

LOOSE FILLINGS

Have new COOPER: had FUN at Speed on Tweed

by David Reid

AT EASTERN CREEK historic races in July I told Garry Simkin and Rob Gunnell I could be interested in a nice old air-cooled Cooper to go with my 1962 T59 Cooper Formula Junior and my ex-US, ex Rob Kirkby 1955 T39 bobtail. Soon after I got home to the Gold Coast, a parcel of photos and other seductive material arrived from Rob Gunnell. I was due to go to Sydney a week later, and as it had been so interesting to talk to Rob I thought it would be good to have a look at his Mk3, the result of which was that I bought it.

Then came the belt down the Pacific

Highway to Sydney to load up car, spares, engines, body bucks, and reams of notes about all sorts of bewildering things (just the start sequence for the 500 makes the T59 seem like a Corolla). We off-load into the playpen on the Gold Coast and, after distractions involving more interstate travel this time with the Type 59, I climb on an aeroplane back to the Gold Coast with three days to prepare the 500 for Speed on Tweed. Buying methanol and castor oil isn't as easy as I thought.

We arrive at Murwillumbah clutching our sheaf of notes and try to get me into the thing. Oh dear! We consult our notes and

GOOD VIBRATIONS

October's GEAR day at Wakefield Park was disappointing, with only four cars actually arriving for the events set aside for aircooled cars. Perhaps we can take some comfort in the number of cars which nearly made it, and which can be expected to be there in October 2006, when GEAR has assured us we will again have our own grids.

Meantime, there is definitely movement at the station, with some long-awaited cars now close to running. As well, there may be an widening interest in air-cooled cars simply because they have a character and mechanical appeal which sets them apart from the mainstream. Could air-cooled cars actually become - gulp - fashionable?

This issue of *Loose Fillings* covers the period to mid-November 2005.

try to start it - and it starts! Wondering to myself if 140 dB is OK, I head off down a side road (gee it's LOUD) to see how the gearbox works - and promptly stall it. No way will it start again. While pushing her back to our pits we notice she is shedding lots of methanol. That's OK because the hot exhaust is dispersing most of it and the rest does a good job of cleaning the magnet. We miss our familiarisation lap, which doesn't seem to matter, although it bloody well would if I was in the T59. If you've never driven the car, what does a new track matter? We drain the tank, dry

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Below: Arnold Stafford at Mairehau in the forward seat variant of his JBS. Max Fisher's history of the five JBS cars in New Zealand is on page 3.



AIR-COOLED ROB ROY

Five 1950s air-cooled cars were expected at Historic Rob Roy hillclimb on November 27, where organiser MG Car Club has given them their own class. The five cars are John Coffin's Robbins BSA, Chester McCaige's WGM Matchless, Graeme Noonan's Mk7 Cooper Norton, John Hazelden's newly-arrived Sidney Rudge, and John Dymond's Mk5 Cooper 1100 JAP twin.

Credit for organising this great roll-up must go to John Coffin, and we also have to thank MG CC's David White for his enthusiastic support.

Early in November the Robbins and the Mk5 Cooper were displayed at Victorian Historic Racing Register's clubrooms, at the launch of Leon Simms' book about the history of Rob Roy and Darren Jones' DVD commemorating the late Mark Dymond. The cars also featured on Channel 31's Pit Lane motorsports show.

NORTON GEARBOXES - AN UPDATE

Terry Wright reports that benchtop adjustment of the selector cam operation doesn't always work as he has described - sometimes 'overselection' in one direction (eg changing up) or one gear means 'underselection' in the other direction or another gear.

"In the box now in the Walton-Cooper I was unable to correct this nor was I able to decide which was the least of various evils. All I could do was adjust until I felt I had the gear change optimised in all gears and directions - this took about a day!

"This led me to a ruthless attack on the 'dolls-head' change mechanism with every worn part renewed or reconditioned. It seems to be poor engineering to begin with so it needs all the help it can get. New pawls, springs etc should be used if available. Try Modak in Melbourne.

"The link between the two arms has two clevises which go tight in some positions unless there is some slop in the pins. I sub-

stituted 1/4 inch UNF spherical female rod ends opened out to 5/16 BSC to take the original rod. I also substituted similar rod ends for the clevises in the gear change lever and rod.

"With all the above the gear shift was worryingly stiff when the car was stationary but it worked flawlessly in action. The special second gears made by Bob Jolly seemed to work well, although, because I had never driven the car before Shelsley, I had nothing to compare it with. However Garry Simkin has reported his experience with them at Wakefield Park (NSW) as follows:

"JBS went like a blur; won a race and found the 19/23 second gear absolutely great. Now drives out of Turn 1 instead of revving its head off, and works good on the top two right-handers as well. Very happy with it."

