

The Dipstick



“The Newsletter of the Tidewater MG Classics Car Club”

www.mg.org

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Dedicated To Preserving The Marque Since 1973

March 2009

MARQUE TIME

We had what appeared to be a record turnout for the February meeting at the Cummings' beautiful home. The traditional offering of multiple grades of homemade chili may have had something to do with it. So did the soft pretzels before the meeting and the vanilla ice cream cones after! Hats off to Joyce and Craig for a memorable evening.

I was lucky enough to catch a ride up to the meeting courtesy of Bill Yoshida. We were accompanied by Walt Westhoff (attending his first TMGC meeting) and Mike Lalli (prospective member looking for his first MG.) Four guys in a Caddy tooling down the interstate at night – shades of that roadtrip in Animal House.

The big news is the changing of the guard in the Activities Director position. After years of dedicated service, Beckey Watson has convinced Tad Carter to volunteer his services in this key role. Beckey has gone above and beyond on a routine basis and we all owe her a huge debt of gratitude. We also need to thank Tad for stepping up to the plate as our new AD. It's just this kind of volunteerism that will keep TMGC a going concern through the coming years.

A quick MGA update. Under Vince's supervision, the carbs are now linked up correctly, to include the choke mechanism. The timing is close enough that the car starts easily and idles at about 950 revs. A quick test hop proved that the brakes do indeed work. As an added bonus there are no hydraulic leaks! Next step is to install some NOS carb kits, recently liberated from Vince's parts collection. More on that next time.

Finally, Mother Nature is teasing us with 70 degree days in mid-February. That means spring is inbound. Time to ditch the top and get those MGs out and about!

Safety Fast!
Mark Davidoski

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Check www.mg.org for the latest info!

- Mar. 4 (Wed) Meeting hosted by Andy Wallach & Cynthia Faschini
- Mar. 7 TRAACA Swap Meet
www.aaca.org/tidewater
- Mar. 12 Dipstick Deadline
- Apr. 7 (Tue) Meeting hosted by Ron Struewing & Anita Edwards-Struewing
- Apr. ?? (Sun) Spring Tech Session hosted by Frank & Debbie Linse
- Apr. ?? (Sun) [WBCC Car Show](#), Williamsburg, VA
- Apr. 12 Dipstick Deadline
- Apr. 18 Brits in the Delaware - Kintersville, PA
Contact Tony Hess - 610-346-9026 or
aghbop@aol.com
- Apr. 24-26 Winery Tour
- May. 3 (Sun) [WBCC Car Show](#), Williamsburg Winery, Williamsburg, VA
- May. 6 (Wed) Meeting hosted by Jim & Betty Villers
- Jun. 2 (Tue) Meeting hosted by Bill & Issie Yoshida
- Jun. ? (Sun) [TTR Brits on the Bay](#) Car Show, Virginia Beach, VA
- Jun. 24-28 MG 2009 Breckenridge, CO
www.mg2009.com
(April 15th cut-off for registration discount)

Upcoming Activities (continued)

- Jun. 24-28 [MG 2009](#) Breckenridge, CO
- Jul. 1 (Wed) Meeting hosted by Bill & Renee Olcheski
- Jul. 14-18 NAMGAR [GT-34](#), Hot Springs, AR
- Aug. 4 (Tue) Meeting hosted by Tad & Karen Carter
- Sep. 2 (Wed) Meeting hosted by Marilyn & Roy Wiley
- Oct. 06 (Tue) Meeting hosted by Chuck & Becky Hassler
- Oct. 30 Hilton Head / Savannah Histories (Track Event) www.hhiconcours.com
- Oct. 31 Hilton Head / Savannah Car Club Jamboree www.hhiconcours.com
- Nov. 1 Hilton Head Concours d'Elegance www.hhiconcours.com



FEBRUARY MINUTES

Michele Peters

We began our February meeting a little on the late side, at 8:17 PM on February 3 at Craig and Joyce Cummings' warm and cozy home with a very decent crowd. We were all having so much fun schmoozing and gabbing that we didn't want to break to actually have our meeting. However, the Prez eventually prevailed upon us to shush up, settle down, and listen (well, we sort of did that...but not really!).

New Members and Guests: Walter Westoff from Norfolk joins us. He is working on an off-the-chaise 1959 MGA restoration, if anyone wants to come out to join him. Contact numbers are 466-9188 (work) and 671-2011 (home). Our guest was Mike Lalli, sans MG. But that's OK, Mike...we'll take ya anyway.

Vice-President: Absent

Treasurer: Jim V. reported that we had about \$300 less than last month, but we are still well in the black.

Activities: Beckey (and Alan) made it to our meeting (Hi, guys! Good to see ya!) with good news about our upcoming 7th Annual Wine Tour (2009), from April 24-26. It is now closed and we have a bunch of regulars, some semi-regulars and a few newbies. Sounds like a wonderful weekend, as ALWAYS! Thank you loads and loads, Beckey and Alan, for another eagerly anticipated weekend of drunkenness and debauchery (NO, NO, just kidding! Everyone is al-

ways very well behaved!).

