



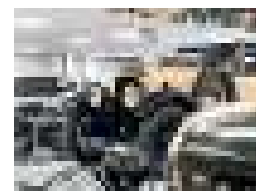
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Vintage Bentley News

vintagebentley.com

500 Lengths of the Ascari Circuit



JAYSON FONG

Lesson number eight... How to go swimming with a cigar

Spitfire pilot and all-round daredevil David Ratcliffe shares his experience of the inaugural Benjafield's 500 in Spain..

"What are you doing next weekend, Pal?" says William. "Is that a loaded question, or what?" I think. But with nothing planned I accepted the challenge to make my way to the Ascari Race Circuit, 120km north of Malaga in southern Spain. My job? To help William Medcalf's team in running the new Benjafield 500 race.

In total 26 cars took part, mainly vintage Bentleys of all

sizes but also a Vauxhall 30/98, a Triumph Gloria Special, a BMW 328 and a pair of Talbot 105's, one of which was a 'Team Car'.

Glyn and the lads from Medcalf (Matt, Dom and Tyler) had set up the paddock the previous evening, offloading cars from transporters, building a period refuelling area and setting up the engineering admin area. Spares included tyres, gearboxes, exhausts and all manner of minor items that may be needed for a vintage Bentley.

With an early start at 6am the task was to have everything ready for practice by lunchtime on Saturday. This involved

some minor mechanical tweaks, tyre changes, fitting transponders to all 26 cars then sending a second person to check that each car had the correct one fitted - nothing left to chance! Also, tasks unseen by the casual observer; race numbers placed in each car, Benjafield decals applied, and to work out a plan to extract each car in sequence to line up on the grid. Honestly, herding cats would have been easier! During this time the drivers and supporting families arrived and milled around drinking copious amounts of coffee provided by the palatial pit cafe. No burger vans or paper coffee cups here, waitress service was the order of the day; it is a private circuit, after all.

Continued on page 2

From the Editor

From the outset, 2017 has been a full and industrious year for William Medcalf Vintage Bentley. Namely, William has spent much of the year investing heavily in the continuation and development of his far-reaching brands and services. Rally preparation, restoration, competition, parts manufacturer and showroom are but a fraction of what's been happening in the quiet countryside of West Sussex. It

started with The Flying Scotsman, where William was asked to partner with dunhill and The Gentleman's Journal for a new campaign and feature article, but has seen a whole lot more; highlights include an invitation from Goodwood to drive the eponymous 1936 Pacey-Hassan Special up the Hillclimb at the Festival of Speed. The company too has invested heavily in new staff, whose knowledge will continue to build this thriving enterprise. William also had his first vintage Bentley client of just 16 years old, alongside many

exciting outings with the Benjafield's Racing Club. In addition, he has also been striving to make the vintage Bentley world more accessible through the Drive-Out initiative and publically open showrooms. As you'll read in the following pages, 2017 has been a full-on year for William Medcalf Vintage Bentley, and one that firmly secures William's name in the vintage automotive annals.

Hugh Francis-Anderson



From dusk 'til dawn

By 9am the paddock was a hive of activity, with everyone seemingly intent on some car related task. Drivers briefing conducted, banter levels increased - as did the track temperature. However, a sumptuous lunch in the restaurant area complete with pool and outdoor viewing area was very welcome. Any other day and we could have sat there all afternoon chatting and enjoying the scenery, but this was a distraction to the drivers who were itching to familiarise themselves with the fabulous circuit stretched out among the hills.

Practice and track familiarisation commenced after lunch and seemed to be a race in itself. But, of course, it was only 'practice'! The circuit is 5.5km long and has 26 corners as well as having some climbs and descents to add to the fun, and with it being a private event access to the pit wall viewing area was unrestricted - fabulous!

By late afternoon the handicap positions had been finalised, the cars were back in their paddock slots and preparation for the following day's race was in full swing. Glyn and the lads were everywhere, helping with minor snags, changing tyres, lending tools and making sure that everybody was all set for the early start the following day. The drivers and friends returned to the coastal resort where their families were camped, no doubt for a small sherry, bath and an early night - at least that is what they told us they were doing! Glyn's team were at it until 9pm before heading back to Ronda, 15km away, for a pizza and several beers, all very well deserved too. However, the boss had us up again at 6am to be at the circuit on Sunday in order to be well prepared for the main event; William never told me that sleep was not an option this weekend...

Sunrise was at 8:15 and by now everybody was keyed up and ready for a grand day of racing. Marshalling the cars out of the paddock in the correct handicap order to line up on the pit lane was a team effort, but once assembled, what a sight! This was going to be fun.

The 1936 Pacey Hassan Special "safety" car led the form up lap and we had all 26 assembled on the grid - the silence belied the anticipation. What a sight!

At 9am precisely the clerk of the course marched down the grid and using a Union Jack, set each car off at timed intervals of a few seconds. The faster cars went first, based on their practice lap times, with the aim of achieving a set handicap mileage in the eight hours available.

The first few laps were fast, several cars bunched together and it was spectacular to watch but the gaps slowly widened as the morning went on. This meant that stood on the pit wall, there was something continually happening, which kept the camera people busy; thank

goodness they didn't have to change rolls of film every 36 clicks of the shutter!

Being a handicap race with two or more drivers the changes started quite quickly, along with topping up of oil, water, and resolving minor issues resolved. Tyre changes were rapid with Matt, Dom and Tyler working as flat out as slickly as any F1 crew. Several times Dom was seen sprinting down the pit lane in time to latch a bonnet or check nothing had been left on the running board. Oh, to be young and fit! He earned his beer for sure.

