An American Dream: The Road and Racing Cars of Briggs Swift Cunningham

by Karl Ludvigsen

The can-do spirit of America at the middle of the twentieth century was alive and well in Briggs Swift Cunningham. Although of modest demeanor and patrician poise, he possessed a burning drive for achievement in the sporting world. Briggs manifested this most fully in his achievements in motor racing, where his cars and team first brought convincing proof to the Old World that the New also had a few tricks up its sleeve.

Having fallen under the spell of racing sports cars, a wealthy American set his sights on developing a viable rival to the best Europe had to offer.

Although America's road-racing fanatics were active before World War II, primarily in European cars and competing in the East Coast events of a budding sports car club, Briggs was still buying, building, and racing sailing yachts. This passion climaxed in 1958 when he skippered the 12-meter *Columbia* to victory in the America's Cup race. His name lives on in the sport for his invention of a rig for fine-tuning the sail of a racing boat.

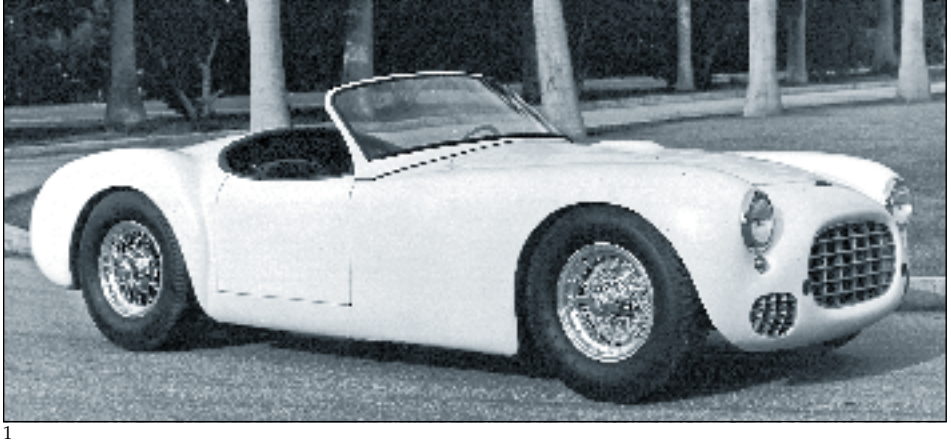
In the late Thirties Cunningham com-

missioned his first automotive creation, a hybrid of a modified Buick Century chassis and the radiator and bodywork of a Mercedes-Benz SSK. Dubbed the Bu-Merc, it was feisty enough to take him to second place in his first two motor races at Watkins Glen, New York, on October 2, 1948. His natural skills suited him well to auto racing, to which he would be dedicated for another 18 years.

The notoriously high cost of racing was not a deterrent. Briggs's father (of the same name) was prominent in the business world of Cincinnati, where the younger Briggs was born in 1907. The elder Cunningham gave financial assistance to the founders of Procter and Gamble, sharing its profits as P&G grew into a soap-manufacturing giant. Briggs's mother, Elisabeth Kilgour Cunningham, was wealthy in her own right. She bought the family's first automobile, a Pierce-Arrow. The first car young Briggs owned was a Dodge but during his prep-school days he drove a Wills Sainte Claire and a series of Auburns.

Briggs's career at Yale was short. In 1929 he abandoned school, giving up plans to become an automotive engineer, and married Lucy Bedford with whom he had spent summers racing yachts on Long Island Sound. They honeymooned in Europe, where they bought an Alfa Romeo 6C 1500 and a Mercedes-Benz SS. Cars had become a passion after Briggs's early experiences with an uncle's Hispano-Suiza-powered Dodge.

When World War II broke out, Cunningham—spurned by the Navy



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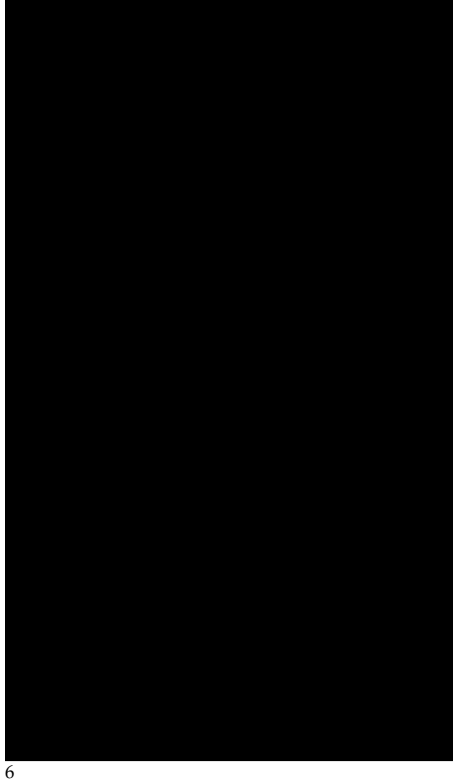

