

Inter View

Tony Gaze

As if plucked straight from an edition of "Boy's Own Annual" Tony Gaze competed at Brooklands in the '30s, flew a Spitfire during World War II, raced in Formula One and sports cars during the 1950s and eventually went on to represent Australia in gliding. Our Australian correspondent, Patrick Quinn, caught up with him at his appropriately named Goodwood Farm to recall some of his colorful past.

You certainly have done some amazing things, Tony. When were you first interested in motor vehicles?

Gaze: I was fascinated by them when I was a kid.

I was at Cambridge before the war and took a letter from the Light Car Club of Australia to the Junior Car Club. Borrowing my uncles' English-bodied Hudson, I drove over to what I thought was a Brooklands' club meeting. Everybody was there from the likes of Fane, Wakefield and Peter Whitehead. Being a beginner, I had to have a passenger to tell when the faster cars were coming up behind along the banking. We didn't get very far due to fuel vaporizing as the fuel pipe ran alongside the exhaust. Later in the *Motor* or *Autocar* it said that the other American car, a Terraplane, was flagged off and they were thinking of flagging me off as well for dangerous driving.

When the war came I bought a J2 MG and an Alvis for my brother, who came over from Australia. After he was killed I gave the MG away and drove the Alvis. When we moved I flew my airplane and my sergeant drove the Alvis but ruined the clutch. We pulled it apart, then were posted away and when we got back it had disappeared.

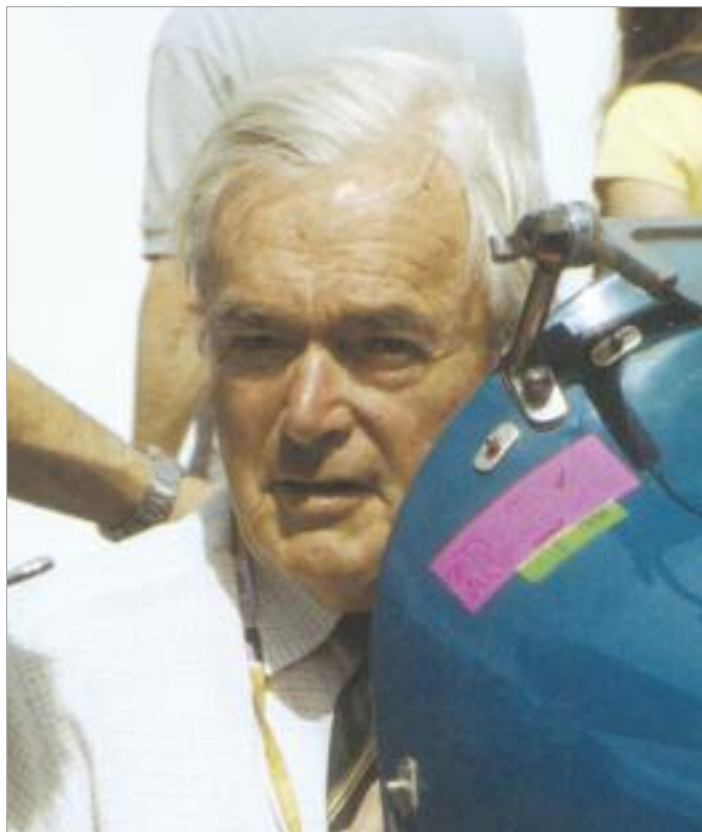
So what did you do for a car then, Tony?

Gaze: I bought an old Aston Martin that had been raced twice at Le Mans. I was shot down later and left with a weepy eye when I pushed my face through the gunsight. The doctors said to get rid of the open car and get a closed one. My English grandfather loaned me some money to buy a Type 57SC Atlantic Bugatti. The blower had been removed and I changed my mind and ended up with a Speed 25 Alvis from Charles Follett. I thought I could keep the price difference but my grandfather was on to that.

What was your connection with Goodwood?

Gaze: When I first went to Westhampnett it was just four big paddocks joined up to make a grass airfield on the Goodwood estate. Tar was put across the grass but there was still a worry that the aircraft refuelling tankers would get bogged. It was Douglas Bader's idea to build a perimeter track and I recall Douglas getting into trouble by abusing the Irish laborers for leaning on their shovels every time anyone took off. It was heard by some reporter who published "Legless pilot rude to our gallant allies from Ireland" or something like that.

That was back when I still had the MG, and every morning Mickey Stoop and I would go for a belt round. After the war I was in Charles Follett's office, as was the Duke of Richmond. He was



president of the Junior Car Club and looking for a replacement for Brooklands. I heard they were looking at airfields and I said, "Don't be silly, he's got one." Then someone said "Go and tell him." So I went over to him and I think I called him sir, or actually he should have called me sir as I was a squadron leader and he was a flight lieutenant.

