

The Hants & Berks Motor Club

The first sixty years

1946-2006



Foreword by Bill Boddy MBE

Dedicated to the memory of the men and women who had
the vision, determination and organising genius to set
this Club on its long and successful road

Written and photographed mainly by members or past members of the Hants & Berks Motor Club

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Cover pictures (clockwise from top)
2CV Cross, Blackbushe, 602cc class, mid '70s
California-in-England Driving Tests, Joan Johns, Austin A90 Atlantic, 1952
Mobil Economy Run, Harrogate, Peter May, Jaguar MkII, 1967
Woodley Classic, Reading, Malcolm & Carole Buckler, Buckler, 2005
Great Auclum Hill Climb, Michael Burn, Frazer Nash Le Mans, 1954
Eight Clubs, Silverstone, Beatrice Shilling's Rapier leads a 3-litre Lagonda, 1956
Map based on Bartholemew edition of about 1950

Cover design by Robin Birchall

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Foreword

It was nice to be asked to write the Foreword to this welcome story of the Hants & Berks Motor Club. It gives me the opportunity of thanking its members. Amusing, too, because I was never a member although I spent much of World War Two working at the RAE in Farnborough and later lived in Fleet. In those days I was involved with Holland Birkett, the inimitable “Holly”, whose lifestyle defies description. It was in this indirect way that I became engaged in the events of your Club, of which you generously made me an Honorary Member after years of my inadvertent absence.

I remember some very ambitious events that Holly devised, mostly nocturnal. How did he get sartorially-correct Eric Giles, brother of Col. G.M. Giles, one of the founders of the Bugatti Owners’ Club, to a “treacle factory” in some subterranean location in the middle of the night and join the industrious treacle-stirrers, who were of course the marshals who had to be found before competitors’ route cards were signed?

I think that in one event, in daylight this time, you had to declare the exact time that a boat (on the Thames was it?) passed a certain mark – but how was this arranged and who was the boat’s captain? Then there was a night control when luckless navigators had to agree to take an aeroplane flight if they wanted their cards marked – something to do with a mock-up machine and a tow car I think. Or how about searching for a marshal and ignoring a couple in the back of a parked saloon car who were obviously in an advanced state of snoggery – but who were, of course, two well-known H&B members there to mark your cards!

I recall how Jenks (also a non-member) and I, at Farnborough together during the war, used to grab any rides available in that petrol-rationed age, in Joe Lowrey’s Morgan 3-wheeler and HRG or in Charles Bulmer’s Morgan and Frazer Nash, while my Chummy Austin 7, Gwynne 8, 12/50 Alvis and Lancia Lambda were exercised on “official” journeys.

These were not the only enjoyments organised by the evolving H&B. Indeed, it was soon to become remarkable for its ingenious competitions and its keen membership, as evident today as then, with supporters not necessarily living in the two counties that its name proclaims. The Club’s lively magazine “*Sidelights*” helps to keep alive the enthusiasm for all things motoring, as does Joe’s idea of revisiting for lunch various hotels and taverns which H&B has used in the past. Living far away in Powys - “shireless”, although once it was Radnorshire - we came to one of these lunches after your visit to the Morgan factory in Malvern. Thanks for your hospitality.

I am now signing-off to enjoy the accompanying history.

Bill Boddy MBE

May 2005

Introduction

To Sheilah Higginson must go the credit for recognising some three years ago that, with the approach of the Club's Diamond Jubilee, efforts should be made to pull together the history of the early years of the Club. This might be the last opportunity to address it using first hand material from those who still remember the early days. It is not Sheilah's way just to sit back and hope this would happen. She set to, accumulating early copies of the Club's magazines, trawled through committee meeting minutes and event regulations and other sources to assemble a comprehensive and organised record of the Club's birth and progress through the decades.

It seemed to me that such dedication deserved a wider audience and I proposed that a book should be written capturing factual account, reminiscence and those very valuable anecdotes, all in a readable form. We put together a wish list of topics, together with the names of possible contributors, letters of invitation were sent out and this book is the result. It has been written entirely by the Club members who contributed to making it one of the most innovative motor clubs of its era. We were extremely fortunate still to have three of our founder members, Charles Bulmer, Joe Lowrey and Bob Newton and even more so that the former two spent a large part of their careers in motoring journalism and were well able to record lucidly their recollections of those very important early years. John Higginson too, stimulated by Sheilah's records, was able to recall in remarkable detail much that happened in the early decades of the Club's events. Sadly, John lost his battle with cancer only a couple of weeks after this book was first published.

Another founder member, veterinary surgeon the late Holly Birkett, was one of the most influential people associated with motorsport in immediate post war Britain and his innovative ideas have stood the test of time to form the foundations of much of today's club based motor sport. Such people were key to the Club's early ability to develop new concepts, a talent which was highlighted by the late A F Rivers Fletcher who described the H&B in one of his books as '*a very special club run by knowledgeable enthusiasts*'.

We are most grateful to Bill Boddy MBE, long term editor of *Motor Sport* and Honorary H&B member, for agreeing to write the Foreword. In the Club's early post war years both he and Denis Jenkinson (Jenks) were significant contributors to its success. At that time both were working at the Royal Aircraft Establishment in Farnborough, from where so many of the Club's members came in those early days.

Finally, a word of thanks to Robin Birchall, our current *Sidelights* editor, who was persuaded to take on the editing of this volume. His task of producing a coherent and readable narrative from the varied and often disparate contributions would, however, have been immensely more difficult, even impossible within the planned timescale, without the willing help and guidance of Charles Bulmer. To Charles alone goes the credit of welding together the complex story of the Economy Runs but he has also spent many hours acting as sub-editor for the remaining chapters. Thank you Charles.

We are aware that there will be many who read this book and protest "But what about so-and-so ..?" Unfortunately it has just not been possible to cover more than the important or unusual threads. Nevertheless I hope that the accounts which follow will bring back many memories for those who have been associated with this great Club and provide an absorbing insight for others into the antecedents and traditions of the Hants & Berks Motor Club.

Bill Bonney

Honorary Club Secretary

February 2006

Founding Fathers

How the Club started and how Hants met Berks

Charles Bulmer

This is my recollection of how and why H&B came to exist – it has to be a personal account because there are very few of us left to share their memories of what happened 60 years ago. For me it started in my final year at university where the future pattern of my motoring life was about to be determined by none other than CP Snow. He was then the special wartime Civil Service Commissioner whose job it was to interview all new scientific and technical graduates and direct them into the forces or into research, taking into account the results of their finals and where they were most needed at this stage of the war.

So, on January 1, 1944, I was told to present myself at the Engine Department of the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) Farnborough to that famous negative g carburettor expert (and Brooklands Gold Star motorcyclist), Beatrice Shilling. She was actually Mrs George Naylor and both she and George were to become H&B members later. At lunchtime I went to the RAE canteen and found myself standing in a queue immediately behind a very small man with a very powerful voice who was saying that the only car that any right-minded person could possibly have was a Frazer Nash. I thought this was a bit dogmatic and said so. He was, of course, a clean-shaven and, at that time far from famous, early prototype of Denis Jenkinson (Jenks) who had arrived there about two years earlier from the Regent Street Polytechnic, in company with Bob Newton who was now also working for Miss Shilling.

In the course of the first few days I met Philip Bateman and Tom Bowling (both of whom I already knew slightly from university), Bill Arklay, who also worked for Miss Shilling and Joe Lowrey, a member of the engine flight test section, who was in the unbelievably enviable position of owning an HRG, bought just before the war, and being allowed petrol to exercise it occasionally on journeys of national importance, some as far away as Cornwall.

Anybody who has never experienced it can have little idea of just how intense the pressure of motoring enthusiasm can become amongst a group of young engineers and scientists after five years of total deprivation. Very soon we started to meet periodically at the Ship Inn, Farnborough, conveniently opposite the Farnborough Grange Hostel where some of us were billeted from time to time in considerable squalor. Most of us were motorcyclists either by inclination or because we were not then old and rich enough to have graduated to anything more expensive.

Most people attended these evenings on foot or bicycle except, of course, Jenks who had somehow become a Home Guard dispatch rider with a khaki 16H Norton, a khaki uniform and mysterious duties that took him past the Ship at appropriate times. Also there was Norman Sharp who lived near Woking and had an official petrol ration for commuting to work on two wheels; on a quiet night we could audibly track his unsilenced two-stroke Scott most of the way home from the pub. Bill Arklay was another Scott enthusiast and so was Arthur Fogg who, I believe, is now Chairman of the Scott Owners Club.

Jack Ballett, from RAE Materials Department, was at this time primarily interested in motorcycle trials riding which he had started before the war. There were many others but not all of this Ship group became significant in H&B history because some, when they were released from RAE after VJ day, returned to the North or other distant places whence they came.

For me the next thread in this story was about to unravel. I must have gained the rigorous Jenkinson seal of approval because he suddenly announced, one day in summer 1944, that he was taking me to see his friend Holland Birkett, the local vet at Fleet. So we set off on our bicycles by the direct route across Fleet Pond, which had been drained to confuse enemy

navigators, arriving at 3 Pondtail Road at a serendipitous moment. Holly, a pre-war founder member of the 750 Motor Club, had been passing through a period of emotional stress following the premature death of his first wife which had caused him, Jenks explained, to diversify from Austin 7s into Bugattis as well. I didn't entirely follow this psychological insight and I suspected the change was also connected with the subsequent arrival of Joan Passini (later Joan Birkett) as his housekeeper. Before the war she had been married to John Passini who ran the famous garage at the Phoenix in Hartley Wintney whilst Tim and Fee Carson ran the pub. Fee and Joan were sisters and after the war Tim became the very successful and long serving Secretary of the VSCC. You can see how rapidly the network was extending.

Returning to 1944, I think that Joan had brought with her a large dowry of Bugatti components, or the knowledge of where to find them, and they were now housed in the dog kennels and securely guarded by displaced and disgruntled Alsatians. However, the Bugatti we found Holly working on that day had a quite different provenance; it was a Type 46 with a crude pick-up body which had done distinguished wartime service as a Home Guard roadblock until it was demobbed and Holly bought it from

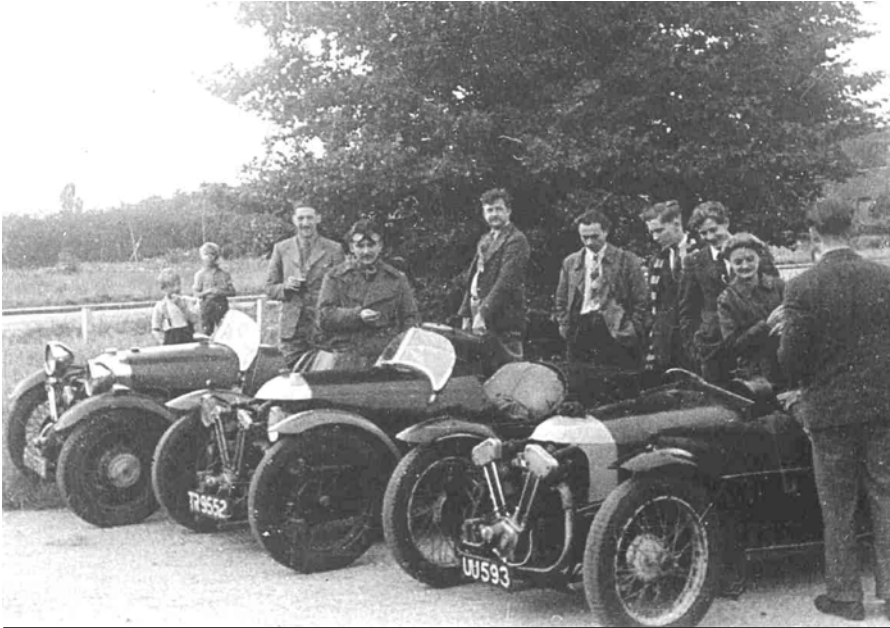
a car breaker for a fiver or so. Now, fully fuelled with surplus petrol from a local Canadian Army unit (it was delivered in 50 gallon drums), he was trying to start it for the first time in many years when a kindly Providence suddenly provided him with Jenks and me.

"We'll all push," he said, "then I'll jump in and knock it into gear - if it fires I can't stop because the clutch has seized - you'll just have to try and jump in the back." It did fire and we were off, 5 litres of straight 8 Bugatti engine at full throttle propelling a chassis with a very light body, unregistered, untaxed, uninsured, practically brakeless, totally illegal and extremely exhilarating. After a few miles Holly decided that we must show it to "the Bod" who lived only a few yards from Pondtail in Wood Lane and whose day job at that time was writing aircraft handbooks for the Ministry of Aircraft Production when he wasn't raising national morale by almost single-handedly keeping *Motor Sport* alive throughout the war. So that was my introduction to Bill Boddy, who later gave the Club so much valuable publicity and support, and to the stimulating and wildly unpredictable Pondtail world which, in the next few years, was to become a focus of post-war motoring life in the south of England and a major factor in H&B development.



The gathering at the Phoenix. L to R Bert Fountain, David Hull, Gerry Browne, Barney Cook, Philip Bateman, Anon, Anon, Anon, Arthur Fogg, Barney Cook's girlfriend, Bob Newton, Charles Bulmer, Nellie Arklay, Bill Arklay, Denis Jenkinson.

Most of us were working on some vehicle while we waited for petrol to reappear. At weekends and holidays I was doing a major body-off overhaul of a Riley Gamecock at my parents' home in Cheshunt and Bob Newton was doing the same with a Singer Le Mans in Barnet. My search for spares and tuning parts brought me into contact with Davidge Pitts, a well-known Riley



Another view at the Phoenix,
Morgans are those of Bateman, Lowrey and Newton/Bulmer.
Beyond lies the verge on which Jenks's ashes lie scattered

afield – we had got as far as the Crown and Cushion at Minley on bicycles but with petrol we could reach the Phoenix at Hartley Wintney, revered as the pre-war spiritual home of the Vintage Sports Car Club. And that is how we all came to be photographed there one day in June 1945 with three Morgans and numerous motorcycles.

What this doesn't explain is the presence, on the left hand side of the picture, of Bert Fountain and Gerry Browne. It appeared that they were out and about on vital wartime business

guru who lived in Hartley Wintney.

But when the announcement finally came that a basic ration would be restored in June 1945, for motorcycles and non-reversible tricycles only, neither of us was ready. Bob and I made haste to the Station Hotel in Farnborough behind which was a row of lock-ups, two of which Jenks had filled to the roof with bits of motorcycles, cars and three-wheelers. He unhooked a bare Morgan chassis from the wall, found some suspension parts, wheels and brakes and rummaged under a vast pile in search of an ohv water-cooled V twin JAP engine. That lot, he claimed, constituted an extremely fast 1929 low chassis Super Sports Morgan with competition ancestry – £25, buyer assembles.

It was certainly terrifyingly fast when we eventually got it to go, a process greatly aided by a huge and very knowledgeable Army Sergeant who materialised mysteriously on a motorcycle and sidecar at critical moments when we got stuck. He explained that, because a V twin had unequal firing intervals, it was essential to time the ignition on the correct cylinder. We hadn't thought of that, being used only to singles and fours.

Meanwhile, Joe Lowrey and Philip Bateman had bought more civilised ready made Morgans and very soon the Ship Inn group decided that we could now venture further

on behalf of their employers, the signalling department of the GWR in Reading, and had unexpectedly found this hallowed pub yard full of interesting machinery. Hiding their car discreetly round the back, they joined us. That was how Hants was first linked to Berks and the second link followed shortly.

Most of the Farnborough contingent flowed continually through the premises of Jim Petty in Cove, an amiable, skilled (and very cheap) welder and paint sprayer who was also the father of Ray Petty who worked for the famous Norton tuning specialist Francis Beart. A few years later Ray was to become the foremost Norton tuner for the 500 cc racing car movement.



The Jenkinson lock up whence came the
Newton/Bulmer Morgan

Jim was a friend of Eversley *garagiste* Harry Hopkinson (father of Molly Tapp), who was building a Ford Ten special, and they used to enjoy a pint together at the nearby New Inn (now the Tally Ho) at the end of a hard day's welding. When, in August 1945, a basic petrol ration was restored for four wheelers, as well as two, Harry thought it would be a good idea to form a local motor club. Jim said he would float the idea among his Farnborough customers and Harry knew a few people in the Reading direction who might be interested because their own Reading-based Sporting Owner Drivers Club (SODC) was showing no sign of post-war revival.

So it was that on a very cold night in December 1945 Jenks and I drove to the New Inn in his TT Replica Frazer Nash to talk this over with Harry. We were not wildly enthusiastic – we had very little spare time, very little petrol and the 750 MC, the VSCC and the Bugatti OC were beginning to revive even if few others were. However, we agreed that we would invite everybody we knew who might be interested to a further meeting at the New Inn on 10 January, 1946 to see if there was much support.

About 20 to 30 people attended and by closing time it had become clear that there was support but nothing else had actually been decided. So yet another meeting was arranged on 25 January when Harry Hopkinson became Chairman and Philip Hayden and his fiancée Sheila Benke, from Hartley Wintney, volunteered as joint Secretariat. Bert Fountain, who had a Le Mans Aston Martin, was thought to be the only person rich enough to be trusted with money so he was made Treasurer, a position that he was to retain for very many years. There was no Committee because the intention was to hold open meetings once a fortnight at which everyone could express their opinions. Since most of the members came from Farnborough, Reading or Hartley Wintney and the New Inn was right on the Hants/Berks border the club name needed little thought.

The biggest argument was about the annual subscription. A figure of seven and sixpence was finally agreed by everybody but Jenks who considered this quite outrageous – it would buy, he pointed out, a month's ration of petrol. So he never joined the Club even though, for the rest

of his life, he behaved like a member and attended any of our events which interested him.

His opposition was led by Bert Fountain who thought this was much too cheap and would let in the *hoi polloi* – like Jenks, for example. Elegant, distinguished and immaculate in appearance, Bert always had an expensive car, a different one almost every time you saw him, to which the same adjectives applied as indeed they did to his constant companion of early years, Joan Cooper. Joan worked in a secretarial capacity at the GWR and not only had access to, but was able and willing to use, all the ultra-modern communication tools of the day like typewriters, duplicating machines and addressographs which were a mystery to the rest of us. She rapidly became producer and circulator of the Bulletin, of regulations for events and of results sheets. She became invaluable to the Committee in general and Bert in particular as Treasurer; later on she also designed the club badge.

Because of his initials (AHS) Holly couldn't resist introducing Bert very solemnly as Albert Herbert Sherbert Fountain which didn't please him. He looked the sort of person who would never in any circumstances touch a spanner whereas, in fact, he was a brilliant practical engineer who spent much of his spare time modifying his cars, remanufacturing ferrous bits in polished light alloy, making new steering wheels and generally perfecting them, after which he would lose interest and start on the next car. He seldom wore working clothes, remaining mysteriously immune to dust, dirt and grease. I remember one occasion, many years later after he was married, when he returned home from an upstage social function in evening dress and, without bothering to change, finished wallpapering the room he had started earlier in the day.

That meeting on 25 January, 1946 marked the end of the beginning – the Club was now launched with a rather tentative Committee of volunteers and a bank balance of about £10. The most creative members and those with organising ideas, energy and ability were still standing on the sidelines wondering if the Club was necessary at all. This was very soon to change.

Charles Bulmer

The early club years

Seven years of remarkable growth after a faltering start

Charles Bulmer

There may be an impression that we started H&B because so little was happening in the motoring world at the beginning of 1946 that we all needed something to do. In fact many of us were extremely busy with major overhauls or building specials for trials or racing. There had already been some large gatherings like the Cockfosters Sprint in July 1945, it was known that there would be full programmes at both Prescott and Shelsley in 1946, the Bristol MC was active and the VSCC and the 750 MC were coming to life. The VSCC held a trial at Marlow on 3 February, 1946, was planning a quarter mile sprint at Elstree on Easter Monday and would be involved in the first post-war circuit race meeting organised by the CUAC at Gransden Lodge airfield on 15 June.

So things were happening but they were not local and perhaps they were too formal for young people who were thinking of competing for the first time and who didn't have specialised cars. Harry Hopkinson wanted to find a nearby sprint venue whereas Joe Lowrey and Jack Ballett were fascinated by maps and spent their spare time exploring the local countryside on motorcycles. In a remarkably short time these two came up with a route, regulations, an RAC permit and enough marshals to run the first H&B event on 9 March, the Blackwater trial, starting from the Ely Hotel near Blackbushe. It was a great success and earned a half page report in *Motor Sport* which described it as the first post-war reliability trial to be held south of the Thames. Joe Lowrey will say more about this and subsequent Blackwaters.

Again it was Joe and Jack Ballett who plotted the

route for the second event, a treasure hunt starting at the New Inn on 27 April of which we remember very little. Strangely enough a copy of the route card turned up recently but nobody has yet been able to follow it. I recall retiring after the first mile with a mechanical problem and limping straight to the finish without visiting any controls. This turned out to be a brilliant strategy because we scored nothing whereas most people accumulated large negative marks due to heavy penalties.

