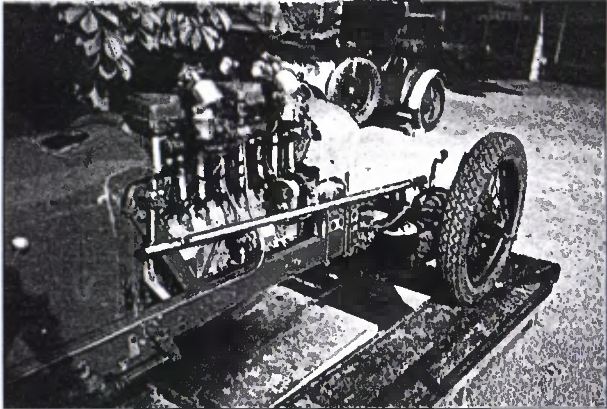
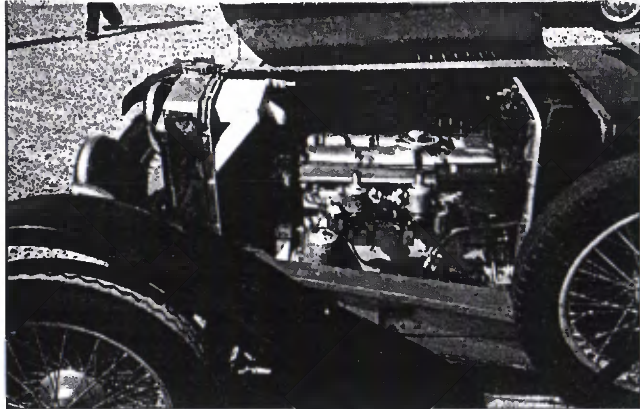
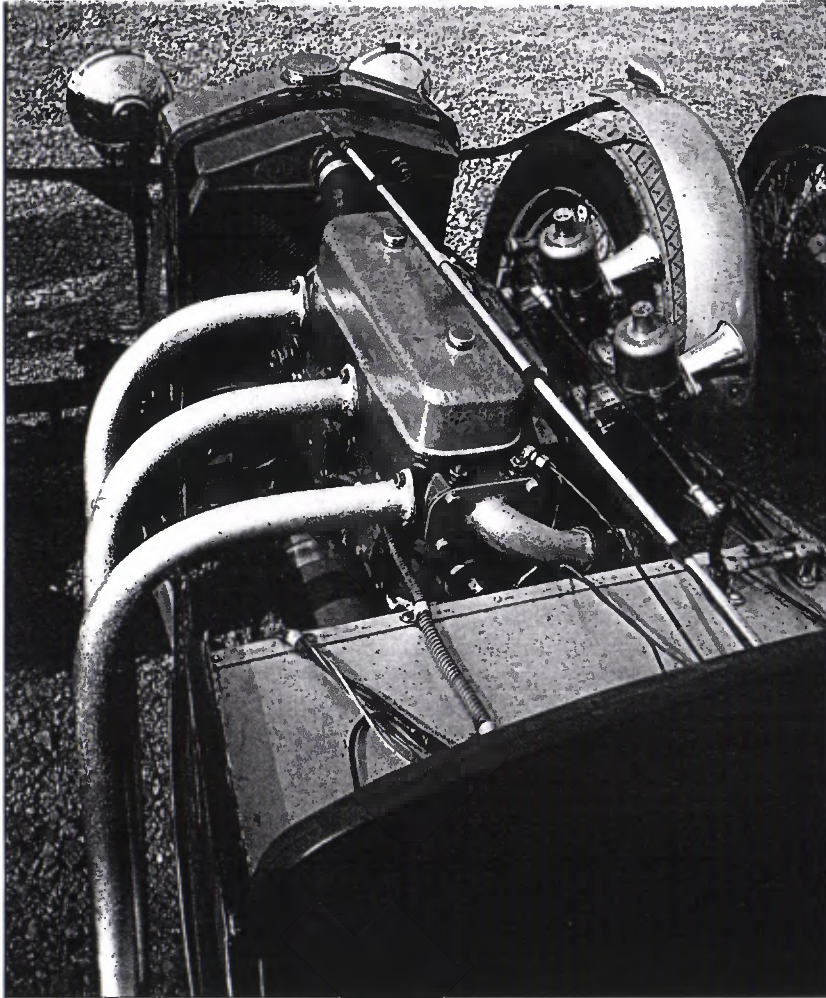


