



Miss Karkow's second grade class. David is third from the left, second row. (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



1 2 3 Next »

27

APRIL 2015

OF MISS KARKOW, TWO CONTINENTS AND A SINGULAR FRENCH CONNECTION

There is probably no relationship more significant in the creation of the automobile over the centuries than that which brings together design and technology. And for Chicago's David Cooper, whose Cooper Technica restoration company slogan is "Preserving the Art of Fine Mechanisms", that historic combination finds its roots in the most unexpected of ways during early childhood.

This story begins in the town of Evanston, Ill., on an early September school day when Miss Karkow (pronounced "car-co") has asked her second-grade class to portray the coolest thing they'd seen during their summer vacation. A fun assignment, admittedly. But easier said than done, as 7-year-old David would

soon find out. Fortunately, the boy's avid young mind had recently been smitten by the vision of a milky white 1932 Bugatti Royale showcased in one of the Henry Ford Museum's hallowed halls during a visit with his father. So the Bugatti was going to be it.

Miss Karkow gave each child a sheet of drawing paper. Except that David kept coming back for more. "Could I have another sheet, please?" he asked. Then, one more. And another. Until a perplexed Miss Karkow got up from her desk to see what was going on. Turns out the budding artist just couldn't outline the car to scale. In fact, he had barely managed to finish but one of the Bugatti's wheels by now.

In her infinite wisdom, Miss Karkow had all of the pupils' tables pushed aside and asked everyone to scotch together a whopping 300 sheets of paper. Moments later, the classroom floor had morphed into a gigantic canvas and David could finally draw, in the spirit of freedom and authenticity, a full-size replica of his treasured subject, the Bugatti Royale. The audience loved it: A car was born.

The years went by as they always do. And before too long, metal trumped paper as boyhood dreams turned into teenage needs, namely securing one's first set of wheels. Again, it was decision time. There were many influences along the way, interestingly, all European. Among those, David had been fascinated by BMW's funky Isetta that could park sideways. Neat urban concept. Dustin Hoffman's 1966 Alfa Romeo 1600 Spider Duetto in *The Graduate* flick also fuelled his fancy. Cool dude, hot car. Too expensive. And there were, of course, indelible images of Ettore Bugatti's exotic offsprings – powerful stuff since that memorable Ford Museum experience. But not even to think of at this stage. So David settled for a cute Fiat 124 Spider with which, presumably, he could still impress the female gallery.

The sporty Fiat was to be followed by an array of nimbler and faster BMWs and Porsches. As could be expected, street driving soon led to vintage racing. Thanks to his primary income gig running his father's machine shop and custom fabrication plant, David found himself making parts he needed for his racers to replace hard-to-find ones. News of this quickly spread around the circuit and orders for specific items such as wheel cylinders, roll bars, shifters and such started pouring in.

Then came his first big restoration job: a 1937 BMW 328 Roadster he rebuilt for a friend. Next in line was a Renault-Alpine A110 imported from France, which he redid in its entirety. From Germany to France, and now into British material with a 1952 MG TD, all the while conducting serious research on the history of these foreign automobiles. In May 1989, he officially set up Cooper Technica Inc., specializing in pre- and early post-war European cars, inside a garage formerly used for the 1961 Ferrari 250 GT California crash scene – the one audiences couldn't bear to watch – in the 1986 spoof *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. For David, this was no day off: a business was born.

After many years of producing award-winning restorations, he came up with a way to participate in the appreciated value of his completed projects. For this, he consulted various investment specialists and established limited partnerships with groups of investors sharing in the acquisition, restoration and marketing of high-end classic vehicles.

“As counterintuitive as it may sound, the most significant lesson I learned from doing my due diligence with these financial experts, is that buying is the most important thing in this business. In other words, if you buy right, then you can sell readily,” he says.

Once his investment model got some people engaged, he undertook to resurrect a 1943 Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 Super Sport Cabriolet with a captivating German-Italian narrative under its belt. Later, he was informed, again via word-of-mouth, of the rarest of rare Letourneur & Marchand-bodied 1937 Delage D8-120 Aérospout Coupe – one of only eight surviving specimens – sitting quietly somewhere in England. Once owned by Standard Oil heiress and fashion icon, Millicent Rogers, the Delage was duly purchased and carefully transported to France.

In order to ascertain the precise provenance and complete story of this latest jewel in the crown, David embarked upon a wild research journey that brought him to Germany, Austria, France and across the U.S.: “Like conducting an Interpol global investigation,” he adds, “aimed at uncovering every possible fragment of the car's history.” Among the fascinating folks he met on his frenzied forensic quest were members of the Les Amis de Delage Club in France that includes collectors, historians and archivists of the famed European marque.

