



Maidstone and Mid Kent

Motor Club

Newsletter

Stephen Stringer Memorial
Edition

 motorsport UK

 StreetCar

You will all probably know by now that Stephen Stringer recently passed away suddenly while marshalling on a cycling event in France. Steve was a long standing member of our club and competed in many motorsport disciplines since the 1960's. He was a skilled autotester and won the BTRDA National championship in 1976 and 1978. His passion was rallying where he had a great many successes over the years competing in his bright red Lotus Sunbeam as well as several other cars, in events from stage rallies to the National Carvan Rally.

Before his premature passing he had sent me a document to extract content for use in the Club Newsletter. As it turns out it as an autobiographical account of his motorsport career. Unfortunately, it stops in 2010 so the last ten years of his exploits remain unrecorded which is unfortunate as I am sure he had some tails to tell. I have taken the opportunity to publish his work in full in a Special Edition of our newsletter in tribute to a man who gave so much to club motorsport, from marshalling to competing at national level. Steve was a true competitor all his life and took FTD's in our autotests right up to the time of his untimely death.

I hope I have spelt his name correctly as one of the last emails I had from him was him admonishing me for spelling his name incorrectly. *"You should know how to spell my name by now!"*

Bruce

Stephen Stringer 29.04.1950 – 20.09.2023



My motorsport life [well what I can remember]

Suze commented on a story I told her the other day [how to get a crash helmet through scrutineering] that I had a lot of tales, it is not the first time, and friends used to number them, and take the piss.... Anyway, I thought maybe I should try to put a brief, and probably not very accurate life story on paper, to bore you all.

As some know I went to boarding school, and was always interested in anything with an engine, so when I found they had a car club, I was in there quick. Kevin Haselden, and Dick Slaughter were also members of this 'elite' group. We didn't have a car however... so from I know not where a 1930's straight 6 Chrysler [very Elliot Ness] was found. It wouldn't start on the [foot operated] electric starter, but with a lot of effort [I was probably 13] we could crank it into life, and for us it was flaming quick, we used to tear up and down the track at the side of the playing fields, and around the tarmac by the science block... TQ 81359 49548 is the chicane through the hedge, which in the wet could be tricky, but fortunately most other boys were aware of our antics. My dad rebuilt the starter, and it worked a treat by the way.



One summer holiday the school caretaker [who didn't like us] towed the Chrysler and dumped it, it would be worth a fortune now. So, another vehicle was needed. One of the lad's [Fletcher] Dad had a building business, which had a very rusty Austin A60 pickup, they had retired, it was a 2.6 litre 4 pot I think, amazing torque, and very lively with a light rear end. Unfortunately, we did such a good job of fettling it he took it back and put it to work.... So, the car club was carless again.

Kevin's Dad came up with a Morris 8 side valve GPO van with a cracked block. That was when we first learnt about Radweld... [Crocker is right it is pretty good stuff]. I cannot remember where that went, I do remember it had no power, but could be kept sideways forever on wet grass.

A couple of us also got involved with the lighting, for school stage productions, which was a splendid wheeze as you didn't have to suffer a whole performance, but could sit in the lighting gallery with a bottle [drinking was of course not allowed]. When parents came to a play or whatever we could get up to other games, my Dad had a Vitesse at the time, and I got the keys, so we could 'go play' while the play was on... it was very nearly a disaster as I was going far too quick across a wet playing field, and only saved when I hit the tarmac on full lock understeer, the tracking was never the same after that.

Part of the lighting gang work was moving scenery around, which of course meant we had to borrow the tractor [grey TVO Fergi] and trailer used by the groundsmen. One Sunday I thought I could get up a flight of steps with this... I failed and got in a right mucking fuddle, extricating myself with the steering brakes, which was fine on wet tarmac, but the next morning the 'Quad' had a large black line..... fortunately, we used to nip off to the pub the boss groundsmen drank in. A couple of pints of Fremlin's 3 star prevented too much trouble.

The school had a CCF [Combined Cadet Force] where we all played soldiers, including days at Mereworth where we were allowed blanks for the .303s.... [a blank fired very close in a 'Nissen hut' is a bit load... but off topic so... someone decided the CCF was not complete without a "motor transport section" so a couple of BSA Bantams were obtained, neither of which ran... now we for some reason were not involved, and after two terms of not getting them to run, they were sold "to the highest bidder" Kevin got the 125 for £3 [he always was tight] and I got the 175 for a fiver... within 30 minutes we had the 175 going, the `125 took a bit longer,

and never ran well. So I was now into motorbikes, quick learning curve and a few crashes and I had that cracked... well sort of, anyway. After a few weeks I was getting very brave. This culminated in me arriving far too fast into the tarmac 90 right approaching the science block - foot peg firmly on the deck, and rapidly running out of road... this is going to hurt went through my mind, but I hung on, and kept all 175cc pumping hard. Net result, a front tyre mark some three feet up the science block wall and me still in one piece, and an official warning from the headmaster whose house was only about 100 yards away. We were asked to take the bikes home at the end of term - mean! It did result in the neighbours at 504 Maidstone Road suffering motorbike noise; one Scot came to complain as I hit the gate, stopping problems again. We used to all have a go. I once watered the top corner when my mate Simon LeGrys was not looking, he ended up in a pile. I also hit the fence at the end of the garden, when the rear brake rod broke, and the 'gear lever' [a pair of mole grips] came off, it shortened the bike by an inch or two and **hurt....**

Our reputation as 'fixers' was growing, and a young science master bought a Heinkel [I think] bubble car, which wouldn't go, so Chris Oswald Jones and I got the job of sorting it... well that was no problem, we gave it a bit of a test, all was fine until I missed a gear, there was a big bang, and I hit the brakes. Chris thought he was getting out and went for the door handle of the forward facing door. He exited very quickly and ended up in a heap on the track! The master was very good about it and the engine became a science class project.

