

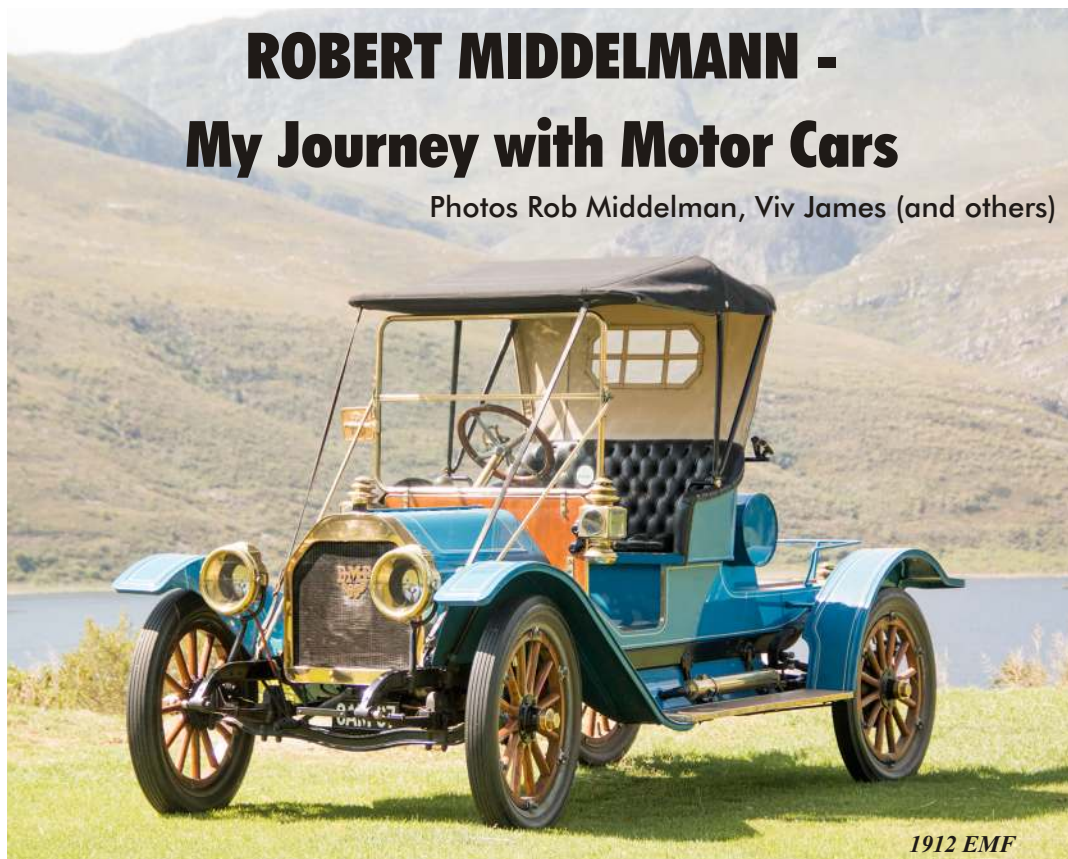
Probably became interested in motor cars because my father, a pre-war immigrant from Germany, had a garage in Vredehoek where the Gardens Centre now stands. I used to muck around in the workshop on weekends and during holidays and would do errands by bike to town for spares and spanners. The first car I really worked on was Tin Lizzie, a 1928 Chev, which did duty on the farm my father bought near Botrivier, to enjoy over weekends to get away from what he called "the stinking garage".

After scrimping and saving my pocket money and earnings at the garage, I bought a half-share in a Chev with Mike Rourke. After school the two of us used to hang out at Kinnes Garage in Wynberg for advice and to scrounge bits and pieces. He was our mentor! Weekends we hung out at Mike's house working on the car.

Enthusiasts like myself used to hang around Angus Kinnes. He proposed the formation of the Crankhandle Club, which I joined 2 years after its founding in 1955. I was a youngster of 15. I was extremely happy that, if I was a junior member for a period longer than 3 years, I did not have to pay a joining fee. As a school lightie, funds were tight.

Maryke became involved shortly before the birth of our first son, when she was Secretary for a National Rally hosted by the Club. Later she typed the Club Newsletters on stencil before roneoing and posting (before label machines and computers) and was the first lady to be elected to the Committee.

