

OWNER

ALVIS

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The Bulletin

No. 500 July/August 2006



THE BULLETIN

No. 500

JULY/AUGUST 2006

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Cover Picture: Very appropriate for Bulletin 500, here is Richard Wadman racing his Speed Twenty at Spa. Photo: via Richard Wadman

Centre Spread: A still from the film 'The Charming People'. See article on page 353.

Photo: via Robert Hickman

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ALVISCITY-

You are now holding in your hands a copy of *Bulletin* number 500. This is a colossal achievement for the Club and it is a milestone that few other clubs have passed. Those adventurous souls who founded the Club in 1951 could surely have had no idea that such a number would ever be achieved and in the austere early Nineteen Fifties, the glossy printed *Bulletin* which started in 1961 would have appeared merely a dream. Almost without a break *The Bulletin* has appeared regularly throughout the Club's 55 year history and it continues as a mainstay of the Club, recording our activities, the history of Alvis cars and many other details about the Club, its members and their cars and the Alvis Company.

Production of *The Bulletin* has moved from stencils and Gestetner duplicating machines, to modern printing aided by computers, scanned images, text transmitted around the world by email and images supplied through email or CDs. Modern technology has transformed the way that *The Bulletin* is produced and has made communications between members, worldwide, a quick and easy process. This technology is also partly responsible for the fact that your editor sits at a desk on the other side of the World from most members and I believe that you would hardly know from *The Bulletin* that this was so.

I believe that *The Bulletin* is extremely important to the life of the Club and ever since I have been a member I have always looked forward to the arrival of each issue. I still look forward to each issue even though I am now the one producing them. I have a long line of bound issues of *The Bulletin* on my shelves and I often take them down to look through them or to check on some fact that I am missing. A complete set of *The Bulletin* is an invaluable source of entertainment and information.

The continuity of *The Bulletin* has been ensured by the fact that in 55 years of the Club there have only been nine *Bulletin* editors. They are: 1952-3 Richard Birks; 1953-60 Ken Day; 1960-63 Gp. Capt. Edwin Shipley; 1963-69 Ray Spain; 1969-77 Brian Ledwith; 1977-87 Eric Stapleton; 1987-93 Ben Lenthall; 1993-97 John Price Williams. I had hoped to include in this issue a series of anecdotes by my distinguished predecessors on what they remember of being editor but most are too modest to put pen to paper. Perhaps later they can be persuaded to write something of their experiences.

Over the years the content of *The Bulletin* has changed. The early *Bulletins* were mainly about the Club's own activities and included the sort of material that is now catered for in the *Calendar*. In the past there were mainly tips on keeping the cars on the road and history was largely ignored. Now we have a situation where most cars have been restored and are no longer everyday cars and members perhaps have more time to devote to investigating the history of their cars. Full-scale restoration articles are more common than hints on how to get you home and of course the subject of originality is of primary importance now. This shift in emphasis shows the way that the Club and its journal have changed with the times and how right this is.

There are many new pressures on the old car movement and the way that we are allowed to use our cars and this is reflected in the pages of *The Bulletin*. It is inevitable that more legislation will appear but luckily our movement is well supported and well represented and I sincerely hope that there will be no reason why, in the future, members will not be celebrating the arrival of *Bulletin* number 1000.

J.N.B.C

BULLETIN 500

John Wheelley and Julian Collins referred in their splendid *Fifty Years of Alvis Enthusiasm* to the failure of the Club in its early days to produce regular communication with members causing a fall in membership and the proposal to close the Club.

It was not the lack of an editor but the lack of a member who would ensure a reliable printing and distribution service. It was thanks to Bernard Stokes and his wife, who filled this vital role, that a regular Bulletin was a major factor in the steady growth of the Club to 1000 members by 1960.

Another early member, G/Captain Shipley, whom we remember for producing the first printed Bulletin hoping that this would not place too much of a burden on Bernard Stokes. With the initials G.B.S. Shipley pointed out that Bernard, not he, should be the editor.

Under Ben Lenthall's editorship the Bulletin was further improved but his business life affected regular publication and timely notice of club activities to members. It was here that Nick Walker saved the day in 1993 with the Calendar which provides a regular and vital service to members to this day.

Now that the Alvis name has been lost within BAE Systems, owners of Alvis cars world wide are extremely fortunate to have Red Triangle Autoservices Ltd as the home of Alvis cars. Indeed I believe no other owners of British cars now out of production can look to support of this kind.

To day all owners of Alvis cars and those interested in them, wherever they live, are supported by organisations providing regular communications on running Alvis cars and Alvis activities.

KEN DAY

THE AGM

The Sixth AGM of the Alvis Owner Club Limited was held on March 19th 2006 at *The Holiday Inn*, Stratford-upon-Avon. Starting at 2.30p.m. This year 52 members attended the sixth Annual General Meeting of the Alvis Owner Club Limited.

Apologies for absence were received from Ken and Sheila Day, Ernest and Marjorie Shenton, David Lowe, Iain Galloway, Julian Collins, David Larkin and Tim Anderson.

The minutes of the previous AGM were approved and signed as a true record. Proposed by Arthur Fairburn; seconded by Brian Neale—all present agreed.

The Director's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31.10.05—were received and adopted. Michael Harcourt proposed and Murray Maclean seconded that the accounts be approved, all present agreed.

3. The following amendments to the Club Bye-laws:-
 - i. in paragraph 3(Council) delete "Membership Secretary" and
 - ii. delete "Public Relation Officer" and substitute "Communication and Marketing Officer"
 - iii. in paragraph 7.a. delete the last sentence "Overseas members shall be represented on the Council by the Membership Secretary" were proposed by Ken Cameron, seconded by Richard Crabtree and all present agreed.

ALVIS DAY

Rare Coachwork Display

—21st May 2006—



Michael Harrison's Silver Crest Holbrook saloon and George Butlin's Vanden Plas Pillarless saloon.
Photo: Chris Storrar

After last year's International display of saloons, this year the East Anglia Region organising committee opted to explore the coachwork theme further, with the topic of "Rare Coachwork". In addition, it being the fiftieth year of the TC 108/G, the car which effectively extended the life of Alvis car production by another ten years, these cars were specially sought out. John Fox ably organised the latter.

Almost uniquely, Alvis never made bodies. One may almost go to say that no Alvis is "standard". All were coachbuilt by outside specialists. However throughout its life, Alvis selected coachbuilders building catalogued designs. In the vintage years, Cross & Ellis and Carbodies were chosen, and in the 30s Cross & Ellis, Charlesworth and Holbrook, with Charles Follet introducing the work of Vanden Plas. Later, from the 12/70 onwards and after the war, Mulliners followed by Carbodies, Tickford and Mulliner-Park Ward were favoured. Also, throughout its life, Alvis offered chassis for bespoke work by other coachbuilders to clothe their chassis. The fact that Alvis continued this right into the sixties is all the more remarkable. Right from the beginning to the end, what a rich variety there was.

What were sought after for the display were rare survivors from the "catalogued designs," "one offs" from the "catalogued" coachbuilders, and those very rare one offs from the more unusual coachbuilders. Hopefully, we succeeded.



Part of the Graber display. John Fox TC21/100 coupé; Miguel Ernard TC108G coupé; Ralph Schwartz TC108 cabriolet.
Photo: Chris Storrar



A rear view of Miguel Ernard's dramatic TC108G coupé.

Photo: John Fox

Things started off much slower this year than last, with much more cold telephoning required. By mid February last year, the job was almost done, but by the end of February this year, the total stood at five cars only out of a required twenty. I write this as a fact, not a complaint, as I had some very interesting telephone conversations, and useful referrals resulted. Perhaps this is a function of a more "difficult" topic.

However, there was no shortage of candidates in the Members' List, but a lot of these rather special cars seem to be off the road. Hopefully, they will reappear one day, whether restored or not, but all retaining their coachwork. They must not be allowed to "disappear" only to surface as something else. One has only to attend a Bentley Drivers Club meeting to appreciate what has been lost amongst the WO cars, with row upon row of green replica Le Mans cars, looking nothing like the cars they originally were, and hardly any genuine period coachwork. The story one is always told is that WO did not like saloons, and only wanted to build sports-racers, despite the fact that the great man himself used saloons personally from DFP right through to the Eight Litre. One is also told that the original bodies all fell apart in no time. Happily, my 1923 fabric saloon has survived perfectly well as it thinks it is an Alvis, and it has taken an Alvis man, Nick Walker, to chronicle "Bentley Coachwork". The Register has a very precise policy on coachwork. This covers the construction of replicas, (on "hopeless or orphaned" chassis only), such as John Burnell's and Greg Wrapson's recent Selway Silver Eagle tourers, both having turned real dogs into cars of beauty. More importantly, it condemns the removal of restorable original coachwork on the penalty of exclusion. Quite right too! I commend the Club to follow the Register's lead. The policy can be adopted word for word.

The first three cars to be confirmed were three of last years cancellations; David Huckle's Crested Eagle, Ken Sheppard's SD 16.95, and Jim Bradshaw's TG 12/50 Alvista Mk2 fabric saloon. I was particularly pleased with Jim's entry, since this is not only a very rare car, but a very rare owner, the son of the original owner in 1928. The reader may suspect that I have affection for fabric saloons. They were made only for a few years, to overcome the rattling and weight of early metal panelled bodies, and are now such rare exotic beasts. It was therefore a great disappointment that Jim regretfully cancelled last minute, having fallen down his neighbour's stairs. Perhaps we should not enquire too deeply at what Jim was up to upstairs in his neighbour's house. Everyone wishes you well, Jim. The other two cars are both significant. David's is a four light Charlesworth, from the very last batch of Crested Eagles before the war, and this was the car's first major Alvis outing after many years tucked away. Ken's Carbodies Silver Eagle is the only six light built on the SD chassis, recently fully refurbished, and knowing Ken, regularly exercised as it should be. Very fortunately, Richard Swaine had entered his 1927 Alvista; it would have been good to have two side by side, but the rare exotic beast was there.

Things started to happen in March, with a call from Murray Maclean offering his 12/50 Carbodies Three-Quarter Coupé, complete with original Alvis advertisement aimed at the medical profession. Then the same evening, a call came from Alan Stote. I had tried to contact Alan earlier, and his return call was very welcome, with descriptions of Lancefield, Windovers, Offord, Cross & Ellis, Vanden Plas, Hermann Graber, 10/30 and Long Wheelbase FWD cars. It almost seemed that if I was still struggling, Alan could fill the event on his own. As it was, Alan and Red Triangle did the event proud, as we shall see later.

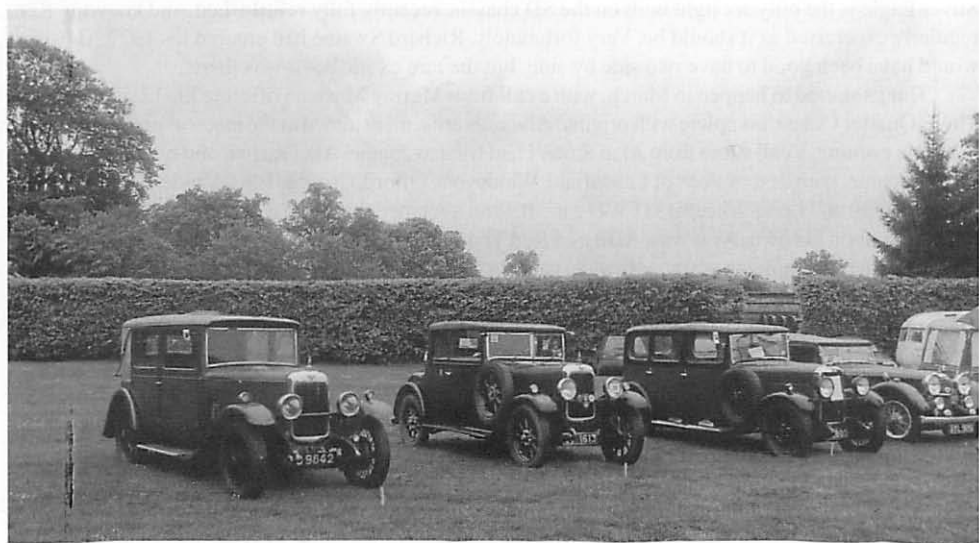
It is difficult for me to select individual cars for special mention. All nineteen deserve mention, but three owners brought their cars from overseas, and deserve special thanks. Serge van Havre brought his 3½ Litre Gurney Nutting two door over the North Sea from Belgium. This very beautiful car was a one off from this coachbuilder, and the only Gurney Nutting Alvis. There were no less than six Hermann Grabers in all. John had hoped to include a Willowbrook, but it was not to be. Two cars came all the way from Switzerland, Miguel Ernard's and Ralph Schwartz's. Ralph's car has one of the most exotic histories of all, being the car in which he smuggled his fiancée across the Iron Curtain in a dummy petrol tank. The petrol tank he tells me is now in the Checkpoint Charlie Museum in Berlin.

As last year, there were a number of last minute changes, in addition to Jim. Tim Scorer rang from Sudbury on the Sunday at mid day to announce both ignition and fuel line problems with his TA 14 Caffyns Estate on the way from Colchester. However, my thanks to Tim for his efforts. We had talked on the phone only the Saturday evening. No sooner had the call come through, than David Holmes appeared at the check-in almost on cue with his father's Estate, and was smartly commandeered. This car is recently back on the road, having been the faithful family workhorse back in 1960. I had interesting telephone



John Oliveira's 3½ Litre Charlesworth Drophead coupé and Serge Van Havre's 3½ Litre Gurney Nutting saloon.

Photo: Chris Storrar



Richard Swaine's Alvista 12/50 saloon; Murray Maclean's 12/50 Doctor's Coupé; Ken Sheppard carbodies Six-Light saloon.

Photo: Chris Storrar

conversations with Richard Day from Rochester. Richard has no less than two Crested Eagle Mayfair limousines, plus a TB14 (A.P. Metalcraft), all with minor ailments, but he hoped to have one ready. When I rang Richard shortly before the event, he regretted no progress, but then offered his new acquisition, a TB21 Sports (again by A.P. Metalcraft). Sadly, fuel feed problems dictated a no show. Karen Bishop was unable to attend in the William Arnold SC Speed Twenty saloon. John Fox had hoped to field two Hermann Graber cars. The TD 21 unfortunately did not make it, but one of his prototype TC21/100s did. Ken Cameron swiftly came to the rescue with his TF21. I had planned not to duplicate from last year, but bearing in mind the Hermann Graber theme, the exception to the rule was very welcome. Both Michael Harrison (Silver Crest Holbrook) and Colin Hall (TA14 Rawson of Harlington-beat that) had to complete mechanical repairs to make it there, and they deserve special thanks for making it.

Both Red Triangle and Earley Engineering added to the glamour of the day. Red Triangle fielded in their marquee the magnificent 4.3 Lancefield drophead, plus the long chassis FE FWD Carbodies sports, both from Alan Stote's personal collection. Outside was the 4.3 Windovers saloon, as Serge's car an Alvis one-off from this coachbuilder, which was for sale by Red Triangle. Alan declared that this is just the sort of car I like, and that I should buy it. One of these statements is perfectly true. I understand this car found a sympathetic new owner on the day. Alan also entered his TF21 Hermann Graber in the main display. Earley Engineering had a wonderful 4.3 Carlton two seater coupé, plus Nick Simpson's Hermann Graber TC 108/G.

Helen joined me for the Saturday night dinner, where we enjoyed meeting friends old and new. Wisely, she scuttled home for the Sunday. As Derek Bradbury said in his speech, there have been wet Internationals in the past, and no doubt there will be again. My thanks to each of the Owners, who were each presented with an Emmy H toiletries travel bag. Also thanks to Steve Horne, John Fox, Red Triangle and all the others who put in so much work, and to all those who stayed to the end. Driving home in the Speed Twenty, I was engulfed in a terrific downpour near Swaffham, and everyone else would have been too. With headlights and wipers on, visibility was almost zero. Bearing in mind that early Speed Twenty distributor right behind the radiator low down (I do have a rudimentary guard), and all the flying spray, I was concerned at getting home, especially since I would have to stop for petrol. I need not have worried, that familiar Speed Twenty bark never missed a beat all the way.

A full list of cars is appended. Nineteen cars, three Vintage, seven PVT and nine postwar including six Hermann Grabers, from eleven different coachbuilders.

ALVIS RARE COACHWORK EXHIBITION

Chassis No.	Despatch	Model	Coachbuilder	Type	Reg	Owner
5737	23.12.1927	TG12/50	Cross & Ellis	Alvista Saloon	TO 9842	Richard Swaine
7742	23.07.1929	TG12/50	Carbodies	Doctor's Coupé	UV 1613	Murray Maclean
8219	16.05.1930	SD 16.95	Carbodies	6 Light Saloon	CF 9882	Ken Sheppard
Only 6 light build on SD Chassis. Recently restored.						
11908	12.1934	SC Speed 20	Van den Plas	Tourer	BYL 926	John Brading
Oxborrow & Fuller Continental Tourer						
13107	29.11.1935	3½ Litre SA	Charlesworth	Drop Head Coupé	CXM 98	John Oliveira
One of 2.						



David Huckle's Crested Eagle Four-Light saloon.

Photo: Chris Storrar



East Anglian stalwart John Oliveira with his 3 1/2 Litre.

Photo: Chris Storrar

Chassis No.	Despatch	Model	Coachbuilder	Type	Reg	Owner
13129	27.01.1936	3° Litre SA	Gurney Nutting	2 Door Saloon	NJ 8646	Serge van Havre
14212	15.04.1938	Silver Crest TF19.82	Holbrook	4 Light Saloon	DHP 67	Michael Harrison
14603	09.12.1938	SC Speed 25	Vanden Plas	2 door Pillarless Saloon	FGJ 808	George Butlin
First of only 3. 1938 V.d.P. Earls Court Motor Show car.						
14804	13.07.1939	4.3 SB	Windovers	4 Door Saloon	ERW 780	Red Triangle Unique.
14955	31.03.1939	Crested Eagle TD25.63	Charlesworth	4 Light Saloon	HRE 729	David Huckle
Last Batch Despatched.						
20829	02.1948	TA14	Rawson of Harlington	Saloon	JYW 289	Colin Hall
Five ordered, but only one built. Aluminium frame and panels						
21918	1948	TA14	Unknown Estate		LWA 683	David Holmes
Owned by David's father. Recently back on the road, having been the family car in 1960.						



Chris and Andrew Storrar with SA Speed Twenty and TA14 respectively.

Photo: via Chris Storrar

Chassis No.	Despatch	Model	Coachbuilder	Type	Reg	Owner
502	25.02.1952	Healey G-Series	Panelcraft	Convertible	MXF 124	Peter Galea
1st production Alvis Healey, ex Jim Oakman.						
25859	27.06.1955	TC21/100	Hermann Graber	Coupé (685)	TDU 810	John Fox
Prototype TC108/G . Earls Court and Paris Show car.						
25924	14.05.1956	TC108/G	Hermann Graber	Coupé (697)	VD 13842	Miguel Ernard
25929	15.04.1957	TC108/G	Hermann Graber	Coupé (705)	ESL 672	Nick Simpson
25941	23.05.1958	TC108/G	Hermann Graber	Cabriolet (719)	SG	Ralph Schwartz
27371	24.06.1966	TF21 Series IV	Hermann Graber	Coupé (793)	NAB 719D	Alan Stote
27438	24.06.1966	TF21 Series IV	Hermann Graber	Super Coupé	KSC 144D	Ken Cameron

CHRIS STORRAR

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ALVISING IN THE HOME COUNTIES IN THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES

In those days, people were entirely different. The roads and transport system were entirely different. Economics and politics were entirely different. People's concerns were entirely different.

For instance, except for mortgages, credit was available only to the very rich (from banks), to those of middle income (hire purchase of capital goods) and to the very poor (from pawn-shops). Woe betide you if you got into arrears. If you wanted to spend more than you could immediately afford, you saved up for it. For this reason, there were many Alvises abandoned on driveways, in garages and barns, or at the roadside. An intensive Saturday afternoon shopping expedition to London's Hampstead, West Hampstead and Belsize Park offered a choice of a dozen kerbside MoT failures, the vast majority of them Speed Twenties, which could be had for £50 to £150.

Why had so many vintage models, and Speed Twenty's, Speed Twenty-Five's and 4.3's, survived World War II, and disproportionately few Silver Eagles, Crested Eagles and Four-cylinder models? I suggest that maybe it was due to the War-time petrol rationing: only those with a need to travel intensively in connection with the war effort were eligible for petrol coupons, and this sort of person tended to favour comfort and (relative) fuel economy, rather than out-and-out performance. Certainly, most of the surviving Speed Twenty-Fives and 4.3s were being used intensively as company cars in the late Forties and the Fifties as an exciting and discerning substitute for the indifferent Humber Hawks, Ford Zephyrs, Austin Sheerlines and Vauxhall Crestas available at the time.

By today's standards, people in those days were as poor as church mice. My father, having started work as a filing-clerk, was now relatively well-off, and could afford a post-war radio, and either a television or a car—not both. In the early Fifties, post-War cars were largely earmarked for export, so waiting lists lasted at least a year, and prices and quality were whatever the manufacturers could get away with. Like many, my father opted, in 1952, for a pre-War car, a low-mileage 1938 Standard "Flying" 12, for £260, rather more than its 1938 list price.

And then, there was the question of running the car. The supply and price of petrol was governed by a Government-approved cartel—it cost less than two shillings a gallon (2p per litre) at first, which was enough to discourage much casual use. Most cars were used only for weekends (especially Bank Holidays) and vacations.

It was in 1953 that I discovered that the Standard 12 was not the ultimate in road-holding. Returning to Walton from a client in Slough, I was overtaken by a new Jowett Javelin (flat-four engine, torsion-bar all-independent suspension) on the back-road to Staines near Wraybury. Trying to match its pace, I followed it through the ensuing long left-hand curve. To my surprise, I found the Standard's customary understeer start to lighten, as the tail began gradually to slide out of line. We emerged from the curve with the Standard still on the Javelin's tail, but on full right lock. Food for a great deal of thought.

The roads didn't exactly encourage motoring. The closest approach to a motorway was the Kingston By-pass, and this was punctuated by roundabouts and traffic-lights. Nowadays, the tiniest cars can reach 100 m.p.h. but, in the Fifties, any speed over sixty was unreachable by most of the dreadful dross that had been passed off on the public in the Thirties. Apart from quickly falling apart, the family cars were dreadfully undergeared, underbraked, and (thankfully) underpowered. My parents and I used to stop and have an immediate family inquest, every time anything untoward happened on the road, and we agreed on a policy that you need not change down from top gear on a hill, until you would have had to



Mr Brian Ledwith enjoying a joke with a friend.

dismount from a bicycle. Another policy was that, if you had to brake for a roundabout on the Kingston By-pass (they could be taken in top gear at 20 m.p.h.) then you had been going too fast beforehand—though this policy was re-thought when we acquired a 1952 Ford Consul, with an over-square, o.h.v. engine, hydraulic brakes and the first-ever Macpherson strut suspension.

The best thing about the trunk roads was that they had been built by the Romans, using that most precise of instruments, the ruler. The bulk of them had three lanes—towards Londinium, away from Londinium, and a free-for-all centre lane that you and the opposing traffic had to fight over. This arrangement was not quite as dangerous as it sounds, because not much overtaking took place. Firstly, there was much less commercial traffic than there is nowadays, because so many goods went by rail. Secondly, commercial vehicles seemed to be unable to exceed 35 m.p.h., with acceleration to match. Thirdly, most of the cars seemed to be content with 35 m.p.h., too.

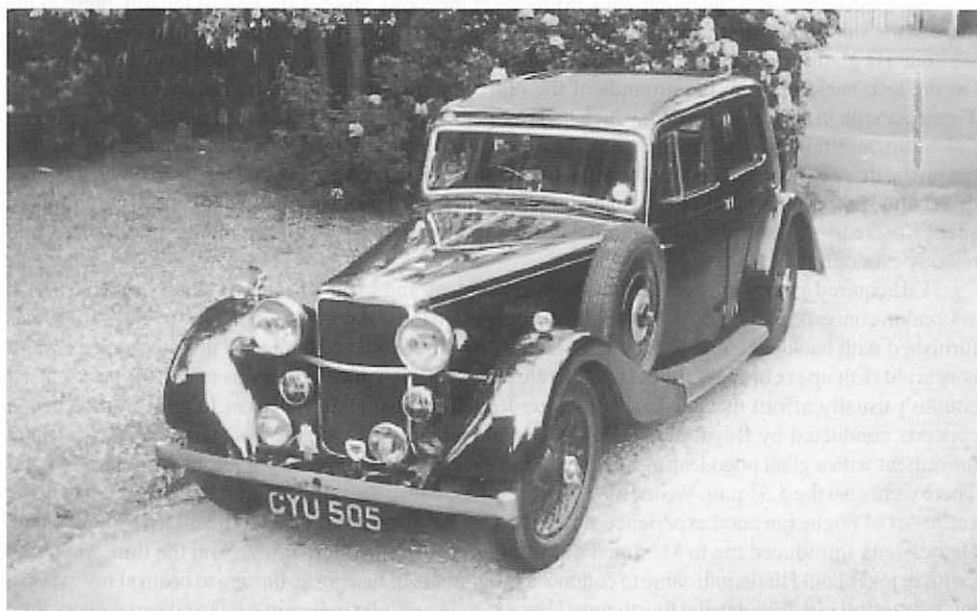
Other main arteries, such as those that led to the South Coast, were built to what we now think of as 'B'-road standard, with one lane in each direction, but divided by a single white line. If one was winding one's weary weekend way southerly, for instance down to Goodwood to watch Fangio race the BRM on a Bank Holiday Monday, one had two options: either join the constant 35 m.p.h. stream of dreamy mimers, or spend much of the journey on the wrong side of the road, accelerating past great bunches of cars while always ensuring there was a space into which to sneak, if an oncoming car appeared. For this kind of driving, one needed power and good brakes.

I invented a safe but spectacular method of overtaking lorries. The object was to spend as little time as possible on the wrong side of the road. If an approaching vehicle was followed by a gap, I dropped back a couple of car's lengths and waited until it was only about fifty yards away. I then accelerated hard. If I had judged things correctly, the approaching vehicle would have passed before I was due to run

into the lorry ahead. I could then nip out alongside the lorry, with already an advantage of at least 10 m.p.h., and be able to nip back in front of it in about half the time the manoeuvre would normally have taken. This became the cause of a major row with my father—I really should have explained it to him before the first time I used it with him in the passenger's seat.

I first realised the potential of the Alvis marque on my first visit to Silverstone, the 750 Motor Club's 6-Hour Relay Race in 1955, with an AOC team, chiefly of Speed Twenties, and an Alvis Register team of 12/50s and 12/60s. I think it must have been the size and weight of the Speed Twenties that I found the most impressive, and of course their lithe shape. But I was living on a student's allowance from my father, and couldn't afford to tax and insure one, let alone buy one. Luckily, my lovely Victorian great-aunt ("Drive as fast as you like, dear") bequeathed me £150, just enough to buy a very smart and totally original black 1936 SG Silver Eagle four-light saloon, and at much the same time the firm to which I was articled decided to pay me a salary of £3 per week. It was 1957, I was twenty-three, in the money and independently mobile at last. I celebrated by dropping out of my accountancy Finals for a year—the stress of working full-time, commuting by train, and studying nearly every evening and at weekends had told.

