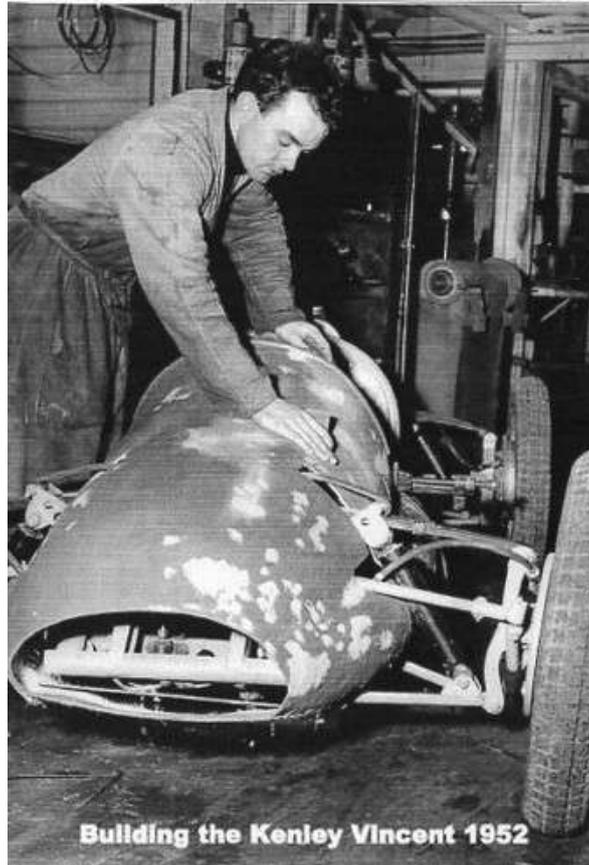


## GEOFF SMEDLEY – “In his own words”

My involvement in motor racing came about almost by accident, not from any special ambition to do so. In 1950 I bought a 1936 4/4 Morgan, the first 4 wheel model and fitted with a Coventry climax F head 1122cc engine. I think I spent as much time working on it as I did driving it. In 1953, by then having a Lady Friend, I upgraded to the slightly more comfortable 1951 4/4 Morgan Coupe. With the idea of building a competition car, the 1936 Morgan was fitted with a tubular chassis and various modifications made, but that project was never finished.



I became interested in the Formula 500 racing, then beginning in England, and decided to build a car based on the Mk 6 Cooper 500 using a brand new Indian 12 hp motor. I was able to build the whole car myself from scratch as I had the use of the machines in our family workshop (Bedford Machine tools) where I was employed at the time. The car was named the Kenley Vincent. By chance Phil Irving visited the workshop when he needed to use the lathe for a job on the Cooper Irving being driven by Lex Davidson when competing here in a hill climb. He was very interested in the car I was building and suggested that a Vincent engine was a far better option than the Indian. With his help and advice the change was made, including fitting a super charger modified from the cabin blower from a Spitfire aircraft (these were readily available for around 5 pounds (\$10) at that time).



When the Triumph TR2 was released, I ordered one from England and my enthusiasm for the Kenley Vincent waned and a friend took it over. We worked on it together for some time and he drove it in several events before it was sold on again and eventually went to NSW and was never heard of again.



Smed at Quorn Hall in (1955)

I raced the TR2 at Longford with mixed results. The car suffered with oil surge, and worse still, severe brake fade which caused me to perform a 360 degree under the viaduct, fortunately without any contact. Sold the TR in 1965 and got married, but the bug was still biting and I purchased a Series 2 (short door) TR2 which was claimed to have larger front brakes, more sump baffling to overcome the surge problems and doors that could be opened over curbs. Somehow we never did click - the colour of the car was pink, and the supposed upgrades made little difference, and the whole car felt loose and disappointing. I was later told this model was assembled in Australia so perhaps that is why it felt different. I raced it once at Longford but can't recall running it again.



At that time the ex-Warrick Hine lightweight MG TC came on the market, so I purchased that. The little TC was a great fun car and I used it a lot. After I sold it, it became supercharged and lost its appeal and performance.

It was then that the Le Mans Jaguar came into being. The remains of a burnt out lightweight XK120 became available from an insurance company in Launceston, and four mates formed a syndicate to make something from the salvageable parts. I was asked by the instigators Brian Dunstan, Alan (Chuck) Cohen and Geoff Richardson to become a partner and the builder of the car. I accepted and set forth to make a race car out of the wreck. A complete new tubular frame chassis was built, along with many other needed parts, and all wrapped in a slim aluminium body based on the competition sports cars of the late 30's and 40's.



