

USED Race Car Buyers Guide

Part 1

*Exploding Interest In The Club And
Vintage Scenes Has Sent Everyone
Scurrying To The Classifieds.
Here's A First Installment Of
Reading Between The Lines*

By Steve Nickless

*With indispensable assistance from
Marc Bahner, Bill Fickling, Mike Gue,
Vern Jaques, Hugh Kleinpeter, Austin Miller,
Paul Pfanner, David Phillips, Craig Richey,
Tom Rust and Bill Sowers*

Somehow, sometime during the last (two? three?) years, it has become fashionable to own an aging road racing single-seater and/or sports racer. Not so long ago, a two-year-old race car gathering dust in the garage—unloved and unsalable—was a curse. Today, those old FFs and S2000 cars are selling like brake pads at Bryar, prices are spiraling upward at a dizzying rate and everyone, it seems, is having fun racing again.

Have you been watching *SportsCar's* "Marketplace" section over the last year or so? The phenomenon of the used race car—"Low miles! Original gel-coat! Never crashed or driven off road!"—is upon us. And it's wonderful.

I read last month's "New Race Car Buyers Guide '89" in *SportsCar*. And, as it has every year since 1978 when Paul Pfanner in-

troduced the "Buyers Guide" idea, my eyes watered and my pocketbook burned. And vice versa. I can't afford a new Reynard 89SF even though I am totally in lust. Consumed.

There's hope, though, for people like me. Club Ford probably started all this. Owners of some otherwise splendid Formula Fords who just couldn't keep up with the high cost of the new car technology race, started organizing "races within races" and enjoying themselves. Eighth overall isn't so bad when you get a trophy for winning your class, and pretty soon there were tire rules and "killer car rules" and all sorts of rules aimed at keeping costs under control.

Club Ford caught on like wildfire. The "races within races" grew to be bigger than the "races," which has ushered in another Formula Ford event called (on the West

Coast, at least) "Spec Ford"—cars newer than Club Fords but not new.

All those hundreds of '73-'83 Fords languishing uncompetitive, unsalable and underneath a pile of gardening tools in garages everywhere were suddenly racing again, battered but not bruised, their owners shaken and stirred.

Some *really* old race cars that had been languishing in garages for a *really* long time were suddenly racing again, battered but not bruised. . . .

All this interest means you probably can't find a decent Ford with which to go to drivers school for \$3,000 any more. The prices are astronomical, and the shape of the word "value" has undergone radical changes.

Despite all that, in most instances it's still cheaper to buy a used race car than a new one, and there's a lot of racing enjoyment to be had for a reasonable investment (no one has never been able to race "cheaply," and never will).

In the pages that follow are the results of my holding the concept of "value" up to the flame of competitiveness. The editor's instructions were to try and come up with some "Top Five" recommendations. Unfortunately, a "Top Five" anything in racing becomes, in the final analysis, more a matter of opinion than fact. Please treat these conclusions as such.

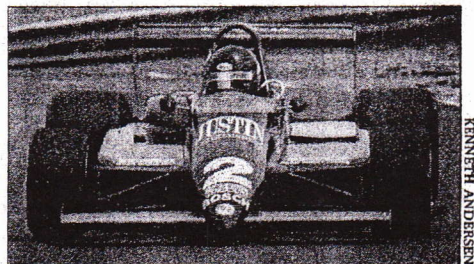
Happy shopping.

FORMULA ATLANTIC

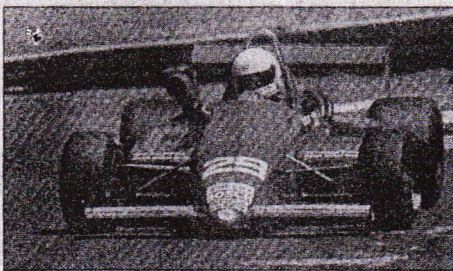
Healthy pro series on both ends of the country contributed dramatically to the growth of Formula Atlantic in the '80s. It's now in a race towards the '90s, eyes straight ahead and staring with interest at a powerplant change from Ford-Cosworth to Toyota.

