



BOBSY

For most people, a hobby means playing golf, fishing, hunting, scuba diving, flying, sky diving or racing. To Jerry Mong, a soft-spoken, mild-mannered mechanic from Medina, Ohio, hobby meant "Bobsy."

As in "twin." As in "twin race cars."

Mong's hobby began rather simply. He was running a tune-up and alignment shop in Medina, a quiet little community 30 miles south of Cleveland. Mong loved sports car racing, and began building his own car to pass the time after work.

The first race car, constructed in 1958, was a tube-framed, aluminum-bodied Special powered by a reversed VW engine. Mong and a few friends formed the aluminum body using Sutton rollers. The car was used in driving school and at local SCCA events at picturesque places like Nelson Ledges and the old Mid-Ohio sports car track.

"I took my own driving school in that first car," Mong recalled. "Driving schools in those days were basically a matter of getting out on a track, finding the fast way through the turns, then wearing stripes on the tail to let the other drivers know you were a rookie."

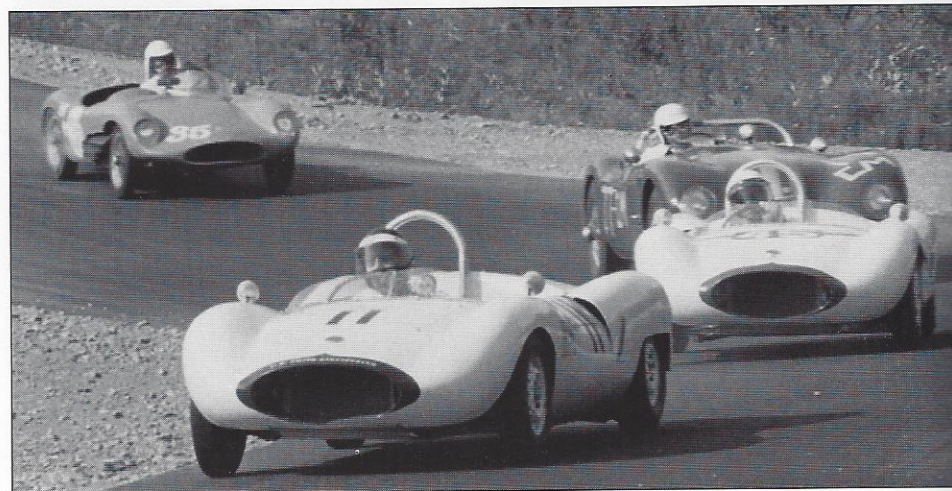
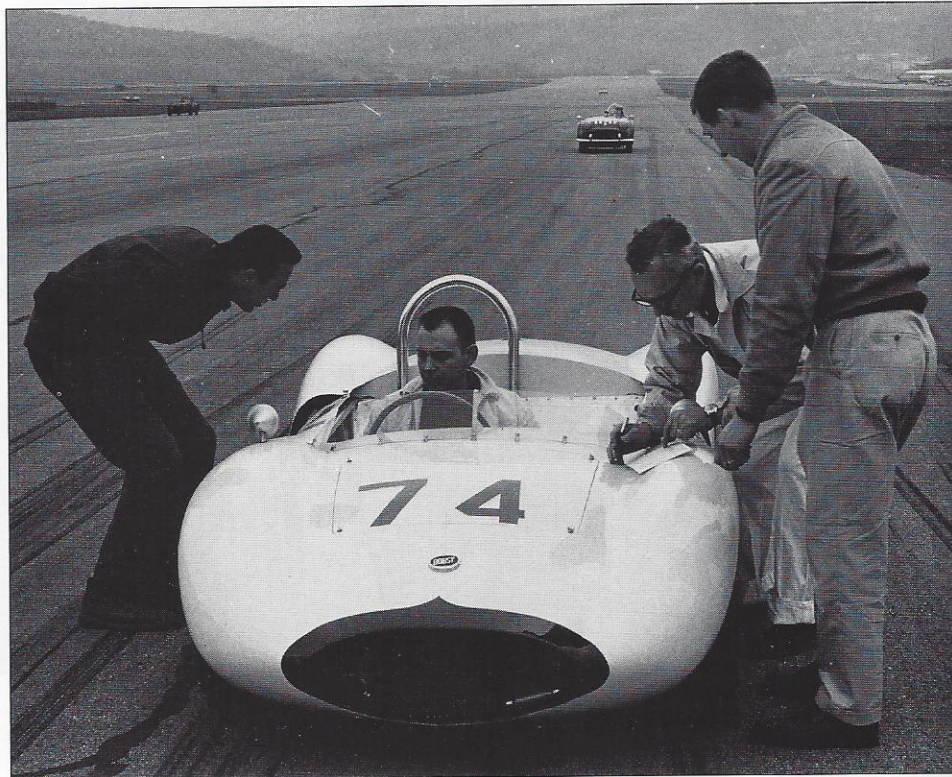
The twins, a pair of identical race cars, came during the period of 1960-62. Mong and two brothers, Kaye and Alan Heir, worked nights and weekends to build the two aluminum-tube-framed cars with fiberglass bodies. The cars were rear-engined, and designed to run in the H Modified (750cc) class. The name Bobsy was chosen because the cars were identical.

