







POWERFUL TRIO

Hibbing home-builts made mark in racing

BY BS LEVY

Hibbing, Minnesota, is better known for long, cold winters and the rich iron ore mined from the Mesabi range than sports-racing cars, but three locals won more than a few trophies and had a heck of a lot of fun with a trio of Hibbing home-builts back in the late 1950s and early '60s. Friends John Staver, Ed Grierson and Bill Larson had all done a bit of racing in assorted Jaguars and Corvettes and surely had the sports car bug. But, like most racers, they chatted over cocktails about something a bit faster, lighter and better-handling. Problem was, current-model Ferraris, Maseratis, Jaguars and Listers were prohibitively expensive to buy and campaign. Yet all three had been impressed by how fast top Corvette hotshoe Dr. Dick Thompson could pedal his production-class Corvette. So what would happen, the three Minnesotans mused,

if you lopped something like a thousand pounds off a production-class Corvette and maybe made the brakes a little better?

What, indeed?

And what if you moreover built three of them, side-by-side, so there would be unusual economies of scale and each of the trio could have his own mount? Now ideas like this bubble to the surface at wintertime bench-racing sessions all over the world. In fact, it's pretty much universal. But what made this one different was that Staver, Grierson and Larson were in a position to do something about it.

Staver ran a local foundry with the space, tools and equipment to turn their dreams into reality. Grierson worked for Staver, was an excellent fabricator and a canny and highly practical seat-of-the-pants engineer. And optometrist Larson was

regarded as something of a hotshoe on the local sports car and oval-track scene.

From the very beginning, the concept was not to build a world-beater that could rival the cost-no-object best from Europe and Southern California, but rather to build a trio of practical, straightforward cars that would supply a lot of bang for the buck and a lot of fun—and maybe even a few trophies—for their owner/drivers. The watchwords of the project were simply: "Will it work?"

So they eschewed the technical and fabrication demands of contemporary tubular space frames, and instead headed for the local junkyards to find three reasonably straight and rust-free 1955-57 Chevrolet sedan frames. These Grierson and friends shortened by some 20 inches and narrowed by six inches, then added a



ED GRIERSON



JOHN STAVEN AND BILL LARSON



ED GRIERSON AND BILL LARSON

all three were being campaigned extensively.

They quickly became the cars to beat on the local scene, often finishing 1-2-3 at unlikely, ad-hoc race circuits like the nearby Eveleth-Virginia regional airport and around the parking lots of Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington.

They also notched 18 podium finishes against top-class competition at the major regional events as well – including a first-in-class for Bill Larson's Echidna right here at Road America in June of 1961. Not bad for a Hibbing, MN, homebuilt based on a junkyard Chevy frame!

This weekend represents something special for Echidna fans (or fans of American V8 power and American grit, resourcefulness and ingenuity who may never have even heard of an Echidna) in that all three cars are entered and racing at Road America, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Staver Echidna's 1959 B-Modified national championship.

Steve Steers has been campaigning his Echidna (Larson's #66) for 20 years (with preparation assistance and advice from famous Chicago-area race car builder/engineer Bob McKee) and has scored many impressive finishes, including a first overall at the SVRA's premiere "Vintage National Championship" at Circuit of the Americas.

He'll be joined by fellow Echidna owner/driver enthusiasts Bob Hardison (Staver's #64) and Vintage Motorsport magazine publisher Mike Silverman (Grierson's #65).

Look for the bellowing blue cars with the discreet triangular logo on their flanks racing in Group 2, at the Friday night race car concours and leading Saturday's lunchtime touring with their own "Lap of Honor."