



VICTORIA

# NEWSLETTER

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- CLUB ROOMS: Edgar Street, Malvern (rear Harold Holt Memorial Pool)
- President: Richard P. Creed, "Woomboona" Wallan Road, Whittlesea, 3757. 716-2193
- Vice-President: David Wischer, "Woolway", Sutton Grange, 3448.
- Secretary: Austin Tope, 8 Wimba Avenue, Kew, 3101. 80-5163.
- Treasurer: John Twomey, 53 Park Street, Pascoe Vale, 3044. 306-9364.
- Club Captain: Ron Wilson, 22 Park Close, Vermont, 3133. 874-2450.
- Editor: Ian McLennan, 562 High Street, Thornbury, 3071. 480-1699.
- Spares Reg.,  
Co-ordinator,  
& PVT Spares: Alan McKinnon, 134 McEwan Road, West Heidelberg, 3081. 458-4433.
- Vintage Spares: Geoff Hopkins, 4 Thanet Court, Ringwood, 3134. 879-1403.
- 3 Ltr. Spares: Darren Cassidy, 15 Burton Avenue, Hawthorn, 3122. 818-1002.
- TAL4 Spares: Bob Graham, 15 Clarke Avenue, Caulfield, 3162. 211-3886.
- Librarian: Peter Shue, 53 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, 3146. 29-1598.
- Committee: Horrie Morgan, 12 Dunsterville Street, Sandringham, 3191. 598-7360.  
David Muirden, 9 Sorrett Avenue, Malvern, 3144.
- Soc. Secretary: John Stewart, 17 Fromer Street, Moorabbin, 3189.

## EDITORIAL

I've not got much to report on this month. Easter is fast approaching and I'm looking forward to that week's break. Please note that the April General Meeting will be held on FRIDAY 27th APRIL as the previous Friday is, of course, Good Friday.

I would like to thank those who have contributed to the Newsletter over the past months and I hope the contributions continue. It does become quite difficult to produce a newsletter without such contributions.

I hope you all have a safe Easter.

IAN McLENNON

## CHAIRMAN'S CHALLENGE

We have had two events of late, both of which had poor attendances. The Wischer Woolway Weekend saw only two cars start in the rally and one other who went straight to David's on Saturday. For those who went, it was a most enjoyable two days. Ian Blackwell and Mary-Anne arrived up on the Sunday. To Bob and Bev Graham, Ron Wilson, and Roy and Joan Henderson, thanks for coming.

The Day Trial was slightly better attended with five starters, four Alvis and one Morgan. Geoff Hopkins had laid out a most pleasant and interesting rally which all enjoyed. To Geoff, I say thank you, I am sure that all competitors enjoyed the pleasant run on a most pleasant Sunday.

Don't forget that this month's meeting is on the 27th April NOT on Good Friday.

Regards,

RICHARD

## MEMORIES

I have only pleasant memories of the 17 years I have been a member of the A.C.C.V. and I would like to recall some of these past events.

My first memory is of the Christmas BBQ at David Wischer's flats in Malvern Road, just after I arrived in Melbourne in 1967. Everyone was so helpful and friendly and it was a very pleasant introduction to the A.C.C.V.

Then there was the trial around Laverton and Werribee run by (I think) Rod Warriner. I can remember by-passing a bridge by driving through a ford a few yards further on. The event was so easy, even though the TAL4 engine would seize after a few miles at a sustained 70mph. Poor alignment of the pistons in the cylinder bores was the problem, I think.

Next would be the interstate rally to Narrandera in 1970 - the first after a break of several years. That dastardly fellow member, John Stewart, took a movie film of me hand cranking the TAL4 after the starter motor solenoid failed. I also did a head gasket on this rally and Chris Higgins donated his spare gasket which was in Sydney and I literally poured 20c pieces into a public telephone arranging pick-up and air freight. We drove home - never once have I had to walk home or be towed home in my Alvis.

The first couple of gymkhanas at Berwick Airfield were fantastic and the surface was green grass, not dust as at Langwarrin. Langwarrin gymkhanas were good fun but Berwick was even better. Either the first or second year we had 21 cars, which really made the event worthwhile.

The night trial down around Mornington sticks in my mind, because Barry Gough was my navigator and I had hard work to get him past the telephone box at Dromana in which were two very nubile young ladies. Neither would Barry agree that the TAL4 was a fast car, my theory was that as it had a very loud exhaust, it must be fast. Nor did Barry get the "Best Lady Navigator Award", even though we won!

The St. Arnaud Rally comes to mind because Ron Wilson brought along a bottle of wine called "Old Borer". The label described the manufacturing process, part of which was that the wine was "strained through an Armenian wrestler's jock-strap". The pub at St. Arnaud was homely, certainly not 5-Star, and I nearly got away without paying the bill!

Angela McKinnon was only a baby on the Adelaide Interstate Rally and, sad to relate, Alan did not have white-walls on the 12/50; and who can ever forget David Caldwell dropping 1½ gallons of oil on the forecourt of the motel in Bordertown? Or Keith Welsh playing bookie at Berri Racecourse?

