



The Bulletin

No. 501 September/October 2006



THE BULLETIN

No. 501 SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2006

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Cover Picture: The Stalwart in training use at Bovingdon. See article Battle Stations.

Centre Spread: George Butlin's Speed 25 Pillarless Saloon. See article p. 431.

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Julian Collins



Julian Collins died on 22 August 2006, at the all-too-early age of 60, after a sudden and deadly resurgence of the hepatitis that he had first contracted, and seen off, several decades earlier. Cruelly, this came at an exceptionally productive time in his life, when he was within sight of a much-deserved partial retirement that would have allowed him to spend more time on his varied interests and projects.

Julian was an exceptionally widely-read and knowledgeable expert in all aspects of human creative endeavour. Cars, certainly, but also buildings, wars, ships, aircraft, steam engines, music, films – the list is endless. But, his interest was not just in the objects themselves – more in the people who created them. In the case of Alvis, his first love among cars, he was fascinated by the vision and application of the founders and engineers T.G. John, Capt. Smith-Clarke, W.M. Dunn, and the works driver Maurice Harvey. It was typical of him that, when he sat in the 200 Mile Race straight eight FWD Alvis, pictured above, his words were: "do you suppose that Harvey sat in this seat?"

As children and teenagers, Julian and his younger brother Felix were much influenced by their practical-minded father Geoffrey, a successful quantity surveyor, who used to experiment with wireless and all things electrical, so it was natural for the boys to interest themselves in similar things. This took the form of model aircraft, and, in a portentous sign of non-conformism, about which Father knew nothing – explosives.

The family car was an Alvis Firefly saloon, which had been used by his father in his war-time work building airfields and later got shut away in the garage when a company car came along. That Firefly was to be the start of Julian's (and Felix's) passion for early motoring and Alvis in particular. Before either had his driving licence, they obtained a copy of 'Wheatley and Morgan' — the classic book on vintage car restoration. That book introduced them, as so many others of their generation, to the delights of vintage car restoration and the art of doing it well. They read it from cover to cover many times. It was obvious that they would soon set about the old Firefly — hidden away, with its body falling apart — which they rebuilt as a special.

They did everything on that car themselves, picking up the skills as they needed them. They made their own castings, learned the use of the lathe and milling machine, welding and coachwork. Their story was told in the Alvis Owner Club Bulletins of August 1968 and June 1970, when Julian was still only 24. He subsequently drove this car on a routine basis, but after he went overseas, he only saw it occasionally and in the meantime Felix had acquired a Speed 20, so the Firefly remained in Julian's house in England.

In 1976, he arrived in Singapore with a British quantity surveying firm, and with a few gaps he remained there for the rest of his life. In the earlier years, this did cut him off from a large part of his natural community, but he overcame that with his weekly newsletters, a personal log of his activities and perceptions. In recent years, he embraced email and the Internet with delight and vigour, as hundreds of people around the world came to know. However, some things never changed — the tie at all times, the seasoned brown leather briefcase and the original brogues, all relics of his early working days in England.

In 1986, by then a Director, Julian was seconded to Sri Lanka for about 3 years working on the Colombo Airport extension project. In 1989, with his business partner Rosni Abdul Rahman, he founded a new firm, Barton Associates Pte Ltd (the name, with his typical sense of history, being one of Julian's family names). His personal professionalism and character were responsible for the volumes of business won by the firm, mostly by word of mouth and repeat business. The company was one of the few that survived, without taking a cut-back, the severe Asian recession of the mid 1990's. In the office, he was a dominant figure, often roaring with laughter, or loudly calling out for his secretary, and he leaves a great void there that will only be filled because his partner and staff are determined to carry on his vision.

His involvement in major international projects gave him the opportunity of visiting many exotic places, for example New Delhi, Rajasthan, Sri Lanka, Zanzibar, Manado, Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, and he took the opportunity to write travelogues which he circulated to his close friends and family. These were full of entertaining anecdotes, for example when he was introduced to the Maharajah of Jodhpur, who was kitted out splendidly in white tunic, turban with pugeree and (of course) jodhpurs while dispensing Rajasthani opium-laced almonds from a silver tray. The problem for the ever-correct Julian (besides a hint of disappointment that he could feel no effects of the opium) was that he had not been forewarned and he

was, uncharacteristically, dressed in a T-shirt and trainers and without his old school tie!

In Singapore, he pitched himself into the local vintage car community, and into what became life-long friendships. He became a member of the Malaysia and Singapore Vintage Car Register, which in the late 1970s was still functioning as a rather eccentric vintage car club, run primarily by British planters and modelled on the VSCC. Julian revelled in that and especially enjoyed the many forays into the Johore plantations in a friend's Talbot 75. He became editor of the MSVCR magazine and maintained it at a very high standard for 13 years. By exchanging the magazines with other editors and enthusiasts around the world, he ensured that the MSVCR punched well above its weight. In recognition of his services, he was made an Honorary Member of the Club.

Car club magazine editors set the tone, and Julian was not slow to do that for the MSVCR, particularly by focusing the club around cars of the VSCC type. It is probably fair to say that, in taking that position, he was holding back an unstoppable tide. Inevitably, the club today is a broader church, numerically dominated by post-war classics. Julian was very opinionated and one thing that really did get him going was to mention MGBs or Minis in the same breath as vintage cars.

While developing and running his business and the MSVCR magazine, Julian had settled into what looked to his friends like a comfortable bachelor status, but in 1987 in Sri Lanka he met Rosemary McCall, to whom he had been recommended, not as a future husband but as someone who would know what a racing car would look like, as a basis for a children's toy. "Well, come back to my place and look at my books" was his masterly line, which worked well because Rosemary turned out to be another book addict and they married 18 months later.

The 32-page Alvis Owner Club Bulletin at the end of 1996 announced that Julian had been appointed Editor. No role could have suited him better. His first issue sprang almost entirely from his own head, a whopping 80 pages in length, building on the style he had adopted for the MSVCR. It is probably fair to say that little consideration for budget had gone into that issue. However, it was enthusiastically received by the membership and particularly by those who had material to contribute, which then started to flow into the editorial offices in great quantity. The result has been, over nine years, a journal of sustained variety and interest that is probably unparalleled among one-make clubs, culminating recently in the 500th issue, a landmark that he felt to be auspicious and to which he devoted huge effort just as his illness started to overwhelm him.

It was a source of admiration (and mystery) to those who knew him, how he managed to produce so much, and yet still find time to read and study, and to correspond with his friends. He must have been able to warp time. His interests and activities spanned a range of subjects too wide to list: Nikon cameras, Mozart, swords, armour, water colouring, ink sketches, steam, aircraft. However he was not an exclusively serious man — he had an extensive repertoire of silly walks and knew the Goon Shows backwards. His ink sketches took a unique form. They were mainly

produced during business meetings, however, these were no ordinary doodles. They were fine and striking pieces and everybody wanted copies, especially his staff. He included many of them in his weekly letters for friends and family around the world.

However, his great passion in life was books, especially motoring books. He had thousands in his office, in his Singapore house and at his family home in Kent. He had no need for interior decorators — in nearly every room, the walls had been completely covered with bookshelves. The range was enormous, of course, but so too was the quality. There was no rubbish there, and everywhere the eye roamed there would be something of great rarity and interest.

There were many more things that Julian wanted to do with his life, in particular travelling, cataloguing his collections, visiting all his close friends, setting up his workshop and restoring the Firefly. Sadly, this was not to be, but he had already achieved and experienced more than most of us, with the life he had.

Above all else, Julian was an assiduous cultivator of relationships, and hundreds of friends, colleagues and relations all over the world will feel the loss of a generous, learned and irreplaceable personality. Our sincerest condolences go to his wife Rosemary; to Felix, Vicky and Felicity; and to his loyal staff at Barton Associates.

TC BL DAB RAR

This week my wife and I, in company with other Alvis members, attended the funeral of Julian Collins at the lovely parish church of St James the Great, East Mailing. In all there were some hundred or so mourners, headed by his wife Rosemary, sister Vicky and brother Felix. The rest of the congregation was made up from relatives and friends from around the world who had known him through his wide range of interests.

The eulogy was delivered by Perran Newman, his life long friend dating back to their school days. This echoed the feeling that I think many of us have of Julian that once you knew him it was for life. Whilst he was a very busy person he always found time to stay in contact with his friends.

After the service many of us went back to the family home in East Mailing where we had the privilege to see the home of which he was fiercely proud. As you might expect many of the rooms were full of books on just about every subject under the sun.

Those that knew him well have lost a true friend and the Alvis owner club has lost an outstanding editor.

Mike Baker.

Members of Council have received emails from several quarters of the 'Alvis diaspora'. These are reprinted, in shortened form, on the next two pages.

My wife and I first knew Julian when he arrived in Singapore in 1974 and we attended gatherings of the Malaysian and Singapore Vintage Car Club. His passing is a great shock and loss.

Julian constantly received words of appreciation for his bulletins which he created from members. Perhaps the highlight of the appreciation was The Annual Bulletin Award by Norman Johnson and Paul Haye (Editor of the excellent Register bulletin). Julian's wide reading, research work, book reviews and correspondence with Alvis owners world wide brought forth the excellent articles to which we looked forward. Julian's work became admired outside the immediate Alvis circle. His Alvivacy editorials were outstanding.

With John Wheeley, Julian produced the splendid 'Fifty years of Alvis enthusiasm;' a very important addition to Alvis literature. With the loss of the Alvis name from the defence industry I believe that Julian's greatest contribution was to make the bulletin the voice of Alvis world-wide, for which he will always be remembered.

K. R. Day

Time has robbed all of us by the passing of Julian. Following his illness in hospital, Julian died on Tuesday 22 August 2006. His family has lost an essential central figure and I offer my condolences to them all. For members of the Alvis Owner Club and also the Singapore and Malaysian Register, the loss will be very poignant. The ripples from the stone falling in the water will be seen and felt for a very long time to come. Most AOC members will have become used to Julian as our Editor for the last 10 years, where he managed to raise the already high standard achieved by Ben Lenthall our previous Editor in the presentation and content of the Bulletin. How ironic his last full Bulletin while alive would be No. 500?

I had frequent contact with Julian by e-mail and he was always responsive to ideas and usually replied by return or within 7 days at the latest, despite his huge commercial commitments and also deadlines for other Club activities. He was fully committed to the production of the Bulletin and over time he inspired members to write, eventually, about their ALVIS experiences for the benefit of us all by printing the articles in the Bulletin.

Julian was an absolute gentleman, erudite and professional. He made light of the Editorial mantle he held for the AOC. His Libraries were an absolute joy, both in Singapore and England, both of which I was privileged to see and browse through. Through his Editorial period the Bulletin became recognised as the standard for other Club magazines to achieve and the Bulletin received an award for the best One Marque Club magazine by the Motoring Press.

I think the best tribute members can give to Julian is to read at random previous Bulletins and reflect on the professional standard he achieved and maintained for all our enjoyment. Well done, Julian, rest in peace now.

Clive Taylor

5058 NZ New Zealand Representative for the AOC
Chairman, Bay of Plenty Branch, VCC New Zealand Inc.

Julian was well known in this club and over recent years had become a personal friend of many of us. He last visited us only six months ago and what a happy time that was for all concerned. There will be a tribute to Julian in our Newsletter 'Alvic' in due course but at this time of especial sadness we would like to send our condolences to Julian's family and close friends as they gather for his funeral.

Though distance precludes our presence it does not dim the spirit and in that we are with you. We share your sorrow as we endeavour to celebrate the good times. There were many of those!

John Hetherington
President Alvis Car Club of Victoria (Australia)

Alvis Car Club members will be shocked and saddened to learn of Julian Collins' death a few days ago. On behalf of our members I wish to convey our sympathies to Rose, Felix and other members of his family.

Eric Cunningham
Hon. Sec. Alvis Car Club New South Wales.

I log into the AOC website only once or twice a week and just did so to read your notice.

I'd never met Julian, but we had corresponded quite a few times. In fact, just today I have been poring through Bulletin 500 and reading J.N.B.C.'s book reviews; marvelling at his ability to consume these books, review them, as well as compiling a truly fantastic Bulletin. All this in addition to his day job!

I share your sentiments that he will indeed be sorely missed. Very sad news indeed, and thank you for sharing with the Alvis fraternity.

Huge shoes to fill! Very best regards,

John Layzell. Miami

Dear Martin,

I am the Editor of the Lagonda Club magazine, a member and former magazine editor of the MSVCR and a long-time friend of Julian Collins. I was shocked to learn of his sad death a few days ago and send my condolences to the Alvis Owner Club. Julian will be a very hard act to follow. I plan to attend his funeral, along with several old MSVCR colleagues.

For some time, Julian and I have exchanged magazines and I would very much like to continue with this.

Yours sincerely Ken Painter

Dear Rex,

The death of Julian Collins is both a shock and a great loss to the AOC. I receive many club journals, and the AOC Bulletin over the last ten years has risen to be head and shoulders above just about all of the rest. It is lively, enthusiastic, deep into Alvis lore yet also outward looking. Julian's book reviews were marvellous — in depth, entertaining and educational. Although we corresponded occasionally, we never met, but I felt I knew him personally through his writings.

I am sure that you will be able to rely upon the support of all AOC members to ensure that Julian's achievement on behalf of the Club will be maintained, and that your Club magazine will continue as a publication to be cherished.

Yours sincerely, John Warburton
Editor, the Bulletin of the VSCC.

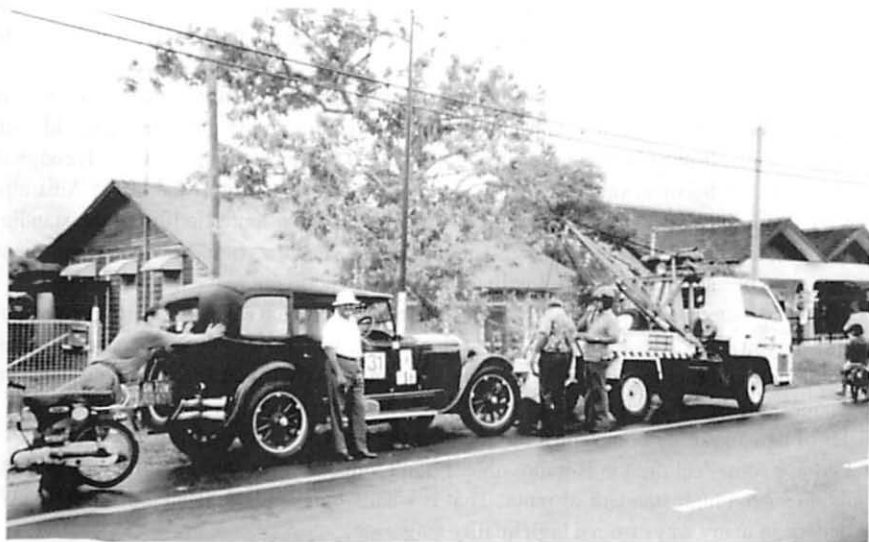
Eli Solomon sent, with his sympathy to Julian's friends and family, a four page reprint of an article Julian wrote in the MSVCR magazine of September / October 1994. This article, titled 'The Joys of Vintage Motoring' was a record of a trip in Ivor Thevathasan's 1925 Buick to the Club AGM at Maur. It can be accessed on the Club website.

The article is the story of repeated difficulties with the American equivalent of the Autovac. Two illustrations from the article seem very appropriate to reprint here.



The joys of vintage motoring. Ivor Thevathasan holds the funnel whilst the editor prepares to yet again re-fill the Autovac of Ivor's Buick

Photo: Eli Solomon



Help arrives and the Editor tries to prove that he can push a 2-ton car.

Photo: Eli Solomon

An Editorial

For over thirty years I have kept a cartoon card, unused. I felt that one day it would be very appropriate. That day came on 23 August, when I met Martin about editing the Bulletin until Julian recovered. As we all know now, a greater commitment had to be made.

The card is a cartoon of the kind which puts animals into human situations. This one had a dog walking a high wire in a big top, watched by a crowd of other dogs. He wears a pot on his head and juggles balls from hand to hand while crossing a wire on a one-wheeled cycle. The text reads 'High above the hushed crowd, Rex tried to remain focussed. Still, he couldn't shake one nagging thought: He was an old dog and this was a new trick.'

Such an appropriate cartoon, I thought, would certainly obtain sympathetic consideration if I sought permission to publish. Not on your life! Our magazine is not academic, it seems! So you have to imagine the card for yourselves!

Even to try to maintain what Julian has achieved over the last nine years is going to require a heroic degree of support from members. Ninety-six pages every two months demands a phenomenal quantity of typescript. I know — I have edited a quarterly magazine of seventy-two pages for the last thirteen years. Still, it has been done, and that magazine has appeared on the fifteenth day of every third month for all thirteen years. With your support, 'The Bulletin' can do as well. Editing is fine: but Editors must have material to edit.

It has been an interesting three weeks. A pack of material came from Singapore. Julian's friends there have been very supportive. There just might be more, but at the moment we do not know. Certainly the production of this issue has used up all the material received and several other pieces as well. Fortunately, I have the equipment to produce typescript and illustrations for articles from most kinds of source. The only source I really find a trial is manuscript, but I do use that when for any reason that is the only way possible.

When an article has been prepared and subjected to first corrections, it is printed out and will be sent to the author, for comment on the arrangement of the article, which may be changed up to the last moment.

It will be obvious to you all that my circle of acquaintances is only a small proportion of that enjoyed by Julian. He was unusually gifted in making and maintaining a world-wide circle of friends. It must be the aim of us all not to lose this most valuable asset. Through it, the Bulletin has become known world-wide. The contributions from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, the East Indies and recently Africa have been a fantastic filip to the standing of the AOC. Whilst I may not know so many people, I am a competent letter and email writer, so do please keep in touch. I will not let you down; do not leave me up the creek!.

With this issue, we are over the first hurdle. The next one or two are likely to prove more testing. If you have any article which you have sent, which has not yet appeared, please reprint it and send it to me. If you have a talent for finding Alvis related items in old motoring magazines, please offer your services — I have only a small motoring library. If you are a reader of new motoring books, please remember the Book Reviews section.

Perhaps some feel the job is impossible. I don't agree, but it certainly will be difficult to maintain such a high standard of input. That is what we must all dedicate ourselves to. We all benefit in many ways from a high quality magazine.

Rex Harvey

An Amazing Coincidence

It all started innocently enough, in about 1964, when I bought my Speed 20 SC (Charlesworth DHC.) The car had several badges on the front, as was fashionable in those days. Among the badges present was a badge that no one knew anything about. The badges were taken off many years ago, when the wire stone guard for the radiator was replated. They sat in a box on the shelf for many years, until I looked at the box one day, and could not remember what I had put in it. As I looked at the badges to see what there was, I again remembered that I still didn't know where this badge was from.

I decided to write a 'Letter to the Editor' with a picture of the badge, to see if anyone in the AOC could help me. I soon had a reply from 'JBNC' telling me all about the badge, and that it had come from the Alvis Car Club of the 30s. I was also informed that if I had purchased the AOC Jubilee Book, I would have known all about it, because it was well covered in that publication. I had not heard of the book, nor had I seen this 600-page tome. (No I don't live in a hollow log, I'm just new to the club)

So it might have ended right there and then, without further ado. A few weeks later Julian sent a copy of a few pages from the book outlining the development of the various Alvis Car Clubs, which included a picture of the badge that I had. This I read with great enthusiasm as I do with anything that comes from 'JBNC.' On the last page was an interesting little snippet, that had nothing at all to do with badges. It stated that; "a Speed 20 owner, Richard Birks of Sheffield and two other local enthusiasts, decided to form an Alvis Club. Considering that Richard Birks was the founder of the Alvis Owner Club, it is regrettable that so little is known of him." Now there have been many Richard Birks in Sheffield, and there still are. They can be traced back to a Richard Birks, who was a yeoman of Ecclesfield, but he died in 1579.

The one who founded the Alvis Owner Club in 1950 was the one born in Sheffield on 1 May 1920 and by coincidence, he also lived in Ecclesfield. He was actually christened, Percival Richard Birks. The frown on his forehead at the time was caused not so much by the cold water of the christening, but by the name Percival. He was not happy with this state of affairs and promptly reversed the order. When War broke out in 1939 he was only 19 years old, but he had enlisted in the prestigious Coldstream Guards under the name of Richard Birks. There are some things that military intelligence doesn't need to know.

At some stage in his service with the Guards, Richard became a Dispatch Rider or 'Don R' as they were then called. The name 'Don R' comes from the First World War British signalman's phonetic alphabet, in which Don stood for the letter 'D' and Robert stood for the letter 'R.' I suppose they couldn't call them 'Don Roberts' because they might think you are talking about a person but I don't really know. You could fill encyclopedias with the stuff that I don't know,...in fact, they have!

Dispatch riders in those days (well they don't have them these days do they?) were a kind of elite group of maverick thrill seekers, who were something of a law unto themselves. They were expected to get the messages through quickly, which to the average rider, meant you could ride as fast as you like, and there was nothing the police could do about it. The thrill of speed was like a magnet to them. They were tolerated, as long as they got their essentially secret messages through to where they were meant to be. They were expected to live and sleep, dressed and booted, and be ready to roll as soon as any message was ready to

be sent. They were not expected to wait for the shelling to stop. They wore a blue band on their helmets and a blue circle on the back of their motor bikes. This was to enable them to ride straight through checkpoints without stopping. The band on the front of the helmet could hopefully be seen as they approached the checkpoint, and the band and circle on the back meant; please don't shoot me, just because I ran through your checkpoint without stopping. This sometimes worked well, until the blackout, and then they just had to take their chances. While kitted up and waiting, and not being allowed to move far away, they often had little to do. As will sometimes happen, when you have adrenalin junkies sitting around, when there was no action, they tended to make their own.

These comments are just a description of the lives of dispatch riders in general at that time, and I have no evidence to suggest that Richard Birks was anything like that at all.

On one of his dispatch rides, carrying sensitive documents and with bombs falling behind him, he glanced over his shoulder to see how far away the bombs were dropping, when he ran into the side of a furniture van. He was in a very bad way and was quickly rushed to hospital. He spent the next seven days in a coma. When he started to come around, he tried to pull his heavy riding gauntlet down to see his watch, but found that his wrist was in a heavy plaster cast. Although he had been wearing his rider's helmet, he had a head injury and his wrist was shattered. He was also to learn that he had lost a leg just below the knee. Like many men at that time, he was fitted with an artificial leg and discharged from active service.

According to his school magazine, after leaving the Guards, he became the 'Manager at Willorby's, in Wolverhampton'. It was also about this time that he married Myrtle, whom he had met in Wolverhampton during the war. They lived with his parents until they moved into their house, at 201 Yew Lane Ecclesfield. On 10 April 1946 his first child was born, a



Picture of car at the beach

Photo: Ralph Birks collection

pretty little girl called Lesley. Lesley was his pride and joy with blonde curly hair. Richard was managing pretty well with his artificial leg, but was still very self-conscious about it. He borrowed some money from an uncle to buy a car, but he would never have any of his cars modified to accommodate his leg. Fourteen months later Lesley was presented with a younger brother, Ralph. Between 1946 and 1950, Richard changed cars a couple of times. By 1950, he was driving his first Alvis and he was very proud to be the owner of such a prestigious car.

