

THE SPURGIN / GIOVANINE / BORGH / CANO / LAWRENCE / NAGAMATSU
ROADSTER; A Legendary Dry Lakes Champion racer

Curt Giovanine provided the following background for his father. "Robert Donald Giovanine was born to Joseph Daniel Giovanine and Pansy Ellen Baker Giovanine, on September 21, 1919, in Moline, Illinois. He preferred to be called Bob rather than Robert. In 1922 he and his parents drove across the country moving to Los Angeles, California. Joseph had been employed by Moline Plow, Tractor, and Automobile Company in Illinois and found work as a mechanic at Harry Green Chevrolet and later J.V. Baldwin Chevrolet in Los Angeles. I can't name the elementary and junior high schools that Bob attended, but he did attend and graduate from Washington High School in Los Angeles, California, in 1937. During high school he ran track and took shop classes. Also, during high school he worked part time for a pilot at the local small airport learning to fly and maintain the pilot's J5 powered Travel Air. After high school Bob started working full time for Vultee Aircraft in Downey, California. I believe he worked there until he joined the Navy for WWII. He applied for submarine service, but when the Navy learned of his aircraft experience, he was assigned to and stationed at Moffett Field, California working on AT-6's and SNJ's for the duration of the war. He married Doris Ann Stratton in October 1941, and his oldest son, Curt Giovanine, was born on February 2, 1946 and daughter, Teri Giovanine, was born on November 26, 1950," Curt said.

"Don Lee broadcasting (KFI Radio) had their studios on the top floor of the same building. That's where Bob met Don Lee's son, who according to Dad used to promote match races out at Muroc in the 1930's," said Curt Giovanine. I know that he joined the SCTA when it was formed in 1938, but I'm not sure of the year or how he came to join Albata. It may have been through his acquaintance with, Jack Layman, Willie Schwartzrock, or Babe Ouse. He met Bob Ruffi and Chuck Spurgin through the Albata club. He ran his own car and partnered with Babe Ouse and Chuck Spurgin running at Muroc and El Mirage dry lakes before the war. He was Chuck's partner after the war and they earned the SCTA season championship in 1948. After the war he went to work as a Civil Service aircraft inspector at North American Aviation near Los Angeles International Airport. At my mother's request and due to family responsibilities he ceased his racing involvement in 1949. He built us a beautiful custom home in Westchester, near the airport that we moved into in 1951. He ended his Civil Service employment in 1957 and went to work for North American Aviation directly, working on the Navajo, Apollo, and Space Shuttle projects until his retirement in 1974. We returned to racing as partners in a new car in 1994."

Karin Edla Spurgin said this about her dad. "My father, Charles Bisbee Spurgin was born August 3, 1916 in Oxnard, California, and he always preferred to be called Chuck. My father attended Beverly Hills High School, then changed schools and graduated from Los Angeles High School. After high school, he enrolled at Santa Monica Junior College, and then went into the Navy just after World War II began and was decorated as a US Navy Chief Motor Machinist Mate for his service during the war. He was responsible for water quality treatment. My dad received his Honorable Discharge with Victory Medal, Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal and Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal. When he returned from the service he went into the propane gas business with his father having the only propane gas business on the West coast. They delivered propane gas to people in Topanga Canyon and all over the hills and canyons of Malibu. Later he worked for the Charles A. Tegner Insurance Company in Santa Monica, California, which was started by his wife's Grandfather," Karin recalled.

"In the early years when I was first born, he worked weekdays as an insurance agent until 2 pm, then went home for dinner and off to work by 3 pm at McDonald-Douglas until midnight. I have always been impressed with how my Dad could just make anything work. If he couldn't buy it he would make it and many times chose to make it over buying it. It was cheaper and more fun. The two things I cherish of all of the stuff I took from the garage for my shop are his vice that sat on the big workbench and the dustpan he fabricated from sheet metal. As the 'gofer' in the garage as a kid I used that dustpan a lot. It's rough and funky, but it did the job. I still use it in my shop, thinking of him every time. My mom was also a hot shoe like Dad. She used to tell me that she and Dad used to drag race down by the airport, this was before I was born. She exercised her right to peddle to the metal. They shared the interests of the outdoors. They surfed together on big redwood boards, water skied up at Lake Arrowhead when we kids were little with the Ruffi's and other families, rode motorcycles in the Mojave, sailed and camped together," Karin concluded.

