

My 1964 Silver Cloud III engine fitted with the Multi-Spark

BEETLES, CLOUDS AND BRIGHT SPARKS!

By Chris Gannon

Several years ago whilst attending some long forgotten classic car show, I saw a demonstration of yet another 'wonder gadget' your engine could simply not do without.

It was amusing enough though, demonstrated with a 'Heath Robinson' type lash up, with several alternative spark plugs standing to attention in front of a large wooden arm. When the crowds dispersed I moved in for the next demonstration. From what I could hear a small 'cotton reel' like device, when placed in the circuit would cure all ills and increase your petrol economy to boot! Several of the faithful parted with their £45, and I moved on for the next stand dispensing 'the last polish you will ever buy!' Well, that was in the heady days of the 1980's when we all had more disposable income for our beloved vehicles. No doubt many of us have tucked away in some forgotten cupboard some wonder gizmo that we would rather our colleagues didn't know that we had been foolish enough to buy. My particular favourite was car polish. I have lost track of the vast amount of hard earned cash that I have supported the car polish industry with. Nowadays, various multi coloured encrusted tins line my garage walls as a testament to the powerful lure of the 'snake oil' cure.

I was with some curiosity then that I saw the same demonstration earlier on this year whilst attending the S.E. Volkswagen rally at Detling. Yes I do have other motoring interests apart from those products from Rolls and Royce. Although it is somewhat ironic to think that my Karmann Beetle convertible is now related by marriage to my 1964 Silver Cloud III and 1949 Silver Wraith! In the intervening years the demonstration had

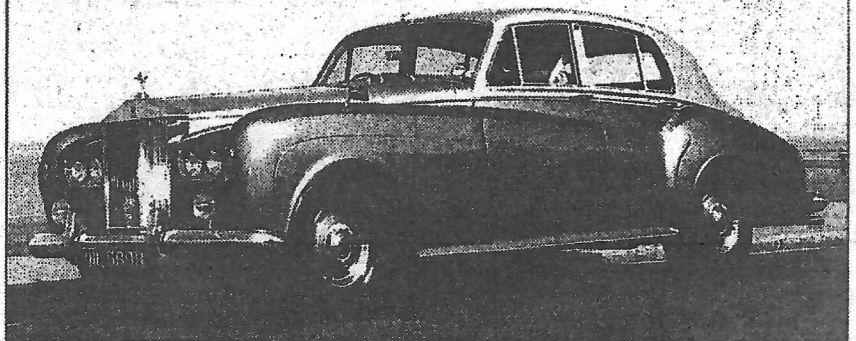
changed little. There was still the smart row of spark plugs and the curious 'cotton reel' like device, which by now had sprouted two high quality H.T. leads; one at either end. Whilst trying not to appear too interested I listened to the sales patter. (The Heath Robinson device sprang to life supplying a pulse to whichever spark plug was selected, all looked very normal until the 'cotton reel' was placed in circuit. Lo and behold, when in circuit the spark jumping the gap had increased from

I lingered to catch the small print - there wasn't any

one to five, I pulled back and paid more attention. Next, with the 'cotton reel' out of circuit a piece of paper was pulled through the gap - several neat little burn marks were imprinted staccato like onto the paper - so what, isn't that what is supposed to happen? I drew closer, by this time my curiosity had got the better of me. The 'cotton reel' was placed in circuit and the exercise repeated, this time the paper was not burned as the spark was

spread over a larger area. By this time I was more than a little confused, the sales patter continued, explaining that with the 'cotton reel' in circuit the pulse to the spark plug was divided, not amplified, and in so doing gives a wider area of 'burn' in the cylinder, this leads to better combustion without having to increase the voltage or current (great for old cars). I was starting to be impressed, with the divided pulse the efficiency and life of the spark plug is increased. With a more efficient spark there is a smoother more efficient fuel 'burn' in your engine; this results in more torque and more fuel efficiency, it was starting to sound too good to be true. I hung back to see just who stumped up the cash, to my surprise six out of the ten people there bought one (us Beetle owners are notoriously careful with money). I lingered to see the catch in the small print, there wasn't any. The unit was guaranteed for 10 years or 100,000 miles, and what's more if you didn't like it you could send it back within 60 days for a full refund, I was hooked, I stumped up the £30 (yes it is cheaper nowadays) and retired to explain to my wife Sarah how I had just spent the funds for our evening meal on a 'cotton reel' with two wires sticking out of it! All the

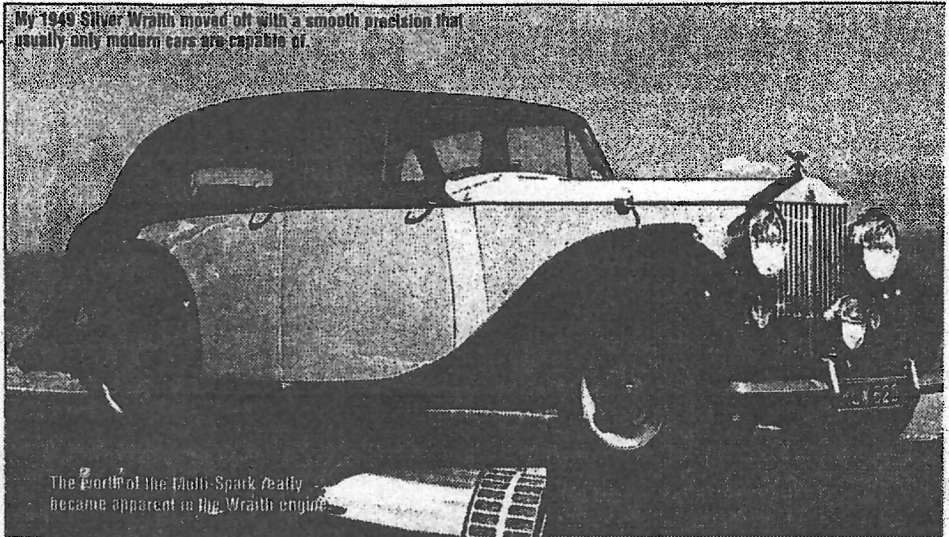
My 1964 Silver Cloud III now drives like liquid Mercury.



