



JEFF BLOXHAM

No visible means of support

A bunch of students have managed to build this Riley and race it... with zero budget WORDS: PAUL HARDIMAN

IN THE TEN years since it was established, Oxford Universities Motorsport Foundation has managed to field four different cars in both rallies and races, including the Goodwood Revival – not bad for an unfunded ‘after-school club’.

‘It was founded to give motor sports degree students the hands-on experience lacking from their courses,’ says founder and only constant member, former student Ding Boston (on left of photo). Boston used to be a street luge champion and a third of Oxford Stunt Factory – remember the 700ft bungee jump and abseil down the dam in the opening sequence of *GoldenEye*? That was them.

This informal and constantly changing group of students, which operates from an Oxford cowshed, has managed to turn an Inca Trail rally cast-off into a successful tarmac rally car, a derelict Elva Courier into a Goodwood Revival regular, and its famous grey Riley 1.5, found in a field in Scotland, into a class winner in both the SOL Rally Barbados and the Ypres Historic Rally – all thanks to the generosity of sponsors. The car still rallies today as a mobile billboard. But the latest, a 1959 Riley One-Point-Five, is almost devoid of sponsorship logos. Why’s that?

Goodwood and Historic Racing Drivers Club rules, basically. Yet this car wouldn’t race without the generosity of a loyal band of supporters and suppliers who pledge their goods and services for free. One of those is Julius Thurgood, who founded the HRDC and waives the entry fees to encourage

this enthusiastic but permanently skint group.

Goodwood rules also mean the motor can be overbored by up to 25%, which this one isn’t. Yet. ‘It’s a 1588cc screamer,’ explains Boston. ‘Trouble is, we’re on our third engine of the year. We’ve been running in Class C, but want to be in B, with less stress using an 1860cc five-bearing unit from an MGB. We’ve become victims of our own success.’

Its latest Riley was found in a garden in Fareham in 2012. It first raced at Silverstone at the beginning of the 2013 season, with class awards at pretty much every outing since. ‘It was much more solid than we could have hoped, though the front wings were off because someone had put a flip front on it, and had beaten the living daylight out of the tunnel to fit a five-speed before losing interest. Our first lucky break was from Enviro-Strip, which meant that we were starting from a completely bare shell, just like any other historic racer with money.

‘In 2012 we got the green light from Julius that OUMF would receive his on-going support with HRDC entries, and that’s what gave us the confidence to go ahead and develop the car. We used all we’d learned running the rally Riley to build a real racer. And, having got sponsorship from Racelogic and KA Sensors, the data-logging potential really bridged the gap between the modern and historic racing worlds for the students. They can see what the suspension and steering are doing, and that’s very valuable. It’s a big step for OUMF as it makes

working on the car more attractive to students who’ll be dealing with this technology when they get jobs. We’ve managed to help many OUMF alumni into good placements and jobs.

‘The Riley is in a constant state of development and it’s forever getting lighter. It’s currently 870kg and we’re just paring even more weight out of the doors. Everyone is equally responsible for the car; I’m just the team member who holds the wheel. No-one’s being told what to do, and by being thrown into the deep end they quickly realise they are in pivotal positions. But putting your life in the hands of first-year students who’ve never worked on a car before has led to some interesting moments...’

Boston says the growth of historic racing means that old skills are back in demand: ‘And in the absence of the old guys, when modern race teams are recruiting, they tend to snap up any youngsters who have worked on historics, because they will have got their hands dirty fixing things – which is really useful if the wires have fallen off the alternator in the middle of a long-distance night race.

‘We’re providing a place for students to learn good workshop practice and tool use. They break things here in the course of learning how not to break them, or be a liability when they get jobs. We are perhaps the most successful student race and rally team since Cambridge University Automobile Club in the ‘50s and it dumbfounds me that even after 10 years we’re still not properly funded.’

OUMF SPONSORS: Phillips Tyres of Oxford; Enviro-Strip UK; Julius Thurgood and the HRDC; THINK Automotive; Lesonal paints; Kent Cams; BTB Exhausts; Autolec Powerlite; All Stage Cylinder Heads; British Motor Heritage; K1 Rods; JE Pistons; Racelogic; KA Sensors; Hardy Engineering; Pilkington Automotive; Plastics4Performance; Quaife Engineering; GDM radiators; FPS Distribution; NGK Spark Plugs; Helix Autosport; ARP fixings; TRS harnesses; Revotec; Speedycables; Bailey Morris propshafts; Performance Braking; Fabricage; Safety Devices; Rustbuster paints; Owslebury Crankshaft Services; SuperB; Samco; T7 Design; MASS; Dave Knight Engine Services; Classic Silicone Hoses; Bob Green; Anthony Binnington; MOSS Europe; RPS Evans fluid; Saftek brakes; SuperPro; Swiftune; Longford Gear Cutting; Redditch Gears