



Ray Mays actively raced his ERA after the war, driving here in 1947's Swiss Grand Prix. He was third in his heat, but broke a universal joint when amongst the leaders in the final.



Racers at the Isle of Man in 1948 included, from left, Reg Parnell, Raymond Mays, Ken Richardson and Cuth Harrison. The first three were destined to play important roles in what became known as The Mays Project. (John Dugdale)

engineers of both Mercedes-Benz and Auto Union and reported on their technologies, bringing back blueprints as well. His findings covered in particular detail the 1½-litre Voiturette that Mercedes-Benz built in 1939, the supercharged V8 W165 that placed 1-2 in its only outing, that year's Tripoli Grand Prix. Here, potentially, was information that could help a newcomer gain access to first-rank Grand Prix engineering.

To say that Raymond Mays was quick off the mark in his campaign to fund a British Grand Prix effort would be putting it mildly. On 2 March 1945, with the war's conclusion in Europe by no means certain, and facing the prospect of a longer conflict

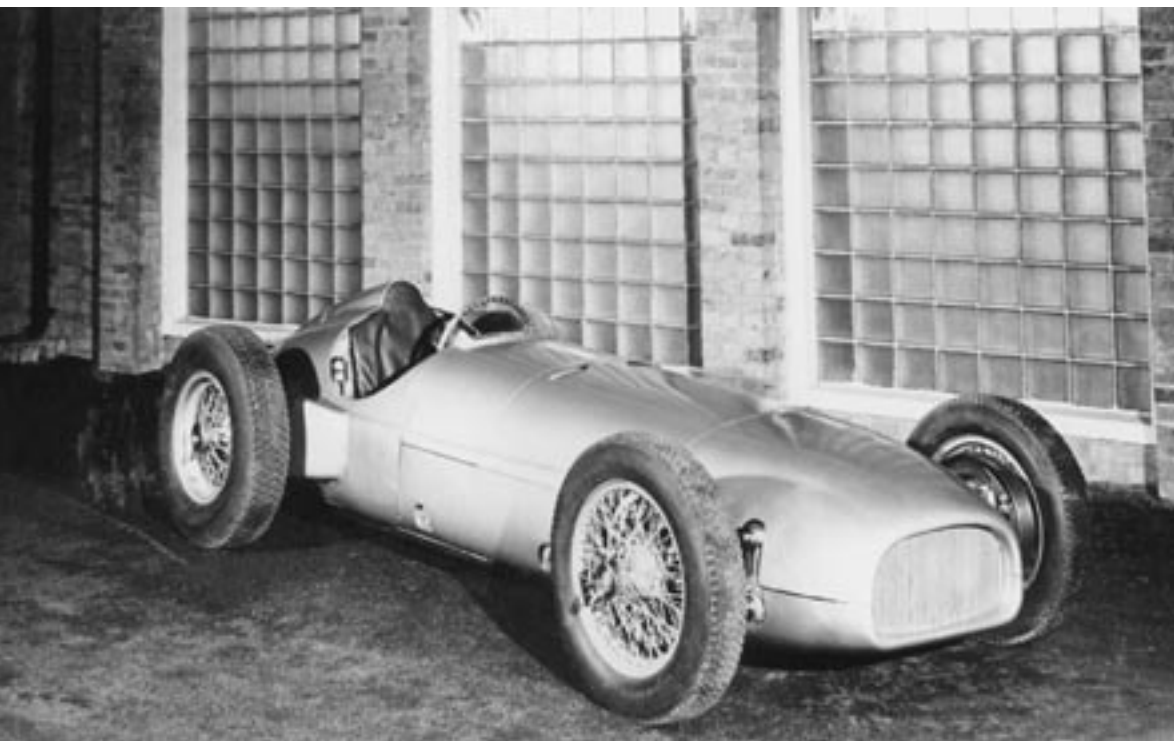


The night before the BRM's launch at Bourne, Louis Klementaski planned in detail his lighting and positioning for its debut photographs. He was engaged for the job by Lucas, which was funding the publicity for the new car.

In mid-November car and engine were united for the first time. An hour before midnight on 28 November, Ken Richardson was in its cockpit when BRM chassis number 1 was towed by the works van down the road outside the maltings and "burst into life with a deafening scream along with the usual misfiring associated with the fuel-injection system," said Richardson. "That brought the lights on throughout the town." The next day he covered 13 laps of Folkingham's two circuits, and on 3 December Raymond Mays took its wheel for the first time. It was a moment of high drama for Mays, still tipped as a likely BRM driver at the age of 50.

The good news and the bad news was that BRM backer Alfred Owen was present for Mays' baptismal laps. Good news because it was a treat to see the car alive at last; bad news because the Trust now knew the car was running. Its members decided that the BRM should be unveiled to the press and public immediately. "Both Peter Berthon and I were dead against this public demonstration," said Raymond Mays. "We knew that the car was not ready for showing. There were fierce arguments; Peter and I lost them." They knew that premature flaunting of a completely untried car would only intensify expectations for its early racing and success. "We were overwhelmed and outnumbered by the less informed majority."

With Louis Klementaski having taken his striking debut photographs the night before, the long-awaited launch took place on Thursday, 15 December 1949, a bleak, wintry day at Folkingham Airfield.



