

Lola T70

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David Hobbs, Jim Clark, Bruce McLaren.

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The story of the Lola T70 personifies the talents and ambitions of Eric Broadley, perhaps the most versatile racing car designer/builder of all time. Chairman, chief executive, chief designer, head chef and bottle washer at Lola Cars Ltd., Eric did it all.

Myth has it that the name Lola, came from a song in the “Damn Yankees” show – “Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets”.

In 1950’s, trained as a quantity surveyor and living in the southern suburbs of London, Eric and his cousin Graham became enthusiastic members of the 750 Motor Club. Remember that in these post-war years there was very little of anything to race with in Great Britain. 750 Motor Club members generally built their own cars, based on the pre-war Austin 7. Amongst motor racing luminaries who were members of this club are such names as, Colin Chapman, Brian Hart, Len Terry, Frank Costin, Len Bailey and the inimitable Major Arthur Mallock – who I raced against in 1968 when everyone had gone to rear engined F2 cars – except for Major Mallock, who drove his own front-engined creation with skill, bravery and great determination.

In 1957 Eric and cousin Graham pooled resources and built the Broadley Special. The “Special” featured a solid rear axle, swing axle at the front and a home-tuned version of the Ford 1,172 cc side-valve engine, first produced for the Ford Model C before the war. Quickly successful, Eric must have been smiling quietly, in his own modest way, when he won the major 750 MC Trophy – presented by arch-rival, Colin Chapman!

In 1958, Eric was joined by long-time friend, war hero Rob Rushbrook who became works manager and went, first in 1963 to Slough, then in 1970, with Eric to a new workshop in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire where Lola remain today. Ambitious plans were made to attack the 1,100 cc class of international sports car racing. The Mk 1 Lola was to be the most successful car in the class over the next three seasons and led directly to the Mk 2 Formula Junior, Mk 3 Formula 2, and as early as 1962 F1 with Reg Parnell’s Yeoman Credit and drivers John Surtees and Roy Salvadori. In a splendid first season, although not winning a Grand Prix, they scored a 2nd place, pole position plus winning non-championship F1 races. The team ran out of money. Eric then concentrated on building customer Formula Junior where although the car was front-engined and therefore outdated, and scoring only 1 win, Lola never- the- less produced forty two of them. Lola also produced F2, F3 and sports cars in this busy time.

In the spring of 1963, Ford tried and failed to buy Ferrari. In a fury, Henry Ford II directed his racing division to find a company that would build a Ferrari-beater in world endurance racing. Accordingly, negotiations were commenced with Cooper, Lotus and Lola. Not surprisingly, Colin placed too high a price on his services and as Lola had already produced the mid-engined Lola Mk 6. with a Ford motor (also known as the Lola GT), the contract went to them. The agreement with Eric included a one-year collaboration and the sale to Ford of two existing Lola GT’s. Not surprisingly, Eric soon disagreed with Ford management and the partnership was dissolved.

2

However, from those humble beginnings sprang the might of the Ford GT racing program with outright victories at Le Mans in 1966 through 1969. In 1964, having disposed of his Ford problems, and seen how successful McLaren were in selling sports-racing cars in the USA, Eric designed and built the Lola T70 Mk 1, with bodywork by stylist John Frayling who went to Lola from Lotus, where his outstanding work had included the exquisite Elite. The bodies were made by Peter Jackson’s nearby Specialist Mouldings.

The beautiful new car was shown to the public at the Racing Car Show in January, 1965. Through his efforts with Yeoman Credit and John Surtees, Eric had established an excellent working relationship with John, who although driving for Ferrari in F1 received permission from Enzo to proceed in developing and running the new T70. USA Chevrolet engine builder Traco were chosen to supply the power and Texan John Mecom became the United States distributor .

