

NEAT GARAGE: BILL BINNIE CAN GIVE TIDINESS POINTERS TO ROGER PENSKE

By Nick Candee



Setting: a modern industrial building in a wooded suburban office park, last night's snowfall scraped off the expansive parking lot. At the target address, the royal blue of the Scottish national flag cuts through the white gloom of the snow-drenched New Hampshire landscape, as the VSCCA has a mid February meeting at the garage of Binnie Racing...the Saltire of Saint Andrew, the white diagonal cross in a blue field that makes the Scottish flag a symbol of freedom, and the Union Jack the tricolor emblem that it is, shows up again as the livery for the Binnie LMP2 race cars that have twice won their class at Le Mans.

Bill Binnie kindly invited VSCCA members and spouses to lunch at his 30,000 square foot shop, and about 70 people journeyed through the slush from beyond NYC: e.g. Dave Baker came all the way up from Wilmington, Delaware. Bill was a wonderful host, gave a most insightful talk on running a race team that finished first among such titans as Aston Martin, Audi, Corvette, Ferrari, Porsche—and Binnie Motorsports. His shop was a lesson in organization for garages, state of

the art race cars, and his blue ribbon collection of vintage cars.

ABOUT OUR HOST

Bill had built up Carlisle Plastics, and sold it to Tyco (your editor had visited Carlisle business units while leading a unit of Cabot Plastics in this country, and found them lean and smart people with whom to do business). Bill's wife and three of his four children joined the gang for this session.

ABOUT THE SHOP

Bill put up a lot of industrial buildings, so much thought went into this one. The whole building has fire sprinklers; there are three main shops along with key support areas. The garage areas for both the modern race cars and the vintage cars feature radiant heat in the immaculate floors and shop-wide overhead racks for attaching exhaust extraction units to keep fumes from fouling the bright white walls. The vintage car shop also has a series of humidity control units; while the race car shop is fully air-conditioned with air filtration units. Ben

Bragg, ace Bugatti wrench, quipped to me as we were outside the "dirty room" that it looked like most shops' clean rooms! And that had a positive pressurization system as part of the clean air system.

The locations of the radiant heat loops are outlined in the floor of the race shop. If the Ladies Room is as nice as the Mens Room, this is worthy of a classy boutique in Newbury Street in Boston—except you do not find an OSHA compliant emergency eye-wash station in frou-frou Newbury Street environs.

LOGISTICS SIDE

The transporter/ tractor-trailer shop has a completely different heating strategy: blowers dry from the top down, with a central drain channel in the suitably inclined AND equally polished bright blue floor. The transporter chamber (too good to call a shed) is designed for tractor-trailer drive through. The overhead doors weigh a ton and a half, and more than clear the typical 14' (4.27 meter) trailer height of most race car rigs.

The transporter shop housed their

Freightliner toter-home, an ultra long Class 8 tractor with a motor home attached. Your editor came to appreciate these hybrid hauler/shelters in 2006, while running his DB4 in vintage, first at Sebring as guest of Autosport Design Racing, and then at Road America, Kohler International Challenge, as a paddock guest of old pals Fourintune and Triple S Racing of Philadelphia; the July event the AC of the toter-home meant reducing the heat shock

week. We are looking at planning down to the tiniest detail. (Roger, you can of course stay up with this). So to this humble scribe, the transport bay was as impressive as the other two. And I have not even waxed eloquent on the mirror finish of the stainless steel on the entrance doors of the double deck trailer...

NOTE: in 2006 Binnie Racing sheltered the Aston Martin Racing rigs between their 2006 engagements in the American Le

fender TRC? Looks like 250 TR, but actually a 4-cylinder; Lloyd Dahmen observed the big bore side pipes were only one side, and two trumpets—so it must be a 4-cylinder! This is a fascinating artifact as RHD Ferrari, presaging the Testa Rossa LHD world-beater of 1958, quite different for its elegant grille, massive motor mounts, and dry sump oil tank on left side, not to mention dainty little tail lights (the TR 250s used the same tail lamp as the TR3 and



of a 95 degree plus day at Elkhart Lake that had even felled the great Richard S. Williams in his debut there.

The transporter shop also shelters all the material units: Binnie racing brings 10 to 20 ton of material to each race: three engines, three body sets, etc. to Le Mans, plus life support fluids. I was most impressed by the named helmet storage/drying units on one shelf; even a vintage racer does not want to put on a clammy wet helmet for the next session. So, having three coolers with three classes of beverage for a VSCCA luncheon was not a stretch for the logistics meisters here! Overall, between the Yale Narrow Aisle Lift Truck (as immaculate as a race car) it reminded me of the elite U.S. fire departments in the USAR system, Urban Search and Rescue, who can deploy manpower and 40,000 pounds of material to a bombing in Oklahoma City or earthquake in Turkey—and be completely self-contained for a

Mans/ALMS series, the high point of which was DBR9s pipping the Corvettes at Lime Rock in July—hooray! Talk about professional courtesy: garage your mates' rigs with enough linear feet to line a city block!

