Moss Motoring

ISSUE 2, 2018

It's a great road ahead
Drive a Fun Car

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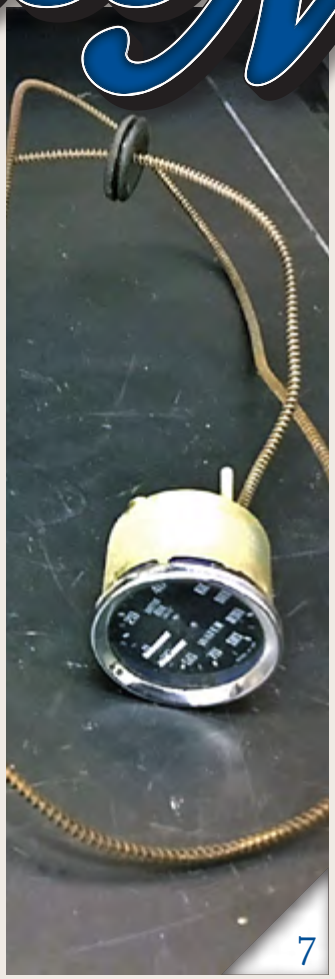
4

The Odyssey Home

The finale of a story we are sad to see end. Well done, Paul!


7

Lab Coat Lessons

These cars may be simple, but there is science within their simplicity.


10

Bugeye Beginnings

A look at the origins and creators of the car that brought a smile to the world.


14

Tale of Two Teachers

Buttoned up military man meets lead-footed lady. Their child's story.

On the Cover:

Brian Kinney's daughter and son-in-law begin a new life together in style. Read Brian's tale on page 14.

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The Winner's Circle

Ownership of an iconic shop changes hands. A torch has been passed and shines on.

On My Reckless Way

A story of a Matchbox car, a boyhood dream, a Facebook friend, and an understanding wife.

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Robert Goldman

A British Chorus

As Moss Motors enters its 70th year in business, we are buffeted by some basic facts of life. To have driven an MG TC at 16 years of age in 1948, one must be 86 years old today. Those folks, and the ones who came shortly behind, are leaving us. Back around the new year, we lost two long time stalwarts of their respective car hobbies.

In December, Herman van den Akker passed away. Herman was the five speed Triumph gearbox conversion guy. If I went to a British car meet, there was Herman, dispensing knowledge to a steady stream of curious enthusiasts.

in January, we lost Ken Smith, who was also known as Mr. MG, or Mr. MGB. Ken was a central figure in advancing interest in cars like the MGB LE. Although a following would grow organically, Ken's involvement and enthusiasm advanced the cause.

Herman and Ken are by no means the only enthusiasts we have lost in recent years, but they were voices for Triumph and MG, pillars of their respective communities, and two individuals I counted among a small, and suddenly shrinking, circle of friends.

Herman and Ken held an incredible amount of knowledge, and knew where to go for the questions they themselves could not answer. Now they are gone. Who will replace them? We have young enthusiasts building their own networks and bases of knowledge, but they won't be known as old time experts for a while yet.

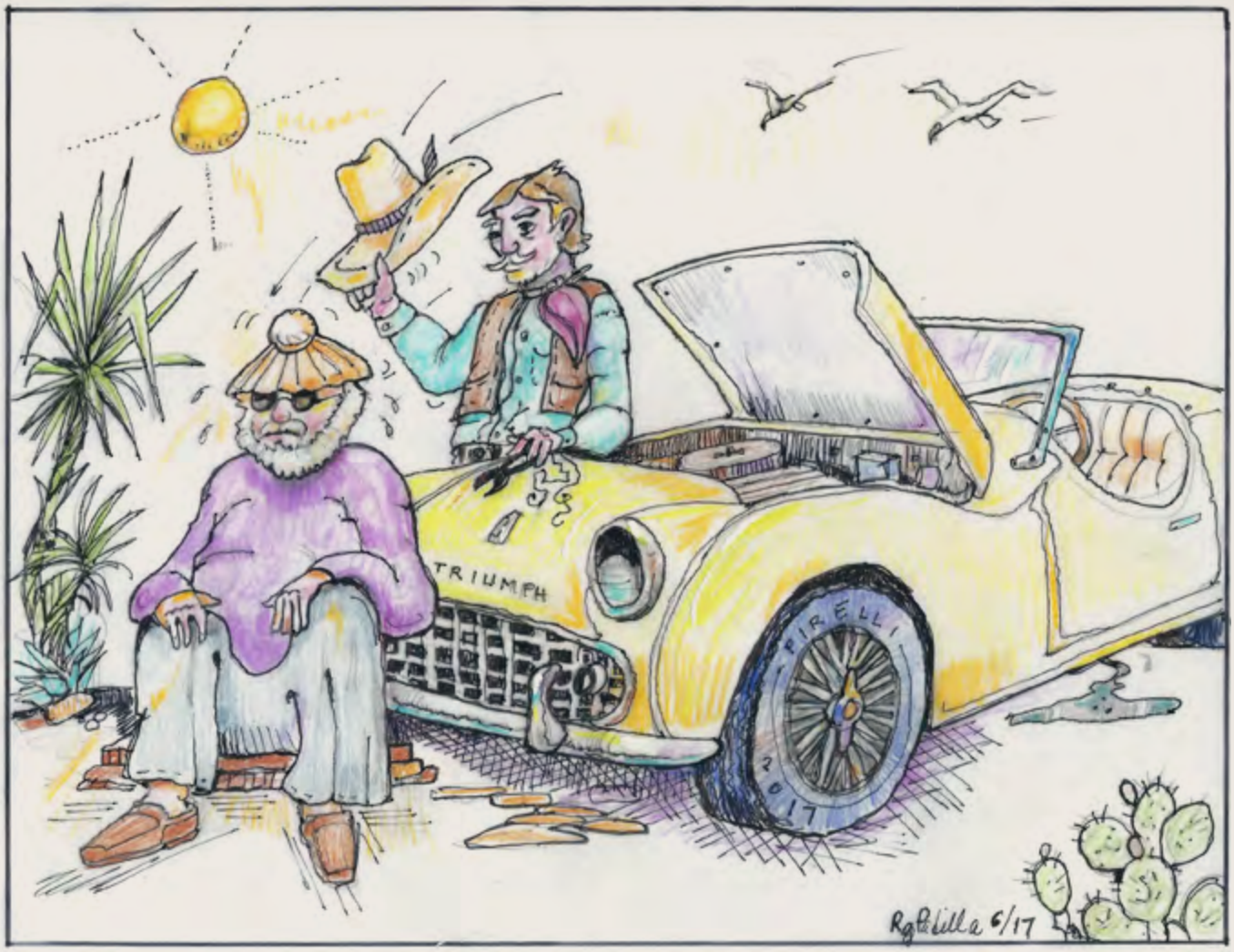
Kevin Flint, our young whelp (he's only like 50-something) Director of Marketing, asked me "what is the voice of Moss?" That's not a topic on which I have much sense of meaning. He clarified by sending me a picture of a slammed Austin-Healey, with drag wheels, and undoubtedly a big V8 motor. "My voice is going to be like this!" he declared. Now I get it. No, you're not.

Jokes aside, there is a slim trail of VoM (Voice of Moss) in our DNA. Whether it was the late Al Moss himself, or people like Kelvin Dodd, or the recently retired Michael Grant, there have been identifiable "voices" within the Moss organization. In reality, Kevin was asking, who is the presumptive in-house keeper of our collective knowledge.

In the case of British car knowledge, perhaps we will be moving away from lead singers, toward more of a chorus. As evidence of this, there was a time when we, as a matter of policy, would not look outside the company for technical knowledge. The argument was simply that we should know. We are the expert. Today, that is an outdated notion. We routinely work with people like Lawrie Alexander, Paul Dierschow at Sports Car Craftsmen in Colorado, or Eric Grunden at Absolutely British in California.

So, Kevin, in answer to your question, going forward, the VoM will be a chorus. Individual members may pass, but the voice will remain the same (with a nod to Led Zeppelin). *MM*

Herman & Ken, they joined us from separate countries across the pond and shared their talent, wisdom, friendship… and love for British cars.



The Odyssey Home

Part III
The Conclusion

By Paul Stover

If you missed part I or II, you can read the story in its entirety at: mossmotoring.com/the-odyssey-home

I clung to Interstate 10 for the safety of traffic until reaching Fort Stockton, one of the baddest towns of the old west. With my heart in my throat I head south to intercept Highway 90 at Sanderson. This road is lonely, hardly ever traveled. My anxiety rises. The land is beautiful in the great vast sort of way. I force myself to savor the beauty and dominate the tension that keeps welling up in me. I had been in the great vast before, being a sailor. I had been in the middle of the ocean in a small sailboat. What does it help to fear? The road wound around gentle rolling hills, pale green with the rugged desert grass and small, dormant flowers that survive for years without water, only to pop up and bloom, regardless of the season, whenever it rains.

Suddenly the land falls away leaving me only a view of the sky. My eyes and brain are in disagreement. I am looking out over an ocean and shocked to know the sea was not there. I had been traveling across a high plateau. I look down from atop the cap rock into the valley below with the Rio Grand River some 30 or 40 miles away. Distances in the desert are deceiving.

Oh god, what's that smell? The air is thick with gasoline. I kill the engine and coast down the long grade to the floor of the plain. Only the sound of the wind rushing past the car, and then nothing. Dead quiet.

I sat. Not moving. I don't know how long I sat.

Under the bonnet I discovered what I already knew. The fuel line to the carburetors had a four-inch split. That old hose was probably born on this car. I don't think duct tape will fix that. But

silly me tried it anyway, three times. I gave up before I set the engine on fire.

