ESTABLISHED 1937

TAYLOR & CRAWLEY

1966 MCLAREN-OLDSMOBILE M1B


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445
Firestone
CHAMPION
BP
2

1966 MCLAREN-OLDSMOBILE M1B

CHASSIS NO. 66-1

The McLaren M1A was the genesis of the now world famous sports car manufacturer and Formula 1 team. Originally designed for Group 7 regulations and USRRC racing, the M1A had a well-designed tubular spaceframe which proved popular with privateers as the chassis was stiff and easy to maintain.

For the following 1965 season, Bruce McLaren, Robin Herd and Tyler Alexander set to work redesigning their sportscar into the M1B. A whole new bodywork was designed by the artist Michael Turner using Alexander's aerodynamic ideas, whilst Herd redesigned the chassis resulting in a 20% increase of stiffness with no increase of weight. In total, 6 M1Bs were built by McLaren before production was taken over by Elva for the customers cars, 66-1 is one of those\
Works cars.

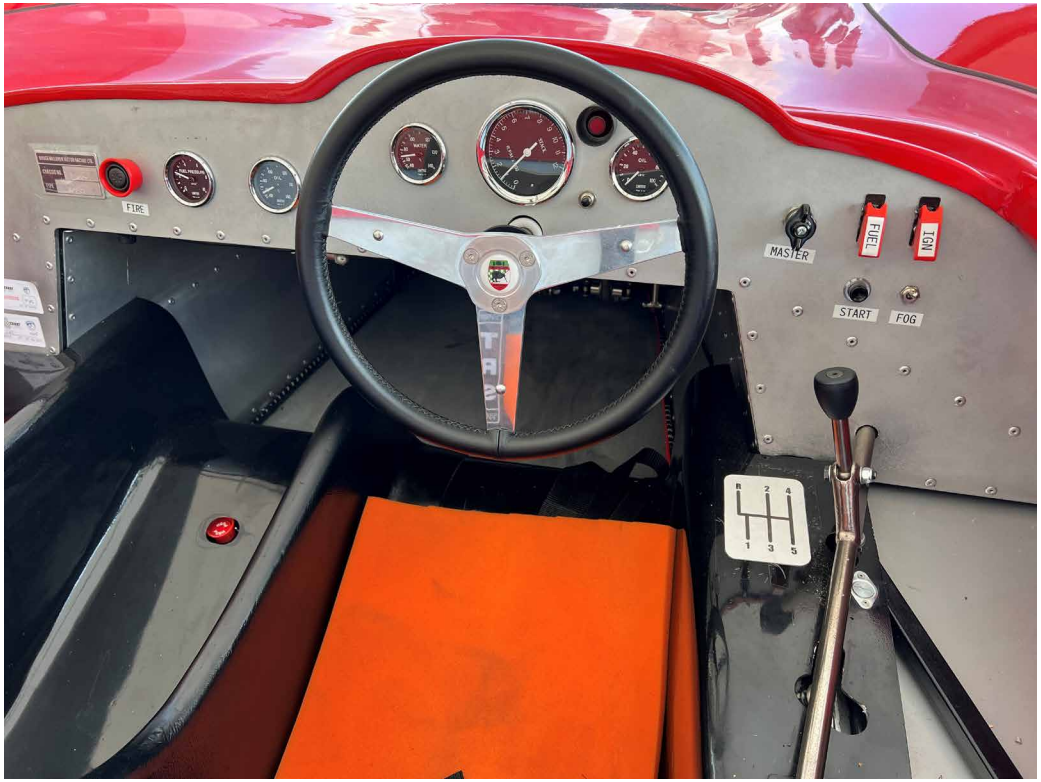
The prototype M1B made its first race start at the 1965 Canadian GP at Mosport; McLaren qualified on pole and led 96 of the 100 laps before Jim Hall in the dominant Chaparral 2A took victory. Importantly, the M1B gave Bruce McLaren a season's ending victory at Nassau in the Governors Trophy race.

Bruce McLaren had been testing F1 tyres for Firestone and was impressed by the new 13" tyres that were to be used in 1966. As part of McLaren's continual development programme the latest M1B prototype, 66-1, was designed with 13" wheels to take advantage of Firestone's latest technology. The revisions were not restricted to the smaller wheels, the bottom tubes of the spaceframe were square 1.5" box section steel tubing to allow the use of a Mallite floorpan; this was a lightweight wood and aluminium sandwich also used in the monocoque of the McLaren Grand Prix car. The chassis also featured a revised front bulkhead and suspension design, with a fibreglass body modified to fit and smaller brakes were required for the smaller wheels.

