

THE TUNERS

J IS FOR JANSPEED



That's Jan on the right.

In the year of 1957 the free Western world was shocked and horrified at the ferocity and ruthlessness with which a revolution in a Communist controlled state was quelled by the Russian "Masters".

You may ask what the foregoing has to do with this somewhat light-hearted and "with-it" magazine. The reason is this, out of these terrifying circumstances was to arise an enterprise in England specialising in making Motor Cars travel very quickly indeed with complete reliability.

I have watched the growth of Janspeed Engineering with considerable interest, initial scepticism and later admiration. I first met Janspeed without realising it. In 1962 I used to compete against a quiet, unassuming man who drove a Downton tuned Mini quite quickly, to me he was just another pleasant and friendly member of the same B.A.R.C. Centre as myself intent on enjoying himself in a motor car and attending the same social and competitive events as myself. To me he was just Tom.

At about this time one of my mates purchased a "Bloody Mini" (I was an Anglia fan in those days), and deciding to make it go more quickly, where more natural place to go than the local tuning firm, Downton Engineering? So of course along we went to meet them, complete with the few shillings we had to spend.

I remember little of this journey excepting that we met a gent who worked there whom we nicknamed "that mad B. Hungarian", everyone called him Jan (pronounced Yan).

I think my first knowledge and in fact probably the first time most people heard of Janspeed Engineering was when a certain John Fenning began to attract the notice of the Motor Sporting public by going very quickly in a black-roofed red Mini Cooper 2705 MW tuned by Janspeed. This was in fact the Works car and in its first year was placed in every International event entered, giving the formerly in-

vincible Cooper Works cars no end of trouble. Most people remember Fenning's epic wheel to wheel dice at the Easter Monday Goodwood with John Whitmore. Janspeed had arrived in no uncertain manner.

In the following year or two Janspeed Engineering became a name known to nearly all enthusiasts and I myself met "Yan" at several events where we competed against each other. I became most interested when I learned that the works were in Salisbury only 19 miles from my home.

Let us now return to the present.

A few weeks ago I called in to Jan's place at Park Street in Salisbury for some carburettor pieces and immediately received a light hearted ribbing about my recent Mini Tuning Series. One thing led me to another however, and finally Jan agreed to let me do this article and the track test of his latest Motor Car (see elsewhere).

So we sat at the table and my interview commenced over a grubby cup of coffee and many cigarettes.

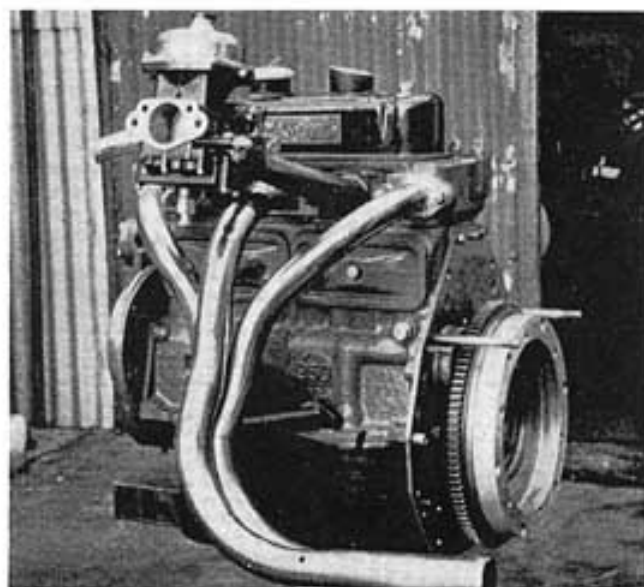
I learned that Jan, full name Janus Odor, had escaped from Hungary at the latter part of the revolution and been placed in a refugee camp near Bath, Somerset. I had visions of furtive meetings in underground tunnels, forged passports and car chases over deserted mountain passes. However, none of this, to quote Jan: "I just walked out, I guess I vos lucky I never met anyvun on zee vay out".

On reporting to the Employment Officer at the refugee camp, Jan was told that a certain small garage in Downton wanted an odd job man. The Garage business was largely Rolls Royce car repairs and making the odd unlikely production car go faster.

On joining Downton Engineering (for such was the small garage) Jan was made most welcome, he lived with the owner, Mr. and Mrs. Richmond (affectionately known as Daniel and Bunty) and was put to work cleaning and tidying up. At this time Jan could speak no English.

In the course of tidying up, Jan found the parts of an old lathe which he amused himself by assembling. Then a customer came to the garage with a completely worn out old Bentley cylinder head. It needed renewing, cost about £300 in those days. However, Jan came to the rescue and to much scepticism undertook to remake it. This he did, drilling out and re-sleeving corroded water jackets, making his own sleeves on the old lathe. He made up new valve seat inserts, etc., etc. Then after several days, voila, the job was completed at a fraction the cost (about £90) and the customer was delighted. Everyone else was amazed.

Naturally enough this set Daniel and Bunty thinking and



they immediately went back to the aforementioned Employment Officer and asked "What the devil does that Hungarian chap really do". They were informed that Jan was in fact a very skilled and competent machinist.

Without more ado Jan was put to work at his rightful trade, and of course as we all know, by 1962 Downton Engineering was on the Mini Tuning Map in a big, big way.

In 1962 the desire to be independent and work for himself caused Jan to sever his long and very close ties with Downton and he started up in business, albeit in a very small and humble fashion on his own at Part Street, Salisbury, where he still operates today.

