

# BRITISH-BUILT CADILLAC

A series of coincidences triggered by an English car enthusiast has helped a prestigious US automobile manufacturer to uncover a key piece of its early history - writes **Ian Morton**



**T**hanks to a Suffolk businessman who decided to turn a standard 1978 Seville sedan into a stunning 30s-style Roadster, Cadillac has been able to fill in an irksome gap in its provenance, and now knows the full identity and background of one of its founders.

The tale is something of a double-ended romance. It began when Rob Maidment, a manufacturer based in Haverhill in West Suffolk, embarked on a project which he himself describes as "crazy" - to build a retro-styled two-seater out of one of his Cadillacs, a taste for which marque he had developed during a childhood in

South Africa. After noting that an example of the car they all admired, the Mercedes 540K, had just changed hands for 1.6 million, Rob and some business associates decided that the world would appreciate a few more cars in the same vein.

With a view to a limited production run, they set about the construction of a 30s-style prototype, using the Seville as the starting point. Though the commercial aspect of the venture fell by the wayside, the building of the prototype itself became a labour of love for Rob.

Six thousand man-hours later - consuming virtually every evening and weekend for two years - and with the continuing

co-operation of sundry friends and specialist firms, he had created a uniquely magnificent vehicle. The standard GM "X" platform remained but the engine and front bulkhead had been moved back by more than two feet, a shortened propshaft and intermediate steering shaft inserted, the steel monocoque severely cut and refashioned, aluminium bodywork in period

style created and fitted, with original rear doors reversed to 30s-style forward opening. Lorry suspension leaf springs were chromed to serve as bumpers, but the suspension was standard Cadillac with revised geometry, and the original wheels were retained. Much of the Seville interior remained, though suitably retailored around a two-seater concept.

# THAT MADE HISTORY

Courier Cadillac - built  
1988-90 in Haverhill. 6.6  
litres, fuel injection,  
weight - 4100 pounds.  
0-60 in  $\pm 7.5$  seconds.  
Top speed 125mph+



The Courier Cadillac taking part in the 1999 Crystal Palace Annual Sprint

After several road tests and the tendering of opinions by friends, various suspension and steering changes were prescribed and a larger 6.6 litre engine giving 285 bhp was installed. The result is a car that moves with laconic ease, hits 60 mhp from rest in around 8.5 seconds, strides on to 125 mph, rides with a notable combination of comfort and security, and sweeps round bends in the

grandest manner.

It is of course hugely eye-catching, and even the purists do not balk - despite its strictly non-vintage origin and the lack of any claim by Rob that it is anything other than his own creation, the car has twice been a star at the Classic Car Show at London's Alexandra Palace, making its second appearance at the specific request of the organisers.

For the last couple of years Rob has used it for "fun racing" at club events, sometimes surprising quite a few with its grip and pace - including, on one occasion Rob relates, the driver of a lightened E-Type who thought he had the event in the bag.

On its home ground it is known as both as the Courier Cadillac in recognition of Rob's firm, and also as the Haverhill Car - a symbol and celebration of the local expertise and support that helped its creator bring the project to fruition. But the whole affair has acquired a further intriguing dimension. Reading up on Cadillac history, Rob found that in 1890 a budding precision engineer called Henry Leland teamed up

with a man called Robert C. Faulconer, described only as a "timber tycoon", to form Leland and Faulconer Manufacturing. A dozen years later this firm - its similarity to the partnership between Rolls and Royce is worth noting - produced the first cars for the Cadillac Motor Co of Detroit, and the two companies merged shortly afterwards to form America's top prestige car maker.

Researching a book through which to tell the story of the Courier Cadillac, Rob was intrigued by the unusual spelling of the name Faulconer - the same as his wife Linda's maiden name. A book on the Faulconer family in America made no mention of a Cadillac

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



The Courier Cadillac racing in the Pomeroy Trophy at Silverstone

connection, though the author had been able to establish that Robert C. Faulconer had been born in England. The coincidence sent Rob burrowing into his wife's family papers. There, among old photographs and records of births, marriages and deaths, he turned up a document bearing the letterhead "Leland and Faulconer". The link was established. The timber tycoon was Robert Charles Faulconer, born in 1845, the eldest son of a long-established family in rural

West Hoathly in Sussex. He had gone to America in the 1860s, married the daughter of a Detroit judge, had six daughters, made money in timber, and remained in Detroit until his death in 1907. So the co-founder of the make of car with which Rob had become obsessed turned out to be his wife's great-great-uncle. Cadillac historians had never made the Faulconer family connection, probably because the Detroit branch moved to Philadelphia soon after Robert

Faulconer's death, and respectable women of the period did not normally concern themselves with their husbands' business affairs. And it was the brilliant engineer Henry Leland who then took the limelight and established himself as one of the founding fathers of the US motor industry. At the same time Robert Faulconer's family in England made little note of the matter. In fact it would appear that they disapproved of his involvement with the new-fangled motor car. His brother

Rudston "Ruddy" Faulconer was a nationally celebrated coach-and-four exponent, while his other brother Arthur was a passionate horseman.

If horsemen of the day regarded the motor car with disdain, equally what happened in America held little interest for the well-to-do rural English. But if Ruddy and Arthur decided to ignore Robert and his distant activities, the discovery that a Faulconer played a part of motoring history has delighted the present family. They refer to Rob's car as the Commemorative Cadillac, and Robert's memory is firmly back in the fold. These new details about the firm's origins have also delighted Cadillac executives. Even before the Faulconer family connection was made, they were sufficiently impressed by the car itself to permit Rob to mount a genuine Cadillac badge on that imposing radiator, and to have the project written up in the firm's magazine.

Rob Maidment is something of a hero in certain quarters of Detroit. Meanwhile the coincidences keep popping up. Rob discovered recently that the anniversary of the emergence of the very first Cadillac from the Detroit factory is October 17 - the day that he and Linda Faulconer were married.



Pole position in Palm Court at the Alexandra Palace London Classic Motor Show