

OUR 1950s MOTORING SCENE

THE EARLY RUNS TO HERMANUS

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

THREE years after its founding, the Crankhandle Club received an invitation to a weekend outing from the Hermanus Publicity Association. The seaside village had organized a spring festival and the club was invited to drive down to participate in a concours d'elegance of classic cars in the Town Square. The dates selected were the 4th and 5th October 1958, a questionable choice as the equinox at that time of year almost guaranteed unstable weather conditions. Undaunted, the owners of nineteen cars signed up for the weekend and in due course the Klaxon reported on proceedings:

'With low clouds and threatening rain delaying an early start and after much telephoning, the cars were eventually under way by 9.30 am; gathering reinforcements en route, a large contingent had formed before Gordons Bay was reached. The heavy machinery stopped for tea at the Steenbras River Mouth, while their elders carried on between intermittent showers and high winds in an effort to complete the 90 miles before lunch. This took the form of a picnic in a delightfully secluded section of the camping site at Onrust, organized by Tubby Swingler, the President of the Hermanus Rotary Club. Harry Sheldrick, after battling with head and cross winds for the last 20 miles, arrived at 1.30, escorted by the E.M.F. and Carlos Regnier's Mercedes. Mrs Sheldrick had retired to the luxury of the Siddeley Special after braving the elements for most of the way.

After filling the 'inner man' there was great activity in sprucing up the cars for the run into



The Old Harbour at Hermanus

Hermanus. The cars were lined up and set off for the last five miles, this was accomplished with much cheering and blowing of horns by

hundreds of cars parked along both sides of the road, until the Town Square was reached, where the cars formed in a semicircle for the

concours d'elegance. Then the inevitable happened, the barriers as usual failed to keep back an enthusiastic crowd. Brian Porter and the Arrol-Johnston received their baptism and Harry Sheldrick was incensed on finding one youngster, who had been lifted by a fond parent, standing on his newly-painted boot-lid - such are the trials of veteran ownership.

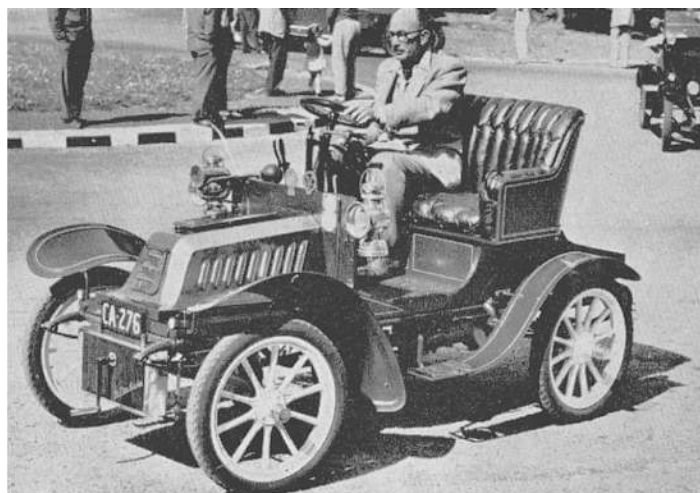
The judging being over, with further rain threatening and the organizers considerably worried by the crowds, it was decided to park the older cars in the lock-ups provided by the Marine Hotel. The remainder then proceeded to the Green Roof tea-garden at Mossel River, where all



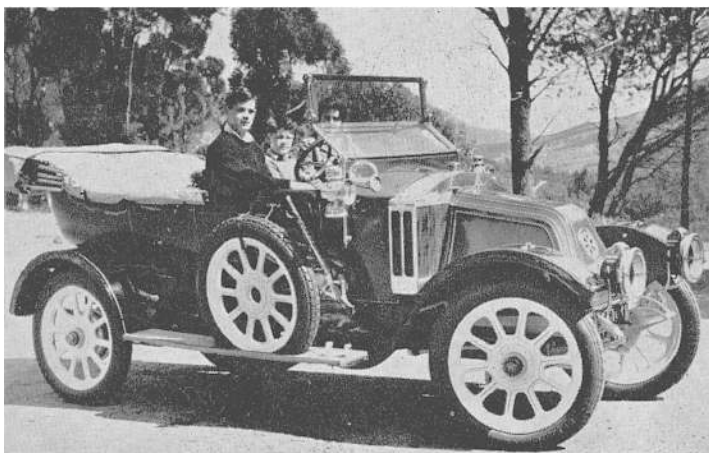
At Firgrove en route to Hermanus, 1926 Graham-Talbot, 1921 Silver Ghost, 1928 Isotta-Fraschini, Oct 1959



Bob Johnston's 40/50 Silver Ghost at Hermanus, 1959



Harry Sheldrick's 1904 De Dion Bouton



Brian Porter in the 1912 Arrol-Johnston

were regaled with a magnificent tea of apple-tarts, waffles and cream.

Members then dispersed to their various hotels to foregather again at the Royal Hotel for a civic cocktail party. Harry Sheldrick, who was the concours winner, was presented with a magnificent cup by Mr Prillewitz, who admitted that he might have been biased as he had learnt to drive on a De Dion; the decision, however, was unanimous. A hearty vote of thanks was proposed on behalf of the club by the chairman, Frank Thompson, for the magnificent entertainment that had been provided. Tubby Swinger in reply wished to emphasize the fact that the cup was to be regarded as a floating trophy that he hoped would be competed for annually.

About half the party had to return to town for family and other reasons; Angus Kinnes driving the Barsons back, Pearl Barson having come to his aid by driving down in George Kinnes' Renault Fregate. They all returned again on Sunday morning to take the E.M.F. and Chalenor's Rover back home, they are to be congratulated on showing such a fine spirit of enthusiasm.