My 1st car was a 1930 Graham



1912 EMF

# ROBERT MIDDELMANN - My Journey with Motor Cars

Photos Rob Middelman, Viv James (and others)

Paige. The car's windscreen was lowered at the request of the first owner, according to the salesman I met many years later at a Natter. That also explained why I could not figure out how to fit a hood. When I started restoration, I consulted what books I could find and did a home-made job which looks a bit different. When I bought the car in 1966 it was dark blue and I paid R300.00. The present colour was found at Toeks Cross, when one of his office ladies walked past with a pair of nice orange shoes! I wanted that colour with brown and bright orange trim!

Maryke had to learn to double

declutch on this car so that we could rally around South Africa in nationals organised by various clubs - Maryke driving, me navigating. We didn't fare badly and made 2nd and 3rd a few times, but never managed 1st! We also participated in many Milligan rallies in PE (Gqeberha). The first one we participated in was Milligan No. 2, in a BMW 328.

The next car I bought was the 1938 BMW in April 1970 from Tony White. I paid what it cost him to import it, but I had to scrape the bottom of my cookie jar to do so. We lived in Cape Town and Maryke drove it often, taking

delight in telling me how she raced an MG, overtaking it on the way to the club's monthly get-together at Constantia Nek. I finished a complete restoration over a period of 10 years, when the car was 50 years old in 1988. At the Concourse d'Elegance in Port Elizabeth it won gold with a score of 98%. At various times, Tony offered to buy the car back, but I had become rather attached to it. Later it stood at

BMW pavilion on the foreshore on display for a whole year, which paid back the cost plus the purchase price. Now don't tell me that wasn't a good investment!

Another car that we used often but later sold was a 1936 Cadillac V12 7-seater Imperial Sedan with a dividing window between the driver and the passengers. It had suicide doors and was often used for the family as a wedding car. During petrol restrictions, on one of the Milligans, a special petrol tanker was put at our disposal, as we could not fill up on weekends. We were told to stand at the back of the queue because our car was so heavy on petrol!

I also own the 1912 EMF which used to belong to George Kinnes, which I bought from his widow, Bridget in September 1972, just before our first son was born. It had been used as an ice truck, and required quite a bit of work, but now it is a prized possession. For an old Veteran it goes really well with a touring speed about 55 - 60 km/h. Yes, it has to be started with a slinger, but it takes very easily. It has acetylene lights and a lot of brass to polish!

After a local rally where it proceeded to smoke like crazy, it was mothballed for a period of 20 years before I got down to doing an engine overhaul, thanks to Richard who insisted that it must be finished by 31st December 2000! He helped for many hours to get it



1928 Chev



done in time for the Millennium. In 2008 an EMF Centenary celebration was held in Chelsea, Michigan and Maryke insisted that Richard and I go as a reward for having done the restoration together.

On one of the last Milligans we decided to take the EMF to Oudshoorn, stopping overnight at Ladismith. It was very cold, and we were dressed like Michelin Men in the early morning. We stripped as the day went by. On the way home to the farm, we did it in one go from Oudshoorn to Botrivier, no problem and no discomfort.

In 1993 I bought a 1922 3-litre Bentley from Bob Dallas, who had the opportunity to buy a 4 1/2 litre. Somehow, although I always thought of myself being an American car man, but most boys want a Bentley, the ultimate car. This early model appealed to me because I've always liked the older cars. It is very reliable, even at this advanced age. It is thought to be the 7th oldest in the world and certainly the oldest in South Africa, with Engine 23, Chassis 24. The body is by Gurney Nutting and it is a 4-seater tourer. The car was originally fitted with two-wheel brakes and had a two-seater body. The car was subsequently fitted with front-wheel brakes and the engine altered to "speed model" specification. This kind of body change is quite acceptable, as long as the engine and chassis, which make it a WO Bentley, remain intact. For those who don't know much about Bentley: the chassis and motor only are built by Bentley. The client then decides on the body and would choose any body builder of the time. The ordinance therefore includes the body builder.

WO Bentley was an engineer who, together with some mates, designed and raced Bentley cars. WO, Barney Barnato, of Kimberley fame, Tim Burkin and Benjafield were known as the Bentley Boys. During the 1st World War WO designed the Bentley Rotary 1 engine for the Sopwith Camel, which was vastly superior to what had been used before.

Our first big event in the Bentley was when we joined the 2nd international Bentley Tour from Durban to Cape Town in 1990. We were the first car away in the morning as entrant no. 1 and came in last every evening. Seeing all those different spectacular Bentleys in one place I was hooked and



1938 BMW 328



Left: 1930 Graham Paige and below: Proof of purchase

Spiro's Stores (Durbanville) (Pty.) Ltd.  
 MAIN ROAD DURBANVILLE - PHONE 700N x 24 & 25E - 809/1/1  
 17/1/66  
 I THEO. SPIRO HAVE RECEIVED  
 THE SUM OF R42-90 (FORTY TWO RAND  
 NINETY CENTS FROM MR. A.H. MIDDLETON  
 AS DEPOSIT ON 1930 GRAHAM PAIGE



1998 Bentley Continental T

got to desire models like the 4 1/2 liter and Speed 6.