Lap Times were displayed to the drivers in the traditional manner with 3'15" the norm, and some definite improvements observed by all the drivers as they warmed to the circuit and the hot conditions. William certainly put in a scorching lap, but only after we added 10 seconds to his previous lap time on the board... Sorrrreee!

A few reflections

The Blower 4 1/2 seemed to take forever to refuel - turns out he was using a litre of petrol every 45 seconds! Seeing said Blower drifting out of the corner before the pit straight then scream past at an impressive rate was a sight to behold, and the noise from the supercharger was impressive too, and not something I had ever heard before.

Luckily, mechanical problems were incredibly few and goes to show just how reliable and well-prepped these cars were. Almost the only retirement was a 4 1/2 with a gear lever that had snapped off at the base. That gearbox probably had a lifetime of changes in one day so it's not surprising it gave up the ghost!

So the day progressed, always something happening either on the track, in the pits or around the paddock. Refuelling was all done by the driver using a hand turned pump from a drum of fuel - just as they did in the day. What the Spanish Marshall thought of this as he refilled the drums using the petrol pump situated a few feet away, I do not know. "Crazy Engleesh", probably!

Close to 5pm the pit wall started to fill with family and friends as the end was in sight - not that the lap times had increased in any way as the cars were still being thrown spectacularly around each corner as hard as ever. Nobody wanted it to end....

However, out came William in the Safety Car to intervene, slow the pack and guide them into the pit lane, lining up in two lanes nose to tail. Then the emotion and excitement of the event spilled over. Champagne flowed, cheering and hugs ensued, and it all ended with the drivers taking a plunge into the swimming pool - nobody was exempt! Fabulous stuff.

Banquet Dinner, speeches and prizes at the Resort followed while the lads packed up the paddock.

Who won? I still have no idea. And to be honest, it doesn't really matter, does it?! The aim was achieved; to participate and enjoy, not solely to win....



Beautiful machinery, and the landscape's not bad either



The headmaster gives the orders

Up the hill and back at Goodwood



Pushing on hard

A particular treat for William this year was the invitation to drive the 1936 Pacey-Hassan Special at the Goodwood Festival of Speed. I swung by to say hello to William before I tackled the Hill Climb myself behind the wheel of the McLaren 720S.

"I was nervous enough, even with the most advanced systems on the planet working hard beneath the bodywork, and when William invites me to clamber into the 230bhp Pacey-Hassan to try it out for size, I physically fear for him. But, this is William Medcalf we're talking about here, and those who know him will understand that little, if anything, fazes him. So, as William sat on the start line of the iconic Hill Climb, little did he know what was in store. The inimitable Bentley single-seater rocketed to the top of the climb, crossing the line at a show-stopping 100mph, but that's not all, "Pulling up at the top of the hill next to Nick Heidfeld

in his Formula E racer, and then going for a coffee to compare notes afterwards, was a bit surreal," says William, "Once again Goodwood put on a brilliant show. It was a fantastic weekend."

The story of the Pacey-Hassan is one of utter magic. As one of the greatest Bentley mechanics of his time, Walter Hassan was a man in high demand. When Bentley was sold in 1932, Woolf Barnato, one of the esteemed Bentley Boys, asked Hassan to remain with him and work exclusively on his cars. As such, Barnato had Hassan build a mammoth 8-litre Bentley Brooklands outer-circuit special, later coined the Barnato-Hassan, in order to break the speed record at Brooklands. It was then in 1936 that Bentley racer and owner, Bill Pacey, 'borrowed' Hassan to build a 4 1/2 litre version along the same lines for himself to race at weekend competitions. And so, the Pacey-Hassan was born.

Tyler, have you ever been to Tokyo?... Well you have now, you're on the next flight!

