

Tangled past of Le Mans Aston

By Dave Selby

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A "missing" Le Mans Aston Martin that languished under a tangle of undergrowth for nearly 30 years has emerged to return to the fabled French circuit - not to race, but to be auctioned, writes Dave Selby.

The DB2 sports-racing prototype is thought to be the only survivor of three built in 1949 as David Brown set about restoring the reputation of the crippled company he had acquired a few years earlier.

After a surprise victory with the DB1 in the 1948 Spa 24-hours, Aston Martin fielded three DB2 prototypes at Le Mans the following year. One crashed and another retired with cooling problems but the third, UMG 65, was driven by Arthur Jones and Nick Haines to seventh overall and third in class at an average of 72.52mph.



On September 21 this car goes under the hammer at Coys' auction during the Le Mans Classic Racing Festival. It is expected to command somewhere between £90,000 and £120,000 and a high-quality, full restoration in line with the car's stature will probably cost between £60,000 and £70,000, possibly more.

Alastair Brown, consultant for the London auction house, explains: "This car represents a pivotal point in the post-war history of Aston Martin. On the track the DB2 sports prototype marked the beginning of the marque's greatest period of prolonged racing success, which culminated with the famous Le Mans victory in 1959. On the road, the DB2 led to production of the road-going DB2 and the blossoming of the DB model line."

Following the Le Mans outing, the three prototypes next appeared at the Spa 24-hours where UMG 65, driven by Lance Macklin and Nick Haines, finished fifth overall and third in class. Later, in private hands, the Aston was campaigned through the 1950s in club races with a good measure of success.

The car later passed in to the long-term ownership of a British enthusiast who last used it in a pre-race parade of historic cars at Le Mans in 1971.

Brown takes up the story: "It's one of the most exciting barn finds we have had for a while, not least because the car seemed to have disappeared. There was only a very small, tight-knit circle of people who knew of its existence."

Over the years, nature slowly claimed back the garage where the car was stored. Says Brown: "You really wouldn't know there was a garage underneath the tangle, let alone a car."

But now that UMG 65 is finally back in open circulation, it will be interesting to see what becomes of it. "The right cars with the right history will command far more than their conventional value based on condition alone," says Brown.

"What people are buying is the history and the opportunity to take on a project and execute it in exactly the way they require. There is increasing competition to gain entries to the more prestigious international historic race meetings. With a car like this you'll be welcome anywhere."

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Aston Martin DB2 - AstonMartins.com (<http://www.astonmartins.org/feltham/db2.htm>)

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