



Sept. 1, 1963, Jim Adams takes the victory in F-Production at Santa Barbara, in his MGA that Doane Spencer helped to prepare. L to R: Marilyn Fox, Jim Adams in MGA and Del Owens.



FLAWLESS



Many racing enthusiasts have probably heard of Jim Adams or Doane Spencer. Some may think of Jim Adams as the driver of a very successful Sunbeam Tiger or perhaps one of many IMSA GTP cars, and Doane Spencer as the builder of one of the most iconic '32 Ford roadsters in hot rod history. What many don't know, is how Adams and Spencer were stitched together for more than 20 years of racing—Adams manning the wheel of some of the most ingenious and well-turned out Doane Spencer-built race cars of the time. Though both were connected early in their efforts to go road racing, getting to that point was quite different for each.

Doane Spencer was born in 1923, and brought up in Southern California. He graduated from North Hollywood High in 1941, despite the fact that he was more enamored with hot rods than school. After high school, Spencer joined the Navy, and his 5'10" 128lb. stature landed him the role of tail-gunner over the South Pacific in World War II. Working on airplanes while in the Navy certainly helped, but the reality was that Spencer was a self-taught mechanical genius and metal master. His first hot rod, his '32 Ford roadster, is regarded by many to be the most iconic of those ever built. The fact that he built this car at the age of 26 speaks to his innate brilliance. Though the Spencer Deuce is now well-known in its present restored state, like all of his masterpieces, it was in a constant state of evolution during his time with it.

Spencer's capabilities and interests resulted in him being one of the first employees at Alex Xydias' So-Cal Speed

PHOTO: HAROLD TREICHLER RIVERSIDE INTL. AUTO MUSEUM

& FAST

**HOT RODDER DOANE
SPENCER TEAMED UP
WITH SPORTS CAR
RACER JIM ADAMS FOR
A WINNING COMBO.
BY CHAD RAYNAL**

Shop. While at So-Cal, Spencer played with some “sports cars,” even stuffing a flathead Ford (V8-60) into an MG, or as he liked to call them, a “You’re a Peon” car. Several articles and even more recent TV show coverage follows Spencer’s hot rod prowess, but we’re sticking to sports cars.

Following So-Cal Speed Shop, Spencer worked at Jim Parkinson’s Burbank Sports Cars. Another employee, Chic Vandagriff, noted his work ethic and mechanical genius. Vandagriff said that Spencer was the only guy in the shop who could diagnose any problem, rebuild it better, and keep the cars and his work area clean. In 1960, when Vandagriff left Burbank Sports Cars to start Hollywood Sport Cars (HSC), he made sure that Spencer came with him. From 1961-63, West Coast small-bore production competition was dominated by an HSC Austin-Healey and MGB driven by Ronnie Bucknum. In 1962, Spencer was even awarded “Mechanic of the Year” by the SCCA. Spencer also built a Sunbeam Alpine that Jerry Titus drove with success during this period. Again, these early successes



PHOTO HAROLD TREICHLER RIVERSIDE INTL. AUTO MUSEUM

▲ Jim Adams in the HSC MGB. Note the changes HSC and Spencer made to the car for 1964 (Silverstone mag wheels, Spencer handmade cockpit tonneau and lower front valance brake ducts).

of Spencer and HSC are worthy of more discussion, but we need to stay on point.

Jim Adams was born in Los Angeles, California, in 1937. His first real desire for road racing occurred while working in the mountains of Southern California as a lifeguard. While driving to and from work, Adams would street race an XK120 Jaguar on the roads between San Bernardino and Crestline. Adams did some local hillclimbs in

an Austin-Healey, sponsored by a local gas station owner, and won. Adams then bought an MGA and started road racing in local Cal-Club events. It wasn’t long before Adams figured out that Doane Spencer was the most knowledgeable person around when it came to making a British sports car perform. Adams would go to HSC just to talk to Spencer and glean more information on how to build or equip his MGA for success.

