

Daisy and Ophelia

The Trials Specials of Cyril Butler and Cecil Evans

By the 1930s trials had become an extremely popular form of motor sport, with numerous one-day events being held around the country. With great improvements having been made to cars and to public roads since the end of the First World War the competitive element of trials was now mainly on rough tracks where a combination of surface and gradient provided the challenge, added to the need to make a non-stop run from a standing start at the foot of each section. The West-country, with the Cotswolds to the north of Bristol and the Mendips hills to the south, provided excellent terrain for such events. Among the many local motor enthusiasts who were keen triallers were Bristol businessmen Cyril Butler, of the Butler's oil company* family, and Cecil Evans. Although not regular competitors, but occasional entrants taking part "*purely for the fun of the thing*", they enjoyed a good deal of success with their MG sports cars.

Production sports cars of the time, such as MGs, Singers, Rileys and HRGs were popular trials cars, but some competitors, not wanting to subject their everyday road cars to demanding events, began building their own 'specials' specifically for trials use. They were also looking for better performance. Some, such as Sydney Allard, opted for the increased power of an American V8 in a special chassis, while others took the less expensive route of lightening and modifying an existing production car. In 1936 Evans and Butler decided they too would swap their MGs for a special of their own, and took the latter route, basing their new car on a Wolseley Hornet. Named 'Ophelia', this car was successfully campaigned by the pair for the remainder of the 1930s.

Following World War 2 'Ophelia' was joined by another special when the pair acquired the ex-Dick Caesar AC-engined Kaiserwagen, which they modified to become 'Starkadder', then modified further to be known as 'Daisy', and later still 'Dacy'. Both cars were owned equally by Evans and Butler, the pair taking it in turns to drive each one, and continued to be used into the early 1950s.

'Ophelia'

Wolseley Hornet Special – 'OG7528'/'JHT400'

Evans' and Butler's first trials special was built from a 1931 Wolseley Hornet saloon (registration OG7528) which they acquired in 1936 for £5 (when new it would have cost around £180). After removing the original saloon body, the chassis was "*shortened by 12 inches by cutting a piece out and bolting the ends together with plates inside and out.*" To concentrate weight as far back as possible the two seats were placed well back, so the passenger sat right over the rear axle. A "*very rough plywood body*" was added, with cycle-type wings. With relined brakes, and the six-cylinder 1271cc Wolseley engine decoked, the new special was ready for trialling. With the pair finding that their new car had much better grip than the average sports car it was dubbed 'Ophelia'*** – "*Oh feel ya wheels gripping*".

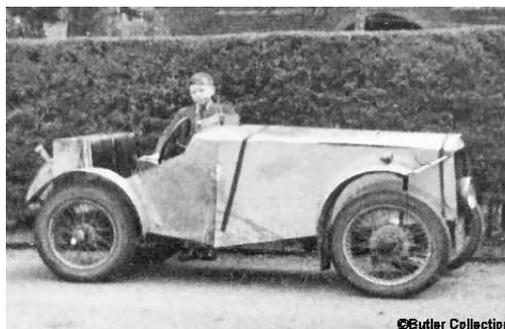
The car was run in this form throughout 1937, but then on the Bristol MC&LCC's Roy Fedden Trophy trial on 13th November, with Cyril Butler driving, a big-end failed, destroying the engine. This prompted a major reconstruction, and a "*very good and well-tuned*" 1282cc six-cylinder MG Magna engine was bought from fellow trialler Philip Flower for 30 shillings (£1.50). The original three-speed Hornet gearbox was retained, but the rear axle assembly was swapped for an MG Magnette differential unit, with MG P-type half-shafts. A better body was also created. Weight was claimed to be less than ten cwt. (half a ton) and, with the new engine, performance greatly improved, and during 1938 and 1939 Butler and Evans claimed a string of awards.

* William Butler & Co. (Bristol) Ltd.

** At some events 1938-39 the car appears to have been entered as the 'EB Special'.

For the duration of the Second World War 'Ophelia' was stored, but neglected, and after an unsuccessful outing on the loose surface Naish hillclimb in August 1945 the engine was stripped and rebuilt, while the Hornet wheels and hubs were now replaced with Rudge's. First time out, in February 1946, Butler in Ophelia, now registered 'JHT400', won the Roy Fedden trial, and Evans followed up in March with the cup for best under 1500cc car on the SUNBAC's Colmore Trophy event. More successes followed, notably in April 1947 when the Bristol club's team – Butler in 'Ophelia', Evans in 'Daisy' and Gilbert Best in a Midget, won the North West London MC's inter-club trial in Somerset's Blackdown and Quantock hills.

The summer of 1947 saw another revamp for Ophelia, with a revised rear end now using short ¼ elliptic springs, while the overall appearance was improved with a cowling in front of the radiator. In this form Butler picked up a 2nd class award on the West Hants & Dorset Knott Cup trial that October. The last known appearance for 'Ophelia' was an entry for Bristol MG exponent Morgan Marshall on the Roy Fedden Trophy trial in December 1948.



