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IN THIS ISSUE..

- REUNION 1989
- PROFILES...
- WANT ADS.. NEWS..



ALVA RODRIGUES - DEVIN PANHARD

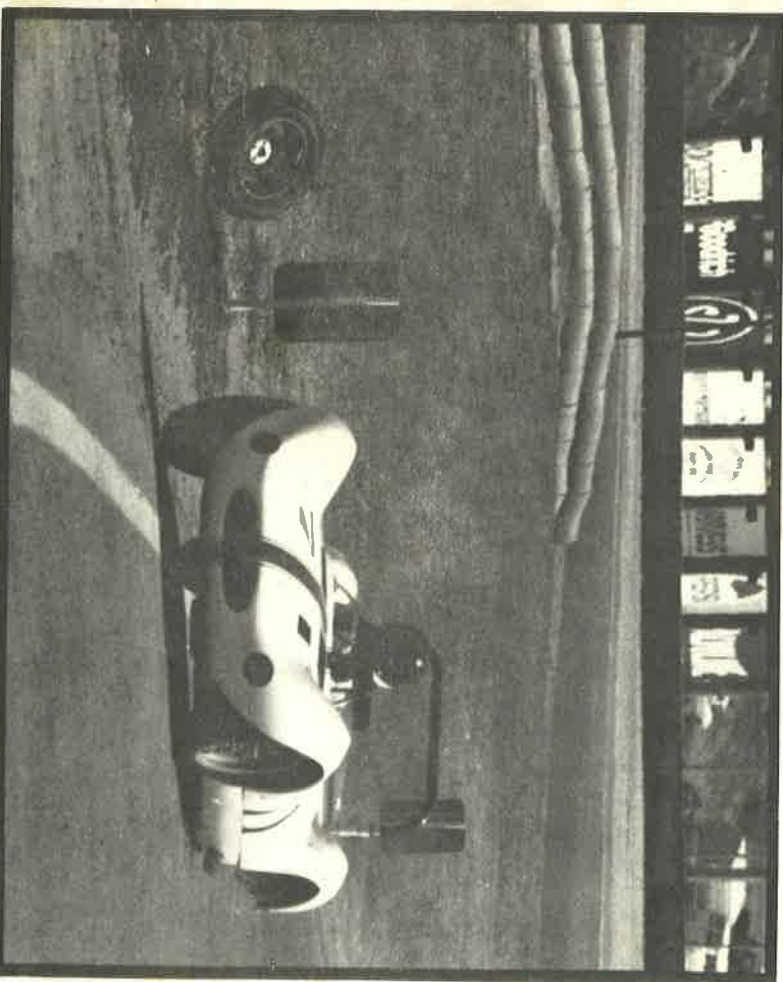
Newsletter



H MOD.

Over the hill gang

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2



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Photo Sean Ewing

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H-MOD OVER THE HILL GANG

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The H-Mod newsletter is published at 22901 Loumont Drive, El Toro, CA 92630. Send all contributions, letters, etc. to this address for the Editor's attention.

This publication is a quarterly publication for the members of the **H-Mod Over the Hill Gang** which exists as a socially omented, not for profit group, dedicated to documenting and tracing auto racing history, and good old bench racing.



Red LeGrand's H-Bomb



EDITOR AT SPEED

With this second issue of the newsletter, we have a good deal more to talk about. We had our first reunion and it was outstanding! We have a club with about 60 members and more joining each week. Original racers in our club number about 35 with the balance consisting of crew members and a large group of vintage racers who drive the H-Mod's today! Our goals are simple-- Let's communicate... record the history of what we've done and help the vintage racers to keep their cars authentic. We're all a little "long in the tooth" but can still get involved with letters and phone calls to keep the club alive. We are trying to arrange a 'H' Modified Series in 1990, for the vintage racers at Sears Point and Willow Springs. A coordinator is needed for an eastern site!

We're already talking about next years reunion. We plan to have it at a location where we can have more time to talk and show our memorabilia (while the ladies shop, if they care to) and then a banquet in the evening. We would like to stage this at a hotel somewhere, but exactly where has not been determined, as of yet. We will be selling T-Shirts and reunion videos to offset the costs of producing those items and to allow us a margin of capital to further our clubs efforts to constantly improve. We were the best racing/social group around 20 years ago and still are today...some things never change!

VINTAGE H-MOD SERIES

The possibilities for staging an invitational race of vintage H-modified cars is being investigated for 1990. One location being considered is Sears Point in Northern California. Other possible sites are Willow Springs, California, Chicago Historic, an event in Colorado with RMVR and in the south with SVRA. We will inform you as soon as possible on this. If you could possibly help, call Joe at (714) 768-7882.

wherein the "H" cars will have a featured event at tracks throughout the USA and an increase in participative membership from the East and midwest, which has already begun.

