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# ALVISITIS

## – PART I –

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The illness started in the summer of 1966. While there have been periods of semi-sanity since then, full recovery has never occurred. Alvisitis infected my being and spread through my family over the ensuing years. The result is that, to date, AOC member 4008 has owned (for varying periods of time) over thirty Alvis cars. Some more than once. It is time, therefore, for me to purge my soul before my memory, or Wayne Brooks' record keeping, are lost.

This treatise is partly the fault of the American AOC Representative, the aforementioned Brooks. Earlier I had an email conversation with Wayne, and having a senior moment, opined that I might do an article on my Alvises. Surely a mistake, as soon I received another email, this from Julian Collins. "Tremendous news" it said, and "do I have photographs as well?" Well, yes, and no. My lovely bride Luise and I now winter in Florida, and all my Alvis memorabilia is in Pennsylvania (that vast hunk of US real estate previously owned by one of your chaps, William Penn). A call to our son Jeff solved the dilemma. He will be escaping the snow and cold by visiting us soon, and will bring some Alvis "goodies" along.

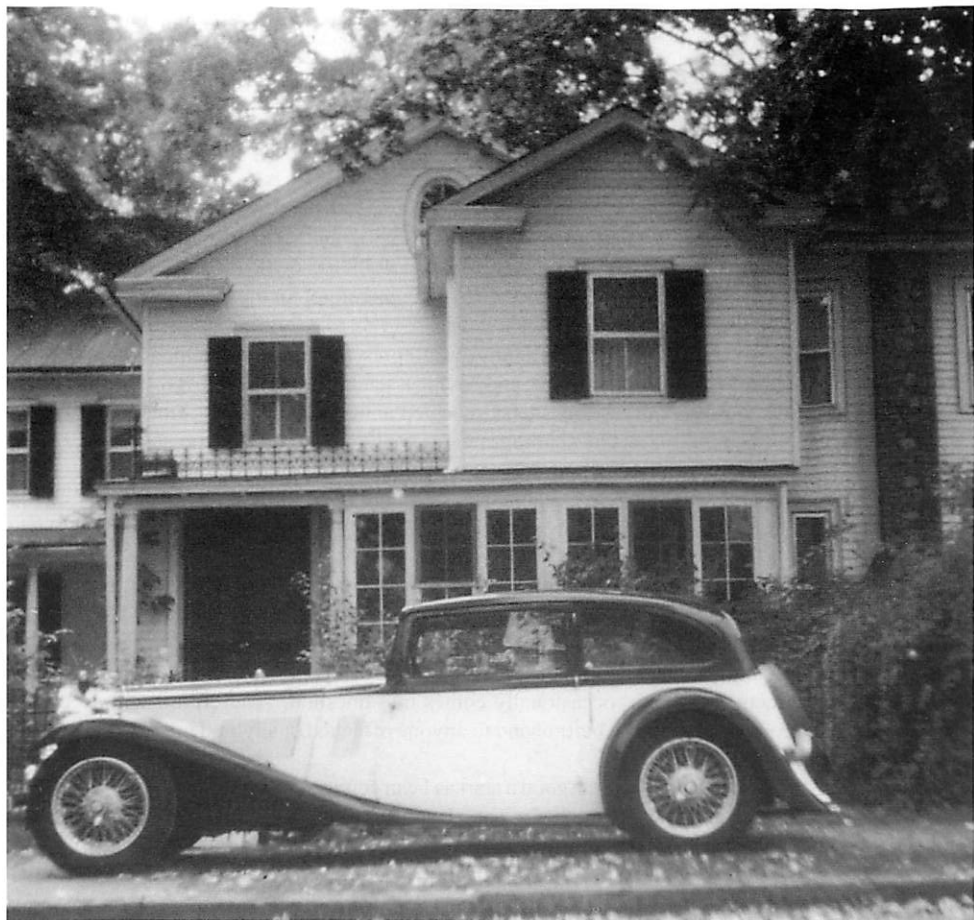
Next came the life and face-saving information from Wayne. He had records of most of the Alvises which have passed through my hands, and a formidable list of photographs as well. It is prudent now to say that what follows is absolutely correct and fully factual, except for certain times, places, people, events and numerous other minor details. You will appreciate that all herein depends a great deal on my memory, which occasionally comes into question. Therefore I will accept no responsibility for errors, and apologise beforehand to anyone offended or slighted in any way. And so I begin to jolt the grey matter.

Returning to the summer of 1966 is as good a start as I can conjure up. Luise (pronounced Louise—her family was poor and could not afford the "o") and I, soon to be married, attended a meeting of the Classic Car Club of America. It was the annual "Grand Classic", held nearby in Morristown, New Jersey. The finest restored classic cars were on display. Rolls-Royce, Duesenberg, Cord, multi-cylinder Packards, Pierce-Arrows and Cadillacs, and many more.

Yet, lo, what to our wondering eyes should appear? A fellow named Phil Steen had brought his Alvis, CWK 600. A beautiful Alvis. A Speed 25 Cross & Ellis tourer, dark green with cognac leather and great big headlights and long sweeping fenders (my American was O.K., my English needed polish) and wire wheels, and, and, and then Luise made a critical mistake. She said, bless her heart, "If you ever buy another old car, it should be one of those". What a joy to be marrying a woman who appreciates such fine machinery. Little did she know what a bucket of worms she had just overturned.

You should probably know the circumstances of our relationship. I'll try to be brief. Having excelled in college at the card game of pinochle, and not much else for two semesters, my father justly decided to allow me to find my way in the workplace. Not having the required sheepskin to become a lawyer or serious banker, and wanting to be better accepted in the community, I embarked on a career as a car salesman. In 1964 I sold a new MG1100 saloon to a lovely couple. All vehicles needed to have state inspection (MOT as it were). Shortly after purchasing the MG, this couples' daughter, Luise, came home from college, and was asked to take the car for said inspection. If the little beastie failed, she was instructed to go to the garage of the MG purveyor, and ask for Bruce. He could fix it. The rear brakes did not register. Failure. Off to ask for Bruce the fixer.

No MG1100 ever passed the state inspection the first time. As all the weight was in the front, and braking inertia caused the rear end to rise and pitch forward, nothing registered on the braking skid



*1933 Speed 20 Vanden Plas Saloon AKE 249. My first Alvis outside our Milford home in c1970.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

pad. Solution? Remove the spare tyre from the well, and with the assistance of an engine crane, insert a three hundred pound anvil. Voila! MG passed. Luise without an "o" and Bruce the fixer meet. Much more to this story, but not now. Probably never.

Married in August of 1966. Semi-pregnant in January 1967. Parents in September. Some time in between I had seen an advert from a chap in Texas attempting to flog off a 1933 Speed 20 Vanden Plas two door saloon. \$1,750.00. Cheap, it seemed. Good, as we had not much money for such foolery. Rang him. Said he had brought back from England a dozen 1930s cars, sold them all save for this unknown Alvis. Pity. We came to terms. In the enthusiasm and stupidity of relative youth, and not able to afford to have it shipped, my brother-in-law Peter and friend Bob agreed to drive with me to Temple, Texas, and drag the Alvis home. In three day's time, as we needed to go to work on Tuesday morning, Monday being a holiday. Seems simple, but Temple is damned near half way across the US from New Jersey, about 1,300 miles one way. Suffice to say we made it unscathed, albeit tired and

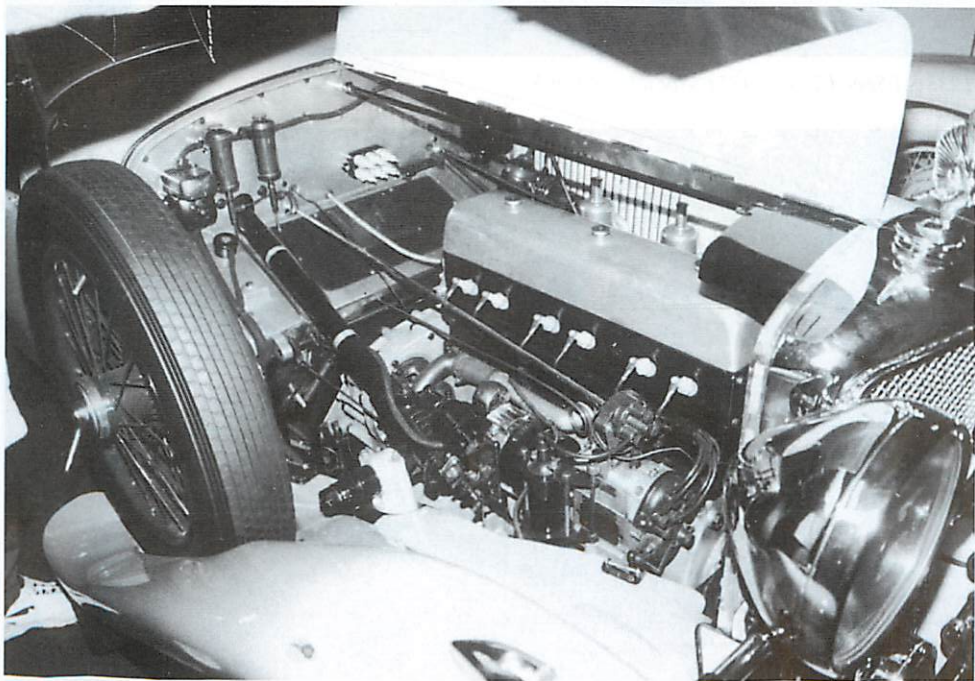


shopworn. Alvis number one was in our garage!

AKR 249 came to live with us, and Jeffrey soon arrived as well. Among other things I learned was how to change a diaper, and not to remove a magneto without properly marking the location of the drive and driven cogs. Live and learn the hard way. In 1969 we moved fifty miles away, to Milford, Pennsylvania. A friend and fellow salesman and I pooled borrowed money and bought a small Chrysler Corporation dealership. Of course the VdP came with us. I loved that car. Wonderful lines from front to the sloping tail. What MG called an Airline Coupé. Many years later we had a 3½ Litre Bentley with a similar body, but just not as strikingly attractive. Terrible gearbox as well. Suddenly opportunity reared its ugly head in the guise of an SA Speed 20 Cross & Ellis tourer. AKR 249 had to go. Roger Langston came from Maryland to collect her. I had parked AKR at the kerb in front of the house. Upon walking out we discovered four year old Jeffrey making a sketch of the Alvis. He said he loved the car and would never see it again, so he drew a picture to keep. It broke my heart, as I had no idea of his feelings, but the deed was done. AKR 249 is now in California. Jeff is 35.

Some years later Roger Langston decided to sell AKR 249, along with a partially disassembled 1934 SB Speed 20 saloon, ACJ 825. They came to Milford together. ACJ 825, as well as most of the Alvis I've owned, has returned to native shores. It seems that ACJ 825 was previously BLB 106, and is now SXU 991. Trying to find itself.

The SA Speed 20 C & E tourer was near Atlanta, Georgia, a mere 900 miles away. I saw the advert in *Hemmings Motor News*, then a small tabloid-sized publication. I was anxious to buy the car, but when I rang, there was no answer. I rang every daylight hour on the hour until a human actually answered. I'll have it, says me. The owner replied that the tyres might not make the trip. No problem.



