

E.D. MARTIN

A TRUE GENTLEMAN RACER.
HIS STORY BY HISTORIAN WILLEM OOSTHOEK

CAPTIONS BY MR. OOSTHOEK • IMAGES FROM THE OOSTHOEK COLLECTION

Six feet tall and skinny, bespectacled and balding, Edwin Dennis Martin looked like an accountant. He certainly did not project the popular image of a race car driver in the Fifties, but the same was said of five-time World Champion Juan Manuel Fangio. Martin never made it to Formula One; in fact, his racing career was surprisingly short, just two and a half years confined to sports racers. However, he could afford the fastest cars available and drove them with skill and consistency, which led to invitations to international events such as Havana, Sebring, Le Mans and Nassau. Until Martin's competition career came to a premature end in November, 1959, pundits considered him one of the top performers of the South.

Born on January 30, 1920, in Columbus, Georgia, near the Alabama state line, Edwin Dennis always went by E.D. A chain of movie theaters started by his father had made the family wealthy. While E.D. was mechanically inclined – he drove two Cords during his college days – it took a while for competition cars to grab his attention. He was 37 when he ran his first race at St. Simons Island in June, 1957, old even by Fifties standards. Professionally, E.D. and his brother by then presided over the largest independent chain of movie theaters in the U.S., more than 125 of them from Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee to Northern Florida. They also owned TV stations, motels and other real estate. The Martins were millionaires many times over, in a time when the term meant something.

E.D. got hooked on road racing when he met business colleague Roy Schechter at motion picture trade conferences. Schechter had started his race career with a Mercedes 300 SL early in 1957. Martin owned a

similar car, bought on a European trip the year before, and decided to give it a try as well. He entered a 10 lap novice race at St. Simons Island on June 15 and finished second behind an XK-120. Until then E.D. had crammed his free time with other daring hobbies: flying, big game hunting, mountain climb-

ing (and fifth in F-Production). Within two weeks he upgraded to the first of his Ferraris. It was a well-used 750 Monza of 1955 vintage, chassis s/n 0498 M, previously owned by produce king A.D. Logan of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The light blue Monza had a good track record and Logan's pilot Ray Jones –

I blasted my car away from there. I went all out, up on the hairy edge of the curves. This was the first time I really extended my car. I wound up in fifth place. I won a ribbon. I drove harder for that ribbon than for many of the big trophies I've won."

Mansfield, Louisiana, followed on September 1. Without mentioning his overall position, the *Shreveport Times* credited E.D. with winning DM class in Race 4, an 8 lap preliminary. It turned out to be good for another fifth overall. He did not start the feature race after giving it all in the previous 15 lapper for small production cars, finishing third in the MGA.

At Stillwater, Oklahoma, on September 14-15, Martin finished sixth overall in the preliminary, then blew his three liter engine in the feature the next day. He recalled: "I was wide open, 150 miles an hour, 6,000 rpm in fifth gear. The number 2 connecting rod turned loose and started knocking holes in the side of the cylinder block. Oil began to pour back over me. I spun out on the straightaway, spun around three times and stopped."

Rather than rebuild the original engine – although eventually he would do so – E.D. decided to buy a more powerful replacement. Luigi Chinetti sold him the 3.5 liter unit from Gene Greenspun's 857 Monza, chassis s/n 0578 M, which had crashed beyond repair at VIR in August. Marquis Alfonso de Portago was the first owner of this car, a fact that E.D. liked to mention in conversation.

Martin's first race in the 857 Monza came at Fort Pierce, Florida, at the end of September. He finished both the 15 lap prelim and the 30 lap feature in fourth overall (first in CM), behind Eddie Crawford's Porsche 550 RS and the 200 SI



E.D. Martin in 1958. He was the happy owner of a 3.5 liter Monza, a 3.8 liter 315 S and a 3.0 liter Testa Rossa.

ing, golf and deep-sea tournament fishing with a fellow angler named Hemingway. But once Martin discovered racing, this sportsman spent little time behind his desk at 1308 Broadway in Columbus. Almost every weekend found him at a track somewhere around the U.S.

An MGA soon replaced the 300 SL. E.D. entered it at the inaugural VIR races at Danville in August, 1957, finishing

also one of his truck drivers – had taken it to victory at Galveston, Texas, on July 7.

Martin made his first appearance in the three liter Monza at Lawrenceville, Illinois, on August 25, although his positions in the preliminary and feature – which went to Eddie Crawford's Porsche – have been forgotten. E.D. was still learning how to handle the Ferrari's many horses and the result with his red MGA in the production race that weekend sank in deeper: "I stalled on the grid. Everybody passed me. There I was, a Georgia Cracker, stalled. I was terribly humiliated.