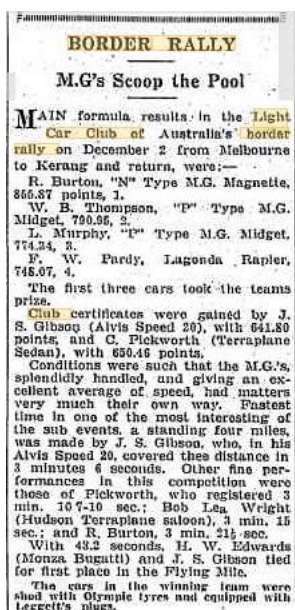
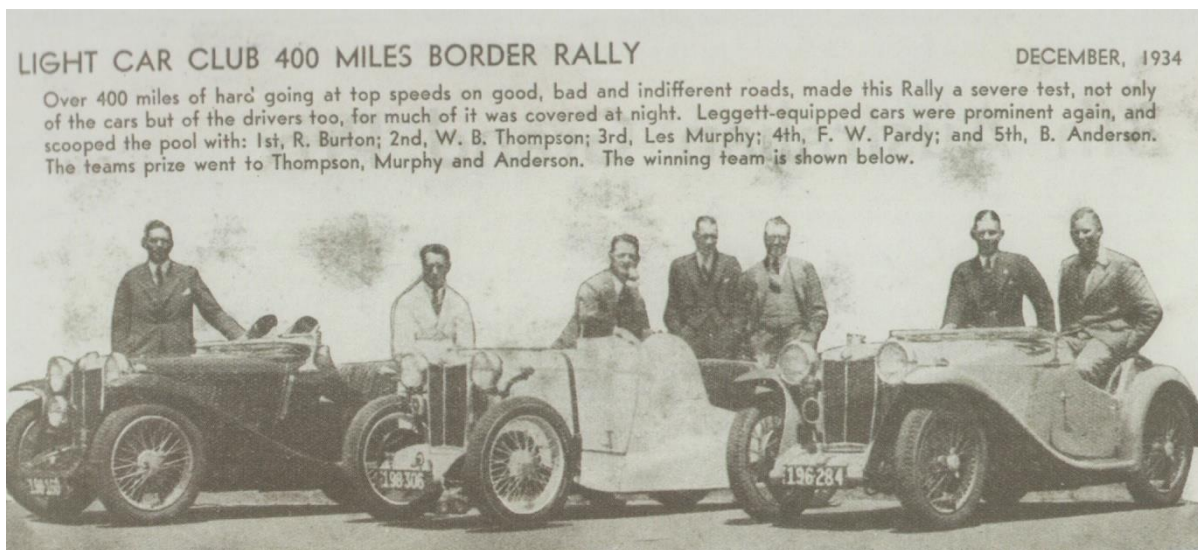


PAplexed..... PAs on the 1934 LCCA Border Rally.

This exercise started off as what should have been an easy enough question. Which P-type did W.B (Bill) Thompson¹ use in the 1934 Border Rally?



In December of 1934 the Light Car Club of Australia (LCCA) ran the "Border Rally" from Melbourne to the South Australian border. This, gruelling 400-mile rally was won by the then almost new NA 0278 owned by R. Burton. However, the Lanes team of three P-types came 2nd, third, and fifth taking the team prize. These cars were driven by Bill Thompson (196-284), Les Murphy (198-306) and R.T. Anderson (198-160). But which cars were they?

Fortunately, from a Leggett's advertisement we have a photograph of the successful team. The centre car is clearly Les Murphy's Aspinall PA, still in its Lanes livery from the Centenary AGP at Phillip Island in October. This car, PA 1292 (1529AP) was imported in September 1934 and first registered on the 6th of October. Aspinall had supplied the car with full guards so it is rather surprising that in the photo it is in race trim although it is possible that the photo was taken at Phillip Island shortly afterwards. After a very successful racing history, the car was sold to John Smeaton in South Australia in July of 1936.

¹Bill Thompson was one of Australia's greatest racing drivers Prewar winning multiple AGPs and numerous other races. In 1934 he worked for Lanes as a salesman and "factory" driver, notably driving K3002.

It ended up dismantled in the collection of Don Shinnars and was probably incorrectly identified as PA 1295 in the sale of his collection. It is believed to now be in Japan with an TD engine.

The car to Murphy's right is clearly an English bodied PA. 198-160 does not appear on the Lanes list of registrations, but it does appear on the AOMC Victorian registration list as engine 1051AP. A quick email to the MMM P type register identified the car as PA 0799.

