

My Early MG Car Club Times.

by David Miles

I joined the club in 1964 as the proud owner of a 1946 MG TC, purchased for me by my Dad for 75 pounds! I often believe his motivation was to “keep me off the streets” as the car had suffered a rather hard life. I very soon learned basic mechanical skills, the vagaries of SU “fool” pumps and Lucas electrics.

In those days, however, the car club for me was just a place to go on Friday nights – more important was the newfound freedom offered by one’s own set of wheels, and the spindly 19" wire variety proved very capable at transporting this eighteen year old to the Gold Coast most weekends. The attractions of surf and sand were, however, often overshadowed by the lure of Tweed Heads’ Dolphins Hotel, where the NSW liquor laws permitted partaking of alcohol from the age of 18. Needless to say, the hotel owed its existence on weekends to pimply faced, bad mannered Queenslanders.

Fortunately, peer pressure and a modicum of common sense intervened after a friend with a very nice MG Magnette was involved in an accident right under the nose of the NSW constabulary and persuaded some attitudinal changes, and the MG Car Club reasserted itself as the social venue of choice. The logical place to begin to learn some basic driving skills was, of course, the club motorkhanas at Tingalpa. I ventured down on that first afternoon, where one Vince Appleby took me under his wing to explain just what was required, and was soon partaking in the forward bending, sled racing and the infamous “bob a ding,” an event definitely not condoned by CAMS!

One of my partners in crime from the days of surf, sand and fourex was Ross Devencorn, who lived with his parents at Norman Park, whilst across the road lived then President Geoff Hawley and his wife Kay. Geoff was constantly intrigued by the goings on across the road as Ross and I spent many weekends fettling our TCs, and evaluating the results of our labours around the streets of the aforesaid suburb. Geoff targeted us as ideal potential workers at the Mount Cotton Hillclimb, then just a piece of bush being attacked by an old tractor and some enthusiastic volunteers.

Whilst I must confess that my attendance at these early working bees was pretty dismal, the club became a more and more important interest and influence upon my life. As the TC was in need of an engine re-build, it was decided to embark upon something more than just rings and bearings, so pretty radical head modification by John Hill (JHH Conversions) was commissioned, along with extractor exhaust, big cam and oversize pistons. The late Rod Hiley, then operating from under his parent’s house at Camp Hill, provided larger carburettors to complete the transformation to the engine. Peter Rayment generously lent a set of 15" wheels to which Dunlop SP sport tyres were fitted and a set of track-rods to the front beam axle eliminated the axle tramp under brakes. We were ready for the first Mt Cotton event!



This photo is from Peter Rayment and reproduced with his permission.

The very first event at Mount Cotton in February, 1968 saw the TC pitted against Brian Tebble's TD and, of course, Brian took out the "MG Cars up to 1500cc" class. The margin was, however, small enough to have us both thinking that, with a little effort, the position could be reversed! Thus followed a series of meetings with times falling and things getting serious enough for the TC to require trailering to the meetings. It was then that Tim Harlock's Centaur Clubman cars looked better value for money than an old MG, so my entry to the clubman class with Centaur Mk 8 with Surfers Paradise and Lakeside becoming exciting adjuncts to the Hillclimb.



David in the Centaur at Mt Cotton at the 1973 AHC

My Centaur story really deserves its own article – perhaps something that I might contrive sometime in the future as it certainly was a privilege to have the last of Tim Harlock's creations during a very significant era of motorsport in Queensland.

In those days, many of those competing in Queensland motor racing were MGCC members, particularly those competing in the sports car categories. John Campbell, Iain and Carole Corness, Will Charlton, Jon McCarthy, Vern Hamilton, John Fraser, Dick Johnson, Kerry Horgan, Tim Harlock were ones who spring to mind, but there certainly were more. Those days of club motorsport in the late sixties and early seventies were great fun!

Meanwhile, having served on the MGCC Management Committee for a couple of years, I was surprised and flattered when then president Will Charlton, over a lunch at the old Embassy Hotel in the city, asked if I would be willing to take on the role of President. Will, along with other senior club members Jon McCarthy and Kerry Horgan were about to embark upon a trip overseas which would see them absent for up to a year. Jon is, as many older members will be aware, yet to return! In order to properly connect with these long gone days, this was the time of Boeing 707 jets, (Qantas "V Jets") the old International terminal at Eagle Farm operating out of a slightly modified WW2 corrugated igloo .

Fortunately, I had a highly experienced and dedicated committee to help me along. Ann Thomson was treasurer, the late Joan Appleby was secretary. The Mount Cotton Hill climb was in its infancy, a far cry from the venue from which we now operate. Our clubrooms were above the old A W Barr's car radio workshop just down the road from the Valley police station. The building, even then, displayed evidence of a previous fire, and was far from "flash," but it provided for our needs at the time. Meetings were held every Friday night, with movie nights courtesy of Shell and BP, regular night runs, and simple social nights where cans of beer were exchanged for tickets purchased at the end of the bar. Our assets consisted of an ancient spirit duplicator, some tables and chairs, and cans of beer and soft drink as stock in trade for the bar. John Campbell was both editor and illustrator of the "Octagon," which was printed monthly on an old wax stencil "Gestetner" duplicator, and compiled by numerous volunteers on a Friday night.

Committee meetings were held on Monday evenings, I think, with social events and Hillclimb taking up most of the agenda. Hillclimbs, if I remember correctly, took up a lot of time. Parts of Brisbane were still in the process of being sewerred, so there were working bees arranged to transport no longer needed "thunderboxes" down to Mount Cotton for placement at strategic points around the hill. This strategy also required they be emptied after each event, but we wisely farmed this job out to a contractor! Spectator numbers were, in those days, quite considerable, particularly when, through Brian Tebble, we were able to enlist Leonard Teale from the then popular "Homicide" TV series to drive, and usually crash, a car loaned to him by one of the members. I have

never since seen such large crowds of spectators lining the top of both loops at Mount Cotton.



Leonard Teale looks to see how much damage he had inflicted on Brian Tebble's "Gertie"

These early hillclimbs served Mount Cotton well, opening it up to a new group of spectators and competitors. Enthusiasm for this form of motorsport grew, and the venue became more and more important to the club. Those who had the determination and vision to support Mount Cotton have played a tremendous role to ensure the financial success of the MG Car Club of Queensland, so that today it is recognised as one of the best in Australia and the envy of other "Marque" clubs world-wide.



David in the TC in Dec 1968



David in Presidential mode at the presentation of trophies at the Australian Hillclimb Championship round at Mt Cotton in June 1973. Also in the photo are John French presenting trophy to Ivan Tighe and Ann Thomson looking on.