

Ivan Washington and Bob Holden

By Paul Watson



GJY643 was known as Joey. Bob Holden collection

Ivan Washington met Bob Holden after the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Ivan had fitted his 203 with his copy of an Abarth twin-carburettor manifold. A friend named John “Dinga” Bell, who worked at A.G. Healings (Solex carbide agents), helped him change the carbide jetting to tune out the flat spots. Bob Holden was buying his carbide jets etc there, and John arranged an introduction.

Bob was racing at all the country and intermediate tracks, including Hume Weir, Bathurst and Orange in NSW and Tarrawingee in Victoria.

Ivan met Bob after a race meeting at Phillip Island, where Bob had his then supercharged 203 and finished a close second to Len Lukey’s V8

Customline in both touring car races. One night Bob took Ivan for a run along Ferntree Gully Road and they reached 100mph going down Wheelers Hill. The car had Repco oversize pistons and sleeves. (Asked about the Wheelers Hill incident recently, Bob said he didn’t remember it, but he did remember racing pushbikes up and down Wheelers Hill.)

In July 1957 Bob moved up to a 403 and returned the 203 to standard specifications, selling it to Ivan, who then set about changing it to non-standard again.

“Bob said he was going to race at Bathurst, and I wanted to go up there too, so my brother and I decided to follow him up there. My brother and I left

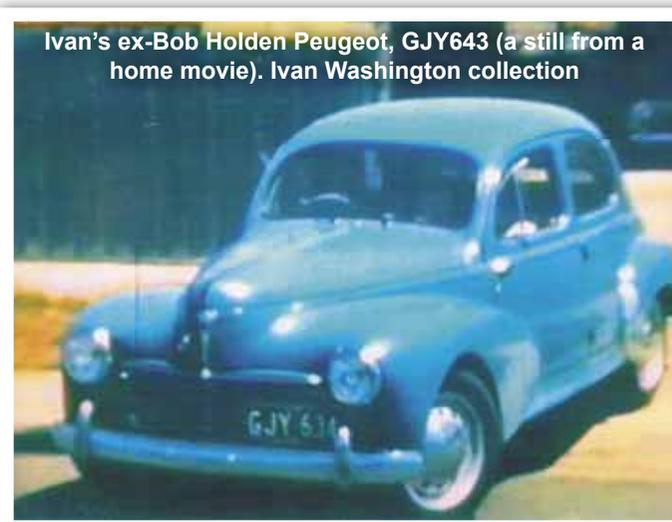
after work on the Friday and we were to meet Bob at a service station at Albury (or possibly Wagga) at 1am, because he was leaving later than us.

“He turned up an hour-and-a-half late so it was 2.30 in the morning and I know now that I shouldn’t have gone on because I was tired and not used to driving at night. Anyway, we followed him and I had no idea where we were going. We got up through Junee and it was a beautiful night with a full moon and you could pretty well drive without your headlights.

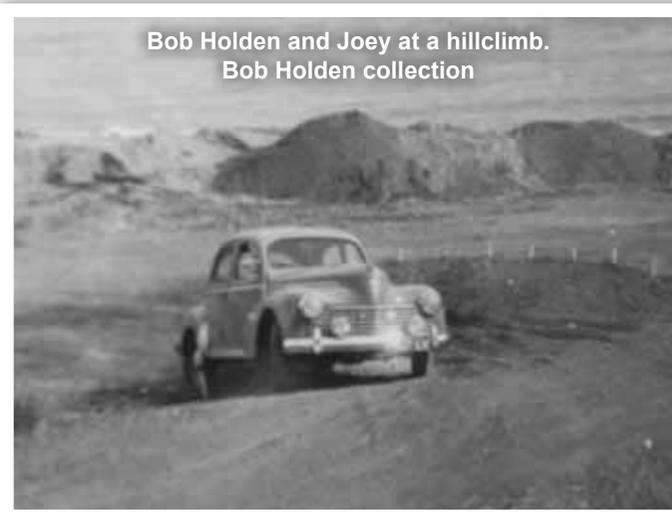
“Bob was being helpful and before he came to a bend he would put out his trafficator arm. We were doing about 60mph and due to the force of the wind on the trafficator arm, it wouldn’t return. So he decided to try to shake it in. So half-way round one bend he put his left-hand wheels off the bitumen and into the rough gravel to shake it in. I was about a quarter of a mile behind him and I got halfway round this bend and all of a sudden my headlights showed dust.

“I had no idea where I was going and as I was fatigued I probably wasn’t thinking clearly, and I thought I’d just hold the steering wheel in the same position and continue round the bend. The trouble was that the bend straightened out and I was running along in the gravel on the left-hand side of the road, so I thought I’d ease back to the right, just as the bend did a second turn to the left.