This car was bought new in 1934 by R.T. (Ray) Anderson from University Motors UK and was a red two-seater with red trim. Anderson was a well-known identity in the LCCA often acting as photographer at club events. He had previously raced L 0595 in the 1934 AGP. The car also appears in a well known photo, just in front of Les Murphy's PA at the Centenary 300 in January 1935.



*Les Murphy in PA1292 at the Centenary 300 race Phillip Island 1934.
PA 0799 appears parked directly in front.*

It appears likely that Anderson kept the car until late October 1936, when the registration was changed to 191-732. This car still exists and is with Rod Smith in NSW.

The final car, the one that was driven by W.B. (Bill) Thompson to second place on the border rally is more of a problem. According to the Lane's list, 196-284 belongs to 835AP which is chassis PA 0485 and was first sold in May 1935 to Mrs Agnes MacKenna some 6 months after the event. Fortunately, Matthew Magilton holds a copy of the original registration papers for this car. This document shows that the car was actually first registered on the 28th August 1934 to Lanes Motors, which would explain Bill Thompson's access to it for the Boarder rally. It is noted as being Blue (with Black upholstery) with silver wheels. It was retained by Lanes until the 4th June 1935 when it was sold to Mrs. MacKenna. Jack Manton who was good friends with Bill Thompson was photographed in the car but does not appear on the ownership papers.



Does anyone recognise this car: Jack Manton in his P MG sometime in the 1930s

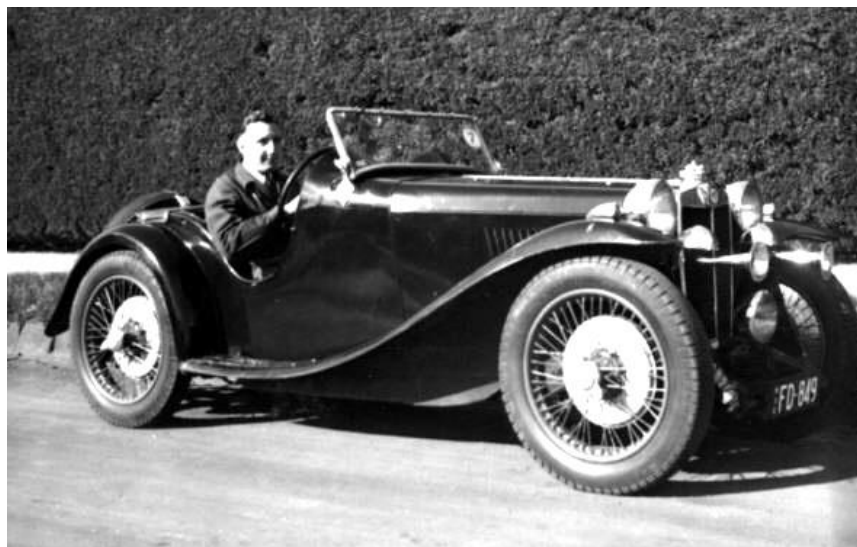
Photo appearing in the PWRA newsletter in the 1980's

Again, this clearly showing an English bodied PA midget.

However, this is where the problem begins.

In the early 1960s a young Vernon Pearson bought an Aspinall PA which had been brought over from Tasmania. The guarantee (VIN) plate said the car was PA 0484, 833AP. The car was completely original with its original engine 833A 134P. Many years later he decided to tidy the car up with a new paint job and on removing the front valance was rather shocked to find that the chassis number was actually PA 0485. Period photos would indicate that this car has always been registered as 833AP (PA 0484) and the story of it coming from Tasmania shortly before Vern bought it is consistent with the AOMC records for 833AP. Inspection of the car on the way home from Yamba in 2019 after the Pre War Register rally showed what is probably the most original and unmolested Aspinall P-type in Australia.

PA 0484, 833AP was imported in March of 1935 and first registered to R.J. Randall as 202-634. In 1943 it was registered FD-849.



