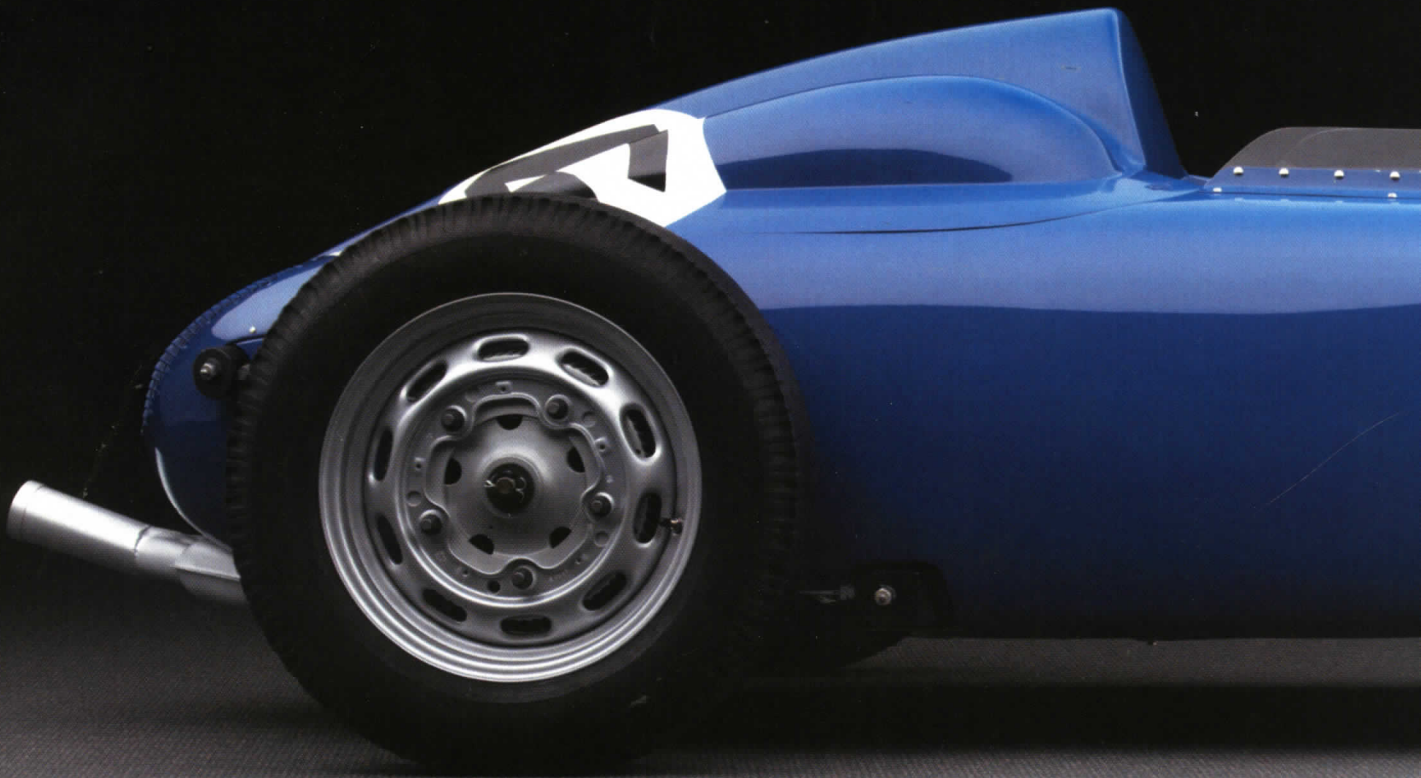


Words: Karl Ludvigsen    Photos: Porsche Archiv, Ludvigsen Partners and REVS Institute

# THE PORSCHE- BEHRA

For the burgeoning Formula Two category for 1.5-litre cars, French star driver Jean Behra based a new racing car of his own on Porsche components. In 1959 it showed its class by beating the factory Porsches in the year's biggest F2 race



**B**uilt in Modena, Italy, in 1959 for French racing champion Jean Behra, the Porsche-Behra was a more handsome and, in its time, more successful car than Porsche's own first open-wheeled effort. 'I like Porsches very much, above all because I had such great successes with them last year,' said Behra, explaining why Ferrari's number one team driver would take the trouble to build his own car. 'I'd like to try out a few things I've thought up on the basis of my racing experience in recent years. This project with the Formula Two car is tremendous fun for me!'