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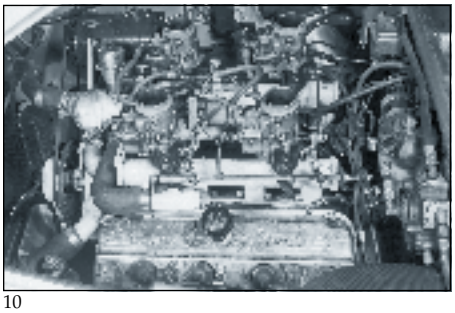

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1. After entering a pair of Cadillacs in the 1950 running of the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Briggs Cunningham set up shop in Florida to create a purpose-built sports car for the French classic. The C-1 was the prototype. *2-5.* The aluminum-body C-1 had a 105-inch wheelbase and a 220-bhp 331-cid Cadillac V-8. (Owner: Revs Institute) *6.* Cunningham was determined to have cars ready for Le Mans in 1951, even when he could no longer get Cadillac engines. *7-12.* The solution came in switching to the new Chrysler "hemi" V-8, to which a four-carburetor manifold was added (10). The result was the C-2R with a tube frame and de Dion rear axle as in the C-1.

as too old—joined the Civil Air Patrol. Piloting a self-funded single-engined Sikorsky S39B he flew antisubmarine missions from key bases along the East Coast. Postwar days found him reviving the Bu-Merc and catching up on auto doings. His friends in the sports car world who had raced in the 24 Hours of Le Mans, especially Sam and Miles Collier, raved about it to Briggs, who decided to tackle it with an American car.

This desire brought Cunningham in contact with the Long Island-based stock car racing team of Bill Frick and "Ted Tappett." The latter was actually Phil Walters, who tore up tracks as one of the East's fastest racers. The two men had formed Frick-Tappett Motors, a racing and specialty garage where Frick indulged his talent for modifying stock models. The Fordillacs he created at Rockville Center, Long Island—1949 Fords with 1949 Cadillac engines—were terrors of the stoplight Grands Prix of that era.

Convinced by Walters and Frick of the car's potential, Cunningham bought a Fordillac to enter at Le Mans in 1950. He was soon advised, however, that his entry would be rejected because of the car's hybrid nature—it was not the product of a recognized auto manufacturer, as the event's rules required. Frick suggested that Briggs obtain a suitable production-car chassis such as the 1950 Cadillac just introduced. He purchased two Series 61 two-door hardtops. One was given twin carburetors and a suitably tuned engine. The other acquired a five-carburetor manifold and an aerodynamic body. Designed by a Grumman engineer, it was a bulky creature (the French dubbed it *Le Monstre*) with enclosed wheels and a wide, flat shape suggesting an aquatic contrivance.

Both cars finished the race, no little achievement. The nearly stock entry placed 10th with the modified Cadillac, delayed by a spell in a sand pit, immedi-