PA "0484" when owned by Alan Male circa 1944 (Magilton collection)



PA 0484/5 2019 with Vern Pearson

But... according to the current register, PA 0484 is the ex-Ken Catlow PA with the “Sydney” body. The current owner David Hall has just completed a strip and refurbishment of the car. Unfortunately, he was unable to find a chassis number on the car and I have not been able to ascertain how it was originally identified as PA 0484. The car carries engine 836AP and the guarantee plate for PA 0486 (836AP). 836AP was initially owned by Britannia Motors. It was registered on the 1st September 1934 as 196-527. The registration was later annulled for unknown reasons but there is a subsequent and last registration BN-527 in March of 1940. The stated story on the Ex Catlow car has variously been that it was an Aspinall body or that it was bodied in Sydney, the former story perhaps being due to the above photo showing an Aspinall car.

So, which car was Bill Thompson driving? And is it possible that the chassis of PA 0485 and PA 0484 were swapped?

It turns out that the issues of chassis and their attributed histories for the early P types is not a new problem. Successive Registrars have struggled trying to rationalise the interwoven stories of the first PAs over the last 60 years with little success.

There are several cases of owners who have bought car X which has been on the register since it began and has a continuous history... to find the chassis Y when they restore the car.

The solution to a problem is sometimes to discount what we *think* and to instead actually look at what we *know*. In this case what we definitely *know* are the photo records, the AOMC copies of the Vic Roads records and the cars as we currently have them.

The first point is that the Vic Roads records only list engine number. The associated chassis number were derived from the Lanes list for those engines. So, is it possible that a mistake was made in assembly?

The Abingdon records show that PA 0481 to PA 0490 were all manufactured on the 27th of March 1934. These were exported “unassembled” with engines, 830AP to 840AP (834AP fitted to a later car). According to the information from Alan Bail’s Lanes list, the cars arrived at different times, although from his original document it is not clear if these are import or registration dates.²

²James Earl looked up his own car in the “Lanes Book” when it still existed. Apparently the details included the manufacture date, ship it arrived on, destination, registration and owner.

The car is traded in on NA 0677 that Edwards had built up from a new chassis using the repaired body from NA 0601. All carefully documented.

The P-type is described rather differently from the previous time. Firstly, there is no mention of it having an English body. The engine number is 743A 135P, and the Chassis number is recorded as P0490. This is the style that appears on the dumb iron, not the guarantee plate. The registration is recorded as 158-123. Stan reregisters it as 276-240 on the 15th October '38.

This car requires considerable work including reboring the engine, re-upholstering the bucket seats, a new aluminium dash and bodywork. The radiator needed repairing. The total cost including purchase comes to £159 4s 3d and he sells it for £195 to Tony Scopidi³ of Footscray on the 28th of January '39.

| Date | Description | Amount |
|-----------|---|---------|
| 2-12-38 | Took Delivery | 112 6 7 |
| 22-3-38 | Hampton & King Batteries Recharge 2/1 ea | 4 - |
| 9-4-38 | Bot Greenhouse Age adv 5/- | 10 - |
| 1-24-5-38 | Ball Race for Spawing Box. Motor 3/10 | 11 10 |
| 21-5-38 | Rebush steering box etc 3/- Berry | 17 6 |
| 21-5-38 | Weld Exhaust Pipe. S.J. Berry | 3 - |
| 21-5-38 | Rebore Engine Grind Main bearings (Reiko) | 10 15 4 |
| | Repairs to Radiator (Colonial complex) | 3 - |
| 2-6-38 | Copper Pipes & 2 nails for oil pipe | 1 6 |
| | Sheet Aluminium for dash | 4 3 |
| 24-8-38 | 2 Lash Lamps D-43 | 13 8 3 |
| | 1 12-Volt Battery | |
| | L. Jay Mounting Body | |
| 19-8-38 | 5 Tyres retreaded 2 7 x 16.00 Hamble | 4 4 6 |
| 31-8-38 | W. Gladwin Disco | 5 - - |
| - - - | Rekin seats & upholstery | 4 - - |
| - - - | Repairing 2 Bucket Seats | 1 5 - |
| 5-7-39 | W. H. M. a. l. i. s. i. s. M. S. | |

Stand Edward's ledger for P0490

Because Edwards has both chassis down as 0490 it has always been assumed that an engine and ID swap was done. However, there is no documentation of this and furthermore, he does not have both cars at the same time. So, are the cars the same? Did a Blue English Roadster in good condition lose 3 cwt and have an engine change and lose half its value in 7 months?

The answers came when some photos came to light.

The first is of 6-469.

³By 1940 (Albury June 17th) Scopidi is noted as owning and racing an N type so had presumably sold the PA.



