



RESCUING THE FAMILY JEWELS

The son and grandson of Sydney Allard have restored this Palm Beach that was a star of the 1956 Earls Court motor show – and they plan to make some more

WORDS John Simister // PHOTOGRAPHY Matthew Howell

‘Allard has gone through many ups and downs over the years, and is set to rise again’

THIS IS A MAGIC moment, a bi-directional signpost for not only a car but also the two people standing beside it, pointing simultaneously forwards and backwards. All have the same name: son, grandson and the red sports car created by the late father. And as the car is reborn, so is the company. Allard has gone through many ups and downs over the years, and is set to rise again.

That's the hope, anyway, and the Allard Palm Beach Mk2 you see here is the trigger point. It was the first of just eight examples of the Allard company's last model before founder Sydney Allard abandoned car manufacture in favour of tuning parts and Britain's first dragsters, and it was built in 1956 for the motor show at Earls Court. Now Alan Allard and his son Lloyd, the latter a busy producer of aluminium fabrications and turbodiesel tuning bits as well as new parts for old Allards, have restored the Palm Beach. And I'm about to drive it.

HAVE YOU SEEN a Palm Beach Mk2 before? No, nor have I. The Allards etched in most people's minds are the cycle-winged, Cadillac V8-engined J2, and the P1 saloon with its ludicrously long bonnet in which Sydney won the 1952 Monte Carlo Rally, the only person ever to do so in a car of his own manufacture. There were numerous others, including sports cars built mainly for racing, mostly with either the sidevalve, 3.6-litre Ford V8 used in the P1 or a larger V8 such as that Cadillac unit. Most were sold in the US, as you might expect. Around 500 Allards remain worldwide, 300 of them Stateside, out of approximately 2000 made.

However, in an attempt to broaden the range's reach and move beyond the obsolete flathead Ford, Sydney Allard came up with the Palm Beach for 1952. Its handmade, full-width aluminium body was broadly a shortened version of that which clothed the also-new K3 sports car, while under the bonnet sat an overhead-valve engine from either a Ford Consul or a Ford Zephyr, the former effectively two-thirds of the latter and with identical bores and strokes. The name made the model's

US aspirations clear, and to this writer's young mind the Palm Beach model looked reassuringly modern next to other 1952 Allards as portrayed in *British Motor Cars 1952*.

I was five years old when given this book in 1959. Tastes and contexts have clearly changed since then, and it's obvious now that the slab-sided Palm Beach could have done with a lot of tidying and slenderising. Allard's New York office thought so too, and its resident engineer and designer, Robert Forsyth, came up with a curvaceous new look while keeping a similar profile and 'face'. The plan was to offer it with a Dodge Red Ram V8, but that part never happened. The rest of Forsyth's proposal broadly survived to become the Palm Beach Mk2 in 1956, this first example of which used a similarly Mk2-designated Zephyr engine, now of 2553cc instead of 2262cc.

Like the K3, the P2 (a new saloon for 1952) and the JR (a handsome sports-racer launched in 1953, replacing the J2 and its J2X racing derivative, and raced by Sydney at Le Mans), the Palm Beach used a chassis based on a pair of hefty steel tubes. The front suspension retained Allard's favoured divided beam, in effect a pair of long swing axles pivoted on the car's centre line. Based on the Ballamy conversion for old beam-axled Fords, it was good for sporting rough-road trials thanks to its long travel, but it was not ideal for fast road or track cars. So Allard engineer Dudley Hume drew a new, strut-based system for the Mk2, but it wasn't ready in time for Earls Court and so the first car retained the old system.

The show debut failed to generate the orders that Allard, trying to rationalise its range after years of scattergun confusion, needed. The Suez crisis was partly to blame, diverting attention away from fast cars, but Allard was already in decline as its Clapham Common workshop – one of several South London Allard locations over the years – was gradually subsumed by Ford dealer Adlard Motors, also owned by Sydney. The two companies had similar logos, but the similarity of name is merely a coincidence that arose from the fact that Sydney's father, Arthur, had bought the building from roofing company Robert Adlard.