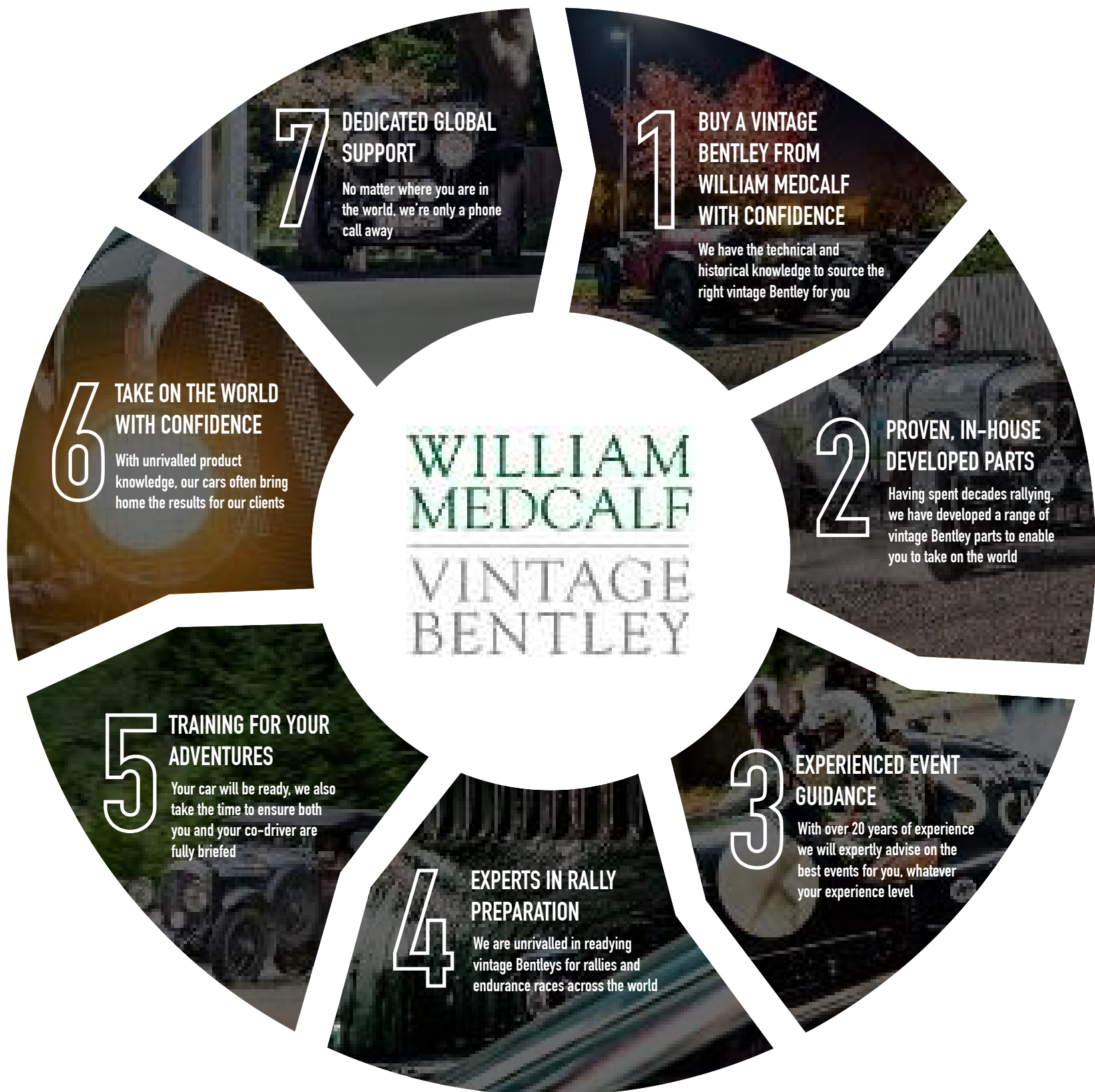


As ever the works are always on hand for its clients, and pride themselves on resolving, fixing and fettling vintage Bentleys, wherever they may be. This year they were put to the test when Chris Lunn called from Japan with a suspected broken half-shaft. Naturally, there was only one thing to do; send Tyler to Tokyo.

"When it's 7am on the Saturday of a bank-holiday weekend and the phone rings in the workshop, you know it's going to be an interesting call," says William, "It was one of my clients calling from Japan with a suspected broken half-shaft." Chris Lunn was making his way to the start of the Rally Round Samurai Challenge, and needed help asap. "So, when the next person through the door is Tyler, I call him over and say, 'Fancy going to Japan?'" he laughs. In double quick time, a hastily assembled team removed the diff out of William's own Supersports, cleaned and packaged it, and sent Tyler off to the airport. As testimony to the WMVB team's determination to help his fallen comrades, it was just 7 hours from phone call to plane. "When he landed, Chris had managed to find a garage, and Tyler was able to easily and quickly replace the part," says William, "Chris then went on the complete the rally." What a happy camper he must have been. "And," William adds, "Tyler managed to get a flight back in time for work on Tuesday morning," he chuckles.

It is with this exacting and dedicated approach that William Medcalf Vintage Bentley sets itself apart from the rest. "We know no borders," states William, "we are wherever you need us."

YOUR JOURNEY



William Medcalf has driven hundreds of thousands of competitive miles in a variety of vintage Bentleys over a number of years across the globe. This experience has enabled the Medcalf team to engineer out failures and issues that occur during the harsh conditions endured during historic rallying. Working to the ethos inspired by W.O. himself, William is the world leader in rally preparation and is on hand to guide all vintage Bentley owners on their journey, enabling them to start their own adventure.

Rather than rely on supplied parts, we engineer and develop in-house and in this year alone we added almost 100 new lines to our parts catalogue, and carry over 15,000 parts in stock. If you need us, we are there. Previously we have travelled to Japan, Stockholm, and Mongolia to supply parts for clients whilst on rallies. We are only a phone call away, and if we can't help on the phone we will be on a plane to meet you within hours.

Whether you want to circumnavigate the globe, be the fastest on the track, or simply arrive in style, the Medcalf team will ensure you and your car are ready for anything.

Don't stress, I'm sure there's a plan...



Metro 6R4s 'track invasion'

The Benjafield's Goodwood sprint in May is always a bit of a mad affair and unlike any other sprint known to man.

Members of the Benjafield's club bring together the most eclectic mix of motorsport possible, from 1898 star which competed against one of the latest Ferraris. It's seriously surreal and it's still amazing how they pull off events which defy gravity. The highlight of the sprint was bearing witness to two metro 6R4 Group B rally cars being driven on the limit - but not in the usual sprint sense of each car taking it's turn on a lonely circuit, but being waved off side by side by a beautiful blonde for a full-on shootout! Not content with a couple of runs which burst the sound meters, members of the Benjafield's Racing Club took matters into their own hands and decided to turn one of the 6R4's round on the start line, much to the disgust of the Goodwood management! Now the two Group B rally cars were let lose in op-

posing directions - it's never been seen before and I'm pretty sure I'll never see it again. As the cars thundered out of sight, many of us on the paddock terrace were left questioning whether we were about to bear witness to a major incident and how on earth the Benjafield Racing Club would ever continue to exist following the inevitable motorsport backlash. In less than a minute and twenty seconds, feverish concern and genuine calls for a sanity check, one of the 6R4's reappeared alongside a Blower Bentley. As they came to rest in a haze of tire smoke on the start finish line, it was finally clear that we'd all been had... the whole thing was a ploy. Cunningly, the Benjafield Racing Club had deployed a Blower Bentley to the far side of the circuit for one of the 6R4 drivers to swap into before returning to the cheering and very relieved crowd of spectators. What a fantastic way to light up a day, as if it needed lighting up any more. Truly original and masterfully executed, the Benjafield Goodwood Sprint is an absolute must for 2018.

