



Reg Hunt – A Tribute Veteran Rolls-Royce and Grand Prix Maserati

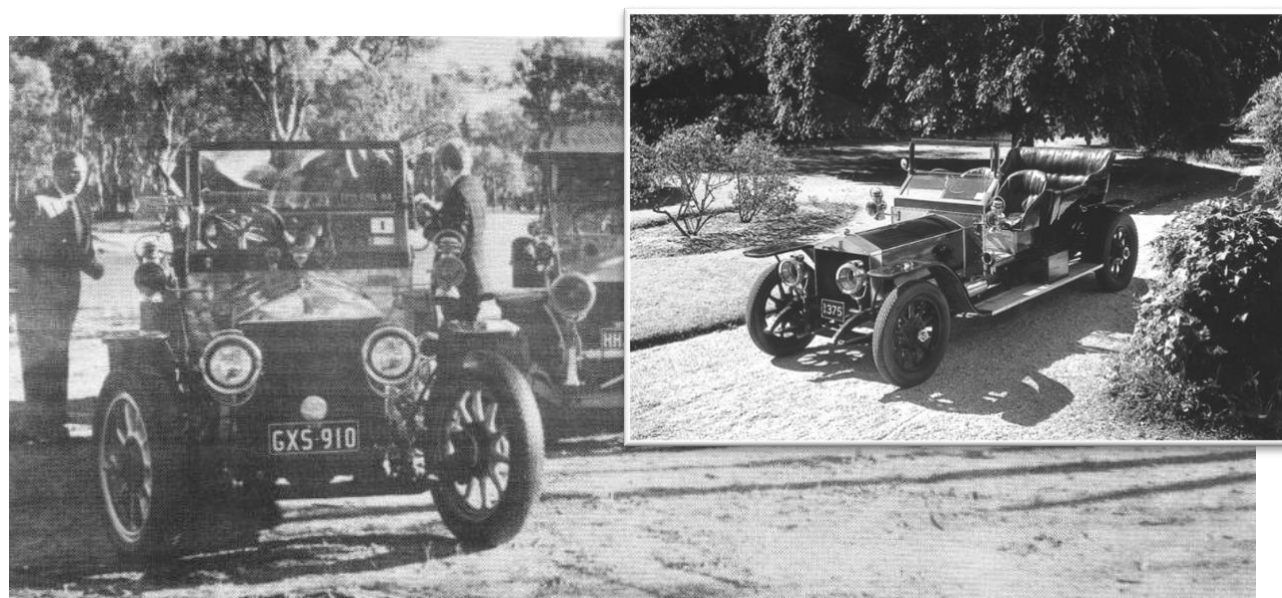
By David Neely

Reg Hunt passed away on 22 August 2022 aged 99. His name will be familiar to those interested in Australian motor racing in the 1950s. He is pictured above at the wheel of his Maserati A6GCM during the Albert Park meeting in late March 1955.

Those from Melbourne may recognise his name as a very successful retailer of Holdens and other makes. He built the largest Holden distributorship in Australia and also ran a vast used car operation including 2,000 cars on a 12 acre site in Elsternwick. He sold out of the car business in 1998.

This tribute to Reg Hunt looks back to the 1950s. His connection with the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia takes us to the Victoria Branch and a veteran Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, which is interesting but not unusual. However, how many Rolls-Royce Owners' Club members competed against motor racing royalty, literally in the case of Prince Bira of Siam, and figuratively in the case of Jack Brabham and Stirling Moss? Reg Hunt did and this takes us to his Maserati open-wheel racing cars.

Reg Hunt joined the newly-formed Rolls-Royce Owners' Club Victoria Branch in 1957. In 1958 he bought 1910 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, chassis 1425, with its Roi des Belges style body from Gavin Sandford-Morgan (1925-2012). Sandford-Morgan discovered 1425 as a farm hack in South Australia in 1955 and undertook a magnificent restoration of the chassis. He then enlisted Cooper Motor Body Works to assist in constructing a period style body – the first restoration of a veteran Silver Ghost in Australia. Sandford-Morgan entered 1425 in the 1956 Golden Fleece Veteran Car Rally, the same year as the Melbourne Olympic Games. The rally went from Melbourne to Ballarat and return in November 1956. The Silver Ghost stood out for the standard of its restoration and performance. It won three sections of the rally, Elegance, Acceleration and the Hill Climb.