But it wasn't only the marking system that was peculiar. Accusations of cheating were made afterwards (cheating hadn't yet been approved for H&B events) and for this and other reasons there was so much discontent that an Extraordinary Meeting was demanded and was held at the New Inn on 10 May. Of the previous officers only Bert Fountain survived as Treasurer, the older and more experienced Davidge Pitts became Chairman, I was elected Secretary and, for the first time, we had a Committee comprising Jack Ballett, Harry Hopkinson, Joe Lowrey and Sheila Benke (who was to retire within three months because of her impending marriage).



Winter 1945/46. Any excuse to go motoring - inspecting the prewar sprint course at Lewes. Holly Birkett's newly finished trials car, Jenks's Frazer Nash and Bob Newton's Singer. Arthur Fogg standing in start line position.



New Inn, March 1950. R to L, Colin Chapman, Hazle Logsdon (m. Ron Willis), Catherine Luff (m. Philip Bateman), Heather Logsdon (m. Charles Bulmer), Hazel Williams (m. Colin Chapman). The car is Colin's first Austin 7 special built from surplus stock after the collapse of his second hand car business

Both Harry Hopkinson and Jenks picked up the gymkhana baton in later years with driving tests at California-in-England, barrack squares in Cove and at Blackbushe.

Jack seemed to play a vital role in all these early events. He wasn't a particularly enthusiastic or knowledgeable motorist but he had a great flair for detailed organisation and a good-tempered determination and ability to get things done properly without upsetting the people who were supposed to be doing them.

Holly Birkett was a surprising absentee from this list because at this time his allegiance was still primarily to the 750 MC which he, together with Arthur Mallock and Bill Boddy, had been trying to galvanise into post-war activity during the first half of 1945. At the end of July he was elected its Club Captain and Bulletin Editor. He was also developing his 750 trials special - a very softly suspended cross country device with swing axle front suspension - maintaining the 2 litre Type 30 Bugatti which was his normal transport, building a Type 38 to replace it, preparing the 5 litre Type 46, mentioned in the previous chapter, to race at Gransden Lodge and starting to build his 3 litre Type 44. On top of all this he was organising the first 750 MC Aldershot Trial for 7 April, 1946, an event which started at The Foresters in Church Crookham and which always drew so heavily on H&B for entries, marshals and spectators that we took it over completely in 1949. This was enough even for him.

The first event after the EGM was a Gymkhana on 2 June, 1946, organised by Jack Ballett on golf club land, soon to be absorbed by the MoD, to the south of the Farnborough-to-Fleet railway line and finishing at the Swan in Hartley Row.

Meanwhile Harry Hopkinson was persuading the owner of West Court, a large estate just up the road from his Eversley garage, to allow us to use its drive (or rather linked front and back drives) for our first sprint, a task complicated by the fact that the property was sold in the middle of these negotiations and the new owner had to be persuaded to honour the deal. It wasn't ideal because the finishing straight of the quarter-mile course emerged on to the A327 and the RAC wisely demanded a large tree trunk across it, 80



1952 Driving Tests at California-in-England
Gordon Madgwick, Austin Ten

yards from the end, to stop those whose enthusiasm might outrun their brakes.

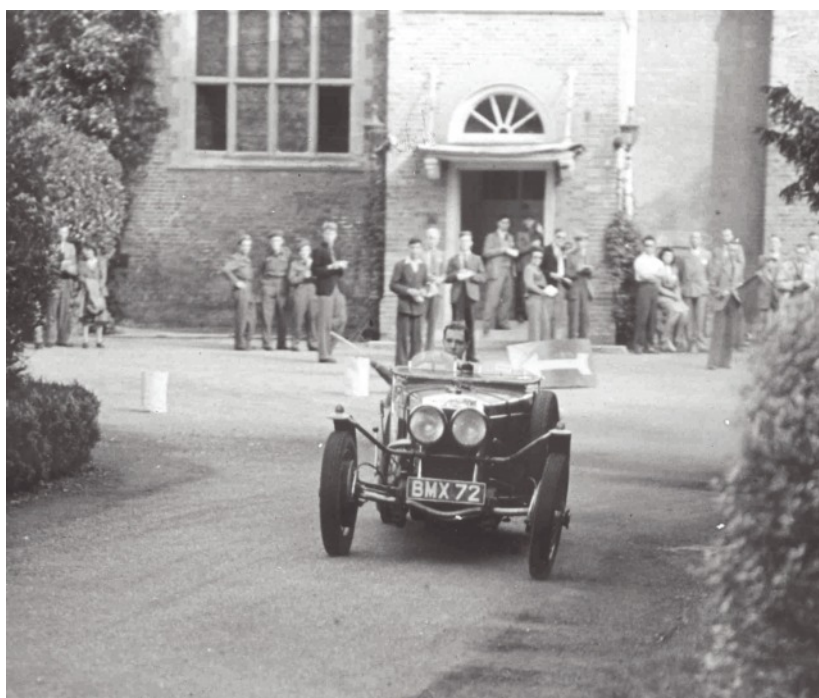
The energetic Jack Ballett became Secretary of the Meeting, Davidge Pitts, who had some pre-war competition experience, Clerk of the Course and a large number of us (membership was now approaching 100) were involved in the preparations, of which the most difficult and potentially expensive part was devising a timing system – you couldn't see the finish from the start so simple flag-waving was out. Philip Bateman "borrowed" a very expensive and highly accurate electrically triggered Venner time clock from its Farnborough laboratory and somebody else knocked up a simple starting shoe with its contacts protected by a length of red inner tube.

But how were we to know when the cars crossed the finish? This turned out to be a simple everyday problem for railway signalling folk and Bert and Gerry Browne (both of whom were also competing) turned up during preparation with miles of electrical cable and a rather vicious spring-loaded switch which was held open by a length of cotton stretched across the finishing line. So, for the price of a reel of cotton – which we could just afford – we had an accurate and quite sophisticated system which, with a few improvements, was later used for several years at Great Auclum until Ray Kingdon built an even better electronic device.

West Court, on 15 September 1946, was a most successful event, as *Motor Sport* said in its two-page report, and received a glowing review from Sir Algernon Guinness, the RAC Steward, which was critical to our future since we were still a new and totally unknown club (Sir Algernon later became a Vice-President). The size and quality of the field was astonishing bearing in mind that it was open only to H&B and the invited VSCC – the 86 entrants included people like Oscar Moore, Sidney Allard, Ken Wharton, Jack Fairman and Roy Salvadori (who made FTD), bringing with them cars up to ERA and Alta grade. We didn't appreciate the significance of this at the time but Eric Brandon and John Cooper brought the very first Cooper 500 and finished first and second in the 1100 cc racing class, ahead of Bert Fountain in his supercharged Q Type MG. Unfortunately the new owner was going to convert West Court into a country club so we couldn't use it again.

All the events so far had followed traditional patterns but something entirely different was about to happen and it was Holly's brainchild. His Austin 7 trials special was also his veterinary practice car and, when visiting some remote house or farm, it was his custom to sling his bag in the passenger seat, load Rex, his large Alsatian, into the stern sheets of the rudimentary open body and examine what in those days was OS Sheet 169. He would then set sail by the most direct route, across fields, hedges and ditches. Rex was not only a skilled, athletic passenger but could also round up any escaping patients on arrival or, with smaller animals, subdue them with a stern look as effective as an anaesthetic.

Thus Holly became familiar with many strange topographical or historical features that few motorists had ever seen before and began to conceive the idea of an event with no fixed route but with fixed points that could only be found (or approached) by skilled reading of an Ordnance Survey map. This may not sound unusual now, but very few people were then familiar with such maps or knew what six-figure references were and whether you should put



1946 The West Court Sprint David Greig in his Frazer Nash

Eastings before Northings or vice versa. Holly wrote his own slightly unusual press release and this is how it appeared in *Motor Sport* for December 1946:

"Knowe ye, alle Charioteerf, ye Automobile Clubbe of Countief of Hampfhire and Berkfhire, will, upon the nichte of January 4th, hold a mighty Trial or Tribulatioun, the lyke of never by manne beholden. By invitatioun, ye humble memberf of ye Vintage Sportef Carre Clubbe, ye DCCL Motore Clubbe, ye Motore Clubbe of Southfea, and even ye Sporting Owner-Charioteerf Clubbe may pitt themselves agaynst ye High-born.

The route of ye Tribulatioun will be longe, yea and arduous, to be found only by much skille in the ufe of ye charts of Hif Magefty'f Surveyorf of Ordnance. Withall, ye Sectiounf will be paffable to any Gentilman'f Carriage with but a reaonable clearance from ye Earthe. Ye checke pointf will be situate in diverf strange and eerie placef; ye caftle of King Johnn, may ye Lord preserve hif Soul, ye Railwaye Statioun, vifited by no mortal traine these twenty yearf, ye Roman bastioun and many another spot on blajted heath and in witch's ride.

Yet, ere the crackynge of ye Dawn will be held a great Feaft with much frying of Saufragef and drinkynge of Tea befide ye Casket of Meade upon ye House.

Thofe who would motore away into ye Nichte, then, to teft their courage and skille in this great Tribulatioun, may send documentf to Squire Birkett, Bridge of Pondtail, in the Toun of Fleet, set in ye county of Hampfhire. Praife ye Lord."

There were 46 entries including many well-known rally and racing drivers like Ken Wharton and Eric Brandon (who won) and, as was anticipated with an event so novel, the



Holland Birkett's vet's transport doing what it was designed for - mud-plugging. Jenks, with nascent beard, plays pillion

confusion was immense lasting right through the night and well into the following morning. Many attempted extraordinary routes and got bogged-down in muddy lanes or chose, for reasons unknown, to approach points like the disused Herriard railway station along its disused railway line instead of by the perfectly normal public road alongside it. The theatrical presentation of the points contributed greatly to what became a cult event that was widely copied. In future years it was to become so popular that competitors had to qualify to enter and it was re-branded as the Experts Night Trial.

Some credit for this must go to Michael Burn who had now taken up residence at Pondtail Road and was providing ideas as well as organising the veterinary accounts (someone had to). Michael was driven by the ambition to retire at 40 (which he did) so he had a lot to fit into a short period. At this time he was working on the Festival of Britain organisation but later, after a spell in Rhodesia, he became Sales Manager for Porsche at AFN, then Sales Director of SAAB (GB) and also a successful competition driver, at first with Bill Arklay's Frazer Nash and later with the RGS Atalanta-Jaguar.

So, at the end of the first 12 months of the Club's activities, it had grown to a membership of about 150, had elected an organising committee, mastered the arcane RAC Competition Regulations, run a trial, a treasure hunt, a gymkhana, an important sprint and a trend-

setting night navigation event as well as dealing with all the less glamorous tasks of issuing bulletins, reports and minutes, starting a bank account and beginning work on the Club rules and badge.

The first proper AGM was held at the New Inn on 28 February, 1947. In addition to those already serving, Holly Birkett became Press Secretary, Joan Cooper Social Secretary and the committee was enlarged by the addition of Jimmy Arklay, Gerry Browne and Derek Buckler, a friend of Harry's who was then busy building the prototype Buckler at his engineering works in Caversham.

Our problem now was how to replace West Court and Harry Hopkinson suggested that we might try for Great Auclum which had twice been used for sprints just before the war. This was the private estate of Neil Gardiner, a Director of the Huntley and Palmer Companies, who had competed before the war at Brooklands. He was so enamoured of this experience that he had his drive built with banked corners on which he could and did terrify his guests. It turned out that he was willing to lend us this drive and his adjoining fields, for paddock, car parking and spectator accommodation, on certain conditions.

If it were to be inspected now by the relevant safety authorities I think they would be horrified but in 1947 the RAC was more tolerant. It was Neil Gardiner who insisted that his trees, which lined the twisty course, should be protected



The downhill start at Great Auclum. Malcolm Chamberlain with the West Court hockey stick timing trigger. RRC Palmer - FN

The Club Badge

When H&B was founded, various people felt that a proper motor club needed a proper badge. The natural thing for a club founded right beside the County boundary at Eversley seemed to be to display the heraldic emblems of the two counties. It was, I think, the late Bert Fountain, our Treasurer for many years, who knew a badge maker in Reading and a few car-sized prototypes in black and brass were duly engraved.

There are ancient legal rights to coats of arms, so their owners were duly approached. Alas, whilst one County Council agreed to our design, the other (I think Hants) said a firm NO. The first design had to be changed, with the two county badges replaced by sketches of Winchester Cathedral symbolising Hampshire and Windsor Castle, symbolising Berks, possibly based on designs used by GWR. Thus our enduring badge design was born.

JL

from the competitors (rather than the other way round) with straw bales and his greenhouses – in the run-off area from the last corner – with railway sleepers. All this was very sensible but it meant that preparations and reparations always involved our evenings and weekends for over a fortnight.

As time went by these nightly preparation parties became a more and more enjoyable part of the social scene, finishing after dark at the local pub, and of course they depended heavily on local

members, their knowledge, their facilities and their scrounging abilities. Bert Fountain succeeded Jack Ballett as Clerk of the Course in 1948 and continued as this or Secretary of the Meeting for 18 years. Later he was succeeded by Douglas Johns, Jimmy Hogg and Sam Moore. Derek Buckler lent his breakdown wagon and people like Jim Fisher and Charles Lambton lent their tractors. One of my abiding memories is of Sam Moore in perpetual

The early club years

motion on his tractor with a trailerload of large rectangular straw bales.

Less acceptable was Neil's demand that, on the day, the local Conservative candidate should address the assembled multitude for 20 minutes through Antone's PA system. Fortunately this proved self-defeating since after 30 minutes the crowd made it quite clear that the speaker was now the last man they would consider voting for. Great Auclum became our most important event for several years as described in the next chapter.

By this time a pattern of events had been established and the Club organisation was running smoothly. But there were setbacks in store - on November 30, 1947 the basic petrol ration was withdrawn again causing the cancellation of the 1947 night trial and its replacement on 5 October by a point-to-point starting at The Venture on the Basingstoke bypass. Also, during the course of 1947, we lost two Chairmen - Davidge Pitts moved to Warwick and then Group Captain Leathart was posted to Scotland. At the end of 1947 Michael Burn became the Bulletin editor and Holly Birkett became Chairman, where he was to remain for many years.

I won't attempt to cover the next few years in detail but there are still a few significant people

and events to introduce. After petrol returned again in June 1948, Barclay Inglis began his competition career very dramatically in the Night Trial of that year. Although normally an extremely intelligent Scottish accountant, he suffered a strange compulsion to demonstrate motoring enthusiasm by driving his Allard with the windscreen flat and without aero screens. Consequently, neither he nor his navigator could see where they were or where they were going which is presumably why they elected to approach their second point by a trackless route which necessitated crossing an electric railway embankment and a canal. Had they ever reached the point they could have left by the main road, which ran conveniently within a few yards.

The news that they were embedded to the axles reached headquarters at 7 am, just as we were going to bed. Rescue operations took several days on and off and we decided that it would be safer to invite him to join the Committee and help on the organising side, which indeed proved to be his forte.

For a long time we had all been trying to think of a way to promote circuit racing for people who couldn't really afford it and who belonged to clubs which couldn't afford to hire circuits - people like us. Early in 1949 Holly and I spent a

day at Silverstone by private arrangement - things were less formal then - looking at various possible circuits and driving several cars, including Spen King's single-seater Rover Special in its early four-cylinder form. Then in July we both competed in the VSCC closed meeting at Silverstone with great enjoyment and all this increased our determination to find a solution. At the time a club with a closed invitation permit could invite up to seven others to its event but this still meant that the task of organising, marshalling and financing it fell on just one of them and so did any potential loss. Could the RAC be persuaded to allow all eight to share the burden?

But before we asked we had to find seven other suitable clubs.



1951 Barclay Inglis, still seeking muddy lanes, this time on the Blackwater Trial

The 750 MC, of which Holly was also Chairman, was a certainty. Many of its members were desperate to race and they were also looking for a home for 750 Formula racing (Holly's formula for cheap home-built Austin 7-based cars). The

argument the final and very simple format of the 6-Hour Team Relay Race was settled by the end of that evening although, in the end, it was the 750 MC and not H&B which decided to sponsor it in 1951.



Busy Eight Clubs paddock, 1956

Lancia Club was run by Julian Jane who was also an H&B Committee member and Barclay Inglis had strong connections with the AC and Lagonda clubs. That left three vacancies which were soon filled by Cemian, Chiltern and Harrow, all of whom were essentially trials clubs but they were reasonably local and their officials were well known to us because trials had been our principal activity in winter for the last three years. All of them, we found, would be prepared to contribute working capital of £20 each and it only remained for Holly, at his most persuasive, to sell the idea to the RAC Competitions Department at their annual meeting of motor clubs in November 1949 - until then the concept of co-promotion had never evolved. We soon received approval and booked Silverstone in July 1950 for the first of the very long series of events described in the chapter devoted to Eight Clubs.

As I recall, the usual Pondtail kitchen table cabinet was in session a few months later - Holly, Michael Burn, Jack French, Jenks, Bill Boddy and probably Arthur Mallock - when someone complained that we now had club level sprints and short races but no long ones. Where was the poor man's Le Mans? Where were the poor men who could afford to race for 24 hours, someone asked, even one hour would stretch their resources. Pursuing the logic of this

their organisation.

By this time Heather and I were just about to get married, we were looking for somewhere to live and I was also increasingly busy with handicapping and several other projects. So after seven years as Secretary I asked to be released and Joan and Douglas Johns (who had joined the Committee the previous year) started their long and very successful stint. That is a good reason for me to end this account in 1953 but also, in retrospect, I think it was a time of change. The earlier emphasis on car technicalities and speed events was shifting towards navigation and rallying. Joe Lowrey, assisted by Michael Burn and then by Douglas Johns, had already devised and run three Versatility Trials (1951 - 1953), an ingenious combination of the two that Joe will describe separately, but they were not supported well enough and were replaced by the Riverside Rally in 1954.

Of the events still to come by far the most important turned out to be the Mobil Economy Run. In 1953 we didn't anticipate that we would soon be involved in this major event to which the talents of our members were so remarkably adapted.

Much the same happened with 1172 racing. We now had a number of members, including Holly, Derek Buckler, Geoff Tapp and David Small who realised that it was much cheaper to abuse Ford 10 rather than Austin 7 components. The 1172 Formula was actually proposed (in the columns of *Autosport*) by H&B but adopted by 750MC. Strictly speaking these examples may not be part of our history but without us they would probably never have happened and our members were very heavily involved in

Charles Bulmer

The Blackwater Trials - wallowing in mud

Joe Lowrey

When this club was founded in 1946 it seemed natural to stage events like those which clubs had run before World War 2. Early in 1939 I had driven a quite unsuitable Singer 9 tourer in the MCC London to Exeter Trial so, on the basis of that slight experience, I offered to try to run a "mud-plugging" trial locally. With the aid of my featherweight Royal Enfield motorcycle, sometimes running on alcohol, I hastily did some local exploring for "observed sections" around the valley of the little River Blackwater.



1953 George Robins, Vauxhall Wyvern, 2nd in class

What did Dr Johnson say about a dog which walked on its hind legs? Our event was perhaps not very good but it happened. It started from the Ely and finished near Wokingham after 25

miles in rather flat country never previously noted as a trials district. I recall two very muddy green lanes near Farley Hill and Bearswood; a watersplash where the Blackwater has long since been bridged; a gravel lane near Sandhurst Church on which restarting at the steepest point was fairly difficult; a very steep bank near the Shoulder of Mutton Inn, on the edge of Hazeley Heath, which is now entirely covered by quite mature trees.



1953 David Small, Jowett Spl

The event proved worthy of repetition, going slightly further afield into hillier and less populous Hampshire as petrol became less scarce. It was aimed at normal sporting cars, trials specials being very rare in early post-war years, and indeed that first event was won by John Panton's open Lea Francis (one of only two cars with a clean sheet) with a Riley 9 heading the other (saloon) class.

Crisis arrived when a left wing government decided that post-war Britain could not afford to let "rich folk" motor for pleasure. They completely removed our basic petrol ration,



The Lincoln mystery

In 1951 there was a section called Dippenup, sufficiently descriptive. An improbable equipe amongst the 35 entries was (later) works Lotus driver Mike Anthony's Lincoln Royal limousine, complete with vast crew (at least nine) and "furniture". This behemoth found the section too much for it and sank with all hands. Marshals and crew struggled to free it but without success. How was it, then, that someone was later able to drive it out of its predicament and to the top of the hill just as the rescue tractor arrived, complete with plough?

RMB



1947 Blackwater, Bill Arklay's much campaigned Standard Avon Coupé

difficulty wasn't to keep moving but to remain astride the bicycle right to the finish line.

As a small friendly event for Club members it kept going for about a decade with a number of different organisers, including Philip Bateman, Derek Buckler and Morin Ness, but eventually other sorts of motoring competition began to be more popular with our members and, with some regret, the Club's oldest established event was allowed to lapse. Events needing subtly clever use of Ordnance Survey maps and interpretation of cryptic clues to discover scenic checkpoints

prohibiting any non-essential motoring, but we kept the Blackwater Trial series intact with an event for pedal cycles on Yately Common. Some observed sections amidst abandoned gravel diggings were so steeply downhill that the

became our (initially unique) speciality, enduring for many more years.

The Versatility Trials - a three pronged attack

Joe Lowrey

This club has always done far more than its share of innovation, often with considerable success. Nobody can win every time so let's now record an interesting failure.

