

THREE AUSTRALIAN GPs

The story of Elfin Mono 6446

In the early 1950s Garrie Cooper quickly established a name as a builder of lightweight competitive sports cars. The first was based on an Austin 7 but others quickly followed and he started to enter competitive motor sport as a driver of his own cars and a constructor of cars sold to others.

In 1963 work started on the revolutionary design of a car destined to dominate the new Australian 1.5 litre capacity class. Colin Chapman of Lotus had already built the Formula 1 monocoque but the idea was so new that Garrie would only have had some vague ideas of the Lotus 25 and would have never actually seen one when he laid down his own design. The monocoque did away with the traditional tube frame chassis and used a very light sheet steel frame to which aluminium panels were riveted to provide a very stiff structure. The finished structure weighed some 80kg less than the tube frame of the Elfin Catalina it replaced. Ingeniously the hollow section of the monocoque was sealed and also served as the petrol tank. The original Elfin Mono made its debut at the August 1964 Melbourne Racing Car show and orders quickly followed.

Elfin made cars for sale to customers in batches of 6 and Chassis No. 6446 was one of the first run of cars. Ultimately 17 were made (*see 'Elfin Mono list'*). The original owner was Mel McEwin of Murray Bridge. Over the next two years Mel ran the car in consistently in events throughout the Eastern states which included the Australian GPs in 1965, 1966, and 1967. He was obviously passionate and enthusiastic and has been described by many as a very capable driver. The competition history in Mel's hands has been listed in detail (*see 'Competition History Elfin Mono 6446'*). He recalls the cars as being blue when delivered new although he said they painted it every time they got sponsorship from another company.

Elfin Monos came with a variety of motors and this car was delivered with a 1500cc Lotus Ford twin cam.

The gearbox was a 4 speed VW casing with Elfin strait cut gears. Very early on Mel fitted the rear wheels to the front and had larger rear wheels made. At some stage after Mel's initial ownership it was converted to Mk 2 suspension.

Racing Car News reported the sale of the Elfin in the June 1967 issue.

The new owner was not mentioned by name but the date of sale was some time after Mel's last outing on 27th March 1967. The history thereafter becomes a little murky. Mel was unable to recall who he sold the car to, but an unidentified Mono appeared in the hands of Col Green at Warwick Farm on 14th May 1967. All other Monos were accounted for in steady ownership through this period and it is a reasonable conclusion that the car was 6446. Col Green raced the car until May 1968 when there is no further reference to him in a Mono but another unidentified Mono started to appear in the hands of Kel Munyard. Again, by elimination it seems reasonable

The Lex Davison Connection

It was rumoured that Chassis No. 6446 was ordered by Lex Davison but he was killed before he had a chance to take delivery. The maths don't add up unfortunately. Motoring writer Graham Howard takes up the story.

"I talked to Mel McEwin in Adelaide at the Australian GP in 1987. He told me "the family thought it appropriate" for me to take over the Mono which he said Elfin had started to build for Davison before his death (Sandown, February 1965).

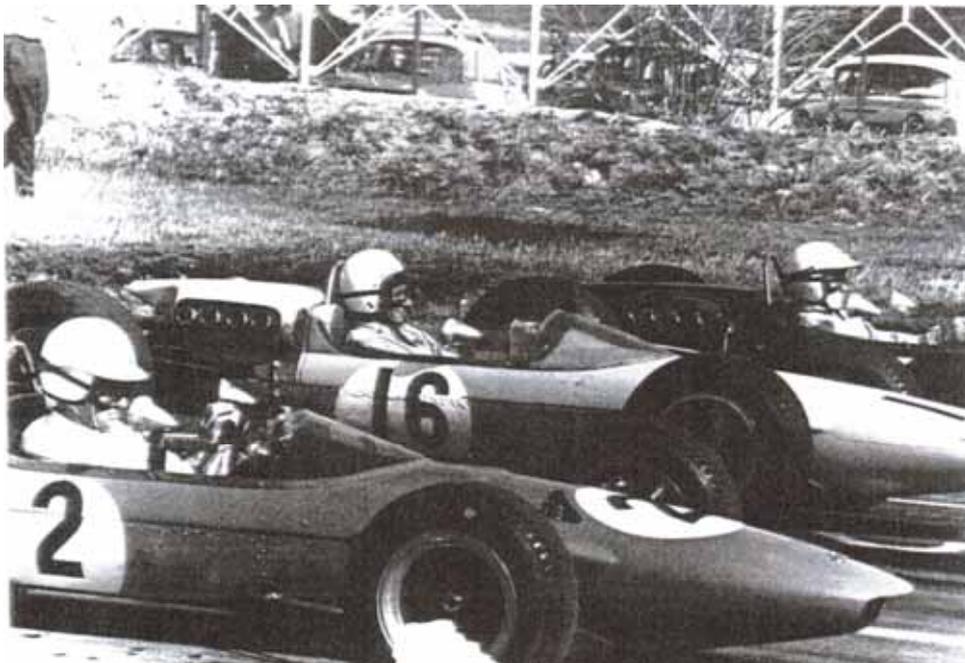
However, Elfin's records show chassis 6446 as having been completed in December 1964. Davison family records show he did not order a Mono until January 1965. In late February 1965, literally only days after Alan Ashton cancelled that order, McEwin was racing 6446 at Longford..... even if 6446 had started off to be a car for Davison the evidence indicates it was not only completed but actually in McEwin's hands well before Davison's death."

to conclude this was 6446. David Clements was the next owner, purchasing the car in 1972, Barry Johnson (*refer 'Talking with Barry Johnson'*) bought it in 1975, and Mel was able to buy it back for sentimental reasons in about 1977. It has been owned by Mel ever since and was dismantled for restoration many years ago.

I bought it on 16th January 2007.



Mel with the Elfin Mono and his Jaguar tow car



Mel in car 16 (chassis no. 6446) alongside Garrie Cooper. He changed the wheels very early in the piece by fitting the larger rear wheels to the front and having much larger composite wheels fitted to the rear. The car was blue originally but he changed the colours every time he got a new sponsor.



Start of the 1965 Australian GP at Longford, 1st March 1965. Mel is second from the rear on the left.