“I went off the road at an angle of about 30 or 40 degrees and through the fence beside the double Sydney-Melbourne railway track. They had dug a ditch about three feet deep and six feet wide beside the track to build it up, so I went right-hand front corner into that ditch, cartwheeled end-over-end over the tracks, landed upside-down on the tracks and came to rest on the other side of the double tracks with the nose pointing towards the tracks.



Ivan's ex-Bob Holden Peugeot, GJY643 (a still from a home movie). Ivan Washington collection



Bob Holden and Joey at a hillclimb. Bob Holden collection

“Seatbelts didn’t exist in those days. So I looked at my brother and said, ‘Are you all right?’ He said, ‘Yeah. Are you all right?’ So I said, ‘Yeah, let’s get out of here’.

“I couldn’t get out because the roof had been crushed down on the driver’s door. The rail had left an impression that went from the driver’s door to the back left-hand door. I had a bruise from where I was rattling around the car as it went over and I had hit my right knee on the window-winder handle. My glasses were still on my nose, so I didn’t have to look for them. No glass was broken, no doors came open.

“Bob had a chap with him named Laurie Graham, who used to rally in a 403 and in a 404 wagon later. His parents owned Gerrard’s wire manufacturing factory. He had noticed my headlights showing up the sky and they came back and we got the luggage out of my car and they took us to the Cootamundra hospital in the middle of the night. They kept us there overnight for observation.

“When we got out we hitchhiked to Bathurst and caught up with Bob in the pits. We slept on the ground and went home on the Monday with a friend who had a brand new Mark 2 Zephyr so we caught a ride and I drove part of the way home.”

Ivan had his 203 brought back to Melbourne, where it was repaired by Canada Cycles’ panel beaters in North Melbourne. Ivan then sold the car for a profit of 10 pounds and bought another 203.

In October 1957 Bob ran the 403 at the Bathurst meeting then in 1958 switched to an FE Holden, with which he had serious dramas at Bathurst. The black ex-taxi FE was one of the first cars fitted with a Repco Hi-Power head and was very successful for a couple of years. Bob had changed jobs and was working for Repco by then.

Ivan says: “Phil Irving designed the Hi-Power head. It’s interesting to compare a cross-section drawing of the cylinder head, valve, rocker gear and pushrod layout of the Repco and Pug 404 heads as they are virtually identical.”

In the 1960 Armstrong 500, Ivan remembers Bob having Panhard rod problems in his early 403, which was a common problem with that model. “The later models, when they went to the telescopic shockers, used a Panhard rod that was the same as the 203’s one, which was then continued into the 404.

“Bob told me that he put a C3 transmission in his car, which was worth one-and-a-half seconds a lap, chiefly coming out of Siberia, down in the far corner. That corner was too fast for second gear in the early model and there was too big a gap to third.”

Ivan was a fire marshal at Phillip Island for the 1961 Armstrong 500, in which Bob shared a 403 with Albert Bridge and Ken Brigden, coming fourth in their class. (There were no outright placings in those days, although the winner of the “big-car” class was assumed by everyone to have won the race.)

Albert Bridge’s brother Keith says Bob, Ken and Albert were leading their class when Albert was twice black-flagged for spilling fuel on the track. The seal on the 403’s hidden petrol filler had pulled out and two attempts were needed to fix it. Then the bolts holding the radius rods on to the torque tube came out, causing the handling to become erratic.

And for anyone who wants to know why the 203’s front doors are called suicide doors, here’s a cautionary tale involving a friend of Ivan’s who had a 203 and a girlfriend named Helen.



Joey gets a lean up. Bob Holden collection

“The first 203 I bought was just before the 1956 Olympic Games and I had this Abarth twin-carbie manifold Dad found in the shed of a bloke he’d bought a 203 off in Maribyrnong and so I made a copy of that before I even bought the car.

“The week after I bought the car I was in hospital having my appendix out. I was sick for five days. But on the sixth day after the operation I was tenderly leaning my tummy over the 203, fitting the twin carbies.”

After learning how to increase the gas speed so the Solex carbies would suit the manifold, Ivan had the engine capacity enlarged to 1400cc, thanks to some help from Bob and Repco.

After much more fiddling and modifying, the car did not perform as it should until Ivan removed the cloth air filter that had been making it breathe like an asthmatic.

After buying Bob Holden’s 203, Ivan sold the other car to a friend whose girlfriend was Helen.

“They were driving one Sunday on the Hume Highway and for some reason stopped by the side of the road and Helen got out where there was dry grass. She got back into the car and closed the door and when they were doing about 50mph she looked down and saw there was dry grass caught in the door.

“So she grabbed the door handle to let the dry grass out and next thing the door had swung around and hit the back mudguard and she was trying to hold on to the door and shot out like an ejector seat. She had a summer dress



Joey in a hillclimb. Bob Holden collection

on and every part of her body that she was game to show me was covered in mercurochrome. She lost a lot of skin and I don’t know how long she was in hospital for. She easily could have been killed if she’d hit a guide post or something with her head.”