

Chapter 5

Horsepower from the stables

The first job that Cosworth Engineering Ltd ever did was for the Vanwall F1 car. That sounds impressive, but in reality it was not much of a job. Cosworth was commissioned to design and build a wooden former for the car's perspex windscreen – something for the windscreen manufacturer to shape the perspex over. Nepotism played its part in the deal, as Mike Costin's aerodynamicist brother Frank was in charge of the Vanwall's bodywork, but Keith and Mike were not complaining. The job was neither taxing nor glamorous, but the young company was glad of any work it could get.

Other than that, the first few weeks were mostly an extension of what Keith had been doing before, for by now he knew his way around Climax engines extremely well. "We used to go over to Eltham," Mike recalls, "and look after a Lotus MkXII there for Dennis Taylor, sadly killed at Monaco in 1962 driving a Formula Junior car. And we did a few jobs on a Dutchman's MkVI."

Keith was frustrated, however, by not having a dynamometer to test customers' engines on. Without that vital piece of equipment, getting the best out of a powerplant was much too hit and miss for his liking. Clearly, John Campbell-Jones had no interest in installing one at Cornwall Garage, not least because another tenant was now sharing the premises, classic car dealer and racer Dan Margulies. So almost immediately after Cosworth started trading, Keith began to hunt for premises he could call his own. It didn't take him long, and in November 1958, just one month after its launch, Cosworth was on the move.

The departure did not mark the end of Keith's relationship with Campbell-Jones, because right into the 1960s he would occasionally bump into John in the paddock. By around 1964, John had a five year-old called Mike with him, a somewhat reluctant passenger who got very fed up with being dragged from one race meeting to another. The experience put him off cars for life. Aircraft were another matter – but we are giving too much away ...

Cosworth's new home was a former coaching stable at 41a Friern Barnet Road. In Ursula's words "... between a café and the Railway Tavern pub, which was useful, and opposite a miserable little Barclays Bank, which Keith thought might be useful."

A firewood merchant had been using the stables to chop up trees, and the premises were in a bad state. The upstairs was unsafe, some stabling booths were still in place, complete with hay baskets attached to the walls, and there was a

central drain in the floor to carry away the horse urine. By contrast, the only toilet for humans was in the pub next door, or at Southgate tube station nearby, and the tenants had to share the premises with the local rats, who had a habit of nipping in from the greasy café.

To Keith, the state of the building mattered less than the fact that it was affordable and sufficiently run down that no one would notice, or care, if the exhaust pipe from a dynamometer suddenly appeared through the roof. Rivals had jested at the audacity of this tiny inexperienced company claiming to offer professional race preparation, dubbing the firm ‘Cosbodge & Duckfudge,’ but none of them had a dyno. Installing one would demonstrate that Cosworth meant business. Keith earmarked the back booth as the home for it, and set up a tiny office under the stairs.

Initially, the mix of work was similar to that at Cornwall Garage. “There was an awful lot going on,” remembers Mike, “but it was all little bits here and there. I wasn’t involved because I wasn’t supposed to be working at Cosworth.” Customers included Graham Warner of sports car dealer Chequered Flag, Ian Walker, and Elva proprietor Frank Nichols – in particular, for John Brown’s very successful racing Elva. The common link was the Climax engine, though Keith also did some suspension work on John’s Elva.

The first Cosworth product appeared around this time, a fabricated manifold to mate Weber carburettors to the Climax engine. Climax gurus still rate the Cosworth manifold more highly than the older cast design from Derrington. By the end of 1958, the fledgling company was beginning to develop a reputation, and a rhythm. To help with the paperwork, Ursula would come in after her day’s work at the publishing company, somehow conjuring up a meal at the same time despite the absence of anything remotely resembling a kitchen. The accounting system was simple in the extreme, based as it was on just three files: paid, unpaid and pending. They banked at the Barclays opposite, and Ursula recalls that “... at one point we had a bank statement from there with just £1.50 left in the account.” In fact, Cosworth lost £744 in its first trading year, on a turnover of £3660 – but by paying on the nail and pressing customers to do likewise, Keith and Ursula could at least be confident that what little they had was actually theirs. Cosworth would grow out of all recognition in the coming years, but its straightforward and cautious approach to cash flow never varied.

*“ I ALWAYS SEEMED TO HAVE ENOUGH NOUS TO REALISE THAT
UNLESS YOUR REGULAR INCOME EXCEEDED YOUR OUTGOINGS,
YOU WENT BROKE. ”*

“Funnily enough,” Ursula comments, “it never occurred to me that he wouldn’t make it. I never actually worried about that, I just had a feeling that it would all be alright. And in those days it was easy enough to get jobs, so if everything did go wrong he could easily get a job instead.”

The next event in Keith’s life had nothing to do with Cosworth and everything to do with Ursula, for on 10 January 1959, the couple got married. The idea was that they would move straight into their first home, a newly-built maisonette not far from the works at Northwood Gardens in Friern Park, just off the main Finchley Road at Tallyho corner. “It was supposed to be ready by the time we got married,” Ursula



Keith Duckworth, Mike Costin and a youthful John Dickens preparing the FVB for testing in Cosworth's Brabham BT10, on the outside of Silverstone's Abbey Curve in 1966. *(Courtesy Ford Motor Co)*

Keith in the back garden of 78 Larkhall Lane around 1967, with five year-old Trish and two year-old Roger.

Em can be seen in the window of the dining room, where the FVA and DFV were designed.



The Guards 100 at Snetterton in 1967: Robin Widdows in his FVA-engined Brabham Cosworth leads Jochen Rindt's similarly-powered Lotus. *(Courtesy Ford Motor Co)*





The 1967 F1 season, beginning of the DFV era.
Main photo: Start of the British GP at Silverstone, the DFV's second win, with Jim Clark on pole in Lotus No. 5, alongside Graham Hill in No. 6.
Insets, from top left: Graham Hill pushing his Lotus following an engine failure in the DFV's inaugural race at Zandvoort; Jim Clark taking the chequered flag in the same race to score an historic victory; Clark on the rostrum after the Dutch win, with DKD (centre) and Colin Chapman (left); Incessant media attention for Duckworth at the subsequent Belgian GP. (Courtesy Ford Motor Co)