

# WHAT HAPPENED BEHIND THE BICYCLE SHEDS IN 1971!



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The phone rings: *"Hello, are you John Starkey? Good. I'm told you are the expert on Lola T70s/Porsche RSRs/935s/Group C/GTP cars"* (delete whichever is non-applicable). Me: *"Er... I don't think I am the expert, no."* Caller: *"But you've written books and constructed ownership databases on these cars."* Me: *"Yes, but in a great many cases, I don't know what happened behind the bicycle sheds in 1971/76/81/88"* (delete whichever is non-applicable).

Whilst all of us historians pick up the histories of the cars that we are interested in at some point in their ownership histories, what we usually have to do is work backwards: That is, find out who owned the car last and what happened to it in their ownership; who owned it before that; until you frequently reach a point where, say in the 1980s, the then owner tells you that he can't remember where and who he bought it from. Now we're stuck. How to find out more? Race mechanics, I have found, are an invaluable source here. *IF* you can find who they were and then contact them, they usually remember important things, such as chassis numbers and sometimes give you important snippets on what happened to other cars in the series that they ran in, although I well remember one such mechanic, when I asked him about what happened to a Lola T70 that he had worked on in 1967, said: *"Can you remember what you were doing in 1967?"* I had to admit that all that I could remember about 1967 was what job I had at the time!

I also remember an amusing case of another T70 that was crashed in the early 1970s. The then mechanic who worked on the car told me that he had transported the wrecked car back to the owner's garage and removed the savable items such as the engine and gearbox. When I asked him what happened to the rest of the car, chassis, suspension, bodywork, etc., he told me that he had left them in an adjacent lock up garage that the owner also owned and that when he'd come to work the next day: *"Someone had broken into that garage and stolen the wrecked parts.... and the owner didn't seem to be the slightest bit surprised when I phoned him to report it...."* Insurance scam perhaps? Strange that there are now multiple T70s bearing that chassis number... but I digress.

When race cars are new, they often crop up in race reports, together with photos but, back in the sixties and seventies, once the cars were non-competitive, they dropped out of sight and usually didn't reappear until they were eligible for vintage/historic racing, which didn't get into it's stride until the late 1960s/early 1970s, when the cars had to be minimum twenty-five years old, so it wasn't until the late 1980s/early 1990s that cars such as Lola T70s began to become valuable. Like all appreciating assets, owners wanted to know the provenance of what they had bought. This led to some nice surprises for some, *"You own a Daytona winner!"*, to nasty surprises for others, along the lines of... *"That car was destroyed in 1969. You own something that was re-created five years ago"*.

And then there's Porsche RSRs and 934/935s.... Based upon "ordinary" 911 body shells, they have become so duplicated, it's wearying to find yet another one virtually (at one time) once a week. One very well known European entrant of several cars in the 1970s and 1980s kept the Wagenpasses (German logbook) of the cars that passed through his team's hands. He sold several cars to America over the years and, in later years, built up copies of them, complete with original chassis number, and Wagenpasses and sold them in Europe. The advent of the Internet meant that a lot of these copies have now been identified....

So it's the one to two years after the cars stopped being used in frontline competition where history finding can be difficult. For example, take the Porsche RS 3.0s that were rallied in Europe in the early to mid 1970s. There were probably twenty of them and they led very hard lives indeed, being used for a rally one weekend, a race the next and a hill climb the week after, then repeated, again and again... Obviously, this led to, at best, some very used and battered cars and, in some cases, complete write-offs. Amazingly, all these cars appear to have survived, most of them now in concours condition. Hmm....

Just last week, a Frenchman contacted me to tell me that he had bought one RSR, "in pieces" and started to put it back together before realizing that the task was beyond his skill set. So, as he had an RS 3.0 that lacked a nose, due to an accident, he combined parts of both to make one car and threw the rest of the "left overs", away. Today, both cars are in existence.

It's an interesting World!