

Tom Carstens

“Uncle Tom” or “Old Leadfoot”, Tacoma’s Tom Carstens was around long enough to earn many nicknames, most of them complimentary. Tom came from a background in boat racing and midget car racing, financed by Carstens Hygrade Meats, a family meat packing business. Tom achieved considerable success and notoriety in the early days of sports car racing when his #14 Cad-Allard, driven by Bill Pollack, won feature races at Pebble Beach, at the time the biggest automobile race west of Watkins Glen. After the Cad Allard was crashed in 1953, Tom bought a stable of cars that had appeared in the movie *The Racers*, including most notably the HWM that was apparently wrecked in an early scene. He dropped a Chevrolet engine into the HWM and appeared on the scene with this car as well as another Cad-Allard owned by fellow Tacoma enthusiast Dave Fogg and once again ruled the roost in the Northwest.

Out of the meat business and into the car business, Tom bought out the Joe Henderson and sold foreign cars out of a Tacoma location as “Carstens AutoHaus” for many years. Meanwhile he kept racing, now personally driving his cars and sticking closer to home. During all this time he was very involved in the regional SCCA, serving in various capacities and exerting considerable influence over the way races were handled and other club affairs conducted. Driving the Cad-Allard Tom won the Mary Hill Loops and the Fort Lawton hillclimbs several times, setting new course records in the process. The combination of Cadillac low-end torque and Tom’s fearless driving style was made for hillclimb events. Tom and the Allard also won at places like Tillamook and Shelton.

The HWM, meanwhile, never really ran up to expectations, and as the Allard was becoming outmoded Tom bought the first of two Listers in 1958. Both were powered by Chevy, and he was successful with each, the first a “Knobbly” the second a Costin. With the Knobbly he won the 1958 Seafair Trophy race after an epic battle with Dr. Frank Becker’s two-litre Ferrari. During these days Tom was notable not only for his driving accomplishments but also for putting around the pits area in a mini-scooter, almost hidden under his considerable bulk. (It should be noted that Tom was not only admittedly portly, he was also physically powerful, light on his feet, and in much better shape than he appeared). Towards the end of his driving career Tom made a few out-of-character appearances in a Lotus Formula Junior, a car apparently too small for him, but in which he showed that he could be fast in anything.

Tom retired from involvement in racing during the 1961 season in the midst of building a Buick-powered Lotus special for Dave Tatom. Tatom was drafted and Carstens, unhappy with the

new kind of racecar that was emerging, abruptly called an end to his long and colorful career, Always a fan of powerful big-engined cars, Tom was not comfortable in the smaller, high-revving rear-engined cars that were beginning to dominate the feature events in sports car racing. Tom came back to vintage racing in the early 1990s and was able to drive some of his old cars again; he passed away in 1995.