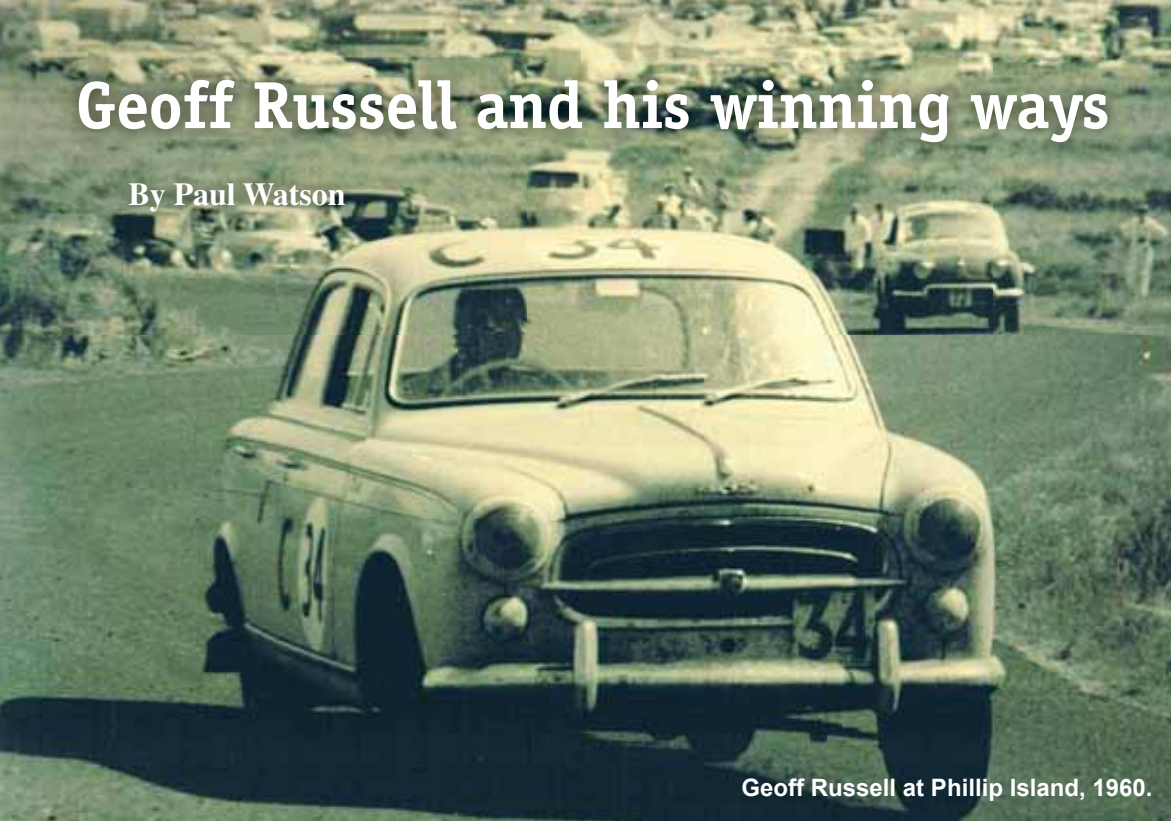


# Geoff Russell and his winning ways

By Paul Watson



Geoff Russell at Phillip Island, 1960.

Australia's most consistently successful racing and rallying Peugeot 403s were driven by Geoff Russell and co-driver David Anderson. With the noted Tony Luxton as relief driver, they won their class in the 1960 Armstrong 500, and some say they recorded the lowest time overall. (This has been a hot topic for 50 years; see the accompanying story.)

But even if the 1468cc 403 was behind the 2262cc Vauxhall Cresta of Frank Coad and John Roxburgh, it still beat home all the other competitors in the "big car" classes including a 4458cc Ford Customline V8, a 2088cc six-cylinder Vanguard, a 220SE Mercedes, and the newly released 2364cc Ford Falcon XK.

With another 403, driven by Bob Holden and Ken Brigden fourth in the class, and Ron Lilley and Jim Gullan's 403 finishing eighth, the three Peugeots won the 1960 Teams Prize.

In 1961, Geoff and David won the class again, one of three 403s in the first four places in Class C. The others were Bill Coe and Ron Lilley (second in class) and Bob Holden, Ken Brigden and Albert Bridge (fourth in class),

with the three 403s winning the outright Teams Prize for the second time.

There was no award or provision for an outright winner until the 1965 event, with the Race Regulations being quite specific: each class would be run as a separate event, starting with the large-capacity class away first, followed by other classes starting at 10-second intervals. In 1960, 1961 and 1962 cars were classified and grouped by engine capacity, and in 1963 and 1964 by their retail price, the whole concept of the Armstrong 500 being to demonstrate and compare the performance and reliability of standard production saloons competing against each other within their own class.

In the 1960 event when the Vauxhall crossed the line, the media descended, instigating the "outright winner" tag, which was then invalidly and irresponsibly used, causing the organising committee and the sponsor, Armstrong York, some concern, having taken pains to present to the industry this concept of equal exposure, and as to the effect this could have on future trade participation.

It is noteworthy that subsequently in the Manual of Motor Sport, CAMS itself published only the outright placings for the 1960 to 1964 events. One could be excused for expecting the sport's governing body, to whom all supplementary regulations are submitted for approval and compliance with the manual, not to be in breach of approved supplementary regulations, and also be in breach of its own requirements.

