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# Moss Motoring

ISSUE 1, 2018

**PUERTO RICO  
STRENGTH**



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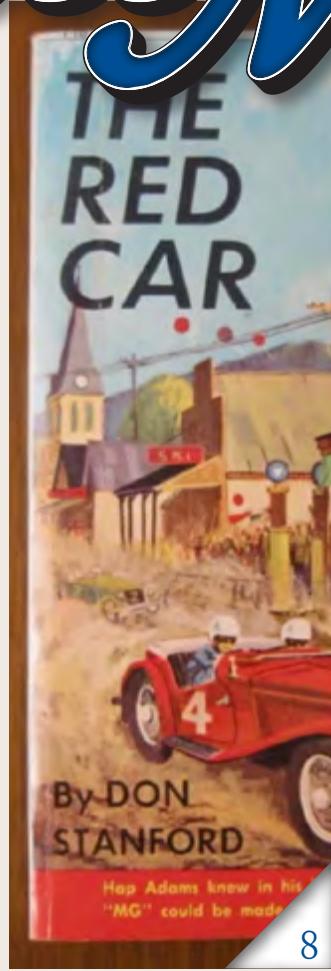
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# MossMotoring



## Puerto Rico Triumph

A decades-long passion  
survives two weddings and a  
devastating hurricane.

## *On the Cover:*

Times have been difficult in  
Puerto Rico. We're proud to  
highlight one of its most avid  
British car enthusiasts.

## The Red Car

A look at the classic favorite  
and the man who wrote it.

## Inside Jaguar

Graham Robson looks back  
at his early days working in  
Coventry.

## Manhattan Mechanic

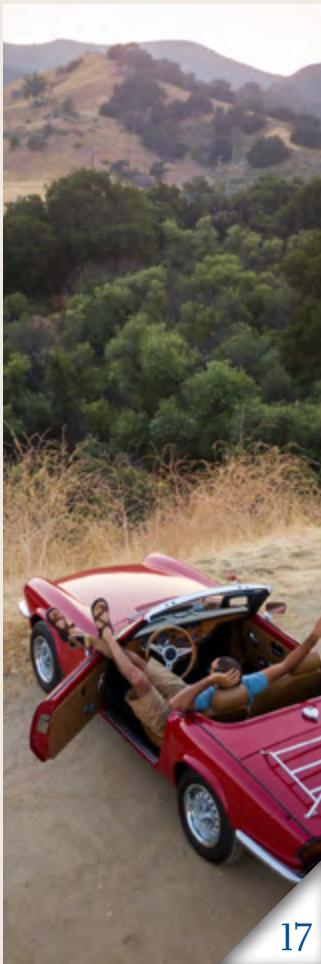
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17



20

## Classic Keys

Is it an exaggeration to say a Spitfire can change your life? Sometimes change is a very good thing.

## Girl On Fire

A road race through California's mountain roads inspires an inner drive toward something better.

Editorial contributions to Moss Motoring are welcomed and should be emailed to [editor@mossmotors.com](mailto:editor@mossmotors.com) or mailed to Editor – Moss Motoring, 440 Rutherford St., Goleta, CA 93117.

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Publisher: *Robert Goldman*

Moss Motoring Team:

Editor: *David Stuursma*  
Editor-at-large: *Kevin Flint*  
Creative Editor: *Brandin Aguayo*  
Website Designer: *Anne Ducal*  
Staff Photographer: *Damon Schenepf*  
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# XKs Unlimited | Powered by Moss



Robert Goldman

and Moss Motors seemingly offered a chance to get into the hobby. Fast forward to 1973, and Jason started his own company, XKs Unlimited. As with several of the early British specialists in the US, what started for Jason as a hobby had become his business.

Through the intervening years, Moss and XKs have alternately been customers and competitors of one another. Like NASA's on again/off again plans for traveling to Mars, Moss Motors' commitment to the Jaguar market has been something of a start/stop affair. At various times we have been deep in catalog development, bought and operated a wholesale business with an emphasis on Jag, and have even been the Jaguar new car dealer in Santa Barbara.

For whatever set of reasons, we never quite stuck. Perhaps as an indication

of things to come, last year, at a tech session during the Vintage Triumph Register National Convention, the question was asked, would Moss ever get back into Jaguar in a serious way? The questioner mentioned a couple companies, perhaps ripe for a takeover. One of the two he named was XKs Unlimited. Did somebody plant the guy? I couldn't tell him we were already in preliminary negotiations with Jason, but it represented an affirmation of the fact we were on the right track.

I've been through a few of these things in my time. Even when you think a deal is done, the whole thing can blow up in a moment. Fortunately with Jason and XKs, it was one of those rare opportunities where both sides were similarly aligned. We closed the deal in October, and have operated the company since.

XKs' General Manager, Michael Marter, and Sales Manager, Armando Pineda, have been with the company for many years. Their presence will help ensure those cultural norms which made XKs a success will not be lost in transition. At the same time, we will be working on everything from inventory availability to updated catalogs, website, and parts availability from Virginia.

Even a well run business has plenty of room for improvement, just ask our President and CEO, Glen Adams, if he thinks Moss Motors is a well oiled machine. He might say something like "Yes, except for the parts which squeak."

Jason Len himself is not yet done in the Jag community. With his retirement from XKs' parts operation, he will be spending his time on XKs Motorsport, the repair, restoration, and competition business he ran alongside XKs Unlimited. We warned Jason, any of his beautiful restorations left in the showroom at the time of closing would be ours. He didn't leave any. Rats!

There will be a little pain, and a few missteps along our way. Current Moss customers will find a better selection of Jaguar product at XKs, but unless you are already an XKs customer, they will not recognize you. Your Moss customer number and order history are not currently interchangeable between the two companies, and we cannot yet transfer your calls back and forth. We realize this is less than ideal. The plan, when XKs eventually converts to the Moss order entry system, is to merge the accounts and order history. These things always sound easy on paper. We will do our best to make it happen. **MM**

## The experience of the XKs team joins Moss:

*Dave, Marth, Hailey, Brian, Mike, Armando, Michael, Don, Connie, Mike, Greg, and Kenny.*



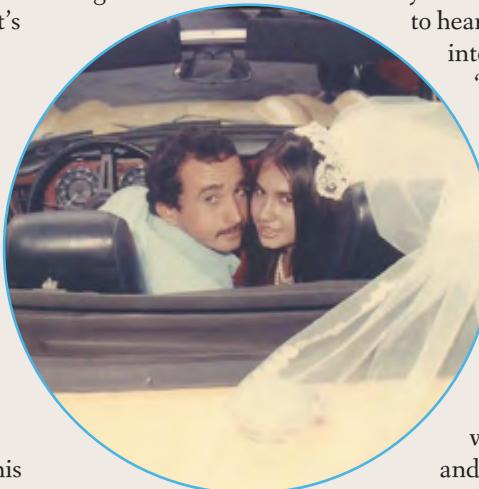


# PUERTO RICO TRIUMPH

By Germán Luis  
Collazo Tirado

The story begins sometime around January of 1971. I was taking my girlfriend back to her house. We were both college kids, young and reckless, and chatting away, when a yellow streak in my peripheral vision caught my attention. That's when I saw it, the most beautiful car I had ever seen, a light yellow TR4A. Instant infatuation.

Later that day, I felt an obligation to take a drive down the same street. I needed to know what I could do to have this car. I talked with the owner, asked him everything I could about the vehicle, and then casually asked, "How much are you selling it for?" "It's not for sale," was his answer. I was disheartened, but only momentarily. From then on I made a point to always drive down that same street on the way to pick up my girlfriend. In time I developed a friendship with the owner.



Lady Luck took an interest in my plight. One pivotal day, after visiting the car once more, I struck gold. The owner walked and talked differently, something was off. Finally, he said with a sigh, "I'm selling it. I need the money to buy..." That's all I needed to hear. My mind sprang into action. I asked, "How much?" I was a college student, and a rather new one. I didn't have that much money to begin with. He was asking for \$2,500. I had \$2,000 to my name. I told him I would come by later, and decided to think on the best course of action.

I called upon a friend for help. I gave him all my money, and told him to come back with the car, no matter how much it cost me. He left, but while he was gone, I began to reflect on my current situation. I was reminded of grade school days, when if you had a crush on someone you would send your friend to talk to them first, rather than do it yourself. A few hours later,



I heard a strong rumble at my gate, and a familiar yellow car going up my driveway. My friend stepped out of the car, \$200 dollars in hand. From that point on, I became “un fiebru,” someone obsessed with classic cars.

