

8.6 The Devin

The Devin car, which was sometimes referred to as the "Devonshire Corvette", was built as a chassis in Belfast for export to the United States where engine, gearbox and body were fitted. No cars were sold in any other market. The choice of the names for the car arose from the co-incidence that it was an American salesman, Bill Devin, who ordered the cars from the Devonshire Engineering Company.

The Devonshire Engineering Company was formed by Noel Hillis, managing director of The Devonshire Hemstitching Company and Malcolm McGregor one of his departmental managers. The Memoranda and Articles of Association are dated 19 February 1959 and allow for manufacture and sale of motor vehicles and components.

Noel Hillis was an enthusiastic sporting driver who had won the first motor race to be held in Ireland after the war, the Handicap Race at Ballyclare on 10 August 1946. In 1957 he decided to build himself a car to his own personal design and specification. When attempting to obtain a suitable body for the car he contacted Bill Devin of Los Angeles, who was the largest manufacturer of specialised glass fibre car bodies in California, and who advertised a range of bodies for use by special builders. Devin was very impressed by the specification of the car and flew to Belfast to see the prototype. He felt that the car had a great potential, particularly in the sports car hungry West Coast of America. He contracted to buy at least 50 chassis and up to 150 in the first year. Hillis and McGregor could not obtain so many engines. They had built the prototype with a D-type Jaguar engine and gearbox. Devin did not mind, he preferred to use a Chevrolet Corvette V-8 283 in³ (4637 cm³) engine and gearbox. These could be fitted while he was adding the body in California.

The complete car had a very sleek appearance and was endowed with superb handling and an impressive performance. Although it was priced at

a very moderate \$5,950 (£2,100 at the current rate of \$2.80 per £) it did not sell well. Devin, who had overstretched his credit in other parts of his operations, went bankrupt when only 15 chassis had been supplied to him. This naturally had repercussions in Belfast, but no attempt was made to obtain an alternative supplier for the body. Hillis and McGregor had considerable respect for the established sports car manufacturers such as Jaguar, Ferrari, Maserati and Aston Martin and decided not to attempt to sell their car on the European market without adequate backing in the way of R and D, service, or racing organisations. The Devonshire Engineering Company tried making go-karts which were becoming popular in 1959 but failed to secure adequate business and so closed down.

The chassis of the Devin was constructed with two main large diameter tubular members triangulated with smaller diameter tubes. The parts were carefully jigged and an elaborate tacking and welding sequence was used to ensure freedom from distortion.

Independent suspension was applied to all four wheels, the front being by equal length wishbones. The use of equal length wishbones was dictated by the requirement to reduce tooling to the absolute minimum and have one simple jig for the complete front suspension. The lower wishbones were of I-beam cross-section and the upper ones were of circular cross-section and had enlarged eyes at each end for the fulcrum bolts. Rack and pinion steering of 2 turns lock-to-lock was used. Motorcycle style combined coil spring and damper units were incorporated as the springing medium. De Dion type rear suspension was used with fore-and-aft location by Watts type parallel linkages. Girling disc brakes were fitted all round, those at the rear being mounted inboard, located adjacent to the Salisbury limited slip differential gear. Centre lock wire wheels shod with Dunlop RS4 tyres were used.

The 283 in³ Chevrolet engine gave some 290 bhp at 6,200 rpm. This

provided 0-60 mph acceleration time of 4.8 seconds and 0-100 mph in 12 seconds. Such performance and matching handling in an attractive body should have been the perfect combination to guarantee success. Unfortunately this was foiled by Devin's bankruptcy. However, one Devin car is reported to have won a considerable number of races in the American Sports Car Championships between 1960 and 1964.

This project should have been the basis for a successful enterprise. The engineering and design were right and the price was acceptable. The product was aimed at a limited market where it could compete, rather than at a mass market where the economies of scale and transport costs could have affected profit margins. The failure of the marketing side of the association again emphasises the need for both engineering and marketing expertise to be available at the right time to give any project a reasonable chance of success.

