



THE STORY OF UMC 272

by Peter Lee

DURING the winter of 1948/49, production of the David Brown 2.6 litre Lagonda was proceeding in the Hanworth factory, near Feltham, at a rate of about five cars each month. Concurrently, the Aston Martin 2 litre Sports Coupe was beginning to see the light of day although only fifteen of these 4 cylinder cars, now known as the DB1, were eventually to be made.

As a result of the successful racing debut of the 2 litre car at Spa in 1948, David Brown agreed to the construction of a team of three new Aston saloons for the 1949 Le Mans and Spa races, with bodies designed by Frank Feeley on shortened and revised Aston 2 litre chassis frames. The first two team cars LMA/49/1 and 2 (UMC 64 and 65) were fitted with the 2 litre four cylinder push rod engines designed by Claude Hill during the war. The third team car, LML/49/3 (UMC 66) received a 2.6 litre six cylinder engine from the Lagonda stable, a fine twin overhead cam unit credited chiefly to William Watson and W.O. Bentley.

A fourth car, LML/49/4 (UMC 272) was built at the same time for David Brown himself who liked to have a replica of the latest racing car. This car also was fitted with a Lagonda 2.6 litre engine, LB6/49/27R, but whereas the team cars were finished in Almond Green paintwork with green canvas upholstery and flock sprayed on internal surfaces, David

Brown's comforts led to a favoured maroon bodywork and more conventional leather upholstery and cloth internal coverings in UMC 272.

The four chassis frames, derived from the 2 litre, were reduced in wheelbase by 9 ins. to 8 ft. 3 ins. constructed of rectangular section steel tubes, liberally drilled for lightness, and generously cross braced. However, the production DBII chassis appear to have additional cruciform bracing to increase stiffness. These 1949 cars ran on 5.50 x 18 ins. tyres and this size, according to John Wyer's Technical Diary (see A.M. Vol. 7 no. 10 of April 1961), also appeared on the later team cars at Le Mans in 1950.

All four UMC cars appear to have been first registered together on 26 April 1949, the team car's history being documented elsewhere. David Brown's car served as personal transport, advertising vehicle and general development model for the subsequent DBII introduced in 1950.

UMC 272 had a photographic debut at Great Fosters near Egham in May 1949, this was a popular venue for Lagonda's publicity pre-war, being close to Staines. Recent books by Michael Bowler and Chris. Harvey have included photographs of the car in its original form, probably taken at that time. In August 1949, David Brown drove her to Silverstone for the B.R.D.C. meeting and although ineligible for the sports car race, UMC 272 was demonstrated around the circuit by Lance

Macklin. The car appeared in advertising, jointly with a Lagonda drophead coupe, for the motoring press before the 1949 Motor Show and then spent some time at the Service Department having a typical list of prototype maladies looked at; modifications to water pump, induction system, various water leaks and draughts etc. by Jack Sopp. The old 18 ins. wheels were substituted by 16 ins. with 6.00 tyres.

Laurence Pomeroy of "The Motor" borrowed UMC 272 shortly afterwards and undertook an encouraging Continental tour which he described in full detail in "The Motor" of 1 February 1950, and which is reproduced in Volume 3 of Adrian Feather's books. Impressive figures were obtained for the trip bearing in mind contemporary performance cars of 1949, and poor petrol available.

Back in the Service Department, Jack Sopp replaced the steering column gear change by fitting a centre change gear box top. Another engine LB6/49/29 was installed and numerous other minor items modified or sorted. This was March 1950 and a respray in dark green was carried out before Lance Macklin bought the car. A successful race on 26 March at Monza in the Coppa Inter Europa 2 hour event brought 2nd in class and 4th overall at 85.1 mph, the outright winner being Sanesi in an Alfa Romeo at 91.5 mph. Shortly before this race, UMC 272 had been fitted at Weber's Bologna factory with three 35

DCO carburetors, free of charge! Probably this was the first fitting of such carburetors on a British car.

Thence to Sicily for the Targa Florio on 2 April. On a wet and slippery road surface, an over-enthusiastic Lance Macklin believed after two hours that he had caught up the leading works Ferrari of Alberto Ascari who had started one minute earlier than Macklin. Mis-reading the road, UMC 272 plunged into a cutting in a mountain section and Macklin's race was over. On return to the factory at Hanworth Park, repairs were carried out, John Wyer removed and experimented with the Webers, and twin S.U. carburetors were fitted. To cover the cost of the repairs. UMC 272 was sold and for the next fifteen years passed through as many different owners, giving to some of them enjoyable long distance commuting around the country.

Some evidence of competition in club events has been found, an entry for the 1952 St. John Horsfall meeting at Silverstone, and a later event at Goodwood the same year. 1954 saw the car in the hands of John Dalton who recorded a 1st at the Notts S.C.C. meeting at Ossington; the same driver in 1955 obtained a 1st Class award in the Shenstone and Buxton rally.

