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WARRIORS
THE NASCAR
RACERS YOU
COULD DRIVE
ON THE STREET

TREND
SETTER
BEFORE
VETTE AND
COBRA, THERE
WAS KURT

vanishing point

HEY, KOWALSKI, YOU OUT THERE

WE DRIVE THE CAR THAT
MADE THE CHALLENGER FAMOUS



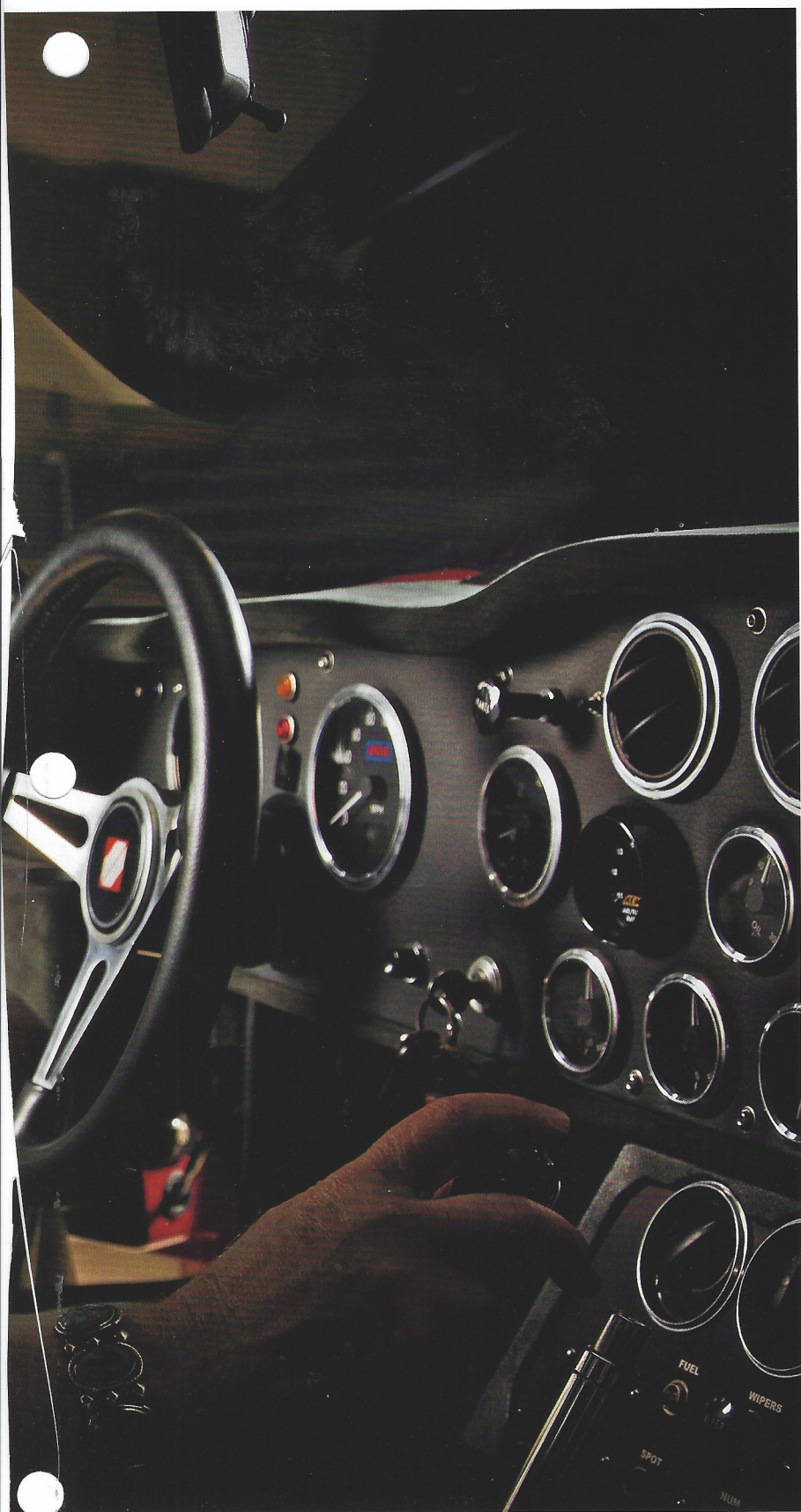
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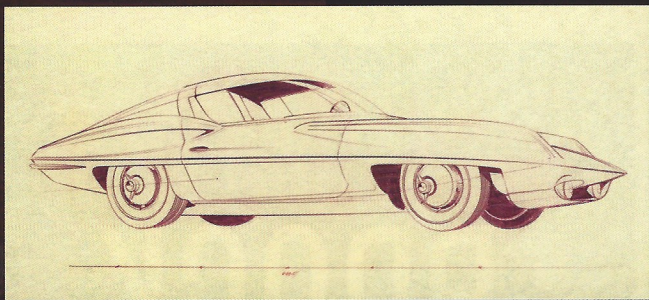
BROCK

