



A-Antics



Looking For The Way To Go

Christmas Party Report
 Peter Brock's First Car
 MG's Death At Abingdon
 Mark's Golden Wrench Award



MICHIGAN CHAPTER OF NORTH AMERICAN MGA REGISTER

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History: The Chapter was established August 14, 1976. It was NAMGAR's first chapter. We are a low-key club, dedicated to the preservation and enjoyment of our MGAs. Anyone is welcome to join our chapter and they are asked to join NAMGAR as well.

Chapter Dues: \$25 annually (\$40 for printed newsletter)

Nickname: **Rowdies**

Motto: **People First!**

Rowdies Site:

<http://www.mg-cars.org.uk/michiganrowdies/>

MG Car Council Site: <http://www.mg-cars.org.uk/mgcouncil/>

NAMGAR Web Site: www.namgar.com

Past Chapter Chairpersons:

1976-1980	Bruce Nichols
1981-1982	Tom Latta
1983-1984	Dick Feight
1985-1988	Dave Smith
1989-1990	Dave Quinn
1991-1994	Mark Barnhart
1995-1995	Herb Maier
1996-1996	Tom Knoy
1997-1998	Neil Griffin
1999-2002	Bruce Nichols
2003-2004	Bob Sutton
2005-2008	Gordie Bird
2009-2015	Dave Quinn
2016-	Bill Weakley

Rowdies Website: Larry Pittman, Webmaster
<http://www.mg-cars.org.uk/michiganrowdies/>
 Larry Pitman's Database Report: 75 Active and Paid-Up Members

Deadline for submitting material for the next issue is: February 20, 2024

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Join over 2,000 enthusiastic owners in the restoration, preservation, and sheer enjoyment of driving an MGA, Magnette, or variant of this noble breed. You'll receive six bi-monthly issues of *MGA!*, our full-color, award winning magazine, invitations to National and Regional Get-Togethers throughout the U.S. and Canada, plus a knowledge base and support group second to none. All this for just \$37.50 per year (North America), or \$52.50 (International). **Get more information at <http://www.namgar.com>, or contact registrar@namgar.com.**





MEMBERS PAGE

Letters

Sad News Twice

We're sorry to announce that two long time mid-west members of NAMGAR group have recently passed away. **Laura Kurkowski** and her husband Jack are well known names in the Indiana Hoosiers. Her obituary reads:



Laura Mae Kurkowski, 76, of Mooresville, passed away on December 7, 2023. She was born in Indianapolis to the late John Root and Dorothy Berlin. Laura had a successful career as a realtor, broker and property developer. She enjoyed gardening, traveling and spending the winters in Florida. Laura loved spending time with her family most of all. She was preceded in death by her sister, Donna Root. Funeral services will be Friday, December 15, 2023 at 1:00 pm in Hampton-Gentry Funeral Home where friends may visit from 11:00 am until the time of service at 1:00 pm. Burial will follow in Maple Hill Cemetery. Survivors include

her loving husband, Jack Kurkowski; daughters, Melissa (Bryan) Sheets and Amanda (Daniel) Morris; grandchildren, Natalie Sheets, Mason Sheets, Levi Morris and Cooper Morris; niece, Erin Ann Root; great niece, Kaia Root.

Donna Finch and her husband Steve were members of the Rowdies and WDMGC for many years until retiring in South Carolina. Her obituary (*reprinted from WDMGC*) reads:

Donna Finch We were very saddened to learn the news that our friend and fellow member Donna Finch lost her 6-year battle with cancer on November 30th, 2023.

Donna and husband Steve joined the club in April 2016 and soon became a very positive force within it. Donna, using her skills as a CPA, served as our Treasurer from 2008 through 2010 and as our US Regalia Coordinator from 2010 through 2013. At the same time she supported husband Steve through his many club offices including Newsletter Editor, Webmaster, Events Coordinator, and finally as President. Their extraordinary service to the club



was recognized in 2019 when they were awarded Lifetime Membership. Donna was born in Japan 69 years ago, her father, who was serving in the US Army, having met her Japanese mother there when she was working in a PX. The family later moved to the US where her father continued his service.

Looking back on those years, Donna described herself as an "army brat", having to move schools some 14 times across several states, but spending most of her childhood in New Jersey. She and Steve met at a college dance 50 years ago and

they married 3-years later. In 2016 they decided to sell their house in White Lake and follow their dream of retiring to the Myrtle Beach area of South Carolina. There they could both follow their passion for golf and be able to drive top-down year-round in their '58 MGA and in their '74 MGB-GT should the weather be less clement. Sadly, it was just after they had committed to sell their Michigan home that Donna's cancer was diagnosed. Although her many and various treatments limited her ability to realize her golfing aspirations, she was nonetheless a true stoic and completed several very long trips with Steve Donna's returned to her country of birth, as mother's.



in their MGs. ashes will be her country of were her

Watkins Glen Mural

While working with artist Robert Gillespie on some artwork, he was kind enough to unveil his latest project with Chari & Dave Smith. The artist wrote - "I'm working on a 10' x 18' mural in the Watkins Glen Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center wall. It's a variation on my 'Queen Catherine



Cup 1952' featuring Denver Cornett (#7). Dave wrote back, "It is so cool, I wanted to share it with our MG Friends. At this time we are planning #49 Racing at the Glen in 2024".

Dave Smith & Bob Gillespie

Rowdie Regalia

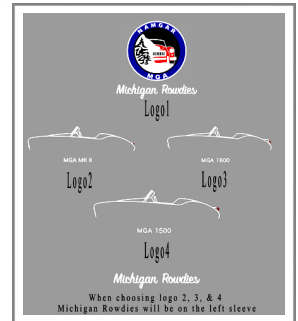
Bruce Mann writes in about our regalia:

With our new regalia webpage I'm not sure many of you have noticed that **we have brought back the T-shirts with the outline of the MGA 1500 1600 and Mark II on the chest left side and the Michigan Rowdies on the sleeve.**

If you go to the website and click on the T-shirts you will see there are four different logos you can pick logo 1,2,3 or 4.

#1 is the traditional logo and the other three are the cars. There are no additional charges for these. Just wanted to make you aware of it, because many of us liked those shirts in the past. I just ordered one, so I'll be the guinea pig. Oh by the way these are embroidered. No coupe yet, but I'm working on it. Check them out at Wagners Signs &Apparel

<https://rowdies.itemorder.com/shop/home/> or <https://www.mg-cars.org.uk/michiganrowdies/regalia.htm>



Rowdies!

Save the date for our first **Official Event of the New Year**. We take stock of the past and plan for the future (and put on a pound or two!) at our ***annual lunchtime Business Meeting***.

Sunday, February 18th, 2024

**At: Bruce and Willie Mann's
960 Denbar Court
White Lake, Michigan
(248) 866-0041
email: bwmann@att.net**

*Bring A Dish To
Pass &
Your Own Adult
Beverage*

Time: 12 Noon Socialize, 1 PM Lunch (pulled pork and chicken provided), 2 PM Business Meeting

We'd love to see ***all*** the members, hear their holiday stories and what everyone wants to do in the coming driving season. Newer members please come with your ***fresh ideas*** to help enliven and energize our 2024 driving season!

