

The two-stroke, one-hit wonder

It looks like a cross between a Frazer Nash Sebring and an Austin Somerset, but sounds like a DKW. **Richard Heseltine** unravels the mystery of a unique roadster

PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER





Oh for heaven's sake, it's just a car; we're not trying to crack the Enigma code. Apparently there's a knack to starting it, but it's one that we're not privy to. Five minutes into our allotted time together and unfamiliarity with this unique Frazer Nash is breeding contempt. Our tame helper is now a broken heap of protoplasm, reduced to setting aside his pride and phoning an expert – one who laughs heartily before letting on that there's a battery kill switch.

Parked in a natural amphitheatre, the two-stroke triple fires with blunderbuss subtlety. A raucous cacophony bounces off the walls as a fug of pale blue smoke engulfs us; it's a chore to even breathe. Talk is short and peppered with much coughing. It sounds angry and unlike any Frazer Nash that we have previously encountered.

But then this is very much an orphan, a one-off that doesn't warrant so much as a passing mention in some marque histories. One authority we canvassed refused to believe that it was a 'proper' Frazer Nash. He insisted that it didn't have a corresponding chassis number from Isleworth's finest (it does) and was just a rebodging exercise. By all accounts – and accounts are hard to come by – this car could well have been a volume product had fate been kinder. But fate is a cruel mistress and the Frazer Nash-DKW was terminated after only one public airing in period.

Which is a pity, because the reasoning behind its creation was sound. Backtrack to the '50s and Frazer Nash was busy building a raft of sporting greats such as the Le Mans Replica, the Mille Miglia and the shortlived Sebring. The firm also had strong links with the German motor industry, having forged close ties with BMW prior to WW2. It was company boss Major Aldington who helped to kickstart Bristol car production at the end of hostilities, using the Bavarian straight-six as a basis for its in-house engine.

Aldington also had a good relationship with DKW, acting as its UK agent via his umbrella AFN business. A tad pricey and leftfield for '50s Britain, the Sonderklasse nonetheless proved a modest hit for the Middlesex firm, which promoted it in selected production car races. A brace of 'Deeks' was entered for the '55 International Trophy meeting at Silverstone, which had a tin-top thrash on the support bill. Tony Brooks claimed 1100cc class honours by more than a minute ahead of team-mate (and AFN's Porsche concession manager) Michael Burn, averaging a none-too-shabby 67.66mph around the Northants circuit. With DKW's also attaining strong results in continental rallies, there was no doubting the car's sporting credentials – ones that were seemingly underplayed by the maker itself.

Brooks' success led directly to the machine you see here. Producing small-series sports cars was all well and good, but Aldington aimed to diversify by selling a cheaper, more popular model. DKW didn't offer a roadster so, on paper at least, the marriage of British sporting pedigree and proven German engineering made sense. The project would, it was reasoned, be good for both parties. And don't forget that the Froggy Sprite was still some years away, so there was clearly a gap in the market for an affordable roadster based on proprietary running gear.

A prototype was swiftly sketched out and slated to make its race debut in the September 1955 'Tourist' Trophy race on the Dundrod road



Simple but well-finished cabin, with lovely wheel. Below, l-r: instructions for fuelling two-stroke, 'first add oil' (1 pint to 5 gals); shaft over engine to fan

circuit. Based on stock Sonderklasse front-drive mechanicals – and clothed with an aluminium body that aped other Frazer Nashes – the freshly completed Anglo-German ragtop not only made it to Ireland, but also threatened to do well.

That year's TT is remembered as much for Stirling Moss' brilliant recovery drive, to claim his third victory in the great race (on only his 26th birthday), as for the many grisly accidents. The works Nash was entered for local man Cecil Yard and late Worthing AC tuner/racer Ken Rudd, who was dispatched to Ulster to oversee the operation. Discussing the car in 2006, Rudd claimed that he'd only been given a minuscule budget so was obliged to recruit his pit crew from a local car club. The Ruddspeed founder added that he felt the Frazer-Deek was dismissed by his 'team' as a no-hoper – it wasn't expected to last a lap, let alone go the 600-plus miles distance.

And it didn't. The crew's *laissez-faire* attitude allegedly hastened the prototype's demise come the race. After a decent showing in qualifying, car 54 was going well, claimed Rudd, until he had to pit for fuel. It was at this juncture that he discovered that his crack squad of spannermen had been "on the Guinness". As a result, his pitstop wasn't as slick as it perhaps might have been. At some point during the ensuing farce, the car was either brimmed with regular leaded petrol or pure racing fuel – in effect Avgas. What is beyond doubt is the little two-stroke engine's reaction to the new go-juggie. Rudd said that it went "like the clappers of death" for a few miles before seizing solid. Without the essential oil-fuel lubrication, it was never going to last.

Legend – open-ended speculation more like – has it that Aldington cited the poor showing in



Ireland as the reason why it wasn't put into production. This doesn't quite ring true because AFN continued to field DKWs in saloon races. Archie Scott Brown won his class at Silverstone in May '56 in a works Sonderklasse, as did Neil Cunningham-Reid – ahead of John Sprinzel's Austin A35 – aboard the factory entry in the tin-top support race at the postponed International Trophy meeting at the same venue four months later. The sporting intent was clearly still there.

