

## Leisure Time Motoring

An increased level of leisure activity, firstly in the "TC" and later in the "TF", followed my promotion to Maryborough. Apart from the attractions of the ocean resorts at Hervey Bay, the towns of Bundaberg and Gympie and the surrounding districts were there to be visited. The proximity to Brisbane, still 275km but a lot closer than Emerald at 950km, also meant that trips to Brisbane and my parents' home at Woodford were more frequent. The change from the "TC" to the "TF" also meant they could be taken in greater comfort and in less time. The first trip in the "TF" purely for pleasure was the one, written of earlier to Tamborine Mountain on the day I picked up the car.

One weekend, when a friend from Maryborough had travelled to Brisbane with me, we took a run to Toowoomba. It was not raining at the time but there had been heavy rain during the night. As a result of the rain the then low level bridge and approaches at Laidley Creek were under water and cars were being towed through with a tractor. Unfortunately the piece of rope being used was old and as it kept breaking became shorter and shorter as it was rejoined. As my turn came the rope was so short the tractor driver gave up his lucrative pastime. In view of past experience with flooded creeks I decided the "TF" would get through unaided so I headed slowly into the water. There was no problem until the driver of a huge milk tanker decided the time was now and came charging through from the opposite direction sending a bow wave in front of his truck. The bow wave when we met simply slapped over the low cutaway door of my car and left me wringing wet. It was probably just as well the tanker driver didn't hear what I had to say. I know that after the wetting I had to apologise to my passenger for what I had said.

My transfer to Toowoomba, in February, 1955, placed me even closer to Brisbane and to my parents' home! It also gave me the opportunity to participate in the full range of activities of a number of car clubs. This included gymkhanas, treasure hunts and purely social events. Gymkhanas could, I suppose, be classified as a leisure activity and I must admit to enjoying them immensely. I have lost count of the number in which I competed at Maryborough, before leaving, on the Darling Downs and around Brisbane. One of the fun events held, usually on those occasions when there were paying spectators, involved the driver being blindfolded. The cars were arranged in a large circle and a passenger recruited to blow each car horn. The drivers were expected to find their own car by identifying the sound of the horn and locating their car as quickly as possible. After most drivers have succeeded, and to add to the fun, a few pushers are recruited to push one of the cars further away each time the driver approaches. The crowd invariably enjoys the game.

In 1954 the timing of my annual leave was arranged to enable me to holiday at Coolangatta and to spectate at the "Nineteenth Australian Grand Prix". This was to be run at Southport on November 7th 1954. The name Gold Coast given to the coastal strip from Southport to Coolangatta was still in the future. By today's standards the roads used would be totally unacceptable as an access road let alone a motor race circuit. It was far too narrow, about three metres wide in most places, and quite rough. There was also a

narrow wooden bridge. Indeed one report of the event blames the roughness of the circuit for the crash which took Stan Jones, in the Maybach, out of the race when in the lead. Another report suggests that Jones had been "involved in a collision with Lex Davidson on an S-bend". The Maybach, a very special special, had been taken over from Charlie Dean after the 1951 races at Bathurst. Charlie Dean continued to develop the car for Stan Jones and later, fitted it with three S.U. carburettors with a bore of 2 3/16 inches (almost 5.56cm). In this form the car had achieved a speed of 141 mph (227 km/h) at Bathurst during the 1952 Australian Grand Prix and had been developed even further for the 1954 event. The engine had originally been fitted to a German half-track scout car captured in the Middle East during World War 2. The Maybach was extensively damaged in the crash at Southport but Stan Jones suffered only a cut lip.

