for 2024

21/04/2024	"Drive it Day" road run to Heskin Hall
11-12/05/2024	Blakemere Military Show (Pre-1950s), Sandiway, CW8 2EB
12/05/2024	Cheshire View, Christleton near Chester (TBC)
12/05/2024	Wirral CCC Claremont Farm
18-19/05/2024	Anderton Boat Lift Show (Under discussion)
26/05/2024	St Helens Bus Museum
27/05/2024	Rainhill Village Gala
1-2/06/2024	Tatton Park (Early show)
08/06/2024	Hale Carnival, NWCC Annual Show, L24 4AX
16/06/2024	So Retro, Walton Gdns, Warrington WA4 6SN
18-19/06/2024	Cheshire County Show (NB: weekday event)
23/06/2024	Lymm Transport Festival (Numbers TBC)
07/07/2024	Lydiate Show (pre 1973 only)
14/07/2024	Warrington Disability, Walton Gdns, WA4 6SN (TBC)
13-14/07/2024	Cheshire Steam Fair, Daresbury (Pre-1973 only) WA4 4AG
20-21/07/2024	Middlewich Show
28/07/2024	Frodsham Rotary Club Show
03/08/2024	Newton Town Show
17-18/08/2024	Tatton Park (Late show)
7-8/09/2024	Avro 40's Weekend at Woodford (Pre-1950s only)
8/9/2024	NWCC Show, Burtonwood
06/10/2024	Wirral Bus and Tram Show, Woodside Ferry

Events listed in blue above are NWCC's own events. Those in black are where the club makes block entries. Those in green require individual entries to the organisers. Please check our web site or Facebook page before setting out for a show.

## KEY POINTS FROM MARCH MEETING

The charity raffle raised £100 and there were 48 members present. Kenny chaired the meeting in Nigel's absence.

Room at the Inn have emailed the club to formally thank us for our support last year and our donation.

Kenny thanked Chris Lee for his work organising the Cheshire Lanes Run to Adam Sykes and Co. which was enjoyed by all. Adam thanked us for bringing some "wonderful cars" and a return visit may follow this September.

Kenny advised that the committee have agreed that only those local clubs with whom we have a reciprocal relationship will be permitted to post their events on our web site and social media.

Eileen has order forms for anyone wanting club regalia in advance of the new season, and also advised that a collection will be held at the April meeting for the hospice which cared for Dave Franks, who sadly passed away recently.

## SHOW INFORMATION

The show season is ramping up. The So Retro event at Walton Hall will be on 16th June, with no cap on numbers. Our own show at Burtonwood is now confirmed as 8th September.

Lymm Transport Show is going ahead on 23rd June, but still cannot give us numbers of places.

Wirral CC have invited us to their show at Claremont Farm, but admission is by individual entry and if you fill in the form on the day it will cost you £1

Sheets for the Heskin Hall Steam Rally and the Cheshire Show are now out.

The Drive It Day run to Heskin Hall will start from the Hayloft, and we are expected at Noon-12.30

The Crawford Show on the weekend of Daresbury has yet to come back to us, but it will provide an option for those excluded from Daresbury by the 1973 cut-off.

Lydiate may advance their cut-off date to 1975 for their show on 7th July.

Dave Slavin reported that Tatton early show have given us a good pitch, with 30 places.

The Victoria Park event in Widnes is no further advanced and will no longer be included in Backfire.



Members had an enjoyable visit to Adam Sykes and Co., dealers in fine classic cars and automobilia and specialists in historic competition cars, on Saturday 9th March.

Thanks to Chris Lee for facilitating the visit, and to all at Adam Sykes

for their warm welcome and hospitality. Members were treated to a stunning display of classics, including this early Porsche 356. Steve Tanser is here contemplating a second mortgage, while other NWCC members are tucking into pastries.



**American Graffiti remembered: The film made on a shoestring against all the odds, which introduced future stars and four hot rod icons that are still being copied today.**

In 1972, some 52 years ago, American film maker George Lucas was challenged by producer Francis Ford Coppola to write a film script which would appeal to mainstream audiences. Lucas was still working on his first film and Coppola had yet to achieve his later reputation. Lucas reached back into his own teenage years in Modesto, California and wrote a coming-of-age story about a group of friends on a single night in 1962, cruising their hot rods and chasing girls, before two of them leave town for college. The plot is an intertwined series of episodes, and there is a sense that it is the end of an age of innocence.

Lucas had experienced the end of cruising culture, and set the film to a stellar soundtrack of rock and roll and doo-wop music, linked to his personal interest in “Wolfman Jack”, a DJ of the time whose disembodied voice is heard throughout the film, until revealed as an ageing man, sucking popsicles and working alone through the night.