As a young man I expected my sports cars to be versatile, my 1100 HRG and Morgan Plus Four providing good everyday transport as well as being entered for assorted competitions. In 1951 I reckoned that there was need for a new event aimed at motoring's "Jack of all trades but not quite master of any". It was aimed at really useful cars, not the freaks built for special sorts of competition.

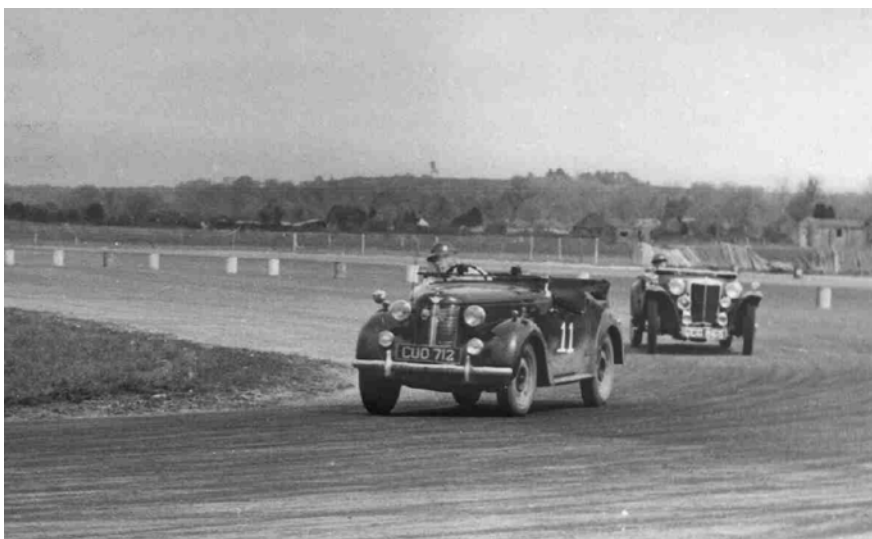
The committee let me attempt a three-part, one-day event. First of all competitors were to be let loose on a road racing circuit to see how quick they were. Then they were sent around a trials route, with no permitted reduction in tyre pressures to enhance traction. And thirdly, a small panel of judges awarded points for their "amenities" so that spacious and comfortable



1952 The Lovells make it a family outing

models might catch up on ultra-light two-seaters with no doors.

Vital to the first event in April 1951 was the co-operation of the Bristol Motor Club who were the lucky tenants of the Castle Combe airfield circuit. There were 34 starters and we timed them for three laps. We plotted our own trials route in the Wiltshire Downs area, finishing at



1953 The sprint at Ibsley. JD Ackerman leads one of several MGs

performance of the day, conscripting husband Douglas and daughter Maureen as competitors with the family fleet of HRG, Jaguar and Ford Popular.

For the third and final year we moved to Ibsley airfield where the West Hants and Dorset Car Club kindly added an extra morning to their year's racing programme just for us. With some further help from their local knowledge, we plotted an afternoon trials route in countryside unfamiliar to us

Marlborough. Two odd incidents linger in the memory. We took the army officer in charge of local military training areas out for a good lunch in Amesbury and he gave us permission to mark out observed sections in a particular hillside field. Checking possibilities on a Sunday afternoon, I knocked the drain plug out of my Jowett Javelin's sump, fettling a wooden bung as a get-you-home substitute and buying cans of oil to make up for leakage. To our surprise we got back to Farnborough with the dipstick still showing full, the fume-consuming breather presumably having sucked dirty air in past our leaky bung, rather than letting oil leak out.

around the fringes of the New Forest. But there were only 19 starters.

We surrendered. Most potentially successful entrants seemed to decide that there was one section of the event which they couldn't hope to win, forgetting that nobody else was any more likely to be best in every discipline. A bigger club with resources for publicity might, we thought, have built up the event, maybe into a real revival of the once-important RAC Tourist Trophy. We didn't regret having had a go but, for this Club's modest resources, there seemed to be more rewarding uses.

Joe Lowrey

And then, on the day, when half the cars had completed the observed sections, a puzzled farmer arrived to point out that the army had de-requisitioned his grassy hillside land about two years previously. He was terribly nice about letting us finish what we had been doing as trespassers and a modest thank you gift was well deserved.

Alas, the first-year entry was excellently varied but less numerous than we had hoped and the following year the entry was smaller still, despite the Club's rally-driving president, Nancy Mitchell, who made best

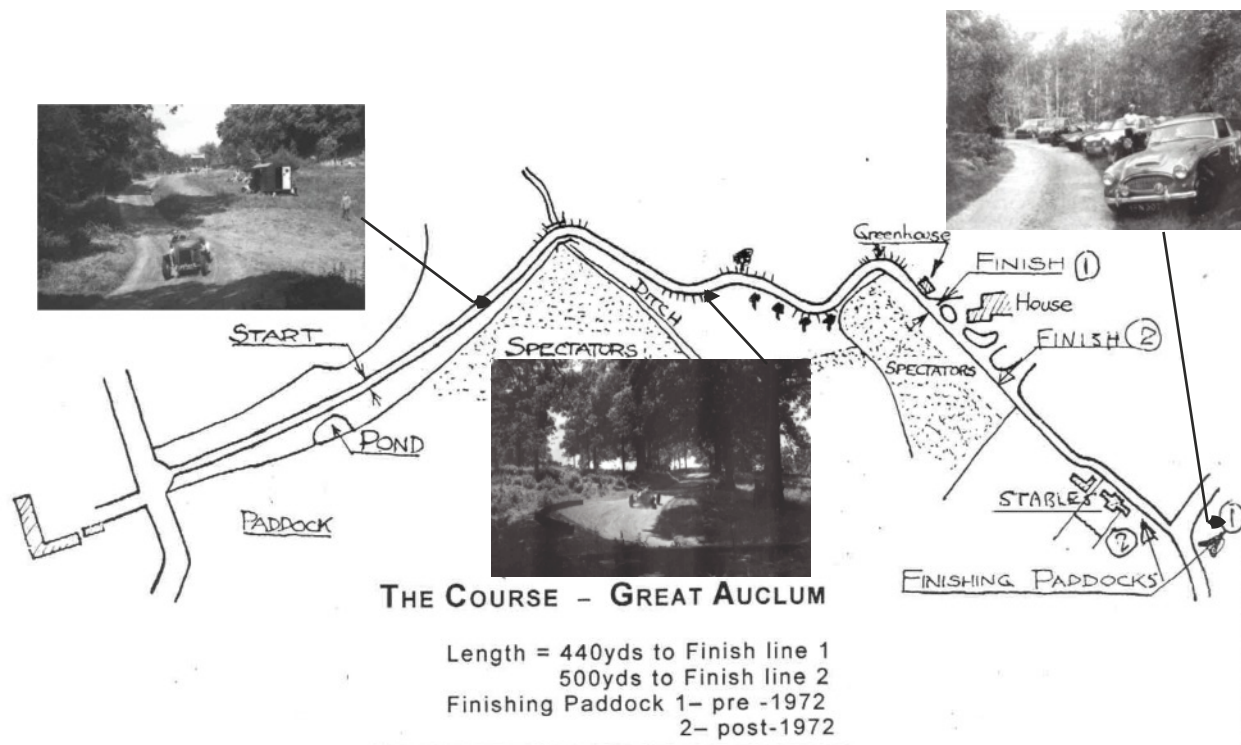


1952 Sprint at Castle Combe; Jeff Chandler in his Chandler Spl. No one hurt and, set back on 4 wheels, he and crew continued

Great Auclum

From West Court substitute to a National Hill Climb

Steve Lovegrove



The first time I ever saw a racing car was at Great Auclum - I was four years old and it was 1962. From then until 1974, when competition stopped, I didn't miss a meeting, not even a practice session. Come rain or shine I would be there watching the cars, drivers and officials. The first signs that the hill climbers were coming back to town was when the large cornfield was harvested and cleared in readiness for the marquees, visible in the distance from our house. The tents would go up on the Thursday or Friday and the drivers would turn up from lunch time on Friday.

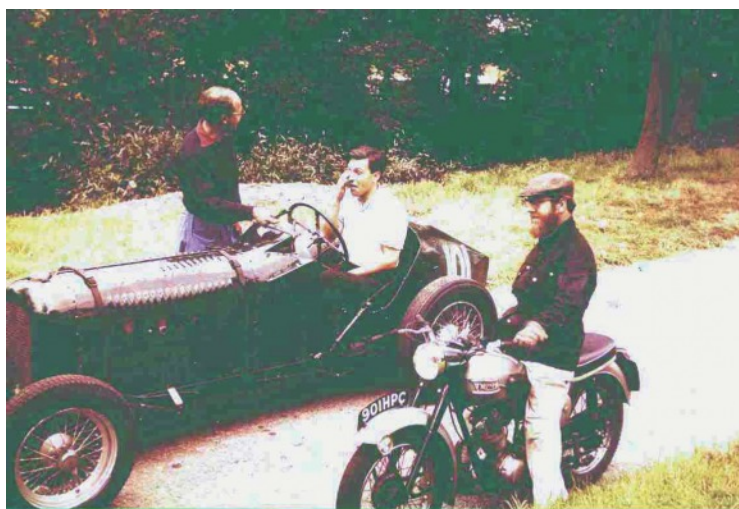
Of course, being early August, we were on our school summer holidays and could watch every movement in the field from afar. The first indication that the cars were ready was usually a few throaty blips of the throttle wafting across the cornfield and through our open windows as we ate our evening meal. This was a cue for me to start gobbling my food so that I could nag my Dad to take me to see the cars.

The top paddock was little more than a stone's throw from where we lived and was possibly one of the most exciting parts as you could see the cars flash past the finishing line at full tilt before braking hard as they approached the small, tight finishing paddock, which was nothing more than a gravelled clearing amongst the trees. Directly opposite the entrance to the drive of Great Auclum there was a kind of ditch in which we used to sit or lie to watch the cars approach head on - in these days of safety and security this simply would not be possible. The unsilenced cars made an incredible noise and I can still remember the smells - Castrol R burning on the hot engines as the cars burst over the finish line and came to rest in the finish paddock. Many ran on methanol and that sweet, intoxicating smell would hang amongst the trees.

The length of the timed course varied from 440 yards (as printed in the programme) to "about 500 yards" as the event regulations put it. All the corners, including the first bend, were described as "moderately banked" and the regulations also observed that there was "a slight S-bend,

unbanked, near the end of the finishing run, which allows ample braking distance beyond the finishing line". Normally, practising was on Friday evening from 5pm until 8pm and on Saturday morning from 9am until 12 noon. Then came the timed runs. The cars would come up the hill in batches of, say, 20 or 25 followed by a pair of motorbikes which would shepherd them back down to the start paddock. On occasion Denis Jenkinson would ride one of them.

At the first meeting in 1947 organised by H&B the Fastest Time of the Day (FTD) was recorded by Leslie Onslow-Bartlett in the 4 litre Mercury Special in a time of 23.50s. The whole event was run with an absence of red tape and interruptions - a fact that was widely



Jenks waiting to shepherd his flock back to the start

reported in the press - and H&B were commended on their organisation. It was memorable, however, as Charles Bulmer has noted in the previous chapter, for the one and only political address ever attempted there.

Over 3000 spectators invaded the rural tranquillity of Burghfield Common on Sunday 25 July, 1948 to see nearly a hundred cars compete. A local newspaper reported that the course had been lengthened to a full quarter mile for this meeting but, if the truth were told, the distance was still only approximate. With the meeting being held (unusually) on a Sunday, practice had been on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. The small capacity sports car class got things underway. Jim Martin, who drove an MG Special at the 1948 and 1949 meetings, remembered the hill with affection despite



1948 and young Stirling Moss explores the banking

enjoying mixed fortunes there, "The MG seemed quite well suited to Great Auclum. It was a J2 Midget with a J3 engine fitted with a No. 9 Powerplus blower which developed about 18lb of pressure, far too much for the engine and that meant that I couldn't run for long at full throttle before the engine got too hot - or something broke! During practice in 1948 I stripped all the teeth off the crown-wheel and pinion so I couldn't take my timed runs. However, Ken Wharton offered me a straight-cut crown-wheel and pinion - which I duly went to collect from his place in Birmingham - he was a real gentleman."

But the real star of this meeting was 18 year old H&B member Stirling Moss in his Cooper 500 who not only won his class but would have taken FTD as well had it not been for one marginally faster climb by Ken Wharton in his blown 750 Special. In 1949 Eric Brandon set the two best times of

The elusive turbine

One curious feature of the event which I can explain is that, from 1951 onwards, there was a separate class for gas turbine cars that nobody ever entered. We introduced this because our friend Spen King was a frequent visitor to Pondtail Road at weekends and had competed at early Great Auclums. Since he was in charge of Rover gas turbine car development we always hoped he might persuade the Rover Company to seek a guaranteed class win as a publicity stunt but unfortunately this never happened. Probably the insurance would have been exorbitant.

CHB

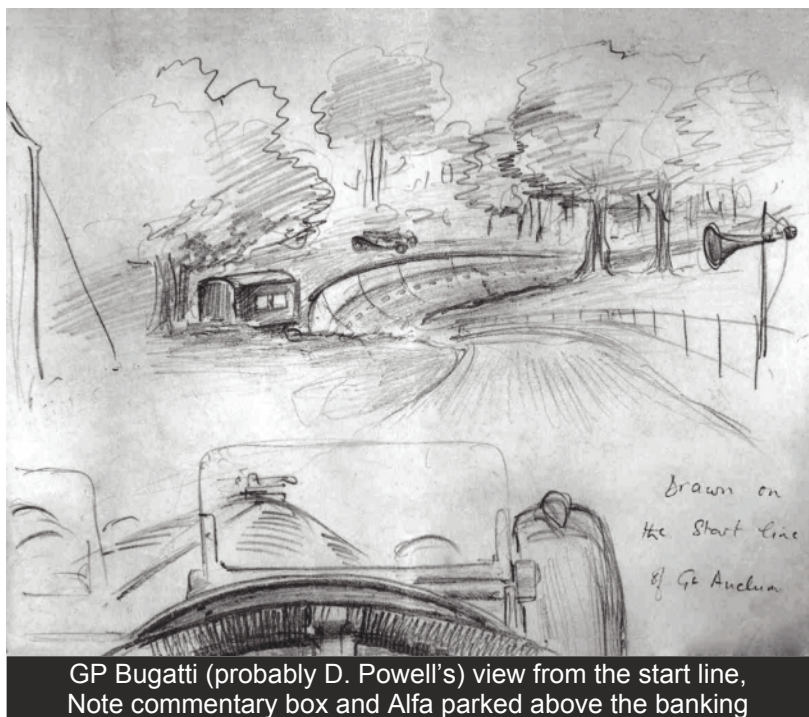
the day in his 994 Cooper JAP and lowered the course record as well.

There were changes for 1950. Neil Gardiner decided to extend the banking on the first corner to increase the height, speed and spectacle. Tony Lovegrove, my uncle, recalls working on this. "We used oil drums filled with concrete to form the base of the new concrete banked section." (The original, shallower banking was surfaced in tarmac.) This work was completed by Jim Fisher, the local garage proprietor and civil engineer who was Vice-president and then President of H&B from 1955 to 1959. It was noted in *Motor Sport* (September 1950) that "It needed real courage to use this banking to the best effect." Obviously this opinion came from Jenks after trying it on his motor cycle.

In fact, three drivers overdid the "Brooklands stuff", Gerry Ruddock getting half his HRC over the top but showing skill in retrieving an ugly situation and holding the subsequent skid, George Naylor hit the rim with one wheel in the ex-Charles Bulmer TT Replica Frazer-Nash which resulted in an epic slide and, in a famous incident, Mrs Thelma Ruffer in a 1488 cc supercharged Alfa Romeo, became well and truly airborne after shooting straight over the banking. Mrs Ruffer, who had apparently been 'imbibing' in the paddock, received a black eye and a bloodied nose and was shown to Great Auclum house at the point of a fire extinguisher by Neil Gardiner.



Mrs Ruffer goes flying



GP Bugatti (probably D. Powell's) view from the start line, Note commentary box and Alfa parked above the banking

1950 saw Great Auclum debuts for Major Arthur Mallock (Austin/Ford Special), Colin Chapman (Lotus) and local man Derek Buckler in his self-built Buckler prototype which he shared on the day with Len Drew. But FTD was made by our Frimley member, Archie Butterworth, in his 4.4-litre, air-cooled, Steyr V8 engined, 4wd Special. Archie worked on military vehicle research at FVRDE Chertsey so you could guess where the bits came from.

In 1951, another local man, David Brake, bravely set FTD in his Cooper twin after overturning his Cooper 500 as he approached the finish paddock in practice. Tragically, David died in a racing accident at Boreham two weeks later. The year after this the meeting was cancelled because of an outbreak of foot-and mouth disease and a Navigational Point-to-Point in the Chiltern Hills was organised "as some compensation". Rain affected the outcome of the 1954 meeting with the surprise result that Michael Burn set FTD (24.52s) in his Le Mans Frazer Nash. The faster racing cars were forced to make their runs just after a heavy shower and could not match his time.

The following year Tony Marsh (on his way to the first of six RAC Hill Climb Championship titles) stormed to FTD in his 1100cc supercharged Cooper JAP and set a new hill record of 20.94s. AF Rivers-Fletcher, well known hill climb regular and

Cameos

The torrential rain chronicled by Steve comes as a surprise. My memories of Great Auclum are all of sun and fields of golden stubble but, above all, the people. As CHB recalls in the previous chapter, there was Sam Moore's Ferguson-propelled train, helpers sitting on the load, legs dangling. Sam, however, was much more than a chauffeur, oiling the wheels with Neil Gardiner who was a business contact. I remember also George Lovegrove, no relation to Steve, wielding a sledge hammer with confidence as a nervous young me steadied the post, Pat Stevens loping around the Start paddock, loud hailer in hand, Ray Kingdon fiddling with the new-fangled electronic timing gear, Frank Lambert, timekeeper and swimming coach who couldn't swim, Heather Bulmer (right) and Pauline Fountain earnestly chalking up times on a blackboard in the Start paddock before tempting workers with a delicious-smelling fry-up in the evening, Joe's gravelly tones coming from the dark green Antone caravan, Derek West, keep fit enthusiast, heaving heavy sleepers with enthusiasm and Stan Chisman touching up his sun tan as he waved



contrasting with his shining (and rapid) Morris Special and the shock of seeing Roy Lane with the first of the rear-engined, grand prix car-style specials, all 5 litres of it, just before Great Auclum finally closed its doors to us.

RMB

staunch supporter of Great Auclum, achieved the next best time in his smart powder blue Cooper twin but won just as many plaudits for taking his customary high line round the banking whilst the tidier Marsh took a more circumspect line round the challenging first bend. Marsh set FTD again in 1956 and another outright hill record of 20.62s. However, for commentator Joe Lowrey, the man of the meeting was David Good who won Class 8 in his ERA R1B "despite the fact that his right arm ends a couple of inches below his elbow."

In 1959, Great Auclum became a round of the RAC Hill Climb Championship, a status it retained until the hill closed in 1974. Always a popular event with drivers and the public, Great Auclum now joined the big league with Shelsley

the home-made batons marshalling the punters to orderly rows in the car park. These Day-glo batons had originally been produced by John Higginson for this thankless task in the days before he delegated the car parking duties.

And the competitors? David Good, short sleeved shirt unashamedly showing his stump and with a broad grin on his round face as he turned in yet another fast time, vivacious Patsy Burt and attentive Ron Smith, suave Rivers Fletcher, always immaculate in blazer and flannels or pale blue overalls exactly matching the colour of his cars. Then there was quiet Ashley Cleave (left), well used boiler suit con-

trasting with his shining (and rapid) Morris Special and the shock of seeing Roy Lane with the first of the rear-engined, grand prix car-style specials, all 5 litres of it, just before Great Auclum finally closed its doors to us.

Walsh and Prescott but, at 440 yards, it was the shortest venue to hold a championship round. Few who attended the 1959 meeting will forget the unlikely sight of Rivers Fletcher high on the banking in Leslie Ballamy's supercharged, 1172cc LMB Ford Popular. The specially



Tico Martini and his TT Special



The Start paddock, David Boshier-Jones's Cooper in the foreground

modified car set the saloon class alight and Rivers scored a popular car class win in a time of 24.63s.

Cooper cars had set seven FTDs at Great Auclum during the fifties, which was a pretty impressive record, but the Surbiton marque scored only one more when David Boshier-Jones set a time of 20.49s in his 1100cc Cooper JAP, 0.5s ahead of the local favourite, David Good. Times were changing and engineers were developing new, quicker car/engine combinations. Hill climbing has always been a hotbed of ingenuity and Great Auclum in the sixties saw plenty of new ideas. This revolution was fuelled by the introduction of the 1.5-litre Formula 1 in 1961 which liberated 2.5-litre engines and cars for hill climbing. In 1961, the meeting, where three new class records were set on the newly re-surfaced course, was stopped when Arthur Owen overshot the banking at the first bend and came to grief on terra firma six feet below.