The new car was finished just in time for the 1966 British Group 7 season opener at Snetterton on Good Friday where both works M1Bs ran 5 litre Oldsmobile engines with five speed ZF gearboxes. Chris Amon drove the 1965 built M1B and Bruce McLaren the new 13" wheel car, 66-1, which was particularly recognisable thanks to its flared rear bodywork.

The 13" car qualified 4th and finished 3rd in the first heat, but a loss of oil pressure resulted in a DNF in the second heat. The next outing was Silverstone in May where 66-1 ran a compromise of 15" rears and 13" front wheels. Amon qualified and finished second as the bigger engine in Hulme's Lola T70 proved unbeatable.

The team then shipped both cars out to Canada for the two lucrative Canadian events held on consecutive weekends, the first the Labatt 50 held at St. Jovite on May 29th with the Players 200 at Mosport on 4th June. At St. Jovite the team cars qualified first and second, with McLaren only 0.8 seconds ahead of Amon, who was again driving 66-1 with 13" front wheels and 15" rears. The two works cars disappeared off into the distance during the race to what would have been a comfortable 1-2 had Amon's engine not cried enough 12 laps from the finish; such was the pace of the M1B, Bruce still finished 2 laps ahead of the next competitor.


FIDE
MASTER
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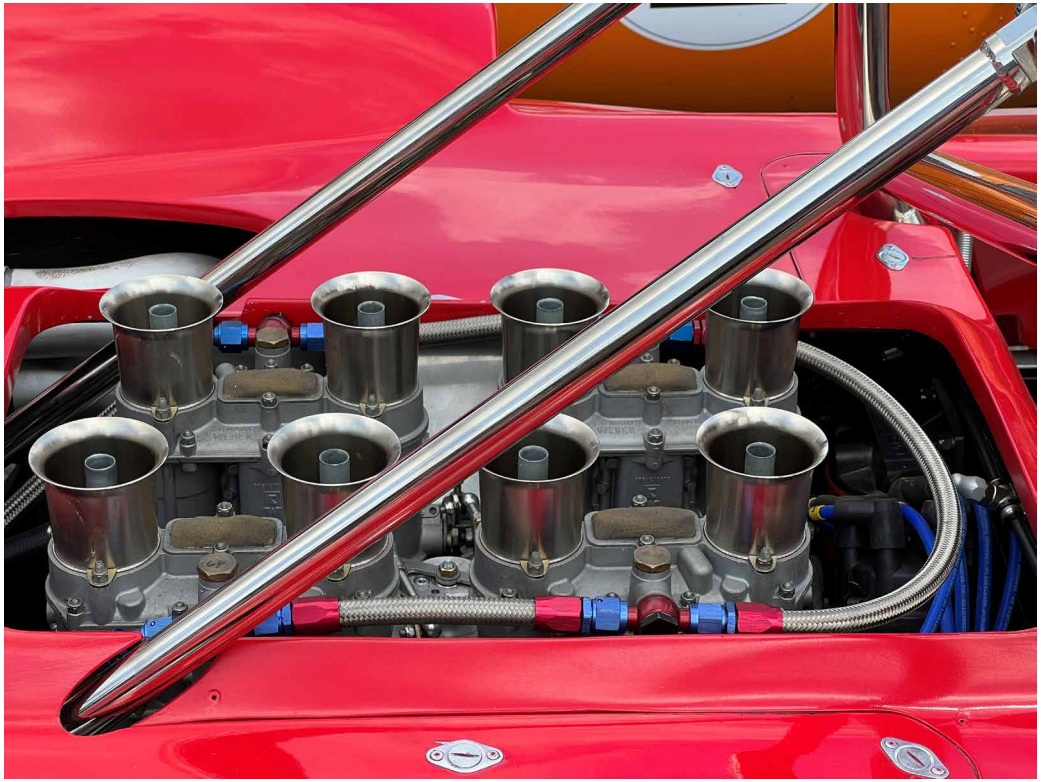



START
Players 200
FINISH
REFRESHMENTS
KAWARTHA 250 JULY 29TH - 30TH
NO SMOKING

At Mosport the following week Amon had to run the spare 4.5 litre Olds in 66-1 but the two drivers again dominated practice, qualifying 1-2 ahead of a strong field. The two part race saw McLaren win whilst Amon finished 10th in heat one after a puncture and third in heat two. This was the end of McLaren's 13" sportscar experiment and 66-1 was returned to the UK to be stripped down in the Colnbrook workshop.