Beckey also reported that we received a very nice thank you note from The Dwelling Place family shelter for our Christmas-time contributions of money, clothing, toys, etc. A special thank-you to Cynthia, who took all the gifts over to the families there.

Tad, our new Activities Director, was Johnny on-the-spot with his WRITTEN reporting of our upcoming activities (Oh, *thank you*, Tad! And all my loyal readers should thank Tad, too, because from now on, I might actually get the names, dates, and activities information correct, for a change!).

Brits on the Bay, Kintersville, PA, April 18, 2009: Call Tony Hess 510-346-9026 or aghbop@aol.com; Williamsburg British Car Show, Williamsburg, VA, May 3, 2009: www.wmbgbrit.com or call Doug Wilson at 757.565.4668 or dew311@cox.net; Tidewater Triumph Register, Brits on the Bay, early June, see club website; MG 2009, Breckenridge, CO, June 24-28, 2009, See YouTube for local scenery, registration discount if postmarked by April 15th (yeah, that reminds me of another deadline,,,,); Shenandoah Valley British Car Club, Waynesboro, in mid-October, details not yet posted; Hilton Head Island, SC at the Savannah Histories, a track event on Sat, Oct 31, Car Club Jamboree featuring cars of Great Britain, info call Bill Schmitt, 843.298.3038.; MG 2010 in Belleville, Ontario (Wow! A foreign country!), June 23-27, 2010. Passports are required (like I said, it's a FOREIGN COUNTRY!), about a 12-hour drive (690 miles) from Virginia Beach. Just think about it.

Clubs: Mike & Jennifer noted that the Richmond Club is having its "Snowball Run" sometime soon (see what no written report does to me!) and they are meeting up at the Tides Inn. For more info, contact Jennifer.

The MGA Register is going to be held July 13-17 in Hot Springs, Ark, the T Register in Concord, NH in June and the MGA Regional in Key West at the end of April. Also note that Peggy sent our info into the 'T' Register editor; thanks, Peggy!

History: Susan reported that "We have history." You can find most of the pictures from earlier years of our club on the website now.

Newsletter: Ron Struewing asked that articles be submitted to both editors, Peggy balloon1@cox.net, and Ron rstruewing@cox.net and photos, with or without an article, be sent to Ron and our historian, Susan Bond sue007@infionline.net. Anita, who was under-the-weather, says "Hi!" "Hi," right back at ya, Anita... we missed you!

Membership: Bill Yoshida reported that our total membership stands at 98.

Technical: Mark Childers was absent.

Old Business: Jennifer noted that Bruce Woodson, VP of the MGA Register, wrote the obituary

for Bill Ludtke in the MGA and MGT Registers. She reports that the funeral was a wonderful celebration of Bill's life, and Martha would love to hear from anyone. She is living in Winchester, now.

New Business: Craig noted that Doug Wilson's parts needed repairing and he is now recovering at home. He would enjoy a "hello" from folks in the club and, good news, he has quit smoking (unlike my little Miss B).

Terry noted that Richard Hall is recovering from a run-in with a grinding wheel and doing OK; would love to hear from us.

Marque Time: Alan noted a conversation about an MG in the movie "IQ" with Meg Ryan and Walter Matthau, "It's a TC; No, it's a TF." Mike noted that it was easy to tell a TC from a TF since the TF had a "long stroke." Uh, it was funnier at the time!

Vince stopped by El Presidente's home for about 2 hours to work on his \$500 wundermaschine. They are working on the distributor.

Becky and Chuck drove 3,144 miles down to Key West with the top down in their MGB with no trouble – what a drive! Hey you guys! Next time, take me!

Alan noted that there is a new owner of Isabel...Matt is working on Isabel now, having sold the Midget. She ought to look mighty fine when he's done with her.

Mike's 1969 B, which was totally submerged in the canal, has only a corroded electrical system for its troubles.

Raffle and Regalia: Mike Ash – magnet; Josh – license plate holder X2; El Prez – MG Magazine; 2 tickets to the Home and Flower Show – Bill Y; 2 tickets to the VA Symphony – Josh again; first in line to eat – Craig.

We adjourned at 8:58 to begin socializing where we left off before the meeting began, all in good spirits, not a "So sue me!" to be heard from anyone.



Note from the Editors

by Ron Struewing

Correction

The February 2009 issue of *The Dipstick* listed the newsletter *Meshing Gears* as the source for the Tech Tip article on page 3. The correct source was *The eChatter* newsletter.



