



# Meek and wild

Known for its small, nimble racers, Ginetta caused a shock when its muscular new V8 won first time out. We reunite that car with its driver Chris Meek to feel the noise

BY IVAN OSTROFF

**L**aunched at the 1965 Racing Car Show, Ginetta's G10 not only looked good but, fitted with a Mustang 289cu V8, promised serious performance. The hope was that the car would attract road-racing competitors in the United States. The G10 was well received by press and public alike, even before Chris Meek, Ginetta's works driver, scored a debut win in the prototype at Brands Hatch.

Though it had been snowing earlier, the weather was fine and sunny for the Redex Trophy for GT Cars in November 1965. Meek started from pole in the G10 and, after a race-long fight, won from Robbie Gordon in the now-famous ex-Dick Protheroe low-drag competition E-type. After Meek pulled away from Sayer's masterpiece at the start, Gordon passed him, and the two then lapped nose to tail with Gordon keeping the door firmly shut at

each corner. Chris finally managed to out-drive the Jaguar at Paddock Hill Bend after five laps and led to the finish. The Ginetta comfortably beat what was categorically *the* GT racing car of that time, with a race average of 73.12mph.

However, because Ginetta was unable to get the G10 homologated for the appropriate American series, it was forced to race them against Lolas and McLarens, Group 6 prototypes of far higher performance. So cars initially ordered by Americans were cancelled, and only three G10s were made.

But the G10 was a pretty car and people clearly liked it, so the Walklett Brothers, owners of Ginetta Cars, dropped an MGB 1800 lump into it, fitted modified MGB rear suspension, relabelled the car as G11 and sold it in the UK. Even then production was problematic due to poor delivery from MG and eventually G10/G11 production stopped, making these fine cars very rare today. >>>



I have driven a G10 a couple times in the past, so when Jonathan Brewin of Gelscoe Motorsport told me they had completed the restoration of that ex-Chris Meek works car for Joe Bamford and fitted it with a 450bhp GT40 engine, and that I could try it at Mallory Park, I made two telephone calls. The first was to Ivor Walklett to get his memories of this iconic racer and the second was to Meek inviting him to come to Mallory and get back in 'his' car.

Ivor remembered the machine well. "Lord Snowdon visited our stand at the Racing Car Show accompanied by Alec Issigonis and John Cooper, and they all expressed considerable interest in the G10."

Did they do much testing before the race at Brands Hatch?

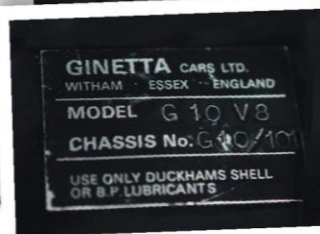
"Obviously its race potential was important to us," Walklett says, "but as with all Ginettas in those days early development was carried out on the then newly-built Witham bypass [near Ginetta's Essex base] and latterly at Brands Hatch. The race car was not drastically different from the road car, but we fitted a variant of our 13x7in magnesium F3 wheels, shod with F1 race tyres. The engine was the 4.7-litre 271hp Ford Mustang imported from the USA. We uprated it to 350hp with the Ford kit from Ford Advanced Vehicles in Slough, where the GT40s were built, with four twin-choke downdraught Webers, a decent manifold, hotter camshafts and stronger conrod bolts.

"Weighing around 900kg, it should have been very quick, but we were slightly disappointed with the performance during our first run. In our eagerness to finish the car, we ran it with the carburettor trumpets protruding through the bonnet and at speed the front body shape created a low pressure area, which caused the atomised fuel to be drawn from the carbs to a height of two inches or so, thus starving the engine of fuel and air. After closing the bonnet aperture, performance was restored and we easily

topped 150mph on the Witham bypass. After testing at Brands we lowered the axle ratio, which helped acceleration and braking, so come race day we were fairly confident of a good result."

