

‘Racers - Memoirs of the Gentleman Drivers’: A new book from Palawan Press

Ian Skailes and Sir Paul Vestey (left and centre, both profiled in the book) enjoy some southern European sunshine with Alain de Cadenet and Mario Cabral© Sir Paul Vestey

Any book that includes a quote describing Enzo Ferrari as “a great bloke to work for” has clearly explored the more cobwebby corners of motor racing history. But what else would you expect from Palawan?

The latest volume from the West London-based publisher is devoted to that species now more familiar in historic, rather than modern racing: the ‘Gentleman Driver’. And while that expression more commonly means wealthy individuals able to indulge in a rich man’s passion, most of the subjects of the book can be described as ‘comfortably well-off’, rather than staggeringly wealthy in the Briggs Cunningham or Woolf Barnato sense.

The central thread, though, is one of well-organised, understated British amateurism with a well-hidden sense of competitiveness. And some, such as Cliff Allison, Noel Cunningham-Reid, John Miles and Tony Rolt, went on to become top-flight international drivers in F1 and at Le Mans.

Many of the biographies and subsequent recollections have a common theme: brought up in the immediate post-War period; member of the family business; a spell doing National Service (the UK’s compulsory duty in the armed services); the purchase of a Lotus or Jaguar; occasional works drives; early retirement from racing to rejoin the family concern.

And then in later years, quite possibly, a life spent somewhere warm – the Algarve or Southern France, perhaps.

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**OPPOSITE** In September John drives his Chevron 114 MK4 at the 12-hour GT race at the Nürburgring (right) for Old money at Le Mans. On a wet track he drove exceptionally well, but his Lotus 47 (left) and Malboro Lotus 47.

**BELOW** After John won the Championship, Alan Tate presented him at Silverstone (right) with a trophy of champagne and, more importantly a cheque. Alan Tate was a great motor sport and aviation enthusiast who, after a period in the RAF, ended up selling off his house.



had Terribit fuel injection and we didn't get anywhere with the car at all - the engine kept popping and banging - until we removed the fuel injection and put it back on Weber carburettors.

I had never driven a car like the Chevron, so it all came as a bit of a culture shock, but then Digby and I began to realise how good a car it was. My best performance that year was in the Monthley 1,000m race in which I had Peter Gethin non-driver. The engine had been built by Chris Steel and he owned it. We had put it in the car on the Tuesday before the race and the oil pressure was 25psi. It did, however, rev quite freely up to 5,000rpm, which, in theory at least, was quite impossible with a Ford twin-cam.

I told Chris that I didn't see how we could use the engine. His attitude was simple enough, 'it's my engine - it's not your own business.' When we got to France, the French Champion was there with a Lotus Elan and he came and looked at the Chevron, which was basically a glass fibre-cast block of resin, he engaged and walked off. I had forgotten to book any hotel rooms and we had to sleep in the cars. Peter Gethin went out to practice, but then came in and said, 'You'd better have a go.' So, I went out, did two laps, came in and said, 'Where the hell does the steering go, Peter? I'm certain I don't remember it.' We went to talk to David Piper, whose Ferrari had blown up, and took over his hotel room. The next day we went back to the circuit and the little man from France was still giggling at our Chevron because we had been something like 15 seconds off the pace. I went out and gave it the treatment - we knew that the Chevron was much faster than the Lotus - and as it proved, I was 8 seconds faster than him in one flying lap. During the race the head gasket blew, but Chris kept waving money at Peter and he kept going. We finished eighth overall and second in the 1,000m class. That was how we introduced the Chevron to France.

For 1967, I kept the B3 and ran in the *Maloring Nova GT* Championship, which was a big, season-long series. Overall, during the year, it had about 120 competitors. The strongest opposition came from John Miles with a new Lotus 47 competition GT car entered by the works Gold Leaf Team Lotus. With a large number of aerial planes and the refinements of Mr Miles's Lotus 47, which caught fire with monotonous regularity because of its Terribit fuel injection, I ended up by winning the Championship. In that series, there were 14 races and I won every race in which I competed.

I took delivery of a new B8 in 1968 and these were simply improved versions of the earlier B3 and B4 cars. My car had a 2-litre BMW engine. At the time, there was an adjustable anti-roll bar, which I understood Derek described as a psychological modification. I knew exactly what he meant by this, he had a great thing about not making his cars adjustable by racing drivers. He thought that drivers knew nothing about suspension settings. If you had non-adjustable 11-litre shock absorbers, two adjustable roll bars and you could adjust the brake balance - that was good enough. If you told him that you wanted to adjust something he would say, 'You can't, hard luck, and walk off.'