Having been a keen motorcycle racer in the 1950s, including racing in the UK and the Isle of Man TT races, George Begg had started to design and build racing cars on his return to New Zealand. After building several different and successful cars to various NZ racing Formulas from 1964 through to 1968, George felt he needed to get back to Europe and experience the modem trends and practices in International motorsport. Begg heard much about Bruce McLaren's tendency to employ talented Kiwi mechanics on his race team so made contact and was employed to develop the new McLaren M8A for the forthcoming Can-Am series. With the strong support of his wife Freda, who took their family to stay with her own family in the Isle of Man, George made his way to Colnbrook on March 25th to start his six month placement with the McLaren team.

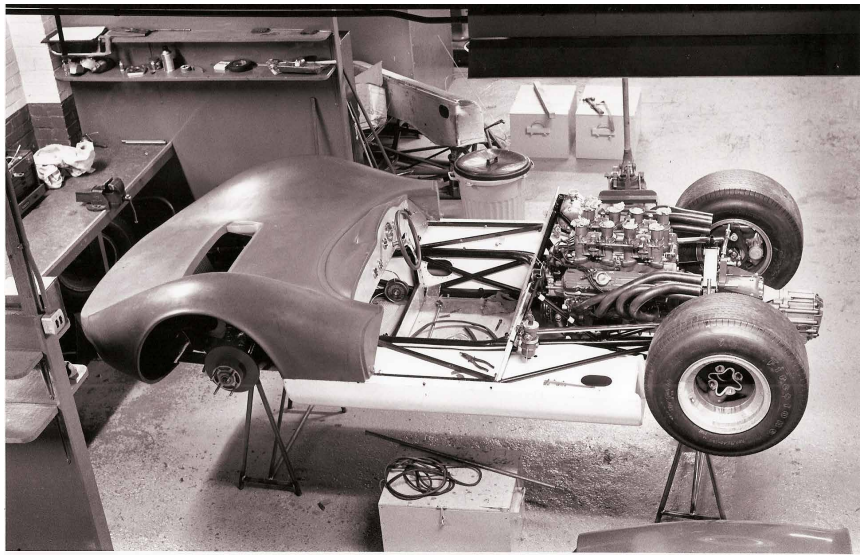
Whilst learning new ideas and techniques at McLaren, Begg was a regular visitor to the 'surplus' department at McLaren and would put his name to many parts that were no longer necessary to the McLaren cause. When George returned to NZ at the end of 1968, he had acquired the 13" wheel M1B with the Mallite floorpan, chassis 66-1, and the chopped down M6A bodyshell from the M8A test hack, along with other 'scrap' parts. George had also bought a small block 5.9 Chevrolet engine and LG500 gearbox. Begg and his team had their new car, referred to by the opposition as the "McBegg", ready for the 1969 NZ Sports Car Championship race that was being held at the 12th International Teretonga race meeting, headlined by the Tasman Championship. Barry Keen drove extremely well in the unsorted McBegg and looked set for a debut victory until a broken timing chain brought the car to a halt.

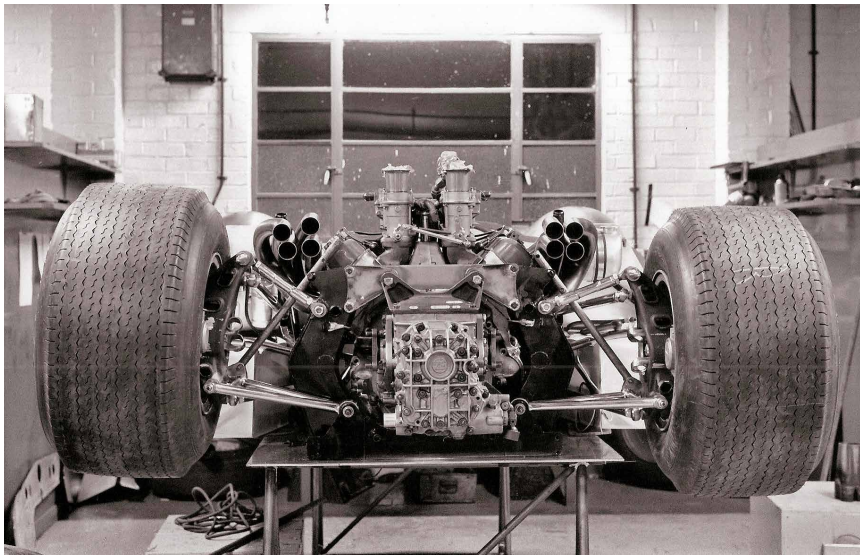
Just one week on from its impressive debut, the McBegg was on track again at a cold overcast Timaru Trophy meeting for the final round of the NZ Sports Car Championship. The team suffered a blow when they found a cracked block in practice, but by driving carefully to hold the engine together Keen was still in the thick of the lead action. After lapping steadily in third in the early stages, Keen missed a downshift when attempting to take the lead but managed to finish a fine second.