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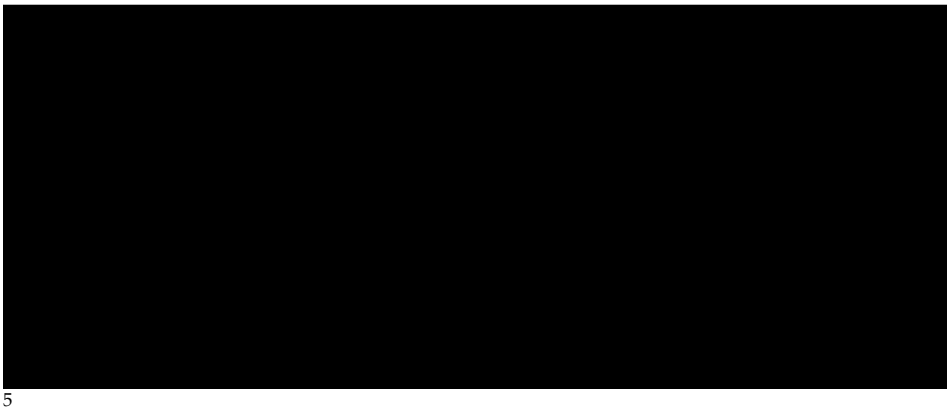
1. Cunningham with the two most successful drivers of his '51 Le Mans effort: Phil Walters (left) and John Fitch (right). They teamed up for an 18th-place result. *2.* The C-2R that Cunningham drove (with George Huntoon) retired in an overnight crash. *3-5.* Scenes from the 1951 Watkins Glen Grand Prix: Eager fans get a close look at Briggs Cunningham's car (3). Walters on the way to victory (4). Runner-up Fitch being pursued by Fred Wacker in an Allard (5).



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ately behind it. Briggs came home from France buoyed by the relative success of his first assault on Le Mans and infused with a desire to return as soon as possible and do considerably better with a purpose-built car. He merged with Frick-Tappett Motors and moved it to West Palm Beach, Florida, where in September 1950 the B. S. Cunningham Company was established.

The firm's first effort was a sports-racing prototype called the C-1. Under its hood was the Cadillac V-8, a logical choice in view of its proven 24-hour durability. One of the car's most advanced features was its de Dion rear suspension. This pairing was previewed in a Healey Silverstone. Bought in 1949 without an engine, the Healey was reworked by Frick-Tappett with the de Dion; Cadillac V-8; and bigger wheels, tires, and brakes. Cunningham and Walters drove it in East Coast events in 1950 with podium-placing success.

Then General Motors balked at supplying more engines. Cadillac powerplants were needed for the Korean War effort and division chief engineer Ed Cole, who would have leapt at the chance to help Cunningham, was setting up a tank factory from scratch. The team next pinned its hopes on the Chrysler "hemi" V-8, which had just been announced for that company's 1951 models.

Chrysler Corporation—through vice president Robert Keller (who Briggs knew from college days) and his father K. T., the company chief—was the only manufacturer to offer significant support. Its Industrial Equipment Department supplied engines and parts at a 40-percent discount. In Chrysler Project A311, also aimed at a possible Indianapolis 500 engine, engineers John Platner and Don Moore extracted both power and reliability from the hemispherical-head V-8. Out of the box output was 180 bhp at 4000 rpm, but a compression-ratio increase from 7.5:1 to 8.6:1 and a log-type manifold patterned after that of the Chrysler K-310 V-8 with four downdraft Zenith carburetors raised power to 220 bhp for Le Mans.

It was a heavy engine and the Cunningham C-2 into which it was to go was a robust automobile. As in the prototype, its foundation was a chrome-moly steel frame with three-inch tubing for the side rails, cruciform center bracing, and rear cross member. A Ford cross member for the Ford parallel-wishbone front suspension was welded into the front end of the frame. Chrysler Oriflow shock absorbers at all four wheels were backed

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1-3. The first closed-body Cunningham, dubbed C-3, was basically a C-2 with a close-coupled roof and undivided C-1-style windshield. Only one was built. (Owner: Peter Hosmer) *4.* The C-3 under construction. It became clear that the cost to build it in Florida would be too high to draw private sales to support the effort.

up by adjustable Houdaille dampers while Chrysler worm-and-roller steering was modified to provide 2.75 turns from lock to lock. Cadillac 12-inch drum brakes were mounted inboard next to the differential at the rear. Special Raybestos linings and helical drum fins raised their operating level to racing standards.

The lines for these early cars were developed on a clay model, then shaped in aluminum over wood forms at the Florida plant. The clean, simple shape, with some debt to Touring-bodied Ferraris, appeared handsome on a car whose proportions were similar to the early Chevrolet Corvette's.

The team of three racing C-2Rs was assembled between March and May 1951, with the 40-man workforce putting in some 80-hour weeks. The finished products scaled a hefty 3400 pounds dry. Their only test running before being shipped was four, five, and 11 miles, respectively, on the only test track then available to Cunningham: the open, undulating back roads of Florida. The cars were shipped to New York City and placed aboard the *Mauretania* bound for Europe.

