

# DELANEY DIVERSITY

There was much more to Delaney Gallay than just radiators, as **Giles Chapman** discovered when he chanced upon the company's extensive archive

**N**o matter the historical significance of Delaney Gallay to the detailed development of the British motor car, the two words meant absolutely nothing to me until, one summer afternoon in 2015, my mobile chimed the arrival of a text message. 'Giles,' wrote an old friend, 'Our next-door neighbour is moving out and I think there's some old car stuff they don't want. There's a skip coming in the morning...'

Needless to say I was over to Barnes, in south-west London, as swiftly as humanly possible. The address was a small 1930s factory in a back street where gentrification had galloped ahead all around. I clattered up the bare stairs towards what looked like Reception. Dapper and courteous, Roger Delaney appeared mildly surprised to see me, but once I'd established the rationale for my visit he seemed glad of my presence.

Had I heard of his late father Tom Delaney? Well, yes, I had, if he was the same remarkable character who, aged 95, had been Britain's oldest-ever active racing driver. Well now, as Roger gestured around the office with its threadbare carpets, I would get to understand something of Tom Delaney the hoarder.

Several factors contributed to Tom's long, prosperous life. One was his robust health, fuelled by a largely vegetarian diet, disdain for booze and liking for physical exercise. No wonder his competition licence kept being renewed as he passed his medical year after year. Another was impressive business acumen, backed by a failsafe recall method. He never threw anything away. The dozens of dusty, mismatched filing cabinets lining the room were packed with a lifetime's documentation. Post-it notes, business cards and notepad

messages fluttered from any armful of yellowing paper Roger gathered up.

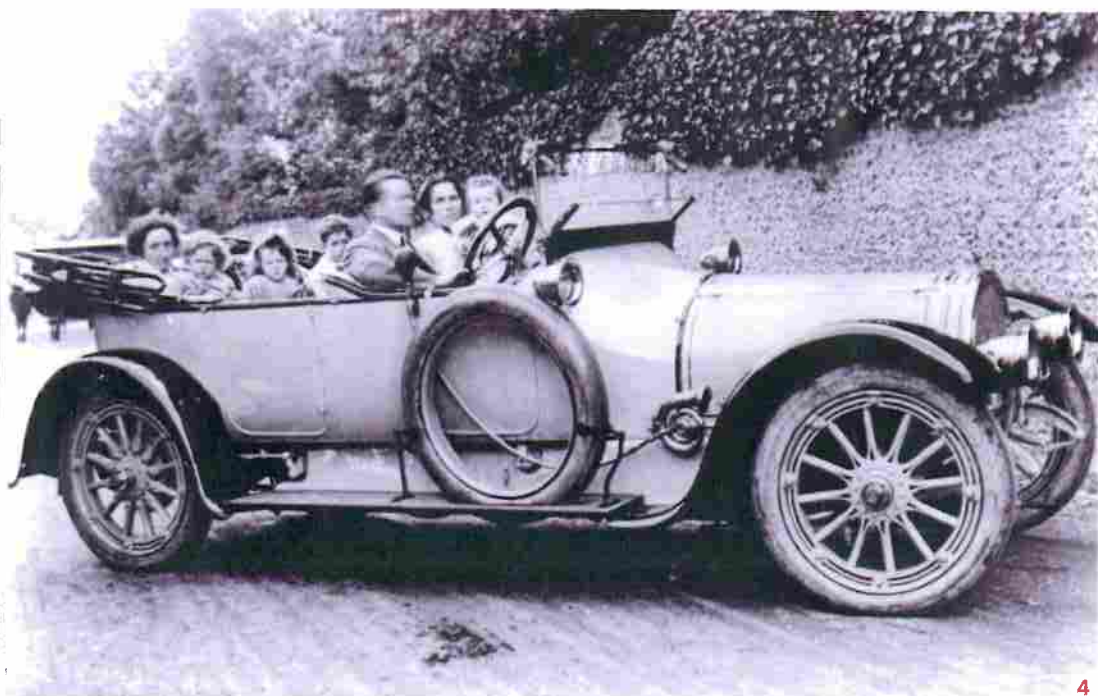
Tom Delaney had been dead for 10 years. Now, his family was selling his building and tackling the daunting task of dealing with its contents. Most of the correspondence would simply be recycled. Roger, however, was reluctant to shred the records of the family business. What he needed was someone to make good use of the stuff, and suggest a fitting final home for it. Well, here I was, the problem solver...

If you're a compulsive grabber of anything interesting from the jaws of landfill, you'll recognise that short-breathed, just-in-time feeling that accompanies a successful rescue mission. That's what I was getting here. Once the material was safely transferred to my garage, I could look through it more carefully and marvel at the many fascinating ways the Delaneys' business empire had influenced car and aircraft production. Here were all the records, from blueprints and patents to an astonishing photographic archive, documenting the long-gone (so I thought) firm's richly varied activities.

