

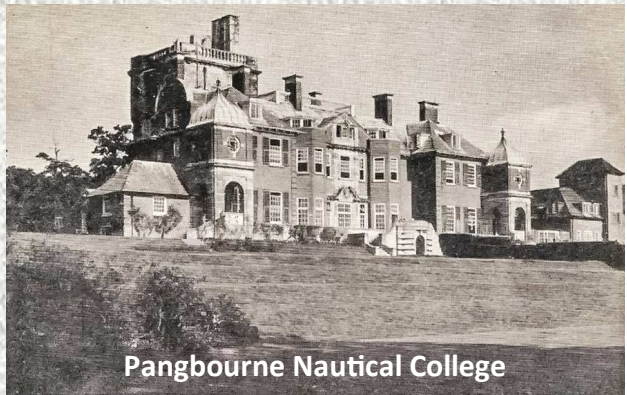
# Tony Vandervell's all-conquering Vanwall racing cars. - Part 3

By Geoffrey O'Connell (Continued from Part 2 in October magazine)

For the year **1955** the name of the racing cars became 'Vanwall'. The chassis were designated as 'VW' with a suffix number indicating the order of factory build as in 'VW1', 'VW2' and so on. If any reader I may still have left is muddled – stay cool man or of course woman. Incidentally, why cannot a female actor still be named an actress?

To assist in the furtherment of 'Vandervell Racing' David Christopher Yorke (1913-1984) was employed as team manager of 'Vanwall Racing' in 1954. Yorke was born in what was then known as Southern Ireland, not too distant from the county town of Carlow – in south-east Ireland some 90km/56 miles south-southwest of 'Dublin's Fair City'.

His father and grandfather were military men. Post private schooling, he joined Pangbourne Nautical College where the scholars were trained for the Merchant Navy. Despite that he 'jumped ship' and in 1934, aged 21, signed up to the Royal Air Force as a pilot. By 1939 he was a Flight Lieutenant. It was during that period that he became a devotee of motor racing.



Pangbourne Nautical College



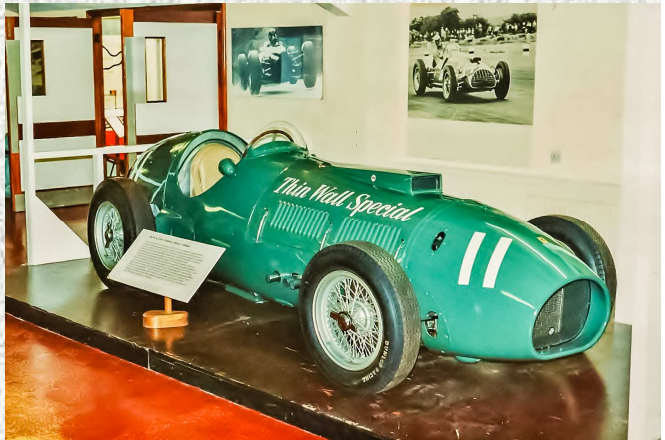
The Red Barron

With the outbreak of WW2, he became involved in the 'Battle of France' (10<sup>th</sup> of May to the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1940), also known as the 'Western Campaign'. He was attached to RAF Army Co-operation Command 16 Squadron flying Gloster Gladiators, the final generation of the biplane fighters which by the time of WW2 were totally obsolete. They were established at Bertangles aerodrome, some 9.7km/6 miles north Amiens City, in the very north-east of France.

The Squadron was only based in France for a few weeks but that did not stop Yorke being involved in a number of combative actions, twice being awarded the 'Distinguished Service Order' ('DSO') for bravery. It was at Bertangles Aerodrome that **THE** Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen (born 1892), known as the 'Red Baron', was taken after he was killed during WW1 on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1918 while flying his Fokker Dr. I (Triplane) in pursuit of a Canadian pilot.

The following day his body and aircraft were taken from Poulainville airfield the 3.7km/2.2 miles north-west to Bertangles aerodrome where he was buried with full military honours. Post WW1 his burial site was eventually moved to Germany. He was credited with killing 80 Allied aircraft pilots, five more 'kills' than the Frenchman Rene Paul Fonck (1894-1953). After France, Yorke flew a single seater Hurricane fighter aircraft designed and mainly built by Hawker Aircraft Ltd., during the 'Battle of Britain' (10<sup>th</sup> July to the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1940). Early in 1941 he was dispatched to India with the rank of Squadron Leader. At the war's end he was sent to the Far East as a Group Captain, remaining with the RAF until 1949.