Shortly after Jan left Downton an old Downton customer went back to have a tune-up. Jan had been virtually "his mechanic". On learning that Jan was working for himself this customer wasted little time in seeking out his premises in Salisbury. This gent, himself a successful business man, had always been very impressed with Jan's standard of work and meticulous attention to detail. He wasted little time in offering Jan the much needed capital in return for a partnership. This was gratefully accepted and JANSPEED ENGINEERING, Park Street, Salisbury, was formed, and the initial partnership between one Janus Odor and the business gent, my old acquaintance Tom, full name "Tom" Sawyer, blossomed into an extremely successful business and friendship.

Naturally enough their first efforts were directed towards Minis and other B.M.C. A series derivatives, and even today these cars constitute the bread and butter of their bolt on trade.

First they raced the aforementioned Cooper Mini until it was rather disastrously written off at Brands Hatch, although the bits were sold for nearly £600 to some chap on the Continent, this proved rather a severe financial set-back.

However, they continued to work hard and obtain new and more customers, and soon in 1964 were to be found racing a B.M.C. A engined Formula 3 Lotus. Unfortunately they were unable to obtain a pukka B.M.C. Short Stroke 970 type engine and had to make do with an ordinary A40 type A series unit fitted with a Red Crank. However the car driven by John Fenning was still fairly successful, though it was found that the publicity gained did not justify the expense and so in 1965 the 1000 Cooper S Club Cars driven by Keith Kirby and Ralph Wilding appeared on the scene. At first they were rather unreliable being fitted with the rather temperamental Colotti Francis five speed gear boxes. A few modifications and attention to detail found them reasonably reliable and many races were won.

Towards the end of 1965 the Mini Marcos came out and Jan got one. First time out with Geoff Mabbs behind the wheel it ran away from the hordes of Elans and Divas in the race, lapping (in only 10 laps) almost the entire field.

During the winter of 1965/66 Jan decided to build an 850 Mini. And some 850 it was, complete with 970 crankshaft, five speed box, etc., etc. Unfortunately race organisers this year have tended to give the 850 class the cold shoulder again, and consequently the car hardly saw the light of day, though it was taken to a Hill Climb where it reduced the class record by no less than 2 seconds. Tom Sawyer was driving and as he says, "I am not a particularly quick driver". Also earlier this year they carried on using the Marcos fitted with a 1293 cc S unit, and earlier on an 1100 S unit. This invariably proved to be the fastest Marcos present and won a few awards. However difficulties both with homologation and roadholding decided Jan to "scrap" the Marcos and race a Mini Saloon.

The 850 Mini was quickly "butchered" and converted to a 1293 S. First time out at Castle Combe it won its race, again driven by Geoff Mabbs, since when it has won its race or its

class at almost every event entered. This car is the subject of the Track Test featured elsewhere.

Thus we are now up to date at least as far as the works publicity regarding racing goes. However, this is only the glamour, it is certainly not profitable and does not earn Janspeed and its employees a living.

Strangely enough bolt-on conversion kits do not constitute Janspeed's main output. The bulk of their business now involves making manifolds, both inlet and exhaust, not only for sale direct to the public or Agents (mainly Mini, etc.), but also for sale under contract to other conversion companies specialising in Imps, Fords, etc. Janspeed are acknowledged by many people as one of the finest fabricators of steel manifolds in the country. The walls of their premises are lined with hundreds of different manifolds, many of which are sold by other well known tuning establishments under their own name. Second to this side of the business comes the bolt on conversion kits, mainly of course Minis, though quite a few kits for Imps, Volvos, Vivas, etc., have been produced for personal callers. Jan does not particularly like making standardised kits, though naturally enough demand forces him to do so. He feels rather as I do, that the ideal is to tailor a conversion to a particular individual's needs, though unfortunately time, manpower and £ s. d. frequently prevent this. One-off work takes a lot of time and money.

Janspeed are however in my opinion invaluable to the more specialised enthusiast in that they welcome (at the right price) one-off jobs and here the gunner's machining knowledge stands him in good stead. He himself has recently made a steel light-weight fly-wheel and a complete set of Mini main bearing caps to name but a few. Not for Jan the posh suit and comfortable office. But a work soiled white coat, a set of tools and a draughty workshop.

Another thing I liked about Janspeed. He does not poo-poo the Do-it-yourself enthusiast, though naturally enough he is somewhat sceptical as to their ability. However if one has a problem needing some specialist part made or modified and one is prepared to pay for it, then Jan's the lad. He is not expensive by comparison to some others I have come across either.

There are 11 Janspeed Agents throughout the country selling direct to the British public and exporting about 10% of the total output.

Future plans naturally enough involve expansion.

It is intended to market complete conversions on a much wider scale than hitherto for Fords, Imps, Volvos, Vivas, etc., and towards this end, providing planning permission is granted, a smart new factory is to be built on the main road out of Salisbury enabling Janspeed to cope with the ever increasing volume of business.

Jan hopes to build a hairy V8 saloon for Club Racing next year, but though details were entrusted to me I can only tell you at this stage that it will not be anything like any other Hairy Monster yet produced. When sorted, watch out you other V8 saloon boys!!

I was most impressed by the obvious workmanlike and practical approach Janspeed offer to a problem; Jan is always willing to help, but beware of two things. He calls a spade a spade. If he thinks your idea is daft, he will tell you so, and he cannot afford to waste time with people that just want a chat and a cup of coffee. On the other hand, if you just want a 25/- exchange quick lift damper, or a set of circlip grooves machined in your 850 Mini pistons he will readily oblige, without trying to force you to spend another £40 on a bolt on kit, though you may get asked if you have considered the idea.

I think we shall hear a lot more about Janspeed Engineering especially when they move into their new factory.