Safety Fast, everyone

*John Alexander
Meets Chair*





Chairman's Chatter

I am writing this between Christmas and New Year. The weather doesn't feel much like Christmas. Unfortunately, we had enough snow recently that the road crews paved the roads with salt. Now it has been foggy and raining for several days. By the time the rain stops, it will probably snow again, bringing new salt. I would be happy to drive my MGs year-round if it weren't for the salt. Back in the 60s and 70s, I drove MGs year-round, because that was the car I had to drive. It was a blast to drive in the snow.

I never really had a problem getting around unless the snow got much deeper than the bottom of the chassis. Otherwise, the balance of the car and the relatively skinny tires made my MGA or later my Midget pretty effective in snow. Of course, the MGA heater was somewhat lacking; make that a lot lacking. Of course, my recollection of the enjoyment is somewhat affected by the fact that I was a lot younger then. So far, the winter has been more rain than snow. Maybe there will be opportunities to drive during the winter. If global warming gets worse, we could be having driving events in January.

Now I have started on winter MG projects. All three MGs are up on jack stands. For the last couple years, I have been driving my A on a set of Kumho tires that are now 22 years old. I know this is a big no-no, but the tires have very few miles and look almost new. They drove fine with no vibrations even though they had no balance weights. They came on a set of nice 60-spoke wheels. They were on the 1600 I bought at an estate sale and subsequently sold to Phil Lyon. The car had apparently been garaged for many years. I finally gave in and bought new Michelin XZX tires from Coker Tire.

Interestingly, the tires were made in Serbia. I have my fingers crossed that they will be as good as a set of Michelins should be. I have stripped the wheels and am trying to decide whether to repaint or have them powder-coated. The paint is only chipped in a few places.

Once I get the new tires mounted, I will have them balanced using the cones that were donated to the club tool chest by Jerry Jesion. ***And that is a reminder to everyone, that the cones are available to any member who needs them.*** Also, anyone who wants one or more very nice, but old Kumho 165-15 tires, let me know. They would at least make good spares.

I've also started a project on my MGC to expand the fuse box. The existing system uses two fuses to cover

most of the electrical components. Over the years, I have added six electrically operated accessories, so the little fuse box was getting overloaded. I bought a compact, 12-fuse box. Dividing the circuits should make it easier to troubleshoot individual circuits. I located it right next to the old fuse block, so I don't have to rewire everything, just added a few short jumpers.

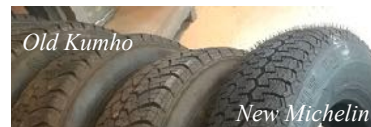
Another project in progress is shortening the seat belts on the A and C. All three of my MGs have retractable 3-point belts which were made for larger cars. On the MGs, the belts don't retract enough to keep them out of the way of the doors. I found a shoe repair shop that would shorten them for me. With that, I have several little projects going to keep me busy for a while, but there are more on the list.

We watched the Ferrari movie last night. I'm sure that I enjoyed it more than Mary Ellen. I really didn't know anything about Enzo Ferrari's personal life, nor the 1957 Mille Miglia that was the climactic event of the movie. There were a lot of period-correct looking cars. I have read that two authentic race cars were used in the film, one a Maserati and one a Ferrari. The rest were recreations built on a Caterham chassis with a supercharged four cylinder and an Italian-built body. The cars looked great, but I didn't hear the sound of a V-12 once in the film. That was a little surprising considering all the other efforts for authenticity.

Our annual business meeting is coming February 18th. In addition to reports and event planning, elections are on the agenda. If you have any interest in serving on the board, please contact one of the board members. We will also have a lot to discuss about GT-50. The GT will be a fun event for all. Yes, it will be a lot of work, but I'm sure we can do it and do it well. I don't think any group in NAMGAR has more experience putting on a GT than the Rowdies and we have a great chairman for it. Please come to the meeting if you can.

This is your club, and this is a chance to have your say.

Chairman Bill



My First Car

Peter Brock

Reprinted from *Classic Motorsports* from September 2017 issue
(Submitted by Dave Smith)



Classic design never fades. It may take some time for that truth to sink in, 'specially if you're a 14-year-old kid searching for his first set of wheels. But scoring your dream and getting it right the first time is something that stays with you forever, because there's no room for compromise after that.

My first car was a '49 MG TC. It set an aesthetic standard that introduced me to a world of fine automobiles, incredibly interesting people, and a design ethic that would affect and influence the rest of my life. My TC didn't run when I bought it because it had a blown engine that made the price affordable. Its condition hardly mattered—just that I'd somehow managed to acquire it.

There was nothing in the world as beautiful or more important than the mechanical freedom that I knew it would someday deliver. I wouldn't drive it on the street

until I was 16, but just having it to study and work on was an incredibly satisfying experience.

Its mere presence in my life became a silent introduction to a welcoming community with common interests. My new mentors graciously overlooked my age and mechanical naiveté, sharing their knowledge and considerable skills to help me learn and make my car run.

That static interim also gave me an unexpected gift: the many hours of silent contemplation that allowed me to absorb and mentally replay every line and mechanical detail of my TC by just closing my eyes. Its perfect stance and proportions, even though I had no idea then what those terms meant, imprinted themselves in my mind's eye and provided a solid foundation for every design I've evaluated or created since.

Even though MG TCs were the only variants of that famed marque when they first became available in America, their classic lines provided an elegant aesthetic anchor from which I judged a whole new world of wheels. (Later, the iconic lines of a beautifully crafted Ford '32 hotrod served as a similar reference point in that separate, wonderful world of hand-built cars.)

I knew absolutely nothing about cars at the time, but I was lucky enough to have a next-door neighbor who owned and raced an MG. Just seeing and hearing it for the first time was a revelation. Its tall, 19-inch wire wheels and sweeping, full-fendered lines, combined with the ripping cadence of its race-prepped engine when it fired up, were instantly imbedded in my psyche. I'd never seen or heard anything like it, but knew instantly that I wanted more.

Eventually there were great rides through the twisting, tree-lined back roads of Marin County. There were fast, cross-country caravans with other racers to events that really opened my eyes to a world I never knew existed. I couldn't get enough then, and still can't; fine automobiles became a way of life for me that persists to this day.

I had no idea then that MG had previously built a PA or the handsome, supercharged TA before the war. I also didn't know that still more beautifully designed and built SS Jags, Rileys and ERAs—and the supremely proportioned Vanden Plas Squire—even existed. There was so much to learn!

I was so disappointed when I saw my first MG TD. How could they possibly compromise the TC's handsome lines?

That's when a stopwatch gave me a whole new understanding of the importance of improved engineering. My previous standard of exterior beauty was only part of the total package. Better brakes, steering and suspension provided safer speed and extra comfort.

The TD, with its softer lines, was the transition to the handsome new TF, which somehow comfortably combined the TC's classic prewar appearance with the future. The realities of cost, production and changing priorities in a constantly changing market all combined to affect design and taste.

