

'GROC's Second Trilogy' (In Monthly Episodes) - Part 4

By Geoffrey O'Connell

(Continued from August mag - Part 3)

On the 6th July French GP, Rouen-Les-Essarts, Peter had to retire his Alta F2 on lap 17 with a clutch fault. At the British GP, Silverstone on the 19th July, he finished in 10th place driving his Ferrari 125/166. Next up was the 9-hour Goodwood Race on the 16th August, at which Peter and co-driver Stewart had to retire their Jaguar C-Type after an accident. On the 13th September, at the Italian GP, Monza, he failed to qualify in the Ferrari.

For 1953 Peter Whitehead had the Alta 2 litre engine installed in a Cooper T24 chassis – the Cooper-Alta T24 – as had the Cooper Car Company for Stirling Moss. Peter's season took in the: Syracuse GP, Sicily, Italy; Lavant Cup, Goodwood; Aston Martin Owners Club GP, Snetterton; Bordeaux GP, France; BRDC International Trophy, Silverstone; Ulster Trophy, Dundrod; Coronation Trophy, Crystal Palace, London; and the Albigeois GP, Albi, France. At the Hyeres 12-hour Race, the department of Var, France, on the 7th June, Peter Whitehead and a Tom Cole came 1st in a Jaguar C-Type. At the 24 hours of Le Mans on the 13th/14th June, Peter and Stewart were 4th in a Jaguar C-Type whilst at the 12-hour Rheims Race on the 5th July, Peter Whitehead and Stirling Moss won in a Jaguar C-Type. There followed the: Crystal Palace Trophy; Mid-Cheshire MC Race, Oulton Park; and the British GP, Silverstone on the 18th July, where Peter came ninth. At the Monsanto Circuit, near Lisbon, Portugal, on the 26th July, Peter Whitehead achieved 6th place driving a Jaguar C-Type. On the 15th August he and co-driver Duncan Hamilton * raced in the 12-hour Pescara event, Italy, in a Jaguar C-Type but incurred a steering problem so DNF.

**Occasionally referred to as 'Drunken' Hamilton. The nickname was probably associated to a saga involving he and Tony Rolt winning the 1953 Le Mans in a Jaguar Cars Sports Team C-Type. Hamilton and Rolt were advised they were disqualified from the event for a technicality. To drown their sorrows the night and dawn before the competition they participated in a rather enthusiastic drinking session. In the morning they were very much the worse for their valiant drinking efforts. Unfortunately, cum the daybreak they were advised, some report by no less than William Lyons, the Jaguar managing director, that a fine had been paid and they were racing. Oh, woe was them! In an attempt to sober up the pair drank copious quantities of coffee but to little effect. It was alleged that certainly Hamilton elected to be served up brandy at his every pit stop. Apart from sustaining his racing capability, the alcohol's effect served him well when a bird struck the windscreen, breaking it and Hamilton's nose. It must be pointed out that both the then Jaguar Cars sports racing team manager, 'Lofty' England, and Tony Rolt denied that both the drivers were drunk – as they would. In fact, 'Lofty' England claimed that he would never have let them race under the 'influence' as he had enough trouble with them when they were sober! In case it may be forgotten, 1953 was not only the year in which Jaguar and Great Britain won Le Mans but it was also the year when Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first men to conquer Everest and that Elizabeth Alexandra Mary was crowned Queen Elizabeth II. Both Hamilton and Rolt had interesting WW2 records. Hamilton flew Westland Lysanders as a member of the Fleet Air Arm. As for Tony Rolt! At the onset of the conflict he was a lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade assisting in defending Calais but was taken a prisoner immediately prior to the Dunkirk evacuation.*

He escaped seven times from some five concentration camps after which he was sent to the infamous Colditz Castle in the middle of 1943. At the latter establishment he was one of the masterminds behind the planned glider escape plan. He left the Army with the rank of Major and the recipient of the Military Cross and Bar. Post-war he finished up as the head of a company promoting four-wheel drive. Lastly it should be recalled that Duncan Hamilton was born in Cork, County Cork, Ireland as was my father's father.

In the 9-hour Goodwood Race on the 22nd August, Peter and Stewart came 3rd driving a Jaguar C-Type. At the Tourist Trophy Race on the 5th September, Peter and Stewart DNF in a Jaguar C-Type. Driving the Cooper-Alta T24 at Snetterton on the 12th September, Peter came 2nd in the Redex Trophy and 3rd in the AMOC Formula Libre event. His last race of that year was the 12-hour Casablanca event, Morocco, on the 20th December. The course was mainly a road circuit, and the start was Le Mans style. Peter and his half-brother Graham came 5th in an Aston Martin DB3.

