



A pedigreed MG-powered Elva Courier Spyder

**W**hen Nate Scigliano acquired his MGA-powered 1959 Elva Courier Spyder 15 years ago it was for a sole purpose – to compete at the annual Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix.

After years of spectating, the Pittsburgh man wanted more – to participate in the incredible annual event.

For the past 37 years, during one weekend in July, the hills of Schenley Park in downtown Pittsburgh have literally exploded in mechanical mayhem.

During those couple days, the winding roads and sweeping hills of the picturesque park became

home to an electrifying mix of high-revving, exhaust-bellowing vintage sports cars.

Even today, the PVGP remains the only vintage race to be held on city streets in the United States – a spectacular show reminiscent of road racing from the '50s when spectators stood mere inches from race cars.

The affable Scigliano and his race car have been regulars at the PVGP and are an example of the Pittsburgh pride that goes into this annual gala.

But last year, Scigliano also discovered a secret about his car. A couple attending the event published a story in an Australian

magazine, *Vintage Metal*, which featured a cover photo of Scigliano's roadster.

Within hours, the owner was overwhelmed with emails from enthusiasts in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. It turns out his Elva Courier may be one of the first in a line of specially built roadsters.

Among those reacting to that photo was Roger Dunbar in the United Kingdom.

"I suppose you could think of me as an Elva expert after 40 years involvement in the marque, having restored a large number of the various model types via Elva Racing, having the official Elva





website, being a major contributor to the award-winning Elva book and being the current brand owner."

"I was delighted to help Nate with some background history of his car, which is certainly of interest being one of the six Elva Courier Spyder models produced -- probably the first.

Although not aware of Scigliano's Elva having an outstanding racing history, "being one of just six does make it special," said Dunbar.

Consider it "a rare example," he said.

Elva was a sports and racing car manufacturing company based in Bexhill, then Hastings and Rye,

East Sussex, United Kingdom.

The company was founded in 1955 by Frank G. Nichols and its name comes from the French phrase "elle va", which means "she goes".

The Elva Courier Spyder, according to auto historians, was designed as a dedicated race car, while the majority of Elva Courier models were created as two-seat road cars.

However, it didn't take long for owners to discover the neutral handling of the cars, which was a huge advantage at speed and on the track. As a result, many of the street versions became successful track cars.

Although initially equipped with an MGA engine, later versions came with everything from MGB engines to engines from the Ford Cortina GT and twin-cam Lotus.

Nate Scigliano was not aware of his car's pedigree when he purchased the car from a friend. But since owning the car, he has learned its capabilities, which has enabled him to do consistently well on the serpentine PVGP race course, which consists of 23 turns, complete with hay bales, water barriers and wooden horses, carved from within the 456-acre Schenley Park.

The fact that he also races a Tiga S2000 sports racer in vintage racing events has helped him to improve his racing at the ever-challenging



PVGP track, he said.

"It just caught my eye," he said of the Elva Courier Spyder when he first saw it while looking for a dedicated PVGP race car. "When I saw it, I said, 'I love it'."

The car, which is red with yellow racing stripes, was in race condition at the time of acquisition, but six years ago Scigliano had the engine rebuilt by Prather Racing in Wakarusa, KS, which for years has specialized in MG racing engines.

"It was just worn out," he said of the Elva's drive train.

The fact that his car is equipped with an MGA engine, transmission and rear end suits him fine. Since

the founding of the PVGP, the MG has played a pivotal role in what has become a 10-day extravaganza that attracts hundreds of thousands of spectators each year and vintage race car drivers from around the world.

If there's any question about the significance of MG in the event, just look at the official PVGP logo, which prominently features the MG TC owned by Alan Patterson, the PVGP's first race director.

"The MG is our favorite car here at the Grand Prix," Dan DelBianco, the PVGP's Executive Director, said in an earlier interview.

Scigliano said he especially likes that his Elva is right-hand drive.

He's among the many racers at the PVGP who offer charity rides to spectators during the race weekend. It's always fun, he said, when they settle down into the left side of the car, giving them a special view of the track.

He also is among a group of veteran drivers who help new drivers to become acquainted with the track – explaining the ins and outs of the course, and making themselves available for questions.

While hooked on racing the PVGP, the affable Pittsburgher said he and others are just doing what they can to help keep their city vibrant and attractive. ○



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