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Moss Motoring

ISSUE 2, 2023



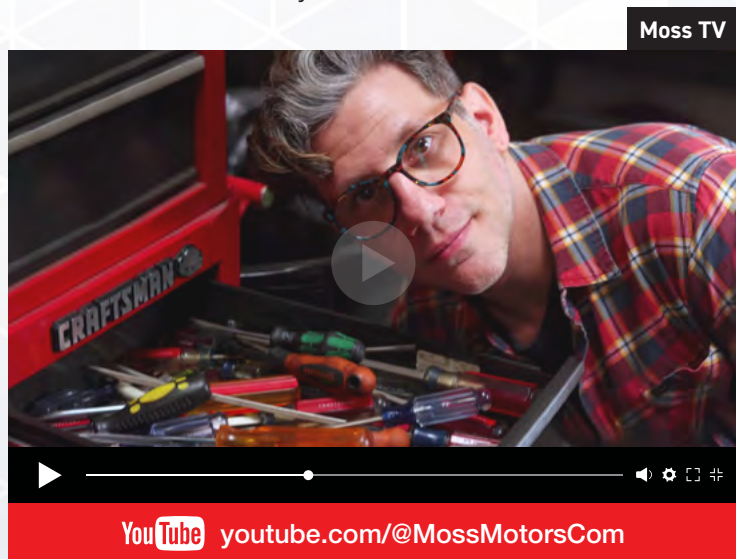
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4

The Practical C-Type

When an XK120 has friends in high places, strings are bound to be pulled.



8

Some Dos & Don'ts

The best mistakes to learn from are other people's. Right, Ned?



13

Sir Leonard Lord

Get to know BMC's hard-charging, difficult, but very effective chairman.



16

Should I Stay Or Go?

Hesitant to put miles on your classic car? If Ross and a Seven can do it, so can you.



18

Homecoming

Here's to you, Grandpa Mel. Your beloved Sprite lives on.



22

Double Header

There's a reason Moss sells these. And it's not just for looks.

On the Cover:

Richard has owned this special car for 50 years and it still has surprises up its sleeves.

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Leading by Example

The longer I'm alive, the more I realize how important it is to see old British cars driving around. Paved roads can easily be an unkind and unfriendly place, but British cars often cause people to smile and wave, even when it's uncharacteristic for them to do so. When Steve and Jim wrote me about the hoops they jumped through when they

both bought cars from Bert Shirey, I thought, "It's like he's marrying off his daughters," followed by, "...lucky guys!" Bert's insistence on seeing his cars well cared for into the future has left a mark on Steve and Jim, a mark that won't easily buff out, nor will they want it to.

~David Stuursma, Editor

TAKING THE LEAD

BERT SHIREY PASSES THE TORCH



I had been on the hunt for a nice Bugeye for several years, but I knew that there was a beauty owned by fellow MGs of Baltimore car club member Bert Shirey. I made it known to him years ago that I would love to have his if it ever came time to pass the car to a new custodian. Sure enough, in October of 2021, I got a call from Bert. His main concern was that the car would go to someone who would care for it the way he did. We got together for a long chat, and the little 1960 Old English White sweetheart was soon safely in my garage.

Bert had owned the car for almost 30 years. He also had made the previous owner aware of the fact that he would like the car when she was ready to part with it. Her name was Bobbi Tarte and she had purchased it new from Foreign Motors in Baltimore when she was the parts manager for that dealership. At that time, she was the only female parts manager in all

of Baltimore. Her name was actually Barbara, but the dealer did not want it publicly known that a lady was running his parts department, so he told her that she would be known as "Bobbi." Times were very different back then. Bobbi became her nickname for the rest of her life. So, Bobbi retired and contacted Bert and he took the Sprite home and began the process of making it road worthy again.

Bert Shirey and I have both been members of MGs of Baltimore for about 40 years, so we go way back. I can say, without a doubt, that he is as fastidious about his cars as anyone I have ever known. They are always as original as possible. They are garage kept and pampered and NEVER go out in the rain. I was quite honored to be the person selected to enjoy and care for this beautiful little Bugeye.

One of the coolest parts about this car is all the documentation. Bert saved everything. The ownership records

are fully authenticated, as are all of the service notes for the past 30 years. Original sales brochures, service guides, handbooks and the original window sticker (\$1,953) all came with the car. Also, enough parts, many NOS, to fill a pickup truck. A perfect factory hardtop was included.

I have spent a good bit of time with "Buggy" over the past year. It needed just a bit of TLC to get it purring, and I also stripped the paint under the bonnet and repainted it to freshen it up. The exterior and interior are beautiful. I have driven it almost a thousand miles in the past year, and it is just crazy fun on the road.

Thank you, Bert, for trusting me to care for your little friend. I'm going to drive it and love it and show it off, just a bit!

~Steve Williams

The Midget was placed in BMC's lineup as a starter car. They were cheaper to acquire than an MGB, and thus more likely to be abused or left to rust. There were a total of 26,601 Mark II MG Midgets built. North America received 13,435 LHD versions. They are rare birds today.

Where do you find one that isn't a rust bucket, hasn't been restored, or doesn't need to be restored? Does a Midget time capsule exist?

Bert Shirey, purchased a 1965 MG Midget (GAN 3L/38868), actually titled as 1966, on October 4, 1965. The car was bought at Foreign Motors in Baltimore for the window sticker price of \$2,214. Bert traded in a 1960 Bugeye Sprite, and applied the trade price of \$534 towards the Midget. The window sticker shows an optional heater for \$59, and a tonneau cover for \$35. The car also came with seat belts, which were mandatory in 1966. They added another \$20 to the price.

The car was always pampered, but it was Sandy and Bert's only family car for 10 years. In 1976, it was retired to their garage and only occasionally driven.

Bert proudly stated, "The car has never seen rain since 1976."

After almost 60 years and a little over 58,000 miles, this car is a testament to Bert's loving obsession with it. Bert carefully conserved the Midget in as near to original condition as possible. In order to retain original features, minor imperfections of use and the patina of time were left alone.

Recently, Bert's move to a retirement community, and his bad back, reluctantly prompted him to find a new owner for the Midget. He wasn't going to have a garage to keep his baby in any longer. But you couldn't just buy the car. You had to pass the test Bert had for the new owner. This meant the car had to be protected in a garage. The new owner had to promise to maintain the car, and not drive it carelessly. Bert was not going to let just anyone be the new caretaker of his beloved Midget.

After multiple phone calls and emails over a two-and-a-half-week period, photo documentation of the space the car would live in, and after a two hour in-person interview, Bert was comfortable with me as the new owner of the Midget. I am extremely honored

to continue Bert's obsessive care of the Midget and appreciate the trust he has in me to do so.

A lot of interesting and hard-to-find items came with the car. The original Maryland license plates that were placed on the car in 1965. The window sticker displayed in a picture frame. The original sales invoice from Foreign Motors on NCR paper. A letter from the British Motor Heritage Trust indicating the car was completed on March 18, coincidentally my birthday. I turned 14 years old the day the car rolled off the assembly line. Lots of books, parts, and Bert's car show trophies. I am hoping I can add to this collection.

I can't thank Bert enough for allowing me to continue the preservation of his lovely Midget. It is an honor, and a responsibility. In the future, if you vote for this car at MGs on the Rocks, you will be voting for Bert. I'm the "designated driver." Bert deserves all the credit.

