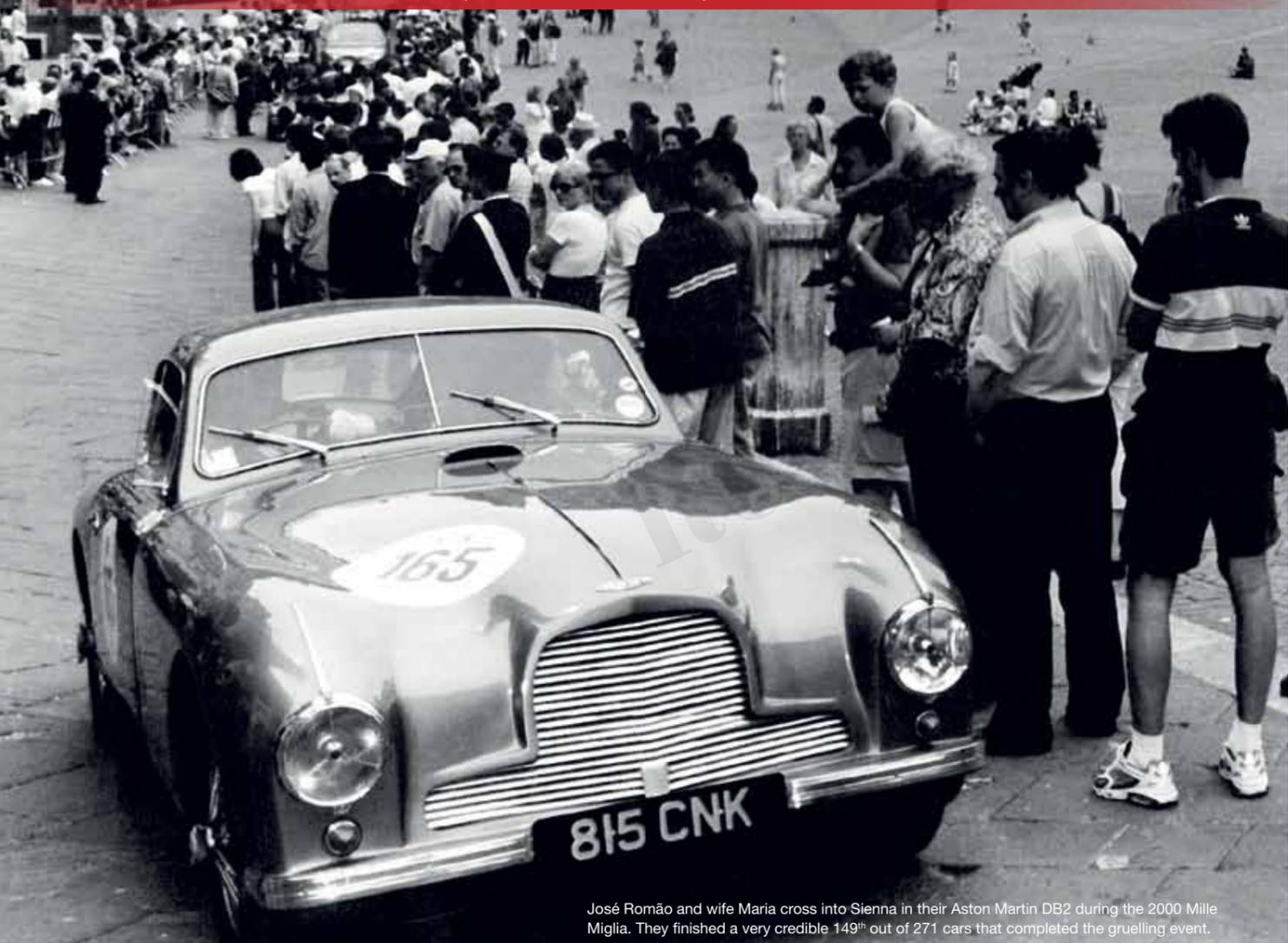


THIRD WIND

Words by **Eli Solomon** Photos from **José Romão de Sousa**



José Romão and wife Maria cross into Sienna in their Aston Martin DB2 during the 2000 Mille Miglia. They finished a very credible 149th out of 271 cars that completed the gruelling event.