Left: Reg Hunt at the wheel of 1910 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, 1425, at the Mildura Federal Rally of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club in 1962. [RROCA 'Quarterly Magazine', Winter 1962]

Inset: The brilliant restoration of the 1910 Silver Ghost is shown here after the 1956 Golden Fleece Veteran Car Rally from Melbourne to Ballarat and return. [Courtesy of Gavin Sandford-Morgan]

Sandford-Morgan recounted the transaction with Hunt over 1425 when he wrote in the August 1988 issue of 'PRÆCLARVM', the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club magazine, "I was lucky enough to enjoy the ownership of 1425 for several years... most importantly, being the car in which I courted the young lady who was subsequently to become my wife... Unfortunately, the financial commitments of married life indicated that, when I received a tempting offer from Reg Hunt for the car, it would be prudent to relinquish it to him. My wife always said that I swapped a Rolls-Royce for her, but I was completely non-committal on that subject!" Sandford-Morgan and Hunt were re-acquainted at the June 1962 Rolls-Royce Owners' Club Federal Rally in Mildura when Hunt attended in 1425.

Reginald Rook Herbert Hunt was born in Manchester in 1923 and with his wife Mavis D Hunt (nee Kinyett) and son Graham T, aged three, left Liverpool on 8 April 1949 on the P&O 'Georgic'. Reg Hunt's occupation was recorded as "Motor Eng." on the ship's passenger list. The ship was bound for Sydney, however, the family settled in Melbourne and Hunt began his career in the car sales business.

HUNT, Reginald R.H.	"	25		325, Stratford Road, Hulme, Manchester.	Motor Eng.
HUNT, Mavis D.	"	25		-do-	Housewife
HUNT, Graham T.	"		3	-do-	

This is the record of the Hunt family on board the 'Georgic'. Rolls-Royce historian Tom Clarke noted the ship's record has an error. It should be Stretford Road, (near Henry Royce's former factory). [Ancestry]

Reg Hunt's involvement in motor sport started in England and continued in Australia as he successfully combined his mechanical ability with his driving skills. In 1953-54 Hunt acquired two Allard J2 sports cars, chassis 1781 and chassis 1782. Six J2s had been shipped from England to Australia in 1950-1951. Following the fastest time at the Rob Roy Hill Climb on 2 November 1953 he entered the 1953 Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park on 21 November. The race, which had 40 starters, was held over 64 laps for a total of 200 miles (322 kms). Doug Whiteford won in a Talbot-Lago T26C. Reg Hunt came tenth of 18 finishers in the Allard J2, chassis 1782, with a Ford Pilot V8 motor.



Above: Reg Hunt at the wheel of 1950 Allard J2, chassis 1782, at Fishermans Bend in October 1953. [Hunt family photographs via Richard Batchelor]

Reg Hunt's next big racing venture was in 1954 and for that he went to the UK and Europe. He bought a new 500 cc Cooper-Norton Mk. 8 for the Formula 3 class and had a great season's racing, including finishing fifth in a big race at the Nürburgring and his final win in the car at Orleans, France. As might be expected from an astute car trader he sold the Cooper at a profit at the end of the season and looked around for a racing car to take back to Australia. Maserati had been suggested and Reg Hunt travelled to Modena, Italy. The company was prepared to sell the Maserati A6GCM, which Juan Manuel Fangio had driven to victory, in two litre form, in the 1953 Italian Grand Prix, and which American Harry Schell had campaigned in 1954 fitted with a 2½-litre engine from the current 250F grand prix car. Twelve A6GCMs were built between 1951 and 1953.



Above: Reg Hunt acquired the actual Maserati A6GCM shown here about to be driven to victory by Fangio in the 1953 Italian Grand Prix. Fangio is in the centre, on the left is Alberto Ascari and on the right is Nino Farina both in Ferraris. [pinterest]

The Maserati A6GCM arrived in Melbourne in late 1954 and was soon back on a ship to contest the 1955 New Zealand Grand Prix at Ardmore. Grid positions were decided by the fastest laps in two 25 mile (40 kilometre) heats. Reg Hunt in the A6GCM was on the front row with B Bira (Prince Birabongse Bhanutej Bhanuban of Siam) in a Maserati 250F. Prince Bira sped away for a comfortable victory in what was to be the last race in his career. Hunt, who had held third place in the early laps, finished fifth due to brake problems.

