

Amilcar-Riley

Although most entries in this book deal with single vehicles, this section is concerned with a group of cars that share the common title of Amilcar-Riley specials. Although splendid cars in many respects, the vintage Amilcars did have a reputation for mechanical fragility. It is perhaps not surprising therefore to find that several of the cars that were sold in Britain are now fitted with British engines, the most popular being the Riley Nine unit. Several of these Amilcar-Riley hybrids are externally little altered from the original French model, like YX 15, a car owned for many years by the Stafford brothers. Others, however, are more drastic departures from the cars that featured in the Amilcar catalogues.

Of these more modified cars perhaps the best known is YF 6321, a car owned for nearly 40 years by Dick Batho and used by him in all manner of motoring competitions. The origins of this car as a special go back to the Second World War, when Roy Taylor bought an Amilcar CGSS from a scrapyard in Welshpool for £15. Given the money and materials available to him at the time, Taylor deemed the damaged engine to be beyond repair

The well-travelled Amilcar-Riley built by Dick Batho. In addition to being used regularly on the road, it has competed in trials, driving tests, circuit races and sprints as well as hillclimbs such as Shelsley Walsh where this picture was taken in 1984.



and so started the lengthy process of installing Riley Nine mechanics. Like most such projects, the job snowballed; the body was also lowered and widened, and a Riley radiator fitted to replace the damaged Amilcar one. In 1946 the still unfinished project was sold through a *Motor Sport* advertisement to Dick Batho for £30, and towed to its new home some 20 miles away "at the end of an ever-decreasing length of rope".

Although it was virtually complete, Dick dismantled and rebuilt the car with numerous detailed modifications that occupied a lot of his spare time for the next 15 years or so, after which YF 632I made its first competition appearance at a vintage meeting at Prescott. One of the first modifications to be carried out was the fitting of a smaller Riley Brooklands radiator (£5 through another *Motor Sport* advertisement). This in turn led to the engine and gearbox being repositioned lower down in the chassis, which then meant that the scuttle line looked too high. A new bulkhead was fabricated and the scuttle-mounted fuel tank moved to the rear of the vehicle and pressurized. A lot of time was spent on altering the various control linkages to increase the ground clearance for trials work.

By the time of its Prescott hillclimb début, a racing Riley engine, fitted with four Amal carburettors and a close ratio gearbox, had been substituted, giving a very satisfactory performance. Subsequent use on the road revealed that the rear suspension was virtually solid; a cure was effected by cutting a piece out of the Riley torque tube and fitting a telescopic cover made from two pieces of large diameter exhaust pipe. When the Amals proved unsuitable for circuit racing because of fuel pressure problems, they were replaced by two SU instruments.

In this form the Amilcar-Riley was regularly used by Dick Batho as a road car, as well as in trials, sprints, hillclimbs, circuit racing and driving tests. It is perhaps fitting that when he died in 1985, it was while driving his Amilcar-Riley to a local transport rally. The car is now owned by Dick's friend Will Hall who, having repaired the slight damage caused when it ran off the road, intends to keep and use it very much in the tradition established by its previous owner.

If the Batho Amilcar-Riley is very much the universal road/competition car, the same cannot be said of the special now owned by Donald Lake. This is rather further removed from a standard Amilcar in that it now features a single-seater body, two superchargers and GN transmission. Like YF 632I, this special also started life as a 1927 CGSS model and was registered as PH 1127 a month after the former car. In July 1931 it was bought by George Gahagan who used the car on

the road until 1936, with occasional visits to Southport for sand racing. During the 1930s it was gradually altered, gaining a Boon & Porter overhead valve conversion and a tail-less single-seater body. When the Amilcar engine was damaged by frost during its wartime storage, an early Riley Nine unit was fitted and supercharged through an ex-Bugatti blower. It competed in this form in 1950, and when this Riley motor was comprehensively blown up at Gamston, a similar unit with an additional supercharger was installed. To accommodate this the radiator was moved forward to its present position, where it is supported low down in front of the front chassis cross member. At around the same time the Amilcar rear axle was replaced by one from a GN. In this form, in which the Riley gearbox drove the back axle via a GN bevel box, the car was used in competition until 1960. After this it was stored at the Gahagan garage until George's death in the late 1970s, whereupon it passed into the possession of Dudley Gahagan.

