



OUR 1960s MOTORING SCENE THE BROTHERS JENKINS, GARLICK'S MOTORS AND THE MYSTERIOUS SPEED TWENTY

By *Derek Stuart-Findlay*

In 1896 John Garlick, the founder of the prominent department store group, set up Garlick's Cycle Supply in St Georges Street, Cape Town. He was catering for the bicycle craze of the time, and while visiting the USA that year, recruited a 24-year-old, William Manley Jenkins, to manage the store.

Jenkins was a record-breaking cyclist from Los Angeles and had won many local races. This determined and ambitious man was the type of person Garlick needed to manage his rapidly expanding cycle store.

In Cape Town Jenkins immediately earned the nickname 'Yankee', and the business grew rapidly, with branches opening across the country. Garlick's Cycle Supply was selling thousands of American and British bikes, including Royal Enfields and Rovers. To manage the Transvaal

branches, Jenkins recruited his brother Leslie, who had made a name for himself doing trick cycling in his home state of California.

At the time John Garlick was researching motorized vehicles, and ordered a Royal Enfield Quad. It arrived in October 1898 and was sold to Mr (later Sir) Alfred Hennessy. This side of the business grew rapidly and Garlick soon established himself as the father of the motor trade in South Africa.

The Anglo-Boer War commenced in 1899, and the citizens of Cape Town formed a Town Guard. Garlick formed 140 of his staff into a Company, with himself as Captain and Yankee Jenkins as a Lieutenant in charge of the 20-man cyclist section. As an American neutral, Leslie Jenkins was able to stay in Johannesburg to keep an eye on Garlick's businesses in the Transvaal and Orange Free State.

In October 1900, Yankee Jenkins participated in the first motor race ever held in South Africa. The five-mile event formed

part of a sports meeting held at the Newlands Cricket Ground. He was almost certainly driving a steam-driven Locomobile, and was competing against a De Dion Bouton petrol-engine Clément. The Clément won easily, demonstrating the supremacy of the internal combustion engine.

Yankee Jenkins's management contract was up for renewal in early 1902, by this time the name of the business had changed to Garlick's



William 'Yankee' Jenkins

Motor and Cycle Supply. John Garlick treated him to a first-class ticket to England on the *Carisbrooke Castle*. Jenkins promptly sold cars to two of his dining saloon companions, the famous author Rudyard Kipling and mining magnate David Pullinger.

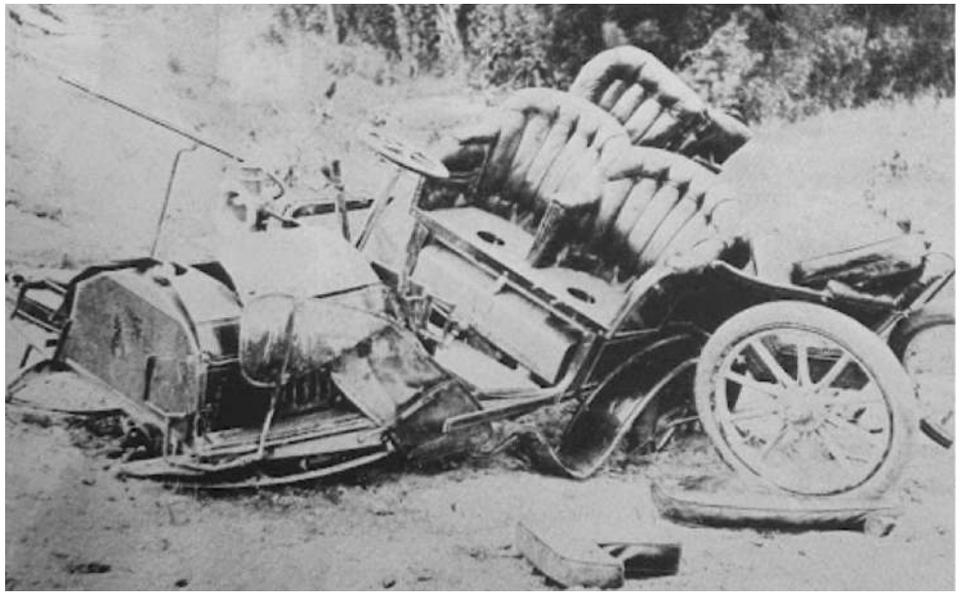
In February 1903 the newly-formed Automobile Club of South Africa organized a Motoring Tournament at the Green Point Cycle Track. Jenkins again displayed his expertise when he set up a South African one-mile motorcycle race record on his American-built Holley.

In 1903 John Garlick took delivery of a brand-new motor car, a Darracq. By then his eldest son Charlie had become an enthusiastic motorist, he was out driving the car in October that year when disaster struck. The gates of a level crossing near Woltemade were open and he entered, only to find the Johannesburg express bearing down on him at speed. The train smashed into the car and Charlie was hurled 40 feet. Fortunately he



Yankee Jenkins and his Holley motorcycle, Green Point Track, 1903

The remains of the Darracq ➔ after the rail accident



escaped with cuts and bruises but the chassis of the car was a write-off. To everyone's amazement, Yankee Jenkins was able to import replacement parts from Paris and had the car back on the road within a few months. Notwithstanding this, John Garlick was becoming annoyed with Jenkins, his interest in the business seemed to be flagging and the books were in a terrible mess.