# Articles

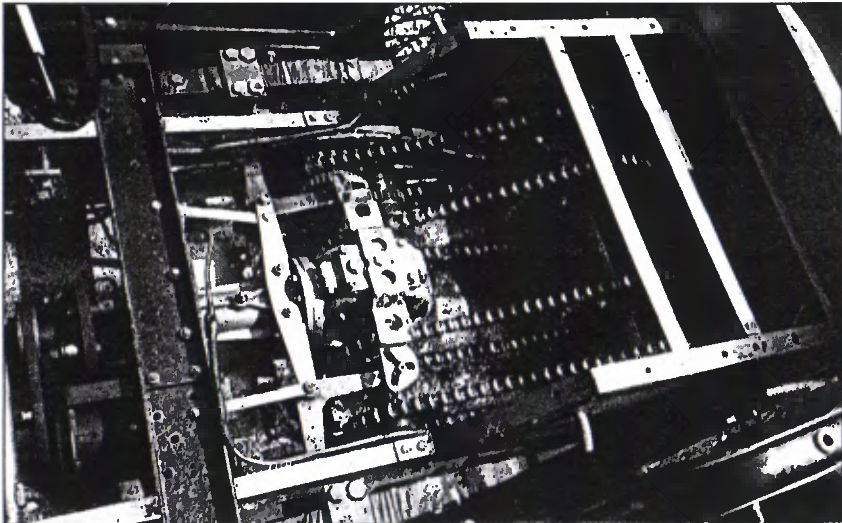




Far left: Dick Smith's Nash, with its very potent-Meadows engine. Above left: John Aldington's immaculate Blackburn-engined TT Replica. Above right: the amazing engine of a GN. Below: what a Frazer Nash is all about . . .

# CHAIN GANG!

Our Continental correspondent, former Grand Prix driver Paul Frère, realises an ambition that has been with him since his teens – to drive a Frazer Nash. In fact, on his recent visit to England, he drove several



WHEN I was fifteen and two years of English at school had remained as good as fruitless, my parents sent me to stay for three or four weeks with an English family who took foreign paying guests aged anything from 14 to 20 in Felixstowe – not a bad place to spend a holiday anyway. Of course, the family were supposed to speak only English with us – and in fact did so – but I got around that by speaking as little as possible to them, and as most of the other youths were French and German, I spent a wonderful holiday, duly repeated in the two following years.

The fact that, on my return to the Continent, my English, judging by the marks I obtained at school, had actually improved is entirely due to my already very vivid interest in cars. When I disembarked in Dover or wherever it was, for the first time, accompanied by my mother, I immediately spotted "The Motor" and its rival publication in a newspaper stand and

forty Frazer Nashes of all vintages, most of them belonging to the Chain Gang fraternity, and some GNs were displayed in perfect order in the car park, two Frazer Nash-BMW 328s and later Frazer Nash derivatives forming a separate group. Reflecting the hand-made character of the cars and their very much "to individual customers' request" specification, every car was different from the others, though the basic TT Replica body was predominant. Some were on the short chassis, some on the longer chassis specially devised to take the Blackburn twin-cam, six-cylinder engine, but one had a Blackburn squeezed into the short chassis, while some long chassis were powered by the shorter four-cylinder Meadows pushrod engine. As Frazer Nashes always used proprietary engines, fitting a type of engine never used originally by AFN Ltd. does not seem to be a crime in

than later models, but reputedly hardly any slower.

