

THE OFF-SIDE UNDO

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English Motoring Club of Mississippi

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‘A gentleman does not motor about after dark.’ —Joseph Lucas

24 hours plus at the Simeone

by Gene Johnston



Le Mans? No, Le Simeone! Iconic Aston Martin DBR1/3, part of the Museum collection, is in the foreground. Photos by Gene Johnston

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. — During our June travels Martha and I found ourselves looking for things to do in eastern Pennsylvania. We (well, “I”) had looked at attending two USAC Eastern Storm races, one at Williams Grove, the other at Port Royal, but we’d just finished a run of 12 sprint car races in Indiana, including the seven night run of USAC Midget Week, so we started looking at alternatives. That is when “Little Le Mans: The 12 Heures du Simeone” popped onto our (“my”) radar. Held June 15th through 16th

at the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum in Philadelphia, the event seemed to fit right in. I called to verify details with the Museum, and was advised that for, get this, the sum of \$24, the doors would open at 9 a.m. on Saturday, the 15th, and would remain open through Sunday, the 16th, for the entire running of the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The race from France would be shown in its entirety on three large-screen TVs in the Museum and classic automotive-themed movies would also be shown overnight. Various automobiles would be highlighted from the collection with lectures and driving demonstrations on the grounds of the museum. Food trucks would be present, and when asked what accommodations were nearby, the staff member said, "Heck, bring your sleeping bag and you can sleep in the Museum!" Oh, wow, all that for \$24! How could Martha and I ("I") resist! Between the choices of two late nights at dirt tracks, regardless of the historic nature of the tracks, or hanging out for 24 hours around historic sports cars, Martha leaned heavily toward the event at the Simeone. So, off we went, and we were not disappointed. Starting mid-afternoon on Saturday, every two hours as promised a historical lecture was given along with antidotes about the cars. Following this, three cars from the collection were started and driven around the grounds of the Museum. This went on until early evening. Nearing midnight, the newest addition to the collection was presented — the 2007 Flying Lizard Porsche, "Draco." The lunch and dinner provided was of course Philly cheese steaks from a local restaurant, and for breakfast there was coffee and croissants. Almost like being at the track! Where, you ask, did we sleep? Well, we don't travel with tents or sleeping bags, and the concrete floors of the Museum seemed a bit hard, so we caught a few hours of shuteye in our truck. It was almost like being trackside! Sunday morning and early afternoon we enjoyed more driving exhibitions at the Museum and the conclusion of the 24-hour race at Le Mans. Would we ("Martha") do it again? I'd say yes, we both had a great time! We enjoyed the staff at the Museum and had a great time with fellow endurance-racing enthusiasts. If you're ever near Philadelphia be sure that you take in the Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum. For additional info check out <https://simeonemuseum.org>.



The Aston and a Jaguar D-type being demo'ed behind the Museum.



A prewar Bentley on its way outside.

Birthday Present

By J. Michael Hemsley

Soon after my return from Vietnam in 1969, I bought a 1956 Lotus 11LM from Evel Knievel's father, Bob Knievel. The car was in Butte, Montana; I was teaching ROTC at Eastern Washington State College in Cheney, Wash., so it meant an all-day road trip. Two cadets and the son of another instructor came with me across northern Idaho and over the mountains to Butte. As we descended the Continental Divide, we saw how treacherous Montana in late November could be — a VW Beetle was down a slope on its side. When we saw the first head pop out of the window, we came to a careful stop, rescued two women and four kids from the VW, and put it on its wheels again. We left them at a gas station and had a good feeling about being able to help. Amazingly, we saw them again as we headed west that evening — all the VW needed was a tow up the slope, and they were on their way again. Arriving in Butte, we had to wonder how Bob Knievel survived selling used foreign cars and new Siata Springs in such a decaying town. We quickly found his showroom, and Bob led us to the Lotus. It started up immediately, and we were completely seduced by its beauty. The price was \$900, and I handed it over without any negotiation.



Lotus 11 (representative image)

