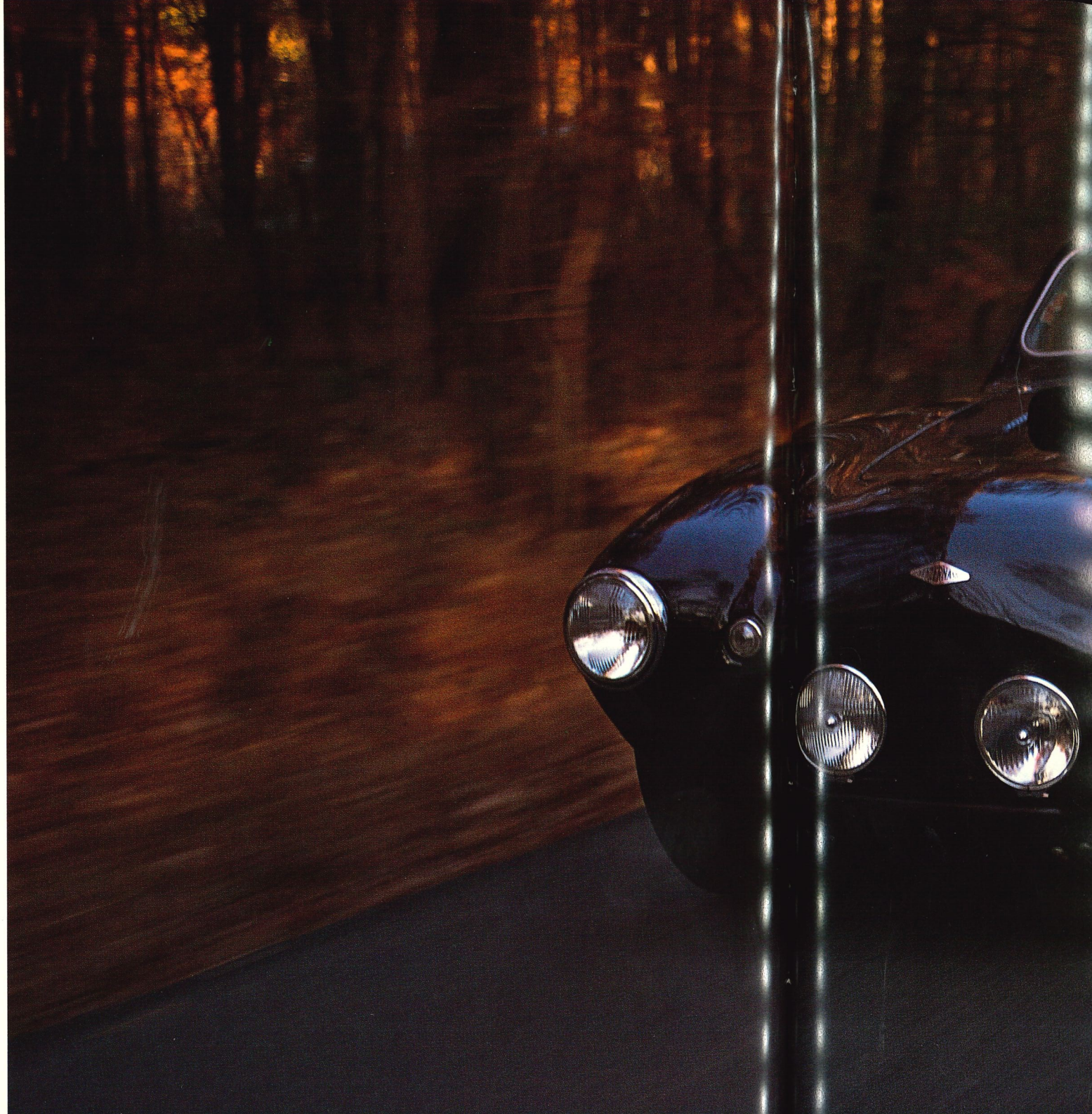

THE
CLOSED LINK
IN THE
FRAZER
NASH
CHAIN

1954 LE MANS COUPÉ

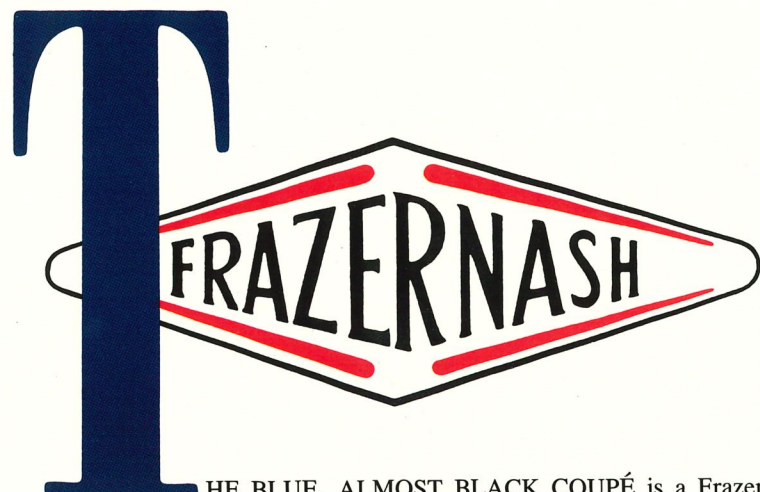
BY JONATHAN A. STEIN

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUY MANGIAMELE





It's dark and low and a little mean looking. And it's LOUD: it doesn't burble or even rumble—it BARKS, sounding just like the small, highly-tuned British six that lurks beneath the bescooped aluminum hood.



