



TRIUMPH SPORTS CAR CLUB OF SOUTH AFRICA  
JOHANNESBURG CENTRE  
**NEWSLETTER**



PO Box 1102,

Southdale 2135

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**Please note that all contributions to the newsletter should be directed to John Crowther, e-mail [johncr@hotmail.co.za](mailto:johncr@hotmail.co.za) by 25<sup>th</sup> of each month**



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## Chairman's Chat

A New Year with new challenges and hopefully a better year than last year.

Our first run was to Glenburn Lodge for the beginning of the year braai. A pleasant day was had under sunny skies, lush lawns and a strong flow of water over the dam wall. Unfortunately a poor turnout from both Jo'burg and Pretoria.

Our Valentine's Day run is planned for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February to Uncle Tim's in Benoni for an enjoyable breakfast....and a casual stroll around their quaint little shops.

There are some notable anniversaries in the Triumph calendar this year and plans are being prepared to celebrate these events. More to follow at a later stage.

I have included a short weekend away to Harties in July to support the Rotary Club's Hartbeespoort Classic Car Meander.

A provisional Calendar is included in this newsletter.

Enjoy your Triumph,

Cheers,

*Norman*

## Events Calendar

MONTH	DAY/DATE	EVENT	HOST	STATUS
January	Tue 15	Noggin		
	Sun 20	Glenburn Lodge	Jhb	official
February	Sun 17	Valentine run-Uncle Tim's	Jhb	official
	Tue 19	Noggin		
March	Sun 17	Piston Ring Swop Meeting		optional
	Tue 19	Noggin		
	Sun 24	Michelotti Centenary run	Pta	official
April	Fri 05-Mon 08	Stars of Sandstone		optional
	Sun 7	Angela's Picnic	SAMCA	official
	Tue 16	Noggin		
May	Tue 01	Dambusters	Sunbeam Club	official
	Tue 21	Noggin		
	Sat 26	Just Wheels	Muriel Brandt	optional
	Sun 26	Cars in Park-Pietermaritzburg		optional
	Sun 26	Cars on the Roof	Pta/POMC	optional
June	Tue 18	Noggin		
	Sun 30	TBA....lunch at Val????		
July	Tue 16	Noggin		
	Sun 14	Scottburgh Classic Car Show		optional
	Sun 21	Pta/Jhbg combined Concourse	Pta	official
	Sun 28	Rotary Hartbeespoort Classic Meander	Rotary..Brits	official
August	Sun 4	Cars in Park-Zwartkops	POMC	optional
	Tue 20	Noggin		
	Sat/Sun????	Graham Cheetam anniversary	KZN	official
September	Sun 01	Wheels at the Vaal		optional
	Sun 08	4th Ave -Parkhurst Show	VVC	optional
	Sun 15	Piston Ring Swop Meeting		
	Tue 17	Noggin		
	Sun 29	TBA		
October	Tue 15	Noggin/AGM		official
	Sun 20 or 27	Jacaranda Run....Pta	MG club	optional
	Sun 27	TBA		
November	Tue 19	Noggin		
	Sun 24	TBA		
December	Sun 08	Year-end Function	Pta	official
Dates and events subject to change				

Dates and events subject to change

**April 2019 Fri 5<sup>th</sup> - Mon 8<sup>th</sup> Stars of Sandstone – Ficksburg**

Tuesday, 24 January 2012

from Gary Booyens

## **MOTOR ASSEMBLIES LIMITED**

### **A small South African Assembly Plant that became a major Manufacturer**

Part 1 of 7



#### **Foreword**

This memoir relates the post war history of the South African Motor Industry as seen primarily from the involvement of Motor Assemblies Ltd, just one of the several manufacturing plants that comprised the industry. To-day MA has become the manufacturing arm of Toyota SA Ltd.

It is a personal story told by some of the participants and concerns their and others' place in the history of the industry. Most of the facts and figures are well known and have appeared elsewhere but this time the telling should be without Company hype.

However, the events that occurred rather than the participants provide a much more important picture of how the world's motor manufacturers reacted to both economic and political pressures over the years. South Africa was very much atypical of the industrial developments spawned through the medium of the motor industry.

Not all those great industrial names featured in this story survived.

Chapter 1. The Beginnings of an Industry.

