

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.

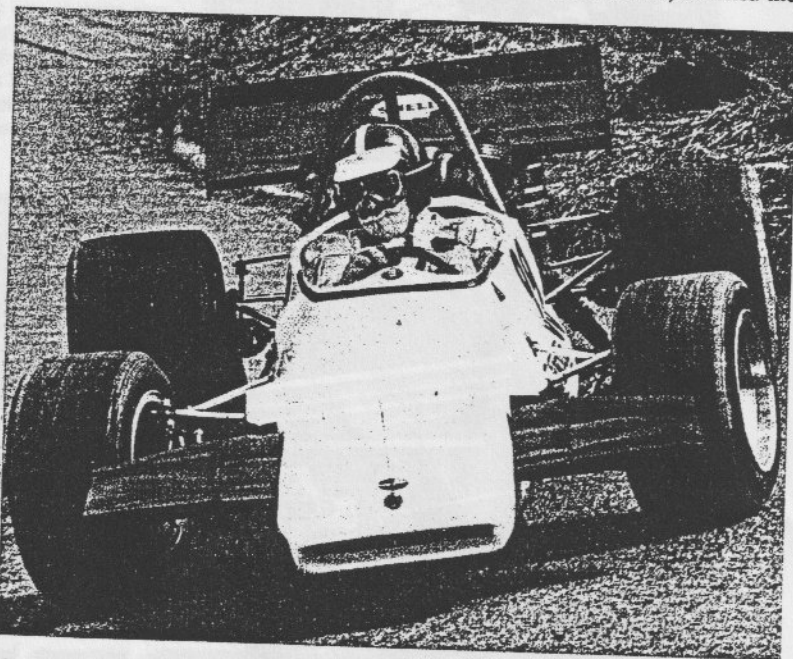
During his racing exploits, Dibley befriended Len Wimhurst, an engineer who worked for Lola and Brabham. Wimhurst cornered Dibley one day in 1966 and suggested he could design and build a car if Dibley would provide the engine and gearbox and race it. The chassis was completed in the backyard of Wimhurst's 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