The car was a Charlesworth Drop-head Coupe, and it was painted dark green. Richard was aware of the prewar Alvis Car Club, although he had been too young to be involved with it while it was operating. He thought it would be nice to be able to mingle with other Alvis owners and if the pre-war Alvis Car Club had still been in existence, then he could. Therefore, his immediate thought would be to restart the pre-war Club. He wrote to Bill Charnock suggesting just that. It seems that no one thought that this would be possible, and so he came to the idea of simply starting a new club from scratch. He tried to whip up enthusiasm wherever he could. He wrote letters and talked about it to anyone who would listen. He put fliers on the windscreens of any Alvis cars that he found in the street and finally advertised in the Autocar on 29 September 1950. The advertisement read;

‘Two one make car clubs have recently been proposed, one for Alpha Romeo owners, (enquiries to H K Deshaw 30 Herent Drive, Illford Essex.) and the other for Alvis owners. (Write to R Birks, 201 Yew Lane, Ecclesfield, Sheffield)’



Lesley Birks outside 201 Yew Lane Ecclesfield.

X marks the house!

The first club newsletter was printed here.

Photo: Lesley Birks collection

The Sports Editors of the Autocar at that time were S.C.H. Davis, who became the Alvis Owner Club Patron, and J.A. Cooper who was to be the club's first President. The response to the advertisement was good enough to go ahead with further plans, and the easiest way to contact the people who had responded to the proposal in the Autocar was to use that method again. On 5 January 1951 The Autocar ran the message that:

‘The newly formed Alvis Owners Club is to hold its inaugural meeting on 14 January, at the Swan Hotel in Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire. The proceedings will start at 12.30 pm and the meeting will be followed by tea and a social gathering to which all Alvis owners and enthusiasts, whether prospective club members or not, are cordially invited. In view of the enthusiasm usually displayed by owners of these cars this is a club that should not lack support. Those requiring further information should write to P. R.Birks, 201 Yew Lane Ecclesfield Sheffield’.

It was surprising to note in the Autocar announcement, that Richard actually used the ‘P’ initial first in his name, because

this was usually kept under wraps. The enthusiasm was thin on the ground at the first meeting, which had a sparse attendance of about half a dozen people, but it was enough to start the Alvis Owner Club. Tenbury Wells had been chosen as the venue for the first meeting because it would be more accessible to people. This was an area that Richard was familiar with, as his wife Myrtle came from nearby Ludlow. The actual time frame from this meeting to the stage of having regular meetings is not known, but within a relatively short time, a newsletter was being produced and regular meetings were being held. It seemed to the Birks family that the actual Alvis Owner Club was situated in their front room. This was set up as the headquarters complete with a large, old, second hand, manual Gestetner Duplicating Machine, tubes of ink and an old manual typewriter. Richards's wife, Myrtle, was [often] the motive power for the Gestetner and she found it very tiring. The house was filled with the smell of ink and correction fluid and the wet ink on the pages as they came out seemed to get onto everything. This provided some entertainment for the children, especially Lesley who thought that the red correction fluid was as near to real nail polish as she was likely to have at that age. When the required number of copies of the 5 or 6 pages that constituted the newsletter had been printed, Richard and Myrtle, with help from two other friends, would sit on the floor in a circle, collate, and then staple the newsletter together. Apart from keeping members in touch and advertising current events, the newsletter acted as a clearing house for requests for information and for those seeking spare parts. Such requests were even received from as far away as Australia.

At this time, Richard was driving for a living, selling 'Novaseal' an underbody coating for cars. His interests at this time seem to be clear. He was driving cars, selling products for cars, and starting a club for cars. Richard loved fast cars, and driving fast. The neighbours in his street used to call him 'Mad-eye Birksie'. Richard's initial patch for selling was Yorkshire and Derbyshire as he was living in Sheffield. Eventually his operations spread further north and as far south as Gloucestershire.

Richard had fitted a musical horn to the Speed 20 and on returning home after a long day on the road he would use it as a signal. His house in Yew Lane was on a feeder road that was a few feet lower than the main road, and parallel to it. As he approached home on the main road, he would sound the horn - Dah-DAH-da-DAAAH! At this, his two children, Lesley and Ralph, would fly out of the house just in time to see the Alvis flash past on the top road. They knew the drill, and quickly opened the garage doors and put a brick in place to hold them, and then they would both jump up on the low garden wall where they would be safe, and where Richard could see them. By this time he had turned into the feeder road and was about to swing into the driveway and then straight into the garage. Some times, he would give the children a ride down the driveway on the running board of the car. There were also times the children had to wait a while before he arrived, and they didn't understand why. Eventually their mother told them that he sometimes went too fast to make the turn into the feeder road, and had to go down into the village of Ecclesfield to turn around and come back.

Richard liked to drive with the top down, and he would allow Lesley at the age of about six to stand up in the back seat while they were traveling, much to her Mother's consternation. She never actually ever fell out, of course, while doing this. There was the time, however, that they were travelling along slowly, near some local shops, and Lesley leant against the door, probably to look at something, and the door flew open and she fell out. Fortunately, she was not hurt, but she was very concerned to see the car's tail lights disappearing down the road. She thought she was being left behind, but in fact, it was the brake lights of the car that she had seen.

Apart from the usual meetings, there were other activities in the early days of the Club. One was a rally that was held at Castleton, in Derbyshire. While the men were engaged in the business of cars, Myrtle was expected to entertain the women and children. A trip down the Blue John Mine had been arranged for this purpose. The ladies were taken underground, and then transferred to a small boat. The guide then propelled the boat by pushing backward on the roof of the mine making the boat slide forward though the inky water. They soon came to a large cavern where the guide turned a hand wheel, which sent a huge cascade of water crashing down into a chasm below. Myrtle was concerned, as the ladies seemed very unimpressed, but her daughter Lesley thought it was wonderful. There was also a Club meeting at a Pub called 'The Rising Sun' in Derbyshire and I believe that it is still there to this day.



Ralph Birks in the (Silver Eagle?)

Photo: Ralph Birks collection

Richard was not only a fast driver, but evidently he was also well skilled. One day while travelling at considerable speed with a neighbour in the car, on the top road, his wife Myrtle, noticed one of the front wheels bounding down the road ahead of them. Richard must have noticed it too, for 'without turning a hair', he was able to pull up the car, still standing on three wheels. "What are we stopping for?" asked Mrs. Rossington from the back seat, totally unaware of how close she had come to disaster. Maybe it was her weight in the opposite back corner of the car that allowed this incident to turn out so well.

During the early fifties Richard decided to do some restoration on the Alvis. Myrtle was not particularly keen about having a house full of dirty car parts, and she thought that by helping to clean and restore them, they would be out of the house [sooner]. Much was done on the body, and the colour scheme was taken from British Racing Green (one of the 3286 shades thereof), to red.

The family used to take their caravanning holidays at Anderby Creek just north of



Ralph Birks with VJ7 845

Photo: Ralph Birks collection



Lesley in front of her father's car.

Photo: Ralph Birks collection



*This is another Alvis owned by Richard Birks
Possibly a Silver Eagle*

Photo: Ralph Birks collection



This is the front of the other Alvis. Reg. No. YS1035

Photo: Ralph Birks collection



Richard enjoyed fishing on his holidays. Photo: Lesley Birks collection

Skegness. About seven miles inland from Anderby Creek, is the little town of Well, it is just to the South of the main road. There are two roads that run to Well and they are about half a mile apart and almost parallel to each other, and both are signposted 'Well'. With encouragement from the children in the back seat it was customary to drive past these two road signs as fast as possible, so that when the children read them aloud, it sounded like you were saying "Well, well!" The family holidays off the beaten track in Scotland would fill volumes, and are beyond the scope of this article.

By 1956 Richard had sold the Alvis and bought a Ford Custom Line. He pursued many fads. There was the tropical fish tank that flooded the hall, and the model railway that he built in the loft, (it may still be there) with two stations 'Leston' and 'Ralphton' named after his children. He then took up photography, and turned the bathroom into a darkroom. The Alvis interest had, therefore been quite a long one for Richard. By the late fifties, his marriage was not going well, and in 1959, he suggested that the family emigrate to Australia and make a new start. He arranged for Myrtle and the two children to go on ahead of him, and that he would follow. It was common at that time to move the family first, while the husband stayed behind to sell up and then rejoin his family with the money later. Richard didn't join his wife and children in Australia and his marriage disintegrated. He visited Australia briefly in 1961 or 62 and even though the family was 180 miles west of Melbourne, he made contact with the Alvis Car Club of Victoria. He knew some of the members from the time that he had received requests from them for inclusion in the AOC newsletter. The family were invited to join a Rally to Hume Weir, via Beechworth, an old gold mining town about 200 miles north of Melbourne. His daughter Lesley rode back from there in a ducksback 12/50, but thought that it was very cold and that it wasn't as nice as the old Speed 20 that she had grown up with.



The motor show in the 60s?[or earlier?]

Photo: Ralph Birks collection



Ralph Myrtle and Lesley as they are today.

Photo: Lesley Birks collection



Richard Birks in the mid sixties (last known photo) Photo: Ralph Birks collection

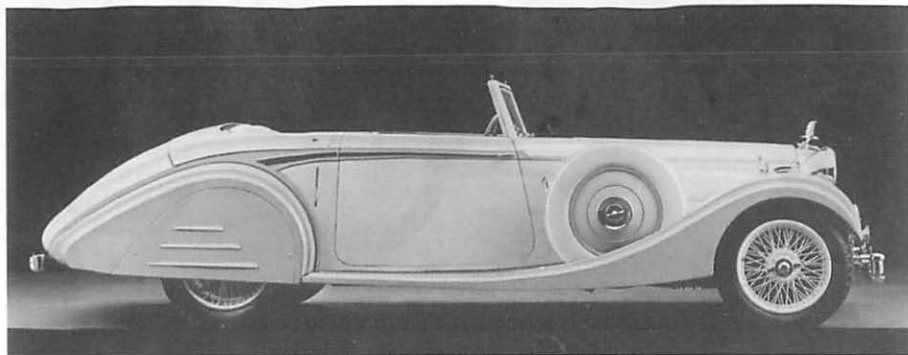
Richard had not yet finished with Alvises. In the mid sixties, he bought another Alvis, possibly one of the last production models. It carried the registration plate ALV15. It is almost certain that he bought the car new. This picture of a motor show with the word Alvis was among the photos he had. It has 1949 written on the back but some of the cars appear to be later than that.

Richard could be a very kind, and extremely charming man, but he also had his demons, and was sometimes very difficult. He lost touch with his family at about this time and was last heard of living in Macclesfield in the early 70s. His son Ralph became a motor mechanic, and eventually owned his own Garage and Multi Car Dealership in Queensland, and Lesley became an English teacher in Victoria. His wife Myrtle is, in 2006, still alive and well and very sprightly, in an aged care hostel in Queensland. If Richard is still alive, he will be 86 years old.

The Alvis was once described as 'The car of choice for the caddish second son of an aristocrat'. I think Richard would probably be happy with that. I hope that this has been able to put some flesh and bones on the name of the man who started the Alvis Owner Club.

So, what's the coincidence? Richard's daughter, Lesley, has been my friend for twenty years and I knew that her father had once owned a Speed 20. I had no idea that he was the one who started the club. Now isn't that a coincidence?

A Lancefield Speed 25 Drophead Coupé



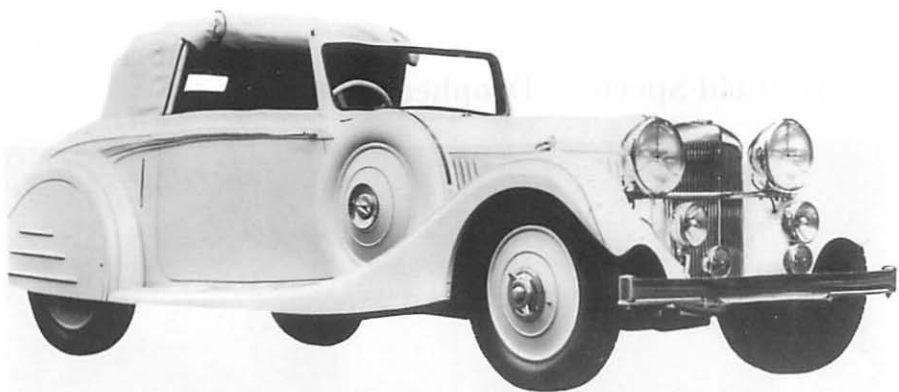
*1938 Speed Twenty-Five with Disappearing Hood Drophead Coupé by Lancefield.
Photo: Alan Stote Collection*

This is the narrative of my search for the unique 1938 Earls Court Motor Show Speed Twenty-Five Lancefield, Disappearing Hood, Drophead Coupé, chassis number 14463, registration number EXW 17.

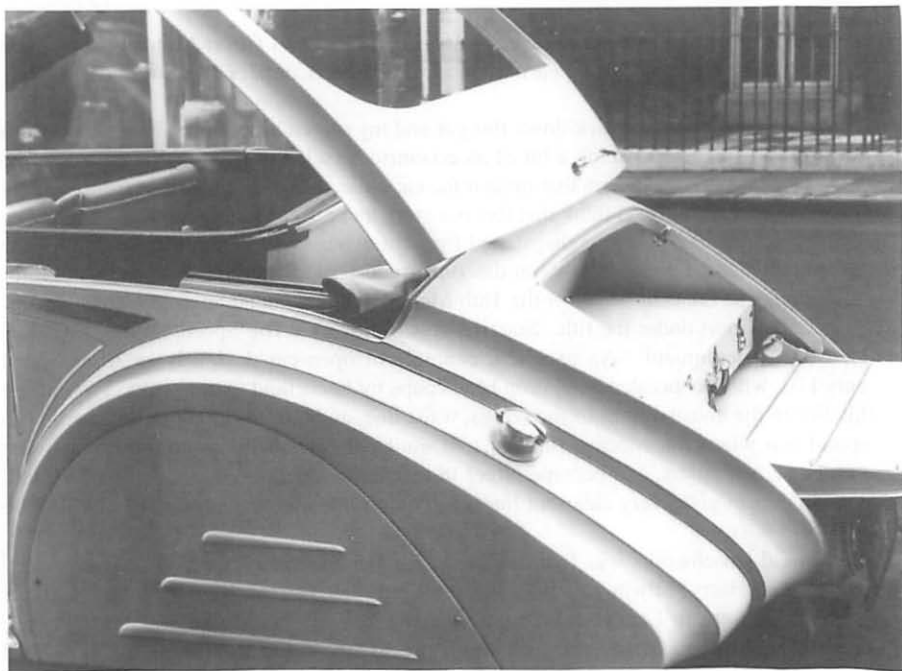
It took me a long time to track down this car and my search brought me into contact with a series of odd characters. Being a bit of an eccentric myself I get a kick out of interacting with the other bizarre characters that inhabit the car collector world as well as from locating Alvises that have been lost. I think that this is a story that needs to be told.

This Speed Twenty-Five was dispatched from the Alvis Works as a 'Chassis only—Car for exhibition at the London Show' on the 19th August 1937 to Messrs Brooklands Motor Co., London. The Autocar issue for the 18th March 1938 contained an article about coachwork at Earls Court under the title 'Superlative Coachwork'. The Speed Twenty-Five was singled out for comment. "An excellent example of open-car design is an Alvis Speed Twenty-Five with a concealed hood drop head coupé by Lancefield Coachworks. The interest in this lies in the unusual lines of the wings, waist line, and tail, for along the edges of both front and rear wings run concave flutings, and similar flutings begin to appear on the waist line at the screen pillars, and become larger in section as they sweep to the end of the tail. This arrangement gives very clear-cut lines, and emphasises the graceful proportions of the body."

Lancefield Coachworks was founded in 1922 under the name Gaisford & Warboys by three brothers, Harry, Edwin and Bob Gaisford and their partner George Warboys. Their first premises were in Lancefield Street, Queens Park in West London and when they moved to Beethoven Street they changed the name of the business to Lancefield Coachworks. In the mid nineteen thirties, Lancefield started to produce some extraordinary streamlined designs of which the 1938 show car was the apogee. With its fluted lines and rear wheel spats it was the epitome of Art Deco design. Bob Gaisford recounted in later life that only one example of this body was built on an Alvis chassis but the same design was



*A Lancefield photograph of the Drophead Coupé
probably taken shortly after its completion.
Photo: Alan Stote Collection*



*Detail of the disappearing hood as well as the fitted boot.
A Lancefield contemporary photograph taken in St. James.
Photo: Alan Stote Collection*



*The Lancefield near the Alvis works in the early fifties.
The car has been repainted and still has the Ace disc wheels.
Photo: Alan Stote Collection*



*Ron Pinto and his wife in the Speed Twenty-Five at the Pebble Beach Concours in 1983, when it was
voted one of the seven most elegant open cars in the show. Photo: Alan Stote Collection*

used by Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Mercedes-Benz and Hotchkiss. Bob Gaisford recalled that "Of all the cars my brothers and I designed, the concealed drophead coupe was my favourite." In addition to the unique Speed Twenty-Five drophead coupe, I believe that Lancefield produced at least sixteen other bodies on Alvis chassis.

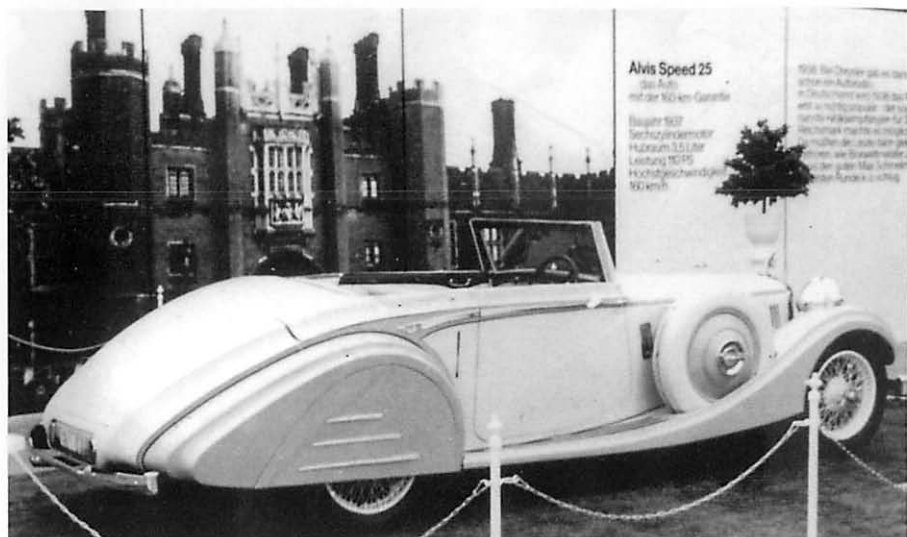
This Alvis with its unique body evidently caused a stir at the 1938 Motor Show but for whom was it built? Surely it was not just a whim of Alvis to impress everyone at the show? As yet I have discovered no details of owners of this car before the war or indeed before it was in the hands of R. Colley, of 39 Emperors Gate, London SW7 who, in 1958, was AOC Member Number 1302SE. Nine years later the Speed Twenty-Five was in the hands of L. D. Jennings of P. O. Box 11, Kingston, Jamaica. Mr Jennings was also a member of the Club with membership Number 34970S. By 1976 the car had passed on to Robin Sutton-Brown, also living in Kingston, Jamaica.

In 1976 John Fox met Robin Sutton-Brown in Kingston. Robin had just completed a three-year structural rebuild of the Lancefield coachwork, replacing all the wood framing in Jamaican hardwood. Later the car passed on to Ron Pinto in the United States. Ron Pinto was originally from Jamaica and he bought the Lancefield in the late 1970s from an advertisement in the Los Angeles Times, placed by Robin Sutton-Brown who was then working for IBM in Fresno, California. The car was stored with Robin Sutton-Brown's brother-in-law in Miami. Ron Pinto bought it sight unseen, and was not entirely happy with what he found when he saw it. Ron Pinto raced a 1952 Ferrari 225 in RCM/Vintage Racing. At Laguna Seca in 1987 he crashed the Ferrari as the result of a heart attack. His wife then encouraged him to quit racing.

In 1982 the Lancefield had been flown to Germany and displayed in the 'Autoshow der Superlative - Veedol Starparade' in Berlin. According to Ron Pinto, the promoter of the show went broke, disappeared and the cars were stuck in a web of legalities. After some legal machinations, Ron regained possession of the car and had it flown back to California at his own expense. The Speed Twenty-Five was displayed at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in August 1983, and then sold in December 1983 when it promptly dropped out of sight.



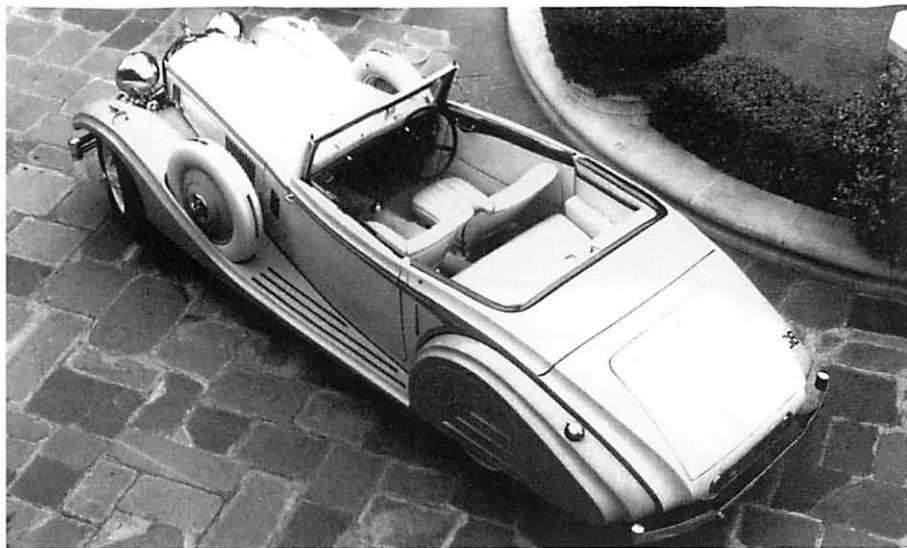
*1938 Speed Twenty-Five with Disappearing Hood Drophead Coupé by Lancefield.
Photo: Alan Stote Collection*



*The Lancefield on show in Germany in 1982. (Picture of Hampton Court? Editor)
Photo: Alan Stote Collection*

I had been searching for the Lancefield since it appeared at the Pebble Beach Concours in 1983. I discovered the Alvis was one of two cars that belonged to a film company. The second car was a 1934 Type 57 Bugatti Gangloff Stelvio cabriolet, chassis number 57192. Both cars had been purchased, for cash, from Ron Pinto by the film company which was owned by two artistic, rather eccentric (a masterpiece of understatement) and secretive individuals, Marc Johnson and a Polish aristocrat, Prince Jean Chretien Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, also known as Prince Stash, a citizen of France who is a resident of both Switzerland and California. He is the son of the internationally known artist Balthus (Count Balthazar Klossowski de Rola).

