

# Dave Roberts

## “My not so brilliant career”

Ian Jackson was responsible for my not so brilliant career and subsequent life as a pauper. In 1956 he took me to the Domain Hill climb where I well and truly caught the bug. Competing that day were well known stalwarts of Tasmanian Motor Racing, L Archer, M Watt, and J Barrie. Little did they know that within 18 months I would be sharing the bitumen with them?

At the time I was a clerk with the T & G Life Company. Like many young men of the time the grass was greener on the other side of the fence and so I became a part operator of the Ampol Service Station Davey St Hobart. At the same time I purchased the “Demon” a Ford 10 Special. I raced this car at the Domain Hill Climb and a few Baskerville Meetings. My lap time was about 1.29 about the same as an MG-TF. However the Demon didn't last, it was slow heavy and definitely pre war.



The next car was the Ford 10 special Mick Watt's “Goat”. I never raced this car. In 1958 the M G Car Club was formed so I bought an MG-TF WHG-649 the last 1250 to be sold in Tasmania. As became the usual practice I immediately tore it apart rebuilding the engine and fitting a high ratio differential. The car was raced at Baskerville, The Domain, as well as the Richmond and South Arm events.

In its latter years it was fitted with a Marshall Nordec Blower. It was a good reliable car, which handled well. My fastest S/S ¼ mile time was 18.8 seconds at Richmond on 17th December 1960. The one course it failed on was Longford and on reflection that was my fault. I thought I knew more about ignition timing than the factory.

For some peculiar reason lost in time “The Ecurie Alle Klassen” entered the car probably because with a number of cars in the stable we could get lots of pit passes. The service station went under and so did my sponsorship so we were on starvation rations as far as our Motor sport went. The TF departed and was replaced by an FJ which in time was suitably lowered. Its nickname was “The Gudgeon Pin Special”.

After a period of abstinence I purchased ex Melbourne the Franz Bird TC Special. This in its day was a well-known car. On arrival it underwent the usual reconstruction as sad to say it was a bit of a snail. The car had to be rebuilt. We fitted the Marshall Nordec Blower and bored out the 1250 block to 1500. When it was going it went like the clappers. Great on S/S ¼ Mile sprints Club days and short races at Symmons and Baskerville but at Longford it destroyed itself. “The old problem of overheating”



In 1965 I went to the U K and spent a year working for a Privateer, David Prophet on the European F II circuit finishing up in South Africa for their summer season. Greg and Peter Ellis looked after and entered the car whilst I was away.

They dispensed with the Blower fitted Webbers, stiffened the suspension. On my return I drove it again for a few meetings it was even quicker; furthermore, no overheating - Greg had solved the problem. The airflow was over the original radiator not through it.

The TC departed and I built a formula Vee. My brother who had also been in the pits with me in the U K and I formed the Roberts Racing Partnership. This was patterned on the team structure we had worked for overseas. Everything was logged, all tasks had a job card, and all the team had a specific job, Keith, until the time he bought his own F Vee

headed the time keeping team. We had a chap who was responsible for ensuring the cars were loaded on the trailers and properly secured. The Vee was a great car it only let us down once and that may have been our fault. Again Longford was our hoodoo with the clutch cable breaking at the crucial moment.



I also entered my MGA-1600 once at Baskerville and at Longford in 1967. Greg and Peter Ellis helped me prepare the car. Subsequent owners must have got a shock when they pulled the engine down to find spacers in the rocker gear, polished balanced rods and crankshaft with a non standard camshaft. There were Vauxhall Cresta springs in the clutch assembly. It was a lovely car stopped and handled well. Believe it or not, the Longford hoodoo struck again. Going well, up in the field with a place in sight and the choke retention springs broke causing the engine to go all woolly.

In late 67 I was married so my not so brilliant career came to an end. In all that time I won one scratch and one handicap race the latter in my brother's Sprite. There were plenty of places but never a winner. My only consolation is that due to our team structure, one year we nearly broke even as our cars always finished and were rewarded with a lap money cheque.



I concluded my time as a scrutineer at Baskerville until a new order arrived and my friends and I were summarily dismissed. Anecdotal evidence was that we were too good at our job. We believed that rules were not made to be broken.

Now I just sit and dream and bore my Grandchildren.

Before I go; one final thing. We still have all our time sheets and original order book!