

LOOSE FILLINGS

GOOD VIBRATIONS

This issue of *Loose Fillings* records the continuing liveliness of the air-cooled movement in Australia and New Zealand, and also the wide range of air-cooled cars on offer to prospective new recruits via our classified ads. It is encouraging to see how many cars are running in close to their original specification, because this greatly helps to preserve the character of each car, and thus also the character of the whole air-cooled revival.

SHEFFIELD STEEL

AN AUSTRALIAN'S UK-BUILT 500

The late Bill Harris, who died in Sydney in 1995, has a unique place in 500cc racing history. Not only was he probably the only Australian to actually build a 500cc car in England during the 1950s, but in fact he did so with some success.

Born in 1915, he started racing on push-bikes (one of which he built himself), raced as a 15-year-old at the legendary concrete saucer at Maroubra, presum-

ably on a motorcycle, and later raced a 2-litre AC at Penrith. After WW2 he raced speedway motorcycles in Sydney, and in 1947 he accepted a free boat ticket to England, to ride for second-division team

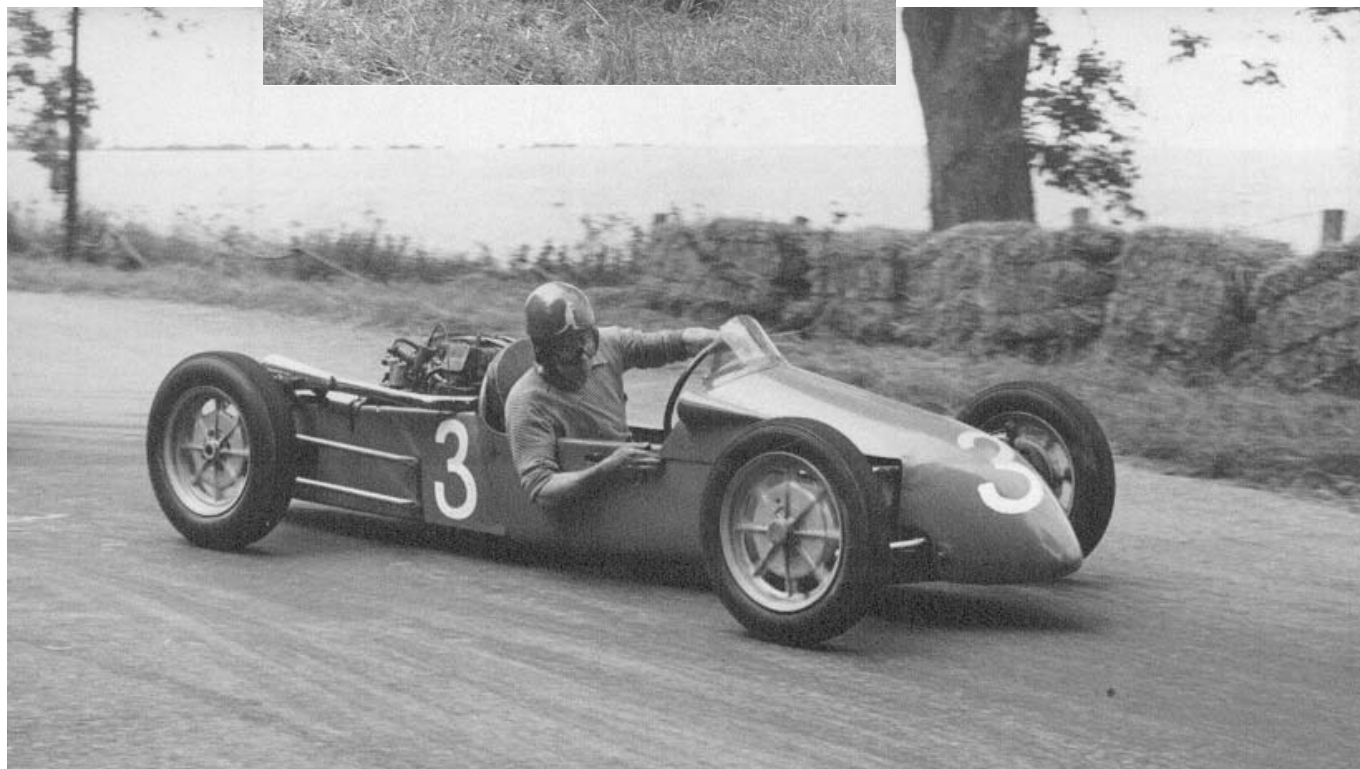


Tamworth. When the speedway boom faded he joined Ken Wharton, to look after Wharton's Cooper Bristol and Cooper JAP for the 1953 season, at the end of which he advertised his services in *Autosport*. He was hired by Sheffield steel merchant Denis Flather as garage manager, with company-supplied house and car; his job was to maintain Flather's London to Brighton 1897 Benz, and prepare and race Flather's Vincent Grey Flash-powered 500. "I'll keep the trophies, Harris; you can keep the prizemoney." It was a mutually satisfactory arrangement, and he stayed for five years.

Denis Flather had many motor sport interests: he was both an enthusiastic trials

Continued on page 4

Bill Harris and the Flather Norton at Cadwell Park hairpin on the way to a race win.



THE LOG

Perhaps this section of *Loose Fillings* should be more prominent, because here we record the ultimate achievement of air-cooled ownership – getting the machine to fire up in public. It is the accumulation of these achievements which, year by year, has helped the revival of enthusiasm for our sort of cars. The least *Loose Fillings* can do is record names, dates and places.

