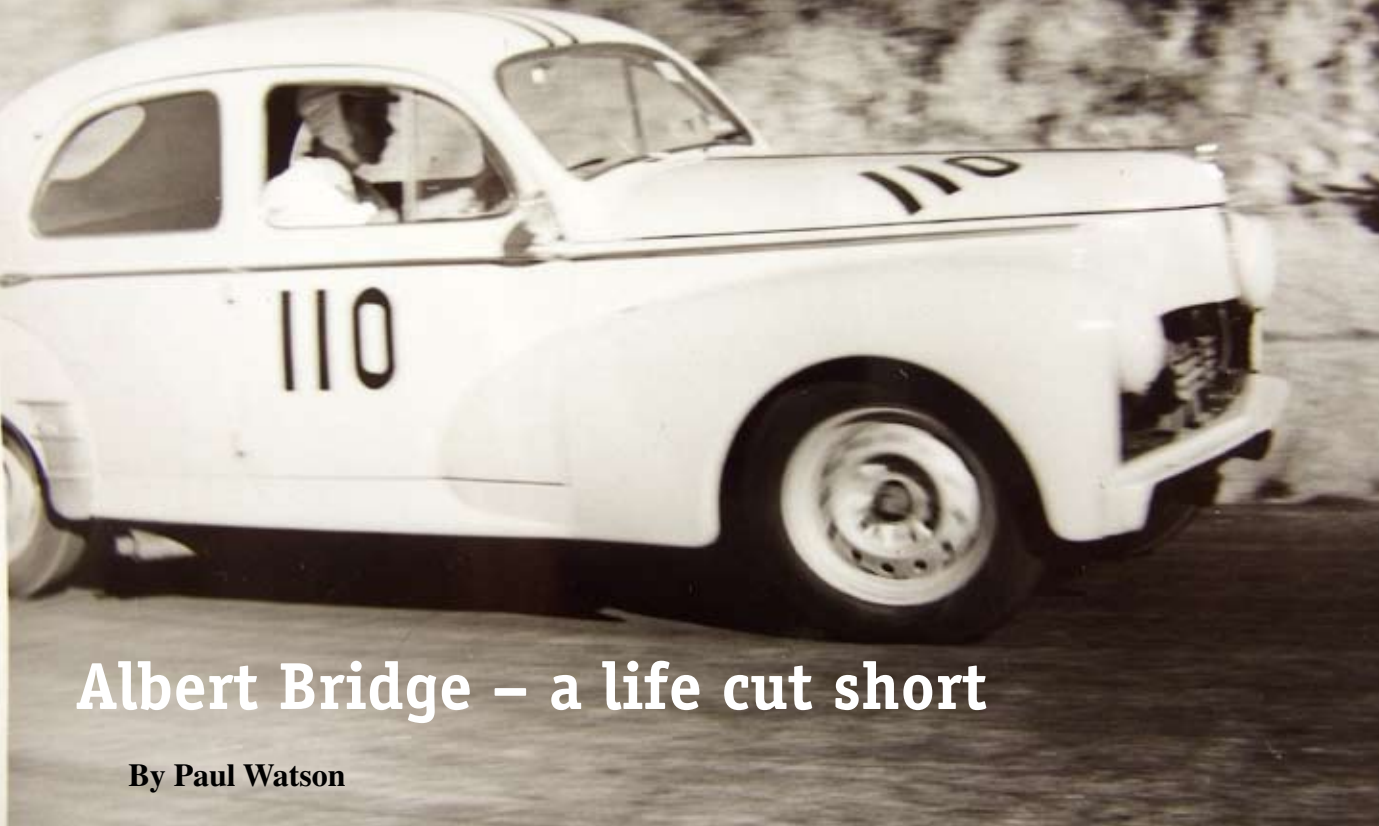


Albert Bridge at Bathurst.
Jim Lever collection



Albert Bridge – a life cut short

By Paul Watson

One of the brightest stars in NSW Peugeot circles in the late 1950s and early 1960s was Albert Bridge from Nowra, the brother of Keith, Robert and Fay Bridge.

Their dad, Keith senior, was a motor mechanic and drove a 203 sedan, while Keith had a ute.

