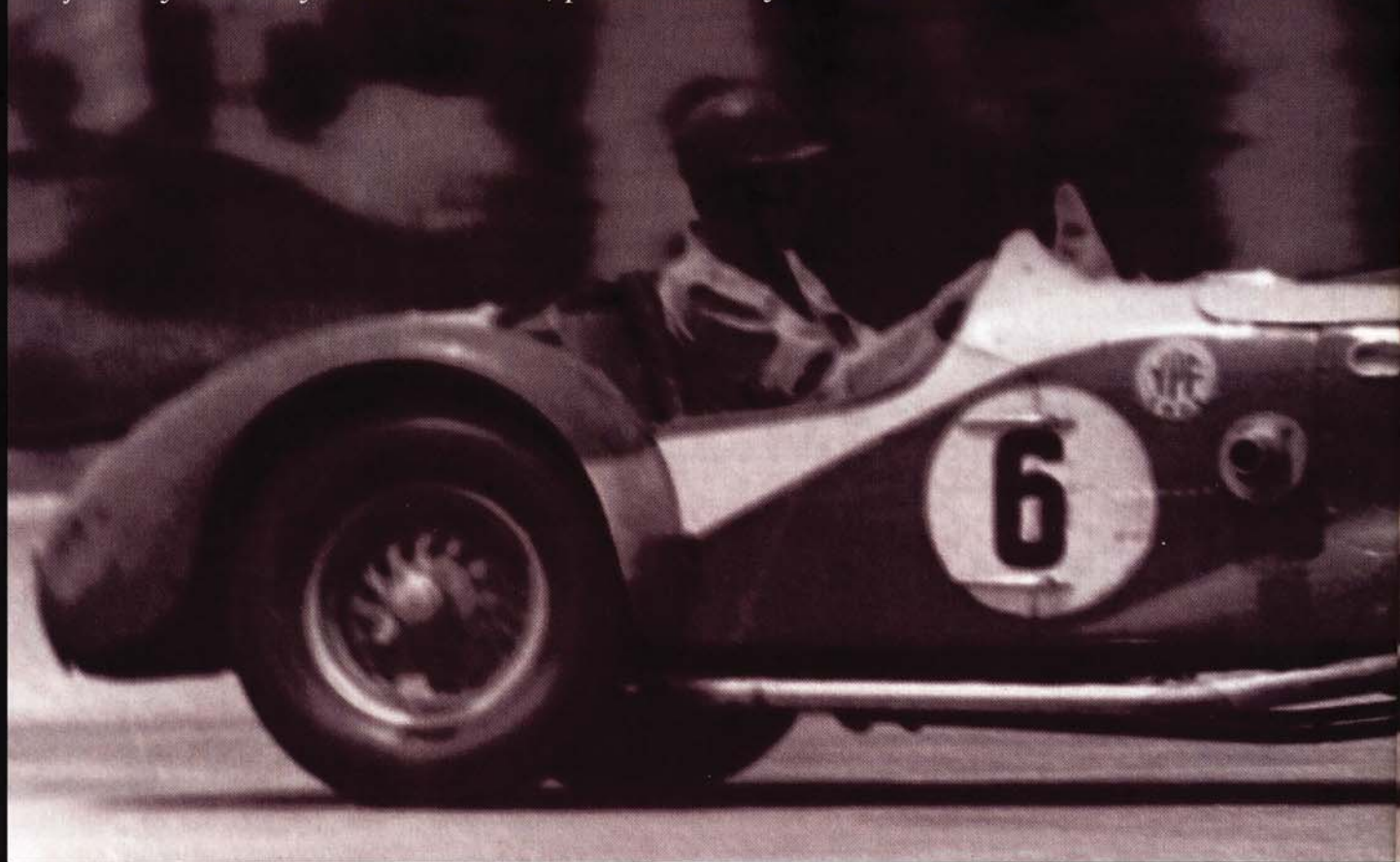


Shelby's Argentine

How a bankrupt chicken farmer and an ex-bush pilot challenged South America's best with help from Juan Perón, old cans of Castrol, and a healthy pair of kidneys. Text by Charlie Warnes; photos courtesy Dr. Vicente Alvarez.

16



It was, from the onset, a most foolhardy venture, but the challenge was offered and accepted before anyone had a chance to think it through. Within days the clapped-out race car had been rudely awakened from its 3-month hibernation, hastily thrown back together as an incomplete mass, and shipped off to the mysterious, foreboding land of Argentina.

