

Chris Amon started his single-seater circuit-racing aged only 16 years in April 1960, driving his 1947 A40 Special. By early 1961 Chris owned a 1956 Cooper T41 Climax, and when racing at the small Levin track on 15 April 1961 he was impressed by the 1953 Maserati 250F F1 car driven to a number of successes that day by Brian Prescott. Chris subsequently searched for, and purchased, his own Maserati 250F, and this is the car now owned by the Southward Car Museum.

This Maserati was built as chassis number 2509 for the Owen Organisation in England, and served as a test bed for the BRM P25 F1 cars then under development by Owen's. 2509 was driven by Owen's works drivers Ken Wharton in 1954, Peter Collins in 1955, and Mike Hawthorn who drove the car in the Argentine and Mendoza Grand Prix in early 1956. 2509 was then sold to Jack Brabham, but he soon signed a contract to drive for the Cooper works team, so drove 2509 only four times before bringing it to New Zealand and selling it to Gavin Quirk. Gavin raced 2509 on many New Zealand circuits between 1957 and 1959, and he asked Ross Jensen to race it in the 1960 New Zealand International Grand Prix (NZIGP) at Ardmore. Lenny Gilbert was the next owner, and drove 2509 throughout the 1961 season. Chris Amon traded his Cooper T41 and some cash to well-known race driver and car dealer Tony Shelly and became the proud owner of 2509 in late 1961.

The first race for now 18-year-old Chris driving 2509 was on 11 November 1961 in a 15-lap NZ Specials and Racing Car's scratch race at Renwick, Marlborough, where he finished in a creditable fourth place. His second race was on the same day in the 50-lap 'Renwick 50' where he finished in seventh place. His next outing was at the short and tight Levin track on 25 November 1961, where in three races his best finish was in a seventh place in the Fred Zambucka Memorial Trophy. After a



Right: Chris Amon's 1954 Maserati 250F, 2493cc – Renwick 50, 11 November 1961. (Photo by Graham Brooks)

quick trip to Ardmore for the Auckland Car Club's pre-NZIGP December meeting, Chris was set for his first international race meeting, still aged only 18 years old!

At the NZIGP meeting at Ardmore on 6 January 1962, Chris was placed sixth in the 15-lap Bardhal Ardmore Championship for New Zealand drivers, and he qualified in 17th place on the grid for the ninth NZIGP. Later that day in the very, very wet running of the 50 laps in the NZIGP, he finished in a very credible 11th place having covered 43 laps. The race was won by Stirling Moss, and many years later Chris recalled the buzz he got that day from racing as an 18-year-old in a race won by Stirling.

On to the Vic Hudson Memorial Meeting at Levin on 13
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Chris Amon's 1954 Maserati 250F – demonstration at Ohakea, 22 April 1990. (Photo by Foto First)



Chris Amon's 1954 Maserati 250F – Renwick 50, 10 November 1962.
(Photo: Graham Brooks)

January 1962, Chris won the first eight-lap preliminary race with a fine display of driving in a relatively big car on the small Levin circuit. He decided not to race in the Vic Hudson Trophy feature race, given the once again very wet conditions. An 11th place followed at the very hot Lady Wigram Trophy race held at the Wigram air force base in Christchurch on 20 January 1962. The next international meeting was one week later in Teretonga, Invercargill, on 27 January 1962, and Chris finished in a credible fifth place in the first heat. His luck was out, though, as he failed to finish the Teretonga International feature race.

One week later Chris was racing again, this time at the Dunedin Road Race on 3 February 1962. He managed a lightning start and led the race from Pat Hoare in the 1960 Ferrari V12. But it was not to be, and a tangle of wheels with another car caused Chris to have a head-on collision with a trackside telephone pole. Master mechanic and good friend, Bruce Wilson of Hunterville, was able to repair the damage such that on 24 February 1962 Chris was racing 2509 in the NZ Racing Drivers Ohakea Championship at the Ohakea air force base. However, Chris recorded his third consecutive 'did not finish' in 2509. The final race for Chris in 2509 was in the 33-lap Renwick Trophy held on 10 November 1962, where he qualified eighth and finished in a very fine second place. After Chris had left New Zealand to race in the UK, Ngaio Amon (Chris's dad) sold 2509 'sometime around the mid-1960s' to Len Southward (later to be Sir Leonard) for £500 and the car has since been with the Southward Car Museum in Paraparaumu for over 45 years.

2509 was the car that Chris was driving as an 18-year-old when his exceptional driving ability and outstanding car control was noticed by team manager Reg Parnell of England. After the completion of the 1962 NZ international series, Reg offered Chris a position in his F1 team and not six months after he last drove his venerable 1954 Maserati 250F 2509, Chris was driving a 1963 Lola Climax F1 car in International F1 races in the UK and Europe. The rest of the story about Chris is history! 2509 played a key part in Chris's international motor-racing career, and this valuable car and is now proudly displayed at the first week-end of the *New Zealand Festival of Motor Racing celebrating Chris Amon* by the Southward Car Museum. ●



Chris Amon's 1954 Maserati 250F – demonstration at Ohakea (22 April 1990).
Photo by Photo First