'Daisy'

GN-AC Special – 'YC 9642'

Originally named the Caesar Special, and later, through subsequent ownerships and modifications, Kaiserwagen, Starkadder, Daisy and Dacy.

'YC 9642' began life as a special when, sometime prior to 1935, Dick Caesar built a two-seater road-going sports car with a two-litre AC Six engine of 1925/26 vintage in a 1923 GN chassis, known as the Caesar Special. He later rebuilt it as a single-seat racing car, still known as the Caesar Special, and used it during 1936; it was then acquired by the Fry cousins, renamed 'Kaiserwagen', and used by them in 1937-38. In 1939 it was taken over by Keith Steadman, who built a two-seater body and used it for trials, entering it as a GN. During the winter of 1945-46 it was rebuilt once more by Steadman and David Fry, still with sports body, and it's last appearances as 'Kaiserwagen' were at Prescott and Shelsley Walsh hillclimbs in 1946 in the hands of Jeremy and David Fry (for more detail of 'YC 9642's history up to this point see *Dick Caesar and his Specials*).

The car was then acquired by the Cyril Butler and Cecil Evans trials partnership. While the performance was terrific it was most difficult to handle and quite unsuitable for trials so, after an unsuccessful outing on 5th October in the 1946 Experts Trial at Pirbright, Surrey, this pair rebuilt it once more. They scrapped the Morgan front axle (incorporated in the Fry / Steadman rebuild) and extended the chassis forward to form a pair of dumbirons bolted over the existing chassis. Starter, front axle, springs and hydraulic brakes from a 1934 Wolseley Hornet were fitted, with one hydraulic brake on the solid back axle, keeping the existing Frazer-Nash brake as a handbrake only. A larger radiator was made up and the water pump scrapped, and various other steering and transmission parts were made up, a hefty duplex sprocket being turned from solid and keyed and grub-screwed to the rear axle. Ignition was by magneto, and with no dynamo the battery was relied on for starting and lighting. The weight when acquired was 10 cwt., and after modification 12½ cwt.; the three carburettor AC engine was reputed to give 80 bhp at 4,000 rpm. Finished in late November 1946 on the night before the Taunton MC Allen Trophy Trial, and now renamed 'Starkadder', Cecil Evans won the event.

The car had however caused a great deal of controversy. The final drive was by chain and sprocket to the solid axle - an axle without any form of differential in operation. The majority of leading trials organizing clubs, including Taunton, had banned the use of solid or locked axles. Although it was customary to make an exception in the case of Frazer-Nash cars the general feeling was that 'Starkadder' was not a 'Nash, but was only using the method of drive employed

on one, and so should not be allowed. Although a loophole in the Allen Trial regulations allowed that result to stand, future events' regulations were tightened up to exclude such cars, so Butler and Evans rebuilt the car yet again.

The final drive by chain and sprocket in conjunction with a solid axle was replaced by a propeller shaft to a 1932 Wolseley Hornet back axle with a freely operating differential, although the quarter-elliptic Frazer-Nash rear suspension was retained. A Morris Minor gearbox was used, with a short shaft and a universal joint between it and the clutch. The total weight was now less than 11-cwt.

Renamed once more, 'YC 9642', still with the 1991cc AC Six engine, would now be known as 'Daisy' (*"days she goes and days she don't"*). In this newly revised form Cecil Evans made the best individual performance on the NW London MC's 'Team trial' in April 1947, as part of the Bristol MC&LCC's winning team. (Also competing, as one of the Harrow CC team, was 17-year-old Stirling Moss in a Frazer Nash-BMW 328; only his second motorsport event.)



Evans and Butler continued to use 'Daisy' on trials, usually in the West Country, through 1948, gaining many awards. From 1949, in Cecil Evans' hands, and now known as 'Dacy', it continued to collect 1st class awards, notably on the Kimber and Fedden trials, with its last known appearance being on the Gloucester Trial in November 1951.

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Notes.

Cecil Evans can be seen with 'Dacy' on film of the Bristol MC&LCC's 19 November 1949 ½-day Sporting Trial at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EZHeqSYTok (at approximately 1 minute and 3 minutes, noumber17).

Among the Bristol MC&LCC trophies is "The Dacy Cup", which was presented to the club by Cecil Evans, and initially awarded to the winner of the club's Summer Rally.

Sources.

Technical information:

"Two Successful Trials Specials", TCG Butler and CC Evans, *Motor Sport*, April 1947.

"More Wheelspin" by CAN May, 1946, GT Foulis & Co. Ltd.

Additional information: *Autocar*, *Autosport*, *Light Car*, *Motor Sport*, *Bristol MC&LCC Journal*, *Gloucestershire Echo*, *Western Daily Press*, *Taunton Courier*, *Wells Journal*, *Tewkesbury Register*, *Birmingham Mail*.

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