

**ESCAPE ROAD**

# Another little blue Simca

*A special car was needed to combat Ken Miles' super MG*

By Roger Barlow

**W**asn't there a third little blue Simca? Indeed there was. I didn't deal with it in my piece last week on these cars because of limited space and because the third Simca was not my car...it belonged to my partner, Louis Van Dyke, and was driven only by him. He and our shop foreman, Bill Pringle, built it with but limited input from me. I regret I can't claim that its elegant yet business-like body was designed by me.

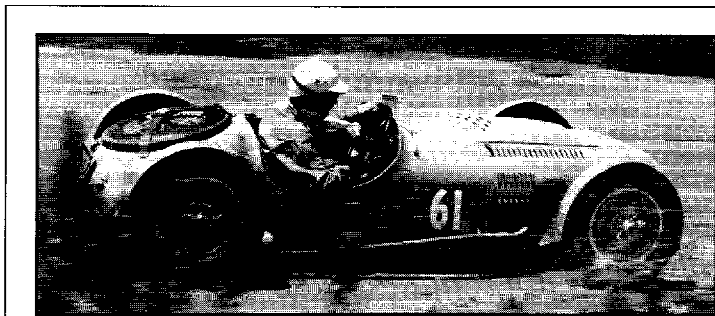
Because the MG factory and Hambro's Bank (who had the US distribution rights for MGs) had treated us most unethically by renegeing on a signed agreement for us to take over the MG distribution for Southern California, Arizona and New Mexico, my first Simca's only reason for existence was revenge—to decisively trounce MGs wherever met on a race course, TCs and TDs included, of course, but especially the various lighter MG specials based upon them.

And we wanted to accomplish this with as near to standard Simca-Fiat 1100 specifications as possible. Except, of course, for the ultra-light body. This 1951 Simca was a winner right from the start, earning a victory at Pebble Beach that year.

The second Simca (for 1952) was still based upon a normal production chassis, though it was shortened and the engine set back. The engine for this car did get some further modifications but nothing very extensive or radical as I deemed reliability far more important than a few extra horses. It, too, was a real MG eater. It also gobbled up a few XKs and Allards on its way to finish lines.

However, early in the 1952 season we learned that our good English friend, Ken Miles, who then worked for the MG distributor, was in the process of building a super MG for the specific purpose of beating the Simcas and restoring the prestige of Abingdon in U.S. amateur road racing.

It would have a relatively light space-frame, a special body and a highly tuned engine, bored out (we heard) to just under the 1500cc limit. Ken was not only a brilliant driver but a practical and formidable engineer, so we had good reason for concern. Therefore we decided to fight back with a



**The No. 3 Simca of Louis Van Dyke (above) benefitted from the experience gained in building and racing the first two cars (right)**



Roger Barlow photos

super Simca also having a light space-frame chassis. As Van Dyke had watched me have all the success and fun in 1951, and as I began 1952 with the even more potent second Simca, this third car of the team would be his with which to join the jolly fray when the car became ready later in the season. He and Bill Pringle incorporated all we had learned from the first two Simca Specials...including the advantage of right-hand steering and a square fuel tank directly behind the driver to put more weight near the right rear wheel to help reduce wheel-spin when exiting slow corners in low or second gear. This was important, for almost all our circuits were run clockwise, giving us five or six right-handers but only one or two lefts. But mainly the No. 3 Simca differed, besides its frame and very low build, in having appreciably greater power by virtue of being bored out as far as possible, larger valves, a more radical camshaft and

higher compression.

It only weighed about 950 lbs and went like a bomb right from the start, though not entirely as intended...in its first race it blew up in a cloud of steam! Once the overheating problem was solved other problems (including blown head gaskets) turned up in the few remaining races of 1952. If Van Dyke drove the car really hard, to take advantage of its obvious potential, the engine simply wasn't robust enough to cope with the power it was now developing. And Van Dyke, frustrated, I suppose, by a year and a half of watching from the pits, simply could not restrain his right foot and drive to place rather than going all out to beat everything...but then *winning* was what this car was supposed to do.

However, remedial work on No. 3 continued and the Simca team looked to 1953 with high hopes of our cars being able to turn back the entertaining challenge of Ken Miles and his now-completed MG Special.

Pebble Beach, early in 1953, was to be the first meeting of these "giants" of the small car division. Grid positions, as usual now, were determined by lot for no practice times were taken. Thus the super MG and the Simcas were widely separated at the start. As I remember, it was raining when the flag dropped, which pleased me since I rather liked driving in the wet and also felt my less powerful car would handle better on a slick road than either Ken's MG or Van Dyke's hot third Simca.

But the battle was never truly joined. Within a few laps the flywheel of my engine sheared its bolts. Apparently the newly lightened flywheel actually put greater stress on them because the engine now picked up revs with more of a snap when the throttle was dabbed in neutral for a downshift.

Van Dyke, in our main weapon for the MG Wars, in a car ideally suited to the twisty, tricky Pebble Beach course, fared little better in this last outing of our once dominant team, being done in by engine failure. Even Pringle, at the wheel of the ever-reliable 1951 car, came to grief from a blown head gasket. Miles won and went on to rule the 1500cc class for some time.

A couple of months later, when we liquidated our business, I believe Simca No. 3 went to a driver who fitted it with an MG engine. However, that considerable extra weight affected its handling and I don't believe this beautiful car which looked a winner, and should have been, ever was. ■