

The Duckham's Story

A CENTURY OF FIGHTING FRICTION



ROBIN WAGER

Foreword by John Surtees MBE

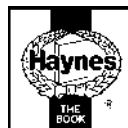
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Haynes Publishing

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FOREWORD

by John Surtees MBE

If we look back over the past 100 years it would, I believe, be fair to say that it has been the age of the internal combustion engine and motorised transport, whether by land, sea or air. Alexander Duckham was a part of that new era. A chemist by profession, he founded his company on products connected with aircraft and with the vehicles that were being developed for both the First World War and the turn to motor vehicles that followed it.

The company expanded and again the war years came, followed by new management and direction, with Jack Duckham taking over from Alexander who died in 1945. Product involvement in speed records with Goldie Gardner, and a friendship and business relationship with Lord Nuffield, brought about further growth.

However, 1951 was the year that Duckhams really made a great surge forward. The decision was made that multigrade was the oil of the future; and so the product was launched that was to be used universally in all forms of transport and motorsport – the famous Duckhams Q20-50, with its distinctive green colour. It is with the success of this product, and an attempt by the company to prove a point, that I come into the story.

Duckhams had moved to West Wickham, and had started a competitions programme largely based around the Mini, which had become such a giant-killer in saloon car racing. Motorcycles were to follow shortly, and the little Duckhams caravan was to be seen around all the British national circuits

providing that back-up with Q20-50.

In 1971, in the second year of my own Formula One race team, I had a call to say that Duckhams would like to test their oil in a Formula One engine, and could I help? My answer was yes, and we provided one of our Surtees team cars to carry out an RAC-observed test at Silverstone, using Duckhams oil purchased from a garage by the RAC scrutineer. The test was over 201.96 miles at an average speed of 123.8mph, and the engine was subsequently dismantled and pronounced to be in a totally satisfactory condition.

The team were delighted and it sparked an increased involvement in motorsport that was to cover Grand Prix support for Team Surtees, Team Lotus, Graham Hill, Embassy and Hesketh. Also, Van Diemen and their Formula Fords have been a success story in their working relationship over the years. If you list the names of drivers who have had support in their early years, it reads like a Who's Who: Hill, Coulthard, Irvine, Mansell, Brundle and Senna, to name just a few on four wheels.

On two wheels, Paul Smart, John Cooper, Ray Pickerell, Dave Crockford – and we mustn't forget the 1995 British Championship-winning rotary-engined Duckhams Norton. Renold Chains went to Duckhams to have the lubrication problems solved with their racing motorcycle chains; BMC did the same with their constant-velocity joints.

As this book relates, the Duckhams story is one of constant development and success on the back of the technology, expertise and

enthusiasm that has supported its products, now into a new phase with the Mobil and Duckhams lubricant brands under the BP umbrella. I look forward to a long continua-

tion of the unique niche, and the support that Duckhams have been able to give with their products, in both two- and four-wheel motorsport, at both national and club level.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Surtees', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

**John Surtees MBE
1999**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Compiling the fascinating story of this unique company in the relatively brief time available would have been considerably more daunting even than it appeared, had it not been for the research already documented by Roger Soper, formerly technical and logistics manager at Duckhams. Roger has also patiently helped with my subsequent queries and provided invaluable assistance in unearthing illustrative material.

Former competitions manager Ron Carnell gave an extra dimension to the motorsport connection with his memories, and the loan of some photographs from his personal collection. Additional help was provided by Pat Lelliott, whose official post for many years was technical manager, but who also happily acted as unofficial press relations manager. A number of the current management and staff at Duckhams Oils have also been of great assistance on a day-to-day basis.

Useful pointers on the family side were given by Neill Foster, grandson of the company's founder Alexander Duckham and

the last family director.

Michael Adams, Chairman of the Governors of the Alexander Duckham Memorial Schools Trust, was most helpful in providing information relating to the origins of the Trust, and arranging the loan of the painting of Vanbrugh Castle.

The people specifically referred to in the text are those who happen, for whatever reason, to have had a higher profile. I am very conscious that there have, over the years, been many others whose dedication to the company justifies inclusion; similarly there are undoubtedly other events in the company's history that probably should have been mentioned. For such omissions I can only plead constraints of space.

I should also point out that, in asking for certain illustrations to be reproduced from very old photographs, and particularly from old company magazines, I have asked the publishers to perform a near miracle; they must be absolved from any shortfall in the resulting quality!

**Robin Wager
Cheltenham**

Chapter 1

THE EARLY DAYS

This is the story of a name that, for much of the 20th century, has meant ‘engine oil’, even to people with no particular interest in motor vehicles. It is also inextricably linked to one man, spurred on by a fascination for engineering and technological progress.

Alexander Duckham was the founder in 1899 of the company that, 100 years later, still enjoys a remarkable enthusiasm and loyalty for its products among engineers and laymen alike.

The 20th century has been a remarkable one for so many reasons, bringing, like every century before it, its share of good and bad. But as we enter the next millennium, history will record the past 100 years as being notable for the amazing advances they saw in two major areas, each to some extent reliant upon the other. Those areas are communications and technology, and it is in the latter field that Alexander Duckham’s company has played an important part.

Alexander was born in Blackheath, South London, on 11 March 1877, at the culmination of the Victorian era. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, science and technology were already taking the major strides that would see them galloping into the next century, gradually improving living standards; but in many ways social conditions were still in the Dark Ages. To help put things in perspective, the London Underground had already been open for 15 years, while children could still legally be sent down the coal mines at the age of 12.

With steam and electricity providing the current forms of mechanical propulsion, the internal combustion engine, with which the

Alexander Duckham, founder of the company 100 years ago.



Duckhams story is closely connected, had only just been invented, and Alexander would be in his teens before the first cars started to appear.

Alexander Duckham was fortunate in his parentage. His father Frederick, a Cornishman by birth, was manager of the Millwall Dock Company, one of the oldest and most important sections of London's docks; his mother Maud was a philanthropic woman and a member of the McDougall family, of flour and chemicals fame.

A brilliant engineer, with an inventive bent and a painstaking capacity to achieve results, Frederick apparently tended to lose sight of financial matters when engrossed in a project. It is said that Maud, who was keen to see her seven children prosper, often tried unsuccessfully to persuade her husband to turn his skills to something more lucrative than the dredgers and elevators that were his everyday concern.

Recalling his childhood in later life, Alexander wrote:

‘The whole of the married life of this fine couple was, I think, an example of what matrimony should be. They both had brains, kind hearts, a great love and respect for each other. They delighted in good work so long as they could indulge in it hidden and unseen. Each put the life and happiness of the other and the children above everything.

‘We were always comparatively poor, mainly because my father was one of the most generous men and was satisfied with the simplest living. I think we all sympathised with my mother whose lot was made a good deal harder than it need have been.

‘She was, however, a wonderful manager with a certain amount of cunning which she often used, quite legitimately, to deceive my father. She developed a system of asking him for £10 when she only needed five, spending what she needed and putting the remainder into her banking account. As a result of this she saved over £20,000 up to her death, which

followed my father's by some few years, while he left only £10,000.

‘His generosity could be very aggravating to his family though. On one occasion he was given a fine job as arbitrator in the Manchester Ship Canal case. This paid 50 guineas a day as a retainer and 200 guineas when the court was sitting. The case went on for months, and we lived in legitimate expectations of some kind of real beano, perhaps a few tricycles or ponies when he received his emoluments.

‘What actually happened was that he gave his helpmate £10 to buy a new hat. Then, with unfeigned pleasure and without any swank, expected us to share his joy in having been able to send a cheque for many thousands of pounds to the London Hospital.’

When Alexander was four the family moved to The White Cottage in Maze Hill, Blackheath. Just across the road stood Vanbrugh Castle, a large, imposing house with battlement-style walls, which, unbeknown to the young Alexander, would later become a testament to the fact that he had inherited his father's charitable nature.

Now a built-up suburb of London, Blackheath at this time was quite rural, and Alexander recorded that the family's new home ‘... secured a more or less country life within reasonable distance of my father's job ... to get to which he walked to the Greenwich Pier near the Ship Hotel, famous for its whitebait dinners, and then he crossed in a rowboat or one of those funny old paddle steamers.’

Entering a dame school at a young age, Alexander progressed to Blackheath Preparatory School (from which subsequently developed the famous Blackheath Rugby Club) where he gained both a junior and a senior scholarship.

Matriculating at just 16, he went on to University College, London, where his brilliant mind gained him the Goldsmith's Scholarship and the Exhibition of the Cloth Workers' Company. His original ambition had

been to become a surgeon, but a fascination with chemistry enticed him away, bringing him the Senior Gold Medal of the university in that subject. He also took the PhD degree of the University of Heidelberg, Germany, but never used the formal title of Doctor.

He was studying at University College under Sir William Ramsay (discoverer of the inert gas argon) at the time of the discovery of X-rays by Röntgen in 1895. Within a couple

of hours of the announcement of this in the press, despite the fact that no details of the equipment used by Röntgen were given, Alexander had succeeded with very primitive apparatus in producing what is thought to

Frederick and Maud Duckham and their family. Young Alexander is standing, on the left of the picture.





have been the first X-ray photograph ever taken in Britain – of the bones in his own foot. The work was carried on by one of the teaching staff and contributed to some of the earliest published papers on the subject.

Most of Alexander's siblings appear to have inherited a share of their parents' special genes. His elder brother Frederick ('F. W.') Duckham became a distinguished civil engineer, counting among his projects London's George V Dock and Dover Harbour as well as docks and ports around the world.

Younger brother Arthur – for some reason always known as 'Bob' to family and friends – also took up engineering, specialising in furnaces and the gas industry, his experimental work resulting in the formation of a group of companies set up to exploit his specialist products and expertise.

Frederick Duckham Snr, closely involved in various developments of the Industrial Revolution, was a friend or business acquaintance of many of the movers and shakers of the late 19th century. One such was Alfred (later Sir Alfred) Yarrow, of the powerful shipbuilding and engineering family, who had become godfather to the young Alexander. Yarrow took his duties seriously, influencing his newly graduated godson to take up the study of lubrication – hardly a science at all at this time, but a subject in its infancy and using the crudest materials.

In the early 1890s Britain's personal transport was still catered for by the horse and the bicycle, and such cars as existed were all imported. Despite this, and the fact that they were legally restricted to walking pace, Henry Sturmey, editor of *The Cyclist*, was prompted to launch a weekly magazine about cars, which he titled *The Autocar*, a name he created as an alternative to the increasingly common 'automobile'.

Alexander's mother Maud was a kindly and capable woman who learned to live with her husband's casual attitude to the family finances.

A British motor industry was born more or less instantly when in 1895 flamboyant entrepreneur Harry Lawson, who had built a fortune from cycles and tyres, formed the British Motor Syndicate to buy up all existing and future motor vehicle patents. He went on to form the Motor Car Club, with the object of protecting motorists' interests.

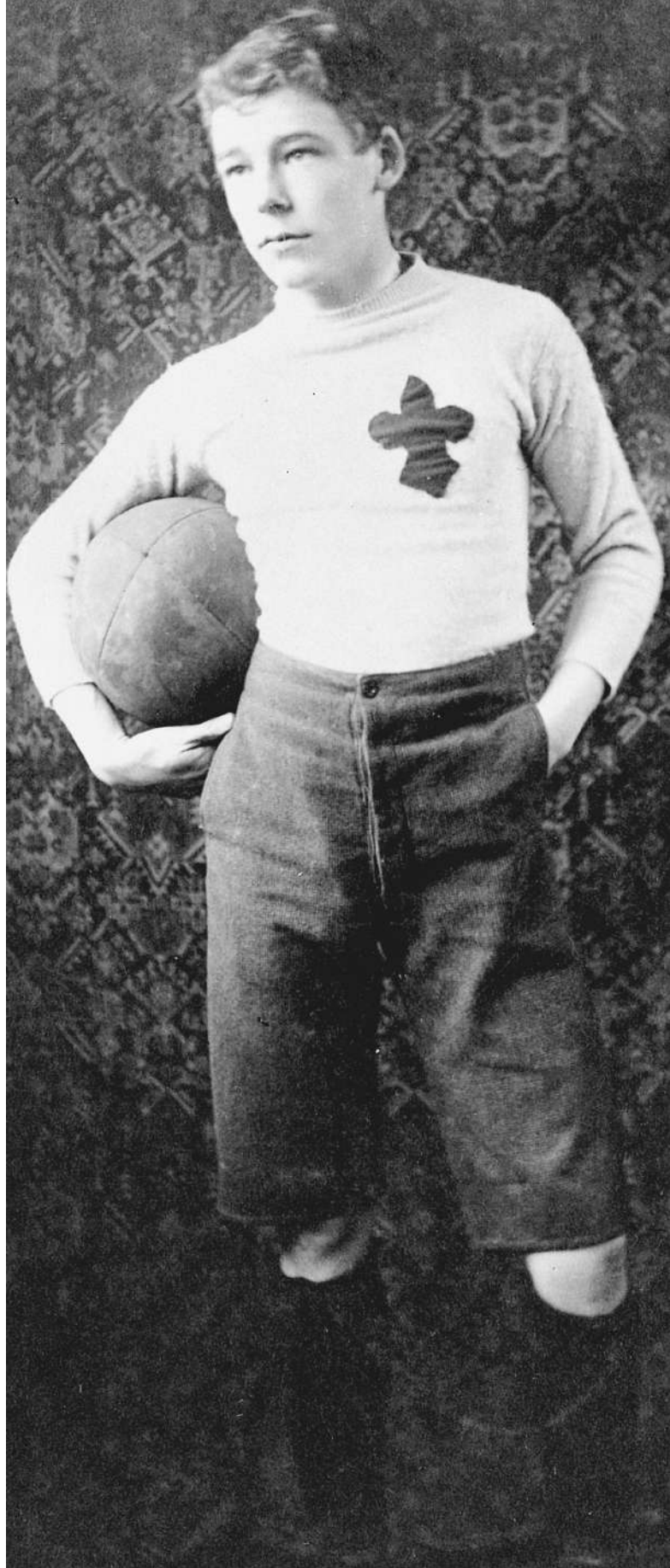
Taking his first job in 1897 as a chemist with Fleming's Oil Company in Millwall, Alexander Duckham found himself on a pittance of 15 shillings (75p) a week. Like father, like son – the money was not as important to him as the additional skills he was gaining. Allied to his theoretical knowledge, these practical lessons were to prove invaluable in his business life; not only the tricks of the particular trade that he induced the various workers to teach him, but also, for example, the demoralising effects of working for an employer who did not appreciate the virtues he undoubtedly possessed.

At the age of 21 Alexander was made deputy works manager, to cover for Fleming's manager who was away for a long period in the Rumanian oilfields. Such was his skill in cost-saving, especially in waste products, that the company was able to pay its first ever dividend. It was also the last, for after receiving a gift of £5 for this achievement, Alexander resigned and the company closed.

Seeing little hope of the advancement he so impatiently sought, he had decided that the only solution was to set up on his own. With £200 donated by his father, he acquired a two-roomed, wooden building in premises at Phoenix Wharf, in the familiar Millwall area of docklands.

First naming his business somewhat diffidently 'Alexander & Co', he then, perhaps as an afterthought, affixed a brass plate inscribed 'A. Duckham FCS, Analytical Chemist'. Numbering about 10 in total, the rest of the

Alexander as a young boy: he enjoyed outdoor pursuits including swimming, cycling and rugby.



staff shared one room as a general office while Alexander used the other as both his office and research laboratory.

It was the end of the 'Naughty Nineties', with a new century about to dawn. The Boer War had broken out in South Africa, and an ad in *The Sphere* proclaimed that 'the quantity of Liebig's Meat Extract already supplied to the British Forces there amounted to the product of 4,000 bullocks or sufficient to make 5,128,192 breakfast cups'.

The 'no nonsense' literary school of Kipling and W. E. Henley was on the way out, to be replaced by the likes of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Carlyle and Samuel Smiles were passé; the influence of new thinkers like Shaw and Havelock Ellis was growing. Art Nouveau was at its peak, and the era of advertising had begun.

The theatre too was booming, and every city had several, all well attended, plus a selection of music halls. London itself had over 50 recognised music halls (the Hammersmith Palace was perhaps the best known) as well as hundreds of 'song and drink saloons'. The entertainment at these was of dazzling variety, with often as many as 20 first-class acts on the bill, and a seat cost 6d (2.5p).

In Germany Count Zeppelin was busy with his airships and in Ohio the Wright Brothers were experimenting with their gliders. The electric light and the telephone were new, while the horseless carriage was regarded by most as a crackpot contraption, although its endorsement by Prince Albert was bringing a new respectability.

The Light Locomotives Act of 1896 not only repealed the 'Red Flag' Act of 1865, which required any self-propelled vehicle to be preceded by a man on foot, but also raised the speed limit from 4mph to a dizzy 14 (although this was promptly reduced to 12mph under a clause giving such powers to the Local Government Board!). The date of this relative 'freedom', 14 November 1896, saw the first London to Brighton Run, celebrated annually

to this day under the auspices of the RAC.

Spurred on perhaps by this gradual emancipation of the motorist, at the time he set up his company Alexander Duckham also acquired his first car, a Germain. This was effectively a Daimler, built under licence in Belgium, lending extra credibility to the story that Alexander had been taken for his first drive in a motor vehicle by none other than Gottlieb Daimler himself.

Unfortunately the motor car had already come to be perceived by the majority of the population as a social evil – and on grounds that are only too familiar today. The first was speeding: all kinds of ways of catching motorists were tried, but in the end it came down to the good old speed trap involving two constables and a stopwatch. With conviction relying on the word of the police (none of whom could afford a car themselves), and with some local magistrates clearly resolved to hound motorists out of existence, drivers became only more determined to fight back.

The second objection was pollution. In bad weather the primitive, poorly made roads became quagmires as they were churned up by the cars' wheels, while in times of drought the neighbourhood was soon choking in a thick cloud of dust.

Motoring, however, was here to stay, and Alexander Duckham motored on, mainly for business purposes. Fired by an all-consuming interest in problem-solving and developing new techniques, his capacity for tireless work was apparent even then, as his own description of his daily schedule reveals:

'Did laboratory work, saw Works Foreman, washed, shaved and had breakfast. Opened small mail and then dolled up to go out and cadge for orders. Came back in the afternoon to put things in trim. Devoted the evening to laboratory and testing work and often slept on the laboratory table.'

The phrase 'cadge for orders' suggests a

certain embarrassment, based on the feeling among business people of the time that it was undignified to tout for trade. In fact this would not prove necessary for long. By 1902 the small business was thriving, and the boss was able to note, ‘... finding that I had no reason to be ashamed of trade as a profession I called the firm Alexander Duckham & Co.’

The fledgling works carried out basic oil and compound blending. Its products went primarily to serve the various developing forms of mechanised production, but also to the local shipbuilders. Millwall was in the centre of naval shipbuilding, with Yarrow & Co on the Isle of Dogs, and also the Thames Ironworks, the largest of the old firms, who built *Thunderer*, last of the men-of-war to be built on the Thames, and to whom Duckhams supplied tallow for the launch slipways (at some £500 per time), and oils for engine trials.

Almost alone in his chosen field, and with the help of Alfred Yarrow in introducing him to other engineers and companies with

specialist lubrication needs, Alexander was quickly able to establish a reputation for himself as an expert on the subject. Never happier than when challenged with solving a difficult problem, he was, perhaps unwittingly, setting the philosophy to which Duckhams would adhere to this day. He recalled that his father’s honest nature, too, clearly helped him in these early days of the business:

‘I found ... when I started in business that his reputation for integrity, ability and kindness of heart were of the greatest value to me. Indeed on more than one occasion it was conveyed to me by those whom I was approaching for business that in view of my parentage they were going to take it for granted that I could be relied upon.’

Keenly interested in ‘The New Motoring’ from an early age, Alexander acquired his first car, a Germain, on founding his company in 1899.



Queen Victoria's 64-year reign ended with her death in 1901, aged 82, and the accession of Edward VII. As the Edwardian era progressed, so too did Duckham & Co: new offices and laboratories were built at the road end of the works, additional chemists were engaged to handle the intensified research into practical lubrication and associated problems, and the first lady typist was employed. With the arrival in 1904 of a chartered engineer, P. N. Hooper, a further cornerstone of the company's later success was cemented: the partnership between the chemist and the engineer, the laboratory and the technical applications of the science. Hooper became a director soon afterwards.

The growing popularity – at least with drivers – of the automobile (in America, Henry Ford founded his Ford Motor Company in 1903 to produce the two-cylinder Model A, setting the scene for the mass-production that was to follow) presented Alexander Duckham & Co with plenty of business, from two main points of view. First, the rather basic oils available needed developing with a view to improving, for example, the control of carbon formation and engine starting. Second, with the country's fuel and oil needs increasing rapidly, Alexander's expertise was called upon at a high level (where the new importance of oil in the event of war had also not gone unnoticed) to investigate prospecting for oil in British dominions abroad.

Trinidad was soon identified as a major oil source, and new exploration produced an extremely high-class crude, much superior to the asphaltic variety produced by wells elsewhere on the island. In the early 1900s Alexander set up the Trinidad Central Oilfields Company (TCO), which, not surprisingly, found a ready marketing agent for the new oil and its products in Alexander Duckham & Co Ltd of London. So important was this side of Duckhams activities that TCO (later to become Tricentrol) appears to have become the tail that wagged the dog of his British company for a time.

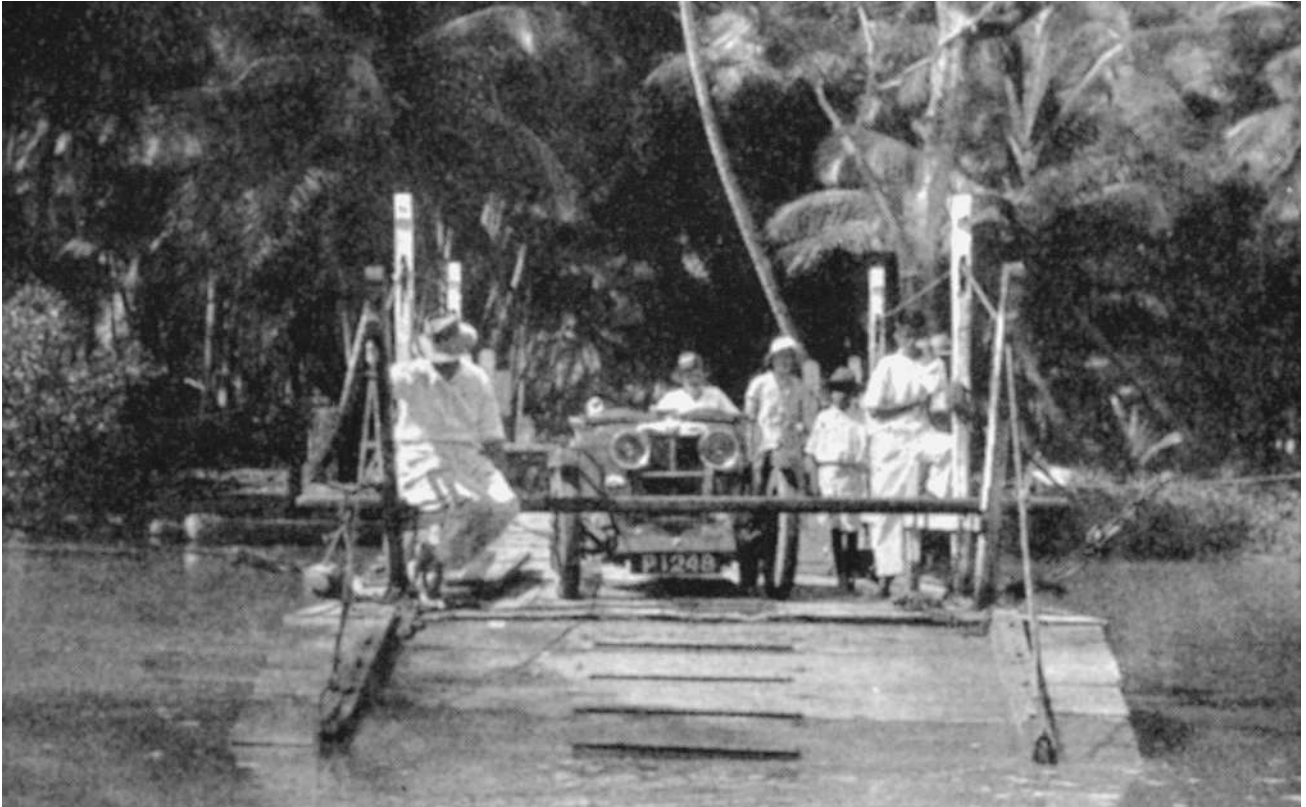
Despite the ready market for cars, social conditions were improving only very slowly. The working week averaged 55 hours, and one person in every 40 still lived below the poverty line (although in 1906 David Lloyd George declared that 60 per cent of the poverty that existed could be blamed on the demon drink!).

By 1907 the Duckham company head-count had grown to around 25, most of the general office staff being teenagers. Weekly remuneration ranged from 25 shillings (£1.25) for the chief clerk to just 8 shillings (40p) for the new arrival, office boy George Joyce. Destined to become a key figure, Joyce would remain with the company all his working life and rise to become joint managing director, one of many staff over the years whose contribution to the company's growth and reputation was invaluable.

Packaging for liquid products did not have access to the sophisticated materials of today, the commonest form of container being the wooden barrel, in which raw materials were received. The company set up its own cooper's shop where new barrels were turned out on piecework, ensuring more than adequate output, and these would be filled and loaded on to horse-drawn carts for delivery to customers.

It was not only land-based transport, as represented by the motor car, that was concentrating the minds of contemporary engineers; so too was the aeroplane. Despite the Wright Brothers' breakthrough in covering 852 feet in their petrol-engined craft in 1903, progress in powered flight was painfully slow for the next few years. By 1908 a number of aircraft were regularly taking to the skies, with France leading the way in the study and practice of

Alexander spent much time in Trinidad, where he played a major part in developing the 'pitch lakes' as a source of excellent crude oil. He is seen here crossing the Ortoire River in an MG Midget and supervising pumping of oil from pipeline to tanker.



aeronautics.

The French aviator Louis Blériot made a flight of 33 miles over land in 1909, and his pioneering flight across the Channel that same year in a twin-cylinder Anzani-engine monoplane had been witnessed by F. W. Duckham, by whose courtesy a stand-by rescue boat had been provided for the contestants in the challenge. F. W. introduced Blériot to his younger brother, who clearly found the flyer a man after his own heart. Indeed, the successful flight so fired Alexander's imagination that he had a granite memorial, in the shape of the aircraft, inlaid at the spot on the Dover cliffs where the intrepid aviator's machine had landed.

Seen here accompanied by Alexander Duckham (left), the French aviator Louis Blériot made the first powered cross-Channel flight in 1909 and achieved a new record altitude the following year.

The following year, after making a number of flights with Blériot, Alexander was invited at the Bournemouth Flying Meeting to accompany the Frenchman in an attempt on the British altitude record for an aircraft carrying two persons. In a machine fitted with the new 100hp Gnome-Blériot engine, they reached a new record height of 1,600 feet – a great achievement at that time. This early involvement with flying was also significant, with Duckhams formulating and supplying lubricants for many of the early aircraft. The year also marked the death of the King, with George V crowned in 1911.

As both the research and production aspects of the business diversified, among the situations to which the Duckham team provided answers were overcoming sludging in the oil systems of electrical turbines and transformers; the simultaneous cooling and lubrication of machine tools (requiring the development of stable emulsions); the treatment and



ALEXANDER DUCKHAM & Co. LTD.

Motor Oils Price List

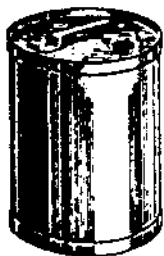
1912

Standard Oil



40 gallon barrel
1s. 5d. per gallon

20 gallon barrel
1s. 7d. per gallon



10 gallon drum
1s. 9d. per gallon

5 gallon drum
1s. 10d. per gallon

POLICE WARNINGS



In each section, we indicate the principal Police Traps that have been worked in the Area since 1909. We have left space for the insertion of new traps as Notification appears in the Press. Ten mile limits and traps in large Towns have not been included.





DUCKHAM'S STEAM CAR OILS ARE UNEQUALLED

Testimonial:

"I have used nothing else but your Special Superheated Steam Oil for the lubrication of my White Steam Car the whole of this season, during which time I have done over 500 miles. I overhauled the Engine last week to see exactly what condition it was in, and was delighted at the Beautiful State of the Cylinders and Pistons, these being practically as new, a result largely to be attributed to the Quality of your Lubricating Oil."

Signed, Will Clayton.

Part of an early price list issued by Alexander Duckham & Co Ltd.

prevention of skin diseases arising from the use of petroleum-based products; the protection of ball-bearing races against corrosion; and the formulation of non-separating greases and non-emulsifying oils capable of withstanding water.

Products of the Phoenix Wharf works included greases, industrial cutting oils, special oils for horse-drawn vehicles including harness oil, preservatives, petroleum jellies, cleansers and soaps. A new product, Concrete Mould Oil, as used in the building of Dover Harbour between 1903 and 1909, was set to grow in importance with the construction industry. This not only enabled the clean release of moulds, which could thus be re-used many times over, but also imparted a smooth surface to the resulting concrete structure.

By now the business was clearly making some money, and Alexander had courted and married Violet Ethel Narraway. Not only could he indulge his desire to own different motor cars, but around 1910 he bought Vanbrugh Castle, the stately building near his old family home on Maze Hill, where he set up a private laboratory away from the somewhat chaotic conditions of Phoenix Wharf.

The 'Castle' eventually became home to the couple's family of three daughters (Millicent, Joan and Ruth) and two sons (Jack and Alec). Jack later recalled how, one night, they awoke to find smoke billowing into their bedrooms after one of father's experiments ended in a fire!

Largely as a result of becoming one of the earliest owners of a motor car, Alexander had befriended the Australian motoring enthusiast and racing driver S. F. Edge, whose British Motor Syndicate acquired the sole agencies for Napier, de Dion and Gladiator cars for its London showroom, and with whom he shared the same hunger for technological progress. It seems that the Millwall works became Edge's unofficial service station, where he called on

almost a weekly basis to drain his car's sump and refill with fresh oil, while discussing with Alexander the finer points of engine lubrication.

Winner of the legendary Gordon Bennett race in 1902, Edge had gone on to carry out early research into the aerodynamics of racing cars, and four years later was involved in the design of Brooklands, the world's first banked high-speed test track, where he was accompanied on some of his record-breaking attempts by Alexander. These included a notable 24-hour marathon, driven entirely by Edge at an average speed of over 60mph, with the circuit lit at night by storm lanterns.

In an early example of the company's wider services to motorists, a motor oil price list distributed by Duckhams in 1912 (the year of the *Titanic* disaster) carried a section detailing the principal speed traps worked by the police over the previous three years. Also included was a testimonial from a customer, a certain Will Clayton:

'I have used nothing else but your Special Superheated Steam Oil for the lubrication of my White Steam Car the whole of this season, during which time I have done over 500 miles. I overhauled the Engine last week to see exactly what condition it was in, and was delighted at the Beautiful State ...'

In addition to lubricants, a further spin-off from the growing involvement with motoring at this time was Duckhams 'Motorist Cleansing Oil', a mixture of hydrocarbon solvent, soap and water. Users were directed to 'Rub a little of the Motorist Cleansing Oil on the soiled (dry) hands then rub in about the same amount of water from the tap. Now rinse thoroughly under the tap'. This product was the forerunner of many specialist Duckhams formulations that served both the motorist and the industrial worker.

Had the Health & Safety Executive existed at the time, they could no doubt have had a



field day, for production methods at Millwall were not without their hazards. Flammable 'slush' oils (preservative products, often dyed with bright colorants) were manufactured in an isolated corner, near the main gates, using old-fashioned tar boilers heated by burning the wooden staves of resin casks. Hardly a week went by without one of these volatile mixtures boiling over, so the local fire brigade became regular visitors to Phoenix Wharf.

Entrance to the works involved negotiating a steep, unsurfaced slope, which in bad weather was a quagmire and a severe challenge to horse-drawn transport. The motorised kind didn't fare much better: when the company bought its first lorry, a chain-drive Commer, in 1913, it was only just about able, on a good day, to get up this driveway without stalling.