It was that year that he accompanied Peter Whitehead, a pre-war motor enthusiast friend, to the 1949 **Czechoslovakian Grand Prix** held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September at which Whitehead was racing in his single seater 'Ferrari 125 F1'. Whitehead won the 20-lap race of the 17.8km/11.1-mile-long course by 35½ seconds and having so done enquired of Yorke if he would become his team manager in 1950. On that request Yorke resigned from the RAF and took the position. When, in 1951, Whitehead was offered a drive in Tony's 'Thinwall Special No. 3' at the British Grand Prix it would have been unthinkable that Yorke would not have met Tony Vandervell.



That coming together was fortunate for both men as when Tony decided to construct his own racing cars in 1954, he offered the position of team manager of 'Vanwall Racing' to Yorke. The latter remained in that position until the end of 1958, despite Tony withdrawing from motor racing after the untimely death of his driver Stuart Lewis-Evans during the October 1958 Moroccan Grand Prix. Yorke did not resurface in motor racing until 1966 when John Wyer of 'Ford Advanced Vehicles Ltd.' requested him to manage the 'GT40 Racing Team'. After a number of years Yorke handled several racing teams, that is until he retired in 1980 aged 67. He continued to show up at various motor racing events but whilst at the 1984 Austrian Grand Prix he died aged 71.

Back to the plot. For the **1955** motor racing season it was planned to possibly construct four 'Vanwall's'. There were certainly sufficient components available towards the 1954 year-end to build two chassis and shortly afterwards there would be enough to assemble a third car if it was required. With all this to the forefront of the planning,

Tony and one of his associates travelled in December (?) 1954 to Modena where 'Maserati S.p.A' was based to meet with Adolfo Orsi, the then owner of the Maserati car manufacturing and machine tools business. The Company had been divided up in 1953 after a steel mill workers' strike action ended in 1952. Adolfo's brother Marcello kept the foundries, and his sister Ida took over the motorbike manufacturing.

The purpose of the get-together with Adolfo was for 'Vandervell Products' to purchase some machine tools from Maserati, including two milling machines - a vertical milling machine and a universal milling machine - which were obtained for a 'mere' £10,000.00 - to quote the handout! In addition,

Tony also acquired a 'Maserati 250F' rolling chassis (No. 2513) complete with transaxle gearbox, suspension, brakes 'et al' but without an engine and bodywork. The purpose? To evaluate a truly magnificent Italian racing car, its chassis, suspension components and its handling qualities. The latter acquisition was also stated to be a very inexpensive transaction with a purchase price of £2,346.00. Next up was the not inconsiderable matter of the 'Vanwall Racing Team' drivers for the 1955 motor racing season. Negotiations commenced with Hawthorn towards the end of 1954 and the terms were quickly agreed for his contract from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April to the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1955. There were nine planned race meetings for that year for which Hawthorne was to be paid a £3,000.00 retainer plus 50% of all starting and prize monies as well as suppliers' incentives.

Obtaining the figures for start and prize payments is somewhat interesting but ..... One set of 'Cooper Car Co.' records in respect of John Arthur 'Jack' Brabham (1926-2014) at a F2 event in 1958 revealed that the race organisers paid some £384.00 for starting and £400.00 for prize money, if he was a winner, which totalled £784.00. In the case of Hawthorn and his 50% that would have netted him £192.00 to start and £200.00 for any prize money. In today's money the £3,000.00 retainer would be some £93,000.00 - that is if my calculations are correct! When it became apparent that Collins and Tony could not reach an agreement for Collins to drive a 'Vanwall' that year, due to various contractual agreements they had entered into with petrol suppliers and an oil company, another driver had to be found. Wharton was chosen as the number two driver to Hawthorne.