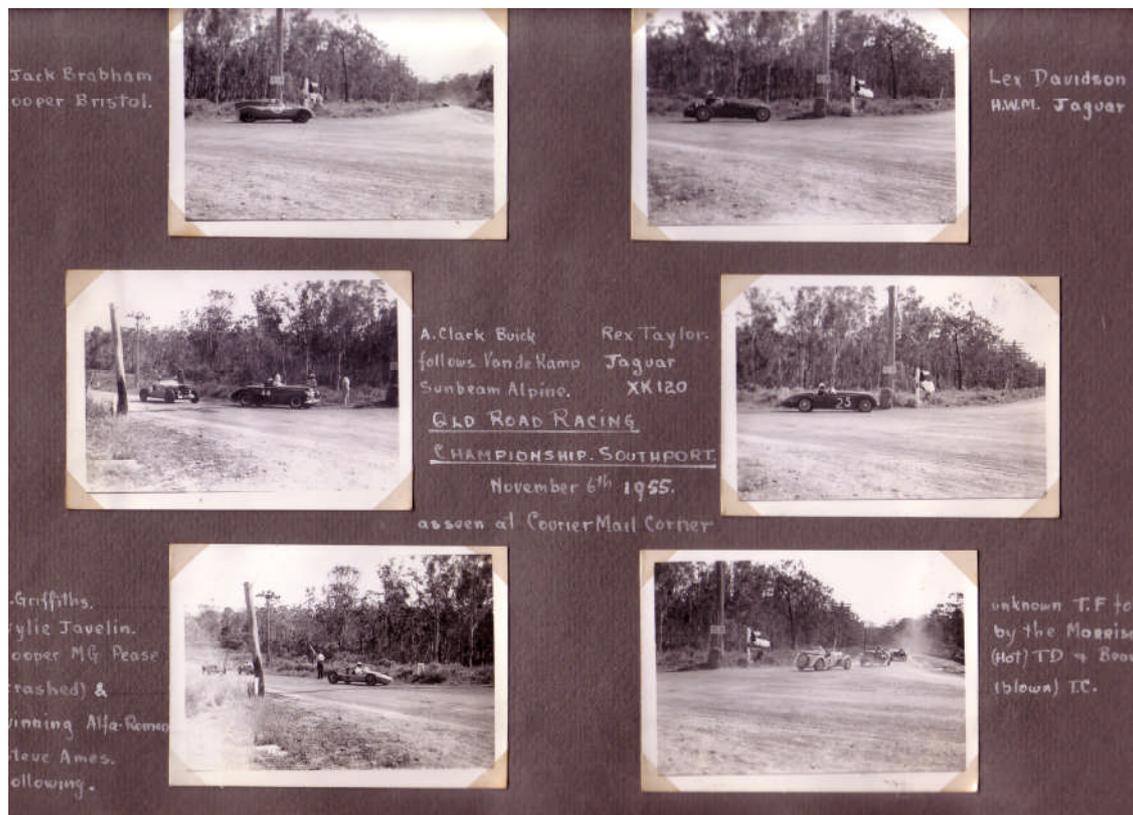
The winner of the Grand Prix was A.N.Davidson in a HWM-Jaguar and Dick Cobden made the fastest lap of 3m 52.2s, a speed of 142.22 km/h. Other races were won by a Triumph TR2, a Jaguar XK120 and an Aston Martin DB2. To my disappointment MGs didn't do too well even though there were three supercharged MGs and two MG specials entered for the Grand Prix. One of the blown MGs was a "TD" the others were "TCs". An MG "TF" was entered in one of the supporting races. An MG had won Australian Grand Prix races in 1935, 1937, 1939 and 1947 but in the fifties they were no longer competitive. The specialised racing cars, many with engines of far larger capacity, being developed throughout the world were beginning to arrive in Australia. It was, just the same, a most enjoyable day of motor sport but for some reason I took only one photograph, a colour slide, of a Lancia Aurelia behind the pits. Some years later I tried to slipstream the Lancia down the circuit at Strathpine without success.