That all changed with the MGA, of course, which marked the emergence of a whole new era of English design. Aerodynamics had become an important factor. The T era had passed. The MGA was a better-engineered car in almost every way—except it didn't have that exceptional, stunning quality of design that the TC etched in my mind. First impressions teach and affect your life forever. car in almost every way—except it didn't have that exceptional, stunning quality of design that the TC etched in my mind. First impressions teach and affect your life forever.

Christmas Comes But Once A Year

The title above is indeed true. But the good news is that it came recently, AND it was officially declared that ALL of the Rowdies (even that occasionally Grinchy 'ol Dave Quinn) were declared to be NICE! I know for a fact that more than one of the group were anxiously waiting to see if they would be up to the standards to qualify for the NICE list, and I was happy when Santa sent me his final choice of names. In my official role as newsletter editor and reporter I am the sole communicator with Santa about the results of his list, and I breathed a sigh of relief when he sent me the final corrected copy. I declared everyone at the annual Rowdie Christmas Party at Chelsea Depot December 3rd to be eligible to receive gifts from under the tree and



announced it to the group. Youngsters all the way up to nonagenarians were reportedly pleased with the result.

With that important bit of business out of the way, socializing among the group commenced with good cheer, and cries of "Ho, Ho, Ho," could be heard ringing out from all 4 corners of the old railway depot. Our hosts, John Alexander, Carolyn King, and Kevin & Norma Peck started bringing in loads of tasty appetizers along with our catered buffet meal for everyone to enjoy. Stockings were not hung everywhere, but tables and chairs had been set for the festive occasion and I have it on good authority that not one person was left hungry by the end of the meal. With that accomplished, it was time to pass out the numbers to be used to determine the order of choosing the surprise gifts. The rules of encounter

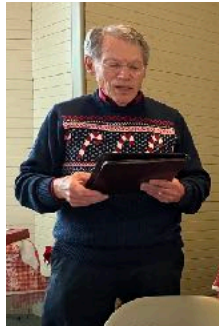




were presented to all by our Chairman Bill Weakley. Any gifts that were already drawn when a new number was pulled could be “stolen” away from the recipient once, but then the “victim” of the “theft” must draw another surprise gift from under the tree. In this way “spirited” exchange of various gifts could occur without the fun going on forever, and without the threat of possible behavior qualifying anyone for the dreaded *Spiral Jack Shaft Award for Unsocial Behavior* (cont. next page).



Chairman Bill





Spiral Jack Shaft Award for Unsocial Behavior



Larry Pittman, our GT-50 Chairman 2025



This book made the rounds



Phil Lyon



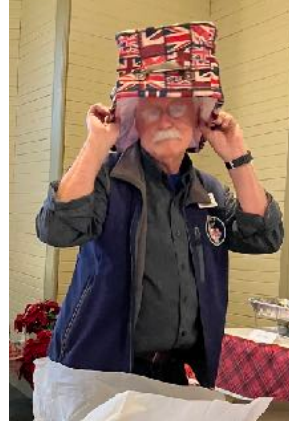
Wow, A full box of bubble wrap

Several gift items made the rounds more than once before the day was over, but it was all fair play with non-Rowdie like behavior by all. Donna Quinn received a year's supply of bubble wrap, Gary Cunningham drew some Michigan brewed libation, Mary Ellen Weakley drew a battle scarred British flag which prompted a reflex salute from our home-grown British member Phil Wiltshire, Carolyn King drew a matched set of "Mr & Mrs Frosty the Snow-person", Curt Smith won a portable traveling Margherita Mix Pack in case he gets thirsty while driving, Gigi Somers won a hand made self-portrait of "Ol St Nick" himself, Stephanie Smith received a hybrid British/American flag pillow solidifying the bond between our MGs and the Queen mother country, Tom Borden drew a pair of British Pantaloons 6-sizes too big for him, Kathy Nelson had to draw 3 times before she ended with a table

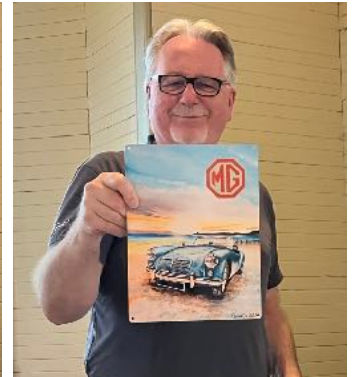
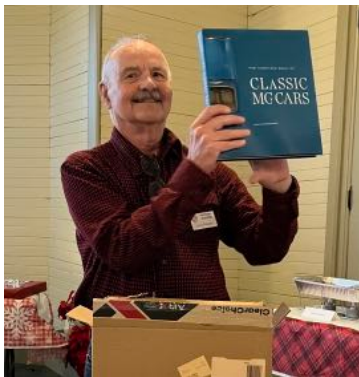


I need 4 volunteers to come help me drink this





top winter decoration, Leslie Johnson received matching placemats, John Alexander picked out a lovely Spring bonnet that could also be used to water the horses that you may need to tow your MGA home with when it breaks down, and Jeff Smith with matching MG shirt and cap. The book 'Classic MG Cars' had 3 or 4 owners before settling down, Deb Smith picked a table runner, and numerous other prizes were manipulated between multiple owners (see pictures). We also learned that the NAMGAR leadership has changed, and Bruce Mann is the new Chairman of NAMGAR. That means that, once again, Larry Pittman has graciously volunteered to take over as Chairman of the Rowdies GT50 in





Our fabulous hosts: John Alexander, Carolyn King, and Norma and Kevin Peck

Traverse City, as well as continue to help NAMGAR. Way to go Rowdies!

Fortunately no one received the infamous “Lump of Coal” award from Santa, but there was a special award given to Mark Barnhart, sent from Joe Tierno for Mark's work crewing for Joe and MGA #029, (the original Bucher MGA that won the Collier race in 1958). This is the ‘Golden Wrench Award’, also given previously to Dave Smith at Lime Rock, and others. (See Joe’s comments below) Meanwhile, thank our team of wonderful hosts for another fantastic Christmas Party for all of us!

Ken Nelson

(Pictures by Mary Ellen Weakley, Ken Nelson)

Mark Barnhart Receives ‘Golden Wrench’ Award

Joe Tierno took the opportunity to present a special award to Mark Barnhart at the Christmas Party. He wrote:

“You know my story well. A young boy, ten years of age sitting astride his bicycle in front of a small grocery store at the corner of Tompkins St. and Conklin Avenue in Binghamton, N.Y. has a life-changing moment. An XK-120 Jaguar towing a small trailer makes a gentle left turn then powers away in a sound as smooth as silk. It was my Norman Rockwell moment. A few weeks later, on September 20th, 1952, my life changed forever.

I was unprepared that day at Watkins Glen, N.Y. by the sight and sound of racing cars pounding down Franklin St. then making a right turn and roaring uphill in a giant wave of screaming engines echoing off the trees. We have all had moments that changed our lives forever, haven't we? I tell you all this to explain to you and the others in attendance why racing is so important to me and how thankful I am to have had you and others help me along the way. One of your greatest qualities is your humility, especially when helping others. You have a vast range of skills but never once did you make me feel a lesser person because I didn't. That was always very important to me.