The Silver Eagle may have been underpowered by Speed Twenty standards, and it may have had a disconcerting habit of bump-oversteer causing the tail to hop out of line, but it really impressed other road-users, who slowed and squeezed into the gutter when they saw it in their mirrors. It also over-impresed young ladies. It even impressed their mothers—or perhaps it was the accountancy thing and my affectation of sophisticated intellectuality; and an embarrassing number seemed to regard the Alvis and/or me as suitable son-in-law material.



The Silver Eagle, which disappeared after being bought by a dental student in 1963, along with my precious handbook meticulously annotated by Harry Charnock. It's in the drive of our house in Walton on Thames—note the rhododendron blossoms. Note also the fully-working and non-leaking sunroof, a tribute to previous owner Nigel Forbes-Marsden. Note additionally the state of the wheels, showing that it was an everyday conveyance, as most Alvis cars were then.

The marriage market in pre-Philip Larkin days was not as it later became. For one thing, the women who could expect to make a reasonably lucrative independent career were very few and far between—curiously, accountancy was the first industry to do something about this. In general, it followed that young women without rich daddies could only expect a life of reasonable comfort by attaching themselves with marital bonds to a promising young man. We young men defended ourselves gallantly—I for longer than most. My response to feminine wiles was to avoid any territory south of the shoulders. This was largely successful, my libido being somehow sublimated under the Alvis's bonnet. I do however remember stopping the car in a secluded lay-by on the way back from a dance, because my companion was complaining that two ends of whale-bone had escaped painfully from the bosom of her strapless evening gown. Applying Alvis "get-you-home" principles, I groped in my pocket for two small coins to act as cam-followers, while she struggled to unfasten her dress. At this point, the Silver Eagle's sumptuous walnut and green leather interior was filled with the light of a powerful torch. I lowered the window. "Everything all right, sir?" asked the policeman, as was their wont. "Fine thanks," I said, "but have you got two halfpennies for a penny?"

One evening, playing outside my league, I took my boss' daughter to a party in Surbiton. Her family were neighbours of ours in Walton-on-Thames. On the return trip, it was 2 a.m. there was no other traffic, no moon-light and the street lights had all been turned off. Fiddling with the light-switch, I discovered that the rather large side-lights threw enough light to illuminate the road at up to 30 m.p.h. As we drove gently down the hill at the back of Esher, the road, the footpath, the trees were infused with a dull, shadowless light. Rosemary relaxed luxuriously, with a smart travelling rug over her knees, lit by the lights of the dashboard. The Alvis burred happily in top gear.

As we dropped over the hump-back bridge over the River Mole at the foot of the hill, there in the glare of the side-lights was the unmistakable sight of my sister's boy-friend, Michael, walking home from Walton. He gladly accepted a lift for the rest of his journey home. The car needed to be turned round. On the left, backing on to the grounds of the old "Gay Adventure" road house, there was a largish Victorian villa in an acre of garden, which had two gateways on to the roadway. I put the headlamps on full-beam, and, taking a risk that the second gateway was open, engaged first gear, and took the car flat-out up the drive to the front door of the villa, turned sharp right on the gravel sweep, then down the other drive, and sharp right out into the road again. Resuming our leisurely pace, I explained to a strangely silent Rosemary: "That's the thing about Alvises. You can get away with driving them anywhere, and nobody ever minds".

I'd acquired a fairly intellectual taste in entertainment, and spent what time I could spare and afford at London concerts, plays, and occasionally the opera—in those days the "Gods" at Covent Garden was furnished with backless wooden benches, and the doors were opened at the last minute, so there was a concerted rush up six or eight flights of concrete stairs, two at a time, if one was to nab the best seats. I couldn't usually afford the star concerts at the Royal Festival Hall, but went to a lot of the cheapo concerts conducted by Roylton Kisch, a dreadful exhibitionist who always started a quick or loud movement with a giant pogo leap as he brought the stick down—he even did it for the National Anthem. There were also the 5.55 p.m. Wednesday organ recitals, where the blind Helmut Walcha performed the entire Art of Fugue (an aural experience similar to a hot day in an Alvis Front-Wheel-Drive), and Jeanne Demessieux introduced me to Messaien's amazing music, to my eternal joy. And the time when that German joker Paul Hindemith came to conduct a programme of his music, turning to beam at my exceedingly beautiful girl-friend in the fourth row (I have mentioned Julia before in Alvis Stalwarts) every time he took a bow. And then there were those marvellous plays—Osborne's "Look Back in Anger" (or was that 1956?), Beckett's "Waiting for Godot", Brecht's Marxist "Caucasian Chalk Circle", and an evening of Noh plays in Japanese.

But what had all this to do with Alvising? Well, the faithful Silver Eagle was usually to be found waiting in the secluded Surbiton station car park, eventually to take my companion home, a stylish end to



The Silver Eagle parked in the evening sunshine outside 44 Charles Street when we lived there in 1958.

a stylish evening.

In 1958, I joined the Alvis Owner Club. Ken Day was General Secretary and Bulletin Editor. The monthly Bulletin, which was produced on a Gestetner type of duplicating machine, was of a high quality in its time, with at least one large photograph. Besides Nigel Forbes-Marsden, from whom I bought the car, I got to know Jock Stephen, Mike Pratt and Mick O'Callaghan very soon. They were very kind and helpful to me when the Silver Eagle ran a big-end the following year. At pub meetings, AOC people were friendly, forthcoming and informal, although you wouldn't gather this from reading the Bulletin, which referred widely to Mr This and Mrs That, but this was the way of the world at the time.

Things rather changed in late 1958. My parents moved to Central London for a couple of months, an experiment because they had been lent a house in Mayfair, in Charles Street, just off Berkeley Square. Luckily, parking meters had not yet arrived, and parking was virtually unrestricted: once, a polite policeman rang the bell and asked if I would kindly move the Alvis away from the English-Speaking Union, as the Queen Mother was about to arrive.

The Silver Eagle really enjoyed himself as a car about town. Once my accounting Finals were over in November, I had more leisure time, and my salary went up from £150 per year to £850 per year, but only until April 1959, when it dropped to 16 shillings a week, or £41 per year, because I had been called up for National Service. In early 1959, I still led a pretty sober life, but played quite a lot of squash. The Silver Eagle was to be seen parked in Pall Mall, outside the RAC, which had superb, if slightly decadent, leisure facilities, or at Dolphin Square (extensive but utilitarian), but the most interesting club that we visited was the Pakistani Officers' Club in South Audley Street (bijou but sumptuous), where I was introduced to one of the several Major Khans who were consecutive World squash Champions in that era. (I ought to explain that I was a very poor player, with an exceptionally weak backhand, but with squash this didn't matter, if you could find an opponent who was equally bad.)



The Silver Eagle in Charles Street in 1958. Note the coachbuilt Bentley heading for Berkeley Square in the previous picture, and the Jaguars Mark VIII, XK 150, Mark VII, and Daimler Sovereign above. Note the almost total lack of street furniture and of street markings, but also the buildings' grime from the still-polluted atmosphere.

By then, I had fitted the car with a single Servais straight-through silencer, and I took childish pleasure, on returning at 2 a.m. from jaunts to Surrey, in driving across Mayfair at exactly 1150 r.p.m., at which speed the exhaust emitted a satisfyingly loud basso profundo reverberation period which echoed off the buildings.

After a spell in someone else's flat overlooking the Marylebone Road (he had been Secretary of the I.Mech.E. and, I learned after his death, had been quite a friend and supporter of Capt. Smith-Clarke in the early fifties when the Captain was developing his "iron lung" respirators), my parents decided to move from Walton to Marylebone. This left me with the issue of where the Silver Eagle should reside, while I did eight weeks of RAF basic training.

The weekend before I was due to be called up into the Royal Air Force (the 'Brylcreem Boys,' as the pongos called us), I had entered for the AOC Chiltern Rally, but my navigator had let me down. This was my first exposure to car-rallying, and Fred and Jean Ansell allowed me to participate in the back of the Bertelli-bodied SA Speed Twenty tourer. This was a most exciting car. The engine and crash gearbox emitted loud and chilling wails, and there was evidence of modifications made when the car was rebodied in 1932. The scanty, narrow body revealed a great deal of activity downstairs and one could see especially odd behaviour in extremis when we had to turn round by climbing a steep, muddy bank into a field—there seemed to be torque reactions in all three dimensions at once. The pinion tried to climb up the crown wheel, the rear universal joint tried to tie itself in knots, the propellor shaft deflected upwards, one of the rear springs (each of them seeming to lack a couple of leaves) went S-shaped in one direction, the other spring went S-shaped in alternate directions, the shackles each banged back and forth, and the

back axle itself twitched simultaneously up and down, back and forth, and round and round. But on the road, it was a most roadworthy and comfortable car, and I coveted it.

The Ansell and I didn't win an award, but I gained a lot of experience which became useful when Humphry Collis and I later became a rally team for twenty-odd years. I also made a pair of instant friends, who agreed to have and to hold, to love and to cherish the Silver Eagle for me for the next couple of months, while I was stranded in deepest Staffordshire, learning to march around smartly, and to pretend to kill people. It wasn't until July of that hot year that I moved to Hereford to learn to juggle statistics and was able to retrieve the Silver Eagle. The subsequent trip to Silverstone, offer of a drive in a D-Type Jaguar, and running of a big-end on the way home, have all been covered in "Alvis Stalwarts". It took several months before the bottom end was sorted and the car came to live on the old parade ground at RAF West Malling in Kent—but it was used only for the occasional weekend drive up to London, usually to see Julia. I'd met her at a party thrown by a very cultured young lady student whose father was guitarist in Billy Cotton's dance band.

Taking Julia home in the Silver Eagle to the small art-nouveau flat in Bedford Park, where she lived with her ex-Indian Army parents, I asked her to nurse my precious Kodak Retinette camera, and she absent-mindedly (or can it have been deliberately?) walked off with it after we had shaken hands good night. You may be sure I retrieved the camera the following day, and this was the start of a two-year friendship which can only be attributable to the Silver Eagle's pulling-power. Julia was a member of the group of professional painters who worked and partied in the studios of Bedford Park, and I enjoyed the slightly bohemian fin-de-siècle milieu. I never managed to meet Julia's friend and mentor, Ruskin Spear, but one friend of hers I did meet was the Secretary not only of the Georgian Society but also of the Victorian Society: he admired my Alvis, and I admired his Imhof mechanical orchestration, an incredibly complex brass and glass device the size of a medium-sized Victorian wardrobe. When she and I eventually parted, Julia gave me a cartoon which jokily predicted what I would look like in my dotage—so far, it's remarkably accurate.

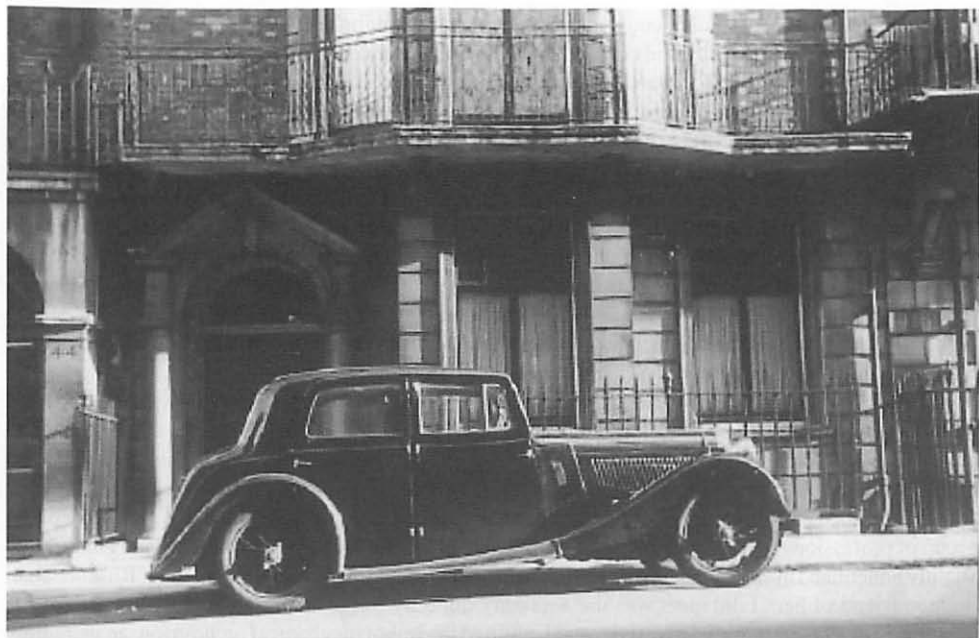
This sounds all very light-hearted, but one should remember that at that time western Europe was at (Cold) war with the Soviet Union, and RAF West Malling was part of the front line of defence against the Soviet nuclear menace—many people on both sides were convinced that the nuclear holocaust ("total sacrifice") of the human race would come soon. The Javelin fighters of 85 Squadron were, as far as I could make out, in a pretty continuous state of armed readiness against incoming Soviet bombers, which occasionally penetrated British airspace. On a "need to know" basis, nothing was ever said at my level, but our highly security-conscious Armoury chaps seemed often to be very busy when the Squadron returned from patrol over the North Sea. (My job was to report to Fighter Command everything that went wrong with the squadron's aeroplanes and everything that was done to rectify them, but armament was excluded from this.)

Something very surreal happened one Saturday in 1960—a nuclear bomb was dropped on Tunbridge Wells. Well, not a real one, but this was part of a sudden rather creepy exercise involving, I think, the whole of NATO's airborne forces in Western Europe. Part of the exercise was to test how operational West Malling would be, only 20 miles from the epicentre. The problem was that Julia and I had tickets to Covent Garden that evening. I also had taken the precaution of obtaining a 48-hour pass, which normally wasn't necessary at weekends. Those airmen not taking part in the exercise were confined to one of the billet blocks, and a sergeant was detailed to ensure they didn't go outside and breathe in the deadly radiation. I put on my best bib and tucker for the Garden, and there then ensued the following Pinteresque conversation:

Sgt: You can't go out, you'd die.

Me: It's all right, I've got a "48".

Sgt: All passes are cancelled. Everybody here has got to stay here because of the radiation.



Julian, I know you don't normally print pictures of dirty cars, but here is what happens when an Alvis is in constant use by someone with little spare time. Only the nearside is ever cleaned, because that is the side seen by one's lady passengers.

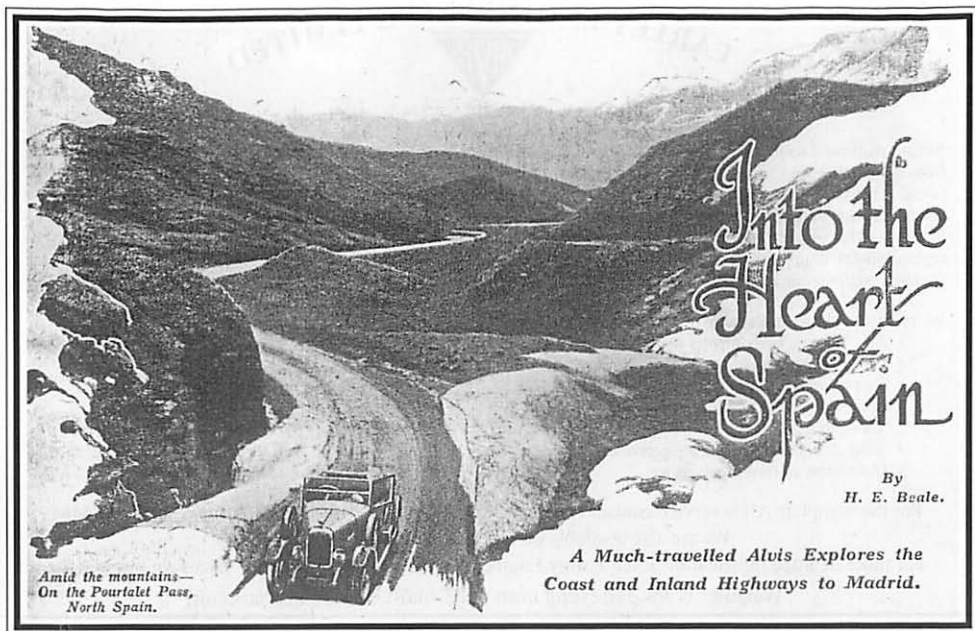
- Me: It's all right, Sarge, my pass took effect at midnight, before the exercise started.
- Sgt: (Pause) Who said anything about an exercise? This could be the real thing. It's happening now.
- Me: It isn't now yet. For me, "now" is 00.01 hours this morning. The bomb hasn't dropped yet—look outside, there's no mushroom cloud over Tunbridge Wells. (Opens window)
- Sgt: SHUT THAT WINDOW THIS INSTANT!
- Me: Sorry, Sarge, I just wanted to show we were living in different time/space continua.
- Sgt: (Longer pause) All right, Einstein, but the radiation will still be here when your now becomes my now, and I say you'll still be here when your now becomes my now.
- Me: But when I'll have gone, you won't yet have ordered me to stay.
- Sgt: (Really long pause) On the other hand (brightly) I could always shift over to your continuum, give you the order, and then pop back
- Me: (Pause) But you'd have had to drop a bomb as well. By the time you worked that, I would be long gone. I'll tell you what, Sarge, nobody has heard this conversation, why don't we both assume that it never took place, and that I disappeared before the bomb dropped? After all, the whole thing is a game.

I can't remember how I bluffed my way out of the gate. Maybe the guard assumed from my apparel and the big black car that I shouldn't be challenged.

(To be concluded)

BRIAN LEDWITH

A totally brilliant memoir by Brian. I ardently hope that he will write much more for us—J.N.B.C.



Spain has always attracted us, and last summer the opportunity offered to visit it. We had heard that Spain was a byword for bad roads, dirty and evil-smelling hotels, and burnt-up countryside, but we wanted to visit it. Dare we face the risk?

Fortunately I knew a man who had motored in those parts, and after seeing him my mind was quite made up. An uneventful run across France and the Spanish Customs faced us, but the frontier was crossed without difficulty, the Spanish officials being courteous and helpful.

The north coast of Spain, the Cantabrian Corniche, as it is called, is nearly 500 miles long, and is most beautiful. After leaving San Sebastian the road takes a turn inland for sixteen miles, traversing some delightfully hilly and well-wooded country. Now and then it runs through peaceful, smiling valleys, but always with the mountains as a background on the left. Then the coast is followed for six miles, again inland for ten miles, and once more along the coast for 13 miles to Lequeitio. This 45 miles is perhaps the gem of the whole coast line, and the road has a splendid surface. Except the inland portion it is mainly cut out of the solid rock on the cliff face, and as each of the numberless capes is rounded magnificent views of the coast are obtained both towards the east and to the west.

Spanish Social Customs

We reached Bilbao, and arrived at the Hotel Inglaterra at 7.30 at least half-an-hour later than we usually like. We were told that dinner was not served until 8.30, although 9.30 was the more usual time, and that the second house in the theatre, etc., commenced at 10.30. That is the custom that I like—the late dinners—especially as the courses are many and very abundant.

Next day a long climb brought us once more to the sea at Somorrostro, where again we had a grand view of the coast line which is broken up into bays, inlets, and coves, mostly with magnificent sandy beaches, though some have deep water right up to their rocky sides. After Gijon the road had become steadily worse. Bump succeeded bump with tiring monotony. We never struck a straight or level stretch,

and at last I began to wonder if it was worth while going farther west, although there were literally thousands of tons of broken stone, ready for repairs, lining the roads. However, we pushed on, and I am very glad we did so, for the road improved and the scenery was grand all the way for the remainder of that section of our tour.

Making for the Capital

At last we reached Corunna, passing lovely coast scenery, with roads half bad, half good. Corunna, with its magnificent harbour, is well worth a visit, and no one should leave it without seeing the Tower of Hercules. It is possible to drive right up to this tower, which is built on a high headland commanding magnificent views along the coast, and of the harbour and town.

We now turned towards Madrid, visiting the wonderful cathedral at Santiago on the way. Our road wound between the hillsides, which were covered with a profusion of heather although it was only May, and the yellow broom was a blaze of colour. The road over the Sierra Cordillera by the Piedra Fita Pass (3,500 feet) was excellent on the Lugo side, but bad on the other side, though there was an enormous quantity of broken stone to resurface it, and the roller was at work on it as we passed by.

The Pass Manzanal del Puerto (3,600 feet) over the Sierra de Manzanal had a better surface, and from the summit a magnificent view was obtained of mountains all round—north, south, east and west. It is a pretty run to the bottom of the pass, but when the plain is reached it becomes very monotonous.

In the 156 miles from Lugo to Benavente there is no place where it is possible to get even a meal. In Spain a decent meal can only be obtained in large towns and, as often such towns are a hundred miles or more apart, it is essential to get lunch put up where you stop the night, and take it with you the next day. The food in large towns in Spain is plentiful and well cooked and nowhere did we see flies or dirt, and only once a mosquito. Between Lugo and Madrid, 323 miles, the only possible place to spend the night is Benavente, and that has only one inn, which is primitive in the extreme, though scrupulously clean.

Through Mountain Passes

Benavente is roughly in the centre of the plain, so we had an uninteresting run until we reached Villacastin, where the scenery becomes very fine through the Sierra de Guadarrama. The pass through these mountains is covered with a very beautiful pine wood, with genesta, broom and wild flowers in prodigal profusion. At the top we looked back over the plain we had traversed, and as far as the eye could see our road could be distinguished, a white ribbon, broad at first, then narrower and narrower until it melted into the hazy horizon. A few yards on and we were over the divide, with a wonderful view stretching before us and Madrid visible in the distance. It is actually thirty miles away, but the atmosphere was so clear that to us, who were used to judging distances through the heavier atmosphere of England, it did not appear to be more than ten.

Madrid is a very fine city with wide streets and palatial buildings. While we were there I thought it a good opportunity to let a mechanic go over all the nuts and bolts after the terrific banging and shaking of some of those terrible roads. How the car held together at all was a positive mystery, and yet every bolt was found to be tight and secure, a tribute to British workmanship.

In the afternoon we drove 30 miles to the Escorial, one of the most remarkable buildings in the world, Monastery, palace, church, burial place of kings, museum, picture gallery, school—all in one—I wish I had the space to describe it. Certainly no one should visit Madrid without seeing it.

Where Speed is Possible

The road north from Madrid to Soria, 140 miles is through barren and uninteresting country, its only redeeming feature being that the surfaces are good and it is possible and safe to travel at any speed of



The Alvis crew halts to eat a wayside meal and at the same time to enjoy the impressive scenery amid the Cantabrian Mountains.

which the car is capable. Crossing the Sierra Cabollera, by the Pass Puerto de Pequeira (over 5,000 feet high), to Logrono is, however, very picturesque. The rise is easy at first, becoming stiffer the last three miles, but none of it presents any difficulty. At the top we saw the most magnificent heather, both white and purple, in great bushes four to five feet high. The lower part of the pass is through a gorge thickly covered with vegetation and trees, with a river flowing below. As the gorge ends, the road runs at the bottom of a valley, between very high red cliffs, shaped like bastions and walls, reminding us strongly of the Dolomites, both in colours and shapes. Gradually these cliffs became lower and lower, till the foothills taper off into the plain. Altogether a delightful and unique pass, worth making a great effort to visit.

Space does not permit any description of our delightful return trip through France, but a few general observations on Spain may be of interest. We were very agreeably surprised with the roads, 50 per cent of which were good, 25 per cent fair, and 25 per cent bad. Many of the villages are just off the main roads, which is an advantage to both motorists and villagers. We never found the heat too much, although I had feared that in the centre of Spain it would be unbearable in June. As a matter of fact, it was much hotter in England within three weeks of our return than it was there.

Petrol pumps abound, a bidon (just over one gallon) averaging 2s. 3d., against 1s. 10d. at that time in England.

The Alvis, as always, did magnificently, giving not an instant's anxiety. I have driven Alvis cars over 45,000 miles, including 10,000 miles abroad, and every mile I drive them I like them better.

I had complete confidence that it would do all I wished, and it did, and did it well. It needs some confidence to take one's car into a country such as Spain, where there are no spares, and except in large centres no repairs are possible; where if anything goes wrong, needing a new part, at the best a long and weary delay is inevitable while the new part is ordered from England, despatched, passed through the Customs of two countries, and sent half across Europe, and at the worst the holiday may be spoilt. Without touching anything. I could confidently have started the whole tour of 3,787 miles over again, and am convinced I should have had equally wonderful results.

Nails and Punctures

I have referred to the roads, but should say that I have never seen so much broken stone by the roadside as in Spain—often when the roads were in good condition. When all the metal we saw is rolled in, Spain will have a magnificent network of main roads.

In a recent article I read of the number of nails on Spanish roads. We had an annoying instance of this, though looking back it now appears amusing. We rose early one morning, and at 9 a.m. were ready to start, but on looking at the tyres found three were flat. Everything was right the night before, but examination showed three tiny punctures in one, and one each in the other two, due to minute nails. With the energetic help of two Spanish boys, willing if not too clean, the three tubes were quickly taken out and repaired. One must be prepared for the rough as well as the smooth when on tour, and it is on such occasions that the advantage is appreciated of the ease with which the new Dunlop tyres can be dismantled.

When one enters a Spanish town crowds of boys form an escort, each desiring to conduct you to your hotel. I found eventually the best way was to take the cleanest on to the running board, and let him conduct me by the shortest way; the rest will then run away and leave one to pursue one's journey in peace. This way of dealing with them has the further advantage that where one cannot speak the language it is very difficult continually to make enquiries as to where the hotel is. We used to decide from the Michelin Guide which hotel we would make for.

No account of Spain would be complete without a mention of the world-famous Cathedral at Santiago. The city is very old and teeming with interest, one of the most remarkable in Spain, if not in the world, with very narrow streets, impracticable for modern vehicular traffic, and arcaded pavements similar to Chester, but all in stone. The Cathedral is wonderful, the Portico de la Gloria, with its marvellous carved figures, the innumerable chapels, one of which has a beautiful altar of carved cedar wood supporting scores of silver caskets wonderfully wrought, the silver effigy of St. James, the altar, the choir, and archbishop's seat with its priceless carving, the illuminated missals, the library with unique tapestries, the beautiful cloisters, deserve far more space than I can give them in this short article. Apart from them, the interior of the Cathedral was somewhat disappointing; it is so cut up that in spite of its enormous size it is not impressive, while it is severely plain and with few windows and no coloured glass. Our guide understood no English and we no Spanish, but we got on quite well, and he succeeded in imparting quite a lot of information to us.

I strongly advise anyone who has the opportunity to tour in Spain. The inhabitants are hospitable, the roads are at least up to the average Continental standard, and the scenery is interesting almost everywhere, and in most parts beautiful. We at any rate, are looking forward to visiting it again and seeing the portions that we could not tour on the journey just described.

Reprinted from The Autocar December 31st 1926 with due acknowledgement and thanks. I very much enjoy these period accounts of travels. Taking a 12/50 to Spain in 1926 must have been quite adventurous—J.N.B.C.

THE REGISTRAR COMMENTS

The Editor must know that I quite like attempting to identify not only the Alvis model in these obscure articles of yore which fall into his lap, but also—for Register purposes—the exact chassis concerned.