I contacted Ron Pinto to enquire about the Speed Twenty-Five. Ron gave me three phone numbers, all unlisted, for Marc Johnson; one in New York City and the others in the Los Angeles area. I called these numbers weekly, without an answer, until the New York number and one of the Los Angeles numbers were disconnected in the late 1980's. I discovered the remaining number was in Santa Monica, California and continued calling it, sometimes twice a week, until January 1993. In the meantime I made inquiries of everyone that might have a lead on the car or who might know the elusive owners. At the Hershey meet in October 1990, I talked with Barnaby Brokaw, a dealer from San Diego, who said he knew Marc Johnson and had access to the building where the Lancefield was stored. Barnaby, being a dealer, was interested in purchasing the car when it changed hands so understandably he did not divulge its location. I maintained contact in case he became the broker for a sale. During April 1991, in a conversation with Les Hudelson, who restored Speed Twenty-Five 14614 and TD21 26932, I found out that Les was a friend of Hershel 'Junior' Conway, Jr. of Juniors House of Color, a noteworthy collector, car painter and Ferrari expert, who was a friend of Marc Johnson. I asked if a message could be delivered to Marc through 'Junior'. Sometime later an answer came back that Marc knew I was attempting to contact him and when the time was right he would contact me.



This photograph of the Lancefield shows off the Art Deco lines of the body and also the very neat appearance with the hood concealed.

Prince Stash was possibly even more eccentric than Marc Johnson. After protracted negotiations, the partnership was being dissolved and the cars were to be sold. However, Prince Stash was reluctant to sell. The Bugatti had been flown to Switzerland in 1989 and was stored in his friend Franco Sbarro's design studio. There was money owed and problems with documentation. The California title was still in Ron Pinto's name, the 1983 bill of sale was to Marc Johnson and the car had been imported to Switzerland in the name of Jean Chretien K. de Rola. A convoluted ownership.

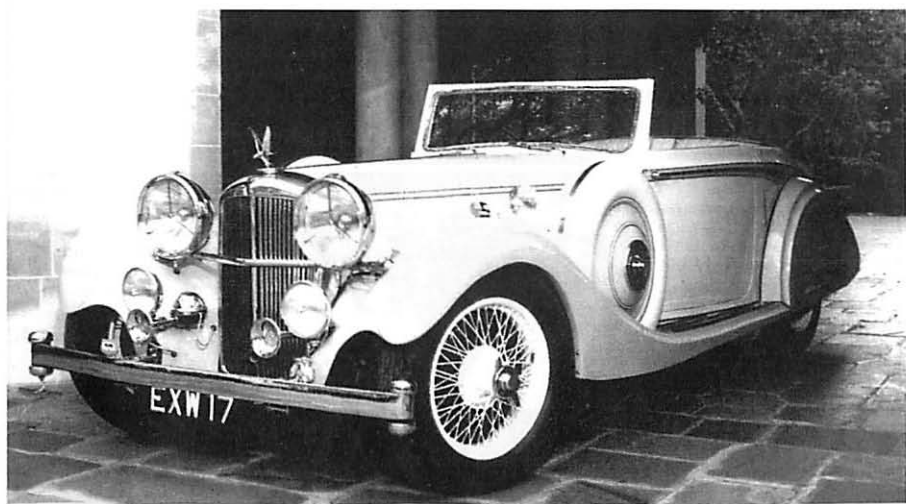
The Lancefield was out of my price range. My only interest was to locate the Alvis and see that it went to a good home. Other than eating Hershey bars, that's the only pleasure I get in life. Although Marc and Prince Stash did not know me, I was asked to handle the sale of both cars. However, I was not allowed to advertise them, divulge their location or reveal the owner's names. For some unexplained reason, probably financial, the Type 57 had to be sold prior to the Alvis and that's another story worthy of a book. Over a period of a year and innumerable letters, faxes and phone calls, a buyer for the Bugatti emerged who was willing to deal with the seller's eccentricities. A price was negotiated. Marc and Stash used an arbitrator to iron out the details of their professional relationship, a business associate of the partners with a Swiss bank account was brought into play, money changed hands and a release from Franco Sbarro was obtained.

Then another roadblock appeared. Franco Sbarro told me we could pick up the Bugatti. Marc wanted it moved immediately before Prince Stash changed his mind, but the documentation required by Swiss Customs had not been obtained. We needed a safe place to store the car for a few days. I made a quick call to Yves Honegger, then owner of 4.3 Litre 14840, ELB 1, who fortunately was in Geneva and not at his hotel on Rodrigues Island. Yves allowed us to store the car in his garage while the documentation was sorted out and transportation was arranged. Finally the Bugatti was transported to England, vetted and that transaction was finalised.

In the summer of 1992, Jerry Rosenstock, an Aston Martin aficionado from California with a DB4GT Zagato, told me that Lorin Tryon (a former owner of Speed Twenty-Five Tourer 14614, BBT 700), then a co-organiser of the Pebble Beach Concours, associated with the Blackhawk Collection and a Hispano Suiza owner, had seen the Alvis. At the Hershey meet in October 1992 I had an opportunity to speak to Lorin. He said a 'Polish Count known as Prince Stash' was promoting the sale of a collection of cars and Lorin was asked to evaluate them on behalf of a potential purchaser. He was flown from northern California to a small desert community east of San Diego, in a private aircraft, met at the landing strip and driven to a warehouse full of cars. The broker of the deal was Barnaby Brokaw. The Lancefield Speed Twenty-Five was one of the cars stored there, but not one of those being offered for sale.

I continued calling the Santa Monica number, usually twice a week. In January 1993 I was rewarded when the phone was answered by a young woman, who said she would advise her father that I had called. Next day Marc Johnson returned my call and talked for over two hours. A quite interesting conversation, over a range of subjects, but no mention was made of the Alvis. He admitted that he was an eccentric who was inclined to involve himself in complex deals with other eccentric characters he liked. After this call Marc called me at least once a week, until the cars were sold a year and a half later. At times the conversations went on for hours.

I soon discovered questions about the Alvis usually did not elicit answers, so I waited for him to bring it up. Over a period of time it came out that Marc and Prince Stash had a partnership in a film company. The film company had purchased the Alvis and the Bugatti as an investment. In conversation I found out that Marc's mother was an English war bride and he told me in addition to being a filmmaker he did some marketing for the Rolling Stones. He had an environmental clean-up company in Mexico, owned a 1940 Ford woody wagon, a 1953 Ford pickup, a 1967 Citroen cabriolet, a 1937 Hudson Terraplane with a one off woody body, a 1927 Chevy fire truck once used by Universal Studios, and eleven camels, if that explains anything!



The Lancefield Speed Twenty-Five photographed in the United States in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, Marc asked if I had any space in my garage. If so, could he ship the Speed Twenty-Five to me? I had just sold my Alfa GTV so space was available. The following week the Lancefield arrived in an unmarked closed van and was handed over to me. I had never met Marc, never even spoken with Prince Stash and now I had the Speed Twenty-Five in my garage, the title in my desk and I was asked to handle the sale. Once the Lancefield was sold I never heard from Marc Johnson again. Talk about eccentricity. You meet the most fascinating characters in the old car world.

I got the Lancefield running for the first time in many years. The petrol was so stale a rag soaked in it would only smoulder when lit and the valves must have been adjusted with something a bit larger than a feeler gauge. I doubt it had been driven on the road since restoration, probably just from a trailer to the show field and back.

It is a stunning car but it required a bit of sorting prior to any extensive use. Alan Stote visited the AACA Hershey meet in October 1994, saw the Lancefield in my garage and was smitten. The Lancefield was repatriated later in 1994.

Acknowledgements

Ron Pinto

Alan Stote

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Nick Walker—A-Z of British Coachbuilders 1919-1960

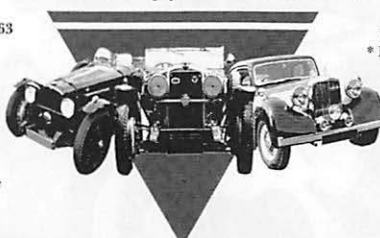
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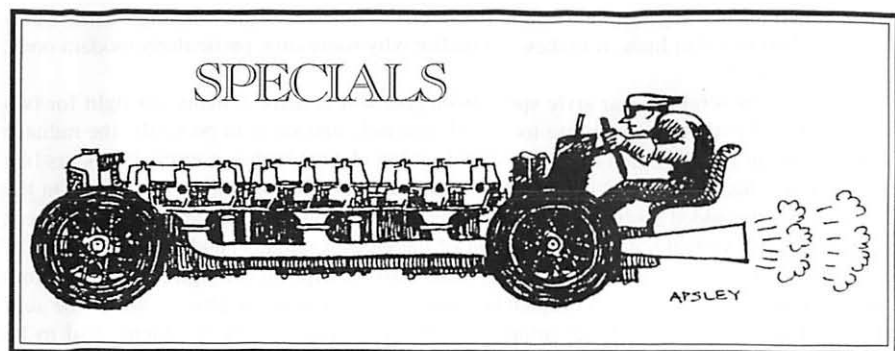
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Jack Clover

I DID IT MY WAY

The Tale of Two Specials; Part 2 — The Speed 21

About four years after completing and enjoying the Flybird Special, a more ambitious special began to occupy the imagination. By this time I had taken redundancy and early retirement, thus removing the need to waste life at work. The time had come!

Why not combine the best of all things? Which is one of the prettiest cars ever made? The early Speed 20, I thought. But, good as they are, they could do with more power, disk brakes, five gears, shell bearings, radial tyres, efficient windscreen wipers, more electricity The later 3 litre has most of these; and what is not there can easily be added. It does have an awful chassis on which to build a special though, particularly in the pre-war style, but it has a reputation for handling better than many of its contemporaries. And they do belong to a very good club! Not only that, I knew of a derelict TD21 with wire wheels, and virtually no body.

So I decided to build a Speed 21, a comfortable, fast tourer rather than a racer. I also resolved to make a photographic record this time, and note all the expenses, a list of which you will find at the end of this article.

During the build of the Flybird, a lot had been learned. Building a 'one off' is very different from a restoration. You have to design the thing to start with. It is necessary to imagine the whole thing in the round, also, design and make a thousand individual brackets, frames, panels, pivots, arrange pipe and wiring runs, then position everything where they are not in the way of each other or anything else. It must be possible to take it to pieces again! You must be able to carry out servicing and adjustments easily. (Modern car makers seem to have forgotten this, however). On top of all this, it must look nice, outside, inside, from the driver's seat (where you see it most often), under the bonnet; be comfortable, safe and reliable and last a long time. Perhaps the most difficult of all is to get the line and proportion right. The eye is more important than the ruler, indeed things often have to be wrong by the ruler in order to look right.

Many times, a perfect side view will look odd from the rear and so on, all round the car. Making a plywood and cardboard mock-up for the overall shape helps, then, during the actual build, making some parts deliberately too large. The right contour can then be found by experimenting with black tape, and looking from all angles before doing the final cut or bend. This method was used on the wing valences, for instance. There are so many little

things which make a big difference, like the door line relative to the running board, wind-screen, and bonnet shut lines. It makes you realise why some cars, particularly modern ones, look such a mess!

I have seen several pre-war style specials on post war chassis — many not right for two basic reasons. Firstly the wheels are too small, secondly and more importantly, the radiator is too far forward, often much too far, so that lean but elegant look is entirely lost. Cars like this must also handle badly, with too large a proportion of the weight at the front. On the Alvis there is the added problem of that steering box stuck high up at the front just where it would be the proverbial sore thumb in front of the elegant radiator, and ruining the line of the flowing wing. Also the chassis is ugly and must be kept out of sight, the front dumb irons will have to be remade completely, and there is too much chassis aft of the rear wheels. Before starting on large lumps of work and money, these problems had to be solved.

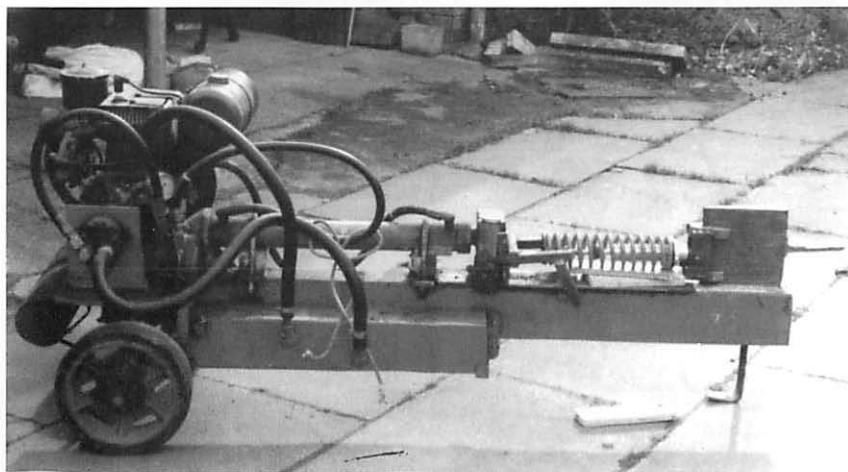
I decided against pre-war type cross-ply tyres on cost and performance, but still needed the large diameter, so I measured wheels on modern cars and perused tyre specifications. Pre-war tyres tend to be 28 to 30 inches in diameter; modern tyres of that size are found on lorries or Land Rovers, but weigh upwards of half a hundredweight and are so thick they would probably hold the car up with no air in them at all. Range Rover tyres, however, are about 28.5 inches, are available with reasonably car-type treads, and are not too heavy or thick. They are of course much wider than pre-war, but I often feel the 30s cars, unlike early Vintage models, would look better with wider wheels and fuller mudguards. In fact, experience has shown that few people notice that the tyres are twice as wide as expected, in spite of my being so conscious of them. Also, my initial worry that they might be noisy has proved unfounded. So Range Rover it was to be. Of course they would not go on Alvis wheels, but 16 x 6 inch spoked wheels were available, with 52mm hubs, and the correct offset. Nothing too difficult here, but they were the most expensive item, even though the tyres were less than half the price of the cheapest cross-plys and will have three times the life.

The radiator position was very cheap to get right. The engine was moved back 18 inches, which places it about where a Speed 20 engine is. The only cost here was an extra cross member to strengthen the chassis at the mounting point, and altering the propshaft. I reckoned this would also give a 50/50 weight distribution, good for handling. This in fact proved remarkably accurate, when the finished car was placed on a weighbridge, it was within a few pounds of the same weight on each axle.

That steering box was more of a puzzle. I know some have changed to rack and pinion, but I was rather uncertain about this, and did not want to change the actual geometry of the steering, crazy though it looks, Alvis must have known more about it than I do and there is their handling reputation. A scrap yard search located a suitable remote steering box by ZF, from a BMW, a beautifully made thing, roller bearinged throughout and fully adjustable. It was possible to mount this below the radiator, between the dumb irons, then using its universal joints, place the steering wheel wherever I wanted it. However it only had a very short drop arm and it needed to be like the original Alvis one, but, to my amazement, the Alvis drop arm fitted on the splines. A drag link then joined this drop arm to the near side idler. The original steering box was simply replaced with an idler box like the near side, but with the drop arm from the original steering box. The wheel, from a Speed 20, was mounted on a collapsible boss, hidden by a stainless steel sugar basin for smartness! The wheel was restored by stripping off the worn out plastic, then applying several coats of high build primer, followed by a whole spray tin of eggshell black. After 30,000 miles it is still perfect, another spray tin would put things right again anyway.

The performance of this system has turned out to be superb and surprisingly light; in fact it was too light, almost as if it had power steering, so I later fitted a longer drop arm from an SC Speed 20, yes that fitted as well! Now the steering has fewer turns lock to lock than a standard car, and is still light in spite of the very wide tyres and does it corner! Incidentally, it was noticed during the construction of the new vintage shaped front dumb irons, that the original mounting of the steering box and bell crank is very poor, there being no proper means to stop the chassis box collapsing under pressure of the bolts. To correct this, steel tubes were welded in between the two sides of the chassis, now all bolts can be torqued up properly.

There is one more problem associated with building any Special which is lighter than the original car, and that is ride height. There were two reasons why the solution used on the Flybird special would not work this time. Firstly, you cannot take leaves out of a coil spring and secondly this car was to have proper mudguards that need to be part of the bodywork rather than an addition to it. Both chassis and wheels need to be in their proper working position during the whole of the design and build. Further, it is preferable if the wheels can be artificially moved though their full upward deflection, to ensure sufficient clearance for the wheels under all conditions, including steering and deflections under hard cornering. Looking into the future, I could see problems in getting the ride height right on the finished car, which would be aggravated by the difficulty of dealing with those lorry rear springs, and worse, the rail car like front coil springs. The best solution, I considered, would be to do away with all the original springs, and replace them with combined coil and damper units, with built in adjustable ride height, and hardness of damping: on the back as well as the front. This has proved very successful, the front spring units will now pass through the hole in the lower wishbone, making removal and fitting very simple, and safe. My hydraulic log splitter made an easy job of compressing the springs to go on the damper units. At the back, the axle is located by trailing arms and Watts linkage, thus it is better located than by the leaf springs, this will be another reason for the good handling. Further, it eliminated the



Compressing road springs on damper units using log splitter

necessity for any chassis behind the rear wheels, removing all restrictions to bodywork design.

The big design problems were now overcome, though, of course there were hundreds of little ones to come.

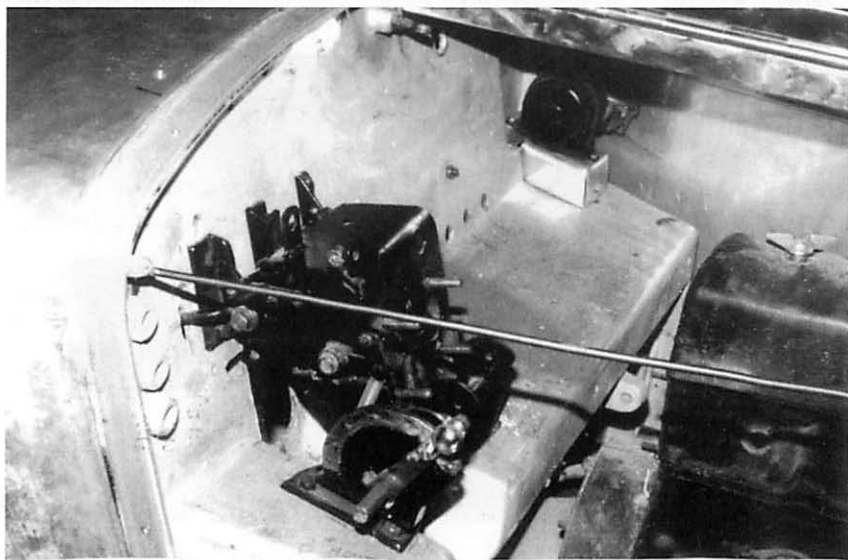
The chassis was totally overhauled, sand blasted, painted, and Waxoyled inside. It was also stiffened by welding in a cruciform section. This did add a bit to the weight, but, again, I am sure it too has improved handling and feel. Certainly there is no trace of the scuttle shake sometimes associated with even quite modern, open cars.

The piping came next for petrol and brakes, all in rustless tube, with adequate supports, and protection wherever susceptible to damage. Brake pipes were made the same length for each side of the car, the better for even braking.

The brakes were updated by fitting 4pot callipers to the front and larger pots to the rear, all with stainless steel pistons and together with a new, slightly more powerful servo. Oddly, a new Lockheed servo was cheaper than a reconditioned exchange unit.

The hand brake, on disc braked cars has a reputation for being poor, so a few alterations were made. The callipers are just a heavy version of that found on a bicycle, so, first I added a means to positively set the outer shoe, then introduced a spring between it and the inner shoe, having discarded the original hairpin spring. The cable and those rods and compensators were scrapped, being replaced by a single cable, the ends of which attached directly to the two callipers, whilst the centre ran on a pulley on the hand brake lever. A torque arm was fitted between calliper housings and the end of the cable outer. This set up allows very accurate adjustment, and a very rigid mechanism; the hand brake is good, and my MOT man tells me that he seldom gets such high or well-balanced foot brake readings.

The original foot pedals were discarded, the master cylinders being inaccessible and in line with too much road dirt from the front wheel. The new pedal box was placed on the ex Speed 20 cast scuttle, with pendant pedals. Because the driver's seat was intended to be



New pedal box and adjusting quadrant

fixed, it was arranged so that all the foot pedals can be adjusted back and forth via a quadrant, also mounted on the scuttle.

Now the time was ripe to design and build a body of exceptional beauty! What a pity it can only be done on cars.

First the chassis was placed on four timber blocks at the desired height, with the suspension fully assembled, but without any of the springs. Two tyres were purchased and fitted; these could then go on whichever end of the car I was working on. An engine was also put in place, just to make sure I did not put anything in its way!



Trailing arms locating the rear axle (coil springs not shown)

The body was not to be a copy of any car, nor was it to be a fake to fool anyone; it was to be as I wanted it. Unlike the Flybird, it was to be all aluminium, which, needless to say, made the job much more difficult, not least because I had never even seen anyone do panel beating and had no idea whether I could do it. However it was done, and what follows is the way I did it. It may not be the way a professional would do it, but it works. As a back up I had purchased a set of Lagonda LG45 mudguards; however, I am happy to say these are now on a Lagonda LG45.

I was fortunate in having the cast aluminium bulkhead from an SC Speed 20 amongst my junk, and I fitted this to the chassis just behind the engine, well where else would you put it? This, of course, determined the height and contour of the body at that point. The radiator shell came next, actually a lowered TA 14 unit, positioned, surprise, surprise, in front, leaving room for an electric fan, and looking right, but not permanently fixed, yet. The position of bulkhead and shell, now determined the bonnet sides, but not the top, this being an example of having to be wrong to look right; the shell height could not be finalised till the body was otherwise complete, and eyed from all angles including the driver's seat.

The next thing was to do a full size outline drawing on the garage wall, the only drawing in the whole construction! This helped to get the relative positions of big items like engine, controls, seats, and passengers, all in a place where they can exist happily together. It also helps to get that all-important line and proportion right, but only in one dimension, there are still plenty of problems.

The engine, wheels, and bulkhead, were, of course, the fixed points, other things had to be positioned round them.

Construction proper could now commence, starting with the bonnet. This was the only part of the body I did not make myself. There is no way to form those long, straight curves, (sounds silly, but you know what I mean) or the folds for hinges, without rollers and folding machines. Also, hard aluminium was used — it seems more suitable for this application. It was deliberately kept oversize to allow for that final positioning of the radiator later on.

Now came the tricky task of getting those curves right on the body frame. I did this by clamping a 12 foot length of 3 x 25mm strip steel to the rad. shell and scuttle, then letting it follow its own line to where I wanted the tail end to be. This gave a continuous, but varying, curve widening round the passenger area, then tapering in again for a graceful rear.

The frame construction was the same system used so successfully on the Flybird; 25mm welded square steel tube sub frame, with soft wood attached just to give the shape.

Having established the front to back curve, the top to bottom one had to be determined. This was more difficult, because it could not be the same all the way along. The shape of the scuttle determined the curve at that point, but this curve needs to change profile towards the rear wings, whilst the boot end needed to curve in then slightly out again. And, of course, this had to be done without losing the continuous curve from front to back at all the levels. This may sound all rather unnecessary, but these little things make a lot of difference to the final appearance.

