

A Family Affair: GKN 991



This is story of an open and secret love affair that my parents, Margaret and Rex Gerovich, had for Traction Avant Citroëns and how the affair has continued to this day, some 40+

Some of Ricky's other cars: 1918 Sunbeam, 1925 Lancia Lamba, 1930 Aston Martin

years later as a family legacy Mum's crush on the marque was love at first site when one of her cousins [Ricky Furlong] turned up at the family home in a slightly used Traction, in the 1960s. I suspect Ricky's love of



the car was initially through it being a cheap car to purchase at the time but he also had a passion for Tractions [including a Family 9], despite owning some very exotic vehicles dating from the early-20th century such as Lancia Lamba, Sunbeam, Aston Martin, Daimler and numerous other classics.

In part I think the love of the brand in the 1960-'70s was because old Citroëns were a cheap car to purchase/own but it also became a symbol of the 'alternative' scene and a pretty cool car to own during the time of the rise in Aussie 'muscle cars'.

It also probably had something to do with the practice of just transferring the windscreen and registration plates from one worn out vehicle to another without having to do road worthies or pay stamp duties as the police had no idea of chassis or body numbers for these exotic foreign vehicles.

Some of the Citroëns Ricky owned in the 1960-'70s including a Family 9 registration GHC 725. In the two pictures on page 48 you can see some of the damage to the French Traction as a result of an off-road excursion. This required the rear door to be permanently welded shut

Images of some of the Citroëns Ricky owned in 1960s and '70s, including [2 & 3] a Family 9, registered GHC 725. The bottom picture was taken in Castlemaine.

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Ricky was also the proud owner of this Traction, registration GLE 977.



The damage to the rear door and the sill can be seen if you look between Rex's legs.

You can also see the damage to the front left wing in this picture.



and a quick touch up paint so the car could be traded in with a car dealer who had not identified that the door had been permanently welded shut. I am told there was a very quick exit from the showroom with a brand new vehicle before they did find out about the door.

As a child I can recall Mum would regularly speak of her love for the Traction but ownership of one was far off, as my father did not openly share the love. In fact, Dad, who had worked in the motor panel repair trade, was quite scathing of them and would recall stories of his apprenticeship in the 1950s having to repair and repaint Tractions that arrived brand new from overseas showing obvious signs of rust from the journey.

He also had a bit of a laugh saying that there were more than one or two brand new Tractions that were repainted with pretty standard Holden colours at times when paint sup-

plies were a little scarce.

Eventually Mum won out and in the mid/late 1970s, through a connection with Bryan Grant [the father of one of my sister's friends who, at the time, was a member of the newly formed CCOCA], she upgraded from the Hillman Minx and became the proud owner of an English IICV, TW 682 in its original livery of silver with white artillery wheels.

This became her daily drive with the first task being that it had to have a respray which was done by Dad in the small single car garage with a dirt floor at home in Mitcham.

It was a shocker to drive, heavy, old and not very cool for myself and my sister [I6 and I4 respectively] to be seen in. My sister would hide under the dash if we were passing any of her friends and it was always a worry if Mum took a corner too fast as the rear door would pop open. This resulted in my great grand-

TW 682 was last seen by Stephen in 2012 at the CCOCA Concours.



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mother holding on for dear life in one particular excursion.

Dad would regularly buy damaged cars and do them up at home after which Mum would then drive them for a few months to 'dirty' them up before being sold. At the time I much preferred the likes of the Blue HG Monaro with the double stripes down the centre, although it was not exactly the best family car for use on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, TW 682 endured. I became a convert and realised that while you saw many of the modern cars on the road, the Traction was unique with a wooden dash and quirky gear change, the very cool sunroof and a classic shape.

Secretly I think Dad's opinion of the Traction was also changing as he began chasing up hidden wrecks for 'spare' parts and became involved in the Club as one of the very early/founding members at the time. He was

A couple of the many other cars that found their way home.

also still quite vocal about how much of a 'S*&! box' they were but this was just to save face after so many years of offering his opinion to all and sundry.