At a time when Formula One cars used 2.5-litre engines, Formula Two was nicely placed at 1.5-litres. Introduced in 1957, it quickly picked up speed thanks to the wide availability of suitable power plants from the likes of Coventry Climax, Alfa Romeo, Borgward and indeed Porsche. Interest picked up as well when it became known that in 1961 the mandated engine size for Formula One would be 1.5-litres.

The basis of Behra's Formula Two car was a set of 718 RSK components obtained on very favourable terms from Ferry Porsche. The RSK was advanced enough in its suspension, especially at the rear, to be suitable in this role. This is the most credible account, although some reports credit the use of a complete RSK, 718-016, as the basis for the Porsche-Behra. However, recent restoration

of the car suggests that this was not the case. Mysteriously its chassis plate is that of a 550.

Behra took his RSK parts to Valerio Colotti, a young engineer who had left Maserati to set up his own design office in Modena at the end of 1958. This was the Studio Tecnica Meccanica, known as Tec-Mec for short. One of its first projects was the Tec-Mec Formula 1 car, which is more successful in vintage racing than it was in its heyday. Colotti was perhaps best known as a maker of racing transaxles.

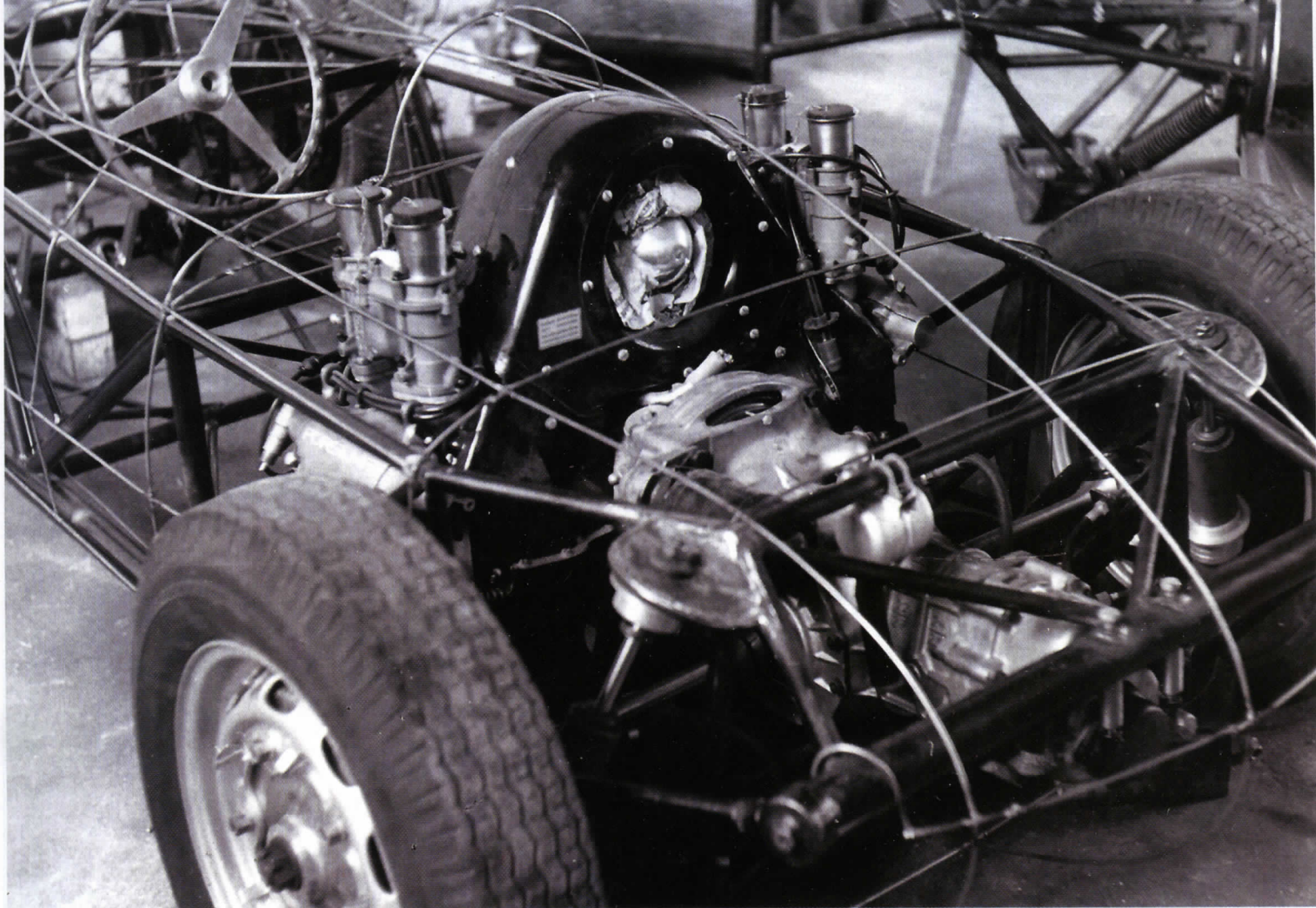
Following Behra's suggestions, Colotti prepared drawings of a new frame to unite the Porsche running gear and a body to clothe the result, which its initiator named the Porsche-Behra. Although a tubular lattice design like the RSK's, the new frame was a unique Colotti creation.

