

Numero

The World's First Formula Vee

The car pictured at right began as one racer's specially commissioned Formula Junior. It ended up forming the basis for what would become one of the SCCA's most popular racing classes of its time, Formula Vee.

How It All Got Started

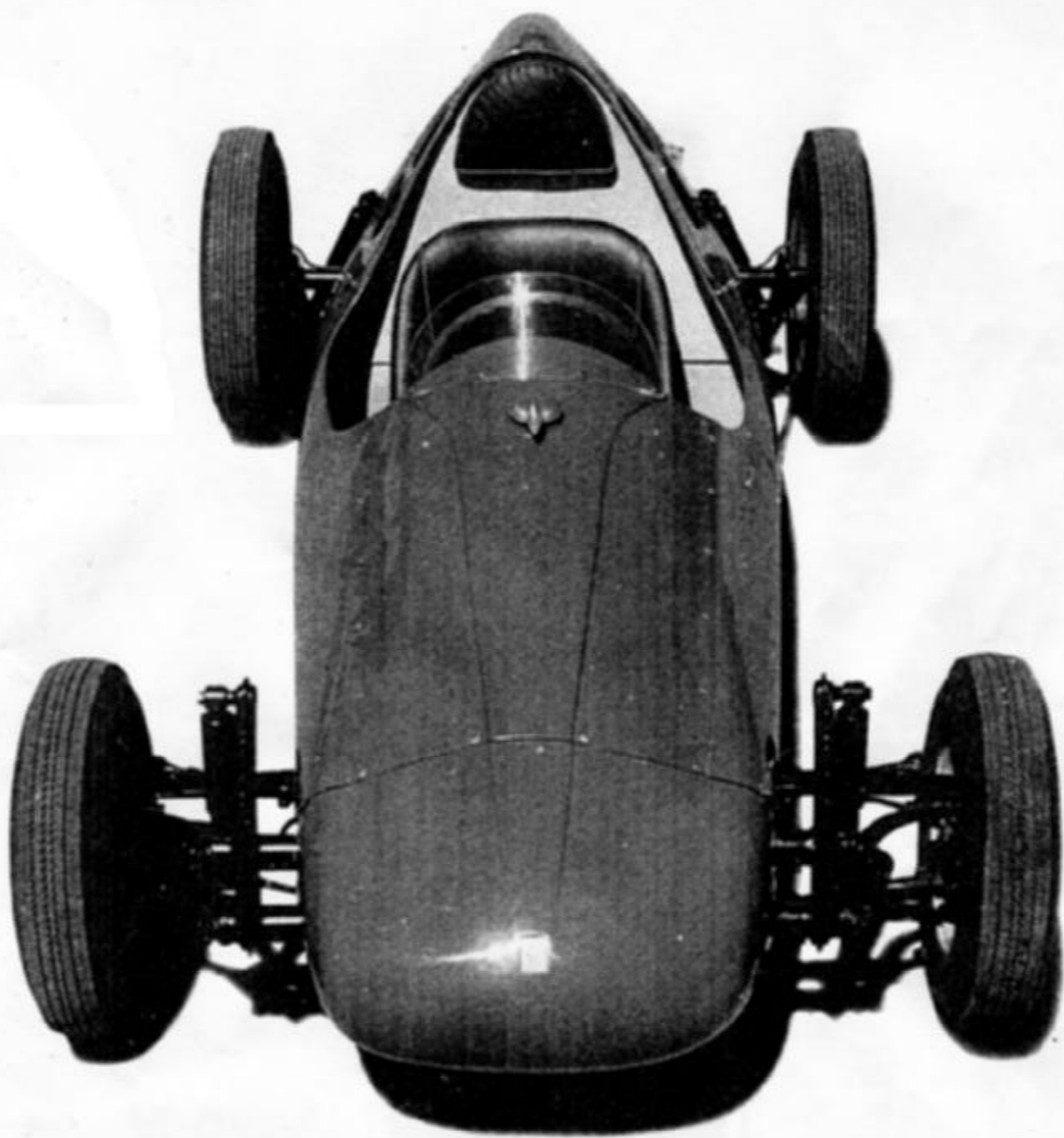
The man who ordered the car that started it all was Hubert L. Brundage, a successful hardware store owner from Miami, Florida. He was also a sports car racer, having driven an MG in the first Sebring race, before there was even such a thing as the Sebring 12 hours. Mr. B also ran in the first Sebring 12 hours, in 1952, finishing 11th overall in a VW special.