I said, "When are we going to have a race around Westhampnett?" He said, "What!" Then I said that we had been racing round and it's a great circuit. He said, "Bless my soul, what would the neighbors say?" He hadn't thought of it as it was part of his home. So that was the start of Goodwood.

Did you race there?

Gaze: Much later. I was driving an HWM-Jaguar single-seater and Stirling [Moss] reckons I trod on the wrong pedal. I was thrown over the 8ft retaining wall and ended up in the crowd, which didn't do my back any good. I was in the hospital for about three weeks and the Duke was worried that, having started the idea, I might be killed there.

What led up to your first Grand Prix?

Gaze: I got a chance to buy this sports Alta and when I was getting ready to return to Australia I took it to Geoffrey Taylor at Alta to look over. He suggested that I should buy Johnnie Wakefield's racing Alta instead. So I had a drive in it and entered them both at Prescott Hillclimb and I think I was 3rd in the sports car class and with the racing Alta I was a bit further down.

I also wanted to get a new sports car to take back to Australia and about the only thing available was an HRG. Charles Follett, by then a good friend, was the agent so I bought one. Came the time, I left the Sports Alta to be sold with HWM and brought the racing car and HRG back to Australia. When I eventually got

home to Melbourne I was met by my father, who said “Now you’ve been enjoying yourself for seven years it’s about time you did some work.” So I worked for him on the property and went motor racing on the weekends at everywhere I could.

My father was unimpressed at my motor racing expenses but it went very well except for the unreliable racing Alta. We got sick of that and thought if I sold everything I could buy a new car from England.

Then I got a letter from George Abecassis saying how well Stirling was doing in Formula Two and I thought if I were to buy an unblown HWM-Alta I’d have a Formula Two car for a European season. So I bought one, took it to Europe and received quite reasonable starting money. However the bloody thing wouldn’t rev out. Monza was the first race where you could really test it with long enough straights. We thought the timing must be a tooth out, as it would pull like stink down low and then die out. With 16:1 compression there would be problems with the valves if we changed the timing. So we left it alone until Avus, which was miles long. We didn’t have a high enough axle ratio so we put the front wheels on the back as they were bigger. Anyway it threw a rod.

What was the Alta engine like?

Gaze: The Alta engine was very much like the Vanwall, almost like four Norton motorcycle single-cylinders. The bore and stroke were the same as the Norton and the four SU carburetors caused a lot of trouble, as a single SU on a single cylinder causes problems. Freddie Dixon used to run them on his Rileys and was the first bloke to get 100 horsepower per liter out of an unblown

Maserati at Snetterton.

engine. After Monza we went to the Weber factory at Bologna where they built up inlet manifolds and fitted Weber carbs.

That was in 1951, what about the following year?

Gaze: We had the engine repaired and I was about to return to Australia when I received an invitation to run in Formula One. The old F2 became F1 and, as Alfa Romeo had pulled out, no one wanted to see a whole lot of Ferraris, as there wasn’t anything else to run.

I didn’t qualify for the Italian Grand Prix, in fact I nearly wrote off Ascari while trying. While practicing I saw him coming up behind me going round the Curva Grande and thought if I could still be in front after the second lesmo I would get a tow down the back straight and possibly stick with him around the South Curve and get another tow. So I went flat through the second lesmo, got

the whole thing sideways and nearly took him with me. He gave me a bit of a look as he went by, so when practice finished I sought him out and said I was terribly sorry. He slapped me on the back and said, “Ahhh! Think nothing, we now go and have a cup of tea.” So he took me off and bought me a cup of tea. Every time I saw him after that at a race meeting he would slap me on the back and say “Have a cup of tea?” I don’t think anyone apologized to him before but I thought you couldn’t take the world champion out like that.

I did Spa, then Reims for the French GP. It had been arranged by a bloke, who also looked after the starting money. I sat in the hotel and was told that I wasn’t listed as first reserve and, as we lived off the starting money, my finances were going down the drain. It went on and on until I lost my temper and returned to

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Gaze at the wheel of an Aston Martin DB3 during the Dundrod TT.

England. Later, on the ship, I remembered that I had this letter in my pocket from the leader of the French Resistance who saved me when I was shot down. They were coming to see me race and if the organizers knew I reckon I would have a got an entry very quickly.

