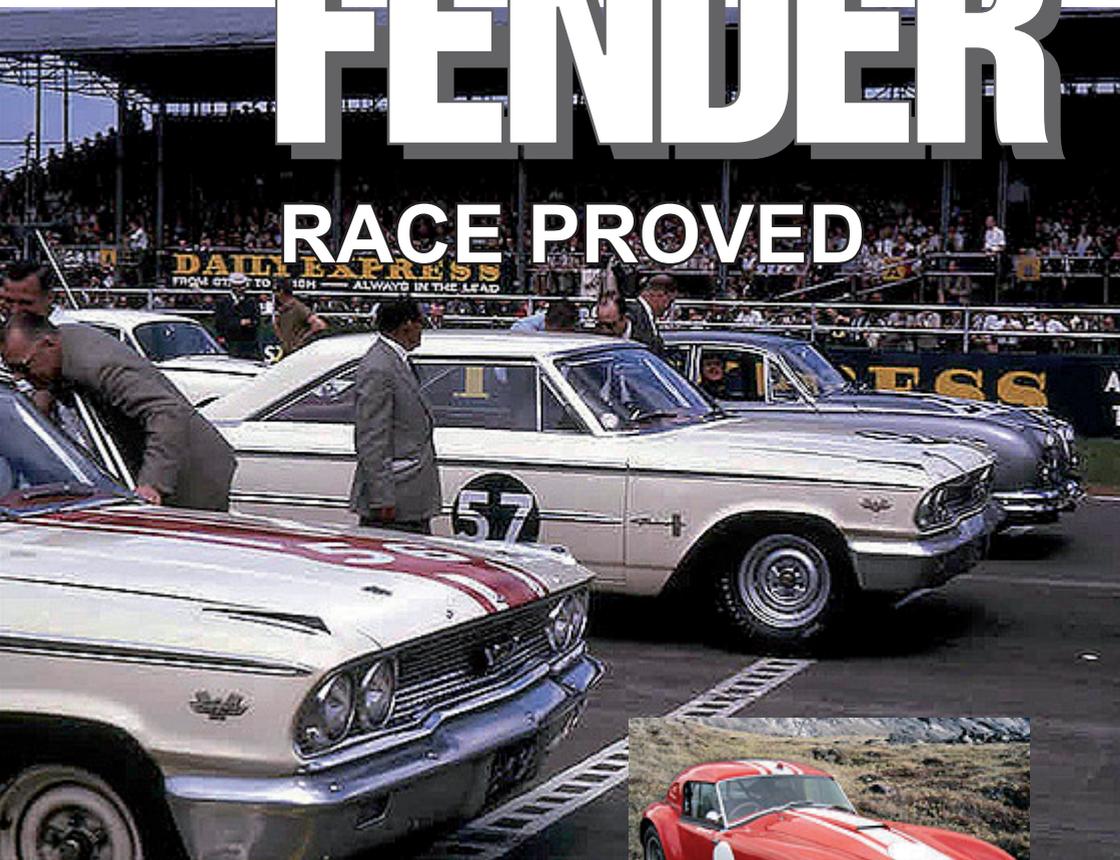




# HOOD & FENDER

RACE PROVED



The Story of the UK Race  
Debut of the Lightweight  
Galaxie & the Shelby Cobra

**WINTER 2014**

# RACE PROVED

The year is 1963, and this is the story of the introduction to the British Touring Car Championship of a very special, 'R Code', lightweight, Ford Galaxie 500 2-door hardtop coupe.

The previous thirty-three consecutive British saloon car championship races had been dominated by Jaguar's MKII saloons, either in 3.4 litre guise, or the later 3.8 litre form. The arrival of this 427 cid (7 litre) Galaxie at a dry but overcast Silverstone circuit in May 1963, would see an abrupt end to Jaguar's dominance.

Run from the same stable as this lightweight Galaxie, the racing version of the famous AC Shelby Cobra roadster would also make its UK circuit racing debut that same year, and while its dominance of sports car events in 1963 was not quite as strong as the Galaxie in touring car racing, its lasting impact was probably greater. This is the story of these iconic race cars during this memorable racing season, but before we delve further, we should meet some of the leading personalities behind



Above: Duncan Uren

this article, for without them; this story could not be told.

## **The Players:**

Firstly, we should meet Duncan Uren.