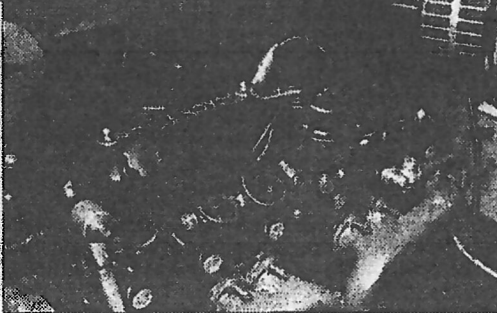
way home I mused on the fact that here was I the seasoned cynic, finally taken in by the entertaining display; and persuaded to part with my hard earned cash.

The next day I opened up the Cloud's bonnet, and proceeded to install the Multi-Spark. It fits between the coil and the distributor, replacing the original H.T. lead; installation took 2 minutes and no tools. The only proviso is that the longest of the two leads fits into the coil. With the bonnet still open I sat in the driver's seat, when a wave of foreboding hit me. This may be fine for lesser cars such as the Beetle, but what repercussions would occur with the mighty V8 of the Cloud? I bit the bullet, and turned the ignition on. No sparks, no terrifying noises, no explosions, for the first time ever the Cloud started first time - I nearly passed out with shock. Anybody with a passing interest in Cloud MkIII's must have heard of their legendary refusal to start. I remember Martin Sargeant telling me he had once moved a customer's Cloud from his car park to the workshop, and then spent a further 10-15 minutes trying to re-start it! So here I was sitting in my car which had started first time, and now was running smoother than it had ever done before. I thought I'd wake up and find it all a dream. After waiting for the oil to warm up I edged the cloud out onto the road, and drove off. Now, I am truly fortunate to own a truly superb Cloud, it has travelled less than 60,000 miles since new; and when Peter Sharman from Shadow Motors inspected it for me prior to

My 1949 Silver Wraith moved off with a smooth precision that usually only modern cars are capable of.



The worth of the Multi-Spark really became apparent in the Wraith engine.



same effect as the finest of tune-ups. We all know the feeling when we pick up our cars after a particularly good service, and so effective has the work been that you wonder if it is the same car.

After I recovered from my initial shock, I tried the unit in my other cars. The Beetle it seemed had gained an extra two cylinders so marked was the improvement - if anything more effective than on the Cloud. But it was

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purchase his comment was 'It drives like silk'. If it drove like silk then, it drives as if it were made of liquid Mercury now. All this time later I am still amazed at the magnitude of improvement this clever little gadget has wrought. As if the starting and revelatory smoothness were not enough, I was taken aback by the new instantaneous throttle response, and best of all, increased fuel efficiency. I have on a long run (Brugge and back with five adults on board) attained 16 miles to the gallon, as opposed to about 14 before. This alone would be worth the cost of the unit in these days when we all should do our bit to save energy. For me though, the addition of this unit to my car has had the

on the Silver Wraith that it's true worth became apparent. Installation was a bit more involved because I didn't want to cut the original H.T. lead. In the end I removed the lid on the Delco-Remy distributor, pulled out the lead to the coil, and then substituted this for the longer of the leads from the Multi-Spark (they screw out). I then removed the brass connector from the shorter lead and fed this into the top of the distributor, and replaced the top. A familiar sense of trepidation hit me as I sat in the driver's seat, this time the Silver Wraith started on the button; and when the engine had finally warmed up, drove off with a smooth precision that usually only modern cars are capable of.

You can tell from the tone of this article I have been mightily impressed with the Multi-Spark, so much so that I have equipped all of my cars with one. Currently there is no distributor for the S.E., however, I have negotiated a special discounted price for members direct with the British manufacturers. Having been so impressed with the Multi-Spark, I have arranged to distribute them to the club via my company. (see advert in this issue).

Naturally there are members who will balk at the thought of any addition to their cars, and their opinions hold just as much credence as my own. But from what I have experienced with these units I would urge you to try one and have a go. The units are guaranteed by the manufacturer for 10 years or 100,000 miles (how many part suppliers can boast that) along with a trial period of 60 days, after which if you don't like it just return it for a full refund. On most cars they are fitted in under 5 minutes with no modification or tools needed, and if you don't like it simply replace your existing H.T. lead. It does not harm your engine, it extends plug life, and by nature of the more efficient 'burn' in the engine, it lowers emissions. In my experience it saves on fuel, increases torque and allows the engine to operate noticeably more smoothly.

This article does not imply any endorsement by the R-R.E.C. or S.E. Section, and is solely my own opinion, although as a club I do feel that we have been unaware of this and some other exciting developments that have been shown at many other classic car shows. On visiting my parents last week I rushed over excitedly to their neighbour to tell him about the Multi-Spark (a hardened classic car enthusiast). He smiled and opened up the bonnet of his Triumph Vitesse. 'You mean this gizmo - I've been using one for over five years - marvellous isn't it!' - Need I say more...