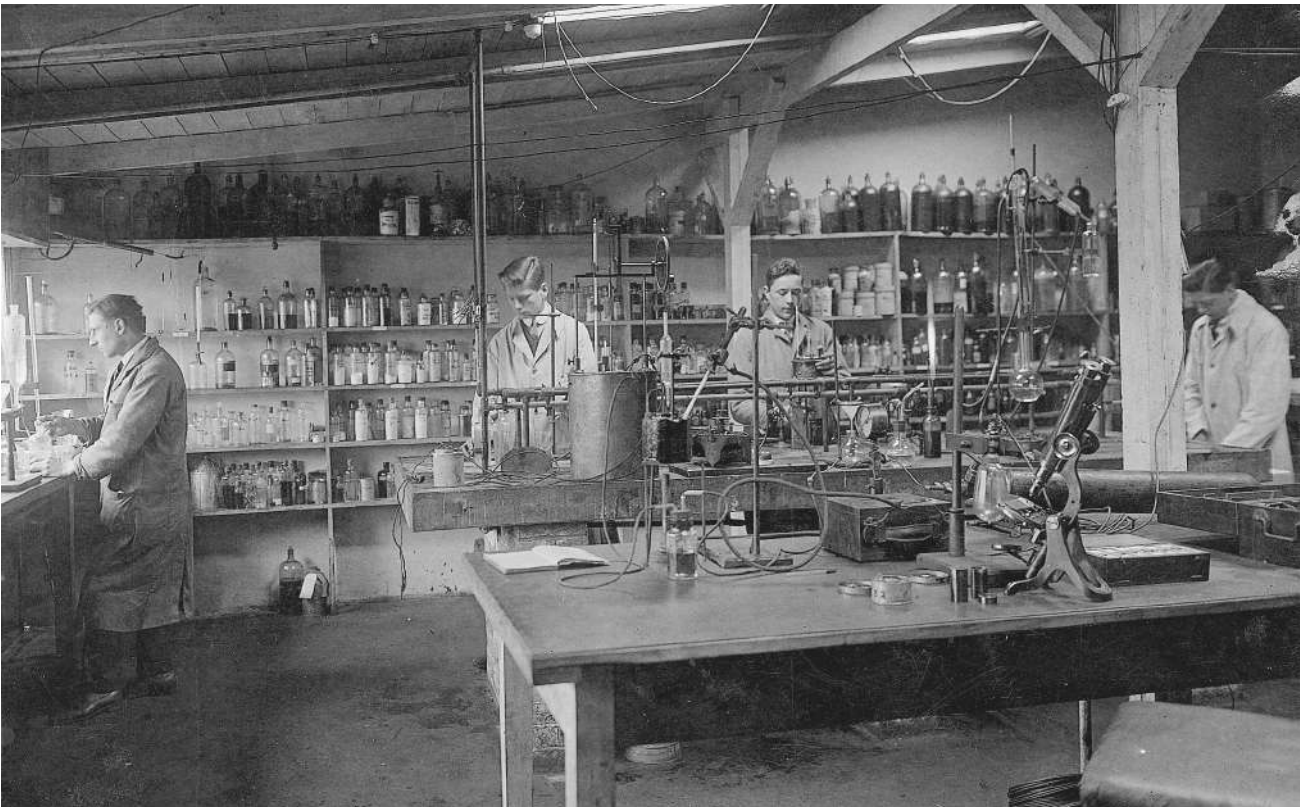
With the outbreak of the First World War the following year, a number of staff left for the armed services, while at home Alexander's expertise was called upon in earnest. He found his newly developed lubricants increasingly in

The early chain-driven Commer lorries had problems with the muddy Phoenix Wharf site.

demand by industry, particularly where metal machining was concerned. The work he had done on cutting fluids resulted in a contract to supply the Royal Ordnance factories, where guns and other weaponry were being turned out as fast as possible to supply Britain's forces.

The war brought about rapid advances in the development of the aeroplane, which in turn played a large part in the warfare, in a variety of roles: reconnaissance, artillery spotting and bombing, as well as through the formation of the first fighter squadrons. The concept of the aircraft carrier came into being; flying boats had also been developed and were used for spotting submarines and for longer reconnaissance flights, while seaplanes carrying torpedoes attacked surface shipping.

Alexander and his brothers devoted themselves wholeheartedly to war work. He and Arthur were both appointed to high office



The early laboratory at Millwall. The building

in the Ministry of Munitions, for which services Arthur was knighted in 1917. 'F. W.' became Director of Tank Design, ending up in the USA to take control of tank production there.

Not content with doing one important job, however, Alexander more or less simultaneously held the posts of Deputy Director, General Ordnance, Controller of National Aircraft Factories and Controller of American Aircraft Assembly, while it would hardly be unreasonable to assume that he also continued to maintain some involvement in the activities of his own business! It is nevertheless a tribute to the calibre of the remaining staff that it both survived and prospered. Production work continued unabated, with an oil-fired vacuum still being installed in 1916 to replace the hazardous wood-fired heating methods.

It seems that Alexander was keen to play an even greater part in the war effort, which he sought from the coalition government's munitions minister at the time, a certain Winston Churchill. A reply dated 10 November 1917 reads:

Dear Mr Alexander Duckham

I am very much obliged to you for your kind letter.

I am very sensible of the fact that your activities will not be fully occupied in the sphere of work which it is in my power at present to assign to you. At the same time the production of machine guns and the development of the new factory constitute tasks of the highest importance to the Army in the future campaign.

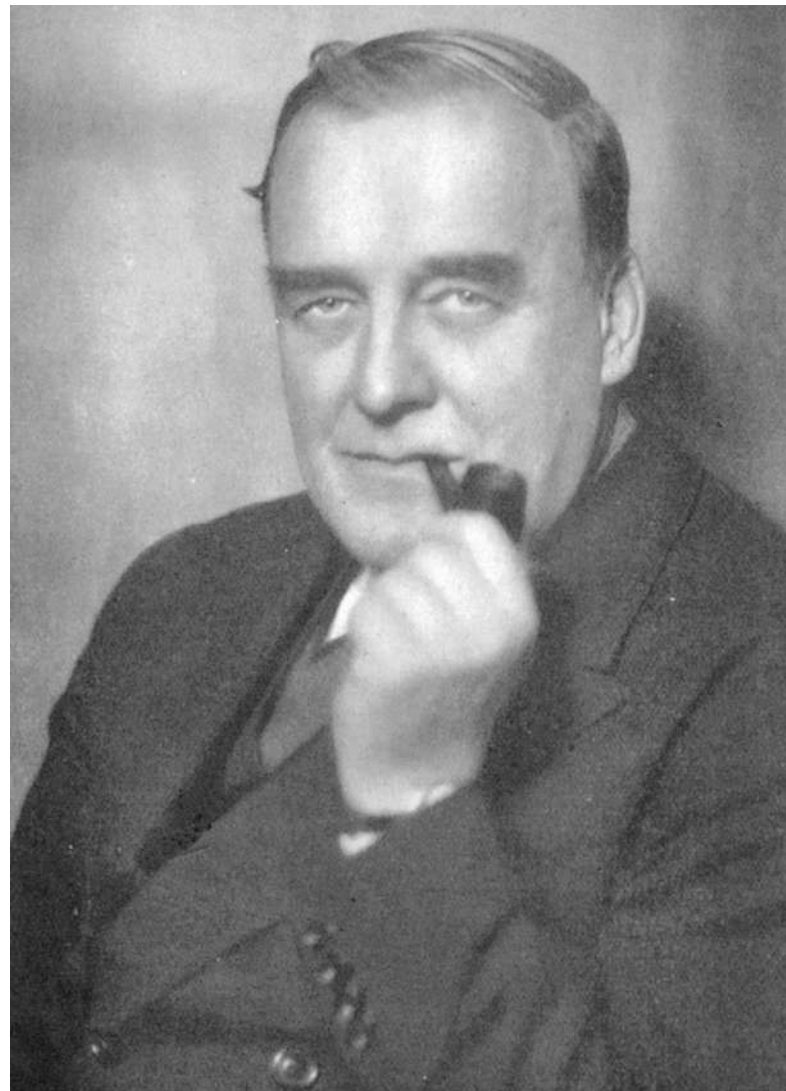
It is my desire that you should continue your care of the Government Rolling Mills, and I hope on my return from abroad to revive your connection with the enquiry into the organisation and staffing of the Department. If, at any time, I feel that there

is no work of first rate importance available for you, I will not fail to let you know, but that is certainly not the case at present.

**Believe me,
Yours very truly,
Winston Churchill**

There is anecdotal evidence that Alexander may have declined honours offered to him for his public service during the war. Following the end of hostilities, the story goes, someone

Alexander's elder brother Sir Arthur Duckham GBE KCB held a number of high-ranking official posts before his untimely death in 1932.



THE ALEXANDER DUCKHAM MEMORIAL SCHOOLS TRUST

In 1920 Alexander Duckham presented his former family home, Vanbrugh Castle in Maze Hill, Blackheath, south-east London, to the RAF Benevolent Fund, to provide a school for the children of RAF airmen killed during service.

Made in memory of Alexander's daughter Dinah, who had died at the age of 18 months, this original gift was augmented at the beginning of the Second World War by the donation of another of his properties, Rooks Hill House and the surrounding 200-acre estate, for similar purposes. The latter was eventually sold in 1961, the proceeds of £15,600 being added to the existing £12,317 in the Alexander Duckham Memorial Fund to form an endowment for Vanbrugh Castle School.

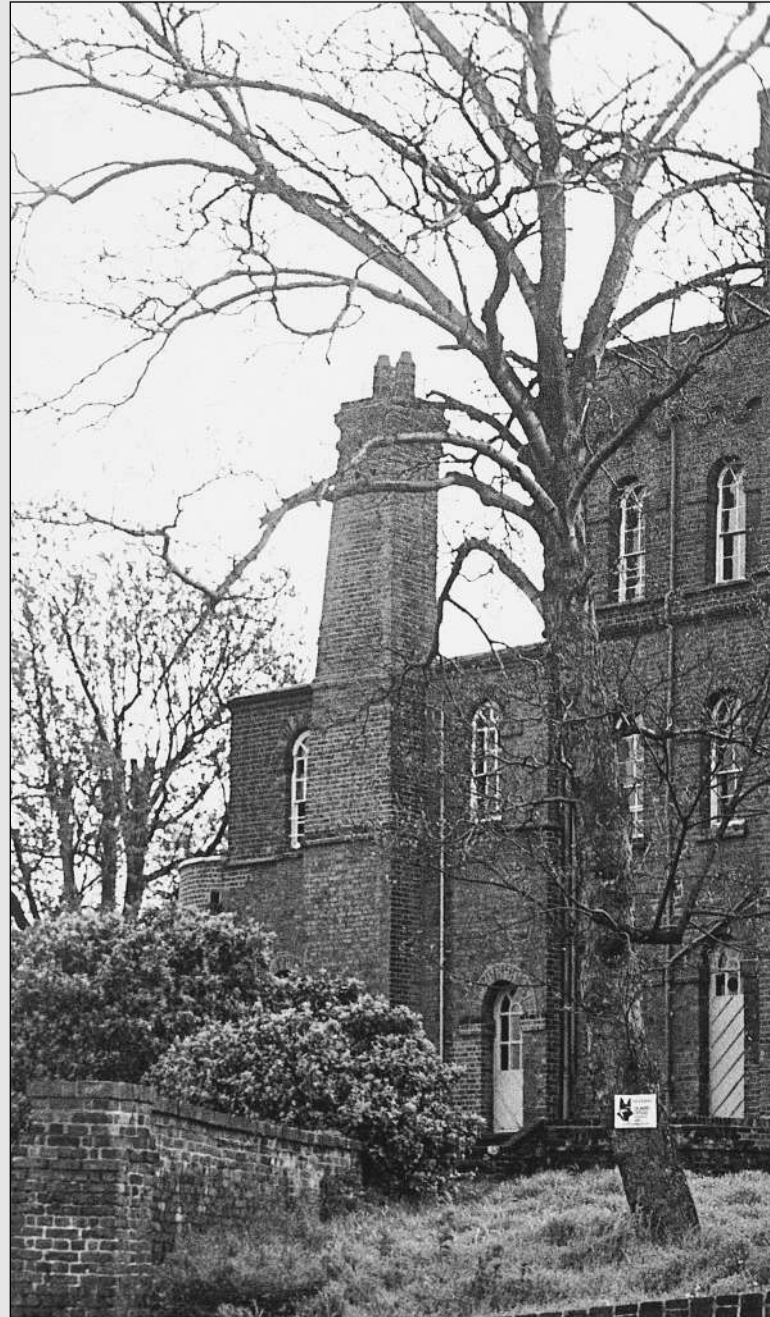
Having served the educational and spiritual needs of the children of two World Wars, in 1976, with the agreement of the Charity Commissioners, Vanbrugh Castle too was sold and the school amalgamated with Woolpit School at Ewhurst, Surrey. The new school, now owned and controlled by the RAF Benevolent Fund, was renamed Duke of Kent School, in honour of the President of the Fund.

With the numbers of needy service children decreasing following 50 mainly peaceful years in Europe, the Commissioners in 1997 decreed that the school should be constituted as a separate charity outside the RAF Benevolent Fund (although the two bodies continue to maintain close relations).

The Alexander Duckham Memorial Fund and the Rooks Hill Fund, identified as being for the benefit of service families in need, together with the whole of the Duke of Kent School Estate, were embodied within the new charity, named the Alexander Duckham Memorial Schools Trust, the present value of which now runs into millions of pounds.

Situated in a beautiful wooded setting between Guildford and Cranleigh, the Duke of Kent School in Ewhurst is a flourishing co-educational preparatory and pre-prep school for both boarding and day pupils, whose interests are controlled by the Alexander Duckham Trust. Six trustees and nine governors, under the chairmanship of Air Vice-Marshal Michael Adams CB, AFC, FRAeS, oversee the Trust and the school affairs respectively.

The current Charity Commission Scheme provides that, in allocating places at the school, the trustees shall give priority to children of serving and former members of the RAF (to include the WRAF, WAAF, Auxiliary Air Force, RAF Reserves and Commonwealth Air Forces) who are in need of financial assistance. Any remaining



vacancies may then be filled by RAF children who are not deemed to be in financial need, followed by children of serving and former members of any other branch of the armed forces.

Pupils currently number some 190, including 70 boarders. Headmaster Roger Wilson MA retires in August 1999 and is succeeded by Dr Alan Cameron, under whom the school will continue its aims of providing a stable, ordered, caring and above all happy

environment in which each child is given the opportunity to discover and develop as far as possible his or her own skills, providing the confidence necessary for success in later life. Considerable emphasis is laid on pastoral care and each child is the special responsibility of one of six pastoral tutors, all of whom are readily available to the children.

Vanbrugh Castle, pictured in the late 1970s.



expressed surprise that he had received no recognition from the British Government. His reported reply is typical: 'It was suggested to me, and I am flattered, but somehow it goes against the grain. Not only did I have a splendid time performing the duties which it was my privilege to carry out, but what's more – I was spared the trenches!'

Sir Arthur Duckham, always actively involved in public affairs, went on to pursue a special interest in economics as they affected both Britain and the Empire. A member of the 1919 Sankey Coal Commission, he was responsible for the minority report it issued. He led a British Economic Mission to Australia in 1928, receiving on his return the honour of GBE to add to his KCB.

Wartime and its fuel shortages clearly had an effect on private motoring, and therefore on Duckhams' domestic sales. While in Britain the Government urged drivers not to use cars for non-essential journeys, some converted their vehicles to run on coal gas and other petrol substitutes, entailing huge gas-bags mounted on the roof, or towed behind in a trailer. Another interesting effect, however, resulted from the shortage of men in the community. This made it necessary for women to take over many formerly male jobs, many working in car production or becoming mechanics in garages, which fostered a new market for cars after the war.

Such had been the progress made in aviation that, immediately following the war in 1919, Alcock and Brown were able to complete their historic crossing of the Atlantic, from St John's (Newfoundland) to Ireland in a twin-engined Vickers Vimy aircraft, in 15hrs

57min. That same year Ross Smith flew a similar plane in stages from England to Australia in 124 hours.

It was perhaps a mixture of the appreciation of his privileged position during the war, and of admiration for the job done by the 'magnificent men in their flying machines', with whom he already enjoyed an enduring affinity, that in 1920 inspired Alexander, who now lived in Kent, to donate the former family home, Vanbrugh Castle, to the newly formed RAF Benevolent Fund, for use as a school for the children of airmen killed in service.

The gift is recorded as commemorating Alexander's fourth daughter, Dinah, who had recently died from the 'Spanish flu' at the age of 18 months; he continued to assist the Fund throughout his life, raising large sums of money in addition to his own major donations.

The end of the First World War seems to have inspired a major reorganisation of Alexander Duckham & Co Ltd, with improved management systems and records. It was possibly to disentangle its affairs from those of Trinidad Central Oilfields that the original company went into voluntary liquidation in 1920, a new one of the same name being incorporated. New premises were acquired in Broad Street Place, near London's Liverpool Street Station, into which the sales department moved.

As peace returned to Europe, Britain entered the era of the 'flappers', and for a younger generation – at least for those with money in their pockets – the accent was on having a good time. The prospect of increasing markets, both at home and abroad, meant that Duckhams was poised for major growth ...

Chapter 2

FAME AND FORTUNE

Following the First World War the American economy entered what was undoubtedly a boom period, often referred to as the 'Roaring Twenties'. The US Prohibition laws, which banned alcohol, caused the upsurge of 'speak-easies' in which it could, albeit illegally, be obtained. During this era the vibrant US pop culture of the time rubbed off on Europe by way of radio, gramophone records and movies, although it would not be until 1927 that Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer* brought the voice soundtrack to the silver screen for the first time.

At the start of the decade, however, Britain also felt the draught of an economic 'blip' in the USA, with labour unrest on both sides of the Atlantic. Miners' strikes, beginning in 1920 and renewed the next spring, caused a state of emergency to be declared and the food rationing (still in force from the war) to become even more stringent.

Although the miners' stranglehold was broken in April 1921, when the anticipated support from the rail and transport unions within the 'triple alliance' failed to materialise, supply problems already created in the motor industry had killed sales and caused a black market to spring up. William Morris (later Lord Nuffield), who had begun producing his own cars in Oxford before the war and continued to do so throughout the hostilities, held out for as long as possible before being forced to gamble on cutting the price of his Cowley model by a third to below £350.

The move paid off, considerably stimulating sales and persuading other companies that the small, economical family saloon was the way forward. Alexander Duckham & Co Ltd was already collaborating with the works on the special lubrication requirements of Morris's chassis, and this proved to be the preamble to a long and mutually beneficial relationship.

The more sophisticated management style prevailing at Duckhams as it entered the 1920s caused the company to take a long, hard look at the cost-effectiveness of its structure. The lease on Phoenix Wharf was nearing expiry and overheads at the site, especially rates, were high given the mediocre facilities. Memories of Millwall from some former employees give an insight into conditions; pensioner Harry Wood wrote in 1969:

'When I joined Duckhams in 1922 at Millwall as a driver, there were two other drivers besides myself. Wages were £2 10s (£2.50) per week and no driver was paid for any overtime. Hours were 7.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and 7.30am to 12 noon Saturday, although most days finished at 6.00 to 6.30pm and 2.00 to 2.30pm on Saturday. You had to be with the company for three years before being entitled to one week's holiday.'

Another pensioner, A. E. Pearson, recalls:

'I started with Duckhams in January 1922 at a salary of around £3 per week, and considered



Glimpses of life at Phoenix Wharf circa 1920: employees Standing and Bennett on the loading stage; barrel-making in the cooperage section; and a works outing.



myself very fortunate to have a job. However, conditions were primitive, the office was a wooden hut and 5-gallon drums were often used to catch rivulets of rainwater that came through the roof ...'

While typical of those prevailing at the time, these working conditions certainly sound less than ideal, so the entire staff must have been delighted when the decision was taken to move to new purpose-built premises. In 1921 a freehold Thames-side site was purchased at a cost of £14,000 at Hammersmith, building work commencing almost immediately.

With the sales staff already relocated to the City, the laboratory was moved to a building in Johnson Street, Minories. At around this time also, the employees must have gained further encouragement when the company instituted a profit-sharing and bonus scheme, a concept well ahead of its time.

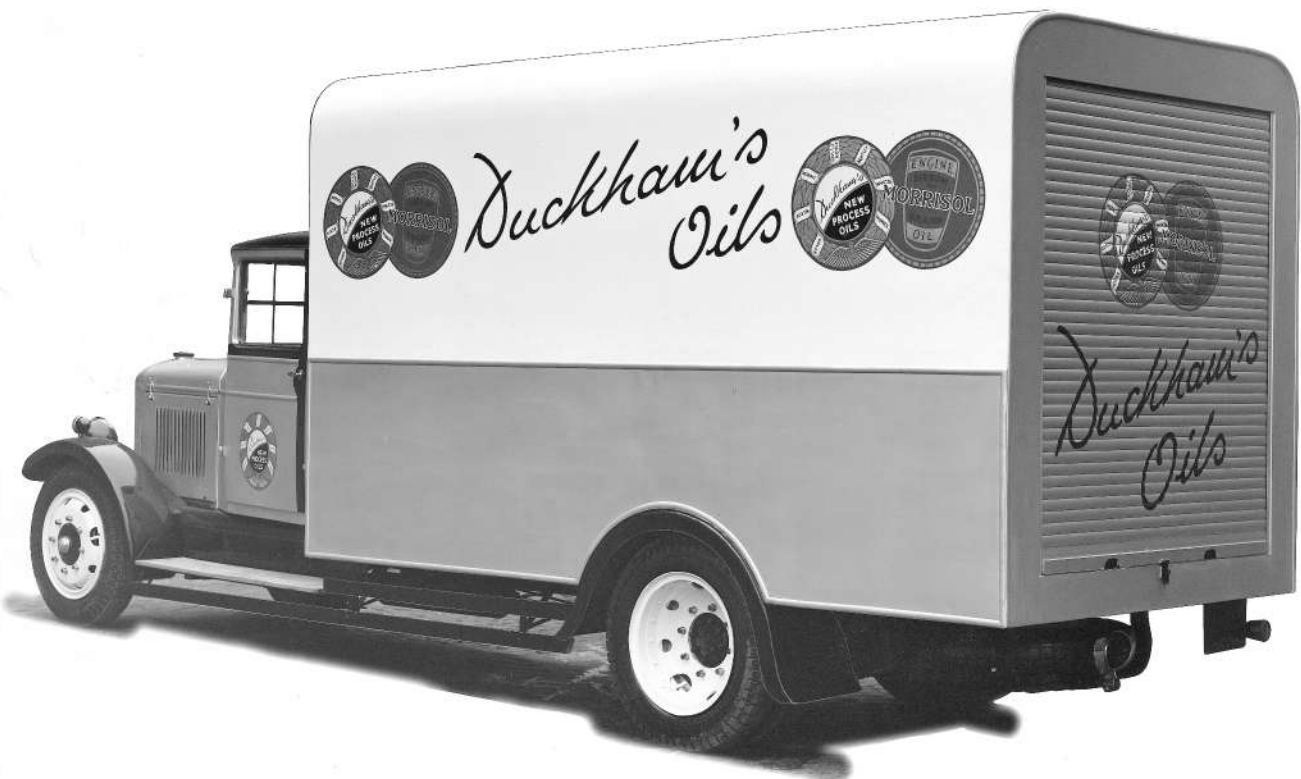
Although Alexander Duckham, perhaps by his own wish, received no honours for his war services, his company had probably reaped its

own rewards as a result of the intensive research that had been dictated by military requirements. Continuing concentration on motor oil development enabled Duckhams in 1922 to launch its revolutionary New Process Oils, the outstanding feature of which promised the answer to the contemporary motorist's prayer – the control of carbon deposits.

So great was the carbon bugbear that any antidote was destined to be grabbed with both hands by the motoring classes. And so it was: within a year New Process Oils were specified by the makers of more than 60 British cars. Even the special lubrication problems of the air-cooled engines, like those of the contemporary Rover 8 and Vauxhall, proved to be overcome by specially formulated grades.

Here can be seen perhaps the first indica-

Duckhams' exceptionally pure 'New Process Oils' were increasingly adopted by vehicle manufacturers whose names became attached to their specific blends.



tions of the modern-day concept of 'own-branding', with the marketing of, for example, 'Duckhams Trojan Oil' and 'Duckhams Vauxhall Oil'. So rapid was the uptake of the new oils that it also marks the setting up within the company of two distinct divisions, one to service the still important industrial sector, and the other to look after the mushrooming motor industry market.

One of the major features that distinguished Duckhams New Process Oils was the exceptionally thorough filtration to which they were subjected, which included a straining through Fullers Earth. This, however, produced a paler

William Morris (later Lord Nuffield), the British pioneer of family car mass-production, became a personal friend of Alexander, and Duckhams collaborated on suitable lubricants for Morris cars from their earliest days. Pictured is the Cowley assembly line for the 'Bullnose' Morris of 1925.



than usual product, and there is evidence of some sales resistance on the part of conservative motorists as a result.

It was more important than ever that they should be able to have complete faith in the product, so great emphasis was placed on ensuring that viscosity characteristics were maintained. The oil was chilled to below 0°F to solidify substances that would normally cause it to congeal; these could then be extracted, leaving it 'clear, limpid and as nearly as may be unaffected by changes to temperature'. An elaborate system of quality control included tests for oxidation and coking.

Amazingly, given the unprecedented demand for the new oils and the upheavals of the various moves, production began at the Hammersmith works in 1923, with Millwall being vacated. The new plant included a 5-ton, coal-fired grease autoclave, to Duckhams' own specification; this was quickly converted to gas heating when better temperature control was found to be needed.

Over the next few years demand for New Process Oils continued to grow and a proper brand name was sought. After some deliberation, from 1926 the name Adcol was decided upon for one section of the motor oils range, this and its variations figuring prominently for many years afterwards.

That year, however, was a black one for Britain, with the long-rumbling dispute between the miners and their employers escalating into the General Strike, in which many thousands of other workers came out in sympathy. As had happened earlier in the decade, a central food and milk depot was opened in London's Hyde Park, and volunteers joined soldiers in maintaining essential services. The strike lasted only a short time, but, with a demoralised and dissatisfied workforce, Britain remained in poor shape for the even greater economic tribulations to come.

From the letter to shareholders in 1927 we



learn that the annual profits of Alexander Duckham & Co over the five years ended 31 December 1926 had averaged a satisfactory £11,921. Trinidad Central Oilfields had now become, temporarily, the major shareholder in Alexander Duckham & Co, the main reason apparently being to satisfy the Trinidad Government of its solid financial base.

The Western World, however, was about to be gripped by the worst economic depression ever seen, as the decade that had come in with a roar ended in tears. On 24 October 1929 almost 13 million shares were offloaded at virtually any price on the New York Stock Exchange as panic swept through the market, and both large and small investors were left ruined.

The fallout from the crash was rapidly exported to a Britain that had itself already been sliding into depression. Pensioner H. E. Price recalls:

Duckhams 'Morrisol' became the official recommendation for Morris and Wolseley

'I joined the company in July 1929 in Broad Street, EC, as area sales manager for the Midlands region, and was paid £400 per year plus small commissions on the sales of oil in my area ... bankruptcies were rising daily and old-established firms of all sizes were sacking staff. Duckhams profits fell to the point where no dividend could be paid. The sales force was reduced to an absolute minimum and paid commission only; senior sales staff were given the same treatment and were put "on the road".'

While unemployment and poverty were once again rife into the early 1930s, and industrial production was at rock-bottom, the better off continued to drive their motor cars, maintain-

ing at least some demand for the company's lubricants.

And cars continued to sell. If New Process Oils needed any further testimonial, they were to receive it in 1931 when Sir William Morris selected one of the grades as the sole recommended oil for his Morris and Wolseley marques, as well as for Morris Commercial vehicles, and the brand 'Morrisol' was launched.

This brought a legal letter from a certain Matthew Wells & Co, who had been marketing an oil under the same name. Morris, undeterred, decreed that henceforth the Duckhams oil would be known as 'Morrisol "Sirrom" regd' (thus incorporating his name spelt both forwards and backwards), and that this was 'the only oil recommended by Morris Motors Ltd and Wolseley Motors (1927) Ltd'.

Just one variety of the by now famous Duckhams New Process Oils, Morrisol 'Sirrom', was to hold 'sole recommended' status for Morris and Wolseley right up to 1946, with all lubricants for the Cowley plant also being supplied by Duckhams. Oil from Duckhams NP range was now actually specified by the makers of more than 90 per cent of British cars, including all Austin models, Bentley and Invicta; New Process Oils also enjoyed 'approved' status from Rolls-Royce, Humber and Rover.

The year 1931 also saw more major expansion and reorganisation and, with the workforce now numbering some 250, Alexander's son Jack Duckham was appointed to the board of directors. Jack's childhood spent at Vanbrugh Castle, living above his father's laboratory, had ensured an early initiation into the workings of the firm.

From school at Oundle, he had intended to go directly to university, but Alexander arranged for him to spend a year in Trinidad as an apprentice oil-well driller, maintaining that practical experience in the oil industry was needed before attempting the theory.

Entering Clare College, Cambridge, he studied geology, applied chemistry and engineering before joining the company on the retail side, where he was given responsibility for liaison with customers throughout the country.

Also in 1931 a freehold site for a second works, in Holyport Road, Fulham, was purchased for £9,000, while the sales department was on the move again, this time from the outgrown Broad Street Place premises to new offices in Cannon Street, leased from Prudential Assurance and grandly retitled Duckhams House.

In 1932 Alexander's younger brother Sir Arthur Duckham died unexpectedly, at the height of his career. His place on the board was taken by Professor J. S. S. Brame, an eminent scientist and a past President of the Institute of Petroleum Technologists. (At around the same time, their older brother 'F. W.', hale and hearty at well over 70 years of age, was heard to be organising an expedition to recover the £5 million worth of treasure reputed to be aboard the East Indiaman *Grosvenor*, wrecked off the coast of Pongoland, southern Africa, 150 years earlier!)

Works No 2 opened in Fulham, following reconstruction to provide production facilities as well as offices, laboratories and storage. A sulphurisation plant with fume-scrubbing tower had to be installed for the production of neat sulphurised cutting oils, and shortly afterwards a soda base grease plant was added.

Meanwhile work continued at Hammersmith, with a building erected to house a new filling plant for small packs. The long frontage on to the Thames provided an excellent vantage point for the University Boat Race, and each year many hundreds of

Alexander's son Jack Duckham joined the company in 1931. He was to take over as chairman following his father's death. (Navana Vandyk Ltd)



friends and customers joined the directors to watch the event.

An important innovation of 1932 was the launch of Duckhams' first house publication, *Links*. Intended to inform customers rather than staff, it mixed 'general interest' articles, like a piece on the developing aircraft industry, with 'soft sell' technical information. The background message all the time was that

The prestigious Cannon Street office building occupied by Duckhams in 1931 was destroyed by enemy bombs during the war.

quality will always give better returns in the long run.

By now Alexander, always interested in something new, had taken up pig-breeding, and this led the company into further product diversification: the development of an oil for grooming and nourishing the skin of animals. The result was Duckhams' 'Arkoil', which during the 1930s was being supplied to London and Whipsnade Zoos, among others, where it was used for various applications including treating the shells of tortoises. The dogs at Battersea Dogs' Home were also





treated regularly with it. An article in the 1932 *Links* describes Arkoil as:

‘... unexcelled for cleaning and softening the skin of animals, whilst in the case of dogs, for example, it imparts to the coat a beautifully glossy sheen such as one aims at when showing. It keeps an animal free from all undesirable trespassers, in addition to which it is antiseptic and pleasant to touch and to smell.

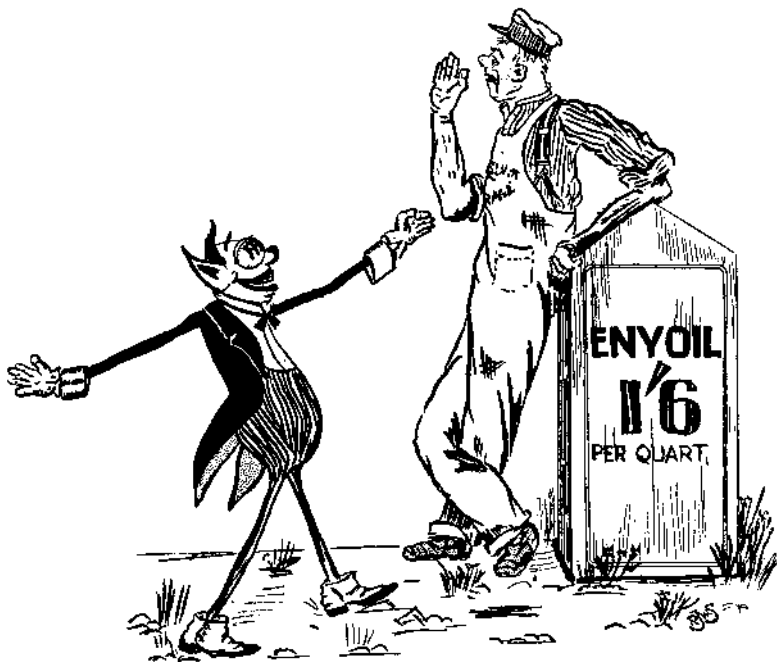
‘Similar attention [should be] given to the animal internally; and here again Arkoil is particularly effective ... so pure and innocuous that it can be used to lubricate internally – a baby, a watch or an elephant. Unlike castor oil, it can be given in any quantity without danger or without any griping or irritating effect – in fact, it soothes inflamed or sensitive membranes.’

