

# Lemon Squash Lever and the early PCCNSW

By Jim Lever



Jim Lever in 2012

I purchased my first Peugeot, a 1949 203 sedan, in 1957. I bought it privately in Strathfield. It was coloured beige with a white roof and boot lid.

The previous owner had never used the fourth gear (overdrive) and it crunched when engaged. Fortunately after a few weeks it worked OK without any need for mechanical work. A few years later I found a 203 advertised in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, with a Nardi twin Solex inlet manifold fitted. I fronted up and offered 25 pounds for the manifold, and took it off myself. It worked well; the old 203 could now match a 403 in acceleration, on the flat. No chance on a hill – that extra 178cc (1290 to 1468) gave the 403 much better torque.

I joined the Peugeot Car Club of NSW that same year. The club meetings were held in the lower room at the back of Petersham Town Hall once each month.

At the meetings I met:

- Clive Hutchison, who worked as a customs agent and was president.
- Norm Saville, ran a petrol/service station on Parramatta Road at Flemington. Norm raced a midnight blue 203 at Bathurst several times. I cannot remember ever seeing under the bonnet.
- Charlie Smith, who was an electrical contractor and keen on circuit racing. He went on to buy a 403 sedan and (with modifications that included special sleeves and pistons, a wild camshaft grind, full extractors and four Amal carbies) raced it several times at Bathurst, topping 108mph (175kmh) down Conrod. In later years Charlie moved on to develop an Austin Lancer, which was a consistent winner in touring car races, usually against Barry Gurdon of Bathurst in a Morris Major (same car, different badges). Charlie's Lancer had a very hot MGB engine (300 hours spent on the head alone) mated with a close ratio four-speed gearbox (50 mph in first gear) from an MG that ran at Le Mans.
- Bill Cooke, who had a scrap metal yard near Parramatta and created a 403 that flew. I saw him beat Charlie Smith's Lancer at Catalina Park, Katoomba. Bill later became a partner in Norm Saville's service station.
- Peter Orr, who was a pharmacist on Parramatta Road at Enfield. He drove a 403 with Nardi exhaust system (in black crackle finish).



Albert Bridge at Bathurst. Jim Lever collection



Bill Cooke's 403. Jim Lever collection



Gary Cooke, Brian Skeen and Peter Orr.  
Jim Lever collection



Jim Lever at Garswood. Jim Lever collection



Jim Lever flat out at Warwick Farm. Jim Lever collection



Jim Lever speeding at Oran Park. Jim Lever collection

I travelled to Melbourne in 1958, with Norm and Charlie in the hot 403 (which rattled like a racing Ferrari on each cold morning), to see the Australian GP. I was all of 19 at the time so I didn't get a drive. My nickname was Lemon Squash Lever – I couldn't get a taste for beer. I do remember quite clearly the first stop for a beer (for the other two) was Picton – so Melbourne was a long way.

At the sprints on Seven Mile Beach near Gerringong, where Charlie Smith pitted his 403 against the flying 203s of Albert Bridge and Ken Brigden.

I also saw Albert running at the Albion Park hill climb, near Wollongong. There were race tracks and hill climbs all over the place in those days.

At the time Bob Holden was based in Melbourne, where he raced his 203. I followed his exploits in racing car magazines. On a driving holiday to Victoria in 1958-59 I visited Nunawading race track to see Bob take on the new-style sedans (Austin Lancers). Unfortunately Bob was beaten that day – it was the writing on the wall for the 203. I also saw Bob run at Templestowe hill climb, which I think he won his class again. Years later, after Bob had moved up to Killara in Sydney, I was privileged to see his open-wheeler (partly built) in his home garage. I remember he had fitted a Porsche transmission and was very excited with his brand new 404 engine, which had been given to him by the Peugeot distributor.

The NSW club moved the meeting place to the Flemington Hotel on Parramatta Road. Here I first met Bill Cooke's sons, Denis and Gary. Each

son had a 203 and raced on the dirt at Parramatta Speedway against all sorts of sedans. I heard that the 203's acceleration from the start won them plenty of races against faster opposition. After one meeting night Denis drove a group of us around the adjoining streets in Flemington in Bill's racing 403. A stupid thing to do, as we were touching 100mph (162kmh) in places. Denis was a master at the wheel but nothing condones that sort of behaviour. I breathed a sigh of relief when we finished our dash.

PCCNSW members combined on one Sunday each month to race around the flags at any available paddock (often at Garswood, near Penrith) and finish the day with a big fire/barbecue along with several beers (you had to watch out for the home brew – it was deadly!).

