

## A RARE 1951 'CYCLOPS'

by Rob North

NG288 was purchased second hand by Mr Jack Hendrie (son of the famous Railway Engineer) of Winterskloof in 1952. The car, grey/blue in colour was then six months old. The vehicle was customised over time with the addition of a sun visor, roof rack, rear window Venetian blind, grab handles on the inside windscreen pillars and some chrome plating of engine components. It spent all its life in the essentially damp climate of Winterskloof at the family homestead, *The Knoll*, then in later years at *Inverknoll*. Unfortunately no information is available about any interesting long road trips which must have been undertaken.

Famous names, such as General Smuts and Dennis Shepstone stayed at *The Knoll* so Jack had a certain aura which combined well with the Cyclops. Both had aged when I first encountered them. Jack, distinguished looking with grey hair and the Rover, with a few bumps and dents and the red undercoat showing in places where regular polishing had removed the top paint coat. Jack's driving skills had diminished with age and the Hilton locals commented that he aimed the car through the village rather than drove it!

Early NROA members might recall an article in the June 1979 Newsletter by Tony Cope where he described a visit to *Inverknoll* and when the accompanying photograph was taken. He also organised NG288 to be displayed at Cars in the Park.

Jack passed away in, I think, 1984 and the car was placed in the care of the Natal Parks Board where it was displayed at the Midmar Museum, but never run. In 1995, the Parks Board closed down the Museum and were busy trying to locate the owners of the hundreds of donated exhibits. Pat Coyne advised me that the Rover was destined for Jack's nephew in Johannesburg who wasn't sure exactly what he would do with it. I contacted him with an offer to purchase the car and this was finally settled after some negotiation - this included a very strong condition that the car would be restored to running order.

Now, what had I bought? I was well informed about the marque generally but I was not fully aware of the significance and rarity of the Cyclops. Once past that rather ugly front appearance, the floppy aluminium boot lid, the spare wheel taking up nearly all the boot space, the column gear shift and the tiny rear window, the true Rover qualities were immediately noticeable. That unique Rover interior upholstery smell, the solidness of the vehicle, the lightweight aluminium doors that thumped closed, the toolkit tray under the front seat still with the original owner's manual included, the freewheel device, the plush carpeting .....

What should I do? The engine was solid. Removal and stripping showed that water had corroded that wafer-thin steel head gasket during its stay at Midmar and this had run into two cylinders where serious corrosion had occurred. My association with the local Vintage Tractor and Engine Club provided an assortment of tried and trusted remedies for stuck pistons, but none worked. The bad corrosion meant that a re-sleeve would be necessary anyway and trying to obtain pistons for this rare 2.567" bore size would be nearly impossible. I thus decided to replace this 2.1 litre engine with the more popular 2.6 litre engine also used in the Land-Rover. An additional advantage of the later engine is that a more conventional full-flow oil filter could be used instead of the virtually unobtainable by-pass Wipac filter fitted to the cylinder head. The appearance of the 2.6 engine is otherwise very similar and I obtained the cylinder head and twin HD 6 carbs from a 105 to 'match' those of the 2.1.

The gearbox was overhauled and required essentially only oil seals to be renewed. The internal components are basically the same as Land -Rover and under Rover conditions will last for ever!

To accommodate the column gear-shift, a weird mechanism is used and linkages cross over from R to L under the gearbox. Here, several bushes had to be renewed.

Removing the front wings was very easy as only one bolt was rusted. For a vehicle that spent 27 years in a very damp environment, the rust found is almost negligible. This includes the chassis and rear end. The front door wooden frames have suffered from the weather, but conventional sanding and varnish will be all that is necessary. All window rubbers are badly perished. I was fortunate, before the SA Rand took a nose dive, to purchase front and rear screen rubbers, quarterlight mouldings, window channelling and front suspension rubbers from the UK.

The bonnet and wings were stored in an outside open shed while I proceeded with mostly the mechanical work. One day I went to look for the bonnet and could not find it. Disaster! It must have been stolen, presumably for the value of the aluminium. Enquiries from the UK were not too helpful and the exchange rate had now nearly halved, so £600 converted to Rands plus transport worked out to more than I had paid for the car. A possibility was to use a bonnet from an early 90, but this has the air scoop cut-out at the rear and would have to be closed.

Enter Clyde Wyatt and a comment passed by him to Tony Cope in Sydney about my predicament. Tony felt sure that a replacement could be found in Australia and using the local Rover Owners Club grapevine (e-mail), a request was sent out for help. In no time I was advised that at least three suitable bonnets had been offered. Club member Jim Moule of Sydney has offered a replacement free "if it gets another Rover on the road". Now that's really nice or simply "Good on yer, mate"! A quote for shipping to SA has turned out to be astronomical, but enter here another good fairy with an exceptional offer. This part of the saga will be told in a later story.

After the December NROA Breakfast Run to Rob Roy Hotel where Tony and family were guests of honour, he expressed a keen desire to see the Cyclops on his way through to Himeville later in the week. Never to miss an opportunity to convert a visit into a social gathering, we set up a small impromptu gathering for a light supper on Thursday the 19th. Local Club members Clyde and Rose Wyatt and Alan and Anne Wilkinson joined us and we were also able to include an old University colleague of Tony's - Robin Phipson who is not unknown in local vintage motoring circles. So, it was a nostalgic technical evening for most of us. Tony was delighted to see old NG288 again and appreciated my two Series II Land-Rovers. Only at a reunion-type gathering such as this does one really get to learn just how much involvement Tony has had with Rovers and Land-Rovers - in fact this applies to all of us!

And so the Cope family are back in Australia and we are left far more fired-up to get on with rebuilding the Cyclops.

