

More TF competition Part 2

### **Motor Racing – Leyburn on Sunday September 18, 1955**

The Leyburn circuit was named after a nearby hamlet and is situated about 74km south west of Toowoomba. It was another wartime aerodrome and better suited for motor racing than the single landing strip at Strathpine. While conveniently placed for Toowoomba residents Leyburn was a long trip from Brisbane. The shortest route, there was no Ipswich bypass at the time, meant a round trip of 430km. The length of the circuit is shown as 4.3 miles on one map and 4.32 on another which equates to around 7 kilometres.

There were two major runways at right angles forming a letter "T" with some abbreviation of the top stroke on the right hand side. To the left the top stroke, called Sheep Pen Straight, ran into a sweeping left hand corner, Backhouse Bend, which topped a low ridge. The back straight lead to a left turn into a short straight. Another left turn brought cars back to the main starting straight which formed the upright stroke of the "T". As the years went by it became increasingly difficult to get the circuit into a fit state for racing.

The event on September 18, 1955 was my first motor race. It was held on the day immediately following the "Australian Hill Climb Championships" as part of the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers. I have only one page of the programme which lists thirteen starters for a five lap Sports and Closed Car Handicap of approximately 35 km. The results are pencilled in down to eight places so it is possible that there were a number of non-starters or retirements. The first prize was \$30 and a trophy donated by "Downs Diesel Service".

The following details, in handicap order, are from the programme. The results are unofficial.

NO.	DRIVER	CAR	HANDICAP MIN. SEC.	FINISHING ORDER
10	R. Taylor	Jaguar XK120	4.00	2
30	A. Gourley	Austin Healey	3.20	3
22	R. Hamilton	Doretti	3.15	7
23	B. Griffiths	Triumph "TR2"	3.15	5
18	P. Kinneally	Triumph "TR2"	3.15	4
26	P. White	MG "TF"	1.35	8
27	W. Weekes	MG "TF"	1.33	1
31	K. Ebeling	MG "TF"	0.05	6

My sixth place appears to be more the result of my handicap than my ability. My handicap in relation to the other MG "TFs" appears to indicate that they were both 1500cc models. The car of Bill Weekes certainly was but whether it had, at the time, been

fitted with the lighter "Buchanan" fibre glass body is not known. It was recognised as one of the faster "TFs" competing in the nineteen fifties. Bill was going well on this occasion as he passed me on Lap 3 after starting 1m. 28s. behind me. The Doretti driven by R. Hamilton which gave me 3m. 10s start, as did the Triumphs, passed me on Lap 5.



*The Doretti, shown here at the Toowoomba hillclimb*

While basically a Triumph "TR2" with a body by the "Swallow" coachbuilders the Doretti seemed to have the legs of the Triumphs at sprints and hill climbs. It did not do so well on this occasion as at some stage of the meeting it had bearing problems. This may have been the reason I finished in front on this occasion.

My diary also tells me that the Kent MG "TF" dropped a valve and a Riley, possibly the special of Stan Mositter, and an MG "TC", possibly the sometimes blown car of Beau Mossitter, burnt pistons.

It was an incident packed day as the supercharged, certainly not turbocharged in 1955, MG Special of N. Huch caught fire at Porter Corner, at the end of the main straight, and was burned out. Some of the fuel pipes were of plastic or rubber, and the fuel used very volatile. Once the fire got under way the limited facilities available could not cope. The driver was unhurt.

As there were no sponsors and he was racing on a shoe string budget there was a whip around among other drivers to help him out. Later there was some dissatisfaction as the story going around was that he had used the money to buy a Norton motorcycle. His name does not reappear on any later programmes or result sheets in my possession. It was also at this meeting that Pat Kinneally overturned his Triumph TR2 at one of the corners of the short bottom straight. There were no roll bars in those days but he escaped unhurt with little damage to the car.

Early on the day of the race, after I had done a couple of practice laps, one of the drivers, who passed me in Backhouse Bend at the end of the Sheep Pen Straight, asked me if I had been taking the bend flat out. You may rest assured that I had not as, so far as I was

concerned, I was going as fast as I dared. The driver concerned, Beau Mossitter, who drove a white supercharged MG "TC", told me that I should be able to take the bend at full chat so the next time round I kept my foot flat to the floor. Going into the bend it seemed much too fast so I backed off a little only to find that it felt worse still and the foot went hard down once again. From then on I took it flat out every lap. Going on the results of earlier sprint meetings it is unlikely that it was any faster than 120 km/h.

### **Telegraph Rally – Weekend of October 1 and 2, 1955**

Having enjoyed the event and been satisfied with the placings obtained in the Telegraph Rallies in 1953 (in the MG "TC") and in 1954 (in the MG "TF") an entry in the 1955 rally, again in the "TF", seemed logical.

