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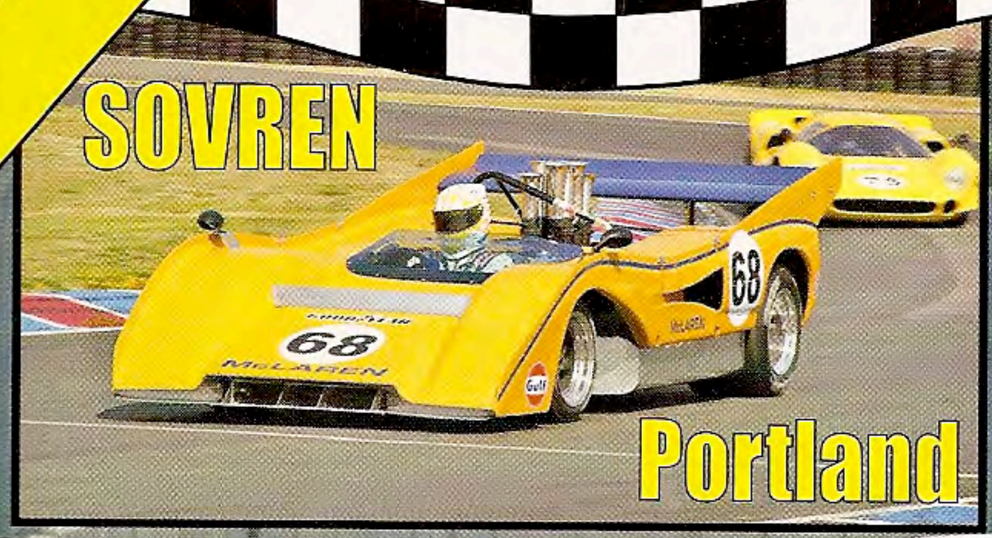

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Phil Lamont

From the Start

A profile of a builder, supporter, and regular participant in vintage racing

Phil Lamont finshed the restoration of his 1960 Lotus 18 Formula Junior car in 1987 and has been vintage racing it ever since.

photo: Bob Harrington

-by Bob Harrington

Most of you know Phil Lamont as the North American distributor of Dunlop tires and the driver of an extremely quick UDT Laystall Green Lotus 18, but there is much more to Phil than that. Over the years he has been a builder, promoter, official, and track manager. He has always had an interest in things mechanical. According to his mother he took a clock apart when he was only three to find out what made it work. There is no record of whether he got it back together.

Phil's early interest was in Hot Rods and oval track racing building a 1934 Ford coupe into a Hot Rod with money earned working after school and summers in a Service Station. His first exposure to racing came helping to design and build a 1937 Ford Coupe to go "Stock Car" racing at the Canadian National Exhibition Oval. The owners wanted to weld angle iron on to the car to make it stronger and handle better, but Phil, even then thinking differently, suggested they make it lighter so it would go faster. While the car wasn't a front runner, it was valuable experience.

His first exposure to road racing came in 1955 attending a sports car race at Edanvale in Ontario, but his first real involvement came in 1960. He had been instrumental in getting Jack Boxstrom, who had just arrived in Canada from his native Sweden, a job in the service station. Eppie Wietzes was starting his move up the ladder with a Sunbeam Alpine "works" car, so his well-prepared Morris Minor was for sale. Boxstrom bought the car and talked Phil into helping him with the preparation. The Morris whetted Boxstrom's appetite for racing and he subsequently bought a Lotus IX, which was in need of restoration. By now Phil was working as an ad salesman for the Toronto Star, one of Canada,s major newspapers, so he would work all day and then go out to the cold garage, this is Canada remember, and work on the Lotus, stripping it down to the chassis and rebuilding it. Phil says he had a cold all that Winter.

The Lotus brought Phil his first competition experience obtaining his license in it in 1962. He said he went very fast, crashed the car, and then stayed up all night repairing it so Boxstrom could drive it in the Sunday feature race. Boxstrom then acquired a front engine Group 7 car, followed by a Lotus 18, and while Phil was still helping as much as he could, pressures from his job and a new family limited the time available.

