

# A SEBRING ADVENTURE

*There was as much drama backstage as was visible on the course during this year's 12-hour race*

by WAYNE THOMS photos by BOB D'OLIVO

It would have been a bitter potion for the Italians to swallow, but Sebring this year came very close to proving that under the proper conditions a good little car can beat a good big car — on a long, high-speed course. Fortunately for the Ferrari team those conditions are highly specialized, the primary requirements being prodigious quantities of water in a continual supply on a course which is ill-provided with even the most rudimentary drainage facilities. The Monday-morning quarterbacks will never know if 12 hours of racing in the rain would have changed the results but it was apparent that such would probably have been the case.

By now everyone who is interested is aware of just how their favorites finished so we shall avoid a reporter's version of the race, concentrating rather on the behind-the-scenes stories, the details of a few of the many dramas, intensified by the miserably wet conditions, played to their conclusion during race week.

Wednesday before race day was scheduled for practice and we dutifully reported to the course. One look and we were convinced that conditions were disastrous. The access road through the paddock area was rapidly turning into a fine Florida swamp; several motorists discovered that to slow down was to sink axle-deep in the blackest, gummiest mud they had ever seen. Practice consisted of a handful of the braver entries touring the course at speeds which meant absolutely nothing in an evaluation of racing cars. Stirling Moss in the Briggs Cunningham Lister-Jaguar and Lance Reventlow in a privately entered Ferrari tied for best time of day — 3:52 or 80.69 mph for the 5.2-mile course. (Course record is 3:20.)

Practice dragged on through the afternoon and between moments of attempting to stay dry we were intrigued to note the varying degrees of watery roostertail thrown by the cars. Occasionally someone would scream along the pit side and

throw a solid sheet of water into the pit apron, adding to the discomfort of the crews already forced to work in three to four inches of liquid Florida sunshine. Keeping dry was no laughing matter except for one driver who apparently didn't care and strolled through the pits in Bermuda shorts, evidently all he had brought for the expected fair weather.

It quickly became apparent that a race in the rain was going to rewrite the record books. Phil Hill complained that he was unable to stay with a Morgan and a Triumph, both able to make better speed down the water-filled runways than his hydroplaning Ferrari. This problem plagued all the faster cars. Drivers said that at speeds of 125 mph or better, so much water was thrown under the cars that the front ends literally floated and there was no control at all. No end of trouble was created when brakes were applied while the wheels were out of direct contact with the ground. As soon as the car reached a solid surface the locked wheels usually caused the unfortunate driver to slide off the road.

Tires play a vital part of racing in the rain and the lack of good rain tires nearly undid the Ferrari team. Drivers complained of complete lack of adhesion in the wet. Tires were available which would have remedied the situation but Ferrari was committed to the exclusive use of a particular brand and they could not deviate. The Lister-Jaguar team had no such restriction. On the same brand of tires as Ferrari they too were completely out of control. As an experiment, they installed Firestones which so radically altered the handling in the rain that the drivers were amazed. According to Dick Thompson, teamed with Walt Hansgen in one of last year's models, the Firestones stuck so well that it was possible to punch the throttle in any gear from second on up without breaking the rear wheels loose. Quite the opposite was true with the other tires which would readily break loose in

