

HIDDEN TREASURES

1978 Lola T620 Super Vee

By Mark R. Brinker



If there are so many of us desperately searching for our old racing cars, why in the heck are we ever crazy enough to sell them in the first place?

That is the very question that has intrigued Charlie Miller for the past 26 years. Miller is an engineer who first got the racing germ at age 17. The year was 1972 and Miller was crewing for a Formula Ford team out of Burlington, Iowa. Not long after he had his first actual duties behind the wheel, mashing his foot to the floor of a 1969 Dodge Charger in the NHRA Stock classes.

Not satisfied with 15,840-inches of drag strip pavement, Miller decided to try his skills at road racing. He and friend, Jim Putnam, purchased a Lola T620 Super Vee rolling chassis (# HU-25) in the early part of 1978 while they were both living in Iowa. At the time Putnam was racing a Formula Ford, and Miller had become the team's mechanic. According to Miller they took delivery of the T620 in February of '78 at Carl Haas' Lola shop in Highland Park, Illinois.

A total of 26 Lola T620s were produced by Lola Cars of Huntingdon, England. The T620 was an aluminum monocoque design with independent wishbone suspension and disc brakes at each corner. By Super Vee class rules, the power plant was a water-cooled 1600-cc overhead cam four-cylinder Volkswagen engine breathing through twin Weber DCOE 45s. Gear changes were accomplished through a Hewland Mk 9

transaxle. The body was an all-business fiberglass Super Vee shell manufactured by Lola Cars. With superb handling and grip and with 200 horsepower on tap, # HU-25 was ready to race by October of '78.

According to Miller, "Jim drove the Lola the first two years in the SCCA Pro Super Vee series and also in the USAC Mini-Indy series racing as car number 46. I've not been able to locate our team's race results for 1979 and 1980, but the car was basically a consistent mid-pack runner. I do have some information from the 1981 and 1982 seasons but it is incomplete. At Milwaukee in 1981, Jimmy drove the car to an 8th-place finish in June and a 10th-place finish in August. Two months later he ran 8th at Michigan. My records show five events in 1982: a race at Phoenix in March (result unknown); a 6th at Milwaukee in June; a DNF at Milwaukee in July; a race at Michigan in September (result unknown); and a 9th at Michigan in September. I raced the car infrequently in SCCA regional events during that same period. In 1983 we retired the car from the Pro Super Vee and Mini-Indy events and started racing it in SCCA regional club races. We were also racing a Vega GT in the recently created Showroom Stock category. In 1983, I bought out Jim's share in the Lola after moving to Colorado where I raced it in the SCCA Formula C class for several years. In 1987 I sold the Lola to a Mr. John Sweeney of Aurora, Colorado. A few years later a career move took me to San Diego and I lost track of the Lola. Several times over the ensuing years I conducted searches for the Lola, occasionally getting a lead from another T620 owner, but I was never able to track it down. It was gone."

What Miller didn't know was that Sweeney had sold the car and the chain of

ownership from that point forward became murky. That is until recently.

In February of 2013 (precisely 35 years from the time that Miller and Putnam had purchased their roller from Haas) the story took an interesting turn. Miller said, "I was poking around on the computer one day when quite by accident I ran across a website I'd never seen before called RacingJunk.com. Within a few minutes of being on the site I stabbed the Formula Cars button. The second car on the list was a Lola T620 and, having owned one, I was naturally interested. As I drilled down through the listing I suddenly began to get that eerie feeling."

Miller called the owner, who turned out to be Robert Ames of Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Ames directed Miller to Bob Alder of Denver who was nearing completion of a 400-hour restoration of this T620 (VRJ readers may recall the Hidden Treasure column on Alder's 1967 Russell-Alexis Mk 14 Formula Ford that ran in the May 2008 issue). It seems that Ames had discovered this Lola in 2012 inside a mountaintop barn in Colorado. It retained its original body and chassis, but was in a very sad state and was slowly rotting away. At that time the car had been owned by Chuck Dunagin, and Ames was able to make a deal and rescue it from extinction. From there the car was shipped to Alder, who spent 11 months restoring it to perfection.

But which Lola was this?

Miller's story continues, "After many emails and phone calls among the three of us (Miller, Ames and Alder), we were becoming convinced that this Lola was quite possibly the very same car I had co-owned some 35 years earlier. Fortunately, I still had most of the original Carl Haas and Lola Cars sales documentation. I also

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knowledge, were only performed on my car's chassis. We had fitted sidepods for USAC Mini-Indy and SCCA Formula Continental duty. The sidepods were long gone, but the nutserts were still in the tub. We had also cross-braced the rear wing side-plates to address a buffeting/stability issue and that modification remained. We had fitted an air intake snorkel during its Formula C racing days, and there it was lying on the floor next to the chassis. A quick look at the chassis plate and stamps on the trailing arms confirmed what, by now, I already knew. This was Jim's and my old Lola, and it was about to embark on one last journey with me out to California to live out her days in my shop, comfortably surrounded by several other aging racecars. Jim Putnam passed away in 2007. I'm sure he would be pleased that the veteran Lola has found her way back home."

Are you thinking of selling one of your racing cars? Think it over, man. DON'T BE CRAZY! 🏎️

still had all of the engineering drawings and tech sheets, and these showed my car's chassis number as # HU-25. Several days later I traveled to Denver to meet Bob

Alder and inspect the car. As soon as I saw her from 20 meters away in Bob's shop I knew it was my old friend. It had many unique modifications that, to my

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