

ALAN CRISP

(1924 -



Alan in 2009 holding one of his paintings showing Patrick Lindsay driving the Napier Railton car, painted in 1967

Alan Crisp is a professional artist and illustrator who completed some excellent motoring paintings, particularly well known for his Bugatti art. He is probably best known for his mural paintings but also painted maritime, portraits and architectural street scenes of towns like Brighton.



Bugatti Type 59 in 1967 paddock scene with Neil Corner (black sweater) talking to Dick Crosthwaite and Sir Ralph Millais (partially hidden); lying in the car is John Gardner.

Alan Crisp was born at Dulwich Village, South London in 1924 and was a sickly child spending quite a lot of time in hospitals. It was partially for his health reasons that the family moved to Brighton in 1929. Alan attended local schools before moving to the Brighton College of Art at the age of 15. He was always keen on art and his mother used to say that "He was drawing before he could walk". This is despite there being no artists in the family.

The second war intervened and Alan joined up with the forces becoming a Trainee Surveyor with the Royal Artillery. His artistic skills could have proved useful as the Surveyors often worked in forward positions plotting and doing sketches of the enemy's positions. He did not see active service overseas and was de-mobbed at the end of the war and did not get transferred to the Far-East front. On leaving the Army he was given

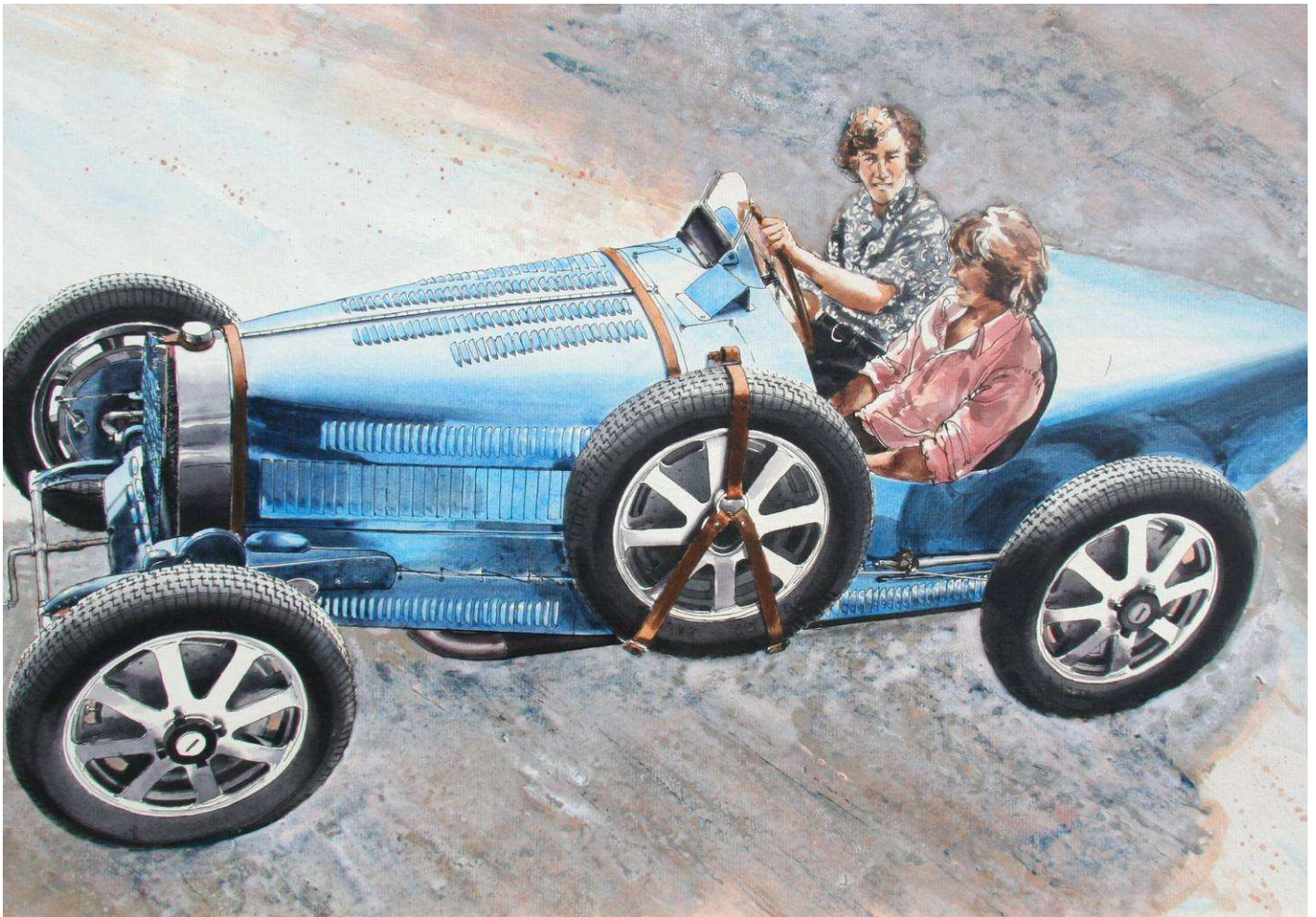


Vintage racing scene with early FIAT



Dick Crosthwaite with Bugatti T59 engine detail

a grant for further training. This was initially invested at the Slade School of Fine Art but he was very disappointed with the teaching. He moved on for a couple of years to a smaller private school in Kennington Road, South London. He also went to the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London where he studied drawing costume models. His first job utilised



Bugatti Type 35 with Dick Crosthwaite and John Gardner

these skills when he obtained a contract with one of the top London advertising agencies – Coleman, Prentice and Varley (CPV). CPV had several major clients including Shell, BEA/BOAC and the Conservative Party. Crisp worked principally on the D H Evans store account producing fashion sketches for newspaper articles and advertisements. He recalls that in 1951 he was paid 15 guineas per sketch which was good money for the time.

In the early 1950's the London smogs were very bad, so in 1953 for his health he moved back to live with his parents in Brighton. He continued working at CPV as it was easy to commute by rail when needed in London. He also went and worked in Canada with an intention of working in the USA but this was never realised as he met his wife Jean (from Liverpool) out there.

Besides the work for CPV Alan started building up other clients and the Kaye Brothers were very important. The Kaye Brothers owned a large number of restaurants in London and the Midlands. These consisted of breakfast bars, American themed and early burger bars, besides the more traditional restaurants. Alan provided murals and the American



Straker Squire car at Prescott 1969