OF ALL TRADES

AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN, RACING,
HANG GLIDERS, TRAILERS
—HE'S NAILED THEM ALL



•••••
WORDS
GARY WITZENBURG
•••••
PHOTOGRAPHS
WILLIAM WALKER



"KID, I DESIGN
THE CORVETTES
AROUND HERE,
AND THAT'S
THE UGLIEST S**T
I'VE EVER SEEN.
NOW GO DO WHAT
I TELL YOU!"

STINGER

From top: Original sketch (November 1957) that GM's Bill Mitchell chose as theme for 1963 Corvette Stingray. BRE's Datsun 510 won the SCCA Trans Am 2.5 Championship in '71 and '72. BRE team owner Peter Brock with drivers Mike Downs and John Morton in early 1972.



THE FINAL RACE of the 1971 SCCA

2.5 Challenge Series, the very competitive pro tour for small sedans that had been spun off that year from the blockbuster Trans-Am series, came down to a battle between factory-backed Horst Kwech Alfa Romeo GTVs and Brock Racing Enterprises (BRE) Datsun 510s. Whichever marque won at the tough, tricky Laguna Seca Raceway near Monterey, California, would capture the manufacturer's title.

"There were a lot more fast Alfas than fast Datsuns," Peter Brock recalls today. "Horst was a brilliant driver and a great preparer of cars, and he knew he had to win. And we had raced against each other all year long, so we knew within a five-minute window when he would run out of gas. There was no way that car could go the distance.

"When he knocked John [BRE driver Morton] off the track, he figured he could coast from there. But John recovered and started catching him again at a half-second a lap, so Horst would have to go all the way without pitting to win the race. If I had allowed John to get alongside him, Horst would've knocked him off again, even if he took himself out, since two more Alfas behind him would have won the championship for Alfa.

"So I brought John in, refueled him, and sent him out, and when Horst didn't come in, we knew his car was illegal. He crossed the finish, turned the key off and on, and sputtered to a stop just past the line, like he had run out of gas. Everybody cheered and thought he had won." Brock promptly protested the Alfa's fuel capacity, and three hours later learned that Kwech's car was three gallons over the legal limit. "They had to disqualify him, and we won the race."

Peter Brock must be one of the most versatile people on the planet. He built an award-winning, Cadillac-powered, chopped-and-channeled 1946 Ford in high school, then brashed his way into Pasadena, California's Art Center College of Design. Just two years later, at age 19, he joined General Motors Styling, the youngest ever hired there. He quit two years later to pursue his dream of racing cars, supporting himself working at Max Balchowsky's Hollywood Motors shop. Carroll Shelby hired him to start a high-performance driving school, and he ended up designing Shelby's logos, advertising, vehicle graphics and, most notably, the Daytona Cobra Coupe that won its GT class at the 1964 24 Hours of Le Mans, and the 1965 World Championship.

