

**Keysoe**

# TOPCATS DICE WITH DANGER FOR A HOBBY

by staff reporter JIM MATHIESON

TUCKED away in a yard surrounded by a small clump of trees of Hatch Lane, Keysoe, is a thriving, expanding business where the "directors" are paying to keep the company going instead of making a profit.

For their business — dicing with danger on England's stock-car and old-banger circuits—is their hobby. Money is a secondary consideration, I found, to the devotees of this dangerous sport.

The man and wife team behind the Keysoe Topcats, as they are known, are Mr. and Mrs. Edward William Cunnew, who live in a large caravan at the stock car stable in the woods.

Mr. Cunnew, a 49-year-old disabled ex-Service man, told me: "We eat, drink, live, and sleep stock cars. It is our hobby just as fishing, photography, clubbing, and so on are other people's hobbies."

"We have not made a penny out of it. Indeed, since my wife and I first became seriously interested in stock-car racing in 1961 we reckon our pleasure has cost us about £4,000. The team consists mainly of local drivers.

Among them are Mrs. Cunnew's only son, 24-year-old Edward Alan, who also lives at Keysoe; Pete Merries, of Astwood; Johnny Huckle, of Bedford Road, Wilstead; Roger Yarrow, of Rothwell; Phil Golder, of Ireland, near Sheffield; and Vic Cook, of Sandy.

## Expensive

In addition there are about a dozen other enthusiasts who spend most of their spare time at Mr. Cunnew's "stable".

Mr. Cunnew reckons that a stock car or banger driver has to fork out at least £120 a year to stay in business.

A camshaft for one of the souped-up cars costs about £25, and one at least is needed every season. Half-a-dozen sets of big ends and crankshafts, costing about £10 a set, about a dozen tyres, and a host of other essential items are required to maintain an efficient racing machine every year.

Mr. Cunnew readily admits that drivers might be able to break even if they were lucky enough to win races regularly but unfortunately the big prize money goes to the star drivers, he says.

Such is the £'s d of stock-car and banger racing that only the really top professional drivers can make a profit.

Cornwall, the Southern Counties, and the Midlands.

Of course they and the drivers get something out of it. For every driver in the Topcats team there is £3 10s. appearance payment to cover essential expenses. Some of the drivers have made more than £20 at an event. However, their income barely covers their outlay. Mr. Cunnew claims.

## Veteran

Although he is not a pioneer of the sport, Mr. Cunnew owns the oldest stock car in the country. This veteran of the stock-car circuits — affectionately called "The Tank" — is at present stabled at the Keysoe yard along with other "crash" victims.

The Topcats hope to expand their business. When I spoke to Mr. Cunnew this week he was preparing for a trip to a Midland "hot-rod" circuit.

He said: "We hope soon to introduce hot-rod cars in this area." Stock car, banger, or hot-rod enthusiast—they are all anxious to improve road safety.

"The way our cars are constructed and with the safety harnesses we employ some of the drivers could drive a vehicle at 50 miles an hour into a brick wall and come out without a scratch.

"This," said Mr. Cunnew, "is how confident we are about safety measures. It is indeed a pity that some conventional cars are not so well equipped."

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