It is a time I particularly loved as quests to find derelict Traction become exciting, especially when 'extracting' some that had lain dormant in people's back yards for 20-30 years. I still do not know why so many people were so obliging at allowing fences, sheds, parts of houses and gardens to be temporarily moved to recover derelict vehicles. I like to think it was the nostalgia and love for these vehicles, But I suspect it was more a case of 'thank god that pile of rust has gone'.

I have lost count of how many Traction appeared, and subsequently disappeared, as I think members of the club either wanted to restore cars or were after much needed spares that were very rare to find at the time and he could possibly turn

a \$ from it. I still have the doors and bonnet for a black French Traction we discovered just around the corner in Mitcham in 1981, including the receipt for \$100 paid for the car.

In the late '70s Dad became more enlightened in the different Traction models, and in particular the rarity of the Family 9 which was one of the Traction's Ricky Furlong had owned [and had subsequently been sold and sent across to Western Australia].

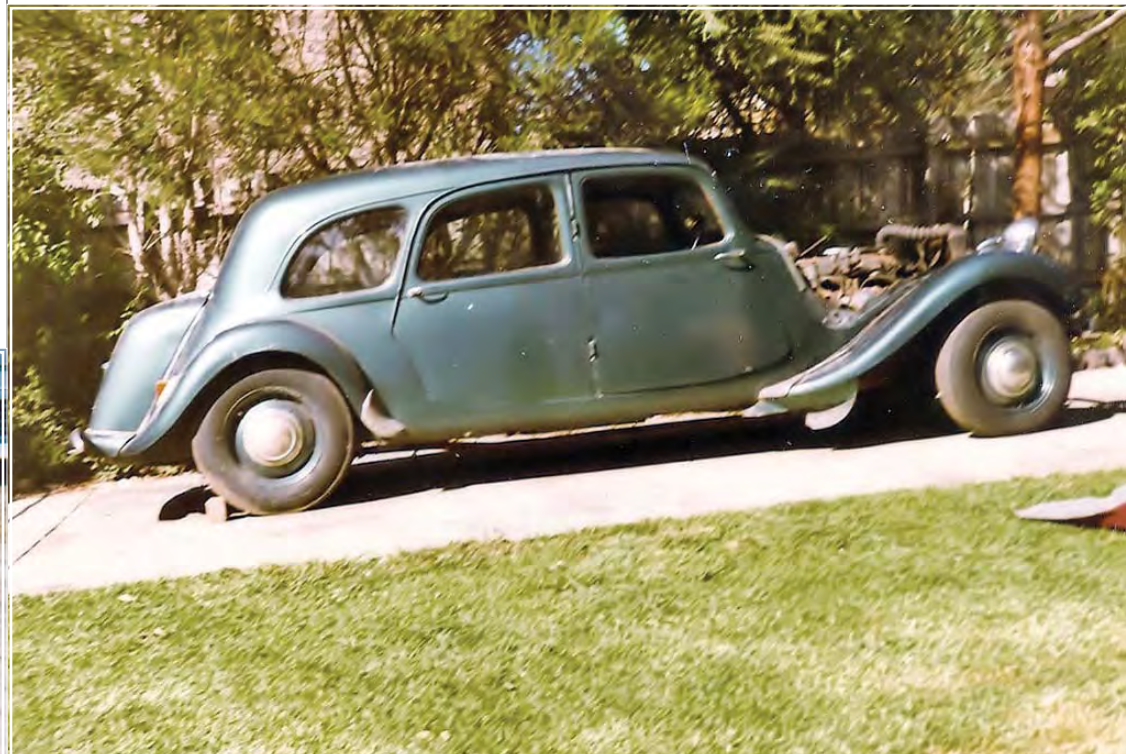
Dad could recall that in about 1970 he had repainted a Peacock Blue Family 9 [distinct with

its extra row of fold out seats] through work and could recall that it had belonged to a relative of one the insurance assessors that still worked in the trade.