**W**hen Meek joined me at Mallory and clocked the rugged good looks of the red and black Ginetta, which he last drove 40 years ago, it triggered memories of those exciting days.

"In 1965 I was beating all the major factory marques including Porsche, Jaguar, Ferrari and Cobra in the Ginetta G4. Walker Day imported two TZ Alfas, prepared for racing, with the aim of winning the Sports Car Championship in England, but our little G4 blew them into the weeds, so they withdrew the Alfas in disgust. The press gave those talented Walklett boys a hard time about the G4 being a special or a lightweight kit car. Eventually the Walkletts said 'enough is enough' and set about building a V8-powered car. They didn't complain about those.



Chris Meek (above) got reacquainted with the G10 at Mallory Park. Right: fending off Robbie Gordon's E-type for a debut win at Brands Hatch in '65

### GINETTA'S MUSCLE CAR |||

"As works driver I was aware of the G10 being built but never had the chance to sit in it before I raced the car at Brands. The factory told me that they didn't think it would be ready in time. Then the day before they called and said, 'Can you be at Brands Hatch tomorrow?' So I got myself down to Brands and the rest is history.

"When I raced it, it was simply unbeatable," adds Meek. "Considering it was thrown together and tested up and down the road, with little time for setting up, it was remarkable. Fine-tuned, this car would have beaten anything in its class. However, after its outright win Ginetta felt they had proved a point and reverted back to the G4 and G12. I only raced the G10 that once. Following that, the Walkletts asked me to meet them at Mallory and try their new mid-engined G12. I'd never sat in that car before either and won the sports car race outright, setting a new record; they then entered it into Formula Libre and it beat everything.

"I must have won something like 100 races for Ginetta; of course I also drove their F3 single-seater. The Walklett brothers created the G10 to prove to the press that Ginetta could build a real car as opposed to a kit car, while at the same time hoping to have success with it in America. Their problem was money; building this car used every penny they could muster."

Jonathan Brewin did a few warm-up laps, and then Chris climbed into the G10. After building up to some quick laps with the V8 symphony bellowing through its open exhausts, he guided the G10 back into the pits, smiling contentedly. Did it feel like the car he drove back then? >>>

### ||| GINETTA'S MUSCLE CAR

"Absolutely. But better. It's sharper, it's a beautiful car to drive. You can take most of this circuit flat in top, just lift for the bump. I missed a gear – I'd forgotten about the long throw of the gear lever – but it has incredible torque. Fantastic grip and handling. This is now a really refined car, and beautifully balanced. You need one change for the hairpin; driven quickly it will take that in third. Even though it's a relatively short wheelbase, it was not the least bit twitchy. Is that a Salisbury diff in it? Thought so. Of course for British circuits a short-wheelbase car is ideal."

After many years in light cars with low power, it must have meant a major change of approach to handle a car with so much more torque.

"The amazing thing was that because I didn't have to use the rev limit I found it easier to use the torque of a big engine even though I had no previous experience. Quite astonishing, really."

What about teething problems?

"Being straight out of the workshop, the brakes weren't quite as they should have been, whereas today they're superb. But that was OK. You get used to a car that doesn't brake too well; you compensate by changing down and using the overrun of the engine."

**T**his is an emotive reunion for Meek, as not only was he Ginetta's home-grown hero through the 1960s and '70s, but in 1982 he became the owner of the track we're standing at. In parallel with his Leeds property company, he nursed Mallory through some tricky years before leasing it on and then selling it to the BARC. He's fond of the place, the car and the people who built it.

"I've never felt enough credit was given to the Walkletts, who created their cars by hand but also from the heart. I'm full of admiration for the late Doug and Trevor Walklett, Ivor the talented designer and Bob who 'cooked the books'. And Dorothy and Sherry who literally hand-fed those boys, even as they worked. We'll never know what Ginetta would have achieved in the Walklett's hands had real money been available. It's wonderful to come back and see the car looking as nice as this. Gelscoe have done an amazing job on the rebuild."

