

‘GET ME TO THE CHURCH ON TIME’
OR
‘If ever I get married again, I certainly will not use your firm’

Tom Robinson

Prologue

At least twenty years ago on a summer’s Friday evening, the telephone rang. It was an urgent appeal from the operator of a Classic Car wedding hire business. One of his fleet had broken down and would I help him out with a wedding the following day? Quite a simple job really; arrive at the operator’s house and park behind an open-top car, await the arrival of the chauffeur [actually the brother of the business owner] from another job and follow the open topper to the venue about eight miles away, Wedding scheduled for 3pm, take the bridesmaids to the wedding and afterwards to the reception. Well, I volunteered and did not realise what I was letting myself in for.

Act one

As requested, I arrived in good time in the Renown and parked behind the ancient open tourer which was suitably decorated. The road was deserted, but I settled down to read my newspaper. I glanced at my watch several times and when 2.30 arrived I became somewhat anxious, but there was nothing I could do but sit back and wait. By 2.40 I began to realise that the beginnings of a full-blown disaster were in an embryonic state. However, the cavalry, in the shape of a Humber Super Snipe then arrived on the opposite side of the road and out tumbled the driver. He disappeared into the operator’s house and changed into what must have been considered an appropriate uniform for the occasion. He soon emerged dressed as an Edwardian chauffeur; large greatcoat with shiny buttons and a large cap. The whole ensemble was complete by the carrying of leather gauntlets. He resembled either one of those commissionaires we older members will recall, who stood outside suburban cinemas and directed patrons to the Stalls or the Circle; or a singer from an Ivor Novello Ruritanian musical where all the men wore military uniforms, strutted about the stage and sang to love-lorn maidens imprisoned up towers in remote Austrian forests.

Act two

My new friend, whom I called to myself, Buttons, said, *‘Right, where are we off to?’* I replied that I had no idea except the name of the village. To say that a blank look crossed his face would perhaps be an understatement. I should remind you, dear reader that the time was now 2.50 and we had no idea where we were to go and no doubt, just eight miles away, in some house, things were getting somewhat fraught in the wedding-to-be department. However, Buttons had the answer. He was sure that his brother had a diary in the house and details would be in there. He shot off as fast as his greatcoat would allow. He soon emerged with a smile on his face and a piece of paper. He reminded me of Neville Chamberlain in 1938 waving his famous piece of paper ‘Peace in our Time.’ Buttons lost no time in mounting the open tourer and for the life of me I cannot recall the make, but it was early ‘twenties. He pushed the starter and nothing happened. He tried again, and again. He was one of those sorts who was not sympathetic to ancient petrol engines for he soon had the engine flooded and eventually flattened the battery. So there we were, past 3 o’clock and no nearer Bride to Be [BtB].

'*You must go on your own*', he said. I responded by saying that I was not an employee, he was, and if there was to be any awkwardness chez-BtB, then I would not be part of it; but I would provide the transport.

Act three

So off we sped with eight miles to cover in record time. Owners of Razor Edge cars will know that they are not the sort of machine to throw round corners, but we covered the distance in quite quick time. Now unknown to us, to reach BtB's house we had to pass the wedding chapel on the left hand side of the main street which was reached by us making a right turn upon entering the village. The chapel was one of those small brick-built ones with a single entrance door and positioned quite close to the pavement. So now you have the picture as we swung right to see in the distance, a crowd of well-dressed people spilling onto the pavement outside the chapel. They saw the Renown with wedding pennants fluttering as soon as we turned the corner. They were, to a man, relieved to see the car and they assumed we had BtB aboard, for as we drew nearer, they all jammed into the one doorway to get inside before she arrived. Imagine their astonishment as we sped past! It was just like an Ealing comedy. The time, by the way was now something like 3.30 and I can still see clearly in my mind's eye, the looks of astonishment on their faces. Buttons soon found BtB's house. It was on a council estate and at the end of a cul-de-sac. As we drew up, two burly fellows each with prominent buttonholes emerged from the house and advanced. Time for buttonholing and time for action from Buttons, I thought, and he gingerly opened the passenger door. Meanwhile I made preparations to make a three – well several –point turn, to be ready to return to the chapel.