The final, lower contour would be determined by the line of the mudguards and running boards, so these were made next.

Now, I had to try panel beating. A friend had lent me a wheeling machine; I had dished the end of a large elm log with an angle grinder and I owned a ball peen hammer. That seemed a good start. Next, I made wooden patterns of the mudguards, one front, and one rear, and so designed that one pattern could be used for both sides of the car. A local coach builder would not tell me which grade of aluminium to use, the meanie! Happily, his supplier, where I also purchased mine, told me; namely, half hard, (i.e. AIG), 1.5mm thick, or 16 gauge.

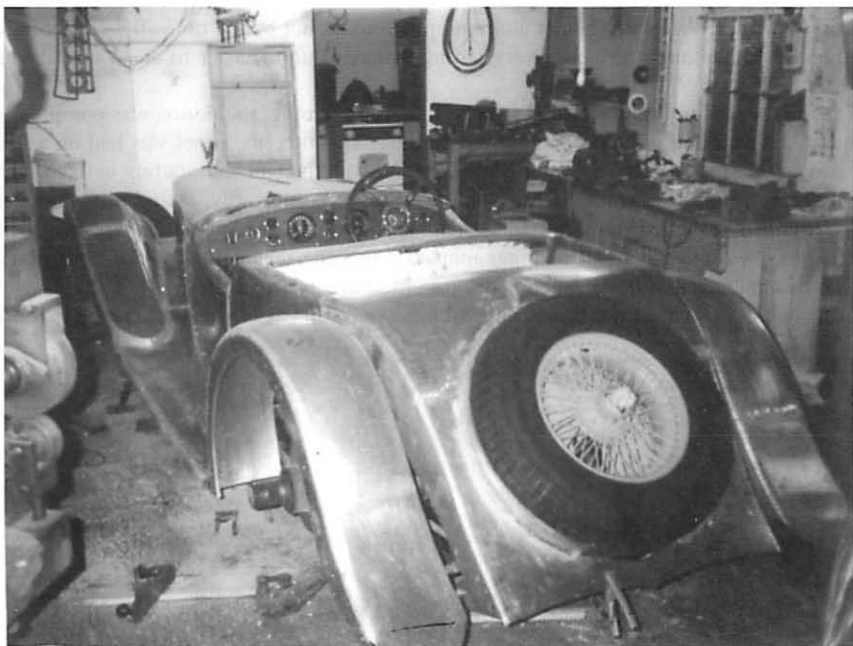


Rear wing and timber pattern

The first necessity was to find the best way of cutting the metal. After trying various methods, I found it best to brush oil along the cut line, then cut using an ordinary jig saw with a wood-cutting blade. This was quick, versatile and caused no distortion, but you do need ear protection!

I decided to try a front wing first. It was obvious that the whole thing could not be made from one piece, so I started with the top section from the front to about halfway down the slope. First it was bashed roughly to shape in the dished elm log, smoothed with the wheeling machine, then the sides curved though 45 degrees on the wooden pattern, the lower section being done in a similar way. The side valence was cut to shape, the top edge curved 45 degrees inwards to meet the wing top, whilst the lower edge was turned 90 degrees in for finish and strength. The inner valence was much more difficult, being roughly triangular in shape, with a deep compound curve, and a varying profile in both directions, and, of course it had to fit the wing along its top edge, and the forward extension of the running board at its lower edge. Further, I had decided to turn the curved front leading edge inwards by about 3 cm, better to hide the independent suspension and give added strength, whilst retaining the open fronted look of the 20s and early 30s. Small pieces were then cut and shaped to give a pointed front and rear to the wing.

So, I now had a small pile of shapes. These, except the inner valence, were now laid on the wooden former, temporarily fixed with clamps or screws and ground off till the joins fitted nicely, difficult with aluminium, because, though soft it gums up whatever is used for cutting. The bits were now MIG welded, whilst still on the former; a bit smoky, but it



Part completed bodywork (wheeling machine just visible on left)

worked. This skeleton wing was now fitted to the car, on steel bracketry made for the job and the running board made and offered up.

The running board followed a continuous curve from the rear wing, then through behind the front wing, right up to the radiator. Now that inner valence could be welded in, and everything welded to the running board. Hooray! I had made my first wing and running board; it had turned out right and in fact was nothing like as difficult as expected. Indeed, I had not known whether it was possible at all. Mind you, I am not claiming it was of the standard of the Rod Jolleys of this world, but probably as good as some of the pre-war originals were. Of course, having made one, the others would be easier!

Well, no! The second one has to be the same as the first, but opposite handed. So it has to be approximately the same. If you carefully check your original Vanden Plas, Mayfair, or whatever, you will probably find it is not the same both sides.

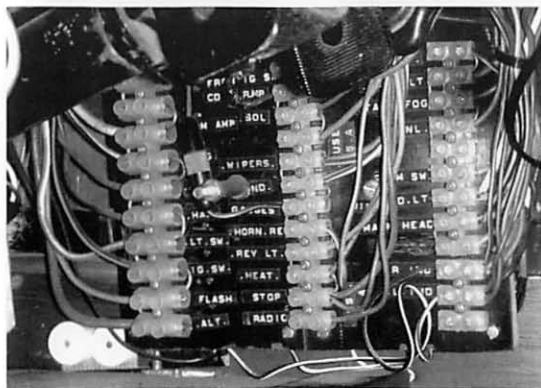
The second front wing did not go right at all. I spent a day and a half on that compound curved inner valence, and could not get it to fit. It was hammered, it was wheeled, it was cut, welded, then hammered and wheeled again, all to no avail. In the end it was chucked on the waste heap, and I started again, with a fresh piece of aluminium. Within a couple of hours or so, I had a perfectly shaped panel. I still do not know what I did differently.

The rear mudguards were made using similar methods. There was no complex inner valence, of course, but a small version was used on the rear half, and the trailing edge turned in and pointed to match the front.. A tricky job was to make and fit the pods each side for rear lights.

The mudguards did not finish here. Flying stones from the wheels can dent mudguards from the inside, so all four were given an inner shield, that on the front following the lower contour of the side valence. Thinner aluminium was used, but by the time all were screwed together, each mudguard formed a very strong and rigid unit. Easier to clean underneath too.

The technique for slightly dished panels, like, for example, the doors, was completely different, no wheeling machine or hollowed elm log. This time the panel was laid on a flat, cast iron surface plate. Very very light hammer blows with the ball end, starting in the centre, then working round in a spiral, caused the panel to curve upwards, taking on a concave shape. If a deeper shape is required, more hammer blows are needed, not harder ones. The convex side, without the small hammer marks, is the one that will show, of course and needs only a nub over with fine wet and dry paper to have a perfect finish.

At this point the wiring was done, whilst things were still easy to get at. Like the Flybird,



Electrical distribution panel

I did not use a loom, though this car was very much more complex in the sparks department. However, by doing one circuit at a time, it is much as taught to seven year olds in primary school when you come to think about it! yet the finished job looks very impressive. Of course, wire sizes must be adequate, and all circuits given appropriate fuses. Every circuit was routed via a labelled distribution panel situated under the dashboard, the lid of which contains a neon test probe. Relays were used for headlights and horn. A few extra switches were incorporated, a main isolator to turn off everything except the clock, another switch for the clock itself, and a switch for the fuel pump. During the job, a record was kept of all circuits, and the wire colour used. Wherever there was any danger of damage in use, the wires were run in conduit, and all frequently clamped. No wires are visible except where they run in stainless steel or aluminium casings.

The dashboard was made from a piece of rosewood-veneered ply, from, I think a club sized TV cabinet. Instruments and switches were collected from a variety of sources, but no rockers. Those with nasty, modern idiot signs had them replaced by wren farthings that fitted exactly. There was no suitable horn button available, so I had to make that too. Also, at this point, the windscreen wipers were fitted, modern, two speed units of the type where the mechanism runs in a steel tube, so is relatively easy to fit any car. The heater too was installed under the dashboard.

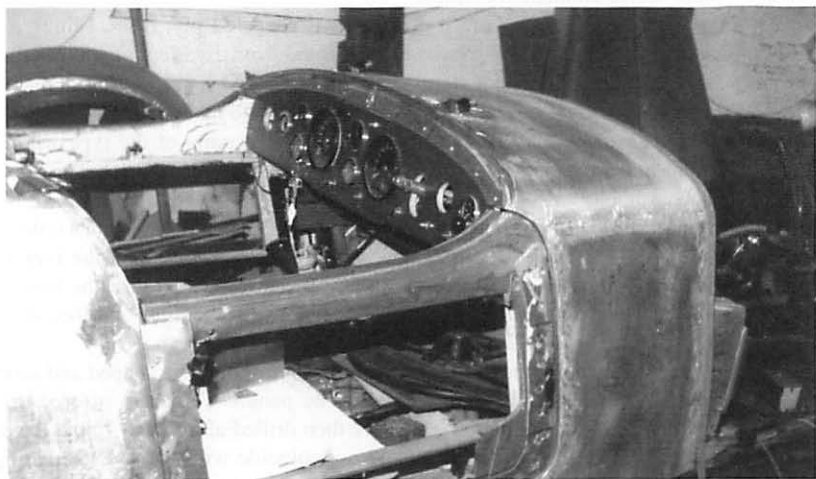
The panels now could be fixed to the body, or doorframes as appropriate. Two different methods were used here. Round door openings, lower edges and the like, the metal was simply tapped round the frame and nailed as on any pre-war car. To turn the metal into rebates, as round the doors, I modified a claw hammer so the hammer end became a D shape, and the claw, a blunt chisel shape.

Another method was used on doors. First, pieces of aluminium were shaped and screwed to the outside of the frame, deliberately oversize. The panels were then offered up and trimmed to fit, but, again oversize. 8mm holes were then drilled all the way round the edge, about 50mm. apart, taking care that the holes did not coincide with the screws holding on the first pieces, as dictated by Murphys' Law! The panels were then tightly clamped, or screwed to the frames, covering those first pieces. It was then simply a case of welding through all the holes, including all those drilled for temporary screws. I now had a strong door too big for the opening, but because there were no turned edges, they could be ground, or filed till a perfect gap was obtained.



Attaching panels by welding through 8mm holes

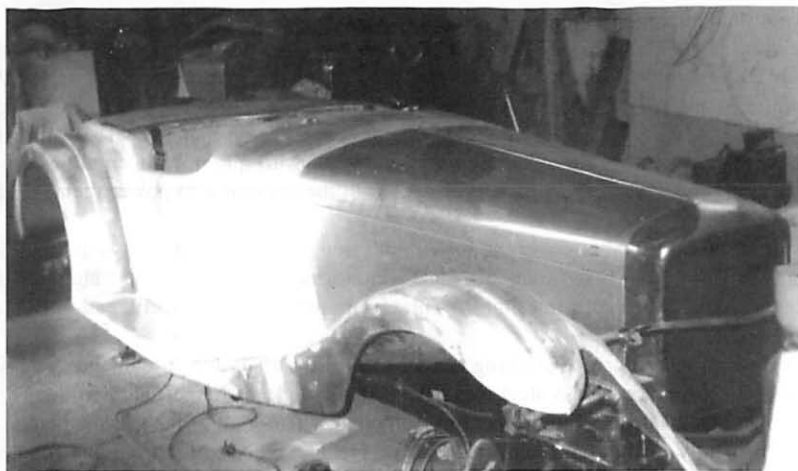
In the interests of safety, doors were front hinged, yet I still wanted that nicely shaped door shut line, with hinges in line with the windscreen to enable any side screens to pivot with the door. This necessitated hidden hinges which I had to design and make. I would never have believed how difficult it was to get these right! At the other end, latches from a 1929 Talbot were used, being a particularly secure design. Also, with safety in mind, doors were given some measure of side impact protection. The steel body frame protrudes slightly into the door openings, and the steel frame of the door, hooks round it, also at this point the square tube has timber tightly fitted inside to stop it collapsing under impact. The unusual rigidity of doors and frame, for a tourer, means they close with that lovely "clunk" associated with a good saloon.



Steel framed door and timber work ready for outer panel

The boot lid was more complex. It did not need to be so strong, so the frame was welded from aluminium angle, with that slight compound curve, and similar, difficult, hidden hinges. These were designed so that the lid moves backwards as well as upwards, so that rainwater is shed away from the opening. The panel was attached to its frame in the same way as the doors were, welding through holes. But of course this lid was horizontal, with attendant waterproofing problems, aggravated because I wanted it to be flush fitting. It was necessary to fix guttering all round the opening, with a drain pipe on each corner taking water down beneath floor level. The inner edge of the gutter was given a special rubber moulding on which the lid would lie without leaks or rattles. Finally, catches were made which would hold the lid in four places from two locking points.

I prefer a rear mounted spare wheel, especially on a tourer. However, a seven inch wide Range Rover tyre would not be pretty, so I decided to recess it into the rear panel. That was not too bad a job, no hinges, catches, and a simple hole to let rainwater out. To improve appearance, a disk was fitted behind the spare wheel close to the spokes, which also provided a hidden home for the jack and a copper hammer. And I did not forget a means of accessing the fuel gauge sender!



Completed aluminium shell, temporarily assembled for a final check on form and proportion

Never to take the easy route, I decided on a hidden petrol filler. Another small door, hinge, catch, and drain pipe to beneath the floor. Ah well, I never took to golf anyway!

The final embellishment was a triangular moulding leading into the spare wheel housing, and a chrome rail, front to back, recycled from a Park Ward bonnet. The lower edge of the tail was given a double ogee shape rather than the usual straight line.

Now at last, the position of the radiator could be finalised, by trying it at various heights and then looking critically from all angles. It is surprising how much the bonnet has to slope down towards the radiator to look level. The bonnet itself could now be trimmed to fit, and the lower edge rolled round a rod for added strength. On all the cars I have seen, the bonnet is prevented from moving forward by the radiator, not a good idea. With a bit of jiggery to the rear end of the hinge, it was located positively to the bulkhead, with a vernier adjustment so the bonnet gaps, front and back, can be precisely adjusted. With silence in mind, no louvres were made in the sides, but an air dam was fitted underneath to draw hot air downwards; there has been no overheating.

I have often thought it odd that a bonnet has a chrome or stainless hinge, yet the scuttle top, between it and the windscreen is plain. So a length of stainless steel tube was cut in half lengthways, and fitted to the scuttle, thus continuing the hinge line back to the windscreen. This has improved the appearance; I do not know why it was not normal practice.

Having shortened the radiator shell, the vertical louvres would no longer fit, of course, but I did not want them anyway. A length of 8mm square stainless steel was bent and welded to form a stoneguard surround, then rebated at the back with an angle grinder. Into this was welded a stainless steel mesh of the correct type, even though its first life was screening baby foods! The final job here was to carve out of wood, a cap to replace the original filler, and then take it to a foundry for copying in gun metal.

The man who made up the radiator proper, produced brass head and bottom tanks of the right size from a heap of such, saying they were from a Fordson Major tractor, then soldered in a core of the required height. "Should do the job boy, that 'ud plough all day!"

I have not tried ploughing, but I've had no overheating.

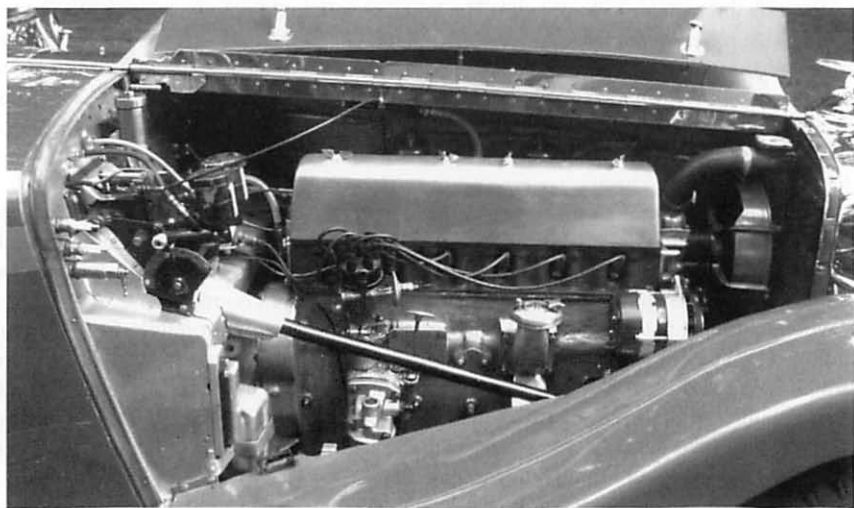
The headlamp bar was made from stainless steel tube, bent to shape with a flange welded on each end for bolting through the mudguard valences to the steel supports. P100 headlamps were tried, but I considered them too big, and dominating, so went for the 11" Rotax with the Alvis badge in the centre; perfect. These were supplemented by two modern, but old style, 6" lamps mounted on the dumb irons, all with quartz halogen bulbs. On full beam all four are on, dip is just the lower two, with the alternator to power them; they are very good.

A valence was formed to cover the false dumb irons, but there was that step down from the front suspension bits. Two small air vents were formed, using the same technique as the radiator stoneguard, but with finer mesh. These camouflaged them nicely, and ducted cool air to the bonnet as well.

Those weird steering rods sticking out in front are vulnerable to damage, so a short bumper of 50 x 6mm stainless steel was fitted via a couple of rubber engine mounts. Just behind, matt black valences hid the steering bell cranks. The shaft of the starting handle was fitted permanently, with a half inch square drive socket welded to the front end running in the bumper. The crank bit lives under the bonnet and also fits the jack handle, and plug spanner. This part was made from an aluminium bicycle crank with the pedal reduced to a hand grip, and the main shaft cut short, then ground to half inch square.

The windscreen was made using parts from a saloon screen, some new brass, and side pillars cast from my timber patterns. It does not fold flat, you can never do it anyway.

Now, that lump up front could be replaced by a proper engine. It was given all the usual treatment; crank grind, rebore, new bearings pistons and chain, and cam followers refaced. The head was given hard seats and new valves. The new, locally made guides were given Land Rover shaped tops and oil seals. The oil pump was re-faced, and water pump rebuilt, but the fan blades were discarded. In their place is a smart cast aluminium electric fan, which is only needed in traffic. It has a manual switch, but if forgotten will come on auto-



Under bonnet. Off side.

matically anyway. An alternator replaced the dynamo, the mounting bracket modified to suit, the original belt still driving it. Purely for the sake of appearance now that the side view could be seen, a few cosmetic changes were made. The dipstick now has a brass T handle, and the oil filler is now on the side, made from a Firefly aluminium front water pipe, with a flange welded to the top, and a pre-war oil cap, the whole being bolted on in place of the front tappet cover, the rear one being replaced by a smarter aluminium one. The cast iron rocker cover was replaced with a polished aluminium one, without oil filler, and about 1 inch higher. It was not possible to use the original as a pattern, so I had to make one; it had to be about 1 cm longer to allow for shrinkage after casting.

On the carburettor side, the exhaust manifold was wrapped and shielded so as to deflect heat backwards and downwards, more effective, I thought, than shielding the carburettors themselves. Cool combustion air is drawn from a vent on the side of the bonnet, whilst a short, insulated petrol pipe comes from under the wing, to the carburettors.

A search had been going on for a suitable 5-speed gearbox. I decided on a type 9 Ford Granada, well the original is only Austin! It has a separate bell housing, easily available, not expensive, and could, I thought, be fitted, using a 12 mm thick steel adaptor plate. It is similar to the Sierra box now fitted to many classic cars, but has the longer input shaft needed for the Alvis bell housing. It will fit beautifully to a ZF type bell housing, but I could see no way of getting the lower bolts in, which is possible with the original Austin type. However, for some obscure reason, Alvis fitted this box to an off centre hole, so bell housing and adaptor plate went to a machine shop for a very expensive central hole. Since then I have acquired a TA21 bell housing, which may be easier, but I have not checked. Maybe on the next Special!

The gear lever, happily, came in exactly in the right place, but joining to the prop shaft was tricky, the Ford gearbox does not have an output flange. The sliding joint on the propeller shaft doubles as the gearbox rear bearing, it seems a bad idea but most modern rear drive cars appear to be the same, so it obviously works and lasts well. The front end of the propeller shaft from a Ford lorry or a Reliant Scimitar fits into the rear of the car gearbox, and has a Hardy Spicer UJ exactly the same as the Alvis. The complete front end of the Alvis shaft was therefore sawn off the tube, which had to be shortened anyway. The UJ fork from the rear end of another shaft was then fitted and welded in its place. A new cross and bearings could then join the front of the prop to the rear of the gearbox. Hey presto, drive!

A Ford 3 ton lorry clutch plate has the correct splines and is otherwise exactly like the Alvis one if 6mm are removed from the circumference, easy, and done by the supplier while I drunk a cup of his coffee.

A big mistake was made here though. The selector rod protrudes from the front of the gearbox, so a hole was drilled in the adaptor plate for it. What I did not know was that it is a D shaped shaft in a round hole, so for the first few hundred miles several pints of oil spewed from here to the clutch housing which made a lot of mess on the garage floor, and ruined the clutch plate. Off had to come the gearbox, however at least on my car this can be done from underneath without disturbing the engine or the transmission tunnels.

Painting came next. The air compressor I had had for years was not up to the job, so a big second hand one was purchased and installed, with all its control gear and much plumbing. This is only like domestic water plumbing, so was no problem.

Etch primer is needed for aluminium; otherwise it is likely to fall off. The topcoat was cellulose, it being fairly forgiving, and not too toxic given plenty of extraction, and a suitable mask. I found the painting more tedious than the panel forming in a way. As a fellow Alvis owner so nicely put it, you rub down and flat off till you reach the b****r it point, then

spray on the paint. The final finish depends largely on where that b****r it point is! Also, mudguards, bonnet, (in four separate pieces), boot lid, and body, all had to be painted separately, then, inevitably, scratched on assembly. As usual, just to make things more difficult, a twin colour scheme was used with a curved and tapering side stripe.

Now there are umpteen bright bits to fit, (more scratches), but mostly straightforward. Those running board strips, however were fiddly and time consuming. There are five strips on each side, each a different length to match the pointed ends of the mudguards. Also, both ends of each strip has to be brought to a point. This involves cutting just inside both side sections, filing a 45-degree angle on each, then removing the base section, finally curving the sides inward to the shape of a gothic arch. Then drill dozens of holes, and screw in dozens of little screws. The rubber strips are not too difficult, being guided in with a blunt screwdriver and a little washing up fluid. Nearly there now, but nothing to sit on.

The adjustable pedals were already in place so the seat could be a fixture, thus adding to the rigidity of the body, but, of course, the right distance from the steering wheel. I like a relaxed driving position, with a hugging supportive seat, elbows on rests, steering wheel naturally to the hands, legs fairly straight. I know not why, but no modern car I have ever tried meets these criteria.