A relative newcomer to the CAAC and the proud owner of a 1962 Cadillac acquired through the showrooms of Trojan Classics, run by those industrious fellow club members, Mark Battye and Alan Jones. Duncan has



since added a 1986 Pontiac Firebird GTA to his stable, and both represent his first experience of American car ownership. In 1963 Duncan was just 8-years old, and more interested

in football than motor racing, but his father was Jeff Uren, team manager for the ultra professional (for the period) John Willment Racing Team, and with a family connection like that, how could a young boy not have his head turned by the intoxicating aroma of Castrol R, top quality racing machines and the famous personalities that inhabited the racing paddocks back in the day. It is thanks to Duncan's perseverance that we can tell this story, because more than anything, he wants to ensure the accomplishments of his father are not forgotten. Duncan is the keeper of the flame, so to speak, and we the beneficiaries of a wonderful story.

**Jeff Uren** was born in Brentford, Middlesex on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1925. One of five siblings, his mother was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Salvation Army. By his own account, it all started to happen in 1954. He and his elder brother, Douglas, were in the contract plant business together, hiring out Caterpillar tractors, Ruston Bucryus excavators, Euclid dump trucks, compressors, concrete mixers and other equipment. Prior to starting this business, Jeff had been an employee of Ruston Bucryus, and in the process of demolishing WWII air raid shelters in the Haymarket and Lower Regent Street districts in London, he would come to know a contractor by the name of Charles Willment. Little did he guess that less than a decade later he would form a strong and successful

motorsport business relationship with his son, John, which forms the centre of this story. But back to 1954.

Douglas, 5 or 6-years older than Jeff, had been in the RAF at the outbreak of WWII and served in Malta – “Faith, Hope and Charity and all that”, as Jeff would later describe it. Retaining an interest in Malta, Douglas persuaded an acquaintance of his called Duncan Bain, with strong theatrical connections, to accompany him to Malta to see how the island was recovering, post war. Donald replied he would be delighted to do so, but on the proviso that Douglas would enter them both in the forthcoming Monte Carlo Rally. An amazed Douglas replied yes, sure in his mind that they would never be accepted, but accepted they were, when a block of French entries dropped out. Panic set in, but his younger brother was a good engineer and mathematician, so maybe with his help, they could make a fist of it. They entered

an Armstrong-Siddley Sapphire. While they didn’t set the world alight, they did finish. This introduction to rallying saw both brothers continue in the sport for a while, but it was clear they did not have the resources to make their mark. In 1955 both brothers switched to circuit racing instead, figuring that this might be more affordable. Commencing with a humble Ford 100E Anglia, Jeff won his first race at Mallory Park in Leicestershire in 1958 in the course of finishing 6<sup>th</sup> overall in that year’s British Touring Car Championship.



*Above: Jeff Uren (centre) confers with Jack Sears (right) and unknown (left).*



*Jeff Uren negotiates Bottom Bend at Brands Hatch in his Ford Zephyr during a 1959 British Touring Car Championship round.*

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On the back of this success, Jeff approached Walter Hayes, head of public relations at Ford in the UK (later to become famous for agreeing to finance the legendary Cosworth developed, DFV Grand Prix engine) and asked him to back him in the 1959 British Touring Car Championship, as he felt sure he could win it outright. Hayes pointed out that Ford already had a three car team in the series and it would hardly make sense

to back a privateer, especially if he were to beat the works entries. Not one to be put off, Jeff acquired his own Ford Zephyr MKII, and good as his word, won the '59 championship as a privateer, capturing class lap records at Aintree, Goodwood, Brands Hatch and Snetterton in the process. This convinced Ford they needed him on their side in the future. As a result, while Jeff continued to race competitively for a further year or so – his last competition car was a GSM Delta sports car - it was as a team manager that he would make his lasting impact on British and international motor sport scene, initially with Ford in the UK, and later with the John Willment Racing Team between 1962 and 1964.

Ford hired Jeff as their Rally and Competitions Manager and he would go on to manage their entries in classic events like the East African Safari Rally, and other major international rallies, using a team of Ford Zephyrs and the recently introduced 105E Anglia, driven by some notable names of the time. The cars were based at Lincoln Cars on the Great West Road. With the formation of John Willment Racing 1962, the strong ties forged with Ford would continue, but the team were active in many classes of motorsport during the period 1962 – 1964, and as well as the Galaxie and the Cobras, they ran single-seater Brabhams and Lotus' in Formula Junior, Formula Two, and even briefly, Formula One, as well as an Elva MK7 BMW and the difficult, Ford V8

powered, Lotus 30 sports racing car. The driver line-up during this period included names such as Frank Gardner, Vic Elford, Bob Olthoff, Bob Bondurant, Brian Muir, Roy Pierpoint, Sir John Whitmore, Graham Hill, Richie Ginther, and others. However, it was Jack Sears who would become most closely associated with the Willment Team.