Test Drive

by Tom Grigsby

October 2008

Susan and Terry Bond visited our antiques store (Pass It On Antiques) in Smithfield this last May. My 71 MGB GT was parked in the store driveway, and I saw them through the windows out there looking at it. Who knew there were others devoted to GTs out there in the world? During the course of the ensuing conversation I mentioned that I would like to join a club, but my GT is so rusty that I was sure it would be an embarrassment to any club member. One doesn't see rusty cars at club events. Susan and Terry disabused me of that notion, mentioning that their 72 was a bit rusty and was quite welcome at events. They even brought it around to the front of the store to show it to me! Though mine is rustier (not sure if that's bragging or an apology), it did put my mind at ease regarding the character of the TMGC members.

Deciding to join the club was easy after mentioning to Susan that my car needed a front-end alignment. Susan immediately told me how to do it myself, and quoted the specs! She was right (I checked the book), and did it myself, saving at least \$60.00. I figured that's three years worth of dues for TMGC, so what choice did I have but to join?

We had swapped a few stories during the visit, but there wasn't time to tell them about one of my more interesting test drives. As I drove down the road, something small and shining briefly reflected in the driver's door mirror, and it seemed to have come from my car. Then another one flashed. Just as the mental alarm bells began to sound, the left rear of the car suddenly dropped hard. It was now distressingly apparent that the flashes were lug nuts. The left rear tire had fallen off! Fortunately I was only going about 20 mph at the time because I hadn't been able to find the source of a loud banging sound that had started about a mile back and seemed to be coming from the front end, so I was heading slowly for home. Home was still about four miles farther on a lonely country road. I had completed about half of the eight-mile loop full of curves and little hills that serves as my test drive route. On most portions the speed limit is 55, and most sections are rural enough that there are no painted lines. Great fun. Poor cell service. Long walk. Dang.

I had found my blaze (orange?) MGB GT at a church auction in Zuni (pronounced zoo-nigh) a couple of years ago. The Presbyterian Church had purchased an adjoining property that had a warehouse, and the former owner had apparently been a collector (think Sanford and Son without the son). There were a number of cars and trucks, along with an entire warehouse of furniture, appliances, books, lawnmowers, and

STUFF! My MG (already I was thinking of it as mine) appeared to be complete, more or less, and only had one flat tire! There was only one other bidder, and he gave up relatively early. It was mine. Now what. A fellow with a big trailer full of lawn mowers discerned my predicament and offered to deliver the car. That was a done deal, so I used the stock MG jack to pull the flat tire (no spare), aired it up at THE gas station (only one in Zuni), and had a roller suitable for pushing the car onto the trailer.



The car was home. Let the tinkering begin. Ok, what works? Not much. The car sported a 1996 license plate (it's 2005 - not good!). One functioning headlight, no tail lights, some sidelights, no wipers, sad horn, no interior lights, brakes frozen (parking brake sorta OK). After installing a new 12-volt battery in the left well I heard the fuel pump thumping. Very good. And the motor would turn over! Hooray! A quick cleaning of the carbs and fresh fuel didn't get it started. I dug around in the garage and finally found my old dwell meter with the 8-cylinder and 6-cylinder scale. What was it again for 4-cylinders - 1/2 the 8 scale or twice the 8 scale? I used to know. It didn't matter, because a quick check revealed no meter deflection at all. Sandpaper! I sanded the points and checked again. Hooray, 30 (60) degrees! Another hit on the starter and ... it started! Wasn't running great, but it lives! To make a long story short, all the lighting problems were just connections that needed cleaned. The wiper motor was full of water and rusted solid.

Unfortunately, I picked a really hot day to work on the brakes. I had the front brakes working fairly well, but the left rear wheel cylinder was frozen. The new cylinder came in the Friday mail (Internet--what a great invention), and I was delighted at the prospect of having brakes on all four wheels! Thinking it couldn't take more than a half hour or so to swap out, I ignored the fact that the outside temp was about 100 when I crawled under the car. I had already put the new pads in the front brakes and this was the last item. Two

hours later, the 20-minute job was done, and I was really tired. I should have waited to do the test drive, but just had to find out how it would do

So there I was, four miles from home, three wheels where they should be, two lug nuts in sight on the road, and one big sigh. Well, after strolling down the road to pick up the two lug nuts, being the eternal optimist, I kept going. If I could find one more lug nut, I wouldn't have to snatch one off one of the other wheels. Best to leave the rest alone if possible - after all at least they were still on the car. And there it was; number three! Now I was feeling lucky. Maybe number four? Strolled a bit further, and just off the pavement it was lurking in the grass. Can't beat that. One thing I wasn't worried about was the jack. I had used it the day I bought the car to pull the flat left front. But when I started cranking it up, the handle suddenly slipped. It seemed to be catching for only 1/2 of each turn. It takes a lot of turns on an MGB jack to lift the car when the thing is working right. Well, nothing for it but keep going. So after a bazillion turns, the car was finally in the air, and the left rear was restored to its rightful place. And, there didn't seem to be any damage. Checked all the other lug nuts of course. All was well. Except for that banging noise. As I got back behind the wheel, I was optimistic (self delusion) that the noise had really been coming from the rear and related to the impending loss of the wheel. But as I got underway, my soaring hopes were dashed to dust. It was still banging away from the left front. I gritted my teeth and headed for home. Slowly. Very slowly.