It is time to conserve energy and get out of the sun. It is HOT. Slightly less than 120 degrees. Looking back up the road, all I saw were heat waves rippling off the surface of the desert. I get the car cover out of the boot and improvise a lean-to for shade. I pulled out the liter water bottle that I had bought back at Grape Vine and drank deeply. With my jacket rolled up for a pillow, I crawled under the canopy and closed my eyes.

Dumb not to bring a piece of hose. Dumb to not change the hoses out before they got so old they fell apart. Stop that negative thinking, it serves no purpose now. Wasted energy. Where is your training? Use constructive thoughts. YES! How far back is Fort Stockton? 35 to 50 miles. First rule in the desert: don't leave the car.

I Awake with a Start

Wet with sweat. All afternoon not a single car drove by. I pulled out the aluminum beach chair I had stowed in the boot, sat down, and watched the big orange sun growing larger turning magenta, then vermilion. Kissing the ground. Sinking.

I reached for the bag that Jackie had put in the car back in Pixley that now seemed so long ago. I retrieved the butane burner, the coffee, the espresso coffee pot, the sugar, my small coffee cup, saucer and spoon. I enjoy the ritual of making coffee, listening to the hiss of the burner, the rush of the steam escaping, signaling coffee is made. A cornbread muffin, a tomato and a boiled egg were all that was left. I ate. The last thread of light bent by gravity, reluctant to leave, gave way to the gray of the evening.

I finished my cup and poured another.

I took the car cover down and folded it into a pallet. The sky exploded with stars. God, more stars than I have ever seen since I was a kid. No city lights for who knows how many miles. Satellites streaked across the sky. Meteors galore. I pondered the universe, ever expanding. Black matter's sub-atomic particles existing only three or four nanoseconds, generating a gravitational field, then falling apart going back to energy form, always accelerating.

Where did I come from? Where am I going? What am I doing? Who am I?

I awoke with a start. Hot breath on my nose. What the hell!?? My eyes popped open. I'm staring into the eyes of a curious coyote. He snorted and ran, scared, like me.

I fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

Dawn is approaching. I didn't want to wake up. My body hurts. I get up, walk around the car, then I circle out around the perimeter, 100-meter radius. No discoveries. I drink the last of my water. Look at the radiator and wonder if there is antifreeze in it.

Where did I come from? Where am I going? What am I doing? Who am I?

I made the car cover back into a lean-to, crawl in the shade and size up the situation. Should I attempt to walk out? That has never worked. Most people never get ten miles. So I opt to stay put. It is hard. You want to do something. There are only two things that can be done. Fix it or wait. I tumble the problem over and over in my mind, going round and round in circles, going nowhere.

Time rolled by. I drifted in and out of consciousness, watching the shadows move from rock to rock from west to north starting to elongate to the northeast.

The singing of tires creeps into my dream from the desert, and stop. Someone shakes my arm. I look at a man. I close my eyes again.

"No you don't." the man said, "Look at me!" and shook me again.

I looked. Was he real?

"Mildred! Get some water."

I guzzled. "Hold it feller! Not so fast." I knew that. "I know that!" I said.

"Ah, so you can talk. Well then, you're not in too bad a shape.

Mildred, make the boy something to eat."

I wonder why he calls me "boy." There wasn't a dimes worth of difference in our age.

Mildred made a bologna sandwich and handed it to me. I sat up, ate, and slowly drank little sips. Dan Parker introduced himself and his wife. We sat and talked.

He walked over and looked under the hood (no "bonnet" for Dan). He grunted, walked back to his truck, pulled out a pair of side cutters and went back to the TR3, passing me on the way, swatting me over the head with his hat, muttering something. Then he cut the fuel line on both sides of the split and threw the piece away. Then he reached over and cut the brake line, taking out a six-inch section.

"What are you doing?" I roared.

"Fixin' your friggin' car!" he roared back. He doubled the ends of the brake line over and crimped it. He then flared the ends of the section of tube he had cut out and slipped it in to the open gap in the rubber fuel line. He then walked over to the side of the road and removed

some bailing wire from a fence and came back to wrap it around the rubber hose ends of the fuel line, and twisted the wire to clamp the tubing tight.

"You cut my brake line," I said

"Fool, you don't seem to understand. The objective here, son, is you are trying to GO... not STOP!" he said as he gave me several more whops over the head with his hat.

"You have handled the stopping part just fine. It's the goin' part you need to work on! I give you another two hours and you'da been dead in this heat. Now drink some more of that water and see if you can go pee."

I did as he said. He was right. I had not realized how far I was in to heat exhaustion and dehydration. It really sneaks up on you.

"I only cut the break line to the rear, they don't do you much good anyway. The front brakes do most of the work and they'll work just fine, that's all that really counts. You'll make it to Del Rio now, then you can fix it right. You don't sound like Californee, nor Tex, you sound more Okie to me."

"Yaw! Well, I grew up on a farm in Oklahoma, My Father was a squatter, sometimes share cropper, when they made him pay rent." I said.

"Dammit! Didn't your Dad teach you nuthin'?" as he started hitting me with his hat again.

"See if she starts!" he ordered, waving his hat at the car.

I started it. It ran fine. I stowed the gear and buttoned up.

"I will follow you 'bout ten miles, where we turn off to the left on the dirt road."

I waved as they turned off the highway and I drive on. My thoughts turned to who's the smarter? Me, the engineer, or Dan Parker, Texas rancher. Well, I had struggled and had not found a solution to my problem, and he walks up says "Hunna!" and in three minutes fixes it with what's on hand and saves my life.

I stop at Langtry

It's the home of Judge Roy Bean. Drink more water. Funny, I noticed that since moving to Texas water is the only drink that I want. The only drink that satisfies. I eat a barbecued brisket sandwich and coleslaw. I hate brisket. Brisket seems to be the only meat Texans know.

I drive on until I reach the historical marker on a rise where the final railroad spike was driven joining the eastern Southern Pacific with the western Southern Pacific Railroad. I get out my beach chair, my coffee pot and make coffee, and relax, watching the sun set. Yesterday's sunset seems like a hundred years ago. Funny how time gets distorted. It is about 30 miles to San Felipe Del Rio. Home.

Guillermina, my lady friend, is a studious little bookworm and dreams of seeing the world she already knows from her books. I read books too, and travel, seeing the world. I think this is what she finds attractive about me, certainly not my good looks.

I entered the village, cruised down Avenue "F" triumphantly though town. The low-pressure sodium street lights glowing orange in silent celebration.

I topped of the gas: 7.5 gallons, 185 miles. That's more like it.

Guillermina was waiting in the driveway as I drove up. "Welcome home, Pablo!" where a real hug and a kiss awaited. *MM*

Lab Coat Lessons

Repair of Mechanical Temperature Gauge

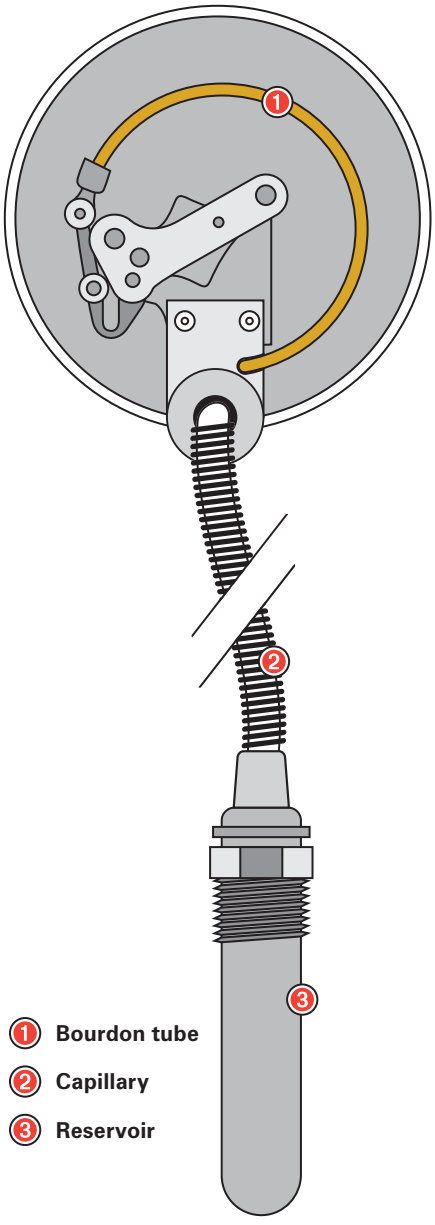
By John Neumeier

A word of caution: *working on automobiles is potentially dangerous, as is swimming in the ocean, snow skiing and grilling hamburgers. The following procedure requires experience and commonsense. A post-graduate degree wouldn't hurt either. ~Ed*

In 1984 I arrived in San Diego with a duffel bag and a few boxes, ready to study Physics at UCSD. While searching for a reasonably-priced car, I ran across a Thrifty Nickel ad for a 1967 MGB. When I spoke to the owner, he interviewed me in order to determine my knowledge about MGBs and cars in general. After passing his "test," he "invited" me to inspect the car. The rear bumper and trunk lid were damaged in a minor accident, it had a few mechanical issues, and there was no top. The missing top was no problem in San Diego. He filled me in on the repairs he'd done through the years, and we agreed on a price of $500. For another $500, a body shop in Tijuana did the body work, painted the entire car in its original primrose yellow, and made a new tonneau cover. For a modest investment, I had the perfect car for my next five years. A few months before leaving the area, I purchased a Bentley shop manual from a woman at the flea market. It was a spare, to augment my Haynes manual. In 1996, I opened it for the first time, finding some notes inside, including the serial number of an MGB, which matched that of my car. I had purchased the repair manual from the previous owner's spouse!