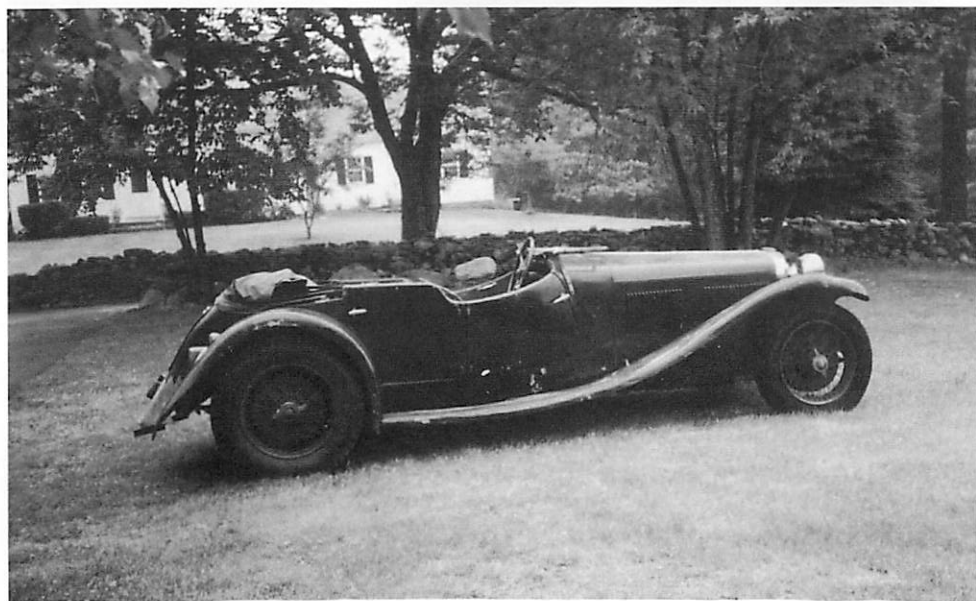
*The engine of SA Speed 20 OJ 2357 photographed when in an auction in the late 1980s.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*1933 SA Speed 20 CG 4871. Not a lovely sight.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*CG 487 after being bought home.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*





*1933 SB Speed 20 Vanden Plas tourer JT187 in Glasgow before I purchased it.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

We loaded up the station wagon with family, tow bar, five new tyres and tubes, and we were off to collect OJ 2357, quickly named *Orange Juice*. The fact that it was green made no difference, the OJ on the registration plate had doomed it. Jim Frostrom (the prior owner) and I mounted the new tyres on the road wheels, removed the half-shafts, hooked OJ to the tow bar, and we were on the road again, northbound. Half way home of course one of the new tyres blew out. The wretched spare and other old tyres made it back with no problem at all. The early SA tourers had the flat rad, and this car came shortly thereafter. Cut down driver's side door; low, taut body lines and a very light feel when driving. I decided that we needed to do a comprehensive restoration on this car. Maybe a year's time. Three years later it was finished, and won a first place in Classic Car Club of America competition at the annual winter meet in Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania. The kids called this car the "take-apart-Alvis" as it seemed always to be in pieces. More "take-apart Alvises" were in the future. This Cross & Ellis tourer differed from the standard body in that the boot had been extended and enlarged. I could never find if it had been done this way originally to a buyer's order, or at a later time. The work was done very well, with no apparent cobbling of wood or metal. I sold OJ to a well known dealer on the west coast named Tom Crook. It has changed hands a number of times since.

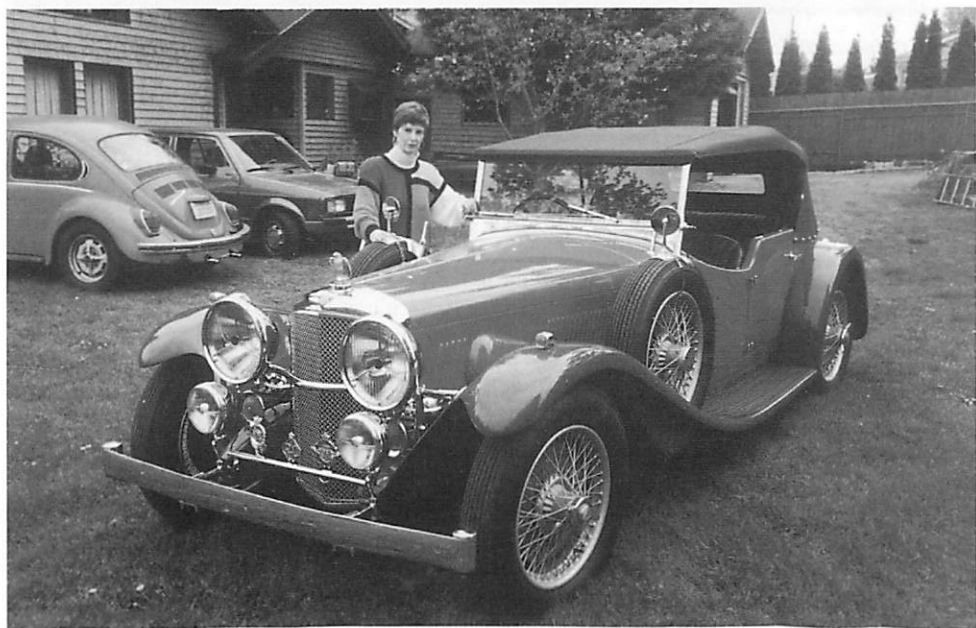
What did I learn from OJ? 1. It takes three spaces in a two car garage to disassemble a car for restoration. 2. You can't make money if your time is valued at more than two cents per hour. OJ 2357 is featured in *Automobile Quarterly* Volume 16, number four. A similar SA tourer, RN 2005, (with

standard coachwork) was owned by my good friend David Marrable in Knutsford, and I've had the great pleasure of driving about Cheshire in it, and in his 12/50 ducksback.

The rest of my Alvises will be written about not necessarily in order of purchase. A simple explanation is that I don't remember exactly which came when, as record-keeping was never my forté. I'll try to keep some semblance of rhyme and reason however, by doing the pre war Alvises first, earliest to latest.

1933 SA Speed 20 Cross & Ellis tourer, CG 4871. I went to buy this car during the first Middle East oil crisis. Petrol was virtually impossible to obtain, but an Alvis was available in Maryland, a scant 200 or so miles away. The owner, Rod Coates, agreed that if I came to see the car, he would have enough petrol available to refill my tank for the return trip. Being a Chrysler Corporation main dealer at the time, I selected a nasty, but very fuel-efficient car from the used car inventory, filled its tiny tank with petrol and was off. Luise came along to restrain me. The Alvis was not to my liking and required more work than I wanted to invest. However, sitting next to it was a most interesting, and very large car. A drophead foursome, five place, aluminium Tickford-bodied, right hand drive, straight-eight engined, large and a very handsome conveyance. What manner of fine British vehicle was this? A 1937 Studebaker President State 8. Did I buy it? Certainly. Why? A confession is in order. I buy things for some of the strangest reasons. This car is very handsome with the hood up, less so with the hood down. The side light frames stay in place, and the hood makes a huge lump over the boot (a la Mercedes-Benz) when folded. However, the lowering and raising of the hood is magic. Just above the rear wing on the side of the car is a rubber plug in the body. Remove the plug, take the massive clock-winder handle from the boot, insert same and crank. Wow! Hood lowers. Kid in the candy shop. I love "gadgets". Luise said as soon as she saw me playing with the hood crank, she knew money would flow from the account. Right.

A return to CG 4871 is in order. While I did not buy her then, many years later a swap was made



1934 SB Speed 20 Cross & Ellis tourer JJ339.

Photo: Wayne Brooks

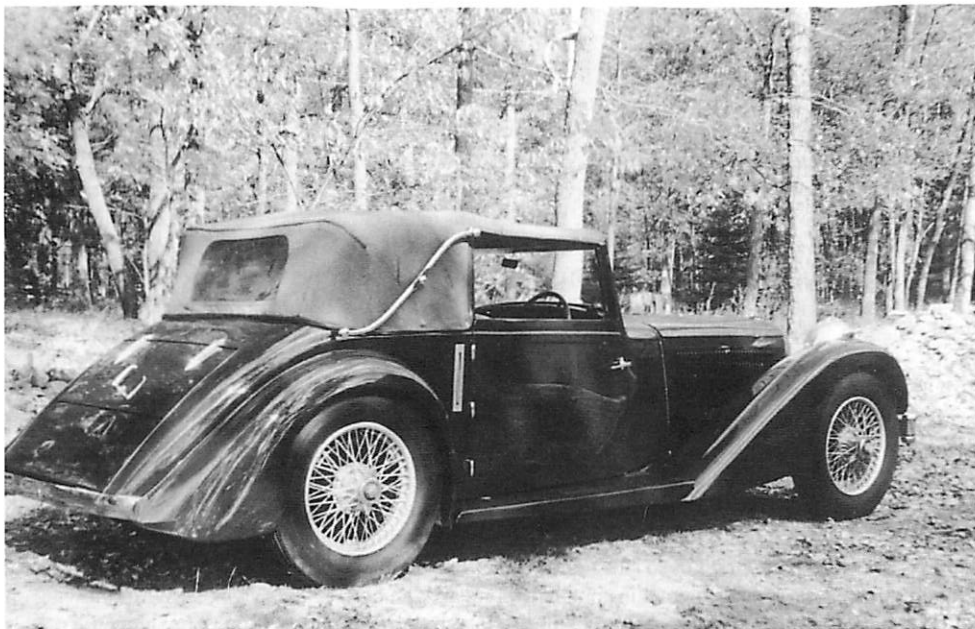
which brought CG home. This gets a little complicated, but here goes. Along with Alvis, I've always loved and been fascinated by the 1936/7 Cord, and have owned too many of them. A call came to me from an attorney in Ithaca, New York. He was handling an estate in which a Cord was among the cars to be disposed of. Would I care to make a bid on a 1937 Cord 812 supercharged phaeton? You betcha! On the road again, liked the car, made an offer, owned the car. Also in the garage, but not for sale, was a 1953 Nash-Healey, close relative to an Alvis-Healey. I left a bid on the car nonetheless, and in three weeks time the not-for-sale Nash-Healey was mine as well. Enter the picture one Leonard Nelson 'Mac' McGrady. Mac, a somewhat unique fellow, owns over seventy-five Nash-Healeys, in all states of disassembly and disrepair. And you thought I was unbalanced? I had seen in *Hemmings Motor News* that Mac also had an Alvis to flog off. Rang him up, made a tentative deal, loaded up the Nash-Healey, towed it to Delaware, brought the Alvis home. By now you have deduced that it was CG 4871, rejected and abandoned by me, for a Studebaker, many years before. Shortly sold it to a friend of Wayne Brooks, and it is back on your side of the pond now.

