

## 1967 Russell-Alexis MK-14 "Formula B" (#AT/FF15)

By Mark R. Brinker

Every now and then something magical happens in vintage racing. Some happenings are spectacular, like Jim Hall and Vic Elford flinging the Chaparrals around Laguna Seca at the 2005 Monterey Histories. Others are glorious, like Stirling Moss ringing out his 1955 Mille Miglia winning Mercedes 300SLR. But not all magical moments involve racing legends. Some simply involve a heart-wrenching personal triumph, like the day Gene Bashor of Encampment, Wyoming, finally took his first lap in the Russell-Alexis he bought some 37 years before. And the way I hear it, there wasn't a dry eye in the paddock.

Alexis Cars of Birmingham, England built, a variety of formula racing cars between 1959 and 1970. The cars were well designed, built to a high standard, and were competitive in their class. As a result, the cars today continue to enjoy a loyal following from enthusiasts around the globe.

The Alexis project began in 1959 when partners Alex Francis and Australian Bill Harris built their first Formula Junior. This car, the MK 1 (chassis = HF 1), had a rigid rear axle, an alloy body, and was motivated by a BMC power plant up front. The MK 1 was followed by a series of continuously improved Juniors. The 1960 MK 2 (chassis = HF 2) retained Alexis aluminum panel-work, but the rear suspension was now independent and power came from a Cosworth unit. Two rear-engined works MK 3s (chassis = HF 301 and HF 302) were built in '61 with special Alexis wheels (replacing Cooper) and unique Alexis wishbones. The MK 3s were raced by Jack Pitcher, Phil Robinson, and Peter Proctor (who scored a win at Aintree and finished 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Oulton Park Gold Cup Formula Junior event in 1961).

The 1962 MK 4s (chassis = HF 401 and HF 402) had several improvements. Alfin drums were replaced by disc units, a Hewland box replaced the VW, and the car received new

wheels and uprights for wider tires. John Rhodes placed well in his MK 4 throughout the '62 season. The 1963 MK 5 (chassis = HF 501) continued the same basic configuration but was smaller with a fiberglass body. Australian John Ampt was a consistent front-runner in this car.

The 1964 season brought a new racing formula; 1,000-cc for F2 and F3 cars. In response, Alexis built two Cosworth-powered MK 6 Formula 3s (chassis = HF 601 and HF 602) and later three MK 7s for Formula 2 (chassis = HF 701-HF 703). The MK 7s were raced internationally by Ampt and Peter Revson. Three fiberglass-bodied MK 8s (chassis = HF 801-HF 803) were built in '65 before Harris left the project and returned to Australia. But not before Paul Hawkins scored the most important Alexis victory up until that point, winning the Eifelrennen F2 event in a works MK 8.

Allan Taylor became Francis' new partner, but the team built only one MK 9 F3 (chassis = TR 2) and three MK 10 F2s (chassis = TR 3-TR5) in 1966 and 1967, respectively. However, the new Alexis pairing got rolling in a big way with the introduction and immediate popularity of Formula Ford in Europe. Jim Russell of the Jim Russell Racing Driving School (JRRDS) was looking for a constructor to build a Formula Ford student car, and team Alexis was eager to do the work. The deal specified that Russell would market Alexis-built MK 14 FF cars under the name Russell-Alexis. The cars were extremely competitive and JRRDS pilot Claude Bourgoignie roared his way to the 1967 FF championship. The cars were also quite popular among gentlemen racers with 57 MK 14 Russell-Alexis FFs sold.

One such gentleman was Gene Bashor who began his racing career in 1947 with a V-8/60 midget. This was followed by a sprint car in '53, a Volpini FJ in '62, and later a Lotus 18 FJ. Desiring to move up in class, Bashor responded to an advertisement by well-known importer, Fred Opert. Opert was having trouble selling chassis = AT/FF15 and had had it set up to run Formula B. Bashor liked the idea and bought the car in February of '68 with a 5-speed Hewland MK 4 transaxle and American Libre wheels, minus engine. In a separate deal, he purchased a 1,600-cc Cosworth twin cam, had it race prepped, and was ready to go...or so he thought.

According to Bashor, now 81, "Shortly after I bought the car, I was told by my doctor that I had heart troubles, so I wasn't able to get a license. Thirteen years later when I went for an annual physical, the doctor told me my heart was fine. Unfortunately, by that time, my hands had bad



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arthritis and I couldn't hold on to tools. So I just gave up on the idea of preparing the car myself." From there, the car lived in Bashor's barn, never got put together, never turned a wheel on the track.

Although Bashor never raced again, he kept himself immersed in the sport as a Tech Inspector for Rocky Mountain Vintage Racing (RMVR). And that's how he met Bob Alder who has been racing his Titan Formula Ford with the club since the late '80s. According to Alder, "I first met Gene about fifteen years ago. Over the years, several folks became aware of the car and tried to buy it from him. But for his own reasons, he was unwilling to sell. I cornered him at an event about five years ago and told him I was interested in getting his car running." Much to Alder's surprise, Bashor invited him to come see the car (still in his barn). Alder made that trip to Wyoming in the summer of 2004. He found the car resting peacefully where it had sat for nearly 36 years. Based on the lovely condition of Alder's other racecars, Bashor was 100 percent confident that he would refurbish the Russell-Alexis properly, and the two quickly agreed on the terms of the sale.

Over the winter, #AT/FF15 was refurbished. "It hardly qualified as a restoration given its incredible mint condition," says Alder. At last fitted with a 1,600 twin cam, the car debuted at the April 2005 LaJunta RMVR event. And, as a very special treat, Alder invited Bashor to take the car out onto the track. As Bashor roared past the pits for the first time, he received a tearful standing ovation from every member of the club... Another magical vintage racing moment.

Further details on this car can be found at [www.TeamterrificRacing.com](http://www.TeamterrificRacing.com)

Further information about Alexis cars can be found at [www.alexisregistry.com](http://www.alexisregistry.com)

*Do you know of a Hidden Treasure? If so, send your photos and stories to Mark at [mbrinker@vintageracecar.com](mailto:mbrinker@vintageracecar.com)*

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