They made the commitment with scant thought of the realities involved, such as how they'd properly rebuild a competition machine in a distant, foreign land with no local assistance. They didn't even know if they could find any parts down there, or how they'd pay for them if there were. Today the venture would be recognized, and dismissed,

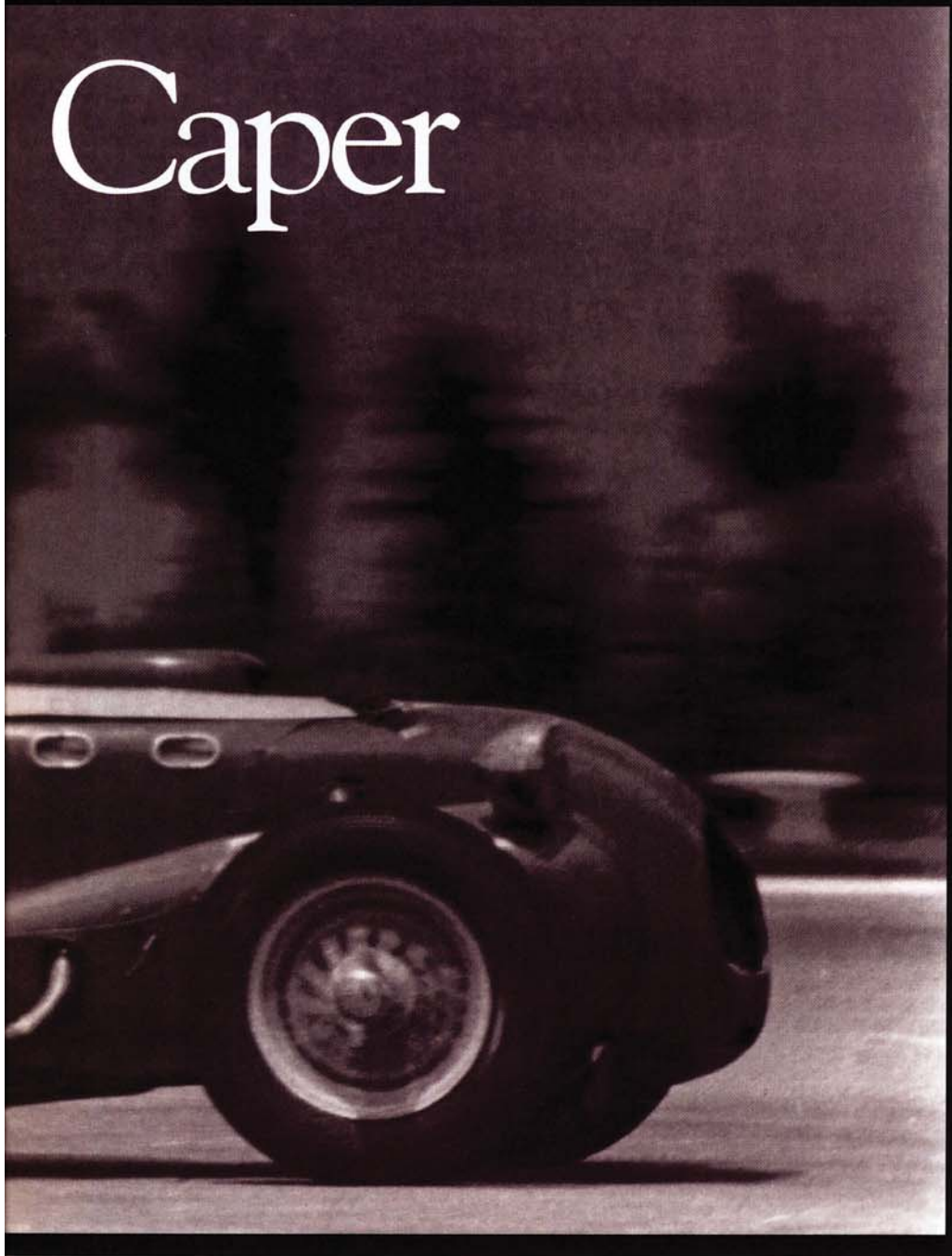
as impossible, but 1954 was a simpler and more innocent age—especially to the cast of characters involved. This included a bankrupt chicken farmer with a driving aptitude matched only by his powers of persuasion; an ex-bush pilot who possessed critical gifts for innovation and tenacity; and a blustering brute of an Anglo-American racing car whose reputation for power and durability was matched only by the notoriety of its devilish suspension system.

