

OUR 1950s MOTORING SCENE

VIC PROCTER AND GEORGE ANDERSON, TWO-WHEELED SPEED FIENDS

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

After WW II the world motorcycle speed record was up for grabs and the imagination of the South African public became riveted on local attempts to capture it. The dramatic performances of the Cape duo Vic Procter and his brother-in-law George Anderson soon propelled them to stardom.

Both had reputations in two and four-wheel racing built up over many years, in 1928 Procter had touched 85 mph on an AJS at Blaaubergstrand and had gone on to win his first motorcycle race as a novice at Rietvlei. Anderson was a master mechanic at Robb Motors and an expert at tuning engines. He and his great friend Dougie van Riet were the only two motorcyclists to finish in the 1931 Port Elizabeth trial on their BSA 500s; just six of 27 entries finished the punishing 1 140-mile course. In 1935 Anderson and Van Riet set a speed record of 10 hours 40 minutes between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in an Austin Ulster. In 1936 Procter broke the lap record in the Kimberley 100 on a 500 cc Norton, and a year later the Austin team cars driven by Anderson, Van Riet and Frank Thompson scooped up the team prize in the Kimberley 100. Some years before, Anderson had crashed at 90 mph and damaged his knee, subsequently his wrist was locked up as the result of a second pile-up. His strangest predicament occurred when a machine behind him hit his back wheel. The rider fell off and skidded unconscious into the gutter, but the front wheel of the machine had locked into Anderson's back assembly. The engine was going full blast and although he cut his engine and applied his brakes he found himself being pushed willy-nilly along the track; in desperation he had to swerve off the track and roll away.

When war broke out Procter volunteered for the SA armoured car division and Anderson joined



George Anderson and Vic Procter discuss their next crazy speed run

the air/sea rescue crashboats. As spectators at a postwar track-meet they both came to the conclusion that their racing careers were far from over, and they were soon back thrilling the crowds at the Green Point acceleration trials and the Camps Bay hill climbs. Procter's first four-wheel race was not a success. Having entered the 1st Van Riebeeck Trophy at Paarden Eiland in October 1948 in an Aston Special, he was leading the field when a conrod shattered and tore large rents through both sides of the engine.

A month before, Rollie Free, an American, had donned a speedo swimming costume and bathing cap and set a new world speed record for un-supercharged motorcycles of 150.313 mph (241.91 kph). He had achieved this on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, being 60 feet below sea level it was a perfect venue. The photograph of an almost naked Free lying prone on his 998 cc Vincent with his legs stretched out in the breeze is still recognized as one of the most famous motorcycle images ever recorded. In response, the Vincent factory in Stevenage immediately set out to build a

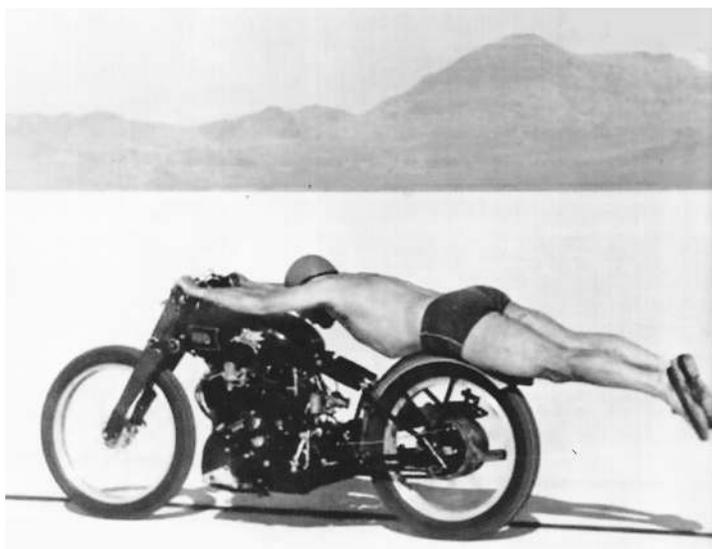
limited edition H.R.D. Black Lightning; as a stripped-down 998 cc racing machine, with 70 bhp and a mass of just 170 kg it was the fastest production vehicle on

wheels. One of these machines sneaked into Cape Town on the last ship to arrive before an import ban was imposed in June 1949. Procter decided that this was the projectile he needed to tackle the twenty-year old South African record for the flying mile set at 97 mph by L.E.H. 'Honi' Hamerton.

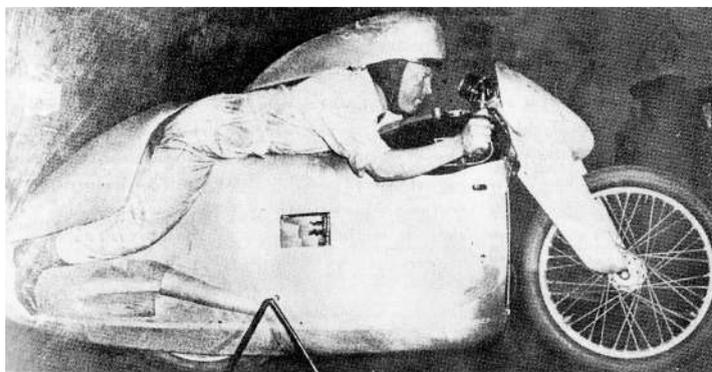
Deciding that a venue that had been good enough for Sir Malcolm Campbell was good enough for them, Procter and Anderson set out for Verneuk Pan in the Northern Cape in September 1949. As both altitude and heat were a problem, in a bid to break the record in the cool night air they arranged for two cars with headlights on to be lined up facing each other at each end of the measured mile. The trip was a success, Anderson had taken his 350 cc Norton and, adopting the Rollie Free prone position, proceeded to set three SA records in his class. This was the incentive for Procter to try the same technique



Procter and his Vincent HRD at Verneuk Pan, 1949



Rollie Free demonstrating his unique record-breaking style at the Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah, 1948



Procter on his streamlined Vincent at Kaalpan, 1950. Note the fairing behind his helmet

and he, in turn set three new SA records for the flying mile (136.26 mph), the flying kilometer (136.444 mph) and the standing start kilometer (88.919 mph).