We also had a very strange German Master [with a glass eye] who spent his holidays working on the roads in Germany to practice his accent, he would even apparently telephone Germans to ask if they knew which province he came from!! He was also very fit, but had a scooter and sidecar, which wouldn't tick over. Well Simon LeGrys and I volunteered to fix it. Not too tricky. By this time I had a provisional bike licence. So, we deemed we could 'road' test it, while the master was taking a games afternoon. All was well until I tried to turn left, with Simon on the pillion, a right was deemed safer [I don't remember crash helmets being worn], so Simon got in the sidecar, only slightly safer [for me]. As we shouldn't have been on the road, the next day we convinced the silly man that a further test was needed around the school quadrangle. All was going well. We all had a go, and then Chris Oswald Jones decided that while Simon LeGry was driving it would be fun to jump up and down in the sidecar, but it was just as they crossed a gully, the resulting moment was only just saved, and a halt was called to the 'testing.'

That was supposed to be a brief intro. [Note by Steve]

I left school [without a lot of O levels, playing cricket in the nets and other things having detracted from revision] a few weeks before my 17th birthday, meant a few driving lessons [and a big "bollocking" from the BSM instructor] and taking my test in Dad's Vitesse. Surprisingly I was then let loose on the highway, and could nip back to school at the weekend and take my more studious mates down the pub. In the summer before I left school, Dad and I had gone to Detling to watch a Players No6 autocross organised by MMKMC, in the back of the programme was a membership form, so I joined!!

By about the late June of '67 Dad had got fed up with me nicking his car and wearing the tyres out [I had found out why Vitesse's and Herald's had a 25 ft turning circle, it was for oppo lock with the swinging arm suspension

and cross ply tyres.... Full oppo flat in 3rd improves the concentration, so I now had a job, [paying a bit under £5 a week] and could afford a car or insurance but not both. A deal was done, and I found a £100 Mini pickup. Dad would pay to insure it. My Gran said I should have a new one and she would pay, so I became the proud



owner of KKR 187E, a beige 848cc Mini Pick up. I immediately entered an MMKMC grass autotest in a very smooth field at Stylebridge. A certain Jack Henley, who used one of his farm Mini Pickups to such good effect the following year there was a Mini pick up class, soundly thrashed me. *[And everyone else. Editor]*

Jack as some know was a very good driver in his day and did well on road rallies in a Boreham built RS16000. I never did beat him in a pickup, it was three years and a change to a Beetle before I did.

Over the next three years I did all the grass events I could, a load of PCTs and anything else I could, I also marshalled on various events, including the Grasshopper, which was a road and stage event over Saturday night and Sunday, with such famous locals as Doug Harris in a Stuttgart built 911. The noise of that on Romney Marsh was awesome, and no doubt hastened the death of road rallying!

During this time, I had stayed friendly with the school crowd, and Simon LG's parents ran the Pipemakers Arms in Rye. It was therefore natural that we would all go down at the weekend in the summer, with beaches close by, sometimes we would meet there, and go in separate vehicles, or maybe borrow Kevin's Dad's Zodiac Mk4, that could get 8 or 9 in easy, but also like the Vitesse had swing arm suspension, not helped by Bert's Haulage Contractor's addiction to Michelin X's, which are without doubt the most unpredictable tyre ever made. No PAS and 4.5 turns lock to lock resulted in a few lurid moments, one being uphill [fortunately] on the old Bluebell in the wet. I had run out of lock, when it decided to come back, and I think we were 6 up!! [Auto of course]. Three weeks running I managed to put the pickup in the same hedge in Bred. It was before the 40 limit and the approach is a sequence of very quick corners into an almost 90 left. I arrived too quick and just came to rest in the hedge, the last time in front of a single decker bus, the driver was sitting there shaking his head. After that I stored the spot more accurately. That pickup spent a bit of time in hedges all over Kent and Sussex. Kevin had a 1600E Cortina and if we went out, I had to drive the wheels off the pickup to stay with him. However, I could turn off the A2 at the Tollgate at 75mph from the outside lane and make it into the carpark. The pickup got smacked from behind at the Blue Door after a Tunbridge Wells CC autotest and was then changed to dark blue. In 1970 I retired it [well actually part exed it] for a Dark Blue VW Beetle 1500 [Gran helped again] TKP 110H. I used that to good effect on grass autotests and finally beat Jack Henley and got a few FTD's. This led to some tarmac stuff, and then a few road rallies [first one in 1971]. After a couple of scares, I put a rear roll hoop in, and "oh look it complies with stage rally regs", so a few of those were done. Adrian Scroop and I got fairly good and got few results. Chris Daisy offered a bit of sponsorship from his "Drive In Silencers" operation, which also meant I was 'invited' to service for him. That was in the days when rallies went on for days. The service crew needed a navigator, so Peter Singleton joined me in an Avenger Estate servicing Chris's Group 1 Avenger. We started on the Tour of Britain I think, the one with Roger Clark and Gerry Marshall in Group 1 RS2000's, fantastic. Clark was busy out-sycing Marshall, including turning his lights out at the Snetterton night race. Marshal thought he had gone off and lifted... Clark nipped past. The TRAC in those days just went on forever, I have never been so tired. Peter was diabetic and had to inject. This caused a bit of consternation at 6 am in a Yorkshire village. The old boy walking his dog was gaping. No doubt he was down the pub that night saying "eee thay am all on drugs yer know... I saw em." Roger Bateman used to codrive Chris. He was renowned for the back of his crash helmet being visible in photos as he didn't like to see what they were going to hit!! On the Scottish we got a mention in Car & Car Conversions for changing the steering rack after the last stage. We were the only Avenger still running, so we had the works guys helping as well [everyone ran a quick unhomologated rack]. The party in Aviemore was mind blowing, the Scottish and Newcastle rep was getting in his car to drive home without one shoe and shirt. A taxi driver picked a fight at the chippy, and the blokes girlfriend laid the taxi driver out. Peter had vanished [as he often did] with a ugly bird, [they are grateful was his theory]. Chris and Roger were up a tree with my Bowie knife pinching the finish banner. The car was in such a bad way they went home on the motorail, leaving Peter and I to drive back, and that is a long way with a hangover.

