

Tony Vandervell's all-conquering Vanwall racing cars. - Part 2

By Geoffrey O'Connell (Continued from Part 1 - September magazine)

It was returned to Ferrari to be rebuilt as the '*Thinwall Special No. 3*' for the **1951** season, based on a long wheelbase '*Ferrari 375 F1*' (V12, sohc, single plug, 4494cc) with a de Dion rear axle. The **3rd BRDC International Trophy** event at Silverstone Circuit on the 5th of May was raced for 6 laps of the 4.6km/2.9 miles course, Reginald 'Reg' Parnell (1911-1964) driving '*Thinwall Special No. 3*' won the event. Nine days later, on the 14th of May, he won again in the '*Thinwall Special No. 3*', that time in the Spring Bank Holiday Monday **Festival of Britain Trophy** race over 15 laps of the 3.9km/2.4 miles long track at Goodwood Circuit. On the 14th of July it was the turn of the **British Grand Prix** held at the Silverstone Circuit and raced over 90 laps of the 4.6km/2.9-mile course. For that event Tony asked Peter Nield Whitehead (1914-1958) to drive the '*Vandervell Racing Team Thinwall Special No. 3*'. In the qualifying Heat Whitehead came eighth and, in the race, which was won by Jose Froilan Gonzalez (1922-2013) driving a '*Ferrari F375/50*' (V12, sohc, 4494cc), Whitehead finished in ninth place.

For **1952** the '*Vanwall Racing Team*' took delivery of '*Thinwall Special No. 4*' which was a '*Ferrari 375*', specification as for '*No.3*', but with a twin plug engine and utilising an '*Indianapolis*' long wheelbase. Racing events for '*Thinwall Special No. 4*' included the:

6th Ulster Trophy F1 event at Dundrod Circuit on the 7th of June and raced over 34 laps of the 11.9km/7.4-mile long circuit at which Piero Taruffi (1906-1988) won.

The Formula Libre event at Silverstone Circuit on the 19th of July was raced over 35 laps of the 4.6km/2.9-mile track which Taruffi won.

The Scottish Daily Express National Trophy race at Turnberry Airfield Circuit was held over 15 laps of the 2.9km/1.8 miles circuit on the 23rd of August. John Michael 'Mike' Hawthorn (1929-1959) was the driver, but he had to retire on lap 8 of 15 or 20 laps – depending - due to gearbox failure or a fire! Make your choices in respect of the number of laps and the reason for retiring.

The Daily Record International Trophy Formula Libre race at Charterhall Airfield Circuit on 11th of

October was held over 40 laps of the 3.2km/2 miles long track at which Emilio Giuseppe Farina (1906-1966) had to retire.

For **1953** the '*Thinwall Special No. 4*' was still deployed and racing meetings included the:

Glover Trophy meeting at Goodwood Circuit on the 6th of April (Easter Monday). It was raced over 15 laps of the 3.9km/2.4-mile-long track at which Taruffi in the '*Thinwall Special No. 4*' came second by 6 seconds after 15 laps to a '*BRM P15*' (V16, supercharged, dohc, 1488cc) driven by Frederick Charles Kenneth 'Ken' Wharton (1916-1957).

15th Albi Grand Prix held at Circuit des Planques, Albi, France, on the 31st of May and raced over 18 laps of the 9km/5.6-mile-long circuit.

Farina retired the *'Thinwall Special No. 4'* on lap 5 of Heat 2 with a broken oil pipe.

British Grand Prix held at Silverstone Circuit on the 18th of July being 17 laps of the 4.6km/2.9-mile-long track. Farina was driving the *'Thinwall Special No. 4'*. He won the **Formula Libre** race in which he achieved the first 100mph lap on that circuit. In the **F2** event he finished third behind Ascari driving a *'Ferrari 500/F2'* (straight 4, sohc, 1985cc) and Juan Manuel Fangio (1911-1995) at the wheel of a *'Maserati A6GCM'* (straight 6, dohc, 1970cc).

Scottish International race at Charterhall Airfield Circuit on the 20th of September raced over 50 laps of the 3.3km/2-mile-long course. In the **Formula Libre** event Farina at the wheel of the *'Thinwall Special No. 4'* went out with magneto trouble.

At Goodwood Circuit on the 26th of September there were the **Woodcote Cup** which was a 5-lap race of the 3.9km/2.4-mile circuit and the **Goodwood Trophy** which was a 15-lap race. Hawthorn driving the *'Thinwall Special No.4'* won both events.

During 1953 the *'Vanwall Racing Team'* engineers had been working at top speed to manufacture the first non-Ferrari based racing car – the *'Vanwall Special 01'*. The tubular frame chassis was designed by one Owen Richard Maddock (1925-2000), the then designer for the *'Cooper Car Co.'* The latter company constructed the product. The framework was reputedly retrospectively given the designation *'Type 30'* and was so constructed as to be able to have fitted equipment similar in style to that of the Ferraris. It had a de Dion tube rear axle and Goodyear style disc brakes produced by *'Vanwall Products'*. The then developed aeronautical disc brakes were adapted by Dunlop Tyres in the UK for cars. The major breakthrough was the *'Jaguar C-Type'* (straight 6, dohc, 3442cc) fitted with them at the 1953 Mille Miglia World Sportscar Championship event in Italy. The powerhouse of the *'Vanwall Special 01'* was inspired by Tony who had been a director of *'Norton Motors'* since 1946. By the by, in 1953 *'Norton Motors'* was taken over by *'Associated Motorcycles (AMC)'* who owned the motorbike makes of AJS, Francis-Barnett, James and Matchless. Tony had for some time fancied the notion of a four-cylinder racing engine founded on motorcycle practices – a four-cylinder, 2 litre F2 engine with the ability to be increased to 2.5 litres. Thus four *'Norton Manx'*, single cylinder blocks (498.7cc each totalling 1995cc) were joined together with a common water-jacket, a Norton-like cylinder head and a valve train (*'the top end'*).