Tom Delaney sold his manufacturing group, with five factories and a 2000-strong payroll, in 1959 to the sprawling Linen Thread Company conglomerate. He claimed it was with reluctance, but he was shrewd enough to accept a timely offer. The British motor industry was consolidating rapidly, and medium-sized 'metal-bashers' who resisted progress faced a difficult future. A few giants, such as Lucas, Smiths Industries and AP, were vacuuming up everything they could. It was the right time for Delaney Gallay to surrender its independence.

What a contrast to its early days and the ebullience of founder Luke Terence Delaney, known as Terry to anyone familiar with this energetic and ambitious young fellow from north London. Born in 1879, Terry Delaney trod a different career path to his Irish actor father, Sylvester Delaney: he had become

**1** *Speed Of The Wind* with (l to r) George Eyston, Terry Delaney, Tom Delaney, Bert Denly and Ernest Eldridge, plus curious Maida Vale neighbours...



an apprentice with French firm Delaunay-Belleville, whose efficient marine boiler designs were licensed to the Royal Navy and used in HMS *Terrible* and HMS *Powerful*.

In 1900, however, the cutting-edge technology was the motor car, and armed with a solid engineering grounding and considerable chutzpah, Terry joined fledgling importer The International Motor Co. It sold the 3.5hp belt-driven Benz, making ends meet by insisting on a 30 per cent deposit before ordering the car from Germany. The company was based in Great Portland Street, and was the nucleus of what would soon become a cluster of London car dealers.

Selling British-made cars would be easier, and the company soon took on agencies for the Coventry-made Allard and Payne & Bates. Delaney had a standard test for any new car,

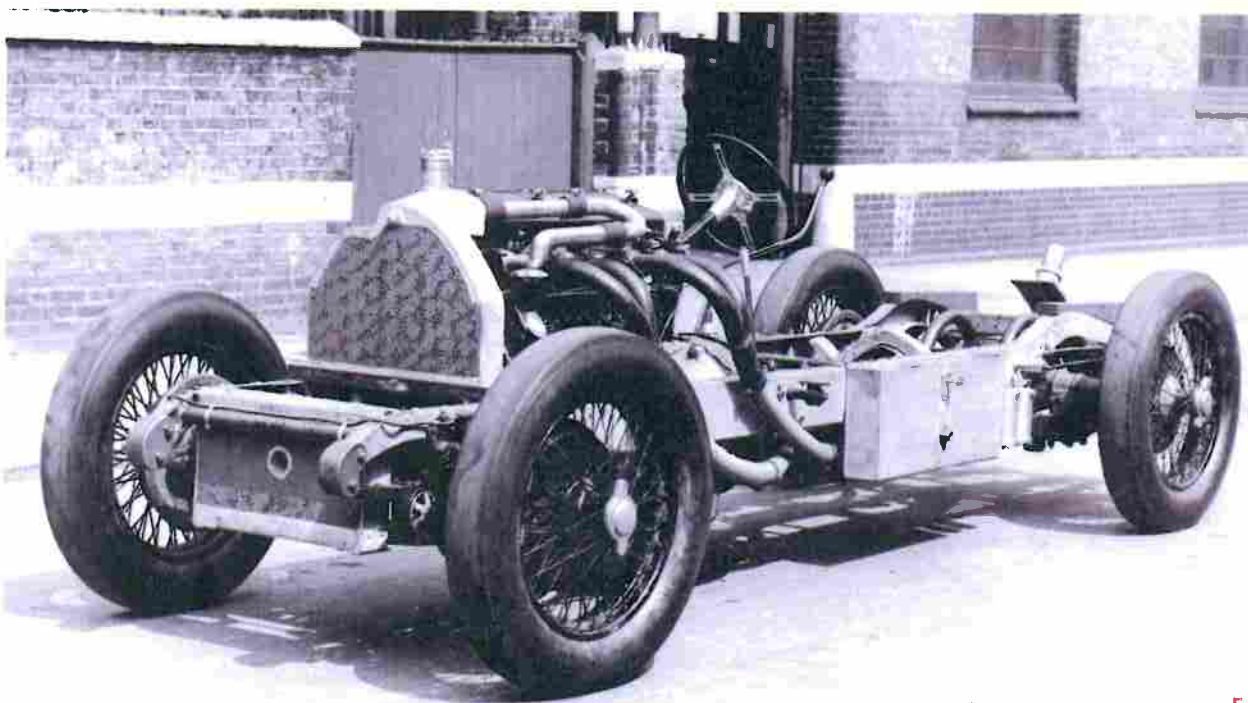
which involved attacking Primrose Hill in first gear. The Payne & Bates chassis failed. The Allard, however, passed muster, and the company started to part-assemble the cars in the showroom before selling them under the name Charette.