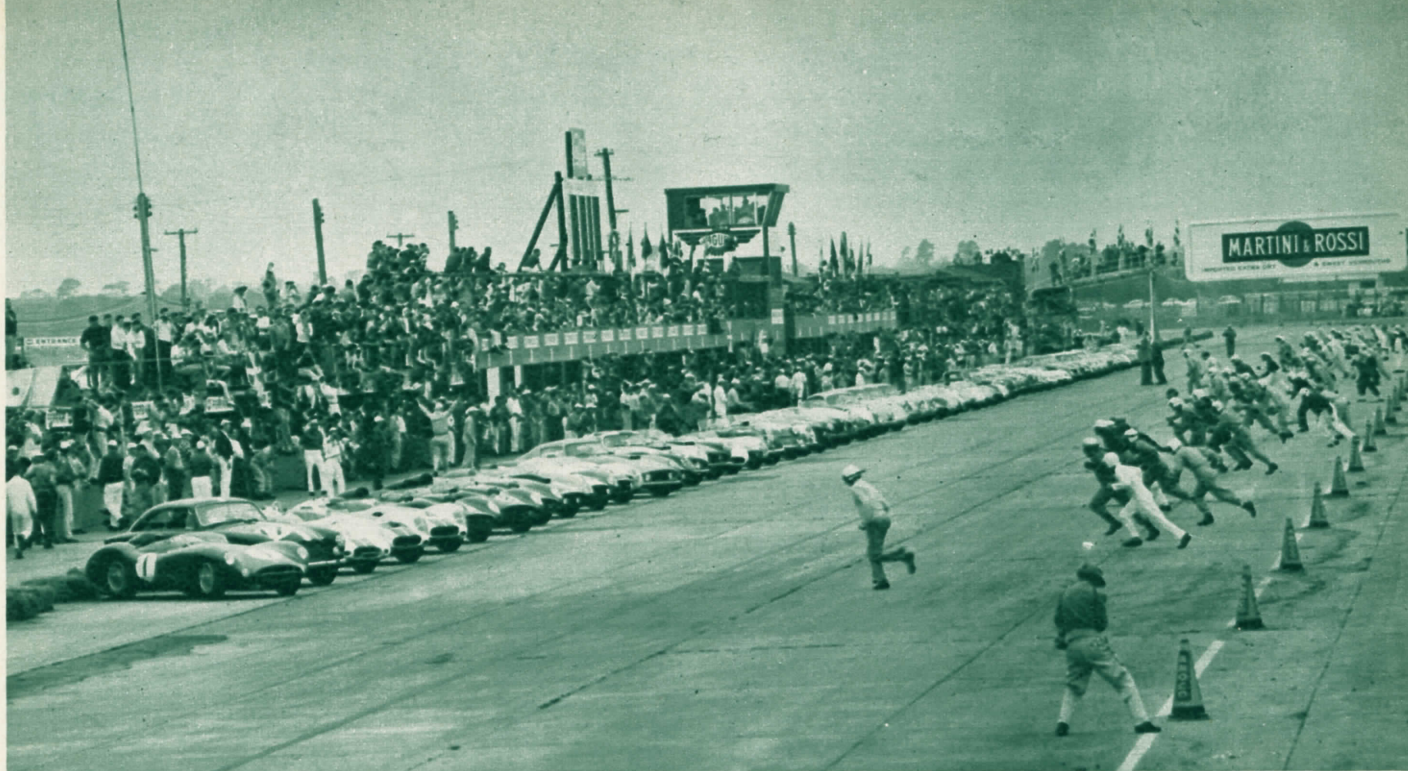
fourth gear at any speed. They were good quality racing tires — just too hard for rain use.

Which brings us to one of the most fascinating rain stories at Sebring — The Otto Zipper Episode. Otto's brand-new 1500cc RSK Porsche, equipped with the same Continental racing tires as the factory cars, was circulating as well as any of the other Porsches during practice, handled by Ken Miles and Jack McAfee, a pair of outstanding racing drivers. Then on Thursday night Otto disappeared, returning the next day with a "rain secret" which he promised to reveal if it rained on race day.

Otto's private entry was a serious contender as proved by Miles' racing lap times of 3:27.8 in the dry, approximately the same speed and occasionally slightly faster than the von Trips-Bonnier 1600cc Porsche which finished third overall. When the rain began, the pace slackened considerably. Nearly six hours of racing had created a course coated with oil and rubber which turned into the slickest sort of roadbed as the first drops struck it.