The next race was Germany and John Fitch was driving a Porsche in the touring car race. During practice he was to drive the first of the 300 Mercedes and borrowed my helmet as he didn't need one in the Porsche. I was sitting on the bench with Neubauer when Fitch was having his test and then Alfred went to have a drive. I was absolutely stupid, as I am sure that if I were to ask for a drive I would have got one. I got on quite well with Neubauer, but you had to be careful about the war as none of them were in it.

Didn't you move on to sports cars after that?

Gaze: John Wyer asked if I would like to come to Monza for a mid-winter test of the Aston Martin DB3. I flew down there and Peter Collins picked me up in a Lagonda and frightened the hell out of me by driving on the ice saying, "Look it goes all sideways when you do this."

There was lots of trouble with the crankshaft pulley breaking. I did half of a lap, then bang putting a hole in an oil pipe. John Wyer said "It didn't take you long to bust it, did it?" So we went to lunch while we had a think, leaving it in the middle which didn't please some bike people, who wanted to practice. We pinched the pulley from the front of a DB2/4 and nearly wrecked the engine again. The mechanics drained the water, fixed it and put it all together. Peter Collins set off and I then asked if they had put the water in the car. Luckily no damage was done, but it was pretty stupid for skilled racing mechanics to do.

Anyway we did a few laps and it started to snow and it snowed and snowed. So I followed some tracks left by the Lagonda. So I

went round having a bit of a go, did our three hours and handed over to somebody else. I went back to England and I was then offered a DB3 if I wanted one.

I bought one and ran it at Silverstone and again in Scotland thinking it was pretty ordinary. I wrote it off completely in Portugal leaving me no car to drive. I wrote to Monza saying that I was unable to run so they doubled the starting money. I couldn't find another DB3 and Lofty England at Jaguar didn't have any C-types to sell so next was HWM, who agreed. Lofty produced what was reckoned the most powerful three-liter engine ever. I ran it first at Reims in the 12-hour with Graham Whitehead, but it handled terribly.

Wasn't the Reims race a Le Mans-style start?

Gaze: We were all mad as it started at midnight and it was pouring. We were standing on one side of the road and I remember thinking that we were crazy because in 30 seconds we were going to run across, jump into two inches of water and hurl off into the dark. After a few laps I was coming down the main straight, started braking only to find myself slithering down the escape road half way to Reims. Next lap I did it again then realized that I couldn't see properly due to a gearbox oil leak. Using caster oil, the more I wiped my goggles the worse it became. I took them off and kept going. At the end my eyes were like two pieces of steak and I was given antihistamine by a doctor who told me not to have a drink afterwards.

My eyes cleared up, but I had a drink at dinner that night. Sitting opposite Carroll Shelby I got halfway through my soup when I went blump with my head falling into the bowl. For the rest of the season whenever I saw Carroll he said "I'll always remember you as the guy who put his face in the soup to drink."

Later, when I turned up at Crystal Palace, Roy Salvadori said "Why the hell did you bring a great big thing like this for? This is

a small car circuit." But I got away with it and won, beating the Cooper Bristols. At Zandvoort it was a disaster as Esso put an extra gallon of oil into the engine. I reckoned I had the race won, as George Abecassis broke a driveshaft on the line in his HWM and Duncan Hamilton had run his bearings during practice.

We were faster than the Ecosse C-types but they went past me. I looked at the instruments and oil pressure was about 10, the oil temperature was about 130 degrees and it occurred to me that the crankshaft had turned into a paddlewheel. After a further lap I lay underneath to drain out a gallon of red hot oil, which wasn't very funny. That was the end of any chance of winning the race. It was two heats and we started the second heat where we had finished the first, which of course was last. I was going quite well and catching people up but I had no hope of winning and I came into the corner behind the pits a bit wild. I thought that I wouldn't risk sliding all over the place but just run over the grass on the apex and got bogged. It made the day for Duncan Hamilton as he told me later that it was the funniest thing he had ever seen.

How did you end up with HWM?

Gaze: I was an official HWM driver really but I only drove the Formula One car at Aintree. They were playing around with fuel injection but the lag was enormous, almost like an early jet engine. Then Pete Whitehead and I were invited to the first New Zealand GP in 1954. I took the supercharged HWM, he took his Formula Two Ferrari with the blower on it and BRM went of course. We went all that way but couldn't buy fuel on race day as it was a Sunday. We started but I was just tooling around enjoying myself, knowing I couldn't even get halfway without more fuel. Then I saw Peter stop and the next lap I saw people siphoning the fuel from his car and I thought I had better hurry as I still had a chance at getting something. They called me in a third of the way through and put in all the fuel they had. I was gaining three seconds a lap but ran out with five laps to go. I opened the filler cap and coasted to the pits. In went a funnel and a churn of fuel. I was pushed the whole length of the pits and in the end came 3rd. The fuel came from BRM and they grabbed one of their churns after it

Tony Gaze in the Formula One Alfa, at Silverstone in 1952.

was refuelled.