The Southport circuit was 9.17 km long on what is still public road. The pits were a grassy paddock on the north side of Ashmore Road near Campbell Street. The start/finish line was east of the pits on that part of Ashmore Road they called Redman Straight. A left turn, at what was once known locally as 4GG corner, took drivers into Bundall Road, which later changes name to become (Meyers) Ferry Road. Then followed the hard left turn into Benowa Road. After quite a few twists and turns another left turn took drivers back into Ashmore Road to the finish line. If you were to follow the same route in 1996 you would have to contend with numerous sets of traffic lights, a roundabout and travel in many places on a four lane road. You would also find the area almost completely built up with houses, office blocks, shops, shopping centres, industrial areas, a hotel and the council offices and the civic centre.

First prize in the Grand Prix was the "Handasyde Trophy" valued at \$300 and \$600 cash. There was also \$100 for the fastest lap and \$6.30 (Three Guineas) for the leader on each lap. The winner's mechanic was also to receive \$20 which wouldn't go far with a Bathurst pit crew. The winner of the first race on the day, "For racing and stripped sports cars running on any fuel" received a trophy valued at \$320 and cash of \$120. The highest prize money in other supporting events, one for sports cars and the other for closed cars (saloons, coupes and convertibles), each with three capacity classes, was \$30 and a trophy (no value mentioned) in each class. The car making fastest time in either of these two events also received a trophy valued at \$126 (Sixty Guineas). At that time there were

no big sponsors, no big prizes and true sports cars were mostly driven to the circuit, raced and driven home again.

Despite any drawbacks the Grand Prix circuit at Southport may have had it was used again the following year. On this occasion it was classified as the "Queensland Road Racing Championship" and was held on November 6th, 1955.



Once again I arranged my holidays, and accommodation at St Leonards Guest House at Coolangatta, to allow me to be a spectator. Another resident at the guest house took a series of quite good photographs and kindly allowed me to have copies made for my album. In a number of them there is a background of tall trees which were cut down several years ago to allow for the construction of the Southport Park Shopping Centre. The centre is located at the corner of Ferry Road and Benowa Road and was called Courier Mail Corner.



Since that time two commemorative runs around the old circuit have been organised. The first, arranged by Terry Gilltrap, took place as part of the 1984 "Tropicarnival" activities and was reported on in the "Gold Coast Bulletin" of Friday October 19, 1984. The report included a photo of Jack Brabham leaving the starting line. He retired on lap four with mechanical problems. Another photo shows Davidson in the HWM-Jaguar, at the then called Courier Mail Corner, about to pass an Austin Healey. There is also a description of a drive around the circuit by a motor sport writer using the pen name of "Filgray".

The second commemorative run took place on Sunday, September 24, 1989. The event, called the "CALTEX CLASSIC" was supported by Caltex, the Brisbane and Gold Coast City Councils and the RACQ. Over 100 cars took part in the run from Brisbane. After a civic welcome by the Mayor of the Gold Coast the cars were flagged off for a few laps of the circuit and assembly for public display on the esplanade at Southport. The 1954 GP winning Davidson HWM-Jaguar now with an all enveloping body and owned by R. Haugh, was on display. The Ford V8 Special which came home third driven in the GP by K. Richardson was also present. This car, rumour says, is more a replica than an original. It was entered in the run by R. Webb. The Riley Imp on display had been driven in one of the races supporting the GP by G. Downing and was entered in the run by G. Mackay. Both the Riley and the original Ford V8 Special were regular competitors in motor racing in Queensland in the nineteen fifties. A number of the same type of sports cars which had raced in supporting events to the 1954 Grand Prix were represented in the Caltex Classic. They included Triumph TR2s Austin Healeys, Aston Martin, Jaguar XK120 and "TC",

"TD" and "TF" versions of the MG breed. It was an impressive gathering but not widely reported in the local press.