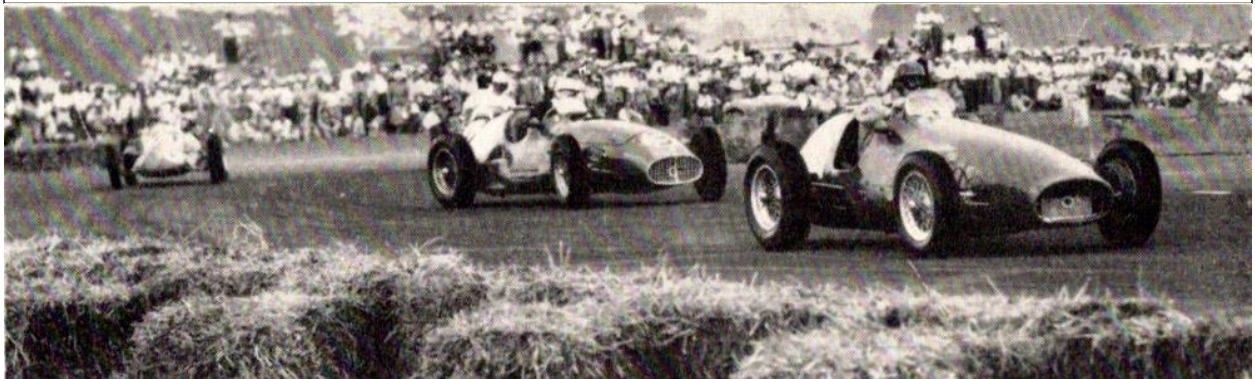


Above: 1955 New Zealand Grand Prix at Ardmore. The front row left to right Prince Bira in a Maserati 250F, Peter Whitehead in a Ferrari 500/625, Reg Hunt in the Maserati A6GCM, and Tony Gaze, Ferrari 500/625. [Bruce Sergent, New Zealand Motor Racing 1954-1976]

Centre: Prince Bira won the 1955 New Zealand Grand Prix in his light-blue Maserati. [Bruce Sergent, New Zealand Motor Racing 1954-1976]



Below: Tony Gaze in his Ferrari leads Reg Hunt in his Maserati in the 1955 New Zealand Grand Prix. [Bruce Sergent, New Zealand Motor Racing 1954-1976]



Back in Australia and Hunt won the Victorian Trophy at Fishermans Bend, the Bathurst 100 scratch race and was considered a good chance for the 1955 Australian Grand Prix at Port Wakefield in South Australia in October. After only four laps Hunt had a 23 second lead over Jack Brabham's rear-engined Cooper T40 Bristol but then a cam follower broke, putting the engine onto five cylinders. Hunt's reduced pace allowed Jack Brabham to take the lead but the Maserati's engine held together and Reg Hunt finished the race second only three seconds behind the future three-time world champion, with whom he shared the fastest lap.



Left: Reg Hunt at the wheel of his Maserati A6GCM at the Bathurst Easter 1955 meeting. It was the cover photograph of the May 1955 issue of 'Australian Motor Sports'.

Right: Reg Hunt and the trophy he won as the 1955 Bathurst 100 Winner. [Hunt family photographs via Richard Batchelor]

Below: Start of the 1955 Australian Grand Prix, Port Wakefield, SA. Reg Hunt Maserati A6GCM front row left and Stan Jones Maybach Mk. 3 on the front row right. Jack Brabham Cooper T40 Bristol and Doug Whiteford Talbot-Lago T26C left to right on row two. [Malcolm Preston, 'Maybach to Holden – Repco, the Cars, People & Engines']



At the end of 1955 Reg Hunt sold the A6GCM and again visited the Maserati factory where he tested and obtained a 250F. Twenty-six examples of the Maserati 250F were built. The 250F first raced in the 1954 Argentine Grand Prix where Juan Manuel Fangio won. In 1956 Stirling Moss won the Monaco and Italian Grands Prix, both in a works car. In 1957 Fangio drove to four more championship victories, including his legendary final win at the German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring. Stirling Moss later said that the 250F was the best front-engined F1 car he drove.