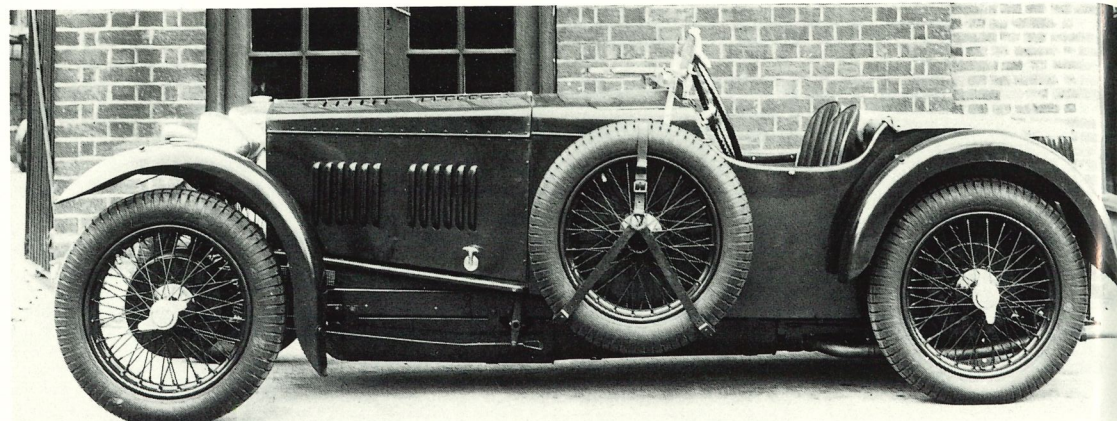
THE BLUE, ALMOST BLACK COUPÉ is a Frazer Nash, and it doesn't have chains either. When AFN Limited resumed automobile assembly after World War II, its products weren't descended from the Anzani- and Meadows-engined chain-driven sports cars of the Twenties and Thirties, but instead from the successful prewar BMW 328 sports cars.

In the mid-Thirties, H.J. Aldington, managing director of AFN Ltd. had the savvy to realize that the hair-shirt, chain-driven 'Nashes had had their day. To supplement and later replace the Frazer Nash-built cars, his firm picked up the Great Britain distribution rights for the BMW, which it marketed as Frazer Nash-BMW.

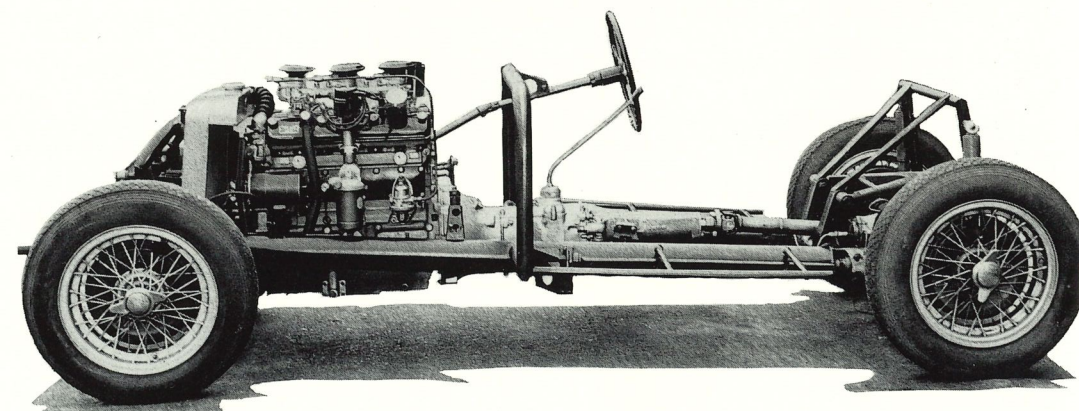
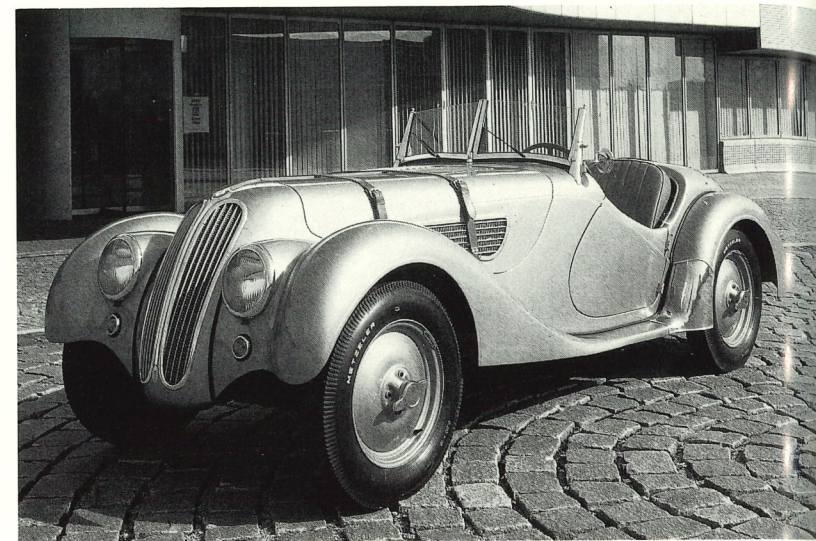
After World War II, the BMW plants in Germany were badly damaged. What hadn't been destroyed was carted off by the victors. However, because the BMW/Frazer Nash ties had been so strong prior to the war, whenever possible the choice bits, cars, plans, and equipment were channeled to BMW's old friends at the AFN Ltd. Falcon Works in Isleworth.