Photo: a2o.com.sg

Abandoned under a tree in London for many years was an Aston Martin DB2 with Malaysian racing history. In 1998, it was given a new lease of life in Europe. 14 years on, the car is on its third leg.

The 1953 Johore Grand Prix, held on the streets of Johore Bahru a short distance from the border crossing with Singapore, was the last circuit race hosted in the township during that decade. There were a couple of international entries and many locally-made Specials. In the Sports Car support race, pilot Phil Caroline entered his powerful and fancied Allard J2X against the even more fancied gaggle of XK120 Jaguars.

A lone Aston Martin coupe, a DB2 bearing road registration BB 2254, was hardly the sort of lightweight that could match the tuned XK120s. Dr S.C. McPherson of Kuala Lumpur, owner and driver of the DB2, decided to upstage the establishment. The race would see the lead change at least four times over the 10 laps! Caroline spun or left the track on five occasions during the race while McPherson took Court House Corner too fast on lap 3 and ran onto the grass. Caroline, his Allard a far more potent car, was rapidly making up ground towards the end of the race, but just could not catch the flying doctor. McPherson and his DB2 held off Caroline's challenge and won with a course time of 22min 38sec, although the Allard set Fastest Time of Day. Malaysian Ho Yue Kong took third place in his actively-campaigned Jaguar XK120.

McPherson had purchased his DB2, manufactured in 1951 with chassis number LML/50/70, from the factory and had it delivered to his address at Oriental Building off Mountbatten Road in Kuala Lumpur. The Sports Car race at the 1953 Grand Prix was his sole foray with the DB2, and the car was shipped to England sometime in 1956. A subsequent owner noted that it had changed hands four times after that before being discarded under a tree in Sidcup, London, where it lay for eight years. It was salvaged in the late 1980s and although in poor shape, still had Perspex windows, wide wire wheels, a close-ratio gearbox and a long range fuel tank. A mention in the July 1995 issue of the *Classic & Sports Car Magazine* suggested that the car was in "eminently restorable" condition even though the sills had rotted through.

Current owner, motoring enthusiast and Aston Martin fan, José Romão de Sousa, is an intrepid Portuguese who had participated in rallies in Portugal in the late 60's and early 70's. As soon as he could afford to buy his first classic car, a 1960 white and turquoise Corvette (which he still owns), he started entering local regularity events.



de Sousa bravely drove the car from England to Portugal in July 1999, just in time to ship it to Argentina for the 1999 Mil Millas in November.

An insatiable thirst to enter the Mille Miglia further fuelled his passion. While living in England between 1971 and 1975, he cultivated a love for the cars from Newport Pagnell, home of the Aston Martin factory. When it was decided that the Corvette, a C1 model, was not the ideal family car, an “upgrade from [the] two-seater ‘plastic’ American bathtub to a 2+2 Grand Tourer” became unavoidable. An Aston Martin was his obvious choice and a 1970 DB6 Mk2 (which he also still owns) was purchased.

The quest for an eligible car to enter the Mille Miglia still continued to gnaw at him. He had little interest in pre-war cars, and magnetos were not his cup of tea. An eligible post-war

car had to be able to accommodate his six-foot-three frame.

Via the grapevine, de Sousa had heard that an acquaintance had an Aston Martin DB2 for sale. “So I went to his place to drive the car sometime in 1997,” he recalled. “The only thing I knew about the car then was what was on the Aston Martin Owners Club Register, and that it had won the 1953 Singapore Grand Prix [in actual fact the 1953 Johore Grand Prix organised by the Singapore Motor Club].” The Grand Prix win added premium to the provenance of the car. His interest was piqued. At this point, the car had undergone a body and interior restoration. The restoration, he realised, was not particularly good and mechanically,

the car ran like “a dog”. It did not, however, stop him from acquiring it a year later. Some remedial work was undertaken to get it into shape before he could consider entering the car in events.

