

Play it again, Sam

At the turn of the year, an old friend, Philip Jones, asked if I would help and "...get my archives up to date."

Simple words – but not such a simple task.



"Memories...of the way we were."

Today it is all e-mails, digital photography and web sites. But when Philip started with Byron over 25 years ago, it was typewriters, faxes and 35mm film and although the records were folded carefully into envelopes each challenged in a different way – faded fax paper or maybe a single photograph and a handwritten note from the cars owner.

Details of nearly 500 cars found their way onto Philip's website, www.allastonmartin.com and along the way I became entranced in the stories behind some of the cars. The RAC Rally winning car that bore the current owner home from hospital as a newborn in Mother's arms; the DB2/4 bought by an Eastern potentate just before the partition of India or Robert Mitchum's old Aston, bought by Philip over the telephone on his way back through California.

But it isn't always the obvious that excites – Neil Armstrong once said "Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand." and I spent a long time trying to understand one particular car.

LML/761 is a 1954 Aston Martin DB2/4 saloon that has been feted around the world – in 1994, it won the Italian Coachwork Class at Pebble Beach – the following year it went to auction in Monterey and is described at having a body by Allemano Serafino of Turin, Italy and designed by no less a designer than the great Giovanni Savonuzzi. No mystery there then – so why did Philip's file on the car bulge with photographs and correspondence?

The photographs were a mix of shots taken of the car in its raw, pre-restoration state and others taken at various stages of restoration. Even to my untrained eye, there were obvious changes – the "before" photos showed a small petrol filler with a flap over it, there was a recess for a rear registration plate and there was no air scoop on the bonnet – all of which have changed on the finished article. Giovanni Savonuzzi's automotive design work is displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York – why, I thought, would anyone want to alter one of his designs?



First correspondence on file was a copy of a letter from September 1989 from Alan Lampert, the owner of the car, to Alan Archer, then Chairman of the AMOC. In the letter, it is explained that the car is beginning restoration and the owner is seeking help in identifying the body.

An American restorer, and some time dealer, Ken Lawrence, was involved with the restoration of the car and on file there is a copy of a letter from Carlo Anderloni, an Italian engineering specialist, to Mr Lawrence, stating that he is unable to assist in the identification. Fredi Valenti of Pinin Farina sent Mr Lawrence a similar note – a very Italian shrug of the shoulders.

Late in 1990, the AMOC, having investigated the case, responded to the owner at length. They identified the sale of a chassis through shipping agents, SOMAG in Casablanca to that City, stating that the grille was shipped with the chassis. They provided a copy of the factory build

sheet that showed ownership details of a Mr J O'Hana of Casablanca.

They were able to give no specific help on the body but offered, from the owner's own photographs, some pointers – with no specific "house style" in evidence, they said that the rear window is very Pinin Farina, the fins at the rear very Ghia, the grille is Bertone and they suggest that the headlamp area may have been restyled.

They also drew the owner's attention to the possibility of a Spanish connection referring to Pegaso. The remark about Pegaso was prompted by geography and the proximity of Spain to Casablanca. But I was interested to note that Pegaso created engine/chassis which were clothed in bodies designed by Carrozzeria Touring, a design house very familiar to Aston Martin owners.

A couple of years later, in February 1992, Ken



"Now you see it..."



"Honey, where did you put the number plate recess?"

Lawrence offered LML/761 to Philip Jones and The Vignale proposition was strengthened by a letter from Ken Lawrence where he outlines the condition of the car – pre-restoration. Within that description, are three items he refers to as missing or perhaps not in good condition. He elaborates; one bumper – can't recall front or rear; grille is there but believed to be a fabricated replacement; only one Vignale side badge came with the car. By mid 1993, the records show that Philip had tracked down the Grandson of the original Jo O'Hana, named on the build sheet, in Switzerland. In a fax dated 20th July 1993, Steve O'Hana stated "Further to your request, please note M. J O'Hana thinks that the coachbuilder of the above car was PININE FARINIA". Further correspondence from Philip questioning this met with a re-iteration, by fax on 5th August, of the same information. Later that month, Philip was faxed a copy of a



request, dated 30th August, to the AMOC from a Brian Hoyt. In the note, he states that he has bought the car from Alan Lampert who, in turn, has told him of the original note sent to Alan Archer requesting information on the bodybuilder of LML/761. Brian Hoyt asks again for help in identification of the coach builder involved. Next correspondence on file is a fax copy of a letter, dated 25th August 1994 that was faxed to Philip in July 1995. It is to the dealer Ken Lawrence from Alan Lampert, the man who sold the car to Brian Hoyt. It opens thanking Ken for his enquiry about LML 761 and how glad he is to relate the information gathered by him when he owned the car. He told Ken that he had not been able to get the information from the AMOC and had tracked Mr O'Hana to Paris through his nephew in London. He stated that although his French translation was not perfect, he was able to get the

information he wanted. He then proceeded to lay out the information on the car that is now familiar from the internet and he finished the letter with the commentCertainly, Mr. O'Hana's recollections accord with what you found when you restored the car.

So there I am, trying to archive some records and all I have is a mystery – a car that pre-restoration had a Vignale side badge, a car whose original owner attributes it to Pinin Farina, that is designed by one of the greatest designers of his generation yet is altered in restoration. I think James Whyman of the AMOC summed it up correctly in his letter to Tim McGrane of World Classic Auction & Exposition Company. "Whether or not the car is by Allemano, I have no reason to doubt that it is a special Aston Martin that is unique."



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