



Ephy Chesler, GSM Dart, Cape Three-Hour, Killarney, 26 November 1966.
(John Duncan)

Van Niekerk returned to South Africa in 1961 to start work on the Flamingo, a closed-top sports car, given that 'Scott and company thought that it would sell better than the open-top Delta/Dart even though we had made a hard-top for the car. When I was in the UK, I had become friendly with the Ford Dagenham people, who told me about the pending V6. I basically designed the Flamingo – without Willie but with Verster lending a hand again – around the V6, but the engine never materialised, so I was stuck with a Grand Touring car without the correct propulsion system. I searched around for alternatives, but the Zephyr straight-six was too much of a lump, the Anglia 105E engine was too small; and so I got the 1800 Taunus straight-four engine, the one with the steel crank.'

Using this engine did, in Van Niekerk's view, impede the Flamingo's saleability in Europe. 'Even though we had the right diff and made our own inlet manifold and the car managed 108mph, the Europeans did not think that a sports car could be powered by a Taunus engine. I took one to Europe to show Taffy von Trips who I got to know through racing, and he said that it would be impossible to sell in Germany because of the Taunus association.'

The Flamingo then progressed to a 1,500cc Cortina GT engine, 'but this was still not a V6. So I made one with a small-bore V8 which I raced in Maritzburg in the Six-Hour where Denis Joubert and I finished second despite driving with only top-gear since Denis had broken the gearlever off.' Van Niekerk owned this car at the time of his death.

Joubert says of the Dart, which he actively campaigned in the 1960s, 'It has exceptional road-holding compared to the other sports-cars of its time. Fibreglass, then a new technology, was not only lightweight, but easy to repair. The Ford components, on which it was based, were readily available, even though it was easy to install other engines – including Volvo, Alfa, Climax, Borgward, Peugeot and even, with Bill Jennings, a Porsche – which especially appealed to the competitors who had grown up with racing specials during the post-war years.' As a result of the Dart, Joubert recalls, 'the sports-car entry doubled, allowing people like me to race on a shoestring.' The driving force behind the car's success, he stresses, was 'Bob's design genius'.

The Dart not only dominated SA grids for much of the 1960s, but defined SA motorsport, its engineering talents and their can-do attitude. Until the Dart, competitive sports-cars had to be imported, something beyond the reach and financial means of most South Africans; after the Dart, the country became an exporter of racing technology. 'It was quick out of the box,' recalls Peter Gough, who used Dart (#3) to win the SA sports-car championship. 'We only changed the