"Take-apart Alvis number two". Of the pre war Alvises I've owned, three were favourites. This is one of them, albeit a bitter sweet experience. JT 187 was purchased from Dr. William Angus Souter of Glasgow. A Vanden Plas two-door tourer, black, black hood and tonneau, red leather, and virtually all original, with a tired, faded, patched tonneau, hood cover and hood included. You know that I love gadgets and gizmos, but I love original cars more. They are original only once. My intention was to keep this gorgeous car exactly as purchased, and keep her a long time. The second part was easily if painfully achieved, the first not so successful. One fine October day I was driving from the Hershey Autojumble to our Alvis Owner Club annual meeting at Allenberry, Pennsylvania. While slowing on an exit ramp, a young lad in a pickup truck utilised the right rear quarter of JT 187 to slow the truck's progress, tearing off and crumpling the wing and other aluminium and timber in the process. There was no structural damage to the chassis, and I was able to drive to Allenberry and the 200+ miles back home. I was by now too busy in business and raising a family to get deeply into doing the work. A critical error in judgment occurred when I decided that rather than repair the existing damage, I would have the Alvis professionally restored by a friend in the business. Familiarity somehow bred contempt in the form of delay after delay. Ten years later, and still disassembled, JT 187 went to Wayne Brooks. It is in good hands in England now. I'm still sad about the affair. Another hard lesson learned. This car, with wing missing, is also pictured in *Automobile Quarterly* with OJ 2357.

Sometime in the early 1970s we began attending North American AOC gatherings. The first I remember was at the annual New Hope, Pennsylvania, antique car meet. I met others with the dreaded Alvisitis affliction: Jack Grotz, who seemed to get Alvis recognized in the US, in his 4.3 saloon ASG 22, now in the Netherlands; Wayne Brooks with his Speed 25 saloon, EZ 7240; Hugh, Nora, and Jennifer Clarkson with the 4.3 VdP short-chassis tourer, DYF 789, and TC21/100 dhc, NRK 25; David and Peggy Van Schaick who owned the eight cylinder 4.4 litre Barson Special Alvis, sort of a Speed 35, drove their 4.3 saloon, LNJ 881, now back in the UK. Had a wonderful meet at another venue, the *Red Fox Inn*, where we met Hank and Judy Hanmer with their 1934 Speed 20 SB VdP two door tourer, WJ 9808. I lusted after this car then and now, but never owned it. Helmeted front wings, dual side mount spares, uniquely squared rear end. Superb. This Alvis is now in prison. Really! The Old Montana Territorial Prison is now a museum, in Deer Lodge, Montana.

More people and Alvises gathered at the annual AOC meets at Allenberry during Hershey weekend. Ballard Crooker drove his Speed 25 tourer, CKV 680, up from Virginia. Ballard is now ninety-two and still active with automobiles. That Alvis is now with Jim Hammers in San Jose, California, having belonged to Jack Grotz before Ballard. Evan Johnson came with his Speed 25 dhc, HMX 34. He purchased the Alvis in 1942, and still owns it! Everett Smith, now living on the west coast, attended and still works on his Alvises. From England appeared John Oliveria of 3½ litre fame, as well. Now, most of the pre-war Alvises have returned to the land of their birth, and the gatherings





*1934 SC Speed 20 Vanden Plas drophead Coupé BLB 791.*

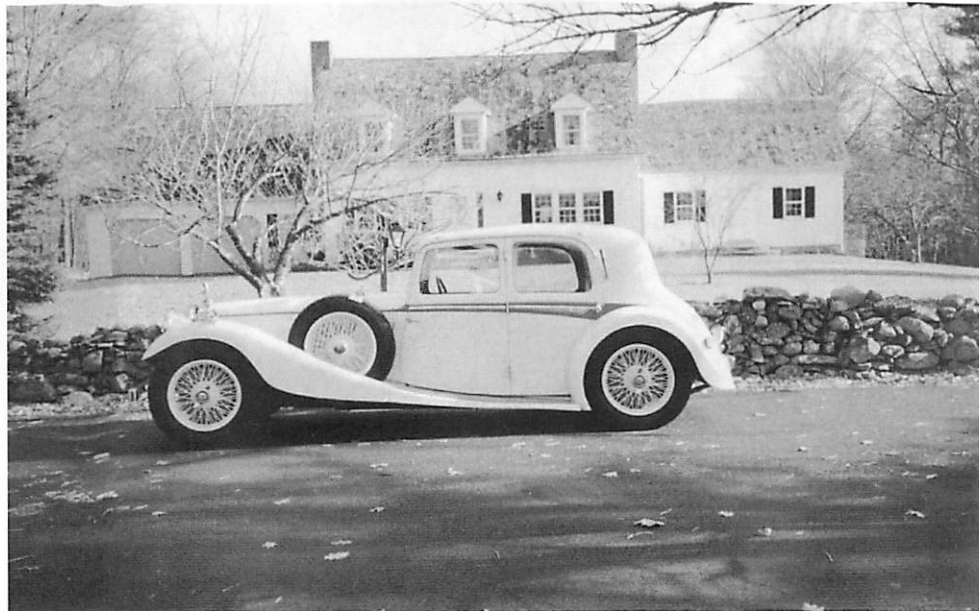
*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

have, for the most part, ceased here in the U.S.

A much more recent acquisition was JJ 339, a 1934 SB Cross & Ellis tourer. Acquisition is probably incorrect. I bought the car sight-unseen from Bill Young, an AOC member in the northwest US, with the intent of sending it eventually to England. I never laid eyes, or anything else, on this Alvis. Shortly after purchase, but before it was shipped the three thousand miles to the east coast, an email came from Nick Simpson. A displaced (or is it misplaced?) English AOC member, temporarily residing in New York, wanted an earlier Alvis to complement his beautiful and unique aluminium TD21 drophead. A few emails and telephone calls and JJ 339 was transported directly to New York. I understand that it is now back in England.

Not all that long ago, a call came from Arlene Christiansen in Ontario. She and her husband have a rather large collection of cars through which was passing an Alvis. Arlene is also an avid Cord owner and enthusiast, and during a visit to us earlier to see my Cord, Arlene had noticed an Alvis in our garage. This triggered a memory, and she offered the Alvis, somewhat disassembled but complete (another botched restoration) to me. I was very pleased to buy BLB 791, a very rare 1934 Vanden Plas SB Speed 20 drop head. None were thought to have survived, but here was one hidden in Canada. The body lines, as with almost every VdP, are superb, and an example is shown in the book on coachwork by Vanden Plas, page 177. The chassis was despatched from Alvis to Charles Follett. This is believed to be the 1934 Olympia show car on the Vanden Plas stand, and was finished in blue and silver originally. BLB 791 went to an AOC member in Belgium. It is presently in restoration, and I hope to see it when finished.

Detroit, Michigan, is the past and present home of many US auto manufacturers. It was also home, for about five years, to AON 623, a 1934 Speed 20 SC Charlesworth saloon. Many people buy things on impulse, then wonder why. This very nice Alvis was purchased from Frank Dale & Stepsons



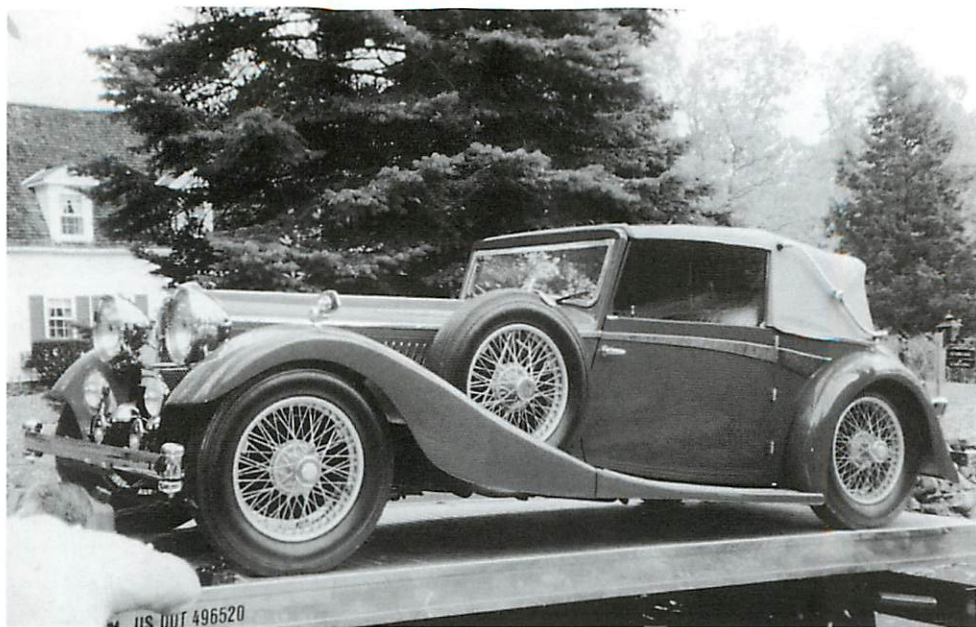
*1934 SC Speed 20 Charlesworth Saloon AON 623 outside our house.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

by a high profile lawyer while on holiday in London. Five years later I was invited to purchase the car by the lawyer's representative. Being older and lazier, a plane ride was in order. The 1920's residence was magnificent, quite like a large English manor house and had been built for an automobile executive. I should like to have converted the garages into a home. After the purchase in London, AON 623 was shipped, via the St. Lawrence Seaway, directly to Detroit, thence trucked to its new home. There sat the Alvis, lonely and dusty, shipping labels and customs forms still affixed to the glass. It had been occasionally started and run, but never driven by the new owner. I did drive it. Primrose with red leather, it got christened "yellow bird", and subsequently went to a German AOC couple who came over to see it. Another lesson. Why drive days and 1,200 miles when a one day excursion will do? I'm getting wiser by now.

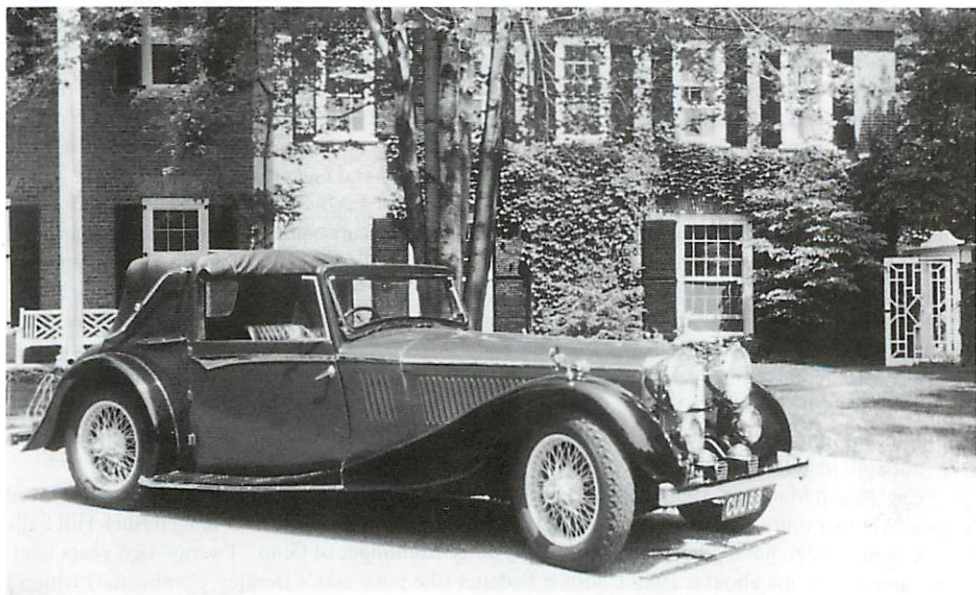
The first time I visited England for the National (now International) Alvis Day (now Weekend) was the last held at Crystal Palace. As Lu had a couple of nippers running about, her younger brother Steve came with me, probably as a chaperone. There, I was able to put faces Bulletin names. Ken and Sheila Day; Norman and Ena Whitton; Neville Trent; Ernest and Marjorie Shenton (who were very helpful in supplying Alvis handbooks for my collection), the Oakman family, and many others whom I've probably insulted by forgetting.