Throughout the history of speed hill climbing there have been few more astonishing tales than that of Renato (Tico) Martini and his tiny TT Special. The record books show that Martini, a Jersey-based Italian, entered and won two RAC Championship rounds in 1962

(Bouley Bay and Great Auclum). What the records don't show is the momentous nature of this achievement. Although hill climbing has always been a friendly sport, the Martini TT Special caused quite a stir amongst the hill climbing fraternity and questions were asked about the eligibility of the driver and his car. This was a great shame since the car was built within the rules in much the same way that enterprising constructors had done before and ever since. The origins of the TT Special

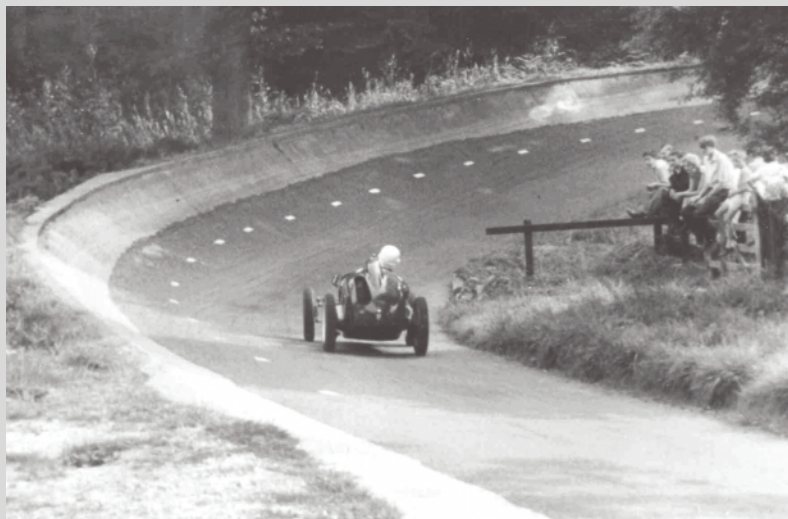
lay in Martini's experience at his local Go-Kart track in Jersey. His interest in competition coupled with his knowledge of Kart technology set him thinking about building a special. His biggest problem was finding wheels and tyres of the right size to fit his design, eventually overcome by fitting Lambretta wheels at the front and Vespa tyres at the rear.

The controversial Special was powered by a 650cc Triumph Bonneville Twin motor cycle engine which developed little more than 55bhp where the Coopers and BRMs had about 250bhp. However, whilst his rivals' cars weighed at least 1000lb, Tico Martini's little Special tipped



1963 Finish paddock Rivers Fletcher in his BB Special, Nigel Arnold-Forster's Delage 'La Torpille' and Peter Westbury's Felday-Daimler. The author examines Peter's tyres

You take the high road ...



The sharp, steeply - banked bottom corner at Great Auclum was unique and we (both officials and competitors) had long arguments about the fastest way to drive through it. As Stephen Lovegrove has noted there were two schools of thought - the minority said hold the car right at the top of the banking all the way round and the majority said bounce it off the beginning of the banking, cut quickly down to a close apex on the flat (like John Bedford (left) in the Monaco Special) and then bounce it off the

end of the banking on the exit. Neither was easy. You approached braking downhill on a left-hand curve, which threw you to the wrong side and, even if you entered correctly, the "lip of the banking" line demanded the highest accuracy, commitment and bravery.

All steep bankings are disorientating, the worst one I know being the Mercedes test track at Stuttgart where parallel straights are joined by a "wall of death" at each end. Instead of the road unfurling from infinity in front of you it suddenly rolls upwards and feeds in from a few feet over your head. Great Auclum wasn't quite as steep as that but the only people I remember who took the top line really well were Michael Burn (right) in his ex-Arklay Frazer Nash, Colin Chapman and the intrepid Arthur Mallock in his U2. Rivers Fletcher always pursued the same course but at a more sensible speed.



CHB

the scales at only 365lb. This excellent power-to-weight ratio was coupled with such compact size that he could take a straighter line through the bends, an ideal combination for Great Auclum. When he arrived for practice on the evening of Friday, 10 August he was met by an H&B official (Bert Fountain?) who, after glancing at the car on its trailer enquired "Have you come to mow the lawn?"

During practice, Tico overcooked the first bend and went over the banking, bending the chassis. This was quickly rectified by putting the car on a large wooden block and hitting it vigorously with a hammer! Another problem in practice was

that the car was too light (or airborne) to generate an adequate pulse in the timing tube at the finish line. The timekeepers suggested that he should brake hard for weight transfer just before the tube. He managed to register a time on each subsequent ascent and went on to set a new hill record of 20.14s.

In 1963 Peter Westbury broke the course record at 19.33s during the class runs driving his Felday (a highly modified Cooper chassis with a 2.6 supercharged Daimler Dart engine) and went on to claim the RAC Championship that year.

Patsy Burt brought her very special 5-litre "Whoosh Bonk" McLaren Oldsmobile to Great Auclum for the first time on 6 August 1966 but the meeting was abandoned during the second runs because of torrential rain. A year later Mike Hawley won the Top Ten run-off in 19.38s (2.0 Brabham BT23 - Climax FPF). David Good withdrew the 4-wheel drive BRM 67 after first gear failed during promising practice runs. The following year Sulhampstead-based GP Roger Willoughby claimed second place in the 1100cc racing car class with his improbable Cooper Imp. Doc Willoughby can still be seen on the hills today in his ex-Dickie Henderson Cooper 1100 supercharged twin.

By 1969, 4-wheel drive was the thing to have and David Hepworth posted two identical 18.84s runs to head the qualifiers for the Top Ten run-offs. It was swelteringly hot on 1 August 1970 and the locals turned out in their droves to get their annual shot of motor sport. Spencer Elton had a scary moment at the first bend when his Brabham got sideways under braking and left the track - landing upside down over the ditch. Years later, Spencer recalled how he was offered a medicinal brandy after his accident and his father Tom Elton admonished the first aider by asserting that it was too much brandy that led to his son's off track excursion in the first place!

Although Nick Williamson was to win the 1970 RAC Hill Climb Championship, his McLaren hit a tree during his first Top 10 run-off which left the way open for David Good to claim top RAC Championship points after Roy Lane also hit a tree on his second run. Lane's consolation was FTD and a hill record of 18.41s set during the



One-handed driving *extraordinaire*, David Good

The Timer

When the Club asked me for a new timing system we came up with a device that had a temperature-controlled crystal oscillator driving a transistor circuit counting the oscillations. Time intervals were displayed on 'Nixy tubes', rather like valves, with the figures that glowed in time with the crystal oscillator. After each elapsed second the circuit triggered an old GPO telephone exchange uniselector which made a loud and very satisfactorily tick, as any self-respecting clock should. It was ridiculously accurate when we had it calibrated against an atomic clock at NPL who certified that it would time to better than a cigarette paper's thickness over our quarter mile. The photocells at the start and finish were vulnerable so I put them inside foot long bits of scaffolding which are quite difficult to crush, though some competitors tried. The system cost the club little more than 10% of the commercial quote in the end and, as far as I know, it still exists in the horologic section of the Science Museum.

RWK

class runs. Chris Cramer – who becomes significant later in the story – set a new saloon car record in his Mini Cooper S.

In 1972 the top paddock was moved back down into a field adjacent to the stables. This was a bigger area and, with hindsight, much more suitable. The cars used to hurtle over the finish line more or less opposite the house and then brake heavily before turning sharp right into the paddock immediately at the end of the drive. There was a five bar gate on this paddock and for a time the marshals used to let us sit on the open gate as the cars drove through! Later this practice was stopped and we sat behind the perimeter fence further down the paddock close to the finish line. In fact, this gave us a better view of the cars as they emerged from the trees at the top of the hill and then accelerated along one of the few straight(ish) parts of the course.

By 1973 rumours were rife that Great Auclum as a motor sport venue was under threat. Plans had been submitted to develop the estate and there was some doubt whether the

1973 meeting would go ahead. In the event, Helen Gardiner wrote to Jimmy Hogg, Secretary of the Meeting, in May 1973 to say that the hill climb could take place as usual. Planning and organising was therefore ramped-up and the circus rolled into town on Friday 3rd August for the traditional evening practice session. The hill record was smashed several times on Saturday afternoon and Roy Lane seemed to have the meeting sewn-up with a record breaking 18.15s run when the Grunhalle Lager sponsored March of Chris Cramer flew up the hill in a remarkable 17.65s, never to be bettered.

At the reunion in August 1998, he spoke of his memories of that day as we walked the length of the course. I was amazed how much he could remember after 24 years and how fond he was of the event, fond enough to travel from his home in Gloucestershire.

By 1974, the writing was on the wall that this would be the last year. The death of Neil Gardiner the previous year had forced his family to sell the estate and the future for the hill looked bleak. The final event at Great Auclum was won by Roy Lane in his F5000 McRae GM1-Chevrolet. Although discussions between H&B and the Gardiner family continued into 1975, there would be no further hill climbs in Burghfield Common. This was effectively the end of Great Auclum as a motor sports venue although, in truth, it must have been under threat of losing its competition licence without significant safety improvements being made.

Neil Gardiner had died in September 1973 at the age of 65. He left wife, son and grandchildren and a considerable estate but the world economy was going through turmoil and in 1974 a family decision was taken to sell the house to meet death duties. Helen Gardiner moved to Guernsey and after several changes of ownership the house was acquired by West Berks Area Health Authority who left it unoccupied for some time pending conversion into a school for disabled children. One morning, at about 5.30am, a milkman noticed flames coming from a window. The house was so badly damaged that it needed a complete rebuild and the owners, by then the School Masters Mortgage Board, built 10 terraced houses in 3 blocks in a style borrowed from the old house.

On a sunny July afternoon in 1999, a racing car was again driven at Great Auclum for the first time since 10 August, 1974. Meridian Television was filming a series of programmes covering interesting walks in the Meridian catchment area and contacted me for information about Great Auclum. I started thinking about what could be done to bring the old hill to life again. After a good deal of plotting and planning, the film crew arrived in Burghfield Common on Monday, 19 July to meet David Gardiner (Neil's son), Roger Willoughby and Tom Brown (son of former Auclum competitor, Richard). Tom brought along his father's very quick red Mallock which was unloaded in the car park of the farm shop opposite the old entrance to Great Auclum and wheeled across the road before being pushed down the hill towards the start-line. After the film crew had set up the shot, Roger Willoughby set off towards the famous banked bend, where he was interviewed and David Gardiner spoke about the history of the event.

That people still remember Great Auclum with affection was shown by the number who attended two reunion events organised by the author in recent years. Many ex-drivers, marshals and spectators turned out to see film, slides, trophies and cars. As the Mallock was loaded back on to the trailer and the film crew left in their people carrier, Roger Willoughby cheerfully shouted to me, "see you at the next Great Auclum event!"

Maybe, some day.

Steve Lovegrove



Richard Brown's Mallock recreates the adventure of the bottom bend for Meridian TV

Eight Clubs

Another Birkett brainchild - a racing consortium

Joan and Sam Moore

In the chapter about the Early Years Charles Bulmer has described the events which led to the conception and formation of the Eight Clubs group in November 1949. It was regarded by the RAC as an Association and not a motor club and the first permit for the initial co-promotion event was issued to the Hants and Berks Motor Club. The RAC classified it as a closed non-invitation event, a concession which gave a useful reduction in the permit fee. Organisation was facilitated by the power given to the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer to seek assistance directly as and when required rather than having to operate through consultation with the committees of the constituent clubs. All the same, the many tasks that were originally distributed round the member clubs tended to remain with them for a number of years and were only changed when there were major alterations in the format of the races or within a constituent club or to the circuit itself, originally a lap of 1.608 miles.

There was no written constitution but various objectives were discussed and informally agreed. They reflect Holly Birkett's view that the ideal (but unattainable) motoring event would have no rules and no regulations at all and included resolutions to run the race meetings primarily for the benefit and entertainment of competitors; to introduce or enforce no restrictions on competitors or spectators beyond those required to avoid danger to life and limb; to minimise the intervals between races to avoid tedious spells of inactivity; to keep strictly to the advertised starting times of all events; to encourage the beginner in the everyday motor car by excluding racing cars; to have a number of High Speed Trials in which no-one was seen to be first or last and to abandon the then universal convention of grouping cars in capacity classes and instead to seed scratch as well as handicap races by bringing together cars of the same anticipated performance.

H&B's Barclay Inglis was appointed Honorary Secretary of the Meeting and he was able to call on a pool of experienced marshals and bring together a group of officials of outstanding ability. The first meeting was held at Silverstone on Saturday, 3 June 1950 and, for the first few years until costs mounted, the organisers, by using most of the modest profit from car parking fees, were even able to repay a substantial proportion of entry fees. The first event proved to be a success and the motoring press was enthusiastic about the combination of informality, effective race control, entertaining racing and strict adherence to the timetable. *Motor Sport* was particularly supportive and a few years later sponsored one of the handicap races which became a qualifying round in the magazine's 'Club Challenge Trophy' series.



After you ... Peter Jowitt, scrutineer, gives way to Joan Johns, laden with paperwork as ever. Douglas observes

Many members of H&B were involved from the outset. Holland Birkett ensured that the fledgling association could present a club race meeting wholly within the co-operative principles set out above. Julian Jane became chief marshal, Charles Bulmer had the vital

The Secretariat's tale

An enormous amount of work was done during the year prior to race day by the handicappers, Secretary of the Meeting, paddock control, programme compilers, etc.

Together with Margaret Inglis, my earliest recollection on race day is having to circulate all information to the Clerk of the Course, Secretary of the Meeting, timekeepers, handicappers, paddock, commentators *et al* at the double - no mobile telephones or electric gizmos in those days - and in between times keeping up with typing of results so that competitors could go home with a copy.

After the first year or two I co-opted a team to keep the Master copy of the programme up to date so that paddock marshals could come in to see the latest update. We then found that Race Control was getting too congested so we issued a corrected copy programme each time a marshal needed it in return for his present copy which was corrected for the next race. We later had a full time typist and the luxury of a Xerox machine! Thinking back on those early days it was fun and practically no aggro. I suppose one can at least see some of the racing with all the modern gadgetry! JM

position of performance assessor and handicapper and Bill Arklay was chief scrutineer. Members of the Eight turned out in strength either to marshal or to compete. Everyone was impressed by the efficient administration of the meeting, another H&B responsibility. Copies of the printed programme were sent out a week before the event with a list of competitors' names and addresses and an index of car numbers. Duplicated results of races were promptly displayed at race control and all competitors were able to take home a full set.

How was this achieved? There were then no facilities of any kind at the track. The circuit was marked out mainly by old oil drums filled with ballast and a few gaunt scaffolding structures

that comprised spectator stands left over from the previous Grand Prix. Sanitation was primitive with no concessions to the prim. Electricity and water had to be brought to the site by the event promoters! H&B ran Race Control from a timekeepers' hut using the Club secretariat's typewriter and a hand turned duplicator. For the first year or so the ubiquitous Joan Cooper was in charge but when she retired Joan Johns (now Moore) and Margaret Inglis continued without assistance for some years until the ever-increasing entry list necessitated further help. The ever-enthusiastic one-man business of Antone (Anthony Curtis) brought sound equipment for the commentators, amongst whom was Joe Lowrey, and a local pub, the Sun Inn at Whitfield, provided on-course refreshments that first year, not to mention a bacchanalian retreat for marshals on the Friday and Saturday nights. More respectable (or richer) folk chose to patronise the classic English inn ambience of 'The Green Man' at Brackley Hatch.

Nearly all competitors drove their competing cars to the circuit, not because they eschewed the use of trailers but simply because the motor car that they had entered was their only conveyance. Many were home built and spare parts usually filled vacant seats. An impressive atmosphere of co-operation prevailed in the paddock with drivers willing to help each other with everything from a spare engine to a grub screw. In cases of dire need it was not unknown for cars of the same model and performance to be borrowed from anybody at the event. In later years such a give-and-take climate was upset by the arrival on the entry list of much more expensive machinery. Nevertheless, the collaborative efforts of those days will long remain in the memory of all who took part. The meeting inspired great loyalty and officials, marshals and competitors had only to come once to become devotees almost for life.

The next year, 1951, the BRDC took over the circuit lease from the RAC and the Daily Express agreed to sponsor that year's Grand Prix. There was a very gradual improvement in track facilities as income grew. The BRDC became a limited company and eventually purchased the circuit and six hundred acres of land, subsequently devolving the management of circuit and estate to a subsidiary company, Silverstone Circuits Ltd. Meanwhile, the annual

day's racing of the Eight Clubs continued with Charles Bulmer firmly established as handicapper. Holland Birkett now represented the 750 MC at Eight Clubs meetings and, much to the satisfaction of people like Derek Buckler, Geoff Tapp and David Small, an 1172 formula event (later to become the 1300 formula) was added to the existing 750 race in the programme. That same year Birkett had also initiated the 750 Six Hour Relay Race but that's another story, concerning neither H&B nor Eight Clubs. In 1954 Barclay Inglis became Clerk of the Course and handed over Honorary Secretary duties to Pat Stark. The following year this responsibility passed to the capable hands of Douglas and Joan Johns, who continued until 1966. Barclay became President in 1957, a post which he adorned until 1969.

H&B continued to put forward successful handicappers. Charles Bulmer had been the doyen of them all and had unerringly been able to spot any false performance claims from entrants (there were one or two!). He relinquished the post in the early sixties to Denis Loveridge and in 1969 Robin Birchall took over, later co-opting Allan Lupton and handing over to



Now where did I put that yellow ..? Laid back marshals hardly seem to notice as Pat Moss goes grasscutting (1956)

him completely in the late '90s. All of them discharged the exacting job with distinction.

As facilities at the Silverstone Circuit were improved so were minor changes made to the races. In the High Speed trials a 'Le Mans' start was introduced for a time, together with compulsory pit stops for changing sparking plugs and front wheels. Informality was still the keynote. Competitors did not enter for specific races because of the diversity of the machinery. They simply told the Secretary of the Meeting what car they would drive and in what sort of races (scratch, handicap or high speed trial) they would like to compete. The handicappers then sifted the entry into up to sixteen races, each containing cars of as near the same performance as possible.

In 1963 John Gott, then President of H&B, gave a President's Cup for the H&B member recording the fastest time of day at Silverstone and won it himself in 1967! In 1965 Bert Fountain became Chairman. The Press Officer of the day sought sponsorship and was occasionally successful, attracting Chandy, Whitbread and HoverLloyd. 1967 saw Les Needham as Chairman with the control of the paddock in the strict organisation of Sam Moore and Pat Stevens. This responsibility had become more demanding as the result of increasing numbers on the entry list. The best ever entry was 350 for 14 races in 1980 but entries of around 300 were typical for many years and persuading them to form up for grids was not helped by shortcomings in the PA coverage. In 1973 the Eight Clubs became a Limited Liability

Scrutineering

I rarely found anyone who had tried to bend the rules. Most of the time all I had to do was pull people up for safety infringements. Over the years I've found a number of vice grips still attached to the undersides of cars.

Motor sport was very enjoyable in the fifties and sixties but I began to lose interest in scrutineering when everything started to get too professional. It took up a lot of my spare time too. I got fed up with the people. Gone were the days when drivers were their own mechanics. The camaraderie was very strong then. It was common for drivers to tow home the broken cars of their competitors after a furious day of sport. More often than not the guy who drives these days doesn't know what's going on under the bonnet. The last of the old style events was Eight Clubs, Silverstone. I always enjoyed that.

DHS

Company and, as Bill Bonney explains in a later section, subsequent H&B involvement (apart from handicapping and competing) became largely that of paddock marshalling.

The Eight Clubs meetings motored noisily and triumphantly on to the fiftieth year celebrations in 1999 and many predicted a further half-century of success for the event. The member Clubs had changed over the years. The ACOC and Lancia OC had been collected under the umbrella of the Combined One Make CC and Lloyd's MC and Herts County A&AC had joined. President for this fiftieth year was Les Needham who had been continuously involved in the meetings since 1950. The Chairman was Robin Birchall who had been elected in 1987. Sad to say, few foresaw major expenditure looming on

the horizon but as we shall see, the days of the Eight Clubs were numbered. If enthusiasm alone could have saved the series the future would have been assured but big business accountants were on the scent of more money.

Memorial Trophies in abundance had been donated over the years including those in the names of Holland Birkett, Barclay Inglis, Douglas Johns, John Moon, John Gott and George Whiteaway, H&B members all. Yet there were still others, one notably the Trophy of The International Police Association, a particular interest of John Gott since he was Chief Constable of Northants.

Joan and Sam Moore

as related to John Higginson

The whys and wherefores of the decline and fall

Robin Birchall

Mike Eyre had been Chairman of Eight Clubs since 1970. When he decided to withdraw completely from motor sport in 1987 and retire to the attractions of the Essex coast, he asked me to take over. In accepting, I regarded it as a great honour, little realising, any more than he did, that it would turn out to be a poisoned chalice.

