


# CLASSIC DRIVER

## 1954 RA4 Vanguard

- Lot sold  
USD 84 759 - 96 867  
GBP 70 000 - 80 000 (listed)  
• **Year of manufacture** 1954
- **Lot number** 626
- **Drive** RHD
- **Condition** Used
- **Location** 
- **Exterior colour** Other
- **Car type** Other
- 

### Description

One of five or six innovative single-seaters built by Hec Green and Jack Brewer. FIA papers till 2029 and has been invited to the Goodwood Revival meeting. Race history at International events (Lady Wigram Trophy). Currently co-owned by legendary New Zealand driver Paul Radisich. A great showcase for Kiwi ingenuity that deserves to be recognized on a global stage. Hector (Hec) Green was a prolific builder of New Zealand racing Specials. From the late 1940's through mid-1950's, the Christchurch based, Otago born engineer, along with Jack Brewer, produced a series of interesting race cars, that were highly innovative in their design and execution. Working in partnership with Jim Lee at Greenly Engineering, and later joined by Brewer, Green's focus, initially at least, was to build his cars "light and simple". But very quickly, with each progressive model, the Green/Brewer pairing grew ever bolder in their design, their ability to repurpose unrelated or scrapyard parts, or build components completely from scratch. Many of the designs they incorporated into their race cars were years ahead of European Formula 1 developments. The first car to carry the RA designation appeared in 1948 and was based on a 6-cylinder 1936 Wolseley. Green, who was introduced to motor racing through his business partners Lee and Brewer, purchased a wrecked Wolseley that started life as a British Police pursuit vehicle and was imported into New Zealand. Green stripped the Wolseley of its 1.604cc straight-6 engine, wheels, and brakes, and sold the remains. From here he had the basis for what became known as the RA Wolseley. Green chose Ford Model T chassis rails, into which he bored large holes to reduce weight. Quarter elliptic springs were fitted front and rear. The Wolseley 6 engine was rebuilt and featured triple SU carburetors, lightened pistons, triple valve springs, a Scintilla Vertex magneto, and a hot camshaft designed and built from scratch by Hec Green. Indeed, camshafts were his speciality and having designed and built his own camshaft grinder, camshaft work provided a steady income stream for Greenly Engineering. The first known event for the RA Wolseley, which weighed a mere 500 kilograms, was the Halswell Road grass Hillclimb in 1948, where both Hec and his brother Graham drove it. RA Wolseley also competed in the Summit Road Hillclimb, and North Island Sprint Championship, both in late 1948, where Green took the fastest time of the day at Summit Road, and a class win in the North Island Sprint. He won the South Island Beach Championship in early 1949, and qualified third for the first-ever Wigram race (named the Lady Wigram Trophy from 1951) on 25/26 February 1949. In the end, Green placed fourth but recorded the fastest lap. He collected 10 pounds in prize money. The 1949 season saw Green win his class in the South Island Hillclimb Championship, plus Fastest Time of the Day (FTD) at the Petone Sprint, Summit Road Hillclimb, and Aylesbury Speed Trials. Meanwhile, fellow Christchurch racer Pat Hoare (later to commission the unique Ferrari Dino 3 litre Tasman car) commissioned Green to build him a car, which first appeared in 1949. The little racer was fitted with the 972cc engine and various other parts from Hoare's Singer Le Mans. Green sought to make the car small and light and to get the centre of gravity as low as possible, including the driver, and as such, incorporated a novel approach to transfer power from the front-mounted engine to the rear wheels. While the driveshaft sat low, it passed beneath the driver to the differential, with a chain drive providing drive up to the rear axles. The car was fitted with an aluminium body built over a tubular framework. Hoare contested the 1949 Wigram race, qualifying last but one, and retired after twelve laps, again when the car overheated. It quickly became apparent this car needed more power, and in place of the little Singer engine went a supercharged 1,442cc Vauxhall unit. With the new engine installed, the Hoare machine was fast, but it suffered ongoing reliability problems. However, it did hold together for the 1950 Wigram event, in which he would have finished sixth, but for a push start following a spin from which he was disqualified. Hec Green contested this race in the RA Wolseley, and after starting third on the grid, ran competitively throughout to win. Both Green and Hoare entered the first New Zealand Grand Prix, at Ohakea. Green qualified third fastest, while Hoare was fifteenth. In the race, Green eventually finishing second, while Hoare moved forward to finish sixth. Meanwhile, in 1950, another Hec Green Special appeared, commissioned by Des Wild for David Owen to drive. Fitted with a 1,094cc Fiat engine, this car was built as a two-seater. It was entered in the 1950 Wigram race, where Owen qualified and finished fifth. Typically, RA Wolseley evolved continuously, but Green and Brewer had already been working on its replacement, which made its race debut during the 1951 season. This car, known as the RA Vanguard, would be one of the most revolutionary designs, not only in New Zealand but in all of world motorsports at the time. Green and Brewer were able to attain a British Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee report on the investigation into the development of German Grand Prix racing cars between 1934 and 1939. Following World War II, the BIOS investigated and reported on various aspects of German industry, including the state-sponsored Mercedes-Benz and Auto-Union Grand Prix racing cars. This information and related secrets were then made available to purchase. As Jack Brewer said, We just wrote to the Ministry in the UK, got a letter back and the price was ridiculously cheap. I guess they didn't think that the information was worth much to anyone. That RA Vanguard looked a little like a miniature Auto Union is no coincidence. Green and Brewer studied the report in detail and from it, they began planning the RA Vanguard. Although the incredible Auto Union racing cars

