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# A TALE OF TWO TARGAS

## PART ONE

### "SORT OF CAUCUS RACE"

by Andrew Roberts



To the encouragement of the voiciferous Sicilian crowd, Andrew Roberts presents his standard DB 2 1/4 D.H.C. at the start of the 1962 Targa Florio

"What is a Caucus-race?" said Alice; not that she much wanted to know, but the Dodo had paused as if it thought that somebody ought to speak, and no one else seemed inclined to say anything.

"Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it." (And, as you might like to try the thing yourself some winter day, I will tell you how the Dodo managed it.)

First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, ("the exact shape doesn't matter," it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no "One, two, three, and away" but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking "But who has won?"

This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it stood for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."

From—Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

**L**EANING heavily on the bar, I echoed in a tone of feigned surprise "What is the Targa Florio? Why it's a sort of Caucus Race!" And proudly I showed a gold medallion in a leather and velvet case.

I knew little about it except that it was a long mountainous road circuit with a colourful and legendary history and that it had first been run in 1905. A racing friend of mine in the trade in Brighton suggested I would have a great deal of trouble in obtaining an entry in view of the fact that I had no "name" and would be driving a seven year old car—my '55 Aston DB 2/4 drophead. I accordingly phoned David Piper who, I understood, had spent a great deal of time racing in Italy.

"The Sicilians are a little bit mad," he said, "you must remember that! They like everything to be 10 times larger than life, so it's no use being modest about any racing you've done or about the car. Just let your imagination wander a little and you'll have no trouble."

I accordingly sat down and composed a suitable letter: "...unofficially have broken the lap records at Snetterton, Brands Hatch, Silver-

stone, Goodwood and Aintree ... subjected to tests by Dr. Von Steiner of the Psycho-Neurological Institute of America in connection with the American Outer Space Project enormous publicity will surround the activities of . . ."

The coldest winter on record had been followed by what I considered to be the wettest early spring, and I had desperately searched Phillips' Atlas for some sunny place where I might conveniently dry out like Alice's feathered and furry friends. My finger alighted on the map of Sicily, the garden of Italy. It was here, according to the RAC Calendar, that the Targa Florio was run. Here was an excuse to take an early holiday from my garage business.

Having had the letter accidentally returned twice by the Sicilian Postal Authorities, I finally received a most enthusiastic reply offering me £60 Appearance Money and enclosing an Entry Form and a small volume of Regulations written in Italian. Armed with an Italian dictionary, I waded through what looked to be the most important paragraphs only to discover that it was essential to have a co-driver. This presented certain problems as I discovered nobody who was prepared to travel over a

thousand miles to drive with the "great" Andrew Roberts in his "super" seven year old Aston in early May. Finally in desperation I decided to shelve the whole idea.

#### Two for the Targa

Ten days later however I found myself driving in a Club Meeting at Snetterton, (my first race in seven years) in close proximity to a Daimler SP250 driven by a Leicestershire farmer and garage owner by the name of Dick Crosfield. After the race I passed him as he was standing by his car in the paddock.

"Care to drive with me in the Targa Florio in Sicily next month?" I said casually. "It'll be damned expensive and there's no hope of doing any good with my old wreck."

"All right," he replied, equally as casually, and it was 'ON'.

We discussed the race at our next meeting, the Oulton Park Trophy Race. It was agreed that I should drive the Aston out by road and that Dick would fly out and meet me in Rome, owing to time snags with his business.

Armed with a spare set of wheels from Dick Crosfield's Daimler which fortunately fitted the Aston, a small trolley jack, five spanners (which was all my Foreman would allow me to



take from my garage), some insulating tape, and a coil of wire, I set off for the Silver City Air Ferry at 11.00 a.m. on Saturday, April 28—Targa Florio or bust.

The first problem came at Le Touquet. I had no Carnet for the spare wheels! Two hours later and my pocket book £21 10s. lighter, I headed for the South of France. Two days later I arrived at Nice and in starting the car I discovered a serious "missing" in the engine. The sparking plugs were too soft for the high speeds I had been maintaining (Paris to Nice at an average of 101.1 k.p.h.) and dropped into a small Riviera garage to get them cleaned. This, however, consisted of the pyjamaed proprietor blowing on them and if anything the engine seemed worse.