1962 Cadillac. We were at an event in Mossel Bay in 1988 to celebrate Bartholomeus Diaz's arrival at the Cape. We never had a car in the post-vintage category and more and more events in that category were on offer. Maryke saw this car and said: "if it has to be post-vintage; this is it". We've had miles of fun in this car, as it could take the whole family plus luggage. The Cadillac has been used for many film and advertising shoots and it wouldn't surprise me if it's close to having paid for itself.

In 1992 I imported a 1958 Corvette together with the Cadillac. It's a car much enjoyed by the whole family. We have done

several tours in it and some one-day events. The advantage is lots of boot space to take luggage out of town events, which in the early days used to be real dress-up affairs. These days events are far more casual. This is another car that has been used for quite a number of film shoots.

The 1950 Bentley Mark VI Special came to us by accident in 1997. It still holds a gentlemen's record on a racetrack somewhere in the UK (you can break records but leave enough space for others to break yours). It belonged to a UK ex-pat, Grant Fear who found his home in Franschhoek, from where he raced it all over the place. He never drove, he raced. Maryke admired the car from day one and

Grant was adamant that when he could no longer drive it, she was to have (buy) it.

Some Bentley drivers pull up their nose at this car; the specials were born as Sedans of which the bodies were rusted, and some enterprising souls started rebuilding them as sports cars. Maryke managed to exceed the club's rally clock timer on the Karweiderskraal road many years ago. We lent this car to a couple whose car did not arrive in time for the most recent international Bentley Tour which was interrupted by Covid. He also pulled up his nose, but beggars can't be choosers and after a day's driving, he proclaimed, "such fun, it's like driving a Mad Max", which is now its name.





*Above: A record crowd attended to hear about the Middelmanne cars*

*Above right: Robert doing the presentation*

*Right: Maryke driving the presentation*

*Left: 1958 Corvette*



*The Bentley family*

In September 2006, while Maryke was gadding around Europe with her siblings, I pulled a sly one and went to the UK to look at a car. Having satisfied myself it was the right one with matching numbers (meaning that the chassis and engine numbers correlated) I surprised them at Lake Constance with a 1930 Bentley Speed 6. To get it to Cape Town we had the opportunity to first ship it to Jordan and participate in the Jewel that is Jordan tour, a very high-class event, staying at the best hotels and having dinner with Queen Rania for a fundraiser and a unique experience at Petra where mine was one of three cars parked in front of the 'treasury' for a tourist brochure.

Since then, we have used this car for a top-rate tour of the Alps, where our boys picked up the car in Geneva to drive it back to the UK, where it is stored when not in SA. We also took it on a lovely drive through France in 2018. A big event was the celebration of the Centenary of Bentley, with a tour starting in Scotland at John O'Groats in March, criss-crossing Scotland and the UK ending in London and the home of Bentley racing at Brooklands. It was a very smart event and included dinner aboard the yacht, Britannia, and dinner in the Tower of London.

In the same year we participated in the Bentley Centenary tour of Tasmania, starting in Adelaide. A bonus trip before leaving for

Melbourne was a chartered flight for participants to Uluru, which blew our minds. From Melbourne we took the ferry to Tassie. A highlight there was the unexpected snow we had in the Cradle Mountains. Tassie is a lovely island which, in parts of the north, reminded us of Elgin and Grabouw and, down south, a bit like the highveld, but not quite as warm.

1998 Bentley Continental T was bought in Feb. 2019. This car has an interesting history. It belonged to Aaron Searl of Seardel Company in Cape Town, and later to the infamous Brett Kebble. It is very luxurious and our preferred car to drive in winter.

#### **The next generation(s)**

I am extremely fortunate that the old car bug has bitten my sons. Their wives and children also enjoy various local events. Richard, who is also rather fond of the older cars, has a 1913 Cadillac, while Nick has a unique, the only one in the world car, a 1907 Nordenfelt which has a Swedish connection. The family supports the Wynberg to Kalk Bay to Simonstown Veteran run when possible. This event is growing bigger every year, with participants coming from as far as Johannesburg and Durban. The boys also love taking their cars to the George show.

