

History of motorsport in Queensland Part 1

By Malcolm Spiden

Prior to the formation in 1953 of the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) a national body overseeing and administering motor sport in Australia, the Australian Automobile Association undertook this role through the local motoring body in each state. Until 1936, the Automobile Club of Queensland (ACQ – it was not until 5 March 1921 that King George V approved the use of the Royal prefix) #1 organised motoring and motor sport events in Queensland.

On 14 April 1908 the ACQ Club Council drew up a programme of events that included the first motor gymkhana and this was held at the Brisbane Cricket Grounds on 30 May 1908. The day included judging the best turned out vehicle, a musical chairs competition for ladies, an obstacle race, a potato race, and, to finish the day, a procession from the Gabba to the Valley corner.”#2

During the 1914-1918 World War, motor sporting events were a popular method of raising money for the various fighting funds. On 17 April 1915 the club (ACQ) held a hill climbing contest in Cooksley Street Hamilton. #3 Further hill climbs were held, each time at One Tree Hill (Mt Coot Tha) on 27 May 1916 and 14 October 1916. These started at Gordon’s farm below the gates to the Reserve and finished near the Summit of the hill, 1.6 miles altogether. By 1918 hill climbs and petrol consumption tests were regular events on the ACQ club’s calendar. #4

Post 1918 competition fixtures included interstate reliability trials such as from Brisbane to Sydney, Brisbane to Rockhampton and return, Brisbane to Grafton and Brisbane to Katoomba. Other events included fuel consumption tests, speed judging competitions, hill climbs and distance judging tests. By 1928 speed events were re-introduced at Main Beach, Southport #4. In 1933 speed events were held along South Pine Road Brendale known as “The Mad Mile” and in 1934 hill climbs at Clear Mountain. #5

Post World War Two road racing commenced at the A2 airfield at Strathpine with the first meeting on 11 August 1946 and the last on 11 October 1958 when the area was developed into housing estates and the Pine Rivers State High School. (The exact location can be found in Roger Marks’ book #6).

What has this short history and long introduction to do with the MG Car Club? At noon on Monday 25 October 1954 a 45 minute meeting was held at Howards Ltd 317 Adelaide Street, Brisbane. Howards Ltd was the authorised Nuffield agent for Queensland and the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. The agenda item was the formation of an MG Car Club for Queensland. Those who attended were George Reid, Bill Pitt, John Muller, Graeme Muller, Robert Burnett, John Gill, Philip Hickey, P Rhodes, J Barling, E Wilson, Frank Taylor and Fred Dyke. With Frank Taylor (Chairman), Fred Dyke (Secretary), Graeme Muller (Treasurer), a committee of R Burnett, John Gill, Peter Uscinski and Philip Hickey, formed the initial committee. #7 A further meeting was held on Tuesday 2nd November 1954 at R. G. Groom & Co (T & G Building, Queen Street, Brisbane) when it was resolved to hold a general meeting at Howards Assembly plant Nudgee Road, Hendra on Tuesday 16 November

1954 to put forward the proposal, open a current account at Brisbane Permanent Building & Banking Society; and organize a day run to Toowoomba. #8. This meeting was advertised and asked “all interested parties are invited to attend. The immediate aim of the club is to cater for social activities, gymkhanas etc and eventually to enter the competitive field.” #9 In between these two meetings and the planned Tuesday meeting, the 19th Australian Grand Prix was held at the Southport road circuit on Sunday 7 November 1954.

The Tuesday meeting saw the 7 committee members and some 30 enthusiasts meet and carry the resolution to form the club with those present becoming the foundation members or associate members where applicable. Unanimous approval was given for the day run on Sunday 28 November and a gymkhana was planned for Sunday 12 December. The formation was reported in the Courier Mail under the headline “Now we have an MG club” #10 Likewise the first outing was reported in the local ‘Motor Sport in Queensland’ magazine which remarked “a good roll up assembled at Kemp Place about the 8 am mark, and it really looked something to see the line-up of ‘G’s’. Lunch was at Picnic Point Toowoomba where future activities were discussed.” #11

Affiliation with both the Parent Club in the U.K. and with CAMS was sought whilst the ‘club was to investigate and report on a suitable timing gear for competition purposes’. #12. It was not long before our club was participating in Interclub events. The first was the ‘Motor Sport in Queensland First Interclub Gymkhana’ held at the Mt Gravatt Showgrounds on Sunday 6 February 1955. Standard tests of the era were to be run, namely:

