



VICTORIA

# NEWSLETTER

VOL. 22 No. 5

MAY 1984

Issue No. 244

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No: VBJ 0554

**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.  
 David Caldwell, 6 Outlook Drive, Heathmont.  
**Soc. Secretary:** John Stewart, 17 Fromer Street, Moorabbin.

## EDITORIAL

Well, it's that time again, Easter has been and gone and the Newsletter is again due and I really don't know what happened to the last month. I received a report from Ron Wilson just prior to Easter, which is included in this issue. Ron advised that he and Alan McKinnon were about to prepare for New Zealand to compete in the V.C.C., North Island Rally driving Ron Blanchett's 12/50 Ducks Back. I spoke with Alan the other day and he informed me that he and Ron had a great time, the 12/50 was a real flier, and after the Rally in the North, they did a lightning tour of the South Island. Ron may be good enough to let me have an article on the Rally in due course, which of course I will publish.

I would at this point also like to thank those who continue to support this Newsletter with their interesting articles. Unfortunately it is the same handful of contributors always and it would be nice if more members could contribute something to fill these pages. Remember, as a previous editor often said "Nothing in, nothing out". You will all appreciate that it does become quite difficult at times to put together a newsletter without much to print.

I spoke with John Kent the other day and he tells me that he will soon be transferred to Wangaratta. He and Wendy are looking forward to the move and will take the 12/50 with them. The Donnans are presently in England for the V.S.C.C. Rally to be held in June and will be joined by others from this Club and the V.S.C.C. of Vic for the Rally. Steve Denner I believe is going as are Sue and Graeme Steinfort. I will attempt to obtain an article for the Newsletter from one or other of the abovenamed in due course.

IAN McLENNAN

CHAIRMAN'S CHALLENGE

1984 Seems to be the same as other years - poor attendance at Club events.

It comes down to just a few people to compete in events and even fewer people to arrange these events. We have over 100 members in the Club. We do have only about 50 percent of that membership in the Melbourne area, but we only get 5/6 starters in most events which is only 10 percent activity.

If you do not have your Alvis on the road, then you could arrange to help run an event or come along in your modern car.

Your present committee is getting very tired of working for very little result and support. For the past eight years that I have been involved with the Alvis Car Club Committee the support for events (other than the big 3 day rallies) has gradually fallen. You will find that we will soon become a social club and Alvis cars will be things of the past.

Think about it.

RICHARD

PAN PACIFIC RALLY - 1986 NEW ZEALAND.

Ron Wilson has some good news about the rally and the costs - all those interested should come to the next CLUB MEETING.

OH RON! (or Where have all the Drivers Gone?)

Eff's famous cry from the heart of "The Glums" fame can only be echoed with regards to our revered club captain's non-report of the Wischer Weekend. I suppose that really your humble scribe is in no position to comment, as he was one who had to phone the organisers and tender an apology for his absence. Of course everyone else may well have said "Thank God for that!" when this was known but one can quite see why such a dearth of entries was to say the least rather off putting for those who had made such an effort to provide their fellow members with an interesting weekend's Alvis activity.

By the same token the entry list for the Day Trial can hardly be described earth shattering. Again someone went to a lot of trouble to organise an event for OUR enjoyment and was greeted by a deafening silence.

The recent comments by both Ron Wilson and Alister Cannon on the subject of the Basil Bowes Trophy are germane to this. We ARE supposed to be a CAR CLUB. That is a group of people banded together to enjoy their Alvis cars. Surely we do this by driving in our Club's events. The turnout of red triangles in the V.S.C.C. Alpine shows that there must be some drivers amongst our members. It might be added in regard to that event that Andre Chaleyzer in the Firefly won class B that an Alvis was sixth outright Vintage and another was sixth P.V.T. and the Alvis team were runners up for the team prize.

Right then you blokes. Why is it that we can get support like that for an "outside" event but our own are virtually ignored?

Certainly not all of us are competition minded, but surely for those who favor social driving rather than driving in anger the Woolway event was a splendid run in the country with your friends. For those who like a nice Sunday afternoon drive the Day Trial was superb. The keen types could have been tweaking their Haldas while the more sedate could have had a pleasant picnic.