Then came a bit of soft sell:

Duckhams ‘Arkoil’ was a remarkable unction for treating the skin of animals. Here it is being applied to a baby elephant at London Zoo.

‘The smallest package in which Arkoil is sold is 1-gallon cans at 7s 6d [38p], but we are quite prepared to supply readers of *Links* with special 8-oz samples at 1s 6d [8p] each, post free. Such a sample is quite sufficient to prove to a dog-lover how efficacious is Duckhams Arkoil, but of course, where the need for a larger quantity is felt, it is naturally far more economical to buy in barrels or 5-gallon drums.’

While the quality of today’s electronically originated magazines may be visually slick and colourful, much of the content is superficial and shallow when compared to the early editions of the monochrome *Links*, whose articles are well written, carefully edited and informative, even if some of them do reflect



“ I suppose, then . . . you will send me back, making the excuse of ‘ No demand ’ ? ”

‘Monty Morrisol’ (seen here) and ‘Archie Adcol’ featured in an educational product series in

their times in not being particularly ‘PC’. Today’s sophisticated publicity manager would probably cringe, too, at the quaint sales angles pursued in its pages.

Take, for example, ‘Monty Morrisol’, the cartoon character employed to relate the story of the oil as it cleans and protects the engine, a theme that ran through the first year of publication:

‘Hallo everybody! This is Monty Morrisol speaking and here I am squeezed into a beautifully clean can, parked in soldierly fashion with thousands of other chaps. Pretty dark inside here, of course, but I’m feeling perfectly fit and nothing matters.

‘Hallo! What’s happening now? I feel myself rudely hauled down, there is a sharp pop followed by a tearing of metal as my sealing cap is burst open and I see daylight. Then gurgle! gurgle! away I go, sliding and

tumbling into a capacious chamber with just a glimmer of daylight above it. What’s to happen next I am soon to learn as I feel myself being forcibly drawn through the engine ...’

Monty’s heroics were clearly deemed to be achieving results, for during the next year he was joined in the pages of *Links* by ‘Archie Adcol’, promoting the New Process Oils to the few unconverted motor manufacturers.

Both cartoon characters were eventually phased out with the completion of this ‘oil education’ campaign, but *Links* continued to inform, with regular articles on the industries of the day. Many of the companies concerned were already household names that, usually, had some connections with Duckhams products.

There were, for example, the special type-mould oils supplied to Monotype Corporation. ‘Hot metal’ typesetting was a precision operation, since the slightest variation in the size of a single character could cause major headaches for compositors in the course of a large block of text. Consequently the moving parts had to be maintained in perfect order, a job for Duckhams Monotype Mould Oil, which both cleaned and lubricated the moulds and was supplied to the Monotype Corporation and its customers for many years. Similarly, in the civil engineering field Wimpey Construction, already prolific users of Duckhams Concrete Mould Oils, would still be a major customer some 50 years later.

The ‘quality equals economy’ theme was of continuing importance. An article in June 1933 points out the ‘extravagance of using inferior lubricants’ in commercial vehicles:

‘The man in the street and, it may be said, some operators of commercial fleets, cherish the misguided opinion that commercial vehicles do not require the best in motor fuel or the best in oil because – well, they are only commercial vehicles. The older they become, the more confirmed the opinion, hence they

reach the scrap heap years before they need do.

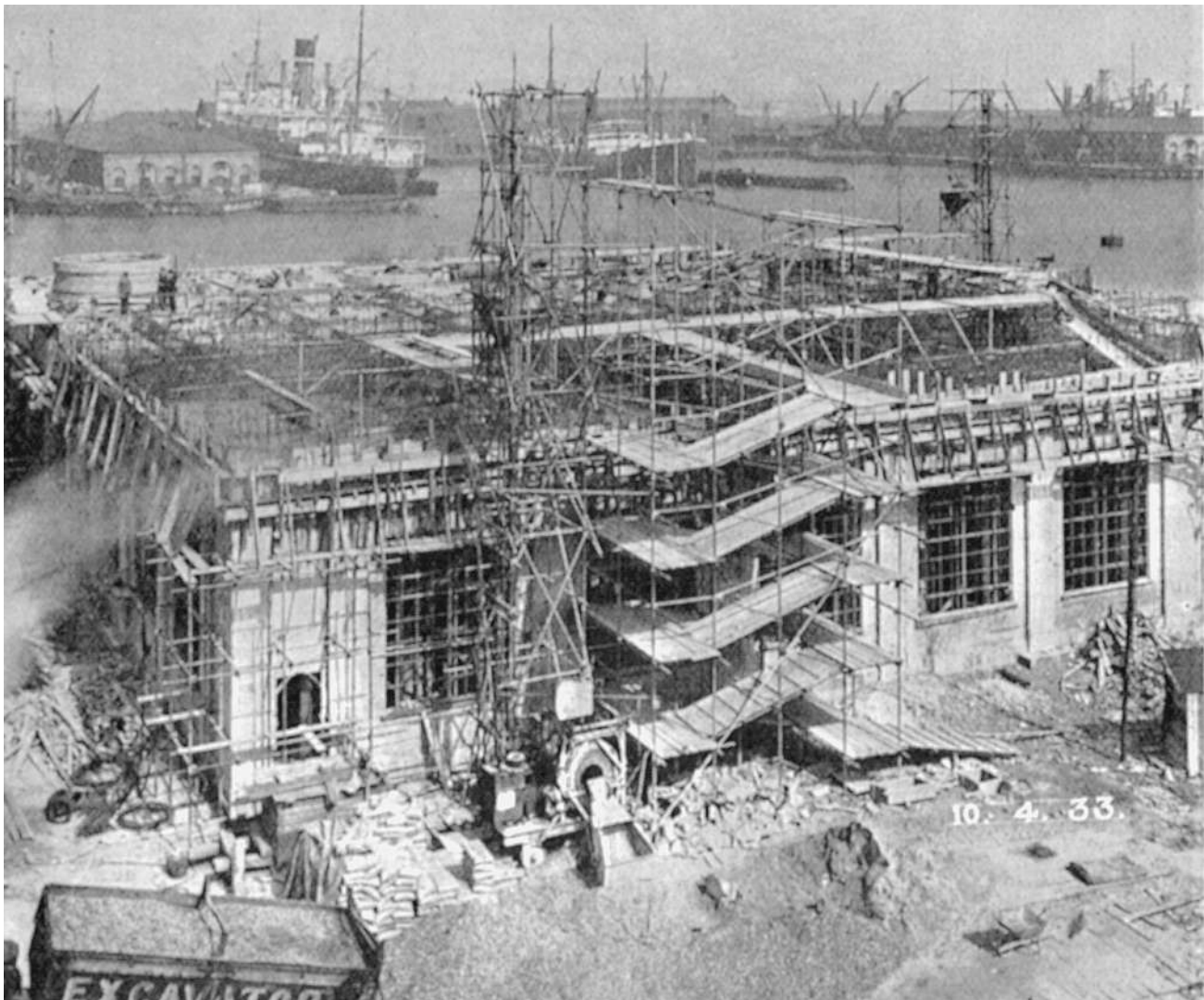
‘Omnibuses, in particular, are prone to crank case dilution troubles brought about by continual stopping and restarting, the trouble, of course, being aggravated during cold weather operation. An oil which can stand up to a fair percentage of dilution without completely breaking down is, therefore, most desirable if undue wear is to be prevented right throughout the engine.

‘... a worm-driven rear axle may not give audible warning of approaching trouble, but, at the same time, quality lubrication is certainly vital to long life. Nothing but the

best lubricant is good enough here, and that is why our “D.B.S.” Worm Gear Oil is so largely used by fleet owners throughout the country.’

The article is illustrated by photographs of some AEC public service vehicles of the time, all using exclusively Duckhams lubricants:

Duckhams Concrete Mould Oil was a significant contribution from the industrial products side of the company to the construction industry, aiding clean release from the timber form and enabling its re-use. It was used on this grain silo, seen under construction at London’s Royal Victoria Dock in 1933. (Links magazine)



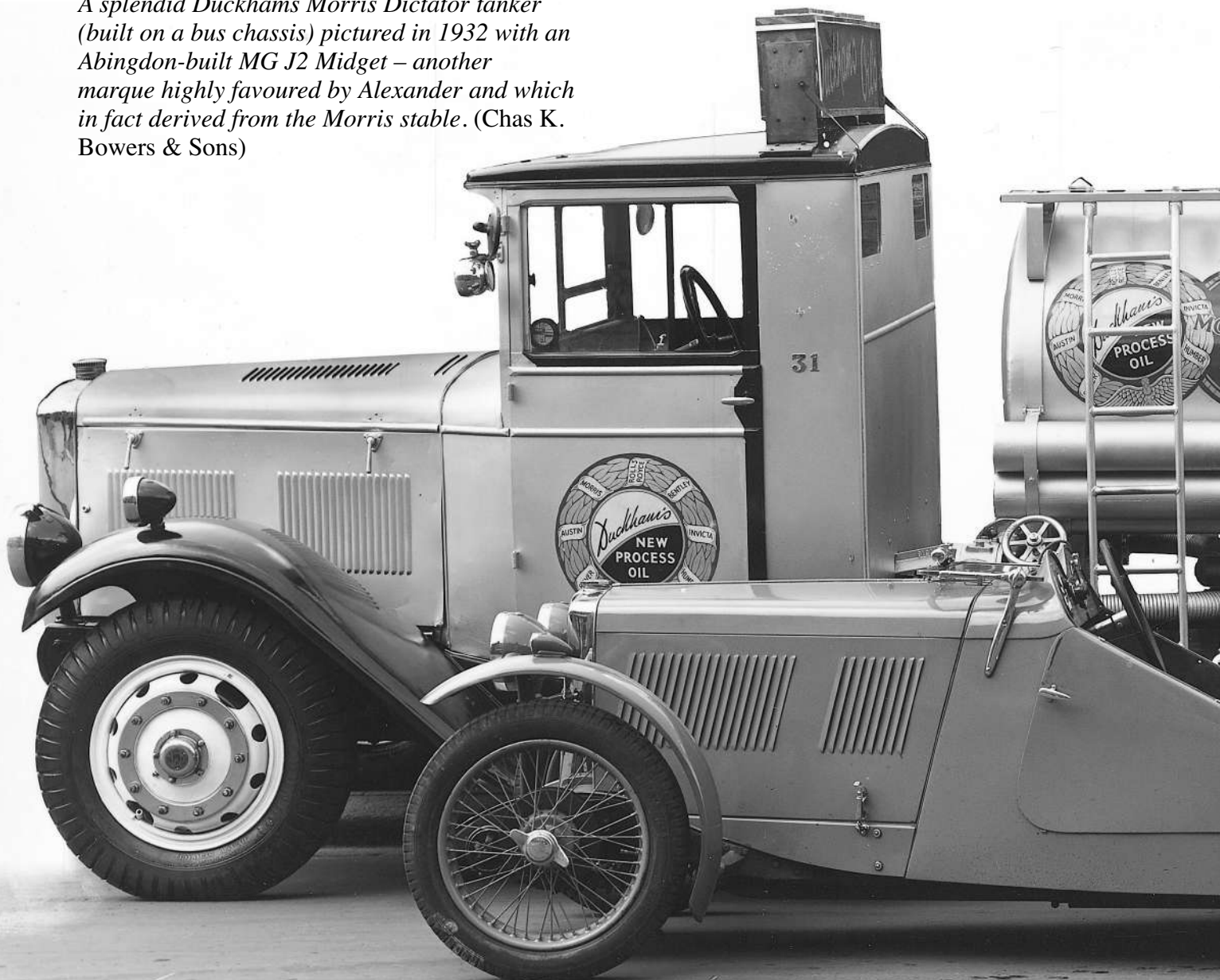
Regent double-deckers owned by Bournemouth and Colchester Corporations, a Regal single-decker coach from the Quest Coaches fleet, and an older double-decker operated by Pro Bono Publico in London.

Export sales were assuming more importance in view of the continuing recession at home, where by 1933 oil consumption had fallen by a quarter since 1929. *Links* helped forge connections with overseas markets, where Duckhams leadership in oil technology provided ready scope for exports. From the 1920s agents had been appointed in strategic locations to provide the necessary local knowledge and product handling, with partic-

ular attention given to the then numerous Commonwealth countries, where British products were held in high esteem.

In Australasia, for example, New Zealand was handled by Hayward Bros & Co Ltd, who had branches in Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin and Lyttelton, while the agents in Melbourne, Victoria, were Ramsay & Treganowan Ltd. Balmer Lawrie & Co Ltd, who took over as main agents in India in 1933, were established back in 1876 and had wide-ranging interests, acting as main agents for some 25 companies operating in the sub-continent, including tea plantations, paper and flour mills, coal companies and construction concerns, and representing many British

A splendid Duckhams Morris Dictator tanker (built on a bus chassis) pictured in 1932 with an Abingdon-built MG J2 Midget – another marque highly favoured by Alexander and which in fact derived from the Morris stable. (Chas K. Bowers & Sons)



firms, mainly in the engineering field.

Links also provided a social service in covering health topics, and sometimes these were product-related, as in the case of skin care. Alexander's long involvement in industrial metal machining, through cutting fluid development, had brought to his attention the various skin disorders suffered by operatives. Not only did he publish articles and booklets on the subject, but he ensured that Duckhams became leaders in skin cleansers and treatments for workers.

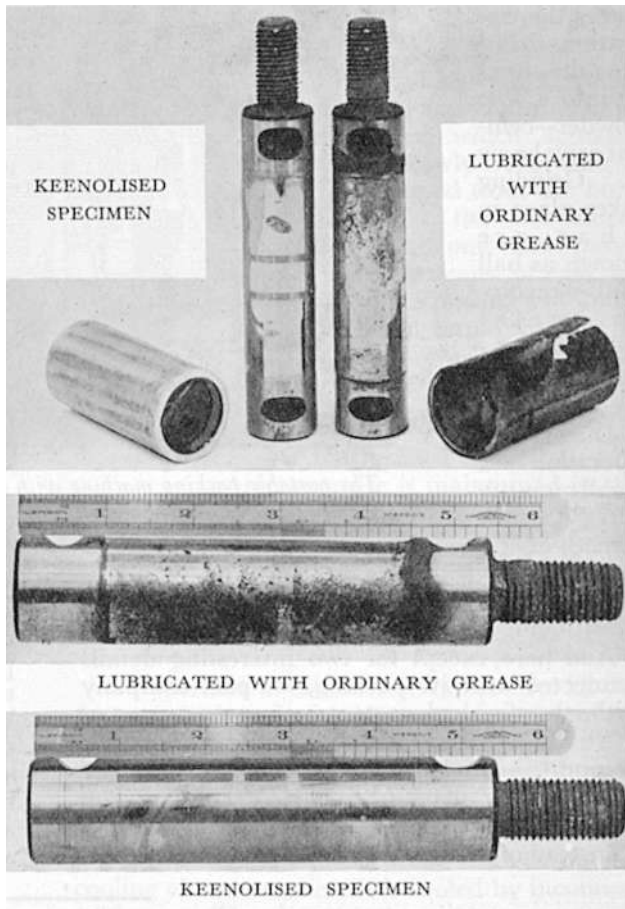
The monotonous drudgery of many workers' jobs, not to mention the cost of heating their homes, found an escape route in the evenings and weekends through the cinema, the popularity of which was soaring. Full houses and queues were the norm, and film shows often included live stage or circus acts; however, with tuberculosis rife at the

time, cinema-goers often had to endure being sprayed with disinfectant by the usherettes! On the way home, an amorous lad might treat his girlfriend to a fish supper for 4d (2p).

The recession may have curtailed motoring, but it couldn't stem the desire for ownership of the latest cars, among which were the products of Cecil Kimber's MG Car Company in Abingdon. Alexander had borrowed an MG Midget roadster in Trinidad during one of his sojourns there, and 'so impressed was he with its performance, particularly ... the manner in which it handled over some of the none too good roads traversed', that on his return to Britain he immediately placed an order for one of the company's Magnette sports saloons.

Perhaps there was just a hint of currying favour here for, following a laudatory *Links* article on the production at the Abingdon





'Keenolisation', using Duckhams patented range of lubricants containing colloidal zinc oxide, offered substantial advantages in applications such as highly stressed gears. It formed an adherent film on the metal surface that was continually replaced as wear took place. (Links magazine)

factory, in September 1933 MG gave sole recommendation to Duckhams N.P.5 (Aero) Oil for engine lubrication, and Duckhams Gear Oil 'N' for gearbox and back axle lubrication of all their models. *Links* reported glowingly:

'We think it can be said without reservation that the most popular sports car in this country is the MG ... The reason for its popularity is not far to seek. In appearance the *tout ensemble* of the MG is the materialisation of

the technical artist's conception of what a sports car should be, and, what is more important, its performance is such as to satisfy the most sporting of enthusiasts ... There can be no question that the successful performance of MG cars has been responsible for enhancing the prestige of the British motor industry all over the world.

'... As the makers of these oils we are proud of being so honoured, especially as the oil has been selected, after prolonged and severe tests, on its merits, and still more because the MG Car Company Ltd, in making this selection, has not asked for and are not receiving any financial advantage for such decision ... Lastly, it is yet another triumph for an all-British firm.'

A number of the motor dealers whose names are recognised as major groups today were growing rapidly during this period, like London's principal Morris agents Stewart & Ardern, who opened new, expanded showrooms and workshops featuring lubrication exclusively by Duckhams.

Morris's service agents, like others, were having to cope with continual advances in technology, one of the most important of which was the advent of the synchromesh gearbox. Until its invention, the only method of achieving a clean, silent gear change was to employ a method known as double-declutching. Synchromesh, as its name implies, is a mechanism designed to synchronise the speed of rotation of the gearshafts as they mesh, doing away with the need to double-declutch. The conventional gearbox oils of the time proved unsuitable for the new mechanism; but, naturally, Duckhams had the answer, as *Links* explained in March 1934:

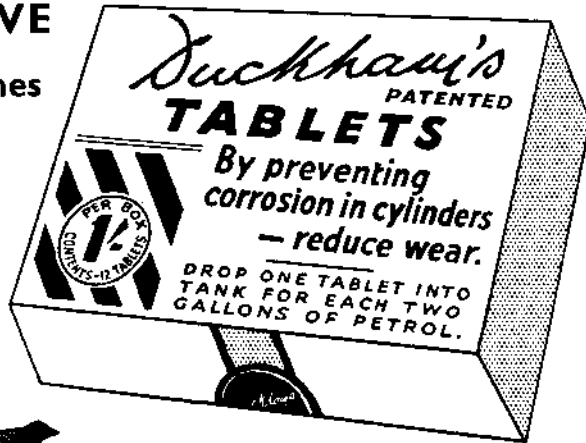
'The introduction of the synchro-mesh gearbox is without doubt due to car manufac-

Conceived in 1934, Duckhams Tablets became a mainstay of sales for many years.

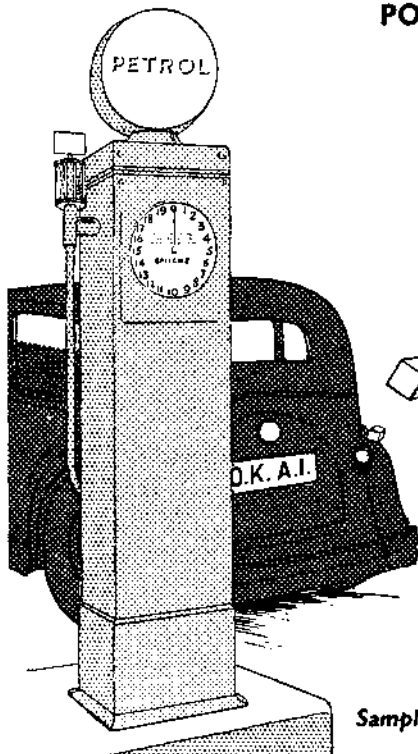
Duckham's
PATENTED TABLETS
SOLUBLE IN ALL PETROLS
 (GUARANTEED TO CONTAIN NO GRAPHITE)

THE CURE FOR CORROSIVE WEAR in all Types of Petrol Engines

- ★ *These Tablets:—*
- REDUCE WEAR
 - SAVE PETROL
 - MAINTAIN POWER
 - HELP STARTING
 - LESSEN NOISE
 - PROTECT YOUR POCKET



Make "old" engines young
 and
 Keep "new" engines new



TO DIRECTORS, GENERAL MANAGERS AND OTHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSPORT COSTS

These tablets are even more important to Commercial Vehicle Owners.

The saving in petrol more than pays for the tablets, and so the advantages at ★ are obtained gratis.

Special price for bulk deliveries to Commercial Users.

WE GUARANTEE THAT WEAR WILL BE REDUCED BY NOT LESS THAN 30%

BOX OF 12 1/- (SUFFICIENT FOR 24 GALLONS)

Samples on application to: **ALEXANDER DUCKHAM & CO., LTD.**,
 Duckham House, 16 & 18, Cannon Street, London, E.C.4.

**ROLLS ROYCE - MORRIS - AUSTIN
 VAUXHALL - WOLSELEY - M.G. &c. &c.**
 SPECIFY *Duckham's* PRODUCTS

turers' efforts to meet the demand of the motoring public for greater mechanical simplicity of control ... achieved by a most subtly designed piece of mechanism for the lubrication of which ordinary gear oil is unsuitable.

'To meet those special conditions Alexander Duckham & Co. Ltd. have evolved a new grade which, after exhaustive tests, has been adopted by both Morris Motors and Wolseley Motors as their exclusive recommendation for use with 1934 models to which synchro-mesh gearboxes are fitted. This new grade is known as Morrisol "Sirrom" (Regd.) Brand Synchro-Gear Oil and its use will make easier changing gears work still more easily.'

The 'factory-fill' contracts with the Midlands car industry meant that regular bulk deliveries of oils had to be maintained. At this time deliveries to the Morris and Wolseley works

After more than 50 cars, Alexander had a love affair with Bentleys. This is BGF 63, his first, a 3.5-litre convertible.

were being made, not unnaturally, by three Morris tankers – two Morris Commercial Dictators and a Morris-Carrimore. Even more predictably, they ran on Duckhams Morrisol Commercial "Sirrom" (Regd) Brand Oils, Duckhams' own records confirming the sterling performance of their lubricants in these hard-working vehicles.

By now the particular efficacy of Duckhams engine oils in reducing high oil consumption – until now widely regarded as inevitable – was beginning to gain wider acceptance. This was backed up by customers like the Morris Commercial user who wrote:

'Compared with the ordinary oil previously used the consumption of Morrisol is almost negligible and, when we tell you that nothing has been done to the vehicles since Morrisol was put in, you will realise our satisfaction.

'Actually of our previous oil we were using a pint per day per vehicle and we thought that the price of 2s 8d [14p] per gallon was a fair figure. Your Morrisol, however, gives a consumption of one pint per vehicle per week.



Our business demands service and we, in turn, appreciate service when we get it. Hence this letter.'

Apart from the direct automotive applications, the continuing development work on the industrial side resulted in a number of breakthroughs. An example is the research into the deterioration of steel surfaces, which culminated in the concept of 'Keenolisation'.

A patented range of lubricants containing colloidal zinc oxide, 'Keenol' offered substantial advantages in applications such as highly stressed gears, where pitting and corrosion were prevalent. On the theory that these were caused by electrical disturbance at the point of contact, the introduction of the zinc compound made the lubricant anodic to the steel, creating an electrolytic couple and forming an adherent film on the metal surface. As wear took place through the stress of operation, this film was instantly replaced. Keenol soon began to be promoted by means of a touring caravan, which housed a display for industrial customers.

Alexander Duckham's prescient chairman's report to the company's 1934 AGM refers to large, foreign combines entering the British market and cutting the prices of lubricants in order to gain sales of petroleum and fuel oils. (This was to be a recurring problem for the company; the majors with their large fuel sales were also able to apply profits from these to subsidise their lubricant prices.) He pointed out that several of the old-established firms had suffered, but that Duckhams remained in a strong position to counter this foreign competition, thanks not only to its modest size but also its policy of concentrating research on solving the problems encountered by industry.

Ironically perhaps, Duckhams' size meant that it remained vulnerable, although the biggest changes that would affect it, later in the century, were to come about through its relations with a British company rather than



A quayside delivery to SS Dunbar Castle, circa

one of the foreign giants by whom he felt threatened ...

Were these occasional glimpses of xenophobia from the well-travelled Alexander provoked perhaps by the events he could see unfolding on the Continent, where Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler had just become Chancellor of Germany? We cannot tell, but soon afterwards *Links* quoted an article in *The Times* lamenting the diminishing birthrate in the British Empire:

'... this will ultimately lead to a crisis, in that sparsely inhabited Dominions which could not be filled by British stock will be filled sooner or later, peacefully or otherwise, with aliens ... Before very long, with improved economic conditions, the Dominions will be clamouring for greater populations, for more British stock

of the right kind to fill their unoccupied territories. Are we going to fail them?’

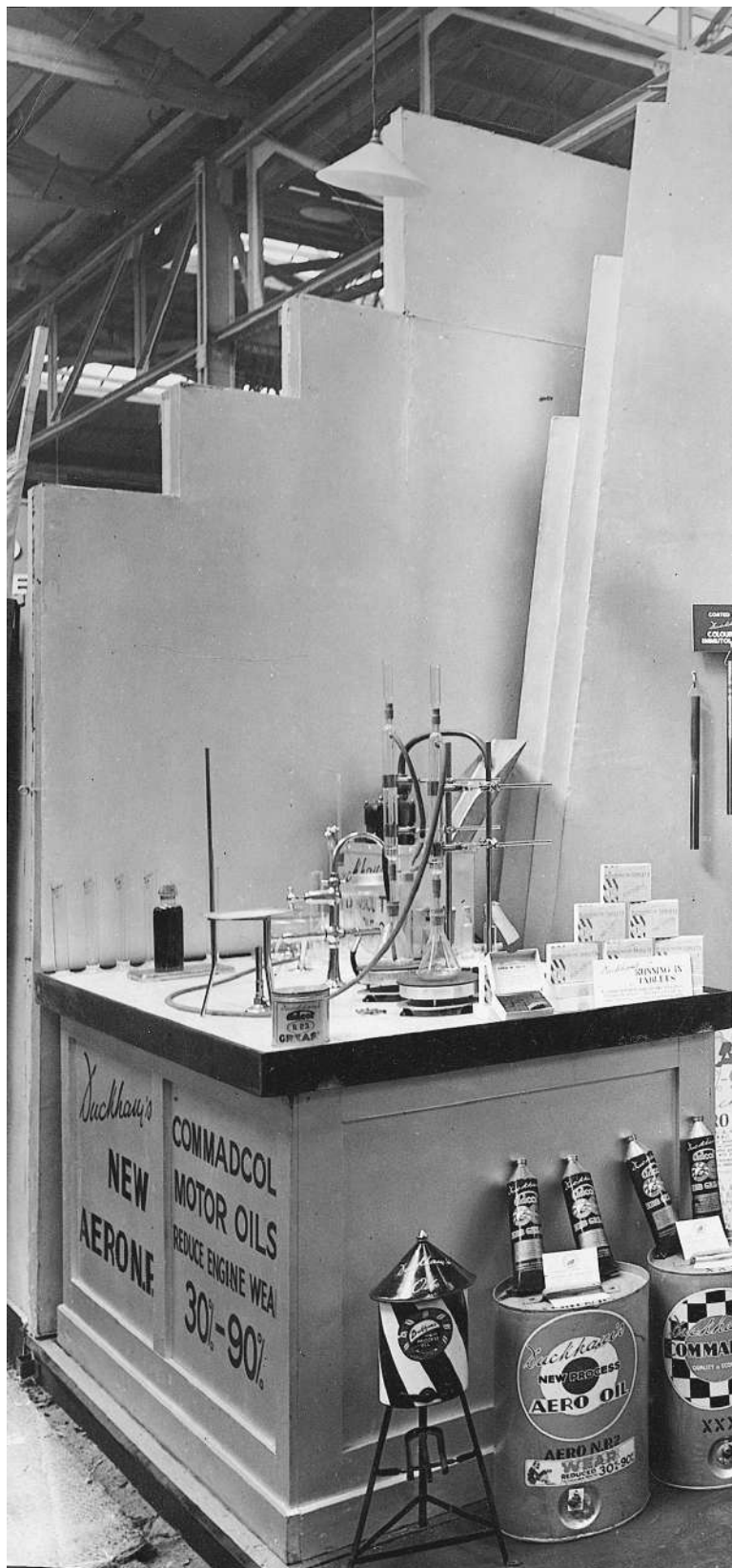
As the effects of recession were gradually supplanted by beneficial ones deriving from preparations for rearmament, the company’s most lucrative new product of this inter-war period was again in the motoring field. Duckhams ‘Running-in Tablets’, simply dropped into the fuel filler neck when taking on petrol, at the rate of one tablet for every 2 gallons, were formulated to keep the upper cylinders and combustion chambers in good order. Based on a blend of additives formed into a waxy, solid cube that dissolved in the fuel to complement the performance of the new oils, the tablets were the subject of a British patent in 1934, when Duckhams exhibited at the Motor Show.

As their effectiveness became recognised, sales of Running-in Tablets soared and their eventual contribution to the growth of Duckhams in the motoring market is enormous. The company’s increasing prosperity is reflected in Alexander’s acquisition of BGF 63, a 3.5-litre Bentley drophead coupé, with coachwork by Park Ward.

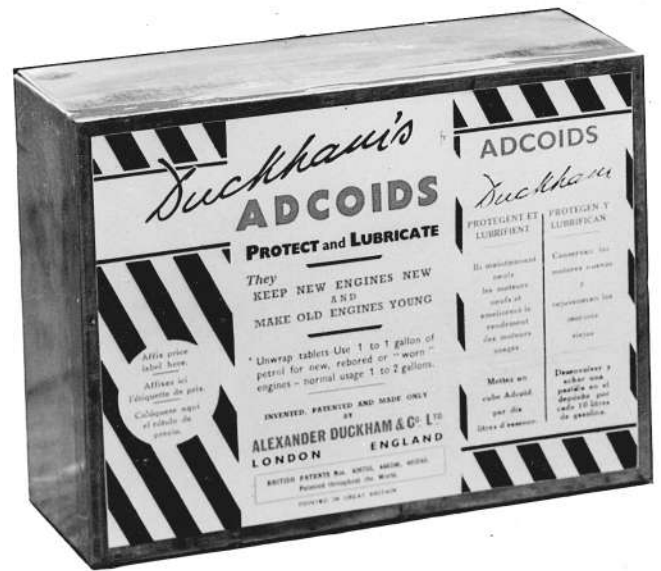
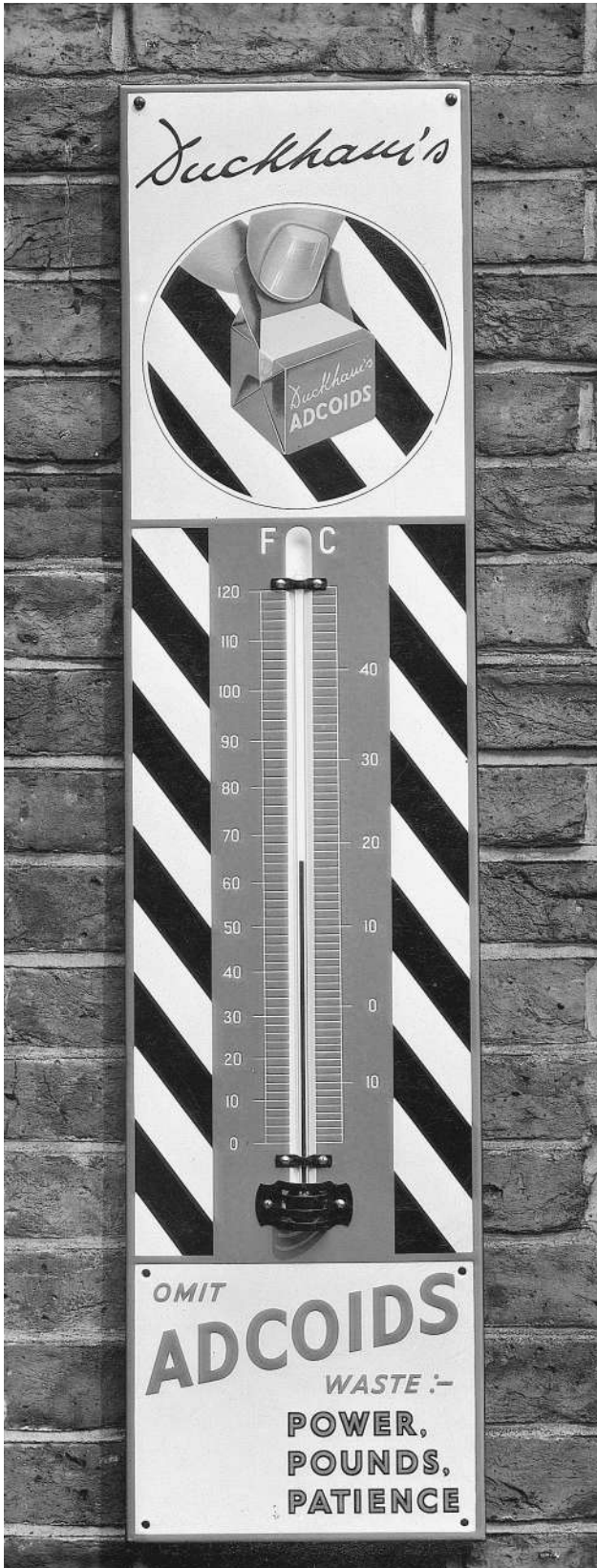
Duckhams engine oils gained a further useful boost when in the same year W. G. Everitt, driving an MG at Brooklands, broke the world record (H class) for the standing-start kilometre and mile, at 69.75mph and 79.88mph respectively, using standard Adcol N.P.5 (Aero) oil. Despite the engine speeds of almost 7,000rpm, this pure mineral oil performed at least as well as the vegetable-based oils normally used for such demanding trials.

