

**SYSTEM
SALE**

SAVINGS ON BRAKES, COOLING, AND MORE!

Moss Motoring

ISSUE 1, 2024



The Uphill Battle

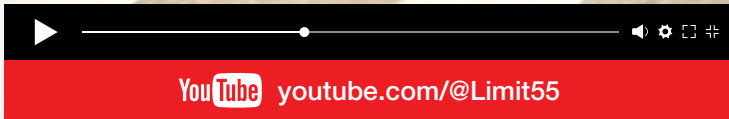
Low on power but light on its feet, an old Sprite is a rewarding hill climb companion.

Hitch a ride in the passenger seat. Pg 24.

Come Along for a Ride in Al's TC.



Limit 55



The story of Moss Motors wouldn't exist without one brown and tan car. Its owner, Al Moss, created something special because of it, and Al's life's work will drive on with our help. Moss Motors is honored to maintain Al's legacy and his MGTC, too. Last year we joined the west coast *Gathering of the Faithful* with Al's TC in tow. Some fun moments were captured by Daniel Harrison and shared to his YouTube channel "Limit 55."

It's worth the watch!

Featured Video

Check it out at: youtu.be/XGaDrTulcCs.

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SYSTEM SALE

Brakes

Cooling

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SAVINGS ON BRAKES, COOLING, AND MORE!



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Photo by Guess Work
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Editorial contributions to Moss Motoring are welcomed and should be emailed to: editor@mossmotors.com or mailed to "Editor - Moss Motoring, 440 Rutherford St., Goleta, CA 93117"

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Published by Moss Motors, Ltd.,
440 Rutherford Street, Goleta, CA 93117
800-667-7872

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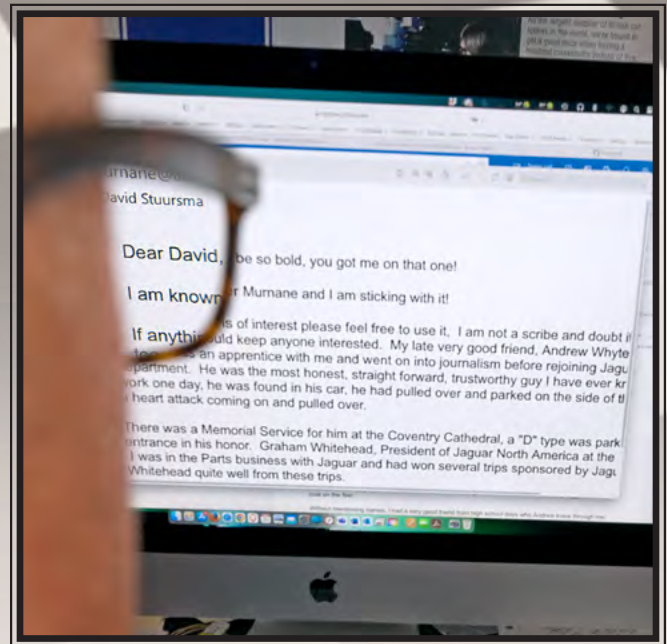
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TAKING THE LEAD

I get email.

This conversation speaks for itself.
And if it encourages the ramblings of more
old men... awesome.

~David Stuursma, Editor
editor@mossmotors.com



Dear Mr Stuursma,

I read your magazine with great interest. I pass along these ramblings of an old man and, as such, are not intended for publication.

When I left High School in England, I was interviewed by the then Mr William Lyons and other board members, and was accepted by Jaguar Cars in Coventry as an Apprentice Engineer. Thus, I spent four years working in various departments of the factory, and the stories in your magazine have awakened memories. One I recall, I was working in the Experimental Department during the development of the XK150. There was a mockup of the proposed car and a modified left-hand front (wing) fender from a XK140. We had to hold the fender in place, at various angles, until Mr Lyons said we had it right. Thus the lines of the XK150 were established.

The bonnet of the XK150 was actually that of a XK140 cut in two with about a four-inch extension welded between the two halves.

During the development of the XK150 some welding had to be done on a cantrail, the piece on the convertible top that spans the door window. This was aluminum, and nobody in the experimental department wanted to do it because welding aluminum has a special technique. I volunteered, having no idea that I was being set up, and did it. No idea how I did it, have never been able to weld aluminum since, not that I have tried much.

I had a "Works Driving License," a coveted item in those days. Thus, driving jobs would often come my way which, as a young twenty year old, were very welcome. There was one design engineer who did not drive, never learned, and had no desire to! Whenever he had to attend a meeting elsewhere, I was called upon to take him.

The last year of my apprenticeship I was given the job of demonstration driver for the duration of the

London Motor Show. There were three of us to drive a XK150, a 3.4 Saloon (Sedan), and a 2.4 Saloon. Our route included crossing Chiswick Bridge over the Thames. There was, and still is, woodland on the North side of the bridge, no buildings, just open road through trees. Our instructions were to reach 100 MPH going North over the bridge and then demonstrate the brand-new disc brakes that were being introduced on the 3.4 liter engine cars. All perfectly legal then. Today there is a 40 MPH limit, but one would be lucky to reach that speed due to traffic. On reflection we must have been thought to be expendable.

When my apprenticeship was over, I wanted to come to the United States and had arranged a job with the Jaguar Distributor in Indianapolis. My Mother was from the Chicago area, we had lived there during WWII, so, in a way, it was like coming home. On the way I stopped in Ottawa, Canada, to visit an aunt and uncle. My uncle was the British High Commissioner to Canada at the time. I expressed interest in visiting the Jaguar dealer in Ottawa while I was there so my uncle sent me in the company car, a chauffeur driven Rolls Royce. I have often wondered if he had mentioned this to his boss? Misuse of company funds perhaps? Since Her Majesty and my uncle are no longer with us, I feel I am free to tell the tale.

The Indianapolis job did not work out, instead I did my military service in the U.S. Army and then joined Jaguar Cars North American Corporation in New York.

My girlfriend, from high school days, and I have been married almost 64 years. She feels part of the Jaguar family to the extent that she keeps two Jaguars at our house in Florida, a 2001 VDP which she has had since new, and a 2005 XK8 convertible, with very few miles, that she bought recently from a neighbor who was having trouble getting in and out of it.

Dear "Rambling Old Man" who pressed "send" before attaching his name...