At Rapallo, on the Italian Riviera, I couldn't stand it any longer and stopped the car to put in a set of racing plugs. Still no good and I was getting worried. I suspected a valve. The road was crowded and progress was slow. When I reached Rome after three and a half days in all on the road, I had only just time to get to the Airport to meet Dick's plane. Rome must be the most difficult city in the world to find your way out of—especially when you're in a hurry. An hour and a half later, with the radiator at boiling point, I parked the car (still in the centre of Rome), locked it, made a mental note of the name of the Piazza and looked around for a taxi. Plenty of taxis in Rome but finding an empty one appeared to be next to impossible.

Reminiscent of a Botanist chasing butterflies with a net, I darted from lamp post to lamp post, from street corner to street corner, hailing taxis that all proved on closer examination to be full. Finding myself outside a Five Star Hotel I walked in by a side entrance, strutted importantly around the lobby a couple of times and out of the front door and, in an American accent, ordered the doorman to find me one. He did, as if by magic, and I headed for the Airport. When I arrived there I discovered Dick's flight had been delayed by two and a half hours. Confident that I now knew how to get to the Airport, and with time to kill, I took another taxi back to Rome to pick up the car, so that when Dick did arrive we would be all ready to scoot down to Naples to catch the overnight boat ferry to Sicily. I foolishly informed the taxi driver that I was racing in the Targa and having been given as a result a terrifying demonstration of the capabilities of an Alfa Romeo 1300 Diesel Taxi at speed, we entered the suburbs of Rome.

*Drifting through one of the imnumerable corners on the Madonie Circuit during the 1963 event*

"Via Vittore? Whicher one? There ees five een Roma."

"Oh heavens! Better try them all!"

**Lost—One Aston Martin—Colour Grey**

Two hours later I still hadn't found the Aston, and realising with every click of the meter and the ever widening smile on the driver's face that I was being "taken for a ride", I stopped the taxi outside an hotel in the Via Venetia and checked in.

"Yes, that's right, a room for two," and "No, I have no luggage". With a sly smile, the receptionist said he quite understood and not waiting to disillusion him, I collared the hall porter and arranged for him to phone the Airport to let Dick know where I was. I then set about the near hopeless task of trying to hire a self-drive Fiat to scour the city in during the night, when there would be less traffic around. At 7.30 p.m. Dick found me in the Hotel Bar.

"Oh yes, everything's all right," I replied cheerfully to Dick's question, "Only thing is, I've lost the car."

Dick, only a recently retired Army Major, took it surprisingly well and set about the "campaign" with military precision. Inside of two minutes he had procured no less than four street maps of Rome, and began drawing them off into sectors, throwing in a liberal sprinkling of map references.

"It's no use hiring a car," he advised commandingly. "We'll have to do it on foot. We'll start at one end of Rome and walk our way through it. It's surprising how much ground you can cover at three or four miles an hour."

I groaned and we set off, the tall lean figure of Major Crosfield striding ahead, while I, puffing and blowing, ran along behind. Less than 30 minutes later I was breathing sighs of relief over the bonnet of the Aston, while Dick, arms folded, stood by watching, a look of smug triumph on his face. This, rather meanly, I decided to remove by telling him of the suspected burnt valve.

**And Now for My Diagnosis**

The following morning found us in a small mews garage somewhere in Rome with the bonnet of the Aston up. "Definitely three valves have gone home," said the Italian mechanic apologetically, "and it will be quite impossible to get three new ones out from England and fit them inside of three days." As he leant back, the better to observe our long faces, he placed his hand on a disused power-brake vacuum pipe on the Aston's engine. The engine responded by surging into full six cylinder life. Dick and I let out a yell of glee. After we had gagged the offending vacuum pipe, we set off for Naples.