At 4 P.M. on June 23 the 24-hour race began. Although first in the lineup, thanks to their displacement, with some 440 pounds of fuel and 125 pounds of spares on board the Cunninghams were not the first to pass under the Dunlop bridge. Two were eliminated by damage done in mishaps during an overnight rainstorm. The Cunningham driven by John Fitch and Phil Walters fared better. It worked its way up from seventh place at 7 P.M. to second at 5 A.M. and held that position for a further five hours, although some eight laps behind the leader. This car set the team's fastest lap, its 32nd, at 98.9 mph, and was timed at 152 mph on the Mulsanne Straight.

The survivor's downfall was the notorious official Le Mans fuel, 70 to 72 octane leaded to 80 octane instead of the promised straight unleaded 80-octane gasoline. It misfired slowly into the pits at 11:35 A.M. for the first of several stops, prompted also by weary connecting-rod bearings. The Fitch/Walters C-2R placed 18th overall and first in class ahead of an equally debilitated Cadillac-Allard.

It was nothing to wave the Stars and Stripes about, but those six hours in second place by an untried design made a major impression at Le Mans. The three team Cunninghams redeemed themselves in their native country in the two main sports car races of 1951 at Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, and Watkins

Glen, New York. They placed first and sixth at Elkhart and first, second, and fourth at the Glen.

After Watkins Glen, John Bentley carried out the first and only Cunningham C-2 road test for *Motor Trend*. "What does it feel like to drive a Cunningham?" he asked rhetorically. "The answer in one word is 'great.'" Bentley reached 60 mph in low and 100 in second and timed the C-2 at 6.3 seconds from zero to 60 mph.

Briggs Cunningham summed up the aim of his company by stating, "We don't intend to build two separate types of car—one for racing and the other for touring. Our policy is to concentrate on one model, readily adaptable for both purposes." This policy was evident in the catalog for the 1952 C-3 Cunningham, published in November 1951. A wide range of racing options was offered, which in layout and styling was planned as a carryover from the C-2.

Only one C-3 coupe—a prototype essentially—was built at the Cunningham factory in accord with these intentions. Below the belt line its shape was pure C-2, whereas its close-coupled upper body (with a C-1-style single-pane windshield) was more abrupt than attractive. Aesthetics became academic, however, when it became clear that the cost to build just the fully trimmed body for such a touring car would be about $15,000, far above the planned retail price of $9000 for the cars that needed to be built to qualify as a manufacturer. This first coupe did find a buyer, though: outboard-motor manufacturer and racing impresario Carl Kiekhaefer.

By February '52, when the next catalog was issued, arrangements had been completed with Alfredo Vignale to have C-3 bodies built in his Turin workshops, with the first such car already under construction. The subtle, fastback-coupe design was by Giovanni Michelotti. This definitive version of the C-3 was officially dubbed the Cunningham Continental Coupe, for which the base price was to be held at $9000.

The first Vignale car was built on a 105-inch wheelbase, the same as the C-2, but later cars had a 107-inch wheelbase to provide a passable 2+2 seating condition. Twin armrests folded down at the center of the seat to provide bucketlike side bracing for driver and passenger.

Under the C-3 was a tubular cruciform-braced frame for which the C-2 had been a prototype. Front suspension remained fundamentally Ford, now with Mercury

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In order to race his own cars at Le Mans, Briggs Cunningham needed to be regarded as a manufacturer. Thus, he set about having C-3s built with bodies from Vignale in Turin, Italy. *1.* An early C-3 on display at the Paris auto show. *2.* Most of the cars built in 1952 and '53 were on a 107-inch wheelbase. *3.* There were some variations in grille and bumper selection. (Former owner: Briggs Cunningham Museum) *4-8.* C-3s were fairly plush and fast grand tourers with a C-2 chassis and the big Chrysler "FirePower" V-8 under the hood. A rear well held luggage. (Owner: Thomas Coady Jr.) *9.* In March 1953 a C-3 convertible was introduced at the Geneva auto show. Of the 27 C-3 road cars built, nine were convertibles.