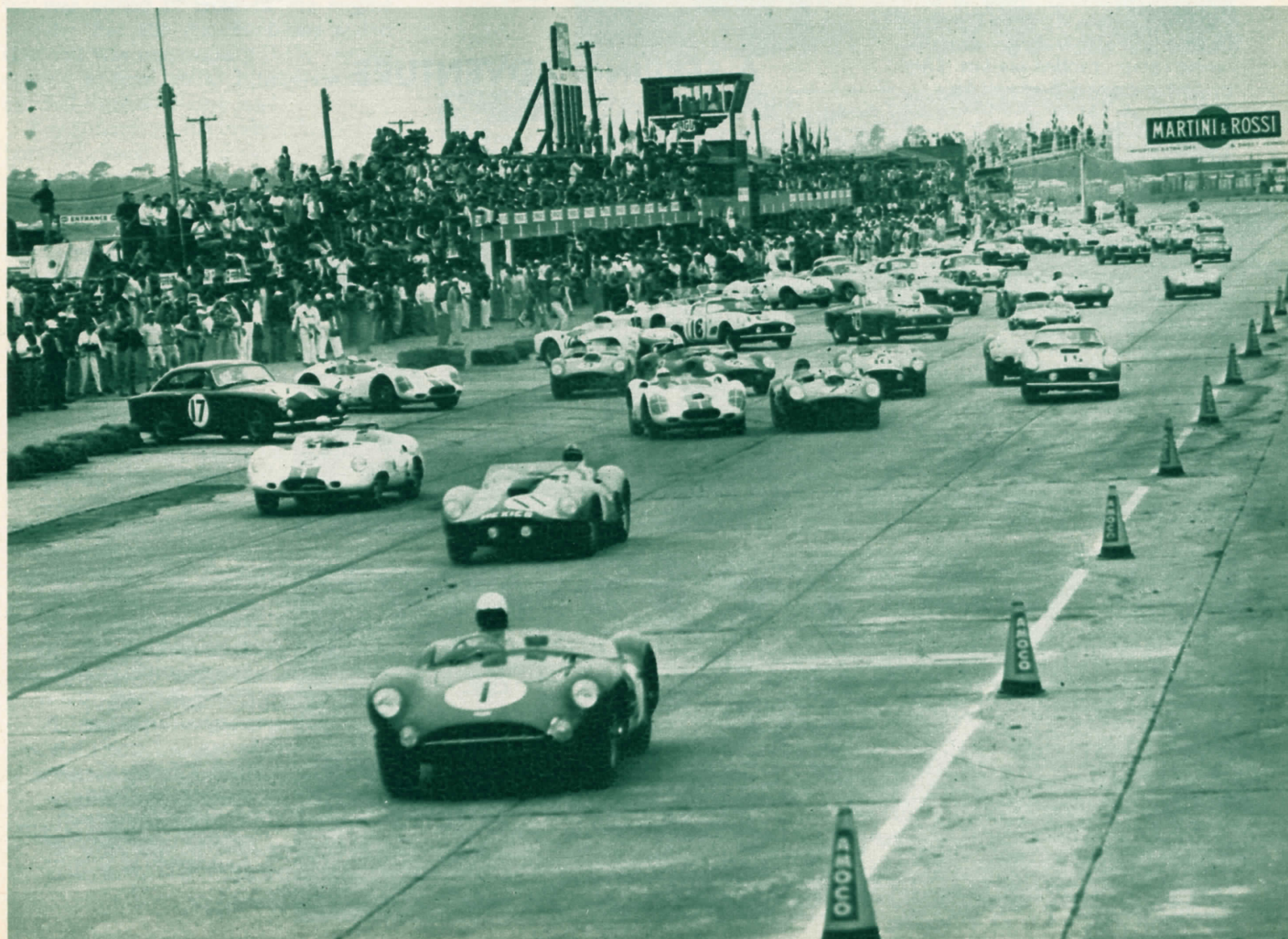
A pit stop at the beginning of the rain and Otto's "rain secret" was revealed — tires. His shift to Michelin-X rubber brought lap times in the wet down to speeds which were greater than either the factory Ferraris or Porsches. If the rain had continued, Otto's car might have been an overall winner. Of course, losing the plastic cover to the hydraulic brake fluid reservoir cost them 20 minutes in the pits at 6 o'clock and from then on "we were the only car in the race with air brakes."