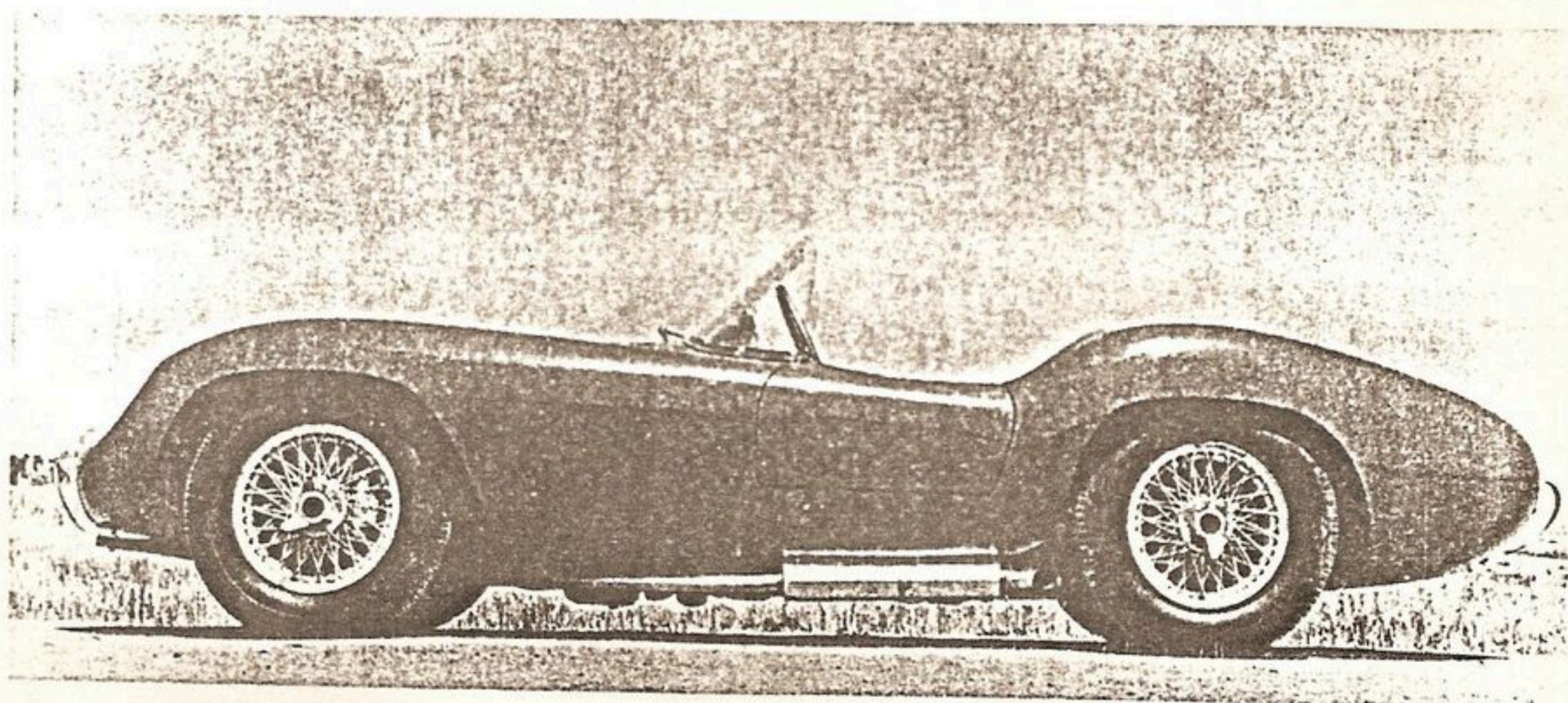


FIG.44 The complete Devin car