I respect your request to keep your words between you and I, but I would love for you to reconsider. Old British cars are special on their own, but what makes them really special are the people who've had a hand in making them, improving them, or are now bringing them back to life to be enjoyed all over again. Stories like your ramblings really do have an impact on the men and women today who are working on and enjoying these cars. I hear it all the time. For some, the little detail of the knowing the difference between the making of a bonnet of an XK140 and 150 is huge. I, for one, will never not see those extra four inches from this day forward, and I'm glad for that! I believe the cars we love have the personalities they do because they've taken on some of the character of the men (like yourself) and women who put them together.

I was emailing with my coworker, Michael Marter, the other day about the XK150 bonnet and his response was: "Sir William Lyons was known for being 'thrifty' — I'm sure they called him a 'cheap bastard' behind his back. It was actually amazing what Jaguar was able to produce for such a reasonable price. The E-Type, for instance, made contemporary Ferraris look like ox carts with their solid rear axles on leaf springs!"

Your first-hand experiences, written in appreciation for others' stories, are heartwarming. If you change your mind and decide to ramble some more, I would be honored to provide space in our little magazine.

In the meantime, at least let me know your name.

~David

Dear David,

If I may be so bold, you got me on that one!

I am known as Peter Murnane and I am sticking with it!

If anything I write is of interest please feel free to use it. I am not a scribe. My late very good friend, Andrew Whyte, was the one for that. Andrew was an apprentice with me and went on into journalism before rejoining Jaguar in the publicity department. He was the most honest, straight forward, trustworthy guy I have ever known. Didn't show up for work one day, he was found in his car, he had pulled over and parked on the side of the road. Must have felt a heart attack coming on and pulled over. There was a Memorial Service for him at the Coventry Cathedral. A D-Type was parked at the entrance in his honor.

Andrew was well known and very much respected. He was a Scot, a group of folks known to be on the frugal side. One time my wife, Anne, and I stopped to see him at his house while driving to Coventry from London. It was a coolish day by British standards so, to honor his guests from the US, Andrew put an extra lump of coal on the fire!

I mentioned that I was interviewed by Mr. Lyons—as was Andrew—a year or two after us he left the interviewing to others, so, for what it is worth, I must be part of a small living group who were interviewed by the founder of Jaguar.

I'm sure your co-worker's comment on Sir William being known as a "Cheap Bastard" is correct but, to his credit, there was an older gentleman, Harry Siverter(?), who had worked with Lyons years before and to whom Lyons must have felt indebted. Harry was crippled with arthritis, I mean *crippled*. Harry was kept on the payroll to answer the phone in the Drawing Office but needed to be picked up and returned to his home every working day. While working in the Drawing Office myself, and having that coveted works driving license, that job often fell to me. I was literally going into his house and helping him out and into the car, a Mk VII or Mk VIII. I

don't recall if I continued after I left the Drawing Office, may well have.

My Mum, prior to meeting my dad, had been a grade school teacher in America. There were many American military with families stationed in England and a need for American schools for American children. My Mum went back to work, teaching in the American school system for the USAF. This enabled her to purchase an American car at US prices. She bought a used 1953 Studebaker. At one point I was working in the Experimental Department with heaters. I brought in our Studebaker to demonstrate just what sort of heating was required in North America. It had an under-seat outlet as well as under dash. Before we had made one circuit of the factory, the engineer, to whom I was demonstrating it, was begging me to turn it off!

I shall look for photographs that might be of interest to you. Speaking of photos, we apprentices were on good terms with the factory works photographer. I recall one race event at Silverstone where "Pit Passes" were limited but in high demand. They were printed in black and white and attached to the windscreen. Copy machines, as we know them today, did not exist, but photography did. Several cars entered the pit area that weekend with photographs of pit passes in their windows. The vagrancies of youth!

Cheers...

Peter Murnane

PM



 One in a **Quarter**
MILLION

By Rodney McDonald

After driving for an hour in a Gulf Coast downpour, we arrived at the warehouse address we were given. The roll-up door opened as we got out of our car and there it sat: a scruffy MGB GT in the oh-so-seventies color called Blaze. The hour's drive was the last leg of a journey that began unexpectedly at an all-British car show in the year 2000.

Over 20 years ago, as that day's events wound down, the members of the South Alabama British Car Club were busily loading up show paraphernalia. I was working with my brother, Alan, loading up something or other when an affable gentleman came up and told us about his 1971 MGB GT. It was home in his garage, but it was rather special. The photos he showed us of his car included a roof top sign with British Leyland and MG logos and script indicating that this was the 250,000th MGB built. To say we were stunned would be a bit of an understatement. The owner said he would love to restore the car, but his job and other life obligations prevented it. We chatted a bit longer, but our attention was needed elsewhere. When we returned, the man and his photos were gone.

In the early 1970s, the MG company knew that they were heading for a milestone in MGB production. Production of the 'B had easily passed that of the MGA and it was nearing the quarter million mark. This sparked a promotional idea by British Leyland in the USA: MGB number 250,000 would be given away to a lucky entrant here in the states—BL's largest export market.

Advertisements were placed in enthusiast magazines trumpeting the achievement and inviting entrants to visit their local Austin-MG dealer and fill out an entry form. Thousands

did and a young man from Mobile, Alabama, did as well. And he won.

William Newton was notified that he won the car, and it would be presented to him at the new Road Atlanta race course during the SCCA runoffs in November, 1971.

William (or "Fig" to his friends) made the trip to Atlanta where he was treated like royalty. He had his photo taken in a custom windbreaker with MG and BL logos along with his nickname embroidered on it. Press releases were circulated to major newspapers and magazines around the country and the publicity folks at British Leyland must have certainly congratulated themselves on a job well done.



Fig took his MGB GT home to Mobile and into obscurity.

It's said that Fig was not a real enthusiast for his car, but he drove it for a number of years until some problem or other caused him to park it in a vacant lot in the early 1980s. Fig moved on to Birmingham, Alabama, but the forlorn MGB GT remained on the Gulf Coast.

Enter Tony Wilson. Tony was an MG enthusiast who drove an MGB GT starting from his high school years and for decades after. A friend of Tony's at the time told him about another car like his that was supposed to be something special. It was sitting outside

and he urged him to look at it. Tony did inspect the car and he was smitten. He negotiated with Fig through his parents who still lived in Mobile until a price was agreed to. It included the car, the signage, and an envelope full of photos, ownership documents, and press releases. Tony borrowed a trailer and took the MGB home to his garage in Mobile where it would stay parked out of sight for almost 40 years.