Prices of used Atlantic chassis seem to have stabilized on the high end despite the cost of converting to Toyota power if the pro series is what's intended. Chassis choices are limited—in fact, limited to two marques: Swift and Ralt.

The Top Five

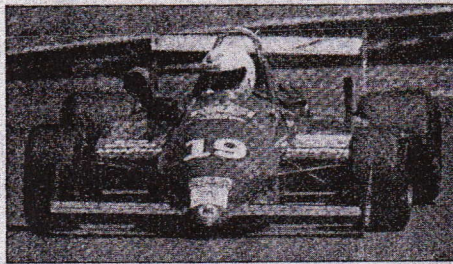


1 (tie)—Swift DB-4 (1987) and DB-4 (1988)—David Bruns' Atlantic chassis has proven to be an excellent one and the marketplace reflects the car's prowess: Swifts are in short supply and prices are high.



KENNETH ANDERSEN

2—Ralt RT-4/88 (1988)—The safest and best of the Ralts, with front shocks on top of the monocoque and additional footbox protection. Pull-rod rear suspension and extremely competitive but only a half-dozen or so imported.

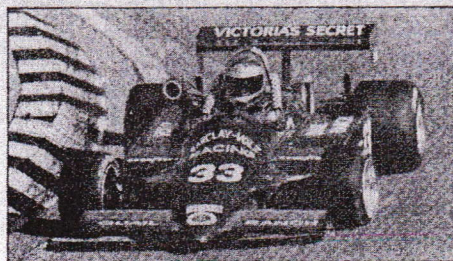


KENNETH ANDERSEN

Ralt RT-4/86

3 (tie)—Ralt RT-4/85 (1985) and RT-4/86 (1986)—According to chassis wizard Marc Bahner, Ralt went up a grade in all its materials in '85, and these pull-rod cars are excellent value. The '86 car has a wider rear track and revised bodywork.

4—Ralt RT-4/84 (1984)—Ralt went from rocker arms to A-arms this year. Good cars in short supply.



Ralt RT-4/83

5 (tie)—Ralt RT-4/87 (1987) and RT-4/83 (1983)—'83 RT-4 was a huge improvement over its '82 predecessor, safer with a new rollover structure and sturdier footbox, and faster with a new front suspension. (Unlike '82, the '83 car's tunnel section allows upgrade to contemporary body panels.) Excellent chassis for the budget minded, though not cheap. The '87 RT-4, meanwhile, was a disappointment: Big new tunnels meant moving the rear suspension up over an inch and the changes weren't particularly successful.

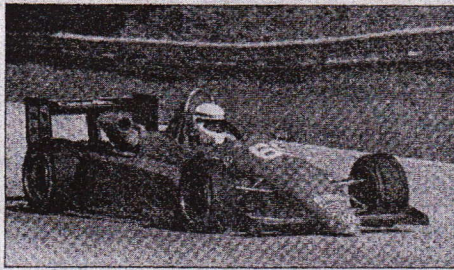
Sleeper: Couldn't find a sleeper here. Only a few constructors—Tiga and Dart among them—dared challenge Ralt, and none did so successfully.

In an upcoming issue we will address the burgeoning Vintage Formula B/Atlantic scene.

FORMULA SUPER VEE

With exception enough to prove the rule, Super Vee racing has been a Ralt stronghold in the '80s and the Used Top Five reflects this...

The Top Five



DAN SCHLOSSER

1—Ralt RT-5/88 (1988)—The '88 RT-5 offered substantial improvements over its predecessor with suspension geometry and aerodynamic changes which proved quite effective.

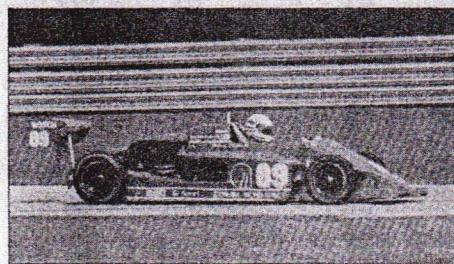


TIM WISE

2 (tie)—Ralt RT-5/85 (1985) and RT-5/86 (1986)—Excellent cars, not a lot to choose between them.