Luckily I have access to a mint copy of the issue in question, and taking a glass to the second photograph, it can be said that with reasonable certainty the registration mark is 'RU' (Bournemouth), the first digit 5 or 6, and the second a zero. I can also conclude that there are only three numbers, because the 5,000 and 6,000+ numbers in the 'RU' Series did not commence issue until 1927 and 1928 respectively. In other words well after the article was written. The next pointer is analysis of the average 'rate of issue' by the Bournemouth authority of marks at this period—which is around six cars per day. If we assume that the actual mark must lie between 500 and 609, I would guess that, making allowances for time spent in showrooms, and delivery etc, the coupé concerned was registered between mid-March, and mid April 1925. A lot of Bournemouth cars at that time went through the dealership of 'Motor Mac's' in Southampton, which would be my first possibility. It is a very long shot hoping that any more may be found, as I do not think that a Guarantee Card for this period survives, so having the first owner's name: Beale, does not help us at this stage. Not a lost cause yet, but one for the back burner.

DAVE CULSHAW



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THE STRAIGHT EIGHT FWD GP ALVIS



Nic Davis, Tony Cox and Alan Stote with the Straight Eight FWD GP Alvis.

Photo: via Tony Cox

Nic Davies, who rescued this car from oblivion in the 1950s, and has owned it for some fifty years, recently advertised the sole surviving straight eight FWD Alvis in *Motor Sport*. The upshot has been that a deal was struck and Alan Stote and I have acquired the car jointly. The attached photograph shows the historic moment, Nic being the wistful-looking one on the left, Alan on the right.

This car comprises the chassis frame, front axle/hubs and body from the 1927 200 Miles Race car, and a 1929 TT straight-eight engine and transmission unit. These have been assembled into one complete car using a few other parts from a four-cylinder FWD, in particular the rear suspension. Nic has driven the car in this form, and I can tell you that to hear that engine is an awesome experience.

The restoration of this car is a huge challenge because there are fundamental issues concerning the fit between the 1929 TT type engine and transmission and the 1927 chassis and front axle. Also, there has been some problem with the engine since the first runs, which will have to be fixed and a recurrence prevented. Such a restoration has to be approached with great care, and we are currently making a detailed work plan for it. This will make the best possible use of the surviving original parts, and should result in a satisfactory working car in a reasonably short period of time. We will post news on this from time to time.

TONY COX

I await further progress on this project with keen anticipation—J.N.B.C.

THE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

—Saturday 22nd April 2006—



John and Jean Taylor with their Speed Twenty outside Buckingham Palace.

Photo: via John and Jean Taylor

We didn't realise the importance of the occasion when Malcolm Davey (The S.E Secretary) rang to tell us that The Parliamentary Car Club wanted a 1934 Speed Twenty for the Queen's Birthday celebrations, until official buff envelopes started to arrive.

Once they had received our agreement we were near enough commanded to appear to fill the 1934 slot with 80 other vehicles. More buff bumph told us to be at Palace Yard at the Houses of Parliament by 11.30 and lunch would be on the terrace by the Thames.

The weather was perfect, a lovely drive from Horsham, over Putney Bridge along Kings Road to the Embankment around Parliament Square into Old Palace Yard. Wonderful cars rolled up. Rolls-Royces, Bentleys, an SS 100 Jaguar driven from Devon that morning and an old wartime ambulance that the Queen had driven during the war.

We had to be in our cars by 1.30 p.m. to await the police escort, and to move off in date order to Buckingham Palace. Crowds of people watching added to the fun. After going through five red lights we followed the escort into the far gate of the Palace to form a line across the parade ground.

The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester came round to thank us for coming and were intrigued with the Red Indian radiator mascot on the Speed Twenty and asked us how many Alvises were there still about. We also learnt that the Duke had a model car collection which didn't have a 1934 Charlesworth Speed Twenty in it. We thought, going home, after such a glorious day, how nice it would be if the Club's President could present such a model to his Royal Highness as a memento of the occasion of which we had the honour to attend.

JOHN and JEAN TAYLOR

THREE LITRE POWER OUTPUTS

It's interesting to study some of the odd bits of paper that end up on my desk as a result of years of collecting Alvis ephemera. These brake horsepower and torque figures are copied from a scruffy old data graph from the Works engine test shop showing some dynamometer test results for Alvis engines. It records TD21, TE21 and two sets of figures for what appear to have been experimental engines. I wondered if one of them, 'MS MK1' might possibly be Dunn's swansong, the TF21. Because the chart was an aged and dirty photocopy from the 1960's, some of the chart markings are not absolutely clear and may be slightly inaccurate.

RPM	TD21 BHP	TD21 TORQUE	TE21 BHP	TE21 TORQUE	MS MK I BHP	MS MK I TORQUE	MS MK II BHP	MS MK II TORQUE
1000	25	142	29	155	31	165	0	not rec
1500	35	152	45	157	40	168	43	151
2000	56	152	62	162	66	172	56	145
2500	72	152	79	168	86	179	80	160
3000	87	151	97	169	105	182	104	176
3500	99	149	113	169	122	182	121	180
4000	106	140	124	161	138	179	130	180
4500	108	125	130	150	144	166	152	174
5000	94	not rec	134	138	150	155	162	168

What is interesting is that while the 'MS MK1' figures compare with the TF21 production engine, 'MS MK 11' shows a rather 'peaky' cam showing less power and torque below 2500 rpm, but romping on to a whacking 162 bhp at 5000 rpm although the torque curve has suffered. I wonder if 'MS MK11' is the engine in the Dunn Special? When my firm restored the car a few years ago, the valve timing was checked and found to be very non standard and the road performance was unusual and did not compare with any existing Three Litres we had experience of.

Could it be that the initials on the chart (MS) stand for 'Mike Special'? Mike Dunn, son of W.M. Dunn was heavily involved with the Three Litre engines. I should not speculate, but it's an interesting thought.

It can also be seen that the TD21 engine was not producing anything like the bhp one would expect. I believe from records that around 112/118 bhp was expected. 106 bhp at 4,000 could be rivalled by a TC108/G engine!

NICK SIMPSON

Absolute fascinating. I wonder if anyone can throw any more light on this matter—J.N.B.C.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Chu du Mont Blanc 16
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Aubonne
Switzerland
Email:

Dear Julian

It is always a pleasure to receive the *Alvis Bulletin*, especially the March–April one that talks about the *Alvis Swiss Tour*. My wife Evyonne and I were very pleased to see the *Alvis* members in Switzerland and we hope to have them back before the next 10 years are over.

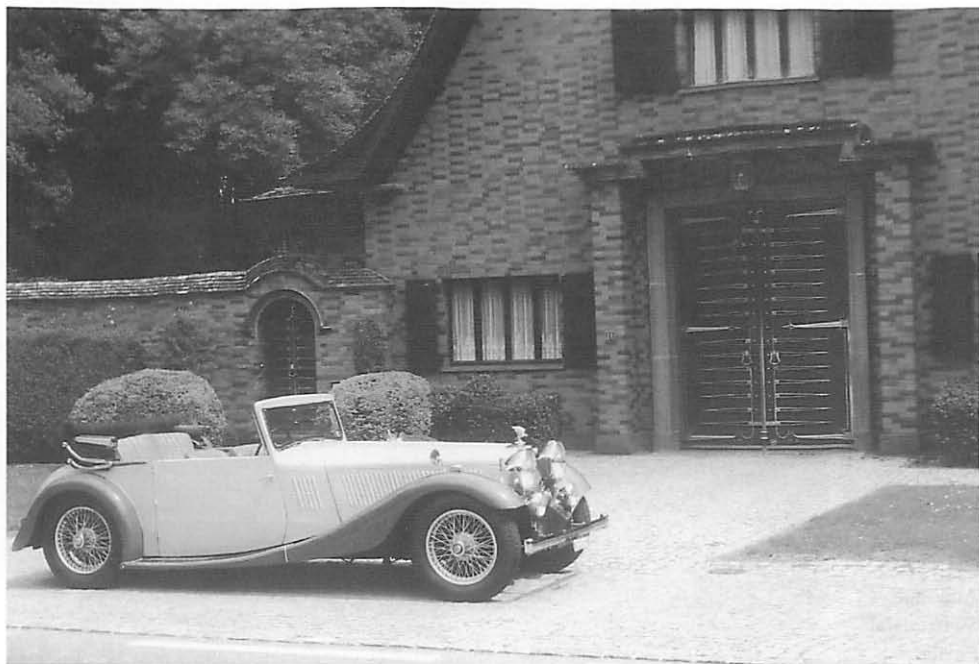
Concerning the double central page, the situation is rather funny since this house is located not far from my place. This property is in Gland (close to Nyon) on the Lake Road, and in fact, the red brick house you can see on the picture is the concierge's lodge. From the lodge, you can drive for half a mile towards the lake before you get to the main house.

When I was a child, about 12 years old, I learned to drive in my stepfather's car while my parents were having tea with the concierge, an elderly lady, a retired schoolteacher. It was the good old days! The property belonged to Mr. Francis Francis, the owner of Douglas Aviation. The neighbours are now Mr. Michael Schumacher (Ferrari Pilot) and Mr. Ernesto Bertarelli (America Cup winner). All the property was recently sold to a German Family.

Today I parked my *Alvis Speed Twenty SC 1934* in front of that lodge, fifty years after my first driving lesson and forty-eight years after the Graber. You never know, we might have met! (*See photograph on next page—J.N.B.C.*)

Yours sincerely
Daniel Fischlin

How wonderful that Daniel has been able to identify the house in the centre spread photograph in issue 498. All we have to do now is to find out the connection between the Graber and the house. As always I am extremely pleased when members are able to respond to items that have appeared in The Bulletin—J.N.B.C.



Daniel Fischlin's SC Speed Twenty outside the lodge pictured in the centre spread photograph in issue 498.

Photo: Daniel Fischlin

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Dear Julian

As chairman and newsletter editor of the Scottish Riley Enthusiasts, I write to seek permission to copy, in slightly-edited form, and with due acknowledgement, an article on the new MOT regime by Martin Boothman, which appeared in a recent issue of the AOC Bulletin. The original was copied to me, thanks to Hal Junker, one of our North Eastern members, who is restoring a Speed Twenty which he rescued from Ireland, some time ago.

It may interest you that, notwithstanding my evident Riley passions, I have for nearly half a century lusted after the products of their Coventry near-neighbours (but not yet achieved ownership). As a schoolboy, I spent such time admiring "Abigail," the summer-visiting 1930 12/50 tourer then owned by Mr John Corderoy, of Sutton, that he took pity on me and, after appropriate discussion with my parents, enabled my pal and me to enjoy a number of drives in this fine car (by then, not original, but still a very handsome and lively example, fitted with cycle wings and very comfy Citroen hammock seats). We later assisted him in the dismantling for spares two other 12/50s, abandoned in a shed at Newton Mearns, south of Glasgow: a badly-weathered two-seat with dickey tourer and a very reasonable standard saloon, both of which, of course, would nowadays be eagerly restored. Perhaps I shall one day acquire an Alvis and fulfil that ambition.

My pal, Stuart Haddon, was the son of the late Jack Haddon, who had owned a number Alvises, including a Beetleback, and by that time (c1960) was restoring a 1932 Firefly from the remains of two such, using the chassis and mechanicals of a standard two-door drophead and the excellent lightweight four-door sports coupe coachwork of its counterpart, which he completely re-framed in ash. This car, PV 808, went on to give several years' good service, before being sold (around 1966), as a more modern vehicle was needed (a Riley Pathfinder, in fact). I hope that PV 808 is going, still. Jack also owned and rebuilt mechanically to a very high (TC 21/100) standard a TA 21 saloon. Great days!

Yours sincerely
Gordon McAllan

Always a pleasure to hear of Alvis sightings from the past. Do the cars mentioned by Gordon still exist?—J.N.B.C

Merrydown
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Alderton
Tewkesbury
Glos GL20 8NW

Dear Julian

The article in the November/December 2005 Bulletin, 'Speed Twenty A to Z,' was really fascinating, a real Boy's Own story. It may be of some interest to the members to know some of the history of the Roots blower. The origins of the Roots positive displacement air pump is much older than the motor car being developed by the Roots brothers, who were farmers in Iowa, as a source of high volume low pressure air for winnowing grain. The truncated figure of eight rotor section was developed by their father, an Eastern European immigrant watchmaker, who used his knowledge of precision gear cutting to form the pressure angles and epicyclical curves required.

Yours sincerely
Darol Baker

ps. The Spies Hecker (automotive paint suppliers) calendar for 2006 features a beautiful Graber model. Registration ZH 12898.

Although I knew the origin of the Roots blower I had no idea that the Roots' brothers' father had designed the rotors or that he was a watchmaker. Thank you for this valuable information—J.N.B.C.

125 Main Street
Cossington
Leicester

Dear Julian

Like all keen AOC members I am always on the lookout for Alvis news when away from home. I have, in the past, made interesting discoveries in places as diverse as Wurtemberg and Sri Lanka. This time my good fortune was during a twinning visit to Epinal in the Lorraine region of France.

Just before Christmas last year I was taken by friends in Epinal to visit an address where an Alvis was reputed to be lurking. It was a "blind" visit and none of us knew the person that we were about to visit. What a surprise it was to be greeted by a gentleman sporting a JDCF sweatshirt (Jaguar Drivers Club of France) which seemed a jolly good start but things certainly got better as our host, Daniel Billeney-Hotz by name, took us into an enormous garage and workshop where we were shown first an XK 120 and an XK 140 undergoing chassis up restoration, a TR3 awaiting treatment and a fully equipped Land Rover rally support vehicle which complimented an immaculate E Type Jaguar which, we were told, had during the year, covered some 20,000 miles in World-wide rallies. These vehicles, together with an XJS Jaguar daily driver and other lovely classic Jaguars were surrounded by a workshop with machinery and tools of impeccable quality and condition.

"What about an Alvis?" I hear you say. The last motor car to be revealed was indeed an Alvis but very much a "Special" and a fascinating mix of components. The engine and gearbox were clearly Speed Twenty and had a starting carburettor so perhaps SB or later but there seemed to be thermostat with thermometer bulb at the forward end. An engine number TH19.8-14748 was stamped on the crankcase lip above the starter and there was a spare Speed Twenty engine under the bench.

The steering box was, I am sure, from a Speed Twenty so I assumed that the remainder of the chassis was likewise but I'm not sure about the twin Andre Hartford units each side of the dumb irons and the bulkhead didn't seem like the usual Alvis cast aluminium arrangement but it did have a plate on it, reading TJ 12/50 Car No 13674. As for the grille, my guess is a TA21.

If our Registrar or indeed any member can provide any history of this odd hybrid machine which had a Registration Number DG8684 then I would like to pass it to M. Billeney-Hotz as I visit Epinal quite regularly and it will enable me to keep in touch with this remarkable man and his wonderful cars.

I would be grateful for any help.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Mason

PS. I didn't mention that the body was an open two seater in pale blue and styled like a mid 30s Bugatti with racing windscreens and an outside handbrake.



Raymond Mason with the Alvis Special in Epinal.

Photo: via Raymond Mason

Of course Raymond's letter was passed on to Dave Culshaw for his comments which I include below—J.N.B.C.

Thank you for your recent letter, and herewith is my input in identifying the elements of this interesting cocktail.

Firstly the Registration Mark DG 8694. We know from Gloucester County Council Registration Records that this was allocated on 17th March 1934 to an Alvis Firefly drophead coupe, chassis 11501. I do not have the name of the first owner (but it should be on a Guarantee Card at Red Triangle), but Gloucester have the last licence expired 30/9/59 with one M.C. Thomas, of Penn Cottage, 50 Penn Drive, Darham, Bucks.

We have not had a record of this car since a German member declared it a while ago.

Engine 14748. This tallies with the declaration of the German member, being a 19.82 hp Silver Crest unit which first saw the light of day in chassis 14286 (TH), a London delivery to Hugh Anderson Ltd., 13/12/38, but there is no record of the Registration Number.

Lastly, the plate bearing Car Number 13674. This seems to have no connection with either of the above, but belongs to a TJ 12/50 of 1931 chassis 8829/GO5433. Listed in the first Edition of *The Vintage Alvis*, with a brake body and owned by J. Jenkinson of Wednesbury.

I would be interested to learn of any progression with this matter, and I hope the above will be helpful in the interim.

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Dear Julian

I can add a bit of information on Speed Twenty SD 13054, BOV 463 that once belonged to John George Haigh, the Acid Bath Murderer.

Known (to me) subsequent owners include:

Mr. Mayhew, Elmhurst Drive, RR 3, Heston, Ontario, Canada

J. Edvean, 110 Springhurst Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

James Sebert, Sebert Motor Car Co. Ltd., R. R. 2, Milbrook, Ontario, Canada

Everett Smith, Vintage Automotive Engineering, Seiad Valley, CA 96086.

Marryet Classics

Road & Track June 1954, had an advertisement Alvis Speed 20 Sport Saloon, IFS, Andre Telecontrol, Luvax, coil/mag, 4sp synchro. Mayhew, Elmhurst Drive, RR 3, Heston, Ontario, Canada.

The information regarding Mr. J. Edevan is from Rowland Simmons who advised Everett Smith that Alvis, Ltd. had an inquiry about chassis 13054 from Mr. Edyvean of Toronto as late as February 1960.

Jim Sebert purchased the remains of Speed Twenty SD 13054 from a used parts dealer whose name Jim told me he can't recall. According to the story, Mr. Edvean is, or was, a wealthy man with many cars who disassembled the Speed Twenty for restoration, tired of the project, and left it outside to rot. The parts dealer rescued the chassis and sold it to Jim. He told Jim he had some other bits from the car and would bring them along later, but has yet to do so.

Everett purchased the chassis of 13054 from Jim Sebert in 1987. He collected most of the needed mechanical bits to make a complete running chassis. Before Everett passed away in 2005 he arranged for his Speed Twenty collection to be shipped to Marryet Classics for dispersal. That's the last I heard of BOV 463.

Yours for longer bonnets
Wayne Brooks

As usual Wayne Brooks' amazing database has come up with more information about a specific car. Did the subsequent owners realise the sinister history of the car's pervious owner?—J.N.B.C.

PO Box 25613
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Kenya
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Dear Julian

As a resident of Nairobi, I was of course fascinated by the article "Good Enough for Africa" reproduced in Bulletin No. 498 from the Autocar of 3 December 1937, which I had not previously seen. I am afraid I cannot assist in identifying the car, and I doubt that even older members of the Vintage & Classic Car Club of Kenya have memories going back far enough. The registration "F 905" looks Kenyan, and I believe the "F" series was issued in Eldoret, some 200 miles North of Nairobi, commencing around 1930.

The story is referred to in one of my favourite books *Wheels over Black Cotton* in which the author, John Bate, reminisces, in 1978, about all the different makes of car he could remember coming across in East Africa (black cotton is a peaty sort of soil common in this part of the world, which is particularly difficult to drive over when wet). The book contains only two paragraphs on Alvis, which may be of interest to readers:

"Alvis were sprinkled pretty thinly on Kenya soil. A 12/40 two seater was run by a chap in the head office of Kenya & Uganda Railways & Harbours for years and, to my knowledge, never saw the inside of a workshop. I knew the owner well so had no reason to doubt this. A very quiet little car with a pleasing performance. Pride of place of course, must go to the beautiful 12/50 two seater sports imported new by the owner of one of the big car firms. If memory serves me correctly, that Alvis was painted primrose and black. A picture in those days of sight and sound, especially aided by that impressive Alvis outside exhaust. Everything so clean cut and neat under the bonnet too.

There was another 12/50, a coupé. This amazing car did the overland trip from Nairobi to London and, I believe, only had one breakdown. Personally little is known of this safari but I mention it, as a trip of that kind in that type of car was terrific motoring in those days. The owner of that Alvis also had a Speed 20 later on, and very impressive it was too. He may still own the car! Latterly I suppose the gem of them all was a Speed 25 saloon. A real motor car both in looks and performance. To complete the Alvis picture a post war four cylinder appeared. Very pleasant to drive and without a shadow of doubt a quality machine but far too low for Kenya roads."

This was written shortly before I imported my Firefly into Kenya, since when no other Alvis has been sighted on Kenya's roads. I reported the remains of a Speed Twenty (could it have been P.B. Robson's?) in the Bulletin about 10 years ago. Unfortunately these were sold a couple of years ago to a fellow member of the VCCCK, thrown in as a bonus when he bought a Bentley and a Rolls-Royce from the owner. Sadly, both cars and the Speed Twenty remains have since been exported.

Yours sincerely
Simon Fisher

I am grateful to Simon for this response on Alvises in East Africa. It is not an area we normally associate with Alvis. Who knows what further discoveries may be made?—J.N.B.C.

Orchard Haven
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Norwich NR13 6BP

Dear Julian

Bulletin no. 497 contained a close-up of a racing Grey Lady taken in 2004 at Goodwood where it upheld the honour of Alvis by disposing of seemingly more likely opposition. As a caption to the picture you asked if anyone knew anything about the car. The question remained unanswered in Bulletin 498 so that now, emerging from hibernation, I can reveal something of its whereabouts.

Readers of the original *Motor Sport* magazine may well recall the advertisements of Ivan Dutton displaying mouth-watering shots of Bugattis close to those of “the purveyor of horseless carriages to the nobility and gentry.” A sortie into the (comparative) wilds of Oxfordshire took me to Ivan’s premises where he was hard at work restoring our kind of cars and brought myself face to face with his racing Grey Lady, bedecked in her resplendent re-spray and coyly secreting modifications to her innards.

May I add that recent contributions to your excellent publication have produced a similarly warming effect on my internals; notably from Dick (“come for a quick sprint up the runway”) Crabtree, who thereby sold me my first TD21; from Ernest Shenton, whose prodigious memory for number-plates rivals Dick’s computer and whose hospitality is legendary; and from John Oliveira, former producer of Direct Transmission, direct antecedent of the Club Calendar, who chauffeured our younger daughter to her wedding in his 3½ Litre dhc many years ago.

The Letters column keeps us all in touch and gives real meaning to the initials AOC—Alvis Owner’s Camaraderie.

Happy editing.

Eric Stapleton

Very good to hear from one of my distinguished predecessors. Eric is quite right about the letters column and I regard this as being one of the most important parts of the Bulletin. Thank you also for the information about Ivan Dutton’s racing Grey Lady. I have provided some more details elsewhere in this issue—J.N.B.C.

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Dear Julian

Chris tells me he is sending you a photograph for The Bulletin of himself and me in front of my TA14 and his Speed Twenty at International Alvis Weekend. (*See page 301 J.N.B.C.*) On stumbling on the enclosed photograph taken in 1972 I thought it might amuse our members to see how unchanged the TA14 appears after the passage of thirty-four years in marked contrast to the custodians.

My records show that the car has travelled a further 110,000 miles trouble free since the earlier photograph. We had already owned it for seven years by then. Since 1972 she has had little major mechanical work beyond re-metalling the big-ends and new pistons five years ago, expertly done by Red



Chris and Andrew Storrar with their TA14 in 1972. Compare the car (and the brothers!) in the photograph on page 301 of this issue.

Photo: via Andrew Storrar

Triangle. Red Triangle also rebuilt the body over the period 1991-1995 constructing a largely new wooden frame, which had begun to disintegrate on the Tickford body. The quality of their work is evidenced by the body still being rattle free eleven years down the line.

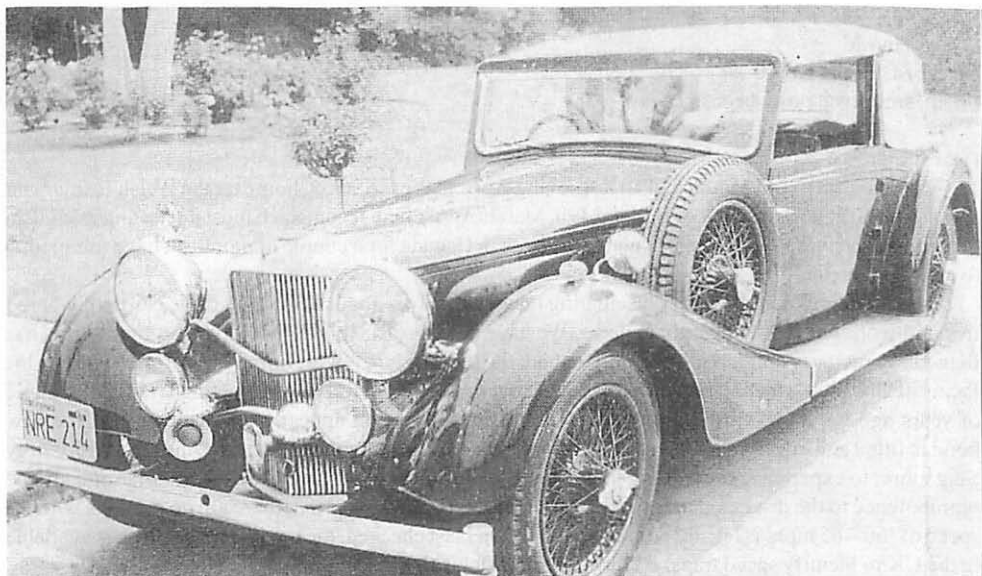
What a refined, willing, dependable friend this car is. I am looking forward to the next 41 years with her.

Yours sincerely
Andrew Storrar

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USA
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Dear Julian

I came across the attached advertisement with photograph on glossy paper cut out of an unknown, probably circa 1950's, magazine. The advertisement reads, "Alvis" Speed 25—1937 for sale, 3½ Litre engine dual ignition system, 3 S.U. carburettors, one shot lubrication, built in jacks among other innovations. Needs very little work on interior. Asking \$2,500, Tom Wolfe, 3118 Burbank Blvd., Burbank, California.



Possibly Alberto Morin's Speed Twenty-Five. See letter from Wayne Brooks.

Photo: via Wayne Brooks

The photograph shows a dark coloured Speed Twenty-Five, probably early Charlesworth, Dhc with light hood and dark wheels, modern pass lamps, incorrect trumpet horns mounted on badge bar type of arrangement below and between the pass lamps, hole in front bumper for crank, rear view mirrors mounted on front wings, spare wheel in left front wing, rubber mat on running boards, California licence plates NRE 214, looks like 1956 expiration.

Might be the ex Alberto Morin (the Hollywood actor who appeared in *Casablanca*) Speed Twenty-Five SB 14376, DNC 754. Mr. Morin sold the car to Geoffrey Griffiths who in 1960 sold it on to Bruce Locken when he got married. I spoke with Geoffrey at Hershey. He recently found some old negatives of the car. Has promised me copies.

Yours for longer bonnets
Wayne Brooks

Another intriguing find from Wayne. I look forward to copies of prints from the negatives in due course. Does anyone wish to hazard an identity for this car and which part did Alberto Morin play in "Casablanca"?—J.N.B.C.

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Dear Julian

I spent a very cold March and an improving April in the UK at my home on the Welsh Border and so was able to collect my copy of Bulletin 498, March/April 2006. It contained most interesting reading in general and on three topics in particular; now back in Canada for a couple of months, I have found time to comment on these.