The car was thought by many MG historians and enthusiasts to have been lost. Just another old British sports car unworthy of attention that ended up in a scrap yard, waiting to become razor blades or gardening buckets.

After our brief chat at that car show, I became a tad obsessed with finding the MGB and its owner so we could continue our conversation and perhaps let the world know that MGB number 250,000 still existed. I kept up the rudimentary web site that the South Alabama British Car Club had at the time, and I dedicated a page to seeking information about the location of the car and to try to get back in touch with the owner, whose name by then I had forgotten. I later kept a blog about all things related to the classic British car hobby, and I would put a story out there asking for information about the car once in a while.

Occasionally, there would be a post on the MG Experience web forum on the subject, but nothing concrete came from any of it.

Then, in 2020 an email arrived from Tony Wilson stating that it was he that talked to my brother and I that day in 2000 and that we would be welcome to visit him at his home in Mobile. Yes, he had finally seen my appeal for information about his car. Then the pandemic kicked in with a fearsome vengeance and the meeting would have to be put off.

Early in 2023, Tony reached out again, saying that he had retired and was moving from Mobile to his

hometown in Mississippi. Would we like to visit? Does an MG leak oil? Yes, we would.

We were given the address of a former Sears Hometown store in a small eastern Mississippi community. We found our way there and was greeted by a smiling and proud Tony Wilson. The same sign that was photographed on the car on the Abingdon production line and in the British Leyland publicity shots was sitting on top of the car, the way it was over 50 years ago.

We must have chatted for about an hour when it dawned on me that I wanted to get some photos of the GT for my records, but the rain never let up. Indoor photos would have to do.

The prize GT is a bit rough, but it is complete. There is some rust perforation on the rear hatch and the orange paint has badly faded. The interior is complete with the exception of the carpeting in the passenger area. There are cracks in the dashboard top which is to be expected of the plastics of the time. Save for the windshield, the glass appears to be original to the car.

Equipment-wise this was a fairly high-end specification car with an BL-labeled AM-FM radio and overdrive. It's on Rostyle wheels. It missed out on the wire wheel option.

It was difficult to read the engine number but, like a lot of early-seventies cars of the time, a lot of the emissions

equipment was removed. No, we didn't sniff the tailpipes.

The serial number of the car was front and center: GHD5UB25000G. THE 250,000th MGB produced. Or maybe near that. Serial number assignment at the time was a bit loose so the actual 250,000th car may have been built sometime in the same month, but for British Leyland's purposes, this would be the car.

My brother and I talked with Tony as we took pictures, and he told us that he once ran into William Newton when he visited the world-renowned Barber Motorsports Museum in Birmingham. There are several lovely MGs in the Barber collection and Tony was chatting with one of the museum guards about his special MGB GT. The guard turned to him and said, "Yep, that was my car." Tony had finally met the man he bought the car from all those years ago. Sadly, Fig passed away in 2013.

As we started to wrap up our visit, Tony pointed out several bits of air cooled VW parts on his warehouse shelf, as well as Sears appliance parts, odd tools and the like. "Oh, by the way, that's an airport searchlight over there, too." Our man had eclectic tastes, for sure.

He asked us if we had time for another stop on our way back home in south Alabama. We followed him into the surrounding farmland outside of

town to a nondescript Quonset hut set back from the narrow road.

Inside was his latest acquisition—a 1972 MG Midget in immaculate condition. Further back in the building was his collection of six-cylinder Honda motorcycles as well as a VW Thing that is purported to have been owned by another Mobilian, the late Jimmy Buffett of laid-back island music fame. Tony was working on proving that connection.

So, what is to become of the MGB we spent so much time in tracking down? Tony says that now that he is retired he hopes to become more proactive in the restoration of the prize car. And he would like to renovate his original MGB/GT and spend more time driving his MG Midget. Excellent plan, Tony.

Whatever the outcome, be it restoration, renovation or preservation, the 250,000th MGB appears to be in good hands, just as it has been for a very long time. *MM*

Author's Note:

Shortly after this story was submitted to Moss Motoring, I was informed of the sudden passing of Tony Wilson in early August. We visited him last in late July and he was looking forward to starting preservation work on his special car. Thank you for saving this bit of history, Tony!





THE UPHILL BATTLE

By Todd Morris

A few years ago, our family completed our build of a 1964 Austin-Healey Sprite race car. We got it street legal, drove it everywhere around town, explored our local backroads, and ran some track days with it, too. But I wanted more of a challenge. I wanted to really race it! I had planned to get my SCCA license, but Covid got in the way.

My good friend, Mike Powell, had recently restored his first race car, one he had built himself and raced

in NASCAR back in the '70s when he was 15 years old. He crashed it but kept the wrecked car out back at his shop for decades. After he retired from the racing industry, he decided to restore it for fun with no real plans other than to haul it to car shows. It's a beautifully restored 1963 Ford Fairlane race car. Mike and his dad, Tex, have been in racing in some form or another their entire lives, both are regarded as legendary car builders. When our Sprite race car found us, the two of

them helped considerably along the way to get our car running again.

Like me, Mike found himself wanting more than car shows and track days. One evening we were hanging out at his shop and hill climbing entered the conversation. Neither Mike nor I had ever been in one, it was new territory for us. I guess the car gods overheard us. Out of the blue a few days later my friend Michael Satterfield calls. Michael is an automotive journalist, as well as a serious British car enthusiast, and he invited Mike and I to a new hill



“ I wasn't the only car running in the downpour. I was, however, the only open cockpit car. ”



climb he would be hosting in Texas: The Groesbeck Grand Prix Hill Climb. Combine the lure of a cross-country road trip from North Carolina to Texas with our post-Covid stir craziness, and how could we say no? Shortly after making that quick decision to enter the race, I experienced a dose of uneasiness. I have driven other friends' modern-day race-prepped cars, but now I just committed to racing a car that me and my kids had restored. Had we done an adequate job bringing each system back to life, or had I just been lucky driving it around town?

I called Rodney Trask (a past SCCA Regional Champion in a Sprite). Rodney had watched over my shoulder as I built my first motor at his place. I asked if I could bring the Sprite by for him to go through from a safety standpoint. He looked the car over, suggested a couple tweaks I needed to do, and gave me the green light. There's nothing fun about second-guessing one's own work, but I'm grateful to have good friends who are willing to share their skills and knowledge.

