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John McCoy aboard the Swift DB4 at this year's Historics.

True Authenticity: John McCoy's Swift DB4

What's a little speed loss when you can have the original?

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS (UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED) BY PATRICK KROHN AND JOHN MCCOY

SOVREN has a wealth of vintage race cars, each with unique stories. The Formula Atlantic series cars are one of those. John McCoy has preserved a very special car with history by actively racing a meticulously restored original Swift DB4 at SOVREN as well as other groups. The DB4 has a storied history over the past several decades.

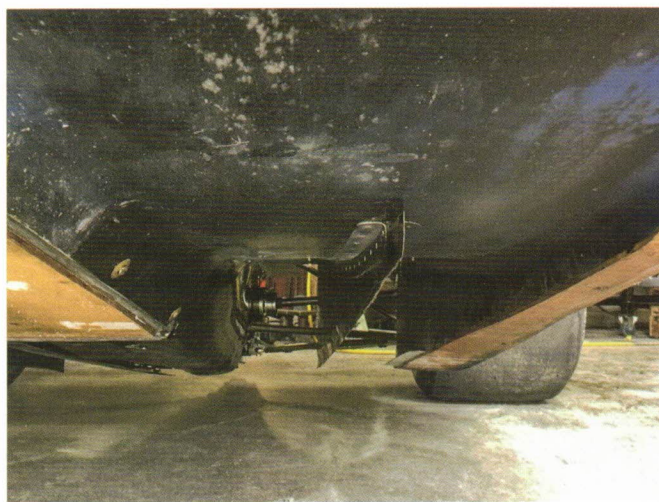
Why is the DB4 unique? This starts in the 1980s with David Bruns building the first Swift DB4 for the Formula Atlantic series. The Swifts were the first cars built by a "few guys in Anaheim, Southern California." There were DB1 (Formula Ford), DB2 (sports racer) and DB3 (Formula Continental) models built in their shop before getting to the DB4. John McCoy's is the 17th car built by the Swift organization, and the first DB4, chassis #08787. The car incorporated groundbreaking aero and safety designs that redefined Formula Atlantic racing and was a precursor to F1 aero and safety technologies. Before the DB4, the English built RALT and March Formula Atlantic cars were the standard bearers for the series. All that changed after the DB4 completed its first race in Portland in the fall of 1987 with driver R.K. Smith's win. He beat all the British built Formula Atlantic cars, including the RALT and March entries. That was the first win by an American car in this category and first win by anything other than a RALT or March since 1978.



An original Cosworth engine powers McCoy's DB4, re-installed after a faster Toyota engine had been put in.

The DB4 was so much faster than the British cars due to several design firsts. The DB4 added under car aero from tunnels versus the flat bottom Atlantics made before it. That outstanding aero package made the DB4 faster not only in the corners with the downforce, but also down the straightaways. The chassis was upgraded to handle this additional downforce. A narrower gear box was employed to reduce drag under the car. These performance and speed improvements were so significant the Formula Atlantic series had to form two groups! One for the DB4, the second for all the other slower cars including the RALT and March models.

The design innovations went further with safety improvements that simply were cutting edge. The DB4 tub (drivers' compartment) used honeycomb aluminum for the lower section. How designer David Bruns' ability to mold and curve a flat piece of honeycomb aluminum was an engineering feat and design first. The upper part of the tub was S-glass and later carbon fiber glued to the lower aluminum honeycomb tub. This made the tub incredibly safe for the driver. Also, open wheel race cars have issues with rotating parts (wheels, tires, axles) during an accident that create inertia and momentum along the path of the car. This creates multiple hazards because these parts will not easily separate from the car and can fly apart injuring the driver. Bruns brilliantly addressed this by using smaller suspension bolts that would snap on impact. It was not uncommon to see a DB4 after an accident with just the driver



Aerodynamic improvements designed by the original manufacture gave the DB4 greater downforce than any other contemporary Formula Atlantic car.

sitting safe in the tub with the rest of the car scattered around him (or her). The suspension parts dissipated energy as they broke away from the car.

So back to John McCoy's DB4. Again, it is the 17th Swift built and first DB4. This DB4 won the 1988 WCAR series championship with Dean Hall driving, along with many other



The McCoy Swift DB4 just after being rolled out to start racing with SOVREN



The DB4 ready to head out to do battle. Bert McBride photo.

wins around the world. It has traveled from the northern hemisphere (USA) to southern hemisphere (New Zealand) back to the USA via Tom Johnson's Vancouver, B.C. based KEEN racing where it was raced by driver Frank Allers. It then went into storage and was followed by a trade among the friends Tom and John McCoy. John set out to learn the rich history of the DB4 so he could perform authentic and meticulous restoration at his shop. Because of his deep knowledge of the 17th DB4, John realized that his car had a significant engine modification from the

original #17 DB4 which had a Cosworth engine. John's DB4 had a Toyota 'box' engine installed by Johnson simply because it was a faster engine. John did the work to find the original engine and reinstall it along with some significant chassis restoration and restoration of the original Johnson/Allers color scheme. While these changes cost him speed versus other Formula Atlantic cars at the SOVREN races, there is authenticity to the car. (Editor's note: we applaud John McCoy's decision and wish more SOVREN racers would follow his example.)

After learning more about the storied history of the John's Swift DB4 and its restoration, we can appreciate that we are seeing true history lapping the track and be grateful for his unyielding dedication to restore this historical masterpiece.

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Additional speakers will be announced soon. Recent special guest speakers have been **John Doonan**, President of IMSA, and **Dan Davis**, Director of Motorsports for Ford. A few of the past technical speakers included, **Jeff Braun** and **Eric Purcell**, race engineers; **Jim Downing** and **Dr. Bob Hubbard**,

inventors of the HANS device; and world leading performance guru **Dr. Jacques Dallaire**.

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In Their Own Words...

- ★ "Good balance of racing and personal performance." **Brad Shinn** – A-H Sprite • "OMG! This has been the BEST seminar I've attended! Every speaker was entertaining, interesting, and informative. I learned so much that will help me prepare for, enjoy, and succeed the next time I'm on track." **James Wege** • "My driving had become stale. This seminar gave me tools I need to improve." **Erik Dolson** – Vintage Corvette • "High quality information by bona fide experts in the fields. Well worth the cost of admission. I'll be there next year for sure." **Cary Richard** – Club Ford • "If you missed today's seminar, you might as well be late to the grid. Everyone who took the time to attend now knows more than you about many aspects of racing. Too bad for you." **John Rankin** – Beach FSR • "The virtual seminar touched upon many topics important to the race car driver. The speakers were extremely knowledgeable in the subject area as well many other aspects of racing. The speakers not only presented important information in a clear, understandable way, they answered questions and posted questions to one another. The capability of watching the recording of the seminar is a real plus, reinforcing the speakers' messaging."
- ★ **Bart Scott** – Triumph GT6



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