

Now, about BPH 418, my "P" type M.G. Midget. The extra solidity and refinement of the "P" type, over and above the earlier J2 model, had been obtained at the cost of a noticeable increase in weight, which was not offset by any perceptible increase in the power output of the engine. No great drawback for main road motoring, but definitely bad for the increasingly difficult conditions being provided by trials organizers.

In seeking a cure, the path of least resistance was first taken, a crown-wheel and bevel-pinion being inserted that provided a lower set of gear-ratios. Unfortunately, the transmission proved unequal to the strain imposed upon it, and, in a period of ten months, five crown-wheels broke up. One of these breakages set me on the road to friendship with that leading motor sportsman and consistently successful competition driver, Guy Warburton.

It happened on Wool Heath, Dorsetshire, during the Great West Motor Club's trial for their Spring Cup, the club having obtained permission to use certain sections on war department land at Bovington Camp. On this area, normally used for army manoeuvres, it was possible to provide non-stop hills with very "sudden" gradients and surfaces (!) of loose sand. The crown-wheel stripped its teeth right in the centre of the heath, and how Warburton, whom I knew by name, but did not recollect having met previously in person, discovered my plight, I never quite knew, but he appeared suddenly "out of the blue," and suggested towing my car into Bournemouth.

Warburton, like Hutchison, mentioned earlier, had not succumbed to the popular fashion for using the small, high-performance little sports cars in competition, and pinned his faith to a "30/98" Vauxhall, with open four-seater bodywork. I was delighted, and Warburton set off to Bournemouth at incredible speed, the old Vauxhall making no more bones about towing the M.G. than if it had had a balloon on a piece of string behind it.

The other side of the picture was when the breakage occurred on Park Rash hill in the early hours of the morning, during the 1935 London-Edinburgh run. Knowing that the car could not be shifted off the hillside until all the following competitors had gone by, the passenger and myself tried to open up the axle casing on the spot. We made a poor job of it. From a fellow M.G. driver I secured a replacement crown-wheel and pinion,

but there remained the job of first removing the broken parts and then fitting in these replacements.

Everything conspired against us. It was a sad story, and I will tell you only that it was early evening before the car was again ready for the road. Then we did the maddest thing. We set out to go the rest of the way to Edinburgh (Park Rash is in Yorkshire), what for I do not know. Maybe by that time we had become a little light headed. We did not go quite so mad as to try to pick up the trials route, and follow that through. We did get across on to the Great North Road, but Heaven alone knows what for. We reached Edinburgh about 10.30 p.m.—and started back home to Birmingham straight after breakfast the next morning!

Even before I went in for the altered gear-ratios, in fact before I ran the car in a competitive event at all, I had the cylinder-head machined, to raise the compression (not, this time, by the reputable firm of long standing), and also had the combustion spaces sprayed with aluminium. Shock-absorbers were a problem on the "P" type. In place of the sturdy, friction type "shockers" standardized on the J2, small hydraulic pattern ones were used on the "P" type. For competition purposes these did not prove strong enough, and were less easy of adjustment than the friction pattern.

However, it was not all depression, that ten months with BPH 418, not by a very long way. Crawford, W. H. Haden, and myself formed ourselves into a regular team. Crawford had bought one of the 1287 c.c., six-cylinder "N" Magnettes. The "N" Magnette was a comparative newcomer in the M.G. range, coming off the production line on April 1st, 1934, when it superseded the earlier "F" and "L" type Magnas. Haden, whose association with M.G. cars went back to the original fabric-bodied "M" type Midgets, was running a "P" type. At the suggestion of Frank Kemp, secretary of the Midland Centre of the M.G. Car Club, we represented that body.

The organized team, usually of three identical cars, frequently painted the same colour and bearing the team name or "colours" on the bonnet sides, was fast becoming a dominating feature in our sport, team rivalry being terrific. Crawford, Haden, and myself did not have three identical cars, nor three cars of the same colour, but we did have a team "emblem." It consisted of the M.G. octagon in cream, edged in brown, with a brown

stripe diagonally across the octagon, and was painted on either side of the bonnets just behind the radiators.

