

Tara Browne's 1965 AC 289 Sports by Binder, Edwards & Vaughan

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It is all too easy to proclaim a car 'a work of art'. In the case of the 1960s triumvirate of applied artists Douglas Binder and Dudley Edwards, and their manager/agent David Vaughan, pieces such as the 'Tara Browne AC' were worthy of exhibition in a London gallery.

Known collectively as 'BEV', Binder and Edwards applied psychedelic hand-painting techniques to cars, buildings and furniture. The completed piece of art was a combination of their painting process (the choice of colour and design) *applied* to an object. Their design, only when juxtaposed on to the unique shape of the subject, became the completed piece.

Working in the mid-1960s, the group was fronted by the extrovert, but not always easy to handle, Vaughan (late father of the actress Sadie Frost) while Binder and Edwards conceived and completed the works.



Edwards was inspired by the artwork of the world of showmen and fun fairs. Together with Binder, he liked to combine sharp edges with smooth gradations: "I feel the effect of our dissonant colour combinations was somewhat akin to the chords played by Thelonious Monk," he told *Classic Driver*.

Having worked on furniture and wall murals, BEV then considered applying the concept to cars, first on a 1960 Buick Electra Convertible. As Edwards recalls, the group “didn’t expect anyone to take the risk of having their cars painted without first seeing an example.”

Cars or furniture, the process was the same: a few coats of gesso sanded down to a “glass-like finish” then the colour (household gloss paint mixed with ‘Flamboyant Enamel’) applied by hand.





Guinness heir The Hon. Tara Browne (who was to introduce Binder and Edwards to The Beatles) commissioned BEV to give his newly acquired AC 289 Sports 'the treatment'. (This car, a 289, was British-built with a 427-type body and chassis and – for legal reasons – could no longer be called a 'Cobra'.)

The dazzling AC was exhibited at the Robert Fraser Gallery in Mayfair and became the subject of a photo-shoot by Lord Snowdon there and on Primrose Hill, North London, for both 'Paris Match' and the American magazine 'Look'.

Pathé News described the AC thus: "It isn't a car at all, it's a painting. The art world is playing a new game with synthetic and flamboyant enamels, combining 1930s-style décor with pin-table pop art. This is art on wheels."



Edwards spent some time in the passenger seat of the ferocious AC. "At that time it was probably the closest feeling to a dragster that one could have on our roads. The top speed was not impressive... but the acceleration: WOW.

"You could hear every piston... the engine would be rocking the car from side to side... you were pinned back

into your seat like an astronaut experiencing g-force at take-off. It was a very masculine machine, no frilly bits inside – all engine surrounded by bodywork that, compared to most cars, was like tin foil.”

Browne was to achieve worldwide fame after he died, aged 21, at the wheel of his Lotus Elan and was immortalised in the Beatles song ‘A Day in the Life’.

Edwards and Binder went on to paint Paul McCartney’s ‘Magic Piano’ and to create murals on many 1960s shop fronts, including ‘Dandie Fashions’ and ‘Lord John’. Edwards then painted murals in the houses of Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr.

And the AC 289 Sports? Marque expert Trevor Legate tells us that a few years ago the car was still registered in the UK and is now painted... wait for it... metallic burgundy.

Related Links

The website of Dudley and Madeleine Edwards, without whom this article could never have been completed: www.amazedltd.com

Dudley Edwards interviewed by 'Groove Grove Graphics': [Part I](#), [Part II](#), [Part III](#)

Paul McCartney playing the 'Magic Piano' on his [2011 world tour](#)

AC Cobras in the [Classic Driver Marketplace](#)

Trevor Legate's excellent book 'Cobra: The First 40 Years' can be bought from www.amazon.com

Rod Leach's Nostalgia cars for sale in the [Classic Driver Marketplace](#)

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