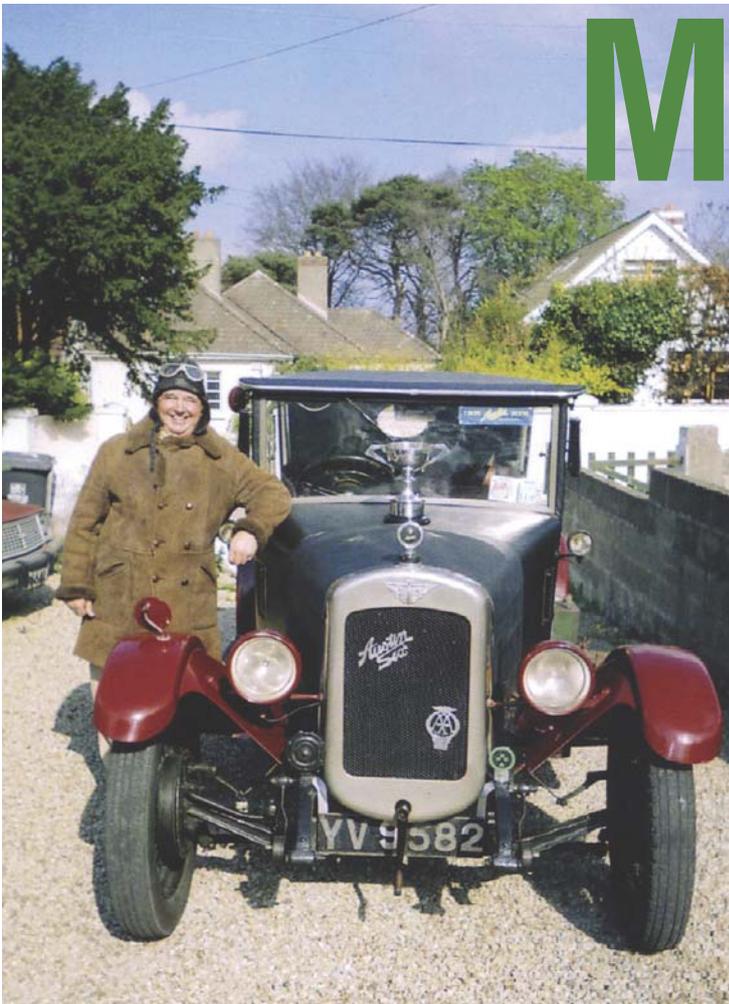


MOTORING NOTES



By **ALAN DONALDSON**



Photo taken at Limerick Racecourse
in May 1956 by Finbarr corry



Rear of Rolls Royce A1 8000

I first heard of the IVCC through my new-found friends. Monthly meetings were held in The West County Hotel, described by one friend as a "singularly charmless establishment" near Lucan. I swiftly joined up and have been a member ever since. This was in the Bill Pegum era. Many are the long-term friends I made in so doing.

One who proved instrumental in my next acquisition, a man of distinctive appearance having a penchant for Edwardian jackets and string-ties and who had an inexhaustible knowledge of old cars and their whereabouts, Liam Scott. I dropped by his house one day to view a nice Model Y Ford he had in his interesting garage, but it was what was parked on the short driveway that really intrigued me. A large gray ambulance. Peering around the front I could see a very recognisable radiator grill. Rolls Royce! A 1949 Silver Wraith which in 1960 had been converted for The Waverly Ambulance Co. of James's Street and received extensive usage till 1965. A1 8000 being it's reg. no. I really wanted it, and after a little negotiation Liam agreed to let me have it, suggesting that with very little effort it could be transformed into a tourer similar to a picture he showed me in a Frank Dale and Stepsons advertisement in the magazine *Motor Sport*. (This also was my introduction to that wonderful publication which I took regularly till it went a bit funny a few years ago!)

I was 27 years old and I owned a Rolls Royce! Well half a Rolls perhaps! Now a deliberate effort had to be made to dispose of the Morris and the Hillman in order that my marriage could survive. No difficulty was experienced in doing this and even a small profit was realised, and I retained all the spare bits and pieces thereby swelling my autojumble stock.

Bringing the ambulance home to Dundrum was a very exciting experience, sitting behind that wheel peeping out the windscreen at that radiator and headlamps proceeding before one. But it was huge! The Luton style body dwarfed what remained of the original saloon. To get it into my garage required that the body be cut in half on the side of the road. A friend and I set about the task immediately. We pried the aluminum panels away from the ash frame at waist level and cut through the uprights with a hack saw. It was hard work but at last we were able to push the top part off from the inside and it hit the road with quite a crash. One could feel the chassis rise about 6 inches with the relief!