The team came up at the first time of asking, which was in the 1934 London-Gloucester trial. "A marathon Gloucester" was the way *The Autocar* described this event. More than 130 cars started out from the Bridge House at Staines, and many drivers both started and finished in the dark, so long were the delays caused by the wholesale failures. All the regular Cotswold "terrors" were used, and there was a new "find," Old Hollow, which proved tremendously difficult, so that only four competitors came through to the finish without penalty—Crawford, Haden, H. M. Avery, and Miss Phyllis Goodban (Singer Nine). My car failed on Nailsworth Ladder, so that it was to Crawford and Haden went the credit for our first team success.

The team was successful also in the M.G. Car Club's 1935 Chilterns Trial, and again in the same club's Abingdon-Abingdon Trial. Thereafter Crawford was unable to continue with the team. An unhappy accident after the 1935 "Land's End" resulted in a temporary suspension of his driving licence, a harsh verdict, in no way supported by the true facts of the case.

All around me, during that ten months with the "P" type, the trials scene developed apace. Trials organizers were right on their toes, and the spate of new hills introduced in this period was remarkable. The Kershams and Cloutsham enlivened The Experts' Trial, away down on Exmoor; King John's Lane—an experiment never repeated—nearly wrecked the Singer Motor Car Club's first trial in the Midlands; Old Hollow wrought havoc in the "Gloucester"; and a new version of Kinton shook Colmore Trophy Trial competitors. Just outside Buxton, rocky, chassis-twisting Cowlow came into use; and with the Brighton-Beer Trial came the king of them all—Widlake.

For those readers to whom these are merely names devoid of any meaning I would like to give a word or two of introduction, and for those drivers who know every bump on Widlake I can only suggest that this is an opportunity to skip a page or so.

Many trials hills seemed to lose their difficulties with the passing of the years, but not so Widlake. It runs directly off the main road that winds all down the Exe Valley, from Dunster, right through Timberscombe and Cutcombe, to Dulverton, and eventually down to Exeter. Just before a point known as Copleham Cross, where the road to the little village of Winsford forks

away to the right, Widlake goes straight up the high overhanging bluff, topped with trees, that is on the left-hand side of the main road. It is steep, narrow, and overhanging trees shut in the track for almost all of its length. The surface is mainly of slippery rock slab, so irregular as to form actual steps at several points, and has several deep cross gullies, the whole thing finishing up in a farmyard, to which it is said to be the sole means of access. Obviously the farmer must rely upon horse-drawn transport, since of the 132 cars which set out in the 1935 Brighton-Ber Trial, into the route for which event this hill was introduced for the first time, three reached the farmyard non-stop, and cars have been spinning to a standstill, with only a few exceptions, on the greasy rock slab of Widlake ever since.

Those three drivers who conquered Widlake were Macdermid, Toulmin, and K. R. W. Shackel, with an oldish M.G. Midget tuned up by M. A. McEvoy. Macdermid ultimately made best performance of the day.

The new version of Kinton was a rocky track under trees, branching off to the right immediately at the foot of the hill generally used for cars, and was entered at rather an awkward angle through a gate. The actual gate itself had been removed, but the massive gate-posts remained, and immediately through the gate the gradient was very sharp and the track extremely narrow, resembling nothing so much as an overgrown ditch of the type dug for carrying away flood water. This Kinton is the little village of only a few houses and a farm in the Cotswolds, above Stanway, not the better-known Warwickshire town.

Old Hollow first appeared in the route of a trial in the London-Gloucester Trial of December 8th, 1934, and lies in the southern Cotswolds, no great way from the town of Dursley. It winds up through a wood, and lies beneath overhanging trees nearly all the way, having a sharp, almost "hairpin," left-hand corner towards the summit, the steepest gradient coming at this point. Old Hollow is a very favourite venue for staging stop-and-go tests, and it was in that manner that it was used in the 1934 "Gloucester," with a non-stop section following immediately from the stop-and-go area, and including the left-hand corner.

Cloutsham, which lies roughly between the foot of Dunkery and Horner Wood, in North Somerset, remote from the nearest village, is a tough-looking hill. There is a deceptive approach to a sharp right-hand corner, and then, immediately above this

corner, the gradient stiffens appreciably, and the surface (!) deteriorates into a sea of loose rocks and boulders. The track swings back to the left, and then goes up in a series of rock steps formed at an angle to the track, and with more loose rocks strewn about, a difficult climb and rather hard on the under parts of the car.

