

RAF Changi

1574 TFF (Target Facilities Flight)

Singapore Vintage Grand Prix Entry

1936 SS JAGUAR

8 – 11 April 1971



Within this article reference is made to extracts from the **Changi Informer** which was the official magazine of Royal Air Force Changi. Published on a regular basis throughout the year it was for the service personnel and their families and carried news stories from the various squadrons, flights and departments at RAF Changi. It was also a vehicle for providing information on schools, social clubs and other facilities on the camp, as well as providing a guide on what films were being shown at the Astra Cinema as well as other attractions that were available in the city.

In 1968, Britain had announced a total withdrawal of its troops “East of Suez” with the pull-out from Malaysia and Singapore scheduled by the end of 1971, so in January the personnel on 1574 TFF began preparations to disband by the middle of the year. In February 1971 the flight had arranged a photoshoot to commemorate the pending historical event.



Figure 1. 1574 TFF Personnel and “Sol & Abbas” Singapore Nationals (February 1971)

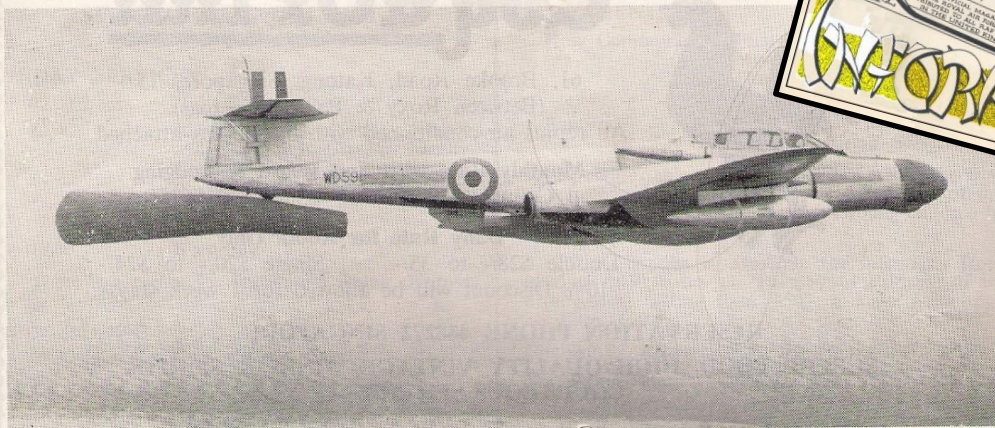


Figure 2. Flight Sgt. Tim Flynn and Flt Lt. Paul Miller (centre) Middle Row

Dated: January 1970



NO. 1574 (TARGET FACILITIES) FLIGHT



It is interesting to find out, whilst busy with our own jobs at RAF Changi, a little of what the people around us do. So, with that in mind, let us take a look at No. 1574 (Target Facilities) Flight, situated at the far end of the airfield. Flt. Lt. Paul Miller commands the Flight which consists of five pilots and twenty NCO's and airmen.

They have, at the present time, 6 assorted Meteors, 3 TT 20s, converted NF 11 night fighters, 2 Mk. 8 old fighter type Radar Calibrators and 1 T.7. The T.7 is twenty years old and is thought to be the oldest of its kind in active service with the RAF. The Meteor was the first British jet to fly operationally during World War II, augmenting the Spitfire in 1944, and one of its jobs was the interception of German flying bombs. It held the world's speed record soon after hostilities ended. From 1949 to 1954 they were the backbone of Fighter Command until the arrival of the Hunter, which replaced them as day fighters, and Javelins, which took over the night flying.

Their main job now is the towing of special targets for Naval gunnery practice. Other tasks include providing targets for the RAF Regiment, banner-towing for air to air firing by RAAF Mirages and work with the Singapore Armed Forces, all of which is enough to keep them very busy.