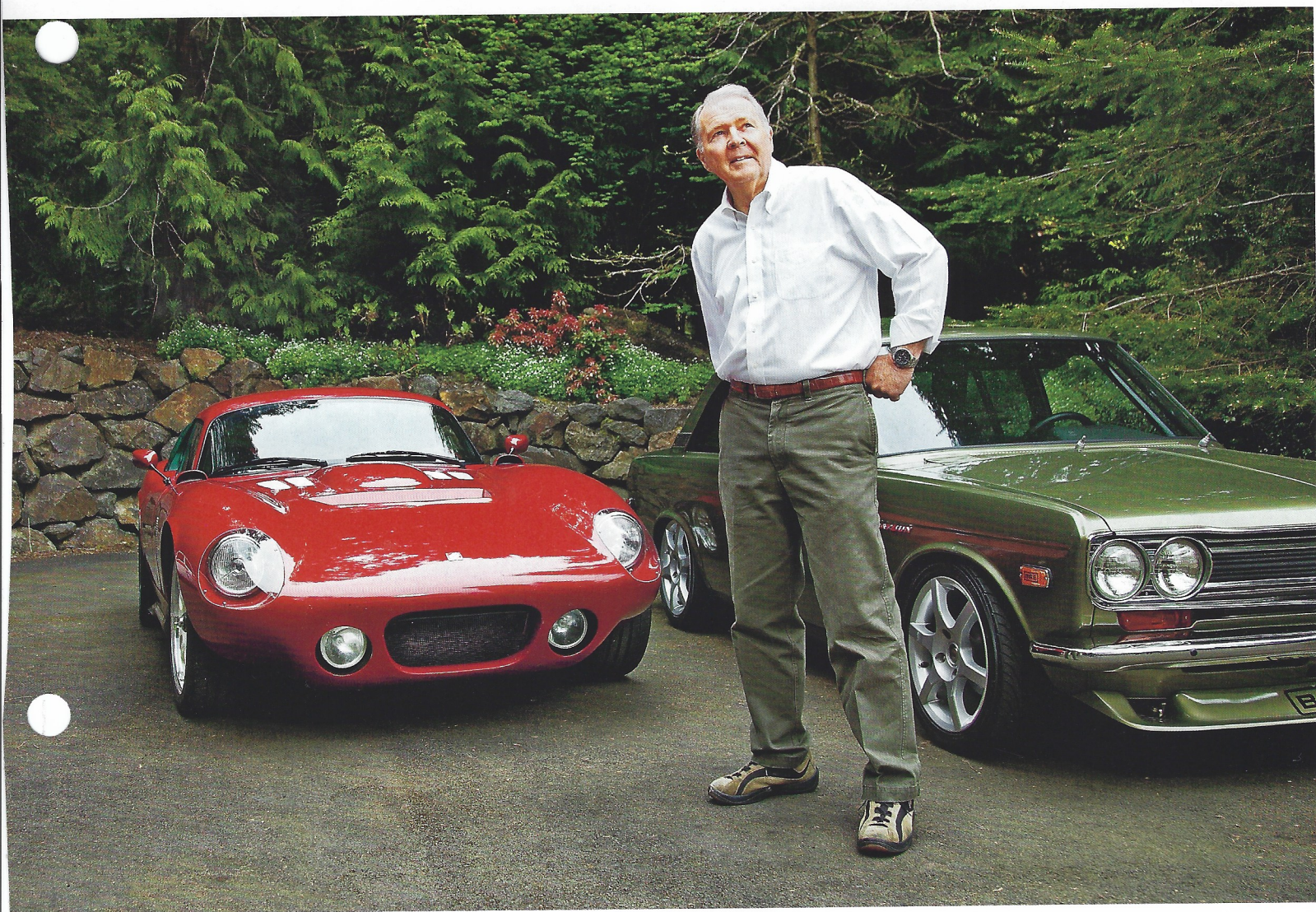
When Ford took over with its GT40 program, Brock was let go. He founded BRE and three years later was Datsun's U.S. racing guru. After his second straight 2.5 Challenge title in 1972, he quit racing, then designed and built hang gliders. In 1999, he designed a new-chassis replica of his Daytona Coupe for Superformance, and he and wife Gayle still drive one to cover races as photojournalists. Yes, he's also a writer, who in June 2011 received an International Automotive Media Lifetime Achievement Award. We don't know if he's an accomplished musician, singer, or dancer, but we wouldn't be surprised.

We recently caught up with Brock to chat about these and other interesting things:

GENERAL MOTORS

Motor Trend Classic: You got into to Art Center on little more than passion and a hastily drawn notebook of sketches. How did you get hired by GM Styling at age 19?

Peter Brock: Chuck Jordan was the headhunter who would come out and interview eighth-semester students. He saw some of my work, and we got to be friendly. When I ran out of money after four semesters, I called and asked him whether he could find me a spot back there, and I had a plane ticket the next day. By no means was it a permanent deal. In the orientation program, they'd



look at your work for six months to see how you were working out. That was an incredible education.

