



CARBON COPY

**A FEW FASTIDIOUS
CARBUILDERS
SET OUT TO
MAKE AN EXACT
REPLICA OF BRIGGS
CUNNINGHAM'S
1952 LE MANS
RACER, THE C-4RK.**

**IT TOOK THEM
SIX YEARS.**



A

CHUCK SCHOENDORF didn’t want his Cunningham C-4RK recreation to look like the original; he wanted it to look *exactly* like the original, down to the delicate curve of every single louver. With just one C-4RK in existence, building a perfect replica wasn’t easy. The original was built by Briggs Cunningham II. Born to a wealthy family, Cunningham was the model gentleman racer, founding the predecessor to the SCCA before World War II. He first competed in the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1950—a pioneering driver who laid the groundwork for every American racing hero that followed. Cunningham wanted to prove that American teams and drivers could compete with the best of Europe. After running two Cadillacs successfully at La Sarthe, he began construction of his own cars.

The C-4R was built in a production run of two roadsters and one coupe for the 1952 Le Mans 24. While the roadsters proved more successful—one finished fourth in ’52, the other took third in ’54—the coupe, the C-4RK, was the faster, more innovative car. The “K” designation stood for Dr. Wundibald Kamm, the German aerodynamicist whose research led to the truncated rear-end design that bears his name. Dr. Kamm visited Cun-

ningham’s West Palm Beach, Florida, shop to help shape the C-4RK. Kamm’s tail design helped make the C-4RK one of the fastest cars on the track that year, topping 150 mph on the Mulsanne Straight, qualifying third, and even leading the 1952 race for a time before dropping out with an engine failure.

Schoendorf, a lifelong Hemi fan and Connecticut-based collector, was originally attracted to Cunningham’s cars for their Chrysler power. All but two of the 36 built had 331-cid FirePower V-8s. Over the years, he came to own a handful of C-3 road cars and got to know the Cunningham family well (Briggs himself died in 2003, at 96). On a visit to Cunningham’s Connecticut estate, Schoendorf happened to find an unfinished chassis under a tarp. In the Nineties, Cunningham’s son, Briggs III, built four C-4R roadster continuation cars, but one extra chassis had gone unused. Schoendorf happened to have an extra Hemi at his shop, complete with an original Cunningham cast-aluminum intake manifold and quad Zenith carburetors.

“I said to Lucie [Cunningham McKinney, Briggs II’s late daughter], ‘You know, I’ve got the right engine for this car, you’ve got the chassis. What do you say we put the two together and build something?’” Schoendorf recalled. “She said ‘Okay, what do you think we oughta build?’” The answer was easy—a C-4RK.

There are two original surviving C-4R roadsters and four continuation cars (plus a replica built in the U.K.), but only one coupe. The original C-4RK is in the Miles Collier collection at the Revs Institute in Florida, and owing to its rarity, it never leaves. Collier—whose father and uncle raced with Cunningham—allowed Schoendorf and Cunningham McKinney to examine his C-4RK for reference, so long as they didn’t touch it. “I’m not into recreations myself,” Schoendorf says. “But on the other hand, when there’s only one in the world, and it no longer leaves the museum, and it’s also such a cool car, it was a project that had to be done.”

Schoendorf enlisted Don Breslauer, a fabricator and race-car builder based near Connecticut’s Lime Rock Park, to help turn the project into a reality. Florida company NeoMetrix performed a 3D scan of the C-4RK, which was provided to CNC



B



C



D

- A. Behind that fishlike mouth lurks a pulsing V-8.
- B. The C-4RK as Le Mans spectators saw it: roaring American ingenuity catapulting down a country road.
- C. The interior is all about the little things, like the perfectly delicate switches.
- D. Dr. Kamm himself shaped the C-4RK’s aerodynamics.



- A.** Schoendorf spends plenty of time in this businesslike cockpit, enjoying his custom-built racer on the road.
- B.** Could this be the best home a Hemi has ever found?

