

Red Wheels and White Sidewalls: Confessions of an Allard Racer

by
Bill Pollack

Foreword
by Carroll Shelby

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Published by Brown Fox Books, Carpinteria, California

ISBN 1-888978-14-7 Softcover

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Brown Fox Books

1090 Eugenia Place

Carpinteria, California 93013

Tel: 805-684-5951 Fax: 805-684-1628

Email: manager@BrownFoxBooks.com Website: www.BrownFoxBooks.com

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pollack, Bill, 1925-

Red wheels and white sidewalls : confessions of an Allard racer / by Bill Pollack ; foreword by Carroll H. Shelby.— 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-888978-14-7 (softcover)

1. Pollack, Bill, 1925- 2. Automobile racing drivers—United States—Biography.

3. Allard automobile. I. Title.

GV1032.P65A3 2004

796.72—dc22

2004007773

Body type and index are set in Stone Serif, titles are New Caledonia, captions and tables are Stone Sans.

Printed and Bound in Canada.

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PART II

People And Places

Venues

PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE found the small agile sports cars fun and exciting. The cars made great sounds and for the most part, held their own with the big American iron, especially in the canyons of Southern California. They had to be driven.

The real enthusiasts wanted to race these new machines. Racing on city streets was not a sane option. The hot rodders had tried that and they finally evolved into dragsters and lakesters. The sports car people were road people; they wanted to race on a road that was as close to real highway as possible. Most of us had read about or seen European road racing and it made sense to us. We wanted to do something like that. California had very strict laws about closing and or using public roads for private racing. This craving to find a venue triggered a search for racing sites that was to continue for years.

PALM SPRINGS AND SANTA BARBARA

Palm Springs Airport was the location of the first race sponsored by the emerging California Sports Car Club. The event was actually put together by a promoter, George Cary. The Cal Club worked with George for a number of years and eventually began promoting the races themselves.

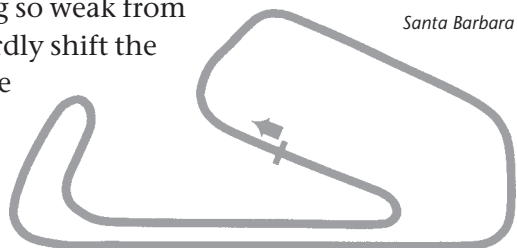
The airport authorities were much easier to deal with than state naysayers. Palm Springs and Santa Barbara were two exceptional examples of airport courses. These venues utilized runways, taxi strips and existing roads. What was always a kick, from a driver's

point of view, was the transition from a concrete runway to an asphalt taxi

strip. The concrete used for runways is especially rough textured, so your traction was great. The black top was inevitably covered with slippery marbles, and no matter how many times we swept the asphalt turns, there were always a fresh supply of these black ball bearings to give you a thrill.

Both Santa Barbara and Palm Springs had some fantastic turns where you had to make massive adjustments for the change in surface. Such as the first turn at Palm Springs at the end of the back main straight. Santa Barbara also had a doozy at the end of the main straight and the turn onto a road that went behind the hangers was famous. This course also had some deep drainage ditches along side portions of the course. This area gets some serious rain, not a problem in Palm Springs. These drainage ditches collected their share of cars as well as water.

Santa Barbara was one of the best of the airport courses, if for no other reason than climate. It has nice cool weather as opposed to triple digits in Palm Springs, which is 200 miles east and in the middle of the desert. Palm Springs did have great nightlife and when the Cal Club hit town, it was an end to end party. I had pretty good luck at the desert venue and raced a wide variety of cars. At one event, probably in the mid fifties, I was driving the Baldwin Special. This car had a fiberglass body and a Ford flat head engine. This was a fast car for the airport circuit as there was always a lot of loose stuff on the road surface and the Baldwin, with its straight axle was a good dirt tracker. It was so hot that any exposed metal touched was good for a yelp. I was doing well in the race probably near the front, but the transmission was sticking between second and third. By the end of the race, I was getting so weak from dehydration that I could hardly shift the car. When I pulled into the pits, I just sat there too pooped to move. Stan Mullin, A prominent lawyer who drew up the



original by-laws for the Cal Club, took one look at me and told someone to get some water in me quickly. I was so dehydrated that they had to lift me out of the car. Stan pointed to my bloody right glove. It turned out, that I had a blister in the palm of my hand the size of a half a dollar and it had broken. Adrenaline can only go so far. This is how all those hero-driver rumors get started.