One night, I was working late, and Harley Earl, the VP of design, walked into the studio. He never talked to his designers but had this retinue of guys who walked around behind him. He would come in and sit down and point with his alligator loafers at drawings on the wall and say, "I think we should move this line up or down" to his attendants, and the assistant would tell the designer what to do.

So he came in that night. I was a 20-year-old kid, absolutely in awe of him, and he turned out to be the nicest, most gracious guy. He took an interest in my point of view because I was a kid. I told him we should build a \$1000 car for students. He liked the idea, and that became my project in 1956. I designed the car, a tiny two-seat Cadet, and he got excited about it. Then we built a panel truck version for flower stores and pizza deliveries. But GM president Harlow Curtis shut it down. "GM doesn't make small cars," he said.

In 1957, you penned a sketch of a peak-fendered sports car that led to Bill Mitchell's Sting Ray racer and the production 1963 Corvette.

That was designed as a coupe, and [new Styling VP] Mitchell really liked it. Earl had just finished the Corvette SS when the AMA ban [on factory racing and high performance] came in. There were two SS cars, one we ran at Sebring and a second "mule" car. Mitchell bought the mule for a dollar, and we started building a new

racer on that chassis down in Mitchell's secret studio. It later moved upstairs, and he brought in Larry Shinoda. They cut off the roof to make it a roadster, and that evolved into the '63, which Larry headed up and brought to production.

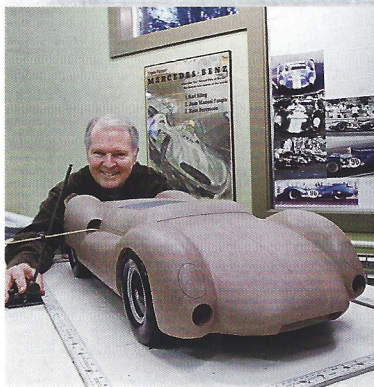
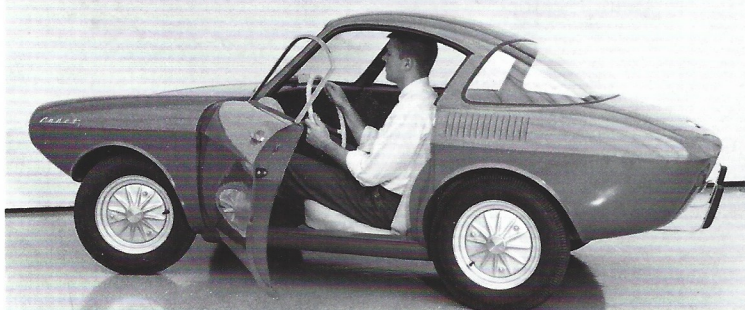
What was Mitchell like compared with Earl?

Completely different personalities. Earl was the imperious leader who isolated himself and gave directives through lieutenants. Mitchell was much more hands-on, a more gregarious guy. We were working on the next Corvette when I found papers in the library copied from some of Wunibald Kamm's [aerodynamic] studies in Germany...written in German, with crude sketches, but I could see the Cd numbers. I came up and said, "This is pretty interesting data." He looked at the little hen scratches, with a pretty ugly shape, and said, "Kid, I design the Corvettes around here, and that's the ugliest s**t I've ever seen. Now go do what I tell you!"