Geoff Russell is in his mid-80s and lives in Queensland and well remembers how he got into motor sport in the latter years of World War II.

Geoff was born in Melbourne and grew up "near the Clifton Hotel" in Studley Park, in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. He undertook a course in industrial management, which included a four-year engineering apprenticeship and four years of cost accounting, and methods engineering.

Then followed three years of contract harvesting in the Griffith irrigation area of NSW, which was "most rewarding in every way, a great experience with a resultant bank account of some merit".

In 1955 he married, started his own business embracing custom industrial design and production engineering projects.

"I was always interested in cars," Geoff said. When he was a boy he had a pedal car and his father used to put him behind the wheel of the family Buick and let him "steer".

He well remembers his first car – an 11.9 hp Bullnose Morris Cowley fitted with a Brescia Bugatti body, “no floorboards or hood, and little other aids to comfort. I still have the original owner’s certificate showing me as the tenth owner. The car cost me 30 pounds, plus a fiver for a new tyre.

“At Christmas 1964 I was invited to spend some time during the holidays at ‘Phoines’, the McNicols’ Casterton property. I decided to drive there in the Morris, it being my only ‘reliable’ form of transport, a terminology somewhat qualified by two of the wheels having 440 section tyres worn right down to the canvas. Using a couple of 19 X 550s with damaged walls but reasonable tread, I cut the beads off and fitted them over the outside of the 440s. With the two other tyres, using pressure adhesive, stretched the thick rubber linings they put in truck wheels, around the outside over the old tread, and with one new spare, confidently started out for Casterton, about 220 miles from Melbourne, not far from the South Australian border.

“We lived just off Studley Park Road and I left with my father somewhat doubtful about the whole thing as I was just 17. The first (and only) puncture I got was at the bottom of the Studley Park Road hill, at 8 o’clock in the morning and less than two miles from home! As I was changing the wheel Dad came down on his way to the office. He pulled up. ‘Are you all right son?’ I replied, ‘Yes, I’m fine’, and he said, ‘Are you sure you’re all right? Good luck, call us when you get there’. I was encouraged he’d said ‘when’ and not ‘if you get there’. Of course there were no mobile phones, in those days one’s only help was self-generated.

“As petrol was still being rationed I was running on kerosene most of the time. I had the copper fuel lines wrapped around the exhaust manifold, and a T model Ford carburettor that once you got going, you could screw the main jet right down, starting on petrol then switch to kero.

“It took me all day to get there because it kept on boiling and running out of water, with many frequent visits to farm dams, which as a matter of interest, are generally located close to the road. The Cowley had no water pump, relying solely on thermo-syphon for coolant circulation, which on a hot summer’s day in the Australian bush, fell far short of the task.

“Anyway, I finally arrived at Casterton, spending a couple of great weeks there before driving the Morris back home without incident. It shows as a young bloke I had set out with the confidence of youth and not a second thought. But that was the norm. When I got back all the boys just said, ‘How

did you go – get there OK?’ It didn’t strike us as being anything remarkable but a lot of fun.”

Geoff then decided to build himself a vintage special. “It all started when I felt that the Morris had earned itself a valve grind. Little did I know what that decision would eventually lead to. A friend, I think it may have been Ted Hider-Smith, gave me a (pre-war) Morris Minor chassis, and being lighter than the Cowley’s, I decided to use that. Another chap I got to know was Arthur Lidsey, who raced midgets (speedcars) at Maribyrnong speedway. He had some 5th Series Lancia Lambda bits but had never done anything with them. I paid him 15 quid or so, and included four wheels, front end, gearbox and diff. When I brought them home and looked at the chassis I thought, ‘this Morris Minor chassis just isn’t at all suited to be used together with Lancia front suspension’.

“I then decided the solution to the problem was to build myself a new one incorporating the Lancia tubular front end. Having made the decision, I then had to find the material. It was at the end of the war and steel of any sort was nearly impossible to obtain, but I discovered some 2 1/4 inch 10 gauge seamless steel tubing at the New York junkyard in Gipps Street Collingwood. I could now set about building what was to eventually become the Russell Morris special.”

Next problem was to then find somewhere to lay out the frame. “We had a large fernery but mother seemed to completely ignore my not-unreasonable suggestion that it would be better employed as a venue for building Australian specials.

“However the problem was resolved when my parents went away to Sorrento for the weekend. It was a golden opportunity to make use of our large kitchen floor, that with 6 inch square patterned lino, when divested of the table and chairs was, as I later pointed out to father, was the ideal facility for the full-scale layout/design/construction of Morris Cowley specials. Short-sighted if you will, he did not agree.

“I had used an electric arc welder Ken Hume lent me to tack all the bits together, but with parental return on Sunday evening somewhat earlier than expected, there was not time to hide, by the strategic replacement of kitchen furniture, the odd burn or two that had somehow inexplicably appeared. They were very long-suffering but understanding parents, and all was forgiven.

“In February 1944 I joined G.N. Raymond and would catch a bus in Studley Park road to the works in Collingwood. In those days if anyone was



waiting at a bus stop you'd pull up and offer them a lift. One day a bloke in a Lancia Lambda stopped for me and we naturally got around to discussing vintage cars.