Alvis Goes to the Movies: A fascinating tale! Lorne lives about a two hour drive North of where I live and work when in Kingston, Ontario. We have talked on the phone but never yet met so this has jogged my memory and intention finally to take the offer of lunch with Lorne in 'historic' Perth at his favourite hostelry "where jazz is often available over coffee". We did have a meeting arranged a couple of years ago but he was still getting a new hood fitted. It would appear from his letter that the new hood is fitted and effective even in torrential rain (and you have to be in southern Ontario, and possibly Singapore, to experience rain falling in torrents). It must be that driving an Alvis imparts some divine omnipotence to the driver since my recollection of the Highway 7 is that there are no sections where a speed of '60 – 65 mph' is legally permitted and, when I last checked, the computerized devices available in the UK to identify speed traps, etc. are illegal in Ontario!

Pre-War Brake (Conun)Drums. Angus tells a marvelous story of life taken almost to the br(e)aking point many times, both figuratively and literally! Angus and I spoke a number of times by telephone when he was selling the Speed Twenty-Five rebuilt by his father, but primarily about overheating problems. His description of his tussle with the idiosyncrasies of the drum brakes on the Speed Twenty-Five is all the more noteworthy since I believe all pre-WWII Alvis cars had such systems. I have a restored Firefly DHC (AUW 36), given the name "Mistress Alice" by 'Management' since it is of royal blue with highly polished black lower parts; I keep my 'Mistress' at my UK home near Hereford. The restoration was done in a systematic and searching fashion over 10 years by its former owner, Mel Grigg of Weston Super Mare. Mel is a machinist, and perfectionist, and before formal retirement was an instructor in an automobile restoration course at the local technical college. Mel had used and maintained it for a further 10 years before passing it to me so the refurbished car has proven reliability. Now Mel's significant machinist skills are turned towards creating magnetically-driven clocks of ingenious design and providing mechanical know-how as he and his wife join friends on numerous Alvis Tours in their friend's TC21—in fact I first met Mel as we both rummaged around an old car collection in Blenheim during the 2002 Alvis NZ Tour.

The car was in apple-pie order when I collected it from Mel and it continues that way. However, whilst I found that both the engine and the pre-selecting gear box to be responsive and robust, the brakes were a bit of a shock. The foot-brake required very significant effort to provide the desired retardation and so my driving country lanes have become 'approach corners slowly with the handbrake firmly clasped for immediate use if required'. This is a new phenomenon for me, namely a hand-brake which will skid all wheels whilst going down a twisting 1 in 6 hill at 20mph. and a foot-brake which does not. Quite the opposite of the modern car with an automatic gear change where the hand-brake is simply a lever or a pedal which does very little except hold the car on an incline—unless already its cable has rusted-up due to salty winter roads and lack of greasing and use. Since the hand-brake works so well, it is clear that I do not have the type of vexations which plagued Angus but were eventually solved, no doubt at great cost in time, patience and effort, much of it professional and at commercial rates. I presume the differences in effectiveness of operation in my Firefly results from the mechanical effort applied in each case i.e. the hand-brake is a much longer lever than is the foot-brake.

This brings me to a request from ‘Bulletin’ readers for help, but first a digression to set the ‘stage’. I used to own a Grey Lady, TC21/100 saloon (1 ALVIS), which I would keep in New Zealand. It was handsome but most un-grey, being cream above the sills, which were maroon, as were the mudguards. It had been subjected to an extensive refurbishment for the former owner—what is commonly referred to as a cheque-book restoration—though perhaps not to the extent to which Mel Grigg personally fussed over every detail of the restoration of Mistress Alice. (In passing, I should note that Mel has an impressive collection of photographs and notes detailing every part of the entire restoration; these, together with the fact that Mel is an accomplished raconteur, could provide readers with a delightful tale of how one might (or might not) choose to spend the first 10 years of one’s retirement—ininitely better than pushing a grocery cart around the local food store or chasing one of those silly little white balls though the thick and the wet!) Our first long trip with ‘1 ALVIS’ was around the South Island of NZ on the 2002–Tour. Well, the engine was responsive and the cruising speed reported by Lorne Plunket was its easy gait. However, the braking performance was poor, in spite of the fact that all the hydraulics had been replaced and even the wheel slave cylinders re-sleeved with stainless steel. Driving through the Southern Alps was a testing experience, with much use of lower gears to prevent massive brake-fade. We finally made it back to our base in Christchurch having collected a few more grey hairs but having shed only the speedo cable and the dynamo front bearing. We had to leave for Canada a few days later so repairs were left to a local garage and I resolved to fix the so-so brakes before we took the car out the following NZ summer.

Fixing the brakes turned-out to be surprisingly easy and relatively inexpensive—about the equivalent of £250. ‘Brakes R’ procured and fitted an Australian-made vacuum-assisting device which they tucked away out of sight in the voluminous off-side front wing. I now had a classic car whose brakes responded much like any modern car and mountain switch-backs were fun to be driven through rather than approached with dread! Since the braking-assistance device was hidden I was even spared any disapproving ‘tut, tuts’ from other club members who might believe that old cars should be brought up only to the standards of the day they were put on the road. I consider this view is quite appropriate when confined to body and power train but quite misguided when referred to brakes; quite simply—if we are to drive our old cars in modern traffic then we should be able to respond safely to any rapid retardation in the cars around us. In my view, choosing not to be able to do so is as a minimum disturbing and could be criminal if an ‘easy’ garage was used to obtain the vehicle’s MOT certificate. No doubt this comment will elicit some vitriolic, possibly even vituperative, comments from the die-hard preservers in the old car world; I would be happy to defend my view in any open forum.

Finally I come to my request. I was told that the Australian company which had made the hydraulic-braking power-assisting device also produced a similar device for mechanical brakes. Do any readers know of how this device or similar might be obtained in the UK? Just in case someone might comment that I drive a car unsafe by my own definition (and should be ‘hoist by my own petard’) he/she will see that I have superlative braking with deft use of the Firefly hand-brake but would like similar response from the foot-brake. I look for to any comments—preferably by email to smithreg@ereal.net

Yours sincerely
Reginald Smith

ALCOHOLIC COOLANT CHALLENGE

John Gregg's provocative article in Bulletin 498 has brought three replies, from Paul Bamford, David Pearce and Reginald Smith. So without more ado, here are the replies.

Paul Bamford

You know I just can't resist it when you talk like that! I love the "Nitty-Gritty" side of engines. Thank you John, for a wonderful article. Perhaps you could be persuaded to write an article on the incredible differences in the thermal conductivity of water, copper, and air, and how heat is transferred from the water through the copper and passed to the air.

Here are my comment's on the "Alcoholic Coolant Challenge". I will try to keep this simple to reach a larger target audience.

I won't be able to claim the bottle of Cotes du Rhone though, because I agree with you.

You hit the nail on the head when you said that;

"The heat lost by the radiator is; $V'C_v(T_r - T_a)$ which must equal to Q' (heat generated per second by the engine)"

The excess heat produced by the engine must equal the heat lost through the radiator core.

When an engine first starts up the coolant and the radiator core both absorb the generated heat from the engine, until the radiator temperature rises above the ambient air temperature. As they rise above this temperature, they start to radiate heat. At this point, heat transfer to the cooling air commences. The coolant temperature continues to rise until it reaches the point where the difference between the ambient air temperature, and the average core temperature of the radiator, is enough to complete the transfer of all of the heat generated by the engine. The cooling system is then in a state of thermal equilibrium. This would mean the car had reached its running temperature.

The following is a formula Produced by the National Automotive Radiator Association (NARSA) and by Richard F. Crook, Transpro, Inc.

$$Q = M * cp * dT$$

Where Q is the heat load BTU/min., M is the mass flow rate of the coolant in BTU per pound per degree F, dT is the temperature drop through the radiator in degrees F, and * indicates multiplication.

* (cp is not mentioned in their literature but is not needed for this demonstration.) Paul.

In any given engine at a given coolant flow rate these conditions remain constant and therefore, the coolant temperature drop through the radiator, will also remain constant. The radiator can only lose, what the engine produces. Making the radiator twice as big will not alter this fact.

What it will do though, is to allow this heat transfer, to happen at a lower temperature. If a radiator were made much too large for a car, and (assuming no thermostat), the engine would run almost cold. This is because the quantity of heat per unit area of core would be lower, i.e. there would not be enough heat to go around. A radiator that is too small will still lose the same quantity of heat but at a higher temperature, maybe well above boiling. This happens due to the increasing temperature difference, between the coolant temperature, and ambient temperature. *For a given flow rate*, both radiators will have the *same temperature drop* across the core. It will just happen at different temperatures.

Some people have a problem with this concept so I will explain it simply. *Quantity of heat* and *temperature* are not the same thing. If I dropped a red-hot tack into the palm of your hand, it would burn you. If I tipped a bucket of warm water over you, it would produce no ill effect. The temperature of the tack is much higher than that of the water. If I drop the tack into the bucket of warm water, it will lose all of its heat to the water. The water temperature will remain almost constant. This is because the *quantity of heat* in the tack *was so small*, even though its *temperature was high*. Now if we could put all the heat contained in the bucket of warm water, into the tack, it would be hot enough to vaporize it. Therefore, *quantity of heat* is not to be confused with temperature.

From the equation above we can see that if we lower the flow rate of the coolant M , then there must be a corresponding increase in " dT " the difference between the top and bottom temperatures in the core, (to keep the equation equal). This means that the temperature at the bottom of the core will be nice and cold, ready to go back into the engine. However, the temperature of the coolant entering at the top of the core, will also have to rise by the same amount. This has to happen to keep approximately the same average core temperature to pass to the cooling air. Now we have nice cold water in the bottom of the engine, but the water in the head, will be *stinking hot*. This is clearly not what we want. This is however, typical in thermosyphon cooling systems. The designers of these systems were well aware of their limitations, and designed them to cope with these conditions.

If we assume the same constant amount of heat from the engine Q , and the coolant flow through the radiator is increased, i.e. an increase in M then there will be a corresponding drop in dT . This means that the temperature at the bottom of the radiator will now be hotter. To maintain the average radiator core temperature then, the top must get cooler by the same amount. This will make the temperature in the head lower and this is where the drop in temperature is needed.

So increasing the flow makes the bottom of the radiator hotter but also makes the head cooler, producing a more even temperature balance between top and bottom.

So why don't cars have super fast pumps that will make the temperature the same throughout the system? Evidence suggests that about 5–8 feet per second of coolant flow through the radiator giving a temperature drop of about 10°F is about the optimum. This is reasonably fast, when you think that it is about the same speed as a billiard ball, when struck by a queue. It may be difficult to imagine coolant traveling at this speed through the core but remember that decreasing the size of the aperture increases the velocity of the flow. The passages in radiator cores are rather fine. This rate of flow gives good "scrubbing" action to overcome the friction of the boundary layer of sluggish, cooler, denser, water that sits against the side of the radiator tubes, allowing the hotter water to slip down the middle of the stream without touching the sides and cooling. This is important, as water is not a good conductor of heat. A flow rate faster than 9–10 feet per second starts to bring negative results. These include, cavitation of the water pump, pressure build-up at the top of the radiator, and erosion of the tubes in the core.

I believe this agrees with John's Mathematical conclusion, which I just loved.

Having proved his point so elegantly, John then states that, "....." under *all* conditions, increasing the flow rate gives a cooler engine". The engine is actually producing just as much heat as it was before, and that all has to be transferred to the radiator for cooling. The heat is simply distributed more evenly throughout the engine and cooling system. However, as most cars have their temperature sender unit mounted high in the engine where the water is now cooler than before, we could expect a lower reading on the temperature gauge. Due to the scrubbing action that the increase in coolant flow is likely to achieve, there will actually be a slight improvement in heat transfer to the cooling air.

It has to be said that water is a very poor conductor of heat as are most liquids and gases. An experiment used in schools to demonstrate this, has an ice cube wrapped in lead wire, (to make it sink) sitting in the bottom of a test tube full of water. Holding the top of the test tube next to a Bunsen burner, the water in the top of the tube can be made to boil, while the ice cube remains intact at the bottom. I believe this could be easily replicated in an engine. It would be quite feasible to have water boiling in the

head, and yet have a body of much cooler water sitting in the bottom of your engine. All you need to do to stop the boiling is to improve the circulation.

Water has a higher specific heat than an either ethylene glycol, or propylene glycol coolant additives. This means that if your car cooling system is just marginal in summer, then running water with no antifreeze just for the summer months will help. If you do this to maximize your cooling then you should try to look for some additive that won't raise the specific heat of the water but will give corrosion protection, and pump lubrication.

Conclusion Raising the flow rate to between 5–8 feet per minute will improve the efficiency of your cooling system. Slowing the flow below 5 feet per minute in order to improve cooling cannot be justified.

As I didn't win the bottle of Cotes du Rhone, I think I'll go and open a nice bottle of Wynn's Coonawarra Shiraz, sit in my favourite chair, and go and console myself.

David Pearce

We expect *The Bulletin* to present us with a certain amount of nostalgia. Usually this comes in the form of motoring, either in days gone by or cars gone by. But this time, thanks to John Gregg *The Bulletin* transported me back to my days as a student engineer.

I am not going to accept his challenge to the extent of commenting upon his calculus. To me integration has become a social rather than a mathematical process. However any engineer will tell you that we fall generally into one of two or perhaps three categories. There are young engineers who can do sums and work out the answers. There are old engineers who can no longer do sums but know what the answer should be. These are sometimes called managers. And there are probably old engineers who can still do sums and these are usually called professors. John must be one of these.

I fall (hopefully) into the second category and I know that if you express the result of John's integration in its most usual form you arrive at the conclusion that the heat transferred in a radiator will depend upon the "logarithmic mean of the temperature difference." This is calculated by taking the temperature difference at the inlet and outlet conditions: adding the two together and dividing by the natural logarithm of their ratio. This is true for all heat exchangers in theory but is adjusted in practice for the actual geometry of the one in question: in this case a "single pass fin/fan" even if we are talking about a vintage Alvis without a fan.

But the real nub of John's enquiry is whether the value of "a" varies with flow rate? The answer is very definitely "yes". What John calls "a", engineers call the "overall heat transfer coefficient" This is a combination of three component heat transfer coefficient. These govern individually the heat transfer between the air and the outer wall of the radiator tube: across the thin wall of the tube: and between the inner wall of the tube and the water. These are combined after allowing for the fact that the outer surface of the tube is slightly larger than the inner surface. The first will be affected by the air flow, the third by the water flow, and the second by neither. It is the third, known as the tube side heat transfer coefficient that concerns us here.

At this point engineers have to retreat from calculus to empiricism and I start to show my age. Young engineers undoubtedly have a suitable computer algorithm. Older engineers will recall that for reasons which were always rather obscure we analysed these problems by employing a system of "dimensionless numbers". I will not go into any detail on these as I am sure that by now I must have lost most readers except a few engineers hoping to wallow in a bit more nostalgia. So for their sake I will just recall the Prandtl Nusselt and Reynold and Grashof Numbers. These dimensionless numbers themselves are composed of assorted variables describing the physical properties of the system in question. This would include amongst others the density, viscosity, thermal conductivity, temperature and the flow rate of the coolant. For the case of water such an equation would reduce down to give a "tube side heat transfer coefficient" of:

$$H = 150(1 + 0.011T) \frac{v^{0.8}}{D^{0.2}}$$

Where “v” is the velocity of the water flowing through the radiator that in a vintage car would be measured in feet per second. D is the internal diameter of the tube in inches and T is the temperature in degrees Fahrenheit; thus confirming John’s suspicion that the higher the flow rate the more heat transferred per unit of area.

John is quite right to ask about the boundary layer. This is very important at low flow rates where the flow is what we call streamlined. The water next to the tube wall is effectively stationary and a smooth (parabolic) velocity profile is set up with the highest velocity in the centre of the tube. Under these conditions heat transfer will be low. As the flow speeds up it becomes “turbulent” when the velocity is constant across the tube except at a very thin boundary layer. Heat transfer is much quicker because the water is being physically mixed up across most of the tube. This transition starts to happen quite suddenly when the Reynolds number exceeds 2,000, and is completed when the Reynolds number exceeds 3,000. (The Reynolds number is obtained by multiplying the velocity by the diameter of the tube and the density of the fluid and dividing by its viscosity). Once again I am using imperial units throughout.

A secondary effect that might also improve with flow rate might be the distribution across the radiator. At low flows there will be a tendency for the water to “channel”. That is to say: the water will take the most direct path between the top and bottom hoses and not flow outwards to make use of the full width and area of the radiator.

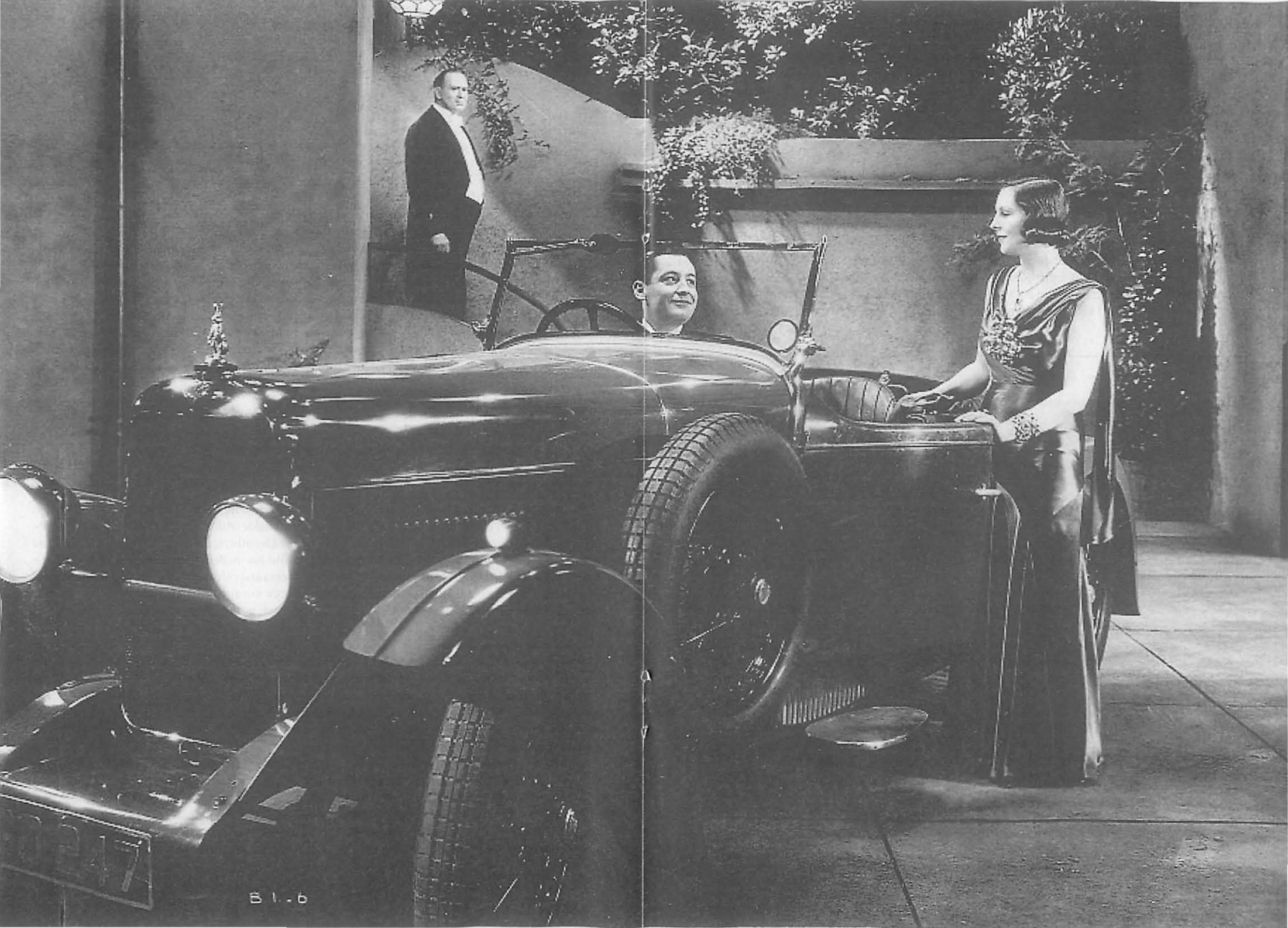
Just in case any of my engineering colleagues are overwhelmed by my powers of recall. I would suggest that a man who allows his garage to fill up with old motor cars is highly unlikely to throw away something as important to his formative years as Volume 1 of Coulson & Richardson.

Reginald Smith

John Gregg treats readers to the analysis of a simple thermal model to illustrate his contention that passing the heated coolant from the engine through the radiator with a greater flow velocity does not reduce the cooling effect of the radiator even if, as claimed by others, the dwell time of the fluid in the radiator is too small to allow the heat to be extracted. Whilst his modelling methodology is logical, the analysis requires that readers have some grasp of both algebra and calculus in order to follow his reasoning. He also offers a bottle of one of the thicker French brews to anyone who might show him another way of demonstrating that his contention is valid. This prompts me to add my two cents (about one ‘new’ penny!)

Let me offer a commonplace analogy in place of the maths. Consider a small river flowing between banks and with sharp curves in it. It may be seen from the motions of floating debris that the flow rate is higher close to that part of the river bank with convex curvature than that at the same distance from the a bank with concave curvature. It will be seen that the water right at the bank barely moves. In scientific terms, we would summarise these observations and say the ‘velocity gradient’ i.e. the rate at which the velocity (speed) increases with distance from the bank is greater for the convex bank than for the concave bank.

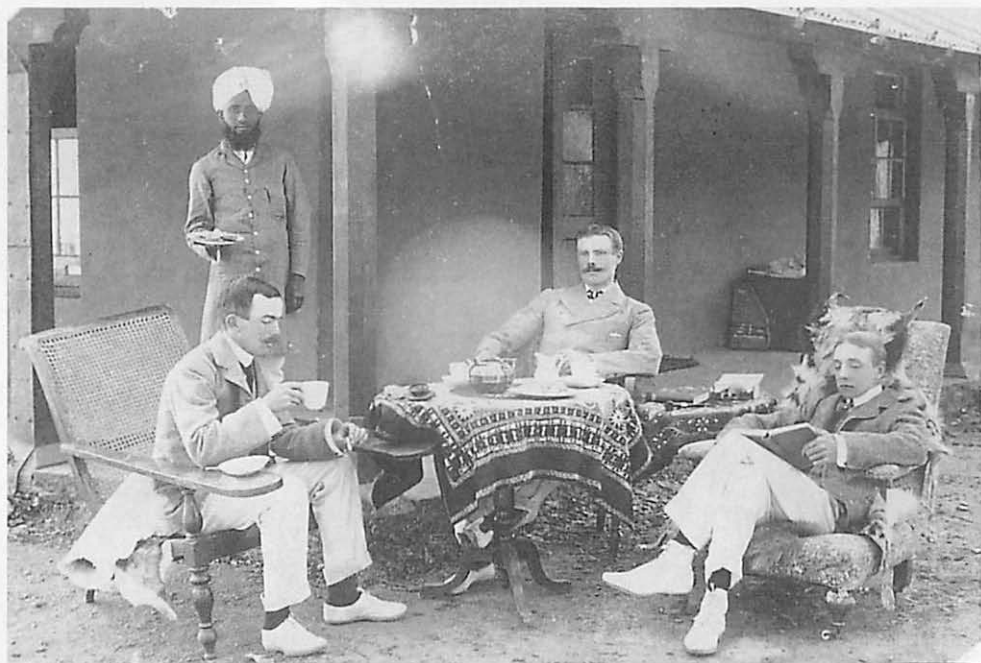
Returning to the flow of water through a radiator, the rate of heat extraction from the liquid flowing through one of the metal cooling channels is proportional to the ‘temperature gradient’ at the metal surface since this temperature gradient drives the heat to the cooling metal surface. There will, in fact be two temperature gradients to consider in the radiator. The first is that into the liquid flowing from the engine. In a like manner to the flow in the river, when the flow rate of the liquid is large, the velocity gradient at the cooling surface will also be large and so will the local temperature gradient. Thus, if the



B1-6

temperature of the cooling metal surface does not increase, the rate at which heat can be removed will increase as the velocity gradient in the liquid at the cooling surface increases i.e. as the flow rate through the radiator increases. Here we must consider the second temperature gradient, i.e. that on the outside of the metal cooling channels of the radiator. The heat will only flow from the hot coolant if it can pass through the metal tube and be taken away by the air flowing through the radiator core. As the overall flow rate within the metal cooling channel increases, so will the need to extract more heat from the outside of the cooling channel by the air passing through the radiator to prevent the cooling channel getting hot and losing its ability to extract heat from the passing coolant.

In practical terms, the rate of extraction of heat by the radiator will be increased by increasing the coolant flow from the engine (by an improved water pump) and the flow of air through the radiator (by an improved fan or driving more swiftly as on the highway after being stopped in traffic). However, all of this begs the question of how close the coolant can get to the heated surfaces of the engine and the cooling surfaces of the radiator i.e. how 'crudded-up' are the coolant passageways in both engine and radiator! I have written on this topic before—see *The Bulletin* for March/April 2003. In that letter I suggest how the (cooling) condition of both the engine and the radiator may be assessed and offer the use of the thermal equipment I keep at my Herefordshire home to check the condition of each.



The editor takes tea with a couple of his chums in the East.

CONDITIONS OF GUARANTEE, TERMS OF BUSINESS, ETC.

While I was in Melbourne earlier this year, Chester McKaige gave to me a superb colour copy of the 1928 Alvis Catalogue. Vintage Alvis sales material is of wonderful quality but the item that particularly struck me in this catalogue was the last page in which is set out Alvis's Conditions of Guarantee and Terms of Business. These make fascinating reading—J.N.B.C.

THE Company takes precaution to ensure reasonable care and skill in the selection and use of the best materials and the best workmanship. Accordingly all Warranties, Conditions or Guarantees as to quality, or as to the fitness for the purpose for which cars or goods are sold, or as to any other matter implied by Common Law, Statute or otherwise, are in all cases excluded. But the Company gives to purchasers from the Company a Guarantee such as is set out below. The Company advises that the total weight of the car, including chassis, body, fuel, spares, passengers, etc., should not exceed 30 cwt. which is amply sufficient to satisfy all ordinary purposes, and this is so far in the interests of the owners that the Company stipulates that the Guarantee shall not apply if the car is at any time so laden that the total weight exceeds 31 cwt. If the chassis, having been continuously and being still owned by the purchaser and in his possession, shall, within THREE YEARS (three years should be ample time to discover faults of material or workmanship) from the date of receipt by purchaser, develop any fault other than by reason of fair wear and tear, dirt, misuse, neglect or accident, and provided that

- (a) no alteration shall have been made to the chassis and the same shall not have been dismantled or repaired by any other maker or repairer at any time after the delivery of the chassis by us unless with our express consent in writing,
- (b) the chassis shall not at any time have been so loaded that the total weight of the car, including chassis, body, passengers, and all else therein or thereon, shall exceed 31 cwt.,
- (c) the chassis shall not, at any time, except with our written approval which in proper cases will be readily given, have been run on tyres other than such as we supply as standard, to wit, pneumatic tyres of suitable size and flexibility,
- (d) the owner shall not have adopted and had fitted (except with our written approval) any wheels or rims being a departure from our standard wheels or rims.
- (e) the owner forthwith, after the fault appears, communicates the facts to us at our works in Coventry, giving the chassis number,
- (f) the owner at a date to be agreed with us, at his own expense, sends the chassis or faulty part to our works at Coventry,
- (g) it shall appear that the fault was in fact due to defective material or workmanship, and not to fair wear and tear, dirt, misuse, negligence or accident,

we will repair or replace the defective part, and if the chassis is returned to Coventry, dismantle and re-assemble so as to leave the part in perfect working order, *free of charge*.