What is it about the Michigan Rowdies? All I can see are passionate, knowledgeable, and talented people. Take, for example, Dave Quinn. He is also smitten with 029 having written an article and made a painting that has been hanging in my home for many years. Most recently, Dave Smith commissioned a painting of him and me memorializing the race between Bob Bucher and Sherm Decker from 1958. That is why you are receiving this token of appreciation. In closing all I can say is thank you in a way that is tangible and heartfelt.”



Traditional Death

by Dennis M. Urner

As owner of both an MGA and an Austin Healey Sprite, I have often suffered the charms of my vehicles: erratic Lucas electrical system, leaking hydraulics, the omnipresent oil leaks. Not peculiar to MG models, all the marques that eventually became British Leyland were prone to the same maladies. How is it, I have often wondered, that vehicles steeped in the racing tradition (Le Mans winners, vehicles with sleek lines that reminded one of the romance of the RAF) could have been so haphazardly built? Some ten years ago, I had the opportunity to find out first hand.

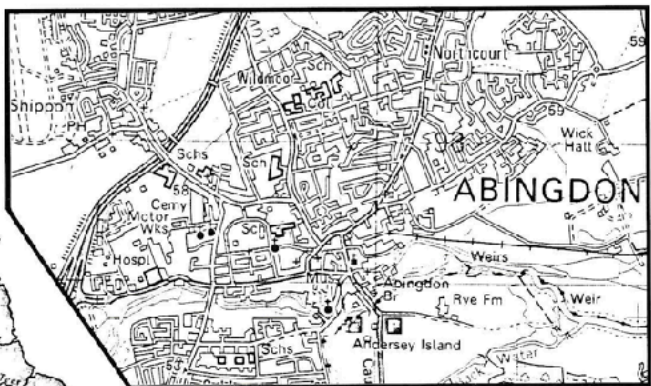
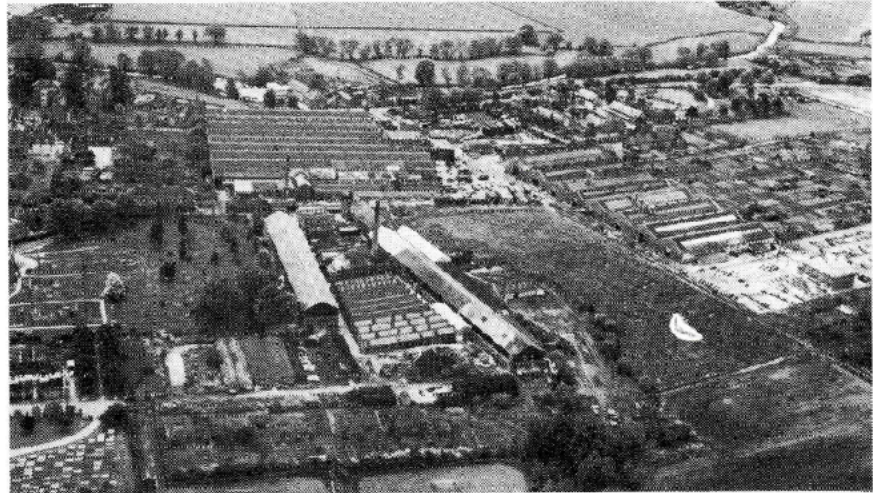
In the spring of 1978 I was attending the London School of Business under a joint program with the Wharton School's Executive MBA Program. Our focus (and *raison de etre*) at LSF, was a study of European, particularly British, business and manufacturing methods; in contrast to the American counterparts with which we were so familiar. Not to be mired in academic discussion, and to the Midlands, for an in-depth tour of a typical British manufacturing facility: the MG plant at Abingdon. At this time the MG plant was part of the conglomerate British Leyland, which had absorbed many of the marques under its umbrella.

We arrived at Abingdon on a rather typical dreary, overcast English day. As we pulled into the parking lot, we surveyed the long low, two-story brick buildings, rather like New England garment mills. We learned that they had been built to produce tanks during the Great War of 1914-1918. The British had kept them in production ever since.

As we disembarked, and entered the plant manager's conference room, trucks much like NU-CAR carriers pulled up, carrying body shells for Midgets and MGB's. Unloaded unceremoniously, they were lifted by crane to the second floor. Inside, as we settled down, we became aware of furtive glances from the plant directors, and whispered comments about keeping the "Yanks" away from certain parts of the plant. Amused, we wondered if there might be a new model, or some fascinating manufacturing techniques, awaiting us. Our curiosity was piqued.

All tours, of course begin with a discussion, and question and answer period. During ours we learned some of the history of the MG; the development of the 4-cylinder engine as a tractor engine in the thirties, and how it remained virtually unchanged through the decades. We were soon to learn how many other things remained unchanged.

This article comes from an earlier MGA! magazine. It helps explain the slow, painful, and unnecessary death of MG sports cars in America.



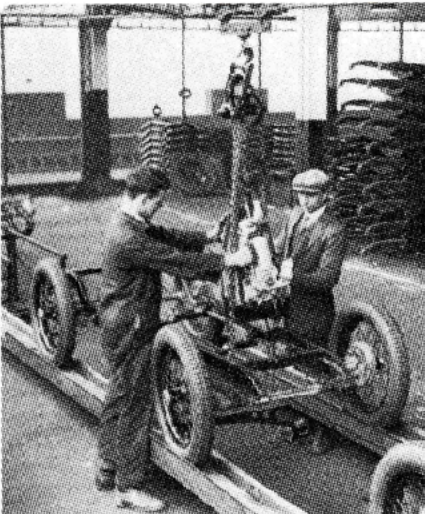
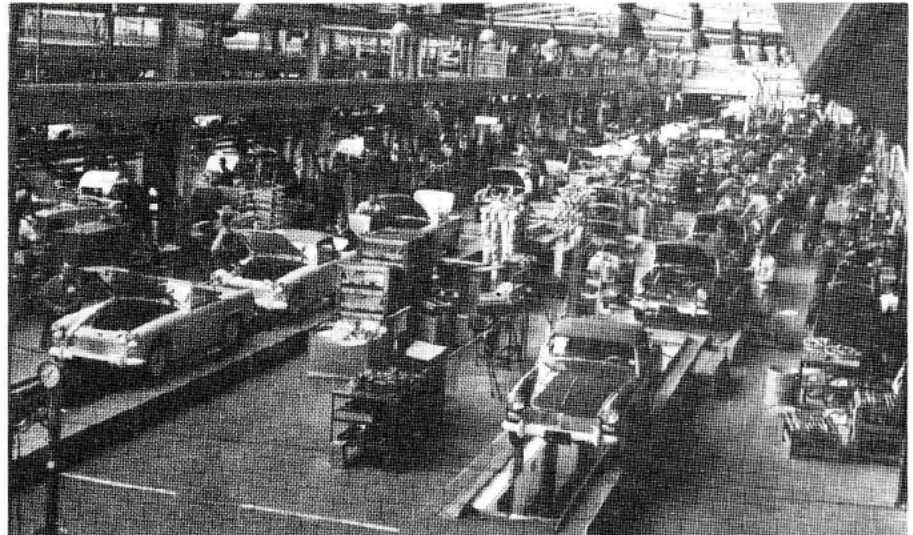
British fashion: they did business with Lucas, and Lucas only, because that was the way it had always been done.