Lucas’s script for “American Graffiti” was turned down by every studio and financial backer, until Universal accepted it. Filming began in San Rafael California, but had to move to Petaluma after only

one day due to local objections. Made for only \$777,000, the film went on to gross over \$250m in receipts, and is still being shown and sold. Despite this, Lucas was constantly fighting off interference from Universal’s senior management, wanting script changes and re-edits.

Central to the film are four classic hot rods and customs, which fired the imaginations of hot rodders and customisers around the world, and have since been the subject of many replicas. That those cars were acquired on a shoestring, and sold off cheaply after shooting makes their story all the more remarkable. Let us take a closer look at them.

### **The 32 Ford Five Window Coupe**

Driven by local drag racing hero John Milner (Paul Le Mat) the ’32 Ford 5 window coupe is the fastest car in the valley, and is the target of rival racer Bob Falfa (Harrison Ford) whose evil black 55 Chevrolet is pitted against Milner’s car in a final climactic dawn drag race, where the challenger blows a tyre and flips before bursting into flames.

As bought by producer Gary Kurtz for \$1,300, the iconic coupe was a

rough, backyard hot rod with a body in primer, full front fenders in red, a 3 inch roof chop and red and white upholstery.. It was bought simply because the roof was already chopped, and trailered to Bob Hamilton's shop in Ignacio. There it was quickly blown over in its infamous "piss yellow" and fitted, at Lucas's request, with cycle front wings and bobbed rear fenders for a "Hi-Boy" look and to keep it street legal for filming. The interior was dyed black, and the chromed reverse-rim wheels and skinny black wall tyres were retained along with the piston gear lever knob.

The engine was a Chevy 283 small

block, fitted with 4 Rochester 2 barrel carbs, a Man-a-Free inlet manifold, Fuelie heads, chromed valve covers and sprint car style side exhausts. The grille shell was sectioned by a few inches, and the dropped I-beam front axle and Buick drum brakes were chromed, and aluminium headlamp stanchions added. The gearbox was a T10, and the rear end was a '57 Chevy axle on a late 40s Ford transverse leaf spring.

Filming took its toll on the coupe, which had numerous holes and brackets added to it to mount camera platforms. It was apparently crudely masked, Scotch-Brited and blown over several times outdoors



**The 32 Ford 5 window coupe, the quintessential hot rod**

in the evenings before filming, and acquired several dents. When filming was over it was advertised at \$1,500 and remained unsold, before being put on Universal's back lot, where it was robbed of some parts and the engine filled up with water. It was eventually bought by Steve Fitch of Wichita, Kansas in a private auction. He restored it sympathetically, and then sold it on in 1985 to long-time Graffiti fan Rick Figari of San Francisco, who owns it today, and has turned down offers of \$2m for the iconic car, which has spawned a whole industry making replicas.

### **The 1958 Chevrolet Impala Bel Air Coupe**

Driven in the film by Steve Bolander (Ron Howard) and later lent to Terry "The Toad" Fields, the

Impala is a note-perfect example of where customs were in 1962. Builders moved away from Fords and Mercurys into more accessible, recently discontinued cruisers. Again we see the reverse-rimmed chrome steel wheels (they cut out the centres and welded them in backwards to give greater offset, then chromed the wheels), along with '59 Cadillac tail lights. The engine was a 348 Chevy with a ¾ cam and a 780 cfm Holley carb with a stick shift 3 speed auto. The interior (famously) was "tuck'n roll" in red and white, which at the time could be done over the border in Tijuana for \$300. With a raked stance, the body was "nosed and decked" by removing badges and trim from the hood and trunk lid, and the door handles were removed, but no sole-noids were fitted.





This led to a broken side window when Ron Howard locked himself out on set. The car was painted a warm ermine white, with red fogging around the accent lines. The “furry” dice were actually crocheted period items and the whole aesthetic was “less is more”, and all the cooler for it. The car was sold after filming for just \$285, but now belongs to Ray Evernham, a former NASCAR crew chief and TV presenter, who purchased it in 2015 and fully restored it after it had sat outdoors since 1974. During the restoration Evernham removed the 283 small block with 4 barrel carb the car had been fitted with post-filming, and sourced a 1962 327 small block with six Stromberg carburetors on an Ofenhauser manifold.

This is the engine Terry the Toad claims the car has in his scene with Debbie Dunham (Candy Clark) in the film, so the car is now true to the script, if not the reality!

