

**Robertson Crusoe:
Tony Maggs, South Africa's Forgotten GP Ace**

Greg Mills

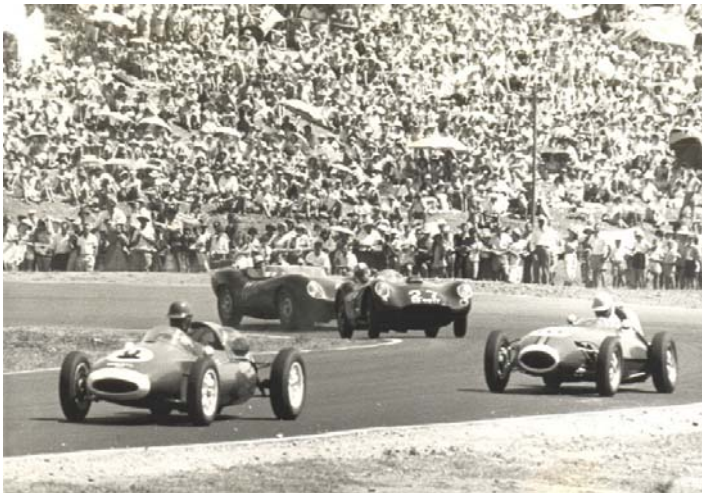
TONY MAGGS, who died on 2 June 2009, was South Africa's first Grand Prix ace, earning two second places in the French GPs of 1962 and 1963, two consecutive victories in the Kyalami nine-hour sharing with David Piper, and a number of top-six sportscar finishes including at Le Mans and Sebring.

But very few living in the remote Hemel-en-Aarde (Heaven and Earth) valley, not far from the Robertson wine district would have realised that the man behind the wheel of the silver Toyota bakkie was once his country's top Formula One driver. More than that, his career quickly scaled great heights, from his first race behind the wheel of an Austin Healey in Cape Town to a works F1 Cooper drive – one of the top three teams of the time – just four years later.

Then Maggs disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived on the international scene, preferring life as a farmer and conservationist to the limelight of a F1 star. After a disastrous season in the uncompetitive Centrosud BRM team in 1964, he moved back to South Africa where, following a bad crash at Pietermaritzburg's Roy Hesketh circuit the following year, he left the sport behind for good.

It was, however, a career that might never have been at all.

Anthony Francis O'Connell Maggs had been born in Pretoria into a military family. His father, Colonel Eugene Maggs, who had had a distinguished war record notably in the Italian campaign, had expected his son to follow family tradition. However, the racing bug bit after he bought a 'Riley 9' for £60, at a time when he was working as a 'learner-farmer' for £10 per month. His grandmother later helped him purchase the aforementioned Austin-Healey 100/6. But he realised that given the South African racing handicap system, "the better you went, the more you got handicapped" and he decided, much against his father's wishes, to go overseas. After some good results in a second-hand Lotus 11 raced on a shoestring budget funded partly by delivering second-hand cars around Britain, he bought a Tojeiro-Jaguar '7GNO' from Ecurie Ecosse and shipped it back to South Africa, using the car in the 1960 SA Grand Prix, a race won by Paul Frere's Cooper-Climax from Stirling Moss' Cooper-Borgward. The Tojeiro, which was



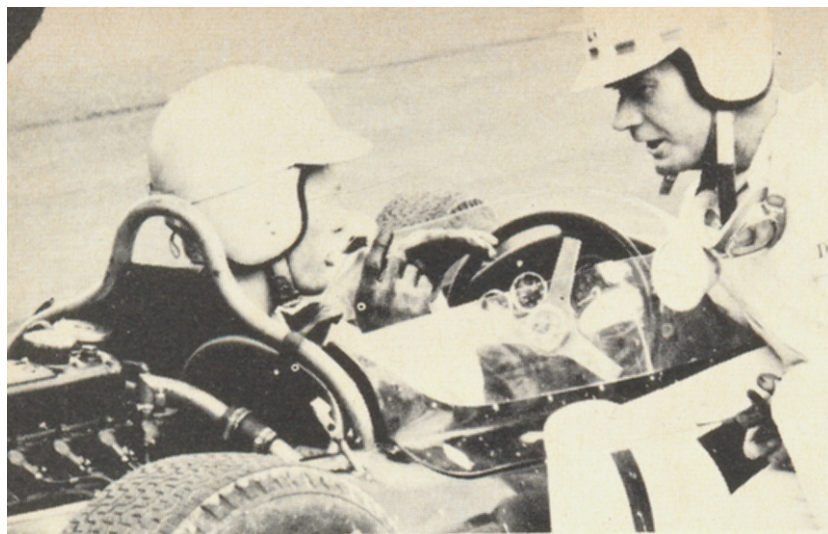
equipped with a De Dion back axle and inboard discs, 'got so hot to drive that the seals in the diff would leak oil onto the discs. Every time you touched the brakes, the fumes would be sucked into the cockpit making it unbearable to drive.'