What likely did for the Frazer-Deek was the arrival of DKW's 1000SP convertible (C&SC, December 2002). This Baur-built machine was very much of its time, with styling that resembled a mini Ford Thunderbird, and the British car appeared old-hat alongside. After Daimler-Benz assumed control of DKW in '58, Aldington chose to sever all ties. So this intriguing what-might-have-been was pushed to the back of the FN factory and quietly forgotten about.

Except that few were aware of the car's existence to begin with. The Nash remained with the Aldington family until 1996, when it was sold, minus the original registration number, 5 DMP.



FRAZER NASH-DKW

- Produced/number built** 1955/1
- Construction** steel platform chassis, with aluminium bodyshell
- Engine** iron-block, alloy-head, two-stroke 896cc triple, with Solex 40 ICB carburettor
- Max power** 45bhp @ 4500rpm
- Max torque** 61lb ft @ 2250rpm
- Transmission** four-speed manual, with column change, driving front wheels
- Suspension:** front independent, by double wishbones; rear dead beam axle, two trailing links, radius arms; transverse upper leaf spring, telescopic dampers f/r
- Steering** rack and pinion **Brakes** drums
- Weight** 1000kg (est)
- Top speed** 90mph (est)
- 0-60mph** 17 secs (est)
- Price new n/a Price now** £56-60,000 (est)

'THE HANDLING REALLY IMPRESSES. IT FEELS LIKE A SORTED MINI ON TESTY SWITCHBACKS'



Bulbous shape is cute, if nose-heavy. Below left: from Saxony, Germany, to Isleworth, Surrey

The car has lived in a private museum in Yorkshire since 2001, making only sporadic public appearances at some of the bigger historic motor sport events. Most recently it took to the hill at the 2008 Goodwood Festival of Speed.

Once up and running, this endearing device defies expectation by not being rubbish. Obscure cars are usually obscure for a reason, but this is a corker. It might have been a one-week sensation, yet there's plenty to commend here. Admittedly, the styling is a bit dumpy, though it does have a certain charm. The rear end is pure Frazer Nash Sebring, the front a bit more Austin A40 Somerset. The slightly skewed proportions are down to no small part to packaging requirements – the longitudinal 896cc triple sits far forward in the chassis, after all – but it's hard not to be smitten.

Inside, even more so. There is sufficient room for this to be a 2+2, with the flat floor and uncluttered dash giving it an air of clean-cut efficiency. Only the fab white Bakelite wheel and DKW dials give the game away that this '50s British sports car has a German soul. The frenzied backbeat, however, lends it a distinctly East European feel. Yet it is refined. It isn't remotely quiet, but for all the two-stroke's bluster the car moves along at a mighty clip considering its meagre displacement, and with very little fuss. The four-speed column change isn't exactly slick. To begin with at least, it's all too easy to change from first into top – though it soon becomes relatively easy to guide. It will freeheel in every gear, which makes it an almost relaxed – if noisy – cruiser.

What really impresses is the car's handling: it's far from the expected white-knuckle ride, feeling more like a sorted Mini on switchbacks. It sounds busy, but the driving experience is great fun. The



precise rack-and-pinion steering loads up swiftly, but the car just clings on without any plough-on understeer nonsense. You can easily understand why the donor saloon did so well on rallies.

The Frazer-Deck undoubtedly grows on you. As to whether it would have found success had more been made is a moot point. The British specialist sports car industry has produced a veritable 'who's that?' of makes that talk up a storm while delivering little. Frazer Nash wasn't among their number. This agreeably eccentric machine, however, broke formation from previous models and, as such, was never going to appeal to the marque faithful. As for the likelihood of it transforming the firm into a big-number manufacturer, we'll never know. Ultimately, it didn't make the cut, but it did add some intrigue to an already colourful period in Frazer Nash lore. For this reason alone it deserves to be remembered, forgotten though it is.

Thanks to Silverstone Auctions, which is selling the car on 23 July: call 01327 856100 for more information or see www.silverstoneauctions.com



Four rings on grille signify Falcon's DKW power unit

Different strokes

The relationship between penny-number British sports-car makers and German two-stroke power didn't end with the Frazer Nash.

Renowned tuner Albrecht Mantzel initiated his own strain of baby GT in 1962, using a glassfibre Falcon Caribbean bodysell mated to a DKW Junior platform. The car was well received by the press, but it remained unique.

Mantzel followed up with ambitious plans to install the DKW unit in a Ginetta G4 and worked closely with the firm's Walklett brothers to help realise his vision. The newly designated G6 featured a tweaked two-stroke engine and a ZF gearbox, and a single car was entered in the 1963 Nürburgring 1000km. Mantzel's son Wolf-Dieter shared driving duties with Peter Ruby. With a top speed of 117mph, the G6 briefly showed well but expired on the track because of fuel starvation.

Other Ginettas were fitted with DKW power, but the project soon ran out of steam.