In about 1979 and after a bit of sleuth work, Dad had made contact with Kevin Keogh to see what had happened to the Family 9 and if he knew of its whereabouts. Much to Dad's surprise Kevin knew exactly where the car was: in his backyard being used as a cubby house. But he was not ready to part with the vehicle.

After a short period Kevin contacted Dad to see if he

The Family 9 on first arriving at Mitcham with the bonnet, grille and front bumper inside the car.



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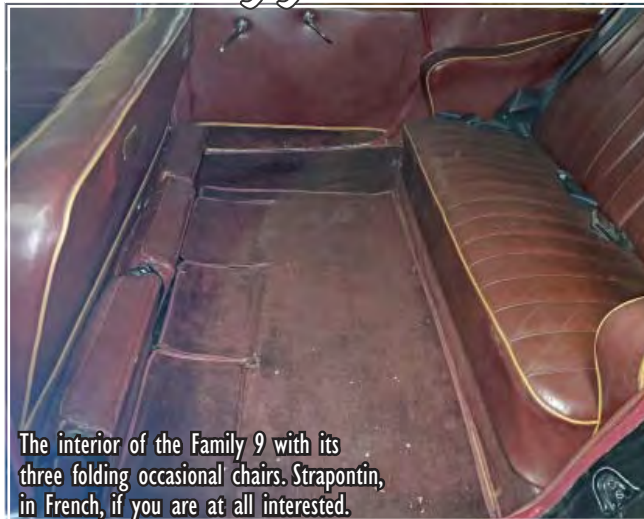
would like to buy it as they were looking at putting an extension on the house and it was in the way.

On visiting the car for the first time it was mostly complete apart from the gearbox as it had suffered a catastrophic failure of the crown wheel and pinion after second-gear had lost some teeth [now that is a surprise!]. The gearbox had been sent to get repaired and had accidentally been thrown out during a Christmas cleanup and a replacement one could not be found.

The paintwork was very tired but the interior was still in reasonable condition. The car had belonged to Kevin's father Brian who was the second owner and after the gearbox had been lost it had just sat in the backyard all that time.

After a bit of negotiation the car was purchased for \$600, a shed and fence removed and it was proudly sitting in the driveway in Mitcham, albeit missing the gearbox.

At the time spare parts, in particular Traction crown wheels and pinions were very hard to come by and the challenge for the next six months was to find one. Eventually a badly rusted Traction parked out in a paddock near Sale was found. After a day trip there the owner wanted \$2,000 for the car and Dad finally settled on \$200 for the



The interior of the Family 9 with its three folding occasional chairs. Strapontin, in French, if you are at all interested.



Showing one of the three seats that fold up out of the floor in the Family 9.



The Family 9 in primer just prior to catching fire.

gearbox and left the rest of the car there. This gearbox was not used at the time and as things happen, in the same week two other gearboxes turned up in slightly better condition and Dad ended up using one of them.

Originally, due to the heavier weight of the Family 9, they had the 'Alpine' lower ratio crown wheel and pinion [8:31] but at the time only a standard ratio [9:31] was available and this went into the car. It only became a bit of a problem when chasing other 11s up hills.

So over the next few years the car was slowly worked on by Dad and myself to get it to a drivable state ~ it was far from a concours restoration that you see done on cars these days

but it was to be a daily user. It was then that the colour was changed from the Peacock blue to black, and Dad sourced some nitrocellulose black to do the job which presented a few challenges when spraying it in the back shed ~ in particular to preventing the paint from self igniting!

Mind you the car nearly caught fire regardless, as when repairing a section of the floor that had rusted through with a welding torch, it back fired and ignited the proof coating. Although a 'fire watch' was on hand with an extinguisher, they had taken a quick break and the water hose had to save the day.