Another major event the PCC ran each year was Foley's hill climb, which was located just off Mona Vale Road. It was on the left on the final descent into Mona Vale. It attracted many diverse cars – sedan, sports, racing. I entered in my first year in the club but did not get past scrutineering (a wobbly steering rack – fixed up a few weeks too late).

Brian Skeen was a mate of mine who ran a 203C with a Rootes supercharger fitted to the front of the crankshaft. It made more noise than power but it was worth a try.

Another person who raced a 203 was Bert Fenton. I've lost track of him. I first saw his 203 at Warwick Farm. He ran a single Solex carburettor (looked standard) and an extractor exhaust but the car flew in mid-field. I remember

Norm Saville looking at the donk and saying that it must be a big bore Bert once loaned me a twin-choke downdraft Weber for my 403 for a standing 1/4 mile event -- not that it made much difference.

One 203 I saw race at Foley's was owned by Keith Williams, a TAFE teacher who worked wonders with what looked like a fairly standard Pug. He had fabricated a simple extractor system that took gasses from the front cylinder and ran back along the head. Each other cylinder joined the same pipe as it ran by – not the usual four into two and two into one, but a 4 into 1 set up. It worked well. I cannot remember the carbie set-up, but I do remember him pulling into the pits after one run with the motor going “pop, bang, pop”. I asked what was up. He was not concerned at all. He whipped off the rocker cover, loosened off one rocker and popped the pushrod back into position. It was now back running on four cylinders – 30 seconds flat.

I recall this same car running at a Silverdale Hillclimb (near Wallacia). It was a popular to walk to the top of the hill and wait for your favourite car to arrive, then ask the driver for a lift to the bottom. A couple of us did this manoeuvre with Keith's car – just riding in a racing Pug made our day – it was the next best thing to competing yourself.

Talking about carbie set-up for the Pugs reminds me of a few variations I have seen:

- The standard set-up with a single Solex bolted above the exhaust manifold – some replaced the Solex with a small downdraft twin-choke Weber
- Another was to leave the Solex as original, then bolt on a manifold (on the inlet side) to take say twin SU or even a sidedraft twin-choke Weber
- I chose to block off the original Solex inlet and use a manifold for twin Solexes over on the inlet side. I tried using twin Webers instead of the twin Solex on my 403 but found little improvement
- Some (Brigden, Bridge, Smith and others) used two sidedraft twin-choke Webers, or twin (then later four) 1½ inch SU carbies, or four Amal carbies.

That inlet side plate allowed a whole range of inlet mods for the enthusiast.

In early 1960s I bought a used 403 from Cecil R. Pierce, the Peugeot dealer at Pacific Highway, Gordon.

At this stage the old Peugeot Club withered and died, leaving me with a box of badges and records, which I passed on to the new PCC in 1973.



Jim Lever's 403 Nardi setup. Jim Lever collection



Keith Bridge (left) and Albert (centre). Jim Lever collection



Peter Orr at Warwick Farm, 1962. Gary Cooke collection

Around this time (early 1960s) I joined the Continental Car Club, where I again met Ken Brigden, who worked and lived at Gordon. Ken owned a 203C which he raced all over. Later Ken began to race a 403. I was in the pits at Warwick Farm one day when Ken drove the 403 out onto the grid. Moments later there was a terrific bang when his flywheel let go and destroyed a lot of his Pug.

I was speaking recently at my bowling club to Bill Cowan, who told me a little of his membership of the PCCNSW in early 1950s. (He was gone when I joined.) Bill was a mechanic who owned a Triumph TR2 when he joined.

One of his first competitions was in the beach sprints on Seven Mile Beach. His TR2 won the day on the sand. He also remembers working in a car sales business on Broadway near Central Railway, and of owning a few Pugs later on. Bill was also instrumental in helping to form the Eastern Suburbs Car Club.

One final memory: in the second half of 1969 I went to work at Mount Newman. I returned in 1970 and needed a car, so I went to see Norm Saville. He sold me a mid-dark green 1965 404, which he said he daughter Robyn had owned. I drove it extensively over the next several years. I remember that the paintwork was getting pretty thin, especially on the bonnet.

When I stuck on a large white number for a lap dash, it didn't come off completely. This meant a total respray. I stripped down the whole exterior (bumpers, chrome badges, stainless steel body strips).

When I traded it in on a 504 at Pymble Cars on the Pacific Highway, they couldn't believe the finish. It looked great – the extra work was worth it. I wish I still had that 404.



Ken Brigden at Catalina Park.  
Jim Lever collection



Peugeots make a slow start at Katoomba. Gary Cooke collection