A bit out of chronological order here, I think. *[Steve's comment]*

I was still autotesting and doing pretty well in the ASEMCA, so started doing a few BTRDA events that were close, to home, still doing PCTs and stages and road rallies. The local motor clubs were running 12 cars with an interclub team award. This was between MMKMC, Sittingbourne, Sheppey, and Rainham I think. On one occasion John Jenson organised one with the whole route as pace notes, clocks were screwed as needed... John even got Bob de Jong from Holland out in a 1275GT [Bob apparently said "John are you **sure** this is legal"]. I seem to remember there was some problem later about comp licences with regard to Bob doing UK events.

In those days the Beetle would maybe do a road rally on Saturday night, a PCT on Sunday, and take me to work [in Lewisham] on Monday. I can only remember one occasion when it didn't manage to get me to work. That was after a 12 car that finished at the Tudor Rose in Collier Street. I hit a telegraph pole on the way home but still drove it back and mum greeted me as a drove in the drive with, "I heard you coming what did you hit?"

About this time, I changed jobs and got a company car, so the beetle was upgraded to a 1303S and was the my 'competition car'. The everyday transport being a 1300 Escort estate. With work all over the country, evening autotests were a bit tricky, but at last we had a service vehicle... [don't tell Tilbury Construction] and for a big event I could scrounge a Tilbury Cortina estate. My Escort was the fastest on the fleet mainly because it was before speed cameras, and I thrashed it mercilessly. Flat out from Heston services to the Severn bridge was normal. Leaving Kent in time to get to Neath for a 9am start before the M25, and after a weekend of Motorsport.

I have to admit I got pretty good at autotests, and by 1975 I had decided that I couldn't afford to go higher in stage rallies, so BTRDA autotests were the way. I stared looking at sports cars. The regs at the time had a wheelbase split, and the Lotus 7 was in the large saloon and sports car class [with MGBs and Escorts]. They had been tried and no one had made it work, but it seemed to me that it should, so I started a search. This fond DLC991J, a 1971 series 4, with a fairly high mileage and a slipping clutch. It was £650 when a good one was about £1100. I picked it up on a Thursday, changed the clutch on Saturday, drove to Eastbourne on Sunday and won the class!! It was one of the coldest mornings I can remember. The screen on the 7 kept freezing up and I had to scrape it with a credit card. On the Pevensey levels I came across Trevor Smith and Dennis Beare stopped. Dennis was towing and thought he had a puncture but after he fell over on the ice, he decided it wasn't! I then had a couple of weeks to get the handbrake working half decent and put an LSD in before the next round. That made the class too easy!! But the plan as good, a year in an easy class and by the end of the year I was getting the odd FTD. I had also met Flip, so the next year it was a serious assault on the championship from both of us. Some events she used Mike Elmer's Canon special [the most difficult thing I have ever tried] and otherwise we shared the 7. We drove the 7 to every event. On one famous occasion we left Ipswich at 6 pm after Flip had had to show her mum's dog in a show and then drove to Anglesey, did the event on Sunday, drove back to Flip's near Diss and then I drove to work on Monday!! There was no way to sleep in a Lotus 7!!

The following year was a repeat except we towed to events. I managed to win the championship and Flip took the ladies with ease. In those days finding accommodation was a little tricky, no world wide wobbly web then. Sometimes we took a tent and sometimes I booked B&B. We used to do an awful event at Huddersfield. I really struggled to find somewhere to stay, and booked a pub. We got to the place and pulled up.. to which Flip [also towing] said 'are we lost?' "no this is it", "I am not staying there!" "well you are sleeping in the car then" It had nylon sheets and massive valve TV that didn't work; they didn't do dinner, but the breakfast was fantastic. So, we said where do we eat? "Te Chinese oop road", which was doing a wedding and they said "te cuntry cloob oop te road first left oop by te mill can't miss it'. Well we found it. There were about twenty coaches parked up, and it was full... "aye no prob, wait till 'trippers go, and it'll be all reet". Best roast beef you could ask for. Result. For the event the next day the CofC had no idea. One test was too tight and while the sports cars were OK, no one else would get round. Trevor was first, I was second to go, so we said we wouldn't start, parked our cars, and told them to take a pylon out. They did in the end. The event was dropped after that.

In '76 I also got enlisted to navigate for Chris Daisy on the caravan rally. This was a stage event for cars and caravans, with special tests at the end [which was the real reason I was there]. We were in a three car team, sponsored by CI and Lee Davy Caravans with cars from Drake & Fletcher/Vauxhall. Lyle Cathcart/Mike Cockle and us had Droop Snoot Firenza's, and Martin Lumby [a CI rep] had a Victor saloon, with Blydenstein head and manifold, which was much quicker than the Droop Snoots. The build-up went on for months. Chris and Lyle went everywhere [even out to dinner] with the caravan on the back. We all went testing at Manston, where it was decided to put the caravans on 6" reverse rims with 70 profile radials. They gave so much grip we wore out the front corners of the caravan when they popped up on one wheel, so skids were fitted! The event was in April and started at Silverstone. It was cold, and we had to sleep in the caravans, which were scrutineered more closely than the cars. We had to have breakfast [cereal and dried milk, tea, water and kettle] toilet facility [bucket and spade]. At scrutiny we only had two tables for three caravans, which caused a bit of trouble, [you talk to him while we swap the table type stuff] and the caravan Club didn't think spare wheels should be bolted to the floor. Anyway, we started eventually with a stage around the track and out into the car parks at about 5.30am. It was very icy!!

The arrows were put up by caravanners... so a straight over crest **was not flat** and led into a hairpin right; after a big tank slapper and both rear wings bent on the Firenza, we stopped. Chris selected first and was flagged down by a marshal who said in his best BBC voice 'I say old chap do you know your gas bottle is hanging off?' For all I know it may still be there. We continued through forests and airfields. I drove some of the road sections so Chris could sleep and I discovered that sleeping on a stage was possible... the days were 20+ hours! We did a USAF base in Norfolk somewhere and all the runway lights were on for us, but it was very icy at the finish. The marshal was standing in the middle of the track to give us a time, but we were not slowing... at the last moment he decided to run...it was like a cartoon his legs and arms were going but he wasn't!! On a road section we met a furniture truck which shot sheet of ice off its roof. This hit the screen, and cracked the laminated glass, then punched holes in the caravan and took the window out!! **VERY SCARY**. The guys from Lee Davy repanelled the van with new ready striped panels glued over the top, as there was a penalty for damage, but we had to sleep in the thing full of ice and glass. The service crews slept in big caravans at Silverstone... Having won the team award spirits were high after the event. It all started with the double bed being made without the table in the middle so that it collapsed. Then we tied a tin can full of stones on a piece of string, and hung it over a handle, waited for quiet, and then gave it a tug. They thought we were winding up the legs so hatched a plan. Roger Bateman filled a saucepan with water, opened the door and tried to throw it over the roof to create some noise, except it hit the side and soaked him..... we gave it 5 minutes and went again, this time he went outside in the cold.... and so the night went on...