The memories flood in, like the rally to Deniliquin where we left Joan Henderson and Bev playing the Poker machines at the R.S.L. Club. The Club closed, the ladies were put out the front door and two original (?) Anzacs tried to pick up the two girls. The Creeds with bicycle clips around their ankles tried to stop the water pouring up their trouser legs driving in the Ballot-Olds in the rain. Ron Wilson saying that the white powder the Army put in the tea during the war to stop the troops feeling sexy, was at last beginning to work.

Then there was the terrifying noise in the back mudguard of the TB14, when a tread flew off a tyre at 70 mph on the Grampians Rally. And John and Wendy Kent driving through the torrential downpour with no hood at 50 mph when everybody else had stopped because they couldn't see, the rain was so heavy.

Memories and people are the spirit that makes the A.C.C.V. such a good club.

SOME NOTES FROM KALORAMA - 1984 - SUNDAY, 18th MARCH

Our Club had the job of looking after the PA system, which was manned by Ron Wilson and David Caldwell - not a very happy job, but easier than trying to get entrance money out of the Mercedes Benz Club.

Alvis was represented by Ron Wilson 12/50 - Peter MacAuley Silver Crest - John Kent 12/50 - Alister Cannon 12/50 - Alf Wilson Silver Eagle - David Wischer Speed 20 and Rob Graham TBl4.

Apart from various wives and relations of Alvis members who attended, Roy and Joan Henderson and family were there and kept everyone more than adequately supplied with food.

Biggest surprise of the day was to see Bill Sinclair with his 12/50 (mixed up in the V.D.C. Black Iron) have a go in the Acceleration and Braking Tests and record the third fastest time!

Most interesting facet of Kalorama always is to stand by your car and listen to the knowledgeable general public discoursing about Alvis in general. One such idiot put the timing gear noise of the Cannon 12/50 to his friend as "twin overhead cams always rattle a bit".

Prize for the oddest car went to a 1920 Unic taxicab. Commentator on the PA who shall remain nameless said "They only made one because they couldn't reproduce".

Best part of the day was when everyone went home and only left the Alvis Contingent to clean up the balance of the stubbies and try out each other's cars around the oval.

And guess who won the Slow Race? No, it wasn't Rob Graham in the TBl4 - it was the Fire Truck again.

The Editor,  
A.C.C.V. Newsletter,

Dear Ian,

I wrote up a report on the Wischer Woolway Weekend Rally for the Newsletter - read it through a couple of times and then tore it up because who really cares?

It's pretty obvious there's not much interest in these types of events, no matter how much work goes into the preparation and promotion.

As long as the Committee keeps on going and provides Alvis spares where and when they are required, it seems that that's all that's wanted by the greater majority of the members.

So, I'm sorry that I haven't got a report for you, but you see - I can't be bothered either.

Regards,

RON WILSON  
Club Captain.

## THE ALVIS DILEMMA

In its issue for April 3rd, 1925 "The Autocar" reported the completion of "one of the most interesting racing cars ever constructed in Great Britain". It was the first f.w.d. Alvis, powered by a 1496 cc pushrod four, installed with its flywheel end forward. This was two months before Miller's Number 1 and Number 2 would attract world-wide attention at the Speedway. Yet the Alvis incorporated the same overall concept in its front end design, plus such identical specific features as in-board brakes, longitudinal quarter-elliptic front springs, similar brackets for mounting them, similar unusual deep frame rails, the same geometry of steering knuckles, outer U-joints and wheels. Plus the use of a front DD tube, albeit double. In their fine book "The Vintage Alvis", Peter Hull and Norman Johnson note this remarkable phenomenon and dispose of it as a case of simultaneous invention. I do not agree. There are too many details that are too close. The design of the early Alvis f.w.d.'s was attributed officially to the firm's chief engineer, Captain G.T. Smith-Clarke, and its chief designer, W. M. Dunn. Who or what might have been their source of information?

One possibility is the relationship between British motor sportsman and some time sports car manufacturer, Count Louis Zborowski and Harry Miller. It began during the practice for the 500 at Indianapolis in May, 1923. Bitterly disappointed with his Bugatti, Zborowski ordered a Miller rear wheel drive on the spot, to be ready for him to drive in the Italian G.P. at Monza in September. Miller himself might have told this influential and well connected client and his right-hand man, Clive Gallop, of the promising new product he had in the works. At this stage the DD tube might well have been double, although this detail is trivial.

Then on July 24th 1923 Murphy, his mechanic Olson and Riley Brett boarded the "Aquitania" in New York, bound for England. Brett's job was to represent Miller at Monza and to brief Zborowski and his crew on the utilization and care of their new Miller Racing Car. With the arrival of the Americans in London a few days later and with Monza still five weeks away, there was time for them to meet and exchange information with a large segment of who was who in British Motorsport. When I met with Brett in 1978 I asked him if he could cast any light on how Alvis scooped Miller. "None whatsoever", he said. "I knew nothing about it."

