

Donald Campbell and Milborne Port

Few people now remember that there is a link between Donald Campbell, the only man to hold the world land and water speed record simultaneously, and Milborne Port. Donald Campbell made his first (unsuccessful) attempt on the water speed record in August 1949. He eventually triumphed six years later, taking the jet-powered Bluebird to 202.32mph on Coniston Water. More records followed, reaching 260.35mph in May 1959. He then decided to try for the land speed record. This began his link with Milborne Port. Recognising the publicity this could offer, Bewsey Dyke wrote to Mr Campbell, offering to supply him with a pair of specially designed gloves for his record attempt. Campbell took the offer, explaining that while making the attempt he would have to select various switches on a congested instrument panel, and would prefer to wear a tight fitting leather glove similar to that issued by the RAF to their flying crews. Dyke's submitted several experimental pairs and after a period of trial, the chosen glove was of super-lightweight Cape Mordant leather, made piqué with ventilation holes at intervals down the back of the hand, and an elastic insertion to ensure a close fit at the wrist. These gloves gave the high degree of sensitivity and the firm grip required, as well as protection against any 'flash' burns which might occur during the high-speed bid.

In September 1960, the gloves were handed to Mr Campbell by Miss Joyce Fay, a piqué glove machinist, during a reception arranged at the Cafe Royal, London, to wish him and his team God-speed on their departure for the U.S.A. Other representatives of the firm present were Mr and Mrs Bewsey Dyke; Miss Beryl Dyke, director; Mr T H Baldwin, company Secretary; Mr R D Wellman, tannery manager; Mr R Gully, general foreman; Mr W Hinks, a cutter representing the male staff and Miss Peggy Thick, a machinist representing the female staff.

Campbell went to Salt Lake Flats in Utah. The trials initially went well, but on the sixth run he lost control at over 360 mph and crashed. A fractured skull and other injuries delayed his plan to break the land speed record. Once recovered, he went to Lake Eyre, in South Australia, where the vast dry bed of the salt lake offered a course of up to 20 miles. However, by May 1963, Lake Eyre was flooded causing the attempt to be abandoned.

Campbell returned to Australia in March 1964, taking the land speed record of 403.10 mph on 17 July. On 4 January 1967 he was killed in an attempt to take the water speed record over 300mph on Coniston Water. The wreckage of the last Bluebird, and Campbell's body, were not recovered until 2001. Donald Campbell was laid to rest at Hawkshead cemetery, Coniston.

The gloves that Silas Dyke's Glove Manufacturers had designed went on sale under the 'Chequered Flag' name and a pair can be seen in the Milborne Port Museum, complete with Donald Campbell's signature on the glove.

Dyke's had the distinction of being the oldest glove firm in the country still owned by the original family until 1976 when it was sold to the Glove Corporation. From then on the factory in North Street concentrated on sporting gloves but production was scaled back until it finally closed in 1984.

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