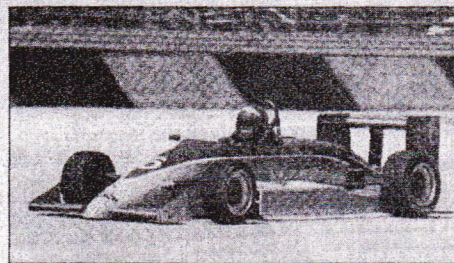
3—Ralt RT-5/87 (1987)—Like the Atlantic RT-4, the '87 RT-5 off the assembly line was something of a disappointment. Before the end of the '87 pro season, the faster runners had put '86 pods and front suspensions on theirs, and '86/'87 hybrids like that would be a very good buy.

4—Ralt RT-5/84 (1984)—The first Ralt with A-arms in place of the original rockers, now dated and most examples are probably high mileage. But they are updatable and would probably make a good entry level car.



JIM ALVIS

5—Anson SA6 (1985-'86)—Johnny O'Connell, Jerrill Rice and others flew in these cars, but reliability was a question never fully answered. Parts are available and they are an alternative if you're into alternatives.



DAN SCHLOSSER

Sleeper: An excellent "sleeper" choice here: Jim Griffith's GR06. A half-dozen of these

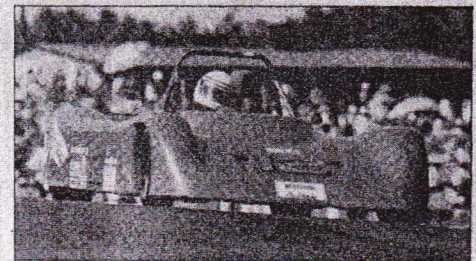
beautifully made machines have been produced and they show a lot of potential. In the words of SportsCar's Super Vee correspondent David Phillips, "If one was of a mind to tinker, and could get a deal, and especially if one lived near Cleveland..."

Be sure to see our forthcoming Part 2 of the Used Race Car Buyers Guide for Vintage Super Vee information.

SPORTS 2000

As with Formula Atlantic, the success of a pair of well-run pro series has elevated Sports 2000 to great heights in the '80s, this despite strong competition from Sports Renault, not to mention the Ford Formulae, 1600 and 2000. There has been fierce marque competition throughout the decade that has taken a toll on some manufacturers in recent years. Happily, several—especially Tiga—are now regrouping.

The Top Three



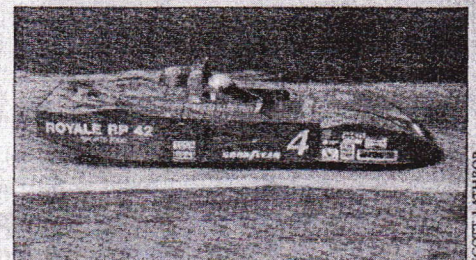
GEOFFREY HEWITT

1—Swift DB-2 (1985-'88)—Swifts, on the strength of their excellent reputation, have become the benchmark against which the contenders are measured. And Swift's Bill Fickling says common sense applies when buying a used one: "You should know the history, who took care of it and how from Day One."



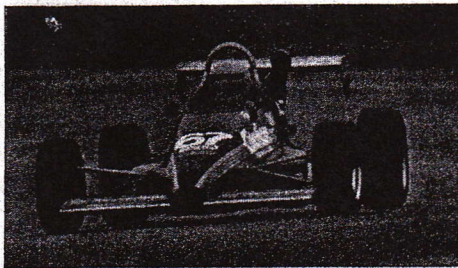
GEOFFREY HEWITT

2 (tie)—Lola T-87/90 (1987) and T-88/90 (1988)—Eric Broadley's son Andrew is credited with the design of these cars. They are very slippery, fast in a straight line, and have successfully kept Swift honest in the S2 arena. The chassis are stiffer than on the T-598 and T-86/90, and both '87 and '88 are updatable to '89 specs.