My name is Germán Luis Collazo Tirado, I am 68 years old, and am a resident of the town of San Germán, located on the west side of the island of Puerto Rico. Two years after finishing high school I was drafted into the US Army. I wasn’t exactly ready for it, but I was obligated to go nonetheless, despite not knowing the English language. I took basic training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, and then infantry training at Fort Ord in California, where I stayed for seven months. I was then transferred to Korea, where I completed my two required service years in 1970.

Since buying my TR4A in 1971, we’ve visited almost all 78 towns on the island, and we’ve been driving together for over 500,000 miles. We’ve been together for 45 years now, and I have never regretted owning it.

We’ve had a long journey together. We were both present at the first ever auto show on the island, in 1971. It was small, only about 40 cars were on display, and only myself and one other gentleman still own our cars. In 1976, I married for the first time. The TR4A took my wife and I from the church to the wedding reception, and took us to our honeymoon as well. 25 years later, in 2001, my daughter Suellen and her husband Joel, repeated the wedding day ride. One of the major newspapers of the island picked up the story, and dubbed the car “El Triunfo que paseó a dos novias” or, “The Triumph that paraded two brides.”

On the drag strip here, I’ve seen TR4s compete aggressively against eight-cylinder vehicles, and I’ve experimented doing it myself, too. I am known around my town for my car, and whenever I go out for a drive in it, it’s almost a certainty that someone will stop me to ask me about it or take its picture. I am a proud, founding member

of the “Puerto Rico British Car Club” created in 1994. We have over 50 members from all over Puerto Rico, and I hope to help it expand.

Three times I’ve tried to restore the TR4A, but unfortunately during the first two efforts I didn’t have the time to oversee the process, and each attempt turned out poorly. However, after my retirement, I decided enough was enough. One day in 2012, I woke from sleep determined to restore the car myself. I promptly woke up my 14-year-old son, also named Germán Luis Collazo. He was sleepy, and had no idea what was going on, but crawled out of bed to work with me anyway. The TR had been a big part of his life, too.

We dismantled the car piece by piece to the last bolt, and I began an extensive campaign to bring the car back to full glory. With the help of a professional, I gave it a full sandblasting treatment, I replaced many parts using the Moss Motors catalog and with tremendous help from salesman Carlos Gonzalez. He is professional in his work, dedicated, and very efficient at what he does. I consider him to be an irreplaceable part of the Moss Motors team. Then, with the help of a friend, I gave the TR a fresh coat of bright yellow paint, both on the interior, a side which might never be seen, and the outside, bringing back its shiny glow. Four years after I began, I finished, with a final product I could be proud of.

Last year on *La Feria de Autos Clásicos y Antiguos*, one of the most famous TV automotive shows hosted here on the island, the special guest of honor was Daniel Short, a known authority in the field of antique car restoration. He’s better known for his TV program *FantomWorks*, which he produces and directs on the Velocity channel. I managed to get an interview with him, where I showed him an album of photos of the recent restoration. He asked to see the car. The next day, I walked up to the usual tent where my car was, but was surprised to find a crowd with cameras had gathered around it. Curious, I approached and





found Daniel Short examining every inch of the car from top to bottom. As he finished he congratulated my work on the restoration, touting it as one of the best he had seen so far. My heart beamed with joy and pride as he took a picture of me and my TR4A with his phone.

I bought it for its beauty, but I kept it for the potential I saw in it. Its power, durability and staying force, are just some of the many reasons why I fell in love with this car. My great little British car has been my most trusted and loyal

friend. I don't accept any other sound from it—including a radio—that isn't the overwhelming roar of its engine. It's an extremely effective therapy for me, helping me cope with personal issues like stress. And every time I sit behind that faithful old steering wheel, touching the familiar wood and leather, and smell the one-of-a-kind scent it exudes, the precious memories of the past 45 years I've spent with it all come rushing back to me. "Yo amo" (I love) my old, faithful TR4A, ever since I laid eyes on it. **MM**

## HURRICANE MARIA AFTERMATH



credit: Sgt. Jose Ahiram Diaz-Ramos, Puerto Rico National Guard



credit: Caleb Nunez | Translation: "We are still standing"

Email from September 19, 2017:

Today one of my best friends, Christopher, sent you some photos for the Moss Magazine. You can choose any one of them. If you need another photo, just let me know. Here in Puerto Rico we wait for hurricane Maria, that means that we may not have internet or any communication for a few weeks.

—Germán

I'm typing this now well over a month later. Thanksgiving has come and gone and heaven knows the things Germán has left for which to be thankful. I've emailed him several times since hurricane Maria ripped through Puerto Rico, but there's been no reply, which is unusual for Germán. Last summer he had been so excited to share his story about his beloved TR4 that any request for info or photos would usually be responded to on the same day.

I wasn't fearful of Germán's health or safety; a couple weeks after the hurricane he had managed to call his trusted friend, and Moss salesman, Carlos Gonzalez (on a working cell phone that belonged to a friend) and relay that he and his family were okay and his car was undamaged. Germán promised to send photos to show the storm's savage devastation, but as of today communication from within Puerto Rico still has little chance of leaving the "unincorporated territory" of the United States.

When in a mood of reflection, long-time owners often remark about how British sports cars are analogous to life's ups and downs, how they are revealing of life's need for the blessing of a supportive community, about how when the rest of the world may push something aside and out of their sight when it is broken, there are still many who are capable, willing and eager to work until that thing is restored and perhaps better than it's ever been.

-David Stuursma, Nov. 30, 2017

Richard "Dick" Knudson  
June 4, 1930 — September 1, 2017



# MY DAD

## DICK KNUDSON

By Leesa Hudak

**D**ad was one of a kind. He was a loving father, husband and grandfather. He was a faithful and loyal friend. He was a wonderful teacher and leader. He was passionate about so many things. Most people saw the obvious; love of family, love of God and country, and love of MGs. But there was so much more.

Dad served in the Navy and was able to see much of the world. The Navy was his ticket to college, however, he enjoyed his time in the service by skiing in Cortina and Lebanon, strolling

through the streets of Venice and markets of Algiers, and going to see Billie Holiday with his shipmates. He would often tell us tales of listening for submarines in the Sonar Shack or try to teach us Morse code.

Dad started teaching in rural Maine, but managed to find ways to continue to travel throughout his teaching career. While on a Fulbright Scholarship in the Netherlands he bought his first MG. It was a 1948 TC, and I can remember

the whole family going for rides in it with my brother and me in the back. Register events were magical, and Dad really enjoyed the people that attended. Dad was so involved with MGs that when my brother's kindergarten teacher asked him what his father did for a living he told her, "He's a mechanic."

Dad lived life to the fullest. Yes, he was passionate about many things. He had many interests, but he also took great pleasure in the small things...a good book, college basketball, whoopie pies, fried clams, and the Red Sox finally winning a World Series during his lifetime. **MM**

*Dick Knudson was a lifelong car enthusiast, especially devoted to the MG sports car. In 1964 he was instrumental in organizing the first MGT Registry in the US and enjoyed the camaraderie of its members his entire life. Not only was Dick a seeker of knowledge, but of adventure, too. In 1988 he participated in the Kimber Alaska Challenge and drove his TC from Syracuse, New York, to Alaska and across the Arctic Circle. And in 1999, he and his wife Ann drove the TC on a three-week circuit of the UK, from Land's End in England to John O'Groats in Scotland. During his lifetime, Dick wrote over 30 books and hundreds of articles about cars and other topics of study and interest to him. As a gesture of thanks for the influence, support and enthusiasm he brought to the hobby, in 2017 Dick was inducted into the British Sports Car Hall of Fame. The impact that Dick had on the MG marque will resonate for decades to come. A few months before he passed away, Dick Knudson submitted to Moss Motors the article on the following pages. It is our honor to share it with you. ~Ed*



# DON STANFORD

**MG'S BEST SELLING AUTHOR**



By Dick Knudson

**A**t last summer's induction ceremony at the British Sports Car Hall of Fame, the first recognition did not go to a person, instead, Robert Goldman, Chairman of Moss Motors, cited a book, a very important book. He paid tribute to *The Red Car* by Don Stanford. This book certainly introduced thousands of readers to British sports cars...in this case, the MGTC. From the audience reaction, there was great agreement with Robert. The all-time, best selling MG book ever written is *The Red Car* by the late Donald Kent Stanford.

Stanford was born in 1918 in Chattanooga, TN; he died in Brantford, Ontario, Canada, in the 1990s. His education included Drexel Institute of Technology, Foreign Service Institute, and the University of Paris. Stanford was a literary nomad who moved about on various continents supporting himself by writing novels, short stories, film and TV scripts.

His first novel was *The Slaughtered Lovelies*, a mystery with a sports car theme. Stanford called it "garbage" in a February 5, 1989, letter to me. He went on to say, "I whipped it up in a great hurry (in 1950) for Ralph Daigh

of Fawcett's Gold Medal Books...but it paid for my TC and several years of pure motoring pleasure."

