

GROC's Second Trilogy' (In Monthly Episodes) - Part 6

By Geoffrey O'Connell (Continued from October mag - Part 5)

Now we must track Peter Whitehead's motor racing season for 1958 – his last. Towards the end of 1957 or early 1958 Peter purchased a new Lister-Jaguar 'Knobbly' 3.8 litre, Racing Sports two-seater car which was the third off the manufacturing line.

Incidentally the sobriquet 'Knobbly' came about due to the bodyworks low frontal area having to have a hump to accommodate the engine and the upstanding rounded wheel arches. Lister Motor Co., of Cambridge, manufactured the running chassis and the aluminium body laid over a steel tube frame was produced by Williams & Pritchard

(coachbuilders) of Edmonton, North London. The power was supplied by a straight 6, dohc, 3785cc XK Jaguar engine and the gearbox was that used on the D-Type Jaguar. It was reported that Peter had the Lister-Jaguar assembled at his Motorwork workshop in Chalfont St Peter. It was suggested that he believed the Morris Minor steering rack rather lowered the tone of the arrangement and had it substituted by using a XK 140/150 rack and pinion installation. That caused an early problem as the different positions of the former and the latter caused turning right into turning left and vice-versa, which resulted in a '*coming together*' of the Lister-Jaguar and the workshop wall. Peter's Lister-Jaguar was chassis no. BHL 103, and the registration was NBL 660. As a matter of record 17 Lister-Jaguars were produced between 1958-1959 and were often sold as kit parts. All that carry on enables me to introduce Peter's first 1958 race – the Sussex Trophy Goodwood on the Easter Monday, the 7th April. There in the Lister-Jaguar he came 4th behind the likes of Stirling Moss, Peter Collins and Duncan Hamilton. The next Saturday was the (BRDC) British Empire Trophy Race staged at Oulton Park on the 12th April. A fault in the Lister-Jaguar's exhaust system in his Heat resulted in his not qualifying for the event. On the 3rd May at the Daily Express Silverstone Race, driving the Lister-Jaguar in the Class for Sports cars fitted with engines in excess of 1½ litres, he made 9th place. That event was followed on the 18th May by the GP Spa Sports Car Race at Spa-Francorchamps. Peter, again competing in the Lister-Jaguar, achieved 9th place just behind Jim Clark driving a D-Type Jaguar.



Lister-Jaguar 'Knobbly'

It was at that meeting that Archie Scott Brown, whilst duelling with Mastern Gregory for the lead in the race, came upon a wet section of the track, hit a road sign which broke the track rod of his Lister-Jaguar, causing a devastating accident. He died the next day in a hospital in Heusy, Verviers. On the 1st June it was the turn of the Internationales ADAC 1000 Kilometer Rennen Nürburgring, which event included in those years the Nordschleife (North Loop track) giving a circuit length of 14 miles/23kms.

Both Peter and half-brother Graham raced an Aston Martin DB3S finishing in 8th place, 2 laps behind the winners of the event, namely Stirling Moss and Jack Brabham driving an Aston Martin DBR1/300.



Aston Martin DB3S

Next up was the year's big one, the 24 Hours of Le Mans Endurance Race on the 21st/22nd of June. Peter and Graham Whitehead were entered to race an Aston Martin DB3S.

They came second, having raced 293 laps, to first home Olivier Gendebien and Phil Hill completing 305 laps racing a Ferrari 250 TR/58 (Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa - V12 engine, sohc per bank, 2953cc). From the sublime to the



Aston Martin DBR1/300

Next up was the Leinster Trophy Race at Dunboyne, Ireland on the 12th July. There in the Lister-Jaguar Peter finished 7th overall and 1st in the Racing Sports Cars engine over 2 litres. That was followed by the GP Silverstone on the 19th July where Peter driving the Lister-Jaguar was reported DNF due to a broken shock

absorber. Then it was the tragic Tour de France Automobiles held between the 14th and the 21st September - that was tragic for Peter Whitehead. That year's Tour, of some 3688 miles/5936km in length, was in four stages: Stage 1 being Nice to Le Touquet; Stage 2 Le Touquet to Le Mans; Stage 3 Le Mans to Clermont-Ferrand; and Stage 4 Clermont-Ferrand to Pau. Peter's co-driver was Graham and they were competing in a Jaguar Mk 1 Saloon (straight 6, dohc, 3442cc XK engine). On the first leg of the event, between Nice and Le Touquet, at Lasalle north-west of Nimes, with Graham driving, the Jaguar slid off the road evidently at a bridge lacking safety barriers. The car and occupants dropped some 30ft/9 metres into a ravine and rolled over several times. Peter was killed instantly whilst Graham, despite his serious injuries, lived. What a tragedy for Peter to have his life cut short when in his prime of life, aged not quite 44.

Other acclaimed racing drivers who were killed whilst motor racing that year included Archie Scott Brown, Peter Collins and Stuart Lewis-Evans.



Archie Scott Brown



Peter Collins



Stuart Lewis-Evans

Peter Whitehead's estate was reported as being in the region of £410,000.00 which in 2022 would be some ten million pounds. A particularly poignant summary of an article in the November 1958 issue of the Motor Sport magazine was as follows:

'We wish to express our deep regret at the fatal accident which befell Peter Whitehead in the Tour de France. Peter was one of the last remaining amateur drivers who with the increasing commercial management of motor racing have been replaced since the war by many professionals. He was quiet, almost shy by nature but a talented racing driver who drove fast without unnecessary fireworks. Perhaps the best attributehas been by one of his former racing mechanics testifying to the fair-minded generosity and appreciation shown by Whitehead ...which is in happy contrast to many present-day business tycoons. Whitehead is mourned by the whole motor-racing fraternity and particularly by those who recall the pre-war days of the amateur racing drivers. William Boddy. And so say all of us.

There is a postscript to Peter's sad demise concerning his half-brother Graham. It would appear that following the Tour de France disaster Graham was in the bar of the Steering Wheel Club, Shepherds Market, just off Curzon Street in Mayfair, London. It was supposedly alleged by a number of the members and patrons of the club that bearing in mind the circumstances of his half-brother's death, Graham was behaving rather inappropriately.

It appears he was boisterous and rather disorderly in his behaviour, so much so that he was discretely requested to leave the establishment. Mark you how I have the temerity to record that possible misdemeanour at the Steering Wheel Club I do not know for I was involved in an incident there myself in the early 1960s. Maybe in the future I will recount the event – but maybe not!

Grumpy Geoffrey

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