In 1964, he became reacquainted with Diana Carter, one of Canada's premiere woman drivers of the day, who had bought Wietze's Sunbeam when Eppie went to Comstock Racing, Ford's Canadian Racing arm. He worked as the Team Manager/Mechanic on the Sunbeam and when Diana acquired an ex Shell 4000 Volvo factory Rally car he converted that into a road racing car. Diana's husband, Jerry Polivka, was a principal in Cantrack Publishing/Cantrack Printing and in 1965 he convinced Phil to leave the Toronto Star and join Cantrack as advertising manager. During 1965, the principals of Cantrack purchased Mosport, so Phil in addition to selling ads for Cantrack's magazine, "Canada Track & Traffic" , getting work for Cantrack printing, was now responsible for selling pit and fence advertising signs, program advertising and race sponsorship.

Bill Brack, who went on the be a three time Canadian Champion, was co-owner of Sports Cars Unlimited (Lotus Canada) one of Phil's largest advertising accounts. Brack asked Phil to try and get sponsorship for his ambitious racing program. Phil discovered Mattel Toys were about to introduce "Hot Wheels" and got them to sponsor Brack's Lotus 41C FB car and his incredibly quick Mini. He scheduled the product introduction to coincide with the Racing Team's arrival in the area of the local Canadian Road Racing Championship event.

In 1967, he was appointed track manager of Mosport Park, a year when the track not only hosted Canada's first Formula One race, but USAC Stock Car, Indy Car, and Can-Am races.