Aged almost 41, Wharton died on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1957 racing at Ardmore Circuit, New Zealand where he was driving his 'Ferrari 750 Monza Spyder' (straight 4, dohc, dry sump, 2999cc) sports racing car. During all those shenanigans the racing team were overcoming the problems of converting the engines to fuel injection which resulted in the 'Vanwall's' not being ready to compete in that year's Grand Prix at Pau and Naples and the 'Goodwood' Easter Monday motor races. The first race meeting of 1955 for the green liveried 'Vanwall's' was the:

#### **7<sup>th</sup> BRDC International Trophy.**

The 60 laps race of the 4.6km/2.9-mile-long Silverstone Circuit was held at on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May. The event was a bean-feast for the 'Maserati 250F's' which occupied the first five places home. First over the finishing line was Collins driving an 'Owen Racing Organisation' 'Maserati 250F', some 39 seconds ahead of Roy Francesco Salvadori (1922-2012). The first of the 'Vanwall's (VW1)' to retire was that of Hawthorn on lap 16 with a broken oil pipe.



More unfortunate was Wharton (VW2) who on lap 21 had a serious crash reportedly caused by a poorly positioned back-marker. His injuries caused him to miss out on a number of race meetings but if there was a silver lining it was that the Pearl Assurance Company had to write a cheque to 'Vanwall Products' for reportedly £4,472 plus a few shillings and pence!

**Monaco Grand Prix/XIII Grand Prix Automobile**, Circuit de Monaco. The 100-lap race of the 3.1km/2-mile-long course was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May. As Wharton was '*hors de combat*' only

'Vanwall' (VW1) was entered for Hawthorn to drive. He finished in twelfth place out of 20 qualifiers but in the race went out on lap 22 or 23 with possibly a throttle problem. The winner, aged 38 years, was the Frenchman Maurice Bienvenu Jean Paul Trintignant (1917-2005) at the wheel of a '*Ferrari 625F1*' (straight 4, 2498cc). A somewhat macabre note involved Ascari who on his eightieth lap, racing a '*Lancia D50*' (V8, 2488cc), '*took to the harbour*' but fortunately rose to the surface and was rescued. Sadly, four days later he was to die at Monza Circuit (Italy) test driving a '*Ferrari 750 Monza Spyder*' sports car.

**Belgian Grand Prix** was held at Spa-Francorchamps circuit on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June and was 36 laps of the 14.1km/8.8-mile-long course. Once again only Hawthorn was entered driving a 'Vanwall' (VW1) and he qualified tenth out of 14 contestants. In the race, which was won by Fangio driving a '*Mercedes-Benz W196 F1*' (V8, fuel injected, 2497cc). Hawthorn retired on lap 8 with an oil leaking gearbox which ceased to function. During the evening after the race, Hawthorn and some friends were having a drink or three in a bar/restaurant in Spa Town when the Vanwall Team manager Yorke attempted to join the group. At that Hawthorne allegedly flew off the handle and bellowed at Yorke precisely what Tony Vandervell could do with the Vanwall car and the team. Having delivered his tirade, he stamped out of the venue. Obviously, the agreement between Vandervell and Hawthorne had ceased. To Hawthorn's credit he repaid the unearned retainer straight away. With Hawthorn departed another driver had to be employed. The chosen man was Henry O'Reilly 'Harry' Schell (1921-1960), an American and the first of that nation to start in a F1 Grand Prix.

Although not entirely germane to 'Vanwall's' racing programme, the 1955 **24 Hours of Le Mans/Les 24 Heures du Mans** (11-12<sup>th</sup> June) at the Circuit de la Sarthe had a marked effect on that year's Grand Prix motor racing. As usual Le Mans started at 1600hrs (4pm) on the Saturday. At 1820hrs (6.20pm) that early evening Pierre Eugene Alfred Bouillin (1905-1955) and known as Pierre Levegh driving a 2-seater sports racing '*Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR*' (straight 8, dohc, fuel injected, 2982cc) was on lap 34 of the endurance event. Due to series of manoeuvres by other drivers, he crashed into the crowded spectators killing 83 and himself and injuring some 180 others. That was the deadliest crash in motor racing history. The motor racing alias Levegh was used in memory of Pierre's cycling and motor racing uncle who died of illness aged 33 in 1904. As a result of that carnage at Le Mans, the French GP (3<sup>rd</sup> July), German GP (31<sup>st</sup> July), Swiss GP (21<sup>st</sup> August) and the Spanish GP (23<sup>rd</sup> October) were cancelled.

*Geoffrey*

*Continued as Part 4 in November magazine*