The event was to include an overnight stop at Lismore. I did not realise what was in store. On this occasion I had nominated a friend Harry Holmes as navigator but due to changed circumstances was to have a workmate, Les Jordan, to accompany me. Once again the start was from the Exhibition Grounds in Brisbane. As it was a bright sunny morning and we had some spare time before our scheduled start time of 10.35 am we took the opportunity to replace the speedometer cable in the hope of curing the tendency of the needle to float madly. We placed the car over a gutter in someone's driveway to make access easy only to find the wrong cable had been provided. We drove back into town for the correct cable which we decided to fit on the spot. Only then did we find we had left the pliers we needed in the gutter used earlier. When we got back to the street near the Exhibition grounds the pliers were fortunately still there. After all the mucking about, the speedometer was still erratic.

We were car 156 and began the day fairly well. Just what route we took out of Brisbane to get us into the Gold Coast hinterland I can't recall. It was not long before we reached the narrow road, gravel in those days, leading up to Tomewin and the Border Gate and on to Murwillumbah. We managed to keep on schedule by passing a number of slower cars on the way up to the gate but ran into trouble a few kilometres beyond. Trouble was in the form of a Model "A" Ford utility. We locked our right front wheels together and the two cars finished up blocking the roadway.

The road wasn't blocked for long as the following competitors soon combined to move both vehicles into a position which allowed other competitors to get by. Our rally looked to be over as the car had about 17cm of toe-out with little hope of a quick roadside repair. As well we had to wait for the arrival of the police. Should you happen to come across an MG "TF" with Chassis Number TF4304 you will find a dent in the chassis where the rim of the wheel had been forced back against it. The policeman after his arrival some time later, and inspection and measurement of the accident scene, summed up the situation in this way. A Ford 150cm wide, an MG 150cm wide and a roadway 270cm wide. It was simply another case where two into one won't go! The Ford had been on the side of the road cut into the hill but on our left side the road dropped away quite sharply into a banana plantation and we most certainly would have rolled over had we left the road. The

driver of the Ford could possibly have given us a little more room but no doubt it was a shared responsibility.

We were able to reduce the toe-out a little by belting the bent part of the steering gear with the wheel nut hammer and taking all the adjustment out of the track rod. The car didn't steer too badly but when we reached the bitumen road the tyres began to protest and set up a continuous squeal. At Murwillumbah we turned a garage forecourt, closed to Saturday trading, into a workshop and dismantled the badly bent arm which connected the track rod to the swivel post carrying the front wheel. We were able to straighten the offending arm a little using a hammer but nowhere enough to get rid of all the toe out. At this stage we heard noises from inside the garage and on walking around the back found someone was working there. We were able to gain his attention and sympathy and the bent arm was straightened further using an hydraulic press. It took two attempts to get it right but it was well worth the small amount it cost us. After the arm was refitted we adjusted the toe out to as near to zero as possible. As a measuring device we used the jack handle which had a sliding coupling in the middle. By now it was late in the afternoon and too late to continue so we decided to head back to Brisbane. We were now very hungry and thirsty as we hadn't eaten since breakfast some ten hours earlier. By the time we got to Tugun, one of the southern Gold Coast suburbs, we were more than ready for a meal. First we had a beer at the Tugun Hotel and then, feeling somewhat refreshed, walked to a nearby restaurant called "The Jolly Spot". There is still a restaurant on the site but it has been much modified and has undergone at least two name changes. We each had a whole grilled snapper and it rates as one of the most satisfying meals I have ever had. The following morning, Sunday, we fronted up to see the survivors arrive back at the Exhibition Grounds and to get ourselves officially listed as retired. It was to be the last of the rallies organised by the Telegraph newspaper and my last two day rally.

While I would take part as navigator or driver in a number of shorter rallies organised by the TAC or Brisbane clubs I did not know at the time that a far greater adventure in rallying was in store many years later. What happened then and how it came about is another story.

On the Monday morning following the weekend of the Telegraph Rally a visit was made to the panel shop run by Howards who were the agents for MGs and all Nuffield vehicles. Their quote for the repairs necessary was \$150. Before deciding to go ahead with repairs I visited Howard's showroom to price a new MG TF 1500. They had a cream one available, and after checking on the repair costs for my car, quoted a figure of \$1700 for the changeover. By today's standards it is enough to make you weep but at the time the amount was well beyond my pocket so there was no deal. At the time my annual salary was \$2616 per annum.