Celebrating their Santa Barbara win, Vince Hotchkiss, Ronnie Bucknum (w/flag), Doane Spencer, Jim Adams, unidentified, Marilyn Fox and Del Owens (w/flag)

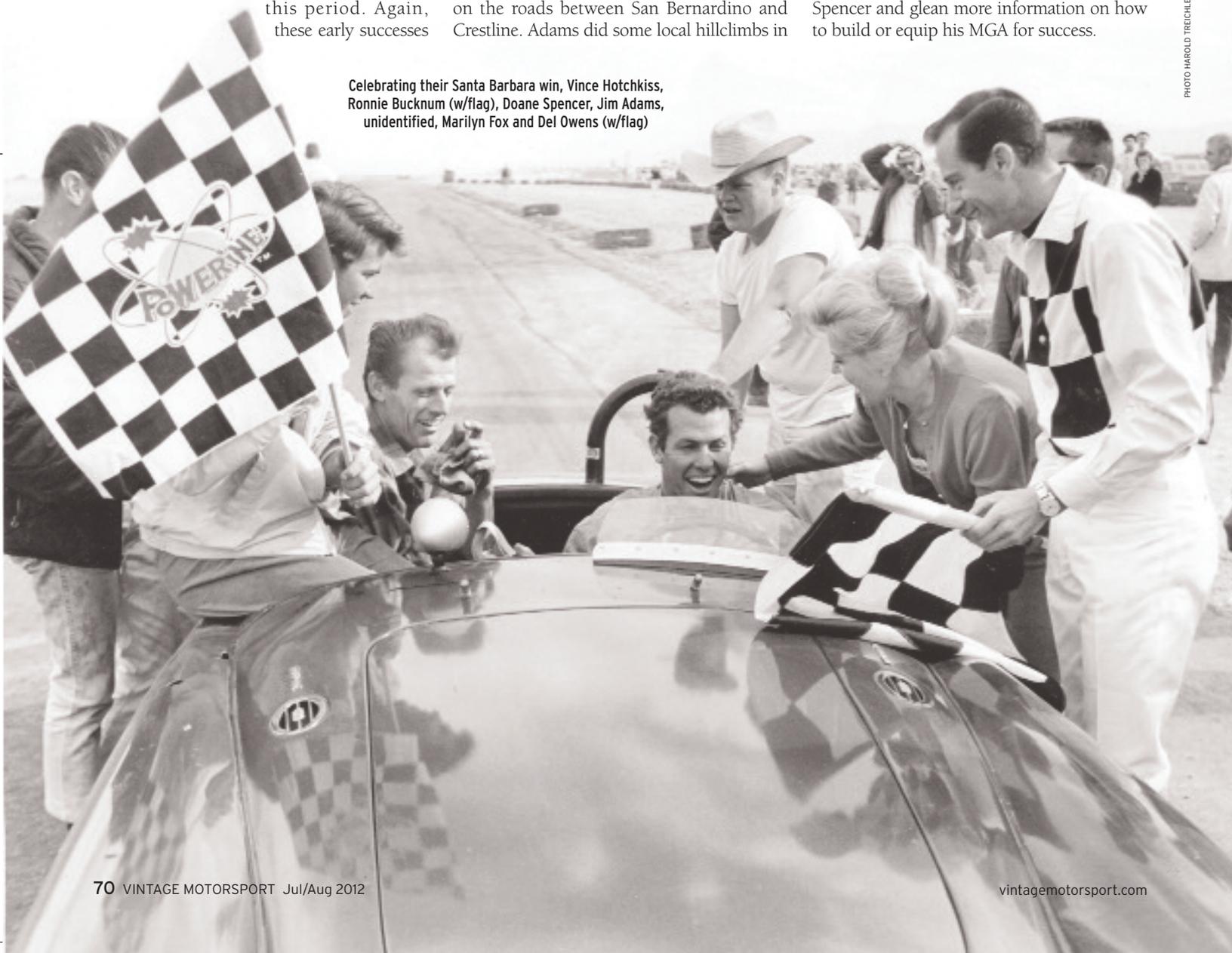


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Coming Together

As Adams remembers it, Ronnie Bucknum, the driver for Hollywood Sport Cars, hurt his shoulder in a surfing accident and couldn't race one weekend. Adams had caught the eye of Spencer while racing his quick MGA, and Spencer recommended Adams get the HSC MGB seat one weekend. Adams got the ride, and remembers turning a faster time than Bucknum had in the same car, on the same course.



May '65, Jim Adams in the HSC Sunbeam Tiger.

Bucknum was still HSC's main driver after this performance by Adams, but it set the stage for when Bucknum left to pursue an opportunity with Honda in Formula 1. Indeed, Adams got the job when Bucknum left. Adams believes he got the nod over several others because Spencer convinced Vandagriff of his natural abilities and potential. This initial trust in Adams' abilities transitioned into a life-long mutual respect that produced an excellent team of mechanic and driver. If Adams thought something was wrong, Spencer didn't question it; he just set out to correct it.

