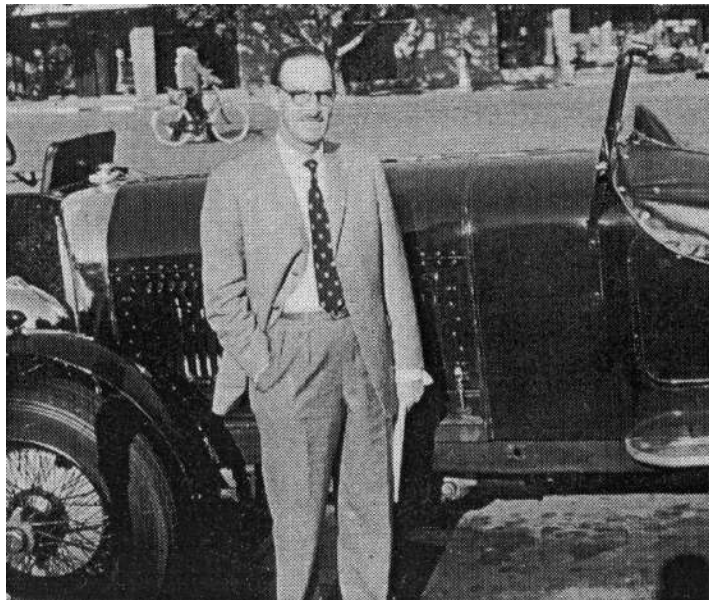


# GEORGE HUDDLESTONE - PIONEER CAR COLLECTOR

by Mike Rourke



*George Huddleston*

**D**uring 1964, while undergoing military training in the Navy, I was sent to Durban. The naval base was situated on the Bluff, which was home to the Radar school. As a young vintage car enthusiast I was eager to see some of the local Natal cars but did not know any of the Durban club members. However, most vintage car enthusiasts knew of George Huddleston and Dr. Dick Collier who were two of the founder members of the vintage car movement in the Durban area.

George owned a Ford agency in the city known as Huddleston Motors. At the earliest opportunity I called at his Ford dealership where I was courteously received. George was very friendly and willing to show me his collection of cars. He kindly offered to send his driver to collect me at the naval base the following Wednesday afternoon. Wednesday afternoons were treated as free time when one was supposed to play sport or attend to private business.

On the appointed day George's chauffeur arrived at the gates of the base in a large black Ford Galaxy. The car caused an immediate reaction as it was similar to the car used to convey the Chief of the Navy. I was whisked away in air

conditioned comfort. What a change from being shaken about in the back of a military vehicle. After having lunch and meeting Dr. Dick Collier we set off for Hillcrest which was about a 30 minute drive on the Petermaritzburg road.

In Hillcrest we stopped at an old building which had previously been used as a garage. The petrol pumps were still in situ. Proceeding inside revealed a collection of old cars and a few motor cycles. A veritable Aladdin's cave!

At this point I should mention that I kept a diary as one had plenty of free time. The diary was invaluable in recording the events of the afternoon.

This storage facility was shared jointly with Dr. Dick Collier, who seemed to own half the cars. The first a 1903 Metz, chain driven and painted white, and the second car a Marion, painted green. The unrestored cars consisted of the following; a 1930 Delage D8 complete but without any bodywork. A 1929 Riley complete but with some or other gearbox problems. A 1928 Lea-Francis which had been botched into a "special" by Chalenor Barson, one of our Crankhandle Club members. A 1922 Saxon-Duplex which was a cheap American car. A 1930

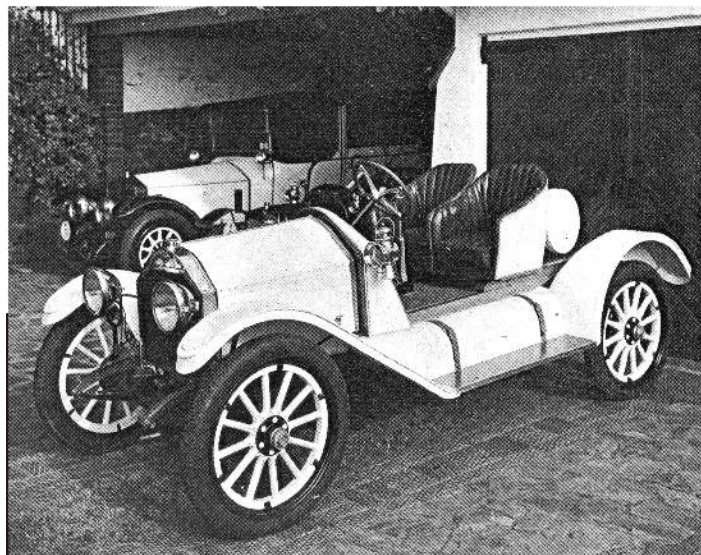
Franklin in very good condition, although the engine had been removed and was lying next to the car. The engine was a large air cooled six cylinder - unusual for an American car. This car was still fitted with its number plates displaying the registration TJ 4. Next to the Franklin stood Dick Collier's 3 litre twin cam Sunbeam in very original condition followed by a Hudson which had been converted into a hearse. The only two small cars present were a 3 wheel Morgan and an Austin 7 Nippy. There were two cars in pieces, a Dort and a 1909 Scat. The Scat was missing its rear axle.

A Rolls Royce Silver Ghost chassis frame leant against one of the walls. There was a Winton engine and a number of motor cycles, one being an A.J.S. An impressive exhibit was a large Napier engine of at least six litres mounted on a well constructed stand together with the radiator. George mentioned that at one time it had been used by the local Technical College to train apprentice motor mechanics.

