



ONE OF DRAG RACING'S MOST IMPORTANT VEHICLES IS REBORN - in Southern England

You wouldn't automatically relate southern England with a piece of drag racing history – particularly a vehicle that those in America (the home of drag racing) see as the key to globalising the sport. But since the 1980s the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu has been the home of Sydney Allard's part-restored 1961 Allard Chrysler – Europe's first dragster that last ran in anger at Blackbushe in 1964. With the cancellation of the Brighton Speed Trials this year the restoration has particular significance. Madeira Drive is known by Americans as the oldest drag strip in the world and Sydney Allard drove this dragster at the event in 1961, '62 and '63.

Five years ago the National Motor Museum Trust, Beaulieu gave permission for a group of drag racing enthusiasts to complete Brian Golder's early 1980s restoration of the car that had been owned by the museum since Brian's death in 1992. The five year restoration project has been followed by the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) in a series of articles to motivate those looking for a career in the motor industry to take up an apprenticeship.

The first public fire-up of the completed restoration will take place at Northbrook College, Shoreham, Sussex during the afternoon and evening of Thursday June 13th as part of the dragster's link with IMI Apprenticeship programmes. Entry to the event is by invitation only with apprentices and other IMI members arriving during the afternoon and evening. They will be able to talk to the restoration team members and get close up and personal with the car that started the sport of drag racing in Europe.

The dragster will then be transported to the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu where it is a major attraction during the Beaulieu Custom and Hot Rod Festival open to the general public on Father's Day, Sunday June 16th. The dragster will fired up twice during the day and the event marks the official hand back of the completed project to the museum. Many celebrities from the world of drag racing will attend.

This link takes you to a recent test fire-up of the car. We have other footage available and there is film of the car racing back in the early 1960s.

<http://youtu.be/akS9hChkifo>



Test firing the dragster on April 25th (photo; Gareth Kent)

About the restoration

The restoration was completed by a group of drag racing enthusiasts who formed the Allard Chrysler Action Group (ACAG). With Pink Floyd drummer and National Motor Museum Trustee Nick Mason as UK Patron, they have gone on to turn what was a basic rolling chassis with body panels (no engine or clutch but a small box of bits including a blower), into a working exhibit. Director of Collections, National Motor Museum Trust, Beaulieu, Andrea Bishop says,

"As far as I am aware, such a task has never been completed on an iconic exhibit in the UK, by a group of private individuals working in partnership with the museum who own it. The ACAG raised the funds, researched, promoted and publicised the project and provided the expertise and people to carry out the work. It truly is an amazing achievement and a fantastic model for other groups to follow".

The first thing the group needed to do was thoroughly inspect the car to check what level of restoration was possible and then set a rough budget so that they could start raising funds to carry out the work. This was done in 2009 in the museum workshops.

The guestimate was that around £45,000 would be needed to restore the car to parade and fire-up ('cackle') condition. It was decided not to take it back to full race condition because this would require many safety modifications that would destroy its unique 'original' status.



The ACAG team check out the dragster in 2009 (photo; Alan Currans)

The rolling chassis was taken to shows, stories about the project were published, website and Facebook pages were created, ACAG shirts were sold along with other items such as a brilliant Paul Whitehouse painting of the car. Eventually the group had raised £10,000 – enough to get a 354 cubic inch Chrysler Hemi engine built to replicate that in the original dragster.

Michigan based nostalgia engine builder Booth-Arons was commissioned to build it and by the Autosport International show at the NEC in January 2011 the ACAG was able to display the rolling chassis and new gleaming engine to the public. The dragster had its heart and the group could now refurbish or replace the rolling chassis components.



The dragster with engine at Autosport International January 2011 (*photo; Sue Whyte*)

More money was raised during 2011 with the aim for that year being to build a basic working dragster before applying final finishes. The first engine fire up was in July of 2012. The car was completely stripped down again early in 2013 so that final chrome and paint finishes could be applied.

By March 2013 the car was again ready for test fire-ups and plans made to officially hand back the completed project to the museum as a working exhibit at the Beaulieu Custom and Hot Rod Festival on June 16th. More details about the project can be found on www.allardchrysler.org. or the Allard Dragster Facebook Page on www.facebook.com/allard.dragster?ref=tn_tnmn

Contact

Brian Taylor – Chairman
Allard Chrysler Action Group
Tel 01395 579733
Mob 07702 043411
brian@allardchrysler.org
www.allardchrysler.org



Europe's first dragster at Santa Pod Raceway July 2012 (photo; Matt Woods)