~Jim Orrell

Please continue to send your stories of the leaders that have so much to do with the enjoyment of the classic British car experience. Submit stories and photos to: editor@mossmotors.com



The **PRACTICAL** C-Type

By Richard Santucci



Fred Dagavar was a man's man. A swashbuckling Errol Flynn type complete with manicured moustache. He possessed a distinctive, deep, gravelly, Armenian accented voice and was arrested in 1935 for brandishing a gun at a man after a fender bender on, where else, Gun Hill Road. "I ought to give you a dose of lead poison and sign your death warrant!" he allegedly said to the president of the Bathgate Taxpayers Association after his car was run into. He received a \$600 fine.

Fred was also a World War II veteran and had an artillery shell holding open the door of his business establishment on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, but I knew him mostly as a racer.

As far as I could tell, Fred's racing history went back to 1939, when a race that he had applied to be in was cancelled because Hitler had annexed the Sudetenland. Legendary racer, Ralph DePalma, personally wrote him the cancellation letter and sent him back his \$25 entry fee. I have the letter.

Fred raced throughout the 1940s and '50s and competed at Sebring at least five times, always in Jaguars. He was also a friend of Bill France. As such, he was a co-founder of NASCAR with France and served as its first competition chairman.

I remember as a small boy accompanying my dad to Dagavar & Dagavar—a DuMont radio and television network factory store that Fred owned. They would discuss Hi-Fi, drink a bottle of Scotch, and talk about his racing days. Mostly I remember the conversations about Fred's Jaguar. To a seven year old, hearing the tales of his exploits in this car, I was transported to a mythical place, one of speed and daring. I recall my mother saying how he slid the car around corners when he took it "down the shore" to Long Branch, New Jersey.

In the early 1970s, I was delivering an order for my grandfather's butcher shop, driving my Mk IX Jaguar on the Grand Concourse. A thought crossed my mind while passing Fred's business establishment. I stopped and said hello, and then I took a breath and asked him if he wanted to sell his Jaguar. It was a car that I had never seen in person. I only knew stories of it, like how Fred drove from New York to Sebring, Florida, in 1955, raced, finishing 46th, and drove it back home.

In his deep, accented voice he said, "Vell, seeing as I'm pushing 70 years old, maybe it's time to let it go." I asked him how much, he threw out a price, and I said I would be right back with the money. I was in heaven. I had a Mk IX saloon and a race car!

Heaven was short lived when I went to the open-air parking area under the concourse and saw the magnificent vehicle of my dreams. It had three flat tires, was painted white with what must have been a whiskbroom, had parts in wooden milk crates and a disintegrated interior. I guess that was when I first realized that I was an optimist.

On the positive side, all the parts were there with matching numbers. And, the copious amounts of oil that it leaked had preserved the undercarriage as if it were covered in cosmoline. On top of that, Fred had given me paperwork that he thought might come in handy, including the original purchase order and bill of sale, and the technical inspection punch card for the 1955 running of Sebring. Then he made me scribble a few notes on the back of a piece of scrap paper. He said, "It's important that you know these things: factory race prepared, close-ratio gear box, high-ratio steering, built all the way loose, 3:31 rear end, and it's a 1955 car in a '54 body." He also said that it was five different colors of red when it arrived.

"Fred," as the car came to be known, sat around for years as I finished college and chiropractic school. I accumulated parts. No internet then, so writing letters to Zurich became a normal way





of life. When fax machines came into vogue, I thought I hit the lottery.

I finished restoring the car for the first time in 1979. When I brought it to Joe Maletsky at Motorcraft Ltd., in East Rutherford, New Jersey, for a mechanical rebuild, I told him that it was special, it had a “C” type head. He looked into the valley between the cylinders and said, “No way, there’s no big red ‘C’ in the casting.” I showed him the purchase order delineating the purchase of a “C” head for an additional \$150, and he said it just wasn’t there—even though the numbers matched.

Lo and behold, I was working one day when I received a phone call from my “mechanic.” It didn’t matter how backed up with patients I was, when Joe was on the phone I answered. There *are* priorities. I will never forget his words. He had disassembled the engine for a rebuild and saw something that was out of the ordinary. He said, “You’ve got sneaky valves.” I asked him what he meant, and he said that I was correct,

it was a C-Type head but one he had never seen before.

Again, time went by. I drove the car almost daily to soccer games, baseball games—me, my wife, and two little boys crammed in it. I took it to the supermarket, hardware store—wherever I needed to go. It sounded magnificent, with a *basso profundo* growl, an absolute wail at high RPM, a whining four-speed Moss gearbox, and it was painted Rolls-Royce Regal Red with a tan interior. I may have put the top up three times in the ensuing 40 years. Ferraris, Corvettes, other Jaguars, and a GNX came and went—the 120 stayed.

Three years ago, “Fred” had an unfortunate altercation with a deer. The car survived, the deer not so much. I was about to have it repaired when I was cajoled into a total cosmetic restoration. Total strip down to bare metal, new interior, re-chroming, and a mechanical freshening up. In the process, we uncovered the damage it sustained at Sebring when it took a

shunt and went off course—caught on film by Ozzie Lyons! The car was as close to perfect as it was going to be, as it is a regularly driven car. Then I was talked into applying to the Amelia Island Concours. Prior to that, it took the Chief Judges Award at the Greenwich Concours.

I was shocked to be accepted at Amelia Island, and happy to tell the story of my car. I thought I had it very well documented. As a result of an interview with a British photojournalist that was put online, I received a phone call from a gentleman in Colorado. He asked me if I knew what I had? I told him yes, and then he proceeded to prove me wrong. I learned that he has a sister car—albeit one with a 9:1 compression ratio—that he has had for 48 years. The difference was that he had no documented race history or paperwork. He then put me in touch with Roger Payne in Australia who was a Jaguar historian and who, with the help of cellphone pictures of casting numbers



and stampings, told me how my Jaguar came to be and what its significance is. To quote Roger's inscription on the inside of his book, *JAGUAR XK120 Authenticity Reference Guide (All Models)*: "What a delight to have been able to examine your very 'special' XK 120 S675904. This has been found to be an exceptionally rare example of a Jaguar Competitions Department race-built and prepared XK120 for a private customer, and is one of only four XK120, (sic) known to have been fitted with a 'C'-TYPE engine as original equipment."

Cut to the chase. Fred Dagavar was a minor racer of note with friends in the right places. He was friends with Bill France and was able to get "Lofty" England, Jaguar's Team Manager, to have a special car built for him. Lofty was well known around the world in almost all Jaguar pits, his most valuable connection was with the Browns Lane Competition Department. Fred met Lofty at Sebring in 1953 when the

Jaguar C-Types "invaded" the 12 Hours of Sebring. Lofty promised Fred he'd arrange an upgrade to his 120 in the competition department with a C-Type engine, close-ratio transmission, and other sensible modifications after Fred's car rolled off the assembly line.

This was to be Fred's daily driver as well as his racecar. C-Types are short on creature comforts and weather protection. Fred asked for, and had constructed, a C-Type drivetrain in a 120 open two-seater body! The head with the "sneaky valves" turned out to be a second-generation hand-tooled "C" head for the LeMans cars. The last of its kind before the "D" type head.

