

The Hahn Chrysler-Kurtis

For years people driving along Aurora Avenue, a main thoroughfare north of Seattle, saw an odd-looking open-wheeled car sitting on top of the roof of an independent auto-parts store. No, that's not where Jerry Grant threw it the last time it broke down, although he might have been tempted. The car was the Chrysler-powered Kurtis 500S owned by Dick Hahn and driven by Lew Florence and Grant. Not much can be verified of the car's origins, it may have been the model driven by Tony Bettenhausen in the 1953 Carrera Pan Americana Road Race. Builder Frank Kurtis at that time was the leading Indy chassis builder, and he based his road-going model on the Indy frame. Dick Hahn acquired it in 1956, dropped in the biggest Chrysler Hemi his dealership could find and went racing. The car was fast—but fragile. It was also attractive in a brutal way, big cycle fenders and a thick red body with typical Kurtis toothy grill treatment. It won a few races Deer Park and Ellensburg among them and led a lot of others through part of the 1959 season—but eventually its poor finishing record doomed it to the junk heap. When the value of old race cars began to skyrocket, the Kurtis was hastily pulled down from the roof of the parts shop and today is on the vintage racing circuit looking great once again.