We had a few months before the Groesbeck event, so Mike and I decided to try and look for another hill climb to enter. We did not want to go all the way to Texas to embarrass ourselves. Scouring the internet, we found one coming up in our own backyard: the "Chasing the Dragon Hill Climb" hosted by CCRSCCA. It takes place annually on a mountain adjacent to the famous "Tail of the Dragon" in western North Carolina. So we signed up.

And now I had two hill climb decisions to feel anxious about! I wasn't helping my cause by watching videos of car crashes from past hill climb events. On top of that I had been talking with a SCCA road race friend about what we were planning. He said the last thing he would ever want to race is a hill climb, and that he would much rather be on a track with runoff areas rather than mountain drop-offs. This conversation wasn't easing my nerves, but then he said, "I would

want to own the hill climb record, but you are racing a Healey Sprite. I would be pushing big horsepower and hard braking, but you will be dealing with a momentum car with low horsepower. You're going to have a great time, just run a pace that you're comfortable with." That advice helped a lot. I was not going to back out of these races. I did, you understand, just in case, sorta get my personal affairs in order.

Off to Chasing the Dragon! My first ever run was in an all-day summer downpour in the mountains. I did not work my butt off getting the car prepared to miss a day of driving because of a little rain. The car was ready, and so I suited up. Our family and friends that came with us helped to get me strapped in and they checked the tire pressure. Mike jumped in the car with an umbrella, and we drove to the staging lane on the side of the water-drenched mountain.

Mike hopped out and left me there on the starting line. I wasn't the only

car running in the rain. I was, however, the only open cockpit car. Spectators, and other drivers opting for a dry track run, clapped for me as I drove by them in the downpour. Was I nervous? Terrified is the word I'd use to describe that moment. I took a deep breath and told myself to just drive where I felt comfortable. I just wanted to make my run, not wreck the car, and hopefully not break down.

Crossing that finish line for the first time was a big deal on so many levels. The most important is that I fulfilled a promise to my kids that one day our Sprite would race again.

After that first run, I saw hill climbing much clearer. It's been said that making a slow car go fast is more fun than driving a fast car slow. But as I found out quickly, making an AH Sprite car go fast and up a mountain is a daunting task. Did I make a clean run? Yes. Did I wreck? No. Did I break down? Nope. I made numerous runs over that weekend, and I watched my





times drop as I learned to trust myself and trust the car we built. Surprisingly, I also did not finish last. Close, but I was not last. That, for me, was as good as a podium finish. This was one of the greatest car experiences I have ever had, and I got to share it with my friends and family, along with all the competitors, spectators, and organizers. The sense of accomplishment had me hooked on future hill climb events.

Off to Groesbeck, Texas! A 16-hour journey split over two days. Most of my family was not interested in the long drive, but my oldest son Christian was up for a road trip. A really good friend and longtime amateur racer, Howard Chapman, heard we were going and asked if I needed help. “Absolutely!” I said. We made a pitstop in Birmingham, Alabama, to pick up my newly acquired crew chief, and then hit the road the next morning along with Mike Powell and his crew. There aren’t a lot of big hills in Texas, but Michael Satterfield

found an amazing location at the “Old Fort Parker” in Groesbeck to have it at.

The cars there were amazing. From British cars to Open Wheel racers and everything in between. The track was curvy and with some very fast straightaways. Both Mike’s car and ours did great. We met so many amazing people, both racers and spectators. Even today, I stay in touch with several of the people we met in Texas, including some amazing British car guys that came in to watch the event as well as compete in it. We left the Lone Star State with a Texas-sized smile.

With two climbs under our belts, we couldn’t help but seek out a third. So, Mike and I and a few other racer friends signed up for the Flag Rock Hill Climb in Norton, Virginia. It was only a few hours from where we live, right in the middle of the Blue Ridge mountains. I cannot say enough about the town of Norton. When we arrived on Friday everyone goes through tech to get

checked in and approved to run. They block off a stretch of road downtown where we set up our paddocks. Many racers camp out, or bring RVs, some sleep in the trucks they towed with. This time my wife came, and we found a historic hotel to stay at nearby. Unlike me, my wife Cami is no camper.

After the tech check-in, the town cleared out Main Street just for the racecars and hosted a block party for us. We met the locals, race volunteers, other competitors, and many of the police and firemen helping with the event. We were treated like royalty in this quiet mountain town.

Flag Rock is a state park with a 1.7-mile mountain run that climbs 950 feet with 15 turns including double switchbacks. Getting my Sprite race car up the mountain was a momentum battle. But I did it multiple times over two days and dropped ten seconds by the end. Mine was the second oldest car there, just after Mike’s. In competitive

measures, my times were a few seconds off the back of pack, and the overall winner was over a minute ahead of me, but I didn't care. I ran as hard as my car would go. Mike Powell took third in his class, which was great. My smart-ass crew chief this time was our good friend Greg Abbot. After the event he sent me a text that said it was nice of me to give 4th gear the weekend off. Not sure why I have friends like Greg in my life, but he makes me laugh and he's a helluva crew chief. I did not go to Flag Rock with expectations to win anything. I went to challenge myself and push the limits of my 60-year-old British sports car. And that's what I did!

Photo by Jed Whitley.

For 2024, we are already talking about going into the northeast for new hill climb adventures. There are so many to choose from! My hope, and part of the reason for writing this, is that I get to run with more vintage British cars so we can see who has the fastest slow car there.

For information on entry requirements and more, www.timetrials.scca.com is a good place to start. *MM*



Photo by Guess Work Photography.

A Different Kind of Survivor MGB



By John Conkle

I bought my 1975 MGB new in my last year of college. After graduation I was stationed as an Army officer at Ft. Lewis, Washington. Originally from the East Coast, I quickly fell in love with the natural beauty and outdoor activities of the Pacific Northwest. And my MG took me on many great adventures.

In March 1980, Mount St. Helens began showing volcanic activity. This captured my attention, and in May, as the minor ash and steam eruptions increased, I decided I needed to go see them for myself. On Saturday, May 17, 1980, I packed my camping equipment in my trusty MG and weaved my way through logging towns via logging roads.

In the late afternoon I came to a roadblock that established an exclusion zone around the mountain. The zone was a 10-mile radius encircling the entire mountain. Fortunately, the

logging landing near the roadblock allowed an unobstructed view of the northeast side of the mountain. There were several other people doing the same thing I was, waiting to get a picture of a steam or ash eruption.