Among other records broken that year using Duckhams oils were the fastest time for the London–Copenhagen–London return flight, set by Capt Neville Stack in a Gipsy Major

An exhibition stand circa 1935 featuring N.P. (Aero) and Adcol motor oils together with industrial products. (H. J. Whitlock & Sons Ltd)







Those tablets again, in their final incarnation from 1936 as Duckhams Adcoids.

Miles Hawk aircraft, and a new best time for covering 24 nautical miles (inboard unlimited class boats) achieved by Arthur Bray in his 92hp Chrysler-engined 18-foot Chris Craft.

The latest, uprated Adcol and NP oils were using corrosion inhibitors and, following successful experience in private car engines, these were extended to the commercial vehicle oil range with the launch of Commadcol at the beginning of 1935 – the Silver Jubilee year of King George V and Queen Mary. To compensate for the increasing use of solvent-extracted ‘thin’ grades, whose advantage of lower viscosity at low temperatures also brought the danger of reduced lubricity, the addition of Adcolid material increased ‘oiliness’ – the ability of the lubricant to adhere tenaciously to the metal and maintain an unbroken film.

With today’s advanced marketing and promotional techniques still in their infancy, Duckhams now began to pioneer the kinds of ideas that still have their devotees among the professionals more than 50 years later. A free life insurance scheme was introduced,

One of the original wall thermometers commissioned to promote Adcoids.

designed to promote both sales of oils and the garage trade. Anyone purchasing a 5-gallon drum of Adcol NP Oil through a recognised garage became entitled to £500 worth of free insurance cover against his or her death in a motor accident occurring during use of that oil (defined as six months from the purchase).

Other schemes designed to aid peace of mind included the Duckhams Key Ring Assistance programme (motorists applied for a key ring bearing a unique number, which in the event of the keys being found enabled the company to identify the owner and return them by post) and the Driving Licence Reminder scheme, where drivers registered their licence expiry date with Duckhams and received a reminder in good time to renew, thus avoiding the invalidation of their insurance. Road maps were also published, showing national and urban routes.

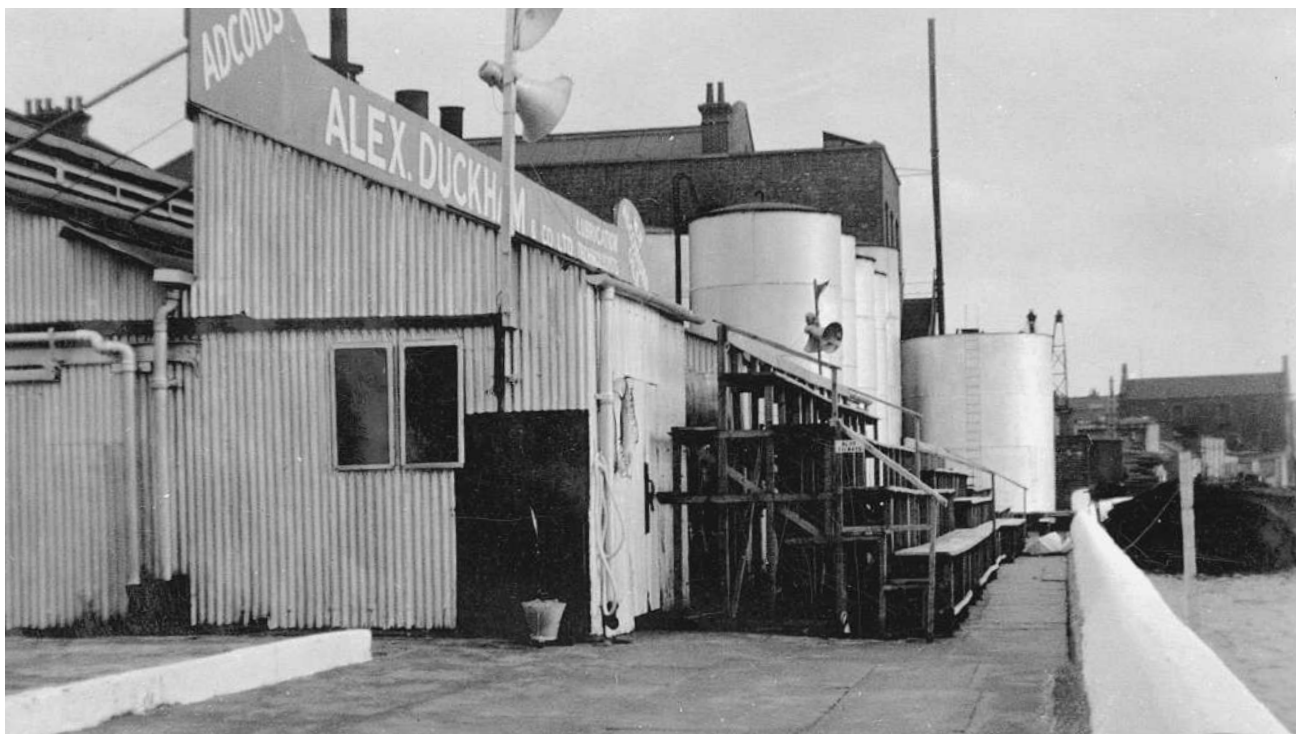
The retirement of P. N. Hooper after 30 years' service in 1936 created a board vacancy that was filled by the chief chemist, Stanley Bowrey, who had joined the company in 1910 having previously worked with Alexander in

his private laboratory at Vanbrugh Castle.

With the realisation that Running-in Tablets were widely regarded by motorists as beneficial long after the end of the running-in period, these were cannily renamed 'Duckhams Wear-Cure Tablets'. Advertising under the new name in the national press, and on the currently popular sandwich boards, ensured a further explosion in demand, requiring additional plant to be installed, including automatic wrapping equipment. Such was the 'brand awareness' (as we would now call it) among consumers that the tablets, now packed in boxes of a dozen, could soon be renamed again simply 'Duckhams Tablets'.

While the tablets were designed to dissolve in the fuel tank, a very small number of complaints (literally one in five million sales) were received to the effect that a tank with no filter at the outlet pipe had been blocked by

The later Thames-side (Works No 1) site at Hammersmith, showing a makeshift 'stand' erected for guests to watch the Boat Race in 1938.





Alexander's all-time favourite car, which he named 'Sheer Joy', was CXB 277, this tailor-made Bentley 4.25-litre drophead coupé with Youngs bodywork. (F. N. Birkett)

fragments of undissolved tablet. A further patent application of 1936 shows that the production technique was modified to incorporate a gas into the tablet, which aided flotation until fully dissolved.

'Envy vandalism', which nowadays often

Alexander's country mansion Rooks Hill House, near Sevenoaks in Kent, was used by him to provide holidays for needy children, later being gifted to the RAF.

manifests itself in scraping a key or knife along the paintwork of a new car, is clearly not new: investigation of 'unjustified' complaints about the tablets showed that two of the blockages were caused by sugar in the fuel tank, and another by soap. Something else that has not changed is consumers' failure to read instructions – motorists who omitted to remove the wrappers before putting the tablets into their tank could surely not have been anticipated!

With testimonials declaring that the tablets did indeed provide not only engine protection but also fuel savings, by this time both Duckhams oils and the tablets were being



officially recommended by the car manufacturers. The Austin Motor Co, for example, specified Duckhams Tablets for the 'top' end and Duckhams NP oil for the 'bottom'.

The American-owned Ford Motor Co, on the other hand, had only just come around to setting its coveted seal of approval on Duckhams NP (Aero) oils for all cars, trucks and tractors. Its caution was hardly justified: that same year Morrisol oil was used in the engine of a six-cylinder Morris 25 by a transnational expedition crew who covered 3,381 miles from Britain to Nigeria in just over seven days.

History does not record whether the team also used Duckhams Tablets, but the sales explosion in these had already sparked one spurious imitation, prompting Duckhams to indulge in a further spot of branding: in their final, most famous incarnation the tablets now became Duckhams Adcoids.

As rearmament peaked during the late 1930s, in response to the increasing threat from Nazi Germany, Alexander Duckham voiced his concern about the 'boom-bust' economy that was becoming the order of the day. With industry now moving into over-capacity, the company had cause to thank the motoring side – and particularly Adcoids – for maintaining turnover levels, and the advertising of the product as an 'engine tonic' was maintained.

As far as we know, Alexander was not a gambling man, but there is constant evidence of his uncanny sense of the right horse to back. In 1936 the company had one of its Morris staff cars fitted with a Perkins 'Wolf' high-speed diesel engine (the term 'high-speed' being relative, as it revved to just over 3,000rpm), racking up many thousands of business miles in it, and prompting an interesting debate as to whether the compression-ignition engine would ever catch on for private cars.

In November 1936 it was reported that the car had just completed its first six months'

service, covering 17,000 miles and showing a pronounced saving in fuel costs. Calculated on an annual basis this amounted to around £65, 'more than twice covering the additional depreciation on the more expensive (in first cost only) diesel engine'. At 25,000 miles Jack Duckham reported: 'When one remembers that the stage of development of diesel engines is the same as that, say, for the petrol engine of 10 or 12 years ago, it would appear that there is a rosy future for the former.'

George V passed away in January 1936 and

Some of the constituents of Adcoids were added to New Process Oils from 1937.



by December his successor, Edward VIII, had abdicated, resulting in the Coronation in May 1937 of the new monarch, George VI.

Alexander Duckham was still indulging his passion for cars, of which he admitted to having owned 49 in 30 years of motoring. As a 60th birthday present to himself he replaced his 3.5-litre Bentley with a 4.25-litre convertible model, CXB 277, tailored to his own requirements:

‘I decided to let myself go and embody those fads and gadgets which I had so often in mind but which I had been too slack to put into effect and therefore accepted the orthodox. So as not to spoil the beauty of line and finish, the car has an all-black body with a grey head and is devoid of excrescences such as “A.A.” or other badges and radiator cap mascot. That greatest eye-sore of all – the spare wheel – has also been made to disappear.

‘I place on record my appreciation of the patience and real enthusiasm displayed by Mr G. H. Wenham, managing director of Messrs James Young & Co, of Bromley – the body builders – in evolving ways and means for incorporating my unorthodox ideas and for the perfect work turned out.’

The car was indeed a beautiful example. Alexander gave Youngs a selection of the things he always carried (clothes brush, Adcoids, tobacco tin, packet of Ryvita, AA guide, keys, etc) so that the glovebox could be specially built with appropriate compartments. Besides that spare wheel, the boot contained a small refrigerator, built by Duckhams’ own laboratory and cooled by solid carbon dioxide, that held four half-pint bottles of beer and a snack. Two pigskin suitcases, fitted into the space behind the seats, held items that might blow around when the hood was lowered, while the rear window blind carried the word ‘THANKS’ so that it could be temporarily yanked up to acknowledge the courtesy of another driver.

Not that Alexander, who was by now clearly a wealthy man, simply indulged his own whims. Having acquired the beautiful country property Rooks Hill House, near Sevenoaks in Kent, some years previously, he now found it too large for everyday living but loved it too dearly to sell it. Instead he conceived the idea of making the house, with its 200-acre estate, available to provide holidays for children of poor families.

Alexander himself moved into a cottage on the estate, while the house would be occupied by children – boys up to five and girls up to seven – gathered together by the non-denominational body of Infant Care Associations. The house could occupy 60 children and a staff of 15 helpers, with stays lasting three or four weeks. Costs, including those of the helpers, were said to work out at 10 shillings (50p) per child per week, with Alexander liable for rates only during the periods of occupation; and he professed himself amply repaid by the pleasure this arrangement gave him.

In 1937 Duckhams’ relationship with the motor industry was set in stone, as it were, when Earl’s Court, which for so long afterwards would be the home of the British Motor Show, was constructed – using, naturally, Duckhams Concrete Mould Oils. It was also the year in which George Joyce, who had joined as office junior 30 years earlier, was appointed to the Duckhams board.

Advances in the packaging field are seen later that year when the company began to offer sealed cans for ‘small-packaged’ oils, as a smart, convenient alternative to the customary glass bottles: ‘A sealed can will give the consumer the confidence that he is getting the grade and the brand he asks for, in perfect condition, in quality and quantity exactly as it left the refinery.’ To help promote the new packaging the ‘Duckhams Canned Oil Cabinet’ was introduced, a simple structure holding 36 cans for quick dispensing on the forecourt.



The move coincided with the incorporation into the Aero NP Oils of certain components of Adcoids; followed soon afterwards by similarly upgraded Commadcol, these 'Adcoided' lubricants represented a further important advance towards the sophisticated blends available today.

In 1938 the company acquired a new member of staff in the person of the Hon Ruth Cokayne, daughter of Lord Cullen of Ashbourne (a former Governor of the Bank of England). Well known as a keen pilot, Ruth's scientific bent had led her to invent the SU Thermoil Lubricator, a device for reducing wear in petrol engines when starting from cold.

The initial version, factory-fitted to some of the more powerful Wolseleys, used the SU thermostatic carburettor as a means of introducing special upper cylinder lubricant into the engine only during the warm-up period; a

A 1930s Morris Commercial box van in 'Aero N.P. Oils' livery. (Chas K. Bowers & Sons)

later development, with its own thermostatic control, was suitable for use with any type of carburettor. The upper cylinder lubricant itself was named Duckhams Adcayne, presumably after the system's inventor.

The company was at pains to point out that the device in no way supplanted Adcoids, but was supplementary to them. Sales of Adcoids themselves peaked at some four million packs (or 48 million tablets) in that year when, at the annual salesmen's dinner held at the Langham Hotel in London's West End, Alexander spoke fondly of the product as 'the company's baby' – promptly going on to pronounce it the 'penultimate baby' as he announced another breakthrough, a stay-put grease for leaf springs named Laminoid. Once again the company was on a roll ...

Names to conjure with: many of the makes listed in this early application chart have since disappeared without trace.

RECOMMENDED GRADES

How to Read this Chart :

- 2. Means Duckham's AERO N.P.2 (S.A.E.40).
 - 3. Means Duckham's AERO N.P.3 (S.A.E.50).
 - 5. Means Duckham's AERO N.P.5 (S.A.E.60).
 - N. Means Duckham's Gear Oil " N."
 - N2. Means Duckham's Gear Oil " N2."
 - S. Means Duckham's Adcol " S "
- (for Constant and Synchro-Mesh Gears)
- DBS. Means Duckham's Worm Gear Oil.
 - HBB. Means Duckham's H.B.B. Grease.

The S.A.E. (U.S.A.) Specifications corresponding to AERO N.P. Grades are given in brackets.

***DUCKHAM'S MORRISOL " SIRROM " (Regd.) Brand ENGINE, TRANSMISSION, SYNCHRO-GEAR OIL, WOLSELEY SPECIAL REAR AXLE COMPOUND and H.B.B. GREASE, the ONLY lubricants recommended by the makers of MORRIS and WOLSELEY Cars.**

When a car engine has completed 20,000 to 30,000 miles and has not had the engine reconditioned, it may be necessary to use the next grade heavier than is recommended on this chart.

CAR	GRADE			CAR	GRADE		
	Engne.	Gear- box.	Back Axle.		Engne.	Gear- box.	Back Axle.
A.B.C.	3	N	N	Bentley	3	3	S
A.C.	3	S	N	Bentley, 1934	3	S	N
Acedes Magna	3	S	N	Bentley, 8 litre	3	3	2
Acedes Magna (Pre-selector)	3	2	N	Benz	3	S	S
A.J.S.	3	N	N	Berliet	3	S	S
Albert	2	N	N	Bianchi	3	N	N
Alfa Romeo	5	S	N	Bond	3	N	N
Alpine Steyr	3	3	S	Bradshaw	3	3	N
Alta	5	S	N	Briton	2	N	N
Alvis 4 and 6 cylinder	3	N	N	B.S.A., 10 h.p.	3	2	N
Alvis (FWD and super-charged)	5	5	N	B.S.A. (3-wheeler)	3	N	—
Alvis (Pre-selector)	3	2	N	Bugatti	5	S	S
Amilcar	5	N	N2	Buick	2	S	N
Angus Sanderson	3	N	N	Cadillac	2	N	N
Ansaldo	3	S	N	Calcott	2	S	S
Argyle Sieve Valve	2	2	N	Calthorpe	3	N	N
Armstrong Siddeley	3	N	N	Ceirano	3	N	N
Armstrong Siddeley (Self-change)	3	2	N	Chandler	3	N	N
Arrol Aster Straight 8	3	3	N	Charron	2	N	N
Arrol Johnston	3	N	N	Charron Laycock	3	N	N
Ascot	3	N	N	Chenard Walcker	3	S	S
Ashton Evans	3	N	N	Chevrolet	2	N	N
Aston Martin	5	S	N	Chrysler (1931 and previous)	2	N	N
Auburn	3	N	N	Chrysler	2	5	N
Aurea	3	N	N	Citroen	3	S	S
Austin (all models)	3	3	N	Cleveland	2	N	N
Austro Daimler	3	S	N	Cluley	3	S	S
Ballot	3	DBS	N	Clyde	3	N	N
Bean	3	N	N	Clyno	3	N	N
Beardmore	3	S	S	Coventry Victor	3	S	S
Belsize	3	N	N	Crossley, 10 h.p.	3	N	N
				Crossley 10 (Self-change)	3	2	N
				Crossley, 1934, 2 litre	5	2	N

Duckham's N.P. OILS CARRY MORE EXCLUSIVE RECOM-

RECOMMENDED GRADES—cont'd.

CAR	GRADE			CAR	GRADE		
	Engine.	Gear- box.	Back Axle.		Engine.	Gear- box.	Back Axle.
Crossley, other models	5	N	N	Invicta (Self-change)	5	2	N
Crouch	3	S	S	Isotta Fraschini	5	2	N
Cubitt	2	S	S	Itala	2	S	S
Daimier (others)	3	S	N	Jowett	3	N	N
Daimler (Self-change)	3	2	N	La Buire	2	N	N
Darracq	3	S	S	Lagonda	5	5	5
De Dion	3	N	N	Lagonda (Self-change)	5	2	5
Delage	3	S	S	Lanchester	3	2	N
Delahaye	2	S	S	La Salle	2	N	N
Delaunay-Belleville	2	S	S	Lea Francis	3	N	N
Derby	5	N	N	Lea Francis, T.T. model	5	N	N
De Soto	2	N	N	Lincoln	3	S	S
D.F.P.	3	N	N	Lorraine Dietrich	3	S	S
Diana	2	N	N	Marendaz Special	3	N	N
Diatto	5	S	S	Marmon	2	S	S
Dodge	2	N	N	Marquette	2	N	N
Dodge (Free Wheel Unit)	2	5	N	Martini	2	N	N
Donnett-Zedal	2	N	N	Mathis	3	3	S
Durant	2	S	S	Mercedes Benz	3	S	S
Enfield Allday	3	N	N	Mercedes Benz (Super- charged)	5	S	S
Eric Campbell	3	N	N	Metallurgique	3	N	N
Erskine	3	N	N	†M.G.	5	N	N
Essex (1932 and previous)	2	N	N	†M.G. (Pre-selector)	5	3	N
Essex, 1933 and 1934	2	S	N	Minerva	2	S	S
Falcon Knight	2	N	N	Morgan, Air-cooled	3	N	—
Farnan	3	3	3	Morgan, Water-cooled	3	N	—
F.I.A.T.	3	S	S	*Morris, all models	Morrisol Standard Recommendation*		
Flint	2	S	S	Napier	3	N	N
F.N.	3	S	S	Nash	2	S	S
Ford, T. model	2	N	N	Oakland	2	N	N
Ford, 1928-32	3	N	N	Oldsmobile	2	N	N
Ford, 1933 and 1934	3	S	N	O.M.	3	S	N
Franklin	3	N	N	Opel	3	N	N
Frazer Nash	3	S	N	Overland	2	N	N
Galloway	3	S	N	Packard	2	S	S
G.N.	3	N	N	Paige	2	S	N
Graham	2	N	N	Panhard Levassor	2	5	5
Graham Paige	2	S	S	Peugeot, Sleeve Valve	2	N	N
Gregoire	3	N	N	Peugeot, other models	3	3	N
Guy	3	N	N	Pierce Arrow	2	N	N
G.W.K.	3	—	—	Railton Terraplane	3	S	N
Gwynne 8	3	N	N	Rally	3	N	N
Hampton	3	S	S	Renault	3	N	N
Hanomag	3	N	N	Reo Six	2	N	N
H.E.	5	S	S	Rhode	3	N	N
Hillman	3	3	N	Riley, 1933-34	3	N	N
Hispano Suiza	3	S	S	Riley (Self-change)	3	2	N
Hispano Suiza (Sports)	5	S	S	Rockne	3	N	N
Horch	3	S	N	Rochet-Schneider	2	N	N
Horstman	3	S	S	Rolland Pilain	3	N	N
Hotchkiss	2	S	S	Rolls-Royce	3	S	N
Hudson (1932 and previous)	2	N	N	Rover, Air-cooled	3	S	S
Hudson, 1933 and 1934	2	S	N	Rover, Water-cooled	2	S	S
Humber	3	3	N	Rover, 2 litre	3	S	S
Hupmobile	2	N	N	Salmson	3	S	S
Hupmobile, 1934	2	S	N	Salmson Sports	5	S	S
Hurtu	3	N	N	S.C.A.T.	3	N	N
Imperia	3	S	S				
Invicta	5	S	N				

† In Winter use N.P.3.

MENDATIONS FOR BRITISH CARS THAN ANY OTHER OIL

RECOMMENDED GRADES—cont'd.

CAR	GRADE			CAR	GRADE		
	Engine.	Gear- box.	Back Axle.		Engine.	Gear- box.	Back Axle.
Senechal	3	N	N	Sunbeam, 3 litre	5	S	S
Schneider	2	5	S	Swift	3	N	N
Sheffield Simplex	3	N	N	Talbot	5	5	N
Singer	3	N	N	Talbot (Pre-selector)	5	2	N
Singer, 9 h.p. Le Mans	5	N	N	Triumph	3	5	S
Sizaire Berwick	2	N	N	Triumph (Self-change)	3	2	S
S.P.A.	2	N	N	Trojan	3	3	HBB
Spyker	2	N	N	Turner	2	N	N
S.S., 1933 and previous models	3	S	N	Vale	5	R	R
S.S., 1934	3	N	N	Vauxhall	3	S	S
Standard	3	N	N	Vermorel	3	N	N
Standard Avon	3	S	N	Vernon Derby	5	N	N
Standard (Self-change)	3	2	N	Vinot	3	N	N
Star	3	N	S	Voisin	2	S	S
Steyr	3	N	N	Vulcan	3	N	N
Straker Squire	3	N	N	Whippet (Overland)	2	N	N
Studebaker	3	N	N	Willys Knight	2	N	N
Studebaker, 1934 models	3	S	N	Willys Overland	2	N	N
Stutz	5	S	2	*WolseleyMorrisol Standard *Recommendation*		
Sunbeam, all models except 3 litre	3	S	S	Zebre	3	N	N
Sunbeam (Self-change)	3	3	S	Zedel	2	N	N

* For MORRIS and WOLSELEY CARS—all Models.

See recommendation at top of page 26

MOTOR CYCLES

Name of Cycle	N.P. Grade	Name of Cycle	N.P. Grade	Name of Cycle	N.P. Grade
A.J.S.	5	Grindlay Peerless	5	N.U.T.	5
A.J.W.	3	Guzzi	5	O.E.C. (Blackburne)	3
A.K.D.	3	Harley Davidson	3	O.K. Supreme	3
Ariel	5	H.R.D.	3	Omega	3
Blackburne Engines	3	Indian	3	P. & M.	5
" (O.H.V.)	5	Ivy	3	Raleigh	3
Brough Superior	3	J.A.P. (touring)	3	Royal Enfield	3
B.S.A.	5	" (racing)	5	Royal Ruby	5
B.S.A. (O.H.V.)	5	James	3	Rudge	5
Calthorpe	3	Levis (2-stroke)	3	Scott	5
Cotton	5	" (4-stroke)	5	Sunbeam	3
Coventry Eagle	3	Matchless (S.V.)	3	Triumph (side- valve O.H.V.)	5
Dot	3	Matchless (O.H.V. and O.H.C.)	5	Velocette	5
Douglas	5	Montgomery	3	Villiers	3
Dunelt (2-stroke)	5	New Hudson	3	Wolf	3
Excelsior	3	New Imperial	5	Zenith	3
Excelsior (O.H.V.)	5	Norton (Racing)	5		
Francis-Barnett	3				

Should your car or motor cycle not be included above we should be pleased to advise you as to the correct grade of AERO N.P. Oil to use on receipt of particulars of make and model.

DRAIN FREQUENTLY AND PROTECT YOUR ENGINE

Duckham's

manufacture lubricants of Quality for all types of
Industrial Plant and Transport Vehicles including:

COMMADCOL

**Branded Oil for Commercial Vehicles, will reduce
cylinder wear by at least 30 per cent.**

"AQUICUT" SOLUBLE CUTTING OILS.	JOINT BOX COMPOUND.
BALL BEARING LUBRICANTS.	"KEENOL" SURFACE BUILDING LUBRICANTS.
BENCH OILS.	"KEMCUT" NEAT CUTTING OILS.
CHAIN AND WIRE ROPE LUBRICANTS.	LOOM OIL.
COMMADCOL MOTOR OIL FOR COMMERCIAL VEHICLES.	MARINE ENGINE OILS.
COMPRESSOR OILS.	MOTOR OILS.
CONCRETE MOULD OIL.	OIL ENGINE OILS.
CUTTING OILS.	PETROLEUM JELLIES.
CRANK CHAMBER OILS.	PNEUMATIC TOOL OIL.
CYLINDER OILS (STEAM).	POLISHING OIL.
DIESEL ENGINE OILS.	PRESERVING SLUSHES AND GREASES.
DYNAMO & ELECTRIC MOTOR OILS.	QUENCHING OILS.
EXHAUSTER OILS.	REFRIGERATOR OILS.
FLORADCOL, FLOOR DRESSING OIL.	ROLLING OILS.
GAS ENGINE OILS.	RUST PREVENTATIVES AND SOLVENTS.
GAS HOLDER FILMING OIL.	SHAFTING AND MACHINE OILS.
GAS METER OILS.	SPINDLE OILS.
GEAR BOX OILS.	STAMPING OILS.
GREASE FOR ALL PURPOSES.	TURBINE OILS.
HARDENING & HEAT TREATMENT OILS.	WORM DRIVE LUBRICANTS, ETC.

Interesting Staff Leaflets of a technical nature on lubrication subjects will be
supplied on application to our Technical Advisory Section.

**Duckham's products are recommended or approved by
over 400 manufacturers of Industrial Plant
and Commercial Vehicles.**

QUALITY IS ECONOMY

Chapter 3

WAR AND PEACE

Duckhams' 40th anniversary was a memorable one for both good and bad reasons. Already predicted to be a bumper year, 1939 brought greatly increased profits, which, in the eight months to August, had already exceeded those for the whole of the previous 12 months. A 40th anniversary book of maps was commissioned, as a gift for selected customers, copies of which occasionally still come to light at antiquarian booksellers.

But it was also, of course, the year war was again declared, and with Chamberlain's momentous words the export market virtually collapsed owing to the restrictions on oil movements. Worse still, petrol rationing curtailed motoring to the extent that Duckhams motor oil sales fell by 80 per cent, leaving the home industrial business to carry practically the whole of the overheads.

Celebrations were nevertheless considered to be in order. Since it was too late for the full effect of these strictures to be felt during the year, the 1939 final accounts showed another record profit, after tax, of £36,884. The retirement was announced of director and chief chemist Prof J. S. S. Brame; and George Joyce, continuing his rise up the company ladder, was appointed deputy managing director.

The likelihood of air raids on London prompted the board's decision to move the head office out of Cannon Street, and for this purpose the company purchased the freehold of a large house, 'Woodlawn', in Page Heath

Lane, Bickley, Kent, for £2,000. Air raid shelters were constructed at the Hammersmith works.

The 1940 Budget, which provided £200m towards the first year's war expenditure, increased income taxes and imposed Purchase Tax for the first time. Rationing was introduced for most commodities – food, clothes, sweets and, of course, petrol. For many people, however, this was not such a new hardship: whereas such items were now restricted by supply, they had previously been effectively rationed by price. The war brought a benefit, too, in that it created virtually full employment for the remaining civilian population.

With wartime constraints biting hard, Duckhams, in common with the rest of business, was forced to make economies. Much of the meticulous record-keeping was abandoned and, with 'poaching' of customers and all other common forms of competition between oil companies suspended by mutual agreement, the largely redundant advertising budgets were slashed.

Now in his 60s, Alexander Duckham was already in failing health, having adapted to a quiet life, much of which was spent pottering in the garden of the small cottage to which he had moved in the grounds of his estate, Rooks Hill. Perhaps because he had seen the plight of some of the orphans whose fathers had died in the First World War, it was at this early stage in the new hostilities, rather than in their aftermath, that he made a further munificent

donation, that of Rooks Hill itself, to the RAF Benevolent Fund, together with a settlement of £1,000 per year towards its upkeep.

The role designated for the large house, with its 200-acre estate, was to provide a shelter for the children of officer and non-commissioned pilots killed in action or in flying accidents. Edward Bishop, in his book *The Debt We Owe – The RAF Benevolent Fund 1919–1969*, relates how Alexander, an inexhaustible patron of the RAF, personally raised a further £100,000 from British industrialists for the Benevolent Fund, continuing to work with two business acquaintances, the Sheffield steel magnate Baron Riverdale and a prosperous City man, Bertram Rumble, to establish the Fund on a firm basis.

During the early months of the war Rooks Hill housed 15 children aged between two and seven. Sevenoaks, however, lying as it did under the bomber route to London and close to the South East fighter defences, was soon considered too vulnerable a location, and in August 1940, as the Battle of Britain raged, Rooks Hill was closed and its occupants returned to family members. Vanbrugh Castle School, too, was closed because of its proximity to London's docks. Both properties eventually did suffer bomb damage and neither re-opened until after the end of the war.

With the feared Blitz becoming a reality, the precaution of moving the offices out of Cannon Street was amply justified when these premises were totally destroyed – somewhat ironically, by an oil bomb. Shelter trenches were constructed in the grounds at Bickley, the work continually interrupted by the wail of air raid sirens. Even these temporary offices did not escape the continuing raids, however, sustaining considerable damage from an indirect bomb strike in 1941.