Rounding the last curve into town, there sat one of Smithfield's finest with a radar gun aimed at those in a hurry to leave town. This caused a bit of anxiety. Here I was creeping along at 20 mph, banging in the front, antique plates, and no inspection sticker (didn't know it wasn't required with antique plates). A ticket for improper equipment and no inspection sticker would certainly be the greasy icing on this miserable test drive cake. As I pulled even with the police cruiser, I stepped on the clutch thinking I might as well save him the effort of chasing me. After all, it wouldn't be much of a chase. But the officer was looking the other way and paying no attention to me at all! Works for me. So I eased out the clutch and pressed on. Home at last. Since my fun meter was pegged, I parked the MG and didn't even look at it for a week. Well, OK, I did look at it from time to time, but that's all. And only from a distance. Curiosity finally overcame though, and I found the banging was the left front brake caliper. The mount bolts were gone and it was slapping around inside the wheel. It seems the lug nuts weren't the only things that hadn't quite been tightened up. Ah the joys of MG ownership. Plenty of opportunities for improving one's maintenance skills.

Activities Highlights

by Tad Carter

British Car Week – May 30 – June 7, 2009

Editor's note: The following information was taken directly from the www.BritishCarWeek.org website.

In 1997, when Road & Track Magazine published Mr. Peter Egan's wake-up call in the May issue of their highly regarded automotive magazine, British Car Week began its first annual tradition of promoting classic British cars during the last week of May. This special week is a calling for all British car owners to get their machines out of the garage and onto the highways and byways throughout their little corner of the world, and give these classics of the past the exposure they deserve. This annual week is as close as we'll ever come to recreating those wonderful motoring days of the past. It is our way of reminding the world these cars are still performing their job very well, and in many cases better than ever. Who knows - maybe, just maybe, you and your favorite British car may spark the interest of some little neighborhood kid who just may decide to get involved with the British car or motorcycle hobby, and in turn help us continue the fine tradition of British motoring for years to come.

So grab your goggles and driving gloves, and top off your dashpots! It's time to have some fun!!



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For Sale

1978 MG Midget



British Racing Green w/ Biscuit interior
67,000 miles
New Weber upgrade
Newly restored; \$9,000 in parts and paint
Located in Chesapeake, VA
Contact Gordon Landry, for more information. 757-375-2034 gman7942@cox.net



Rebuilding a '77 B' Brake Master Cylinder

by Steve LaPaugh

Talking to MG enthusiasts you'd think brake master cylinders are one step removed from nuclear reactors. The majority consensus seemed to be that since the master cylinder performs such an important function many owners opt to shell out hundreds of dollars for a new unit. If you happen to fall in this category, more power to ya'. However, since my master cylinder was in relatively good shape I decided to rebuild. Compared to a new cylinder the rebuild will set you back roughly \$25 for a complete rebuild kit, depending on your application.

While this article deals with a 1977 MGB master brake cylinder, this type was used from 1975-1980. In addition, all master cylinders are basically the same so the process is the similar regardless of year. Once the brake master cylinder has been removed from the car you are ready to start disassembly. To eliminate drips from the lines I installed plugs and O rings into the threaded openings. These plugs helped later on during sandblasting and kept foreign particles from entering the freshly honed bore. These plugs are available from aviation suppliers or you could also use bolts.



Rebuild kit with sandblasted master cylinder

The cylinder was clamped in the vice and screws holding the fluid reservoir were removed. Remove reservoir and rubber seal from the secondary feed port. Next, remove the snap ring (C clip in manual) from the bore. Now you can remove the primary piston, return spring and its cup.

Once the primary piston has been removed you must remove the stop pin in order to remove the secondary piston and spring assembly. In order to accomplish this you may want to grow an third hand prior to

disassembly. Otherwise you will need an assistant to help push down the secondary piston with a soft metal rod or wooden dowel while extracting the stop pin located in the primary well. In my case, the pin was extremely hard to locate due to rust and gradoo. With your assistant and a pair of needle nose pliers pull out the stop pin. Once removed the primary piston and spring/cup assembly should slide out of the bore by applying compressed air to the secondary outlet port. Remember to lock the stop pin in a secure location as loosing it will surely cause pain and heartache. Don't drop that sucker either as it tends to disappear to the one place you can't get to on the shop floor.

Remove the 13/16" end plug using an open end wrench. Once free, leave the spacer (Distance piece) and copper washer on the end of the plug.

For the next task it is advisable to hose down the pressure differential piston with a liberal amount of penetrating fluid and have your favorite frosty beverage. This will loosen up the infamous stuck piston so you can keep your sanity during the remainder of the rebuild. Allow penetrating fluid to do its job for 24 hours or so. To remove the piston, apply compressed air to the secondary outlet port and it should pop free. In my case, I used the pressure failure switch connection. Disassembly is now complete.