Meanwhile, hoping to enter the auto industry, the Bristol Aeroplane Company had purchased a controlling interest in AFN Ltd. Jointly, the two firms planned a line of Frazer Nash-Bristol cars powered by a Bristol version of the prewar BMW two-liter six-cylinder engine. Much of the other technology was also borrowed from the German firm. Subsequently, it was decided that the touring models would be marketed as Bristols and the sports cars as Frazer Nashes. But before production commenced, tensions between the two firms reached such levels that they parted company and AFN Ltd. regained its independence: As part of the separation agreement, though, Bristol would supply AFN Ltd. with engines and four-speed transmissions.

The first post-war Frazer Nash was developed by Fritz Fielder, who had designed the original BMW 328. The new sports car used a tubular frame and front suspension derived from the BMW 328 and rear suspension from the BMW 326, although it used torsion bars for springing. The new chassis, complete with engine, transmission, and



The traditional chain-driven Frazer Nashes (like this 1931 Boulogne II model above) were superseded by a Frazer Nash-badged version of the successful BMW 328 sports car (right). After the war, former BMW engineer Fritz Fielder designed the chassis (below) for a new series of Frazer Nashes to be powered by the BMW-derived Bristol two-liter engine.



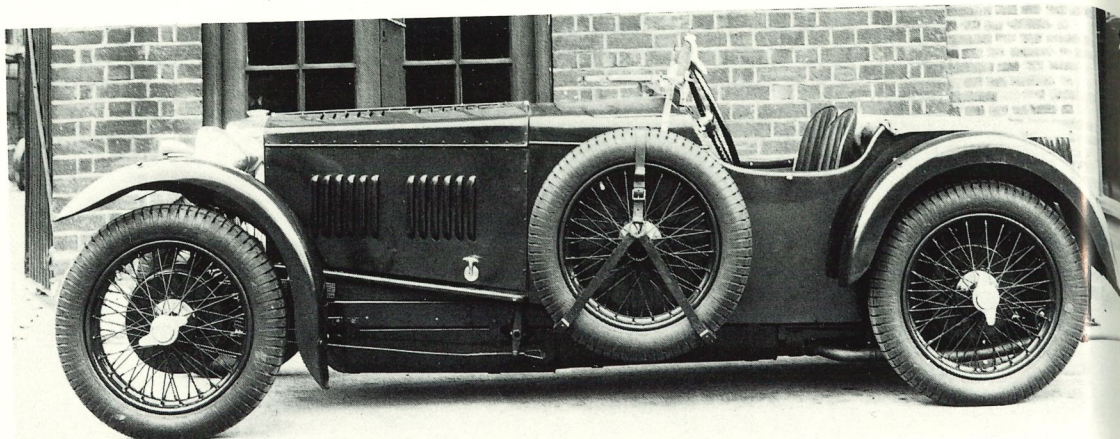
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Frazer Nash cars and 20th in 1950, cycle-fendered Le M roadster had compe for 1953, regulation windshield sizes. T vantage in entering same basic 200-serie was essentially a n permanently-fixed t

