

biography

... Dropped in on our recently re-elected National President over the weekend, in order to gather some material for a "biography in brief" on the fellow who was responsible for the creation of the FCCA, and who has been elected National President for the past eight years.—Ed.

—o—

I told John of the purpose of my visit and asked him to pardon the number of questions I would ask, and if he would mind answering them at some length, rather than with a "yes," "no," or a date. He smiled, and said he appreciated my problem because for many years he has written biographies of members in the various National and local club publications. Now the shoe was on the other foot, and so we got down to business.

"When did you come to this country, John?"

"1947, from Canada. I had often visited this country, and always loved it. Bunny and I spent our postwar honeymoon touring the whole U.S., then we went back to Canada to save up so we could come here to live."

"Are you from Canada?" I asked.

"No, though I have lived several years in, and all over Canada. I'm from Southport, a small seaside resort on the west coast of England. I left England in December 1940 and have only been back twice for short visits. The war years took me just about around the world, to Europe, Canada, U.S.A., India, China, Assam, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Australia, Borneo, and I ended up on a tiny coral atoll in the South Indian Ocean, called Cocos Island."

"Apart from seeing the world, what was your job during the war?"

"I was a pilot in the Royal Air Force, night fighters and daylight sweep stuff mostly in the early days during the Battle of Britain, then over to Canada as part of the British Empire Air Training Program. Spent a couple of years as an instructor, very dicy, then an interesting session on Mosquitos, then the west coast of Canada for a thrilling six months on B-25's and B-24's on coastal work and training, then off to the Orient for a bash on heavy bombers. Routine stuff mostly."

"You must have had many interesting experiences during all those years. Care to tell of any?"

John's face broke into a grin and he studied the glass in his hand for a few minutes before replying.

"There are many indeed. I learned at an early age that I was a guy that things happened to, and I honestly think that most everything in the book crossed my path. But by the grace of God, a fine crew, excellent training and enough luck to last a fellow three lifetimes, I survived. Almost any incident I choose to relate would take up the space of short story and would only illustrate these facts, so let's skip them for some other time, if you don't mind?"

"O.K.," I replied. "Maybe we'll cover them some other time. Let's have a little on your boyhood, training, and your job now."

"My boyhood conjures up pictures of camping in the highlands and on the moors of England, Scotland and Wales; of motorcycles and broken bones; of swimming everywhere and anywhere; of sports car races every weekend in the summer on the 10-mile stretch of beach at home. Of getting in everybody's way in the pits, just to be near Malcolm Campbell, Freddy Dixon, Prince Bira, Dick Seaman, Conan Doyle, Tim Birkin and Sir Henry Seagrave. Trips to the Continent, building a boat and sailing it wherever it was considered impossible or dangerous. My youth was wrapped up in the innards of a 1932 Morris Minor, later a lovely little PB MG, and finally a TA in 1939 which I lost in a raid on Bristol. All this time I was an apprentice engineer. From when I was 14 I went to college and worked in a factory. Wound up as a graduate engineer from the Merchant Venturers College at the Bristol University. The outbreak of war nipped a promising career at Bristol Aeroplane Company in the bud, and a few hours flying before that decided for me which service to enter. After the war I was a liaison engineer at Fairchild in Montreal. I came down here to fly but found the field crowded and no openings for aliens. I was a designer for Westcraft trailers for about a year until they folded. That's when I decided to become a U.S. citizen, but I had a five year wait and had to eat, so I went into the then practically unknown business of selling sports cars."

"Who was that with, John?" I asked.

"There were only two places in town where you could find an imported car. One was Bob Roberts on Ivar in Hollywood who handled Duesenberg, Cord, and such classic domestic jobs, and who could get, on special order from New York, a funny little hard riding, wire wheel job with right hand drive called the

MG. The other place was Light Car Motors on Hollywood Blvd., where Trend Publications are now. They handled the Austin (U.S. and British), the Willys and a lush job called Triumph, the 1800 roadster. Bob didn't need a salesman, so I went to work for Light Car Motors. Made a lot of friends through the fabulous Austin A40, one of the best cars ever made, and made a lot of money, too. In fact, I opened up the first imported car agency outside of Hollywood when I joined forces with our service manager Glenn Fancher and had our own agency in Glendale.

continued on next page

biography

from page 3

That's when we formed the Four Cylinder Club, and little did I guess how popular it would become."

