

# LOOSE ..... FILLINGS

## OUR OLDEST COOPER?

WITH chassis number 10/13/49, the Cooper JAP which Rob Gunnell has owned for the past 24 years seems highly likely to be the oldest Cooper in Australia, as well as being one of the oldest Coopers surviving anywhere in the world. It has a distinctive detail of very early Coopers in that its rear dampers mount behind the driveshafts.. Rob Gunnell's research has established his Cooper was sold new to Ken Watkins in the UK in February 1949, with a 500cc JAP, and had its first race at Silverstone in May 1949, finishing fifth in a race won by Stirling Moss, also driving a Cooper.

It was then bought for 1950 by Alan Rippon, who ran it regularly in the UK and

Europe and had some good results including second place (to Watkins, in a new Cooper) in the 1950 Silverstone 100-mile race.

In 1951 the car was bought by Bill Fergusson and taken to Malaya, where, after running as a 500, it was fitted with a JAP 8/80 with bronze heads, in which form it won the 1951 Johore Grand Prix, was third in 1952, and also won many sprints and hillclimbs.

Four owners later, the engineless remains of the Cooper were found by Ian Boughton in 1977 and brought to Australia. His restoration was completed by John Mann, who fitted another 500cc JAP, painted it black, and had David

## GOOD VIBRATIONS

The date to aim for is July 28 at Wakefield Park, just outside Goulburn in southern NSW, for the annual air-cooled events organised by GEAR. These non-racing events do not require CAMS log books or licences, although GEAR will require a Wakefield Park licence and some evidence of driving experience. Last year's day had five air-cooled cars, all from NSW. This issue of *Loose Fillings* records work in progress on a number of cars, several recent changes of ownership and of course an impressive list of cars available for purchase. What will you be driving at GEAR in July?

Medley drive it in historic events. Rob Gunnell has owned it since 1980, and it has run with excellent reliability in his hands.

Jack Saywell's red JAP 8/80-powered car, chassis 10/26/49, which Saywell raced from Easter 1950, was the earliest number in the batch imported by Keith Martin, although Martin's own pale blue car, 10/42/50, was the first to actually compete here.

It was run ("four days off the boat," according to *Australian Motor Sports* magazine) by Arthur Wylie at Fishermens Bend in January 1950.

Below: Rob Gunnell's 1949 Cooper 500, at Amaroo by way of Silverstone and Johore.



# DISCOVERING THE ALBA

by Alan Morton

I discovered the Alba under Peter Hitchin's house in suburban Sydney in 1982, when it was no more than an unidentified old air-cooled racing car, owned by Steve Glover.

I bought it from Steve on December 22, 1982, and started two years of sometimes interesting, most times frustrating, detective work to research the car's background. The major breakthrough came in March 1984, when at last I found the car's creator, Bob Rochfort, who was then living in Quirindi in northern NSW.

Bob told me he built the car in an 18-month period in 1958-59 in A.J. Heasman's workshop in St Peters (Sydney). Bob said the car was built to his own design, although he had copied ideas from many other cars. All the production components in the suspension were bought new from Heasman, although the front suspension was of Tauranac design and the four wheels were bought new from the Tauranacs. Rear suspension was by swing axle, using bungee cord in tension as on several other air-cooled cars of the period.

The following is copied from a letter sent to me by Bob Rochfort. "The front end had a roll centre about three inches above ground level. Consequently the rear suspension was designed to have a roll centre about two inches below ground level. This resulted in a car roll centre close to ground level and about an inch or two below the centre of gravity of the car. Theoretically, this should produce an exceptionally stable car." (He certainly got the last bit right.)

Bob told me a 650cc Triumph Bonneville engine and gearbox were installed. The original engine was brand new and owned by Ray Selby. Don Selby,

Ray's brother, later told me he remembered buying the new engine from a motorcycle firm in Hay St, Sydney.

Bob could not remember where the moulds for the bullet-style fibreglass nose cone or the Cooper style tail came from, also he could not remember who made the alloy side panels. One thing he was certain of was that the car's original colour was black. Bob never raced the car himself. He said it was raced before it was completely finished, and first ran using David McKay's old number, 77.

Exact dates for the car's early history are not entirely clear. Alan Heasman thought construction started in 1957 and was completed in 1959, and he and Don Selby said they clearly remember the car running on the dirt at Hume Weir in 1959. However, after a long and frustrating process of research the earliest reference I have found to the car at Hume Weir was on March 12, 1961, listed as a Triumph, entrant A.J. Heasman, driver Don Selby. The earliest race date I have found for the car is the opening Catalina Park meeting on February 12, 1961, listed as the Alba 650, driver Bill Slattery, owner Bob Rochfort.

