

Richard Gibbs



Hi I'm Richard Gibbs, I have lived in Tasmania, Hobart area all my life. I was always interested in cars at an early age. My mum recalls when I had a pedal car that I lifted it upside down to study the "workings" to see what made it go. Apparently I used to run around the house mimicking Formula 1 car noises from the 1960's. (Too much tv at an early age) I remembered vaguely watching on black and white TV, at age 5 when mini's won at Bathurst in 1966.

In the early 1970's as a teenager we moved to a new house in Lenah Valley next to "the Jones's" They had 2 boys about 2 & 3 years older than me. They got me interested in electronics and cars. Their dad had been a fitter and turner in earlier days and was very mechanically minded and knowledgeable and they always had projects going on. My older sister was given a 2 door 803 Morris Minor from my grandfather which I learned to drive in at age 12. I bought a 105E Anglia in 1976 at age 15 for \$100 while still in high school. I tinkered with it and read books on engines from the State Library.

I used to take a 4L fuel can to school in my bag on occasions and used my bus money for the week to buy fuel for the Anglia and cart the damned fuel container all the way home from the petrol station. This way dad didn't know I had been driving around using up fuel. Although my dad wasn't particularly mechanically minded, having been an accountant, though he did have many practical skills so was able to support me earlier on. I taught myself to drive on the road (when I was 15) after school before mum and dad got home from work.

I sold the Anglia in 1977 at 16 and then had two mini 850's in quick succession, which I cleaned up and sold prior to buying a Mini Deluxe 998 I purchased while still on L plates. I remember driving the car home from purchasing it and getting pulled over by the police because it was blowing so much smoke.

I began rebuilding the 998 motor, modified an 1100cc head and got an exchange wade 240 Cam from Lyn Archer. I fitted mini Cooper 997 twin S.U's and extractors. The engine went well and got me through college before I sold it to a neighbour. I also bought and sold two Morris 1100's to fund my passion and to buy more tools from the Kmart !!

About this time I had reconnected with an old high school friend (Michael Dureau) with whom I shared a common interest in electronics and cars. I bought a 1963 mini cooper 997 from Michael, which was in poor condition; hand painted with a brush and had the wrong engine, however it was genuine. I had a number of engines in this car from 998, 1100 and 1275 over a few short years. In 1980 I joined the mini car club and got to know Peter Bergman, Kit Ellis, and Ray Thomas etc. I found out this car had a colourful history as it had been owned by Kevin Knight many years prior and used in rallies.

By this time I had also purchased a 1071 Cooper S and had an 850 mini that I painted red and with drum brakes and a hot 1275 motor that I built myself and I began running club days. I had also met Graham Westwell, Tony Gonn and Geoff Munyard who were all racing various cars and had an influence on me towards racing. I took the red mini with the hot 1275 motor to a club day at Baskerville in 1982 and its performance impressed Chris Ellis enough for him to heavily quiz me on the engine specs, gearing etc. I remember him asking what final drive ratio it had as he noticed I was changing into top gear going up the hill. I said "when it gets to seven in third I change into fourth"

Now getting back to the Cooper 997, Appendix J hadn't long started as had "street cars". It was 1983 and I decided to build my 997 cooper into an Appendix J Cooper S car as Ellis and Bergman had already just started racing theirs. I restored the car, repainted it myself to the original Nurburg white over Osmond green fitted a souped up 1275 'S' motor and went racing in 1983 in Appendix J as it was known then. The cars were very basic then however I was able to beat Bergman but not Ellis in my first meeting. I began studying cylinder heads and camshafts and suspension geometry, it all seemed so technical but I was able to make some improvements to my car on apprentice wages and achieved rookie driver of the year for 1983-1984 I raced the car for two seasons and managed to win the Baskerville

“Peterson Autos” series for 1984 just ahead of Barry Mitchell. Barry had led me all the way through the season but had a rare DNF that put him behind on points.



I sold this car to John Hamilton from the Tasmanian Devil Park. I restored the car back to 997 Cooper spec for John who ran the car in at least 2 Targas winning his class. The car was later sold to Scotty Taylor who then shipped it to the UK where it currently races in the Historic class, in the hands of Gary, (surname Preston I think?) and it has become known as the “Aussie Mini”

I had 2 years off then came back with another mini, this time in 1986 with a BRG Cooper 998 made up as a 1275 S with the same engine as before. By this time many of the other guys had gone quicker due to developments with their cars. I was a bit left behind and needed to spend money on an LSD, tyres, gearbox and further engine development which I decided against. I still managed to win a handicap race from near the back of the grid at a wet race meeting at Baskerville. I only ran the car for about one season and then ended up selling the car to Keith Morris who let his son Andrew and Chris Ellis drive the car which later went to John Saggars, then to Chris Fitzgerald.

I had decided I wasn't interested to race again or at least for a while until Tony Watts called me up one day asking if I would be interested to drive his car (No 2 car). Initially I declined, but for those of you who know “Wattsy” you would know that whatever he wants, he goes hard for, which turned out to be a good thing for both Tony and myself. We raced the car for about 4 years, and won quite a few races with it, 2 lap records and got driver of the year for 1990-1991.

Our biggest challenge at that time was the late and great Chris Ellis. Most of you would know that Chris was a hard charger and last of the late braker's etc etc. But through Wattsy's good work in managing and developing the car and with help and support from Bob Loring, Richard Shuttler, Wayne's Car Sales and a few others, we were able to achieve some great races, headlight to tail light and door handle to door handle with Chris Ellis. The truck meeting in 1991 was the last time we raced the car, so Tony put it into storage for over 20 years. For me it was a memorable meeting as I very dived hard with Kevin Knight in the rotary powered escort during a combined race. With the growing popularity of the annual Baskerville Historic Meeting, in 2010 we decided to enter the regularity events which have been great fun.

Baskerville 2011

In November 1989 I took a redundancy from the HEC where I had worked for over 9 years. I commenced working for myself in the Hobart city area in February 1990 in a workshop I rented from Wayne's Car Sales, which Tony Watts had kindly organized for me. I worked from there till Dec 1994 when I moved my business to Derwent Park where I stayed till Feb 2004.



Chasing Chris Ellis at Baskerville – taillight to headlight stuff

In 1997 the Mini Eleven racing class of minis came about. The cars were base model minis with 1000 or 1100 engine, limited modifications, drum brakes, single S.U. carb and Falken tyres. The cars raced within the Group N class, mainly at the back of the field. The cars became quick for what they were, often clocking times around 68 to 69 seconds a lap. I built one initially with a 1000cc engine which went well but was down on midrange power so I built an 1100 which went a bit quicker. We had some great racing with Gary Willson, Ossie Fitzgerald, Jeremy Dyer and a few others. The class was relatively short lived, though I feel successful as it served some useful purposes at the time. Over the next few years I had little to do with motorsport as I was busy working for myself in my own mechanical repair business. I did however build many motors for Targa and racing minis for other people during this time.

In Feb 2004 I decided I would sell up my business and find a “cushy job” (heh heh). So after selling out to the Willsons I had a stint at working at DJ motors in the workshop for around 2 years until I moved to Hazell Bros at Easter in 2006 where I’m currently employed. Since then I have continued to date, to help out in my spare time a few other motorsport competitors with their cars. I have a number of minis including one I plan to run at club events when I get around to finishing it in early 2015. My other interests are dogs, cats, goats and other animals, natural health cures and conspiracy theories.

Richard.