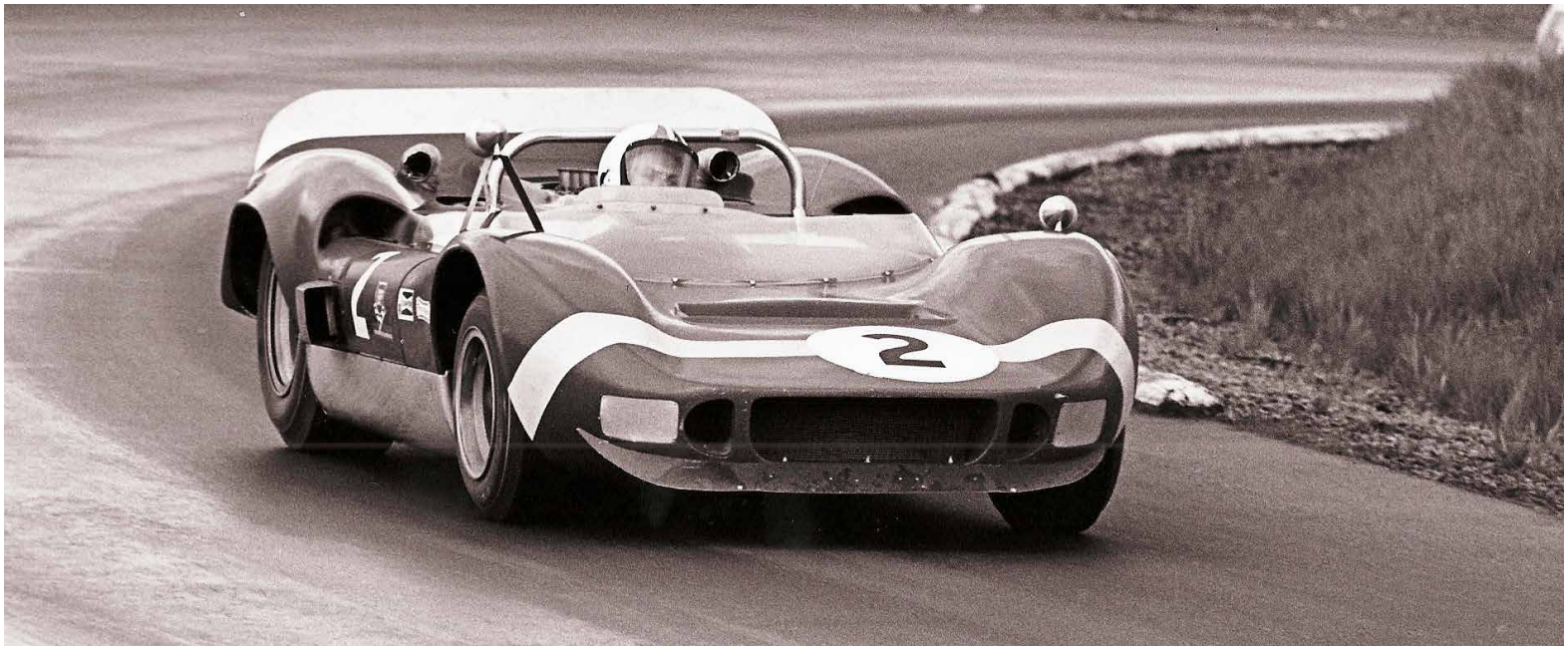
After another race at Pukekohe, the McBegg was prepared for an attempt at the NZ land speed record. At an event organised by the Christchurch Motor Racing Club, an eight-mile stretch of public road was closed off and the cars were run for two miles before the measured kilometre and a three mile run from the other side. The driver for this attempt was Laurence Brownlie, and after a few attempts and some small adjustments he was finally able to raise his average to 177.9 mph, thereby seizing the car record by 4.1 mph over the previous record.

