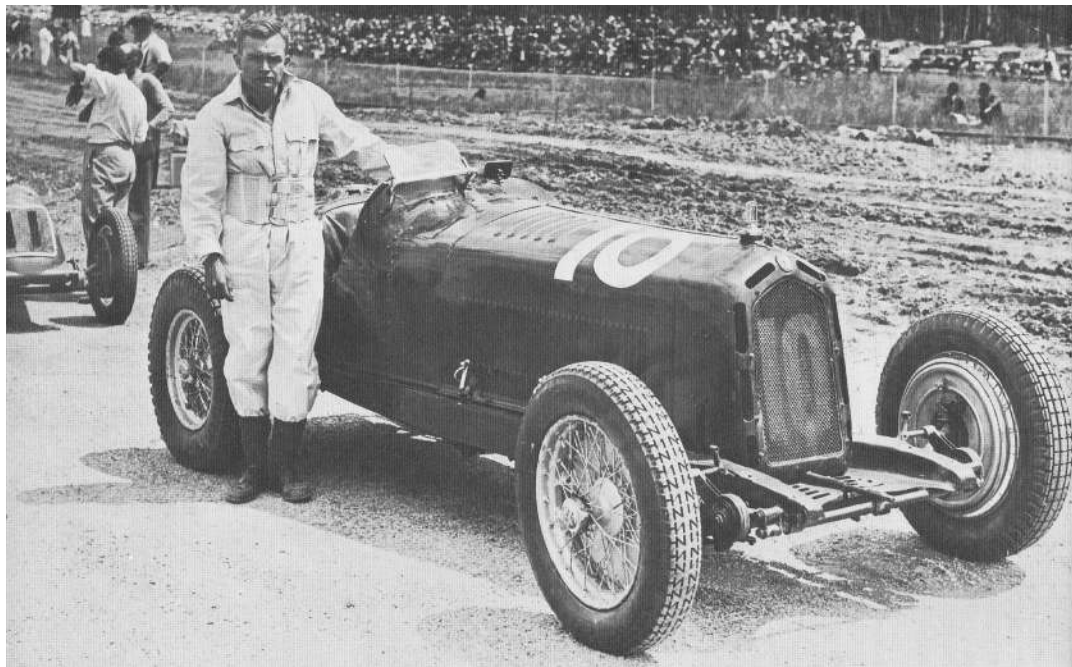


## Our Pre-War Motoring Scene

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

# THE BLOEMFONTEIN CONNECTION



*Bill Roderick and his 2 632cc Alfa Romeo 8C - First Rand Grand Prix, 1937*

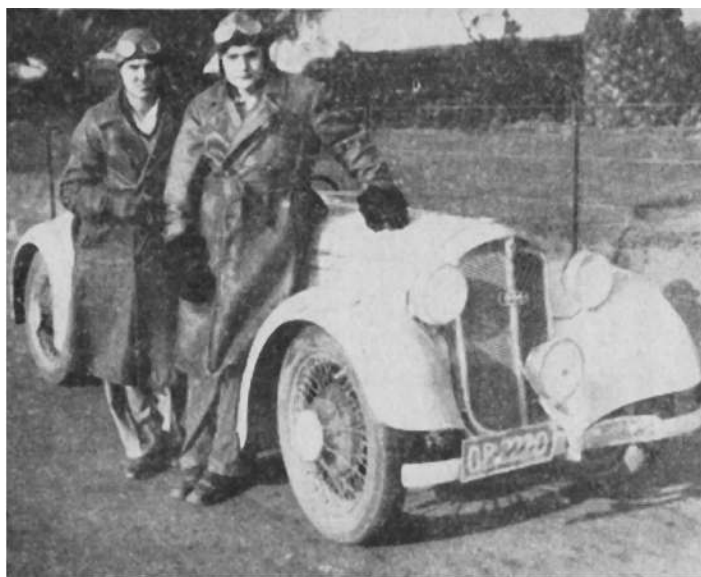
**C**rankhandle Club members John Roderick and Rudi Greyvensteyn and his sons Colin and Ian have family ties to fascinating aspects of South African motoring history. During the 1930s John's father William (Bill) Roderick was a talented young rally and motor racing driver, based in Bloemfontein. Bill's father, John Roderick, owned one of the largest motor dealerships in the Orange Free State, and Rudi's grandfather Philip Greyvensteyn was one of his managers.