Inevitably the Colotti design had some attributes in common with the Porsche works single-seater, especially the tubular structure of the front bay between the suspension and the dash. The RSK's 82.6-inch wheelbase was kept. The front torsion bars and their carrying tubes were shortened by about five inches to reduce the front track to 46.9 inches.

At the rear the Porsche-Behra's track was reduced by two inches to 47.6 inches. Rear suspension remained the original RSK design, with low-pivot swing axles located by Watt linkages. Although these were heavier, bulkier and harder to adapt to an open-wheeled auto than the

*Below: Livered as it was for its battle with Stirling Moss at Reims in 1959, the Porsche-Behra retired in restored and running condition to the Collier Collection in Naples, Florida*





trailing wishbones at the rear of the single-seater that Porsche was building, Colotti made a good fist of it. In fact he put the coil/damper mounting platforms outside the frame instead of inside so that the main tubular structure could be narrower for strength and better body lines.

Valerio Colotti and 'Jeannot' Behra gave their improvisation the look of a thoroughbred with an oil-cooler inlet in its pointed nose, a distinctive sharp peak line ahead of the windscreen, shapely bulges above its carburettors and screened air inlets in the tail. Its shell was hammered out of aluminium by one of Modena's many artisans while an ex-Maserati mechanic rebuilt the chassis. The workshop of another former Maserati man, Giorgio Neri, was the site of the car's final assembly, supported by Behra's personal mechanic Auguste Stocklin.

Behra's aim was to have the car ready for a Formula Two

race at Pau on 18 May 1959. It was coming along well enough, he decided, to enter it for the Monaco GP eight days earlier. This was for Formula One cars but F2 entries were allowed to take part. However they had to qualify among the 16th fastest cars, this being the maximum number of cars that were then allowed to compete on the twisty two-mile circuit.

There was no time to paint the Porsche-Behra before the race in Monte Carlo. It missed Thursday practice and arrived on Friday to be driven by Behra's choice, Maria-Teresa de Filippis, a relative newcomer to Grand Prix racing although with experience of the Monaco circuit from a qualifying attempt the year before. Getting under 1:45 was the bogey but at first she could not improve on 1:49. A handicap was the RSK gearbox with only four synchronised ratios and 'crash' engagement of low gear, which was needed on the tightest corners.

