

# LOOSE FILLINGS

## GOOD VIBRATIONS

This is issue 40 of *Loose Fillings*, which started some 12 years ago to support the revival of the traditional motorcycle-engined racing car in Australia and New Zealand. During that time we have seen a wonderful array of cars return to the track, with a welcome - and very necessary - emphasis on restoration to original specification. *Loose Fillings* has the enjoyable distinction of being largely written by its readers, and of being read right across the world by enthusiasts for our sort of car.

## THE SHOCK OF THE NEW: THE FIRST AUSSIE COOPERS

By Graham Howard

When Coopers first appeared in Australian racing in early 1950, they were the first brand-new racing cars to run here after WW2. More than that, they were also startlingly different, a complete break with front-engine, beam-axle, wire-wheel tradition. They looked suspiciously fragile and their air-cooled engines and chain drives seemed

utterly out of place. Yet from the outset their circuit times were better than all but the very fastest of our conventional racing cars, particularly on shorter circuits with lots of slow corners.

Mt Panorama was another story, with its long straights and sustained high-speed sections. Jack Saywell drove his Mk4 JAP 8/80 at five consecutive Mt Panorama meetings from Easter 1950. While he was

credited with a lap in a startling three minutes exactly in practice for the Easter 1951 meeting, a 3.10 lap at Easter 1950 and a 3.12 that October seem more realistic. Alf Barrett won an Under 1500cc handicap in October 1951, driving Misha Ravdell's Mk4 Cooper Vincent; over the six laps his race time averaged 3.12.6 secs per lap.

From notes gathered over the years, it is interesting to see how established drivers from the early 1950s remembered their Cooper experiences.

In 1939 Jack Saywell, then in his late 20s, imported a 1936 3-litre Monoposto Alfa Romeo. It was the fastest car in

Caption/credit



Australia and the virtually inexperienced Saywell drove it well on their few appearances, before a chapter of accidents left it without its supercharged straight-8 engine. After the war he could have imported another pre-war GP car, as a number of other Australians did. Instead he took the daring step, for a competitive driver, of ordering a car from Keith Martin's first batch of Coopers, which arrived in January 1950, and Saywell's first appearance with his Cooper was at Easter Bathurst in 1950. He set fastest time in the Under 1500cc handicap in October 1950 and won a three-lap scratch race at Easter 1951. A great photograph in the 1952 chapter of John Medley's Bathurst history (p.136) shows Saywell and the Cooper well sideways through the fast corners across the top of the mountain.

He had no reservations about the Cooper. "You'd look at it and laugh, but when you got in it was a real car." The Cooper was prepared by motorcycle legend Don Bain, then in partnership with Ron Kessing. Saywell recalled that Bain believed in starting a race with the motor cold. "All the other fellers would warm them up. Bain used to laugh at that. We'd push it out onto the line quite cold; they'd back me up 20 feet, push start it, hold it steady at 2000 rpm and start carefully. The others would be over the hump on Mountain Straight by the time we were around Hell corner, but we'd catch them... I used to pass Crouch on the straight at Bathurst; I think he might have been faster up the hill.

"The only trouble I had was staying in it. It used to hold the road so well, and on right-hand corners I used to bash my elbow, it would swell up like a football. One day I saw in a women's shop a pair of

bust-enhancers, what they used to call "gay deceivers." When I went into the shop I caused a bit of a stir - in those days men didn't go buying women's underclothes (these days of course women don't wear any). And then I told them I only wanted to buy one."

Alf Barrett and his 1932 2.3-litre Alfa Romeo Monza were Australia's fastest combination in the years either side of WW2, before Barrett, then aged 40, decided to retire in 1948. He was at Bathurst in October 1951 as a spectator when offered a drive in Misha Ravdell's Firth-prepared Mk4 Cooper Vincent, after Ravdell himself had been injured in a local road accident. Not having driven a racing car of any kind for more than a year, and with no experience whatever of a Cooper-style car, he won a six-lap Under 1500cc handicap, and was well placed in the main event when he ran over a displaced sandbag and broke a driveshaft universal joint.