When did you finish racing in Europe?

Gaze: The last race I had in Europe was just before we went out to the third New Zealand Grand Prix. I found that fellow Australian David McKay was interested in sharing my HWM or even starting a team. The team idea really appealed and that's what we did.

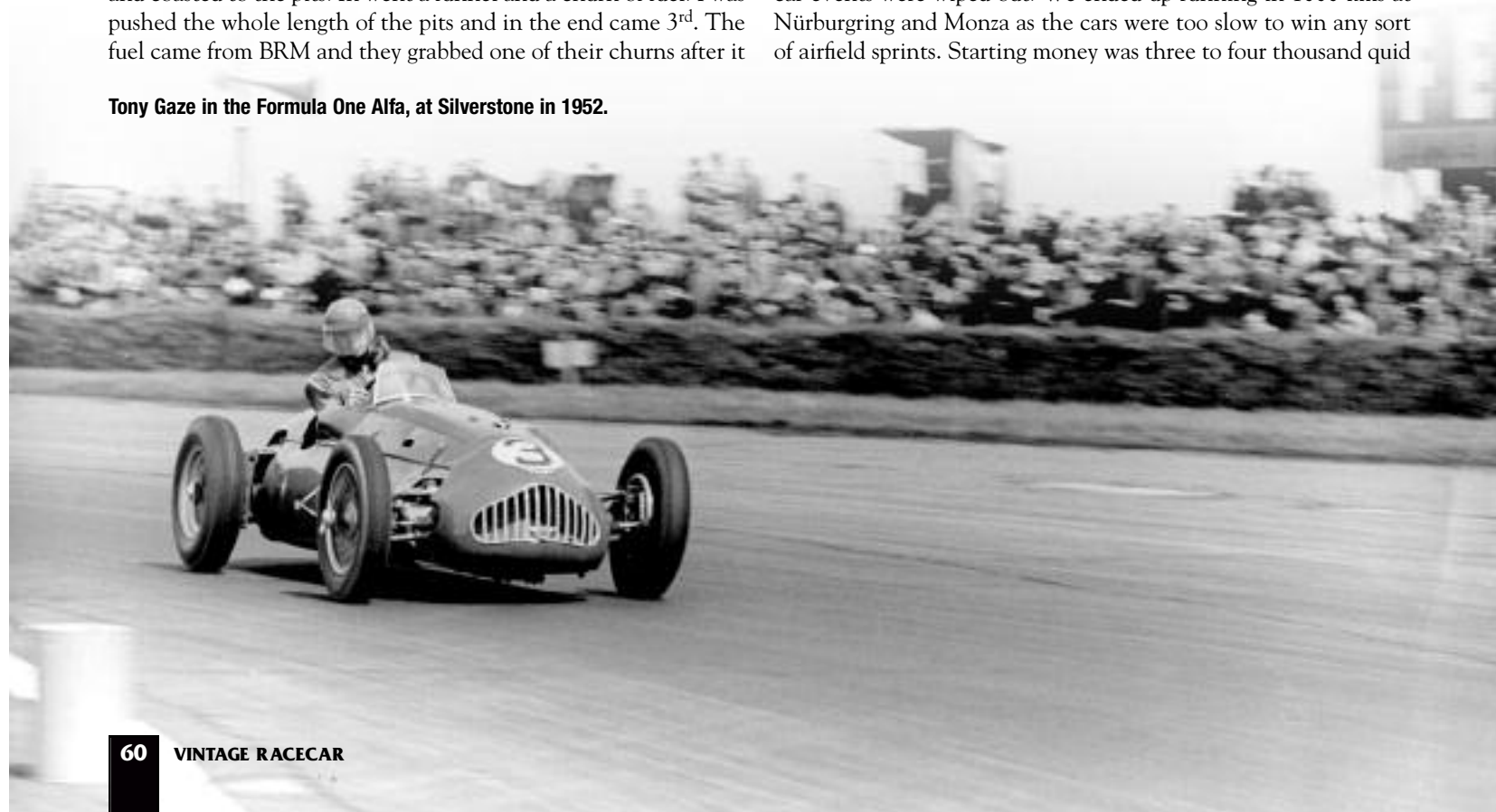
We couldn't get three D-types from Jaguar and I wasn't all that mad keen on Aston Martins so I tried HWM but they weren't in a position to make three. In the end, we went to Aston Martin but suddenly they said that we couldn't have Webers but Solexes instead. In the end I cancelled the order and then David McKay got terribly worried so I had another go. Like everything, the cars came through in dribs and drabs.