*Above: Porsche's Type 547/3 four-cam 1.5-litre engine, giving at best 155bhp, was tightly tucked into the rear of Behra's special. Gearbox was five-speed versus Porsche's six*

*Below: For the major 129-mile Formula 2 race at Reims on July 2, 1959 Hans Herrmann had to win his ride by outqualifying a rival, both trying their best in the Porsche-Behra*



Finally Maria-Teresa reduced her time to 1:47.8, which did not threaten the man on the bubble's 1:44.8. It was her last attempt at Grand Prix qualification. Behra, who was in the front row and fastest Ferrari qualifier for the race, offered his F2 car's cockpit to Porsche's hillclimb star Edgar Barth, but as a newcomer to the circuit he was unable to better the best time of de Filippis. The Porsche-Behra sat out the race while her owner retired his Ferrari at quarter-distance.

Pau on 18 May was destined to be one of only two races in which this great French driver personally piloted his Porsche-Behra. 'Much to Behra's continual regret,' wrote Denis Jenkinson, 'Enzo Ferrari would not give him permission to drive the Porsche in Formula Two races. While he could not stop Behra running the car and lending it to people, the whole project was not received with enthusiasm at Maranello.'

With his own Formula Two car having been wrecked at Monaco a week earlier, along with the first works Porsche single-seater, Enzo Ferrari granted Behra permission to race his special on Pau's twisty street circuit. Only a tenth of a second in arrears of the fastest practice time, he put it in the middle of the front row for the start. On the fourth lap he took the lead, only to spin and bend a wheel on the wet track. Behra spent a frantic five minutes in his pit searching for a replacement, then set the race's fastest lap while pressing hard – too hard – to get back in the running. He spun and bent two rims but kept going to place fifth in spite of the delays.

The Pau performance proved that with a world-class

driver at its wheel the Porsche-Behra was one seriously fast Formula Two car. The best outing enjoyed by the rakish-looking French-blue car was in the biggest F2 race of the year at Reims on 5 July 1959. Staged after the French GP, 23 cars started a contest that was seen as a preview of the Grand Prix competition coming when the 1.5-litre Grand Prix Formula took effect in 1961. The Porsche-Behra was driven by Germany's Hans Herrmann, to whom Behra said, 'You drive it, Hans. You'll get more out of it.'

His was not the decisive voice, however, for Porsche's Huschke von Hanstein also had a say in the selection. This could well have been the result of a likely deal between

Behra and Porsche to cover the cost of a fresh drive train for the demanding and important French race.

Huschke had lined up Briton Colin Davis when Herrmann – a notorious oversleeper – was delayed in getting to practice. Whoever was fastest in training, Huschke said, would race the car. The canny Herrmann arranged for a friend to time the laps and stand in advance of