Three more races followed the successful record attempt and at the end of the season the McBegg was sold to Aucklander, Digby Taylor. It is believed that Taylor competed in the New Zealand Sports Car Championship from 1970 until 1973. The series was eventually limited to under 2 litre cars in 1974 and the McBegg was retired.

In the 1990s it was discovered by Auckland-based McLaren specialists Duncan Fox and Tony Roberts, whose Group 7 Sportscars concern subsequently commenced the historic car's restoration before selling the project mid-rebuild to Moscow-based New Zealander Roger Wills in 2012. In his custody, the restoration continued; initially with Group 7 Sportscars before the car was shipped back to the UK in 2014 for further input from McLaren specialists Autotune Limited of Rishton, Lancashire.

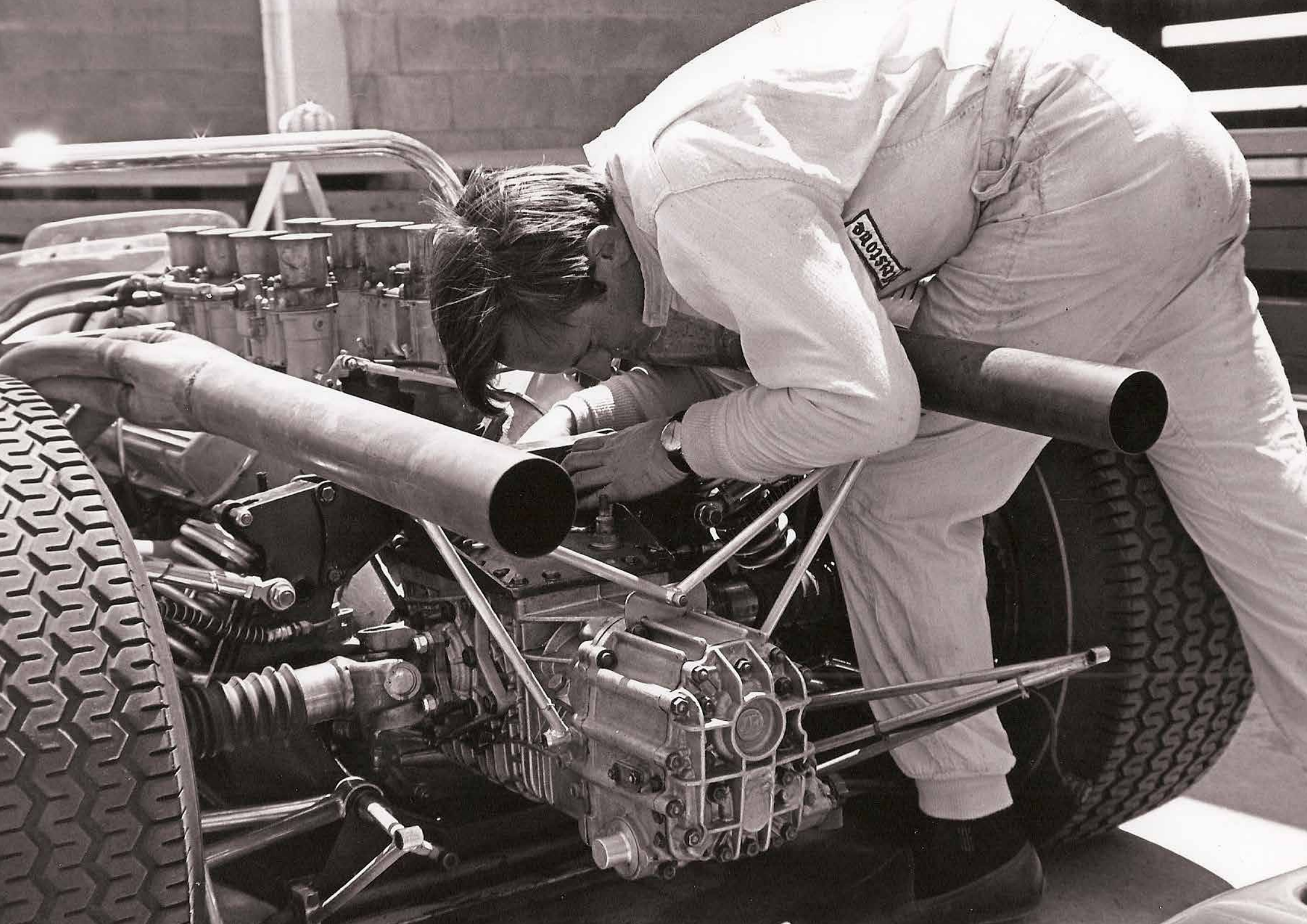






Having restored numerous McLaren M1s, M6s and M8s over the past 40 years, Autotune were ideally placed to move the project forward, and they have since concentrated on collating and restoring all usable parts of the project and reinstating as many of the original Oldsmobile-powered car's distinctive features as possible. The car's chassis was found to be structurally solid and in alignment, and still retaining the original and distinctive thin-gauge steel chassis bulkheads. Although the original Mallite panelling - as previously fitted to the dashboard, floor and rear firewall - had long since disintegrated, a more durable modern equivalent was sourced, this being cut to size and fitted to the appropriate areas.

Accompanying the project from New Zealand to the UK was a sizeable cache of Oldsmobile engine parts, including the original Traco inlet manifolds and a set of four Weber 48 IDA carburettors. An engine was subsequently entrusted to renowned Rover and Oldsmobile V8 specialist John Eales for a rebuild, with all major internal components - such as the crankshaft, connecting rods, pistons and valves - being replaced as a matter of course. As referenced previously, 1-66 appears to have been one of only a handful of M1s ever fitted with dry-sump lubrication - a detail recorded in Bruce McLaren's contemporary Autosport column "From the Cockpit", and one which has been reinstated during the car's rebuild.



A correct specification ZF DS-25-0 gearbox, as originally fitted, accompanied the project and this unit has since been completely rebuilt by Elite Racing Transmissions with new bearings, a new CWP and re-coated synchro cones. Great care has been taken to replicate the original installation exactly, with a new gearbox lid being cast in order to mount the gearbox top directly to the rear cross member, as per the original build photographs accompanying the car.