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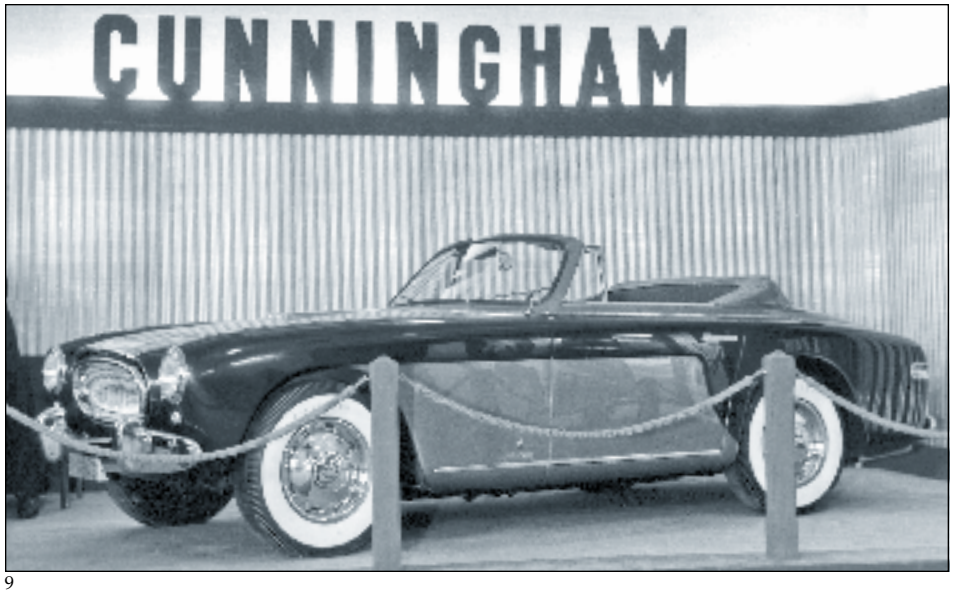
parts included, whereas de Dion rear suspension was replaced by a simpler Chrysler live axle, still located by parallel trailing arms and sprung by coils.

Rectifications at the factory were required for the Dodge/Ford/Mercury steering combination on early C-3s, accounting for a running increase from 2.75 to 4.5 wheel turns needed from lock to lock. The adjustable Houdaille shock absorbers also gave trouble in service, especially when set toward the stiff extreme.

Cunningham's only modifications to the V-8s supplied by Chrysler Industrial were external, in the form of two-inch dual exhausts with Porter mufflers and the Cunningham cast-aluminum log manifold for four Zenith downdrafts, topped by Hellings wire-mesh air cleaners. These changes supplied a total increase of some 40 bhp which, working from Chrysler figures, gave the C-3 220 bhp at 4000 rpm in 1952 and 235 bhp at 4400 rpm in 1953. Compression ratio stayed at 7.5:1 and fuel capacity was 18 gallons—adequate with mileage that ranged from 17 to 23 mpg.



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Some C-3s were delivered with a three-speed Cadillac transmission, which provided the best performance: zero to 60 mph in 6.9 seconds and 100 mph in 11 seconds. Most, however, were equipped with Chrysler's Fluid-Torque semiautomatic torque-converter transmission. On the column-mounted range-selection lever was a push button that provided a downshift for braking, supplementing the normal accelerator downshift. Acceleration was still respectable, reaching 60 in 8.5 seconds and covering the standing quarter mile in 16.2.

Vignale did a copybook job with the C-3's interior, from the pleated leather seats and leather-lined doors to the instrument panel with two big dials embracing the steering column. On the right was the speedometer and to the left was a clock combined with engine gauges, including oil temperature. High between them, at eye level, was a small Sun electronic tachometer. Provisions were made for luggage behind the seats because the "trunk" housed little more than the spare tire and fuel tank.

The first Cunningham Continental Coupe came to the USA in time to be taken to Watkins Glen with the team in September 1952. Thereafter it went on display at numerous auto shows in the eastern United States. Meanwhile, a production C-3 coupe was shown, albeit

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1-4. The most enduring and memorable racing Cunninghams were the 1952 C-4Rs. This one finished fourth at Le Mans in '52 with Briggs Cunningham driving for 19.5 hours. (Owner: Revs Institute) *5.* C-4Rs at the front of the pack for the start of the 24 Hours in 1954. *6.* The Bill Spear/Sherwood Johnston car finishing third overall in '54. *7.* Cunningham crossing the line in seventh in the '53 race. *8.* Back home, the two C-4Rs are prepped for the 1954 Watkins Glen race. Phil Walters won in the number-18 car; Johnston was third in number 19. *9, 10.* A C-4RK coupe with a Kamm tail was raced from 1952 to 1955, by which time it was in different hands (10). *11, 12.* In the Nineties, Cunningham's son Briggs III joined an effort to make "continuation" C-4Rs. (Former owner: Martin Swig).


