



Denis Joubert winning the 1962 sports car event in his Dart

OUR 1960s MOTORING SCENE

THE CAMPS BAY HILL CLIMBS

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

The twice-yearly Camps Bay Hill Climbs were highlights of the Cape motor-racing scene.

Well over a century ago, in November 1912, the CPMCC organized the first timed motorcycle charge up the precipitous dirt track of Kloof Road. The bikes scrambled

past the historic Round House to the finish at Kloof Nek. The first run of the day was tricky as the climb had to be as slow as possible, while the second event was run as fast as possible. The sprint events became very popular, particularly after cars were included, and the Round House Hill Climbs were held in

most of the years leading up to the mid-1930s. But the sharp curves were dangerous and the 1934 event turned dramatic when O.G. Davies overturned Hoodoo, his famous C-Type Montlhery MG, near the restaurant.

In 1935 the hill climb moved to the new Camps Bay Drive. The

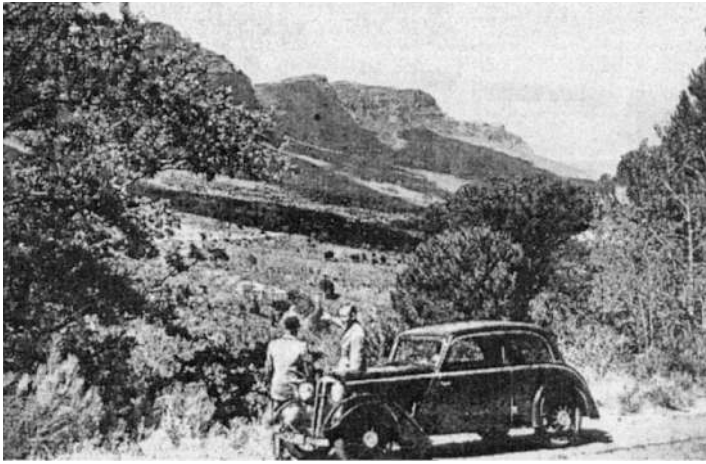
route, running from Kloof Nek and looping down to the Camps Bay Main Road, had been built in 1902 as a tram track. The road followed the original tram route, characterized by numerous straight sections separated by sharp corners. Today the lower part of Camps Bay Drive still follows



A determined motorcyclist tackling the first hill climb up Kloof Road in 1912



Fireworks Pheiffer setting the fastest time of the day on Camps Bay Drive in 1935



Pat Fairfield pointing out Camps Bay Drive as a potential GP circuit in 1936

those original twists and turns. The Terraplane Trophy was won in spectacular fashion by Henry 'Fireworks' Pheiffer in his '34 Ford V8 convertible. He went on to win the trophy three more times before World War II intervened.

The famous racing driver, Pat Fairfield, was in Cape Town in January 1936 and immediately saw the potential of the new route. He believed that it could be made into one of the finest GP race tracks in the world, and was quoted "Taking the track to be six miles long, you could organize a most spectacular race of 25 laps. Naturally the racing would be up the Round House valley and down the Camps Bay Drive. I think speeds up to 65 miles an hour would be possible." Sadly his idea was not accepted, but it probably sparked the construction of the Grosvenor GP Circuit at Pollsmoor later that year.

In January 1938 a promotion was held for the official opening of a new suburb established below Camps Bay Drive. This was a hill climb up the main access road, Geneva Drive. 4000 spectators were enthralled as the cars skidded and slithered round hairpin bends up the 1500-yard gravel track. This time O.G. Davies was the hero of the afternoon when he beat Steve Chiappini's racing Riley by four seconds in his Frazer Nash BMW. Chiappini also competed in Tromp van Diggelen's SS Jaguar.

The CPMCC held another hill climb on Geneva Drive in April 1940 in aid of the South African Mayor's Fund. Vic Procter put up the fastest time of the afternoon on his AJS motorcycle, and Steve Chiappini the fastest car time in his racing Maserati. Strong competition was offered by Chalenor Barson in his unique Alvis straight-

eight Barson Special No. 11, Peter Burroughes in John de Villiers' rare 1.5-litre Squire, and Frank Hoal in his MG PA.

The first post-war event was held on Camps Bay Drive on 30 November 1946. The course started from just above the main sweep at the Camps Bay sports venue, and was slightly less than a mile in length, ending near the Geneva Drive turnoff. Vic Procter repeated his previous success and set up fastest time on a Norton. Peter Burroughes won the Terraplane Trophy in his Hudson Special 'Red Peril', and his wife Diana won the women's class in the same car. Roddy Turner won the men's 1000 cc class in his Austin Seven Ulster, ahead of Ralph Clarke in his MG J2 Special and Don Philp in his Singer Le Mans. Andre du Plessis competed in his Graham Talbot.

