

'GROC's Second Trilogy' (In Monthly Episodes) - Part 5

By Geoffrey O'Connell

(Continued from September mag - Part 4)

After ceasing motor racing, for a time Peter helped a friend out in his Worcestershire Garage before 'taking to the drink'. He is supposed to have remarried, I believe to a nurse, and ceased to drink. Having suffered dementia, pneumonia and an infected thigh bone, he passed away on the 1st March 1984. The GP Sveriges or Swedish GP was held on the 12th August at the 4 miles/6.5kms long

Rabelovsbanan Road Circuit, Kristianstad. Peter and Graham came 6th in a Jaguar D-Type. The Daily Herald International Trophy Race was held at Oulton Park on the 18th August and was held in a relentless downpour. Peter was listed as driving his Maserati 300S and shown as a DNF. Then it was off to the Southern Hemisphere for the Australian Tourist Trophy Race on the 25th November, held at Albert Park, Melbourne, where Peter is listed as coming in 6th in his Ferrari 500/750S. In a supporting motor race to the Tourist Trophy, the Bryson Industries Cup, Peter came first in the 'Ferrari'. Here it is necessary to advise readers of a significant change to Peter Whitehead's competition stable for one of the 1956 Australian and all the 1957 New Zealand races he entered.



Jaguar D-Type

At the latter end of 1956 Peter Whitehead and Reg Parnell purchased from Ferrari Cars one each of the four manufactured (straight 4, dohc, 2498cc engines) built for the 1955 season. The latter were replacements for the poorly handling Ferrari 553 Squalo constructed for the 1953 season. Incidentally, Squalo is the Italian for a shark, so the Type 555 became Super Squalo!



Ferrari 555 Super Squalo

By the by for the 1956 season Ferrari replaced the Ferrari 555 Super Squalo with the Ferrari-Lancia D50. The two Ferrari 555 Super Squalo's acquired by the 'Brits' were 555/1 and 555/2 and they were modified for Formula Libre racing by extending the chassis by 3 inches/7.6cms, fitting 3.5 litre Tipo 860 Monza engines (straight 4, dohc, 3432cc engine) and renumbered FL/9001 and FL/9002.

Only four days later, on a Thursday, it was the turn of the Forez 2 Hour Event, St Etienne, France. At that Peter came home in 6th place with the Aston Martin. Following that it was back to England for the (BRSCC) Norbury Trophy for Racing Sports cars at the National Crystal Palace Race on Monday the 10th June, the Spring Bank Holiday. He came in 5th with the Aston Martin behind Jack Brabham driving a Tojeiro-Jaguar. I believe it was the second of the four Tojeiro-Jaguars manufactured and was powered by a straight 6, dohc, 3442cc Jaguar XK engine. Twelve days later and it was the commencement of the 24 hours of Le Mans on the 22nd/23rd June. If any reader I have left considered some of the information I have detailed has appeared somewhat convoluted, hold on to your whatever's! Almost all the records of the event list Peter and half-brother Graham being entered by a certain David Brown of Aston Martin fame, naturally enough in an Aston Martin. They are listed as competing in a Racing Sports DBR2/370 (straight 6, dohc 3670cc engine), of which only two were manufactured and that was in the year 1957. Now we get to the tricky part of the tale for one commentator maintains that only one DBR2 was completed in time for the event where it was raced by the Works Team – note one Works Team - and Peter and Graham Whitehead were allocated a pair of DBR1's which is nonsense as they were co-drivers driving only one vehicle. On the other hand, possibly the most authoritative analyst advises that the Aston Martin's Works Teams of Roy Salvadori and co-driver Les Leston and Tony Brooks and co-driver Noel Cunningham-Reid competed in DBR1/300's (straight 6, dohc, 2922cc engine) and the Whiteheads in a DBR2. That is backed-up by the Whiteheads' 1957 Le Mans entries recording them as driving a DBR1 but that the car was annotated '*In the Entry List Only*', whilst their actual racing vehicle was listed as a DBR2. You can now understand why I suggested '*holding on to your whatever's*'. My personal feeling is that a cupcake or three or a drink or two – or maybe both – might well suit you. As to the Endurance event: the Whitehouse's went out in the 8th hour on lap 81 with a broken gearbox; Salvadori/Leston retired in the 10th hour on lap 112 with gearbox problems, which in the main was being stuck in fourth gear; and Tony Brooks had an accident in the 12th hour on lap 140. Also stuck in fourth gear, exciting Terte Rouge, Brooks lost control, hit the bank and the car rolled over. If that were not '*sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*', he was supposedly run into by Umberto Maglioli in a Porsche 718 RSK. However, the listed lap failures of the pair do not tie-up with Maglioli exiting on lap 129 and Brooks on lap 140. Whatever, Brooks was carted off to hospital to be treated for serious cuts and bruises. I cannot but admit I am delighted that event is now over. Incidentally I have the bible in respect of all the Le Mans 24-hour Endurance events but unfortunately it is in France! Bother.



Tojeiro-Jaguar.

