

MEMORIES ... from Tom Storrie

It must have been early 1963, I had just joined the MG Car Club after being befriended at a meeting at the Wickham Street clubrooms by my still very good friend, Kerry Horgan, who at that time owned a great Austin Healey 6. Kerry had chosen for his race car, a retired 1950's Ford Custom, and on this particular week-end I was invited to drive up to Lowood with some other members of the club, so the Custom could be test driven to check out two of our 'unique innovations'.

The first was one we had dreamed up to keep V8 engine cool – an MG SU fuel pump mounted up front with one piece of fuel line going to a water reservoir, and the other was that all you had to do was flick the switch on the dashboard of the Ford, which in turn would start the SU fuel pump and that in theory, would deliver a fine water spray over the radiator in the hope that it would cool the V8 beast and stop the overheating problem we had. Now don't all laugh at once. It did work, for a while.

Innovation number two was one of mine. You see I had the idea of cutting out black and white discs, and the racing numbers of the relevant size, from the then new product on the market 'Fabulon'—do you remember it? This done, I mounted numbers 71 on the Custom's doors. I thought this was a marketable idea, but Kerry thought it would never take off. Maybe he should ask my friend Peter Mulder from Race and Rally in Sydney, was the idea a good one?

We all arrived at Lowood safely, Kerry, Dick Johnson, Doug Partington, Dane Horgan, Iain Corness, and yours truly. Kerry drove up in his Austin Healey 6, Dick, I am told, drove the Ford Custom and the rest of us were in Dane Horgan's car.



Tom, Dick and Harry (sorry, Kerry) got together again at the Official opening of the Clubrooms on September 30.

After a few hours testing, I got into the Custom's passenger seat with Doug Partington driving, and off we went to do a few laps of Lowood for my first real time in car on

the race track, as everything I had done was in club events back in my home town of Townsville.

Everything was going well until the second or third lap, when I felt a bit 'squeezy' from all the engine fumes coming into the cabin of the car which had been totally gutted. I reached for what I thought was the window winder only to find that this particular handle had been mounted on to the door release. The door immediately flew open just as we entered the bends between BP and Bardahl, and I went out the open door with the movement of the car into the corner.

We weren't all that safety minded in those days and only the driver had a seat belt. I grabbed the edge of the open door and the B pillar to stop me from going right out of the car, but my backside was precariously close to the bitumen. Doug suddenly realized what was happening and let go the steering wheel with his left hand and grabbed hold of me while steering through the corner at speed with his right hand on the wheel. He steered at speed through the corners, but not before we brushed up against a tyre wall throwing tyres skywards. The rest of the group in the pits, watching all this happen, thought we were 'gone'. But no, Doug dragged me back into the car, got the car under control and drove safely back into the pits. Everyone looked relieved to see us drive in and stop, but it was a talking point for awhile, and even today if you ask Doug Partington about that day he will right away tell you 'I saved his life'.

But the adventures of the day didn't stop there. Dick's version of the rest of the story, according to Doug was, that seeing Dick was regarded as head mechanic on this project and Doug his offsider, Dick's reward was to be allowed to drive the Ford Custom back to Kerry's home in Park Road. Doug went with Kerry and the rest of us were in the remaining car.

Just outside Ipswich at Blacksoil, the left-hand front wheel decided to 'pop' off and lodge itself up under the mudguard, with Dick driving. Of course everything and everyone ground to a halt to see what had happened. Then someone, who maybe had been watching too many TV westerns, remembered an old stagecoach trick and with a few tugs on on a nearby tree branch, made the necessary repairs by lifting the front leftside of the car off the ground and lodging the tree branch through the suspension mounts. Dick then drove the car to the nearest garage to have some bodgie repairs done, then drove on to Park Road.

So ended a memorable day of testing. Well I'll remember it, with apologies to those who think I got it all wrong. Thanks Doug.

Oh, by the way, with regards my idea about stick on discs and racing numbers, Doug Partington relates, in his own words via Elaine Hamilton, that at one race meeting Dick borrowed the number '71' from Kerry's car and affixed them to his car as '17'; the beginning of a legend.