Attempting to explain the sole source philosophy, the spokesperson told us of a recent problem with their windshield manufacturer. Because of a strike, the manufacturer, also a sole source, had been unable to meet delivery schedules. Pressed to meet its own production deadlines, the MG plant had sought another supplier, outside the U.K., in Belgium. The supplier was not only able to meet production schedules and quotas, but was producing a superior quality product. It seemed to us that now that an alternative source of supply had been found there was no reason for the sole source philosophy, at least for this product. When the strike was settled at the U.K. plant, they would have two suppliers. Not so, we found out. The strike was settled, but the plant remained with the new supplier alone. Sole source remained!

Some of us had experience with British Leyland products, particularly MG's, from our younger days. Now that we had all achieved a degree of experience in the business and manufacturing world; we were particularly interested in things like the longevity of the relationship with Lucas electrical systems. There was tacit agreement that none of us would have tolerated the apparent quality control failures in our own organizations. The reply, however, came back in a typically unabashed

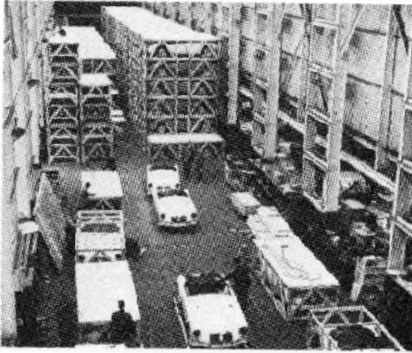


Our hosts indicated that the time for the tour had begun, and we proceeded upstairs, to watch the beginning of the "assembly line". I had seen automobile manufacturing lines before, but this one was unique: no bodies hung on automatic conveyers, moving from station to station, with duties, motions, and times defined. Instead each body shell was brought in, placed on a dolly, and manually pushed from station to station; across the old, uneven wooden floor, littered with discarded parts and debris. Some parts station's without some minor, but needed item. Work appeared to progress at a snail's pace, as workers reworked holes and cutouts on the body that had been incorrectly punched or drilled. Why not have the problem corrected by redesign at the body stamping facility we asked? It could be done just as well here, we were told.



Fascinated as we were, watching the body and interior work; others of our group were watching the assembly of the engine, transmission, and frame work on the first floor below. At the building's end, the completed body shell was swung out, and lowered onto the chassis. Remembering worker's compensation claims at home, we cringed. No safety equipment! No protective cages! In fact the body shell was held by two small hooks at midpoint under the body as it was lowered. A workman guiding it from below, and two others leaning precariously out over the edge, pushing it from above. Mysteriously, though, we were told that there had not been any worker compensation claims. The explanation of that eluded us until the end of the tour.

With the marriage of the MG's body and soul, it reached the end of the assembly line. It was then pushed onto a dynamometer, a system of rollers on which the wheels perched, while the engine was started, run up, and tested. The moment of truth! Sixty percent, they proudly told us, would start right up. The other forty percent, unfortunately, would have to be reworked. Furthermore, of the sixty percent that passed mechanically, another sixty-percent were in perfect condition appearance wise. The other 40% were battle scarred from their run through the assembly gantlet. These would go to the paint shop. The survivors went on for full engine and emissions testing.

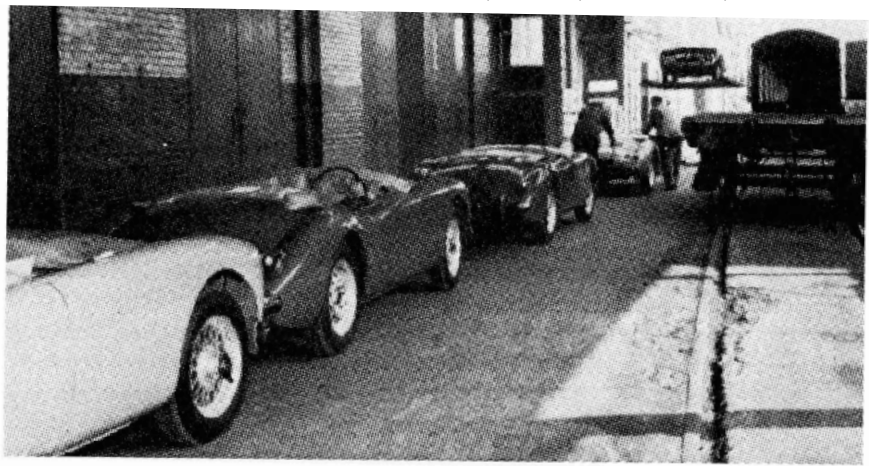


For the vehicles that were sidetracked to the paint shop, we expected to find hoods mangled by dropped pneumatic tools, and doors and fenders scratched, kicked, and banged. Despite the cramped, and litter strewn working conditions, this was not the case. Damage was limited to barely visible nicks and chips, which could easily be repaired at the destination, and which would certainly reoccur in trans-Atlantic shipping. It was not in the British tradition, however, to ship in less than perfect condition, and we witnessed whole bodies repainted for such minor flaws.

In the emissions testing lab we got a few comments from the technician about how the "Yank" new emissions and safety standards had caused them to "muck up" a good engine; to say nothing of ruining the fluid body design with the black rubber nose and tail on the MGB. This despite the fact that 92% of the production went to the good old U.S.A., where building a plant as the Japanese have done, would have been unthinkable.

Outside, on the lot, we surveyed acres and acres of new cars, running on for as far as the eye could see. At least a thousand, we were told. And why were they here: today's production, awaiting immediate shipment? Not quite. They were, in fact, sidelined not shipped, until they received some parts. Parts like what, we wondered: Engines? Wheels? Brakes? Nothing so dramatic, came the reply: cigarette lighters, windshield wiper blades, and tail light bulbs. Incredulous at the inventory cost for such minor items, we asked why not ship them out-get the items once they reached the U.S.A.-but get them to the dealers now? It would be against British tradition, came the reply again, to ship an incomplete vehicle.

"Against British Tradition" was the reply in many cases. What were these traditions and conditions which seemed to hinder the business, and would inevitably lead to its downfall? Having finished the tour, we could hardly contain our questions as we headed back to the conference room.



We opened with a restatement of our question on worker's compensation claims. Surely, with such working condition, there must be accidents? How did they avoid claims? Of course, we were told, accidents happened every day, but that was no cause of concern for management. Britain, you know, had socialized medicine. No worker's compensation system was needed. An injured worker could be taken care of by the Nation Service. Unfortunately, from our point of view, there was no incentive to reduce injuries, or reward an efficient manufacturer.

We began to get a useful insight. In our aggressive, American, entrepreneurial mode of thinking, we had looked at everything with an eye as to how much more efficient it could be. Efficiency wasn't the game here, we discovered. Instead of a manufacturing plant to build vehicles, we had a "vehicle" to build manufacturing jobs. The pre-Thatcherian goal was not to be an efficient entity, but to preserve manufacturing jobs in the Midlands. So what if a car had to be rebuilt six times before it was shipped? It kept men busy doing it. During our visit employment was about 1100; production was about 1050 cars a week. Instead of pumping out one car per hour that Detroit was capable of, the MG plant took one man week to produce each vehicle. Inefficient, yes; but it was intended to preserve jobs.