He vividly remembered the Cooper's vibration. "It was like driving a lawnmower - dreadful. You'd get out of it as if you'd been driving a lawnmower." But everything else, compared to his beloved Alfa, was a revelation.

"The Cooper made my hair stand on end. It ran so straight, and it stopped straight. The brakes were like running into cotton wool. With the Alfa you always felt you were a foot off the ground, and it would get such dreadful brake tramp.

"The thing I noticed with the Cooper, it held on until all four wheels went together. You could go too far with the Alfa and cars like that, and they'd still hang on, The Cooper would just go snap.

"But that little Cooper - it just went straight, it stopped straight. So when I say the Alfa was good, it was good - until the

Cooper."

Dick Cobden started his racing career in a perfectly stock MG TC at the outer-Sydney Marsden Park airstrip in 1947. He graduated to a special-bodied TC, prepared by Gordon Stewart and developed to be possibly the fastest unblown TC special of its time. He sold this car to David McKay in late 1951, and - almost on impulse, as he tells it - bought a 500cc Mk5 Cooper JAP. This was followed in 1953 by the ex-Stillwell Mk5 Cooper JAP 1100, with which he had a year of great racing at Mt Druitt against Jack Brabham's Mk4 Cooper Vincent. Their rivalry continued when Brabham bought the "Redex Special" Cooper Bristol and Cobden bought a supercharged 1½ - 2.0 litre V12 Ferrari. Tricky to drive and maintain, the Ferrari was his last racing car.

Cobden recalled that, having sold the special MG, he saw the pale blue 500cc Cooper on display (for 1300 pounds!) in John Crouch's tiny showroom in Woolloomooloo. "It was there in Crouch's window. I saw it there a few times and I thought to myself, "I think I can go faster." After the vintage design of the MG, Cobden clearly remembered the handling of this Cooper and its 1100cc successor. In an article in HSRCA's journal *The Oily Rag*, he said, "Both these cars were great to drive. They handled superbly and did everything you asked except (often) keep going." He later added, "You could throw them around a bit, and that was very much part of the scheme - it was the car and you; they did what you wanted them to do."

His Coopers were maintained by Gordon Stewart, who if necessary would consult speedway racer Chook Hodgkinson. Cobden recalled it was very simple to change ratios, and that reliability was a problem: "It was pretty simple to change engines too."

The complex, contrary Ferrari was a different story: "I went from the Cooper, a car with no vices, to the Ferrari, which was a car full of vices."

Dick Cobden, an often under-rated driver, is still very much with us. Jack Saywell died in 1991, Alf Barrett died in 1998. Saywell's Mk4 Cooper is being restored with an 8/80 JAP by the Halliday family. The Cooper Alf Barrett drove has been restored by Garry Simkin to its original form, as owned by John Snow. Dick Cobden's 500cc Mk5 was fitted with a blown Vincent by Lex Davison, and is owned in this form by Neil Videan. His 1100cc car, later fitted with a Vincent engine, is owned by Rob Phillips.

Left: Caption/credit



# MOORE KEIFTS MYSTERY IN NEW ZEALAND

By David McKinney

Once the Coopers came onto the 500 racing scene in 1947, they dominated the class of British (and Continental) events. JBS were the first to offer a consistent challenge, in 1950/51, followed in 1951/52 by Kieft. In the ensuing years Mackson, Arnott, Staride, Martin, Revis and others followed, but the sheer numbers of Coopers produced each year, and the attraction of top drivers to their winning pedigree, ensured their supremacy continued for as long as the formula ran. There were also literally scores of one-off and small-run cars, which came and went over the years.

Ten Mk1 Kiefts were built and sold in  
Caption/credit

1950/51, though none achieved anything startling in the way of results. The first five (the Mk1A prototype, three 1Bs and a 1C) were more or less similar, with the sort of round-nosed bodywork common to most 500s of the day. The remaining five, all Mk1Ds, were flatter-sided and with squarer noses, and were consequently referred to as the "coffin" cars.

