

EXHIBIT Memories

Under the bonnet

Zepelin power

CHITTY Bang Bang — the first of the legendary Chitty Bang Bang, compiled from readers' information by Martin Shearsmith. The third and final instalment will deal with the fate of the cars.

To look at, she was crude, and one contemporary dubbed her "a monster".

To Louis she was more than that and reaching speeds of up to 120 mph soon made her presence felt on narrow country lane around Bridge, a memory shared by many Extra readers who answered our request for information.

Primarily, Chitty I was a racing car and as the first three, was to all intents and purposes a prototype model.

On her first appearance at the Brooklands Race Track at Weybridge, in Surrey, Easter 1921, she easily out-performed her rivals, winning all three of her races.

The secret of her success was under the bonnet.

For technical buffs, the Maybach engine, with cylinder dimensions of 165mm and 180mm, developed 305 bhp at 1,500 rpm.

The four overhead valves per cylinder were operated by exposed push rods and rockers

cars.

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from a camshaft on each side of the crankcase and two Zenith carburettors were fitted on each end of a long induction manifold on the off side.

Feed to the oil pumps was a huge flared oil tank slung on the off side to get sufficient ground clearance. A large fuel tank was mounted behind the driver and passenger.

The exhaust system was primitive — a single pipe taking a sharp right hand bend, where it left the side of the bonnet on the left hand side, before continuing to the rear of the car.

It was from the exhaust system that the car gained its name, "Chitty" being the valve clatter and "Bang Bang" the exhaust as the engine was started.

Starting the enormous engine was a job in itself and consisted of special starting crank fitted with a long steel tube, on which several men heaved while another wound a starting magnet.

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followed a short spell in the workshop as Zborowski and Gallop made some minor improvement to the car.

In the earliest photographs of the car, taken in the summer of 1921, Chitty is pictured with a two seater body with duck's back.

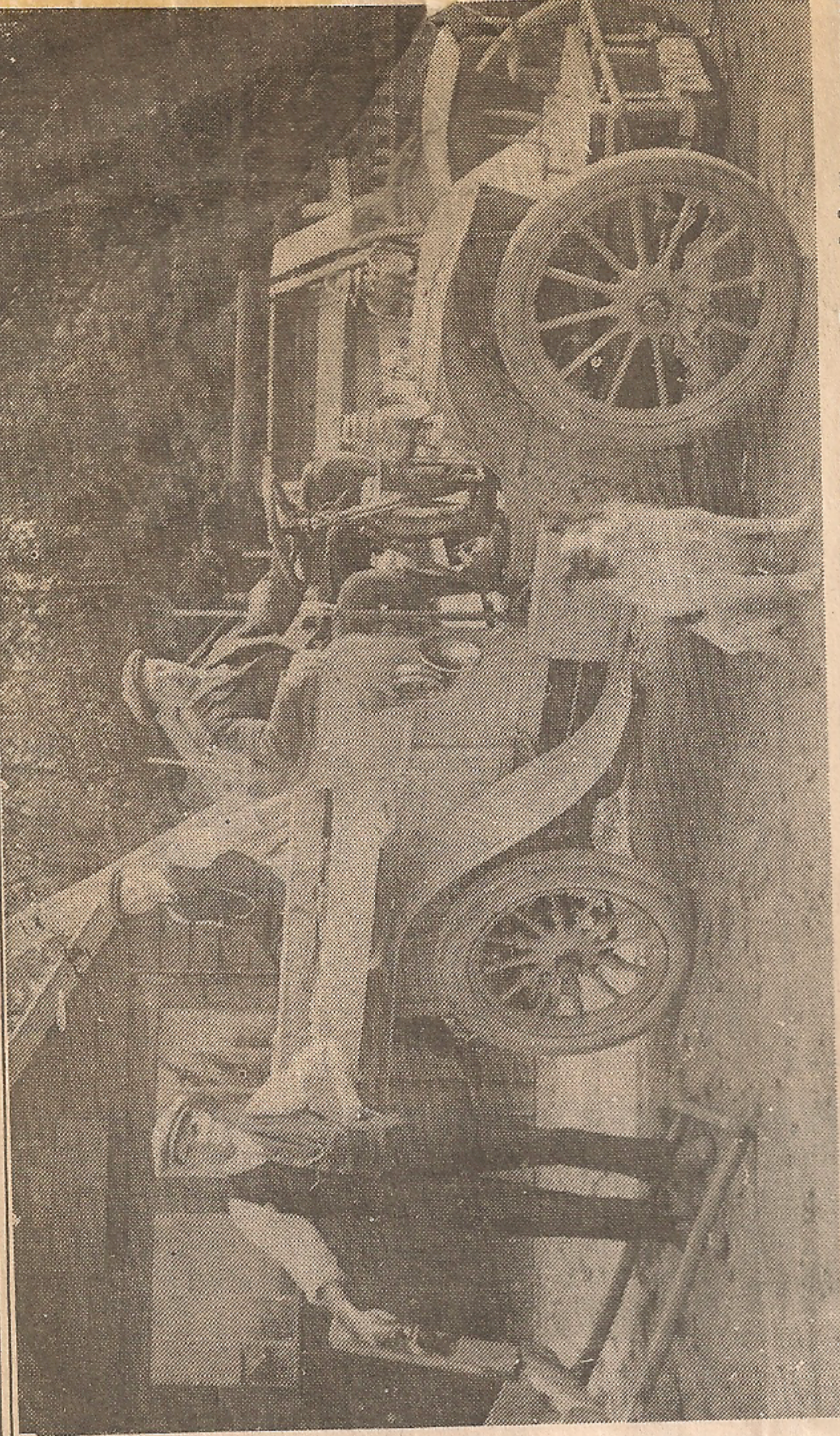
Chitty I's domination of motor racing at Brooklands lasted just over a year.