The owner, having sent the chassis to our works pursuant to the above shall, in any event, be under obligation to remove the same from our premises if required so to do.

This Guarantee shall not apply to any chassis which has been used for racing or other competition work; nor does it apply to coachwork, tyres, batteries, nor any proprietary article forming part of such chassis, such as dynamos, magnetos, lamps, speedometers, etc., which are not manufactured by us.

In the event of the original owner disposing of the car before the expiry of three years from date of purchase, the Company is prepared to transfer the Guarantee to the new owner for the unexpired portion, providing that the car is brought to the Works at Coventry to permit an examination being made of the car (for which examination a nominal charge of £5 is made) and providing that the original or the new owner agrees to any work being done by the Company, which the latter, in their opinion, may specify as being necessary for putting the car in proper condition.

The three years Guarantee does not apply to cars sold or delivered for use outside the United Kingdom, or which are habitually used outside the United Kingdom. In such circumstance the period of the Guarantee is limited to one year.

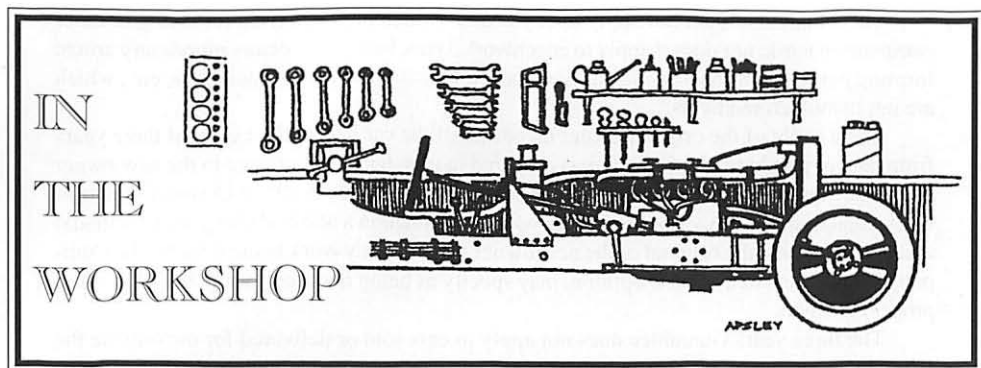
REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENTS. All parts sent for repair or replacement must be forwarded carriage paid, and bear the sender's name and address; the car number and year of manufacture should also be given. Cars which are sent for repair will only be driven by our employees at the risk and responsibility of the owners. Repairs of cars are undertaken only on the assumption that the owners give us authority to drive the cars on their behalf.

DEALERS. Those firms whom we style our dealers or agents are not authorised to act on our behalf by advertising or otherwise incurring debts or transacting business for us; nor are they authorised to give any Warranty or make any representation on our behalf. The term "Agent" is used in a complimentary sense only.

ALTERATIONS IN PRICE, CONDITIONS OF PAYMENT, SPECIFICATIONS, ETC. The Company reserves the right to alter the price and conditions of sale or the specification of a particular model at any time without notice, and all cars are subject to price and conditions ruling at the time of delivery. All previous catalogues are hereby cancelled and the issue of this catalogue does not constitute an offer. All prices quoted are for nett cash upon notice being sent that the car or chassis is ready for delivery, and payment must be made before the same leaves the works. Delivery is given at the Company's works, Coventry—carriage and insurance therefrom being payable by the customer. Every effort will be made to adhere to promised date of delivery, but the same cannot be guaranteed, and no claim shall be made upon the Company in respect to any such delay or for any loss or damage arising therefrom.

EXHIBITIONS. Goods are only supplied by us on condition that same are not to be exhibited by any person, or firm, or Company at any Exhibition or Show held in the United Kingdom other than an Exhibition or a Show held or approved by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, Limited, for Exhibition of Motor goods by its Bond Signers. Any breach of this provision shall render the purchaser liable to indemnify us in respect to our liability to the Society, and to pay such damages not exceeding £250, as the Committee (or on appeal the Council) of the Society may award.

*I wonder how many Vintage Alvis owners lost their rights to the Guarantee because of racing their cars? You will note that however generous the three year Guarantee, the owner still had to get the car to Coventry for repairs. My thanks to Chester McKaige for the copy of the catalogue—
J.N.B.C.*

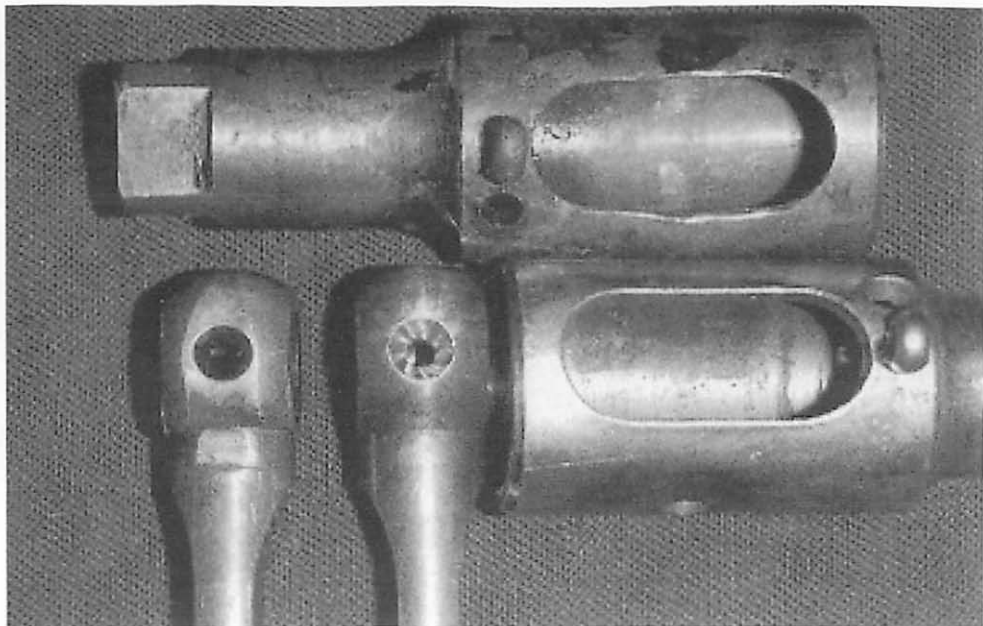


THREE LITRE THROTTLE LINKAGE



As Alvis cars get older throttle linkage wear is becoming an increasingly common problem. The worst offender is the control lever and control lever cage positioned on the bulkhead. An old worn example is shown in the photograph next to a new unused one, you can see quite substantial wear on the used example.

Wear in these two components can lead to the car losing as much as 20% of its available power, just because it stops your foot from being mechanically able to access the full throttle position on the carburettors...



It is worth following the linkage through its course and assessing the play at each junction of components, you will probably be amazed. If all the components are replaced as necessary your car will feel much more responsive and often just plain faster!

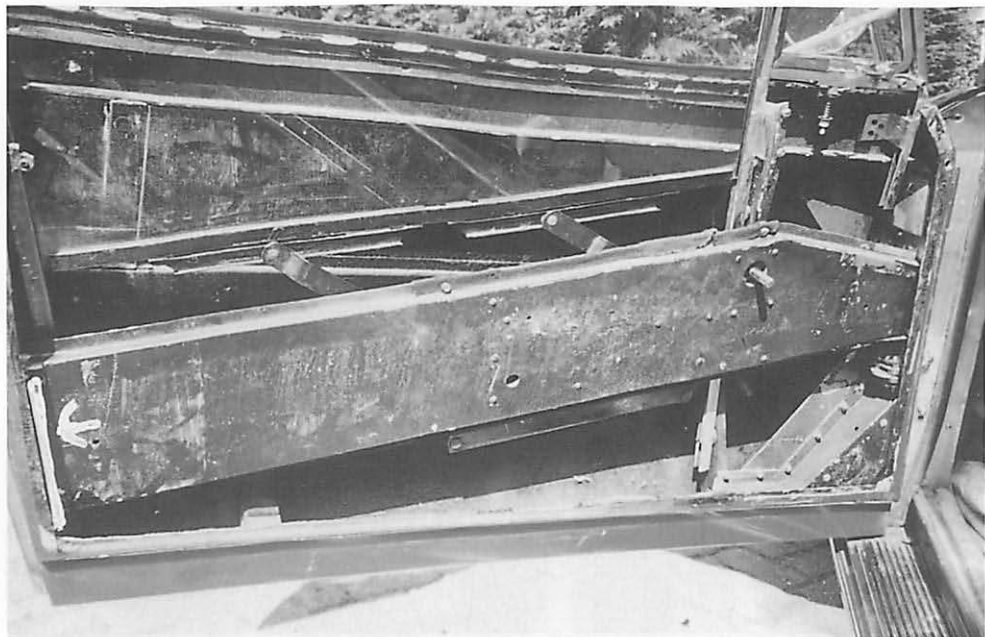
PETER CROWLEY
Senior Technician, Red Triangle

CAR DOORS

With something over fifty years experience of fairly ancient, and always unusual, motor cars I have some knowledge of the trials and tribulations of car doors. My earliest recollection of a car door problem in the mid 1950's, is of the near side door of my 1932 BSA three wheeler, flying open on a corner somewhere in South London and my map book disappearing on to the pavement, only to be missed some few miles further on. It was still there when I retraced my tracks and once again I found my way. In those days a supplementary bolt was perhaps a good idea and did not seem to offend the then "10 Year annual MOT Test regulations." I am told that elastic straps from one door to the other can have a similar useful effect but should be removed before the annual inspection.

As to Alvis cars, over the past thirty years, I have many times had to dismantle the mechanism of the doors on the family TF21. More recently this doubtful pleasure has extended to the 1935 Firebird Holbrook saloon, finally restored and now in regular use—(see *The Bulletin* No. 489).

With repairs to any car door one has, if doing the job oneself, to be prepared to expend a seemingly disproportionate amount of time and particularly patience, along with ready access to replacement rubbers and guides (Red Triangle or particularly useful C.O.H. Baines of Tunbridge Wells.) If you are,



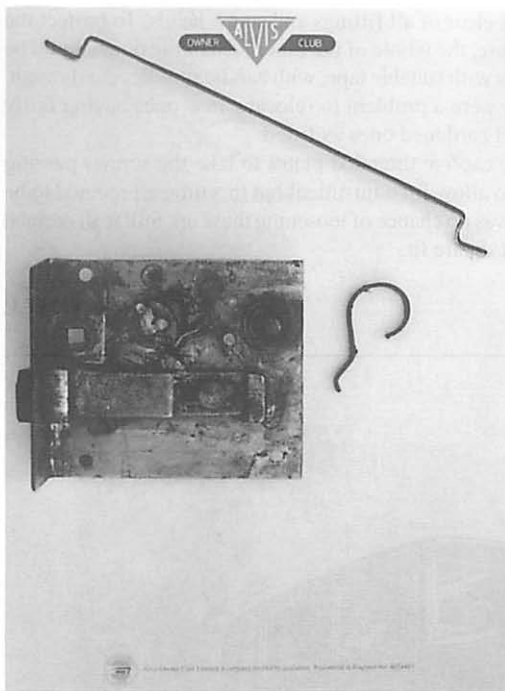
The inside of the passenger door of Brian Neale's TF21.

Photo: Brian Neale

perhaps wisely, leaving the job to a professional, do not complain at what is likely to be a large labour bill, since with the restricted space available and the large amount of dismantling needed, such must always be a costly undertaking even if new parts used are minimal or even not needed at all.

I have recently had trouble with the doors to both the Firebird and also to my recently acquired all-aluminium, Rod Jolley-bodied TF21. The doors of which are original Park Ward which, with their substantial alloy framing and skin, were soon adopted by Alvis for the Graber styled 3 litre cars. I recall the late Roland Simmons telling me that when the Graber cars first appeared, the Service Centre was receiving complaints from owners of new cars that after just six weeks the doors would not open. Alvis had to strip off the steel skins and re-clad the doors in aluminium alloy in order to reduce weight. I am not sure from when the all alloy doors appeared, but probably not until the Series Two TD. After that the doors were all well engineered even if age does take its toll with the window and door latch mechanisms. I have found that spare parts are well catered for by Red Triangle who can either supply new or as refurbished.

The photographs show the extent of my latest door problems. With regard to the locking mechanism for the driver's door of the Firebird, the latching bolt had suddenly lost all of its spring outwards, so there was nothing to keep the door shut. After stripping off the trim and outer handle the whole could be got off on to the bench. The flat coiled strip return spring had broken off on its last outer turn with the inner end being secured in a slotted but captive post riveted into the back plate. Thanks to Ray McMullen, all was not lost as he had, some two years ago, passed on to me free of any cost, a complete set of Holbrook doors one of which helpfully contained a driver's door lock. This rather interestingly had had the return spring replaced with a bright and shiny new spring with the securing centre post drilled out of its retaining plate before being neatly welded back into place. I would not have been capable of making a new spring and tempering it up but someone had. These doors were off a Holbrook Firebird body [No.63?] which had earlier been scrapped.



Firebird door lock and broken spring.

Photo: Brian Neale

alone. On refitting the window with replaced bottom channel, which seemed secure enough, the glass could be juggled into position and wedged up into place, just leaving replacement of the main cross member carrying the winder mechanism.

This is where the real trouble began since with the scissor lever guides slotted into the well greased window channel, the cross member could not be made to pass through the available width between the front and rear edges of the door itself. It had not been all that easy to get out even when free of the glass. In fact the cross member could just be juggled in without being engaged into the glass channel but then it was impossible to latch the roller guides into the channel, they have to go in from the ends. Yet it had been fitted and seemed to be just as it had left the factory, although it is more likely that it had been out in more recent times to renew the outer fence rubber to the glass. This is a point to think about if ever doing this job access to the securing screws holding the outer chromium plated or polished aluminium cill trim strip and rubber, is only available with the glass out. On my earlier TF I replaced this rubber (RT stock).

Back to the TF window difficulties. It had to all go together; yet no amount of forcing could widen the gap enough to get the cross member into place, at least whilst hooked into the bottom of the glass. The answer was to remove it all again on to the bench and to trim off with a band saw the merest $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch strip off the rear edge of the cross member—see arrow on photograph; after such modification, it all fitted together without more ado. The top inner cill was then screwed into place, but note the two short lengths of buffer felt which had been found in the bottom of the door which needed to be stuck on to the glass side of the cill to provide a smooth surface for the glass to bear against. The rest of the reassembly was straight forward. The opportunity was taken to polish up the

As to the TF21 the photograph shows the inside of the passenger's door but without the top inner window cill in place. The lower flanged cross member is at its front end screwed and bolted through the door frame which involves removing the aluminium trim plate and the door check stop. A word of warning. Temporarily replace this stop when working on the door otherwise there is a danger in the door opening too far with resulting damage to the paintwork to the leading edge of the door and front wing. The rear edge (arrowed) of the cross member is simply bolted into captive nuts in the alloy frame.

My trouble was that the metal channel to the bottom of the window glass had been found lying in the bottom of the door having been pulled off in winding, perhaps due to a worn rear vertical guide channel to the glass or to general lack of lubrication to the guides, scissor action levers/quadrant and winder pinion, the teeth of which all appeared to be in good order.

Thanks to Baines I had in stock a suitable coil (ex-Firebird restoration) of fabric covered glass channel, the rear one was replaced after removal of the vertical brass guide channel. The longer front one looked fine so was left well

door edge trim plates when on the bench and thus clear of all fittings and screw heads. To protect the ply wood face of the leather door trim from moisture, the whole of the inner face of the door should be sheathed in polythene and secured around the edges with suitable tape, with handle spindles cut through. The rubber D buffers to the rear edge of the door were a problem to relocate, new ones having fairly recently been obtained from RT to replace the old hardened ones as fitted.

My recollection of my earlier car is that the captive threaded plates to take the screws passing through the D rubbers should be loosely located to allow for adjustment but this time all seemed to be solid, short of removal of the outer door skin there was no chance of loosening these up. Still it all seemed to go together again with the door a good firm and square fit.

BRIAN NEALE

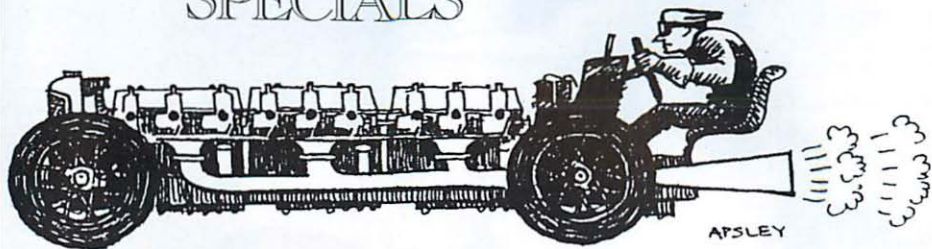


PERFECTION

THE Alvis three-years-guaranteed Chassis, a magnificent piece of Engineering . . . Alvis Bodywork, ultra modern and captivatingly beautiful . . . Alvis Quality, unequalled in its attention to detail . . . Alvis Performance, superlative, unsurpassable . . . This is but a brief summary of Alvis characteristics . . . traits that, combined, mean *perfection*.

To know the true meaning of perfect motoring, drive an Alvis. The "Famous Four" and the "Supreme Six" are each described in the Alvis Catalogue, sent free on request.

SPECIALS



I DID IT MY WAY —The Tale of Two Specials— The Flybird Special

It really started in 1963. I had been using my Firefly tourer hard for three years when I wanted it to go a bit harder, so I fitted the larger Firebird engine and a higher ratio diff. This produced my first mild Special.

This was still no ball of fire, but in those days when Ford Pops and the like were the norm, it was a king of the road. This car gave much pleasure, and reliable service for another forty years. I still have it.

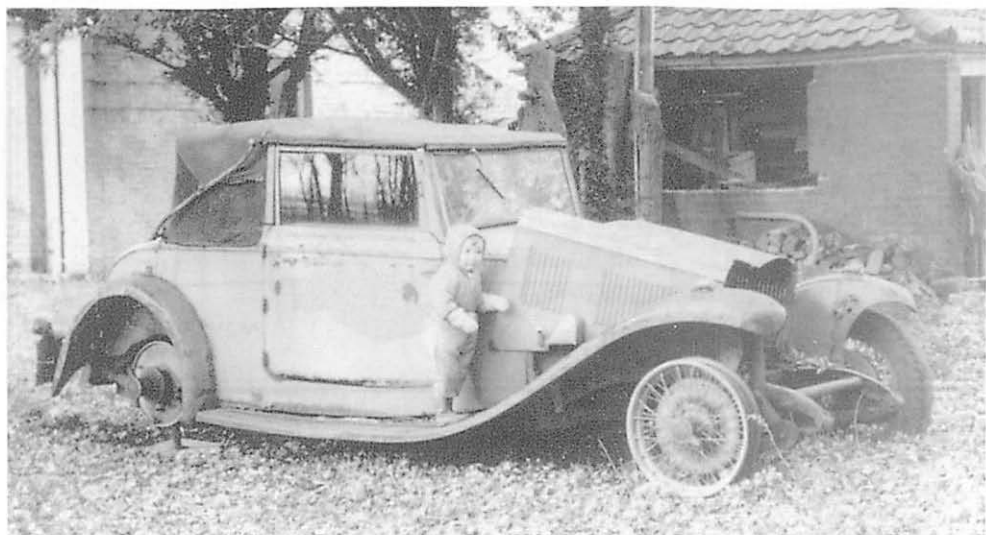
The next effort was a Speed Twenty purchased in the early 60s for £17 10 shillings; those were the days. This car was rebuilt, fitted with a Speed Twenty-Five engine, a 4.1 diff. and a lowered modified Firebird Tourer body. It made a very fine car, one of the nicest Speed Twenty tourers. It is such a shame that it idles its life away in the Haynes Museum in Dorset.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, well Old Rectory, there lay a very dead Firefly Drophead. This had been bought, also in the early 60s, as spares for the tourer for seven and a half quid. The body was in an unbelievable state, roofing felt nailed over the hood, cracks and holes all over the place with patches just tack welded over the top. It had actually been used in this state for many years; I had seen it parked at Thetford station every day. The owner had run it into ground since buying it thirty years before when it was only a year old. Incredibly, however, the chassis was as good as the body was bad. It was virtually perfect.

So a proper Special began to form in what passes for a brain, and in the sorting of the big heap of bits out in the shed.

The objective was a fun road car, rather than a blood and thunder racing car, so the engine was to be another Firebird with a bit of tuning, and there happened to be one lying about the place. In other respects, the car would simply shed as much weight as reasonably possible.

The chassis was shortened to nine foot, the centre cross member and most of that heavy steel rear floor removed. Just the rear corner sections with edges upturned, were left to maintain lateral rigidity. This is the only rigidity a Firefly chassis has anyway. As cutting and welding a chassis is a rather important operation, perhaps a few notes on how I did it might be useful. It is important that all dimensions are right, and that it is not going to part company. 10 inches were to be removed, so cut lines were scribed exactly 10 inches apart, on a straight and parallel section, at 45 degrees to the horizontal. More



The rather unpromising start of the project.

Photo: Jack Clover

lines were then scribed, on the top horizontal edge only, exactly 14 inches apart. Cuts were then made, using a hacksaw, on the 45 degree lines. Help! Two useless bits of cars, and two even more useless short bits of channel. Earlier I had made up two clamps from straight, heavy gauge, 2" by 2" square tube, each with scribe marks exactly 4 inches apart, on the top tube. The two halves of the chassis could now be brought together, and held in the clamps, with the scribe marks on clamps and chassis in line, and the two sections level, and parallel, all ready for welding. An arc welder was used, and a small section of extra steel was added to the edges of the joint, but extra side plates were not used, because on flexible chassis like the Alvis, this can lead to undue stress on each side of the plate. Phew! Chassis back in one piece!

The engine was moved back 5 inches, to attain a 50/50 weight distribution, and incidentally make it look better, yet give room for an electric fan. This involved grinding out the rivets on the large cross member supporting the rear of the engine and fitting it further back using close fitting high tensile bolts and lock nuts. This operation also, of course, moved the foot pedals back, necessary for the driver but it involved changing the length of brake cables, not too difficult. It did not seem a good idea to interfere with the front cross member so an additional one was made and bolted in behind it, to support the front of the engine.

Now the steering wheel needed to be moved back. Repositioning the steering box and its pedestal was simple, but a half inch distance piece was necessary to compensate for the slope of the chassis. There is a small advantage, in that both the holding studs now pass through top and bottom chassis rails thus giving a slightly more rigid mounting. Now, of course the steering drag link was too short. The tie rod from a 3 Litre, however, was exactly right. Handy!

The only change at the rear end was to refit the petrol tank between the chassis rails above the rear axle. This necessitated making a large dent in the bottom to clear the diff and fitting a quick release filler cap, from a 4.3, to the top, and of course, removing the original filler. The spare wheel could now be mounted, at an angle in the space vacated by the tank. Everything was now neatly within the chassis, giving a short, sporty, appearance. All the aluminium was polished, brake backplates, even the back axle, which was now very visible.

The car could steer and stop; now to make it go.

The Firebird engine is a robust unit but not very efficient. It only has 10% more power than a Firefly, yet has over 20% greater capacity.

The pistons are 4mm from the top of the bore at TDC, so a search was made for taller ones. Those for a Simca are 2mm higher, and equivalent to $\pm .040$ on diameter, but with larger gudgeon pins, the same size as a Speed Twenty-Five in fact. Speed Twenty-Five rods are identical to the Firebird in all other respects, and I had four in the big heap. Problem solved.

One of the new camshafts, with quicker, and higher lift was fitted, but with modifications to the oil feed. In standard form all the camshaft bearings are gravity fed, but for some reason on all engines, the centre bearing or bearings, unlike those at the front and the rear, suffer undue wear.

In an attempt to cure this, the gravity feed on that bearing was closed off. A new oil way was drilled in from the side. This was supplied with oil under pressure from a tee let into the pipe which feeds the overhead valve gear. If I ever complete 150,000 miles I'll let you know how it's worked.

The 12/70 or TA 14 head is similar to a Firebird, but with larger inlet valves and ports. Also 14mm plugs are used which are not masked, so I was able to thread them right through and use long reach plugs. Metal was removed from head and block to give what I reckoned to be about 7.5 to 1 compression ratio. It was not too difficult to fit the head to block, but a set of SC Speed Twenty push rods are needed. Another scramble through the heap produced these too.

The later exhaust manifold is reasonably good, but a 12/70 unit was chosen because it has a handy platform to support the inlet bits.

Both the 12/70 and TA 14 inlet manifolds appear to be worse than a Firebird, which is in fact quite good. Why did Alvis enlarge ports and valves, and then fit a more devious manifold with a smaller carburettor? However, the MGA was fitted with twin 1½" carburettors of pre-war type, on an aluminium manifold with balance pipe, another scramble in the big heap. I cut a 12/70 manifold off where rectangular changed to round, removed the head end flanges from the MG unit, stuck two pieces of 1½" timber up the holes to hold them together, then welded round. The discarded centre section of the 12/70 was then fitted to its place on the exhaust platform, and welded between the twin manifolds. This provided mechanical support, and some heat to the inlets.

This, together with a mechanical rebuild, gave a good power unit. Initially, the standard Firefly clutch and gearbox were used with a 4.5 to 1 differential, giving 20.5 mph. per 1,000 rpm in top. I did not fit a speedometer, it only being necessary to double the tachometer reading.

So, it now steers, stops, and goes. But it needed something to sit on and some protection from the elements, and to look pretty too.

I did not want the usual pointed tail job, and was unsure about panel beating, so decided on a fabric covered body which finished just ahead of the petrol tank, a sort of baby Bentley, but low line. The common construction methods of tube and pop rivets, or ash framing were also discarded. The body was to have a strong inner frame of welded square steel tubing, with timber attached to give the desired shape. Because this is not structural, lighter and easily formed softwood can be used.

A full sized drawing on the garage wall came next, this enabled things such as height, proportion, and space for essentials like engine and passengers to be gauged, but only in one dimension, of course. The body was to be barrel shaped, so at its lower edge, it need be no wider than the chassis, giving a neat, Vintage look.

First, two lengths of hardwood were bolted to the chassis side rails, then three steel hoops made and bolted thereto, one immediately behind the engine, one where the windscreen would come, one behind the two seats. These were joined four and aft, again in welded steel.

There was to be no driver's door, and only a small one for the passenger, so the frame could be high up, and rigid. The front and rear hoops then had plywood attached, contoured to the body shape. Softwood was now fixed to the steel frame and carved to the desired form. Very thin plywood covered the gaps in the frame. The whole was then covered with a thick, curtain material.