After spending some time talking with my fellow adventurers, I took my backpack and camping gear and headed off down a trail to find a place to camp for the night. I woke up with the rising sun hitting my tent around 6am on May 18. I had an unobstructed view of the mountain just by rolling over and looking out of the tent opening. Mount St. Helens was glowing pink with the reflection of the morning sunrise. I took a picture, rolled over, and dozed off.

The next thing I knew, I was startled awake by what I thought was a very low airplane. It was 8:32am. I looked out of the tent, and that's when I saw the initial stages of Mount St. Helens erupting. I quickly fumbled for my

camera. I thought to myself, "I need to get a picture before this stops." I snapped one picture and then realized not only was the eruption not stopping, but it was coming straight toward me!

(Note: The famous sequence of pictures taken that morning showing the eruption was taken from the logging landing by one of the people I had spoken to the night before. More about this at the end.)

As quickly as I could, I threw on my clothes and shoes, grabbed my backpack, and ran back up the road toward my car, leaving the tent behind. When I looked back, I noticed the eruption appeared to be slowing, but then looking about a quarter mile to the west I saw the cloud of ash had already raced past me up a ridgeline.

When I finally reached the landing, everyone I had spoken to the previous night had gone. Small pebbles were falling from the sky and the static



angled such that I couldn't budge it. Going forward wasn't an option either. As I stood there wondering what to do next, it began to rain mud balls of ash.

The logical thing to do was to get back inside because I thought even a soft-top MG was a safer option. The mud and ash soon obscured the windshield, and it became pitch black inside. I attempted to try the radio but only got static. After sitting awhile in the dark, I opened the door and discovered about six inches of ash had accumulated. I said a quick prayer and made the decision that I was not going to die sitting in the car, and that if this was the end I was going to die trying to escape. I knew that from where I was the closest town was 22 miles down the logging road. I tied a wetted handkerchief over my nose and mouth, grabbed my backpack, and started off. It was pitch black and my flashlight was useless as the beam could not penetrate the falling ash. I said to myself, if I just put one foot in front of the other and watched that I did not veer off the road I could slowly make progress. It was 9:30am.

After walking slowly for an hour, I was able to start making out shapes. The ash fall was not as heavy, and I could begin to see where I was going. (I later realized the direction I was traveling took me out of the ash cloud that was blowing east on the prevailing wind.) I walked 18 miles on that long dark day before I was picked up by a US Forest Service truck. I spent the night in Randle, Washington, with others who were stranded by car breakdowns and the closing of Route 12 caused by the thick, fluffy ash covering the landscape. The good residents of Randle fed and housed all the stranded travelers in their homes for the night.

The next day I attempted to convince the US Forest Service to help me retrieve my car, but they just laughed at the request. With the help of another stranded traveler with a broken-down car, we were able to find someone to drive us west to get out of

electricity in the air was causing lightning strikes. I was hoping to get inside the car for whatever protection it might provide me.

The MG started immediately (thanks Lucas electronics!) and I drove faster than usual down a twisty logging road. Coming around a sharp

turn, I fishtailed on the loose gravel. I overcorrected and was careening toward a drop off. With both feet on the brakes, I came to a stop on a soft downhill slope. I made several attempts to back up but could not get any traction in the soft gravel. I got out and attempted to push, but the car was

the ash-filled air. A fellow with an old pickup took us to Tacoma, which was clear of ash, as he was attempting to get to Yakima via I-90.

I communicated with the US Forest Service daily to get permission to retrieve my car but was routinely told it was too dangerous. Finally, one month later I received the phone call to come pick up my car. I arranged for a tow truck to haul the car from the logging road to a gas station in Randle. And from there I hired another tow to a mechanic/body shop in Tacoma. Because I had not driven the car through any significant ash, I wanted to have it drained of all fluids before restarting and driving again. Besides the obvious damage caused by the ash everywhere, the car had been vandalized.

As I was at the gas station in Randle, a car came by on the road, screeched to a stop, did a U-turn, and drove into the gas station. A woman jumped out and asked if I owned the car. When I said yes, she gave me a big hug and said she was there with me the night before the eruption. She and the others left as soon as the eruption started, but they all worried about me because I had hiked off to camp. They all thought I had died!

As I mentioned earlier, the photographer who took the famous sequence of pictures showing the eruption was interviewed by the Seattle



Times soon after the event. In the article he said, “We all got out safely except for the guy with the red MG. We don’t know what happened to him.” I was able to contact him and let him know I, too, was safe.

Soon after my experience I left the military, returned to college, and embarked on a very rewarding career in the paper industry, which I’m retired from—all spent entirely in the beautiful state of Washington.

I have never suffered any negative impact either physically or emotionally from my experiences that

day. If anything, it only enhanced my desire to get out and enjoy all the easily accessible outdoor activities afforded by living in the beautiful Pacific Northwest.

I have so many great memories of skiing, mountain climbing, sailing, backpacking, and hiking enjoyed with friends and my beautiful family—including visiting Mount St. Helens with my wife Stacie last summer.

That day 43 years ago did not shape my life but allowed me to have a once in a lifetime experience. I’m grateful to have lived through it. *MM*



LEAVING THE PRESERVATION CLASS

By Keith Daniel

Back in the latter half of the last century I restored my Austin-Healey. All new metal front to back on the bottom 12 inches. Went through the brakes, hoses, belts, starter and generator. Just an amateur restore, not a frame-off, but turned out pretty good. Got my friend with a body shop to paint it. The interior was in remarkably good shape for original thanks to vinyl in the last production year rather than leather, so no work needed there, other than carpet. Time for fun.

Since then I've been having a blast with it every summer and, surprisingly for an old Brit, in 25 years it has never let me down. Just as reliable as a Honda and twice as pretty or more. Three years ago, the SU fuel pump started getting lazy, and after sitting for a week or two I would have to bang on the floor in back to wake it up, so after 50+ years I upgraded to a new electronic one.

Guys would tell me about their complicated procedure in the spring to get going. Me, with no battery tender or anything else besides fresh fluids, I would turn the key and hit the road. Every few years, set the valves. That's about it. My philosophy has always been "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" or "Don't mess with success." Or maybe "Lord Lucas knew what he was doing."

