

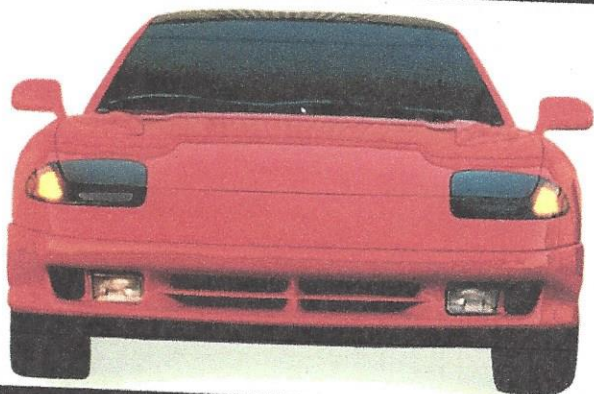
Lamborghini Diablo—Chrysler Takes a Hand

AUTOMOBILE

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Oceanside, California—

he world's bravest automotive writer, Denis Jenkinson (he was a world champion motorcycle sidecar rider before he became a journalist, and he rode in the 1955 Mille Miglia as winner Stirling Moss's navigator), once said that, although he thought Moss was the best driver in the civilized world, there

could well be a totally unknown lorry driver in Nigeria who had more sheer talent and ability than the brilliant young Englishman could muster but who, because of time and circumstance, would forever languish in obscurity. I suppose that is true in many fields of endeavor. But with cars so universal in the modern world, it's hard to imagine today that a brilliant young would-be car designer

could not find a way to make a place for himself.

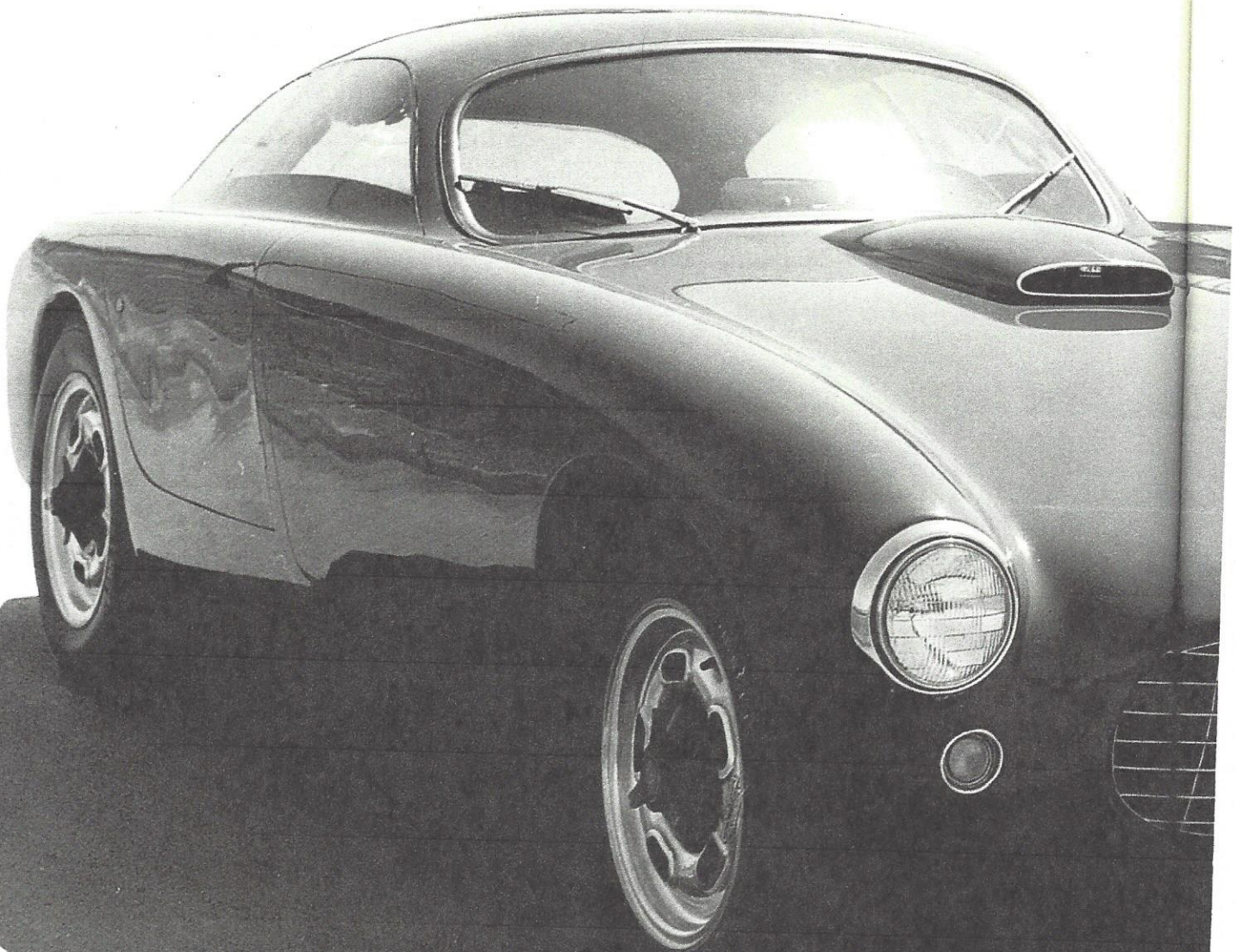
It has happened, though, and there is no better example than Richard Bosley, a quiet sixty-one-year-old nurseryman in Mentor, Ohio. When he finished high school back in 1946, a lot of elements that help today's design hopefuls simply didn't exist. There was no such thing as a guidance counselor in the Mentor