Kersham, too, is in North Somerset, and is approached from that main Cutcombe-Dulverton-Exe Valley road by doubling back down a narrow lane at a point known as Wheddon Cross. There is a steep, bumpy, and extremely narrow descent to the foot of the hill, which then rises out of a farmyard, round a sharp right-hand corner, on greasy rock slab, with a good deal of rock outcrop above the corner and a gradient of about 1 in 4.

Cowlow lies immediately off the Buxton-Matlock main road, only a mile or so outside Buxton, and zigzags up a hillside, clearly visible from the main road. There is one very acute right-hand corner, at a point where the track is very narrow, and has a high bank on either side. The surface is terribly rough, and takes away much of the enjoyment of attempting successfully to negotiate the quickly following twists and turns of the track.

There was one other hill which really "hit the headlines" in 1935, and that was Leckhampton, included in the route for the Colmore Trophy Trial. Here is the story of Leckhampton as told by *The Autocar* of even date :

"Frightful rumours had been current all day concerning the severity of the last hill, called in the programme Leckhampton and known locally as the Jinny. This hill turned out to be like at least four Simms Hills rolled into one, slippery surface, 1 in $2\frac{1}{2}$ gradient, and tractor were all there." (*Note* : The tractor, actuating a wire cable, was stationed at the summit for the purpose of hauling up cars unable to climb unassisted, it being quite impossible to manhandle a car to the top.) "Yet Simms is in the heart of desolate Dartmoor, while the Jinny is on the very outskirts of the far-flung town of Cheltenham, leading off the main road.

"Special permission had been obtained for the use of the hill, which is common land, and reserved as a rule for walkers only." (*Note* : It formed the base of a now dismantled wire-rope railway to the quarry at its summit.) "But the police stopped the first cars from ascending, and were only prevailed upon after some delay to allow proceedings to go on. Even with the short,

sharp Simms . . . there was, in the recent London-Exeter Trial, a long queue of cars waiting. With the immense length of this new terror, Leckhampton . . . a delay would, in any case, have been inevitable, and apart from the short lane leading to the gradient, there was only one place for the waiting cars—the main Cheltenham-Birdlip road!

“Rapidly this main road became choked as well with a double line of spectators’ cars. A policeman strove nobly at the entrance to the narrow lane, but he could not be everywhere at once, and for a time complete chaos reigned. Main-road congestion, too, was inevitable with ‘racers climbing a precipice’ so near a populous town. . . .

“To add to the difficulties of the situation, or, perhaps, to solve them, the tractor broke down when some twenty-two competitors had tried their ascents, of whom only Haden with his M.G. Midget and Attwood with his Magnette were successful. A massive cog burst asunder, and those who were stuck on the hill—were stuck! A six-wheeled lorry was next reversed down to pull up a car which had stuck, but the caterpillars of this broke under the unequal strain, and the car pulled the lorry down the hill. That finished it. The hill was abandoned, the cars waiting in the lane had to reverse, and the competing cars lined up in the main road went on their way.”

The drivers met the new difficulties in a variety of ways, a favourite first step being an attempt to reduce the weight of the cars. The Bastock-Toulmin-Macdermid M.G.s appeared for the “London-Exeter” (December 1934) stripped and shorn of every ounce of surplus weight. In the process the full-valanced, sweeping mudguards were discarded, and light, racing-pattern blades, on the lines of the J2 models, were substituted, giving the cars a curiously unfinished appearance. The three cars were repainted chocolate and brown, Abingdon’s official “colours,” and had inscribed on the bonnet sides, for the first time, “Cream Cracker,” and it is by this team name that these particular three M.G. cars will be identified from this point onwards.

The three new 1½-litre Sports Singers which Baker, Barnes, and A. H. Langley brought to the 1935 Colmore Trial were also much lighter in weight than previously, and rather sketchy as to bodywork. The engines were set farther back in the chassis than in the 1934 cars, all weight being concentrated to the rear,

to aid wheelgrip. All three cars were painted dark green instead of one red, one white, one blue.