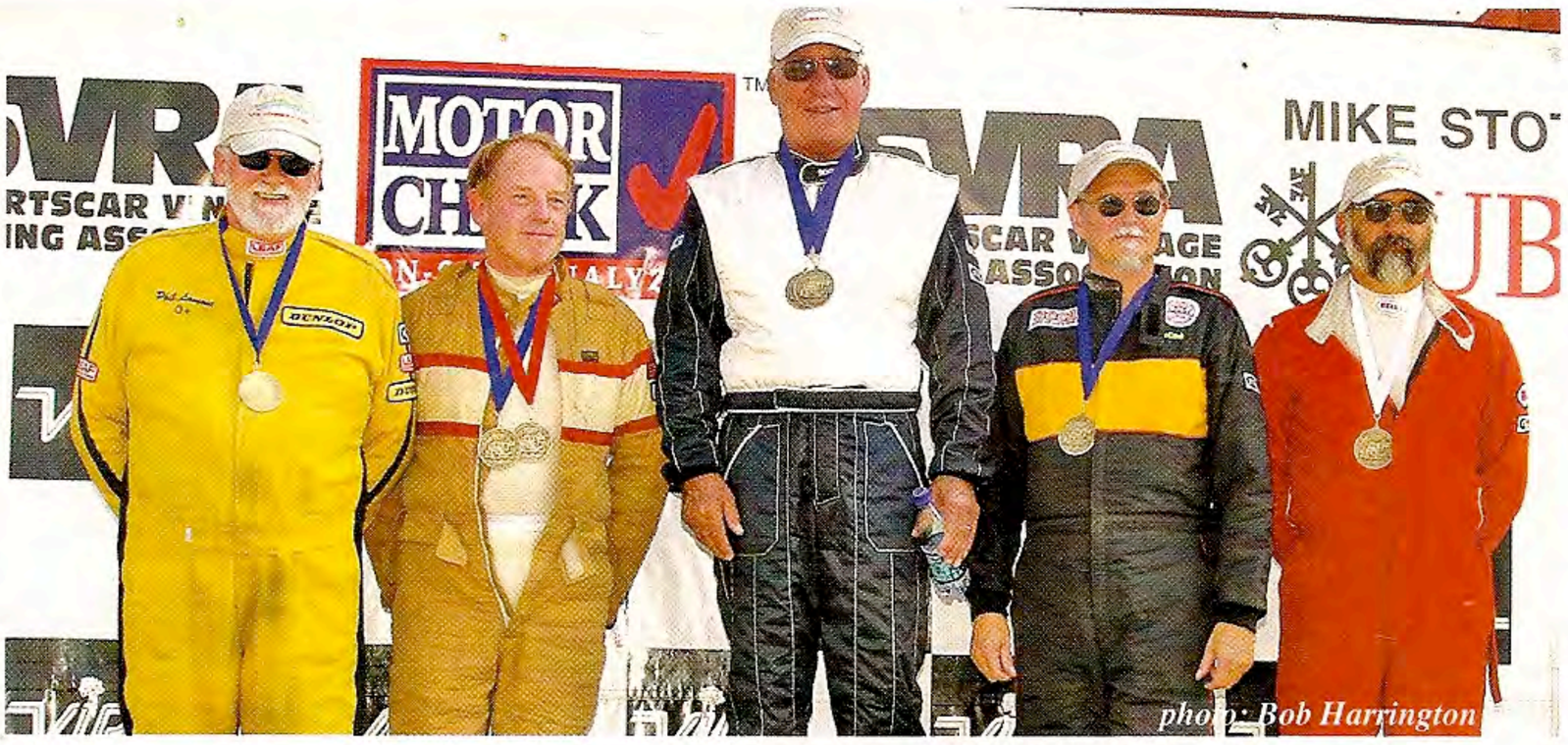
photo: Michael Casey-DiPleco

Phil and the Lotus 18 at the VARAC International Vintage Festival at Mosport in 2005.

As this was not enough he continued as Brack's Team Manager, sponsor hunter and publicist, traveling extensively throughout North America contesting Formula A; 5000; B, and US and Canadian Championships. He negotiated a ride for Brack in the USAC Stock Car race at Mosport where Brack finished third in a second rate car and then arranged Brack's ride with Team Lotus in the 1968 Canadian Grand Prix and the BRM ride in 1969.

By 1970, the ownership of the Cantrack companies had changed a couple of times, and Phil, seeing the writing on the wall, left and joined McConnell Advertising. The downside was the agency work required a lot of time and he was forced to withdraw from major participation in Bill Brack's team in 1971. By 1973 he was ready to strike out on his own, forming Lamont Communications in the fall of that year.

In 1976, Jack Boxstrom came back into his life, telling him about the formation of the



Phil Lamont, on the extreme left, after winning his class in the Formula Junior race at the 2005 SVRA Formula Car Festival at VIR.

In 1980, Phil was appointed the Canadian distributor for Dunlop (UK) Vintage Racing Tires.

