

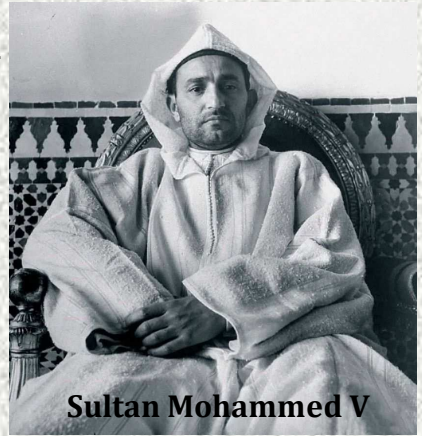
Tony Vandervell's all-conquering Vanwall racing cars.

Final - Part 10

By *Geoffrey O'Connell*

(Continued from Part 9 in June Mag)

The last F1 race of that year was the **Moroccan Grand Prix/VII Grand Prix International Automobile du Maroc** at the road-based Ain-Diab Circuit, Casablanca, Morocco, on the 19th of October. It was held over 53 laps of the 7.6km/4.7-mile-long course. Morocco gained its independence from France in March 1956 and had decided to establish the race in order to assist in gaining worldwide prominence. Sultan Mohammed V became the King of Morocco in August 1957, and he attended the start of this event. At the F1 race both Hawthorn and Moss were in the frame to win that year's F1 World Drivers' Championship. That which follows may well require a Mensa High IQ but here goes. Moss with 32 points needed to win that race and set fastest lap, with Hawthorn on 40 points finishing no higher than third in the race, or to win the race without gaining the fastest lap, with Hawthorn finishing third or lower but also without the fastest lap. It is probably time to have a rest by lying down and having a drink or three. The 'Vanwall' drivers were all present with Brooks at the wheel of 'VW10', Moss in 'VW5' and Stuart driving 'VW4'. More than most Grand Prix races the designated laps on which this, that and the other occurred are on many occasions at variance with each other. Out of the 25 qualified racing drivers, eight retired and one had a fatal accident. On lap 18 (or 15 or 16) Moss was lapping Seidel for the second time when they collided with each other. The 'Vanwall' underwent some front-end bodywork panel modification, but Seidel sustained damage to the front and rear of his 'Maserati 250F' and retired. On lap 29 (or 30) the 'Vanwall' of Brooks incurred an engine failure. After a moderate amount of research, I have selected lap 29 as that on which Gendebien spun his 'Ferrari D246'



on engine oil which the 'Vanwall' of Brooks had dropped on the circuit. The Ferrari was then impacted by the 'Rob Walker Racing Team' entered 'Cooper Climax T43' (straight 4, dohc, dry sump, 1475cc) driven by Francois Picard (1921-1996) and the 'British Racing Partnership' entered 'Cooper Climax T45' (straight 4, dohc, dry sump, 1475cc) raced by Thomas 'Tom' Bridger (1934-1991). All three racing cars caught fire.

Gendebien and Bridger only had light injuries but Picard was taken to hospital and remained incapacitated for some six months. He never motor raced again. On lap 41 Stuart was in fifth place when the engine of his 'Vanwall' seized up, the rear wheels locked solid and the racing car spun off the circuit, somersaulted and crashed into a tree-lined sand bank. Either a fuel pipe broke or the fuel tank burst and the racing car caught fire. Stuart managed to crawl out of the inferno but suffered life-threatening burns, made worse by the fact that his racing overalls were alight. Tony Vandervell immediately had him flown to the Centre for Plastic and Jaw Surgery, Queen Victoria Hospital at East Grinstead Town, West Sussex, England. Despite all the hospital ministrations Stuart passed away six days later.

Incidentally the Centre for Plastic and Jaw Surgery, where during WW2 they treated deep burns and severe facial disfigurement, was founded by Archibald Hector McIndoe (1900-1960). He was a New Zealand born plastic surgeon who worked for the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. In wartime 1941 patients of the Centre formed the Guinea Pig Club for RAF and Allied aircrew. Moss won the race but Hawthorn driving a 'Ferrari D246', who was the second racing driver home, won the F1 World Drivers' Championship by one point from Moss. Third placed Phil Hill was racing another 'Ferrari D246'.