SA Grand Prix, 1960. Don Philp's Cooper leads Tony Kotze's Lotus, Eric Glasby's Tojeiro-Bristol and Tony Maggs in the Tojeiro-Jaguar. (Photo: Frank Hoal Collection)

The heat had other costs: 'I brought the car out by boat, and the car came out as unaccompanied baggage, and I drove it up from Cape Town to the Transvaal. At the time I was a fan of Chris Barber's Dixieland Band, which I had been introduced to by Sir John Whitmore who drove a Lotus Elite for Barber. However, the records which I had stowed in my luggage melted from the heat of the back-axle and discs, taking the form of the clothes.'

In 1960, he moved back to the UK to drive a Gemini Formula Junior and a F2 Cooper in which he drove to a second, third, fourth and the lap record at Snetterton in just five outings. On the strength of these performances he was invited by Ken Tyrrell to join his Formula Junior team with Rhodesian John Love as his team-mate.

As Maggs recalls, "This was a different time. With Tyrrell – quite a character who loved to stir, and one of whose favourite expressions was 'drivers, they're sh*t' – we drove the transporter, and fetched the engines from BMC in Birmingham by Mini van." There were plenty of off-track escapades too. "We once found ourselves at a shooting range in a fun-fair after the races in the Formula Juniors. John was quite a good shot and won a fluffy doll for shooting down the targets. Then he won another, and another. The owner got upset by this and would not let him continue after he had won three or four prizes after which an argument ensued. John then shot out the light of the stall. The event ended with the owner chasing and shooting at John who leapt onto the back of a man on a passing motorised bicycle to make his getaway!"



**The 'Tyrrell Twins': John Love and Tony Maggs, 1962.
(Photo: Courtesy Adri Bezuidenhout)**

During 1961 there were plenty of one-two finishes for the 'Tyrrell Twins' that year in a racing season that took them all over Europe. As Maggs recalls, "From the team's headquarters to the cars themselves, they were straightforward compared to the *highfalutin* stuff you see today. The hotels were probably the cheapest, but that seemed to be an acceptable part of racing then. We had no fancy illusions of our own importance." With wins in eight races at Goodwood, Magny-Cours, Monza, Karlskoga, Zandvoort, Oulton Park and Montlhéry, the 24-year old Maggs would share the European Formula Junior Championship with the Lotus of a Swiss ex-motorcyclist by the name of Jo Siffert.

Maggs said of the cars of the time that they "were very controllable. They would slide easily, and the Coopers were always very reliable. Some circuits were more demanding to drive than others. At Monaco, for example, I calculated that I made a gear-change every one-and-a-half seconds for two-and-a-quarter hours of racing. No-one ever spoke about safety, as it was the same for all of us. I don't want to appear hairy-chested about it, but danger was part of the challenge. The only circuit that tested my confidence was the old Spa. There were big drops on both sides, fast corners with the car skittering on the edge of traction, and in places houses right next to the track." Of the drivers: "Clark was smooth and very fast, taking a different line to the other drivers. He was inclined to go into corners tighter and slower, take a different apex, but come out faster and get a higher speed down the straight. Jack Brabham was tough – another John Love. He once nearly put me into a pedestrian bridge at Silverstone, but I got my own back on the Silverstone short-circuit by braking impossibly late and spinning him off." Before his death in 2005 from cancer, Love shared the sentiment about Clark, saying he was "the ultimate driver – though it is difficult," he added, "to know how he would do today with all the technology drivers have to deal with."

The Tyrrell Formula Junior Coopers suffered from a lack of horsepower when compared to the Lotus-Ford of main rival (and later Clark F1 team-mate) Trevor Taylor. As Maggs puts it: "At Reims, which was made up of long straights and a couple of corners, we were at a terrible disadvantage compared with Taylor's Lotus. Our BMC units had 88bhp, his Ford 104bhp, or 20% more. We simply weren't in it. We could only compete by slipstreaming the Lotus, so I went to Ken who agreed to stick a higher ratio in the gearbox so that we could keep up in the slipstream on the straights. Although I was quicker in some corners than Taylor, he could out-accelerate me. So the trick was to see who could outfumble each other as to who would come out of the last corner first." Despite the 1,100c engines, the FJs, Maggs recalls, could reach over 140mph on the long straights. After three heats at Reims, Taylor finished just 0.8secs ahead on aggregate.