In the same year another distinguished scientist, Cecil Pepper PhD BSc FRIC FCS, was appointed to the board of the company. Dr Pepper, who came from a farming family



George T. Joyce joined Duckhams as office junior in 1907 and rose to become joint MD.

but had gained a scholarship that started him on a career in science, was another graduate of London University who, after obtaining his higher degree, joined the research labs of Alexander Duckham & Co, working closely with the founder himself.

During the course of the war he assisted in overcoming the problems posed by shortages of raw materials, plant and labour and became more concerned with the commercial and economic sides of the business. Later, by keeping a careful eye on developments in





Repairs under way to the temporary offices at Bickley, which were badly damaged (above) in a

other world markets, he was to play an important role in the company's post-war product developments.

Perhaps succumbing to an illogical British feeling that even the Luftwaffe would not dare to destroy the top London hotels, Alexander hired a suite in the Waldorf at £40 per month to serve as his office. The Hammersmith works was clearly vulnerable to the bombs, so to reduce the fire risk it was decided to move the manufacture of products with a low flash point from there to Kent. Formally known as Works No 3, this operation was in fact based in the grounds of Alexander's property at Seal, the temporary arrangement lasting for just over a year.

To prevent a single bomb strike wiping out a huge quantity of product, stocks of oils were dispersed around the country, these 'reserve dump' locations including Birmingham, Bristol, Chard, Glasgow, Goole and Manchester.

For the second time Duckhams had seen its staff reduced by war service, this time from



Distinguished chemist Dr Cecil Pepper was mainly responsible for Duckhams development of the first European multigrade engine oil, following his fact-finding visits to the USA.

around 170 to 130, and with a corresponding increase in the proportion of female employees. Among those leaving to do their duty was Alexander's son Jack who, as a Major in the RAOC, was for some time seconded to the 51st Highlanders and saw service in the Low Countries and Germany.

In the petroleum industry, men over 30, and women over 22, were deemed to be in reserved occupations, although working hours were increased. Fire-watching (keeping a

look-out for fires started by enemy raids) became compulsory for these male staff, and voluntary for the women.

Transport was becoming a problem owing to war restrictions. Lorries were prohibited from leaving the factory with less than an 80 per cent payload, and deliveries out of London were restricted to a 30-mile radius of Charing Cross (the only exception being bulk tankers, which participated in reciprocal arrangements under the provisions of the Lubrication Oil Pool).

With a major proportion of the company's sales being to Midlands industry, to help overcome the transport restrictions Works No 4 was set up in Birmingham, following the purchase for £6,550 of No 42 Grosvenor Street. This plant, a self-contained unit with its own small laboratory capable of basic quality control, appears to have enjoyed a charmed life, adjacent as it was to the local railway marshalling yards that were targeted many times during the Blitz.

Adcoids production was reduced to a minimum and capacity turned over to neat cutting oils and soluble fluids, as well as hand cleansers, skin ointment and other hygiene aids for industrial workers. The commencement of production of these at Fulham in 1943 required significant changes at Works No 2, where larger volumes of soluble oils had to be stored and raw material storage tanks were turned into blenders.

Although it sustained no direct hits, the continuing air raids of 1944 saw Works No 1 suffer from extensive blast damage; it was nevertheless back in action within two days thanks to tireless work by the staff, already under considerable duress. A memorandum from the works manager to Alexander Duckham refers to 'the air raids, blackout, fire-watching and travelling difficulties ... having an impact on staff, causing lack of sleep, strain, fatigue and irritation.'

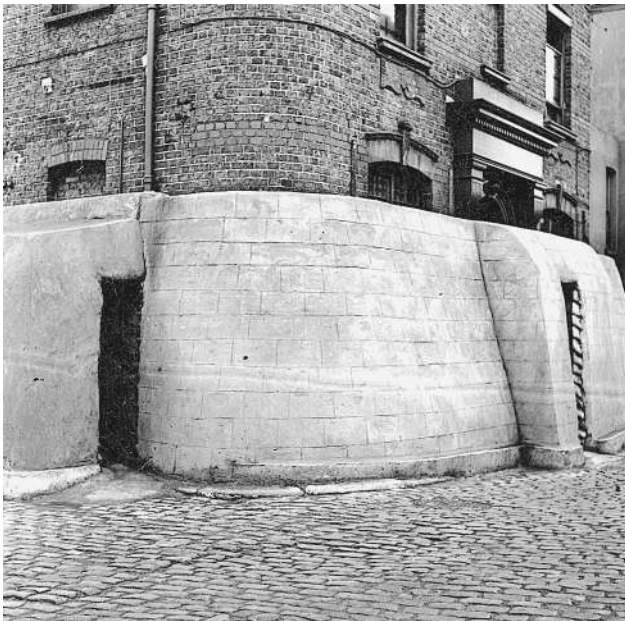
Referring to packaging problems, he says: 'Due to the shortages of metals we are forced

to cut out sales in small packs except for government requirements, and to utilise second-hand packs ordinarily suited only to scrapping.’ (The allocation of steel for new packs was under the jurisdiction of the Petroleum Board, which decreed minimum sizes of 10 gallons for oil drums and 28lb for grease.)

With a possible end to the war in sight, it was not all doom and gloom in the latter half

of 1944; in any case, the ever-optimistic Alexander found a ready excuse for a celebration. On 25 July he hosted a luncheon at the Waldorf to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Blériot’s historic Channel flight, the list of

The Hammersmith works was vulnerable to bombs during the war, and precautionary blast protection was erected at strategic points around the site.





Situated not far from Buckingham Palace, the premises at 12–14 Wilfred Street were the scene of many a cocktail party.

distinguished guests including Sir F. Handley Page, Mr T. O. M. Sopwith and Lord Brabazon of Tara. Also in attendance was Cdr John Ide USNR.

It is typical of Alexander that, despite the continuing restrictions on the industry, he was already anticipating the Allied victory, and enthusing about the possibility of getting the

company back to something approaching normality, when he died on 1 February 1945, aged 67. The funeral took place at Golders Green Crematorium, followed by a memorial service at St Michael's, Cornhill, on 12 February.

Alexander Duckham had maintained control of his company throughout and, although he was looked upon by many as an autocrat, this was no more than the general management style of the time. Among his many achievements was bringing Duckhams to a leading position in the lubrication industry, with a loyal team of engineers and chemists, supported by sales and administration personnel, who had made the company's philosophy of 'quality and service' their own.

Following Alexander's death his son Jack, although still in the Army, was appointed to take over as chairman of the company.

Jack Duckham is remembered with affection, by both staff and outsiders, for his outgoing personality, which was so useful in winning trade. A distinguished and entertaining character, his natural interest in people, and ability to remember the details of their lives and families, made him a natural 'front man' for the company. The nuts and bolts of business administration did not greatly appeal to him, and it seems that he was never happier than when out visiting customers or socialising at a party or dinner. There will be a few who still recall the supercharged Morris Eight that heralded his arrival, and the tendering of a business card that bore his full name, Jack Eliot Duckham.

It was not until Jack's early discharge later in 1945, however, that he was able to take up the reins in person and oversee the gradual return of the company to its peacetime footing. As the lights came back on all over London, the office at the Waldorf was vacated, a new chairman's office leased in Dover Street, and further freehold office premises in Wilfred Street, off London's Buckingham

Gate, purchased for £12,000. As the company grew, this location came to provide a prestigious venue for receptions, press launches and so on, and is remembered with affection by those who attended functions there.

The large American oil companies had clearly gained significant ground during the war, leaving small British independents like Duckhams with much leeway to make up. Dr Cecil Pepper, now joint managing director, was closely involved in a programme of replacing overworked plant and overhauling production techniques to offset the high cost of labour and materials.

Discussions were soon undertaken with Morris Motors to re-establish the pre-war relationship, resulting in the new specification 'NOL' (Nuffield Official Lubricant) as the exclusive Morris/Wolseley recommendation in 1946. With oil availability improving all the

time, the winding up of the Petroleum Board in 1947 was perhaps the final symbol of normality in the industry, although the damage done to the British economy by the war was made only too clear in Prime Minister Clement Attlee's newly announced austerity measures. 'Work or Want' and 'Export or Die' became official slogans.

That same year new freehold offices were purchased in Kensington for £30,000 and, with a view to boosting exports, overseas trips were embarked upon by senior management, Dr Pepper travelling to the USA and George Joyce to Australia.

The following year brought a prestigious

After the war the company reinstated its 'lost keys' registration scheme for drivers. The original records had been lost in the bombing of



accolade for Duckhams when Lt-Col A. T. 'Goldie' Gardner set a new international car speed record in Belgium, using the company's products. Cabling head office with the good news, Goldie advised: 'Lubrication by Duckhams as ever perfect'.

In 1949 a new era of small cars was heralded by the launch of the Morris Minor, followed closely by the oddball Citroën 2CV. The world's largest aircraft, the Bristol Brabazon, made its maiden flight.

Sadly Alexander, who would have been thrilled at these achievements, had not lived to see them. Neither could he witness the one that would perhaps have made him proudest of all: his company's Golden Jubilee in 1949. The surviving directors, though, made sure this year, in which the prestigious Kensington premises were occupied, was a memorable one, with some company traditions revived and special emphasis placed on customer involvement.

Publication of the *Links* magazine was recommenced, targeted at those in technical and administrative roles in business. Then the 'lost keys' scheme for motorists was re-introduced, after its forced abandonment through the Cannon Street bombing, with both old and new customers invited through the pages of *Links* to write in and register their details in exchange for their engraved Duckhams disc. Re-introduced too were Duckhams road maps in a new bound format.

Two major sporting events saw the contemporary equivalent of 'corporate hospitality'. In June 1949 Duckhams took three coachloads of important customers to the Oaks meeting at Epsom, and the following month representatives of major motor trade groups and manufacturers like Wadhams, Caffyns, Puttocks, Hartwells, Ford Motor Company and Leyland were the company's guests at Henley Regatta.

No jubilee year would have been complete without a formal dinner, so in October a long list of celebrities and customers joined

Duckhams management at the Savoy Hotel, where a message of congratulation from Prime Minister Winston Churchill was read out to the assembled company.

The company received a suitable 50th birthday present from the indefatigable Goldie Gardner who, still running exclusively on Duckhams oils in his new MG Record Car, set new record speeds in international classes E to I.

But times were changing rapidly. As the motor industry entered a new phase of mass-production and relative sophistication, not only were cars like the Morris Minor starting to look more like those we know today, but widening markets and servicing requirements meant that it was increasingly impractical for manufacturers to stick with one brand of oil.

George Joyce was consequently obliged to enter into an outline agreement that would effectively end Duckhams' solus position as suppliers of recommended lubricants to the Nuffield organisation. Perhaps to sweeten the pill, Joyce was asked to act as go-between in the negotiations with the other main oil companies for their inclusion on the 'approved' list, effective from 1 January 1950.

The return of peace had brought plenty of employment for Britain's workers as they faced the huge task of reconstruction following the bombings. Some of the constraints of wartime were slow to disappear, however: it was only in 1950 that petrol rationing, which had been in force for ten years, ended (as did, more bizarrely, the rationing of soap as well), causing record traffic on that Whit Monday.

Gradually, though, a new age of consumerism was created and living standards rose. Commercial television and Premium Bonds were introduced. Council houses

Jack Duckham breaks out the bubbly with Goldie Gardner to celebrate another successful record speed run in his Duckhams-lubricated MG at Utah in 1951. (Nuffield USA)



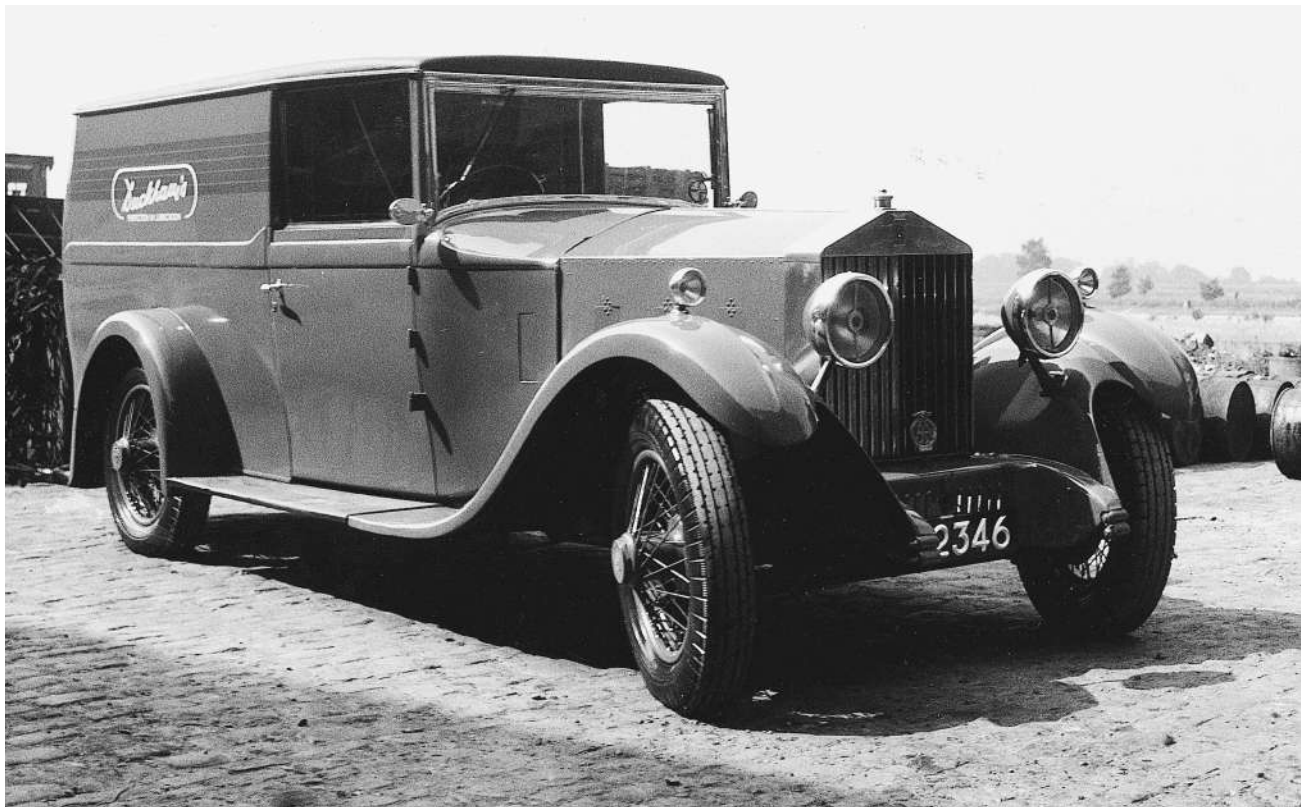


With the return of peacetime, transport was in demand, and Duckham's fleet encompassed all sorts. Here we see a Morris Eight 5cwt van, a Morris-Commercial box van, an Austin ex-Army 30cwt Austin K30 truck pressed into service as an extra delivery vehicle, a Morris-



Commercial LC series small tanker, and a Rolls-Royce 'van', about which perhaps the less said the

better!



sprang up, including the ubiquitous ‘prefabs’, which could be quickly put together using preconstructed sections to fill the new demand for housing. Those who had previously had no chance of owning their own home could now, with a secure job, buy one on a mortgage for £10 down; indeed, ownership soon became the better bet as private rents started to increase substantially.

In the new atmosphere of affluence, and in anticipation of escalating motoring-related production, Duckhams increased raw material storage capacity at Hammersmith by some 1,000 tons, later expanding the works itself by taking over a portion previously let.

One hundred years after the Victorian Great Exhibition, in 1951 the ‘Festival of Britain’

Crowds line the Hammersmith Works river frontage for the 1951 Boat Race.



opened on London’s South Bank. Like the Millennium Dome that was to follow 50 years later, its ‘Dome of Discovery’ and cigar-shaped ‘Skylon’ excrescence proved controversial to a public still suffering from the deprivations of wartime. One of the main complaints was the price of a cup of coffee at the exhibition – 9d (4p).

By now the company had taken the decision to end the sale of New Process Oils, and the NP name, used for 30 years, was incorporated into the NOL brand. Motoring was entering a new era and, thanks to Duckhams, engine oils were more than keeping pace. A new product, Adcoild Liquid Upper Cylinder Lubricant, was now also introduced, trading on the brand name of the product launched 14 years earlier in tablet form.

Dr Pepper again visited the USA to check out developments in motor oils there, and,

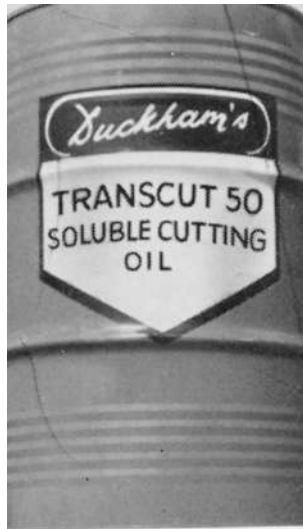
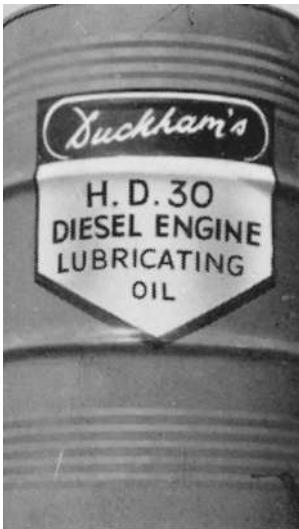
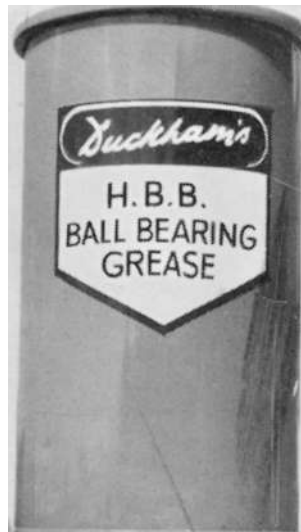
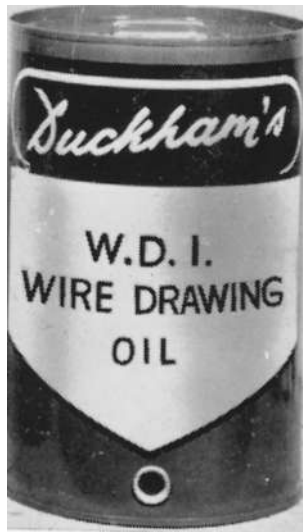
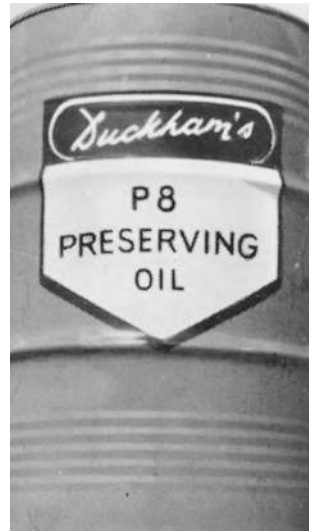
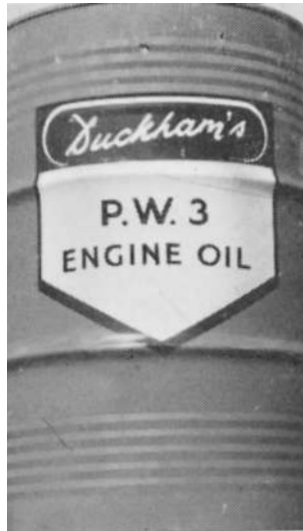


despite embargoes on imports by some Continental countries, Duckhams continued efforts to rebuild its brand awareness in post-war Europe. Under an agreement designed to get round import restrictions, production of Adcoids and NOL oil began in France, and new export arrangements were set up through

The Adcoids formula was introduced as a liquid upper cylinder lubricant in 1950.

Duckhams' caravan-based stand displays agricultural lubricants at the 1950 Barnstaple (Devon) Show. Tow vehicle is a Standard Vanguard van.





Duckhams' diverse range of industrial lubricants at the start of the 1950s.

agents in Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark and Portugal.

The company's major event of 1951, though, was also probably the single most important product launch in its history,

destined to put even Adcoids in the shade. Inspired by Dr Pepper's first trip to America, where greater extremes of temperature are the norm and where a new type of engine oil had been introduced, Duckhams unveiled for British motorists the famous 'Q' for the first time. It was Europe's first multigrade engine oil. And it was green ...

Chapter 4

THE QUEUE FOR 'Q'

The result of intensive laboratory research, Q5500 was a 10W/30 multigrade (an oil whose 'flat viscosity curve' meant improved flow characteristics at all temperatures), which had been undergoing field trials with several hundred motor trade customers for the past year or so. It was claimed to have extreme fluidity at both normal and arctic temperatures, increased film strength and 'oiliness', and a high degree of detergency. Increasing engines' resistance to oxidation and corrosion, its most noticeable practical advantages to motorists were easier starting and quicker getaway.

The distinctive green hue of this original 'Q' brand was introduced into the formulation originally in order to overcome an irrational prejudice on the part of the motoring public against pale-looking oils, which were thought to lack 'body'. Pensioner Jean Walton (née Gould) recalls that, as a technical assistant in Duckhams Works No 2 labs, she mixed the first multigrade (destined to be Q5500) for Dr Pepper. It was so pale that it looked more like mineral or hydraulic oil, so he asked her to add a green dye to make the appearance more acceptable.

The colour used in production derived from a bespoke dye manufactured by Williams of Hounslow for Duckhams. Although the company subsequently attempted, unsuccessfully, to register 'green oil' as a trade mark, it immediately became a well-known feature of Duckhams multigrades, even customers who could not remember the brand name asking

for 'that green oil', encouraging 'passing off' by spurious imitators.

Another frequently asked question concerns the derivation of the oil's name, and the answer, though simple, does not disappoint. Duckhams chemists maintained a 'Q' book in which experimental formulations were documented under a 'Q' number prior to being preserved in a more formal way. The new formula's number in the book happened to be 5500 ...

Advertised as 'the super lubricant for the motoring connoisseur', over the next three or four years Q5500 steadily gained acceptance, becoming Europe's best-selling multigrade. The motor manufacturers themselves, however, always cautious, continued to specify mainly NOL brand 'straight' lubricants.

The year 1952, in which Princess Elizabeth acceded to the throne on the death of her father King George VI, also brought the death of John Cobb, holder of the World Land Speed Record, when his jet-engined boat disintegrated on Loch Ness at 240mph. The following summer, however, the nation rejoiced as a new Elizabethan era was heralded by the Coronation. And in the same year, after being outdone for a year or two, Ford again claimed to have the world's

Reflecting oil developments in the USA monitored by Dr Pepper, Q5500 was developed by Duckhams to become the first European multigrade.

The ORIGINAL
'FLAT-CURVE'
MOTOR OIL

Duckham's
Q 5500
SUPER
LUBRICANT

EASIER STARTING
QUICK GET-AWAY
IMPROVED RUNNING-IN

ALEXANDER DUCKHAM & CO. LTD.
LONDON. W.6.

*First
in the
Field!*

cheapest car with its four-cylinder Popular at £390, beating Austin's new A30 (£475) and Standard's Eight (£481).

As multigrade oils began to catch on for cars like these, competitors introduced their own brands. Naturally, Duckhams had anticipated this and had never reduced the level of commitment to the strong industrial products division of the company, with the lubricants, coolants and associated products continuing to be developed and, of course, promoted.

The increased levels of trading, resulting largely from the sales volumes created by the multigrade breakthrough but also from sustained sales of NOL, required greater working capital, and in 1954 the company announced a conversion and rights issue, doubling the total issued capital to £250,000, comprising 1,000,000 five-shilling (25p) shares.

The growth in volumes for the oil companies was being created by mushrooming car ownership, all the companies seeing extra business despite new levels of competition between them. The majors were engaged in a game of 'tied' service stations, as they attempted to sign up retailers to stock only their brand. The 'carrot' consisted of special trade terms, and back-up by way of signage, hardware, advertising and marketing aids.

The balance between sales of the NOL monograde and Q5500 multigrade brands was gradually changing, thanks to developments in engine design that were largely American-led. With manufacturers slow to change their recommendations, however, it was still a time for hedging bets; Q5500 was advertised for its 'winter' attributes, with NOL being promoted on the 'prevention is better than cure' theme.

The company had to keep a constant eye on the ever-changing requirements in service workshops. Chassis developments meant that many of the newer passenger and commercial vehicles no longer needed the various specialised greases for different components, and in response Duckhams introduced LB 10, a lithium-based all-purpose grease with high

water resistance, which considerably simplified life for the mechanic.

In a market where complacency could mean death, Duckhams strove continually to move forward. Whether in the motor or the industrial sector, there was the same strong commitment that has existed throughout the century, to continually upgrading the product to meet the changing needs of users.

Investment in new plant and equipment continued apace, and by 1955, the year in which Churchill (now aged 80) handed over the premiership to Anthony Eden, production capacity was double that of seven years previously. In conjunction with an increase in the numbers of laboratory staff, engine test facilities became more sophisticated, permitting ever more stringent tests to be run, while research into cutting coolants and tool life took a major step forward when Duckhams' laboratory became the first in Europe to begin using radioactive tracer elements in this field. With the company's hand cleansers and skin treatments highly regarded, a dedicated bacteriological laboratory was also installed.

Meanwhile in the lubricants laboratories, while Q5500 was still establishing itself with motorists, Duckhams boffins were already working on its successor ...

A bullish start to 1956 saw Duckhams taking a more pragmatic view of its activities. The Adcoids patent was sold to Shell, while an agreement was negotiated with British Sun Oil, of the USA, to market the American company's lubricants in Britain. Capital expenditure continued, too, with a new grease-making plant commissioned for Works No 1.

It soon became clear, however, that the British motor industry was starting to experience another recessionary phase, and this was compounded later in the year by the Suez Crisis, which threatened oil, and therefore petrol, supplies for the first time since the end

The traditional underbonnet holder in Morris cars could now carry a multigrade oil.



IMPORTED BY
STEWART & ADRIEN LTD.
MIDDELTON ROAD
THE YALE
ACTON, W.3.

Sackham's
Q 5500
MULTIGRADE
ENGINE OIL
10w/30

A SUPERIOR GRADE
ENGINE OIL
SUITABLE FOR SUMMER AND WINTER USE

Special Qualities
IMPROVED RUNNING-IN
EASIER STARTING
MORE POWER DEVELOPMENT
ENGINE CLEANLINESS
REDUCED WEAR

ALEXANDER BUCHANAN & CO. LTD.
HANOVER BUILDING, LONDON, W.11

of the war. As things turned out, 1956 was not to be the best year in which to launch a new oil.

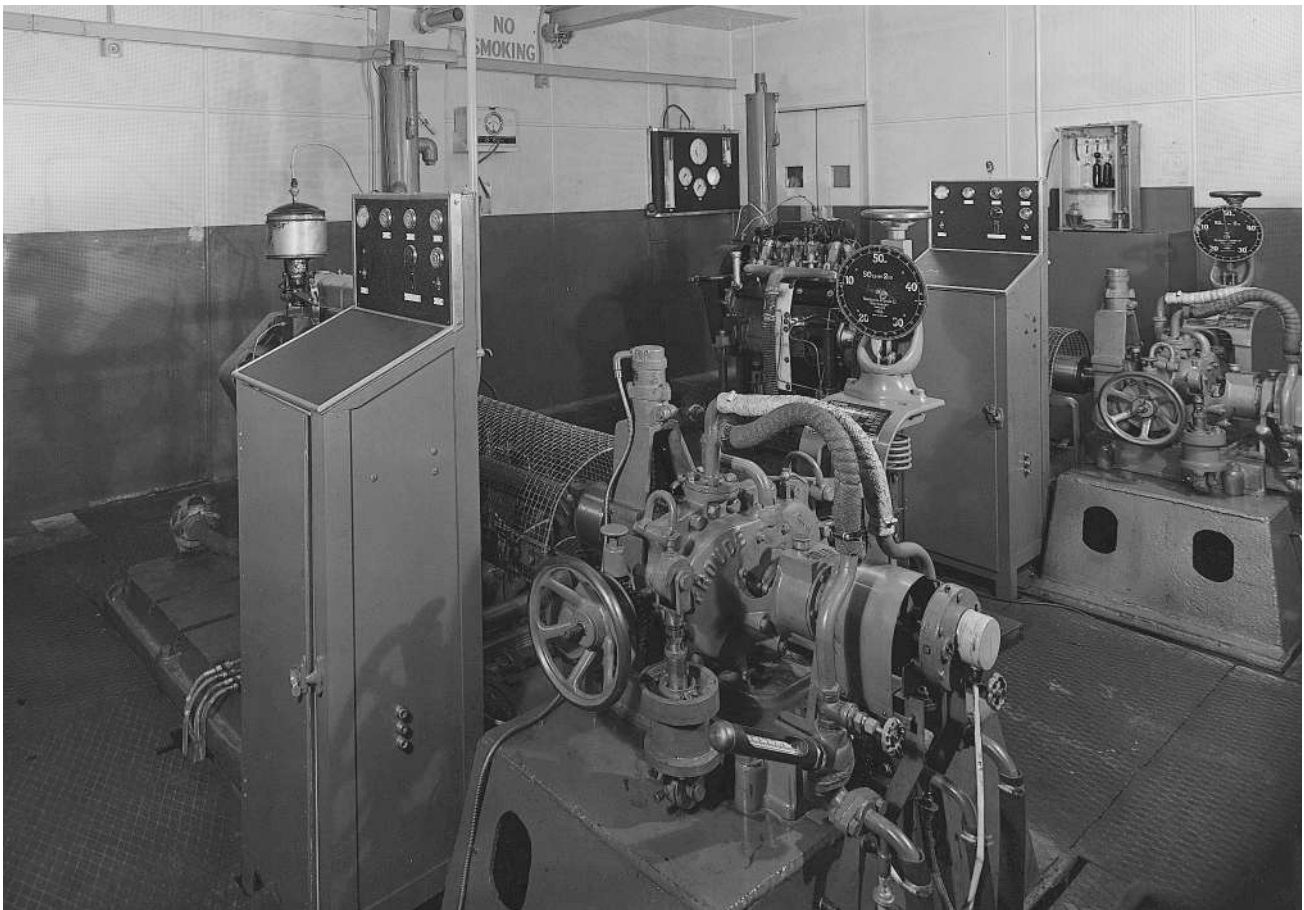
But in true Duckhams spirit, launch they did, even though Q20-50 first saw the light of day as a motorcycle oil. It was a depressingly downbeat time for the birth of what was to become the company's best-known brand of motor oil, the new year dawning against the gloomy background of fuel shortages, with constant queues at filling stations and the precautionary issue of ration coupons to motorists on the basis of need.

Fortunately the downturn was not a sustained one and, with the re-opening of the Suez Canal and the gradual lifting of fuel restrictions, 1957/58 proved to be healthier years than expected.

Expansion at Hammersmith in the 1950s included new engine test bed facilities.

Although Britain remained outside the European Common Market, created by the initial six signatories to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, Duckhams' export sales improved, as did those of industrial products, thanks to an extensive range offering everything from commercial engine oils, through press and wire-drawing compounds, to hygiene preparations like soaps, detergents, barrier creams, and skin cleansers including the widely used A.S.C. (Antiseptic Skin Cleanser).

Some of the previous year's sales deficit was made up for by an improvement in turnover of the new motor oils, with Q20-50, Q5500 and NOL 30 all featuring in the range. Despite the competition between the oil majors for 'tied' sites, the vehicle manufacturers obligingly continued to encourage free choice in motor oils, and Duckhams exploited every opportunity to offer its products through



garages and filling stations. The commercial vehicle oils range was also updated, with 20W/50 and 10W/30 rated multigrades, and the concept was even extended to ‘multigrade’ hydraulic oils.

It was not uncommon for the family car engine of the day to need at least a top overhaul at 30,000 miles and, by 50,000 miles or so, wear in the bores would probably be causing it to burn oil. Although still advertised as a motorcycle oil, Q20-50 was becoming recognised as ideal for car engines that were beginning to suffer oil consumption problems in this way. These would only increase with driving speeds on the imminent motorways, of which a pilot stretch – the Preston By-Pass – opened in 1958.

As motorists recommended ‘Q’ to friends and neighbours, ads proclaiming ‘Complete engine protection’ and ‘An all year round oil’

made increasing reference to cars as well as bikes. ‘Time for an oil change? Change it to Duckhams!’ – and thousands did. Combined with High Street availability through Halfords stores, this brought daily converts to the new oil with its mysterious green hue. As sales soared, the company’s capitalisation was again increased, by a bonus issue, to £500,000.