- January 27, Mornington, RACV Rally, Ken Bedgood, Penrite's Mk5 Cooper JAP 1100
- February 13, Wakefield Park GEAR – Greg Snape, Cooper Mk10 BMW
- March 1, Morwell hillclimb (Vic) – Graeme Noonan Cooper Mk7 Norton; John Coffin, Robbins BSA
- March 7-8, Phillip Island historic races – Duncan Rabagliati, in Graeme Noonan's Cooper Mk7 Norton
- March 11, Rob Roy hillclimb – Ken Bedgood, Cooper Mk5 JAP 1100; John Coffin, Robbins BSA; Andrew Halliday, Brabham speedcar; David Palstra, Newbound BSA
- March 22-23, Mallala historic races – Derry Greeneklee, Cooper Mk9 JAP 1100.
- March 29, Eddington Sprints (Vic) – John Coffin, Robbins 500; Neil Videan, Cooper Irving.
- April 11-12, Wings and Wheels static display (Vic) – John Coffin, Robbins BSA; Penrite's Mk5 Cooper also present, but not fired up
- April 19-20, Eastern Creek historic races – Garry Simkin, Cooper Mk4 Vincent
- May 4, VHRR Rob Roy hillclimb – John Coffin, Robbins BSA; Colin Kirkpatrick, Cameron Kawasaki; David Palstra, Newbound BSA; Neil Videan, Cooper Irving.
- May 24, private testing, Ardmore aerodrome, NZ – Ian and Mark Garmey and Graeme Brayshaw, in Ian's Cooper Mk5, its first outing for 12 years!

MARCH ROB ROY & EDDINGTON SPRINTS

At the March 11 Rob Roy meeting, held between Phillip Island historic and the Grand Prix, Ken Bedgood ran a best of 24.65 with Penrite's Cooper Mk5 1100 JAP, a new best time at Rob Roy for this car. Of the other air-cooled cars, John Coffin had a best of 30.18 with the Robbins BSA, and David Palstra a best of 32.25 with the Newbound BSA. Andrew Halliday, driving the Brabham midget which won the 1951

Australian title at Rob Roy, ran a 26.11 from a rolling start.

Eddington sprints, a natural venue for our cars, saw only two air-cooled runners at this year's event, held on March 29. Neil Videan let the supercharged Cooper Irving stretch its legs a bit and ran a best of 16.96 before a minor engine problem. John Coffin's 500cc Robbins BSA ran 18.01.

MAY ROB ROY

We could not have wished for better conditions than we enjoyed at this meeting, the track itself was good and the pit area is showing signs of grass regrowth. Four air-cooled cars ran, Neil Videan's Cooper Irving, David Palstra's Newbound BSA my Robbins BSA, and a new addition, Colin Kirkpatrick's Cameron.