were rear-engined, and John Cooper had started producing rear-engined race cars for Formula 3, this configuration was in no way common in 1950. Indeed, rear-engined cars were yet to appear in Formula 1, other than Harry Schell's brief and unsuccessful appearance at Monaco in an F2/3 car. That a small engineering workshop in Christchurch, New Zealand, could take a set of Auto Union blueprints and build its own rear-engined racing car is ambitious. But Green was nothing if not enthusiastic, and talented, and he was driven by engineering challenges. As its name implies, the RA Vanguard was powered by a 4-cylinder 2,088cc Vanguard engine, to which a Wade supercharger, possibly a modified War surplus cabin blower, was fitted. The supercharger was chain driven. A pair of SU carburettors were used, while spent gases exited through four stubby exhaust pipes, which pointed skyward, much like those on the Auto Unions. The supercharger ran 16lb boost and the engine produced around 200hp on methanol. To allow Green and Brewer to mount the engine behind the driver, they used a Citroen-ERSA gearbox. While Cooper racing cars were using a rear-engined layout at the time, theirs were a simple design using a motorcycle engine which drove the rear wheels with a chain. It'd be five years later before they incorporated the ERSA box into their designs. The RA Vanguard chassis was made of four steel tubes, all of the same length. Two were 4 inches in diameter, and two were 2 inches in diameter and ran the length of the car with the 4-inch tubes at the top. All four tubes featured a long, gradual bend at the rear, and met in the middle. Fabricated members braced the four tubes together, and also provide the various mounting points. Front suspension was based on the Ferdinand Porsche designed Auto Union blueprints, and was independent, with aluminium trailing arms made from scratch. Following the War, aluminium was extremely hard to source in New Zealand. However, Green and Brewer frequented RNZAF auctions at Wigram and were able to acquire propellers and other War surplus items that could be melted or machined. Trailing arms were carved from aircraft propellers. The rear end used low-pivot swinging half-axes made from tapered early Ford torque tubes. The rear suspension used War surplus Kittyhawk tail wheel oleo struts. Aircraft -style rubber bands (bungee cords) completed the suspension layout and would stretch and retract, working against the shock movement. The RA Vanguard featured rack and pinion variable-ratio steering with eccentric offset, designed by Green. In a straight line, the steering was low geared but increased as the wheel was turned. Green also designed and built the 16-inch diameter wheels. The bold little race car was painted orange with white wheels. Green's friend George Begg (later to manufacture the very successful Begg F5000 cars) had a spare can of orange tractor paint and offered for the project. It was free, so Green was happy to accept. RA Vanguard made its first appearances in late 1951, including a quarter-mile sprint where it clocked an impressive 13.8sec run from a standing start. Its first major event was the International 1951 Lady Wigram Trophy. But the impressive new car didn't even make it to the start line when a piston was holed in practice. 1951 saw the car entered in various events, including sprints, hill climbs, plus the New Zealand Beach Racing Championship, held at Oreti. In February 1952, Green again entered the Lady Wigram Trophy where he started from fifth on the grid. At the start, Green leapt from the second row to chase John McMillans McMillan Special, another locally designed and produced rear-engined single-seater, although one based more closely on Cooper design principles, including chain drive to the rear wheels. By the end of lap 1 Green was in front, followed by Hec McLean in a Cooper-JAP, Les Moore in an Alfa Romeo Tipo B, and George Smith in the newly built GeeCeeEss Special. Green began to pull away from the field, chased by Smith and Moore, and while the two front-engined 8-cylinder cars battled, the little 4-cylinder rear-engined car drew further ahead. Until lap 14, when it coasted to a halt. The gearbox had failed. Green tended not to travel to the North Island, where an increasing number of high-quality events were taking place. Instead, he remained in the South Island, tackling local competitions. For him, the engineering challenges were at least as enjoyable as the racing itself. He entered the 1953 Lady Wigram Trophy, which boasted a great entry, including 1953 CWF Hamilton Trophy winner Ron Roycroft in his Alfa Romeo P3, and 1952 Ohakea Trophy winner George Smith in the GeeCeeEss. Green started from the back row of the grid following a troubled Heat race, but rapidly worked his way forward, to battle Roycroft for second in the early laps. This continued until lap 12 when the RA coasted to a stop. The RA was then entered for the first Dunedin Street Race, held in June 1953 but it wasn't Green who was listed as the driver, it was Jack Brewer. However, the little orange racer failed to reach the start line when Brewer suffered a gearbox failure in practice, locking the rear wheels solid at speed. The gearbox proved to be the RA's Achilles heel throughout its early racing life. Indeed, years later when Cooper began