"Now that we have reached the club John, tell us a little about its formation and your long association with it."

"Well, it was rough going at first in those days. People who drove the little 'furrin' cars were considered nuts and we sure had a rough time putting them over. It was our enthusiasm that won out in the end, not salesmanship! Dealerships sprang up everywhere and reaped the benefit of our pioneering. Light Car Motors had argued against my suggestion to bring in the MG. 'That darn little thing will never sell over here,' I was told. So Rodger Barlow appeared on the scene with his fabulous International Motors and stole the thunder from everyone for several years with the MG, later the Jag, Rolls, Bentley, Talbot, Simca. A sports car club had been formed by Rodger with its natural aim racing, and after a couple of rather abortive efforts the first Palm Springs Road Race was successfully staged in 1950. It was a wizard race, only a very few people were there and we raced everything in sight, including Austin sedans and a Cadillac sedan. Sterling Edwards from S. San Francisco won the main event as I recall, in his 'special'! John Von Neuman was there and Rodger Barlow, Bill Friedauer and Bill Corey and several others who are still active today in what has become the California Sports Car Club. Looking around at the number of small car owners who were enjoying the activities from a spectator's view it occurred to me that here were all the people we

needed for a club dedicated to all the other motoring sports, like so many of the clubs in Europe. I recalled the fun I had had in England with the Bristol Sports Car Club and immediately got cracking on organizing one over here. We just put ads in the papers and let it be known through the dealerships that such a club was being formed and in no time we had hundreds of members. Like Topsy, it grew, and it was a barrel of fun. Just like today, there always seemed to be the help we needed when we asked, and such wonderful people as Lew Himmelrich, The Gregson Family, Curt Parker, Harwood Jones, Perry Peron, Glenn Fancher, Gloria Dearbron, Jean Burkhard and so many more contributed endless hours to its success. It became so big we had to split it up into chapters, and to look after all the mail and business involved we had to form a National Office and Board, separate to any chapter, and each succeeding year I have been assigned the job of President of this National Office."

"Before you continue with your part in the club today, John, I know you are no longer in the sports car business. When did you leave it, and what are you doing now?"

"Just a few days after I got my U.S. citizenship I nipped up to Lockheed and told them I knew of a good engineer going to seed. That was Christmas of 1954. I'm still there, though things are pretty precarious in the airplant industry these days. I write the maintenance manual on the engine of the F104 fighter, the most interesting job I've had to date; it's very challenging and very different to playing around with four cylinders!"

"Are you running for office again this year, John?"

"I never run for office, old boy! Each year I resign. The new board takes over and when the question arises, who is going to take over? everyone looks around the room, sees I am the oldest member there and 'volunteer' me for the job."

We had covered most of the points I had intended to cover except the important one of Bunny, John's wife. What does she think of all these goings on in the Foster family? When she brought us our third round of beer and I was just about ready to dive in the pool, I asked her.

"I used to work very close to Jack in the early days of the club; our house was the headquarters with never a dull moment," she laughed. "But there were other things to be done and a family to look after, so I left the club activities to Jack and anything he does is fine by us, so long as we see something of him each week," she replied, then added, "Jack has many ambitions in many other directions that at the moment he just doesn't have time to pursue; that is the only reason I would like to see him step down for awhile. It's the old itchy feet he was born with. This is the longest time I have known him to be in one spot in his life!"

"And that's what I call an understanding wife; see what I mean about being born lucky," John (Bunny calls him Jack) said as he gave her a hug, and we prepared to leave.

"Heavens! Look at the time," John exclaimed, looking at his watch. "I've promised to show some movies over at the Vets Hospital this afternoon. I'll try to be home for dinner, honey."

And with a quick "Cheerio" and "Thanks" he was gone.