SHELBY

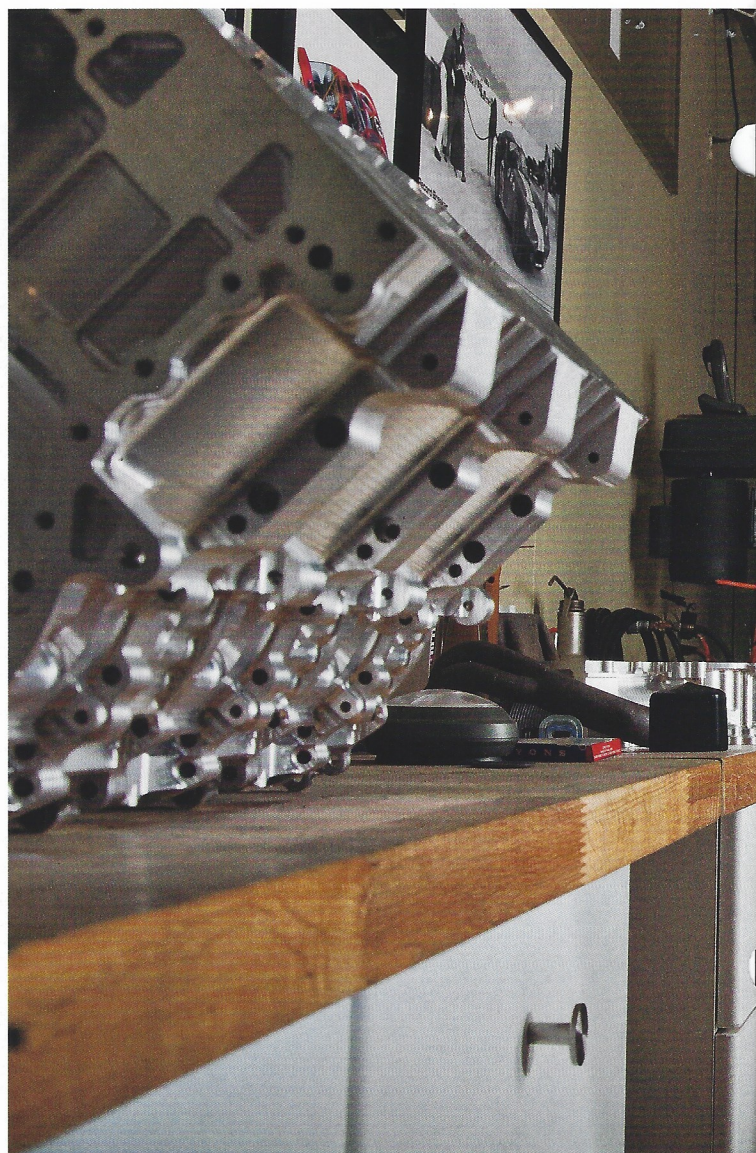
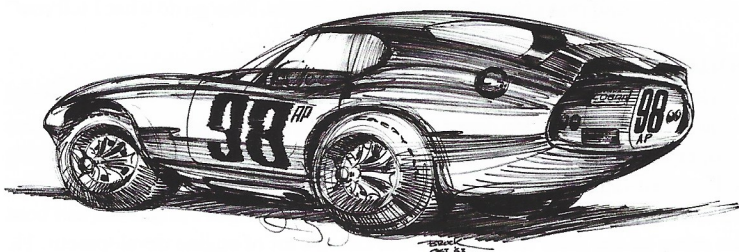
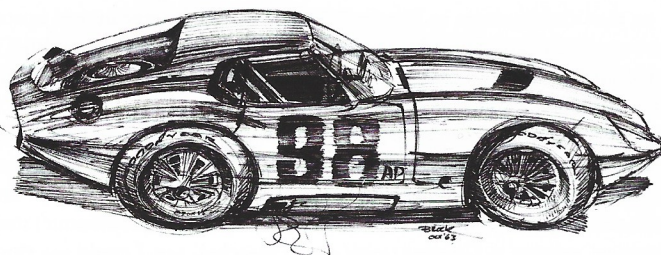
You left GM in 1958, moved to California and found a job with Max Balchowsky. I really wanted to be a race driver and had bought my first race car, an ex-LeMans Cooper Climax. Max was one of the most influential guys in my life, an incredibly brilliant self-taught engineer who built hot-rod special racers in California at that time. They were ugly but quite sophisticated underneath. He laid out and bent the tubes on the shop floor, and he was doing a lot of engine development. He

DON TOLD HIM,
"IF YOU WANT
TO GET THIS
THING GOING RIGHT,
TAKE IT OVER
TO THE STATES
AND SEE
PETE BROCK."



DESIGN LINE

From top, 20-year-old Brock in mock-up of Cadet "student car" he designed at GM. Sculpting 1/4-scale clay model of a King Cobra to rebody an original chassis. When Shelby needed to show Goodyear what a Daytona Coupe racer would look like, Brock drew "napkin" sketches in minutes.