With the closure of John Willment Racing in 1964, Jeff adopted the old team's "Race Proved" slogan and set up Race Proved Performance and Racing Equipment,



*Works Ford Zephyr on the East African Safari Rally*

operating from premises in Hanwell. Here he developed and sold the famous *Savage* model. Based on the Ford Cortina MKII, usually in 1600E form, and powered by the 3 litre V6 engine taken from the Capri/Granada

range, he built around 1,000 of these cars, as well as a further 700 cars split between special 3-litre Capris called the *Comanche*; 3 litre powered MK1 Escorts called the *Apache*; special 2 litre powered MK1 Escorts called the *Navaho*; 2.5 litre powered Cortinas called the *Cheetah*; a special 3 litre Granada called the *Seneca*; 5 litre, V8 powered Capris called the *Stampede*, and a 3 litre, V6 conversion for the Ford Transit called *Easypower*.

Having moved his company and family to Ashburton, Devon, in the early 1970s, he continued to produce a small number of cars, but the market had changed,

and Jeff changed tack and formed an interior design company called *Gracious Living* before retiring in the 1980s. One of *Gracious Living's* specialities was importing antique style telephones and ceramics from Italy, and a young Duncan recalls driving at least ten return lorry trips to Italy to pick up goods, and meeting some amazing characters in the process.



*John Willment discusses race set-up with Jeff Uren*

Jeff reappeared at the Goodwood Revival meet on two or three occasions, racing a similar Ford Zephyr to the one he raced in 1959, but after battling against cancer, he passed away in 2007 and his wife, Penny, sadly followed in 2009, leaving his son, Duncan, to carry the flame.

### ***John Willment***

As well as running a very successful construction and contract plant hire business, which among its enterprises, built the famous Cooper Car Company Hollyfield Road factory and offices in Ewell, John Willment ran one of the UK's largest Ford main dealerships from premises in Twickenham, near the famous rugby ground. From here he would base his famous "Race proved by Willment" team of cars with their white and red racing stripe livery, managed by Jeff Uren. Jeff and John would have met on the racing circuits when both were enthusiastic amateur saloon car racers, and with their mutual connections with the Ford Motor Company, their partnership was a natural. From this base they would run

racing prepared Ford Anglia 105Es; early Cortina MK1 GTs and later Lotus twin-cam powered versions; the light-weight *Galaxie*; the Cobras, and various single-seater and sports racing cars. According to Duncan Uren, Willment didn't run the team as such, but provided the initial finance, premises and circuit transportation to allow the operation to function successfully.

When the Willment racing team was dissolved, John Willment went on to provide much of the finance for the famous JW Automotive Engineering concern which was run by ex-Aston Martin team manager, John Wyr. Most assume that the initials JW in the company title stood for John Wyr, but actually they stood for John Willment, but conveniently, the initials were suitable for both men. JW Automotive of course became legendary for their Gulf Oil backed Mirage Ford GT40s and works Porsche 908 and 917 sports racing cars that won LeMans and other important international races, as well as taking over the production of the original Ford GT40 from Ford Advanced Vehicles in nearby Slough.

John Willment would spend his retirement on the Channel Island of Guernsey.

### ***Jack Sears***

Born on the 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1930, Jack Sears is often described as a farmer from Norfolk, and while that is not inaccurate,

it a bit like describing the Queen as the head of successful family business based in London. For most, “Gentleman Jack” is best known as a very successful racing driver who won his first British Touring Car Championship in 1958, driving an Austin Westminster, after initially finishing on the same points as Tommy Sopwith. It was only through a series of five lap races for both drivers, held at Brands Hatch, using identically prepared Riley One-Point Fives, that Jack Sears was declared the overall winner. He regained his title in 1963 driving both a Willment prepared Ford Cortina GT and the team’s light-weight Ford Galaxie. He would have many successes driving the same teams AC Shelby Cobras, and would co-drive with Mike Salmon at the 1963 LeMans where they would finish 5<sup>th</sup> overall in a Ferrari 330 LMB.

“Gentleman Jack” still makes appearances at race events and only last year your editor saw him present the trophies for the touring car race at the Classic Silverstone meet. The current British Touring Car Championship honours Jack Sears with a special trophy in his name for the best privateer,

and his son, David, enjoyed a successful career as a single-seater driver, before going on to run successful F3000 and later GP2 race teams.

**Silverstone, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1963**

The Willment Team began their assault on the British Touring Car Championship in 1963 using three race prepared Ford Cortina GTs which were called Willment Sprints. Their 1498 cc capacity placed them firmly in Class B of the four class championship, with Class A for the smallest cars and Class D for the largest capacity cars.