For the following years caravan rally I serviced, and the Droop Snoots were retired, everyone had Victors. They were 2300's with Blydenstien heads and exhausts, with Koni shocks and they were a fabulous tow car. Martin Lumby thumped a fence with his and put a decent dent in the front. After the event I bought it from Drake and Fletcher, still with dent. Flip and I were by then towing to events. I had come home one Friday to be greeted by Dad who had bought a trailer!! [cheap I am glad to say] we hooked it on the Beetle and as it had Land Rover wheels, the back was about 4 feet off the ground... we had to do a bit of re-engineering. It was shortened by 5 feet, and a pair of Indespension units put on. That trailer survived several reincarnations [including becoming a 4 wheeler] until 2000, when I gave it to Graham Standen, who has now passed it on. Anyway, when we both towed as my Beetle was slower, I led, and Flip followed in the MGB GT. I hadn't mentioned the purchase of the Victor. I just turned up on a Friday night in it. She didn't think it was good plan, until she took it out for a quick run and came back saying from now on, she was leading. She never knew a Victor went like that!!

Stepping back a little, HKJ had been like its predecessor, an all-rounder, but I decided it needed more power, and I had also bought a Mini Clubman estate to run about in. That also did a few autotests and broke a drive shaft which Premier motors replaced under warrantee. HKJ had acquired some Formula Vee heads and a cam from Mike Jeffries, as well as twin minnow carbs. It would now rev to 6500 rather than 4500 and went pretty well. We then had the fuel crisis and no events. Eventually the Beetle's engine dropped onto three while I was

chasing a Merc down the Sevenoaks bypass, I calculated we were doing about 125!! I later read that the airflow to a Beetle engine stops at about 95. As there were no events, and I had the Seven now, I exchanged the engine for a VW unit. Somewhere in Germany there was probably a confused man rebuilding an engine that wasn't as he expected. I think that Drake & Fletcher actually took it in part exchange.

Sometime about 1978 BTRDA started the Allrounders Championship, so I had a few goes at that as well as the autotests. My best result was second and in that year I bought a 970S autocross car. It was an evil beast, and I was up against Tom Law, but managed a class win on three occasions. It had an LSD and would fight you all the way. After three laps I couldn't get my hands up to undo the crash helmet my arms were so pumped up! Sold it at the end of the year for the same money I bought it for.

About 1979 I thought rallying would be a good idea, so I found a rolled ex Jersey 1100 Mk2 Escort hire car. I then bought a Mk1 autocross car to get the suspension etc, took what I wanted out and sold the shell. That had a really strong Pinto, but I wanted to go 1600, so bought Trevor Smith's cross flow. Flip had done the Faberge Fiesta championship in '79 and then bought a rolling shell Mk1, a rough green beast. The Pinto went in that and we shared it at autocross.

During the Fiesta year I did little except service for Flip, it was a Ford find a Lady Rally Driver competition, and Flip was one of twelve given a Fiesta to rally. The winner getting a works drive, which is how Louise Aitkin [Walker] was found. It was a very alcoholic year for us. The guy from Flip's sponsor [Spruce Howlet] the MSA scrutineer and one of the Boreham mechanics and I tried to drink everywhere we went dry of Port. It also included some races, and it was a bit out of order occasionally after events. I remember one of the girls being handcuffed to her steering wheel [another was a WPC] it was then noticed that she didn't have a key. It turned out Cheshire police had different keys. In the end they had to drive from Oulton Park to Birmingham to get unlocked. Graham Robson [author and ex Triumph team manager] was "in charge". We picked his Fiesta up and put it lengthways between two trees. Took him ages to get it out. We went to Belgium for a race, there was a dinner for all the Ford Belgium top brass, which was boring, so Leslie crawled under the table a tied their shoelaces together.... A sense of humour failure occurred!!

Anyway, back to the Mk2, as it was an import it got a new reg number GKR759V. Getting to the first event was as always a bit of a rush, so I did it without an MOT on the basis that no one would expect a month old car to need one. We arrived at Llandudno, and the first stage was the Orme. I set off with great enthusiasm changed into second and pulled the gear lever out, so we did the stage in 2nd. At the finish the marshal said you are on fire.... I said no it's just hot, he said, well there are flames... so a quick puff of BCF sorted that and we pushed it to service, where it was found that the tee piece had come apart and pumped fuel over the distributor. It had also burnt some plug leads, all of which accounted for the two cylinders running at the end of the stage. We got it fixed and finished the event, but every time we hit water it got in the burnt plug leads!!

I can't remember the order of BTRDA rounds then, but Peter Singleton and Martin Kiernon shared codriving. I did a Welsh event with Martin which used the Esgair Dafid stage that featured on the BBC televised ralliesprints. It was a sequence of open hairpins downhill. I lost it at the top, and collected it at the bottom, even having to open the side window to see as it was covered in mud. Martin was very quiet all the way down!! Later in the year I did Somerset with Peter and on the second run through a stage understeered off, got the front wheel behind a log and climbed a bank. The car then fell over!! Peter and I climbed out and enlisted some spectators, who had never before seen a car roll, and were in a bit of a flap, as well as playing pass the baby. Anyway, we got it the right way up and finished. I did Keilder with Peter who had a duck call. At one Stage start he had the marshal's 6 year old looking for a duck under the car. We were laughing so much 15 seconds had gone before I found a gear and got going. Needless to say the prizegiving was a little noisy. Later in the year Martin and I did another Welsh event. Remember no notes in those days, and Martin didn't call a lot off the map. We arrived at a crest flat in third, the tree line went straight on... but the road went 60 right. I tried the handbrake, but we were in the air. When we landed in tree stumps, it flipped very quickly and landed on the wheels. I started it and a Speccy opened the door to say we were the eleventh to roll. The car wouldn't move It turned out the

handbrake rod had gone through the diff casing and locked the CW&P!! With that sorted we were pushed out and on our way. Then I noticed wheezing noises coming from Martin. Still again we finished. Martin drove back to Kent and on Monday went to A&E where they said he had bust two ribs. Another lesson; do not use reclining seats, even RS ones jump the stops. I came back via an autocross at Stafford where some friends of my uncle couldn't understand how I could do that to a new V reg car... !!