In the early days of SCTA racing, there were innovative and creative individuals that competed against each other in racing, but at times would share much of their personal research and racing knowledge with each other. One always wants to know the sometimes-intricate connections between some of the great and legendary builders of the day. "Ralph Schenck, an Albata car club member, had been racing a Chevy powered car at the Lakes since 1935 and taught Bob Rufi, also an Albata member, the special tricks with a Chevy motor. In 1938, Rufi ran his first modified car with Chuck Spurgin's help as they knew each other since they were six years old and lived on the same street in West Los Angeles. In 1940, Spurgin ran a 2-man Chevy powered modified that he and Bob Rufi built in 1938-39. The white #76 had an engine block owned by Spurgin and Bob Giovanine owned the Olds 3 port head as per the Racing News of the time. The car was entered under Chuck's and Bob's name. Giovanine also partnered with Babe Ouse in his Winfield powered modified during 1940 and points were awarded as per the December SCTA Racing News for both teams towards the Albata Club High Points championship that year. I think my father had his own modified car similar to Babe Ouse's, with his own Chevy engine in it for power per an article written by Ouse. Giovanine re-built Babe Ouse's modified that he had run in 1939. The Albata Club was the SCTA High Points Club for the 1940 racing season according to the newsletter," Curt Giovanine said. "Streamliner points were sewed up by the two Chevy 4s of Ralph Schenck and Bob Rufi while the modified class points were taken by the Spurgin / Giovanine Chevy 4, the Noble-White Hudson 8, Knapton / White V8, and the Ouse / Giovanine / Winfield flat head 4," according to Curt.

In 1941, a modified was entered once as the Giovanine / Spurgin entry #87 with Giovanine's engine. There was a period publication stating; "With Giovanine's new engine, there will now be two potent Chevy Fours running on the lakebed," Curt Giovanine told me. Curt said that's what he remembered in an old newsletter. As there was some confusion as to if Giovanine's engine was Rufi's engine. It was in 1941, that the roadster made its debut run, which cost \$25. "Bob Giovanine developed his 1925 Chevy four engine to compete in the modified class. The engine at the time used an FB camshaft. The lobes were larger so that there was enough meat for Winfield to grind a more aggressive profile. The oil pump was driven off the front of the back-gear, generator drive. It was noted that the FB was the only Chevy 4 cam that Winfield would grind on," Curt Giovanine remembers. The May 1941 Throttle magazine states that, "Bob Giovanine was building an engine nearly identical to Bob Rufi's engine and he would be running it in his modified racer," and that engine would be used later in the 25' Chevy Roadster. Bob Rufi made a special main bearing oil supply tube for Giovanine which was at the bottom of the block and it was fabricated from electrical conduit. The Albata Club was first organized in 1937 and took its name from one of the very oldest racing fraternities that dates to the Coliseum in Rome. Other members who later helped Bob and Chuck were Bob Rufi and Ralph Schenck. In the March 1941 Throttle magazine pictured at the SCTA Awards ceremonies were Bob Giovanine who was the second fastest modified and Chuck Spurgin, who had the third fastest modified.

In the Throttle magazine - May 1941 issue, there was comments about the Albata Car Club stating, "Chuck Spurgin better known as the bad boy of the Albata Club, will be running a stock body rig this year. He still is sticking to the four cylinder Chevys. He's running a stroked "C" shaft and some potent Winfield cam and some more 'Alky' jugs." Giovanine had half completed a super modified when the war broke out. "With the intervention of WWII, Chuck stored the roadster and Bob stored the new race motor. The car was pictured with the Whippet grill-shell half painted white and was photographed at a workshop near Overland and National that was rented by Jim Travis and Charlie Beck," according to Jim Miller. Following the end of the war, they reunited their talents and equipment to race again. In 1946, Chuck Spurgin, entered his car at the April 28, 1946 meet. The times were quite respectable with a 105.01 mph clocking. In 1947, Spurgin ran his car with Giovanine as the Giovanine / Spurgin entry #87 at several of the meets. The #87 Class B Roadster still had a three-springer with a Chrysler tube front axle. The meets that year resulted in recorded speeds of 114.94, 121.95, 120.64, 122.61 and a 126.64 mph as they captured 15th place in the SCTA points race and subsequently they were granted the racing number 15-A for the next SCTA racing season. Another contributor was Duke Hallock, who provided valuable help to Spurgin and Giovanine. In 1947, Bob and Chuck raced in B Class. That year they finished 15th in the SCTA individual point standings and they were given the number 15 for the following year.