Carroll Shelby had just completed his second year as an amateur race driver, and during the 1953 season he'd piloted this very same Cad-Allard J2X with distinction. It was purely serendipitous that his career path and that of the Allard marque should have intersected at this juncture. Shelby's

star was definitely on the rise in '53, while Allard's racing fame had crested a year earlier, never to recover. The mighty J2X was an ergonomic and handling improvement over the first-generation J2, but the Allard Motor Company simply didn't have the resources and organization to keep up with the competition's growing momentum. Still, for a few months in 1953 and early '54, the Allard's raw power and quirky behavior proved an ideal stage for developing and showcasing Shelby's driving talent.

Nineteen fifty-three had also been a busy year for Jack Joerns. He had a promising engineering career going with General Dynamics, his after-hours race-car shop was off to a good start, and his crew work for Roy Cherryhomes' racing team offered

Caper



ample excitement and challenges. By Christmastime, Jack was looking forward to a few weeks' respite before tackling the rebuild on Cherryhomes' Allard for the 1954 season.

Then the phone rang. It was Shelby. The driver had just called to chat, but he also casually mentioned an endurance race that was coming together down in Argentina—something called the Kimberly Cup Challenge, a trophy chase that "Gentleman Jim" Kimberly, the formidable amateur Ferrari racer, had established after his Argentine racing experience a year earlier. Some other drivers—Phil Hill, Masten Gregory, and Boris Said—were going down, Shelby said, and they needed a fourth team to represent the United States

against the top four Argentinean sports-car efforts from the past season. Might be fun: Heck, the Municipal Government of Buenos Aires was even supposed to pick up the shipping and travel costs. Carroll had been talking with Roy about his running the Allard J2X, and he couldn't help wondering if maybe Jack might be interested in coming along....

Joerns certainly wasn't averse to the idea, but he didn't take Shelby very seriously, either. After all, he thought he knew car-owner Cherryhomes well enough to guess that these sorts of shenanigans wouldn't interest Roy. Joerns also had reason to believe that Shelby's personal finances were in about the same sorry state as his own. So Jack didn't give the idea

much thought until a couple of days later, when Carroll called back to announce that the trip was on. He'd actually persuaded Roy into letting him take the Allard to South America, but he'd be on his own for parts and running costs.

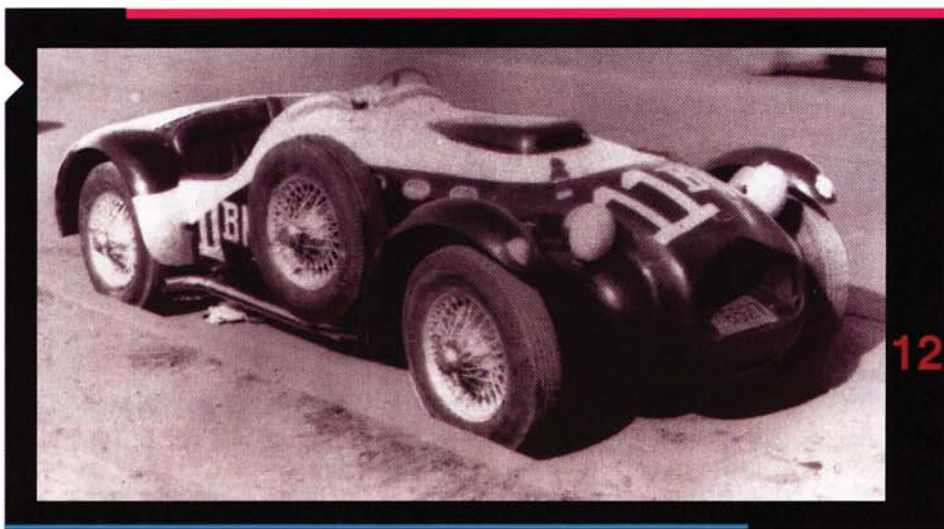
Now Carroll had a couple favors to ask of Jack. First, could Jack please throw the tired old race car back together in the next two days, at least well enough so it could be shipped off to New York? Second, would Jack come along to Argentina as Shelby's mechanic?

Some background on the car itself: Allard J2X s/n 3146 had left the Allard works on 20 November 1952 for shipment to Los Angeles. As was common with Allard sports and competition cars, it was shipped without an engine or transmission.