### **The Chopped 1951 “Lead Sled” Mercury Coupe**

In the film the evil-looking chopped 1951 Mercury prowls the streets of the town as the chariot of local bad boys, “The Pharaohs”. They inveigle Curt Henderson (Richard Dreyfuss) into robbing a slot machine, and chaining the back axle of a police car to a hydrant and tearing past it, with predictably hilarious results.

Of all 4 cars central to the action, the Mercury was frankly, a heap. It was bought by Transportation Captain Henry Travers who spotted it

In a stock car track parking lot near Pomona. It was taken to Close and Orlandi's shop, who turned it around in just 14 days. They chopped the top by 4 inches, but rather than cutting new glass, simply sank the rear window into the body, covered the gap with filler and threw the rear side windows away altogether. There was no headlining, and welding seams can be spotted in the interior shots. The car kept its original flathead V8, the badging and trim were removed and the cheap hubcaps were on the car when purchased. A scrap bumper section was used to make the grille, and the "frenched" headlights were just trim rings bonded in and filled. Lots of filler and a quick paint job in cinnamon red completed the car. After filming finished, the car did not sell, and went on display at the Universal Studios lot with the yellow deuce Coupe, before being moved to a shed. It was later bought by customiser Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, who tidied the car up somewhat, including adding side windows. It was then sold sight unseen to Stray Cats guitarist Brian Setzer, who described it as "just a big piece of junk" before selling it in the 1980s to a buyer in New York, whose brother inherited it upon his death. It languished for some years in a scrap yard on the New Jersey state line, but is now believed to be being restored. There is also a well-known fake "Graffiti"

Mercury with some dubious documentation which has plied the US car show circuit, and was offered for sale at \$95,000. Caveat emptor...

### **Bob Falfa's 1955 Chevrolet 150 Street Racer**

Of all the cars in Graffiti, it is the 1955 Chevy that has the most screen presence, as the bad-to-the-bone street racer come to claim the crown as the fastest car in the valley. Yet it has a complex history, being not one but 3 cars, spanning two different movies!

In 1971 Universal Pictures released "Two Lane Blacktop", a road movie starring musicians James Taylor and Dennis Wilson. Known simply as "The Driver" and "The Mechanic", they journey from one drag race to another, living off prize money and bets on their '55 Chevy. The film has a cult status among petrol heads for its detail and accuracy.

The three 55's were prepared by Richard Ruth, with 454 big block engines, twin four-barrel carbs on hi-rise Weiand manifolds and huge aluminium air scoops in the hood. A Muncie M22 "rock crusher" gearbox, and a Pos-a-Traction back axle with 4.88 gears completed the ironmongery. The cars were stripped bare

to shed weight, with fibreglass doors, trunk lids and flip-fronts. With no bumpers, and finished in primer the '55s went from fleet base models into drag cars capable of 10 second quarter mile passes. Universal retained the cars when filming wrapped, and two of them were re-used in American Graffiti. For this they were painted black, and regained standard front fenders and hoods, with smaller air scoops, suggesting that the big blocks with their tall manifolds had been replaced with something less powerful. One car had a roll cage, which was used for the stunt scene where Falfa rolls it, but it was actually just driven off the road. It is known that a scrap '55 was obtained from a junkyard, rolled over

and ignited for the burn sequence, before being taken back for scrap. After filming, both of the cars were sold on. One went to a stock car driver and was subsequently crushed, while the other survives, but has been modified beyond recognition. A sad end for such an iconic street racer.

American Graffiti had an impact far beyond nostalgia for the era of drive-ins, cruising and rock and roll. It documents an age of innocence, soon to be overshadowed by the horror of the Vietnam war. For car lovers the film recalls a golden era most of us would love to have been a part of, with iconic hot rods you could drive at 17, that would be copied and loved by enthusiasts half a century later.



## Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery: Beyond kit cars and taking a look at the very best of the tool room replicas

At the upper end of the classic car hobby exists a small, specialist world in which a few companies are remanufacturing great classic cars to a level of detail well beyond that of even the best constructed replicas and kit cars. These are modern homages to the great cars of the past, using later engines and running gear and incorporating some modern safety features. Such cars, like the Suffolk SS100 Jaguars or the Lynx D Types, are beautiful and correspondingly expensive, but they are still not totally faithful reproductions, and an enthusiast can spot the differences.