Bill Slattery, of Studebaker fame, crashed the car at this meeting, coming out of Craven A corner. I talked to Bill by phone, and he told me the Alba was the worst racing car he had ever driven, everything was wrong with it. Somewhere in ARDC's film/video library there is a tape of the Alba being unceremoniously hoisted off the ground and towed away. I actually saw this video at a booze-up in the ARDC clubrooms at Amaroo after one of the 1980s all-Historic meetings.

Mary Packard (the world's best motor race meeting organiser), supplied me with

the car's Warwick Farm history: July 30, 1961 (see photos), September 19, 1961 - Heasman/Selby, 650cc, green and yellow.

Ownership of the car is fairly clear cut: 1958-61, Bob Rochfort, Sydney; 1961-63, Don Selby, Sydney; 1963-79, Eddie Slade, Mittagong; 1979, Bob Radic; 1979-80, Fred Whatmough, Sydney; 1980-82, Steve Glover, Sydney; 1982 to date, Alan Morton, Sydney and Gold Coast.

Eddie Slade bought the car from Don Selby for 350 pounds, and ran it at Oran Park, Catalina, Amaroo dirt circuit and several hillclimbs and sprints. He retired it in 1965 and it sat in a paddock for the next 14 years.

My ownership has seen the car's busiest years. A look at its logbook reveals that I have raced it in at least 50 races (plus practice sessions) at half a dozen circuits. It has

Below left: Don Selby in the Alba at Warwick Farm, July 1961. The words "Cooper Special" are just visible on the nose, and the single-arm top link of the front suspension can also be seen. Todd Hamilton's Ralt, and also one of the very early Lynxes, also used this single-arm style of front suspension. Note the crossply Dunlops on the front, Michelin Xs on the rear.

Below right: this shot, also from Warwick Farm in July 1961, shows the Alba's fibreglass tail, which was probably taken from a mould Chris Conroy made from Noel Hall's T51 Cooper Climax. The nose of the Alba was probably from the Blake/de Bord Cooper Mk 8 which later became the Walton Cooper. Car 14, in front of the Alba, is the car now known as the Scarab, which at this time was also owned by Alan Heasman and raced by Ray Selby.



DNF'd in only three or four events, never as the result of mechanical engine failure. This has proved to me that air-cooled racing cars can be very reliable machines if properly race prepared and run with standard, under-stressed engines.

The Alba's major specifications, then and now, are: chassis - tubular steel space frame; wheelbase 82", front track 50", rear track 45"; front suspension independent with coil springs and telescopic shocks; rear suspension swing axle with bungee cord in tension; front brakes 8" Vanguard, rear single Girling 9" with separate master cylinders; steering Lynx rack and pinion; wheels Ralt; engine/gearbox Triumph 650.

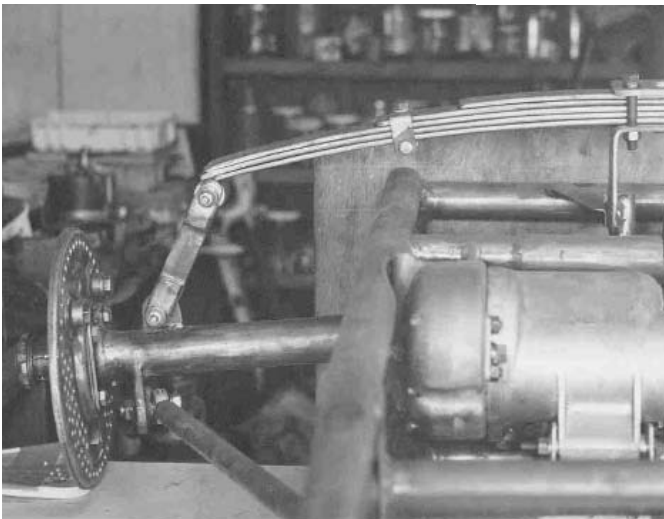
## PENTLAND 500 MAKES PROGRESS

**R**ESTORATION of the BJP 500, built by Victorian Brian Pentland in the late 1950s, is making rapid progress under owner Keith Roberts, as shown in these early-2004 photographs from Keith's Eddington (Vic) workshop.