I had written to the author to ask him about a photo that accompanied an article in an early copy of *Road & Track* about a road race in Aspen, Colorado. Stanford answered, "The photo in *Road & Track* on Labor Day 1951 of a very amateurish SCCA road race we ran: Le Mans start, driver and riding mechanic in each car, all eager and sincere. I hit a hay bale on a turn and ripped my left rear wing so that it was rubbing on the tire. My 'mechanic' a girl named Alice-something, wore off her fingernails holding the wing together while we finished the race in third place. I loved that TC and drove it cross-country many times, beating girls off with a stick as I drove. Irresistible little car."

At the time of my contacting him, I had read his third novel, *The Red Car*. In that book there is a road race in a Colorado town, and the protagonist is in a TC when they hit a hay bale causing some damage so that the riding mechanic had to lean out to hold things together. That was just too much of a coincidence, and so began my search for Don Stanford.

Stanford proved to be a delightful man who was still enthusiastic about his TC even though it had long gone. He described being persuaded to write *The Red Car* this way: "In the first place, I didn't want to write it. I was in one of my insolvent periods, and I bugged my agent, Lurton Blassingame, to find me a book contract, any kind of contract, and Lurton got back to me and said he could contract me to Funk & Wagnall's for a juvenile novel.

"Juvenile! I said. Not my line of country. You mean The woody-tooty twain goes woody-tooty-tooty down the woody-tooty track? Not me, Buster. Give it to one of your other clients. Aren't there any adults reading out there somewhere?

"Go, Lurton said. Go, have lunch with Bill Sloane at Funk & Wagnall's. He will pay. Do not have more than six martinis, and listen to what he

has to say. So I went, and Bill Sloane explained that what his company had in mind was a series of informative sports/adventure novels for teenagers, and that their readers would be the most knowledgeable, and the most critical audience imaginable.

"If you write a book about a car, he said, it will be read by boys who don't read much but who like cars, and they will know about cars, and if you get the wrong number of cylinders into a Bugatti, your publisher will get 5,000 illiterate letters the next morning all beginning, 'Dear Sir, Who is this schnook?'

"Sloan continued, also, you will not write down to them, because these are kids who are acquiring vocabulary, not losing it as we all tend to do after we leave school and begin indulging our selves in careless speech habits, reducing ourselves to a lower common denominator. If you use a word they don't know, they'll look it up...but the chances are you won't. Do not condescend to expanding minds.

"He ordered a fifth martini, but I declined. Put that way, the project sounded kind of intriguing, and I knew I was going to write his book. And not in three weeks, either. It took me an entire summer, and I wrote more carefully and critically than I had ever written before. It had been my habit to whack a piece out and turn it in without even re-reading it. With Bill Sloane's comments in mind, I found myself re-thinking and even re-writing paragraphs...and pages...and entire chapters. It wasn't that the story didn't re-write itself. I had lived the climatic road race in the book. I had lived for more than a year in Aspen, and I knew most of the characters in real life, it was just that for the first time in my life I was considering the people who would be reading this story and respectful of their opinions."

Don Stanford had real feelings for his TC and took special pride in *The Red Car*. This book has been translated into several languages and sold very well abroad. It was also bought by Scholastic Books and went through many printings

(with several different covers!). All told, I am sure that the sales of *The Red Car* easily topped two million. I am sure that most of you own a copy of the book. After reading what the author thought about the book and his effort to make it outstanding, I hope that you are motivated to take it off the shelf and re-read it. I know, too, that many of you may have purchased it for your MG library and may have never have read it. Well, now is the time. You won't be sorry. **MM**

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**Stanford also contributed over eighty short stories and articles to various magazines including:** *Redbook, Argosy, Woman's Day, Cosmopolitan, This Week, Hitchcock, Coronet, Writer, True, Collier's, Saturday Evening Post, Reader's Digest, and Holiday.*

# Growing up at JAGUAR

By Graham Robson



**I**t was a coincidence, really. I was enormously lucky, fell on my feet in one of the most famous companies in the world, and have never forgotten the great times I had while I was there.

It all started at Oxford, where I was reading Engineering, and was already determined to get into the motor industry. But who, where, and doing what? A polite letter to Jaguar started this off, but an immediate refusal winged its way back to me. After all, Jaguar did not have a graduate training programme, they knew nothing about me, and in Coventry there was already a long line of young hopefuls looking for a starting-grade appointment.

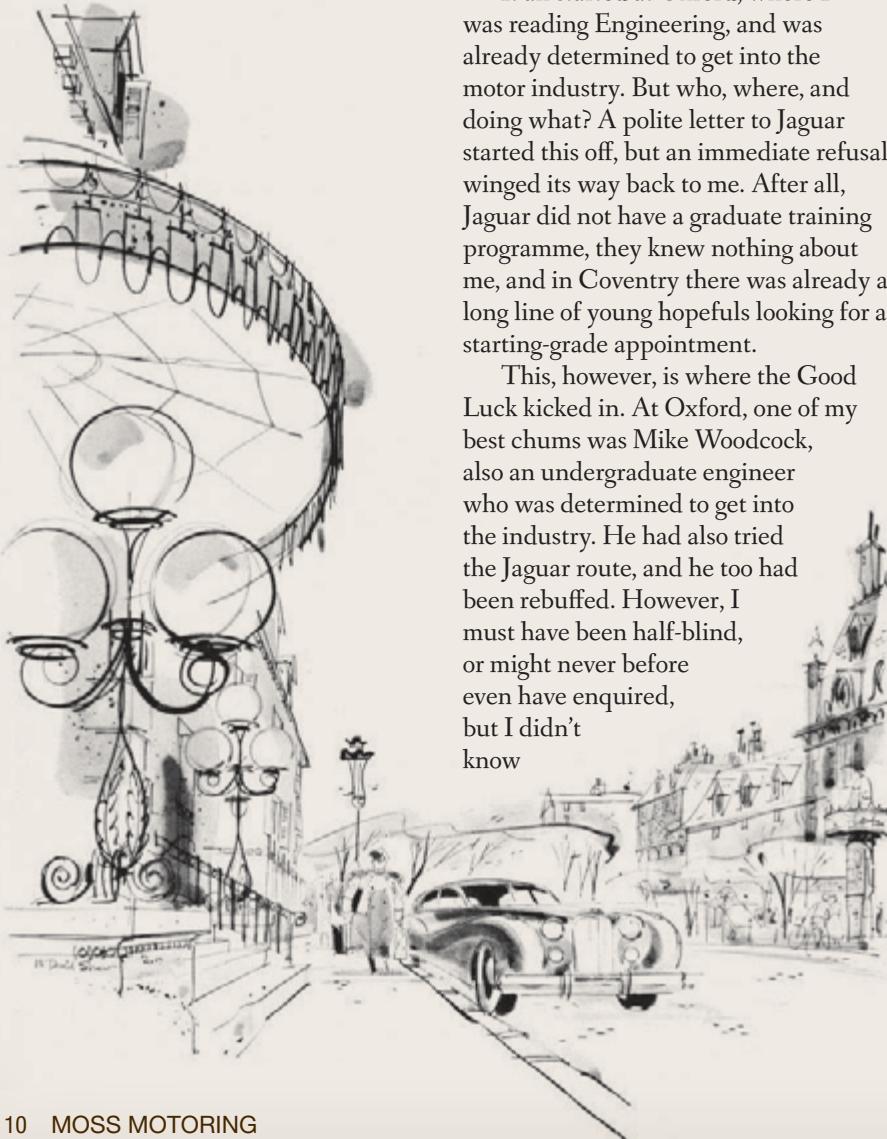
This, however, is where the Good Luck kicked in. At Oxford, one of my best chums was Mike Woodcock, also an undergraduate engineer who was determined to get into the industry. He had also tried the Jaguar route, and he too had been rebuffed. However, I must have been half-blind, or might never before even have enquired, but I didn't know

that his father was no less than Jim Woodcock, who just happened to be CEO of BMC's massive assembly plant at Cowley, on the outskirts of the city.

One day, while we were sharing a coffee in one of Oxford's new-fangled and trendy coffee bars, Mike suddenly said: "I know. I'll tell Dad, and ask him to have a word with Sir William Lyons..." (Sir William, of course, was Jaguar's founder, chairman, and master of everything which moved in the Jaguar business.)

It worked. Within days we were both summoned to Coventry, each survived a rather fierce interview with technical boss William Heynes, and—amazingly—Jaguar almost instantly set up a Graduate training scheme, of which we were to be the first members! I was in Hog Heaven. I somehow fought my way through my finals, gained a respectable degree, and moved from Oxford to Coventry in September 1957, where would I share rooms with Mike Woodcock for the next three years.

