

PLAGIARISM *IN* STEEL



“This is nice, what is it?”
“It’s a Lagonda V-12 LeMans replica”
“Oh, a replica, what engine does it have in it?”
“Lagonda”
“And gearbox?”
“Lagonda”
“Chassis, suspension, brakes, back axle?”
“Lagonda, Lagonda, Lagonda and Lagonda”
“Well then, how can it be a replica?”
“Because it isn’t one of the two cars they made for Le Mans”
By Dickon Daggitt



do not betide anyone who builds a replica and dares call it such, in these days of 2011 Cobras, GT40s and ubiquitous Lotus 7s. This story opens with a conversation with a self-appointed expert from the EU in my workshop, looking for bargains. But this time, and with a new car, I'm really sticking my neck out.

A chap called Captain Middleton D'Este bought a Bugatti T23 Brescia rolling chassis in London in June of 1925, paying 144 pounds for it. This car is Chassis Number 2534 and Engine Number 933.

His intention was to take the Brooklands 1 100cc record with the car, which unfortunately was 1 500cc as built. Undaunted, he re-engineered it to 1 100cc with his own all-rollerbearing crankshaft, conrods, radical camshaft, cut the sides off engine and gearbox to move them to the left of central, and sat beside them in a very

narrow pointy tail single seater body.

In his own words: "I towed the car to Brooklands, did six laps at 100 miles per hour, towed it home, dismantled it, and went to India."

It was in this state that Clive Woolley of Johannesburg found the car in an attic in the UK in 1979. Popular wisdom, at the time, suggested that a record-breaking attempt car was of little interest, and that the smart money was on returning it to road going condition. Now, the original car was a T23 and was supplied sans body, and is longer than the ubiquitous two-seater bolster-tank Brescia we are all used to. The T23 was usually a four-seater, often a saloon, so Clive had the chassis shortened, in way of the major bend put in by Capt. Middleton D', and had a two-seater body made.

I bought this car half way through its restoration and completed it, fitting new



crankshaft and rods, to bring it back to its 1500cc specification. This car, a shortened T23, with two-seater body is now in the Franschoek Motor Museum. The FMM car is Chassis 2534 and Engine Number 933, both numbers stamped on in the correct places. This car is the Middleton D'Este record breaker, restored to a road car and has the original engine, gearbox, chassis, front and rear axle, brakes, instruments etc.

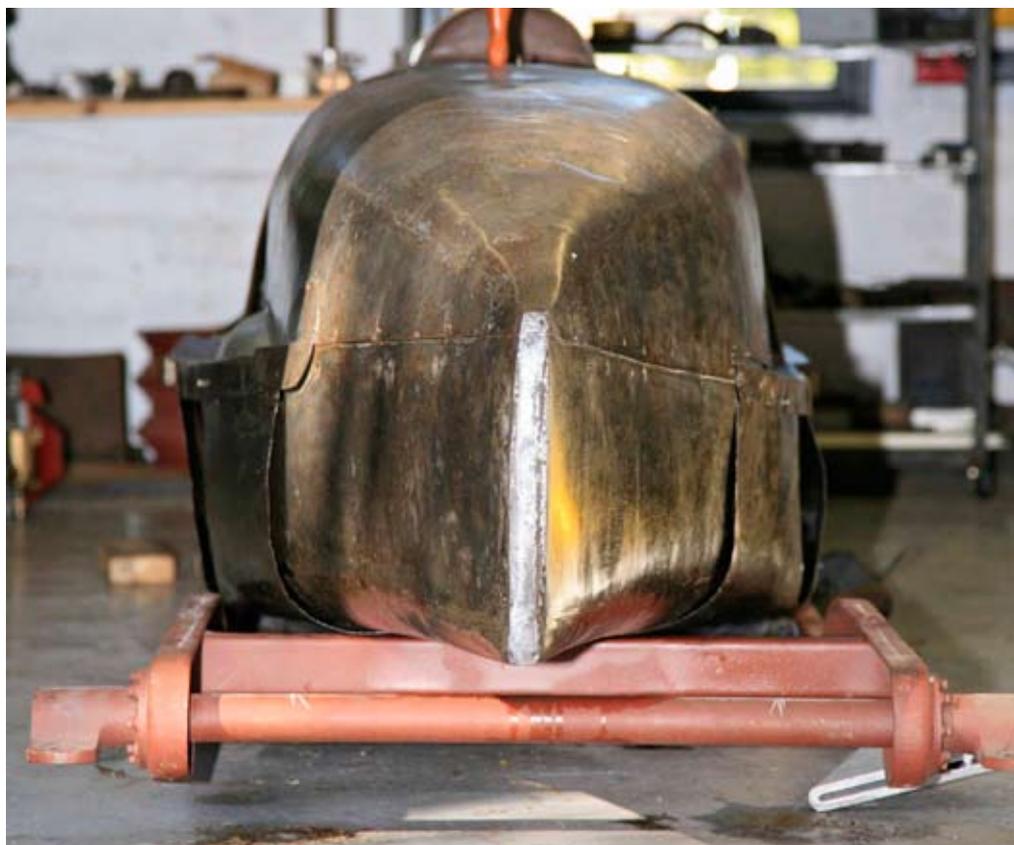
The only unusable Bugatti part of the record breaker, now the FMM car, was the radiator which had at least 4 extra holes bored in it by the good Captain, and this was replaced with an original Bugatti one.

