

# The Preservationist

The Member Newsletter of the Historic Race Circuits of Elkhart Lake Preservation Society  
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## The Barlow Simca 8 Special

The Overlap of the Hot Rod and the Sports Car Cultures

Growing up in the late 40's and early 50's we dreamed of custom "Hot Rods".... modified 32 Ford roadsters with performance enhancement from Holley, Edelbrock, Iskenderian and others. Foreign sports cars were



1932 Ford roadster  
"Hot Rod"

beginning to make their presence known, but for us, an American hot rod was the dream and California was the place

where it was all happening.

California was also the home of the man whose vision and ingenuity would merge hot rod technology with



Roger Barlow

the emerging foreign sports car racing craze. His name was Roger Barlow, a mechanically minded Minnesota farm boy who had moved to southern California and was now the owner International Motors. Barlow once wrote that while hot rods had many virtues including low cost and excellent acceleration, control and superior road handling was not among

them. He preferred that his "street rod" as he called it, come from Jaguar or Porsche. He also recognized that as competition intensified in the fast growing sports car road racing arena, more and more cars (*often called Specials*) were being modified to enhance performance.

After sizing up the competition, Barlow concluded that the highly competitive 1500cc class was vulnerable and decided to build a "Special" sports car designed specifically for competition in the class; an adaptation of hot rod building technology to a modern sports car. His vision became known as the Barlow Simca 8 Special.

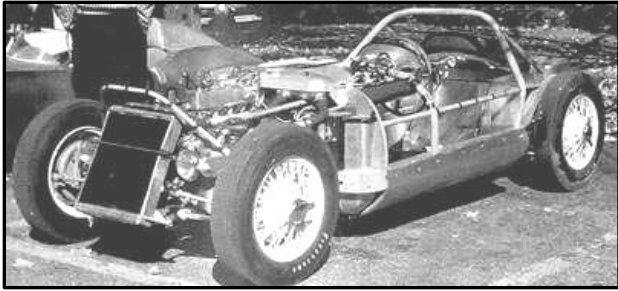
Starting with a Simca "Huit" sport convertible Barlow



Simca "Huit" Sport

removed the beautiful but ponderously heavy body. The frame was then widened to allow for a lower seating position. The engine was moved back six inches and the radiator moved forward by the same amount to obtain better weight

distribution. To help reduce unsprung weight, Borrani-Rudge light alloy wire wheels were fitted that also helped to cool the powerful Simca hydraulic brakes allowing more air to reach the finned aluminum drums.



*The Barlow Simca 8 Special as it appeared before the fitting of the Dielt light weight aluminum body.*

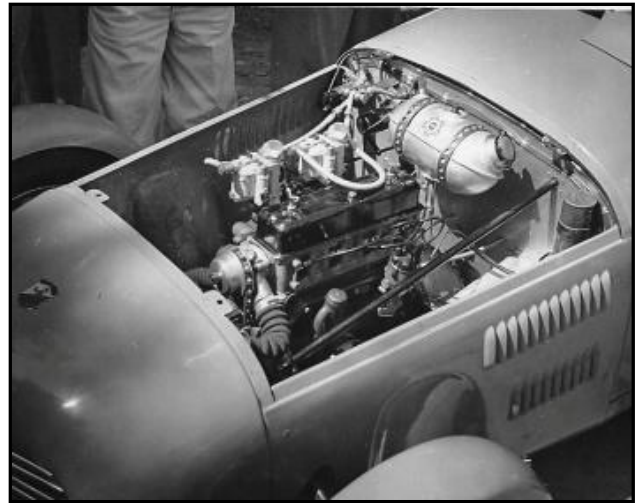
Finally a feather light aluminum shell fashioned by master body builder Emil Dielt and cycle style front fenders were fitted. While absent the typical compound curves found on many sports cars, the body painted a light sky blue had a graceful appearance that made ingenious use of the original Simca grille.



*The completed body of the Barlow Simca 8 Special featuring the adopted Simca grill.*

The original Simca 1390cc engine underwent high performance tuning

by ace engine mechanic Bill Pringle. Adopting standard hot rod builder technology, the aluminum cylinder head of the engine was milled, ported and relieved. Next the flywheel was lightened and stiffer valve springs were fitted. To top it off, two Weber carburetors were installed on an Abarth manifold and the cooling fan was removed. The result was a thirty percent increase in bhp and a compression ratio boosted to 9.25:1.



