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Sojourn in a Foreign Land

Brian Redman, September 2006

In July, 2005 I attended the Goodwood Festival of Speed driving a Ferrari 312 PB. The owner's instructions to me were "Brian the engine has just been rebuilt and maximum rpm is 8,000". Well, the normal power band for this motor is 8,000 to 11,000. I said nothing, but after the first run up the hill when the motor almost stalled I said to the owner "if you wish to keep the revs down to 8,000 then it might be best if you drove it" - we settled on 10,000 and everything was fine.

Parked behind us in the paddock was a fabulous 3 liter, straight 8, double overhead cam, 1921 Sunbeam Grand Prix car, in fact, the very car which won the 1922 Isle Man Tourist Trophy race. Whilst I was admiring this beautiful example of early racing history the owner came up and in a strong Yorkshire accent asked if I would like to race the car at Monterey in August. Of course, I was delighted to accept and this led to further conversation during which it was agreed that I would consult with John and James Hanson's collector and racing car organization, *Speedmaster*, based in Bradford, Yorkshire.

In January I was invited to attend the fabulous *Retromobile* car show in Paris. *Speedmaster* had a display and on the stand was the Sunbeam, plus a Vanwall F1 car. I met several old friends most of whom I haven't seen for many - actually, many, many - years and these included that great patron of motor racing, former Aston Martin owner Peter Livanos plus of course several drivers, including Patrick Tambay and Gerard Larrousse with his wife, Michelle.

Later, we went to the big July Silverstone vintage car race with over 500 historic racing cars. The intended steed was a 1974 March F1 car but at the last moment, it developed an engine problem and a very fine 1971 BRM. P160 substituted, on loan from American owner, Nick Rini. This particular car was famously driven by Peter Gethin to win the Italian Grand Prix at Monza in 1971 in one of the closest finishes in Formula 1 history. Marion and I stayed at the Cromwell Lodge in Banbury. An old building dating back to the 17th century, full of wood paneling and ancient charm, some of which lost its attraction whilst dragging heavy suitcases up three flights of winding stairs and trying to cope with the considerable heat of an unusually warm English summer. No air-conditioning, of course. I felt particularly sorry for the barman, who was not only trying to cope with a full bar, but at the same time, a wedding party of over a hundred. Sweat streamed from every pore in his body. Not only that, but he was on duty at 6:30 am the following morning in the dining room, serving breakfast! You may wonder why I make mention of this. As a youth, I was trained for the hotel industry and in the summer and winter vacations spent much time working in various hostelries around the north of England. There is not space or time to bore you here with recollections of the catering industry, but if you feel impelled to learn more, George Orwell's "Down and out in Paris and London" will give you a very good idea!

It was twelve years since I'd been to Silverstone and not only the circuit and the buildings had changed but also the approach roads. So having first navigated my way into the circuit I then had to learn what was essentially a new track.

The "vintage" track, designed in the main by Howden Ganley, is fast and in places, definitely a challenge! The BRM. was beautifully prepared by Rick and Rob.Hall, however it's some years since I've driven a car with this sort of performance and I regretted not doing more exercise.... I'm a follower of the Jim Clark school of exercise - lifting your leg to get into bed at night. I just about managed to complete the thirty minute race, finishing not too far down the field.

In April John Hanson asked if we would like to go to the *Goodwood Revival* in September and it was agreed that Marion and I would go, whether or not he had a car to race. One week before the event, a call came from Scott George, curator of the Collier Museum in Naples, Florida asking if I would like to drive the Vanwall F1 car. I'd driven this car several years earlier at one of my *Targa Sixty Six* club meetings at Roebling Road, Savannah, where fairly quickly the gearbox stuck in a gear. On Wednesday evening the phone rang, it was Marion Calver-Smith, Lord March's secretary, she had three requests: would I play cricket the following afternoon in Lord March's team: would I drive a 1957 Hillman Minx with owner Andrew Colley in the two part pre-1959 saloon car race: would I co-drive a Cobra with owner Grahame Bryant in the RAC TT race. (Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy). Every excuse to try and avoid the cricket match was skillfully countered. Thus, I found myself on the playing field in Charles' team. Opposing us in Richard Attwood's team was a certain young gentleman by the name of Charlie Settington – Lord Charles Settington, the twelve year old son of Charles and Janet March. Without going into the intricate rules of cricket, let's just say that young Charlie not only dismissed half our team when it was our turn "at the wicket", that is, trying to strike the ball with the bat, but also had to retire whilst "batting" as he had scored the maximum "runs" allowed for one person of 25! I have little doubt we have a future England player here! In my case chasing and being hit by an extremely hard ball was not really part of the plan. Fortunately, the sprained left thumb, swollen right hand and general muscular stiffness of the lower limbs were not quite enough to prevent driving.

On the third lap of the first practice session in the Vanwall braking from around 140 mph, I changed with no problem into fourth gear, but then 3rd didn't feel right – because of known gearbox problems, I didn't immediately release the clutch when shifting, but "felt" it in. Well, it didn't "feel" right, so slowing almost to a halt I then released the clutch and it was in goodness knows what gear, with the lever itself in neutral. The Vanwall – the name comes from an amalgamation of the names of team owner Tony Vandervell and his company product "Thinwall" big-end bearings - famously won the 1958 Constructors Championship with Stirling Moss and Tony Brooks each winning three races. Stirling finishing just one point behind World Champion, Mike Hawthorne. Unfortunately, third Vanwall team driver Stuart Lewis-Evans was fatally injured in the final race of the year in the Morocco Grand Prix when his transmission locked-up. Badly burned in the resulting accident, he succumbed to his injuries six days later.

The two-part St.Mary's Trophy for sedans 1959 and earlier, was a riot and a great crowd favorite. Saturday afternoon, with intermittent rain, the "pro" drivers did their thing. In vehicles ranging from Jaguar Mk VII, 3.4 Mk 1 sedans, Austin A105 Westminster, A35, A40, Ford Anglia and Zodiac, Holden FX, Standard 10, BMW 502, MG Magnette, Morris Minor, Sunbeam Rapier, Peugeot 203. Alfa Giulietta and Lincoln Cosmopolitan the racing was fast and furious, with notably few incidents or off-course excursions. I was able to enjoy a great race long dice with Richard Attwood in the Vanguard and Alan Jones in the BMW 502.

Friday afternoon Tourist Trophy practice in the Cobra was unfortunately limited to three laps due to two separate accidents delaying proceeding. So, starting in 17th place wasn't really the idea especially as the four cars ahead of me were involved in a titanic battle between themselves, making overtaking difficult. Unusually, I decided discretion was the better part of valor and chickened-out of making the necessary effort to pass.....must be getting old!

It has been said time and time again that there is nothing like Goodwood, and indeed, there is not. From the impeccable background of one of England's finest country estates, to the World War II Goodwood airfield, the original war-birds swooping through the skies above, the surreal racing cars with their attendants and owners in period dress, the magnificent period ball and – somewhat to Charles' dismay no doubt – some of the best and fiercest racing you will see anywhere, at any time. Long may it continue. Till the next time, Brian