From then on the hill-climbs



Baron Barracco in his Lancia at the finish of the 1951 Trans-Africa Rally at the Muizenberg Pavilion



Radcliff in his Studebaker, Signal Hill, 1951

were held in March and November. The November 1947 race programme described the course in humorous detail, naming the corners as 'Mac's Moses, Cecil's Curve, Weaver's Wiggle, Duggie's Dip, Burroughes' Bend and Thompson's Turn' That year Pierre Kelfkens from Johannesburg raced the ex-Lord Howe 3.3-litre super-charged Bugatti and Sam Tingle competed in his 4.5-litre Bentley.

The hill-climbs continued for the next three years but eventually the

CMPC was told to find another venue for the Camps Bay Hill Climb. The AARC took over the organization of the next event, held in March 1951 on the Signal Hill Road. Two of the competitors had been participants in the first Trans-Africa Rally that had arrived in Cape Town some ten days before. Excellent times were recorded by young Prince L. Murat in his Hotchkiss and Baron Roberto Barracco in his Lancia Aprilia. Pat Brown impressed in his Cisapria,



Tony White, Volvo 544, 1962



Ronny Kaplan, Austin Healey 3000



Derek Fordham, SAAB 93



Brausch Niemann, Lotus 7

as did Stanley Reed in his supercharged Citroen Special. But the mile-long Signal Hill course was treacherous with a number of sharp corners. The road dipped at the start with a left turn at the half-way point just as the cars were hitting high speeds. The competitors moved into a shallow right-hand corner that suddenly intensified and required violent breaking. David Fettes was driving the ex-Fraser-Jones Jaguar. On his timed practice he tore into this dangerous corner, left the road and continued up the bank. When the dust had settled his car had spun around, two of the wheels were badly buckled and the tail was bashed in. The corner was immediately dubbed Fettes' Folly. John Radcliff, in his Studebaker Special (the ex-Peter Burroughes Boffin Special) set up the Fastest Time of the Day (FTD), but while trying to better this time, came to grief at Fettes' Folly in a smash that was every bit as spectacular as the first. After this dramatic performance the City Council, with reluctance, allowed the hill-climbs to return to Camps Bay Drive for the November 1951 event,

But the damage had been done and it was to take more than eight years before the popular hill-climbs could be reinstated. Enthusiasts had to wait until December 1959 before Camps Bay Drive again became

the venue for a hill-climb organized by the MG Car Club. The event was held over a 0.9-mile course and was open to all types of car and motorcycle. Nigel Payne participated in the W.G. Thompson Volvo 444 'Black Lady'. In the up to 1500cc production car event he found it difficult to compete with Baba Joubert, who lived in Camps Bay and knew the course like the back of his hand. Unfortunately many drivers were unable to improve their first-round times after Koos Swanepoel dropped the sump-plug of his MG Special and sprayed oil over the length of the track. FTD was taken by Fred Wilmot in 53.1 seconds on his 500cc Norton. The quickest car was driven by Roddy Turner, the only driver to have competed previously on the course. He won in 56.6 seconds in his supercharged Austin Healey Sprite.

The oil-slick didn't help, as another few years were to pass before the next recorded hill-climb, staged by the AARC on 20 January 1962, the 50th anniversary year of the original. This time, probably to reduce disruption on side roads, a half-mile course was laid out. The top three production cars over 1500cc were Volvo 544s driven by Dougie Maister, M. E. Grevler and Tony White. Bob van Niekerk, driving the Formula Junior Equipee Judette Lotus Ford, swept up the hill in the record time of 26.3 seconds,



Don Philp at the Centenary with Dave Alexander's 1932 Lagonda

reaching more than 100 mph towards the end of the climb. Koos Swanepoel won the 1500cc production car class in his Anglia in 30.9 seconds, and Denis Joubert, in his lightweight Dart, the sports car honours in 29.5 seconds.

The last Camps Bay Hill Climb was held on 16 February 1963, organized by the AARC in aid of Rotary Benevolent Funds. Bob van Niekerk again achieved 26 seconds over the half-mile, this time in his 1800cc GSM Flamingo. Interestingly, as part of the proceedings, Crankhandle Club members laid on Vintage and Veteran Car Races. Eleven members participated in a demonstration run, and another nine in the hill-climb competition. Rudi Reitz achieved the fastest time of 40.2 seconds in his 1929 Rolls-Royce, with Jill Harvey second in her 1930 Austin Ulster, and Bob

Johnston third in his 1921 Silver Ghost. A fitting end to a competition that had been a Cape highlight for over fifty years.

So it was entirely appropriate that the CHC should celebrate the centenary of the first local hill climb. On Sunday 11 November 2012 some 60 cars and motorcycles, ranging in age from 1912 to 1963, stormed up Camps Bay Drive and Signal Hill and down Kloof Road. It was a fabulous morning, ending with a line-up of the participants on the playing fields of the Camps Bay High School. The cars that took part were similar to those that had raced originally. Incredibly, a few, like Viv James' 3-litre Sunbeam, had actually raced. Even more impressive was the turnout of eight of the original drivers, they'd all had a ball.



Camps Bay Hill-Climb veterans at the Centenary in 2012. From left; Koos Swanepoel, Peter Gough, Roddy Turner, Nigel Payne, Gerald Goott, Denis Joubert, Ralph Clarke. Foreground, the immaculate Joubert Dart.

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