

The following story is told by Martin Woodward, who was always on hand to get Daisy out of the many situations she managed to get herself into whilst she was out driving her car when she was well into her seventies.



The author at Daisy's house with the two identical Austin 16/6s.

Daisy Fearon lived in a tumble down house across the road from where I lived as a child in Bembridge, on the Isle of Wight. She was always considered to be one of those 'village characters' that every small community possesses, and she used to fascinate me with tales of her family life in China and other colonial locations that her family were posted to.

Daisy never married and was frequently seen driving her Austin around the island roads. When I was a child it was

common to hear the cry: "Watch out! Here comes Miss Fearon," and we would all dive for cover, as her driving was a bit unpredictable at times. It was always a guess as to which side of the road she would actually be driving on during any particular day. She nearly always wore a wide brimmed hat, from under which she would peer out through the windscreen, adding to her already slightly eccentric image.

There were several amusing incidents over the years, but I will only quote a couple of the more memorable ones.

Back in the 1960s, Daisy was driving to Newport one day, a distance of about 12 miles, and there was a crossroads on the way at Brading. At this point, the main road from Ryde crossed the route that Daisy was taking, and she was supposed to stop and give way at the junction. For some reason she failed to do this and carried straight on, colliding with a large Luton box van in the process. The Luton van was impaled on the front of the Austin, and was a total write-off, but Daisy calmly reversed out of the wreckage, drove around it and continued on her trip to Newport. Naturally she was later apprehended for this slight oversight and there was a subsequent court case during which she was asked why she failed to stop after the accident. Her reply was: "Well, the engines were still going, so I thought everything was alright, and I did have some shopping to do!" Daisy always referred to 'the engines' of the car, and I often wondered whether she actually thought there were two of them under the bonnet. The Austin, needless to say, survived the incident virtually unscathed (apart from a few bruises).

The next incident was particularly memorable for me, and occurred a few years later, in 1971. Daisy used to have quite a few knocks with the Austin, mainly whilst getting in and out of her small garage, and I think I rebuilt the nearside wing for her about seven times in all. All the work I did on the car was done on a favour basis, as I had known Daisy for so long, and I was very keen on old vehicles myself, having had several old cars in the past. As a result, she would usually ring me if she had trouble with the Austin.

On this particular occasion, she phoned to say that the 'engines' would not restart after she had been visiting a friend's house, so, I told her to wait where

Lyrics for *Oh, I would like a Baby Austin*:

**Oh I would like a baby Austin.
One between us two.
Wouldn't it be fun,
Just a little one, take it out together when our work is done.
Just a baby Austin,
Then I'd be ever true.
Oh I would like a baby Austin,
Just a dear little car for two.**

Whilst this particular song was rather short on lyrics, yes, that was the full complement of lyrics, it has to be said that the accompaniment was very catchy.

The second song was, of course *My Little Austin Seven* with lyrics by Clarkson Rose and set to music by Norman Long.



Entertainer and composer Norman Long.



**Entertainer and composer
Clarkson Rose.**

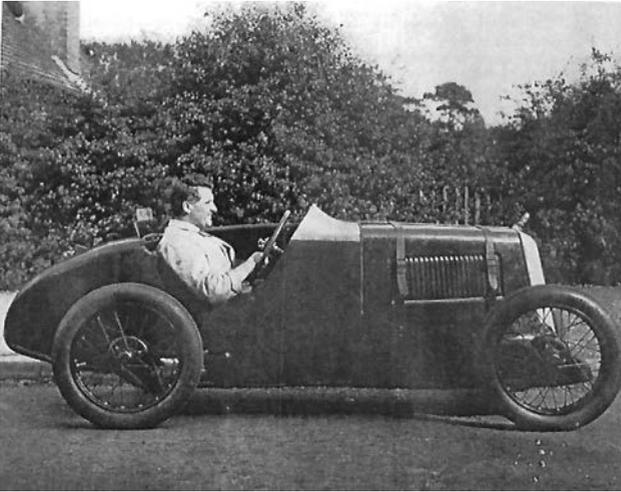
Both Clarkson Rose and Norman Long recorded this song, each presenting it in their own particular style.

Norman Long was an English entertainer, born in 1893 in the South London town of Sydenham. After the First World War he embarked upon a career as an insurance salesman, but also found the time to write music which gently mocked the establishment. When being introduced as an entertainer it was as 'Norman Long: A Song, a Smile, and a Piano', but later, when he began broadcasting on the radio, it was changed to 'A Song, a Joke and a Piano' when the 'smile' became irrelevant. Norman Long died in 1951, aged 58.

Clarkson Rose was also an English entertainer and song writer, and is probably best known for his comic song about owning an Austin Seven. Born Arthur. C. Rose in Dudley, Worcestershire in 1890, Clarkson Rose began his working life as a bank clerk, entertaining in his spare time. Whilst still in his teens, he formed an eight-strong concert party and began dabbling in serious theatre. He was also one of Britain's

as those sent to the distributors. However, once they reached the experimental department's workshop, the engine underwent some basic changes, such as replacing the camshaft and fine-tuning the engine.

