

# LOOSE ..... FILLINGS

## GOOD VIBRATIONS

This is issue 40 of *Loose Fillings*, which started some 12 years ago to support the revival of the traditional motorcycle-engined racing car in Australia and beyond. During that time we have seen a wonderful array of cars return to the track, with a welcome - and very necessary - emphasis on restoration to original specification. *Loose Fillings* has the enjoyable distinction of being largely written by its readers, and of being read right across the world by enthusiasts for our sort of car.

## THE SHOCK OF THE NEW: THE FIRST AUSSIE COOPERS

By Graham Howard

When Coopers first appeared in Australian racing in early 1950, they were the first brand-new racing cars to run here after WW2. More than that, they were also startlingly different, a complete break with front-engine, beam-axle, wire-wheel tradition. They looked suspiciously fragile and their air-cooled engines and chain drives seem ed

utterly out of place. Yet from the outset their circuit times were better than all but the very fastest of our conventional racing cars, particularly on shorter circuits with lots of slow corners.

Mt Panorama was another story, with its long straights and sustained high-speed sections. Jack Saywell drove his Mk4 JAP 8/80 at five consecutive Mt Panorama meetings from Easter 1950. While he was

credited with a lap in a startling three minutes exactly in practice for the Easter 1951 meeting, a 3.10 lap at Easter 1950 and a 3.12 that October seem more realistic. Alf Barrett won an under 1500cc handicap in October 1951, driving Misha Ravdell's Mk4 Cooper Vincent; over the six laps his race time averaged 3.12.6 secs per lap.

From notes gathered over the years, it is interesting to see how established drivers from the early 1950s remembered their Cooper experiences.

In 1939 Jack Saywell, then in his late 20s, imported a 1936 3-litre Monoposto Alfa Romeo. It was the fastest car in Australia and the virtually inexperienced

Below: Alf Barrett, Bathurst, October 1951.  
Photo courtesy John Medley.



Saywell drove it well on their few appearances, before a chapter of accidents left it without its supercharged straight-8 engine. After the war he could have imported another pre-war GP car, as a number of other Australians did. Instead he took the daring step, for a competitive driver, of ordering a car from Keith Martin's first batch of Coopers, which arrived in January 1950, and Saywell's first appearance with his Cooper was at Easter Bathurst in 1950. He set fastest time in the under 1500cc handicap in October 1950 and won a three-lap scratch race at Easter 1951. A great photograph in the 1952 chapter of John Medley's Bathurst history (p.136) shows Saywell and the Cooper well sideways through the fast corners across the top of the mountain.

He had no reservations about the Cooper. "You'd look at it and laugh, but when you got in it was a real car." The Cooper was prepared by motorcycle legend Don Bain, then in partnership with Ron Kessing. Saywell recalled that Bain believed in starting a race with the motor cold. "All the other fellers would warm them up. Bain used to laugh at that. We'd push it out onto the line quite cold; they'd back me up 20 feet, push start it, hold it steady at 2000 rpm and start carefully. The others would be over the hump on Mountain Straight by the time we were around Hell corner, but we'd catch them... I used to pass Crouch on the straight at Bathurst; I think he might have been faster up the hill.

"The only trouble I had was staying in it. It used to hold the road so well, and on right-hand corners I used to bash my elbow, it would swell up like a football. One day I saw in a women's shop a pair of bust-enhancers, what they used to call

"gay deceivers." When I went into the shop I caused a bit of a stir - in those days men didn't go buying women's underclothes (these days of course women don't wear any). And then I told them I only wanted to buy one."

Alf Barrett and his 1932 2.3-litre Alfa Romeo Monza were Australia's fastest combination in the years either side of WW2, before Barrett, then aged 40, decided to retire in 1948. He was at Bathurst in October 1951 as a spectator when offered a drive in Misha Ravidell's Firth-prepared Mk4 Cooper Vincent, after Ravidell himself had been injured in a local road accident. Not having driven a racing car of any kind for more than a year, and with no experience whatever of a Cooper-style car, he won a six-lap under 1500cc handicap, and was well placed in the main event when he ran over a displaced sandbag and broke a driveshaft universal joint.

He vividly remembered the Cooper's vibration. "It was like driving a lawnmower - dreadful. You'd get out of it as if you'd been driving a lawn-mower." But everything else, compared to his beloved Alfa, was a revelation.