The next visit was to the Swift Service Station in Wynnum Road, Morningside. The proprietor, Fred Dyke, was also a Nuffield dealer and well known to motorsport enthusiasts and MG owners. He offered me space in his workshop and some discount on any spares needed for me to make the repairs. As I was on my annual leave this was too good an offer to refuse. The first step was to remove the damaged front mudguard and to

take it to a nearby panel beater for some preliminary work while work went forward on the suspension. The bent steering arm had to be replaced and the swivel post on which the wheel turned was straightened on an hydraulic press. After the suspension was reassembled and aligned the guard was refitted for final attention and painting. The final cost of the repair was far less than the original quote due to my own efforts and the assistance of Fred and his staff.

Some weeks later I received a letter from the owner of the Ford asserting that as I was to blame for the accident he expected to be reimbursed for the \$66 repair bill for his utility. As the police report suggested that we were equally to blame I replied that in the circumstances I was prepared to pay half of his repair costs provided that he paid half of my quoted repair costs of \$150. I still have the letters concerned. His reply reads "Thanks for your letter, re accident. Guess we have both suffered losses, let's forget it. I wish you the compliments of the season, a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year."

### **Motor racing – Strathpine on Saturday October 8, 1955**

I have a clipping which announces that the MG Car Club would be promoting their first Strathpine motor race. Even though I was there I did not compete and in fact a diary entry notes that I accompanied Fred Dyke to the course as a spectator. Indeed I had not submitted an entry as I had planned to tour North Queensland and to visit friends and relatives. These arrangements had to be postponed until I had repaired the damage resulting from the rally.

### **Motor racing – Lowood on Saturday November 26, 1955**

I was only a spectator at the Lowood trophy Motor Race Meeting, conducted by the Queensland Racing Drivers Club. As the names of many of my sports car driver friends do not appear on the programme it seems probable that it was closed to members of the QRDC. Despite having a programme I did not record results other than those for the opening three lap event for "Sports Cars and Saloons of Under 1500 cc." These were, in place order, Lionel Ayers (MG TC), Alan Wickham (MG TC), and the Continental Cars Pty Ltd (Simca Aronde) entry driven by K. Smyth.

The Lowood circuit was another abandoned wartime aerodrome used for motor racing. It was named after the township of Lowood which is in the Lockyer Valley about 80 km from Brisbane. It may be a little less since the Ipswich bypass was completed, probably in the early nineteen sixties. In my photo album there is a photo of a working bee erecting temporary toilets prior to a Lowood meeting. The walls consisted of the remains of huge packing cases and disposal was in trenches dug in the ground. If you expected any of today's motor racing spectators to use the type of facilities provided at that time they would stay away in droves.

I was there at least once in my motorcycling days and on a number of occasions while I owned the TF but it was never raced there. At one meeting I was able to convince the driver of an MG TF that he should run in an event using an "Index of Performance"

formula to decide a winner. Using the information provided by the timekeepers for the earlier events I felt sure, from my calculations, that his TF 1500 was well in the running. As it turned out he won the "Index of Performance" event quite easily. At one of the first, if not the first meeting at Lowood one of the drivers went into the wall of one of the hangers still standing and was badly cut about the face. The driver was, I believe, J. Taylor who was an active member of the TAC for many years. There are no prizes for working out the reason why one corner was called Hanger Bend for the early race meetings. Another called Tarampa Bend was named after a small mountain nearby. Names of corners were to change as sponsorship money became available.

### **Speed Trials – Leyburn on Sunday February 19, 1956**

The section of the Leyburn circuit known as Sheep Pen Straight was used for sprint meetings by the Toowoomba Auto Club. The start line for sprint meetings was usually at the sheep pens where a fence across the straight had to be taken down, with the owners permission, for the duration of the event. This straight was used for the sprints as it was possible to go back to the cattle grid at the entry for a longer run into the timed section of the flying quarter mile. It had a bitumen surface all the way and probably had been an access road for entry to the aerodrome. If you were still going too fast at the end of the straight after the timed section there was always room to pull up with safety on the rise into Backhouse Bend. On one occasion the Anderson family provided planks across the cattle grid to allow Mrs Anderson to have a longer run into the timed section in one of the Jaguars she drove. I do not recall being at the event but always understood that it had been the D type Jaguar. In later years it was generally accepted, in a sort of gentleman's agreement, that all flying starts began at the entry cattle grid.

This February 19 event was apparently sponsored in some way by the government owned air line, then called Trans Australia Airlines, as it was promoted as the "TAA Sprints". The report in Motor Sport in Queensland says "Unfortunately for both competitors and spectators alike, rain intervened and caused the cancellation on safety grounds of the sprints organised by the Toowoomba Auto Club, at Leyburn."