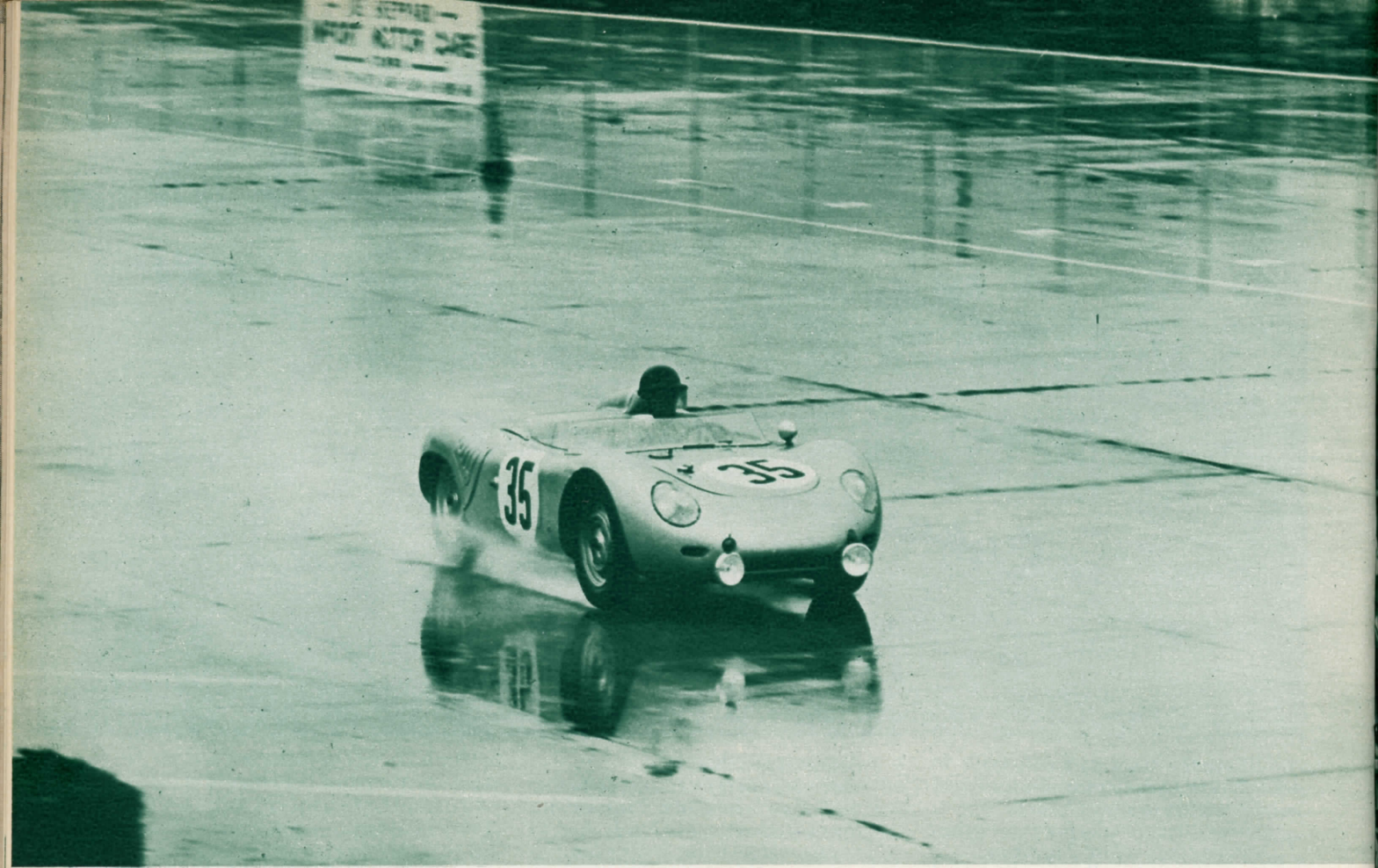
Zipper went to considerable difficulty to obtain the Michelins when he saw that the factory cars had none. After several phone calls he located the required size in Atlanta, Ga. and had them flown to Tampa where he kept an all-night vigil waiting for the plane. After returning to Sebring, he literally kept the tires under wraps so that the factory mechanics, whose garage area adjoined



*Above: Le Mans start, only for effect in 12-hour race, always finds a few drivers who are either exceptionally fast or who start running just before flag drops.*