"The Cooper made my hair stand on end. It ran so straight, and it stopped straight. The brakes were like running into cotton wool. With the Alfa you always felt you were a foot off the ground, and it would get such dreadful brake tramp.

"The thing I noticed with the Cooper, it held on until all four wheels went together. You could go too far with the Alfa and cars like that, and they'd still hang on, The Cooper would just go snap.

"But that little Cooper - it just went straight, it stopped straight. So when I say the Alfa was good, it was good - until the Cooper."

Dick Cobden started his racing career in a perfectly stock MG TC at the outer-Sydney Marsden Park airstrip in 1947. He graduated to a special-bodied TC, prepared by Gordon Stewart and developed to be possibly the fastest unblown TC special of its time. He sold this car to David McKay in late 1951, and - almost on impulse, as he tells it - bought a 500cc Mk5 Cooper JAP. This was followed in 1953 by the ex-Stillwell Mk5 Cooper JAP 1100, with which he had a year of great racing at Mt Druitt against Jack Brabham's Mk4 Cooper Vincent. Their rivalry continued when Brabham bought the "Redex Special" Cooper Bristol and Cobden bought a supercharged 1½ - 2.0 litre V12 Ferrari. Tricky to drive and maintain, the Ferrari was his last racing car.

Cobden recalled that, having sold the special MG, he saw the pale blue 500cc Cooper on display (for 1300 pounds!) in John Crouch's tiny showroom in Woolloomooloo. "It was there in Crouch's window. I saw it there a few times and I thought to myself, "I think I can go faster." After the vintage design of the MG, Cobden clearly remembered the handling of this Cooper and its 1100cc successor. In an article in HSRCA's journal *The Oily Rag*, he said, "Both these cars were great to drive. They handled superbly and did everything you asked except (often) keep going." He later added, "You could throw them around a bit, and that was very much part of the scheme - it was the car and you; they did what you wanted them to do."

His Coopers were maintained by Gordon Stewart, who if necessary would consult speedway racer 'Chook' Hodgkiss. Cobden recalled it was very simple to change ratios, and that reliability was a problem: "It was pretty simple to change engines too."

The complex, contrary Ferrari was a different story: "I went from the Cooper, a car with no vices, to the Ferrari, which was a car full of vices."

Dick Cobden, an often under-rated driver, is still very much with us. Jack Saywell died in 1991, Alf Barrett died in 1998. Saywell's Mk4 Cooper is being restored with an 8/80 JAP by the Halliday family. The Cooper Alf Barrett drove has been restored by Garry Simkin to its original form, as owned by John Snow. Dick Cobden's 500cc Mk5 was fitted with a blown Vincent by Lex Davison, and is owned in this form by Neil Videan. His 1100cc car, later fitted with a Vincent engine, is owned by Rob Phillips.

Parramatta Park, 6 September 1952 saw close competition between the Coopers of Dick Cobden (#10), Bib Stillwell (#13) and Bill Shipway (#15). Photo courtesy Dick Cobden.



# KIEFT MYSTERIES IN NEW ZEALAND

By David McKinney

Once the Coopers came onto the 500 racing scene in 1947, they dominated the class of British (and Continental) events. JBS were the first to offer a consistent challenge, in 1950/51, followed in 1951/52 by Kieft. In the ensuing years Mackson, Arnott, Staride, Martin, Revis and others followed, but the sheer numbers of Coopers produced each year, and the attraction of top drivers to their winning pedigree, ensured their supremacy continued for as long as the formula ran. There were also literally scores of one-off and small-run cars, which came and went over the years.

Ten Mk1 Kiefts were built and sold in 1950/51, though none achieved anything startling in the way of results. The first five (the Mk1A prototype, three 1Bs and a 1C) were more or less similar, with the sort of round-nosed bodywork common to most 500s of the day. The remaining five, all Mk1Ds, were flatter-sided and with squarer noses, and were consequently referred to as the "coffin" cars.

The successful Kiefts were the swing-axle Mk2 designs as driven by Stirling Moss and Don Parker to many successes, but the two or even maybe three cars that went to New Zealand were earlier models.

Below: The Moore's two Kiefts outside the factory late in 1951.

Right: The car crashed by Ron Moore in the Lady Wigram Trophy meeting of 1952.

