

The T Type Years

Allan Scott's reminiscences of racing a TC in the early 1960s

T Racing 1964. My situation changed and I was expected to travel vast distances, West Freugh, St Mawgan, Llanbedr, from Farnborough. For this I got mileage allowance and also flying pay at 10 shillings an hour. A reliable car was required. For some time I had watched with admiration a TC being customised to a state rarely seen in those days. It was mechanically standard and it was driven by a South African lunatic. Ian Hodson was an accident looking for somewhere to happen. The car was ready as the racing season approached and I had some hair raising rides to prove it. Fortunately he was offered the Chequered Flag Lotus 6 Climax which was fast enough to intimidate even him.

I was offered the TC to raise the money for the Lotus. I sold the PA and the ND. Experience with the perky P and the N and the 'Labours of Hercules' with the TA now payed off. It was effectively a brand new car and the new T Register racing rules could have been written around this car for class A:

1. Engine to stage II, + 60"
2. Bucket seats
3. No bumpers
4. Remove spare wheel
5. Windscreen folded flat
6. Sidescreens removed
7. Hood folded and strapped beneath tonneau
8. Panel wiring trim may be removed
9. Oil cooler permitted
10. Non standard size wheels permitted (later amended to 16")
11. Non standard dampers allowed

It came equipped with telescopic front dampers and cord whipped springs. It ran on 15" wheels. It was hard as a board. It had neither the compact feel of the P nor the urge and sensitivity of the ND. It improved as you got to know it. The bucket seats helped a lot. After three years of marshalling it was time to compete. To race prepare it, 16" wheels were needed. I used 5.50 x 16 rear and 5.00 x 19 front. The regs also permitted the use of stage two tuning. The head came from Derringtons. The engine was then Crypton tuned at the local racing stable. When I collected it, I took it for a blast along Hartford Bridge Flats. It felt a bit harsh, but I thought that was the extra power. At 85mph the engine began to misfire and lapsed onto three cylinders. Off with the rocker cover - a rocker had broken. The misfire persisted and it was smoky, the tappets were closing up, the oil consumption, fuel consumption and the temperature went up! Off with the head! All the spark plug ceramics were shattered and the valve seats fell out. The head was cracked between valve seats. Replace standard head and return it to Derringtons. I checked ignition timing, 58° BTDC or 30° static. I had been taught never to exceed 38° at peak revs. Reset to 7.5° static. With only a fortnight to go, the engine was running well, if a bit smoky.

Silverstone 1964 was my first event. Proudly displaying No 112, I set off for scrutineering. For the first and only time it passed without comment. It was my first of many conversations with Fred Matthews. 'I'll be watching you!' was his opening gambit. 'New car?' It was he who had pulled me over at Brands in the PA, for a little chat with the Clerk of the Course. He never forgot a face or a car. He was very strict and I have seen FI teams reduced to tears by him. He had a gruff helpful approach to clubmen. A mine of information.

First practice. I was impressed by how slowly I was moving. In the vast wastes of the track, there was no sensation of speed. Also I had severe understeer at Becketts. I was told that I was lifting a front wheel. Lap time 1m 38.5s. Put the tyre pressures up to 38psi front, 28psi rear. This lifted a rear wheel causing it to spin.

Second practice. We cut the spring whipping at the front and loosed the rear. This kept both front wheels on the track, halving the understeer 1m 36s a lap. Becketts was taken in 2nd at a wheel spinning 4500rpm. There was just a trace of understeer at Woodcote in 3rd gear at 5000rpm. A touch of oversteer at Copse, effectively flat out 5200rpm. Lap time 1m 34.5s I was surprised to hit valve bounce on the approach to Woodcote. 5700rpm is 89 mph.

The 20 minute High Speed Trial was first. We estimated that our 17 lap target plus two pit stops for valve cap changes required us to lap at 1m 37s. I did this with time to spare, without driving flat out.

First race was a five lap event. Midgets versus T Types and I found that I was not as good as I thought. Even hitting 6300rpm I only managed 8th.

T Type versus HRG race was next. There were dark mutterings in the HRG camp about 'chewed up MGs'. Of course the class B cycle-winged and blown cars disappeared into the distance and class A was left to do battle with the HRGs. I spent the entire race travelling with Ken Chiesman's TC and Mahoney's HRG 1500. What surprised me was that I could out brake and out corner the other cars but they simply pulled away from me down the straight. From Runway Crossing where caught me, into the 120 degree Woodcote they appeared to have a 10mph advantage. We all did 5 laps at 1m 33s, crossing the finish, line abreast.