The final job was to stretch over and fit the green hooding, which proved very difficult. Upholstery vinyl, would have been easy, being stretchy, and I know some have used it, but it does not look right, and is not very durable in the weather. The whole body was covered with one piece of material, the only join being on top of the scuttle in line with the bonnet hinge. The difficulty was to avoid folds and creases, but with the help of my son, a hair dryer, a staple gun, and much pulling and stretching, the job was done. The ultimate proof of this occurred on the car's first outing. A friend was there with his professionally, and expensively restored Lea Francis, also with fabric body. Mine had the better finish. It should be said that this last job was done with the body off the car; I do not think that it would have been possible in any other way.

The original bonnet was cut down to suit the lower and narrower body, but it had to have openings to let the carburettors hang out. Likewise, the original radiator shell was used, shortened, which also removed the rusty lower edge of the false honeycomb. The Firefly shells are made of German silver, not brass, so this was de-chromium plated and polished: it added to the vintage look. The core was cut down from a Land Rover.

The windscreen had been found years before in a gravel pit surrounded by a few bits of rust, which must once have been a small car. New side supports were needed, however, so I carved them out of wood, then took them round to a local foundry to be copied in gunmetal.

Wiring came next. I never use a loom, preferring to make it up as I go along. This way the wiring can be neatly hidden, except for those bits actually joined to units. These can be of aluminium wound wire, or enclosed in stainless steel conduit. The remainder of the wire was of the multi-coloured plastic covered type, recovered from modern cars, free and good.

As this was to be a road car, it was properly trimmed and upholstered, but not in leather I'm afraid. All the stitching was done on a pre-war, hand wound, domestic Singer. This strong old machine was capable of sewing through several layers of vinyl and thin plywood, and made a professional looking job.

I had found a set of aluminium cycle wings at an autojumble, but there was another problem. The car had lost about eight cwt. so it stood up on its springs like a cat in a temper. I overcame this by piling weights in the car to simulate its occupants, then removing spring leaves until it stood at the correct height. At the rear, twelve leaves came down to six, at the front, seven came down to five.

Now I could make bracketry and mount the cycle wings, then mount the headlights on modified Fiat conrods.

Now, that great (we hope) moment that all we rebuilders look forward too—try it out.

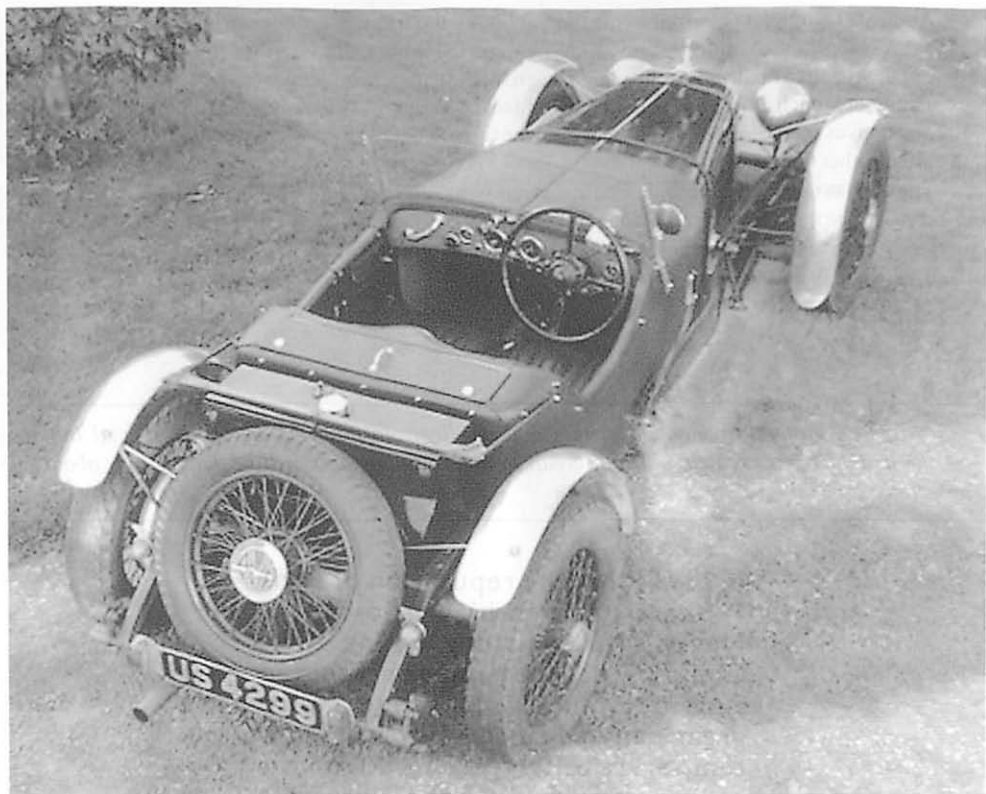
It was good, leaping acceleration, not much like a standard Firefly, and powerful anchors with so much less to pull up. However, as always when things have been altered, all was not perfect. The steering had a bit of a mind of its own. It would veer either to right or left for no apparent reason, not wildly, but sufficient to need correction. I guessed that the removal of so many spring leaves was allowing one or both axles to move out of alignment and so steer like a traction engine.

The front seemed the place to look first. The axle is fitted forward of the spring centre, so the front section is shorter. I added back one more leaf each side, but cut it off behind the axle. This stiffened the part of the spring which locates the axle, but left the suspension part as it was. Steering problem cured.

The car was used like this for some time and was great fun. It could leave the slower modern cars, like people carriers and four wheel drives, (at least it could ten years ago) and give others a surprise. Eighty mph came up quickly and without stress. I'm sure ninety is available, (4,500 rpm) but have not tried it. Moreover it does thirty odd miles to the gallon.

But, (there's always a but), that slow change on the crash box seemed to occupy the greater part of the acceleration curve. This, in spite of my having already converted the clutch stop to manual operation, which did improve things. So I decided to fit a 12/70 gearbox. In fact it does not fit, anywhere, but what has that got to do with anything? It can be made to fit.

The bell housing has a male location spigot, so does the engine. The bell housing spigot was milled



The Flybird Special in its present form.

Photo: Jack Clover

off with a router, but then only two bolt holes lined up, so these were screwed together, then new holes were drilled in the engine, or the gearbox as seemed most appropriate. A couple had to be missed out. As the bell housing is joined to the timing case with more $3/8$ " bolts than the timing case has $5/16$ " bolts holding it to the crankcase, its nonsense anyway. It is necessary to use the 12/70 flywheel and clutch, but this is interchangeable. This gave a further advantage, in that it is easy to remove metal from this unit to lighten it; 24 pounds were taken off the outer diameter where it has most effect. This has made the engine much more responsive, with no effect on smoothness, or tickover. Why did Alvis put that great lump on to start with?

The biggest problem, however, was yet to come, the Firefly bell housing has mounting feet, the 12/70 does not. The only answer was to fabricate feet from welded steel, and bolt them to the bell housing. This gave another opportunity; fit modern type engine mountings. One was fitted to the front as well, I now probably have the world's smoothest Flybird. A shorter propshaft completed the job. The gear lever is further back, but is a good thing.

The difference was unbelievable. Not only had I the benefit of synchromesh, but the ratios were so much better, especially with the 4.5 back axle, I even forgot to change out of third once or twice, it not being much different from the standard car's top.

At the same time, it occurred to me that, although the trumpet air intakes looked the ticket, they must be sucking in dust and grit thrown up by the front wheel, not good for the engine. I therefore replaced them with a made up air cleaner, using a modern paper element.

Things are much as this today, but I have added a hood, and an electronic bicycle speedometer. Ten quid, and it gives speed, total and trip miles, and the time. A couple more quid would give average speed, and various other things.

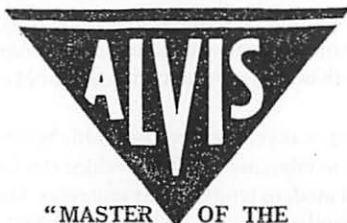
The car has now been in use for about sixteen years, and is great fun; it has even pulled a caravan big enough to be its own garage. But of course, it is not a very practical car for long holidays, very little storage space, even with the trunk which can be added to the back. Maybe it needs a "Special" stable mate! A Speed Twenty-One perhaps?.....

JACK CLOVER

I am extremely grateful to Jack for writing this excellent piece on the art of the Special Builder. The car that Jack has created is a real credit to him. Coming soon will be Jack's story about his Three Litre Special—J.N.B.C.

NEVER has the reputation of Alvis cars stood so high as to-day . . . Never in the history of the Alvis Company has the name represented such outstanding car value and so great an advance beyond contemporary effort. The Alvis car of to-day fulfils the greatest ambition of its manufacturers—to produce a car superlative in every detail. The All-British Alvis is worthy of your earnest study before you buy your 1930 car.

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— The Registrar's Column —

“THE CASE OF THE MISSING CREDITS”

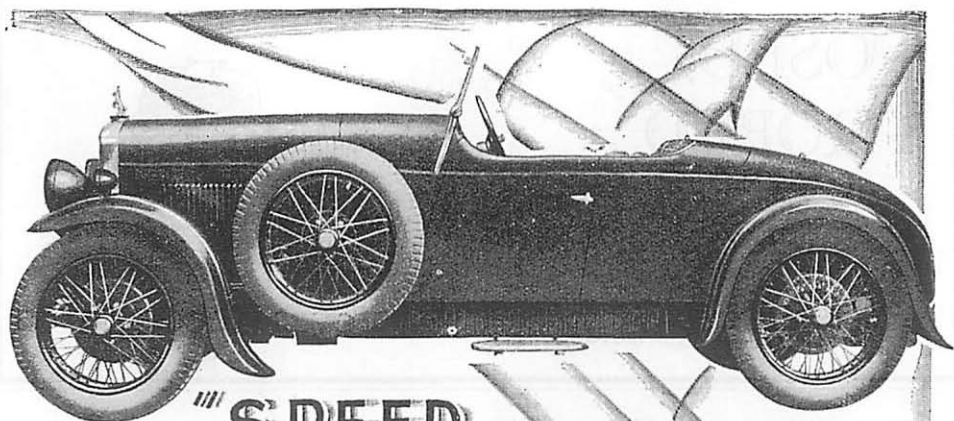
The fact that our member, Robert Hickman C.B.E., recently sent the Editor a period photograph of a 12/60 Beetleback by way of enquiry, fortuitously precipitated the progression of a long-standing mystery.

The photograph concerned has appeared before—in Bulletin 321 of March 1982, with the inconclusive caption that the car had been lent to a film company. There the matter has rested for almost a quarter-century, until the appearance of Robert's version of the photograph, the reverse of which bears the following inscription.

*“Come into my Alvis said the spider to the fly.”
So in effect says the secretary, played by
Mr. Antony Ireland, to his master's wife, played
by charming Miss Nora Swinburne in the film version
of Michael Arlen's play “THESE CHARMING PEOPLE,”
splendidly produced by Paramount British Productions.
The film has just been released and the car, which,
on this occasion rather conveniently runs out of
petrol, is the new ALVIS 12/60 two-seater Sports model.*

Now this is incredibly useful. We now have the name of the movie, and a trek through the ever-useful *Halliwel's Film Guide*, confirms its release as 1931, and via the dramatis personae we can surmise that the actor in the background is Godfrey Tearle. The plot need not concern us here except to say that it is a drama with complicated co-incidences, based on a short story by Michael Arlen—an aspect which I shall return to later.

So returning to the car, one can now say that since it first appeared in these columns it has been established that the mark GO 247 is in fact one of a confirmed block of London County Council allocations to Follett's, by which it is possible to date the machine fairly accurately. See Table A, accompanying



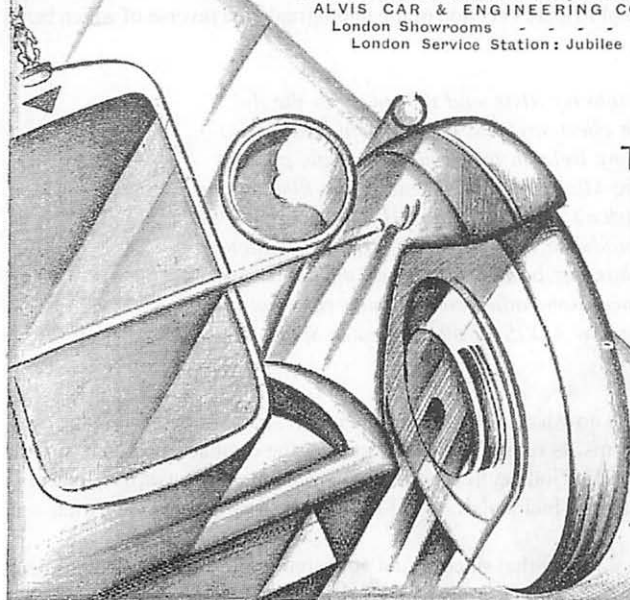
“SPEED MERCHANT”

Worthy of the title, this new 12/60 h.p. ALVIS with streamline Two-Seater Sports body claims the best performance of any sports car regardless of price. It is a notable successor to former models upon which the name and fame of ALVIS cars have been built. A specially balanced twin-carburettor system gives more power, combined with wonderful acceleration and smoothness. A speed of 80 m.p.h. is easily attained, and may be considerably exceeded in racing trim. If you think that motoring has lost its thrill—TRY THIS NEW ALVIS. Petrol consumption averages 30 m.p.g.—remarkable considering the performance! The rear road springs are specially designed to make fast driving safe and comfortable. The hood is entirely concealed in the coachwork. Fully illustrated particulars from ALVIS CAR & ENGINEERING CO., LTD., COVENTRY.
London Showrooms - - - - 18, Berkeley Street, W.1.
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12'60
TWO-SEATER SPORTS

ALVIS

£410

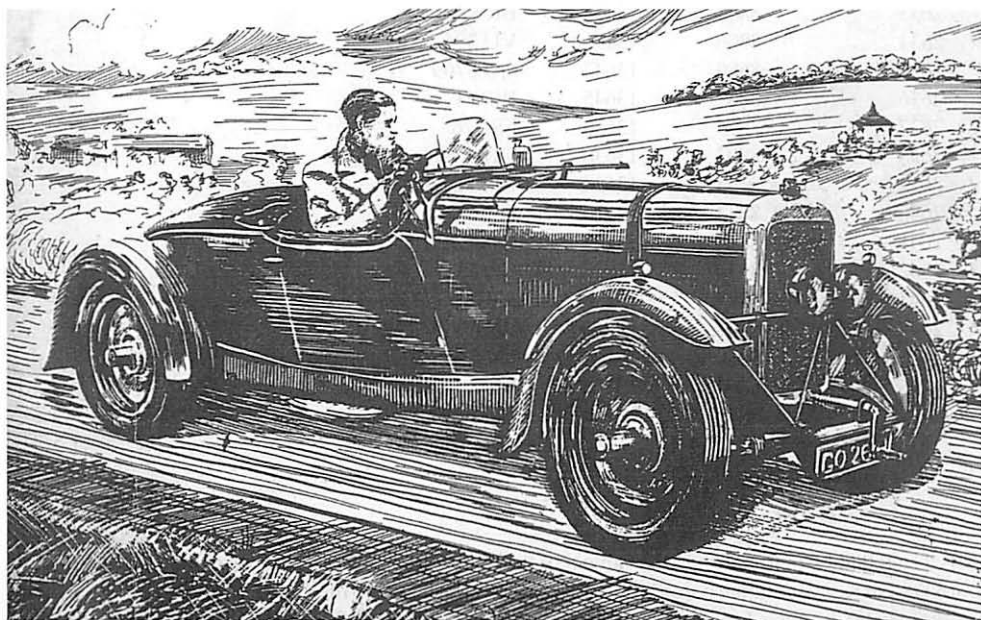


this feature. The movie photograph caption describing the car as the ‘new’ Alvis 12/60 is especially important here, as we need look no further than *The Autocar* of March 27th 1931, wherein occurs a description marking the model’s introduction—this date happily tallying with the block allocation referred to.

TABLE A – First block of London county council “GO” allocations to follett.

	<u>Model</u>	<u>Chassis</u>	<u>Car</u>	<u>Description</u>
GO 242	TC 19.82	8667	13506	10/2/31
GO 243	—	—	—	—
GO 244	—	—	—	—
GO 245	12/60			24/3/31
GO 246	12/50			13/2/31
GO 247	12/60	– SEE MAIN TEXT		
GO 248	TC 16.95	8704	13562	27/3/31

(Does any member have a photo of GO 243 or GO 244 in their collection?)



A sketch by Denis Phillips of Rivers Fletcher’s 12/60 GO 2619. This illustration appeared on the cover of Bulletin 243, February 1974.

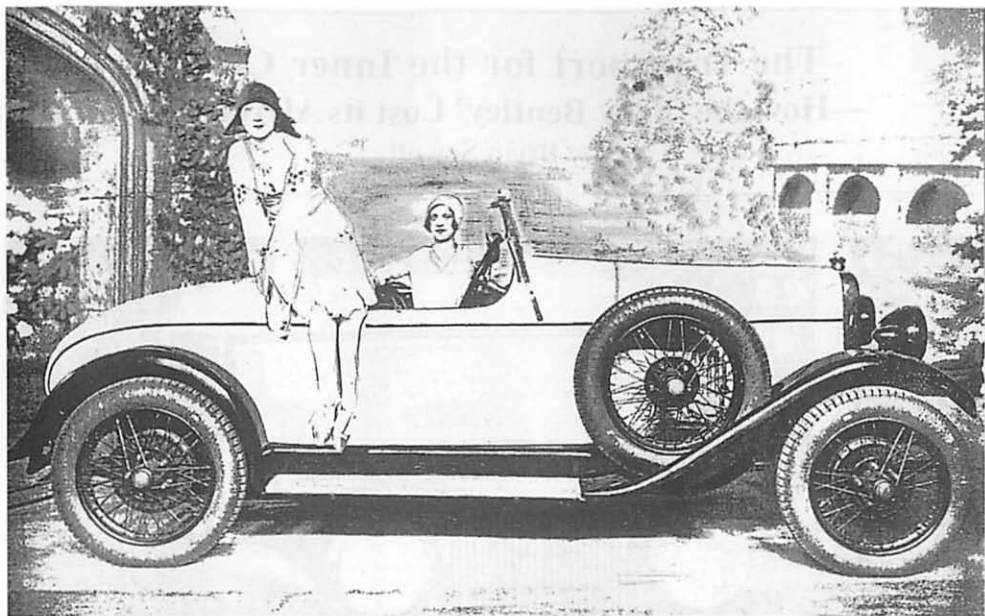
The next logical step therefore would seem to be to isolate the first such run of this type of Carbodies coachwork, by body number, and thereby ascertain their apportionments to which chassis, and I have John Burnell to thank for filling in the gaps in some of my records here. The results of this exercise can be observed in Table B, which will be seen to contain a number of well-known and much photographed examples of the genre. From this exercise only two Follett-delivered beetlebacks emerge, 8796, and 8833, and I conclude that our 'movie' car must be one of these, and most probably the earlier of the pair. The other remarkable conclusion to be drawn from isolating the first beetleback batch in this way, is that 13 of the 23 are listed as extant in the Alvis Register Membership List. A survival rate of over 56 % in seventy-five years. Did I hear someone say 'longevity'?

TABLE B – First batch of Carbodies 12/60 Beetleback bodies.

<u>Carbodies No.</u>	<u>Chassis</u>	<u>Car</u>	<u>Registration</u>
♣ 2625	8768	13600	SC 9865
♣ 2626	8766	13628	GO 2619
♣ 2627	8769	13625	GP 3301
♣ 2628	8767	13640	GO 4883
♣ 2629	8765	13646	WM 6315
2630	8796	13669	Follett (L)
♣ 2631	8754	13571	PL 7192
2632	8850	13682	DG 2476
2633	8805	13633	BR 8806
♣ 2634	8806	13651	VU 3957
2635	8680	13642	GO 5769
2636	8807	13645	WP 41
♣ 2637	8816	13650	FS 376
♣ 2638	8804	13638	GG 4051
♣ 2639	8795	13624	LJ 3762
2640	8833	13670	Follett (L)
♣ 2641	8817	13707	KJ 658
♣ 2642	8834	13697	GO 5767
2643	8797	13630	RT 7753
2644	8851	13726	EN 4903
♣ 2645	8860	13694	VC 8440
2646	8864	13716	VC 8445
2647	8861	13709	Henly (B _m)

♣ – Surviving car (per current Alvis Register list)

I said that I would return to the subject of the writer Michael Arlen (1895–1956). He was actually born Dikran Kouyoumdjian before adopting Britain for most of his life's work. A contemporary writer is reported to have referred to him almost disparagingly as, "the only Armenian who never tried to sell me a carpet," but as we know from the novels of the equally late Ernest Bramah, such as *Kai Lung Unrolls his Mat*, the action of unrolling is seen (at least in the East), as heralding story-telling, so in this case it could almost be seen as a compliment. Appropriately, as I was preparing this piece, I happened to be thumbing through January's *Motor Sport*, and spotted William Boddy's reference to the autobiography of former Attorney-General, Sir Patrick Hastings. Apparently Hastings used to run all types of exotica,



An as yet unidentified Beetleback of 1929 on the stage of the Adelphi Theatre, with Binnie Hale.

including during the twenties, a Hispano-Suiza which he used to park outside Michael Arlen's flat in Shepherd's Market. It is claimed that the displeasure which this caused Arlen led him to identify this marque with the well known novel *The Green Hat*, of 1924. I was also intrigued to find, when reading up on Arlen, of another loose Alvis connection. Of the 1920s and 1930s London set, the photograph and artist Cecil Beaton was certainly one of the most prominent. Beaton not only had an Alvis—a Speed Twenty SB Type, chassis number 11231—but is also known to have made a pencil portrait of Arlen which as subsequently acquired by the National Portrait Gallery.

I now return to the thespian theme, of which the use of an Alvis sports in *These Charming People*, can be seen as the centre of trip-tych. The late Peter Hull was once kind enough to furnish me with details of *Mr. Cinders*, a play starring Binnie Hale which ran at the Adelphi during 1929, and placed an SD Beetleback on stage. Later, as member Tony Simpson reminds me, another 12/60 Beetleback chassis 9071/VC 9367 was not only *The Motor* road test car of November 1931, but starred in the 1933 movie *The King's Cup*.

Whilst these days it is quite common to see "vehicle supplied" in the list of credits, not so then, so perhaps, seventy years on, this feature may restore a little of balance.

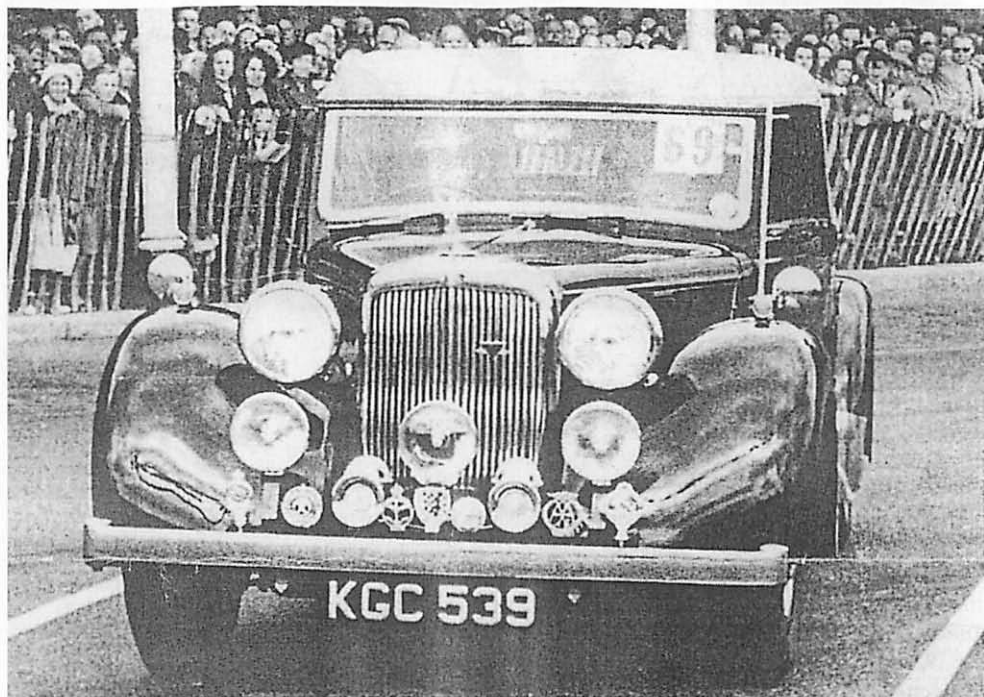


Michael Arlen

DAVE CULSHAW

The Transport for the Inner Circle —How the ‘baby Bentley’ Lost its Alivacity—

by Brian Sewell



Monument of respectability—The Alvis TA14 (apologies for the poor reproduction of the photograph)

This article was first published in ‘The Independent’ Tuesday 22 February 2005 and is reproduced with due acknowledgements. Albert Ainsworth and Dave Culshaw sent me copies of the article and Dave provides a postscript—J.N.B.C.

I have just been asked by some art aficionados in Swindon to spend a day there among the inducements being a visit to what must be the nation’s least-known municipal collection of 20th-century British art, and the thrill of being driven thither from the railway station in an Alvis TA 14.

Thrill? A thrill or two may certainly be had in an Alvis 4.3, once Britain’s fastest production car, in a Speed Twenty, even in a Silver Eagle, Crested Eagle or Firefly 12, but hardly in a TA 14, for if ever a car was designed *not* to thrill it was this demure monument of taste and respectability (and I use the word “monument” deliberately, for this was a car that proceeded only at a stately pace, and was most imposing at a standstill).

It was the kind of car that, paradoxically, contributed to the myth that Britain made the best cars in the world, and, at the same time, brought about our industry's downfall. The engine, of four cylinders and 1,892cc, essentially dated back to the firm's earliest years (Alvis was founded in 1920), the 12/50 of 1922—then with a capacity of 1,645cc. With twin carburettors, it became the 12/60 in 1931, then the Firefly and Firebird, and in 1937, the 12/70, by then bored out to 1,842cc and the subject of some tinkering from George Lanchester; as was the sensational 4.3.

In this form, bored out by one more millimeter, it became the post-war engine, producing 66 bhp at 4,000rpm, not bad for a design that was, by then, twenty-four years old and unfashionable; European marques had, for a decade, moved to engines with equal dimensions of bore and stroke, and Alvis was way behind with a cylinder bore of only 74mm to a long stroke of 110mm. It was, however, well made and very refined for a big four—but then, Alvis had always thought of its cars as baby Bentleys, and with the same level of craftsmanship, they had, from the start, been absurdly expensive, at £695 for a four-seater 12/50 saloon in 1924, against £1,150 for a four-cylinder Three-Litre Bentley chassis.

In performance, the stripped Bentley on the shortest chassis could be persuaded to reach 100mph, but the Alvis, half its size and much tinkered with, circled Brooklands for 200 miles at an average speed of 93.29mph; the more realistic figure for the little car was the 70mph that the maker guaranteed, and in 1924, even that speed was quite remarkable.

Throughout the Twenties, the four-cylinder Alvis was the mainstay of this undercapitalised firm; in its class it beat Bugatti, AC and Aston Martin. Vintage-car enthusiasts now look upon it as a flawless classic. With steady improvement to the engine and chassis, it gained acknowledgement as “the greatest engineering achievement in its class.” and remained at the forefront of English sports cars, yet at the same time broadened its appeal with family saloons.