The "Green Machine" 1934 Speed 20 SC Charlesworth DHC, KY 8639. Bright blue-green, red leather. Another time-lapse story. About thirty years ago I saw KY 8639 at the annual Buck Hill Falls CCCA winter meet, having been just restored by Jerry Remlinger of Ohio. Twenty-two years later, Jerry came to see me about a 1949 Cadillac Sedanet (the poor man's Bentley Continental) which I owned. He drove it, liked it, didn't buy it. Three years later I called Jerry to see if he still had the Alvis. He did, and did I still have the Cadillac? I did. We dealt. The Cadillac and a wallet full of money were traded for KY 8639. Jerry had gotten the car from H. J. Sibley. At last notice it is owned by an AOC



*The "Green Machine" 1934 SC Speed 20 Charlesworth drophead coupé, KY 8639*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*1936 SD Speed 20 Charlesworth drophead Coupé whilst owned by Larry Erd.*

*Photo : Bruce Earlin*



member named M.Ridley. Anyone know him?

CUU 88, a 1936 SD Speed 20 Charlesworth DHC, was mine thrice. Seems a bad habit. Also pictured in Automobile Quarterly. Green, black hood. I first bought it about two eons ago and sold it to Jerry Frankle, then an AOC member. Jerry ran out of time and patience, never did anything with CUU 88. I bought it back (with ERF 349, of which more appears anon). A nice solid car. I drove it to another Hershey meet, about 1985, stuck a "for sale" sign on it. Along came Larry Erd from Ohio, asks 'whazzat?' 'Whazzat' is a typical question concerning Elvis automobiles in the U.S. I think Larry knew "whatitwuz", but was testing me. He bought the car and took it home to Ohio. This was the beginning of a long friendship and multiple car-swapping. The last time I owned CUU 88, Larry had traded it back to me, along with a truly beautifully restored but rather sloooooow 2.4 litre Jaguar Mark II saloon. He got a 1937 Cord Custom Berline, then a 1937 Cord Custom Beverly from me. Amazing we haven't killed each other by now. A fellow named Hugh Belcher rang me about CUU 88, and had to have it. Doubt that he still does. And what lesson herein? Mark II Jaguars with 2.4 litre engines are 1.0 to 1.4 litres too small, and much harder, therefore, to sell. Product knowledge is helpful.

As far as my memory and Wayne Brooks' records serve me, these are all the Speed 20 Alvises I've had the privilege to own, albeit some for a very short time. Seems to come to ten. Not bad so far. Next up will be Speed 25 and 4.3 litre cars. I've never owned a pre-1932 Alvis of any nature, being more taken by the larger cars. Must be the strange American trait of bigger is better. Actually I have never had any four cylinder Alvis, save one, a very unique Duncan TA14, which I'll cover later on.

BRUCE EARLIN

— To be Continued —

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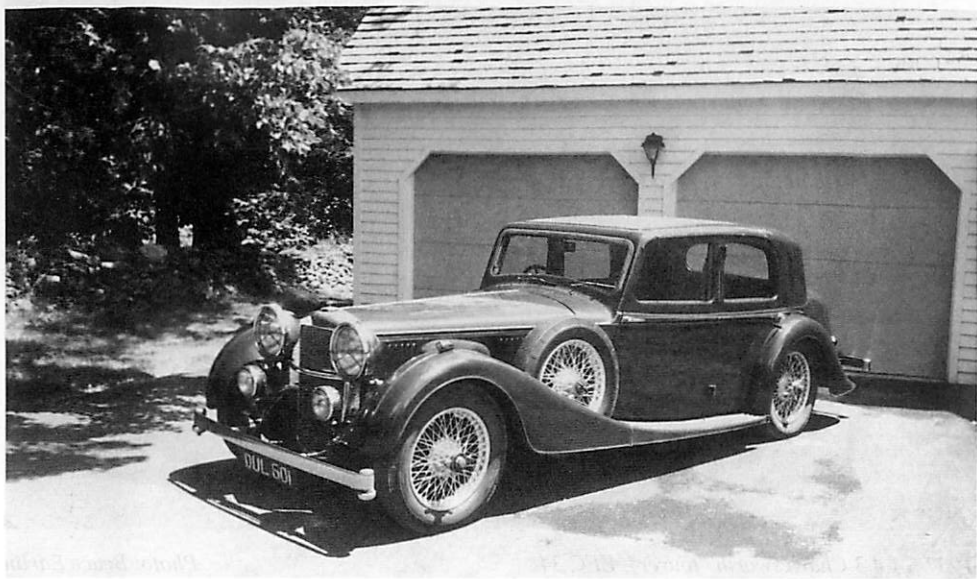
*A terrific tale from Bruce Earlin. More in the next issue—J.N.B.C.*

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# ALVISITIS

## — PART II—



*1937 SA 4.3 Holbrook saloon, DUL 601 in front of the garage at Staircase.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

Still learning. When is a 4.3 litre Charlesworth saloon not a Charlesworth saloon? When it is a Holbrook! I had purchased a 1937 SA 4.3 saloon many moons ago. It looked to me exactly like all other cataloged 4.3 saloons. I bought it as a Charlesworth, sold it as a Charlesworth. Now I find after all these years that Wayne Brooks' records show DUL 601 to be a Holbrook bodied car, one of ten (numbers 3912 to 3921) built to Charlesworth specs. I'll be pleased to have someone tell me the differences, if any, between the two, and why two different companies built virtually identical bodies. Was the job done under licence from Charlesworth (farmed out, as we say in the U.S.)?

Comes now an unusual Alvis, although not originally so. A 1937 SA 4.3 Charlesworth. It seems that Olaf Lund preferred open cars to saloons, and dramatically lowered the overall profile of this stately Alvis (and a few others, I'm told). Utilizing a metal cutting device, he "improved" the roof line by removing same from the window sills upward (save the windscreen). Completely. Entirely. EFC 34 found its way across the water as a "parade phaeton", eventually purchased by a judge in Ohio. The judge insisted that the Alvis was, and always had been, an open car. What sort of hood was provided? None. Got lost. Was that important? After having some fun with this new found Alvis, it was passed on to a gentleman nearby in New Jersey, who still owns it after some 25 plus years.

I had seen CCE 980 advertised in *Hemmings Motor News*. A large photo advertisement. Very handsome and impressive, in the *Rippey Automobile Museum*. However, Rippeys was in Denver, Colorado, not a great deal closer than Hawaii. Forgot about it. Some years later this 4.3 Charlesworth



1937 SA 4.3 Charlesworth "tourer", EFC 34.

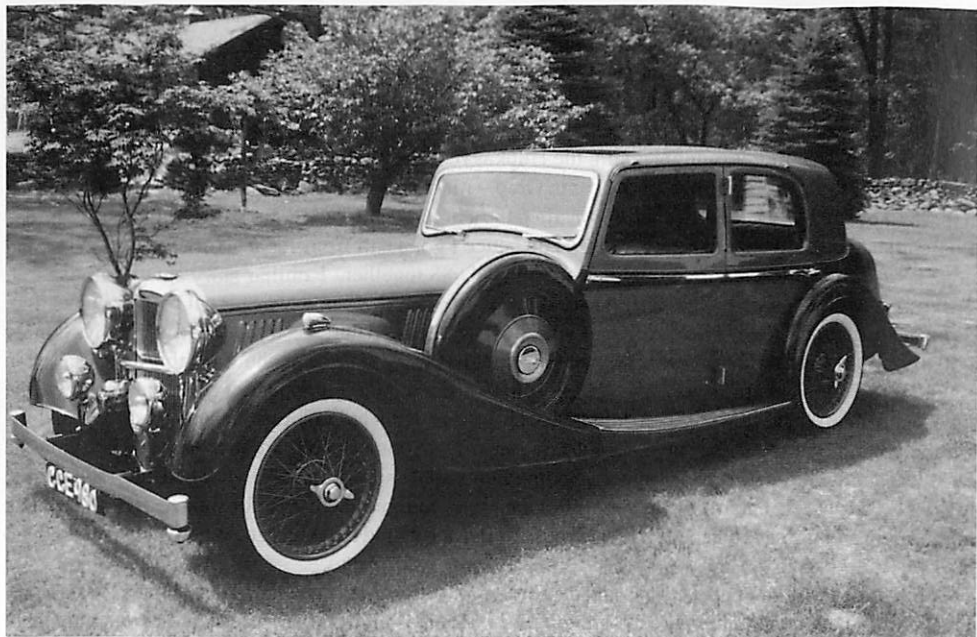
*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

saloon, again a 1937 SA model, reappeared on the market, much closer to my home. I managed somehow to own another 4.3 saloon, promptly despatched an advertisement via airbourne snail mail (the only thing going at the time) to the AOC pink pages. Obviously priced too low, it went another 3,000 miles across the water to a well known and much beloved AOC member and former club official, who flogged it off to another well known and much beloved AOC member, who consequently repeated the pattern, by passing it on to a dealer, who sold it to a loving and appreciative club member. All these details are provided so that you can appreciate that while I have brought some fine Alvises westward, I've returned more, directly or indirectly, homeward.

Driving a well sorted 4.3 is so nice. Shift into top, and the power and torque are so smooth that other gears are rendered useless until seemingly nearing a crawl. More education; you may not buy everything you want when you first want it, but second chances do present themselves.

ERF 349. This Alvis has had more keepers than ZsaZsa Gabor has had husbands, and some more than once. I was approached many years ago by a young man from upper New York State. He wanted to know the value of a 1937 Speed 25 tourer. My reply was that it was a matter of condition, originality, and completeness, but it was of interest regardless. He explained that it had come into his possession after he found it sitting outside, behind a barn, where it sat uncovered for a year or more. The story continued that the car had been restored in England a number of years before, and sold to an American. The owner, in a fit of pique, had lost it in a game of poker. The winner had no great love for old cars, funny foreign ones in particular. He stored it in the barn. Shortly, the Alvis took up too much hay space, and out it went. Would I come see it and make an offer? No was my reply, unless a maximum purchase price was established first. This being agreed, my friend Jim Hupka and I hooked





1937 SA 4.3 Charlesworth Saloon CCE 980

Photo: Bruce Earlin



Speed 25 ERF 349

Photo: Wayne Brooks

trailer to truck, secured a pile of portraits of dead US Presidents (50 and 100 dollar US bills) and were off. Sad to view was the Alvis, but reasonably complete, solid, and very interesting. Twin wing mounted spares and twin fuel fillers were most unusual. Loaded ERF up, secured all loose bits with bungee cords, and back to Pennsylvania we travelled. I did not take ownership of this Speed 25 at this time, as Jim Hupka and his father wanted the car. Some three years later, after much cleaning up, sorting out, and getting it running again, the Hupkas realized the project was more than they cared to handle, and I found a new home for the car in Ohio with Jerry Frankle. Name sound familiar? So why, if I was not the owner directly before or after the Hupkas, am I including ERF 349 in this tome? Remember second chances? Again a few years hence I got a call from Jerry. His level of interest had gone south, and he offered me both this car and CUU 88 together. Familiar story again, same result. Two more Alvises owned. Please refer to 1936 SD Speed 20 Charlesworth DHC a few pages ago. Some history on ERF 349. This rare and lovely car was owned and "restored" in England by Stanley Pollard, a name as familiar in older Alvis circles as Olaf Lund. I've seen photos of this tourer taken in England just ten years prior to my rescuing it from the field, and it appeared quite handsome at the time. Foolish insensitive American dolts! Probably closely related to foolish insensitive English dolts who have done much of the same. Sold this car to Dr. Sonnie Isbell, another name which may be familiar, and which will reappear later. Sonnie purchased this Alvis and a very sad early TD21 dhc together. The TD21, I am informed, is still in the US even more the worse for wear. ERF 349 is back home again and faring much better, thank you. Round and round the Alvis go. Where they end up, who is to know?