This time we found our way out of Rome fairly easily by following the driver of a high speed Lancia who had offered to assist us after meeting us nose-to-nose in a one way street. As soon as we were on the right road, I joyously put my foot on the accelerator. The policeman was very charming and sympathetic but explained that it just wasn't done in Italy to drive through a red traffic light at 80 m.p.h. in a built-up area. He hit me where it hurts, in the pocket book—for the equivalent of £6—but I was thankful it was all over





and done with so quickly. I slipped the Aston into gear and we set off once more.

We sat in silence contemplating our previous troubles and smiling to ourselves at our good fortune in overcoming them. "Well at least we haven't had any punctures," said Dick. A few miles later I changed the rear off-side wheel for the spare, following the inevitable puncture which comes of a "damn-fool remark like that", and we pushed on.

#### **An Extremely Attractive Young Neapolitan Lady**

We arrived in Naples after only a few hours, but after driving around the sprawling sun-baked suburbs for almost an hour looking for the way to the docks, Dick, who was now driving, pulled into the courtyard of a nearby railway station. Inside the entrance I asked a convenient book-stall attendant the way to the docks. Ignoring my question he summoned an extremely attractive young Neapolitan lady standing near-by and spoke to her very rapidly in Italian.

Unsmilingly she grabbed me firmly by the arm and marched me out of the station murmuring something about "Mia appartemente". Dick, whose mouth was wide open, drove the Aston very slowly across the courtyard a few feet behind us while I, with a wide grin on my face, attempted to show him in sign language that I was being taken to her apartment by force and entirely against my wishes. We eventually arrived at a block of flats a few minutes walk from the station, where the young lady's mother appeared on a balcony and gave me directions in fluent English. The young lady then bowed, smiled politely, and departed leaving me standing forlornly on the pavement, more lost than ever.

The road which "Mama" had suggested was not a good one as there was a diversion which led us down a narrow overgrown path between the hippo house and the rhino enclosure in the Naples Zoo and having finally emerged from this, led us back into it no less than five times. Finally we selected the most unlikely road we could find and a short time later drove through the dockyard entrance and parked alongside our ship. We took our place in the queue of cars on the dock; two Ferrari sports-racing cars, six Berlinettas and a bird cage Maserati. I was beginning to wish we'd never come!

#### **All's Fair in Love and the Targa**

"Oh, it's all a bit of fun," said Colin Davis who was to drive the Maser for Scuderia Serenissima. "This is my fifth Targa. You'll love it." I began to pump him with questions about the hopelessness of our chances.

"It's all right as long as you can get round in about 50 minutes a lap."

said Colin. "If you can do that, it's just a question of the car's suspension lasting the distance." "Are the roads really unmade?" I asked. "Good gracious no, but they're a bit rough in places and after a few hours it begins to tell. The smaller cars are started first at 30 second intervals followed by the larger GT cars, and then the sports/racing cars bring up the rear. They all change places somewhere up there in the mountains. Sicilian sense of humour," he added drily. "Remember to overtake on the right." He looked thoughtful. "Although some say the left!"

The sea passage was comfortable and smooth and I came on deck early the following morning to see dead ahead over the deep motionless blue water the town of Palermo dwarfed by the gigantic mountains which surround the capital.

After checking into our hotel we drove the 30 odd miles to the course and reported for duty.

#### **Il Medico**

First on the agenda was a compulsory medical examination. We queued outside the doctor's hut for almost an hour in the broiling sun. Dick and I went in together. The doctor indicated for Dick to sit and cross his legs so that he could test Dick's reflexes. He raised his little rubber hammer but unfortunately before he had a chance to strike, Dick impatient to get on with it, involuntarily and rather violently kicked out, striking the medico on the hip! When a moment later the hammer did strike, relations were not improved any, for Dick's leg was "dead". This was the first of no less than three medical checks we were subjected to. There was much excited shouting over Race Insurance, but Colin Davis advised us to shout just as loudly and to gesticulate just as wildly while speaking English. It worked like a charm and in thanking Colin Davis I told him I was worried about the modified exhaust on the Aston.

