

# Off-Side Undo

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## More contributions to the OFF SIDE UNDO.

Hey you guys! Keep those cards and letters flowing in.

### Lotus Position by Mike Hemsley

(This article originally appeared in the July/Sep 1983 issue of "Australian Sports Car World")

It was earlier than I like to be up, especially on my birthday, but this birthday was different. I was on my way to buy my first race car!

One of my top priorities after settling in as a teacher at a college near Spokane, Washington, in 1969 was to find the local sports car group. I had been a member of a few clubs and had even rallied a little, but the group I found in Spokane was more serious about motorsports than any I had ever encountered. About half of the club, called Northwest Motorsports, were honest-to-God racers. They raced in the International Conference of Sports Car Clubs in the northwest US and Western Canada in everything from a Lotus 18 to a 44 and from a Brabham BT8 to a boxstock Alfa GTV.

Well I was infected; in less than a month I was looking for a race car. One of the more esteemed members, who ran the best foreign car repair shop between the Cascade and Rocky Mountains and whose shop, therefore, was The Hangout, told me he knew a guy with a Lotus XI for sale, cheap. Wow, a Lotus XI, a sports racer,

and me a Lotus freak and all! I didn't want to admit that I didn't have the foggiest idea what an XI was. After some incredibly astute questions like, "Is it a front or rear engined Eleven?", he realised my functional knowledge of Lotus was limited.

Well, he patiently explained, it was an XI not an 11, that it was front-engined, a Le Mans version, Climax powered, Weber carburetted, disc braked, and de Dion reared! I still didn't understand half of what he said, but he had drawn a sketch of the car, and I was in love.

That same day I called the car's owner, Bob Kneivel, in Butte, Montana. Unlike his son, Evel, who had made a name for himself doing unusual things on a motorcycle, Bob was into sports cars. The car had a cloudy history--possibly raced at Le Mans in 1956, probably raced in SCCA events in the early '60s, and definitely hill climbed in Montana and Idaho up to 1969.

The price was \$900 for the car and whatever related parts Bob could find in his workshop.

Luckily, although my then-wife might disagree, I found an ex-racer who had traded his Dunlop overalls for a banker's pin-stripes. He was still a little crazy, so he loaned me \$600. With the bank's money in my pocket, I set out with two of my students and a friend's son to pick up the car.

It was 530 km (330 mi) from Cheney to Butte; the road was mountainous and would normally have been fun, but when you're towing a trailer behind a Volvo wagon...well, the others slept a lot. The only excitement came when we slid on some ice, noticed people climbing out of a

VW lying on its side in a ditch, and rescued two women (grandmom and mom) and five kids from the Beetle. We left all their worldly possessions, except for the youngest's sackful of bubblegum, in the car and set out for help. We had gotten the VW on its wheels again, but it needed a tow out of the ditch. Amazingly, it still ran. On our return run we saw it again, still heading east, full of seven people, a bunch of suitcases, and one sack now only half-full of bubblegum.

When we finally arrived in Butte and saw the XI, we *all* fell in love with it. It was sleek, low, and green. It started immediately and sounded great! The deal was closed, the car and spares were loaded, and we headed home after pork chop sandwiches at downtown Butte's closest thing to a fast food joint.

The trip home would have been incredibly boring (the highpoints of the drive consisted of passing *through* Anaconda, Bearmouth, Deer Lodge, and Smelterville) if it hadn't been for my new car. Soon after leaving Butte, it became clear that we'd have to stop for gas somewhere in western Montana--the boondocks! And somebody was bound to ask what kind of car was on the trailer. The consensus was that it couldn't just be a Lotus; it had to be something more exotic, a car even less likely to be known to the people of Montana. The starting point was the car's racing number, 426. From there it was all down hill.

After a two hour ride, we stopped for fuel at a little crossroads town. The gas station served as Post Office, restaurant, bar, and, probably, house of ill-repute. As expected, a weathered old cowboy came out to pump the gas. I went to check the Volvo's oil as Dean, Paul and Jeff converged on the attendant. Before I had the hood up, he asked, "What kind of car is that, sonny?"