*Jack Sears (left) discusses race strategy with Jeff Uren (right) at Silverstone in May 1963*

However, Willment harboured plans to enter the largest capacity class, and in January of that year, Jeff was dispatched to Daytona for discussions with Holman-Moody, the successful race team that prepared many of the US Fords raced as part of Ford’s Total Performance programme. With introductions made by Ford, Jeff negotiated the supply of a genuine, R-code, lightweight Ford Galaxie 500 2-door hardtop coupe, powered by

full race, dual-quad, 427 “top oiler” V8 developing some 450 to 500 bhp, and equipped with an aluminium case, T-10 four-speed transmission (“side oilers” were apparently not allowed under Appendix K which were the



*An Austin Westminster, like the one Jack Sears used to win the very first British Touring Car Championship 1958*

# Duncan's Race Proved Scrap Book



*Above: Gardner, Jeff Uren & Sears at Revival*



*Above: Monte Carlo Rally Zephyrs*



*Above: Galaxie in South Africa  
Below: Leading at Brands Hatch*





*Above & left: Willment Cobra Coupe Below: Recalcitrant Ford V8 powered Lotus 30 Lower, right: Sears in Galaxie wins at tight Crystal Palace circuit*



*Below, right: Jeff Uren at Brands in 1959 Below: Restored Willment Cobra 39 PH*



regulations that applied in internationally at the time). Built at their Charlotte base, and finished in Corinthian White, unlike the NASCAR cars that Holman-Moody were famous for, it came with a complete, red vinyl interior, as well as a full roll cage with extra bracing to improve rigidity. Duncan recalls that his father told him that he had wondered out loud to Ralf Moody just what it must be like to travel around the steeply banked Daytona oval at the speeds the NASCAR race cars

were attaining back in 1963. Jeff soon found himself strapped to the role cage of a Holman-Moody Galaxie, and with team driver, "Fast Freddy" Lorenzen at the wheel, he was given a first hand



*Jeff Uren watches the action from behind the pit wall at Daytona*

courtesy of Ford, Jeff now had to get the car home to England. He managed to arrange for it to be flown back on a US Airforce transport aircraft, sharing the load deck with delivery of Coca-Cola for the American airbases in the UK. This cost the team \$700. The car would debut at Silverstone on that grey, blustery day in May, at the International Trophy meeting where Round Five of that year's British Touring Car Championship was due to take place, supporting the non-championship

Formula One race. Jack Sears had already won his class three times that year in the Cortina GT, but so had Graham Hill, in the John Coombs entered Jaguar 3.8 MKII. Duncan explained that Jeff Uren had



*Dual Quad 427 cid Ford V8 power under the hood of the R-Code lightweight Galaxie*

demonstration. Apparently, when the Galaxie returned to the pits, it took several minutes for Jeff to regain his composure!

Having secured the Galaxie for free,



*Four-speed T-10 manual gearbox with Hurst shifter and steering column mounted tach*

phoned Jack Sears and offered him the Galaxie drive for the rest of the season. Jack asked if he could have time to think about it. Jeff replied he had 24 hours; otherwise he was going to offer it to someone else

he had in mind. Luckily, Jack decided to take up the offer, but it was by no means a certain winner on the tighter racing tracks that were typically found in Britain, so his reticence, which at first might seem odd, was perhaps understandable. He had already proven that the Willment Cortina GT was a winner, and indeed, he was the only driver to beat the legendary Jim Clark, driving the more powerful, Lotus Cortina, fair and square. Unbelievably, before the Galaxie could race, the scrutineers demanded that the roll cage bracing be removed as it would confer an advantage over other entries, which left just the single hoop behind the driver. This seems amazing given safety considerations, but these thoughts were far from peoples mind back in the innocent sixties.

We are lucky that contained within Jeff Uren's collection of memorabilia, Duncan found a copy of a high quality cine film of that famous Silverstone debut race. Who took it, no one knows now, but whoever

it was, they must have been relatively wealthy, as well as skilful, as the half hour film has been shot in full colour, in a period when most most non-professional

footage was still filmed in black & white. The cine film, now expertly edited, set to period music, and burnt to DVD by Duncan, shows the three Cortinas and the Galaxie being disgorged from a specially constructed Ford Thames Trader based race car transporter in the Silverstone paddock. The double-decker transporter is fully sign written in "Race Proved by

Willment" colours, and each car is finished in plain white with the famous red racing stripes. The team cars are lined-up in front of the transporter, and each Cortina features a different colour grille to help distinguish them in the heat of battle. The turnout matched anything the Formula One boys could manage in a period when many teams relied on a converted old coach, or just trailer towed behind a Volkswagen camper. The crowds of spectators gathered

round, with most paying particular attention to the vast "white whale", because the Galaxie looked very large next to the Cortinas. Could it possibly be competitive on British race tracks?