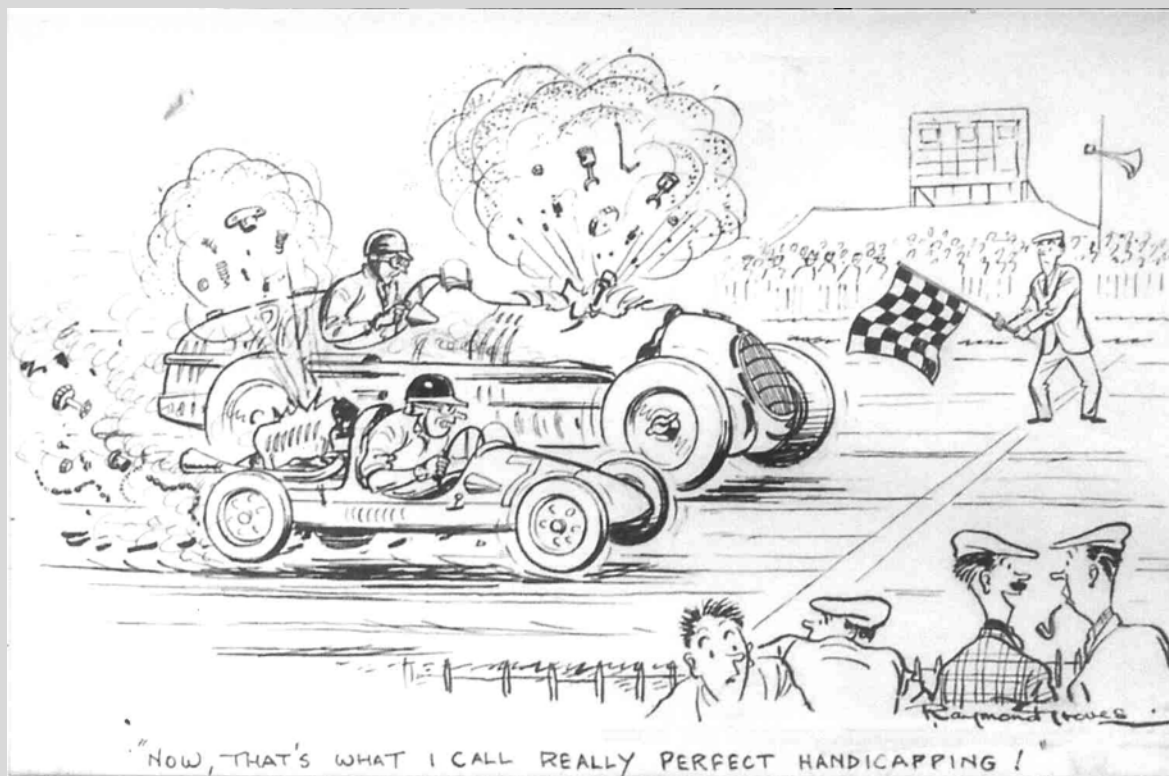
But first, a word about Mike who, after all, was an active H&B member. A senior MSA timekeeper, he had, despite his considerable bulk, raced Austin Sevens of which he had a baker's dozen, some very rare. Not surprisingly then, much like Holland Birkett before him, his main allegiance was to 750 MC, a club which continued to provide a large proportion of the Eight Clubs competitors. As far as H&B is concerned, he will be remembered by most members for his larger-than-life presence on many a Mobil Economy Run.

During his tenure clubs like Cemian and Chiltern began to fade (although the latter kept an honourable presence in the person of the Secretary of the Meeting). We had perforce to consider whether they should be replaced by clubs which, like the original constituents, wanted to go racing but could not afford the financial risk of running their own meeting. One-make clubs like Porsche GB, Alfa Romeo OC and BMW CC were considered. We'd had

a brief flirtation with CSMA but, despite a vast membership, they had contributed little to the grids so we were wary of bringing into the fold clubs which might not further the tradition that was Eight Clubs. Moreover, the motivation for change was not great with grids still frequently oversubscribed and a healthy bank balance so the opportunities passed without any action.

Club motor racing had changed markedly over the half-century since the formation of Eight Clubs. Gone were the simple A7- and Ford Ten-based specials to be replaced by affordable mass produced sports cars of which the archetypes were the Spridget and MGB. The effect of these was that owners, wishing to make them faster than their peers, tuned them, upon which the unmodified variety cried foul. Thus was born a series of highly specialised classes of such close performance potential that the need for handicapping disappeared. Single marque club racing became dominated by championships and scratch races. This evolution was not confined to production sports cars but spilled over into historic sports and saloon cars and club racing became a highly regulated sport, with the honourable exceptions of VSCC and Bentley DC - and Eight Clubs.

The effect on Eight Clubs was twofold: First, few competitors were willing to risk their expensively and highly developed sports cars in mid-season



Handicaps

Like many things in early motoring from chassis design to styling, racing took its cues from the equine world and attempts to equalise performance were no exception, initially (as now in BTCC) with additional weights but later, in the wide expanses of Brooklands, by adjusting the distance to be covered.

Neither of these options was considered practical at post-WWII circuits so time delays were imposed dependent on the expected performance over the race length. This was more flexible and worked well while performance differences were small but, once the overall spread exceeded the lap time, credit laps had to be introduced. However, it was clearly not safe to allow the slowest competitor to arrive on the grid just as a faster one was starting. A safety margin had to be built in and immediately, any accuracy the method might have had was compromised. Further, as safety awareness increased, Clerks of the Course grew increasingly nervous about the risks and insisted on yet greater safety margins. To compound the problem, events like Eight Clubs took their entries from an ever widening field to the further detriment of the accuracy of the handicap as it became harder to keep or even find records on every competitor..

To offset this at Eight Clubs Allan Lupton and I pioneered computerisation of the records and the arithmetic, initially with programmable calculators, finally with PCs. RMB

Cartoon by Raymond Groves for Charles Bulmer to mark his retirement

while they were still contesting their favourite championships and second, the so-called grass roots competitor bought himself a production sports car as first choice or, if he was really serious, took to karts. So, although the competitor base had in theory greatly increased, this was offset by specialisation. Gone were the days when a competitor would bring a hire car to the circuit and race it (I last saw that in 1980). Apart from everything else, safety regulations had, very properly, been extensively tightened

and it was no longer possible to borrow mother's shopping car to go racing without her noticing additions like welded-in sun roofs and external ignition switches. Nevertheless, Eight Clubs continued to thrive on its combination of informal efficiency and grids with an extraordinary mix of machinery but this sort of ad-hoc racing was only saleable if it was cheap.

In December 2000 BRDC, owners of Silverstone, accepted a merger agreement with



Mid-range sports car scratch race about 1963.
Note well-filled stands and early appearance of E-type

Octagon. Immediately, the alarm bells sounded since Octagon already owned Brands Hatch and their hard nosed commercialism was well known. By contrast, BRDC had encouraged grass roots motorsport, allowing clubs running non-revenue race meetings to hire the circuit at an advantageous rate. It looked as though this was likely to change. Sure enough, hire costs for 2001 tripled, giving us an increase in overall costs of some 65% which we dared not pass on to the competitor entirely. The meeting that year made a substantial but not crippling loss. There was now clearly a finite limit to how long Eight Clubs could survive under these conditions. In 2002, with yet higher entry fees and the country in mild recession, the entry fell to its lowest level for 30 years and the resulting loss left us so short of funds that we were unable to underwrite another meeting. When the story got into the specialist press there were offers of support from entrepreneurs and circuit owners but the strings attached were unacceptable. In March 2003 Eight Clubs was dissolved and the surplus funds invested in a bursary to support safety-related projects in club motor sport. So ended a glorious history.

Could the disaster have been averted? As may be imagined, there was much discussion about alternatives. At an earlier stage we could have embraced the fashion for championship scratch races but ended up, as Les Needham noted at the time, with 'just another race meeting'. Delegates were agreed that this was not in the spirit of the consortium. We could have gone to a cheaper circuit but there was strong emotional resistance to leaving a circuit which had been

our 'home' for more than half a century. Alternative circuits, in any case, came at a price. If they were cheap then they were remote like Pembrey or Snetterton and that brought problems of ensuring adequate marshalling as we had found to our cost in an abortive attempt at a second-string meeting at Lydden some years back. It had been abandoned after only two years..

The disquiet over Octagon's takeover of the prime racing circuits in England, which gave them five out of 18 but 75% of the revenue, was such that the Competition Commission was asked to investigate whether the acquisition

was against the public interest and in mid-2001 Eight Clubs was invited to send a representative for interview. There I pleaded that the lack of concessions would spell the end of grass roots motor racing but the Commission eventually concluded that the merger was not against the wider public interest although questioning some of Octagon's financial practices. I had also put our case to a senior member of Octagon but he took the line that conditions should be the same for all clubs across the board. Larger clubs like MGCC could ease the cost by using cheaper circuits in the mix. Clearly we didn't have that option and Octagon's final offer of a cheaper rate if we took a late calendar date proved an empty promise - but by then Octagon itself was in serious financial trouble.

Some good came out of the crisis. The Commission had questioned the wisdom of having such a fragmented sport (there are about 600 registered motor clubs) and, in response to the Octagon threat, the smaller racing clubs met to form an association which was at least partially responsible for pushing MSA into recognising the need for a concerted voice. The whole group, including BARC and BRSCC, met in April 2002 to form the Association of British Motor Racing Clubs. That body, of which I was the first Secretary, has done invaluable work in ensuring that there are now proper lines of communication between circuit owners, circuit users and legislators. It's nice to think that the voice of Eight Clubs continued to be heard even after its death.

Robin Birchall

Thirty years of Eight Clubs – a personal view

Bill Bonney

My first Eight Clubs meeting was in 1972, the 23rd annual Silverstone meeting. At this time H&B were still providing key event officials, with George Whiteaway as one of the two Club Stewards, Mike Eyre, the Chief Timekeeper, Dr. John Nelms, the Chief Medical Officer, Robin Birchall, the event Handicapper and Pat Stevens, the Chief Paddock Marshal.

Having just joined the Club, my work colleague Mick Harris suggested I should accompany him to Silverstone where he would be working with Pat Stevens in the paddock area. I did not need asking twice, just the thought of having access to the hallowed heart of this famous circuit prompted a very positive "yes". I had previously been to the circuit to spectate at the annual VSCC meetings and, as a member, had often walked around the paddock area admiring the exotic machinery but to be involved with the running of such an event was just a dream in those days.

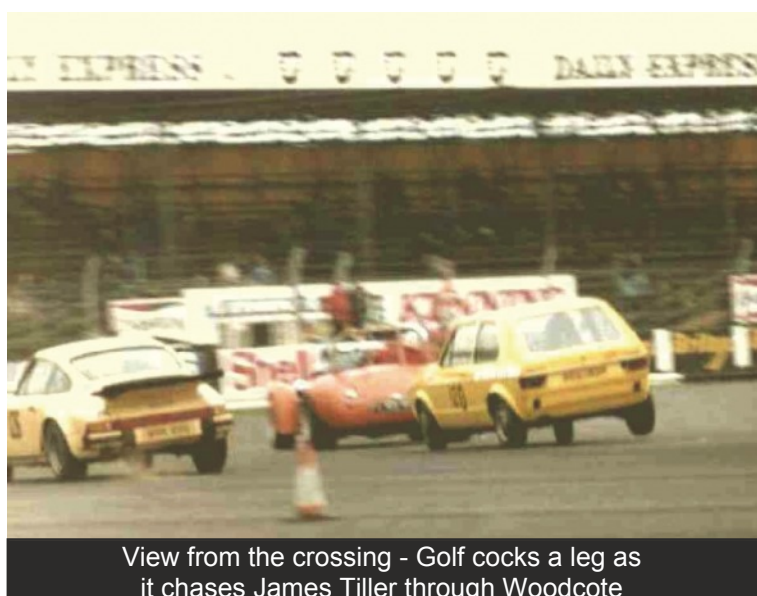
On Saturday, 6 May I arrived at the circuit and met Mick and the other marshals for the briefing by Pat Stevens. Mick would be marshalling the track crossing just south west of Woodcote corner. In those days, before the bridges had been built, access to the paddock meant that all cars with track passes, both competitors and officials, had to cross the Club circuit so we moved our cars near to the crossing. The routine was straightforward. After each practice session or race, the Clerk of the Course, having driven the circuit, would stop by the track crossing and signal for us to open our barriers and direct waiting cars across the circuit into the paddock. Once the barriers were again closed we were able to watch the competitors form up on the grid and had a really spectacular view of the competitors coming down the Club straight and exiting through Woodcote. This would be the first but certainly not the last time I watched cars such as Golfs lifting their inside wheels.

For the next six years our routine would be the same, with time during the lunch break to walk around the

Paddock and talk with the drivers. This was one of the friendliest race meetings in the calendar and, although there was fierce competition on the circuit, drivers were ready to help each other in the Paddock. Often you would see several helping another who had some form of mechanical problem, all mucking in to try and get the car ready for its next race.

A similar story could be told of the marshals who were there both to assist with the safe running of the event and to enjoy some excellent motorsport. I well remember the occasion when there was a cry for help for someone to assist in the race control telephone exchange. Silverstone had the old type of exchange where you plugged the jack plug into the appropriate socket to redirect the call. Apparently one of the regulars who always did this job had not turned up and, before the event could start, someone needed to volunteer. On other occasions word went out for additional help as track/flag marshals. Often members of our team in the Paddock and at the track crossing found themselves doing another equally important job on the day. But that was the true essence of the Eight Clubs experience, a relaxed but expertly run club event.

By 1980 I had nine years' experience and had been promoted from the Track Crossing team to running the Paddock exit. In those days this consisted of a simple dual purpose swing barrier which allowed competitors on to the track and cars with track passes to enter. The next year it



View from the crossing - Golf cocks a leg as it chases James Tiller through Woodcote

was all change following the sad loss of Pat Stevens, I took over the mantle of Chief Paddock Marshal and became the H&B voting representative in Eight Clubs Ltd. We still maintained a strong H&B presence with the provision of the team of paddock marshals with responsibility for calling up competitors on the Tannoy, lining up the grid for each race and despatching them to the circuit. We had the opportunity to see every car and talk with the drivers who were as enthusiastic as we were about this annual meeting.

By the late 1980s the addition of the Luffield complex and changes at Becketts increased the length of the Club circuit from 1.608 miles to 1.913 miles. Later changes, including adding the vehicle bridges and moving our Paddock exit compound to behind the circuit medical centre, decreased it again to 1.649 miles. We now had a further challenge; our Tannoy system could not be heard by competitors who were at the far end of the Paddock, so it became routine to send runners out to find competitors for most of the races. We also had problems in communicating between the exit gate and the far end of the assembly area but this would be solved with the use of rather ancient two way portable radios which were especially important on those occasions where we experienced really murky conditions and it was impossible to see what was happening at the far end of the assembly area.

During the 1990s the RAC Motor Sports Association introduced a licensing system for Clerks of the Course which brought about changes of personnel to Eight Clubs and, by the end of the decade, all track and paddock marshalling had been taken over by members of the British Motor Racing Marshals Club. We still assisted but our role changed significantly to managing the competitors through Scrutiny and then taking on the role of Paddock safety observers during the rest of the meeting.

In 1981 I attended my first Eight Clubs committee meeting. At this time Eight Clubs was chaired by Mike Eyre and twice a year Robin Birchall and I would make the pilgrimage to Mike's office in St. John's Wood where we would

meet in the boardroom. These meetings were quite different from those I had experienced before. Every February or March we would attend the AGM which would be followed by an ordinary committee meeting with a fairly short agenda, the main items being to decide whether or not to run an Eight Clubs event later that year and agree the date. The second meeting was held after the event and served as a review meeting. The AGM usually took between 10 and 15 minutes to complete an agenda normally containing eight items. It was a demonstration of the how well the whole Eight Clubs experience was organised. However, the ordinary committee meeting took a lot longer. By the end of the decade Robin Birchall had taken over as Chairman and our meetings were held in the High Wycombe area, saving that trek into the capital.

Robin has explained how the meetings came to be dominated by the question of survival. At the meeting on 19 November 2002 Robin asked us to vote on whether we would run an event in 2003, the 2002 event having made a loss of £10,000 and the Club now having insufficient funds to underwrite a further event. Of course it was very sad but the answer had to be no. It was the end of 30 years of involvement on my part but many more for some of the others. Sometimes one has to wonder if progress does take us in the right direction, but of course the world has moved on since the 1950s and perhaps I have to accept that there is no longer a need for such a grass roots event.

Bill Bonney



Martin Davies accepts the George Whiteaway Award from Bill Bonney (R) as he presents it for the last time (Nov '02)

2CV Cross

A French experiment

John Horne

2 CV Cross began in France in 1972 and was introduced to England by H&B at Blackbushe Airport in June 1975. Further meetings were held in June 1976, and in June and August 1977. The events were sponsored by Citroën Cars Ltd, with additional sponsorship from Total Oil in 1975 and 1976.

Total, who were funding the annual Economy Run (now the Total Economy Drive), introduced H&B to Citroën who were seeking a UK organiser for 2CV Cross. Pat Stevens, Dick and Nan Cawthorne and Sam Moore were taken to Le Pêchereau near Argenton-sur-Creuse to see a French event and were set the task of organising a similar meeting in England. Each one occupied a weekend with competitors camping at the race venue and costs were kept very low with no entry fee for competitors and no performance-enhancing modifications allowed on the cars. Citroën organised the International 2CV Cross Championship, five countries in '75, seven in '76



Pam Roper and John Horne (back view) surrounded by appropriate cross country machinery

and eight in '77 but everything else was to be done by the organising club. Normally, for this, the club would keep the gate money but, to get the event off the ground, Citroën met the costs for the first three events. An International RAC permit was required.



602cc grid

The H&B venue was a gravel and sand pit at the northern end of Blackbushe Airport close to the Kart track. A tortuous 700 metre circuit was bulldozed into shape by a Farnborough DMC member with a JCB and was then honed into precise imperfection by spade-wielding H&B volunteers during the week-end before the meeting and the evenings of the next five days. Part of the course fitted into a gully and the rest was marked out with piles of old tyres painted with white stripes. Rope barriers were erected to keep spectators at a safe distance from the track. In addition we had to construct a paddock cum village to accompany the circuit. Marquees were hired to accommodate scrutineering, stores, the Press, a dining area (complete with tables and chairs) and the odd spare in case we had forgotten something. Mobile toilets, complete with hot showers and



Rockin' and rollin' - the smaller category field

hand basins were installed; a GPO telephone line was run to the Club caravan and crowd control barriers were erected in an attempt to channel the anticipated crowds of spectators into entering by the pay-gates. In 1976 we took advantage of a short gap in Her Majesty's programme and borrowed these from Buckingham Palace on the Friday afternoon, then dismantled them at 5 pm on Sunday to do service at Holyrood Palace on Monday. A caterer to feed competitors, marshals and spectators and policing, ambulance and first aid facilities, and even sewage disposal were all arranged.

The competing cars were all Citroën 2CVs, modified only for safety. There were two categories - 425cc (16 bhp) or 435cc (24 bhp) and 602cc (28.5 bhp). Saturday started with scrutiny followed by three practice laps, then heats of eight laps leading to semi-finals for each category and a mixed final of 12 laps. On Sunday there were more heats, finals for each category and a Super-Final. Grids were of 18 cars for the finals, somewhat less for the heats. The track was rapidly torn up, resulting in spectacular dust clouds, and driving was gladiatorial in style with no quarter given; some even tried to drive over cars bogged down in the sand. The attrition rate was high with about a third of the field failing to finish each race but they were soon rebuilt for another bout.

In 1975 89 H&B members marshalled the event over the weekend with others, relatives and friends, pressed into service too. In 1976 this fell to 73 and, by August 1977, only 57. By then it was also apparent that gate receipts would never pay the expenses of running such a meeting and 2CV racing dropped out of the Club calendar.

John Horne

The Commentator's Story

When I was asked to write about 2CV racing at Blackbushe, I realised that time had dulled my memory but a few photographs in an old album helped me recall a highly enjoyable weekend. I do remember the tireless effort that so many H&B Club members put into ensuring that the meeting would be a success and would show the professionalism of the Club.

Committee members, particularly Dick Cawthorne, were responsible for much of the planning and the link with Citroën Cars. Sam Moore was made Clerk of the Course, a job of which he had ample experience, Ray Kingdon did excellent work with the timekeeping and my wife, Maureen,

assisted Scrutineer, David Small, with translations so that technical problems with the

Derek Argyle



1976 Earthworks, start line, timekeepers' tent & commentary box



The French student jazz band

cars of the French drivers could be kept to a minimum. Others organised the pre-event publicity and, on the day, acted as parking attendants, programme sellers and message takers. I had plenty of experience after years of autocrossing so I took some time off work and helped plan the layout of the track and then direct the bulldozer in contouring it and shaping the safety banks. The track itself was over sandy, stony soil and dust was always a problem when fields of twenty or so cars circulated the track so the use of a water cart quickly became a necessity.

On race days, I hardly had time to mix with Club members as I had been roped in to share the commentary with a fellow who commentated at several of the autocross meetings I had attended. Not having been behind a mike before, I found it took time to recognise each gaily-coloured *deux chevaux*, to speak to the drivers for background information and to select music tapes to fill in the gaps in our commentary. I remember that Chuck Berry's 'Ridin' along in my automobile' went down pretty well with our audience. In a delightful touch, Citroën had invited a large group of student musicians who entertained the crowd with their traditional jazz band.