But you eventually got everything?

Gaze: Yes we got them. Our third partner, Tommy Sulman, got his first and eventually the others arrived. We ran once before Le Mans in the 12-hour race at Hyeres as it paid good starting money and got us away from airfields to a proper road circuit. Jack Brabham came with us and we very nearly won but ended up just 40 seconds behind the Ferraris. David McKay was driving the last step and he seemed to be enjoying himself. I went to the pit crew and said that I was going to speed him up a bit and see what happens. If the Ferraris speed up, I'll slow him down again. I thought we were 40 seconds behind but was told that we were a lap and 40 seconds behind. I said leave it then, as it wasn't worth it.

How long did the Kangaroo Stable last?

Gaze: It lasted to Le Mans and we got entries all over the place and good money being the only Australian team. We did well with all three cars finishing even though the Brabham car had run out of brakes. It was 1955 and suddenly the next week all sports car events were wiped out. We ended up running in 1000 kms at Nürburgring and Monza as the cars were too slow to win any sort of airfield sprints. Starting money was three to four thousand quid





Gaze and his 1.5-liter HRG at the Rob Roy Hillclimb in Victoria, Australia.

for the three cars. It was big money when you think that a racing mechanic's yearly wage was around 500.

The only races that we could go to were the Portuguese races because they didn't care if you killed yourself and the 9-hours at Goodwood. I think I came 6th in the Porto race and in the Lisbon race I cracked a brake drum with the other cars finishing right down.

Did you then head back to Australia?

Gaze: I promised my wife, Kate, that if she ever got really worried I would give it up. I got the signal that she was and I said that I would give it up after the next season's New Zealand and Australian races. Pete Whitehead and I wanted to buy a couple of cars, race them for a year or two and then sell them in Australia. So we went to Alfa without success and then Ferrari, who was very fond of Pete. Ferrari came to see us in the hotel and after a little haggling we agreed on two of the four-liter Indianapolis cars fitted with three-liter engines.

We went to be fitted up for the cars, especially me as I'm so tall. Unknown to me I got Ascari's car and Pete got Gonzalez's. Then we got a note saying why don't we take the Squalo front suspension, and five-speed gearbox? So I had a word with Mike Hawthorne who said "Don't! It may be more comfortable but nowhere near as predictable. If I were you I would leave yours well and truly alone." This I did, but Pete did the opposite and I ended up beating him every time. He did win when it was his turn in the team.

Did you retire from racing after New Zealand?

Gaze: I had sold my cars to Lex Davison, which satisfied Kate. Then in 1956 Dicky Stoop asked me if I would drive at Le Mans for Frazer Nash. I said that's okay as it's a different sort of race. We were doing four-hour stints and leading the class against the Porsches and the like. By the time the race was half over, virtually all the Porsches were out having caught fire, crashed or some-

thing. I was in the Shell sleeping quarters when Von Trips came to me and asked me if I was enjoying it. I told him that I wasn't used to driving smaller cars and getting in everyone's way. Then he told me that we were leading the two-liter class and asked me if I expected to be leading the bloody race.

The Bristol engine blew back a lot and there was a lot of petrol fumes. It was the first time with full width screens so we made a bug deflector for overnight. Dicky went out and didn't have any problems. My goggles kept blowing off as the wind of the deflector was blowing over the top of the screen right into my face.

In the dark suddenly the engine stopped and I pulled over. I tried to take the cap off the tank and then realized that I would have broken the seal. Using my flashlight I could see that the fuel line had broken off at the pump. It was too far to push but I managed to get back by pushing the pipes together, filling the bowls, driving for a few seconds and then doing it all again.

Luckily we had a spare pipe, but back in those days all the spares had to be carried within the cars and laid out along the pits prior to the race. Dicky went again but after his stint he didn't come in. He had lost concentration and flew off through the esses.

Was that your last time at Le Mans?

Gaze: I ran again in 1957, reserve in 1958 and then team manager for Duncan Hamilton and Ivor Bueb the following year. That was about it for my motor racing career but I stayed in the UK and started a new career farming and salmon fishing. However, just beforehand, I was talking to Prince Bira at Silverstone and he asked me what I was going to do. I told him about the farming, which he thought was fairly quiet and suggested that I take up gliding. I did that with some enthusiasm and in 1960 represented Australia in the World Championships.

I came back to Australia permanently in 1976 and married Diana Davison after Lex had died. Now we live on a small farm roughly in the middle of Victoria named Goodwood Farm. 🚗