Once as much information as could be unearthed was brought to light, it was time to get on with the restoration work. Luckily, David's newfound French friends had taken him to some highly gifted artisans – a felicitous twist that resulted in his second shop being opened near Lyon. Combining art and technology from today and yesterday, he and his staff use cutting-edge laser scanning, digital imaging and 3-D printing that can retrace contours as close as two millimeters from the car's original lines. Thanks as well to an antique piece of equipment known as a French crown forming machine, nicknamed “three olive,” of

which there are only precious few left in the world, metal sheets are shaped with absolute precision using such traditional methods. All of which ensures an unequalled degree of accuracy, both aesthetically and historically.

With his expertise increasingly recognized across the U.S. and Europe, David was asked to bring his knowledge to bear as a concours judge around North America. At the Barrington Concours near Chicago, he moved up the ranks to Assistant Chief Judge and then was asked to become the event's Co-Chair – a role he agreed to, but on the condition that the show be moved to downtown Chicago, so as to grow into a truly national, if not international, happening. The Concours d'Elegance of Chicago, of which he is now Chairman, is scheduled for the first weekend of June 2016 and will help raise funds for Ronald McDonald House, its designated charity. In the meantime, the buzz is on across town and beyond, as the Concours presents a year-long series of run-up events leading to the big launch on the city's scenic Northerly Island.

Intriguing how the pieces of some people's lives seem to assemble neatly together in time, just like those of a sophisticated Bugatti Royale. It's been quite a ride for David Cooper, from the days of Crayola crayons on the floor of Miss Karkow's class, to those of digital imaging of high-end European automobiles. "Outside-the-box all the way expresses it best," he quips from his "box" – a 20,000-square-foot restoration shop in Chicago's West Loop area.

To this day, David can still summon up the emotions he felt as a 7-year-old, when he learned that his beloved second-grade teacher got married without letting him know. Apparently, the lady with the ominous-sounding automotive name has since been, and forever so, pardoned. That being the case, one can only imagine how proud Miss Karkow would be of her impassioned car artist as he continues to tackle bigger and better canvases, eagerly defying the borders of geography as we know it.

For more, check out the following links:
coopertechnica.com
concourschicago.net



David pulling off the racetrack at Road America in his 1972 Renault-Alpine A110 (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



David's first restoration project: a 1937 BMW 328 Roadster - seen here at the Road America racetrack (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



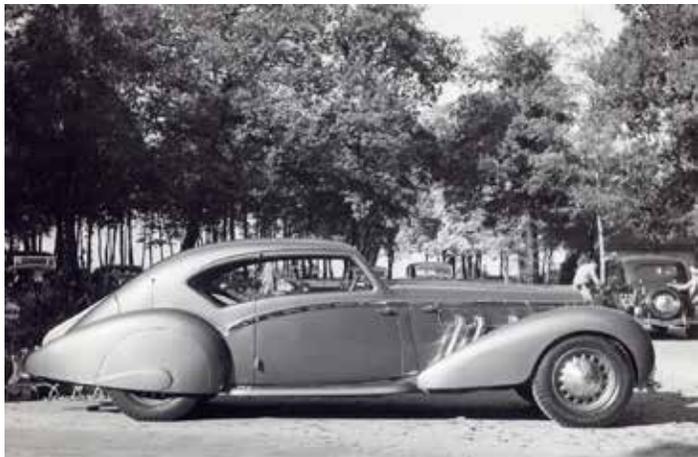
From the Cooper Technica restoration team: this 1927 Bugatti Type 35B (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Another stellar restoration job: this 1931 Alfa Romeo 6C1750 Grand Sport Testa Fissa Mille Miglia race car (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Fitting the trunk panel on the restored rear body section of the 1948 Delahaye at the shop in France (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



The 1937 Delage D8-120 Aérospout Coupe, originally owned by Standard Oil Heiress Millicent Rogers (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Inside the Cooper Technica workshop/studio in Chicago (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



The 1948 Delahaye 135M Saoutchik Cabriolet, originally owned by French actress Suzy Prim - one of Cooper Technica's limited partnerships (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



David at work - measuring before drilling on the Bridgeport milling machine (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



1943 Alfa Romeo 6C2500 Super Sport Cabriolet, first owned by Wolfram von Richthofen, next to the body bucks at the Chicago shop (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Comparing the digital rendering with the original photo of the 1943 Alfa Romeo 6C2500 Super Sport Cabriolet (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Raw laser scan image of the 1943 Alfa Romeo 6C2500 (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Public events at the shop: David presenting the Voisin car (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



Digital image of the 1943 Alfa Romeo 6C2500 Super Sport Cabriolet before restoration (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)



With French car expert Richard Adatto at the Voisin presentation (photo courtesy of Cooper Technica Inc.)