By February 1904 Leslie Jenkins had moved to Cape Town and was demonstrating his cycling skills on the Grand Parade as part of Frank

Fillis' circus. His claim to fame was executing a daredevil loop of three-hundred-and-sixty-degrees in the circus tent on a bicycle. Using a short thirty-foot run down a ramp, he pedalled furiously to build up momentum to reach the apex of a twenty-two-foot diameter structure. During several attempts he fell from the top as he had not built up enough speed, and would have been severely injured had it not been for his body-padding and nets. The crowds were thrilled.

Leslie Jenkins moved back to the USA with the circus as part of the St Louis Exposition, and within a few months his brother Yankee Jenkins had moved to England to join the Enfield Motor Car Co. These Californian siblings had played significant roles in the foundation of both the bicycle and motor industries of South Africa.

Charlie Garlick took over as manager of Garlick's Motor and Cycle Supply. He favoured Rover cars, and his wife Ethel was also a keen motorist. In October 1917 an article was written about her in the magazine 'Motoring in South Africa'. She had been driving since 1909, she drove a 12 h.p. Rover, and she and Charlie averaged 8 000 miles a year.

In time the name of the business became Garlick's Motors, and during the 1920s it continued to import Rovers. Sadly, Charlie was in England in 1925 when he received news that his free-spirited wife Ethel had died of pneumonia. Their children, Margaret and Ian, were nine and seven when they lost their mother. Charlie never remarried, but immersed himself in the business. By 1937 Garlick's Motors was no longer profitable, it

was closed down and absorbed into the department store business.

In late 2020 the CHC received an email from Mike Evans, the Vintage Registrar of the Rover Sports Register at the British Leyland Heritage Museum at Gaydon in England. One of their prized exhibits was a triple-carburettor Speed Twenty Rover coupe with coachwork by Corsica of Cricklewood, London. This magnificently restored car had spent its early life in Cape Town but its year of manufacture was a mystery and Evans had been asked to date it. The coachbuilding-company records had been lost, but it was known that Corsica built sports bodies on Rover chassis from 1932 to about 1935. The car had been wrongly ascribed 1930 because it was fitted with an engine and gearbox of that year from a Rover Meteor saloon. Fortunately Evans had come across a caption on the records for the car that read 'bought as a 21st birthday present for Miss Garlick of Cape Town'. This would be an important dating lead if we could find out which Miss Garlick was being referred to.

Knowing that Chalenor Barson

had owned a car like this in Cape Town, I contacted his son Brian who sent me a copy of a letter from his Dad. In it Chalenor described how he had found the car in a garden of a Cape Town suburb with a tree growing through it. He was unable to date the car but confirmed that it had originally belonged to a Miss Garlick, and later to a Mr Martin, a maintenance engineer who used it to transport oxygen and acetylene bottles! The Rover was in appalling condition but he'd bought it for £25 and towed it home. He'd restored it completely in 1950, the mechanics were in reasonable condition but the body had to be completely rebuilt - all the woodwork had to be replaced but he was able to preserve the aluminium bodywork. The body was repainted by hand in its original British Racing Green. The Rover had a top speed of 90 mph and Chalenor had used it as daily transport for eleven years.

Unfortunately, in 1961 the crankshaft had broken and it had taken him four years to find a replacement engine and gearbox from a 1930 Meteor saloon in England. After getting it going again he sold the car to fellow CHC

FILLIS'S CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE.
GRAND PARADE.
LAST 2 NIGHTS.
TO-NIGHT
 (Friday), March 4,
GRAND COMPLIMENTARY BENEFIT
 TO
LESLIE JENKINS,
 The first and only man to successfully Loop the Loop in South Africa.
 A great Programme will be put forward, including the celebrated "Wheeler, Trick Cyclists," and a host of other novelties.
To-Morrow (Saturday),
 March 5,
GRAND FAREWELL MATINEE,
 When Children under 10 years of age will be admitted to all parts of the house for 1/-, Malay and Coloured Children 6d.
 On this occasion a Child's Riding Pony will be given away.
TO-MORROW EVENING,
 At 8 o'clock,
 Positively the Last Performance,
 Grand Farewell Benefit to F. E. FILLIS, tendered to him by his Cape Town friends prior to his departure for the St. Louis Exposition.



Ethel Garlick in her 12 hp Rover



Ethel Garlick with her children Ian and Margaret



Chalenor Barson and his Rover Speed Twenty, c. 1960

member Mike Cheminais. Mike repainted it cream, but, frustrated that he was unable to date the car, sold it in 1976 to Peter Sutcliffe who took it back to England. It was later housed in the museum at Gaydon.

But we still had to confirm the Rover's year of manufacture. Fortunately, one of John Garlick's great-granddaughters, Sherry Garlick Stanton, was writing a book on John Garlick and his large

family. From her we learnt that the 21st birthdays of only two of his granddaughters fitted the time period and one of them was Margaret Boyes, Charlie Garlick's daughter. We contacted her son Michael who confirmed that his mother had told him that she had received a Rover sports car as a present on her 21st birthday on 24 November 1937, and she had later crashed it. So at last we had the date

of manufacture, it was later than previously thought and the car could well have been the last of the Rover Corsica coupes.

So by a long circuitous route, after some seventy years of uncertainty, the age of the superb Rover Speed Twenty at the Gaydon museum has finally been determined.

One is tempted to quote the Roman author and philosopher,

Pliny the Elder, who famously wrote *Semper aliquid novi Africam adferre* - There's always something new out of Africa - referring to Africa as a traditional source of hybrid animals!

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