Down Memory Lane with a Loving Restoration

Merlyn Mk3 12R.
- story and photos by Paul Flanery

On a cold drizzly winter’s evening in 1961 near the small English town of Woodbridge my half brother Herbert J. Simon, (USAF, Lt/Col., retired) who was stationed at Bentwaters AFB attended a “social” at the Officer’s Club for the local business owners. Col. Simon struck up a conversation with John Barrington Lewis, and Selwyn H. Hayward. John Lewis owned a large farm in Little Bentley, Selwyn Hayward was a mechanical engineer, and designer for large lifting cranes. They began talking about road racing. One thing led to another and my brother mentioned that I was racing an MGA in the colonies. John Lewis, an old racing driver, piqued everyone’s interest by suggesting they design and construct a race car, and export those cars to the USA market. Colchester Racing Developments was born. Things progressed and a factory was started in a small tractor storage barn on John Lewis’ farm, with a dirt floor, I might add. John Lewis was the general manager, Selwyn Hayward the chief design engineer, and Col. Jerry Simon, head of export to the US.

You may ask why the name of Colchester Racing Developments (CRD), well Little Bentley, where Johns’ farm was located, was not far from the town of Colchester, England. Do you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merry or Soul and a Merry Old Soul” you remember the kindergarten song, “Old King Cole was a Merr...
sold 12 R to a fellow in Miami, PR 11 was raced at Bahama Speed Weeks in 1962, and I was told by Kolb that the car was totally destroyed and left in Nassau as junk, (which I doubt to this day). Bill Ward of Palm Coast, purchased car 12R subsequently, raced extensively. In 2002 Bill had the car for sale, after repurchasing it in multiple pieces. I would have purchased the car at the time, but was in the process of restoring a Merlyn MK 6A Sports Racing car and I didn’t want to take on another restoration at that time. Bill sold that car to Doug Elcomb of Canada. When I sold the Mk 6A, I contacted Doug who agreed to sell me 12R. We thought it was 12R as it had the same transmission with interior rear drum brakes plates on the transmission, and exhibited the light metallic blue color under many layers of paint on the body parts that we had originally painted the car when we received it in 1961. I also acquired the chassis, although with no chassis number plate for the dash. Upon getting the Formula Junior I promptly took it to the chassis shop to replace tubes that had been cut out, and to repair any damage. The chassis shop called and asked me if numbers stamped on the rear chassis meant anything, and did I want to preserve those numbers before they started welding. I knew from Selwyn Hayward, and John Lewis, that Colchester Racing Developments stamped the chassis with serial numbers, but had subsequently forgotten about those numbers. Rick of “Rick’s Chassis” shop told me that after wire brushing the area, where he was about to weld, between the rear shock supports that the numbers stamped there were 14R. Low and behold those numbers were on the Rodger Ward car. I was amazed because I had thought all along that it was 12R. After forty eight years I suppose that the various parts of both cars have become intertwined, so now I have parts for 12R and 14R! The chassis being 14R. See picture of 14R SN stamped on chassis. I am now in the restoration process of restoring 14R. There were only three Merlyn MK 3’s imported into the US, 11PR, aluminum, prototype, 12R fiber glass body, drum brakes, Holbay, and 14R, Cosworth, four wheel disc brakes, five speed early Hewland gearbox,14R the Rodger Ward car. I have the original invoices for all three cars with pictures and complete documentation, etc.

This will be a most enjoyable restoration and held in the highest vintage regard, with documented history, love and the memories I had as a young man during the time we raced in anger, partied hard, and lived the racing life. Aww, Bahama Speed Weeks, 1961, I’m there again!

An after thought, Selwyn Hayward went on to become one of the premier designers of Merlyn cars. Selwyn designed the successful, innovative Merlyn Mk 6, that Charlie Barns won the G Modified SCCA Championship Nationals in 1964. I sold Charlie that Mk 6 at factory cost. Selwyn later designed the Formula Ford Merlyns that had such great success. Drivers like Emerson Fittipaldi, Jody Scheckter, Tim Schenken got their start in Merlyns. Colchester Racing Developments still exists today and is located at Station Road, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex, UK. The proprietor is Clive Hayward, Selwyn’s younger brother, Selwyn being retired and now living in the south of France. In passing I like to mention that one of Selwyn’s Mk 5 Formula Juniors won the Monaco Formula Junior vintage race twice in the last several years, driven by Dennis Welsh.