At this time, the infamous Max Hoffman was responsible for importing virtually every sports car into the U.S., and the scene was in a state of change. The U.S. market was becoming more and more important, so foreign manufacturers wanted to set up their own distribution networks in the U.S. and not deal with a middleman like Hoffman. Brundage had been constantly writing Volkswagen and asking them for his own distributorship.

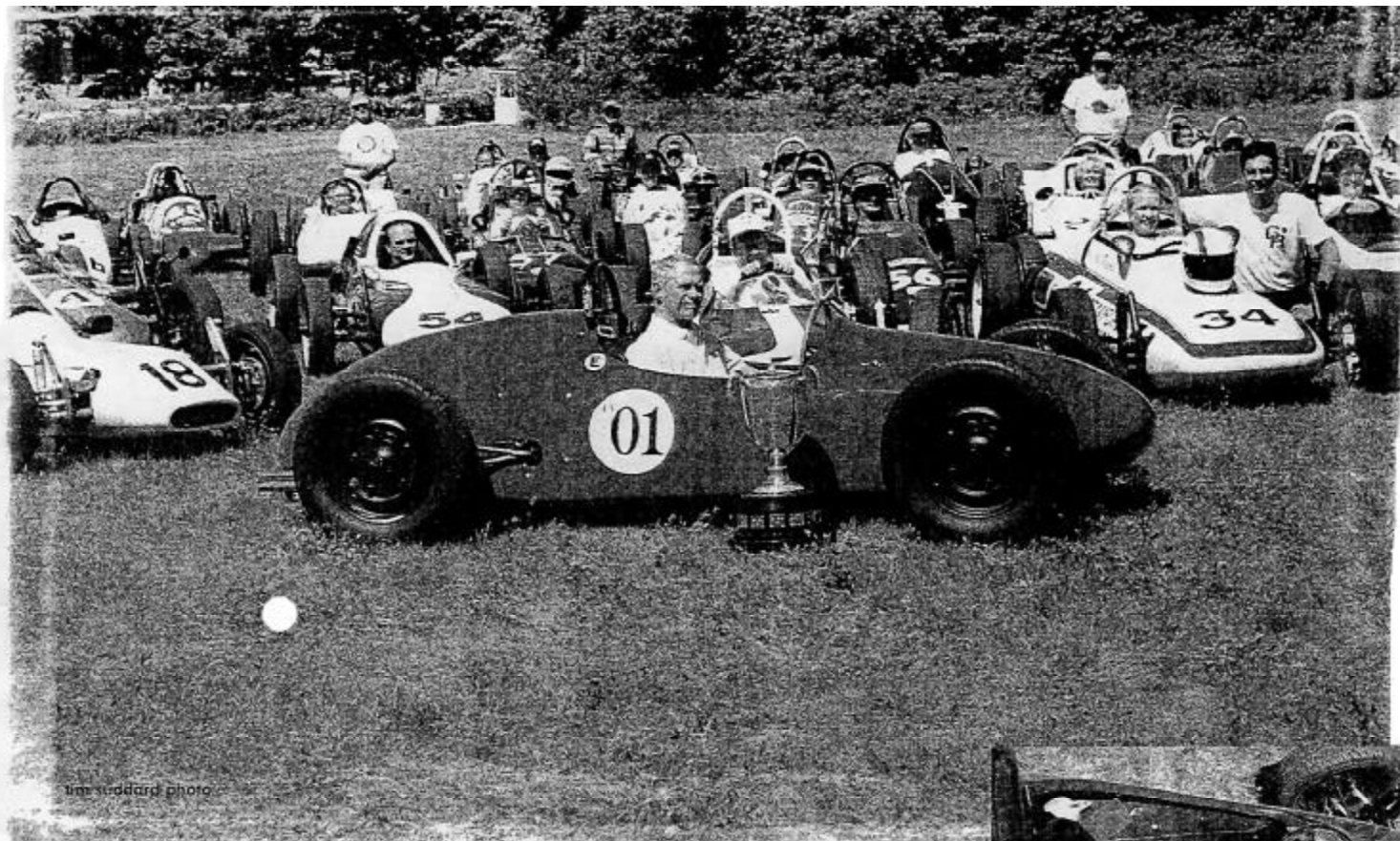
His persistence paid off: while Brundage was racing at Sebring, Wil Van de Kamp of Volkswagen AG came up to him in the pits. According to Brundage's son Jan, Van de Kamp was dressed in a formal black suit, which was quite unusual since the weather was typically Sebring hot. Van de Kamp tapped Mr. B on the shoulder with his umbrella and announced that he was there from Germany to discuss his VW distributorship. Jan says his dad looked back and said, "talk to me Monday in my office—can't you see that I am racing here?"