What is the difference? The C-Type heads had straight inlet ports, bigger valves, high contour camshaft profiles, and should move the redline from 5000 rpm to 5300 rpm. This would give at least a 20 bhp increase in engine output. Fred left the compression ratio at 8:1 as opposed to 9:1, as it was his daily driver. He did, however, order

an extra set of needles for the twin SU H6 carburetors, which would provide a richer mixture at high rpm ("RB" versus standard "RG").

According to the Jaguar Heritage Certificate, "Fred" was completed on June 25, 1954, but went back to the factory for a "factory race engine" upgrade and was not shipped until August 11—way over the average shipping time of less than a week following completion. The "all the way loose" note that I had been told to write down meant that because it was a racecar with a 13 ½ quart sump, it was engineered to burn a quart of oil every 125 miles or so, which it does. This aided cooling in endurance races.

I have had the car for 50 years, and it is only in the past few years that entire chapters of its story have surfaced. I could have lamented that Fred Dagavar didn't buy a C-Type, especially since he was a racer. But then I found out, in his own way, he did! *MM*



Some Dos & Don'ts

(but mostly don'ts)

By Ned Serleth

This little tech article is for all you backyard mechanics who work as wholeheartedly as Ted, my friend and mentor. Unfortunately, so much of my own work, which I attempted before I found Ted, the Dalai Lama of MGA reconstructive surgery, caused me to suffer untold hours of labor that would have otherwise been accomplished

in three shakes of a lamb's tail. This narrative's purpose is to save you those anguishing hours of head scratching and the resulting hair loss.

The first "do" and "don't" for you MGA aficionados relates to securing the body before lifting it from the frame. When securing the front to the rear cockpit area so the body doesn't fold like an accordion, "do" be sure

to use strong metal braces. That way the body comes off neatly in one solid piece. Since the B-pillar is probably rotted through like last year's butternut squash, lifting the body without those braces being securely attached means you'll soon have two pieces of MGA rather than the anticipated one. Having two pieces is not twice as nice. Twice as complicated? Yeah.

A second "do" and "don't" comes while lifting the body, either in one piece, or two. Be sure to remove those SU carburetors. "Don't" try to lift the body from the frame with the carburetors still attached. You'll find SU means Screwed Up. Even if you are doing a no expense spared restoration, a new set of carbs will set you back a half week's wages, unless, of course, you're a teacher. Then you're looking at half a month's time with children who don't want to buy what you're selling.

Another "do" and "don't" involves attempting to get the vehicle running without the body. Naturally, you'll want to run a few wires to specific

locations in order to start and test drive the chassis with its unattached seats, steering wheel, and batteries. I presume you'll have two of those six-volt batteries because you want to make sure the car is as original as possible. Trust me on this one, "do not," when using positive ground—or positive earth if you want to be authentic about the language you're using on your British roadster—I repeat, "do not" attach the negative battery terminal to the other negative battery terminal and both positive terminals to the frame, especially if your fire extinguisher is past its expiration date.

Okay, so the batteries are set up correctly and you've got substandard wiring running from the voltage regulator to the fuse box, starter, generator, and distributor. You've also got a jury-rigged ignition and the second new fuel pump, since the first was toasted when you connected both positive terminals to the frame. Now's the time to turn the switch, pull the starter, and wonder why the wires are beginning to smoke and melt the outer plastic insulation. At this point you'll turn off the switch in a hurry.

"Do" recheck your wiring diagram and try again. After a few tries, and if the wires still smoke, there's one last place to check: the second new fuel pump. It is not prudent to ground both the regulator-to-pump wire and the ground wire from the pump. "Don't" "do" that! After you've attached the wire from the regulator to the pump itself, try the switch again. You should have clean ignition.

Of course clean ignition doesn't mean the car will run well. It may cough and sputter, which probably indicates the timing is off. Now is your opportunity to check the distributor and make sure your plug wires are snugly on their respective plugs.

Once satisfied with that outcome, it is now time to remove the distributor and fiddle with the distributor drive spindle. "Do," according to Barney Gaylord, the MGA Guru, "screw one of the tappet cover bolts into the threaded end of the distributor drive gear,"





whatever that means. Or, use a $\frac{5}{16}$ " bolt to screw into the head of the spindle before attempting to remove it. "Don't" just jam a screwdriver into the head and endeavor to pull it free. Chances are pretty good, and I should know, that it will come off the screwdriver and fall with a clink into the oil pan.

Let's just say for the sake of argument your distributor drive spindle is now resting in a bath of 10-30 weight at the bottom of the oil pan. Be sure to thank your lucky stars it's in the pan and not jammed up somewhere in the bottom end of the motor. Naturally, the pan must be removed, an easy job, except for the three bolts at the front of the pan that are playing hide-and-go-seek with the frame.

The job now is to pull out the trusty engine hoist and lift the motor a bit after removing all the motor mount bolts. I hope you enjoy hide-and-seek. The motor mount bolts like to play that game, too.

Lift the motor but "do" put a basin under the end of the transmission to catch any oil as the engine is being raised. If you "don't," you will soon be moisturizing your back in some of that 10-30 while you're under the vehicle attempting to loosen all the pan bolts. It goes without saying (does it though?) that you remembered to drain the oil from the pan before beginning to remove the pan itself.

Now for those pesky three bolts that defy you to find and loosen them. Try as you might, the $\frac{7}{16}$ " wrench with which you're striving to coax them from their homes won't quite fit. Tip of the day: get out your trusty torch and "do" put a bend in the box end. Now you can reach those little rascals while moisturizing your back. One last word of caution: "don't" let the box end slip off the bolt head and out of your oil-covered finger tips where it will land on your front tooth, chipping it into a serrated edge.

Once you've extracted the spindle from the bottom of the pan, "do" order a new gasket from Moss Motors and get yourself a beer or two. Your part will arrive within the week.

Great! The pan is back on, the spindle is in place, the distributor reinstalled, and you're ready to fire up the engine. If it still coughs and sputters, you'll probably need to realign the spindle. There's a chance you're off 180 degrees. Remove the distributor and the spindle, "do" use that $\frac{5}{16}$ " bolt you've welded a little cockeyed onto a long rod.

Another "do"—rotate the motor so that it rests about seven degrees below top dead center. You'll want some white enamel paint to locate the timing marks. They're hard to see while you're on your back in that pool of 10-30 weight you spilled out of the pan because you didn't drain the oil prior to removal, like I suggested.

After a few dozen attempts to realign the spindle with the cam gear,



you'll find you need to look carefully at the notches in the spindle. "Do" make sure the larger off-set slot in the end is facing up when you start to insert the spindle. Again, according to the MGA Guru: "As the gear engages with the camshaft, the slot will turn in an anti-clockwise direction until it is approximately in the one o'clock position." "Don't" face the notches towards any other hour on a clock, or you will spend a lot of extra time lying in oil, lining up those pesky timing marks, and removing the distributor and spindle numerous times while trying to start a coughing and sputtering car.

Some days later, after you have successfully aligned the spindle according to the timing marks, and all the wiring has been properly attached, it is time once again to attempt to start the car. This time you feel confident. You've even installed the drive shaft in anticipation of a run around the yard in your go-kart on steroids.