A

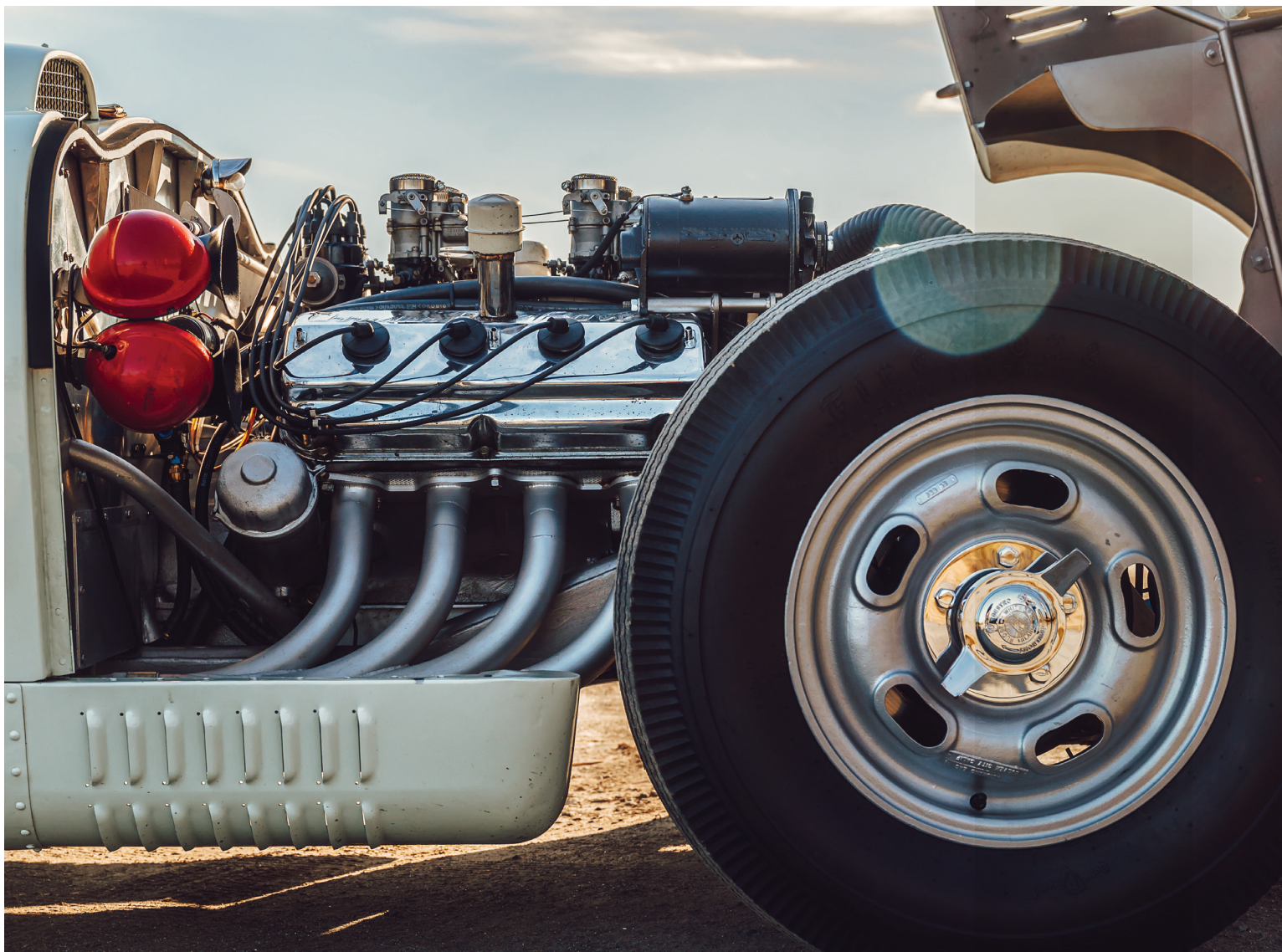
shop Four Corners in Millerton, New York, to make a wooden buck. Breslauer worked on the chassis and fabricated necessary parts, while Mark Barton of Stratford, Connecticut, hammered out body panels. Both Breslauer and Schoendorf made many trips down from Connecticut to the Revs Institute to study and document the original C-4RK. “It couldn’t look like an awkward kit car,” Breslauer says. “We really had to have that shape replicated, or it wasn’t going to be the project that we wanted. So we spent a lot of time on details.”

