



# ALLAN McCALL

## PART ONE

**OPPOSITE:** Jim Clark and Allan setting up the Lotus 49, Silverstone 1967 (Getty Images).

**BELOW:** Allan with Jim Clark and his Lotus-Cortina (Photo Terry Marshall).

# LOTUS, MCLAREN AND TUI

Allan McCall was born in Point Chevalier, Auckland. He learned to drive while he was helping out at his uncle's farm on the Coromandel Peninsula. After leaving Avondale College he took an apprenticeship with John W Andrews in Auckland then moved on to Collett & Fleming. After his father died in 1961 Allan travelled to Australia where he worked for a while as a jackaroo, before returning to New Zealand to work in the South Island at the Manapouri Hydro Power Station, maintaining the heavy machinery being used to build the access road.

## LOTUS & JIM CLARK

It was August 1964. A ship called the *Northern Star* was steaming towards the UK from Auckland. On board was a young Allan McCall who had decided to seek some adventures in Europe. A couple of wide-boy English car dealers befriended the twenty-two-year-old, telling him that they were racers. They advised him to call their friend Colin Chapman at Lotus, mention their names and he would give Allan a job as a racing mechanic.

When Allan arrived in England he did as his travel mates had suggested, he rang Colin Chapman. Chapman said he had never heard of the two car dealers but he advised Allan to write to Andrew Ferguson, the Team Lotus Competitions Manager. Allan duly wrote to Ferguson and, while he waited, he took a job at Adlards, a Ford garage in Putney. Towards the end of the year a telegram arrived from Ferguson asking him to come to Lotus for a test. Allan told the story in the book, *Tales from the Toolbox*, by Michael Oliver:

"I understand that I got the job because I was the only person out of the seventy-odd applicants who could butt-weld two bits of steel together without a welding rod. About a month later I received another telegram asking me to turn up the following week at

*Allan McCall worked with Lotus and Jim Clark, most notably at Indianapolis, before working for Bruce McLaren's Can-Am team. He was also the man behind the Tui formula racing cars. Allan was recognised by MotorsportNZ with an Historic Heritage award a year before he passed away in 2017. Peter looks back at Allan's remarkable career.*

Words: **PETER R HILL**

the factory to start work with Bob Dance on the Lotus Cortina team."

This was the beginning of an association with Jim Clark that would take the Kiwi around the world, working on the Scot's saloon, Indy, Tasman and Formula One cars.

After Allan joined Lotus, he shared a

rented house with two other mechanics, Bob Sparshott and Sid Carr and in 1965 Allan found himself in the USA with Sparshoot and Bob Dance campaigning two Lotus Cortinas. After two non-championship races at Riverside and Laguna Seca, the two Bobs were told to travel to Indianapolis where the





1. Allan examines the DFV engine in Jim Clark's Lotus 49; 2. In the pits with Jim Clark and the 49; 3. Allan pushing Clark's Lotus 49 at Zaadvoort; 4. Allan (right) working on Clark's Lotus 49; 5. Allan (left) and Dick Scammell (Photo Eoin Young Collection); 6. Allan looks on as Clark climbs into his Lotus 33 at Pukekohe in 1967 (Photo Terry Marshall).

Lotus team was struggling with its Indy 500 effort. This left Allan by himself to look after two race cars. The Bobs re-joined Allan for the three-hour race at Sebring that was held the day before the twelve-hour. Jim Clark won his class by two laps from his team-mate Jack Sears.

Bob Dance remembers Allan well:

"Allan was a one hundred percent worker, and he was a real character. He was known as the 'Maori dog'. He specialised in frightening security guard dogs. He'd get down on his hands and knees and bark at them until they backed off. He was always up to some prank or another."

In 1966 it was Allan's turn to be at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, for that year's running of the Indy 500.

The legendary American motor sport

journalist and commentator Robin Miller quoted Allan's comments on the 1966 Indy car effort in *Racer* magazine:

"In 1966 the Indy car was cobbled together because we spent all our time on the H16 Lotus. It was the previous year's Indy car and BRM was supposed to make us the motors, but they never turned up. I remember Al Unser jumped in the second car and thought it was wonderful, but Jimmy kept complaining. He kept changing the car, but he was struggling and needed to pick up the pace.