Hastily we pulled the roof to one side so as not to delay the passing traffic which by now was taking quite an interest in the proceedings. Although now resembling a truck it would fit out of sight in my garage where I started to create the new body with enthusiasm and ignorance in equal measure.

I retained the back wings with their large tail lights etc. - the result looked very strange indeed; a Royce



1946 Hillman

from the front, the Batmobile from the rear. Not quite the Freestone and Webb ideal I had envisaged.

Shortly after, some friends and I drove into town one evening and on returning home came across a Garda road block. The cars ahead were getting a real going over, torches flashing everywhere. My heart sank as I got nearer, my tax disc being somewhat less than current, there might also be an issue with a bulb or two, not to mention the tyres. A young Garda approached and shone his torch on the front of the car and to my astonishment leaped two feet backwards and most energetically waved me on! It was only on later reflection I realised my reg. no. being AI 8000 was very similar to ZJ 5000 the presidential conveyance. He must have thought I was De Valera! What did he make of the hindquarters I wonder? Batman perhaps!

When I learned of the annual Gordon Bennett Rally I gained an ambition to acquire an eligible car to enter that wonderful event - that is one built before 1930. Once again "Scotty" came up trumps. Cars of the Twenties were hard to come by he said but he happened to know of just such a vehicle and it could be inspected in David Dunn's yard which was now in Drimnagh. Well it was love at first sight! A 1928 Austin 16/6, YV 9582. She had lain for some years in a field in Letterkenny and was very dilapidated but as Scotty observed "She's all there".

Well quite a bit of her anyhow. Everything was uniformly well seized-up, engine, gear-box, brakes etc. What bodywork remained was all heavily rusted, the top of the bonnet having collapsed in on top of the engine. No tyre would hold air. It was very difficult to get her onto my trailer but we managed, Dave, who seemed eager to see her leave his premises lending a hand.

By this juncture I was renting a large shed up the road from my house on Taney Road for one pound a week and it was there I brought the Austin thus avoiding any wifely 'contratemp's'. Once inside the body dried out and largely fell off onto the floor, leaving me with the scuttle and wings and little else! I would have to build the rest. But first she had to be 'freed out'. The gear lever was stuck in neutral but with liberal dosing of diesel oil and careful tapping with a large hammer it was soon free. I put an artillery type wheel that had come with the car on the jacked-up back-axle and poured more diesel down the plug holes leaving it to soak for some days.

Placing the gear lever in third, I once again prevailed on Matt my drummer, to assist me by peering down the plug holes to observe any movement as I rocked the wheel back and forth by standing on the spokes. After what seemed an eternity, during which I was on the point of

giving up, she came loose shooting a jet of black filthy oil into poor Matt's face temporarily blinding him in both eyes. I callously ignored his cries of protestation and discomfiture such was my jubilation at this success!

When, after a good clean up, head off, sump down, and all that, I started her up I could not believe the quietness and smoothness of the six cylinder engine. Ever since I have had a great regard for Austin cars. "You can't beat quality!" as the late, great Finbarr Corry once exclaimed on regarding her on her first outing to Powerscourt many years ago. Finbarr had a fondness for Austins as well as his well-known love of Rolls Royce.

He kindly provided me

with copies of photos he had taken of AI 8000 at the Limerick Races in 1954



Later modified rear

when it was in the ownership of Patrick Power, and confided to my great pleasure, that seeing it at that time had been an inspiration to him.

I think it can be said, without fear of contradiction, that nobody has done more for the old car movement in Ireland than the redoubtable Finbarr. I know we all miss him.

I have had my Austin for 39 of its 83 years and have taken part in so many events, including a good number of Gordon Bennetts, as well as Leinster Motor Club vintage runs and she has never failed to proceed. Touch wood!

My next project was to build a "Special" with a view to joining the Sports Section, a now defunct part of the IVVCC (later to become the HRCA) to which I was introduced by Tony Colley. A merry band of men which included such notables as the friendly David Millar, Tony Dowling, Paul Macnaughton, Kieran White, Dr. Brendan O'Hara, Paddens Dowling, Trevor Story along with the aforementioned Dave Dunn, Christy Hone and Scotty, all led by that likeable Englishman Stephen Curtiss. But that's another story for another time!