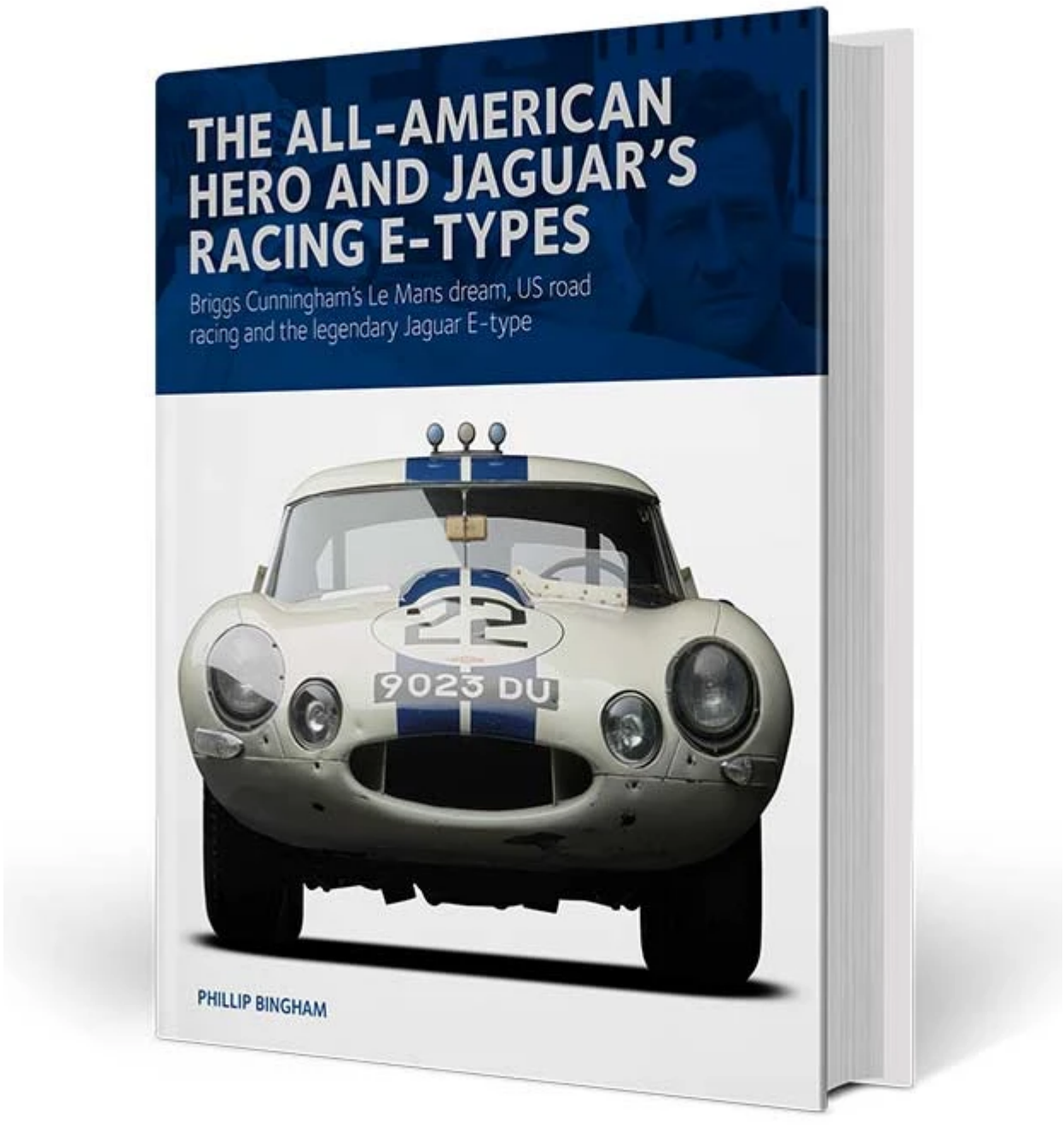
For Your Bookshelf – The All-American Hero and Jaguar's Racing E-types

Published: June 17, 2020

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/for-your-bookshelf-the-all-american-hero-and-jaguars-racing-e-types/



Review

ed by Kieron Fennelly.

Title: The All-American Hero and Jaguar's Racing E types

Author: Phillip Bingham

Published by: Porter Press International Ltd. www.porterpress.co.uk

287 pages; hardback

Price: £60.00

ISBN: 978-1-907085-01-9

The subtitle of this work, 'Briggs Cunningham's Le Mans dream' reflects the ambition of one (very) rich American enthusiast to win Le Mans with entirely American machinery. He came close with his Chrysler-engined sports cars, but after five years began to realise he would never beat the top European teams and instead campaigned his own 'D' type Jaguars. As the 'D' faded, he progressed to the more sophisticated Lister Jaguar before pressing Jaguar's 'E' type prototype the EA2 into service. After several years' perseverance, a Cunningham Jaguar, a lightweight 'E' type achieved a fourth place at Le Mans in 1962, the best result of any Jaguar since the final 'D' type victory in 1957 and comparing favourably with the best Cunningham-built car which had managed 3rd in 1953. After a fruitless attempt at Le Mans in 1963 with three Lightweight E types, the now fifty-six-year old Cunningham decided he could achieve nothing more in Europe and he raced on as a private entrant in the US, finally retiring from the sport in 1966.

Covering fifteen years, this is an ambitious book, dealing first with Cunningham's own racing cars and then with the various Jaguars he campaigned. Although the early years of the Chrysler Cunningham were chronicled by Karl Ludwigsen in 2003, the reader craves more technical detail: By the time of the C-6R, the final racing Cunningham was impressively sophisticated with an Offenhauser engine, reduced frontal area and a Kamm tail.

The paucity of the engineering story here is a shame because for many this will be the more interesting part of the book; by contrast, the racing exploits of the ‘E’ type which take up the larger part of the work have received attention from many authors and there is less novelty here. Nonetheless, interesting details still emerge: Jaguar never felt it would need to race the ‘E’ type, particularly after the publicity in the US generated by the fire at Browns lane in 1957.

Although his team raced many different marques (and he personally scored the first victory of a Ferrari in America) Cunningham’s enduring loyalty to Jaguar got him not only the distributorship but allowed him to have the first prototype ‘E’ type which he prepared with factory help for Le Mans in 1960. The fact that Cunningham was also racing Corvettes gave him the opportunity to discuss the ‘E ’type’s chronic instability with Zora Arkus Duntov and understand that the reason was the Jaguar’s toe-out rear suspension configured essentially for the banking at the MIRA. Once resolved, test driver Gurney was able to describe EA2 as a ‘normal, good-handling car.’

VERDICT

This is an interesting and ambitious work, but though essentially about one man’s dream, there is comparatively little on Briggs Cunningham himself. Clearly a competent and technically sympathetic amateur racing driver, as an individual and how he thought about his dream as over the years as near-misses accrued is not explored. Neither are his qualities as a manager of people. The Jaguar aspects by contrast are covered in almost too much detail – do readers need reminding about the launch of the ‘E’ type and several pages devoted to sixties Britain complete with pictures of the Beatles?

Comprehensively illustrated, this is an impressive work apart from a few colloquial lapses of the ‘*hung on in there*’ variety. However, the book is let down by the type face which is too light and small and not readily distinguishable from the font used for captions. Given the largely older eyes that are likely to be reading this work, this is unfortunate.