I made at least two trips back to Maryborough after being transferred to Toowoomba. The first trip on June 11 and 12, 1955 was made via Brisbane and took four and a half hours for the 304 km. It was 189 miles in those days. The return trip was a bit quicker as it took six minutes under the four, hours on a road considerably different to the present highway, which is divided in places and has no gravel stretches. The second trip began on the Friday, July 9 just after 1 pm. and was again made via Brisbane. I left Brisbane at 3.05 pm. and got to Maryborough at 7.35 pm in time to get showered and dressed to take a young lady, who had been a regular dancing partner, to the Post Office Ball. The return trip on the following Monday took 3 hours and 10 minutes to Woodford, for a quick visit to see my parents, and a further 1 hour 50 minutes to arrive in Toowoomba in plenty of time to start work at 3 pm.

The longest trip taken in the "TF" was as far north as the Atherton Tablelands in North Queensland. A detailed itinerary for the trip had made out but it came very quickly to grief when I pranged the car in the 1955 Telegraph Rally on the first week end of my holidays. The trip scheduled to start on October 4 did not begin until October 14 after the damage had been repaired.

Most of the way it was a solo trip but on the way north a male hitch hiker was picked up just outside of Maryborough and taken as far as Rockhampton. The Route taken was up the Bruce Highway (Hwy 1) as far as Rockhampton (646 km if Bundaberg and Gladstone are bypassed) and then 278 km west to Emerald to visit friends of past years. The distances vary depending on which oil company map is used. Then followed the trip north to Charters Towers, another 483 km to see my mother and sister. The road from Emerald to Charters Towers had been upgraded a little since my trip in the "TC" and the improved suspension of the "TF" made for a more comfortable ride. A few days in Charters Towers were followed by a trip to Townsville (130km) and then a further 349 km to Cairns. From Cairns the scenic highlights of the hinterland are readily accessible. After a night in Cairns I took a trip up the range to Kuranda for a visit to the Barron Falls. The drive offers a delightful scenic view of the Cairns suburbs, the surrounding cane fields, the beaches and the Pacific Ocean beyond. I had previously seen the falls from the train, one drawn by a steam locomotive back in 1942, on the regular service from Cairns to Chillagoe and Mungana. The train ride up the Barron Gorge, past the Stony Creek and Barron Falls, to Kuranda Railway Station, and its renowned gardens and greenery, is now of course a regular tourist service. Few first time visitors to Cairns omit them from their itinerary. I walked down the railway line to the falls after a chat to the Kuranda Station Master. At the time the stairs to the bottom of the falls were still useable and in response to my question "How many steps are there?" he replied "Three hundred on the way down and three thousand on the way up!" Having descended to the bottom of the falls, admired the view and taken some photographs I began the climb back up. I didn't count the steps either way but coming up I understood fully what he meant and realized why there were seats provided at every small flat rest area. I then took a drive up the Gillies Highway and stayed overnight at the guest house at Lake Barrine one of the two famous crater

lakes on the tablelands. In the evening after supper another visitor invited me and two other guests, to join him for a row on the lake. In the still of the evening we tried out the echo from the tropical rain forest surrounding the lake. We couldn't see any pythons on the rock where they were reputed to sun themselves. In truth the sun was almost gone. In the morning I awoke to the chorus of the birds which was so delightful I got up and went for a walk in the forest. They were readily heard but not easily seen. I also saw for the first time the two giant kauri trees which grow nearby. At some time since that visit in 1955 a viewing platform has been provided which gives the lookers and photographers a better vantage point. The main building was no longer a guest house when I visited the area in 1983 but it still catered for the tourist trade by selling souvenirs. In 1983 a boat trip was taken to see Python Rock on the far side of the lake and to watch the scrub turkeys come down to the edge of the lake to be fed. There were no pythons on the rock but we did get a very close look at a python. The skipper of the cruise boat caught a python which was trying to make a meal of some young ducklings and took him aboard in a large garbage bag with a secure lid. Before releasing him into the water near Python Rock he held him up for the photographers to take pictures. After leaving Lake Barrine on my 1955 trip I visited nearby Lake Eacham, The Crater, the Curtain Fig Tree and the Millstream Falls all of which are on the tourist trail. After a side trip to the Tully Falls and gorge and the Millaa Millaa Falls I took the Palmerston Highway down the range to rejoin the Bruce Highway. There was a short pause to view the scenery from Crawfords Lookout.