A final do. "Do" disengage the transmission. "Do not" leave it in gear after starting the car successfully, only to have it launch itself into your rolling tool box, thereby denting it so the drawers don't work—and also denting the car's original radiator, though thankfully still usable.

Indeed, if you follow these sage instructions, you will be able to enjoy that ride around the yard and will look forward to reassembling the body to the frame after you have painted it in the carport. And, as all backyard car hobbyists know, "Do" be sure to paint early in the morning before the carport becomes a wind tunnel. *MM*



"Shortly before I retired as a high school English teacher and theatre director, after torturing children for 36 years, I purchased a 1957 numbers-matching MGA. It's the third vehicle I am bringing back from an early grave. My hobbies include writing, wrenching, welding, and napping. I also enjoy giving grandkids rides around the yard in my go-kart on steroids."





In My Toolbox: Moss Online Tech Center

By Ted Cryer, Austin Healey Club of New England



Every month I attend the Austin-Healey Club of New England's Technical Conference Calls and the meeting of our local Brits of the Hudson club where there is always some nagging or new problem that a member is seeking advice and counsel, or voodoo magic, to resolve the issue and get back on the road. A resource that I have seldom heard mentioned is the Tech Center found at the bottom of the Moss Motors website, which has helped me resolve problems on more than one occasion. There you will find their Tech Videos—and there are many of them. In the Electrical section alone there are 62 videos, including four on voltage regulator testing and adjustments. This was very helpful for me last summer to

determine why my Austin-Healey 100 was not changing, verifying the rebuilt generator was working fine and how to, successfully, adjust the voltage regulator. There are lists of videos for brakes, clutch and drive train, cooling systems, electrical, and engine, too.

I stumbled across the Tech Center about nine years ago when our 1964 TR4 became difficult to shift into gear, and I decided it was a hydraulic failure. The clutch fluid in the reservoir looked like month-old coffee so I ordered a new Classic Gold master, slave cylinder and the hose. Initially, I would have a nice, firm pedal but it quickly became a phantom pedal after one or two pumps. Numerous attempts at traditional bleeding with my wife assisting, and then bleeding by myself from the slave

cylinder, gave the same results. The mystery continued for two weeks while I tried anything that anyone suggested. In lucky desperation, I discovered a MossTV video that explained the possible problem and described how to bleed the system in two steps. It was magic! On the first use of the Moss procedure the pedal was perfect and has been ever since.

I have also found great PDF reference materials to some of the parts in the catalog. For example, when upholstering TR6 seats there are seven pages of instructions—and with pictures! I give Moss kudos for these videos and instructions. They are examples of the added value and support we receive from them. *MM*

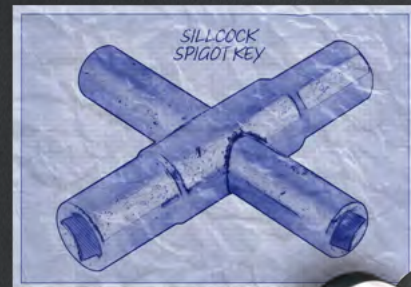
Whatchamacallits, Thingamabobs, & Doodads

A well-stocked toolbox will evolve over the years. Sometimes unique tasks inspire special doohickeys or custom-made contraptions. We want to hear about the unique tasks, problems, and tool solutions that British car owners are more likely than most to encounter and hurdle with a bit of ingenuity and luck.

Tell us about your oddball
and custom-made tools at:
MossMotoring.com/oddball-tools

I am fixing the leaks on a TR6 gearbox top cover. The fork retaining set screws were in very tight, and I knew my open-end $\frac{3}{16}$ " wrench was just going to round off the heads. No one in the area carried square-head wrenches or sockets, but I found a solution in the plumbing section of the local hardware store. The $\frac{5}{16}$ " arm of a sillcock spigot key is a perfect match for the square-headed setscrew. I cut off one of the smaller arms for clearance, turned the key with a long bolt inserted into the remaining arm for leverage, and loosened all three setscrews. I hope this helps someone stuck looking for a tool at the last minute to get a transmission job done.

~Jeff Lemon





Sir Leonard Lord BMC's Chairman

Courtesy of the archives of
Graham Robson

The comic-strip definition of a tycoon is of someone who swishes around in a huge stretch limo, smoking huge cigars, and doing shady financial deals behind the backs of organized labor. Sir Leonard Lord was not like that, rather, by any standard he was a rough diamond. Often to be seen walking around his factories, his attire dishevelled, his hawk-like face scowling, his manner combative, a hat usually leaning toward the back of his head, and always smoking a cigarette.

Yet as BMC's chairman he controlled 40 percent of British car production—and was a classic case of the WYSIWYG persona—What You See Is What You Get. He could come across as crude and uncaring. And he was. No one doing business with Len Lord ever got the benefit of the doubt. To receive the rough edge of Lord's tongue was an experience not to be wished.

People usually reacted to him in the same way. Even after he was knighted, Sir Leonard Lord was still "Len Lord" to his acquaintances. He ran Austin through the 1940s and was BMC's

master in its formative years. It was Len Lord's vision which recognized the genius of Alec Issigonis's design for the new Mini.

Leonard Percy Lord was born in Coventry in 1896, was locally educated, started working at Courtaulds (a large textile concern), and did not join the motor industry until 1922. Then at Hotchkiss (soon to become Morris Engines), Lord specialized in production engineering, made sense of the ramshackle facilities, leading Morris to take over the Wolseley car concern in 1927. Lord was then despatched to Birmingham to repeat the trick.

Although he could be charming, for short periods, such moods didn't last long. Lord never wasted time being nice to people, and if there were niceties to be observed, they were invariably flouted. Callers rarely found Lord at his desk, for he was usually out on the factory floor, dabbling with the design of new cars, invariably setting up instant deals, and galvanizing action from usually sedate personalities.

Those who worked with him or for him fell into two categories. Either they idolized him, sweated blood for him,

and glowed in the promotions which followed, or they left, disillusioned with the tornado surrounding him, the hostility which was never hidden away, and Lord's refusal to consider anyone's feelings.

However, he worked a miracle for William Morris (later Lord Nuffield) at Cowley. Arriving in 1932 to rationalize the business, he found an aging factory, assembly lines needing men to push cars from station to station, and too many models. In three years the place was modernized, and sales more than doubled. Lord's demand for a big pay raise was then refused, the eruption was inevitable, and Lord stormed out. Two years later Lord Austin hired him to transform the Austin business. A replacement for the Seven was readied in a year, Austin started building trucks, boosted the building of military aircraft and aircraft engines, and laid down a new range of overhead-valve engines.

This was where events leading up to the birth of BMC really took shape. After 1945, Austin was the first to announce post-war cars, early to start selling cars to the USA, and soon became Britain's largest car maker.



Len Lord and Donald Healey.

Within five years there was a vast new assembly hall at Longbridge, with new buildings on the way.

Lord ran this empire with an iron hand, and visited the Austin styling studios every day. He was a compulsive designer and knew that he had more engineering and styling skills than those paid to do those jobs. Much of what went into the post-war Austins originated from his office, known as “The Kremlin” at Longbridge.

By the late 1940s he was convinced that Austin could not survive on its own and aimed to absorb the Nuffield Organization. Not surprisingly, Lord Nuffield resisted this, but a merger was inevitable. The British Motor Corporation that resulted was Len Lord’s greatest achievement.