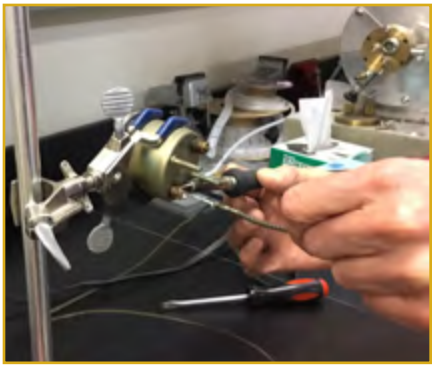
For 24 years the car was stored with friends, or in my own garage. I drove it occasionally while living in Los Alamos, Boca Raton, and Bozeman, Montana, where I now live. In 2014 I acquired a used overdrive transmission on a trip to the east coast, and the following summer I removed and rebuilt the motor. Naturally this project grew in scope, as such things do. One of the items needing repair was the temperature gauge. Once I learned how it worked, the repair seemed like a challenge for someone interested in physics, thermodynamics, and the general subject of "how things work."

Modern automobiles utilize a sensor containing an electrical resistor that is placed in contact with the coolant in the engine block along with a dashboard gauge. American vehicles built prior to the mid 1950's, and many older English vehicles built prior to the mid 1970's, used a different method of measuring engine temperature. It is a closed system consisting of reservoir, capillary, and a Bourdon tube encased in the dashboard gauge housing. This closed system contains a small amount of a diethyl ether. Diethyl ether has the chemical formula (C2H5)2O and a boiling point of about 93° F (34° C) at standard atmospheric pressure. In the operating temperature range of an engine, the diethyl ether coexists in two phases—vapor and liquid. As the temperature increases, more liquid transforms into vapor, and the pressure in the closed volume containing it increases. The relationship between temperature and pressure in a constant volume containing diethyl ether is shown on the following page. The Bourdon tube is a flattened thin-walled tube formed into an arch. It is closed on one end, with the other end connected to the capillary. When the pressure increases, the closed end of the Bourdon tube moves in an arc, which causes the temperature needle of the gauge to deflect. It is calibrated to indicate the engine's temperature. The unique pressure/temperature relationship of diethyl ether is essential for the proper function of the temperature gauge. As an interesting side note, the Bourdon tube measuring oil pressure in the dual gauge is identical to the Bourdon tube used for measuring temperature.



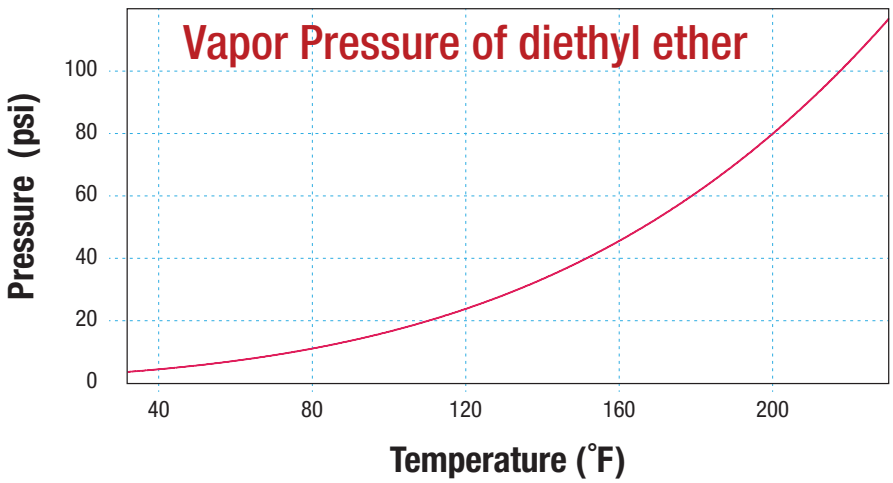
Note: Illustrations are for visual reference only. Not drawn to exact scale.

Figure 1



Disassembly

The Bourdon tube is inside of the gauge housing mounted in the dash. Ideally, the gauge housing need not be disassembled (see the section on Testing the Gauge and Calibration). Soft soldered to it is the capillary and the capillary's other end is soft soldered to the reservoir. The capillary is made of copper-nickel alloy. It has an outside diameter of about 1/16″ and an inside diameter of about 0.015″. Filling the capillary and reservoir requires it to be removed from the gauge, which can be done with a hand-held solder iron (see Figure 1). A flame should not be used, since diethyl ether is extremely flammable. The gauge itself will become hot, holding with a leather glove or a vise is necessary. Once unsoldered, old solder should be cleaned from the capillary's end by heating, and use of a wire brush. Clean the excess solder from the gauge with a solder pump. Or you can use the physics principle of inertia—heating the solder to the melting point, and shaking it out. Use a 1/16″ drill bit held between your fingers to open the hole at the gauge to allow the capillary to easily be inserted. About 0.15″ from the point where the capillary is inserted, there is a tiny hole that is perpendicular to the capillary. This hole should be cleaned of solder using a small drill or other means. It is a viewing hole, that will be used later to tell whether you have sufficient solder to properly seal the capillary in the gauge.



Searching for Leaks and Inspecting the Capillary

Make sure that the capillary is not obstructed. I used 0.012″ piano wire to probe the entire length of the capillary. Remove any sharp bends prior to feeding the piano wire through. Air from a compressor can be applied with adaptor hoses while submerging the capillary and reservoir in water to check for leaks. The reservoir has a soft-solder seal at the far end with a brass plug. This may be how the gauge was filled at the factory. The plug, or the solder joint near the middle of the reservoir, could be sources for leaks. If the plug is drilled out for repair, a small brass screw can be soldered in place to reseal the end.

Filling the Reservoir

Diethyl ether is a controlled substance, but small quantities can be purchased on eBay. There are also YouTube videos illustrating how to distill it from aerosol starting fluid. There are many liquids containing the name ether, diethyl ether, (C2H5)2O, must be used. It has the appropriate pressure/temperature relationship for which the Bourdon tube is constructed. Having a least six milliliters on hand will be good, but twice as much would be better, just in case. Work in a very well-ventilated area, in the presence of no flames or sparks. Fill a bucket that is deep enough to fully immerse the reservoir with water and ice. Have a means of securely holding the capillary and syringe for the remainder of this process, perhaps by mounting them on a wooden board with a few screws and some mechanic's wire. The gauge end of the capillary should be about 4-5 feet above the ground with the reservoir at floor level. Use shrink tube to form a seal between the syringe end and the open end of the capillary. A small amount of solder flux around the outer diameter of the capillary helps to provide a seal, but do not allow any flux to enter the capillary. Add about 5 ml of the ethyl ether to the syringe, and cover with a metal plate or coin to minimize

vapor loss and to keep dirt from entering (see Figure 2). Make note of the starting volume. Heat the reservoir with the heat gun to cause air to escape until bubbling of the ether stops. Now place the reservoir in the ice water and allow it to cool for a minute. This will cause ether to enter the capillary and reservoir. Heat the reservoir again with the heat gun. The ether will enter the syringe again. Wait until bubbling through the ether stops. Place the reservoir in the ice water. Repeat this process 3-4 times. You will notice that the ether can be admitted or removed from the reservoir and capillary by cooling or heating, respectively. This process removes any air, but also leads to the loss of some diethyl ether. For the final filling, aim to have about 3 ml in the reservoir/capillary. Once this is accomplished, keep the reservoir in the ice water until the open end of the capillary is soldered to the gauge in the next step. The syringe can be removed and the excess ether placed in its container. The volume of the reservoir, capillary, and Bourdon tube are estimated at 4, 0.5, and 0.1 milliliters, respectively. Overfilling is possible, since diethyl ether expands its volume by about 13% upon warming from 23 °C to 100 °C. This can lead to excessive pressure, which is discussed below.

Soldering the Capillary to the Gauge

Be sure that the cylinder head fitting, rubber grommet, and any other fittings have the capillary inserted through them before soldering. Secure the open end of the capillary in a horizontal position while the reservoir remains in ice water. Put a small amount of solder flux on the capillary (not near its end though, since you don't want flux and solder to enter the capillary). Slide the capillary into the gauge about 0.5" to 0.6". Hold the solder iron on the end of the gauge on the outside of where the capillary is to be inserted. Use some solder on the tip to transfer heat. Once at the melting point, feed solder at the joint until the small hole mentioned earlier is filled.

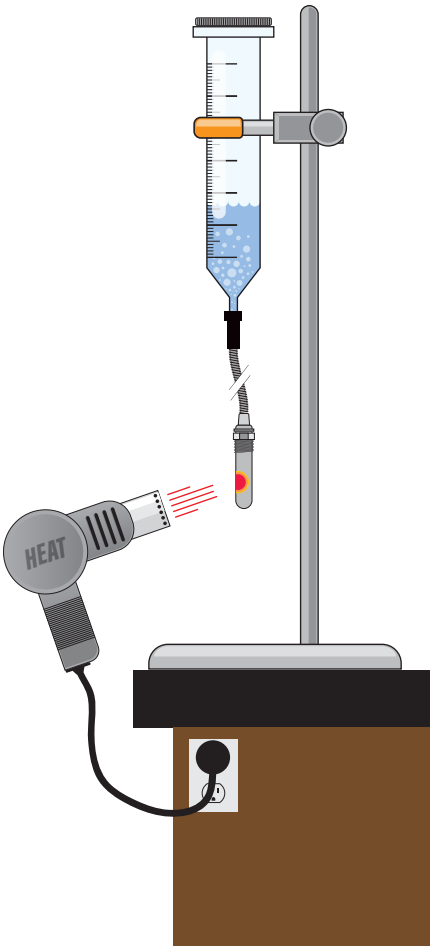
Testing the Gauge and Calibration

The next step determines if the gauge works properly and is not overfilled. Place the reservoir in a pot of water while heated gently from room temperature. If the gauge deflects normally as you reach the boiling point of water, the quantity of ether is fine. If the gauge deflects excessively prior to reaching the boiling point, you likely have too much ether in the reservoir, and some must be removed. I experience this after adding 5 milliliters. If the gauge does not deflect at all, there must be another problem that needs some troubleshooting.