Although Jaguar immediately kitted us out with the famous apprentice-green overalls when we arrived, the bosses didn't know what to do with us at first, especially as we were obviously aiming for higher things in the development team, rather than trying to learn to be top-grade mechanics and technicians. At the time, too, the entire Jaguar business was trying hard to recover from the near disastrous fire, which had engulfed one end of the assembly lines in February 1957, destroying one third of the buildings.



Even so, to start us off we had to spend weeks learning how to work metal and a variety of machine tools. Before long they concluded I should be sent out to do some hands-on oily-fingered work, which was how I came to work on the XK engine crankshaft machining line for some weeks. From time to time, too, I was sent out on 'Day Release' to the local technical college, though I never quite worked out how 'Work Study' and setting 'piece rates' was going to help my rise to being William Heynes' successor.

Often, though, I found it easy to go walk-about. It was those strolls immediately after the canteen lunch which told me so much—for somehow the Apprentice-green kit was an acceptable disguise which were rarely challenged by officious foremen, and it was on one of those covert strolls that I first spotted the original light-green E-Type prototype on a ramp in Experimental. That was sheer happenstance, for it had just been completed in great secrecy in the Competition Department, which was nearby, but they didn't have a ramp of their own. Chief test driver, Norman Dewis, was with the car on that day, treating it very much as his baby, which effectively it was.

That was when I really started lobbying to do something more interesting. Shortly I found myself reassigned to Body Experimental (which was next door to 'Competitions'), working on folding soft tops for the new XK150 Roadsters, interiors for the new Mk VIII, and the first sheet metal details for the MK IIIIs—but never on the E-Type. There was still only one (E1A) in 1958—for it was rarely seen (but often heard over the partition), it was only driven by Norman Dewis, and usually only at weekends.

Being next to 'Comps', of course, had its moments—for on Monday mornings, usually after a hard race in which some damage or breakdown had occurred, Ecurie Ecosse D-Types might turn up, with 'Wilkie' Wilkinson pleading for speedy repairs or rebuilds,

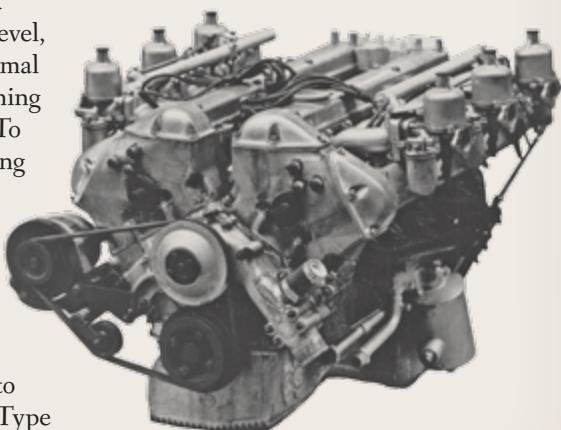


and occasionally we'd see the racing 3.4 sedans, as driven by Mike Hawthorn and Tommy Sopwith at Silverstone.

Sir William Lyons, of course, was everywhere; he might have been remote in his personal dealings, but never in his application to the job. Always immaculately dressed (he always wore a dark blue suit, and seemed to take a different new car home, for assessment, every night), he could often be seen bustling in and out of Experimental to see what was going on—and he expected everyone to be as knowledgeable and dedicated as him. There were several occasions when the green-overalled Robson, working away under a body shell, noticed an immaculately polished pair of black shoes appear by my elbow, at floor level, and have a crisp, polite, but very formal voice wanting to know: "Good morning young man. What are you doing?" To my relief, I always seemed to be doing something of which he approved.

In 1958-59, by the way, the factory was bursting at the seams. The fire damage had been repaired in a matter of months, the XK150 was selling well, the Mk VIII sedan was about to become the Mk IX, and both the E-Type

and the Mk II models were on the way. Although I was just about to get a 'real job'—working on a drawing board in the main Engineering office—I still found time to note the frenzied activity in Experimental, too. There were two obvious priorities. The original production-type 'steel' E-Type shell was evolving, and spent some weeks up on ramps (it was the third car of all, I believe, for 'Comps' was building the aluminium E2A in conditions of great secrecy), where prototype panels, supplied by Abbey Panels on the other side of Coventry, were being riveted together, not welded, so that technical chief Bill Heynes could carry on altering details to bring down the costs.





Jaguar was like that, at the time. If Heynes wanted something doing, he would often walk through the assembly shops to Experimental, to spend hours climbing all over the latest shell. If Sir William wanted style changes made, he would visit the department himself—and I will not forget the days when he would get chalk all over his suit, as he was using a stick to sketch out the lines of new rear windows and rear door cut-outs on the latest version of the Mk II shell, which was a modified version of the original Mk I. That change, I clearly recall, was achieved ('in the chalk') in the morning, the shape cut out by the end of the day, ready for Sir William to inspect on the following morning.

My move to the Engineering Drawing Office was very exciting for me, as it seems that I was the only young hopeful to have an engineering degree, and everyone else seemed to think, quite wrongly as it transpired, that I could solve the problems which were bothering them. My first assignment was to the engine/transmission/section part of the office, where I soon learned that all the detailed work carried out on the 'parchment-style' paper of the day during the week could be ruined on a Friday afternoon, when Bill Heynes made what we all called his 'Modifications Tour', which meant that

he would descend on a paper project of interest, make his own decisions and—with 4B pencils in both hands—would scribble his suggestions for change. We did what we were told, of course.

This office was an exciting place to be, for that enigmatic aerodynamicist Malcolm Sayer was just one aisle and two drawing boards away from me (he never, repeat never, told anyone else how his calculations were made—and it wasn't for years before the world realised how empirical they actually were), chief chassis designer Tom Jones was a few yards away, and mysterious consultants like Willy Watson (ex Aston Martin/Lagonda/Invicta designer) and the stylist Vanden Plas were always floating about. Claude Baily was Heynes's deputy, and concentrated on engine work.

The view from the second floor window was enthralling, for it was across the way from 'Lofty' England's office, so there was much motorsport 'traffic'—both of cars, or of famous drivers and personalities—through those doors. On the other hand, none of us were ever allowed into the ultra-secret styling workshops, where Fred Gardner worked away in wood to satisfy Sir William's fancies. What we did know (for I was involved in design work on the car's front suspension, on paper

at least) was that concept work on the 'Zenith' project, which was supposed to replace the Mk VIII as the Mk IX, took so long, that it came to be nicknamed as the 'Mark Time' instead, and eventually appeared as the Mk X!

With design work completed on the MK II just as I arrived in the offices, I found myself spending much enjoyable time 'detailing' components on projects which eventually came to nothing, not only on the first four-cam road-car iteration of the V12 engine, but a 'why don't we?' study of a flat six power unit (Bill Heynes had just seen, and was impressed by the new Chevrolet



Corvair), and also on Willy Watson's proposal to produce a brand-new dry-sump race car gearbox for the E-Type, which was of course cancelled. New inlet manifolds for Mk II sedan race cars and transmission linkage control details on Mk IIs were all part of the variety.

However, I soon realised that the E-Type programme was running late, and money was tight, for all the detail activity seemed to be crammed into 1960 itself. Should I have been surprised, then, that my section leader called me over one morning, said: "Look we haven't designed the exhaust system yet. These are the silencers we're going to use—it's your job and you have five days."

OK, that was fair enough—but as soon as I had assembled all the other drawings (and hung around under one of the very rare prototypes), I realised that the rest of the chassis was settled, the floor pan pressings had already been released for tooling, as had the massive

rear suspension, so there was nowhere to recess the silencer boxes. And do you now wonder why they are so obviously visible, at the rear, on early cars? My fault, I guess—trust me!

Not that this was the end of the shoe-horning exercises—for a new type of rear anti-roll bar was needed, and the propeller shaft (together with my newly minted exhaust pipes) all got in the way. Does that explain the odd shape? It should. Or why such an odd fixing was needed for the electric radiator cooling fan motor which, if I recall, was a Lucas instrument? All my fault, I'm afraid—the initials on the drawings in the archive prove it.

It was to break free from that type of frenetic activity that I was tempted away by an offer to get involved in design, development and motorsport management in the Standard-Triumph organisation. But that is a story for another day... **M.M**



The author with Kas Kastner.



