

Ivor Bueb

Focus on 500s

In the late 1950s Cheltenham based Ivor Bueb was one of Britain's top sports car racers, best remembered for his two Le Mans victories with Jaguar in 1955 and 1957; his motor racing career did, of course, begin in 500cc Formula 3 racing cars.



Ivor starts his first race, 12th April 1952 at Castle Combe

Ivor Leon Bueb was born on 6th June 1923 in East Ham, London. His father, Leon Gervase Bueb, was born in Alsace-Lorraine of French parents, and came to England in 1910. In pre-World War 1 days Alsace-Lorraine had been part of the German Empire, and therefore, having German nationality, Leon was interned for the duration of the war. In 1919 he set up as a provision merchant in Streatham in

South West London, and the same year he married Grace Marie Alice Vagnolini, who had English, Italian and Welsh grandparents. Although Leon and Grace divorced in 1926, Ivor was bought up in Dulwich in South London and while a teenager went to all the meetings at the nearby Crystal Palace track. Watching pre-war stars such as Bira, Freddie Dixon and Raymond Mays in action fired Ivor's enthusiasm for motor racing and stirred visions of becoming a racing driver.

Post-war, although he returned to electronic engineering after leaving the RAF, concluding that that wasn't going to help him afford to go motor racing, Ivor invested what money he had in a business buying and selling ex-War Department vehicles in Newport, Monmouthshire (his mother Grace, having remarried, now also lived in South Wales.) Around this time Ivor was also learning to fly, gaining his Aviator's Certificate in 1949 at Cardiff Aero Club in a DH82A Tiger Moth. By the early 1950s however, with his wife and young son, he had moved back across the Severn Estuary to Cheltenham, where he went into partnership with Geoffrey Turk in his motor business, Turk's Motors in North Place, near the city centre. It was this move that led to Ivor, now 28, beginning his motorsport career.

In Cheltenham he found himself among a group of motor traders who were also keen motor sport enthusiasts, including 500 racer Jimmy Ebdon, whose Ebdon's Autos Rootes dealership was nearby, as was Jack Welton's Bellevue Motors. They also belonged to the long established and very active Cheltenham Motor Club which, early in 1952, obtained use of the former RAF training airfield at Staverton, between Cheltenham and Gloucester, for some speed trials. For the first meeting there, on 29th March, a club members' only event over a 1000 yard course, Jack Welton acquired a JAP-engined Cooper Mk.IV 500 for himself and Ivor to share. In a blinding snowstorm, Ivor duly recorded fastest time of the day to win his first ever event (albeit there were only 17 starters), stopping the clocks in 31.8 seconds. Of the other 500s, Welton was 1.8 sec slower, with Jimmy Ebdon's Iota a further 0.4 sec in arrears.

The next step was to try circuit racing, and Welton and Bueb entered the Cooper for the 500cc Formula 3 race at Castle Combe on 12th April. Getting a tremendous start in the second heat, Ivor led the field round the first corner, Quarry, but fifty yards further on the throttle cable slipped, and that was the end of Ivor's first race.

Undaunted, and keen to buy a car of his own, with the assistance of Jimmy Ebdon Ivor then purchased an early Cooper 500 (reputed to be ex-Peter Collins) which, by his own account, "had been severely pranged several times". His first outing in this was at the Cheltenham club's invitation sprint at Staverton on 25th May. On this occasion he was 5 seconds slower than

Ebdon's Iota, and a further 1.2 off class winner Boshier-Jones' Kieft. Driving an 1172cc Dellow in the sports car classes, Ivor was only 5.2 sec slower than in the Cooper.

After a further Cooper outing at Silverstone, having realised his mistake Ivor then acquired a much better machine in the form of Fred Tuck's Iota-Jap. He now began to achieve some success, with a heat win at Thruxton at the beginning of August, having led from the start in heavy rain. Then at the Silverstone Commander Yorke Trophy meeting later in the month he won the Junior race ahead of Ken Tyrrell. Campaigning the Iota though the remainder of the year, including hillclimbs at Prescott and Shelsley Walsh, and Brighton and Westwood Park speed trials, as well as further races at Silverstone and Brands Hatch, produced little more in the way of results. Ivor had, though, liked the way the Iota handled and, although the JAP engine had proved unreliable, had gained useful experience of running and driving the car.

Looking for something better for 1953 he came to an arrangement with Daphne Arnott and George Thornton to have the latest works Arnott (with Turks Motors appointed the sole Midlands agents) but good results were few and far between, just a handful of 4th places at Brands Hatch and Castle Combe, and various mechanical failures.

