

TALKING OF SPORTS CARS (No. 293)

BRITISH racing prestige was at a very low ebb in the early 1930s. The glory of the Bentleys had departed and British drivers were mostly racing foreign cars, for in spite of the critical letters this action provoked in the Correspondence columns they had no alternative if they wished to compete in Continental events with any chance of success.

Then in the winter of 1932 the M.G. company, heartened by its successes with its 747 c.c. Midget, produced a blown 1,100 c.c. car, the K3 Magnette. The new model made its first appearance in the Mille Miglia, entered by Earl Howe, and won not only its class but the team prize as well. This was but the first of a long list of successes, for the K3 has been winning ever since. Most of those still competing have been extensively modified and as a result have grown steadily faster as their age increased.

The two cars described this week belong to Frank Kennington, of Weybridge, whose burly form is often to be seen at Prescott and elsewhere hurrying to the top of the hill to the accompaniment of many revs and a shrill scream from the blower.

This year Kennington won the Baines Trophy awarded for best aggregate time by a visitor at Prescott's three open meetings. VIZOR.

ALTHOUGH the two K3 Magnettes under review were both complete and distinct entities when they came into my possession," Kennington points out, "their life story, so far as I am in a position to tell it, is somewhat complicated by the fact that they have been the subject of wholesale merging of identities. The earlier car, JB 1269, was the first K3 ever built and served as practice machine for the M.G. works team in the 1933 Mille Miglia. The later one, HJJ 870, was one-from-last in the K3 series and dates from 1934; it was first registered as late as 1940, which ex-

plains its 'modern' registration number.

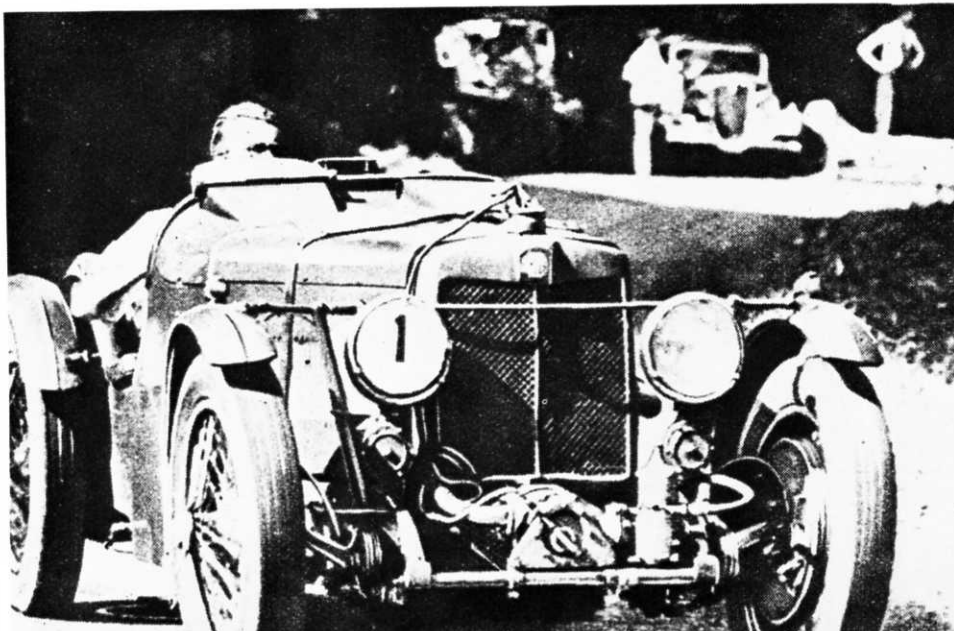
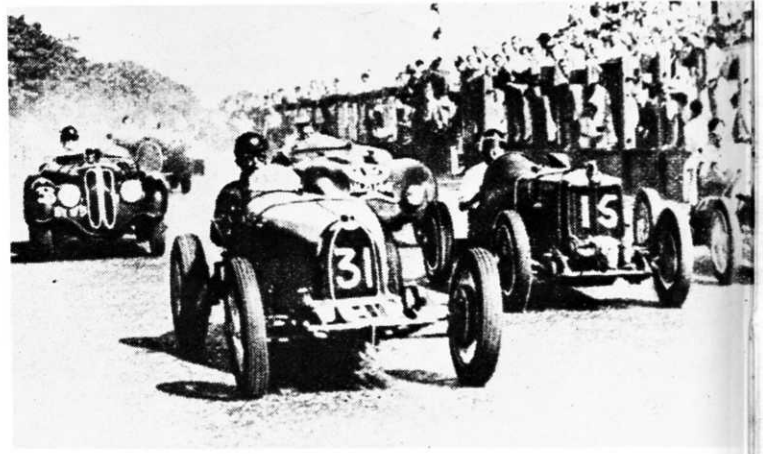
"For quite some time after its Italian sojourn, JB 1269 remained the property of the makers, leading a life of obscurity until its acquisition by Yallop, who in the mid-'thirties drove it in the Mannin races and elsewhere. There was a third owner whose name doesn't strike any familiar chords—he laid it up for the war period—and then the car passed to Jack Bartlett, from whom I bought it in the summer of '46.