By this time Flip and I had split up, and in late '81 I had started my own business, so a few autocross and one or two local events were the menu for a few years. Then I met Pam, whose brother did scrambles [he was national champion in pre '65s about ten years ago] so as she was into motorsport she had a few goes in the Escort. Sprints at West Malling etc. On one occasion the finish marshal had to run for his life. It was sometime later we realised that when it was sideways, she didn't have enough strength to steer one handed. She then took up codriving for me and was very good. The Escort went to help the business, and then Pam joined me and did the drawings, so for a while money was short, however Pam bought a 1000cc Mini DLM 996J as a road car. Immediately friends found bits in the back of garages, and it became known as the 'Oxfam' Mini!! Chris Brown had a roll cage and alloy wheels, Mike Jordan some full harness's, another mate had an "S" rotting in his garden, that had some seats, and we sold the log book!! My cousin put his 1275 GT into a gate post so we bought the front subframe and engine for £50, and so it went on. Stage rally regs were still lax so we did a few, and some slaloms at various venues. One event was an airfield south of Oxford. We were reserves and got to run at number 9!! A local wanted to know how we got such a high seeding. I told him we were just quick... he didn't like that, and it turned out he had a full spec 1340 on split Webbers and all the bits. I don't think to this day he believes we had a standard 70k mile 1275 GT, when we beat him well and truly!! I did knock the door mirror off on a chicane gateway that Pam convinced me was flat... we also collected an arrow every time round one corner! I did some PCTs in it as well for allrounders. Simon autocrossed the Mini and that was where it died. We also used my mum's Volvo for a few PCTs.

In 1985 Phillip Young [of long distance rally infamy] wrote an article in Car & Car Conversions on a Skoda Trophy. That seemed a good plan, as they were supposed to be Group A. So, a few trips to Belgium may be possible. We went up to Skoda GB, and talked to Sherlodge. The nett result was a new 130L for £2500 [list £3700], it was going to be a demo for a few months [for discount], and any bits we didn't want went back into stock. I had the shell stripped before it was registered which when Skoda GB found out, we got a real roasting. Apparently if the DVLA had come to look they would have lost the Skoda concession!! I think the sound deadening was 50% of the weight of the car. Anyway, we got it all off, put an alloy cage in, and threw everything away we didn't need, and were still about 100kgs heavier than a works cars [we think they had thin panels]. A shakedown at Goodwood, some local stuff and two Autosport national events [to get Skoda start money] filled the year between breakages! In '85 we towed it with all the gear behind my 305 estate, which was a bit marginal, as was proved when with Pam driving when a wheel bearing went and the trailer took over. The result of which was a three lane and hard shoulder tank slapper that ended with us facing the wrong way, with only three wheels on the trailer and dented rear wings on the 305. Pam had to drive the rally car, which was overheating [again] back while I drove the 305 and three wheel trailer. The insurers were very rude about my faithful car and wanted to write it off. It only had about 130k on it, but they did mend it in the end though.

Then in '86 we did the whole championship ending up 3rd. I have never had a car that broke so many different things. I also used to have problem with my mind wandering on stages, the thing was so slow! I would be thinking about what was happening tomorrow or next week, not conducive to a good time. We had bought an Avantura 5 berth motor home from Barry Dutna. It was on a single wheel Bedford CF chassis, and was probably overweight when empty! With a rally car on the back, and not helped by the fact it had a Rover V8 and auto box in it, it was a bit difficult to stop, but it made mincemeat of hills. Pam and I would leave with the rally car and motorhome and the service crew would come up later in my 305 Estate, which had a lot of hard miles on it but was a good tool. I think it worked out cheaper than hotels!! When we did Granite City in Aberdeen, Pam and I had left on Thursday, stopped on the way up and arrived in plenty of time for the 2 hour scrutineering queue. We were set up in the service area, and had sorted all the paperwork, at about 10pm thinking it was

time Dennis and Tony turned up. We then got a message [pre mobiles of course] to say the 305 was scrap, but they had hired a Montego and were on the way [still in Newcastle!!]. So, we did the rally, one of the roughest events I have ever done. It broke the front suspension arms, so we had no front dampers, not too bad on the stages as we just ran in the ruts, but lethal on the road! Every time we met the lads all they did was whinge about the Montego, which I later discovered Dennis was driving pretending to be Tony as he was the only one with a licence, so the only one the hire company would let drive. Any way we finished which most Skoda's didn't. Then we took the hire car back to Aberdeen Airport as it was on a one day hire, only to find that it was one way 24hour hire. They then charged the full rate and mileage of £485 on Tony's credit card. He went white, as I don't think he had ever spent that much in his life!! We packed everything in the rally car and motorhome and headed back to Newcastle to collect the other bits from the 305. Non-stop it is a long drive I can tell you!! We also had a great deal of trouble keeping the car without dampers on the trailer. This time the insurers did write the 305 off and paid Tony's hire car bill. It was the other driver's fault. Dennis and Tony had stopped with the road blocked on the A68, only to be collected by a Sierra that was next over the crest! The last but one event was Carlisle, and I went over the flying finish of the last stage flat despite Pam saying there was a bend. We landed on top of the biggest rock in the UK, all 4 wheels were dangling!! In true Skoda Trophy comradeship all the other runners stopped after the stop line and came back to lift us off, which did my back. The next morning busting for a pee, it locked up while I had one leg off the over cab bunk, and one still in the bunk, the others thought it was funny. I very nearly had an accident!!