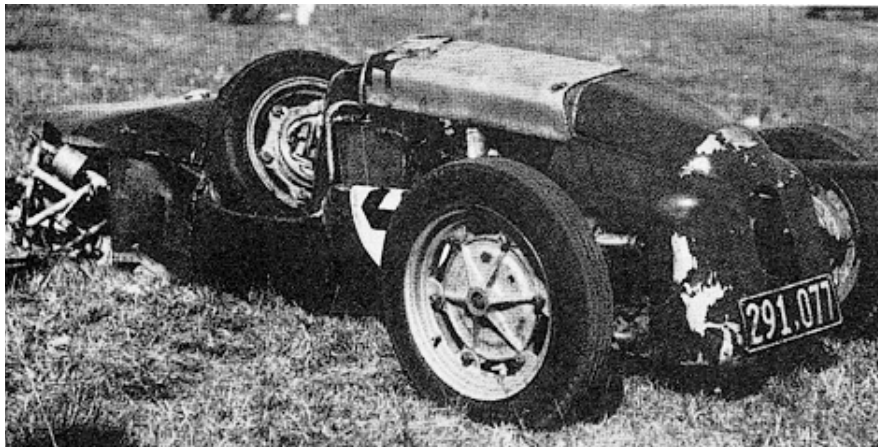
The successful Kiefts were the swing-axle Mk2 designs as driven by Stirling Moss and Don Parker to many successes, but the two or even maybe three cars that went to New Zealand were earlier models. As we shall see, one of the swing-axle cars may have ended up there too, but if that rumour is true, the car seems never to have seen any competition after leaving the UK.

In 1951 eighteen-year-old Ronnie Moore from Christchurch, in England on one of the annual speedway-racing trips that would bring him the world title in

1954 and again in 1959, saw the two works Kiefts in action at Shelsley Walsh and bought them both. One would supposedly be for his own use in NZ, the other for his father. The cars he bought, although sometimes described as numbers CK50-2 and CK50-3, were actually Mk1B-1 and Mk1B-2, these numbers having been supplied to present owner Chris Read by the late Cyril Kieft. Either way, they were the second and third 500s built.

Before delivery to the Moores the factory lengthened their chassis from 7ft (2134mm) to 7ft 5in (2261mm) to take the supercharged 1000cc V-Twin Vincent Black Lightning engines the cars were fitted with for libre racing in NZ, and were in other ways uprated to the latest factory spec.

The two cars never raced together in NZ during the 1952 season - or indeed ever. Les Moore gave one a tryout in an early-



- The Moores were originally from Tasmania, where Les ran a Wall of Death act, before emigrating to NZ after the War. He was involved with speedway both as a rider and a promoter, and at a very early age son Ronnie was a star of the Aranui track in Christchurch.

- During 1950 500 driver Ken Gregory fancied the idea of building a 500 of his own. He was managing Stirling Moss at the time and they got together with Swiss-born engineer Ray Martin, assistant RAC competition manager Dean Delamont and John A Cooper, sports editor of *The Autocar*, and completed their design of a new car, utilising Martin's swing-axle rear-suspension. They presented their ideas to Cyril Kieft, who was enthusiastic, and the prototype was raced by Moss in 1951. Replicas went into production as the Kieft CK52, the earlier model having been the CK50.

- Max Fisher always believed that one of the Mk2s went to New Zealand around 1956. Owner was reputedly a Northern Irish school-teacher, a brother of Jim Mickle who would subsequently import the Cooper "jet car" (now Ian Garmey's Mk5 500) to NZ. Max followed up all sorts of leads, but never found the car, and it was certainly never raced in NZ. Some validity attaches to the tale as there was a Kieft in the family: Jim Mickle had raced an 1100 JAP-engined car in Ireland in 1955.

- The first Keift went to Malaya, eventually becoming the Lim Special.

season grasstrack meeting, and a few weeks later Ron appeared at the Lady Wigram Trophy meeting.

On the basis of elapsed times in the heats, he started from the second row of the grid for the feature, and went straight into sixth place, only to spin and drop back. He was soon back up to eighth, but on the 12th lap came across a three-car tangle and, with nowhere to go, rammed a big old sports Alfa. The black Kieft rolled, pinning its young driver underneath. He was very lucky to escape with burns from leaking fuel, but the car was wrecked.