For these or any other Norton gears contact Bob Jolly at his works on +61 (0)8 8268 3133, or fax +61 (0)8 8268 3244.

BITS AND PIECES

● Lost and found: the Triumph 650-powered Donland special, sold earlier this year through Shannon's Grand Prix auction, has surfaced in Auckland. And while Garry Simkin was ministering to his JBS at the September Eastern Creek meeting, a stranger commented, "I've got one of these." He was Queenslander John Lennon, who told Garry he was the purchaser of the interesting JAP-powered Bowman 500 described in *Loose Fillings* #14, which was sold by Shannon's in 2003.

● Chris Tracey's BB Ariel made a few shakedown laps around ACT Engine Exchange early in November, the car's first runs under its own power since the late 1980s. The BB was built in the late '50s-early '60s south-west of Sydney at The Oaks by Brian Schureck, for what he later estimated to have been between £100 and £200. Its Red Hunter engine originally had Art Senior piston and cams, and was con-

verted to through-bolts by the constructor. Gearbox was 1936 Norton. It used Fiat 500 front suspension and self-built transverse-leaf rear in a four-tube chassis with a Lynx fibreglass nose and an undertray made from half of a 2 1/2-litre Riley bonnet. It mainly ran at Silverdale, where it was a consistent 44-45 second car. The BB later provided Graeme Snape's entry to Historic racing, and was also raced in Historics by John Merrick, Shane Bowden and Ewen Lippman.

● Other news of Australian cars simply serves as a reminder that life with an air-cooled has its ups and downs. While the Halliday's Mk 5 Cooper finished all its races at Eastern Creek in September, Garry Simkin's normally reliable JBS had a magneto problem, then revealed some worrying crankshaft end-float - since diagnosed and treated. At Rob Roy in June, John Coffin's usually well-behaved Robbins also had magneto problems, but John said Chester McCaige's front-drive WGM "really sounded good" with a megaphone on its Shelsley Matchless engine.

● Keith Roberts had hoped to have his lovingly-restored BJP 500 ready for the October GEAR meeting at Wakefield Park, but could not get the necessary engine work done in time. David Reid, just after taking delivery from Rob Gunnell of the Mk 3 Cooper, ran it at Speed on Tweed and sent an email to *Loose Fillings* saying "What a brilliant little car!"

● In his story on JBS cars in New Zealand elsewhere in this issue, Max Fisher mentions later examples used alloy wheels rather than wire-spoked wheels. Garry Simkin suggested a possible explanation after seeing photographs of his wire-wheeled JBS in action through Turn 2 at Eastern Creek with the outside front wheel visibly bending. Repco-Brabham engine machinist Dave Nash recalled that around 1960 Alan Staton in Victoria converted the very fast blown Manx-powered BRM to alloy wheels for the same reason - Dave Nash showed him photographs of the car bending its wire wheels at Rob Roy.

● The first competition outing by an air-cooled Cooper was in 1946, at Prescott hillclimb in England on July 28, barely a year after the end of WW2 in Europe. Driven by John Cooper, the little car used a five-stud JAP, Triumph gearbox and Fiat wheels and suspension. To mark the 60th anniversary of this occasion, Bugatti Owners Club at its Prescott hillclimb on July 23, 2006, will include special classes for Coopers and Mini Coopers, a cavalcade up the hill, and static Cooper displays. There will also be a dinner at Prescott

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CLASSIFIEDS

For sale: BRM 500, outstanding car built by Alan Staton 1957-58. Major restoration project, suit confident fabricator. Many photos, etc available. See below

For sale: Cooper Mk XI, claimed to be remains of Mk11/6/57, imported from UK by the late Rob Kirkby. Alloy panels, other Cooper parts. Massive project. More info on either car from Graham Howard, (02) 9440 4081

For sale: Scarab Triumph, race history from at least early 1960s. Rebuilt Bonneville engine, new 4-speed box, \$20,000, all offers considered. Graeme Worsley, 02 6362 8734.

For sale: Norton laydown box, believed complete, turns over OK, case has no visible cracks or damage. Plus two upright end covers. \$350. Also Cooper 500 road wheel with integral brake drum in primer, v.g.c., with original skinny Dunlop race tyre, \$300. David Rapley, 03 5629 6222.

Wanted: Fiat 500 15-inch wheels, to help complete US 500cc project started in 1958. Tom Cecil, Rigger2TC@aol.com

Wanted: upright Norton gearbox. John Coffin, 03 9802 1066

Air-cooled cars in New Zealand

by Max Fisher

JBS

IN EARLY 1950 WEMBLEY speedway rider Alf Bottoms bought the Cowlan 500 (built by Coward and Lang), which was powered by a hard-to-get o.h.c. Norton engine. The Cowlan had similar design formula to the Strang, a very successful early 500, with ex-Fiat Topolino chassis and front suspension, and live rear axle suspended on quarter-elliptic springs.