Sure enough, despite the rebuke, on Monday they did hammer out a deal, and Brundage Motors Inc. became a Volkswagen distributor for Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. Brundage also received a Porsche distributorship for seven southern states (the aforementioned three,

Uno



story by tim suddard • photos courtesy jan brundage unless otherwise credited



Jim Stoddard photo

plus North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana).

As part of his new deal, Brundage had to relocate to Jacksonville, Fla., to be close to the southeastern U.S. port of entry. The telex address for Brundage Motors Inc. was "BRUMOS," so the company name was also shortened to Brumos—a name that is recognized by enthusiasts as one of the most famous Porsche dealerships.

Although the Brumos name was not immediately well-known, Mr. B had an early business partner in the venture who did carry some name recognition, Glenn H. Curtis, Jr. Curtis, son of the famous Curtis airplane family, was a boyhood friend of Mr. B and invested the money that got Brundage started. Interestingly, while Brundage went on to become a millionaire from this adventure, Curtis' team of financial advisors told him that there was no future in selling foreign sports cars in the United States, so he soon sold out to Brundage (though the two remained friends).

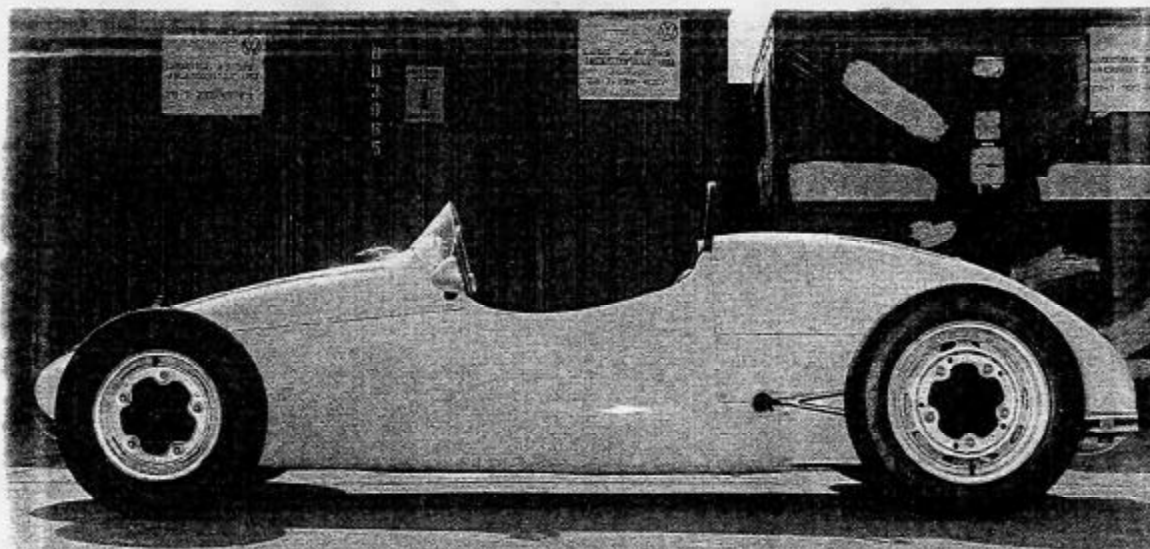
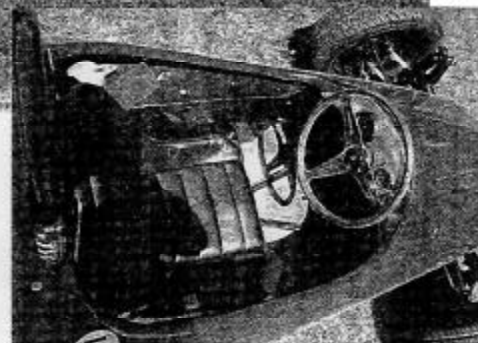
Early Interest in Formula Cars

By the end of the '50s, the Formula Junior class had attracted Mr. B's interest, but he disliked the constantly-changing rules and the increasing costs required to remain competitive. From his past experiences with VW equipment, Brundage thought that he could create an inexpensive, but competitive, Formula Junior using VW components.