"When I mentioned I was building a special, he said so was he. I asked if I could come and see it, and when he gave me his address I thought, 'That looks familiar'. Anyway when I arrived he opened the door and introduced himself as Charlie Dean. And behind him was his wife who said 'Hello Geoff, what a surprise' and threw her arms around me. But the really surprised one was Charlie, who was completely nonplussed and said, 'What's going on? Who the hell's this young bloke?'

"It was some years earlier that I had met Charlie's wife through her cousin Loraine, whom I was taking out at the time, and was living there as her companion while Charlie was away serving overseas as a captain in the AIF. As a threesome we would often see a movie or go dancing together, and became good friends.

"When we explained how we had come to know each other it was quite hilarious, with Charlie seeing the funny side of it as much as, if not more than, we did.



**Charlie Dean in the Maybach at Bathurst, Easter 1951.**  
George Reed, Bathurst: *Cradle of Australian Motor Racing*

"One day I was talking to Bob Baker at Days in South Melbourne, where he was making an aluminium monoposto body to replace the two-seater sports body on a Boulogne Frazer Nash that was brought out from England for the 1932 Australian Grand Prix at Phillip Island, but never ran. With the new body Bob excelled himself. Renamed the Innes Special, it was driven by Reg Nutt.

"However, when I spotted this classic two-seater body sitting on the office roof. I said, 'Bob, that's exactly what I need for my special'. Bob replied, 'But it's far too heavy for it Geoff, that's why it was taken off the Frazer Nash'. I climbed onto the roof and on closer inspection found the body had been fashioned around a frame of solid English oak and steel, to which the actual steel body shell was only attached in a few places. I think I paid 30 quid for it, and included the leather cockpit upholstery, a 6 inch Jaeger rev counter and 6 inch speedo. Dave Anderson came with me in his father's ute, and helped me get it home. Scrapping the old heavy frame, I replaced it using light-section steel angle, including a completely new scuttle. The result was light and very strong.

"After over 60 years, thousands of road miles and racing at more than 20 venues in Australia, there is not a crack or fatigue damage to be seen. One person can remove and take the body away, although admittedly with maybe a little help from a wife or some other passer-by.

"Charlie Dean helped me greatly with his advice and encouragement whilst I was building my Morris special. He was a very modest man, a respected and extremely clever engineer. He had designed and built the Maybach special, and working with Phil Irving at Repco, was instrumental in designing and building the Grand Prix motors for Brabham.

"When he first ran the Maybach on the road, it was in chassis form, consisting of radiator, scuttle and bonnet, with a couple of bucket seats, in which he'd pick me up on the way to work. And did it go! Coming home up Studley Park Road hill, the Maybach would fly past the other cars, leaving them but a distant memory!

"Charlie was a wonderful fellow and it was a tragedy the way he died. He was helping a friend lay some concrete pavers when one of them fell on him and damaged his spleen. The injury was quite serious but not critical, and the subsequent operation in hospital was a success. I went to see him and said that I'd be back again at the weekend. He said 'Don't bother, I'll be going home in a couple of days'. That night a thrombosis developed, causing

a fatal blockage to his heart. The Maybach was probably the most successful special that's ever been built in Australia. When I first saw it in his garage he was setting it up on some banana boxes, with a Lancia diff and gearbox, and what was I think a Terraplane front suspension, all waiting to be put together, with the Maybach engine propped up in the middle."

The 4.3 litre, six-cylinder engine came from a tracked German scout car that had been brought back to Australia from the Western Desert for evaluation at the end of the war. Charlie Dean had bought the engine for 40 pounds, initially fitting six separate Amal carburettors, later replaced with a Rootes supercharger. The chassis was seamless tubular steel, the two main tubes being some 3 inch diameter, with the front suspension being upper wishbones and a lower transverse leaf spring. The rear suspension was typically Bugatti-style, with a live axle and quarter-elliptic leaf springs. It wore a Grand Prix-style body.

"The car (Maybach 3) performed extremely well. It went over to New Zealand in 1954 and ran in the NZ Grand Prix driven by Stan Jones. That was a story in itself. It threw a rod in practice and everyone thought, 'That's the end of that'. But they got stuck into it that night. Using a conrod from an International truck, I think it was, which was the right length and near enough in weight to the others, by morning it was finished and ready to go. A friend of mine, Don Busch, was over there helping them. He told me, 'I couldn't do much about assisting them put the motor together, so I decided I could at least fix up the hole in the crankcase where the rod came out'. He cut a patch out a bit of steel plate, drilled and tapped it about every inch, polished and machine turned it as was done with vintage dashboards. It looked magnificent.

"Next day in the pits one overseas bloke remarked 'They not only built a new motor overnight, but also prepared it for a bloody concours!' That day the Maybach and Stan Jones went out and won the International N Z Grand Prix, finishing in front of all the top overseas international cars and drivers."

Geoff said most of his mates were enthusiastic supporters of motor sport. "The Hume brothers who lived just around the corner owned the 1913 Indianapolis Delage. Ken also had an 8 cylinder Buick chassis special and David, the youngest of the brothers, a Riley V8 special. They were all driven with great verve (and courage).

"Arnold Terdich lived half a mile away, where in their garage was the 1928 Type 37A Bugatti in which his father Arthur, had won the 1929 AGP at Phillip Island. I never tired of the opportunity to visit Arnold if only to

examine and admire this example of Ettore's ('Le Patron') creative genius, which had a lasting appreciation on me of what exemplified the classic vintage racing car.