Tony Maggs' fourth-place Cooper-Climax, SAGP, East London, 26 December 1961.
(Peter Little Collection)

Formula Juniors were a good grounding for a range of future stars: Hulme, Siffert, Lotus driver Peter Arundell, American Peter Revson (who was killed at Kyalami in a Shadow practising for the 1974 Grand Prix), Jochen Rindt and Clark all cut their teeth in the formula. Rhodesian Dave Riley and the South African farmer from Hekpoort, Trevor Blokdyk, would also both win FJ races in 1962 in their Coopers. (A former racing motorcyclist, Blokdyk was regarded as a real talent, though his career was cut short by a leg injury which meant he had to fashion a spring tied to a garter on his leg to pull his foot back. A bad crash also at Albi in the last race of the 1965 European F3 season reputedly cost him a Lotus F1 drive the following year. He would later race a Cooper T51-Maserati, a Cooper T53-Ford and Cooper T59-Alfa in the SA domestic F1 series until his retirement in 1969.)

Maggs' GP debut was in a privateer Lotus 18 owned by a wealthy American Louise Bryden-Brown in the 1961 British GP when he finished 13th. He also finished 11th in the German GP. He moved on to the Cooper F1 team for 1962, though continued to drive for Tyrrell in the Formula Juniors when his F1 commitments allowed, and also for the Midland Racing Partnership in their Lola Formula Two alongside Dickie Attwood.

Although Maggs and Love were very evenly matched, Tony believes he likely got the call from the Cooper F1 team on account of his age, being thirteen years younger than his Rhodesian team-mate. Maggs: "Tyrrell enjoyed a strong association obviously with Cooper. When Brabham left to do his own thing, Bruce McLaren moved up to be the number one driver, and I got the number two drive. There was not much difference between John and me in terms of driving capabilities. I was quicker on the faster tracks, and he was faster on the tricky, tight stuff. He was, however, a lot older than I was. And this might have had a lot to do with Cooper's selection." John Cooper confirmed this view in Adri Bezuidenhout's early biography of six-time SA Driver's Champion Love: "People always want to know why I chose Tony Maggs and not John Love for the Cooper Formula One team in 1962. Two factors influenced me in my decision to promote Tony and not John. Firstly, Tony was single and, secondly, he was younger. Even now I would hesitate to say who was the better driver, John or Tony. All other things being equal, there was not much between them."



Maggs did his time in sportscars before making the move to single-seaters. He drove an Aston Martin (pictured left at Oulton Park) as team-mate to Jim Clark.

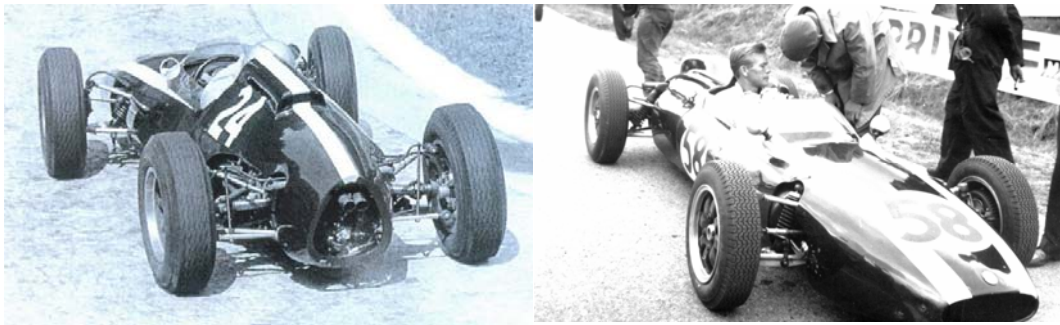
In addition to his two Nine-Hour victories with David Piper in 1963 and 1964, Maggs finished third in the 1965 Sebring 12-Hour (with Piper), and fourth in the Aston DBR1 in the