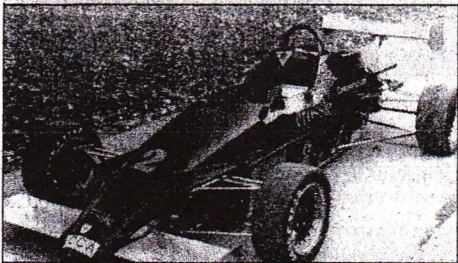
SCOTT LATHROP

3 (tie)—Royale RP42 (1986) and RP42A (1987)—Few of these cars escaped the Southeast which is a shame because they were quite suc-

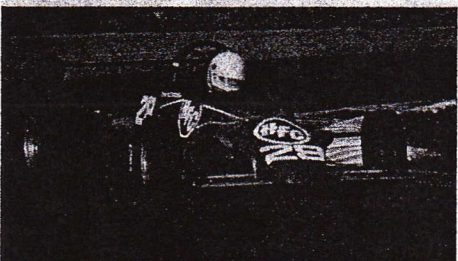


Citation 88F

GEOFFREY HEWITT



Crossle 68F



Reynard 86SF

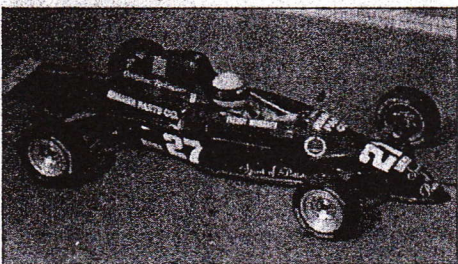
KEN BROWN

Sleeper: Two "sleepers" in Formula 2000: First the '88 Crossle 68F and/or its very similar '86-'87 predecessor. These 2-liter cars boast all the familiar Crossle advantages—strength, ease of maintenance, quality of construction—coupled to a surprisingly slippery shape. Then there's the terrific Reynard 84SF and 86SF (the 85SF was an aberration; stay away). Very, very potent, good-looking and good luck trying to find one.

FORMULA FORD

The Swift DB-1 won the '83 Runoffs in its first appearance, and SCCA National Formula Ford racing hasn't been the same since. The competition struggled for a while and then pretty much folded its American tents (although, happily, there are signs of rekindled interest). On the used car front, if National competitiveness is your goal, the choices are limited...

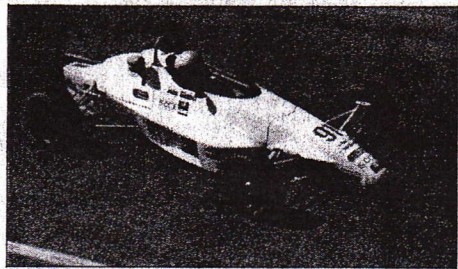
The Top Five



KEN BROWN

1—Swift DB-1 ('84-'85)—The Swift is the car to beat and the car to have. The long-tailed pre-'86 DB-1s, meanwhile, have something of a mystique about them suggesting a slight edge.

2—Swift DB-1 ('86-'88)—There are far fewer '86-'88 Swifts to choose from than '84-'85s, but if you can't find an early long-tailed example, fear not: These newest cars are still terrific.



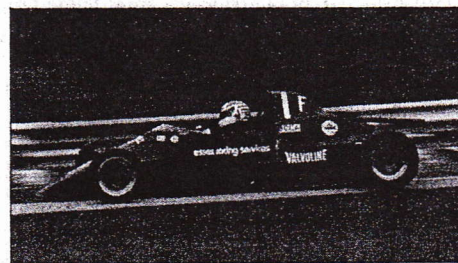
GEOFFREY HEWITT

3 (tie)—Citation 87F (1987) and 88F (1988)—Steve Lathrop's Citations have mounted the strongest challenge to Swift over the last few seasons and have benefited from a lot of development. They've got the straight-line speed and, apparently, the handling to be a Swift beater in the right hands.