Ironically the Alfa was owned by his father, who was driving a single-seater version, the famous ex-Nuvolari P3, in the event. Les Moore had won the big Wigram race with the Monoposto in 1951 and did so again this year.

The story goes that the father then raced the second of the family's Kiefts (MkIB-2) while the remains of the original (MkIB-1) pretty much stayed with it as a source of spare parts. At present they are being put back together by Chris Read - 60 years after the Wigram accident.

Caption

But I have a couple of problems with the accepted wisdom. First, although Les Moore raced a Kieft once in 1952, [deletion] it could have been Ron's car. One can understand him keeping the Alfa for the bigger races, but there were numerous small events on sand and grass tracks during the remainder of the season, events of a type he would support in later years, and he didn't appear in any of them. And when he did appear with a Kieft the following season, it was a coffin bodied car, like a MkID

So, did Les rebody his car? Why he would do so remains a mystery. Was it in fact a third car?

It would be several years before Ron's speedway commitments allowed him to race cars in England. But what he did do before that, together with some other speedway friends, was hire Brands Hatch during the week and run a series of informal races. Did he send one of his MkIBs to NZ and leave the other in England for his fun days at Brands Hatch? That could explain why Les did not race a Kieft for most of 1952 - there wasn't one available.

And it could also mean that the coffin-bodied car he raced after that was a third Mk1 - and not Mk1B-2 at all.

Against this suggestion that the two NZ cars arrived in the country at different times is the fact that at its first known appearance, at the beginning of the 1953 season, the square-sided car was registered 291.076, one digit off the Wigram wreck's 291.077, but it was numbered 291.077 thereafter. Both numbers must surely have been issued at the same time, so did Les's car sit unused for a year after all?

Les Moore died in 1960 and although Ron is still alive his last speedway accident was a serious one, and he can't remember anything before 1975. So perhaps we'll never know the answer to these intriguing questions.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**For sale:** BB Ariel, built '60-'61, Red Hunter engine, Norton box, complete spare engine plus engine and gearbox spares, new body panels. Chris Tracey, 02 6280 5285

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

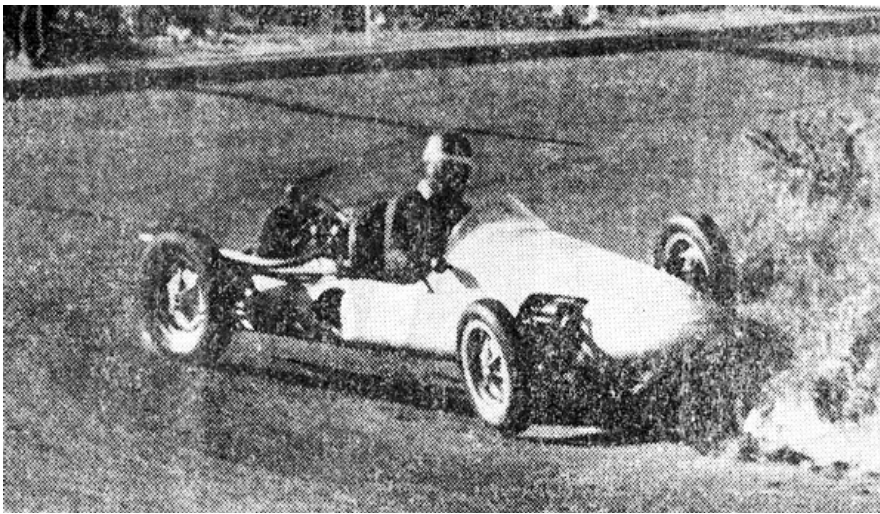
**For sale:** motoring and motorsport books and magazines, mostly US and European, email for 12-page list. Graham Howard. grimes@ix.net.au or 02 4787 8772

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

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

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

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



# NEW COOPER TWIN FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Just as South Africa's apartheid system was hitting top gear in the late 'forties and early fifties, motor racing there was struggling to get under way after the war years.