Inspection clean up and part replacement If you're lucky the bore of your master cylinder is good and free of any serious pitting, rust, nicks or other damage that can't be otherwise honed out. Honing is sim-



DIY honing set up

ple and can be done using a small hone attached to a hand drill. Remember to lube the bore prior to honing with oil or penetrating fluid. Once the cylinder is cleaned up and free of any defects, the bare metal should be coated with brake fluid or light oil to prevent corrosion. Due to the small bore size of the pressure differential piston cylinder, it is impossible to use a standard hone for clean up. I used a piece of brass stock

and duck taped a piece of fine sandpaper to the end, and inserted it into the cylinder to dress up the bore. This method worked well as long as the sandpaper was



Pressure differential piston

lubricated. If the bore is gunked up, you can use coarse sandpaper first to knock down the gunk then polish with 400 grit or so.

With the bores cleaned up you can move on to the master cylinder itself. I screwed the plugs in the threaded holes and sandblasted it. This worked great and kept the dreaded sand out of the clean cylinder. The aviation plugs didn't protrude any further than the head of the plug as might be the case with using bolts. [See photo] This was then painted with a clear coat to



Primary and secondary pistons, Primary Diff. Piston ready for installation. Note the stop pin bottom center for retaining primary piston

preserve the bare metal finish. Snazzy! The threads were cleaned up using a 3/8" NF tap. Remember once the master cylinder is installed in the car these threads are difficult to reach and would be impossible to tap in place.

The pistons can now be cleaned up by wire brushing. Before going crazy and tearing into the re-

build kit, make sure to count the pieces in the kit. I thought I had been shorted, but later realized two seals were stuck together.

When reassembling try to keep parts as clean as possible as any contamination can compromise the rebuild. Remove the U shaped retaining clips holding the spring in place. Using a dental pick or slim knife, remove the two O rings from the pressure differential piston. These can be cursed things so take your time and don't stick your finger! Again, wire brushing works well for cleaning the piston. Don't let the wire wheel grab the piston from you as this can be dangerous! Inspect piston assembly for damage.

The rubber seals will be easier to install if they are coated with brake fluid prior to installation. Also lube the bores to insure smooth instillation of parts. Install new O rings to the pressure differential piston. Make sure the ultra thin shim washers have been installed on both primary and secondary pistons. Match up the new rubber seals using your fingers as to not damage the parts. It is easy to install the seals backwards so be careful to match the seals to their original orientations.

Eyeball the two springs. The shorter of the two is the secondary spring. Place secondary return spring/cup assembly facing inward into the bore. Put the secondary piston into the bore, with seal lubed with brake fluid. Use a wooden dowel or soft metal rod to install piston. As with the disassembly process, the installation will require an assistant to again install the cursed stop pin once the piston head has passed the feed port, while you depress the piston/spring assembly. If well lubed, this is not nearly as difficult as it was to remove. Install the remaining spring/piston assembly and install



Fluid reservoir cleaned up. Note cap is apart.

the snap ring. Verify correct orientation prior to installing pressure differential piston. The piston should just drop in. Reinstall the plug with distance piece and copper washer, then torque to 33 ft-lb. or 396 in-lb.

Install the thin O ring into the primary feed port. On my master cylinder, this part did not want to

come apart so I left it alone. Murphy's Law would obviously be in full effect in this case. If however, yours came apart, good on ya! Next, install the secondary feed port seal round edge down. Again, life is much easier if it is lubed first with clean brake fluid.

Inspect the fluid reservoir for cracks, especially around the seams. If your reservoir is beyond help new ones are available from The B Hive and other suppliers. This can be done by cleaning and using the solution to check for leaks. I was able to squirt some general purpose cleaner into the reservoir and slosh it around. This cleaned the gunk off of the inside. Once your reservoir is clean, set it aside to air dry or use compressed air to dry it. The cap on these things has two pieces. Go figure. So, it's a good idea to separate them and clean them as well. A knife blade is useful to separate the parts then clean with an old tooth brush and let dry. By now, your brake fluid reservoir should be the envy of the neighborhood. Reinstall the reservoir onto the master cylinder.

According to the manual once the master cylinder is installed, you should check the brake pedal free movement. As stated in the manual, "If the pedal free movement is not adequate, the pistons in the master cylinder may fail to retract fully when the pedal is released. As a result the compensating ports of the master cylinder will be blocked by the pistons, eventually causing the brakes to drag or lock up." Page 218 in Bentley Manual 1975-1980.

Pedal free movement is adjusted in the following manner. Loosen the stop light switch locknut and turn the switch clockwise to decrease or counter-clockwise to increase the clearance. Tighten the locknut once you have achieved 1/8" as measured from the rear of the brake pedal pad to the front of the pad once contact is made with the switch.

