



OLD SODS & SEXY CARS: HOW I CAME TO OWN A LOLA T70 SPYDER

by Bruce Kopitz

YOUTH

I grew up during the glory years of British marques. I owned a curvaceous Jag XKE that set faster lap times with coeds than at the track. My Michelotti-designed TR6 was a sleek and stylish cruiser. But my favorites were the British bantamweights, including a Mini-Cooper and several Caterhams. Under the hood of my second Caterham lurked a Cosworth BDG, a two liter typhoon generating winds of 280 hp and waves of 9,000 rpm in a vehicle weighing less than six sturdy men. It drove like a coaster car with steering wheel and brakes. It cornered like the world is flat and barked like mad English dogs. Infused with the spirit of Colin Chapman, that Seven invaded my psyche, adding lightness of judgement to my heavy right foot.

MATURITY

So now, decades later, my judgement should have mellowed. Today I'm Rocky Balboa in Creed II, so I'll take my car rare with a little less throttle, right? A Morgan Plus Four, perhaps, or an Aston Vantage convertible? But recollections of youthful passions are like stockinged legs - both engage rusty gears in old guy heads, and set us lurching down old new paths. Which led to this: The purchase, by my mature self, of a Lola T70 Spyder for use on street and track. A Can-Am car with 383 mouse motor built to bursting by Hypercision. Genuine AP racing brakes and Fuel-Safe cell. An ex-works fiberglass

body of Renaissance perfection laid over an aluminum and steel monocoque. HSR logbook. A flyweight English roadster for the ages - or in my case, the aged.

I have previously indulged the fantasy of restoring a race car to the road. In my garage primps a gorgeous Porsche 935 tribute, formerly a track-only car that turned impressive 58.5's at Lime Rock. She now wears a license plate and, between track excursions, cruises historic M1 and surrounding byways. The experience of converting the 935 to dual use, measured in years, prepared my boots for walking this new and tortuous path.

THE PURCHASE

Lightning strikes thrice! IMPACT ONE: In 2016, the ad for my 935 leaps from the pages of race-cars.com and lands like a bat blow to the brain. IMPACT TWO: Time passes - it's summer of 2021. My 935 is substantially complete, and I'm nearly recovered. Lounge time is deserved, and I'm enjoying it, meandering again through race-cars.com. Suddenly, 30,000 amps takes the form of a *Lola T70 Mk II Spyder* ad. *Are you kidding?* I was instantly transported to Watkins Glen, the Back Straight, tight against the rail, eardrums thwacked by dopplering straightpipes. Via the ad, and conversations with current and prior owners, I discovered this Lola to be a hybrid replica – a mixture of old and new parts, re-engineered via CAD / CAM for dual purpose street and track. Exterior proportions and appearance are

indistinguishable from originals. Track and wheelbase also match. Original AP racing brakes drop anchor, and the underlying structure is familiar aluminum monocoque. But like the Mk I Lola, my monocoque is mated to a steel ladder frame, for improved resistance to harsh public roads. For the same reason, the uprights, hubs and spindles are C4 Corvette (fragile Lola spindles nearly killed John Surtees at Mosport in '65). Additionally, the car is LHD, with a wider cockpit favoring passengers girthier than Wicket the Ewok or Tatoo from Fantasy Island. But the list of street creds was incomplete. Designer John Gyann of Can-Am Creations intended to produce a series of cars. However, a recession intervened, and he produced just two in 2003, neither of them fully outfitted for street. Turn signals, high beams, horns and much more were missing. This is the point to which I had obtained when life, once again, interfered with art.

25 years of racquetball finally destroyed my left knee. I could no longer operate a heavy clutch, like the Sachs high-pressure unit fitted to the Lola. I gave the matter serious thought, and finally succumbed to the mature decision - I wimped out like a kid. I really hated discussing my situation with Ron, the T70's excellent owner. But he completely understood, as he most likely possesses a background in kindergarten instruction. Seasons passed. I often mused over the Lola, but remained confident some other Ponce de Leon had snapped up my fountain of youth. During the winter of 2021, I was apprised of a stem-cell therapy with excellent prospects. I subjected my knee to the process, and soon reacquired the ability

to walk distances and negotiate stairs. By spring of 2022, wild dreams of streetifying a fierce, manual-equipped track-eater returned. Suddenly, IMPACT THREE: On a vagrant afternoon, while lollygagging *again* through race-cars.com, the same Lola ad exploded from the page! Perhaps wearied from the loss of our deal, Ron had done nothing more to sell the car, until submitting her once again to the website.

