

THE JET PILOT'S RACING CARS

Airline pilot Hugh Dibley took time out to build racing cars in the late '60s and, although the project stopped for a while, it was later resurrected in 1975

THE MARQUE PALLISER came into being in the late 1960s. Around 150 racing cars, chiefly Formula Fords, were built before the firm became insolvent and disbanded early in 1972. Late in 1974, however, the name was revived by one of the former directors and a new model was announced for the 1975 season.

British racing driver Hugh Palliser Kingsley Dibley was behind the project. The son of a naval officer, and a descendant of Admiral Palliser who served with Nelson, he was born in Hong Kong in April 1937. After entering the Fleet Air Arm for his National Service, Dibley forsook all traces of water for air, and trained as a pilot: he joined BOAC and became an airline pilot. Dibley began motor racing in 1959, at the age of 22, competing in production sports-car races with an AC Aceca-Bristol. He graduated to Formula Junior with Lola cars, and in 1964 raced a Brabham BT8-Climax sports car sponsored by Stirling Moss. He won the supporting race in that year's British Grand Prix, beating Denny Hulme and Roy Salvadori, and also enjoyed success in the United States.

In 1965 and 1966, Dibley raced large-capacity Lola T70s, winning the sports-car race supporting the British Grand Prix once more. The year was 1966 and this time he conquered Chris Amon, Jacky Ickx and many others. In 1967, he co-drove a Ferrari 250LM to a class win in the BOAC 500 at Brands Hatch and was due to race the Howmet TX gas-turbine sports car in the following year's event. However, it was crashed before his turn to race. Dibley also appeared, unsuccessfully, in a Chevrolet Camaro saloon car.

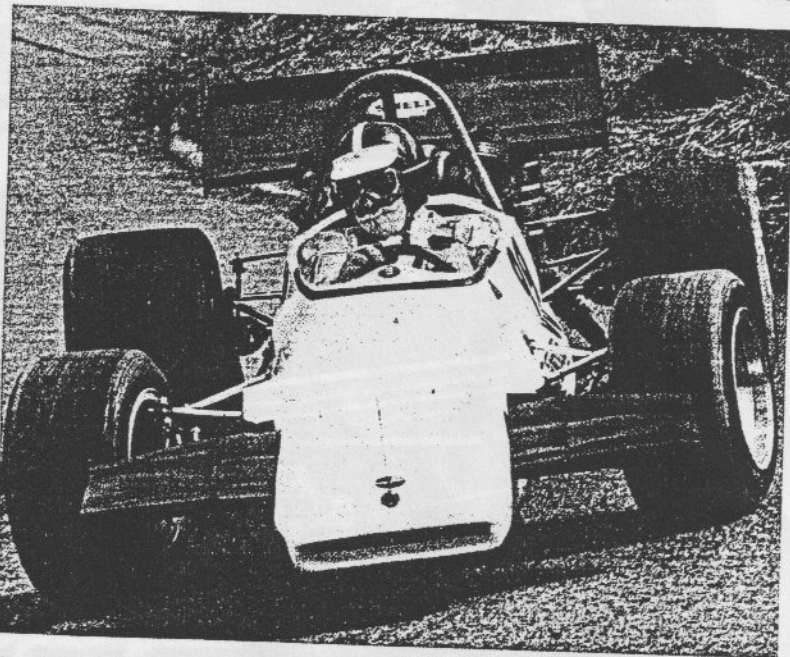
During his racing exploits, Dibley befriended Len Wimhurst, an engineer who worked for Lola and Brabham. Wimhurst cornered Dibley one day in 1966 and suggested he could design and build a car if Dibley would provide the engine and gearbox and race it. The chassis was completed in the backyard of Wimhurst's house in Catford, South London, in December 1966, and by October 1967 the complete car was on the starting grid for its first race at Castle Combe. It was quickest in practice, but retired on the last lap owing to a fuel blockage. At first known as the TBN—to be nominated—the car was eventually christened the Palliser WDB1; Palliser was the second of Dibley's three forenames, W was for Wimhurst, D for Dibley and B for Formula B, a 1600cc production-engine formula popular in the United States, and known as Atlantic in England.

In 1968, Wimhurst built three more Pallisers, again in his backyard, which were sold to customers in the United States for Formula B racing via Bob Winkelmann, the American agent who was soon to become a director of the company alongside Dibley and Wimhurst (the American cars were, in fact, known as Winkelmanns or Winkelmann-Pallisers).

