

MISCELLANEOUS

RAMBLINGS

By JOHN R. BOND



Stag Tour, continued . . .

LAST MONTH we got as far as northern Italy. At Milano in October, we saw hundreds of Giulietta coupes in the Alfa-Romeo factory, but not one single roadster. Farther south, in Bologna, we saw the new 3-litre Osca in process and even got a peek into the designing room (two men, 3 boards)! At the Weber carburetor plant we were more interested in the "racing" carburetors, which were built in a small department off to one side. The most interesting new carburetor was a strange sliced-off type designed to fit neatly into the narrow space between cylinder banks of the G. P. Lancia-Ferrari V-8.

The Ferrari factory, near Maranello, was quite impressive (after Molsheim), for this operation must be like Bugatti's used to be. The nearly new plant is roughly L-shaped with one wing devoted to machine tools, the apex area for parts storage, and the other wing for final assembly. Frames are made by an outside supplier, but castings are now poured in their own foundry nearby. This foundry, incidentally, was the cleanest of its type I have ever seen. The racing department has its own separate building for storage, rebuilding, assembly and engine testing. A Lancia V-8 was on test and the racket was shattering. We saw the unfinished Lancia G. P. streamliner and counted 11 spare Lancia V-8 engines! What a Utopia this was!

For me the most interesting spot in all Italy was the little known shop of Scaglietti in Modena. Here, in a space measuring about 100 x 150 ft. are built all the genuine sports-racing Ferrari bodies. There is one hard-wood, metal re-enforced mock-up for the current Monza style body, but other one-off bodies were in process by the most amazing methods I have ever witnessed. A sort of welding rod, space-frame is built up on a chassis with the aid of a few very rough preliminary drawings and then refined and corrected with the naked eye. Relatively inexperienced men beat-out rough body panels for each area until the contour is correct, approximately. At this point the aluminum is really rough, and it is then turned over to a man with the requisite skill for finishing. Finally a body framing structure is erected by designing on the spot, and as this progresses the welding rod "guides" are removed. How they get the beautiful lines they do, without being ugly from some angles is a mystery to me. But they do.

The "hot-rod" shops of Stanguellini and Nardi were about as expected, and the most interesting item at the former place was a modified Giulietta coupe for which 100 bhp was claimed.

Both the Pinin Farina and Ghia body shops (in Turin) are large, well organized operations. Farina is very busy making stock, limited-production bodies for such firms as Lancia and Fiat. We saw a new station wagon on an 1100 Fiat chassis that made Rolofson sorry he'd bought a Rambler before we left. Ghia is doing "secret" work for many different customers, and we therefore saw only a portion of this plant. Dual Motors' Dodge convertible (the "Fire-Arrow") occupied much of the area we saw and Count Luriani's "Little Guilda" was nearing completion and will be out for new 500 cc records soon we were told. Bob Gurr claims he got one quick look at the nose of something—which turned out to be the "Plainsman" shown on page 10. From Italy, we traveled by deluxe bus (with hostess) to Nice, then after two days flew to England.

The take-off for England was punctuated by our excitement over whether or not the plane could get off the ground with a complete Porsche crankshaft, smuggled aboard in a brief case, without being weighed. However, we made it, and in England rented a magnificent Rolls of about 1935 vintage for transport.

We visited only the MG and Jaguar works. The former are turning out model A's at a good pace, but the new 2.4 Jaguar sedan production line was still doing pilot operation only, and we cannot expect any of these cars over here before early summer. About 80 D-Jaguars were in various stages of assembly, and watching the assembly of this nearly frameless design (using built-up body structures made by an outside sub-contractor) I could appreciate the slowness of delivery on these potent machines. Mr. Heynes, Jaguar's chief engineer, only smiled when asked whether the export model would have the larger 3.5 litre engine.

The show at Earls Court was very crowded and I thought the extent and variety of the "side-shows" more interesting than the car exhibits. The supporting industries which supply proprietary items is apparently very large indeed. At the overseas press room, I met the famous technical editor of the "Motor," Mr. Lawrence Pomeroy, whom I enjoyed talking to very much. We left England, still not completely recovered from the mental strain of driving on the left.

Amateur Drivers . . .

This is being written a few days before leaving the smog area for Detroit's snow, and the S.C.C.A. annual meeting. The club has a knotty problem to resolve, now that Sebring has official F.I.A. sanction and will offer prize money. I have listened to the pro vs amateur argument for years and still have no firm conviction either way. Amateur drivers get money in Europe, which makes our semi-pro position somewhat difficult to explain. Whatever the decision may be I have only one hope—that it will increase the popularity of sports cars, both for spectators and car owners.

Driving Impressions . . .

The new Corvette transmission described on page 28 was actually installed on some of the last 1955 cars off the line. I had a short drive in one and it's very surprising what a difference it makes. The 2.20 low is near-perfect for a starting ratio, and the feel of the shift mechanism is true sports car. I had suspected that the 1.31 second gear would be very flat at low speed but it isn't at all. However, I think the wide gap between the two gears will be noticeable if these cars appear in competition as a factory team at Sebring, as rumored. Unless, of course, they find drivers who can manage double-clutch down-shifts into low for lap after lap without a single miss.

We have also completed a full scale road test on the new Giulietta Spyder (convertible coupe) for next month. This is probably the most exciting fun-car we have driven in a long time. Another car I have driven recently is the "Pooper." It's surprisingly easy to drive, as specials go, and it did zero to 60 in 7 seconds flat, without apparent effort.

Cunningham . . .

Briggs Cunningham has sold his Florida factory to a fellow sportsman John Shakespeare and will operate a team of D-Jaguars during the 1956 season. These cars can make for some real competition when properly prepared—which Briggs will surely do. However, American Iron advocates will be sorry to see him give up a good cause.

New Cars . . .

It's too early to get any accurate idea as to the reception of the new MG-A, but it's probably going to be good—if and when cars are available for delivery.

A hot rumor from Germany says that there will be a new 300 SL roadster, 200 lbs lighter than the coupe and using the single pivot independent rear suspension.

Tatra, in Czechoslovakia, are coming out with a new model to replace their pre-war V-8 rear-engined job, to be known as the T-603. I drove one of the smaller flat-four jobs (the Tatrapian) once and it was a horrible beast. However the new car has the engine positioned very low, and you can at least see out of the rear windows. Top speed is given as 100 mph with 105 bhp.

The Ghia-designed, Karman-built Volkswagen is also creating a rumpus. Dealers who put them on the floor have had to remove them, for the new car hurts sales of the regular model, especially when no delivery date on the coupe can be specified or guaranteed. I think VW should tool-up the New Jersey plant for just this one body, but apparently they have other plans. ●