In 1959 he contacted Italian race car designer Enrico Nardi (of steering wheel fame) and commissioned a race car using primarily VW parts. The Nardi

car would carry its VW powerplant in the rear, setting it apart from other Formula Juniors of the day. (This would soon change, however, with the debut later that year of the Lotus 18 as the first rear-engined Formula Junior.)

While son Jan can't remember the exact time line, he claims it was obvious right from the beginning that Mr. B had every intention of building more than one of these cars. Mr. B probably saw the Nardi as a Formula Junior rather than its own class, though. His plans soon

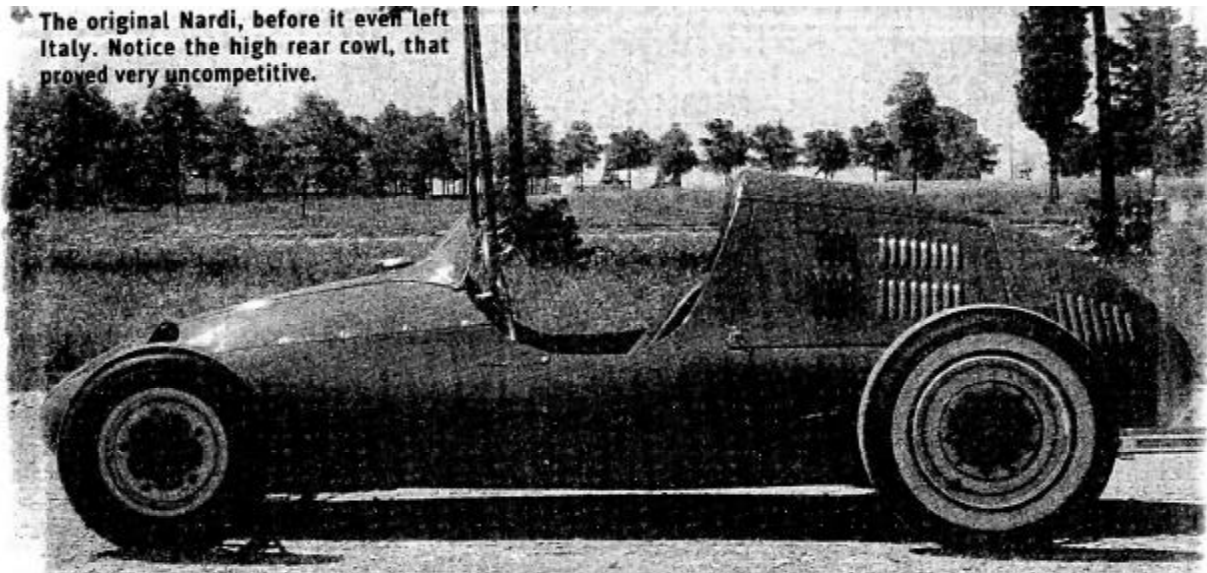


The same original Nardi, after the rear cowling was lowered. This photo was shot just before the car was presented to Formcar, for duplication

changed when the Nardi, as it was called, turned out to be totally uncompetitive against newer Formula Juniors.

It seems that the car had deficiencies in both handling and horsepower. Brundage had racer Bill Bencker Jr. try to develop the car further, but he found little success. The car was so uncompetitive that although it was rated at 1200cc and the Formula Junior rules limited displacement to 1100cc, the Nardi was allowed to run in several events.

The original Nardi, before it even left Italy. Notice the high rear cowl, that proved very uncompetitive.



The First Car

Unlike the many Formula Vees that would follow it, the Nardi did not start with parts salvaged from a junkyard wreck. Instead, Brundage bought a brand-new VW Beetle and had it shipped to Nardi. Although Mr. B insisted that the car should be built almost entirely from VW components, the car was first constructed with front and rear transverse leaf springs (Jan Brundage tells us they were of Fiat origin). Upon seeing the car, Mr. B was very upset and had it converted back to all VW components. Another unfortunate feature of this first car that is readily apparent in its early photos (see above) was the high rear cowling. As this was very poor aerodynamically, it was quickly changed. Other details included a hand-formed aluminum skin surrounding a tubular steel chassis and, as with any Formula Vee, stock VW engine, suspension and brakes.

