

LOOSE FILLINGS

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Victoria was the most active state for Australian air-cooled activity in the 1950s and now leads the air-cooled revival, as demonstrated at Rob Roy in November where five 1950s air-cooled cars competed — plus two of their 1960s descendants. We can be grateful to the Victorian Historic Racing Register for introducing a trophy for the 1950s cars, but, at the same time, this trophy has been earned through the sustained efforts of the Victorian air-cooled brigade, with not a little help from South Australia.

‘A MOST IMPRESSIVE LITTLE CAR’

ANDY MENZIES’ FRONT DRIVE 500

By GRAHAM HOWARD

One of our most distinctive 500s was built and driven by star speedway solo rider Andy Menzies, using a dry-sump JAP single driving forward to the front wheels. Its brief career started in late 1953 and its last recorded appearance was in 1955.

Menzies was a member of the 1937 Australian speedway Test team when aged just 21, and in 1938 he also rode for UK club Wembley. When WW2 started, the RAF turned down his application; back in Australia he was judged medically unfit because of racing injuries, and spent the war in the service department of

Melbourne Ford dealer Melford’s. He won the Australian one-mile championship as the culmination of an active 1946/47 season, raced for Sheffield in 1949 and had his last appearances with the Australian team in the 1949-50 season. Before the war he had surprised UK riders by using fusion welding rather than brazing to build frames, and he continued to build frames in Australia after the war, some of them using chrome-moly tubing

Andy Menzies at Sydney Sports Ground, 1946 (right courtesy Brian Darby’s website Vintage Speedway) and at Rob Roy (below, courtesy David White).

obtained through friends in the aircraft industry. His son Max recalled, “Dad used to make a speedway frame one weekend,



and next weekend he'd be off making money with it."

Menzies hoped he might also make money from building 500cc cars to order, and (as Reg Hunt had done some years earlier) ran advertisements to this effect in Australian Motor Sports magazine in early 1954. One respondent was John Mann, who some 40 years later restored and prepared the Mk3 Cooper JAP now owned by David Reid. John visited Menzies but decided not to take the idea further.

The car first appeared at Fishermens Bend in October 1953, the organisers taking no chances with someone of Menzies' reputation and giving him the same handicap as Bill Patterson's Mk5 Cooper JAP. The 500 Car Club's notes say the car "went hard for a lap" but then retired. On Cup Day it ran at Rob Roy, where Patterson was dominant at 30.93 secs from Reno Motors' Mk4 Cooper JAP (34.61). Menzies' 35.95 was reasonable for a first timer at a challenging hill, and AMS wrote of "...Andy Menzies' very pretty f.w.d. JAP. This car looks like a miniature GP car."

At Albert Park later in November it finished 7th in the 50-mile Albert Park Trophy. Fifteen laps around Albert Park fully merited AMS' reference to it as "a most impressive little car." Menzies finished the year at Templestowe in December, running a best of 68.21 against Reno's 65.5, again not a bad debut on another challenging hill.

Menzies' 1954 program started on March 18 with the opening meeting at Altona, never a driver-friendly circuit. He crashed, turning over one-and-a-half times "with considerable damage to the car," according to one report, and suffered cuts and bruises. Amazingly he was running again two days later at Fishermens Bend. He was rewarded by finishing second after Bruce Walton had retired from a duel with John Barraclough in the Patterson Cooper.

This event was a scratch race over five laps, with eight starters, and was billed as the first Formula 3 race in Australia.

Menzies ran twice more at Altona in 1954, finishing sixth in May in a scratch race won by Walton, and third in another Formula 3 race in June won by Patterson from Don Swanton's Cooper. He also ran at Rob Roy, where his best time came down to 31.20. But Bert Flood ran 29.58 in Jack Godbehear's live-rear-axle JGS, and Walton in the Walton JAP set a stunning new class record at 28.10.