With this work completed, de Sousa bravely drove the car from England to Portugal in July 1999, “just in time to ship it to Argentina for the 1999 Mil Millas in November”, Argentina’s 1,000-mile equivalent of the gruelling Italian Mille Miglia. In 2000, he entered the car in the prestigious three-day Mille Miglia Retrospective in Italy, pitting the DB2 against 374 other classics in this exhausting event.

Over the years, he has tried to find

Aston racer is resting, but restorable

This sparkling Aston Martin is “entirely restorable”, according to Simon Duvel Smith. It’s certainly a vehicle with history. It’s a 1952 DB2, registration 815 CNK and chassis number LM/50/70. Originally owned by a Dr McFerson, it won the 1953 Singapore Grand Prix in his hands. Simon says the engine was upgraded to VantageSpec by the factory, although Aston Martin Owners’ Club records state that the power unit was originally a standard 105bhp unit. Other mods are Perspex windows, wide wire wheels, a close-ratio gearbox, and a large tank. The car was rescued from a barn in Wiltshire where it resided for 20 years or so. The engine turns, there are no holes in the body, it’s upright, and the chassis is good, says Simon. Interested? The Aston could still be on the market. More details via this column.

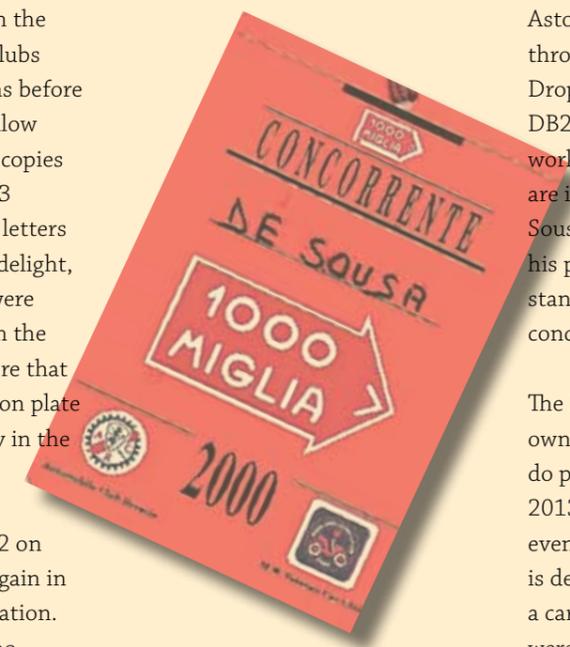
Sills are ragged, but the body is claimed as soon

Daat complete **Somebody has started on body**



out more about the Asian history of his DB2. He drew blanks with the Malaysia and Singapore car clubs and motor sports associations before a chance encounter with a fellow DB2 owner resulted in photocopies of paper clippings of the 1953 Johore Grand Prix and some letters coming his way. To his great delight, two photographs of the car were subsequently uncovered from the National Archives of Singapore that show the DB2 with registration plate BB 2254 on its way to victory in the 1953 race.

A decade after taking the DB2 on its first long rally, the car is again in need of another major restoration. “To be honest, it has taken too long, although it is now progressing



quickly,” he told me recently. An Aston Martin aficionado through and through, he currently drives his 1950 Drophead Coupe Prototype while the DB2 undergoes long-overdue repair work. As the mechanicals of the car are in less need of extensive work, de Sousa tells me that the bodywork is his primary objective, but “the final standard will not be exceptional for concours.”

The DB2 will continue to give its owner a good run for his money. “I do plan to apply for a place on the 2013 Mille Miglia, plus other similar events such as the Targa Florio. It is definitely not a trailer queen, but a car to be driven... That’s what they were made for!” de Sousa reports cheerfully. ◀