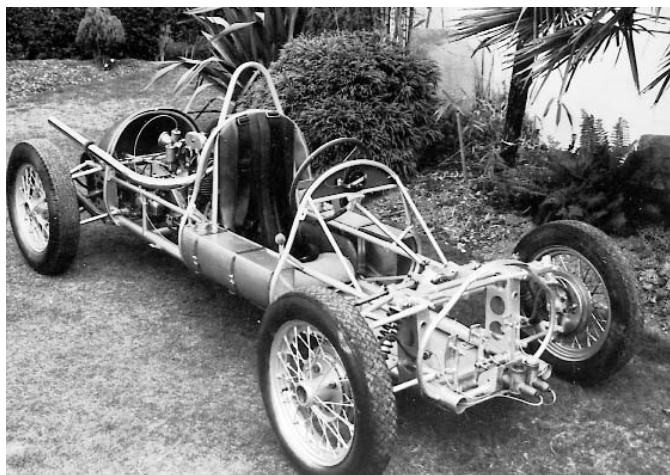
Alf extensively lightened the car, and while he retained the Fiat front suspension he replaced the rear suspension with his own design using double wishbones and coil springs. Named after the family chicken-breeding business James Bottoms and Sons, this car became JBS no. 1, or 50/1. It was a definite threat to the Coopers, and was later bought by Andre Loens in Belgium.

The production JBS was unveiled early in 1951. It had a ladder-type chassis of 2-inch diameter tube with supplementary 1-inch top rails, wheelbase of 84 inches, and all-wishbone suspension, pivoted from sheet steel towers. Steering was by JBS's own alloy-case rack and pinion, front uprights were shortened Morris Minor, and wheels were specially-built wire-spoke, although some later cars used cast alloy wheels. The alloy bodywork could be anodised to customer's choice, and the factory claimed dry weight with double-knocker Norton and five-gallon fuel tank was only 508 lbs.

Unfortunately, late in 1951, aged 32, Alf Bottoms was killed while practicing for the 500cc Luxembourg GP and, apart from a conversion of one car to de Dion rear suspension, development came to a halt although Alf's brother Charles and his

father James continued production until the end of 1952, after which the operation was sold. As a matter of interest, a JBS less engine and gearbox cost GBP550 in 1952.

In New Zealand Ron Frost was the offi-



Alex McLennan's JBS 51/13. Photo below at Levels near Timaru by Euan Cameron.

cial JBS agent, and from the total JBS production of approximately 23 cars he sold four of the five New Zealand cars. These cars are:

- JBS Norton single-cam, chassis 51/12. This car arrived in NZ in 1952 and was used by Ron Frost, then sold to Jim Berkett, and bought from him by Garry Simkin, who has owned it for the past 35 years.
- JBS JAP, chassis 51/13. This car had the special dry-sumped Type 8 JAP engine built for 500cc cars, and was raced by Bill

Lee, Arnold Stafford, Syd Jensen and some five other owners and drivers. It is currently owned by Alex McLennan in Southland, and is immaculate. For part of its life this car had a far-forward driving position, in the style of a Kieft. Garry Simkin was told by Arnold Stafford that this was very cramped for the driver, and also made the car difficult to catch when the tail stepped out.

- JBS JAP, chassis 52/1. This car had a long and varied career in the hands of some eight owners, including Peter Ward, John Scurrah and John Mansell. At one stage the

surviving components of the car - the four corners, brakes, steering, gearbox, clutch, rear drive sprockets etc - were owned by Max Fisher. Present owner of these items is Dion Coleman, who has not started a rebuild.

- JBS JAP, possibly chassis 52/10, one of two cars sold to speedway rider Mick

Holland who bought the remaining parts from the JBS factory when it closed. The car was raced in NZ by some ten owners, including John Callender and Peter Glendall. It was ultimately converted to a Citroen special by lengthening and widening the chassis. The remains, including corners, brakes, steering box and some other spares are now owned by Dion Coleman, who has not started a rebuild.

- JBS JAP, possibly chassis 52/9. This was the other Mick Holland car, imported to NZ in 1954, raced by Holland and some four other owners and now fitted with a Triumph twin. It has also been extensively modified with a low-line fibreglass body and a driving position suited to the small stature of the previous owner. Now owned by a Mr Cooper, the car is in very good condition and is located in the Yaldhurst Motor Museum in Christchurch

JBS cars were, in general, good cars for their time. Alf Bottoms was the brains behind the JBS outfit and a crack engine tuner, and he would have given Coopers and Kiefts a real run for the top slots in the international Formula 3 class. The cars attracted some really good drivers, amongst them Peter Collins, Les Leston, Don Parker and Dennis Taylor. They are generally pleasant little cars to drive, with a distinct personality and handling, as Garry Simkin will confirm. They were not, however, designed for tall drivers like me,



House the evening before. More information from Richard "Woody" Neale, the Cooper club's tireless secretary, on woody@coopercars.org, or www.coopercars.org. The Laguna Seca historic meeting in August will also feature Cooper. Who will set the record for the highest number of Coopers in one pantech?