*John Willment shares a joke with American driver, Richie Ginther*



*Willment Team line-up of three Cortina GTs and the Galaxie at Silverstone in May 1963*

Within the crowd assembled around the team cars, certain personalities stand out. Jeff Uren, wearing a quilted blue anorak,

is clearly seen conferring with head of Willment engineering, Spike Winter, and later with an urbane appearing Jack Sears. Brian Muir, who would himself go on to win the British Touring Car Championship in 1970, driving a Camaro Z28, had a role as one of the team mechanics in 1963. Walter Hayes is present, and looks coy when he discovers himself being filmed. Alan Mann looking dapper in a sheep skin jacket as he looks on with interest,

out last minute checks while the drivers of each car start to appear and confer with team personnel. And what a line-up. Joining "Gentleman Jack" were American Formula One driver, Richie Ginther, in one of the Cortinas, while another was driven by Australian Frank Gardner, who would go on to win the British championship in 1968 with an Alan Mann entered Escort Twin Cam, achieve a 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in 1970 with a Boss Mustang, and win again



*The end of Lap One, and Sears already has a good lead over Graham Hill & Roy Salvadori in the lightweight Galaxie*

and John Willment looks as pleased as punch at his line-up and the interest they are generating. In the background can be seen a white, 1961 Ford Galaxie convertible, which allegedly belonged to John Willment, although later Duncan remembers he drove a Lincoln Continental. Parked alongside is a '59 Edsel Corsair, while further footage shows a bronze '59 Chevy Impala in the background, so American cars were popular choice of transport at Silverstone that day.

The mechanics scurry around carrying

in 1973 with the 7 litre SCA Camaro. The final Cortina was driven by David Haynes, son of the owner of the Haynes of Maidstone Ford dealership.

The grid assembles, with Jack's Galaxie on pole and the Coombs Jaguar of Graham Hill alongside, and the Tommy Sopwith entered Jaguar of Roy Salvadori on the outside of the front row. Jack Sears had started practice on road tyres, and it was only the final session when the Galaxie was able to be fitted with race tyres supplied by Goodyear. The works Cooper

Car Company team were another team to debut new cars at Silverstone, with a team of three 1071 cc Cooper S' entered in the smallest capacity class driven by driven by Paddy Hopkirk, John Whitmore (later Sir), and John Rhodes. A non-starter of note is Sir Gawaine Baillie's similar Galaxie, but this is not yet ready to race and is a non-arrival.

The flag drops, and Jack Sears makes a slow start, courtesy of a worn clutch after trying some practice starts on the infield that morning. Graham Hill grabs the lead from the start, followed by Roy Salvadori with Jack Sears trailing in fourth place going into Copse Corner. But the extra 250 odd horsepower soon starts to

show on the long Hanger Straight and at Stowe Corner Sears sweeps through into the lead. On the opening lap Peter Harpers Sunbeam Rapier slews sideways and then rolls and is mounted by Christabel Carlisle's Mini Cooper S. Neither driver is hurt, and nor is Mike Young who rolls his Superspeed Ford Cortina GT. The

film shows the Galaxie drifting through Woodcote Corner at the end of the first lap, already with an appreciable gap to the two chasing Jaguars. Hill and Salvadori never give up, but it is clear that they have no hope. Hill retires anyway, with a puncture, and Mike Salmon's Jaguar is also out with ignition problems.



*Richie Ginther in the No.30 Willment Cortina GT before retirement with a broken drive-shaft*



*Jack Sears motors on to a 20 second lead and the lightweight R-Code Galaxie's first win outside of the USA*

At half distance, Sears has built up a 20 second lead with Slavadori and Peter Dodd in Jaguars following at a respectful distance, followed by John Whitmore and Jimmy Blumer in Mini Cooper and Cortina GT, respectively, going at it hammer and tongs.

Meanwhile, Richie Ginther breaks a drive shaft in his Cortina, which means Willment will be denied the team prize, while John Rhodes also retires his Mini Cooper S. Sears eases off considerably towards the end after setting an new lap record, no doubt to help save his overworked brakes, which left most of the entertainment to be provided by the

works Mini Coopers which smoked their front wheels as they drift at undiminished pace through the corners. Hopkirk sets a class lap record but Whitmore beats him and Blummer to the flag. However, after 12 laps, it is Sears who secures a dominate victory in 22 minutes, 57 seconds, with Salvadori second some 22 seconds behind, and Peter Dodd in the Bracknell Motors Jaguar, a further 36 seconds down in third place. The lightweight Galaxie wins its first European race at its first time of asking.

The cine film shows Sears arrive back at the start with the big Galaxie after his slowing down lap, where he is handed his trophy and a laurel wreath which is hung

on the door mounted, exterior rear view mirror. He then proceeds to take his lap of honour to great applause. Jack Sears qualified with a 1 minute 50.4 second lap, and set fastest lap in the race with a 1 minute 51.6 seconds. David Haynes survives to be the best placed Willment Cortina with 8<sup>th</sup> position, while Frank Gardner is credited with 11 laps completed. Back in the paddock, John Willment is all smiles, while a relaxed Jack Sears, who appears to have not even broken into a sweat, recounts to anyone who will listen, how exhilarating driving that Galaxie had been.

