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OUR CARS

Despite having issues with the car early on Eddie Cheever warmed to the beast and placed as high as second before rain stopped play



MIKE GOODBUN, TREVOR LEGATE, PETER DE ROUSSET-HALL

**1964 AC COBRA 289 MKII FIA
1963 LOTUS CORTINA MKI**

OWNED BY KEVIN KIVLOCHAN,
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“Eddie Cheever had to race with his head out of the window”



I suspect the biggest word in motor sport is ‘if’, and that’s what the conversation on our journey home from September’s Goodwood Revival was full of...

I’ve been fortunate enough to have raced at seven Revival meetings and for the 14th running of the magical three-day event I entered my 1963 works Lotus Cortina in the St Mary’s Trophy for saloon cars – with triple Le Mans winner and Revival race winner

Emanuele Pirro sharing the drive – and my 1964 AC Cobra in the RAC TT Celebration race, paired with ex-F1 driver Eddie Cheever.

The build-up to the weekend actually starts the week before, with a test day at the Sussex circuit. This was one of the first times I’d driven the Cortina on track and it felt lighter, smoother, and easier to drive than the heavy, understeering Cobra. But I soon got to grips with the handling, pushing a three-wheel drift out of the chicane. It was also a good chance to meet up with Emanuele, but sadly the engine wouldn’t rev to peak power (I suspected a higher volume fuel pump was needed), so we couldn’t test to the limit.

This was also the first event with a noise limit since the Cobra’s restoration and we managed to get its natural 122dB vocals down to the 105dB limit. However, in doing so we strangled the engine which wouldn’t rev above 4000rpm. So, after three slow laps we decided to call it a day to avoid damage.

Qualifying the Cortina on the first day of the Revival didn’t go to plan. Despite having fitted a larger fuel pump it still wouldn’t rev freely, falling short of peak power by 2000rpm. Despite this Emanuele qualified the car 12th overall for Saturday’s race (part one of a two-

part encounter). If only we had had the engine running well, I am sure he could have put us in the front two rows of the grid.

Afterwards Richard Walbyoff and Neal Cuss of RW Racing Services (01280 840799) went through the car, checking everything and replacing the points, coil, and master cut-off switch, just to be on the safe side. But at the end of lap one of the race Emanuele pulled into the pit lane declaring that the car was no better: ‘I don’t blow engines,’ he said, ‘it will be safer to park up as she is still not right.’

It was a bittersweet moment: thankfully he gave priority to saving the engine, but it marked the end of our weekend with the Cortina. If only we’d had a spare engine, what could have been? Top three at least.

For the Cobra, both Eddie Cheever and I took turns in the car over the Friday and Saturday qualifying practice sessions. On the Friday I went out first to check all was OK then handed over to Eddie, who had never sat in it. In fact Eddie had never raced a historic car, or a Cobra, or at Goodwood, and he’s only raced a right-hand drive car once. And he was less than complimentary about the handling: ‘Great engine, so much power, but it handles like a pogo stick’, said the ex-Formula One

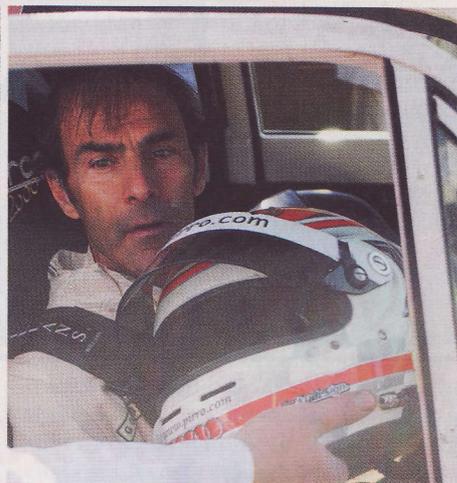
Discover what the Classic Cars team has been up to over the past month



Poor fuelling put an end to the Cortina's chances of Goodwood glory with Emanuele Pirro (below right). There's always 2013...



In the TT paddock are four Cobras that Kev has raced at Le Mans – a unique achievement and a unique sight; daughter Maisie on polishing duty; Cobra co-driver Eddie Cheever



man. He went on to say that getting to grips with it is like watching a monkey trying to 'flamenco' with a football. Only he didn't use the word 'flamenco'.

Richard Walbyoff responded in his usual calm and controlled manner, accompanied by a wry smile: 'Don't worry, we can sort that,' before stiffening the bump settings on the rear for Saturday's session.

Sure enough, Eddie was much happier with the handling on Saturday, although he felt it was still sliding too much. Richard adjusted the rebound on the rear dampers for Sunday's race and we were confident the handling was where it needed to be.

Sitting out part two of the St Mary's race we mulled over a few more of those 'ifs', before getting set for the TT race with the Cobra. Late-running meant the hour-long fixture was cut to 45 minutes, with a driver change pit window between 15 and 30 minutes.

The weather was dry but the track was damp. Eddie started from 14th but made an amazing start to grab fifth place by the first bend. A great tussle developed between Eddie and Jochen Mass in Rob Hall's Cobra, Chris Beighton in the Sunbeam Tiger Le Mans and the Ferrari 250 GT 'Breadvan'

driven by works Peugeot sports car racer Nicolas Minassian.

As the race unfolded the weather worsened, although from the pit wall it didn't seem Eddie has noticed. He picked off the competition one by one until at one point we were running second. But unfortunately he was so engrossed in the action that he missed five calls to pit, and when he eventually did come in we'd missed the pit window and got a 60-second penalty. To be fair, by this time the car had steamed up so much that Eddie was having to race with his head stuck out of the side window, so it's no wonder he missed our signals.

I took the wheel in torrential rain, conditions I've never seen in more than 20 years of racing and don't want to see again. Eventually the clerk of the course decided the conditions were too dangerous and the race was curtailed. I think I got three laps. We finished 14th, having recorded the fourth fastest lap.

Looking at the Cobra after the race there was a small kiss (sounds better than a dent) on the nearside front wing – apparently some slight contact with a Breadvan. But Goodwood is a tough track and the Revival is an extremely tough event – to finish relatively unscathed really is a blessing.

If only we'd had the Cortina's engine running on song for Emanuele. Imagine if Eddie had come over to Goodwood a week earlier for the test day with the Cobra. If we hadn't missed the pit window we would have been fifth, and if the car had not misted up... Surely that could have been another podium at the world's greatest historic racing event?

We seemed so close, but that small word 'if' got in the way. What a big word it seems now.

Still, two days after the event I got a nice email from Eddie saying: 'Thanks so much for trusting me with your Cobra. It is a proper beast (in the nicest possible way), and a pure testosterone rush deciding where to brake after the long Goodwood straights.' I guess he liked it after all.

NEED TO KNOW

1963 Lotus Cortina Mk1

Miles this month 40 Costs £1250 Time owned One year
Engine 1558cc, in-line four-cylinder Power 170bhp @ 7000rpm Performance Top speed: 140mph; 0-60mph: 7sec

NEED TO KNOW

1964 AC Cobra 289 MkII FIA

Miles this month 80 Costs £3000 Time owned Nine years
Engine 4727cc, V8 Power 409bhp @ 6500rpm
Performance Top speed: 170mph; 0-60mph: sub-5sec