PA 0490 with unknown TA, circa 1938

This photo is clearly of an English roadster (complete with trafficators) in good condition. The interesting feature is the car behind. This is a T type, probably a TA. We know from the Lanes list that the first TAs arrived in February of 1938⁴ so the photo must date after that time, i.e. after Stan sold the car. This photo was taken when the car was in the ownership of Richard Lock's father, so some time after Mr Hescott owned the car.

The second car also appears in a photo taken in the early 1940s.



P0490 and J3 3756 circa 1940

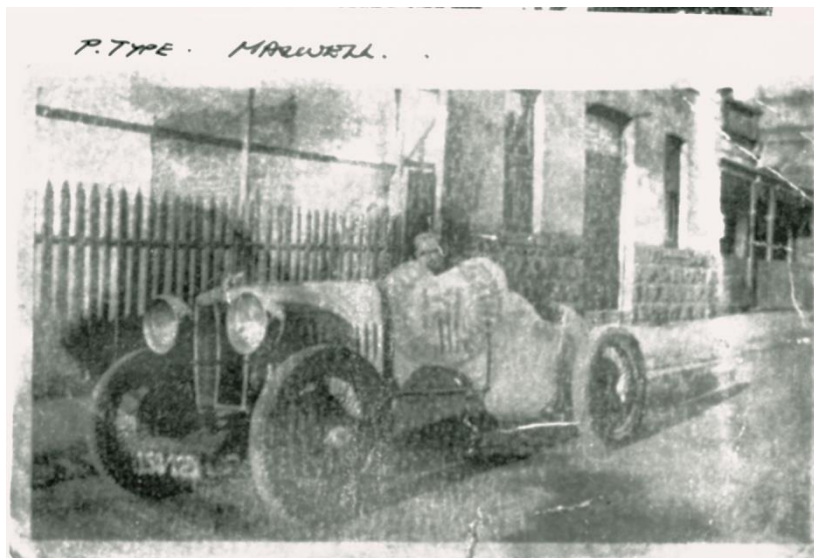
Again, this photo can be roughly dated as the accompanying car is J3 3756. The car was sold by Edwards to Bob Hollingshead on the 6th of September '38. The registration on PA dates the photo as after October of 1938. The photo is of "Hollingshead and Lord" so must post date the ownership of 276-460 by Tony Scopidi.

So clearly both cars existed at the same time and the registration followed the engine numbers.

So which car is P0490? Going backwards, 743AP (which should be chassis PA 0438) was first registered on the 30th June '34 to CM Maxwell who was the mechanic at Lanes. Maxwell often raced with Bill Thomson. Maxwell had an Aluminium Aspinall type beetle-back body

⁴The AOMC records indicate a privately imported TA in November of 1937 but the registration of that car is different to the one in the photo.

built on the car incorporating a 41 gallon (186 Litre!) fuel tank. Unsurprisingly, this was not a great success. Maxwell is known to have raced the car in the Centenary AGP at Phillip Island in October of '34 and the NSW LCC Championships at Maroubra raceway NSW on the 24th November 34.

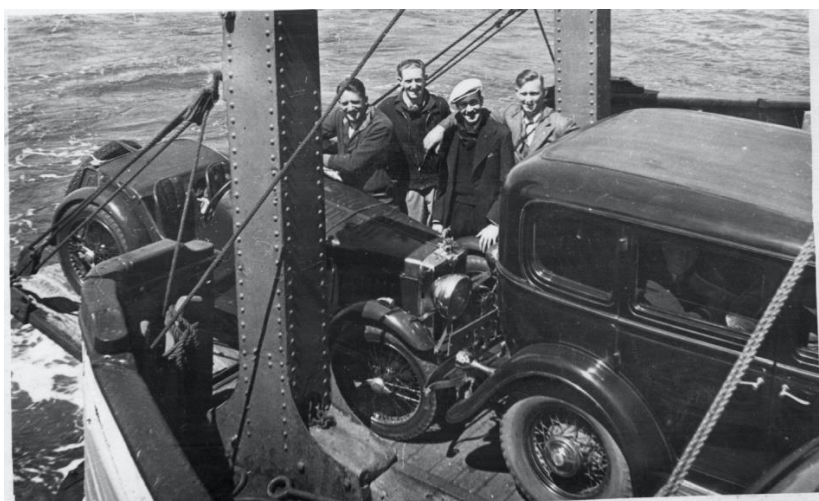


C.M. Maxwell in his PA in original form circa 1934.

The only known photo with Maxwell, shows distinctive headlights and bonnet louvers.