The TT.20 carries a crew of two, comprised of pilot and TT operator (a volunteer from the groundcrew who willingly accepts the extra work of operating the winches and targets in the rear cockpit, without complaining about the discomfort involved). The targets can be towed anything from 2,000 to 6,500 yards behind the aircraft, depending upon the task. The single seater Mk. 8s are used principally for gun tracking, anti-shipping strikes and banner target towing. The aircraft are usually given free rein to provide the ships with as many varied and difficult attacks as possible. The T.7 is used for continuation training and also doubles up with the Mk. 8s on Radar Calibration and other operational tasks. Although working in the slimming conditions of a small cockpit, in the tropics, the pilots still manage to keep cool enough to provide the Naval gunners at sea with plenty of experience against an ever mobile target. They then return home with their dry sense of humour and very damp flying suits.

There are, of course, problems with servicing a vintage aircraft, especially as most of the groundcrew are young men who have had no previous practical experience of working on the Meteor before joining the Flight. On arrival they are passed into the able care of FS Tim Flynn, who keeps a fatherly eye on them and is affectionately known as "Our Man Flynn". It is well worth pausing a while to learn more of Tim Flynn who first joined the RAF in 1938, seeing active service during the Battle of Britain, following the War to India from 1941 to 1945 and even managing to be at RAF Wundsdorf servicing the aircraft that took part in the Berlin Airlift. Whilst serving as NCO in charge of second line servicing he was involved with the early problems of the ejector seat. After a flying incident where a whole squadron was ordered to eject he was awarded the BEM for his work on the maintenance of the seats. A well deserved reward for a man who is still helping to keep our aircraft safe.

The Flight decided that they would like to have their own special insignia and, as the underside of the Meteor is painted with black and yellow stripes and as they used to operate Hornets in 1952, they devised a badge in the form of that insect. With the Flight meeting an increase in their flying task perhaps a worker bee would be a more appropriate emblem!

At the end of February 1971 there was an order to clear out the contents of the Flights wooden hut and move them into the nearby tent (shown in Figure 3). A few days later there appeared through the security gates that provided access to Telok Paku Road, a newly painted car chassis complete with wheels with new tyres fitted and nothing else. This was quickly manoeuvred into the now empty hut, effectively hidden from view.

Soon it became evident that the chassis belonged to the Commanding Officer Paul Miller who called the flight personnel to a briefing in the crew room. We were informed that the chassis was from a 1936 SS Jaguar and that it had been shortened.

The engine and gearbox were currently being overhauled and the radiator repaired and re-chromed.

Paul Miller then took out of his pocket a matchbox toy car of a racing Bugatti and told us his intention was to enter the car into the forthcoming Singapore Vintage Grand Prix which was in 6 weeks' time.



The aim was to build a body which looked like the Bugatti from scratch.

And so the project began.....



Figure 3. A recognisable RAF Changi trader "Maryson Lim" Fresh Fruit seller at 1574 TFF (Hut shown in Background)