Now, with Britain still making more cars than any other European nation, and with exports booming, Lord was in his element. BMC might have shareholders, but Len Lord rarely considered their interests. He was more interested in building and selling a lot of cars than making big profits, he embraced “badge-engineering,” and unleashed a flood of new models.

Soon Lord reduced BMC’s original quiver of eleven engine families to

four, made sure that new Austins and Morrisies shared the same body platforms—yet maintained their dealer networks in most territories. Along with smart strategy, he had vision. He was the first British boss to turn to an Italian styling house—Pininfarina—to shape new models for the 1960s.

Not only that, but he also invented the Austin-Healey marque, and gave immediate approval for the Mini when it was first shown to him. This, at the end of a whirlwind career, was his biggest triumph, when he must already have been thinking about retirement. When the time came for BMC to develop a range of new small cars, Lord spurned advice, followed his instincts, and challenged his technical consultant, Alec Issigonis, to develop a bizarre little concept, that of a tiny and boxy ten-foot-long, four-seater saloon, yet using an existing four-cylinder engine which was already in mass-production at Longbridge.

The trick, which surprised almost everyone else, was to place this engine sideways, and to drive the front wheels. All this, along with rubber cone suspension, and all-independent suspension, was so new that there must have been corporate nervousness.

Such innovation and originality wouldn’t have reached production without a forceful top man involved.

Yet Lord never hesitated. On this occasion he had not interfered at the design or the styling stage, and he backed his instincts by authorizing millions of tooling capital. The Mini, and evolutions like the BMC 1100 which followed, underpinned BMC for the next decade, long after Lord had gone.

Although he had already announced his ‘partial retirement’ in 1956 (he was 60 years old), few people believed him, especially his long-suffering deputy George Harriman. Yet it was true enough: five years later Sir Leonard stood down, allowing the smooth, urbane, always-dapper and likeable George Harriman to take over.

The change of atmosphere at BMC was immediate, with many admitting that Longbridge was a quieter and more peaceful place when Len Lord had gone. Sir Leonard stayed on the Board until 1966, and everyone knew he was there, but there were no more explosive outbursts. When he died in 1967, he was genuinely mourned by thousands.



Mini cutaway display, 1959.

George Harriman

Although it was Len Lord who authorized the new Mini, it was his managing director, Sir George Harriman, who ran the factories that made it so. Nothing new here, for Harriman had been Lord's faithful bag-holder for many years.

Personality-wise, the two were poles apart, but they got on well together for decades. Lord was abrasive where Harriman was emollient; Lord was the dictator while Harriman was always the consulting boss; Lord was always decisive while Harriman often seemed to be diffident.

Coventry-born Harriman joined Morris Motors' engine plant in Coventry as an apprentice in 1923, and finally stepped down as British Leyland's chairman at the end of 1968, having joined Austin (and Len Lord) in 1940. First as an apprentice, then a production superintendent, he briefly worked for Len Lord before their career paths split once again. Then, in 1940, he jumped ship from Morris, joined Lord at Longbridge, and started the steady rise to CEO. Production manager in 1944, then Works Manager in 1945 (when he joined the Board),

he became Len Lord's official deputy in 1950.

As Austin founded BMC, eventually absorbed Pressed Steel, then Jaguar, Harriman became more and more powerful. After Len Lord went into 'semi-retirement' in 1956 (though no one really believed it), Harriman became joint managing director/deputy chairman, rose to become BMC's sole managing director in 1958, finally adding the chairmanship in 1961 when Sir Leonard truly retired.

Through and around all these corporate promotions, "Young George" was always gentlemanly and courteous, and interested, but not fanatically so, in cars like the Mini and the 1100, which Alec Issigonis brought to market. To Harriman, making profits, keeping the customer happy, and projecting the right corporate image, always seemed to be more important than cutting-edge technology and everything which Issigonis and acolytes such as Alex Moulton found fascinating.

It was, for instance, significant that Alec Issigonis was not originally interested in Mini Coopers, or other variations, whereas Harriman saw all as valuable to the car's (and BMC's) image. He, above all, realized that he had to

keep his multifarious dealer chain, at home and overseas, happy, and liked to give them all manner of derivatives to promote.

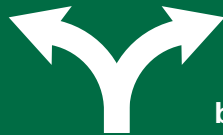
Accordingly, the many Minis became famous during his spell in the chair. Harriman became Sir George in 1965, saw BMC absorb Pressed Steel in the same year, and also took over Jaguar (which included Daimler) in 1966. It was during this period that so many different Minis were launched, flowered and prospered, when Issigonis began to evolve his engines/models/structures master plan, and even began to dabble with a replacement Mini, the 9X.

Then came the biggest corporate merger of all, when his conglomerate got together with Leyland, to form the ill-starred British Leyland. At first it was agreed that Sir George would continue as chairman of the board, but that Leyland's Sir Donald Stokes would be his CEO. With Leyland more and more prominent in the new business, this arrangement did not last for long, and a physically ailing Sir George announced his retirement from business in September of 1968.

Thereafter he took no further part in the motor industry and died in 1973. He was only 65 years old. *MM*



Should I Stay **OR** Should I Go?



by Ross Robbins

As caretakers of old cars we face a lot of skeptics when we plan to venture far from home. In fact, because of others' skepticism, or even our own, many of us don't take our old British iron much farther than our local cars and coffee. I think that is a shame.

It is the lure of the two-lane road for me... roads I call byways. These are the paths of adventure, the roads of real people, the way to interesting places, and for those reasons, the roads where stories are found. You may say: "Yes there are stories but not many services." I say, these are the very places where service still abides. In fact, since classic cars are far less complicated than modern cars, even the smallest towns are almost surely able to get you back on the road, whereas if you were in a high-tech car they might not.

Let me share an experience in one of the smallest, most obscure, old cars on the road: a 1968 Lotus Seven. It has four wheels, two seats, an engine and not much else.

Starting in California and having cleared the Sierras, I was headed home to Colorado and feeling pretty smug.

There I was in Nevada, on the part of US 50 cheekily called "The Loneliest Road in America," running straight as a string between two mountain ranges, and then wiggling up and over to the next valley floor, then straight till the next wiggle. It's an absolutely perfect sports car road except for one thing: it is The Loneliest Road in America.

You can drive 100 miles between towns and find no gas, no food, no people, and no cell service. Sometimes an hour goes by with no other car in sight.

On a flat, straight stretch between Austin and Eureka, where I could see five miles in either direction, the charging light lit up on my dash. I pulled off to the shoulder, although I could have parked in the middle of the highway without concern. As I eased to a stop I noticed the temp gauge rising rapidly. Aha! No water circulation. Must be the belt. I took off the bonnet and nose cone to have a look. I found a loose bolt in the generator bracket, and the generator lying on its side.

Apparently, the bolt in the front bracket had backed out from vibration. The now poorly supported generator had broken the back plate and the fan belt was thrown. But when? A hundred yards back? Two miles? I would have looked but even if I found the belt, it was too big without the generator.