The "H" Mod group has grown now to nearly 70 and with all race-worthy cars considered, we have a field of at least 25 now and another 10 by year-end 1990.

It is a fact that our membership has over 35 cars in various states of restoration on the West coast alone!

If this reunion left us with an impression it was, "Wait 'til next year!" A rally cry for "H" Mod guys as far back as I can remember.



JIM PARKINSON AT THE PODIUM

H-MOD REGISTRY UNDERWAY

We are attempting to build a database on the cars. This would provide traceability in following the evolution of a given car from original construction to vintage racer. We will be sending out a member listing soon, which has columns for the members to fill out. When you receive your form, fill it out, keep a copy for yourself and send it back to us for input to the data base. Your assistance in investigating cars known to your will help us all.

I decided that with a little effort, we could expand the group, get the word out, bring in the families and today's vintage racers and have a hell of a party. Perhaps we could get a club together to be of significance in documenting the history of the cars and drivers of the "H" Modified group! And that is exactly what happened.



I'll Never Forget Frank

by
Joe Puckett

There have been numerous characters I have met in 30 years of motor racing whom I'll never forget. The most memorable of them all has to be the late Frank Davis.

I met Frank Davis at the Douglas Aircraft Plant in Torrance, CA in 1960 where he was a 47 year old moderate sized "wheel" and I was a 24 year old tool design illustrator. Frank loved his cars and after hearing about my racing a 750cc Crosley Special he promptly introduced himself. People usually didn't display a lot of interest in home-built cars then, since our race event usually signaled the lunch break, but Frank was very informed and wanted to get involved in racing.

Frank Davis by description was kinda like a suave Dean Martin in his kickback approach to life, yet, he actually looked like a musted up Cary Grant. I'd better explain that--Frank wore good clothes but usually had a black tie loose at the collar, blue sports jacket, black pants. He still looked like a Gentlemen's Quarterly magazine ad...Frank was the personification of middle age cool...

He adopted me, I guess...some might say just to drive the car, but no, Frank wasn't like that... his likes and dislikes were never veiled and he just didn't use people, he became part of their lives. He taught me that "a good vodka martini comes in a chilled glass, 2 fingers of booze and just bring the vermouth into the same room," he said, "Next to women, I like cars. There is some distance between the two, however."

He was a chain smoker who rarely seemed vulnerable. But racing fascinated him as well as scared him, and he would openly admit it. He'd talk about his fears to the delight of the less open, more macho and younger drivers. Once in a movie event at Palm Springs Frank was smoking a cigar etc in the car and had another between the fingers of his right hand. He would sometimes shake so badly he couldn't buckle his seatbelt and would require help. No matter, Frank was immediately considered one of the "guys" in "H" Modified circles and was an extremely popular conversationalist. He would break us up with his riotous experiences driving as a "moving chicaner" or "spectator on wheels".

One time at Riverside Frank was

crewing for me. I was scheduled to drive in the GH and I Modified event and waited the start at idle on the grid...Frank, standing beside the car, leaned over and, giving me a wry look, exclaimed, "Somebody out here is spurring oil all over!" Abruptly his head disappeared and when I reappeared, his face was twisted in agony... "Aw, Chris...it's us!"

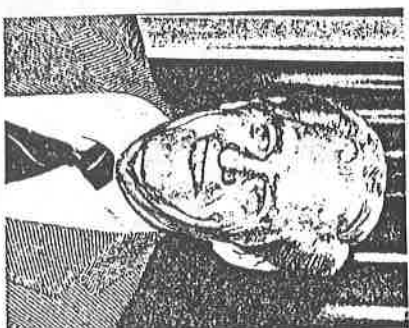
Later that evening I found Frank in his white dinner jacket at the Mission Inn Lounge having cocktails with a lovely young lady he'd met somewhere. I had fixed the broken oil cooler hose and returned in my grubbies to tell Frank. He coolly gave me the once over, introduced me to the lady, then said, "Why don't you join us...but you'd better sit on a napkin." I declined the offer and said excitedly, "The car's outside on the trailer but the tow car's unhooked. We need to move it somewhere safe or someone might steal it!" Frank grinned at the young lady and haltingly said, "Should they steal that car, they'd definitely be sorry!"

I sold the MPX Crosley the next race and decided to campaign a production Fiat Abarth Zagato. Frank's statement had helped me make a decision that was already in the works...the MPX was obsolete because the new cars were mostly rear-engined and either Saab or Fiat twin-cam powered and much faster.

In those early days Frank was a backmarker, yet the "class" of the entire H Modified legion. He drove well, not very fast, and he would crack up the CSCC Club banquets with descriptions of how fast others were passing him and how he'd "begin braking for turn 1, 20 yards from his pit!"