My dear late friend S. C. H. (Sammy) Davis knew all of these people, rode with Zborowski in the Miller, drove f.w.d. Alvis cars for the factory. I asked him what he thought of this remarkable coincidence. He attributed the Alvis design to Smith-Clarke alone and told me in writing that it was his feeling that, if the engineer had not obtained his information from one of the Americans, he obviously had to have gotten his hands on some good illustrations of the Miller f.w.d.

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The above article is an extract from "Automobile Quarterly" - 4th quarter 1983, by Griffith Borgeson on "Fresh Footnotes to the History of Miller Front Drive"; and was sent in by Eric Cunningham, as was the following article from "Motor Sport", March, 1984 by Bill Boddy and is in reply to the Borgeson article.

## BORGESON ON MILLER

The history of the Miller racing cars which contributed such an important part to the American racing scene has been fully covered in the book written by Mark Dee, which for some reason or other has not come the way of this reviewer. I have heard enough about this Miller history, however, to believe that nothing else on the subject is called for. So it came as a surprise to find an article on various aspects of the racing Millers by Griffith Borgeson, in the last issue of the American "Automobile Quarterly" although less of a surprise to find that Borgeson takes issue with Dee on

BORGESON ON MILLER (continued)

some points of Miller history. Not having seen Dee's text, I am in no position to discuss these. But, like Alex Ulmann before him, Borgeson also questions some aspects of the previously accepted European scene.

For example, in his well-illustrated outpouring he questions the origins of the first f.w.d. Alvis racing car of 1925, which was announced two months before Miller produced their first front-drive racing car. A British "first", you might say, But Borgeson refutes this, rejecting the opinion of Peter Hull and Norman Johnson, expressed in their book "The Vintage Alvis", that the idea was a simultaneous one in both countries. Borgeson is trying to convince himself that Miller drawings must have crossed the Atlantic and arrived in Coventry, allowing both f.w.d. cars to be built at roughly the same time, these Alvis and Miller f.w.d. racing cars being too much alike for there to be any other conclusion. He quotes the longitudinal front springs, on similar mounting brackets, the very deep side-members of the chassis frame, and the same steering, universal-joint and wheel geometry of both makes as proof of his contention that the Alvis Chief-Engineer, Captain Smith-Clarke and/or his Chief Designer, Mr. W. M. Dunn, copied Miller's design. On the face of it the similarity does seem remarkable. Until, that is, you ask yourself how else would a pioneer f.w.d. racing chassis have been laid out at that time? Universal joints for this purpose were in an experimental stage and both designers presumably had to adapt those available,  $\frac{1}{4}$ -elliptic springs were the logical means of mounting the de Dion front-end, and with all the mechanicals now forward of the bulkhead, it was no doubt necessary to use deep side-members, or "side-rails" as Borgeson calls them, to stiffen up the rear part of the chassis that no longer had cross-members supporting the gearbox to strengthen it. It is significant that the Alvis, which was completed at least two months before the Miller, used double de Dion tubes, instead of the single de Dion tube at the front of No. 1 f.w.d. Miller, and had inboard front brakes, whereas the American car used outboard brakes at this time, Alvis having used such brakes at the rear of their 1923/24 racing cars.

This does not dispose of the possibility of a common source of f.w.d. inspiration on both sides of the Atlantic, and may leave a "the chicken or the egg" dilemma. Borgeson's difficulty is that, although he has researched (and no-one applauds his research and tenacity more than I do) f.w.d. in America and has written a book about it (so far, he says, published only in France), he cannot say with any certainty how, if Alvis cribbed from Miller, this came about! S. C. H. Davis having disclaimed giving such information to Smith-Clarke, and Miller's engineer Riley Brett having said he knew nothing of the new Miller development when he was in England en route for Monza in 1923, Borgeson quotes Count Zborowski as a possible conveyor of the drawings or other illustrations to Captain Smith-Clarke.

This seems improbable. True, Zborowski bought a rear drive Miller, an out-dated and never very satisfactory car, while in the U.S.A. for the 1923 Indianapolis race, and he drove for Miller at Monza that year. But, by 1924, before he was killed during the next Italian GP, he was concerned with his new role as GP driver in the Mercedes team. Borgeson describes Zborowski as a "sometime sportscar manufacturer". This is rather stretching things! Zborowski put money into Lionel Martin's Little Aston-Martin Company around 1922 because he wanted a means of entry into road racing, for which the racing cars then owned were unsuitable. He saw this as simply an interim stage in his chosen amateur career, the Astons giving away half a litre under the then prevailing GP formula. After his Miller had shown itself to be quite unsuitable for road racing, in the 1924 French GP, Zborowski followed his star to Germany and Mercedes. I would have thought he was the last person to become involved in passing on other companies' design secrets to English companies - but if he did, why not to A-M? Gallop, his engineer, perhaps? But did he at that time have links with Alvis? Borgeson, as the leading historian of the subject of

BORGESON ON MILLER (continued)

f.w.d. in the U.S.A., must do better than this. Has it not occurred to him that Captain Smith-Clarke or Mr. Dunn could have met Harry Miller in the States or otherwise have promoted Alvis innovations there, had they wished to do so?

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Footnote: Borgeson, an American, is now believed to be living in France.

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