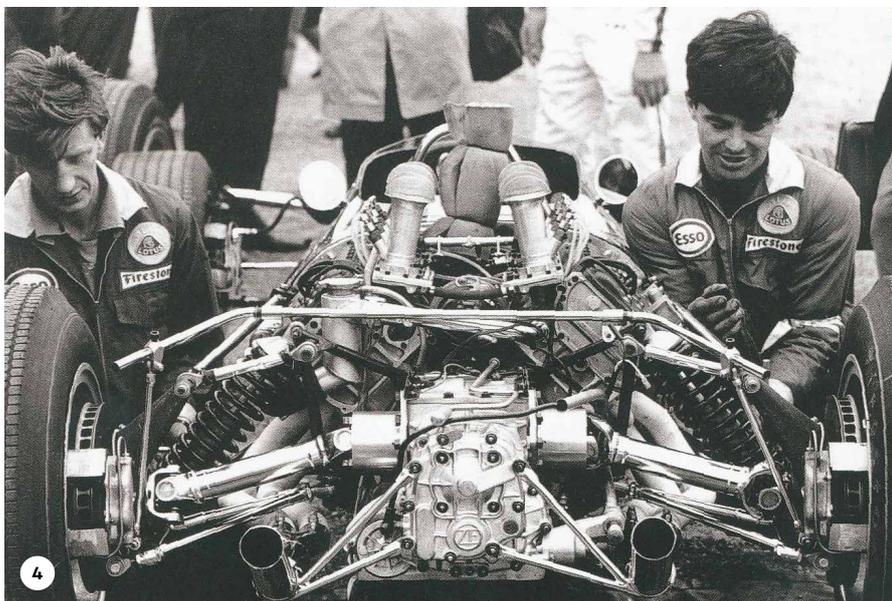
"One night Chapman sat us in a circle and put Jimmy in a chair in the middle. He said: 'All of these boys are giving their best, what about you, James?' Jimmy got redder and redder, but never said a word. He was livid. But he got with the program and qualified second quickest."

Clark went on to officially finish second behind Graham Hill but it was controversial, as Allan related:

"Graham Hill got lapped and then un-lapped himself, but there's no way he beat Jimmy. We ran down to victory lane and when we got there, Graham was already in the box. We were pissed because we had the official RAC scorer in our pit and USAC had a little old lady, and our lap charts clearly showed we finished ahead of Graham. Clark did win the race. There's no doubt in my mind, and he thought so as well."

### SOUTH AFRICAN GP & TASMAN SERIES

Before he returned to New Zealand to look after Jim Clark's car for the 1967 Tasman series, Allan went to South Africa for the Grand Prix at the start of January, where he worked on Clark's Lotus 43 BRM P75 H16



that retired with engine failure.

"I built up an H16 for Jimmy to use in South Africa. We actually built the thing in South Africa; it was a dreadful time."

Allan had a better time in the 1967 Tasman series which Clark won driving a Lotus 33 fitted with a 2-litre Climax V8 engine. When Allan was interviewed by Michael Oliver for his book on the Lotus 49, he expressed the opinion that he gained Clark's confidence during this Tasman series.

"Contrary to what people think, Jimmy was very conscious of the fact that mechanics could hurt him. He figured I always had his health in mind and that I was taking care of him. That's the reason I got his [F1] car because of the Tasman series ... we got on quite well and it never missed a beat, never frightened him, nothing ever fell off, so, I suddenly ended up with his [Lotus] 49, on his request."

When Allan returned to the UK from New Zealand, he wasn't immediately assigned to work on a Lotus 49, he was given Graham Hill's Monaco two-litre BRM car which Hill drove to second place. Then Allan started work on Clark's Lotus 49.