Delaney split his time between demonstrating cars on the street and at motor exhibitions and getting down and dirty under broken ones, gathering a wealth of mechanical experience. 'The more you knew about the mechanism of automobiles, the more sceptical you became about the future,' he recalled drolly, but he was undeterred.

Discovering the owner of The International Motor Co, a Mr O Seyd, was planning to sell out, Terry Delaney decamped to rival engineer-dealer Frank Wellington in Regent's Park, who sold sundry French marques including Mors,

Clément and Gobron-Brillié. Mere months later, Delaney's business affairs developed the complexity that was to mark out his *modus operandi*. He became Allard's London representative, arranging for the Burlington Carriage Company to sell the car from its Oxford Street premises. In 1902, he negotiated the de Dietrich agency for Britain, and his gathering status assured him a place in the factory team for the 1903 Paris-Madrid road race. This event, during which three spectators and five drivers were killed, plus dozens injured, was a rampant demolition derby, with reckless drivers sometimes hitting 80mph as cattle sauntered across their paths.

Spectators stood in the middle of the road to watch the cars coming as Delaney powered along on his de Dietrich. 'The only thing to do was to drive straight at them,' he recorded in



2 Terry Delaney and the ill-fated de Dietrich before crashing out of the 1903 Paris-Madrid road race

3 Delaney's impressive works in Carlton Vale, north-west London

4 Sunday drive for the Delaney clan in a Delaunay-Belleville, Terry in charge

5 Chassis of *Black Magic* cradling its AEC diesel bus engine

6 The sleek nose of *Black Magic*. The car was capable of 120mph and 30mpg



1945. 'Then they would open out, forming a lane to drive through, many trying to touch the cars as they passed.'

Sensing the crowd he was aiming at between Libourne and Bordeaux wasn't fleeing, Delaney swerved and left the road, wrecking the car. Fortunately he was largely unscathed. 'I realised racing and business did not go well together,' he reflected. The race was cancelled, and competition on public roads gained such an appalling reputation that the heroic age of city-to-city races was over.

Terry Delaney was increasingly occupied as, first, a freelance consultant to Burlington, and then its full-time manager. He reckoned the company needed a prestigious new marque to sell, and headed for the 1904 Paris Salon to review the options. The latest offering from Delaunay-Belleville proved the winner, and soon these impressive machines were being sold from a new showroom at 49 Pall Mall.

Delaney realised chassis preparation and servicing of Delaunay-Bellevilles was where the real money lay, and he astutely exploited that by opening his own depot at 115-129 Carlton Vale in 1910. With assembly bays on the ground floor and machine shops above, it occupied an impressive corner site in north-west London's Maida Vale. Expensive British coachwork was mounted on the French chassis there, and with the advent of the First World War the company built armoured cars on the same frames, in the manner of Britain's own Rolls-Royce and Napier. Terry Delaney himself drove open chassis back from the Paris factory for these military transformations.

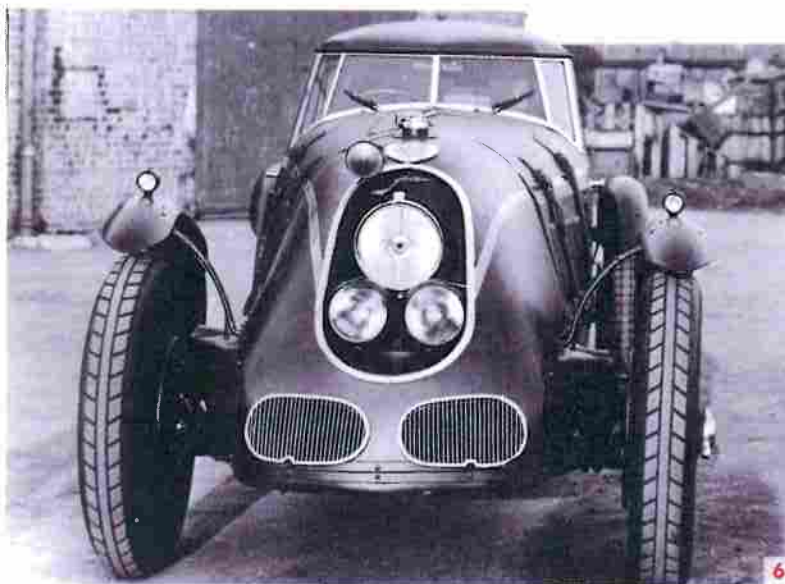
In 1912 the need for custom-made parts had led him to buy a second premises a couple of miles away in Scrubs Lane, Willesden, for sheet metalwork and welding. The company soon started making tow-bars for military vehicles there, and fuel tanks. On a European trip that year, Delaney met Swiss engineer Jean Gally and was impressed by his portfolio of designs for efficient car radiators, then finding favour with several European marques. A deal was done for tools and British manufacturing rights, and the Gally Radiator Company (always 100 per cent Delaney-owned) was established in Scrubs Lane. Its products would greatly improve the engine cooling in British cars, including the first Bentleys, as well as Rovers, Sunbeams and Straker-Squires, plus Guy, Dodge and Saurer lorries.