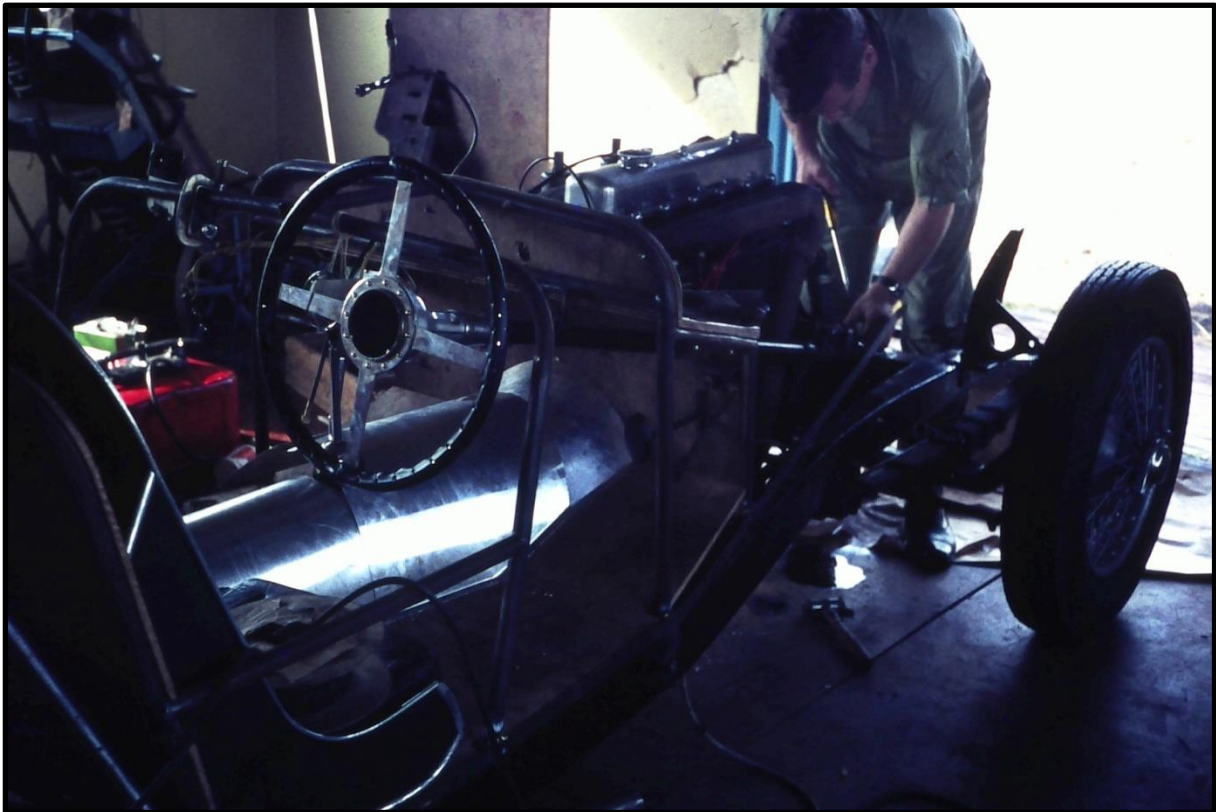


Figure 4. Early stages - Tubular framework built by Station Workshops and the engine being fitted