Among the cars present was also the Meadows-engined TT Replica in which, more than 30 years ago, I had had that lift on the Spa circuit, still in the hands of the same owner, though unfortunately he did not mention it to me until after the meeting.

Though every Frazer Nash made could be called a "Special" in its own right, there were also some fascinating real specials, among them a fabulous but unfortunately rather rough device which started life as a GN and had its flimsy chassis made even more whippy by lengthening it about two feet to take a reputedly pre-World War I (it certainly looked like it) four-cylinder, air-cooled Hermes aero engine. While this was a rather ragged special, a beautifully made 2-litre AC-engined single-seater (could it have been the Simmons Special?) was a complete contrast: it was not only in almost

owner felt very much as I remembered it. In spite of the limitations imposed by its narrow wheels and tyres, its handling came nearer to that of modern cars than of its contemporaries, and it was still quite quick by modern standards. It certainly oversteered more than it should have, but this may have been caused by the stiffer than standard springs the owner, obviously an addict of the pure vintage school, had fitted.

On the following day, after an early rise to take some photos of the unforgettable sight in the car park, all the cars left for the Donington Circuit. This time, John Aldington offered me the wheel of his own Blackburn-engined TT Replica in which he came as my passenger and the drive of some 30 miles to the circuit was a real thrill. The 'Nash's fully reversible bevel gear steering felt much more accurate than the worm-and-peg steering to be found on

kindly offered his. I headed for the track in good company with Anthony Crook doing some demonstration laps in the post-war Frazer Nash with which he had won the first post-war race on Jersey, and Tom Wheatcroft who was supposed to give the ex-Fane single seater an airing, but unfortunately, the car obstinately refused to fire.

Driving the TT Replica on the track showed what a real Frazer Nash is all about. With the weight well back and the narrow tyres, the incredibly quick steering is not as heavy as one might expect, and this is all the better, for any attempt to forcibly turn the wheel when going into a bend at speed will result in abominable zig-zags as the car changes from initial understeer (quite to be expected with no differential and a narrow rear track and spring base) to quite violent oversteer when the grip on the inside rear wheel is broken. Once the car starts to



successors helped improve my English much more than all Felixstowe families put together.

If I can't remember where I disembarked, I certainly remember that both the magazines I tried to read on the train to London's Victoria Station contained reports on the Shelsley Walsh meeting, then a very important event justifying a three-page report including many photographs. Some showed a sort of car I had never heard of and rather puzzled me: it was called a Frazer Nash, was obviously quite fast judging by the attitudes it took in the bends and (even more obviously) had nothing to do with another sort of Nash, made somewhere in Michigan.