Ideally, you should not need to calibrate the gauge. If the temperature reads more than 5 °C above or below the boiling point of water, you may want to calibrate it. This is a delicate job. Remove the chrome bezel by rotating it on the gauge housing until it comes off with the glass. Make note of the light diffuser position prior to removal of the bezel and glass. On the dual gauge that I repaired, three flathead screws hold the oil pressure gauge mechanism and three similar screws hold the temperature gauge mechanism. The Bourdon tube has a small wire that can be bent to calibrate. If you use this method, paint its end with white paint for visibility. Then reassemble the gauge, but without the bezel and glass installed. You can then reach into the housing with a very stiff wire or dental tool to bend the calibration wire. Another calibration method is to remove the indicating needle and reinstall it at the correct temperature. It is only necessary to calibrate the boiling point of water. The remainder of the calibration scale is determined by the Bourdon tube's construction. Once satisfied, the gauge housing can be reassembled and the temperature gauge installed in the car. *MM*

John Neumeier is a professor of physics at Montana State University. When he's not working with superconductors, he enjoys fine-tuning his MGB.

Figure 2



BUGEYE BEGINNINGS

By Graham Robson

Many years ago, when I was an undergraduate at Oxford, I met up and became great friends with Mike Woodcock. We were both petrol-heads, both determined to join Jaguar if we could, and became the company's first two graduate trainees in 1957. Mike and I roomed together for several years after that, and he often unburdened himself about what he knew to be brewing at BMC's Cowley (Oxford) and Abingdon plants, where his father was CEO.

Not that he told me everything, though on several occasions in 1957 and into 1958, he would let slip a few comments about 'a certain small sports car' that was being developed, but would say no more. Even so, when BMC announced that they would shortly relocate Austin-Healey 100-6 assembly from Longbridge (Birmingham) to Abingdon (Oxford), where they would be built alongside the MGA, the plan was that the small plant at Abingdon would become BMC's sportscar assembly site—and 'the light came on.'

Because I was living in Coventry, and because I had gotten to know almost every young sports car enthusiast in the city, even before the new car was launched I had worked out how BMC's byzantine reasoning, and way of making cars in their often-chaotic 1950s, was going to work.

Although the new car—which we all christened 'frog eye' as soon as we had seen it for the first time—was to be assembled at Abingdon alongside the existing MGA, virtually none of it was to be manufactured there. Basically, much of the structure would come from the independent Pressed Steel company, the engine came from BMC Engines in Coventry, the transmission and some of the suspension came from Austin at Longbridge, while the rack-and-pinion steering gear was borrowed from the Morris Minor 1000, which was built at Cowley (Oxford).

Confusing? It's going to get worse. As BMC's very first unit-body sports car, every example of the Bugeye's structure would start as a sturdy lower platform which had been pressed and welded together by John Thompson Motor Pressings of Wolverhampton, this then being trucked to Pressed Steel in Swindon for completion, later trucked even further to the BMC 'Morris Motors' plant at Cowley for

painting and partial trimming, then—and only then—being transported to Abingdon for final assembly. That's right, three separate road trips before the chassis/body structure of the Sprite was introduced to its running gear for the first time.

As Geoff Healey, Donald's son and the Healey company's chief engineer, told me some years later, actually inventing the new car and getting approval for it to be made had been much easier than feared. As he later wrote in one of his fabulously-detailed books: "The Sprite was first conceived in the winter of 1956, the result of a meeting between DMH (Donald Healey) and Leonard Lord (BMC's dynamic chairman)... During a discussion on the sports car market both men agreed that sports cars were becoming expensive... Len Lord then commented that what was needed was a small, low-cost sportscar to fill the gap."

It really was as simple as that. Healey had already produced the 100, Len Lord had bought in to the idea and invented the Austin-Healey brand overnight, and after that Healey was totally tied in with development of the new cars, which BMC was to make for them. Geoff Healey then shared with me that they were told that Austin had already tried (and failed) to produce a new sports car of their own, that MG would have nothing to do with the new machine, and that the small Warwick-based group would have less than two years to do the job.

Looking back, this was a very exciting time for Healey—and, indeed, for the British motor industry—for in late 1956, when work began on what Healey called 'The Tiddler' project, the mass-market sports car scene was wide open. The vast majority of them were being exported to the USA, where price competition was serious. At the time, there were three popular roadsters: the MGA, which sold for $2,195, the Triumph TR3 for $2,625 and the Austin-Healey 100-6 for $3195. A few specialist companies were building crude little machines (often with poorly-finished glass-fibre bodies) at knockdown prices, but apart from that there was nothing smaller, and certainly nothing cheaper than the MGA.

Healey's directive, therefore, was very simple—yet it would be difficult to satisfy. BMC would leave them with a free hand to engineer, style and develop a new small sports car, but they insisted that there should be little new engineering involved, and that a strict price target should be met. As Len Lord would later say to Alec Issigonis when the BMC Mini was being designed: "You can use whatever engine you like, but it must already be on our production lines." In the case of the Sprite, the same edict not only applied to the engine, but to the transmission, the suspension and the steering too.

Geoff Healey loved such a challenge (to describe him as stubborn was perhaps to understate his usual attitude to life), and set to by demanding, and getting, a mountain of drawings from his link-men at Longbridge. It was only then that the sheer mountain that he would have to climb became clear. Not only would the price targets be demanding, but so was the time schedule—BMC wanted to see the car launched early in 1958, and Len Lord was always impatient about such things. Healey would have to deal with the challenge which Abingdon's 'cottage industry' layout demanded.

Quite simply, from the day that the MG car plant had been set up in 1929, the assembly method had centred around a separate chassis frame, into which the running gear was lowered from above, followed by the addition of the body shell. Because of the way that the 'Tiddler' (as Healey called it for a time) was to be engineered—with a unit-body layout—that could not be done. Instead, the engine and transmission

Sprite Works team, 1961.

would have to be placed on the line first, after which the combined chassis/body shell would be lowered into place.

Then, of course, there was problem of dealing with all the prototype testing and development which was needed, as BMC had no proving ground of their own, the industry's corporate proving ground at MIRA (the Motor Industry Research Association), near Nuneaton, was certainly not the place to take a still-secret car where the rest of Britain's automotive world could see it, so the tiny Healey company could originally do no more than use public highways, usually at night, and often during the weekends. Straight line testing took place on public roads near Leamington and Coventry, hill-climb work was centred on the mountainous roads of Wales, and on a few occasions Healey managed to persuade the Royal Air Force at Gaydon (where squadrons of V-bombers were based) that nuclear war was not about to break out on a Sunday, and that he could use the two-mile straight runway there.

And how many hand-built prototypes were used? Just two at first, one of which was ready to be shown to Len Lord in January 1957, the other being handed over to MG's engineers at Abingdon so that they could make it truly compatible with the production facilities there. It was during this time that the original plan, to equip the car with fold-back headlamps in the bonnet, was abandoned to save on cost and engineering complexity. But as British law made it essential for these lamps to be at least 26 inches from the ground, this meant that they had to stick up on the bonnet instead—and it was in this way that the 'bug eye' style evolved.

By the end of 1957, the existence of BMC's 'baby sports car' project had become an open secret across the industry. Much of the work involving high-speed endurance running, and rugged, car-destroying pave testing, had both been concentrated at the MIRA proving grounds, while the handful of hard-working prototypes were regularly seen on dashes down to Cornwall, where the rest of the Healey family were in residence.

Originally, BMC had wanted to announce the new car to the world, on 5 April 1958, but this date slipped to 20 May, when an early-production fleet of French-registered cars was shown to the press in Monte Carlo. The first examples reached North America by mid-summer, and from 1959 the trickle turned into a flood.

It was not just the Sprite's cheeky character which did the trick for American customers, but the fact that it was such a nimble, simple, easy-to-own little machine. Oh yes, and I almost forgot to mention that BMC Chairman Len Lord's wish to see a cheaper sports car go on sale had been achieved. The first of the bug-eye Sprites cost just $1,795, which made every rival car—even MG—start to worry.

And so they should, for the Sprite was a lasting success all over the world. And it was only British Leyland's Lord Stokes who killed it off, by pulling out of the Austin-Healey franchise at the end of 1970. *MM*

A Visit with Barby Smith – March 6, 2018

Ken Smith worked with Moss Motors for more than 25 years. His passing in early 2018 was something he had prepared for, as his health had been declining. Ken died peacefully, surrounded by his two sons and his wife, under the care of hospital staff who were , as you can imagine, well aware of Ken's love for MGs. Barby Smith lives just across the street from Moss headquarters in Goleta, where she has many friends. Every day she works on a crossword puzzle, often to completion, though not as often as she did with Ken's help. Ken's passing is a dimming of a bright light, but the community of helpful, enthusiastic British sports car owners will carry on his spirit. The following are excerpts of a conversation with Barby about her life with Ken—one of many we'll be having, I'm sure.
~David Stuursma

"Today is going to be difficult. It's a milestone. It's our wedding anniversary."

