

C.L. BANNISTER SOLVED

Photos courtesy of Clive Bannister and Ferret Photographics

You may recall my request in November last year for any further information on C.L. Bannister, the driver of the first Porsche - a 356 - to race in this country. The 50th Anniversary of the event was celebrated at Castle Combe in September.

A call from member David Ozan put me on the trail and shortly afterwards I was able to chat to Clive Bannister, son of Claude Bannister, whose 356 it was.

Claude Bannister was an import/export agent after the war, working between Germany and Britain. He had offices in both countries, spending six weeks at a time in each and commuting between them by road. He clearly had a passion for cars and the success of his trade in the filtration agent Kieselguhr, enabled him to indulge it. Besides Porsches - he had two, a split screen and the A featured here - he ran a Mercedes Gullwing that he also raced, along with various Jaguars and Bentleys. The latter was apparently the 'commuting' car.

As a boy, Clive enjoyed flying out to Germany and driving back with his father. He recalls the excitement at his boarding school in Lincolnshire, when his father arrived in one of the machines, especially the Porsche. Apparently, it had been subject to attention by a tuning firm in Hanover and the exhaust was decidedly non-standard.

"As a small boy of 15 I could not wait to start it up and blip the throttle. He also allowed me to drive it around his factory perimeter, provided I did not get out of second gear and kept below 50kph. This was the car he drove over to Castle Combe and raced in October 1952. It was the first Porsche to be seen on a circuit in GB and caused quite a stir. It was not ideally geared for such a track and he did not exactly get on the podium. However, it did give him enormous pleasure."

The Porsches were kept mainly in Germany and were run on British Forces Sector registration plates, as can be seen in the picture. The race car's registration was 42 42 42 and was retained even when the car was in use in this country. Claude Bannister only raced the Porsche once - at the Castle Combe event - and Clive remembers that afterwards it was parked outside the Dorchester, where he was staying, still bearing all its race numbers.

"Father drove it back to Germany a few days later and it did not miss a beat. New tyres were fitted, but it needed no further attention until its next dealer service."

In 1956 the Gullwing Merc tickled his fancy and the trusted Porsche left his stable. He did race this car a few times and Mercedes, always aware of its reputation, sent a mechanic along to nurse the car free of charge."

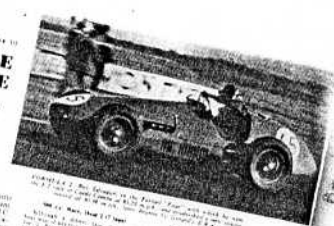
Both the Bannister Porsches were sold in Northern Germany, but Clive recalls that his father was always an enthusiast for the marque.

Claude Bannister retired to Guernsey and then moved to the Isle of Man where Clive provided a Targa for him. He died in 1997.

Clive himself went to work for Rover - initially as an apprentice - and remained there for 45 years, ultimately reaching the position of Director. In an extraordinary coincidence, one of his employees was a young Andy Goss - now MD of Porsche Cars GB.

Thanks to David Ozan and Clive Bannister for their help in completing the story. 🍷

CASTLE COMBE



Autosport Castle Combe 1952

Mercedes-Benz 2500 cc
 1st Clive Bannister 10:00
 2nd [unclear] 10:15
 3rd [unclear] 10:30

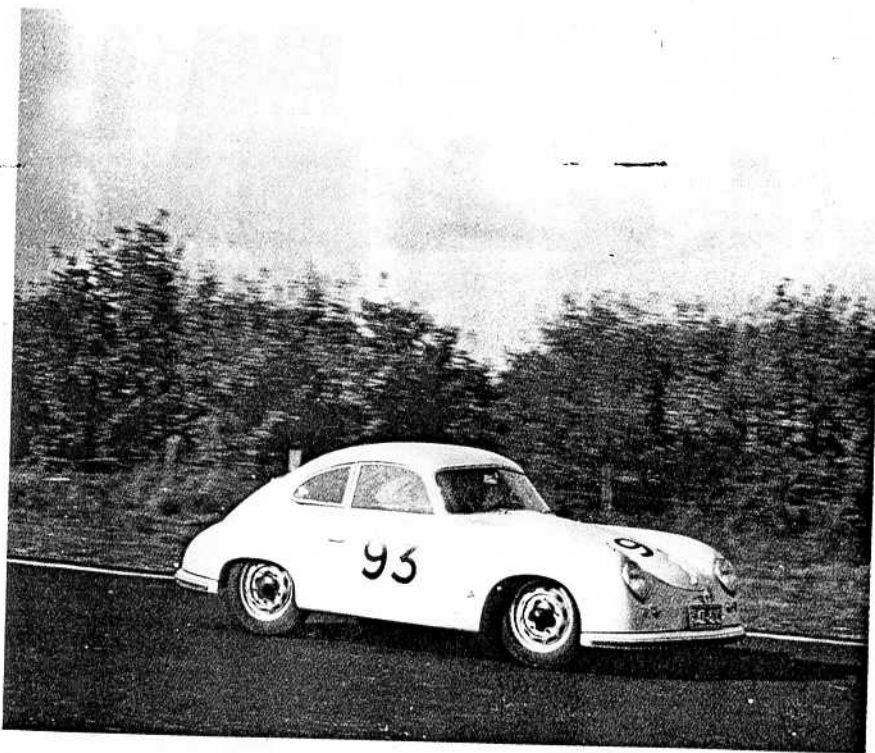
Porsche 356
 4th Clive Bannister 10:45
 5th [unclear] 11:00
 6th [unclear] 11:15

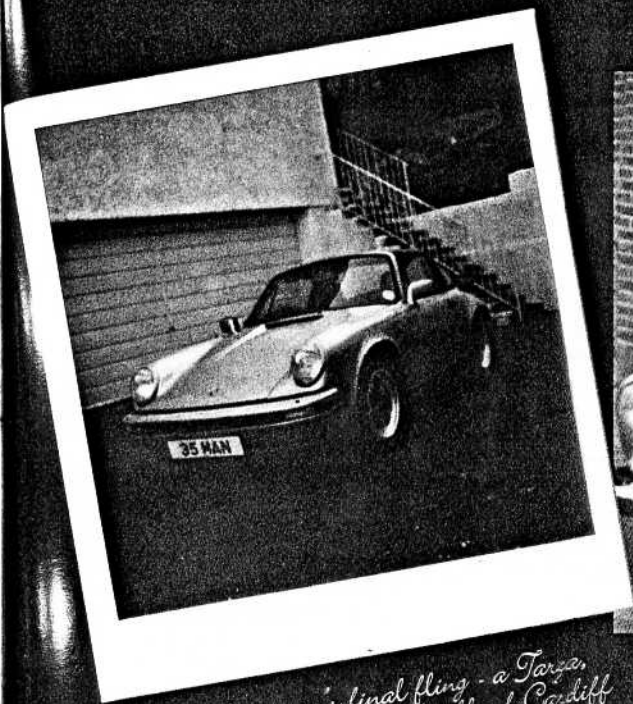
Other results:
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 1st [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 2nd [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 3rd [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 4th [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 5th [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 6th [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 7th [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 8th [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 9th [unclear]
 Mercedes-Benz 1500 cc 10th [unclear]



ABOVE
 The original Autosport report, October 10th 1952

BELOW
 The Bannister Porsche in action at Castle Combe





Claude Bannister's final fling - a Targa, sourced by his son, from Howells of Cardiff and used on the Isle of Man



Mercedes shared affection with Porsche - the Bannister 300SL



Father and son in the factory yard with Bentley and Porsche

Porsche and "rather ugly Hooper Bentley



Schoolmates admire the car