"The Clifton Hotel used to be the watering hole in the early days of the Vintage club. Most of the better-known members would regularly call there, if only to combat the ever-present danger of dehydration on their homeward journey. There were only a handful of Vintagents then, and they owned 'proper' cars – 23/60 and 30/98 Vauxhalls, Bentley, Alvis, Lancia, Salmson, Aston Martin, Riley, Delage etc. as well as some early vintage specials. With Ted Hider-Smith I had also joined the Australian Motor Sports Club when it became operative in Melbourne in about 1944. My mother had a Fiat 500 which I borrowed, took it to a hillclimb and ran the bloody big end bearings. With the engine clattering I had to limp home, get some bearings, pull the sump off and fit them, and Mother never ever knew anything about it."

Geoff first ran his Morris special at a hillclimb on Herb Ford's property at Hurstbridge, and then at Easter 1952 with good mate Fred Haig, entered it in the Mount Tarrangower hillclimb near Maldon, gaining equal first place and his first motor sport trophy.

"To run at Tarrangower, we removed the headlights, cycle guards, and a large army ammunition case sitting over the tail containing our camping gear and tucker. We collected the trophy, put the bits back on the car, and drove to Bathurst for the racing on Easter Monday, then headed for home. However just past Cowra on the road to Yass, we blew the head gasket.

"Lyle Grey arrived and towed us into Boorowa with his new Studebaker Lark, taking the opportunity in air-conditioned luxury to demonstrate the car's performance to Fred, whilst meantime I was swinging at high speed on the end of a rope in the rain (of course) with very limited options, saturated brakes, no lights, and thinking if that bloody Lyle doesn't slow down a bit, this could well be The Final Journey! Quite remarkably, we did arrive without incident, but at the time having formed a rather jaundiced view of mankind, I wasn't even vaguely amused, unlike the two in front. Fred and I stayed on at the pub for a couple of days, where the benefit of the local brew repaired my shattered nerves, and together with the blacksmith, we fashioned a makeshift head gasket that successfully lasted to get us back home. We had no generator but a full battery and magneto ignition. Those were the days when, if you were into motor sport you had to be a real enthusiast, and you just did it."

One of Geoff's life-long friends in the AMSC was John Cummins (Cummo), with whom he shared the love of motor racing and jazz. "As with all true Vintagents we reflected the philosophy of 'proper cars, proper music'. A hell of a nice bloke, a great sense of humour, I knew him well. He stayed with us several times when my wife Shirley was alive.

Like John, Geoff knew Roger and Graeme Bell. "I knew Graeme and the boys in the good old days and some of the jazz boys from overseas too, like Turk Murphy who owned several historic cars, and whom in 1979 I brought to the Gold Coast for a jazz concert, but that's another story. I have enjoyed jazz for many years and used to play the trombone but very badly. I play the washboard a bit and also the duck whistle, which is a little unusual. Turk Murphy also played one, as did Tom Baker. In about 1992 I was running the Morris at Amaroo, and on the Friday night at Robbie Rowe's garage, we had quite a party and impromptu jazz gig, with Tom and I both on duck whistles. Down in the pits the next morning a fellow came up to me and said, 'That jazz last night was the best jazz I've ever heard in my life'. I replied, 'Well you must have been as drunk as we were'.

"After the Australian Motor Sports Club, in 1946 I joined the Vintage Sports Car Club and in 1948 the Light Car Club when I got my first competition licence, which in those days were issued by the AAA, CAMS not existing until 1953. Alex Bryce was the Vintage Club president, with the meetings being held at members' homes. There was one memorable picture night at my place when Miles ('Boozee') Ryan arrived rolling the 'niner' keg up to the front door demanding entrance, the only problem being he went to the wrong house, which was occupied by two elderly retired missionary maiden ladies, who were somewhat surprised at the sight of a large barrel of beer on the doorstep, with the incoherent Miles gently swaying in the background!

"The Vintagents were a great group of blokes, being well known participants and enthusiastic followers of motor sport before and after the war, and largely responsible for the foundation and the backbone of the post war resurgence of the sport in Australia. We all used to drink at the Clifton Hotel at the Kew Junction. There was a small saloon bar which became somewhat of a Vintage clubroom, with Saturday mornings always a popular meeting time for the Vintagents."

Geoff said he had considered entering the first Redex Trial in a Peugeot. "Some of the boys who used to go to the Clifton, Lloyd Buley, Lyle Grey, Fred Haig and Stan Williams, they decided to enter the Redex Trial in a Ford

Customline and asked me if I wanted to be in it. I didn't have that sort of money – I might have had enough to buy the odd girl some fish and chips and a few beers. I said, 'You blokes are bloody mad. There would be four or five of you in the car. I can't afford to go anyway, but what I would like to do is get someone else and run in a Peugeot 203; it has a wheel on each corner, it handles well and goes well, and it's reliable'. And I was right because a 203 won. And they had terrible trouble with the Customline.