Changing tack, midway through the season he decided to go his own way, buying an older Arnott and modifying it to incorporate his own ideas. The chassis was lengthened by eight inches, the Norton engine moved back, and fuel tanks moved from the side and put between driver and engine. Coil spring dampers replaced the torsion bars, and weight was saved where possible - Ivor's burly build, six-foot plus and around 15 stone, wasn't ideal for 500's racing. The resulting green and black car was then entered as the Bueb-Arnott (and on occasion as the Bueb-R-Not).

Until now Ivor had worked on his cars himself, although with a lot of voluntary help from John Denley (who ran City Motors in Gloucester), but now he employed Cyril 'Pip' Preece as his full-time mechanic. The following year Ivor and Denley would form a racing partnership, the pair entering under the Ecurie Demi-Litre banner.

With the Bueb-Arnott Ivor began to pick up some better results in the latter part of '53, with a 2nd place at Silverstone in June, and a heat win and 5th in the final at Crystal Palace in July. Then at the Silverstone Commander Yorke Trophy meeting in August he won the production car race and was 2nd to Ken Smith's Smith-Buckler in the Silverstone 100.

At the end of September Ivor had his first continental excursion, travelling to southern France for the meeting at the Circuit d'Agen, not far from Toulouse. Racing hard for the lead with André Loens' Kieft in his heat, on the last lap he ran short of fuel exiting the last corner, and coasted over the line second. Although initially running well in the final Ivor first suffered magneto trouble, then had a rear hub shaft break and was forced to retire.

While Ivor had been more competitive in the second half of the year, his aim was to improve still further. Back in July he had initially been refused an entry with his Arnott in the 500 race at Silverstone's British GP meeting. Austen Nurse offered Ivor his entry, but as this was for a Cooper the organisers wouldn't allow a substitute marque. Then 'Pop' Lewis-Evans came to the rescue, generously offering Ivor the use of his Cooper for the race. Although eventually finishing well down in 14th place, this experience convinced Ivor that to progress further he needed to be in a Cooper, and at the Earls Court Motor Show in November he duly ordered one of the latest Mk.VIIs from John Cooper.

Bueb and Preece had a small racing workshop in Suffolk Place, in Cheltenham, and when the new chassis arrived in February, drilling and cutting where possible, they lightened the car by about 20 lb., and installed their own Norton engine and gearbox. With the new Cooper Ivor became a regular front runner in 1954, but suffered early season unreliability.

Although Ivor achieved several heat wins, outright race wins eluded him until he travelled to Sweden for the meeting at Skarpnäck airfield near Stockholm on 5th September. Victory in the Skarpnäckslöppet began a run of wins on successive September weekends at Silverstone and Crystal Palace (the Redex Trophy). Two more victories followed in October (Brands Hatch and

Cadwell Park), and he finished off the year on a high, winning the Christmas Trophy at the Boxing Day Brands Hatch meeting.

It still wasn't all circuit racing though, as Ivor continued to take in occasional hillclimbs at nearby Prescott, and also supported his Cheltenham club's speed trials. At the 1954 Staverton sprint he provided the Ecurie Demi-Litre Challenge Cup for the 500s class winner but, having won that class himself, instead presented the cup to second place man Jack Moor. In addition to running his Cooper 500, Ivor also won one sportscar class in a 1087cc Cooper-Riley, ran a supercharged 1200cc sports Austin in another, and also shared Jack Welton's 1098cc supercharged Mk.V Cooper.

In addition to mechanic Pip Preece, Ivor's business partner Geoff Turk and racing partner John Denley, several others from the Cheltenham group (who used to meet regularly in the Garricks Head, not far from Turk's garage), were regular helpers, including Arthur Teal, Ronnie England, and Colin Parkes. Teenage gofer Tony Edwards recalled tales of Ivor driving across Europe from one meeting to the next with Arthur Teal and Geoff Turk rebuilding engines or gearboxes on the back seat of the tow car. Later Ecurie Demi-Litre would use a converted ex-BOAC observation coach.

Although he'd begun racing in 500s as that was all he could afford, Ivor was still keen to try other categories, and having had a good 1954 season would get the opportunity the following year. Accepting an offer from John Cooper, he signed up as a works driver for 1955, with Cooper not only supplying one of their latest Mk.IX 500s, into which he would fit his own 500cc Norton engine, but also a central seat 'Bobtail' sports car, for which Ivor would also provide his own, 1100cc Climax, engine. (Ivor's 1954 Cooper MkVIII would be taken over by his Ecurie Demi-Litre partner John Denley.)