Summer in South Africa had been a playground for the big teams and other names in the 1930's, but the 1950's were different. The white population of 2 million out of 15 million held absolute political and economic power. There were tight controls and massive duties on the import of racing cars which made new cars almost impossible to obtain.

Nonetheless there was plenty of motor-sport activity with many locally built specials, a full calendar of street races in or around the major towns and cities and a few hillclimbs. There was close contact with Europe naturally – it was, after all, just two weeks away by Union Castle liner.

Arthur Mackenzie was a Durban garage owner with a mixture of 2 and 4 wheeled prewar racing experience and a reputation for excellent preparation.

His first post-war success was in his Austin Seven special, winning the 1949 junior handicap on the Durban Snell Parade beachfront circuit which was held each year in honour of local boy Pat Fairfield who had been killed at Le Mans in 1937. Only a few months later Mackenzie was to be beaten into second place at Pietermaritzburg by Orlando Fregona's locally built 500 called 'Tiger Cub'. He did well too with the Austin in

Maybe a dozen or more Coopers went to South Africa and neighbouring Southern Rhodesia during the nineteen-fifties and a few have followed emigres to Australia. One of the finest of the few that remained there has now come to Australia courtesy of Derry Greeneklee who has bought it from Richard Baker of Johannesburg.. Terry Wright has a look at the car's history. For more on Mackenzie and other South African drivers see Rob Young's article at [www.500-race.org/Men/Mackenzie.htm](http://www.500-race.org/Men/Mackenzie.htm).

1950 and for 1951 he was one of the first two drivers to have a Cooper lined up. We don't know what happened but Mackenzie entered his 500 Cooper for races at East London (16.6.51) and Snell Parade (6.8.51) and recorded "d.n.s." at both. Maybe Mackenzie's car hadn't turned up

or it just took that long to obtain an import permit as it can even today in Australia?

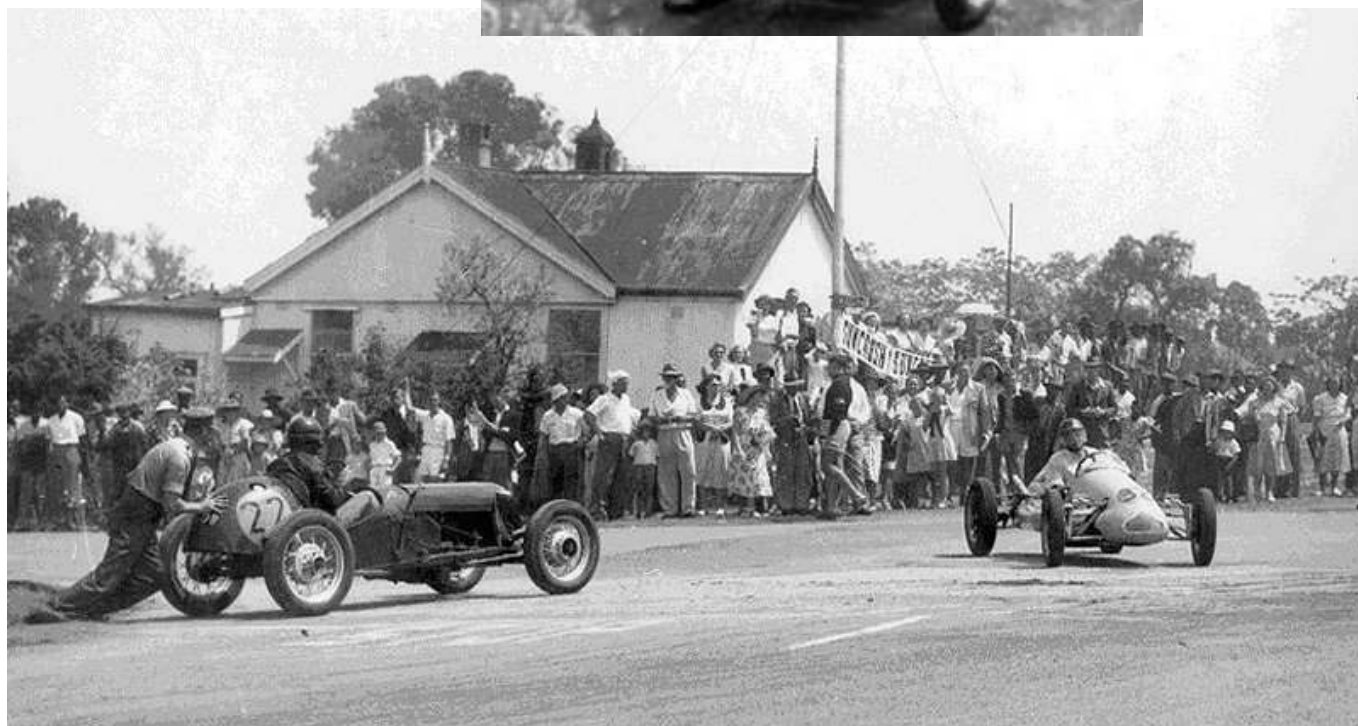
Be that as it may, in the races around the streets of Ladysmith on 1 October 1951 Arthur was winner on scratch and 5th in the handicap. Next, at Durban's Burman Drive hillclimb (17.12.51), he became national champion while being beaten into second place for the event.