KEN BROWN

4 (tie)—Reynard 87FF (1987) and 88FF (1988)—The 1600cc versions of Reynard's killer FF2/FC are rare in the U.S. but have a lot going for them, not the least of which is sex appeal...



MARK WEBER

Van Diemen RF87

5 (tie)—Van Diemen RF86 (1986) and RF87 (1987)—These cars were extraordinarily successful in Europe, and deserve more than the passing glimpse they got in the American market. There were none of the equally promising RF88 FF1600s imported as far as we know; otherwise the same comments would apply.

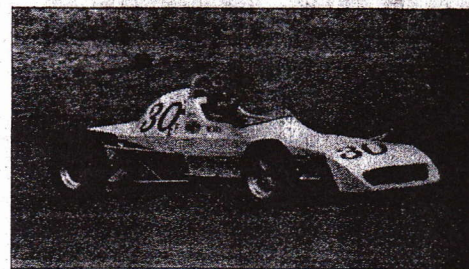
Sleeper: Crossle's 65F (1987) and 67F (1988) are the sleepers here, excellent cars most certainly—has John Crossle ever let a really bad one out of his shop?—but all the market wanted was Swift-Swift-Swift.

SPEC FORD

The latest West Coast craze stretching from San Diego to Oregon is the erstwhile "Spec Ford" class, an offshoot of Club Ford for newer cars (often pre-'81) on which no more than one end has inboard suspension. The rules for Spec and Club Ford are by no means standardized across the country, but

that causes surprisingly few problems in coming up with a top five list...

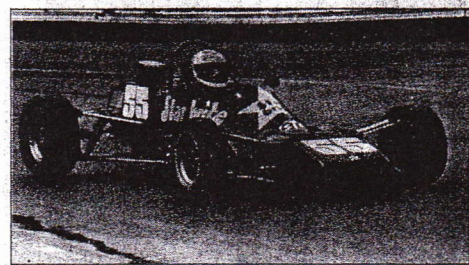
The Top Five



TIM WISE

Crossle 35F

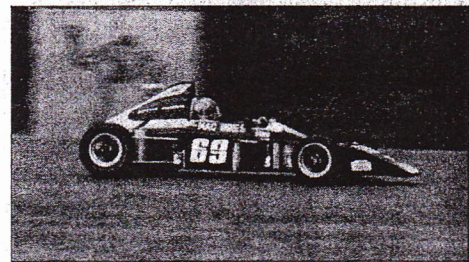
1 (tie)—Crossle 30F (1975-'76), Crossle 32F (1977-'78), 35F ('79-'80), 45F (1982-'83)—The results sheets give the nod to Crossle in this battle reliving the good ol' days. The Northern Ireland-based firm built winners consistently for almost a decade (the narrow-track 40F was the only exception), and the cars are still winning.



STAN CLINTON

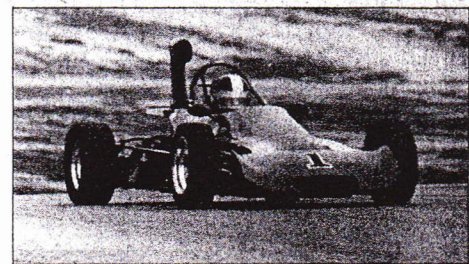
Van Diemen RF81

2 (tie)—Van Diemen RF79 (1979), RF80 (1980) and RF81 (1981)—Excellent, relatively long (94in.) wheelbase cars, preferable to the Crossle in some circles—designer Dave Baldwin really had his sums together in penning cars so successful on so many different tires. Very reliable, and parts are still plentiful.



