

Car Culture

with Tony Davis

ROYAL ANNIVERSARY

The Royal Automobile Club, without which the British would very likely have to drive their Aston-Martins and McLaren F1s at 4 mph preceded by a man with a red flag, is celebrating its centenary.

The early history of the club is complex; its founding members first got together to fight the infamous "Red Flag" Act and, in 1896, held a reliability run from London to Brighton to celebrate their success (33 cars left in shocking weather and 22 arrived).

The group inaugurated the club in 1897 and in 1899 organised what was perhaps the first motor show. In 1900 the big event was the 1,000 Miles Trial, an event often credited with putting motoring on the British map (and the forerunner of today's World Championship RAC Rally).

In 1909 the club worked with the government to establish "RAC Horsepower" as the basis of car taxation. Some makers still quote RAC horsepower, though its formula (based on

bore and stroke) no longer even approximates the output of engines.

The wealthy, slightly whacky, upper-crust Brits who formed the majority of early RAC members included many aviators. Hence the RAC Upside Down Dinner of 1914 to celebrate the first British loop-the-loop. The meal started with coffee and liqueurs and worked back to *hors d'oeuvres*.

They weren't all Fotherington-Smythes and Cholmondeley-Fortescues, however. Australian racing driver S. F. Edge was an early luminary and won the Gordon Bennett Race and other events on behalf of the club.

Today the RAC's role is similar to that of the NRMA, though it maintains close links with the now famous annual London-to-Brighton Run, which we'll talk about next week.

HAMMERIN' TONGS

An estimated \$3 million worth of cars and memorabilia goes to the highest bidder this weekend. More than 50 vehicles go under the hammer at the Brooks-Goodman Darling Harbour Classic Auction, held in conjunction with the Australian International Motor Show.

How about a magnificent 1928 Bentley 6.5-litre tourer (estimate \$370,000-\$420,000), the 1933 Alfa Romeo 6C Supercharged Gran Sport drophead below (\$190,000-\$230,000) or any one of a variety of Caddies, Jags, Mercs, BMWs and Rollers? At the other end of

the scale, there's a Morris Minor Traveller,