The seat back rest was formed into a shallow, curved W shape, using flexible plywood, covered with about one inch of fairly dense sponge rubber, with a softer layer on top of that. The best angle was determined when I was laid up with back strain; well if it is comfortable then, it must be right! The best combination for the base was found to be flat zig-zag springs as found on settees, or modern car seats, with woven carpet on top. The cushion was cut from a Dunlopillow mattress, with a harder sponge rubber glued to the top face. The centre arm rest doubles as storage for a pair of binoculars, a torch, and small items needed in transit. All was covered with red leather from the rear seat of a Mayfair saloon. This arrangement has proved very comfortable after many hours at the wheel. Although not required by law, I fitted seat belts; it is after all, a fast car. These were, of course, attached to the chassis; it is no use screwing them to some flimsy part of the body. The door, inner panels were of plywood, with a thin layer of foam, then Vinyl on top, the whole being stitched on a huge industrial sewing machine rescued by my daughter-in law where she worked, it was destined for scrap. The stitching was in the traditional sunburst design used on many pre-war cars. Carpets were edged in the same Vinyl, and also stitched to thin plywood, this stops them getting rucked up in use.

Useful bits were added, such as a tool tray under the seat, and shelf under the dashboard, with map pocket below. There's a power socket and map reading light, pen holder, and two cup holders with cups, each with the Alvis badge. Well, you have to, don't you?

The last detail was to cover all rough edges with polished aluminium and stainless screws, and of course, coachbuilder's plates. To make these I ground Park Ward off the original plates, and replaced it with J Clover, and a three leaf clover plant, the letters formed from multicore solder, glued on. One was screwed to each door sill.

The car was now ready, although the only weather gear was a tonneau cover. At long last, it could hit the road, via the MOT man, and a petrol station, they are always needed!

So was it up to expectations? Indeed it was, indeed it is. Quiet, smooth, responsive, flat cornering, light on all controls, comfortable, taut, and rattle free. And lovely from the driver's seat, with that long bonnet at exactly the right angle, the eagle at the end, and supplanted by big chromed lamps and both front wing. But life is never perfect.

After a few hundred gentle miles it became apparent that the engine was unwilling to go over 3000 revs, and would sometimes spit back, classic symptoms of weak mixture, but



Coachbuilder's plate

only at wider throttle openings. The carburettors had the standard needles, yet they could not be adjusted correctly, it was over rich low down, or weak higher up, or both. The best answer seemed to be a local tuner with a rolling road. His first readings confirmed the weak mixture, and showed only about 85 BHP, and about the same for foot pounds of torque.

His cure was to file the needles in stages, working his way up the rev. range, and it worked. We ended up with readings of 116BHP, and 165 foot pounds of torque. On the road the improvement was obvious, no more spitting, 70 mph with a touch of throttle where before it had to be well down, and there was no reluctance to rev. Later I carefully measured the needles, (he had made a remarkably good job of it) and compared them with the SU needle chart. I found they were similar to Firebird needles, and indeed the engine will run well on a couple of them, but in the end I bought two new needles near to the average measurements as filed, these are still in service.

I do not understand why the engine requires needles so different from the original. The only change I have made is a tubular exhaust manifold, necessary to get round the chassis, though this has also eliminated the inlet hot spots, surely a good thing for modern, highly volatile fuel. Perhaps some tuning expert knows the answer to this one.

One other problem showed itself, the front of the car sunk slightly, and the suspension would easily bottom. When fitting the new coil/damper units, I had chosen springs of the same poundage as the originals (250 lbs/inches) even though there was about 400 lbs less weight on the front. It now has springs of 400 lbs/inches, but shorter, so less compressed. These have been in use for the last four years, and are good enough for me not to have changed them again. However I feel that a slightly lower poundage, with more compression may be better still — one day! At least they are very easy to change.

Now the car remains superb, and to the above list of attributes can be added, quick. It easily pulls the high gearing; fourth is similar to a standard fifth at 25 mph per 1000rpm, yet it is very flexible and will take almost any hill. In fifth, nearly 30 mph per 1000 rpm means 70 at around 2400 rpm, and still no need to change down on normal main road hills. The only problem is, third has to be used in speed restricted areas, and there are lots of them. However, it is as quiet as top.

After a few wet runs, weather protection for the occupants was constructed. Not the usual hood, but a semi hard top which can be disassembled, and stored in the front part of the boot, still leaving space for luggage. It is not of the instant erection variety, but is effective, and the car looks nice with the top on or removed. In a sudden storm it is best to keep going as quickly as possible, dodging the raindrops until a petrol station roof can be utilized!

Later, a cigarette lighter socket was added to power a satellite navigator situated where it

can be safely seen, which is more than can be said of many standard installations. As the loud speaker cannot be heard at speed, a set of earphones were added, and are kept in the door pocket when not in use.

If an open grand tourer is what is wanted, I feel this car is probably the best around, but then I am biased!



The Speed 21

At the beginning, I mentioned a list of the more important costs, this follows, but it does not, of course, include any figure for my own time, and there was lots of it, as any who have completed large projects will know very well.

Before starting, I had estimated a likely total cost of about £12,000. This proved to be fairly accurate, in fact being nearer £13,000 (Government departments please note!)

I have broken the main costs down into three areas, namely

The chassis; The body; The power plant.

The initial cost of the car (very little) has been ignored, because, in my case sale of unwanted parts more than paid for it.

The Chassis	£
Sandblasting	70
Steel	90
Springs and dampers	510
Suspension parts; modifications, bushes, rubbers and such	200
Brake callipers	850
Master cylinders	160
Hydraulic fittings and pipes	110
Servo	230

Brake disks, reface	56
Steering box, ball joints and modifications	180
Radiator core	160
Bespoke aluminium petrol tank	120
Petrol pump	45
Stainless steel twin exhaust system	370
Propeller shaft; modifications, and reconditioning	80
Battery	53
Wheels, spinners, tyres and tubes	1670

The Body

Sheet aluminium	260
Steel	40
Timber	100
Brass	38
Hinges for bonnet	120
Castings	123
Windscreen wiper parts	60
Lights	200
Paint, adhesives, sealants and the like.	230
Chromium plating	363
Badges	110
Mascot	65
Vinyl	50
Running board strip	100

The Power Plant

Rebore, pistons, crank grind and bearings, small ends, timing chain, special valve guides, unleaded conversion, new valve	1250
Gaskets	90
Recondition water pump	80
Recondition carburettors	97
New alternator	68
Stainless steel exhaust manifold	400
Exhaust heat wrap	37
New aluminium rocker cover	97
Reconditioned Ford type 9, five speed gearbox	320
Clutch plate	25
Clutch hydraulics	52
Conversion parts for gearbox	70

In addition to the above major items there were a myriad of small parts, such as nuts and bolts, screws, fittings and fastenings, welding rods and wire, which, added together, come well into three figure poundage. There were also many items that do not form part of the car, for example, grinding disks, saw blades, wet and dry paper, welding gas and of course electricity. I hate to admit it, but experiments and, yes, out and out mistakes totalled about £500!

I did not keep any time records, but had I paid for labour I would probably have had to

sell my house! It was great fun on the whole, and it gives me a great sense of achievement which is renewed every time I use the car. We have now covered something in the region of 30,000 miles in this country and abroad, often in the fast lane! However, I am looking at the possibilities of reducing consumption, and increasing engine power; Fuel injection?

Would I do it all again? It would be difficult to improve upon, but I do fancy something different, something after the fashion of a Rolls Royce Alpine Eagle?

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Centre Spread

Speed 25 Vanden Plas Pillarless saloons

The Pillarless two door saloon shown in the centrespread is Chassis 14603, Registration number FGJ 808; the first of three cars built to this design. It was built by Vanden Plas for their stand at the 1938 motor show and the illustration was published in the Autocar on 30 December 1938. The car was finished in what was described in contemporary reports as 'Jeweltescence Green with fawn crush grain upholstery'. When I purchased the car in 1991 there was still evidence of motor show preparation in that a number of chassis components, including the spring gaiters showed evidence of having been finished in the body colour. The VdP design number was 1577 and the body number 3650.

The second car of this design was Chassis 14631, Registration FXP 192, body number 3651. Happily this car still exists in superb condition in Arizona having been in the ownership of Bruce Lieberman since 1972. The car is shown in the photograph in front of Bruce's very interesting house in a style known locally as 'Desert Territorial'.

The third car, Chassis 14638, Registration FDU 517, body 3652 is well recorded and was described by Dave Culshaw in Bulletin 466. This car was mothballed during the war, first registered on 31 December 1945 and was unique in having experimental coil sprung independent front suspension. The car was used by J J Parkes from 1945 to 1949 and was last known to exist in the Leamington Spa area in the early 1960's. It's registration was cancelled in December 1965.

Three further body numbers 3653 to 3655 inclusive were left unallocated indicating VdP's intention to build further cars to order, but were not executed.

To me, the design has several distinctive features which make it so elegant; in particular, and contrary to previous two door saloons, the glass to glass junction between door and rear light. The effect, enhanced by the generous sunroof, is extremely light and airy. Having seen the naked ash frame during restoration I feel that the car is much lighter than a Charlesworth saloon, or indeed a Charlesworth drophead. It certainly feels friskier on the road.

It is one of those cars that looks it's best travelling on the road rather than stationary. I am of course biased, but consider it amongst the most elegant Alvis saloons constructed.

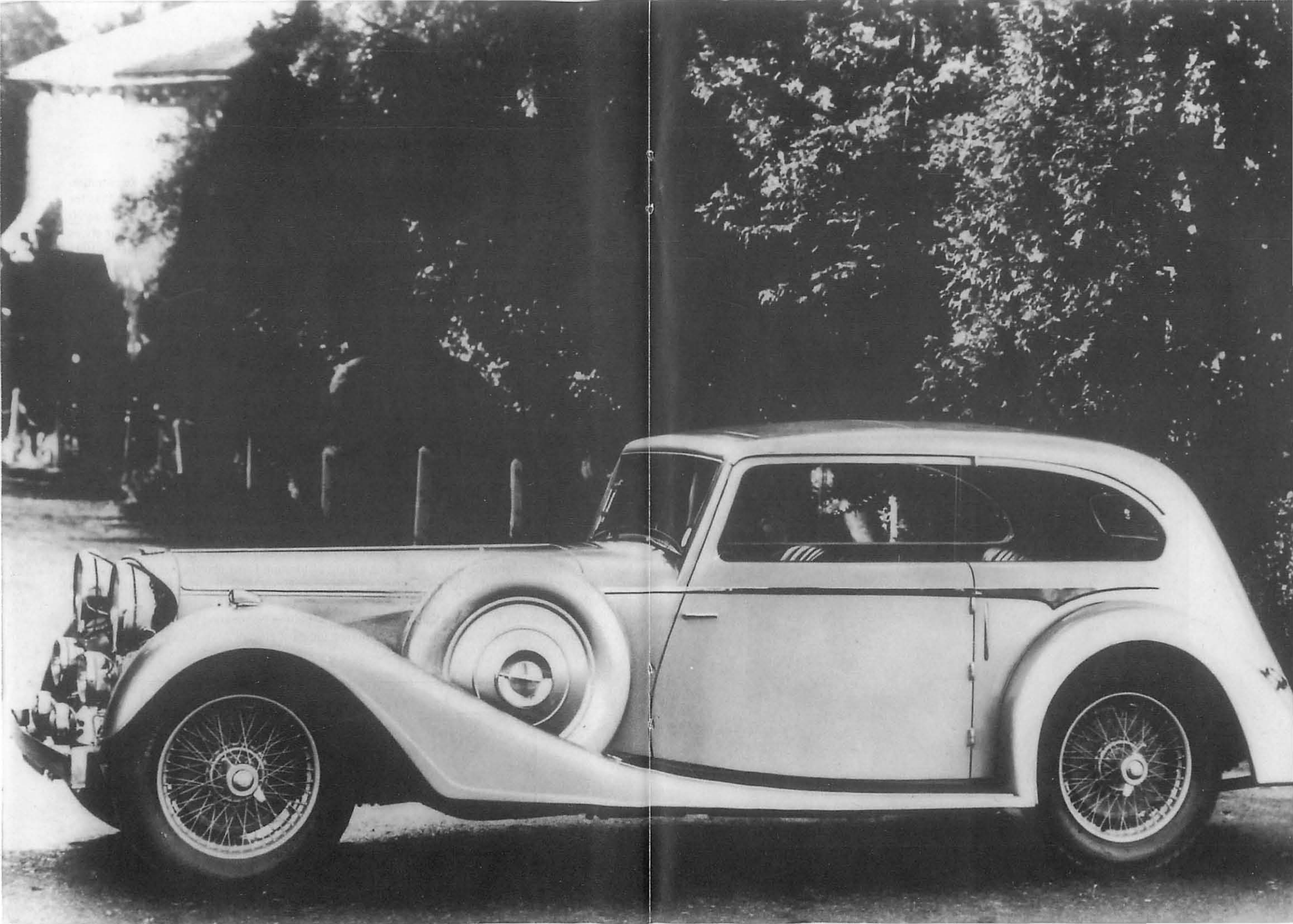


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FXP 192 Bruce Liebermann's car at home in Arizona.



FDU 517, presumed destroyed sometime after December 1965.

Battle Stations

Reproduced by kind permission of the I.A.M. Editor Ian Webb and the timely cooperation of Graphic Designer Stephan Fowler. Dave Coulshaw provided the original.

As a Troop Leader in the Royal Armoured Corps, Prince Harry will be in command of four **Scimitar** armoured reconnaissance vehicles. *Advanced Driving* visited the Armour Centre in Dorset where he is currently training for his new role.

An armoured vehicle may look heavy, slow and clumsy, but appearances can be deceptive. Watch one perform over the sort of rutted, waterlogged terrain where even the toughest 4x4 car would fear to tread and they are truly in their element – agile, surefooted and unstoppable. Their abilities can take even the experienced by surprise. During the Falklands conflict, one officer jumped out of an armoured vehicle, only to sink up to his waist in mud. He'd just discovered that despite the vehicle's bulk, its tracks distribute the weight so widely that it exerts less pressure on the ground surface, in terms of pounds per square foot, than a man.

These are a few of the characteristics of the Scimitar reconnaissance vehicle that Prince Harry will become intimately acquainted with as he learns his profession at the Armour Centre in Bovington, Dorset. His intensive 20-week training course covers vehicle driving and maintenance, communications, gunnery and armoured tactics. Once he qualifies as a Troop Leader, the Prince will command four Scimitar armoured reconnaissance vehicles, each manned by a commander, driver and gunner.



Although primarily a reconnaissance vehicle, the Scimitar is armed with cannon and machine gun

It's a demanding and dangerous job at the front line of combat operations. The Royal Armoured Corps has been involved in almost every conflict in which British forces have served during the last decade, including Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq. As one of the main combat arms of the army, the Corps has a duty, as Colonel Jamie Martin, the Armour Centre's chief of staff, bluntly puts it, 'to close with the enemy to defeat and destroy them'. 'In battle the role of the Scimitar is out in front of friendly forces,' he says, 'probing, looking, finding and reporting. We are the eyes and ears of the commanders and we favour the skills of the poacher.'



Driving an armoured vehicle requires close teamwork between the commander and his driver

Although designed for reconnaissance rather than outright firepower, the Scimitar has some serious teeth. It is armed with a machine gun and a 30mm cannon that can be used against light armoured vehicles and low-flying aircraft. In size it's little larger than a people carrier, but whereas a Ford Galaxy weighs around 1800kg, the Scimitar tips the scales at nearly five times as much. The fuel consumption would shock the school run driver too, at 5.4mpg, but a massive 93-gallon fuel tank gives a respectable range.

The Scimitar came into service back in 1970, one of a number of models in the Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) range that also includes the Spartan armoured personnel carrier, Striker anti-tank guided weapons vehicle and Samaritan ambulance.

Despite the long period of service, continual improvements have kept the Scimitar in fighting form, and it is expected to remain in use until 2015. Most recently the original 4.2-litre Jaguar petrol engine has been replaced by a Cummins diesel, praised by drivers for improved reliability, flexibility and greater range – among other things: 'I never liked the



The 10,000 acres of rugged heathland at Bovington provide plenty of challenges for the novice armoured vehicle driver.

petrol engine,' remarked one officer sombrely. 'Petrol burns too easily.'

Bovington has been the location for armoured training since 1916, when tanks were in their infancy and communications training meant learning the art of using carrier pigeons. Today the 10,000-acre training facility includes an 8km all-weather driving circuit, a 15km cross-country circuit, and numerous testing water crossings, ascents and descents.

Vehicle maintenance is an integral part of training, and Prince Harry will be expected to

get up to his elbows in engine grease. There are practical benefits in having a crew able to sort out mechanical problems on the spot in battle conditions rather than wasting time – and putting their lives in danger – waiting for support to arrive.

Most training is carried out in Spartan personnel carriers, more roomy than the cramped Scimitar. Driving instruction is given under a range of conditions, on-road and off, by day and night, and with the hatch open and closed – the latter seriously restricting visibility.

‘Students used to driving a car adapt to the Scimitar easily enough,’ says Armour Centre driving instructor Sergeant Mark Jones. ‘The gear box is semi-automatic and pedal operated. The biggest difference is that you steer with levers, one on each side, using them to brake each track individually through the gearbox to change direction. We have to watch out because students coming from driving a car sometimes reach automatically for the left-hand steering lever as though it’s a gear stick when they change gear.’

Getting used to the width of an armoured vehicle is also a challenge, says Jones, with the combination of a left-hand driving position and restricted vision making it hard to judge where the right-hand side of the vehicle is on the road. But the driver does have the help of an expert back seat driver – the commander, who sits behind and is in continual radio contact with him.

In fact the commander’s responsibilities go much further than this. Although the driver carries out the physical actions of starting, stopping and manoeuvring the vehicle, it is the commander who is ultimately in control – and who is held responsible if anything goes wrong. His job is to give directions, look out for hazards and act as an extra pair of eyes. This is particularly relevant when the hatch is closed, in a combat situation. Then the driver’s vision is restricted to what he can see through a narrow visor, while the commander can get a 360-degree view from seven periscopes placed around the turret.

Splitting the physical and mental driving tasks between two people gives driving an armoured vehicle an extra and unique challenge. From drivers’ comments, it’s clear how much importance they place on having a good relationship between commander and driver. ‘You’ve got to have faith in your commander,’ commented one driver. ‘If he says pull the left stick you have to do what he says. You’re not allowed to override his orders.’

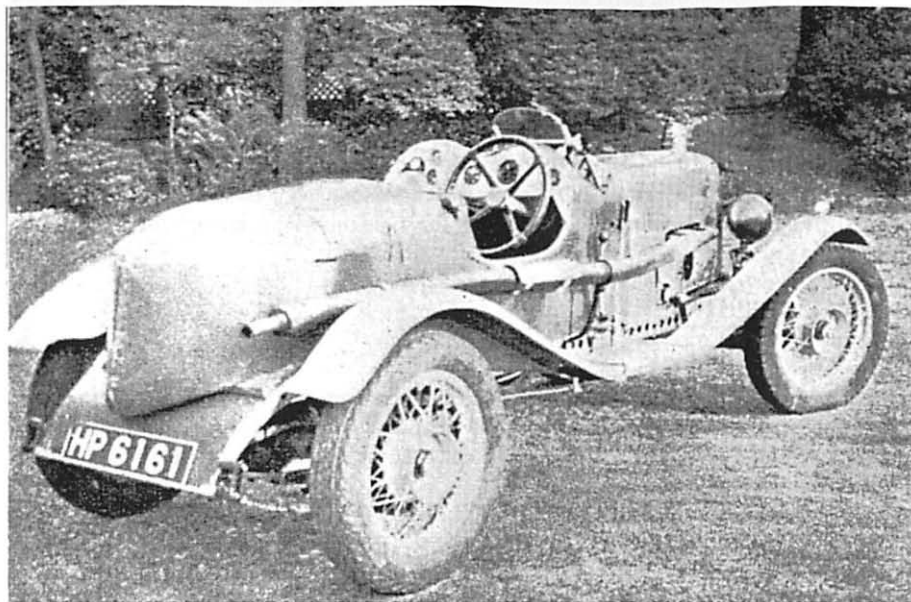
‘But at the same time a commander has to learn to rely on his driver. A poor commander ends up micro-managing the driver, giving too many instructions and not letting the driver get on with what he can do best.’

This is the reason why Colonel Martin stresses the importance of teamwork in the training Prince Harry will receive at the Armour Centre. He describes how the Prince and his crewmates ‘will be working very closely in cramped, uncomfortable and often dangerous conditions’.

Despite advances in technology, the chaotic nature of battle continues to present the same challenges for the commander of an armoured vehicle as it always has done. Colonel Martin memorably summed this up with a quote from a WWII tank commander: ‘The 75mm is firing but the 37mm is firing traversed around the wrong way. The Browning has jammed. I am saying ‘driver advance’ on the radio set but the driver, who cannot hear me, is reversing and as I look out of the top of the turret and see 12 enemy tanks 50 yards away someone hands me a cheese sandwich. . .’

An Historic Alvis.

In the April, 1950 issue of 'Motor Sport' (page 180) this picture was published.



*The caption to the photograph was
'AN HISTORIC ALVIS — The first of the special racing '12/50s' is still in existence, owned by
A.J.Linnell of Wellingborough.*

The accompanying letter is repeated here in full.

Sir,

I was most interested to read your column on the 'Film Star, duck's- back, 12/50 Alvis', which is being rebuilt by T. Laxton. This machine is, as you say, a very fine example. In this connection it is not out of place, I think, to bring to your notice an even rarer model of which I am now guardian. I enclose two photographs.

In your article you mention that an outside exhaust system was used, but the Laxton machine seems to have lost it in the years. As you will observe H.P. 6161 still has this unit which makes as much noise as you might expect from a drain pipe of such proportions.

H.P. 6161 was in fact No. 1 competition 12/50 Alvis as delivered to T. Simister in 1923 after M. Harvey had performed with it for Alvis. It had one of the first, probably the first, big-port engine, the others being fitted to the 200-Mile Race cars. The car was completed in the middle of 1923 and delivered to T. Simister in December of that year. The following year it passed into the hands of Mr. A. J. Linnell, of Wellingborough, who has had it ever since.

The present body is not original. In the first place, apart from an unlouved bonnet, there was practically no body. The two low sides finished just behind the staggered seats leaving a large cylindrical petrol tank exposed, athwartship, naked and unashamed. The crew felt pretty much in the open, too! The car is still in very reasonable trim and, apart from a broken rod and piston, all moving parts are original despite its very considerable mileage. Even the timing gears are fairly good — which means something on an Alvis. Old age has, of course, slowed the old girl down a bit, but on an aerodrome runway, suitably marked out, she still managed a 21 sec. s.s. quarter-mile, and 34.7 s.s. half-mile. The maximum is 80 plus or minus 2 m.p.h. according to how she feels at the time. I feel sure that a little more alteration will make for an improvement right through the performance range.

An easy 80 m.p.h. within the reach of a 12/50 is, I think, a bit much (see your column, January). The weight is just under 16 cwt.—the chassis having been much drilled by Alvis. Naturally I could go on enthusing over this car for some time — but enough for now.

I am,

Yours, etc.,

R. J. WICKSTEED

Kettering

This snippet was in the file which I received from Singapore. I sent this piece, created so far, to Dave Culshaw for his extension of information about the car. I was not disappointed. On the contrary and as always, I was fascinated at the amount of information which our Registrar can dig up!