By 1960, the bodywork of the car was giving successive owners increasing concern and no doubt bad ventilation had resulted in many attempts to improve matters with various openings cut out to add to the general fatigue of metal. During the winter of 1964/65, UMC 272 passed into the hands of Bill Monk who, realising that drastic measures were called for, completely stripped the car for a full rebuild. At this time Bill also became the owner of one of the delightful DB3S Coupes and, rather than rebuild the two cars simultaneously, offered UMC 272 for sale. This, in July 1965, is where one of my schoolboy dreams came true and I became the proud owner of this prototype DBII, or rather three lorry loads of bits and pieces!

The next five years involved basically re-assembly of the various items, interrupted by marriage, house purchase and the



In the restoration, new bonnet panels were fabricated by Aubrey Fineburgh of Classic Autos.

necessity of earning a living. Being a prototype car, many idiosyncrasies came to light during this period, such as the high ride level, which coupled with the low roof line, certainly for my height led to almost negative head room! The seats were non-adjustable in the seat pans, set within the chassis cross members, and David Brown's height was doubtless the yardstick for this one-off vehicle.

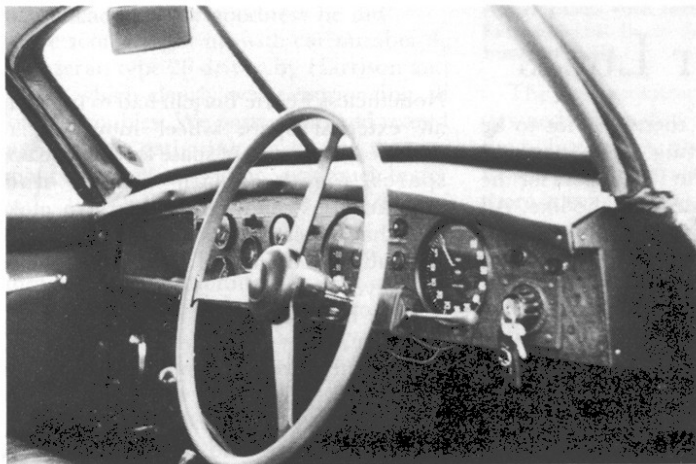
Sadly, I just missed completing the re-assembly of the car in time for the 1970 Jubilee Meeting of the marque at Crystal Palace but enjoyed immensely the manners of a DBII on the road. During this period of building up the car, the engine and gear box were left untouched as they were reckoned as serviceable while the rear axle was a factory reconditioned unit, albeit for a standard DBII with fitting for the rear shock absorbers longitudinal whereas UMC 272 has rear shock absorber mounting points transverse above the rear axle. I will leave you to ponder on the conflicting arcs involved!

I was fortunate in locating a new wiring loom at the time and used this up to two terminal blocks on the bulkhead. From here on I relied on a wiring diagram for a DBI, as UMC 272 was built with a wooden

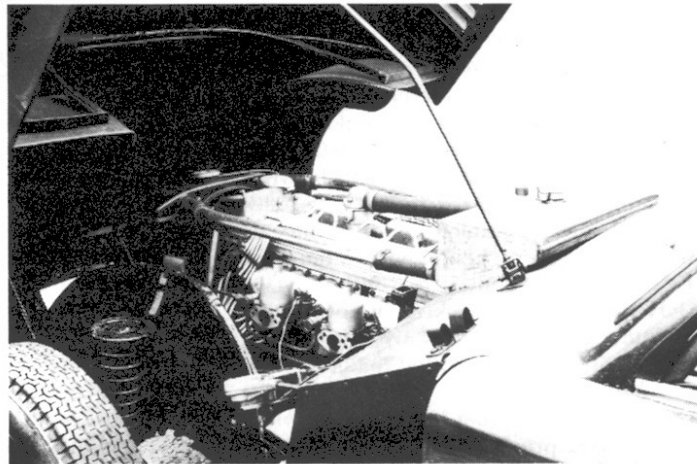
dashboard seemingly from a production DBI. All the needles and pins within the front suspension were replaced, the various seals and bushes, king pins and wheel bearings, and at the end of the exercise all the oil stayed put within the front suspension cross member, and some twenty years on it is still there.

New steel brake tubes and flexible pressure hoses were fitted together with new rear slave cylinders. The front brake cylinders on UMC 272 have a single piston passing through the back plate operating wedges and rollers to spread the shoes, a remarkably effective device, still having a twin leading shoe capacity due to transfer bars across the back plate. Being newly-wed, my exchequer stretched only to minor tidying up on the body at this stage although, in its finish of Roman Purple, many a head turned in the summer of 1970. Only a relatively few miles were recorded before I was forced to lay up the car for several years as I recuperated from a somewhat comprehensive writing off of a Rover 2000. Also, I seem to remember that helping to bring three sons into the world slowed matters Aston to a virtual standstill.

The spur which was needed came from Roger Stowers following the factory re-



The interior of UMC 272 with dashboard based on a DBI.



The under-bonnet area looks much more familiar to a DB2 owner.