- We grew up in Yorkshire and went to the same youth club. That's where I met Ken. He and the other boys would play snooker on the billiards table while the girls would natter away, put on records and dance. Later we'd all go to the fish and chips shop.
- Ken was always helpful. If he saw someone carrying a heavy weight, he'd offer to take it off their hands. He put my needs before his own, too. The last few years, when he could no longer do things to help me throughout the day, that hurt him more than anything.
- When Ken retired we were asked why we didn't go back to England? We've been gone so long, and it's not the same country we grew up in. And it certainly didn't help that they stopped making MGs.
- Ken raced bicycles with his buddies. They would ride all day long, losing track of the time, and end up in some far away town. More than once he missed a date and came home hours after dark. He bought a tandem bike so we could ride together. Then he got a motorcycle. When our first son was born he bought a sidecar.
- During the war Ken was a pilot, flying cargo planes while stationed in Egypt. He had a lifelong fascination for airplanes, photography, and of course MGs.
- Our marriage worked because it wasn't one-sided. It was about giving and taking. "We'll do it your way this time, my way next time," we'd say. And we always settled our arguments. There was never a bad word spoken towards the other person.
- For me, the very best thing about Ken's work with MGs was that it brought us to America. There's something very special about the MG community here. No matter where we traveled, we were warmly welcomed, offered a place to stay, and people would even invite us to use their cars. When Howard Goldman, the owner of Moss back then, bought the companies in England that now make up Moss UK he said to me, "I bought these companies just to get you and Ken!"
- Ken loved MGs and the cars loved him back. Only Ken could talk his way into the factory at Abingdon and make friends with the workers. At the factory there were signs forbidding photography, and yet the foreman would do more than turn a blind eye. "Did you get a good shot, Ken?" he'd say.

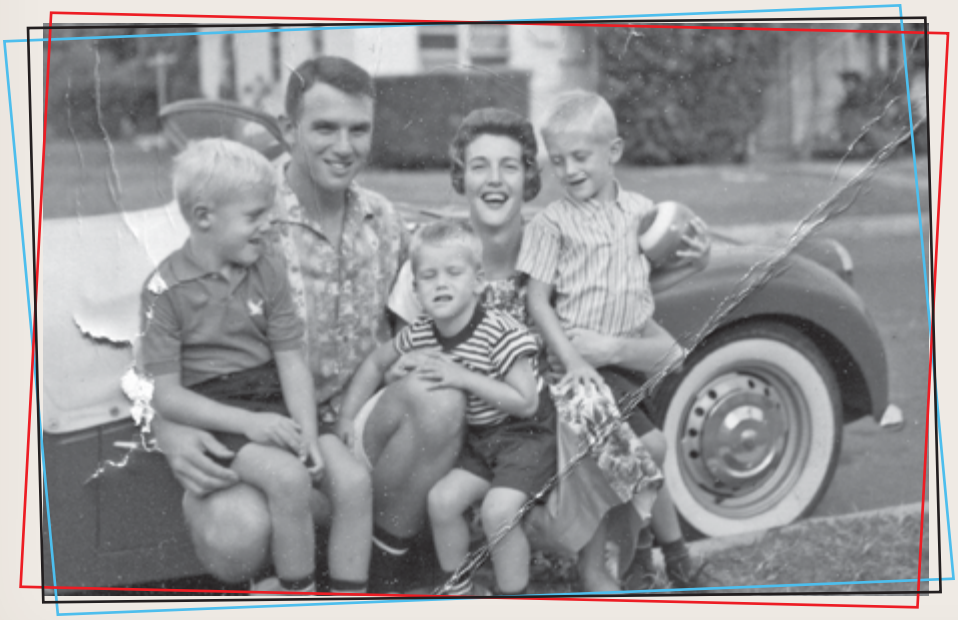
A Tale of Two Teachers

By Brian Kinney

Memories are funny things. In 1963, when I was four, my Dad bought my Mother a birthday present. I know this because I have the hand written bill of sale in the glove box. It was a red, 1961 Triumph TR3A Type 20 roadster. My Dad had recently been stationed in Hawaii as an Air Force pilot flying C-118s and we were fortunate to be able to go with him. He was gone a lot, that was the nature of the job, so he wasn't aware that I was being taught to drive.

It wasn't that Mom was aware she was teaching me anything either, I was absorbing the smell of hot vinyl, engine oil, and the visceral sense of speed through my back. Mom drove aggressively. She wedged and strapped my two brothers into that car, and I would say that it really blew our hair around, but Dad made sure we didn't have much. It was a new feeling that we didn't get in the back seat of our 1955 Pontiac four door. We used to have fun tying string to our Army Men and dropping the through the rust perforated floors in an attempt to get the car behind us to run them over. What did we care, they were *Army* men and we were bored. For young people reading this: there were no seat belts in a '55 Pontiac.

I got older, we moved to Universal City, Texas, and the car moved with us. Dad was a flight safety officer for the squadron and was in the process of teaching very green South Vietnamese how to fly. There was a circle drive around the "Taj" (observation tower) on Randolph AFB that Mom would always take too fast, and she invariably got pulled over by the Air Police. I can remember on many occasions off base, Mom would have taken off her shoes, tucked her mid-length skirt between her legs (which forced her to re-iron it later) and go scooting down Pat Booker Road though Universal City when we would be rapidly approaching our right turn on to Red Horse Manner. She quickly flicked the clutch, down-shifted into third, no brake, flick the clutch again, second gear, blinker, and then hard right all the while staying in the appropriate lane. It was better than a carnival ride and I soaked it all in. We heard more than one loud 'discussion' at home about this and Mom would promise that she would slow down—then she'd wink at me if I was close by. Around this time Dad bought Mom another car, a turd brown 1966 Buick station wagon. I'm sure it had nothing to do with my mothers driving habits, but Dad started driving the TR to work.



In 1970 Dad volunteered to go to Vietnam. We moved to Foley, Alabama, during Dads tour, and the TR went into storage soon after. I recollect one memorable drive to see my Moms'

parents. We stopped at Moore's Store at the beginning of Oak Street to pick up a soda. I would climb up and reach into the chest fridge to get a root beer while 60-plus year old Frank Moore, the proprietor, would gently scold Mom with a grin about driving so fast in "that legal go-cart" with children in the back. He spoke with a comfort that comes from knowing someone for most of their life. Mom said he probably remembered when she would slowly drive a pickup truck between the watermelon patches, riding the clutch, allowing her partners in crime to 'hook' the melons from the field without putting the pickup in the ditch. I'm sure my Grandparents were proud.

My Time at the Wheel

We spent several years overseas as an Air Force family and when we got back to the States the TR was waiting. I was now old enough to actually, physically learn to drive. Dad took on the chore.

He decided I was going to learn how to drive a four speed. He claimed if you drive a clutch you could drive anything. I relished my future. My enthusiasm waned as I noticed Dad with a pad of paper, generating "check lists."

That was Dad, the consummate pilot. I learned how to read the gauges, change tires, check tire pressure and fluid levels. "Before you start the engine, the bonnet key must be located and placed in the driver door pocket," he would say. After two days in the carport going over checklists and performing proper walk-a-rounds, I was ready to get behind the wheel and attempt to start the TR. My older brother was having the laugh of his life watching this process. Mom taught him to drive while we were living on Kadena AFB on Okinawa. When Dad wasn't teaching me to drive, my brother was zipping around in the TR.

"To start the engine," Dad would state in perfect pilot-ese, "depress clutch and with the parking brake set, place gearbox in neutral. Now turn the ignition key to the 'on' position. Pull out the choke with your right hand and reach through the steering wheel with your left hand and depress the start button." Nine times out of ten the 1991 cc engine would fire to life. If by some reason it did not, I repeated the steps until it did. A little louder now, Dad would state, "Now is the time to scan, with your eyes only, the gauge cluster on the dash. By the way, let go of the choke."

These regimented lessons went on for a week. I found that to keep a finger from tapping the side of my head it was best not to look at the shifter as I changed gears. Eyes constantly moving across the dash, head on a swivel, estimating the speed of others while you paid attention to everything around you. Dad even taught me at what RPM to change gear. Everything on those checklists had a purpose, a function for efficiency and safety. (If you open the boot lid today you will find the three strips of flight line reflective tape Dad placed inside, so if you had to pull over at night they would glow when headlights hit them.) An automobile was a tool of privilege that came with responsibility. I was wishing for my green Army men and some string.

Dad took me to take my driver's license test in the TR. I was fidgety about parallel parking and starting on a hill. Dad told me I would do fine. I passed the written exam and moved outside with the rest of the sad sacks. Each car would pull up to the line and a Missouri State Police Officer would administer their driving test. These guys were big. I mean they were probably assigned this duty based on their girth. I am sitting in a little red British car that couldn't have looked accommodating. To my relief, a petite female officer holding a clipboard stepped next to the TR.