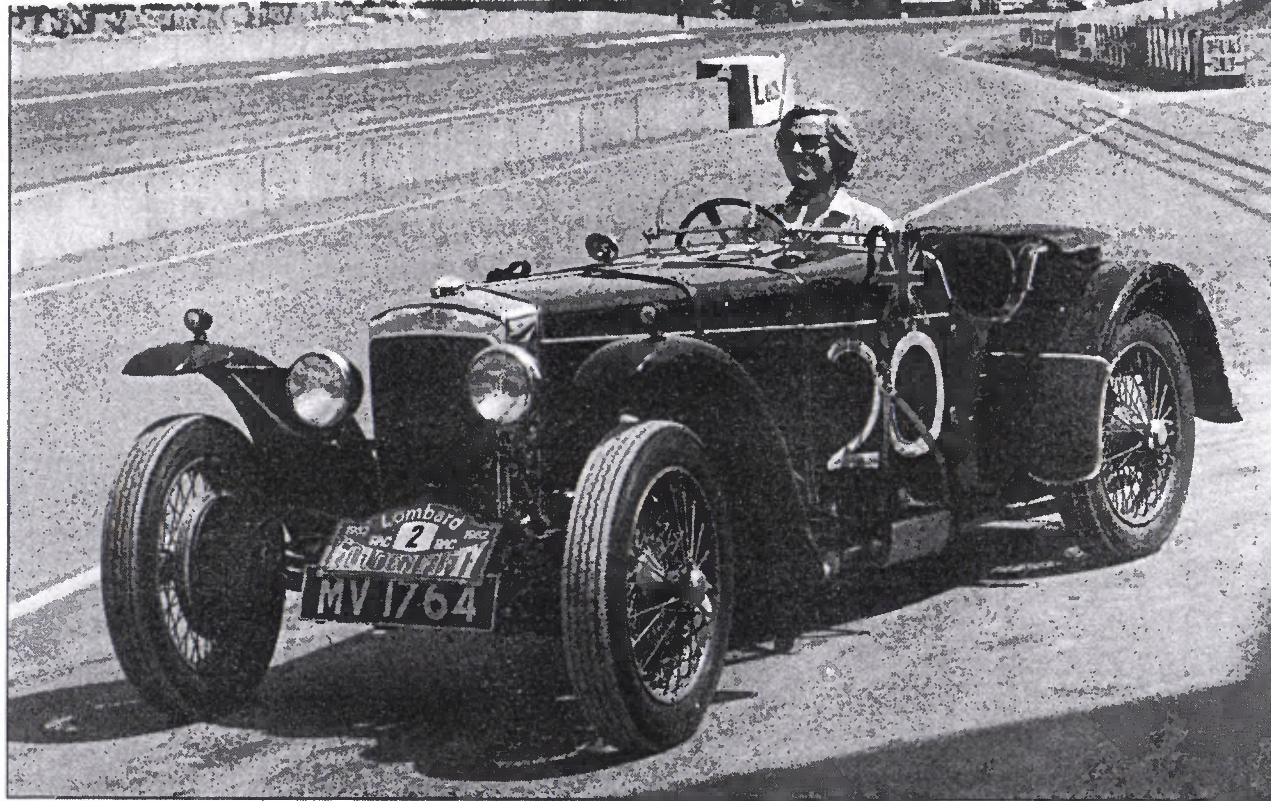
In the following year, 1933, I came upon a road test of a Blackburn-engined TT Replica and that was a real eye opener: not only had the device a quite astonishing performance, doing 0 to 60 mph in 16 seconds, but nearly 50 years before VW invented a name for it – Formel E – it was quicker in 3rd than in 4th gear. To cap it all, it was, of all things, chain-driven! Even though I still had two years to go before I was legally allowed to drive, I had strong opinions about steering systems and considered that the higher the gearing, the better they were. The 'Nash had only about ¼ of a turn from lock to lock!

I soon became a great admirer of the Aldington brothers whose exploits in racing and in the Alpine Trials I keenly followed. I dreamed of taking AFP Fane's place in the seat of the twin supercharged single-seater. If this was only a dream, I would not be happy unless I had tried this much vaunted lightning-quick gear change that could even be performed without using the clutch, and found out for myself what the testers meant when they wrote of the extraordinary road-hugging qualities of this differential-less car.

Until very recently, the nearest I had ever come to it was when, some time around 1950, I got a lift from Stavalot to Francorchamps in a TT Replica an English enthusiast had taken to Belgium on the occasion of the Grand Prix or the 24 Hours Race – I don't remember which.

I was also lucky to meet the Aldington brothers on various occasions, but it was left to John Aldington, HJ's son and current Managing Director of Porsche Cars of Great Britain, to fulfil my ambition when he kindly invited me to join the members of the Frazer Nash Club on the occasion of the Club's 50th anniversary celebrations.

This took place at the Peveril of the Peak Hotel, in Derbyshire and, being one of the last guests to arrive, the sight which met my eyes was almost unbelievable: at least



A smiling Paul Frère at the wheel of John Aldington's TT Replica *Cl 2047*  
*WRONCA*

engine into a J2 Midget or, say, a Chevrolet into a Lagonda chassis. One of the cars present actually had a 3½ litre Alvis Speed Twenty-five engine under its bonnet which the owner did not find necessary to keep firmly locked: he did not even have a particularly red face – at least not until the apéritifs were served. Nobody seemed to object – except perhaps the chains, but they can't speak, only act.