However, world events soon reshaped Delaney's business. The early fighter aircraft essential to the First World War needed cooling systems, but the tubing for traditional aero-engine radiators had mostly been imported from Germany. Now Gally's film block-type radiators really came into their own, thanks to their efficiency and relative lightness, so contracts soon followed from the new Aircraft

Production Department. By 1917, Gally's first aircraft radiators were airborne.

This made the war a time of frantic activity and growth for the company. Afterwards, the peace was actually rather grim as military orders wound down. Terry, always a fiery personality, was forced to sell his Maida Vale works and concentrate on his metalwork plant, casting around for new products such as steel luggage trunks. Meanwhile, he joined the boards of northern car manufacturers Vulcan and Ruston-Hornsby (they could have been good radiator buyers if their car ventures had prospered) and in 1921 he arrived at Lea-Francis as joint managing director.

Delaney bought back his Carlton Vale building, adding a rear extension and mercury-vapour lighting, and installed one of the first electro-hydraulic car lifts in the country so vehicles could be raised to the first floor. Up there, the workshops were adapted around 1925 to service the latest addition to the renamed Delaney Gally portfolio, France's vane-type Cozette supercharger. They were



available as a factory option for the Austin Seven, although Delaney also found a profitable outlet for Cozette's No 11 in a new Lea-Francis sports model, the Hyper. The 25lb boost turned the car into a pint-size Blower Bentley that did wonders for L-F's image when Kaye Don won the 1928 Tourist Trophy in one at Ards, Northern Ireland.

Looking after the spares and tools in the pits on that historic event was 18-year-old Cyril Terence Delaney, Terry's son, who forever used the nickname Tom that his nursemaid had bestowed upon him. Terry took Tom, one of his six children, to Brooklands many times to witness tuning and testing. Before long he was bringing him into the family business as his right-hand man, overseeing Carlton Vale. There was an exciting incentive. In 1930, Terry bought Kaye Don's giant-killing Lea-Francis Hyper and gave it to Tom, who immediately started campaigning the car himself at Brooklands and other tracks. This kicked off a lifelong partnership between man and car. Tom contested the 1931 Irish Grand Prix and

then drove the car all the way back to London afterwards, where the Hyper was used for his daily commute. He won two trophies in his first season and, in 1932, Kaye Don sent a hearty congratulatory letter after seeing him tussling with Raymond Mays at Brooklands. 'I think it is splendid to see you lads of the younger generation coming along in this fashion,' he wrote.

The Delaunay-Belleville business petered out, so L T Delaney & Sons started selling Talbots and Swifts, but Tom turned space over at Carlton Vale to constructing special one-offs for racer and record-breaker George Eyston. The first, completed in 1933, was *Black Magic*, an extraordinary beast indeed. Designer Ernest Eldridge installed an 8.8-litre six-cylinder AEC diesel engine from a London bus in a Chrysler Imperial chassis, and covered it with a streamlined Vanden Plas fabric saloon body. It had Gally cooling, naturally. It was used in repeated diesel speed record attempts, eventually hitting 120mph at Monthéry in 1936 while averaging 30mpg.