The Kalorama turn up was not bad considering that it had to be restricted to pre-war Alvis but once again this is an outside event, albeit a very pleasant one.

OH RON (continued)

For the competitively minded it is not particularly rewarding to win an Alvis event. To come first in a field of four Alvis is not nearly as meritorious as to come, say tenth outright and third in class in an event with a field of forty plus actively driven cars.

The Queen's Birthday weekend sees an unfortunate clash of dates with the Gippsland Gallop and the V.S.C.C. Day Trial at the same time. This can only tend to reduce entries in both. The former deserves a worthwhile field. The writer intends to be one of the starters. He will regret missing the other event but Ron must have the support of Club members if we expect him, or anyone else for that matter, to continue to run events for us.

The Basil Bowes Trophy was instituted because the man it commemorates was a believer in Alvis owners actually driving their cars. This is surely what a one-make car club for a marque with sporting connotations is all about. If our entry lists shrink too much or if no-one will offer to run events for a mere handful of starters then it is a sad fact that the trophy should not be awarded.

What do we want from our Club? Is it to be a car club? Is it to be a rather esoteric mutual admiration society? Is it to be purely a source of spares, which it is only because a couple of our members know where to get these odd bits made? Should the Club be wound up and we become a sub-section of the V.S.C.C., after all those with post war cars would still be welcome there as associate members, or what?

Are we running the wrong sort of events? Should we run events and if so what sort do YOU want?

Please think on these things and tell YOUR committee your feelings before one of the best one-make clubs dies of stagnation.

BILL BARBER

THE DAY TRIAL - SUNDAY 8 APRIL

Organiser - Geoff Hopkins

Five cars lined up for the start at Kalorama - Bill Barber 4.3L, Ron Wilson 12/50, Austin Tope Speed 20, Rob Graham TB14 and President Richard Creed in a modern device.

The trial was in two sections with the first being a short loop through Olinda to Begley's Bridge, then via the Sherbrooke Forest and Sassafras, back to Kalorama where a very welcome cup of hot soup was waiting. The second section was to Belgrave via Monbulk then up to Emerald then across to Beaconsfield and Pakenham. Then it was off via Gembrook to Woori Yallock and Silvan and back to Kalorama.

Now I don't know if that was the intended route as I can only write it as my architect navigator directed me to go, but it was most enjoyable with perfect weather and a well worked out mixture of hills and bends, a couple of long fast straights, plus some good forest roads. At the finish I heard there were some secret controls and found that everyone took the wrong direction leaving the start, but what the heck - it was a good trial with good company - good cars and good fun and that all made up a really good day's outing - many thanks, Geoff!

RON WILSON  
Club Captain

YOU'RE WRONG MR. BORGESON

The article in the April Newsletter in which Griffith Borgeson suggested that the Alvis design for their first front wheel drive cars was cribbed from that of the Miller cannot go unchallenged. This is an indication that this writer is not just a bigoted old twit with red triangular eyes and it must be made clear at the outset that he has always held Griffith Borgeson in very high regard as an automotive historian. In fact it might be said that "The Classic Twin Cam Engine" is the

finest thing of its type since Pomeroy's "The Grand Prix Car". By the same token your humble servant has always seen the work of Harry Miller among the highest levels as mechanical jewellery, none the less the Borgesonian slander cannot go unchallenged.

The first notable use of front wheel drive in racing was presumably J. Walter Christie of New York. This device can be most kindly described as agricultural. He later built rather more sophisticated cars on basically similar lines, notably a 19litre monster for the 1907 French G.P. Not very surprisingly it did not distinguish itself on the Dieppe circuit. Certainly Mr. Christie carved himself out a much greater niche in history by his designs of suspension systems for tanks. Of course a prophet has no honour in his own country and it was only after generations of tanks from other countries, notably Britain and the U.S.S.R., had established the layout that it was long after his death in 1944, in penury, that the virtues were recognised in the U.S.A.