Chapter 2. The Industry Starts to Grow.

Chapter 3. The Japanese entry into the market.

Chapter 4. Some of the People Who made it Happen.

Chapter 5. Consolidation.

Chapter 6. The learning curve.

Chapter 7. Growing up.

Epilogue

Appendix A Component Suppliers

Appendix B Production Figures for Jacobs Plant

#### **Chapter 1. The Beginnings of an Industry.**

From the time of the 1920's the American car had shown itself superior to others in withstanding the Colonial conditions to be found in Africa and Australia. First in 1924 Ford, and then in 1926 General Motors, began car assembly in Port Elizabeth to supply the South African demand. This development has to be seen against the condition of the roads, if that is what one could have called them. In the 1940s there were very few major roads that were tarred so a system of "National Roads" was set up after WWII with the aim of rectifying this situation. But even by 1971, of the 171 000km of Provincial roads, only 20 000km were surfaced and of the 10 000km of National roads linking the major cities there were still 1 000km without tarmac. The American cars not only had high ground clearances but their design was also uncomplicated and they were easy to repair in primitive conditions.

The establishment of these plants was based not only on the products, such as the Model T's suitability, but also on the economics of Imperial Preference, since in reality the right hand drive imports came from Canada. It also reduced freight volume by locally assembling from what became known as CKD kits while to minimize inland freight these assembly plants were built at the coast. In the 1920's it is also difficult to think of a European car that could compete in terms of value for money let alone practicality. Further assembly plants were delayed by the impact of the 1930's depression but as the effects wore off so other US manufacturers planned for their expansion in the SA market. However, the participation of their importers was very necessary as each held not only a specific sales territory but also their own Import Permits. In the post-World War II period these relationships were to be vital.

Prior to the Second World War the Chrysler agents in the Cape (Atkinsons) and Orange Free State (Oates) decided to build an assembly plant at Paarden Eiland near Cape Town in order to supply their sales areas but the outbreak of the war delayed the completion of the plant until 1941.

At much the same time the Hudson and Willys importers, Stanley Motors, commissioned a plant at Natalspruit near Alberton in the Transvaal to be known as National Motor Assemblers. After the plant's post war opening, the Austin A40 was added for a short period until displaced in 1950 by Peugeot and Rootes products, for which Stanley Motors had also become the distributors. This was the first plant to be built away from the coast and, although in the area of the biggest vehicle market, the Transvaal, it was not seen as the most cost effective location for an industry dependent upon imported material. Things were, in time, to change.

In the early 1940's the Chrysler Agents for Natal, McCarthy Rodway (Dodge) and Forsdick Motors (Chrysler, Plymouth and De Soto) also came to the conclusion that they too would have to start local assembly if their Chrysler products were to continue to sell well. Atkinson Oates also invested in the plant. The Americans then designed a plant for them to be located in Durban and to be called simply enough just Motor Assemblies Ltd (MA).

The MA Company was registered in 1941 and authorised to buy five acres of land at Lerwick Road, Wentworth but, due to the war, no plant could be built and the land was leased to the Government. Plant construction started in 1946 and the first General Manager, Hank Lisseman was not unnaturally an American and his main responsibility was to oversee the transfer of assembly technology. Apart from regular Chrysler, Dodge and De Soto sedans a range of Dodge and De Soto Pick-ups were also to be produced. Production commenced in 1948 and a total of 3418 units were built in that year.

In 1947 construction started of a plant for the assembly of Studebakers at Uitenhage north of Port Elizabeth and the first unit left the production line in 1947 while two years later production of the Austin A40 was transferred to it from National Motor Assemblers and in 1951 the VW Beetle was added. In 1956 the plant name was changed to that of the Volkswagen franchise holders South African Motor Assemblers and Distributors (SAMAD).

Another immediate post war plant, this time at East London was started as a contract assembler, Car Distributors and Assemblers (CDA), with Packard, Nash, Renault and Standard models to produce.

The position of most of the European manufacturers was generally similar to that of Chrysler where a number of different dealers each imported directly for their Province-based sales territories and contracting for the assembly of their own imports. For GM and Ford the situation was rather different as they had dealers in almost every town, large and small, as well as country communities. This was particularly important in providing support to customers such as farmers who ran not only their cars but also pick-up trucks and three tonners.