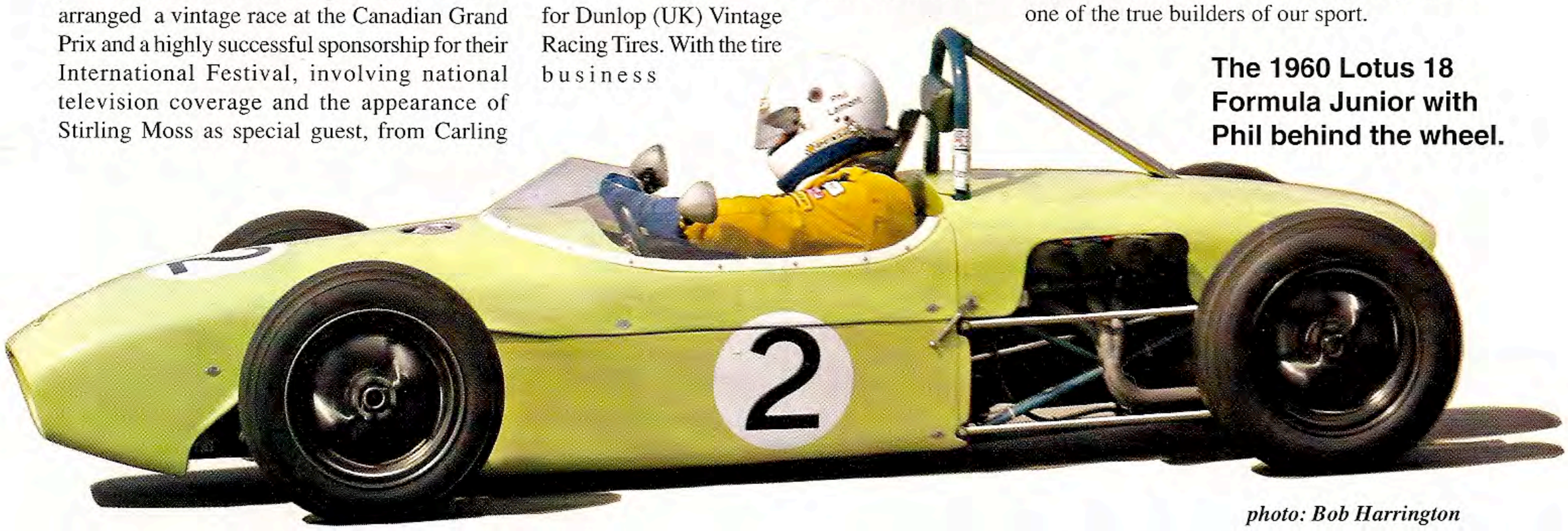
Vintage Automobile Racing Association of Canada (VARAC). Phil joined, member #6, and started restoring a 1959 Cooper-Norton Formula III car, first racing it in the Hamilton street race of 1978. Phil had become Chairman of the VARAC Eligibility Committee and the following year, 1979, President. During his term, VARAC arranged a vintage race at the Canadian Grand Prix and a highly successful sponsorship for their International Festival, involving national television coverage and the appearance of Stirling Moss as special guest, from Carling O'Keefe. During this time he was also a Director on the Board of the Ontario Region of the Canadian Automobile Sport Clubs (CASC). Following his term as VARAC President, Phil became the Race Director of the Ontario Region of CASC, a member of the CASC National Race Committee, and Chair of the National Appeal Board. He was also chief instructor and organizer of the CASC Racing Driver's School and in his spare time raced his Cooper and a Mallock 20B Sports Racer which he shared with "Ollie" Clubine.

On the business side he assisted Jones Racing Limited in their communications sponsorship and marketing programs to promote John Jones. John won the 1988 CART Rookie -of -the Year Championship and competed in the FIA F-3000 Championship. Lamont Advertising negotiated the contract between CASC and General Motors to set up the GM Challenge Series. Subsequently they were retained by both GM and Players to produce advertising and communications for the series. Phil also worked in the series as a steward and tech inspector.

In 1987, the restoration of the Lotus 18 we are all so familiar with was completed with its first outing at the VARAC Festival that year. Running at Mosport, Shannonville, Grattan, Watkins Glen and Lime Rock the car quickly became a very familiar sight and a consistent front-runner. Phil had started importing small quantities of tires on a nonprofit basis for VARAC members and in 1980 was appointed the Canadian distributor for Dunlop (UK) Vintage Racing Tires. With the tire business expanding, in 1990, Vintage Tyres Limited was incorporated and appointed the distributor of Dunlop vintage and contemporary race tires and tubes in North America. They expanded to include wheels, and classic and restoration tires for road cars. They have continued to build market share being the sole suppliers to the Grand Am GT and SR classes for three years 2002-2004. With the time pressures of the tire business and still competing Phil closed Lamont Communications in 1998.

Back on the racing side, the restoration of a Caldwell D9 was completed which Phil ran in CASC Regional races. He said it was a nice car, but not as much fun as the Lotus so he sold it. He still has the original Cooper-Norton, which he hopes to run this year, and is in the process of restoring a Cooper Mk9. He has won Monoposto Racing's Class B, early rear-engine Formula Junior five or six times and is a very strong competitor every time out.

Phil also has a strong sense of community, serving as Secretary Treasurer of the Yacht Club, Warden of his Church and chairs the Parish's Building Committee. Phil says one of the joys of racing is meeting the many talented people. He was quick to point out the level of activity he has enjoyed would not be possible without the strong support of his family especially his youngest daughter Diana who worked with Phil in Lamont Communications and now in Vintage Tyres Limited. The next time you are at the track, stop and say high to Phil, he is a great guy, and one of the true builders of our sport.



The 1960 Lotus 18 Formula Junior with Phil behind the wheel.

photo: Bob Harrington

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and Bob Harrington, Writer/Photographer