In 1976 we bundled up the boys and came over for the 25th Anniversary Tour. What a grand time! We were able, by post, to buy a really superb TA21saloon as our tour car. Met Ian, Sheila, and Adam (he was somewhat smaller then) Frith, the young couple John and Nadine Fox, Malcolm Lee, from whom we bought a lovely Alice blue TD21dhc (231 EXN). John Holder, who had just completed a wonderful restoration on a then not very old TE 21 dhc GYV 135C, arrived with his wife and two small daughters. David and Jean Marrable came in their 1932 SA Speed 20 tourer RN 2005. We are still great friends, and have visited back and forth across the pond more times than I recall. Cresting over a hill came a TA14 dhc, JUR 934, pulling a caravan. Within were Chris "Big End" Holt and lady. I recall sharing a many laughs with Chris then and with Ian and Adam Frith, John and Jenny Olivera and many others recently on the Alvis 2000 USA Tour. We motored north from London to Carlisle, the north of England, the south of Scotland, Edinburgh, and all round the Lake District. One of our hotels was the *Black Barony*, a scary place indeed. Dark and cool (read cold) inside, slightly forbidding, and somewhat past it's prime, but very memorable. Joyously it was in close proximity to one of Scotland's oldest distilleries. A visit was arranged, some product consumed. Who needs a warm room when good whiskey is in abundance? Luise and the boys, it seemed. The TA21 came home with us, and appears in the *Automobile Quarterly* featuring Alvis. It, too, is a multiple transatlantic-crossing Alvis, having found safe return.

Some time in late 1972 or early 1973 another Alvis demon possessed me, and I thought I needed a modern Alvis automobile. An advert was placed by me in the AOC Bulletin, and one answer was of particular interest. AOC member Jack Linnell, known to many as the very long-time owner of 1923 Alvis Racing Car number one, sent a letter offering his Alvis. Jack had purchased new a TF21 dhc, JRW 445E. While he did not wish to part with it, he had recently lost a leg, and the Alvis was a manual. I had two good legs, enough money and desire. We struck a tentative deal. Jack explained that the car had been recently repaired and refinished in the original dark blue after a large full keg of beer had fallen off a brewery lorry which he was following in the Alvis. The ensuing sheet metal damage was severe, but structurally all was unhurt and in fine order. All's well that ends well, but what a terrible waste of beer! I understand there is an historical marker at the site of impact bemoaning the unfortunate demise of the "suds". Not long thereafter another letter arrived explaining that Jack had acted in haste, and that

his wife Betty did not wish to part with the Alvis. So this was not to be. Also included was an invitation to come and stay with them at Wilby House during our visit to England, and if the timing was right, to attend a 50th birthday party for Racing Car Number One. Of course we would, thank you, and did. Invitations were actually sent to particular Alvis cars, and their owners were allowed to come along as well. Upon entering the drive, Racing Car Number One was there to greet everyone, wired up to toot a horn, and, I believe, flash its lights. It was a grand and wonderful affair, and Lu and, I were to be their guests again upon visiting England. After Jack passed on, we kept in touch with Betty for quite a long time. Alvis are wonderful things. Friends are just simply more wonderful.

On one of our earlier sojourns to England, Luise and I visited a few dealers in London. *Frank Dale & Stepsons* had on display a very lovely 1938 SA Speed 25 Charlesworth dhc DFY 890. They had just run it through their shops and did what appeared to be at least a very nice cosmetic restoration. I enquired about the car, and was told that it had just recently been sold to an American client, Sidney Herman. So sorry. Me too. In 1969 we purchased a lovely home, *Staircase*, just outside Milford, Pennsylvania. Money was required, an Alvis had to go. Funny how women cause you to do strange things. They value a lovely home above a lovely car. Consigned my Speed 25 saloon, about which more will be revealed later, to an auction near Springfield, Massachusetts. What to my wondering eyes should appear but another classic Alvis at the same venue. I needed to sell an Alvis, not buy one, so DFY 890 got away again. Nice house, no Alvis. Bummer!

End of story? Surely you jest? The gentleman from Cape Cod who bought DFY 890 at auction advertised it for sale a pile of years later, and Presto!, home she came to Milford, crossroads of many Alvises, dead or alive. At last report DFY is living on the Isle of Jersey.

The dreaded whitewall tires. I am loathe to admit that I have committed this great sin more than once. I was younger. Stupider. Put sets of bloody great wide whitewall tires on Alvis wheels, where only proper black tyres should be. This phase has long passed, and on my recently departed 1932 Auburn twelve Convertible Sedan a set of six bold, black tyres were installed, making the car look much more "macho" and business-like. Mea culpa. Never again will the sin be committed by me. Confession finished.

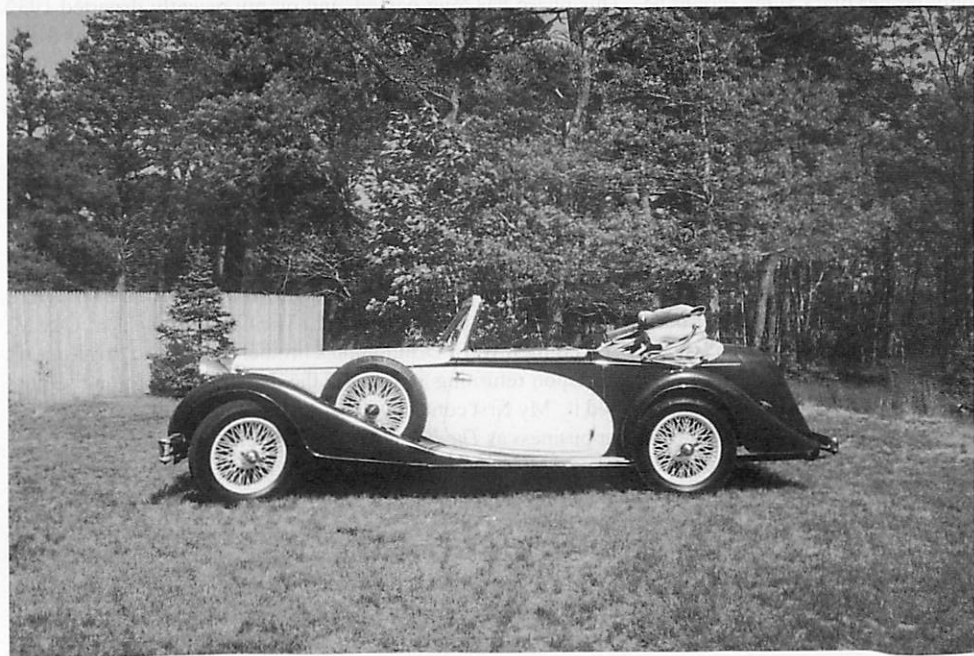
Many of you who attended International Alvis Day 2001 probably saw Dr. Sonnie Isbell with his beautiful and very red 1939 SC Speed 25 Cross & Ellis tourer, wearing registration DHP 772. This is the same Sonnie Isbell mentioned just a few Alvises ago, albeit a different Speed 25 C & E tourer. Sonnie was invited to display the Speed 25 at the Amelia Island Concours in Florida, also in 2001 and brought it to International Alvis Day to visit with its other Alvis relatives. The car was originally ordered with twin side mounted tyres, a longer steering column, and other specified changes, by a Canadian banker with offices in London. Delivery was direct to Toronto, and until Sonnie brought it to IAD, this C & E had never been off the North American continent. The Canadian banker, Guy M. Drummond, put the car up when he served in WWII. Drummond's brother decided to drive it a bit during this time, and damaged a wing. Upon returning and seeing the damage, Drummond wanted nothing more to do with the car, and sold it. My first contact with this Alvis came from a small advert placed by Jack Sutherland, doing old car business as *The Barn*. We talked about the Alvis, but I decided not to buy it. Next contact came some years later during a visit to a friend, Don Kolb, in Connecticut. There was the tourer in bits, and on its way back to a state of full restoration. The Speed 25 has been awarded an Antique Automobile Club of America place award. I met Don again at Hershey about 1992, where he had brought the Alvis, and offered it for sale. Passed the opportunity again! Jackson Brooks from Colorado (no relation to Wayne) became the new owner. As an aside, it is believed that this Speed 25 was never given a British registration number, as it was exported immediately. Another Speed 25, a saloon, was owned concurrently with the tourer by yet another person, and the registration plates may have been 'swapped', as Dave Culshaw indicates that DHP 772 was indeed issued to a Charlesworth saloon. All this wonderful minutia from Wayne Brooks' research and records. Bless





*1939 SC Speed 25 Cross & Ellis Tourer, DHP 772 now owned by Sonny Isbell.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*1938 Speed 25 Charlesworth drophead Coupé DFY 890.*

*Photo: Wayne Brooks*

you, my son.

Jackson Brooks decided in 1990 to trim his collection, and I called him concerning a supercharged 1937 Cord 812 Phaeton. He said I should have the Alvis. I said only if he would care to take two cars as part exchange along with another pile of 'greenbacks'. Shortly the deal was done. A 1959 Bentley SI saloon and a very rare 1938 Daimler 4 litre 'Light Straight Eight' Charlesworth saloon (looking like a 4.3 Alvis save for the fluted rad shell and bonnet) went two thousand miles to Denver, the Speed 25 arriving in Milford. As I knew nearly nothing about Daimlers of any nature, I became a quick learner by joining the Daimler Club briefly. I endured a great deal of derision from Nick Simpson over this car, but it really was quite nice. But I digress. Within the year Luise and I decided to "downsize", selling *Staircase* and its large garage (my playhouse). We sold our old cars as the new house had no garage at all. Sonnie Isbell had also inquired about the Speed 25 when Jackson offered it. I rang the good Doctor in Florida, and we struck an agreement almost immediately. At last Sonnie had his restored Speed 25 tourer after many years and tribulations. He had long since sold the unrestored car. As a note of interest, another American AOC member, Jim Sprague, was invited to display his 4.3 engined Speed 25 Offord disappearing hood two place tourer at *Amelia Island*, Florida and *Pebble Beach*, California, in 2002. Two Alvises at *Pebble Beach* and *Amelia*. Very high society, thank you. Wayne Brooks tells me that Jim's beautiful Offord Alvis spent WWII under German occupation on the Isle of Jersey.