Menzies' car appeared to have reasonable racing reliability, and there could be no doubt about its driver's ability or the performance of its JAP engine. The car just did not seem to be fast enough to win. It did not appear again until Altona in May 1954, in an eight-car Formula 3 handicap, where it lost its plug lead and finished in the lake. This was its last outing.

Early in its career the car had been entered as the CMC 500. The initials covered the three people central to the construction of the car: Bill Curtis, Menzies himself, and Dr Peter Croke. Curtis, a fitter and turner, was the all-round assistant during the build. He had served his time at Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, and his aviation contacts were useful in sourcing chrome-moly tubing for the car. Croke was also Menzies' GP. Bruce Walton recalled that when Menzies did mechanical work on one of Croke's cars, Menzies would write the bill in guineas.

Curtis and Croke were just some of the remarkable people who were part of Menzies' circle. Famed American speedway rider Cordy Milne called in whenever he was in Melbourne, and Max Menzies said his father had been "very close" to the legendary solo rider Lionel van Praag, who had helped to get his father his initial place with Wembley. Van Praag won the George Cross with the RAAF during WW2, and post-war rose to be chief pilot for air-sur-

vey company Adastra; when he was in Melbourne, "Praggie" would join the other story-tellers at Menzies' Friday night "bible class."

Menzies may have got some ideas for his car from other Victorian 500cc enthusiasts, but the Victorian 500cc Car Club seems to have been unaware of his project until shortly before its Fishermens Bend debut. The club's notes in AMS for October 1953 described the newcomer as using "Hartnett front end...rear suspension by wishbones and coil springs within telescopic dampers... [and]... a light tubular frame." The frame was a simple four-tube affair, possibly deliberately designed to be adaptable for front- or rear-engined layout. Max Menzies recalled, "Dad was always saying you had to have a roll bar, but you can't see one."

Bill Curtis recalled that the rear wishbones were pressings in mild steel produced in the tramways workshop at Preston. Similar wishbones appear to have been used at the front, with Hartnett hubs and possibly Hartnett driveshafts and rack and pinion. The wheels were certainly Hartnett, with bolt-on rims and brake-drums integral with the cast centres. The rims on the rear were reversed, to marginally widen the track.

Bodywork was in aluminium, built by Bob Pryor, who had previously built the steel hard-top for Peter Croke's Jaguar XK120 roadster. The completed car was painted pale green.

The CMC's engine was a dry-sump four-stud JAP, driving forward to the gearbox then forward again to the final drive. Morrie Wheeler, one half of the team which produced the remarkable front-drive WGM with its overhung engine, said Menzies had told him it had been a mistake to put the engine behind the front wheels, rather than ahead of them, because acceleration tended to take weight - and hence grip - off the front wheels.. Whatever the



Left: the freshly completed CMC500 in the street outside Andy Menzies' house in West Preston where it was built. Photo Dr Peter Croke. Above: the front mounted JAP engine, photo Shearer collection.

and the front uprights in the current JBS rebuild, but we kept all the bent and damaged original parts as mentioned.

Shortly after buying the JBS ruins I visited Garry Simkin in Sydney. He had 'escaped' from NZ with one of the five JBSs, and his car is probably the most original JBS left in the world – most of the other known cars have been modified over the years. I spent three days photographing and measuring Garry's car before returning to NZ to start the rebuilds.

My previous experience helped a lot and I have tried very hard to build the cars as closely as possible to the original specifica-

tion. This included welding up the chassis by bronze welding, a technique I learnt at the Brabham factory in 1965 and which was employed even earlier at the JBS factory in 1951-52.

The rebuild has included building up eight wire wheels. I was called crazy by various 'experts' for even thinking of building the wheels, but the more comments I heard the more determined I was to do it. I am pleased to say that the finished articles are probably stronger than the original wheels and as explained above they proved up to the task in the day.

Both cars are powered again by JAP motors as fitted at the factory, although using original parts in these would be like trying to race to the bankruptcy courts, so modern crankcases and con-rods have ensured they will last longer than the original JAPs tended to do.