Early in my days of servicing for Chris Daisy, he did Ypres, about 1974 I think. He had gone out to note with a Rootes Avenger demo, so I was taking the rally car out [no trailers then], late at night on the Thursday, I think. We arrived about 5am and I had driven straight over a main road give way junction, which was very badly marked. Good job nothing was coming, or I would have been very unpopular! This got me hooked on Belgian rallying. It wasn't very successful as the axle tube pulled out and stuffed Chris in the ditch. So we borrowed Tony Maslen's Granada and Trail. I was then left in the car at Calais while Chris went to get the recce/service/Rootes demo car. We then towed the rally car onto the boat and off at Dover. At passport control, Chris stopped handed over the passports for checking and pulled away forgetting, I had my own passport. We were soon surrounded and marched back to the passport booth, where the officer was having a sense of humour failure. My first run in with Dover customs, others were to follow! After this early sortie I was always up for servicing over there, and went many times with Kevin Haselden, Chris Browne etc. We used to go via Zeebrugge if we had a trailer as the Belgians were far less difficult over paperwork. On one occasion we got stopped and the customs bloke told us we couldn't enter Belgium and walked off. So we drove off through the dock gates. Kevin was and still is a bugger for not doing everything on a car, he was using a Sunbeam Ti in Group1 spec and had never bought the front air dam, or rear spoiler, that were on the papers. Eventually he couldn't get through scrutineering at Ypres, so being a jammy git, drove down the road until he found a Ti parked. He then went in a shoe shop found the owner and borrowed the tailgate and spoiler!! The rally in those days was 24 hrs nonstop, so on Sunday morning KH and I took the tailgate back leaving Pam and Liz Jordan drinking coffee in the square. Well we didn't know the guy's wife was going to cook cakes etc for us did we? So, several hours later we returned to a big bollocking! Of course, we had then missed the boat, but bluffed our way onto a freight ship. As there were two girls, the captain asked us up to the bridge for afternoon tea. KH missed it all as he was asleep, but we had a very interesting crossing.

So, all that meant that after two years of a pain in the backside Skoda, we were up for a bit of Europe [which was the original plan for the Skoda]. Study of form and championships led to the formulation of a plan. The Skoda was sold [for £3600!!] and it was decided the West Euro Cup looked good. Events in Sweden [which we were not ready for] Holland [2], Germany 3 [we did 2] Belgium 2, [we missed the first], Isle of Man and Southern Ireland, all looked just the ticket. I wanted a proper rally car that you could get all the right bits for. For a short time a Reggie 5 Turbo was an option, as Sherlodge were also Reggie dealers, but the FIA changed the turbo multiplier and put it in with the Cosworth's. After a really helpful afternoon with the very nice Des O'Dell, who told us exactly what was worth buying and what spec to aim for, a written off 205GTI was the on

the shopping list. I found a rolled one and Den and I went and fetched it. We did a bit of a deal with Rootes, and new shell and a long list of bits were ordered to build a Group A 1600. As always time ended up tight and three days before the event we left for Holland. I drove it all the way up to Cheshire to run it in and to put it on Skip Brown's rollers [they had supplied the head]. Some intermediates and wets were ordered, and we loaded it all on my trailer behind Bill Cook's Transit and had an overnight run to the Tulip Rally. The organisers supplied pace notes and a lot of the event was on army ranges. One problem reared its' head fairly early on; they didn't have surface changes, and we ended up hitting a massive Finkelstein [tank trap] sideways. This gave about 2 inches of toe out at the back!! Still, we finished and got 2nd in class. We continued with various dramas, including arriving at scrutineering on the Hellendourne, and finding everyone else had numbers. We were supposed to have signed on, so that was quick trip back to the town centre on the wrong side of the road with the lights on. We only retired from one event in Germany with an electrical fault, [caused by the fact that the comp distributor had not had a small mod done!!]. I put it in a ditch on Bianchi. The first stage there was around a car park with bales of straw, a big autotest; 3rd overall after that!! Then I wrong slotted having miss heard a note, which made me a bit cross. Pam said she was going to tell me to back off, but never got that far, as I lost it under braking in 5th, went a very long way down a grass verge sideways, which stopped at a ditch! The front was on one side, the back on the other. The spectators, many of whom had been jumping out of the way, said it was "kaput", but after I dragged one into the ditch, they got the idea and helped. We finished but rather low down the order! The next event was Manx, for which we bought some notes. By the time I had decided they didn't work for me, it was too late, that is not the place to lack confidence, also a 205 jumps horribly, so we ended up with our worst score of the year, 5th in class. It was a high coefficient though and several had not entered, so it could have been worse. That left the Cork 20, as we didn't want to go to Germany for a coefficient one event if we could help it. It was one of those events where it all went well, we were catching people on stages and flying. We even passed the works Peugeot Ireland car. We were 1st in class and 8th in Group A overall, beating all the 2 litres! The end result was 2nd in class and 6th overall in the championship and a trip to Holland for a piss up and to collect about £600 of prize money.

1989 started with the beginning of the last recession, as usual surveying was the first to feel the pinch, we decided to do some Dutch championship events, but money got too tight after the first one [Zuiderzee]. That was a nice little event but got off to a bad start. We had free accommodation, and Simon was servicing with Barry and Ann Callen. They were coming out with the van and trailer but as there was a French customs strike there was no one to sign the Carnet, so they decided to get the map out and deviate, only to be turned round at gun point. Si had tried to convince the copper he didn't understand, then when they got close he realised, he had left the chalet address on the table at Hale Farm, so rang his sister from the phone box by the gate!! While we were pace noting we kept meeting cars coming the other way, dangerous said we... anyway on the event we did the first loop of stages and arrived at the finish of Stage 1, which Pam was adamant was the start of 6, but I remember roads well. It was then we found the stages ran in both directions... oops. On a couple of occasions, we had noted roads that were parallel earlier in the year, and in Germany had almost missed one altogether! The Germans have regimented practice times. When we came to go home the service crew took the 305, and Pam and I the van and trailer, but there was a force 9 southerly blowing. The old Merc couldn't get out of third, so it was a slow run, but the others were stuck at Calais as no boats were sailing!!