HP 6161: THE REGISTRAR COMMENTS

Probably one of the most-photographed, best documented and charismatic vehicles in the Alvis firmament is the 'No 1 Race Car'. For the record it is chassis 2091, engine 2454EX, and Car number 7577. References to it abound in a number of publications, and we are lucky indeed that on several occasions Robert Wicksteed put pen to paper regarding its various changes and minor foibles (mainly overheating). Insofar as our Bulletin is concerned, the car was first written up most comprehensively by Keith Brettel, for then Editor Ray Spain, in Bulletin 121 of September 1965, and in October 1977 it appeared as the Cover Car on Bulletin 285 when then Chairman Eric Oakman reported on the 80th Birthday celebrations of Jack Linnell, HP 6161's longest custodian.

It is also pleasing, and indeed topical to report that the car is just in the final stages of restoration by new member Robert Hunt, of Ross-on-Wye, who is Robert Wicksteed's son-in-law.

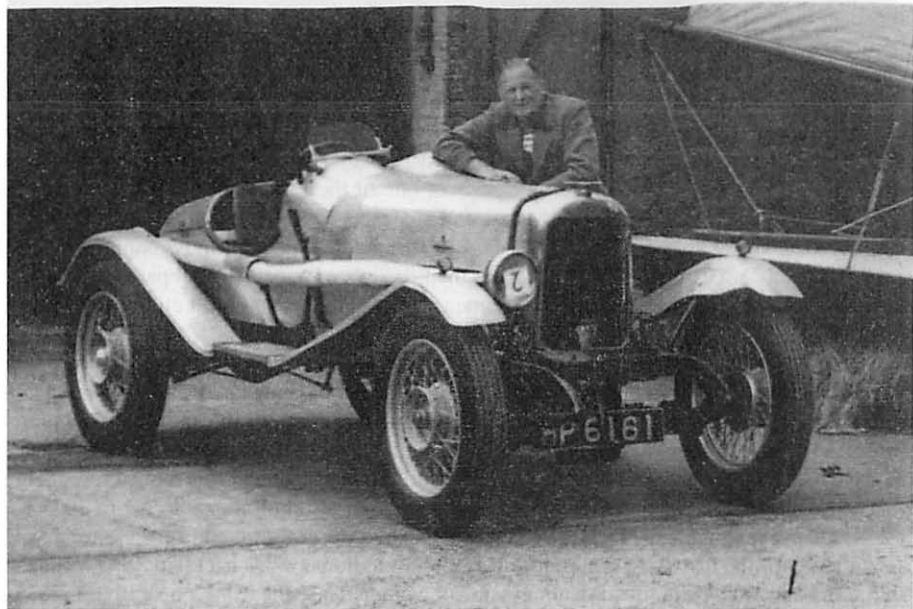
(The Motor Sport article refers to an additional 12/50, and the clues given permit identification of this as well. This was chassis 5720, engine 4067, Car 9064 : YL 6225. It co-starred in the movie 'Another Shore' with Robert Beatty, Moira Lister, Stanley Holloway and a pre-Steptoe Wilfred Brambell. The car is still with Register Member Julian Berrisford)

Members desirous of observing the original configuration of HP 6161 need look no further than page 89 of 'The Vintage Alvis' whilst Robert Wicksteed's obituary appeared in Bulletin 484.

Keith Brettel's article is reprinted on the next two pages.

An SA12/50 of Special Interest

By Keith Brettel



Following the July V.S.C.C. Silverstone last year I was imbibing a quantity of beer at the popular local Green Man when I heard tell of an ex-Brooklands Alvis owned by one man since 1923 and presently living in Northants. Now, I am attracted more than usual by an Alvis that has some history attached and this story tickled the motoring palate. Brettell was about to discover a complete 'Racer' that no one had seen since it graced the lengths of Weybridge concrete so long ago. In a state of considerable excitement I phoned Ken Day with the news only to find that I had been forestalled by a number of years. "Oh yes", he said, "must be the Linnell car that was at Crystal Palace a few years ago; supposed to be the reserve car for the 1923 200 Mile Race". Abashed but still very interested I pursued the car and easily got in touch with Mr. Linnell, eventually arranging to see the car in February.

John Pritchett and I motored up an almost deserted A5 in the latter's TA14 a few weeks ago, mostly between high banks of stale and filthy snow. We had two aims in mind, to find out enough to make a BULLETIN filler for which the Editor is always crying out, and to try to persuade Mr. Linnell to bring the car down to National Alvis Day. It must be the oldest Alvis to remain in the hands of one owner apart from its undoubted technical interest.

We were royally entertained in a beautiful, mostly original, Georgian farm house of which both our host and his house-keeper are justly proud. We heard with interest that Mr. Linnell owns no less than three aeroplanes, his Comper Swift being a regular King's Cup competitor; five cars, a David Brown Lagonda D.H.C., a Ford for shopping, a very fine 3fi S.S. Jaguar, a very ancient looking Morris Cowley and the 12/50.

The house has an extensive garden and three batteries of chickens which distinguished themselves a few weeks before by laying 10,000 eggs in a week. We were interested to see the spotless chicken houses and heard that the radio is relayed continuously. The effect of this is to give a constant noise to the birds so that they remain undisturbed by the attentions of their keeper and the wind and the rain, it is not suggested that they lay more eggs to Frank Ifield! Rather disbelievably the radio relay was installed and when switched on for the first time coincided with a programme about birth control!

After lunch we gathered around the 12/50. As is well known, Alvis entered two cars for the 1923 200 Mile Race and one of them, that driven by Harvey, ran out the winner at an average of 93.29 m.p.h. Mr. Linnell's car is not one of these two entries. However, it was sold to him in late 1923 as the reserve car and since we have no reason to doubt his word and the mechanical specification of the car is not standard, we can safely assume that if it wasn't actually used for the 200 mile Race then the car was specially prepared for racing, indeed, Harvey is supposed to have had some success with the car at hill climbs and sprints late in 1923.

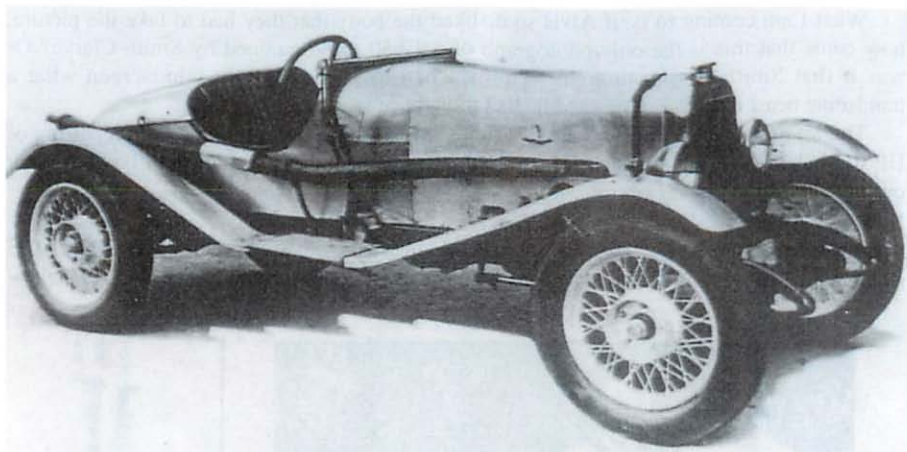
Until 1935 the 12/50 was the everyday motor car and we saw several photographs of the car in guises varying from a triumphant re-entry to the Brooklands Paddock following a win in a minor club race, a charming period picture of the car with the family's TE Sports Tourer to a rather shocking one of the car wearing a Galleon, this the entry in a local fete ! The excuse, humbly given as we must have looked rather shocked at this desecration, being that the Alvis had so many lightening holes it was so easy to bolt things to it ! In 1935 the 12/50 having become rather exhausted it was pushed out into the end of the garden and forgotten until the last war when transport from unit to home was a necessity. It is fortunate that, after the war, some of the enthusiasm for vintage cars, then in comparative infancy, brushed off on Mr. Linnell. Aided by one Wicksteed, one of the founder members of the 12/50 Register, what little remained of the old body was thrown away and the rather attractive cross between a ducksback and a beetleback that it carries to this day was put on the chassis.

Unlike the two actual race cars this one appears to be a standard chassis with open hub wheels, brakeless front axle and subframe engine. The engine would seem to likely have been the same as that fitted to the other two cars as it has the dry sump arrangement with nearside, flared, oil tank and did have, originally, a special cylinder head, presumably a big port which had to be replaced in the early thirties with a standard small port following some frost damage. The remains of the big port outside exhaust system are still used but the smaller bronze Solex has been fitted. There is a very small flywheel and cone clutch and the car has a belt driven dynamo for the lighting system with which it was not originally fitted. Gearbox and final drive look standard although Mr. Linnell thought that the gear ratios are probably special. The petrol tank is the original drum type mounted behind the driver. The whole chassis has been drilled along with the spring shackles, brake links, pedal arms, etc.

During the summer months, the car is taxed and insured and given frequent outings on the road. It goes like hell apparently, though the rear-wheel-only brakes leave something to be desired.

A most absorbing visit, and Mr. Linnell has promised to drive the car down to Alvis Day.

Robert Wicksteed wrote the following short article on HP 6161 for the Alvis Register Bulletin 142, October 1981.



The photograph was taken by the Alvis company on one of the numerous occasions when they borrowed HP 6161 (No. 1 Racing car) for Coventry Carnivals during the 1950s and 60s. They used to fit a 12 volt fan unit behind the radiator to delay the boiling, but in fact those wretched carnivals did much to cause the overheating troubles we have had ever since.

The body shown was my second effort. I squashed the first of the Wicksteed bodies in 1949 when I rolled the car trying to avoid an accident, would you believe. I still have much of this second body but did not make time to refit it last year for my roll at Cadwell to commemorate the 31st anniversary of the first success.

The photograph you show was used for the short history booklet *The Alvis Story 1919—1967* by Bernard Light. It was a very bad and inappropriate choice, and the text conflicts with the inaccurate caption describing the car as one of the cars entered for the 1923 Brooklands 200 mile race. The caption does, however, qualify the statement by saying 'though not the winning one'. There were several pictures available of the correct car, or cars, and many of HP 6161 in its original form, and there was no excuse for failing to use one of them. There were many people around who could have corrected the text and the captions—so why all these errors?

I had previously thought that Alvis, and Smith Clarke, disapproved of this body because they had gone to the trouble of doctoring (sorry about that. Dr.!) the photograph. The picture shows the bottom frame and fittings for a straight full width windscreen. Now, such a windscreen, using the bottom half of a standard split windscreen, was fitted in 1924 by Alvis to HP 6161. I still have it. It was used, when the original body was replaced in 1969, until 1975, when I took it off for some race and just didn't bother to put it back again.

The photograph shows no glass or side frames; but to remove those parts it is necessary also to remove the tightening screws and bottom hinge and arms. These are still in position in the photograph. Funny!

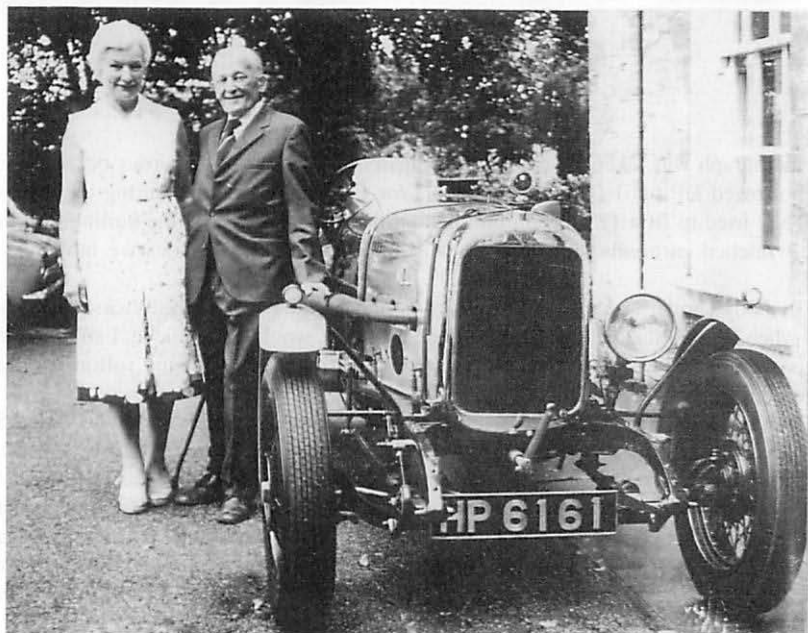
The real mystery is why they bothered to fake the picture at all. Actually the car at that time had two flares to the scuttle and instrument dash board, very à la mode in the 1930s and early post war cars. A picture of HP 6161 published in the June 1969 *Bulletin* shows these flares very clearly and no straight windscreen, just one aero screen.

What I am coming to is, if Alvis so disliked the body that they had to fake the picture, how come that this is the only photograph of a 12/50 to be retained by Smith Clarke? Or was it that Smith Clarke thought 'if only I had used the straight windscreen what a handsome beast it was', and wished he had thought of it.

The affairs of state and my state of affairs have delayed and prolonged the repairing of HP 6161, but there is not much left to do now and hopefully we shall both be exercising ourselves again next year.

Robert Wicksteed

Finally, before we leave HP 6161, here is the superb picture used on the cover of the AOC Bulletin in October 1977 to celebrate the 80th birthday of her longest custodian, Jack Linnell.



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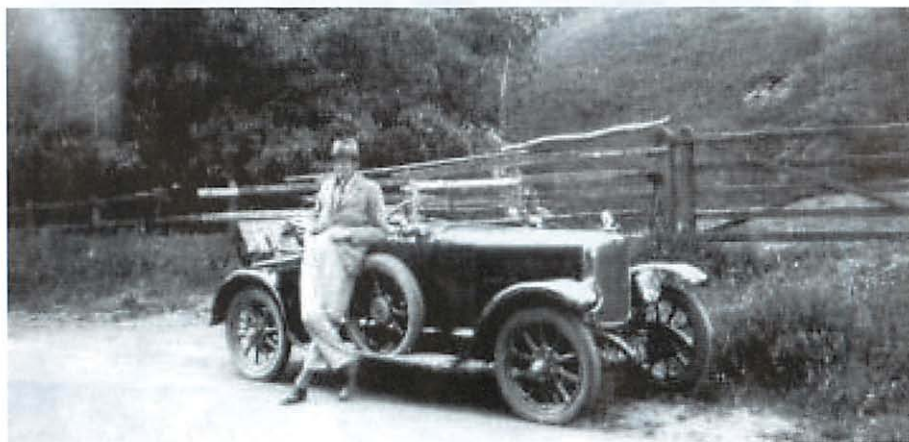
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Denis Knowles (1895-1979) and his six Alvis cars

My father, Denis Knowles, loved his Alvis cars. Unfortunately I used to be horribly car sick in them which rather reduced his enjoyment of their performance, especially on those winding unmade roads in New Zealand from our farm in Tauranga up to Taupo, Wairakei and Rotorua. I usually had to travel in the front seat if I was to have any hope of surviving even the shortest journey and remember vividly those long bonnets stretching ahead. I also recall many of the finer points of Alvis management, especially the occasion when something went wrong with one of the cylinders with KV 1569 and we had to plug an open spark plug hole with a piece of wood yet the Alvis still got us home.

Anyway to start at the beginning, after riding motorcycles and flying airships in the First World War, my father's first Alvis XN5949 was purchased new in April 1923 with a legacy from an aunt. I believe it only had rear wheel brakes. He toured Scotland in it and sold it in Wales where his brother had a garage in 1926.



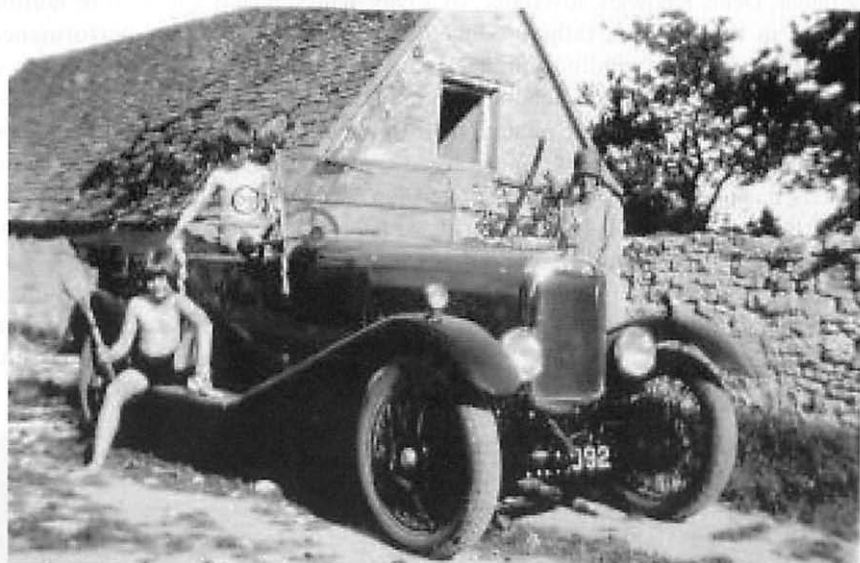
XN 5949 in Scotland

He next purchased XR2992, Car no: 9772, in November 1927. This was a sports tourer built on 25 June 1926, first owner Mrs N.N.Lees Smith of London WC1. This car was restored in 1966 by Brian Harcourt Smith.

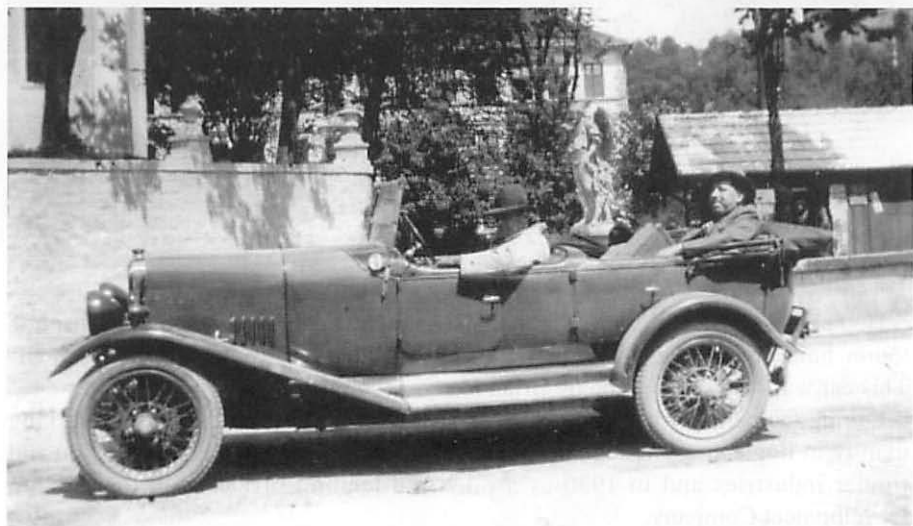
During the period when he owned his first two Alvises my father was working mainly in England as an engineer with various companies in the construction and timber industries and in 1930 as a pilot and landing officer with the Airship Development Company.

On 13 September 1929 he purchased a black and green sports tourer Chassis No. 11140 registration YU4746 built 9 December 1927. According to Alvis records

this was converted in 1930 to Silver Eagle specification. In it my father toured Europe extensively in 1930 and in 1931 went to Berlin to study German in anticipation of an East European assignment with Trinidad Lake Asphalt. However while studying he met my mother who was also studying in Berlin and together they visited



XR 2992



YU 4746

Dresden, Prague and elsewhere in Germany, always of course in those days staying in separate hotels as my mother had no chaperone! They married in September 1931 and decided to set forth for New Zealand where my mother had relatives, taking YU4746 with them which became Y 103 809 6. They founded Four Winds Farm at Otumoetai just outside Tauranga, North Island, where they grew lemons and myself, born in November 1932.

In 1935 we came back to England via the Pacific on the 'Maripos', across America by train, and across the Atlantic on the 'Bremen'. YU4746 was sold in Tauranga and has not since been traced. My father then bought VC2405, a Silver



On the 'Bremen' in 1935

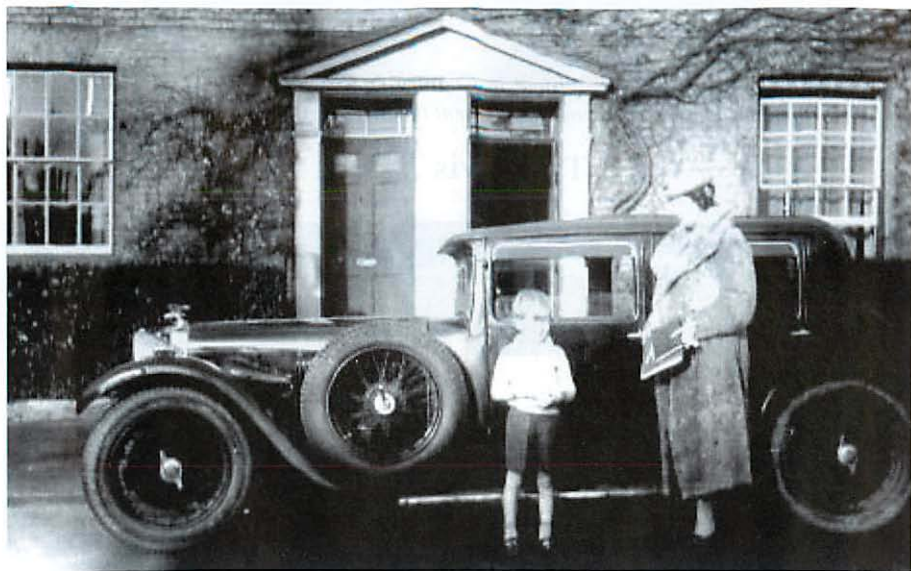


*VC 2405, photographed on a European Tour.
This photograph was used as the centre fold of Issue No. 499.*

Eagle Clubman's Coupé, car no: 12759, first owned by Mr G.V.Goddard of Leicester. In this car my parents toured Europe from Bergen to Calais via Oslo, Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Vienna, the Arlberg, Lichstenstein, and the Black Forest, after which we and the car returned to New Zealand on the 'Rangitane'. The whole trip was written up for the 'Bay of Plenty Times' in a series of League of Nations Articles and while in Berlin they were able to attend one of the big Nazi rallies as accredited representative of the paper. The only trouble my father experienced with the Alvis was something to do with the auto vac on the Arlberg Pass. It was sold in New Zealand in 1937 when the family returned to England and was later rebuilt by Greg Wrapson in Yorkshire who brought the car to our house in Essex in 2005. Greg Wrapson's article on pages 86-89 of Issue no: 249 of the Bulletin of the Vintage Sports-Car Club Autumn 2005 tells the full saga of this restoration project.

On return to England my father looked for an apple orchard to purchase and we stayed in Witham Essex while he studied apple growing. He purchased a Speed-twenty, KV1569, from Lex Garages in London. Not much is known about this car, nor has it been traced. It was probably sold early in the War when petrol was short.

EXT 638 was the final love of my father's life. This was model 12/70, 4 cylinder



KV 1569

drop head coupé by Mulliners of Birmingham, car no: 19567, chassis no: 15384, built in 1938 and owned by my father in the 1950's and 60's when he had become a successful apple grower near Colchester. He toured many farms and markets in this car but not overseas as my mother preferred our other car for these trips. This Alvis was strictly for his own use only but once I was allowed to drive it up to Cambridge. He was not an easy passenger! At last when he became too blind to drive any more the car was sold and is now owned by Chris Storrar of Braintree who restored it magnificently.