Adams continued to have a great deal of success in the MGB that Bucknum had originally driven, and Doane Spencer added even more tweaks to the MGB during 1964. Per Cris Vandagriff, Bucknum noticed some of these changes, and he gave Spencer a hard time for not doing this during his time with the car. Though surely not mentioned to Bucknum, many believe and know that Spencer has a stronger bond and relationship

with Jim Adams. The feeling was mutual. Adams is quick to tell you that he'd have "probably drove a roller skate, if Doane had built it for (me)."

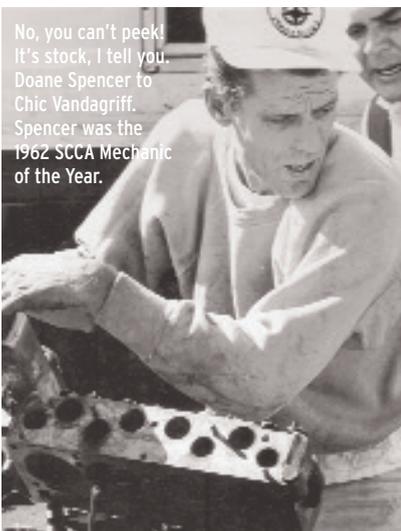
In November of 1964, the HSC MGB was invited to the inaugural American Road Race of Champions (ARRC) at Riverside. Adams showed very well, and finished second to Bob Tullius' TR4 in the ultra-competitive D-Production class.

Mold That Tiger

After limited success with Lew Spencer in a Shelby-prepared Tiger in 1964, Ian Garrad, West Coast manager of the Rootes Group/Sunbeam, went looking elsewhere. Garrad believed that Duane Spencer and HSC would build the most capable Sunbeam Tiger, and that Adams showed the driving talent needed to beat the Shelby Mustangs and Corvettes that were dominating SCCA B-Production.

Though a book could be written on the modifications that Spencer put into this car,

No, you can't peek! It's stock, I tell you. Doane Spencer to Chic Vandagriff. Spencer was the 1962 SCCA Mechanic of the Year.



I'll note just one ... the engine. With the Tiger, Spencer was provided the opportunity to couple his hot rod expertise in a Ford-powered road racer. The SCCA homologation for the Tiger forced Spencer to keep the engine at 260cid, but his custom head porting, the ultra-high compression and handmade exhaust system made it a match for the rest of the larger displacement competition.

A standard head gasket wouldn't hold up

to the 14-to-1 compression Spencer wanted to use, so he used an old hot rod trick. He used a 289 block, then sleeved it down to a 260 bore with a cylinder liner, and left the liner proud of the deck. He then machined a groove around the cylinder, so that he could install a copper generator wire to act as an O-ring to seal the combustion chamber. Head gaskets and power were never a problem. The brakes however, were marginal.

With nine wins on the season—even some overall wins against A-Production Shelby Cobras—they more than qualified Adams and the Tiger for the 1965 American Road Race of Champions (ARRC) at Daytona, Florida.

Legs and Loyalty

To better illustrate the relationship between the pairing, we need to step back months before the ARRC. Adams broke his leg in a dirt-bike accident. Spencer was so loyal to Adams that he refused Rootes' desire to have

May, 1965, Santa Barbara. Adams debuts the HSC Sunbeam Tiger.

