

'Call it MGA' is launched at the NEC October 2004

George Dutton

Our 50th anniversary celebrations commenced with the publication of 'Call it MGA', which was set for the end of September 2004 in time for the Christmas gift market. Thanks to the hard work of the authors the book was completed on time. Here in the UK, the classic car "season" ends in October with a massive show at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham and so we decided to use this venue to launch our anniversary book.

With the help of the MG Car Club, two MGA roadsters took centre stage on the Club stand against a backdrop of five large posters showing the story of the MGA. Throughout three day weekend the dedicated sales counter for MGA regalia was busy as more than 40 MGA owners came to say "hello". Also on sale we had the 50th anniversary gold grille badges newly arrived from Australia as well as models of the MGA.

The highlight of the weekend for the two owners, Russell Hudson and George Dutton was the visit of MGCC President Bill Wallis who posed for pictures and wished us luck with our events in 2005.



George Dutton with Bill Wallis (right) on the Club stand

Photo: Russell Hudson

'The MG Era' at Brooklands

Roger Martin

The first gathering of MGAs in England during the 50th Anniversary year took place at Brooklands, the first purpose built motor racing circuit in the world and the location of many of the racing successes that established M.G. as a successful sports car manufacturer in the 1930s.

2005 saw the biggest turnout of MGAs, yet, at the now annual 'MG Era' event, with fifty cars being present. Alan Feast brought his smart black Judson-supercharged roadster and Stuart Mumby undertook possibly the longest journey to bring his 1,840 cc MGB-engined car over 200 miles from Yorkshire.

Around lunchtime a call came over the PA system for MGA owners to volunteer to exercise their cars up the Test Hill. A number of cars then assembled at the foot of the hill, ready to be flagged off by the waiting Marshall. The key considerations for us drivers were 1) whether to stay in first gear or try to snatch second half way up, 2) how to avoid lift off on the brow of the hill and 3) remembering to achieve the requisite sharp right turn after the brow to avoid hitting the tree trunk barrier across the end of the track.

Needless to say, great fun was had by all.



MGAs assembled in front of the Club House

Photo: Colin Grant



Chris Alderson's coupe attempts the Test Hill

Photo: Roger Martin

Silverstone MGA 50 Trophy Race Gallery



Dennis Bron's coupe in the Paddock
Photo: Roger Martin



Martin Shaw's race car
Photo: Roger Martin



Barrie Carter's race car
Photo: Roger Martin



Mark Ellis' Twin Cam engine
Photo: Roger Martin



Mark Ellis passes Rob Innes-Ker down the Pit Straight
Photo: Colin Grant

1955 - L'Aventure Le Mans - 2005 Christian Lissot

“We shared a very special week”, according to Ton Maathuis, the President of Luxembourg MG Club, who joined our activities for the l'Aventure Le Mans. What unforgettable moments...

Monday 13th of June: The start at Abingdon (by George Dutton)

Our plan was to celebrate the launch of the MGA in June 1955 by re-enacting the journey taken by the 4 EX182 race cars from Abingdon to Le Mans following the exact route. Thanks to the help of the Abingdon Works Centre, we were able to assemble the convoy outside the offices of Central Television at the Business Park which now occupies the former M.G. factory site.

By 12 noon more than 30 MGAs were lined up for a photo shoot and live TV interviews. Two significant cars were in the front row, SRX210 the ex Le Mans race car and MBL867 the works rally car from 1955 now prepared to compete in the “Legends” race at Le Mans on the following Saturday. At the centre of the action were four men who worked in the Competitions Department at MG. Jim Cox, Cliff Bray and Gerald Wiffen were members of the Le Mans team in 1955, plus Brian Moylan who joined them in later years. Jim gave a very moving account of the 1955 tragic accident to the TV news reporter.



Steve Dixon and Jim Cox starting in 'MaBeL'
Photo: ????

Brain Moylan and I flagged off the cars heading for Folkestone and The Burlington Hotel, where the cars and race drivers met for a final briefing before crossing to Boulogne aboard the “Lord Warden”. None of the mechanics from 1955 could recall the exact route to Folkestone, so we followed the advice given in my 1956 “AA Road Book” with a few diversions to avoid the motorways.

