

Our Post-War Motoring Scene

By Derek Stuart-Findlay

MOTORING IN THE 1950S

GUNNERS' CIRCLE



The start of the 2nd False Bay 100, New Year's Day 1953. Peter Burroughes (Aston Nash, 28), Doug Duff (Riley, 30), Stanley Reed (Citroën Special, 31) and Edgar Hoal (Riley, 32) in the front row.

In the immediate post-war era competition between the Cape car clubs was intense. In 1947 and '48 the Amateur Automobile Racing Club of South Africa (AARC) staged acceleration and driving tests on a section of the old Malmesbury Road at Killarney, and on two occasions in 1949 speed trials were held on a half-mile course laid out on the Beach Road at the Strand.

After participating with the other clubs in organizing the racing at Paarden Eiland that year, the AARC set out to find a suitable track of its own, and Frank Hoal came to the rescue. As site engineer of a ring road in a new industrial area in Epping, Gunners' Circle, he obtained permission from the City Council to complete the circuit in time for the Third Van Riebeeck Trophy on 2 January 1951. The 3.3-mile oval was intercepted by a railway crossing and three sharpish corners known as Butts Bend which diverted the road around a wartime rifle range.

In the absence of appropriate race cars, enthusiasts had built up a bewildering variety of specials. Entries included Roddy Turner (Austin A40 Special), D.E.(Bill) Jennings (his first special, a rear-engined Riley), Stanley Reed (Citroën Special), Dawie le Roux

(LRX Special), John Radcliff (ex-Boffin Studebaker Special), Peter Burroughes (Aston Nash), Frank Hoal (offset Riley), Pat Brown (Cisaprilia) and Barry Morton (s/c Squire, one of only seven built).

Scrutineering was done at the Gallow's Hill Traffic Department,

in the care-free attitudes of the day contestants drove to Green Point without silencers or number plates. Rain enlivened the 150-mile race with cars spinning or leaving the road, while Pat Brown was hit on the head by a flying stone and drove in a daze for several laps.



Frank Hoal at the wheel of the offset Riley in 1951.



Pat Brown in his *Cisaprlia* in 1952.

The victor was Stanley Reed, followed by Pat Brown and John Radcliff. After the engine-failure of Frank Hoal's Riley, in which his father-in-law Buller Meyer had won the 4th South African Grand Prix in East London in 1938, he sold the car.

The next major event at Gunners' was the First False Bay 100, held on 2 January 1952. Although the circuit is nowhere near False Bay, the name was initiated after a City Council official thought the area around the Muizenberg pavilion and along the beachfront would make a circuit that would rival Monaco. Unfortunately the city fathers failed to support the idea, but the name had been submitted for the first national event of the year, so it stuck. Fifteen MGs were entered, including Les Miller in his Special and Gordon Henderson's blown R-Type. Five Rileys were listed, including the ex-Hoal offset Special, driven by its new owner Keith Stanley. Edgar Hoal, Frank's brother, had sold the 1496 cc engine in his Riley Special to Bill Jennings,

and installed a 2443 cc unit. Jennings was building his second lightweight car around the smaller engine, a front-engined Riley Special which proved ultimately to be devastatingly quick, allowing him to become a triple-title holder in the SA Drivers' Championship, sweeping to victory in 1954, '56 and '57. Stanley Reed took the Gunners' Circle flag for a second time, followed by Dawie le Roux, Les Miller and Keith Stanley.

The Fourth Van Riebeeck Trophy was held three months later. Bob van Niekerk participated in his Austin Seven Special, Roy Humphreys competed in his Consul Special for the first time, and Dougie van Riet drove his blown 750 cc Brooklands Austin in its last outing. It was a tall order for the little Austin as it started in the same group as Andre Du Plessis' Graham Talbot, Tex Kingon's 5500 cc Indianapolis Studebaker and three Frewen Specials, and Van Riet eventually retired. The race was won by Cliff Rushby in his MG, followed by Harry Sutcliffe in



Tex Kingon in the Indianapolis Studebaker chases Gordon Henderson's MG R-type in 1952.



Andre du Plessis with his *Graham Talbot* in 1952.

another MG, Keith Stanley and Stanley Reed.

By the Second False Bay 100 on New Year's Day 1953 Butts Bend had been eliminated and speeds had become appreciably higher. George Cannell was driving the powerful 3700 cc 6C34 Maserati raced by

Mario Mazzacurati in the pre-war era, he started with a sizzling 85 mph lap before incurring serious engine damage. Tex Kingon, who later bought the Maserati from Cannell, was racing his Indianapolis Studebaker. The Natal-based Ecurie Miller PTO ■ ■ ■ ➔



The start of the 1st International Cape Grand Prix, 3 March 1956. From left, front row: Jimmy de Villiers (Cooper JAP, 4), Gordon Lindsay (Cooper Bristol, 3), Bill Holt (Connaught, 2). Second row: Vic Procter (Vincent Kieft, 7), Edgar Hoal (Riley, 6), Bill Jennings (Riley Special, 5). Third row: John Hanning (Aston Nash, 11), Harry Peirce (MG, 10), Gordon Phillips (MG, 9).

performed brilliantly, MGs driven by Les Miller, Ray Lock and Cliff Rushby, swept the field, coming in first, second and third.

