

NZ Update Australian Pre-War MG Register Newsletter: July 2018

Denis and Desna Jury

Reporting on a very special MG in New Zealand

As we have previously reported, Geoff Broadhead has been doing a sterling job in updating and significantly extending the NZ Triple-M Register. During this exercise the unearthing of previously unknown cars, undocumented histories and in some cases histories created with a degree of, shall we say, *licentia poetica* has been very interesting. One case is the fabulous R-Type in the Southward Motor Museum in Paraparaumu just North of Wellington.

So, on a particularly 'rubbish' NZ day in April Geoff Broadhead and Denis Jury headed south to meet up with Ross Armstrong and Mike Burnside from Wellington at Southwards Motor Museum. We were there at the invitation of John Bellamore, the Assistant GM of the Museum to have unlimited access to R0253 (short of driving it!) -inclement weather could not keep us away from this opportunity.

With help from Bob Milton in the UK Geoff has been able to establish the true provenance of R0253, some of which was mistakenly attached to other vehicles. R0253 is a special car, being one of the three ex Eyston 'Works' cars in 1935; then one of the three R-Types raced by Bellevue Garages in 1936, and of these three, it is the only which had the DOHC McEvoy / Pomeroy head fitted. So, a very rare car.



Double overhead twin cam and Zoller supercharger in R0253

RA 0253 has an extensive race history. The car was raced regularly at Brooklands, Donington Park, Isle of Man, the Irish GP and Shelsley Walsh during the 1935/6 seasons as part of Eyston's (1935) or Bellevue Garage's race team (1936). Throughout the 1936 race season the car competed with the McEvoy / Pomeroy DOHC head. When sold by Bellevue Garages, the new owners, Ashmore Bros, continued to race the car at Brooklands without any notable success.



Doreen Evans in R0253 at Brooklands in 1936. At this time
RA 0253 was developing 141 bhp at 7,300 rpm with a 25psi boost

After many owners (and jumping forward a few years to the 1950s), R0253 was 'resplendent' with a 'Microbond' fibreglass two-seater body and no supercharger, but still with the central steering wheel and road registration -so extremely sporting... not! At this time Peter Stevens, an RNZAF officer stationed at Henlow, purchased the car. He proceeded to replace the 'Microbond' body with a J2 style body, front telescopic shock absorbers, rack and pinion steering, and the steering wheel repositioned. In this configuration Peter brought the car to NZ in 1960. Peter persisted with the car for several years, enjoying the superb handling but it had little boost and very low power... he finally sold the car to the Southward Museum in 1965 for 400 pounds.

The museum set about restoring the car to its original state SOHC R-type monoposto body and it now looks superb. Mechanically the car is all there with DOHC head, Zoller supercharger and Wilson pre-selector gearbox, but it requires considerable mechanical work. Antipodean MG enthusiasts should be grateful to the Southward Museum for saving and partially restoring this very special MG.



Geoff Broadhead looking very comfortable in R0253 as he contemplates the "Brooklands banking".

RA 0253's history is fully documented, together with great photos, in the NZ Triple-M Register which can be seen at: <http://www.mgclub.org.nz/Site/information/MG-Registers/Triple-M.aspx>

During the day we were also entertained by Mike Burnside's stories from his time working as a racing mechanic for a number drivers and teams in the days when, in his words, *sex was safe and motor racing was dangerous*. Mike's best story was from a more recent work colleague who had worked with Frank Whittle during the late 1930's on the development of the jet engine. The story goes that they had to be able run fast, and when asked why... with a look of *it should be obvious* ... he responded with "*well, the early jet units showed an alarming tendency to race out of control!*" Imagine today's workplace health and safety inspectors.

So, we had a great day at Southwards. Many thanks to John for access to R0251, for his hospitality, and for the extended and informative tour over the rest of the museum.