After six years of work, the team completed the car just in time for the Cunningham reunion at the 2018 Greenwich Concours. Every component has a story. The Marchal driving lights required a trip to the Retromobile show in Paris, as Schoendorf couldn’t find the correct units in the U.S. Most Marchal lights in the States have a central crease; the C-4RK had units with a small nipple in the middle. The 24-hour clock on the original’s dashboard was from a B-17 bomber. Schoendorf happened to find one on eBay. Every other period flourish is present and correct: the Halibrand magnesium wheels, the Pontiac taillamps, Stewart Warner gauges, Renault 4CV license-plate light. They’re all here. Photographer Dave Burnett noticed the interior window frames were the same shade of blue as the car’s stripes. Schoendorf corrected him. It’s actually a slightly different shade, just like on the real car, and the blue on the fuel neck is a third shade. “Who knows how many times [the original] car got painted, repainted.... Did they even pay any attention to it? I don’t know. Maybe, maybe not,” Schoendorf said. That’s the fun irony of this car. Schoendorf and his co-conspirators put more work into the replica than Cunningham gave the real thing. After all, the original was a race car, a tool. The details didn’t matter. But for the recreation, the details were everything.

“Looks good to me,” Collier told Breslauer after a careful inspection at the car’s concours debut. Breslauer says that vindicated the whole project.

Schoendorf graciously offered us time behind the wheel of his C-4RK on the roads around Connecticut’s Silver Sands State Park, just as the sun set on a warm November day. The car felt deeply

B



A

- A. Schoendorf spends plenty of time in this businesslike cockpit, enjoying his custom-built racer on the road.
- B. Could this be the best home a Hemi has ever found?
- C. Long hoods hide the best secrets, especially those held in place by leather straps.

evocative, with an amazing V-8 rumble and a surplus of torque, but never race-car angry. The five-speed gearbox was notchy, with a tall, upright shifter, and the engine was happy to idle all day, despite breathing through a cluster of carburetors. Steering felt quite heavy, and you had to shuffle the thin, wood-rimmed wheel by the armful to turn, but that was it. With its upgraded brakes, this car was set up to be used in modern traffic, something Schoendorf isn't afraid to do.

I had to remind myself that the original was built as a Fifties Le Mans racer, designed to run with C-Types, SLRs, and Ferraris. The C-4RK was capable of 150 mph on bias-ply Firestones, so why should it fear a modern intersection? Whereas the original is an actual museum piece, this is a usable car. And Schoendorf drives the hell out of it. He

hopes not to damage it, but if something were to happen, the wood buck still sits in his shop.

"We built it once, we can do it again. But believe me, I have no interest in doing any repairs," he said. And as great as it is to pore over every detail when the recreation is parked, it's more fun seeing it on the road—an endurance-racing refugee, designed to beat Europe's best, just sauntering through Connecticut traffic. The Hemi sounds familiar, but the car looks otherworldly.

The amount of attention it got was staggering, and Schoendorf was happy to entertain curious passersby while we shot photographs. This C-4RK recreation is a thing to be shared and enjoyed. It brings Cunningham's history, and American sports-car history, to life in stunning fashion. We are thankful for the obsessives who made it a reality. ⑥

SPECIFICATIONS

Cunningham C-4RK Recreation

PRICE:
"No one kept a tally"

ENGINE:
5.4-liter V-8

OUTPUT:
337 hp @ 4900 rpm
381 lb-ft @ 4100 rpm

TRANSMISSION:
5-speed manual

CURB WEIGHT:
"A little over 3000 lb"