

ROLAND AUTOMOTIVE

28140 26 MILE ROAD - CHESTERFIELD, MICHIGAN 48051 - 586-749-9804

Phil Carney

18 Nov 01

Sorry I don't have as much spare time these days as I used to have, so it has taken me longer to get an answer for you than I thought it would. I will try to give you information both on my specific car and on what I know in general about America Roadsters.

1952 PORSCHE AMERICA ROADSTER - 10465

I bought this car from Vic Skirmants in the late summer of 1975, just as we were moving to our present home. I debated whether it was a good idea to spend the money while trying to buy the house and move, but time has proven me right. Vic had the car for about a year. I remember him calling me with great enthusiasm, and we went out driving all around in it on a cool fall day.

Vic had gotten the car quite by luck. John Sullivan had advertised a very nice Roadster, with a hot 912 engine, disc brakes, etc, and a spare parts car. Stoddard ended up buying this car. When I saw the ad I assumed that the parts car was a rusty coupe. Vic, though, knew from previous research that Sullivan had two Roadsters, so he called him. Sure enough, the parts car was the other Roadster. Vic ask if it might be for sale separately. It was and being just a parts car it was considerably cheaper, and within Vic's budget, so he bought it, leading to the above driving experience. As it turned out this was the far more important/valuable car. More on that later.

Dr. Sullivan purchased the car from Mrs. E Allen Henderson, through an ad in the Aug 1967 issue of Hemming's Motor News, apparently on the death of her husband. I remember seeing the ad which looked like an estate sale, and wondering what an America Roadster was. I had been working with Porsches since 1963 and had taken an interest in their very early cars, but was in no position to buy anything like that since I had just finished Officer Training School for the Air Force and was going to California for flight training. Good things sometimes come back around, though.

I compiled the following ownership list in Sep 1981 after receiving all the information that Dr. Sullivan had collected, and talking with several of the owners.

Briggs Cunningham
John Bentley
Paul Sagen
Dick Lockwood
Carl Miller
Bill Haupt
Ed Bond
Edgar L. Roy
E. Allen Henderson
John J. Sullivan
Vic Skirmants

Ron Roland – Although I had put the car up for sale in 1996, with the rest of my collection, I have since decided to keep the car and give it to my children, Lord willing.

R. B. Roland, 18 Nov 01, Porsche America Roadster, Phil Carney

2.

There is a plethora of information on 10465. Articles or pictures I have include:

- Autoweek, Apr 27, 1998, p. 16 – 1952 Watkins Glen photo
- Vintage Motorsport, May/June 1997, p. 35 – 1952 Giant's Despair photo, and article about Phil Walters, Cunningham's ace driver, who also drove this Porsche.
- 8x10 photos taken at the Aug 1952 Thompson, CT race by Wayne F. Potter. Cunningham in Roadster #18, R. Thorpe in Roadster #101 (more on this car later).
- Sports Car, Aug 1952, p. 17 – Race results at Thompson, CT. Koster, Thorp, and Cunningham
- Road & Track, Nov 1952, p. 19 – Photo of Phil Walters winning at Brynfan Tyddyn. This victory is the first overall race victory for a Porsche *named* car (a Porsche as we know it).
- Unknown magazine – Pictures of Thompson grid
- Sports Car, Nov/Dec 1952, Vol. IX No. 5, p. 26 – Photo at Watkins Glen
- Sports Car, Jan/Feb 1953, Vol. IX, No. 6, Photo, Briggs Jr. # 52
- Auto Sport Review, Feb 1953, p. 15 – Photo of Cunningham #18 at Thompson
- Sports Cars and Hot Rods, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1953, p. 84-87, photos of Cunningham's Roadster in article about Alfred Momo's garage on Long Island.
- Auto Age, Dec 1953, p. 20, 21 & 60, 61 – Cover photo in yellow with green spears over And under headlights, and (presumably) green wheels. This is the quintessential America Roadster article done on 10495 by John Bentley after he purchased the car from Briggs Cunningham. Page 35 drawing of a Roadster wearing #77 is apparently Bentley's car. Josie Von Neumann is also pictured driving a Roadster at Torrey Pines, not 10465, probably 12336.

I wrote Cunningham once in Jan 1986. Unfortunately, he kept no records of the cars he had back then, although he did remember a Porsche he got from Max Hoffman, had it a while, then turned it back to Hoffman (maybe) for another car. May or may not be 10465. Later, I actually talked to Phil Walters twice. First on 4 Feb 1991, and last on 12 Jul 1992. His memory was better. He said that after the 1952 Le Mans race (Jun 1952) He and Cunningham were invited to the Porsche factory by Ferry Porsche. They were shown an America Roadster, because Porsche wanted Cunningham to race the car for them in the Brynfan Tyddyn race. Porsche no doubt knew that the race had been restricted to two liter cars and thought their chances were good. Whether Cunningham was to buy the car is hard to say, but Porsche was never known to give anything away. Walters thought Cunningham probably paid for the car and had a "gentleman's agreement" to race it through 1952.