Dean was the first out with the much-practised reply, "That's a 426 cc Bubushka-engined, Zeiss-Ikon Skoda!"

The cowboy hesitated, looked at the car again, and said, "Humph, looks like a Lotus to me!"

The rest of the trip was uneventful, except for the tyre-change in the red light district of a small mining town. But my subsequent racing career in the XI was worthy of that trip. In spite of its age and my questionable abilities, the XI got me through my novice year and into second place in the E/Sports-Racing Championship. After two years and many events I still got \$900 from a buyer. And I was happy with the deal. Little did I know in 1971 that the Lotus XI was already a classic. After all, it had been more important for me to keep up with racing rivals than market values.

(ED. Note In the small world dept., I was living in Great Falls, Montana from 1966-mid 1969. This was when I had the 427 Cobra and belonged to SCCA. I saw this car when Bob Kneivel owned it and saw him auto cross it many times. We all thought he was so cool to be racing at his age. He probably wasn't that old, but he had white hair and a bit of a beer paunch.

Barbara)

### **Simmers chosen NAMGBR's Good Samaritan of the Year for 1996**

Our own John Simmers was recently chosen to be the North American MGB Register's Good Samaritan of the Year for the assistance he gave Dik Sleeth and his wife, Mary, while they were on holiday in the South. John received a very nice wall plaque and a gift certificate good for a one year membership in the Register. Following is a copy of Dik's nomination letter.

21 Jan 96

Marcham Rhoades, Editor  
MGB Driver  
P.O. Box 2645  
Goleta, CA 93117  
Dear Mr. Rhoades:

A nomination for the "Good Samaritan"

award. While Mary (wife) and I were traveling this past fall in the MG, we toured down Missouri highway 19, a perfect MG road running along the western edge of the Mark Twain National Forest, to Vicksburg, MS, with an overnight stop in Helena, AK. More of the beauties of the trip another time. While on the run to Vicksburg the "B" developed a nasty habit of dying at low RPM.

We made it to our motel, across the street from the Vicksburg National Military Park, our goal, and rested a bit while I considered our options. A call to Rick Ingram elicited a suggestion that I contact Bob Mason in Fairhope, AL. Unfortunately there are four Bob Masons in Fairhope, but a call to John Twist provided the phone number. Mrs. Mason graciously suggested their friend John Simmers of Vicksburg as a source of information on reliable repair shops. At this point I was assuming I needed to disassemble the carbs to solve the problem. I called John Simmers at his work number and explained my plight to his answering machine. He returned my call later in the afternoon FROM CONNECTICUT and said don't do anything yet "I'll be home this evening".

The next day, he called us at our room, drove over, and we followed his MGB GT to his home in a lovely wooded area. Mary was convinced we would need Indian guides to find our way back to Vicksburg. John and I proceeded to adjust the carbs over the next several hours. Well, no, John did the adjusting and I watched. In the meantime his wife arrived to find guests, (a surprise) then proceeded to whip up a wonderful cajun specialty for supper that we have been bragging about ever since. The dinner and conversation were both a delight and the evening passed all too quickly.

John's rapid and may I say extraordinary response to our plight and his wife's marvelous reaction to unexpected dinner guests (the wives will appreciate the enormity of this) certainly qualify both for the

appellation GOOD SAMARITAN.

Sincerely yours,

Dik Sleeth  
602 Woodland Drive PO Box 66  
St. Joseph IL 61873

(Ed. Note. None of us who know John and Florence are in the least surprised at their actions. It is just very satisfying to see someone else recognize what truly neat people they are. Thanks, Florence, for sharing this with us.)