Jack would go on to win again at the non-championship Aintree race, and then again at Round Six of the championship at the very tight Crystal Palace track and then

at Round Seven, back at the wide open spaces of Silverstone for the British GP meet. Jim Clark would make one of his infrequent appearances at Round Eight at Brands Hatch, and vanquish all in his Lotus Cortina, while South African driver, Bob Olthoff, would win Round Nine at Brands with the Willment Galaxie, and Rounds Ten and Eleven would go to American Dan Gurney and Australian, Jack Brabham, driving the Alan Brown entered lightweight Galaxie.



*The lightweight Galaxie way out front as usual*

At the end of the season, Jack Sears was declared the outright British Touring Car Champion on 71 points, scored driving a combination of Galaxie, Cortina GT and Lotus Cortina.

John Whitmore was second overall with 69 points, all scored driving Mini Coopers, and Graham Hill was third overall with a distant 49 points from a combination of the Coombs Jaguar and a guest drive in a lightweight Galaxie. Roy Salvadori was 4<sup>th</sup>, Jimmy Blummer 5<sup>th</sup> and Paddy Hopkirk 6<sup>th</sup>. From now on, American V8 power would be needed to win British Touring Car Races outright, and the big Galaxies would be followed by ex-works, lightweight Ford Falcon Sprints, and then the first of the Ford Mustangs. These cars had all been shipped from America, prepared in the UK, and entered in Continental events like the Tour de France and Monte Carlo Rally before being declared surplus to requirements and ending up on the

British Touring Car Championship grids, but that is a story for another day.

### *The Willment Cobras*

In 1963 John Willment Racing became the first private team to become directly involved in racing Shelby Cobras when they purchased two of the roadsters directly from AC Cars based at Thames Ditton. These cars had formed the basis of AC Cars assault at LeMans in 1963 when car No.3 was entered by AC Cars/William Hurlock (MD of the company) and managed by a now retired Stirling Moss and driven by Ninian Sanderson/Peter Bolton. The



*The Sanderson/Bolton works AC Cobra at LeMans*

second car was No.4 and was entered by the American owner/driver Ed Hugus and Englishman Peter Jopp. Both cars had been prepared at Thames Ditton with 4.7 litre (289 cid) V8 engines and unusually, featured Dunlop alloy wheels, similar to those run on the lightweight racing E Type Jaguars of the day, rather than the usual American manufactured, Halibrand wheels that most would associate with these cars. Both cars were equipped with the rare “LeMans Hardtop”, an early attempt at aerodynamic improvement which was said to be worth an extra 10 to 15 mph on the long Mulsanne Straight. At the end of a race dominated by a strong Ferrari entry, car No.3 was placed a highly credible 7<sup>th</sup> overall.

Chassis number CS2131, registered as 39 PH and CSX2142 registered 645 CGT were the two cars, and of course, with the passing of time, these chassis details have become critical when

authenticating original Cobras given the values that they now fetch. The Willment team also purchased the spare LeMans car with the chassis number CSX2130 which was registered 644 CGT.

According to an account by Trevor Legate in his book, *Cobra: The First 40 Years*, it fell to the South African driver/mechanic, Bob Olthoff to test one of the cars at Brands Hatch, where he declared it to be almost un-drivable. The Willment team contacted Carol Shelby for advice, but his response was there “ain’t nothing wrong with the Goddamn car, it’s the driver”. Even so he

sent across Englishman Ken Miles, the legendary test and race driver for the Shelby team, to test the car, and after he flew off the road at the very first corner the Willment team were soon the recipients of a supply of wider Halibrand wheels with suitable tyres and some suspension modification. As a result, the cars began to handle reasonably well. Nevertheless, the first outing for the team’s cars at the 1963 Goodwood TT didn’t go well, when both were rejected by the scrutineers because of non-standard wheels and the suspension mods. This deprived the crowd of a rare opportunity to see Ken Miles racing in the UK.

The next event for the Willment Cobras was the Autosport 3 hours at Snetterton where Olthoff was scheduled to race CSX2142, still in its LeMans trim with Dunlop wheels, standard suspension and the fibreglass hardtop that had been fitted to the AC team cars for the French event. This



*The Willment Cobra driven by Gardner leads the team's Galaxie in South Africa Springbok Series*

was another ignominious result though, as the tired engine lacked power and the team were forced to retire the car. However, before it could be properly prepared, the car was shipped to South Africa for the winter Springbok Series. This was a popular series with the Willment team who would also race their Lotus Cortina and the thundering Galaxie with Bob and Frank Gardner the designated drivers.