LEIGH FOSBERG

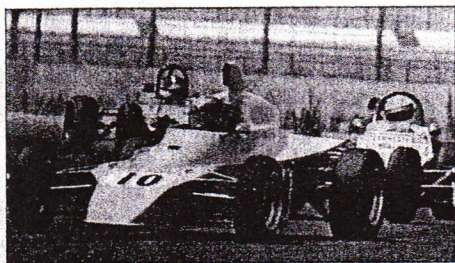
3—Zink Z10 (1973-'78)—This car was steadily improved over the half-dozen years of its marketing life. The original Z10A is an acceptable Club Ford, but after about '75 the cars got much better suspensions, and can hold their own in a group which includes cars of more recent vintage.



DAN FITZGERALD

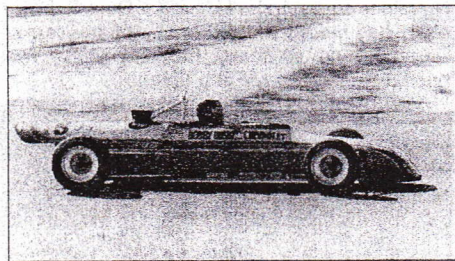
4—Lola T-540 (1977-'79)—The T-540 was the first stiff-chassis Lola FF, and is the only narrow-track (49in. at both ends) car on this list. They worked well in their day...

USED Race Car Buyers Guide



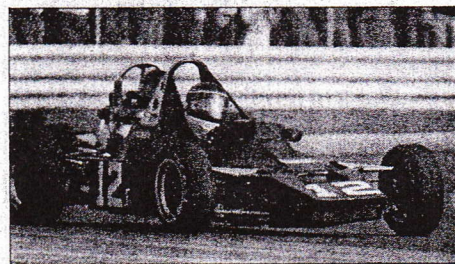
JIM HANSEN

5—ADF MkII (1973-'79)—Very rare but still a great car. Parts are somewhat available. The short wheelbase is something of a drawback given the tall McCreary spec tires, but a new rear tire reportedly on the way should help ADF runners.



PETER WORTH

Eagle



DAN SCHLOSSER

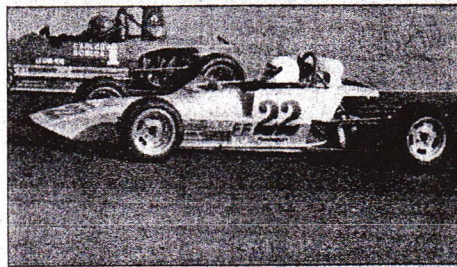
Royale RP26

Sleeper: Two picks here, cars at opposite ends of the maintenance spectrum: First is the Eagle ('77-'78 and recently made again) is a pretty good car, very straightforward with plenty of parts availability; second is Royale's squarish RP26 (1978-'79), a very quick car in its day but tough to work on with lots of little tubes.

CLUB FORD

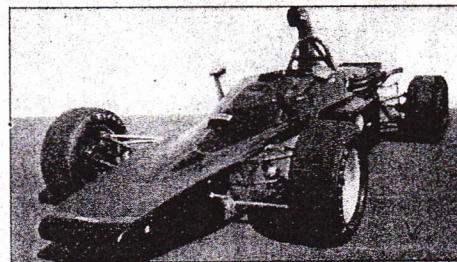
This is a wonderful class, popular in almost all parts of the country. The rules vary, of course. The West Coast translation

of Club Ford is '73-'78 chassis (with several cars notably excepted; see Spec Ford list above) and McCreary tires. The star players are:



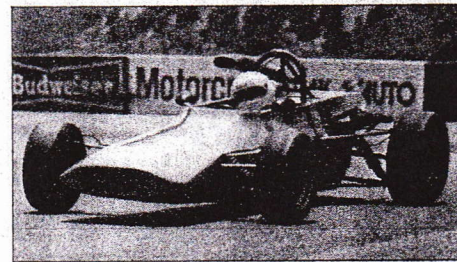
MARTY GEORGE

1—Crossle 25F (1973-'74)—This was a "transition" car in John Crossle's move from short wheelbase 16F/20F to long wheelbase 30F, yet it was quite successful on its own (a Runoffs polewinner in '73). Crossle quality and parts availability, does more need saying?