"I built the car [49/R2] and maintained the car during that year [1967]. That was my car and the guy that helped me on the car was Gordon Huckle. That particular car, the only time that year that Jimmy never drove it was at Mexico, Solana drove the car. It was one of those things where the motor in the car had done a lot of mileage, and R1 had a fresh engine, so Moisés [Solana], who was renting a car, got to drive the car with the worn-out engine, so to speak."

'Allan's' Lotus 49 was to win on its debut at Zandvoort in the Netherlands, a combination of a great chassis and a great engine — the new Cosworth DFV. Despite winning four

races, Clark came third in the championship that year, while the reliability of the Brabhams delivered the championship to Denny Hulme ahead of his boss, Jack Brabham.

It was at the 1967 Italian Grand Prix at Monza that Allan was involved in one of Chapman's notorious fuel failures. Chapman was so obsessive about weight that he would try to calculate the absolute minimum amount of fuel that would be needed to finish the race. Allan tells the story in *Tales from the Toolbox*:

"Chapman did the fuel calculation and decided that we only needed thirty-one gallons ... Dick Scammell took me to one side and muttered, 'Put thirty-three in it.' I'd done my own calculations and put in thirty-six."

In the race Clark had to pit following a puncture. He then gave a display of brilliant driving, catching the field and taking the lead. On the last lap he ran out of fuel and coasted over the line in third place.

"After the race he [Chapman] was shouting 'Who put the fuel in? How much did you put in the car?' I think Scammell spoke up and said, 'Actually Mr Chapman you said thirty-one gallons and I told Allan to put thirty-three in it ...' and I added ' ... and I put in thirty-six.' Then I got this enormous lecture about not doing what I was supposed to do. That was the wonder of Chapman: the man was brilliant but now and again ... he had also to realise that some of us had brains. We could calculate — we went to school ourselves you know."

Without the extra gallons added by Allan, Clark would not have finished.

1967 was to be Allan's last year with Lotus. He had become frustrated by a number of things, including the fragility of the car, as he told author Michael Oliver:

"At the end of 1967, I ended up in Mexico.

Quite honestly, I got so pissed off with the car and the fragile parts and what happened at Watkins Glen with the rear wheel falling over. [The top link on the right rear suspension broke with two and a half laps to go. Clark nursed the car to the finish and won]. What we called the 'pine trees' on the back which held up the rear suspension — they used to break on a very regular basis and when we got to Mexico, I spent my own money and my own time in Mexico City, and I found the bits and pieces and made up a little bracket that supported, went between the two links. I even found a place and had it nickel-plated. This was before anybody turned up. And I put it on the car, and Chapman came along and went ape shit! I suppose he was going to anyway."

The brackets weren't allowed to remain on the car.

"I was getting too big for my boots I suppose... but by the same token I know that stuff like that mattered to Jimmy."

Allan rated Jim Clark as the best driver he worked with.

"Jim's feel was incredible and he was so sensitive to what was going on with the chassis. You didn't have to give him a good car, just a car that would repeat itself. I worked with seventy-five race car drivers and there was nobody like him."

It was after the 1967 USA Grand Prix that Phil Kerr approached Allan to switch to the McLaren team to look after Denny Hulme's Formula 1 car as well as being involved with their Can-Am campaign.

## MCLAREN

In 1968 Allan took up Phil Kerr's offer and joined McLaren. In his first year he worked on the Formula 1 team where, after the first race in South Africa with BRM power, the





1. Allan and Denny Hulme (Photo Allan McCall Collection); 2. Allan listens to Denny Hulme at Rouen 1968, while a thoughtful Phil Kerr looks on (Photo Allan McCall Collection).



team joined the Cosworth family. Denny Hulme finished third in the championship behind Hill in the Lotus 49 and Stewart in the Matra-Ford. Bruce McLaren finished fifth. At the end of that year Allan switched to working on the Can-Am cars. Kiwi Jimmy Stone joined McLaren for 1969, and worked with Allan.

