

"We had been flying for quite a few hours, the engines droning away. Most of the crew had dozed off or were reading or playing cards, when the skipper said, 'Watch this.' He suddenly throttled back all four engines. The result was instant silence, which was livened shortly thereafter by spectacular pops and bangs and flames from the open exhausts – from 48-cylinders – with the aircraft then dropping several hundred feet. It really startled me, and I could actually see what was happening! He then got on the intercom and said, 'Stand by to abandon aircraft,' and pandemonium broke out as six crewmen tried to find their 'chutes in the back of the aircraft. This was a very difficult thing to do in such a confined space, and arguments inevitably flared up. The skipper had made his point (somewhat graphically), and cancelled his order, saying: 'Perhaps now you will stow your 'chutes properly.' After that, they did."

In the space of two years, Warner had gone from practicing aboard a basic biplane to joining the Jet Age, and had experienced massive evolutionary leaps in aviation design. "In April 1950 I was with the Advanced Flying School, flying Meteors from RAF Driffield in Yorkshire for three months before returning to the south of England to the Operational Conversation Unit flying Vampires from RAF Stradishall in Suffolk. The Vampire was quite simple to fly, but it had a few nasty tricks. It would flick out of a turn if you loaded it with too much G-force, which was very dangerous at low level. Of course it was a subsonic aircraft, so if you approached its limiting Mach number it would porpoise badly and start to shake itself to bits. The Meteor had some vices, too. If you extended the air brakes to slow it to the limiting speed for lowering the wheels, you had to retract the air brakes before selecting 'wheels down,' or the combination would so disrupt the airflow over the tail surfaces that control could easily be lost. The early jet engines would flame out if the throttles were opened too quickly which made close formation flying quite tricky – and don't forget we didn't have ejector seats. I flew only single-seat Vampires prior to the introduction of the two-seater T11 Trainer version. A great number of both types were lost through accidents – usually fatal ones – for those were pioneering days."

1951 would prove a pivotal year for Warner. Having earned his spurs in a variety of aircraft, he decided that life in the armed forces wasn't for him. "I developed a hernia after hand-cranking a car, and had to come off flying duties for an operation. While I was recuperating, I took the opportunity to leave the



RAF. I loved the flying side but by that point I was fed up with all the 'bull' and red tape that came with it."

Without a job in 'Civvy Street' awaiting him, Warner embarked on life as a car dealer, just like his motor racing idols. In order to do this, first he had to buy a car of his own. "My first was a Riley Nine 'special,' registration number MY5481. It was essentially a cut 'n' shut saloon car with a rather rudimentary, doorless two-seater body made of aluminium. It had cycle-type wings, wire wheels, a fold-flat windscreen, an alloy gear change extension with a tiny gearlever (possibly



Warner was an early member of the jet set, seen here piloting a Meteor IV in 1950.

from a Riley Imp), and it was rather a racy looking thing. It went quite well, too; even more so after I added four Amal carburettors, a high compression cylinder head and a four-branch Servais exhaust system.

"I greatly enjoyed driving it to events. I went down to circuits such as Goodwood and Silverstone where I got to see the great Froilán González, 'The Pampas Bull,' win the 1951 British Grand Prix for what was

Ferrari's first ever victory in a World Championship Formula One race. He defeated the hitherto dominant works Alfa Romeos in the process, and was great to watch. This only reinforced the desire to compete myself. I did a couple of driving tests in the Riley which were quite popular at the time."

However, the leap from aspiring racing driver to circuit star would have to wait a while longer.

III. Onwards and upwards

Necessity is often the mother of compromise, and The Chequered Flag Stable's sophomore season would involve a degree of rationalisation. Having fielded six cars the previous year, a pragmatic Warner would run just two for 1959: the altogether more important business of selling cars had to take priority. The existing – and proven – Lotus

Seven-Climax would be retained, primarily for sprints and hillclimbs with the occasional circuit outing thrown in. Its new stablemate, however, was something altogether more purposeful. Aspirations were elevated with the purchase of a brand new 2-litre Cooper Monaco, which would be shared over the course of the year between Percy Crabb and the team principal.