The car is now fitted with a fire extinguisher and with a roll bar and seat belts the same as Garry fitted to his JBS. As this is written I am preparing the car for its first outing at Taupo on December 3. Then it will be back home to finish the second car for Laurie, after first correcting any 'bugs' we find in the car at Taupo.

...AND THE OTHER THREE NZ JBS'

The car imported by speedway rider Mick Holland has been in the Yaldhurst Museum near Christchurch for many decades. The Norton-powered car 51/12, imported and used by Ron Frost, then Jim Berkett, has been owned since 1971 by Garry Simkin and has been in Australia since the mid 1980s. The fifth car is 51/13, now owned by Alex McLennan. Previous owners included Arnold Stafford, Syd Jensen, Dave Caldwell, Ron Roycroft, Ray Mitchell and Vern Russell. *Garry Simkin*

TRENBERTH VINCENT AT GOODWOOD

Expat Aussie Kerry Horan was again invited to run in the Earl of March Trophy race for 500cc Formula 3 cars built between 1948 and 1959 at the Goodwood Revival meeting in September 2011. Kerry's car is the Trenberth Vincent, built by Murray T. as a one off in South Australia in 1952 and powered then by a Vincent Black Lightning 998cc V twin.

A very quick car it was out of the box and probably its finest hour was finishing in fifth place in the Australian Grand Prix at Port Wakefield in 1955, which was won by Jack Brabham in the rear-engined Cooper Bristol. Incredibly, Murray covered 76 of the 80 laps of the race, finishing just behind Victorian Kevin Neale in a Cooper Bristol and just beating home Keith Rilstone (again most creditably) in his similar rear-engined Vincent-powered special.

At Goodwood, the 'TB' turned up alongside the many motorcycle-engined racing cars but did not practice or race due to 'ongoing piston problems' with the Vincent Comet engine. This was disappointing for lots of Aussies at Goodwood this year as the car looked immaculate and very much in place with the many UK and international cars in its class. The car featured in the Goodwood Revival booklet article on the 'Earl of March Trophy'.

See articles on the Trenberth Vincent in *Loose Fillings* Winter 2001 and Autumn 2002. There are good photos of the 'TB' as well as the Rilstone special in Paul Wilkins' 1994 book 'The Vincent HRD story in South Australia'.

So all I can say is that it was on display

Painted in its original dark red, the Trenberth Vincent at Goodwood in September.
Photo Dave Williamson.



CLASSIFIEDS

Wanted: for JAP twin a second 4 stud barrel 160mm e.g with part number 11888 cast on it. Can swap for 5 stud type or your price paid. Terry 02 9418 2974

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: 1958 Scarab/Triumph 650, extensive NSW history. Triumph pre-unit 650 twin engine/gearbox, early Ralt rack and wheels. Total restoration 2008-9, excellent condition, with on-board electric starter system. New aluminium body panels, quick release steering wheel, new BTH magneto, new brakes and tyres, good range of new and used spares. Nothing to spend, ready to race. Asking \$19,500. Terry Perkins, 0265 835765 or trp62129@hotmail.com

For sale: motoring and motorsport books and magazines, mostly US and European, email for 12-page list. Graham Howard. grimes@ix.net.au or 02 4787 8772

For sale: Waye 500, built in 1953, CAMS log book, JAP 500 dry-sump engine, Norton gearbox, roll bar fitted, new upholstery TT carburettor, Lucas magneto, eligible to run overhead cam Norton, ready to run, \$15,000 ono, Andrew Halliday 02 9888 6175

For sale: 12 volt roller starting system to get your air-cooled car fired up. New and unused. Comes with jump-leads, starter cable and button and "hockey stick" jack to raise the other rear wheel. Garry, 02 9958 3935, or gjsimkin@iprimus.com.au

For sale: Sidney Rudge, built mid-'50s by Len Sidney, 1938 4v Rudge 500, later JAP and Vincent. Ready to roll \$25,000, John Hazelden, 03 5968 4025