From my earliest memories I recall my father talking about his cars and his airships when he was not expounding on the problems of red spider, woolly aphids etc on his apples. There seemed to be a certain similarity between keeping an airship up in the air (when the engine stopped you climbed out onto a strut and swung the propeller....) and keeping an early Alvis on the road in all weathers, especially in the days of rear wheel brakes. But I do recall them all as magnificent cars and most useful for keeping one's end up at school. To see so many Alvises gathered together at Houghton Hall this Spring was a magnificent sight and one that brought back many memories.

If you are also interested in how to fly an RNAS Airship in the 1st World War then see the article on my father by Kenneth G. Slocombe on pp 185-191 of Vol 19 No: 4 1988 'Cross & Cockade', International Journal of the First World War Aviation Historical Society which was taken mostly from my father's own memoirs.

This road test was originally published in Country Life, 11 June 1948 and is reproduced with due acknowledgements. Dave Culshaw sent the original to me—J.N.B.C.

The Alvis TA 14



The present Alvis TA14, although it incorporates no truly post-war features of design, is the outcome of a logical continuation of the firm's previous policy, and appears to retain to a pleasant degree the handling qualities and characteristics of the earlier models on which the Alvis reputation was built. My tests were divided between two different body versions of the car: the standard four-door steel saloon and a chassis fitted with a convertible body designed and built specially for the Alvis distributors—Brooklands of Bond Street, London, who submitted both models for test. As the engine of the cabriolet model had not yet been fully run in, the actual performance figures were obtained on the saloon, but, since both the frontal area and the overall weight of the two models are practically identical, the figures can be accepted for either car.

The engine is on straightforward lines similar to those of its pre-war equivalent, being a four-cylinder of just under 2 litres capacity, with overhead valves operated by push-rods. A maximum power output of 65 brake-horsepower is provided by the engine at the relatively low speed of 4,000 r.p.m. and with a total car weight of 26 cwt. a power/weight ratio of 2.5 brake horsepower per cwt. is obtained. The theoretically safe engine speed for prolonged periods, usually accepted as 2,500 feet/minute piston speed, is equivalent to a cruising speed of 57 m.p.h. Only a single carburetter is employed—an unusual feature in these times—and this draws air through an exceptionally large air cleaner and silencer. The water circulation is thermostatically controlled, and thus aids rapid warming up, and so the prevention of oil dilution and wear, when one is starting up from cold. The oil filler, which is of sensible proportions, is conveniently placed on top of the valve cover, making replenishment a simple and cleanly achieved task. No dip stick is provided, instead, a simple gauge is fitted on the side of the engine which can be easily checked at a glance, although slight inconvenience is noticeable after dark.

As independent suspension is not employed, the chassis is of comparatively simple construction. Straight side members are used, passing under the rear axle to give greater stability, but they are boxed at both the front and the rear end. Further stiffening is provided by two cross members, one below the gearbox and the other in front of the rear axle. All four wheels are sprung by semi-elliptic laminated springs, assisted by hydraulic dampers. The brakes are of Girling design, and employ two leading-shoes on the front wheels — a system giving greater braking efficiency for a given foot pressure. A convenient hydraulic jacking system is fitted which can be operated from either side of the car as necessary.

On both types of body — the saloon and the convertible — the standard of internal finish is high, grained hardwoods being used for the instrument panel, door fillets, and windscreen frame. Pockets are fitted to all doors, and there is the usual cubby-hole for small articles in the dash-board. The difference in the internal dimensions of the two models is very slight, being at the most fin. in one or two cases. The following measurements, taken on the convertible body, indicate the amount of room available. Across the front seats measures 44 ins., and across the rear seats 45 ins.; the distance from the seat to the roof is 34 ins. and 31 ins. in the front and the rear respectively. The angle of the squabs and the width of the seats are such that ample support is given, and in the rear seats, particularly with the folding centre arm-rest in use, the standard of comfort is comparable to that of one's favourite chair. Both the centrally mounted gear lever and the hand-brake are placed where a driver's hand would instinctively reach for them.

The cars tested were fitted with heating and air-conditioning, as an optional extra. This item appears to me to be among the necessities of car equipment. Apart from its more obvious benefits during the winter months, the ability to control a cooling draft of air greatly increases one's comfort during hot spells. Ventilation control is assisted by louvres over the windows and a large scuttle ventilator. The spare wheel is recessed into the lid of the luggage boot, thus leaving more room for luggage, although with the disadvantage that the lid is made heavier to handle. On the convertible body it is possible to retain the top in three separate positions; fully closed, fully open, or in the intermediate coupé de ville position. An electric switch on the dashboard brings a 2-gallon petrol reserve into operation,

THE ALVIS 14

Distributors: Brooklands of Bond Street, London, W.1.

SPECIFICATION

Price .. £1,275 19s. 6d. (includ. P.T. £277 19s. 6d.)	Final drive Hypoid bevel
Cubic cap. 1,892 c.c.	Brakes .. Girling
B : S .. 74 x 110 mm.	Suspension Semi-elliptic
Cylinders Four	Wheelbase 9 ft.
Valves .. Overhead	Track (front) 4 ft. 6 ins.
B.H.P. .. 65 at 4,000 r.p.m.	Track (rear) 4 ft. 6 ins.
Carb. .. S.U.	Overall length 14 ft. 6 ins.
Ignition Lucas coil	Overall width 5 ft. 6 ins.
Oil filter Suction gauze	Overall height 5 ft. 2 ins.
1st gear .. 14.46 to 1	Ground clearance 6½ ins.
2nd gear .. 9.42 to 1	Turning circle 39½ ft.
3rd gear .. 6.48 to 1	Weight .. 26 cwt.
4th gear .. 4.875 to 1	Fuel cap. 11 galls.
Reverse .. 14.46 to 1	Oil cap. .. 1½ galls.
	Water cap. 2½ galls.
	Tyres Dunlop 6.00 x 16

PERFORMANCE

Accelera- tion	secs.	secs.	Max. speed 76.8 m.p.h.
10-30 .. Top	14.0	2nd 7.2	Petrol consumption 23
20-40 .. Top	13.8	3rd 8.2	m.p.g. at average speed
0-60 .. All gears	26.8		of 45 m.p.h.

BRAKES: 30—0 in 34 ft. (88 per cent. efficiency).

RELIABLE CRUISING SPEED: 57 m.p.h.

a system that seems much more convenient than the more usual one of a tap situated near the tank itself.

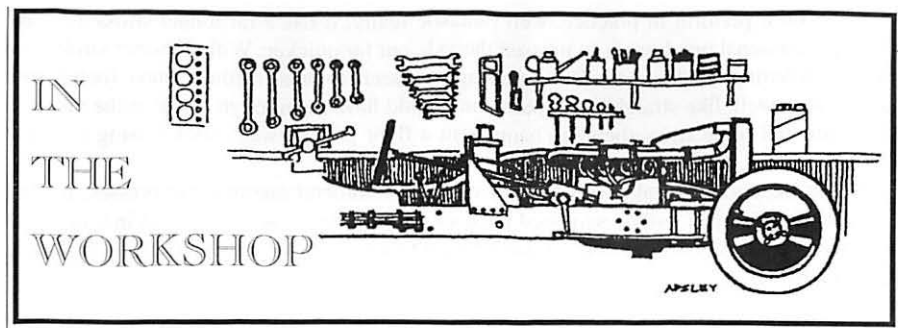
When I began my tests, my first impression, which persisted throughout the time I had the car, was of the unusually high standard of silence and mechanical smoothness. It was not until I had been driving for some distance that the performance capabilities of the car were made obvious — by the effortless and untiring manner in which the ground was being covered. Even up to the maximum possible speed on all gears this high standard of silence was maintained, and it was only when the car was forced over its maximum, with the assistance of gravity, that the engine reached a speed where noise became obtrusive.

Although this model is slightly smaller than the average medium-sized car, the relative positions of the rear seats and the windscreen have been so skillfully chosen that the rear passengers are given an unobstructed view of the road ahead. While such modern features as independent suspension are not fitted, the suspension appeared to be as good as the best I have tried among cars employing a similar springing layout. Since the rear seats are fitted in front of the rear axle, it is only over exceptionally rough roads, and at low speeds, that any discomfort, even slight, is experienced. From normal touring speeds right up to the maximum the car holds the road well, and, even if corners are taken at speeds normally considered excessive, the steering remains accurate and remarkably little rolling is felt.

I found in practice that the theoretical cruising speed could be exceeded quite easily, and without any signs of distress from the engine. On more than one occasion I kept the car going at between 62 and 65 m.p.h. for many miles, and it appeared to enjoy such treatment. Although the performance figures do not equal the best achieved on my tests by cars of similar engine capacity, the manner in which the car achieves its performance is difficult to surpass. Even when I was testing the car for acceleration from 0-60 m.p.h. (a test which calls for a ruthless getaway and extremely fast gear changing), no impression was given that it was doing anything out of the ordinary.

Apart from the normal proportions of different types of motoring I usually experience during my tests, such as town, main road, and by-lane driving, I had an excellent opportunity to drive the car really hard on empty roads. This occurred when a friend, involved in the preparation of his car for a forthcoming race, asked me to collect some essential parts from near Chichester, and, owing to the limitations of time and space, it was necessary to start from home at 5 a.m. It is, I think, praise for the car that I did not grudge the loss of sleep, and enjoyed every minute of the round trip, which was covered at an average speed of fractionally over 50 m.p.h.

Motoring after dark was rendered easy by the wide-vision front screen, the long-beam headlamps and the handily placed dipping switch on the steering-wheel boss, which leaves the left foot free for gear changing even when one meets an oncoming car. In view of the high speeds maintained during almost all the time I had the car, the petrol consumption figure of 23 m.p.g. is good and it would be reasonable to expect some slight improvement at more normal touring speeds. Owing to the low chassis level, and the deep doors, there are no footwells to inconvenience the rear passengers. Generally speaking, the car appealed to me as being better than theory had previously suggested.



A Shop Press

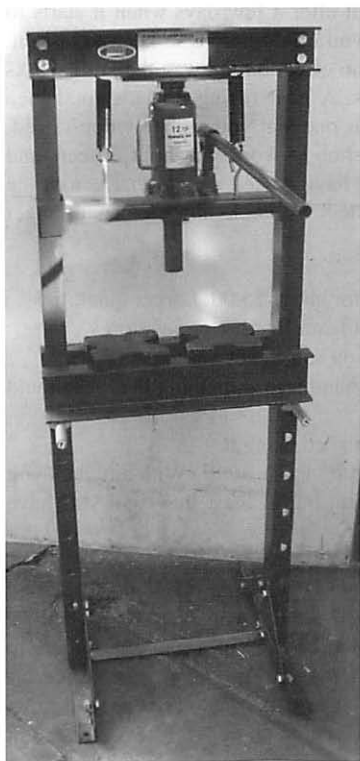
Having recently done an article on building a sand blast cabinet, I thought it would be a good idea if club members passed on details of useful tools and equipment they have either recently purchased or had for years and found indispensable.

To start the ball rolling my latest acquisition is a 10 ton shop press from Northern Tool & Equipment. I have on occasions had to press bearings and bushes out of housings that have been very tight, the last one was in so tight that my usual trick of a couple of sockets

and the vice failed when the vice snapped with an almighty bang! Also as part of my business of restoring aeroplanes I have recently had to remove an axle from an undercarriage leg and had to take it to a friends engineering shop to use his 20 ton press, but that's a round trip of over two hours. When it came to remove another I had the idea of looking to get a press of my own.

I looked through all my tool catalogues but the cheapest was around the £200 mark. I had an old catalogue from Northern Tools but very out of date but it did have a press that looked interesting and at a very good price. I looked on their web site and they still stocked the same press but now even cheaper! This was quickly ordered and three days later it arrived.

I wasn't sure what to expect but it came in two heavy stout cardboard boxes and was very easy to assemble, the instructions recommended it took two people but I managed ok by myself. I am very impressed with the sturdy construction and the principle is very simple using a large bottle jack as you can see from the picture. It also came with two thick steel plates with different shaped cut outs on each side, a great idea. The bed is adjustable over a long range as you can see from the holes in the side frames.



How did it perform in practice, well fantastic really, it has a far longer stroke than the 20 ton professional one I used, so pressed the axle out far quicker. With a shorter stroke you are forever letting the pressure off and putting in spacers to press further. I have found other uses for it as well, like straightening parts that would have been tough going in the vice and I even pressed some strengthening channels in a floor panel I was making using a simple plywood former, dead easy.

If you like tools to make jobs easier I would recommend one of these presses, it's not too expensive and you will be surprised the uses you find for it, so I would get in touch with 'Northern Tools' (details below) and don't forget to write and tell others of useful tools you have found.

Northern Tool & Equipment Tel: 0800 1692266 www.northerntooluk.com
Item Number 14589E 10.8 tonne Hydraulic Shop Press Price: £129.99 + VAT

Home-made, non-toxic, biodegradable, rust remover

No this is not a 'secret potion' — it has been around for ages. Farmers have been using this recipe for years as they had the ingredients always to hand. All you need to do is to buy a jar of molasses, pour it into a large plastic container, and pour eight more bottles full of water in on top of the molasses. Stir it up and its done.

At this stage it is so harmless you could drink it but after a few days when it starts to ferment and gets a mould growing on the surface of it you might not be so keen to taste it. However the mould and the accompanying smell have no effect on the way the stuff works and you can go on using the same tub of it for years. A neat fitting lid is a good idea because the smell given off, while not really offensive, is one that you probably don't need. I have had a tub of this with a lid, sitting in the workshop at work for about 4 years and there have been no complaints about the smell so far. I have placed a metal bar across the top of the container and hang the pieces I want "de-rusted" on hooks made of coat-hanger wire.

The advantages of this mixture are many.

1. It doesn't cost a bomb. You can make about 9 litres for about \$5.00. Larger quantities (4 litre plastic containers of Molasses) can be bought from 'feed & grain' stores.
2. It removes rust around corners and in places where you can't even see.
3. It won't hurt your skin (if you are game to put your hand into something that has mould growing on top.)
4. It can be tipped out on the ground when you have finished using it.
5. It lasts so long that you could leave it to grand children in your will! (With any luck you will have managed to have squandered their inheritance, but at least they will still have Grandpa's rust remover!)
6. And the best part is it really does remove rust!

The only price you pay for having such a cheap product is that like other old fashioned things, it's slow. Having said that, it works unsupervised around the clock ("24/7" I believe is the latest way to imply this.) It takes one minute to put an item in it and one minute to pull an item out. There just happens to be a week in between. To give you some idea, a work colleague brought a small cast steel vice in to be cleaned up. It was one of those that clamps to the edge of the bench with a 'G' clamp type screw underneath. It was covered in

red powdery rust that had been there a long time. It went in rusty in one piece on Monday and came out bright clean steel on Friday. All inside the hollow casting was nice and clean also.

My brother had some window sash weights that had been used to lower the 'gang plank' for his yacht. They had been hanging on the Williamstown jetty for years with salt water washing over them. The rust was so thick that it came off in flakes about 2mm. thick. After 2 weeks in the tub they came out looking like they were covered in wet mud. After a good scrubbing in fresh water, they came out as bright, white, cast iron. They were then primed and painted to make them like new.

You will find it necessary to wash the molasses off after the process. The process does not go on eating away at metal after it is removed from the molasses. Products that have been pulled out, washed and dried with a blast from the air hose sometimes sit around the workshop for weeks and show now signs of rusting again.

I have heard stories of people who put rolled edge wheels in the mix and then had them spray-painted and then, eighteen months later, found that the rims were rusting out. The story was that the molasses reaction just kept on going inside the rim and 'chewed' it out. The reality is that any chemical reaction only continues as long as there are unused chemicals available. Once the reaction has happened and a new substance is formed, the reaction stops. However if those rims had been rusted inside and the rust was removed then the true condition of the wheels might have been revealed. If the inside of the rims were cleaned of rust and then left unpainted and unprotected then they may start to rust out.

If I wanted to use this process on such wheels then I think that the rims should be dipped into a phosphoric acid mix and when dry, dipped into a metal primer and then finally into paint to make sure that the inside of the rim was properly protected. Dipping so that paint can fill the rim would be the only way to be sure that it was all covered inside. You only need a shallow tray to do this as you can stand the wheel up in the mixture and then move it round to the next section of rim and so on until the whole wheel has been done.

If you have a lot of rusty ironware to deal with this is the simple, easy and cost effective way to deal with it.

Paul Bamford

Work on a Graber Body

This is an extract from the Pre-1940 Triumph Owners Club Journal, June 2005. Reprinted with the kind permission of the Club, per David Mason (Press & P.R.). Communicated by Darol Baker.

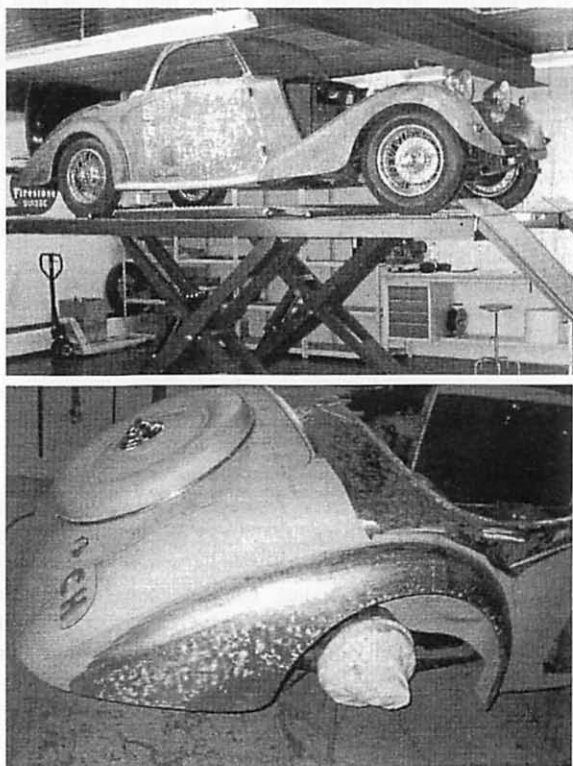
In the June 2005 issue of the Pre-1940 Triumph Owners Club Journal, Franz Hatebur reported on a new treatment of the Graber bodywork on his Triumph Continental. Generally the car was in very sound and exceptionally original condition, but due to several repaints the visual quality of the car was not appealing. The aim was to bring the car back to its original condition. The work required included stripping the body down to bare metal, partly separating the body from the wooden structure (replacing where necessary), then reassembling and painting the body.

Unhappy with experiences of chemical stripping and the classic bead blasting, the author had heard of a new type of 'ice blasting' that was being used for removing underseal

coatings in Germany. It is basically like sand blasting, but with much less force and using dry ice instead of sand. The dry ice freezes the attacked surface immediately the material just 'explodes' from the surface it is attached to. This works for all kind of coatings and a trained operator is able to remove each layer without destroying the layer underneath.

First the underside of the Triumph was cleaned, with all wiring and running gear left in place. Even the leather spring gaiters, which were covered in a thick layer of grease and muck, turned out almost like new and the underside of the car looked hardly used after the treatment. With such an impressive result removal of the paint from the body was tried, which the operatives had not tried before. The result was fantastic. No thermal or stress defects on the entire body and a clean surface free of grease or any solvent to work from; the dream of any coachbuilder.

Some of the lower body sections were detached from the partly rotten wood structure of the body with the help of a coachbuilder. A local woodworker, who has the rare skill to rebuild the woodwork professionally even recognised that the two sides of the original structure at Graber had been done by different workmen. This was assumed to be because of the very short time between the delivery of the Triumph running gear and the Geneva Motor Show (Graber put in about 1,930 man hours within 11 months to finish the Car in time for the Show). Reassembling and painting the body took some 150 man hours using the traditional techniques that were used originally. The only compromise was the use of modern two pack paint. But the original paint was thoroughly analysed to get the correct colour and finish.



POSED, PROBED AND SOLVED

— The Registrar's Column —



‘The Case of the Surplus Bumper’



*Jean Guichet taking part in the 1954 Liege-Rome-Liege Rally
Photo: via Laurent Le Pont*

Surely there can be few members of the Club unaware of the ‘hen’s teeth’ scenario which currently surrounds the availability of TA and TC Three-litre bumpers—particularly the early-type TA version with its art deco pattern curvature—concave at the top, and convex below.

Thanks to a recent piece of input from one of my French correspondents, Laurent Le Font, I now have a pertinent story. Laurent is writing a book which, amongst other things, encompasses the activities of the Anglophile Jacques Savoye, who raced Singers at Le

Mans and elsewhere before the war, and after cessation of hostilities became the Paris Alvis and Singer importer. One of these imports was a TC21/100 Tickford drophead coupé, and Laurent has a photograph of it competing in the 1954 Liege-Rome-Liege Rally, driven by Jean Guichet, in which it suffered some damage (fairly evident from the photograph), and it subsequently retired.

Now being unsurprisingly inquisitive in establishing exactly which car this was, I ploughed through the records of the French exports of this model, and happily found a match with chassis 25536. Confirmatory to this identification is an order, by the said Jacques Savoye, in the car's service history, for a replacement bumper for the owner, who is recorded as being a M. Raemaker. From further correspondence in the file it transpires that Alvis Ltd (most uncharacteristically) supplied a bumper of the wrong type (early TA) whereas a TC type was obviously required. Savoye goes on to bemoan the fact that having paid scandalously excessive import charges and carriage on the said part, it will be uneconomic for him to return it. I understand that one of the correct type was subsequently despatched by the Works. My devious mind now wonders if there could still be in France, somewhere, a 'hen's teeth' Art Deco TA21 bumper still in its maker's wrappings? Food for thought.

The Alvis connection with Jean Guichet does not end with the unsuccessful Liege-Rome-Liege event. A decade later Guichet was to win the 1964 Le Mans Twenty-Four Hour Race in a Ferrari, in partnership with Vacarella, and had hoped to repeat the success the following year when his co-driver was Mike Parkes, son of J.J. Parkes, Alvis Ltd's Managing Director. However he retired with gearbox problems.

In conclusion, if any member is privy to any information relating to Jaques Savoye, French Alvis imports, or any of the events mentioned, I would appreciate being contacted so that Laurent Le Pont may be assisted with the fullest Alvis input to his forthcoming book.

Is it not sad that one only learns of the sometimes colourful lives which some members have led after they have passed on. Henry Stonor (Obituary No 499 page 196) was twice a member: 2563 of August 1963 then 4323 of January 1971.

In March 1991, when he was living in Malpas, Cheshire, we received a letter from him enquiring as to the location of his Silver Eagle (Chassis No. 12713, Registration No.WS 6850.....and where is it now??)

However, Henry Stonor will be best remembered for his Speed Twenty SB Special, chassis 11218, which had started off with the mark YY 96, but had been re-registered NG 8267, fortunately still around and with member 10093: John Wykes of Norfolk.

This car has been written up at least twice in Bulletins: 211 of May 1971, where HAS also mentions once owning a TA21, then again by Ken Day in Bulletin 247 of July 1974. Henry Stonor was clearly a larger than life character who will be greatly missed.