The pressure to accelerate the restoration was on when I

The wedding cortege of Tractions



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wanted to use the car for my wedding which later became a ritual for all my siblings. The car was 'completed' and a roadworthy obtained in the week running up to the wedding but a last minute hitch meant that the original registration could not be used on the car until a sign-off from the previous owner. A minor crisis was averted with a new registration paid for and a 'temporary' plate of BDS 555 issued to get the car to the church

on time.

At the time Dad was quite concerned about who could drive the car and John Couche volunteered his services to drive the 9 with Kenn Gilbert providing his 1943 Big 15 as well. Mind you as this was the first real run of the 9, the wedding cortege of three Tractions was closely followed by Dad in his Ford LTD.

Dad's concern over who was 'allowed' to drive the 9 continued for many years after, and it



was rare for even Mum to get a look in. After a few years I was actually allowed to drive the car to bring our first born child home from hospital with his bassinet placed on the spacious back floor. The nurses at the time thought this would be pretty safe: I don't think they would be taking the same view today!

Over the following years the car became part of the family ritual with babies coming home from hospital in it [bassinet on the spacious rear floor], family and friend's weddings and any special occasion. However there was still fear amongst my sisters in being able to drive the car although they did sneak drives in it when Dad did not know.

I recall not long after being 'allowed' to drive the 9 by myself, using it for a school mate's wedding. As the family were Scottish the whole bridal party were in the 9, including the groom and best man in kilts.

All was going well until the time to travel from the church in Mitcham to the reception in the Western suburbs. In a long traffic jam to get to the intersection of Flemington Rd and Elliot Ave, the 9 decided to die half way across Flemington Rd. after the coil overheated. The bridal party all hitched up skirts/kilts and pushed it across the intersection and it did make a great photo to add to the wedding album.

Clearly Dad, at my own wed-

ding, was well ahead of the game following in the LTD and it became common practice for someone to follow in another car in subsequent weddings ~ in addition to carrying a spare coil in the boot.

Generally the car was reliable except for one Grape Grazing weekend in the mid '90s when the car died on the side of the road in the Yarra Valley. The problem was diagnosed as the pin for the fuel pump lever coming loose and could be easily fixed on the side of the road. As I opened the boot to get the tools out, a Police car pulled up behind us and the fear of a breathalyzer and what my reading may be got the heart pumping. Fortunately for me it was the local Police Sergeant who stopped to give me a hand as his father also owned a Traction and he knew something about them.

At the time I was restoring a 1947 Mark IV Jaguar and created a controversy when I borrowed the 9 and joined the Jaguar/SS Pushrod Car Club on a run with the leaping jaguar of the Mark IV mounted to the grill of the Citroën!

Many a Jaguar expert was stumped, and despite quite clear Citroën badging on the boot and the chevrons on the grill, thought the car was a special 'one off' Jaguar build. Another very respected SS Jaguar authority and I had a laugh saying it was

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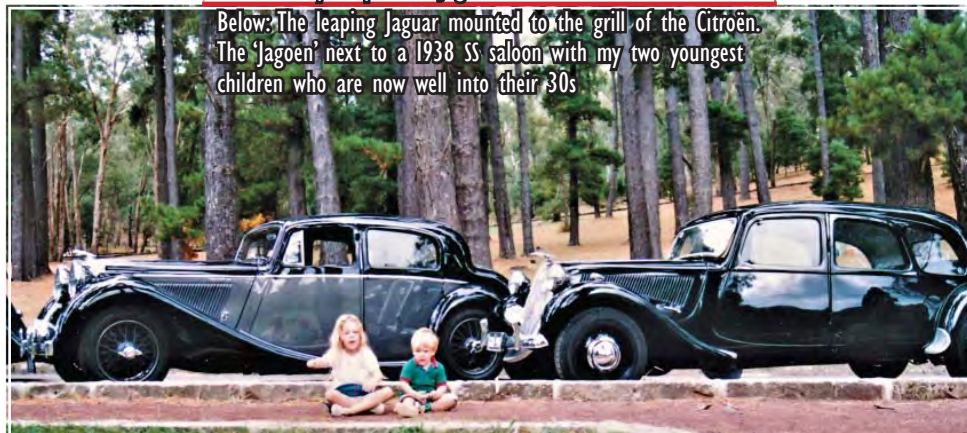
a trial British/French collaboration version of a 'Jagoen'. After they requested to have a closer look I could not help but quote Monty Python: 'Of course not, You are English types-a'. Needless to say it was completely lost on them.