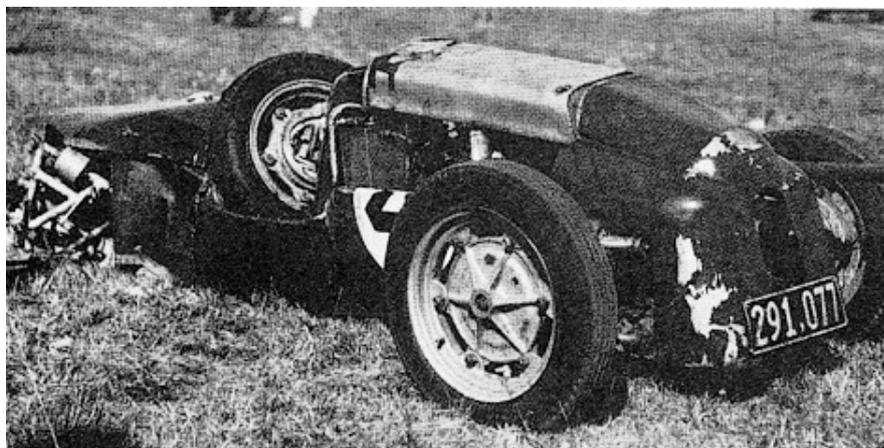
As we shall see, one of the swing-axle cars may have ended up there too, but if that rumour is true, the car seems never to have seen any competition after leaving the UK.

In 1951 eighteen-year-old Ronnie Moore from Christchurch, in England on one of the annual speedway-racing trips that would bring him the world title in 1954 and again in 1959, saw the two works Kiefts in action at Shelsley Walsh and bought them both. One would supposedly be for his own use in NZ, the other for his father. The cars he bought, although sometimes described as numbers CK50-2 and CK50-3, were actually Mk1B-1 and Mk1B-2, these numbers having been supplied to present owner Chris Read by the late Cyril Kieft. Either way, they were the second and third 500s built.

Before delivery to the Moores the factory lengthened their chassis from 7ft (2134mm) to 7ft 5in (2261mm) to take the supercharged 1000cc V-twin Vincent Black Lightning engines the cars were fitted with for *libre* racing in NZ, and were in other ways uprated to the latest factory spec.

The two cars never raced together in NZ during the 1952 season - or indeed ever. Les Moore gave one a tryout in an early-season grasstrack meeting, and a few weeks later Ron appeared at the Lady Wigram Trophy meeting.

On the basis of elapsed times in the heats, he started from the second row of the grid for the feature, and went straight into sixth place, only to spin and drop back. He was soon back up to eighth, but



on the 12th lap came across a three-car tangle and, with nowhere to go, rammed a big old sports Alfa. The black Kieft rolled, pinning its young driver underneath. He was very lucky to escape with burns from leaking fuel, but the car was wrecked.

Ironically the Alfa was owned by his father, who was driving a single-seater version, the famous ex-Nuvolari P3, in the event. Les Moore had won the big Wigram race with the Monoposto in 1951 and did so again this year.

The story goes that the father then raced the second of the family's Kiefts (Mk1B-2) while the remains of the original (Mk1B-1) pretty much stayed with it as a source of spare parts. At present they are being put back together by Chris Read - 60 years after the Wigram accident.

But I have a couple of problems with the accepted wisdom. First, although Les Moore raced a Kieft once in 1952, it could

have been Ron's car. One can understand him keeping the Alfa for the bigger races, but there were numerous small events on sand and grass tracks during the remainder of the season, events of a type he would support in later years, and he didn't appear in any of them. And when he did appear with a Kieft the following season, it was a coffin bodied car, like a Mk1D

So, did Les rebody his car? Why he would do so remains a mystery. Was it in fact a third car?

It would be several years before Ron's speedway commitments allowed him to race cars in England. But what he did do before that, together with some other speedway friends, was hire Brands Hatch during the week and run a series of informal races. Did he send one of his Mk1Bs to NZ and leave the other in England for his fun days at Brands Hatch? That could explain why Les did not race a Kieft for most of 1952 - there wasn't one available.

And it could also mean that the coffin-bodied car he raced after that was a third Mk1 - and not Mk1B-2 at all.

