

Newsletter 2-2026



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UHS publishing

Uniquehandbuilt.com	Uniquehandbuilt.com is our new domain pointing towards the homepage for The International Festival for UNIQUE HANDBUILT SPORTS CARS
UHS	UHS is the official name of our events and an abbreviation of Unique Handbuilt Sports Cars.
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Text in this edition	Anton Schulz, John Mellberg



UNIQUEHANDBUILT.com - from article "A Valkyrie sends the warrior to Valhal"

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UHS-2026 is not feasible

By Anton Schulz

We have now passed March 1st, and I regrettably must note that, among the more than 100 invited, only 7 have given binding commitments to participate in UHS-2026.

This is too few, and we unfortunately must conclude that the event cannot be held.

We have, of course, tried to understand why the event cannot go ahead.

Two main reasons...

Two main obstacles seem to prevent most people from participating:

First, many face a very long journey and thus a significant time commitment, meaning they would need to set aside 5–6 days in their calendar to attend. For many, this is simply too much time to invest. Second, several have expressed difficulties in securing a vehicle capable of transporting a car project. This means either an auto transporter or a car trailer, and using a trailer also raises issues with total weight, as many people's driver's licenses do not permit them to drive vehicles with such a high total weight.

There will be no further attempts from my side to organize an on-site event with car projects. However, I will continue to expand the network and write articles about the many incredibly exciting car projects.

Name change

If others are interested in attempting to organise a similar event, I am happy to offer my network, and the brand can also be "borrowed."

I believe an event located more centrally in Europe would have a better chance of success. Please feel free to contact me if you have the interest and energy to organize such an event.

As a consequence of not having a physical event with car projects on site, I now change the organisation name to UNIQUEHAND-BUILT.com, and thus also the facebook group and site will change name into uniquehancbuilt.com.

So what now?

In June, I am going to Le Mans, and I plan to combine that trip with visits to even more enthusiasts across Europe. If you have any tips about projects I should write about, you are welcome to contact me.



The International Club-UHS



UNIQUEHANDBUILT.com -Pascal Collard and his Valkyrie

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This newsletter is accompanied by the announced article about Pascal Collard's interesting and beautiful Fiberfab Valkyrie project. Thank you to Pascal for his hospitality and the time he took to meet with me for this article.

Next Issue of the UNIQUE-HANDBUILT.com newsletter

The next issue of the newsletter from UNIQUEHANDBUILT.com (Newsletter 3-2026) will cover a relaunch of our website and will be accompanied by an article about JEM Design, which creates fantastic redesigns from standard cars. Stay tuned. Eric van Hamme features JEM Design in this article.

About JEM Design

The two brothers Eric Van Hamme and Jonas Van Hamme is respectively running the companies JEM Design and JEM Car Care.

I discovered Erik Van Hamme through a facebook group, and I was absolutely blown away by his creations,

On that basis, I reached out to Eric Van Hamme to see if it might be possible to arrange an interview with him on one of the days I had planned a research trip to the Netherlands and Belgium.

Fortunately, Eric was accommodating, and I actually visited him the day before my visit to Pascal Collard, whose article follows this newsletter.

So, look forward to the next issue, where Eric Van Hamme's JEM Design will be featured.



An example of JEM Design creations

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An Interesting Acquaintance

In my efforts to find fascinating individuals who could contribute either technically or historically to the theme of “unique hand-built sports and racing cars,” I recently came across the designer Richard Oakes. It was actually his creation, known as the “Nova” in England ,the “Sterling” in America and “Eagle” in Aistralia.

Richard Oakes and his designs were featured in an article written by John Mellberg, who runs the internet blog “Rare Component Cars” (link and mention at the end of the article).

I have been granted permission to republish John Mellberg’s interesting article, so here it is in its full length:

Richard Oakes – Designing UK Sports Cars Since The 1970s

John Mellberg stories are based on a rich understanding of hand-built cars which goes back to the late 1990s when he started one of the earliest websites dedicated to celebrating these cars:

Richard Oakes

By John Mellberg - Rare Component Cars

While not well known outside of the UK Kit Car scene, Richard Oakes has always been an inspirational figure to me. His path into the world of car design was unconventional, something personally relatable to me having taken an unusual route in my own career. Plus, having a passionate interest and some family pedigree when it comes to car design, his journey and work have always been fascinating and I’ve seen what it takes firsthand. His diverse portfolio includes some of the most iconic specialty cars ever created. So, what follows here is a look at the man’s story and his work.