So what am I doing?

I have the crankshaft and conrods and camshaft from the record breaker, as well as the exhaust and supercharger, all of which are non-Bugatti items. I was mechanic-ing for a mate at a race in Angouleme, France, where there was a race for Brescia Bugattis: I got chatting and while most had heard of the Middleton D'Este car, nobody realised that some of the special record attempt bits still existed and I was encouraged in fact, told to build a replica of the record attempt car.

So: I have sourced replica chassis (T23 and unmodified), engine, gearbox, back axle and front axle. I have found a few (very few) original Brescia parts including a couple of gears, clutch actuating rod, inlet and exhaust manifolds, and the Captain's seven-hole-in-one radiator. My search has yielded parts from all over the UK, Germany, France, New Zealand, and recently I found some more bits in Johannesburg.

I have yet to make or find, brakes, hubs, steering mechanism, gear change, and so on, totalling about 400 parts. What is quite wonderful is that the Bugatti Trust in the UK, has virtually all the original Molsheim Bugatti factory drawings, and makes them available in photocopy form to members of the Bugatti Owners Club. Armed with these, (in the original French, date stamped 1925) one can make virtually everything, and the BOC can supply new castings of a lot of the required parts, as well as newly-



manufactured Bugatti-style nuts and bolts. In fact, Pur Sang in Argentina will make you a whole new Brescia if you so desire!

Then, wonder of wonders, the body that Clive had discarded in 1979 reappeared and its owner put it about that he had the body.

I compared photos taken by Clive and those of the body advertised, and it is the same one. This was never a Bugatti part, the good Captain had it made for his record attempt.

I had no choice but to buy it: it is the right thing, and if someone else had bought it there may have been two replicas. Better by far to have as many of Middleton D'Este's original bits as possible on one replica.

Although before buying the body I had some photos of it, once I laid it out on the new chassis all sorts of dimensional gems were found, for instance that there was a lot of room between the engine and the radiator, while on the Brescia they are very close. So why was there a hole through the front of the radiator if the supercharger went behind the radiator? Well, it turns out that the car was double-supercharged as, suspected by a chap in Australia: I have the Amhurst Villiers with huge bronze SU carburettor, while he has the Cozette blower in Aussie. I reckon the Amhurst Villiers went in front of the radiator with the carburettor, driven by a shaft through the radiator, off the back of the Cozette which was chain driven from the front of the crankshaft, and blowing into the Cozette and thence into the engine.

Some will feel that this vast expense of work and money is a folly, perhaps it is, but as John Wesley said, " Catch on fire with enthusiasm, and people will come from miles to watch you burn."

I'm sure the team from CPCA will keep you updated as the project progresses, and I trust this article will go some way to addressing two of last month's contributors:

- Yes, even a pedestrian Mercedes A Class will be more comfortable to drive, go faster, even be capable of taking the speed record, and do it for half the price, half the fuel etc. And do it day after day. But will it evoke the passion, the history, the mystery of this outdated but unique replica?

- It is a replica of a racing car. It uses some 1925 parts but many more 21st century bits all to the pattern of the original Bugatti. It borrows nothing from any other manufacturer or model, although admittedly the boost gauge is off a 1944 Sea Fire! To cap it all it is no longer nor wider than the original car.