With the latest machinery allied to Pip Preece's impeccable car and engine preparation, Ivor's prospects were already looking very good for 1955, but additionally a test for Jaguar in December offered the chance of a move into top level sportscar racing too.

The 1955 season got off to a good start with wins in major 500 races at Kirkistown, Goodwood, Brands Hatch and Crystal Palace, and throughout the year Ivor raced neck and neck with Cooper team-mate Jim Russell for the National 500 Championship. Going into the final round at Brands Hatch in October Bueb led Russell by a single point. But there the title was decided in Russell's favour, although Ivor, in hot pursuit, broke Brands' 60 second barrier for the first time, bettering John Surtees' Manx Norton motorcycle lap record. Eventually finishing third in the final, Ivor lost out in the championship to Russell by two points.



Ivor at Castle Combe in October 1955

In addition to his 500s successes Ivor was also regularly winning sportscar races in the Bobtail Cooper, and was called up at the last minute by Jaguar to partner Mike Hawthorn at Le Mans on 11th June. With little prior experience of the big D-type it was a huge step for Ivor, and having to take over for his first stint minutes after witnessing the terrible disaster unfold in front of him

was a massive strain. However, the pair's eventual victory immediately propelled Ivor to international prominence, and a regular place in the Jaguar team. Success also brought promotional opportunities, such as advertising the blackcurrant energy drink 'Ribena', produced at Coleford in the Forest of Dean, just 30 miles from his Cheltenham home.

Continuing with Jaguar the following year, he gave up the partnership in Turks Motors to become a full-time racing driver, although he continued to live in the outskirts of Cheltenham at

Charlton Kings, and later Prestbury. Although the Jaguar factory withdrew from competition at the end of 1956, racing (and occasionally rallying for the Rootes Group Sunbeam Rapier team) wherever he could, Ivor won Le Mans again in 1957 with Ecurie Ecosse, and also had occasional Grand Prix outings in works Connaughts and privately entered Maseratis. He also continued to run his own Ecurie Demi-Litre Lotus and Coopers through to the end of 1958.

Continuing with his Mk.IX 500 - now under the Ecurie Demi-Litre banner - Ivor was still a front runner in 1956 - winning at Goodwood and Crystal Palace - although now taking in fewer races. He continued with the same car for a handful of races in '57, but with little in the way of good results. Then, at the Oulton Park Gold Cup 500 race on 5th October, he was involved in a first lap four-car pile up at Cascades, apparently after hitting oil. His Cooper hit a tree broadside near its cockpit and overturned, Ivor being helped from under the car by one of the other drivers. He was taken to hospital in Chester, and although initially it seemed he'd been badly hurt, luckily had only chipped a vertebra and was released the following day, and soon recovered. 1957 was Ivor's last year in 500s and his Mk.IX subsequently passed to former mentor Jack Welton who with wife Pauline (née Brock) gained numerous hillclimb successes – many literally in their own backyard, as the Weltons lived at Pardon Farm, halfway up Prescott hillclimb.

For 1959 Ivor signed with the Moss family's British Racing Partnership team to race their Formula 2 Cooper-Borgward, with Brian Lister for sportscars in the works Lister-Jaguar, and with Tommy Sopwith for saloon car races in the Equipe Endeavour 3.4 Mk1 Jaguar. With no cars of his own to be looked after, 'Pip' Preece now moved to Jim Russell's team in Norfolk.

Although Ivor had a busy programme for '59, he'd already been making plans to move from Cheltenham to join his good friend Russell at Snetterton for 1960. His intention was to join the Racing Drivers School Jim had established a couple of years earlier as a director and instructor, and to share Jim's Cooper Monaco in some long-distance sports car races.

This was not to be, as in France on 26th July Ivor suffered a fatal crash in the Formula 2 Trophée d'Auvergne race on the Charade circuit, being thrown from his Cooper. He suffered grave internal injuries, and died six days later in Clermont Ferrand hospital. Ivor's funeral was at Manor Park Cemetery, Newham, London on 10th August, where his family and many Cheltenham friends were joined for the service by numerous motor sport luminaries. Although his father Leon was unable to be present, he arranged and attended a high mass at Clermont at the same time.

Despite beginning his racing career at the relatively late age of 28, Ivor had quickly risen to the top of his chosen sport, and was widely acknowledged as one of the country's best sportscar drivers. He was also very highly regarded by his friends - following his death Jimmy Ebdon paid tribute: *"Despite his burly figure, he was indeed a quiet and very sensitive person. He was very modest in success and always most outspoken about his failures"*, while Mike Macdowell, whom he mentored in the late '50s, recalled him as *"a generous warm-hearted and genuine man"*.

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