



DUNCAN BLACK, IN THE AUSTIN 850, DIVES INSIDE OF FRED BARRETTE'S LARK. BOTH CARS WERE NUDGING EACH OTHER AT THIS POINT.

by Harry N. Roberts

DOES AUTO RACING prove anything? Here's one race that did — the fourth annual Lime Rock Little Le Mans. The formula is simple to the point of brutality: take 31 imports and compacts, wave a green flag over them, let them run flat-out for eight hours over the snaky, car-killing Lime Rock Park road course, Lime Rock, Conn., and then wave a checkered flag over them. What happens in between flags separates the automotive men from the automotive boys.

Importers who find that their product has a fondness for losing wheels at inopportune moments, or swallowing valves, or flipping when pushed through a bend just don't return a second year to make fools of themselves. Three previous runnings had cut the list of entries down to Volvo, Saab, and a gaggle of small deer who came to prove their dependability, if not their sheer speed.

This year, the compacts were to come. Several did. They

practiced in August for the race that tropical storm Brenda washed out of existence, and they practiced on September 30th for the October 1st running. Two Larks, entered by Pritchard Motors of Poughkeepsie, stayed to race. The other compacts went home.

The Larks, sporting 4780cc V-8 powerplants and export suspensions, and beautifully prepared by Ralph Moody of stock-car wizard Holman-Moody Enterprises of Charlotte, N.C., and Jocko Maggiasco, Poughkeepsie driver, car builder and master race-tuner, were there to win. They did. They worked for it, for they had to whip a group of fantastically fast Swedes to pull it off.

The Volvo contingent was led by Art Riley, two-time winner of this race, leader last year until he was disqualified. The hard-driving Long Islander, teamed again with Bill Rutan, of Essex, Conn., rated as favorite with the journalists,

most of whom felt that the Lark's brakes couldn't weather the Lime Rock bends. A few outsiders thought that the tiny, 750cc two-cycle Saabs might win all the marbles for once. The superb handling of the Saabs had gained them class wins and Index of Performance wins each year out, but nobody really notices the class winners. This time, the Saab team was loaded for bear. But for the margin of one wheel stud, a black Saab, driven very well by Joe Dodge and, terrifyingly well by Dick Thompson, might have had "Lark under glass" for the evening's main course.

The race got under way with the mad scramble of a Le Mans start, and after two laps, Art Riley was on top, being dogged by the Larks of Maggiasco and Moody, and Rune Svenson's wildly-driven Volvo. By the end of the first hour, the order was dramatically changed. The Jocko-driven Lark had fried a clutch, and was in the pits, to stay there for almost two hours, and Riley's Volvo had snapped a halfshaft, thrown a wheel, and rolled. Riley submitted not too willingly to a quick examination by a doctor, and proceeded to repair the terribly battered car. Less than two hours later, the Volvo, sporting a radiator borrowed from a spectator, was back racing. It was to turn the second fastest lap of the day.

momentarily under the car, split the gas tank. The fuel ignited on the hot tailpipe, and the car went up in a gusher of flame. Jefferies, who had gotten out in time, tried to return to the car for the mandatory fire extinguisher, but was forced to retreat and stand by helplessly while the car burned.

The race ground on, the cars streaming by the charred, smoking hulk of the Volvo, and at the halfway point, the Moody-Maggiasco Lark was in the lead, its margin for almost 270 miles of racing a scant 13 seconds over the flying Dodge-Thompson Saab. An extra pit stop by the Lark put the Saab on top, however, and at the six-hour point, the tiny Swede held almost a full lap lead.

From this point, the race became a personal saga of Dick Thompson. The Washington, D.C. dentist, a gifted driver who has won SCCA championships in both Corvettes and Austin-Healeys, and who has driven Saabs at this race since its inception, staged a display of driving that had the crowd on its feet and screaming. Maggiasco, driving the Lark that had dropped a clutch early in the race, tried desperately to keep Thompson behind him, and permit Moody's Lark to close the gap. Jocko is not greatly experienced on road courses; however, a fine driver is a fine driver. He held Thompson at bay for five harrowing



PHOTOS: HARRY N. ROBERTS, LEN GRIFFING



All this frantic action left the Moody-driven Lark on top after the first hour. Hot on his heels was the Thompson-Dodge Saab, the Svenson-Elfstrom Volvo, another Saab driven by Hal Mayforth and Louis Braun, and the Ray Gaul-Jerry Oathout Volvo. Gaul, who was to encounter various minor maladies in the next hour, was able to recover and, with his co-driver, take a fine fourth overall at the finish. The finish was a long way off, though. The finish never came for the Svenson-Elfstrom Volvo. Three times the car pitted, with flames licking out from the area of the gas tank. It finally pitted for good. The exhaust had been bent virtually shut, and the back-pressure build-up caved in a piston.