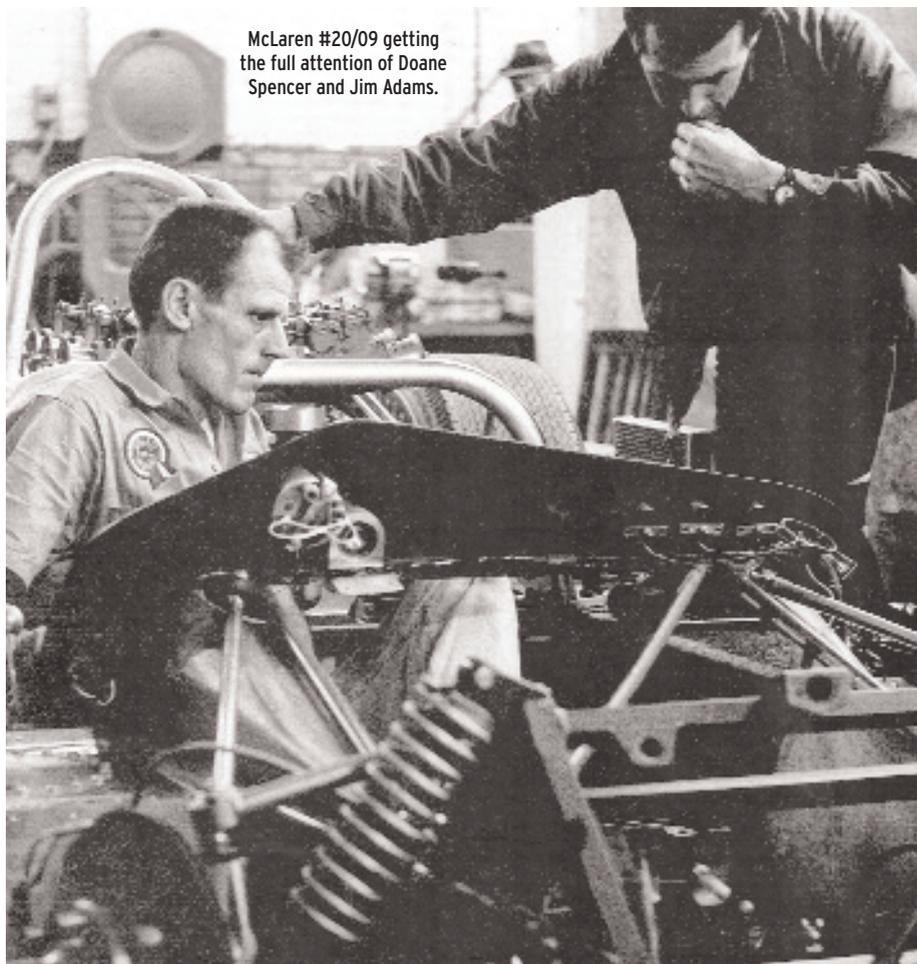


Ken Miles run the Tiger in additional events while Adam's leg healed. As Cris Vandagriff notes, this loyalty that these racers had for each other, and to Hollywood Sport Cars, probably hampered their individual opportunities for glory. The collective character and feelings for their relationship was obviously larger and more important than personal egos.

Once at the 1965 ARRC, the duo thought they had something for the Shelby GT-350s, and though recently off crutches, Adams qualified the Tiger on the second row. Unfortunately, a back-marker Corvette (Dave Heinz) ended all the hopes on the first lap of the race when the Corvette skidded out of control and slammed into Adams. Though he made it back to the pits for Spencer to inspect, the impact from the Corvette had sheered the rear leaf spring shackles. Adams took it back out on track, but soon stopped once the car proved impossible to handle. The collective hopes of winning the national B-Production title for themselves, HSC and Rootes/Sunbeam were over.

Shelby American also hired Adams as a driver for their Cobra Daytona Coupe in 1965 (and again later for their Trans-Am Mustangs). Shelby's own Ken Miles had provided the recommendation. The first Shelby American drive had Adams paired up with Lew Spencer, who was then relieved by Phil Hill in a Daytona Coupe at Sebring, 1965 (chassis# CSX 2602).

There were four Daytona Coupes being run by Shelby American at this event. Adams was one of eight drivers. Though this was his first race in a Daytona Coupe, he out-qualified all of his Shelby teammates, and was the fastest car in the GT class.



McLaren #20/09 getting the full attention of Doane Spencer and Jim Adams.

PHOTO DOANE SPENCER/RAQUEPO COLLECTION

And while we're mentioning Phil Hill, Adams tells of him asking how it figured that a 260-powered Sunbeam Tiger had been such a near match for Phil's 427 Cobra at Candlestick Park in 1965. Adams, being as humble a driver as I've ever met, determined their competitiveness was more a matter of

the tight confines of Candlestick suiting the Tiger than it was Spencer's genius or Adams' ability behind the wheel of the Tiger.

Though the HSC Healey, MGB and Tiger were thoroughly "trick," with numerous re-engineered bits by Spencer, the rules of the various production classes kept the cars in

McLaren #20/09 with all "first round" Spencer modifications at Willow Springs in 1965, with Jim Adams aboard.

