



One of three pre-production MGAs entered for the 1955 Le Mans race; the Stabulum de Balliolo raced another one of the three, with the same registration number.

Stabulum de Balliolo

In 1959, a newly constituted College society, the Stabulum de Balliolo, submitted its first report. The society's purpose was

To arrange pleasant successful car racing in such a way that it is combined with wide travels and the best chances of meeting people in the places visited. Thus it is as gipsies that we travel about in our three ton van – to those who cue [sic] up waiting to see a Ferrari disgorged from our van only to find our good looking red MG inside we offer coffee by way of compensation.

Wilson Southam (1957) was the society's president and driver; Michael Thornhill (1956) its secretary and social convenor; and John-Christopher Spender (1957), who recently discovered the 1959 report in his papers, was responsible for transportation and accommodation. The group included Nicholas Ouroussoff (1956) and Angus Clydesdale (1956), as he was known then (later the 15th Duke of Hamilton and 12th Duke of Brandon), and others whose names we now seek. In the *Annual Record 1959* the society described its main activity as 'the preparation and racing of one of

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the three MGAs built for the 1955 Twenty-four Hour Race at Le Mans', which the 'ideas and efforts of the two engineering students in the Club', with generous help from the works engineers in Abingdon, made into 'one of the fastest MGAs in England'.

The furniture van, a Commer repainted in the College colours, transported the members and their MG 'all over England even to Scotland', mostly during the vacations. The 1959 report lists some racing successes of 1958 – 'Coventry Hill Climb

(1st beat all Healeys, Triumphs and MGs). Brands Hatch Spring Meeting (2nd in class, Overall Award for 1st member), Aintree Liverpool (1st in handicap, 3rd in Marque race ahead of 8 triumphs, 2 MG and Healey 100-6)' – but in the second half of the season, 'The Stabulum was plagued by bearing troubles and superhuman feats were performed by the pit crew building up and running in the car between Saturday and Sunday events but also to little avail.' Altogether they entered 19 races that year. They achieved two first places, one second, and two thirds; there were three D.N.F. (did not finish), five D.N.S. (did not start) and one 'no result'. The season was a demanding one, as the report's 'notes on season' convey:

- a) *Chris discovered that if you line your front teeth up in front of an Iskerdarian valve spring and let go of the compressor it knocks your front teeth out.*
- b) *Nick discovered that if you drive a van right through two nights and work on cars all day you start hallucinating ...*
- c) *Michael discovered that even when hiding in the North of England there is a great deal to be done.*
- d) *Wilson discovered that putting your foot through the steering wheel on a Le Mans start is SLOW, being beaten by a Cambridge Man is HUMILIATING, and catching a LOTUS XI from behind in an MG leads everyone to conclude it must have been parked.*

After the last race, the members rebuilt the inside of the van. By the time of the report the van included: 'an aluminium covered work bench: 6 built in storage cupboards: 7 Personal Wardrobe cupboards: Cooking equipment cabinets: Fold down cooking tables: individual homes for differentials: a roof rack for tires: sleeping place for seven people: radio: 4 electric lights including outside lighting for working on the car at night: a winch: ramps and filing drawers for small parts'.

Plans for the future were enthusiastic. About the car, the report says: 'Eyes are being cast longingly and lovingly at twin cam engines but plans are also going ahead to race it in 1500 c.c. events with the old engine reworked.' On entries: 'Experience has taught us to enter fewer races and to plan very carefully to the last detail for those who entered. Now that we are in possession of a national class licence, this will be particularly true.' On the size of the society: 'One Cambridge man and several Balliol men may be availing themselves of the services of the transporter during the coming season. It promises to be great fun.' And on the transporter: 'Miss Cary Nichols and Mrs Beverley Southam will continue to maintain their excellent cooking standards.'

Wilson, who had been loaned the MG, bought it in February 1959 and raced it again that year, having had a new steel body fitted, in red. Pip Danby (1958) recalls that in 1960 he and Alastair Mack (1958) were responsible for getting the car to the track and then back to the workshop. After a race meeting at Crystal Palace, Pip suggested to Alastair that the quickest way out of the circuit would be around part of the track, forgetting that there was a low bridge crossing the track. 'The Commer transporter never recovered!' Pip says.

But it seems that after Wilson went down in 1960, taking the car back home with him to Canada, the Stabulum folded. Today at Balliol, while there are students involved in the related sport of karting, only in the Master, who holds a current racing licence and is Vice-President of the UK Maserati Club, does the Stabulum's motor-racing spirit live on.

Vehicilorum furiousum

Nicholas Ouroussoff (1956)

The past comes rattling down the decades.

To begin at the beginning: my memory of the name was the 'Stabulum de Balliolo vehicilorum furiosorum'. This was devised by Jasper Griffin (1956, Tutorial Fellow in Classics 1963–2004 and Emeritus Fellow), who should know.

Other things: We had much help from Geoff Williamson, who had a workshop at Wheatley. He was a very clever engineer who had designed a cross flow head for the BMC A type engine, and he had a machine shop and a dynamometer and knew a lot more about engines than we did. We met there some motor racing luminaries: Mike Parkes, who was said to have achieved 190 mph on the Henley Fairmile, and Ted Martin, who had designed the twin Cam MG engines and later the Martin engine. We later fitted a Derrington cross flow cylinder head to the MG. I can't remember if it gave much benefit. We took the car to Charterhall in Scotland, where we got some friendly advice from a young driver called Jim Clark.

Angus Clydesdale and I were at the time practising, in his Ford Anglia equipped with an overhead valve head designed by Geoff Williamson, to attempt the Cambridge to Oxford record, held at that time by Anstice Brown in a Lotus. We wisely decided against it.

Those hallucinations stick in my mind. The first one was that a team of marines with white gaiters (created by the dotted white lines on the road) was marching towards me, and then a double decker bus, created by a house with lights in the windows, and finally a grizzly bear in the hedge, at which point we decided to stop.

I spent my working life in, initially, the outer fringes of the motor industry and then designing and making various machines.