Blatant inefficiency and featherbedding contributed to the low production figures. Our questions led us to discover that the low production was also attributable to yet another venerable British tradition: labor union strikes. The MG plant in Abingdon had to contend with several hundred separate unions and guilds, not only in their own plant, but with their suppliers as well. Hardly a week passed without some type of work stoppage. Infighting among guilds, as well as action directed at the plant, was a constant source of disruption.

We left the Abingdon plant that day in May, wondering how much longer it would survive, despite the philosophy of preserving British traditions. We live in a global economy now we thought, and if Britain isn't going to keep up, it will have to drop out. In the final analysis, the MG did not die of its own ills. It was killed by a system that would not let it live up to its promise. Overwhelmed by the burden, the frustrated management of a nationalized industry abdicated completely. The plant finally closed several years later, ending nearly three quarters of a century of some of the finest British traditions. ■

(If you have driven a "made in the USA" vehicle lately, I'm not so sure that we aggressive, American, entrepreneurial, types are doing so hot, ourselves. That Abingdon was never allowed to modernize cannot be laid at their doorstep. Anyone who knows their history, call recall the many times when Abingdon was thinking ahead, only to have non-Abingdon management, afraid of their success, hold them back. If this had not been the case, you would have been able to enjoy an MGA in 1952! Remember also, ADO 21, the 1969-70 project car that higher management thought would be too much competition for their TR-7. ADO 21 which should have been the foundation for the MGB to carry on the Abingdon tradition of Safety Fast, never saw the light of day. I never had the opportunity to visit Abingdon, but when I drive my MGA, I know the people that started and worked on the Abingdon line survived interference, non-Abingdon management, economics, and American efficiency experts. They produced cars that may not have been the last word in the entrepreneurial mode of thinking, but they are still providing fun today. Our author saw the end of a great tradition in sad times. What he saw was real, but what we remember was the tradition that made the MG unique and fun. Ed.)

Gearbox Oil Reviewed

Gearbox Oil

After my Memphis experience where I could not force the shifter into a lower gear when downshifting I was forced to add STP oil additive to get home. After draining my 20w50 I wondered about its replacement.

As Donna reminded me, I had issues getting into 1st or 2nd in the past but nothing like the Memphis trip, so I wanted to do more research.

The original factory recommendation was straight 30 non-detergent oil. At some point the factory confidentially recommended 90 but quickly and confidentially change the recommendation to 20w50. 20w50 is an oil for obsolete engines, produced before mid-1990. It has been recommended as the best oil for both engines and gearboxes in MGs for decades by both John Twist and Barney Gaylord. It seems most Rowdies used 20w50 without any problems in the Memphis trip. John Esposito of Quantum Mechanics Ltd in CT cautions using 20w50 in MGs with an overdrive, saying it foams up. He said 30w was best. NAPA #75-995.

The concern with running some engine oils in a transmission is the additive package. Engine oils often have friction modifiers, moly, zinc, etc. all designed to provide additional wear protection if the base oil is stressed too much and fails under pressure. These additives are wonderful for engines but may have negative effects on the brass synchronizers inside MGA manual transmissions. GL4 is what you want in vintage cars. For example, the concern raised by Barney Gaylord in using 80w90 in an MGA gearbox is the additives will over time damage the brass synchro's. In our Memphis trip the hotter the day got, and longer the drive - - the worse it got. Heat was certainly a factor. This got me to check my maintenance records. I must confess my oil had not been changed in 35,000 miles - - not what you would expect from someone from Oil City, PA. Shame on me. Factory says to change it every 6,000. That won't happen again. Differential is also every 6,000 miles. John Twist said to change it every 12,000 miles or every five years.

According to the internet the shelf life on average for unopened bottles is five years. Since mine was twelve years old I thought it was time to buy new Castrol 20w50. I always learn something new about the MGA with every long drive. Whether I gain or retain knowledge or not is another story. Just did a 500 mile trip and all worked well.

Safety Fast, Dave Quinn

Good to hear Dave. I've also tried to always use GL-4, and not modern GL-5, lubricants in my MGA manual transmission because of possible deterioration of the brass

synchronizer gears. But it's tricky to find the correct type lubricant. Here's a lineup of some REDLINE products: **REDLINE MT-90** (GL-4 High Performance Lubricant for manual transmissions) states they meet that requirement:

- *HIGH PERFORMANCE - Gear protection and longer synchro life. Recommended for GL-1, GL-3, and GL-4 applications, as well as where most special synchromesh fluids are specified*
- *OFFERS QUICKER SHIFTS - Excellent gear and synchro protection, balanced friction control & slipperiness for easier shifting even in cold climates*
- *SAFE FOR BRASS SYNCHROS - GL-4 Gear Oil lacks the reactive sulfurs found in most GL-5 oils that cause damage. Recommended for GL-1, GL-3 & GL-4 applications*

REDLINE MTL (GL-4 manual transmission manual transaxle lubricant) also states:
Safe for brass synchros, as it lacks the reactive sulfurs found in most GL-5 oils that cause damage. Offers quicker shifts, perfect synchronizer coefficient of friction. Satisfies the gear oil viscosity requirements of 75W, 80W, and motor oil viscosities of SAE 30, 10W30, and 5W30

HOWEVER, **REDLINE 75W90 Gear Oil** is a GL-5 product NOT recommended for our transmissions, but IS OK for our differentials (no brass components in the diff):

- *Contains additional friction modifiers for suitability with clutch-type limited slip differentials - for most LSDs, no additional friction modifiers are required*
- *This product is not designed for use in most manual transmissions or transaxles in passenger vehicles, since the extreme slipperiness may cause synchronizer mesh issues that lead to shifting problems*
- *Recommended for API GL-5, GL-6, MT-1, MIL-L-2105E, SAE J2360 and Chrysler spec MS-9763*
- *Suitable replacement for a differential calling for an 80W90 or SAE 90 gear oil*

So I guess we need to all read the labels carefully. Redline is expensive, but I am trying to stick with their products for now.

Ken Nelson

Timing A Positive Ground Car

INDUCTION TIMING LIGHTS AND POSITIVE GROUND CARS

from MOSS MOTORS June 13, 2012

Timing lights, dwell meters, hand-held tachometers, and some other modern electronic tools have had problems when being used on some of our Classic British cars that happen to be electrically outfitted to be Positive Earth (Positive Ground).

Timing Light

The root of the matter is the circuitry of these electronic tools is polarity sensitive. They simply will not work if we try to connect them up in the reverse of what is called for.



As an example, if your electronic tool has a wire with a red clip and a wire with a black clip for power, we would normally connect the red to the positive terminal of our battery and the black to the negative terminal. If the car is set up to be Positive Earth, we can often use our meter by simply closing our eyes to the car we are working on. Red still goes to the positive side of the battery and black still goes to the negative side of the battery. The polarity of the car is a non-issue at this moment.