When the various company boards for both pre- and immediate post-war assembly plant construction gave their go ahead for the investments they could not have realised that the days of popularity for the large American car were shortly to end. The improved road network of the 1950's was no longer so "colonial" and car ownership was increasing amongst the middle and lower income urban population. The European car had also improved greatly in reliability and ride so that names such as Vauxhall started to replace that of Chevrolet and Ford Dagenham products out-sold those from Ford of Canada.

South Africa was also a member of the Sterling Currency Area, which, when the Pound was devalued in 1949 became an important consideration for a buyer as well as in the issuing of Import Permits. In 1947 a Ford V8 cost £504 when a side-valve 950cc Morris Minor was £475 but after the devaluation the Ford was £650 so the Morris became more interesting, in particular to those who lived in the towns.

But Chrysler, at that stage, had no European make, nor partner and were in any case facing the competitive threat from the Big Two of Detroit. However, it so happened that McCarthy Rodway also held the franchises for Nuffield products - Morris, MG, Wolseley and Riley - for Natal, as did one of the other MA shareholders, Connocks, for the Transvaal. It was natural that, to offset the declining sales of American cars, and to increase Nuffield sales and keep the assembly lines full, the first Morris products came off the Motor Assemblies production line in 1949.

In the aftermath of the Second World War various countries in the New World started to formulate policies for both industrial development and self-sufficiency. The most far reaching of these was arguably to be found in the Argentine

and Brazil but India, Australia and South Africa decided to incorporate similar policies albeit with different approaches. The need to conserve foreign exchange and the growth of Nationalism had in each case given impetus to localisation as well as the realisation that in difficult times, such as had been experienced in WWII, when imports of cars had completely dried-up, traditional suppliers should not be trusted.

In the 1930's, shortly after GM and Ford started their assembly operations, a small component supply industry had established itself producing tyres, glass, batteries and interior trim materials. These industries had become very strategic at the outbreak of war, as had the production of steel by Iscor. It is not surprising therefore that after 1948 the new Nationalist Government decided from the 1950's through to the 1980's that these foundations should be built on and to try to use the Motor Industry as the "locomotive" for Industry in general.

There can be no argument that the initial pace of the industry was set by GM and Ford. They were then the market leaders but with internal resources and systems that could not be matched by the others, in short very professional. That they were not able to hold this position is one aspect explained in this memoir. But it must also be acknowledged that many people who worked in the Industry spent their formative years in Port Elizabeth only to join the competition, taking with them this professionalism and know-how.

In effect, with the exception of Ford and General Motors all these immediate post-war plants were labour intensive contractual assemblers with minimum investment, interested mainly in products for which they held sales franchises but also willing to work for any other suitable clients.

The industry would also not have been as effective in dealing with Government without its own Association - NAAMSA - National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa. Much credit for this must go to its second Director, Frank Locke. NAAMSA ensured that the motor industry was never faced with Government regulations on "Job Reservation", which in almost every other industry, including the component suppliers, ensured that certain work, on a Provincial and or Industry basis was reserved for certain race categories. NAAMSA thus played a leading rôle in best meeting both Industry and Government's aims in an industrial development that would not have occurred otherwise, and which today provides employment and considerable export business.



*Original MA plant in Lerwick Road, Jacobs, about 1961. Beyond the trees behind the end of the building is the Clairwood horse racing course. Lansdowne Road runs across the end and leads to the body shop and paint shop to the right of the picture. Down the left side of the building is the unloading bank running the length of the building. CKD material arrived by goods train curving in on the left corner but some material was stored outside.*

## Chapter 2. The Industry Starts to Grow.

The Motor Assemblies production of Nuffield products was initiated in 1949 with the 950cc side-valve Morris Minor and at that time the plant consisted of a CKD unpacking area, body shop with main frame fixtures and spot weld guns for each model followed by a finishing line where the body in white was completed, a paint shop using nitro cellulose lacquers, a trim shop where the interior trim including the seat covers were made, a body trim line, mechanical assembly line and final inspection and rectification.



Apart from the Minor, production was started for the Cowley, Oxford and Isis models from Morris plus Wolseley, Riley and as a first outside the UK, the MG TD. As was more or less standard for all the vehicles produced in SA at this time, the paint, glass, tyres, batteries and interior soft trim were locally produced, primarily to reduce the value of imports and make their associated permits go further.