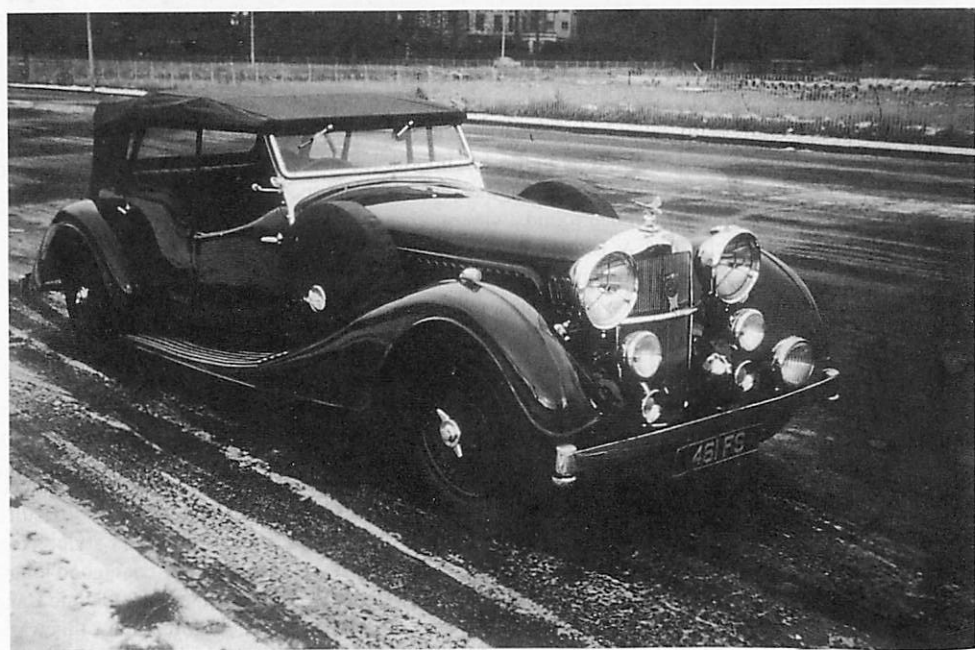
While attending the last AOC Crystal Palace meet, I learned of a 4.3 tourer for sale in Edinburgh. I contacted the seller, a Mr. McKay, and after some correspondence and international phone calls, bought BSF 345. The agreement was that the Alvis would be transported to Liverpool for shipment to the Port of New York, which is located, not surprisingly, in New Jersey. Arriving in Liverpool the first day of a U.K. dock worker's strike, it sat there, uncovered, for three months. Joy unbounded! Eventually notice was received that this rare beauty could be collected at Port Newark, New Jersey. Fearing the worst, a truck, trailer, winch, tools, jumper battery, friend Dave and I proceeded to the port. Naturally, US Customs required import tax payment and documentation prior to us seeing the poor broken wreck. Amazingly, and happily, shipping and storage damage was minor. Deciding that optimism is a good idea, I leapt into the car, turned on the ignition, activated the easy start device, listened to the fuel pumps click (a good sign), and pushed the starter button. Say Hallelujah, say Amen, BSF 345 actually, really started. And continued to run. Dave drove the truck with trailer, et al, the 75 miles back to Milford. I led the way in the 4.3, hood folded, surely grinning all the way, going faster than might be prudent. It seems that the original purchaser had specified a 120 mph speedometer which was calibrated 10 mph fast. I had found, twixt purchase and receipt, that this 4.3 was a short-chassis Alvis, the only such Cross & Ellis so erected. This was, obviously, the second of my three favourite Alvises. At one of our American AOC gatherings, we "wowed" the crowd by demonstrating the fully functional hydraulic jacking system. In case the registration number seems somehow familiar, please refer to *Red Triangle* adverts in the Bulletin. There is pictured BSF 345, fully restored and magnificent in black, now with Alan Stote. This Alvis is also the one used by the *Franklin Mint* to do the well-detailed model (in green). How wonderfully inexpensive all old cars were in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. How lucky I am to have owned them.

Which Alvis was my absolute favourite if not the 4.3 short-chassis tourer? Strangely enough, not an open car, although I love open car appearance and motoring. My favourite Alvis was the last Speed 25 built, EVC 564, a 1940 Charlesworth saloon. Loved the overall shape, as it is much more difficult to build a beautiful closed car than an open one. Pontoon type wings replaced the earlier style. No running boards. Low, sleek, quick, and to me, attractive from any angle. We kept this car a good long time. Toured many places in the States, and drove the 1975 Upper Canada tour with the Classic Car Club of America. The boys loved the car, Luise loved the car, I loved the car. Unfortunately, this was the Alvis which had to go when we bought our home *Staircase* in 1979. While the house had a lovely if unpretentious staircase, the name came from former owner Alistair Stair.

I bought EVC 564 from Jack and Doris Burrow after he answered an advertisement I'd placed in the Bulletin. £1,875 sterling. Jack would not accept a deposit from me, and would keep the Alvis until our visit some four months hence. It was beautiful just as described. Jack asked if I teetotalled? I took a deep breath and answered honestly, not knowing the consequence of my indicated imbibance. "Good", said Jack, "Let us take the Alvis for a drive to the local for a pint or two". Deal done. I still miss this Alvis, but will probably never see her again, as the last address is Sicily.

One hard lesson learned came just before we left Milford for the Upper Canada tour. While doing a general check-up, I removed the rear seat squab and floor panel to add a bit of fluid to the aluminium diff housing. The filler is covered with an oval 'oil' embossed capping secured by two wing nuts. The proper way to remove the cap is to loosen the wing nuts and slide the cap off. In a fit of extreme stupidity, I managed to completely remove one wing nut, slide the cap off, and drop the wing nut forthright and straightaway down the filler into the depths of the diff. Non-magnetic bronze wing nuts. A small bit of mental self examination and blue language came forth, followed by the knowledge that some disassembly was required. All's well again that ends well, and the holiday was lovely. These eight Speed 25s and 4.3 Litre Alvises bring the total to eighteen.

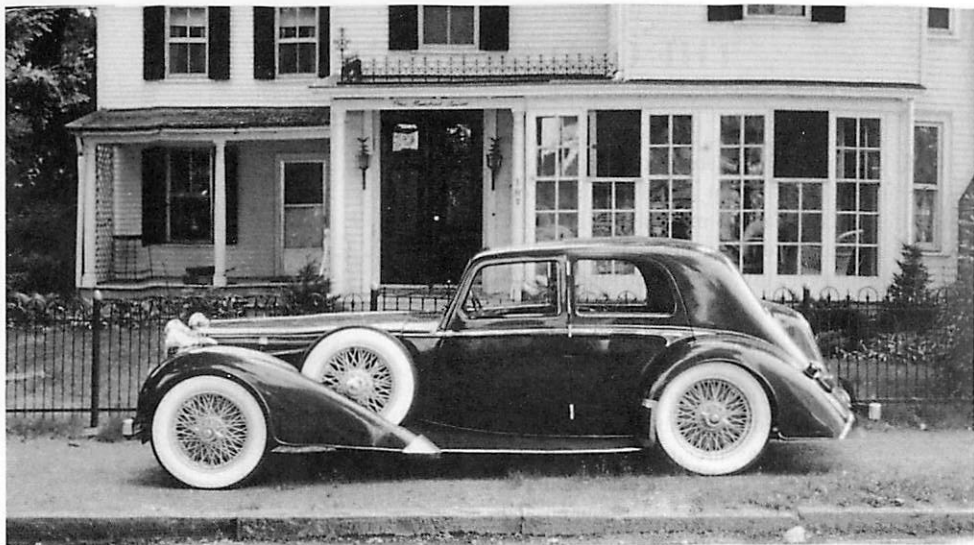
Thus ends the pre-war portion of my story, except for a few important 4.3 bits. An engine and transmission to be exact. At the Carlisle and Hershey shows in 1976 there was a truly clapped out VdP pillarless saloon for sale, sagging on a trailer, minus most running gear. Too great a project for me it was saved by two AOC members in Massachusetts. Very shortly thereafter I was contacted concerning an Alvis engine and transmission for sale. You need not be Sherlock Holmes to figure this one out. I went to New Jersey, bought the package, and they've rejoined the rest of the car. I am happy to report that the car is nearing completion after much noble effort, and DLU 444 will again see the light of day.



*1938 SB 4.3 Cross & Ellis tourer, BSF 345, prior to purchase in a snowy Edinburgh Street.*

*Photo via Bruce Earlin*





*EVC 564 the last Speed 25 built in front of our Milford home in c 1976.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

Somehow I've missed ownership of a 3½ litre. Probably as they were produced for so short a time and are so rare, but more likely that an opportunity to have a really fine example never presented itself. I'm not dead yet!

Interesting advice from a friend. In either 1979 or 1980 Lu and I came to *Knebworth House* for National Alvis Day, and brought our friends Keith and Jan Canouse. A wonderful time was had by all. Keith is also a fully-registered 'gearhead', and has acquired a number of fine old cars over the years. He informed me that we do not really own any of the fine cars we purchase, restore, drive, and enjoy. Or occasionally detest. As the cars will doubtless outlast us, we merely keep them for the next 'collector'. Quite true, isn't it.

**BRUCE EARLIN**

*— To be Continued —*

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*The last part of Bruce's super recollections will appear in the next issue—J.N.B.C.*

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# ALVISITIS

## – Part III –

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Now to post war Alvises, again not in order of purchase, but chronological (as well as by age).

1947 TA14 Duncan dhc, GSG 639. Lovely to look at, delightful to see. Same coach lines as the Duncan two door saloon, but in a drop head. Same 'dipped' belt line but with blind rear quarter lights. Reminded me of a poor man's 1940 Packard Darrin, as the aforementioned 1949 Cadillac fastback Sedanet is a poor man's Bentley Continental. A professor at the State University of New York in Albany contacted me about GSG 639. He had a sad tale. He purchased the car via telephone (this was at least twenty years ago) from one Harry J. Sibley, Bude, Cornwall, UK. The professor was most disappointed to view his sight-unseen purchase at US customs, New York. His mental picture was of far greater grandeur than the vehicle before him. He was further disappointed when the Alvis would not start, yet alone run, necessitating the further expenditure of having it ungraciously transported to Albany. He spoke unkindly of the seller, and the loss of funds to procure a dream car cum nightmare. Please come view the poor beater, and give advice, he said. Lu and I drove the three hours to meet the gentleman, and see the Alvis. In truth, it was very straight and solid, absolutely complete, and somewhat tatty. A used car. Well used. Looked tired, would not start, but burped and tried hard. Lu loved the Duncan lines, it was not much money, and guess what? Our first and last four cylinder Alvis. After having to return with trailer to fetch GSG, very little was required to sort out the mechanics. Drained the dead petrol and put in some fresh gas, dismantled, cleaned, and reassembled the carb and distributor, threw in new plugs, shot twelve fresh volts through the system, and 'zoom', we were 'DTR' (down the road). Performed minor cosmetics and had some fun with this nifty TA14, then sold it to Carson 'Kit' Thompson. Kit flew to the east coast, tool box in hand, then drove, yes, drove this Alvis 3,000 miles back to Californiia. Lesson here? Yes, but for Kit Carson, not me. The only problem he had was in New Mexico (somewhere near Guatamala) when the carb packed up with grit. While taking the carb apart, he dropped some small bit in the grassy verge. It disappeared, much like my wing nut. Took him three hours, in the rain, to find it and become mobile again. Good idea to put down a sheet or tarp before ever trying an exercise such as this again. There is a fortunate owner now in the SE section of England with GSG 639.

