

John Streets – early post-war years in the UK with Arthur Mallock.

Here are some wonderful insights into John Streets' early racing activities given in *The Lone Furrow*, the biography of Arthur Mallock by Paul Lawrence (1997, ISBN 09530005208, out of print). Arthur was the creator of the U2 racing cars and the long running range of Mallock front-engine sports cars which remains so successful and popular in Club racing in the UK, Sweden and Australia. We are most grateful to Paul Lawrence for his permission to quote from this book, and these excerpts add to the tribute to John Streets.

Arthur Mallock was active already before 1939 with trials cars like *The Terror* and *Bloody Mary*. Immediately post war he was driving *Bren* and *Bombsk* before making his first U2 race car in 1958. Here is a flavour of Arthur's competitive spirit in 1947 when John Streets first met him as recounted in *The Lone Furrow*...

WJ1515, the *Bombsk*, was driven in both the sports car and single seat classes in 1947. 'We just took the mudguards off and took the back off the bodywork. The regulation said you had to carry a spare wheel, but it didn't say anything about having to have a tyre on it so we ran the wheel only strapped to the side!' Typically, Arthur was always quick to spot an opportunity to save weight where the regulations allowed. Driver protection was non-existent, at a time when even helmets and goggles were yet to become compulsory. Arthur was posted to Germany before he and Kay moved south to New Milton in Hampshire. He transferred to the Signals Research and Development Establishment SRDE¹ in Christchurch. 'I was still in the army but only very vaguely!' During his time at SRDE Arthur worked on the circuitry design of mobile transmitters and receivers. It was before the era of walkie-talkies, but Arthur and his team did a lot of development work on backpack systems.

While at SRDE Arthur met and befriended a young apprentice who was to become a life-time devotee of the Mallock marque. John Streets was a 17-year-old engineering apprentice. 'I was dead keen for motorsport. We were the penniless enthusiasts; we couldn't even afford to buy a book' says Streets. They met in 1951 and John was soon helping with work on WJ1515 - *Bombsk*.

'I could get in the welding shop and the first thing I did was put a tubular cross member in. Oh, that was a big tweak' remembers Streets. During the '51 season, Arthur had tried the car as a single seater and 500 cc Formula 3 guise. Streets started to help out in the evenings and weekends and he was soon helping Arthur take out the JAP Formula 3 engine and transplant a 750 cc unit.

The first outing for the car back in 750 guise was at Silverstone later in '51. Streets remembers his first visit to a race meeting vividly. 'We have not slept for a week. We got into the car and drove it to the circuit. That was running it in! It was pretty hairy and adventurous...'

¹ The Signals Research and Development Establishment (SRDE) was a British government military research establishment, based in Christchurch, Dorset from 1943 until it merged with the Royal Radar Establishment (RRE) in Malvern, Worcestershire to form the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment (RSRE) in 1976.

Though WJ1515 gave good service as a sports car. Arthur was competing in the 1100 cc class which pitched him against Mike Hawthorn in his Riley.

Arthur bought a car called a CRM but it proved an expensive disaster... 'Quick but desperately unreliable. Every time I raced it something would blow up. I sold everything in the house to pay for it. The end of the CRM story was that I sold it and the bloke who bought it did a complete season, including a 100-mile race and it never let him down. I kept on saying, well there's nothing else that can break. It had a wire-and-bobbin steering system and the wire would break' recalls Arthur. Streets, too, remembers the CRM era; 'We had a dismal season with it as far as results but we had a lot of fun. We dragged the thing all over England.'

WJ1515 had been stashed away at the back of the garage while all their efforts went into the CRM, but the faithful chassis was pressed back into service for 1953 when the 1172 formula was announced. The inaugural race was at Ibsley airfield track near Ringwood and both Arthur and John were on the grid. Arthur had WJ1515 back in race trim with an 1172 Ford engine taken from his road car, while John raced his own special that he had been building with Arthur's support. Lotus 6s took the first two places, but Arthur was pleased to have at least finished.

The WJ1515 was now a dedicated racer, Arthur still tackled an occasional trial with Streets as his passenger. 'His road car was a rotten old Ford eight and we used to take the race 1172 engine and stick it in there and do a trial. Arthur looked at it and decided that the easiest thing to take off with the doors because they were pretty heavy so we knocked out the pins and took the doors off and put a little piece of aluminium across where the doors had been.'

In 1954 Streets moved to RAE Farnborough² and Arthur was posted to Germany. By now he had risen to the rank of major as he dovetailed his military career with motorsport. John Streets recalls 'He left WJ1515 with me but the only problem was it didn't have any rear axle. Somehow we moved it from Christchurch to Farnborough and it was propped up on blocks at Farnborough for a long time waiting for Arthur to come back'.

One day in 1955 Streets got a letter from Arthur asking him to rebuild WJ1515 and take it to Germany. 'It was a momentous thing in those days to even think about leaving England' recalled Streets. But undaunted we found some parts for the back axle, put the car back together and then started to figure out how to get to Germany. Arthur sent me a set of license plates which were BAOR-British Army of the Rhine. The only problem was that there was a little caveat with them... "Don't get stopped because you're only allowed to drive with these plates if you're in the army and they will want to see your papers." So we had to be very careful'.

Along with a friend, Graham Walter, John set off the Dover and got onto a night boat to Dunkirk. 'We were sitting in the café having a cup of coffee looking at one another and said 'okay, we're on the boat, where is Mönchengladbach? We had no map and Arthur had given us no directions. Graham looked down and there were a little paper mats on the table. They were maps of Europe! They didn't have much and glad back on but we knew where it was

² The Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) was a British research and development establishment, headquartered in Farnborough, that played a crucial role in aeronautical research and development, particularly during World War II and into the space age

near so we took two of these as our maps. Inevitably we got hopelessly lost because the paper maps proved woefully inadequate. But eventually we arrived safely in Mönchengladbach.'

Also serving with the signals regiment was John Harwood who owned a Streamliner Veritas and the plan was for Arthur to race it in the Grand Prix des Frontieres at Chimay in Belgium as Harwood did not have the necessary license. Having sorted some late problems with the Veritas, Mallock, Streets, Harwood and Walters set off for Chimay but diverted to the Nürburgring on the way. Arthur electrified everyone by going round there at a high rate of knots, remembers Harwood. His best time lap for the 22 km track which he had never seen before was 14 minutes 29 seconds, an average speed of 56.7 mph.

The very attached WJ1515 then travel the rest of the way to Chimay where Arthur raced in the Grand Prix. They had not arranged any accommodation at Chimay and so the quartet were camping by the side of the road. 'We had not eaten properly, slept properly or even washed properly for about four days and Arthur was wandering around the town asking for a hotel' recalled Streets. "Then a local resident invited us into his house and despite a complete language barrier gave us food and a hot bath they were excited because they had race car people in their house. That was the sort of amazing things we did when being around Arthur. He would pull rabbits out of hats that no one else could.'

Streets also remembers another piece of Mallock ingenuity. 'The Veritas had huge tanks because it was a long distance race and the real trick was to go and get it filled up because Shell gave free petrol for the race cars. We got enough gas to get it home!'

Soon after the Chimay trip John Streets immigrated to California and it would be 30 years before he was actively involved in the Mallock story again.