The chassis was set up for a 331-cid Cadillac V8 and Ford 3-speed gearbox—a popular and well-proven combination with a reputation for bulletproof reliability. Even so, after nine strenuous races during the '53 season, Cherryhomes and Jack agreed that the engine was overdue for a total rebuild. The brakes also needed to be completely gone through, and the mechanic had additionally wanted to change the car's axle ratio to mitigate future engine abuse from Shelby's heavy right foot. Fortunately, Jack had been procrastinating on the engine so far, but he'd already begun to rebuild the brakes and tear into the rear axle.

A brake job was a rather mundane task on most cars of the era, but not an Allard, with its de Dion rear end and inboard rear drums. Not only were the latter ensconced deep in the dirty end of the creature's underbelly but gaining access entailed lying on one's back to dismantle a network of safety wire, U-joints, and adapters just to get the drums off. Considering that Jack was also committed to a demanding day job—and bearing in mind the axiom that things come apart at least twice as easily as they go back together—the net effect was that Jack's chances of finishing the brake job before the car had to sail from New York were slim indeed.

Thus the next two days became a mad scramble to do just enough field surgery to get the battered soldier ready for transport. Joerns barely had time to bolt the major assemblies back together and toss the remaining parts into every nook and cranny of the aluminum shell—leaving Carroll with hardly enough room to squeeze into the cockpit and drive the brakeless Allard from Jack's Fort Worth shop to Love Field, the site of President Johnson's historic inauguration a decade later. The car then traveled via Flying Tiger to New York, where it joined the other three American machines being loaded aboard the *Evita* for the voyage to South America.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Above: Starting lineup at the Buenos Aires Autodrome, with the suited-up Shelby (in helmet) and Joerns idling around the Allard in the foreground. Next in line are the Najurieta/Gomez Maserati-Ford (DNF) and the race-winning Farina/Maglioli Ferrari.

Left: Shelby's Allard, owned by Roy Cherryhomes, in a Brownie shot taken on a rural '50s American street. Photo from the Peter Booth Collection.

Top right: The second-place finisher, Schell/de Portago's Vignale-bodied 3-liter Ferrari, coming off the trailer.

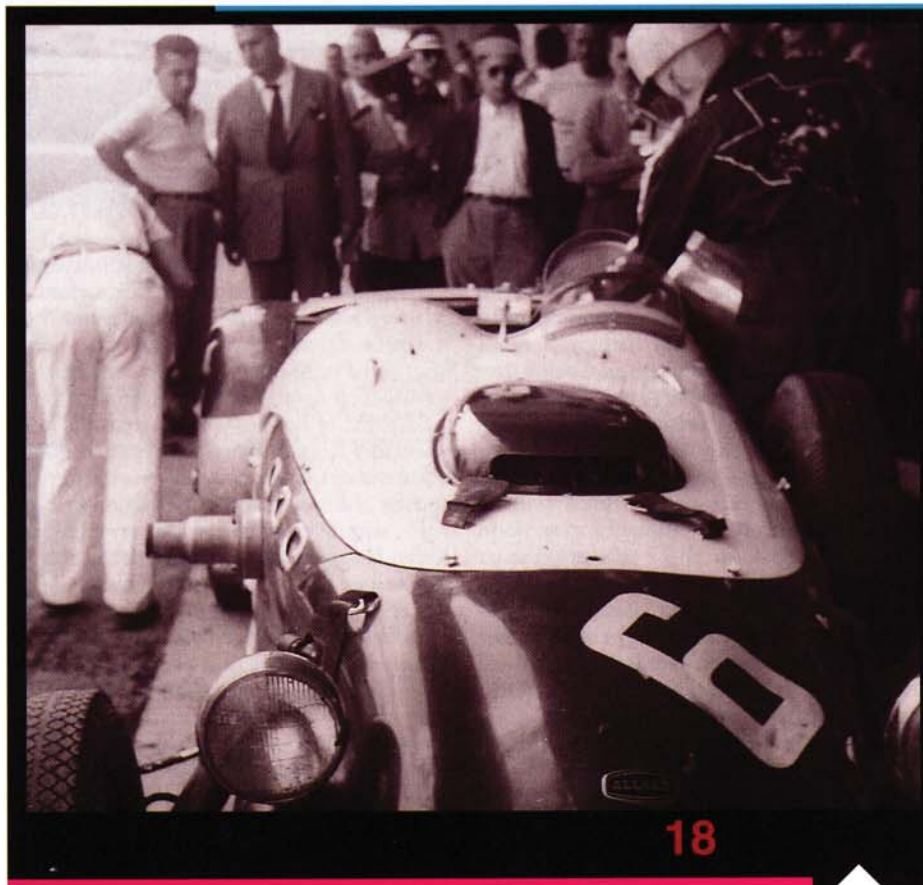
Top center: Boris Said kneels next to the Jack Frierson OSCA he'd share with George Moffet. Behind is the Collange/Speroni OSCA 1100 (2nd in class/11th overall).