The officer, in a very matter of fact voice, explained what we were going to do and in what order we were going to do it, without variation. She then had me pull away from the curb and proceed to the first stop light. I was sweating again. Once around the corner she had

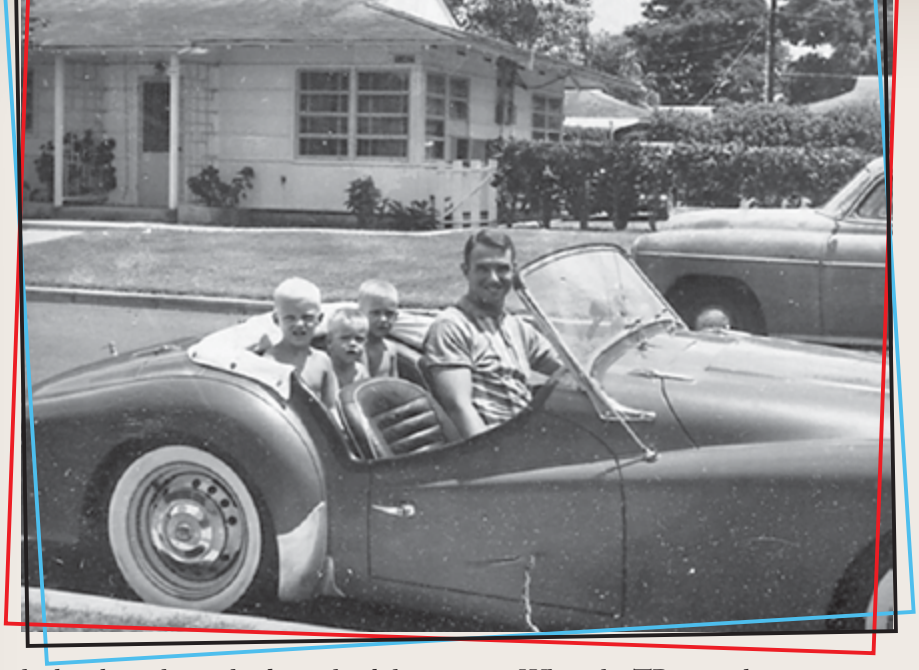
me come to a complete stop, turn my wheels to the curb, set the brake, and kill the engine. She then explained that I would pass the test if she could drive the car for a few minutes. I was back to riding in the passenger seat of the TR with an aggressive female driver at the wheel. I did not complain nor tell my father about it until forty years later.

I shared the TR with the rest of the family until my senior year in high school... in Illinois... in the winter. I questioned my privilege.

Retirement came for my Dad in 1979 and he, my Mom, and my sister moved to South Carolina taking the TR with them. I was in college and had my own life staring me in the face. There were few lingering thoughts about the little red car.

Now I'm the Teacher

I have had many cars since then: Oldsmobile's, Chevy's, Ford's, and Dodge's as well as most of the Asian imports. The one I remember the best was a well used BMW five-speed my oldest daughter acquired while in dental school. She didn't know how to drive a stick so we ended up in an abandoned Wal-Mart parking lot with lots of room. She already had already been taught how to read the gauges, change tires, check tire pressure and fluid levels. She had learned how rebuild a Ford 2bbl carburetor and change the transmission filter in our 1963 Ford Fairlane as a junior in high school. With a few tears and many jostling starts, she got the hang of the clutch in about an hour. She



had to drive the car back to school that same night. She did. As she drove away from the house, I heard her flick the clutch, shift strongly into second, throw gravel from the tires, and disappear right smartly around the corner. She has a lot of her Grandmother in her.

About nine years ago my parents were in the process of downsizing and I again got the privilege of the "little red car." Dad towed it from South Carolina to Illinois. She had been well maintained and even received a re-spray about 18 years ago. I was so pleased with the acquisition that I built a garage to house her in the manner she deserved.

When the TR arrived an assessment of her condition needed to be done. My Dad had kept records over the last few years. I read it, considered it, and then set it aside. I needed to go from front to back without bias. The car was visually stunning. She had been maintained and stored well when not in use, but there were mechanical and some electrical issues that needed to be attended to before it could be driven regularly. The first and foremost was the serious steering play and bump steer. The car would literally jump two feet in either direction, you didn't know which, when you hit a bad spot in the road. Not safe. I red tagged the car until repaired.

The apron and radiator came off the front so I could more easily get to the steering and suspension components. I found that the rubber encased isolator bushings that connect the drag link to the other components had failed, the rubber was completely gone. While at the front of the engine I also noticed that the bushings and bolts that held the fan to the engine had suffered the same fate. It was the first time I had to look for parts. The Moss Motors website made it easy to find them. Getting those bushings in and out of the steering link without a press was another story.

I went from front to back checking and repairing the small things that needed attention. I was amazed at the amount of parts available for this 50-plus year old car. When I would hit a snag, online forums and LBC club websites connected me with the people and answers I needed. I even joined a one of these clubs. The members of the Illinois Flatland British Car Club are instantly accessible and a great group of people. Their support and love for these cars eventually inspired me to take the TR3 to the 25th annual Champagne British Car Festival in Bloomington Illinois in June of 2016. It was a great day with exceptional cars. I even purchased a T-shirt. I drive the TR regularly in the warm months. I try to keep her clean and dry. My youngest daughter asked to use the car in her wedding, her new husband driving them away from the venue in the car. Good day to own an LBC.

I learned how to drive from my two teachers, both bringing with them something special. They brought it with love. You can be relatively safe as well as have a relative amount of fun. We lost Mom a year ago and I know that every time I look at her car it will hurt. But that is not going to let it stop me from driving the TR on the edge every now and then. Right after I check the fluid levels and tire pressure. *MM*

Performance Art

By Tony Ly

I have been in the hobby since my late teens. I love these cars, especially the Austin-Healey Bugeye Sprite for its unique personality and character. As I got older, my visual taste and appreciation expanded to other forms of art, too.

The first time I saw Revi Ferrer's work, I was immediately drawn in by her use of metallic colors. Her paintings take on a dream-like feeling.

Over time, I've gotten to know Revi better and my fondness for her and her talent grows. So, during my annual "Nomad's Christmas Party," I asked Revi if she would create something while the party was in full swing. I thought she might draw something for us, instead, she wanted to know what I like to see painted. Of course it's the Bugeye! I'm happy to report the Christmas party-goers got a treat and were delighted by the live performance, as well as by the artwork.

On a base of swirling, metallic, abstract details my Sprite is floating, always in motion. One could even describe it as being in a mind-altering state of reality. It's like the feeling I get when I'm behind the wheel. I'm transported to a magical place. *MM*

To see more of Revi's art, visit instagram.com/reviferrer.theartist

THE WINNER'S CIRCLE OF LIFE

By Jeff Porada

My good friend suggested we restore cars together. This nudge in my life made sense. Get paid to do something I love? Yes, I like that idea. I had been running a restaurant and touring with a jazz band but it was nearly impossible to play music around a busy restaurant schedule, so off we went. Out of his three-car garage he did the paint and bodywork, and at my home garage I did the mechanics. We mostly worked on British cars because that's where I have the most experience. After a couple years of this, the unthinkable happened. My mother had a stroke and passed away at the age of 58. Two months later my grandfather, who gave me my love of music and whom I had played in bands with since I was 12, passed. Two months after that, my grandmother, who I was also very close to, followed. This put everything on hold.

I inherited some money my grandparents had saved. It wasn't really life changing money for most, but it was more than I had ever seen. With it I bought a building in need of a lot of work. It would be my new shop.

I gave my business the name DEB Vintage Motorworks. DEB stands for Don, Elaine, and Barb, the names of my mother and grandparents. I didn't do any advertising, but kept getting work just from referrals. A guy down the street started working with me. He was taught to wrench from a former Formula 1 driver and had worked on very high-end restoration projects. My brother is great at interiors and finishing work. My dad works on weekends doing electronics. The business was starting to become something.

GET PAID TO DO SOMETHING I LOVE? YES, I LIKE THAT IDEA.

On the Way to Conclave

In 2016 my local club, Ohio Valley Austin Healey club, was to host the Healey Conclave in Cincinnati. I've had a Bugeye for about 15 years, but at the time it was a pile of parts. I have been to many Conclaves, but never in my own car. I didn't have the extra time or money to get my car done, but my girlfriend, Nancy, and I decided it had to be there. I rebuilt the engine and it ran great, but without a top, windshield wipers, a horn, and with seats that had dust for padding. We had a great time at Conclave and anyone who attended may remember seeing me perform with my band at the time: "Keith Jones and the Makeshifts." We played for the car show and after the banquet; I was the sax player who stands on the bass.

The next summer's Conclave was in Waco. Nancy and I, along with a few of the local club members decided it was a good idea to drive our LBC's to Texas. As with every winter, my car was apart again, this time to fix the body. I stripped everything off of the car and cut out all the rust.

Nancy and I are clearly bad with directions. On the way to Texas in the Bugeye we thought we should first drive to Maine for a wedding. When putting my car together and knowing we had this big road trip planned, I decided to get away from my tired wire wheels and install Minilites I got from a friend. The problem was that they rubbed the springs. It was suggested I call Dave Giorgi at The Winner's Circle to get some wheel spacers for the car.

The next phone call ended up being more influential on my life than

expected. I called The Winner's Circle and Dave answered. I told him what I needed, he made a recommendation and we chatted for a bit. I told him that my focus was mainly restoring Sprites and Midgets. His immediate response: "You should buy The Winner's Circle." I laughed and we talked a bit more. Before I hung up, I asked out of curiosity how much he wanted for it. The next few days I thought a lot about it. I mentioned to Nancy what he had said and talked to Jake Jacobs (a good friend and the guy who organized the Cincinnati Conclave) about it since Jake is a businessman who understands how money works. Strangely, they both thought it wasn't a terrible idea.

Over the next few weeks, I was hustling to get my Bugeye back together hoping to have time to test things out before our adventure. My car was being built on a tight budget. I wouldn't have frivolous luxuries like a roof or working gauges. One day I decided to call Dave back and see how serious he was. It turns out, he was determined to sell his business to someone younger who is passionate about Sprites and Midgets. As you can imagine, that's not a high percentage of the population. He suggested I make a trip up and see the place and we could talk some more.

The Winner's Circle was a nice little tired storefront in Cleveland with a beautiful all-original Bugeye sitting in the entry. Nancy and I talked with Dave for a few hours. He explained that his son Rob was working with him, but had taken a new job and that he himself was too old and tired to keep the place going like it deserved. He showed me some of the products made specifically for him, many of which he had developed on his own. Dave also told me about all of the products which he made in the past and just let die because he didn't have the time to oversee them anymore. He is a master distributor for Moss Motors, but this only scratched the surface of what made The Winner's Circle special.