Viable production, even with only basic assembly and moderate investment, requires volume, and there were several motor manufacturers without their own volumes to justify this, so that the availability of contract assemblers like MA was of commercial interest. Export of vehicles in CKD form was also not a monopoly of the US or UK industry and other European manufacturers without a dealer network in SA were interested in establishing themselves in a market which, following the victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948, was seen to be less and less tied by tradition to America or the United Kingdom.

In the Heavy Commercial vehicle sector of the industry, market leaders were AEC and Leyland, both with assembly in Durban.

Adding to the model availability, Fiat contracted out assembly to CDA, Auto Union to SAMAD and Peugeot to Stanley Motors. In 1952 Standard Triumph came to Motor Assemblies.

In 1954, after the formation of BMC in 1952 and the merger of Nuffield and Austin empires, Austin, on what was not a very strong South African market position, decided to build a plant to be located at Blackheath, near Cape Town. So in 1955 Austin assembly moved yet again! The major benefits of this plan were to come later with all BMC assembly transferred to Blackheath as well as importation and distribution functions.

In 1956, Chrysler, determined to become a serious challenger to the dominance of GM and Ford, decided to start their own plant at Elsie's River near Cape Town, first taking over the production from Paarden Eiland and later that of MA although, to help soothe their still important dealers and MA shareholders, left the production of pick-up trucks in Durban.

By May 1957 Motor Assemblies had produced 50 000 vehicles and employed 750 people.



*This was the 20,000th Morris Minor when it came off the production line in May 1957. From the left: Dick Russel, Ian Barratt, Ken Scallan, Dennis Probert, Bimbo Munro, Jack Johnston, Christiaan van Staden, Andy Cameron, Dave Martin, John Bokhorst, Wally Griffiths and Terry Dunbar-Curran*

At around this time Forsdicks were taken over by McCarthy Rodway and now as Nuffield, Austin and Chrysler agents, were able to give MA important leverage over BMC and Chrysler, at least for a time.

In 1958 there was a relaxation of import control, which allowed the import of fully built up units not seen in any volume since before the war. This was short lived as annual sales increased from 59 000 in 1956 to 90 000 in 1958, increasing the outflow of foreign currency. By the beginning of the 60's the Government was putting together the final touches of a

local content programme that would change the face of South African industry, and not just that of motor manufacture. That the programme had to go through several phases and modifications was inevitable as shall be told.

At the time that import restrictions were lifted in 1958 Borgward had already started to make a very good local reputation with the Isabella, particularly in the country districts with bad roads. The importer maintained very good relations with several Government Ministers, in particular the Minister of Economic Affairs and the relationship was seen as a chance for Afrikaners to gain a foothold in the industry. They now increased their imports and one of Borgward's engineers was sent to South Africa to conduct a detailed study of local manufacturing possibilities and initiate the manufacture of certain parts with a spares application. With this information they made a number of direct proposals as to how the local content system could be organised and were well prepared for the future although their experience in production outside of Germany was confined to Mexico. Once the governments local content plans were made known Borgward's backers concluded a contract for assembly with MA. It was more than disappointing that the parent company in Germany went bankrupt and we shall never know what long-term impression they might have made on the market.

After import regulations were re-imposed, those manufacturers active in built-up exports to SA started to re-examine the long term potential of the market and several decided to get more firmly established while there was a chance. This led to Fiat, Mercedes Benz (1960), DKW / Auto Union and Alfa Romeo going to CDA for their models to be assembled.

However, from time to time assembly arrangements were changed. In 1962 Fiat decided to leave CDA in East London and move their production to MA. Their new Managing Director had big plans for establishing themselves firmly in SA, and that the then current 1100, 1500 and 2300 models justified this view. Using MA as their production base they felt their own staff had sufficient experience of parts manufacture in South America to comply easily with the local content regulations.

Soon after this change, assembly was also to be started at MA for Volvo and Lancia.

Since the very start of the motor industry there have been not only the disappearance of manufacturers but also takeovers and mergers so that there was an ever changing scenery but with consequences nevertheless reaching the shores of SA. As already noted the first major UK merger was that of Austin and Nuffield to create the British Motor Corporation in 1952 although for a few more years their individual distribution systems ran independently. In 1960 Jaguar had taken over Daimler and in 1966 BMC merged with Jaguar to form British Motor Holdings.