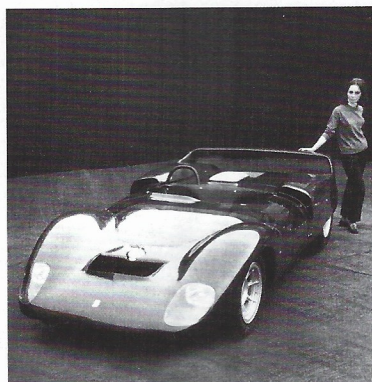
built his own flow bench, did studies on every engine and found out that Buick had the best-flowing engine, so he ran Buick engines in his cars.

You met Shelby there, and he ended up hiring you. Your thoughts on him? Carroll Shelby was probably the greatest promoter in the world, a great salesman, and nothing would've happened on anything else I worked on had it not been for him. The period of his greatness was when he had the greatest people around him. Guys like Phil Remington, Max Kelley, and Ken Miles didn't let him make any mistakes, and consequently he went to the top. He's a great American icon, but what he has done in his later years is sad. He has let his legal team go after guys who literally put him on a pedestal and made him who he is.

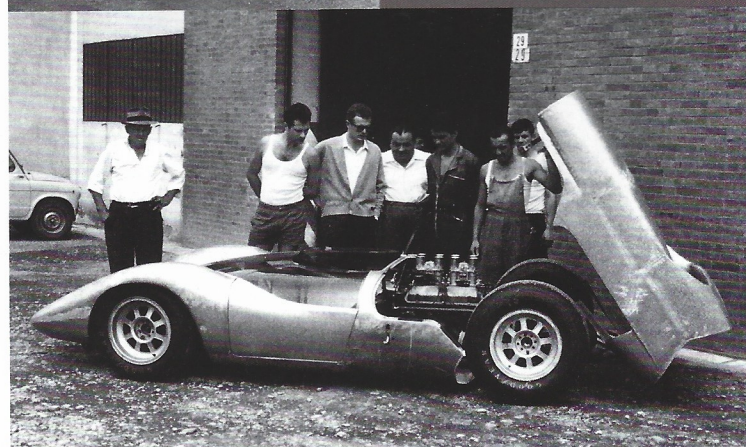
HINO

Then you hooked up with Hino, a Japanese truckmaker with a small passenger-car division at the time. How did that happen?

Don Nichols [of UOP Shadow Can Am fame], who was with the American military in Japan, made a lot of money selling racing tires to the Japanese factories, and he was working with the Japanese trying to develop a NASCAR track at Fuji Speedway. Going back and forth between Daytona and Japan, he'd stop in and talk to Shelby and me to see what was going on, and I got to know him pretty well. The other American in the sports car club over there was Bob Dunham, who was racing with the Hino factory. Don told him, "If you want to get this thing going right, take it to the States and see Pete Brock." So I made a deal with Bob: "I'll build up the car, you run it for a year, then you go back and leave it with me, and it will be my car to race."



DID YOUR
APPROACH TO
DATSUN HAVE A
REVENGE MOTIVE?
YEAH, I'D BEEN
ROYALLY SCREWED
BY BOTH TOYOTA
AND SHELBY.



FAST FLEET

Top and center, following success of his Daytona Coupe, Brock continued designing for Shelby, working in Italy on the DeTomaso P70. Below, Alan Mann Racing ran the Cobra Daytona Coupe program in Europe in 1965, winning the World's GT Championship for Shelby American.

There were no SCCA sedan races in those days, but Cal Club in Southern California started allowing sedans to run, and it happened that the opening event at the Times Mirror Grand Prix at Riverside—the biggest money race at the time, with huge crowds—was the Mission Bell 100 for small sedans. There were Cortinas, Minis, and Saabs; and I won the race. The Japanese were here studying American racing and marketing, and when I pulled into victory circle, I met all the people from Toyota and Nissan. Everyone wanted to hire me, but I said I'm happy with Hino. I did a lot of work for them, and they were fabulous to work for. Had they come into the American market, they would've been quite successful, but the chairman of the board died suddenly of a heart attack. Toyota took them over in a hostile takeover, primarily for their pickups, and killed their car program immediately.