Terry Trovato sent in this excerpt from the 10 October 1996 issue of CHATTER, the newsletter published by the Austin-Healey Club of America. Terry knows in what esteem British car owners hold Joseph Lucas and wanted to share. The excerpt is an editor's note prefacing an article entitled "Lucas, Prince of Darkness"

Two years ago the WALL STREET JOURNAL reported that Lucas Industries was in trouble with Boeing for falsifying parts inspections. Lucas denied that charge but was under federal investigation for allegedly supplying substandard gearboxes for the U.S. Navy's F/A-18 fighter plane.

Maybe someone should have spoken to a few British car enthusiasts before doing business with Lucas. Before the company became Lucas Industries, PLC, it was called Joseph Lucas Industries Limited, and Joseph Lucas was referred to around the world as "the Prince of Darkness". It was, some say, Lucas electrical equipment that almost single-handedly killed the British motor industry in North America. In the process, thousands of American owners of British cars were stranded on the highways and byways of this continent. Lucas became part of our automotive culture, and it appeared that Joseph Lucas was trying some sort of English terrorist campaign to avenge our successful revolution and separation from Great Britain.

Reid Trummel provides another amazing, yet true, tale about Lucas and again reminds us of a saying attributed to Joseph Lucas... "a gentleman does not motor about after dark". ---Ed.

Pat and I have attended only one car show in the month of November, so we don't have a lot to write about this month. Thanks to Terry, Mike, and Florence who helped us to fill us this issue.

After we attended the Concours Italiana, Vintage Races, and Pebble Beach show in August of 95, Pat said, " There is one other car show of this magnitude that I would like to go to someday. It is the National Classic Motor Show in England. It will be held in Birmingham in November of 96." In a weak moment and after a bit of negotiating for a few extra days in London, I gave him the go-ahead to start planning the trip.

Once again for us the timing was terrible. (For the Concours Italiana, etc. it was the week the kids started school, but what the heck, we just left them with grandma and lit out like we had good sense.) The Birmingham show was the weekend before Thanksgiving, which I always cooked a big meal for all the family at our house. In typical Pat & Barbara fashion, we informed the extended family it was dinner-on-your-own this year, left John with grandma, and Amanda with Pat's sister and her now husband. They have no children nor any prospects of having any, but need to know the joys of living with a headstrong 16 year old. Bless her heart, Amanda did not disappoint them either. She wrecked her 79 Malibu the first night we were gone.

We left Tuesday the 16th and spent the concessionary three days in London seeing plays, shopping for vintage clothes, car books of all descriptions, models, and scouting out fabric and quilt shops. Saturday the 23rd we took the train to Birmingham for the show.

There we met up with Ernie and Ann Knott of the Gordon Keeble Club and Charles Giles who recently wrote a book

about the Keebles. It was most enjoyable to talk with them and see what they were up to. We found out that Ernie builds models and has a collection of over 600!

We wandered among the more than 40,000 who came to see the cars and look for that obscure part in the largest indoor auto jumble held in England. Since anything purchased had to be stuffed into a suitcase and lugged back to the states, we came away with only a radiator drain tap, assorted fiber washers, decals, and a few back issues of English magazines.

Barbara's great find was a pair of 1941 utility nylons (the kind with the seams up the back) still in the original package. Almost anything you could want was somewhere among the piles in the vendor's stalls.

Jaguar, Lotus, Triumph, MG, Austin, Marcos, Riley, Jensen, Humber, Lancia, BMW, and many many more makes were represented at the show. It was really almost too much to take in.