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against a wall and under a stairway, at the Paris Salon. As production began in earnest in early 1953, chassis were being built at a rate of one a week at West Palm Beach while the Vignale end of the operation was taking two months per car. At the Geneva show in March 1953 a convertible C-3 was unveiled.

Of the total output of 27 Vignale-bodied Cunninghams, nine were the handsome convertible model. The delivered price, when new, was $11,422.50 for a convertible at a time when an XK-120 Jaguar cost $3345. At that level, said Briggs Cunningham, "we pretty much broke even on the sale of the C-3s." The production total put the B. S. Cunningham Company comfortably over the minimum run of 25 cars that were needed at that time to qualify the company as an automobile producer in the eyes of the Le Mans organizers.

The C-3 Cunninghams proved that sporting performance and handling could marry happily with American-style comfort and roominess. However, with the conversion of the C-3 to a touring machine—to say nothing of selling off all three C-2R team cars to a Los Angeles dealer—a new out-and-out competition Cunningham was needed for 1952.

As unabashed Cunningham booster Tom McCahill told his *Mechanix Illustrated* readers, "The 1952 Cunninghams have four wheels and a base Chrysler block but aside from this they look no more like the 1951 models than I resemble Fred Astaire on a ballroom floor." Designated C-4R, this new car became the most durable and successful competition Cunningham and the model most widely known around the world. Slimmer by six inches, shorter by 16 inches, and lighter by 990 pounds


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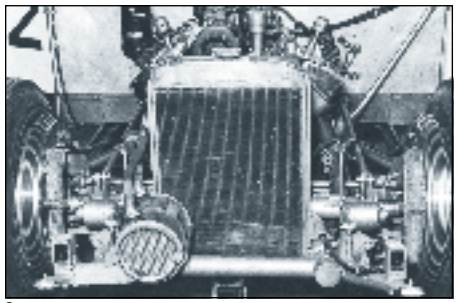
than the C-2, the C-4R was intended to be faster and better. In all respects it succeeded.

Experience helped shape the C-4R but it would have availed little without the skill of G. Briggs Weaver, a new addition to the Cunningham crew as of October 1951. In the Twenties Weaver designed bodies and special models for du Pont automobiles. His talents welded the design ideas of Briggs Cunningham and Phil Walters into well-balanced, fully detailed automobiles.

The C-4R's hemi engine now had a roller-tappet camshaft and developed 325 bhp at 5200 rpm on the shop dynamometer. Ford front suspension was integrated with a new frame whose side members were superimposed steel tubes, joined by sheet-steel side gussets and kicked up at the rear. There and under the seats tankage for 50 gallons of fuel was stowed. It had been hoped that de Dion rear suspension could be carried over from the C-2, even to installing it after Le Mans if necessary, but the team never had time to add a rear suspension to its other new projects. The live Chrysler rear axle was located by parallel trailing arms and a lateral Panhard rod.

Well ahead of the previous year's schedule, the prototype C-4R roadster was first shown on March 12, 1952. Its first racing appearance was at Bridgehampton, Long Island, on May 24, where Walters moved it from ninth at the start into the lead on the second lap, only to be black-flagged because an exhaust pipe had broken loose when a wheel left the pavement on lap 12. Another roadster, complete with cowl-mounted, aircraft-type cylindrical oil cooler, was being readied for Le Mans.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1-5. The "shark"—the 1953 C-3R—arguably gave the Cunningham team its best chance to win Le Mans. With a sleek body design by Giovanni Michelotti, a weight-saving tube front axle and torsion-bar suspension, and a 310-bhp Chrysler V-8, it got up to 154.81 mph—best in the field. (Owner: Revs Institute) *6.* Fitch at the wheel during the '53 race. Sharing the run with Walters, they maintained a hold on third place for about half the 24 hours. *7.* That, however, is how they finished, unable to keep up with Jaguars with effective, new disc brakes. Inadequate underhood venting blew out chunks of the body panels.