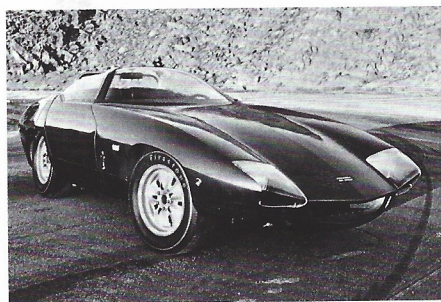
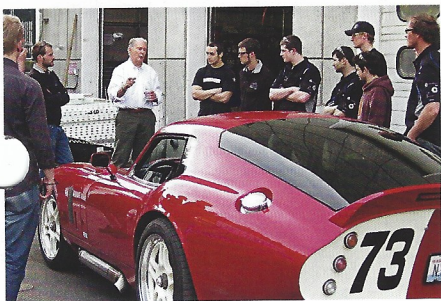
DATSUN

You did a series of innovative prototypes for customers, none of which reached fruition for various reasons. Which was most frustrating?

The 1967 Hino Samurai was probably the most advanced of those. It had movable aerodynamics—a wing airfoil on the back 20 years before the F40 Ferrari—and some really trick stuff, and if the whole program had not crashed because of the chairman suddenly dying, I think we might have really done something with that car. Another was a beautiful GP6 for Toyota. Shelby convinced Toyota to switch its race program over to him. Did your approach to Datsun have a revenge motive? Yeah. I'd been royally screwed by both Toyota and Shelby. We started with Datsun in 1968, but they had no confidence in their car [the 2000 roadster]. The guy

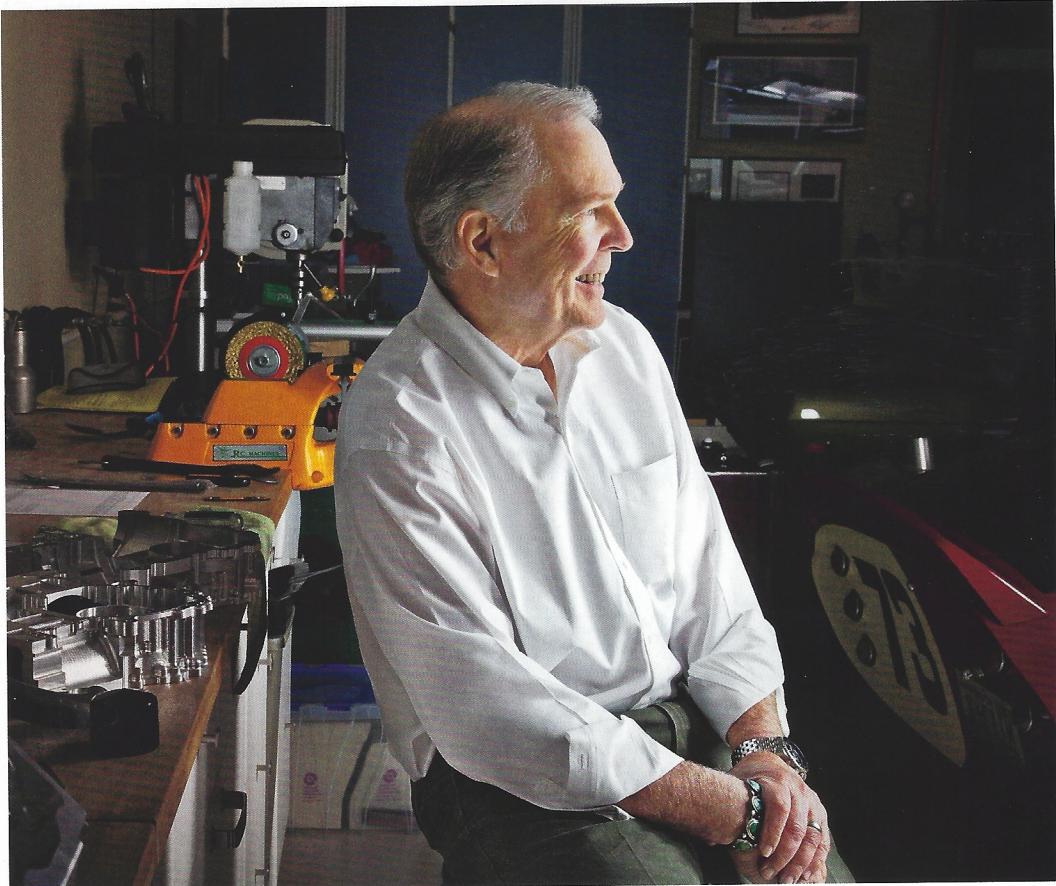






CHAMELEONS

From top, Brock shares stories with SAE engineering students at Western Washington University. Brock's 1967 Triumph TR 250K concept car. In his shop at home in Redmond, Washington.