In 1948, SCTA re-aligned the classes and the team decided to race in the new A Class. They destroked their motor to comply with the Class A requirements. Bob Giovanine handled the driving chores for the season. The top end of the engine consists of a three-port Oldsmobile head which has two intake ports, enlarged to 1 7/8"

diameter with 1 3/4" intake valves. The Olds three port head were milled to raise the compression ratio to over 16:1. For the majority of the 1948 racing season, two head gaskets were installed dropping the compression to 13.5:1 as they dominated their Class. The exhaust valves were 1 5/8" as per directions from Ed Winfield, for the "full race" cam used. The cam was a re-ground Chevrolet cam with a 7/16 "lift through 1 1/2 to 1 Chevy rocker arms. The valve timing was at 45 degrees each way at the top and 65 degrees each way at the bottom and the horsepower started to go up to 3,000 rpm. The ignition was a Mallory, which was fitted with a ball bearing on the rotor shaft to keep it steady. The ignition was standard including points clearance at twelve thousandths. The carburetion was very special and had used two 1 7/8" steel throats fitted with Winfield bowls with one large dump-tube each for the prior season. They used special throats of 1 3/4" internal diameter' while using one dump-tube for the mixer.

Duke Hallock helped them with his knowledge of the effects of weather and air conditions. The idea behind Duke's throttles was a sector for a throttle plate rather than a conventional throttle plate mounted to a throttle shaft. This was to achieve a clean, unobstructed passage for the intake of air at full throttle. His critical analysis of a conventional throttle was that the shaft and plate divided the flow front into two smaller flow regions, which restricted the amount of air that could flow through a given diameter tube. It was Duke's critical observation during the runs that was critical to optimum performance as he had a special gauge to measure the vacuum behind the throttle plate at full throttle during a run. Duke had Bob check the vacuum readings (there was a special Allstate vacuum gauge to the left of the tachometer) to record the vacuum behind the throttle plate at full throttle during a run and he would adjust it accordingly. "Duke, working with Bob, did not want to see over 1/4" of mercury-vacuum reading for minimal air restriction at full throttle," Curt Giovanine told me. In the event of a barometer check showing less pressure, which would be a compression loss, they removed another head gasket and raised the compression to 16.25 to 1 or about 14 to 1 at the Lakes, depending on the weather. They sometimes went to a compression as high a 20 to 1 to find the right combination. Each carburetor used two jets, an intermediate and a high speed, running aft from the bowl and crossing over through an adapter into a hollow ring, set perpendicular to the side draft airstream. The back-side of the ring, or side facing the intake ports, has minute perforations for the fuel to enter the airstream. A sector, set flush against the back-side of the ring, is opened. At the same time, more air is allowed to enter. At full throttle all the perforations are exposed and the sector has moved to a position that completely opens the venturi.

The two carburetors attached directly to the block without the benefit of an intake manifold and it was designed by Duke Hallock. He used a barometer to help him calculate air density for his jetting. Duke built a special set of carburetors with rotary port openings and no "butterflies." The exhaust pipe passed through the firewall and continued into the cockpit and the pipe was wrapped in asbestos next to the driver in the cockpit as it continued to exit out as a straight pipe in the center of the tail section of the car. There was a stock Chevy rear end and the body had been channeled. They also had support from Bob Rufi who was one of the most respected race car fabricator of the day. The Rufi speed tricks included the use of the WWI Curtiss OX5 engine (that was used in the Jenny) connecting rods and 3/4" longer than stock and the full oiling system which he was known for. They channeled the body over a modified chassis and added the front axle from a 1932 Ford. There was a hand fuel pump and a simple aluminum seat.

Methanol was used for fuel and a modified valve system for durability. The motor was balanced including the pistons, rods, crankshaft, flywheel, and the clutch. For the 1948 season, Bob and Chuck did some modifications on the roadster, which included a full belly pan and a two spring front end being replaced with a Ford cross spring and axle assembly. The car weighed in at 1680 lbs with fuel and oil. The roadster was equipped with the 3.27 gears in the rear end and 6:00 x 16" Firestone tires in the rear and 5.00 x 16" tires at the front. Hydraulic brakes were used in the rear Chevy wheels only. The engine was able to turn at 4800 to 5,000 rpm. The estimated power output was around 150 bhp and the top speed was reached within 3/8th of a mile. A Jewett oil pump was used with the full pressure system. The ignition system included Champion R-2 spark plugs and a Giovanine modified Mallory distributor. The cockpit was almost entirely enclosed with a tarp for the dry lakes meets with a fire extinguisher in the cockpit. The instrument panel included a full set of gauges. At the start of the 1948 season, they flashed through the traps for a 120.52 mph run, which was an impressive first in a Class A win and they set a new two-way record at 113.950 mph. In June, the roadster captured another first at 116.27 mph and a new record again at 117.517 mph. In July the team went 123.79 mph and they again broke the record with a 118.480 mph. In August they went 119.68 mph and set another new record with a 119.855 mph. In