In the first event, Olthoff was paired with Australian Frank Gardner, but he struggled to stay in touch with Englishman, David Piper's famous green Ferrari GTO, and would experience a rear tyre failure that would cause the Cobra to roll and throw the driver clear. Amazingly, both car and driver continued, and Olthoff struggled across the line to finish the event. The second outing for the car, in a sports car event supporting the South African GP, was

much more successful, and equipped with wider Halibrand rear wheels and suitable tyres, Sir John Whitmore raced to victory.

The Willment team would enjoy many successes in 1964 with their team of Cobras driven by such notables as Jack Sears and Sir John Whitmore. However, 39 PH (CS2131) suffered damage at the Nurburgring when the engine seized and the car came to rest upside down, straddling a ditch. This did allow Frank Gardner, who was driving at the time, to extract himself, and the car was returned to Thames Ditton for repairs after the meeting.

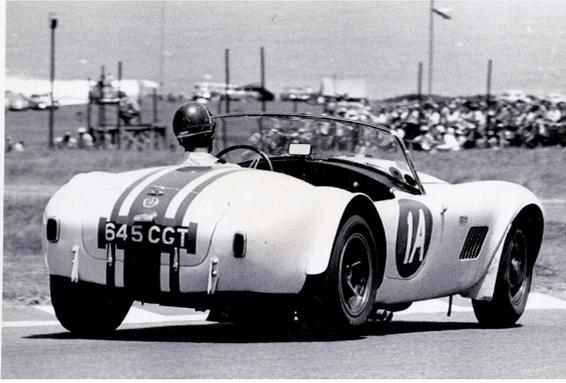
Originally, the team's Cobras had been raced in white with red stripes, but once it was appreciated that most professional film work was now being made in colour, the team switched to red bodywork and white stripes. It was in this colour scheme

that Jack Sears would have one of his most outstanding races.

The Ilford Trophy Race supported that year's British GP held at Brands Hatch, and there were three Cobras on the grid.

According to an interview with David Friedman for his book, *Shelby Cobra*, practice had not gone well for Sears as his particular Cobra had handling issues, and as a result, he ended up fourth on the grid. Team mate Olthoff was fastest in his Cobra, with Jackie Stewart alongside in the Coombs lightweight E Type, and completing the front row, Roy Salvadori in the Tommy Atkins entered AC Cobra. However, after setting fastest qualifying lap, Olthoff crashed. His car was too badly damaged to start, leaving his position vacant on the grid.

This suited Sears, as he was originally positioned right behind Olthoff on the grid and this would give him a free and unobstructed start. However as the grid formed, Stewart lined up on pole, and Salvadori in second position. Sears automatically



*Bob Olthoff takes his turn at the wheel of the team's Cobra*

the marshal walked off the grid. The flag was dropped, and off the cars roared.

Sears, by his own admission, made a bad start and was 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> into Paddock Bend. On the completion of the first lap there was more bad news when he received the black flag. Sears thought "what are the hell are they black flagging me for". Jeff Uren had always instructed his drivers to never come into the pits on the first lap after receiving the black flag, but wait for the permitted three laps, to give him time

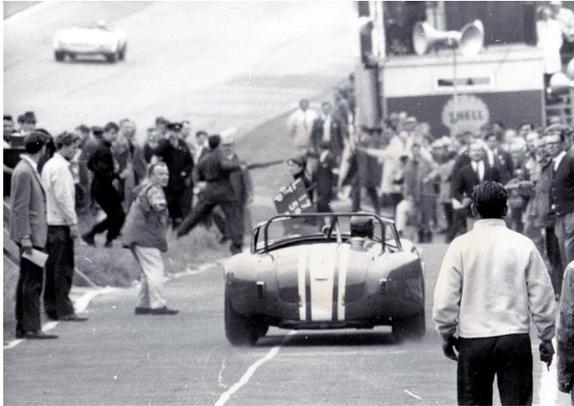
to argue the team's position with the race officials. Nevertheless, Sears pulled into the pits on the following lap, and received a dressing down from an official for starting in the wrong position, and was then waved back into the race. Sears charged through the pits and back onto



*Frank Gardner leads Piper's Ferrari GTO in South Africa*

the track, shaking his fist at any official he could see, although some reports suggest the two-finger gesture was used.

To quote Sears from his interview with Freidman, "I was white with rage, absolutely livid. When I rejoined the race I was 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> position and I forgot about any problems with the car. I began at a record pace, picking up several positions a lap. I was driving with blind rage and almost lost it several times. I could hear 50,000 people screaming and told myself: Don't be stupid, settle down and drive the bloody motor car. As the race was winding down



*Sears races down the pit lane after being black flagged*

I was gaining on Stewart who was leading the race. I took Jackie at Hawthorns and went onto win by 4 seconds. It was the greatest race I ever drove, a supreme moment. Everyone was cheering including all my competitors pit crews".