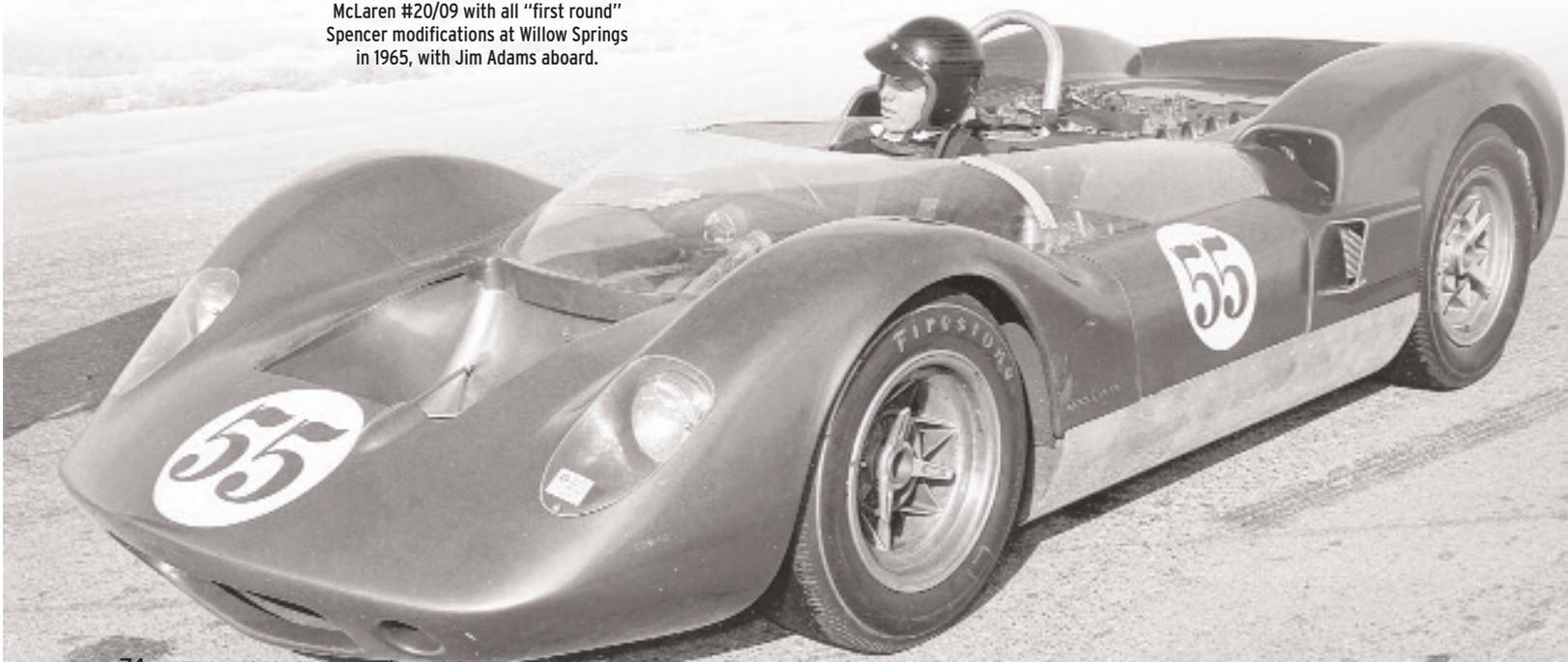


PHOTO CRIS VANDAGRIFF COLLECTION

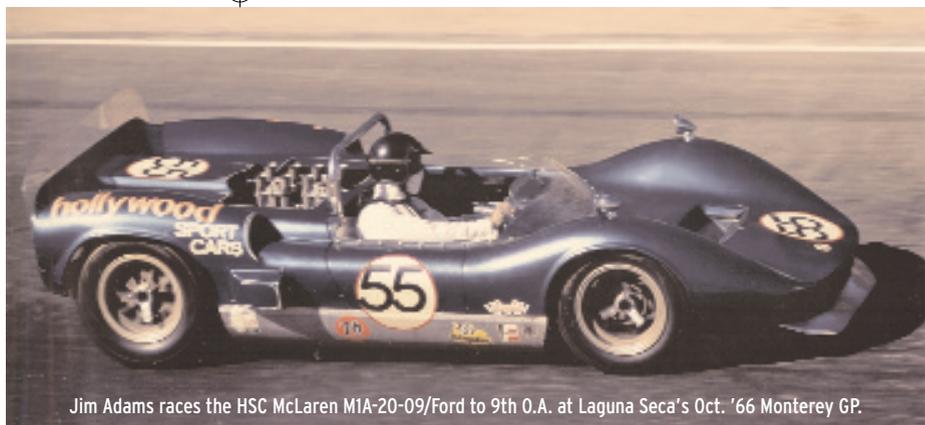
check. The next Hollywood Sport Cars-funded Doane Spencer creation would not be bound by as many rules. See, Chic Vandagriff was an integral part of the formation and guiding thoughts on the Can-Am series, and he wanted one of his dealership's cars to be a part of the series. Vandagriff ordered his McLaren from Carl Haas and he received the ninth McLaren-Elva MkI made (chassis# 20/09).