Act Four

By the time this complicated manoeuvre had been completed, Buttons had pacified the minders and I saw one of them pushing a large bridesmaid into the back of a two-door Escort. Not very dignified, I thought, but there was no choice. The Escort sped off and BtB emerged with father. He was no trouble; no doubt an ample supply of spirits had dulled his senses. As there was no time to lose, Buttons bundled them into the back and we sped – well drifted off, as fast as we could.

Obviously BtB was not pleased with the service she had received and addressed us two in the front by saying the words in my title.

'If ever I get married again, I will certainly not use your firm.'

But our problems were not yet over as I discovered as we entered the long main road. In our haste to get our guests aboard we had not thought about who should sit where. Glancing in the mirror I realised that BtB was seated on the nearside, and if you have been paying attention so far, you will realise that on our return trip, the chapel was on our off-side, thus presenting an undignified arrival.

Of course, the frustrated congregation had once again spilled onto the pavement, but upon seeing the Renown approaching, they all tried once more to get inside the chapel in good time! Several members saw us once again speed by as I had seen a left-hand junction where I could safely reverse and deliver BtB safely alongside the pavement.

Well that was the first hurdle over and Buttons began to relax once he had opened the door for the Bride to emerge. Glancing at my watch I saw that we were 45 minutes late – not bad under the circumstances.

The rest of the adventure fell rather flat. The Classic Car firm owner upon returning from yet another wedding saw the stranded tourer and managed to get it into life and bring it along just as the bride and groom emerged.

So all I had to do was convey the bridesmaids and best man to the local pub for a somewhat delayed knees-up. I did overhear one bridesmaid tell her friend that the Bride had made up some potted meat sandwiches for the coach trip to Manchester Airport for the Honeymoon!! What a way to start a marriage – I wonder if they are still together, and if not, then which Wedding Hire Firm did she use for the next one!!

Epilogue

So there you have it.

If I can pass on any advice it would be; do not answer your telephone late on a Friday night if you want to avoid any wedding day adventures!



MODIFICATIONS TO A 2000 ENGINE

One-time saloon owner Alan Fairclough has been a good friend to TROC over the years. Here he passes on a tip which he has found to be beneficial to his Triumph Roadster.

Of course, any mechanical work carried out on your car must be undertaken by a fully qualified mechanic.

I have recently fitted a Weber 34ICH carburettor with which you are no doubt familiar, when it arrived the main jet was 1.65 and the idle jet 0.60, some members in the club have been quoting miraculous mpg figures. When I put the car on a rolling road, we found it was running far to weak, we changed the jets for a main 1.75 and the idle 0.65 and it now runs brilliantly. Thought that might be of interest to anybody who has fitted the same carburettor. I have also fitted a 123 ignition, which replaces the original distributor on the car; I had great difficulty in trying to find out what the ideal setting should be as there are 16 advance curve settings. After a lot of messing about we finally settled on number 4. TR Enterprises in Mansfield were very helpful and they tend to run their TR engines on number 6. The engine in my Roadster is a 1949 one i.e. low compressions etc etc.

I thought this might be of interest to anyone who has done the same conversion.

When I notified the insurance company of the change of carburettor they merely noted that the vehicle was modified but no change in premium - at least they know about it.

I Hope this is of some interest.

VISIT TO NICK BLACK AND FAMILY – NOV 2011

John Bath TROC Historian

After reading Nick Black's excellent book "*Triumph and Tragedy*" earlier this year, and then writing a review for *The Globe*, I made contact with Nick on the phone to see if I could arrange to call in to see him later in the year, and got a very positive response. For those not familiar with the story, Nick is the youngest son of the former well known MD (and the driving force) of Standard Motor Company, the late Sir John Black.

Luckily, Bob Hobbs was keen to come along too and he kindly volunteered to drive up his Coventry-registered 1952 Renown, LKV 541. When you think that Bob is based in Calne in Wiltshire, and Nick is based in Stamford, Lincolnshire, this meant a round trip (via my home in Surrey) of some 450 miles.