Many of us do not like to connect our test gear directly to the battery. For battery tests we should always connect directly to the battery. However, for other tests some of us have gotten into the safe habit of first connecting our red clip to the positive side of the battery and then connecting the black lead to the block. This is done to avoid the possibility of a small spark over the battery when the second lead is connected. Batteries produce hydrogen gas which is explosive. (This technician has about a dozen small scars on his chest from connecting a timing light to a battery in a running car. The battery exploded when the second cable was connected.) In a Positive Earth car connect the black lead from the meter to the negative battery terminal and then the red lead to the block. Since the block is earth, and the car is Positive Earth, the red lead gets the positive it wants.

Now, what happens if we connect a **dwell meter** to a Positive Earth car? If the meter were completely

independent of the car, except for use as a power source, we could get away with it. But that's not how dwell meters work. The dwell meter is also connected to the small wire that goes from the coil to the points. (Tachometers usually do the same.) The points go to earth. In a Negative Earth car, that wire will be negative. In a Positive Earth car, that wire will be positive. Our electronic meter is expecting to have negative power in the black lead to the battery, and the same kind of power in the lead going to the points. ***If the car is Positive Earth, the black battery lead to the meter will be negative, but the lead to the points will be positive. The meter will probably not function.***

Timing lights appear to be constructed a few different ways. The red lead for the battery can be put to positive terminal, and the black for the battery to the negative terminal, irrespective of how the rest of the car is wired. ***The challenge comes in the inductive pick-up most modern timing lights have.*** They look like a clothes pin that simply clips onto the #1 spark plug wire. When a spark passes through the plug wire, the induction pick-up detects it, and tells the timing light to flash once. ***Most of these induction pick-ups have an arrow on them showing the direction the spark is supposed to be traveling.*** So, we put the induction pick-up onto the plug wire with the arrow pointing toward the spark plug. If the car is set up to be Positive Earth, the spark will run the other way. In a case like that, the timing light may not work at first, but will often work if you simply turn the induction pick-up around so the arrow points to the distributor cap.

Sometimes even this won't work, but a trick might work. If you use a second independent battery to power the timing light, it will sometimes work. This means bringing a second battery close to the car so the timing light can get power from it. Or bringing another car over as if you were going to give the car a jump start, and connecting your timing light to the second car's battery. (The second car does not need to be running.) This will probably not work on a dwell meter, because it's looking for a contact with ground through the lead that goes to the points. If the power cables for the dwell meter are connected to another power source, it will have trouble identifying the ground the points are connected to.

Modern timing lights and dwell meters almost always work with older, Negative Earth cars. With a Positive Earth car, an electronic dwell meter probably won't work. With a little creativity, timing lights will

usually work. Of course, if your car was originally a Positive Earth car but it's been converted to Negative Earth, these issues are moot.

Lastly, since we are talking about batteries and such, let's talk about **jump starting**.

Using a modern car to jump start another car means taking a risk. The modern technology in the newer cars is not designed to deal with the impact of a jump start. For that reason we make two suggestions:

1. It is better to use a battery charger to recharge the dead car's battery than to use your modern car.

2. If you must use your modern car, turn it off. Run your cables. Start the second car. Carefully disconnect your cables starting with the one on the block. Then, you can start your modern car again. If the dead car does not respond quickly to the jump, you should give up the idea of using your modern car for the jump. If the dead car won't start quickly it will draw a lot of power out of the modern car's battery. Most modern cars have alternators that can put out over one hundred amps. That brings a lot of current into the electric system to recharge the modern car's battery after the jump. The battery can easily be harmed. Even if the dead car starts quickly, you should turn the lights on in your modern car when you start it to draw off some of the current for a few minutes as the modern car battery is recharged.

When attempting a jump start, we need to keep two points in mind about placing our cables.

1. *We need to connect positive to positive and negative to negative.* Run a cable from the positive terminal in one car to the positive terminal of the other car. Do the same with the negative. *If one of the cars is Positive Earth, it*

makes no difference. We still connect positive to positive and negative to negative. What the car does with the positive and negative is not consequential to the jump start.

2. It is best not to connect both cables to the battery.

Connect one to the battery and one to a place a foot or two away. The second cable will always make a spark. Batteries explode.

In a conventional Negative Earth car jump starting another Negative Earth car, you can connect the positive terminal of one battery to the positive terminal of the second battery. Then connect the negative cable to the block. The block is negative so the net result is the same. We are just getting that second cable away from the battery and the hydrogen gas. Connect the cable to the block second. A spark at the block is harmless. Disconnect in the reverse order. Disconnect the block, then disconnect the battery.

If a Positive Earth car is trying to jump another Positive Earth car, the principle is the same. Connect the negative terminals of the two batteries together. Connect your positive cables to the block of each engine.

If we are trying to jump a Positive Earth car with a Negative Earth car, turn the Negative Earth car off. Connect the black cable to the block of the Negative Earth car, and the other end to the negative terminal on the battery of the Positive Earth car. Connect the positive cable to the positive battery terminal of the Negative Earth car, and the other end to the block of the Positive Earth car. We're still going positive to positive and negative to negative. When done, disconnect at the block first.

When Glory Comes Late To The Story

From Classic Motorsports
11-12-23 by Johan Dillen

Driving the short-lived MGA Twin Cam is Magical

When the Twin Cam engine arrived in 1958, MG was finally able to deliver the power that MGA buyers had been craving for several model years. Fulfilling that promise proved difficult, however, as reliability problems cut short the career of the MGA Twin Cam: MG halted production partway through 1959 after building just 2111 units. Today, driving a well-sorted MGA Twin Cam is nothing short of magical.

The 1959 running of the Alpine Rally, which linked famous mountain passes in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, turned grim for the MG factory entry when John Milne and Stuart Turner crashed their MGA



Twin Cam. But for Den Green, the deputy foreman of the mechanics crew, the bad news was just beginning to arrive.

"I was sent off to a local garage to try to find some suspension parts to get the car going again and found a garage with a couple of 'dead' Twin Cams," he recalls in Mike Allison and Peter Browning's book, "The Works MGs." These were, he continues, "All customers' cars suffering from the dreaded engine problems. I asked the garage owner if I could 'borrow' some of the suspension

parts from one of these cars and replace them with new parts I would arrange to be sent out from England. But when he discovered that I worked for MG he gave me hell about the unreliability of Twin Cam engines and threw me out of the place.” That’s what you’d call direct customer feedback.

From the Le Mans Special

The Twin Cam was supposed to have been the crowning achievement for the MGA, which had debuted in 1955 to deliver a much-needed breath of fresh air for MG. The car was derived directly from the experimental MG TD special that George “Phil” Phillips had entered at Le Mans in 1951. Phillips was a strong MG supporter and wanted nothing but an MG, but he was aware that all the company had on offer was the aging TD.

Help came from MG’s development department, which agreed to create an advanced-looking, lightweight body for the TD. Phillips’s MG TD special had to retire from the race at the eight-hour mark due to engine problems, but the effort had shown that the company was prepared to move away from its traditional, bulky approach to sports car styling and follow the lead already embraced by the competition. Sleek was ready to move in.