Down the track Dad continue with his not vocal 'love' for Citroëns and was always on the lookout for them.

I recall spotting some Tractions at a property in Ringwood in the mid 1980s [Derrick and Effie Moore] and telling Dad about this and he was there the next day trying to see if they would sell any of them. Apart from the Tractions [4s and a 6] there was a 1929 Buick Master sedan and some Tri-



Above: Can you spot the 'Jagoen'?



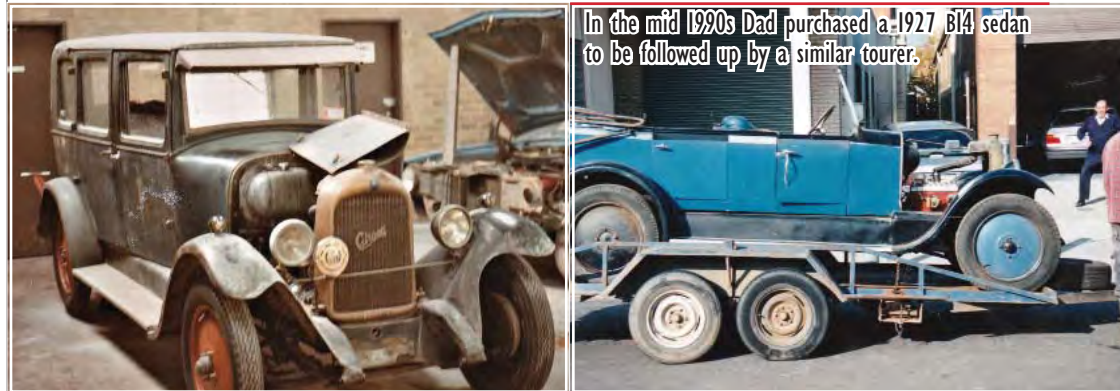
Below: The leaping Jaguar mounted to the grill of the Citroën. The 'Jagoen' next to a 1938 SS saloon with my two youngest children who are now well into their 30s

umph Mayflowers also sitting in the back yard. I learnt many, many years later that there was also apparently another Family 9 in the shed which Bruce and Peter Stringer are doing up now for Chris Moore.

In the mid 1990s Dad purchased a 1927 B14 sedan to be followed up by a similar tourer. The sedan was in its total original condition and had a registration sticker on it still that, I think, was numbered something like 8278. It was literally owned by some

elderly sisters who kept in a garage after it broke down some seven years earlier.

After a little work on the brakes, a bit of a tweek/clean of the fuel system and replacing the magneto we were driv-



In the mid 1990s Dad purchased a 1927 B14 sedan to be followed up by a similar tourer.

ing it up and down along the street. The car sat at Dad's factory for about five years with him regularly saying he needed to get working on it. I worked around the corner from the factory and would regularly call in and have a tinker but it did not get very far.

At the time you could re-register the car if you paid the back-registration fee and Dad tried to do this with the B14. Unfortunately, this

was not able to be done and so a conspiracy theory was hatched. When the Victorian Road Traffic Authority held the first of their heritage plate auctions, registrations numbers in the 8000s went for \$3,500. Far more profitable than re-issuing an old plate for the price of the unpaid reg-

istrations. Dad took great delight in making up a No 1 registration plate and posed in a shot with the car for an article written about Dad's 'love' for Citroëns by Peter Janson.

Mum eventually sold TW 682 as it was getting too difficult for her as a daily drive and I think at



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Right: An extract from the original registration document.