BY ROBERT CUMBERFORD

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF RICHARD BOSLEY COLLECTION

ONE WHO GOT AWAY

*Richard Bosley was
America's coachbuilder,
but no one knew it.*



school system, car magazines were scarce, and television did not bring to small-town people a wider view of the world than was provided by the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life* magazines. Bosley knew he would like to design things, cars in particular, but he didn't know how one went about becoming a professional designer and had never heard of the nearby Cleveland Institute of Art, where design training was available.

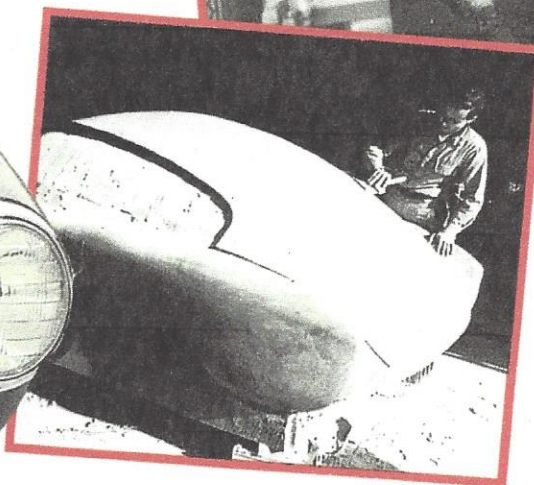
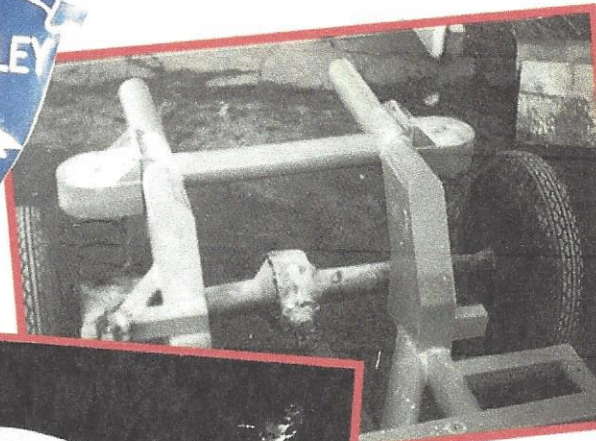
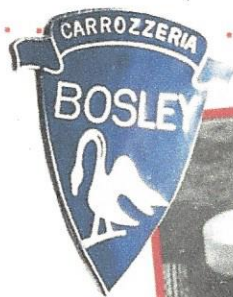
So Bosley—an accomplished model-airplane builder who loved the *look* of things, but who had no particular bent toward the slide-rule mentality required of engineers, who he supposed created cars—followed in his nurseryman father's footsteps and entered Ohio State University in its excellent horticulture