When he was 20 Albert bought a pale green 1954 203A, which had previously been owned by a local GP and Peugeot fancier, Dr John Oldham, who had moved on to a 1957 Peugeot 403.* Using Phil Irving's book *Tuning for Speed* as his reference, Albert heavily modified the engine of the car so that it went like a startled gazelle.

He won events at the Nowra hill climb and was just beaten in a sprint on the sand at Gerringong's Seven Mile Beach, but he wanted to mix it with the big boys.

So he entered events on the country circuit – driving to Orange and Tarrawingee, then pulling out anything that could be removed to save weight – and obtained a CAMS licence for open events.

At the Bathurst Easter meeting in 1960 he entered his 1468cc 203 in the combined GT-sports car event against such legends-to-be as the Geoghegan brothers, Peter Manton, Bill Buckle and Brian Foley. He was placed fourth in the GT class. He also took third place in the Appendix K GT race, winning a silver tray and 18 pounds prizemoney. The car was clocked doing 117mph (188kmh) down Conrod Straight. Ken Brigden, Norm Saville and K. Watts all drove Peugeots in the same race.

In October 1960, Albert raced in the 50-mile Australian GT Championship at Bathurst. He was doing well and his brothers were closely watching his progress after a few laps but were horrified when his car wasn't to be seen as the field passed the pits. Then there was news of a fatal crash on the mountain, and Keith and Robert were starting to panic when Albert came walking back to the pits, carrying a broken fan belt

In the second Armstrong 500, held at Phillip Island in 1961, Albert shared a 403 with Peugeot specialists Bob Holden and Ken Brigden. They were leading their class when the car was twice black-flagged for spilling fuel on the track. The seal on the 403's hidden petrol filler had been dislodged and two attempts were needed to fix it. Then a bolt holding the radius rod on to the torque tube came out, and the Panhard rod chewed out its bushes, causing the handling to become erratic. Despite these problems the car was fourth in its class, not far behind two other 403s.

At Bathurst's Easter meeting in 1961, Albert came home ninth outright in a gran turismo scratch race, two places ahead of Ken Brigden. Albert also



Albert Bridge leads Ken Brigden at the Cutting, Easter 1960.

**Norm Linehan, Bathurst:
*Cradle of Australian Motor Racing***

took second place in his class. In the Main Event for GT Cars, Albert was placed seventh, with the Peugeots of Bill Cooke and Ken Brigden further back.

Jim Lever, who belonged to the original Peugeot Car Club of NSW in those days, remembers Albert well, particularly when he turned up for the annual sprints at Seven Mile Beach, near Gerringong.

“The hardest thing was driving through the deep sand from the dirt road to the hard-packed sand surface. I remember driving my 203, Charlie Smith with his 403 and the two 203s of Ken Brigden and Albert Bridge. Ken was an established circuit racer with his 203 (sand colour) which we all believed to be the fastest 203 in NSW. So when this young guy turned up at the beach with his 203 (pale green) fitted with motorcycle-style megaphones instead of mufflers, he shocked the crowd. I think it suddenly became the hottest 203 in town.

Albert Bridge's 403 is passed by Bill Pitt's Jag, Bathurst, October 1961.

George Reed, *Cradle of Australian Motor Racing*.



“He ran twin 1_ inch SU carbies with the usual extractors down the side of the motor (plus those megaphones – that was the first and last time I saw them used – the noise was shattering). Ken also ran twin 1_ inch SU carbies but had unique extractor system which came out directly from the cylinder head, through the bodywork and down within the front mudguard, around the suspension and along under the floor to exit near the rear wheel.

“Ken and Albert went on to have some spirited competition at various NSW race tracks, including Warwick Farm, Catalina Park and Bathurst.“

Jim said the beach sprints were unique. “I raced at Seven Mile Beach. I remember my 203 being a bit slow on the damp sand, running something like 25 seconds or so for the 1/4 mile.. At low tide the surface was very flat and suited to this activity. Anything with a bit of horsepower had little trouble getting up to a decent speed.

“I don’t know how they got permission to run the event, but it was a regular annual bash and well attended.

“I remember speaking with Albert and Keith at their home in Nowra where I sometimes dropped in unannounced. They had a large shed in the back yard where the 203 was garaged. One time I drove up and walked around when Albert had the Pug in pieces – head off – manifolds everywhere. Albert got a shock when I turned up and he commented that he hoped Ken Brigden wouldn’t be doing the same. (Ken might have learned some of Albert’s tricks if he stuck his head under the bonnet like I did – I didn’t understand what I was looking at, luckily).