As was prone to happen with large, fast cars, as the Count was lapping Brooklands in a practice run in Autumn 1922, the off side front tyre came away from the rim.

Chitty went out of control, struck the parapet at the top of the banking, slewed round and then slid backwards down the concrete, went clean through the timing box and finished up on soft ground with the front axle torn off and the offside tyre wrapped round its rim.

Miraculously, Zborowski survived without a scratch. Unfortunately the same could not be said for Chitty and though later repaired, she never raced again.

With the desire to race even stronger than before immediately on a successor.



Not actually one of the Chittys, but a fascinating picture. This 1908 Chiron Laundalette was owned by a very young Count Zborowski before being sold to a Shepherdswell wheelwright and carpenter-builder in 1911. This photograph of the Chiron, converted into a builder's run-about truck, was sent in by the carpenter's son, Mr Leslie Woodridge, husband of our sister paper, the Kentish Gazette's, Shepherdswell correspondent.

She was an ideal tourer though, and took Louis and his new wife, a dancer called Violet, all round Europe and by one account, across the Sahara desert.

Chitty 3 was of similar mould and was often called The White Mercedes because of its Mercedes chassis and white bodywork. She too was ideal for touring and often accompanied Chitty II as the baggage car.

Zborowski loved the big cars but more importantly he loved racing and with that in mind The Higham Special was unveiled in early 1923.

Built from scratch by Gallop and Zborowski she was the largest car

ever to race at Brooklands.

The Chassis had been tailor made by Mercedes, again chain-driven, and was fitted with a magnificent 27-litre, 400 horse power V12 Liberty aero-engine.

According to one source, as the car was backed out of the Higham workshop under its own power for the first time, the clutch was so fierce that it striped out its gear box and Gallop had had to fly to Germany for a replacement.

It was in the Higham Special that Louis took part in his first grand prix at Lyon in 1924, but weighing 33cwt on tyres only five inches wide, the

huge machine was doomed to failure.

Ironically the 29-year-old Count was driving another car when he met his death at Monza on October 19 1924.

On the 43rd mile of the Italian Grand Prix, the brakes apparently failed and his Mercedes left the track at immense speed, went over some banking, hit a tree and came to rest on its side, with mechanic Len Martin trapped underneath and the Count fatally injured.

Louis was wearing the same gold cuff links his father had been wearing when he died in a car crash 21 years previously.

● To be continued