2CV racing at that time was fairly new to the Brits and the enthusiasm and the creditable turn-out was most impressive for the first International meeting in the UK. Unfortunately, most of the British competitors still had to learn the tricks of the trade when it came to making their lightweight mounts withstand the rigours of rough bumpy tracks but the skills of the welders kept most of their fragile cars mobile throughout the weekend. Like the Superalloy rules now, 2CV

racing allowed those who trailed or broke down to race again later, so we always had full grids. Racing all day Saturday led to the finals on the Sunday and showed that the overall winner in the heats leading to the final race of the day was often not the driver who led the field each time but the one who gave a little more consideration to his car over the suspension-breaking course. Of course it invariably turned out to be a French victory but the Brits had done surprisingly well.



Interviewing the winner (right) Derek's the one with teeth

I really did enjoy the weekend enormously and was very sorry when the sound of twin cylinders revving their heads off was not heard again at Blackbushe.

Night watchman

Bill Bonney

Unless you have watched 2CV Cross, it is difficult to imagine how different it is from normal motorsport.

My own recollections revolve around three quite separate incidents during our 1976 and 1977 events at Blackbushe. We were enjoying a hot spell and the biggest problem we were anticipating was dust causing virtually nil visibility for the intrepid pilots of these small French cars. My official job was Assistant Paddock Marshal working alongside Mick Harris and in those days our area of Blackbushe was unfenced allowing unhindered access to all and sundry. We were concerned about the security of the whole site so it had been agreed that Mick would bring his caravan and we would undertake night watchman duties. As it happened this turned out to be useful in more ways than was intended.

By late evening the entire British entry had arrived but we were still short of the 15 cars due from France and Belgium. All we knew was that they were all on one transporter and it was somewhere en route. By about 10 pm we had eaten and were ready to try and get some sleep before an early start when in rolled a huge two tier transporter. Our continental friends had experienced a number of delays and were only interested in getting to their overnight accommodation in Camberley as soon as possible, so we got them to turn around, took them to the exit on the A30 and told them to drive due east towards Camberley. The transporter steamed off on the wrong side of A30 for as far as we could see, and that must have been a good three miles. We stood there in utter amazement waiting for the noise of the collision. When we saw them return next morning all in one piece we could only assume that, at that time of night, the road had been completely deserted.

To describe 2CV Cross as agricultural is, if anything, an understatement. Most of us have walked around the paddock of motoring events and watched drivers and mechanics fettling their highly tuned vehicles with gleaming tools and



Skilful overhaul with crowbars

occasionally, perhaps, a hammer to knock out the odd dent. The paddock area at a 2CV Cross event was quite different. There appeared to be just two pieces of equipment needed to keep these cars running, a large hammer to reshape the bodywork following regular inversion and long steel bar used with precision to lever the front suspension away from the engine to allow the drive shafts to be re-inserted.

My third recollection must, I think, have been in 1977. Even though we had done all the work in bulldozing and preparing the 0.7 km course, the owner of Blackbushe, Air Vice-Marshal Bennett, still required payment for its use and it was one of my jobs to deliver it. He insisted on cash, so £250 was withdrawn from the Club's bank for me to take to his office at Blackbushe late one afternoon. When I arrived his secretary said that he was out somewhere on the airfield in his Rolls-Royce but it would be alright if I left the money. She pointed to an attaché case on a chair in the office and told me to put the money in it. On opening the case, I could not believe my eyes. There must have been tens of thousands of pounds all in well used notes; our small contribution would make little difference to the total. I insisted on having a receipt which she signed for me and off I went slightly bemused by it all.

The Economy Runs

How H&B joined forces with Mobil

Joe Lowrey

The "greatness" of this expensive, commercially sponsored event was virtually thrust upon us. In 1951 I had competed quite successfully in a Cheltenham rally, run by a charmingly eccentric Pole called "Joe" Dembowski in which, besides speed and navigational skill, fuel economy was also important to success. In the next three years, that rally became a pure fuel economy contest in which others of the H&B Committee also competed.

Alas, sponsorship of those economy runs, by the News Chronicle and by Esso, shrank and the Cheltenham Motor Club decided regretfully to abandon their unique event. The ex-competitors on the H&B committee felt that somebody should organise a replacement and that they were competent to do this.

I had read about Mobilgas economy runs in California, staged with much razzmatazz, so I wrote to the Vacuum Oil Company (as they were then called) in London asking if they would help us to stage a petrol economy contest in Britain. The response was astonishing. Their American owners had just decided to introduce Mobilgas petrol on the British market and had told their UK Company to stage an economy run as launch publicity. I had contacted Mobil just as they were scratching their corporate heads about how on earth to do what their American bosses demanded. Things then happened fast.

It wasn't exactly a marriage made in heaven. For one thing, Mobil staff worked 9 till 5 on weekdays whereas we ran our club during evenings and weekends. The solution for them was a not-very-senior chap called Peter Bedwell who was ordered to work lots of overtime. We, in H&B had the youthful Bob Gotts whose

parents' business (oddly enough selling lubricants as a very much smaller Mobil rival) allowed him to take time off for motor club activities.



First H&B Economy Run, Joan Johns/Joyce Chesterton. Car is Buckler prototype, rarely seen with hood and full windscreen

At a meeting on 24 February, 1955 we finally agreed to run the event on 18/19 June - a date for which we already had a national permit - and Mobil would sponsor it to the tune of £1000 over and above their own contribution in time and materials. At later meetings in March it was decided that it would start and finish at Great Western Motors, Reading, run via Silverstone for a speed test (to catch out any freakishly detuned cars), then over the Long Mynd into mid-Wales, south across the Wessex hills to Bournemouth and back to Reading - about 600 miles. It was well supported (44 competitors) and it was won by my colleague, Dick Bensted-Smith of *The Motor*, who averaged 71 mpg in a Triumph TR2.

So we had got the show on the road in its first year but, as a Technical Editor of *The Motor*, I didn't want to endanger my commercial independence and it was left to others in H&B to continue the series while I became a competitor.

Joe Lowrey

The growing organisation behind our biggest event

Charles Bulmer

During the post mortem on the first (1955) event it became very clear that the views of Joe Lowrey and Bob Gotts on future development could never be reconciled with those of the Mobil Company. Committed to the pattern set by their parent company in the USA, Mobil wanted standard cars, rigorous scrutiny, a 1000-mile route, no coasting and maximum advertising and publicity which, they felt, demanded results which should be impressive but credible. They also wanted us to aim for an International permit so that we could invite competitors from countries like France and Italy where there were similar events.

Given all this they were prepared to spend real money and throw in the considerable resources of their marketing, commercial and catering departments. They were aware that they knew nothing about the organisation of motoring competitions. We, of course, had only limited experience of economy runs - I had competed in three and Holly Birkett in two - but we formed a new organising committee in which Holly was Secretary of the Meeting, I looked after all technical matters (scrutiny and fuel measurement), Pat Stevens became Chief Marshal and Bert Fountain had responsibility (in conjunction with Mobil) for the start and finish and some route stops.

This committee remained largely unchanged until 1962 when Pat Stevens became Secretary of the Meeting, still leaving Holly as Clerk of the

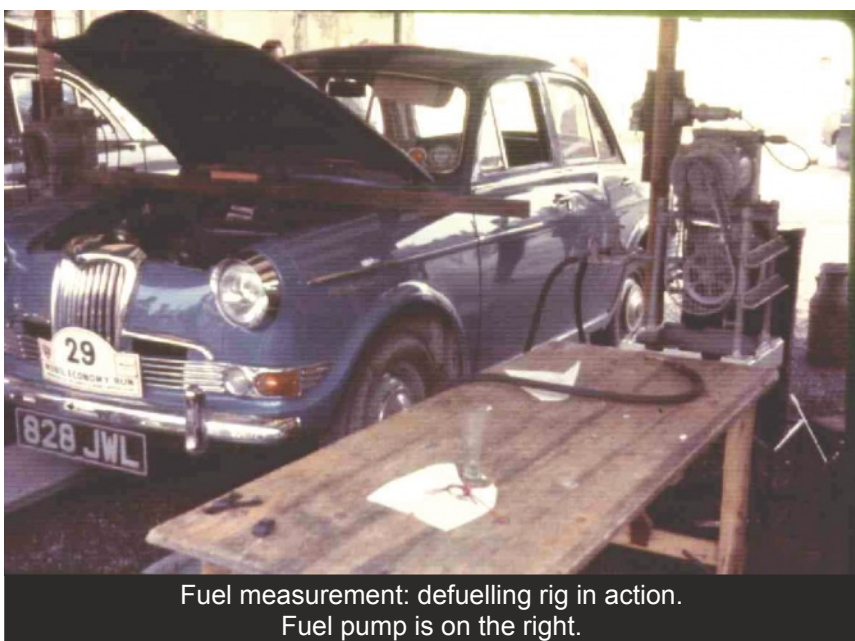
Course until his death the following year. Mike Igglesden was co-opted as Technical Secretary as scrutiny became ever more elaborate and the preliminary paper work grew with it and, when Bert Fountain also died in 1966, Stan Chisman joined the committee. He and Mick Harris progressively did more of the route finding,

We were well aware that Mobil were not sponsoring us for the good of motor sport and the entertainment of H&B members. To them it was just a marketing exercise whose cost could only be justified by column inches of press coverage, so the announcement of results and the accompanying press releases had to be very carefully timed to meet the rigid deadlines of the national press. If we ran at all late because of fuel measuring or scrutineering problems or unresolved protests, the value of the event was nullified for Mobil. We were conscious that we had to plan everything deliberately to minimise this possibility.

The Company put considerable resources into the organisation. Under Board Director Peter Bancroft, their principal liaison man was the amiable Peter Bedwell, whose job gradually developed into an almost full time occupation, while Commander Henry Barnes negotiated the commercial side of hotel accommodation and catering. His rigorous naval standards of smartness and disciplined behaviour were severely shocked by some of our scruffy members and scruffier competitors and he never

understood Holly's sense of humour but, apart from a few sticky patches, our association was a happy one and grew more so as we came to know each other better.

In 1958 Colonel Stanley Barnes, the post-war head of the RAC Competitions Department, was the RAC Steward on the event. He then retired and Mobil engaged him as an expert consultant to watch their interests. This was unfortunate because, although he was a man of vast experience, he knew absolutely nothing about



Fuel measurement: defuelling rig in action.
Fuel pump is on the right.

economy runs and had very rigid ideas of what you could and could not do which didn't match our innovative approach. To us he was another handicap to overcome.

Fuel measuring

However, in 1956 much of this was still in the future. First we needed a better method of fuel measurement. During the first two events the fuel level in the tank was measured by establishing a sight gauge (in effect an external and visible U tube), an ingenious method inherited from the Cheltenham Motor Club which, unfortunately, sometimes gave anomalous results difficult to detect. We set up an experimental working party – Holly, Bert, Brewster Cobb and me – and spent several long, fume-laden evenings at the Mobil depot in Wandsworth, working with Colin Cook, a young graduate engineer from their technical staff.



Powerful suction pump and condenser. We had to be sure to select the car's supply pipe rather than the return to suck from



Scenic route check, by Buttermere. Overdrive could be freed after locking on downhill stretches to prevent free-wheeling

Under controlled conditions we confirmed the sight tube anomalies and we also confirmed that the simple topping-up method of filling the tank to a visible mark in the neck could produce large errors with certain shapes of tank, even if the car attitude was accurately controlled. In some cars there was a variability of 2 to 3 pints in successive refillings, even when the car wasn't moved between them, and twice that if it was disturbed. Although the topping-up system had been used from time immemorial in the US Mobil run, their 3000 mile coast-to-coast route and thirsty cars meant that each consumed 100-200 gallons which concealed the start and finish errors.

We thought of various better systems and rejected them all because of cost, reliability or time (over 40 cars had to be processed in a few hours at both start and finish) and by default we finished up with a system based on the powerful suction pumps we had been using in Wandsworth to drain the tanks to outlet pipe level. With various refinements (levelling, etc) we eventually had a system that matched the 1% claimed accuracy of the commercial pumps used for refuelling en route (which all had to be checked and tested before the run). Several of these devices were built (for parallel processing) and presided over by Brewster Cobb from 1957 until he died in the late sixties and then by Dick Cawthorne and Rowland Smith who made further improvements in 1968.

Scrutiny

As the event developed in importance and advertising value we knew that we couldn't rely on the cars being presented in completely standard form, as the regulations demanded, and that the most ingenious cheats were likely to be the car manufacturers themselves. I spent a lot of time thinking what I would do to improve economy if I were a competitor and then I extended this thought experiment to include what I might do if I were an inventive but thoroughly dishonest and disreputable competitor.

In the end there was a very long list and absolutely no hope of checking many of them in 1956 - we just selected a few which were easy to monitor and then added a few more each year, adopting a flowline system which progressed through a series of specialist checking stations for comparison against the details pre-recorded in each car's Technical Record Book. Even by 1963 this had become a major operation, described later by Mike Igglesden, involving vehicle hoists, a rolling road, a fuel laboratory for checking specific gravity



A hurried bite in Wales - Pat Stevens and Peter Lear

and a very large number of people including a number of paid professionals.

The Route

To spread the event around the country, Mobil would suggest different regions each year. The route finding team - mainly Holly, Pat and Joy Stevens, Mick Harris and Stan and Vera Chisman - after prolonged study of Ordnance Survey maps, hotel guides and lists of Mobil petrol stations - would then set forth. It took an immense amount of work to piece together a whole route and after that to write the elaborate route book, get it checked and finally get it re-checked at the last moment because something always changed. Bill Bonney has more to say about this later.

Over the course of the years this team developed an amazing knowledge of the most obscure districts and you would often hear Pat and Mick, who had photographic memories, looking at their maps and plotting a new route from their armchairs. "Do you remember," Pat would say, "where that road comes down the hill past Jones's farm?" "Yes," Mick would reply, "you pass three haystacks on the left and then it turns sharp right opposite the mountain rescue hut." RAC regulations didn't allow us to set an average speed higher than 30 mph on the public roads but, by incorporating large cities and long sections on obscure and hilly minor roads, even that speed could be made challenging to drivers who were trying not to use the brakes or the lower gears.



The Bulmers in the Lotus XI, 1956. The floor was too well sealed and wouldn't let the rain out

However, since we could set any average we liked on private circuits, we decided to incorporate a one-hour section on the Goodwood circuit in 1956. It was essential that we didn't ask the impossible and so we spent a whole day there timing a wide variety of cars to find out what was the best they could do and then, of course, scaling this down by a large safety margin. I later found that I could achieve the sports class schedule in the aerodynamic Lotus 11 Climax with only three bursts of top gear acceleration per lap, remaining in neutral with the engine switched off the rest of the time. In subsequent years we used Oulton Park, Silverstone, Mallory Park and Brands Hatch.

We already knew that peculiar driving techniques were highly advantageous because petrol engines are usually at their most efficient when working at about three quarters of full load in the middle rpm range. In practice this meant accelerating in the highest possible gear and then switching off and coasting in neutral as far as possible - sometimes repeating several times a mile. We found that driving like this for a thousand miles demanded prodigious anticipation and concentration but could reward you with a 50% increase in mpg. It was a technique that we had ourselves developed and refined for the Cheltenham MC events, in which Joe Lowrey and I had averaged over 60 mpg in a Jowett Javelin. But this was definitely not the sort of result that Mobil wanted so, ironically, we now had to find some way to prevent it.

Where are they now?

We seem to have outlived most of our Mobil colleagues except Colin Cook who escaped from executive stress by opting out at an early age. He and his artist wife Carol became close friends of ours until they emigrated to Tasmania in the seventies. They now live a relaxed life in a hippy district on the East Australian coast.

I asked him for his Mobil reminiscences and he replied that his only really abiding memory was the horrified look on the face of his boss (Bert Perkins) whenever we met at a restaurant and he watched Holly chew his way rapidly through that month's expense allowance.

CHB

The only answer seemed to be to carry impartial observers, but who would suffer this job in return for little more than bare subsistence? Technical students might regard it as an enjoyable adventure, we thought, and we had a supply close to hand at the RAE Apprentice School. Holly persuaded the School authorities that it was a necessary part of a liberal technical education and a deal was made. There were some difficulties like morning sickness and the occasional tendency for them to bond enthusiastically with the team whose car they were in, rather than policing it, but this will be recounted later by their erstwhile leader, Dave Wilson, who used to carry reserve observers round the course.

There were four or five travelling officials apart from the refuellers and timekeepers. The pilot car (usually Pat Stevens), starting one hour ahead of the first competitor, ensured that the marshals were in place (the right place), waited for them if they weren't and performed miracles of impromptu re-routing if the local authorities had just dug up our road (which often happened). So the competitors were liable to catch him up. The Clerk of the Course (Holly) and two deputies (Bulmer and Igglesden) would be scattered through the field dealing with frequent crises



1961 Holly's most expensive transport - the Aston Martin DB4
Stan Chisman (R) admires

en route, like accidents, breakdowns and disasters at eating and refuelling stops. Behind the event was the back marker (usually Mick Harris) who followed the last competitor, closed the route checks and collected the time sheets; except, of course, when competitors vanished when he would have to take on the role of St Bernard.

A change was made in 1962 because the Mobil marketing and publicity people were not happy with class winners only. All proper competitions, they said, must have a separate overall winner to make an impact on the press and public. Couldn't we devise some overall figure of merit - like ton-miles per gallon? This led to extensive analysis of previous results to find a formula that was a reasonable fit yet simple enough for the results team to calculate under pressure (remember they didn't even have electronic calculators then, let alone computers). Much of the analysis was done by Mike Igglesden and his Figure of Merit formula was twice adjusted later. If we were still running the event I suppose we could derive a figure simply by comparing actual mpg with the official EEC test results that now exist for every model.

At the end of 1973 Mobil decided to withdraw from the event permanently, a strange decision we thought with the world fuel crisis of 1973/74 bringing acute shortage and the threat of petrol rationing, but it was the global decision of all the oil companies.

Later Events

Total Oil (GB) then took over sponsorship, starting with a one-day "holding" event on 17 September, 1974, confined because of lack of time to the Brands Hatch short circuit. The various classes ran for one hour each and pre-event scrutiny and fuelling was done the day before - we had bought the necessary equipment from Mobil. With more time for organisation the events in 1975, '76 and '77 reverted to a 3-day, thousand mile format, starting from Harrogate, Central London and Coventry respectively. But nothing was quite so lavish because the Mobil budget had been some £70,000 per event (excluding post-event advertising) and the Total budget about half as much.

Of the original organising committee only Pat Stevens (as Chairman) and I still remained - Bert Fountain had died in 1966 - but we had been joined by Dick Cawthorne, Stan Chisman, Mick Harris, Mike Igglesden and Dave Wilson, with Stan now playing a major part as Technical Secretary and Chief Marshal. As an innovation for the 1975 event there were two new classes for modified cars in addition to the four for standard cars and in 1976 an attempt was made to broaden the base with a series of regional club events in October and November, acting as qualifying runs for an H&B Club Final in December which was organised by Dave Wilson over a 200 mile route.

After the 1977 event Total withdrew - I think they had began to realise not only that the heyday of economy events had passed but also that they remained indissolubly linked to the name Mobil. But H&B still had the expertise and the equipment and we tried to keep things alive with an unsponsored 400 mile overnight event, based on Aldershot, in September 1978 and then the 3-day BP Petrol Stretching Run based on Donington Park in October 1979. This comprised a day of track tests and then a traditional road route with a night stop at Sandiacre. Competitors were not enthusiastic about the track sections and the whole event was not very well funded.

In 1980 Pat Stevens died. After Holly's death in 1963 he and Joy had carried the main burden of a very demanding year-long job - Secretary of the Meeting, Clerk of the Course, chief route finder and liaison with our paymasters, the sponsors. Some of us on the Economy Run organising committee were beginning to think that after 25 years his death also marked the end of an era. Paradoxically, as the critical importance of fuel consumption continued to grow after 1974 and manufacturers were forced by legislation to take it more and more seriously, its attraction as a sport and its publicity value seemed to diminish. Fuel economy had turned professional.

The Club Committee was more optimistic and their continuing efforts to attract new sponsors after 1980 are described later by Bill Bonney.

Charles Bulmer

Keeping the competitors honest

Mike Igglesden



1963 Scrutiny Area

My involvement with the Economy Run started with the third event. I helped Charles Bulmer in 1957 at The Royal Ascot hotel (start and finish) and then marshalled a check point in Warwick. Sleeping late on my return home, I had a panic call from Buxton to do an express delivery of Holly Birkett's dinner suit which he had left at Ascot; unsurprisingly to anyone who remembers Holly's size, he couldn't find an alternative to fit him that evening. This led to my being accepted as a useful member of the team, to developing a formula for a Figure of Merit which would give all competitors an even chance of a win, regardless of class, and then to becoming Technical Secretary of the event some years later.

Preparation

At a very early stage the organising committee had to decide on the venue for the Start and the Scrutiny Area. We needed plenty of space and the Harrogate Exhibition Hall and the bus garages at Worthing and Edinburgh were ideal.

Each year the Technical Committee discussed what entrants might do to improve their performance, from preloading the lubrication system with very thin oil to less honest means such as using soluble plugs to release fuel gradually from a hidden reservoir after the initial draining of the tank; we had to decide how we could check, and what we could do if we found any delinquents.