The first day of testing at Symmons Plains was to prove that the Jag didn't suit all tastes. Geoff Richardson thought he would be better off taking up another challenge and bowed out, but Brian Dunstan seemed to enjoy it and Chuck Cohen reckoned he could master the beast. So Chuck and I did most of the driving, with Brian having a couple of races with it at Symmons Plains and driving it very well indeed.

Race Driver Austin Miller approached me then with the hair brained idea of modifying his Cooper Climax for an attempt on the Australian Land Speed Record, a challenge indeed! Austin rang the Hotel Monaco in Launceston which had an upstairs room hidden away which was used as a workshop for the project. The only drawback was that everything, including the car, had to be winched up to the top floor. I was still able to use the family business to make and modify most of the parts required. We made history when we set a new Australian Land Speed Record in 1961 at Bakers Beach in NE Tasmania.

No sooner were the calibrations over when I was approached by John Youl of Symmons Plains to take up a position of engineer/mechanic responsible for the preparation of his then new T51 Cooper Climax and later T55 model. This was a full time position and required living at Symmons Plains and setting up a permanent racing workshop to keep the car maintained and competitive for all the Gold Star races around Australia during 1962. So; a new era in motor sport began for me and by 1963 we were contesting the full NZ/Aust rounds of the Tasman Series. As a driver John was a force to be reckoned with throughout his short career. He was forced to retire from the sport in 1965 on the death of his Father which left John (the eldest son) with the responsibility of the Symmons Plains property.

I then received several offers of work in the field of motor racing, one being from the newly formed Total Motor Racing Division in Sydney which needed a caretaker for the two cars Frank Matich was driving at the time, a BT11 Brabham Climax and the Lotus 19B. After negotiations into workshop facilities and residential convenience, I took the position in 1965 until Total pulled out of racing in Australia in 1966, when another team took over the workshop and talked me into taking their 3 cars under my wing. These were a Lotus 27 mono, Lotus 23 and a Lotus Super 7 which I looked after until returning to Tasmania in late 1967, having, I thought, finished with motor racing.

But March 1968 saw me back at Longford involved with Leo Geoghegan's ex Jim Clark Lotus 39 that had by this time been fitted with the Repco V8 engine. Leo needed a mechanic for Longford, so the smell was back in my nostrils once more. This Longford meeting was a wash out due to inclement weather and was also the final meeting ever held at that circuit.

On the Sunday (which was always a lay day) of that final meeting I received a phone call which I took to be a hoax as someone was always playing jokes among the racing fraternity in those days. The caller mentioned Singapore and the upcoming Grand Prix, but I ignored it and hung up. Soon after, I received a second call which proved to be from P.H. Wong of Newton Enterprises in Singapore requesting me to come to Singapore to discuss which car he should purchase to contest the Singapore Grand Prix only a few weeks away. He, being a Director in Malaysia Singapore Airlines I suggested he come to Tasmania, but we compromised and met in Sydney. From cars available in Australia we settled on the Brabham Climax that Alex Mildren had on offer, as it seemed there was little opposition for that car in Singapore. Not wishing to sign a contract, it was agreed that the air travel would be free; I would work in Singapore for 6 weeks then come home for 6 weeks, depending on dates of race meetings.



The ex. Mildren BT11 in Singapore 1968

A story worth telling was my meeting with Teddy Yip, later to be known for the Theodore Racing Team. In 1968 Teddy owned a Lotus 20 and was having trouble with the engine and a few other bits and pieces. P.H. Wong suggested that Teddy should fly the car to Singapore for me to rebuild the engine and give the car a general tidy up. The car was then delivered to Malaysia's Batu Tiga circuit 3-4 weeks later for a meeting at which the Newton Enterprises car was also racing. Our team had been made late arriving having to drive from Singapore to Batu Tiga through monsoons, and as both P.H. and Teddy had been kept waiting for some time, the Johnny Walker had by then had quite an effect on them. Never the less Teddy was determined to practice in the Lotus 20 and was able to have the circuit closed in order to do his couple of laps. After his epic laps he told me that the car had never gone better, and so began a firm

friendship which included an invitation to be his guest at the Macau Grand Prix each November, a journey I made each year until 1996 when Teddy passed away.

I was privileged to have had these opportunities in life, creating fond memories of wonderful places and events, and meeting many great people and drivers in the world of motor sport and feel I was involved in the best years of Grand Prix racing. It was difficult to return to normality, but the time had come and I ended my business, Classic Cars, in 1977 and was able to restore some of the world's best cars, some of which now reside in museums around the world. In 1987 my Wife Sylvia and I opened the National Automobile Museum of Tasmania, which was a working museum where many lovely cars were restored.

Now at the age of 82 I still find delight in making specialised parts for friends and am thankful that my life time came when it did, born in a depression, began my working life at 14 and learnt the good, the bad and the not so good looking!

“Smed”