September they were first in class at 127.65 mph and set a record of 123.05 mph. In October they were first in first in class at 125.52 mph and added another new record with a 123.655 mph, which would stand for two years. The 1948 SCTA Season High Points race car award was given to the Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster. The last addition to the car was the pair of ram tubes run in March 1949 for a trap speed of 135.13 mph. The Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster was a feature car at the Second Annual Hot Rod Exposition in Los Angeles with a special display in 1949. The Hot Rod book stated that there is a banner displayed prominently at the entrance to the 1949 LA Hot Rod Show at the LA Armory that states that, "out of the 597 cars at the El Mirage event, all but 22 were powered by Ford or Lincoln Mercury Flathead V8s." The banner did not say that the little Chevy four 'banger' got the first perfect score and broke the world record each time, and was almost as fast as Alex Xydias in a streamliner with a ford V8. This car (Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster) actually was faster than hot rods two years later running Ford V8s. "To win an event in 1948 you had to qualify at a world record speed and do an A run and a B run in a reverse direction both at a world record speed." The Roadster was the Cover Car with a feature story (Hot Rod of the Month) in the March 1949 issue of Hot Rod Magazine. The Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster was also the Cover Car for the California Timing News, November 1948 with a feature article of the car. The Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster was raced in 1949 as they were experimenting on an air induction system and did a one way run of 149 mph and something broke in the car and Bob and Chuck never ran the car again. A program noted in a 1949 El Mirage Program that the "great little car" is not coming to the meet. The Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster was subsequently offered for sale in the June, 1950 issue of Hot Rod Magazine.

"In 1954, Carl Borgh of Harbor City, in the Los Angeles County area, bought the Roadster and continued racing it actively in a modified configuration as the 'Mothersill's Special.' The new owner was also a member of the Albata Club, changed out the engine with a 292-cubic inch GMC, using the same Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster body and chassis. Carl ran the car at El Mirage Dry Lake in September of 1954, turning 141.73 mph. Carl also competed in Drag Racing at Colton, Morrow Bay, San Fernando, Orange County, and other Drag Strips," according to Kent Borgh. "The car was pictured in Drag News Magazine, April 15, 1955. There were changes from the original appearance with a roll bar, steering to the center, and now with a red and white paint scheme. Carl Borgh was an Aerospace engineer at McDonnell Douglas and he added internal bracing with tube materials. The Roadster was raced in the C modified Class. In 1955, Carl made the change in internal configurations as the engine was moved to the rear. There was also a new nose fabricated out of aluminum, changes in the belly pan at the rear, and a fabrication of a new manifold. Carl also built his own quick change rear end, new steering, Indy 'skins' in the rear, and he painted the car a light Lakeland blue. The car turned 149 mph at Bonneville. The wheelbase at 112 inches was maintained and the Roadster had no driveshaft with the U joint connecting directly to the 'spline' on the rear end. The motor was a big bore GMC with a full race McGurk cam, tubular pushrods, and Borgh's own designed log type intake manifold with three dual throat carburetors. On the original Spurgin / Giovanine rear body deck was nicely painted the Albata Club sign," Kent said.

The Carl Borgh Mothersill's Special configuration was featured in the October, 1956 Hot Rod Magazine with a two page feature for the car. The racer was sleek looking with very clean lines. The Mothersill's Special was featured in the 'The Best of Hot Rod' magazine and the Bonneville racer had a special 'Von Dutch' pin striping touch. Kent Borgh told me that his father, Carl and his buddy took both of their roadsters to Kenneth Howard's (aka Von Dutch) garage and bought some booze for Von Dutch. By sunrise and drinking all night, Von Dutch pin striped the two cars. Also noted is that 'Mothersill's' was a woman's remedy for "That Time of the Month." There is an official bill of sale for the Spurgin / Giovanine / Borgh Mothersills Special Roadster as it was sold on February 29, 1956 to Robert A. Cano of San Pedro for the sum of \$625.00 and a 1936 Ford Coupe. Robert A. Cano now lives in Lomita, California. Joe Cano, who is the son of Robert Cano, stated that the car, which was called the 'Snoot,' had been raced at the Lion's Drag strip. At the time that Robert had raced the car he had owned a Union 76 service station at Western Avenue and 25th Street, in Los Angeles. Robert converted the engine to run on alcohol to run at the Lion's Drags. At one time he was surprised at the power of the car and he looped the roadster at the drags.