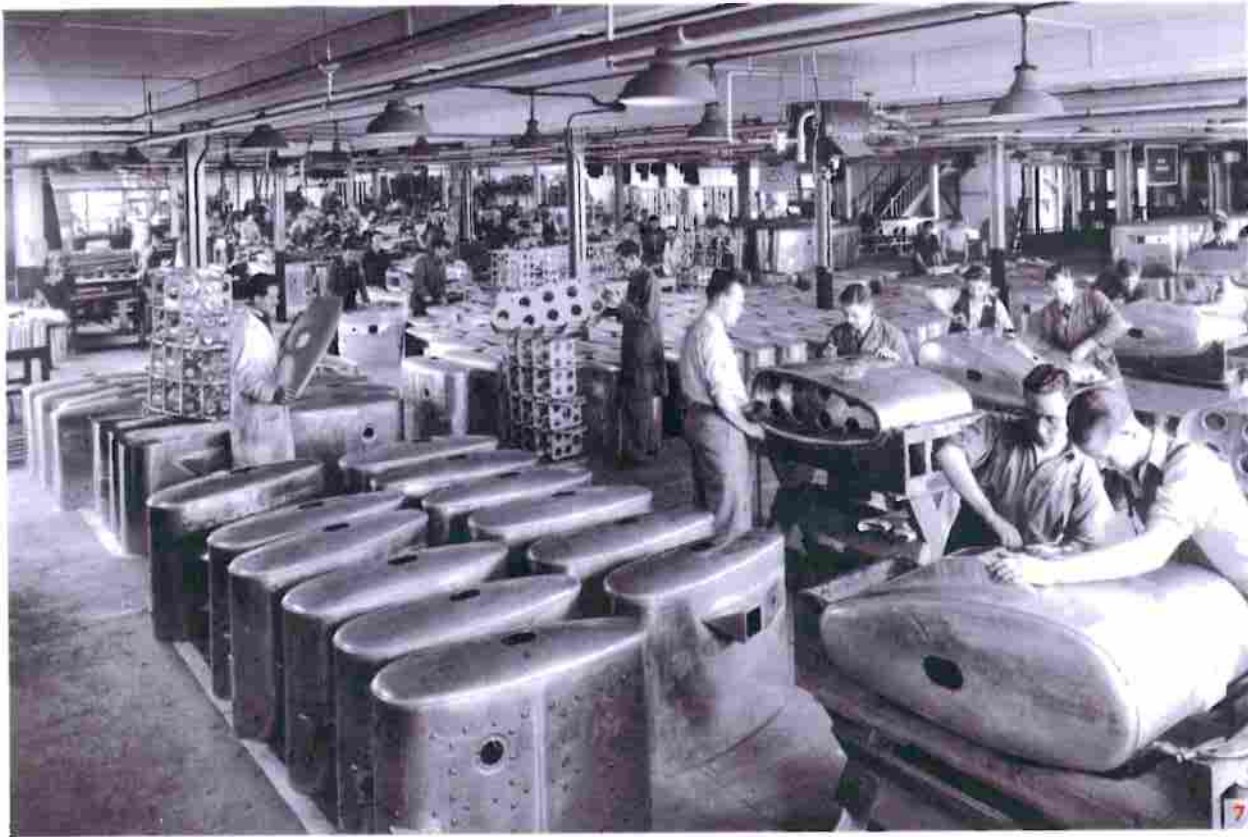
Tom proposed to Yvonne, a Lea-Francis employee and frequent visitor to Carlton Vale, and she accepted on the condition that he give up motor racing. He agreed, and promptly started flying instead, gaining his pilot's licence and joining the Brooklands Aero Club. *Black Magic* was unusual, but *Speed of the Wind*, completed in 1935, was spectacular. This was Eyston and Eldridge's concept for a combined Land Speed and endurance record car, with interchangeable 21-litre Rolls-Royce Kestrel petrol aero and experimental 19-litre Ricardo diesel engines powering the front wheels. It went to Utah in September to lap the 10-mile Bonneville salt-bed

circuit there, and broke the 24-hour endurance record at 140.52mph. The following year, it just failed to raise this in a head-to-head with Ab Jenkins's *Mormon Meteor*, its 149mph average pipped by 1mph.

*Speed of the Wind* bristled with Delaney Gally components, including a surface radiator wrapped round the curve of the bonnet, an aircraft-type oil cooler, and riveted aluminium fuel tanks. Inside these, Tom Delaney designed a baffle system that sped up refills and prevented fuel surge. You may know *Speed of the Wind* from the ubiquitous Dinky Toys replica of it, and I'd love to say you could see this car, and *Black Magic*, in a museum today. Sadly, both were blown to smithereens by a bomb that fell on the Willesden building they were stored in during World War Two.

Perhaps that direct hit was intended for Delaney Gally's Scrubs Lane plant. The Luftwaffe would have had good reason to target it. For, once again, the Delaney family business was proving vital to the war effort. The company geared up quickly this time for big





7 Mass production of fuel tanks underway in Delaney Gally's clanging Cricklewood plant

8 Steel luggage trunks, some designed with French firm Chausson, were a profitable line in the 1930s

9 Heath Robinson-style experiment to test a prototype de-icing system

volumes of aircraft radiators and oil coolers for the Rolls-Royce Merlin engines in Spitfires, plus masses of heaters for aircraft interiors. This took place in a huge factory up the Edgware Road in Cricklewood, bought in 1934 from the Vulcan Motor Company. With Carlton Vale vacated, the Vulcan works became the new Delaney Galley HQ and centre of its specialism in 'heat-exchange'. Another plant opened in Exeter, and the workforce swelled to 1500. But the Delaneys never let go of anything that generated income. Hence, a rather incongruous petrol station remained on the forecourt of the large Cricklewood complex.

