

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Classic Driver Dealer: Duncan Hamilton & Co



**Some years ago, I was lent a copy of Duncan Hamilton's autobiography, 'Touch Wood'. Aside from providing an insight into the life of this motor racing hero of the 1940s and 50s - a man who won the 1953 Le Mans 24 Hours outright - it moved me, repeatedly, to tears of laughter.**

My favourite episode is Hamilton's account of driving his transporter lorry to the Brighton Speed Trials in 1947. Coming down the hill into Guildford, he 'saw the splendid honeycomb radiator of a Bugatti in the outside rear view mirror'. Hamilton moved over and waved the Bugatti past, but the car hung back. Further down the hill, the Bugatti accelerated and drew level with Hamilton, at which point he saw there was no one in it: 'The awful truth dawned on me - it was my own car, gathering speed fast.' He'd forgotten he was towing his 35B, and it had broken loose.

Remembering the book, I was intrigued at the prospect of interviewing Duncan Hamilton's son, Adrian, who today runs the company which his father set up in 1948. Duncan Hamilton & Co Limited is a leading dealership in thoroughbred post-World War II historic competition cars. They've found new owners for some 60 or more Historic Formula 1 Grand

Prix cars over the past two decades, including such gems as a legendary 1955 Mercedes-Benz W196.

"I'm extremely fortunate to be using my father's name as he was such a rumbustious character, greatly loved by many people and respected for what he did," says Adrian Hamilton. "Just as art collectors have an interest in art, our customers have a real interest in cars. I liken myself to a fine-art dealer with wheels on each corner of the picture frame."

Did you have any choice about what you would do with your life? "I was a complete dumbo at school, frightfully dyslexic and dreadful at everything. I can honestly claim I never failed a single exam - but only because I was too stupid to take any. I don't have an O-level or A-level or any damn thing. My father sent me off to join the Merchant Navy for two years and I was employed on the princely sum of fourteen pounds ten shillings a month, scrubbing decks and polishing brass. It was a poor man's form of National Service. After that, I became an employee of Duncan Hamilton & Co, and earned three pounds a week. So I'd gone backwards.







"But my interest grew. I ran our own racing team – a Ford Touring Car – and we entered eight cars at Le Mans over the years. Then came an increasing awareness of Jaguar C-types and D-types, and Ferrari GTOs and so on. My own C-type, which is my father's actual 1953 Le Mans-winning car, is a wonderful thing, which I was lucky enough to buy from Briggs Cunningham in America 26 years ago. I take it all over the world: America, Australia, Hungary... The car alone is a fabulous route into events which I would not have been invited to if I had a rusty MGB.

"These days, there are more and more events you can do, if you have the right sort of car: both races and road rallies, of which I organise one called the Hamilton Tour. This sort of event helps fuel the huge interest in post-War historic cars, since men can take their wives or girlfriends along. At the same time, the cars are a fantastic investment. In this country, if you buy a car for half a million pounds and sell it for a million pounds, then that profit is all yours – there's no capital gains tax."



A year ago, Adrian Hamilton launched another entrepreneurial venture: a website called [www.wifegone.com](http://www.wifegone.com). "It's a one-stop-shop for people whose wife has gone off with the window-cleaner or whatever, and they're left behind not knowing if it's Christmas or Piccadilly and their head's going round like a tumble-dryer. The site gives legal advice, counselling, helps you find someone to look after the children... Over the years, in fact, I've been involved in all sorts of things. I've sold railway engines and helicopters and aircraft, and I once started a helicopter charter company which flew into Silverstone, avoiding the traffic. As it was going in and out of race courses, I thought the obvious name for it was Intercourse. I didn't make a fortune out of that..."

Any regrets? "Only that the old man wouldn't let me go motor racing. I'd have been bloody good, I'm sure I would. That's a serious regret, sportscar-wise."

Please click [HERE](#) to see all **Duncan Hamilton & Co's** cars for sale in the **Classic Driver** car database.

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