- That first-ever Cooper was later raced in the early 1950s by Cromie McCandless, younger brother and Belfast business partner of Rex McCandless, who is credited with designing the "featherbed" Norton frame. In the mid-'50s the brothers also built two ingenious front-engine, four-wheel-drive 500s. At least one of these cars survives, and the Cooper was still in use at least into the 1970s.

- From the US, Tom Cecil reports encouraging response to his first newsletter aimed at the North American 500cc fraternity. This newsletter is called "The Tinger," and describes itself as "as subtle as a finger in a light socket." "I sent out about 55 newsletters, about 45 of those to actual owners of 500s," Tom told *Loose Fillings*. "From that mailing I got nearly 15 new names...Readership is climbing towards 70..."

THE LOG

- July 3: Rob Roy hillclimb, John Coffin, Robbins BSA; Chester McCaige, WGM Matchless

- September 10-11: Eastern Creek historic races, Andrew Halliday, Cooper Mk 5 Norton; Garry Simkin, JBS Norton

- September 17-18: Speed on Tweed, - David Reid, Cooper Mk 3 JAP

- October 12: GEAR, Wakefield Park - Garry Simkin, JBS Norton; David Halliday, Cooper Mk5 Norton; Col Davidson, Scorpion Vincent, Barry Parsons, JRS Triumph

- October 23: Mt Tarrengower hillclimb (Victoria) - John Coffin, Robbins BSA

- November 4: Fishwyck - Chris Tracey, BB Ariel

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David Reid and the ex Rob Gunnell Mk 3 Cooper at Speed on Tweed. Photo courtesy Marshall Cass Photography

everything and disassemble the carby, which seemed to have a stuck float. As the sparkplug (seems funny to just have the one) was out, we thought we'd rotate the wheels to clear the cylinder. What a fabulous little water pistol! We reckon the stream of methanol went about 15 metres (naturally in strict accordance with risk management principles and OH & S strictures).

All back together again and it started first go, so off to the start line by barging in at the head of the queue. Not sure whether aircooleds get special treatment or whether the incredible racket just intimidated them, but they ushered me in and off I went wondering what gear I was in, what the brakes were like, what its handling was like, how would I get out of it in an emergency, what its peak revs were, whether my current will was up to date and whether there was a 95dB noise limit.

On approach to turn 3, I grabbed second gear but missed, arrived too quick for the off-camber, and promptly spun. I remembered Rob Gunnell telling me that with no diff, you need to get the clutch in to avoid stalling so I did all that only to have a long discourse with the corner marshals who were unwilling to push me back. Whilst telling the marshals that no, it doesn't have a reverse gear, the clutch overheated and we stalled. I arrived back in the pits feeling like a hero. What a machine!

By now it was time to retighten a whole lot of bits that had come loose, including the exhaust. This involved more tinkering, fiddling and twiddling whilst fielding all sorts of questions from Joe Public, a surprising number of whom knew what the car actually was. I was amazed at the number of people who said they used to work for Coopers - they must have had either 2000 staff or a 2000% staff turnover! It

was amazing what a crowd gathered whenever we started up. By now we had negotiated special entrance to the start line and this made all the difference. On the second run we managed to lock an odd wheel under brakes, slide just a wee bit and make lots of NOISE. Then back to the pit for more fiddling, use of some fencing wire, tightening loose things and fielding even more questions. Off on our last run, this time only using first and gears and completing the course a couple of seconds quicker.

On reflection, the overwhelming thing about this car is that it makes me laugh - it is just such good fun. The T59 seems so serious and sterile by comparison. With that car you are concerned about millimetres in setup, power at the top end, tyre pressures in one-pound increments and temperatures in five-degree variations. With the Cooper you are only concerned that it will start and keep going. The fettling needed by the car in general, and the engine in particular, reminds me of my childhood on windswept circuits with my Dad. This car has taken me back to a different era. The 60's are called the Golden Era, and whilst that is true, the pre-'60s period covered by J, K and L categories has so much more to offer for the grass roots enthusiast. That's what I like about this car - I have rediscovered my memories of motor racing when it was motor sport.

The next Loose Fillings will include Terry Wright's photographs of some interesting 500cc cars at Goodwood, a report on the Walton-Cooper at the Shelsley Walsh Centenary meeting, reports on air-cooled cars at Historic Rob Roy and the Ashley Cowan Trophy meeting at Wakefield Park, and details of Barry Parson's Triumph-powered JRS.