A couple of years ago on the way to a weekend meet, the old girl started sputtering and missing. Considering that the points, plugs and condenser were all 25 years old, it seemed reasonable to think that they were near the end of their lifespan. (Sidenote: never even had to set the points in that time period.) No worries, I always carry spares. New ones didn't fix it so I got to thinking, "Oh, who knows maybe it's the 50-year-old coil." That wasn't it either. Turns out I just got a bad tank of gas. Unusual for sure in this day and

age. And no, I didn't put the old parts back in.

The last couple of hot summers proved that the valve seals were due, so end of season last year I dug into that job. The ones that were still in place would crack into pieces when I touched them.

Now, a little explanation is in order. With the first restoration, I never detailed the engine bay. Never power washed it, never nothing. Hey, I was busy working and raising kids. Well, one thing, probably 20 years ago when setting the valves, I painted the valve cover. In hindsight the contrast between the painted cover and the rest of the bay was shocking. But you know what they say: It's only 50-year-old grease and grime once. I'm all about originality.

With the valve seals done I got to thinking, maybe it's time. I'm retired now and the kids are in their 40s. I pushed the car outside and powerwashed the engine and went to work. Dug around and found the 20-year-old can of Healey green paint, which was still as good as new and barely used. Speaking of paint, I can't help but wonder why someone from England, which is known for understated elegance, would combine green, red, yellow, and blue under the same bonnet. Nevertheless, with the paint and a few orders from Moss, the engine bay now looks not perfect, but respectable. And in factory correct colors.

I can't help but wonder, though, if just maybe I painted over some of Donald Healeys fingerprints.

It's only original once. *MM*





Humble Beginnings

By Dominic Ruffalo

When I was growing up, both of my grandpas instilled in me a love of classic cars. Outings with either of them often included attending local cruise nights and car shows. I learned from them at a young age to identify makes and models of vintage automobiles. I was hooked. One day I would have a classic of my own.

The past several years have been chaotic. I moved away from where I grew up and, just as I was getting settled with a new job and life, the pandemic hit. The experience of this uncertainty unnerved me as I'm sure it did others. I missed activities that I took for granted, car shows in particular.

I am hesitant to admit it, but I did not start out as a British car enthusiast. I often walked by them at car shows thinking they seemed small, almost unsafe, even comical at times. How wrong I was. My friend Doug set me straight and introducing them to me. He conveniently lived down the street from where I grew up and has an extensive collection of English cars.

I wanted a unique car, ideally a stick shift convertible, and black. Definitely black. While casually searching for cars on Facebook Marketplace one night I came upon a car that I had never seen or heard of before. For sale: 1962 Triumph TR4. I was immediately taken with its presence and design. To top it off it was a black convertible! I needed to see the car in person as soon as possible.

I played hooky from work the next day and arranged to meet the seller

outside of Dayton, Ohio, several hours from where I live. When I got to the gentleman's home the car was sitting outside. It looked better in person! The car had been mechanically restored by Macy's Garage with a rebuilt motor, transmission, brakes and new trunk and floor pans. We took the car out for a spin, and I was absolutely hooked! From the sound of the wet liner four, to the interior, gauge cluster, and banjo steering wheel—I had to buy it!

We made a deal and I arranged for the car to be trucked back to my home. Still in a state of euphoria from the purchase, I invited my buddy Sam to join me on its very first spin out in the countryside—the old Lincoln Highway to be precise. I wanted to open it up! Somewhere between Indiana and Ohio I was on cloud nine, driving down the highway too fast, almost as if I was finally managing to outrun the pandemic.

I slowed down a bit as we entered the decaying remnants of a small town. The sound of the motor misfiring brought me back down to earth. I pulled over and opened the bonnet. Nothing seemed out of ordinary until I turned the key and only heard the whine of the starter without the motor firing. Maybe it was a fluke. I preceded to crank on the key again. Nothing. Shoot. The euphoric buzz was rapidly wearing off. I tried again hoping not to be stranded on the wrong side of nowhere in rural Ohio. One more time... It fired up! The car was running poorly at best, belching black smoke from the exhaust like a

locomotive, with me cursing behind the wheel hoping I could get back home. Every time I reached a stop sign the car wanted to die. Luckily, I was in the middle of nowhere, so with a watchful eye towards any oncoming traffic, I proceeded to blow half a dozen stop signs on the way home.

I got a few blocks from home and was unfortunately foiled by the turning of a stale green light. The car promptly died in the intersection. Oncoming drivers drove slowly around us stopping to turn, point and look. A nice FedEx driver helped Sam and I push the car out of the intersection. As if on cue a squad car pulled up alongside us.

At this point Sam is laughing at the whole situation, and I am mad at myself thinking that I bought a lemon! To top it off, here I am, probably about to get a citation for blowing half a dozen stop signs in my mad dash to get this heap out of Ohio. The window lowers and I am greeted by the friendly voice of a policewoman, "Nice car! Are you guys okay?"

The officer seemed to find humor and interest in the situation, staying with us longer than what's required. I will admit that the brief thought crossed my mind of trying to ask her out when this ordeal was over. This was fleeting of course upon seeing a wedding band. I turned my attention back to my poor dead Triumph and trying to get through to anyone from AAA to tow the car the few blocks back home. While waiting on the phone I thought I would try the key just one more time.

By some absolute fluke she started! I asked the policewoman if she could escort the car back home since I would be unable to stop without the engine dying again. She agreed, turned on her lights, and off we went!

I didn't want to look at the car once I got it home and in my garage. My curiosity eventually got the better of me. I opened the gas cap and was greeted with the smell of ether. Was my problem as simple as rotten gas? I siphoned out several gallons of straw-colored gas and sediment. Then I blew out the car's fuel lines, cleaned its fuel pump, and partially disassembled and cleaned the jets and bowls of the dual SU carburetors. Satisfied with my progress, I tried again to reawaken the sleeping four-cylinder engine... Nothing. On to spark! I pulled one of the engines plugs, grounded it to the block, cranked over the engine and looked for spark... Nada. I turned my attention to the distributor. Removing the cap, I found a short and a burned-up condenser. Eureka! The previous owner gifted me a box of spare parts and conveniently a new set of points were inside along with a Lucas gapping tool. If this didn't work, I was at a loss. I installed the points, crossed my fingers, and turned the key hoping that third time's a charm... The motor awakened! I took it around the block, bought a can of seafoam, and filled the tank with it and ethanol-free boat gas hoping I could dilute the residual material left in the gas tank.