Determination and Heart

Dave started racing a Bugeye in 1963. He ended up crashing and rolling it, but he continued racing for decades after. He started The Winner's Circle in 1967 out of his home garage. He eventually grew enough to start a storefront in 1970. There just aren't many people around anymore with the experience and knowledge of these cars that Dave has. One of his selling points of the business is that I get Dave's help whenever I need his brain. Dave has been there and done that with everything on these cars, and if he hasn't done it himself, he knows someone who has.

Talking with Dave, I found that often he would get people asking for something, so he'd figure out how to get it made. One example is Hawk brake pads. The company didn't think it was worth it to make brake pads for Sprites and Midgets. Dave went and met with them and asked what it would take to get them made. They said they did not want to pay for the fixtures for them. Dave got the fixtures made and they are still making brake pads off of those. As Dave's son Rob grew up, he got the racing bug as well. For many years Dave or Rob would pick up the phone if you called for help and they always had the answer.

After meeting with Dave for several hours, Nancy and I continued

up to Niagara Falls, across Canada, to Maine and on down the East coast. We discussed buying the Winner's Circle many times and both thought it wasn't a bad idea and that it fit well into what I was doing.

The New Glory Days

The Bugeye never did make it to Texas. Since I had spent more time on customer cars and less time testing my Bugeye, our journey ran into a few bumps. We replaced a head gasket in a hotel parking lot, replaced a piston in Rhode Island, and eventually had to pronounce the car dead. We towed it down to Gary Lownsdale's where his wife Paulette let us drive Miss Piggy, her BJ7, down to Texas. We met up with the rest of the Cincinnati Healey drivers and had a great time at conclave. I even managed to win the gymkhana in Jake's Bugeye.

When we got back home I called Dave up to let him know we took on a loan to buy his business and he was happy to hear it. He had some interested parties, but he was pulling for me. With a Suburban, a work van, and two 14-foot enclosed trailers we trucked as many parts as we could from Cleveland to my shop in Cincinnati, but this was less than half of what was there. On these trips I spent much of the day with Dave going over different products, how they are made, what he stopped making that I should bring back, and how to work the old computer system.

The next couple of months were spent trying to organize everything onto shelving again, all the while trying to keep the business running. The sheer number of parts were overwhelming when they were sitting in a pile unloaded from a trailer. Every phone call for parts was a challenge—a challenge of finding a part's physical location, a challenge answering questions about custom parts that I just got my hands on, and a challenge of finding part numbers for the custom parts. Often when I would call Dave for a part number I couldn't find anywhere he would say, "That's because it's in my head." That's great if you're Dave, but challenging if you're not.

Today everything has a place. Dave gets fewer phone calls from me, but if there's something I don't have an answer for, I'm not ashamed to admit it and give him a call. I am in the process of bringing back many of the old products Dave helped produce. I have the original build sheets and patterns. The Winner's Circle's "Competition" and "Super Competition" oil pans are now available again. This is an oil pan with a larger sump area, (more capacity), baffles and trap doors to keep the oil by the pickup under hard braking and cornering. The Super Competition has a windage tray, scrapers, multiple trap doors and a custom oil pickup. We are also bringing back the two part engine mounts, big brake kits made off of the factory blueprints, offset leaf springs, and more than 50 custom parts altogether.

I've loved these old cars since before I could drive. I've always bought projects because I've never had the money to buy something completed. Being cheap meant I also learned how to work on cars with my dad who fixed his own vehicles and anything else needing fixing. I've always dreamed of having my own space for my cars and a nice place to work on them. I'd better stop writing and get back to keeping this dream going... *MM*

If you would like to contact **DEB Vintage Motorworks** or **The Winner's Circle**, call **216-889-4666**

GOTTA/GET IT/RIGHT

By Michael Kolowski

"You are now approaching a roundabout. Please enter in a anti-clockwise direction and take the third carriageway on the right," said the voice from my GPS. Earlier that afternoon I had cleverly toggled my GPS's voice to "English Gal." She has a charming British accent, although some of her terms and cues were unfamiliar to my ear. As I drew nearer to the roundabout I felt panic rising. And then I remembered that I am an American driving in America. I got this.

Much about driving is a reflex; forty years of muscle memory at work keeping me safe and going with the flow of traffic. If I ever found myself driving in Cyprus or Malta or Great Britain for that matter, I thought I would surely die. So strange then it was that I would not only entertain buying a right-hand drive automobile, but that I did.

After nearly a decade of searching for a classic British Mini, I found the one that spoke to me. Since I had planned to modify the entire car to include new paint, new upholstery, uprated suspension and a highly tuned motor, my only requirements were that it be rust free and have the steering wheel on the right-hand side. Yeah... I know.

I've been driving 'Rosebud' almost daily for three years now and I have some thoughts to offer on driving on the wrong side of a vehicle.

I'll start by talking about left turns. They take some getting used to. When there are cars stopped and the goal is to turn left, sitting behind them in the right-hand side of the car is a decided disadvantage. Unable to see around the left side of the cars in front, you must place more trust in the decision making ability of other drivers than they may deserve. Plus, if you do get hit by an oncoming vehicle, it'll be right in the middle of the right-hand door—your door. On the bright side, when you are driving a car the size of a Mini, you've earned the right to leave yourself the extra space that normal sized cars would fill.

Lane placement requires constant and continued adjustment. I frequently have the unsettled feeling that I'm driving too far to the right of my lane. When I'm properly centered, those mailboxes seem alarmingly close. It's not until I hear and feel the centerline road reflectors for 30 seconds or so that I realize I should probably move more to the right.

Parking lot ticket dispensers, tollbooths and fast-food drive-thrus? Forget about 'em. They're not for you.

Honestly, my biggest concern is how to gracefully and without a hint of humiliation walk from the left side of the vehicle where I was about to jump in and get behind the wheel, to the right side of the vehicle where the steering wheel is actually located. If I sense anyone is watching—and there is always someone watching Rosebud, it attracts more attention than the Oscar Myer Weinermobile—I simply bend down and take a few seconds to adjust the left side review mirror, then calmly walk around to the other side and get in, my pride intact. *MM*

On My Reckless Way

By Scott Fischer

Yes. This.

That was the two-word Facebook posting from my friend, and fellow British-car sufferer, Jeff Zurschmeide in April 2013. It accompanied a Craigslist ad he'd found for a 1951 MG TD, unrestored, in a nearby town at the edge of the Oregon wine country. From the pictures, it looked complete, straight, and with unimpeachable patina over what appeared to be original Almond Green paint and tan leather.

I looked at my bookshelf with the selection of Matchbox cars I'd had since childhood. One of them was a TD, originally Pale Primrose with red-painted seats. But at some point, when I was about eight years old, I decided a proper British car deserved to be green with tan interior. So I took my model paints, found an appropriate medium green and a flat tan, and customized my little TD.

And now I was looking at the full-size version, some half a century later.

Between those extremes, I'd owned a number of British cars, including my first, a 1974 Midget, and later, three and a half MGBs.

You know you're a true British-car enthusiast when you measure your ownership in fractions. For those new to the game, the half was a parts car I bought when preparing my E Production MGB racecar for SCCA road racing in 1990-91.

More significantly, I'd just sold a classic that had always filled me with a mixture of love and fear. When it ran, I loved it. But every time I tried to start it, the fear took over. It was rare, exotic, and valuable, and owning it so far exceeded my comfort zone that I never really enjoyed it. Fortunately, its sale left me with a fair chunk of cash, and I'd hinted to my friends that I was looking for something with which I felt more at home, something I could tinker with.

As my wife Julie says, "Your friends really like spending your money."

And so it came to pass that Julie and I took a drive on an only moderately overcast Oregon weekend to meet Jackie, the fellow selling the TD. Jackie's house was surrounded by the kind of beautiful, mature trees it's so easy to love about rural Oregon, and the barn behind it was filled with cars and car paraphernalia.

He rolled the TD out of the barn, peeled off the cover, and I fell in love.

I puttered, peered, and wriggled into the driver's seat, listening to Jackie talk about how he came to own the car. He'd acquired it three years before from a longtime friend of his, a fellow named Lou, who sold the car when he turned 80 and said it was too hard to get in and out of the suicide doors. Jackie himself was more a fan of Sixties muscle and pony cars, of which Lou had some very special examples. So Jackie was cashing out the TD hoping to purchase a Sixties-era Ivy Green Mustang convertible that Lou was selling.

I was more than happy to help out two fellow car guys. We agreed on a price, I hit my bank the next business day for a cashier's check, and Julie and I returned to Jackie's tree-lined home to take possession of the TD. We arrived with the top down on my 1996 Miata, enjoying a day filled with sun and blue skies.

As I handed Jackie the check and took the keys, something occurred to me.

I had never actually driven the TD.

In fact, as Julie pointed out, I'd never even started it.

So it was with a mix of excitement and trepidation that I took the driver's seat and watched as Jackie pointed out which stop of the key powered the ignition, which knob enriched the pair of SU carburetors and which was the starter. I listened to the oh-so-familiar tickticktick...tick of the SU fuel pump, and when it stopped, I pulled the starter knob.

The XPAG turned over briskly and came to life. Coughing a bit, a little lumpy, but who knew how long it had been since it had been exercised properly? I selected first gear, feeling the lovely mechanical slide-and-catch of the gear lever on the straight-cut, non-synchro box, and let out the clutch. The car moved under its own power, but we were clearly not hitting on all four

cylinders. No problem, I thought, it'll clear up as I get under way.