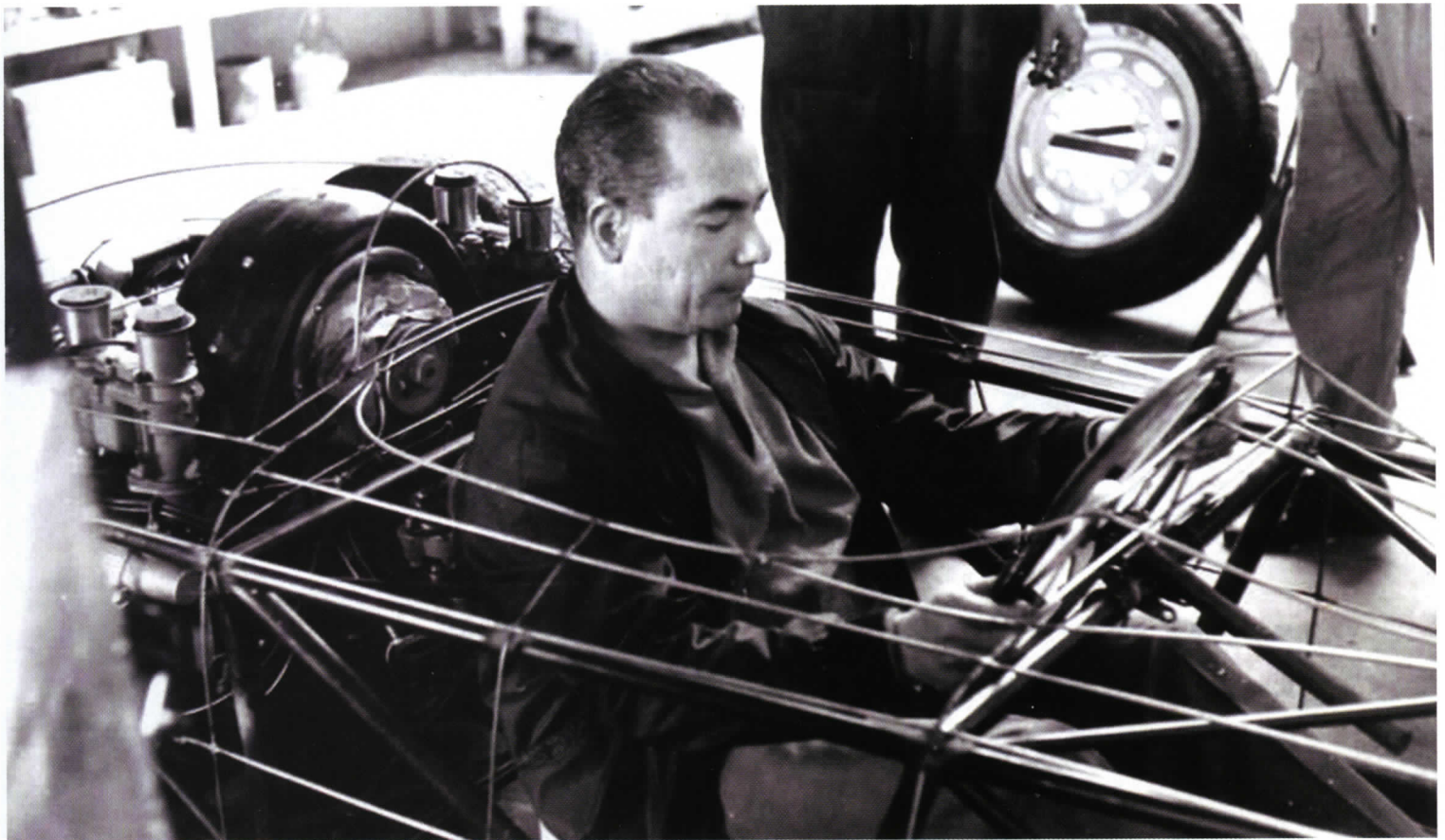
the pits, where he was to lift the front of his red sweater if Hans were the faster. 'Then when I roared by after a few laps,' said Hans, 'he had taken it off completely and was waving it in the air!'

Herrmann gave the car one hell of a ride. He set practice times faster than the works single-seater Porsches. In broiling heat he fought hard for the lead in the race with Stirling Moss's Cooper-Borgward. 'On lap four,' wrote Denis Jenkinson, 'Herrmann and Moss were side by side, where they stayed for the next eight laps in a typical Reims circuit

## “IT WAS NOT RECEIVED WITH ENTHUSIASM AT MARANELLO...”

*Below: The rear view of the Porsche-Behra showed how tightly Colotti shaped it around its components. The blue car was often faster than its silver counterparts from Stuttgart*





dice, Moss being quicker round the back part of the circuit but the Porsche gaining on maximum speed and braking, in spite of its old-fashioned drum brakes. On this very fast circuit its performance was a tribute to the aerodynamic ideas of Colotti and Behra.

'The battle for the lead finished when Herrmann took the escape road at Thillois,' added Jenkinson, 'which left Moss unchallenged in first place.' A front brake had finally seized and thrown Hans into a skid. The Porsche-Behra finished 12.6 seconds behind in the 129-mile race and almost a minute ahead of Jo Bonnier in the Porsche factory's F2 car.

Herrmann drove the Porsche-Behra once more in an F2 race at Rouen on 12 July. 'I still remember a scene that was typical of my friend Jean,' said Herrmann. 'When I indicated before the start that the mirrors needed adjusting, he told me with gestures, "Oh, that, the mirrors. We'd rather take them off altogether. You should just look forward and win!"' Starting from pole position Hans was contending for third place when a seized gearbox forced him to retire.