*A glimpse of the highly modified Simca engine in the Barlow Special with bonnet removed.*

The Barlow Simca Special made its' first race appearance at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Palm Springs Road Races on January 4, 1951 where it failed to finish due to a transmission failure. From there it was entered in the Pebble Beach Cup race at the Pebble Beach Road Race on May 27, 1951 where Barlow finished 1<sup>st</sup> in class and 5<sup>th</sup> overall. The Simca Special was next entered in the two day racing event at the Carroll Speedway in Gardena, California. On July Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> Barlow finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Trophy Dash and was winner of the S1.5 and the Match Race events on Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup>. Barlow

next entered the car in the August 26<sup>th</sup> races at the SCCA Nationals in Elkhart Lake where he finished 1<sup>st</sup> in class and 13<sup>th</sup> overall.



*The Barlow Simca Special in Elkhart Lake with Roger behind the wheel.*

Barlow and the Simca Special went on to race at the Reno SCCA Nationals and in Palm Springs both in October ending the year at Torrey Pines in December taking 1<sup>st</sup> in class at every event and the SCCA Class Championship.

The Simca Special was again in Elkhart Lake for the 1952 Kimberly Cup Race but by then time and competition caught up with the highly modified car and Barlow finished

nearly three minutes behind the OSCA of Bill Spear and the Porsches of Karl Brocken and Johnny Von Neumann, all unmodified factory sports cars.

So was the Barlow Simca Special a Hot Rod or a sports car? I think the only conclusion one can come too is that it was despite Hot Rod like modification, it was pure sports car. Hot Rods were built for the most part on lowered frames of American cars with little attention paid to cornering agility. They performed at their best racing down a long and straight drag strip. Sports car used suspensions that were built for superior handling on roadways curving both left and right. If you start with a sports car frame and suspension, not matter how many other components are modified, it is still a sports car.

*Note: The term "Huit" in the Simca name is French for eight. The Simca "Huits" all used 50 bhp engines. In French "road horsepower" terms, 50 bhp translates to 8 road horsepower, hence the Simca "Huit" or Simca 8.*

## **Activities Behind The Scene**

The Preservation Society was founded as an educational and charitable nonprofit organization within the meaning of Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. It was the belief of the founders that in

addition to the preservation and protection of the public roads used in the 1950, 51 and 52 open road races in Elkhart Lake, the rich history that surrounds them was worthy of preservation.

Since its formation the Society has grown to nearly 250 members, who with their guests have enjoyed the annual Society hosted member Dinner Events. However, the general membership may not be unaware of the many behind the scenes activities undertaken by HRC's Directors that promote historical awareness of the open road races in Elkhart Lake. Believing that current and future generations should be familiar with that history and the role the races played in the survival of the Village of Elkhart Lake as a tourist destination including its emergence as a kind of mecca for Midwestern sports car enthusiasts, HRC engages in a variety of behind the scene activities not seen by most members.

Each year HRC participates in Tourism Commission sponsored media tours exposing hundreds of travel writers to the history of open road racing in Elkhart Lake that lead to the creation of Road America. HRC participates in and makes presentations for historical societies and museums. We also make presentations to car clubs as diverse

as the Ferrari Club of North America and the Burlington Classic Cruiser Club telling the story of open road racing in Elkhart Lake.



*Director John Calhoun makes a historical presentation to the members of the Shelby American Automobile Club.*

In addition, HRC responds to the many requests from individuals around the world researching the history of a particular car or driver that participated in the original open road races.

All of this goes on quietly in the background focused on our goal to promote a better understanding of the history of the open road race circuits, their place in the history of Elkhart Lake and the important role they still play as a valued cultural and economic resource.

## Fall Dinner Event Wraps Up the Year

Eighty eight members and their guest attended the HRC Fall Dinner Event at Siebkens to bring to a conclusion another successful year. As usual

Siebkens served up an appetizing five course dinner that was preceded by the usual social gathering enjoyed by all.

In honor of the sixtieth anniversary of Road America the evening's program featured a video from the first races on the circuit in 1955 and the split second win in the 150 mile main event by future world champion Phil Hill driving a class DM Ferrari 750 Monza over the class CM Jaguar D-type driven by Sherwood Johnson. The Jaguar was owned and entered by Briggs Cunningham and the Ferrari was owned and entered by wealthy East



The photo finish of the 1955 Main Event with the Ferrari Monza in front by a matter of inches.

coast industrialist George Tilp. The Tilp family had professionally produced the program video from an extensive collection of 8mm films. HRC member Bill Wuesthoff introduced and commented on the video pointing out the Volkswagen T1 (Beatle) he had driven in the GP class race. Several large screen monitors insured that everyone had a great view. All in all a very entertaining evening and a fitting wrap up for the year.