program. Sometime in the late Forties, he saw his first car magazine. It was one of the early numbers of *Road & Track*, then issued sporadically every time the owners could put together enough money to print another compendium of European car photos and race reports. Bosley was hooked. He had to have a GT car, and it had to be better than those he saw in the sepia-tone pages of that odd little publication.

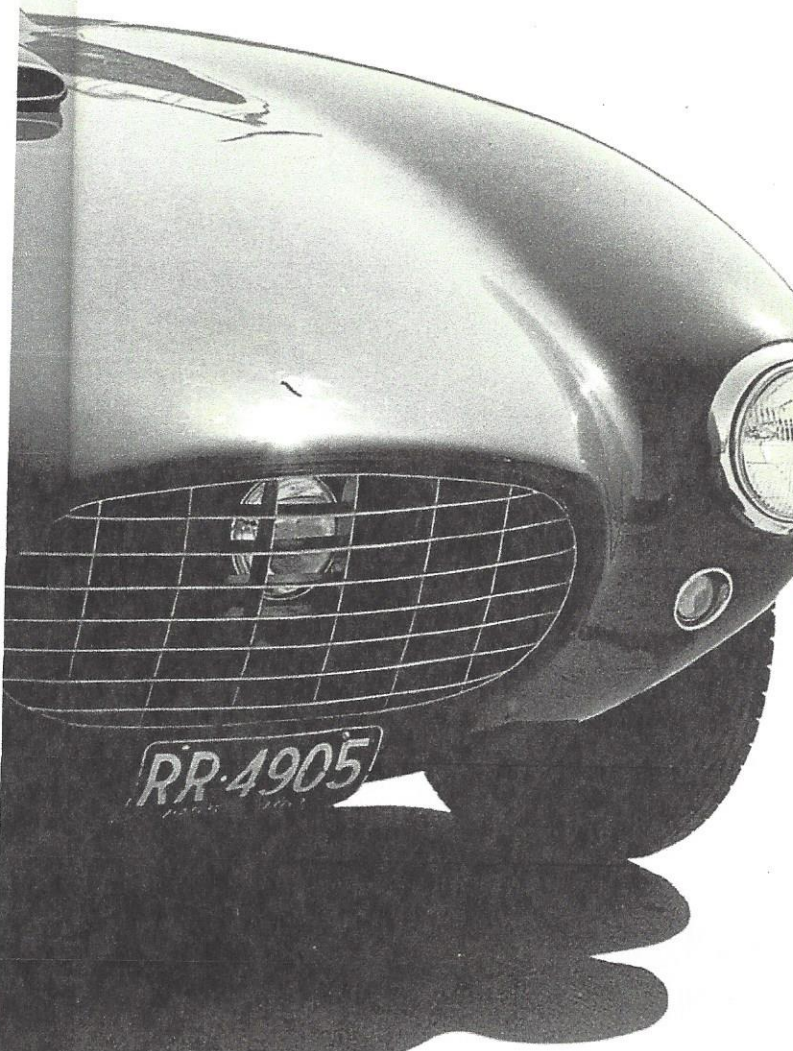
The way to accomplish that, he decided, was to make one himself. No matter that he knew nothing about it; he'd learn as he went along. From his reading, he knew that you could make a chassis out of tubes, so he did that, welding four-inch tube sections to a 1950 Ford front suspension cross-member. Chrysler made the most pow-

erful engine in America, the 331-cubic-inch Hemi that Briggs Cunningham had chosen for his Le Mans adventures. Bosley bought one and obtained a four-carburetor manifold from Cunningham to put on it. The transmission was a five-speed with overdrive fifth, as used on Ford light trucks; the rear axle came from a 1948 Mercury; but the suspension had a torque reaction link patterned after that of the C-type Jaguar. The new wonder material, fiberglass, seemed to be the perfect solution for the bodywork, so Bosley set out to learn how to use it.