Discussions resumed. I discovered that my Lola had won several track events and competed in others including Road Atlanta's 2012 The Mitty and 2012 Fall Historics. I learned that the car possessed a Georgia title, enabling plating in my state. I also discovered that the car had received nothing more than occasional restarts since 2012, meaning every bit of rubber, the racing harnesses and fuel cell were aged out! This and other factors were debated, and a price resolved. I wired a deposit and planned a trip south for the official rekindling of my youth. However, completion of purchase was contingent on an expert inspection. This was provided by Jason Plante, proprietor of Balanced Performance Motors in Cumming GA. I grew enamored of Jason and his second-generation knowledge of race and street performance. His acumen, references and communication skills were superior, and so were his Georgia labor rates compared to high-cost Michigan. Besides approving the car, Jason won the bid for a long list of upgrades and repairs. Jason retrieved the Lola from Atlanta Motorsports Park, long its home. I'd completed the first steps on my journey of a thousand miles.

THE BUILD

At Jason's enclave, Lola body panels flew up against the walls. Her naked frame exposed vulnerability and lack of mass, reminiscent of a boudoir experience. Also exposed were the reasons for the



Attack of the Killer Cockpit Fumes: Blowback leaks from exhaust couplings. That, plus glass packs too loud for modern tracks and boulevards, meant a complete upgrade of the exhaust system. The grungy wheels were refinished, and all original rubber lines replaced with Teflon-cored versions. Every hose, fitting, belt, tire and type of fluid, plus boxes of hardware were renewed. Hella air horns with steering wheel button were fitted. New tri-bar headlights with high intensity LED bulbs and integral turn signals were installed. The brakes went back to AP for refurbishment, and ditto the QA-1 shocks.

A 14 gallon cell was fabricated by Fuel Safe. Dive planes were affixed to the nose to reduce lift over 150. The carbon fiber rear spoiler was replaced with an in-period raw aluminum unit. A full tuneup and corner-weighted alignment were the raisins completing this spotted dick.

So, what do Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne, Simon Crowell, Amy Childs and Madonna have in common with my Lola? They've all had "work done". After years of playing hard and thrusting her nose into tight spots, Lola was due for plastic surgery (scars and creases), dermabrasion, a fresh foundation and professional makeup. Required was a paint gun full of magic, and a master to wield it. Once again, I turned to Jason Plante – did he know a da Vinci for my Mona Lola? Within minutes, I was talking to Mike Cottrell from Sentry Body & Paint in Lilburn GA.

Mike, like Jason, is a 2nd generation craftsman, imbued with work ethic and restoration skills by his father. Mike restores Rolls-Royces, exotics, collectables, hot rods and race cars. Mike and his dad have prepared and painted BPM cars since Jason's pop ran BPM. Jason leaned on that long association, and Mike gave us the best price and timeliest completion, winning our work.

Oddly, Lola never left BPM. Jason trailered her panels to the friary at Santissima Annunziata. That was Leonardo's workshop, with branch office in Lilburn. A few weeks later, my Mona Lola was

complete. Mike had restored her cryptic smile, and eyes that follow wherever you go – a pity if you see them in your rearview mirror. Jason conveyed the repainted panels back to BPM, and transformed the naked ingenue into a finished and glorious mademoiselle. Now, it was time for me to head south and cheat on my wife with Lola.

I hooked the Explorer to my hauler and loaded personal effects, including wife Debbie, who was not about to leave me alone with *those* curves. Our trip down I-75 included sunlit passage through the Cumberlands, that great green breast of America - a story in itself. Late the second day, the foothills of Sawnee Mountain funnelled us into Cumming GA and Jason's shop. A miasma of anticipation and dread clouded my third eye prior to meeting Lola. Would she be worth the effort and investment? Will Deb divorce me when she finds out the cost? Suddenly, the air pulsed with the chain gun verbiage of Jason Plante. Rarely has a man known exactly what needed saying, and said it as quickly. Every word is a seed with Plante, and he is one fast farmer. As convivial as his language is compact, Jason quickly welcomed and led us to a back room. An outer door flew up, and a lowering sun scintillated on Lola. It is true – da Vinci's brush strokes cannot be discerned. Lola's perfect surface was the cerulean blue of a Caribbean bay. Her cam covers were polished, and eight Weber barrels stood like silos. Newly refinished wheels with black hubs and polished aluminum rims wore steamroller rubber. The cockpit with Mountney wheel and Willens belts exuded authenticity, with the two full-sized seats less correct

but more comfortable. And, projecting from her terse derriere, two fulsome tailpipes echoed jet nozzles, which I suspected to be an accurate simile.

THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Many track days and some historic races lie in the future. But today, only roads around the shop. Still, deep impressions. Flick the kill switch on, stab the Webers and thumb the red start button. The engine ignites with a shock – more experience than sound, as you absorb the roar and rotation with brain, bone and viscera. The clutch is light as I slot into first. All around me swollen fender bosoms heave, exciting my right foot. I offer no resistance. In seconds, I'm past 80. Over the shallow plexiglass deflector a typhoon smites, requiring mouth in, nose out breathing. Taxis have throttles – this car has a superpower switch. It accelerates like a diving raptor. It brakes like a bottoming anchor. It turns faster than my attention on a distracted day. Its limits will never be approached on a public road. Slowing down now. I receive, through fingertips laced round the wheel, an exact transmission of road textures. The smells are those only a roadster can convey – mown grass as if you are laying in it, lilacs like the scent of your mom, oddly charming manure, and just enough fume to let you know what you're doing. This car can terrify, but it can also cruise. While motoring into the sunset, I experience an out-of-body lightness, a feeling of being able to pull back on the wheel and drive right up into the clouds. At this point, it is

appropriate to credit the person who designed this sublime and trepidating vehicle: Eric Broadley.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LOLA

Lola Cars was founded in 1958 by Eric Broadley, an architect who abandoned the engineering of buildings for the opportunity to “tinker” with racing machines. He distilled Lola from a group of enterprises including carbon fiber and rowboat manufacture. Origin of the company name was similarly eclectic: Many believe it derived from a song in the Broadway musical “Damned Yankees” entitled “Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets”, a remarkably prognosticative appellation. Original quarters in Bromley were modest, and emanated modest sports cars of diminutive 750 and 1,172 cc displacements. Soon, these tiny warriors were amassing immodest volumes of podium finishes, becoming known as “Broadley Specials” and the only cars in class to own. Broadley followed this success with the first to bear his company name, the 368 kg, 83 hp 1958 Lola Mk I. This miniscule dominatrix began winning everywhere she competed, and gained Broadley a reputation for superior chassis engineering and construction. Lola eventually became an important supplier to the global race car industry.

Development in 1962 of the sleek Lola Mark 6 coupe was the cornerstone in the emerging Lola edifice. Hank the Deuce (aka Hank the Ferrari Hater) recognized the Lola Mark 6 as his shortest path to

retribution, and in 1964 he bought Lola. During those captive months, Broadley reverse-engineered his Mark 6 into the Ford GT40, famously victorious at Le Mans from 1966 through 1969. After one year, Eric found his way out of that arrangement, moved to Slough, and commenced construction of his amazing Mark 6 successor: 1965's lithe and lissome T70 Spyder. The 1967 T70 Coupe was next, its slippery shape enabling even higher top speeds. T70's won hundreds of races. In January of 1971, Lola moved to its final quarters in Huntingdon.

The fertile mind of Eric Broadley did not rest with a single success - a multiplicity of models proliferated from his pen, including the T16X, T22X, T210, T212, T28X, T29X, T38X, T39X, the MK's 2, 3, 4 and 5, the T61, T62, T80, T90, T192, T330, T332 and many more. Lolas won at Le Mans, American Le Mans, Indianapolis, IMSA, the European and UK Championships, Super Vee, Sports 2000, Formulas 3000 and 5000, USSRC, the original Can-Am and the '70's Can-Am redux. An unparalleled A-list of world class drivers had affairs with curvaceous Lolas, ending in dramatic podium exposures: George Follmer, Dan Gurney, Mark Donohue, Roger Penske, John Surtees, Graham Hill, Paul Newman, Jackie Stewart, Al and Bobby Unser, Bobby Rahal, Mario and Michael Andretti, Hélio Castroneves and Nigel Mansell, plus innumerable "Joe Clubmen" with names like Steve McQueen.

In 1998, after 40 years at the summit of his chosen mountain, an unfortunate foray into Formula One cost Broadley control of his company. Lola emerged from bankruptcy under the control of Irishman Martin Birrane. For four decades, the genius of Eric Broadley permeated the world of racing, equating the great name of Lola with speed and success. The company Broadley founded persisted under Birrane until 2012, and is scheduled for resurrection under new ownership in 2024. Eric Broadley, age 88, slipped the surly bonds of Earth on May 28, 2017. The “Great Tinkerer” laid down his T-square on the day of the Indy 500. His remains were interred the week of Le Mans.

Perhaps the greatest mystery of Broadley’s success is how a thoughtful and unobtrusive English gentleman, a product of topiary gardens and stuffy Victorian mannerisms, created the Lola T70, one of history’s most voluptuous car designs. A shape this sultry was expected of Scaglietti, Pininfarina or Guigiaro, those Italian experts in sheet-metal sex. Instead, it was Broadley’s T70 that piled on the supercar tropes: Tumescant scoops behind the doors and atop the rear quarters – trouser bulges for every current McLaren, Ferrari and Lambo. That sinuous S-curve beginning at the nose and wending up and down the entire length of the car – again, a super and hypercar meme for decades now. The aerodynamic kammback tail – true, Wunibald Kamm pioneered the design in the 1930’s, but major implementation did not occur until deep into the ’70’s, and few ever looked this good. Even the mouth of the car – big and wide, like an

athlete gulping air, flanked by two amusing dimples (brake air ducts) and topped by flared, arresting eyes – cars haven't had such expressive faces until recently, but Broadley's was trolling us back in the '60's. The T70 is as iconic and contemporary as the Ferrari 250 GTO, the Lamborghini Miura and the Jaguar XKE. That self-effacing English gentleman gave us a prototype for the pantheon. Salutare, Eric Broadley!