Out on the track, though, a real fire was in progress. Hal Jefferies, a Montrealer co-driving with Mel Jones in Jones' Volvo, broke a half-shaft, which resulted in a wild

Top: Jones-Jefferies Volvo burns (driver unhurt), after splitting the fuel tank with a broken axle. Above: Exuberantly driven Volvo of Svenson-Elfstrom is shown dusting along the outside of course.

spin and the loss of a wheel. The wheel, which was crammed laps by flogging the dark blue Lark mercilessly, using all of the road on the bends, but Thompson, driving with an "I can whip 4½ liters anytime, anywhere" determination, caught the Lark in the S-curves and passed.

With a shade over an hour left to run, even the Moody crew knew that it was all over if the Saab stayed together. Then, sliding wildly down the straight and into the pits came Thompson, with the Saab's left rear wheel flapping wildly.

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Little Le Mans

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Dick Thompson slams his Saab past the Maggiocomo Lark, culminating a hair-raising 10-lap dice between the two cars.

Just as the car hit the dirt pit apron, the wheel flew across the track, narrowly missing the officials at the start-finish line. The front-wheel drive Saab dragged itself down the pit lane like a dog with a broken back. A wheel stud had loosened, and the vibration created by this had torn the other studs out, causing the wheel to come loose in a 90-mph bend at the head of the straight.

The Lark roared by as the Saab crew bent to work, but the Lark was in the pits on the next lap for fuel and tires. It left seconds before Thompson, who now had to unlap himself. As he came flying down the straight the next time by, the car sounded well. Thompson dove into the bend at the end of the straight, stomped on the brakes at the 50-foot marker—and went sailing down the escape road at over a hundred. The black car overran the escape road and ripped through underbrush and saplings before Thompson was able to snub it down and turn it around. The next stop at the pits cost him five laps on the Lark. A brake line had let go under the vicious impact of the lost wheel, and when Thompson went for the binders, he had nothing at all under his foot but floorboards.

Repairs were made in fine time, but the cause was hopeless.

The Lark had too great a lead now, but nobody told Thompson this. He jammed his right foot hard down, and virtually flew after the Lark, turning the course in times that would do credit to a fast Lotus. Thompson finally turned a staggering 1:15, the fastest of the day, and managed to carve the Lark's lead down from six laps to three at the finish. Maggiacommo, in the lead Lark now, wisely refrained from dicing with the flying dentist, drove smoothly and easily, and let time run out on the gallant Thompson and his gutty little car. Following them home was the Saab of Stutz Plaisted and Bob Malone, the Volvo of Ray Gaul and Jerry Oathout, and the Saabs of Floyd Stone-George Oulton and Lou Braun-Hal Mayforth.

The Lark had the Detroit-haters talking to themselves. It handled beautifully, went like gangbusters, and stayed in one piece. The other Lark, after its unfortunate clutch incident, also ran like an express train. It's hard to say how other U.S. makes would have fared. They didn't show up, or showed up and retreated. Their failure to appear left a large number of race fans with a view of one domestic compact—and a very impressive view it was.

Saab placed five cars in the top eight—a phenomenal performance for a sedan whose engine is less than half the size of the Volvo's, and less than a sixth of the Lark's V-8. The Saab's Swedish brothers, the Volvos, did less well than usual. While the mishap that virtually wrote off the Riley-Rutan car could have happened to anybody, it is notable that two Volvos snapped axle shafts, and three had suffered the same fate the previous year. There is no doubt that Volvo, with a deserved reputation for a fast, tough car, will check this problem over carefully, and that Riley and Rutan will return next year with their battered tan warrior to better their 15th place finish—amazing in itself with a virtually demolished automobile.

A team of very fast Morris Mini-Minors and Austin 850's, identical except for the name, was entered by Inskip's, the New York distributors for BMC products. The Minis, running engines tuned to Formula Junior pitch, were driven by the cream of the crop of the SCCA drivers, including Duncan Black, SCCA E Production champ; Bob Grossman, SCCA C Production king and veteran of Le Mans and Sebring; and Sherman Decker, probably the best MG driver anywhere. The highly-tuned engines didn't last past the fifth hour; however, the little cars certainly put on a fast, noisy show while they lasted, and demonstrated excellent handling qualities. The rest of the pack—two Vespas, whose engines had a staggering 200cc displacement; a team of BMW coupes, quick, attractive automobiles; a team of NSU Printzes (or would it be



Doors of the Larks were chained shut, so relief drivers dove through the windows. Crew used high-pressure refueling lines.



Riley, twice winner, rolled his Volvo after losing a wheel. Two hours later he was back in the fray, turning near-record laps.



Saab times suffered from lack of mechanical pit equipment, such as pressure fuel lines, air-operated lug wrenches, pro help.

Printzen?), which ran like clocks; an ancient Renault 4-CV; an ancient Volkswagen; a fast, fine-handling Ford Anglia and a smooth Triumph Herald—displayed fine staying power and nimble handling. But it just wasn't enough.

This was a day for a Swedish Lark. ●