Still with me? Palm Beach Mk2 production staggered on until 1958, reaching eight in all,

five powered by Jaguar 3.4-litre XK engines and following two Zephyr-propelled cars. Two of the Mk2s were closed coupés, one of them built right at production's end with a 5.7-litre Chrysler Hemi Firepower V8 with push-button Torqueflite automatic transmission. And that, for the time being, was that.

Just two more complete cars would bear Allard badges thereafter. One was the Allardette, a tuned 105E Anglia with a Shorrock supercharger, for which units Allard was the distributor: you might remember the splendid Shorrock advertisements, in which 'Sydney Allard, famous sporting motorist', tells how you can 'take it in top' as you approach a hill in your Mini, Herald, Beetle, Anglia or whatever. The other Allard logo, much later and much more strangely, was to be found on three rebadged and retrimmed Lexus LS400s in a venture mercifully aborted. One was written off, one has vanished and Lloyd Allard recently bought the third on eBay out of curiosity.

ALL OF THAT is in the past. Alan and Lloyd managed to reclaim some of that past when they came upon this Motor Show car, chassis 72/7000Z. After the show the Mk2 became an Allard demonstrator and was then used by an Allard manager, Brian Howard, who also ran the Golde sunroofs offshoot. In 1969, while Allard still existed as a tuning company run by Alan (Sydney having died in 1966 at a cruelly young 56 years of age), the Mk2 was sold to Walter Hemsworth, who ran it until 1976. It stayed in storage, latterly outside, until Alan and Lloyd bought it from Peter Hemsworth in 2012.

It was complete but in a terrible state. 'The market for Allards has been rising over the last few years,' says Alan, 'so we thought we could revive the name. We plan to make a Palm Beach Mk3, developing the car into what it might have become had it stayed in production, and also a continuation JR. Restoring this car seemed a good way to get started, to get a feel for how an Allard was made.'

Right
Curves galore made the Palm Beach Mk2 a beauty among its contemporaries – and far more alluring than the Allards that went before it.



ALLARD PALM BEACH MK2

Below and below right

This is the original 1956 motor show car, now restored by surviving Allard family members Alan and Lloyd.



The knowledge thus gained has already shown itself in the new JR chassis Lloyd is constructing in the Gloucester unit that houses his tuning and fabrication business, but the learning curve has been a steep one.

'Lloyd and I are used to working on moderns, such as his racing Golf,' Alan says. 'A 1950s car is very different. How far do you go with an old car? There are things in this car we wouldn't have designed that way, but we have to keep it authentic. Some restored cars now are far better than when they left the factory. We want a restored car, not a modern concours car.'

Allard father and son wanted to re-use as much of the original car as possible, but nearly everything made of wood, rubber, leather or fabric was rotted beyond redemption; apart, curiously, from the pedal rubbers. The aluminium body panels, hand-beaten in Clapham by Jack Jackman 58 years ago, had survived well beneath layers of paint and filler, which had to be soda-blasted away. The steel had fared less well, with the bulkhead and the bottoms of the fuel tanks non-existent, the inner wings holed and parts of the chassis crumbling.

Obviously the whole car had to be disassembled, calling for much cutting and grinding of corroded fasteners, and specially shaped wooden frameworks were fitted inside each body section after disassembly to help them keep their shape. Lloyd repaired the bodywork splits and added discreet reinforcement where time had shown it to be necessary. He also remade the live rear axle's radius arms to a thicker, stronger design.

Lloyd's metal-fabrication skills also enabled him to remake all the corroded sheet steel with

the correct ribs and swages, which accounted for most of the inner panelwork. He also built the double-tube bumpers, whose design is reprised in a smaller scale on the edge of the under-dash shelf. The engine rebuild was subcontracted, as were the final body preparation and paint plus some of the interior re-trimming, but otherwise this is a full Allard production. It looks properly authentic. Even the slightly wiggly wheelarch and sill lines? 'That's how they were,' replies Alan.