I thought that it would be wise after my adventure to get the car checked out thoroughly by my mechanic. After rebuilding and tuning the SUs, tackling a minor electric issue, and replacing its engine and transmission mounts, the car was given a clean bill of health. Just in the nick of time before the car show season ended.

All in all, I have no regrets buying my TR4. While I am still a newbie convert to the British automobile world, I'm enjoying the experience of owning one. There is nothing like cruising country roads with the top down after a long day of work. I hope to own my TR4 for many years to come. *MM*



A LEGACY OF *love and restoration*

by Marissa Neely

In the world of car restoration, the passage of time often intertwines with the preservation of memories, creating a tapestry of family bonds that transcends generations. It is a realm where grease-stained hands become the conduit for passing down not just mechanical skills but also a profound sense of heritage and tradition. Our story begins not with my husband, Chris, but with his parents, who shared a passion for restoring MGs before they even exchanged wedding vows. It was they who laid the foundation for their youngest son to become the English-engine addict he is today.

Sharing a love story similar to our own, Chris's parents got together when they were very young and could be considered textbook high school sweethearts. Instead of buying something off the lot, Chris's parents embarked on a restoration project together, an MGA, back in 1973. It was a shared endeavor that ignited their love for automotive restoration. Over the years, they acquired many MGs, refurbished them, and sold them as a source of income.

As their collection grew, they found themselves in possession of two MGB wrecks, one in considerably worse condition than the other. These forlorn vehicles found a home behind Chris's father's photography studio, gradually succumbing to the elements, slowly rusting away, and overgrown with weeds.

Fast forward to the early 2000's when Chris's older brother, Jon, expressed interest in undertaking the MGB restoration project. The family



decided to transport the car to their mountain home, placing it in the garage. In a short time, however, Jon shifted his focus to other hobbies, and the project sat, barely started and forgotten about. But a few years later, Chris, the younger brother, stepped in, taking up the mantle when he was just 12 or 13 years old.

Months of dedicated work followed, with Chris pouring his heart and soul into the restoration project with his dad giving guidance every step of the way. Finally came the time to breathe new life into the car by replacing her rusty, multi-colored exterior with bright white paint. So, the father-son duo put the car on a trailer and towed her back down to the valley. In the paint booth she went, and she would come out a few months later looking like an entirely different car. Tragically, during this time, Chris's father passed away from his battle with cancer. It was a tough time for young 14-year-old Chris, but when the MG emerged from the garage, its pristine, glistening white exterior adorned with classic blue stripes down the center, Chris was determined to complete the build, fulfilling his father's vision and making him proud.

It was during this time that our own love story began. Chris and I started dating, and as we lived three hours apart, many of our nights were spent on FaceTime. His phone was often propped up on a workbench, allowing him to chat with me while diligently working on the car. With help from friends, the internet, his family and (of course) Moss Motors, Chris was able to complete the build after years of tinkering, trial, and error.

On my birthday, he surprised me with a fully functional sports car and a picnic basket ready for a lakeside adventure. Our first date in the MGB was the start of countless unforgettable moments.

The MGB soon became Chris's daily driver during high school, and he honed his skills navigating the winding mountain roads without power steering. As a teenage boy he definitely tested the





limits with his car, but never with me in the passenger seat. It was a combination of his gentlemanly care and his tenacity to see things through that led me to saying “yes” without any hesitation when he asked if I would be his wife.

In 2018, we celebrated our wedding and drove off together as husband and wife in the MG—a car that had become deeply intertwined with our love story. There were moments when Chris contemplated selling the car, but I staunchly refused. The MGB is a part of his legacy, and I couldn’t bear to see it part ways with our family so easily... even if our attention and time was directed elsewhere for a while.

Following our wedding, we moved aboard our 1979 Cheoy Lee 41 sailboat, Avocet, that became our home. A humble living situation for two newly-wed-twenty-somethings

with barely a dollar to their names. While we transitioned to life afloat, our beloved MGB became a storage unit for bags of clothes, boxes and other things we hastily removed from our apartment while trying to assimilate into boat living. During the same time, Chris expressed his desire to install a overdrive, necessitating the removal of the transmission. Unfortunately, boat projects took precedence, and car projects were reluctantly set aside for the next four years.

However, while sailing Avocet in Mexico, we experienced a near-catastrophic engine failure that led Chris to rebuilding our English Perkins 4.108 engine, which brought him right back to the days he spent leaning over his English car’s engine bay. That experience, although stressful and unplanned, reignited Chris’s passion

for automotive restoration. Upon our return to California during Mexico’s hurricane season, he channeled that tenacity and was determined to revive his beloved car.

After weeks of tinkering and meticulous care, he had the MGB up and running once more. Oh, how I missed the sound of her sturdy engine echoing in the mountains. To celebrate, we packed a picnic basket and set off for the lake, experiencing a sense of déjà vu. The MGB, with its rumbling engine, once again became a vessel for our land-based adventures, a testament to Chris’s unwavering dedication and love for restoration, and a tangible link to the legacy his father passed on to him.

Our summer in California came to an end as our life afloat Avocet beckoned to us. Parked in the very garage she was built in, Chris and I put



the cover on over our sweet car that would be waiting for our return. While sailing on Avocet, we will have plenty of time to plan for a proper road trip this coming summer. After all, with a packed picnic basket, some driving gloves, a wide-open road and a capable car, the opportunities for adventures are endless. *MM*

Marissa and her husband Chris hail from California but these days find themselves living in Mexico aboard their 1979 Cheoy Lee 41 "Avocet." You can follow the couple's adventures on their website www.svavocet.com, on instagram @svavocet or on their YouTube channel "Sailing Avocet."



A Short Tale

by Ned Surleth

With most of our projects hibernating during this season of winter wonder, I thought, why not snuggle up to a cozy fire with a hot-toddy and share a yarn I call the “Post-Holiday Hot Wires.” Comfortable? Here goes...

Once Upon a time in a land called Tenn-Es-See there lived an old geezer who foolishly thought he would restore a little British sports car which he had purchased sight unseen. This little roadster, named “the MaGi,” soon became a garage full of dismantled parts. However, the man was a wise old crow since he took the time to tag, sort, label, box, and bag each rusty, grease coated fender, bonnet, boot, brake drum, assorted nuts, bolts, screws, et al. He particularly tagged the ratty wiring harness that would drop pieces of rotten braiding like dandruff from Santa’s beard.