The car that Cunningham and Walters was shown, Walters confirms, was not the one they raced. They probably saw 10469 which had been completed 6 Jun 1952. This is most likely the dark colored car photographed at (not in) the 1952 Le Mans race. This car is pictured on pg. 92 of Ludwigen's book and looks like it could have been red. It also looks like it has two grills and is the second body style, like Paterek's' car 12317 (the third car on the grid at Thompson), which is a little lower and sleeker looking than my car. Compare with the photo on pg. 90 of Lloyd's car, 10455, most likely the first Roadster. By the time of the Le Mans race only three America Roadsters had been built; 10455, and 10465 were already in the U.S., leaving only 10469 in Europe, it was subsequently shipped to Hoffman, but Walters says this is not the car they raced.

He also said that Bill Spear took delivery of a Roadster and drove it to Le Mans in 1952, and it was red. It would have to have been 10469. Interestingly, Walters said that Bill Lloyd who bought

10455 was a nephew of Cunningham. I had talked to Lloyd three days earlier, 9 Jul 1992, but did not have all the right questions to ask him, and never could contact him again. He confirmed that he had a silver, single grill Roadster that he bought from Hoffman. His friend Roy Thorpe sometimes drove it, and he did not sell it to John Bentley. Cunningham and Bentley were very friendly and Cunningham most likely sold his car directly to Bentley, according Walters.

I have done quite a bit of work on 10465, although the restoration is far from complete. Unfortunately, I took it to a hot-shot, local body fabricator. I needed to have somebody weld up some misc. cracks in the Aluminum. I told him I didn't want any panels cut off or a new body built. He ignored me, let the janitor who couldn't weld work on the car, and then when it was screwed up he started cutting off the rocker panels to make new ones. I rescued the car and learned to weld aluminum by welding the "unweldable" rocker panels back together. This was necessary because I was starting the restoration of 12362 for Heath Hurlbert and had to do the aluminum repair myself.

What I noticed in all this was that 10465 seemed to be thinner aluminum with minimal bracing. The luggage area behind the seats was painted black rather than having black felt glued in, there were no holes for the Glaser badges, and there is no sign that the car was ever undercoated. It is like this car was intentionally made very light to be a race car. And it worked.

The car as I have it is pretty much stripped except for a full windscreen, and it is very quick. Of course I don't know if the engine is stock, although it does bear the original 1500 Super number, 40020. This is probably the first car to "officially" have the 1500 Super. 10455 had a 527 1500, just a couple of weeks earlier. Stock or not, the engine happily winds the tack past 6000 RPM. It has the early VW non-syncro "crash box" so one has to learn how to drive, double clutching is standard. The crash box has a large gap between second and third, not a good gear set for racing. Of course the car came with the big brakes – *grosse bremsen* – another trademark of the America Roadster. The original brake drums appear to have been made by taking the VW drums Porsche was using – with shrunk-on aluminum cooling fins – and cutting them just outside of the lug bolt holes, then adding the large aluminum braking surface over the lug holes. Drums on 10465 now appear to be early, all aluminum, machined Spyder drums and drilled backing plates, which have to be lighter than the composite parts.

The car hasn't had paint since I bought it and for a long time prior to my purchase. The doors bear the outline of a racing number 133. Interior looks to be original, green vinyl with unique seats. The seats look like maybe a modified VW item, much lighter than the standard Porsche seat, but not the nice wrap around seats of the later Roadsters. But with all its shortcomings, though, it is still a ball to drive.

THE PORSCHE AMERICA ROADSTER

The importance of the America Roadster cannot be overemphasized. While we could speculate endlessly on what may have become of Porsche without their dominant racing heritage, the fact is that they have it. And much of it hinges on the brief history of this small series of cars, and on one particular car and owner.

The series, of course is the America Roadster, built pretty much one by one in 1952 and 1953. The individual car is the one that Briggs Cunningham briefly owned. The owner of importance, though is not Cunningham, as much as the car's second owner, John Bentley. Already an avid Porsche owner/racer, he couldn't wait to get this car from Cunningham. As a magazine publisher and writer, he then publicized this car's attributes and victories well past its prime giving Porsche invaluable advertising exposure.