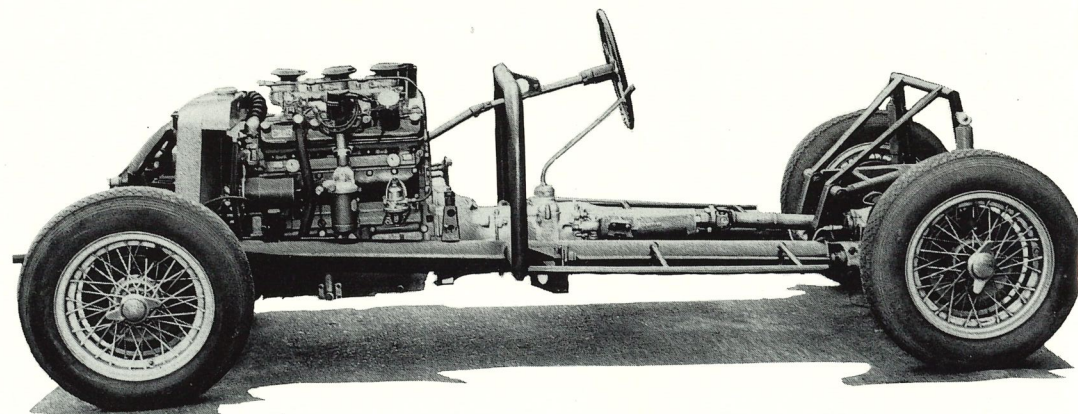
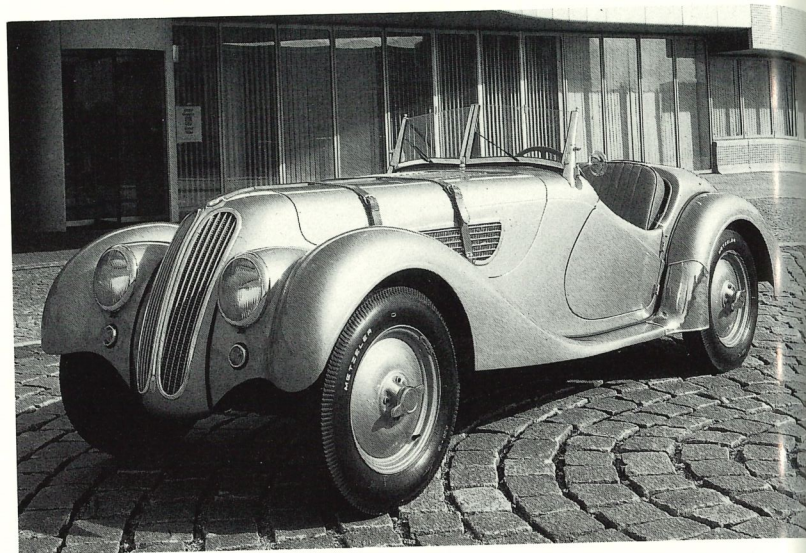
The prototype cou in April 1953 and w YMK5, and fitted w gallon reserve, Alf Wharton debuted the trouble. Bristol rec Crook, owner of B recalls that YMK5 v corresponds to the o Driven in the race b won the 2-liter class who shared the same at the 12 hours of R

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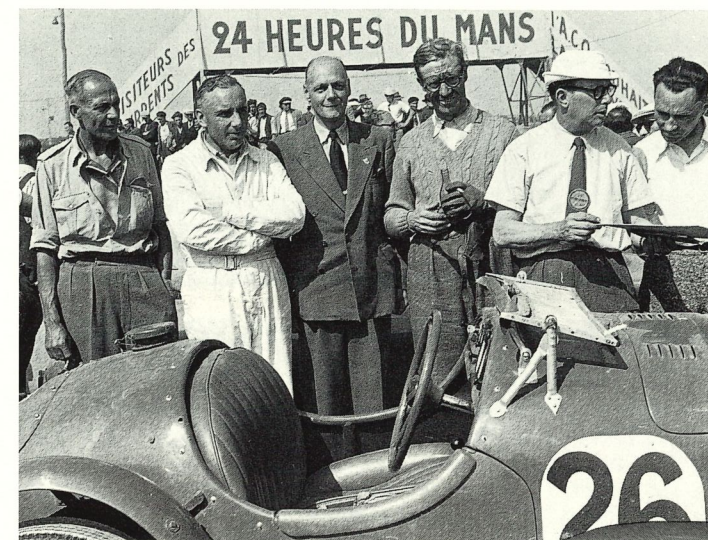
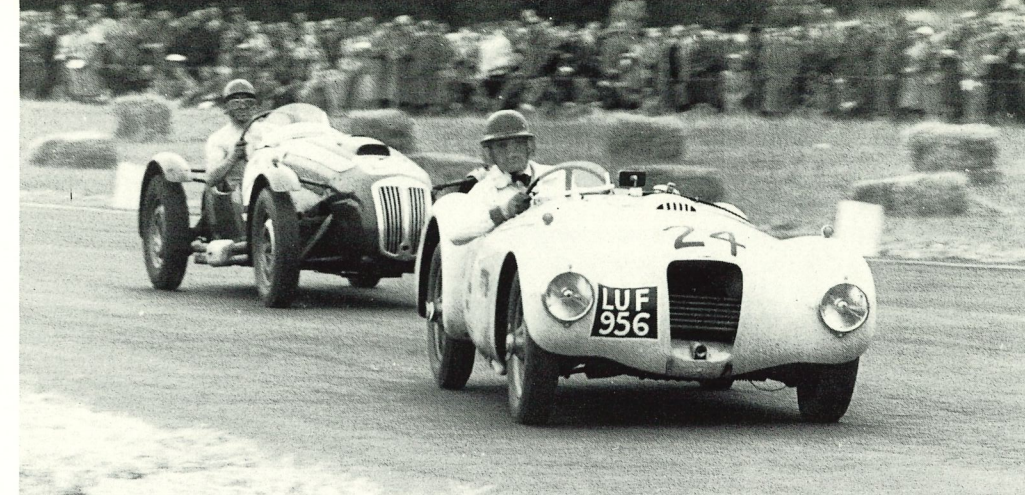
fuel tank weighed just 1220 pounds. It could be ordered with a stark cycle-fendered body or with an all-enveloping streamlined shell. It was one of the doorless, cycle-fendered "High Speed" models that "Aldy" Aldington shared with its owner Norman Culpan to finish third overall in the first post-war 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1949. After its success, the model was renamed the "Le Mans Replica." Following a sixth-place in the Mille Miglia and wins in the 1951 Targa Florio and at Sebring in 1952, the Frazer Nash lineup was completed by additional "namesake" models.

