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Auction Date: 25 September 2010

Lot 59 - 1954 Ex-Noel Cunningham-Reid 'Barn Find' Aston Martin DB2/4 Mk1 2.6 Litre Competition Saloon



- Registration: 760 GBL
- Chassis Number: LML 659
- Engine Number: VB6E/50/1413
- Odometer reading: TBA
- Estimate: £65,000-£75,000
- Hammer: Sold
- Plus Commission: £63,000

Mr Noel Cunningham-Reid was a British racing driver who began his career in 1954, perhaps one of the forgotten greats of motor racing, his ability was recognized early on by legendary Aston Martin team manager John Wyer who signed him up to race a works DBR1 for the factory in 1957. Indeed his career began in an Aston Martin in 1954, that car was a DB2/4 Mk 1, chassis LML 659, the car we are proud to offer for auction today.

In an interview with Chris Nixon published in Classic and Sportscar magazine in 2003, Mr Cunningham-Reid remembers the car 'Early in 1954 I bought an Aston Martin DB2/4 from Brooklands of Bond Street and with it came a year's membership for the AMOC. Then, in the post came an invitation to take part in an AMOC meeting at Snetterton in April.' He finished third overall and continued to compete and modified the DB2/4 until deciding to purchase a Lister Bristol to race. He went on to race an HWM for George Abecassis achieving third place in the 1955 Redex Trophy race at Castlecombe. He continued to race with Abecassis in an HWM for the next season and showed great ability, giving drivers such as Ron Flockhart, Dick Protheroe and Duncan Hamilton a good run for their money.

John Wyer had noted Cunningham-Reid's performance and invited him to Silverstone to test a DB3S with three other potential drivers. His first race with the Aston works team was at the British Empire trophy at Oulton Park in early April, driving a DB3S alongside Roy Salvadori who was driving the new DBR1.

Cunningham-Reid finished 5th overall but the Nurburgring 1000kms race is where he would shine. He drove a superb consistent race with Tony Brooks who had started the race extremely well, and the pair would win outright after 44 laps, 4 minutes and 13.7 seconds ahead of the Collins/ Gendebien 4.1 Litre Ferrari. The pair also drove together at Le Mans driving a works DBR1 but gearbox problems and an accident marred their performance. Cunningham-Reid also drove for the works at Spa-Francorchamps using a DBR2.

The guarantee for LML 659 was first issued on 14th April 1954 and its first owner was noted as Mr. Cunningham-Reid, the car bearing the registration OXW 676. It was Cunningham -Reid's intention to race the car and the record shows a number of modifications including heavy duty shock absorbers and RJ needles. The record card also notes that the car was racing at Snetterton in June 1954 with the owner's modifications.

Having achieved 3rd overall at Snetterton, the car was sent back to the works in September where triple racing Solex carburetors were fitted with special manifolds and controls. The rear axle ratio was changed to 3.5 to 1 and a set of Alfin brake drums were fitted. In addition an exhaust camshaft for the inlet side was fitted as were modified axle buffers, rear springs and a twin exhaust system from fellow racer Tommy Sopwith's car. The car was maintained by the factory throughout his ownership and the records indicate that occasional body damage repairs were undertaken so there can be no question Mr Cunningham-Reid made full use of the car!

The second owner was Mr Young of Bond Street, London who purchased it in June 1955 and barely a month into his ownership sent the car back to the works for a full engine rebuild. In February 1958 a replacement engine was fitted by the factory, as detailed on the works record and also confirmed in a letter from Captain Ivan Forshaw written in 1978, which states the original engine VB6E/50/1388 was replaced by VB6E/50/1413, the engine which is still in the car today. Interestingly in the same letter Forshaw also states 'Both these engines are 2.6 litre Vantage units, 2580cc.' Captain Forshaw also refers to the original registration OXW 676 being changed to 760 GBL but is not sure when this transfer occurred.

The record card shows details of a further three owners and then in the late 1960's the car came into the hands of Mr Bryan Parnell who is understood to be Reverend Parnell, of the Theological College, Chichester, Sussex. An invoice in the history file addressed to Rev Parnell from Stubberfields garage of St Leonards-on-Sea, dated 31st March 1969 details a full engine rebuild at a cost of £467 and 16 shillings! Some time after the completion of this work, Reverend Parnell passed the car to a Mr Whittaker and we understand the car was put into storage in the early 1970's and hasn't been used since.

After almost forty years of hibernation, in August 2010 the vendor decided to coax LML 659 back to life,

adding fresh oil, the engine turned over and was running using road going SU carburetors. The vendor states the car sounds excellent and holds good oil pressure, the clutch works and the gears engage. An important part of this cars original specification were the racing Solex carburetors fitted by Cunningham-Reid and a close inspection of the bulkhead shows it was modified to accept these Solex units in 1954. These carburetors are extremely rare and the vendor was able to reunite the original triple Solex twin choke racing units which had been sitting on his shelf for over ten years prior to him purchasing the car. The set of twin SU carburetors will be supplied with the car.

LML 659 is offered with a history file containing a copy of the original works record detailing the modifications carried out and various servicing works by the factory, correspondence from Captain Ivan Forshaw confirming the history of the car, French carte grise and a number of service bills from the 1960's. A photograph of Noel Cunningham Reid racing the car at Snetterton is also included.

This is an exciting opportunity to acquire a genuine piece of Aston Martin racing history, raced by a works driver of the period in fabulously original condition. Indeed today there are very few opportunities to obtain a Feltham Aston Martin with racing history and this could well be the one of the last of those opportunities, a barn find period competition car owned and raced by a works driver, what more could an Aston Martin collector ask for?

The AMOC Register notes the full competitive record of the car as listed below:

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • 1954 | Snetterton (Cunningham-Reid) | 3 rd overall |
| • 1954 | W.E.C.C. Snetterton (Cunningham-Reid) | 3 rd overall |
| • 1966 | Belfry Concours (Jones) | 3 rd |
| • 1966 | Silverstone (Jones) | 4 th |
| • 1966 | Fort Belvedere Concours (Jones) | Denman Trophy |
| • 1966 | Wiscombe (Jones) | 2 nd |
| • 1966 | Curborough (Jones) | 3 rd |
| • 1966 | Belfry Concours (Clare) | 3 rd in Class |
| • 1966 | Fort Belvedere (Clare) | Denman Trophy |

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