But perhaps this is not a big deal for a near 200,000 mile Renown which is always superbly maintained by Bob and has been owned by his family almost since new. And the electrically controlled overdrive ensured a smooth ride. But this car was first owned by Standard Motor Company and many years ago, when based in Worcestershire, Bob was stopped in the locality by a former employee who recognised Bob's car and its registration number, telling Bob that he recalled Sir John driving this actual car. Surely there could hardly be a more appropriate car for the task.

The journey up the A1 to Stamford was uneventful, until we passed a couple of wedding cars on the way. The lead car was a "semi-razoredge" Princess limousine, followed by what must be the last iteration of English razoredge styling, the Daimler DS420 limousine, in the Hooper coach-building style and no longer a common vehicle, despite being built up to 1992.



About to pass the Daimler limo somewhere on A1M in Hertfordshire

We turned many heads, but a stop at the Peterborough Services saw another driver asking to take pictures of Bob's Renown, as Ian (with his wife, Chris) from Northampton recalled very clearly being taken to school in his father's Renown – lucky chap!! The day was working out very well, and even the rain held off.

Arriving at Nick's house we were made very welcome, meeting his charming wife Nicky, plus daughter Charlotte and son, Tom.

Bob took Nick and Charlotte for a spin round Stamford in the Renown, as we had promised, and once again serendipity was at work- the sole classic car we saw on the run, was a very nice blue Triumph TR3A coming towards us. Friendly waving from both drivers naturally ensued.



The tour of Stamford – Nick Black in passenger seat

I could not help thinking that if only that TR3A driver had known who was on board “our” Triumph, then he might have been somewhat incredulous. Charlotte was very impressed with Bob's car – *“it was like being in the cast of Downton Abbey”*, she said!

Back at the family home, it was time for the promised Black family album to come out. Apparently, Nick's father was brought up in relatively humble circumstances, though in the pleasant market town of Kingston in Surrey, not far from my own home.





Top. Charlotte sitting where perhaps her grandfather had sat on many occasions.

Below Bob Hobbs and Nick Black after the run around Stamford.



Above Charlotte in whimsical mood

Below Nick Black, the youngest son of Sir John Black MD of Standard Triumph



None of his predecessors (as far is known) achieved the heights in commerce that John Black did, making him a “one-off”, so to speak, as a very driven individual. Had he lived in the current century he would no doubt have appeared in the society columns, as he mixed with the wealthy, the great and good, marrying in to the Hillman family initially. His brother in-law was Spencer Wilks (who later found fame in Rover), who also married a Hillman daughter!

We saw pictures of him about to depart on the liner, *Queen Elizabeth*, from the Pullman boat train, with wife and family, and heard about his love of cards, messing around in boats and gambling. He also liked riding and hunting, and was a member of Atherstone Hunt Club. Many happy family times were spent relaxing in “The Bungalow” - Mallory-y-Mor - near Llanbedr In Wales which Nick recalls very well.



Above 'The Bungalow', Malory-y-Mor

Left Sir John's gravestone in Llanbedr churchyard.

Photos by Bob Hobbs

Nick was only 16 when his father died which is very young age to lose your father. He had two elder brothers, and the surviving brother lives in France. Sadly the middle brother, Steuart committed suicide aged only 40.

Sir John Black has not had a good “classic car press”, and every picture I have seen published to date shows him to be an unsmiling, almost austere character, clearly from another age. So it was good to be able to hear about another side of his character from Nick. When the Standard, Company Secretary, Leslie Dexter, died prematurely of TB just before war, Sir John adopted, Fay, his daughter, to ensure her well-being. Fay lives in nearby Exton to this day and Nick and Fay are still in touch.

Also, you may not have read that Sir John had the advantage of a photographic memory, remembering the names of his many employees, without prompting, and thus a very rare gift. Sir John loved the Welsh people very much, and seemed to relate more to them than perhaps those “yes men” who would doubtless talk up to him at work. Perhaps unsurprisingly (in view of the happy times spent in Wales), he is buried in Wales rather than Warwickshire or Surrey where he was brought up.

Finally we saw a DVD of Nick’s christening at their home at Mallory Court in 1949, in colour, with tantalising shots of brand new Vanguard, the family, and their beautiful home. You can now visit Mallory Court as member of the public - it is now a luxury Hotel which you can find in Harbury Lane, Leamington CV33 9QB.