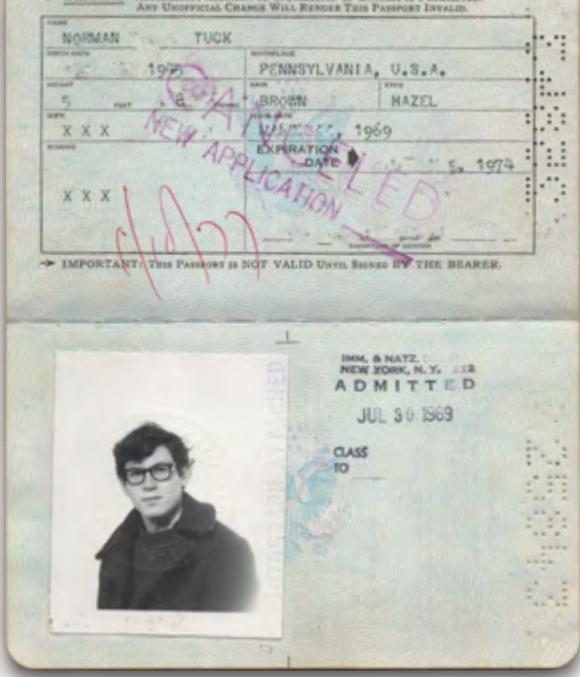
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*I owe a debt to a handful of men, my friends and mentors from my past. I feel that it is important to offer a glimpse, however fleeting, of the lives of a diverse class of skilled workers who shared a love for British automobiles of the period, yet have never had the privilege of actually owning one. These men kept the cars running for us and should be acknowledged.*



# Manhattan Mechanic

By Norman Tuck

I left Florida for New York. It was September of 1967 and I was 22. I fit my tools and my clothes into a polished green MGB and followed Interstate 95 North to the Holland Tunnel toward a new life.

In the Yellow Pages I found Adams-Mahoney & Company, an authorized MG repair shop at 429 East 74th Street on Manhattan's Upper East Side. I was told to bring my toolbox on Monday to start work.

That night I parked the MG in front of Emmanuel Turk's real estate office on East 14th Street. I slept as best I could in a bucket seat, hidden from the street beneath the roadster's black tonneau cover. In the morning I was the first in line to meet Mr. Turk. He was an older Hasidic Jew who had been filling the Lower East Side with a new breed of kids like me. I was, suddenly, a New Yorker.

## The Workplace

Weekdays began with an exhilarating 74-block run up First Avenue. Synchronized traffic lights, top down, and fast. I should have punched in by 8:00am, but I was always late. One day my boss offered to raise me to \$100 a week if I showed up on time. My promptness improved considerably.

The garage would be nearly empty on Monday mornings, with just a few dust covered older exotics waiting for

parts. Then the cars rolled in. Mostly MGBs, with a smattering of Healeys, Sprites and Minis. The little sports cars were simple, elegant machines that had never made the transition to modernity. Still, they glowed with a beauty that illuminated the darkness of the dingy shop.

A-M reflected the early days of automotive history. There were neither hydraulic lifts nor pneumatic tools. The two-story garage with its curved ramp had probably been converted from a Manhattan stable or carriage house.

In the summer the shop was unbearably hot. We were issued light, cotton uniforms. Salt tablets were available at the water fountain. Big electric pedestal fans blew hot air in from the street, but nothing helped as idling engines filled the air with hot exhaust.

It was the New York City winters that I most remember. The shop was largely unheated. Our elegant black and gold woolen winter uniforms looked terrific, but they couldn't keep away the cold. I exhaled a foggy breath as my naked fingers did their work on cold, hard metal.

George Adams and Larry Mahoney were my bosses. They had worked side by side as mechanics at J.S. Inskip Motors, an historic importer of exotic automobiles. Inskip had provided

custom Rolls-Royces and Bentleys to Manhattan's moneyed elite since the 1930s. When Inskip dissolved in 1967, George and Larry joined to form Adams-Mahoney & Co. I suspect that they had received financing from the serious men in long, black woolen coats that occasionally arrived in big Cadillacs for long meetings in the back office.

## George Adams

George Adams had organizational skills, a clear mind, and a vast knowledge of automobiles. He was a good boss who was always honest and straightforward with me and the other workers. He kept the books and steered Adams-Mahoney on an orderly path. George had been a front line soldier in World War II, and he brought a post-war American optimism with him into our work place.

On weekends George and his teenage son raced powerful American dragsters on strips in New Jersey. He had little respect for the British two-seaters that were our bread and butter.

## Larry Mahoney

Customer relations was Larry's domain. He was a charismatic entertainer whose cheerful banter with both employees and clients made the office a fun place to be.

No customer escaped Larry's Irish charm, but he was especially attentive to the ladies. I wouldn't want Larry to fix my car, but I always enjoyed watching him do what he did best. I grew to like the warm smell of Larry's whisky breath as he kept up a constant chatter of good



cheer. As the day wore on he would become ever more ebullient with each drink, until, at days end, he would choose the classiest customer car to take home for an extended "test drive."

## Wheels and Tires

The balancing machine had a powerful electric motor that rubbed against a front tire to spin it at high speed. First, I'd mark the wheel with a piece of chalk and then carefully place a sensor on the car's suspension. The sensor triggered a strobe light aimed at the rapidly spinning wheel. The strobe light magically made the wheel appear still, with the heaviest area at the bottom. I would make a mental note of the wheel's position and then stop the whirling wheel to hammer lead weights onto the rim. The process would be repeated until the wheel spun smoothly, without vibration. It required two mechanics to balance the rear, driving wheels, one to work on the wheel and the other to sit in the driver's seat of the raised car and rev the engine with the car in high gear.

I was thrilled, and a little scared, to be working just inches away from a heavy wire wheel spinning at highway speeds.

As a teenager in Miami I had watched this process being done on my father's car, and I think it was then that I decided that, more than anything else, I wanted to work in a sports car shop.

## The Mechanics

We mechanics were a mixed bag. Marcelle, Emilio and Mike were three older Europeans who had worked together at J.S. Inskip before moving on to Adams-Mahoney. Roy, Zion and Leroy were three young black men from Jamaica. Then there was me, a young man from Florida, taking it all in.

## Marcelle

Marcelle was from Belgium. He was a religious man who attended Catholic Mass each morning before coming to work. I never came to work early enough to see him arrive, or stayed late enough to see him leave. He was probably in his late 50s, but his experience as a Nazi Prisoner-of-War had affected his health, making him seem older than his years. Miraculously, he found the love of his life while at A-M. His loving wife, Maria, was his glorious reward for having lived a virtuous life here on Earth. Marcell was a good person and, as our best mechanic, he was given the most difficult, technical jobs. I grew to love him and I miss him now as I sit here, writing this.

## A Healey Exhaust

Sometimes it would be my job to replace the exhaust system of a big Austin Healey. I would crawl under the car with a flaming acetylene torch to remove the rusty pieces and then weld together a new assembly of heavy steel pipes, silencers, resonators and rubber hangers. It was a big job made harder when the tip of my torch got too close to a pipe and exploded with a loud "pop," shooting sparks at my goggled face.

## Mike

Mike was a heavy-set Irishman who reminded everyone of Jackie Gleason, whom he would frequently impersonate. He was our shop foreman, parts man, and third in command. Part of his job was to drive the little red and white Morris panel truck to the parts depot



in New Jersey, and return to refill the shelves with needed supplies. He also worked on the major, extended mechanical rebuilds that were always lingering in the corners of the shop.

I never really liked Mike. He was untruthful about the most mundane things, making work difficult for those of us who depended upon him. He seemed to have his own agenda that I never understood. Although we seemingly got along, he was someone that I could have easily done without.

## A Test Drive

In good weather I might decide that a Big Healey or Mini Cooper S needed a test drive. I drove quickly through heavy traffic to enter the FDR Drive at 79th Street and speed south, ever faster, to the exit at 63rd Street. It was a short but exhilarating circuit that would raise my spirits.

## Emilio

I always felt sorry for Emilio. He had been a foot soldier in the Italian Army and, like Marcelle, World War II had not been good to him. Even though he was very experienced, having worked many years with the others at Inskip, he would often make mistakes and could no longer be trusted with difficult jobs.

Emilio could display a violent temper, and the Jamaican mechanics would taunt him just to see what he would do. I can't forget the time he threw a heavy iron shock absorber at one of them, missing the mark but leaving a lasting gash on the concrete wall.

Mamile, as Marcelle called Emilio, was really too unhealthy to be working under our harsh conditions, and this added to his general unhappiness. He was what I call "played out." High blood pressure made him dizzy, and his utterance, "Head no good today," has stayed with me, especially now that I have been made intimately familiar with the manifestation.

## Coffee Time

At the shop I was considered "the kid," and it was my job to gather snacks at 10:00 and 3:00. I collected money and wrote orders on little pieces of scrap paper.