As one of the venues for his photography, Louis Klementaski chose the exterior of the new engine-test house, by far the most modern-looking of all the buildings on the Eastgate estate. Klementaski made his own contribution to the BRM project by working for less than his usual fee.



Fuel flowed into Reg Parnell's tank at a pit stop from BRM's Norton-powered pressure-delivery system. Vapour locks in the vent pipes from the scuttle tanks meant that both cars had to stop a second time for additional fuel.

retired at Silverstone, Nino Farina, said that the BRM engine was "fantastic, fantastic," and that the car could be a winner on a fast track. A Ferrari driver, Gigi Villorosi, gave his impression that "it was going very strongly and, in both acceleration and power, was already superior to the Italian cars, and that all that was left for BRM was to complete the final proving stage."

"We did not get much done during the remainder of July," Tony Rudd admitted – "we were too busy shaking hands with ourselves." This laissez faire attitude meant that there was no chance of making the demanding German Grand Prix on 29 July,

while Parnell's hopes of entries at Winfield and Gamston went unrequited. Farina thought the cars would have gone well on the long seaside straight in Pescara's non-championship race on 15 August, but this was passed up. Pencilled in were Goodwood on 29 September and the season-ending Spanish GP on 28 October. It looked like anything but the promised 'full season'.

All efforts were concentrated on preparation for the Italian Grand Prix – into the lions' den – on 16 September. During a visit to Bourne, the Monza circuit's Giuseppe Baccigaluppi had secured the prized BRM entry, with promises of £500 starting

Vindication?

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After the embarrassment of Ulster, Juan Fangio was asked if he would drive the BRM again. "I will," he said. "I consider it to be, basically, the best Formula 1 car ever made. All it needs is improvement in certain details. No car has ever given me such a thrill to drive, or a greater sense of absolute mastery. I will stand by it." As Ray Mays had hoped, Fangio proved to be the mechanically sensitive yet blisteringly fast driver who could cope with it. But Bourne's luck was out again. On the day after the Dundrod race a fatigued Fangio crashed at Monza, broke his neck and was out of racing until the beginning of 1953.

As Fangio's replacement Raymond Mays auditioned the tall young Briton who had finished second in Ulster in a Cooper-Bristol, Mike Hawthorn. He tried the car at Folkingham, but concluded "it was no use – every time I came to a corner and went below 8000rpm, the power went right off. Then, suddenly, as you reached the 8000 mark the full power would come in and you had a job to hold the car straight. At over 8000 it really

did motor, but the steering was nothing to write home about." Instead, Hawthorn would drive the 4½-litre Ferrari of BRM nemesis Tony Vandervell.

Responding to unabated public interest in the BRM, the BRDC added a 102-mile Formule Libre race on 19 July to its 1952 British Grand Prix meeting at Silverstone. To combat the Albi overheating, Peter Berthon specified much larger water pumps as well as radiators. The latter required the addition of a scoop above the grille to deliver engine-inlet air. Louvering remained similar to the hasty Albi effort but more neatly done. To overcome the source of Fangio's embarrassment in Ulster, very large fuel filters were installed in both cockpits.

Drivers for Silverstone were Froilán González and Ken Wharton. Both made typically sluggish BRM starts, but Froilán was second at the end of the first lap and chasing leader Taruffi in the Thin Wall Ferrari. The latter was penalised half a minute for jumping the start but BRM's pit wasn't up to giving this



With their bonnets well ventilated after the heating difficulties at Albi, two BRMs lined up next to two 4½-litre Ferraris at Silverstone on 19 July, 1952. Taruffi's Ferrari (26) was jumping the start while Ken Wharton (8) started next to Luigi Villorosi's Ferrari (15).



At Aintree on 29 May, 1954, Peter Collins led the field in the Thin Wall Ferrari ahead of Flockhart in the first Mark II BRM. Ken Wharton was a few places back in the second such car. While Wharton retired with brake problems in this, the 105-mile final, Flockhart finished third in a race won by the 250F Maserati of Stirling Moss. The new Formula 1 cars were proving hard to beat.

Breaking such a record would have put the V16 on the map for perpetuity.

Tony Rudd checked with Rolls-Royce to see what power they thought the BRM could produce if tuned for all-out speed for only a few miles: "They said it would pull 800hp with all the goodies and 1000hp with a sprint fuel." Rudd said that this matched the car's likely output when Graham Hill drove it in a demonstration in South Africa in 1968, fitted with the original, larger Rolls-Royce blower inlet. With Hill revving it to nearly 13,000rpm it must have been producing 780hp, Rudd thought. But this potential was never deployed to attack the Class F record.

Though Peter Collins is deservedly associated with the Mark II's final successes, the new model did have one get-together with the man who is renowned for his pedalling of the

awesome Mark I. In 1954 Raymond Mays received approval from Alfred Neubauer of Mercedes-Benz to invite Fangio to drive the BRM in its shorter, lighter Mark II form in autumnal races at Goodwood and Aintree.

He didn't race it after all. But Juan Manuel came to Folkingham on 13 September to test the Mark II. Driving it flat-out as usual, he turned ten laps and averaged 100mph for the last seven, knocking four seconds off his best Mark I time. "This was the last time he drove a BRM," said Tony Rudd. "It was evidently a memorable sight, the multiple World Champion driving a Mark II when contemporary for the first, last and only time." Fangio had his own coda to his career with Britain's BRM: "It was the most fantastic car I ever drove – an incredible challenge in every way."

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