Below: Current engine ID plate which Stephen thinks may be from a French car

the time it went up to Queensland. I caught up with it again at a CCOCA Concours in 2012 when it had come back to Melbourne and looked much the same [apart from a set of driving lights added] with the original two-pack paint work Dad did looking pretty good.

In the late 1990s Dad developed cancer and without saying anything to us he sold off the two B14s which I was always saddened by as I had a love for the sedan. I keep a look out for it to see what has become of it and if its back on the road or for sale but it does not appear to have surfaced yet.

Dad did not survive the cancer and passed not long after but fortunately the Family 9 was not sold. At his funeral service it acted as the mourning car for the family: a not so pleasant family ritual.

After Dad's passing there was

ROADS CORPORATION	
Certificate of original registration details in Victoria	
This is to certify that, on 26 November 2013, Roads Corporation records were checked and show the following original Victorian details for the vehicle with VIN number 9 557012	
Vehicle Condition:	NEW
First Registered in Victoria:	04/11/1955
First Vehicle Registration Number in Victoria:	GKN991
Office where vehicle was registered:	ILLEGIBLE
Year / Make / Type:	1955 CITROËN SEDAN
Model:	N/A
Vin/Chassis Number:	9 557012
Original Engine Number:	AW15677 W
Original Serial Number:	N/A
Axles:	2
GCM, GVM, Tare mass (values in kg):	N/A, N/A, N/A
Original Colour:	BLUE
Engine Type:	PETROL
No. of Cylinders/Rotors:	4
CC'S:	N/A
Fuel Type:	PETROL
Transmission:	N/A
 Signature of authorised officer	
Reference : CRSWAS	WENDY SYMONDS
Dated issued : 26/11/2013	Name of authorised officer

This certificate sets out the results of a search of VicRoads' historical records under regulation 104 of the Road Safety (Vehicles) Regulations 2009

still a whole Traction and parts being stored at my sister's house and this was donated to the club. Mum continued to drive the 9 occasionally and it appeared in John Reynolds book 'Eighty Years of Citroën in the United Kingdom' as it probably was the only English 9 accessible and registered at the time.

In the end looking after the 9 became too much of a task and Mum made the decision to sell it. Fortunately, the family were offered the first chance to buy it. At the time I was doing up the Mark IV Jaguar which had all the

The four Graham children in front of the brand new GKN 991 in November 1955



mechanics and paint work completed but the choice was simple ~ the Jag was sold in no time and the 9 remains in the family.

It was being regularly used by myself and my daughter and we had a very pleasant surprise at the CCOCA concours in 2011 when a guy came up to me and said, 'That's my father's car'. He also added that he recognised the registration number [the car still has the original registration], it used to be blue and had a tow bar on it. Now many know that the car was Peacock blue originally but hardly anyone knew it had been mounted with a tow bar [the mounting holes are still in the body].

His name was Chris Graham and his father, Dr Bernard Graham, was the original owner of the car when it was purchased in 1955. Chris had learnt to drive in the vehicle and his parents and siblings used to go on holidays in it with suitcases on a roof rack and towing a caravan.

His father had purchased the car as with four kids they could all fit in the back with the row of dickie seats folding out of the floor. As the Family 9's had a lower geared crown wheel and pinion it could chug along with all on board, albeit at a rather slow pace with its 4-cylinder engine.

Chris contacted his siblings and they were able to find a pic-

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ture of them all standing in front of the car the day it arrived brand new.

They also recalled that one day on a trip either to, or back from Geelong, there was an almighty bang in the engine bay with smoke pouring from it. The cause was described as being the 'big end' with 'the piston going through the side of the cylinder' in the early 1960s.

Jeremy Graham believes that a 'new' engine had to be sourced. The engine number of the engine in the car now does not match the original registration details but all the other details [carburettor, air filter, water pump etc] look correct for the 1955 model. I suspect a replacement block was sourced and everything transferred over from the original engine.