In 1935 Dick Souter was looking for a car to race and bought the car from Bill Thompson at Lanes. He found it unsuitable and traded it in on Colin Dunne's PA (837AP) which was for sale with Les Murphy.⁵ It is probable that Murphy modified the rear of the body of 743AP and replaced the fuel tank with a more normal M.G. style slab tank. This light-weight ex racing car is almost certainly the one arriving at Stan Edward's yard in 1938. If the guarantee plate was missing and he read the chassis number off the dumb iron this would explain the style of chassis number written down in his ledger.

The car seen in the Hollingshead photo (and below taken circa 1938/9 by Alex Bini) show several similarities to the Maxwell photo, notably the headlights, the humps and the body cut-outs.



PA 14124 and "P0490" on the Phillip Island Ferry. (Bini Collection)

⁵Interview with Dick Souter by Alan Bail in the 1960s.



PA 14124 and "P0490". (Bini Collection)

So, it would appear that the car with engine 743AP may have actually had chassis P0490 under it from new.

But what of "PA 0490" 840AP? This car passed through several hands eventually ending up with Walter Magilton in the early 1960s. At the first Pre War register night at Wal's home, Wayne and Garry Carne arrived wanting to buy a P-type. Walter sold "PA 0490" to them. The car was in need of restoration by this time, but the brothers did not have the funds, so the car languished for 20 years. Wayne finally bought his brother out and commenced a restoration with the body being done by a garage in Watsonia and the mechanicals by Ray Skews. At this time engine was still 840AP and the guarantee plate on the firewall was for PA 0490 which is how it appeared on the Pre War Register.

In about 2011, Wayne decided to sell the car. As it was kept in Yakendanda he sent it down to Graeme Davies factory in Melbourne to be sold. About this time, the remains of a P-type were discovered in northern NSW. The car had been bought by a couple of young farm lads, driven around the property and rolled. It had then been used as a saw bench until it threw a rod. The remains had been thrown in a dam. The remains were acquired by Robert Gibson and cleaning up the dumb iron revealed the chassis number P0490. The then registrar, Tony Sloan promptly went to Graeme's factory and removed the front valence from "PA 0490" and cleaned up the nearside number iron To reveal P 0437. So, it appears that the car that had been registered all its life as PA 0490 actually had chassis 0437 under it.....

So, could there be more?

As it turns out, yes. The car that had first caused confusion in the register was 837AP. This car had been bought by Alan Bail in the 1960s. As outlined above, this car was first owned by Colin Dunne, a young farmer from the Western District who would go on to become one of the leading pre-war Australian Drivers in the Ex-Bira K3, K3 3030. He would tragically die with his wife when his BMW crashed into the back of a car at Phillip Island in 1940. PA 0487 received a green Aspinall doorless body with swept guards. It was first registered 195-046 on the 1st of August 1934. By early 1936 Dunne had traded the car in to Les Murphy on an N type⁶. As mentioned, Dick Souter traded the Maxwell PA he had bought from Bill Thompson at Lanes for this car. Souter had an extensive racing history with the car including the 1938 AGP at Lobethal when it was driven by Arthur Beasley.

⁶Rob Roy 29th March 1937.



"PA0437" with Dick Souter and Arthur Beasley Phillip Island Cup Day races, 1937.

In the 1960s Alan Bail acquired the car still with its Aspinall body and engine 838AP. He meticulously documented the cars continuous ownership record and undertook a complete restoration of the car, winning the 1972 M.G.C.C. concours.



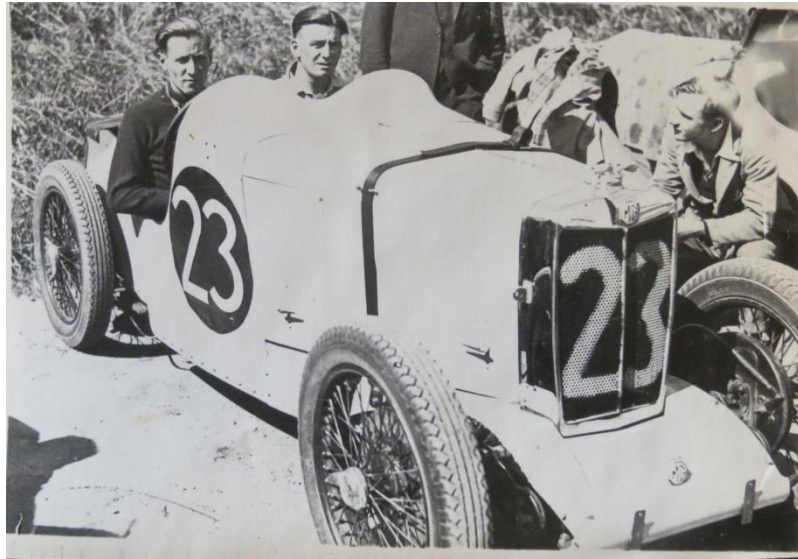
Alan Bail winning the 1972 MGCC Concours

