

Norm and Bill – a couple of lads

By Paul Watson

Norm Saville and Bill Cooke were prominent in racing and rallying in the 1950s.

They entered the 1954 Redex Trial in a 203 and came home 88th in a field of 120 finishers. A photograph of them in Perth appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on July 16, 1954. It shows Norm standing up through the sunroof while Bill drives through the city.

In 1955 they switched to a Vanguard Spacemaster and were among the front runners when, near Katherine, the fuel sender short-circuited and the car burst into flames. They had to jump for their lives from the burning car, which was destroyed. Norm and Bill were taken to hospital but were not seriously injured.



The start of the 1954 Redex Trial.

CARS REACH PERTH



With the most difficult stages behind them, Redex trial competitors were yesterday driving into Perth. The picture shows Bill Cook's Peugeot, halted at an intersection in St. George's Terrace, Perth. His co-driver, Norm Saville is inspecting the capital through the car's sliding roof.

Norm and Bill reach Perth in the 1954 Redex Trial. *Sydney Morning Herald*

In October 1955, Norm entered his 203, described in the program as being of 1200cc, in a six-lap sedan car handicap. Holdens filled the first three places and Norm's placing was not recorded. At the same meeting he competed in a sedan and sports car race, which attracted a big field. MG TCs were first, second and third but the other placings are unknown.

At the Bathurst Easter meeting in 1956, Bill Cooke entered two races in an MG TF but we cannot tell how he fared. At the October 1956 meeting Bill was in a 403 and raced against Norm's 203 in a sports and sedan car handicap race, which also involved Bob Holden. Bill's 403 was second to David McKay in a Simca, and Bob Holden's 1498cc 203 was placed fifth.

PCCNSW president Clive Hutchison noted in his August 1957 *Bulletin* column that Bill Cooke's 203 looked the exact twin of Norm Saville's. "They both raced at Mount Druitt last meeting and Terry Byrne the announcer had a job to tell who was who. They will be competing again at Mount Druitt on Aug. 11 and by the time you have read this I hope they will have cleaned up everything because it looks as if the under 1500cc boys will have to watch both studs of the Cooke and Saville stable. By the way, Bill's pet name for his steed is 'Me Old Mare', she's a country girl and quite used to the open spaces and therefore shouldn't get lonesome as he should pilot her out in front of the rest of the field."

Elsewhere in the same column, president Clive reported that at the Camden motorkhana the month before, there had been an incident when Norm was competing. "Things almost took a serious turn when Norm Saville snapped his wrist band and gouged a piece out of his wrist when it caught on the spokes of his steering wheel and sent his very potent 203 hurtling in

the most undesirable direction. This reminds us of how simply accidents can happen as Norm would be one of our most capable racing drivers. He received a very nasty shock.”

Ken Brigden still holds an admiration for the cleverness of Bill and Norm: “Cooke and Saville used to try everything in the book to beat me. They had their engine sealed one meeting and – you’ve got to give it to them – somehow they slipped their whole engine out through the wire and put back another engine, without breaking the wire.” Source: *Australian Touring Car Championship – 25 Fabulous Years*.

In October 1957, Bill’s 403, now 1498cc, came fifth in the handicap section of the NSW Championship for Touring Cars at Bathurst. Bob Holden’s 203 was third. An N. Bolton entered a 1468cc Peugeot in the same race. Those three entered a sedan and sports car event, and Bob Holden came home fifth, behind four sports cars.

At the Bathurst Easter meeting in 1958, Norm was placed sixth in a sedan car handicap event, while Bill entered a Peugeot special in the Bathurst 100 for racing cars but, for reasons unknown, did not start.

In October the same year, Norm was up against Ken Brigden and K.M. Williams in a sedan car scratch race, all in 403s. Norm was second in their class, but Bob Holden was third outright in the Repco Holden. Later in the meeting, the four met again in a sedan car handicap, in which Keith Williams was first on Handicap.

At Easter 1959, Norm, Bill, Ken Brigden and Keith Williams entered their 403s in the sedan car scratch race. The race was won by David McKay in his 3.4 litre Jag, with Ken 10th and Norm 13th. Bob Holden entered two cars in that race: his 203, which did not start, and his Repco Holden, which won its class and took second place outright.

In another sedan car scratch race at the same meeting, also won by David McKay, Ken was eighth, Bill was 11th, Norm was 12th and Keith Williams 17th. Bob Holden entered both his cars but did not start in the 203. The Repco Holden’s placing is not recorded.

According to *Worm Drive* from October 1959, Norm and Bill were partners in a scrap metal business [run from Norm’s home] and had competed in Redex, Ampol and Mobilgas Trials. They also ran Cooke & Saville Motors and when the time came for the two businesses to be split, they tossed a coin. Bill got the recycling business and Norm got garage, which became Norm Saville Motors and for a time sold Mazda as well as Peugeot.