*Iota* magazine (February 1952) then reported: "Mackenzie ('Cooper MkV') won the 100 mile Fairfield Handicap at Snell Parade, Durban 20 January 1952' and then, 'MacKenzie only recently took delivery of the Cooper which had not previously been entered in a race'".

Mackenzie competed regularly with a 350 and/or 500 JAP through 1952-4 appearing first with an 1100 at Roy Hesketh (Pietermaritzburg) on 31.5.54 winning the Union Day Handicap. The



Caption/waiting for ok to use pic



programme for the Grand Central circuit near Johannesburg for 21.8.54 states:

*'Arthur Mackenzie specializes in swopping engines in his Cooper and may be using a 500cc JAP or an 1100cc of the same make. Mackenzie is a Natal man who turns in some wonderful performances when things go right, and Transvaal enthusiasts will expect much of him today, especially if he races the bigger motor'.*

However, Mackenzie did not start at that meeting. He did not race in 1955 and ran the 500 once in 1956. At the Roy Hesketh circuit 20.1.57 he is listed as 1st with the 1100 in the Fairfield Trophy. He then appeared with the 1100 at Roy Hesketh with dnf's on 22.4.57 and 7.4.58; He crashed with serious injuries there on 18.1.59 and did not race again.

The car was next run by Frank Maritz with the programme for the 1/3.4.61 Roy Hesketh meeting stating:

*'Although we haven't seen Frank for some time now he is an old hand at the game and becomes even more formidable driving the ex Mackenzie 1097 Cooper JAP which at one stage held the lap record at the Hesketh circuit. Here is a real dark horse and will prove particularly worrying to those 4th to 6th places'.*

Maritz is recorded as entered at Grand Central in March 1960, Grand Central 18.3.61 and Zwarzkop (Pretoria) 12.5.62. He died in 1973. Frank's son Frank jnr, who now lives near Auckland, has provided the following information about his father's ownership of the car:

*'The family lived in Krugersdorp near J'burg; my father had a garage business and he had been racing since about 1953/4 when he started with an MG Special. In the early 'sixties, probably April/May 1963 when I was at teacher training college my father and two others made the trek across the Kalihari Desert to a race meeting in South West Africa at Windhoek [the capital city]. A spectator from Port Walvis on the west coast of SWA, either at the meeting or later, arranged to buy the car from father, and subsequently came down to Krugersdorp to collect it.'*

The car is believed to have been used for sand or beach racing and in 1977, a J H Pieterse of close-by Swapokmund put up the Mk5, a Mk7 and several twin engines for sale at an auction of collectable cars held at a local country club.

After passing through several hands Richard Baker restored both cars and the Mk5 ran again in February 2006 and occasionally since.

With the car's history known from 1951 to date there is fun to be had in speculating about its first few months before it went to South Africa. It is a Mk5 of 1951 without doubt but there is no chassis plate which is not that unusual. Sometimes cars or bits of them left the works and had no plates; sometimes the plate has been removed for chassis restoration and lost (the plate on my Walton Cooper came with the car in a jam-jar).