It was a tremendous task, mind-boggling in its complexity, but he did it and did it well in only three years. The car cost him \$9000, more than twice as much as a Jaguar XK120, but that didn't



At left is the beautiful Bosley number one, easily mistaken as the work of an established Italian carrozzeria. At the top is a detail of Bosley's chassis, overbuilt perhaps, but strong and effective. Above, Richard Bosley builds up the fiberglass and resin layers over the male pattern.



RICHARD BOSLEY

matter. His car was twice as good-looking, a lot faster (160 mph!), and infinitely better adapted to American road conditions. Bosley liked to drive at night, so he fitted a 55-gallon fuel tank behind the seats so he could drive *all* night if need be. In those far-off days, gas stations might well have offered terrific service—clean your windshield and check the oil, water, and tires as a matter of course—but they didn't stay open twenty-four hours. He had the car on the road in late 1954. I was at Sebring in March 1957 and was staggered by the bright red Bosley parked behind the Chevrolet pits. Its finish compared favorably with those of the General Motors show cars I'd been working on, but it was a *real* car, not a static display that never had and never would run. Bosley had driven

from Ohio, as he did every year, to officiate at what was then America's only international race.

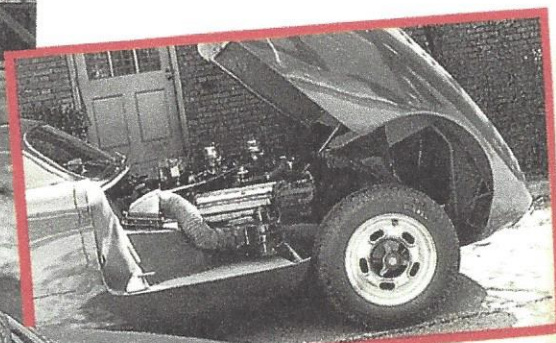
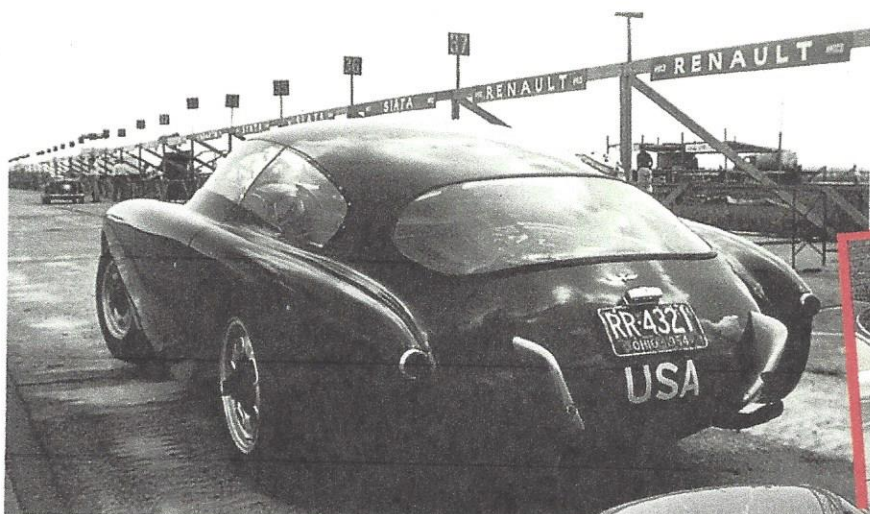
That event was a turning point for Bosley in a number of ways. His first car, the one I so admired, had been built over a male mold, and it was quite literally a one-off that could not be repeated. A lot of people had expressed interest in buying a replica body to fit to an existing chassis—that was a popular way to get a sports car at the time—and Bosley could not accommodate them. He was already thinking about making a second car, using female molds so bodies could be produced in small series, and at Sebring he saw a way to make it happen.