"As long as they can see your 'Form of Homologation' with the word Aston Martin on it you'll be all right. They'll walk around to the front of the car and seeing the name on the bonnet of the car will exclaim—"Astoner Marteen" and rubber stamp everything within sight." His prophecy proved correct to the last detail, or did it? One of the Scrutineers slid a rectangular block under the car to check the ground clearance but was unable to slide it under the silencers. Soon I counted a crowd of some 20 people around the car, all shouting and gesticulating. Suddenly an Italian driver stepped out of the crowd and everyone stopped and watched breathlessly. Deftly he he knocked the rectangular block on its side and passed it under the offending silencers. There was much

handshaking, smiling and back-slapping at this happy solution. Another Scrutineer wanted us to make the indicators work. I explained that they had been disconnected as the car now had flashers. But he was not satisfied as it is compulsory on the Continent to have flashers on the wings as well as front and rear.

"It's in the Highway Code," said Dick finally in desperation.

"What ees this 'ighway Code?"

"Good gracious! Everyone's read the Highway Code?" replied Dick haughtily. The Scrutineer withdrew looking a little sheepish and after clipping a Passed Seal to the steering wheel we were allowed to take off into the mountains.

#### **A Road with a View**

The race consists of 10 laps of a 45 mile lap course which can only be described as a giant scenic railway. The views were superb, far more awe-inspiring than anything I had seen in Switzerland. It was obvious from the start we could never hope to learn the course in the time available and we concentrated on trying to remember only the landmarks which preceded the corners that really "shook us". The corner which Mike Hawthorn describes in one of his books as "Coffin for England corner" was unmistakable. It was approached through a series of fast downhill left and right "flicks" and then suddenly it was there ahead, convulsing and contorting unbelievably on the edge of a precipice. Several times I "lost it" on the loose gravel, only to regain control as the outside wheels brushed the edge of eternity. It was exciting driving down the narrow streets of Sicilian mountain villages at speeds sometimes exceeding 100 m.p.h. Albeit, being British, we were overpowered by a dreadful sense of guilt at this flagrant disregard of the speed limit. It was on the outskirts of these villages that we encountered the worst road conditions for although the road appeared solid and well tarmaced, they were in fact very often like black ice, polished by the steel rimmed wheels of the ox-drawn farm carts. It was impossible to see this "soap" as one Italian driver described it, until you were on it, the car skating uncontrollably. Around one bend we came nose to nose with a tiny sports racing car driven by two enormous American Servicemen. We both stood on our respective brakes and, wheels locked, stopped nose to nose a few feet apart. I remembered that the road was still officially open to traffic so that technically they were allowed to practice the wrong way round—but even so! Dick and I, who were "in the right", both grinned widely, but the Americans only frowned and the driver rolling his cigar from one corner of his mouth





*The author gets the count-down in the manner of the great road races of the past. This was at the start of the 1963 Targa and they went off 30 seconds apart in the traditional manner*

to the other, screeched his car round us and was gone. Approaching the low-lying coastal strip we encountered a herd of cattle blocking the road. They were not impressed by the Aston, and not easily moved. The five mile straight along the coast was refreshing and I kept the Aston to a steady 120 m.p.h. down the long narrow tree-lined avenue and relaxed. At the end of the straight there were a few fast curves reminiscent of an English race track and then we were back at the Grandstand and pits.

The following day, Friday, was devoted to Official Practice and the roads were closed to traffic. Most of the drivers were reluctant to practice, not wishing to risk "bending" their machines so close to Race Day. After my second lap I found I had scared myself sufficiently to hand over to Dick, but was gratified to find I had kept my time down to the 50 minutes to which Colin Davis had referred. Dick stopped half-way around to give a lift to a driver whose Porsche had run into a ditch. Dick decided that giving a lift to a stranded driver was one thing but going slowly was another and he continued on at racing speed. The driver was quite unperturbed and although he

could speak no English he was a great help, for he knew the course in every detail. When Dick approached what looked like a tricky blind hairpin the Italian would yell "Go! Go! Go!" rapping the fascia with his fist to lend emphasis to his words and Dick would respond accordingly. And similarly when approaching a corner which looked fast, the Italian would yell "I freni, i freni!" Dick would stand on the fast fading brakes and mutter his grateful apologies as the car grazed the parapet of a bridge or suddenly encountered a rough section of road.