In the early sixties at a Santa Barbara Race, Carroll Shelby showed up with the prototype Cobra. He had taken a British chassis built by AC, modified by Carroll, and dropped a Ford in the engine room. Carroll offered the car to a bunch of us to take out on the course and play. I think Phil Hill, Dan Gurney and I tried to turn that car



John and Eleanor Von Neumann made three trips to New York to pick up new Porsches from Max Hoffman and drive them back to California. The first delivered by train was for Bill Pollack, a 1952 model with a one-piece windshield with three tight curves, looking through the bends was best avoided. It was a wonderful toy and a great car in which to learn how to drive fast carefully.



JACK CAMPBELL / POLLACK COLLECTION

On March 23, 1952 it was back to Palm Springs for the Fourth Annual Sports Car Event. Bill drove Leo Caton's Morgan Plus 4 to a 7th place finish.

In the main Bill switched to John Edgar's number 78 Siata 1400 GS and earned a 3rd place for the under 1.5-liter class.



DENVER / POLLACK COLLECTION



DENVER / POLLACK COLLECTION

Al Torres lines up the starters for the Del Monte Trophy Race at Pebble Beach on April 19, 1953.

Pollack in the Allard leads Bill Spear in a Ferrari 340 Mexico and Phil Hill in his 250MM Vignale Spyder. The finish was reversed with Bill Pollack crossing the line third.

After the race, Bill and mechanic Charles Drucker, went out to identify the source of brake trouble. Under acceleration, an axle shaft snapped and sent the Allard J2 into a pine tree. Drucker suffered a broken pelvis in the impact.



How To Race An Allard

PEBBLE BEACH, 27 MAY 1951

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING I drove the Allard to the Pebble Beach course. Carmel is one of the entrances to the 17 Mile Drive. Some of the most beautiful land, views and homes in the world are located within this gated community. The Del Monte Lodge, site of the Pebble Beach golf course and the famed Concours de'Elegance, was our race headquarters. Just a short walk from the hotel was the stable and this was where the pits and the start and finish line were located. The Allard with its six-liter Cad made some serious noise and the tall stately soft pines that bordered the roads made a perfect sounding board. I don't know anyone that would not have blipped the throttle at least once. I'm weak and this car was something special. So I thought that it was time for everyone to wake up and smell the carbon monoxide.

The actual pit area was in front of a four-bar corral fence, something that would not be allowed today. Putting the cars in front of the fence was inherently unsafe. The Cal Club and the SCCA had a somewhat cavalier attitude about safety. We discussed it and were in fact concerned, but neither club had been exposed to a really bad accident involving spectators. The paddock area was behind the fence and all other cars and trucks along with spectators were allowed to freely roam in this area.

In a later year, Trader Vic, the famed restaurateur from San Francisco, would come to the race and set up a circus tent in the infield and serve exotic food and drinks to the participants at his own expense. Of course, the drivers would put the world's best mai tai's

on hold until after the race. Somehow, the corn dogs of today don't quite match up to Vic's cuisine.

While many of the cars were getting last minute adjustments, the Allard was being treated only to some waxing and polishing. Tom Carstens had a thing about working on cars in the pits. I cannot remember the hood being opened for anything other than for someone to take a picture of the gleaming engine compartment.

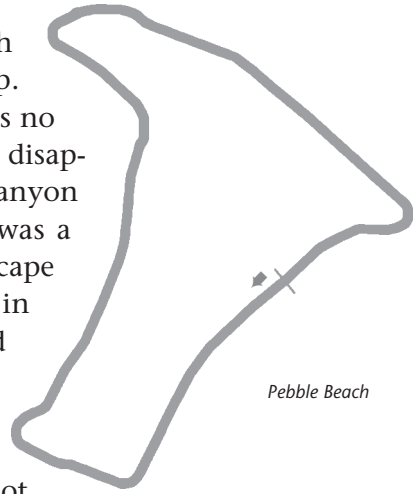
Just before practice I noticed that all of the gauges on the instrument panel had been taped over—the tachometer, oil pressure, and temperature gauge were all covered. I pointed to the tape and Tom told me that he didn't want me looking at the gauges. Tom's attitude was that the car should run and if something went wrong then it was his problem, but that I should just concentrate on driving. It made sense to me.