Indeed, they needed to be versatile. Their clattering industrial machine was underused after the war, its job done. The equipment was clapped-out, and the shortage of work led to substantial losses. Terry Delaney passed away in 1946. For Tom, left to run the business, something new was as ever required. The company had contemplated car manufacture

before. When Bentley and Lagonda were in receivership in the 1930s, Terry had circled for a while but couldn't agree terms. The family was friendly with the Chausson clan in France, whose company was the leading radiator manufacturer there as well as building buses and Chenard et Walker delivery vans. On a trip to Chausson's works at Asnières in 1946, Tom was shown the front-wheel drive CHS economy car it had designed in secret, away from prying Nazi eyes. The French government refused to allocate the raw materials to build it, insisting Chausson stick to buses, so now the CHS was redundant. Tom Delaney suggested he could try to interest British firms in building some. In December, 1946, the prototype travelled to north-west London and Delaney began cold-calling.

The CHS was an open two-seater with tiny dimensions: 5ft 9in wheelbase, 3ft 2in track. The chassis-less structure featured welded steel panels. A 340cc single-cylinder engine,

a water-cooled two-stroke, sat right in the nose, with its petrol tank below. Tom Delaney demonstrated the CHS to the motoring media. *The Motor* magazine declared it 'amazingly roomy' thanks to the flat floor and spacious footwells. They also found its ride impressive, from all-independent suspension. *The Autocar* condescendingly stated that it 'buzzes along merrily' while suggesting a smoother, more powerful engine would be preferable.

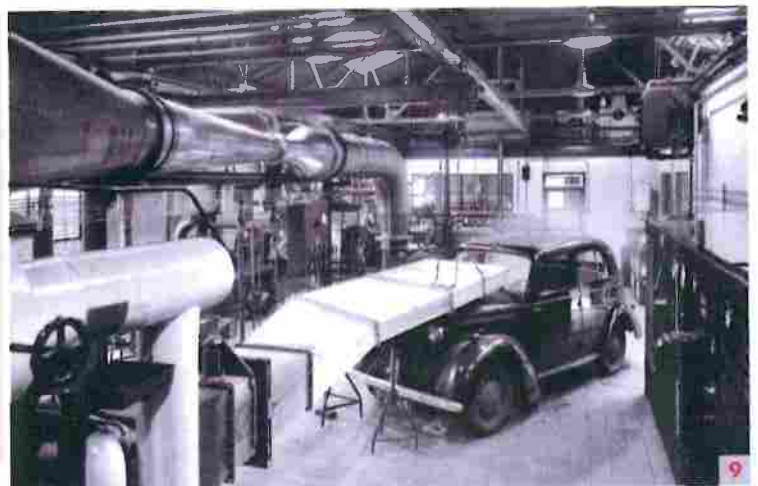
Tom Delaney tried everything he could to interest local partners in producing it, courting Humber, Austin, Jaguar, even Aston Martin. For engines he lobbied Triumph, Coventry Victor and Scott, and for retailing it he approached numerous car dealer chains. He saw the car selling for about £200, convinced there'd be huge demand for a basic runabout that could attain 50mph and 75mpg. His instincts were spot-on but his timing, sadly, was unlucky. In late 1948, the Bond Minicar was revealed as the world's thriftiest car, and at £242 it was close

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1934 Buick Chausson Car fitted with Chausson Gally Steel Trunk (London model as standard equipment)

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Telegrams: Willelde 3811-3812-3813.