It was just before the outbreak of the Second World War that Alf was promoted to become the chief experimental engineer within the production development division – in his own modest way Alf admits in the interview that there was only him on the job, which was agreed to between the shop and the drawing office.



Alf Depper seated in an early Austin Seven circa 1932. (Courtesy Bob Wyatt)

ANOTHER WAR AND ON TO THE MINI

The war put paid to any further ideas of racing, and all efforts were directed towards providing munitions to satisfy the insatiable appetite of the war machine. Alf remembers his work in the development of aero engines and a tank engine called the Meteorite in about 1941.

Once the war was over, research and development focused once again on private cars, and the first new model to be put into production was the A40 'Devon' saloon. Alf worked on the development of these and the first two experimental 'Atlantics.'

In Alf's final years at The Austin, he worked on prototypes for the 1100 and 1800 projects and, of course, the Mini, which he liked very much. The first experimental Mini took to the road looking very much like the A35 to disguise it from industrial spies.

Alf finally retired from work in 1966 when he was just 65, after devoting 50 years of his life to the Company. When Alf's father noticed that his son had a keen interest and ability where engineering was concerned he was certainly not far off the mark, and that letter that he sent to Mr Herbert Austin requesting an interview for a 'bright lad' certainly paid off handsomely.

Chapter 12

A funny thing happened on the way to the cemetery

Being the owner of a vintage motor car soon attracted an agent whose job it was to provide period vehicles for the film and television industry, and thus began an interesting, period of ownership which was to last for just over 20 years.

My 1929 Austin Sixteen fabric bodied saloon car was much favoured, as the fabric bodywork, which was a type of leather cloth, did not reflect the powerful studio lights as perhaps highly polished all-metal coachwork did.

In all the years that I have owned this particular motor car, it has rarely given me any trouble, and has proved to be a most reliable vehicle, that is until I introduced it to the joys of filmmaking. 'Lights, Camera, Action' seemed to have some sort of death wish effect as far as the Austin was concerned. If anything was to go wrong, it would go wrong at the most inappropriate time, usually when on set.

One such incident occurred during the filming of *One of Our Dinosaurs is Missing*. I was the driver of the lead car and made up to look like a Chinese gangster. We were all ready to go and the word 'ACTION' was my cue to start the engine and drive off. However, at that precise moment, the teeth of the little gear at the base of the distributor decided to sheer off and that was that. On *The Abominable Dr Phibes* the Austin was used as a police car which would attempt to catch up with the elusive Doctor Phibes. After a long day filming at Elstree, I was making my way home to Acton when a noise from the rear axle told me that something had broken. It turned out to be the planet gears in the differential that decided to shed their teeth just half a mile away from the location. Being part of the 'traffic' driving around war-torn London (recreated at Elstree Studios) in *Hanover Street* was interesting, as Harrison Ford, in his



The 16/6 on the wartime set of *Hanover Street* at Elstree Studios.



John Moore-Brabazon at Dieppe in number 18 (AB 1010).

drawn cart, which just happened to be travelling on the wrong side of the road. The car was damaged to such an extent that he took over the spare car (AB 983), but ended up wrecking that, too, when he crashed it into some trees avoiding yet another horse-drawn cart. The Austin overturned and trapped both him and his mechanic, who was rendered unconscious. Following a near riot caused by the locals who were protesting about the accident, the local gendarmerie were summoned and considered the matter serious enough to place Resta under arrest in Dieppe Prison.



The team lined up for a photograph prior to the Grand Prix at Dieppe. Warwick Wright in number 34, J T C Moore-Brabazon in number 18 and Dario Resta in number 1.

However, both he and his mechanic were lucky – just a few days before, a British driver named Ernest Hall-Watt was killed whilst testing his Renault around the circuit, and on the same day another driver managed to run into and kill a spectator, so it is little wonder that the locals were not all that enthusiastic about the forthcoming race.

On hearing of the incident and the resulting incarceration of one of his drivers, Austin immediately set about securing Resta's release in time for him to participate in the Grand Prix. The two crashed cars were frantically rebuilt into one by the engineers which Austin had thoughtfully brought over from England and, with additional parts having been rushed over from Longbridge, they completed the job in time for the race.

The race commenced at 06:00 to ensure that even the slowest cars could at least finish whilst it was still light. Dario Resta in '1' took to the track first, followed one minute later by Willy Pöge ('2') in a Mercedes. Moore-Brabazon and Warwick Wright started 18th and 34th respectively.

The Austins driven by Resta and Moore-Brabazon ran well but were soon outclassed by their rivals. Their progress was not helped by both having to stop several times to change tyres, with Resta requiring ten replacement covers!

The race was won by the German driver Christian Lautenschlager in his 140hp Mercedes, which averaged 69mph over the entire course. Moore-Brabazon finished 18th at 54.8mph taking 8 hours 42 minutes and 50 seconds, and Resta came 19th taking 8 hours, 46 minutes and 50 seconds, both setting an average speed of 50mph. Warwick Wright retired due to engine failure after completing just four laps. His mechanic was blamed for failing to ensure that the engine had sufficient oil in the sump.