Bill Roderick displayed his talents at an early age. His father was an agent for DKWs and in July 1936, at the age of nineteen, Bill shattered the Rand-Cape light car speed record by driving a DKW the 973 miles in 20 hours 35 minutes. Accompanied by an observer, G. Fitzmaurice, he broke the record set five years before by Gordon Collins in his 1089cc Riley. He was able to reduce the record by 35 minutes, even though the engine capacity

of the twin-cylinder two-stroke DKW Meisterklasse sports, at 684cc, was considerably smaller than that of the Riley. Roderick's success was part of a co-ordinated promotion; a year before, the DKW agent for Africa, Asia and Australia, Baron Klaus von Oertzen, had moved to Johannesburg to promote the marque. He

was extremely successful and within a few years German cars, the majority of which were DKWs, were outselling British makes in South Africa.

It was soon obvious that the excellent publicity generated by Roderick's record had made him a man in demand. Within three months of the record-breaking



*Bill Roderick (right) with his record-breaking DKW*

run, he and Philip Greyvensteyn were in Kenya, to compete in the incredibly tough 2 732-mile Nairobi-Johannesburg race, this time in a Pontiac.

Within another two months Roderick was in East London to compete in his first major motor race, the 3rd SA Grand Prix, held on New Year's Day 1937. He was driving a 1933 Alfa Romeo Monza 8C 2 632cc, bought from Mario Mazzacurati's Eagle Racing Stable in Cape Town. It was his misfortune to be racing that year against the rampant British racing champion, Pat Fairfield, who achieved considerable success during his 1937 racing season in South Africa. Within a few weeks Fairfield won the 3rd SA Grand Prix, the 1st Rand Grand Prix in Johannesburg and the Farewell Handicap at the Grosvenor track in Cape Town, and came fourth in the 1st Grosvenor Grand Prix. He was driving his potent supercharged 1 100cc E.R.A. but had to work for his win on the strenuous 70-corner circuit in Johannesburg. He reckoned that Bill Roderick was his chief challenge and set out to get him, for 33 of the 60 laps he settled behind the tail of Roderick's car and just chased him, hoping the engine of the five-year-old Alfa would blow up. Roderick took up the challenge and drove as though pursued by Satan. Finally, however, the old Alfa faded and Fairfield went through, quickened his laps, and won, followed by Lord Howe and Jack McNicol, Roderick came in eighth.

Two weeks before, in the 1st Grosvenor Grand Prix at Polls-moor in Cape Town, Roderick had been driving a second Alfa Romeo bought from the Eagle Racing Stable, a 1929 6C 1 500cc model. He was still in the race



*1925 Hispano-Suiza sport*

after 42 of the 45 laps but had to be flagged off after the excited crowd had broken the barriers to mob the winners, Ernst von Delius and Bernd Rosemeyer. They had been driving the incredible 6 006cc Auto Unions, brought out to South Africa by Baron von Oertzen to promote his DKWs.

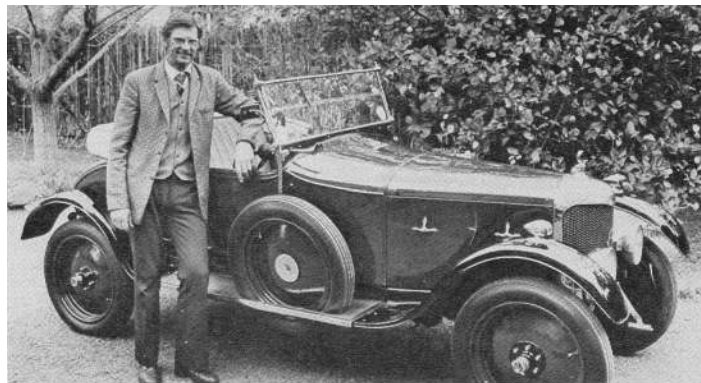
For the initial race of the next season, the Rand Grand Prix held on 16 December 1937, Roderick competed in a 2 992cc Maserati 8CM, which the Italian racing driver Piero Taruffi had brought out to South Africa with his 1 500cc Maserati 6CM. Roderick had bought the car but did not achieve success in it and returned to the 8C Alfa Monza for his last two races, the 4th SA Grand Prix and the 2nd Grosvenor Grand Prix held in January 1938. He married later that year at the age of 21, and as the Maserati and the Alfas were no longer competitive, he gave up racing in the interests of his new family. During World War II he was seconded to special intelligence operations in the Western Desert and was promoted to the rank of major. After the war he was appointed MD of the family motor business and pursued a successful career as an auctioneer, he was only 43 when he died in 1961. The 8CM Maserati was acquired by the Louwman Museum in Holland, the 1 500cc Alfa Romeo 6C was bought by Peter Hunt of Bloemfontein, while the 2 632cc Alfa 8C racing car was taken over

