

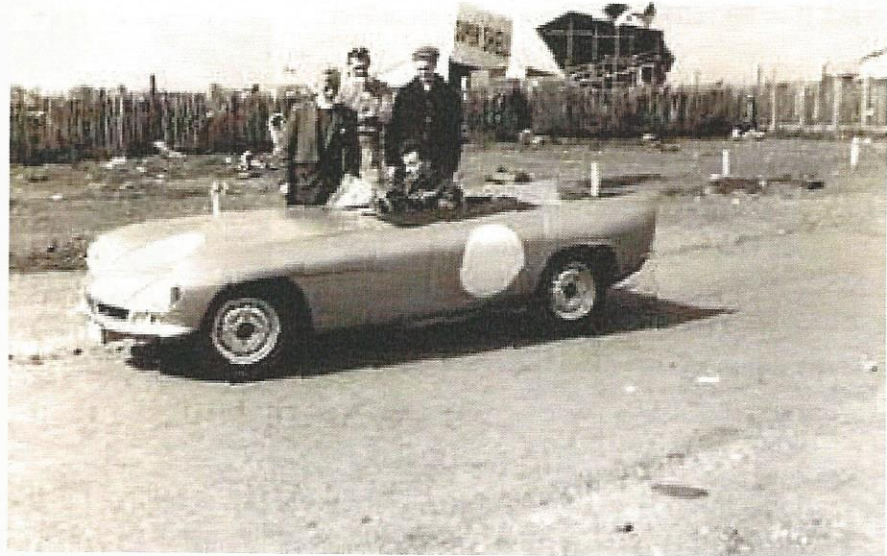
racing in the Austin, but we had a lot of fun racing around the Dagbreek Hostel with the students leaning out of the windows!

'Willie did not like being at university, and left to go to Williams Hunt in Paarl, where he became an apprentice mechanic. After that, his mother sent him overseas in 1956.' At the time, Van Niekerk was working for Deutz tractors in Paarden Eiland when 'Willie wrote to me and said that he had found the material to make our sportscar from – glassfibre.' Bob sold the Peugeot 203 that he was racing with success at Killarney to Gys Maasdorp, the circuit commentator, and used the money to go overseas 'to learn about fibreglass.' After a while 'we knew how to make bodies, but did not possess the artistic, styling abilities. Verster de Witt was then a stylist in Coventry and was married to Joan Peters who was a friend of Willie's. So we rented a flat in Earl's Court, and started making quarter-scale models in plastacene, and Verster would come down each weekend to comment on our efforts. It took 14 models to get it right.' And so the Dart was born.

'We made a mock-up and took a mould and shipped it to South Africa aboard a Union Castle ship as personal luggage. I made two bodies in the UK to pay for the trip back, one for £75, the other for £32. Willie had already returned to set up the Glass Sport Motor (GSM) company to produce the cars, the first two of which were produced in the Durban Road premises in Bellville, Cape Town, one red (for Willie) and one black (for Van Niekerk). They were raced by the two partners, powered by Anglia 105E engines with Willment overhead valve conversions designed by another associate John Passini.

The name 'Dart' was chosen 'as we had originally wanted to call the car the 'Assegai', but thought that this would be too strange for the English, so we decided instead on the name 'Dart' as it was a small Assegai!

Bob van Niekerk in the Delta at Brand Hatch, 1960. Behind him is John Passini, Donald Wagner and Cherry Crisp.
(Courtesy Bob van Niekerk)



It was a small world of motorsport enthusiasts. Before going to the UK, Meissner had earlier bought a Ford-based special which he raced with

some success from Dave le Roux. Known as the 'LRX', and later raced by Koos Swanepoel, it had 'a flat-top Ford V8 with an Ardun conversion.' Sydney Ehrenreich (father of contemporary trade unionist Tony) who earlier had worked for Le Roux on this car, came over to GSM to produce Darts and Flamingos.

Bob-and-Willie formed a partnership of intellectual equals. In Van Niekerk's view, 'Meissner was simply way ahead of his time. He made engines rev to 10,000rpm well before anyone had ever thought that possible.'