Competition between Neil and me was close, with the Robbins just in front until our third official runs, when the Cooper got below 30 secs (29.96) and my best for the day was just .08 slower at 30.04. David Palstra, who had run a 33.16 in practice, sadly spread his motor across the track during his final run, putting holes in crankcase and barrel. Fortunately he has a couple of spare engines.

The scrutineers flatly refused to let the Cameron run, not even as a demonstration, because it had arrived without its floor. So the team drove two hours back to Brighton, collected the undertray, drove back to Rob Roy, passed scrutineering and had time to make two climbs. However, fuel problems stopped the car from showing its potential. The Cameron is presently running a four-cylinder 550cc Kawasaki engine, and some previous owner had modified its original transverse leaf suspension to more modern type, but the basic bones are still there. Looking like a three-quarter scale Mk9 Cooper, this car first appeared with Don Cameron in August 1960 with a 250 Velocette (see *Loose Fillings* #20), and later ran 350 and 500cc Velocette engines.

Neil Videan will be overseas and miss some meetings later this year, and has offered his car to former Victorian motorcycle outfit racer and tuner Lindsay Urquhart, a very successful local and overseas racer in the '50s and '60s.

John Coffin

(NEXT) NOVEMBER ROB ROY

Rob Roy hillclimb in Victoria, one of the most historic motorsport venues still in use anywhere in Australia, is now run by MG Car Club which has shown considerable sympathy for older air-cooled cars. This has been matched by John Coffin's outstanding efforts in encouraging air-cooled cars to run at the hill, especially

at the late November event. This year the date is November 30, yet again clashing with an HSRCA race meeting in NSW, which makes it a difficult choice for NSW air-cooled people.

Be that as it may, the plan for Rob Roy is not only to give our cars competitive runs up the hill but also to give them demonstration runs and provide a static display. For cars and drivers without the necessary level of CAMS paperwork, the opportunity for demonstration runs is worth considering (and you get a mention in *The Log*), and the display could even be a good place to offer cars for sale. Early indications are that there will be a record attendance of our cars.

More information from John Coffin, 03 9802 1066, or at 556 Highbury Rd, Glen Waverley 3150.

AIR-COOLED GEAR, OCTOBER '08

Every year the Golden Era Auto Racing club (GEAR) offers exclusive fields for air-cooled cars as part of the program at one of their non-racing, non-CAMS track days at Wakefield Park, near Goulburn. For 2008, that special GEAR day is October 8. Plan now to get there, because the air-cooled GEAR days have always seen the best turnout of air-cooled cars outside Victoria.

GEAR and Wakefield Park are both designed to be competitor-friendly, and the helpful, informal GEAR atmosphere is unique in NSW motor sport. Information about entries and accommodation is available from GEAR Secretary, Richard Cardew, 0405 459 546 or rcardew@primusonline.com.au

BITS AND PIECES

- Background car in LF28's photograph of Peter Collins and Stirling Moss at Shelsley Walsh was a Mk6 Bentley, registered CTL 17. Cooper driver David Reid, himself a Bentley Mk6 owner, advises that CTL 17, chassis B432DA, was delivered from Bentley Motors in October 1948 to a great Shelsley competitor, and the central figure in ERA and BRM, Raymond Mays.
- Alex McLennan, in New Zealand's south island, has sold his JAP-powered JBS to his nephew Grant Clearwater, who also owns some other interesting cars, and who currently works in Europe with the SEAT touring car team. The JBS, which hasn't been out for some time, was originally one of the forward-seating cars, and was later converted to a more conventional driving position.
- The ownership history of Derry Greeneklee's Mk9 Cooper was covered in some detail in last issue of *Loose Fillings*,

but at the time Max Fisher cautioned that there might well have been at least one other owner between Cliff Waite and Bill Smith. Max has now found that owner, John Hearne, who told Max he bought the car from Cliff Waite and later sold it to "someone in Hastings," which could only be Bill Smith. By a nice coincidence, a photograph of the Cooper while owned by Bill Smith arrived in time for this issue.

- Energetic John Coffin has made a reconnaissance visit to the nearly complete Haunted Hills hillclimb course in the Latrobe Valley south-east of Melbourne, a replacement for the old Morwell hillclimb, which has been taken over for coal mining. John reports there are some very interesting features, including several off-camber corners and an extremely steep pinch reminiscent of Templestowe. No doubt John's Robbins BSA will be perfectly geared when the hill opens.