- Forward Bending race (for race read test)
- Potato race
- Forward and Reverse Bending race
- Southern Cross
- Slip Rail event
- Parking Test
- Thread the Needle
- Find the car event (apparently a very popular event of the era)

Members of our club’s team included Fred Dyke (MGTF), John Gill, and Frank Taylor. Results of the eight clubs participating:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----|--------|
| Gympie Motor Sporting Car Club | 16 | points |
| Ipswich and West Moreton Auto Club | 15 | “ |
| Beaudesert Sporting Car Club | 13 | “ |
| Queensland Motor Sporting Club | 7 | “ |
| Brisbane Sporting Car Club | 7 | “ |
| Toowoomba Auto Club | 6 | “ |
| M.G. Club (Queensland Division) | 4 | “ |
| Brisbane Light Car Club | 1 | “ #13 |

A full calendar of events for the first year of existence (1955) was promoted by the club which included navigation exercises, scavenger hunts, gymkhanas, film evenings (remember NO Television as yet), trials, petrol consumption test, socials and dance, Concours D’Elegance, hill climbs, sprints at Strathpine (the first on 26 June), as well as a visit to Nasons Automotive Workshop at 403 Adelaide Street, Brisbane. #14

A second Interclub Gymkhana was held on Monday 13 June (Queens Birthday holiday) at the Caboolture Showgrounds with the same tests as used on 6 February. The M.G. team members were Fred Dyke (MGTC), Bill Weekes (MGTF), Vince Jordan (MGTF), Ken Ebeling (MGTF), Stan Pollard (MGTC) and T Jones (MGTD) #15.

Within ten months of forming in August 1955 the news of “M.G. club to promote road racing” was a heading in the local publication. The report stated an 8 event programme including 3 motor cycle race events was to be staged on Saturday 8 October 1955. “This will be the M.G. club’s first venture into the promotion side of road racing; and it is indeed good to see them staging a meeting and thereby really doing something for the competitor”. #16. The report of the meeting states a large crowd attended and the “first car event conducted and completed was a Open Scratch race over 5 laps (7 miles) was won by Steve Ames driving the ex- Lex Davison Alfa Romeo Tipo 8C 2900 cc P3”. #17. For our first year, the Queensland Centre was awarded the Nuffield Trophy for the Pacific Area from The M.G.Car Club, Abingdon-on-Thames.

The programme for 1956 was just as hectic as our first year; however this included two open race meetings on 31 May and 6 October. In the summary report to A. Russell Lowry, the General Secretary of The M.G. Car Club, the then Secretary, Frank Taylor, indicated achievements of the Centre included: our centre designed and built our timing gear for our sprint meetings and lent it to and operated it for other clubs; the centre organized and trained a team of members who acted as timekeepers and lap scorers at ALL major road race meetings; the centre organised and ran two major road race meetings. During the October meeting the first duration race in Queensland was staged (this was over a quarter hour duration and incorporated a Le Mans start). This was won by E.J.(Jim) Bertram in his Triumph TR2 who covered 11 laps within the time. #18.

Thus a short history of the first 2 years of the life of our club. This may also jog a few memories.

References

- 1 Longhurst, Robert; “A Road Well Travelled – RACQ First 100 years”, Playright Publishing, Sydney, 2006 p77
- 2 Longhurst, p45
- 3 Longhurst, p70
- 4 Longhurst, p71
- 5 Wheelspin Display at Pine River Museum July 2007
- 6 Marks, Roger; “Queensland Airfields WW2 50 Years On” in Brisbane City Council Library call Number 940.544394 MAR
- 7 Minutes MG Car Club Library
- 8 Minutes MG Car Club Library
- 9 Motor Sport in Queensland November 1954 Vol 2 No 3, p30 Consolidated Publications Brisbane
- 10 Courier Mail Thursday 18 November 1954, p16
- 11 Motor Sport in Queensland December 1954, Vol 2 No 4, p31
- 12 Minutes MG Car Club Library

- 13 Motor Sport in Queensland February 1955, Vol 2 No 6, p18 & 21
- 14 Motor Sport in Queensland March 1955, Vol 2 No 7, p 4.
- 15 Motor Sport in Queensland June 1955, Vol 2 No 10, p9
- 16 Motor Sport in Queensland August 1955, Vol 2 No 12, p28
- 17 Motor Sport in Queensland October 1955, Vol 3 No 2, p16
- 18 Correspondence MG Car Club Library.