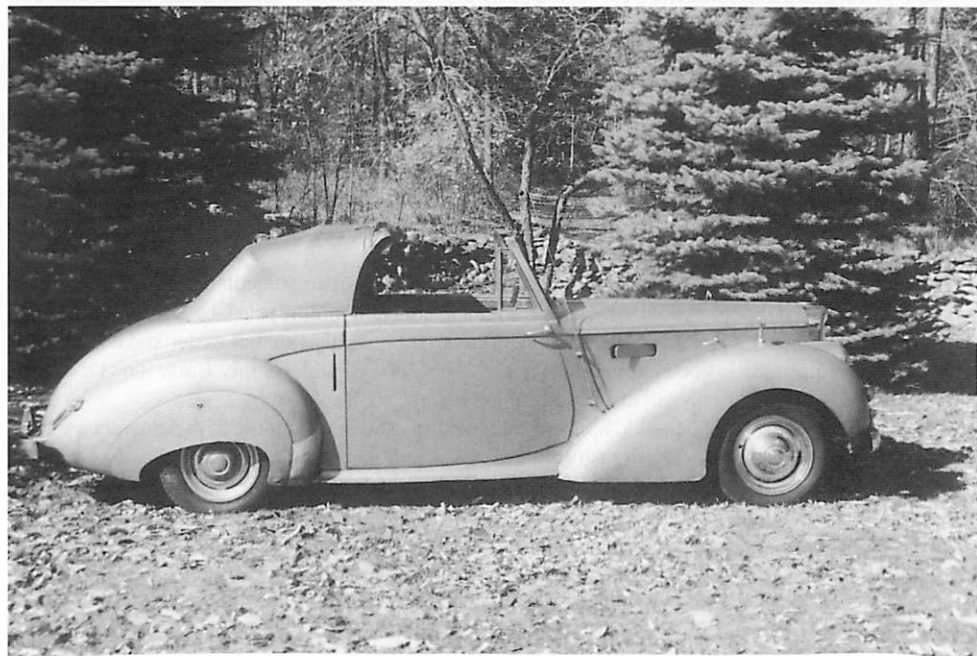
I've had the pleasure of spending a little time with the American comedian, and avid 'hands on' vehicle collector, Jay Leno. Asked why he has so many cars and motorcycles, he gave the following paraphrased statement: "I've one wife, and lots of toys. It's not only fun, but easier and cheaper this way." If this philosophy is good enough for Jay Leno, it's good enough for me. Luise too. Of course, the difference is that Jay Leno can afford to keep all his toys. C'est la vie.

The 1951 TA21 saloon, MNN 578, is the car we purchased to use on the 25th Anniversary Tour. Mr. Syder had done a wonderful job restoring this Alvis, and it was well known in the club. He had recently passed away, and we were fortunate enough to be able to become the new owners. It ran faultlessly throughout the holiday, but I worried about the low oil pressure indicated on the gauge at tickover. This seems to be common with the 3 litre, and anxiety was unnecessary. The day the tour visited Edinburgh was very wet, so David and Jean Marrable squeezed in with Luise, two small boys, and me. Seemed that a warm, dry saloon is preferable to a Speed 20 tourer in a rainstorm. A major advantage was that Eric Oakman, who had done a wonderful job organizing the tour, arranged (through BP, I believe) for free petrol for the Alvis on tour. Does an Alvis really run better on free fuel?

1952 TA21 dhc, left hand drive, car number 24776, built originally for the US market. An Alvis

in my back garden, or nearly so, being only thirty miles away. I had known of the car for some time, and was well acquainted with the owner, Tom Hindley. We ran into each other at a car meet again a few years ago, and I enquired about the TA. Tom said that he would probably never get around to doing anything with the Alvis, and invited me to come see it at his home where it had been stored for years. Naturally we came to agree on a price, and home it came. Very solid, complete, and unabused. Truly an 'easy restoration', a phrase which normally brings tears of laughter, but this time true. A bit of tidying and general cleaning up presented a nicely preserved Alvis, now with a German collector. In reference to Alvis despatched to the US, we know of only two distributors, one in New York and one in Los Angeles, California. Just think, if you owned an Alvis, and lived in Kansas with Auntie Em, Dorothy and Toto, you would need drive only 1,500 miles either west or east for Alvis service.

I still don't believe the way this next Alvis left Milford, or that it survived the ordeal. 1953 TA21 dhc NXU 307. I received a call from a gentleman named Ian Drummond, a resident of Toronto. Ian had spent some time in London, and purchased the TA for use there, bringing it home at the end of his tenure. After some time he decided to sell the long unused Alvis, and rang me. His description of the car and the price were satisfactory. We agreed to split the cost of shipping and import duty (Canada to US), and after the usual hassle from customs, the Alvis came to roost at Staircase. Again, tidying and sorting out put the NXU 307 in the 'good used car' category. A young Swedish old car dealer, Chris Jacobsen, contacted me about another car, and we did a combined deal on that car and the Alvis. Jacobbsen and a friend arrived in a six cylinder Volvo saloon, pulling a brakeless trailer. I asked as to how they intended to take the second car to Baltimore (well over 200 miles) for shipping. Without skipping a beat, they said they would attach a tow bar from the trailer to the TA21, pulling the articulated lot with this poor Volvo. My opinion, which was summarily dismissed out of hand, was that this was obviously illegal and somewhat dangerous (let alone insane). They insisted, I took the



1953 TA21 NXU 307 at Staircase.

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

money. As Staircase is two miles up a rather steep hill, I did insist on driving the two cars to the bottom, where they hooked up this unholy alliance. The last thing I saw were tail lights going down the road. They made it all the way through parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland to Port Baltimore, avoiding motorways and toll roads of any nature. Apparently not a single minion of the law saw them or cared to stop them. How they stopped the nearly 11,000 pounds of tin with the Volvo brakes, or got up some of the northern New Jersey hills, defies my imagination to this day. Surely I'd be doing "twenty to life" in the slammer for a caper of this nature. This dhc is now with a SE member of the AOC.

One of my earliest Alvis purchases was a car once owned by Eric Oakman. Hank Hanmer, US, former owner of SB Speed 20 WJ 9808 written of earlier, had visited the UK, and purchased '54 TC21/100 dhc KNR 999 from Eric. After a few years happy motoring here with the Alvis, he sold it to me for resale to a neighbour in Pennsylvania. This fellow moved to the middle of the US, and sold it to a dealer, *Spring Buggy Works*. A few more owners followed, the Alvis going first to Texas and ending not far from me in Connecticut. Last known address for KNR 999 is with an AOC member in Germany.

In addition to attending the last Crystal Palace annual AOC National/International meeting, Lu and I have had the pleasure of coming over for two Knebworth and two Tatton Park meetings. Son Jeff and I came to Duxford, enjoying the 'fly-in' as well as all the Alvis, be they automobiles, military vehicles, or flying machines. Numerous Noggin and Natters have seen us in attendance, and a few Alvis weekends as well. In order to continue the tradition, we expect to attend (or have, according to when this treatise is published, already attended) the October 2003 Welsh Marches and Cornwall Weekends.

Years ago we made it a point to visit Red Triangle whenever possible, and were saddened to hear of the passing of David Michie and Roly Simmons recently. Whenever possible, I'd stop to see Rod Jolley, who always had something of wonder in his shops. Rod always had time to spend with us, and a drive in a somewhat faster than usual Alvis was enjoyed. Early on I met Dave Culshaw and visited with "Clink" and Peter Black. Sue Speyer could usually supply some needed Alvis bit. Went over the river and through the woods with David Marrable to visit Mike Hirst on a few occasions, and also popped in to see Ernest Shenton. Always found something to talk about. Ian and Sheila Frith provided warm accommodations and lovely meals during some visits. In recent years Nick and Pat Simpson, whom we met at Tatton Park, have done the same on more than one occasion. Seems that Nick runs a regular Cotes-du-Rhone wine express service across the Channel, and I've been forced to help deplete the supply. Visiting 'Earley Engineering' is always fun. Wonder why it isn't 'Later Engineering'?

Some times you just stumble into things. This time was just three years ago, and the thing was a left hand drive '54 TC21/100 dhc, car Number 25547. As usual in late August/early September, the annual Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Festival was being held in Auburn, Indiana, during the long Labor Day holiday weekend. An American Bank Holiday weekend if you will. At the same time, the Kruse Auction company hosts a humongous five day auction of some two thousand cars. Also at this venue are a very large autojumble and car corral. On leaving the auction area, I wandered through the car corral. Before me appeared a Tickford dhc TC21/100, resplendent in blue and silver, sporting chromium plated wire wheels and vast whitewall tires, seeming not out of place on a lhd Alvis. Bought the little sweetheart straightaway, and had 25547 transported back to Staircase. I found out shortly thereafter that earlier owners were Glen and Alvis Weeks. I went to Williamsport, Pennsylvania with 25547 to join the AOC USA Tour, then one week later to the immense Hershey show to meet the Tour again. While at Hershey I met John Swindle, who now owns this TC 21/100. I dragged him over to meet Wayne Brooks and David Van Schaick at their autojumble spaces, and John became American AOC member 9600US.

1958 TD21 dhc WRW 891. Some things stay hidden in your sub-conscious, and pop out when





*1954 TC 21/100 Lhd, Car No. 25547 at our house Staircase in September 2001.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*

needed. Or just stay hidden, niggling away at you. The nearest part of Long Island, New York is only about 85 miles from Milford. The first 70 miles of the journey are quite simple. The last 15, and the first half of the island itself, are a driver's nightmare, somewhat akin to actually driving from the north to the south of England by going straight through London at rush hour. Knowing this to be true, there was, nevertheless, an Alvis for sale about half way out the island, and the siren call could not be ignored. Eventually we arrived at the address given, and found an Alvis there. Not quite the one described on the phone. Not even close. Sat outdoors for some time. Rear foot wells among those missing. Great chunks of body filler gone. Generally tatty throughout. Just plain tired. But it ran nicely, and drove surprisingly well. I made an offer commensurate with the condition of the car. Said offer was rejected. We went away with a couple of Polaroid photos in hand, and in due course reached the safe haven of rural Milford again. Something kept telling me that this Alvis was familiar, although I knew I'd never seen it before. Suddenly it struck me. Among my collection of original Alvis literature was a brochure showing a Park Ward saloon and a drop head. The drop head registration number was indeed WRW 891. This was the early TD21 retained and upgraded until 1960 by Alvis Ltd, and used for advertising and demonstration. Some time after that, a TE engine found it's way under the bonnet, providing a bit more poke. A bit of time passed, and the owner of WRW 891 rang to ask if I would still be interested in the car at the figure offered. I agreed, but only if he drove the car off the island, meeting me in Fort Lee, New Jersey. Another deal done. This car went all the way to the US west coast, where it still resides, I believe.