#### A Day of Rest

Saturday was a day of rest for everyone, except me. I drove from town to town, from garage to garage, trying to find the 16" tyres, which size I was told, did not exist in Sicily or Italy. The tyres that we had been promised had not arrived and I was desperate. There were telephone calls to Milan, Genoa, Naples and Rome and even cables to England, but all to no avail. Daniel Richmond of Downton Engineering whose Mini-Cooper was to be driven by Prince Meternick and Bernard Cahier and who shared our pit suggested I try a garage in Palermo in which they had worked all the

previous night on the gearbox of the Mini.

The two Foreman Brothers were colourful characters (one of them had been racing mechanic to Fangio). They were incapable of talking quietly. They could only shout—in Italian at that! Albeit their Italian was liberally sprinkled with the only English they had heard from their all night vigil with the Mini-Cooper.

"Buon giorno! I am trying.... to find... some 16" tyres... pneumatic!" I said to one of the Italian mechanics.

"Ruddy hell!" replied the mechanic, who didn't speak any English, while politely smiling.

Finally in desperation I drove 40 miles to the village of Cefalu where the Ferrari team were firmly entrenched in a small hotel.

I sought out the Ferrari team manager who was returning with his wife from church. I explained my grave predicament and asked if I could borrow some Ferrari wheels and tyres which I suggested might fit the Aston hubs.

"I am not the regular Ferrari Manager. I'm just keeping an eye on the team while they're in Sicily. I just can't give permission under the

—Please turn to page 165

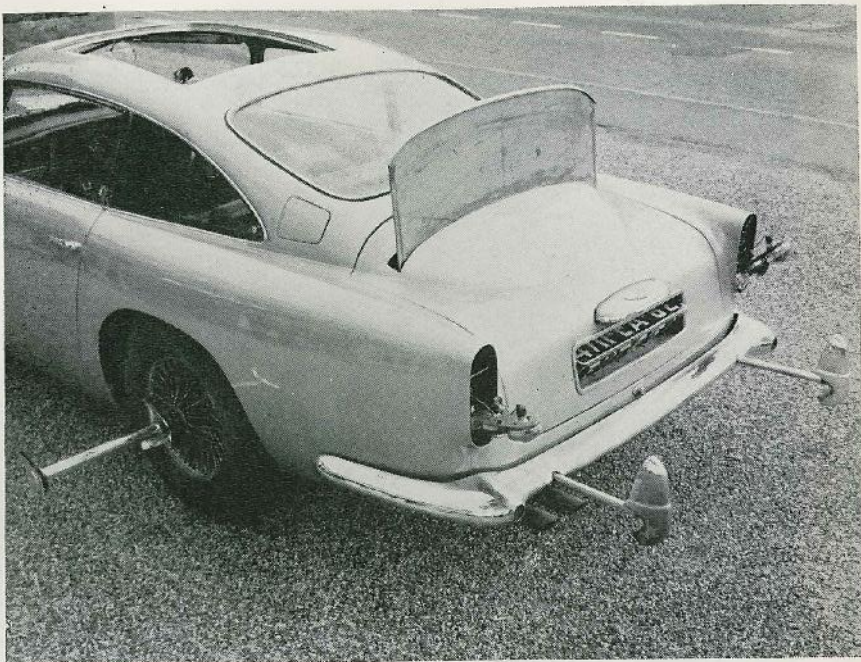


type. Ejection is effected by a push button control mounted on top of the gear lever. A snap-up cover precludes accidental usage and prior to ejection a secret panel in the roof is jettisoned (as with jet aircraft). All the Goldfinger "extras"—apart from the ejector seat—are operated by switches concealed in the arm rest.