This is how the arrival of the Maserati was reported in the Australian press. *“Gift Maserati for Reg Hunt”*, was the heading in the Melbourne newspaper ‘The Argus’ on 27 January 1956. The article went on,

“Yesterday one of the world’s fastest Grand Prix racing cars, a 1956 2½-litre Maserati, was landed from the Roma at Port Melbourne, despite the strike. The car is worth almost £15,000 and capable of a speed of about 185 m.p.h. The Italian factory, however, supplied it without cost to Reg Hunt, who will race it as the only official ‘works’ driver employed by the firm outside Italy.”

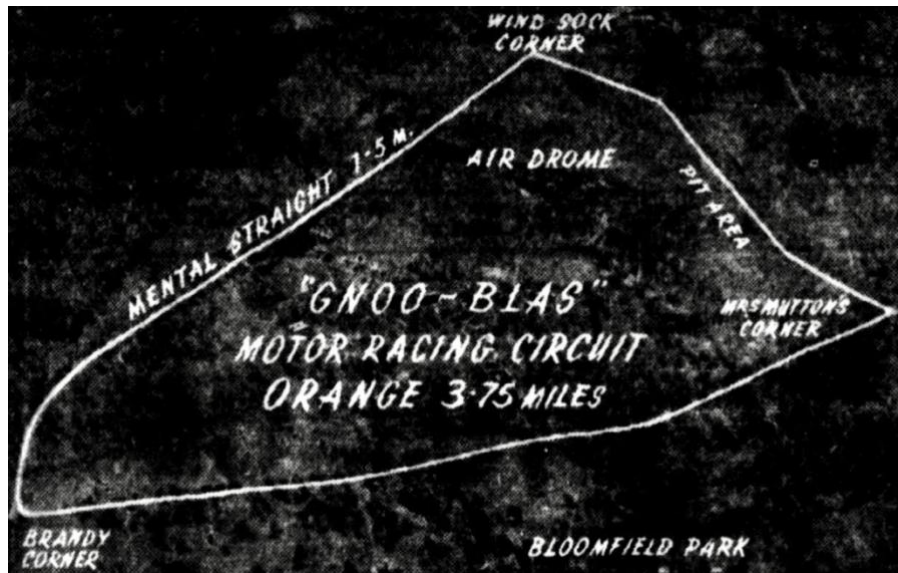


“This top racing honour was paid to Hunt as a result of his winning 10 out of 12 races in which he competed last year in his privately owned Maserati. A new feature of the 1956 Maserati is a five-speed gearbox. The car will have its first race on Monday, at Orange, N.S.W., and has been tuned at the factory, especially to suit that circuit. Probably it will make its first appearance at Fishermen’s Bend on March 11 and 12, and then in The Argus Moomba races at Albert Park on March 11 and 18.”

“Only five of these cars have been built, and it is the first brand-new Grand Prix car to come here. The Maserati has been made available partly because of the valuable publicity it will give Italian products during the Olympic year.”

Above: Albert Hunt standing in the trailer admires his son’s new Maserati 250F, chassis 2516, prior to rolling it off the trailer in Elsterwick in January 1956.” [‘The Argus’, 27 January, 1956 / B King Collection]

Reg Hunt won the 1956 South Pacific Championship for racing cars on 30 January at the Gnoo Blas Motor Racing Circuit at Orange in the Maserati 250F. The factory tuning of the car by the Maserati mechanics had paid off! The race was contested over 27 laps, a total distance of 100 miles (160kms). Jack Brabham was second in his Cooper T40 Bristol.



Above: A diagram from January 1953 of the newly-constructed Gnoo Blas circuit at Orange. Mental Straight was a reference to the adjacent Bloomfield Hospital, a former psychiatric hospital. It was later changed to Hospital Straight and later still to Total Straight with petroleum company sponsorship. Reg Hunt clocked a flying eighth mile at 162 mph (261 kph) down the straight in 1956 in his Maserati.

Below: Reg Hunt on his way to victory at Gnoo Blas in 1956. Note the steam train and 'The Sydney Morning Herald' van in the background with an ambulance on the right. [Gnoo Blas Classic Car Club]





Left: Before the race, Reg Hunt at the wheel of his Maserati 250F at the Gnoo Blas circuit in Orange, 30 January 1956. [Hunt family photographs via Richard Batchelor]

Right: Reg Hunt after his win at Gnoo Blas in 1956. Note the grit on his face. [Hunt family photographs via Richard Batchelor]

Reg Hunt then drove his Maserati 250F to victory in the 1956 Argus Trophy race held at the Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne on 18 March 1956. The race covered 48 laps, a total distance of 150 miles (241 kms). It was the feature event of the two-day 'Moomba Meeting'.