Frazer Nash cars continued to compete at Le Mans, finishing ninth and 20th in 1950, 14th and 19th in 1951, and 10th in 1952. Both the cycle-fendered Le Mans Replica and the envelope-bodied Mille Miglia roadster had competed repeatedly in the famous 24-hour contest. But for 1953, regulations changed, outlawing cycle fenders and restricting windshield sizes. These new rules prompted "Aldy" to see an advantage in entering a fixed-head-coupé in the 24-hour race. Using the same basic 200-series chassis as the contemporary open cars, the coupé was essentially a modification of the envelope-bodied cars with a permanently-fixed top and a wider grille opening.

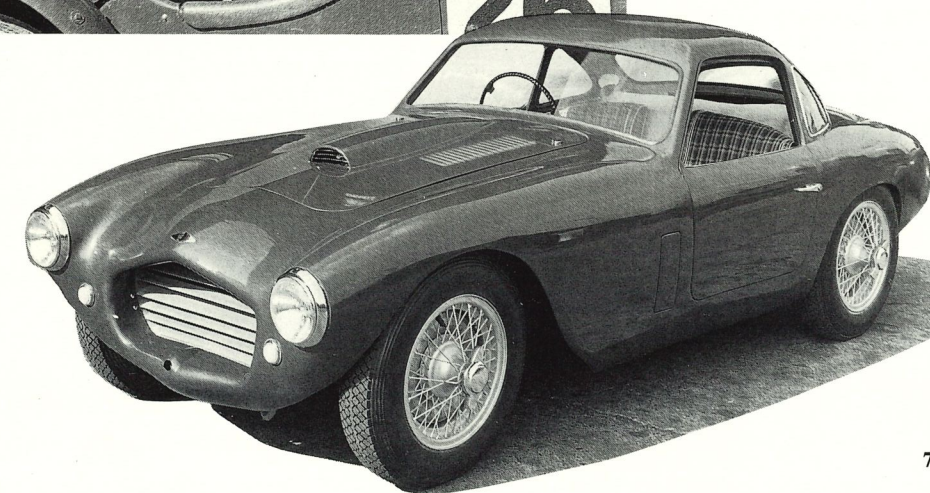
The prototype coupé, built on chassis 421/200/186, was completed in April 1953 and was, in fact, the works car for Le Mans. Registered YMK5, and fitted with wire wheels, a 20-gallon fuel tank with a five gallon reserve, Alfin brake drums, and a Bristol BS1 engine, Ken Wharton debuted the car at Silverstone in May, but retired with engine trouble. Bristol records rated the BS1 engine at 138 bhp, but Tony Crook, owner of Bristol Cars Ltd. and former Frazer Nash driver, recalls that YMK5 was raced at Le Mans with a 148bhp engine, which corresponds to the output of the more highly tuned BS1A Mk III unit. Driven in the race by Wharton and H.A. Mitchell, the dark green car won the 2-liter class and finished 13th overall. According to Crook, who shared the same car with his "then racing partner Roy Salvadori" at the 12 hours of Rheims:

The car had been driven throughout the 24 hour Le Mans race a week before and nothing had been done to it when it was driven from Le Mans to Rheims. . . . Unfortunately the clutch failed, but I remember it pulled 5750 rpm in top gear (over 130 mph with the high axle ratio fitted) down the long straight.

The following year, now privately owned and painted blue, YMK5 returned to Le Mans to be driven to eleventh place by Marcel Becquart and rally driver Maurice Gatsonides. Two other Frazer Nashes also competed in the 1954 24 hours of Le Mans: a Targa Florio-bodied roadster, 421/100/150, which retired after seven hours, and a Le Mans Coupé, 421/200/199, driven by Swedes Sture Nottorp and I. Andersson, which was disqualified for refueling too early. Although the Swedes' coupé was visually similar to the earlier car, it benefited from another year of development, used a Bristol BS4 engine, and incorporated adjustable anchorages for the rear torsion bars. Nottorp drove the same coupé to a steady 53rd place in the 1954 Mille Miglia.



Frazer Nash received a boost when Norman Culpan (at left in overalls) and H.J. Aldington (wearing sweater) drove Culpan's production High Speed model to a third place finish at Le Mans in 1949. In the early Fifties, many top drivers drove Frazer Nashes: Mike Hawthorne's envelope-bodied Mille Miglia (above) leads Ken Wharton's Le Mans Replica at Boreham in August of 1952. Frazer Nash built this coupé (below) for the 1953 Le Mans race.

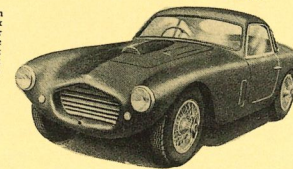




FRAZER-NASH in 1955

Manufacturers of Hand-built Sports Cars for over 25 Years

FRAZER-NASH First English car to finish at Le Mans in 1949—3rd in the 24-Hour Grand Prix d'Endurance; the only English car ever to win the fabulous Targa Florio; the only English car to win the Schering, 12-Hour Grand Prix (1951). Winner of the Solihull and Class winner (in 1951). Winner of the 2-litre distance record and Class Winner (in 1950) at Le Mans in 1953, winner of the Empire Trophy Race in 1951. These and many other successes were gained with privately owned production models. For more than 25 years Frazer-Nash cars have been prominent on track and road circuits, in reliability trials and hill climbs.