Years went by and the old codger, slaving away like one of Kris Kringle’s pointy eared elves, cleaned, primed, and painted parts till they sparkled in the sun. Those that were no longer serviceable he replaced with authentic Moss Motors mechanicals. And when the MaGi’s body needed new bones, the old man painstakingly reattached posts and sills amidst spitting slag.

Hours he toiled with Bondo, sandpaper, and primer till his fingerprints became as smooth as freshly Zambonied ice. When the MaGi whispered, “Paint me,” in the old crock’s hairy ear, he was deaf to its implorations. And so the MaGi’s gray primered hull languished forlornly on a





sleigh-like wooden dolly in the darkness of the unused toy shop, aka garage.

Two years passed, and the MaGi, ready for a coat of glistening ebony, continued to gather dust while spiders happily spun webs in its hollow shell. But one day, the old curmudgeon decided, "I'll put the body back on the chassis and paint it at the booth on the far side of town."

The MaGi, overjoyed at the man's rather delayed decision, once again sat proudly on its dolly, looking forward to being rejoined heart and soul.

Well, no sooner had the old fella come to this monumental decision, when neighborly help knocked on the door and the MaGi's body soon found itself placed gently onto its rolling chassis. Now the ol' thumb twiddler had a renewed purpose: make the MaGi run again.

Soon, a dented radiator found its way back home. Then the lungs of the MaGi, its SU carburetors, were transplanted back into the chest of the little roadster. "It won't be long before I'll take to the street again," thought

the MaGi. "All I need now is an electrical harness."

The old coffin-dodger read the MaGi's mind and climbed the ladder, rung by rung, to the top of the shelf where the old and new wiring harnesses had been placed years before. After no little struggle coming down while carrying a box of electrical goodies, he set his bounty down on the toy shop floor and began to unwrap the old and new braided and color-coded wiring.

As I said earlier, the wise old quibbler had tagged each original wire when he disconnected them from the organs of the firewall and dash early on in the MaGi's resuscitation. He then laid the old and new harnesses next to each other, switching tags from one to the other as nearly as he could, since many tags had succumbed to the ravages of time or had become soiled beyond legibility by the greasy old braiding. Nevertheless, he soon had four harnesses tagged and ready for installation. The new front to rear braid already hung neatly under the chassis.

The main harness, lying on the floor like the roots of an evergreen, branched

out in all directions with tags hanging here and there like ornaments on a Christmas tree. With some trepidation the old cur grasped the multi-branched set of colorful wires and proceeded to lay it in place near the control box, fuse unit, and direction indicator relay unit, which he had already installed on the MaGi's firewall.

Thinking ahead, the old coot also put the wiper unit in place, knowing to do so later would be as difficult as getting reindeer to fly.

With three wiring diagrams at his disposal, the determined old fusser set to work attaching color-coded wires here and there. Although the guru of all MaGi, Barney Gaylord, suggested step-by-step installation instructions in one of his many missives, the contrary old crank ignored that advice and simply connected the many branches one at a time willy-nilly.

Nevertheless, after a day of contented joy, the main harness lay happily in place. The old fossil rubbed his hands together and retired to his chalet with thoughts of dash harnesses dancing in his head.

The next day, suffice it to say, the dash and main harness were hung from the body with care, in hopes that ignition soon would be there. The negative grounds tested positive at all points, and the wires were nestled all snug in their joints.

Now, the time had come to reattach the twin power supply, turn the key, and give the sleeping MaGi a nudge awake, which is exactly what the old boss did.

Nothing.

Another tug on the cable unsettled the MaGi who began to starter switch smoke. "This could become a bad habit," the MaGi coughed. Hurriedly, the old grouser released the cable, switched off the key, and disconnected the two-lobed-positive-earth power supply.

Days later and after tracing down each color-coded wire and its proper terminal, all to no avail, the old grinch was stumped. Why even an extra starter switch caused the MaGi to smoke as badly as before. Yes, indeed, it was a real head scratcher. "It ran when parked," he thought.

"Who ya gonna call?" the MaGi intimated.

"I'll call Ted, the Dalai Lama. He'll know what to do," said the old mutterer.

For two hours two graybeards tried two starter switches, two ways, with and without harness, but the MaGi simply refused to budge. Why, they couldn't even get a shiver out of its starter. "Let's bypass the switch and touch the battery and starter wires together," Ted proposed. The old growler, although fearful of too many amps, did as Ted suggested, and like an AED, it worked; the MaGi's heart gave a jump and began to pump!

Bad switches seemed the obvious conclusion, and Ted returned home, leaving the old gaffer to order a new one.

Later that week, the UPS man and his brown sleigh arrived with a new switch from Moss. Installation soon commenced. But lo and behold, like a yule log in a fireplace, the MaGi

continued to puff away. Although three bad switches seemed as unlikely as a fat man coming down a chimney, the old stager ordered another, hoping that would cure the MaGi's smoking ways.

While waiting for the fourth switch to arrive, the old pensioner wasn't one to let a stone go unturned. He hobbled to his computer and posed the problem to The MG Experience forum. Back and forth the conversation ran with this possible solution or that. Till finally, someone called for a picture of the starter, hooked up and sitting in place like a plate of cookies and milk. The old patriarch whipped out his trusty cell phone, took a picture, and posted it for all to see,

Well, before long, Ohmite, a helpful elf, replied with a possible diagnosis: could the cable to the starter be shorting out on the starter switch case? The old ganger shuffled quickly to the toy shop where he rotated the end of the starter cable connection, added a spacer to boot, and like Rudolph's red nose guiding Santa's sleigh, his problem was solved!

With the new harness in place and the little electrical gremlin rooted out, the old hermit gave the starter cable a tug and rejoiced in the MaGi's rumbling cacophony. Then, in a what felt like a blink of an eye, wiring harnesses, seats, steering wheel, and tires found their homes.

And just like that, the MaGi backed out of the toy shop and out onto the driveway, delightfully happy in its new found freedom. Finally, the little roadster's body and chassis, sans fenders and doors, had become one, and he could scoot around the yard like a young colt once again with grandkids in the saddle."

There you have it, a 'short' tale on encouraging your MaGi not to take up starter switch smoking. By the way, should you ever need a starter switch, I know an old-timer who has three extra. Come to think of it, I'll bet Ted will need one for his MaGi makeover. *MM*





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