- Restoration of the Triumph 650-powered Scarab is close to completion, and owners Raewyn and Terry Perkins in Port Macquarie expect to have the car running before the end of the year, 49 years after it first appeared. "As with all restorations they take longer than estimated and unforeseen problems arise," Terry told *Loose Fillings*, "I can't wait to use it."

- Unknown air-cooled cars continue to emerge from hibernation. In Melbourne Bill Keenan is making progress with a semi-complete 1950s car he has owned for some 15 years, and which had previously been owned by a Victorian motorcycle racer, Stan Brown, although earlier history remains to be established. The chassis is a close copy of a Mk9 Cooper, with transverse leaf springs and wishbones at both ends. Wheels are late-'50s Ralt of the same pattern as (for example) the Scarab, the fronts with integral 8-inch drums. Bill will fit the car with a JAP V-twin.

A NOSE FOR ALL SEASONS

The alloy nose from Roy Blake's Mk8 Cooper JAP (the car which later became the Walton Cooper) was borrowed by Ron Tauranac, who had a mould taken from it to make a fibreglass nose for the Ralt Vincent, which first appeared late in 1956. The same mould then produced more noses for nearly a dozen other NSW-built air-cooled cars. First of them was Bob Joass' 1957 Triumph-engined car, followed by one of the clones of that car, the Scarab. Tony Fatouros' BSA-powered circuit-racing car also used that nose, as did Bob Rochford's Triumph-powered Alba, nowadays owned by Alan Morton. Three "kit" Ralts used this nose, as did two of the three air-cooled

Lynxes, after Lynx Engineering acquired much of the Ralt kit inventory. Brian Schureck bought the nose for his BB Ariel hillclimber (nowadays owned by Chris Tracey) from Lynx, and the Ralt nose on Geoff Surtees' JAP-powered hillclimber probably also came from Lynx.

Several Victorian one-offs (Alan Staton's BRM, Ivan Tighe's Tighe Vincent) also used a Cooper-shape fibreglass nose, but it is not known whether these noses came from the Ralt mould, or whether they were made in Victoria, perhaps from the Walton Cooper or from Murray Rainey's Mk9.

BILL KELLY & ERIC WAINWRIGHT

Bill Kelly, a Mt Albert, Auckland, garage proprietor and 1950s 500 competitor, died recently. He worked as mechanic on the Mk4 Cooper JAP owned by the Johnstone brothers of Epsom and then bought the car and ran it for a season before selling it. Bill worked behind the scenes for motor sport in general, was a major force in the Northern Sports Car Club and also a senior MANZ steward. He was in motor sport for fun and enjoyment, and he will be sadly missed because he had safe, common-sense ideas that helped a number of competitors get hassle-free racing. Motor racing needs people like this.

Eric Wainwright, well known in the Auckland club scene in the '50s and '60s, also died recently. He was a great modifier of early Coopers, and kept them competitive for longer than most people would believe. He lightened the suspension, removed all unnecessary weight (even upholstery), changed shock absorbers, added radius rods, and for loose-surfaced hillclimbs used chevron-tread tyres. He could get a Mk4 handling and going as well as a Mk8 or Mk9. He was a real enthusiast, who did his hillclimbing on a minimum budget.

Max Fisher

LOOSE FILLINGS DELIVERY

You can get *Loose Fillings* faster by e-mail, and save us postage at the same time. If you would like to receive the magazine electronically, send your e-mail address to publisher Garry Simkin at gsimkin@iprimus.com.au.

New Zealand readers can receive e-mail copies by contacting Ian Garmey, at garmey@xtra.co.nz. In the UK contact James.Holland@icap.com.

To those readers who prefer *Loose Fillings* to arrive in the traditional ink-on-paper form, it is much appreciated if from time to time you can send Garry Simkin a book of 50-cent stamps.

