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# ROAD & TRACK

# 12

# BEST CARS UNDER \$30K

WE PICK THE BEST ENTHUSIAST CAR FOR THE MONEY:



- ▶ CHEVROLET COBALT SS SUPERCHARGED
- ▶ FORD MUSTANG GT
- ▶ HONDA CIVIC SI
- ▶ MAZDA MX-5 MIATA PRHT
- ▶ MAZDA SPEED3
- ▶ MINI COOPER S JCW
- ▶ MITSUBISHI EVO RS
- ▶ NISSAN 350Z
- ▶ PONTIAC SOLSTICE GXP
- ▶ SCION tC TRD
- ▶ SUBARU WRX LIMITED
- ▶ VOLKSWAGEN GTI





» The Voisin C28 Aérospout is a wonderful blend of 1930s' aerodynamics, cubist style and Art Deco details.

driver and driving the rear wheels. Charles Cooper, a highly regarded race-car mechanic and manager for wealthy sportsmen, joined son John and the latter's friend, Eric Brandon, in building such a car.

Handily enough, two crashed Fiat Topolinos yielded their front-end assemblies. Fabricated back-to-back, these gave transverse-leaf independent suspension, front and rear. Power originated in a methanol-fueled speedway motorcycle motor built by J.A. Prestwick, popularly known as a J.A.P. A chain transmitted torque to its 4-speed motorcycle gearbox (the first of 4-wheel racing sequentials?), another chain to the rear drive sprocket. All of this was clothed in a minimalist light alloy body.

Other enthusiasts asked the Coopers for similar examples, and the U.K. supply of wrecked Topolinos was quickly exhausted. A simple chassis of large-diameter round tubing was cobbled up—and then engineering drawings were done.

I once raced one of these half-pint mid-engine thumpers up Mt. Equinox (see "Little Car, Big Man, Really Big Mountain," December 1995). I noted at the time, "There has never been as much safety wire in one place as on a properly prepared Formula 3 car."

Nor as much enthusiasm either, as experienced by participants at this year's Historics. Nice people, all.

## MEMORABILIA GALORE

I found a neat book, *Cooper 500 and its Rivals*, at Automobilia Monterey, a Tuesday-Wednesday happening and one of the reasons for stretching the Monterey Weekend into an entire week. It's from Vintage Motorbooks, run by Logan Gray, out of Portland, Oregon (P.O. Box 25537, Portland, Ore. 97298-0537). He brought quite the nice collection of new and second-hand books. Logan tells me he's looking for automotive books and collections as well. E-mail address: [vintagemotorbooks@comcast.net](mailto:vintagemotorbooks@comcast.net); telephone, evenings and messages: 503-292-7747; fax: 503-292-5636.

The Cooper book reprints articles, mainly from British magazines dating 1945 to the mid-'50s. It's all original source and quite fascinating. A "Who's Who in 500-cc Racing," 1951, lists a fair number of names not unfamiliar to enthusiasts today: William Boddy (still writing for *Motor Sport*), Peter Collins (famed Ferrari driver in the 1950s), Geoffrey Goddard (late, of R&T photography fame), Denis Jenkinson ("Jenks"), Stirling Moss—and a fellow named Bernard Charles Ecclestone. Yep.

In another part of Automobilia Monterey, R&T pals Dale and Sally LaFollette were offering their wonderful Vintage Motorphoto-



» R&T friends Dale and Sally LaFollette had photos galore on sale at Automobilia Monterey, another of "The Weekend's" must-attend events; this one, a Tuesday-Wednesday happening.



to collections of motor racing photographs. You may recall that Dale occasionally unearths one that's perfect for our PS page.

For a long time, he was manager of Portland International Raceway, one of our country's rare city-owned race circuits. Dale is retired now, but more active in retirement than several I could name still allegedly in the workforce. Vintage Motorphoto is also out of Portland (did I ever tell you that the area is a positive hotbed of R&T readers?). Its particulars are [www.vintagemotorphoto.com](http://www.vintagemotorphoto.com); telephone: 503-697-3204; fax: 503-699-0433.

## THE ROLLING CUBIST ART OF GABRIEL VOISIN

I really like Voisins, so I was in luck that these French cars were one of honored marques at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. Gabriel Voisin trained as an architect (his inflatable structures and prefabricated homes were years ahead of their time), but got caught up with the dual turn-of-the-century technologies of aviation and the automobile. In fact, Avions Voisin produced some 10,000 airplanes before he turned to automobiles, his first car offered in 1920. In time, his cars became the favorites of H.G. Wells, Maurice Chevalier, Josephine Baker, Rudolf Valentino and fellow—and famed—architect Le Corbusier. (There are tales of Le Corbusier piloting his Voisin through Paris with particularly reckless *joie de vivre*.)

Voisins used double sleeve valves rather than the conventional poppet variety. For those unfamiliar with the concept, imagine concentric ported cylinder sleeves, the motion of which covers and uncovers the combustion chamber ports. The cars also featured Dynastart, a silent starting mechanism of Voisin's own invention. And Voisins were among the first cars fitted with front-wheel brakes.

But I like Voisins because of their cubist styling, surfaces seemingly deconstructed and reassembled as viewed from different perspectives. My favorites also bear significant aerodynamic influence. One of these, the C28 Aérospout, was on display at Pebble Beach. Voisin claimed it was the first car ever with pontoon fenders, and it was certainly a sensation of the 1935 Paris Auto Show.

Gabriel Voisin retired in 1960 and, I like to imagine, spent the remaining 13 years of his life cackling over his autobiography, a most entertaining book, *Men, Women and 10,000 Kites*. The book contains several utterly scandalous family tales as well as a chapter detailing the "hoax" of the Wright Brothers. Voisin felt the honor of the first powered, sustained, controlled flight belonged to an airplane of his own design (and his arguments are not without merit).

One may differ with Voisin's views on the origins of flight, but certainly not with his exuberant interpretations of the automobile. ☑