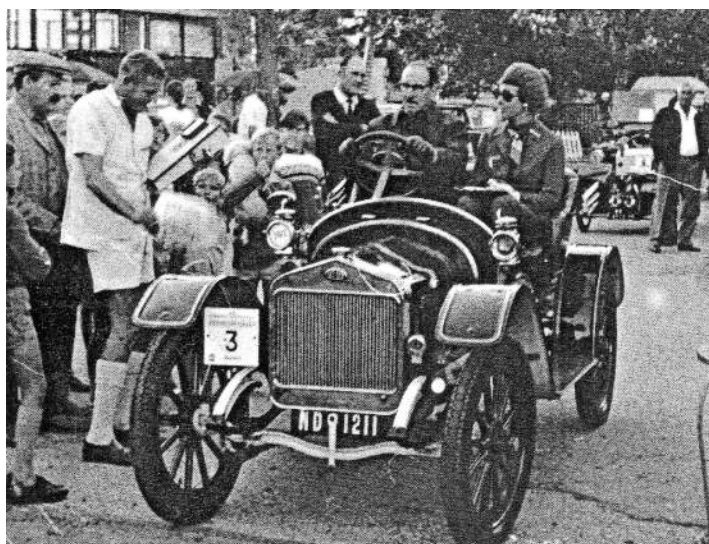
A number of brass radiators were to be seen leaning against a wall, one from a Sunbeam, the other from an Alldays and Onions. There were two enormous wooden packing

cases which belonged to Dr. Collier. These contained two Hall-Scott crash boat engines. Collier had bought these two engines at a Railways and Harbours auction of unclaimed goods. These were petrol engines of about 35 litres and with 12 cylinders. The term 'crash boat' may sound somewhat ominous to some of our younger members.

After some refreshment we left Hillcrest and set off back to Durban. The first stop was at Riverside Garage. There were a number of old cars in the workshop. The oldest was a 1901 Toledo steamer. This car had belonged to a Mr. Ferguson who had died six months previously. The car had tiller steering and large wooden spoked wheels and a hood that looked like it came from a Cape Cart. (a horse drawn vehicle). An interesting car that was being worked on was a Lorraine Dietrich of about 1911. The chassis was of massive proportions and the engine about 5 litres. George mentioned that little was known about this car, even by overseas enthusiasts. Then there was Dr. Collier's 1919 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, the restoration of which was nearing completion. The Rolls had been owned by a wealthy Indian gentleman who had



*The Marion, in all its splendour after restoration. In the background another of George Huddleston's stable - 'Charlie' the 1912 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost.*



George Huddlestone and Erica Drummond leaving after the lunch break at Pinetown in the 1909 Delage. Clerk of the Course Andre Malan sees them on their way.

painted it a violet blue colour. The original body had been scrapped and Dick had successfully fitted an early Dennis body which he had found in an old building in Point Road. The style was that of an open drive Sedan de Ville.

I thought that Dennis only made fire engines. George mentioned that Dennis started off making cars and

later changed over to commercial vehicles, specialising in fire engines.

We left Riverside and proceeded to George's home which was at 47 Grosvenor Crescent, Durban North. The first car to be seen was his 1912 Marion Bobcat, standing under a carport. This car had a large four cylinder engine and the gearbox

was in the rear axle. George admitted that he was too scared to crank the car and that it was safer to have it push started. Standing inside the garage was a 1909 Delage with two seater body. The car was painted maroon. Next to the Delage was the 1912 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, fondly known as "Charlie". The Rolls was painted black and yellow and the coachwork was by Barker. The car had wooden spoke wheels and was the oldest Rolls in the country. George was busy preparing the car for an international rally to be held in New Zealand. The rally was still some 14 months away. By now it was late afternoon, George's driver took me back to town and I caught the bus back to the Bluff.

17-6-1964

Some years after my initial meeting with George he acquired the ex Labia V16 Cadillac, a very large four door saloon. After a few years use it too left our shores, sold to an American buyer. On arriving in the U.S.A. the car was impounded by the customs authorities who suspected the car of being used to transport concealed drugs. In their search the hood lining and upholstery was stripped. No stash was found. The car was eventually released to the new owner who must have had to re-restore the car's interior.

What became of these cars ?

1. The Marion and the 14 HP Delage were sold to Nick Hoenderdos, and put on display at his "Jukskei Museum". After

Nick's death the cars became the property of his daughter, a Mrs. Nel.

2. The D8 Delage was restored by Eyon Ducasse of Pietermaritzburg. At some stage the car was sold to a Belgian collector, a Mr Alfons Vervloet.
3. The Rolls Royce Ghost "Charlie" went back to England.
4. The 1930 Franklin went to a museum in Holland.
5. The Lorraine-Dietrich was bought by Waldie Greyvensteyn. The car is now in the Franschoek Motor Museum.
6. The Sunbeam 3 litre went to Andre Malan of Durban.
7. The Napier engine and gearbox; George acquired a later type Napier chassis which was assembled into a running chassis. Our member Jolyon Simpson completed the car by building a "Bobcat" style body. He used the car for some years before it left for the U.K.

Notes on some of the cars:

The 1930 Franklin: Bob Johnson remembered this car being driven around Johannesburg during the 1930s. The car was owned by Barney Rosenberg who was also the importer.

The Lorraine-Dietrich and the 1909 S.C.A.T. were recovered from the Newburys Prynnsberg Estate at Clocolan, Free State.

Dr. Dick Coller emigrated to Canada in the early 1970s. His 1905 Mors was sold to the Jimmy Hall Museum. The car is now owned by his son Peter Hall. 🚗



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