

FOCUS ON VIC PROCTOR

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This month, we have to say "thank you" to The Vincenteer, the magazine of the South African Section, for this interview with Honorary Member Proctor which appeared in their July issue. The interviewer is Errol Hunter of Durban, who went to some considerable trouble to hire a suitable tape-recorder for the occasion.

Vincenteer-Mr. Proctor, do you still have an interest in motor-cycles?

V.P.-Yes, I still have occasional rides on Greenpoint Common near here, which is out of the way of any traffic.

Vincenteer-What happened to your very famous Lightning?

V.P.-Oh, I sold that in 1965. It went to a chap from Port Elizabeth, Brown, who intended to hitch a chair on it and race it at Pietermaritzburg. I don't believe anything came of his plans, I don't know whether he got scared, or if the Beast didn't like the sidecar, or perhaps it was a bit costly.

Vincenteer-What was the period when you were doing your thing?

V.P.-1948 to 1950.

Vincenteer-How many Vincents did you own yourself?

V.P.-three. I started off with a Comet, then went to the Rapide and finally bought the Black Lightning.

Vincenteer-Did you know or correspond with any of the other record-breakers?

V.P.-Well, in the world record-breaking attempts at the time were Rollie Free in America, Noel Pope and Bob Berry in England, Eric Fernihough also in England, Ernst Heine in Germany and Ruffi of Italy. And me.

Vincenteer-Did you get any assistance from the factory at that time?

V.P.-Only advice.

Vincenteer-You mean technical data and so on?

V.P.-Yes ... all from Phil Irving himself.

Vincenteer-You have a family?

V.P.-Yes, my wife, Olive, two sons and a daughter. Both the boys have done a bit of racing.

Vincenteer-How long have you been in business by yourself?

V.P.-I started in the garage business at Salt River in July 1944, straight after my discharge from the Army (I was in tank reconnaissance); when the business expanded, we moved here, and we've been here for 23 years.

Vincenteer-Tell me more about your business.

V.P.-Well, my petrol sales are very high, mainly because everybody in Cape Town knows where we are, who I am and so on.

Vincenteer-When you had the Vincent agency, were you the only one selling Vincents in the Cape.

V.P.-Yes, for a while, then Nathan Smith started in Durban. I encouraged him to carry on with it.

Vincenteer-As an agent, you sold Vincents right to the end?

V.P.-Till there was no more stocks. We sold quite a few, mainly the enclosed models. I sold a lot of Comets at first, but when the enclosed jobs came out, there was a terrific demand for them. The factory couldn't supply them quickly enough. One customer we had, a Mr van der Brooke, was so very fond of Vincents that each time a new model arrived, he would hand in his old one and take a new one.

Vincenteer-I understand that your Lightning now belongs to Neville Alwright of Durban, who intends to restore it to concours condition. V.P.-That shouldn't prove too much hard work, because although there were many thousands of racing miles under its belt, it was in very good nick.

Vincenteer-Tell me about your racing life.

V.P.-I started off in 1948 at Verneukpan, where I used the track previously used by Sir Malcolm Campbell with Bluebird. This was a clay pan, which exerted considerable drag (something like three mph, I should think), so I went to Kaalpan, near Hopetown. Being salt, this was very much firmer and I found I could do over 150 mph without any streamlining. The drag was still quite pronounced, so I managed to persuade "them" to close the national road at Beaufort West. I had to discard the streamlining because, I had side winds as well as cross-winds and I found the bike was using the full width of the road. Still, I managed a speed of 162 mph. I realised then that the roads weren't wide enough for anything faster, so I had to go back to

Kaalpan, where I enclosed the bike with streamlining. On my first run out, I managed to beat the world speed record of 174 mph, set up by Ernst Heine on a BMW. But on the return run, which had to be done within the hour, through some misjudgment in the streamlining, the front wheel lifted and I left the road and rolled over at 170 mph or so.

Vincenteer-What was the damage?

V.P.-I was only scratched and bruised, but the bike was in a bit of a mess.

Vincenteer-Was that the only time you came off?

V.P.-The only time in record attempts. But when you've done road-racing for some 37 years, cars and bikes, you take steps to learn to fall properly. You curl yourself up into a little ball and roll. Don't stop, just keep rolling and you don't come to too much harm.

Vincenteer-Just as long as you don't roll into something.

V.P.-Quite! The first Vincent I ever saw belonged to a chap who brought a very nice Comet down from Rhodesia and I raced against him in Port Elizabeth. After that, he raced in the Kimberley Hundred, which was half gravel and half tar, and that bike really performed well there.

Vincenteer-This was before you got into Vincents?

V.P.-Yes, I was racing Nortons then. My career actually started in 1928 on a Matchless single which I bought in bits, rebuilt it and raced it in a beach race called the "Argus Derby" at Blouberg Strand. I raced that for a while, then eventually managed to save a bit of money and got a Big-Port Ajay, then, later, an Ariel Red Hunter. Only then did I start to get known and the BSA people offered me a ride. I also rode a Triumph, but really I stuck with Nortons till I "went Vincent". One Norton I had was a genuine Isle of Man job and had been ridden by Jimmy Guthrie in the 1936 TT.

Vincenteer-Is that right you've raced on every circuit in South Africa?

V.P.-Yes, and Lourenco Marques, but I've never raced in Rhodesia. One year, I never worked, just raced. We used to leave Cape Town and go down to Port Elizabeth for the South African TT, which was always run over Christmas and the New Year. From there we would go on to East London at Easter, where they always had a big race meeting, then to Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and the Kimberley Hundred. There were two circuits in Johannesburg, the Grand Central and Band, so there was always something to go to every month. I did that for a whole year, doing backyard jobs to keep a bit of cash coming in between races.

Vincenteer-Sounds like an expensive business!

V.P.-Yes, but of course, we loved it. George Anderson and I used to be the two favourites of Cape Town. George rode a Rudge Whitworth - the radial-valve Rudge, then went to Nortons. He had beaten boys like Casteloni, Joe Sarkis, Rudi Adderson, Nathan Smith and Ray Amm. We never had a dice against each other, but we would go to the front, knowing full well there was no-one to come past, so we didn't kill ourselves, then we used to ride round handlebar-to-handlebar, our two hands touching as we went around. A fiddle, but it was great entertainment. We learned to ride motor-cycles by going into corners as fast as we could go fast, go faster, go faster still, then when you fell off that was fast enough. I'll never forget the first time old Nathan Smith decided to race a Vincent.

Vincenteer--That's a very interesting photograph on the wall over there?

V.P.-Oh, that's the first time I rode the Vincent in a road race in Port Elizabeth on the George Grey circuit, which was a very fast circuit. On that occasion, there were 93 competitors on a nine-mile circuit (I remember it as if it was yesterday) and I lapped the circuit at 106 mph.

Vincenteer-That was the Lightning that went to Mr. Alwright?

V.P.-That's right. I converted it back to road trim as I bought it.

Vincenteer-Well, Vic Proctor, on behalf of the Vincent Owners' Club throughout the world, I should like to thank you for granting me some of your time.

V.P.-It's been a pleasure.

Vincenteer-Have you a message for your fellow Vincent-lovers?

V.P.-Mr. One Track's slogan says it all, I think-"Ride 'em, don't hide' em.