"Without replacing anything except piston rings we ran the car in four 1946 sprint events, scoring class wins twice at Prescott, once at Bouley Bay and running second in the 1,100 c.c. supercharged sports class at Brighton. (To do both these M.G.s justice it should be borne in mind that 'eleven-hundreds' run in the 1½-litre category at Prescott).

"In the winter of 1946-47 JB 1269 was stripped down to the last screw and rivet, a process revealing the fact that the crankshaft had at some time broken and been welded together again; as we had repeatedly run the engine up to 6,500 in the course of sprints and a re-

Right: Alongside E. G. Pool's elderly Bugatti HJJ 870 begins the preliminary lap before the start of the Manx Cup race, during which it oiled three plugs.

Below: The older car, JB 1269, setting up a new Prescott record for blown 1½-litre sports cars at the July meeting with a time of 51.33 sec. The Arnott blower was in use on this occasion.



A Brace of M.G.

Late and Early Examples

spectable road mileage (the car being in daily use for general hacking) one may conclude that the welder knew his job. The Mille Miglia edition of the K3, of course, with its comprehensive road equipment and full-width body, was in no degree less habitable than milder M.G. models such as the L-type Magna two-seater, which it somewhat resembled, although the K3 fuel tank, to outward appearance of slab type, actually had a large and invisible forward extension, giving a total capacity of 26 gallons.

"Neither trouble nor expense was spared on the winter rebuild, an operation which can be very briefly summarized as follows: Laystall crank, Martlett pistons and a probably unique set of heavier-than-R-type connecting-rods installed (the base of the bores had to be relieved by interminable filing to give these rods clearance); water feed to engine drastically revised (standard system employed a single duct to the middle of the block, whereas ours used a four-branch pipe to the off side of the head.

leaving virtually static water around the bores); standard blower, a Powerplus No. 10, scrapped in favour of a big Arnott Type 2800, driven at engine speed—as against a small reduction with the Powerplus—and giving a top boost of 23lb; inlet manifold entirely redesigned in conjunction with Robin Jackson and coming into line with Goldie Gardner practice, i.e., blower delivers to No. 1 manifold pipe; that one in turn feeds through one port to pipe No. 2, which in its turn connects through two ports to pipe No. 3, whence the charge enters the head itself (this system effectively corrected an earlier tendency for plugs Nos. 5 and 6 to swamp, because of maldistribution); head lapped direct to block; E.N.V. self-change gear box fully overhauled by makers, and crown wheel and pinion replaced.

"In its new form the K3 would run happily up to 7,500 r.p.m. and, in addition to being a uniquely exhilarating road car, promised reasonably well, we felt, for the 1947 racing season. Incidentally, owing to the difficulty of obtaining

K3 Magnettes

of a Potent Blown Eleven Hundred



The big Arnott blower fitted to JB 1269. Note the oil feed to the nose of the blower from an auxiliary oil tank on the left and the large S.U. carburetor.

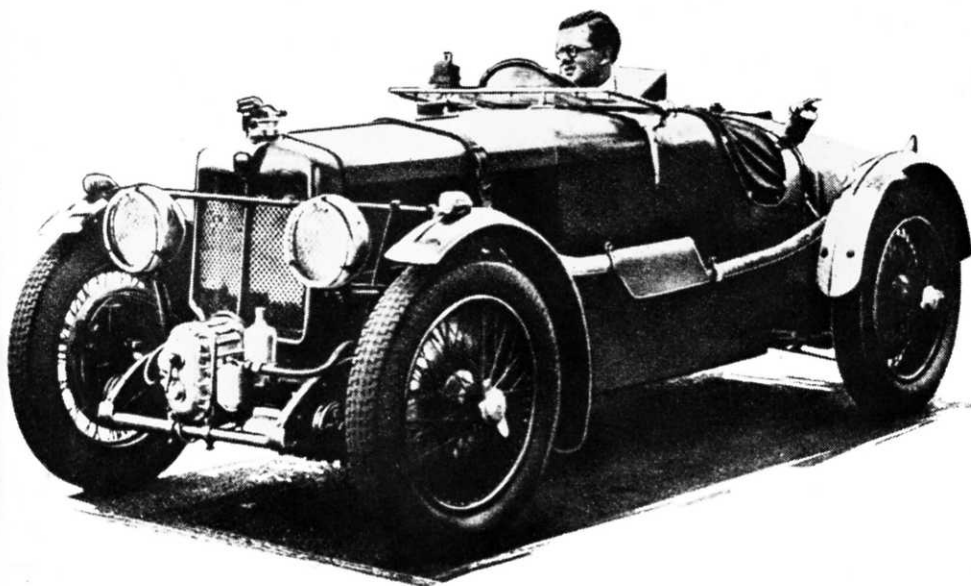
"A single-seater racing car, utilizing the JB 1269 engine but in other respects almost entirely original, is now in the early stages of construction. At the time of writing, however, a few days before Black Sunday, November 30, the one complete K3 in day-to-day service is the outcome of the marriage between this same JB 1269 engine and the 1934 chassis and body. When the single-seater becomes a *fait accompli* we intend compounding a road car from the Mille Miglia chassis and engine—Marshall-blown with some 15lb maximum boost—and the 1934 body.

