

# KEMPSFORD

## CLASSIC CAR & MOTORCYCLE CLUB

Newsletter  
Summer 2009

Here we are again at the end of another season, but a longer season than usual with decent driving weather right up to the end of October. Even so, by the time we get to this time of year most of the shows are well in the past and there is precious little to fill these pages. So, such as it is, let's get on with it...

### FAIRFORD TRACTION ENGINE RALLY

It's great to see this event back on the calendar, and with such a wide range of attractions in addition to the steam engines themselves. There was a good turn-out of classic cars with Kempford well represented on both days. Many members were disappointed with the location chosen for the classic car display feeling that we were too close to the steam engines and their smoke. Most of us went home with a fair coating of soot and there was some concern about the effect this might have had on paintwork, but I'm sure a bucket of soapy water was all that was



needed. We know it's a steam rally and, of course, the steam engines are the main attraction. Consequently their needs must be considered first, but it did seem that a more suitable site could have been found for the classic cars. Having said all that, it by no means spoiled the show which was a great success.

There were plenty of interesting cars to look at, and which to include here has to be a matter of personal choice. Two which particularly appealed to me were this Cadillac Fleetwood and Vanden Plas Princess R. You could say that these cars occupy opposite ends of the spectrum: the Vanden Plas representing conservative respectability, perhaps the conveyance of a senior banker or the managing director of an

engineering company. It was the car of a successful man and it murmurs this discretely in your ear. The Cadillac was also a successful man's car but it says so loud and clear. This car is as brash and loud as its owner: perhaps he was a record producer, then again he may have been in the rag trade, or owned a string of coffee bars. Either way it was a treat to see these cars. Looking good but not concourse, they were clearly loved and used.

Not a classic car but still interesting was the motorised dough mixing bowl taken from Radway's the bakers when they closed down.

### THE COSTELLO MGB-V8

Thirty five years ago last March John Roker gave his brand new citron yellow MGB GT and £1,072.50 to Ken Costello. What he got back was a Costello MGB-V8, perhaps the most exciting MGB of them all. John still has the car today. Sadly it is confined to the garage of



John's Kempsford home under a SORN, but John has plans to bring it back to its former glory.



BT20 with a 1000cc Cosworth engine. During a break in filming Ken visited the museum in Monza and was inspired by a small block Maseratti to build a really fast small car.

The chance came in 1969 when he happened across a Rover V8 in a workshop in Kent. He immediately borrowed an MGB Roadster from a friend and fitted it with a Buick 215 (later the Rover 3.5 litre) V8 engine. The job took 6 months of hard work but by November it was complete. Next followed an MGB GT conversion for Lady Cripps. The car's performance was well beyond the standard MGB and Ken realised he was onto a winner. He decided to go into business for himself and set-up the V8 Conversion Company with a team of eight in Farnborough, Kent.



The cars were recognisable by their 'egg box' grille, alloy wheels and, at least on the early models, a power bulge in the bonnet to accommodate the carburettors. Badging was discrete: a simple V8 Costello tail badge was the only embellishment permitted by Ken. The motoring press was ecstatic. With a power output of 155bhp at 5000rpm the V8 had a top speed of 130 mph compared with the standard car's 104. Acceleration from 0-60mph was reduced from 12.1 to 7.8 seconds.

Ken had been unaware of it but in 1970, with the poor performance of the MGC and strong competition from the Triumph Stag and the Sunbeam Tiger, British Leyland's Chief Design Engineer, Charles Griffin was instructed to investigate fitting the very same Rover 3.5 litre V8 into the MGB. He reported to Lord Stokes, BL's Chairman, that "the car would have to be widened at least 3½ inches. Obviously this is not feasible."



When he subsequently read the reviews of the Costello V8 he wrote to Ken asking to borrow a car, which Ken duly provided.

Unfortunately the following year the MGB GT-V8 was born and Lord Stokes issued an edict forbidding dealers to supply the V8 engines without getting an old unit in exchange. This was widely seen as an effort to cut-off Ken's supplies, but it is not clear why Stokes should have thought this necessary when the Costello was so much more expensive than the factory car.

Ken Costello went on to convert around 200 cars and brought out a number of innovations, including fuel injection a full two years before British Leyland.

By the time John Roker bought his car in 1974 the SU carburettors had been replaced with twin choke Webbers which meant there was no need for the power bulge in the bonnet. With less than 200 of these cars still in existence we look forward to seeing John's car restored to its former glory

#### KEMPSFORD CHURCH FETE



The Church Fete at the beginning of September was another great success with a good selection of cars from Kempsford and Fairford clubs and beyond. There was some very superior metal on display including no less than three Rolls Royces and two Bentleys. Unusually there were two MGAs, my 1600 and a Mark II owned by Neil Shakell who also lives in Kempsford. Also on show was a very nice Jowett Jupiter: quite

a rarity today.

There was added excitement with the arrival of the pack of foxhounds from the hunt kennels. These boisterous animals had just completed a very noisy circuit of the showground when one of their number doubled back and devoured some hapless soul's picnic lunch in a single lunge.



#### PETROL PRICES

The lowest price locally for unleaded is yet again the Shell station on the Fairford to Lechlade road at the Whelford turning, where it is 104.9p per litre. This is up 5p compared with August. The second lowest price, as usual, is to be had at the Calcot OTR Esso station on the A419 at Cricklade, and it's 105.9p.

#### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

November 29<sup>th</sup> Coach trip to Coventry Motor Museum: see Terry for details



#### CONTACT:

If you have any stories, photos or information you think ought to be included in the next Newsletter, or would like to comment on anything in this edition, please contact me, Alistair Kennedy, on 01285 810440 or email: [Alistair.Kennedy@cadillacplastic.co.uk](mailto:Alistair.Kennedy@cadillacplastic.co.uk) If you're going to send me text or photos, could I please, if possible, have them electronically, by email or on a CD.