



## ELVA Newsletter December 2016

The last few days of 2016 are approaching, and what a year it has been!



Lots of uncertainty around the world due to various dreadful conflicts; the not totally unexpected UK vote to "BREXIT" from Europe, and perhaps the rather more startling result of the U.S. Presidential Election. Interesting times ahead for sure!

The 'New ELVA' project has continued to gain momentum and over the past twelve months some hugely influential people have taken an active interest in the proposals. This has been very encouraging and if all goes to plan then there will be exciting announcements during 2017.

While there has been much to applaud during 2016, with ELVA competition cars and drivers continuing to perform brilliantly on the track, the current year has also seen the loss of several key figures from the ELVA story, including Jon Clifton, Chris Meek and Carl Haas. At the end of 2015 Butch Gilbert.

As I believe all these people would want us all to celebrate their ELVA involvement, here are just a few of my memories and amusing moments; you can add more to the Forum if you wish.

### Butch Gilbert

I went to spend a couple of days with Butch and Sharon Gilbert at their home in Northern California in the early 1980's and apart from their most kind hospitality, I was shown a large collection of motorsport goodies, part completed cars, and others ready to race. Most of this was of ELVA origin and of course Butch was recognised as a very competitive competent driver, capable of getting the best from a car without the need of gold plated spanners. The sort of hands on mechanical engineering that Frank Nichols would have recognised and admired.

I have since met with many other ELVA owners over the years with a similar outlook and trackside capabilities. They know every important race setting on the vehicle, will recognise every single nut and bolt, every part intimately. I have a feeling they get the best from their chosen sport.

### Jon Clifton

My meetings with Jon Clifton have been on both sides of the Atlantic and he had amassed, possibly more accurately rescued, a number of ELVA sports racers over the years. I believe this numbered eleven but maybe more? He also had at least one Formula Junior and probably a Courier or two.

Jon visited Frank at his home in Kent and a strong friendship developed to the point that Jon became the dedicated chauffeur for 'Father' during our many trips to the States to celebrate some anniversary or other. I often had that job in the UK when my means of transport was a Sierra Cosworth which had been tweaked in the ELVA Racing workshops to add to the fast fun factor. However, I was subjected more than once to a 'rollicking' by Frank for driving too fast; I think this reflected his confidence in the car but not necessarily the driver!

It seemed no bad thing to be told to slow down by the eminent founder of a race car company; I just wish I could have been faster on the track! Jon seemed to get the driving balance just right and was much respected by all who knew him, particularly for his ELVA dedication, enthusiasm and knowledge.

### Chris Meek

Racing driver Chris Meek was one of the many truly colourful characters of the ELVA era, who remained extremely loyal to the brand until frustrated that he could not obtain the same sort of relationship with the Trojan empire as he had previously experienced when Frank Nichols was at the helm. He needed to know he was getting a 'deal', but this was more easily obtained during the Bexhill/Hastings days rather than the stricter business regime he found at Croydon. Chris considered that he was treated as a 'works' driver in the early Couriers and later in a rear-engined F/J.

In his business life Chris Meek was extremely successful in the property world, and of course gained much applause for his involvement in keeping the future of his beloved historic Mallory Park circuit secured. He was very happy to be kept updated with our ELVA news and equally share his immense enthusiasm for the various Mallory events. Allan Miles and I had a most interesting day with Chris, meeting with Lawrence Tomlinson at the then new and extensive Ginetta facility in Leeds. Lawrence was able to provide funds to give new life to the Ginetta brand.

### Carl Haas

There is little to be added to the thousands of words written about Carl Haas over the years, however it would be impossible to overstate the importance of his relationship with Frank Nichols and ELVA from the early days. Carl was not known for 'small talk' but was incredibly kind and generous with his time. Again he never forgot the importance of ELVA in his success story; starting from when he sold parts at various Chicago area race circuits for the early ELVA sports racers; parts which he kept in the boot/trunk of his road car.

He soon became a shareholder in the ELVA companies and his input remained throughout including the McLaren-Elva series and beyond. Carl, being such an acknowledged businessman, gently became involved with Lola, Hewland and other manufacturers in the world of Motorsports and he was to rise to the pinnacle of US motor racing. I was a privileged visitor to Tower Parkway on a number of occasions and when visiting with Jeff Allison to research for the ELVA book, it became obvious that he was enjoying recalling the ELVA era to the point that his secretary later said that she had never known him to have given so much time to anyone else during office hours.

I have previously recounted the story of a very early telephone call to my hotel room in the Highland Park area, as unbeknown to me, Carl had decided to treat me to breakfast before heading out to his office. He was an extremely early riser so for me, two of the customary "3 s's" needed to be achieved in a record breaking time that morning! I am hoping that the proposed book telling the life story of Carl Haas will be published in due course, and that his extremely close genuine affiliation with ELVA will be fully told.

### ELVA and McLaren

This gives an appropriate link to another truly important and close relationship, being the ELVA and McLaren agreement during the late 1960's, which has been rekindled thanks to the warm enthusiasm of Mike Flewitt, the CEO of McLaren Automotive. Under the superb guidance of such an experienced CEO, McLaren Automotive have just celebrated the build of the 10,000th high performance supercar, each proudly wearing the McLaren badging. Made in Britain and shipped around the world; what a wonderful acknowledgement of an amazing team. Superb!

### Goodwood 75th MM

Pleased to read that the 75th MM (Members Meeting) to be held in March 2017 will include a race dedicated to the late Archie Scott Brown who is a great hero of mine. Despite his severe disabilities he was an outstanding driver who had a number of outings in ELVA sports racers, including the 'works' Mk.II with UK registration number 'KDY 68'.

