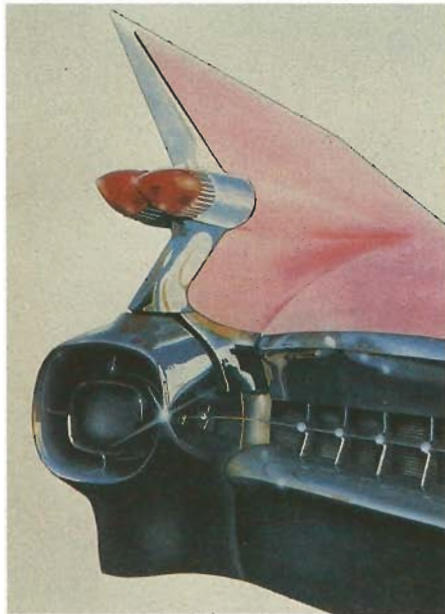


Profile: Harold James Cleworth

It is arguable that the last American cars that were truly American were the chrome-slathered creations of the late '50s. But whether you subscribe to this premise or not, we feel certain that you will be charmed by one of the champions of the Age of Chrome, Harold Cleworth, who is this month's cover artist.—Ed.

A portrait of the artist

by Paul Dean



FERRARI CAMPIONE DEL MONDO

Within Harold Cleworth's automotive art is his high sense of nonsense. "I like to paint cars that are saying, 'Look at me. Aren't I a lot of fun? And when they designed me they didn't stop, they just kept going.' What an abysmal but wonderful excess."

He is tugged by personal nostalgia. "The '50s were my period of growing up in England where you looked at

the United States for everything. American movies with Marilyn Monroe, American music with Bill Haley, and American cars being driven by GIs from Burtonwood Air Base near my hometown."

There also is Cleworth's cogitative side: "I hope there's a serious, creative streak in my work, a full dedication to the technique of painting—that is to say capturing a

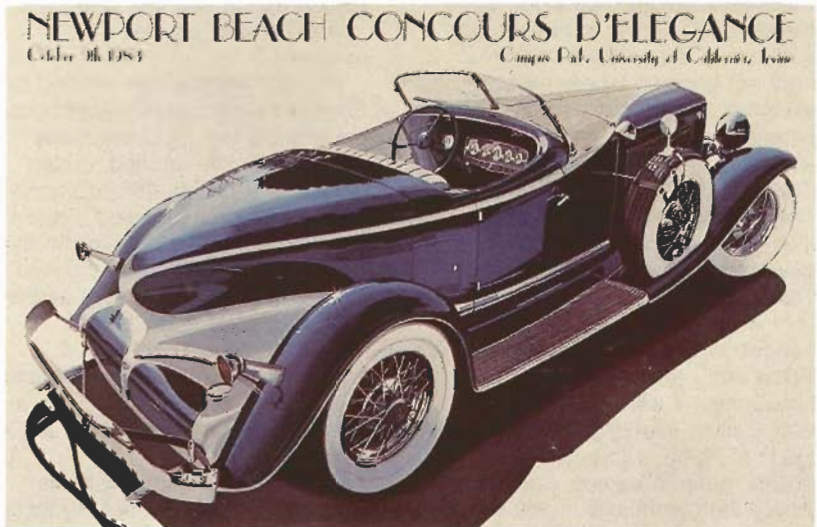
strong image of a car, something that smacks you in the face, the portrayal of one layer or layer upon layer of a car's character from the engine out."

Clearly, for Lancashire-born Cleworth, 46, the combination is doing very nicely, thank you, luv. In the past 10 years he has sold close to 200,000 poster copies of 14 automotive images. His current (and resolute) outlets are 400 galleries and boutiques in the United States, Australia, Canada, England, France, Sweden, and Africa.

He painted the nose-on, wings-up view of a black Mercedes 300SL that on Sunday nights hung behind the studio set desk of television detective Matt Houston—likely the purest thing in a series often featuring (shudder) neoclassic replicars. It showed up again in "Superman III." There have been Cleworth's Porsches of Beverly Hills, a black Turbo side by side and snout to tail with a 911 SC, and the pomodoro-red Countach once owned by former Duke of Hazzard John



Opposite page:
1959 Cadillac fin,
the artist at work
on our cover, 1967
Ferrari 275 GTB 4.
This page,
clockwise from
top: 1967 Jaguar
XK-E, 1933
Auburn V12 Salon
Boattail Speedster,
1939 Cadillac and
1937 La Salle
Opera Coupe, 1955
Mercedes-Benz
300SL Gullwing.



CLEWORTH • IN • CHICAGO
SEVENTH FIFTH ANNUAL AUTOMOBILE SHOW - 300 CORMICK PLACE - CHICAGO ILLINOIS - FEB. 26 - MAR. 6 1985

Profile: Harold James Cleworth

Schneider, and the pink tailfin of a '59 Cadillac, and the interior of his own tri-tone (turquoise green on emerald green over pea green) '58 Chrysler Imperial and a full inventory of bechromed, beglamored, befettered, befitting, and still beguiling Detroit behemoths.

Cleworth has been interviewed by "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" because his acrylic-on-canvas portraits of Auburns and Duesenbergs are commissioned by today's well-fixed and celebrated. Starting at \$10,000 a pop.

Harold James Cleworth (that's the official signature) is a one-man show at a Santa Monica gallery with John Ritter on hand and a champagne party at Trumps for the unveiling of his dealer-commissioned portrait of the Lincoln Mark VII.