The problem was.... The chassis under the car was PA 0438 not 0437 as per the guarantee plate. While 837AP had thrown a rod at one point and been replaced, the original block was with the car and was subsequently repaired and returned to the chassis.

So, could Les Murphy have swapped the chassis? This would seem most unlikely. The Dunne car was a going concern as was the Maxwell car when traded in. Given that this was so early in both cars' lives, it seems more likely that this was the way they had been assembled.

But then there's more.....

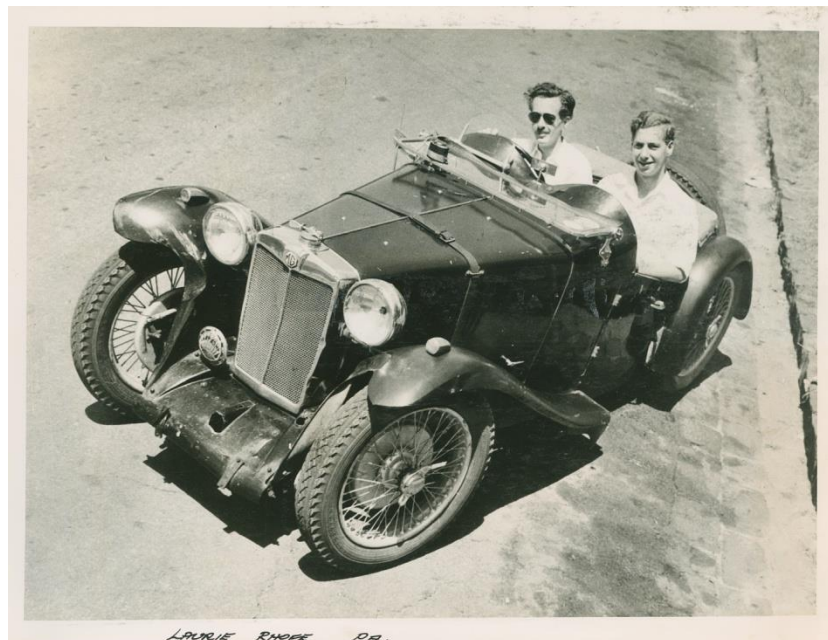
841AP (nominally chassis PA 0482) was bought by R.H. McKay and registered on the 5th of September 1934 196-656. It too was bodied by Aspinall with one of their doorless 2 seat, open backed racing bodies.



Roy McKay and Les Turner. Centenary 300 1934. (Magilton Collection)

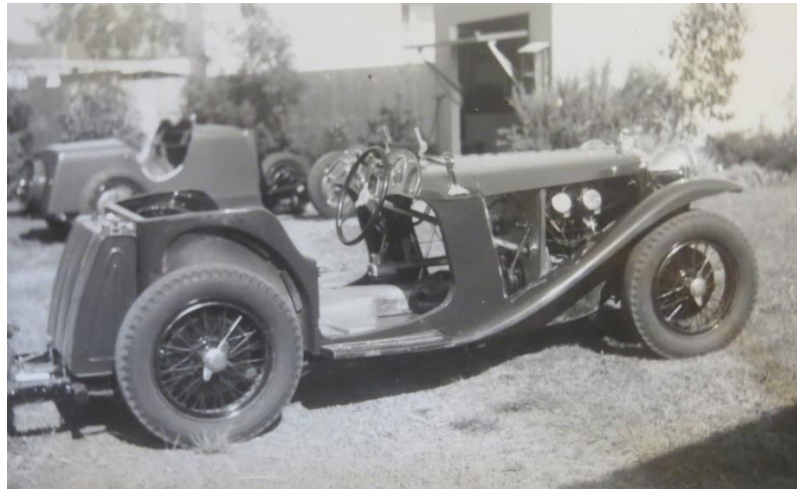
Roy McKay raced the car extensively, appearing at the Centenary 300 in '34, LCCA AGP in '35 and the '36 LCCA 24-hour trial.