'The view ahead is as 1950s a panorama of curves and bonnet louvres as you could wish for'

I'M SITTING BEHIND a large, wire-spoked steering wheel with a squirly plastic rim and a very 1950s horn ring. A small speedometer and revcounter flank a large, central dial containing the four vital minor gauges; a left-hand drive conversion would be easy here. An impressive row of switches, some of them working, lies beneath.

The view ahead through the windscreen is as 1950s a panorama of curves and bonnet louvres as you could wish for, and the view sideways is unencumbered by such comforts as quarterlights or side windows. This is a sidescreens-and-draughts sports car, with no heater. →





That, reckons Lloyd, was one small nail in the Allard's coffin: it was too old-school, too assumptive of its occupants' hardiness, to suit post-war America. Its shape might have moved with the times, but the rest of it hadn't. 'The doors don't open far enough, either,' he points out.

The straight-six engine was originally rated at 90bhp and drove through a three-speed gearbox, but over the years – and as befits Allard the tuning firm – it has been enhanced. Power is now conservatively estimated at around 120bhp, which comes with the help of triple long-body SU H2 carburettors, a keener camshaft, a proper tubular exhaust manifold and twin exhaust pipes the whole way through. A later, MkIII version of the Ford Zephyr has also donated its four-speed, all-synchromesh gearbox.

It sounds lovely, deep and crisp with a blattery beat overlaying the straight-six yowl as I drive off, slightly starstruck by the presence of Alan Allard, forced-aspiration guru and once Britain's fastest drag racer, next to me in the car his father created. That still-gentle state of engine tune gives the Palm Beach a lively, torquey getaway, helped by gearing short enough to call time at 100mph by the estimates of the day. Extra power is no help when you run out of revs.

1956 ALLARD PALM BEACH MK2

ENGINE 2553cc Ford Zephyr straight-six, OHV, three SU H2 carburettors
POWER 120bhp @ 4800rpm (approx)
TORQUE 140lb ft @ 2500rpm (approx)
TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
SUSPENSION Front: swing axles, radius rods, coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, paired radius arms, Panhard rod, coil springs, telescopic dampers
STEERING Marles steering box
BRAKES Drums **WEIGHT** 1016kg
PERFORMANCE Top speed 100mph

Co-operative engine apart, you have to think hard when you drive the Palm Beach. The accelerator pedal is buried too far below the brake to allow heel-and-toe gearchanges, so you have to get the braking done in advance of the gearshift. And given that braking is by drums that bite well but require deliberate movements of the pedal, this impedes the driving flow. Remodelling the accelerator would be easy enough, though, after which the Allard would feel a lot easier to control.

This car has always sat on coil springs and telescopic dampers, but it now has modern AVO spring/damper units that, as currently adjusted, make the ride a touch choppy. Again, this can be tweaked, which would make the tendency of the steering to wander –

exacerbated by the front swing axles' constant changing of track – less evident. As it is, you just let the Allard find its own path within your directional parameters, enjoy the speed of steering response once past the centre, and revel in the taut, pointy, squirty nature of this sports car's progress. On a track it would surely four-wheel drift beautifully.

SO THE REBORN PALM BEACH works, and works well. A Mk3 would have a wider track, a Jaguar XK engine, modern front suspension and all the little things Lloyd and Alan would like to do differently, while keeping the spirit of the original and the continuing involvement of Dudley Hume. Meanwhile there are those new JRs to develop, and much longer-term maybe a modern sports racer, currently existing only as sketches. Some uncertainty over the Allard marque name's ownership has also been resolved, so it's now firmly under the control of the family that created it.

The stage is set, then, for Allard's rebirth. First, though, Alan and Lloyd have to sell their prototype Palm Beach Mk2 to finance the next act. Whoever buys it will have a unique piece of history which also happens to be a thoroughly usable 1950s sports car. **End**

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