*Below: Roy Salvadori's Aston Martin is first away, misses traffic jam behind him. This is about the only advantage of fast footwork as cars seldom finish in same lap.*





*Ken Miles steers the Otto Zipper RSK Porsche down the pit straight during rainy practice session. This car posted some of best wet laps.*

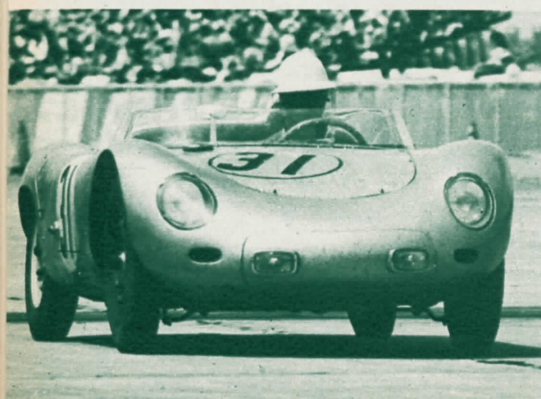
## A SEBRING ADVENTURE continued



*Far left: Jim Hall's Maserati soaks mechanics along soggy pit apron. Car spent most of race in pits.*



*Left: Prominent driving trio, l to r, Joakim Bonnier, John Fitch and Edgar Barth, discuss successful Porsche strategy.*



*Far left: Third place Porsche driven by von Trips and Bonnier was only 1600cc RSK model entered.*

*Left: Factory Porsches received constant attention from mechanics, were probably best maintained at Sebring.*

his, would not be aware of his secretive maneuver.

That the Porsches were all very fast was shown in an incident which left Hansgen in his Lister considerably shaken after a practice lap. As he accelerated out of a turn onto one of the long straights something low and silver passed him, showing more acceleration and top speed than the Lister. It was one of the factory Porsches — they never determined which one. Fortunately, the new-model Lister driven by Moss and Bueb was a faster car. Its better aerodynamics enabled it to stay with any of the other entries.

The Cunningham garage, secluded in the midst of a group of hangars and warehouses on the rambling Sebring Airport, was the site of experimentation with one of the most significant technical developments in the history of racing — water-cooled brakes. True, they were removed from the Hansgen-Thompson car on Friday night for conventional discs, but their future importance should not be overlooked. The drivers had nothing but praise for the way in which they operated. The wonderful thing about them was the fact that the pedal never varied. A series of 20 panic stops from 120 mph showed no change in characteristics and a brake temperature which never exceeded 150° F. An extra radiator was added in front of the engine radiator but the manufacturers stated that this was unnecessary if the regular cooling system would handle continuous full throttle engine load.

Roy S. Sanford, the brake's developer, hovered closely around the test car but did volunteer considerable information about the product. "These brakes are nothing new," he said. "We license the Raybestos-Manhattan Co. to build them, mainly for heavy truck use. This is the first installation on a race car and we feel that the extra 60 pounds they add will be more than offset by the security the driver feels, knowing that when he reaches for brake pedal, it's right there. Part of the 60 pounds, incidentally, is the extra radiator which we feel is unnecessary. Alfred Momo, the chief mechanic, wanted a safety factor and added it. Because they run so cool, these brakes wear very little. We've run huge logging trucks for thousands of miles past the point of replacing conventional brakes and there was no appreciable wear. This system is being tested on helicopter rotor brakes and on jet transports with gratifying results, and it could be adapted to passenger cars. It's expensive right now because each installation is custom tailored, but some day it may be standard equipment on high-performance automobiles."