The Beginning of the End, or the End of the Beginning

Volkswagen AG became aware of Brundage's efforts and, due to the company's non-racing policy of the day, basically issued him a cease-and-desist order. It might have all ended right there if it were not for two men: Bill Duckworth and retired Air Force Col. George Smith, both of Orlando, Fla. Duckworth and Smith had seen the Nardi and taken an interest in it—not as a Junior, but as the basis of a new formula class. Smith, who was involved in the sailboat racing Star Class (which featured very strict rules), saw the Nardi as a cheap way for racers to get into formula car racing.

Brundage sold the Nardi and a second car to Smith and Duckworth for the whopping price of \$1 each. The Smith and Duckworth team soon opened shop as Formcar Constructors, Inc., and began producing racing machines based on the Nardi. They called their car the Formcar, and a basic kit was offered for \$1000, while a complete ready-to-race Formcar was listed at \$2400.

Smith, who was involved with the SCCA administration, approached the sanctioning body to have Formula Vee (as Smith called his formula) adopted as a new class. As in Star Class boat racing, under Smith's plan all of the cars would be identical (and thus be Formcars).

Word of this idea spread, and two other racers stepped forward with their own thoughts on the matter. Ray Caldwell and Gene Beach liked the idea of a strict class of inexpensive formula cars using VW components, but they wanted to design and build their own cars—Caldwell the Autodynamics, and Beach the Beach. After much discussion, the SCCA modified Smith's original specifications to allow other manufacturers the opportunity to build Formula Vees. Smith, Duckworth and Bill Baker wrote the original specifications for the formula, and Smith drafted the original bylaws of the Formula Vee Racing Association, an organization designed to get the class going.

By 1962, the first true Formula Vees appeared on the scene. Although the new formula cars were not taken seriously at first, they quickly made their mark in several Southeast Region SCCA events. The SCCA Board of Governors announced shortly thereafter that Formula Vee would be recognized as a racing class in 1963; if interest

continued, the class would be accepted as a National class in 1964. The rest, as they say, is history. Today's Formula Vees remain true to their origins, running 1200cc VW engines and mostly VW components.

Then What Happened?

In 1963, Jan Brundage opened up a VW, Porsche and Mercedes dealership in Pompano Beach, Fla. (This was to become Champion Porsche, the largest Porsche dealership in the world.), and in 1964, Mr. B died at the age of 53 in a motorcycle accident.

While sitting in his office one morning in the early '70s, Jan was perusing a copy of *Autoweek*. He saw a classified ad for an all-aluminum Formula Vee for \$1700. Jan thought that the Nardi was the only aluminum Formula Vee ever made (although the first few Zinks had featured aluminum monocoque construction), so he dispatched Bill Bencker up to Ohio to check out the car.

Sure enough, it was the Nardi. They dragged it home and put it in storage. Jan Brundage knew he wanted the car back, as it was part of his family's history, but he had no real plans for it.

Flash forward to 1984, and the first of Butch Deer's and Ron Rutenburg's Formula Vee Reunions. These two Vee enthusiasts convinced Jan Brundage to participate in the event, even though the Nardi was still in pieces. So Jan left the car home, but attended the reunion. Once there, he says, the camaraderie he experienced convinced him to put the car back together when he got home.

The Nardi's First and Second Restoration

So the Nardi was dragged out of storage and resurrected—briefly. During a practice session for the 1989 Bahamas Vintage Race, Bill Bencker wrecked the car quite badly. The Nardi was taken to Fred Clark's Caracal Cars in Jacksonville for repair. While awaiting repair, much of the car's original aluminum bodywork was stolen, along with Jan's trailer.

Despite the setbacks, the car was rushed to completion in time for the 1988 25th-annual Formula Vee Reunion at Road America. It appeared in raw aluminum; Bill Bencker again drove it.

Ten years later, for 1998's 35th-annual Formula Vee Reunion at Road America, the car was again restored, this time in first-class fashion. Robby Robinson, formerly of Aston Martin, perfected the bodywork. Bert Greenwood of Greenwood Corvettes in Sanford, Fla., put an incredible red paint job on the car, and Toby Bergin redid all the mechanicals. Paul Schiener coordinated the restoration. While the revived Nardi was not race legal (no fuel cell), the car was displayed, won the concours and run in exhibition at the 1998 reunion.

Plans for the Future

Jan Brundage is now long retired, and while he stays busy with a new family and two kids, he still has racing in his blood. He claims that very soon you will see the Nardi back out on track with both him and Bill Bencker at the wheel. He is planning the required safety mods to run some exhibition events, and also has one of the original Formcar fiberglass bodies to put on the car in case it gets damaged. Expect to see this rare and beautiful car out on track again.