

CLASSIC DRIVER

[This Harrington Sunbeam Alpine legitimately wore the Ferrari crest](#)

Lead

At the 1963 12 Hours of Sebring, this Sunbeam Harrington Alpine competed under the N.A.R.T. banner, becoming the first and only British sports car to legitimately bear the Cavallino Rampante...

The Harrington Alpine was a factory-approved upgrade of the rorty Sunbeam roadster, carried out by Thomas Harrington Ltd., the Sussex-based coachbuilder, and distributed by the Rootes Group, Sunbeam's official dealer network. The most obvious change was the addition of a streamlined glass-fibre roof, transforming the cute convertible into a handsome (and finned) fastback GT car, ripe for development and use on the track.



The well-heeled recipient of this rare left-hand-drive example was Filippo Theodoli, an Italian nobleman whose accounts as an executive for Gardner Advertising Agency included Ferrari and Alitalia Airlines, the latter of which was a key financial supporter of the Sebring circuit. Perhaps more importantly, he was also a close friend of Luigi Chinetti, Ferrari's official East Coast concessionaire and the influential head honcho of the [North American Racing Team](#).

After personally taking delivery of the car in England, Theodoli soon put it to work on the tracks of North America as part of the works Rootes Motors team. Alas, results in 1962 were mediocre, topped with a tenth-place finish in a four-hour SCCA event at Vineland. Its first race in 1963, the 12 Hours of Sebring, was to be the Harrington's swansong.



Widely held as the first battle of the storied war between Ford and Ferrari, the 1963 12 Hours of Sebring was a memorable race, attracting a roster of the day's superstar drivers considered to be the finest ever seen at an American motor race – Surtees, Hill, Rodriguez, Scarfiotti, Bandini, McLaren, they were all there.

As an honorary member of N.A.R.T. for the race, the Sunbeam shared pit space with Ferrari 250 GTOs and the previous year's Le Mans-winning 330 TRI, and received a number of NART-sourced parts including a 40-gallon endurance fuel tank and a blue bucket seat just like that found in a GTO. Of course, it also had the privilege of wearing the N.A.R.T. crest on its wings.



Partnered with Bill Kneeland, Theodoli finished 36th overall and fourth in class behind another Sunbeam, an Abarth-Porsche and a Porsche Carrera – but the race was not without controversy. Fuel consumption was woefully high thanks to a Weber carburettor upgrade, and when the fuel filler assembly came clean off during an early pit stop, the car began spilling copious amounts of fuel on the track. Masten Gregory in his Jaguar E-type actually spun as a result but, despite his subsequent anger, the stewards saw no issue and the result stood.

Before the car had even been unloaded from its trailer following the race, it was bought by New Hampshire native Bob Avery, in partial exchange for his Sunbeam Rapier. As part of the deal, the workshop where it was located agreed to revert the car to street specification, removing the motorsport regalia and, essentially, erasing its unique history. It wasn't until some 30 years later that the Sunbeam, still in Avery's possession, would be restored to its former Sebring splendour.



Avery cherished the car until his death in 2012, after which a British collector bought it and set about a second restoration, with a view to returning the car to the track. And at the 72nd (and 73rd) Goodwood Members' Meeting, he did just that, much to the joy of the slightly bemused race-goers, who must have been second-guessing why this distinctly British-looking sports car was wearing Ferrari badges.

We imagine there'll be a few similarly bemused faces in the saleroom at Battersea Evolution next week, when the car goes under the hammer at the [RM Sotheby's London sale](#). RM has attached a pre-sale estimate of £100,000-140,000 – a relatively small price to pay for a two-time Sebring entrant and a genuine ex-N.A.R.T. machine?

Photos courtesy of RM Sotheby's © 2016

Gallery

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