As with 837AP, this car too has a well-documented continuous ownership history. By 1950 it had passed into the hands of Laurie Rofe who would go on to own several desirable M.G.s. By this time, it had acquired doors, not an unusual modification with the Aspinall bodies.



PA "0482" with Laurie Rofe circa 1950 (Bail Collection)

However, by the 1960s, the Aspinall bodies were out of fashion and Michael Smith, the then owner, ditched the original body to replace it with a standard UK roadster body the origin of which is unknown. The car then passed through the hands of Ross Williams and finally Walter Magilton who completed the "restoration" in the mid 1960's.



PA "0482" during completion with Walter Magilton circa 1964 (Magilton Collection)

Walter went on to have an extensive competition career in the car at MGCC and VSCC events. He sold the car in 1973 only to reacquire it 20 years later. Sometime after Walter's ownership, the then owner, removed the front valance to discover that the chassis number stamped on the near side front numb iron was actually PA 0483! He contacted the Registrar to tell him of his discovery and that he had ground off the number and re-stamped the correct one on!

But what of the remaining cars in the batch?

832AP (nominally PA 0483) was imported by Lanes in November of 1934 and registered 2-342 on the 28th of October 1934 to Miss Lane. The car was reregistered in 1942, DP-648, F-849 in '43 and HBY-740 in '59. About this time the engine was transferred into PA 1427 which had a Vauxhall engine in it.⁷ The car gained engine 1761AP from PA 1459. Alan Bail's notes contain a wealth of information on rumoured M.G.s. He notes "*Peter Martin..... new (sic) of another P – Rook Myers Advertising Aspendale 3-4 years ago (1964) Australian Body. PB543 (Miss Lane). Black with Silver Wheels. Chass no 832AP(sic)*"

Fortunately, a photo of PB-543 exists.



PA "0483" Circa 1968

⁷AOMC records

This car was acquired by Andrew Barnett in 1968 still complete with its Aspinall body. While the car carried the guarantee plate for PA0483 the chassis was in fact PA0486. There is no evidence in the AOMC records to indicate a chassis swap at any point.

We have two more cars for which we have somewhat lower level of evidence.

838AP (nominally PA 0488) was first owned by A J Barrett. It was bodied by Aspinall with doorless racing body and first registered 174-634 on the 14th August 1936. However, the car had actually been imported in 1934 and Barrett had used it for racing before registering it. "The Car" noted that for the 1936 Centenary AGP at Victor Harbor, AJ Barrett had lent his P-type to the up and coming driver Tim Joshua. Joshua went on to take second place. Little was heard of the car subsequently. The AOMC records make mention of it being in the Ballarat area with the last registration for the engine was GCC-951 in 1953. For many years the Register had known of a P type in the backyard of a house in Brighton. The Author visited the owner of this P type in 2002 to find the car in the middle of the backyard with a 2-metre tree growing through the middle of the chassis. It had a Riley engine and an Aspinall body with doors. The owner assured the author that he was "gunna" finish it!

On the owner's death, Tony Sloan was able to acquire the car from the family and commence a rebuild as a Special.⁸ The chassis number was noted to be P0481. On commencing the enquiries for this article the author contacted Tony and the registration sticker on the windscreen was photographed.... Revealing CGL-951 engine 838AP. So, could this be the APG car? The addition of doors to the body was not uncommon as seen in 0841AP. The car had been in the previous owner's hands since the 1950s but had lost its engine hence the Riley adaption. The AOMC records do not record an engine change in this car.

This leaves 4 cars unaccounted for. The car presently on the register as PA0484 was owned for many years by Ken Catlow. As previously mentioned, it carries the engine 836AP and the matching guarantee plate for PA 0486. On the car changing hands, the new owner has done a complete strip down. This has failed to demonstrate a chassis number. It is unclear how it was allocated the number 0484 in the Register.

The engine, 839AP was sold to Tony Sloan during his restoration of PA1299. He was told that it had come from the Harry Firth car, PA 0489. Whether this is because it came from there or because of the number is unknown. PA 0489 is currently in the USA and has engine 1756AP in it. The Chassis number was verified during Geoff Scott's ownership although the number was damaged after a major crash in the car in the 1960s during Rex Robert's ownership.

742AP's story is more circumstantial. In the late 1970s Ray Skewes acquired a P-type chassis and commenced a rebuild. The guarantee plate with the car was for 742AP, PA0437 however, the fonts and form of the plate would indicate that it was not a factory stamping.