Before the meeting was abandoned the competitors in all classes were able to complete the standing start event and the Closed Cars and the Racing Cars had time for one run at the flying quarter. This gave Mrs Anderson ("D" Type Jaguar) the chance to set a new speed record for Leyburn and Queensland of 217.58 km/h (132.5 mph). The Leyburn record had previously belonged to Cyril Anderson (Jaguar Special) at 202.56 km/h (125.87 mph). Lionel Ayers (MG "TC") set a new standing start record of 18.3 seconds for Class "F" Sports Cars to better his existing record by 0.59 seconds. The Class G Sports Car record of 22.6 seconds was beaten by Peter Downing in the Riley Imp with a time of 21.42 seconds. Steve Ames (Alfa Romeo) broke both standing and flying event records in Class D for Racing Cars to better the old record of C. Whatmore (Studebaker Special). In the Closed Car section the best speed recorded was that of A. Wickham (Holden) 135.7 km/h (83.7 mph) and the best standing quarter time that of L. Bailey (Bristol 203) 20.06 seconds.

The Closed Car record, in Class "F" flying was broken by E. Burrows (MG Magnette) with a time of 21.70 seconds to better the record held by another Magnette of 23.16 seconds. The times for competitors, other than Closed Cars, were as follows:

DRIVER	SPORTS CARS	CLASS	STANDING START SECONDS	FLYING START	
				MPH	KPH
P. Downing	Riley Imp	G	21.42	na	
V. Jordan	MG TF	F	22.05	na	
K. Ebeling	MG "TF"	F	25.18	na	
W. Weekes	MG "TF" 1500	F	19.48	na	
L. Ayers	MG "TC"	F	18.30	na	
J. McKinney	Porsche	F	19.80	na	
J. Poteri	Austin Healey	D	18.88	na	
M.A. Kent	Austin Healey	D	20.11	na	

#### RACING CARS

A. Griffiths	Wylie Javelin	F	16.36	106.6	171.55
K. Richardson	Lago Talbot	C	15.62	--	--
Mrs C. Anderson	Jaguar D Type	C	---	135.2	217.58
S. Ames	Alfa Romeo	D	15.75	113.8	183.14

My fastest time of 25.18 seconds was 3.04 seconds slower than my previous best at Leyburn. Perhaps the car was getting a little tired as even a Consul, a four cylinder Ford saloon competing in Class "E", managed 24.17 seconds.

#### Sprints – Strathpine on Saturday February 25, 1956

While I did not realise it at the time this meeting was to be my last competitive speed event in the MG "TF". The day was to prove that my car was running as poorly as it had done at Leyburn six days previously. My times were in fact slower than those achieved by the other "TF" 1250 cc cars and also slower than the two Morris Minors of less than 1000 cc capacity. This however had nothing to do with the meeting being the last in the "TF" despite my best time in the standing event, of 23.76 seconds, being 3.27 seconds slower than my previous best at Strathpine.

As was usual at MG Car Club sprints the winners of the event was decided on a handicap but no account has been taken of handicaps in the unofficial results below.

DRIVER	SPORTS CARS	CLASS	STANDING START SECONDS	FLYING START	
				MPH	KPH
R.J. Barrett	MG "TF"	F	20.09	75.13	120.9

K.C.Ebeling	MG "TF"	F	23.76	62.24	100.16
V. Jordan	MG "TF"	F	20.08	70.87	114.04
P.E. Hickey	MG "TF"	F	21.31	70.81	113.96
S.A. Pollard	MG "TC"	F	18.92	74.07	119.21
J.A. Boneti	MG "TF"1500	F	20.03	72.35	116.43
W. Weekes	MG "TF"1500	F	18.45	79.79	128.4
J. Poteri	Austin Healey	D	17.86	86.12	138.6

#### CLOSED CARS

T. Yule	Morris Minor	G	22.84	62.46	100.51
P. Uscinski	Morris Minor	G	22.48	64.1	103.16
E. Ansell	MG "Y"	F	23.62	63.16	101.64
E.T. Burrows	MG Magnette	F	21.71	68.18	109.72
J. Cranley	Studebaker	D	24.15	61.64	99.2

#### RACING CARS CLASS

K. Richardson	Lago Talbot	C	14.46	110.43	177.71
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As I drove to my parents' home at Woodford later that evening I had no idea of the changes which would occur, only nine days away.

In 1987, after a lapse of many years, the "Classic Car Club" ran a "Back to Leyburn" Quarter Mile sprint for a small number of invited clubs. There was a dinner, and film show, of events in the fifties and sixties, the night before which was enjoyed by all present. The surface of the old aerodrome was too badly broken up to permit fast times by the 23 entries. After all, it was built in the early part of the nineteen forties and was not intended to be in any way permanent.

At one time my Triumph TR2 held, and it may still hold, the Leyburn course record for the flying quarter mile in the 2 litre racing and sports car Class E.