Chevrolet was present at Sebring in a big way that year. In addition to presenting a new American sports car challeng-

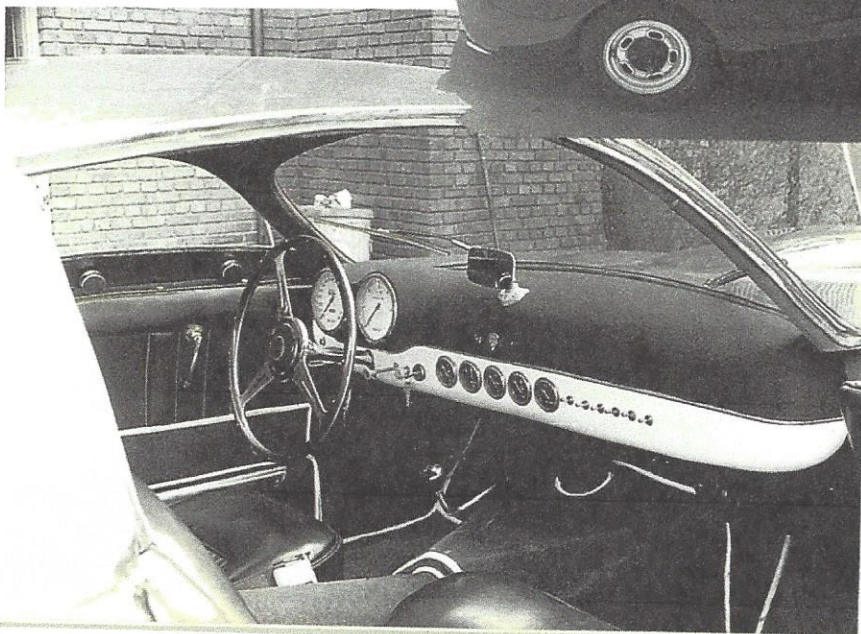
er, the exotic Corvette SS, in its first—and, as it happened, only—race, GM also ran a team of Corvette SRs, which were slightly modified '57 production cars. It was their wheels, the same five-hole, knock-off Halibrand Indy magnesium design that he had adapted to his Mark I, that seduced Bosley. They hadn't gone onto his original car without difficulty—Ted Halibrand had to be persuaded to sell them for road use, for one thing—but if he could obtain one of those SR chassis, he wouldn't have to struggle with the wheels. So a deal was struck with Dick Doane, an Illinois Chevrolet dealer who fronted for GM, and Bosley was given the scruffiest of the Sebring cars and some cash in exchange for the Mark I Bosley.

He figured that building the second

His first car had been built



Above, Bosley number one in the pits at Sebring, where the builder annually worked as an official. Below, the faces of the speedo and tach were both custom-made with the "Bosley" insignia.



The top photo displays the Chrysler Hemi with the Cunningham four-carburetor manifold, and the elegantly simple design of the heating system. Halibrand was originally unwilling to sell magnesium center-lock wheels for road use, but Bosley's determination prevailed. The roof-mounted fuel filler was necessitated by the car's low roof and the 55-gallon tank it covered.

car would be a lot easier than doing the first one. But he'd been a bachelor for that project, and he was a newly married man and a father when he set out to do the second car. Instead of being quicker, the job took nine years! Despite the pre-existing chassis, the second car was much more complicated than the first, and it simply took longer to handle all the details. The bumper and grille unit, for instance, was finally contracted out to Reutter Coachworks in West Germany (you know the company now as Recaro), which was then still building bodies for the Porsche 356. Bosley recalls with some chagrin that he asked Reutter's people what they would have charged him to do the whole job and not just make the front bumper and the seats. Their answer was "about

\$15,000," a sum Bosley had already spent at that point, with years to go before the car could be finished.

