

LIONEL HART & HIS TASSIE RACING CARS

Part 2 by Rob Saward

In 1951 it emerged that Lionel Hart was constructing a very nicely built racing car using the BMW engine/transmission unit from Byron's motorcycle. I have no doubt that Don Gorringer was involved in the project, if only for support and assistance, being the state's leading special builder by that time. It is likely the car was constructed at one of Gorringer's several business premises in Hobart, as Lionel Hart was always a man of modest means.

In June 1951, when Lionel and Don were returning home after a late night session working on either Lionel's BMW or Don's Skoda Special, they were involved in foiling a break-and-enter at Hobart City Bodyworks after they spotted two burglars entering the premises. Our intrepid duo apprehended the offenders; the result was several days spent in court as witnesses.

The 494cc BMW Special, as it was initially known, had its debut at the two-day Valleyfield meeting in November 1951. In a preamble to the meeting in the *Hobart Mercury*, it was described as "probably the best looking racing car yet built in Tasmania". The car was based on a shortened and narrowed pair of vintage car chassis rails of unknown origin. The front suspension used a solid axle with transverse leaf spring and Renault hubs and wheels. The rear end used an Austin 7 rear axle and wheels, probably employing the original BMW shaft drive to the Austin axle. The attractive aluminium body had a very long tail.

The BMW special was unplaced in the (handicap) races at its first meeting; it became a feature of the car's results over subsequent years that it always went better at hillclimbs than it did on the airfield circuits which hosted Tasmania's only road racing in the 1950s.

In his first appearance with the car at the Muddy Creek hillclimb on the West Tamar near Launceston in May 1952, Lionel achieved both fastest time of day and the overall event win (decided on handicap). Other Muddy Creek successes came over the next few years.

In the 1953 Tasmanian Redex Trial (a mini version of the mainland trials) Lionel Hart was part of a three-man team comprising Don Gorringer, Bill Caldwell and himself, in a Jowett Javelin. During 1954, Lionel assisted Mick Watt in the building of one of Australia's prettiest and fastest small

Ford specials, the Watt Prefect Special.

By 1955, Lionel Hart's car was being entered as the Hart BMW. It was developed continuously, sporting shorter and even prettier rear bodywork by 1956, telescopic dampers at the front and even twin rear wheels for hill climbs. However, as more racing cars were built, or imported into Tasmania, the car became less competitive.

During 1957, a new Hart BMW special appeared, smaller and lower than the original, with smaller wheels. Little is known about this car, and the only photograph I have is not very clear. It appears certain the original BMW engine unit was transferred to the new car; the original car re-appeared in early 1958 with a single cylinder 500cc engine of unknown make, as the Saanen Special, owned by John Watt. The ultimate fate of this car is unknown.

The second Hart BMW had a short life,



being replaced in late 1958 by the Hart Norton, a new car powered by a 500cc Manx Norton engine. This car appears quite different to the BMW engined cars, being built on a twin-tube ladder frame, having a very short nose, wire wheels and curved lower panels. It appears to have used a swing-axle rear end with a transverse leaf spring and located by long trailing arms. The car was painted a very pretty deep blue. Very little evidence of the Hart Norton remains, except for 7mm movie footage from the November 1959 Australian Hill Climb Championship at Hobart's Queen's Domain course, shot by Hobart man David Cramp and which recently appeared on the internet. Lionel was third in the under 500cc racing car class at the AHCC, though some way behind the leading 500cc pair of Dave Powell (Cooper Norton) and Alan Staton (BRM Norton).

The 1959 hillclimb championship appears to have been Lionel Hart's last appearance in a racing car, though he did make at least one start, in a Holden, at a Richmond quarter mile sprint in late 1964. Although Lionel Hart defied the odds in his early motorcycling and working life, the injuries he suffered in the 1944 wall of death crash

Left: the second Hart BMW, with apparently different chassis and bodywork, and what look like smaller wheels, probably at Hobart's Domain hillclimb. Photo courtesy Mick Watt. Below: Alan Davey in the 'Cooper' Norton, taken at Baskerville in 1966. The cockpit section is unchanged from the Hart Norton, but nose shape and suspension front and rear have been heavily modified. Photo courtesy oldracephotos/Geoff Harrison.



left him with a severe limp, and those who knew him later remember that as a distinguishing feature. He was accident free with his racing cars, and died in Hobart aged 81 in 1994, having retired in the late seventies from his job at South Hobart company Transport Industries (making truck and trailer bodies) where he had a reputation as being a very quiet person and a clever engineer who could make anything. Lionel was never a wealthy man but in the early seventies was able to indulge himself with owning an XW Falcon GT. Relatively little is known about the man and his cars and I hope we can now correct that.

After many years of wondering about the fate of the Hart Norton, I can now say with certainty that the car was sold, and remained in Hobart until it was destroyed in the Forest Road section of the February 1967 Black Tuesday bushfire, whilst in the ownership of Alan Davey. Alan likely purchased it as the result of an advertisement in the October and November 1964 editions of *Tasmanian Motorist* magazine, as he first entered it at Symmons Plains on 29 November 1964, and thereafter raced it regularly at Symmons Plains and Baskerville. Its last appearance was at Symmons Plains two days before it was lost to the fire.

By the period of Alan's ownership, it had been heavily modified, with different nose (more modern perhaps, but not as nice as Lionel's original) and redesigned front and rear suspension. A Fiat *topolino* front-end was grafted onto the Hart chassis at the front, with coil-over damper units replacing the leaf spring at the rear. Through all this the cockpit section of the chassis and body remained unchanged, identical to the way Lionel ran it in 1959. Alan Davey always ran it with a Norton Manx engine.

During the period after Lionel sold the car, it became known as a Cooper Norton, even though it had no connection with the Cooper Car Company. In those days, many in Tasmania used the name Cooper as generic for 'small racing car with a motorcycle engine in the back'. All the entries I have found for the car list it as 'Cooper'.

In between Lionel Hart and Alan Davey I believe the 'Cooper' Norton had at least two other owners, probably including Dave Powell Senior (who may have bought it from Lionel and done the modifications) and Richard Snow. A 'home made Cooper' was entered by these two at Symmons Plains in February 1963 (though with 1098cc engine, which precludes the Norton fitted before and after), but I have so far been unable to prove it was this car, or locate Richard Snow.



Above: More JMWs but just blokes this time, at what looks a bit like a 1950's version of Top Gear. In fact it's scrutineering for a Fishermens Bend race meeting but we don't know the details other than that's clearly John Wynn on the right. Photographer unknown.



Left: the editor has been most impressed by this catalogue of Amal parts and complete carburettors from pre-war models through GP racing types to the latest Concentrics. With diagrams and full parts lists this is a magnificent effort by the successors to the original company. The obvious thing to do for more information is to go online at www.amalcarb.co.uk



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