Against this suggestion that the two NZ cars arrived in the country at different times is the fact that at its first known appearance, at the beginning of the 1953 season, the square-sided car was registered 291.076, one digit off the Wigram wreck's 291.077, but it was numbered 291.077 thereafter. Both numbers must surely have been issued at the same time, so did Les's car sit unused for a year after all?

Les Moore died in 1960 and although Ron is still alive his last speedway accident was a serious one, and he can't remember anything before 1975. So perhaps we'll never know the answer to these intriguing questions.

Whatever Les's mount was in 1953 it was a fearsome beast, not lacking in speed (or noise!), but woefully short on reliability. Over the next four years the car was entered in ten major NZ races but failed to start seven of them, and retired in the other three - on the first lap of one race and the second of another.

In his first season Les went out of the

Top: Les Moore in the 'coffin car'.

Bottom: Ronnie Moore at Dunedin 1954. Note the new bodywork.



- The Moores were originally from Tasmania, where Les ran a Wall of Death act, before emigrating to NZ after the War. He was involved with speedway both as a rider and a promoter, and at a very early age son Ronnie was a star of the Aranui track in Christchurch.

- During 1950 500 driver Ken Gregory fancied the idea of building a 500 of his own. He was managing Stirling Moss at the time and they got together with Swiss-born engineer Ray Martin, assistant RAC competition manager Dean Delamont and John A Cooper, sports editor of *The Autocar*, and completed their design of a new car, utilising Martin's swing-axle rear-suspension. They presented their ideas to Cyril Kieft, who was enthusiastic, and the prototype was raced by Moss in 1951. Replicas went into production as the Kieft CK52, the earlier model having been the CK50.

- Max Fisher always believed that one of the Mk2s went to New Zealand around 1956. Owner was reputedly a Northern Irish school-teacher, a brother of Jim Mickle who would subsequently import the Cooper "jet car" (now Ian Garmey's Mk5 500) to NZ. Max followed up all sorts of leads, but never found the car, and it was certainly never raced in NZ. Some validity attaches to the tale as there was a Kieft in the family: Jim Mickle had raced an 1100 JAP-engined car in Ireland in 1955.

- The first Kieft went to Malaya, eventually becoming the Lim Special in Singapore.

Mairehau road race with engine trouble shortly after half-distance. At Wigram the engine went again in practice, and after repair (or replacement) gave further trouble in its heat and didn't start the Trophy race. Reports conflict as to whether or not it made it to practice at Ohakea – we think not, and it certainly didn't race.

The following year, 1954, brought the first international NZ Grand Prix at Ardmore, but the car didn't make the grid. At Wigram it was entered for Ron, but fell victim to clutch failure on the first lap of the race. With Les back behind the wheel, it suffered gearbox trouble in practice for Mairehau, and they retired in the race. Ron then had another go, at Dunedin, and went well in practice, but didn't start the race.

Intriguingly, at Dunedin, if not elsewhere, the car had curved-panel bodywork. Had it been fitted with a new body? Or was this in fact the repaired Wigram wreck?

After this we know that only one car appeared at the big meetings, so the question of whether Ron raced a different one does not arise again. And the Kieft that did race continued to regularly fail at this level. It retired in the 1500 preliminary at Mairehau in 1955, and was unable to start the main race. It was entered again at Ardmore and Wigram in 1956, but didn't start either race. In fact I don't think it made it to the more northerly venue at all.

Throughout this time though it showed well in short-track events where, it has to be said, the competition wasn't as tough. Les had it in third place in the South Island Beach Championship at Brighton in one of his first drives in it, but again didn't last

long, and a few weeks later broke the Tahuna Beach lap record before going out. Two weeks later a small race-meeting was run on a 1.6-mile road circuit at McCormack's Bay, just out of Christchurch, and the Kieft was a close second in its heat. It went on to win one of the handicaps and place second in the other, its ear-shattering exhaust bouncing off the surrounding hills.

By this time Ron had imported a MkV Cooper, which was fitted with the Vincent engine from the crashed Kieft, though without its supercharger, and Les tended to favour this when his son was away on the European cinders. But he did take the Kieft to FTD – and a new record – in the June 1954 Craigmore hillclimb, and the following season was second in one of the Tahuna races, though hampered in others by yet more engine troubles.

Between these last two events the car had crashed into a tree in a grasstrack race when the throttle jammed.