Right: Though Shelby has already lost a number of parts from the Allard, his driving suit remains....

Gentleman Jim's Argentina invitation ostensibly aimed to pit the USA's top four SCCA racers from the 1953 season against their South American counterparts in a winner-take-all showdown. The cars on the American side proved a broad cross-section of the best sports entries of the day. There was, of course, Shelby's thundering Allard. Masten Gregory brought a C-type Jaguar that he

would run with his brother-in-law Dale Duncan, while Allan Guiberson's 4.1-liter Ferrari would be piloted by Phil Hill and David Sykes. Rounding out the group was Jack Frierson's 1342 OSCA with Boris Said and George Moffet at the wheel.

Three weeks later, on 15 January 1954, the teams themselves embarked from Idlewild on Aerolinas Argentina for the 31-hour trip to Buenos Aires. Their host, Senor Luis Herrera, made sure that hospitality and accommodations befitting their VIP status greeted them upon arrival, but



Joerns knew from the start that he'd have to forego those pleasures if there was any hope of getting the Allard rebuilt and sorted out in the next week. Thus he chose to bunk in the garages instead, where he could work unimpeded by the festivities.

Time pressures aside, Joerns also had to bridge the language and cultural barriers to bargain, barter, and beg for the vital brake components and other sundry parts the Allard would require before race day. Those challenges, however, were minor compared with the problems thrown up by the officials; each day they seemed to confront and confound Jack with a new twist to one of the race's multitude of perplexing regulations.

Take the fenders, for example. The Argentinean officials interpreted the FIA rule requiring fenders on sports cars—a key feature that differentiated them from the Formula cars of the day—to mean panels contiguous with the body. In short, the Allard's stock front cycle fenders simply wouldn't fly by the Argentinean interpretation of the rules, no matter how hard Jack argued the point. After considerable effort he finally relented, complying to the scrutineers' demands by cutting up some 5-gallon Castrol cans and attaching them between the cowl and the cycle fenders with sheet-metal screws. (Ironically enough, Rosier and Trintignant were allowed to run a rebodied *monoposto* Ferrari in the event.)

Despite the frustrations and difficulties the Allard was up and running on 23 January, giving the team a day for shakedown and practice runs before the race began. For a whole few minutes, at least, everything looked like a go—right up to the time that the fever-pitched Shelby punched it too hard while leaving the pits and shredded the racer's cluster gear.

Considering the massive number of Fords trundling around Argentina, finding a new transmission to replace the one that Shelby destroyed shouldn't have presented a serious obstacle. The problem was, any engine beefier than a stock Ford flathead V8 ate standard-issue Ford transmissions like popcorn. Translation: They had to have the tougher gears from a Lincoln Zephyr, and Zephyrs were a mighty rare commodity in South America. Fortunately, Jack's parts quests over the past week had helped him polish up on his techno-pidgin Spanish—a dialect he'd picked up during his earlier life as a bush pilot in Mexico—and, with the help of the taxi driver who was put at their disposal and even more dumb luck, they managed to find the remains of a wrecked Zephyr that was ripe for the picking. The effort was back in business before the end of the day.