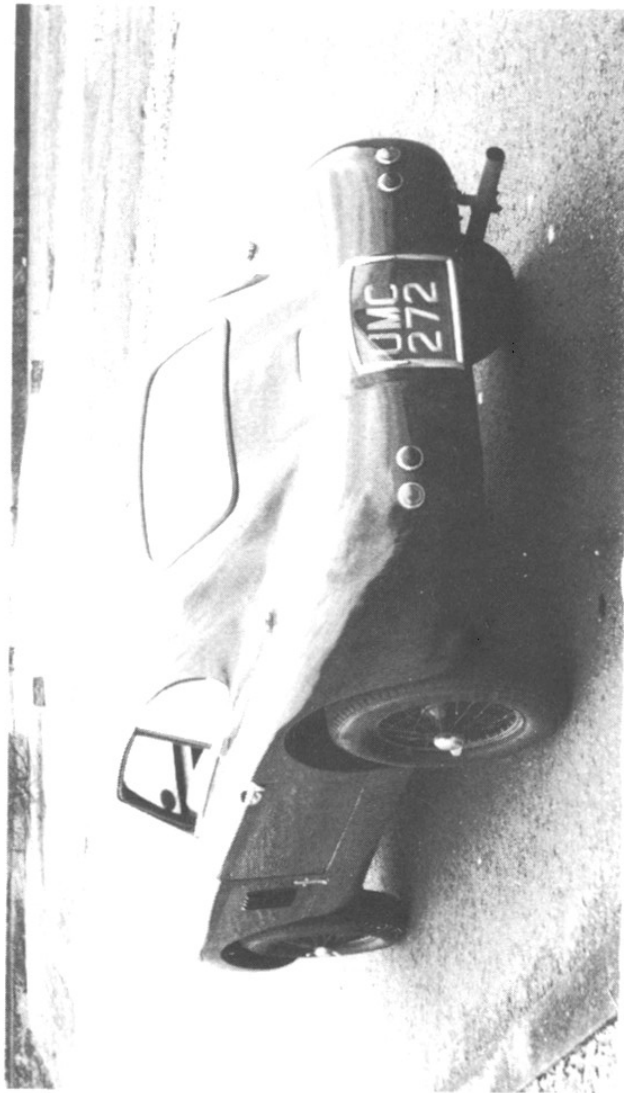
organisation of 1975/76 for he sent me a picture which he had found of UMC 272 taken in May 1949.

So, after a few months a decision was taken to pull UMC 272 apart again and re-start the exercise. I must admit now that doing this a second time on the same car on a relatively tight budget is not the best of exercises. A bare chassis frame was shot blasted and peened for good measure and initial re-assembly took place as much of the earlier work on suspension and brakes gave a good boost.

The rear axle was left untouched and as the gearbox had been a joy to use in 1970, it was felt best to leave well alone.

This time around, the engine was stripped and the crank showed minimal ovality with just a 0.010 in. grind. New main shells were fitted and the big ends white metalled, and new rings, valve springs and timing chains were obtained. This was ten years ago and I think the going rate for an LB6 engine was then about £250—(what are they today, I wonder?) Hindsight tells me to shotpeen the rods, crack test and balance the crank etc. to preserve an engine such as this at today's values. Maybe some engineers among the membership would educate us all by writing a suitable detailed treatise on the subject.

Regrettably, the whole bonnet section was beyond reasonable repair and a new aluminium fabrication was made by Aubrey Fineburgh of Classic Autos here in Kings Langley, a very fine piece of work indeed. He also de-dented much of the body, fitted new door skins and a new bulkhead. My expertise with a paint spray and sewing machine dictated, as did the time element, that these items were completed elsewhere, just in time for UMC 272 to appear at the Motor 100 at Silverstone in May 1985. The first time I had driven her for fifteen years and here I



This is how Frank Feeley's original design looked, UMC 272 being the fourth built, directly after the team cars.

was on the Friday evening driving along the club straight past the AMOC stand with a Nimrod passing me one side and a 'D' type on the other. No rear view mirrors as I suddenly realised, and a sticking brake master cylinder!

With my priorities elsewhere, UMC 272 stayed within its garage for a further three years, not to be recommended as cars need to be used. A seized clutch required the gear box to be removed; fortunately my eldest son David is now well versed in Aston ways and a weekend saw everything mobile once more.

Earlier this year, I began to realise that family and business commitments would keep this rather special car hidden away, and for some years to come its lack of use would result in a steady deterioration. So, with some reluctance, I decided that after twenty four years we must part company.

An auction by Christie's in Monaco provided a painless and in fact a very

enjoyable way of saying 'au revoir' to a car that to me had become almost a way of life. I had in fact owned UMC 272 for twenty four of her forty years and at least her future is assured in the hands of her new owners, Hexagon of Highgate. During the weeks prior to leaving, UMC 272 gave me a great deal of pleasure, driving first on the Ford Motor Company circuit at Boreham and then at the army training circuit at Chobham. Both events were arranged by Christie's and have left me with the most pleasant of memories of a prototype Aston Martin, designed as a development vehicle over forty years ago but still very capable of providing a pride of ownership and of driving on a circuit as well as only the renowned DBII does.

I have been fortunate indeed, and wish UMC 272 well in whatever the future has in store for her. She has her own rather special place in the post-war history of Aston Martin.