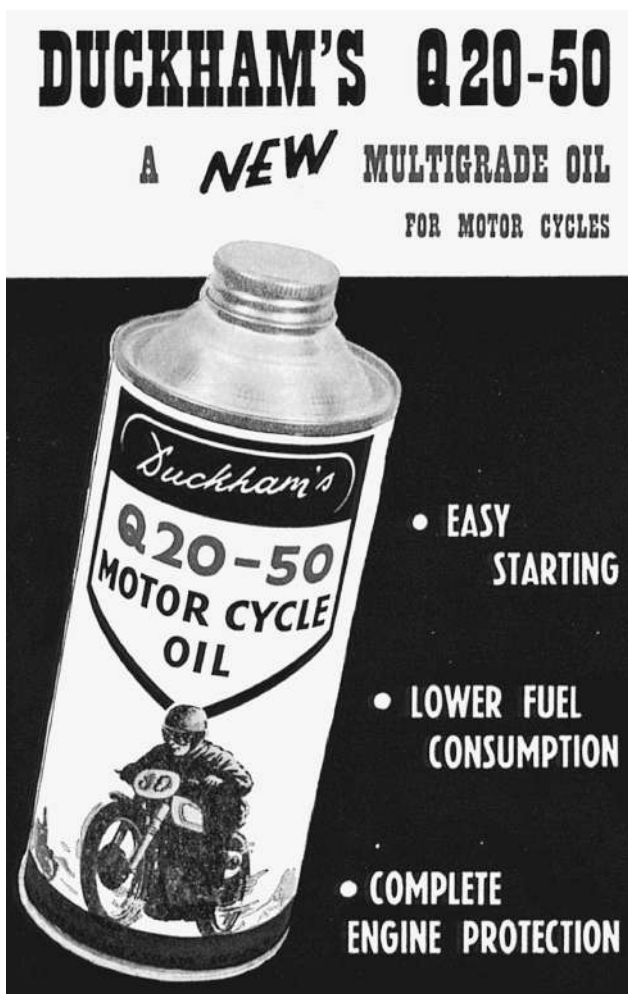
It was in 1959 that Duckhams lost an invaluable scientist and administrator in its joint managing director Dr Pepper, who was taken ill and died aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* while returning from a business trip to the USA. It was he who had seen the potential of the multigrade oil concept on an earlier visit to the States. Duckhams had never been averse to copying a good idea, but always endeav-

New underground raw material storage tanks being craned into position at Hammersmith.



DUCKHAM'S Q20-50

A **NEW** MULTIGRADE OIL
FOR MOTOR CYCLES



- EASY STARTING
- LOWER FUEL CONSUMPTION
- COMPLETE ENGINE PROTECTION

The later multigrade, Q20-50, was originally

oured to improve it; and on his return Pepper had overseen the research and manufacture stages of the project that provided the company with the mainstay of its automotive sales over the next half-century.

That year also saw the British Motor Corporation launch its ground-breaking new

A decade after the Minor, the first Mini (a Morris Mini-Minor) rolled off the line at Cowley, bringing a new lubrication challenge for Duckhams with its revolutionary integral engine/gearbox unit. It is pictured here with designer Sir Alec Issigonis, on the occasion of his retirement in 1971. (Rover Group)





£500 family car, the Morris Mini-Minor. Issigonis's radical design not only turned BMC's A-series engine through 90 degrees, starting a trend followed by most family hatchbacks today, but also placed the transmission beneath the crankcase, with the gearbox effectively operating in an extension of the sump.

While this was fine for space-saving, it caused problems for the engine oil, which, in addition to suffering the usual contamination from combustion deposits, was suddenly called upon to act as a gear oil as well. Not surprisingly, there were problems. Probably the greatest of these was the 'shearing' effect of the high pressures involved in the gears, which quickly broke down the polymers in ordinary oils causing loss of viscosity and lubrication properties.

Once again, it was Duckhams to the rescue. While monograde NOL had been the manufacturer's original recommendation for the Mini, Q20-50 proved to be in a class of its own in this type of engine, maintaining viscosity and reducing the oil leaks that had started to plague the Mini.

As other front-wheel-drive spin-offs from the Mini concept started to arrive on the scene, their highly stressed constant velocity joints proved vulnerable to rapid wear. Duckhams was called in again, and provided the solution with a special molybdenum disulphide grease.

With Q20-50 still considered unique in the market, widening its availability appeared to be the only obstacle. The question of 'solus' petrol stations, with the associated tied sales of lubricants, was becoming a major issue with the independent and specialist producers; in 1960 they finally succeeded in getting the practice referred to the Monopolies & Mergers Commission, which, in time-honoured fashion, embarked on the lengthy process of taking evidence.

In that year, too, another member of the Duckham family joined the company when

Alexander's grandson Neill Duckham Foster, the son of Millicent Duckham and her husband Wilfred Foster, was appointed company secretary.

The Hammersmith plant commenced major expansion, and a new plant was also installed to provide more efficient production of the latest types of grease. Nearby, construction of the Hammersmith Flyover was under way with, naturally, extensive use of Duckhams Concrete Mould Oils.

The Government had, of course, long taken an interest in the country's love affair with the car, and the 1960 Budget saw taxes on oils increased. It was a setback that did little to blunt demand for the product. When, just down the way at Earl's Court, that year's Motor Show opened its doors, Duckhams' associated advertising featured the ditty:

'For starting on a winter's day, or driving on
the motor way,
For those who can afford the best, and cars
that pass the ten year test,
For crawling in a traffic stream or driving in a
rally team,
Use Duckhams Q20-50.'

Perhaps The Beatles, who were making a name for themselves in Liverpool, should have been called in to write the lyrics! Also featuring in the Duckhams ads of the time – and a reminder of the continuing links with Morris – were the Millionth Morris Minor (a celebratory edition finished in a love-it-or-loathe-it lilac shade) and, of course, the 'incredible' Mini.

When joint managing director George Joyce retired in 1962 after 55 years' service with the company (he had joined as office boy in 1907, and his son Ron followed him into Duckhams, becoming the company's technical services manager), sales had more than doubled within

The answer to the Mini's oil consumption problems? Duckhams Q20-50, of course!



REMARKABLE OIL CONSUMPTION TEST AT SILVERSTONE

THE TEST 1001 miles over 347 laps at an average speed
of 77.26 m.p.h.

Drivers: Warwick Banks, Harry Ratcliffe,
Brian Redman and Bob Smith.

Scrutineer: R. J. Soanes, M.S.A.E., M.I.M.I.

Time Keepers: W. W. Turner and D. W. Bell

THE CAR A Mini-Cooper 1275 S - a performance car used by
enthusiasts for fast driving at maximum engine revs,
where oil consumption is an important factor.

THE CONSUMPTION 2 pints during the whole test.
ONE PINT PER 500 MILES!

THE OIL

DUCKHAM'S

20-50

MOTOR OIL

the oil that likes to be driven hard!

* Silverstone, 14th July, 1965.

15 years, despite full potential being hampered by the restrictive practice of ‘tied’ outlets, which remained under consideration by the MMC.

These rapidly growing sales, which were being enjoyed in spite of the trend in the motor industry towards smaller sumps and extended oil drain periods, were to prove something of a problem. Not only were the existing premises in danger of being outgrown in the shorter term, but the company’s capital

A BMC-badged delivery van at Hammersmith in the late 1950s.

base was constantly under strain as well. This, coupled with the highly competitive trading conditions at the time, tended to create a ‘stop-go’ regime within the company.

Industrial sales were also buoyant, and re-organisation of this side of the company resulted in the launch of the Duckhams Industrial Lubrication Service. Duckhams was now in the enviable position of being the only independent to offer a full-range, nationwide lubrication service covering industry, transport and private motoring.

There was more good news soon afterwards when, following collaboration between the



technical staffs of Duckhams and Vauxhall Motors, the contract was gained for the supply of production line fill-up supplies, with Duckhams products to appear in the approved listing in the handbook of the new Vauxhall Viva HB.

In August 1963 Lord Nuffield, a fellow philanthropist, business colleague and friend of Alexander Duckham and Britain's most successful motor industry figure, died aged 85. Having given up his directorships 10 years previously, he had set about disposing of his fortune charitably, including allocating £10m to set up the Nuffield Foundation. Also that year, US President John F. Kennedy died at the hands of a gunman in Dallas, Texas.

Such were Duckhams' sales levels by now that even the squeezed profit margins were able to absorb the overheads associated with the setting up of regional sales offices. By the year end large field forces were operating in both retail motor and industrial sectors, and were getting results.

Having been available on the UK market for some 12 years, multigrades were at last replacing the traditional monogrades as the recommendation in manufacturers' literature. With car production booming as consumer affluence grew, competition for the increased business was severe, but Duckhams held its own with renewed marketing and promotional effort, the emphasis now firmly on 'Q20-50 Multigrade Engine Oil for every car on any road at any time of the year!' – a simple-to-understand message that caught on with motorists.

The house colours were changed from green (originally conceived to represent the colour of Q) to the first incarnation of the now familiar blue and yellow logo. Such was the loyalty and recognition by this time that large numbers of garages and fuel stations continued to defy the move to 'tied' outlets, and the regional field staff were poised to provide a ready response to their demands to stock Duckhams. Together with the countless



Joining as company secretary in 1960, Alexander's grandson Neill Foster was the last Duckham family link. Later becoming MD and vice-chairman, he left in 1974. (The Ullage magazine)

motorists who bought their cans in High Street stores, they helped make it Britain's fastest-expanding brand by 1964, when the newly formed British Motor Corporation approved Q20-50 for the engine of its new 3-litre, Rolls-Royce-powered Princess R saloon.

The increased brand awareness among the motoring population can only have helped the 'pull-through' effect on industrial sales. From production engineering right through to local authority sewage works, Duckhams had a substantial share of the market, aided by specialities such as the aerosol silicone spray Adsil.

In October 1964, as Harold Wilson's Labour Government squeezed to power with a majority of four, the purchase was completed of a Manchester works from United Lubricants to ease the pressure on existing facilities. A nucleus of retained staff helped effect a rapid start-up, with production under way within a few months.

The burgeoning packaging industry of the new consumer age was identified as a likely



Hammersmith works saw further major expansion in 1961/62, to provide new offices, packaging facilities and vehicle workshops.

target for diversification into wax production, with Duckhams expertise in hydrocarbon compounds ideally suited to the requirements of impregnating, laminating and coating paper. A couple of sales representatives were appointed, but delays in the supply of equipment meant a slow start in 1965.

The new year brought a landmark for the British motor industry with the production of the millionth Mini, but this was overshadowed as the nation mourned Winston Churchill, who died aged 90.

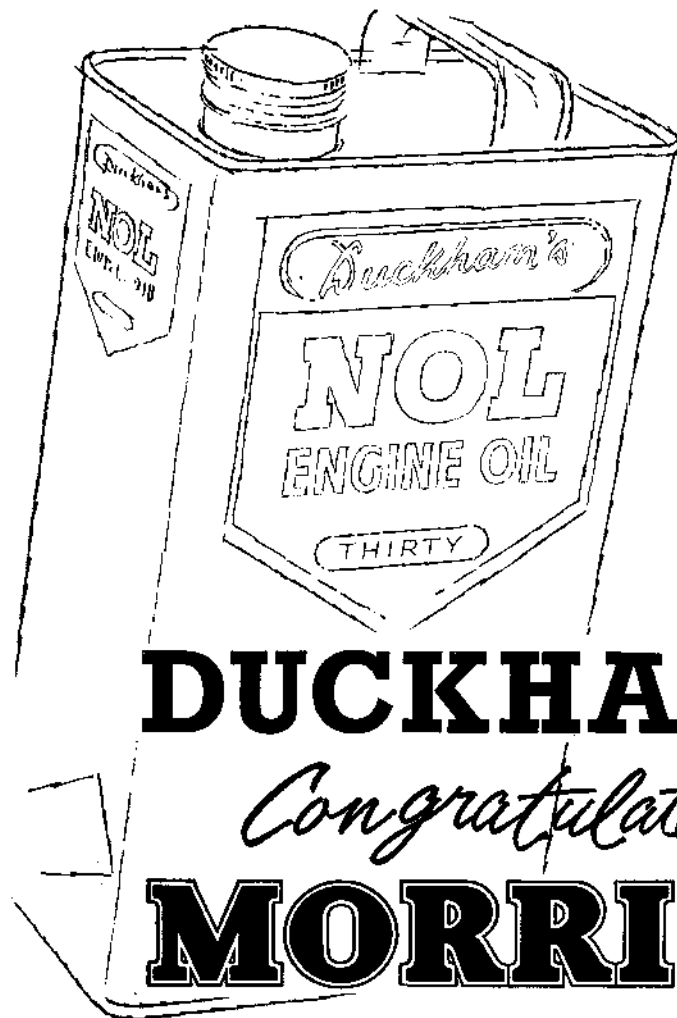
Following a further increase in Duckhams share capital to £750,000, June of that year also saw the opening of leased premises in Hounslow, as a filling and distribution depot,

capable of automatic filling of gallon, quart and pint cans.

With industrial sales now showing a decline, war was declared on overheads, with the closure of some regional offices, much to the regret of chairman Jack Duckham, who was very conscious of the key role played by the field forces. A corresponding upturn in European sales, however, meant that it became cost-effective for local manufacture of some products to be licensed, thus avoiding import restrictions.

With the benefit of hindsight, the brake on costs was perhaps an over-reaction. While it certainly improved the profitability of the industrial department, demand for motor oils

The millionth Morris Minor in 1961 inspired both BMC and Duckhams to celebratory promotions.



DUCKHAM'S

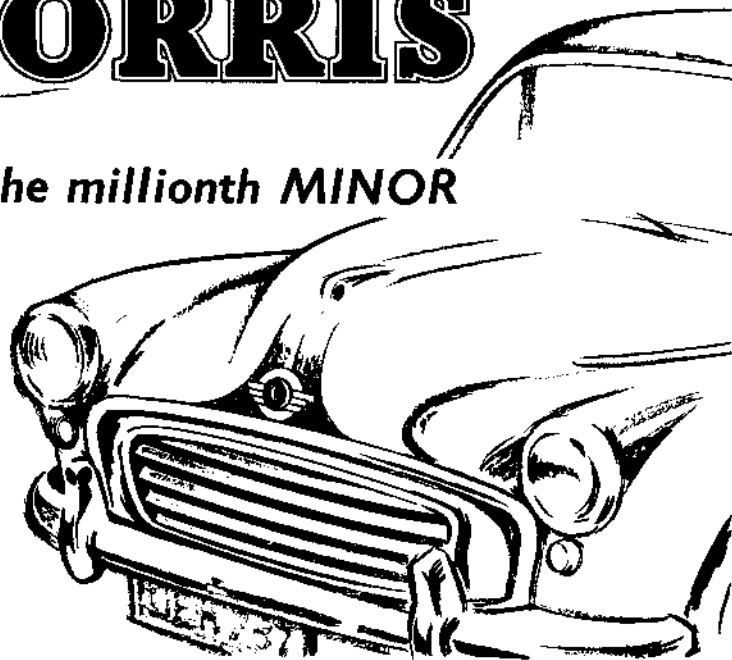
Congratulate

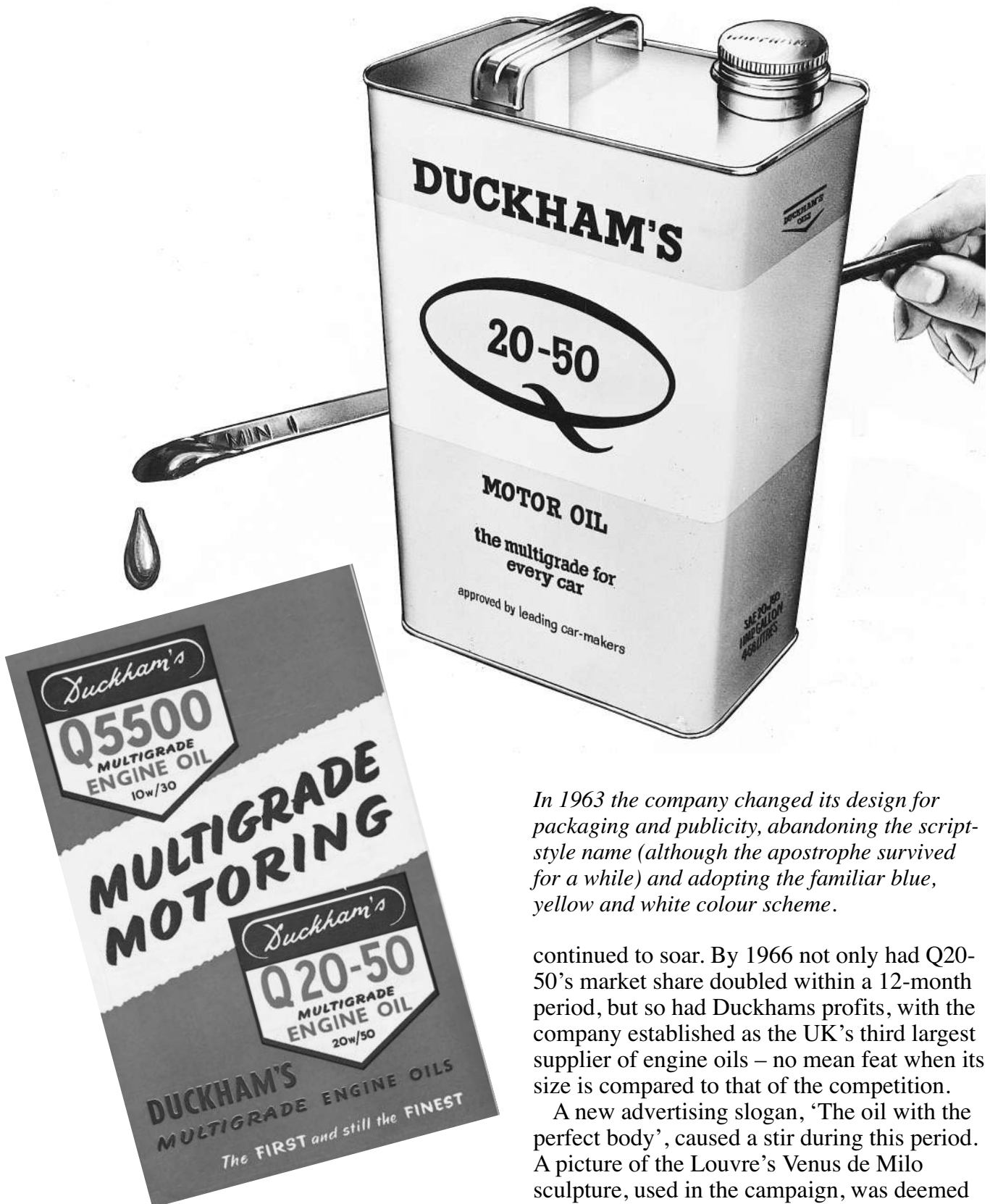
MORRIS

on producing the millionth MINOR

Duckham's oils
have been officially
recommended by
Morris Motors Ltd.,
for 30 years

**ALEXANDER DUCKHAM
& CO. LTD.,
LONDON, W.6**





In 1963 the company changed its design for packaging and publicity, abandoning the script-style name (although the apostrophe survived for a while) and adopting the familiar blue, yellow and white colour scheme.

continued to soar. By 1966 not only had Q20-50's market share doubled within a 12-month period, but so had Duckhams profits, with the company established as the UK's third largest supplier of engine oils – no mean feat when its size is compared to that of the competition.

A new advertising slogan, 'The oil with the perfect body', caused a stir during this period. A picture of the Louvre's Venus de Milo sculpture, used in the campaign, was deemed



unacceptable by some people, one North London clergyman writing to the press to complain about ‘the desecration of art’. It was a case of any publicity being good publicity, however, from which Duckhams (unlike the Venus statue) derived plenty of coverage!

The continuing rapid sales growth in motor oils was causing severe pressure on facilities, alleviated to some extent by the coming on stream in March 1966 of the Manchester Works. A couple of months later the sales and publicity departments, with some other admin staff, moved from Hammersmith to new offices at Summit House, West Wickham. Additional space was created by leasing extra warehousing in the Hammersmith area, and purchasing a private house in Skelwith Road, next to the works, for security purposes. New depots opened in Norwich and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, followed later in the year by another in Newry, Co Down, to serve the company’s recently established Irish arm, Duckhams Oils (Ireland) Ltd.

As a fast means of increasing capacity, the Manchester works was acquired from United Lubricants in 1964 with a nucleus of existing staff. (Trevor D. Wainwright)

With staff numbers now increasing almost daily, working conditions were improved at Hammersmith by the purchase of the cargo barge *Ipswich*, to be moored alongside the works. Refitted and renamed *Aphrodite* (the Greek name for Venus), it fulfilled a multiple role as staff restaurant, social club and training centre.

The efficacy of ‘Q’ in dealing with the oil consumption problems of contemporary cars was becoming legendary. Quite apart from the increasingly professional advertising, many of the company’s best salesmen were ordinary motorists who spread the word to friends and relations. It was also at around this time, however, that the company fully realised the impact on publicity of maintaining a presence in motorsport, and marketing director Cyril



The leased Hounslow depot not only brought extra distribution facilities, but was also equipped for rapid automated filling of smaller packs of oil.

Ford gave the task of setting up the appropriate department to Ron Carnell, whose reminiscences appear elsewhere in this book.

Nor was it just at home that the phenomenal growth was being experienced. Duckhams' European agents were also seeing unprecedented demand for Q20-50. When the financial press were briefed in March 1967 on the company's excellent 1966 results, they learned that exports had risen by 75 per cent in that year alone. And prospects received another fillip when, after years of cogitation, the Monopolies Commission ruled in favour of independent suppliers and against the practice of 'tied' outlets.

Still the roller-coaster had not reached the top of its ride. As market share continued to increase, fuelled by aggressive promotion,

further expansion of the field force, and the opening of more new depots, profits would double again in 1967. By July *The Observer* was able to comment: 'Racing away with the motor oil stakes is Alexander Duckham's Q20-50. Their market share has increased from 5 per cent in January 1966 to 12.5 per cent now', while *The Scotsman* reported: 'The Duckham market share has increased from 1.5 per cent to 12.5 per cent in just three years, with sales for the first half of '67 up by 120 per cent'. This UK market share confirmed the company as third largest player, led by Castrol with 35 per cent and Shell with 16 per cent.

While the office staff's snowballing workload – processing of orders, invoices, accounting and statistical records – was relatively easily coped with by replacing the existing punch-card equipment with a new IBM computer-based system, production resources were now at the point where further expansion of the brand was unthinkable without drastic action. The decision was taken



to build from scratch an additional plant on a canal-side site at Aldridge, Staffordshire, most of the capital to be raised through a combination of a rights issue to ordinary shareholders and the issue of 7 per cent Debenture Stock. Construction work started almost immediately, in May 1967, to provide a projected additional annual capacity of 10 million gallons.

The increase in export turnover was maintained, with southern Africa proving a fast-growing market. To develop this more efficiently, arrangements were made with the South African agents for the setting up of a new subsidiary, Duckhams Oils Africa (Pty) Ltd.

With the employees in the various locations around the country now numbering around 700, a house magazine, *The Ullage* (a term for the wastage or dregs involved in fluid processing industries), was launched to aid communications. A major re-organisation of the technical department was implemented, which

This series of ads in the 1960s met with some controversy, one newspaper claiming that they represented a dangerous distraction for motorists! (Robin Ross)

formally divided research from the ongoing activities of quality control and troubleshooting.

From the early 1960s part and parcel of the active promotion that was helping to drive Duckhams' turnover ever upward was the brand's presence at the major shows and motorsport venues. The importance of sponsorship in this type of industry was now fully appreciated by a management initially taken almost unawares by the tremendous demand for its products. The Duckhams Racing Service was established, with the familiar yellow caravans strategically placed at the various race meetings to provide support for the company-backed drivers and riders. Duckhams Oils Ireland negotiated exclusive rights to advertising at the Phoenix



Summit House, West Wickham, formed the company's main offices from 1966.

Park circuit, also sponsoring the saloon car meetings there.

With the additional capacity from Aldridge yet to feed in, it was decided to extend the Manchester works, currently blending more than 2 million gallons annually for distribution to the North, Ireland and northern Europe. In the background, industrial sales were quietly holding their own in a declining market, while wax sales were beginning to take off.

The new year brought further acclaim with the completion of a 10,000-mile test in a BMW 1600, observed by the Royal Dutch Automobile Club, that confirmed the effects

of Q20-50 on oil consumption. Sales of the older grades like NOL and Q5500, although they were still available, had now been replaced almost entirely by Q20-50.

With devaluation of the pound in late 1967 further boosting exports, Duckhams products were now sold in 37 countries (most of which had been added in the past few years), and in February 1968 the first international conference was organised, attended by representatives from overseas agents. Recently appointed among these was Harper Gilfillan & Co, who covered Malaysia and Singapore and whose offtake had rapidly grown to 150,000

To cope with the explosion in demand for 'Q' oils many regional depots were opened, such as this one in Bristol. (Bromhead Bristol Ltd)





Moored at Hammersmith, this Thames barge, renamed Aphrodite, became the canteen and social club HQ in 1966. (Henry Ellis

gallons a year. Closer to home, Duckhams Oils Ireland now claimed an 11 per cent market share.

With the service bay an all-important area in the battle for market share, additional engineers were taken on to back the provision of a free-of-charge planning service for garage workshops.

Three months into 1968, market share had reached 18 per cent with Q20-50 on sale at some 30,000 outlets. Brand loyalty was at its height, with an estimated 2 million motorists specifically asking for Duckhams Q20-50 when buying oil. Still more sales personnel were employed, taking staff numbers to more

than 800, and marketing spend was further increased. Included in that year's publicity budget was the purchase of a 600 cubic metre hydrogen balloon carrying the 'Q' livery. This unfortunately was to survive for less than a year, crashing in flames on the following Easter Monday, though thankfully causing no serious injuries.

Approaches for sponsorship were continually being received, and the company's policy continued to be to support the up-and-coming motorsport drivers and riders, rather than those already in the top echelons. In this way

The ill-fated 600 cubic metre hydrogen balloon Venus, acquired as a novel publicity aid, makes its take-off after the Easter 1969 race meeting at Thruxton Circuit. It was landing near Swindon when venting gas ignited and it crashed in flames. (The Ullage magazine)





Neill Foster presents Ray Gunter MP with a gallon of Q20-50 at the opening of the Aldridge plant in 1968. (Birmingham Post)

the budget could be spread much wider, and the brand message constantly renewed at grass-roots level. Organisers of expeditions to various parts of the world could also count on Duckhams support, further aiding brand awareness overseas. With all this background activity in mind, a new publication, *Quest*, was launched to bring motoring enthusiasts full-colour news of Duckhams-backed

competitors in motor, motorcycle and powerboat sport, as well as stories of notable journeys, product updates and technical information.

Annual output now exceeded 50 million litres, and with Hounslow depot filling 2 million cans per month a new depot opened at Townmead Road, Fulham. Despite dilution by a scrip issue of a further million shares in May 1968, the share price had bounced back to 61 shillings (£3.05) within a month. Given the high profile and record trade levels enjoyed by Duckhams at this time, it was hardly surpris-

ing that rumours should have started to circulate about possible takeover bids, although the board put out the usual disclaimer ...

With the installations at Aldridge plant complete, the official opening was performed by Ray Gunter MP in October, production immediately transferring from the old Birmingham works and 30 new jobs being created.

It was an exceptionally healthy company that chairman Jack Duckham handed on in December 1968 when he retired after 37 years as a director. He had latterly been in failing health and, despite suffering considerable pain from arthritis, remained notable for his uncomplaining attitude and solicitude for others. Reflecting a nature acquired from his father, he had made almost a full-time hobby out of devising aids and gadgets for handi-capped people.

Jack himself took up the honorary post of president of the company, his nephew Neill Foster and newly appointed chairman Sir Richard Manktelow becoming joint MDs, the former nominally responsible for the

marketing function.

Trading profit was set to pass the million-pound barrier for the first time, and Duckhams now held no less than 25 per cent of the retail motor oil market, with exports (although still a small fraction of total sales) up by another 50 per cent. A further boost to turnover came from the waxes and hot-melt compounds, which were now being sold to most UK packaging converters.

The company's 70th anniversary year marked further technological advances, as the supersonic Concorde made its maiden flight and American astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man on the Moon. Closer to home, oil was discovered in the North Sea.

Vice-chairman Neill Foster declared that, over the previous six years, Duckhams had progressed from an expensive minor brand to the UK's least expensive major brand. As still more new staff joined the technical and field forces, market research in early 1969 showed

The Duckhams sales force pose for a snapshot at the opening of the Aldridge works.



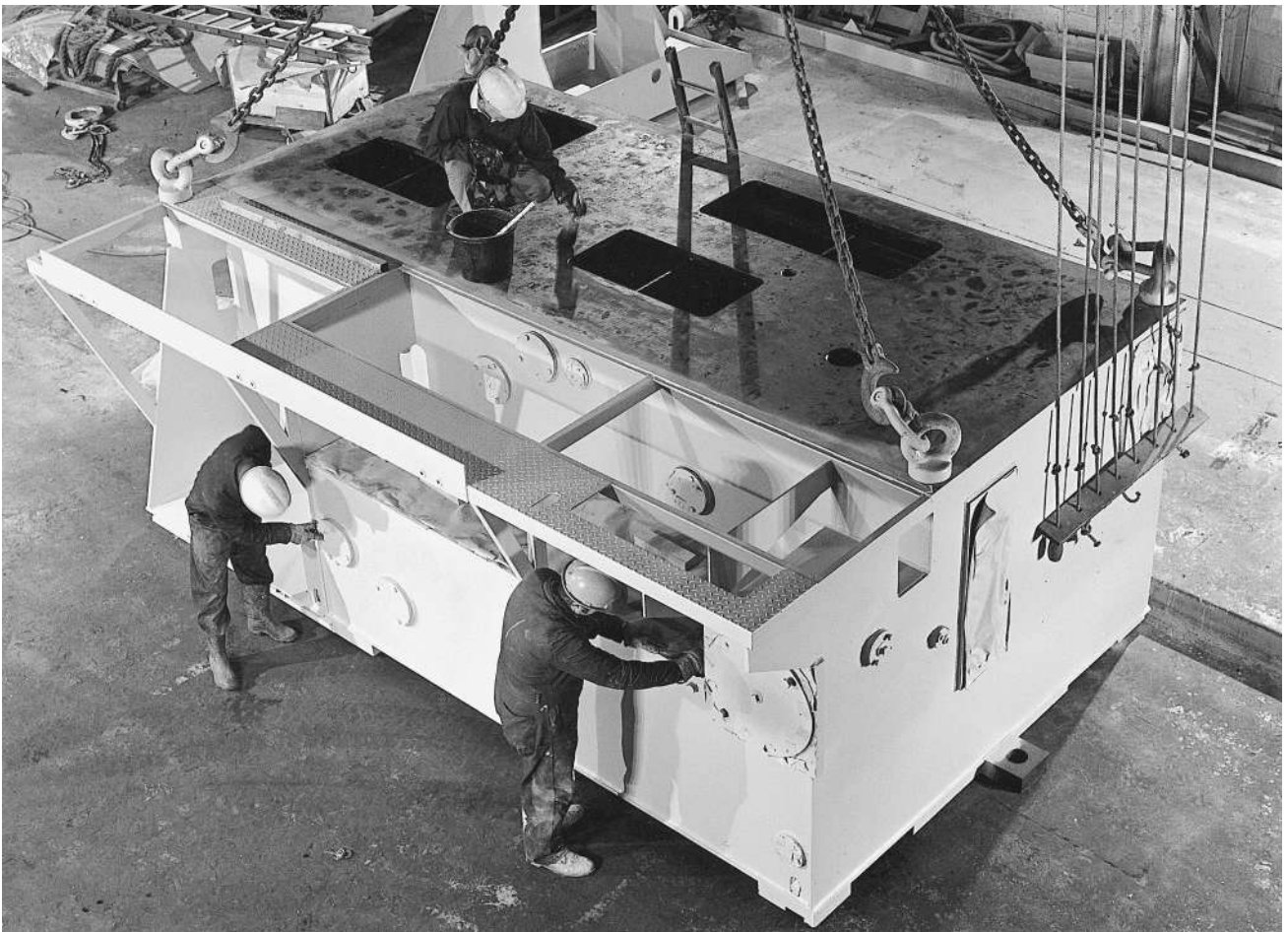


Sir Richard Manktelow became the first non-family chairman when he took over from Jack Duckham in 1969. (The Ullage magazine)

Duckhams running neck and neck with its main competitor in the public awareness stakes.

