



July 2013

THE QUEST FOR ORIGINALITY SPREADS TO THE ALLARD CHRYSLER DRAGSTER DRIVER APPAREL

Although there are photographs showing Sydney Allard driving Europe's first dragster in a sports jacket, shirt and tie in the early 1960s, his son Alan was more safety conscious with his racewear when he drove the car in 1964. And certainly to fire up (cackle) its 354 cubic inch Chrysler Hemi engine in today's more safety-aware world would definitely require something more substantial.



Sydney Allard at Goodwood in 1962 (source; Bernard Gudge)

For some time the Allard Chrysler Action Group (ACAG) has been assembling the elements of an early 1960s driver fire suit. As well as being used at cackle appearances the suit could sometimes be displayed on a mannequin alongside the car at its home - the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu. American Ron Hope of Rat Trap fame (recently appearing at the Goodwood Festival of Speed) donated a pair of his old gloves and Chris and Claire from the Wild Bunch donated some boots. But we still needed a jacket and trousers or a combined suit.

After talking with American drag racer Bob Keith who came over to the UK in 1964 and 1965 to race at the International Drag Racing Festivals organised by Sydney Allard, we made contact with Ben at Deist Safety – the company that supplied Bob’s fire suit for those UK tours. The company’s founder, Jim Deist, passed away on March 9th 2009, but for over 50 years, he had dedicated his life to improving the safety of all types of motorsports. He was an innovator, a dedicated racer, and a friend to all. And Jim’s legacy is continued at Deist with most of the staff having worked alongside him for 20 years; some for over 30 years.

After hearing about the restoration of Europe’s first dragster Deist supplied the ACAG with a single layer silver ‘nostalgia type’ racing jacket and a nostalgia fuel mask. This features multiple layers of aluminized silver or Nomex material with deist’s exclusive “liquid barrier” insulation. It includes a respirator for the removal of fuel fumes. A link to the Deist website can be found on the links page of www.allardchrysler.org. A video of Gareth wearing the jacket and facemask during a pit cackle at Dragstalgia 2013 can be found via this link.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMydhIBIplQ



Gareth Kent wearing the new Deist jacket and facemask at Dragstalgia 2013
(source; Kev Roberts)

Stu Bradbury located some period goggles so all we need now is a pair of fire-proof silver trousers and an open-faced helmet. The look of the driver and the dragster will then both reflect the early 1960s drag racing era.

END

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