Thanks I am grateful to all the following for making this event possible and in chronological order they are:-

- **Phil Homer** of Standard Motor Club for passing my details to Nick to make contact with me.
- **Bob Hobbs** for making his car available -the session would have been nothing like as enjoyable without his car.
- And of course to the **Black family** for allowing us to disrupt their Saturday afternoon!

All photographs in this article, except where stated were taken by John Bath

Extract from Letter to TROC from Nick and Nicky Black after receipt of photos etc

Dear John,

Thank you so much for the articles on Avon (*Inf: Avon Bodies a coachbuilder with close links to Standard*) etc. Very interesting stuff.

The photos were excellent-Charlotte is a lot more photogenic than myself!!

I'm trying to revamp my book for our possible third print run and am attempting to relate some of the new material that I've discovered.

Thanks once again. The flowers were lovely. In fact we keep filling up the vase with fresh flowers.

Speak later,

Nick & Nicky

458 MILES IS LONG WAY IN A DAY IN A RENOWN!

Bob Hobbs with John Bath for company



458 miles in a day?

No problem

Bob's TDC pauses at Worcester Park, Surrey

As a result of my article some while ago about the hotel in which a number of us stayed for a TROC rally, Nick Black, the son of Sir John Black, made contact with me. Sir John Black was, as many may already know, the former managing director of Standard Triumph and instigator of the design and production of our Razoredge Triumphs. For some time now John Bath and I have been trying to juggle dates with Nick to visit him in order to glean any information that is available about the life and principles by which Sir John Black worked and relaxed.

On November 12th, the day finally arrived for the visit. I had offered to transport John Bath in my Renown as its first registered owner was the Standard Motor Company Home Sales Division in Coventry. Also particularly relevant to this was the memory of a former employee of Standards who told me that he remembered my registration number from 1952 and that Sir John had driven my car on a number of occasions.

When I had offered to make the trip it was before my wife and I moved to Wiltshire. As a result my journey required me to drive from Calne in Wiltshire to Surrey to pick John up and then motor on to Stamford where Nick resides.

This resulted in a total mileage for the day in the Renown of 458 miles. Unfortunately the weather was not too kind to us and what started out as a very clean polished Renown ended up at Nick's house looking rather covered in the residue from the more or less continual spray as we were overtaken by almost every other vehicle on the road that day. This was despite cruising at around 55 to 60 miles per hour in overdrive.

The Renown behaved faultlessly throughout the day but its driver was perhaps rather worn out having started out at 6:15 in the morning and arrived home at 10:35 in the evening. I was very pleased to have made the change recently to radial tyres as the effort to hold a steady course down the road was much less than it used to be.

As usual, the most significant hazard to us on the journey was the “it’s an old car coming, I must pull out in front of it to avoid being held up” syndrome. This is all very well but as ever, such people seem incapable of assessing one’s speed of approach and also of getting a move on once they have decided to hold one up. However, as we were returning to John’s house in the Kingston upon Thames area I did manage to see off a challenge from another motorist to the surprise of John who said “well done, that was a BMW as well!” Granted the said BMW driver was probably busy on his mobile ‘phone and did not try too hard.

All in all though it was a tiring day, it was also quite a nice end to the season’s use of the car and Nick and his daughter were delighted to be taken for a drive while we were there.



From Standard Triumph Review April 1948. Sir John Black and Lady Black arriving at Southamton from New York aboard RMS 'Queen Elizabeth'. An early production Vanguard was there to meet them.

ROYAL CAR BADGE ON A RENOWN

Lothar Klementz



Recently I promised to send some shots of a special RAC Badge. There were two badges produced by the RAC for the use on the Queen's car and for the use of the Royal Household.



In the book *"Badges of the Royal Automobile Club"* Joan Williams mentioned these badges on page 10. In the book *"World of Car Badges"* by Jan Sörnesjö these badges are mentioned and pictured on page 116. A couple of years ago the RAC sorted out some surplus stock. And I bought both types of these badges. The one for the Royal household displays the Union Jack instead of the E^HR + Crown.