The coffee choices were: light and sweet, dark, dark no sugar, or, of course, regular (milk and sugar). Most ordered either a "butter roll" or an "egg on a roll." The butter roll was a seeded hard roll with a big glob of glorious sweet butter hidden deep within.

I'd walk the few blocks to the Deli and stand in line with the other young gophers. I'd call my order to the counter man and then move along to pay the nice lady at the register. Like the food, the constant banter of the Deli was warm and indigenous to New York at the time. "One Regular," was coffee without pretense.

I liked taking the orders. I liked the little walk. I liked the warmth of the Deli. But most of all I liked the 15 minutes when I joined the others to sit together and exchange stories and opinions before returning to the isolation of the work.

## Roy

Roy was the oldest of the three Jamaicans. He was a family man who had come to New York to better his situation. He kept a low profile, working hard without complaint. He sent most of his paycheck back to his wife and children on "The Island."

Every evening, after work, Roy attended night school to study computer science. His reasons for coming to New York were clear: it offered a "Land of Opportunity" where he could earn good money and receive an education that insured a bright future for him and his family after his return home.

## Leroy and Zion

Leroy and Zion were a pair of young guys on the make in the Big City. At lunchtime I would attentively listen to their stories of weekend parties and the girls that they had come to know.

There was much about life in New York that was difficult. As we sat together, eating lunches in a cold repair shop, and watching falling snow through dirty, frosty windows, Leroy and Zion would reminisce about the tropical world they had left behind. I wondered what kept them in The City. With my limited, privileged background I was unable to accept that it was only money that motivated them to leave Jamaica and endure New York. I wondered if, like me, there was something more elusive that was keeping them here at Adams-Mahoney.

## Epilogue

Eventually, the long days at Adams-Mahoney were no longer fun. I felt like the Sorcerer's Apprentice: as I fixed one car, two others were breaking down somewhere else, and it was all too much for me. I never had it in me to become a real professional. I'd had enough.

I was 25 when I left New York for graduate school in Pennsylvania. It was September of 1970. I fit my tools and my clothes into a ragged MGB and headed west over the George Washington Bridge to follow Interstate 80 toward a different life. **MM**



# The Keys to Your First Classic



By Karan Bhatia, member of the Southern California Triumph Owners Association

The desire to own a classic car was growing and it finally felt the time was right to begin my search. My dad, a life-long automobile lover, has owned and maintained a variety of his own British cars and “me mum,” as the British would say, grew up in Coventry, a city in which much of England’s automobile history is rooted. It felt right to purchase a classic British car. Practicality has always been a priority to me, so I sold my perfectly reliable, low mileage Honda, started using my motorcycle as my primary means of transportation and began searching for an old project car to begin fixing up, with absolutely no knowledge of how to do so!

I wanted a complete basket case of a car. I had grand plans of a frame-off restoration, as this is obviously the most logical thing to do for someone who had done a total of zero oil changes and didn’t even own a single socket. I own a 2016 motorcycle and it runs so perfectly that it never needs any work. I wanted to work! My dad reasoned with me and although I silently felt he was killing the fun, he talked me into finding

something that was at least drivable, by a safe standard.

The search didn’t last long. I found a Triumph Spitfire for sale locally. I rushed my dad over to see it, since he has far more experience than myself when it comes to British cars, although, to be fair, even a rusty lug nut has more experience with British cars than myself. This was probably the five hundredth British car I’d seen for sale but the first that seemed worthy of checking out in person. You can imagine my disappointment when we pulled up to the owner’s home, only to find a beautifully painted car with an engine that had recently been rebuilt and was running excellently. How do you call this a project?! It looks fantastic, I can drive it home and it shifts and brakes perfectly! Then the owner opened his garage and said he’d happily give us the 10 or so large boxes of parts he had that had yet to be installed, as most of the detail work remained to be done on the car. A shimmer of hope. I was sold, even though I felt like the car was going to be effortless to own and my plans had been far more ambitious. The last thing he handed me was a dusty copy of the

Haynes manual. I mindlessly placed it in one of the many boxes. Little did I know that would turn out to be the most useful thing he gave me.

The car is home. I’m eager to work on it, but that’s a bit difficult when I really don’t know how to do anything. Start with cleaning it, I guess? I know how to wash a car. After the first wash the turn signals stopped working and the hazards wouldn’t stop working. I was permanently hazardous! The first thing I learned since owning my British car: It appears I don’t know how to wash a car. And so began the journey of owning, but most importantly, learning.

Each day, I became a bit more adventurous in my endeavors. I began attending car shows and joined a local Triumph club. The British car community is incredibly welcoming and helpful. I noticed everyone had immaculate engine bays. I started buying tools and taking things apart that looked dirty. My skill set didn’t extend beyond cleaning (I soon found out I knew nothing about cleaning either, as I was clueless when it came to degreasing, detailing, washing and more). The engine bay was atrocious, so



that became my first actual “project.” The engine had been rebuilt, but everything around it was covered in the thickest layer of grease I’ve ever seen (although initially I thought it was just painted black, as it never occurred to me an engine could have that much perfectly caked grease on it). As I began degreasing, after learning what degreaser was, I discovered worn out metal parts, like windshield wiper motors and that dreaded PDWA, even though I had no clue what the parts were. I began removing parts and restoring them, with the help of my new friend, the Haynes manual. I would figure out what a part’s function was, determine whether or not it was functional and then do everything I could to make it work right and shine at the same time. I was eager to turn wrenches, so parts came off hastily and went back on after being cleaned and restored, with much swearing, sweating, screaming and sandpaper. Each small project gave me a bit more confidence to tackle slightly larger projects. Catalytic converter blocked up? Easy replacement on the driveway. Firewall has dents and shabby paint? No problem. Armed with my manual and the help of YouTube, online forums and fellow British car owners, I have been furiously attacking this car, learning how to do basic body work, restore a variety of parts and materials, tune carbs, adjust timing,

install a soft top, fuss with a sticker to go on my heater control knob and so much more. Who knew how exciting a rivet gun could be! And while it’s true that I often did more damage during the first attempt fixing something, the persistence of reattempting things multiple times before being satisfied is a powerful teacher. I’ve found the key to success is lots of swearing, sweating and screaming. Oh, and sandpaper.

As I spent more time working on the car, I truly began to appreciate my dad’s advice. Thank goodness I didn’t buy a complete basket case of a car.

This car looked to be 100% complete to my untrained eye when we first went to look at it, and the more time I spend working on it, the more I realize how much work this car requires, at least for someone who began this venture with no knowledge of where to start. There will probably always be something that needs tinkering with and I’m thrilled about that, as all I wanted was to learn about maintaining a classic car. I used to laugh when I read that people spent nine years doing a frame-off restoration... and then I spent five hours trying to figure out how to dismantle my seatbelt assembly. Nine years you say?! Wow. You’re fast. Would you mind helping me put my seatbelt together?

I now have a relationship with my car that is tough to describe. I’ve poured hundreds of hours into her. I can identify most if not all the components of the car. I know what purpose each item serves and how it works. I have studied my car voraciously, along with its manual and many other resources, and I understand it better than any other car or motorcycle I’ve ever owned. I have loved cars my whole life, but I’ve never appreciated them at this level until owning a classic British car. I’m far from an adept mechanic, (although I’m great at taking things





apart without knowing how to put them back together), but my Spitfire has made me better and continues to challenge me and help me improve. All I wanted from owning this car was a chance to learn a little more about how cars work. This car has given me that but so much more as well. She is far from perfect. She is definitely not problem-free. She is not at all what I perceived her to be when I first saw her in the previous owner's driveway. She came to me with many of her own issues and occasionally

throws small fits, but that is what I love about her. I love that my “to-do” list on the car seems to shrink by one but grow by five every time I work on her. I keep discovering new things that need tending to and improving, or discovering that pieces are missing, damaged or installed incorrectly. I genuinely love the time I spend working on her, making the smallest, most trivial aspects look and function slightly better. I look forward to continuing to swear, scream and sweat with each project I tackle on

her. I no longer panic when something happens to my car, but calmly approach diagnosing and fixing it. This car has given me a true appreciation for trouble shooting and problem solving. It’s taught me patience at a whole new level. More than all of that, nothing makes me happier than driving it and knowing she looks and drives as she does because of all the time I’ve spent on it. Owning this Triumph has absolutely been, and continues to be, one of the most satisfying experiences of my life, one speed bump at a time, both under the hood and on the road.