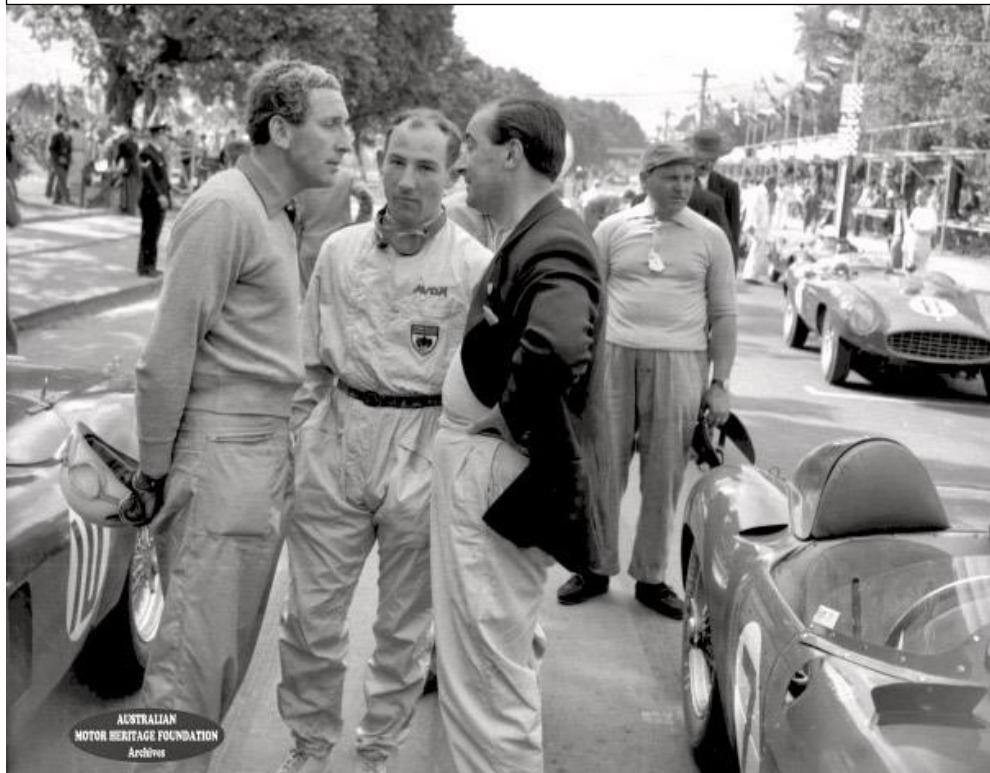
Above: Reg Hunt on the left launches his Maserati 250F in the 1956 Argus Trophy race, which he won, held at the Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne on 18 March 1956. Centre is Kevin Neal in Hunt's former Maserati A6GCM and Lex Davison on the right in a Ferrari 500. [Primo tipo]

The 1956 Australian Grand Prix was held at the Albert Park Circuit, Melbourne, on 2 December 1956 over 80 laps covering 250 miles (400 kms). International representation included the two works Officine Maserati drivers Stirling Moss and Frenchman Jean Behra, who brought no less than five Maseratis with them. They shipped three 250Fs, two of the latest specification and an earlier chassis, and two 300S sports cars both of which remained in Australia after the event. The cars were based at Hunt's Holden dealership in Elsternwick reflecting the close association between Hunt and Maserati. Hunt came fourth with Moss first and Behra second, all in Maserati 250Fs. Moss and Behra dominated the two-week festival and were placed first and second in the Australian Tourist Trophy sports car race each driving a Maserati 300S. Jack Brabham, the defending champion was absent.