The America Roadster has, and continues to be somewhat of an enigma. One of the big debates centers around how many were built. Numbers range from fifteen up to well over a hundred. About fifteen years ago, Ray Knight (owner of the Sauter odd-door roadster) and I tried to approach this question systematically. We knew that all the AR's had been built by Glaser, narrowing the serial number range considerably. We "knew" that they all had 1500 Super engines. The quotes are because this turned out to be a faulty assumption. Then there were other characteristics, like *big brakes, no radio, leather (trunk lid) straps, or aero windscreen* which were only fitted to the AR's. Integrating these features with the known serial numbers produced sixteen cars. This list has never been improved upon to my knowledge, with one notable exception, 10455.

The AR's were often said to have been produced in two or three series, depending on how you cut it. The first series was said to be three cars, all with single grill engine lids. This was based mostly upon the three cars pictured on the grid at Thompson, CT. However, only one single grill car could be verified, 10465, the Cunningham car. So the feeling began going around that this was the first AR. As the owner of this car I knew something wasn't right. There were too many names associated with this car that were at the same place at the same time, and that had no connection to each other.

About ten years ago I began an intensive investigation. The end result was that I found that the car owned by Bill Lloyd and frequently raced by Roy Thorpe was one car and the car owned by Briggs Cunningham and sometimes raced by Phil Walters was a second car. Careful research now points to Lloyds car as the first built and Cunningham's the second. Lloyd's car had not surfaced in the first study primarily because it did not have a 1500 Super engine. It did have the big brakes which may have been a better sort. The serial number of Lloyd's car is 10455, and it used the early, 527, 1500 roller bearing engine. This engine was considerably less powerful than the Super engine, and so it didn't come to special racing attention. Following is a list of articles that depict Lloyds' car.

Road & Track, Aug 1952, p. 21 – Photo and race results for R. Thorpe # 99 Porsche Special

Speed Age, Jan 1953, p. 62 – Photo of Bill Lloyd driving and working on the two tone (black and red?) Thorpe Roadster, at Turner AFB, Albany, GA 26 Oct 1952.
 Road & Track, Nov 1952, p. 26 – Photo of Bill Lloyd #19 at Convair Trophy Races

R. B. Roland, 24 Nov 01, Porsche America Roadster, Phil Carney

4.

There is a picture of what is described as “an early single grill America Roadster” on page 75 of *Porsche Year 1982*. Walter Kiekhefer has been associated with the first Von Neumann car 12336. 21336 is definitely a double grill car and was built just before Stoddard’s car, 12345, which has the third body style. The car pictured in *Porsche Year*, is an earlier style, and appears to have a single airscope on the back of the car. It could be 10455, Kiekhefer could have had two Roadsters. Maybe 10455 is lost in California, not on the east coast.

There are a great many more interesting questions like this to be answered and I hope you have the time. I am out of time right now, and have to go back to school tomorrow. If you have additional questions I will be glad to help, if I can. Maybe I’ll have more time when I finish school in May. I will be home for Christmas from the 17 of Dec through the 5 of Jan.

Following is the list of serial numbers that we know to be America Roadsters. If you have any new or conflicting information I would like to discuss it sometime.

10455	30250	26 Apr 1952	Hoffman	Lloyd	Silver	Unknown
10465	40020	5 May 1952	Hoffman	Cunningham	Radium Green/green	Roland
10469	40022	6 Jun 1952	Hoffman	Spear (?)	Red/beige	Unknown
12312	40033	24 Jun 1952	Hoffman		Ivory	Totaled ?
12317	40035	9 Jul 1952	Hoffman		Grey	Paterek
12322	40037	25 Jul 1952	Hoffman		Azure Blue	Preone
12323	40039	1 Aug 1952	Hoffman	Brocken	White	Unknown
12324	40041	15 Aug 1952	Hoffman		White	Unknown
12336	40045		Hoffman	Kielnecker (?)	Feuer Red	Japan ?
12345	40048		Hoffman	Lloyd 1976	Adria Blue	Stoddard
12353	40055	20 Oct 1952	Hoffman	Hicks (#2)	Ivory	Just sold
12360	40063	23 Oct 1952	Petermax Muller	Europe (?)	Strawberry Red	Unknown
12361	40112	13 Aug 1953	Hoffman		Silver	Jackson
12362	40113	13 Feb 1953	Hoffman		Radium Green/green	Hurlbert
12363	40466	29 Jun 1953	Hoffman		Red	Schrepter
12364			Hoffman	von Neuman	Ivory/red	Eads
12371	40511		Hoffman	(steel body)	Rosedegrün/green	Kempton