I summoned up a confident attitude and began a search for something I could turn into a suitable fan belt. Now, there isn't much room for stuff in a Seven, so pickings were slim. I had a small tool kit with some wire and hose, spare clothing, and my gas jug, all tied down with bungee cords. That's it, a bungee cord! I found one that looked to be a bit short, figuring it would stretch, and pried off the hook ends with a screwdriver and small pair of pliers. Then, like a surgeon, I connected the ends together with my fine wire. 45 minutes passed by, but not one vehicle.

Finally, I had what looked like a fan belt. Green, puny, and stretchy, to be sure, but it would have to do. I slipped it over the crank and water pump pulleys, bypassing the generator since I could make it a long way without charging. I started the car, it ticked over for a bit, and the temp stayed steady!

The town of Eureka was my destination, but how far was it? 20 miles? 40? More? I'd better get going. But first, I thought I'd make sure my fix worked. I blipped the throttle. The bungee flew. The sudden load of the water pump probably stretched it and allowed it to come off. I remounted it and eased the throttle up gently.

It worked perfectly to about 1700 rpm. Each time I got there the bungee would fly, so I set off for Eureka at 1600 rpm. 1st, 2nd, 3rd gear; it worked fine. In top gear I was moving at about 25 mph—several times the speed of a covered wagon, surely, yet still slow enough to observe and absorb central Nevada up close.

In the more than one hour drive, only one car passed me at about 80 and two went by the other way. I thought of the skeptics as I had ample time to reflect on my plight. But, not only was I moving, I was moving toward help. As alone as I felt, it was nothing compared to the pioneers. Brave folks indeed. All this reflecting was accompanied by the reassuring click, click, click of the bungee fan belt as it spun merrily around. As long as I heard that reassuring sound, all was well. Finally, I reached the booming metropolis of Eureka, population 600. The gas station

didn't have belts but the hardware store did. So I clicked up Main Street to the hardware emporium. The very kindly lady there asked what I needed. I said, "A fan belt for a 1968 Lotus Seven." I should have asked for world peace, too, while I was at it.

She had lots of belts but I didn't know the size I needed. I carefully wrapped some wire around both pulleys marking the overlap spot with my pinched thumb and finger. Into the store I marched, and found a matching size Gates belt—for a washing machine. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, so out to the waiting car I went. I struggled until I put the car into gear and gently rocked it forward. On popped the belt. As I checked for fit, I found a perfect half inch of deflection. Neither too loose nor too tight.

It was getting late and without a generator I would need to follow the Lucas mantra: Be home before dark!

My mission was clear: drive as fast as possible. I made the 73-mile trip to Ely in less than an hour, wiggles included, and stopped there since I had made a lodging reservation in a place with a modicum of civilization. I was back in business.

What is the point of this lengthy personal story? It is simply this: I cannot imagine a more obscure car in a more desolate situation, yet it turned out fine. I don't think you will ever be any more isolated or with less support than I was that day in Nevada in your old British classic. In a town of 600 people in the middle of vast and empty Nevada, a helpful hardware store had saved my bacon for \$6.89.

So what are you skeptics waiting for? Go! Indulge your inner traveler! Take that trip this year. It will be a bit of welcome adventure in a too regular and regulated world, and you will create a memory for the rest of your life. *MM*



When Ross isn't buzzing across the countryside in one of his classic cars, it's likely he's got his mind on another special drive. Eight years ago, Ross and his wife Ann started a non-profit called Driving for Kids and Moss has been honored to support their events with prizes and giveaways over the years.

Driving for Kids is a seriously fun charity event for owners of classic British cars to support The Roundup River Ranch. It's a four-day trip on incredible back roads and with a stop at the Ranch, which is one of a global community of medical specialty camps for kids founded by Paul Newman. Mr. Newman was a great "car guy" and also firmly believed that kids with



serious illnesses needed a place to "kick back and raise a little hell."

We're now running our 8th drive, and we've travelled over 5,500 miles of the best ridges and canyons of Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming, seeing the spectacular vistas of aspens and dining as though calories don't count. The gorgeous variety of cars add even more shine to the memories we create. It's a perfect way to combine the fun

of driving old cars while doing a bit of good—we've raised over \$404,000 for the camp so far.

The teams in Driving for Kids win twice... Once on the weekend drive through the fall majesty of the Rockies, and again when we see the magical energy the Roundup River Ranch gives to these special kids. Lucky us!

Learn more at
www.drivingforkids.com



HOMECOMING

By Matt Hunter

The title was transferred to me on a bright November day, outside a dusty airplane hangar in middle-of-nowhere Mississippi. But my guardianship started as a little boy whose feet barely scraped the floor mats in the passenger seat of grandpa's car.

As little kids, my big sister and I played "drive-thru." We sat in grandpa's parked car while our grandma

played the "car hop" and brought us Pecan Sandies to eat. It was the plastic sliding windows that gave us the idea.

The car was a 1959 Austin-Healey Bugeye Sprite MkI. It had a BMC A-series 948cc engine and was painted Iris Blue with an all-black interior. What it lacked in power it made up in personality. The Sprite was a treasure awaiting me as the garage door creaked open. It smelled of oil and worn leather

infused with pipe tobacco. Gas leaked and it routinely broke down, but it was a prized family possession and an annual Christmas parade tradition.

My grandfather, Mel Gibbs, was a gentle, dapper man with a calming charm. He served in World War II in the Army Air Corps and went on to proudly work for years at Inland Steel outside of Chicago, a plant that produced automotive metals. He was happily married, golfed, smoked a pipe, cooked burnt hot dogs, and made things by hand. One time I said, as kids do, "I wish grandpa and grandma's house had a jungle gym." The next time I visited, a modest swing set greeted me in the shaded nook of their backyard.

Like many young boys, I dreamt of an automotive inheritance. But one day, without warning, my grandpa sold the car. He said it was because he'd gotten too old and weak. I hate to think of him struggling to take care of the car he loved so much. And then in the summer of '05, my grandfather passed away unexpectedly. Out of love and nostalgia my mom and I pondered the idea of searching out the Sprite's owner, but time carried on.

In 2019, on a whim, I wondered if the old British Sports Car Club in Memphis, of which my grandpa



Helping pick up the Sprite at the airport are Steve and Jim on the left of Matt, and Maggie, Pete, and Matt's dad on the right.



was once a member, was still around. A quick Google search revealed it still existed, and I decided to join the club to—at the very least—honor my Grandpa with a financial contribution. Included with my application form, I provided a letter explaining why a young guy from Los Angeles was looking to join a Tennessee-based car club. I told them about Grandpa Mel, his beloved Bugeye Sprite, and my goal to one day find the car and buy it back. Expecting very little to nothing in return, I snail-mailed the letter and application form. I've come to find that most car clubs don't have the most up-to-date communication systems.

One week later, the head of the Memphis British Sports Car Club emailed to welcome me to the organization. He also, to my surprise, sent an email to the entire club, explaining my search for my grandfather's car. Within an hour, a member responded with fond remembrances of my grandparents and information about who had bought their car! Just like that, I had a name, number, and address of the buyers: a couple named Pete and Maggie, who now lived in Mississippi. The power of the internet is wild. (I apologize

for my previous statement about "up-to-date communication.")

I called the number the following day. It didn't ring. Just beeped. Feeling hopeful, I tried again later when I had better reception. Again nothing. Presumably a dead or disconnected line. My heart sank. While the situation was unfortunate, I can't say it surprised me. I reasoned that the buyer might be dead or in a nursing home. (I apologize to Pete and Maggie—these presumptions were far from true.) Regardless, I still had a mailing address. Without another option, apart from wandering around Mississippi screaming "Maggie! Pete!", I wrote the buyer a letter, sure to mention every way they could get a hold of me.

