

RAY W CLARKE 1923 – 2008

Ray joined the Lancashire Automobile Club (LAC) as an ordinary (RAC Affiliated) member on return from the RAF in October 1946 – largely influenced by the late Bill Turner who was always on the look out for Marshal Fodder for the many 'all night' and 'daytime' rallies he was fond of organising. He competed in 'road events' whenever marshalling permitted including an entry in the Blackpool Rally of 1947. He took part on many short mileage Saturday Club rallies, which were run over short distances due to the shortage of fuel at that time, these were mostly organised by another LAC stalwart, Sam Isherwood. He is even reputed to have won a 'speed competition' over country roads in the north Fylde and is quoted as saying 'it was great fun'!

He marshalled on all the Morecambe National Rallies and helped organise the first Woodvale Sprint. He recalled that he must have done something right because he was appointed Secretary of the Meeting for the majority of the remaining Woodvale events. Ray will also be remembered for pioneering past LAC events such as Clerk Hill, Hurstwood, Scammonden Dam and even Baitings Dam Hill Climbs. He had much to do with the Oulton Park Sprint meetings during 1978/9 and it is known that he had particularly fond memories of this venue. When the Club moved to the Three Sisters circuit for its sprint events Ray was there at the start looking after all manner of things such as entries, results etc. One event that must be mentioned however is the Club's 'Blue Ribbon' event, the annual Manchester to Blackpool Veteran-Vintage Car Run. Ray was there at the start and was very much involved for its first thirty years. Those who also have helped to run this prestigious event over the years will remember every year Ray and Jean setting out the magnificent array of awards on the stage before the prize giving, only Ray knew how to do this to perfection and the display always looked wonderful.

Ray was nominated for the Committee by Neville Tudor-Thomas in 1965 and joined this august body under the Chairmanship of Phillip Potter shortly afterwards. About this time he became actively associated with the Midland Bank Motoring Club, leading to being an accredited RAC Club Steward and as such was appointed pro. RAC Steward on several "Three Banks Northern Rallies" in the following years.

The early 1970's saw the completion of the Longridge mini race circuit and the LAC's involvement both in racing and sprinting there. During this period he became a 'student' race secretary under Dr Stanley Foulds, which inevitably led to Assistant, and Secretary proper at these and other speed and road rally events. Ray always said that it was hard, but satisfying work, but the only way to learn. Under his guidance these events always made a small profit for the Club so he was elected Hon Treasurer for the Club in 1974 and then Chairman of the Speed Events sub committee in 1975. Apart from a short break 1982/4 to allow him to become Chairman of the General Committee and 1984/6 whilst President he continued as Hon Treasurer until 2004. No doubt if Ray had been allowed his way he would have continued for ever, but it was decided that he had done more than enough and the position was taken by a younger member Stephen Proctor, much to the relief it is imagined of Ray's wife Jean. It's a well known fact that Stephen worked hand in glove many times with Ray and no doubt learned much from his knowledge and expertise of the financial workings of the Club.

One of Ray's rules of motoring was the need for correct maintenance to the last detail and it is somewhat fitting that on 16th February 2008 he just completed his usual Saturday morning job of washing the car before sitting down and quietly and peacefully passing away.

The Club and particularly the Committee have much to be thankful and grateful to Ray for. He very seldom missed a committee meeting, and attended the last one just two weeks before he died and also the AGM just three days before, he always there kept us in line with Club rules and protocol. He loved to get involved with events, it will be difficult to imagine the start of a Fellsman Classic Tour without him being in charge of signing-on. He was justifiably an Honourable Life Member, an office he was particularly proud of. Ray leaves a huge gap within the Club, a gap that it is doubtful will be filled. The Lancashire Automobile Club will sadly miss him

Sat 16th February 2008

A FEW OF RAY CLARKE'S JOTTINGS AND MEMORIES

Interest in motors and motoring is remembered from the age of about 3. His father owned a MAXWELL open tourer of around 1920 vintage and uncles were proud possessors of such machinery as a Model T Ford (hush) and a VULCAN (made in Southport). The Vulcan was a well remembered car and the Rolls-Royce of its fleet! It lived in Blackpool and was so tractable as to push crowds before it with its front bumper and without damage during the 'lights' period.

Personal motoring commenced in 1943 when a Riley Lincock 9hp was acquired – this was fortunate because for many years thereafter no cars were generally available. Owned the Riley for 13 years and still regrets parting with it; particularly after rebuilding the car stem to stern in 1950/51. With its 'silent third' crash gearbox one had to LEARN to drive it – not a painless process, but the final achievement was relished.

Subsequent to the Riley was a Morris Minor (Post War) which again had the rebuild treatment (Purchased new, larger engine, sold old one, purchased new gearbox with the money, sold old one, purchased new back axle with the money, sold old one, purchased new speedometer, calibrated to the new set up with the money - some financial flair appearing here?)

After the Minor came a couple of Fords, firstly a 1340cc Classic then a 1968 MkII Cortina GT 1600cc, slightly interspaced by an Austin 1800 ("A mistake" - RWC); a 1972 Renault 17 (His personal favourite); two Minis (one a Clubman); two Alfa Suds and recently since 1992, one Opel Manta and six Vauxhalls. Which is the best? – not easy to say, but the Alfas were by far the most comfortable, least tiring and best road holding cars in the stable!!!

Probably the most intensive motoring was done in India during RAF service in 1944/46 – no salubrious machinery there: Crossley and Thornycroft 3 tonners, V* Canadian Ford transports and the occasional Standard 14 Staff Car and a couple of Leyland cables Tiger Queen Mary's. Distances were vast on the Deccan – a trip for supplies was 250 miles round trip and undertaken sometimes twice a week.

A period of leave consisted of some intensive motoring in Kashmir in a borrowed FIAT which took an unbelievable battering – and still kept going. Best vehicle – the Thornycrofts...