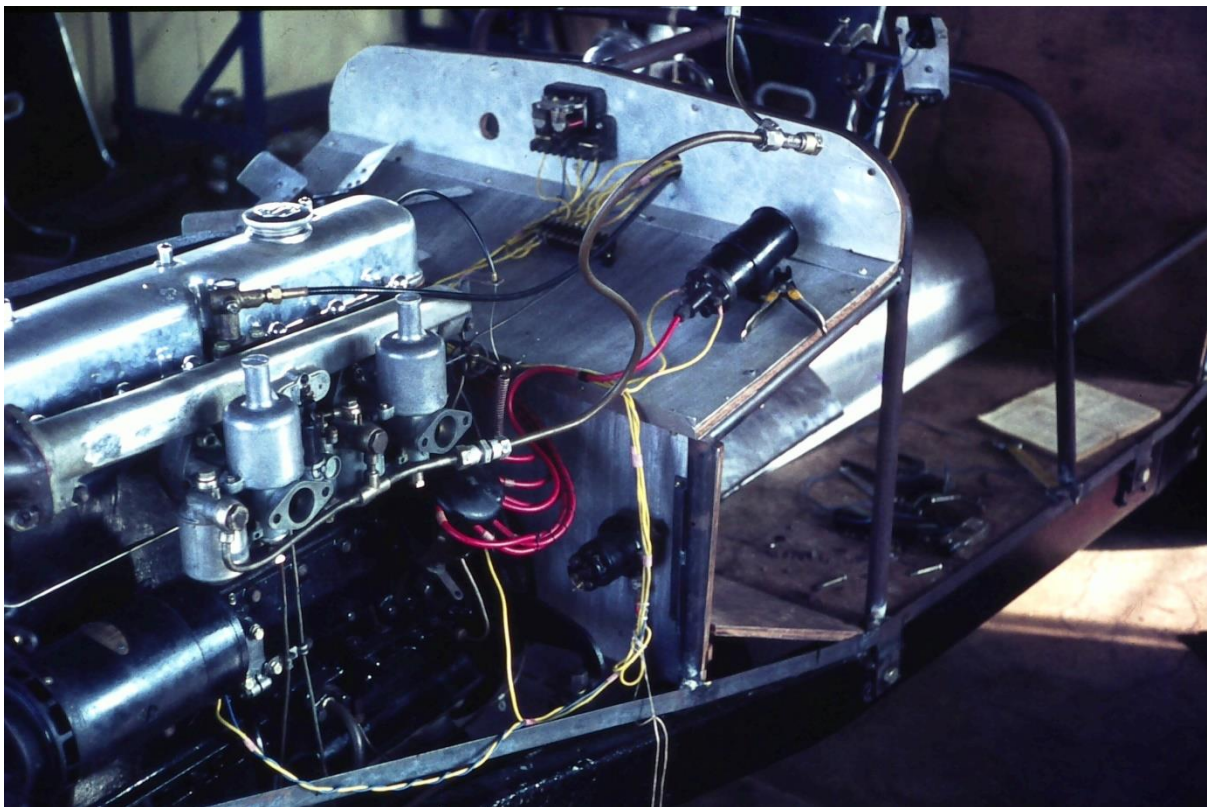


Figure 5. Components installed on bulkhead and cabling being fitted.