1963 Nurburgring 1000kms (with Cooper team-mate Bruce McLaren). His career also took in three Le Mans appearances, in an Aston-Martin DBR1 with Roy Salvadori in 1961 (retiring in the 19th hour when lying fourth), finishing sixth overall (and second in class) in 1964 in a Ferrari GTO with Innes Ireland, and in a flat-8 Porsche prototype with Swede Jo Bonnier in 1963 (they crashed out in the ninth hour). Maggs is pictured (right) in his Lotus XI-Climax at the April 1959 Goodwood BARC meeting. (Courtesy Tony Maggs)



He finished seventh overall in the World Championship in 1962 when racing for the factory Cooper team with 13 points (a year won by Graham Hill with 42 with Jimmy Clark second with 30), with the highlight being second at Rouen behind Dan Gurney's eight-cylinder Porsche. He raced again for Cooper in 1963, finishing eighth in the overall standings with nine points, the year the title race was dominated by Jimmy Clark. Replaced at Cooper by Phil Hill for 1964, he joined the privateer *Scuderia Centro Sud* BRM team, scoring just four points. "The team management was shambolic, the car poorly prepared and I think they still owe me money today. That car left me upside down in the sand at Zandvoort," Tony recalls in his characteristically humorous manner, a dry quip never far from his lips. Thereafter he returned to South Africa permanently, taking in one final GP race with Reg Parnell in a Lotus 25 in his home GP in 1965. He gave up the sport after a bad accident when a steering knuckle broke in the Willment Brabham BT10-Lotus at the Natal Winter Trophy held at Roy Hesketh in June 1965 in which a young spectator standing in a prohibited area lost his life.

Maggs' career also took in three Le Mans appearances, in an Aston-Martin DBR 1-300 with Roy Salvadori in 1961 (they dropped out in the 19th hour "after I managed to spin it through the Esses in practice without touching sides"), finishing sixth overall (and second in the 1500-3000cc GT class) in 1964 in a Ferrari GTO with Innes Ireland, and in a flat-8 Porsche prototype with Swede Jo Bonnier in 1963 (they crashed out in the ninth hour when a Ferrari blew-up in front of Jo on the Mulsanne, coating the windscreen with oil). Of the Astons, he says while 'they were quick in a straight line, their handling left a lot to be desired. They understeered like hell. You had to go into a corner and brake hard to get it sideways, and then give it a great boot full of throttle. If you could not get the back to break away, you just went straight on. There was not,' he says, 'much finesse involved.'



Maggs is pictured, left, in the 1962 Cooper F1 car (top left) and the 1963 version (top right). (Courtesy Tony Maggs)

Despite his success in sportscars, Maggs preferred single-seaters in which he achieved a great deal of success in just three short seasons, finishing second twice in the French GPs at the real driver's circuits of Rouen and Reims in 1962 and 1963. He also "hated Le Mans – almost all F1 drivers did." This was because "you could not drive the car flat out, and you were always running at 75% of your car and your capability. Like that it just gets bloody boring. I did it in the Aston, which was hopeless and the fuel tank split. It was quite an adventure with Innes Ireland in the Ferrari. The clutch was slipping like crazy – we could hardly get the thing out of the pits. Innes would drive it like hell. I would then spend my session trying to get it working again, only for Innes to thrash it again!"

Maggs: "Although you were not allowed to change any major components, there were plenty of tricks to getting cars to the finish at Le Mans, which the organisers

kept a close eye on: 'The mechanics would drop old parts into a bucket full of dirty water to cool it down, and would feel around in the bottom and pick up a new part which had earlier been put there.'

Maggs says the old Kyalami "was much more fun than Le Mans with its miles of straight." And, he adds, nine hours against 24 makes a big difference.' There were other antics in Southern Africa: "We did one race in Angola [in 1964] with David [Piper] in the GTO and LM. He asked me to drive the GTO but we only had long-distance, hard compound tyres. The track ran right through the middle of the town. When it started to rain the car became a real handful – so much so that I missed my braking and turned a whole block to late." Another year Johnnie [Love] went up in the D-type. When people crowded all around the car he blipped the throttle and collected a gendarme who slid right up to the windscreen." Even then, he recalls forty years later, "Angola was a wild place. We were not allowed more than ten kilometres outside Luanda."



Maggs in the V8-powered Lola GT shared with fellow South African Bob Olthoff, Nurburgring 1,000kms, 1963. They retired after a wheel came off 'with a musical tinkling noise as the well-polished knock-on wheel nut tried to overtake me'. (Photo: Courtesy Tony Maggs)

He also raced the Lola GT prototype (the forerunner of the emblematic Ford GT40), including with South African friend Bob Olthoff at the Nurburgring 1,000kms in May 1963, a circuit Maggs regards as his favourite and most challenging "by miles": "No circuit could hold a candle to it. A lot of the time, the car was airborne. There were trees, hedges, forests – and it could be raining in one part and dry in another, literally from corner to corner. You would 'drive' the circuit beforehand in a hire-car, probably a VW Beetle. At racing speeds, however, many more corners appeared."