"I didn't ever get a 203 but later on I decided to buy myself a second-hand DB4 Aston Martin from Adelaide. I'd had that for a while and I took it to Bob Baker, who used to build the most magnificent alloy bodies for monoposto racing cars and specials. All the good ones were built by Bob, who used to navigate a lot for me in trials. Anyway the Aston had a few cracks in the aluminium body and Bob said, 'Bring it around and I'll give it a facelift'. When I went to pick it up it looked better than new and Bob said, 'Do you want to sell it? There's a bloke who's been here today and wants to buy it'. I'd paid about 1600 pounds for it and didn't particularly want to sell. So this bloke came around and after we went for a drive around the Boulevard he said, 'I want to buy it'. But he really didn't have much idea about how to buy things, saying 'You must have a price on it'. So I thought I'd just ask double what I'd paid for it and said, '3200 pounds'. He rang his secretary who then arrived complete with bank cheque for 3200 pounds, and by that afternoon I was carless.

"My wife and I had arranged to go away to Tambo for Easter, and this was only the week beforehand. I was in real trouble! I phoned Russell Lane of Lane's Motors and said, 'What have you got in the way of a good Mercedes or something? I'm in need of a car'. He told me that a judge had gone to England for six months and left a near-new 220SE for him to sell. 'It's only been driven by his lady secretary and is like brand new'. With my fingers crossed she accepted my offer of 2800 pounds, so I wound up with a 220SE Mercedes with only some six hundred miles on the clock for a net total outlay of 1200 pounds, and a happy house."

"When in 1960 I heard about a proposed 500-mile race for standard saloons at Phillip Island to be promoted by the Light Car Club, and sponsored by Armstrong shock absorbers, I decided to enter with a 403. I'd had a pretty successful run in trials with the Peugeot, and felt that it would be an ideal entry for this event. Subsequent events certainly vindicated my choice!