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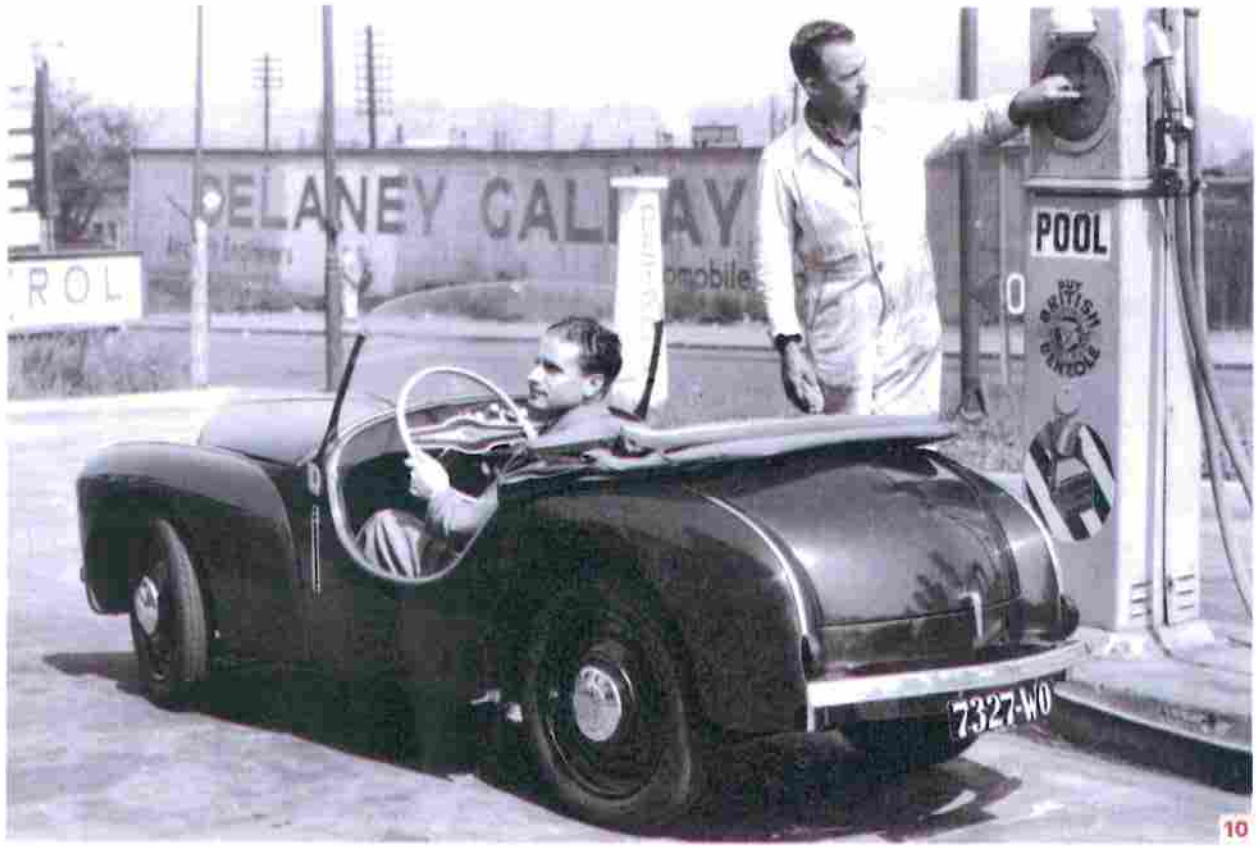
**10** The Chausson CHS tips some Pool petrol from the company's pumps, with Tom Delaney at the wheel

**11** This Chenard et Valcker van was briefly considered for British production

**12** The CHS's tiny single-cylinder engine and front-wheel drive leave plenty of room for the toolkit

**13** Tom Delaney makes the CHS look rakish on the Delaney Gallay petrol forecourt

**14** An Austin A40 Devon towers over the promising Chausson CHS economy car



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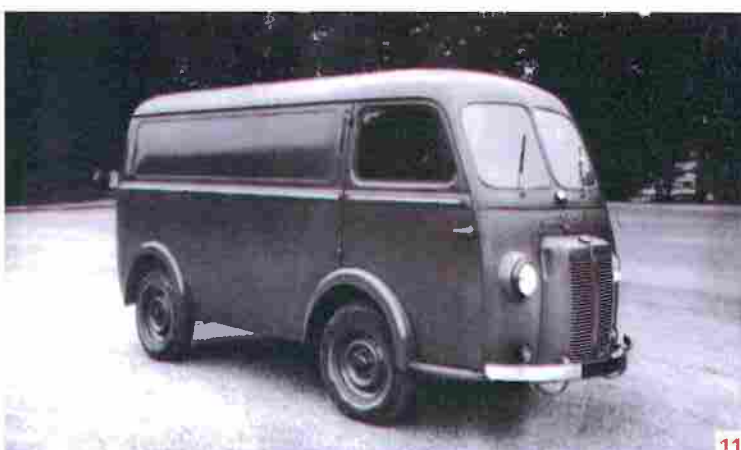
to the CHS's projected price. Although crude and uncomfortable, the Minicar could by virtue of its three wheels exploit motorcycle levels of taxation, and be driven on a motorbike licence.

Tom drove the CHS prototype into the back of his garage and forgot about it. In 2012, the Delaney family put it into a Silverstone

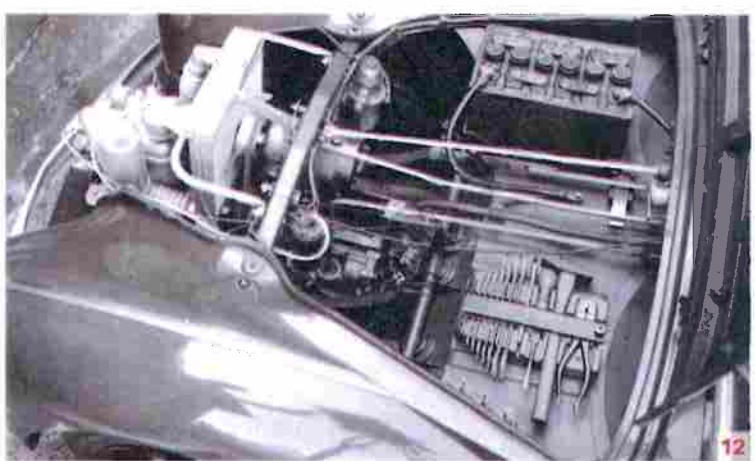
Auctions sale, where it made £11,200. The buyer was none other than Christophe Chausson, who undertook a beautiful restoration of his heirloom, producing a stunning book on the car which covers the history of his family company.