On enquiry at Newport Pagnell we were told: "While Aston Martin Lagonda Ltd. are delighted to assist their customers in every possible way, the 007 'special optional extras' are not generally available and we claim no credit for the splendid engineering of these special features—that should go to Eon Productions Ltd.—we are content that Ian Fleming chose our product to ensure for Agent 007 the high performance, impeccable road behaviour, safety and silence so essential to the success of his mission."

*Co-stars note:* Co-starring with Sean Connery in "Goldfinger" are Honor Blackman, Shirley Eaton, Gert Frode—and the DB5 in silver birch (originally a standard saloon that retails at £4,248 17s. 1d.) but who knows what it cost in 007 form.

The premiere of the film was held at the Odeon, Leicester Square on September 17, and is due for general London release shortly before the Motor Show.



Rear view of the special DB5 with tyre ripping cutter extending from near side rear hub, lamps dropped to allow nearside an oil spray to the rear and, offside nail spewing device to eject spiked tyre wreckers and rear ramming spring bumpers. The bullet-proof shield is in the raised position and the roof panel is out ready for the ejected unwanted passenger to follow

## "A Tale of Two Targas" — concluding Part Two

circumstances much as I should like to help you out."

Being a nobody in Motor Racing, I'm all for the small man. It seems to me anyone can sing the praises of a Stirling Moss, a Graham Hill or a multi-thousand pound racing organisation. My mind wandered back to my first race meeting at Brands when I was 18 years old. I was particularly impressed by a very attractive brunette prancing around the Paddock. My ancient '33 Le Mans Aston was only a reserve entry so I was extremely gratified when I was not only called into the race but shunted into the front rank of the grid! Miss Brunette would be impressed!

"Number 31 is Andrew Roberts," intoned the well known public address commentator. "His father is an Antique Dealer and it looks as though Andrew has brought along one of his father's antiques!" Four thousand spectators around the circuit gurgled with amusement and I metaphorically shrunk from 10 feet to 10 inches.

I finished last but one and afterwards in the paddock as my friend and amateur mechanic, Peter Jenson, worked on the engine, the winner drove his shining green Cooper up

to a superb green Jaguar limousine and assisted by his chauffeur stepped out.

Miss Brunette suddenly appeared from nowhere and throwing her arms around his neck declared to the world, "Darling, I don't know how you do it!" At which point in disgust I threw the copper headed hammer I was holding down onto the ground. Actually it went onto Peter's foot. Ever since then all's been fair in Motor Racing for the small man in my book.

### Grand Larceny

Accordingly I decided to "borrow" with or without permission the four wheels from the Ferrari Berlinetta practice car. The hotel garage was swarming with mechanics and I knew my only hope was to hide behind the crumpled Ferrari which stood in one corner—the Ferrari that Phil Hill had written off in practice, until the mechanics went to lunch. Soon all was quiet. It was like a morgue! I picked up a hammer to loosen the hub-nuts. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder and I jumped. It was Colin Davis. "Sixteen inch tyres," I breathed. "Try Pirellis, they're encamped in the village of Cerda," he said with encyclopaedic authority.

Pirellis had just two 16" tyres and I decided these should go on the front

while the Avon Turbospeed with distorted tread and the bald Dunlop Racing tyre should be put on the rear.

### Any More for the Targa

At 3.30 a.m. on Sunday morning it was still dark as practically all the guests in our hotel crept silently and sleepily out of the hotel lobby and set about the journey to the Little Madonie Circuit. The first car was due off at 7.00 a.m. Soon we were at the pits, changing the plugs and attending to the thousand and one little things that I always remember only at the last moment. As the first car left, the sun was already high and warm in a cloudless blue sky. The grandstands were packed, the smell of shimmering, sunbaked sports cars pervaded the atmosphere as they queued one behind the other at the Start. Officials and mechanics jostled shoulder to shoulder, news cameras whirred, the whole colourful, glamorous, exciting spectacle that is a motor race. I was given the count down: "six . five four three two . ." and I was away feeling like a bird released from its cage. But soon I was battling with the grim reality of the demented road. Behind me were the other five cars in my class leaving