“I remember a couple of times when Albert took the 203 to Bathurst. On one occasion Albert ran the 203 with small-diameter rear tyres and managed to top 100mph up Mountain Straight.

“I used to travel down the South Coast for holidays and any car events I could find. There was a popular hill climb on a public road (closed for the day) just west from Albion Park. Keith and Albert were very involved in the running of events at Nowra Hill – as well as competing.

“I remember on one occasion Keith was trying to fix up a misfire in an Austin 7 single-seater. He removed the distributor points and was cleaning them. Suddenly he shouted, ‘These points are as black as shit!’ He spun around to see if anyone had heard, because back in those days this exclamation was a bit on the rude side. We all had a laugh about that. This memory has stuck in the back of my head for all these 50 years.



**The 203 in the pits in the early 1960s.
Rex Robinson collection**

“There were several ‘boys’ who ran Peugeots in the Nowra area. Just to hear them chat about their cars and the way they ‘flicked the column shift from overdrive back down to third gear’ – it was so much better than any Holden you could imagine. At that time it was a real Peugeot-versus-Holden world, as new car prices were very similar (it was 1,000 pounds or so).

“Another time I called in to see the Bridge boys I was disappointed they were out somewhere. So I set off home across the Shoalhaven bridge and on towards Berry. Suddenly Albert caught up with me in his Pug. We pulled over just before the road branched off to Jamberoo Valley. He didn’t want to miss my visit (unannounced as usual) and so we managed to have a good old chat. That was what it was like – a very casual friendship – with very occasional contact – but with a common purpose – Peugeots. I valued these meetings greatly.

“Albert was growing his auto business locally. He spoke of a local enthusiast with a Valiant which Albert had ‘tuned’. He said he got it to the stage when it would spin its wheels in top gear along the backstreet behind his home. Another car he weaved his magic over was a Sprite (white two-door sports) which I saw race at Warwick Farm – it went like a rocket. Albert turned his hand to fabricating exhaust extractors (four pipes into two and two into one). I bought one for my 403 but my grand plans did not materialise. I remember I had the extractors aluminium sprayed (to avoid corrosion) – they looked great in pure white. They lay on the floor under my bed for several

years while I planned just how I’d use them, then I moved on to a 404 and they were no longer useful for me.”

Keith says that Albert was keen to get into open-wheeler racing and designed and built a space frame, to which a Rennmax body was fitted. The car used the motor from the race car, connected to a VW gearbox (turned upside-down so the cars went in the desired direction). Albert raced the car at Warwick Farm in December 1962 but it didn’t handle well and he redesigned the front and rear suspension and rebuilt it. It was entered for another Warwick Farm meeting in February 1963 but during testing it broke a tie-rod end, crashed and rolled end over end, landing on its back. Incredibly, Albert’s injuries were limited to severe abrasions on his back and a bad headache. Keith said Albert’s helmet saved him. The racing ace David McKay was one of the first on the scene and helped Albert from the damaged car.

The car was put away under the house of the brothers’ parents and stayed there for many years until the house was sold and Keith decided to do something with it. He repaired the body while Robert fixed the frame and



**Albert on the grid at Warwick Farm with mechanic and friend Hughie McLean.
Rex Robinson collection.**



Albert on the Causeway at Warwick Farm.
Rex Robinson collection



Albert keeps an eye on the owners of Lynx, John Brudelin and Leon Thomas.
Rex Robinson collection

they put an engine in it, then they had it on display at the celebrations for the Shoalhaven and Kiama District Auto Club's 50th anniversary. (Keith was the club's first president and held that position for 10 years.)

"It created a sensation," said Keith. They also took the car to Goulburn in January 2012 for the 85th anniversary of what was claimed to be the first Australian Grand Prix, although the race was not sanctioned as such.

The Shoalhaven and Kiama District Auto Club, is pushing for the creation of a motor sport complex at Nowra and the open-wheeler is being used to promote the idea.

Albert was to share a 404 with Bob Holden in the 1963 Armstrong 500 at Bathurst, but was killed when he was a passenger in a car on a trip to Sydney to collect bits for a new Lotus 25-style racing car that Albert was building for Rex Robinson.