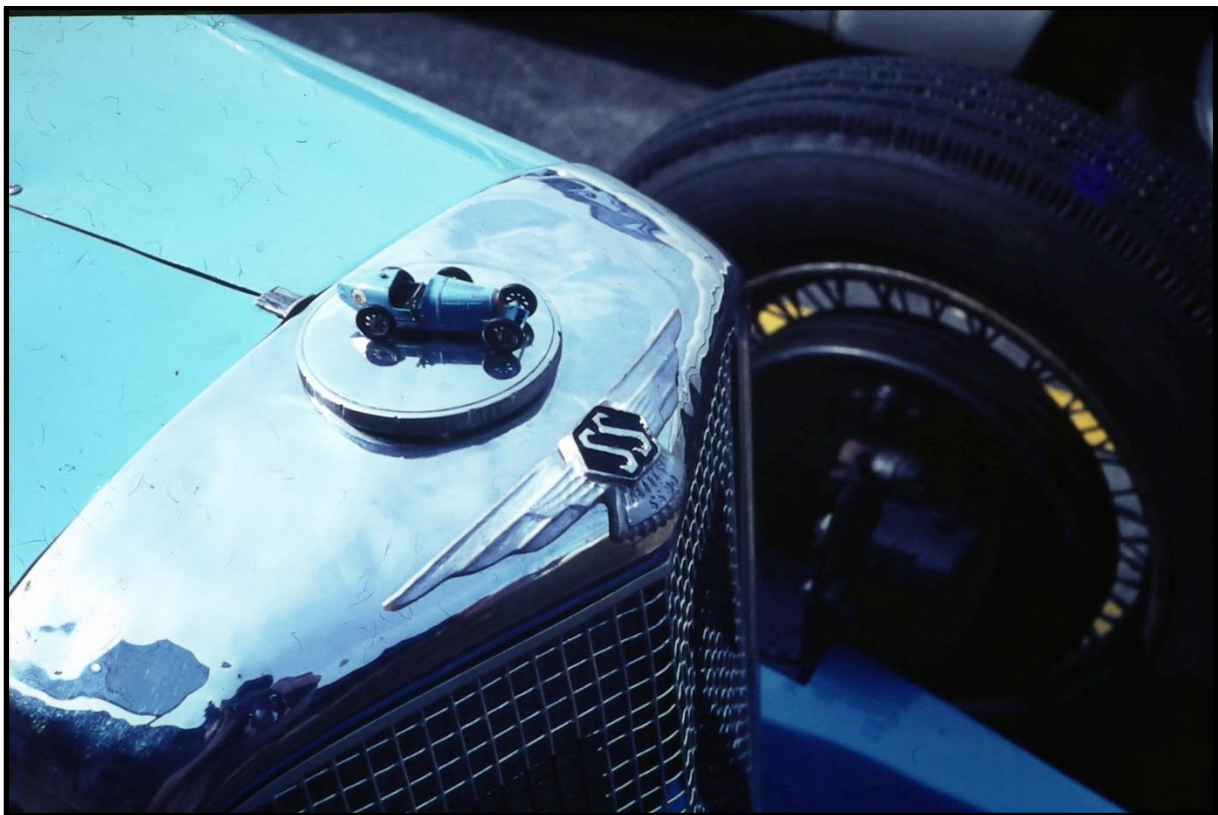
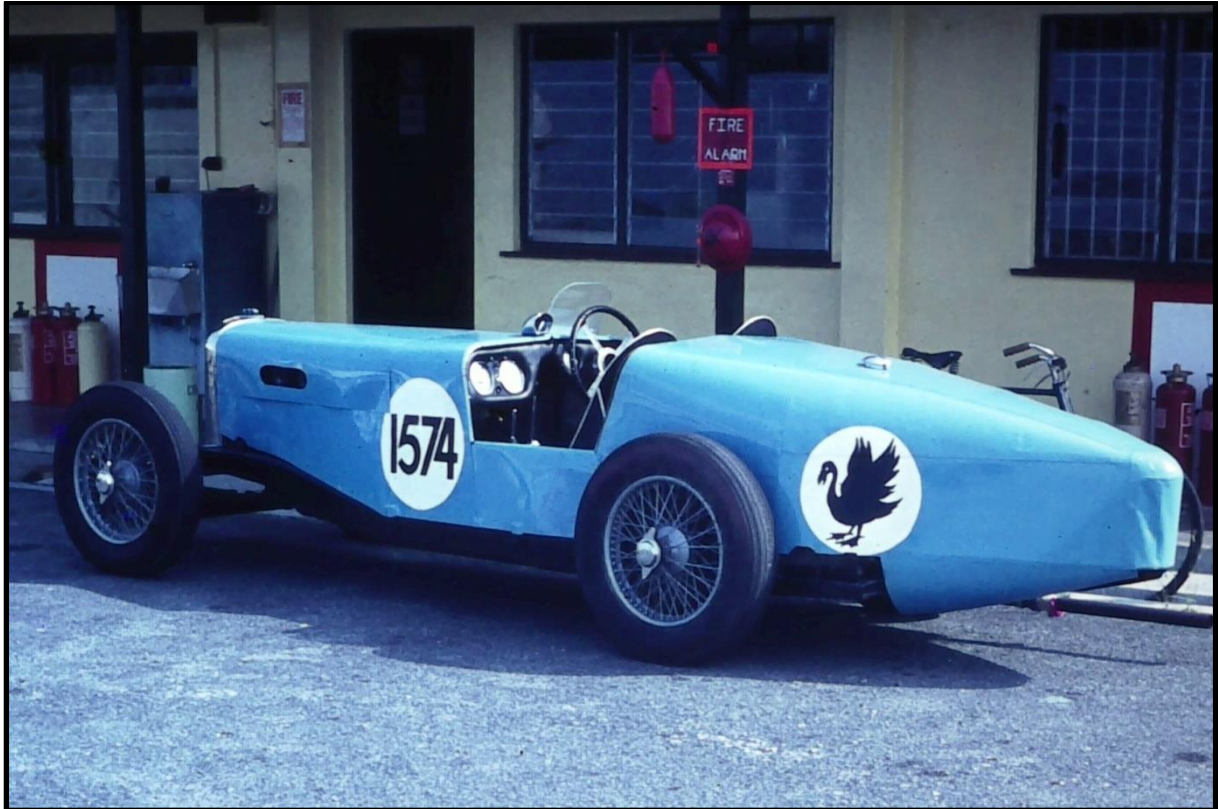


Figure 6. Note the concrete manhole cover (for ballast) and car is wider than the door!

In addition to the procurement of the manhole cover from the Department of the Environment (Not sure if they knew about it), the straight through exhaust pipework was rumoured to be a scaffolding pole that had found lying around – apparently unwanted!