In October 1968, Palliser Racing Design Ltd was formed and Wimhurst moved into new premises in North Street, Clapham, South London. Nearly fifty

cars were built in the cramped, 1700 sq ft premises in 1969, over 40 of them Formula Ford WDF1s and the remainder Formula B WDB2s. Plans for an advanced-specification Formula 5000 car—which was to use side-mounted radiators and other innovations 'borrowed' from the 1968 Chaparral Can-Am car—were shelved owing to lack of time and finance.

In 1970, the bulk of Palliser's production was again shipped to the United States. A works Formula Ford Palliser WDF2 was raced in Britain by Peter Lamp-lough with encouraging results, while Roger Keele was lent a chassis for Formula Three use. This car, known as the Palliser WD31, was unfortunately plagued with engine problems. Bob Evans, a customer, clinched the



Above: Mike MacDowel competing in the Gurston Hill-Climb of June 1971. His car was based on a Formula B WDH1 Palliser chassis and used a 3-litre Repco-Brabham Formula One engine

Townsend Thoresen Formula Ford Challenge series at Brands Hatch, while Vern Schuppan and Russell Wood also scored successes for the firm at the end of the season. In mid 1970, Palliser took over the production rights of a Formula 5000 project begun earlier in the year by Frank Gardner and Ford designer Len Bailey. Originally known as the Franklen, it was renamed the Palliser-Franklen WDA1. No orders were received for the production of replicas, and the prototype was eventually sold to Australia.

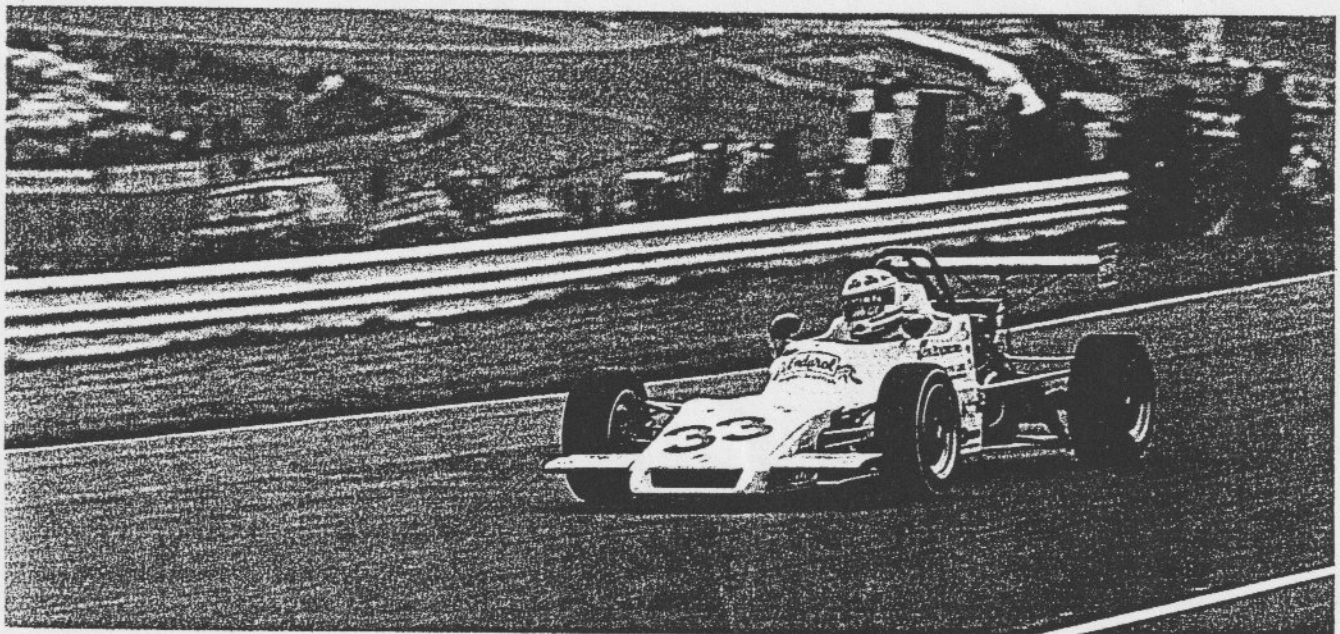
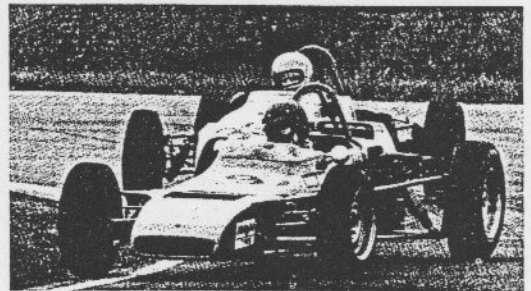
For 1971, a wider market for Palliser cars was sought by Dibley, owing to the poor economic climate in the United States. More workshop space, giving an extra 3000 sq ft, trebled the area available, and the range of cars was increased. Pride of place went to the Formula B Palliser WDB4, a development of the original 1968