Frank Davis progressed slowly in his racing career but had decided to buy his own car rather than alternating with me in mine, to get more track time. He bought a rear-engined Don Miller creation that had a Ford 105E engine sleeved down to fit the 830 maximum in our class. His progress still moved at a snail's pace. After about 4 years he had begun to place 2nd and 3rd on occasion, almost as part of a 10-year master plan.

Retired from racing after the 1962 season (first of 3 times) and got married in 1963. Frank was my best man and, having been twice divorced, tried everything in the way of a delay



to keep me from doing the deed... Finally, with everyone waiting at the traditional ring exchange, he handed me the ring and said, "Give 'em hell, Joe!"

We drifted apart, Frank and I, more geographically than socially, I guess. Frank kept racing into the 1970s and began to win his share of trophies. His health began to decline and he retired from work on August 7, 1973. He kept that fact from his racing friends and the officials as he began to cut back on his activities. Then in 1974, a mutual acquaintance handed me a news item, "Don't you know this guy?" That item stunned me...it still does today. March 17, 1974

'SPORTS CAR DRIVER DIES
DURING RACE
A Rancho Palms Verdes man died of an apparent heart attack Sunday after being stricken during a sports car club event at Riverside Raceway, authorities reported.
Raceway officials said Frank Davis, 57, raised his hand to indicate trouble while on a straightaway, then crashed at relatively low speed into a brick wall. He was dead on arrival at Riverside Community Hospital.
Racing was everything to Frank, he just couldn't stop. I know Frank loved H Modified and "H" Modified loved Frank Davis.

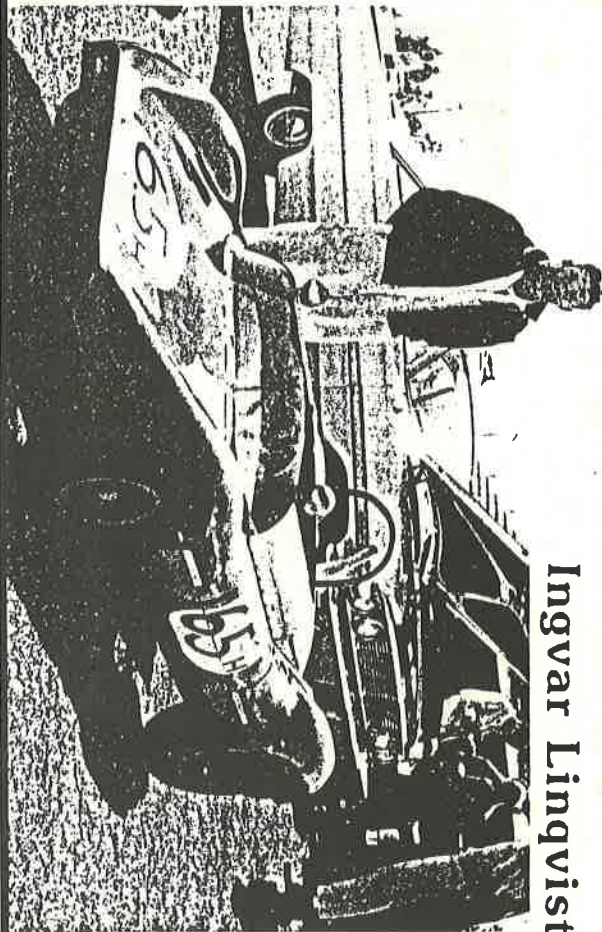
H MOD FOLKS WHOOP IT UP...

The reunion was attended by 35 "original" racers, their families and a group of vintage racers which brought the total attendance to around 80 people. Notables attending were Bill Devin, famed racer/merchandiser; Nick "Brajae" Brajevich, long time Crosley speed parts specialist; Rich Erickson; Bill Mollie; Dale Tholen; Chuck Gounis; Bob Snow; John Donaldson; Jim Parkinson; and Walker Edminston, each accounting wins in the West coast wars of post 1958 SCCA - Cal Club racing. From the "hot cross bun" of Cliff Bundy, a street driven race car that Cliff campaigned in the 1950s, to the Panhard Special of Scot Knox, who raced in Colorado in the old days and still drives today, we had lots of stories. Scott recently found part of his Panhard being used by a farmer as a chassis for a cement mixer. The racers told stories that touched everyone attending. Time may have altered the facts a bit, but the crowd didn't care. The Vintage Racing crowd sought out the "original racers" for valuable input on their cars as previously raced. The excitement of discovery was a major part of this enjoyable event. The "H" Mod Over-The-Hill Gang has several goals in mind; a quarterly newsletter, another reunion in 1990 for the 40 year celebration, some vintage racing in 1990



RECOLLECTION CORNER:

REUNION 1989



Ingvar Linqvist

The car in my mirrors hung there like a blurred watercolor as I made every attempt possible to shake him loose. As we slid through Riverside's Turn 7A, Ingvar Linqvist deftly motored his SAAB Special outside of my MPX Crosley. A slight nod and a wave and he began to ease away in a cloud of blue smoke and noise toward the Goodyear bridge. It wasn't the first time or the last.