For me, the 1968 season was the worst that anyone could possibly have. I had punctures, gearbox failures, engine failures, suspension failures - you name it, I had it. For 1969, I took delivery of a new blue BMW-powered B8 and I was going to run it monthly as a workalike Home Racing car. I took it on the trailer to Silverstone Park and drove round in it. Then I took it back to Chevron and

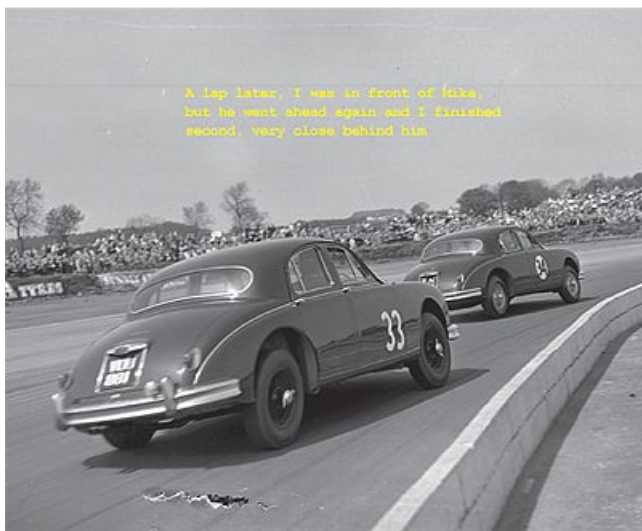
RACERS John Lepp





**BELOW** Tony Sopwith's Eagle Endeavour entered Tony's race with a Jaguar 3.3 in the final. Car race at Silverstone in May 1961. The photo shows the first lap, with Tony's car in the lead. The car is a 1951 model, and the driver is Tony Sopwith. The car is a 1951 model, and the driver is Tony Sopwith.

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RACERS Tony Sopwith

A lap later, I was in front of Mike, but he went ahead again and I finished second, very close behind him



Seas first drove for the team at Silverstone in June, but after broke trouble he finished second behind Jimmie

**IT WAS A VERY SAD BLOW WHEN IVOR**

introduced the MG 8 in 1959 and we used this model in 1960 on 1.8 litre. I also bought the first Aston Martin DB107. Roy Parnell, who had been running the Competition Department of Aston Martin, told me that they were introducing a short wheelbase of the DB107 and I said that I would have one of these. It was finished, as cars like this always were, at about two o'clock on the morning of its first race. It was an immensely quick car and a very exciting performer, but as Dagmar and about Bentley's 'They make the fastest horses in Europe' and up to a point the same was true about the DB107.

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In 1960, Jack Sears drove for the team on a regular basis and Gurnea was still racing with us. Our first race of the year was at Goodwood on Easter Monday.

RACERS Tony Sopwith



RACERS Mike Anthony

Mike Anthony's Lotus 6 (1961) at Goodwood on the 19th of May 1961. The car is a 1961 model, and the driver is Mike Anthony. The car is a 1961 model, and the driver is Mike Anthony.

streamlined Lotus 6 had been crashed and as he practised in my car. Instead of me being just a Lotus customer, we became great friends. Both Hans and Colin were very friendly and we continued to go on and on until the following year. After the Silverstone race, I went back to the machine shop and suggested that we should weld the steel liners into the cast iron block. We did this and it worked very well.

The Mk 6 understeered like mad, although we were so naive that we didn't understand understeer or oversteer. The front-end adhesion was so poor that it was easy to initiate a four-wheel drift, even though the engine developed only 175hp. In my youth, I suffered from the delusion that I could go round corners faster if I didn't use the brakes. I used to slow the car on the entry and then the steering.

When we decided that we were going to run in the British Empire Trophy at Oulton Park in April, Chapman suggested that he (with his 177A) powered Mk 6. Peter Gossman (who also had a Mk 6 with an 177A) and myself should run as a team under the name Team Lotus - the first time that the name was used. We used the same several times later during the year and the first occasion was the Sports Car race at the International Trophy meeting at Silverstone in May. Colin won the 1,500cc class, with Gossman third and me fifth in the class - it wasn't good enough for the team prize, which went to Ecurie Ecosse with their Jaguar C-Type.

We ran again as Team Lotus in the 1,500cc Sports Car race at the British Grand Prix meeting at Silverstone in July. Colin won the race, Gossman finished second and they both beat Hans Herrmann with a 1,800cc twin-cam-engined Porsche Typ 500 Spyder. That month then and this time we did win the team prize, but of course Ecurie Ecosse were not competing in the same race. Later in the year I set a new class record at Prescott Hill Climb and won my class at the Brighton Speed Trials, but I hadn't done as well as I had hoped and for 1961 I decided to move onto a British-powered car.

British engines were dominant in the 2-litre class of British Sports Car racing, with the exception of the Maserati A6G/20 raced by Roy Salvadori for the Gilby Engineering team. The A6G/20 was a powerful, heavy car



and, although they had achieved a lot of success with it, it was primarily a car for endurance racing and its left-hand drive caused some problems on British circuits with mostly right-hand corners. As it happened, Gilly transferred the Maserati engine to a Cooper chassis for 1955. However, this was not an improvement, as the new Cooper-Maserati understeered to an extreme.

The most successful British-powered car was the works Lotus-Bristol directly. Archie Scott-Brown had first appeared at the British Grand Prix meeting at Silverstone in July 1954. I discussed all this with Colin Chapman and we concluded that a Mk 8 Lotus as raced in the 1,500cc class by Chapman in 1954, but with a Bristol engine, would be lighter, faster and corner better than the Lotus. We were right, except for the fact that we did not allow adequately for the brilliance of Archie's driving and, although the new Lotus Mk 10, as it was designated, was a very good car, no one could match Archie's skill with the Lotus.

During the winter, while the car was under construction at Horney, Colin wrote me up and said: 'Would you like disc brakes on your car?' Up until that time, no Lotus had been fitted with disc brakes. I thought that it was a brilliant idea and when I asked him how much it would cost, he said: 'An extra thousand pounds, which



RACERS Mike Anthony

For further information, visit [www.palawan.co.uk](http://www.palawan.co.uk).

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