by the Johannesburg enthusiast Dr Hugh Gearing to complement the other Alfa Romeo in his collection, a beautiful 1750cc sports car.

Philip Greyvensteyn's son Waldemar (Waldie) was always fascinated with cars, and was invited as a youngster to accompany Bill Roderick's support team for the 1937 and 1938 SA Grand Prix series. In 1946, while still a matric pupil in Bloemfontein, he started his famous collection of cars with an Austin Seven Nippy. He swapped this car for a J-type MG, which was eventually sold. Years later he found the MG in a sorry state and fitted with the wrong engine, after buying it back he stripped the car for a complete restoration.

Waldie Greyvensteyn established a business named Acme Engineering in Bloemfontein. Lacking both the capital and the space to own more than one car at a time, he upgraded his cars by selling and buying them one by one. From the proceeds of the sale of the J-type MG he bought a Citroën Light Fifteen with drophead coachwork, this was sold to buy another drophead, a 3.5 litre Jaguar. This in turn moved on to accommodate a 1.5 litre Aston Martin Ulster, later fitted with a Nash engine and raced by John Hanning at Eerste Rivier and Gunners Circle as an Aston-Nash Special.

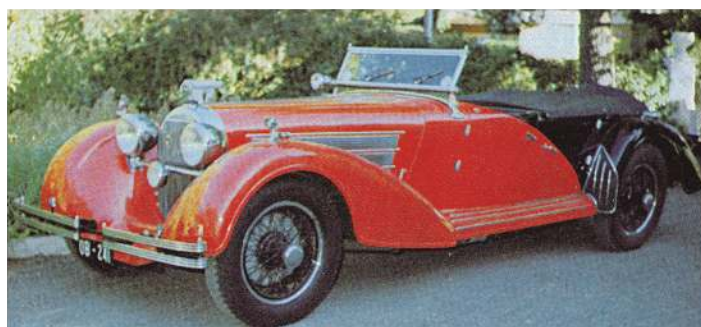
Waldie bought a 1922 AC two-seater from a young couple who were travelling from the Reef to



*Waldie Greyvensteyn and his 1922 two-seater AC*



*Figoni-bodied Alfa Romeo 6C 1750cc*



*Austro-Daimler Bergmeister tourer*

Cape Town but struck mechanical problems at Brandfort, where the Greyvensteyns owned a garage. It was a rarity fitted with a four-cylinder Anzani engine, and he drove it in the second ever South African National Veteran and Vintage Rally, held in 1955. A pride of his collection was a beautiful 1925 Hispano-Suiza sports car, fitted in England with one-off boat-tailed coachwork by Harrison. Another two of his magnificent cars were salvaged from the majestic Prynnsberg Manor Estate near Clocolan in the Free State, a 1911 Lorraine-Dietrich fitted with a convertible body by Cockshoot of Manches-

ter, and a 1922 Isotta-Fraschini. Waldie found the Isotta in pieces scattered over 30 hectares on the estate which had fallen into disrepair many years after being built by diamond mining magnate Charles Newberry, a major shareholder in De Beers. A few parts were missing, including the vital crown-wheel and pinion which he was eventually able to replace with a spare found in a scrapyards in Cornwall.