Most of the cars had the regular front quarter-elliptic springs, but some had the cantilevers usually associated with the impressive straight "Shelsley" axle of which the only one I saw was rigged up to quarter-elliptics. According to the car's vintage, there were plain and finned front brakes, the former shaft-operated, the finned variety being actuated by Bowden cables and – oh shame! – one car even had hydraulics! There was also what is probably one of the rare Nürburg models, looking rather like a Shelsley, but with a Meadows (rather than supercharged Gough) engine and none of the other "Shelsley" attributes. Early side-valve Anzani-powered, polished aluminium bodied cars were also present, looking much less stark

day, it put up a fabulous performance in the 10-lap race staged for the Club on the Donington Circuit, keeping station with the fastest post-war Bristol-engined models to finish a very close second to one of them, magnificently driven by its 60-plus years old owner.

John Aldington had informed most of the members of the Club that I had come to fulfil an almost lifelong ambition and immediately, one of them suggested that we went out in his car, a Meadows-engined TT Replica. Hardly had we come back when the owner of one of the BMW 328s offered me a drive in his car. Though this was not what I had come to drive, I was delighted to accept, as I had not driven one since 1939, when a college friend of mine at Brussels University had one and, though its performance was quite impressive for the period, I always thought it was a most strange car to drive. This was because with its rather soft suspension and very light and accurate rack-and-pinion steering, it was really the forerunner of the current school of thought and felt very different from what we, at the time, thought a sports car should be. In fact, the 328 I took out with its

six-cylinder engine was quite smooth and silent, revved readily to 4,500rpm and produced a very respectable performance. The irregularities in the road surface seemed to be accommodated as much by the chassis flexing torsionally as by the springs, but the car was in fact a lot more comfortable than I had anticipated. Quite often, we exceeded 70mph on the clock with still quite a lot to come and the gearchange was certainly the easiest non-synchromesh change I ever experienced, very similar to a motor cycle gearchange. No wonder, as the principle is exactly the same: dog clutches running at much less than engine speed. Shifting amounts to displacing the small gear lever from one slot to another as quickly as possible, though downward changes are smoother and can be perfectly silent if the engine speed is roughly adapted while partially disengaging the clutch.

Out on Donington track, I was kindly invited to do a few laps in a car of my choice. I asked for what I thought would be the most typical model, a Meadows-engined TT Replica, if possible in near-standard tune, and Freddie Giles met

a clean line, specially as there is not enough power to control the tail slide in the dry. So if you want to be quick and at the same time look reasonably polished, you should never handle the steering wheel forcefully. Except on tight bends, never attempt to use more than the fingers and the wrists. If this is remembered, the car will go around the bends at speeds which, though well below those attainable by modern machines, are quite remarkably high for a sports car of the 'thirties and fully justify the superlatives used by the testers and observers of the period.

In this example, fourth gear was quicker than third (in a 'Nash, you just change the individual sprockets to get any gear ratio you want on any gear) and the change itself worked exactly as on John Aldington's Blackburn-engined model which I had driven to the track. Even the brakes were quite decent, though they were of the plain drum type, and I would think that the performance was still just about as good as when the car was new. I believe they let me do five laps before calling me in and I was happy Tony Crook did not lap me with his more modern machine.