By mid-year rumours were rife once more of possible bids for Duckhams from major oil companies. In fact, an approach by Esso had already been made during May but was

Further industrial interests were gained in 1969 with the takeover of Jenolite, a company specialising in rustproofing and metal surface treatment. The picture shows a GEC Gas Turbines bedplate being treated at the Egham (Surrey) works of Duckhams Jenolizing



thwarted, following which the Duckhams board entered into confidential negotiations with BP.

Expansion plans, however, continued apace with the cash acquisition in September of the Jenolite organisation, which specialised in metal surface treatments, to supplement Duckhams' industrial activities.

As Duckhams once again flew the flag at the Earl's Court Motor Show, the press carried reports of an imminent bid from BP Oil. BP's current access to the UK lubricants market was confined to its shared interest within the Shell-Mex & BP joint venture, and the acqui-

sition of Duckhams would provide independent entry. In going public on the bid, BP confirmed its intention to 'maintain Duckhams as a corporate entity trading at arm's length, with freedom to determine its own competitive commercial policy and prices, and to maintain by means of its own sales force its brand image in the market. Duckhams' commercial activities will not be constrained on account of BP's other lubricants interests through Shell-Mex & BP.' Following acceptances from holders of 82 per cent of the shares, the acquisition of Duckhams was confirmed on 31 December 1969.

Chapter 5

THE SPORTING LIFE

One of the most rewarding and inspiring aspects of Duckhams' activities, linking its continuous programme of research and development with advertising and promotions, was the company's involvement with the competitions side of motoring and motorcycling. There can be few better ways of advertising a product like motor oil – and winning

Ron Carnell was never happier than when involved in the two-wheel side of the sport. He is seen here with some early beneficiaries of Duckhams support, all top riders of their time – Rob Edwards, Gordon Farley and Dennis Jones –



friends in the right places at the same time – than by supplying it to drivers and riders for use in the thick of competitive racing, rallying or trialing, together with some well-placed stickers for car, bike or boat.

While the company, from its early associations with drivers like S. F. Edge and Goldie Gardner, had long been involved in various forms of sponsorship, these had generally resulted from personal friendships of Alexander or Jack Duckham; there was no co-ordinated effort until the 1960s, when Cyril Ford was the company's director responsible for sales and marketing.

One of Ford's salesmen, Joe Gardner, an RAC scrutineer and keen motorsport enthusiast, was pushing for Duckhams to get involved in racing. Finally, in 1966 Cyril called in a young man who had just been recruited as a technical writer, and asked him: 'If we got a caravan would you be prepared to give up a few weekends a year to represent the company at motor race meetings?'

The young man was Ron Carnell, who was also a motorsport fan, and he recalls: 'It was a dream come true – I couldn't say yes fast enough!'

'So we got a caravan, painted it in Duckhams colours and off we went. In those days, if we found a couple of cars running with our oils we were very pleased. It seemed to be a useful exercise, so I asked if I could take the caravan to motorcycle meetings when there were no car events on, and this was well received. (In those days, "trade support" was



permitted at only a limited number of race meetings designated by the SMMT and the tyre companies.)

‘By the end of the year I was called in again and asked: “This all seems to be going well – would you like to head up a motorsport department?” Well, to be honest, I wasn’t sure I was up to it. All the established motorsport trade representatives seemed such flamboyant characters (even if some of them were pretty successful alcoholics as well!). Anyhow, that’s the way I got the job, and so we set about building up contacts.

‘Joe Gardner came from Bolton, and introduced us to Chevron Cars and Brian Redman, a young up-and-coming driver who was already running on Duckhams oils. We also got to know Brian Hart, a driver as well as an engine tuner, and were able to show him that BDA engines were better protected by Duckhams 20/50 than they were by the castor

Duckhams-backed Ray Pickerell (works BSA) pictured at Mallory Park in 1971.
(B.R. Nicholls)

oils then considered *de rigueur* for racing.’

This was just the sort of message the company wanted to get across: by switching to Duckhams, Hart solved the problem of excessive bucket tappet wear on those engines and, of course, the word got around.

From the outset, Ron Carnell’s brief was that all such support was to be only with a Duckhams product identical to that available over the counter to the private motorist. The product was supplied free of charge in return for permission to advertise any successes: there were no formal contracts, a handshake being considered sufficient to seal the agreement.

As the support programme became established, it also became more wide-ranging. ‘In

saloon racing, Ken Costello and Harry Ratcliff were going well in Minis,’ recalls Ron, ‘but we didn’t find real success in single-seaters until Formula Atlantic came along. That brought great drivers like Tony Brise and David Purley, and it was marvellous: almost every finisher used our Q20-50 in those races, and it became practically the Duckhams formula!’

Still climbing the motor racing ladder, Duckhams first entered Formula 5000 with Brian Redman and Sid Taylor, with Alan Rollinson following; then came the first exciting possibilities of involvement in Formula 1. In 1971 the company was in discussions with Team Surtees, who posed the \$64,000 question: could a Ford Cosworth DFV F1 engine run successfully on totally standard Duckhams Q20-50?

‘Although we had every confidence in the product, nobody knew the answer for certain,’ says Ron. ‘Quite reasonably, John Surtees wanted the oil fully tested, both on the bench and in a car, before he would commit his team to a contract. The bench test proved satisfactory, which was encouraging, but we still had to test the oil under race conditions, which we did at Silverstone in the November.

‘We decided to turn this test into a bit of a publicity exercise. To show it was totally genuine, we asked the RAC to buy some Q20-50 off the shelf somewhere and put it into the Surtees F1 car. Alan Rollinson then drove the full grand prix distance on the circuit. He didn’t hang about, either – if I remember correctly, he set a time that day that would have given him fourth place back in that year’s British Grand Prix!’

Much to everyone’s delight and relief, when the engine of the Surtees was stripped it was found to be in totally sound condition. The go-ahead was given for the 1972 season, with Mike Hailwood and Tim Schenken using Duckhams Q20-50. The exceptional cleanliness of engines raced on ‘Q’ was noted time and time again as they were worked on by race technicians, and

this added further to its reputation.

During that season an approach was made concerning support for Team Lotus the following year. Ron Carnell admits to being concerned at the time that Duckhams might be getting out of its depth, not least from the financial point of view, but he was won over by the team’s boss. ‘The way Colin Chapman handled it was really impressive. He rang my MD and said: “No strings attached, but the John Player people are coming up for lunch in a couple of days and I thought you’d like to join us. I’ll send the plane over to Biggin Hill – pop over and have some lunch, we’d love to see you.”

‘The plane picked us up right on time at Biggin, and we were soon touching down on the private landing strip at Hethel. Although we were just 100 yards from Colin’s private door into the boardroom, a Cadillac (not a Lotus) rolled up to the plane and took us the short distance. We were ushered in and there was Chapman, waiting to shake hands. It was all so impressive, our MD was just thinking, “Where do I sign?”

‘So now we were with Lotus, and once we got to know the team I thought, this is it – now we’re in with the top professionals, we’ll really learn what it’s all about. But to my amazement, I found that they were the same as all the others; they’d still change the roll bars, the spring settings *and* something else all at the same time, so they didn’t really know which tweak had made the difference! Even so, it was really interesting and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The drivers were Ronnie Peterson and Jacky Ickx, and although Peterson was a terrific driver I don’t think he could ever really “sort” a car. He used to pinch Jacky’s settings quite a lot, which upset Jacky a bit.’

His close working relationships with the race

Duckhams was rightly proud of the test that found Alan Rollinson’s engine in perfect condition after driving a full F1 distance at Silverstone.

The toughest test of oil.

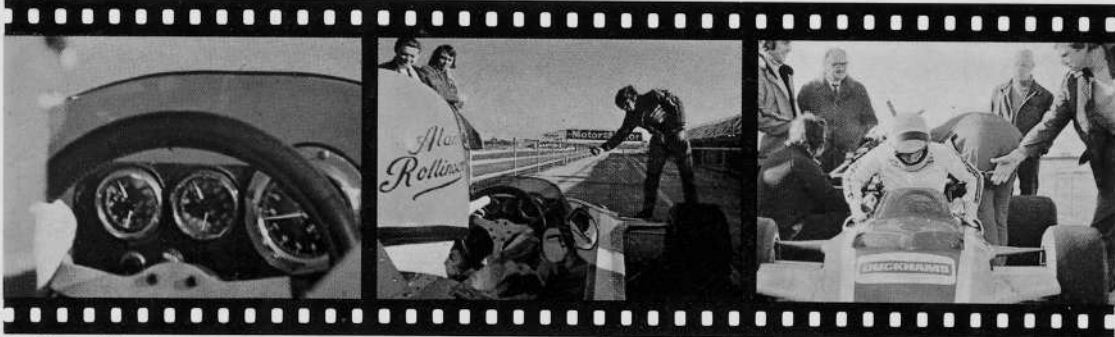
Silverstone...
a Formula 1 Surtees TS9...
Duckhams Q20-50



1 Where could you find a tougher test of a motor oil than in a Formula 1 racing car? Yet this is the test to which Duckhams publicly submitted Q 20-50.

2 In the presence of an official RAC scrutineer and timekeeper, 20 pints of Duckhams Q 20-50, the same oil the makers recommend for your car, are poured into the engine.

3 Alan Rollinson is the driver. His brief is to drive the Surtees for 200 miles at Grand Prix speeds. That means speeds topping 160 mph, and maximum revs up to 10,000.



4 Under conditions far tougher than anything you could possibly meet on the road, the oil temperature remained normal and oil pressure was good throughout the test.

5 200 gruelling miles later, Rollinson gets the thumbs up. The test is over. Now the engine is to be stripped and examined by Race Engine Services Limited.

6 They reported: "The engine was in first class condition and in our view the test was completely satisfactory."

The Formula 1 Test is the latest and toughest challenge for Duckhams Q 20-50.

In the world's hardest and fastest motor sport events, Britain's best selling motor oil has been proving itself for years.

With Duckhams Q 20-50 in your engine, you can depend on the oil which has proved it will stand up to anything.



DUCKHAMS

One oil. Whatever you drive.



teams left Ron Carnell with a host of reminiscences, and one in particular concerning Team Lotus is worth sharing: ‘I think it was the Rothmans 500 – there were Formula 5000 and lots of F1 cars there. We qualified very well, and Peterson got into the lead with Ickx about fourth. Ronnie was going extremely well when some silly electrical thing caused him to retire; Jacky inherited his place and went on to finish something like third.

‘The general verdict was, “What a shame

John Surtees (right) shakes hands with competitions manager Ron Carnell on the deal that would see Team Surtees running successfully on ‘off-the-shelf’ Q20-50 oil for the

Ickx wasn’t in Peterson’s car and vice versa, because then we would have won.” But I just happened to be standing in the pits as Jacky pulled in at the end of the race. Colin Chapman went over, patted his helmet and said, “Well done, Jacky, nice finish.” Jacky replied, “Thanks, Colin, but you might just have a look at that offside front wheel – I think you’ll find the pads are in back to front.”

‘Sure enough, when they removed the wheel they found the mechanics had installed the brake pads inside out: he had driven the whole race with metal-to-metal contact on one brake! Now obviously that was never reported in the press, so who can really say who are the great drivers?’

Duckhams raced with Team Lotus for two



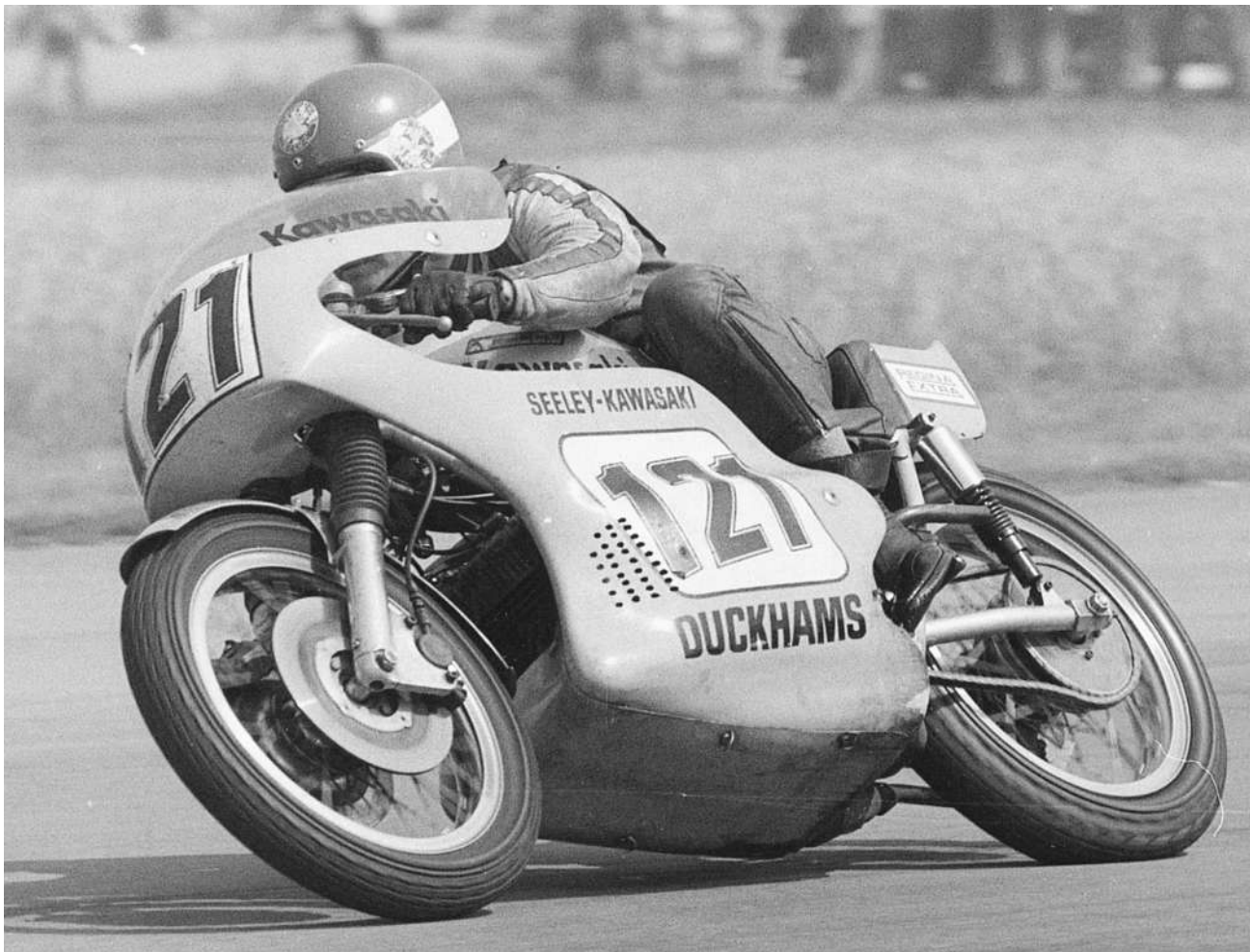


seasons, during which engine builders started to see F1 engines coming back in superb shape after running on genuinely standard Duckhams Q20-50. The word went around that, if a driver or team was looking for an oil contract, it was the one to go for, and that brought a number of names into the frame.

‘We ended up running Mo Nunn,’ recalls Ron, ‘who had built a Formula 1 car for Rikki von Opel of Team Ensign. Graham Hill now had his own team, with sponsorship from Embassy – he couldn’t run anyone else’s stickers on the car so he was on Duckhams oil! Oh, and then there was Lord Hesketh: he, as some will recall, wouldn’t run any decals on the car except the little bear; but that was a fabulous deal, I thought, because in return for supplying the lubricants we had permission to use the team in any way we liked for publicity.

Lotus boss Colin Chapman has a word with Ronnie Peterson in the JPS Lotus, while James Hunt passes by (top right) with girlfriend of the day.

‘So we had an F1 car with James Hunt driving, and I had a personal deal with James: we would give him £25 for each World Championship point he got. In return for that he wore a very large Duckhams badge on his overalls and two Duckhams helmet stickers. The “mileage” we got out of that was absolutely incredible – women’s magazines, obviously the men’s magazines too – James appeared everywhere, and I think in the end it cost us about £200. It was another wonderful deal! One way or another, you know, at that time we had virtually half the Formula 1 field running on Duckhams oil.



Pat Mahoney (Seeley-Kawasaki) races with Duckhams at Silverstone in 1973. (John Stoddart)

‘There’s one story we’d have loved to use in an advert, but we couldn’t. One of the well-known names in Formula 1 management rang me up and said: “I know I’ve got a cheek, we can’t do anything officially with you because we’re under contract to — —, but we’re building a brand new F1 car and I’ve been told that, if we want to lubricate it from front to back, we should use Duckhams and there won’t be any problems. We’ve got enough of those already just building the car, so could you supply us with the lubricants? We’ll pay for them, of course, but there’s no way you can use this because of our contract with — — !”

‘I thought that was such a fantastic recommendation, I gave him the oils free of charge, of course. Although we couldn’t use it officially, I knew I could mention it at motor club talks and suchlike, and it was a genuine boost for our products.’

The 1974 season was a good one for Duckhams, and by the end of the year the roll of honour read:

Formula 1: Jacky Ickx wins Race of Champions; Ronnie Peterson wins Monaco, French and Italian GPs; James Hunt wins International Trophy at Silverstone
Formula 5000: 16 out of 19 races won on Q
Formula Atlantic: 23 out of 24 races won on Q
Formula Ford: 43 out of 55 races won on Q



That, of course, was the name of the sponsorship game and it was all intended to pay off in heightened brand awareness, leading to increased sales. Ads were run along the lines of 'Ronnie Peterson wins the Monaco Grand Prix using the same oil that you can buy'; another series gave a blow-by-blow account of the Surtees engine testing.

The effect on consumers can be very difficult to measure, though, and in practice the most quantifiable result of all this activity seemed to be simply an increase in the number of approaches for free oil. Certainly, Duckhams had established a reputation for top-quality products, but motor racing sponsorship costs were growing disproportionately, especially at the top of the sport, as the big tobacco companies raised the stakes.

Ford 'Rallyman of the Month' Malcolm Wilson, with co-driver John Davies, throws his Mk 1 Escort round a corner in the Greystoke Forest en route to victory in a Lakeland Stages Rally of the 1970s. (Tony North)

Before any major decisions could be made, Ron Carnell was approached by Alain de Cadenet, who was preparing a Ford DFV-powered car for the 1975 Le Mans 24-hour event. As the DFV unit was known to run well on Duckhams standard oil, would they be interested in sponsoring it?

'Well, our budgets were never that big anyway, and by April/May they were gone,' reports Ron. 'But from our discussions it seemed that Alain was not being taken seriously. Although he had had the car built by





A delighted Lord Hesketh clasps the trophy while World Champion-to-be James Hunt sprays the champagne after gaining the first Formula 1 victory for Hesketh in 1974. (Mike Keppel)

Lola, a firm of great repute, people were laughing behind their hands at the thought of it taking on the top-line Matras, Ferraris and Porsches.

‘In the end I said: “Alain, I can give you £200 towards your fuel costs, and for that we want decals on the car.” He replied: “OK, but what I really need is some practical help – I’ve got no hospitality vehicle, nowhere for the mechanics to sleep. Could you come over with your caravan and provide a few helpers? If you can I’ll put the car in Duckhams colours and we’ll call it a Duckhams-Ford.”

‘I just didn’t believe this, but I really took to the guy and we got on well. Anyway, off he went to Le Mans and the car really was painted up in our colours and entered as a Duckhams-Ford, with Chris Craft as the co-driver. So I rustled up a “support crew” who were really a bunch of amateurs – butchers, bakers, candlestick-makers – with a couple of people from the office. We went out to join them and it was just unbelievable. Alain’s car was running second or third at one time, due to pit-stops by the works cars! We did reach dizzy heights, but then there was a bit of a shower and Chris slid off and bent the front suspension.

‘They banged it straight in the pits but the scrutineers wouldn’t let him out again. So Alain had a furious row, as only he can, and in the end they let us out for the last few laps. The car finished 12th overall and won the *Motor* Trophy for the best-placed British entry! It ran on the standard oil, of course – the consumption was quite remarkable – and when they stripped the engine afterwards it was virtually as good as when it started the race. We backed private Le Mans entries again for a couple of years, but that was our best result.’

Another branch of motorsport in which Duckhams featured strongly was rallying; for years the company had been backing some of the best drivers in the lower echelons of the sport. There were always plenty of entrants in the British Rally Championship running on Duckhams, and for some of the major events like the RAC Rally a mobile back-up service was provided, generally for the smaller teams and privateers.

Suddenly, through one of those quirks of fate, Duckhams found its colours on the World Rally Championship Ford Escorts. The Rothmans team, managed by David Sutton, ran in blue, white and gold. The deal originally involved support from Shell, but Rothmans did not want the clash of their red and yellow on the team livery. Shell pulled out and, at a late stage, Sutton rang Duckhams and invited Ron Carnell along to a meeting with the main sponsor. This resulted in a deal that satisfied all parties, and a Drivers' World Championship for Ari Vatanen with Duckhams and 'Q' in 1981.

Following his success with Rothmans, David Sutton gained the contract from Audi to run the Quattro rally cars in the British Championship. In the first season, 1982, the team gained second place for Audi in the makers' section, with Hannu Mikkola third in the drivers' championship, both he and team-mate Waldegard scoring outright victories in individual rounds. Sponsorship for the British Audi team subsequently moved to Duckhams' parent company BP.

This was followed by backing for Team Toyota, which, according to Ron Carnell, cost

The famous pairing of Hannu Mikkola and Arne Hertz in the Audi Sport UK Quattro. With Duckhams backing, this car was driven to individual victories in the 1982 British Rally Championship by both Mikkola and team-mate Bjorn Waldegard, with Mikkola finishing third in the Drivers' championship and Audi second in the manufacturers' category. (Audi UK)







Barry Sheene and girlfriend pictured on a Duckhams-sponsored charity trial in the 1970s. The company had backed him in his early days, riding Bultaco two-strokes prepared by his father.

about £10,000 in the first year but soon escalated to something like £60,000 for just a small decal on the car.

Two-wheel sport, of course, played a big part in Duckhams promotional activities too, although when it came to racing bikes there was one fundamental difficulty. Whereas the company's policy was to run only on the standard mineral oil, the majority of racing engines of the time were assembled with large tolerances and were designed to run on castor-based oil.

For that reason, involvement with the top riders was small, although a well-known relationship was that with the legendary Sammy Miller, which lasted for some years and saw numerous British Championship wins by Sammy. Another name who was to become legendary, Barry Sheene, was backed by Duckhams when he first started riding competitively.

A certain gentleman by the name of Mike Hailwood also teamed up with Duckhams on a couple of occasions. Ron recalls: 'He could ride anything; I always felt he could have made it big in Formula 1 if he had just knuckled down and done what he was told.

'I remember once another extremely successful rider, Phil Read, said he would take

on Mike in the Oulton Park Gold Cup race if they were both riding British single-cylinder machines. Mike, true to form, rose to the challenge and asked a friend of mine, Colin Seeley (who was being backed by Duckhams at the time) to build a bike for him.

'We all went off to Oulton Park and Mike went out to practise on this single-cylinder 500. He was doing pretty well but eventually he came in and said: "It's gone off a bit and it's making funny noises as well." The engineer said the big-end had gone, so I went off to Bill Smith, the local racing dealer, and he said: "I bought one of those bikes in a few months ago – it's up the back of the workshop. I don't know what the engine's like but you're welcome to take it." I rang Colin with the news.

'So I was in the Duckhams caravan when Mike Hailwood came in and said, "Everything OK?" Colin told him there was no problem

but we were going to take a bit of a gamble on the race. "I've got a works development engine that we brought as a spare. It's never been raced but it's showing good power on the brake. I'm confident it'll do the business." Mike looked delighted.

'Meanwhile this filthy old engine was in a dustbin having a couple of gallons of petrol poured over it to clean it before we rushed it back to Oulton Park, just in time to be fitted and wheeled out for the race. Mike beat Phil Read, won the race and, giving his garland and trophy to Colin Seeley, said: "Well done, thanks very much, but I'd have a word with your engineer if I were you – that development engine wasn't half as good as the one I had in practice ..."

Military-style support from Duckhams for the British Army team in the Lombard Esso Scottish Rally of 1977. (Colin Taylor)



While running mainly in the lower formulas of motor racing, Duckhams was also involved with the Unipart Formula 3 team, one of whose drivers was a certain Nigel Mansell. Ron Carnell remembers him mainly through his father: 'We were at Silverstone one day and there was a tap on the door; in came this young man with his father, who said, "Can I talk to you about oil?", and I didn't know them from Adam. It was the way his father asked about oil temperatures, when it should be changed, etc – I could see they were keen to do the thing properly and I said, "Fine, let's have a deal, I'll give you some oil and you can put some stickers on." That was it – I hadn't taken any notice of him or his driving ability up to then.

'Once he got the Duckhams stickers on, I watched him start to do well and move up; to be honest, that's all we did for Nigel that season. Later, though, when he was starting a little high-performance tuning and servicing garage with a friend in Birmingham, he came back to me. "I've got this thing going, servicing Porsches and Ferraris and the like. You helped me when I was starting, so I'm not going to any other company – I want Duckhams in the lubrication bay." That was nice, but he didn't need that business for long!'

Another famous name briefly associated

with Duckhams is that of Ayrton Senna. In his early racing days he was supplied with oil, decals and perhaps a small bonus; like Nigel Mansell, he had yet to achieve fame. That was in Formula Ford, and among competitors in that formula who also received Duckhams backing were Eddie Irvine and David Coulthard.

Coulthard in particular is remembered by Ron Carnell. 'I sponsored him in Formula Ford before he even sat in a car. A friend asked me to come and watch this lad David who was driving in a kart race at Silverstone. I did, and he was fantastic. I met his father, who obviously wanted to set things up properly and we agreed a deal in Formula Ford without more ado.'

The last major motor racing involvement was in Formula 3000. The early days were entertaining, with Duckhams-backed cars winning the championship for the first two years. Soon, though, as it became more of a training ground for Formula 1, the big-bucks sponsorship hit this as well and, mindful of the lesson learnt in F1, Duckhams decided to get out. 'After all,' says Ron Carnell, looking back over his colourful competition days, 'Our natural home has always been with the enthusiast, the broader band of competitor.'

Another sentiment with which Alexander Duckham would undoubtedly have agreed.

Chapter 6

TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM

In an interview for the house magazine in January 1970, Neill Foster told staff that BP had been considered an 'attractive' suitor compared with the original bidder. Chairman Sir Richard Manktelow agreed, while expressing the regrets felt by many of the staff over the unavoidable change in Duckhams' status:

'We were the only remaining company of any size in the lubricating field, and we all had every reason to be proud of the results of our

A Range Rover of the British Trans-Americas Expedition negotiates a ladder bridge built by the Royal Engineers. (Rover Group)





Duckhams was involved in the foundation of the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu, and has maintained links since. The picture shows the sponsored motorcycle gallery in the 1980s.

efforts, especially in the last few years. However, we realised that we really had not the financial resources to meet the substantial competition from the integrated petroleum companies. We felt that a takeover was inevitable and we count ourselves fortunate that events have taken us into the BP Group.'

In what was becoming an age of environmental concern it was fitting that, during 1970, the company conducted a trial run of an alternative and traditional form of transport for bulk deliveries to Aldridge works. Having no direct rail access, and given its large annual throughput, deliveries of bulk raw materials, and the associated containers etc, were increasing road congestion in the site and its surrounding area. Most raw materials already

arrived at Hammersmith by Thames lighter, so consideration was given to waterborne deliveries to Aldridge via the adjacent Wyrley & Essington Canal.

After some logistical experimenting, the solution was reckoned to be to deliver bulk oil by coastal tankers of 700–800 tons, via the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal, to storage contractors Berry Wiggins & Co at Ellesmere Port. From here it would travel by road tanker for three-quarters of a mile to a wharf on the Shropshire Union Canal and be unloaded directly into canal boats.

Two narrowboats, 70 feet long by 7 feet wide, were each equipped with four rectangular tanks; working together, a motor boat towing a 'butty boat', between them they carried some 38 tons of oil, equivalent to almost three full-size road tankers. A pipeline manhole was installed on the towpath at Aldridge, connected via a pump to bulk storage tanks, enabling direct transfer of the raw material.

It was proposed to run four pairs of boats on the 180-mile round trip, giving an estimated capability of about 6,000 tons per annum. Unfortunately unforeseen snags, including longer than anticipated transit times, meant that the pilot scheme was not extended.

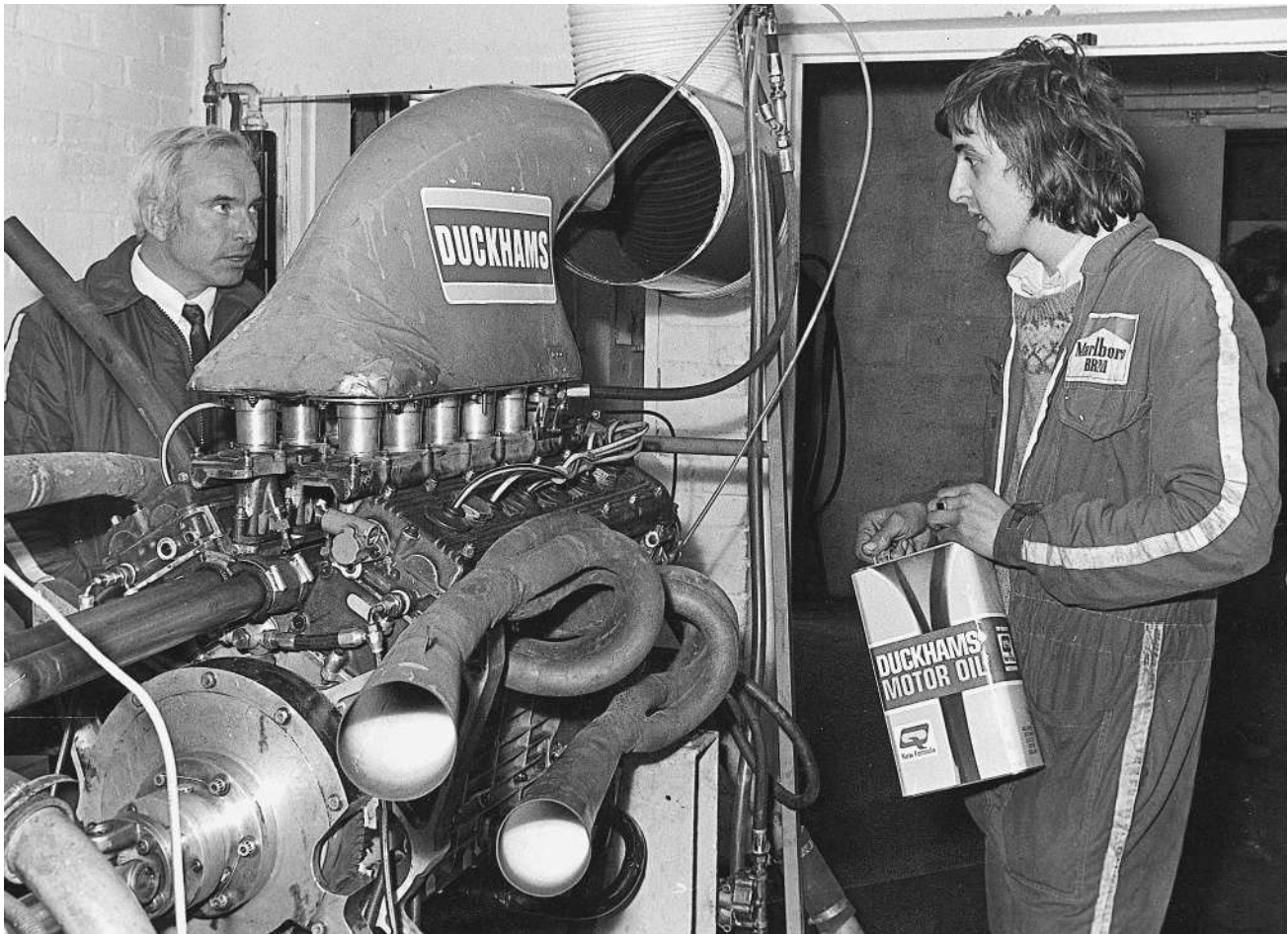
The kind of happy arrangement that had so often been struck by Duckhams was repeated in September 1970 when an agreement was signed with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution for the company to supply the lubrication needs of the whole of the UK fleet of lifeboats. These also included (yes, really) special oil to pour on troubled waters; the new Heath Government could perhaps have used some of this as the upbeat mood of the 1960s fast disappeared in the growing industrial unrest.