Whilst concentrating on the Cooper, Les kept the Kieft until some time in 1959. Two or three years before that Basil Campion had built a JAP-powered 500 special with which he was just about unbeatable in grass-track events around the Christchurch area. He bought its JAP engine from Les Moore and – here's the interesting part – the special used the rear end of a Kieft. The wreck or the runner?

The new owner of the (complete) Kieft was another speedway rider, Bruce Abernethy of Wellington, who had new bodywork made for the car, more reminiscent of a late-model Cooper. He ran it in a quarter-mile sprint in September 1959 but

couldn't get it going properly, and it broke down in practice for a hillclimb soon afterwards. Not deterred, he entered it for the national race meeting at Levin in November when, as had long been its habit, it failed to make the grid.

It was then put away until April 1961 when 'Abbo' conducted it to a very impressive fifth in the Houghton Bay hillclimb, a round in the national Gold Star championship. His times were considerably faster than those achieved by circuit-racing star Tony Shelly, who also drove the Kieft on the day.

Shelly took his life into his hands again at a Levin circuit meeting a week or so later, when the Kieft started in two races, spun in at least one, and finished neither.

The Kieft-Vincent then didn't officially appear again until July 1965, at a Levin sprint, when it was owned, I believe, by Frank Coutts, and was down to be driven by Lotus 7 driver Mid Beckett. It was a non-starter, and again at the Levin race meeting four months later. Beckett recalls Coutts saying the car was "undriveable", but says he never drove it himself.

It then disappeared until Wairarapa enthusiast Richard Wright acquired it from Russ Buckthought, former owner/driver of the Lestone Special (see Loose Fillings 34). Contrary to the general belief, Wright says it was Buckthought who had collected together the bits of the other car. "There wasn't very much - a few wheels, some suspension bits and that was about it," he recalls.

Wright ran it in a local hillclimb, a Levin sprint and a grasstrack race meeting



Taking the race numbers of other cars into account, this photo was taken at Levin in March 1962. I am sure it's the ex-Abernethy Kieft, and the only photo I've seen of it with an engine cover – or in this livery. It wasn't entered and, although I was at the meeting, I don't remember seeing it on track. It was owned at about that time by the late Bill Shiells, driver of the Lestone Special 500 half a dozen years before. He may have been a late entry – or maybe took the car to the meeting to display to potential buyers. If it is our car, it seems to have lost its paintwork (and the engine-cover) at some point over the next half-dozen years. DM

around 1969, using a Triumph 650 engine. He never had an engine-cover for it, and photographs show its appearance to have been similar to when Abernethy ran it eight years earlier.

In 1971 Wright sold the car – and the bits – to Lin Neilson of Dunedin, a well-known saloon driver who was interested in historic racing, which was just getting under way in NZ at that time. Neilson ran it in some 1981 events with a Norton engine, and once or twice with Vincent power the following season.

In June 1982 he was killed in a road accident and the car (and spares) were offered at auction by his estate, whence they passed to Chris Read (I was an unsuccessful bidder). He has got the complete car running again and is rapidly nearing completion of the other, with a new chassis and other necessary bits.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**For sale:** 1958 Scarab/Triumph 650, extensive NSW history. Triumph pre-unit 650 twin engine/gearbox, early Ralt rack and wheels. Total restoration 2008-9, excellent condition, with on-board electric starter system. New aluminium body panels, quick release steering wheel, new BTH magneto, new brakes and tyres, good range of new and used spares. Nothing to spend, ready to race. Asking \$19,500. Terry Perkins, 0265 835765 or trp62129@hotmail.com.

**For sale:** Waye 500, built in 1953, CAMS log book, JAP 500 dry-sump engine, Norton gearbox, roll bar fitted, new upholstery TT carburettor, Lucas magneto, eligible to run overhead cam Norton, ready to run, \$15,000 ono, Andrew Halliday 02 9888 6175.

**For sale:** 12 volt roller starting system to get your air-cooled car fired up. New and unused. Comes with jump-leads, starter cable and button and "hockey stick" jack to raise the other rear wheel. Garry, 02 9958 3935, or gjsimkin@iprimus.com.au.