Bill Cooke running third at Catalina Park. Jim Lever collection

Bill Cooke's Pug single seater at Bathurst. Jim Lever collection



Below: Denis Cooke winning at Oran Park, 1964. Gary Cooke collection





Norm Saville, with his preferred racing number, 28. Robyn Duffy collection

The president noted in that same issue that Norm's car "acquits itself very well, 105mph, and Charlie Smith's isn't exactly dawdling. Bobby Holden's 203C really went fast too. Now Billy Cooke has built a racing car out of 203 bits and pieces and in less than two months from the time of commencement, the car completed in its first meeting and that was on the last holiday weekend at Bathurst."

Clive goes on to say how the car handles like a 203, has no problem in braking with 203 drums, was quick off the mark, and did 112mph down Conrod". Clive said a floor change would be fitted, but said the car was "as docile as a 'hack' but as lively as a cricket".

But the car was not without its problems. "Troubles encountered at Bathurst were one valve head protruding through combustion chamber into water jacket and one valve stem in sump, visible through piston; also a bit of gear linkage trouble."

Another entry about Bathurst said: "Daredevil Cooke cut quite a figure in new white shirt and pants crouched over the wheel of a gleaming white special. Getting reprimands, throwing rev counters at the clerk of the course."

At that meeting in October 1959, Bill entered his 1468cc Peugeot special in the first qualifying heat for the NSW Road Racing Championship for racing cars but his name does not appear in the first 10 finishers. In the next event, the NSW road racing championship for sedan cars, Ken Brigden was first in class, but the placings of Norm and K. Watts are not listed in the results.

Worm Drive also reported that at the same meeting "Saville and Smith grogging on the hill to late hours and on race day they had ice boxes full".

At the Easter 1960 meet, Norm, Albert Bridge and K. Watts competed in the sedan and gran turismo scratch race in 1468cc Pugs, while the engine capacity of Ken Brigden's car is listed as being 1650cc. Albert was placed eighth overall.

In October of the same year, Bill was driving a 1598cc 403 in the second qualifying heat for touring cars, but did not rate a mention in the first 10 finishers, the first six places being filled by Holdens. But Bill's son Denis drove the 1598cc 403 in the NSW Touring Car Championship, without appearing in the results. K. Watts drove in the same event.

At the Easter 1961 event, Bill entered his Peugeot (designation unknown) in the three-lap touring car scratch race, with a big field of 22 starters. He came home 15th outright and second in his class. K. Watts was 22nd outright and Bob Holden's Repco Holden sixth. In the main event for gran turismo cars, this time 10 laps, Bill, Albert Bridge and Ken Brigden all took part,



The engine in Norm Saville's 203. Gary Cooke collection



Gary Cooke at Katoomba. Gary Cooke collection



with Albert taking seventh place outright. In the main event for touring cars, where Bob Holden's Holden was second outright, Bill and K. Watts were unplaced.

For the Easter 1962 meeting, Norm's 203, Bill's 403 and Gary Cooke's 203 were entered by Cooke & Saville Motors in the 10-lap touring car handicap. Ken Brigden and K. Watts had 1500cc Pugs in the event. The race was won by a Killara Motor Garage Simca, driven by Martin Faithfull. The results show that second place was filled by a Studebaker Lark, driven by Bob Holden. Yes in the program, the Lark is shown as being driven by W. Slattery. Very strange. Another touring car scratch race later in the program, Ken Brigden took part, without troubling the scorers.

The boys were very active at the Easter 1963 meeting and again had three cars in the touring car scratch race: Norm and J. Robinson in 203s and Bill in his 1598cc 403. But they were outclassed by Ken Brigden, who took first



place in the under 1600cc class in his 1545cc 403. Later in the day, there were three Cooke & Saville Motors entries in the eight-lap touring car scratch race: Norm and J. Robinson in 203s and Bill and son Denis in the 403. H. Fenton also drove a 203 and Ken Brigden his 403. H. Fenton took second place behind a VW in the 1101-1300cc class, with Norm in third. Ken Brigden's 403 was first past the post in the 1301-1600cc class.

The last appearance of Cooke & Saville Motors in the book *Bathurst: Cradle of Australian Motor Racing* is at the Easter 1964 meeting, where Bill drove his 1598cc Pug in the touring car scratch race (won by Bob Jane's Jag) and the NSW Touring Car Championship (won by the Geoghegan brothers' Cortina GT).

TOURING CAR RACE, 1001-1600 c.c. - 5 Laps

1001-1300 c.c.

