

Motor Racing at Schofields – 1958

Jon Marsh/Barry Collerson

Barry Collerson was a well-known figure on the Sydney motor racing scene in the 1950s and 60s. Starting his career in 1955 in a Singer 9, he progressed through two MGs, a Lago, a Cooper Minx, a Jolus Minx, and a Repco Brabham before realizing a dream in 1966 and heading to Europe for two seasons of Formula 3 racing. He now lives at Wilberforce. In his book *Mount Druitt to Monza* (Bookworks 2004) he recalls racing at Schofields Aerodrome in 1958. The following article is reproduced by permission of the author.

“The Canoblas Trophy was followed by a win in the 1.5 litre Racing Car class at Foley’s Hill Climb, to be followed by two highly successful meetings on the Schofields Aerodrome Circuit. With the demise of the Mount Druitt circuit in 1957, New South Wales enthusiasts were starved of motor racing venues, having only Gnoo Blas at Orange (one or two meetings per year), and Bathurst’s Mount Panorama (two meetings per year).

Circuits such as Warwick Farm and Katoomba’s Catalina Park were still a couple of years away from fruition when a group of enthusiasts, led by Bruce Polain from the Manly Warringah Sporting Car Club, successfully negotiated with a sympathetic Commanding Officer at HMAS Nirimba, a naval airbase at Schofields on the outskirts of Sydney. The result was an interesting motor racing circuit that combined the main airstrip with the various perimeter and service roads of the base.

The first meeting, jointly organised by the Manly Warringah and North Shore Sporting Car Clubs, was held on 6th July 1958. What a wonderful day for the motor racing starved people of Sydney! The program commenced with scratch races for Touring Cars up to 1100cc, followed by 1101-1500cc and over 1500cc races. Next were Sports Cars under 1500cc, followed by over 1500cc. The latter race was won by Frank Gardner driving a D type Jaguar, ahead of Frank Matich in an Austin Healey. Both these drivers were destined to make their mark in motor racing, Gardner on the European Sports and Touring Car scene, while Matich would dominate Racing and Sports Car events here in Australia in the mid-nineteen-sixties.

With only two entries for the over-1500cc Racing Car Scratch Race, the under and over 1500cc Racing Car events were run concurrently. As a result, I had a wonderful dice for outright honours with Frank Walters in the So Cal V8 Special, with Frank beating me across the finish line by one second, leaving me a comfortable winner of the under-1500cc section from Robin Orlando, in yet another famous supercharged MG Special from the Mount Druitt “Glory Days”, the Fowler MG. This little yellow car, originally built and raced by Ray Fowler, was based on an MG J2 chassis and powered by a 1500cc TC engine, blown by a J100 Marshall supercharger. Paul Samuels finished third in yet another MG Special.

Now to a race with a difference, the Inter-Club Teams Relay Race. Each team consisted of one Racing, one Sports and one Sedan car. North Shore Sporting Car Club was represented by Frank Walters’ So Cal V8 Special (racing car), Tom Sulman’s Aston Martin DB3S (sports car) and Ken Brigden’s Peugeot 203 (sedan). The MG Car Club had Paul Samuels (MG Special), “Tex” Downie (MG Special Sports) and Les Howard (Simca), while Manly Warringah Sporting Car Club was represented by myself in the MG Special, Frank Gardner (D Type Jaguar) and Bill Thompson in the twin-cam Waggott Holden sedan.

Racing Cars were first away, and, as we completed our lap and screeched to a halt, I was narrowly in front of Frank Walters and Paul Samuels. Leaping out of our cars, we then ran to our Sports Car team-mates, who in turn ran to their respective cars and took off...unfortunately, the D-type was in reverse gear and the delay allowed the Aston Martin into the lead ahead of the MG, with the Jaguar charging up behind. As they re-appeared onto the straight, the D-type had re-taken the lead from the Aston Martin, so that at the changeover Bill Thompson was the first away...in the same manner as his teammate...in reverse! The delay was only slight however, and the superior power of the dohc (double overhead camshaft) Waggott Holden enabled Thompson to re-take the lead before the end of the lap and receive the chequered flag to give victory to our team. Second place went to North Shore with the MG Car Club team a close third.

As the day's program had run smoothly and was, in fact, ahead of time, the CAMS Steward was approached with a proposal to hold an additional race. Permission was forthcoming and the over-1500cc Sports Cars, together with all Racing Cars, were assembled for a "Le Mans Start" scratch race, the Racing Cars to be "push started" by their respective pit crews. I doubt that officials would condone such a dangerous event today, but things were pretty "rough and ready" back in the fifties. Fortunately, we all managed to run to our cars and get away, without any pit crew members being run over! To quote Australian Motor Sports magazine:-"Collerson (MG) led Frank Gardner through the first corner, but the Jaguar slipped by as Barry slowed while fastening his safety belt. These two positions remained unchanged, and Horst Kwech (Austin Healey) was third".

Following the resounding success of this initial race meeting at Schofields, the Singer Car Club of Australia was prompted to run a meeting at the same venue, albeit with a more orthodox program. Again, "the Hotty", as I had affectionately titled the MG Special, was running like a dream and I had the satisfaction of two wins and a third placing from three starts. After winning the under-1500cc scratch race from Robin Orlando in the Fowler MG and George Websdale (Buchanan MG). I started from the back mark in the under-1500cc Handicap and got through the field to win from George Websdale and Tom Corcoran in yet another MG Special.

Finally came the last race of the day, the All Powers Handicap, traditionally known as "The Butchers Picnic". The "Hotty" was giving away lots of litres, but we managed to finish third in the scratch section behind Jack Robinson's Jaguar Special and Frank Walters' So Cal V8 Special."



Racing at Schofields in 1958. Barry Collerson with his MG

Photo courtesy of Barry Collerson