The car seats were of course from a Meteor aircraft – where else. Across the runway and unbeknown by many, were two Meteors that had been taken out of service many years earlier covered by greenery and overgrowth. Suitably adorned to protect against the wildlife the cockpit was opened and the seats removed and modified for fit to the SS Jaguar.

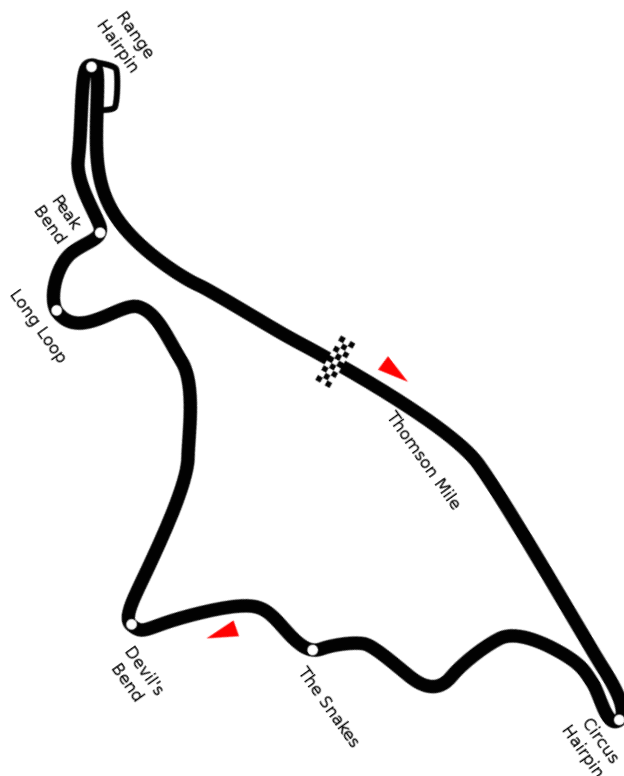
The Finished 1574 TFF SS Jaguar



On the radiator cap is the original model matchbox Bugatti from which the final bodywork shape and design was taken.

The radiator badge was made by the Dental Centre. How many fillings would that have made?

The Thomson Road Grand Prix Circuit - Today and how it was in 1971.



The **Thomson Road Grand Prix circuit** was a former race circuit encompassing Old Upper Thomson Road in Singapore.

It was formerly a racing venue for the Formula Libre & Australian AF2 rules from 1961 to 1973.

The track was 4.865 km or 3.023 miles long and ran in a clockwise direction. New Zealander **Graeme Lawrence** who became the most successful driver in the history of the event with three successive wins from 1969-1971.

What happened?

Extract from the Changi Informer June 1971

VINTAGE GRAND PRIX 1971 (and Before)

There were to have been three cars driven by members of RAF Changi in this year's Vintage G.P. A 1927 Dodge, a 1934 Austin 7 and a 1936 SS Jaguar. However only the SS ran in the race but sadly this failed when it overheated with two laps to go.

The Dodge was entered by Flt Lt Robin Mitchell. He had discovered the car in Katmandu and got it to Changi on a friendly Hercules. After months of careful restoration the car was almost ready to race but Flt Lt Mitchell, who works for FEAF MAMS, was whisked away to New Zealand on a less friendly Hercules the day before the race.

The Austin 7 entered by Sgt Slim Baring-Gould of the MT Section, did something disastrous to its timing gears and had to be scratched.

The SS Jaguar, however, should have won. Though it was mostly prepared and built in a frantic six week burst, it had nearly the whole might of RAF Changi behind it.

The SS which is jointly owned by Flt Lt Paul Miller (1574), Fg Off Bruce Handyside (103) and Dr David Brewin was conceived and built at 1574 Flight (which explains its resemblance to a Meteor at the back). Every member of 1574 and most of Station Workshops made a contribution to its construction, to say nothing of free medical advice from an oily doctor, and a smart new radiator badge made at the Dental centre. (There's something about false teeth and S'S). Even the Department of the Environment made a contribution in the form of a 5 cwt concrete manhole cover which was built into the car in an effort to keep its back wheels on the ground.