For sale: Walkem Vincent, converted mid-'50s by the constructor from his original 1952 Walkem Manx. Comes with Black Shadow(?) motor, all components and CAMS log book. \$50,000, Paul Zahra,

over the three days of the event but it was not brought out onto this historic race track to mix it with the cream of 500cc racing cars of the period. *Kerry Smith*

BITS AND PIECES

- Six times Australian Hillclimb Champion (1958-63) Bruce Walton and his wife Camille were guests of MG Car Club Queensland in October, and spoke at an MG CC social night before attending a hillclimb at Mt Cotton. On the Monday the Waltons (and three-times champion Ivan Tighe – 1964, 1985, 1991) were guests of John Holmes in Toowoomba, and revisited the Price Henry Drive course where Bruce in the Walton JAP finished second to Lex Davison in 1955, and won in 1961 driving the Walton Cooper.
- Two Mk4 Coopers with long Australian history, and both previously owned by the late Rob Kirkby, have recently changed hands in Sydney. One of the bodiless chassis imported in 1950 by Keith Martin, and first raced by Ken Wylie, has been bought by expert panelworker Rodney Hoffman and will be restored with a 500 JAP. Another of Martin's bodiless chassis, which was given Mk5-style bodywork and chassis additions and first run by Reg Smith, is now owned by many-times Cooper owner Ivan Glasby.
- If you need nuts for your spark plugs (these days plugs often come without them), you need NGK part number NT4245:B. They are about 10c each.
- Victorian Historic Racing register has created a trophy for competition amongst

pre-1961 air-cooled cars, to be awarded on alternate years to Under 500cc cars and 501-1100cc cars, starting with the 1100s. The trophy was first contested at the November Rob Roy meeting and narrowly won by Ken Bedgood with the ex-Crouch Cooper Mk5 JAP 1100 from the Greeneklee Cooper Mk9 JAP, which on this occasion was being shared by father and son Brian and Keith Simpson. There was close competition amongst the 500s as well, all three cars setting their best times in the 30-second bracket, with John Coffin the fastest.

- The huge website Atlas F1 includes many discussion forums, its "Nostalgia Forum" carrying a huge amount of interesting information and photographs of Australian and overseas motorsport history. Within Nostalgia Forum is a further forum "Historical Research," which includes an interesting thread on Australian air-cooled racing cars with several *Loose Fillings* readers contributing. It's well worth a look.

- After nearly 50 years of inactivity, the 1951 Mk5 Cooper Norton originally raced in the UK by Bob Gerard recently ran again in Queensland for its new owner Martin Ackland. After Gerard the car went to South Africa, from where it was brought to West Australia. It was raced in the early 1960s by Howard Davies before being bought by Don Hall, who sold it in 2006 to Frank Trento in Melbourne. Martin is being assisted with the car by the experienced racer/tuner Joe Wilson.

- As others see us: from the October issue of the Victorian Historic Racing Register

newsletter, "...there is something fascinating about watching the 500cc brigade try to start their cars for an hour or more. Sort of like trying to figure out the mindset of the masochist." Masochists? Us?

HAUNTING THE HILLS

Five 1950s air-cooleds competed on September 18 at Bryant Park, Gippsland Car Club's replacement for the old Morwell hillclimb in the Haunted Hills between Moe and Newborough. The layout is challenging, very slippery with absolutely no grip for lighter cars (is coal dust still a problem as with Morwell?) and with multiple unsighted corners which favours those with experience of the course.

In addition to the period competitors (John Coffin, Robbins 500; David Palstra, Newbounds Special; and Graeme Noonan, Cooper Mk7), Paul Schilling and Darren Visser were there with their Jinx and Cyclo Kawasaki triples.

John Coffin took fastest time of the traditional 500s with a 70 sec. run, Graeme Noonan three secs behind, and David Palstra a further seven secs back. Unfortunately on his last run David hit the concrete wall head-on at the ever-tightening final corner, after spinning at the same corner on an earlier run. The Newbounds' front end, chassis and nose were all severely damaged. Another project for David to take on. I don't think I would run the Cooper there again, unless I could get more grip by fitting the alternative set of wheels with wider section Dunlop R's.