Richard was the son of a graphic designer who was best known for logo design on brands like “Rolo” and “Quality Street”. He grew up in Yorkshire (Great Britain) and started his working life as a sign writer, but he quickly tired of that. Having a keen interest in car design and wanting to get involved in the industry, he sent speculative letters out to various auto makers like Lotus and Marcos offering his services.

1970 Davrian Sports Car

While none took him up on it, he did manage to find employment as a pattern maker among the development staff at Adrian Evan’s new firm Davrian. However, they did not see eye to eye. Oakes said of the late Evans that he was a great talent but lacked in presentation skills. By sheer luck, one day in 1969, he was sent down to Brixham in Devon to repair a crashed Davrian at the company’s laminators, Western Laminates, and ended up taking a job with them and moving

to the West Country.

Western Laminates “Tramp”



It was at Western Laminates that he had the opportunity to design his first specialty car called the “Tramp”. It was a Volkswagen Beetle based dune buggy, which went to production in 1970. More than 70 examples were sold but, despite its success, the company folded in 1971. However, Oakes was already envisioning his next project and it would be the stuff of legend.

Oakes teamed up with his friend Phil Sayers in South London and set about creating what would ultimately be one of the most famous specialty cars of all time. This car would combine the appeal of a dune buggy’s layout and construction with the styling of an exotic sports car. Taking cues from cars like the Adams Probe 15, Ford GT-40, and Lamborghini Miura, Oakes penned a low and curvaceous sports car with a one piece canopy for entry and egress.

Nova - Sterling - Eagle Dear child, many names



In Great Britain This Was called the “Nova” while in the USA It Was Called the “Sterling”

Called the “Nova”, it was unveiled to the motoring press in the fall of 1971. The car was based on the VW Beetle and was offered for sale as a kit. The reaction in the press was electric and it was called by some “The prettiest car in the world”. The Nova would ultimately be produced by the hundreds under license in numerous countries, including the US where it is known as the “Sterling”.

Though initially a great success, sales of the Nova slowed in the early 70’s and by ’73 the oil crisis had all but killed the concern. Sayers left the company and Oakes sold off the property, turning to freelance

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design of trailers and even taking a job making molds for concrete "Garden Gnomes", of all things! As a result, his planned replacement for the Nova, due in 1974, did not see the light of day.

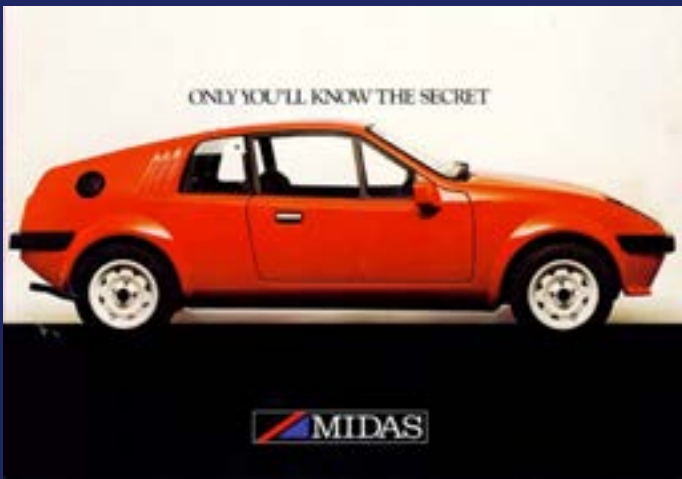
Here's The Second Generation "Nova" That Was Planned But Did Not Come About



Still, his ambition to be a car designer did not wane and he was able to secure a spot in the Royal College of Art's Automotive Design Course, with sponsorship from Rover in his first year and Ford in his second.

This culminated in employment at Ford UK as a designer in their Essex studio. As he tells it, most of that time was spent designing headlights for Ford Escorts. He did contribute to the design of the new (at the time) Sierra though. This did lend credibility to his raw talents however.