A week later I was at a bar with friends when I received an email from the buyer's husband, Pete. Although Pete and Maggie had kept the car in dry storage, they hadn't run it in six or seven years, so they couldn't swear to its condition. Perhaps for that reason alone (and the obvious personal connection), they offered to sell me the car for an amount of money so low that it made me cry. \$1000. The quality of the vehicle made no difference to me. I immediately agreed to buy the car.

Going forward, the plan was to retrieve the car in November when I

had time to fly home. That meant I had about three months to prep myself, like an expectant dad waiting for his first child, an old rusty metal child. Overall, I was ecstatic but scared. I had not intended for this "life goal" to happen at this point in my life. I didn't have the knowledge to restore a car, let alone the means to even own a second car. I can barely find parking for my daily driver at my apartment building, and I sneer at paying 99 cents for upgrades on iPhone games. Furthermore, prior to this experience, I wouldn't even come close to calling myself a "car guy" or "proficient with cars." In my research to care for the Sprite, I would look up car parts and their function as I came upon them for the first time in blogs and manuals. Did you know a carburetor combines fuel with air? Because I didn't.

Two local members of the Memphis club, Jim and Steve, offered to help me retrieve the car from the buyer in Mississippi. I'll be forever grateful to these two effortlessly nice, mild-mannered Southern gentlemen for their help, endless patience in answering my basic questions, and enthusiasm to get the car running.

I met Jim and Steve in person for the first time on the morning we retrieved the Sprite. With the rest of my family



trailing in a separate car, we set off for Mississippi and arrived at a small rural airfield around noon. It was there, as we rounded an old plane hangar, that we laid eyes on Grandpa Mel's Sprite for the first time in decades. It looked so small sitting alone on the tarmac, like a toy that had escaped its packaging. The Sprite had since been repainted Olde English White, but otherwise it was exactly as I remembered it. I have a low bar for judging the quality of classic cars, but it seemed to be in good shape. The first thing my sister noted was that "it still smells the same," which is remarkably true. After years it held onto its characteristic aroma—a mix of petrol, leather, and smoke—that I loved so much as a kid. Later that night I would find myself ducking into our garage to sneak a whiff just to indulge in the memories.

Jim and Steve loaded the Sprite onto the trailer. Again, I didn't know enough about cars at the time to help very much here, and we traversed the flat Mississippi landscape back to Memphis. On the way, Steve asked me when I'd be returning from California to work on the car. I answered vaguely that I'd be back at the end of December.

"No, when exactly?" He pressed. "We could trailer it over to my garage, and I'll have it running in a day."

He wasn't wrong.

When I returned to Memphis for the holidays, Steve hauled the Sprite to his home, as promised. Once situated on jack stands, and with the Sprite's 35-pound bonnet vaulted up, Steve peered into the aged engine bay and remarked that "some idiot" had cut my fuel lines. I couldn't discern what he was talking about, and with a wink Steve drove a box cutter through the cracked rubber lines. We were off to work. Also, let's be clear that when I say "we," I 100% mean Steve was off to work. He was a man on a mission: to revive the spirit of this sleeping Sprite. I kept myself busy shuffling around his garage, relocating the same box of spare parts, and fetching tools like a nurse assisting an old-hand doctor at surgery. By 4pm, after the gas, oil, coolant, and various rubber lines had been removed and replaced, we were ready to ride the lightning, spark the solenoid, gas the gussey. (One thing that Steve did not teach me was automotive slang.) After a few false starts, Grandpa's old Sprite whirred to life with a throaty

growl for the first time in nearly a decade.

A few days later I returned to Steve's garage to address a leaking wheel cylinder. This day was my true indoctrination into working on the car, as I vowed to change the parts myself. Steve later confessed that he would let me silently struggle for a little bit before he would come over and effortlessly solve my problem. The second day was less successful than the first. Despite some attempted revival, both the brakes and clutch yielded a weak response, a clear sign of a leaking this or loose that. Did I mention I'm new to this?

I returned the next morning to Steve's to bleed both the brakes and clutch again, but this still didn't fix the problem. In a panic that the brakes only worked after several pumps, Steve calmly replied, "Well I guess just be extra careful when driving home." The Sprite's problems were now exclusively my own. But taking on the burdens of the Sprite is exactly what I wanted. Anything to get me closer again to my childhood hero, Grandpa Mel.

Look, I know I'm not alone when it comes to experiencing the overwhelming feelings of regret and



confusion when taking on a large project. I constantly questioned why I'm burdening myself with a seemingly endless stream of problems, in an area outside my usual realm of knowledge. I found solace one day when I was emailing with a local British parts dealer and in thanking him for offering me a deal said, "I'm just a poor kid trying to restore a car." To which he responded, "We all are just kids! And since we are car guys, we are poor! But boy do we have fun!" I guess he's right, but that still didn't stop me from falling into an automotive existential crisis every few days.

I returned to California, and a week later I had the car shipped across the country. I breathed easy once it was safely in my newly acquired garage, after it nearly fell off the car hauler while being unloaded. 2020 provided an unexpected amount of time indoors, which allowed me the opportunity to get my knuckles greasy and actually learn how to work on the car. Since then, I've installed an electric fuel pump, cleaned and rebuilt my carburetors, restored the gas tank, converted the drum brakes to disc, removed one dead mouse, and replaced

the master cylinder. In the past few years, the Sprite has remained healthy, met with the twisty back roads of LA county, and even garnered praise from discerning car enthusiast, Jay Leno.

Now I'm at the endless frontier of restoration. I'm always fixing something. But I take the opportunity to imitate my grandfather's ability to quietly address an on-going list of problems

without fuss or complaint. Routinely I find myself calling the Sprite "our car." It was once grandpa's and, in my mind, will always be that way. I haven't taken mental ownership and maybe never will. I'm merely a guardian of the car. Watching after it and carrying on the maintenance in way that would hopefully make my grandpa proud. *MM*



Remembering my *Triumphs* of the Shirtless '70s

by Joel Justin, Member of the Central Coast British Car Club

When I was in high school in the mid-1970s, I was into cars like all my buddies. Most of them had American muscle cars, but my best friend and I were into sports cars. We read *Road & Track* instead of *Hot Rod*. We went to sports car races instead of the drag strip.

I wanted a TR6, but they were new at the time and unaffordable for a high school kid, so I convinced my dad to let me buy a fixer upper TR4. I think he thought this would be a good way for me to learn about auto mechanics.

I found one for \$700. Since I only had my learner's permit, my dad drove my mom and I to the dealer, then I drove it home with my mom in the passenger seat.

For the next two years, I completely took over his three-car garage, rebuilding the engine and redoing the wiring. I wonder if my dad regretted his decision? I got a job at the local Union 76 station in town, which gave me access to tools and expertise. Once I got the car running, I drove it through my senior year and on into college.

Even from a distance you could see the body was in poor shape, and I wanted to do something about that. In the summer after my freshman year, I came home and went back to work at the 76 station. One day, a guy came in with a blue TR4. It had a clean body and an overdrive gearbox. He saw my TR4 and we got to talking. Before he left, I told him to let me know if he wanted to sell it.