This first day of the tour ended with dinner together at the Burlington. So far, so good we had

captured the spirit of 1955, tomorrow we will be off to France and the magic of the Le Mans 24 Race.

Tuesday 14th of June: Hucqueliers and Normandy routes



Hucqueliers Assembly
Photo: Christian Lissot

The assembly is set in a little village of Northern France, Hucqueliers, where our local organiser, Vincent Dransart, lives. We meet up with more than 40 MGAs that left Abingdon on Monday morning: The party includes MGA Register Chairman George Dutton, who didn't come empty handed, he gave each participant a rally plate, a T shirt and an embroidered cap, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Bob West and Steve Dixon. The lunch, taken in a little auberge in the centre of the village, is the opportunity to get to know each other and to practice English (for the frogs of course). But no time for rest: a long road is waiting for us along the route to Normandy. (Meanwhile some of the UK cars headed straight for Le Mans following the route taken in 1955 as detailed in the diary of Mrs Heather King, wife of the Team's doctor and reproduced in the book 'Call it MGA'.)

The first stop is to visit an old World War II V1 base, 100km south. This visit, given by one of the restorers of the site, allowed us to discover the functioning of the base, which permitted us to realize in the context of the Second World War, the awful efficiency of these flying bombs. After we got back to our cars, we continued the route towards Normandy with a superb viewpoint allowing us to see Honfleur. This compulsory stop allows us to visit the old part of the city and to enjoy a bit more of the warm day; but also to rest our ears after 300kms of buzzing!!

roads. Our total distance covered on the MGA.A.A. had been 4,345 km [2,604 miles]; we used 364 litres of 'super' fuel, which was 32 mpg. Doug Bailey's car used 25 litres of oil and 5 bottles of Wynns!

Many thanks to Mike, John and all the others for organising such a great adventure and to the support crews who were always there for us all.



*Free State Highway
Photo: John MacKenzie*

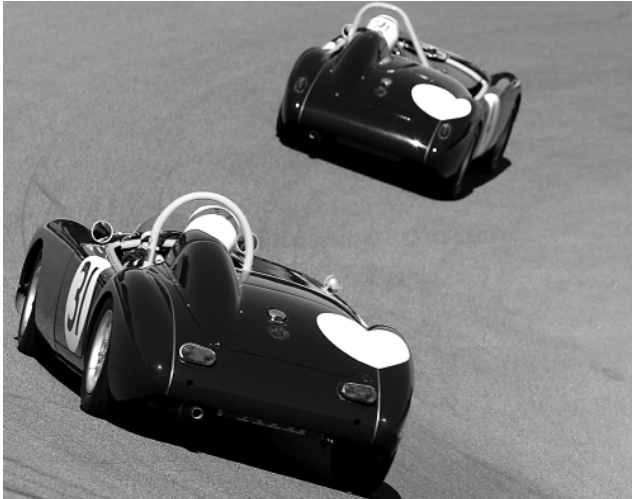


*Through the Karoo
Photo: Nick Parrott*



Finish at the Drostdy Hotel

We had an excellent practice on Friday in unbelievable weather. Friday night Jim took us to his favorite haunt, the Baja Cantina, a must see if you've ever in the Monterey area. The theme is racing, and the walls, ceiling and even bathrooms are covered with racing memorabilia. I really think Jim was trying to slow us down a bit as the margaritas were amazing. All of them!



*MGA race-cars at the Laguna Seca Raceway
Photo: courtesy Scott Brown, pictured*

Saturday morning and another day of incredible weather. We were out at 11:30 for our practice/qualifying session. Ed Lamantia and I qualified in "E Production" in almost identical MGAs. We were quite shocked that most of the grid wasn't in front of us for the race. The big race went off without a hitch...a few spins and offs but nothing (thankfully) major. I managed to sneak by Ed in his 1962 MGA Mk II (EX182 look alike) at the start, so we were nose to tail all race long. My best race all year. Jim Weissenborn had an all-British battle and finished in front of the E-Type not far behind us. What can I say; we held up the NAMGAR spirit and MGA's big birthday for all to cheer!