The accident happened on the Back Appin Road near Campbelltown. The car, being driven by a friend, crashed on a bend. Albert was thrown from the car and died of his injuries. He was 25.

Rex, who is a builder and lives in Canberra, said: "Albert did some work on my first race car, a Buchanan MG. He was fantastic with extractors and things like that."

Rex said Albert was a highly talented automotive engineer. "While he was a marvellous driver, his future would have been in Europe, building Formula I cars, that's what he would have been doing. He was a sensational fabricator."

After Albert's death, Keith repainted the 203 dark green and his wife Hilma used it as her everyday car until they bought a 404 wagon. The 203 then sat in the shed until Keith and Hilma's son Trevor started driving. Keith put the car back on the road after cutting out rust, repainting the body and refreshing the engine.

Five years later Trevor bought a Datsun 1600 and the 203 went back into the shed again. But in 2005 Keith decided that he would restore Albert's car to its past glory, hoping to have it finished by Easter 2010, the 50th anniversary of Albert's first race at Bathurst. He hoped to take it to the Festival of Motor



The great David McKay checks out Albert's car.
Rex Robinson collection



Lex Davison in a low-line Cooper Climax. In the background, are Albert and a very thin Kevin Bartlett.
Rex Robinson collection

Robert and Keith Bridge with Albert's 203.



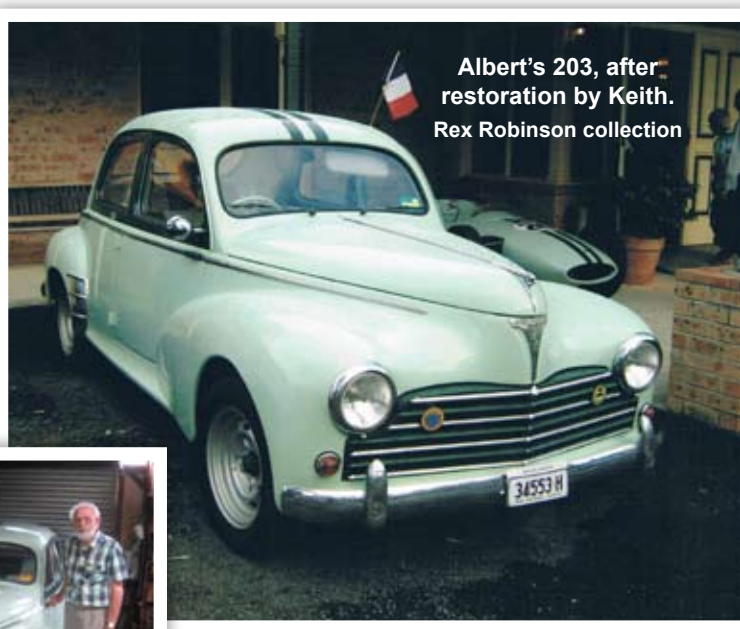
**Keith Bridge (left) and Albert (centre).
Jim Lever collection**



Sport but didn't quite make that objective. Still, anyone who has seen the car since its completion in 2010 will agree that the result justified the delay.

In recent times the car was used for the 2012 Peugeot Pageant at Young, where it was awarded the Mayor's Choice prize, and in the Kick Start Rally at Nowra.

Keith and Robert had another racing 203, which they took turns to drive at meetings at Oran Park and Warwick Farm, among others. The engine was the same configuration as in Albert's car. When Robert crashed the car he



decided to move over to motorcycle competition and the car sat in the shed for a while until Keith decided to rally it. Just for something different he cut the tail off, making it a bobtail 203.

Son Trevor used the car in hill climbs, including one near Nowra, where competitors started at the top of the hill, drove to the bottom then turned and climbed to the top again.

The bobtail 203 is still in Keith's collection, along with Albert's race car and Keith's 203 ute.

* Coincidentally, Paul Watson was born in Nowra and spent the first two years of his life in the house where the Oldhams later lived. One of Dr Oldham's daughters later married Paul's second cousin.

(With acknowledgement to Keith Bridge, Jim Lever, John Medley, Rex Robinson and the South Coast Register)

Some Bathurst results have been taken from *Bathurst: Cradle of Australian Motor Racing*, by John Medley.