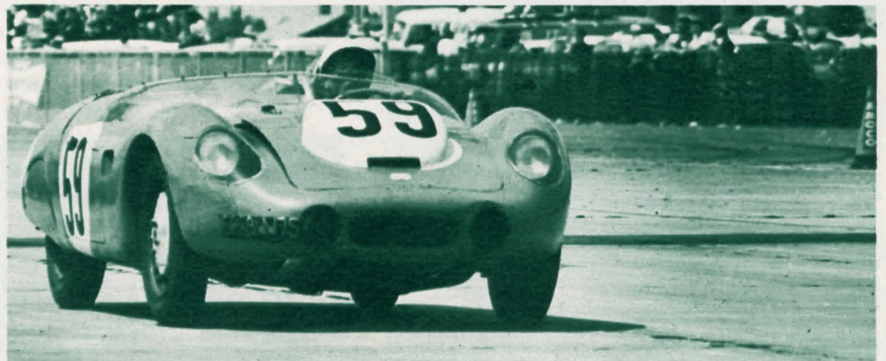
The water-cooled brakes, admittedly an experiment on Cunningham's and



*Stirling Moss abandons role of gentleman driver to aid mechanics in maintenance of Lister-Jag.*

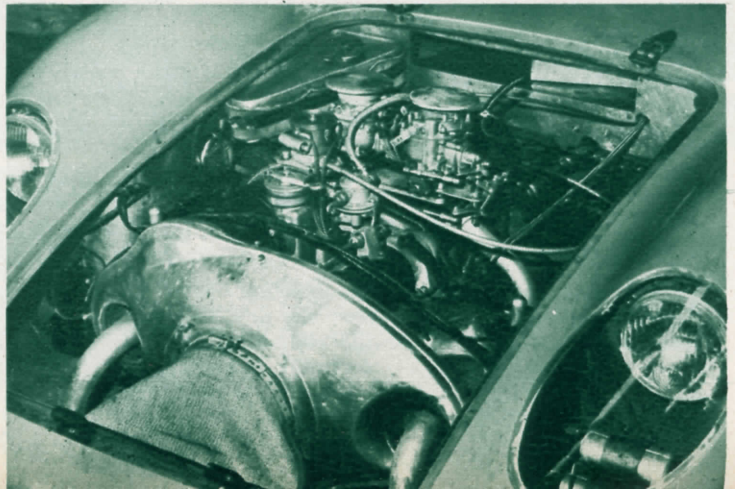


*Moss and Briggs Cunningham discuss problems of tire adhesion for wet course conditions at Sebring.*



*Above: Tiny Deutsch-Bonnet, driven by Armagnac and Laureau, won Index of Performance and finished 17th overall.*

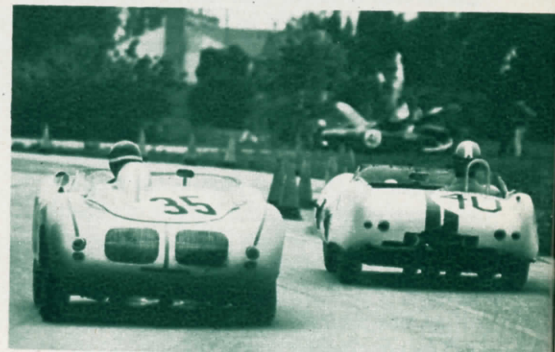
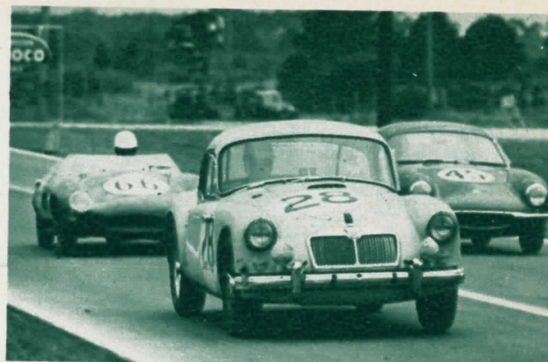
*Below: Engine of Index-winning D.B. is highly-modified Panhard, displaces 750cc. Ignition coils are below headlight.*





Team of twin-cam Abarth-Fiat went extremely well, finished 1-2-3-4 in Grand Touring class 3.

Austin-Healey Sprites attracted much attention with neat hard tops, wire wheels, disc brakes. Cars won class.



Top: Twin-cam MG coupe is followed down warehouse straight by Stranguellini (66) and Lotus Elite. MG drivers held revs to 6000, could have gone to 7500.

