

## My first car – Part 2

By Ken Ebeling

As for Bathurst we did enjoy the motorcycle-racing on the Saturday and the car racing ran the Monday. My dream car of the decade, an Aston Martin DB3, raced at the meeting. An XK120 Jaguar practiced but did not race after hitting a bank during practice. There were also quite a few MGs which attracted my attention both on and off the racetrack.

*Photos of racing at Bathurst*



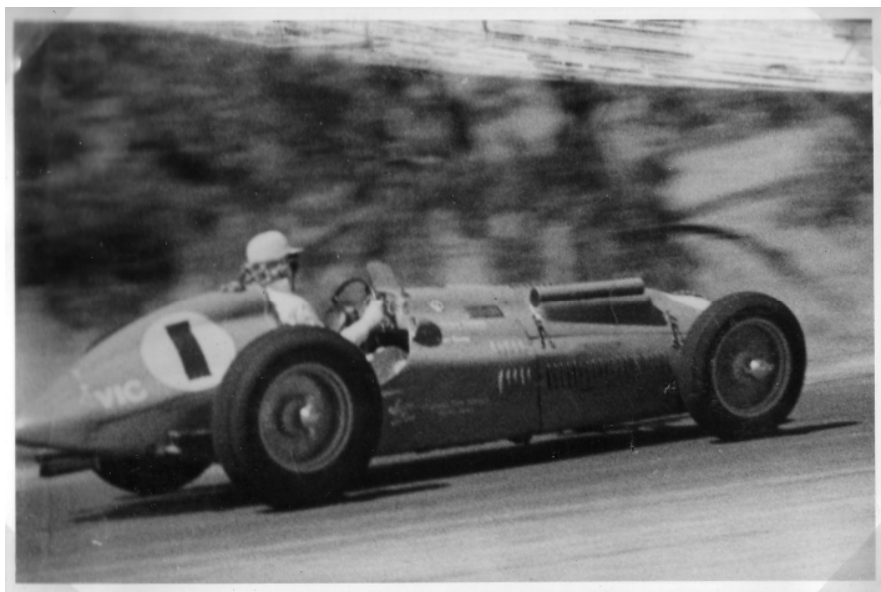
*Lago Talbot follows Keinig's Hudson*



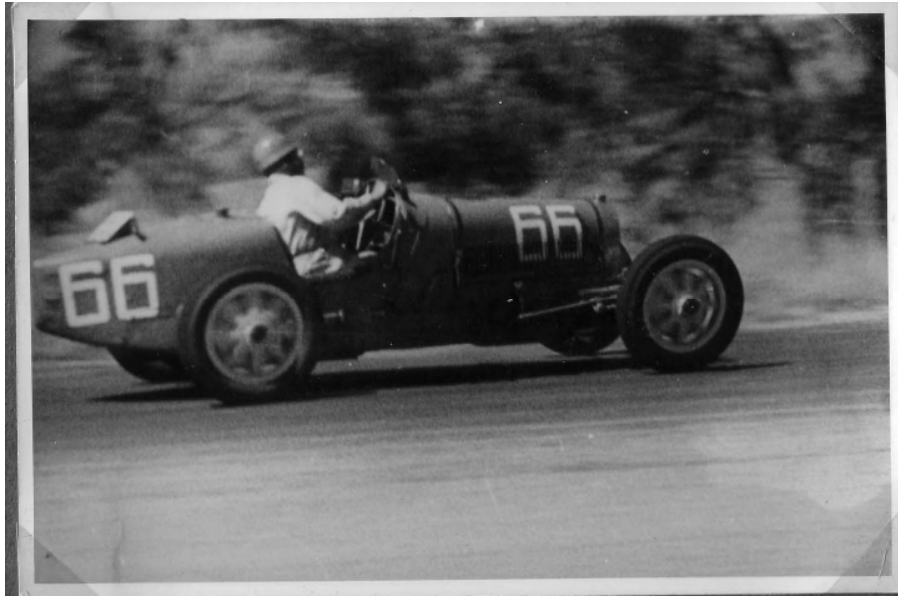
*Les Taylor*



*Saywell, Cooper*



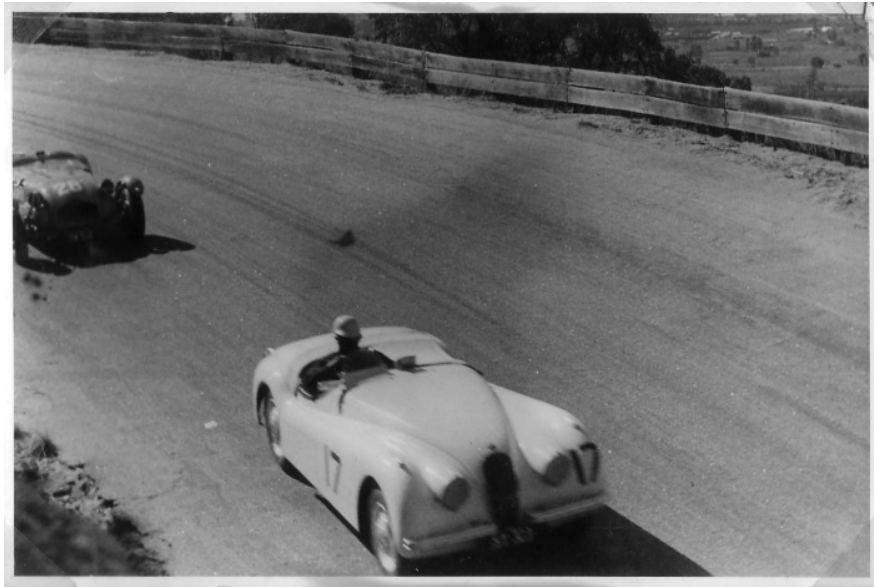
*Doug Whiteford, Lago Talbot*



*P Menere, Bugatti*



*W T Burrows, MG TC*



*H Bartlett, Jaguar XK120*

About mid-morning on the Tuesday following our Easter weekend at Bathurst we headed to Sydney for a few days of sightseeing. We were the last to leave the barracks of the National Fitness Camp as most other people had left after the races finished on Monday or very early Tuesday morning. After arriving in Sydney, for what was my first visit, we decided to head for Bondi by following a tram. All went well until the tram headed between some buildings on what had turned into a railway type track instead of two rails set into the road surface. We finally found Bondi and a few nights accommodation only a short walk from the famous beach. The most obvious feature of my first foray into the Sydney traffic was that far more attention was given to the "Give way to the right " traffic rule. If it wasn't given it would most likely be taken.

We attracted quite a lot of attention while driving around Sydney due firstly to a distinct lack of silencing and secondly to the cardboard notice attached to the driver's-side door. There had been dozens of them attached to the fences on the inside of the circuit. They read in large letters "NO SPECTATORS THIS SIDE". The other souvenir of our visit to Bathurst was a large cloth sign about a metre square with nothing on it apart from a huge red 'X'. I'm quite sure Mr. Shepherd of REDEX never missed it. We did the usual things in the city such as visiting Kings Cross and driving up Pitt Street, or was it down Pitt Street. Actually it was both up and down as our first attempt disclosed all the cars parked facing the opposite direction to our travel.. The reason soon became obvious even if the "ONE WAY" signs initially were not! It was at night and obviously pretty quiet as I don't recall anyone blowing their horn at us. Next morning, we parked the car in the city and went window shopping. On the way back to Bondi we attracted a bit more attention. The electric petrol pump packed up again and the engine stopped. This time it was in

William Street in the middle of the peak hour traffic when we were the leading car waiting for the traffic policeman to wave us on. The policeman standing in the safety zone waiting for a tram thought it was funny but the officer on traffic duty obviously thought otherwise. On that day I set a new record for the time taken to get out of the driver's seat of an MG, lift the passenger side bonnet, get a spanner from the under bonnet tool box, tap the pump to get it started, put the spanner away and the bonnet down and get back into the car to drive off. The next day I fitted a new set of contact points to the pump. They were far more effective than the old ones which had been filed down to the soft iron beneath the tungsten facing of the contacts. A new muffler quietened things down a bit and some panel beating by the same helpful MG dealer restored the crumpled running board and did away with the need to use a piece of rope to keep the door shut. While this was being done we visited Taronga Park Zoo.