⁸The body was given away and the car retains the Riley engine and gearbox.



Ray rebuilt this car using the UK -roadster body from PA 1566 which was obtained after that car was split up during a marriage dispute. A cursory look at the chassis number seemed to show a chassis number of 0437 and an unrelated engine was used in the project (2001AP) The car appeared on the Australian Register with this identity for many years. When the previously described issues with PA 0490 / PA 0437 arose, the then Registrar made a more thorough examination of the number which revealed P0487. The guarantee plate was then transferred to PA 0437 and a reproduction one stamped up.

This leaves two cars missing.

835AP (nominally P0485) the Bill Thompson Border rally car. As previously mentioned, the registration papers for 835AP still exist with Matthew Magilton though the reasons why are unclear as Walter did not remember the car.

After spending a year with Lanes, the car was sold to Mrs. MacKenna of Fairfield in May of 1935. She kept the car for 4 years, selling it in 1939. The next owner was a Mrs. Winifred Cameron. It briefly passed through Stan Edwards hands in 1941 before going through a number of owners. The registration changed twice, firstly to DN-860 in late 1941 and then to GD-152 in 1944. The last registered transfer was to Derek O'Brian of Williamstown in 1956. One further name appears after this on the document, but without details and only as a semi legible signature.

Sometime in the 1960s when PA 1294 and PA 1298 were in the hands of Jack Leibert, the engine from PA1294 (1533AP) was transferred to PA 1298. 835AP then appeared in the chassis of PA 1294, with the fate of the chassis that was with 835AP and the body, unknown. Could appearance of a blue English body on 831AP around this time with Michael Smith be just a tantalising coincidence?

830AP is not known to currently exist. Apart from its initial registration number and first owner, no other details exist.

The table below summarises the likely original arrangements and identities of the various P types as built.

| | Stated chassis | Actual Chassis | engine | Import (Bail) | First owner | Body | Rego number | date |
|----|----------------|----------------|----------|---------------|---------------------|---|-------------|-----------|
| PA | 0437 | 0487 | 742A135P | Jun-34 | H Johnson | ? | 198-058 | 02-Oct-34 |
| PA | 0438 | 0490 | 743A135P | Jun-34 | CM Maxwell | Aluminium beetle-back/later Aspinall type | 158-123 | 30-Jun-34 |
| PA | 0489 | ?0489 | 839A135P | Jul-34 | C F King | Aspinall open back "Roadster" | 194-006 | |
| PA | 0487 | 0438 | 837A135P | Aug-34 | A C Dunne | Aspinall open back "Roadster" | 195-046 | 01-Aug-34 |
| PA | 0490 | 0437 | 840A135P | Aug-34 | R R Lewis | English 2 seater | 195-073 | 02-Aug-34 |
| PA | 0488 | 0481 | 838A135P | Aug-34 | A J Barrett | Aspinall 2-seater with doors. "Roadster" | 174-634 | 14-Aug-36 |
| PA | 0485 | ? | 835A135P | May-35 | Mrs Agnes MacKernal | English 2 seater CKD "Roadster" | 196-284 | 28-Aug-34 |
| PA | 0486 | 0484 | 836A135P | Jul-34 | Britannia Motors | Aspinall open back | 196-527 | 01-Sep-34 |
| PA | 0482 | 0483 | 831A135P | Sep-34 | R H McKay | Aspinall open back "Roadster" | 196-657 | 05-Sep-34 |
| PA | 0483 | 0486 | 832A135P | Nov-34 | Miss N Lane | Aspinall 2 seater with doors "Runabout" | 2-342 | 28-Oct-34 |
| PA | 0481 | ? | 830A135P | Dec-34 | Mrs Kingston | ? | 163-529 | |
| PA | 0484 | 0485 | 833A135P | Mar-35 | R J Randall | Aspinall open back "Roadster" | 202-634 | 09-Mar-35 |

Should this theory be correct, this raises an interesting conundrum. While the MMM register is clear that a car's identity lies with its true chassis number, if these cars been miss identified from new, should they carry their original or correct guarantee plates and how should they be most correctly be identified?

To answer the original question, "Which car did Bill Thompson drive on the 1934 Border Rally?" He drove 835AP, chassis unknown, an English bodied roadster, the engine of which is currently in PA1294 and the body of which was probably donated to one of the cars previously described.

Andrew Fock 2020