By the Third False Bay 100 in January 1954, John Hanning had taken over Peter Burroughes' 2770 cc Aston Nash, Tony Fergusson was racing a 500 cc Cooper Norton and Raymond Rieder the Indianapolis Studebaker. Edgar Hoal cruised to victory, followed by Bill Jennings and Tony Fergusson.

By the Fourth False Bay 100 in 1955 Keith Stanley had sold the offset Riley to Neville Littleford, while master mechanic Johnny Barata was driving his first race in the ex-Boffin Studebaker Special. Tex Kingon had his hands full in the big Maserati when it threw a tyre tread at 130 mph, but he managed to keep the car under control. Ray Lock's MG was at full speed when a half-shaft broke and a lump of steel went through the floor, embedding



Jimmy de Villiers in the ex-Lord Louth D-type Jaguar ahead of Jimmy Shield in ERA R4A, Grand Central, April 1958.

itself in the firewall inches from his legs. Bill Jennings new Riley showed its potential when he steadily drew away from his rivals to win comfortably, followed by an elated Johnny Barata and Des Jenkin in his Moriat.

During 1955 the Government moved rapidly to cool down the economy, and sales of large vehicles tailed off. A motor racing era seemed to come to an end that July when, tragically, Tex Kingon

was killed in his powerful Maserati in East London and the huge Studebaker Specials were gradually withdrawn from racing. The Fifth False Bay 100 held on New Year's Day 1956 heralded several new much lighter specials, including Willie Meissner's sleek single-seater LRX-Ford, Bob van Niekerk's innovative Bobcat Special, and Adrian Pheiffer's diminutive Spyder Special. None of the first eight across the finishing line boasted a power plant larger than 2000 cc. Bill Jennings triumphed, followed by Rhodesian Jimmy de Villiers (Cooper Bristol) and Tony Fergusson (Cooper Norton).

The First International Cape Grand Prix was held at Gunners' Circle in March 1956, it attracted Britons Mike Young and Bill Holt in their Connaughts. Holt damaged his fuel tank when he bottomed over the railway hump, and although he broke the lap record seven times, his back axle disintegrated due to the pounding. Gordon Phillips won in his MG, followed by Edgar Hoal and Roy Humphreys.

Although the oil embargo induced by the Suez Crisis had wreaked havoc by January 1957, support for the Sixth False Bay 100 was enthusiastic. Jimmy de Villiers entered his blown 2-litre ERA, together with Horse Boyden and Gordon Lindsay in Cooper Bristols and Roddy Turner in a 2660 cc Austin-Healey. Tom Lewis appeared in the ex-Kingon Maserati, Ernie Retief in the ex-Boffin Studebaker Special, and Austin Dabbs in the ex-Jennings rear-engined Riley. De Villiers streaked into the lead, making maximum use of the ERA's acceleration, but

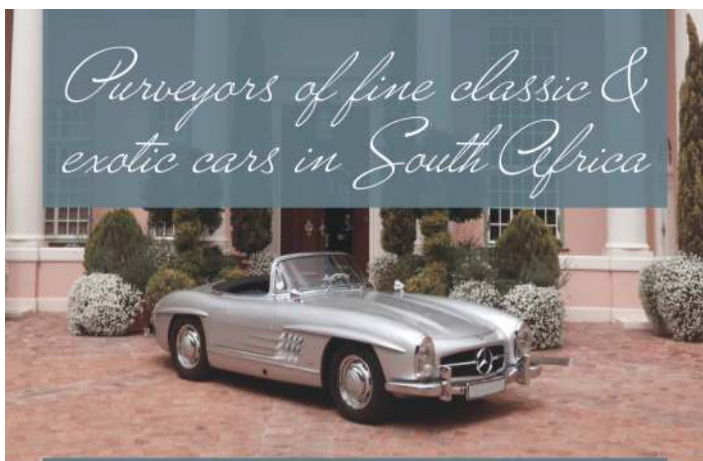
retired in the second lap with a hole in a piston and smoke billowing from the cockpit. Dabbs lost a wheel, the Riley rolled over and he was removed to hospital with broken ribs. Bill Jennings was again victorious, followed by Boyden, Lindsay and Turner.

De Villiers arrived again in 1958 for the Seventh False Bay 100, this time in a Jaguar D-Type, with Rhodesian teammates Jimmy Shield in the ERA, John

Love in the second ex-Jennings Special and Sam Tingle in a Connaught. The race marked the debut of the impressive new GSM Dart prototypes, driven by Willie Meissner and Bob van Niekerk. De Villiers locked the brakes on his Jaguar at the Railway Esses, slid off the road at high speed, hit a light pole and leapt high in the air. Shield got through without mishap but Tingle, blinded by dust as the Jaguar hit the ground, collided with a marker drum. Amazingly, De Villiers was unhurt but his car was a sorry sight. A preliminary race had been marred by a tragic accident at the same spot, a young farmer Neil Oosthuizen had died of injuries sustained when he rolled his Triumph TR3 at the Railway Esses. Jimmy Shield won the main race, followed by John Love, Tony Fergusson and Flip Viljoen, who had excelled in the ex-Boffin Studebaker Special.

Shocked by the accidents, the City Council withdrew permission for further racing events at Gunners' Circle, and plans were made to build a bridge over the dangerous railway crossing. Rival municipality Bellville climbed in, grabbing the opportunity to offer facilities at its new Sacks Circle industrial area.

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