Jeremy thinks the car was sold off in about 1964-1965 and this ties in with the time Brian Keogh purchased the car making the Gercovich family the third owners in the car's 65 year history.

An interesting link to the original owner was that when Jeremy's twin sisters were bought home from hospital in 1958 their bassinets were also just placed on the floor in the back as I had done with my children in the 1980s.

Jeremy himself owned two Citroëns in the 1980s and thinks the registration of one of them was PR 007 or PR 008 so any news of this vehicle would be much appreciated.

In the last couple of years, the ravages of time have started to take a toll on the 9 with much bare wiring which was replaced with a new loom by David Gries. David also upgraded the regulator to modern electronics in addition to wiring-in indicators.

The body work has rust and bubbles both starting to appear but overall the original paint job by dad does not look too bad [if you don't look too closely].

More recently second gear decided to give up the ghost: not too bad considering it was a sec-



More recently second gear decided to give up the ghost, not too bad considering it was a second hand gearbox when we put it in the car in 1979.

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The gearbox was rebuilt by club-member Rini Zysvelt using a lot of parts from that 'spare' gearbox purchased off the car in Sale way back in 1981. An original brand new low ratio crown wheel and pinion was sourced

and has been put back into the gearbox just to help with the extra weight of the car despite there being nothing wrong with the standard ratio one that was taken out of the car.

While the car was off the road I also took the opportunity to lighten the flywheel, change

I could not believe the amount of rubbish that came out of the fuel tank and that the car was able to run at all quite surprised me.



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to a 123 Ignition, changed the clutch system to a diaphragm type, rebuilt the steering, replaced bearings/ball joints etc, Installed CV-type drive shafts, replaced shockers, cleaned up the fuel tank, installed an electric fuel pump and replaced the fuel lines. I could not believe the amount of rubbish that came out of the fuel tank and that the car was able to run at all quite surprised me.

After finally getting everything back together I took the car for a very tentative first run which only lasted about one kilometre, as I noted a stream of steam coming from under the bonnet. The radiator core had a sprung a leak and after pulling the front bodywork off again it was diag-

nosed as irreparable and a new one was ordered from overseas. This is now in the car and I also took the opportunity to install an electric fan for it as we all know how much Tractions love our warm summer days.

First drive after the radiator work was again a bit nerve racking and I ended up being quite disappointed with its effort of climbing hills, especially with the crown wheel and pinion change. After a ring-around Ted Cross suggested that I just check that the rear handbrake was releasing properly. Well the handbrake was releasing properly but the shoes were actually stuck in the 'on' position. A quick clean and freeing up of these and off again for the latest test drive.



The car certainly handles hills a bit better now with the 'Alpine' ratio crown wheel and pinion in place although I have noticed it has a very short first gear. Top speed on the freeway now is about 85kph but that's not a big problem as the joy of driving the car is about the overall feel and it was never going to be about how fast a Traction can be.

In the future the engine head is next but again I cannot yet bring myself around to getting the body work done as it is something that was done by both Dad and myself and has the look of use and most of all the memory of Family. It will get to a stage when it will need to be done but I think that is going to be a decision for whoever is the next owner.

In a club register from 1986/87 it lists six Family 9s being in the Club with only the one regis-

tered at the time being GKN 991. Its great to see that the fleet of 9s on the road is close to expanding with the possibility of three being grouped together in a future Club meeting.

The help from Ted Cross, Ian Macdermot, Micheal Hose, Bruce Stringer, Peter Stringer, Rob Little, Lance Wearne and David Gries have been invaluable and highlights the benefits of being a member of the Club.

I have started to put together notes of bits I have done along the way and hopefully they are useful for someone else as the biggest joy I have had is actually again working on bits and pieces that I shared with my father 40 years ago.

Stephen Gercovich

Stephen's notes about the work that has been 'done along the way' will appear in the next edition of 'Front Drive' in June 2021.