

OPEN COCKPITS & STRAW BALES

MOTOR RACING IN THE 1950s

Bryan Apps

The 1950s was a great time to be British: we had just won the war, with a little help from our friends, and we were to celebrate both the Festival of Britain and the Queen's Coronation. The Empire held sway and we proudly watched her sons conquer Everest, run the first four minute mile, and produce the world's first jet airliner. The post-war decade was also a great time to be a motor racing enthusiast. To begin with there were the Alfa Romeos and E.R.A.s, dusted off after six years of enforced rest, and in 1952 the brief appearance of Hermann Lang in a 1939 Grand Prix Mercedes in Argentina. Entirely new racing cars were being crafted in England, Italy and France in what was little more than a cottage industry and, also in the 1950s, Jaguar and Aston Martin echoed the epic victories of the 'Bentley Boys' at Le Mans.

In *Straw Bales and Open Cockpits* the author, through his superb paintings, captures the excitement of the cars and drivers who risked everything in what turned out to be the final days of unrestrained competitive motor racing, when cars were still operated by controls which any motorist would easily recognise today, racing drivers were clearly visible in their open cockpits, often with only thin leather helmets to protect their heads. National colours and large racing numbers made the cars and their drivers easy to identify as they sped past only yards away from where one stood. But with the thrills came increased dangers for the drivers with little more than straw bales between them and disaster. So many great racing drivers lost their lives in the course of those ten years and all of them are remembered here.

This book inevitably majors on the Formula 1 World Championship series which began at Silverstone in 1950, but some notable non-championship events are also included and, in addition, the Monte Carlo Rally, the Mille Miglia and Le Mans.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

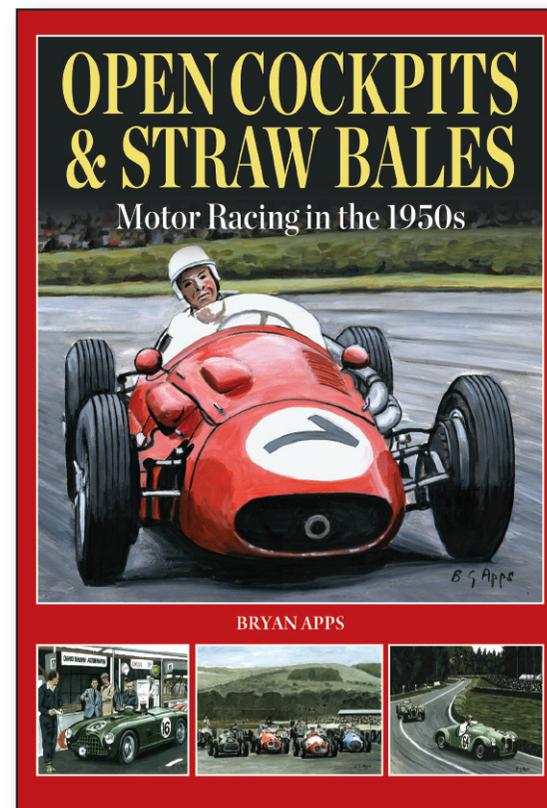
Bryan Apps, an Oxford graduate, has been an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Winchester for nearly 50 years. When he was a young curate in Andover his 97 hp Mobile Church attracted the interest of the international Press. His passion for motor racing was ignited at the age of twelve by a visit to Goodwood in 1949, and he corresponded with Raymond Mays, who was both the originator of the E.R.A., and the instigator of the B.R.M. His paintings of racing cars and drivers from the earliest days of the sport are wonderful evocations of their period and they led to lasting friendships with Manfred von Brauchitsch, Ken Tyrrell, and many of the most famous racing drivers from before and after the Second World War. His previous books include *When Motor Racing Was Fun*, *Silverstone Shadows* and *When Toys Were Fun*.

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Above: Stirling Moss and Denis Jenkinson in their 300SLR Mercedes Benz immediately before the start of the 1955 Mille Miglia.

Top left: Alberto Ascari driving the Tipo 125 V12 1.5 litre two stage supercharged Ferrari in the 1950 Swiss Grand Prix at Berne.

Left: The CR5 Cunningham on its way to third place at Le Mans in 1953.

Below: Example of a double-page spread.



Reg Parnell overtaking Felice Bonetto's 159 Alfa Romeo in the 1950 4.5 litre Thin Wall Special during the First Heat of the International Trophy Race at Silverstone.