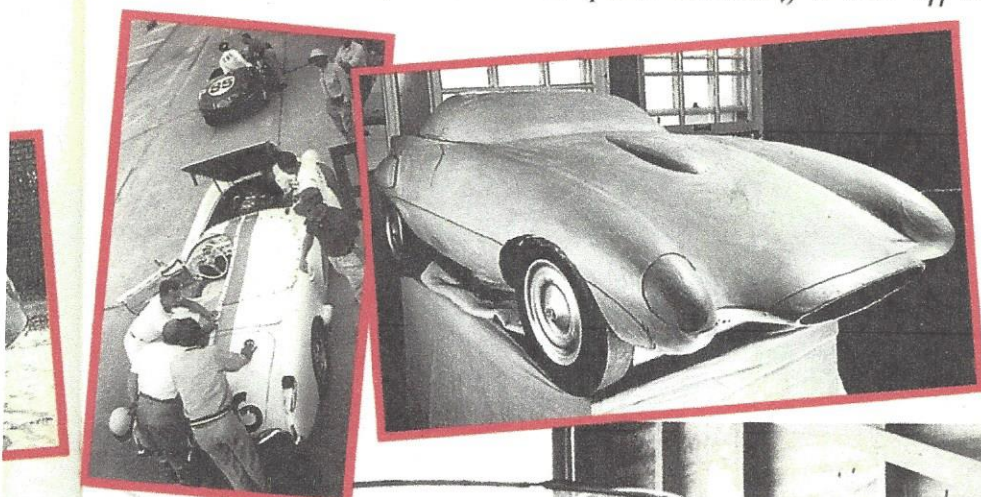
The Mark I was a brawny car—it weighed 3360 pounds. It looked a bit like a scaled-up Vignale Ferrari, with its simple egg-crate grillework and full curves, yet it was more sophisticated in detail than a typical Italian car of the time and far better finished. Bosley had flush glass on the sides—plexiglass, actually, as he had no way to form real glass—and the windows simply came out if you wanted them open. A sort of "cuff" came up out of the door to give the side transparency a striking arc shape in profile.

Bosley set the hood scoop for the carburetors up away from the skin to avoid stagnant air in the boundary layer. In the