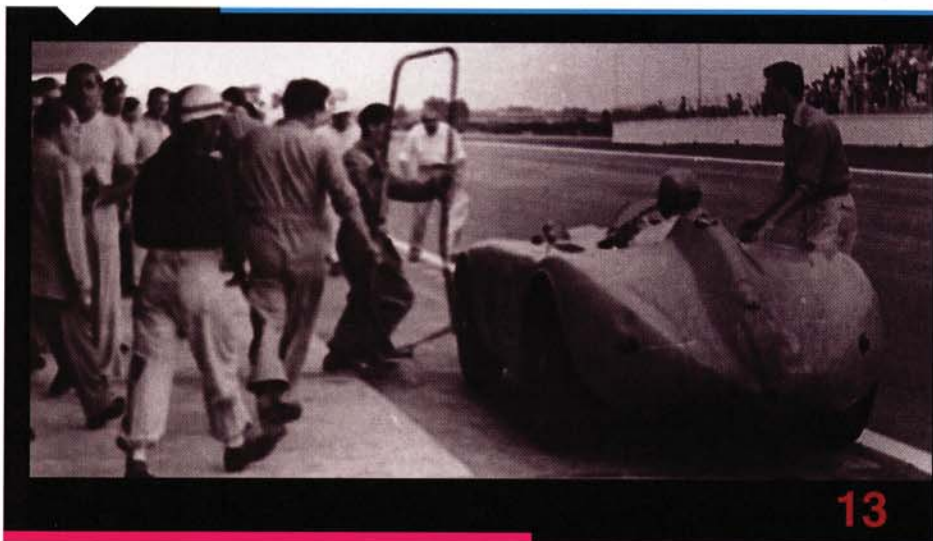
Not that they were out of the woods, particularly as pre-race tensions and jitters

mounted. Even the seemingly petty concern of the fire extinguisher became an issue between Jack and Carroll. Just so much dead weight to Carroll's way of thinking, no sooner would Jack install one than Carroll would throw it overboard as he left the paddock. Then there was the matter of tires—or rather the sorry condition of the ones that were already on the car, rivaled only by the even-sorrier condition of the team's finances. Despite their luxurious accommodations, the team was in fact desperately cash-poor. The situation became so acute that at one point Jack was appealing to the other teams to loan him their spare tires for the race. Fortunately, they got a last-minute reprieve when Bob Masterson—the great Texas oilman and enthusiast had come down for the race—heard of their plight and sprang for a set.

To understand the mood of the Kimberly Challenge, it's important to understand how wild the Argentineans were—and still are—about motor racing. The city's first America-vs.-Argentina sports-car challenge actually took place in 1951, when four teams of Yanks had come down and Connecticut's John Fitch, driving an Allard J2 usually piloted by Tom Cole, won the event in grand style.

The Buenos Aires Autodrome, from which the Challenge would be flagged off, was one of the many grandiose public-works projects of the Perón regime. It included five circuits in one, elaborate pit garages that opened directly onto the track, and seating for 120,000. The facility was completed just prior to the '52 Argentina Gran Prix and nearly 400,000 spectators had come to witness its dedication by President Perón for the 9 March 1952 race, a non-sanctioned event won—to the crowd's obvious delight—by Juan Manuel Fangio in a 2-liter Ferrari. And the Argentineans' passions grew to mania proportions with the first FIA-sanctioned GP at the Autodrome on 18 January 1953. More than 350,000 spectators had arrived a full two hours before the 4:00 start time, and thousands stormed over the barricades to line the curbs all the way around the track. Giuseppe Farina was running third at mid-race when a spectator stepped onto the track by the first turn; Farina swerved to miss him, lost it, and plowed into the crowd, killing ten and injuring 32. And yet the race continued, with Alberto Ascari eventually winning in an F2 Ferrari.

For 1954, the Kimberly Challenge was to be a race-within-a-race running concurrent with the FIA-sanctioned World Championship of Marques—a 1000-kilometer enduro for sports cars. In order to include some high-speed straights in the event, the organizers ran the course well beyond the confines of the Autodrome and



out on to General Paz Avenue (the 1954 rendition of a South American freeway), which allowed speeds well in excess of 100 miles per hour.

The chase began with a Le Mans start at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, 24 January. Aside from some minor dicing between the two leading Ferraris during the first eight laps, the field was soon spread out along the entire 6.2-mile course. Considering the dangers of the sprawling course and the very high attrition rate, the long-distance race actually offered very little action for the spectators, with few surprises and not much wheel-to-wheel action.

The one major exception was Shelby's manhandling of the thundering, cantankerous Allard—and this alone was enough to provide the bulk of a day's entertainment. Wind and vibration soon took their toll on the car's makeshift fenders, which went sailing off along the freeway at full speed (without, fortunately, any reported decapitations). Better still, as the race proceeded the Allard continued shedding other extraneous parts along the way, including a battery, one of the fuel tanks, and eventually the right front cycle fender.