A time of change



Henry Platt – Manager, Benchmark Precision Engineering

Henry Platt is a tool-maker by trade, who has spent 30 years working in the modern British automotive industry. He started his career at Jaguar working in product development, and played an important role in the development of the XJS and the XJ8. Later he moved into current-car engineering, which involved troubleshooting, engineering and development of vehicles on the production line, before moving to Aston Martin to work on the V8 Vantage and DB9. "I once had the fun of testing DB9's at 120mph on racetracks and calling it a job," says Henry, "It was brilliant." Later, Henry moved into the bespoke section at Rolls Royce, with a focus on parts quality, before moving into a role as quality manager in the wood-shop, and then into purchasing. "I used to buy all sorts for customers, from mouth-blown crystal and snakeskin, to rare woods and diamonds, all for an automotive application. It was really challenging to make these products meet automotive tolerance requirements." He then became lead engineer on the new Rolls Royce Phantom 8 Bespoke. As such, Henry brings with him a wealth of knowledge in the creation and development of automotive parts. "This role takes all the knowledge I gained throughout my career; the quality, the purchasing, the engineering, the top-level standard for a vehicle, and the ability to make decisions and make things happen. I now look after the manufacturing and the project management within William Medcalf Vintage Bentley." Henry project manages the new parts that come through the workshop, which means using hyper-modern techniques and applying them to vintage Bentleys. "Quality is everything," says Henry, "no mistake gets through. Using the techniques that I've learnt, we'll be able to demonstrate to the client, 'This is your vehicle, here's our plan for how we're going to rebuild it, this is where we are, and this is what we've got left to do, this is how much money we've spent, this is how much is left of the budget,' all those controls and processes mean you really see the benefit of systematic planning. It's about implementing change to the small business. To add to this, William has also invested heavily in KTP (Knowledge Transfer Partnership), in which he is linked to The University of Surrey. "We have a graduate who works with us, employed by the university, and the transfer is both ways, she has modelled a W.O engine into state of the art software to determine the tolerances and to show where internal parts can be improved." In this way, William once again combines the vintage with the modern to provide world-class services to his client.



Special moments through the winscreen, sometimes you have to pinch yourself

Gentlemanly driving in Scotland

Earlier this year I joined William as his navigator in The Flying Scotsman rally, in collaboration with dunhill and The Gentleman's Journal. This article originally ran in the September 2017 Issue of The Gentleman's Journal.

“Three, two, one, GO!” shouts the marshal as he drops the flag on the first stage of the 2017 Flying Scotsman Rally. A cacophony of grinding engine parts growl as I’m thrown to the back of my seat, gripping with all the power in my left hand just to stay stable. I look down at the navigational book flailing in my right hand, which displays a rough outline of the timed course we’re careering around.

“Left of cone A,” I bellow, “90° right.”

The 1929 Bentley 4½ that I’m the passenger in moves at a rate I hardly thought possible. As my driver, Britain’s premier vintage Bentley restorer, William Medcalf, hauls the steering wheel to the right, the wheels begin to slide. We’re now travelling sideways in a £750,000, 88-year-old Bentley, with the delicate sound of thunder erupting from the exhausts,



VM6475 in his natural habitat

and a steady wave of mud and gravel rising from the wheels. Suddenly my door flies open and I brace hard to remain within the car.

“Left of B, slalom,” I howl as I force the door closed.

“What?” cries Medcalf.

“Left of B, slalom!”

Medcalf hammers on the brakes and weaves the 2-ton hulk of metal through a tight salmon section. When I call to stop astride the finish line, Medcalf stomps on the throttle before pulling hard on the handbrake, making the Bentley slide wildly along the asphalt before stopping perfectly astride the line. A gentle plume of singed rubber drifts into my nose as Medcalf releases a hearty chuckle.

“What?!” I exclaim, “I didn’t know you could drive a vintage car like that.”

“Oh, you haven’t seen anything yet.”

And so I was plunged into the throws of vintage car rallying, a world simply inundated with the gentlemanly racers of old. Now in its 9th year, The Flying Scotsman is the pinnacle of British vintage car rallying, “It is Britain’s toughest vintage rally, bringing together over a hundred pre-war cars,” says Medcalf, “The camaraderie is electric.” And it’s true. It is an event that amalgamates all that is great in the world of vintage cars. You see, there are those who would own these vehicles and keep them in concourse condition, primed and ready in a showroom somewhere. And then there are those who will push them to the limits, and sometimes past. These are the men and women who inspire. From CEO’s and businessmen, to former-rock stars and mechanics, the Flying Scotsman brings together people from all walks of life, and puts them on the same playing field. One competitor is even rallying in an original 1937 Le Mans-winning Lagonda, worth a cool £6 million – and he threw it around like a go-cart, mud sprayed over every exquisite panel, and the occasional waft of burning clutch drifting from its hand-formed hood; you’re beginning to get the picture.

Originally following a similar route as its locomotive namesake, the journey we’ve embarked upon sees us drive through the majesty of the Scottish Highlands. As I get to grips with the concept of navigating (I have never done it before, and I’m achingly aware of it) we make our way through the wilds at an altogether gentlemanly pace.

“So what’s vintage rallying all about?” I call to Medcalf as the wind pummels my ears.

