

# Stewart Brown's Cobra - Brief View



Photo courtesy of Trevor Legate

Stewart Brown is the proud owner of Cobra COB6107, once owned by Tara Browne, a wealthy aristocrat and friend of the Beatles and Rolling Stones. COB6107 didn't go to Shelby in the US but was one of 25 Cobras (chassis numbers between 6101-6129) completed by AC Cars in the UK which were built to a MkIII specification and called AC 289 Sports.

When ordered in 1965 it was red with black trim but not long after attained its psychedelic livery, painted by artists Dudley Edwards and David Vaughn.



Origin of photo unknown

Sadly and shockingly, in December 1966, Tara Browne died, crashing a borrowed Lotus Elan on his way to the opening of an art gallery where the Cobra was due to be displayed as an art car. John Lennon wrote *A Day in the Life* in response to the tragedy:

*I read the news today, oh boy  
About a lucky man who made the grade  
And though the news was rather sad  
Well, I just had to laugh  
I saw the photograph*

*He blew his mind out in a car  
He didn't notice that the lights had changed  
A crowd of people stood and stared  
They'd seen his face before  
Nobody was really sure if he was from the  
House of Lords...*

COB6107 spent some years in the US before its return to the UK but subsequent owners until Stewart bought it in 2013 seem to be a mystery. Stewart says it was then in a sorry state made beautiful again by Martin of Hawk Cars.



Silverstone 2016

Stewart's car is shown in the photo above at Silverstone in 2016 next to Mark Morgan's AC 289 but since modified to look like a 427. Mark had swapped the engine back to a 289 but left the 427 bodywork unchanged.

On the Sunday morning, Stewart's Cobra suffered an unfortunate experience but is a story worth telling.

We had enjoyed Stewart and Sarah's company at the Saturday evening meal at the hotel near Silverstone where I recall him saying that he often exercised the Cobra by driving it to the Supermarket to shop!

As we were preparing to go to the circuit next day, we spotted Stewart and his Cobra in the car park next to an RAC van. He had suffered the embarrassment of choosing the wrong nozzle to fill his car and had duly called the rescue service which did the necessary draining and cleaning.



The indignity

I couldn't resist snapping his car's distress. Byron and the Mercedes honourably assisted the rescue by taking Stewart to fill a couple of cans with the right stuff.



Sarah hastens away

Stewart has been ill recently and we send both Sarah and Stewart good wishes for his speedy recovery to good health.

Source for most of the information on the Cobra in its psychedelic livery:

- Wallace Wyss  
<https://collectorscarworld.com/a-day-in-a-life-a-cobra/>  
And  
<https://mycarquest.com/2021/11/a-day-in-the-life.html>

Thanks to:

- Trevor Legate for the photo above, for the photo on the front cover of this **News** and for his book: *Cobra - The first 40 Years*. Touchstone Books (2006)
- Wallace Wyss, Kay Hafner (collectorscarworld) and Mike Gullett (My Car Quest) for help in my search for Copyright information
- Stewart Brown, John Coward and Byron Bevan

## More on Stewart Brown's 1965 AC 289 Sports



Stewart Brown's AC 289 Sports is numbered COB6107. AC chose not to use the Shelby Cobra name for the 27 AC 289 Sports cars which were built in the UK on the Mark III chassis, developed for the 427 Cobra. The new chassis was wider and stronger than the Mark II used for the 289 Cobra, and most importantly had all round coil sprung suspension, finally making a significant break from the transverse leaf springs of the original AC Ace design. There were other changes, most obviously the more bulbous front and rear wings to accommodate the wider tyres suitable for the 427 engine's higher power output. AC equipped the AC 289 Sports with the 289 Hi-Po engine and more modest wings, which to my eye at least suit the car far better. Nevertheless, some AC 289 Sports owners have converted their car to 427 specifications in a search for more power. Stewart's COB6107 has retained its original 289 engine but has had other unique changes.