Within MG, work started on evolved, wider prototypes based on the TD special. Unfortunately, the company found itself just then under the newly formed British Motor Company umbrella. By the time MG came up with a proposal for the MGA, the top brass at BMC had already been sold on the Austin-Healey 100/4 by Donald Healey. There was no place for two competing roadsters within the extended family, so the MGA went on the back-burner.

It wasn’t until late in 1954 that MG finally got the green light to start up production of the MGA. Although the manufacturer had been slow to release a modern roadster, it countered that history with a most impressive introduction for the MGA, entering three prototypes of the car for Le Mans in 1955. It was the first time in 20 years that MG had entered the race with a works entry.

That running of Le Mans was most memorably marred by tragedy when Pierre Levegh’s Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR took off into the crowd, killing 83 and injuring 170, but despite the pall cast over the event, the MGAs made their mark. Ken Miles and Johnny Lockett finished 12th overall and fifth in class, averaging 86 mph and recording a top speed of almost 120 mph on the long Mulsanne Straight.

The enthusiastic press reports that followed meant that by the time the MGA made its world debut in September 1955 at the Frankfurt Motor Show, the public was already anxious and waiting. Launched under the slogan “first of a new line,” the MGA was a clear departure from the old style. The new car found buyers

eager for just that. In 1956, the first full year of production, the Abingdon factory was rolling out 300 MGAs per week. Most of them were bound for the United States, creating the lucrative export market BMC directors were hungry to explore.

Poised for Coronation

The form may have been advanced, but the underpinnings were trusted familiars since the suspension design was much like its T-series predecessor— and even shared a few parts.

The B-series BMC 1500 engine used in the car, however, was new. At first it gave the MGA 68 horsepower, but output would progress to 78 horsepower. The car could reach 98 mph and accelerate to 60 mph in 15.6 seconds. Later on, a 1600cc engine upped power to 79.5 horsepower.

The MGA was pleasing to the eye and fun to drive. It was also a runaway success. Still, it awaited its ultimate coronation in the form of a truly sporting engine.



That, alas, was the task bestowed upon the Twin Cam, which was supposed to give the MGA the fighting power it needed to toss it out with the more powerful cars in the class.

At first glance, the Twin Cam engine more than delivered. Capacity of the B-series engine was increased to 1588cc, connecting rods were strengthened, and special pistons were delivered in order to run a 9.9:1 compression ratio. The engine also received a cross-flow cylinder head topped with shiny alloy cam covers, while twin SU carburetors fed it. The result was a very impressive 108 horsepower at 6700 rpm. The production MGA Twin Cam could reach 113 mph, while the zero-to-60 time had been chopped to 9.1 seconds.

The car also received disc brakes all around along with knock-off wheels. It’s the wheels, along with the Twin Cam badge on the hood, that provide the exterior visual clues that this is no ordinary MGA. MG offered the Twin Cam in both roadster and coupe form.

The Twin Cam outperformed the standard MGA, but it also cost more; it cost more than the competition, too. Compounding that disadvantage was the fact that the MGA Twin Cam turned out to be a bit of a nightmare to own. Thanks to the high compression ratio, only the best

fuel and most perfect ignition timing would suffice; lax owners would be rewarded with holes in the pistons. The engine also had an unhealthy appetite for oil.

By the time MG got on top of the problems, the Twin Cam's reputation was sunk. Although MG produced just those 2111 Twin Cams, the manufacturer delivered more than 101,000 standard MGAs.

Sebring Glory

Despite the issues, the Twin Cam had its moments in the sun. In the car's first serious rally outing, the 1958 Marathon de la Route—a 3100-mile, nonstop effort from Liège, Belgium, to Rome and back—it finished ninth overall with John Gott at the wheel. Perhaps more important, Gott reported that for the first time, he felt that he had a car that could challenge the Porsches and Healeys.

Two works MGA Twin Cams and four private entries—including the car pictured here—showed up for the 1959 Tulip Rally, an event that started in Holland, but made a big tour of France as well. This Twin Cam, which at the time wore Glacier Blue paint and a hardtop, was entered by the British duo of owner/driver Harry Mainz and artist Rex Vicat-Cole. Although a privateer Twin Cam beat the works entries that year, this one, the results show, scored a DNF. Mainz and Vicat-Cole gave their Twin Cam another go at the 1960 Tulip Rally, where they scored second-to-last in their class.

Right as production wound down, however, the Twin Cam hit its competitive stride in the U.S. and abroad. The model quickly found success at Sebring, with three near-showroom-spec cars taking fourth, fifth and sixth in class in 1956; a Twin Cam won its class in 1957. Twin Cam roadsters finished second and third in class in 1959 before landing one more podium in 1960—the same year that a modified Twin Cam coupe took class honors at Le Mans. Before the MGB took over for 1962, an MGA Twin Cam finished 14th overall and first in class at Sebring. The Twin Cam eventually did well against the clock, too. Rauno Aaltonen stunned the field at the 1962 Tulip Rally, setting fastest time overall on the famed Col de Turini stage and finishing sixth overall in one.

And Still Crazy for Revs

The problems of the past have largely been overcome, and right now the MGA Twin Cam's rarity and performance make these cars very much the Holy Grail of the model line. They come with a price premium, however: Where MGAs sell for between \$15,000 and \$35,000—Hagerty says \$30,000 for a No. 2 roadster—you'll need to budget about \$45,000 for an excellent Twin Cam. (And before you scoff at the price bump, get a quote on a Twin Cam restoration.)

What can you expect in return? Well, this particular Twin Cam is a charmer. It is in fine condition, having been completely restored and sorted in 1986 by its former

owner, Paul Channon. He also extensively and enthusiastically rallied it from the mid-'80s up until 2005. It still sports a rally look, thanks to the added pair of auxiliary driving lights and the Tripmaster in the interior.

It's also an icon from a time when sports cars were defined by SU carburetors, wire wheels and those all-important cut-down doors. The MGA Twin Cam is finally the pearl it always wanted to be.

Behind The Wheel

The twin carburetors create a profound, deep growl as the Twin Cam engine accelerates effortlessly, and it really comes on song at 4000 rpm, that growl replaced with a rawer rasp. That still leaves plenty of revs for this engine to truly express itself, with the orange part of the tach only beginning at 6500 rpm and the redline itself marked at 7000 rpm—impressive for a 1959 car that normally wouldn't be considered exotic.

The engine feels best between 5000 and 6000 rpm. Combine it with the four-speed manual box-synchronized in second, third and fourth—and acceleration is lively. The short-throw lever is situated close to the steering wheel and makes the perfect partner in crime. The throw is a bit sturdy, but very precise.

Straight-line acceleration isn't even this car's best performance attribute: It's what it can do in the corners. The four-wheel-disc brakes give good bite and, as a result, instill confidence in the driver. Rowing the big, four-spoke steering wheel takes a bit of work, but the chassis feels very stable in the corners and seems to beg for more.

Downsides to the Twin Cam? Of course, it's best to deal with one that has been properly sorted, and drivers who are on the larger side might find the MGA cockpit less than comfy. Also, the required footwork takes a little while to learn. The reward, though, is very much worth the needed acclimation



Photography by Dirk de Jager