CLASSIFIEDS

For sale: BB Ariel, built '60-'61, Red Hunter engine, Norton box, complete spare engine plus engine and gearbox spares, new body panels. Chris Tracey, 02 6280 5285

For sale: Arnott JAP, 1952, one of two special long-chassis cars ex Ivor Bueb, modified in England by Pip Preece to coil-over suspension and lengthened by 10" in the centre of the chassis. Immaculate condition. Contact Rob Williams, NZ 09 427 8120 or roshwill@orcon.net.nz

For sale: Cooper Mk6, 1952, MK VI-IV-52, fitted with Tiger 110 motor and gearbox since early '60s, used by same owner ever since. Absolutely race-ready, with spares and covered trailer. \$NZ36,000 negotiable, Alan Kerr, 0064-9-480 9881 evenings

For sale: Cooper Mk 5 MKV/8/51, 1951, ex Bob Gerard with Manx Norton, to Australia ex South Africa. Now with long-stroke Manx, new cases and timing covers, all new internals, fully rebuilt by Manx guru. Original Cooper steering wheel and magnesium road wheels. Brakes, chains, bearings all new, BTH TT magneto, new Amal series 1000 36mm carburettor. More details on request. Shipping and crating anywhere. \$38,000, Franc Trento, EuroBrit Australia, 03 9432 6886, www.eurobrit.com.au

For sale: Gilbert JAP 500, built 1968 by Roy Gilbert with 1938 4-stud JAP 500, upright Norton box, 10-inch steel Mini wheels. Spares include registered trailer, small Shorrock blower, some engine, gearbox and carburettor spares. \$10,000 or offer, John Cooper, 02 4982 6370, 0407 202 436

For sale: 1951 Cooper Alta sports, chassis 51848, 930cc 4-cylinder Alta engine, aluminium body.

1953 RGR Triumph F3 single-seater, chassis 53302, alloy body, some engine spares included, HRSCC log book, VCC identity card, registered with UK 500 Owners Association. 1949 Cooper Mk 4 F3 single-seater, ex Peter Collins UK, Alan Freeman NZ. Massive history. This car comes as a rolling chassis, new alloy body, complete with 2 x 4-stud JAP engines, disassembled, and a heap of both new and used spare parts.

Max Fisher, phone/fax New Zealand 09 534 2245.

Wanted: pre-WW2 Morris 8 Series 1 stub axles, steering arms, tie-rod ends and front brake backplates. Series 1 has bolt-on steering arms, not taper-fit type. Graham Howard, grimes@ix.net.au or 02 4787 8772.

SHEFFIELD STEEL From Page 1

driver and a founder member of the BRM Trust. He was also an early supporter of the 500 movement, and his Marwyn-based, water-cooled Scott-powered Marot 500 appeared in 1948. In 1949 this car was given a 500cc Grey Flash Vincent engine, and in 1951 a new Vincent-powered Flather Vincent appeared; Bill Harris was possibly not alone in referring to this rather ungainly-looking car as "the camel."

He raced the Flather Vincent during 1954, while building a new car to his own design. He hoped to get a Rennsport BMW flat twin for it, but BMW "didn't want to know." Instead, Denis Flather's Norton connection (he supplied Norton with steels) produced a new long-stroke Manx engine. Special parts for the new car could be made in the Flather company toolroom, and there was of course no difficulty obtaining steel.

The new car used Cooper wheels, and its tight-fitting bodywork, straight-tube chassis and single rear brake were reminiscent of the Beart Mk7 Cooper. Unlike Coopers, the Harris-built Flather Norton had wish-bone and coil front suspension, and de Dion rear suspension which used coil springs, a small-diameter de Dion tube and single radius arms.

It is not clear when the new car first appeared, but he was certainly racing it by May 1955, and information supplied through Duncan Rabagliati from Richard Page in the UK shows he entered for six meetings that year, twelve in 1956, eight in

1957, twelve in 1958 and nine in 1959. During 1956 the car was given a short-stroke engine, and in 1957 its chassis was revised to make it both stiffer and lighter. Photographs in Bill Harris' album also show many minor variations, including a switch to paired rear radius arms for the de Dion system, and occasional use of Dunlop-made alloy rear wheels of the type earlier used on the Flather "camel," and also on some JBS, Mackson and Staride 500s.

