

### **Gerry Marshall – Driver**

“I’d been driving for Dealer Team Vauxhall (DTV) since 1971 and had achieved fantastic success on the UK racing scene. Our greatest success was, though, when Australian saloon car legend Pete Brock and I won our class, led the Vauxhall team to victory in the prestigious Coupe du Roi team prize and finished second overall in the 1977 Spa 24 hour Saloon car race.

“The race was for Group One saloon cars, only minor modifications allowed – but the Vauxhall Magnum had been very carefully prepared by Bill Blydenstein. Needless to say, it rained during the race and our Dunlop tyres, which had been brilliant in the dry, began to lose us lots of time.

“I persuaded the guy from Michelin to ‘lend’ us a set of their wet weather tyres and at one point, as the track was drying, we had Dunlop slicks on the front and Michelins on the back. Dunlop, to whom we were contracted, weren’t very happy but the switch did the trick and it was Dunlop’s logo on the side of the car!”

### **Jim Dugdale – Artist**

“Gerry Marshall and Pete Brock – both fully deserving of their legendary status as saloon car drivers – really did a remarkable job at Spa in 1977, against some far more powerful machinery.

“My painting shows Gerry drifting through the hairpin at La Source, the wet circuit reflecting the colour scheme of the DTV Magnum. Bill Blydenstein was a key part of DTV’s success and he can be seen in the crowd, to the right of Vauxhall’s Gerry Johnstone, both wearing their distinctive red DTV blazers.

### **Old meets new at Murketts’ Cambridge showroom launch**

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Historic racing cars and the latest Vauxhalls were among the attractions for visitors attending Murketts of Cambridge's launch party at its new showroom on Histon Road last weekend.

The theme for the event was 'old meets new' and star cars included the new range-topping Vauxhall Insignia, resplendent in metallic silver paintwork, flanked by a historic, 1977 Dealer Team Vauxhall (DTV) Magnum racing saloon car.

The Insignia range is available with five engines, meets the Euro 5 emissions standard and comes with either manual or automatic six-speed transmissions. The three petrol engines currently available range from a four-cylinder 140PS unit to a V6 with 260PS. Two new 2.0-litre direct-injection diesel engines will be offered with power outputs of either 130PS or 160PS. In time, the Insignia engine line-up will be extended with an EcoFLEX version offering ultra-low CO2 emissions in addition to other, more powerful variants. The Insignia range starts from £16,640 on the road.

The racing Vauxhall Magnum was originally built by Bill Blydenstein's team at DTV to take part in the 1977 Spa 24 Hour event, where the car was entered for Gerry Marshall and Peter Brock. The car ran strongly to finish second overall and win its class and thus lead the team to carry off the prestigious Coupe du Roi, the Manufacturers Award, and the Index of Performance against more powerful 3-litre opposition.

Bill commenced his racing career in 1958, starting a three year relationship with an unlikely racing car in the form of a self prepared Borgward Isabella TS. His spirited handling of this unwieldy car led to a works Mini drive in 1962. The Dutch born aeronautical engineer started his long association with Vauxhall in 1963 by campaigning FB VX4/90s for himself and Chris Lawrence under the Lawrence Tune banner.

He then drifted into preparing Minis but also ran a highly modified 1258cc HA Viva. In 1966 he read a report in a [motor](#) magazine about the new HB Viva. Bored with shoehorning bigger and bigger engines into Minis he wrote to Vauxhall to suggest some assistance in preparing one of the [new cars](#) for racing. Fortunately Vauxhall men Colin Wood and Roy Cook of Engineering and Jeremy Lawrence from Marketing persuaded the management of the day to work a little "back door" magic. The result was the 1967 Shaw & Kilburn Special Viva. A tuned, pushrod engined HB, it was developed and built by Blydenstein in the double garage at the side of his house and driven by him to a sensational debut class win at Snetterton. But capable driver that Bill was, he realised that if he was to concentrate on getting the best out of the car, they would need to get another driver.

Enter larger-than-life Gerry Marshall, to start a career that would take Vauxhall to the top of saloon car racing in the UK and earn Gerry the title "Mr Vauxhall". Used to more powerful Elans and TVRs, he took time to adapt to the puny 95 bhp Viva and everyone in the fledgling team looked forward to the launch of the 2 litre "slant four" overhead-camshaft engine in the 1968 HB Viva GT. By 1969 the Viva had won its

first race in 2 litre guise and Bill and the team were joined by "the other Gerry", preparation expert Gerry Johnstone. Following a very successful 1970 season, in January 1971 a group of London Region Vauxhall dealers decided to circumvent any opposition from General Motors or Vauxhall to racing by forming Dealer Team Vauxhall or DTV. Alan Maidens of GN Croydon was the first Chairman and the venture was funded by a dealer subscription.

Also in 1971 the team switched to the new Firenza body style and a range of specialised racing engines were developed over the next few years with [fuel injection](#) and special heads with capacities between 2.0 and 2.6 litres. The final iteration used Lotus LV240 16-valve heads and with a capacity of 2.3 litres developed around 230bhp. The chassis was continually developed too, acquiring a five speed ZF gearbox and droop snoot in sympathy with the 1974 HP Firenza. The car became the stuff of legend, achieving 63 victories and many championships in its long career and earning the nickname "Old Nail".

DTV was managed by Bill and was established in the unlikely surroundings of a disused railway station (complete with platform which gave rise to some interesting photo opportunities) at Shepreth near Cambridge.