To commence 1954 Peter Whitehead made an excursion to New Zealand. There on the 9th January he entered the 1st New Zealand International GP held at Ardmore Airport, which during WW2 had been a base for the Royal New Zealand Airforce. The location is 20½ miles/33kms from Auckland CBD and 6.8 miles/11kms from Manukau City. The circuit of some 2 miles/3.2km utilised two sealed runways which were in operation at that time. Peter in his Ferrari 125/166 had to retire on lap 15 with a clutch problem.

Next was the 24 Hours Mount Druitt Road Race, New South Wales, Australia, held on the 31st January/1st February. Peter Whitehead, Tony Gaze and Alf Barrett made 16th place driving a Jaguar XK 120C. That was followed on the 6th February by the 4th Lady Wigram Trophy event, Wigram Airfield, in the Christchurch suburb of Sockburn, South Island, New Zealand.



Alf Barrett



Tony Gaze

No holding back our buccaneer. He did not let the side down, coming first in his Ferrari. Once home, as it were, he mainly competed in his Cooper-
Alta T24 except when co-drivers were necessary. Events included the: Lavant Cup, Goodwood; Bordeaux GP, France; and the BRDC International Trophy Race, Silverstone. At the 12-hour Hyeres Race, France, 6th June, Peter Whitehead was to be accompanied by Duncan Hamilton.

Unluckily their Cooper-Jaguar T33 (CJ-1-54; straight 6, dohc, 3442cc Jaguar XK engine) incurred a broken crankshaft and they did not start. A week later, on the 12th/13th June, it was the turn of the 12-hours of Le Mans endurance event. Peter Whitehead and co-driver Ken Wharton were driving one of the three Jaguar D-Type's (straight 6, dohc, 3442cc XK engine) entered by the Jaguar Cars Sports Team. After 13 hours racing, on lap 131, they had to retire with a transmission problem. On the 27th June Peter competed on the street circuit race at Porto, Portugal, and came 3rd driving his Cooper-Jaguar T33.

The 12-hour Rheims event held at the Rheims Gueux circuit on the 4th July included Peter and Ken, once again driving a Jaguar D-Type in which they came first. Next up was the British GP, Silverstone, on the 17th July at which Peter had to retire his Cooper-Alta T24 on the fourth lap with an oil leak. On the 25th July Peter driving the Cooper-Jaguar T33 came 9th at the Circuit do Monsanto, near Lisbon, Portugal.

That was followed by the Redex Trophy event at Snetterton, 14th August, where Peter driving the Cooper-Alta T24 had to retire after 19 laps with suspension problems. At the Wakefield Trophy Formula Libre Race, 28th August, Curragh, County Kildare, Ireland, Peter came 4th in his Cooper-Jaguar T33. At the RAC Tourist Trophy Race, Dundrod, County Antrim,



Ken Wharton

11th September, Peter and Ken Wharton came 6th in a Jaguar Cars Sports Team D-Type whilst on the 2nd October at the Aintree International Race Peter came in 8th in his Cooper-Jaguar T38. As far as I can ascertain his last race of 1954 was on the 23rd October at the GP Penya-Rhin, Barcelona, where he DNF driving his Cooper-Jaguar T33.

For 1955 Peter Whitehead repeated his 1954 venture, returning to New Zealand to compete on the 8th January in the 2nd New Zealand International GP held at Ardmore. On that occasion, after 100 laps of the 1.86 miles/3km circuit, a mere 23 seconds separated the winner Prince Bira from Peter Whitehead. There's close! Bira was driving a Maserati 250F (straight 6, 2497cc engine) whilst Peter was campaigning a Ferrari F500/625 (straight 4, 2498cc [or possibly 2968cc] engine).