Following on the heels of Duckhams (New

Zealand) Ltd, another associated company, Duckhams (Sweden) AB, was set up. At the end of 1970 sales volume exceeded 70 million litres and turnover was up by some 10 per cent, but with competition hotting up, trading profits had fallen back below the million-pound mark when Sir Richard Manktelow retired in December, Neill Foster taking over as sole managing director.

It was with the inevitable wind of change already blowing through Duckhams that its president Jack Duckham died while on

'New Formula Q' was an upgraded version of Q20-50 introduced in 1973. Here test bed operator Robert Fowler fills a BRM V12 engine with the new oil, watched by Duckhams competitions manager Ron Carnell. (Colin Taylor)





Clay Regazzoni (Marlboro-BRM) running on New Formula Q in the 1973 British Grand Prix at Silverstone. (Colin Taylor)

holiday in Tunisia in January 1971, after serving the company for 43 years. In his will he had, typically, provided for a party for all staff with more than 15 years' service with the company. So it was, in October of that year, a total of 224 employees and spouses attended an all-expenses-paid luncheon and tea-party at Armoury House, in London's City Road. Some staff had served considerably longer, like Ernie Cox who, retiring with 50 years to his credit, was joining only two others – W. H. Palmer (1903–1954) and G. T. Joyce (1907–1962) to have achieved the half-century.

The sales battle was now being fought to a large extent in the High Street outlets like Woolworths, where other recognised oil companies like BP, Shell and Castrol also

offered their brands. However, the concept of 'own branding' of oils, produced by other major companies, initially for well-known dealer groups, was growing too.

Q20-50, still of course by far the company's best-selling line, was from time to time updated to the latest technical specifications. Improved engine cleanliness, reduced thickening and better protection against wear were among the claims made when the product was upgraded to meet API/SE and the latest Mercedes-Benz diesel car specifications early in 1972.

Publicity was now being gained from the involvement in motorsport already described, the testing for the F1 collaboration with Team Surtees being used in advertising. In April

A view of the new central laboratory opened at Hammersmith in 1974. Duckhams scientists continually monitored production quality as well as pursuing new research projects.







The new wax pastillator installed at Hammersmith in 1974, with (l to r) Duckhams staff Ted Atkins, Steve Jacobs, Eddie Munroe, Frank Tranfield and Roger Dinning.

1972 Q20-50 featured in a Land's End–John O'Groats run by a 1934 Austin Seven; oil consumption over the three-day trip was just one pint. A couple of months after this came Duckhams' successful participation in the Le Mans 24-hour event.

Later in 1972 the company supported 'the most ambitious expedition ever': a north-south crossing of the American continent from Alaska to Cape Horn, led by Major John Blashford-Snell. The 14,000-mile trek involved negotiating the Darien Gap, one of the last barriers in Central America to the opening of a Trans-American Highway and consisting of a daunting 250-mile mix of impenetrable jungle, swamps, mud, ravines and mountains. That the expedition eventually won through was all the more amazing when it was revealed that it took the 90-strong party almost three months to get its two specially equipped, Duckhams-lubricated Range Rovers through the Gap.

The year 1972 also saw the opening of the National Motor Museum in Beaulieu, Hampshire, with Duckhams among the list of subscribers to the trust through which it was financed.

Further changes were taking place within the company. As capacity was fully met by the new Aldridge plant, the Manchester works ceased to blend lubricants. More departments transferred to the company's HQ at Summit House, West Wickham, leaving only the technical and production staff at Hammersmith.

The competitive atmosphere in the field meant that the servicing of Duckhams outlets had to be a constant priority, and by now the number of PSMs (Publicity Service Men) responsible for this had reached 22. Their job was to ensure that the Duckhams signs,

forecourt cabinets, etc, were in top condition, and that service bays received the necessary back-up.

In 1973 the company held its corporate breath as another crucial product launch saw the foundation of its current success, Q20-50, superseded by 'New Formula' Q.

Accompanied by a press and TV advertising campaign, this was basically a relaunched Q20-50 with improved characteristics and packaging. All-round performance was enhanced, with much better viscosity and shear stability, while the pack design simulated the green oil flowing down the can.

The new oil was trialed by the Marlboro-BRM F1 team in the International Trophy meeting at Silverstone, the cars finishing 3rd, 5th and 9th. New Formula Q was now taken up officially by the Team Ensign, Hesketh Racing and LEC Formula 1 teams, with others also testing it in preference to the vegetable and synthetic alternative 'racing oils' traditionally used.

Internal reorganisation continued, with the closure of Duckhams' own printing department and the modernisation of the Manchester factory, which, with the purchase of adjacent buildings, became home to various operational staff, the industrial sales department and the publicity stores. Soon after this Works No 2 closed and a new central laboratory opened at Hammersmith. A new, more powerful computer was installed at head office to assist the still expanding business, as profits showed a substantial increase on the previous year to break through £1m again.

However, the Middle East crisis of 1973 brought huge rises in the price of crude oil and, as rumbling industrial unrest eventually erupted, chaos for the country. With striking mining unions lined up against the Heath Government, enforced power cuts and shortages of raw materials soon meant a three-day working week for most of industry. Road fuel, while never officially rationed, was restricted by availability. The election forced

upon Edward Heath in February brought Labour back, but without a majority, while a second election in October gave Harold Wilson a majority of just three.

In spite of the recent restrictions, three million motorists were by now reckoned to use Duckhams Q, while on the track it was in the engines of more than 1,000 contracted drivers, including no fewer than six Formula 1 teams. James Hunt had recorded his first F1 win in April with the Duckhams Q-lubricated Hesketh, and the following month Ronnie Peterson won at Monaco for John Player Team Lotus. In the lead-up to the British Grand Prix, the newly sealed association with the John Player team was being exploited through car stickers and the marketing of Q/JPS T-shirts and other linked merchandise, with the mail-order 'Duckhams Motor Sport Shop' doing great business.

August 1974 had seen the severing of Duckhams' final link with its founding family, when Neill Foster left after 14 years' service, to be succeeded as MD by Ray Strettell.

That year, the 75th anniversary of the company, was marked by a series of parties. Regional staffs held their own celebrations, while in London some 900 guests attended a dinner-dance at Grosvenor House. There was an extra cause to celebrate for, despite continuing difficult market conditions, trading profits for the year were on course for a new record at more than £1.5m.

This also being the 150th anniversary of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, on 31 December at the Earl's Court Boat Show the RNLI was presented with a cheque for the purchase of an inshore lifeboat, to be named the *Alexander Duckham*. Without doubt the philanthropic gentleman after whom it was named would have thoroughly approved!

As Margaret Thatcher ousted Ted Heath in 1975 to become Tory leader, the 1970s continued to bring changes. Fulham works was sold, while expansion was announced at Aldridge on the purchase of extra land

THE LIFEBOAT ALEXANDER DUCKHAM

The inshore lifeboat *Alexander Duckham* was funded through a donation by the company to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution in 1974, the 150th anniversary of the RNLI and the 70th anniversary of Alexander Duckham & Co Ltd. During her time at station the *Alexander Duckham* spent a total of 1,647 hours at sea, was launched on 618 occasions (including 475 to the aid of pleasure craft) and saved 207 lives.

Her station record is:

1976–1987	West Mersea
1988–1990	Mudford
1991	Poole
1992–1993	Falmouth
1993	Poole
1995	Port Erin

Since 1995 the *Alexander Duckham* has been available as a relief lifeboat and is currently based at the Inshore Lifeboat Centre, Cowes, Isle of Wight, awaiting station allocation if necessary.

In celebration of the dual anniversary in 1999 – Duckhams 100th and the RNLI's 175th – the company is donating a replacement for the *Alexander Duckham*.

The inshore lifeboat Alexander Duckham at sea and with its crew at West Mersea.



opposite the existing works. On the packaging side, the 1-gallon can was phased out in favour of the 5-litre version as metrication progressed.

Rally ace Paddy Hopkirk was contracted to feature in a five-week television campaign, plus associated press advertising promoting Q, with a 'save money on motoring' theme, backed by a 16-page giveaway magazine. As a mobile promotional gimmick, a Mini was used as the basis for a giant Q can: the first airing for the Duckhams 'Q Car' was a promotion at Woolco.

Competition from 'own brands' was still

A 'Q'-liveried AEC Mercury 2,000-gallon

growing. The Ford Motor Company had introduced its own oil in 1972 and, among others, Woolworth and Tesco were shortly to join it. It was predicted within the industry that 'own brands' would capture some 14 per cent of the market by the end of the 1970s.

Against strong international competition, a major new contract was won in May 1975 under which Duckhams was to supply London Transport with all lubricants for its London buses. This was calculated at around 2.5 million litres annually.

It was a year when Duckhams-lubricated vehicles excelled in competition at all levels, with James Hunt's all-British Hesketh-Ford 308 winning the Dutch GP and coming second in the French event. The only disappointment





Rally star Paddy Hopkirk was enlisted for a TV ad campaign in the 1970s. (*The Ullage* magazine)



was a singular lack of success for the John Player Lotus team; its outdated cars were being replaced for the next season and, although the direct sponsorship arrangement was now ending, the team continued to use Duckhams lubricants. The year closed on a sad note with the death in an air crash of double World Champion racing driver Graham Hill, together with five members of the Lotus Grand Prix team.

Internal reorganisation continued at Duckhams. The existing joint venture company Shell-Mex & BP Ltd was now to be wound up and it was suggested that as a result there may be closer links with BP on the manufacturing side.

January 1976 brought the grand opening of Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre by HM The Queen. Thanks probably to the company's prominence in the city's Festival of Motoring over the previous few years, Duckhams was invited to be one of the few commercial concerns to exhibit, mounting a 20-metre stand with a motorsport theme at the special opening show, which was attended by

an estimated 150,000 people.

In March, when James Callaghan took over as PM from Wilson, an announcement was made to staff concerning the probable closure of Hammersmith works (scheduled to become a residential and recreational area under the Greater London Development Plan) and a £3m expansion of the Aldridge plant.

Under constant pressure from the budget-priced, own-brand oils, Duckhams' continuing assertion that 'quality is economy' received some vindication when it was arranged for the AA to take 13 oils from the shelves of UK supermarkets and have them independently tested. More than 50 per cent failed to meet the very basic Leyland low-temperature requirement, while 10 did not comply with published requirements in one way or another. Duckhams used this information in advertising, which, while it received a mixed reception, achieved its objective of making consumers think.

With no formal sponsorship now in operation as the company concentrated on the grass roots, Duckhams-lubricated cars never-



London Transport's entire bus fleet went over to Duckhams following a contract signed in 1975.

theless continued to win in the big events. The Italian GP was won by Ronnie Peterson in a March 761, while the JPS 77 of Mario Andretti won the Japanese GP at Fuji, with 29-year-old James Hunt clinching the World Championship in the same race in his McLaren.

For the Queen's Silver Jubilee in May 1977, Duckhams produced a 5-litre container of Q in a special carton carrying the Union Flag, together with a free Silver Jubilee medallion, half a million of which were affixed to cans at Aldridge and Hounslow. In a separate exercise, a special limited edition of 2,000 hallmarked and individually numbered solid

silver medallions was struck at the Birmingham Mint, for presentation to key customers and as prizes in competitions. The entire promotion was supported by radio and press advertising, and by the 'Q Car' which, complete with medallion, embarked on a nationwide tour.

With sales of non-motor oil products still providing valuable turnover, the diversification programme had borne fruit. Jenolite and the Jenolizing process, taken over eight years earlier, provided a service to industry for corrosion protection through both mobile and factory-based systems.

In a new venture, Duckhams launched Q on the West Coast of the USA through strategi-

Duckhams was the major sponsor of the 1975 Birmingham Festival of Motoring.





Duckhams was one of the few companies privileged to exhibit at the opening of the National Exhibition Centre in January 1976.
(Gareth Lewis)

cally placed distributors. Blended locally to the company's specification, the oil would be packaged in US quart containers exported from Britain. For the UK 5-litre oil cans, the former metal screw caps were replaced by a new plastic 'Clipper' cap, which removed the risk of cut fingers. In this as in other matters, Duckhams led the industry, with others following soon afterwards.

In a motor oil market dogged by over-capacity, Duckhams was clinging to its substantial share, but only by joining the heavy discounting that was rife, to the consequent detriment of profitability. Competition support was maintained at the important grass-

roots level during 1977, with 175 events covered by the conspicuous Duckhams caravans, but the budget was slashed for the new year.

That year marked a major attempt at boosting the company's image, extending even to kitting out the industrial staff in new modern workwear. The biggest advertising campaign ever mounted, embracing TV, press and 1,000 hoardings around the country, including sports ground locations, was aimed at convincing 12 million motorists that Q was best. With the theme of 'The Utmost Care', it depicted an engine cocooned in a green oil droplet.

In further reorganisation the Hounslow plant moved into the control of BP, while the Hammersmith plant began to run down. The Aldridge extension, which incorporated a pipe bridge carrying blended oil from the stock



tanks across the road to a new warehouse and filling lines, was officially opened in May.

Despite margins squeezed by multinational and own-brand competition, the half-year loss already forecast by the pundits was prevented from being disastrous by the contribution from overseas and industrial sales. By the year end, however, the still shrinking margins led to the posting of a £750,000 deficit.

With further diversification still a sensible option, early in 1979 Duckhams increased its stake in the wax sector by acquiring a 49 per cent stake in wax producer Kerax. Other small-scale, non-lubricant activities were developed, such as water filtration and treatment, and new product launches included DPP, a multi-purpose de-watering and penetrating aerosol spray.

In March 1979 the Labour Government lost a crucial 'no confidence' vote and the ensuing

election brought the installation of Margaret Thatcher as Britain's first woman Prime Minister. Duckhams backed the Transglobe Expedition (led by Sir Ranulph Fiennes and of which the Patron was HRH Prince Charles), which aimed to circumnavigate the globe by ice, sea and land.

A new, updated and more aggressive TV ad campaign was launched, and a fleet of 13 new, versatile delivery trucks was introduced for drops in remote areas where a bulk tanker was not cost-effective. The fully-liveried vehicles delivered bulk oil from lift-on 250-gallon tanks and also carried prepacked product.

Half-year results for 1979 showed a remarkable turnaround as prices were made to 'stick', and despite the Aldridge plant's production surpassing 50 million litres, the company struggled to satisfy demand. This at least provided encouragement for the launch of

'The Utmost Care for Bikes', a programme to bring new market-specific packs to motorcyclists, backed up by Duckhams participation in the Superbike Championship.

Year-end results appeared to confirm the reversal of fortunes with a trading profit of £1.4m. This was, however, to some extent enhanced by increasing stock prices, and profits soon slumped again. As Britain waged war with Argentina over the Falklands in 1982, Duckhams was fighting its own major battle against overheads, eventually involving the disposal of part of the West Wickham premises and the Westgate works, and the folding of both the house magazine *The Ullage* and the consumer title *Quest*.

The Manchester operation was reduced to a depot only, and Gateshead depot was closed, as was the loss-making Jenolite Corrosion Services operation. The Duckhams South Africa plant was sold and marketing responsibility handed over to BP South Africa; and the 40 per cent stake in Duckhams Sweden was sold to BP Sweden. Hammersmith's barge and former canteen-cum-social club *Aphrodite* was also sold.

Great efforts were made to turn the business round. New UK Industrial and Retail divisions were formed, the former becoming so successful that it managed to halt the slide, thanks largely to the setting up of an increasing network of UK distributors.

The product-led marketing strategy had never been forgotten, and March 1982 saw the launch at London's Mayfair Hotel of Duckhams Hypergrade. The result of three years' intensive development work, this was a 15W/50 engine oil developed to meet the needs of all cars, including diesels and turbocharged models. Completely replacing Q motor oil, it was approved by every motor manufacturer and surpassed the industry's highest specifications.

While international markets retained the Q brand, and some regrets were expressed within the company at its disappearance in the

UK, the Hypergrade launch was accompanied by a massive marketing exercise, with all signage at outlets being changed and a national TV campaign supporting the product, which was presented in new-image 5-litre metal cans and a newly introduced small plastic pack. This major commitment of resources was reported to have built a strong foundation for improving future sales and profits.

Industrial Division's success continued as new product lines, like a new range of industrial aerosols, new soluble oils and the revolutionary long-life cutting oil Endura, gained significant ground. With industry's new computer-controlled equipment geared to minimum downtime, Duckhams' traditional philosophy of working closely with customers and machinery suppliers was paying off, and relationships were cemented through regional distributor conferences and a nationwide 'meet the customer' programme.

It was in 1983 that another major restructuring wrought real changes to the previously largely autonomous Duckhams. On the sale of Hammersmith, BP assumed responsibility for all production and distribution activity and a study team was set up to review Duckhams' internal structure. In the autumn of that year Duckhams' industrial operations were taken over by BP's Industrial Division, and all remaining Duckhams industrial product lines were rebranded BP. The changes were not confined to industrial operations, the Aldridge blending plant being transferred to BP in December together with the London and Manchester depots.

The reorganisation showed in improved financial results, but by now just 160 staff remained to attend the conference held in January 1984 to discuss concerns.

Built on Mini underpinnings, the Duckhams 'Q Car' proved a big attraction wherever it went. The livery was updated from time to time to match the current packaging.



With brand awareness paramount, motor-sport backing continued, major support being provided to Team Toyota Europe and the Van Diemen Formula Ford team, the latter relationship remaining strong today. Excellent results in 1985 included wins for the Toyota team in the Ivory Coast and Safari rallies, and championship wins in European Formula 3000 (Christian Danner), European Formula Ford (Paulo Carcaste) and World Hot Rod Championship (Ormond Christie).

The Japanese motor industry established itself in Britain for the first time in 1986 with the opening of Nissan's Sunderland plant. That year, following a TV ad campaign featuring the catchline 'The Engine's Choice', Duckhams broke from its traditional one-product approach to the retail oil market

'Composite' trucks, used for deliveries in outlying areas, carried lift-on tanks as well as small packs of product. Note the built-in delivery hose.

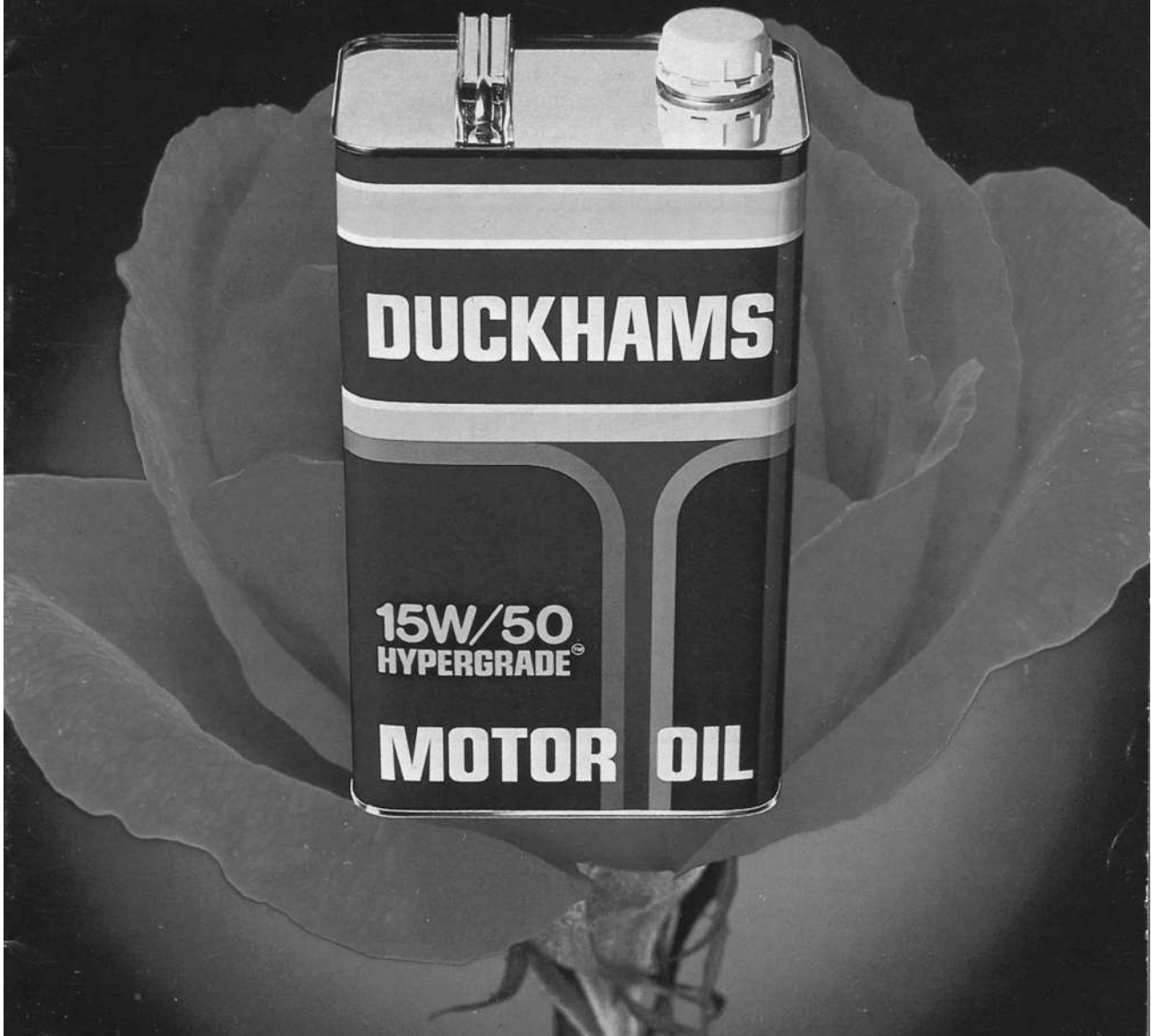
The 1982 successor to Q was Hypergrade, a superior quality mineral-based oil that equalled the new synthetics in performance.

with the launch of QXR as an additional line, aimed particularly at the increasingly popular 'hot hatch' sector of the car market. A 10W/40 performance-enhanced oil developed through co-operation between the Duckhams/BP Oil technical support staff and BP Oil International, this was successful in its aim of converting many motorists currently using an inferior 'own label' oil to a premium type.

Presented for the retail market in an expensive blue plastic 5-litre pack complete with explanatory booklet, and supported by eye-catching advertising and through motor-sport exposure, QXR gained acceptance relatively quickly. Hypergrade too continued to be promoted, and it was also transferred from the traditional tinfoil to plastic packaging.



**AFTER MULTIGRADE
DUCKHAMS THINK YOU'RE
READY FOR AN OIL CHANGE**





DUCKHAMS

HYPERGRADE
MOTOR OIL

DUCKHAMS

HYPERGRADE
MOTOR OIL

The first plastic retail packs were introduced for Hypergrade in 1987, replacing the customary tinplate ones.

Duckhams was now building once more on its image as an independent lubricants brand both at home and abroad, and it is pleasing to record that in 1987 the company funded the renovation of the memorial to the Blériot cross-Channel flight at Dover, originally commissioned by Alexander Duckham himself. The freedom symbolised by that historic flight was beginning to be reflected behind the Iron Curtain, where Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was calling for *perestroika* (reforms) and *glasnost* (open government).

With the lease on the company's offices at West Wickham due to expire, a new head office location was earmarked in Bromley and officially opened in February 1987 by HRH Prince Michael of Kent.

The following year Jenolite, now outside Duckhams' core business, was sold, leaving the company to concentrate 100 per cent on motor oil. A new Toyota Team Europe sponsorship deal was confirmed for 1988, and the same year an agreement was signed with motoring publishers Haynes for Duckhams products to be featured in their best-selling range of service manuals. Regular national promotions continued, the most successful being the purchase-related special offers on overalls and a used oil collector.

In what might appear an odd move, Duckhams reintroduced to the UK market during 1988 that old favourite, Q20-50, previously superseded by Hypergrade. As Q20-50 was now two generations older than the state-of-the-art QXR, the intention was not to place it in the premium sector, but rather to provide a direct and well-known competitor to the ever-increasing number of own-brand oils. The theory was that, faced with the choice of Bloggs or Duckhams oil at a similar budget price, the motorist would opt for the well-

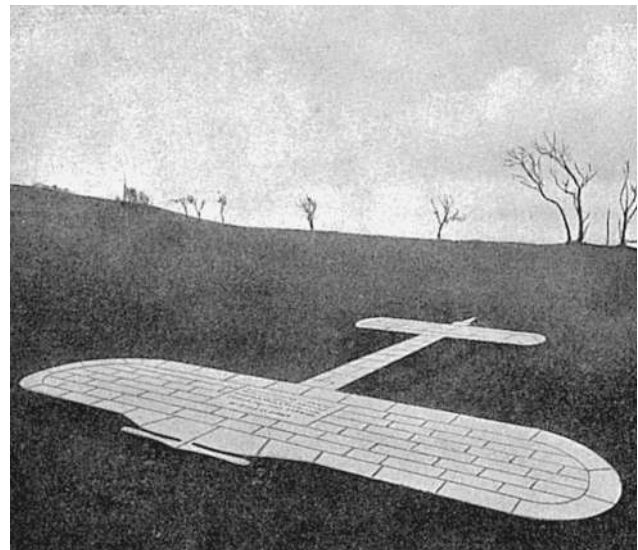
known name every time; and it was largely borne out in practice.

In 1989 responsibility for Duckhams' international business passed to BP Oil International, leaving Duckhams to concentrate on its UK sales and marketing, including BP retail activities, while providing the international operations with brand expertise. An international brand manager was appointed, to co-ordinate brand development 'worldwide' – an expression that was beginning to have a whole new potential as the Berlin Wall crumbled that November, followed closely by the collapse of Communism itself.

As the peoples of the former Soviet Union celebrated, many Britons were rioting, or at least protesting, against the Poll Tax, culminating in the removal of Mrs Thatcher, to be succeeded as Prime Minister by John Major.

While the UK economic downturn at the beginning of the 1990s, reinforced by the effects of the 1991 Gulf War, influenced sales of motor oils, Duckhams' branded sales held up well, with QXR making further advances in an otherwise stagnant market. A difficult

The Blériot memorial at Dover was restored at Duckhams' expense in 1987, prior to celebrations for the 80th anniversary of the historic flight it commemorates.





The Padgetts Racing teams were another highly successful Duckhams partnership, both in solo and sidecar events. Pictured is Darren Dixon, winner of the European Sidecar Championship in 1990. (Colin Taylor)

year for the parent company in 1991 saw further restructuring of the UK lubricants business, the main result of which was that Duckhams would once again become more or less independent from BP.

Meanwhile the company launched a new five-strong range of engine oils in new plastic packs. Included were the fully synthetic oil QS, an improved-specification QXR, and new products Duckhams Diesel and Hypergrade Plus. In another 'first' for Duckhams, this range brought the latest API SH specification to the UK market.

Introduced in 1993, QS was Duckhams' first fully synthetic engine oil for the UK, although such oils had been made available previously to distributors in cold regions. The company had traditionally argued that the premium grade QXR would meet all the requirements of a fully synthetic oil 'more cost-effectively', but had never ruled out producing synthetics should motor manufacturers start to recommend them. After months of testing and comparison with other synthetics on the market, the company was confident that QS was at the top of its class.

The launch of Duckhams Diesel, already successfully test-marketed in Ireland, was ideally timed to meet the increasing numbers

The Bromley head office was opened by HRH Prince Michael of Kent in 1987.





Duckhams launched its first fully synthetic engine oil in 1993, together with Duckhams Diesel and Hypergrade Plus, meeting the latest API SH specification – another first for Duckhams in the UK market.

of diesels in the UK. Sales quickly accelerated to unexpectedly high levels, with plenty of evidence of buyers switching brands to this new diesel-specific lubricant.

That year the Duckhams-lubricated Van Diemen team won the Formula Ford Championship, while in the British Rally Championship Steve Bennett and Duncan McMath, running a Peugeot 205 on the new QS oil, bagged the BBC Top Gear Award.

With the product range now being tested in a number of new markets including the Middle East, international activity generally was increasing as expertise and ideas were shared. Continuing strict control of budgets meant that brand awareness had to be maintained in a cost-effective manner and,

following a redesign of packaging, the new format was introduced across the range. In a series of developments, this was followed soon after by multi-lingual labelling, which reduced plant complexity and helped service developing markets; this was replaced again on 5-litre cans by peel-off, multi-layer side labels that gave even more countries the opportunity to have own-language information on the product.

In 1995 a marketing agreement with British Motor Heritage paved the way for the launch of the new Heritage range of products aimed at classic and older vehicles, with packs and support material designed to represent earlier versions. A special older formulation of Q20-50 was used as the main launch grade.

As an international sales conference in Portugal in early 1996 confirmed the export progress being made (Duckhams was now marketed in more than 60 countries), another major announcement concerning the future of the company was about to be made. The

setting up of a joint venture between BP and Mobil would involve the transfer of Duckhams' UK and European activities to Mobil, with non-European operations moving to BP.

As these decisions took formal effect, planned product introductions continued with the launch of upgraded QXR and QS meeting the latest API SJ specification. With assurances in place concerning the maintenance of Duckhams as a stand-alone brand, it was well presented at the start-up meeting of the new joint venture in Rome. A sales conference announced major new marketing initiatives and confirmed Duckhams' co-operation with the Ford Mondeo team in the British Touring Car Championship.

In the run-up to the Millennium, history continues to be written. Shortly after the

landslide Labour victory under Tony Blair in May 1997, the country was plunged into mourning for the Princess of Wales, killed in a car crash in Paris. More recently, the launch of the Euro has brought uncertainties over Britain's position on monetary union and its relationship with Europe.

After a century at the forefront of oil technology, Duckhams is still taking the lead. It decided in the spring of 1998 that the time had come to do away with the complicated technical jargon surrounding the marketing of a diverse range of motor oils.

Recognising that the majority of today's drivers want 'fill-and-forget' reliability, it

Ian Simpson, 1994 HEAT British Supercup Superbike Champion with QXR, on his Duckhams Norton. (Turn One)



relaunched Duckhams brand motor oil as a simplified range, accompanied by straightforward product descriptions, that nevertheless brings the best quality and performance ever available to motorists. The relaunch was marked by major investment that included a return to television advertising for the brand after a 10-year absence.

Upmarket silver plastic packs, with colour-coded caps and labels, now offer the simple four-way choice of Hypergrade in petrol and diesel engine versions, or QXR Premium in petrol and diesel engine versions. All technical specs (apart from the key information concerning viscosity) are confined to a small panel on the back of each pack, beneath an easy-to-follow guide to checking the car's oil.

While all are made to a high quality, the QXR Premium oils offer additional protection that makes them particularly suited to cars that have longer service intervals, as well as aiding starting in cold conditions.

Reinforcing its grass-roots appeal, Duckhams in recent years has turned its sights on football, and sponsorship of Sky Television's coverage of the Nationwide League is continuing for a third season in 1999/2000. This is backed by promotions and competitions giving fans the chance to win VIP trips to see their favourite team and meet Sky's football commentators.

Accompanied by a restyled form of the familiar blue and yellow logo, the relaunched range takes the brand forward into a new century that will bring further technical advances of which we can only dream today. Duckhams' investment in its valuable brand is testimony to the confidence with which it approaches the Millennium and the start of its

While maintaining its support for grass-roots motorsport, Duckhams has recently signed a football sponsorship agreement with Sky Television for its coverage of the Nationwide League, to continue for the 1999/2000 season.







With its simple, user-friendly range of oils, Duckhams is ready to serve the motorist of the 21st century.

second hundred years. Its story is a unique one, founded as it was by a man of exceptional skill and vision, and nurtured through the past century by a loyal and dedicated staff,

together with representatives around the world, all of whom believed that the customer was there to be served, and problems were meant to be solved.

Alexander Duckham had a great sense of occasion. The centenary of the company in 1999 is one celebration in which his spirit will be participating with special enthusiasm.

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The Duckham's Story

Alexander Duckham was a distinguished chemist, a philanthropist, a patriot – and a compulsive solver of problems. All these traits left their mark on his company, which introduced the first multigrade motor oil to Europe. The famous 'Q' brand quickly went on to become Britain's best-known oil, taking the lion's share of the market during the 1960s and 1970s.

From providing better lubrication for the engines of early motor cars, Alexander Duckham & Co. worked throughout the 20th century with the motor industry and many other customers in varied fields like industrial engineering, developing new products to serve the needs of ever-advancing technology.

They met challenges as they arose – from facilitating concrete moulding to conditioning the skins of zoo animals. But this is as much a human story as a technological one, and it explores the personalities involved, and places each innovation in its historical and social context to create a fascinating chronicle of 100 years of extraordinary change.

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