For the next couple of years things were quiet, a few events got fitted in, we did Epynt, the second time I had been there, and it rained, and rained, and rained, which led to a scary, 5th gear aquaplane, when we only stayed on the road because the banks kept us there!! We did the Zero 6 [now Essex Charity] where I first came across Howard Fisher, who wanted my FIA spec extinguisher nozzles hammered over, I told him I wouldn't and we had a stand up, but after I told him if he chucked me out, I was going to the MSA, he let me run! 1st 1600 and in front of all the 2 litres was good though. We did Imber Stages during this time as well, I don't think you can get in there now, but that was very good.

Eventually with the homologation about to run out we sold B533 SCT to Andy Corner who was still using it until he rolled it last year. We must have built it well and it was the best rally car I have owned.

Rest time!! As the Irish comedian says “there’s more” and the TV is poor.

During the layoff I serviced for various people and had my 2nd run in with Mr Fisher.. he would not pass Simon Thompson’s [ex Haselden] Nova at Snetterton single venue because the number plate light didn’t work!!!

In about 1995 the HRCR started to run a class for ‘Classic cars [which faded out again a year later]. Trevor Gilkes announced his intention of moving to France, he had a 1600 Sunbeam FBF25T, with a Skip Brown built engine, to Group A and a bit, with LSD, Ledas etc. He had used it for years on sprints, autotests and the odd road rally, so I had a little run round and after getting the ‘rear wheel drive grin’, bought it. I got it home and stripped it to a shell which revealed a bit more rust than I had thought! So, a bit of repair followed, then Pam was ill with the first bout of Cancer, so everything went on hold. After she was given the all clear, a bit more work ensued and we got on with it. About this time a mate of Si and mine who had fallen out with his woman sometime earlier, had to clear the garage at the house they had shared. This had mainly a Lotus Sunbeam, which he had taken apart to the last nut and bolt. Well you know what they say about forced sales? [it was a good buy]. Suddenly a change of plan. Well even a standard 16v 2.2 was going to be a lot better than a 1600. Then I realised that a Lotus had a bigger tunnel and Pam was ill again. Back on hold. This time her recovery did not happen, unfortunately. Time to put my mind elsewhere, so back to FBF25T. I was lying in bed and saw a hill climb Lotus Sunbeam and trailer for sale in Devon. It had Ledas, a roll cage, LSD, big brakes etc...£1500 the lot. I rang the guy and he said the shell was a bit poor. Si and I went down after work on the Wednesday night [much to my secretaries’ horror. “But you have work tomorrow”; I know we will be back”. Si and I got back at 4am with the whole lot including all the odds and sods that the guy thought was junk, but included a set of Bilsteins. Sold the trailer for £400. Graham Standen came over and cut the tunnel out of both cars and put the Lotus one in FBF, and also transferred the cage. Simon went mad with the spray gun and flash red. All was ready for Millbrook in 2000. Who should be scrutineering but my old enemy!! Now I knew I had a small problem in that my crash helmet wasn’t strictly legal, but I couldn’t get one that fitted. I knew I wouldn’t bluff Mr Fisher, so hatched a plan, borrow Chris Browne’s helmet for Scrutineering and use mine on the event, but Fisher had a way to check you had the helmet he had passed. He put a small sticky dot on the right hand side of the peak. Well, I sussed that, and put it on my helmet. He looked at it at the start of SS1 and Andy Gibson and I were in business, for one and a half stages, until the rotor arm cracked. Only the week before I had been telling Graham Waite who had retired with the same problem how I always carry a spare one...not this day, and no one else had one either; PAH early bath. For the rest of the year and the following year Andy [or Sometimes Bill Cook] and I and Chris Browne with Ali in his Chevette went over top in Northern France and did some really good events. We ran in a class for cars ten years out of homologation, and both had good results. We found that our road rally background gave us a real edge in the dark. The French crews we had swapped times with, we would suddenly start to catch, taking a minute out on a 10k stage. About this time, I had the engine which had come as a box of bits put together by Skip Browns. This probably gave another 40 bhp, but was “cammy”, so a close ratio gear kit was needed. Brian Wilman [who did all the works Sunbeam boxes] had just had some kits made as ZF ones were like rocking horse poo, and mine was the first in competition. HRCR announced that they were going to run a classics class in 2003 so I felt I was obliged to do some of them, as I had been supporting Charles Golding and going on about it!! Unfortunately, Charles had passed away by then. Simon had done a few events in the Sunbeam, and Carrol was keen to codrive, so she and I did a couple of single venues, including blowing up the engine at Avon Park and doing the Essex Charity. At the end of 2002 she and I went off to Llandudno to do the Cambrian, the first event where she really had to navigate, and my first sortie into the woods for ten years [and that had been a one off in the 205; before that it was ’87 in the Skoda]. Things went OK, apart from three stages without a clutch [broken cable] and I think we got a trophy. So, for 2003 we said we would do a few HRCR rounds. The first one was the Robin Hood, and we made the mistake of winning it!! That meant we had to do the next, where we were 2nd... dam. In the end we did the whole championship and were in with a chance until the last round, being beaten by Gareth Lloyd of West Wales Rally Spares in an exworks Mk2. We had a few problems along the way. One was that Simon [with Carrol] had put the car into a tree hard on the Rally of Kent. We in the chase got a call from Carrol to say they had gone off, and we said, “are you OK?”, to

which she replied yes, but she couldn't get out. What about Si? Well, he is stomping up and down the stage. His wife's welfare didn't seem too important!! The next event [Pendine] was close, so we enlisted Si's uncle [body shop man] and a dozer to pull the Sunbeam back to sort of straight [one side is still 20mm shorter] and as Carroll had hurt her shoulder a bit, Bill stood in. Now Bill is always a bit of fun, so Si and I were in the pool at the hotel when Bill runs and jumps in. Si shouts as he takes off 'that is the shallow end'. Bill's expression had us chuckling for hours. The event wasn't one of our best, there were splits and merges all over the place, and between us we missed a split. We also got caught [a big problem with so many splits] by a WRC Scooby, while pulling over for him I hit a gate post and smashed a rear wheel bearing, fortunately it was lunch time as the spare half shaft hadn't been turned down to fit the disc, so Si used the angle grinder with the car in gear while I went to scrounge some wheel nuts [they were standard studs!!]. Not the first time, as we had used that trick on a TAC in Belgium! Another event in Wales was very dusty, and as we approached a stage start Grant Shand was parked up, and waved us by, he therefore used up a minute of penalty free lateness and put us behind a slow 1600. I kicked myself as I should have known better. As luck would have it the 1600 had a puncture, so we told the marshal who pulled him out the queue. On the next stage the brake pedal went a bit soft... then the front nearside wheel fell off, complete with hub and brake. We had to wait for recovery. And then on the last event [Trackrod] when we still had a theoretical chance to win, a dry sump oil pipe split. As with the wheel falling off, somewhere with no phone signal. Another walk up a mountain! 2003 was the first time in my life I had thought halfway through the season 'where has all the money gone' and with the number of events, preparing and or repairing the car, I had had enough and did nothing in 2004!! [Apart from an abortive visit to Boucle de Spa where the oil pump blew a gasket out, and we came home, and I had food poisoning!!]