Had the Walkletts' plans for its throaty new contender worked out, Ginetta might have become a by-word for muscular big-banger racers. But the company's real expertise lay with small, light and lithe machines, and as the G12 continued the G4's run of unlikely success, the prospects of new trans-Atlantic markets seemed not only further off but less and less important. The hunky G10 and its more practical G11 spin-off faded from view, leaving the memory of one scarlet and black rocketship taking one dramatic victory that would never be followed up. M

With thanks to Mallory Park Circuit and Gelscoe Motorsport.



Ginetta's race car fleet is steadily expanding

Jacob Ebrey

## INSIGHT RECOVERY DRIVE

Under Lawrence Tomlinson's leadership, Ginetta has found new purpose

Ginetta became well-known for its racers in the 1960s and '70s but struggled to maintain a solid commercial basis thereafter. The founding Walklett brothers finally relinquished control in 1989, after which a number of owners tried to make it a success in a difficult world, until finally current owner Lawrence Tomlinson took charge.

Tomlinson (right) may describe Ginetta as "a wrinkle on Ferrari's back", but what greets us at the factory on the outskirts of Leeds is far from that. Ginetta has grown up over the past few years, and is once again a well-respected race car manufacturer. It's not just the track action that consumes Tomlinson's time, though; he also has two road cars, the F400 and G40 R, in the pipeline.

"We're working on a new car every minute of the day," says the Ginetta chairman as we sit down in a lavish boardroom overlooking the factory. "Nowadays our philosophy is different. The G20 and G20 Juniors, which existed when I bought the company in 2005, are great to race, but the build quality was poor.

"The G50 (the company's G14 car, which has won the class in every British GT Championship since its 2008 launch) was the first car I designed. I came at it from the angle of, 'if I was a race team or customer, what would I want?' We started to make a G50 road car, but that was in '08 when the world came to a financial end. We only made a few and what was apparent was that we hadn't designed the race car well enough to convert it to a road car. The bodywork fit and finish was unsuitable, so we concentrated on that with the G40." This entry-level racer was launched in 2010 to replace the G20 Junior coupé.

In February Ginetta launched the G55 GT3, eligible for the one-make Supercup as well as other GT3 series worldwide. "We wanted to move up a class into GT3 and the timing was right," says

Tomlinson. "We needed a major step forward with the car, so we took what we'd done with the G40 in terms of bodywork fit and finish and the G50's racing pedigree and came up with the G55.

"We can't produce enough cars at the moment, whether it's a G40, G50 or G55. It's a great position to be in, but we're flat out." A race-ready G55 costs £75,000 compared to £310,000 for a McLaren MP4-12C, but Tomlinson says Ginetta's current success has little to do with

outpricing more expensive rivals. "It's a totally different market," he says. "We're bringing people into the sport, and our car will become more competitive as the upgrade packages arrive. Even though the GT3 programme is only six months old the company is already looking at GT2 and GT1."

Tomlinson says the 'different market' philosophy also applies to Ginetta's new F400 supercar – a carbon-chassis, 400bhp, 1050kg rocket. "We're only intending to produce 35-40 cars a year and they'll cost less than £100,000," he says. "We inherited the project when I bought the company and we've spent a year enhancing the car. We don't want to release it until we're happy."

The company is also launching a G40 road car, a track-day version of the G40 racer with an FIA-approved rollcage. Tomlinson wants people to drive to the circuit, race, and then drive home in the same car, "like everyone used to do with MGAs – although with the G40 R you'll be able to get your golf clubs in the back".

Even without the shelved LMP2 project – abandoned when Ginetta surprisingly missed out on an Intercontinental Le Mans Cup or Le Mans 24 Hours entry – the company has its hands full. GT4, GT3 and GT2 projects, plus possible GT1 plans, countless single-make series and two road cars... It's great to see Ginetta back to its best – and enriching the British car industry. Ed Foster