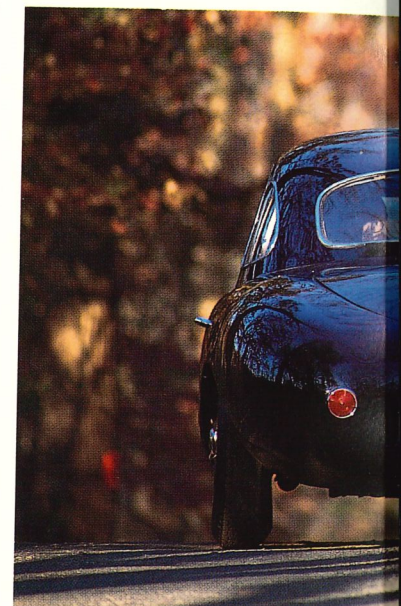
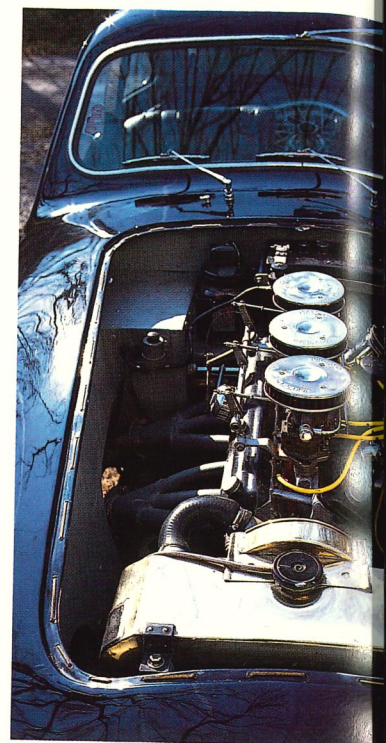


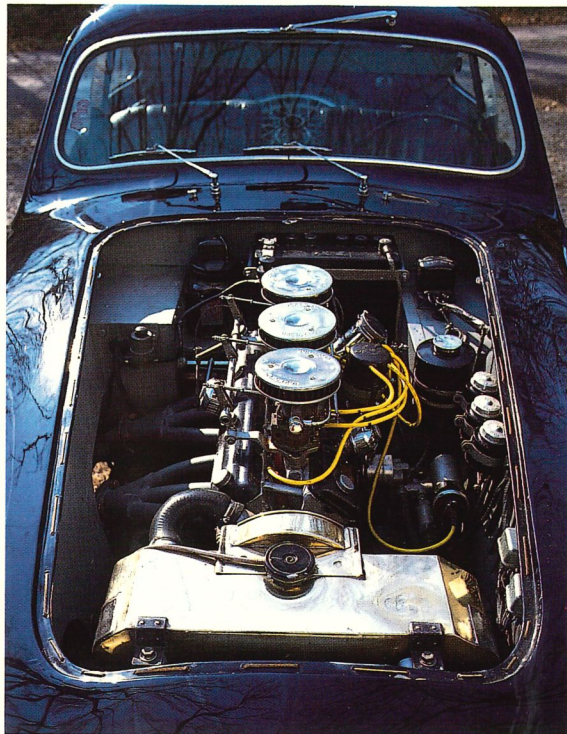
The last time a Le Mans Coupé raced at the Sarthe circuit was also the final entry for the marque. In 1959 John Dashwood and W.E. "Bill" Wilkes drove Dashwood's own coupé, 421/200/203, which was registered XMC1. Completed in April 1955 for Mrs. K. Maurice, this car used the BS4 engine originally from Targa Florio 421/200/198. Bill Wilkes recently recalled that when Dashwood purchased the car second-hand from Frazer Nash it had not been used for competition, although the engine was very worn. Wilkes remembered that "we did all we could to make it raceworthy, including a complete engine rebuild, axle ratio change, increased fuel [capacity], and general overhaul, weight reduction, etc." As noted in Denis Jenkinson's history, *From Chain Drive to Turbocharger*, with help from W.H. Aldington, the pair was allotted a reserve entry for the race. Fortunately, the reserve entry gave way to a place on the grid of 55 starters. Wilkes took the start and drove for the first three hours. He was comfortable with the car and "was confident that we could go a long way." However, within a very short time Dashwood put the car into the sand. The shunt damaged the steering rack and ended their race. According to Wilkes, the car was quite quick and, with the 3.5:1 rear axle, was pulling about 140 mph at 6000 rpm. Despite the coupé's straight-line speed, Wilkes preferred the cycle-fendered Le Mans Replica, which he recalls as a "very special experience."

The Frazer Nash pits tended three cars (above) at the 1954 Le Mans, including the eleventh place Becquart/Gatsonides coupé (above right).