Argentinean army soldiers aboard motorcycle sidecars patrolled the perimeter of the course and also picked up debris along the way. They soon began presuming

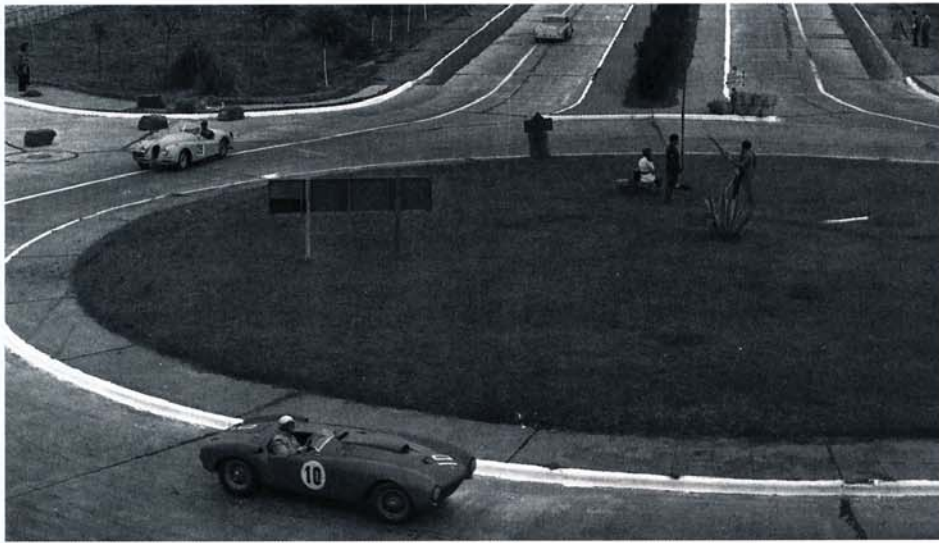
NOW KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Top: Trintignant shared Rosier's Ferrari 375, a rebodied GP single-seater.

Above: Masten Gregory brought Dale Duncan to help handle the C-type, but the entry spent enough time in the pits that a second driver proved redundant. The Jag was running at the end but far in arrears.

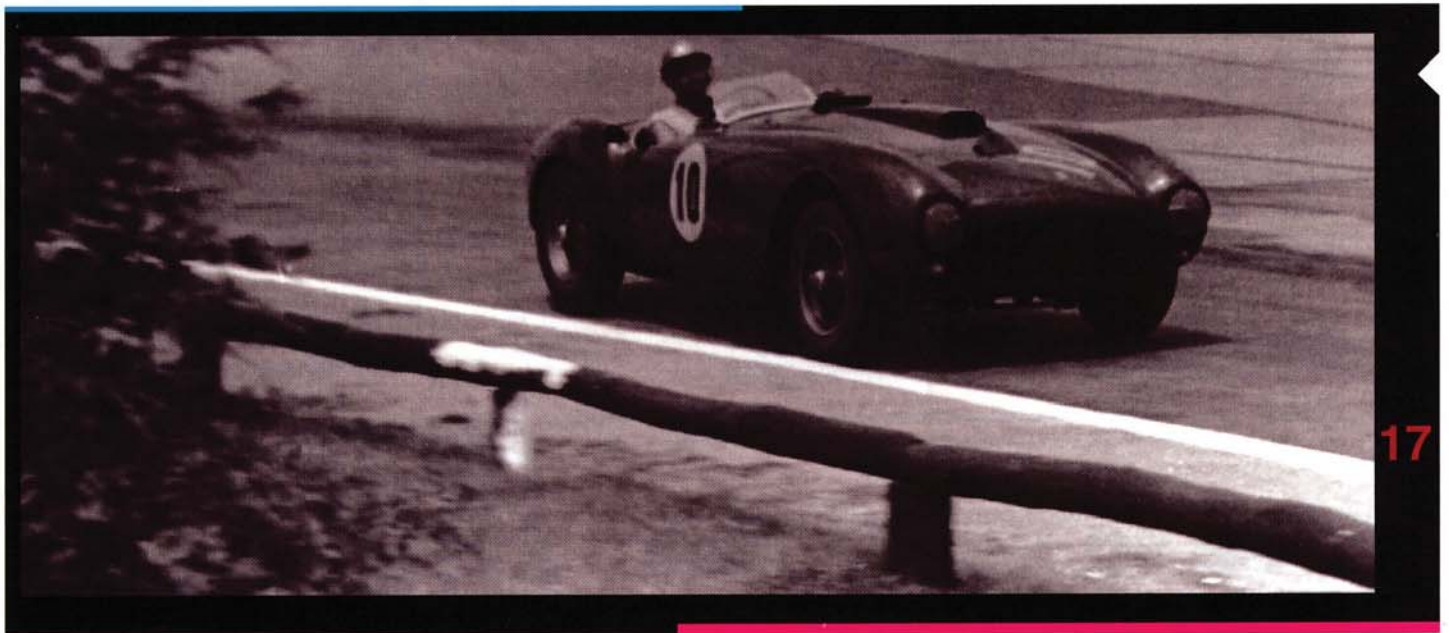
Top right: The winning Ferrari 375MM of Farina/Maglioli leads the local XK120 of Zubiria/Pesce around the far end of General Paz Avenue. After the race, Masten Gregory was so impressed with the Italian car's performance that he bought it on the spot. It's the same one he later brought to Europe.