The tool room copies are on a higher level still, and can even

involve the original manufacturer in the process. One such example is Aston Martin's "Sanction 2" replicas of their famous DB4GT Zagato lightweight racing car. In 1960 Aston took 19 of the shortened chassis of their DB4GT racing model, fitted with a higher compression 3.7 litre engines and Webers, and shipped them to Zagato in Milan, to be fitted with hand-formed aluminium bodies that were 45kg lighter than Aston's vaunted "Superleggera" (Italian for super light) efforts. Although not a vast weight saving, it must be remembered that for all their undoubted beauty, Aston DBs are heavy beasts, with a

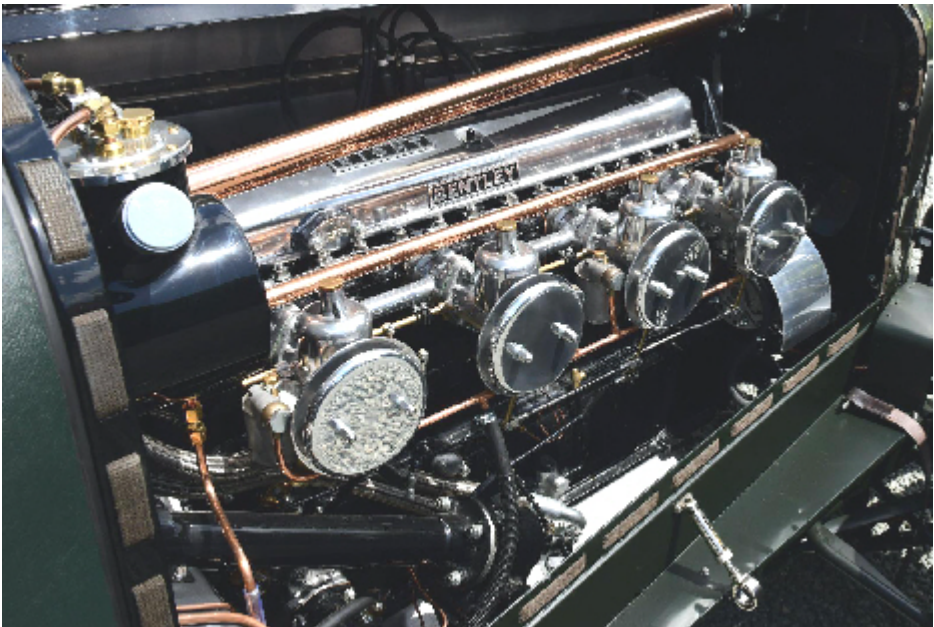


hefty steel platform chassis under that lovely coachwork, so any saving was welcome. The finished article, designed by Ercole Spada, was stunning, despite Zagato's reputation for sometimes achieving lightness at the expense of aesthetics.

Fast forward to 1987, and Aston authorised a run of 4 replicas, using unused chassis numbers. Bodied by former Zagato man Mario Galbiati these "sanction 2" cars were unveiled in 1991 at R.S. Williams' Aston dealership (who had initiated the project and lent his own 1961 car). Even so, the replicas were on 15 inch wheels instead of 16, and the engines were 4.2 litre units with larger Webers. In 1992 Aston gave Williams approval for two more cars, called "Sanction

3" using up remaining parts, at which point Zagato declared a halt. Another example of the genre are the magnificent vintage Bentley replicas created by Racing Green. Those of us who were at the (dry) Newton Show in 2022 may remember one of their Speed Eights winning the car of the show award.

Yet that car uses a Bentley Mk 6 Chassis from the 1940s, and a straight eight Rolls Royce B60 or B61 engine originally made as part of a modular series of engines built for the military. These were used in Alvis military vehicles like the Stalwart, Saracen and Saladin. No vintage Bentley ever left Cricklewood or Derby with a straight eight engine and four SU Carburettors.







What you are seeing is a clever amalgam of older Bentley parts, accurate reproduction parts and undeniably superb craftsmanship, but it is not a vintage car. Even the name comes from Guy Smith's 2003 Le Mans winning Bentley endurance racer. These cars are registered as "Bentley Specials", with the identity of the donor chassis. Used examples are around £350k

For probably the best example of a tool room replica we must go to Argentina and the Pur Sang T35 Bugattis. "Pur Sang" in French means "thoroughbred" and was original Bugatti advertising copy. Pur Sang, based near Buenos Aires have been established for 30 years and began as a restoration shop.