Between 1955 and 1959 he raced against such 500cc legends as Don Parker, Jim Russell, Ivor Bueb, Ian Raby and Trevor Taylor, and while the late '50s in England saw 500cc F3 gradually declining from its mid-'50s peak the class remained highly competitive. Over these five seasons Bill had five wins and – perhaps more representative – was frequently in the top five. This was no mean achievement for a driver who by then was in his 40s, when it is realised he was running against drivers headed for Formula One, or at least aiming to get there.

Bill had been Denis Flather's passenger in many mud trials, and later recalled the pleasure of adjourning to the warmth of a pub fire after a day on wet and muddy hill-sides. Through these trials he met Birmingham master builder Alex Francis, and during 1959 they decided to go into partnership to build a car for the new Formula Junior. Their first car, front-engined and with live rear axle, was called the Alexis, using the first four letters of Francis' name and the last two letters of

Bill's. He resigned from Flather Steel, moved to Birmingham and did not race the 500 again.

Later Alexis Juniors were directly competitive with the Lotus, Lola and Gemini Juniors. Bill drove on occasion, in fact more often than the records show, but the team also signed up some recognised talent including Peter Procter and two former rivals of Bill's from 500cc days, Jack Pitcher and Phil Robinson. In Formula Two, which evolved from Formula Junior from 1963, Alexis found it hard to match the Brabham, Lotus and Lola works teams, but John Ampt scored a 1000cc F3 second at the Nurburgring in 1964, and Paul Hawkins won there in 1965.

At the end of that year Bill Harris and his wife Reimer returned to Australia, Bill later saying he felt he was going rusty in the English climate. He believed the Flather Norton was sold to America, but it is possible the remains of the car may still be in England.

Graham Howard

Below: Bill Harris in the Flather Vincent "camel" at Brough, near Hull.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Bill Harris in Tamworth colours, 1947; working on the Flather Norton - posing for the cameraman (no oxy flame, no welding goggles), but showing Cooper-like gearbox tensioner; Flather Norton, first version; later version had higher top tubes forward from the firewall.

All photos from Bill Harris' photo album courtesy Garry Simkin.



AUSTRALIANS IN THE UK

While Bill Harris was unique in being an Australian who built a 500cc car in England, at least five other Australians competed in air-cooled cars in England and Europe during the 1950s.