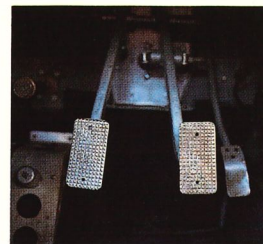
ACCORDING TO WILKES, THE LE MANS COUPE WAS QUITE QUICK, PULLING ABOUT 140 MPH AT 6000 RPM.

Just nine Bristol-powered Frazer Nash Le Mans Coupés were built from April 1953 until October 1956. The most remarkable feature of these cars is that a full one-third of the entire production run raced at Le Mans. Although not reknowned as competition cars, especially when compared to the lighter Le Mans Replicas, Mille Miglias, Targa Florios, and Sebrings, those Coupés that raced did well, especially in the longer races, as the Le Mans records reveal. These results aside, the majority of the closed cars were intended to be good fast tourers, including the fourth car, 421/200/196. In late 1953 or early 1954, American businessman Jo Conn Guild visited the Falcon Works and ordered a new Le Mans Coupé. Although intended as a road car, Guild ordered his Frazer Nash with a 140bhp BS4 engine and wire wheels. But there are several features that make it unique, including the fact that it is the only left-hand-drive Frazer Nash ever built. But more importantly, the massive Mr. Guild (standing well over six feet tall and weighing more than 250 pounds) requested that the roof be raised by an inch to provide extra head room. Completed in May 1954, the coupé was delivered directly to Guild in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In its haste to complete the car, in an unusual oversight, AFN Ltd. neglected to have the car photographed and retained only the most rudimentary records. Those records that do exist note that the body was finished in Ash Grey and that this coupé was originally





When Guild ordered his coupé, he specified the BS4 Bristol engine (above left), a raised roof, wire wheels, and most importantly, left-hand-drive (above), which required the use of an Austin Cambridge pendant pedal assembly (below). However, it's unlikely that Guild requested fenders of differing lengths (right).





fitted with the optional adjustable rear bumpers. From the time 1990 during the course of which Denis Jenkinson had received the drive mystery coupé.”

When he purchased the car, After using it as an occasional car on to his friend, a businessman, sports car racer, wheel formula cars, and in the Sixties, Harrison entered the car for top lady driver Smoke for the car to employee Mac Moore advertised the tire in *Road & Track* in 1966—by

In 1972 Pennsylvania visited to buy a Frazer Nash and found an old copy of *Road & Track* with the number, and found that the car was worse for wear. The roof had partially collapsed, crushing the car, virtually destroying the body in less than years of neglect and the car retained its original engine. The 36-gallon fuel tank mounted on the Nash at what was essentially the car home behind his house. That the 1973 gas crisis had led to the Nash onto the trailer and when the Mercury ran low, he sold

Once home, Ford had the car on the original framework, which wears today—only recently repainted. Originally been painted green, that the roof above the windshield third wiper, as used by the car, a third wiper and reopened the car, hauling the mechanicals, Ford the old car for a life of vintage to maintain oil pressure and The car may not be entirely

Years of street use and vintage the Frazer Nash was an excellent nolly leather is original, although peting required replacement the attention to detail is apparent airvents directing cool air out at the front fenders and you one fender juts out substantially

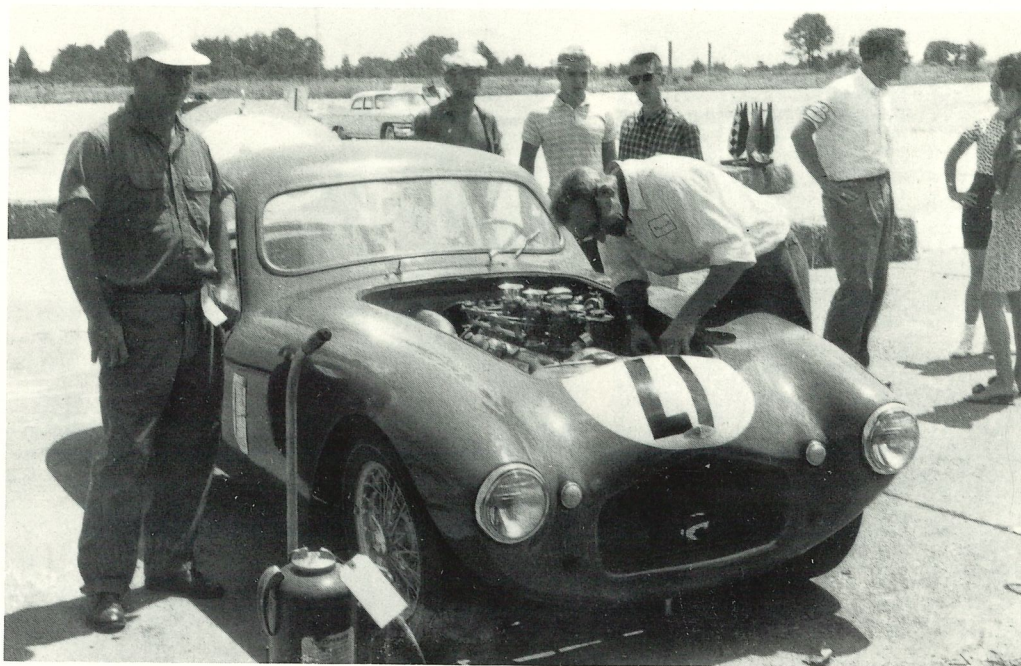
fitted with the optional adjustable radiator grille, heater, and front and rear bumpers. From the time of its delivery to America until late in 1990 during the course of the research for this article, AFN archivist Denis Jenkinson had received virtually no news of “the left-hand-drive mystery coupé.”