The racing debut was Silverstone in March where in pouring rain John led many times, but also spun more than he led, leading John to agree with Eric that the T70 needed a rear spoiler! By the end of the season the list of T70 drivers on both sides of the Atlantic was impressive: John Surtees, David Hobbs, Paul Hawkins, Frank Gardner, James Garner, Mario Andretti, Bob Bondurant, Parnelli Jones, Roger McCluskey, Jerry Grant, Ronnie Bucknam, Chris Irwin, Denny Hulme, Dan Gurney, Mark Donohue, George Follmer, Peter Revson, Chuck Parsons, Ed Leslie, Lothar Motschenbacher, A.J.Foyt, John “Buck” Fulp, Skip Hudson, Skip Scott, Bill Krause, Roy Pierpoint and Hugh Dibley, amongst others.

Poor David Hobbs, driving a T70 for Harold Young Racing Ltd. suffered one of the most disappointing race

results of his fine career at the renowned Tourist Trophy, held at Oulton Park, just outside Manchester in the north of England. The race was run in two, two hour heats. Following a pit stop due to a battery short circuit in the first heat, the checkered flag came down between Denny Hulme in Sid Taylor's Brabham BT8 and David, giving Denny an extra lap. In the second heat, another questionable decision gave the race victory to Denny with David second even though his elapsed time and average speed were faster than Denny's. Due to public sensibilities, we can't reproduce David's exact words in this article! Hours of acrimonious discussion with governing body, the RAC (Royal Automobile Club), led to them admitting the result was a mistake - but they wouldn't change it! This would have been the first major international win for the T70, if only.....

John Surtees formed a two-car team to contest various races. He won at Brands Hatch in the new, second chassis. Then came Mosport in Canada, where Jackie Stewart, down to drive the second car, complained about the handling. John took it out to test it. A front-upright failure (fitted not by Lola, but by their American agent who was talking about setting up a production line for T70 in the USA) led to a wheel coming off, and an enormous accident for John in which he was badly injured, suffering the worst injuries of his storied career on two wheels and four. Though "Big John" recovered it was not in time to drive the Lola Indy car which he'd been testing with promising results. John's advice to employ Graham Hill in his place was fortuitous. Graham won Indy, the first of many Lola victories at the famed oval.

In 1965 I'd driven an ex Graham Hill/John Combs Jaguar Lightweight E Type for Red Rose Motors in Chester. At the end of a successful year, owner Charles Bridges, asked what I'd like to drive in 1966. The answer should have been F3, but I'd just seen a certain David Wishart Hobbs win a race at Croft, a nearby north of England circuit, driving this incredible Lola T70 spyder. I told Charles that given a choice, I'd race a T70 in 1966. Sure enough, in early April I was summoned to Oulton Park where this gleaming red monster sat idling in the pits. A brand-new T70 Mk II fitted with a "used" 350 cu.in Chevrolet, #TS1, obtained from John Surtees. Wow!

3

After greetings were exchanged Charles said "Well, it's my bloody car - and I'm going to drive it first!" In he jumped, the mechanic, Terry Wells, needed no second invitation before he was in the passenger seat. Off the Lola went, I heard the engine note rising and falling as it made it's way around the circuit. Soon it appeared over "Deer's Leap", the blind, fast, left kink just before the pits. A quick wave of the hand from Charles as he shot into the corner. Almost instantly he started spinning and with tires screeching and wailing, was extremely fortunate to come to halt just two feet from the giant old oak tree which used to reside on the inside of "Old Hall" in those days. Although his pale face told the story, his words were more explicit "I'm never driving that bloody thing again!" And he never did. At the end of the year, along with Chris Lambert and Jackie Oliver we received a Grovewood Award, presented to Britain's most promising young drivers by non-other than Jim Clark.

In 1966, John Surtees won the Can-Am Championship, winning 3 out of 6 races, the T70 winning 5 out of 6. Lola's order book was full to overflowing. In 1967, perhaps because Lola were trying to do too much, little success until John took back his 1966 winning chassis and won Las Vegas, the final race of the year and his final Can-Am appearance.