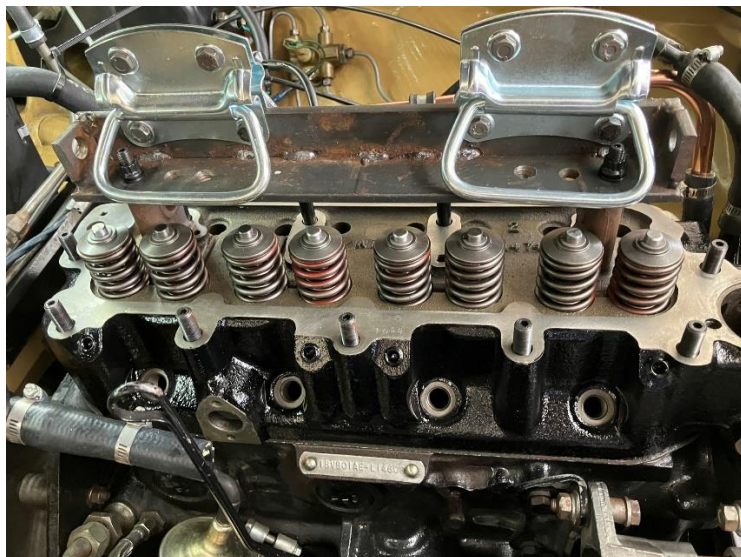
The car was quickly loaded, and we were underway by late afternoon. At a stop at Porkchop John's for sandwiches, my three companions realized that we'd have to stop for gas somewhere in rural west Montana and that whoever was pumping gas would probably ask what kind of car was on the trailer. In the next few hours, after a lot of joking, a new marque and model emerged. The Lotus, competition #426, became a 426cc Babushka-engined Zeiss Icon Skoda. When we stopped, I asked to have the car filled and opened the hood to check the oil. As anticipated, the attendant, a wizened old cowboy, asked "What kind of car is that, sonny?" It was Dean who got to him first and announced the well-practiced "It's a 426cc Babushkaengined Zeiss Icon Skoda." There was a pause, and I could imagine the cowboy looking at the Lotus. Then he said, "Hmm, looks like a Lotus to me." Dean didn't say much during the rest of the trip and looked just a little annoyed when one of us would say, "Hmm, looks like a Lotus to me!" I spent much of 1970 trying to get the many layers of paint stripped and finally had it in primer in time for the last two races of the year, which would be my required novice races. My first race was at Portland International Raceway, and I gotta tell you, the butterflies were tearing me up as I waited to pull onto the track for a standing start. Once the green fell, though, the butterflies were gone, and I was last by a lot — the car was geared for a rolling start and bogged down when the clutch was popped and a lot of gas was applied. Still, I worked my way up the field of mixed race cars driven by novices like me and finished O.K. I even got some good reviews from the senior drivers who were observing us novices. The second and last novice race was at my home track in Deer Park, Wash. It was an old bomber field with mostly right angle turns and very long straights — one was 5,000 ft., with a slight kink at about 3,000 ft. I had the same problem at the start, but there weren't many slow corners, so I soon began catching and passing the other novices. My Lotus sports racer was decidedly quicker than all but one of the cars in the race, and I didn't figure I'd catch him. When I passed a Datsun 2000 sports car, I figured I was in 2nd and backed off a bit — at least until I saw a red car disappearing around the turn at the end of that long straight. I soon realized it was the car I didn't think I could catch — a Lotus 23 sports racer powered by a Porsche Carrera 4-cylinder DOHC engine. Backing off was soon forgotten. With a couple laps to go, I had caught the other Lotus, and it became apparent that the driver was having a lot of trouble finding gears in the corners. I would pass him in the corner, he'd find a gear, and he'd blow past me. That kept up for the remaining laps until he threw a stone that hit me on the side of the nose. (That would be the last race I ever ran in an open helmet.) He took the checker first, but I was awarded the win because his required physical was out of date. I don't count that win. In 1971, I raced much of the season, missing only the race on Vancouver Island in Canada. Half of the ten races were at Westwood in British Columbia near Vancouver, two each were in Portland and Seattle, and one at Deer Park. At the last race, in Seattle, I had a one-point lead in the E Sports Racing class, but I blew a head gasket on the Coventry Climax engine and didn't get a qualifying time. Luckily, there was a guy in Seattle who raced an 11 in SCCA, and he loaned me a head gasket. Starting from the back of the grid, I passed much of the sports racing field before I got to the start/finish line. I was driving very hard, probably over my head, for no

reason. The guy in 2nd in the championship had pulled into the pits with a throttle problem. I was going to beat him, at least until I got to Turn 2A, where I dropped a wheel off on the outside of a very tight, downhill corner. The second time I did it, I broke a shock absorber in half! I was out, and I finished 2nd in the championship. That was the last race for the Lotus. I sold it to a fellow in Boise, bought an Alfa Romeo Giulia Super sedan, and turned it into a race car for 1972.

MG Cylinder Head Removal/ Install Made Easy!

by Charlie Durning

A while back I had the need to remove the cylinder head from my '74 MGB GT. Unfortunately, it turned into a bit of a debacle with smashed and skinned fingers. After that was all over and the car was running well, I took a look at the process to see if cylinder head removal and installation could be made easier. First, I took a good look at the shape of the cylinder. There is just no good way to grasp the head. Sure, it can be done... with skinned knuckles and smashed fingers. The B Series head weighs in at about 45 lbs. With the engine in the car and arms outstretched while bending over the fender can be very awkward, not to mention hard to maneuver the head over the studs. Clearly, this was time to invent a new tool. The tool is simple and easy to make. In lieu of a piece of angle iron that I could have sworn that I had, I instead welded a couple of pieces of fat iron together to make the angle iron. In the angle iron I drilled a pair of holes that would align with the two long rocker studs. On each side I mounted a pair of handles. As spacers, so the angle iron would clear the valve springs, I cut in half a pair of worn-out rocker stands. Now the angle iron can be securely mounted to the top of the head. Using the handles on each side, two guys can easily maneuver the head in place in just a jiffy. The benefit is no skinned knuckles or smashed fingers. Head removal is also a snap using the tool. As an aside the angle iron can also be used as a lifting fixture for engine removal and is adaptable for use on A Series engines.







Charlie's tool for cylinder head removal. Above: The components, including the spacers. Below: The tool in use, the long rocker studs (arrows) aligned with holes in the angle iron. Photos by Charlie Durning