We had the fastest qualifying time so I was to start on the pole. There was an Allard next to me, I think it was Jack Armstrong, and in the second row was Phil Hill in his supercharged 2.9-liter Alfa. The Alfa made all kinds of whiny sounds with overhead cams and straight cut gears, I wasn't sure just how fast the car was but I knew Phil would drive the wheels off it. The starter, Al Torres, gave us the whirling flag, the sign to start our engines. When my engine fired the exhaust blew a piece of pavement the size of a dinner plate into the side of the Allard next to me. It must have shaken Armstrong up to realize that I was throwing away more horsepower than many of the smaller cars had.

There were probably ten rows of cars in the main event and waiting for the starter to run all the way to the back row to make sure that everyone was running was the longest couple of minutes in my life. My adrenal gland must have been putting out enough power to light a small village. My right leg would not stay on the throttle, it kept bouncing up and down. Finally I saw Al in my rear view mirror, running back up between the cars. I knew he would run to the front and cut to the side, then turn and look down the line making sure no arms were raised, indicating problems, then he would leap into the air and drop the flag.

I had checked and re-checked the gear selection a dozen times. This would be the only time I would use first. When the flag fell it

was six-liters to the wall. The clutch came out and everything hooked up. When I took my first breath, there was no one beside me. The pits were rapidly disappearing and the car was diving into a canyon of tall soft pine trees. The first turn was a ninety-degree to the right, with an escape road straight ahead for those who got in over their heads. I knew where I should shut off but on this first lap I did not want anyone sneaking in front on this first turn. Shifting down into second and trying to brake smoothly was not easy as I was still overdosed on adrenaline. Coming out of the first turn, the big V8 just smoked the tires and leaped down the short straight to the next sharp right onto the backstretch. This piece of road had some very interesting little gentle bends, but with your foot in the firewall you needed all of the road and a little bit more. At the end of this test of nerves was a big sweeper to the left that climbed slightly to a right hand hairpin.



Invariably it was at the end of this sweeper and the hairpin that Phil Hill would catch me and be right on my tail. I would drag the Allard down to almost a boulevard stop for this tight turn. The Alfa on my rear would be shifting down though the gears. If I could, I would make the driver behind me go for his lowest gear to pull up around the hairpin and get away. The Allard would come around that turn in second and I would just punch it. The acceleration from five or ten miles an hour with all of the torque was astounding.

The road from the hairpin went fairly level for a short distance and then with a slight bump sloped down to the final start and finish straight. This was one of the fastest parts of the old Pebble Beach Circuit. The slight bump turned into a launching platform at a 100-mph. There was always a stiff breeze coming off the ocean and the car tended to weathervane when it was airborne. I would have to figure out where the wind was coming from and head into it a tad, so that when I came down the car would still be on the narrow crown topped road.

I never tried to add up my flight time in the Allard, but every second was thrilling. In later years, it was just past this bump that Ernie McAfee left the road in the 4.4-liter Ferrari, to a fatal conclusion. I have always wondered if that bump, contributed to the accident.

Continuing past the bump, drivers were faced with another right angle turn. Getting slowed on this long down hill to the main straight was a serious brake test. There was an escape road but it bent off to the left and many drivers decided too late to take the road and were forced into a clump of Monterey Pines. Basil Panzer, a reputed German count, managed to climb one of those pines in an Allard, quite a feat.

Turning onto the main straight there was a slight bend to the left. It was full throttle time. Half way down the main there was another slight bend to the left and it was there that I learned how to really drift a car at way too much speed. After a few hair-raising laps I settled into the routine of having Phil on my tail and knowing that I could out accelerate a bullet. Traffic was my forté and I used it to the best advantage. With the Allard's acceleration, I could pass cars just about anywhere I pleased, but I would try to pass in places where my opponent would have to wait. That would give me a moment or two of a breather. We went on to win. The Allard would continue to win many victories and the scenario was pretty much always the same. Usually, Phil Hill would be my major competitor and he would be in some kind of a Ferrari. It was always a David and Goliath kind of thing. The press portrayed the contest as the "Small fast nimble Ferrari against the big brutish American powered beast." (Of course the Ferrari's and Maserati's et al, got bigger and bigger.)

RENO, 21 OCTOBER 1951

The trip to Reno in my blown TC was described elsewhere, but suffice to say that Bobbi and I arrived at our hotel resembling Nanook of the North and his mate.