The Spurgin / Giovanine / Borgh / Cano Roadster was stored in the backyard of a house in Apple Valley for over 35 years and was found in good condition with the rolling chassis and body complete with the painting of the 'Mothersill's Special' on each side of the car, minor decals, along with official Bonneville decals from 1955 on each side of the car as well. There was no rust as some of the original paint was intact and had protected the

body from any rust in the High Desert. Present were all of the original welds, holes, mountings, pick-up points and brackets from the original Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster configuration as the chassis was strong and intact. The modifications that were made to the rear engine configuration were made on the durable chassis and were internal, without changing much of the original Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster body other than the front nose and upper hood area. The nose was formed aluminum nicely done and was without a grille for Bonneville. There was a slight adding of height to the door sill area but the original weld line is still present. It was a complete rolling chassis with original spindles and even the original trunk lid worked with the small prop bar to hold it open with wood supports under the lid. There were original old wood struts and bracing at the internal of the cockpit. The original exhaust opening was still in the center at the tail section of the car with addition of the two holes made for the push bars for Bonneville. The rear tail area had the original reinforcing strip where the belly pan was attached and the front belly pan was original and intact. There were air scoops added with rivets on each side for the salt flats racing. All of the modifications on the chassis are evident along the chassis with the original weld position such as the firewall location, motor mounts, radiator mounts etc. of the first configuration. The owner had bought the car in the early 1970's for a potential drag race configuration in trade for a Model A.

David Lawrence is a dealer in Los Angeles, California and he specializes in Art and Automobile Collectables. He was at a Memorabilia show in Long Beach when he placed a note at the front of his table as business was very slow which stated, "I Am Interested in Race Cars." The show was the 'Toys for Big Boys' at the Long Beach Convention Center. A very tall gentleman in a biker jacket came to the table and told David that he had a famous Lakes race car that raced at El Mirage. David made an appointment to see the "famous" lakes race car and he took along the lakes experienced Edward 'Crummy' Cummings to verify the car. Edward had seen the Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster race in the late 1940's and he instantly verified the car as the original Spurgin / Giovanine Roadster, as it was a good rolling chassis and body completely intact with minor modifications. There was a discussion as to the many collectors that were looking for this legendary record breaking car for many years. Lawrence researched for historical information on the famous Roadster and he shortly decided to try to auction off the Spurgin / Giovanine / Borgh / Cano / Lawrence Roadster. "The car was offered for sale at the Brook's Auction in Carmel, California, on August 19, 2000, but didn't meet Lawrence's reserve," Curt Giovanine said. Curt also told me, "I have a copy of the auction catalog given to me by Lawrence, and I provided photos for the Brook's people to use in the catalog," Curt concluded. David pulled the Roadster out of the Auction and brought it back to Los Angeles. The car was featured with a story in *Thoughtbred & Classic Cars of England* magazine as the 'Auction Find' of the entire Monterey Auction Weekend. The writer, Julius Thurgood wrote, "Here was the most exciting find I have seen in ages...a proper model T turtle decked salt lake roadster, gloriously original and refreshingly unrestored."

David Lawrence kept the car for several more years and in May of 2005, Ernie Nagamatsu, who was a long time friend of David Lawrence, offered to buy the Spurgin / Giovanine / Borgh / Cano / Lawrence Roadster, as it did not appear that Lawrence was going to complete the restoration project. Ernie owns and races the Max and Ina Balchowsky 1959 Old Yeller II Buick Special and he was looking for a race car with legendary history. The Spurgin / Giovanine / Borgh / Cano / Lawrence Roadster was the perfect find. Ernie is now currently restoring the legendary record breaking Spurgin / Giovanine / Borgh / Cano / Lawrence / Nagamatsu Roadster, which will again pay tribute to all of the previous owners. It will be restored to the swift blue roadster that in 1948 streaked across the time traps at the lakes, but the history of all of the owners will be preserved.