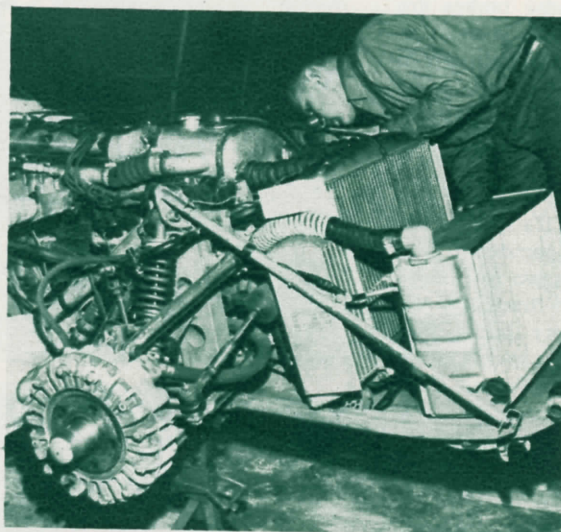
Above: Ken Miles in RSK Porsche (35) passes the slower Lotus of Charles Moran through the dangerous esses. Visible in background is Alfa which rolled.

## A SEBRING ADVENTURE continued



Top: Lotus Elite driven by Pete Lovely and builder Colin Chapman showed excellent handling, good speed, with no preparation.

Above: Tiny 750cc twin-cam Stanguellini ran 124 mph on straights, later was demolished when it struck bridge support.



Water-cooled brakes on Lister-Jag required forest of plumbing, had extra radiator. They were removed before race.



Twin-cam Abarth-Fiat appear ready for inspection. Cars are available in limited quantity for about \$5000.

Momo's part, were pulled because of wear. According to Momo the functioning of the brakes and the cooling were perfect and had the race been for only 500 miles he would have left the system in place. The problem was between the copper plate and the lining — one was too soft and the problem is being worked out in the Raybestos labs at this time. The brakes will be back on the Lister-Jag for future races.

Sebring is organized on a basis which is unique and probably comes closer to European-type organization than any other event in this country. As a once-a-year race, its volunteer workers get little chance, except for the practice days, to work as a team. Organization remains somewhat loose. This was notably demonstrated at the pit exit during rain practice. A well-meaning flagman was directing all cars, fast and slow, onto the course in front of the pits without regard for traffic conditions. There were a number of near-misses and several complaints from drivers of faster cars that they had to brake sharply to miss slower machines. During Wednesday practice there were only two corner flagmen on the entire course — not a safe situation. And on race day we saw spectators, who obviously didn't know about out-of-control sportscars, wander freely through areas where no one should have been, simply because they had some sort of pass, often purchased on race day. The crowd control was nearly as miserable as the weather.

But to Alec Ulmann's everlasting credit, the race always begins promptly at 10 A.M. and anyone who isn't ready is left at the post.

Drivers are troubled by peculiar things. Dick Thompson, the Washington, D.C. dentist, had difficulty adjusting to Lister-Jaguar's right-hand steering. He said that he knew where he personally should be in relation to any given corner but that he invariably placed the car off the proper line because he was "sitting on the wrong side." Phil Hill claimed no problem in switching driving sides but was bothered by Ferrari's changing the position of the accelerator pedal. Last year's cars had the pedal in the center; this year the pedal was conventionally mounted on the right and he didn't like it. Why did Ferrari change? Nobody seemed to know. They just did. Then there was Ray Pickering who slid his twin-cam MG-A coupe into the sandbank at the hairpin. Leaping out, he pulled the fender away from the wheel with a mighty tug, re-entering the car with considerable finesse — except for one thing. He got in the wrong side. The MGs were also right-hand drive. Embarrassing? Just ask him.

Spectators who arrive for race day and only see cars in action miss a great

deal. For example, a few minutes' observation in the Lister garage shattered at least one illusion — that of the gentleman driver. Expecting to see Stirling Moss neatly attired in form-fitting coveralls, calling commands in his clipped British, it was a shock to see the true picture. Stirling and co-driver Ivor Bueb, both sweat-streaked, dirty and looking very busy, appeared to be personally rebuilding their car. Actually they were changing the steering wheel and lightening the passenger seat but from the professional manner in which they handled the tools they probably could have kept the car in good order.