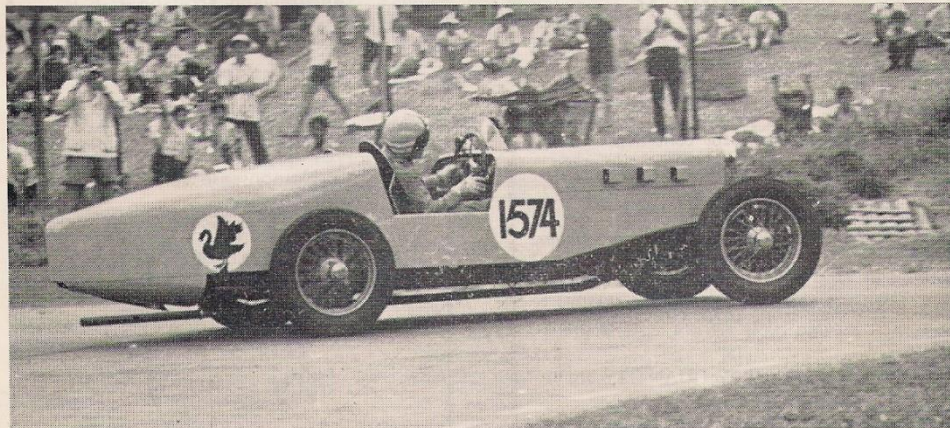
In the race the handicappers set the car a target of 3 min 43 sec per lap. It actually managed 3 min 41 sec, but with only two laps to go it faltered and stopped. Severe overheating had melted the plug leads.

But some RAF honour was upheld, for the car that won the race had been built in similar circumstances at RAF Tengah in 1964. But it will never look as beautiful as the SS with 1574 for a number and 103 Squadron's black swan on the tail!



Flt Lt Paul Miller in action.

P L M



Cornering during the Grand Prix, the Jaguar SS clearly displays its Squadron affiliations.

In the above photograph you can clearly see the straight through exhaust pipe. Extracting the car from the wooden hut had proved a problem due to the fact the doorway had to be enlarged and in addition when the car was wheeled out on wooden planks unfortunately the exhaust pipe supports brackets were damaged.

Due to the tight deadline (apparently the car was still being painted the night before the race) the repair to the exhaust supports was hurried. Although not mentioned in the Changi Informer report, it was found that the exhaust support had unfortunately failed during the race causing the exhaust pipework at the engine to release hot exhaust gases which damaged the plug leads.

Last time up for an aging foursome

The following photograph and article was taken from the **Singapore Straits Times**



METEOR JET "Victor Whisky 487" veteran aircraft of the Far East Air Force took this picture during its last flight - a photographic sortie to film three Meteor Mk 20 target-towing jets which were also taking to the air for the last time over Singapore from where they have been operating since 1954.

"Victor Whisky 487" had been flying for more than 21 years. All four aircraft of No. 1574 Target Facilities Flight were based at Changi.

Primary task of the Meteors was target towing for gunnery practice by warships of the British, New Zealand, Australian and Royal Malaysian Navies, and by RAF aircraft, British Army artillery units and RAF Regiment light anti-aircraft squadrons.

Postscript

I was stationed at RAF Changi from September 1969 until August 1971 working on 1574 TFF as a Corporal Instrument Fitter (Navigation). This year marks 50 years since I was involved with many others at RAF Changi helping Flt Lt. Paul Miller build his Bugatti shaped SS Jaguar racing car. I was mainly involved in modifying the Meteor seats and making the instrument panel. Unfortunately I missed the last week of the build and also the race having been struck down, along with my wife who was 8 months pregnant, with "Singapore Gut". Thus the reason for the missing photographs of the completion of the bodywork. I'm the airman sitting on the jet intake of Photograph Figure 1.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading and sharing my memories of Singapore.

Stay Safe.

Barry Fagg - February 2021