When he purchased the Frazer Nash, Guild was already elderly. After using it as an occasional road car for several years, Guild passed the car on to his friend, J. Frank Harrison, who was a local businessman, sports car racer, and race team owner (sports racers, open-wheel formula cars, and Indy cars). Several times during the early Sixties, Harrison entered the car in Southeastern regional SCCA races for top lady driver Smokey Drolet. A few years later, Harrison gave the car to employee Mack Williams. Little is known of the car's intervening years until yet another owner, a young man named Fred Moore advertised the tired, and by then, red coupé in the back of *Road & Track* in 1966—but it didn't sell.

In 1972 Pennsylvania vintage racer and collector Gary Ford decided to buy a Frazer Nash and remembered that he had seen an ad in an old copy of *Road & Track*. He dug out the magazine, called the number, and found that the car was still for sale, although somewhat worse for wear. The roof of the garage in which it had been stored had partially collapsed, crushing portions of the aluminum bodywork, virtually destroying the hood, and badly damaging the roof. Other than years of neglect and the remodeled body, the car was sound and retained its original engine, although it had been modified with a huge 36-gallon fuel tank mounted in the trunk. After buying the Frazer Nash at what was essentially a used car price, Ford decided to tow the car home behind his Mercury Marquis. The only problem was that the 1973 gas crisis had set in by then. So, Ford backed the Frazer Nash onto the trailer and filled up that massive gas tank. Whenever the Mercury ran low, he simply siphoned the fuel from the coupé.

Once home, Ford had the roof straightened, a new bonnet fabricated on the original framework, and the car resprayed in the dark blue it wears today—only recently did factory records reveal that the car had originally been painted grey. When stripped for painting, he noticed that the roof above the windscreen had originally been drilled for a third wiper, as used by the Le Mans entries. It was simple to locate a third wiper and reopen the original mounting hole. When overhauling the mechanicals, Ford made two minor changes to prepare the old car for a life of vintage racing. He added an Accusump system to maintain oil pressure and a dual straight-through exhaust system. The car may not be entirely street legal now, but it sure sounds great.

Years of street use and vintage racing haven't disguised the fact that the Frazer Nash was an expensive hand-built automobile. The Connolly leather is original, although the original black Wilton wool carpeting required replacement. The seats are firm and comfortable and the attention to detail is apparent everywhere, right down to the outside airvents directing cool air onto the occupant's feet. Take a good look at the front fenders and you'll really know that this car is hand-built—one fender juts out substantially further than the other. Although Ford



During the late Fifties and early Sixties, the lhd coupé was often seen at races throughout the Southeast.

THE GARAGE
ROOF HAD
PARTIALLY
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THE OLD
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was aware of this when the car was awaiting refinishing, he decided not to correct it, because there was no sign of any repair damage. The car had simply been built that way.

Although technically one of nine cars built, like all Frazer Nashes since the earliest days of Archie Frazer-Nash, Le Mans Coupé 421/200/196 is one of a kind. By 1954 when Jo Conn Guild bought his car, engine choices were limited to state of tune, but color, wheels, tires, bodywork, and options were all to special order. Virtually any addition or alteration was available. Guild requested left-hand drive and extra roof height, racer Dickie Stoop had de Dion rear suspensions fitted to his Le Mans Mk2 and Sebring, and actor Errol Flynn ordered his Targa Florio with a secret compartment to hold a bottle of Vodka and a brace of glasses.

Fewer than 13 cars and four years later AFN Ltd. ceased manufacturing cars. The key to the firm's success had always been in knowing exactly what the customer wanted and providing it. As demand for Frazer Nash cars diminished, the firm sought a solution from its own past. In 1953, nineteen years after AFN Ltd. had first imported BMWs into the United Kingdom, H.J. Aldington signed an agreement to become Porsche's exclusive importer in the U.K. As production of Frazer Nash cars slowed to a trickle (after building fewer than 90 post-war examples), importation of Porsche 356s and Carreras increased to a torrent. Thirty-eight years later AFN Ltd. still exists as a healthy subsidiary of Porsche, and the cars it built are just a memory—albeit a glorious and often cacophonous memory. ☼

FRAZER NASH LE MANS COUPÉ

Many thanks to Gary Ford, Tony Crook of Bristol Cars, J. Frank Harrison, and Denis Jenkinson of the Frazer Nash Archives. Mr. Jenkinson was particularly willing to help research the history of this car, which was know in AFN Ltd. circles as the "unknown left-hand-drive coupé," because so little was know about it from the time it left the Falcon Works in early 1954.

Black-and-white photography, pg. 76 top, courtesy *The Autocar and Motor*; pp. 76 center and pp. 77, *AQ* Photo and Research Library; pp. 76 bottom and pp 78, courtesy the Frazer Nash Archives; pp. 81, courtesy J. Frank Harrison. Advertisement, pg. 78, courtesy Gary Ford.