

Allard rides again

Sydney Allard is a pretty obscure figure in motorsports, one of a generation of British enthusiast racer-builders who, after World War II, knocked together cars for road and track, usually in a fog of penury. Unlike Colin Chapman (Lotus) and William Lyons (Jaguar), Allard's fame did not outlive him.



Allard Motor Company built 1,908 cars, with the only notable ones being the fiery, American V8-powered J2 and J2Xs. In 1950 Allard and Tom Cole managed to wrestle a Cadillac-engined J2 to a class win at Le Mans

(third place overall) and for several years thereafter the J2X was a formidable but by no means dominating presence in road racing. Among Allard's alumni are Carroll Shelby, John Fitch, Masten Gregory, Steve McQueen and Corvette engineer Zora Arkus Duntov.

According to the Allard Registry, 83 J2Xs were built between 1951-53. There history would have left it, a dusty footnote, but for the strange passion of one man, and his coincidental last name.

Roger Allard, 62 (above), admits he is no particular kin to Sydney, except insofar as -- going back to William the Conqueror -- English-speaking Allards are probably all related. In fact, he had never heard of Allard cars until a chance encounter in 1996 at England's Beulieu National Motor Museum, where he saw some literature in the bookstore referring to the Allard. Curious, he asked a museum docent, who led Allard to the namesake car in the collection.

"It was purely serendipity," says Allard, when he visited the L.A. Times last week.

He might have remained a richer man if he'd remained ignorant, he admits. Allard, a marketing consultant by trade, got it in his head to re-create Allard as a bespoke sports toy for rich enthu-

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siasts; a modern, high-performance car with the charismatic shape of the British racing roadster. Such enterprises almost always end in tears. Then again, Allard — a motorcycle rider, skydiver and scuba diver — is accustomed to risk.

With the permission of the Allard family, Roger Allard incorporated Allard Motor Works in 1999. Allard bought out Neil Hardy, an Allard restorer and builder of replicas in San Diego, and moved Hardy's tooling, molds and other parts up to Montreal, where the company began the costly work of computer-designing and prototyping the J2X Mark II.

In order to earn the "Mark II" name, Allard was determined to preserve as much of the traditional look and feel of the J2X while making it user-friendly and drivable on modern roads. While it retains the long hood, the rear-canted cockpit, the Lakes pipes and side-mounted spare, the neo-Allard added six inches to the wheelbase (106 inches), raised the height (44



inches), lowered the seating position and moved the engine forward to achieve a 50-50 front-to-rear weight ratio. The body is a molded composite, while the bonnet (the hood, we Yanks call it) is steel. Polished steel stone guards on the rear fenders, polished roll hoops and 72-spoke Dayton wheels provide a scintillating complement to the period-correct flat enamel British Racing Green paint.

The new car — while bigger and dramatically more comfortable in the cockpit than an original — is convincing enough visually to earn an official nameplate from the Allard Registry.

The J2X Mark II is built on a tube- and square-section steel chassis incorporating safety features — door reinforcement and five-mile bumpers, for instance — that are not strictly required by the government for a hand-built car. The fully adjustable suspension is straight hot-rodding: coil-overs front and double-A arms in front and coil-overs and lower control arms in back. Wilwood inboard brakes flank a 9-inch Ford rear end, encased in a polished cast aluminum pumpkin.

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Also faithful to the original, the J2X Mark II is available with a variety of heavy-breathing V8s, from a GM small-block to a race-tuned and blueprinted 6.1-liter, 600-hp Chrysler Hemi, prepared by Sean Hyland Motorsport in Woodstock, Ontario. The car can be ordered with a four-speed automatic, but the preferred gearbox is a slick Tremec TKO 5-speed.

Twelve long years after his visit to Beulieu, Roger Allard is just now delivering his first cars. He was kind enough to bring 001 -- the first production car, with the Hemi, costing \$164,000 -- to the L.A. Times offices for a test drive before delivering it to a client in Sedona, Ariz.

“There are two kinds of potential clients,” Allard said. “Those who remember the cars from Watkins Glen and races like that, and younger customers who want something truly different.” The client in Arizona, who wishes to remain anonymous, is a 67-year-old connoisseur of lightweight, elemental sports machines, having owned a Shelby Cobra, a Lotus Super7 and a Ford GT40.

That the Allard is. Looking like it's rolled off the pages of a history book, the car causes a small panic wherever it goes, with people swerving dangerously up in traffic and leveling cellphones to take a picture. Our stop at a gas station turned into a 20-minute product briefing.



Given that I only had a 45-minute drive in the car, involving blustery squirts down the Harbor Freeway and back, it's impossible to gauge the car's handling. But the power is certainly there. And the build quality: This is an astonishingly well-fettled machine, with beautiful machine-turned aluminum dash, supple leather seats, and exceptional tactile qualities. The steering is light and precise, the Tremec gearshift slides effortlessly through the shift gate. At full romp, the engine sounds echoed through the megaphone of decades.

The price for a time machine with modern engineering? A mere \$138,500 with the GM small-block, \$164,000 with the hot Hemi.

-- Dan Neil

Photos: Allard Motor Works, Dan Neil