

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## How to win back your first true love...

### Lead

We can all remember that first pang of love, stirred deep inside by something or someone special. For racing driver Sam Thomas, it occurred the day his father came home with a Hawk AC Cobra. The car was in his life for five years, with the love deepening over time, until, one day, she was gone...

I remember only too well the first time I had the feeling. Deep inside, you feel a dull yet insatiable ache, unlike anything you've felt before. Your breath shortens and you suddenly become aware that you're the only one in the world who understands why. The ache only vanishes when you're in the presence of the entity that fills the void, evaporating the pain and making your heart beat faster. It's that first flutter of love.

### Teenage kicks



For Sam Thomas, he was about to experience that same feeling for the first time, albeit for a car rather than a girl, while growing up in France. While he was living in the United Kingdom, he'd wanted to play football and not much else. But after his father had relocated the family to France and he'd attended an all-French school (initially armed with just a few essential phrases written on his arm), Sam had focused and blossomed, both as a student and a sportsman. His father, originally a tailor in London and now an established automotive upholsterer, had always boasted a fierce passion for cars, and it seemed to rub off on Sam. While there were always special cars in and around the workshop, it was the Cobra with which young Sam was smitten.

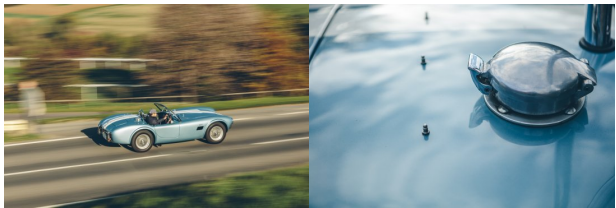
### Marriage made in automotive heaven



"I'm not sure what made my eyes open the widest", recalls Sam about the day his father brought the car home, still crystal clear in his memory, "either the curves or the noise. Whether you love it or hate it, you can't deny the Cobra is one of the most iconic cars ever created." That we can't disagree with – the Cobra is a design classic and the quintessential personification of the much-copied Anglo-American automotive marriage.

During his father's ownership, Sam formed a special bond with the car, proudly taking responsibility for keeping it clean and tidy. The effort wasn't in vain – when the time came, Sam was, extraordinarily, taught to drive in this very car. "I'll never forget that feeling when I started it up and drove it for the very first time", he reminisces. "I just wanted to keep on going forever."

### Cruel mistress



One day, however, Sam returned home to discover that the car was gone – his first love had been cruelly taken away. His father had sold it and, crestfallen, Sam wanted to know why and where it had gone. But the deal was done, and it was too late. Luckily, Sam soon became distracted from his lost love when he began to pursue his interest in motorsport, and his subsequent racing success led him to establish [Sam Thomas Racing](#), a race preparation specialist on the south coast of England. With the business very much encompassing historic cars, in addition to the more modern machinery, it was inevitable that Sam’s first love never strayed too far from his heart. He vowed to win her back...

### It was fate



By sheer coincidence, earlier this year Sam discovered that the car was physically not far from him. After it left France, the Cobra spent many years in Africa, before returning to the United Kingdom, where, in recent times, it has lived just 18 miles from Sam’s home. “I’d always regularly checked the market to see if she ever came up for sale”, he explains. “One day I saw her and my heart literally skipped several beats.” Naturally, he grabbed the phone, rang the number listed on the advert, and within an hour, set eyes on the car he’d so desperately loved once again. Needless to say, Sam ‘moved hell and high water’ to buy the Cobra, right there and then. “To have her back after all these years...I’m truly speechless, it means *so much*”, comments Sam, with all the passion of a man who’s fallen in love for the first time all over again.

### The next chapter





This car has a genuine small-block 289 V8 from a Shelby Cobra, with a matching-numbers gearbox and original Cobra touches, including genuine AC pedals, steering wheel, gear stick, and Raydot mirror. It stands so pretty, glinting in the sunshine as we pause from the driving for an impromptu photo. "It also has the split boot, as per the original '39 PH' car, to accommodate the Le Mans-style hardtop, which is now an extremely rare thing", he adds.

Perhaps the best thing about this charming story is that Sam's own family has fallen for the car, too, and enjoy joining him for spirited drives, almost as much as Sam relishes taking his father out in it again. As we part, Sam hops in the Cobra, pulls down his shades, and beams back at me as he fires the engine. This love runs deep, and long may it continue.

*Text and photos: Alex Lawrence / The Whitewall*

**Gallery**





















































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