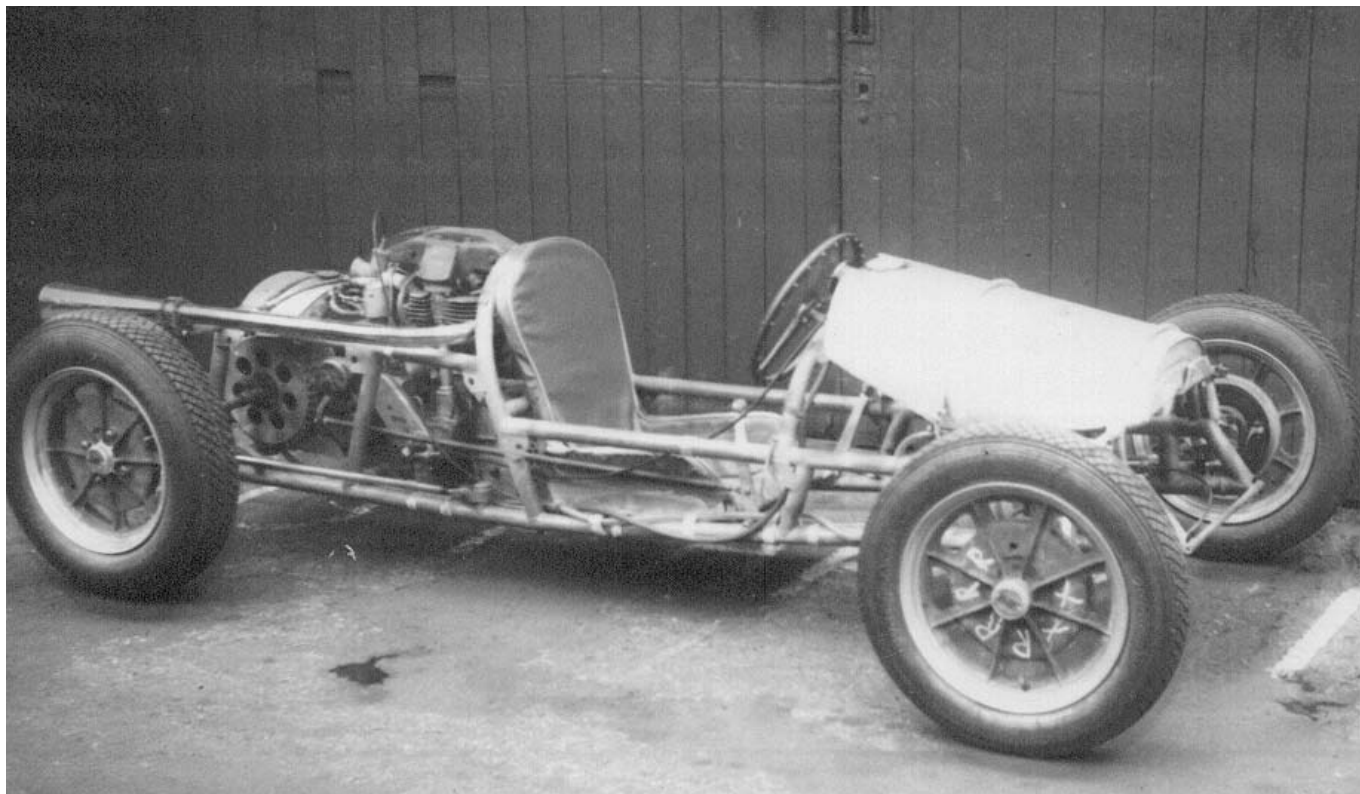
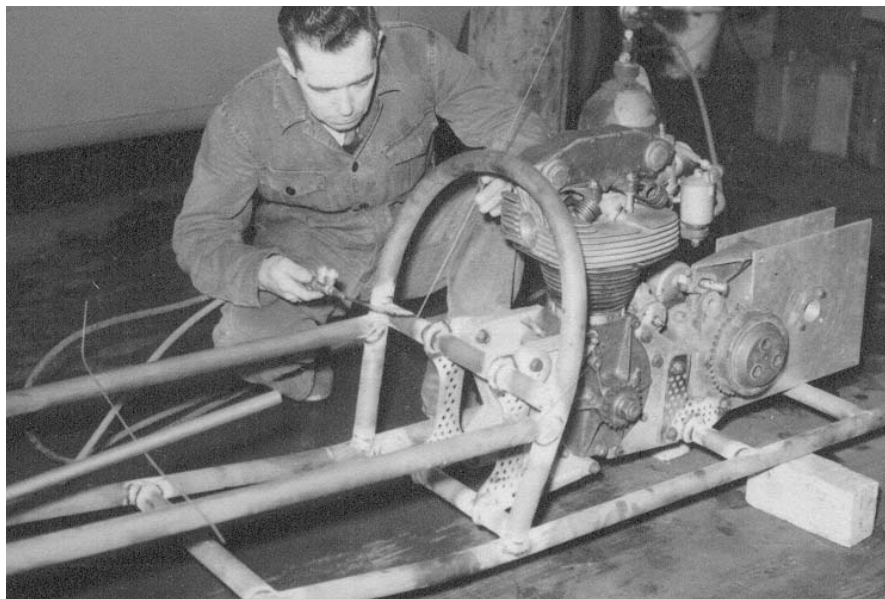
First of the five was Bill Patterson, who raced a new Mk5 Cooper JAP 500 in 1951 in England and Europe and attracted favourable comment in the UK motorsport press. He later won the 1954 Australian hillclimb championship with the Mk5 in 1000cc V-twin form; the car is now owned

by Queenslander Peter Harburg. In 1952 the original Australian Cooper distributor, Keith Martin, competed in a Mk4 Cooper at Rest and be Thankful hillclimb, and possibly other events. Manchester-born Reg Hunt, winner of the 1952 Australian hillclimb title with his self-built "Flying Bedstead" Hunt Vincent, raced in England and Europe during 1954 with a Mk8 Cooper running a Beart-prepared Norton.

J.D. "Bill" Sleeman, an Australian who lived in Birmingham and had been a successful trials and rally driver, hillclimbed a Cooper with a 1130cc Robin Jackson-built engine which combined Norton heads with

a JAP twin crankcase; he died after crashing this car at Bouley Bay hillclimb in Jersey, in 1955.