Maggs eventually came back to South Africa as he had "enough of racing in Europe, and I wanted to pursue my great love in nature." It was not a way to get rich either. "Jimmy Clark told me that he calculated that his first World Championship was worth just £8,000 at the time, and then you had to deal with all the public events that went with it from the opening of supermarkets, giving speeches, and so on." In those days "You signed up with a fuel company from which you could make £3-4,000 annually to use their products in return for which they could use your name to promote them. Then you received a percentage of the start money and usually 50% of the prize money. We normally had to pay our own flights and hotels with the F1 team, though we sometimes got a bit of assistance with the long distance travel." Nonetheless, it was a special time. "There was tremendous closeness between the drivers. Jimmy Clark and Trevor Taylor might have been enemies on the track, but off the track we held fantastic parties and did other things such as going water-skiing together. There was a tremendous bond, not unlike the bond, I suppose, between World War Two fighter pilots."

"There was the time at Brands Hatch when [Lotus driver] Alan Stacey [killed at Spa in 1960 after being hit in the face by a bird] was chatting up a girl in the pit-lane, resting his artificial leg on the wheel of his car. Innes walked up and thrust a screwdriver into Alan's leg, which the girl did not know was false. She simply passed out!" Or there was the time at Reims "when we retreated to our usual bar where a few drinks developed into a food fight with pot-plants being tossed

about. The police were called, but in the meantime the mechanics responsible for much of the carnage had left. We pleaded ignorance, and the police departed. But they did not get too far. The mechanics had unscrewed their wheel nuts, and they only made it a few metres when their wheels fell off!"

Such 'highjinks' were perhaps unsurprising since motorsport then was a very dangerous activity, in which drivers were being killed virtually every race. "I remember racing with David Piper at Montlhéry in France, an old banked circuit. The problem," says Maggs, "was the banking had been designed for much slower speeds. We were coming though the banking so fast that we were sideways up there on the rough corrugations and then had to somehow get the car straightened out as we came off the banking at more than 140mph." Some were not so fortunate – or perhaps as skilled. During the same race at Montlhéry, "a lightweight E-type crashed in front of us killing the driver." But there were lighter moments. "David Piper, whom I raced with often, had a mechanic by the name of Fairfax 'Fax' Dunn. He had a very short fuse, but was quite a character. At one race, he emptied the bucket of soapy water he had been using to clean the windscreen between driver changes onto a French photographer replete with cameras and lenses who had been getting in his way!" He also relates racing in a rainstorm in the Sebring 12-hour with Piper in a Ferrari 250LM. Although they finally managed to finish third overall in a race won by Jim Hall's Chaparral, Maggs recalls having to open the door of the car round bends to allow the water out of the cockpit, otherwise "it flowed under your seat and over your head under acceleration and under your feet and into the dashboard under braking causing all manner of problems."

After his crash in the Brabham at Hesketh in which he injured his shoulder and suffered severe concussion, Maggs ran the family beef farm in the then Northern Transvaal before establishing a nature reserve on 5,000 hectares in the Soutpansberg where he stayed until a little over a decade ago.

In 1967 he was an unwitting passenger in a light aircraft accident, which exploded on impact. Tony managed to get out, but got badly burnt when he went back into the flames to pull out the other passengers.

Cancer claimed Tony Maggs in his seventy-second year. To the end, he was ever the softly-spoken gentleman, habitually avoiding the limelight. "We did not do it for all that rubbish," he gently recently admonished me over suggesting a tribute should be arranged for him, "it was for the racing you know." But as this author can confirm, he retained, too, a keen motorsport eye in his infrequent trips to the Killarney circuit outside Cape Town, offering some useful advice on the set-up to my historic Dulon Formula Ford at the Piper Series historic revival. He also complained that most of the cars were not being driven hard enough, a limit that he knew of only too well.

Dr Mills heads the Brenthurst Foundation in South Africa, dedicated to strengthening African economic performance. In his spare time he has authored five critically-acclaimed books on Southern African motorsport (all published by *Ecurie Zoo* in Johannesburg – voszoo@global.co.za – for the benefit of the Motor Racing Legends Fund), most recently *Paddy – Who? A Driver's Life of Bikes and Cars*.