I mentioned Alvis literature. This was the cause, fortunate or otherwise, of my meeting Nick Simpson. About 1990, a decision was made to unload most of my collection of original brochures,



*1958 TD21 Dhc WRW 891, as seen on Long Island, New York. An ex-works car.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*TD21 26045 in a dreadful state.*

*Photo: Wayne Brooks*

handbooks, et al, which was quite comprehensive. The Alvis items stretched from the 1920s through 1966, 10/30 through TF21. Nick, who I did not meet until Tatton Park IAD in 1992, was seeking Alvis literature and memorabilia for his collection. The collection was offered in it's entirety to Nick, and he purchased the lot. Have you ever boxed up and FedEx'd paper products overseas? Very heavy, both in weight and cost! Aside from forwarding everything except the half dozen or so 4.3 items, which drawer I failed to open and empty, the deal went off quite well. Nick rang to say that some items seemed missing, and he was right. Off went the 4.3 goodies next day, and all was right with the world. Simpson and I have shared a pint or two, traded verbal barbs, and visited on both sides of the pond for ten years now. Pat and Lu have come along as well.

How do they become so neglected? In some way information on 1959 lhd TD21 dhc 26045 (Canadian delivery, no UK registration) came to me late one 1980s winter. The Alvis, and a number of other cars, were stored in a barn in mid New York state. Neither rain nor sleet nor gloom of night could keep me from hooking trailer to truck. A few hours later, assisted by some fellow at the farm, and with the aid of a chain attached from truck to Alvis, the subdued light of a cold grey day was cast upon the poor wretched and neglected example of Park Ward coachwork. Having a four wheel drive pickup truck can sometimes make retrieval through semi-frozen mud simpler. Another hour of prodding, prying, and winching caused the once lovely Alvis to board the trailer. Now a sad thing to see, this early example of a TD 21. Park Ward used timber in the doors and other places, which had rotted and sagged, and "double-skinned" the body to allow moisture to eat through both sides of the sheet metal at one time. Nonetheless, a saved Alvis is a happy Alvis. This is the same car which went to Dr. Isbell with Speed 25 tourer ERF 349, is still in the US and has not measurably improved. An old Canadian registration card in the cubbie showed a familiar name, D. Bertinelli, Toronto. I had met the gentleman years earlier at Hershey when he purchased a not particularly attractive post war Pinin Farina Alfa



1963 TD21 231 EXN, ex Malcolm Lee, in c.1980

Photo: Bruce Earlin



1963 TD21 Series II 386 HYK, which I restored.

Photo: Bruce Earlin

6C2500 Cabriolet from me. Small world.

One of the last Alvises I've owned, if ever so briefly, is 1962 TD21 Series II dhc FWA 333C (formerly 216 DXO). Tom Rossiter, a friend who has an upscale collector car business called *The Stable*, rang to tell me he had in stock a convertible Series II Alvis, dark blue, wire wheels, auto gearbox. He had traded the car once before, and took it back in part exchange. Would I be interested? Luke warm about an autobox, but loving the Series II, and only an hour and a half away in Northern New Jersey, off I went, dragging my friend Jim. Who knows when an extra driver will be needed? Jim Goetzman and another good friend, Tom DeGroat, usually accompany me on these adventures, some far and wide, some fruitful, some useless. Always fun, with witty repartee and laughter at some of my lesser efforts. The Alvis looked good, drove well, and was priced right. Done! Very shortly thereafter, Tom Rossiter called and asked if I would sell the Alvis again? He had included the Alvis with the rest of the cars on his stock list, and a local person had called with interest. Long tale cut short. Tom repurchased the Alvis from me and sold it straightaway to another party living within a few miles of *The Stable*. Picked up some beer money.

1963 Alvis TD21 dhc, 231 EXN. This is the car we bought from Malcolm Lee during the 25th Anniversary Tour in 1976. Looked particularly smart in Alice Blue. Some colours on some cars look right, others not so successful. Alice Blue is lovely on a Park Ward Alvis drop head. Manual gearbox and wire wheels. White wall tyres as well, which had been installed by Malcolm when he restored the car. Not my fault this time. I'd not met Malcolm before the tour, and he appeared slightly Americanised to me. He wore blue jeans, and that seemed quite unusual at the time. Liked white walls too. We enjoyed this Alvis for some time. About a year after bringing 231 EXN to the states, we had a small birthday party for Jeff. Half a dozen kids went for a ride in the car, with the hood down. None had ever ridden in an open car before, and were quite excited by the experience. A small pleasure which I'd always taken for granted. The car was purchased by a fellow near Philadelphia who sold it a while later,



then re-purchased it. We suspect he still owns the car.

The ones you love most the are the ones you become most involved with, Alvis, that is. The post war Alvis I kept the longest and enjoyed the most is TD 21 Series II, a 1963 dhc, 386 HYK. Purchased from a fellow in Westchester County, New York, the car was very solid, but simply neglected and tatty. I thoroughly enjoyed doing a rather extensive cosmetic restoration on this Alvis. Mechanically it was very good, needing only normal sorting from lack of use. Stripped her down for repaint, disassembled and had some of the brightwork replated, accomplished complete detailing of the engine bay and boot, a bit of time and coin invested in the hood and interior. Got dirty, got greasy, got clean again, any number of times. Upon purchase, I'd decided to replace the chromium plated wire wheels as they looked terrible. Seems that they were crusted with years of road grime, brake dust, and dirt. Cleaned them with a mild solution of muriatic acid and elbow grease, over and over.

The time spent was more than the cost to replace them might have been, save that it was my time, my car, my project. The end result was very satisfying. Why I sold this Alvis is beyond me, save that I am sometimes fickle and impulsive. Remember the crank-up hood on the 1937 Studebaker? And the Jay Leno truism, that many cars and one wife is much better than the other way round? Besides, if you kept the cars you had early on, you'd never have the funds to buy and enjoy the next opportunity of ownership. If you've had more than one wife, I'm told, you have no money left at all. I believe 386 HYK is still in the US.

In England for another National Alvis Day quite a few years ago, we made our normal visit with the Marrables. David and I would motor about in his 12/50 Ducksback or SA Speed 20, searching automotive interests. His friend, David Roscoe, then in Public Relations for Rolls-Royce at Crewe, arranged a very comprehensive tour of the works for the two of us. Very grand it was, with a gentleman on the staff in formal attire to show us round. Peter Harper, a purveyor of fine vintage vehicles near



*1963 TD21 Series II, 7040 BH at an airfield in Cheshire.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*1963 TD21 Series II 2688 KV. The only TD Series Saloon I have owned. David Marrable at the back.  
Photo: Bruce Earlin*



*1964 TE21 ABM 808B at our house Staircase. Note the eagle mascot.*

*Photo: Bruce Earlin*



1964 TD21 BDA 674B.

*Photo: Wayne Brooks*

Warrington, was normally on our schedule. Another time found us at Brian Classic's shops, then located at a disused airfield a bit north of Knutsford. Brian always has some fantastic machinery. ERA's, Ferrari's, Alfa's, other racing cars to drool over and purchase, if pockets are deep enough. Among the much less expensive items to be had was a 1963 TD 21 Series II dhc, 7040 BH. A very lovely car, again in Alice Blue, grey hood and leather, wire wheels and automatic. Why did Alvis elect to use the Borg-Warner unit, particularly without electric overdrive? Smooth enough, but not very efficient methinks. Perhaps I was 'maxed out' in automobile collectibles, as no purchase was made this holiday. So why this dissertation? About eight years later an Alvis was advertised in Alabama. 7040 BH, of course. Caught a flight going south. I went, I saw, I purchased and drove the very long way home without incident, save that the transmission gave off a great deal of heat during the nearly 1,000 mile, hot summer voyage. 7040 BH seems to like going long distances, and lives in California now.

Another Marrable connection. Poor David. 2688 KV belonged to his friend Neil Bell. Neil was employed at Crewe, and owned this lovely 1963 TD 21 Series II Saloon. Neil told David that he was going to sell the Alvis. I was coming over, and we ventured off to see 2688 KV. Of course I bought this very fine example, the only TD series saloon I've ever had. Luise and I were returning to England in about six month's time, and David had an empty garage in which the Alvis, found refuge. David exercised the car occasionally, and we then used the Alvis to tour from Cheshire to Land's End. After shipping the car back with us and using it for some time, we drove to an American AOC gathering in New Hope, Pennsylvania. As usual, we stayed with Hugh (then the long-time North American AOC Representative) and Nora Clarkson in nearby Furlong. Hugh fancied this comfortable modern saloon car to go with his 4.3 short-chassis VdP tourer and TC 21/100 dhc. Some years later he passed it on to another American owner who subsequently sold 2688 KV back to an English AOC member. Another Alvis back home again.

ABM 808B (originally BDA 674B). This 1964 TD 21 dhc concludes my Alvis experiences. Not the last Alvis I owned, just the latest. Regrettably. For the most part I was very fortunate in purchasing Alvises sight unseen. Alvis owners are a good lot, and will reveal the warts as well as the roses in their cars. The gods got even with me on this one. The advert was encouraging, the owner engaging, the description enticing, the price in line. Needed only a new clutch which was being installed, even as we spoke. Rust? Cars don't rust in Texas. Not even in the sills or frame members? The boot perhaps? Nay, none that could be seen by the gentleman seller. Money was sent. I had to conclude upon first seeing the transporter bringing the car up Staircase's driveway that the prior owner had to be blind, as surely not a lie had been told. From fifty feet the body was obviously sagging. The first right curve on the first drive produced enough flex that the driver's door flew open unassisted. I continued to the bottom of the hill, thankful to have tightened the seat belt, turned 180 degrees round, drove the two miles back home, and parked the saggy, baggy Alvis in the garage. Never drove it again. Immediately advertised it for sale and sold it at a substantial loss to the first "looker" a "restorer" from the Philadelphia area who represented the purchaser. I understand that the car has changed hands a few times since, and may be back in the UK now, present condition unknown to me. Strange to say, but I was just as happy to bail out of this project at a loss then as I was somewhat later to flog off a Jaguar XJ12C which inexplicably lost seven cylinders. Silently. Instantly. Five cylinder Jaguars do not sell easily at any price. In retrospect, the monetary loss on the Jaguar was more than the cost of the Alvis, so things could have been worse.

So there you have it. Thirty two in all, lest I've (gasp!) forgotten something. Sorry that the last story was a 'bummer', but on balance insignificant. Our Alvis experience has provided us with great vehicles, grand tours, wonderful long-time friends and memories. My sincere thanks to Dave Culshaw, David Marrable, and Nick Simpson for filling in some blind spots. Foremost kudos and thanks especially to Wayne Brooks whose help has been immeasurable. His time and efforts (and poking and prodding) have seen me through. I'll just close with Wayne's signature Alvis sign-off, 'For Longer Bonnets'.

**BRUCE EARLIN**

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*A great story from Bruce Earlin. I hope that this three part series will encourage others to recount their Alvis stories. My thanks to Bruce for the effort he has put into this series to entertain us all—J.N.B.C.*

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