Almost in parallel, Leyland had bought Standard Triumph in 1961 and expanded its heavy commercial vehicle side in 1962 with the purchase of Albion, Guy and AEC and in 1966 acquired Rover/Land Rover. These developments led the way to the inevitable fusion of BMH and Leyland in 1968 to form British Leyland.

MA was to be considerably affected by all these changes. The first significant products of the Austin / Morris merger were the badge engineered, Farina-styled ADO 7, Austin A55 Cambridge-Morris Oxford V-MG Magnette MkII-Wolseley 15/60-Riley 4/68 look-alikes and Austin 7 / Morris Mini 850 so that when they were introduced in 1960 production of these units was shared between MA and the BMC plant in the Cape. This production sharing continued until 1962.

Nevertheless, MA had a unique position in producing sports cars in CKD form. The MG sports car was only ever produced outside the UK in South Africa. Production started at MA with the TD and changed in 1957 to MGA 1500 roadster. The MGA 1500 Coupe was to follow as well as MGA 1600, 1600 Mk II and Twin Cam. With Standard Triumph as a customer it was natural that their TR-series should be built starting with the TR2 in 1955 and running until the last TR 3A came off the production line in February 1963. Spitfire assembly followed from 1963 to 1967.

The Government, through the deliberations of the Board of Trade and Industries, had looked at the local content systems used in other countries and after considerable consultation with the motor industry and component manufacturers decided that, if SA were to maintain reasonable trade relations with countries that were not in favour with the Nationalist Governments policies, a different approach was needed.

In order to implement the policy, in the late 1950's the SA Board of Trade initiated a dialogue with the motor industry through their trade body, NAAMSA. The outcome, intended to spread the technology as far as possible, was a proposal for a graduated increase in local content but based on a horizontal integration with as broad as possible a base of independent component suppliers, such as existed in the UK, rather than the vertical model favoured by GM and Ford in America.

The final proposals were therefore, that, while on the one hand the high Customs import duties would be maintained on completed vehicles and spare parts, on the other hand these duties were to be rebated when sub-assemblies and parts were imported in a specified CKD form. It further proposed to introduce an Excise Duty based on the average weight of a particular model but which was also to be rebated, provided certain local content levels were reached by mass according to a specific time scale. At the time some observers thought that the 50-odd models available then would be reduced to half a dozen. But this was thought by others to be unacceptable to all parties.

*Part 2 next month*



Here's the latest newsletter from our good friend, Chris Harvey, in New Zealand



# The Radiator Cap



## February 2019 Newsletter

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Click [HERE](#) to view the Newsletter as a small PDF (2 MB)

Click the Yumpu link below to view the Newsletter as a flip-book

<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/62371386/radiator-cap-february-2019>

## Tail End Giggle

### *Top 10 Best Golf Caddy Remarks*

No. 10

Golfer: "Think I'm going to drown myself in the lake." Caddy: "Think you can keep your head down that long?"

No. 9

Golfer: "I'd move heaven and earth to break 100 on this course."

Caddy: "Try heaven, you've already moved most of the earth."

No. 8

Golfer: "Do you think my game is improving?"

Caddy: "Yes sir, you miss the ball much closer now."

No. 7

Golfer: "Do you think I can get there with a 5 iron?"

Caddy: "Eventually."

No. 6

Golfer: "You've got to be the worst caddy in the world."

Caddy: "I don't think so sir. That would be too much of a coincidence."

No. 5

Golfer: "Please stop checking your watch all the time. It's too much of a distraction."

Caddy: "It's not a watch—it's a compass."

No. 4

Golfer: "How do you like my game?"

Caddy: "Very good, sir, but personally, I prefer golf."

No. 3

Golfer: "Do you think it's a sin to play on Sunday?"

Caddy: "The way you play, sir, it's a sin on any day."

No. 2

Golfer: "This is the worst course I've ever played on."

Caddy: "This isn't the golf course. We left that an hour ago."

... and the No.1 best caddy comment:

Golfer: "That can't be my ball, it's too old."

Caddy: "It's been a long time since we teed off, sir."