The wheelbase is 88", three inches longer than the advertised 85" for the standard Mk5 chassis although this may actually have been 86" in production. It has a factory type optional ZF differential which is rare. All this suggests the car was one of the 'L' long chassis models of which we know definitely of L1 to L9 with L1, 2 and 3 not accounted for.

Robin Montgomery Charrington's car was advertised for sale in *The Autocar* on 5 October 1951 so Mackenzie couldn't have had that one. Nothing is known about L2 or about the Mr Norton for whom it was supplied according to Nye's book (no Mr Norton raced a Cooper single or twin before Tom Norton in the late 'fifties). It could be the Harry Schell L3 car which probably last raced in June 1951 and of which nothing more is known. It could also be the car John Cooper raced at Goodwood Easter 1951, but not subsequently as a twin, of which again nothing more is known either.

We will surely never know, but whether we do or not, it's a really beauty, one of the nicest period Cooper twins to survive and a good thing to have in Loosefillingsland.

● Checking the log book for his Robbins BSA, John Coffin discovered that since buying the car from Warwick Hanstead in June 2000 he has run the car at some 70 different events at 11 different venues since his first competition outing with it at Rob Roy in November 2000. The logbook shows the car has run at Rob Roy 35 times, Mt Tarrengower 10 times and Eddington quarter-mile sprints nine times

● Graham Hoinville points out that the story on Andy Menzies' front-drive 500 in Loose Fillings 39 gave the wrong date for the opening race meeting at Altona in 1953, The correct date was March 8, not March 18 as shown in the story. This explains how Menzies had a bit more time to repair the car after the Altona accident before its next appearance at Fishermens Bend on March 20-21. Since the Menzies 500 story appeared, Max Menzies has recalled his father also ran at Rob Roy before WW2 – on a speedway JAP motorcycle. With no gearbox and no brakes, stopping at the end of each run was apparently pretty interesting.

● The photo in LF39 of Kerry Horan's Trenberth Vincent at Goodwood was incorrectly credited to Dave Williamson, and was in fact taken by Kerry Smith.

● Alan "Toby" Hindes, who competed between 1960 and 1962 with a Vincent-powered Ralt, died on the NSW north coast in December, aged 86. He is survived by his wife Marie, daughter Lynne, son Alan, daughter in law Bronwyn, and grandson Matthew.

The Ralt was one of the small batch of late-1950s "kit" Ralts, and was bought semi-complete from Peter Wilkins. It was later sold to Todd Hamilton, who still owns it. Despite two seasons of frustrating engine problems with the car in single- and twin-cylinder forms, Toby recalled his Ralt years with enthusiasm and was a keen reader of *Loose Fillings*.

**THE LOG**

- February 12 - Rob Roy hillclimb, John Coffin, Robbins BSA
- February 25-26 – Wakefield Park historic races, Derry Greeneklee, Cooper Mk6 JAP 500; Andrew Halliday, Garry Simkin, Cooper Mk4 Vincent, Brian Simpson, Cooper Mk9 JAP 1100
- March 8-11, Phillip Island historic races, Graeme Noonan Cooper Mk7 Norton
- March 18 Mt Ku-ring-gai testing, Terry Wright, Walton-Special JAP
- April 7-8, Mallala, David Reid, Duck Anderson Special; Derry Greeneklee, Cooper Mk 6 JAP 500●; Brian Simpson, Cooper Mk9 JAP 1100.
- April 14-15, Hampton Downs NZ, Laurie Callender, JBS JAP 500; Max Rutherford JBS JAP 500; Arthur Hopkins Cooper Mk5 JAP 500; John Holdsworth, Cooper JAP 1100

*Edited by Graham Howard,  
grimes@ix.net.au*

*Produced by Terry Wright,  
(tsrwright@gmail.com)*

*Published by Garry Simkin,  
28 McClelland Street, Willoughby,  
NSW 2068 phone 02 9958 3935,  
(gjsimkin@iprimus.com.au)*