

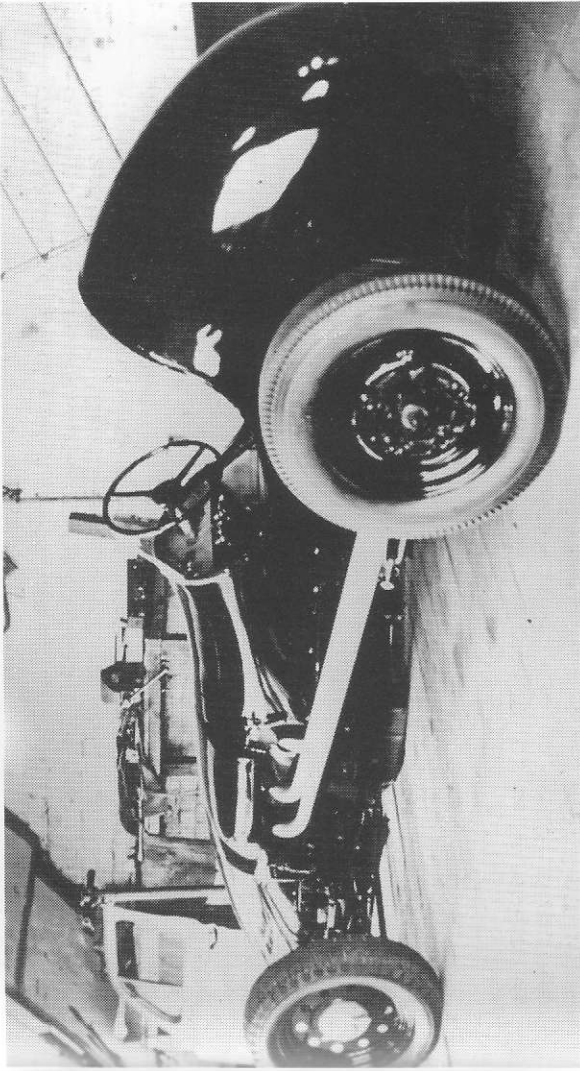
correctly losing the sight of one eye. I was there and it was not nice, but the car was certainly motoring at the time, coming on the tar seal in real speedway style. Gilroy never raced again as far as I know". Herb's view on the incident was "...I never wanted to see a race car again as my accident altered my whole life - caused by my exuberance and not the car..."

In 1956 the remains went to a former Auckland speedway driver Dave Lichtenstein (now living in Cairns), who had it re-bodied by Khyber Pass Road body builders May & Findlay, but retained most of the running gear and the rear body section of the original Des Herrick midget. Dave remembers the car thus: "Now to the car you question me about. As you possibly know, Herb Gilroy nearly killed himself in it. I bought it as a wreck from him and with help from Bruce McLaren, Phil Kerr and Colin Beanland, both of whom went with Bruce to England, restored it in my home garage which was just a few houses away from the McLaren's residence in Upland Rd., Remuera. A new body was built by a panel beater in Khyber Pass and I raced it once at Ardmore and once or twice at Muriwai hill climbs. It was a terrible car to drive." Dave ran it for a while, but it ended up in a Greenlane car dealer's yard around 1958.

The next owner was a 16-year-old sheep farmer's son from Bulls by the name of Chris Amon. Chris bought the car in 1959 (as his first race car) for 200 pounds which accounted for most of his savings. Chris described it as "...a tuned-up Austin A40 which for some strange reason had a Bugatti gearbox (apparently the Bugatti box had been re-installed)...". Chris ran it at the Admiral Road hillclimb, coming fifth (despite losing a wheel). The period report of this event is interesting: "...the event was run twice, the second being a round of the national hillclimb championships, the Gold Star, and this attracted entrants from all over the country. Of course the records tumbled again. Duncan McKenzie of Wellington was fastest in his Cooper at 43.6; D Lawrence set a new sports car mark at 47.2 in his Cooper 1100; and Alistair McLeod in his very rapid Mk 2 Zephyr showed the way for saloons at 50.7 secs. A young driver from Bulls competed in his Austin Special and made 5th fastest time - the only time Chris Amon has competed here....". Chris later ran the A40 at Levin, where it's performance was memorable - "...the A40 left the line with a substantial handicap, but it never finished the race, the head gasket quietly blowing and most of the plug leads falling off before the whole motor expired in a cloud of steam - and with it Chris' 200 pounds...". Chris remembered the car being painted black and being "...a fearsome looking object..."

In the book "Trio at the Top", the A40 Special is referred to as "...something of a joke..." and being "...one of the worst handling cars Chris has ever driven...". This "rubbishing" of the A40 Special, when reported in the "Wairarapa Times-Age" in 1983 raised considerable outrage from both drivers and spectators who knew the car in Herb Gilroy's time. A number wrote to the Times-Age defending the car and one even came to the conclusion that "...perhaps Gilroy at those (period) meetings was a better driver than a young Amon...". Interestingly, one local resident recounted the A40 being "...a very forgiving car - Chris was seen to drive it at times gazing skyward with both hands clasped in prayer..."

Unsurprisingly Chris sold the car on and a succession of owners and drivers including Keith Smith, John Curtis, John Maisey, Doug Lawrence, Ken Smith, John Riley, Bruce McLaren, Graeme Harvey and Garth Souness experienced the delights of the A40 Special. As with most old racing cars at that time, it had had a hard life and, apart from general deterioration, bits had been changed, lost, or taken for other projects. The remains ended up with Fred Courtney in Kaikohe. In TACCOC's August 1977 Bespoke magazine, it is noted that "... Fred Courtney has offered to track down the old Chris Amon A40 Special ... Fred sighted the car many moons ago and it was seriously



Above: Following the Dave Lichtenstein rebuild. This was the form in which Chris Amon drove it. Below: John Curtis, at the Chamberlin Road Hillclimb, 6th September 1964.