The majority of suspension components were believed to be high quality replacement items, so these were duly crack-tested and reassembled on the car, together with four new single-adjustable FIA-legal steel-bodied, single adjustable dampers and four new Girling BR brake calipers. However, both the front uprights and rear hubs were believed to be original and serviceable so following successful crack-testing, these were re-used alongside the replacement items. All hydraulic, electrical and fuel systems were renewed as a matter of course, whilst a new FIA-specification fuel safety cell has also been fitted. Finally, although a replacement production-specification M1B body accompanied the project, Autotune have since tailored the front section of this to reflect the distinctive “flattened off” front wheel arches which the first iteration of 1-66 sported in period; a modification initially permitted by the smaller diameter front wheels and performed to achieve a lower overall frontal area.

With the second incarnation of 1-66 having returned to Historic racing in the early 2010s after a lengthy restoration, the Bruce McLaren Trust assigned its progenitor - this car - the retrospective chassis number of 66-1 so as to avoid confusion between the two entirely separate entities.

2023 was the 60th anniversary of McLaren and Goodwood decided to feature McLaren at the Festival of Speed and as an important milestone in McLaren’s early history, 66-1 was invited to the hill-climb. The restoration of 66-1 was then put front and centre of Autotune’s schedule and was completed just in time, the final shakedown was completed on the way to Goodwood where it proved to be a hit with the cognoscenti and has now been invited back to Goodwood circuit to race in the Surtees Trophy at the 81st Members Meeting. 66-1 is also eligible for a variety of historic racing events both in Europe and the United States. These include the ever-popular Europe-based Masters Historic Sports Cars series, the Daytona Classic 24 Hour and the Whitsun Trophy at the Goodwood Revival - the last-named a race won in period by John Coundley’s M1A.

Impeccably restored, comprehensively documented and with its numerous Works idiosyncrasies dutifully reinstated, 66-1 truly represents the holy grail of McLarens: an ex-Colnbrook M1B built and driven by Bruce McLaren himself, not to mention his Le Mans-winning co-driver Chris Amon. Assuredly this is one of the most historically significant McLarens to have been offered for sale in recent times, and it would represent a highly-prized addition to both any historic race grid or private collection alike.

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