Original Midas Prototype



His study at RCA also connected him with Harold Dermott, who was looking to create a successor to his line of Mini Marcos cars. This meeting inspired Oakes' Degree Project, called the "Midas". It was the first full scale model course entry the department ever had.

It was also the beginning of a longstanding relationship with Dermott as a client and the creation of a very successful make of kit car. The car won Oakes a good deal of critical acclaim, even getting the attention of the famed racecar and McLaren F-1 designer, Gordon Murray.

Midas Gold Convertible



Midas Gold Coupe



In 1979, having finished his coursework at RCA and leaving his job at Ford, Richard Oakes struck out on his own. With his credibility established, he became the UK's go-to designer for specialty cars. He also did freelance work for JCB tractors, and SAAB. His ensuing work in the kit car industry included such notables as the Dutton Sierra SUV, the GTM Rossa sportscar, Pimlico Domino Mini conversion, and unusual projects like the Jephcott "leaning" 3-wheeler.

Dutton Sierra SUV



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By the late 80's, he disbanded his design firm in Kensington and moved to Cornwall, setting up his home and workshop near the "Cliffs of the Lizard" peninsula. London had lost its luster and Oakes wanted to focus on his family. The majority of his clients went with him. "If they'll visit Turin, why not Cornwall?"; Oakes muses humorously.

In 1987 he designed the Deltyn Pegasus for The Parradine Motor Company. The Pegasus was inspired by the classic AC Cobra but intended as a modern take on the theme. A muscular Grand Tourer, it is probably the largest car Oakes has ever designed.

Parradine Deltyn Pegasus



Richard's long association with Paddy Fitch and Peter Beck at GTM Cars, which began with the Mini based GTM Rossa (launched on the market in 1986), continued with Mk2 Rossa in 1989. Their next collaboration was the GTM K3 Rossa, a completely new design using Rover Metro components and the K series engine, first produced in 1993.

GTM Rossa K3



In 1990 Peter Beck and Paddy Fitch had purchased designs and mold's of the Midas Cars from Pastiche Cars, and resumed production of a revised Gold convertible. They also envisioned a new Midas Coupe, using the K series Metro as the donor vehicle, and decided to sell off the Midas Bronze and Gold molds to help finance this aim. So again, with Richard's assistance, a new design, the Mi-

das Coupe 2+2 was developed in 1995.

Work also began on the final collaboration between Beck, Fitch, and Oakes in 1995. This was to be a replacement for GTM's Rossa line which would take their fiberglass monocoque concept to its most advanced iteration. It was called the "Libra" and made its debut in 1998. Rather than relying on donor components, the chassis and suspension bits were all bespoke for the most part.

GTM Libra

Initially launched with the 1.4 liter Rover 'K'-Series engine, the Libra was also fitted successfully with 1.6, 1.8, 1.8 VVC and KV6 2.5 liter Rover engines as well as some Honda units and the Audi 1.8 turbo engine. A roadster version called the "Spyder" was introduced in 2002. It was easily their finest product yet and compared favorably to any "production" cars in their segment. It exemplified Oakes philosophy of simplicity and subtlety in its design.



In 1996, Oakes decided to do his own car and sell it under the banner of "Blackjack Cars". His first product, the Avion, was based on a Citroën powertrain and front suspension, fitted to a structural polyester body molding and subframes. Front suspension had vertically mounted dampers and a bespoke anti-roll bar. Rear suspension had a special swinging arm with spring and damper unit. The wheels were 16 polished stainless steel wires, with aluminum hubs.

Blackjack Avion



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The Avion also featured an air deflector / windscreen with optional all weather gear on offer. In 2001 Oakes designed an all new three wheeler, the "Zero". This time the donor engine and gearbox came from the classic VW Beetle Type 1, the chassis, body moldings and suspension are all produced by Blackjack cars. There was also another version in the range powered by a Moto Guzzi V twin motorcycle engine. Nearly 70 Avions were produced and another 20, or so, Zeros. However, Richard decided to retire in 2013 and closed Blackjack Cars.

Blackjack Avion Zero



Now one might think the story ends here, but it doesn't.