In 1918 Ben Gregory set up the Front Drive Motor Company in Kansas City. His cars employed a deDion tube, arched to clear the front mounted transmission but the front suspension was by transverse leaf. Gregory campaigned a car around the American dirt track circuit which was originally powered by an OX 5 aero engine, later replaced by a Hispano Suiza V8, presumably ex-Spad. The company was wound up in 1922.

Almost immediately after this, in 1922 Jimmy Murphy was seeking a car for Indianapolis that was to be significantly faster than the Miller engined Duesenberg with which he had just won the famous 500. Riley Breet persuaded him to commission Harry Miller in Los Angeles. Unfortunately it was not until well into 1924 that Goossen managed to make the Miller's ultra-compact transmission work properly, so the front drive Miller did not appear at the Brickyard until 1925 when it finished second - driven by Hill and Davis, as Murphy had been killed at Syracuse N.y. in late 1924.

There is no doubt that the Miller design was inspired by the prior work of Christie and Gregory and that the line of cars that it sired were a magnificent series of motor cars, but there is NO evidence that Alvis can be included in this blood line.

The debut of the Alvis front wheel drive sprint car was at Kop hillclimb on 28 March, 1925. This car had a 12/50 type engine fitted with a Roots type blower and mounted back to front in a light weight aluminium punt type chassis with the clutch, gear box and final drive extending forward in that order. Front suspension was by a deDion axle carried by quarter elliptic springs.

Smith-Clarke had become interested in front wheel drive used on the Latil commercial vehicles of the Great Western Railway, and at Avonmouth Docks. He had the idea of a front wheel drive car at the back of his mind before he joined T.G. John at Alvis and both he and W.M. Dunn believed that it would save weight as well as help handling. In this regard it is amusing to consider the Alvis production FWD cars which were decidedly overweight and (Pax, Horrie) did have some odd quirks in their behaviour.

Until Mr. Borgeson started his hare - appropriately enough as he was chasing a Vintage Alvis, it has been generally accepted that the similarities of the design of the Miller and Alvis cars was simply a case of great minds think alike. Considering the state of the art at the time a deDion axle located by superimposed quarter elliptic spring and dampers as radius arms was the logical way to set about the job. There are many other examples of similar solutions recording two designers working simultaneously. The crankshaft torsional vibration damper being adopted by Henry Royce and Dr. Lanchester at the same time springs to mind at once. There is no evidence whatever to suggest that the English design was inspired by the Miller one.

Let us now consider those suggested paths of leakage from Los Angeles to Coventry. It has been proposed that Clive Gallop could have been the missing link as he was at Indianapolis in 1923. However, at that date the FWD car was not even a twinkle in the good Harry's eye, or perhaps one should say a squiggle on his ouija board. In any event if Gallop had wanted to convert his patron Zborowski to the idea of front wheel drive then surely he would have commissioned Aston-Martin to take on the task. After all, he had gone to the trouble of going back to Peugeot, where he had served his apprenticeship, and getting his old pal Marcel Gremillon to provide the design



TRADING POST

**ALVIS BOOKS** : The new Ken Day Alvis Book is available from the Club. Price \$30.00 each.

**WANTED** : for TA 21 Drophead -

FRONT BUMPER SECTION

Col Winslade, Lake Boga.

**WANTED** : To suit Silver Eagle

Generator Lucas C 5 R

Richard Unkles 857 9417

**WANTED** : To suit 12/50 -

Steering Drag Link (for front wheel brake)

Contact Geoff Hopkins 879 1403 (business)

**Graeme Steinfort offers for sale the following :**

- (1) Alvis Silver Eagle, fully restored, fast and reliable
- (2) Austin 7 "65"
- (3) Lancia Lamboa, 8th series sedan (suitcase)
- (4) 1927 "T" model Ford, complete running and reg.
- (5) 1916 Sunbeam, almost fully restored and running
- (6) Garford Butchers Truck, fully restored and running.

All serious enquiries can be made to Graeme on 49 3827 (home) or 480 1699 (business).

\* \* \* \* \*

INTERESTING READING

Leadfoot by Nicholas Fisk

I S B N 0-340-26809-3

by Knight Books.