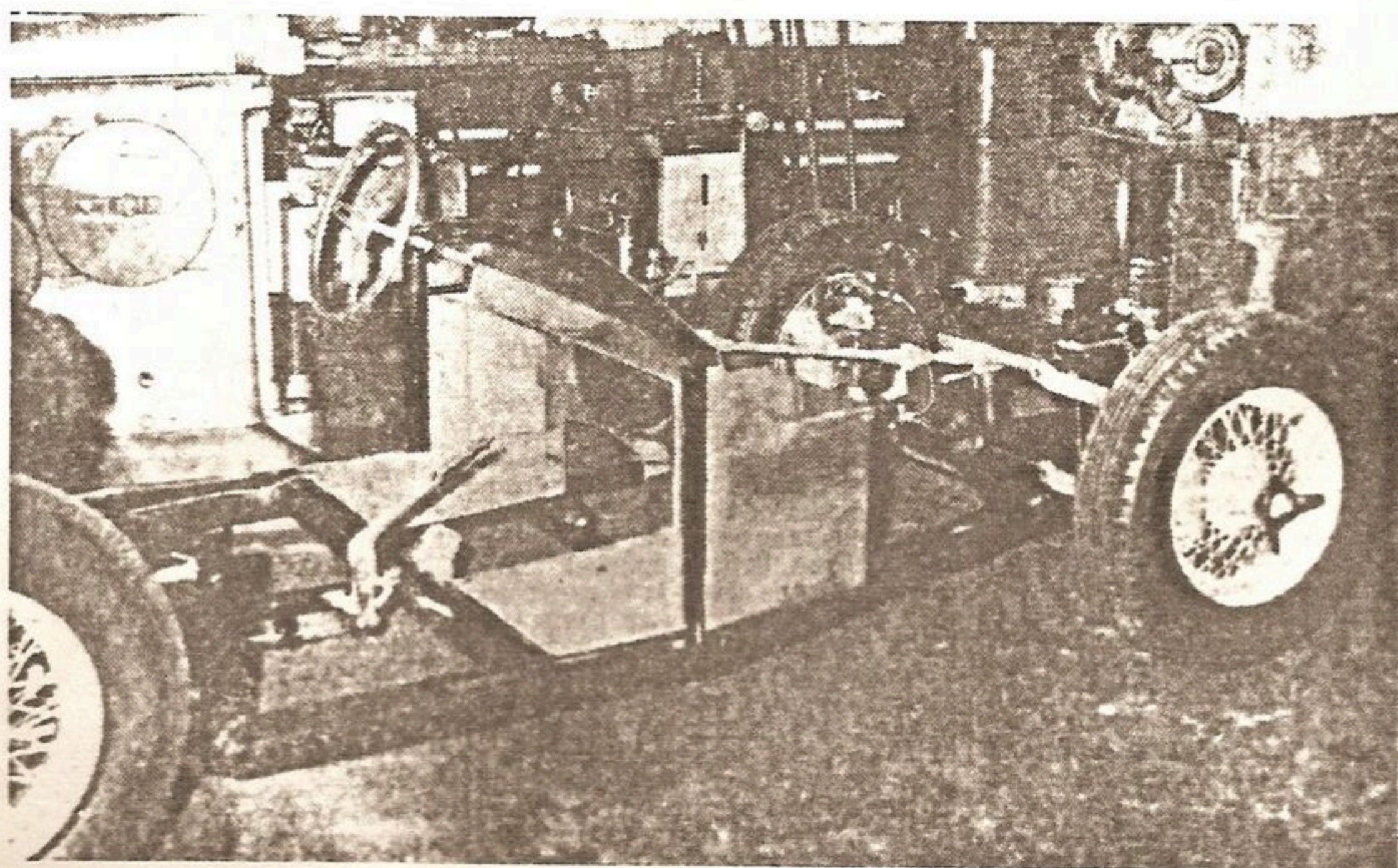


FIG.45 The chassis of the Devin car