In late 2019, a new car was unveiled in Dundee, Scotland called the "ADO Coupe". Car enthusiast Douglas Anderson enlisted Richard Oakes and engine specialist Clark Dawson in this new project which revived and re-imagined a replacement for the iconic MG Midget. The concept had originally been proposed in 1964 at BMC but was never produced. This new model retains the character of the proposal but modernizes it with contemporary creature comforts and MG Power.

ADO Coupe



Oakes once opined, "[Some modern cars]... are almost too perfect. Where is the flaw, like the mole on Marilyn Monroe's cheek, which makes it beautiful? ...Design shouldn't go in one direction, it needs to have an element of eccentricity, character, or individuality, even if that means parts of it are obviously wrong".

That's something I couldn't have said better myself.

Sources:

World Sportscars Magazine, Spring 1989 issue by Chris Rees. (from my library)

<http://www.lightauto.com/Richard%20Oakes%20Story.html> (A nice write-up of Oakes career)

<http://www.execpc.com/~pctths/page15.html> (From my original RCC website, not active)

<http://www.blackjackzero.com/mainindex.htm> (About the Blackjack cars)

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/dundee/1042716/new-car-to-be-built-in-dundee-unveiled/> (Latest project)

Postscript - Thank you John Mellberg and Richard Oakes

by Anton Schulz



John Mellberg

First, I would like to once again thank the author of this article about Richard Oakes, John Mellberg, who runs the online blog "Rare Component Cars" both as an independent blog and as a presence on Facebook.

Direct link to the original article:

<https://www.undiscoveredclassics.com/authors/richard-oakes-designing-uk-sports-cars-since-the-1970s/>

Thank you for granting me the right to bring the article. It has been a huge job for you to gather and compile all this valuable information about the remarkable designer Richard Oakes and all his wonderful creations.

John Mellberg about himself:

"I have been a lifelong Car fanatic, artist, writer, musician, and amateur Kit Car Historian. I was among the first to use the internet to promote handcrafted cars, having started in 1997. My website and postings were branded "Rare Component Cars" and the sites were available until roughly 2005. The demands of a new career meant it was sidelined. Now, more than 20 years on from when it began I have revived the project"

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from his own workshop, including the following remarks:

"I have attached some pictures of my Blackjack Avion and Blackjack Zero for your interest, and pictures of my 1924 Citroën Cloverleaf which I am currently working on. You are very welcome to visit me and have a closer look at my cars, if you are interested. I am planning to offer them for sale soon, in a down-sizing operation."

Such a message is hard not to react to, so perhaps I will take a trip to see him. For some, his last remark about downsizing will be of interest with a view to purchasing.

On this basis, I would also like to send a direct and warm thank you to Richard Oakes for the immediate warmth and openness with which I was met during my first contact with him.

Thank you, Richard!

Next, I must share with you this:

After reading John Mellberg's article, I wondered whether Richard Oakes was still with us, and if so, whether he might be interested in participating as a guest lecturer at UHS-2026.

It was really difficult to find information online about Richard Oakes' recent activities, so I simply decided to contact Keith Helfet to clarify whether Richard Oakes was still alive. Keith confirmed that he was, and in fact, he had been in contact with Oakes not so long ago.

Keith was kind enough to send me Richard Oakes' contact information, and I managed to reach him by phone. Richard Oakes was extremely welcoming and commented positively on my activities, both regarding my own car project and the idea of bringing together like-minded people at an on-site event.

He would not be able to attend the event in person, but I am convinced that we could have had him join live on a big screen.

After our phone conversation, Oakes also sent me some pictures

UNIQUEHANDBUILT the magazine

I am now compiling my articles into a magazine, to be published 1-2 times a year. The magazine will be titled "UNIQUEHANDBUILT.com the Magazine."

I am currently exploring whether the magazine should be available both as a printed publication and/or an online magazine.

I will invite external authors to contribute to the magazine, so if, for example, you are documenting your own project in article form, I would be very interested in featuring it in the magazine.

If you would like to contribute to the magazine's publication through advertising, there will also be opportunities for that.

Much more about the magazine, club, and website in Newsletter 2-2026.



UNIQUEHANDBUILT.COM
- The Magazine



Contact:
Anton Schulz
AScon Business Services
Nørregade 20, 6240 Løgumkloster
Mobil: +45 29 99 37 89
Mail: schulz@asconbs.com
Web: www.uniquehandbuilt.com