None of which is too shabby for Cleworth (spoken Cloo-worth by friends back home), a bus driver's son from a sooty textile town in northern England where he sold sketches of gray canals and black pitheads in dismal local pubs. Yet surrounded by such dinginess, young Cleworth developed a lust for color. The starkness of Lancastrian skylines, their chimney pots and slagheaps, gave him hunger for softer forms. That's when he found American cars.

"I was 14 and had hitchhiked to London to see the Earls Court Motor Show and I remember a Cadillac convertible, a silver Eldorado Biarritz with a silver interior," recalls Cleworth. He is at home, a three-bedroom house-studio in Venice, California, where the community image still balances between artists and street gangs. The place is furnished in the same combination of plexiglass Art-Deco and Naugahyde nouveau gauche that Cleworth has long adored in American land yachts. "That Cadillac at Earls Court was typical. Compared to the plain, practical British cars, here was total ostentation and bad taste; far too much, far too gaudy, and for me, God, far too wonderful."

His wonderment survived studies at the Manchester College of Art and Design, a London job illustrating hot love stories in a women's magazine, and his 1972 move to San Francisco. Where he guzzled on and gawked at big American cars in bulk. He painted a portrait of a '42 DeSoto. Then that single tailfin of the pink Cadillac. "That was a moment of truth for me, and I realized that it is what I'd really wanted to do all along. I'd loved cars all my life. Here I was in America with

cars slapping me in the face. So why not paint cars?"

The market for affordable posters was just beginning. The state of automotive art was limited to grand prix posters and enlarged centerspreads from motoring magazines. So with friend Scott Green standing in as collateral and business manager, Cleworth borrowed \$2000 to produce lithographs of the Cadillac fin. He set up shop in an area of Haight-Ashbury where glitter overlapped scuzz.

"We opened a gallery right on Haight Street among the derelicts and bums sprawling outside our door. Why would they buy anything to hang on their walls? They didn't have any walls.

"All we had to sell for a year was the pink Cadillac. But, somehow, we sold three fourths of the 950-print edition during that first year."

And the rest, as they say, is whiskey.

In 1982, shortly after moving to Southern California, Cleworth crushed a Ferrari. S'fact. A Costa Mesa restorer had the torched, gutted corpse of a Ferrari 365 rusting in his yard. Cleworth suggested a more dignified end. Why not squash the Ferrari into a cube to be cleaned and painted (Ferrari red, 'natch) as the base of a plate glass table?

It was done. "There was a tremendous feeling of true sculpture to the result," said Cleworth. "So a year later we crushed the shell of a 930 Porsche."

Cleworth was happy with his Stuttgart cubism. But not the thinly disguised hype, champagne, and tuxedo-in-a-junkyard that his publicist arranged. "So when it was suggested that next we crush a Rolls-Royce, I declined, figuring it was time to retain some artistic integrity," he continued. "But I have to admit that crushing a Rolls would have the ultimate cringe factor."

Cleworth—whose work begins with a full photographic inspection of his automotive model before the transfer to canvas—currently is completing a painting of a '30 Rolls-Royce that will become the poster for this month's (October) Newport Beach Concours d'Elegance. Then he starts preliminary sketches of the '86 Saab 9000 for a limited edition of 1000 dealer prints with the original painting headed for executive offices in Sweden.

Next year—as a spinoff from his program cover for this year's Greater Los Angeles Auto Show—Cleworth (the ultimate accolade, i.e., "Did you

notice that bozo had *three* original Cleworths in the den?") will be the poster of the Toronto Auto Show.

Not too long ago, Cleworth was considering a departure into painting the classic boats and airplanes of the filthy rich—but there hasn't been sufficient letup in automotive commissions. There were skinny times when he was painting anything, including the insides of some discos—but now he can be selective, to concentrate time and talent on cars of character, and especially American cars of yesteryear.

He has analyzed his success at rolling these vehicles into living rooms and above fireplaces: "I'm holding up a mirror in front of America and saying: 'Here, this is what you're like. Look at the kinds of things you've done. I'm from somewhere else, and this is what impresses me—the ostentatiousness, the gaudiness of these cars, but also the fun you have injected into things.'

"Sometimes I think about the pink Cadillac and want to meet the designers. Did they burst out in shrieks of laughter when they made it pink?

"And look at my Imperial with its tremendous extremes of freedom and design, especially those chrome rings going through the fin. Did you know that the second ring was an option? Can you imagine a salesman at that time asking a customer: 'Do you want one ring or two?' It obviously was ostentatious, but that's what the public wanted.

"Someone once suggested I do the '58 Edsel and I said I'd never heard of the Edsel until I came here. Then people said you must do it because it's the worst car ever made. I don't know about that, but it probably has the silliest face I've ever seen on a car, like sucking your cheeks in until your mouth is a hole."

And once turned on by that fragment of fun and caricature, Cleworth did indeed do the '58 Edsel. As, in 1983, he painted another car of dubious distinction and subsequent extinction.

A group of dealers thumbed out \$12,000 for this portrait that was to be a surprise presentation. But they failed to collect the finished painting. It still hangs in Cleworth's hallway—gathering dust and the apparent disinterest of the proposed honoree, John Z. DeLorean.

Paul Dean, who describes himself as an "automotive appreciator," is a staff writer with the Los Angeles Times. 