M.G.s "pushed the boat out" again, and put into trials (their first appearance was in the 1935 "Land's End") three of the actual "N" Magnettes which had run in the Tourist Trophy Race, on the Ards circuit in Ulster, the previous autumn. They had new bodies, though, of exactly the same pattern as those fitted on the Midgets, with the big, external petrol tanks and two spare wheels on a vertical bracket behind. At the outset they were driven by Lewis Welch, Kindell, and Nash (or Hounslow). The first car bore on the bonnet sides the name "Athos," the second "Porthos," and the third "Aramis," the team, as a whole, being known as "The Three Musketeers."

The possibilities of weight reduction having been thoroughly exploited, though not exhausted, more power was sought, and the supercharger, hitherto regarded more as the perquisite of the out-and-out racing car, began to appear more and more on the trials cars. First Centric, and then the firm of Marshall, Drew, demonstrated that an efficient and comparatively reliable unit, at a "commercial" price, was now practicable. Macdermid had one, on the "Cream Cracker" Midget, and Toulmin also. By the autumn of 1935 the era of "low pressure" supercharging had been well and truly inaugurated.

Amongst all these comings and goings, I struggled on, but it must be said that the "P" type Midget, judged, I hasten to add, purely on its suitability for the particular job in hand, proved the least happy of the various cars on which I pursued the trials game. The season had its bright spots, however—the Lawrence Cup Trial, for example.

It was my first "Lawrence," but I remembered the motoring press reports of the previous year's event, and how the North-West London Motor Club had introduced a number of startling sections on W.D. ground at Camberley Heath, with alarming gradients and surfaces of loose shale, fine sand, and earth.

The start, on a gloriously sunny afternoon (May 1935), was from "The East Arms," at Hurley. The event got under way most deceptively, with such well-known and comparatively mild non-stop hills as Shillingridge Wood and Maiden's Grove. But we came, in the fullness of time, to the War Department area.

A first sight of the straight, comparatively short, very steep, and terrifyingly "sudden" gradients was rather shattering. The

hills started straight off the level, the gradient being "immediate," just like the initial pull-up of the big switchbacks at the South Shore Fun Fair at Blackpool. They levelled off again at the summit just as suddenly, so that, for a few seconds, at the crest, the front end of the car pointed straight into the sky, and the driver had no idea at all of what might lie beyond the top. There were four sections, of which the last counted as two separate climbs, failure on the first automatically entailing failure on the second, and an optional climb of Red Roads.

The track known as Red Roads was reputed to have a gradient as sharp as 1 in 1, and certainly looked like it. This hill had featured, for some years, in the route of a "tough" motor-cycle trial called the Camberley Scramble.

My "P" type, that day, could do no wrong, and, though most of the radiator water boiled away, the car successfully climbed all but Red Roads. I do not know whether my surprise or my delight reached the higher level. I finished as runner-up to J. H. Summerfield's supercharged "P" type, my car's best performance.

I broadened and ripened my circle of friends and acquaintances. I met, and got to know, some of the "Bristol boys," Keith Steadman and Cecil Evans (who were going to be such Good Samaritans to me when I was to break down in the following Easter's "Land's End"). I picked up fresh trials lore from J. C. G. Bond and W. E. C. Greenleaf, from London, who used to do incredible things with (apparently) standard Morris Minor two-seaters. I gleaned from Bond, however, that there was quite a bit of M.G. in the mechanical specification of his Morris, I remember, particularly, that he had fitted an engine revolution counter to his car. It was of the big dial variety, and, as it was quite impossible to accommodate it on the cramped instrument panel of the Minor, Bond had it clamped to the steering column, so that it was customarily referred to as his soup-plate.

I knew well Mrs. A. E. Moss, redoubtable exponent of the alleged weaker sex, prominent in nearly every event with her white, 1½-litre, six-cylinder Singer. Through my team-mate, Bill Haden, I met R. E. (Bob) Sandland, who managed a garage out in the Black Country. After establishing himself with one of the later pattern four-seater Singer Sports Nines, he joined up with D. E. Harris and H. W. Johnson, both of whom I knew well, to form a trio known as the "Ruddy" team. The name