using the ERSA gearbox, Citroen agreed to strengthen it for greater reliability. But this was not an option for Green and Brewer in 1953. One of the first attempts they made to cure the problem was to remove reverse gear and manufacture their own gears and shafts, converting it to a close-ratio 4-speed. But still it failed. Eventually, Green found drawings for a constant mesh Cisitalia gearbox and was confident this would provide the strength they needed. To that end, they discarded the Citroen gearbox entirely and set about making patterns, casting aluminium cases, and cutting their own gears and shafts to build a completely new replacement for the discarded Citroen. Finally, this appeared to solve the gearbox issues that gearbox is still in the car nearly 60 years later. But it took time to resolve, and by 1953, Green was already working on his next project, having tired of the RA Vanguard. The result was the hugely impressive RA Special, which Green raced from 1954. For the next few years, the RA Vanguard was driven sporadically by a series of drivers, including Jack Brewer and Geoff Mardon. Reliability issues continued to haunt the little car but it was still fast in the 1958 Lady Wigram the car was running third behind Lister works driver Ross Jensen in his Maserati 250F and a young Bruce McLaren in a 2 litre Cooper. Hec Green sold out his share in Grenly Engineering to Brewer, and with the RA Vanguard being a company asset, it remained with Brewer. Brewer had no interest in racing the car, so placed it on the market, where it was purchased by speedway bike racing legend, Les Moore, in 1959. Les was the father of Ronnie Moore, who would twice win the World Speedway Championship. Driving an Alfa Romeo Tipo B, Les Moore won the first Wigram race in which the winner was awarded the Lady Wigram Trophy. On purchasing the RA Vanguard, Moore rebuilt the rear suspension, replaced the Hec Green wheels with wire wheels, and entered selected events in the 1960 season, including the Lady Wigram Trophy, but retired with tyre failure after 8 laps. Les Moore also entered an event in Washdyke, Timaru, in the winter of 1960. During his race, a wheel tucked under the car, sending it into a somersault, and throwing Les clear - however, the car landed on him, killing him in the process. Les son Ronnie, whose speedway racing career kept him in Europe for much of the year, had nowhere to store the RA. Despite the crash, it wasn't heavily damaged. Jack Brewer agreed to store the car at Grenly Engineering, where it sat for several years until purchased by Bob Blackburn. Blackburn attempted to get the car running again, but found the supercharger, which was made from electron magnesium alloy, wouldn't run. He took it back to Brewer to diagnose, and when opened up, was found to be unsalvageable, due to having run on alcohol, but having sat since Les Moore's accident in 1960. The engine was weak without the supercharger, and again it disappeared. Eventually, enthusiast Grant Cowie purchased the remains from Blackburn where they sat in the elements out the back of his workshop for many years. The car ended up with Mike Courteney, who the car made some historic racing appearances, including at the Hamilton Street Races. The RA was then sold to Richard Anderson, who historic raced it for a couple of years, before, after much discussion with original builder Jack Brewer, set about rebuilding the car back to correct specifications. Rather than paint it the orange of the original, Anderson instead opted for silver, which gives the little car a distinctive miniature Auto Union look. Richard Anderson historic raced the fully rebuilt RA on occasion but found he wasn't using the car enough and had a stockpile of other projects demanding his attention, and in 2017 it was purchased by the current owners. 1950s New Zealand was a challenging place to go motor racing. Draconian import laws massively restricted the average person's ability to source cars or speed equipment from overseas. Added to that a total lack of permanent racing facilities plus a limited number of events each season, meant even attending races required a herculean effort. Racing machines had to be built by mating together standard road car parts, or recommissioning items originally created for totally different purposes. Or simply building them from scratch, as Hec Green and Jack Brewer did. But this is what made New Zealand racers so adaptable, and so creative, and what made their services in international racing so sought after. This fascinating little car provides a great showcase of Kiwi ingenuity that deserves to be recognized on a global stage. Veteran Kiwi motorsport writer Alan Dick describes Green a genius and the car as the most ingenious and important of all the NZ-built racing cars. In all, there were at least five, possibly six RA race cars built. The wording behind the RA abbreviation isn't completely clear. When asked Hec Green reportedly said Rong Again. Hec's business partner Jack Brewer, however, said it stood for Racing Associates. Perhaps fittingly, its true identity will remain a mystery. The car comes with a spare engine (condition unknown), spare supercharger, 2 sets of pistons and spare magneto, which will need to be collected from near Gatwick.

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