“Would Sir prefer a Jaguar D-type or an Aston Martin DB3S?” Graham Warner shows racer Mike Dickens a pair of exotic sports-racers.





Parkes is seen here leading eventual winner Moss at Brands Hatch in June 1960, where the works Gemini-Fords took a resounding one-two finish in The John Davy Trophy Formula Junior race.

Esses, which pitched LOV1 off the circuit and allowed arch-rival Leston to assume the lead.

Then came the team's first overseas foray of the year, the Coupe International de Vitesse des Formule Junior encounter at Rheims on July 2, which was a support race for the French Grand Prix. Team Lotus laid down a marker early on, Trevor Taylor's car featuring a 1.1-litre Cosworth-Ford engine, along with 6.5in by 15in rear tyres. The Yorkshireman scorched to a practice time of 2min 46.4sec, comfortably the fastest of all three timed sessions. Only eight of the 40 or so runners managed to get below the 2min 50sec barrier. Warner recalls: "New regulations allowed bigger engines with only a slight weight penalty. Colin Chapman persuaded Cosworth not to supply these units to rival teams, so the Lotuses were always going to be tough to beat."

Parkes arrived at the circuit on the Friday before the race, having missed the first two practice sessions.

He showcased his customary adaptability by clocking a time of 2min 49sec inside his first 15 laps of the circuit, despite a lack of familiarity with the venue. With the race being run over three heats, the victor decided on aggregate, it was Taylor's Lotus 20 which predictably headed home the Cooper of Tony Maggs in the opener, with Moss third in the other works Gemini. Parkes' good work, however, was undone after he missed a gear accelerating out of the Muizon hairpin. The clutch exploded, showering shrapnel across the track and ending his day prematurely. In the second heat, Maggs led home Taylor, with Dick Prior third ahead of Moss.

The final heat was held following the Grand Prix, in which Ferrari's Giancarlo Baghetti caused arguably the greatest upset win in Formula One history by winning on his World Championship debut. It was now past 5pm, the two prior Formula Junior races and 52 laps of the banner event having left the track surface a greasy

out, carried out engine tests and their pre-take off cockpit drill. All pressures and temperatures were good; all systems go. They lined up at the threshold of the runway, received permission from the control tower to take off, and then John Larcombe opened the throttles smoothly and the Blenheim accelerated down the runway. The engine note rose, the tail came up, and we all held our breath as the magical moment for which we had been waiting for so long had arrived. And then, just as she was about to become airborne, John throttled back and abandoned the take-off. It was nothing serious: the under-nose escape hatch hadn't been secured properly.

"They then taxied back to the other end of the runway and tried again. John opened the throttle, the Blenheim accelerated, the engine note rose, the tail came up, and this time it lifted cleanly. She was airborne! We all cheered, slapped each other on the back and then cheered some more. We had done it! She flew beautifully. John returned to Duxford and did a few fly-pasts and low passes to our great delight. Then, with wheels and flaps down, he performed a beautiful three-point landing. John taxied back to a rapturous welcome and opened the champagne which had been carried on that first flight. We drank from plastic cups and ignored the rain that was falling once again."

This would, however, be a triumph stripped of euphoria. With exhaustive flight tests procedures completed, and having been granted a Permit to Fly, the Blenheim participated in its first-ever public display to great acclaim at the Biggin Hill Air Fair on June 6-7 1987. A week later, the aircraft was due to appear at both the Duxford Military Display and at the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators event at North Weild. "We had more than a dozen other confirmed air display bookings for the rest of year including the big International Air Tattoo at Fairford," Warner recalls. "We also had strong interest from organisers for the following year. The income generated by these events would start to repay BAM for the enormous expenditure sunk into the Blenheim, and I informed our bank manager that we would soon be able to reduce our rather bloated overdraft."

Then disaster struck. Chief pilot Lancombe was unable to attend the Duxford and North Weild events due to a scheduling conflict with British Airways, so reserve pilot Roy Pullan took his place at the controls. "My choice of pilot was somewhat restricted by the insurance company," Warner says. "I would have loved to have flown the Blenheim myself, but I was deemed to be insufficiently experienced. Roy was a 'dyed-in-the-wool' aircraft enthusiast who had been involved with the Blenheim restoration over a four or five year