Geelong's Murray Rainey took his Mk9 Cooper, with both 500cc and 750cc Manx Norton engines, to England in 1959, where he crashed at Crystal Palace during his first UK race. The car was rebuilt with all-wishbone front suspension and a front anti-roll bar – retaining the fabricated Cooper upright but otherwise very similar to the first Cooper Formula Junior, which appeared later that year - and Murray raced it in France before he and the car returned to Australia. *GH*



ANOTHER NEW ZEALAND MK9

Following on from the story in *Loose Fillings* # 28 about the New Zealand Mk9 Cooper that found its way to Australia (the car now raced by Derry Greeneklee), a photo (below) has arrived at the publisher's desk, supplied by Graham Richards, showing both the Greeneklee car while owned by Bill Smith (car #41) and a sister Mk9 (#2) owned at that time by Graham Richards.

This photo was taken in the early '70s at one-time Tasman Series venue Levin (NZ), where the two Coopers occasionally raced in company with Formula Vees. Both cars show some of the modifications used to keep a 1950s design competitive 15 years later. The Bill Smith car can be seen to have wider Lotus wheels, lowered nose-cone and double knocker Manx, whilst Graham's similarly-engined car has a lower radius rod and Cooper Bobtail wheels at the rear.

Once again Max Fisher was able to provide not only early details of the Graham Richards car (chassis number Mk9/25/55), but also a copy of its "Certificate of Registration of Motor Vehicle", which lists owners and dates of ownership, in this case from March 16, 1962 through to May 4, 1976. This New Zealand requirement to register a race car is rather unusual, but explains why there are older photos of NZ race cars with number plates attached, and

in some cases an annual label on the screen. (My JBS Norton still has the holes in the tail where plate number 327-357 from the 1950s was attached when I bought it in 1971.) The up-side is that an official record like this makes it very easy to trace the chain of owners.

Graham Richards' Cooper had been another imported by Frost Motors Ltd, and Ron Frost raced it with Manx sidecar piston and barrel (close to 600cc) before selling it to Rob Levick, from whom it moved on in 1962 to Gisborne NZ driver John Ward, who was killed at Catalina Park NSW in 1968 in a Lotus Cortina. Bill Stone, later to progress to Brabham open-wheelers, then to March and other well known UK race outfits, was the Cooper's next owner in 1963.

A number of years in the Hamilton area saw it with Grant Bloor, then to D.A.P. Gibson, then in 1967 with Claude Leech, who told *Loose Fillings* recently that he fitted the Bobtail wheels to the rear, and the modified lower wishbones with radius rods, which he believed made an improvement for gravel hillclimbs.

Next owner was Edward Bain, who sold the car in October 1968 to Graham Richards, who hillclimbed and sprinted it as well as racing at the aforementioned Levin meetings. Garry Moore, a former mayor of Christchurch, used it in the South Island, and subsequent owners were Robert (Bob) Mansbridge, Allan

Bramwell and Gavin Bain

Information from Ken Bedgood of Penrite added the name of R. Bramwell after Bain's, Allan Bramwell subsequently telling me that this was his late brother Russell, who had started to fit a Vincent Comet engine into the Cooper whilst living in McAnrews Bay, Dunedin. Former Cooper JAP racer Richard Anderson recalls going to Dunedin with next owner, Alan Styles of Napier, to buy the car, in an unfinished state. Thirty seven kilos of Comet engine flew back with Richard as cabin baggage.

After Alan Styles' death in a road accident while riding a Ducati, the Cooper-Comet then crossed the Tasman to join the Penrite collection in Melbourne, where it remains as of 2008, fitted once again with a Manx Norton.

Garry Simkin

*Edited by Graham Howard,
22 Bridges Street, Blackheath,
NSW 2785 phone 02 4787 8772
(grimes@ix.net.au)*

*Produced by Terry Wright,
(tsrwright@gmail.com).*

*Published by Garry Simkin,
28 McClelland Street, Willoughby,
NSW 2068 phone 02 9958 3935,
(gjsimkin@iprimus.com.au).*