The next day we left for home via the New England Highway. It was an uneventful trip apart from one minor incident. One bracket supporting the heavily loaded luggage carrier gave way. This caused it to drag along behind with a dreadful scraping and screeching noise to let us know all was not well. We put our suitcases in the car and packed our soft luggage between the bonnet and the mudguards and tied the carrier to the spare wheel. Fortunately we were approaching Cunningham's Gap with only about 160 km to go. The compulsory stops to add oil every 150 km or so added interest to the journey. Obviously you can't burn your oil and have it too!

Some few days later, while still on holiday, I made a trip to Rockhampton and on one occasion was a little late adding oil. As I swept around a long sweeping bend approaching the small town of Miriam Vale the oil pressure gauge began to fluctuate madly and there was a hurried stop made to top up the sump. The problem encountered made it very obvious that the time had arrived for a major overhaul which was likely to be very expensive no matter how it was done. The decision was made to remove the engine and gearbox myself and to take the short motor to the reconditioner's for attention to the cylinder bores, pistons, crankshaft and bearings. The first job was to clean out the garage at the boarding house on the corner of Vulture and Leopard Streets, Kangaroo Point and to fix the door so that it could be opened. It had a dirt floor and had been used as a wood shed with access only through a rear door.

The "Instruction Manual for the MG Midget (Series TC)" says very simply, as the first step towards removing the engine and gearbox, "After radiator and bonnet have been removed: - Remove the seats, carpets, rubber gearbox cover or gearbox carpet and floorboards." Then there are a further eight instructions before coming to the one which says 'Finally'. It all sounds very simple, and by today's standards it was, but I can tell you from personal experience it is easier to write about than to actually carry out. It takes time when you are working, mostly on your own, at night after work and at weekends in a boarding house garage with limited facilities.

Once the motor and gearbox were out and dismantled, the ghostly noises of the Bathurst trip were laid to rest and a broken rear engine mount discovered. The latter was probably due to the off-road excursion on the way to the Jenolan Caves. The engine mount forms

part of the gearbox rear cover and after removal was taken to an engineering shop which specialised in the welding of aluminium. At the time welding of aluminium was less common and more difficult than it has become with the techniques now available. The surface which bolts to the gearbox had to be lightly resurfaced in a lathe after welding to ensure an oil-tight joint. A new clutch plate was purchased along with the various gasket sets and the carbon faced clutch throwout bearing which was badly worn.

The wait for the reassembled short motor was longer than anticipated and far longer than promised. This gave me ample time to paint the auxiliaries and various cover plates with bright red enamel. It also gave me time to study the manual which says very explicitly 'that the oil spray hole above the big-end bearing shown on Illustration No 26 must be in a position to properly lubricate the cylinder walls.' I still have a manual, unfortunately not the original one but an exact copy, which I obtained from England long after the TC was a distant memory. It seems that the reconditioners didn't have a manual because the motor came back with the oil spray holes on the wrong side. I sat down to reverse the rods by removing the big-end caps, rotating the piston and connecting rod assembly and replacing the caps. The first piston was pushed up too far and out popped the rings including the multiple part oil control rings referred to by the trade name of 'Cords'. At this stage, my then current lady friend, objecting to the profanity and wishing to remain a lady, went up to the house to talk to my landlady who was also her aunt. This was just as well as a second burst of profanity ensued when I discovered that rotating the assembly had brought the part of the piston marked 'front' to the back of the cylinder bore. Fearing that I might do my block, and also the cylinder block with the axe from the woodpile, I quit and went to the house to seek consolation from my lady friend. Consolation was a long time coming after the second burst of profanity which had issued from the garage.