This completes the rebuild. To ensure smooth operation, bench bleed the cylinder before installing it in your vehicle. You have saved much money and gained valuable experience. I take no responsibility for the accuracy of this rebuild as my B isn't running yet. However, by maintaining attention to detail I see no reason why it won't function perfectly. My first SU carburetor rebuild went smooth with only minor tightening of parts to make it work again after spending 10 years in the trunk. So, I'm confident that the master brake cylinder should work just as well. Good luck!

What Went Wrong?

by Geoff Wheatley

June 2007

Ed. Note: This is Part One in a Two-Part series.

In America it's Hershey, in Europe it's Beaulieu. I'm talking about motor auctions, vendors and 150,000 classic car enthusiasts assembled in one location twice a year. Beaulieu is situated on the south coast of England a few miles from the sea. About two hours by road from London, assuming you don't visit when the motor show is on! Like Hershey it can take a few hours to arrive and even longer to depart but who cares, the prospect of 2000 vendors and at least 500 cars up for sale makes it all worth while. I try to visit Beaulieu at least every three years and have managed to maintain this routine since I came to North America back in 1976. Sure it's a 6,000-mile trip each way with a visit to my relatives after doing the important things like looking for spare parts and negotiating with vendors. Like most expatriates I can always find an excuse to return and I am pleased to say that the beer tastes as good today as it ever did! On my last visit in 2005 I managed to pick up a few trinkets including a 1952 "Earls Court Motor Show" catalogue. Earls Court was the premier car show of the year back in the 1950s. Every British manufacturer introduced their new models at this annual event in company with a few American and European companies with an eye on the then British/Commonwealth market. Buyers from as far a field as Australia and New Zealand attended in company with dealers from South Africa, India, Pakistan, Kenya etc. Looking through this faded publication I was struck by the number of British manufacturers there were back in 1952. "Austin, Morris, Vauxhall, Singer, Hillman, Armstrong, Bristol, Lagonda, Triumph, Rover, Riley, M.G. Sunbeam, Bentley, A.C. Motors, Jowett, Daimler, Rolls, Morgan, Allard, C.V.R. Standard, Jaguar, Bond, Healey, Lancia" etc. Today, only Morgan and TRV still survive as British companies, the others have either been taken over like Rolls Royce now part of BMW and Bentley the VW Group. (Who would have ever believed that back in 1952!) Jaguar is now part of Ford who also own the Range Rover name, while the rest have simply just faded away never to be seen again except at Classic British car show events where we dedicated idiots still spend time and money trying to keep these lost names alive. Why did this happen? The answer is not that easy to find but a brief review of the antique management structures coupled with government interference including a total lack of vision mixed with poor labor relations and antiquated production techniques leading to virtually no quality control of the end product, may provide the answer! Let me hasten to add that the latter



was not exclusive to the British Motor industry as Detroit managed to produce a few examples of "Rust Buckets" during the same time period.

In reality the British motor industry was given a world market in the post "World War Two" years. Europe was in ruins and would take at least twenty years to get back into real consumer production. The American post-war car market faced a serious supply problem as did most other industrial countries and Detroit was never able to meet the US demand until the 1960's. Only the US and the U.K were producing private vehicles during this period so almost anything that Britain could make with either two or four wheels sold. America was the prime market and the British government who were broke after six years of war, encouraged export sales to countries with a hard currency. Government controls were placed on all basic materials to ensure that production went overseas, especially to the USA. Britain had a major debt to the USA for war supplies and needed to export anything and everything in order to clear this commitment.

This export drive by the British government put some companies out of business, including certain motor manufacturers who were forced to export knowing that their products would not succeed. (More on this later.)

The vast majority of the British cars were too small and under-powered for the US market yet people purchased these vehicles and put up with poor service facilities, prewar designs and a general lack of the comfort usually found in the American automobile. Heaters and radios were considered luxury extras by the British manufactures who never understood that such things were a standard feature this side of the water. Nevertheless these small vehicles did find a ready market, a market that Detroit had simply ignored for reasons that even today are still unclear. In the so-called sports car market the situation was even more astounding. The small British sports car was certainly known in the USA prior to the war but imports were minimal and usually went to the rich and famous. Lord Nuffield, head of the Morris Empire did give Edsel Ford an MG for his birthday as a token of his esteem for his father, and I believe the car still rests in the Ford Museum. Several film stars of the day had British sports cars including the humble M.G but it was not a serious sales situation and no British Sales Manager lost any sleep over export figures in the 1930s. But by 1948 with the forced export of the MG TC, a prewar sports car design with the steering wheel on the wrong side made by the Nuffield Group things had certainly changed. By 1948, seeing the potential MG and others started to design cars for the US market and by 1950 MG had produced a modern version of the TC built for export called the MG TD. Jaguar had set the motor world on its heels with the launch of the XK120 which