Wandering through another garage we discovered how to increase a Stanguellini's speed — with a hammer. This particular machine, owned by Bob Rollason, was later driven into a bridge pier with considerable damage, but at the moment the problem was running out of revs on the straights at 7500 rpm, the point the twin-cam 750cc engine develops its 73.6 horsepower. The answer was a higher speed rear axle ratio which no one had. The alternate answer was a larger section 15-inch tire with which to turn the hoped-for 124 mph. The hammer? It was used to batter out the rear fenders to provide more wheel clearance.

The ultimate in pre-race suspense was provided by an unknown ship captain whose cargo included several race cars — the two Lotus Elites, a Cooper Monaco and an Osca among others. To say that the ship was late is an understatement. A storm prevented a landing at Miami, keeping the vessel offshore while worried car owners wondered if they were going to have to sit out the race. The Lotus team had a truck standing by at dockside for nearly a week. As time drew shorter, they made arrangements to have the Elites run through technical inspection at the course as late as 9 o'clock Saturday morning, one hour before the race.

Finally, as the ship prepared to land on Friday noon, less than 24 hours before race time, another problem was thrust at the anxious car owners. Because of the rain, dock workers were under no obligation to unload the slippery and dangerous cargo. Somehow this problem was resolved and the cars quickly cleared through customs. A quick change of plans for the Elites; no time to truck them to Sebring, 165 miles away. No time for anything except for drivers Sammy Weiss and Pete Lovely to fill them with fuel and take off for a 100-mph run to central Florida to "help loosen them up." Race preparations for the Elites included a few quick laps of night practice, a headlight adjustment and the painting of numbers. With this in mind it makes their showing remarkable; one Elite retired after 6½ hours,

the other finished 21st overall. And it helps explain the poor performance of the Cooper Monaco, a car which got no practice and sounded very sick as it pulled off the starting line some 30 seconds after the rest of the field had disappeared from sight.

The Ferrari California convertible — so beautiful it seemed a pity to risk it in a race — driven by Richie Ginther and Howard Hively was another amazing racing machine. Legitimately equipped for street use, it finished ninth overall and first in its Grand Touring class. This in spite of fuel pump trouble early in the race when Ginther could get no more than 5000 revs from the engine. Afraid that the race was virtually over for them, he turned the car over to Hively. In one of those frustrating (for Ginther) moments, as soon as Hively took the wheel, the car smoothed out and ran beautifully the rest of the day.

There are dozens more stories from Sebring which deserve telling — about the handsome Lanca Appia coupes which handled precisely but were woefully underpowered and slow for the company they were keeping; the Austin-Healey Sprites with business-like hard tops, wire wheels, disc brakes and engines which wouldn't quit; the concealed disappointment of Ferrari drivers Gurney and Daigh when they were replaced by eventual winners Hill and Gendebien on orders from the team manager; the carnival-like atmosphere which prevails throughout; the "caste system" used in issuing a frightening number of press passes; and the fine food and refreshment furnished the press by Hambro Automotive; how someone pulled the plug on Colin Chapman's illuminated pit board sign as he was signaling "last lap" to the remaining Elite. But the limitations of space only let us add a fervent hope for fair weather during the 1960 Sebring 12-hour race.

#### HOW DID YOUR FAVORITE CAR DO?

CAR	OVERALL FINISH POSITION
Ferrari . . . . .	1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 13, 20, 46
Porsche . . . . .	3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11
Lister-Jaguar . . . . .	12, 15
A. C. Bristol . . . . .	14, 22, 24
Alfa-Romeo . . . . .	16, 39, 42
Deutsch-Bonnet . . . . .	17, 37
Osca . . . . .	18, 47
Elva . . . . .	19, 23
Lotus . . . . .	21, 33, 44
Arnolt-Bristol . . . . .	25
Morgan . . . . .	26
M.G. . . . .	27, 34, 45
Fiat-Abarth . . . . .	28, 29, 30, 32
Austin Healey Sprite . . . . .	31, 36, 38
Lancia . . . . .	35, 40
Maserati . . . . .	41
Turner . . . . .	43
Triumph . . . . .	48