Many hours and many swear words later, I had the motor back in the chassis and began putting the bits and pieces in place. One saucer-shaped washer with a large hole, which I couldn't place, turned out to belong to the camshaft timing gear for oil control. This meant that the timing gear cover had to come off again. Fortunately the radiator had not been replaced and the work could be done with the motor in place. There were also a few bolts which had gone in one place and belonged in another. Of course, you don't know that the ones left are not long enough until you come to the last few bolt holes. Then there is the steel plate around the steering column. This should be outside the ramp plate, which has been bolted down, but instead it is hanging on the column out of the way and inside the ramp plate! In the book 'Tuning and maintenance of MGs', the author, Philip H Smith, says 'The floorboards are secured by screws or bolts and bosses secured to the propeller shaft tunnel.' If these are difficult to remove, he suggests drilling them out. This proved to be unnecessary as the threads were frozen and unscrewing the bolts caused the bosses to come away from the tunnel. As he suggests, I had to use nuts and bolts for reassembly. Have you ever tried to screw up nuts and bolts in an unheated garage during winter with one shoulder on a dirt floor and an arm under the car and the other arm reaching through the car doorway? The first time isn't too bad .... Then you discover that the carpet covering the propeller shaft should have its edges under the floorboards. This means undoing all the bolts, putting the carpet down, then the floorboards, and doing up all the bolts once again. Such are the joys of motoring!

Finally there came the time to start up! Due to the long layoff, the battery was not up to the job and neither common sense nor the handbook had said to keep it charged. The motor was fairly stiff to turn even with the crankhandle which is almost an unheard of device in this modern age. We began by trying to tow start but finished up breaking every piece of rope we could find at the boarding house or borrow from other boarders with cars. There had been no sign of a start so we had to quit as my mechanic friend had to go to work. Many tradespeople still worked on Saturday morning at the time. While he was at work I bought a new piece of rope which was still serving me well years later. It outlasted an MG TF 1250 and a Triumph TR2 and later still provided a swing for two of my children. Even with a rope equal to the strain, the car was reluctant to start. As a final resort, we connected a six volt ignition coil to the twelve volt system of the MG to really boost the spark and away it went just in time to take me to hockey. It started again after reverting to the proper coil and we went off to hockey with a car minus bonnet, gearbox cover and carpets, apart from the bit of carpet over the propeller shaft.

It was a refreshing change not to have to stop to add oil every 150 km or so, and the months that followed were filled with some pleasant motoring. Included were trips to the Gold Coast to enjoy excellent beaches, picnics to places like Cunningham's Gap, Heifer Creek, Warwick and Toowoomba. There was also time to become a spectator at motor sporting events, little realising at the time that before long I would be a competitor. As is usually the case, there came a time for the good news and the bad news! The good news was that I had obtained a promotion. The bad news was that the promotion was to the small country town of Emerald in central western Queensland.

There was other bad news as well, as the TC had developed a very rough idle which appeared to be caused by cylinder three. A check of compression by the RACQ indicated that something was seriously amiss and the cylinder head would have to come off. With the head off, the problem was very apparent. The top of the piston was slightly dished and it did not come to the top of the bore. This meant that in all probability the connecting rod was bent and the sump would also have to come off. With the sump off, the bent rod was confirmed and the piston and rings replaced. Why the rod was only straightened I no longer recall but I do know that the top of the piston was still a fraction down the bore and is clearly visible in a photograph taken at a later top overhaul. The damage was probably due to water leaking into the bore through a faulty gasket. When the engine started, the piston tried to compress the water and the piston lost the battle.

Now that the car was running properly, the next event of importance would be the drive to Emerald to take up duty as Officer in Charge of the Emerald and district Telephone Exchange.