Under Tom Delaney's aegis, the business recovered its momentum by churning out

radiators for tractors and fuel tanks for lorries. He tried all manner of things, including heated seat cushions for tractors. A foray into domestic heaters failed, but lightweight radiators for Britain's growing motor sport industry did well. Delaney Gallay aircraft cabin heaters moved the firm into the jet age,



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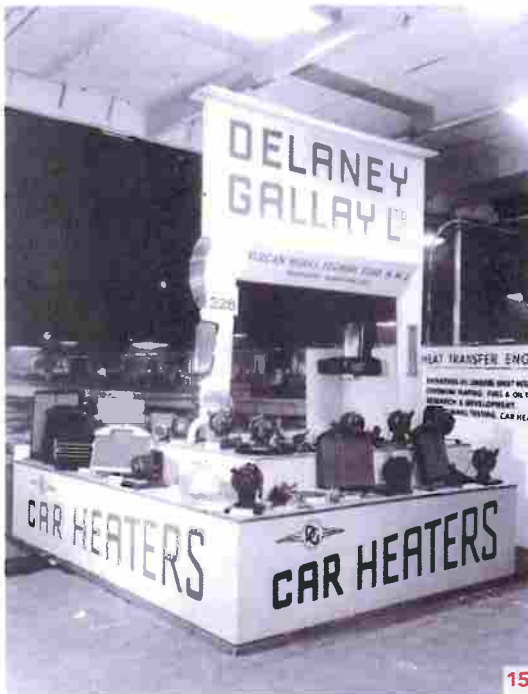
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prompting diversification into other aerospace equipment, from ejector-seat systems to airliner lavatories. Laboratories and test facilities were added at the Vulcan Works as Delaney Gallay got deeper into specialist insulation and heat-exchange production.

One automotive growth area in the 1950s was in-car heaters, which were beginning to be expected as standard equipment by new-car buyers. At first offering them under its own brand, and made in Cricklewood, the company hit the big time when Standard-Triumph placed a massive ongoing order for heaters for its 1959 Herald. With that contract landed, and some 850 employees, Tom swiftly grabbed the opportunity to sell the whole Delaney Gallay group to Linen Thread, which in 1961 became Lindustries.

In 1967, an even bigger contract for heaters came from Ford for its Escort Mk I. This entailed opening a brand new plant in Wellingborough to make the huge quantities needed, as the firm added its Delanair air-conditioning systems for the Rover P6 and Jaguar XJ6 to its product line. Its insulation expertise covered everything from Concorde to Hinkley Point nuclear power station.

As for Tom Delaney himself, as soon as the

dust had settled on the buyout he became a gentleman property investor, released from the stressful maelstrom of Britain's increasingly crisis-ridden motor and aviation industries, wintering in Spain and pursuing his many interests. He tracked down his beloved Hyper to Aden, brought it home and spent the rest of his life campaigning it in VSCC races. He eventually bequeathed it to the Coventry Transport Museum on the condition that it would never be raced again. The 2005 television documentary *The Oldest Drivers In Britain* showed Tom as a courtly and enthusiastic nonagenarian, still loving motor racing. And that was despite being thrown from his beloved Lea-Francis in 2004 in such a way that it then ran over him, fortunately only causing a slight wrist injury.

For the Delaney Gallay group itself, the 1970s era was rocky, with subsidiaries sold off and Lindustries taken over in 1979 by notorious 'asset-strippers' Hanson Trust. The Wellingborough site, though, which by now specialised in bespoke radiators and cooling systems for military vehicles, was bought by its management in 1985, and reverted to the name Gallay Ltd.

This I only discovered when musing on the

fate of the Delaney Gallay archives so bizarrely in my custodianship. Believe me, it's not easy to consign historically important documents with the appropriate institutions. Both the Science Museum and the RAF Museum at Hendon gave a polite but firm 'no' to taking on the records of this most diverse and yet crucial British company. So I thought I'd try Gallay Ltd.

To my huge pleasure, and his great credit, the company's managing director, Michael Ledlie, was happy to add them to his corporate archive, reinstating almost all of the firm's history up to the point where Tom Delaney bowed out. My rescue-and-preserve job was, at last, complete. ■

15 Delaney Gallay motor show display featuring the products that finally made the firm's fortune

16 Another trade showcase. The company's seatbelts grew from a venture into ejector seats

17 A young Tom Delaney with his ex-Kaye Don Lea-Francis Hyper, and some of the duo's accolades

18 Tom Delaney was still racing the same car in 2004, aged 94, even after it had run over him...



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