We were at pains to avoid penalties, which would mean wasted entries, so we tried to forewarn competitors of changes. One example was the discovery that some BMC cars with SU carburettors could gain 10% in economy with 10 degrees over-advance so we introduced the checking of TDC markings on the flywheel to prevent deception of the Crypton timing test. By the time the Regulations came out, traditionally on 1 December, we were pretty far advanced with the planning of the scrutiny area layout, and we had a draft list of scrutineers and officials.

I should explain that the only way known to motor sport law (the 'Blue Book') to specify standard condition, at that time anyway, was to make entrants declare that their cars would comply with "the specification as usually supplied for the UK market with no modifications or additions", and then demand enough details to ensure that we could identify the model precisely. We could then invoke Article 77 of the GCRs of the RAC which said that you must offer the car at Scrutiny to the exact definition given in your Entry Form. This form was in three parts: the first enabled the would-be entrant to offer several different models, the second gave the exact details of the car that had been selected by us and the third covered competition licence numbers and other details that might be available only just before the run.

Unfortunately, some entrants (including manufacturers) didn't seem to be able to fill up their forms very well, and Brewster Cobb, Robin

Birchall and I spent a long time putting them right. Otherwise we should have had Minis turning up without final drives, others with no doors, no carburettors, downdraught distributors and some very odd tyres (one very popular make was "Undecided"). It was surprising how many variations had occurred over the years, particularly on the smaller cars with fixed jet carburettors, which had to be reconciled with each car's production date; sometimes, we

began to feel we knew more than the manufacturers did. Finally, we provided SU, Solex, Zenith, Autolite and Crypton with a list of what was actually fitted to current production so they could determine the exact jets and the ignition advance curves.

The next task was to fill up the Technical Record Books, which accompanied each car through

Scrutiny, with all the specific items that would be checked at Scrutiny and might have to be examined after the run. Although we tried to maintain an up-to-date bible of technical specifications, by the time we had checked various items against literature provided by the makers, it took at least ten hours' work to complete the forty books; mostly man-hours, but also a few woman-hours and even child slave-labour hours.

My notebooks were full of flow-diagrams showing how it should be possible to get a car through the whole Scrutiny process in 3½ hours (14 units of 15 minutes each). The stages, some of which occupied more than one unit, comprised:

Draining all oils and refilling with the appropriate Mobil oil.

Looking for changes to tyres, signs of weight or drag reduction, checking all switches, overdrive etc., suspicious

electrical leads, fuel pipes, signs of fuel tank modifications, then on to the rolling road for axle ratio checking.

Checking for signs of ignition trickery, meddling with the carburettor, including manifold mods, air bleeds, automatic choke override and even correct size of battery.

Carburettor manufacturers' experts checked every detail and replaced jets with factory items.

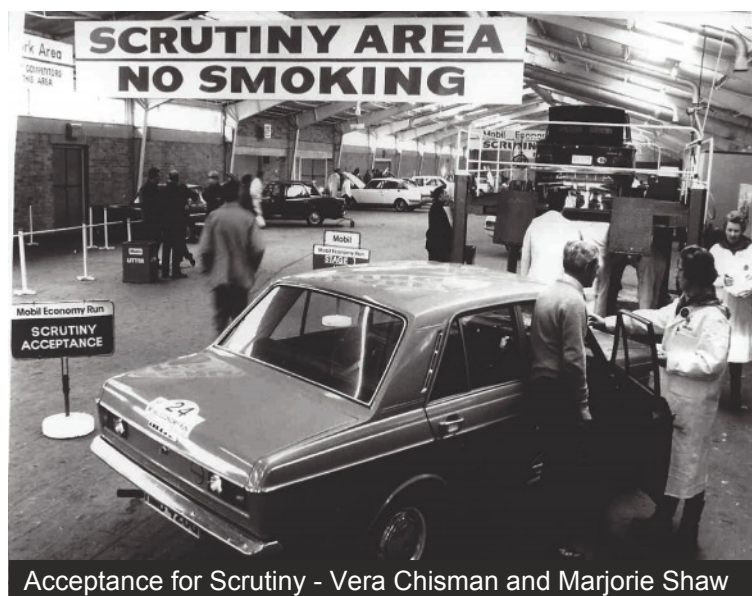
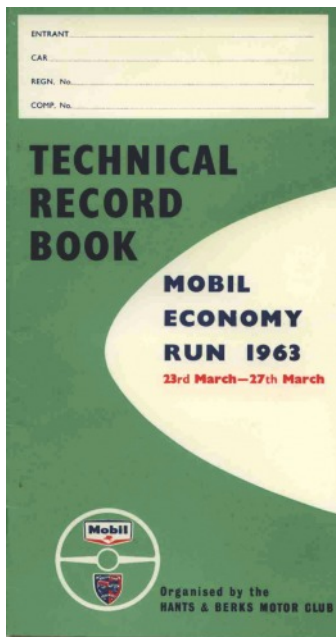
We then did a 10 mile engine warming run and speedo calibration with observer, followed by carburettor adjustment by the expert and a running test when operation of speedometer, instruments, overdrive or automatic transmission and other items were checked on a rolling road.

There followed initial fuelling by draining the tank and refilling with amount requested by the competitor, an engine run to check for leaks and transfer to impound, the car being driven there with an observer and accepted (or not) by the competitor as in satisfactory running order.

At the end of the event, the further stages were:

Fuel measurement by draining and weighing the remaining fuel.

Examination of the car to check against any report of work done during the event, any crash damage and, for potential class leaders, a check on compression pressure. This might lead to dismantling for a full check of valve, cylinder and even combustion chamber dimensions or, in





Zenith carburettor expert at work

fact, any of the things that we dared not do before for fear of being blamed for spoiling the car's performance.

On at least one occasion, a fuel tank was removed and cut open to find any crafty baffles that might trick the 'empty to empty' measurement system. This was done as a public warning to everyone, not particularly because we suspected the 'victim'.

The Scrutiny days

Scrutiny would begin on the Friday afternoon, in a large covered area like the Exhibition Hall at Harrogate, with 8 cars called to give us a leisurely practice for the system and provide us with a primed line for the Saturday morning. We called competitors to arrive at carefully chosen times so that the carburettor people could be fed steadily with the right type of carburettor - roughly one SU, one Zenith and one Solex every half-hour.

Naturally, in a complicated process practised only once a year, things never went as smoothly as we wished. Ignition checking was a tricky business, involving finding top dead centre before the electronic measurements could begin and it was difficult to prevent the competitors from getting a long lecture on the benefits of electronic tuning while their cars were being dealt with by the expert from Crypton or Sun.

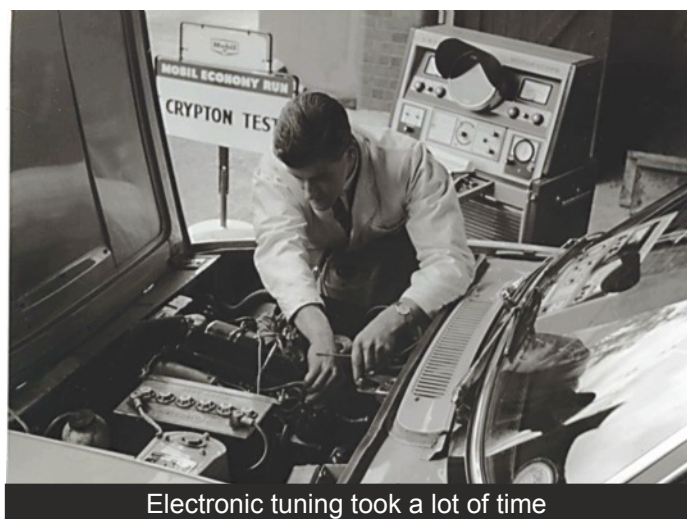
As we improved that process, we found that the bottleneck usually moved to the

carburettor stages. One or two twin-carburettor cars were a real problem (really difficult cars like the Imp Sport could spend up to three hours on the first of the carburettor stages instead of the planned three-quarters of an hour) and it didn't help that some cars came in very bad condition. A few competitors reckoned the organisation would do the preparation for them, which didn't indicate a very serious approach; the shining examples of good preparation usually returned the best results. And every year someone would ask, "Why don't you call competitors at carefully chosen times?"

Eventually we could repair to dinner and I could get ready for my other duty as Deputy Clerk of the Course. With my companion/navigator, I set off to enjoy mingling with the competitors to sort out problems. I usually managed to borrow an interesting car from one of the manufacturers but the real joy was that my responsibilities were quite different and were accompanied by relatively unrestrained driving (my co-drivers might have another description) in wonderful country. But that is another story.

Back to the Finish

At the end, remaining fuel was drained and weighed, overall consumption was calculated by the results team under John Bagley and Anne Wilford (now Jones) and the cars examined as described previously. Potential class winners were thoroughly looked at by the local dealers' mechanics, who stripped, checked and reassembled engines in a very short time - not



Electronic tuning took a lot of time

quite up to modern Formula 1 or World Rally Championship speed but very praiseworthy.

The run was a technical exercise and I believe that H&B was especially well able to organise and handle it because we had so many highly qualified, voluntary Scrutiny staff, nearly all from the RAE at Farnborough plus a few professional experts like David Small. They always coped, despite this being done only once a year without

rehearsal. All were able to act strictly, yet in a manner that always attracted praise from competitors. As one RAC Steward put it, in what other international event could officials and competitors drink together without suspicion of dirty dealings? It gave me great satisfaction to be part of it.

Mike Igglesden

A NOTE ON THE H&B FORMULA.

Since about 1960, Mobil had been asking for an outright winner based on the performance of the driver (not the car) rather than four class winners based on engine size. We had our own technical interest in the variation of consumption with various parameters of the cars. We had long debates and read learned papers. The idea of ton-miles per gallon has existed since the days of Lanchester but others ranged from subjective handicapping (soon abandoned) to very complicated technical formulae unsuited to rapid computation (no electronic computers then). Eventually we developed an idea (suggested by Joe Lowrey) that uses engine size, gearing and car weight to predict the gallons used over, say, 1000 miles:

$$G = aL/M + bW + c \quad \text{where} \quad \begin{array}{l} G = \text{gallons used} \\ L = \text{engine capacity (litres)} \\ M = \text{mph per 1000 rpm} \\ W = \text{homologated weight (lb)} \\ a, b \text{ and } c \text{ are empirical constants} \end{array}$$

In effect, this combines a swept volume and gearing component, ton-mpg and straight mpg. The constants a , b and c were deduced by comparing equally meritorious performances across all classes over several years, giving:

$$G = 145L/M + 0.0035W + 5 \quad (\text{introduced in 1962})$$

Roughly speaking, a mid-range 1.5-litre would use $14 + 9 + 5 = 28$ gall (equivalent to 36mpg). The calculated value of G was compared with the actual consumption to produce a Figure of Merit across all classes. Later, weight was quoted in Kg and other adjustments were made in the light of experience so that, by 1965, it became inverted to give a 'bogey mpg' rather than 'bogey gallons' for the event:

$$\text{MPG} = 1000/(140L/M + 0.008W + 5)$$

Later still, in 1973, the weight-related component was modified again in two respects, to become $0.006W$ where W now had 225 Kg added to the homologated weight to represent the weight of the crew. There it remained to the end.

We never came to a satisfactory adjustment for automatic transmissions. There was no obvious technical parameter, and past results were inadequate in number or quality to permit conclusive analysis. However, it was used as it stood from 1970 to produce the winner of the automatics (Class V) and in 1971, happily, it gave the award to Joe & Margaret Lowrey in their Rolls Royce. They achieved 16.595mpg (Figure of Merit 1.017); this was also the second Figure of Merit overall, less than 2 percentage points below the best (1.031) by an Austin 1800 with 36.69mpg.

However, the Figure of Merit did serve to provide a reasonable measure of performance across and within the classes and, although not enthusiastically adopted by Mobil, it also became the criterion for the H&B Driver's Award (the Holland Birkett Award). MSI

Adventures of the Chief Timekeeper (1955 to 1962)

John Higginson

I was very fortunate in being able to call on my experienced pals Peter Cole and David Morgan as assistants - we were all about 25! Only Peter was credited as 'Deputy' in the programme (he sadly died twenty years ago) but fortunately David Morgan still survives. This illustrates how friends (and in some cases friends of friends) had to be 'volunteered' in the early years to make up the manpower required. By year five or six, Pat Stevens was turning volunteers away.

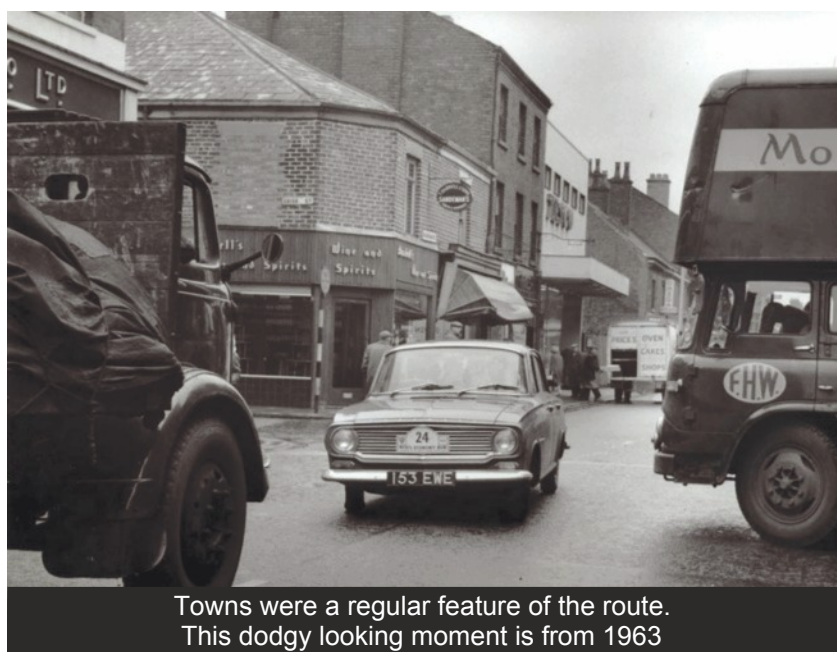
Smiths Instruments were providing suitable timepieces and, as I was working in Westminster, I had the task of collecting and returning the clocks to their Cricklewood factory. Three clocks were supplied for each timekeeping team and for the first year Smiths, with considerable experience in supplying rally competitors, provided their standard and accurate 2½ inch black faced dashboard instruments which required little or no adjustment during the run. Mobil thought these clocks were insufficiently prominent in 'action' photographs of competitors booking in and out

of time controls so Smiths were later asked to supply larger timepieces - 'cabin' type clocks with white dials of about 6½ inches diameter. A similar but still larger model was supplied for elevated display by the start line banner under which, 'personalities' or civic worthies waved the Mobil Pegasus flag. The accuracy of these was appalling and they required constant adjustment by reference to the Greenwich time signals but publicity, of course, was all-important to the Company and sometimes conflicted with the regulations of the event, as will become apparent.

The large 'prestige' Mobil station on the A4 at Shepherds Hill, West Reading was used for scrutineering and fuelling before the start of the first run and the Company insisted that the petrol filler cap and bonnet of each competitor should be ceremonially 'sealed' for the benefit of photographers and the motoring press in particular. The roadbooks had check boxes for

'seals intact'. I recall Bob Gotts almost screaming with frustration as the lengths of black Bostik sealing strip carefully applied and 'stamped' would in some cases immediately fall off in the hot sunshine of that June afternoon. The later introduction of RAE apprentices as observers circumvented the problem.

The Mobil publicity machine was slow to start that first year. Time controls were sited at filling stations of various sizes, some inconveniently small as the result of the Company's headlong



rush to acquire as many outlets as possible, but each station received the same quantity of red, white and blue bunting so the smaller ones were ridiculously over-dressed. They had appointed a small firm of contractors from the Black Country to put the decoration up just before the arrival of the competitors and remove it once they had passed through. This caused the following dialect clash at a time control in Weymouth, Dorset:

Contractor to assistant, "Have you got the pussy's ear notice, Fred?"

Assistant, "Right then, the pussy's ear?"

Contractor, "Aye."

We watched in amazement as a domestic stepladder was produced and a large banner

Timekeeper's transport

I went to a business conference where one of the speakers was the Sales Director of Ford Motor Company. We got talking and I told him of my exploits with H&B on the Mobil Economy Runs. He offered us an ex-works Capri to use for marshalling on the Mobil. Considering it was 3 litres it wasn't very fast. Next time we had an ex-works Escort RS 16 valve. It was claimed to have a top speed of about 135 mph but I only managed to squeeze 133 out of it. The only thing that gave the game away was a badge on the side, and by the time you'd seen that it was too late. On another occasion we borrowed an Escort Mexico, an ex-Monte Carlo race car in 'yuck green'. John Hadnutt and I did timing at the Start of the Mobil and then drove a hundred miles to time in the runners at lunch with a passage control on the way. One fellow asked if all the marshals had the same cars, "You seem to be everywhere." It became quite a hobby to start off the cars then try to catch them all up by lunchtime. I think we made it to number four on one occasion.

RWK

unfurled and tied securely with string. "MOBIL ECONOMY RUN PASSES HERE", it said. This firm did not reappear on subsequent runs.

I think it was on the second run that Georges Chatterre competed in his 2CV which had achieved success in the French Mobil event. He was volatile and expressive but adamant that he could neither *parlez anglais* nor comprehend the English spoken or written word. The entire resources of the Club were put to the test to find an interpreter - who was it? At the first time control of his first British Run he was still in a Gallic rage at the organisers and spluttering, "*il faut, il faut, il faut.*" Why does everything have to be '*il faut*'?"

The President of Mobil GB, J.C. Gridley, was much in evidence in the early stages of that event. At the half way point he attended the competitors' dinner at the Grand Atlantic Hotel, Weston-Super-Mare and spent the night there.

Arrangements had been made for the timekeepers and other start line personnel to be served with an early breakfast and at the appointed time we were sitting around waiting for hotel service. None was forthcoming - the kitchen and reception areas were deserted.

Enter John Gridley with hand luggage. He had been promised breakfast before departing for an important early meeting at Westminster. Frequent expeditions set out to the hotel kitchen. We banged doors and rang bells without result and eventually President Gridley decided that he would have to cut breakfast and leave for London. We helped him with his luggage to the hotel entrance. This time he was baffled as well as hungry - the hotel doors were securely locked.

A furious President now sought a way of escape. The lounge had huge double hung sash windows to give guests an uninterrupted view of the Bristol Channel and six marshals eventually managed to lift a bottom sash. We watched in awe as the expensive suiting of the President collected salt encrustation and grime as he slid over the sill and dropped to the ground while his luggage was passed down through the open window. It was the photo opportunity of the entire run but, fortunately for the Company, no cameras were at hand. We never got any breakfast that morning since, by the time the last competitor had been flagged off, service had finished in the dining room. This hotel was not used again.

The year that Holly Birkett, as Clerk of the Course, wangled an Austin Healey 3000 for his transport he managed (exceptionally) to visit



Timekeepers could get cold, 1965 at Harrogate

most of the time controls. The scene is a large Mobil station on the outskirts of Harrogate with the timing crew expecting the first competitor in late afternoon. Enter a be-capped Birkett grumbling at his conveyance. "It's going squeak, squeak," he said which seemed a churlish comment from one who invariably drove vehicles with pieces of bodywork that could be heard squealing in protest. As an afterthought he added, "Everyone has found the course through the Dales very difficult and some will

be extremely short of time. Mobil do not like anybody to be late, John, so please don't record them as late." I took a dim view of this and told him so but Birkett could be inscrutable at times and chose to be so at that moment. Would he have condoned breaching the regulations? We never found out and never discussed the incident again. In fact two or three crews were penalised and their fuel consumption figures suffered accordingly.

It was also in the Harrogate area on another run in the late fifties that I was nearly immobilised. Both timekeeper crews usually worked to a very tight schedule with hardly any spare time but, on that particular Sunday morning, we had two or three hours before we had to leave for our next control. I thought I would like to photograph some of the surroundings in the early spring sunshine and drove the Magnette northwards until the engine stuttered and expired. It was fuel starvation - the SU pump in the boot was too hot to touch and it had obviously seized for good.

Pegasus or lady luck took pity - a passing police patrol stopped and quickly summed up the problem. "There is a spare parts shop next to the (police) station and the owner lives over it." We drove some six miles to Hebden Bridge and, with my police escort, the shop duly opened for me on a Sunday and produced a spare pump. Back to the Magnette and in fifteen minutes I was on the road again, accompanied by a strong smell of petrol. I have had several brushes with the police in succeeding years, none of them at all helpful, but my criticisms have been much



A few hills helped to keep figures sensible, 1970

softened by that Yorkshire incident. Ever afterwards on our BMC vehicles I carried a spare petrol pump and never needed it.

My hard worked Deputies, Peter Cole and David Morgan, were naturally given all the time controls in Wales, the Marches and generally everything west of longitude 2° 30'W. However, on the Run in question, this crew had to deal with an early morning seafront control at Worthing. The scene now becomes that town centre at about 3am. It is raining heavily and from the northwest enters the timekeepers' travel-stained Hillman Minx which had motored non-stop through the night from some remote location. David slowed to study the route instructions. Suddenly a police constable appeared in front, arms waving from under a soaking wet cape. David wound down his window and the following dialogue ensued:

Wet police constable to tired driver, "Can you tell me where you are going sir?"

Tired driver, "We are looking for a filling station."