car which was now also eligible for the new British category. Basically, it was a multi-tubular space-frame design with stressed panelling, featuring wide-based, unequal-length double-wishbone front suspension and lower wishbones, top links and twin radius rods at the back; it sold for £2400 less engine. Most prolific car off the production line was, of course, the 'bread and butter' Formula Ford WDF3. Of necessity, a more simple space-frame concept, it sold for £1325 less engine or £1650 with a BRM-tuned Ford engine. A high spot for Palliser in Formula Ford in early 1971 came when Peter Hull, later to become McLaren PR man, took Peter Lamplough's works car to South Africa. Hull won the five-race Sunshine Series, sponsored by BOAC and Ford, from Englishman Geddes Yeates and up-and-coming local boy Jody Scheckter. A Formula Three version of the WDB4, the WD32, sold for £2250 less engine (it was virtually the same chassis, but with a Hewland Mk 8 instead of a Hewland FT200 gearbox) and a Formula Super Vee version of the WDF3, the WDV1, was available at £895 in kit form less Volkswagen parts, or £1850 complete with standard 1585cc Volkswagen engine. The light-alloy monocoque Formula 5000 Palliser-Franklen WDA1 was still listed at £3750, while the range was completed by the Palliser-Daren Mk 3 sports car. Dibley had taken over the manufacturing rights of the Daren 2-litre sports car, designed, built

Right: a Formula Ford Palliser WDF3 in action. A simple space frame design, the car cost £1325 less engine and £1650 when fitted with the BRM-tuned Ford engine. In 1971, New Zealander Peter Hull took one of these cars to South Africa and won the five-race Sunshine Series beating drivers of the calibre of local aces Jody Scheckter and Richard Sterne

ship, driving the works Palliser WDB4 powered by a Ford Twin-Cam engine developed by BRM. It was an excellent achievement, but not enough to save the firm.

Despite initial announcements of an intensive programme to be pursued in 1972, Palliser Racing Design Ltd was offered for sale as a going concern in mid February. Hugh Dibley was now a first officer on BOAC Boeing 747s, and a jumbo-pilot instructor. He could not devote sufficient time or energy to running his firm, which was now in financial difficulties, with few orders on the books for the coming season. Instead of concentrating on making Palliser a profitable company, Dibley had perhaps entertained too many unprofitable deals with customers and had tried to



and raced by John Green. It had a steel-monocoque centre section and exterior alloy panelling. In addition, a one-off car was built for hill-climb purposes. Based on the Formula B model, this WDH1 chassis was built around the 3-litre Repco-Brabham T740 engine for Mike MacDowel.

Hugh Dibley also revealed that he could construct a Formula Two car for any interested customer, and hinted that in the not-too-distant future, a Formula One Palliser was a distinct possibility.

On the surface, 1971 was a successful year for Palliser with their cars excelling in Formula Ford and Formula B. Vern Schuppan, the Australian driver who at one stage was employed by Palliser to liaise with customers and undertake general administration work,

Above: Irishman Damien Magee piloting his Palliser P742 Formula Ford 2000 to victory at Brands Hatch in early 1975. Although the company producing this model retained the Palliser name it had no business connection with original Palliser founder, Hugh Dibley

expand too quickly. He found that race-track successes did not pay the bills.

In mid March, the firm went into liquidation, and later in the year most of the stock was bought by Cambridge Sports Cars, a company run by racing driver Ian Mawby. Lem Wilmhurst continued to design and build racing cars, one bearing his own name being campaigned in Formula Atlantic during 1972. Wilmhurst revived the Palliser name late in 1974, introducing a car for the new Formula Ford 2000. Known as the Palliser P742 and driven by Northern Ireland driver Damien Magee, it displayed enormous potential and quickly became a leading contender in the 1975 Allied Polymer Group Ford 2000 Championship. A Formula Ford 2000, it was the