**For sale:** Sidney Rudge, built mid-'50s by Len Sidney, 1938 4v Rudge 500, later JAP and Vincent. Ready to roll \$25,000, John Hazelden, 03 5968 402.5

**For sale:** Walkem Vincent, converted mid-'50s by the constructor from his original 1952 Walkem Manx. No engine has COD, \$20,000, call Paul Zahra on 0418 362 369 or z.oz@rocketmail.com.

**Wanted:** long 4 stud JAP barrel 160mm between faces for 8/80. Terry Wright 02 9418 2974 or tsrwright@gmail.com.

## BITS AND PIECES

- Checking the log book for his Robbins BSA, John Coffin discovered that since buying the car from Warwick Hanstead in June 2000 he has run the car at some 70 different events at 11 different venues since his first competition outing with it at Rob Roy in November 2000. The logbook shows the car has run at Rob Roy 35 times, Mt Tarrengower 10 times and Eddington quarter-mile sprints nine times

- Graham Hoinville points out that the story on Andy Menzies' front-drive 500 in Loose Fillings 39 gave the wrong date for the opening race meeting at Altona in 1953, The correct date was March 8, not March 18 as shown in the story. This explains how Menzies had a bit more time to repair the car after the Altona accident before its next appearance at Fishermens Bend on March 20-21. Since the Menzies 500 story appeared, Max Menzies has recalled his father also ran at Rob Roy before WW2 – on a speedway JAP motorcycle. With no gearbox and no brakes, stopping at the end of each run was apparently pretty interesting.

- The photo in LF39 of Kerry Horan's Trenberth Vincent at Goodwood was incorrectly credited to Dave Williamson, and was in fact taken by Kerry Smith.

- Alan "Toby" Hindes, who competed between 1960 and 1962 with a Vincent-powered Ralt, died on the NSW north coast in December, aged 86. He is survived by his wife Marie, daughter Lynne, son Alan, daughter in law Bronwyn, and grandson Matthew.

The Ralt was one of the small batch of late-1950s "kit" Ralts, and was bought semi-complete from Peter Wilkins. It was later sold to Todd Hamilton, who still owns it. Despite two seasons of frustrating engine problems with the car in single- and twin-cylinder forms, Toby recalled his Ralt years with enthusiasm and was a keen reader of *Loose Fillings*.

## HARTNETT WHEELS

Hartnett wheels, the cast-alloy 15-inch composite wheels from the failed Hartnett small car, were first used on an Australian competition car in 1953 by Andy Menzies' JAP-powered front-drive CMC 500. However, these wheels, with their integral 8-inch brake drums, later appeared on a number of other Australian specials, starting in 1956 with the neat Victorian-built front-engined Ford 10-powered car later known as the Gazelle, which also used

Hartnett front suspension and steering. At the end of the 1950s Hartnett wheels started to appear on a number of other Victorian-built cars. Garth Rhodes bought an entire Hartnett car to get its wheels for his Hireweld 500, and Hartnett wheels were also used on the Velocette-powered Linton 500 car built by Garth Rhodes and Don Ubergang, on the Vincent-powered car built in Melbourne by Ted Whiteford for Tamanian Lex Sternberg, and on the JAP-powered Kinnear 500. In addition, Hartnett wheels were used on an engine-less chassis, of unknown origin but clearly intended for motorcycle power, which is now owned by Darren Visser.

## THE LOG

- February 12 - Rob Roy hillclimb, John Coffin, Robbins BSA.
- February 25-26 – Wakefield Park historic races, Derry Greeneklee, Cooper Mk6 JAP 500; Andrew Halliday, Garry Simkin, Cooper Mk4 Vincent, Brian Simpson, Cooper Mk9 JAP 1100.
- March 8-11, Phillip Island historic races, Graeme Noonan Cooper Mk7 Norton.
- March 18 Mt Ku-ring-gai testing, Terry Wright, Walton-Special JAP.
- April 7-8, Mallala, David Reid, Duck Anderson Special; Derry Greeneklee, Cooper Mk 6 JAP 500; Brian Simpson, Cooper Mk9 JAP 1100.
- April 14-15, Hampton Downs NZ, Laurie Callender, JBS JAP 500; Max Rutherford JBS JAP 500; Arthur Hopkins Cooper Mk5 JAP 500; John Holdsworth, Cooper JAP 1100.
- April 24, Collingrove hillclimb, John Payne and Derry Greeneklee, Cooper JAP Mk 6.

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