Dave Culshaw

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



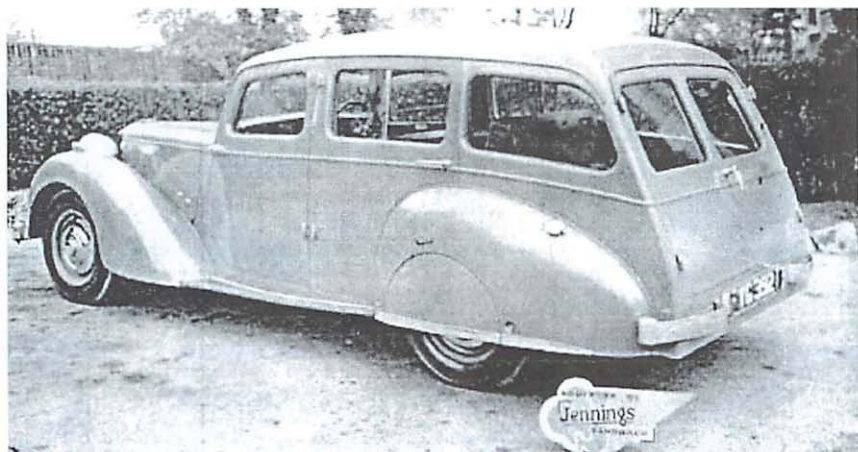
From: <Woodieuk8@aol.com>

Hi Julian,

I was visiting the son of the founder of Whitacres Coachbuilders in Stoke on Trent yesterday and I found the attached photo in a pack of photos given to him by Derek Jennings, the former MD of Jennings Coachcraft based in Sandbach.

Not exactly a Woodie (although undoubtedly using a wooden frame) but it sure looks like a TA14 to me. If you like it I'll include a high resolution version in the batch of photos for the woodie feature. Unfortunately, I didn't turn up any other Alvis Woodie photos, but loads of Austins and a few Standards, including a prototype Standard 10 woodie!!

Regards, Colin Peck, Woodie Car Club

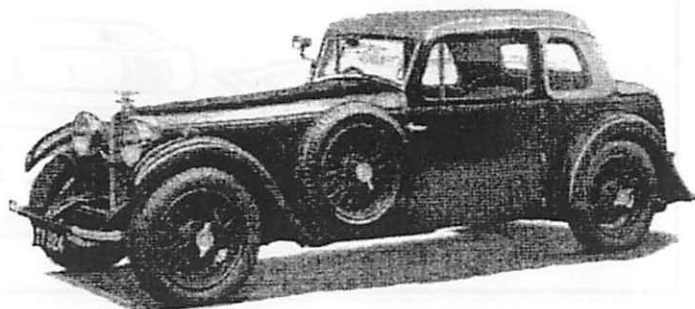


From Graeme Richardson, 11, Cedar House, Heatherhayes, Ipswich. IP2 9DD

Dear Julian,

This photocopy is from 'Duple' by Alan Townsin, published by Venture Publications Ltd in 1998. ISBN 1 898432 46 5 This book is thoroughly recommended to members who are interested in coachbuilding. Among the most interesting cars bodied by Duple was this Alvis Speed 20, dating from late 1932, registered YY 924. It was for Mr Lloyd Thompson

of the Holdsworth concern, major suppliers of moquette. It had a larger boot than then usual and provision was made for the removal of the rear seats to allow additional space for the carriage of luggage. It was painted black with green mudguards and wheels. Does the car still exist?



30 Ormond Park Road, Brookville, NY, 11545, USA

Dear Julian,

I read with great interest the article by Bob Dark in the March April 2006 Bulletin No. 498. If you refer back to the November / December 2000 Bulletin No. 466 you will see that the two unidentified Alvises are Tickford 24728 and Mulliner 24826. I had originally found these cars on Long Island, New York and contacted Wayne who came and bought them from the owner who was moving house and could not take them with him. I'm pleased to see that they finally made in back home to the UK. As a side note during a recent visit to Hong Kong I met Daniel Fischlin from Switzerland who was participating in an Asian road rally. I have enclosed a photo of his Speed 20SC Charlesworth.

Best regards, Edward Haleman



I also have copies of these e-mails, which refer to previous articles in the Bulletin:

From: Daniel Geoghegan

August 19, 2006

Subject: KENYA

Dear Julian,

I have been meaning to write regarding the article on Alvis in Africa, but Simon Fisher's timely letter in Bulletin 500 has provided a very suitable link between the original article and my note below.

Last year I came across a dismantled 12/50 that, so the story went, came to the UK from Kenya along with a dismantled Speed Twenty and a Bentley 3-4 1/2 litre, reflecting elements of the same story that Simon tells in his final paragraph. The advertisement mentioned a chassis, engine, gearbox, front axle (with steering arms welded to the beam, presumably to facilitate use as a trailer axle), all found in Kenya, and enough other pieces to make this a viable rebuild project. I went to see the collection of pieces, to find a remarkably good chassis absent of any pitting or corrosion, and what turned out to be an engine in very solid shape and still to original specification. Strangely, the teeth had been removed from the outside edge of the fly wheel, so it may have seen some service in running a sawmill or, perhaps, a water pump or similar.

I had been looking for a good two-seater vintage Alvis for a while and, having completed the purchase, decided that the ideal would be to have a polished aluminium beetleback with external exhaust. In full SD specification, it would be even better, with big port head and close ratio gears. As John Bate succinctly reminisces in the excerpt in Simon's letter, 'Pride of place, of course, must go to the beautiful 12/50 two seater sports... A picture in those days of sight and sound, especially aided by that impressive Alvis outside exhaust'.

A few weeks later, the Car Record arrived from Red Triangle and, stamped 5172, it appeared that the chassis was dispatched 17th May 1927, registered WK 1147, to the 'Crown Agent for Colonies', presumably for immediate export. It was hard to credit the commence and my good fortune, when it transpired that Car 10511 is actually a 12/50 SD, having been dispatched as a '2s Sports' by Carbodies (body 4793), 'Pol. Alum' with 'Outside Exhaust'. I now wonder if this was the car that John Bate recalls, albeit it left the UK unpainted and he recalls "if my memory serves me correctly, that Alvis was painted primrose and black".

The chassis came with engine number 6898, which is also intriguing, as it indicates that another 12/50 must have been in the vicinity at a similar time. The Car Record states that it belonged to Car 11344, chassis 6505, dispatched 1st March 1928 to 'J.R. Bell Esq., Ayrshire (for Uganda)'. This was a TG, registered 24 March 1928 as WK 4431, a 4 seater sports by Cross & Ellis (body 30098). 'Royal Blue, cellulose finish, wings - black'. I will forward a picture of the completed chassis.

Best Wishes Daniel

From: Simon Fisher

To: Daniel Geoghegan

August 22, 2006

Dear Daniel

Thank you for letting me know the fate of the Kenyan 12/50. I had known of its existence and that of the Speed 20 since about 1995, when they were languishing in a barn on a farm owned by Guy D'Olier on the shore of Lake Naivasha. Guy had about 15 pre-war cars at

that time and, whilst he always had a couple in driveable condition, restoration work was very slow. The star of his collection was the 3/4.5 Bentley of about 1928 that was scruffy but motored well, and he still has a vintage Hotchkiss. I recall the Speed 20 being fairly complete mechanically, but in pieces and with no bodywork. At that time I only saw the 12/50 engine, and was unaware that there was also a chassis. Guy mentioned, if my memory is correct, that it used to drive a water pump on the farm.

I wrote to Guy asking if he would sell me the Speed 20 parts, or offer me first refusal, but he replied saying they were not his and he was only storing them for a friend. I was therefore quite upset when I found out that he had sold them three or four years back to an acquaintance, Roger Tanner, in Nairobi together with the Bentley and a vintage Rolls-Royce (which featured quite prominently in the film 'Out of Africa'). When I met Guy later he apologised to me, saying that he had just wanted to get rid of everything in one go. Roger, unfortunately, is as much a trader as an enthusiast and quite quickly got all the cars and bits crated up and sent to England.

It certainly seems likely that your chassis is the primrose and black car referred to by John Bate.

Best wishes, Simon

Dear Julian

Just received the latest Alvis Bulletin, which as ever is a tribute to your editorial excellence.

I'm contacting you as being the current owner (since 1999) of DNC 754 mentioned in the letter by Wayne Brooks. I've been putting together information about its history and had been wanting to contact you eventually with a view to writing a piece about it, but pressure of work (retirement?-Pah!) had conspired against. Wayne's letter has been an obvious spur, and if I were to say that I would try to get the research finished and something written by the end of the year, would you in principle be prepared to publish it? (Dave Culshaw, George Butlin and others have been in touch over the years with helpful information; I now have in mind a fully detailed piece).

Incidentally, I believe that the car was owned not only by Alberto Morin but by Tom Wolfe the novelist, who appeared to own it at the time he wrote his book about the California car culture. The mind boggles to imagine him turning up in a black 1937 Alvis to meetings of protohippies driving psychedelic street machines! I'm researching this - my wife knows Tom slightly from way back. A current picture of the car is attached.

Best wishes, John Buckingham



This letter from Chris Storrar contains important information about the selection of Alvis models to be the 'Topic Cars' for International 2007.

Subject: AOC

To: rexh@btconnect.com

Dear Rex,

I was very saddened to hear from Steve Horne, our EA Chairman, the news about Julian Collins. Julian joined the Club at about the same time as Andrew and me — in the mid sixties. By coincidence, the office I used to have in Singapore was in Golden Mile Tower, the same tower building as Julian's, overlooking the sea in Beach Road, and I was always glad of Julian's cheery smiling welcome and interesting chat, not only on Alvis, but Malaysian Vintage Car Club, Spitfire Society, and others of his many interests, on my business trips out there. I visited him at his family home in East Mailing, Kent after International last year and spent a very happy few hours in his motoring library, of which he was very proud. He took the dustsheets off the Firefly Special and anticipated the joy of getting her back on the road again in the future. He was a lovely man, who did so much for us, and will be much missed.

My thanks to you for picking up the baton of The Bulletin, a much looked forward to part of life and an essential part of the 'glue' binding our Club together.

No sooner has the dust settled on the 2006 International, than thoughts turn to preparations for next year. As in the last two years, I will have the pleasure of organising the Display, this time with Derek Tourle. The EA Committee has still to announce the exact date and location.

The Display topic for 2007 will be 75 years of the Speed 20 and Firefly, so Derek and I hope to gather a good selection of all types, with a wide selection of coachwork. The Speed 20 and Firefly were very much landmark cars in Alvis history, particularly in styling, which deserves celebrating. Nick Walker's 'Alvis Speed Models in Detail' lists the prototype Speed 20, chassis 9184, as registered on 14 October 1931 and was referred to as a '20 Horsepower Sports Silver Eagle'. The first cars in the hands of the dealers and the name Speed 20 appeared at the beginning of 1932, with the Firefly following shortly after, so we can not let this anniversary pass by. My car is a Jan 1933 and as friends will know, I am besotted with it! A mention in the Bulletin would be welcome and members wanting to bring their Speed 20 can contact me on Chrisstorrar@aol.com or 01371 811849. Derek reminds me that the four cylinder cars are just as interesting and Firefly owners should contact him on Derektourle@hotmail.com or 01798 873320. It would be nice if Julian's Firefly made it, in his memory.

I still have my Programme for the 13th National (as it was then) Alvis Day at Crystal Palace on 19 May 1968, entitled Speed 20 Year. It is fascinating to think that the cars are now over double the age they were then. At that time, I was using one as my everyday transport — an SB Van den Plas saloon, now with Joe Marsden in New Zealand, and happily very well restored including original coachwork.

I attach a Photo taken on Wedding duty on Sat 26th August at Hedingham Castle, Suffolk, of Steve Horne with his Speed 20 SD Charlesworth DHC, and my SA Van den Plas saloon. What better way to travel.

Best Regards,

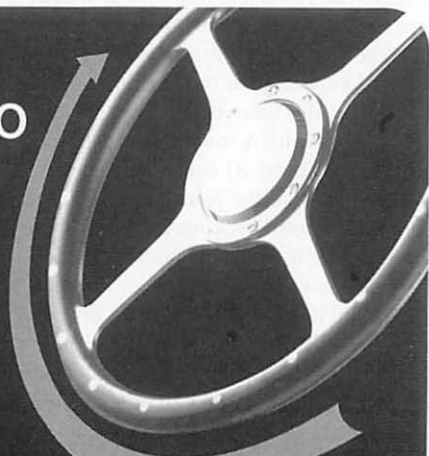
Chris Storrar



Steve Horne with his Speed 20 SD Charlesworth DHC and Chris Storrar's SA Van den Plas saloon.

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Reflections on a Wet Weekend

(Norfolk, 19-21 May 2006)

A lack of holiday entitlement meant that we could only book one day's holiday for the Alvis weekend; so with apologies to Richard Joyce we ducked out of the Friday Red Triangle event and made a late start from Ruislip and Harrow (to pick Jennie up from work) only to get caught up in the homeward bound traffic from London into East Anglia.

Around the Norwich Ring Road we caught up with John and Jenny Oliveira and nearly followed them to the Airport Freight Terminal. A mad scramble to our room, a quick wash, change of clothes and brush up before mounting the steps of the Routemaster which was to take us to a Yacht Club for dinner. The occupants of the top deck getting a resounding drumming from overhanging branches to which the Routemaster eventually succumbed and decanted its load to walk the last leg of the journey. A few pints of Wherry's local ale and a hearty meal made the evening pass quickly. In reminiscing old times with Frank Allwood, sadly now wheelchair bound, we didn't notice the restaurant had emptied and our concerns were that the Routemaster might leave without us. A long walk up the driveway in pitch black was occasionally aided by the powerful flash lamp of David Pearce. We heard that at least one person had tumbled into the ditch, fortunately unscathed except for their pride. Malcolm played bus conductor on the way back but wasn't allowed to collect any fares. The bus had a good turn of speed but anything over 45mph produced horrible noises from beneath like as if the propshaft was having a serious fight with the back axle. The purists bemoaned the Cummins engine.

Saturday morning and we were busing again, this time on a luxury coach to the heart of Norwich for a guided tour around this historic city. It wasn't long before we were dodging the rain showers and poking umbrellas up and down. Highlights of the walking tour were the plaques dedicated to Norfolk Trades on the wall of the City Hall: the magnificent churches including the one with the infamous Norwich spire: the Guildhall: the wall made out of cut flint and the colourful awnings of the Central Market. Our guide also pointed out many other interesting sites such as boundary markings, which would not have been spotted otherwise.

In the afternoon 'The Mistress' took us to Wroxham, the capital of the Norfolk Broads for a boat trip. Most of the party were happily seated on the open deck chatting away and playing 'King Canute' to the threatening black clouds about to dump their worst. Very soon a mass transfer to the lower internal deck confirmed the miserable conditions. On the outward journey, traversing the inner and outer decks at the whim of the weather, we had fun spotting all the wild life and their young, looking at all the different craft, waving to people (something us Brits are good at) and observing all the splendid houses, cottages and boat houses all with their own waterways for their boats. The return journey over the same stretch of water at 4 mph became a little tedious.

By the late afternoon and evening the rain had set in good and proper but this did not spoil Malcolm's enthusiasm to check over Malcolm Boote's 'new' TA 21 and go for a drive with him in the 'The Mistress'.

The essential evening gala meal with welcoming speeches, presentations to John and Nadine Fox from the Swiss contingent and general conviviality all went down extremely well.

Awake at 6.00 am on Sunday to see brilliant sunshine, sadly not to last, but it stayed dry long enough to enjoy Malcolm's 'Very Senior Moment' having a very pleasant drive through North Norfolk and along the North Norfolk coast to arrive at Holkham Hall! Where was everybody! Thankfully with Jennie's expert navigating skills we did eventually arrive at Houghton Hall and were greeted with concerns and worries from Jack Clover as judging of 'concours', of which Malcolm was part of the team, was well under way. Malcolm's job was to judge engines and chasses of the post war cars. Was this retribution for arriving late? At least Malcolm was given a 'prayer mat' to kneel on but this soon became as wet as the grass it was meant to protect him from. Was Malcolm the only one walking around with wet knees? Our first appraisal of all the cars concluded just as the heavens opened so a hasty retreat to the marquee gave Malcolm a chance to conduct some Council business and ponder the Speed 25 chassis. Judging results were being handed back to Jack and we had only concluded our first appraisal. So out into the wet we both went to allocate marks and return some very soggy score sheets. The blue Swiss Graber was a clear winner on this occasion.

Announcements were made and entries invited for the new 'Roly Simmonds' award for best-restored car over the last twelve months. Our Chairman and Malcolm had a very pleasant time checking out the entries and made a joint decision to present the trophy to Malcolm Boote for his 'new' TA21 saloon. A heart-warming moment for the TA21 Model Secretary. Malcolm took up the offer to drive Malcolm's car around the estate and was mightily impressed with his project. Everything taut, no rattles or shakes, positive and light steering, smooth engine performance and just as the car would have been straight out of the show room.

Duties over it was time to check out TA21s in the car park, the fantastic exhibits in the Red Triangle marquee and other fabulous cars dotted around. Tea and cakes also went down well.

All too soon it was time for prize giving and with yet more rain we made a squelchy exit from Houghton Hall and headed home to London.

A big 'thank you' to Steve Horne and his Team for a fabulous weekend in spite of the weather. One more to go for East Anglia! I am sure next year's event will be equally as enjoyable.

Member Michael Crawford of Wotton - under - Edge wrote to Julian, sending two CDs and some prints of photographs he took at Houghton Hall. (I have received the prints but not the CDs). I have added some of them after Malcolm and Jennie's two pictures. Michael said that he could not provide individual captions, but I have done my best to fill in the gaps, using the 2003 list of Members and their cars. Some might, of course, have changed hands since the date of the publication.

Thank you very much, Michael, for the photos. We all tend to have many which are unattributed, but it does not reduce the pleasure of owning photographs of some interesting vehicles!

I have not included photographs of cars which appeared in Issue No. 500.



Malcolm and Jennie Kindell's 'The Mistress' is drawn up for close comparison with Malcolm Botte's 'New' TA 21. The fronts do not look so different.....



but there are several points of difference in the rear ends!

'The Mistress' is CMM 828

Malcolm Botte's 'New' TA 21 is KWF 838.



The Red Triangle Sales pitch.



The Carlton Coachwork bodied 4.3 litre. Chassis No. 14858.

(Info: Dave Culshaw)



The 1966 Graber TF 21 coupé belonging to K.S.Cameron.



The 1957 Graber TC 108G coupé of N.M.Day.



The one-off Windover 4.3 litre saloon. Chassis No. 14804. (Info: Dave Culshaw)



*Rear quarter view of the 1958 Graber TC 108G dhc of R.W. Schwarz.
The registration is of St. Gallen in Switzerland.*



Elegant 1948 Green TA14 Woodie belonging to P.W.Holmes.



*In the Red Triangle tent was this 1935 Speed 20 SC Charlesworth dhc.
It belongs to J.E.M.Lee.*



SECTION NOTES

– Alvis Activities From
Around The World –

MIDLAND SECTION

HOWARD ARMS, ILMINGTON, MEETING, 25 JULY



*One of the tables at the Howard Arms, with (L to R) Wendy Hardiman (guest),
Hugh Gibson, Martin Boothman, Rachel Pryke, Jenny Pulham,
Roger Pulham, Joseph Moore.
(photo by Genny Walker)*



A crush of cars and people in the Howard Arms car park. (photo by Genny Walker)

The July noggin and natter at the Howard Arms in Ilmington has traditionally taken the form of 'Supper in the Garden'. Behind this lies the theory that there should be summertime weather to provide a balmy atmosphere, but in our fickle climate that hasn't always been the case - there has been more than one instance of a sudden rush for shelter halfway through the evening.

This year of all years, however, the hot July came to our aid, and a record number of diners - 47 - enjoyed a truly Mediterranean ambience. The car park was filled to overflowing with Alvis cars from far and wide - 12/50's, Silver Eagles, Firebirds, Speed 20's and 25's, TA 14's and 21's, Grey Ladies, a TD and a TF21. Terry McGrath's Amilcar was deemed an honorary Alvis for the evening, as it was standing in for his 12/50 which was suffering from a fit of the vapours. The long-distance award was judged a tie between Peter Knapp and company from Reading and Ken and Pat Cameron from Ludlow.

The eating and drinking in the garden alternated with tyre-kicking in the car park, and both activities lasted well into the dusk. May the last Tuesday in July bring many more such memorable evenings.

Nick Walker

EAST ANGLIAN SECTION

VISIT TO HELMINGHAM HALL ON 18 JUNE

A warm, sunny morning saw a rumble of Alvises heading towards the picturesque, red brick Helmingham Hall, closely surrounded by a moat, complete with drawbridge, and many acres of formal, and informal gardens, also with a moat. Coffee and cakes were the first priority, of course, then there was a choice.

With the permission of Lord Tollemache, we were able to try each others cars on the extensive tarmac driveways, a circuit of about a mile, I guess. In fact, fewer people took up this opportunity than expected; I thought the problem would be keeping cars far enough apart. However, some did have a go, and yours truly swapped drives with five cars. Speed 20, 12/70, Crested Eagle, 12/50, and Firefly, for my 'Speed 21'. All were fun as expected, but the biggest surprise was Albert Markhams' Crested Eagle mobile drawing room, I expected such a large car to be sluggish and hard work to get round corners. Not so, it was a responsive and tidy drive, no wonder Albert drives it such distances. I'm afraid I made a total mess of the gears in Maurice Gallahers' 12/50 though, even after his demonstration. Admittedly I have not driven my crash box Firefly lately, some practice will be needed before it's 75th next year?

Prize for the day, though, must go to Tim Scorer's TA14 'Woody'. Apparently Lady Tollemache was heard to remark that Tim's estate would go very nicely with her estate!

Alternatively, all those who did not wish to see people mishandling others cars, could enjoy the colourful gardens, well not quite all. Sue had been "volunteered" to act as a marshal at the exit, Alvis ladies have a hard life. After a good value lunch, everyone took to the gardens at some time, by now the hoi-polloi had arrived so we no longer had exclusive use of the roadways. Another good day out.

Jack Clover



Some of the cars with Helmingham Hall behind

SILVERSTONE CLASSIC EVENT

28 - 30 July 2006



The Sunday Alvis contingent at the Silverstone Classic event.

This three-day event at the end of July is now in its second year, and still aspires to take over from the former 'Coys Silverstone' event which died, to the regret of many, a few years ago. The formula is very similar - car club displays and trade stands support a three-day programme of vintage, classic and historic racing. The difference these days is that each club's display area is more of an upmarket car park, in a privileged location. Another difference is that we fill our allotted area on a first-come, first-served principle, according to how far in advance a member is prepared to buy his or her half-price tickets.

There are still teething problems to be overcome, and the Council will be deciding in due course whether we should continue our support. However the management seem to be doing a professional job in most respects, and at least they actively seek the clubs' opinions - an accusation never levelled against those behind the Coys event. Equally important, though, is whether AOC (and Register) members want to give their support: six or seven cars each day was enough to save us from embarrassment, but only just.

Nick Walker