

ESCAPE ROAD

1912-90 Roger Barlow

Car-lover's passing leaves a long legacy of memories

By Matt DeLorenzo

Roger Barlow loved cars. Producer, director, writer, photographer, erstwhile exotic car dealer were his vocations; racing, driving, just flat loving cars, his avocation.

Roger died May 9. He had been contributing *Escape Roads* since 1986, sharing his memories and experiences, his love of cars with others.

He touched many lives, from the great to the lowly. But while he sold cars to the likes of Clark Gable and Gary Cooper, the measure of a man is how he dealt with all people. And it's those lesser-known who express best what he meant to the lives he touched.

R. Sam Miller, an acquaintance from Bridgewater, Va., a neighboring town of Roger's hometown of New Market, writes: "His worldwide travels and contacts with celebrities both in the United States and abroad were legion. He could talk with heads of state or laborers with the same degree of ease."

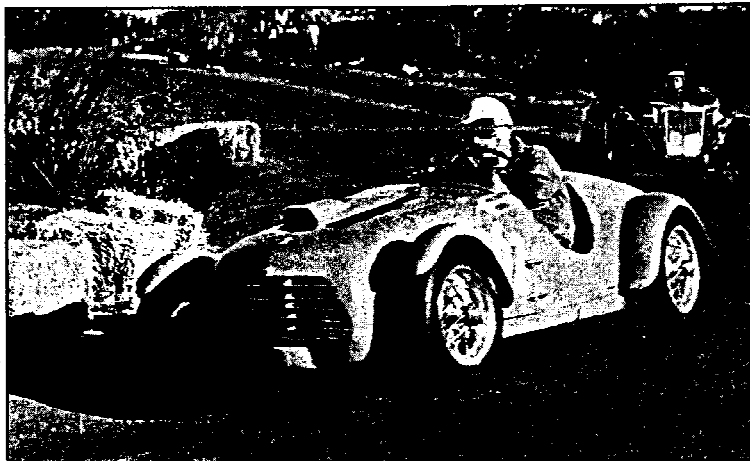
Longtime family friend H. Walt Lamm remembers his first encounter with Roger:

"This man was driving a Citroen along a dirt road 50 years ago. He stopped to pick up two boys carrying fishing gear and dropped them off at their destination, a nearby bridge, and drove on. I never forgot the car or the name on the driver's key tag—Roger Barlow.

"I started following Roger's accomplishments many years later. His wife and father-in-law were good friends of mine, and through them I heard of Roger's foreign car dealership in Los Angeles. I remember seeing one of the Bentleys purchased by Bing Crosby, and pictures of other cars sold by Roger to movie stars such as Clark Gable.

"His living room contains pictures of friends such as Ansel Adams, Phil Hill and Robert Frost. These pictures frame his racing trophies and unique models of the cars he has owned, complete with a vast library of car reference books.

"After the Korean war, I caught up with Roger and found him racing sports cars. It was a great pleasure reviewing his winning trophies and having him share pictures of 'that little blue Simca' he raced."



Barlow drives the car that epitomized his approach to life: 'That little blue Simca'

That little blue Simca proved to be Roger's alter ego—a car that epitomized his approach to life.

Three years ago, he wrote about the Simcas in his life. Roger recounted that the question, "Are you the Roger Barlow who drove those little blue Simcas?" was put to him from the Arctic Circle to Pago Pago.

"What may have earned the Simcas such admiration and affection were that they were cheeky underdogs," Roger noted in that *Escape Road* (AW, June 8, 1987). "Not purebred, expensive, pedigreed machines, but ingratiating automotive mutts."

Much like Roger himself.

Reader Miller recalls: "I first met him in 1957 or '58 when he was touting Borgward as Europe's latest savior to America's wheel problems and demands. He was truly a 'free spirit' and seemed to have the ability to earn a good living in spite of himself. He certainly enjoyed life to the fullest and was one of the most interesting conversationalists I ever knew. He was never boring and some of his stories were so far-fetched that you had to really know him to realize that it was mostly factual. I'm sure he embellished them to a minor degree."

Roger was born March 4, 1912, in Minneapolis but migrated to New York and later California to ply his film trade and fuel his passion for automobiles. It was in California after World War II that Roger sold cars out of showroom shared with a Nash dealer in Beverly Hills. He later moved to Hollywood Boulevard and started his Interna-

tional Motors showroom there, now the site of Hollywood Sports Cars.

Roger was also an avid sportsman and combined his knowledge of cars, guns and photography to become a leading writer for many magazines. These include *Sports Afield*, *Guns & Ammo*, *Gun Sport*, *Shooting Times*, *American Rifleman* and *Guns*. In addition to *AutoWeek*, his auto exploits graced the pages of *Road & Track*, *Motor Trend*, *Car and Driver*, and *The AutoCar*. He also authored two books, *The Diesel Car Book* and *Can a Lady Love a Diesel*.

Of all his many interests, his greatest love was cars. Even while researching and writing about firearms and hunting, he included illustrations and comments on the performance of his current transport: Ford, Chrysler, Fiat, Mercedes-Benz, Volvo, Volkswagen, General Motors and Rover.

He was also an accomplished racer, winning the Golden Steering Wheel Award in 1952 behind the wheel of one of those little blue Simcas. And he co-founded the California Sports Car Club.

With his roots on both coasts, Roger made many crossings of the U.S. by automobile. During the summer of 1988, he undertook a very difficult trip—his 100th crossing of the U.S. (*AutoWeek*, Dec. 26, 1988 and Jan. 2, 1989) at the age of 76. This time Roger drove a 12-cylinder Jaguar. Quite a difference from some of his previous trips which included a 1936 DKW and Nash 600.

This year Roger had begun planning yet another trip to the West Coast. His love of the automobile has spanned more than 60 years. It would have been great to have him write about each one of the cars he has owned or tested—Bugatti, Rolls-Royce, Talbot, Rover, Mercedes-Benz and other favorites. Somewhere in his fabulous memory there was a story about each one.

Roger lived in retirement with his wife, Mary, in his distinctive mountainside home, (a story in itself). Still, it's the memories of the Simca that shine through it all.

"After 35 years," Roger wrote nearly three years ago to the day, "I still dream of again being at the wheel of one of them at some race. Maybe St. Peter will look up from his book at the Pearly Gates and say, 'Good Lord, are you the Roger Barlow who drove those pretty blue Simcas?' Then if one is parked just inside on a street of gold, I'll know there's really a motorist's paradise."

Roger, enjoy the drive. ■

Photo courtesy of Mary Barlow