Race day turned very warm, as it can in Reno, and Charles Hornburg was shuttling around the parking lot talking Jaguar owners out of their radiator pressure caps. It seemed that water in the cooling system did not like the altitude and kept finding its way



POLLOCK COLLECTION

Bill Pollack received a special salute in August 2002, at the Monterey Historic Automobile Races.

The Rolex Moments in Time Display was a special tribute to the influential driver who won with equipment as diverse as the MG TC, Baldwin MkII Special, Cooper-Climax F2, Chevrolet Corvette, and the famous black Cadillac-Allard J2 that became known for its red wheels and white sidewalls. Of course, the Allard was also famous for its winning race history in the hands of Bill Pollack, including wins in the Main at the Pebble Road Races, two years running.

The Allard Reborn

THE TREE WAS ONE FOOT from the front of the car and I was still accelerating. Disbelief flashed through my head before everything went blank. I was still in the car when I came to and I was completely numb. Looking down I saw that the steering wheel rim had been torn off the steel hub. My chest was covered with blood from my nose, and pine needles from above. Within moments I was lifted out of the car and laid down on the ground. I don't remember the trip to the hospital or ever seeing Chuck.

I was still in the emergency ward when Bobbi arrived. She was all dressed up and ready to go to the trophy banquet. I assured her that I was okay and urged her to go. I think she was a lot more upset than she let on. She said that Tom Carstens and Bob Coogan were there to see me. I think everyone was surprised that I was still alive as there had been a rumor at race headquarters that I had been killed. Tom came in with a long face and wanted to know how I felt and not to worry about the car, that everything was all right. Coogan came in and wanted to know what the red stuff was. I told him it was race driver's blood.

I had not broken any bones, but my nose took a pretty good hit and looked like it had a zipper down the middle. The hospital released me the next morning and Bobbi and I went over and looked at the Allard. That was a mistake, as I felt worse after seeing what was left of that beautiful machine.

Chuck Ducker was seriously injured in this wreck. I took out the steering wheel; Chuck hit the instrument panel. The next morning I was told he was in surgery and I could not see him, but he would soon be all right. I think they underestimated his recovery by sev-

eral months. Chuck's wife, Beverly, stayed with him until he finally left Carmel with a limp and a busted spleen. She later left him to marry the Cal Club accountant. In a rally Chuck drove off a cliff and was found bent, but alive, by the Lone Ranger—my friend, John Hart. John and I concluded that Ducker should stay far away from racing.

We decided to head for home and, sore as I was, I wanted to drive our 356 Porsche home. Just south of Salinas is a small town called Greenfield. I was driving about 40 in a 35 mph zone when a 1950 Buick Roadmaster pulled up along our right side. When I looked over the man put on his police hat and motioned me to pull over. I painfully climbed out of the car and walked slowly back to meet him. He looked at me with my bandaged face and two black eyes and was about to say something when Mrs. Pollack came at him with a flashing tongue. He stepped back from the blast as she advised him with some choice Anglo-Saxon verbiage. This was out of character for my beautiful young wife and the covert cop and I stood back with our jaws dropped open. Despite Bobbi's move toward pleas describing a hero race driver injured while raising money for charity and so forth, he wrote the ticket. In later years, Greenfield became famous as a speed trap and I can claim the distinction of being one of the first victims.

Leaving Greenfield, I thought this could well be the end of a fabulous era. Would I ever see the black Allard again? Could it ever be repaired?

OTHER VOICES: DAVE BRODSKY

I discovered the Allard when I went to purchase some antique model airplane engines from Bob Rehfeld. Walking through his garage in Alameda, I saw the Allard and knew what it was because I had been attending the Monterey Historics for a number of years as a spectator. This was around 1983. Tom Carstens sold the Allard that was wrecked in 1953 to a salvage outfit in Seattle. Bob told me a person in San Francisco purchased the Allard and had a well known hot rod constructor put it back together. The owner wanted a different look and had the front end modified similar to a Ferrari but still with the cycle fenders. It eventually ended up in a lot for sale and Bob and his