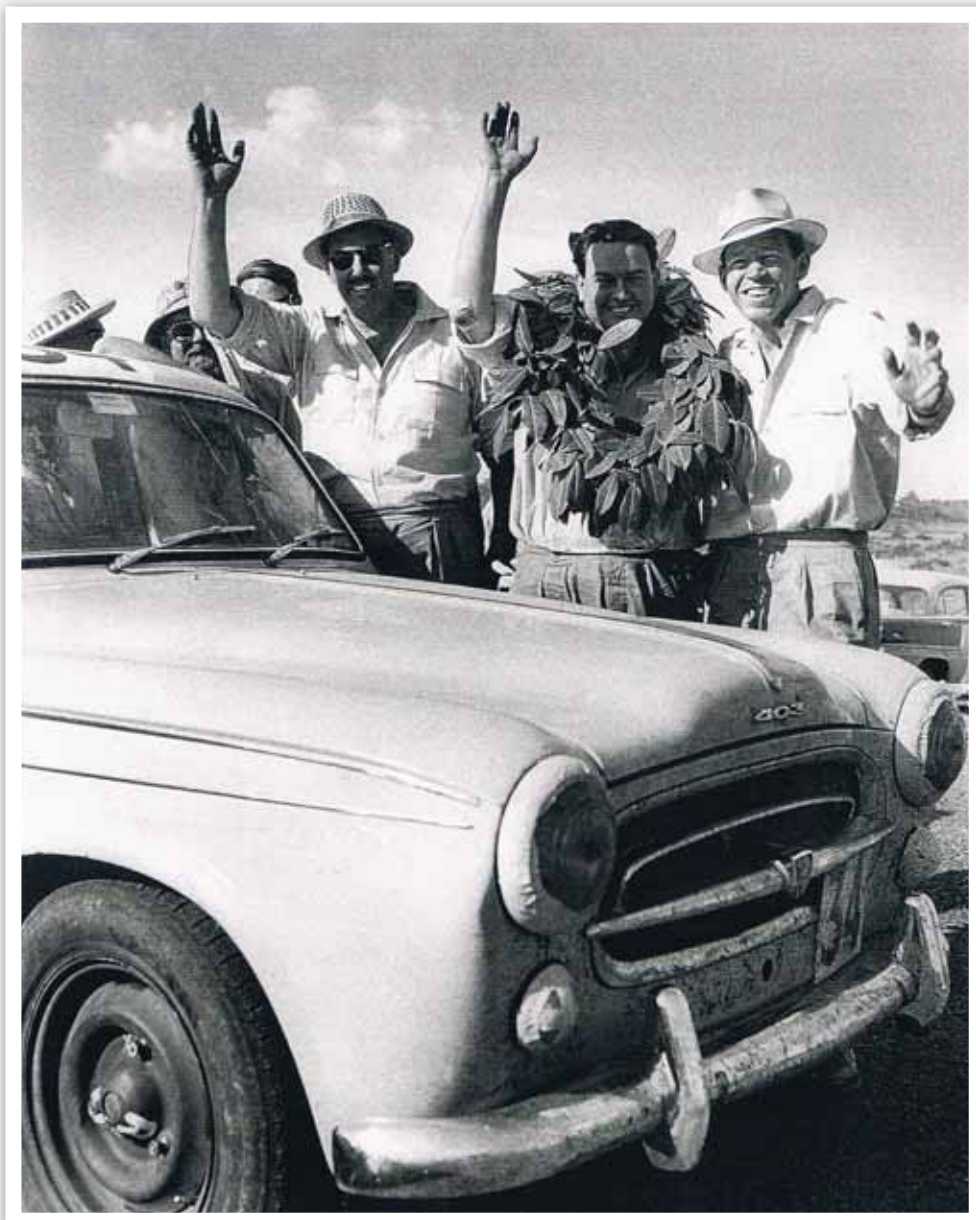


“I then approached Continental & General Distributors’ chairman, Cyril Dickason, who having successfully raced an Austin 7, gaining three thirds and a second place in the first five AGPs at Phillip Island from 1928 to 1934, might well be sympathetic to my suggestion of running the latest Peugeot in the 1960 race at the Island. Despite his reputation of being a hard man from whom to extract a quid, it was agreed to supply a new 403 at factory cost plus 100 pounds, and a set of Dunlop RS4 tyres, that unfortunately proved unsuited to the conditions. We decided to use Michelin X, having found them fast and handled well. Dan O’Brien of A.P. Sutherlands assisted with the supply and testing of the Michelin tyre, as did Henry Jacks of Bosch plugs, and Shell Lubricants.

“I had entered my own car, but Arnold Terdich, who was co-organising the event, trying to get as many trade entries as possible in this first 500, put my entry down as Continental & General, who were Peugeot distributors. Arnold had a bit of an axe to grind, but despite my protestations, this error was never rectified. That car was immaculate in its preparation, assembled and built with the most exacting TLC for that first 500. We selected a CKD chassis from Continental & General at Heidelberg with Alan Kohn, the works factory manager, enthusiastically co-operating and assisting in every way with the project.

“I have always done my own engine balancing, but the race regulations prohibited the removal of metal or component modifications. Each night on my way home I’d borrow from the factory parts store, pistons, rods, gudgeon pins, then overnight within the allowable standard tolerances, select the matching parts. In this way we were able to achieve a near-perfect and balanced motor, complying with all the requirements of the Supp Regs. Likewise with the cylinder heads, pistons, valves, rockers etc. It was put together like a beautiful wristwatch, and is why that Peugeot went so well.

“At the time, there were some big names driving some little cars, with Doug Whiteford and Lex Davison, whose NSU Prinz (entered by Continental & General), won the 750cc Class A. Straight across from the pits was Lane’s MG Corner. The track swept around from the back straight through a fast left-hander with the Peugeot flat out in third, down the hill to the Lane’s hard right-hander, and with those great Peugeot brakes go deep into the corner and have the inside running. This strategy usually worked, with the other car backing off – except once when an NSU held its line. It was Doug Whiteford. I had to brake like buggery and take rather drastic avoiding action, and as I went by he



**Winners are grinners, Phillip Island 1960.**  
**From left, Jim Bryce, Peter Menere, Bill Wardell, Tony Luxton, Geoff Russell and David Anderson.**



THE 1961

# ARMSTRONG "500"

SPONSORED BY ARMSTRONG YORK  
ENGINEERING PTY. LTD.



CONDUCTED BY  
THE LIGHT CAR CLUB OF AUSTRALIA

PHILLIP ISLAND  
Sunday, November 19

1961 Phillip Island 500 race programme

looked out, grinned, and gave me the fingers. Although we knew each other well, there was no way he was giving way to me. If I'd realised it was Doug in the NSU, I certainly wouldn't have tried it on him. He was a brilliant driver, one of the best in Australia, racing his Ford V8 special, the famous Black Bess over many years with great success. He won three Australian GPs, In 1950 with Black Bess, then driving his Talbot Lago T26C, won both the 1952 and 1953 AGPs, finishing ahead of Stan Jones in the Maybach."

David Anderson was Geoff's co-driver in the 1960, 1961, and 1962 events. "Tony Luxton was actively involved in the sport, was a very capable driver, past president and life member of the Light Car Club. We knew Tony and his wife Esme well, and before the first 500 she said to my wife Shirley 'I wish Tony was in it,' so I said, 'We'll enter him as a relief driver and he can drive one of the legs'. He was rapt, and drove superbly.

"As the preparation for efficiency applies equally for both economy and speed, with Peter Menere as co-driver and doing the final preparations, we set our sights on the Mobigas Economy Run with a Peugeot 403. It was a good call, winning the events two years in a row, gaining outright first in both the 1961 and 1962 Mobilgas runs, as well as the brilliant Peugeot setting a new world record for ton-MPG."

In the 1962 Armstrong 500, the classes were dictated by price. Bob Jane and Harry Firth shared a Falcon XL and were first across the line, but by then Geoff was aligned with Ford (more on that later) and chose to drive a Zephyr Mark III because of its better handling and brakes. But the race was not without incident. "We had always used a practice car for testing tyre wear, fuel consumption etc, but the weekend before the event we tested the actual race car. During the fast right-hander at the end of the straight, cornering stresses allowed the bonnet catch to jump out of its socket. During several hundred laps in the practice car this had never happened, so our list of things to do prior to official scrutineering was amended, from 'adjust bonnet' to 'fit bonnet catches'. These were then officially approved by chief scrutineer Hedley Thompson, with the added recommendation, 'I would like to see catches fitted to all cars with front opening bonnets, and in the interests of safety, be a mandatory requirement'. Several other cars, the Minis in particular, had fitted bonnet clips, all being passed by the chief scrutineer.

"Then at the end of Saturday's official practice the race steward, Alec Hawkins, came up and said, 'Geoff I've got some bad news, you've got to





**Winning the 1962 Mobilgas Economy Run**

take those bonnet clips off. The cars have to be absolutely standard and there's been a protest that the clips are not a standard fitting'.