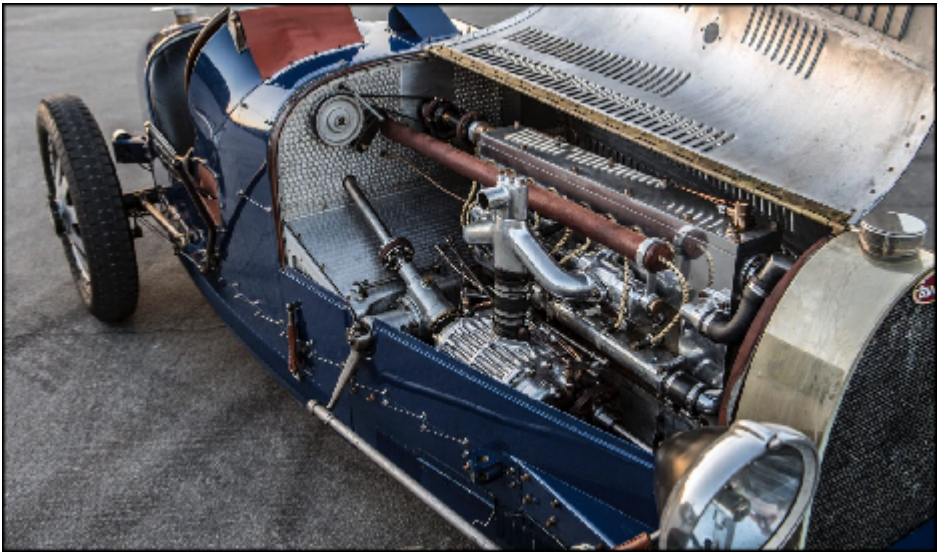
The founder, knowing he would never afford a real Bugatti, took accurate measurements and photos of one he was restoring, and made his own type 35.

Pur Sang have since made hundreds and have also replicated Alfa 8C Monzas and Mercedes SSKs. Priced at around a tenth of the value of a real type 35, it is very accurate, and has sold to owners of the real thing, who can drive their replica hard, knowing it is all new and repairable if it breaks. Argentina's protectionist trade tariffs mean that the country has grown used to making things for itself, and a wide network of specialist engineering facilities exists there. Pur Sang make almost

everything in-house, even tyres. The only deviations from original specification are plain bearings in place of roller bearing crankshafts, (rollers are an option), and a modern Ford distributor disguised as the dashboard-mounted magneto. All cars are built to order, with an authentic 2.3 litre 3 valve supercharged straight 8 giving 170-180 BHP in a car weighing just 1800lb, and capable of 125 mph.

Pur Sang parts are also on genuine

Cars around the world where originals were not available. Of all the replicas, evocations, continuations and recreations out there, the Pur Sangs are undoubtedly those truest to the original both in execution and spirit. It is ironic that a small Argentinian company, based on a country estate, using local artisans, has exactly replicated the way in which Bugatti himself built his cars. I am sure he would have approved.



## Our NWCC Charity Partner 2024

Warrington Disability Partnership (WDP) is an internationally acclaimed user led charity. With over 30 years' experience of developing and delivering mobility and independent living services, our aim is to support disabled people and people living with long term health conditions.



<https://www.disabilitypartnership.org.uk>

They really shouldn't have: A look at some cars that should have stayed on the drawing board...



I am sorry, I don't care how beautifully made they are, or that the Panther Owners Club are really nice chaps, or even that this one has a V12 Jaguar engine - it is hideous. If you are going to build a modern version of a Bugatti Royale, at least try and get the basic proportions right.

Created by Robert Jankel of Panther Westwinds, around Jaguar running gear, it was aimed at wealthy clients who craved vintage looks with modern driving

comforts. At that time, it was the most expensive car in Britain. Owners included such arbiters of good taste and decorum as Elton John and Oliver Reed.

With Austin 1800 doors, a radiator set too far forward, comedy headlamps, undersized wheels and roof styling that escaped from a Cortina 1600E, it was not a happy result. They did manage to sell 60 though, and one later appeared in Disney's "101 Dalmations" as the transport of Cruella de Ville!

### FIND THE CLUB ON THE WEB AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA AT:

Web: <https://nwcasualclassics.online>

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/groups/northwestcasualclassics](https://www.facebook.com/groups/northwestcasualclassics)

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/NWCasualClassics>



**Back Page Beauties:** Designed by John Reinhart and Gordon Buehrig, the Lincoln Continental Mk.2 was built from 1956-7 by the Continental division of Ford, and at \$9,066 was the most expensive car Ford had made. Equivalent to over \$100,000 in today's values, Ford lost \$1000 on every one. Intended as a prestige "personal luxury coupe", buyers included Elizabeth Taylor (her car, pictured, was painted to match her eyes..) and Frank Sinatra. With a 6 litre V8, 300 BHP and 400 Lb/Ft of torque it was more than capable. Virtually hand-built to the highest standards, it serves as a reminder that Detroit could build beautiful cars of restrained elegance when it chose to.