In 1981 Donald Lake bought the car and at first ran it exactly as it had been in the late 1950s. More recently the Riley gearbox has been dispensed with, and the GN transmission now boasts its full quota of four chains and is responsible for the "cog swapping". This Amilcar-Riley once again has an active competition life, for Lake uses the car regularly in VSCC events.

The other single-seater Amilcar-Riley can claim to be a genuine Brooklands car, for although it was assembled by Stanley Kerr-Bate primarily for sprint work, it did on occasion run at the Mountain circuit of the famous Surrey track. Using an Amilcar chassis, shortened by 3 in, and the mechanical remains of Riley Nine registration number TM 2771, Kerr-Bate produced a simple lightweight racing car which he fitted with a rather stumpy-tailed aluminium body. Both Amilcar axles were retained, but the front one was modified to take Riley Mark 4 brakes, while the back axle was adapted to accept a shortened Riley torque tube. The cable-operated brake system was redesigned on the lines of the early Bugattis, and all the steering components were carefully polished. Modifications to the engine included Laystall crankshaft and connecting rods, Martlett pistons and four SU carburettors on a special inlet manifold. Ignition was by BTH magneto, which was rebuilt twice each season to ensure reliability.

As a sprint vehicle, top speed was not that important and was estimated at just under 100 mph, which may account for its unremarkable lap speed of 57 mph at Brooklands in 1939. The best time recorded for the standing start half mile was 29.8 sec.

Despite wartime air raids the car survived the war with little damage, apart from slight

rearrangement of the front of the bodywork caused when the doors of the garage where it was stored were blown in by a near miss! The Kerr-Bate special was sold to a Mr England in Birmingham in the early 1950s, and it was around this time that the car lost its original body in favour of a fibreglass and tubular steel affair. In 1958 it was again sold locally to Messrs Wood and James, and in the early 1960s was owned by Sandeman-Craik. Robin Townsend acquired it in 1966, promptly removed the "plastic" body and rebuilt the car with a one and a half-seater aluminium body in the Amilcar/Bugatti style. When attempts to register the car with the original Riley number were thwarted, 999 HYR was issued as a substitute. Townsend ran his much improved Amilcar-Riley at vintage Prescott in 1967 before deciding that he really wanted a Frazer Nash. From then on, this special became exceedingly well travelled, being sold first via Jack Bond's *Vintage Autos* to an enthusiast in the United States. It returned to Britain briefly, in 1981, to be bought by Roger Bell of Western Australia, again returning to the UK in more recent years.

It is perhaps a tribute to man's individualistic ingenuity that by using basically the same parts, cars of such dissimilar appearance can be built.

Amilcar-Riley

Technical Specification Data*

Date of origin: 1927-30

ENGINE

Type: Riley

Capacity: 1087 cc

No of cylinders: 4

Valve operation: ohv
Estimated power output: 70-80 bhp
Carburation: 1 x SU carburettor & two-stage supercharging

GEARBOX

Type: GN

No of ratios: 4 (no reverse)

CHASSIS

Type: Amilcar

FRONT AXLE

Type: Amilcar

Suspension: 2 x Semi-elliptics

REAR AXLE

Type: GN

Suspension: 2 x Quarter-elliptics

BRAKES

Type: Drums all round

Actuation: Cable

WHEELS

Size: 19 in

Tyre Size: 4.00 x 19 (front)

4.50 x 19 (rear)

OVERALL DIMENSIONS

Length: 131 in

Wheelbase: 94 in

Track: 44 in (front)

39.5 in (rear)

* The ex-Gahagan example