wife purchased it the day of their wedding. They would take it for rides on nice days, but by this time it had been sitting for quite awhile and wasn't running. I tried to buy it from Bob but he was sentimentally attached to it and wouldn't sell. I kept in touch with Bob over the years and he promised to let me know when he was ready to sell it. He moved, taking the Allard with him, to Santa Rosa where I took some pictures of it. I showed the photos to a number of people who knew the car and they were as excited as I was. In 1986 Bob was ready to sell, but I was facing some potentially large medical bills and told Bob I couldn't buy it at that time. Finally we reached an agreement in December 1987 and I was to pick up the car. I arranged to have a trailer delivered to me in Santa Rosa. When my wife and I checked in at our hotel, we had a message that Bob's wife Audrey called to try and stop us from driving to Santa Rosa. Bob had a severe stroke and was in the hospital. We checked in with Bob's neighbor and he promised to keep us advised of his condition. Naturally, Audrey had no desire to discuss the Allard. Bob remained in a coma for many days until one day he came out of it long enough for Audrey to ask questions. Bob instructed her to sell the car to me. We received the phone call that night and picked up the Allard the next day. Unfortunately, Bob passed away the day after we got the car.

Then the restoration started. It needed everything, so we started from the frame up. I decided to restore it to the 1953 Pebble Beach configuration. The body work was done by Kent White (The Tin Man) and the paint was done by George Hagel. The mechanicals were by Bob Graham with myself assisting. I wanted the car to be accurately restored and I was in charge of scrounging the parts. We needed to find a correct unmolested Allard in order to restore the front sheet metal properly. That was a challenge because many of the Allards had been modified over the years. I finally settled on an Allard in Houston and Kent White went there to take measurements and photos.

The car was finished in time for the 1989 Monterey Historics. I had been racing a Crosley Special since 1985 but Alan Moss suggested that I get the original driver, Bill Pollack, to run it. I called Bill and he thought it would be great. The engine was an unknown because we didn't go through it, but it ran fairly well. The car caused quite a stir at the race and performed adequately but the transmission needed

work. After the race the Allard was invited to be shown at the Concours d'Elegance at Pebble Beach on Sunday.

The 1990 Monterey Historic Races featured a tribute to the Allard marque and the No.14 Allard was on the program cover and posters. Again Bill ran the Allard, but this time the engine gave up. Tom Carstens, the original owner, was at the race and asked Vic Edelbrock, Jr. to prepare the engine for me, as Vic's father had in 1952 for Carstens. Edelbrock had Bobby Meeks, the original builder, redo the Cadillac engine. Bobby did a great job and the Allard was ready for the 1991 Historics. Bill drove the Allard in the event for the third straight year, this time with no major problems.

I raced the Allard in the Historics at Laguna Seca from 1992–95, then in 1996 I sold it at the Christies Auction to Bill Marriot. I didn't see it again until it appeared at the 2002 Monterey Historics, the year Bill Pollack was honored.



A Record of Races: Bill Pollack

by Michael T. Lynch with the assistance of Jim Sitz

Date Venue	Event	Car	Race No.	Result	Serial No.	Entrant
1949						
August 7 Goleta	Time Trial	MG TC		2nd Novice		Bill Pollack
1950						
16 April Palm Springs	Main	MG TC s/c	4	3rd		Bill Pollack
25 June Santa Ana	Race 4	MG TC s/c	8	2nd		John Edgar
Santa Ana	Main	MG TC s/c	8			John Edgar
10 September Sandburg	Hillclimb	MG TC/sc	107	8th		Bill Pollack
October 15 Carrell Speedway	Heat 2	MG TC s/c	88	1st		John Edgar
Carrell Speedway	Heat 7	MG TC s/c	88	3rd		John Edgar
Carrell Speedway	Heat 10	MG TC s/c	88	1st		John Edgar
1951						
25 February Carrell Speedway		Jaguar XK120		3rd		Bill Cramer
27 May Pebble Beach	Main	Allard-Cadillac J2	14	1st	1850	Tom Carstens
21 October Reno	Main	Allard-Cadillac J2	14	1st	1850	Tom Carstens
1952						
23 March Palm Springs	Production O1.5	Morgan Plus 4	45	7th		Leo Caton
23 March Palm Springs	Modified U1.5	Siata 1400 GS	78	3rd		John Edgar
20 April Pebble Beach	Main	Allard-Cadillac J2	14	1st	1850	Tom Carstens
31 May Golden Gate	Main	Allard-Cadillac J2	14	1st	1850	Tom Carstens
28 July Torrey Pines	Main	Ferrari 340 America	90	Ret	0150	Tony Parravano
9 November Madera	Formula 3	Cooper-JAP Mk VI	4	3rd		Bill Breeze
Madera	Main	Allard-Cadillac J2	14	1st	1850	Tom Carstens

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