One thing is for certain: if I can help it, I will always have a British car. God forbid I only have a trusty Honda and a reliable motorcycle now that I’ve spent all this money on these tools! **MM**



# Girl on Fire

By Alicia St. John  
Photos by Christian Maurer

The best years of my life have been spent driving my MGA. Nothing could compare to navigating the curves of Mulholland Drive, on a starry night, with Sinatra playing on the stereo. The beautiful instrument panel, lit up against the darkness. My right hand cradling the wooden shifter, feeling the beating heart of the engine. I would glance at my gloved hand, poised on the Mota-Lita steering wheel, and know that perfect moment of joy. Since the age of 21, I had worked on my own engine, under the tutelage of long-time friend of Al Moss, Mike Goodman. My

MGA was neither a toy nor a hobby; but, since I built her from the ground up, customizing every beautiful detail, she was my identity. My handsome Irish father had built his own cars as a young man living in 1950s Manhattan. I loved his stories of racing for pink slips and always winning. I lost him early on in life, but his love of classic cars now flows in my blood.

Ten years ago, my dream car was destroyed in Los Angeles, in a violent act of crime. Coupled with personal threats against me, the LAPD and LAFD confirmed that I had been the target of a psychopath. Late one night, I watched as my MGA went up in flames, which escalated 15 feet high, consuming the car beyond repair. I will never forget that sight. I had done nothing to incite or deserve anyone's vengeance. I was always a strong and independent woman, intelligent, responsible and kind. Despite society's penchant to shame victims of violent crimes, I must say that oftentimes good people are simply preyed upon.

How does one heal from violence? There are many possible paths and none are easy.

I was not familiar with the term "post traumatic stress disorder," but now I understand that it is the natural reaction of anyone who experiences violence or trauma. Previously, I had thought it was suffered only by soldiers returning from combat, policemen and firefighters. For the past ten years,



it is a condition I have been treating within myself and, since the condition is complex, I have approached the solution medically, psychologically and spiritually. I believe that the most important component of healing is forgiveness. Philosophically speaking, being able to forgive allowed me to start a process of personal growth, rebuilding my world from a position of strength. But, like many people who have endured these experiences, I have not been willing to speak about it.

I am not defined by loss, tragedy or violence. I am defined by the beauty I create, the joy that I bring to life, and the wisdom with which I grow. William Saroyan wrote of a journey to a place of a terrible compass; but, once through the storm, we are transfigured. The journey back to myself would take me ten years and, metaphorically speaking, thousands of miles, but I was determined.

We are at our best when faced with adversity. We have the power within us to hold back the darkness, to right a wrong, to live the life we choose to live. But, when you are in crisis, it does not feel so optimistic. It is simply painful. What I needed to rediscover was my own strength and indomitable spirit.

### Road to Recovery

I set about to have my dream car once again and purchased a 1958 MGA through an online auction. She was transported from Florida to California, and I remember the day of arrival. The car was not in good shape. Her paint was faded and cracked, worn-out upholstery, pitted chrome, and I barely got the engine to turn over. However, all I could think about were the possibilities. And so, the MGA went in for a complete frame-off restoration.

It took a total of eight years. The engine was blueprinted and specced by California Showcase Classics and completed by my own hands. Moss Motors was there for me at every moment, sourcing the parts that would create an absolute beauty. The King of Tech, Moss' Kelvin Dodd, puzzled out the decisions with me,

down to the smallest details. And my deepest gratitude goes to Roy Miller, founder of East-West Motors restoration shop. Roy is a 35-year

of leaks. I walk around noting that the Vredestein's are all in perfect condition and the tire pressure is 30psi, inflated with nitrogen gas. In the trunk of the car



automotive judge, 17 years at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. He was the only mechanic who would allow me to work with him, and in the process I found a kindred soul.

The culture of classic cars sometimes resembles a brotherhood of like-minded individuals, and Roy Miller is not only a master of the art of mechanics but also an historian. There is something so incredibly magical about working on an engine, while hearing about the history of auto racing and the men who became the legends we so admire.

I wanted my MGA's story to be a part of that same magical history, and so last summer I drove my newly restored MGA in the Rally-4-Kids, a 200-mile race to raise money for the local Boys and Girls Club.

### Morning, Race Day

I've checked and double-checked my list of mechanical items to inspect. Plug wires and belts are tight, fluids are topped off and there are no signs

is the spare, on the 5th wheel rim, ready to go, the wooden knock off paddle and a jack, just in case she blows one on the course. Always prepared, I've brought a few tools and parts. The Girl Scout's checklist of supplies also includes a quart of 20/50, sewing machine oil for the SUs, the MGA manual, a fire extinguisher, Mag-Lite, flares, and a first aid kit.



In any show or rally, everyone pays as much attention to getting his or her car to look as perfectly as it runs. For me, the flawless curves of the car, the spotless camel men's wool suiting and matching leather of the interior, the high polish of the lacquer and chrome are all "practical." I step back and admire her. It was two weeks of prep work just for this rally...two weeks with my arms up to my elbows in the engine (note: a woman's hands are the perfect fit for the British engine and I've never needed to use special tools to reach down to tighten a nut) and polishing the seemingly endless details of the interior and body. It was all worth it... She's gorgeous.

***If I'm not ready now,  
I never will be...***

I climb into the cockpit of the MGA and belt myself in. The matching camel and chrome seat belts were something that I sourced and installed. According to Roy Miller, back in the day, drivers preferred not to have them at all, but be ejected. In the event of a crash, I think I'll stay with my car.

I pull the choke and tap the throttle, feeding her a little octane, and turn the key before the organizers called my class group forward. The engine roars to life and a deep satisfaction comes over me. I smile from ear to ear. Another driver yells out to me, "Behave yourself out there, Alicia!" and I reply, "Absolutely not!"



The organizers have the new Ferraris and Porsches out of the gate already, long before the vintage cars. These guys will be seriously trying to outmaneuver one another on the road, likely up to 120mph, and I'm sure that they want the vintage cars out of the way. Nevermind... an MGA with no modern modifications will never outperform a new Ferrari, and I have nothing to prove here anyway.

Many of the men take their wives and girlfriends, however, out of 54 entries there are only five female drivers. The other four gals are driving new sports cars. I am the only vintage racer.

My car is signaled forward, through the gate. Then, the adrenaline rush flows over me and I am in the moment. I put her in gear and take off. The landscape rushes by me at rising speeds. I find myself trying to catch the car ahead and the chase is exhilarating!

Winding endless roads, I push her through the corners. It is the first time that I've sent the newly rebuilt engine to redline. She is doing 80mph without overheating and is steady and sure of herself. And so am I. Car and driver are one.

I do not consider that we are ever victims nor survivors. I believe that we are heroes. There is nothing that cannot be overcome. The focus should never be on what was lost, but on what we build, a testament to the human spirit. The journey of the hero is the privilege of a lifetime.

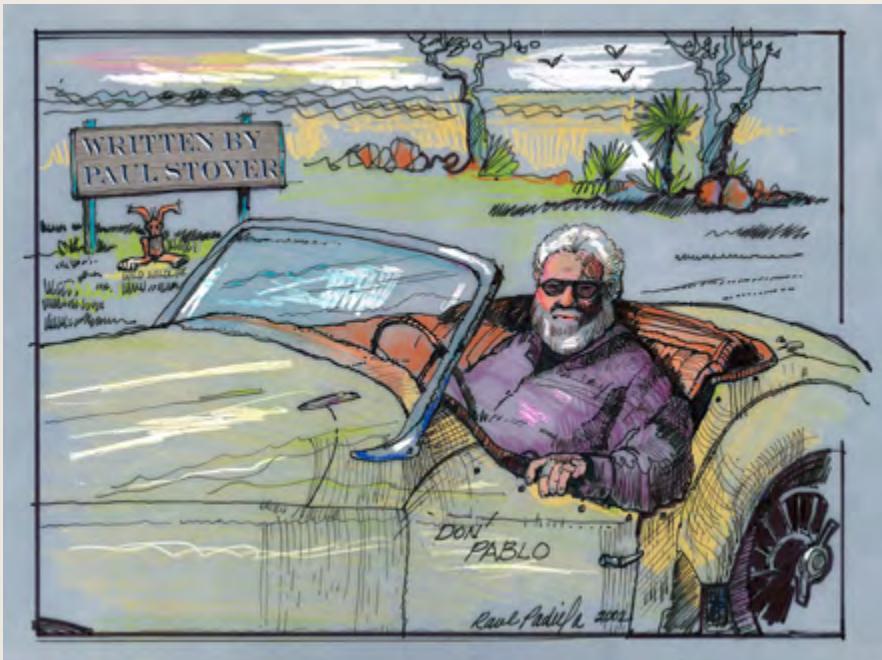
I am currently creating a mentorship program for the Boys and Girls Club. "Inspire The Next Generation" is an interactive TedTalks for children, drawing on mentors from the community, and is at no cost to the club. My own mentor was the iconic author Ray Bradbury, whom I met when I was seventeen and knew for twenty-four years of my life. It took many years, but I eventually became the writer that Ray wanted me to be. As a volunteer for charitable organizations, I learned that I could make a difference, especially when I became a mentor. It is our responsibility to inspire the next generation. I live each day with that goal in mind. **MM**



# THE ODYSSEY HOME

## PART II

If you missed the adventures of part I, you can read it at:  
[mossmotors.com/the-odyssey-home](http://mossmotors.com/the-odyssey-home).