In the 1960's no small-bore power plant had the success or, for that matter, the failure ratio of the 750-850cc, 2-cycle, 3 cylinder SAAB engines. The engines were unusual, difficult to tune, but powerful. The teams who campaigned the little pre-mixmasters were either successful or a failure; there wasn't much middle ground.

On the U.S. West Coast, Ingvar Linqvist, who owned Linqvist Motors in Culver City, was the man to beat. Talked to Ingvar recently about his road racing career. In his familiar, easy manner he told me about those years from '59 to '65, his voice accented with a touch of Swedish inflection. "I won a couple of regional championships...," he recalled, "SAAB engines were quite popular."

I asked him what combination made his cars so fast. "My mechanic, the late Malte Andersson, was great with two-cycle engines...we were careful with our fuel mixture, kept the operating temperatures down and used a proven free-flowing exhaust system with just the right back pressure...and we went fast of course!"

His first car, referred to as the "Double Ender" in Bob Rotolison's classic trend book, "Sports Car Specials", was a sleek, fast and agile rear-engine car, featuring a 748cc SAAB engine rated at 57 Bhp and 4800 RPM. The car had a Porsche transmission, chromemoly space frame and a modified VW front suspension. The front and rear brakes were also Porsche. The car weighed 750 lbs. with a wheelbase of 82", a track of 52" and was 53" front to rear.

Ingvar built a variety of SAAB Specials, each very successful, including a front-engined Lotus SAAB, a front-engine/front wheel drive, another rear drive special later owned and subsequently crashed by Jim Lawrence and the final car of the Linqvist line, a light-

weight, rear-engined car with equipment from the late "Red" LeGrand. To my knowledge, none of these cars has yet surfaced in vintage racing events.

On the East Coast, Martin Tanner had built the Tanner T-1 as a Cosley powered special, then intrigued by the 2-cycle SAAB, he converted the T-1 to the little 2-cycle engine which began a string of six different SAAB powered winners that would extend into the 1970's.

Many teams, as I said, previously weren't too successful with SAAB. Dale Tholen, who built many fast cars, including the famed "Thundermug", told me recently how he felt about racing 2-cycle SAABs: "I don't like the smell, sound or design of them...and they have the loyalty of a postulant!"

Story by Joe Puckett



Considering all the various classes during the "formative" era of sports car racing in the USA, "H" Modified had to be the most unique. This class was comprised of lightweight modified sports cars with a displacement from 500cc to 750cc; an engine size, which in time, would expand to 850cc. It was the most inexpensive way to get into road racing, if you were mechanically inclined and creative. It was also very, very expensive if your taste ran to purchasing quick, tiny, Italian exotics, like the comely OSCA 750, or the equally eye-pleasing Nardi, Moretti or Sata. Conversely, the backyard opposition featured homebuilt powered by Crosley, Panhard, Renault, Fiat, Excelsior, SAAB, Triumph 650, Mercury outboards, sleeved-down Fords (105E), Lloyd, DKM, BMW 700, et al.

In 1959, I came over to "H" Modified from "E" production racing where I had campaigned Triumphs with some success; but although that class was fun, I found I had been seduced by the power per cubic inch performance, class competition and mystique of the "H" Modifieds, racing then in Cal Club and SCCA. I bought Walt Manzke's Crosley Special and was introduced to the wildest, most fun-loving group of maniacs that ever pulled on a leather covered helmet. "H" Modified, in the 1950s and 60s, was big on the East coast, throughout the midwest, in the South and on the West coast. When I say big, let me qualify that. On some race weekends, you'd get 5 "H" Mods and on others you'd get 30, but that was on Saturday. Sunday would usually pare that down a bit to maybe 2 and 15! The class existed from 1950 - 1965, then was replaced by "D" sports racer, as the little, low cost, homebuilt faction began to fade before advancing technology and big bucks! The class had a magical quality that was not unlike a touring group of madcap 1920 barnstormers in Curtiss "Jennys" bent on doing what they felt like when they felt like it!

Recently, after better than 25 years, the old "H" Mod group reunited in Lakewood, California, to socialize and bench race about old times and races won or lost.

The reunion was an outgrowth of a mini-reunion in 1987 wherein some of the "H" Mod faithfuls, including Nick Braje, Don Miller, Jim Paul, "Doc" Mollie, and Chuck Gounis decided this was a good idea.