

Vanderbilt racer returns to LI

Local buyer gets car that raced in first Indy 500

BY BILL BLEYER

bill.bleyer@newsday.com

In the five years Howard Kroplick has been researching the Vanderbilt Cup races and buying artifacts, he has amassed posters, race programs and even the Tiffany plaque given to the 1908 winner.

Now the amateur historian has a new centerpiece for his collection: one of the few surviving cars to have competed in the six groundbreaking Long

Saving the Vanderbilt

Unless the Centerport museum can raise \$35,000, it will close Jan. 14.

A17

Island races organized by William K. Vanderbilt Jr. from 1904 to 1910.

The East Hills resident has become the proud owner of the Alco-6 car named "The Black Beast" that won the Cup in 1909 and 1910 and also competed in the first Indianapolis 500 in 1911.

"I've followed that car for years," said Kroplick, retired chairman of a medical sales firm. "For the last 10 or 15 years it was in France and was owned by an architect. Then it showed up in various auctions where it didn't sell. Then it was in a private sale, and I found it on the Internet and jumped on it."

A Belgian dealer was trying to sell the car for the architect. "I made an offer, and after some negotiations they accepted it," Kroplick said. Be-

fore finalizing the deal, he flew his family to Brussels to inspect it.

The car would have sold for millions of dollars if there was proof that it was fully original, he said. But since some parts have been replaced, he was able to buy the vehicle that originally cost about \$6,000 in 1909 for "less than six figures."

"A portion of the car is definitely the car that ran in the races, the chassis and the engine probably," Kroplick said.

After it arrives by ship in Port Newark on Jan. 1, "I'm going to find a classic car restorer to evaluate how much is original and add appropriate safety features so I can drive it."

The two-seat, six-cylinder car was running as recently as several months ago and is capable of reaching 120 mph.



THE 1909 ALCO-6 "THE BLACK BEAST"

PURCHASED BY HOWARD KROPLICK OF EAST HILLS

The Alco-6, below, in early days, and, above, in Belgium.

Kroplick plans to display it in exhibits and events next year. Then he wants to display it in a museum dedicated to the history of automobile racing on Long Island. Since he has served as a researcher at the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum, the home of the cup race organizer, for several years, he has talked to officials there about restoring one of the buildings to display the Alco and other memorabilia.

Museum board chairman Steven Gittelman said yesterday, "We're short on space, but we'll find a way to do it."

■ Original cost \$6,000. Sale price "less than six figures."

■ Believed to be the car that won the 1909 and 1910 Vanderbilt Cup Races on Long Island and finished 33rd out of a field of 40 cars in the first Indianapolis 500 in 1911.

■ One of the first six-cylinder race cars, one of only 12 known Alco cars and the only known existing Alco racer.

■ Manufacturer: American Locomotive Co. (Providence, R.I.). Wheelbase: 134 inches. Weight: 3,306 pounds. Horsepower (Estimated): 100. Maximum Speed (Estimated): 120 mph. Engine: 690 cubic inches with six cylinders, "T" head engine with four-speed transmission and chain drive.

For more details, see VanderbiltCupRaces.com

