

Brian Muir

It is our very sad duty to report the death of Brian Muir, the immensely popular Australian racing driver, who collapsed on his way home from Silverstone last Sunday evening after competing in the Tourist Trophy. He was 52.

An active driver for 33 years, 'Yogi' Muir had long been a central figure in British saloon car racing circles, to which he brought high standards of professionalism and a genial spirit which earned him both the respect and affection of all his fellow competitors. During 18 British racing seasons, he made countless friends, never once an enemy.

Trained as a motor mechanic in his native Sydney, he first tasted motorsport at the age of 19 when he entered his Alvis 12/50 in a night trial. He became a regular rally competitor, won a local championship title in 1956, and a year later took part in his first race, driving an Austin A30 at Bathurst. He had a job as a salesman for Holden, and subsequently raced these cars in Australia.

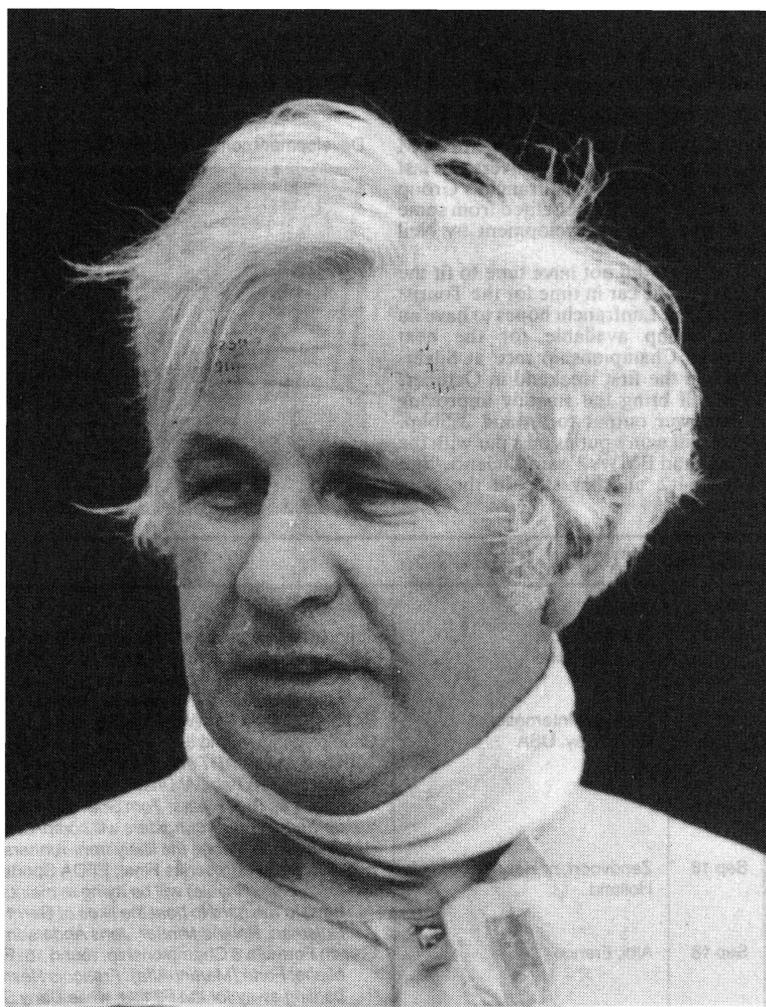
He came over to England in 1962 and his compatriot Jack Brabham gave him a job as mechanic. After one year with Brabham, he left when John Willment Racing offered him the post of chief mechanic, and Brian had his first introduction to the British Saloon Car Championship which was to dominate his career in the sport. He spent the 1963 season preparing the Willment team's 7-litre Ford Galaxies driven by Sir Gawaine Baillie and Jack Sears, and the latter won the series. Brian's first events as a driver in Britain came in one of the Willment team's Ford Cortinas, but these were occasional drives, and he returned home to race Holdens on a semi-professional basis the following year.

He was soon back again. His performances down-under earned him a Smiths Industries Driver to Europe award for the 1965 season, and on arrival he was again employed by Jack Brabham responsible for development and sales of the Brabham Viva.