I entered Interstate 8 and started east. Earlier that day, I had removed the tonneau cover, put the hoops up, and installed the top, being a little sunburned and expecting rain.

The engine purrs smoothly with its throaty sound as I start to climb the pass. The traffic thins leaving El Cajon. I begin to detect an unevenness in the engine running. *Th th thp th thp pht pth th th??!!* It doesn't seem to degrade the power. What could it be? Spark? Points bouncing? Loose contact in the wiring? I drive on, at times it smoothes out, later returns to haunt me. Over the crest at 4,187 feet of elevation. The air changes aroma, a damp sweet smell like curing hay. Wonderful! I can tell the effect of the monsoon rain that has been present from San Diego to El Paso for the past several weeks. I had been monitoring the weather looking for a break; the outlook was not good. San Diego has been HOT, unusually hot, 85 degrees and 95% humidity. I welcomed the cool.

"Sea level" the sign said. The lights of El Centro come in to view. I stop and top off with gas. The engine smoothed out at lower speeds while I am cruising around town. I slowly come up to

freeway speed; at first it seemed smooth then steadily began its roughness. It must be the needles hanging up in the carburetors. *Th th thp th thp pht thp th pht*. Yuck!!?? I don't know what it is. I'll try to find a lighted place in the next town and take a look. I wish I knew more about these carbs. Think! It's my job to fix things I've never seen before. I've been doing it for 20 years, that's why I'm a Project Manager, a shotgun engineer. Funny how you can fix things for others, but not so easy for yourself.

60 miles to Winter Haven, 10 more to Yuma. The lights of Yuma come and go. I'm on adrenaline now; I can probably go all night. Flashes of lightning on both sides of the road. The light show is spectacular. There is hardly a moment when there is not a strike in that quadrant. Silent thunder. Only light, with a subtle spectrum of colors haloing the bolts. Jumps from ground to sky, sky to ground, and cloud to cloud. The smell of wet earth elicits long buried memories of my childhood, of springtime in Oklahoma, contrasting the dry West Texas that my family had moved from. The Oklahoma catastrophic weather: tornadoes, downpours, electrical storms, and just straight hurricane force blows, made

all other climates bland by comparison. The only thing that comes close to expressing it is Vivaldi's Four Seasons, Primavera. Now the rain shower begins, not hard. I turn on the wipers. They throw the water off the edge of the windscreens only to blow back on my face. I turn off the wipers. Quarter-hour later, the stars are out. Tires sing on the wet pavement. The light show is behind me. I drive on.

### ROUNDING GILA BEND

I gas up, make a pit stop, walk around. "What time is it?" I ask the attendant. "Just after midnight." I climb back into the tight cockpit. Turn the key. Press the starter. Silence! Nothing! Dead! What happened? Everything was fine when I pulled in here. Hell, even the engine was running smooth. I turned the lights off. Huh? Got out and pushed the car away from the pumps. Some Mexicans saw me and came running over to give me a hand. "Neat car! Get in," they instructed. We push started the engine; it sounded good. The electric fan came on. Oh! The fan was set to come on at 175 degrees; the engine was normally running at 185. So the electric fan is running all the time. The generator probably can't

carry the load of both the fan and the headlights. I opened the bonnet and set the fan thermostats to the highest position. I checked the ampere meter, it was charging. I pressed the clutch to put the car in gear. It died! Hit the starter. Nothing! Wow! The battery is down. The Mexicans came running to the rescue again. "Hey man, my tío, he has a car just like this. We have to push start it all the time." The engine started. "Muchas Gracias!" I called, and I was off into the night. Going for it. I thought about Steinbeck's book, and the people that helped the Okies on their odyssey to a new land, their new home, the unknown. How did they deal with fear? The anger? For me, I knew where I was going. I had been there. Yet there was fear.

The rain starts to pour. No lightning, just black spray seeping through the seam where the top meets the windscreen. Not bad, I can live with that, for a while anyway. 90 miles to Tucson. The engine lumps along, steady, seemingly reliable. I would like to rest easy with this, but I cannot really. An hour passes. Casa Grande lights come in to view. I debate whether to go on. The town passes by and I press on by default. I wonder how many decisions are made by that method. The night now turns very black. I don't know if it's the rain blackening things out or my lights are dim? I drive on, hoping to make it to somewhere before the lights go out completely.

### ELOY ARIZONA

The morning sun shines through the drab drapes. Coffee! It is the first order of business. The Triumph is still by the motel office under the car cover where I left it last night. I walk across the street to Bob's Big Boy. With a large coffee in hand, I sit for a while on a bench to let things settle and let the coffee do its work. I ask the motel clerk about a mechanic garage. "No. There is a man named Jim who has a van, roadside service. Costs \$50. I think that's kind of expensive," she says. I agree.

Under the bonnet I tighten a loose fan belt and check wiring connections. "Need help?" I hear someone say. "Yeah! I could use a jump start." "Not a problem." I continue. I hear a generator start up. "Excuse me, let me connect these cables to the battery." I back away, look around. There's a van. "Hi! I'm Jim," the friendly face says and sticks out his hand to shake. "Nice car." Jim puts on the car, checking the points, the carbs, tightening this and tweaking that. He is the sort of guy that is hard not to like—and hard to get away from. He had a garage. Locals all wanted his service on credit. He could never collect. So he closed the doors, painted a sign on a van and helps people passing through, 50 bucks a pop.

11:00am, I am rolling down the road. The battery is charging well, though the engine is still running rough. I feel good, better after having lunch in Tucson. 30 years ago I had traveled this route. It was desert. Now it is green, beautiful farms. It is hot, but with the apparent wind of a roadster it's not uncomfortable. I enjoy the scenery, play tag with other travelers, I notice that some cars and trucks keep passing me and honk, give me a thumbs up or call out, "neat car!" Frankly, I am not prepared to handle all this attention. I see a lot of cars and pickups with trailers packed to the hilt and California license plates, often in caravans, sometimes stopped along the road making repairs.

Four years ago, with my pickup truck loaded, I too, was part of the exit from California with tears in my eyes. Gave up my dream family, my dream friends, and my dream home, lucky at my age to find a job. The submarine shipyard at Mare Island, in Vallejo, California had closed, and the nation seemed to rejoice. And now, on my way home, driving the symbol of my triumph over total ruin, my heart is with these people. I know they are feeling scared and sad.

### INTO NEW MEXICO

I hardly notice, the mileposts read 00, 01, 02. Lordsburg, Las Cruces, then stop for the night in El Paso. I look forward to my visit with my cousin Randall and his wife, Maria. Maria had grown up in Chihuahua, Mexico, the daughter of a Land Baron. Emit Randall Johnson came from Colorado and was the son of a peasant sharecropper, but he didn't know that. He didn't know he was out of his class. He thought he was just like every body else, and in Colorado he was. He fathered a dozen children, and educated each one, doctors, engineers, professors and such. He is a retired schoolteacher now. Lovely people.

"Wake me when you get up, Randall. I want to get an early start."

"PABLO! It's 4:30, is flied lice and coffee okay?" "Fried rice and coffee sounds great."

5:00am I was rolling through southeast El Paso, reminiscing of walks with Randall as he pointed out 300-year-old buildings. And all the people, his students, 40 years and younger, running up to him. "Oh, señor Johnson, how good to see you!" followed by embraces and kisses from men and women alike. He seemed bewildered by it all. Each student of his felt personally loved and cared for, and now he is loved and cared for. I drove on.

450 miles of vastness, the Border, Big Bend country, The Great Vast. Nothing. The last of the Great Wilderness. Only one village with more than 12,000 people. I was sure I would make it home now. As I climbed over the pass east of El Paso the weather was cool. I considered putting on a jacket that I had brought just in case.

Inadvertently I put my hand on the canvas car top. Hmmmm. The *th th th thp th thp pth th th* of the engine seem to match the *th th th thp th thp pth th th* of the wind vibrating the canvas. You kidding me? Is that all it was?! **MM**

*Join us in the summer issue of  
Moss Motoring for the conclusion of  
Paul's Odyssey!*



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X Large	911-114
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Small	911-117
Medium	911-118
Large	911-119
X Large	911-120
XX Large	911-121



#### *White*

X Small	911-122
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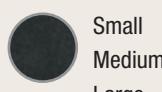
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