doing the program was doing a bad job and blaming the car. Luckily, my contacts at Hino knew the chairman of Nissan and had lunch with him, and then I got cars and money directly from Japan. We built them in secret, and when we showed up to race, we went from last to first place.

There was also a prototype TR 250K for Triumph.

As we began to develop the Datsun thing, I got to know [Triumph racing boss] Kas Kastner. We were competitors on the track and good friends off, and he was worried about British Leyland. They were saying, "We're in trouble and don't want to spend so much money." We developed the TR 250K to show them what great design could do with a really nice body on the existing car. They stole it and did a bad copy, the TR-7. **You won races and championships with John Morton in Datsun 2000s and 240Zs before taking on the 2.5 Challenge pro series, and you also ran 510s at Baja.** We set records at Bonneville and in NHRA with 510s, then had a wonderful time running Baja. When we talked the Japanese into doing it in 1969, they sent us three factory Safari cars assuming we could just take them down there and win. But we had run Baja for two years, and we knew how bad it was. I looked them over and told the engineer that we were going to have to change the whole front suspension. He said, "We can't do that." It turned out that his boss, who had designed the front suspension, would lose face if we changed it. So he said, "We'll rent an airplane and fly over you with support mechanics. If it breaks, we'll land and change the front suspension." And that's exactly what they did. We were running against Eric Carlsson's Saab factory team, and were much faster. But every 150 miles or so, the rubber doughnut on top of a MacPherson strut would blow out, and the shock would go through the hood and make a big hole. We would pull over, they would land the plane on the side of the road, or on the road, and these two mechanics would run out and change the whole front suspension in five to seven minutes. Then we'd continue on until the next time one blew. All that so his boss wouldn't lose face.

GOING UP

You quit racing in 1972 after the second 2.5 championship and took up hang gliding.

Our El Segundo shop was near the LAX airport, and they were building a big

power station at the end of the runway. They had dug a huge hole in the sand and made a giant sand dune, and that's where hang gliding started. There was a bunch of hippies out there having great fun flying off of this big sand dune on taped-together bamboo gliders. The glide ratio matched the side of the hill, so you could run off the top and get about 150 yards of flight just six or eight feet off the ground. If the thing broke, you would just fall into the sand.

I was driving by and went up there one day, and some hippie guy came up to the top all out of breath and said, "Hey, man you want to try this? It's really cool, but I'm too tired to do it." So he strapped me in, and I flew off down the hill and said, "This is more fun than anything. I have to build one of my own." I went back and made some really nice hardware for a kit that would cost maybe \$15, built my first one and took it out. Everyone was super impressed at how wonderful it was, and I said, "The kit will cost only \$15." They said, "God, what a rip-off!"

So I had all these parts and decided to get into the glider business. We started a company called Up and ended up as the world's largest glider manufacturer and won all these international contests and the world's cross-country championship six out of seven years.

Now you have the Aerovault trailer that is selling very well.

Our biggest problem is we can't build enough of them. We're already sold out for the year. I designed it primarily for weekend warriors who just want to put the car in there with a spare set of wheels and tires and go for an SCCA weekend. The primary advantage is aerodynamics so you're not pushing so much wind, and also light weight.

Any comment on the car business today?

There is not as much passion in designing cars today because of government intervention and limitations on what you can do. Being less able to innovate is hurting us tremendously. And there's not much future in the electric car. The whole "green" car thing is going to be another gigantic crater in the world.

Designer, race car driver, car builder, team manager, entrepreneur, businessman, journalist. Is there anything else Brock can do?

If I hadn't been so passionate about cars all my life, I probably would have been a dealer in antique Southwestern Spanish Colonial art. I specialize in Saltillo textiles from 1750 to 1800 and Navajo silver from 1800-1940. ♦