When Stewart bought his car in 2013 from Coy's, his initial concern was whether it was in fact a genuine AC 289 Sports and he consulted several members of the AC Owner's Club about its provenance. All his enquiries confirmed that it was the genuine COB6107, registered in 1965. Originally painted red with a black leather interior, the car was completely redecorated with a hymn to psychedelia by Tara Browne, as described in the Spring newsletter. After the death of Tara Browne in 1966, the car changed hands several times, and one of the new owners repainted the car in its current purple colour and changed the upholstery and trim to match.

"Purple Haze" is not a standard AC colour, although it has a nostalgic 1970's feel about it. Stewart received many suggestions to recreate the 1966 psychedelic paint job. He

faced the same dilemma the National Trust has when deciding how far back they should travel when restoring one of their ancient buildings. Restoring the Tara Browne psychedelia would have required some of the bodywork to be restored as well. Stewart was quoted £150-200K, and he made a sensible decision – do nothing! For those interested in the car's history, traces of the 1966 paint can still be found.



Stewart had other more pressing jobs to do on the car and initially consulted a couple of Cobra restoration specialists. Fortunately, he got in contact with Gerry at Hawk Cars who recommended leaving the car in its current state as far as possible. So, he enlisted the help of Gerry and Martyn to restore the car to roadworthy condition, while maintaining the originality of its mechanical specification. All that Gerry recalls doing was replacing one of the top wishbones which was bent and carrying out the normal maintenance of the car. The bills from 2013 through to 2015 show that this was quite extensive, including the replacement of shock absorbers, clutch and brake cylinders and flexible hoses. Gerry also sourced full weather gear. A specialist fabricator, Hayward and Scott, replaced most of the exhaust system.

Stewart used the car for local trips and I regularly saw him and COB6107 heading in and out of Waitrose in Beckenham, but it's fair to say that he avoided longer trips in it, apart from his visit to the Silverstone Classic in 2016. That may have been more to do with the initial absence of a soft top, as he really enjoyed driving the car. He garaged it at his home and kept his other pride and joy, a Lamborghini Countach which is notoriously impractical for everyday driving, in storage.



John Coward 

## Stewart Brown, 1952 - 2022



Stewart Brown, who died on March 31<sup>st</sup>, lived with his wife Sarah in Bromley, Kent not far from where I live. I first got to know them in 2013 when Stewart bought his 1965 AC 289 Sports, which was featured in the Spring 2022 Newsletter.

Stewart was a professional musician who started his career as a clarinettist. However, he was better known in the musical world as the founder of Testament Records, specialising in releasing historic classical music recordings, many previously unpublished or deleted, from the archives of major record companies. If you listen to Radio 3's *Building a Library* you will have heard many of his more famous record releases, some of which dated from before the 1939 war.

Stewart was a bon viveur with a great love of fine wines and food and was very generous to his friends. One of my earliest recollections was when he decided one day to take me out for lunch at a local restaurant – I think I had lent him some Cobra books which were out of print. Anyway, we decided to drive there in my Hawk. We had just ordered our meal, when I suddenly felt faint, staggered towards the door to get some fresh air, and then crashed out flat on the floor. When I came to, Stewart had ordered an ambulance, which rather put paid to our nice lunch. The best bit was when Stewart volunteered to drive my car home from the carpark but could not find reverse gear. There was a panic phone call to Gerry, who told him where reverse was on a Rover V8. I'm sure we'd not started on the wine...

He had a lifelong obsession with Cobras and was very careful to consult with as many AC experts as he could find about the history of his unique car, and the best way of preserving it. He was not just a Cobra enthusiast, he also has a Lamborghini Countach tucked away, and a large collection of wartime pilots' watches. My very last memory of him was when he proudly showed me several watches which had belonged to British Spitfire and Japanese Kamikaze pilots.

Stewart had a kidney transplant in 2006 at King's College Hospital and spent a lot of time there over the last 30 years, not just on his own treatment, but helping to support other transplant patients in recovery, which was very typical of the man. It was the King's College Renal department who looked after him with great compassion during his final weeks. We will all miss him greatly and send our deepest sympathies to Sarah and their sons.

John Coward 🚗