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1952 Singer 4AD SM Roadster (Chassis #4ADI582V)

By Mark R. Brinker



By his own admission, Geoff Hacker specializes in finding cars that no one is looking for. It's actually an interesting collecting strategy that virtually guarantees no competition. One of Hacker's recent acquisitions is a post-war Singer racer. Now how many amazing post-war racing cars from Singer Motors of England can you name? Not many coming to mind? Actually, I had the same problem. So I called an expert.

Peter McKercher of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, has been a Singer collector, historian and enthusiast for over 60 years. McKercher's father was an airman stationed in England during WWII. According to McKercher, his father contracted the sports car bug while in Europe and infected the son immediately upon returning home. McKercher recalls that his dad bought a 1935 Singer Le Mans in 1952 and from that point forward both father and son were hopelessly stuck on the marque.

McKercher is particularly fond of the pre-war Singers and said, "The pre-war cars were more interesting (than the post-war Singers) in that they were in tune with the marketing endeavors of the day and were one of the best sports cars of the era. They raced at Le Mans and were very competitive. At the time, Singer's business was thriving. The problem was that Singer, like many other European companies, suffered greatly throughout the war. Singer in particular was heavily bombed and lost a lot of their factory capacity and much of their records. They were pretty much broke by the end of World War II. Coming

out of the war they made the mistake of continuing to produce pre-war style models and they didn't spend a lot of time making improvements to the cars like other companies were doing, such as Jaguar. Although the post-war Singer cars were well built and competitive on the racetrack, the company was not marketing their aging products all that well. Singer built the wonderful 4AD during this time period, but was only able to hang on until 1955 when they were forced to turn over their assets to Rootes."

According to McKercher, the Singer 4AD SM Roadster was built between 1951 and 1955 with a total production run of 3,440 cars. The 4AD was assembled on a ladder frame constructed from U-channel and was motivated by a peppy 1497-cc 4-cylinder SOHC engine swigging through a single Solex carburetor. The roadster body was an aluminum unit with a steel bonnet and fenders. Up front, suspension was by way of a coil and wishbone independent arrangement and a live axle did the work out back. Stopping power front and rear was by drums actuated through a hydro-mechanical system. The 4ADT was essentially a twin-carbureted version of the 4AD and between 1953 and 1955, Singer produced 700 examples.

McKercher has spent the last several decades compiling information regarding Singer road racers in the United States and shared the following. "The post-war Singers were quite competitive in the under 1500-cc classes. Most of the cars raced in the Production classes and they were certainly competitive against the Production MGs because they had a little bigger engine, they braked a little bit better and they were a little bit lighter. The main drawback to the Singer was that it had worm and nut steering. My research shows that somewhere between 30 and 40 Singers raced in the U.S. during the '50s. Most of the Singers stopped racing in the mid-1950s but the car Geoff Hacker now owns, a 4AD SM Roadster, was an exception. That car was owned and raced by Ralph Bush, who was the editor of the *Singer Squeal*, which was the official magazine of the Singer Owners Club of America." It seems that when others were parking their racing Singers, Bush was just getting started.

Long time vintage racer and enthusiast Michael Jacobsen recalls, "Ralph Bush was my shop teacher at Pasadena High School, and during my senior year in 1960 he was

putting his Singer together to race. At the time I also had a Singer 4AD, and Ralph gave the plaid cut-down top off of his car to use on mine. While he was building his car, I went over to Ralph's house on several occasions and helped him with a few things. One was to make disc supports for the wheels. Singer wheels tended to tear off and fly away so I helped Ralph build special rings to strengthen his wheels. Ralph's first race in the Singer was probably in 1960, and I recall he raced the car at Pomona in the early '60s." In addition, McKercher's research suggests that Bush may have also raced his Singer at Riverside, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Taft and Las Vegas in the early 1960s.

Zoom forward five decades and it turns out that Bush is still around. And he's still racing! He runs a Thunder Roadster with NASA (National Auto Sport Association), and by his own account, he's having more fun than ever racing his car.

Bush says he first became aware that his Singer had resurfaced from his old pal Jacobsen who emailed him a photo. Several details on the barn-find Singer seemed familiar but the original roll bar was intact and was absolutely the same one he'd built more than half a century ago. Bush said, "When I got the email from Michael Jacobsen I couldn't believe it. What an exciting discovery."

Bush's memory regarding his old racing Singer is vividly clear. Bush said, "Back then I was President of the Singer's Owners Club of America. Our group was quite active and our events were a little hairier than most with hillclimbs and time trials and slaloms. I was initially drawn to the Singers because they were affordable. I paid 900 bucks for my first Singer, but I broke the crankshaft racing that one at Santa Barbara. I wound up selling that one, but jumped at the chance to get a second Singer when Robbie Robinette's car became available. Robinette was a guy in the club who drove a Maserati. He also had the Singer, but was having a mechanical problem with it and brought to a shop run by Johnny McLaughlin and Frank Monise. Somehow they wound up losing the inspection plate off the rear end. The car wound up sitting at the shop and Robinette started to accumulate debt on the storage. Robinette got tired of the whole situation and one day he told me I could have the car if I paid the back storage fees. I told him I couldn't just take the car so we made a deal. I bought him a



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cup of coffee and a donut and he signed the title over to me! McLaughlin and I had a mutual friend and I was able to take the car without actually paying for the storage. I ran that car in Production, but did make a few modifications that I tried to disguise. I filled the lever-action shocks with 140-weight gear oil and I got it down to where there was no lean at all. I raced the car with dual carburetors. It had plenty of power and handled really well in the turns." When Bush was finished racing his Singer he sold it and lost track of it.

As far as I can tell, no one was actually looking for Bush's old racing Singer... especially Hacker. However, Hacker was heavily researching 1950s Singer Specials (Singer cars re-bodied with fiberglass skins) as part of his ongoing quest to learn everything there is to know about '50s fiberglass cars (www.forgottenfiberglass.com). It was during his research activities that Hacker became quite a Singer expert himself and befriended McKercher, who ultimately told him about the discovery of Bush's car. Largely intact, believed to be the last and only known surviving racing Singer, and with Southern California racing history, Hacker could not resist the



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opportunity (he never can!). So he quickly made a deal to buy the car from its current owner, Eric Weese, whose father had owned, and stored, the car for more than four decades.

Hacker has amassed a collection of more than 50 cars, many like the Singer...in need of much work and love. His plan is to return the Singer to its Bush racing configuration and hopefully Ralph Bush will be there to witness its post-restoration

debut. That would bring the story full circle. The story of a Singer originally purchased for a donut and a cup-of-Joe, now found by a ravenous collector who was not looking for it but has added it to his mountain of unfinished projects.

Makes sense to me. 🏎️

Do you know of a Hidden Treasure? If so, send your photos and stories to Mark at mbrinker@vintageracecar.com

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