Peter bought chassis number FL/9001, it being suggested in some quarters that he traded in his Ferrari 500/750S to facilitate the new purchase. If at this stage a reader feels a headache coming on perhaps it would be best to sit or lie down with a glass or three of whatever is close to hand. In the new to him re-engined Ferrari 555 Super Squalo, Peter entered the 2nd December 1956 Australian GP held at Albert Park and gained a third place behind Stirling Moss and Jean Behra, both driving Maserati 250F's (straight 6, dohc, 2490cc engines). From Australia it was off to New Zealand for the commencement of the NZ summer motor racing season



Maserati 250F

where Peter Whitehead's first event was the Fourth New Zealand GP at Ardmore on the 12th January 1957. Ferrari 555/860 mounted, he came second to Reg Parnell in a similar vehicle. Next up was the 6th Lady Wigram Trophy Race at Wigram Airfield on the 25th January. There Peter bested Jack Brabham driving a Cooper T41/Climax (straight 4, sohc, 1460cc engine) to come first. On the 2nd February there was the 5th Dunedin Road race on the Wharf Circuit where Peter came third to first man Reg Parnell and second placed Jack Brabham. Two weeks later, on the 16th February, at the 9th NZ Championship Road Race (2nd Southland Road Race) at Ryal Bush, Peter came home first ahead of Reg Parnell. After that event, as one report advised, Peter '*sold his racing car locally and high-tailed it back to Europe*'. As a chap would so do.



Aston Martin DB3S

Back at home, first off the starting line was the 19th British Empire Trophy Race (BRDC) at Oulton Park on the 6th April where Peter came 10th driving an Aston Martin DB3S. Despite being entered in the Sussex Trophy Race (BARC) at Goodwood (22nd April), with his Aston Martin DB3S, he DNA. He was in '*good*' company as neither did a certain Bernie Ecclestone and his Cooper-Jaguar. On the 12th May

it was the turn of the Grand Prix Spa, at Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium, at which he recorded a 9th place at the wheel off his Aston Martin DB3S/7. A week later he was at Snetterton for the Formula Libre race on the 19th May in the Aston Martin where he achieved a third place. A week later, at the 1000km of Nürburgring, Germany, he and half-brother Graham completed the race driving the Aston Martin. They came in 9th out of some 74 competitors who arrived for practice and ahead of the likes of Joakim Bonnier and co-driver Stirling Moss racing a Maserati 300S.

After all that drama, the next race meeting for Peter Whitehead was the Leinster Trophy Race at Wicklow, Ireland, on the 13th July. There he managed a 7th place in the Aston Martin DB3S. On the 20th July at the Aintree International Race Peter made 9th place in the Aston. At the non-headline breaking National Snetterton meeting on the 28th July Peter driving the Aston came 4th in the Racing Sports Cars over 2 litre event and 6th in the Formula Libre Race. The Grand Prix du Royal Automobile Club of Belgium (R.A.C.B.), GP des Ancetres (Ancestors) was staged at Spa-Francorchamps on 25th August. Driving the Aston, Peter came home in 7th place, which was not too bad a result considering his fellow competitors included Tony Brooks, Roy Salvadori, Jack Brabham and Innes Ireland. Following that pomp and ceremony in Belgium it was down to earth at the Snetterton Motor Racing Club (SMRC) motor race meeting on the 1st September. In the Racing Sports Cars event Peter came 2nd in the Aston. Some 2 weeks later, between the 15th and the 21st of September, it was the Tour de France Automobiles event.

The first Tour de France, organised by the Automobile Club de France, was in 1899 after which it was run again in 1906. The two World Wars interrupted the usually annual event, with the first post WW2 event taking place in 1951. The 1957 Tour de France: took six days; covered 3418 miles/5500kms; started at Nice on the 15th, routed along the Mediterranean Coast, through Tourmalet to Pau, then north via La Rochelle and Nantes to Rennes, where onto Le Mans and Rouen, from whence over the Belgian Border at Roubaix, east to Charleville Mezieres, from whence south-west to Montlhery, south through Bourges and Vichy, then south-east through Grenoble and Die, where north'ish through Mont Revard and onto the finish at Rheims on the 21st September. The route included races at: Pau (10 'tours' or laps); Le Mans (eight laps); Rouen-les-Essarts (17 laps); Montlhery (10 laps); St Etienne (1 lap); and Rheims (24 laps). In addition, 'en route', there were hill climbs at: La Turbie; Mont Ventoux; Tourmalet; and Mont Revard. Golly gosh!

Be that as it may, at that event Peter and Graham competed in a Jaguar XK150 (straight 6, dohc, 3442cc Jaguar engine) but DNF. Peter last recorded motor race for 1957 was on the 28th September at the National Open Goodwood Trophy. He is detailed as being a 'starter' with the Aston but also as 'result unknown' which is a rather unsatisfactory way to record his last race of 1957.

I have to advise that at the year end of 1957 I was becoming rather concerned in respect of Peter Whitehead's future. I could not help but feel that the end of 1957 was an omen for 'our man'. It may well be thought that with hindsight it would be surprising if I did not think that. Nevertheless, there were some substances to my misgivings. For a starter, whenever he and his half-brother Graham were that year racing in separate cars in the same event Graham would almost always come home in front of Peter.

Additionally, it was the end of that year, which was the first for quite a number, that Peter did not travel to the southern hemisphere and motor race in Australia and New Zealand. Straws in the wind? We shall see.

Grumpy Geoffrey

Continued as part 6 in November Magazine