By 1962, Mong's hobby changed to a full-time business. Plans were made to build and race a car for a season, just to sort it out and gain some recognition. Mong dubbed the latest version the SR2.

The SR2 was constructed at Mong's home workshop in one of Medina's quieter neighborhoods. When heli-arc work had to be done, Mong had to do it between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. so as not to disturb his neighbor's TV reception.

The basic structure for the SR2 remained the same, but the powerplant was stepped up to a Holbay 1,100cc Ford engine with a Hewland Mk 3 gearbox. Mong used Cooper front uprights and wheels, which were later changed to castings of Mong's own design.

"Up to this point, I'd been building and driving the car," said Mong. "We felt we needed a professional driver to do our development program. We recruited Chuck Dietrich as our driver for the 1963 season, and he won the national championship with the car."



Mong recalled the most memorable race of the 1963 season. "We were doing the 500-mile USRRC race at Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin. The car, which was being driven by a co-driver on the team, was essentially destroyed during Thursday's practice session," said Mong. "We totally rebuilt the car in a day-night thrash session and had the car ready for the grid Sunday. Dietrich drove alone and finished eighth overall against some very formidable competition."

"Later that season, we ran at Watkins Glen and raced the same car in two classes, G and F, on the same day, changing the engines between races. Chuck won both races."

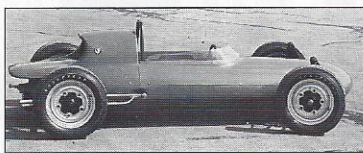
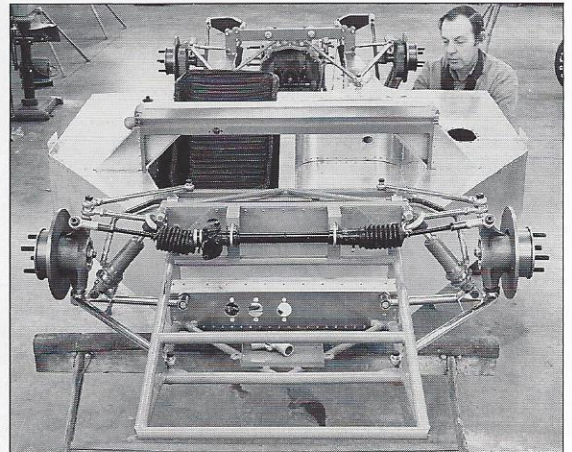
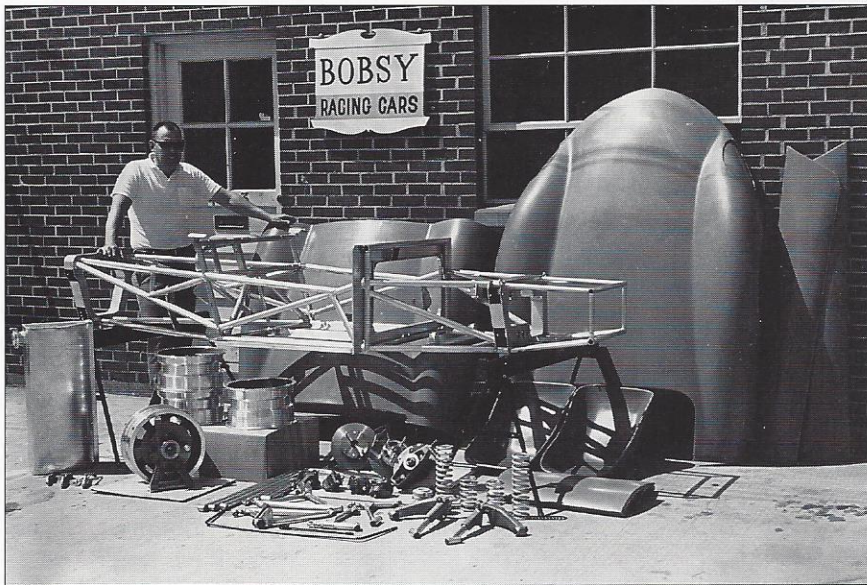
Dietrich, who still races Formula Atlantic, talked about that season. "I'd been driving since '51, and had a lot of experience in different types of race cars. I basically drove every Elva ever made from '56 to '63. Jerry's Bobsy was quite advanced technically, with