“Well you’ve got to drive hard and play hard,” he says with a wink, “But also help your fellow competitors when they’re in trouble. It’s all about looking out for one another as you take on the world.”

So it’s only appropriate that a brand like dunhill London should sponsor an event of this magnitude. As a propagator of traditional gentlemanly garments, fuelled heavily by the heritage of motor racing, dunhill relishes the opportunity to back motoring events that evoke the charm of the past; events that draw together gentlemen, historic vehicles, and fine clothing. Needless to say, the rich shearling dunhill overcoats that Medcalf and I have on do a spectacular job at keeping the howling Scottish wind well at bay.

I quickly come to realise that the very nature of driving pre-war cars means that, however good the mechanics, something’s bound to go wrong at some point. And as we roll along the roads, we pass numerous fallen comrades, and stop each time to lend a helping hand. It is in this vein that the gentlemanly nature of the Flying Scotsman is further personified. As Medcalf attests, “Of course you want to win. But you want to win well and in favourable eyes of your opponents.”

Medcalf himself, proprietor of William Medcalf Vintage Bentley in Sussex, is one such gentleman that breathes the vintage car world. “When I was 5 years old, my father’s idea of a family holiday was 28,000 miles around America and Canada in a vintage Bentley,” he says casually, “I’ve been all in ever since.”

The journey takes us through numerous stages. There are Regularities (where time, speed and distance must be carefully monitored to match the average speed noted in the road book), Specials (timed courses around various obstacles), and then navigating from stage to stage, based entirely on distances and landmarks. Medcalf tells me that the top competitors are so accurate that they’ll likely only be two or three seconds out over the entire three-day rally. Naturally, we’re not here to be competitive, and once the basics have been understood, I’m soon in the swing of it and loving every minute.

When we do finally stop, after upwards of 8 hours in the car, it’s to trays of beer, radiant laughter, and copious amounts of oil and engine parts; and it’s entirely brilliant. “This event is a cauldron of like-minded, adventurous, determined, stubborn drivers,” says Medcalf as we enjoy a cold beer, leaning coolly against our steed, “All supported by their adaptable, flexible and super bright navigators,” he chuckles in jest.

Over three days, some 500 miles, and numerous roaring nights, I arrive back in London with a newfound energy. In the fast-paced world in which we live, where immediacy is of the essence, finding a group of individuals who actively pursue the unhurried pastime of a bygone era, is a treat like no other.

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WILLIAM VINTAGE
MEDCALF BENTLEY

www.vintagebentley.com

IMAGE: MATT WATSON



Legendary dinner

The Benjafield's Racing Club is well known for its extravagant and opulent events, and it strives to recreate the charm and allure of the 1920's, and the Bentley Boys that ruled this era. As such, they recreated the celebratory meal enjoyed by the Bentley Boys at the Savoy after their first Le Man win in 1927. As ever a presence in Benjafield's events, William explains what it was like.

"For me, one of the highlights of the year was the Benjafield's Savoy dinner," says William, "It was almost to the day of the original, and it was held in the same style as it was 90 years ago, white tie and all. About 90 people attended, and we all demolished the 11-course meal." In 1927, the head barman at the Savoy invented the Bentley cocktail to celebrate the Bentley Boys win. And through some careful searching by the club's committee of the bar's records, they discovered the original recipe and re-made them. "It was challenging," says William, "It really showed how bitter they liked their cocktails in the 20's." Luckily for the guests, the recipe was amended shortly after, and the exact method is now a closely guarded secret.



No parking, apparently



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A day of Bentleys and spitfires, what could be better

Spitfires at 12 o'clock

A new initiative for William came with the Drive-Out days, of which he has hosted three this year.

"We open the works for anyone to come and see, the RAC club lay on their catering unit and the chef cooks proper breakfast baps. We then drive out to somewhere special," says William, "In June, we went to Goodwood and got a Spitfire out, had a chat with David Ratcliffe, a spitfire pilot, and started it up." On this particular day, over 250 people joined William for the Drive-Out. "It's really an event for anyone, you can turn up in a mini, a motorbike, whatever you like, it's for anyone with an interest." The next planned Drive-Out will take place on 6th Jan, where they're going to stay put and soak up the atmosphere in the workshop.

To add to the success of the Drive-Out initiative, the showroom is now open to the public every Saturday from 9am-1pm. In a move to actively engage with the public and drive interest in vintage Bentleys, the open showroom is an opportunity for anyone to get up close and personal with these machines. Run entirely by vintage-Bentley-fanatic volunteers, it acts as an accessible way to become involved with William's work.

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"The best is good enough"

BENTLEYS

No pressure then, Canada!

Long-time family friend of the Medcalf family, David Duncan, flew all the way over from Canada to join William as his navigator in this year's rather eventful 1000 Mile Trial. He writes about his experience for Vintage Bentley News.



Some rallies include a car wash

My first adventure with William involved me suggesting he join our annual Polar Bear Dip in the icy waters of Lake Ontario on January 1st one year. Most people would bristle at such an unusual proposal, but he was instantly 'all in' and upped the ante with an elaborate costume to add some flare to the occasion. I'm only just realizing now, as I write this, that this memory should have been on my mind last year when he proposed the two of us team up on another adventure - the HERO 1000 Mile Trial vintage car rally in his 1925 Bentley Supersports. It was to be the same: unusual, 'all in' and with more flare than you can shake a stick at - just the way he likes it.