WATKINS GLEN 'COLLIER CUP' Bob Schoeplein

Forty MGs took the green flag for the start of the 51st annual all-MG Collier Brothers Memorial Race. At the checker, Dave Smith driving his 1962 MGA was the first MGA across the line and winner of NAMGAR's "Bucher-Decker Cup". The Collier Cup race is a highlight of the Southeast Vintage Racing Association Zippo Vintage Grand Prix, held the first September weekend each year at Watkins Glen, New York. Watkins Glen is the birthplace of sports car racing after World War II, the first race being held in 1948. This weekend is more than one of the largest vintage racing events each year in the US.

The town of Watkins Glen, four miles from the track, hosts a weeklong festival of racing, drawing many thousands of visitors. The race cars on Friday afternoon come down from the track to town, where they are greeted by wall-to-wall spectators on the 10-block long main street. The main street, Franklin Street, was part of the original 1948 6-mile long road course. The start and finish was in front of the County Court House. Today the race cars under police escort leave main street after two hours with the fans and take two laps of the old 6-mile road course before returning to the track.

The Collier Cup race this year was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the MGA, and MGAs were well represented in the field. Gridded at the start were Jerry Richards and Les Gonda in their monster MGB-GT V8s, followed by 3 MGBs and Jack Cassingham's super-fast MG midget. Dave Smith in the fourth row was gridded seventh. All race cars maintained their starting positions. As Dave Smith said after the race, "I was able to stay near Fred Danovitz's MGB until the late laps. Then Alan Tosler in his MGB closed, and we had a great two-lap dice for the seventh overall finishing position.



*Dave Smith takes the 'Bucher-Decker Cup'
Photo: ??????????*

At the flag, our two cars were less than six feet apart after more than 20 race miles." Smith beat Tosler for seventh place. Dave Smith also was first MGA, as Joe Tierno and Jim Holody in their fast MGAs could not catch him. Dave Smith continued, "When I approached Victory Circle, it was still a shock to see Jack Worhrle point me into Victory Lane. I pulled #49 in and shut it off. As soon as my helmet was off, somebody put a Zippo event hat on my head. At that moment, I realized that Rowdie Racing had put #49 in the winners' circle at Watkins Glen and that this victory would be a small footnote to all the great races and great drivers that had gone to Victory Circle here."



Gaisberg Hill Climb, Switzerland

Geoffrey Iley **Piers Hubbard**

Not long after John Thornley took over as General Manager he realised that he needed a second pair of hands as Deputy General Manager. Such a man was found in Geoffrey Iley who had been an apprentice at Wolseley. Geoffrey started in January 1955, with the responsibility of maintaining production. During our interview Geoffrey constantly mentioned John's attitude to work, that it had to be fun. Geoffrey was in charge of all day-to-day functions beside production itself, leaving John to concentrate on development, competition and keeping Longbridge away from Abingdon.

Geoffrey Iley related his own story to me.

Much earlier, in 1950, there was a chance to go on the first apprentice exchange between France and England. A lad from Austin and I went and we worked on the shop floor at Hotchkiss. We worked in the gear cutting section initially and that was next to the tool room. There was an old guy there, this was 1950, he must have been eighty, a very, very old chap with spectacles with lenses like milk bottle bottoms. We chatted to him in my terrible French and he told me that he had been involved in making the first six Hotchkiss prototype engines for Morris Motors, the Morris Cowley. Subsequently, Hotchkiss were supplying volume numbers and they had this factory at Courthouse Green, Coventry which they used as a base in the U.K. to produce engines for Morris. Subsequently Morris bought that factory and it became Morris Motors Engine Plant.