A few weeks later he came back and said he would. I bought it for \$2,500 and spent the rest of the summer swapping all the good bits from my white car to the blue one. Now I had a good running car with a straight body—and an overdrive gearbox! I sold my white car for the same \$700 I bought it for.

While driving from home back to school, the engine thrust washers decided to fall out. I didn't realize it was the thrust washers at the time, but what I did know was that every time I pushed in the clutch, a horrible grinding sound came from the engine. I quick-shifted, kept it in neutral at stops, and made it back to school. I then got to rebuild the engine a second time (after sourcing a new crankshaft and block) in my room



My mom, kid brother, and I in my 1964 TR4—circa 1977.

in the fraternity house. Sadly, I got in a fender-bender (fortunately with a fraternity brother who wasn't upset at all as it did no damage to his Mustang). My straight-bodied TR4 wasn't so straight anymore.

When I met my future wife, I needed to come up with money for an engagement ring. The TR4 wasn't running well at the time, and I had another car, so I sold it.

I got married, graduated, got a job, and had kids—life, you know? After the kids were off to college, I needed a hobby to keep myself busy. My son had introduced me to the TV show *Top Gear*, and that got me thinking about my long gone TR4. I started looking—not seriously—and then found a car for sale nearby.

I went and looked at it and fell in love. I had to get my wife on-board, and when I asked her about getting one, her reply was, “I knew when you sold your TR4 in college to get my wedding ring there would be another one in our life one day.” I took that as a yes and purchased it.

Without realizing it, I purchased a very early car (CT254L). It ran decent and the body was very clean. The only non-original items were some very uncomfortable racing seats and a Moto-Lita steering wheel.

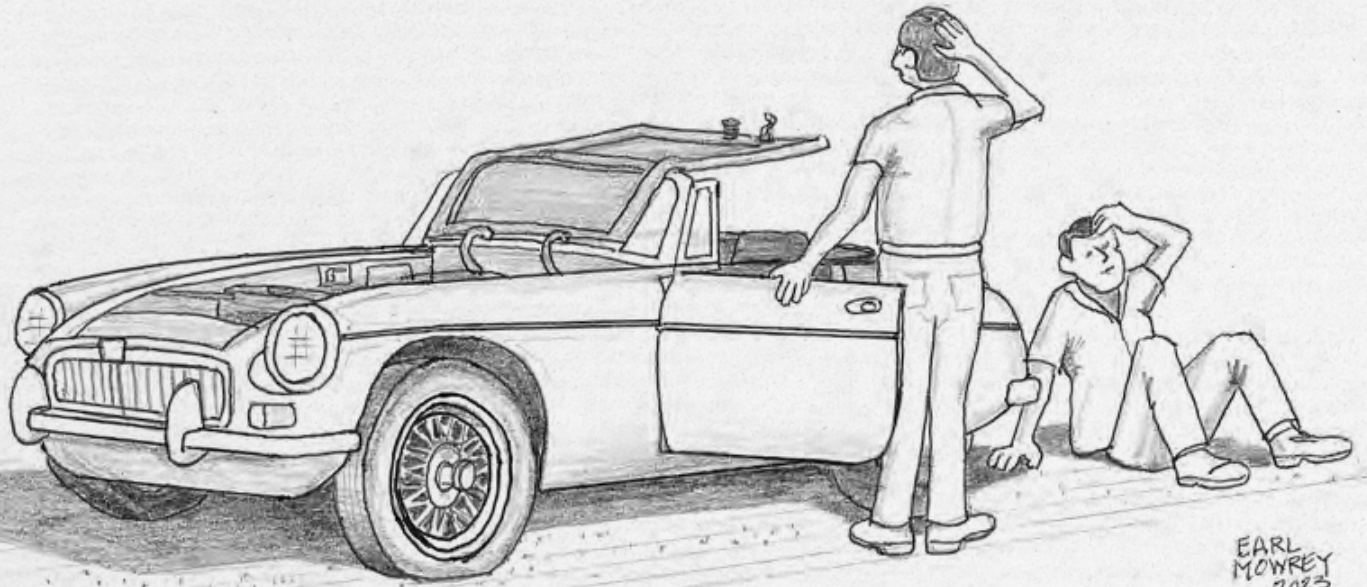
While I wanted to maintain the original look to the car from the outside, I was anxious to tear apart the engine and rebuild it like I had in high school (and again in college). Like riding a bicycle, it all came flooding back. Moss Motors was not only instrumental in my engine rebuild, but also in many other rebuilds and upgrades over the years.

I have several Triumphs now. It's a disease, but something my wife's fully bought into. “No more than six,” she says. This TR4 is my go-to car. We take it on all our long distance road trips, which are many. In the 11 years I've owned it, we've gone close to 30,000 miles, and with Moss' help, I expect that pace to continue. *MM*



Being a kid in high school and college living near the beach with a convertible, topless driving was the thing. You'll notice the Joel from 10 years ago wasn't nearly as tan!





“Double Header” By Cal Sikstrom

A 1969 MGB Mineral Blue aluminum bonnet stands on my driveway with bright yellow circles around two big dents. PAUL is printed in the middle of the deepest one. My name CAL is printed in the other.

The van arrives to pick me up. A passenger door slides open and I settle in for a ride to work.

“What the heck’s that?” asks the driver. He points at my bonnet.

“Saturday was a lovely summer evening wasn’t it?” I said. “Would you like to hear a story?”

I offered Paul a ride. He is about a foot shorter than me. We aimed straight west out of town on First Avenue. My tires hummed sweetly as we headed out. Then the front end bounced wildly as I geared down on the washboard before the Primrose Highway stop sign.

I turned left. Noted the tubes were doing their job over the rough road surface and holding their air. Hard on the gas, shifting through first, second,

and into third gear at 5000 RPM, when the hood catches came loose.

This had happened to me once before in Calgary. I was travelling much slower on a city street then, but this time the speedo showed 70 miles per hour. I began ducking, gearing down, and peeking under the widening gap between the hinges. Paul was sitting straight up not knowing that when the hood hits the windshield it would snap backwards and whack us on the tops of our heads.

I had managed to shift down to second by this time. The gap between the hinges allowed me to turn the car to roadside. Paul staggered when he got out. I felt a little dazed, too. We circled the car a couple times before setting to work.

I pulled my tool kit from the boot. An essential item to carry in an emergency. What to do? Our thinking was a little discombobulated. At last we figured it out. A half-inch box wrench was all that was needed, but it is an

inconvenient truth that the headlights of an MG only point forwards. It was getting dark. Paul offered the solution: he lifted his shirt and by the reflected light of his pale torso, I removed the four hinge bolts. We lifted the bonnet off.

“Why is my dent deeper than yours?” he asked.

“It’s happened to me before,” I said. “Jeezuz.”

“Never mind—let’s hide it in the ditch.”

“Why?”

“Someone might steal it,” I replied.

We drove back into Cold Lake at a leisurely speed. Yesterday we retrieved the bonnet. I circled the bumps with a yellow grease marker and set it up for you to see the miracle of a double header this lovely morning.

I say, “Two heads are always better than one, don’t you think?”

No one answers. The only other person, still awake in the van, is the driver. *MM*



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