Not only could the T70 race in Group 7 (Can-Am) but also in world endurance races. As early as 1965, John Mecom entered a T70 at the Sebring 12 Hours. John Cannon led the first lap - ahead of a certain Jim Hall driving his Chaparral 2. Front bulkhead failure led to retirement. A second car was ordered - and lead driver

Walt Hansgen promptly wrote it off at Mosport. Thus leaving poor John without a drive! Such is racing.

In 1967 the Lola T70 Mk.3 GT appeared at the London racing Car Show, it looked as if the new car would be a sure winner in Group 4. In 1966, an overhaul of FIA categories saw Group 4 Sports Cars redefined so that they were now subject to a minimum production requirement of 50 units in 12 consecutive months (ha! ha!) and had to be fitted with all equipment necessary for use on public roads. A 5,000cc engine capacity limit was applied for 1968 and the minimum production requirement was reduced to 25 units for the 1969 season – thus leading to the incredibly dominant Porsche 917K in 1970 & '71. Although clearly competitive – at the Spa Francorchamps 1,000 Ks in May, Paul Hawkins overtook the Spence/Hill Chaparral and was closing on eventual winner Jacky Ickx in the Gulf Mirage when the T70 started misfiring, finishing 4th. The real hope for victory in Group 4, and possibly overall, lay with the works team of John Surtees and David Hobbs. The choice of the highly touted Aston Martin engine proved disastrous. In its second race, the vitally important 24 Hours of Le Mans, the factory car went out on only the third lap with a holed piston, the second Lola Aston blew it's engine in the third hour. As soon as the dispirited team arrived back in England, the Aston engines were yanked out, never to return.

At the end of 1981, having won the IMSA Camel GT championship with the new Chevy engined Lola T600, team owner Ralph Cooke and I went to Greenwich, CT, to talk with the Aston Martin engineers about using their engine in 1982. However, our initial enthusiasm was somewhat dampened when the head engine builder told us that each engine was different, and they had to be hand-built with special parts individual to each engine. Chevy for 1982!

In 1967 Can-Am, the McLaren steamroller was taking over and Lola's star fading although Dan Gurney had this to say: "One of the proudest moments of my racing career was winning the pole position at the 1967 Times Grand Prix in our Ford-powered Lola T70. I beat out some pretty illustrious names for that honor, but my only problem was that I blew the engine after leading the race for just three laps".

4

In 1968 Carl Haas became the U.S.A. distributor for Lola. Smart as a whip and working with immense energy, Carl went on to help make Lola Cars Ltd the largest manufacturer of racing cars in the world. I drove for Carl in F5000 for four great years, we never had a contract, everything done by word of mouth and a handshake.

Highly competitive in Europe in 1968 and 1969, the T70 suffered from the mandatory lower octane fuel, causing innumerable problems with cylinder heads and gaskets, due to pre-ignition. At the Daytona 24 Hours in February, 1969, I was fortunate to be one of ten factory Porsche drivers entered in the long-tail 908 LH coupe. At the Belgian Grand Prix on June 9th 1968 I'd been lucky to escape with a badly broken right forearm when the suspension broke on the 7th lap, sending me on an unwelcome visit through a corner workers station. Although declared healed, in December whilst taking part in the South African Springbok series, I was having some discomfort from my arm. Visiting an orthopedic surgeon in Johannesburg, he informed me there was no union of either bone in the forearm. Operating the next day, he advised not to use the arm until I had to. Accordingly, I arrived at Daytona six weeks later, took the sling off, and drove with one hand. Early in the evening, the first of the 908's arrived in the pits with the engine misfiring. The engineers examined it, and declared: "ve are finished, zey vil all break". We were out by midnight. Saved by the bell. Lurking in the background was eventual race winner, the Penske Sunoco Lola T70 driven by Mark Donohue and Chuck Parsons – after spending two hours in the pits! The most serious problem, a broken exhaust header taking an hour and nineteen minutes to fix.