The impending launch of the MGA Twin Cam happened to coincide with John and Joanne Thornley's 25th wedding anniversary, so they were having a jolly in the U.S. culminating in a big party with the M.G. Car Club in New York where the car was being given its American announcement. I was left looking after the shop. Incidentally, I had

prepared for John and Joanne a very nice loving cup in glass, diamond point engraved with the M.G. octagon on one side and an owl, which was a thing that they were particularly fond of, on the other. I contrived to have it presented to them at the New York dinner but that is a side story. Meanwhile back at the ranch we were building cars and trying to prepare them for the impending launch at the press day. This was being held at the Army proving ground at Chobham where they had got a high-speed track. However, before we had enough cars ready for the press we discovered a most horrible thing. When they were fully run in, at speeds of 100 mph. plus, on about half the cars you got a very nasty engine vibration. I think the worst speed was around 108 mph and we didn't know what the hell to do about this. We got onto Engines Branch at Courthouse Green, Coventry; who said that they were balancing them as best they could so we rented an airfield at Grove, just off the road to Wantage. We had drivers working in twenty four hour shifts running them in and we then picked the good ones from the bad ones. Subsequently, it transpired that they needed a much higher standard of dynamic balance than Courthouse Green could do and was eventually resolved when they finally got a machine that could balance the clutch, flywheel and crank as an assembly. Until then, I think that they had been balancing them separately.

So the great day came when we had got enough cars for the Press Day, at Chobham. We had 'the great and the good' there, and the Morris Motors band playing selections from Gilbert and Sullivan and Poet and Peasant in the drinks tent. The idea was that you picked up a Twin Cam and did two or three laps, came in again and handed over to somebody else. I think we had about five or six cars, I cannot remember the exact number, and mechanics from

MGA Archaeology - MGA Twin Cam SRX210 chassis no. YD3/627/S Steve Dixon - in collaboration with Bob West

Research continues to establish with greater certainty the evolution of SRX210 from its believed 1955 Le Mans roots as an EX182 prototype. Much evidence has been assembled indicating that the body of the car is indeed that of LBL303, chassis EX182/40, the Ted Lund car at Le Mans 1955, just as the man himself always said.

Having said that, there are some caveats.

Firstly, any research and resulting evidence is potentially flawed. Opinions, facts, estimates and the like are all subject to later scrutiny which can always overturn them. Nothing is absolutely certain.

Secondly, when we talk of the body of SRX210 as if it is a single, integrated, unit we should remember that whilst it started life as the beautiful dark green-painted alloy body of the EX182 at Le Mans it was all downhill thereafter. At various times elements of it would have been replaced and repaired. As we see the body today, only the inner panels (the "tub") are original. Wings, doors, front shroud, hard top/rear shroud are all later additions. The nearside sill is steel. Even the vertical and horizontal elements of the front firewall are not original (occasioned by installation on a twin-cam chassis). The expression "EX182 body" must be seen in this light.



*Don Hayter reunited with SRX210
Photo: Piers Hubbard*

Chassis number - correction

The chassis number of this car was always YD3/627/S and not YD3-623 as stated in 'Call it MGA'. In fact, YD3-623 never existed but YD1-623 did and is a relatively standard car that still exists in South Africa.

The confusion seems to arise with the article that appeared in *Thoroughbred & Classic Cars* magazine in January 1975. This quotes the number as "YD3623 S". It may be, though, that the magazine was merely repeating erroneous information in the Twin Cam Group's Production Records list, which also made the same mistake.

Interestingly, the original log-book, showing the M.G. Car Company as the first registered owner on 3rd June 1959 (just 9 days before Le Mans) shows the chassis number as YD3/627/F (not /S).

The original chassis-plate and the Abingdon production records are clear that the number is YD3/627/S. In the records the /S is added in blue crayon after the sequentially-stamped number 627 on 3rd September 1958.

The official results from Le Mans for the three years 1959/60/61 show that the car had the chassis number YD3/627/S (although the "S" appears as "5" for 1959!).

The Swiss Keller car

A diary kept by Cliff Bray of the Abingdon Developments Dept. records that on 9th August 1958, he drove what he described as "the EX182" to Switzerland for a hillclimb at Gaisberg and a race at Zeltweg driven by Heinz Keller, B.M.C.'s Swiss agent. He was accompanied by Alec Hounslow driving PJB147, the Twin Cam demonstrator. They stayed for eight days and both cars were left in Switzerland. Exactly when or how the cars were returned is unknown. We know that PJB147 came back, of course, and must assume that "EX182" did as well.



The Keller car at Gaisberg in 1958

The car had the registration LBL304, seemingly another example of Abingdon's penchant for switching number plates if we are to believe the evidence that the car was, in fact, the body of EX182/40 as had been LBL303 at Le Mans.