32	Riverside Service Stn. (Dvr: K. Fisher)	Volkswagen
33	G. Reynolds (Vic.)	Volkswagen
34	Cooke & Saville Motors (Dvr: G. Cooke)	Peugeot 203
35	" " " (Dvr: N. Saville)	Peugeot 203c
36	Epping Motors (Dvr: W.S. King)	Peugeot 203
37	Killara Motor Garage (Dvr: M. Faithfull)	Peugeot 203
38	J. Robinson	Peugeot 203c
39	Armstrong Baker P/L. (Dvr: R. Shesby)	Simca Monthlery
40	Scuderia Octagon (Dvr: W. Carden)	Simca Aronde
41	R.N. Puckeridge	Fiat 1100
42	A. Hemsley	Morris 10/4
43	G. Geshopoulos (Reserve)	Volkswagen
44	Darling Harbour Garage (Dvr: G. Cook) (Reserve)	Volkswagen
45	K. Johnston (Reserve)	Simca Aronde
46	R. Lyons (Reserve)	Simca Aronde

1301-1600 c.c.

47	K. Bridgen	Peugeot 403
48	Killara Motor Garage (Dvr: R.J. Holden)	Peugeot 403
49	Cooke & Saville Motors (Dvr: W. Cooke)	Peugeot 403
50	Bemar Engineering (Dvr: I.C. Barberie)	Austin Lancer
51	R. Smyth	Austin Lancer
52	Jamison Motors (Dvr: D. Williams)	Austin Lancer
53	T. Ford	Austin Lancer
54	R.J. Burrows	Morris Major
55	R. Martin	Morris Major
56	Alison Motors (Dvr: R. Kaleda)	Morris Major
57	P. Brown (A.C.T.)	Wolsley

Peugeots aplenty entered at Warwick Farm, 5 August 1962

Gary and Denis Cooke both raced Peugeots for years, as well as Minis and other cars. Gary's 203 was timed at 113mph at Bathurst and Denis had a black 203 sports sedan with a white stripe, known as the skunk.

Gary's car once suffered an engine fire at Bathurst, but the damaged fuel line was replaced in time for the next race. Gary turned to speedway when he lost his licence at 18. His best mate was Geoff Freeman, who persuaded him to try the circuit, usually at Westmead. He found the 203 performed like a circuit car, even without modification.

When I bought my first 404 in 1972, Norm was regarded as the doyen of Peugeot dealers. Norm always had the best used cars, really nicely kept 404s and 504s, plus the occasional 203 or 403.

The parts department was excellent and the mechanics knew their stuff. Plus there was the added attraction of the junkyard dog in the wrecking yard out the back. She was called Lady and had been trained to go mad if someone said "cat". At that time there was a French mechanic names Georges, who would refer to a 404 in the French style, "quatre cent quatre". To poor Lady this sounded like "cats on cats", and she would go wild, racing up and down between wrecked cars, looking for the cats.

There is a sad end to the Norm Saville story. In 1979 he and two friends from Auburn Lions Club drove a 504 in the Repco Trial. (The car was the 504 that Ross Dunkerton had driven in the 1977 London to Sydney Rally with Bob Watson and Roger Bonhomme. They finished fifth outright and were first in the 1300 to 2000cc class in it.)

They were near Derby in northern Western Australia, about 7am, and Norm was driving. He was blinded by dust and the rising sun as he came over a crest. The car went out of control and rolled and the two crew members, John Fyvie and Peter Harris, were killed. Norm, who was injured, was pulled from the wreck by Peter "Flash" Flanagan, who was running near the front of the rally field but gave up any chance of success in the rally and took Norm to hospital at Kununurra. Flash, who is a well-known Peugeot enthusiast, said Norm told him that he and his friends had "cut and run" to make up time and had ended up closer to the front of the field than they had wanted to be.



The Saville, Fyvie, Harris 504 during the 1979 Repco Reliability Trial.

It was not an event that could be laughed off, like the Vanguard fire of 1955.

Although nobody blamed Norm for the freak accident, he took it very badly and died of cancer a few months later. His daughter Robyn believes that the accident was a factor in his death.

This excerpt comes from The Pugilist in 2003, a report by Peter Wilson on the 30th anniversary dinner:

Robyn Duffy, an early stalwart and daughter of the late Norm Saville, a noted Peugeot dealer and Peugeot sporting identity, said: "I'm sure dad would be here in spirit tonight."

Delighted to be back with old friends, Robyn told of growing up in a Peugeot household.

Her first memories as a toddler were of being dumped in the pits at the Castlereagh Speed Strip or at a car race meeting somewhere, she said.

Her mother had said only recently: "Dad never thought the car wouldn't get us home" (after racing it).

Robyn recalled the excitement of club sporting events and of the fun in committee meetings, some held at her home.

"I'm pleased to say that my children drive Peugeots," she said.



Norm Saville's 203. Robyn Duffy collection

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Jim Lever, Robyn Duffy, Gary and Denis Cooke for providing photos and information. Many of the Bathurst results have been taken from *Bathurst: Cradle of Australian Motor Racing*, by John Medley.