Frank Nichols told many stories of those times, often involving a few expletives, one tale included a description of Archie effectively driving one handed at full throttle, drifting around the hairpin Druids Bend corner at Brands Hatch and changing gear mid corner! How? Frank told of how they listened for Archie making that particular change and assumed that he held the steering with a knee mid corner as his right arm was short and deformed. Archie would of course have changed gear with his strong left hand; all happening a full speed in seconds. Certainly the lightweight steering wheel was often replaced after each of his determined ELVA drives! Absolutely fearless!

'Father' was hugely frustrated by the Butterworth engine Mk.III saga as the power unit had tremendous potential and with Archie Scott Brown driving the car he would be way ahead of the field until the heads of the sodium filled exhaust valves shot out of the exhaust system when they let go!

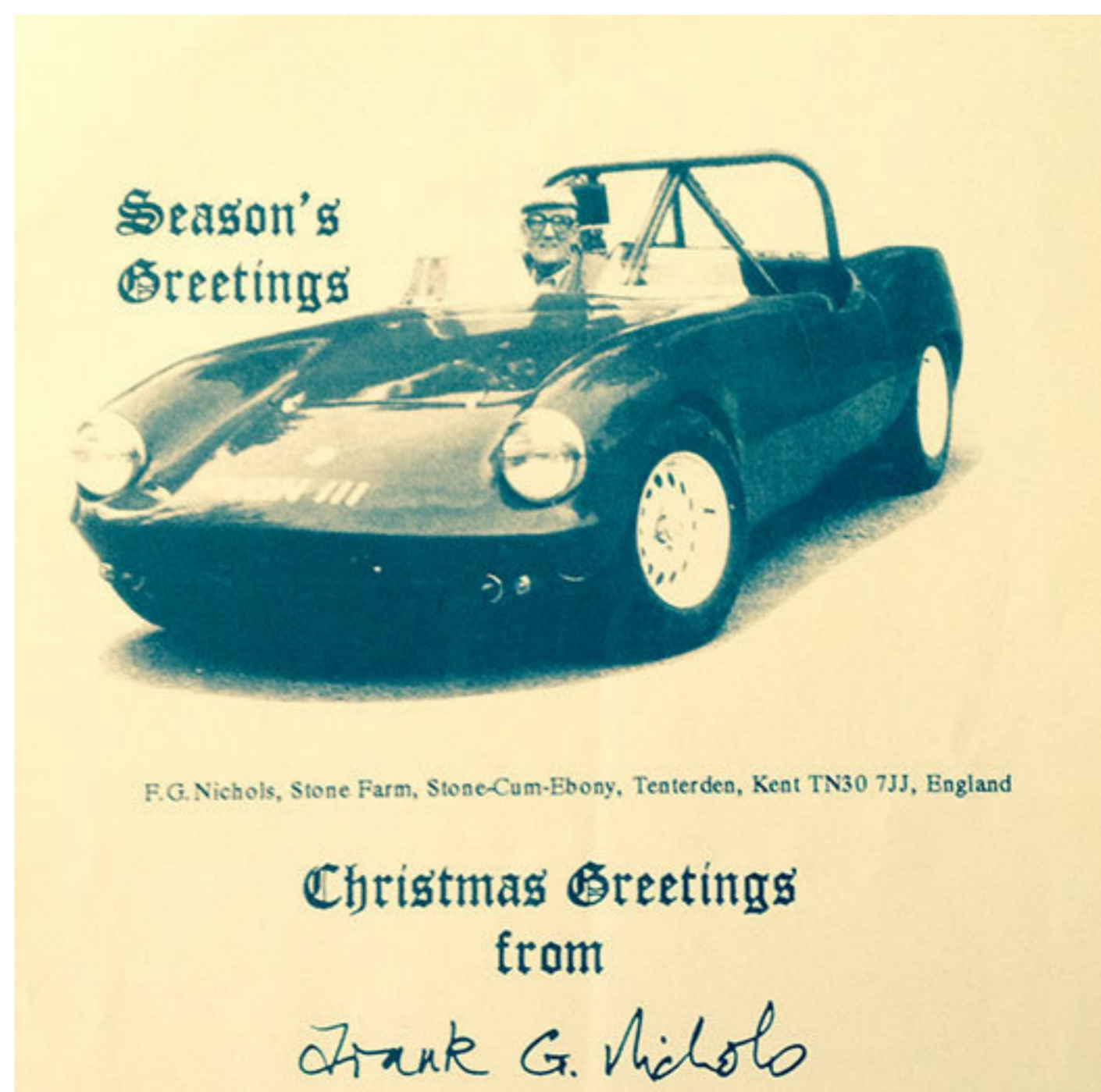
Engine designer and colourful character Archie Butterworth would not change anything despite the ELVA team pleading with him to change to standard exhaust valves, the siving valves were no problem, and Keith Marsden wanted to keep the unit cool with a water jacket. It was Frank who needed the cooling water jacket on the day he 'politely' told Archie Butterworth to 'stick' his AJB engine. It was over.

The Goodwood 75th MM "Scott Brown Trophy" race will of course feature Lister, but what a shame that the ELVA-BUTTERWORTH Mk.III is not around as it would have attracted huge attention; unless Paul Adams is willing to ship over 'KDY 68' which raced at the very first Revival in 1998?

### Frank Nichols

So many stories of admiration mixed with frustration, which often became colourful when being related by 'Father' Frank, but he was a father figure who really believed in the very many people who had contributed to the ELVA story.

Appropriate to add this image of Frank sitting in the first production Courier, chassis #2, taken close to twenty five years ago. Let's do him proud in 2017.



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