had more orders in its first six weeks of promotion than any other sports car in the world. The Standard Motor Company who had purchased the Triumph name when the company went under a few years earlier came out with an equally modern sports car that was a success on American roads, while Healey, with the personal knowledge of its founder on prewar racing developed the now famous Healey 3000. To understand the situation in Britain during this period it is important to reflect on the political change that had taken place immediately after the war. The Conservative government led by Winston Churchill had been defeated by a strong Labor Party, dedicated to the idea of state ownership. The railways, coal mines, road haulage, steel industry, fuel production, and health service were now under government control. Industry had to do as it was told or supplies of basic materials were withheld. Example, if the motor industry did not export at least 80% of its production, which included tractors, buses, coaches, motorcycles, trucks as well as private cars, they did not get adequate steel supplies, coal or oil for their boilers, guaranteed road transport or easy railway access. Yes, it was "Export or Die", as the government slogan proclaimed but it could also mean a slow death for a manufacturing company who did not meet the government export requirements. Some companies resorted to producing cars in alloy as this was not rationed but these cars were not that successful. The Singer Company was one such corporation. Once the third largest motor producer in Britain it suffered the slow death being forced into bankruptcy by 1954 simply because they did not meet government export quotas. Standard Motors who had a modern production plant at Coventry that once produced tractors and some of the most attractive cars on British roads suffered the same fate but the Triumph Motor Company which Standard had revamped after the war continued under new ownership through to the 1980s.

This Government involvement with private industry continued for several decades with disastrous results and in many ways can be blamed for the decline of several industries throughout the United Kingdom.

It should also be understood that the British Motor Industry was never that keen on serving an export market. The whole idea of setting up dealerships overseas and maintaining a supply of spare parts for these outlets was almost beyond their comprehension especially when, without government restrictions, they could sell everything they produced to the home market with a few cars left over for Australia and the other far flung outposts of the gone but not forgotten British Empire. The idea of setting up and dealing with American retailers who sold monster cars with equally monster size power units covered with Christmas Tree chrome horrified the average British export manager, they would expect him to start chewing gum next!

In consequence when the British cars hit the American shores dealers were hard to obtain and effective service was even more difficult to establish especially when most of the technology employed in these cars was pre-war, i.e. side valve engines, three speed gear shift and starter handles just in case the Lucas system failed. Need I say more! However, by 1953 most of the successful export vehicles had moved into the 20th century and a few years later some were ahead of anything else in the world, as illustrated by the Jaguar range or the Lagonda, Rolls Royce, Daimler etc. At the other end of the financial scale cars such as the 1950s MGA set a standard that few other inexpensive vehicles could match. Add the Triumph TR3 and the Healey 3000, the MGA Twin Cam, and the Sunbeam in the sports range. Now look at the Rover Turbo and successful 2000, the Triumph Stag, the Lancia and of course the incredible Mini that first saw the light of day in 1959. Who can ever think of James Bond without an Aston Martin by his side? Not a cheap car but one that most of us would love to find in our Christmas stocking even if it was thirty years old. The ability was certainly there but a few other important features always seemed to be missing like an adequate supply of spare parts for the limited number of service outlets!

One interesting story out of this period was the fate of the Riley Motor Company:

In the 1930s they produced some excellent cars both on the track and of course for the general public and were at one time a strong rival to MG. However, as an independent and small company it was difficult to keep the operation in the black, (as was the case with MG in the prewar years but MG always had Billy Morris to bail them out as and when required). In 1938 just prior to the Second World War Billy Morris, or to be correct, Lord Nuffield, as he was then known took over the company and merged it within the Morris Empire. With the end of the war Morris personally took control of Riley and started to make the 1.5 liter and 2.5 liter saloon cars which were a true semi-sports classic in their own right. They sold well both at home and overseas and Morris decided that they should be made at Abingdon the home of the MG! The MG people were not that pleased to hear the news as this would mean that part of their production ability would be taken up with these fancy Riley vehicles. It was even suggested that Abingdon should be closed and all production moved to the main complex at Cowley, Oxford

Thank goodness very few people ever argued with Billy Morris, who was pro Abingdon or the MG and of course the Mini may well have had a stunted career!

The success of the MGA and of course the Healey sports that was also made at Abingdon eventually forced production to the main Morris works where it remained until the marquee ended. A nice car espe-

cially the Riley Pathfinder with a 2.5 power unit that did much to sell the car in the USA where it was the darling of the social set as the wife's vehicle. However, despite this success it was discontinued as an expensive toy in favor of the more basic Morris vehicles. Around this time the bean counters had started to take over the British Car Industry in company with the government of the day!

Equally interesting is the story of Jaguar who in 1932 was a small company producing a sports car with a Standard Motors engine and various bits from other manufacturers. The company started by making sidecars for motor bikes but by the mid 30s they had moved into sports cars with the now famous hand produced SS range. (The name Jaguar was not introduced until 1936 when the company wanted to express speed as well as elegance. The term SS was removed after the war for obvious reasons!). The secret of Jaguar success was simple, a small company with dedicated workers and great leadership. Whilst the other guys were trying to out maneuver the government regulations in 1947/52 and go for the easy home market, Jaguar saw the export potential and went after it.