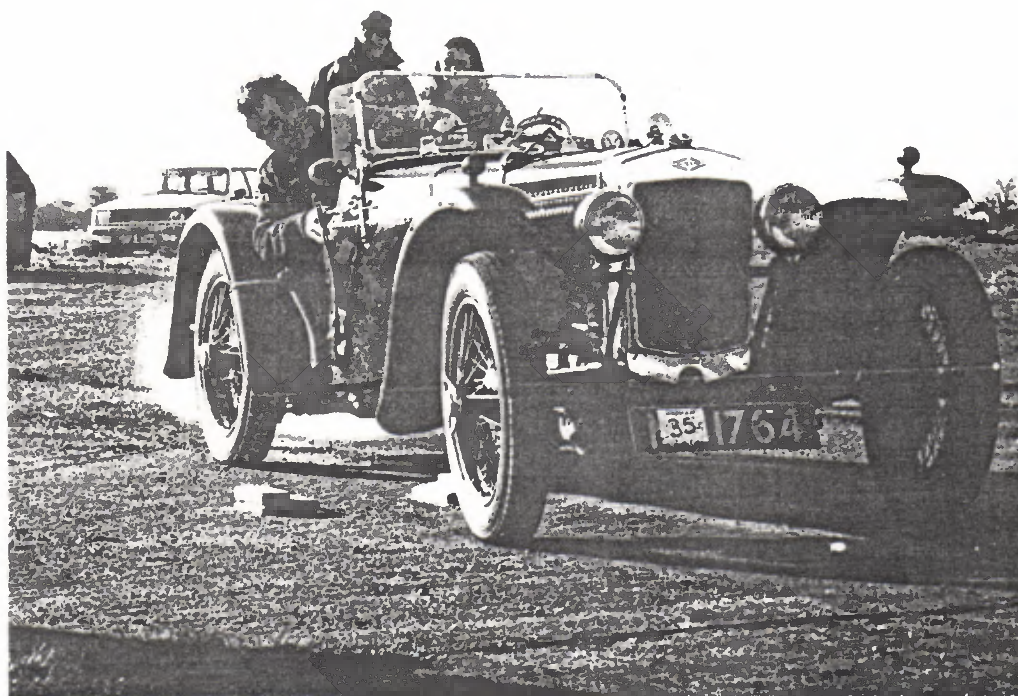
The Frazer Nash Club anniversary race was quite illuminating in showing what sort of speed can be extracted from those Chain Gang cars, the AC-engined special and Dick Smith's lightweight Meadows (reputed to have about twice the power of the standard version) being both particularly impressive and well driven, to be beaten only by one of the Bristol-engined post-war models, among which there was the only original Formula 2 Frazer Nash, a car with which my HWM shared the starting grid of the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa in 1952, when it was driven by the late Ken Wharton who went very fast, but crashed in the wet. My only disappointment was that, after the Frazer Nash race, I could not find a single chain shed on the track to take home as a souvenir.

To cap a memorable weekend, John Aldington entrusted me with his precious "Sebring" for the drive back to the hotel, a really good performer, even by modern standards (though it just hates city traffic) and a car which handles far better than a BMW 328 of which it is the obvious successor, both cars being the brain-children of Dr Fiedler.

With the sun doing its best to achieve Mediterranean vigour – and fully succeeding – and a most pleasant and entertaining farewell party, these are two days I will long remember. Thanks to all concerned for enabling me to fulfil an almost lifelong ambition. They really made



teeth off. There are lots of stories including the one about the rev counter scale reading from 0 - £600! (it still does). Happily it is now on loan to Robin Harcourt-Smith and is expected in the Pom.



2047

The author watches his man negotiate the pre-lunch hazards  
Photo Tom Threlfall

There was a good Nash entry only eclipsed by hoards of Austin 7's of one type or another. Barry Clarke scrutineered them for eligibility and some were regraded because of one thing or another. One fooled him by using 18 mm plugs which had 14 mm size bodies...

We started with Test 8. Court Colham Canter, round markers, stopping in a garage. Handbrake turns essential if Nashes to do it without reversing: Mitchell with hangover but without handbrake didn't do too well. "I must get off to the pub straight away...had a nasty on the way up here, slid right off the road on the ice!". Giles very fast - made fastest time of day. Geoff Hare not enough handbrake for this one but jolly good on the others: Tony Harper...made a fair job of Seven Tune Saunter, the