After celebrating a raucous Canada Day in Trafalgar Square with compatriots on July 1st, I headed back to familiar ground in West Sussex at William Medcalf Vintage Bentley. I have visited William over the years and have joined him for short periods to help around the workshop and to ogle the beautiful curves of the extraordinary machines he repairs, preserves, sells and rallies. I slip in amongst his crew and help with odd jobs like sanding ash frames or ordering parts or pulling valves from engines. It's like a second home and so there's a lot of banter with his staff when I'm there. The only thing to get used to for me was my new nickname, as William routinely bellowed, "Canada! Where are you?! I've got a job for you!" And so, it was to be that I'd become 'Canada' for the rest of my life!

The main thrust of the banter with his staff on this par-



A great road, but is it the right road?

ticular occasion revolved around the upcoming 1000 Mile Trial. I already know William to be highly competitive and that he strives for excellence in all he does, but I was getting seriously nervous the more I discovered what I was really in for. I had no idea what regularity rallying was. Never done one. So, the lads in the back of the shop were all over this and building up the pressure for 'Canada' to learn how to navigate damn quickly, as William, they said, had every intention of winning this thing.

I was somewhat relieved to hear I'd be given instruction from one of the best in the business, Tony Brooks, who'd won the Flying Scotsman with William a couple of years prior. While I'm a reasonably quick study and good with maps and maths, I only started to appreciate how devilishly difficult navigating can be when Tony generously shared his special skills and told me of all the insidiously sneaky ways the rally organizers try to trip up the competitors. It helped not one iota that the lads preparing about eight Bentleys for this rally were chirping about how 'Canada' better be a good student and not shame my homeland. Sure, William's a great driver they said, but if I were to really mess up, there's only so many heroics even he could pull off to save us, they said.

No pressure.

The event

If that weren't enough, I had one another cause for significant concern: I'd been in Bentleys with William before and knew he likes to drive them as intended - to the limit - but I'd never actually been anywhere close to that limit with him before. I only thought we'd been going crazy fast, but again, I had no idea. The test drive along narrow English lanes the day before our departure for a pre-rally event in London had me hanging onto the chassis so tightly I was told by William, in no uncertain terms, to calm down as I was making him nervous! It didn't get any more relaxing on our drive out to the rally starting point in Windsor: here we were on the M4 in an open, 92-year-old race car with no seat belts, and we were the fastest thing on the road! This was going to be a long week as navigator unless I really joined my driver in the fast lane! So that's what I did. I looked at William timing the turns, picking his moments to overtake and I said to myself, "He's got this. You have to trust him. And he has to trust me to just get on with it!"

And that's what it came down to: trust. Trust in the superb engineering of the Bentley, trust in the driver, trust in the technicians who'd prepared the vehicle ... and somewhat misplaced trust in the navigator! By day 2, I had my game face on and was finally settling into the ride. With Tony Brooks' sage words in my mind, I was determined to help

my driver win this thing - you see, I still had no real clue how much skill the best navigator/driver pairs really have!

It came as a huge surprise, therefore, when William, hurtling down the M4 in the Supersports, leaned over to me and yelled over the sound of rushing wind, "Well, we have three ways to approach this rally."

"We do? Three ways?" I called.

I was thinking we had precisely one way: win this 'cause that's how he rolls! He continued, "We can be competitive and try to win OR we can just go out and have fun OR, if someone breaks down, we stop and help them."

It turned out that we did all three and that made it the most memorable, entertaining and exhilarating ride of my life to date. We were competitive largely due to William's handling of his aged vehicle in the speed and maneuverability test. For my part, I was 'right chuffed' as they say on the English side of the Pond, that I'd turned in a couple of perfect scores on the navigation. We did stop a number of times to help other competitors on their way, including sacrificing a part from our own car to help one of the truly competitive Bentley teams. And we had loads of fun as well.

Truly, there was no pressure.

The reflections

As I reflect on five days of regularity rallying through picturesque southwest England and Wales, it was ultimately the people I met that illustrated why events like the 1000 Mile Trial endure. Sure, there were a few teams of the 60-odd that really did have a chance to win it (including perennial contender Tony Brooks and his driver), but everyone I met, regardless of their race intentions, was so friendly, helpful and high-spirited. When rain disabled one of this newbie navigator's trip meters, fellow navigators offered spares. When I still couldn't remember to have my tulip book scanned, the long-suffering and elaborately costumed officials eased me through the process of sorting my paperwork. The talented and ever-vigilant technical crews were always ready to lend a hand and do some creative repairs off the back of their trucks. And just when I thought all I needed to do in the morning was get my driver out to the car at the right time, I discovered another dimension to rallying: pranks. Amazing how encountering one's car swaddled in "Fragile" packing tape or filled with styrofoam peanuts can throw off one's timing during a precision egress from the hotel!

So when I next chat with to William, I'll ask him, "D'ya think I can be your navigator again in a rally? No pressure!"

One of the rarest Bentleys in the world



Unique

Barn finds have always been the holy grail for those of a classic and vintage car persuasion. The concept of prising open a long-forgotten garage door to discover a timewarp vehicle stuck in the past is a romantic notion too tempting to ignore. A genuine ‘house find’ is even rarer. Yet this Bentley – one of only eight 1928 Bentley 4 ½-litres with Victor Broom Drop-head Coachwork – was discovered scattered throughout a house in the middle of London, near Kew Gardens.

William recalls: ‘I received a phone call from the daughter of one of my clients. Her father would pop down to us from time to time for parts, as he was a keen enthusiast. Sadly he passed away and his daughter invited me to visit his house as he had been storing the dismantled Bentley around him.

‘I walked in to find the cylinder block on the bare floorboards of the entrance hall. The clutch was on the stairs.

There were bits everywhere. It took four of us nearly a week to find all the missing parts. There were bespoke parts in drawers and the doorcards were upended in the spare room.’