Back at the Bruce Highway junction I turned south and headed for home via Townsville, Charters Towers, Emerald, Rockhampton and Maryborough. Certainly the loneliest part of the trip was the inland section of 481km between Charters Towers and Emerald. Even then there was a further 279km of not very good road to Rockhampton. Whether it was any worse at the time than the notorious Sarina to Marlborough section of the recommended road from Townsville to Rockhampton is open to question. The bad section was not part of the designated Highway 1 which was to be constructed closer to the coast. At the time there were no service stations on the 273km section and it was mostly unsealed with a number of low level bridges which flooded and held up traffic in the wet season. One of the streams, Funnel Creek, was the setting for a double murder in later years. A map dated as late as July 1983 still shows the section of Hwy1, which saves 39km and is closer to the coast, as "under construction". When completed it was fully sealed and until that time the RACQ never recommended Highway 1 for travelers between Marlborough and Sarina. The new road parallels the railway for part of the journey and near the small hamlet of Clairview offers a view of Broad Sound. It isn't a bad view at high tide but at low tide there is an awful lot of beach, of sorts, as the tidal range of nine metres is one of the highest on the Australian coast.

On the return trip, Gladstone was again bypassed. On the outskirts of the small township of Bororen I stopped to pick up two Canadian nurses who were hitch hiking around the east coast of Australia. We ate a picnic lunch on the banks of the Kolan River, at a spot now covered by the waters of Monduran Lake which resulted from the damming of the river. There are lots of small townships in Queensland like Bororen but in days long gone the local baker was famous for his pies. In the days when the prestige train to North

Queensland was hauled by steam locomotives, and the train was known as the Sunshine Express, the train left Central Station in the early evening. When the train paused at Bororen, early in the morning before the breakfast stop at Gladstone, it was always met by the baker selling delicious pies. When the train stopped he was quickly surrounded by regular travellers who were well aware of the quality of his wares.

As it was my intention to again bypass Bundaberg, a saving of 48km, and the nurses wanted to go there I dropped them off just out of Gin Gin on the Bundaberg road. After retracing my steps for a short distance I headed for Maryborough and points south. After a stopover at my parents home at Woodford it was back to Toowoomba for a return to work.

The trip between Toowoomba and Woodford was made fairly regularly and in a sports car was a fun drive with lots of gravel roads and little traffic. The route left Toowoomba with the climb of Mount Kynoch on the way to Crows Nest. This road was left at Hampton for the run through the forest, past the Ravensbourne National Park then down the Great Dividing Range to Esk to join the Brisbane Valley Highway. A few kilometres north of Esk the turn off to the right led to Somerset Dam and then along the scenic winding section of road following the edge of the lake until it met the D'Aguilar Highway just before Kilcoy. The route then followed the highway east to Woodford. Especially at night the forest section was alive with night birds and nocturnal animals which made for a slower trip.

Quite often the return trip to Toowoomba would be made on Monday morning via Brisbane to catch up on MG gossip at the Swift Service Station at Morningside. This was of course the business owned by the often mentioned Fred Dyke. This trip was made possible by my afternoon shift which began at 3 pm. At other times the reverse would occur with a trip to Brisbane for a night out followed by a late night trip up the north coast road to Caboolture then inland to Woodford. This was made possible by the knock off time of the morning shift being 4.30 pm.

There is no doubt that these first two sports cars provided a lot of fun both in regard to leisure and in competition. While there were a few anxious moments and some minor problems it certainly did not prevent me from thinking about ordering a newer model MG. The decreasing level of performance at sprint meetings in preceding months may have sown the seeds of dissatisfaction.