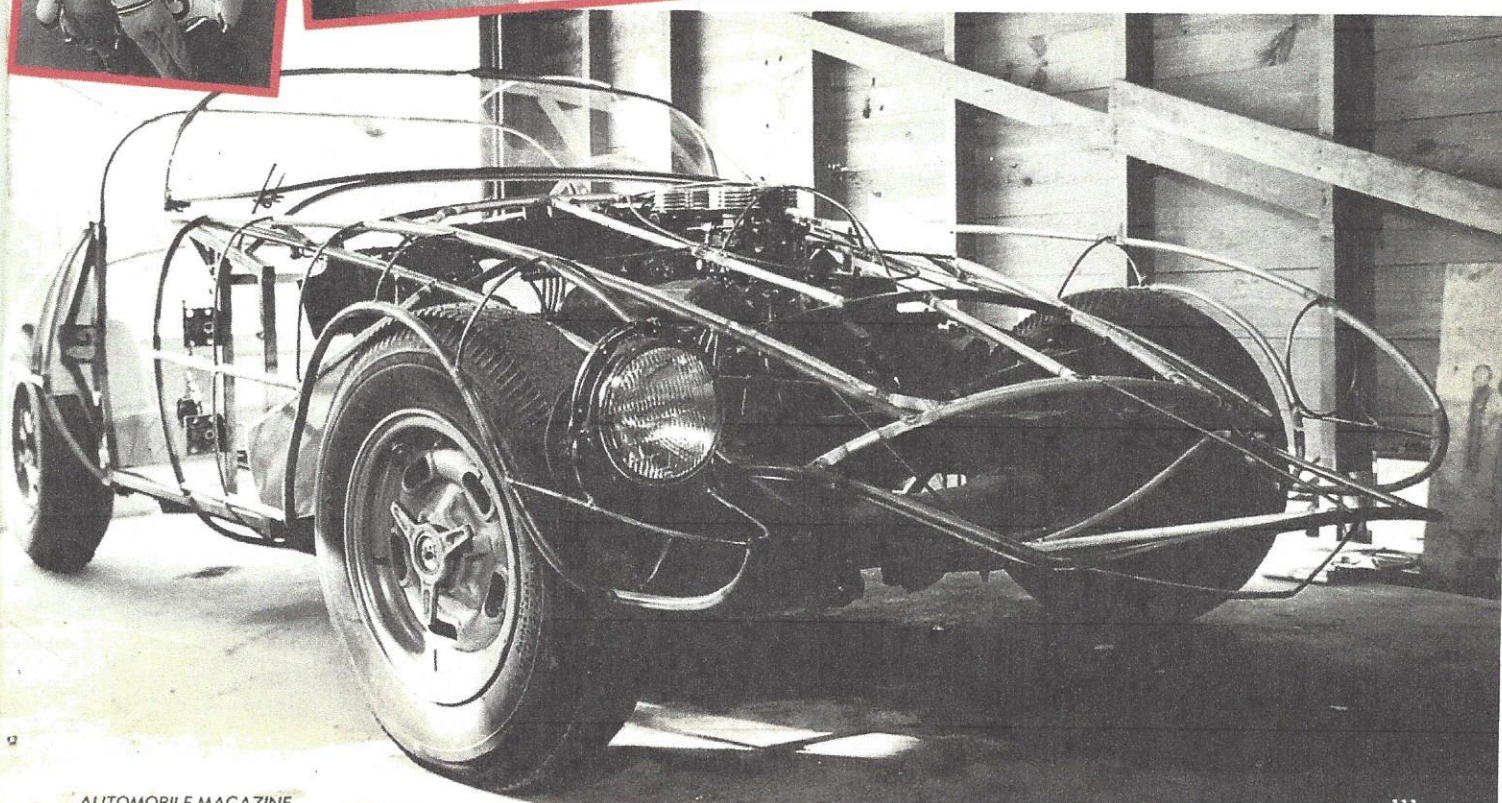
Italian manner, there were no bumpers at all in front and only summary diagonal push bars in back. The interior, too, owed something to Italian design, with two huge dials in front of the driver and a row of minor instruments across the bottom of the panel. With its racing fuel filler on the roof and the giant spare wheel lying on top of the huge fuel tank, it had all the touring practicality of an early-Fifties Ferrari—that is to say, almost none. You could squash in a couple of soft bags, but little else.

Bosley's second automobile, brilliantly named the Interstate in honor of the new highway system then starting to be constructed, would remedy all the shortcomings of his first car. By then he had learned about clay models, and he built one with a lot of advanced body

t over a male mold, and it was quite literally a one-off that could not be repeated.



Far left is an original Sebring Corvette, one of which gave up its chassis for Bosley number two. Once introduced to modeling clay, left, Bosley could preview and develop more complex shapes. Below, just like the big kids, Bosley built a tube-and-rod buck to finalize dimensions and clearances.



features that were beyond his capability of execution: a wraparound windshield and bubble top that prefigured racing sports cars that came ten years later; stability fins on the rear fenders; and intriguing clearance bumps for the rear tires on the sides of the body. In the end he took a more classic approach. Although Bosley had Sibona-Bisano in Italy build the side glass and the vent windows, the window line didn't follow the overall roof shape as well as his homemade windows on the first car did.