Right: The cars of the Maserati Racing Team for the 1956 Australian Grand Prix lined up in Reg Hunt's Elsternwick garage. First on the left is the Maserati 300S Stirling Moss would drive in the meeting. [R Hunt via D Zeunert Collection]



Below: Reg Hunt at left Stirling Moss centre and Ken Wharton at the start of the 1956 Australian Tourist Trophy. In the bottom right-hand corner is the Maserati 300S that Moss drove to victory in the race. [Australian Motor Heritage Foundation Archive]



After his stirring drive at the Australian Grand Prix, Reg Hunt retired at the age of 33 with the reputation as an extremely fast and determined driver, who never crashed or even spun his cars. Richard Batchelor interviewed Reg Hunt in 2013 and wrote, "Hunt was one of those daring young men who thrilled Australian crowds in the 1950s, racing Formula 1 cars on highly dangerous tracks, their only concession to safety being flimsy polo helmets made from layers of cloth and gum."

Returning to the 1910 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, it joined Hunt's collection of 200 classic cars and motorcycles, which included a very valuable 1956 Maserati 300S – one sold in 2013 for UK £4 million.

The collection included an impressive line-up of six WO Bentleys: 1925 3-litre, chassis 1003, acquired in 1975, sold 2005; 1925 3-litre, chassis 1205, acquired 1977, sold 2005; 1926 3-litre, chassis LT1581, acquired 1980s, sold 1991; 1927 6½-litre, chassis PR2306, acquired 1982, sold 2005; 1931 4-litre, now an 8-litre roadster special, chassis VA4077, acquired 1981, sold 2005; and, 1932 4-litre, chassis VA4078, acquired 1987, sold 2005. Richard Batchelor related the story told by Hunt when three Bentleys remained to be sold, "A wealthy businessman came over from Perth to look at the Bentleys but after about an hour said he could not make up his mind which one to buy. I said in that case you should buy all three. He looked at his wife, she nodded and we shook hands on the deal." Batchelor added, "Reg Hunt had not forgotten how to sell cars!" The purchasers in 2005 were Trevor and Judy Eastwood.



Left: WO Bentley 1931 4-litre, chassis VA4077. Owned by Reg Hunt for 24 years pictured top outside his workshop and below at a DBCA run - Reg Hunt's last Club event before selling this and the other two Bentleys shown here to Trevor and Judy Eastwood in 2005.

Centre: WO Bentley 1925 3-litre, chassis 1003.

Right: WO Bentley 1925 3-litre, chassis 1205, when offered for sale by Reg Hunt in 2005.

All photographs from 'Vintage Bentleys in Australia' by Clare Hay, Bob Watson, Phillip Schudmak and Tony Johns, The Bentley Drivers Club of Australia, Inc., 2019.

In 1998 Hunt sold the 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 to John Kennedy, UK, though the car has been kept in Australia in the custodianships of Rolls-Royce Owners' Club members. Gavin Sandford-Morgan writing in 1988 paid tribute to Hunt, "It was nice to know that Reg Hunt kept and enjoyed the car for some 30 years after he bought it from me, and was a loyal and attentive custodian." In fact, Hunt was the custodian of 1425 for 40 years.

One thing the Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost and the Grand Prix Maserati had in common were completely exposed driving seats. However, in 1962 a drive from Melbourne to Mildura open to the elements in the Silver Ghost was a genteel excursion compared with hurtling down Mental Straight at Orange in 1956 at over 160 mph in the Maserati, with only a polo helmet and goggles as safety equipment!



Vale Reg Hunt

Acknowledgements: Hunt family photographs via Richard Batchelor; Richard Batchelor's interview with Reg Hunt in May 2013, 'Reg Hunt – Unsung Ace of the 1950s'; Richard Batchelor, 'When Maserati Ruled Australian Tracks'; Philip Stanton's account of J2 Allards imported into Australia; 'Vintage Bentleys in Australia' by Clare Hay, Bob Watson, Phillip Schudmak and Tony Johns, The Bentley Drivers Club of Australia, Inc., 2019.

About the author: David Neely has owned Rolls-Royce models, a 1926 Phantom I, a 1929 Phantom II, a 1963 Silver Cloud III and 1985 Silver Spirit. He is the co-author, with Tom Clarke, of 'Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country – The first fifty years in Australia'. He is the author of 'Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Rear-View Mirror – A history of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia'. Both were published by The Sir Henry Royce Foundation, Australia. He edited 'PRÆCLARVM', the national magazine for the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club, from 2004 to 2009 and is an Honorary Life Member of the Club. A former Trustee of The Sir Henry Royce Foundation he is currently the Foundation's Historical Consultant. Sydney 2022.