The car was smoking after its race exertions. I took it easy in the handicap race. I wasn't going to win that anyway. There was an odd vibration too. In 45 laps, I used 4 gallons of fuel, 1 gallon of oil and wore out the front tyres. Oh yes, and I broke the gearbox mount. Engine out to repair it, I dropped the sump and withdrew the pistons. All the top rings were broken. I assumed this to be the result of the ignition problems rather than over revving. The car was certainly run in. The Derrington head was refitted having been welded. I found the car was lively on the road and could be driven in a sporting manner.

Firle Hillclimb was the next event. It rained and there was unusually for the time of year, black ice on the roads. In a burst of over exuberance I lost the front end on a downhill sweeping bend just past Haywards Heath. I killed a reinforced concrete bus stop. No one hurt. Adrian Price and I looked at each other and said in duet 'That was a bloody stupid thing to do!'. We were travelling in convoy, the Mini and the A35 having already had similar incidents. We lifted the car off the stump and pressed on. In the paddock we set about making the car road worthy. After the event I was due to travel to North Wales. We excavated a lot of earth from the front wing to open the bonnet and door. The front cross tube was missing having sheared the pins. The dumb irons were sprung inwards and had to be jacked apart. To reconnect the springs, we found some large bolts on an old gun in the quarry. The front apron was completely destroyed. There was a bruise on the radiator shell where the impact had been. By last practice the wet muddy car rolled towards paddock exit. To get out you had to go through scrutineering. Well why not? I got a ticket and with two up and no crash hats I drove up the hill. Handling was fine. Firle is one of those hills where time is limited by which gear you can use. A standard car cannot pull third gear so the fastest it will go is limited by valve bounce in second. Hence maximum speed is 48mph and time 38.5s. The first bend is taken still accelerating and the final bend is flat in second. A blown car can pull 3rd gear and do 34.5s, but the increase in speed up the straight reveals a left kink. In the afternoon it rained even more. The car was like a hip bath. I won the class, only 0.1s slower than the Modsport class. They of course went fast enough to have handling problems at the kink.

Next day I drove to Wales and spent a week in Llanbedr. On the return journey down A5 near Brownhills it boiled. The impact on the radiator had torn the top hose. Running high mileage on the road and racing extended my maintenance skills. The steering box was always a worry and spokes needed

careful attention. Although bearings were adequate for road use there was always play in the rear axle after a race meeting and then there was tyre wear. The Derrington head gave good road performance but it never materialised on the track.

August, JDC Silverstone. During first practice I was settling down to 1m 36s laps and entered Copse flat in top as usual, when the steering went light and I lost all control as the left front wheel collapsed and I rushed headlong into the bank. I was joined in quick succession by a Lister Jag. The panic braking reversed the thrust on his diff which broke. Then by an E Type with terminal understeer under braking. Straight on. He moaned like hell, a new bonnet cost £120. It was a curious sensation as although I was still in the car, I saw the accident from about 12 feet above and behind the car. I smashed my visor and the tachometer on the dashboard and the front axle wrapped itself round the bonnet. The chassis was very bent at the footwell bulkhead and strangest of all was a deep indentation on the top of the propshaft tunnel. Into this my left arm fitted perfectly. Incredibly there was no bruise to match! Not a mark! Obviously the car was not drivable.

Next day without prompting, Bruce Beer very kindly appeared with his TF and trailer, having driven from Houghton. He delivered the car to Farnborough. This was the first of many kindnesses and much appreciated assistance I received from the Beer family.

It was fortunate that I was on leave. I stripped the car to chassis level, assessed the damage and went to see John Stacey at Sports and Specials with my list. The car was up and running in three weeks but it was three months before it was even close to its former condition. I bought some 16" wheels, new front springs and axle, plus new standard dampers. It needed a new chassis, so the rebuild was a simple transfer exercise. I was confident enough in its appearance to enter it for Beaulieu. The steering became more and more dead until you could hardly steer into the field. The entire front was dismantled to diagnose the problem.

I thought the steering column was bent? No. Maybe the axle was back to front? No. Maybe the 16" front wheels, or a flat tyre? No. Maybe king pins? Ah! The left king pin was seized. It had been renewed after the crash and not lubricated because mud in the grease nipple was obstructing the flow.

As the nights grew shorter the electrics started to play up. After a night at the Hautboy natter it was totally dead. The battery terminal post had pulled out. We wound it with wooden blocks straps and tape and got it going. When the headlights were switched on it died. Those who have been there will know that it is the darkest wood in Surrey. Sue was due to return to London. I was to return to Gosport.

On sidelights or less we set off in convoy to find light. The A3 in fact. I tried increasing idling speed hoping the dynamo would sustain the ignition, but unlike a modern alternator it would not activate the field coil. Since nothing seemed to work we carried on. We reached Petersfield at 1.00am. There the Police were waiting, bored to tears. They called up another car and escorted me all the way home. Sue returned to London. Fantastic!