2005 and to 2007 I did events I fancied in Belgium, usually with Andy or Bill, often with 1st or 2nd in class and a lot of enjoyment and relaxation. Early in 2007 I had the engine rebuilt by John Smurthwaite and it now gave 226 bhp on his rollers. Probably 40 or more up on what it was, and far more driveable. No wonder we had trouble staying with the BDAs in 2003 when it was dry!! The first event for the new engine was a return to Wallonie, one of my favourite events. Unfortunately, a union came out the dry sump pump and by the time I stopped my new engine was scarp!! How to spend £6k in 70 miles! Anyway, a new block, crank, and other bits later we did few more and enjoyed ourselves, even getting a fair way up the Belgian Championship without trying.

A plan was hatched to do the Belgian series in 2008. Dave Town was introduced to Belgian Rallying at a very wet TAC, which starts in a small town with a nice Brasserie where we had agreed to meet Chris and Ali. We hadn't been there for 4 years, but they remembered us. Not sure if that is good or bad! We had a good run and Dave did a good job on the notes, with the odd yeh hah thrown in! End result; a class win, after a big fight with Kurt Devreux in a Mk2. For Wallonie, Andy was back, and we retired with a broken diff. For Sezoens, Dave was on the notes and again it pissed down!! [bit of a pattern here?]. Sezoens is an event with a mix of gravel and tar as the weather was forecast to be dry, and I didn't have enough wheels. We had left the A2s at home, so cut slicks were the order of the day. Now some of the straights were a 1000m and on gravel with puddles, that concentrates the mind. It seemed OK with power on, but at the end you had to slow. Anyway, Devreux who lived near got his revenge and took us to the cleaners!! Ypres, the best I can say is Andy and I finished. I was stupid and allowed myself to get dehydrated, which on a 34km stage had me nearly throwing up. I got done for speeding, which was not too bad. The copper said 'you will not have time to do the paperwork, I will see you in service, where he took 50 Euros from me, but no points. Flanders was the last event I could afford as the banking crisis had arrived, so fortunately we got enough points to win the class in the championship, so in November Chris, Ali, Craig Salter [another convert] and I went to Brussels for a big awards bash.

Flip [go back 20 years] had married Charles Golding after she and I split up, and after Charles died, she and I saw a fair bit of one another, unfortunately she also succumbed to the dreaded C and her daughter Charlie, and I have stayed friends. Charlie is now sharing the Gold 16v I bought to do allrounders with in 2008, she is a quick aggressive and a natural driver, taking after her parents, so in 2009 I did enough events to at least qualify, she keeps me honest, and may well soon beat me!!

For 2010 the Golf is ready so a few sprints, solos and PCTs are probably on the agenda for Charlie and I. The Sunbeam needs a bit of work for an MOT and hopefully subject to money I am going to drag Dave out to a few small Belgian events. I am nearing the return of the Seven as well, with a new chassis and bodywork.

Now how can I use a bus pass to tow a car to events??



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2024 CLUB FIXTURE LIST

Event	Clerk of Course	Secretary of Meeting or Contact	Date
12 Car Rally	Si Kellow	Toby Groves	26 th January
Annual Awards Evening	Liz Jordan	Lyle Cathcart	20 th February
Stephen Stringer Tarmac Autotest	Ann Cook	Ann Cook	2 nd March
Autosolo Ashford Market	Ben Dawson	Emma Dawson	16 th March
Tyrwhitt Drake Trial	Tom Thompson	Bruce Jenkins	7 th April
<i>Hughes Rally</i>	<i>Blackpalfrey MC</i>		<i>13th April</i>
Stephen Stringer Memorial Tarmac Autotest [NAT]	Dave Cook	Ann Cook	20 th April
Autotest Taster Day - TBA	Richard Olsen	Bruce Jenkins	5 th May
Annual General Meeting	Liz Jodan		7 th May
Evening Autotest - Headcorn	Brian Sharpe	Andy Jenner	15 th May
Evening Autotest - Otham	James Muir	Andy Jenner	29 th May
Evening Autotest - Headcorn	Jim Pullar	Andy Jenner	12 th June
Mike Jordan Tour	Tim Mewett	Liz Jordan	29 th June
Evening Autotest - Otham	Lloyd Covey	Andy Jenner	26 th June
Evening Autotest - Headcorn	Ben Dawson	Andy Jenner	10 th July
Lydden Co-pro Sprint	Steve Castle / Tony Perrett	B19 MC	13 th July
Summer Slalom	Andy Jenner	Hilary Jenner	28 th July
Evening Autotest - Otham	Liam Carfrae	Andy Jenner	7 th August
John Ashwell All Day Autotest -Headcorn	TBA	TBA	18 th August
<i>Kent Forestry Targa Rally</i>	<i>Weald MC</i>		<i>TBA</i>
Headcorn Model Show Parking	Tim Mewett	James Muir	<i>31st August / 1st September</i>
Brian Lewis Trial	Tom Thompson	TBA	29 th September
Ashford Autosolo	Ben Dawson	Emma Dawson	19 th October
Ashford Tarmac Autotest	Ann Cook	Ann Cook	16 th November

Notes:

All Evening Autotest Clerks of Course are provisional pending confirmation.

BST Starts 31st March

BST Ends 27th October