

Received from John Bates (to Nick England—Beach Historian) 2/22/05

Email:

This attachment deals with the time frame of 1972-73 when I was wrenching on chassis 104. I am responsible for the rebuilding of the car at that time, including much of the work involved in lengthening the car. Please pass this along to the current owner. John F. Bates

Document:

I was browsing the net when I came across the page listing the Beach sports racers. Surprise does not even begin to describe the feeling I had when I saw that the car that I worked on over thirty years ago was still in existence and looking substantially the same as when I last saw it. This car, and the experiences surrounding it, were a substantial influence on me at the time, and ever since.

The story begins in Carbondale, Illinois, where I was attending Southern Illinois University. I knew Michael Bartlett through the university car club. Mike had graduated several years before, but worked for SIU in the data processing department as a systems analyst. Mike decided that he wanted to go racing despite the fact that he was in his thirties and had never done so before. I and my friend, Ken Hodl, as well as my brother, Rob, volunteered to be the mechanical crew.

Mike found an ad in Autoweek which offered the Beach for sale at what seemed a reasonable price. My brother and I had been planning a road trip to the general area where the car was, so a detour to Mr. Schlossberg's home was added to the itinerary.

Mr. Schlossberg was a very likable fellow, and we spent some time listening to his stories about his racing experiences. When we looked at the car, it was painted a light metallic blue and was in good shape. At least good shape for an old race car. We were told that the engine while it would turn, had not been run in some time and would need freshening. We then called Mike and told him the car was complete and worth a look. I did suggest that he try it on for size. Mike was about six feet, four inches tall. We then continued our trip for the next two weeks.

When we arrived back in Carbondale, to our surprise, the car was already there. Mike had driven to Massachusetts and picked it up. He had not tried it on for size. When he put his helmet on, his head stuck above the roll bar by a goof three inches. What is more, he could not work the pedals as his knees would not fit under the dash. To make matters worse, a check with the SCCA rule book showed that the roll bar, which was a simple hoop, would not pass tech without cross bracing and support fore and aft.

The simple solution would have been to sell the car right away and find another that would fit and be legal, but Mike had fallen in love with the car and decided to modify it. The car was then dismantled down to the frame which I sandblasted. Then the tubing was ordered and the frame cut and welded with an additional eight or so inches added. A new aluminum floor pan was fabricated, held on by what seemed to be a million pop rivets. They were put in by hand, and it took several days to recover my grip. We then enlisted the aid of a fiberglass wizard, Morris Walker, who extended both side pods and the doors. He then painted it green and black. It looked great,

The radius rods had to be made longer to fit the rear suspension location. For some reason, Mike wanted the brake lines to be made of copper tubing, so we made them up. The hoses were Aeroquip.

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The engine had very worn bearings and the crank needed turning. This crank had been de-stroked to get to 850 cc. It was turned and then chromed to maintain its size. I believe that later Mike put a standard crank in the car, but I am not sure of that. New pistons were ordered from Venolia. The carburetors on the car were some ancient Weber DCO3 s. These needed rebuilding which I did. We were good to go.

The car was taken to Wentzville and to Blackhawk Farms to get Mike licensed. He fell off the track several times, but the car ran well. The only problem that came up was that Mike had the habit of pushing the clutch pedal in and out while on the grid. On two occasions, the clutch slave cylinder stuck, losing that session of track time.

Despite the lengthening, the car handled well, turning in some respectable lap times. The engine was sometimes difficult to get started, but once running, was smooth and powerful although it had a very narrow torque band.

Despite my best efforts, I left Carbondale about 1974 and never heard from Mike or about the car again until today. My main regret is that I did not find the car in the junkyard first!