Though the McLaren-Elva MkI was already the most advanced HSC race car to date, it didn't stop Spencer from immediately modifying the car. Some of the changes were to revise the MkI front bodywork to lower the leading edge profile, most likely in an attempt to provide more downforce ... or just achieve less lift. He also changed the design of the driver roll hoop, added his own cross-ram Weber-equipped 289 Ford, installed a Schroeder rack and pinion and fitted pin-drive knock-off magnesium wheels.

Perhaps the modification in this first-round effort that provides the most insight into Spencer's genius was what he did to the chassis. He skinned the entire belly of the car and lower sills/rockers/fuel cells in aluminum. The "skinning" was to strengthen a chassis that was said to be a bit too flexible. Many say that Spencer performed this mod to the HSC McLaren before the "team cars."

However, there was already a problem. Within two months of receipt (early August '65), the revised and updated McLaren-Elva MkII's were already racing. Though Chic was furious about the whole situation, and even threatened a return of the car to Haas, they kept the chassis. Spencer began modifying the McLaren, again. So much time, effort and resources went into this that even publications like *Competition Press & Autoweek* began to refer to the car as the "Million Dollar McLaren." This second round of work progressed up and until the Can-Am debut event at St. Jovite, Canada, in September, 1966.

Though the HSC McLaren didn't garner



Jim Adams races the HSC McLaren M1A-20-09/Ford to 9th O.A. at Laguna Seca's Oct. '66 Monterey GP.

PHOTO BOB HORTON/ONE



Jim Adams at Willow Springs with the Ferrari 612 P.

PHOTO DOANA SPENCER-RAQUEPO COLLECTION

podiums in the 1966 Can-Am events, it did collect a respectable 9th-place finish at the Laguna Seca round (Monterey Grand Prix, October '66). The car had good pace, but drivability and overall reliability were in question with the maxed-out, yet still undersized, small-block Ford engine.

Over the winter of 1966, the rear bodywork on McLaren 20/09 got wider to house the ever-growing Firestone rear rubber. The car also received Chevy power for the first time in 1967. According to Chic Vandagriff, the engine was purchased from Al Bartz, without Spencer's involvement. Vandagriff knew that Spencer, a die-hard Ford man, wouldn't want to switch to Chevy power. According to Adams, the new Chevy engine transformed the car. Wins in 1967 at both Willow Springs and Santa Barbara would seem to back up his feelings.

The 1967 Can-Am and USRRRC events still surfaced some problems, but the continual additions by Spencer seemed to provide additional pace. One effort to pick up the pace at the Kent USRRRC race, as told by Chic Vandagriff, also provides a bit of insight into Adams' sense of humor.

"There was a 'bypass' on a part of the track no one could see, and Jim used it. All of a sudden Jim was a couple of seconds up on the entire field. Everyone thought he did the time! Of course he didn't come clean for a really long while. It was a great prank—made dad [Chic] and Doane proud!"

A Respite and Then ... More Racing

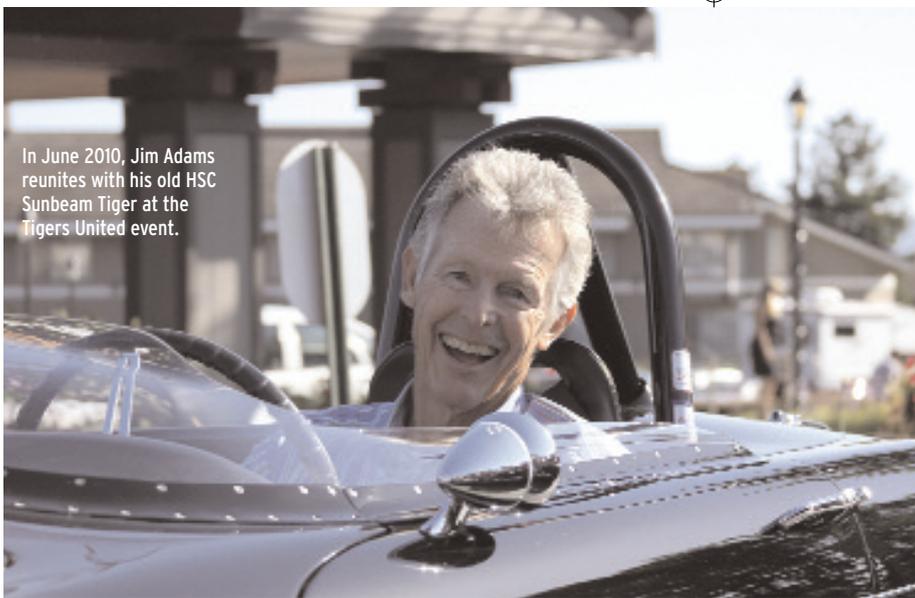
After the 1967 season, Adams took a two-year hiatus from racing.