"Allan's probably one of the best race mechanics for his era," said Stone. "He was an incredible guy and I learnt a lot off him. He was a cantankerous little bugger, but he was very, very skilled and he was the right man for that era. He was different to, shall I say, the rest of us

"I started at McLaren at the end of 1968. Allan was there. He'd done the '68 Formula 1 season with Bruce and Denny. In '69 he didn't want to do Formula 1 any more, he wanted to do Can-Am. So, Kerry Taylor, Allan, Alex Greaves and I built the Can-Am cars for the '69 series.

"We went off to Mosport ... had a good run. At Mosport Teddy Mayer asked Allan if he could shift his Jaguar from the front door of the McLaren factory because they couldn't get in. Allan said, 'No, that was the only car park that morning when I wanted to fly out, so it can stay there.' So, the next meet was at Saint-Jovite in Quebec, Teddy flew over again and he said, 'Allan we've got to shift that car, we can't get into the front door of our factory.' Allan said, 'Well if that's the way you feel, I quit.' So that was the end of his Can-Am, but he went back [to the UK]. In the meantime, McLaren shifted premises from number 5 to 17 David Road."

Allan's friend Hywel 'Hughie' Absalom, who had moved from Brabham to join Allan at McLaren, remembers that Bruce McLaren smoothed things over when Allan returned

from the USA. Allan got to work completing the McLaren M6GT car in a corner of the new premises.

Allan recorded his own notes on his time with McLaren.

"My wage trebled with my move to Maccs (from £12pw to £36). And the perks such as a company car were unheard of anywhere else. The mechanics also got ten percent of the entire prize and contingency monies. When I wanted to go off to do my own thing as a driver, Bruce took me upstairs to try to talk me out of it. He ended up talking me into building my own car. He said it was the only way to go. He told me to go to the storerooms and take all the redundant M4 (F2) and M7 parts and pile them in the middle of the floor. He then told me to haggle with Teddy Mayer for a price. After a couple hours we agreed on £1,000 for the lot.

"I went upstairs to Bruce to give him a cheque and he told to put it away and get the bits out of there. He said Teddy only needed the discussion, not the money. There were over two large vanloads of castings, bodywork, rims, uprights etc. In fact enough for me to build my first car, and all with his blessing. When the first car was finished, he insisted that I bring it up to Colnbrook and put it on display beside his new M14 in January 1970.

"Whenever the money ran low, he [Bruce] would find me another very well-paid job to do. In '69 he paid me an unheard of £100 per week to build up the M8Bs and I did the first two Can-Am races as his mechanic in '69. In 1970 he got me back to help with the first Indy car, just because he knew I wanted to do it. I owe a huge lot to this very generous man."

Allan was then part of the team for the 1970 Indianapolis 500. That was a

horrendous year for McLaren as Denny Hulme suffered terrible burns to his hands during practice at Indy then a few days after the Indy 500 Bruce McLaren was killed while testing a Can-Am car at Goodwood. After Denny got burnt, Allan primarily worked on Peter Revson's M15A.

## THE FIRST TUI

Allan built his first Tui Formula 3 car, AM1, in 1969. He started work on the car while he was still with McLaren, with Hughie Absalom's help. Allan then moved to the World War 2 bomber base at Membury in Berkshire to complete the build. The rent was \$3 a week while Allan lived in a \$25 caravan. The old perimeter roads and runways provided an ideal test track. The car was a monocoque construction with the engine and gearbox as stressed members, a first for Formula 3.

AM1 was driven by Bert Hawthorne in the 1970 British Formula 3 championship. Lack of funds only allowed five races, with four accidents and a fifth place at Brands Hatch. Bert was more than the Tui's driver, he was a close friend of Allan's and, as Nick Phillips wrote in *Motor Sport* magazine, Bert played a major role in the Tui story. Allan told Phillips: "Bert and I were sort of partners, but it was never formal. We never got around to discussing it. It would have ended up that way for sure, but neither Bert nor I had a penny to scratch ourselves with. We slept on everybody else's couch and everything we got we spent on the car. In the end Bert found the money and I built the cars." ☞

*Next edition: Team Tui; Techno F1; North America – Tui Formula Atlantic and Super Vee; Indianapolis; and Team Manager/Engineer.*