Denis Pacey setting the fastest time of the 1950 at Shelsley Walsh in his 1950 V12 2.8 litre open-cockpit Alfa Romeo in 1950.

In the years immediately after the war racing cars were still operated by controls which any motorist would easily recognise today. Racing drivers wore closely visible to their open cockpits, often with only thin leather helmets to protect their heads. National colours and large racing numbers made the cars and their drivers easy to identify as they sped just only yards away from where you stood.

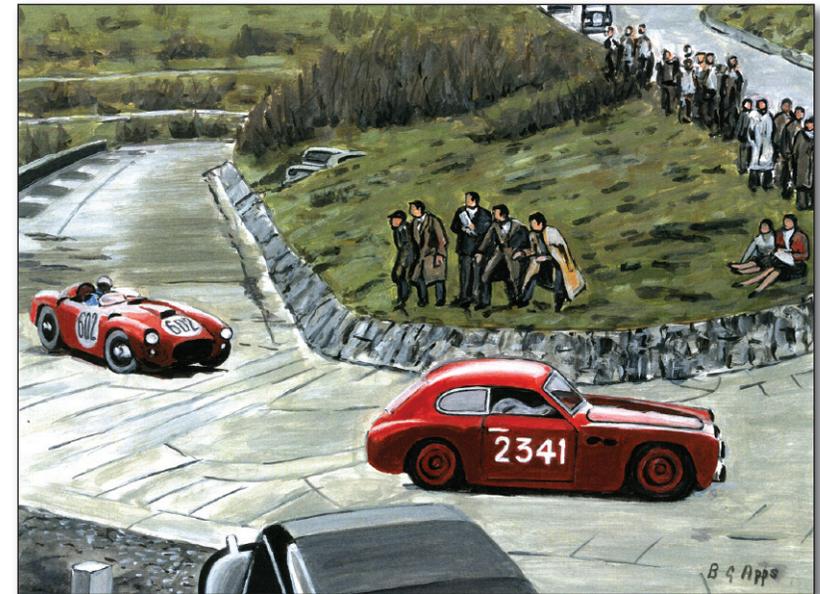
The 4CLT Maserati looked exactly how a racing car ought to look and the big 4.5 litre Ferraris and Lago Tullios were mighty spectacular. H.W.M.s led the way from Britain to

Stirling Moss driving the two seater H.W.M. Aba at Clerbs on 10 October 1950.

the Continental circuits, and in 1950 Raymond Mays struck a chord with the whole nation with the B.R.M. He intended it to be a world beater and it certainly sounded like a winner wherever it could be persuaded to fire on all 16 cylinders. The B.R.M. drew vast numbers of the British public to motor racing for the first time, and my correspondence with Raymond Mays and Alfred Owen enabled me to feel uniquely in touch with the sport. John Cooper's little 500cc racers brought added interest and excitement to any race meeting and within ten years he produced the World Championship winning 2.5 litre Cooper-Chassis. Such was the speed of change in Formula 1 in the course of the 1950s. H.W.M.s were joined in Formula 2 by Connaughts, Cooper-Bristols and Gonulins, and chance captained John Heath, Rodney Clark, John Cooper and Arnold Gordon into the World Championship series in 1952. The 1950s also produced flights of fancy like the 'Toothpaste Tube' Connaught, and adventurous projects such as the transverse engine Bugatti Space Frames gave birth to the iconic 248F Maserati, the racing 1200Lancia, the V800 Mercedes Benz, and the Vanwall. The 2.5 litre B.R.M., equipped with a space frame but almost a monopoco, eventually became a Grand Prix winner at Zandvoort in 1959. There was also the first engine of Lotus and the beautifully constructed Aston Martin DBR4 which, like the original B.R.M., proved too late to make an impact.

In the 1950s a works Aston Martin was actually driven along the public roads of England and France to compete at Le Mans. The astonishingly graceful XK120 Jaguar of William Lyons gained instant success on the track and was followed in quick succession by the C-Type and the D-Type Jaguars. Each year new models appeared so that, for example, the David Brown Aston Martin progressed in rapid stages from the sports saloon DB1, via the DB2 and the supercar DB3S to the Le Mans winning DBR1. Ferrari and Maserati produced new cars annually, and the gull-winged 300SL Mercedes caused the motor racing

Stirling Moss winning Heat 2 of the British Motor Sport Challenge Race in his Cooper-Norton in 1950.



Ascari's Lancia D24 closing up on Claes's Cistalia to win the 1954 Mille Miglia at 87.27mph.