After winning the F1 World Drivers' Championship Hawthorn declared that he was retiring from Formula One motor racing. It was suggested that he had ceased to enjoy the sport in which so many of his colleagues and friends had been killed. Additionally, there was the question of his health. In 1955 he had lost the use of one kidney and as the years rolled by, he began to have troubles with his remaining organ. Some three months and a few days after his last F1 motor race at Casablanca, on Thursday the 22nd of January 1959, Hawthorn was driving a modified Jaguar 3.4 litre saloon car (later termed a 3.4 Mk 1). Its registration number plate was VDU 881. The vehicle was loaned to him by Frank Raymond Wilton 'Lofty' England (1911-1995), who had joined 'Jaguar Cars' in 1946, when Hawthorn was racing Jaguars during 1955, 1956 and the Daily Express Production Touring Car event on the 14th of September 1957. The latter was part of the 9th BRDC International Trophy race held at the Silverstone Circuit. It had been postponed from its usual month of May due to the then recent Suez crisis when the Suez Canal had been closed to ship traffic between October 1956 and March 1957. But back to the 22nd of January. On that fateful wet morning, at about midday, whilst Hawthorn was on the forecourt of his Tourist Trophy Garage at Farnham, Surrey, a 'Mercedes-Benz 300 SL' slowly drove past and the driver, Rob Walker of the 'Rob Walker Racing Team', waved a greeting to Hawthorn and then drove off towards Guilford Town. That gesture activated Hawthorn to set off in pursuit of Walker whom he overtook on the A3 Guilford By-Pass.

Within sight of the premises of Coombs of Guilford, then beside the A3 Guilford By-Pass, on a right-hand bend in the road, Hawthorn hit a 'Keep Left' bollard, bounced off an approaching lorry and the Jaguar careened across the dual carriageway and smashed into tree.



The impact threw him onto the back seats of the car where he was found dead. He was aged 29³/₄.

In 1958 the International Cup for Formula One Manufacturers was won by the 'Vanwall' racing car constructor. That title changed in 1981 to the World Constructors' Championship.

Apart from Tony Vandervell's declining health, for which his physician recommended that he took a 'back seat' as it were, it became apparent that the tragic death of Stuart Lewis-Evans had a very great effect on him. Taking into account those two reasons, in addition to the strain of forming and running the Vanwall project over the years, it should come as no surprise that at the 1958-year end Tony withdrew from the whole project. It has been reported that he offered the 'Vanwall Racing Team' and its racing cars to 'Lofty' England who declined to take up the opportunity and remained with 'Jaguar Cars'.

Tony increasingly isolated himself from the limelight and in 1964 turned 'Vandervell Products' into a public company. At the time of his death, on the 10th of March 1967, he lived at Brookhurst Park, Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire. Nonetheless, he had had a falling out with the Vicar of the Stoke Poges Church telling him 'What he could do with his church roof'. Consequently, he had to be buried elsewhere which was next to his son Anthony at St Anne Churchyard, Dropmore, Littleworth Common, Burnham, Buckinghamshire. Tony had another son, Colin, born on the 3rd of May 1944 at Marylebone in the City of Westminster, London. Whilst at Stowe Public School he was kidnapped and a ransom note delivered to his father demanded £100.00. Colin escaped from a field where he had been left bound and gagged and presumably the ransom demand was not paid. Tony was not very charitable to Colin on his death. Allegedly the only inheritance Colin received was a grandfather clock. If that were rather insufficient it was discovered that the original mechanism had been replaced with a battery-operated unit! Having been forbidden to motor race during his father's lifetime, after his death Colin commenced racing late in the 1960s. He participated with extensive skill in F2 and Formula Atlantic in the early 1970s.

Following the demise of Tony Vandervell, GKN Ltd., known until 1961 as Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds, acquired 'Vandervell Products' which at that time was exporting over half its output to overseas vehicle manufacturers.

My father Ron was a tool maker, a breed of precision engineers. A client of his was 'Vandervell Products' at Acton. On one occasion he was visiting the firm's Tool Buyer to discuss a job. Throughout the then tightly knit London Home Counties group of precision engineers it was known that Ron had been a very enthusiastic motorcyclist pre-WW2. At that visit to Vandervell's, the Tool Buyer suggested he went down to the Works Stores, where all the equipment was kept and booked out to specific jobs and have a word with the Storeman. Father so did and introduced himself to the overall wearing fellow who suggested they should go down to the factory's cellars. Lo and behold there were dozens and dozens of pre and post WW1 motorbikes, mainly Norton's, about which the storeman commenced to elaborate. After the comparatively extensive tour of the exhibits, Ron returned to the Tool Buyer's office and thanked him for the voyage of discovery.

In passing he mentioned that the storeman appeared to have an excellent understanding of the vintage motorbikes. The Tool Buyer replied that so he should as he was the Tony Vandervell. That even left my father speechless. Incidentally, the Home Counties is an imprecise definition, but my understating is that they include the Counties of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Middlesex, Surrey and Kent.

Geoffrey