One of the most engaging variants of the 12/50 was a close-coupled drop-head coupé seating three abreast, advertised as “compact and cosy,” but then, Alvis was always naff in its self-esteem: “Cars for even the Connoisseur,” it claimed, and for “the Inner Circle,” for the Firebird, the 1935 predecessor of the TA 14, it coined the ghastly “Alvivacity.”

To give the firm its due, however, we must remember that it introduced front-wheel drive to racing cars in 1926, and to a roadster with all-independent suspension in 1928; that independent front suspension and full synchromesh were standard on all its cars in 1933 (far ahead of Rolls-Royce); and that when it turned to making big sixes, in the Speed Twenty and 4.3 it made some of the best, most beautiful cars of the Thirties. Alas, when it returned to car manufacture after the Second World War, it put all its eggs in the single basket of the TA 14.

This was the type of car that, in the firm's quarter-century or so, had been its forte—a small car with the presence of a large and a reputation for advanced engineering, quality, reliability. The TA 14 was the 12/70 of 1937 revised, the body now built by Mulliner, its cabin widened, lines refined, running-boards removed, the perfect classic English coachbuilt body that was the pre-war Derby Bentley built small, elegant and proportionate. But it was heavy; all “Alvivacity” had gone, and here was a car ultimately no faster than its grandmother; and that was of scant use with Jaguar snapping at its heels.

By 1948, Alvis realised that it must move on, and a three-litre straight six, short-stroke engine was dropped into what looked like stretched TA 14 bodies. It was too late for such “gentlemen's carriages,” even Graber's swan-song design for the two-door saloon and drop-head could not save the marque from oblivion. Rover swallowed it in 1965 and the last Alvis car left the line in September 1967.

Post-war production amounted to 7,129, of which 3,315 were variants of the TA 14, built from 1946–1950, the marque's most successful model, I am sad to say. One of them survives in Swindon as a prime attraction.

I have included this article as a curiosity rather than a balanced piece of Alvis history. I doubt whether any of our TA14 enthusiasts will endorse many of Brian Sewell's sentiments—J.N.B.C.

THE REGISTRAR COMMENTS

Despite bearing an Alvis Owner Club badge, this TA 14 Tickford, KGC 539 has never formally been identified. There is a similar photograph to this at NMM, which would seem to put the location on Brighton's Madeira Drive.

Member Tom Poole (3595 BE) is known to have owned it, but he never declared the chassis number. It has other 'KGC' Tickford contemporaries. 531 is 31973, 532 is 21943, 533 is 21971, and 540 is 21879.

It is just possible that KGC 539 may be 21960, the Tickford privately imported into Japan and last heard of with Y. Shimakazi (5553). Can anyone enlighten us?

DAVE CULSHAW

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SPEED TWENTY GY7177



The Speed Twenty in its present form.

Photo: John Whiting

I was delighted to read Greg Wrapson's article "Leaves from a Family Album" in the January/February Bulletin No. 497, as I acquired Speed Twenty GY7177 three years ago. The car is now fitted with an SD engine mated to the original SA gearbox. It has the original body and upholstery; the latter being in a very tatty state indeed.

Long gone are the elegant Vanden Plas swept wings and running boards only to be replaced with solid, ungainly fittings that at best would serve as effective side-impact bars. The previous owner advised me that the rear mudguards were made out of locomotive steam domes.

The colour of the car is now green with garish red wheels.

As Greg Wrapson reported the car was re-registered BDD834 in 1936 and it was saddled with this number for the next sixty-eight years. However I have now recovered the original number GY7177.

I first saw the car several months before I actually purchased it. At that time I noticed that the fuel lines and twin SU pumps were fitted inside the car in the front passenger foot-well. By the time I purchased it the fuel lines had been relocated under the bonnet and were served by a single larger SU pump.

Another curious feature is the instrument panel which is set about ten inches back from the normal position, making it very difficult to read whilst driving. There is no wooden surround. I have seen one other car with the instrument panel in this position.

The rear bodywork has no exterior boot-lid and has been cut short just above the filler cap and tube, possibly following rear-end damage, and the spare wheel has been re-set upright under a luggage carrier.

I was aware of the early ownership of Percy Joseland followed by the Earl of Shrewsbury as Dave Culshaw had kindly provided me with copies of the Alvis guarantee cards. I was, however, enthralled to see a photograph of the car when new with Percy Joseland in the driving seat. I now hope to restore the car to its original appearance.

Apart from this early history I know very little about the car so, if any members can contribute any information to add to my scant knowledge I would be very glad to hear from them.

JOHN WHITING

It is splendid that this car still exists and I hope that members may be able to assist John with information concerning it. I look forward to an account of its restoration in due course—J.N.B.C.

TEN YEARS OF ALVIS OWNERSHIP

The cryptic comment in Jack Clover's article on his Firefly and the problems with the head gasket has prompted me to write to you to relate the experiences we had in 2005.

Our TC21/100 was commissioned and put on the road in 1995 and it was the first full restoration that Earley Engineering had undertaken when Nick Simpson set his own business up. The car has given us excellent service, travelling all over the Continent, America and New Zealand clocking up 50,000 miles.

Last Summer we joined the Swiss Tour and on the first day had an unfortunate experience when in a Summer storm, a French motorway service lorry dumped the top of its load of gravel on top of us giving the whole car a serious chipped problem. That turned out to be the least of our worries as during the last weekend of the tour when we arrived for our fabulous weekend at Gstaad my car was seriously boiling and a faulty head gasket was diagnosed. Four of us set to on the Saturday to change the head gasket. After a hard morning's work, a beer and sandwich lunch was served by the hotel on pristine white tablecloth in the garage. We had the car finished by 4 o'clock. There was some concern that the casting between cylinders one and two did not look right and this proved to be the case as the poor old car only managed 100 miles before stopping completely with a split between the cylinders.

Footman James did a superb job of getting the car and us back to the UK. The car was returned to Nick Simpson for remedial work. Again Footman James came up trumps and footed the bill for the re-spray and I sat down with Nick Simpson to discuss what to do with the engine.

For those of you who read *Classic and Sports Car* and have read the article on Earley Engineering in the March 2006 issue you will have a clue as to my decision. I opted for a TE engine, which has been re-built to original spec to go into the TC21/100. Whether it is right or wrong time will tell and I will write to you to let you know at the end of the Summer.

DAVID LITTLE

A TA14 SHOOTING BRAKE



TA14 JGJ832 with shooting brake bodywork by Castle Bodies of Kenilworth.

Photo: Jim Hook

In about 1952–53 my brother-in-law bought an Alvis shooting brake for the purpose of carrying goods for his business and also to provide a family car. Estate cars as they are now called, weren't very popular in the 1950s but this was an extremely attractive vehicle.

Being an engineer myself I drove it quite a lot and enjoyed maintaining it and considered the Alvis chassis a good rigid design. The engine was quite good if perhaps a little underpowered at 14 H.P. (RAC Rating). JGJ 832 never gave any problems and in all was a credit to the old Alvis company. I especially liked the oil float oil level indicator.

As you can see from the photograph it was an attractive car but it ended there. The body was built by persons unknown and was an insult to the chassis it adorned. All aluminium, painted silver with light oak wood beading, it was poorly assembled. The rear hatch was in two parts, the window opening up and the tailgate down. Rear seats were of standard bench type but very poorly constructed and fitted badly. There was no binding or panelling on the seats and they did not match the front seats provided by Alvis.

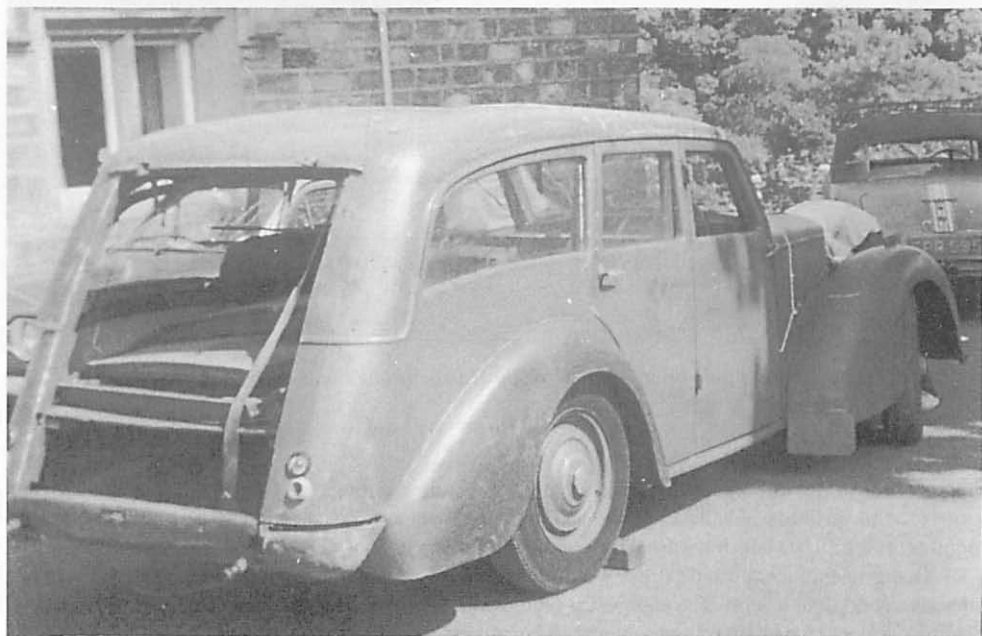
After about a year or so the corners of the scuttle split and a local bodyshop hammered two patches in mild steel, subsequently chromium plated and riveted on. They covered the splits but were of no structural use.

It is a shame that such a fine chassis and engine should be downgraded in this manner but the body did look good.

It was subsequently part-exchanged for an Armstrong Siddeley saloon.

JIM HOOK

I was introduced to Jim Hook by my friend Bev Hicks. When I wrote to Jim he kindly put together some notes about the TA14 which appear above. I passed the article and photograph to Dave Culshaw who responded as follows—J.N.B.C.



TA14 GDU784 with similar bodywork once owned by Dave Culshaw.

Photo: Dave Culshaw

THE REGISTRAR COMMENTS

An interesting one this, in that several examples of this particular shape of “Woody,” have been identified over the years. Some are listed on Works Guarantee Cards as ‘Castle Bodies of Kenilworth,’ and ‘Caravans of Kenilworth.’ Presumably either the same, or related companies.

The 20849/JGJ 832 of your photograph has the timber framing exposed, and for comparison I supply a photograph of 20726/GDU 784 with obviously identical framing, but with the panelling clad externally instead of hung from within. I had the latter car very briefly and whilst the aluminium panelling was nicely formed in a professional manner, the timber construction was truly appalling or as Sir Henry Newbold once wrote of 'The Old Superb,' "Her sticks were only fit for stirring grog." Believed still in existence but as a special.

DAVE CULSHAW

A RACING GREY LADY

Various notes and photographs have appeared in *The Bulletin* over the last few months concerning Ivan Dutton's racing Grey Lady. Evidently this is a remarkable motor car and now through the generosity of David Moore who sent me a copy of the magazine *Octane*, which contains an article by Paul Chudecki on this car, I am able to reveal some of the details.

Ivan Dutton bought the car from a widow. She and her husband had owned it since 1964. Ivan decided to modify the car for racing so the body was lowered by 1" and bolted directly to the chassis. A roll cage was fitted internally, which had the added advantage that it stiffened up the car immensely. The engine was also rigidly mounted, and an additional cruciform brace added to the chassis.

The front suspension was modified to allow for adjustments to be made and to provide negative camber. The whole suspension at the front was also lowered.

The rear axle was fitted with a Panhard rod and dual shock absorbers.

Power steering from an Isuzu pick-up truck was fitted but with a replacement light alloy casing. A pedal box was fitted internally. Surprisingly the original rear drum brakes are used but at the front, discs are from a TD21 with four-pot calipers.

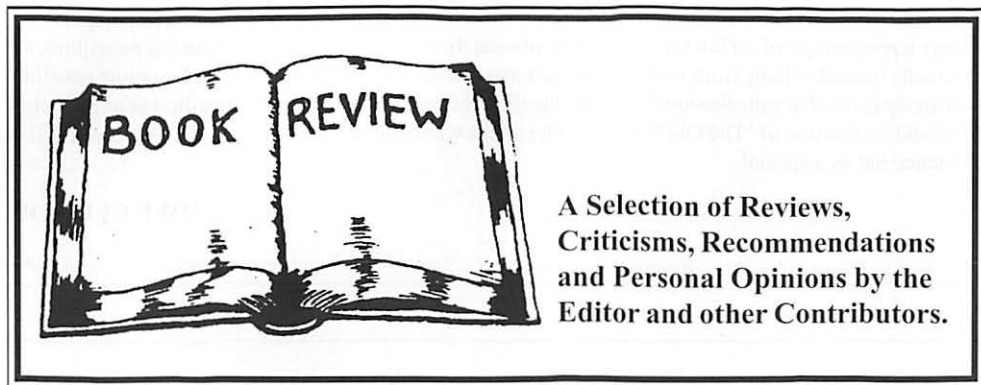
The engine has been considerably modified. A new crankshaft was designed and manufactured. The block has been overbored by 1mm so the capacity is now 3065cc. Off the shelf Ford pistons are used. Mixture is provided by triple 2in. SU carburettors on a shortened TF manifold. The rocker box has been recast in aluminium. Apparently the engine produces an incredible 185bhp.

A dry sump lubrication system has been fitted and a much modified camshaft and a racing clutch. The engine revs to 6500rpm. Gearchanges are made at 6000rpm. The back axle has a 4.09 ratio limited slip differential. The wire wheels have 7in. rims and are the original 15in. diameter. They have aluminium rims and are one-offs built by Torino. Top speed seems to be about 120mph.

Although considerably modified the car is still completely recognizable as a TC21 and the work has all been carried out to a very high standard.

There may not be many members of this club who wish to modify their cars in this manner but there may well be lessons to be learned here. A 185bhp, 6500rpm Grey Lady would really be quite something!

J.N.B.C.

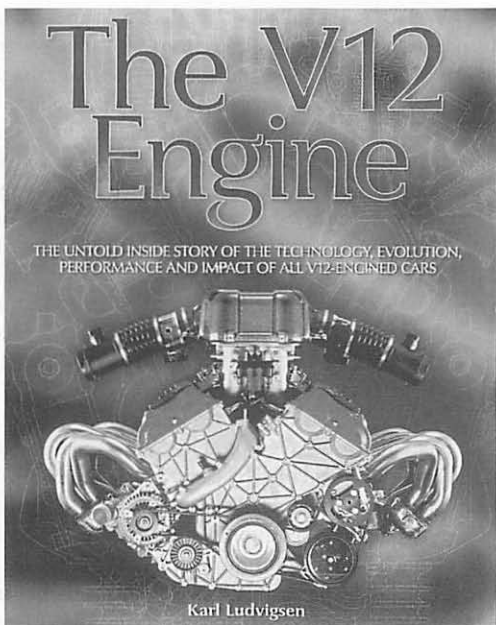


The V12 Engine—The Untold Inside Story of the Technology, Evolution, Performance and Impact of All V12-Engined Cars by Karl Ludvigsen. 424pp. Price £45.00. Published by Haynes Publishing.

This latest book by Karl Ludvigsen is a wonderful tome for the enthusiast who takes a deep interest in engines and their history. The author's enormous knowledge of automotive history allows him to effortlessly span a period of a hundred years of V12 engines and to write interestingly about every epoch. Starting with the first V12 produced by the Putney Motor Works in London in 1904 and then Louis Coatalen's designs for Sunbeam which were evolved at Brooklands the reader is soon transported to America and we are introduced to various V12 designs, principally Packard. The story moves back to Europe with descriptions of the post-war Sunbeam and Delage racing cars with V12 engines. Karl Ludvigsen takes a liberal interpretation of V12 and includes the twin six Fiat racing car of 1927 and also includes within his story the various broad arrow engines that have appeared over the years such as the Napier Lion. Such rarities as the 1927 Itala FWD racing car also merit detailed descriptions. Indeed this book is probably the only one where you will find all this information in one place.

A splendid chapter on aero engined land speed record cars allows the author to describe various V12 engines used in them from the Sunbeam Matabele, the Napier Lion, the Liberty and the Rolls-Royce 'R' and the disastrous Sunbeam Silver Bullet.

Most American V12s in the twenties and thirties were rather dull side valve engines although smooth and quiet. In Britain Daimler produced the sleeve valve V12 to power limousines whilst Rolls-Royce produced the aero engine inspired Phantom Three engine and WO Bentley designed the superb single cam Lagonda V12. In the thirties, in Germany, Horch and Maybach produced impressive V12 cars



and of course the V12 featured prominently in Mercedes Benz and Auto Union racing cars pulverising all opposition.

The latter part of the book is largely concerned with V12 engines of racing cars and post-war sports cars especially, of course, Ferrari. All this makes fascinating reading although I note that as more recent history is reached there are fewer details available of the engines reviewed. The main feature of this book is its splendid production and design. Every page is beautifully printed and laid out with wonderful photographs and detail drawings. Captions are extensive and the whole book is as well assembled and designed as the engines that it discusses.

Without a doubt this is an important book and deserves to be on the shelves of any serious minded student of engineering. Although expensive it is extremely good value for money and it is a masterpiece. Highly recommended.

J.N.B.C.

Walter Wilson: Portrait of an Inventor by A Gordon Wilson. 173pp. Price Unknown. Published by Duckworth.

This book was published in 1986 and has long been out of print, but copies are occasionally offered for sale by specialist book dealers such as Kenneth Ball and John Knowles.

Walter Wilson, although apparently a difficult person to work with, had a fascinating career, the main connection with Alvis being that he was the inventor of the Wilson pre-selective gearbox, versions of which were designed by his son, Brian Wilson, manufactured by ENV, and used in the Alvis Firefly and Crested Eagle. After his death, his company, Self-Changing Gears Ltd, was placed under the control of Alvis Ltd within the British Leyland conglomerate. But early in his career he had narrowly missed being involved in the first powered flight and during the First World War was recognised as the inventor of the tank.

Wilson was born in Ireland in 1874 and joined the Navy as a Cadet at the age of 17. He left the Navy after only three years, however, to attend King's College, Cambridge, where he obtained a first class degree in mechanical sciences, and where he met his future wife, Ethel. He took a keen interest in the development of the internal combustion engine and acted as mechanic for Charles Rolls on occasions in 1896 and 1897. Soon after, he met Percy Pilcher, who was experimenting with gliders. Together they then set up the firm of Wilson-Pilcher Ltd and started making cars in London. At the same time Wilson assisted Pilcher by developing an engine for use in the latter's continuing flying experiments. Pilcher was building an aeroplane for powered flight in 1899 and he invited people to inspect it while at the same time demonstrating



his glider, with a view to raising more capital. Tragically when his glider reached 30 feet a tail-guy parted and Pilcher plunged to his death. Had it not been for this gliding accident, Pilcher and Wilson might well have been the first to achieve mechanically powered flight instead of the Wright brothers whose first flight was four years later.

Deeply upset by Pilcher's death, Wilson now focused on the car business and developed the Wilson-Pilcher car. A few hundred are thought to have been built up to 1904, when he sold his business to Armstrong-Whitworth, but only one survives. He patented an epicyclic gear as early as January 1900.

Having sold the business and paid off all his debts he married the patient Ethel and set off on an extravagant honeymoon in Europe, during which they watched the 1904 Gordon Bennett Motor Race. Wilson then worked for Armstrong-Whitworth, designing their first car, which replaced the Wilson-Pilcher in 1906, and, significantly, an Artillery Tractor. But he was not happy in such a large conglomerate and moved to J & E Hall Ltd in Kent in 1908 to design a new lorry for them, the Hallford.

He worked there, raising his young family, until the First World War started, when he rejoined the Navy. Strangely it was the Navy, with the active support of the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, that carried out the early development of what came to be known as the tank. Wilson found himself as part of a small group of officers making up the Armoured Car Division of the Royal Naval Air Service. The book covers the development of the tank in considerable detail. Wilson's innovative engineering skills came into good use, especially his experience of epicyclic gears, which he used to solve the problems of providing transmission to the tracks through differentials that could be controlled to provide steering. A Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors set up after the War concluded that Walter Wilson and Sir William Tritton had made the greatest contribution to the development of the tank and awarded them jointly £15,000.

In 1920 Wilson set to work designing an epicyclic gearbox for cars, based on his experience gained in tank design. He succeeded in interesting Vauxhall in the concept, and built some 20 gearboxes after testing a prototype. These would have been used in a new car that Vauxhall were about to launch, but General Motors put a stop to all work on the gearbox when they took over Vauxhall. J.D. Siddeley of Armstrong-Siddeley then made a direct approach to Wilson that resulted in them setting up a company, Improved Gears Ltd (which later changed its name to Self-Changing Gears Ltd) owned 50% by J.D. Siddeley and 50% by Wilson. Siddeley contributed £5,000 as capital, while Wilson made over his patents as his contribution.

A new gearbox was put into production in 1929 and used first by Armstrong-Siddeley and then, in 1931, by Daimler, whose technical director at that time was Laurence Pomeroy. Daimler was granted a licence to make the Wilson gearboxes, and used them in conjunction with a fluid flywheel. Daimler, who owned the patents neither for the fluid flywheel nor the Wilson gearbox, were then allowed to patent the use of the gearbox and fluid flywheel in combination. Wilson and Siddeley clearly felt that this was unfair, and it severely damaged the potential of their business, but no one ever challenged the Daimler patents. (This is corroborated by a minute of the Alvis Board on 8 November 1933 when T.G. John stated that in his opinion "the need for using a fluid flywheel in our cars was not so pressing as to warrant risking heavy litigation, which would be likely to ensue in such event.") The setback apparently caused a row and a falling out between Wilson and Siddeley that never healed. The Wilson patents would expire in 1935 and synchromesh gearboxes were already beginning to appear on the market, so Wilson started to turn his attention to racing cars, where the smoothness of a fluid flywheel was not necessary. Wilson gearboxes contributed to the racing successes of ERAs and M.G. Magnettes.

ENV Engineering Co in Willesden had, as well as Daimler, been granted a licence to manufacture Wilson gearboxes, and at this point Gordon Wilson hands over the story briefly to his younger brother, Brian Wilson. In a rather strange bit of editing Gordon reveals that he showed the manuscript to Brian, who was clearly rather miffed at not getting a mention in his father's biography. To rectify the situation, Gordon merely inserts a letter written by Brian, which includes his comment, "I felt rather left out."

Brian was recruited by ENV when they found out he had designed a smaller pre-selective box than the existing models. He joined ENV in May 1932 and an initial production order for 5,000 of these gearboxes, known as the Type 75, was put in hand. By the time of the London Motor Show in October 1932, ENV had already sold gearboxes to Alvis, Crossley, Invicta, Lagonda, M.G., Morris, Riley and Standard, and had entered into supply contracts with all but Morris. (Alvis despatched their first Firefly fitted with an ENV gearbox on 3 November 1932, showing how quickly the gearbox had been designed and developed). ENV did not have sufficient skilled manpower to meet the initial demand, but Brian Wilson explains how the nearby Bentley factory had just been bought from the Receiver by Rolls-Royce, and ENV were able to recruit a complete team; manager, designer, testers, inspectors and skilled workmen.

A stronger gearbox, the Type 110 (fitted to the SB Firefly), was developed in 1933 but Brian acknowledges that problems with "clutch judder and idling noises which were inherent in the gearbox when used without some form of independent clutch caused it to lose popularity and sales fell off," causing ENV to withdraw from the market. Alvis by this time had developed their own synchromesh gearbox. (Whilst the Type 110 gearbox might have given problems of clutch judder and idling noises, the fact that many of these gearboxes continue in perfect working order today with the minimum of maintenance is a tribute to the superb quality of their design and construction. To the best of my knowledge the Type 110 box on my 1934 Firefly has never been touched other than having its oil changed periodically.) ENV's skills and facilities soon became of immense value to the war effort. They made the Wilson transmission for the early "Matilda" tanks used in the Second World War.

Around 1936, Siddeley sold out all his interests to the Hawker group, and the Armstrong-Siddeley car business almost ceased. Walter Wilson had continued to be involved in tank development in the inter-war years, and so by the outbreak of war his company found itself working closely with ENV, having technical responsibility for the Matilda II gearboxes produced by ENV. They were also working on the design of the transmission for the "Cruiser" tank and other models, such as the Churchill, Challenger, Conqueror and Centurion. But tank manufacturing was now a large and complex business, and Wilson's difficulty in working in collaboration with others led him to lose interest and turn his inventiveness into other channels. One of these was a powered bomb for which he invented a simple form of jet engine, but when the Air Ministry realised this they told him to stop work because someone else (Frank Whittle) was already working on such a project. This was another devastating blow for Wilson, but he again (in his late sixties) switched his energies into a new project—a two speed epicyclic gearbox for motor yachts.

At the end of the Second World War the British motor industry was in poor shape. Daimlers continued to build Wilson gearboxes for armoured cars, but ENV gave it up, and it was left to the Americans to develop Wilson's invention into the automatic car gearboxes of today. Self-Changing Gears Ltd instead concentrated on the development of transmission systems for buses, lorries, and diesel railway locomotives, as well as a continuing involvement in the development of tanks and other military vehicles.

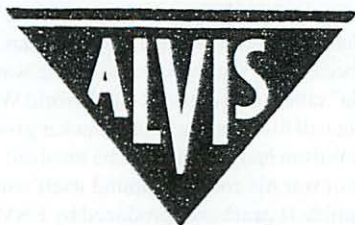
In 1951, however, Leyland bought a one third interest in Self-Changing Gears Ltd, which at that time was still owned 50% by Hawker-Siddeley and 50% by the Wilsons, with Gordon Wilson as Managing Director. Hawker-Siddeley seemed to be relieved that they were no longer responsible, and Leyland took control, buying out the other shareholders by 1961 (Walter Wilson having passed away in 1957). The company was then swept along through the reorganisation (disorganisation?) of the British motor industry in the sixties, and ended up placed under the control of Alvis.

The book ends with a postscript written by Ian Williamson, Managing Director of Self-Changing Gears Ltd, in 1986. With some bitterness he claims Alvis plundered his company, their first action being to transfer the production of the transmission developed by Self-Changing Gears Ltd for the Alvis Scorpion to Alvis' own machine shops. The company, however, was reformed in 1976 and placed in the Special Products group under the Ryder plan for BL, before being transferred to the Cummins Engine

Company in 1986 as the book went to print.

Altogether a fascinating book and well worth a read if you can get hold of a copy. Gordon Wilson tries to present an impartial view of his father's strengths and weaknesses, but is quite gushing in his admiration of his "long suffering" mother, and one gets the impression that the relationship with his father was probably quite cool. The book is as much a history of Self-Changing Gears Ltd as it is a biography of Walter Wilson, and Gordon continues the story long after the death of his father. He gives interesting insights into the engineering issues and politics involved in the development of the tank in both world wars, and into the structure and management of the British motor industry between 1920 and 1960, with observations on the management style of such giants as J.D. Siddeley, Frank Spriggs, and Henry Spurrier.