Already strained, Jean Behra's relationship with Ferrari was not improved by the way the Porsche-Behra had handily defeated the latest F2 car from Maranello at Reims. At

Ferrari, said team driver Phil Hill, 'Behra had never been happy with us. He resented Tony Brooks as a Number One, was uncomfortable at the performance of a newcomer like Dan Gurney, complained about always being given the slowest car – which was simply not true – and lost his temper more often than the Italians, which is going some!' The upshot was that Jean Behra and Ferrari parted company that July, after which he was free to drive the cars of his choice.

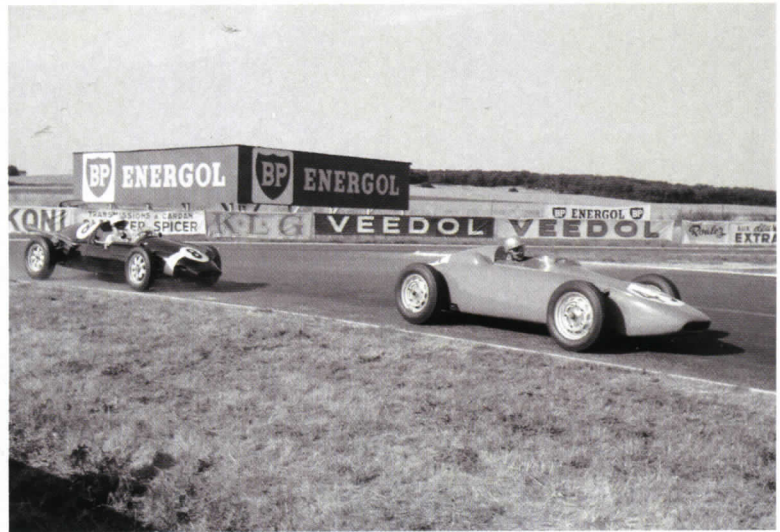
On 26 July 1959 Behra drove his blue Porsche-Behra in the Auvergne GP on the Clermont-Ferrand circuit, a mini-Nürburgring in the heart of France. In the curtain-raising two-hour sports-car race for cars of up to two litres he dominated the field in his personal Porsche RSK, setting fastest lap. An incipient fault caused a brief pit stop, however, culminating in a broken cam follower with ten minutes to go that dropped him to second at the finish.

From row two with his Porsche-Behra at the start of the 26-lap Formula Two race, Behra established himself in a clear second place behind the dominant Cooper-Borgward of Stirling Moss. 'On lap 16,' reported Denis Jenkinson, 'Behra stopped out on the circuit when a petrol pipe to his left-hand carburettor split and he had to watch the whole

*Above: Behra's personal mechanic Auguste Stocklin assisted in final assembly at Giorgio Neri's workshop. Wire frame delineated the surface of the bodywork*

*Below left: At the rear the Porsche-Behra used the Type 718's low-pivot swing-axle suspension. The large cross tube was demountable at its centre to ease installation of the transaxle*

*Below right: In what was the Porsche-Behra's greatest race Herrmann dived with Stirling Moss in his Cooper-Borgward in the early laps, finally placing second only 12.6 seconds behind*



field go by while he made a temporary repair with a piece of plastic tubing from a breather pipe.' The subsequent pit stop for a permanent repair set him well back. Though only 12th at the finish, he duelled with Moss for fastest-lap honours, losing narrowly.

'Jeannot' and Auguste Stocklin prepared, impeccably as usual, both his RSK and his single-seater for the German Grand Prix at the Avus in Berlin on 2 August. Tragically the plucky Frenchman was killed outright in the sports-car race that was the warm-up for the Formula One event, for which he had practiced among several outclassed but plucky F2 entries. The popular Behra's death at only 38 years spread gloom over the weekend. His car was withdrawn from the Grand Prix together with the lone works F2 Porsche as a sign of respect for one of the Zuffenhausen team's most successful drivers.

Taken over by the American Camoradi team formed by Lloyd 'Lucky' Casner, Behra's special was entered for the Argentine Grand Prix on 7 February 1960. Although the race, on the city's shade-free municipal Autodromo, started at 4:30 p.m. the ground temperature was still at 100°F. Drivers happily slowed at the tightest corner to have buckets of water poured over them.

