



# THE OCTAGON

Newsletter of the M.G. Owners Club  
The Northern California Centre of the M.G. Car Club



*Since 1957!*



Don Davis's 1967 MGB/GT with daughter Julie



## July 2020



## About *The Octagon* and the MG Owners Club

The M.G. Owners Club, formed in 1957, is the Northern California Centre of the M.G. Car Club, formed in England in 1930. The Peninsula T Register was formed in 1973 and is now an informal sub-group of the MGOC. We receive a copy of the MGCC's *Safety Fast*, available to members on loan from the Corresponding Secretary. The club is also associated with the North American MGB Register, the North American MGA Register, and the New England MG T Register. The MGOC holds a business meeting each month at an event known as the "Natter and Noggin" in the style of English clubs. *The Octagon*, our newsletter, is published monthly by the MG Owners Club. Opinions expressed in *The Octagon* are not necessarily those of the MGOC, its members, or Board of Directors.

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### CLUB ADVISOR PROGRAM

Feel free to call these members, who have volunteered to help with purchase, repair, and restoration of various M.G. models, etc.

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### COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING IN *THE OCTAGON*

Direct all questions about advertising to **Mike Jacobsen** at 415-333-9699 or [MikesMuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:MikesMuseum@yahoo.com). 2005 rates are: monthly (yearly): full pg. \$25 (\$240), half page \$18 (\$175), third page \$12 (\$120), business card \$8 (\$75).

All ads expire on Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, and fees for a partial year will be pro-rated to that date. Deadline for ad materials is the 10<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month. The MGOC makes no claims as to the reputation or quality of work performed by businesses advertising in *The Octagon*.

### MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS TO *THE OCTAGON*

Your stories, photos, tips, questions, and anything MGOC-related are always welcome in *The Octagon*. Please make your contributions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the issue in which you want them to appear. Please email all contributions to [magnut\\_dan@hotmail.com](mailto:magnut_dan@hotmail.com) or send them to: **Dan Shockey**, 10 Willis Rd., Scotts Valley, CA 95066.

### RECRUITING MEMBERS FOR THE MGOC

Have you helped recruit any new members lately? The club roster is available from **Steve Kellogg** upon request.

### MGOCSE.ORG

Upcoming events, MGOC history, photos, membership forms, *The Octagon*, and helpful links are posted on the Club Web site at <http://mgocsf.org>.

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Welcome



THE ROAD IS NEVER LONG  
BETWEEN FRIENDS.



*Virus Permitting - See the  
President's Column*

## MGOC Annual Show & Picnic Saturday, August 22, 2020

11:30am-12:00pm: Club Meeting

12:00 -2:00pm: Picnic

Tilden Park in the Berkeley Hills, the Padre Picnic Area

The park is reached via Canon Drive, Shasta Road, or South Park Drive, all off Grizzly Peak Boulevard in Berkeley.

Come enjoy a day in a lovely park with old and new friends who share a love of MGs. Bring a picnic lunch or your favorite meats for grilling. George will fire up the BBQ\*. MGOC will supply charcoal, ice, drinks and cups. \* If the park permits fires this year





## From the Editor

Another month of missed events. The Triumph club, the Rough Riders, the North Bay Brits and the Sorry Safari all had small local tours so we are getting close and some are pushing the envelope. Best to be safe. I am a senior with a history of respiratory problems.

I continue to work at home for my job and do some minor projects with the MGs. The latest was to add a nerf bar rear bumper to the PA for some minor parking protection. I started work to create a "bikini" top for it. I worked on the gearbox rebuild for the MGA. I am also working to get set up to load the PA in the back of my pickup truck.

I finally got the "cobblers" sewing machine working. It is a \$100 unit made in China that is a copy of an 1850 English design (sent to China in 1870.) Just the thing that Chinese village cobblers would be seen using. It will sew through plywood, anything. I had some trouble getting the tension right, the right thread and needle. I had to order bonded polyester thread for sun resistance. I had never used a sewing machine so I was a slow learner.

Get that MG out and get it ready for the club picnic. I am eager to see you and your MG.



### Dan

I used the picnic ad (p.3) from last year since I am only hopeful so far that we can hold it.

Below from the Triumph Travelers



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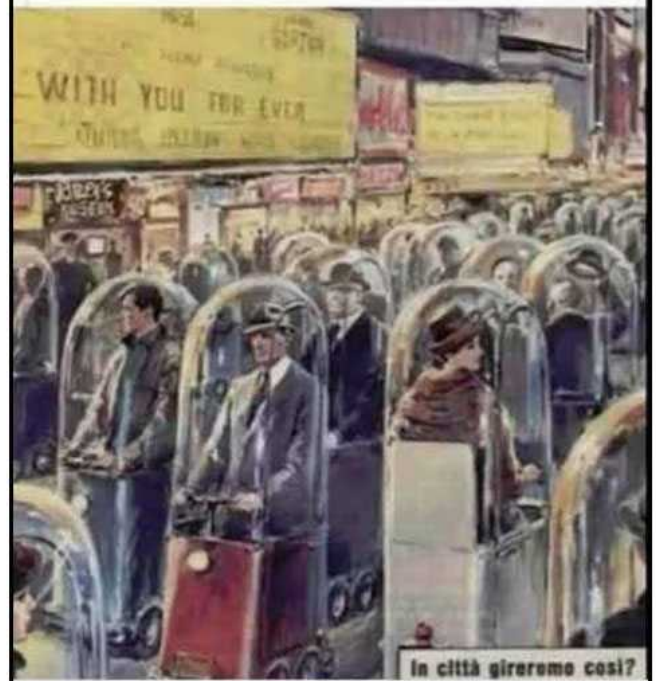
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APR09

Scary! 1962 illustration from  
an Italian magazine about  
what life could be in 2022!