Crouching in the paddock at Bridgehampton, but not entered, was the third 1952 team car, a coupe called the C-4RK. The "K" stood for "Kamm." It was the only one of the many Kamm-type autos since World War II that was actually designed by Wunibald I. E. Kamm. A German professor and researcher who had been captured at the end of the war and brought to the United States, Kamm came to West Palm Beach as a consultant and altered the coupe clay model to its ultimate flat-back shape. As executed by the Cunningham coachbuilders, who gave it a flat, slitlike windshield; huge fuel filler in the low roof; twin scoops on the cowl; and numerous louvers, this was one of the meanest-looking machines ever to take the road.

At Le Mans Walters stormed the C-4RK into a first-lap lead, then turned the fastest 1952 lap for the Cunningham team on his second round at 105.6 mph. It later retired with valve-gear problems as did one of its open sisters handled by Fitch and George Rice. Briggs himself placed fourth overall in the remaining roadster after an iron-man driving stint of 19.5 hours, finally relieved by Bill Spear.

Although other special Cunninghams later took the limelight, the C-4s returned to Le Mans in 1953 and 1954. The cars did well, considering their advancing years. They came in seventh and 10th (the RK) in 1953 and third and fifth in 1954. Briggs Cunningham and Sherwood Johnston placed third in the '53 Reims 12-hour race held a couple weeks after Le Mans.

The C-4R roadsters were also successful in domestic competition. In 1952 they won

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at Allentown, Pennsylvania; Thompson, Connecticut; Elkhart Lake ("Living up to expectations, the Cunninghams dominated the race," *Speed Age* said in its report of the last event run on the original circuit); and Albany, Georgia. Walters and Fitch teamed for victory at Sebring, Florida, in 1953 over a factory squad of DB3 Aston Martins. Victories at Thompson, New York's Floyd Bennett Field, Albany, and a big "East versus West" race at March Field near Riverside, California, wound up 1953. At the Glen in '54, Walters and Fitch finished first and third, respectively.

According to Walters, 1953 was the year Cunningham should have won Le Mans. The car to have done it was the new C-5R, a vehicle remote in concept from the European norm with its solid axles at front and rear. This was well suited to Le Mans, which did not place heavy demands on suspensions. The C-5R's tubular front axle saved 30 pounds in unsprung weight, using long parallel leading arms on both sides and a vertical slide at the center, attached to the axle rather than the frame. All four corners were sprung by longitudinal torsion bars. Slung under the axles, in classic fashion, was a narrow, straight frame of twin oval steel tubes.

Retaining the big Chrysler engine, rated at 310 bhp in 1953, the C-5R was still a big car. In appearance it made an uncharacteristic change from the brutal to the sleek. The envelope body had no hint of prior Cunningham competition cars' "haunches" over the rear wheels, and the wide "grinning" grille was a departure from the oval openings of the past. Its shell was fabricated from 0.051-inch copper-alloy aluminum to a quarter-scale clay model inspired by a Michelotti rendering. Although no wind tunnel verified the shape, at Le Mans it registered the fastest timed speed of all entries: 154.81 mph compared to 146.21 mph for the C-4R roadster and 150.24 for the C-4RK coupe.

At Le Mans the C-5R showed the speed and stability that allowed it to duplicate the previous year's record lap and, on lap 195 of the race, to average 110 mph. What the C-5R couldn't do was hold off the new Weber-carbureted, Dunlop-disc-braked C-Type Jaguars. "We could outspeed and outdrive the Jags," said Walters, "but on their brakes alone they easily cruised faster than we could. We ran the first two hours at our target speed, which was 104, and then raised our sights to catch the Jaguars. We couldn't do it."

Walters and Fitch went through to finish at 104.26 mph, but they were seven laps behind the winning Jaguar. The C-5R held its third place almost without interruption from 3 A.M. to the 4 P.M. finish. (Incidentally, 1953 marked the first time that every Cunningham entry finished the race and placed among the first 10.) The C-5R had its other moments, such as Fitch's spectacular inversion at Reims and short-lived leads by Walters at March Field and Albany, but its main purpose, and achievement, had been Le Mans.

Meanwhile, Briggs Weaver had been making progress with a C-6R chassis, the first Cunningham to be produced entirely from engineering drawings. It was also Cunningham's first and only right-hand-drive product. Its frame had large twin tubes on each side forming a pyramidal truss structure that started from a big tubular cross member at the front. Suspension was by wishbones in front and de Dion at the rear. Coil springs were used all around.