Right: Designed for the Mille Miglia, Umberto Maglioli and Giuseppe Farina's 375 was one of the few European thoroughbreds tough enough for the pounding Argentinean streets. The car averaged an incredible 93.221 mph over the 1000 kilometers.



After 106 tedious laps, the World Championship of Marques was won by Farina/Maglioli in a 4.5-liter Ferrari, their running time of six hours and 41 minutes working out to an average speed of 93.43 mph. Harry Schell and Alfonso de Portago came in second in a 3-liter Ferrari, and Collins/Griffiths managed third in a fine drive for Aston Martin.

Folklore often credits Shelby with the win but in fact he came in tenth, some 20 laps behind the leader. As a counter to the adage "There's no substitute for cubic inches," ninth place went to a 1.5-liter Porsche and 11th was held by a 1.1-liter OSCA. But the key here was *finishing*, a feat accomplished by only 16 of the 36 starters. All four members of Argentina's Kimberly Cup effort failed to reach the end, and thus Shelby and the Allard won the 1954



that any scattered parts they found had originally been part of the Allard and simply deposited everything they happened upon with Joerns in the pits. Consequently, Jack soon found himself with a much greater stock of racing parts than he'd started out with America!

In the later stages Dale Duncan—who wasn't really needed by Gregory, since their Jag was spending so much time in the pits with electrical woes that Masten could casually stroll about smoking cigarettes between laps—agreed to spell Shelby for a while. By this time attrition had become a major factor in the race, and the Americans were keenly aware of the need to make the car finish at all costs. Having already experienced Allard cars' legendary quirkiness firsthand—Dale ran a Chrysler-engined version himself—he drove with all due caution, both out of strategy and from a healthy fear of the battle-worn beast.

Then it happened. About a half-mile past the pits Dale slowed for a turn and some raw fuel siphoned up through the front carburetor and onto the hot manifold. The gasoline caught, and flames instantly began spewing from the bubble over the dual-quad carbs. Dale hastily pulled over, reached down for the extinguisher...and found the empty space left when Shelby had tossed the latest fire bottle overboard! He looked around for help; there wasn't a corner worker or extinguisher in sight.

Cool thinking quickly came to the fore. Within seconds Dale had the hood straps undone, his pants unzipped, and the fire safely extinguished. The damage proved to be minimal, and the dually relieved Duncan was able to nurse the scalded Allard back to the pits for quick repairs. It's rumored that one spectator was able to capture this heroic act in one of history's more dramatic, albeit so far unpublished, examples of racing (and/or firefighting) photojournalism.

Kimberly Cup race-within-a-race for the United States by default. Among the DNFs were Hill's Ferrari and Said's OSCA, both of which dropped out in the early stages with mechanical ills. Gregory's Jag ultimately did finish, but far, far in arrears.

John Wyer of Aston Martin fame was one of the spectators at this race. He was later to remark that the Allard, with the arbitrary camber of its split front axle, seemed to be turning corners all the way down the straights. However, he also took note of Carroll Shelby's skill, which was to come up again a couple of days later when Peter Collins introduced the two men. Shelby and Wyer hit it off immediately, and subsequent discussions led to Shelby running a DB3 at Sebring two months later. Then it was on to Europe, where he drove a works Aston at Aintree on 29 May and later joined the team for Le Mans, marking the beginning of his professional driving career. While the Kimberly Cup win might not have been elegant, it set some very important wheels in motion. ●