Over the New Year I had to travel to Newcastle. It was a beautiful, cold and sunny day. I used the AI, hood down, arriving at Leeds about 4.00pm. Stopping for fuel, I got out and fell flat on my back. Zero temperature and 60mph wind chill. Hood up and hat on, next hazard the Cleveland hills. Going up was OK but going down was something else. An oil tanker in front jack knifed and controlled it the whole way down. I had to admire his skill.

Overnight in Whitley Bay the car was parked on top of the cliffs facing the sea. In the morning the starter would not turn the engine. Temperature -8°C, Wind chill -52°C. Antifreeze couldn't cope. The water pump was solid. After several bottles of hot water I could turn it on the handle and rolled down the cliff road to start. Lucky! After the freeze up there was always a slight misfire.

1965. I should have dealt with the misfire of course. It was still with us on the National event at May Prescott. It was a freezing cold morning and at Cricklade the car began to crab and bounce. A tyre had

blown, taking the carcass off the rim. I fitted a new tube, but I had to hoof it to town to buy a pump. I pressed on, and arrived as the paddock went to lunch. Practice periods were well over subscribed so I booked 15.00. I struggled with the tent, it being the first trip of the season and there being a stiff breeze. I reappeared at 2.00pm scrutineering with soup and sandwiches in hand. The well fed scrutineer caused no grief. The course was awash with mud, so I took it easy. The first bend is fast and deceptive. I was red flagged and on return to the paddock there was chaos. The paddock marshals turned stropky. I slipped practice period and it rained and how. There was no traction, the track wasn't just wet, there was a water film over mud. I had wheelspin in each gear I tiptoed past the armco at Orchard, hauled it round Ettore's and really tried in third up to Pardon. I crossed the sand in the run off and used 2nd up to the Esses, spun inwards into the trees, gathered it all together, went gently round the Semicircle and pressed on to the finish - 78s. Meanwhile things got worse. It rained harder. I only used 2000rpm on the second run. The noise under the wings sounded like a car wash. Braking early for Pardon a rear wheel locked, the car lunged to the left, away from the armco. This was really scary, I was being very careful - 98.5s. I retired to my tent for a wet miserable meal. It was a good steak. Old friends and competitors began to circulate. The atmosphere worked its magic. It didn't look so bad ...

The wind blew itself out, the rain stopped and we were awoken by a tremendous bellowing. First one then more. Cows not cars! We investigated the cause of the cacophony to find a newborn calf inert on a cluster of hay. After an early breakfast we found the paddock in apple pie order. All runs complete before lunch. The calf was up and walking. It was drying. I was still pretty wary, but it was safe. Second run I really had a go. It was a disgrace, I couldn't find 2nd gear off the line and it stuck in 1st out of Pardon. I was hoping for a Red flag and sure enough there was. A clean run, 72sec. I retired to the role of spectator. Finally, winner of the Top Ten run off was the absolutely amazing Roy Lane - 43.67sec. On the 120 mile homeward trek I reflected on my future in Motor Sport. I was finding racing boring. Hillclimbs were the way to go.

1965 Silverstone was to be character forming. Pushing the car hard to the Silverstone event on a damp miserable morning, the misfire became blatantly obvious. At 5.00am we set out to change the head gasket. We were just in time for 1st practice. I noticed several things: I could only manage 1m 38.5s; there was an anvil chorus from the rockers. The car would not enter Copse fast enough and on the run up to Becketts there was a distinct air brake effect. This was confirmed on the run down to Woodcote where I got an impression of restricted vision. The Woodcote stands looked low. I pitted. We found that the radiator mounting nuts were missing. What had occurred was that the aerodynamic force under the front wings at 80mph was enough to lift the combined weight of radiator, wings and bonnet. Almost 2cwt! Hence on a wet road at that speed, there is only 6cwt keeping the front wheels on the tarmac! We reset the tappets in the interval to the 2nd practice. I wasn't impressed with the effect of the 16in front wheels and the car seemed to be braking under power in the corners. Then the oil pressure took a dive.

I heard a big end rattle. The rocker box gasket had slipped in on the left side. You can see clearly the oil running from the sump in the photo at Copse, a high 'G' corner. We dropped the sump, changed the bearings, just in time for the HST. In the event I noticed the oil pressure surge. Before I could do anything, it sagged and a big end went. Never say die! We changed the bearing shells again. This was the pattern of the day. I completed the next five lapper but the damage was done. We selected the best shells and set off for home. We abandoned the car in Bletchley in the Police Station yard. We hired a Ford Anglia next day to tow it to Gosport. An over night engine change got us to work on Monday.

Job prospects looked bleak again. I'd had it with reliability. I decided that a dedicated car was needed for racing. The TC was sold.

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