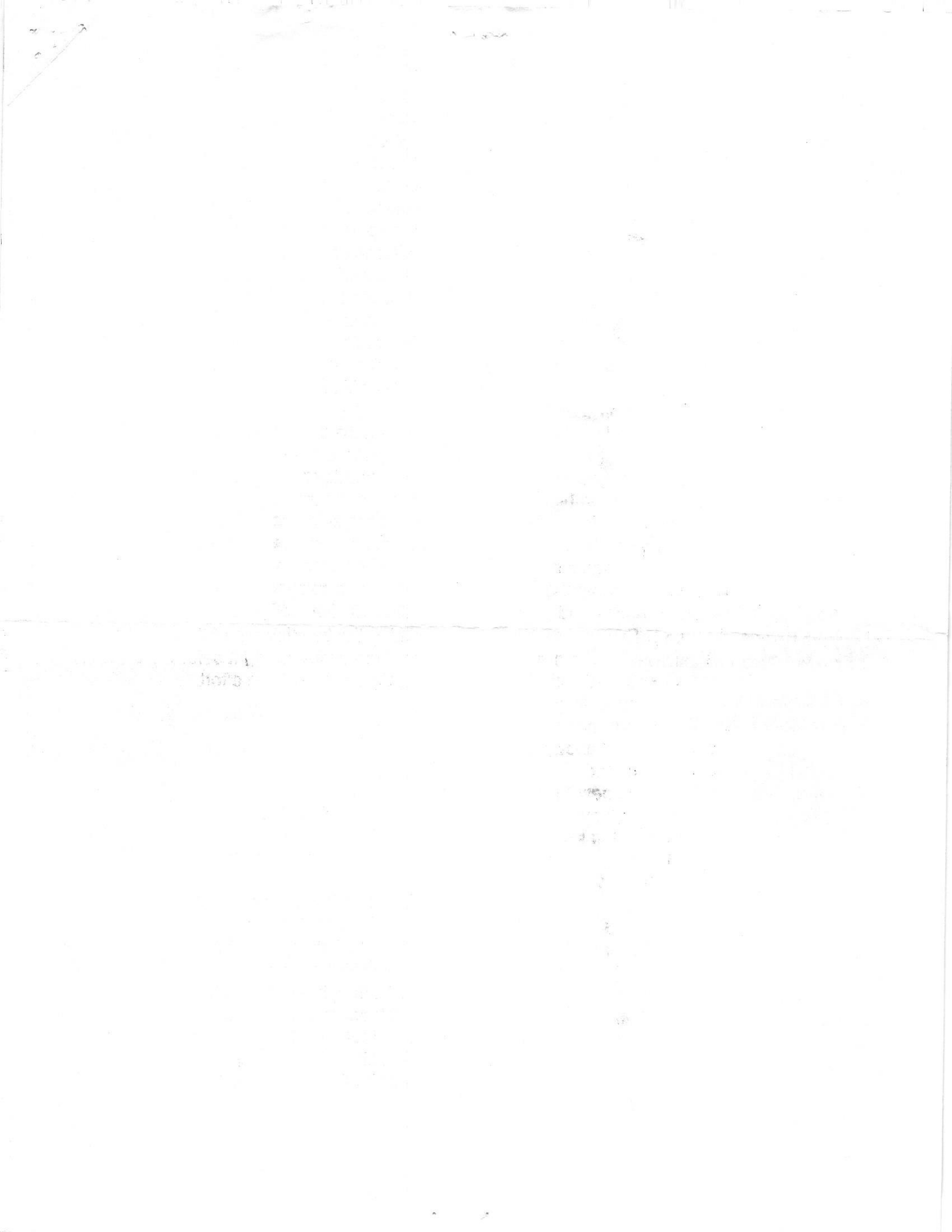
An interesting part of the British Motor Heritage display was the ongoing build of a MGB GT. Several guys worked on the car during the two day run of the show and built the entire car right before the crowd. Really an impressive effort.

## ON THE CALENDAR

### EMC Christmas Party

Saturday December 14 at the home of Barbara and Pat Cashman, 237 McAuley Drive, Vicksburg. 638-3240.

Take Exit 4-B from I-20. Go west on Clay St. Turn right at 2nd traffic light. Go one block and turn left. Go right at flashing light onto McAuley Drive. White brick house on right side of street about half mile from flashing light. Come at 4:00p.m..



# Off-Side Undo

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Vicksburg, MS 39180



Alex & Tere Wade  
63 Willowbrook Lane  
Brandon MS 39042-2