Jack Brabham

That was Whitehead's only outing in New Zealand that year as he was off to race his Ferrari on the 31st January in the South Pacific Championship at the Gnoo Blas motor racing circuit at Orange, New South Wales, Australia. He won. Second home was a chap with a name that was to become internationally famous – namely one John 'Jack' Arthur Brabham. Then it was off to South Africa. There Peter Whitehead raced in the Van Riebeeck Trophy at the Eesterivier Airfield, the Cape Flats, Cape Town on the 12th March. Peter came 11th but it was a handicap event. That was followed by the 1820 Settlers Trophy possibly on the 26th March at the Palmietfontein Airport circuit near Alberton, south of Johannesburg or on the 22nd April at Queenshaven. Confused? So am I but I must own up to both being listed. That excursion to NZ, Australia and South Africa delayed Peter Whitehead's European races until the 7th May Silverstone International where he came unlucky 13th driving the Cooper-Jaguar T38. That was followed by the 12-hour Hyeres, France, on the 29th May. At that Peter, racing an Aston Martin DB3S (straight 6, dohc, 2922cc engine) with half-brother Graham, had to retire with an engine cooling problem. The pair were to compete again in Peter's Cooper-Jaguar T38 (straight 6, dohc, 3442cc, Jaguar XK engine) at the 11th/12th June 24 hours of Le Mans. Regrettably they had to retire after 4 hours on lap 38 with an oil leak. On the 26th June Peter competed at Porto again, coming 4th in his Cooper-Jaguar T38 whilst Tony Gaze came 8th in an Aston Martin DB3S. Frederick Anthony 'Tony' Owen Gaze (3rd February 1920-29th July 2013) was a fascinating character. He was born at Melbourne, Australia and was the eldest son of Irvine Owen Gaze, who was also a very interesting personality. Irvine was one of the ten-man crew of the Ross Sea Party manning the SY Aurora whose task was to lay food depots across the Antarctic for Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-1917).

The Aurora became frozen into the ice packs, lost its moorings and was swept away by the ocean currents. The Sea Party were stranded at Cape Evans for two years (14th Dec. 1914-10th Jan. 1917) during which period three of the party died. However, the planned task was in vain as Shackleton's ship, the Endurance, was crushed in the sea ice and the Trans-Antarctic expedition was abandoned. Irvine became a WW1 pilot but was shot down and imprisoned by the Germans. Fortunately, it was not long before the Armistice came into effect on the 11th Nov. 1918. During WW2 Irvine became a Squadron Leader and Commanding officer of a Royal Australian Air Force Training School. In between times he re-joined the family-owned shoe companies. Tony Gaze was a student at Queens' College, Cambridge University, England, when WW2 was declared. He was commissioned in the Royal Air Force, as was his younger brother Scott. They both joined No. 610 Squadron RAF at RAF Westhampnett in March 1941, from whence were flown Supermarine Spitfires.

Westhampnett village is close to Chichester, West Sussex and the RAF station was built on land belonging to Goodwood Estate. Unfortunately Scott was killed in action soon after his 19th birthday. During the war Tony was awarded a DFC and two Bars. In September 1943 he was downed, and crash landed probably close by Le Treport, some 20 miles/32kms north-east of Dieppe. Despite head and facial injuries, he evaded capture by the Germans and was gathered up by a French Resistance organisation. After being sheltered in 'safe houses' en route, he and other escapees were led over the Pyrenees into Spain.

They travelled to Barcelona, then Madrid and on to Gibraltar. From there Tony was flown to England.

That escapade lasted less than two months. At the war's end he was credited with 11 victories, 3 shared and 4 probables, as well as a V1 rocket. Having carried out some high-speed motoring on the asphalt surfaced perimeter roads of RAF Westhampnett, Squadron Leader Gaze enquired of the Goodwood Estate landowner, one Freddie March, when was

there going to be a motor race on Westhampnett Airfield? The Duke, who pre-war had raced motor cars, took the hint and on the 18th September 1948 Goodwood Motor Racing Circuit held Great Britain's first post war motor race meeting organised by the J.C.C. (Junior Car Club). Prior to returning to Australia, towards the end of 1947, with a pre-war, supercharged, 2 litre Alta Racing car and an HRG Aerodynamic sports car (straight 4, sohc, 1496cc Singer engine), he competed at Prescott Hillclimb in July 1947. He was listed as Sqn Ldr Gaze and in the Alta gained a third place in the



Cooper-Jaguar T38

1501-2000cc Racing Car Class. On returning to Australia his first motor race was at the Australian GP on the 26th January 1948, held at Point Cook, Melbourne. He had to retire the Alta after 5 laps with a magneto problem. His last year motor racing was 1956. Incidentally a then young Jack Brabham was a member of the Kangaroo Stable established by Tony in 1955.