A notable car in his collection was a Bentley Speed Six originally built for one of the famous Bentley Boys, Glen

*Continued overleaf....*

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Kidston, who drove it in the 1930 Monte Carlo Rally. Another of his cars was the oldest Bentley in the country, a 1923 Three-Litre with neat Doctor's Coupe body-work by Salmons of Newport Pagnell. He owned a unique Alfa Romeo 6C 1750cc which had been driven into sixth place in the Le Mans 24-Hour Race in 1935; after the race the rather stark sports racing body had been removed and replaced by a ravishingly beautiful coupe body by the Parisian coachbuilder, Ficoni. Another exceptionally good-looking car was the Austro-Daimler Bergmeister sports tourer previously owned by Desmond Baumann, the biscuit man of Cape Town. Other cars in the collection were two Phantom II Rolls-Royces, two Packards, a low-chassis Invicta S Type, a Jaguar SS 100, and a Cord 810 Westchester.

It is good to know that many of these cars remain with us here in the Cape. The J-type MG is being

restored again by Waldie Greyvensteyn's grandson Colin in Cape Town. The Anzani-engined AC two-seater, the Lorraine-Dietrich, the Isotta-Fraschini, the Three-Litre Bentley, the Austro-Daimler, a Rolls-Royce, a Packard, the low-chassis Invicta, the Jaguar SS 100 and the Cord 810 are all on public display in the Franschhoek Motor Museum. Many of the other cars in Waldie's collection now belong to his son Rudi and are housed at his home in the Wilderness.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the pioneering motor fraternity of Bloemfontein has bequeathed us a legacy that is literally world class.

*Acknowledgments to South African Grand Prix by Brud Bishop, Sun on the Grid by Ken Stewart and Norman Reich, Sunday Times 25 July 1936, CAR Magazine August & September 1980, Classic Car Africa Dec 2015 & June 2016, Mike Monk, Ken Stewart, John Roderick, Rudi and Colin Greyvensteyn.*

## Plugs !

By Tony McEwan  
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For two or three years I have experienced a baffling problem on my Bentley 4 1/2 Litre here in South Africa. I had found that when travelling up long steep hills occasionally the engine would start to lose power and there would be some pronounced spitting back through the carburettors which left them covered in soot. On reaching the top of these hills the problem would disappear and the car would run at 2500+ rpm without missing a beat.

Believing it to possibly be fuel starvation I fitted a higher capacity fuel pump (even though the problem manifested itself on both Autovac and Electric Pump), I changed plugs, checked timing, valve clearances etc all to no avail. I contacted the Bentley Drivers Club Forum and had an excellent dialogue with some of the stalwarts of the Club but no new ideas were evident.

Then, after a very brief trip in the car with one of the local "old hand" mechanics, he immediately diagnosed the problem and I am pleased to say that, having just completed a 600 mile round trip in 10.5 hours I can categorically say that the problem has been solved.

The Technical Facts of the Vintage Bentley recommends the use of NGK A6 or A7 Spark Plugs for modern fuels and this is what I used to use 10 or so years ago. Then NGK ceased production of the A6 plug without any evident replacement. The alternative plug recommended was the Champion D16 and this is still shown as an alternative today by the Green Spark Plug Company. However, the D16 is a slightly "hotter" plug

than the NGK A6 and the fault that was diagnosed on my engine was that under heavy load (i.e. driving up a long hill) the electrode on the plug was heating up to such an extent that it was not cooling sufficiently on the exhaust stroke with the result that on the induction stroke the red hot electrode on the plug was igniting the incoming fuel resulting in an explosion through the inlet valves and ejecting burnt fuel through the carburettor air intakes.

Being a Scot I never throw out anything that might come in handy and so I had an old set of A6 plugs that I had used 10 or more years ago. I removed the D16 plugs, replaced them with the old A6 plugs and the "problem" immediately disappeared. NGK do now make a replacement for the A6 plug called the AB6. I have fitted these and am delighted to report that on my 600 mile round trip, the engine did not miss a beat.

Another advantage of the AB6 plug is that it has the same size Hex as modern plugs, so that a conventional plug socket can be used which makes the installation and removal of these plugs so much easier on a Vintage engine.

NGK also make an AB7 plug which is even colder and some may consider it worthwhile to have AB7 plugs on the exhaust side and AB6 on the inlet side.

If any of our Vintage drivers (or at least their cars) are experiencing a similar problem, try a change to these plugs and, with luck, the problem may disappear!



**Q:** What was the first car fitted with an alternator, rather than a direct current dynamo? Answer on page 14.



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