The overnighters foregathered at The Bay View Hotel after dinner where a jolly time was had by all.

All cars returned home again by the coastal route on Sunday, which was a perfect day. It is noteworthy that the whole trip of approximately 200 miles was accomplished without any type of breakdown, and was voted by all to be a marked success.'

The cars that had taken part were: Harry Sheldrick's 1904 De Dion Bouton, Angus Kinnes' 1912 E.M.F., George Kinnes' 1912 Humber, C.L. (B o y k i e) Marais' 1912 Arrol-Johnston driven by Brian Porter, Holmes Motors' 1914 Model T Ford driven by Bill Williams, Bob Johnston's 1921 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, Des Baumann's 1923 Willys-

Overland, Bridget Kinnes' 1924 Renault driven by John Skaife, Ernst van der Horst's 1926 Model T Ford, Frank Thompson's 1926 Graham-Talbot, Ralph Rohr's 1928 4.5-litre Bentley, Jack Love's 1930 Austin Ulster, Chalenor Barson's 1931 Rover Meteor, Louise Baumann's 1931 Lagonda, Frank McLean's 1935 Lancia Astura, Count Luccio Labia's 1936 Siddeley Special driven by Greg Forsyth and Carlos Regnier's magnificent 1937 Mercedes-Benz 540K.

The weather conditions around the equinox came back in spades during the following year. Many years later Bob Johnston vividly recalled the weekend of 3 October 1959:

'Members turned out in cars like the Labia's huge Isotta-Fraschini, the Harrison Rolls-Royce and numerous other stalwarts of those early days, including chairman Frank Thompson with his Graham-Talbot Special, all looking forward to a pleasant weekend. However a morning picnic en route at Onrus

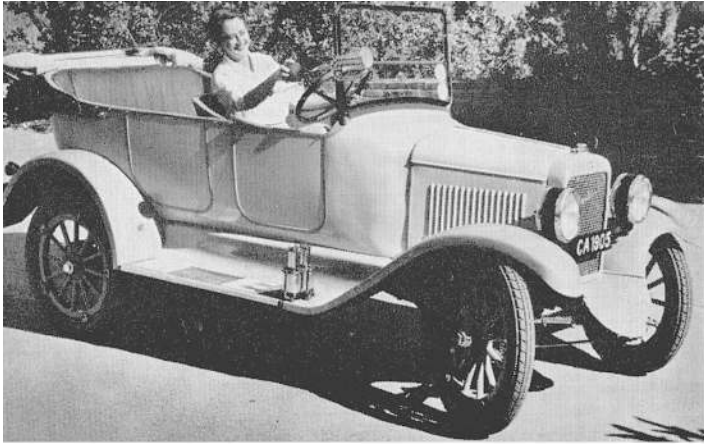
beach revealed ominous black clouds approaching from the sea. By the time of arrival at Hermanus a ferocious gale with torrential rain had struck but those of us with side-screens and wind-up windows ventured out. We need not have bothered as the streets were virtually deserted for a reason not strictly connected with the descending rainfall. Instead of watching the parade, crowds had gathered on the cliffs to witness something of greater interest taking place ... a shipwreck!

In the New Harbour a fleet of fishing trawlers was sheltering while enormous waves were crashing over the breakwater, even submerging it at times. One vessel, the 55 foot fishing boat *Zuiderkruis*, had broken its moorings and its crew, after trying desperately to start the engine, leapt into a dinghy, an act which undoubtedly saved their lives. Everyone gazed as the boat was swept stern-first out through the harbour entrance into the raging sea.

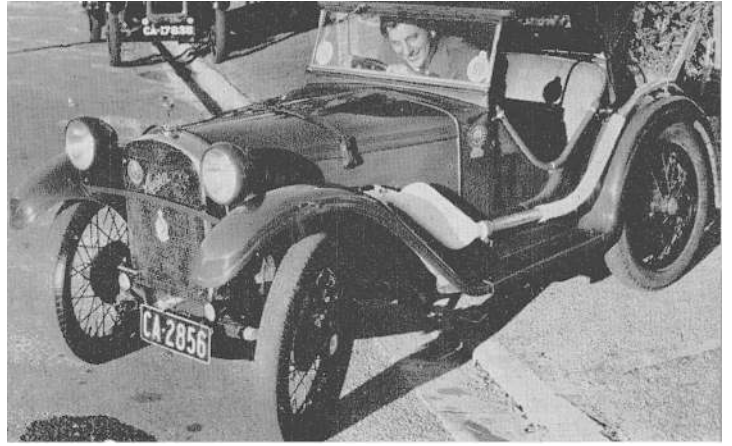
Leaving our cars, we joined the



Chalenor Barson's 1931 Rover Meteor



Des Baumann's 1923 Willys-Overland



Jack Love's 1930 Austin Ulster

onlookers and for the first time in my life I realized the awesome power of a real ocean storm. For about three hours the trawler surfed the huge waves that were driving it towards the far shore, rollers that increased in height as the water grew shallower. Eventually, dismasted and with her deck house swept away, she was seen to rise on

a crest and disappear into the next huge wave.
The following morning, with a blissfully quiet sea, we wandered along the beach and all we could find were scraps of smashed timber hardly more than a metre long. There was no sign of the big diesel engine that must have sunk far out from shore.'

Although the Crankhandle Club has not participated officially in the annual Hermanus Spring Festival (now known as the 'Whales 'n Wheels') for many years, it has inherited an important legacy from those early days. At least four of the floating trophies awarded to members at the club's AGM were donated by the Hermanus Publicity

Association. The organization obviously appreciated the contribution made against all odds by our pioneering members!
Acknowledgements to the Klaxon December 1958 and the CHC Chronicle Nov 2009



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