CLASSIC DRIVER

<u>'Racers - Memoirs of the Gentleman Drivers': A new book from</u> <u>Palawan Press</u>

lan 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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Mike Hawthorn and Roy Salvaskiri were there and also Patay Thirt, she was probably, the best known help driver at the time and was competing in circuit resear with a new Astun Martin UES24 prepared by Rob-

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Peter Sutcliffe - part of a Yorkshire, mill-owning family – started racing in a Frazer Nash Le Mans Replica, then proceeded to campaign what would nowadays be a stellar collection of cars: D-type Jaguars, a new Lightweight E-type, a Mk 2 Jaguar saloon, a Ferrari 250 GTO and a Ford GT40. In 1967, he also raced as an occasional member of the works Ferrari long-distance team, finishing 5th at Brands Hatch in a P4.

Jaguar drivers Peter Blond and Jonathan Sieff were in the rag trade, Kenneth McAlpine (who financed the Connaught GP team) a member of the McAlpine Construction family, Tommy Sopwith was the son of Sir Tom Sopwith, of Sopwith aircraft, America's Cup yacht racing and Hawker-Siddeley fame. And so on.

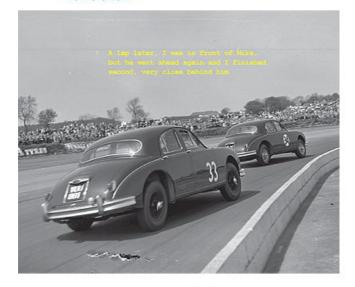
The Vestey/Sadler Gp. IV Porsche 910 at the Vila Real 500km, Portugal, in 1969 © Sir Paul Vestey

It was Cumbrian-born (to a family of garage-owners) Cliff Allison who made the down-to-earth comment about *II Commendatore*. Allison, having graduated from 500cc Coopers to spending many years behind the wheel of works Lotus Le Mans, F1 and F2 cars, was engaged by Ferrari in 1959 to drive sports cars and be an occasional member of the single-seater squad. A return to Lotus in 1961 resulted in the inevitable 'Bad Accident in a Lotus' and retirement from the sport.

A fascinating tale – as are the other 25 – in the 432-page, 288mm x 238mm, beautifully laid-out book. Two versions are available, a numbered, cloth-bound edition of 500 (£250.00) and a leather-bound, signed and numbered run of just 25 (£700.00).

For Palawan collectors it's a 'must', as it is for enthusiasts of this now sadly long-gone era of uniquely British motor sport.





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