Lola T340

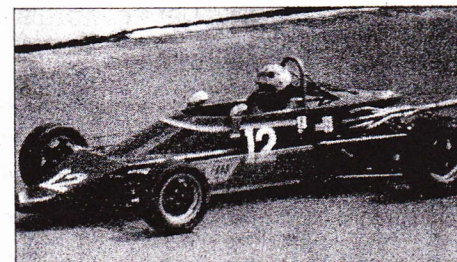
2 (tie)—Lola T-340 (1973-'74) and T-342 (1975-'76)—Lola's "fifth spring" (flexible chassis) concept worked extremely well although it sure upped the cost-of-maintenance ante. These are surely the best-looking and well-finished Club Fords and a pristine example is worth a fortune.



BRUCE MUSCOLINO

Titan Mk6C

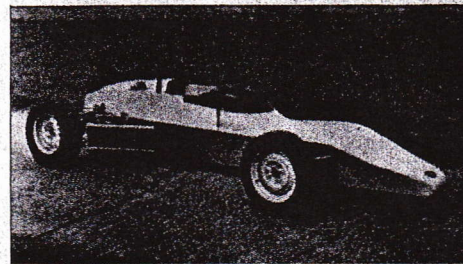
3 (tie)—Titan Mk6 (1970), Mk6A (1971-'72), Mk6B (1972) and Mk6C (1973)—Truly exceptional fast-track cars that, like Crossle's 30-series, offered a level of competitiveness which transcended eras. It's third on this list only because of parts availability which is perhaps unfair because parts are still out there now.



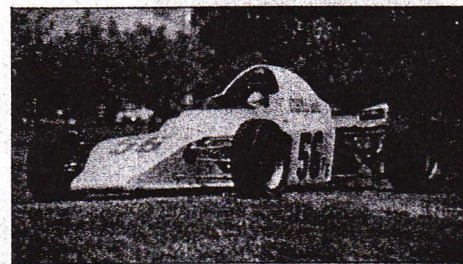
STEVE NICKLES

4 (tie)—Hawke DL15 (1976) and DL19 (1977)—Call this a hunch: These cars are rare in the U.S. but Adrian Reynard had a hand in the 15's design and they went pretty well. Parts are

probably a nightmare, but get too far away from Crossle, Lola or Van Diemen in this country and that's what you face.



5 (tie)—Royale RP21 (1974-'75) and RP21A ('76)—Another hunch: Benetton F1 designer Rory Byrne penned these delicate, short-wheelbase cars, and they went like stink in Britain. They've been overlooked for too long in the U.S.



LeGrand Mk21

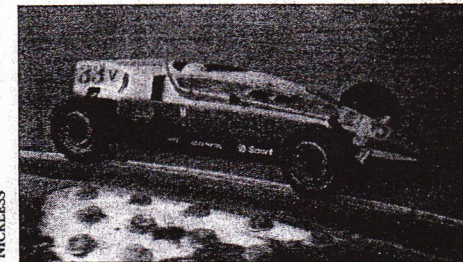
Sleeper: Many were saddened by Red LeGrand's passing several months ago. He was a fascinating man, and in reflecting upon his cars and his accomplishments, we had occasion to remember how fast several drivers were in Red's Mk13 (1973-'74) and Mk21 (1975-'78)...

Details of Vintage Formula Fords and "No Man's Land" FFs (those inboard suspension cars obsolete by the Swift) will be included in the second installment of the Used Race Car Buyers Guide.

FORMULA VEE

Formula Vee was the SCCA's first "full-field" class, tremendously popular in the '60s and into the early '70s when it was overtaken in strength of numbers by Formula Ford. Vee began to stutter in the latter part of the '70s, but the mid- and late '80s have brought with them something of a renaissance of interest. Good values abound on the used car market...

The Top Five



GEOFFREY HEWITT

1—Model D (1980-'88)—A Caracal by any other name might be a Lynx. These Runoffs-winning cars are plenty fast and parts are plentiful. A kit version is the Caracal C; find out who assembled it before you buy.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 77