To complete the unit, a proprietary crankcase was required and Tony's eldest son Anthony, who had been apprenticed at Rolls-Royce Motors, suggested the crankcase of the four-cylinder R-R B40 military engine but cast in aluminium – rather than the standard cast iron (*'the lower end'*). Once the project was completed, extensive testing of *'Vanwall Special 01'* was undertaken at the RAF Odiham Airfield, Hook, Hampshire, prior to any motor racing taking place.



Vanwall Special

During the year **1954** the '*Vanwall Racing Team*' competed with both the 'old' '*Thinwall Special No. 4*' and the 'new' '*Vanwall Special 01*'.

That season's events included the the:



BRDC International Trophy race at Silverstone Circuit (35 laps of the 4.6km/2.9 miles long track) on the 15th of May. At that event Alan Everest Brown (1919-2004) racing the '*Vanwall Special 01*' managed a sixth place in Heat 1 but during the race had to retire on lap 17 with a broken oil pipe.

BARC Daily Telegraph 200. Held on the 29th of May at the newly constructed 4.8km/3-mile-long Aintree Circuit situated 8km/5 miles north of Liverpool City. It was the only purpose-built Grand Prix racing track in the UK and was constructed within the surrounding Aintree Horse Racecourse. The most notable person involved with the tracks was Mirabelle Dorothy Topham (nee Hillier) (1891-1980) who was an actress prior to her marriage. She was elected to the board of Aintree racecourse in 1935, took over Topham Ltd. in 1936, purchased the racecourses in 1949 which were subsequently sold to the property developers Walton Group in 1973. But back to the motor racing. For the 34-lap race Peter John Collins (1931-1958), driving the '*Thinwall Special No. 4*', came second in Heat 1. In the race, on lap 19, he had to make a pit stop to have the plugs changed. Tony Vandervell was in the pits and assisted in the task. That pit stop set Collins back in the race order and, despite having recorded the fastest lap of the race, he had to retire on lap 28.

British Grand Prix held at Silverstone Circuit on the 17th of July for 90 laps of the 4.6km/2.9-mile-long course. Collins was driving the '*Vanwall Special 01*' fitted with a 2.3 litre engine (2,237cc). He came eleventh in the qualifying Heat but during the race had to retire on lap 16 with a cylinder head gasket failure.

Formula Libre race at Snetterton Circuit was staged on the 14th of August at the 4.4km/2.7-mile-long course. Collins was entered in the 40-lap event driving the '*Thinwall Special No. 4*' with which he won the race, some 3 laps ahead of the second racing car home.

Italian Grand Prix/XXV Gran Premio d'Italia at the Autodromo Nazionale di Monza, Monza, on the 5th of September. Collins was driving the '*Vanwall Special 01*', still fitted with the 2.3 litre engine as the 2.5 litre (2,489cc) unit had dropped a valve during testing. He qualified in sixteenth place. In the 80-lap race of the 6.3km/3.9-mile-long course he finished in seventh place, even after incurring an oil pressure gauge leak.

He was 5 laps in arrears of the race winner, Fangio, who was driving a 'Mercedes-Benz W196R' (straight 8, dohc, dry sump, 2496cc) fitted with a streamline body.

7th Goodwood Trophy race was 21 laps of the 3.8km/2.4 miles course held at Goodwood Circuit on the 25th of September. The 'Vanwall Special

No. 1' was at last fitted with the 2.5 litre engine. Collins came second behind Stirling Craufurd Moss (1929-2020) driving a 'Maserati 250F' (straight 6, dohc, 2490cc). For the 10 lap **Woodcote Cup** race Hawthorn raced the 'Vanwall Special 01' in which he came fourth and Collins took the wheel of the 'Thinwall Special No. 4' finishing first home.

Daily Telegraph Trophy race which was held at the Aintree Circuit on the 2nd of October. In the 17 lap F1 race of the 4.8km/3-mile-long course Hawthorn at the wheel of the 'Vanwall Special 01' came second to the 'Maserati 250F' of Moss. In the 17 lap **Formula Libre** event he spun off the circuit whilst Collins driving the 'Thinwall Special No. 4' had to retire on lap 9.

Spanish Grand Prix was held on the 24th of October being 80 laps of the 6.3km/3.9 miles long track of the then street circuit of Pedralbes situated in the western suburbs of Barcelona. Collins driving the "Vanwall Special 01' 'DNS' in the qualifying session as prior to that, whilst getting used to the track, he had an unfortunate coming together with a substantial tree - tail first. Some reports advised that the racing car turned upside down. Whatever, the result was that the machine was unraceable. The damage was so extensive that the 'Vanwall' was written off, but Collins was unharmed! Fortunately, the 'Vanwall Special 01' was insured with the Pearl Assurance Company who having inspected the remains of the wrecked racing car handed over a cheque for £1,473 8 shillings and 6d. The Pearl Assurance Co. started out as The Pearl Loan Company in 1857, working from the then Royal Oak Public House opposite the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets which included most of the old East End of London. The title changed to The Pearl Assurance Company in 1914 when it moved to 252 High Holborn, Central London, WC1. Before I forget that was the last major race held at the Circuit Pedralbes.



Italian Grand Prix in the 50's

Geoffrey

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