It was only when Sears drove to his pit that Jeff Uren told him of the drama that had been unfolding while he was driving the race of his life. John Willment had become enraged at his driver receiving the black flag and had stormed into race control and confronted Basil Tye of the RAC, the organisation that ran the British GP meet. "I said to him, what the bloody hell are you doing? The RAC chap said you shouldn't have upgraded your start position and you were black flagged. I said it was your man who told him to move up. I really lost my temper and I got hold of this chap by the collar and gave him a good shaking. I didn't punch him, although I thought

about it". The result was that Basil Tye fell backwards over a small wall and ended up in the flower bed, and John Willment was escorted from the circuit for his troubles! Jeff Uren was very worried, as a meeting was subsequently scheduled by the RAC to discuss the incident, and he was concerned the team would lose its competition licenses that were issued by the RAC, and this would mean they couldn't race,

and everyone would lose their jobs. In the end, the team avoided this, but it required some humble pie to be digested.

The three original roadsters were not the end of the Willment team's involvement

with Shelby Cobras. Aware that, even with the factory hard tops fitted, the Cobra was hardly the most aerodynamic device available, and impressed with the new Daytona coupes that the works Shelby team had debuted on the international stage, the team asked if they might acquire one as well. They were given short shrift, however. True to form, this didn't deter the team though, and they purchased a fourth chassis, which had been heavily damaged and repaired by AC Cars. This was chassis CSX2131, not to be confused with the existing team car CS2131. With drawings supplied by Shelby, and with the help of John Ohlsen (an ex-Shelby employee, now working for Willment), a new buck was constructed and the team built their own version of the Peter Brock designed Daytona Coupe. Frank Gardner did the re-engineering and the Willment Coupe differed from the works cars in detail. In particular it had a little less frontal area

and the rear window followed a shallower line which meant the cam tail differed from the works cars. This car was raced extensively by the team in both 1964 with a 1<sup>st</sup>



*The Willment Coupe behind the team premises in Twickenham*

overall at Snetterton in September and a 5<sup>th</sup> overall at Kyalami, South Africa, both credited to Sears. In 1965 the coupe achieved a 7<sup>th</sup> place overall at the Tourist Trophy held at Oulton Park with Gardner driving; a DNF at the Rheims 12 hours, and a 1<sup>st</sup> overall at the Red Ex Trophy at Brands Hatch for Sears. At the end of the season, the Willment team returned to South Africa for the Springbok Series with the Willment Coupe, the Galaxie and a Lotus Cortina to be driven by Bob Bolthoff and Jack Sears, but the team would be disbanded after this series, and the cars offered for sale. Olthoff purchased one of the Cobra roadsters, when unbelievably, the team had difficulty in finding buyers. The Galaxie also stayed in South Africa.

The Willment Coupe turned out to be the most successful of all of the Daytona coupes, as the works cars were restricted to just the World Manufacturers Championship races whereas the Willment cars were raced everywhere. All of the Willment Cobras are still in existence, and the roadsters can often be seen racing at events like the Goodwood Revival TT race, but the Coupe was confined to a museum in Boulder, Colorado, for a long period, and hasn't been driven in anger for many years. Even this isn't the end of the Willment Cobra story, however, as there was at least

one further car built with custom coachwork, which was not a race car. CSX3055 was a coil sprung, 427 cid powered chassis which was fitted with a modified

version of the bodywork of the Fantuzzi/Savonuzzi Fiat 8V Supersonic. The conversion was carried out, it is believed, by Ghia, and the car, which is considered a fully certified Cobra by SAAC, is known as the Willment Ghia 427 coupe. This car still exists, and has been listed on at least one famous American auction site in recent years.

So there you have it. Thanks to Duncan Uren's dedication, the stories of the first lightweight 7 litre Galaxie to hit UK race tracks, and the first racing AC Cobras to end up in private hands live on. The AC Cobra has become such a collectable icon its unlikely the stories attached to the Willment cars would be allowed to die, but the Galaxie story is less well documented, although again, thanks to the Goodwood Revival, we are still able to watch up to three 7 litre Galaxies fight it out on track, each year, in the St Mary's Trophy saloon car race. Unfortunately, none of these are the original Willment car, although a replica does exist, built for Lord March. However, all is not lost. Jack Sears still owns the Willment team car that he first raced to victory at Silverstone, back in May 1963, having successfully tracked it down in South Africa, and repatriated it.

*The legend lives on.*