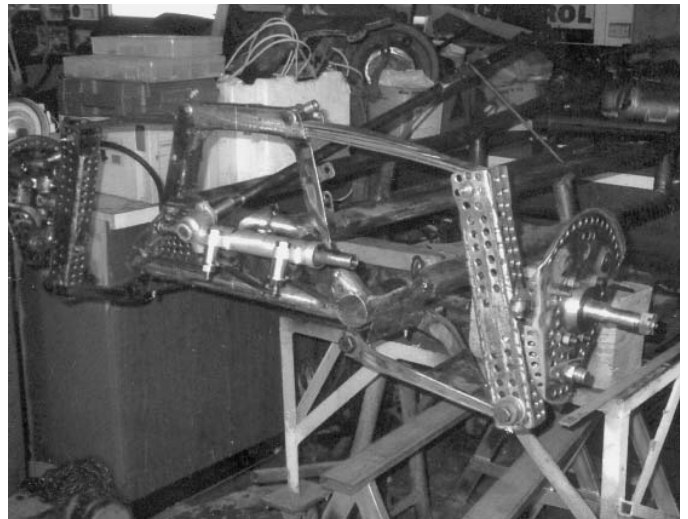
Front suspension uses a production forged lower wishbone of so far unknown origin, a transverse upper leaf spring, and a much-drilled fabricated box-section upright incorporating a Morris 8 axle-end and kingpin knuckle. Steering rack is Hartnett, while stub axle, steering arm and brake backplate are Morris 8.

Rear suspension is robust swing axle, unusual for a 500 in having an axle case as well as the actual driveshaft. The car has a four-tube chassis, and runs specially-made three-stud 13-inch wire wheels. It has a laydown Norton gearbox, and will use a 500cc JAP.

The original owner recently produced old photographs of the car at Hepburn Springs hillclimb, very probably in May 1959. At this meeting the BJP finished third in class behind Alan Staton's BRM 500 and John Fish's Walton JAP.



Right: Brian Pentland leaving the line at Hepburn Springs hillclimb in 1959. Below: swing axle rear suspension, Fiat-type front suspension during restoration. No prizes for guessing the number of lightening holes!



# Classifieds

For sale: Cooper Mk V Norton, ex Bob Gerard (UK). Immaculate. Don Hall, 08 9386 2346.

For sale: 1961 Lynx Vincent, ex John Marston, oldest surviving Lynx. Very original, partially restored (see Loose Fillings # 4) includes new Terry Prince Vincent crankcases, other Vincent parts. Approval in principle with blown 1200. Asking \$20,000. David Lawry, 08 8373 1633, jlawry@picknowl.com.au.

For sale: Scarab Triumph, NSW race history from at least early 1960s. Rebuilt Bonneville engine, new 4-speed box, single Amal. No trailer. \$20,000, all offers considered. Graeme Worsley, 02 6362 8734.

For sale: Cooper Mk 8 Norton, bought new by Dick Campbell, held 350 and 500 NZ speed records. More details from Ian Garmey in New Zealand.

For sale: Sidney Rudge, the former Sidney Vincent recently refitted with fully rebuilt 4-valve iron-head Rudge 500, in which form it began its long Australian history in the 1950s. A clever and well made car. \$14,000, keen to sell. Cameron MacMillan, 0408 676 527.

For sale: Cooper Mk 4 JAP 500, superbly presented, not run since total rebuild. Ex-Saywell 8/80 car, first Cooper to race at Bathurst. \$35,000, Matt Segafredo, 0418 280 000.

For sale: Cooper Mk 9 Triumph, more details from Ian Garmey in New Zealand.

For sale: 1951 JBS Norton 500, fast, immaculate, very original. One owner past 35 years. Garry Simkin, 02 9958 3935.

For sale: Bruce Gooden special dirt-circuit car, built 1950s, won NSW titles 1963-64-65. 8-inch front wheels, 10-inch rear, ran Norton, Gold Star and Jawa engines, for sale without engine or gearbox but with trailer included in \$1500 price. Keith Smith, 02 6384 7311.

For sale: Robertson Indian, amazingly original 1950s Victorian-built special with pushrod o.h.v.

Velocette barrels on Indian crankcase, 19-inch wire wheels. Kevin Catt, 02 6332 2551.

For sale: 1949 Cooper JAP 500, immaculate, reliable. Oldest in Australia, long racing history in UK, Europe, Malaysia and Australia. Rob Gunnell, 02 9427 0816.

Wanted: one old, worn-out 135x15 tyre to fit Cooper Mk5 front wheel for wall display. Brian Reed, 2/230 Albert St Brunswick Vic, 3056, 03 9387 0062.

