

# How the Super-Space GT was born

André Loubser describes some aspects of his life in Stuttgart and London in the 1960s that culminated in his design of the Super-Space GT, an extension boot lid for the Austin 1100.

**D**URING 1964, I found myself in a quandary. Working at the Porsche factory in Stuttgart, I headed up the VIP sales department and in February 1964 delivered a Porsche 904 to the Stirling Moss Automobile Team (SMART).

But the story really started in 1962. After his near-fatal accident at Goodwood, Stirling Moss, a professional racing driver, but with little business experience, felt he needed 'to get to work', having retired from the sport owing to his severe injuries. Coincidentally, my reason for travelling to Germany in 1962 was 'to get into motor sport', not necessarily to build a career at Porsche. However, as a departmental head I had to give this serious thought, as such an opportunity doesn't generally fall into the lap of a 24-year-old son of a middle-class Cape Town school teacher.

Anyway, two years on, in 1964, SMART's three mechanics turned out to be South Africans - brothers Ed and Bud Rossler, and Piet van Asperen (the latter 'from below the line in Rustenburg, Seth Effrica', as he introduced himself to upper-class English ladies fascinated by this bearded wonder). Our connection strengthened during the two-month build of the 904 when the mechanics came to Stuttgart for a technical course, and was certainly a magnet for moving to England. In the end, in May 1964, I decided to quit Porsche and move to London.

Once there, Stirling offered me a job with the Stirling Moss Paint-a-Car System, a company that sold spray painting and light body repair franchises throughout the UK. Stirling was neither a director nor a shareholder but was paid a royalty per branch for endorsing the system. Head office was in Knightsbridge close to Harrods; and, apart from acting as chief cook and bottle washer, setting up branches, handling staff training and solving technical problems,

Stirling also asked me to protect his image. Eventually I also helped to set up branches in Brussels and Paris. My 'company car' was a Bedford (Vauxhall Viva) van resplendent in SMART's light metallic green.

Among my first calls in London was to Hugh Dibley's mews house in Queen's Gate Mews, South Kensington. (Some Crankhandle Club members will recall that Hugh was a guest speaker at the club when he regaled us with stories of his racing career and involvement with the airlines industry.) Hugh had entered his Brabham BT8 sports car under the SMART banner and the car was maintained in his garage by Ed, Bud and Piet.

Now comfortably settled in London, my own thoughts turned to motor racing and I decided to take a Jim Russell course at Snetterton, Norfolk, about 100 miles from London. Conveniently, I had inherited a crash helmet and overalls from Stirling in exchange for translating an article from German into English. But that's a story for another day...

On a salary of £25 per week, I wasn't going motor racing anytime soon, but nonetheless I lived well

on the equivalent of R50 per week!

As I was born with something of an inventive mind, in 1965 I formed Dynamic Designs Ltd, in the hope of hitting the jackpot with one of my designs, to enable me at least to buy a Formula Three car. As I was fully employed by Paint-a-Car, I called the new company 'my hobby'. Stirling knew about it, though, and was always keen to discuss new ideas. It was fortuitous that, when I was between flats, I stayed in his house at 46 Shepherd Street for two months in October and November 1964, which allowed us to discuss many things, including the possible establishment of his own Paint-a-Car centre in London - an idea that eventually came to fruition.

One of Dynamic Designs' early projects was a battery-operated colour slide projector. I spent a great deal of time in the R&D division of Eveready in its north London HQ working on improved batteries and bulbs, all for free! Eventually, armed with a plywood prototype, I headed to Great Universal Stores, then Britain's largest mail order company, where I met marketing director, Mr Gliksten. An old hand at assessing new products, he told me he

instinctively knew what would sell and what would not, but said I was the first person to confuse him. He asked me to remain seated while he walked around the boardroom listening to my sales spiel. If I could convince him, he promised an order for 100 000 units that I could pledge to a plastics moulding company. Hoo boy, I thought, here comes my Formula Three! But evidently my presentation was too low key and the offer was rejected a few days later.

During my seven years in Germany and England, 27 racing drivers were killed so perhaps Mr Gliksten indirectly saved my life. The moral of the story, however, is that inventors should never try to sell their own designs but leave it to glib salesmen.

In 1966, I was standing with a friend next to his Austin 1100. About to take his family on holiday to Cornwall, he noted that boot space was limited because of the car's sloping rear end. In a split second I envisaged an extension boot lid.

Next day, I was off to a scrapyard to purchase a boot lid. I cut out plywood sections, bonded them on, filled the spaces with rolled up



*In Stirling Moss's cast-off helmet and overalls, André took a Jim Russell course. Did the clothes work their magic? No! But the course was most enjoyable and he's still alive.*



André Loubser in Queen's Gate Mews, with his newly-patented boot lid extension for an Austin 1100.



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NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE, SHEFFIELD, BRISTOL

12th December, 1966.

Dear Mr. Loubser,

U.K. Design Application Number 925,811  
 - A Lid for a Vehicle Boot.

The Registrar of Designs has now agreed to complete the registration of the above design on the basis of the drawings which accompanied your letter to us of the 16th November, and in this respect we have been obliged to meet the Official fees which have been obliged to complete the Registration of the Design, and to enable the authorities to accept the modified representations.

An account in respect of the additional services connected with this case is now enclosed.

You will note that the registration remains in force for a period of five years as from the 12th November, 1965, and is renewable for two subsequent periods of five years thereafter.

Your acknowledgment of the certificate of registration in due course will now oblige.

Yours faithfully,  
*Melan*

newspaper and set about making the plug with plaster of paris. At the half way mark, I realised I would never get a smooth finish and thought in terms of a metal master. So, after visiting my bank manager to obtain an overdraft, I went to Williams & Pritchard, well-known aluminium and fibreglass body builders in north London.

The design was registered with patent attorneys Mewburn & Ellis, the first unit cast and mounted to a red 1100. Stirling was convinced that because of the Kamm effect, ie blunt tail, top speed would be higher. To prove the point, he suggested we should take an 1100 to the M4 and check top speed with the standard lid, then switch lids and repeat the run. It never happened but was an interesting thought!

I had professional photos taken in

Queen's Gate Mews by an excitable American photographer. Gill, my then fiancée, and now my wife of 50 years, acted as model. The photos were taken in front of comedian Terry Thomas's house. As result of the commotion, Terry appeared on an upstairs balcony and, looking just as if he were on a film set, asked: 'I say, is that an 1100 GT?'

'No Terry,' I replied. 'It's an extension boot lid.' With a grin he simply commented, 'Jolly good!'

Five more lids were produced between then and 1968. However, just as consideration was being given to setting up production, Gill and I decided to relocate to South Africa. I felt the Paint-a-Car concept had great potential in South Africa. Stirling agreed and suggested we launch the business as a joint venture but then discovered that his Canadian associate (the MD of

Paint-a-Car) had him tied up worldwide. He wished me well and Mike Hailwood, who had frequently raced in South Africa and owned a house in Durban, was the next logical choice. As a result

we established the Mike Hailwood Autospray System.

The Super-Space GT moulds were stored in a barn on a farm belonging to friends in Hampshire and could still be there!

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