Unfortunately Procter's performance on the race track was not as successful. He entered the Black Lightning in the 2nd Van Riebeeck Trophy at Paarden Eiland a few months later but crashed at Ice Cream Corner, the machine caught alight and had to be rebuilt.

Sadly, the Verneuk Pan records proved to have been in vain. They had been set under the auspices of the internationally recognized Motor Cycle Union of South Africa, the governing body of motorcycle sport in the country. Shortly afterwards the MCUSA was merged with the RAC, which did not recognize any motorcycle records set prior to 1950.

In response, Procter decided to tackle the world record for supercharged motorcycles, set at 174.3 mph in 1937 by the German Ernst Heune on a blown BMW 500. While training as a shopfitter in his

youth, Procter had become a specialist in working with aluminium and stainless steel, so he built a fairing for the bike at his car dealership in Salt River. For subsequent speed-record attempts he wore a set of overalls and an old pudding-bowl helmet that he'd streamlined with metal to make the air flow around his neck. Realizing that Verneuk Pan, with its notorious streaks of shale, was far from ideal, in September 1950 he set off for Kaalpan, south of Hopetown. He came very close to beating the world record, achieving 174.6 mph on his first run, only to experience disaster on the return leg. He recalled later; "I remember the rev counter reading 5700 and still climbing, when the horizon started to tilt at an alarming angle. At over 174 mph I hit a bump that sent me airborne for 45 feet and then did a final jump of another 30 feet before the bike and I parted company. We ended up a couple of hundred yards from each other and I remember getting up and running to switch off the motor, which was screaming its

head off. They found me lying next to the bike a bit bruised with cut cheeks and hands but not another injury. Lady Luck was on my side". He had graduated to membership of the international Caterpillar Club, open only to those who had survived a 150 mph motorcycle crash or had landed safely after

jumping from an aircraft with a parachute that had failed to open. He later discovered that the aerodynamics of his streamlining, far from holding the bike down on the track, had encouraged lift-off.

Undeterred, Procter and Anderson continued to race. In 1951, during the PE 200 on the Walter Gray Circuit, Procter achieved 100 mph laps on his Vincent for the first time in SA motorcycling history; at the time it had been the fastest combination of man and machine ever seen at a road-race in the Union. Anderson won the South African 500 cc title three times, and for many years was the oldest senior motorcycle champion in the country.

Procter then resolved to beat the South African speed record for a second time, and found a section of the national road near the Beaufort West airport which complied with the requirements. As it could only be closed for half an hour at a time he had to move quickly. Eventually, on 26 May 1952, he achieved a new South African record of 149.99 mph, earning him Springbok colours for motorsport.

By this time Procter had opened a service station in Three Anchor Bay. He decided to concentrate on

**MOSQUITO
GARELLI
MOPEDS**

VIC PROCTER'S MOTORS

**GUZZI
TRANSPORTERS**

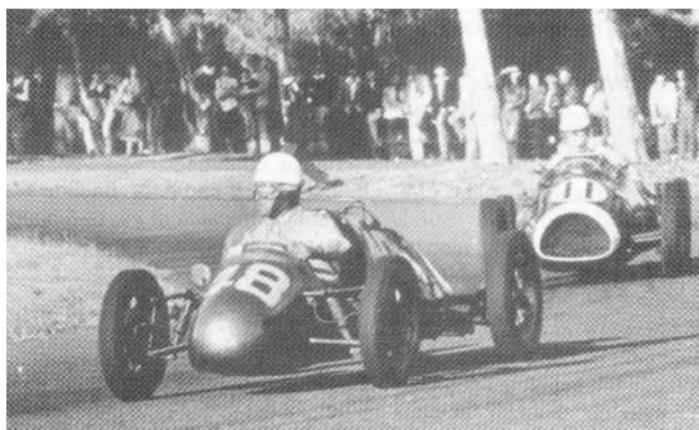
PAYLOAD 1000 LBS.

BEACH ROAD, THREE ANCHOR BAY Ph. 44-8009

four-wheel racing and bought a Kieft, a single-seater with a rear-mounted 500 cc single cylinder motorcycle engine. He discarded the power unit, replaced it with the 998 cc engine from the Black Lightning, and soon built up a reputation as a 'send it or bend it' type of racer. The tail-heavy Kieft became notorious for its dramatic slides off the track, especially after he had replaced the Vincent engine with a 1 100 cc Climax unit and later a 1 470 cc Alfa engine. After skidding off one too many times at Killarney in 1961 he retired from racing at the tender age of 50.

Incredibly, Vic Procter's South African record of 149.99 mph lasted for 15 years until it was broken in 1967 by Bob Olthoff in a McLaren Elva Ford. Even more impressive was the 45 years it took before his record was broken by a motorcycle, this had to wait until 1997 when Capetonian John Mountain achieved 300 kph (186 mph) on a Kawasaki 1100.

Acknowledgements to Killarney, 50 Years by Adrian Pheiffer, SA Motor & Cycle News Feb, June, Dec 1951, Cape Argus 24,26 May 1952, Classic Car Africa April 1998, Nov 2004, Aug 2010. 🏍️



Procter racing his Kieft Climax at Killarney