Graeme Noonan

Six air-cooled cars on a nine-car grid at Baskerville (Tasmania) in 1959. Front row J. Watt Saanen Spl. (left), Dick Crawford (Don Gorrings' JMW). Second row, Arthur Hilliard Riley Spl (left), Lex Sternberg Whiteford Vincent. Third row Dave Powell, Mk4 Cooper (left), Ralph King Prefect Spl, Brian Mahoney Mk5 Cooper Vincent. Fourth row, Stan Allen K4 Spl (left), then (obscured) possibly the Abbey BSA or the Hart Norton. Photograph via Randall Langdon from Andrew Lamont's Hobart Sporting Car Club collection. Thanks to Randall Langdon and Rob Seward for identifications.



TERRY'S TIPS

I recently looked up the piece I wrote a while ago on chains for *Loose Fillings*. It could have been clearer, so I have gone back to square one:

JAP and Norton primary drives use 1/2" pitch to British not American standard dimensions. The following table shows how the 1/2" pitch dimensions differ for apparently similar chains and sprockets:

| | Width (internal) | Roller Diameter | Motorcycle reference |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| British (BS) | 0.305" | 0.335" | 428 |
| American (ANSI) | 0.313" | 0.313" | nil - don't use |

Sprocket blanks to suit the British Standard type chain are available and should be ordered up if not in stock at your supplier. Avoid the ANSI type which seems to be more readily available; it may look the same but is not.

Strangely enough I have just noticed a JAP speedway sprocket marked 1/2 x 5/16 x 17t (see photo above). Question is, where does the 5/16 (0.3125") come from? It's not the width of the sprockets which measure in the range 0.275"/0.285". It's not the internal width which as shown above is 0.305". My Norton manual confirms the chain is 1/2" x .305. Note that the American chain is 5/16" internal width.

In the case of final drives these are normally 5/8" pitch by 1/4" width (#520) which size is only found in the British standard. The 3/8" width (#530) is identical in the British and American standards but you shouldn't need to use that.

Both the British and American standards have numbering systems to uniquely identify chains and sprockets but these are too



complicated for everyday motorcycle use. The three digit references above are widely used by motorcyclists today and probably originated with the Japanese industry in the 1950s or '60s.

I can recommend the UK's 'Sprockets Unlimited' - phone/fax +44 1386 831341, email astrosprox@btinternet.com or see www.sprocketsunlimited.com. I have just bought two 44-teeth sprockets from them with centres bored to size for a total cost of £60 (that's about \$95) including packing and postage. They are also very good for chain cut to length but the postage may make this less cost-effective.

While on the subject of chains and sprockets, here is a good way of locking a sprocket so the mainshaft nut can be done up. The vise-grip in the photo (below) is of cheap unbranded China origin and has been doing this job for years. You need to do a bit of grinding to make the clamps fit the sprocket but that's about all

Tightening JAP speedway type cylinder heads need some really good tools and a standard spanner just isn't up to the job. In my experience, most JAP fasteners, which they made themselves, have across-flat fractional inch dimension hexagons.

This means you can use a UN sized flare nut spanner. They are wider than normal and have a greater bearing on the flats of the hexagon. I got a suitable spanner of this type from AutoOne and they also had a 'crow foot' attachment (right) with a 3/8" square drive. This would have fitted my

JAP hexagons except the torque wrench head fouled the studs and the fins. It was extended by welding on a spare socket. See the photos to get the idea which is a bit hard to put into words.

The extra leverage produced by this was about 12% so the necessary adjustment downwards was made to the torque wrench setting. Next question - what should this be? For 7/16" diameter steel of not very special tensile strength (mine were made out of 4140 (EN19A) which couldn't be heat treated because the hexagons are hard soldered on) the uncorrected limit would be 40ft.lb for 20tpi according to a table I have looked at. I settled for 30-35ft.lb which I am sure is more than enough for the 26tpi thread. *Terry Wright*



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