Weaver's elegant design was only enhanced by the apogee of fabrication elegance that West Palm Beach had now attained, thanks to Bob Blake and Herbert "Bud" Unger. "By the time we built the C-6R," Weaver recalled, "we had the best crew I ever worked with. I could draw up anything, take it out to the shop, and they could make it. They did beautiful work." Its dry weight was a commendably light 1904 pounds.

Making a lighter car meant saying farewell to Chrysler and hello to America's racing-engine maker, California's Meyer & Drake. The C6-R joined the popular 3.0-liter category with a four-cylinder 16-valve engine that displaced 2942cc. Put on the dynamometer in West Palm Beach in late October 1954, it was developed with the frequent telephone cooperation of Leo Goossen of Meyer & Drake. With 50DC03 Weber carburetors it produced a useful 260 bhp at 6000 rpm and a peak reading of 272 bhp at 7000 rpm, driving through a ZF four-speed gearbox.

Starting at Sebring in March 1955 with a disintegrated flywheel, the Offenhauser-derived Meyer & Drake four displayed uncharacteristic unreliability. The C-6R failed to finish any of its starts, including Le Mans, where it freshly sported a stabilizing fin behind the headrest. After a hiatus in 1956 it returned to the fray in 1957 with a 3.8-liter Jaguar D-Type engine, radiator, and gearbox, as well as a Jaguar nosepiece. Though thusly embarrassed, the C6-R took Briggs to finishes in three Sports Car Club of America national races that year.

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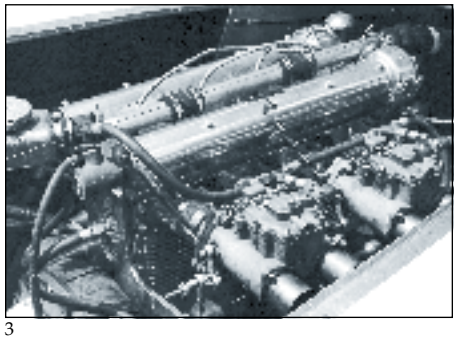
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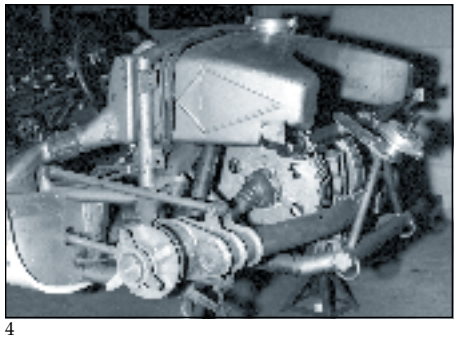
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The final Cunningham-branded racing sports car was the C-6R, built in 1955. *1.* Cunningham himself got the car to the Le Mans circuit, driving it through the streets of the town. *2.* Sherwood Johnston, who shared driving duties with Cunningham, wheels the C-6R, which was destined to drop out after 18 hours. *3.* A Meyer-Drake Offenhauser-type four-cylinder engine powered the C-6R. *4.* The car's horseshoe-shaped fuel tank rests above the de Dion rear axle. *5-8.* After a year off, the C-6R was returned to competition in 1957, but with a Jaguar D-Type nose and 3.8-liter engine. (Owner: Revs Institute)

In 1956 Cunningham was racing D-Types, having signed a pact with Jaguar as its East Coast distributor and dealer. When the team switched to Lister-Jaguars in 1959 he raced those too. In 1960 Briggs took Corvettes to Le Mans and in 1961 he drove Maseratis. Jaguar's E-Type came into the frame in 1962 and '63. Starting in 1964 he raced only a Porsche 904 through the end of his track career at Sebring in 1966 with Fitch as a codriver.

Briggs Cunningham had not lost his appreciation for the C-3. The black coupe he bought stayed in the Cunningham family for 61 years—daughter Lucie had

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it at the end of her life. Fifteen years after his death, a wider appreciation of the 36 Cunninghams of all types that were produced was the mustering of 33 survivors at the 2018 Greenwich Concours d'Elegance. Owners and marque enthusiasts Tom Cotter and Chuck Schoendorf led the campaign for the finest all-Cunningham display in history. Briggs would have been chuffed. CA

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Club for 1950-55 Cunningham Fans

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