The story behind the find is fascinating. The only known survivor of this car's kind, it had been purchased in 1962 by one Stuart Wallace, who was on the lookout for something a tad different to the Austin Sevens and Standard Eights used by fellow students of the day. During this time, you could pick up a ‘proper’ Bentley for next to nothing – in Stuart’s case, for only half the price of a Mini. However, crippling fuel costs soon found the Bentley laid up out of financial harm’s way.

Rather than sticking it away in a garage to rot, Stuart took everything apart, photographing and logging each stage

and storing several delicate parts in jars of oil. Headlamps were stashed under the bed, with the radiator and unique dashboard squirrelled away in the spare room. Amazingly, William and his devoted squad found enough components to build a rolling chassis – although there was one thing worrying them. The bodywork was missing.

It wasn’t until Stuart’s daughter informed them of her father’s garage that the bodywork was located. Balanced on the roof, open to the elements, was the sole survivor of Broom’s eight Bentley frames. Within the undergrowth was a large metal chest, containing the final pieces of the puzzle.

William says: ‘Stuart had taken the entire car apart – right down to the last details – but never found the chance to put it all back together again. We thought about restoring it, but with all the original parts to hand in such a condition, we



Scintillating

decided to keep it as preserved as possible.'

Despite being 87-years-old, the Bentley, amazingly, still had its original lead seals in place, alongside the original wire wheels, suspension, leather gators and even the tyres. Unbelievably, not a single nut or bolt had to be replaced – they were all present. The odometer read-out displayed a lowly 39,000 miles, which, given the documented history, was believed to be accurate.

That was back in 2015. Two years on and the 'house-bound' Bentley stands before us in Medcalf's workshop, almost unrecognisable. It's got fresh, period-spec paint, straight panels and an original, concours interior that would leave Pebble Beach judges salivating at the mouth.

The body now sports the original colour scheme it had worn prior to being re-painted in Stuart's ownership, with Saxe blue wheelarches and flanks together with cream bodywork and Saxe blue-spoked wheels. Every minute detail has enjoyed proper attention, from the transferable rear light to the footholds over the back wings that allow access into the 'mother-in-law' boot seats. Under the seats rests the original tool kit; while the odd tool had to be sourced, 90 per cent of it was complete and therefore as it was when it accompanied the Bentley in 1928.

The engine bay sparkles, with everything in place to create a work of art around this 110bhp-plus powerplant. However, William has kept it strictly 'as it should be', rather than pandering to the concours brigade.

William smiles: 'Judges for concours competitions would baulk at the dull shine from the copper and the steel rocker cover with its scuffing. But that's how they left the factory. It wasn't all gleaming; these engines were built by hand, with parts hand finished to fit.'

Regardless of the debate William's Bentley has caused about originality against clinical preserve, no one can argue its finest aspect – the way it drives.

On the road

Before the mighty beast so much as fires up, you can feel

the grunt seeping out of the bonnet vents. It snorts upon engagement of the starter motor before bellowing into life, roaring on the choke with a rebellious exhaust note echoing the grace of bygone exploits.

Pulling away, the Bentley feels refined in a way that would leave contemporary motoring journalists deeming the sophistication rudimentary. Yet what it actually oozes is raw sporting pedigree. It grumbles along the road in a luxurious manner, the gearbox whine and engine revs offering an indefatigable touch of command, as the long bonnet leads you into each bend with enough grace and authority to leave other motorists diving for the nearest hedgerow. Saxe blue wheelarches slice through the scenery, with the radiator mascot leading the way like some mad, proud military general.

Each gearchange is an art form, with no synchromesh on any ratio, while the brakes require serious planning for the obstacles ahead. Yet once you're accustomed to the controls, and grasp the concept that this fine pre-war vehicle pre-dates legislation allowing women over 21 the right to vote, the sense of occasion is overwhelming. It handles in a surprisingly nimble fashion for such a leviathan, with sprightly acceleration to match. Normal road speed can be attained long before you start to hold up Lord Audi in his A4 saloon, and the ride comfort knocks that of any modern BMW into a cocked hat.

Up to this point the 4 ½-litre is remarkably civilised, gliding around like Her Majesty's butler. Except this manservant knows jujitsu. The noise from beyond the bulkhead intensified into a rampant growl that propels you into the 1920s, barrelling round Brooklands with Malcolm Campbell for company. It eggs you on well beyond the constraints of your comfort zone. You push harder, whirring the wheel between your hands as you grab the next gear on a wave of adrenaline. The outside world is now a racetrack, your screaming passenger a fellow gentleman racer. 'Is that all you've got, dear boy?'

As the roads narrow, it seems sensible to slow down.

While far from being a road-going GT car, this Bentley is all the better for it. It's dripping with panache. Radiating class and smelling of leather-lined victory, even the shortest of blasts yields enough respect to find yourself saluting the ghosts of those whom designed and built it. Returning it to the lustrous showroom adjoining William's workshop feels like traveling through time. Except there is imminent sadness upon leaving the vehicle, for this is as close to driving a factory-fresh 'proper' Bentley as you could ever get. And it's already sold, to be whisked away out of public view, never again to return under my control.

The William Medcalf Vintage Bentley team's painstaking efforts to maintain the Bentley's originality make this pre-war vehicle a genuine one-off, the likes of which is unlikely ever to be replicated again.

I smile and make small chat as the Bentley is swiftly taken away, back into the workshop. It glints in the autumn sunlight, leaves splattered over the tyres, bodywork smeared with condensation.