While apart in 1968, HSC and Spencer built an M6B McLaren that Jerry Titus drove.

PHOTO AUTOSPORTS.IT/COM



Sebring 12 Hours, 1981. Jim Adams and Chris Cord lasted 94 laps after starting in 13th position in the DeKon Monza.



In June 2010, Jim Adams reunites with his old HSC Sunbeam Tiger at the Tigers United event.

PHOTO CHRIS COFFEL

Canadian Terry Godsall, already a partner of Titus in other racing endeavors, lent some financial assistance to the venture. In 1969, Ferrari loaned a 612 to Chris Amon for Chic Vandagriff to run in Can-Am. Spencer wrenched (along with Roger Bailey) and Amon drove.

For 1970, a 512S Ferrari (chassis #1040) brought Spencer and Adams back together. The car was fielded by Earle-Cord Racing/Professional Racing Ltd. (Steve Earle and Chris Cord, owner). Spencer was the mechanic and Cris Vandagriff was there as his assistant and apprentice.

Cris Vandagriff remembers the 1970 Mid-Ohio Can-Am race with this car. "Pedro Rodriguez drove a super trick NART 512 at the same race. Our car was basically stock. Pedro and Jim set the same lap time, and were 5th and 6th on the grid—with 5.0-liter engines. Jim got food poisoning and didn't tell anyone. He got so sick he passed out, came into the pits—unconscious! We had to grab the car as it rolled by to stop it. We pulled Jim out, I stayed with him until the ambulance arrived. He had a core temp of 105. Steve Earle grabbed Bondurant to put in the car. My dad (Chic Vandagriff) kept begging him not to, but he did anyway. After 20 laps Bondurant was still much slower than Jim!"

After the Mid-Ohio Can-Am, this 512 (#1040) was sold to Roger Penske and Kirk White. The Penske team re-bodied and modified the car into their own take of a 512M.

The next Can-Am entry, for later races in 1970 and 1971 was the Ferrari 612P (chassis #0866). This was the same chassis that Chic and Spencer helped Chris Amon run in 1969. Now it was owned by a partnership including Steve Earle, Chris Cord and Chic Vandagriff.

As with nearly every car before, Spencer did a tremendous amount of modification to the chassis and bodywork of the 612P because nearly the whole back half of the

original chassis was cut off and placed in the weeds behind his shop.

Much of the bodywork didn't fare much better. This may seem sacrilegious to the tifosi, but Spencer didn't place Ferrari on a pedestal. As a matter of fact, many will tell you that one of Spencer's most memorable lines is that "a Ferrari should be delivered from the factory with the fender covers in place."



"Quarter Million Dollar Unpleasantness" article in June 1980 On Track showing Chris Cord Monza and 935 wreck at Laguna Seca.

Spencer made the back half of the chassis from scratch, utilizing more than just small round tubing, and the engine became a stressed member. Afterwards Amon said that this 612P handled as good as or better than a then-current "team" McLaren. Given these thoughts of Amon, one might wonder if some of Spencer's redesign work with the 612P was because the Ferrari factory construction standards just weren't up to his.

And beyond all of Spencer's fabrication talents, he was also a fabulous mechanic and engine builder. Turns out he was one of the few, if not only, private parties that was

trusted by the Ferrari factory to rebuild these engines on his terms and premises.

A fourth at Donnybrooke and a couple of 8th-place finishes at Mosport and Laguna Seca were very respectable results for the 612P given the 1970 and '71 Can-Am opposition.

The Dekon Monzas

After the 612P, Adams stepped away from professional road racing for a bit. Spencer dabbled in many efforts over the next few years, but the duo didn't come back together in earnest until 1977. One of their old Ferrari Can-Am owners, Chris Cord, brought them back together with a Chevy Monza. Cord had acquired a DeKon Monza (chassis 1011), and went gradually into both Trans-Am and IMSA competition. By 1979, when Cord began to compete at most of the scheduled IMSA events, Spencer had executed some very large changes in the Monza. Most visibly, he worked with Wayne Hartman to transform the factory bodywork. Nearly every dzus-on panel was more purposeful, elaborate and elegant, while managing to be lighter weight and better fitting than the standard DeKon pieces. Spencer also altered the driving position so the driver's legs weren't a couple inches askew of the steering wheel, like the as-delivered DeKons.