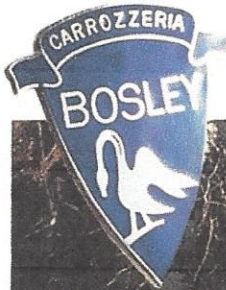
Looking at photos of the Interstate, one is struck by its plunging nose, which is much like those on cars of today. Bosley says a driver could see the ground three feet in front of the car. This, despite the need to cover a much bigger engine than the original Corvette

unit. Wanting the effortless torque he had enjoyed with the Chrysler, Bosley installed a 345-bhp Tri-Power Pontiac engine in the chassis. To cure some of the flex of the Corvette, he plated the bottoms of the frame rails as Detroit manufacturers used to do for their convertibles. With the thick fiberglass used for the body, the car was a lot stiffer than a Corvette.

Bosley had really thought out matters of safety and convenience for long-distance high-speed driving, and the Interstate had a lot of features that are still advanced. All-around visibility was exemplary for the time and good even now. A light bar above the rear window served to warn following cars when Bosley turned or slowed; the driving lights in front folded away to keep them

clean until they were needed; he used an untinted windshield so there would be no diminution of visibility at night; and the smoked plexiglass backlight kept down interior temperatures while ensuring that there would be no color distortion. The reclining passenger's seat had a headrest—common now, but rare indeed when the car was planned thirty-two years ago.

In every way, the two Bosley cars had the earmarks of production models coming from experienced factories, not one-offs from a small garage in back of a Midwestern nursery. If the first model looked as though it might have come from an Italian carrozzeria, the second had all the signs of being mass-produced. Bosley used an aircraft interiors specialist to execute the gold and burnt



If the first model looked as though it might have come from an Italian



orange trim in leather and wool, and the result was splendid.

Where are the cars now? Doane sold the Mark I back in the Fifties, and when Bosley last heard of it, it had done more than 100,000 miles and was on its third engine. The Mark II was his personal transport for many years, but it had to be sold in a divorce settlement, and it has been dismantled by a vintage-racing enthusiast who wanted to put a Corvette body back on the SR chassis so he could race at Monterey. To me, that's a bit like scraping off all the paint van Gogh put on a canvas because you've heard there's a third-rate nineteenth-century farmyard scene beneath all those wild sunflowers, but at least the Bosley body has been scrupulously preserved intact. Conceivably, that discarded shell with

its elegant lines and clever design solutions—Bosley had laminated glass-and-epoxy rear bumpers long before anyone else thought of chrome-plating plastic parts—may one day be acquired and resurrected as a work of automotive artistry. It deserves to be, for it is an American classic worth far more than all the '57 Corvette SRs put together.

Bosley hasn't built a third car, but he thinks about it all the time. In a note received recently, he writes: "Work on the one-quarter-scale 'Great American Dream' is going well . . . Other cars in my mind were a superwide Jeep to keep from turning over, the big car with the huge interior space due to low floor, etc., the stealth car, and some ideas for a limousine for developing countries." The hard part of designing and making

cars is the time it all takes. Bosley recounts a chance meeting with retired GM Design vice-president Harley Earl in a West Palm Beach gas station—he in the Interstate, Earl in the Oldsmobile F88 "dream car." Looking back on his long career, Earl told Bosley that if he had it to do all over again, he'd try to be a dress designer. "At least that way, you could think of something in the morning and see it by the afternoon."

That may be, but I think it's a real shame Richard Bosley wasn't able to give us more than two cars in his life. American writer John Greenleaf Whittier put it better than I ever could in his poem "Maud Muller":

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen, / The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

in carrozzeria, the second had all the signs of being mass-produced.



Different in concept from Bosley number one, the new car represented the maturing designer/builder/driver. The Interstate's purpose was fast cross-country travel in relative luxury. Even the dash was less "race car" and more mid-Sixties American GT. The original model's more flamboyant elements (plexiglass roof, fins, and rear fender scoops) are absent.



Yes, Richard Bosley is still at it, and he maintains his wry sense of humor. There is little time these days for building real cars from scratch, but the ideas continue to flow unabated. The latest Bosleys include the outrageous GAD (Great American Dream) 40D, which verges on an X rating with its leather belt and soft, flesh-textured surface. The stealth car uses air force technology in materials and surfaces, absorbing and scattering radar signals so that a speed gun has nothing to read.