"We tried adjusting the spring, but were unable to test it as official practice had finished and the circuit closed. We kept our fingers crossed, but on the third lap of the race the bonnet again jumped up onto the safety catch. I kept driving until they black-flagged me so I had to stop at our pit, jump out and slam it back down. If a car pitted in the first 33 laps, only the driver was allowed to work on the car, and then only allowed to use the tools supplied with the car. All other personnel had to remain behind the pit counter. This continued to occur until the fourth time it jumped up and it just kept coming up!

"The safety catch was diecast, which half-way through the corner and at over 100mph had finally snapped, leaving total visibility restricted to a very close-up view of the bonnet, which had wrapped itself right back over the screen. Using the edge of the circuit as a guide I pulled off onto the grass. My main concern was not being able to see anything much of the outside world

I remember thinking, 'If there's a flag marshal in front of me and he doesn't look out, he's history'. I stopped and tried to push the bonnet down, but it was cocked up in the air at the front, and after about 20 feet the wind got under it and it flew up over the hood again. As I got out one of the flag marshals ran up. In early days they used to communicate by army intercoms, and he'd grabbed some of this old telephone wire lying in the grass. He said, 'Here you are Geoff, tie it down with this. Don't you wish you were driving a Peugeot?' He was a member of the Peugeot Car Club of course. I laughed, replying, 'I really have to agree with you'. As I drove back to the pits Peter Menere confronted the race stewards, and I believe after a fairly colourful discussion, and 'in the interests of safety', we were reluctantly given permission to secure the bonnet. The boys placed a piece of four-by-two timber across the mudguards. Dave Anderson jumped from the pit counter landing on the bonnet, which just went clunk, springing back with the catch perfectly in place. A couple of pieces of welding wire held it down from underneath, and it was not opened again until the end of the race.

"We came second in our class, four laps behind the Studebaker Lark of Fred Sutherland and Bill Graetz, which was on the same lap as the Jane-Firth Falcon, but the time lost due to the faulty bonnet catch cost us the race, the Zephyr lap times showing we would have finished well over a lap in front had that not happened."

By now the track at the Island was in such bad repair that the 1963 event was moved to Bathurst, where the Zephyr which Geoff shared with John Raeburn was tipped by motoring editor Peter Livingstone to be first across the line. The Zephyr came in second in the top-price class, just behind a V8 Valiant, covering 126 laps. Third place in the class was taken by the 404 of Bob Holden and Bill Marsh (119 laps) but another 404, driven by Syd Fisher and Bill Coe, was disqualified even though it had completed 119 laps. The outright winner was the Cortina GT of Bob Jane and Harry Firth (130 laps), just ahead of the Holden EH 179 S4 of Ralph Sachs and Frank Morgan and two more Cortina GTs. "Going up the mountain was where you won the race or lost it. With the Zephyr gearbox second gear was too low and third too high, but the Zephyr's handling and superb disc brakes made it up, and of course we'd be flat out down the straight passing and easily outbraking the others. We were comfortably leading the class when my right rear tyre punctured just before McPhillamy Park. So I thought, 'What will I do?' To change the wheel myself right there or limp back to the pits, but to do that



I had to drive across the mountain from McPhillamy, through the Dipper, Forest Elbow, slowly down the straight, so I elected to change it on the spot. When I tried to open the boot – we always had a key taped to the lid – the bloody thing would not open. And all the peasants were lined up at the fence, cheering me on. I thought ‘This is ridiculous’ and losing my temper I gave the lid an almighty thump with my fist, the Gods relented and it opened! I then had to change the wheel using those impossible car jacks and spanners. However, by then the Valiant, who had been a lap behind, passed me. Being close to the race end, there was no time to catch him again, finishing with a not-dishonourable second place in the class.”

With navigators Wally Walsh and Bill Wardell Geoff won plenty of rallies, including the Alpine and Experts trials and the Shell Two Day trial, also scoring class wins in some five BP Rallies. Geoff said that after he had won the Victorian Trials Championship in 1960 and 1961, he was considering an entry in the East African Safari with the new Peugeot 404. “I was getting sponsorship for tyres from Michelin and the promise of some factory backing from Continental & General, but it was still going to be a very costly venture, as you can well imagine.” One Friday night over a few drinks at the Light Car Club, he was giving another member and good friend Les Powell a hard time about what rubbish the Fords were. “Les, who was the Ford competition manager, said ‘I want you to drive for us next year’ and he replied, ‘What? In a Ford? I wouldn’t risk my bloody life in one of those things’. Les then replied ‘Well how would you like to run in the next East African Safari, with all expenses paid, the whole bit?’ “I said, ‘What time does the boat leave?’ That’s when I changed to Ford.”

In the 1962 East African Safari, Ford Australia entered five Falcons, driven by Geoff with Dick Collingwood navigating (Car 78), Jack Ellis with Mal McPherson (Car 80), Ken Harper with Des Scott, (Car 83), Harry Firth with Graham Hoinville, (Car 84), and Doug Hughes with Rex Lewis (Car 86).

The cars were fitted out and prepared for the event by the Firth brothers in Hawthorn, with the project having the benefit of the team’s total trials experience behind it. It was, however, an overly ambitious campaign pitted against the world’s top rally drivers, in the world’s best rally cars, and the world’s hardest rally. All things considered, the Falcons did quite remarkably well in winning the Overseas Teams Award.