Tony first married Kay Wakefield, the 30-year-old widow of Johnny Wakefield, a pre-war racing driver killed in 1942 flying with the Fleet Air Arm. Kay passed away in 1976. In 1977, Tony married Diana Davidson, the widow of Lex Davidson who had died in 1965 whilst testing a Brabham Tasman car at Melbourne's Sandown Park. Diana died in 2012. Peter appeared at the Circuit de Monsanto on the 24th July, with the Cooper but DNF due to a transmission failure. The 20th August heralded the 9-Hour Goodwood Race at which Peter's co-driver was Michael Head in a Jaguar D-Type (straight 6, dohc, 3442cc XK6 engine) but an engine fault caused them to DNF. On the 27th August the Oulton Park International Race saw Peter compete in his Cooper-Jaguar T38, finishing in a lowly 14th place. That was followed on the 3rd September by a 5th in the Cooper-Jaguar T38 at the Aintree International event. On the 17th September, with Graham as a co-driver, at the RAC Tourist Trophy, Dundrod, County Antrim, a possible chassis fault caused them to retire their Cooper-Jaguar T38 on lap 43. Peter Whitehead's 1956 motor racing season commenced in New Zealand driving what had become a Ferrari 500/750S * (straight 4, 2999cc engine) with an Argentina style bodywork. His first event was the Third New Zealand GP on the 7th January at Ardmore Airport where won a third place.

**The full title of that engine was '750 Monza Spider', hence the 'S'.*

Two weeks later, on the 21st January, he came first in the 5th Lady Wigram Trophy Race at the then Wigram Airfield Circuit – 2 miles/3.4km long – which was some 4½ miles/7kms from Christchurch City, South Island. The following week, on the 28th January, he came 4th in the 4th Dunedin Road Race. That was run round the Dunedin Wharf Circuit (1.8 miles/2.9km in length), the surface of which was ‘rough and tough’ and included a gravel surface section. On the 11th February it was the turn of the Southland Road Race at Ryal Bush, some 12 miles/19kms north of Invercargill, South Island. The 3.65 mile/5.87kms long circuit was over roads which were sealed once permission had been given to run the race.

Peter came first but was only some 40 seconds ahead of Tony Gaze racing a similar model Ferrari. After that Peter travelled to South Africa, where his first race was on the 24th March at the Rand GP, Palmietfontein Airfield, near Johannesburg. Driving his Ferrari 500/750S he came first. That event was followed on the 2nd April by the International Coronation (Handicap) Race at the Roy Hesketh Memorial Circuit, near Pietermaritzburg, Natal where he came second to the Connaught A5 (straight 4, 1960cc modified Lea-Francis engine) driven by Bill Holt. It was then off to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. On the 15th April at Marlborough Stadium, just outside Salisbury, there were the Kafue and the Limpopo Handicap Races. The dirt circuit was 2.4 miles/3.9kms in length. Peter won both his events. Then it was back to Europe for the summer motor racing. First was the 5th May Daily Express Silverstone meeting at which Peter came 11th racing a Maserati 300S (straight 6, dohc, 2991cc engine). That was followed by the 19th May, West Essex Clubman’s Car (WECC) Snetterton Handicap Race where Peter came third with the Maserati. Next was the Circuit do Porto on the 17th June, again with the Maserati, although at least one source indicates he was driving a Jaguar D-Type.

Whichever, he had to retire on the 21st lap for an unspecified reason. On the 8th July he appeared at the Rouen GP held at a circuit (4 miles/6.5kms in length) which deployed public roads close by Rouen at Rouen-les-Essarts, France. He DNF driving the Maserati. Next up, on the 21st July, was the Scratch Leinster Trophy Race at Wicklow Circuit (8.4 miles/13.5kms in length), Wicklow, Ireland. Peter was driving the Maserati and is recorded as winning the over 2000cc class in Heat Two. Peter Whitehead did not perform at the 1956 Le Mans but his friend and probably favoured co-driver Peter Walker did compete in that event. The two Peter’s had won the 24 hours of Le Mans in 1951, however the 1956 endurance race, in which Walker’s co-driver was Roy Salvadori, was to prove an absolute disaster for ‘Skid’ Walker.

In the 16th hour their Aston Martin DB3S/10 (straight 6, dohc, 2992cc Lagonda engine) which Walker was driving at the time slid on the wet track close to the Dunlop Bridge, crashed into the track edging wall, turned over and slithered upside down along the track. Despite his near fatal accident, he did race the next year in at least one race. Peter Walker seemingly recovered from his serious injuries but allegedly was never the same man again. His altered persona was acknowledged by the barman of one of Peter’s local pubs who maintained that a very small amount of drink affected his balance, he would mumble to himself and make strange utterances. Due to his carousing, drinking and womanising, his wife Patricia (‘Patsy’) Jane had left him sometime prior to 1953, for that was the year in which she married Lt Col Uvedale Corbett.