Starting the unique racer from 16th on the grid, thrusting American Masten Gregory made a pit stop to change his

right rear wheel, his team using an air wrench to speed up the process. His Porsche-Behra placed 12th among 14 finishers, respectable for its 1.5 litres against the 2.5-litre GP cars.

The teams were invited to stay on for the Ciudad Buenos Aires Grand Prix, a Formula Libre event strangely held in a park at Cordoba, 430 miles upcountry from the city in the 158-mile race's baptismal name. 'When we saw the circuit we just couldn't believe it,' said one entrant. 'Around the city boulevards with trees at the kerbside and a huge statue slap in the middle of the road at one point. We asked the guide which side the cars were meant to go round it and he just grinned and said, 'Either side, ees up to da driver.'

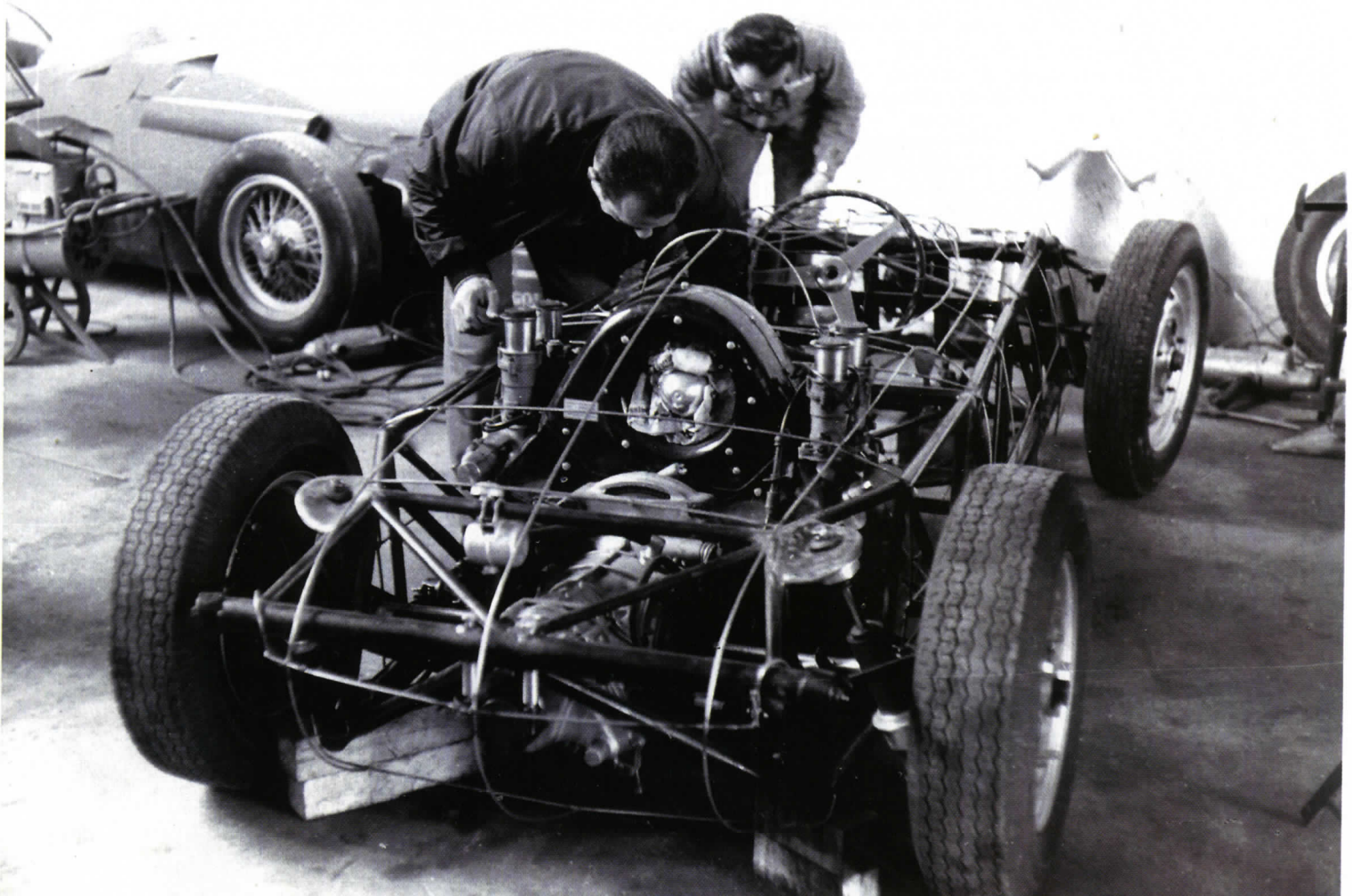
While the Walker, Ferrari and Centro Sud teams declined the privilege of participation, 18 cars mustered for practice at Cordoba. Among them was the Camoradi Porsche-Behra, which attracted a