In 1971 the concept of production car racing was re-introduced to the UK and Gerry started to compete in his 2 litre Vauxhall supplied Firenza road car! This led to official DTV entries of more suitable 2 litre and the later 2.3 litre Firenza versions. Gerry, partnered by Australia's Peter Brock, scored a marvellous swan song result for the DTV Magnum by finishing second overall and winning its class in the 1977 International Spa 24 hour race, one of few Vauxhall international results. Held in poor weather, the team "borrowed" some wet weather Michelins (they were sponsored by Goodyear!) and the 23rd hour retirement of the previous year was avenged.

Under Bill's management DTV produced two of the most iconic "big banger" race cars of all time, Big and Baby Bertha. By 1974 Vauxhall were well advanced with a prototype Ventora FE V-8 road car, both the FD and FE models being designed with this possibility in mind. Vauxhall were keen to promote this venture by developing a racing car first. In the event, the road car never made it and "Big Bertha", as the racer was aptly called, had a very short life indeed.

Designed by aerodynamics expert Frank Costin and Vauxhall stylist John Taylor and built by DTV, the car used a front mounted Repco Holden 5 litre V-8 producing nearly 500bhp, De Dion rear suspension and was clothed in a sensational fibreglass "replica" FE body some 10 inches wider than the original. The car proved to be a handful even for the burly Marshall and in only its fourth appearance disaster struck. New brake callipers had been fitted after practice but the usual locking wire not applied to the pad retaining pins. The result was a major fright for Marshall and a badly damaged car. Blisteringly fast though it was, with the V-8 road car project already cancelled there was little point in persevering with this heavy car which was compromised for racing by the now unnecessary need to look like a road car.

No time was lost in installing the engine into a much lighter Firenza based creation which was immediately dubbed "Baby Bertha". Stylist Taylor took two weeks vacation which he spent at Shepreth helping design the new car and in May 1975 Gerry switched from "Old Nail" to debut the new car which was successful "straight out of the box". Loud and sideways was the only way to drive Gerry knew and the

crowds loved it, taking the car and Gerry into their hearts. Only ever beaten once, "Baby Bertha" won the Super Saloon titles in 1975 and 1976 and entered the motor sport hall of fame alongside "Old Nail", which continued as a DTV entry with Scottish ace Bill Dryden at the wheel. Last raced by Gerry in October 1977 at Thruxton, "Baby Bertha" remains active today and this still raucous projectile has been a star at the Goodwood Festival of Motoring and other major classic events to the delight of the crowds.

By the end of 1977 neither the Firenza nor successor Magnum range would still be part of the Vauxhall road car range, so decisions had to be made for the 1978 season. The first decision was to go rallying with the Chevette and the second was to create a Cavalier to continue in special saloon car racing. This latter design comprised a sensational John Taylor penned Mark 1 Cavalier fibreglass body stretched over a Jo Marquart designed space frame chassis. It was designed to take either a 2.5 litre turbocharged Opel engine or, incredibly, an 8.1 litre Reynolds Aluminium-Chevrolet engine used by the all-conquering McLarens in the US Can-Am race series. Sadly the project was cancelled in mid 1977 and one can only guess how "Mega Bertha" would have performed. Maybe we will get the chance to find out as happily the remains of the project are in Ireland and the owner will hopefully bring the car to life. This episode brought an end to the glorious DTV racing operations after 10 years of uninterrupted success for the Luton marque.

Sad though this undoubtedly was, the move to rallying signalled an intention to move out of the UK club motor sport arena and into international competition. Ford was Vauxhall's biggest rival in the showroom and it was into everything from Formula 1 to World rallying. By comparison, Vauxhall had acquired a sporting reputation "on the cheap" through the magnificent efforts of their dealers, Bill Blydenstein, the Shepreth team, Gerry Marshall and a few dedicated Vauxhall staffers.

Since the Viva days, a rally preparation operation had been run by Coburn Improvements from their base in Banbury. Brought under the DTV banner, works drivers Will Sparrow, Chris Coburn and Chris Sclater were regulars on British championship events in Firenzas and Magnums. In 1974 Sparrow won the RAC Group 1 Rally championship with a 2.3 Magnum and in 1975 the rally programme was taken over by DTV at Shepreth. For 1978 Vauxhall created the limited production HS Chevette specifically with homologation to International Group 2 in mind. It used a 2.3 litre Vauxhall "slant four" engine with a special twin cam head and a Getrag 5-speed gearbox. For rallying, better breathing Lotus heads from their alloy version of the Vauxhall engine design were employed and a "rock crusher" ZF gearbox. Changing the 'box was within the regulations, but the heads later caused a major homologation row as they were not fitted to the required 400 road cars. Despite these difficulties, the car brought team drivers, Finn Pentti Airikkala and Chris Sclater, three victories in its first season and in 1979 Airikkala won the British Open Rally Championship outright.

In 1980 an "evolution" car was produced by the Shrepreth operation. Called the HSR it featured flared arches to accommodate wider wheels and a revised rear axle location. 40 were required for homologation and the hilarious stories of the homologation inspections by the FIA for both HS and HSR Chevettes probably explains why nothing like the homologation numbers can be accounted for today. Among many major victories, Russell Brookes won the Circuit of Ireland in an HSR, an example of which is in the Vauxhall heritage collection wearing the appropriate

"Andrews Heat for Hire" livery.

When the DTV operations were finally closed, Bill continued to specialise in Vauxhall tuning, particularly cylinder head gas flowing. I had the privilege of meeting him at his meticulous little workshop at a farm near Buntingford. Few signs of such an active life in motor sport were evident except a mangled [steering wheel](#) from a huge accident in the Isabella. However his enthusiasm for tuning unlikely cars remained as he made a beautiful job of my PA cylinder head and [manifolds](#).

Bill was a quiet, self effacing engineering genius to whom the Vauxhall marque owes a huge debt of gratitude