In spite of being a factory Porsche driver, I also drove Sid Taylor's T70 Mk 3B in several events. The most

disappointing non-win being 2nd to Denny Hulme at Silverstone when just as I was about to pass for the lead, on the last lap, his gearbox oil drain-plug fell out and we were covered in oil, barely able to make the finish! At Karlskoga, during the Nordic Series, Jo Bonnier, Grand Prix Drivers Club president, declared : “Lola owners meeting at 1 o’clock chaps”. Well, there were eight Lola T70’s running in the series and a certain Finnish driver in a Porsche 908 spyder, Leo Kinnunen, was winning the races. At the meeting, Bonnier (who was also the Lola agent for Europe) declared: “right chaps, this bloody fellow Kinnunen’s making us all look stupid”. We all agreed: “I want an agreement that whoever arrives in the first corner with Kinnunen – knocks him off the track”. Guess who was first into the first corner? I retired with broken suspension, Leo won!

We had been promised 1,000 pounds (about \$2,400 at that time) starting money to go to Keimola in Finland. When we got there, the organizer, Curt Lincoln, apologized and declared: “sorry chaps, no money”. The Lola owners departed en masse. The race was run with three drivers: winner Jochen Rindt, (Curt’s son-in-law), 2nd Curt’s driver Leo Kinnunen and 3rd Richard Brostrom in a Porsche 906.

So, the lovely T70, although winning many smaller races, barely featured in the big internationals due mainly to engine reliability problems. By 1970, the Porsche 917K was developed, reliable and a consistent overall winner. Not too surprising really, as although the T70 aerodynamics and monocoque chassis were far in advance of the original 917, the 302 cu Chevrolet in the Lola gave a pretty unreliable 475 h.p. The 917 as it came out in 1969, at 4.5 liters, 570 and by early 1970 in 5 liter form a very reliable 620 h.p. Today, the T70 is much sought after as a highly competitive vintage racer – now with at least 700 reliable h.p. from it’s 350 cu, or bigger, Chevrolet engine.

5

Lola built cars for every category but much to Eric’s great disappointment never really succeeded with an F1 car. It was not without trying. First with Yeoman Credit and John Sutees, Then in ’68 with Surtees again in the R301 “Hondola” as it was nicknamed, 1974 with Graham Hill’s Embassy team, 1985 with Carl Haas’ FORCE, (not built by Lola, but called Lola due to Carl’s American Lola distribution business). 1987-1991 F1 cars for Gerard Larrousse – not helped much in the early days when Gerard’s partner Didier Calmels was arrested and charged with murdering his wife. In 1993 another disastrous entry into F1 with Scuderia Italia and in 1997 the crowning blow when after a terrible partnership with MasterCard and one disastrous race, Lola Cars Ltd went into receivership.

To the rescue came Martin Birrane, racing enthusiast and driver, holder of the Irish Speed Record, owner of Mondello Park race track, property developer in England, Ireland and Spain. In the next fifteen years Martin continued to develop and build race cars with great success. Recognizing that there was a need to diversify into other areas, Lola Composites Ltd was formed to produce state-of-the-art composites, especially for the aircraft industry. Projects have included: cowlings, wing components, fuel cells, floatation systems.

Drivers of Lola cars scored points in the FIA Formula 1 World Championship from the marque’s debut season in 1962. Lola’s roll of honor also includes no fewer than nine CART/OWRS championship titles, three Indianapolis 500 wins and the 1978 USAC Triple Crown, eight US/European/Tasman Formula 5000 titles, victory in the 1963 Monaco Formula Junior Grand Prix, the inaugural Can-Am Challenge series of 1966, the 1969 Daytona 24 Hours, the 1973 European 2-litre Sportscar Championship, five successive “new” Can-Am titles, eight Japanese Formula 3000 crowns, numerous FIA International F3000 championships and three Sports Car Championships in 2001 alone. Additionally, Lolos have carried amateur and professional competitors to countless championships and race victories on every major continent.

Hit with severe cash-flow problems, once again, sadly, in May Lola Cars International Ltd. and Lola Composites Ltd. entered receivership. It is hoped new investors will come forward to rescue and allow this fine company to move forward.