SIMON FISHER



If you seek a superlative car "under 1,500 c.c." you will choose the Alvis "Famous Four"... a car that for eight years has been acknowledged the greatest engineering achievement in its class.

There is in the Alvis range a car that will exceed your greatest expectations . . . and give you motoring joy in its fullest sense . . . Send for the Alvis catalogue . . . and discover Alvis supremacy . . .

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

This article by Bill Boddy appeared in the June 1950 issue of Motor Sport and is sub-titled "The Editor Drives a Further Selection of Different Motor Cars." Much of the article is taken up with Alvises and I have included only that part in this reprint. Reproduced with due thanks and acknowledgements—J.N.B.C.

A few days after this convincing demonstration that a pre-1914 car can provide eminently practical transport I had to adjust myself to more modern things, when Mr. K. Smith kindly suggested that I should take away his special Speed Twenty Alvis and play with it. I decided to use it over the weekend of the Royal Silverstone Meeting and duly collected it from Harrow on the Thursday afternoon. It brought me home to Hampshire remarkably quickly, spurred on along the A30 by a Javelin saloon which I could just lose by exceeding 4,000 r.p.m. in top, and on acceleration to rather beyond that in the indirect gears after a traffic check, but which was never far behind. However, that is to anticipate. First, to explain this Alvis.

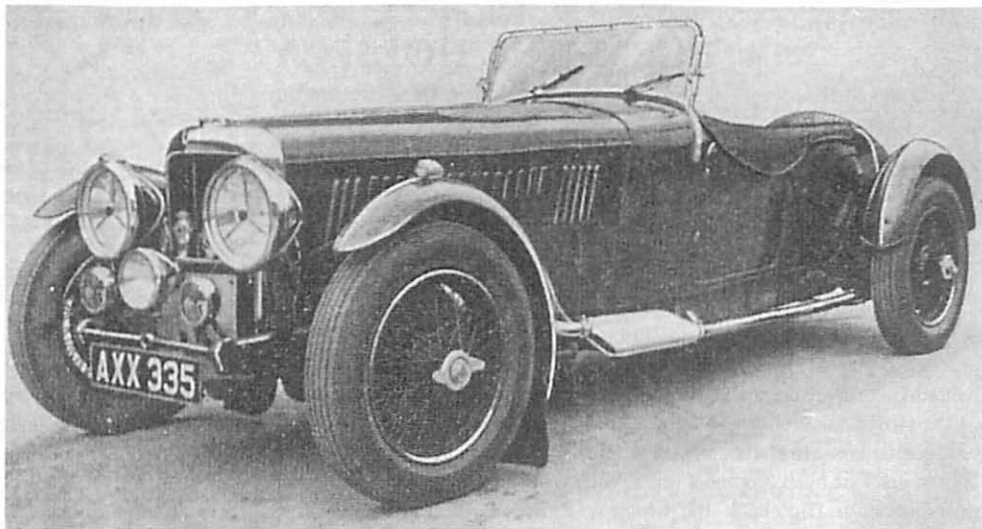
Although I have owned five "12/50s" and a "12/60" in the past I am therefore favourably inclined towards the make, the Speed Twenty and its immediate successors had remained practically a closed book, although when I was in Yorkshire Norman Routledge did his best to attend to this side of my education and a year or so ago a ride in Guy Griffith's Speed Twenty saloon considerably impressed me. Consequently, Mr Smith's car was of more than passing interest.

It started life as a 1934 Vanden Plas drophead coupé weighing 34 cwt., but was drastically reduced, by 9° cwt. to be precise, by throwing away the original body and designing a 2/4-seater sports body. This body is in four sections, radiator-to-dashboard, dash-to-doors, doors, and the tail. It was constructed to Mr. Smith's own drawings by Middlesex Motors of Harrow, who made a very nice job of it. The car has a truly imposing appearance and I particularly liked the low, shapely tail. As the chassis is on the heavy side weight had to be saved in the body, which is of 22-gauge aluminium with no steel anywhere in its construction, mounted direct on the chassis with a packing of canvas belting, each section being free to move independently of its fellows. Light-gauge duralumin flooring and alloy bucket front seats with blade backs complete the job. Derrington supplied the cycle-wings, which were neatly valanced, and a firm at King's Cross made up a neat four-branch external exhaust and silencing system.

Neat, I thought, was the way the children's rear seat folded forward to give access to the rear shock-absorbers and twin batteries. The car came to me with proper hood, tonneau cover, an Elliot fold-flat screen designed for the job and was smartly finished in racing-green, with chromium plated metal parts.

This Alvis looked as if it would "tick," and it did. The reason was not for to seek; it was, in fact, under the bonnet—talking of which, its length really had a lot to do with the imposing air imparted, for it was quite 8-litre-Bentleyish, only much lower, of course, the radiator of the 1934 Alvis being fairly far forward and the scuttle of this car moved back 4 in, to give better access to the new clutch assembly.

Under the bonnet, as I was saying, things had been "moved about to the car's advantage. The neatly-turned-out six-cylinder (push-rod o.h.v., 73 by 100 mm., 2,511 c.c.) engine has three downdraught S.U. carburetters, fed by two S.U. pumps from a rear tank, special bronze valve guides, a Vokes full-flow oil filter and improved cooling obtained by drilling extra water transfers into the head and by pumping the water direct into the head instead of into the middle of the block. A new flywheel and Borg and Beck clutch assembly was designed, balanced to 5,500 r.p.m., a Ford V8 thrust-race being incorporated.



Mr Smith's Speed Twenty.

The saving in weight here is notable— $34\frac{3}{4}$ lb. against the 96 lb. of the Alvis assembly. Apart from these useful modifications new parts were put in where necessary and the block and crankshaft were reconditioned by Laystall. A Scintilla Mk. 6 magneto replaces the old B.T.H. The compression-ratio is quite moderate, as a 12 s.w.g. plate lives beneath the cylinder block.

I was told that the power unit has proved very durable, no wear being evident in the bearings after some 20,000 miles of lead-footed driving, and that although the triple downdraught carburetters have been difficult to tune, in the days of benzole around 5,000 r.p.m. was possible in top gear with bags of ignition advance, without departing from the standard setting of 90 jets and 81 needles. On "Pool," screen up and P.100s in place, I got over 4,000 r.p.m., or about 85 m.p.h.

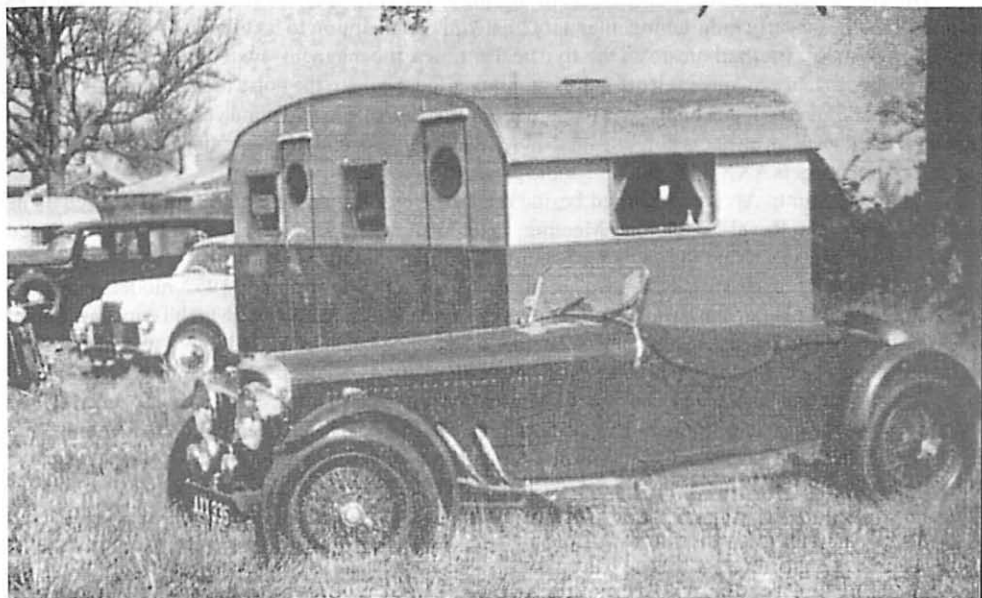
The car has a 4.5-to-1 back axle ratio and 5.50-19 tyres. So much for the technicalities of Mr Smith's intriguing Alvis.

Right from getting to know the car I enjoyed using the short, rigid central gear-lever, even if it did "catch-up" a bit at times, and found the roadholding and steering very good, the latter light, with just enough castor action, and asking 2" turns lock-to-lock, so that one took the big car through traffic with confidence. I liked the neat grouping of the instruments on a central, alloy panel, oil gauge reading around 40 lb./sq. in., the water thermometer reassuringly below 70 deg. C. (55 deg. C. on a cold day), the 4-in; Smith's speedometer (which suffered from chronic needle-float) and rev.-counter registered anything the throttle-foot dictated up to quite imposing maximums. And only once did I tread on the central accelerator when I wanted to stop!

It was pleasant to be out in a big car again, and this one was particularly good fun, because the exhaust note rose to an Alvis—crackle at around 40 m.p.h. in top gear, the gears made music, especially on the over-run, when an exhaust reverberation, quite startling at first, was set up, and transmission backlash was exaggerated by the light flywheel. Generally one sensed that this car was "alive," lack of wooden floor boards and antidrumming precautions accentuating the noise, of course. If I have described a certain car tried recently as a "boy's motor," I would call the Smith-Alvis a "man's car," with the proviso that it is really quite straight forward to drive and tractable in traffic.

With these thoughts in mind, rather than visions of "158" Alfes, I climbed into bed late on Silverstone-

Thursday, anticipating an enjoyable run to the course on the morrow to see the practice. From my home near Aldershot I have evolved a delightful "off-the-red" route to Silverstone where one is either driving in a valley or along the heights almost the entire way. It reads: Eversley, Twyford, along that beautiful stretch flanked by the Thames via Wargrave to Henley, up the straight-as-a-die Fair Mile on A 423, off through the Chilterns via Stonor and up Pishill to Watlington, through its narrow winding streets and over its fantastic cross-roads (which I hope they never spoil by planting traffic-lamps) and out, past Pyrtom atomic station, to Lewknor, which, with the "Lambert Arms" where I turn left for a brief spell on the A 40 which I somehow always associate with the M.G. Car Club in the time of cheery "Flem" Harris. And so off-the-red again to old-world Thame with its broad rough-surfaced high street. Then it's right-handed at Long Crendon, up over Dortonhill with its seats at the roadside inviting the weary to tarry awhile and admire its splendid views, and down again, past Dorton's School for the Blind in its rural setting, avoiding Brill, crossing another main road and going on along a less picturesque route past the London Brick Company and over the adjacent concrete way into the delightful town of Buckingham.



The Speed Twenty parked at Silverstone next to the Motor Sport caravan.

I always find this drive satisfying, if better suited to the soul than to a fast car, for it crosses innumerable main thoroughfares without involving you very much with any of them, and the hills are never far away—"Goodness, how the man drools on, but then, of course, he does it for a living. . ." To revert to that Alvis! It handled very nicely, possibly because the front end had been stiffened with extra 1½ in. fabricated channel at the front cross-member and a tubular cross-member used to tie the front dumb-irons, so that the twisty route I followed provided much enjoyment, yet the i.f.s., with its rather heavy wishbones and massive transverse spring, and the rear suspension, damped by heavy double-acting hydraulic shock-absorbers from an armoured car, effectively absorbed road-menders' indiscretions. The chassis was, of course, stripped and worn parts renewed while the plot was hatching.

Mr Smith showed me over 5,000 r.p.m. (over 70 m.p.h.) in third gear on a rev.-counter checked by Smith's for accuracy, before he handed his Alvis over, but I preferred to regard 4,000-4,500 r.p.m. (57-

64 m.p.h.) as the limit, changing normally at 3,500 r.p.m. in the gears (50 m.p.h. in third). In top the exhaust crackle merged with the engine roar and the Alvis was particularly happy at 3,000 r.p.m. (62 m.p.h.), with 3,500 in hand (72.5 m.p.h.) when one wished to hurry. Aided by spells in the lower ratios, which gave very useful acceleration, this mile-a-minute gait could be maintained along the byways as well as on the through-ways, and what with the combination of mechanical and gaseous noises and scanning along the 4' ft. of bonnet, it was a most satisfying way of getting along. All this added up to 44, miles or so in the first hour of the Silverstone journey without hurrying, and, 1^o hours for the 62 miles to Buckingham, including such rural things as cows and milk lorries and a stop to make notes. Naturally the engine disliked "Pool," but intelligent use of the ignition control did much to defeat the "little men mit hammers"; full retard killed the pick-up quite noticeably. I liked this control and its fellow lamps and hand-throttle controls in the wheel centre, also the neat triple bonnet fasteners, "proper" fuel-pump and ignition switches, Bowden lever mixture control on the steering column, stowage of jack, etc., under the bonnet and the typically Alvis right-hand brake lever.

The engine started easily and really hard driving still gave a fuel consumption of practically 18 m.p.g. The Alvis clearly didn't altogether appreciate this interruption to its hibernation, for its starter pinion made merry fire-bell music on the flywheel at times, the magneto-switch became useless, and eventually the exhaust tail pipe fell off—the latter rather fun, because the noise then became very "Juan Fangio" and I figured out that on Royal Silverstone Saturday no one would mind very much. But beyond that it behaved well. Its owner is now engaged on something lighter and more exciting and so the Alvis is for sale; whoever gets AXX 335 will have some pleasant motoring.

While the Smith-Alvis was parked beside the Berkeley caravan which *Motor Sport* used as its headquarters at the Royal Silverstone Meeting, Peter Waring and B. Chevell, who both race Speed Twenties, came to see it, and the day after I returned it I went out in the Waring car.

These two Alvis cars made a most interesting contrast. Waring's is a 1932 model with non-independent front suspension, which started life as a standard four-seater and which is, indeed, one of the first forty Speed Twenties to be made. The body has since been converted into a two-seater with tank and spare wheel in the flat tail and many interesting "mods," have been made to the chassis.

The engine has a balanced crankshaft, Martlet narrow-ring pistons, KE 965 inlet and DDT 49 exhaust valves, 15 per cent stronger-than-standard Terry valve springs, Glacier mains and big-ends, and a copperised head. Along the off side runs a water gallery which feeds water to the exhaust valves via four off-takes, the centre two going to the existing core-plug holes in the head, the other two to holes specially drilled for the purpose. The water pump sits on what was once the magneto bracket, the car now using coil ignition, and the old water inlet is coupled to the suction-side of the pump to give a static effect to the water in the cylinder block. The rear water transfer and the outlet from the head are as Mr Alvis intended them. The compression ratio is in the region of 8½ to 1, 30/50 benzol-petrol mixture being the normal diet, which is consumed at approximately 17.5 m.p.g.

The usual triple horizontal S.U.s are retained, using standard settings, but they have no hot-spots, as two manifolds from a 1939 Crested Eagle are fitted which contrive to avoid them. Fuel feed is by twin double-S.U. pumps from the usual rear tank. The ignition distributor is driven by Firefly gears and has a Lucas non-tracking head; the advance and retard is cunningly actuated from the Alvis steering-column control by Bowden cable. Waring uses Champion R15 or R16 plugs for road work and Lodge HLPs for racing.

Like Mr. Smith, he has thrown away the heavy Alvis clutch housing and flywheel and in its place has fitted a self-change gearbox which transforms the car's entire character. A Firefly flywheel replaces the old one and drives via a flexible coupling to a Wilson gearbox taken from a 1938 25-h.p. Armstrong-Siddeley. This gearbox is mounted on the chassis, was overhauled beforehand and hasn't given a moment's trouble. It is controlled by a transversely mounted Daimler quadrant and lever, convenient to the left hand. Behind the box the propeller-shaft has been shortened. The 4.5-to-1 back axle is used,

with 5.00–20 front and 6.00–20 back tyres. The brakes employ special Capasco linings, which resisted wear most courageously for an entire season, and are still like new.

Thus it will be appreciated that this trim black two-seater differed considerably from the other car I drove. The earlier chassis were lighter than the i.f.s. pattern, and Waring told me it weighed only 22 cwt. 2 qr.

Naturally, I was very anxious to try it on the road, but in the short time I drove it I could not hope to emulate its owner, who took the car through heavy traffic along the Barnet By-Pass in a manner which showed a high degree of skill and entire confidence in the brakes and controllability of his car. Indeed, what with remembering to preselect the next required ratio with that delightful little lever and prod the clutch pedal to select it, and remember that the right-hand pedal was the brake and not the throttle, your Editor gave every indication that he is getting a ham-handed old man! Even so, the car responded sympathetically and obviously provides near-60 m.p.h. averages when driven properly. The revs. climb easily to 4,500 r.p.m. in the gears, the rasp of the exhaust note typically Alvis, and lightning changes are possible with the A.S. box, so that acceleration is continuous, with no pause to select the cogs.

Waring regards 4,800 r.p.m. as maximum, but points out that power falls away after 3,800. This gives you 70 m.p.h. in third and, as with the other Alvis, 3,000 r.p.m. is a very easy way of going along, and on this car represents 63.5 m.p.h. I understand that flat-out 4,500 r.p.m. will come up in top, equal to a shade over 95 m.p.h.

I found that you really could sit up and see things behind the wheel, that the car was beautifully taut to handle, the steering wheel very much in your lap and giving good, perhaps a shade low-geared, control, while the brakes, given a good push, were amply effective, of the wheel-locking kind if really used, yet delightfully smooth and well balanced.

Somehow, one got the impression that this was a friendly car, giving of its best to those who could handle it; no doubt the instant response to a jab on the gear-selector pedal (there is, of course, no normal clutch) and pressure on the accelerator gave rise to this impression. The ride was comfortable, the pneumatic upholstery likewise, and only occasionally did the front axle remind you of its presence as a rigid beam. The speedometer read properly and was usually at 70 plus, save when traffic conditions intervened, when the Alvis could be slowed with reassuring rapidity, to the accompaniment of exciting explosions in its forthright exhaust system. Oil pressure, I noticed, sat steadily at 60 lb./sq.in., the water temperature at 100 deg. F.

Of necessity the ride was brief, but I came away feeling that these Alvis Speed Twenties can be very lively and that they have much in common with a vintage car (even to a whippy frame!) yet are perhaps less exacting to drive and to service. Moreover, spares should be readily procurable.

BILL BODDY

This delightful article amply demonstrates Bill Boddy's unique writing style. What is perhaps amazing is that 56 years later Bill Boddy still writes every month for Motor Sport. Long may he continue. There was a follow-up in the August 1950 issue of Motor Sport in the form of a letter from Norman Routledge, which I reproduce below—J.N.B.C.

Sir,

Re the article "Busman's Holiday-II" in your June issue, I feel that the figures given by Mr Smith for his Alvis Speed Twenty are rather optimistic, and I would point out that 1,000 r.p.m. in top gear the car would, with 4.5 to 1 axle ratio and 5.50 by 19 tyres, given exactly 19 m.p.h.

The Waring car with the same ratios but 6.00 by 20 tyres would give 20.38 m.p.h. per 1,000 r.p.m.

You quote 62 m.p.h. at 3,000 and 85 m.p.h. at 4,000 r.p.m.; that means the extra 1,000 r.p.m. gives an extra 23 m.p.h. Whereas at 4,000 r.p.m. the actual speed is 76 m.p.h.

Now I don't doubt that the car did 5,000 r.p.m. in third gear, but with the type of box fitted to that model (all four synchromesh, separately mounted) the speed at 5,000 r.p.m. is about 66 m.p.h. and not, as stated, over 70 m.p.h.

I fitted an E.N.V. box to my own Alvis because of the higher indirect ratios on that type as opposed to the wider spaced ratios of the Alvis box and my car only does 72 m.p.h. in third at 5,000 r.p.m. with a Smith's corrected Speedo (within 2 per cent.) and rev.-counter (within 5 per cent) both checked against each other.

My car, by the way, has a lapped head and block with no gasket, special valves to my design, and 7,000 by 18 tyres on the rear to cut down wheelspin. Also the pistons have been liberally drilled, and all moving parts polished, and balanced, and, of course, it has hardly any flywheel, the E.N.V. box being used as a clutch.

I am, Yours, etc.

NORMAN ROUTLEDGE

(We were not supplied by Mr Smith with the gear ratios for his car and may have based our calculations on a gearbox different from that which, in fact, is in the car. If so, the matter is regretted and we thank Mr Routledge for pointing it out. His figures correct the maximum speed we attained to approximately 76 m.p.h.—ED.)

THE REGISTRAR COMMENTS

The above, being peppered with Alvis references, give much food for thought as a number of them can be elaborated upon, despite the fact that over fifty years have elapsed in between.

William Boddy's custodianship of a number of Alvis cars has been acknowledged before, and the two-line reference to "five 12/50's and a 12/60" was later to be considerably elaborated upon, as it formed the basis of W.B.'s contribution to *The Autocar*, of March 7th 1952, in the *Talking of Sports Cars* series, No. 346, entitled 'Alvis Nostalgia' which was reprinted in Bulletin No. 484 November/December 2003. I hope that I may be forgiven if I do not quote all their chassis and registration numbers here. W.B. however does mention riding in Guy Griffiths Speed Twenty saloon, and this is comparatively light work to identify as it has featured in The Editor's Archive series (Bulletin 459 of Sep/Oct 1999 p. 466) and has been established as an SC model, chassis 12765, Reg No. CLA 328.

The main subject of the article however, and the subject of the photograph, is AXX 335, known to be an SB, chassis 11277 which started life as a VdP dhc, No. 3148. The K. Smith mentioned in the Article seems to have sold it mid 1956 to a D.J. Williams of great Missenden, who was member 743, and subsequently transferring it circa May 1965 to an R.F. Betts of Doncaster who was member 2985.

On the final page, reference is made to two other Speed Twenties, of Peter Waring and Brian Chevell. The latter very likely connected with the famous KLR 573, which was fully written up in the Bulletin of Jan/Feb 2002 (No. 473) Even Waring's car can be identified, due to its having been converted to a Wilson pre-selector gearbox. Dorothy Stanley-Carill-Worsley, had acquired just such a device, which apparently was used in the first six-hour relay race at Silverstone in 1951. This is known to have been one of the pre-production SA Speed Twenty SA models, chassis 9455, Registration No. GX 4979, VdP 1763. This was later recorded with member 2189 : J.A. Plowe (Sept. 1961), then P.H. Warrener (Mar. 1978), and then at Sept. 1990 with member 8077, Jeremy Wade. Subsequently, I am informed, a Brooklands exhibit.

DAVE CULSHAW



SECTION NOTES

– Alvis Activities From Around The World –

NORTHERN SECTION

SPRING IN NORTHUMBERLAND SUNDAY LUNCH RUN



From left to right: James and Carol Edwards, TF21; Arthur and Margaret Fairburn TF21; Mark and Dorothea Joyner, TF21; Dave and Freda Adams, TF21; Les and Marjorie Siddle TE21; Jeff, Julya and Ben Siddle, TA14 Duncan and Ted and Penny Garner, TA21 drophead coupé.

Photo: Les Siddle

Sunday 9th April saw a good turnout with seven Alvis cars, one Morgan, one M.G. Magnette, one Austin Cambridge estate car plus several more modern cars. Fortunately, the weather improved from the previous day when it snowed, hailstoned and blew very strongly from the North. A good crowd assembled at the Siddles in Wylam on the banks of the river Tyne for coffee and biscuits.

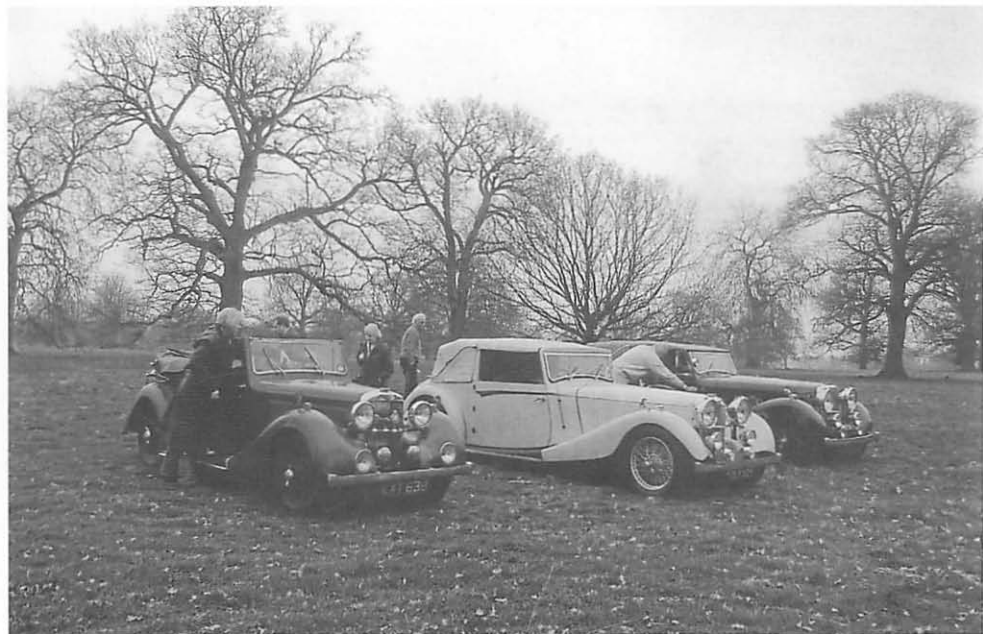
John and Dorothy Wiggins motored from Easingwold in Yorkshire Margaret and Arthur Fairburn arrived from Galashiels in the Scottish Borders and Andrew Saunders came from Allenheads in his Morgan, he is still looking to change this into a pre war Alvis.

By 11.30 a.m. everyone was on the road, the sun shone, the suggested route was quiet, taking members past the castles at Barrasford and Chipchase, over the North Tyne at Wark, on to Bellingham and along a quiet byway to the *Pheasant Inn* at Stannersburn about 1 mile short of the huge Keilder Reservoir (water a plenty here, no chance of a hosepipe ban in the Northeast!)

After an excellent roast beef/lamb lunch and a word of thanks to mine host Robin Kershaw it was time to leave for home. Ben Siddle aged nine would like to thank everyone at the lunch who sponsored him for his Greggs 5 mile Run for Cancer to the tune of £120-00.

LES SIDDLÉ

EAST ANGLIAN SECTION
FBHVC DRIVE IT DAY APRIL



Chris Storrar 12/70, Steve Horne Speed Twenty and John Oliveira 3 1/2 Litre.

Photo: via Chris Storrar



Graham Grimble nice and dry in his TE21.

Photo: Chris Storrar

I attach two pictures of the East Anglian Section FBHVC Drive It Day held today. We have only just got in, so literally hot off the press. About ten Alvis, from Brian Aket's Firefly to a selection of Grabers. We met at Long Melford, Suffolk, on the green by the Church, for coffee, visit to village and pub, and for the hardy, a picnic lunch. Then a short drive to Ickworth House National Trust near Bury St. Edmunds, for a walk around the gardens and a cup of tea. Yesterday was a lovely sunny day, but it poured down at Long Melford, only clearing up later. The 12/70 enjoyed herself, especially getting Helen and I thoroughly soaked.

CHRIS STORRAR