Civil War scenes were extremely popular. These were often at a large scale up to 120 feet in length and were mainly on panels but the work did involve visiting the sites in cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester.

The Brighton Speed Trials held since 1905 on the promenade can be blamed for Alan's interest in old cars. Alan despite his father's opposition purchased a series of old cars including Bugatti, Bentley and Roll-Royce. Alan had several Bugattis including a Type 35B sports racing car. The old cars led him in the early 1960's to the door of the fledgling firm of Crosthwaite and Gardner (C&G). C&G were specialist in the repair, maintenance and restoration of classic cars, and so developed a very productive partnership. Alan painted car portraits which would be presented to clients on completion of restoration in exchange for C&G maintaining his cars. As C&G were the principal restorers of Bugatti cars it is not surprising that this marque dominates his art. This C&G art normally shows the car in a static situation in a pit or paddock often with the owner seated or alongside the car. Alan's driver's portrait and figure work is extremely strong and the personalities are easily recognisable. He likes to think of his work as 'car and driver'



Hugh Conway with Type 43 Bugatti in foreground and Type 35 behind

portraits. Besides the principal features the backgrounds are often very 'busy' with detail and figures. The motoring paintings are always in watercolour despite Alan being a very competent and productive oil painter. Asked why, he said the medium suited the old cars and he saw no reason to change. In most cases the watercolour is executed over a very fine pen and ink drawing, this shows great detail down to nuts and bolts, even the fine piano wires of the Bugatti wheel. However, he did occasionally work with the watercolour onto board with the minimum of drawing, this leads to looser work, better suited to vehicles in motion. However, whatever the style the colours used are bright and fresh producing a very distinctive work, which combined with the detail is instantly recognisable as an Alan Crisp painting. Asked if he felt any influence of other motoring artists Alan said he admired the art of Gordon

Crosby. Alan Crisp often lined and coloured up his own card mounts for his art, the colour would be a single body colour of one of the main colours from the painting. The works are normally signed 'Alan Crisp' in a forward sloping script but there are quite a lot of works that were not signed plus some of the early non-motoring art is just initialled 'A C'. The sizes of the watercolours are often around the 18 by 12 inches but he used a variety of size of papers. These were often pasted onto a grey board backing before watercolouring.

Asked if he did any motoring work for clients other than C&G he said there were a few who approached him directly. One of the more interesting ones was Ralph Lauren who purchased several works, after (it is said) specially flying over from the USA to come to Brighton. He also remembers some motor illustrations for Girl and She comic magazines in the early 1950's.

Alan Crisp's motoring art petered out in the late 1980's with his own movement away from vintage cars to more practical forms of transport.