I stopped at the end of Jackie's long driveway. The familiar push-lift-PRESS on the brake pedal reminded me of the way my MGBs had felt when it was time to adjust the rear drum brakes. Okay, that's easy and free to fix.

The steering was wonderful—more like my Midget than my MGBs—bright and quick and energetic, tracking straight without much play. But as we left Jackie's home and followed the contours of the country road leading back to my house, it became clear the little XPAG was not happy, making sad little two-stroke popping noises and producing very little in the way of forward thrust.

About a mile and a half from Jackie's place, the engine died. I put the car in neutral and steered over to the side of the road, Julie falling in behind me in the Miata, which we had filled with the boxes of various MG paraphernalia that Jackie included with the sale.

As I sat in my now-silent sports car—thinking of all the times and places before when I'd found myself in a suddenly silent sports car—an early '80s El Camino rolled up near me and the driver hopped out.

"Wow!" he said, enthusiastically. "What is that?" "It's an MG TD," I said.

"Is it from the Thirties?" he asked. I decided not to go into how the TA begat the TB, then the TC, and eventually the TD and TF, but simply said it was a 1951, based on a design from 1935.

"Does it have a hand-crank to start it?" I'd seen it clipped into place behind the driver's seat, so I said yes. I was a little surprised not to hear the usual questions ("Is it a kit car?" "Who makes it?"), but I was also a little distracted, and less than chatty, seeing as it had just quit on me, and I didn't know why. So it was with a certain relief when the El Camino driver gave a cheery wave and drove off.

Of all the various times one or another of my MGs had quit on me, I recalled only one that had been a carburetor problem, so I got out and lifted the side of the bonnet covering the ignition. And sure enough, I got lucky: the #1 spark plug wire was lying on the dynamo, not connected to the #1 plug. How easy is that? I thought, and reached for it.

Not that easy: the ceramic insulator for the #1 plug had snapped and was inside the plug lead, while the metal part of the spark plug was still in the cylinder head.

I took my traveling toolkit out of the TD's tonneau (as I'd soon learn the space behind the seats was called). I knew I had some spark plugs left over from a previous roadside adventure I unzipped the little case I kept the bits in and ran into hurdle number two.

The plug I took from the TD's head had a short, half-inch throw—the threaded portion that extends into the cylinder head. The spare plugs, meant for the Miata, were nearly an inch long—far too long to just insert into the head and drive home without risking an unhappy meeting of piston and plug.

As I was pondering what to do—trying to visualize whether all four sealing rings from the Miata plugs would make a sufficient spacer (and sealer) to fit the longer plug in the shorter head—Julie walked up from the trunk of the Miata.

"Will this help?" she asked, and handed me an MG spark plug. Grimy, sooty, oily—but complete.

"I saw you fiddling with the spark plug," she said, "and I knew Jackie had given us a box of spare parts, so I dug through it and found this one, plus a few more."

I threaded the plug by hand, tightened it with the plug wrench, reconnected the spark plug wire, and—because I may be an idiot, but I'm no fool—left the bonnet open while I test-fired the car.

It started immediately and ran more smoothly, though still giving sign of needing—you should pardon the expression—an Italian tune-up.

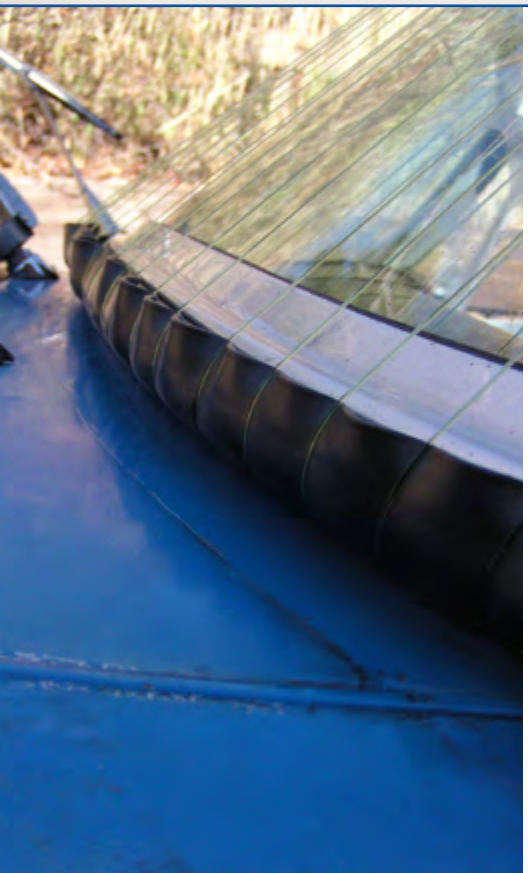
I closed the bonnet, lovingly running my hands over the twin latches embossed with the octagon, climbed back into the car, and drove home on an April afternoon with a few white clouds lazily following the Chehalem Mountains, thinking as always of my dear friend, Toad of Toad Hall, on his discovery of motorcars:

'And to think I never KNEW!' went on the Toad in a dreamy monotone. 'All those wasted years that lie behind me, I never knew, never even DREAMT! But NOW—but now that I know, now that I fully realise! O what a flowery track lies spread before me, henceforth! What dust-clouds shall spring up behind me as I speed on my reckless way!'

I could still tell that something wasn't quite perfect with the little 1250: oil pressure was good, temperature (Lou had installed a Stewart-Warner temp gauge just above the starter knob) was a solid 180 F, but when revs climbed over about 4500 RPM, the ignition seemed to run into a wall and begin coughing and sputtering till I dropped the revs back down. Still, there was inestimable fun to be had, motoring on such a day in such a car, and I knew that I'd be able to suss out whatever was holding me back.

That was three years ago; I've since solved the rev problem. The original, from-1951 coil was no longer effective in producing spark at the rate required for high-rev operation; a new Lucas Sport coil from Moss lets the car run like a proper sports car up as high as I feel comfortable winding the 67-year-old crankshaft. I added the Moss steering coupler kit, which replaced a coupler that had no rubber left in one lobe and about half in the other two; this made a stunning difference in how the car responds to the helm. I've replaced the fuel pump, and am preparing a few other pieces of deferred maintenance for weekends that are still in the future as I write this.

Maybe I'll even adjust those brakes. *MM*



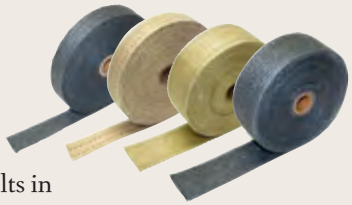
Windshield Tech Tip

By Willie Alexander

I replaced all the weatherstripping and glazing on the windshield of my 1979 MGB. A review of online forum posts indicated installation of the windshield would be a challenge. I dry fitted the windshield and found the forward lip section and bottom tubular section of the 'windshield to body seal' creating interference with lining up the mounting brackets. Using a single piece of 50-pound fishing line, I wrapped the windshield frame so that the forward lip section was folded up towards the glass and the tubular section compressed. The fishing line ends were anchored at the visor arm mounting holes. The fishing line was spaced about 3/4" to 1" apart, and taut enough to produce a weak 'banjo' twang when strummed. This removed most of the interference, but still required the use of a couple C-clamps to help hold the mounting brackets in place while installing the bolts. The C-clamps were utilized from the outside of the mounting bracket wells. Once installed, I simply cut the fishing line and pulled it out. Don't forget to apply your favorite sealer!

In hindsight, next time I will space the fishing line no more than 1/2" apart and apply more tension to insure the bottom tubular section is completely compressed. *MM*

Exhaust Wrap by DEI



Wrapping headers and down pipes is an important first step in reducing unwanted and power-robbing under hood heat. Less under hood heat results in a cooler air charge for improved performance and keeping exhaust gases hotter within the exhaust system helps in decreasing exhaust density and increases exhaust flow.

Tan			Black		
1" X 50'	231-920	$35.99	1" X 50'	231-922	$39.99
2" X 50'	231-921	57.99	2" X 50'	231-923	62.99

Exhaust Wrap and Tie Kit by DEI

DEI Pipe Wrap is used in many types of applications for reducing unwanted and harmful heat under the hood and from entering the driver compartment while improving horsepower. Kit includes one roll of 2in x 25ft exhaust wrap and four 8" stainless steel locking ties to secure wrap.

Black		Tan		Titanium	
231-930	$32.99	231-931	$31.99	231-932	$36.99

Hi-Temp Silicone Coating Spray by DEI

The High Temperature (HT) Silicone Coating provides lasting protection for any hot surface up to 1500 degrees. DEI recommend the use of this coating with their exhaust wrap because it seals the material and provides lasting protection from oil, dirt and road grime. Don't limit the use to exhaust header wrap, this products works well on headers, blocks, starters and even on your grill at home. HT Silicone Coating is VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) compliant in all 50 states. Recommended for use with DEI non-Titanium exhaust wraps, HT Silicone Coating penetrates, seals and protects as well as helping to extend the lifespan of exhaust wrap.

Black		Aluminum		White	
231-935	$11.99	231-936	$11.99	231-937	$11.99

Optimized Distributors by CSI

CSI-Optimized Distributors offer a fully electronic ignition system built into the correct type of Lucas distributor housing to suit your car, keeping the original appearance in the engine bay. Gone are the points and condenser and mechanical advance mechanism, all replaced with a high quality electronic ignition system. These distributors are maintenance free (no points to adjust), and offer the benefits of, easier starting and smoother running, more torque and power, reduced fuel consumption and lower emissions.

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MGA, MGB 1962-1967 - 25D4 Pos Gnd	143-291	449.99
MGB 1962-1974 - 45D4 Neg Grnd	143-292	449.99

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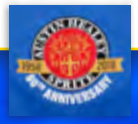

Back detail

Sleeve detail

Side detail

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