W.p.c, "They are all shut this time of the morning."

T.d., "We know that."

The policeman reached for his notebook, his worst suspicions aroused and then fully alerted when he saw the three clocks on the back seat. It took a little while for the timekeepers to convince the law of the legality of their journey

but eventually they parted on good terms. The constable had come on duty at midnight and the Minx was the first moving vehicle he had seen.

Years later, after Sheilah and I had moved to East Yorkshire where we were isolated from participation in Club events for twenty years, I had an unexpected call from the Club asking us to marshal at an Economy Run daytime route check. The location was Emley Top, a wild moorland height between Huddersfield and Barnsley which we knew. The only structures to be seen on the summit were a communications mast, a telephone box and a very good pub, the Three Acres. We were miffed to find that the control opening times didn't fit those of the pub but packed a thermos instead.

We duly dealt with the competitors on a cold, drizzly and windswept morning with the top of the mast lost in mist. There was a note attached to the bottom of the check sheet, "please telephone central control to report that all cars have passed through". Off I went to the telephone box. That was the year when the sponsors had decided to base the event at a hotel in Kensington. I dialled the number from

the cold, damp and draughty box and gave my message. An elfin female voice answered.

"Nobody ever bothers to telephone us or tell us anything at all and we are so terribly bored, why don't you come up and see us?"

I grinned as I put the 'phone down, partly because the contrast between Emley Top and Kensington was so great, and partly because I was certain that I would never again get a similar invitation. I forgot that central control knew very well that I was at a safe distance, nearly two hundred miles away up the A1.

Today, the Club Committee seems to have forgotten that the healthy Club bank balance is largely the result of the members of those days working so hard on those Mobil Economy Runs. The events relied absolutely on the efficiency and expertise of the technical members and none of the Runs could have been mounted without them. Fortunately, I never got mixed up with any of the politics of Company v Club.

John Higginson

Travels with observers – and promotion to the Pilot Car

Dave Wilson

My involvement with H&B started in 1956 when the Club was 10 years old and I was 19. With a friend who wanted to join the 750 Motor Club, we called on Holland Birkett (then President of the 750 MC) at his veterinary surgery in Fleet, looking for entry forms. We admitted that we were apprentices at RAE, Farnborough and Holly said he had written to the Principal of our college asking to use RAE apprentices as riding observers on the Mobilgas Economy Run. He had had no reply. My friend was good at politics and suggested that Holly should ring our Principal and tell him that the matter was urgent and that Imperial College would be asked to supply the observers if Farnborough couldn't. This ploy produced instant agreement and, within the week, notices went up

around the college asking for volunteers.

That year, 1956, was the first time that observers were used. The start was from Phyllis Court, Henley and the event ran continuously, including an hour on the Goodwood circuit



Anxious competitor waits as his remaining fuel is weighed



Results maestro, John Bagley works out diversion allowances - snow, perhaps. Observers' reports were evidence

where the observers were allocated to different cars, and then via the Cheddar Gorge to Weston-Super-Mare, where they were changed. Those who had ridden the first half were relieved by others who had been taken by bus to Weston. The warm beds vacated by the "second shift" were gratefully taken up by those who had completed their duties at Weston. Competitors had to drive down to the West Country and return to Henley with no more than the odd meal break.

My memories are of a wet start at Henley, of being allocated to a Borgward Isabella Combi, the crew of which smoked incessantly and refused to open the windows because they were trying to save fuel, of being driven at irresponsible speeds through hill fog over the downs to Goodwood, of watching Charles Bulmer circulating at Goodwood in the rain in a Lotus XI, of having a terrible headache, of being driven down the Cheddar Gorge in a VW Beetle by Bill Bengry, of being most grateful to be taking over a bed of any sort after my experiences and of being treated to caviare in the back of a garage in Wells Road, Bath (a route check for the returning competitors) on the way back to Henley by coach. I also remember the shiny new leather wallet with Mobilgas logo and the two crisp new £1 notes inside it and feeling very ill prepared for my ONC exams the following day back in college.

The next year, I was promoted to Deputy Chief Observer (because I had become the

Chairman of the College Motor Club and the Chief Observer didn't drive) so I was the one putting up notices seeking volunteers. This was my first experience of management and it has stood me in good stead ever since. I was privileged to attend meetings of the organising committee and to witness the endless trouble of very able H&B volunteers to ensure that the event ran smoothly. I did route plotting expeditions with Pat Stevens and spending weekends driving around the biggest hills we could find and living in posh hotels was a great

pleasure. The route that year took us to the Yorkshire Dales and was particularly destructive to the competing cars. I tried to pick up the stranded observers from badly damaged cars and finished up, in the middle of the night, returning to Buxton for a Mobilgas reception with 12 of them in a Mk.2 Ford Zodiac. Other memories include being overtaken at very high speed by John and Sheila Higginson in an MG ZB Magnette and filling my car with Esso in Ambleside (with Mobilgas Economy Run messages emblazoned across all the doors) because no Mobilgas could be found within range.

For several years afterwards I was the Chief Observer, all references to the Students' Union having been abandoned. Leaving the college and my apprenticeship in 1959 meant that to continue my involvement I had to join the Club. I still had some function at every event but almost missed the 1960 one (based in Worthing) when I couldn't get time off a Royal Air Force



Another delay allowance - closed level crossing

course (I had joined for three years to avoid National Service). I did, however, manage to do a late evening stint as a car park guard in company with Derek Buckler.

As my time in the RAF was spent predominantly in Norfolk it was convenient to help Holly by collecting from the Lotus works the primrose coloured Elite which he was to use as Clerk of the Course. On returning the car to Cheshunt, I found that my Ford van had been broken into and the radio stolen. Lotus asked to keep the van in case it contained any evidence that might help in catching the thief - they had things missing as well. How was I to manage without my van, I asked? Perhaps I could manage with the Lotus, they said. Eventually, I had to pester them to give me back my van, as the Elite was wearing out rapidly but there was a certain kudos in appearing at work in it each day and it did wonders for my image.

After Holly's flying accident in 1963, Pat Stevens became Clerk of the Course and I drove the Pilot Car with Peter Lear. My successors as Chief Observer included Graham Rood and Tony Bedingfield (later to become our Club Chairman). My job required me to move around the country, limiting the time I could spend on Club duties, so I really was, for many years, an "Economy Run" member. Then, just as fuel economy was becoming a big issue, Mobil dropped their support and Total took over, then BP, then Redex and, improbably, Memorex. Bill Bonney has more to say about this phase later.

The Economy Runs were all fun in their various ways but the organisation and participation in the Mobil years remains the high point for me.

Dave Wilson

Plotting the route – apprenticeship with Mick Harris

In the late 1960s my employer, the SEB, moved me from my home town of Portsmouth to Aldershot where I was to undertake my first management assignment. The group with which I was to work included Mick Harris, a long-term Club member and, as I was soon to find out, one of the leading lights of the Club's Economy Run organising team.

Mick's enthusiasm for all things motoring linked with my own interests which, at that time, revolved around ownership of a series of sports cars, membership of several one make clubs and annual pilgrimages to VSCC Silverstone and several hill climbs. Within a month of joining H&B in November 1971, I was volunteered for active service on the Mobil Economy Run planned for the following April. Little did I know at this stage the impact my involvement with H&B would have on my next three decades.

Bill Bonney



Another scenic route check. Heather Bulmer (R) chats with John and Beryl Nelms, ready for anything with trailer and camping gear

Mick explained how the economy event was planned and run. Once the 1000 mile route had been decided in outline and marked on Ordnance Survey maps, it was split into four sections and he, along with other Club members, went off to drive and detail their sector. That all makes sense now, but then I only knew what OS maps were because I had been introduced to

them during my training when working with the company's surveyors planning new sections of overhead electricity lines. Mick asked me if I would co-drive with him on this route-detailing exercise over the weekend. The plan was that I would meet him at his house in Church Crookham on the Friday and we would then drive north, making for the Scottish borders and spending Saturday and Sunday working our way around the last 250 miles of the route back to Harrogate.

This turned out to be a real adventure for more than one reason. First, we drove on roads and through parts of England and Scotland that I had never even heard of. We seemed to find and climb every hill on each of the maps we traversed and I soon got a good grounding in navigation and map reading and mastered the route detailing shorthand that had been developed over the years.

The next module of my economy run apprenticeship took place early in 1972 when we were off again checking a different 250 mile section of the route, detailed by others in the team, to make a last check on the route and look for errors in the (now typed) Road Book. We had already driven over 1000 miles and this was before the event had even started.

At the pre-event scrutiny at Harrogate on 8 April 1972 I found myself working with Jack Booth, a fellow electrical engineer from our Aldershot office, and club member Jack Shaw, alongside several Crypton technicians armed with their latest engine testing equipment. Our task was to undertake a detailed check on the cars' ignition systems, including static timing, centrifugal and vacuum advance curves and resetting to manufacturer's specification. The bonus for getting all the cars through promptly was to have your own car checked over and set-up by the Crypton experts.

My last and the most demanding task was to co-drive with Mick Harris as Back Marker - a sort of tail-end Charlie. We had to follow the last competitor away from the start to the first Route Control, collect the route check cards from the marshal and then continue to subsequent controls closing the route as we went. Bearing in mind that they were spaced about every thirty

miles along the route and that we spent three to five minutes at each, we had to average somewhat more than the 30 mph that the competitors were required to maintain. Our ambition was to be behind that last car before it reached each control. This was the task that taught me a great deal about fast driving when in the right hand seat and calling junctions accurately when in the navigator's seat. We found that a maximum of two hours behind the



1963 Crypton rolling road tuning

wheel was about the most you could do and we would then change drivers and alternate on this basis for 500 miles each day.

The other dimension of the Back Marker's job was dictated by the Pilot Car which was driven by Dave Wilson and started about an hour before the first competitor. If the route was blocked for any reason, his task was to erect diversion signs and then arrow the new section until it returned to the original route. We had to dismantle and collect all these signs. As Dave Wilson was six foot four and I was the tallest in our car it fell to me to remove these temporary decorations from all manner of places but generally fairly high up on street furniture or war memorials.

When the 1973 Mobil came around I was well up to speed and again enjoyed the route detailing, checking and back marking. But unfortunately this was the end of the line with Mobil after a partnership that had developed over 19 years. They were pulling the plug on sponsorship of all their economy events worldwide.

The final decade - a variety of partners

Bill Bonney

As Charles Bulmer noted, the death of Pat Stevens in 1980 coincided with loss of sponsorship and perhaps signalled a natural end to the series. Also, the RAC made changes to fixed route public relations regulations, requiring organising clubs to contact all premises used at night on other than A and B roads, giving them details of the event and inviting comment. However, the Club Committee felt that we should try to continue if we possibly could.

By March 1981 we had received the good news that Mobil were prepared to contribute £3500 towards an event but did not wish their name to be associated with it because a home brewed event would necessarily be of lower status than the International Mobil Economy Runs and they didn't want comparisons between them. Stan and Vera Chisman took on most of the route planning work for what would be the second H&B economy run and, as before, many members contributed to the organisation and made their premises available to the event. It attracted just 26 entries, even though the entry fee had been held down to £50 per car. Some thought the low entry was due to this event breaking with tradition and cars not carrying independent observers.

In May 1982 I had an enquiry from a PR company representing the Redex organisation and we prepared outline proposals for them. Within days they confirmed their wish to proceed and to use the event to launch their re-vamped Redex product. It would start in London, with the overnight stop in Manchester, and they wanted it to be run in late October that year which brought real pressures on the organisation.

It was first proposed to re-use a route that had been used in 1976 to minimise route organisation costs and time but after further discussions it was agreed to put the event back to 19-22 March 1983 to give a more realistic organisation period. Although a large number of

experienced marshals took part, the organising committee was completely new, with Keith Simpson as Secretary of the Meeting and myself as Clerk of the Course. By October we had our route approved by the RAC, the necessary Permit had been issued, the regulations were being printed and general organisation was well advanced. This Redex Economy Run put the Club back on the map, gaining good publicity for both the event sponsors and organisers.



However, by January 1985, no new sponsors had been found and we decided to run what would be the third H&B Economy Run. Past competitors were keen to see a further event, including our own Joe Lowrey who made a number of constructive suggestions, one being the possibility of using the Scatter principle, spacing three points at the corners of a triangle and requiring competitors to visit two of them. The RAC Motor Sports Association said they had no objection to the Club running it as a Scatter under a Waiver of Permit, thereby saving route preparation costs and the PR work.

Coincidentally Keith Simpson had discussions with Memtek (Memorex) who said they might be prepared to sponsor an event for a sum of £5000. After a further meeting with Mr Suri of Memorex, agreement was reached to run a short event, which would have to be in October 1985, with a more realistic budget of £5000 to £7000. It was agreed with the RAC MSA to run the event under a National permit with PR work only required around the Route Controls.

We now had very little time. After a couple of false starts the start and finish location was agreed as the Princes Water Ski Club, Bedfont, adjacent to the Memorex offices, but this location added costs for tentage as there were no other suitable buildings on site for the limited technical scrutiny that would be carried out pre- and post-event.

The Memorex Economy Run took place over the weekend of 19/20 October and broke new ground by running on the Scatter basis. The initial route took competitors from the start to Newport Pagnell Services on M1 via a control at Earls Court to coincide with Motorfair 1985. There was no chance of recording outstanding fuel economy figures on this section through London on a Saturday afternoon and Joe Lowrey calculated that it had reduced his overall economy on the whole event by 3-4 mpg.

Competitor feedback indicated that this new format provided crews with a reasonable challenge but in no way compared to the traditional fixed route. However, it did prove that a reduced cost event was still possible with a budget of just over £7000 compared with the £40,000 spent on the last 'proper' event. Although Memtek was very happy with the



Spoils of victory. Graham Hill presenting prizes to Economy Run stalwarts Stuart and Hugh Bladon. Total 1976

Club's organisation, their PR machine was hardly wound up and Mr Suri said that, if he were to sponsor a further event, he would take over the publicity himself rather than use a specialised PR company.

The follow-up event didn't happen but we found that the Caravan Club was still interested in a joint event if it provided a class for car and caravan combinations and by December they reached a tentative agreement with H&B to run a 500 mile fixed route event. They would pay £1000 towards the event and provide a further £600 for awards in the caravan classes. They had been involved in the legendary Caravan Road Rally and were keen to get a competitive event into the Club's annual calendar again. It would be known as the 1987 National Car and Caravan Economy Run.



Another successful regular, Ralph Stokes (R), receiving his award from Dick Cawthorne, 1983 Redex

The start and finish was at Isis Motors, Farnborough and the route would take both cars and caravan entries to Llandrindod Wells for a supper stop. Then the cars would take a longer route out to Tregaron over the Devil's Staircase whilst the caravans would take a main road route to Llandovery where the two events would merge and continue over the Brecon Beacons, then south and east back to Farnborough.



Caravan Economy Run, MER veterans
Harold Marfleet and son

Although he was well out of time, a huge cheer went up when he pulled into the finish in Farnborough at about lunchtime on the Sunday. The marshal incident, I learned at the finish, was that Dave Wilson, marshalling just west of the Devil's Staircase on the Tregaron road, had become marooned as his BMW automatic lost traction on the snow covered inclines but he did finally make it as road conditions improved.

In 1988 the Caravan Club decided to run its own event and H&B provided assistance for which it received a fee. They continued to run an annual Economy event using our scatter principle for the next five years, maintaining contact with H&B through my role as the event's Clerk of Course.

The one thing that will always stick in my mind was the problems just a few centimetres of snow caused to at least one caravan outfit and, as I would learn later, to at least one of our route marshals. As Clerk of the Course I found no problems before the supper stop but, coming out of Llandrindod Wells, I decided to follow the shorter caravan route to get to the finish in good time. As we left there was a slight sprinkling of snow on the ground and adhesion was fairly good but as we started to climb the Brecons conditions rapidly got worse. On a left hand bend in the road, following a long straight, my headlights picked up what appeared to be a caravan hanging over a fairly steep drop but luckily still tethered to its tow car, a substantial Volvo.

We slid to a halt to be greeted by the driver, long-term economy competitor Alf Charlton. I suggested I would drive to the next refuelling point and summon help – no mobile phones in those days. Alf would have none of this, "You carry on; we will soon have this sorted. See you at the finish." Alf held a very senior rank in his police force and apparently the local bobbies were soon in action and his outfit recovered.

Finally, at the November 1988 Club committee meeting, it was reluctantly agreed that much of the economy run equipment was now redundant and that it should be sold to save the ongoing burden of storage charges. This would be the end of the road as far as economy events were concerned until Stuart Bladon asked the Club to assist with the Mileage Marathons in the late 1990s.

Bill Bonney



Ending on a high note - Edinburgh 1962

The Legacy - MPG Marathons

Ironically it was just at the time when the motoring public was beginning to take interest in fuel economy that the long series of Economy Runs organised by the Hants & Berks Motor Club came to an end. But at the Geneva Show in 2000 I was approached by Ross Durkin, Editor of *Fleet World*, and asked to arrange an economy run to be called the MPG Marathon.

I responded at once that we would need staff to do the job properly, and added that I thought I would be able to produce the man (and woman) power to do it. Finance was no problem, replied Ross, and it turned out that he was tackling the fund-raising matter with a massive entry fee of £2,000 per vehicle.

When the entries started pouring in he was over the moon, with a final total of 35 vehicles.

My wife Jennetta and I had a lot of fun plotting the route, which I would do first on the OS Landranger maps, and then she would drive it while I dictated route instructions into a tape recorder. Then I would key out all the instructions and we would drive it again. I copied the long-established H&B system of route directions and abbreviations (L at RJ; SO at rbt).



A secret route check at Montgomery, run by Gordon and Deirdre Madgwick

We didn't have the wonderful printing capabilities of Mobil or Total, so everything was put in a large loose leaf book for each competitor with one sheet as the fuel log, and another as the time record.

Stuart Bladon

A small request in *Sidelights* for what I always called 'Marshal Aid' - evoking memories of America's war-time help - soon brought the offers tumbling in.

The start was based at the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon, where the vehicles had all been filled the day before and the first day's run went



Ann and Dave Wilson taking it easy at the control above Machynlleth by the Wynford Vaughan-Thomas memorial

up to Buxton then back to Gaydon. In addition to three non-club marshals we were helped by John Higginson, Sam and Joan Moore, David and Ann Wilson, Mike Bloodworth, Gordon and Deirdre Madgwick and John Horne. The two overnight stays were at a hotel at Stratford.

On the second day, the route gave a lovely run across to Malvern where Mike Bloodworth ran the route check. I was using a Volkswagen Golf 4-Motion which went extremely well and enabled me to tear along by a more direct route and set up the route check at Clywedog reservoir, in a clearly marked car park.

Gordon Madgwick and John Horne ran the route check at Dinas Mawddwy, where a fine lunch was provided.

The event was rated a success, and having more time I was able to do a better job for the 2001 event, which again attracted a big entry of 37 vehicles. This time we would use an intermediate hotel instead of having to drag back to the start after the first day, and scrutineering and fuelling were done at the RAC's headquarters near the M6 just north-west of Birmingham.

On the first day the route went up to the Lake District, and in fine autumn sunshine we had a magnificent run over the Hardknott and Wrynose passes, then across to the Hotel Majestic at Harrogate evoking more H&B economy run memories.

Again there was an enthusiastic response to the call for Marshal Aid, and we had the help of Robin and Fiona Birchall, Bill and Janet Bonney, John Horne, Gordon and Deirdre Madgwick, Sam and Joan Moore, Mike Pearman, and Pam Roper who ran the control at a coffee stop pub in the Lake District charmingly called 'The Drunken Duck'!

The weather deteriorated for the second day, and Bill and Janet Bonney did heroic work manning the control at the top of Holme Moss in torrential driving rain. Later, Jennetta and I manned one of the controls in the dark near Skipton and enjoyed sitting in the Rover 75 Tourer which I had borrowed and watching the car's very effective built-in television while waiting for competitors.

For the 2002 event we again used the RAC headquarters at Bescot then went across to North Wales over territory very familiar to me, passing the old family home at Llanbedr, through Harlech and then across past Chester to overnight at Mottram Hall near Shrigley. Our Marshal Aid team that year comprised Bill and Janet Bonney, Mike Pearman, Gordon Madgwick, Dave and Ann Wilson, Sam and Joan Moore, Robin and Fiona Birchall.



Robin and Fiona Birchall in charge at the Brondanw Arms tea stop, with Jennetta (L)



Most successful of several H&B entrants in the MPG Marathon, David Madgwick and Ashleigh White with their VW Lupo 1.4 TDI after their class win in 2002

This time I had worked out a complicated spreadsheet for computing the results, which eliminated all the boring subtractions and divisions, and only had to be fed the appropriate data to give instant results.

Why did the MPG Marathon collapse? Despite the generous funding, there wasn't the follow-up advertising of results, so manufacturers felt they weren't getting publicity value for money, and VW pulled out. Others followed. Also, the RAC and Esso declared that they would not support an event in 2003. It missed four years but then in 2007 *Fleet World* ran a simple and much shorter economy run, but I was not involved and was told it was a pale shadow of the great 2000-2002 events. Also, the support of the Club was not required for this and subsequent years since the route was all on main roads and on-board data loggers checked that co