distinguished driver. Although he had retired from the sport a year and a half earlier, Juan Manuel Fangio was eager to try the little Porsche special on the streets of Cordoba to see what these new-fangled mid-engined cars were all about.

Wearing an unfamiliar white helmet, Fangio took a number of practice laps and was credited with a time of 1:30.0. This was six-tenths of a second less than Masten Gregory recorded in official practice to be ranked 13th for the

## “HAD TO WATCH THE WHOLE FIELD GO BY WHILE HE MADE A REPAIR”

*Below: In 1958 Colotti established his own design company, Studio Tecnica Meccanica, known as Tec-Mec. He created the bespoke tubular space frame for Behra's racer*





start. A chaotic race in heat even worse than in Buenos Aires saw only two cars complete the full 75 laps and five ranked as finishers. Numerous retirements included the Porsche-Behra after 17 laps.

Camoradi's Porsche-Behra rested until the German GP in July of 1980, which was run on the Nürburgring's South Loop for Formula Two cars. Both Hans Herrmann and Olivier Gendebien tried it during training but chose other cars for an important race in which the blue racer really should have participated.

For Behra's hybrid the 1960 season ended in September with a Camoradi entry in the Italian Grand Prix, the last race in Europe for the 2.5-litre Formula One. Run over the combined road and banked-oval circuits, the race was boycotted by British teams on the grounds of the bumpy oval so the Monza organisers were desperate for entries.

Driven by America's Fred Gamble, the Porsche-Behra was running in eighth place as first non-works entry when it slowed to a stop in Monza's South Turn, its fuel pumps ticking impotently. Although the car's builders had assured Camoradi that it carried enough fuel to finish the race non-stop, the team had added a precautionary churn at a splash-and-dash pit stop. However, the fuel system didn't pick it up.

Running back to his pit, Gamble collected enough fuel to get going just in time to be awarded 10th and last place, albeit nine laps in arrears.

After brief ownership by a young American, Ray Colet, who had loaned it back to Camoradi for the Italian GP, this unique car languished outside the customer service department at Werk I in Zuffenhausen. In retrospect it was surprising that the Porsche-Behra, which had shown such commendable pace in 1959 and '60, wasn't picked up by an enterprising team or individual for the new 1.5-litre Formula 1 of 1961. With some development, including a gearbox like those in the works cars and good preparation, it could have made a more-than-decent account of itself.

In 1961 however it was brought to America and purchased by Vic Meinhardt of Merrick, Long Island. Meinhardt raced it successfully, winning the SCCA Formula Libre Championship in 1963. Vic sold the unique racer to Dick Souan, from whom it was bought by Philip Sadler in 1969. A later owner, restorer and racer of the Porsche-Behra was Murray Smith. The blue car now rests in Florida's Collier Collection in impeccably restored condition, liveried as it was when Hans Herrmann showed its furious pace at Reims. It is a fitting tribute to Jean Behra, one of the greatest drivers of the era. **CP**

*Above: When owned by the American Camoradi team, the Porsche-Behra had the honour of practice laps in the hands of Juan Fangio before a race at Córdoba in February 1960*

*Below left: Jean Behra, left, and Valerio Colotti enjoying a laugh in Modena, Italy. That was Colotti's base during engineering stints with Ferrari and later Maserati*

*Below right: Liveried as it was for its battle with Stirling Moss at Reims in 1959, the Porsche-Behra retired in restored and running condition in the Collier Collection in Naples, Florida*



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