The cars William and his team restore capture everything a driver could possibly yearn for – and this 4 ½-litre is the pinnacle. Peel away the body and the interior, and you'll find the beating heart of a purebred racer with a backstory most supercars would kill for. Its shape and sensation leave you intoxicated with gentlemanly tales of fighting, the opposite sex and sheer, outrageous Britishness. This car isn't fickle, it doesn't ache for your approval. It wins it without so much as trying, akin to the team behind it.

The Bentley may have spent decades broken up in a London house, but it now laps up the open road with vigour. Here's hoping the new owner returns it to the tarmac, where it rightfully belongs.

photographs courtesy of Octane,
words courtesy of Autoclassics



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An Interview with Rally Round's Liz Wenman

Bentleys regularly play a leading role in vintage and classic rallies, and the events of 2017 have been no exception. In September, Bill and Jacqui Cleyndert scored a popular victory in Rally Round's Odyssey Italia rally in Corsica, Sardinia and Tuscany, winning by a margin of 28 seconds in their 1924 3/4½-litre, while on June's Paris-Prague Rally Mark Robinson and Simon Parfitt achieved a well-deserved class win with their 1936 Derby 4½-litre. In contrast, Chris Lunn and Chris Myers didn't win any silverware on April's groundbreaking Samurai Challenge in Japan, but they did make headlines when William Medcalf flew a mechanic out to Hiroshima with a new driveshaft for their 1929 4½-litre - service par excellence!

There will be plenty more excitement to come for Bentley crews (not to mention competitors in a huge variety of other marques) on next year's Rally Round events. The period-dressed Paris-Amsterdam Rally (17-23 June 2018) celebrates the 120th anniversary of the first international motor race and will visit several iconic circuits including Reims, Hockenheim, Solitude and the Nurburgring Nordschleife; the event also commemorates the 130th anniversary of the world's first long-distance drive in a motor car, by Bertha Benz and two of her teenage sons in 1888, so rallying mothers with children are especially welcome, as are all-female crews. Rally Round Director Liz Wenman and Rally Co-ordinator Heidi Winterbourne are always keen to draw newcomers to the sport, offering unrivalled levels of customer care and assistance, and to that end every Rally Round event is designed to suit novices and touring participants as well as experienced competitors. The spectacular Rally Round Africa (1-27 October 2018) has already attracted many couples and husband-and-wife teams, all eager to enjoy a relaxed and highly sociable adventure that combines safe yet entertaining regularity (time-speed-distance) competition with leisurely sightseeing. Designed by international rally expert Kim Bannister, the 6,780km (4,213 mile) route runs from Dar es Salaam to Cape Town via Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa, and includes no fewer than five rest days and six safaris, with accommodation in top-quality hotels and private game lodges.



Rally Round's Liz Wenman (L) and Heidi Winterbourne

Places are still available on both Paris-Prague and Rally Round Africa, but if neither one takes your fancy there are yet more adventures in store for 2019, including the Maharajah Marathon (6-28 February), a luxurious, non-competitive tour of royal palaces in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat, the Midnight Sun Rally (15 June - 6 July), travelling through Sweden, Finland and Norway via the Arctic Circle, Lapland and the North Cape, and the Flight of the Condor (11 November - 8 December), exploring the coastlines, mountains, deserts, rainforests and countless historic and cultural attractions of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

Every Rally Round event is accompanied by fully qualified mechanical and medical support personnel, a luggage transport service and a highly experienced team who can assist with everything from crew and car preparation to insurance and shipping, so if you need advice or more event details simply visit the Rally Round website at www.rallyround.co.uk, email info@rallyround.co.uk or telephone +44 (0)1252 794100.



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The Expanding World of Benchmark

"We've exceeded all our expectations for Benchmark Precision Engineering," says William. "There's been this serious demand for the products, and we have 1,100 model lines now in stock." As ever, the juxtaposition between 90-year-old motor cars and components being flipped in 3D on a PC running computer modelling software is something out of this world.

"We fitted 3,000 square feet of mezzanine flooring in our workshop to create the extra space required. Plus, we upgraded our CNC capability, which brought even more in house." Now, Benchmark supplies absolutely anything and everything for four-cylinder Bentleys. It's an incredible achievement for the company, and something that puts it into an enviable position within the industry. "There is nothing that we can't manufacture, overhaul, or rebuild for a 90-year-old motor car," comments William.

The growth of Benchmark is an important milestone for the business overall, because it brings to life a remarkable situation. With Benchmark, William Medcalf Ltd and The Medcalf Collection, the closed loop of sales, restoration, preservation, development and parts become completely self-supporting. Thanks to an investment and development program in infrastructure, equipment stock and skills, the company is now supplying a big share of the market.

Benchmark's expansion is supported by the adoption of new admin software, which gives complete transparency and traceability of parts and processes through each of the three businesses. There's also a new inspection room – all part of William's drive towards quality and perfection.

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Immersed in the world of vintage Bentleys for all his life, William Medcalf is an authority in all aspects of heritage Bentley ownership and his name is synonymous with the marque. William is based in West Sussex on the road from Brooklands to Goodwood, with easy links to the continent and beyond and is the only place you need if you want to buy, sell, service or prepare a vintage Bentley.

William is personally involved with everything related to vintage Bentleys, and can often be found with his sleeves rolled up getting stuck into manufacturing new parts, organising or taking part in numerous events and preserving the cars.

With hundreds of thousands of vintage Bentley miles under his belt, William is renowned for establishing the most successful vintage Bentley rally-preparation team in the world.

With his obsession for excellence and a passion for tradition and heritage, William is the friendly expert willing to assist and guide owners and enthusiasts of the marque through all aspects of Vintage Bentley life and the unique experiences which ownership brings.



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