The introduction of the XK 140 and its magnificent win at Lemans sealed the future of this company until it was taken over and was virtually micro managed to death, but that's another story for another time!

One simple example of how to win friends etc, was the Jaguar policy of training overseas service staff. If you were a Jaguar dealer your service staff were invited to come to the factory and work with the people who made the cars, inspected the cars and tested the cars. However, if you were the dealership for any other British manufacturer at this time the best you could hope for was a training film and a couple of books. If you were a big outlet a guy might visit for a week from the "Old Country", but don't count on it. Even if he did fly over and give you a few tips the chances of you getting a steady supply of spare parts to make up for poor quality control was slim. This did eventually change but it took too long and only came about because the Japanese and Germans were after the same markets as the British.

From 1950 through to the early 1960s the British sports car manufacturers had no real competition. The MG and Triumph vehicles had the low end of the market, Jaguar the top and Healey/Sunbeam/Riley catering for the middle price range while a few other British manufacturers picked up what was left. Detroit seemed either blind or simply not interested in sports cars even as this market grew each year.

Economists will tell you that competition is the secret of success, and I think they are right, but this message never seemed to get through to either the British government or the British motor industry. Did they expand this unique hold on the American market with

better cars, better service and better quality control..? ANSWER...NO! Why not? They saw no need.

In fact by the early 1960s the British development policy was to destroy all the features that had made Jaguar and Aston Martin and Morgan a success like individual production units, a loyal work force with strong individual leadership. Encouraged by the government of the day companies started to merge into larger groups that had little in common.

The Government had a special interest in encouraging such activity regardless of their political party; they had made a pact with the powerful Trade Unions that workers would not be laid off in any of the declining industries. By bringing the good and not so good manufacturers together jobs could be saved. The successful company would hold up the not so successful even when the product was no longer acceptable or was outdated by normal progress... This happened to the motor industry, shipbuilding, the coal mines and the railways each with the same tragic results.

One of the first and certainly a classic example was the amalgamation of the Nuffield and Austin empires through the creation of the "British Motor Corporation". It should be understood that Mr. William Morris and Mr. Herbert Austin had been tough rivals since the 1920s so this merger did little to enhance the working relationship between these two major car companies whose marquees covered Morris, Austin, Riley, MG, Triumph, Healey, and Wolseley. (The original Wolseley Company asked Herbert Austin to design the first Wolseley vehicle in 1899. It was a success, but in 1927 the company went bankrupt.

Seeing a good purchase at a give away price Morris snapped up the Wolseley Company in the face of opposition from Austin. This started the ongoing rift between these two motor moguls!) With this background there was considerable distrust between the Austin workers who had a strong Union representation and the Morris workers who never felt the need to create a union structure. Billy Morris was certainly a man who liked to get his own way but he was also a good boss who had never laid off his work force even when things were slack and the economy weak. He had a special relationship with his employees that was almost unique. However, the rejection of union's attitude by the Morris people changed when Morris retired from active service. One could ask why Billy Morris allowed this to happen. His empire was a commercial success, he owned MG, a sure winner in the export market. He also produced one of the most successful family cars of its day, the Morris Minor which is still being produced fifty years later in India under a different name. The Mini was off the drawing board almost ready to go into production and there were a couple of other new projects just around the corner. On the other hand Austin had not set the world on fire with any of

their products. I think the answer was simply financial; Morris was always a bottom line man who saw success as figures in the black. Sure his companies were selling more cars but the return, especially on export sales was not healthy. You simply pushed out more cars for much the same return and at the end of the day profits went down. Shipping vehicles 5000 miles also took a bite out of the bottom line. Now, add the costs of overseas dealers who wanted money up front to carry your products and expected service at the drop of a phone call. By joining forces with Austin there would be a larger allocation of steel and more cooperation from the government for home market sales where the real money was to be made. There is not official record of this but he may have been advised that the new CEO of the British Motor Corporation was going to be a Morris Motors man. The selection was to be made by the British government and Morris did have some pull within the majority party of the day.



Membership and New Members

Bill Yoshida

Not much is happening with Memberships. No new members have joined TMGC since December. We are still at 98 memberships and holding.

With the threat of snow on the evening of the monthly meeting in February, I decided to drive my other car to the home of Craig and Joyce in Williamsburg. Since I had plenty of room in the car, Mark Davidoski decided to ride along and Walt Westoff also needed a ride due to having been to an eye doctor's appointment that afternoon. On the Peninsula Side we picked up Mike Lalli, a friend of Mark's, who is interested in buying an MGB and wanted to learn more about the club. During the ride there was lots of talk about MGs in general, why they are such great cars to own, and who is doing what to their cars. Although the ride to Williamsburg wasn't as "sporty" as driving the MG, it did make for a great evening both before and after the excellent club meeting hosted by the Cummings.

The task at hand is to find the right MG for Mike Lalli to buy so he will have a reason to join TMGC as the 99th membership...

Until next month, "Safety Fast".



The Dipstick



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