Large Girling Porsche-style calipers, over the Lockheed-supplied units, were employed. Spencer also laid the radiator more towards horizontal to allow the exiting hot air to be expelled out of a beautifully shaped duct in the hood.

Outside the function, each interior panel was more shapely, and like the bodywork, better-fitting than the "as delivered" items. Spencer's fabrication work was so impeccable, that nothing needed paint to cover a flaw in finish or construction. All the tinwork was black anodized once completed. This beautiful work was done to a car Spencer wished he could re-skin with Pinto bodywork ... and run a Ford engine. We're really talking about a Ford guy at heart.

In 1979, at the height of Porsche's dominance with the twin-turbo 935s, Adams held the lead at the IMSA Times Grand Prix of Endurance at Riverside. While under caution, and again, in the lead, a Porsche punted Adams' Monza off course. This excursion damaged the front suspension, and the car was forced to retire.

Another interesting story Adams remembers from his time with the Monzas took place in May of 1980, at the Laguna Seca IMSA event. By this time Spencer had re-crafted both DeKon 1011 and 1012 for Cord.

Adams notes that the incident with his

teammate at Laguna Seca was started by Hurley Haywood diving under Cord just before the corkscrew. Haywood and Cord tangled, and then Adams arrived on the scene and crashed into his teammate and car owner. Haywood's teammate, Bruce Leven, also crashed into the mess. *On Track* magazine reported on the incident in their June 1980 edition, with the segment titled "Quarter Million Dollar Unpleasantness." Even back in 1980, this incident may have cost more than the *On Track* reporter claimed.

In less than two months' time, Spencer had fixed one of the Monzas, and it was racing at the Watkins Glen event in early July.

Toward the end of 1981, the Monzas, even with all their tweaks, were outclassed in IMSA's GTX class. With that, Cord bought a Lola T-600 (chassis #HU5), and the car was quickly showing real form. Though the car had some very nice second-place finishes in its two-year run, it really seemed like a win was in order at the '82 Times Grand Prix at Riverside.

Doana, Spencer's daughter, remembers the day's events very well: "Jim had the pole position. As the field came around the last turn of the parade lap, John Paul Jr. who was in something like third position, jumped out of his starting spot and came down the left side, hit Jim and pushed him into the wall ... all well before the start/finish. John Paul Sr. came running down pit lane screaming and threatening all sorts of things. I had been down on the start/finish and captured the incident on film (I still have the photo of the attempted pass before the start) and knew Jr. was at fault. I was so angry at Sr. for accusing Jim and my dad of all sorts of stuff. I was also sick at heart that the car my dad had spent so much time on had just been put out of the race before it even began. The rule was there should only be something like five people on the pit lane side of the wall. I waited my time on paddock side of the pit wall, and then one of the crew stepped over on to my side of the wall. Before anyone could stop me I jumped over the wall and into Sr.'s face. I began backing him up on his heels with every boney finger thump on his chest I could deliver. Sr. was only about 5'4" so I felt as though I towered over him. All very foolish."

Different Paths

After 1983, Adams and Spencer were still linked, but not at the track. Adams continued on with 10 more years of professional racing, driving AAR Toyota Celicas in IMSA GTU and GTO, then a bunch of GTP cars for various teams. Some of the IMSA GTP cars include Porsche 962s, a Jaguar XJR-5 (including Le Mans in '85), a

March 83G and a Spice.

Spencer kept building and restoring cars out of Doane Spencer Racing in North Hollywood, California. After a heart attack in August of 1984 and the loss of his home due to a fire two weeks later, he moved his home and business north up the coast to Cayucos, California. Doctors' orders after the scare were to get out of professional racing. Though he followed the letter of the law, he didn't remove himself too far, even helping Adams work through problems on a Porsche 962 that he'd never even touched a wrench to. Spencer was commissioned by many race car enthusiasts and collectors to restore many

important race cars, even a Ford GT40.

Spencer passed away in 1995 a week after winning the "People's Choice Award" at a local car show in Atascadero, California, with his 1955 Ford Thunderbird.

Jim Adams is still looking sharp, and working as a financial advisor in Southern California. Though his humble nature keeps him from attending too many retrospectives, with persistence, Adams has been persuaded to a special event here and there. The Sunbeam Tiger Owners Association (STOA) have been lucky enough to have him at more than one of their large "Tigers United" gatherings. 