"To date the two K3 Magnettes have aggregated something like 12,000 road miles, and neither engine—discounting the supercharger seizure mentioned earlier—has suffered a breakage of any sort. Starting, except occasionally in freezing weather, is instantaneous, tractability is adequate and many a well-cared-for family saloon produces more mechanical engine noise; admittedly, of course, this mechanical reticence can only be appreciated on the over-run, for under any other conditions the exhaust note, negligibly subdued by a Brooklands silencer and fishtail, tends to divert attention from fainter phon sources.

Fast Motoring

"The contemporary K3, pulling the 4.89 to 1 axle ratio, more than once registered 6,300 r.p.m., equal to about 114 m.p.h., in the course of a pre-Abolition run from Weybridge to Dorchester-on-Thames. R. M. Oliver, the Prescott Bugatti man, who once kept station with the M.G. on this trip, spoke afterwards of the 'furry black lines' left by our rear tyres up to a speed of 75 m.p.h. on dry tarmac.

"Fuel consumption under road conditions averages a surprising 15 m.p.g. As regards general creature comforts, there is a hood, but, as only a Maskelyne could get into or out of the car with the roof erected, it stays furled. The full-width screen is also kept permanently flat. A passenger-side tonneau cover being a fixture on all solo excursions, it is found easier to take the quickly detachable steering wheel on and off for ingress and egress, rather than unpress the dots. The instruments, reading from L to R, are an ammeter, oil thermometer, water thermometer, boost gauge, engine oil pressure gauge; second row, blower oil pressure gauge, fuel tank ditto. All the foregoing are small and matching; at the extreme right presides a soup-plate rev counter.



The Marshall-blown HJJ 870 has the more streamlined body and the revised braking system.

benzole in quantity, our fuel, for road work as well as such competitions as give *carte blanche*, has been 60 per cent methanol, 30 per cent benzole and 10 per cent Pool.

"So far as sprints were concerned the K3's 1947 score was satisfying; class wins at two Prescott meetings and second place in another; two seconds off the class record for the hill; fastest 1,100 c.c. sports car at Brighton and Merston. The three actual races entered, however, brought negative results, though through no fault of the car's. At Gransden, acting on a false hunch after fifteen trouble-free practice laps, I increased the rate of oil flow to the blower, and promptly drowned two plugs in the race. At Rheims, on the extraordinary pretext that the M.G. 'looked too old-fashioned' and therefore 'wouldn't be a credit to Britain if it won,' the organizers refused to allow it to start, although it had made third best practice time. (After the race, incidentally, in support of the Speed-through-Chagrin movement, we motored the 179 miles from Rheims to Dieppe, two up, wing-less and with open pipe, in three hours dead—departure and arrival times both independently verified.)

"Our last race of the season was the Manx Cup; but first, to keep the chronology straight, HJJ 870 must come into the picture. This car, of whose past history I know little, apart from the fact that it belonged latterly to a Mr. Phillips, was acquired in May, 1947. With its narrower, doorless body and faired tail its appearance is, of course, quite different from the Mille Miglia model, although both are painted the only possible colour, British racing green.

"With the Manx race in view we in-

stalled the souped-up JB 1269 engine in the 1934 car, thus availing ourselves of the new-found maximum speed and acceleration, while also harnessing the HJJ 870's lighter weight, smaller frontal area and better brakes; the later K3s, it will be remembered, had scissors-type brake actuation, giving roughly a 100 per cent increase in retarding effect for a given pedal pressure.

"For the Isle of Man the axle ratio was raised from 4.89 to 4.33 to 1, but was subsequently changed back for the September Prescott meeting. On the 4.33 ratio 6,100 r.p.m. were realized, equal to about 120 m.p.h. with the size of tyre then fitted. Because of the impossibility of transmitting the available power—roughly 130 b.h.p.—through the standard 4.75 by 19in covers, we are using 6.50 by 16in at the rear.

"But to revert to the Douglas meeting. During practice, two days before the race, the blower seized at 7,500 r.p.m. In response to an SOS, Charles (Carter Paterson) Brackenbury flew out from home base at Weybridge with a Marshall as replacement. This supercharger had never been run but by working through the Wednesday night we were just able to 'be and appear' at the pits on the Thursday in time for the parade lap. The Marshall, as you would expect, had spent its life submerged in oil, a fact of which, in all the frenzy of the preceding thirty hours, we had forgotten to take account, with the result that three plugs oiled up on the ceremonial circuit at 25 m.p.h. It being impossible to pull back the lost time in so short a race as this (about 46 miles) I decided to cut my losses and retire.