the aluminum tubes instead of steel. I'd like to think the car was successful because of me, the driver. But I think it was a combination of things. The car weighed 300-400 pounds less than the competition, and I only weighed about 135 pounds or so. When you're talking about cars in this class, the weight difference was significant.

"The car handled well and was extremely well-built," said Dietrich. "I remember going down a long straightaway at Virginia International Speedway at 120 mph when the rear deck flew off. I didn't know about it until I pitted and Jerry asked where I'd lost it."

Dietrich won at least nine races with the Bobsy, and since the national championship was determined by a driver's nine best races, Dietrich won easily. No one else was even close.

"The car was extremely well-built with excellent workmanship," said Dietrich. "It



Bobsy also built Formula Vees. Pictured are the Vanguard (above) and the Vega (right).



above
Jerry Mong at work on a Bobsy SR6 chassis.
photo by David Wenner

top - left
Mong poses with a SR3 kit at the Bobsy plant.

top - right
Mong won the 1965 H-Mod race at Daytona with his SR3.
photo by Alice Bixler

left - center
The Bobsy SR2 built for Chuck Dietrich in 1963.
photo by W.D. Huskonen

opposite page

top
Jerry Mong takes one of the Bobsy "twins" through tech at Cumberland, Maryland for its first race — May 1962.
photo by Edward Gifford, Jr.

bottom
Mong leads Kaye Heir in their identical Bobsy H-Modifieds at the "new" Mid-Ohio racing circuit — 1962.

all photos courtesy Jerry Mong

compared favorably with the Lotus and Porsche of that time."

Full production of the SR2 began in 1964 in a rented space of 1,200 square feet. By this time, Mong had five employees building three cars at a time. The project was expanded to include a new prototype Formula Vee called the Bobsy Vanguard.

By 1965, the operation had to be moved to a larger building, where they continued to turn out FVs and sports-racers. The SR2 was upgraded with a new nose cone and many chassis changes, and was renamed the SR3. Around 80 FVs were built at the Medina facility, and a large number of SR3s were sold as kit cars.

Before the year was over, Mong had acquired a new 5,000-square-foot shop, which he named Vanguard Automotive. There, the new Vega FV model was developed, of which approximately 20 were built and sold.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bobsy progressed to the SR5, a rear-engined semi-monocoque car with a 1,300cc Cosworth BDH. The SR5 was quickly reworked to the SR6, which then drew the attention of Jim Trueman, a young entrepreneur and racer from Columbus, Ohio. Trueman, who built the Red Roof Inns motel chain, raced the car extensively. At one point, Trueman ran 35 consecutive races without a DNF. He won about 25 of those races, according to Mong. Trueman won the C Sports Racing national championship at the SCCA Runoffs at Road Atlanta in 1972 with the SR6.

Trueman was moving up in racing and Mong constructed four Formula Fords and four Formula Atlantic cars, along with an IMSA GT Monza. When Trueman hired a young sports car driver named Bobby Rahal to go Indy car racing, Mong decided to get out of the development and building of race cars.

"I'd had enough of the 16-hour days and the traveling," said Mong. Vanguard was converted into a full automotive machine shop specializing in vintage race and road engines.

"There are still a lot of Bobsy race cars out there," said Mong. "Al Beasley, from Mentor, Ohio, was racing and winning with one not long ago. But drivers like to modify and change cars to their own liking. Every once in awhile I get a picture from someone who wants to know if their car is a Bobsy. But when someone has added this and changed that, I have a hard time telling what it might be. But the Bobsy was fast and fun, and won a lot of races in its time."

Mong's son, Ronald, has followed in his father's footsteps, building and developing race cars in an operation called Elite Fab & Machine in Columbus. But for Jerry Mong, the memories of the Bobsy are enough excitement at his Vanguard shop. *Tom Suits*