CONTENTS OF THE VINTAGE CAR GARAGE

We will not do a catalogue of the contents therein, merely note that Bill understands the glory days of the 1920s-1930s and the 1950s-1960s, with spectacular cars. Faves:

DB5/1714/L superbly presented coupe in Silver Birch (think Goldfinger), tan trim, two-ear knockoffs, chrome wheels, triple SUs, standard rear window, keys in the ignition.

FAB FORDS: Cobra 289, Ford GT40P, Mustang GT350...

C-Type, Ecurie Ecosse, riding high in the water with engine out...

Prototipo Ferrari Scaglietti pontoon

very early Aston Mark III).

BENTLEYS: thumping big 4.5 liter of 1925 in which Bill and pal Fred had done Peking—Paris, in effect driving around the world, including tough spot, Quetta of Pakistan from whence they were glad to emerge alive. Also cute 3 liter with three rows of seats...

Mr. Binnie created the body to carry the family with four kids, kind of a Bentley SUV and WAY more character than the modern ones built for Sultan of Brunei.

MASERATI 300S—a thing of beauty.

Bugatti Type 35 in polished aluminum...

BMW 328 had famous VSCCA Bugattiste Sandy Leith of Dedham MA salivating.

Barson Alvis special, very special, the only eight-pot Alvis, ex AMOC stalwart DLVS.

...the vintage collection is a set of great exemplars of their era.

DRIVING: WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE, BILL?

Since this was a party given by a serious racer for vintage racers, comments and questions were pretty good, and Bill made hard-hitting comments on car & tire prep and driving style. Bill would have been a great preacher should that have been his vocation; key points of his sermon included the following:

1. Cleanliness of the whole operation is essential: even a vintage car should be clean, to pinpoint any leaks quicker, and to keep the track safe for others.

2. A good seat is fundamental for control, and for safety.

3. Good foot position is essential, as one should be at 110% pressure when under full throttle—and when you brake, brake hard. When asked about trail braking, Bill observed “there is no one in this room qualified to trail brake—and that includes me.” He observed that the contact patch can do one of three things well:

- ✓ accelerate
- ✓ brake
- ✓ corner

One should not attempt to expect two or more jobs to be done well! Bill observed that success today is 1/3 each for chassis, motor, driver—and tires.

When asked how long it takes to learn a new circuit, Bill said it used to take until the end of the weekend; now it takes 6-7 laps. Track time is so precious at a major

event, and given the “blinding cost per hour” of running a race car today, one must learn it immediately. He likes to walk or bike a track; younger drivers drill on PlayStation.

In comparing us with vintage racing in Europe, he drew a distinction between being a “good guy” with constant point-bys, vs. being a good driver, and urged the drivers to hold their lines, stay on line; it is the responsibility of the overtaking car to get past, safely, and there is more danger presented by “nice drivers” going off-line.

He attributed part of his success in endurance racing to his VSCCA experience in preserving the car. For example, his around the world drive in the 1928 Bentley was about preserving the car. He was asked if there are tricks to winning at Le Mans. Bill said that some younger drivers may be a second or two faster at Le Mans by driving up over the curb—but after repeated strikes part of that car may break before the race is over. His advice to would be enduro

This could be the topic of another article, or Part II of this one! Since this is Garage Mahal column, I will stop here.

Thanks to Bill Binnie, family, and crew for a remarkable lunch at a great garage in deep winter. www.binniemotorsport.com See Ed Hyman’s photos on www.vscga.org

COMMENT from AMOC-E Chair Jim Hazen: I'd add that the whole experience was a display of extreme passion. Bill is a very focused but understated guy. Almost matter-of-fact about what he has built.

But to me the passion was reflected in details, the drive for perfection in the way he thinks about and prepares for a race. It was also in the collection of cars. Each was unique and exquisitely prepared.

There are certainly bigger and better funded racing operations, but I think you would be hard pressed to find one that is better run (especially as a private operation) with such intelligence and a passion for both professional and vintage racing.



winners: slow down to finish. This brings to mind the old VSCCA mantra, “To finish first, first you must finish.”

Bill discussed the LMP2 race cars present, and their evolution over the years, The 2007 winner for example uses vinyl covering instead of paint to gain a 20kg weight advantage. Bill also observed that recent obsolete race cars are about the best deal going in collectible cars, e.g. the ‘05 Le Mans winning Corvette sold for \$110k.

Binnie Motorsport won Le Mans, twice — and ranks in skill with Aston Martin, Audi, Corvette, Ferrari, and Porsche teams.