**The Geoff Russell-David  
Anderson 403 at Phillip  
Island, 1961.**  
*Autopics.com.au*

“Of the five Falcons, Harry and Graham had the best result, our own run finished just short of Mombasa. Before the rally the complete route was surveyed using rented Ford Zephyrs, the rally cars not having landed. However on their arrival we discovered that due to damage during transit, our car was pulling to the right. Despite front-end alignments and the best efforts of Ford Nairobi, the problem remained until some 3000 miles and three days later it was resolved by an unscheduled high-speed excursion into the African bundu (bush). About three hours after leaving Dar Es Salaam for Mombasa the steering link end, worn out by three days of compensating for the misalignment, came away. As we left the road I answered Dick’s concern with ‘Look’ and spun the useless wheel. ‘Shit,’ said Dick, which echoed my thoughts exactly. Luckily, we missed most of the rocks and trees, but the front end was less than pristine and never pulled to the right again! A native truck towed us out and into the next town, where with fencing wire and welder, we managed it into a sort of shape and pressed on. Just before Mombasa was an observed very muddy mud section with a number of cars completely bogged ahead. The unanimous decision was ‘Sydney or the bush’. However, half-way along the whole right-hand front end wound up buried in mud, jammed under the petrol tank. Dick and I went to the nearest pub, had several large beers, and slept for ten hours.”

In subsequent races as a Ford works driver, Geoff drove a Cortina GT and with John Ould as his mechanic, competed at Sandown, Calder, Warwick Farm, Longford and Catalina Park, where he won the NSW 2 litre Touring Car Championship, and establishing a new outright track record.

In one of the first Sandown enduros. Geoff drove a 404 Injection for Regan Motors. "John Regan bought the new 404 with Kugelfischer fuel injection, and asked me to drive it. For the final injector settings we took it to some dyno in St Kilda, and as fate had it that day luck was with me. When John Ould and I were developing the Cortina we were able to use the Heenon and Froude dyno at Perfect Circle, where the testing was remotely controlled from a separate room. At St Kilda you stood alongside the motor and operated the controls from there. Being close to a motor being run on a dyno is bloody frightening – the noise! Anyway I was standing beside this bloke recording torque readings etc, while he ran the 404 engine through its rev range. The following day, the next motor he was testing was a V8, and at full revs blew up. It completely disintegrated. Tragically there was little left to recognise. It was reported later that bits of the engine were found in St Kilda Road. It was then I learnt exactly what was meant by 'my blood ran cold'.

"At Sandown, the 404 started off well, but then after a couple of laps began to boil. There was nothing I could do but pull into the pits, and Regan's mechanic, I think it was Albert Johnson, twigged straight away that the thermostat had stuck. We had to drain the water and cool the motor to pull the thermostat out, and lost at least five or so minutes. However we kept going with the car performing beautifully, but it didn't do as well as it should have.

"That was just before I came up to Queensland to live. At the time Rick Dureau approached me wanting to buy the Morris. I said, 'I don't want to sell it, but give me 300 pounds as a bond, on the proviso that after a reasonable time I can resume it, and also anything you do to it has to be with Peter Menere's knowledge and approval. And that's what happened. A year or so later Graeme Steinfort rang me and said he wanted to buy the car. I explained the agreement, came to Melbourne and sorted that out. He ran the car for about 10 years with a lot of success, and he really looked after and improved it. At the time it was proposed to run the Austin 7 team in the raid made on the Brits, Graeme, who was busy with preparations, suggested that I take over the Morris. As I had been thinking about competing again in vintage events, I paid him the 300 pounds, Bob Seed loaded the car on to a trailer and towed it all the way to Queensland for me. Then stripping it completely from top to bottom, I rebuilt the motor, installed a Citroen Light 15 crankshaft, made new lightweight pistons with Argo HT rods, machined a new high-tensile alloy head, restored and refitted the Alvis blower, that on its first outing had been

an absolute utter disaster, and replaced it with twin SUs. The 4 speed Lancia gearbox I converted to close-ratio constant-mesh, and the Lancia differential to limited slip. The Lancia cable brakes that only worked per favour of the gods, were later replaced by hydraulics all round, with twin leading shoes on the front. It won outright at the Geelong Sprints two years in a row, and does the standing quarter mile in just over 13 seconds. It's quite fast, handles well, and for over 60 years the Morris has been both consistent and competitive in vintage racing, and proudly lays claim to being the only car of that era still being raced and owned by the original owner/builder."

John Cummins used to present the Terry Kelly Memorial Trophy for the most interesting Australian special, and at Winton in 1992 the Russell Morris was honoured to be the recipient. In 1998 at Rob Roy it also won The 'Conducteurs Anciens' trophy.

Geoff used to fish and now enjoys the occasional game of golf and walks his Rhodesian ridgeback when he can. He said he's not old enough to play bowls. He recently went to hospital for treatment of an ulcer on his leg and spent seven weeks there with an obstinate bug infection. He usually tries to visit Melbourne each December for the annual 'Old and Bolds' get together of former Light Car Club members and friends at the Elsternwick Hotel in Brighton Road, Elwood. He was there for the 2012 gathering.

*(With acknowledgement to Geoff Russell.)*