He came to prominence as a driver in 1966 with a full season with a Willment Galaxie, also driving on occasion the team's fearsome Lotus 30 and AC Daytona Cobra in home internationals. He showed such obvious potential that, when Dick Thompson was controversially excluded from driving in the Le Mans 24 Hours that year, Alan Mann flew him out to France at the last moment to partner Graham Hill in one of his 7-litre Ford Mk 2 cars, which the pair ran in the top six before the suspension broke in the eighth hour.

Brian drove other sports cars including Digby Martland's Chevron B8 and was invited to partner Jacky Ickx in a Mirage M1 by John Wyer in the 1967 Le Mans. The engine broke early on but Muir, having co-driven Pace Godia's privately entered Ford GT40 to victory in the 1968 Barcelona 6 Hours, impressed Wyer sufficiently to be asked to share Jack Oliver's Gulf GT40 at Le Mans a year later. In 1969 he was contracted with Gold Leaf Team Lotus to drive Lotus 62 coupes with John Miles, but it was a miserable season apart from a class win in the BOAC 500.

Yet saloon car racing was Brian's first love, and he competed in the British series all the while. He raced ex-Baillie Falcons in 1967-68 and in his second season, driving the car owned by Bill Shaw and prepared by Mathwall Engineering, he won the class championship title with six overall wins and seven lap records. In 1969 he began a fruitful five-year association with Malcolm Gartlan, first with the ex-Hobbs Falcon and ex-Oliver Mustang, then for two seasons with the team's Chevrolet



Camaro, immaculately prepared by Ted Grace. The Wiggins Teape-backed Camaro gave him three wins in 1970 although it was generally outpaced by Frank Gardner's Boss Mustang, but in 1971 he won the class title for a second time, with seven more national victories.

Gartlan moved to Ford the following year, when Brian was very quick in the Wiggins Teape Capri RS, but lost out on the title through unreliability. Apart from some success at home, though, the team found that the blue Capri could run competitively with the works Cologne cars in European championship events, and Brian, co-driving with John Miles, achieved a win at Paul Ricard over the Jackie Stewart/Francois Covert Capri, and a second place at Zandvoort. These successes inspired Gartlan, Grace and Muir to venture further in 1973, which brought another high point in Brian's career.

Commencing a long business relationship with the Alpina tuning firm, Brian competed with a superb BMW CSL in both Britain and Europe. His home season, again opposed by Gardner's more powerful SCA Camaro, was the less successful, although he won on occasion and enjoyed his rivalry with Frank which was characterised by much good-natured banter. With the Alpina team in Europe, however, Brian ran a very strong season against the works BMWs and Fords, winning at 126mph with Niki Lauda at Monza, and scoring second place with Toine Hezemans at Salzburgring and Mantorp Park and with James Hunt at Zandvoort. A third placing in the TT at Silverstone made him runner-up in the European championship behind Hezemans.

When the British series went Group 1 (Brian having won the last ever Group 2 race in this country with the BMW0, he briefly raced a Maxda RX-3 but concen-

trated in 1974 on sporadic forays into Europe as Gardner's SCA Camaro team-mate. Returning to the Bill Shaw team, he drove a Dolomite Sprint in British G1 the following season, often showing the way to the works/Broad-speed entries and, indeed, sportingly backing off at the end of the final race at Brands to allow Andy Rouse to clinch the title.

After a short season with the Norman Reeves Capri in 1976, Brian embarked in 1977 on a six-year relationship with Martin Thomas with a Renault 5. In 1978-79 the Browne & Day Capri gave him his last two victories in the British championship, both at Brands Hatch. He drove the Patrick Motorsport Rover in 1980-81-82 (harrying the Jaguars during a memorable drive in last year's TT) but now his competition driving was winding down.

Although this season he has been closely involved once more with Malcolm Gartlan and Ted Grace, running the Group A BMW of Frank Sytner, Brian had his first drive of the year in last Sunday's Tourist Trophy. He and Sytner finished 10th, but all weekend Brian felt unwell, believing that he was suffering from a bout of 'flu. His death has come as a terrible shock.

It was often said that, in not coming to Europe until the age of 31, he had missed the boat as far as an International career was concerned. But Brian, confident of his immense ability, accepted this with a disarming frankness and not a trace of resentment. It is hard to accept that we will no longer be privileged with his comradeship and unfailing courtesy, his great enthusiasm and sense of humour. AUTOSPORT extends its deep sympathy to his widow, Jan, his daughters Karen and Tracy, and to his many friends and associates.

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