Found by Chris Digiorgio



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# Member Notes

## Welcome Jake Krachman of San Francisco with a recently purchased MG Midget

Thanks for reaching out.

I just bought my first MG/British sports car. I just graduated college last year and had a little disposable income and some itchiness to pick up a cool new project.

My 1979 Midget is in real rough shape right now, so it may not be the best time to post picture in the newsletter, but I'll get her fixed up over the next few weeks/months to a normal operating level.

So far I have ordered a new top, got new seats, removed the radio a previous owner put in, fixed the flat tire, and ordered new carpeting for the interior.

Some things on the list include changing the oil, getting a little more comfortable working on the engine, fixing the windshield washer fluid pump/bag. Hopefully every weekend I will get a little closer to be comfortable driving. While it does run and drive now, I am going to wait until I can fix most of these things to get to riding in it. I want to go over every part I can so I know that I am not screwing anything up while driving.

Thank you for welcoming me into your community and I am excited to come and meet up with all of you when the virus gets a little better.

Best, Jake

## Welcome Boback Emad of San Francisco with a newly acquired 1953 MGTD

Thank you for welcoming me into the club.

I had a 1973 Porsche 911 which burned in the Tubbs Fire in 2017 but this is the first British car I have owned. I am an international sculptor working from my studio in San Francisco and Paris. My work can be seen in public places in Europe, Mexico and the United States. Colorado, Oregon, Washington and California. My web site is [www.bobackemad.com](http://www.bobackemad.com). (See photo page 7.)

Thank you, Boback

I'm impressed with your PA work...paint job looks terrific along with the cycle fenders. Let me put my 2 cents in about the wheels - I like them in silver... green would be too much, although painted wheels were quite common in the UK.

Also. The famous picture on the last page (June **Octagon**) of the young lady sitting in the boot of the MGB/GT was used in an ad and a few years back my daughter Julie and I recreated the picture using my 1967 MGB/GT at the Palo Alto Concourse - photo on front cover. Pity the Palo Alto Concourse put on by the Lions Club is no more - Stanford would not allow use of their fields anymore!

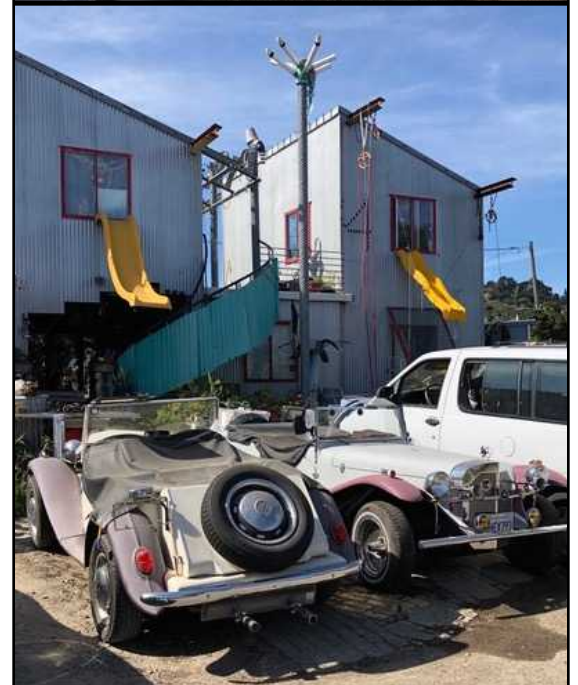
Don Davis, Los Gatos

Thanks to Don Scott, we are back in business down here. It took two weekends, one digging it out and the second getting it down the hill and on a trailer, but we acquired his 1972 GT from a hillside in Napa - and now it's in Oakland being combined with Bill's car. (Top photo)

Thanks again Don!

David L. and Bill, Alameda

Marty Rayman spotted these kit cars in his walks around Kentfield. I see that the MG is getting just as much loving care as the Mercedes. Someone will convert them to VW bugs one day.





The Geico Gecko has good taste in automobiles. Mike Jacobsen noted it is a custom one with door handles!

Tokay geckos (genus Gekko gecko) are known for their loud mating calls.

Beep beep!

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## President's Ponderings

**"ARE WE THERE YET?"** When we were kids we went on holiday every year with our parents to the seaside for a fortnight. Our favorite spot was the Isle of Wight and we vacationed there lots of times. We drove in my Dad's Humber Hawk Estate car which could easily fit the luggage for a family of five. My sister always sat in the middle of the back seat because she was the youngest (that was our excuse). My brother and I had the outside seats so we could see out the windows. It was a long drive, especially on the trunk (main) roads before all the motorways were built. After being in the car for several hours we always asked the same question, "Are we there yet?" and the answer was always the same "NO".

This story and trip reminds me somewhat of our present situation with the Corona virus pandemic. "Are we there yet?" and I feel the answer should be a little more positive but presently we seem to be heading in the wrong direction, even going backwards with an increase in cases being reported in several states. It looks like it will be a long time before we finally arrive at our destination.

We don't have any drives on our calendar for July so our next tentative event is the Annual Picnic in Tilden Park scheduled for August 22. Marcia recently checked in with the East Bay Regional Parks District and all parks presently remained closed and even the road to our picnic spot is closed. This is a great picnic location with lots of tables and benches so we could all feel comfortable and practice SD, and they also have proper toilets! The Parks Service are going to make a decision later in July about opening up the picnic grounds so I'll keep you posted with any developments.

On a completely different subject and one that is car related I recently ordered a new tonneau cover for my 1967 MGB from Prestige Auto trim Products in England. Prestige specializes in making tops and tonneau covers for British sports cars and is one of the only companies that supply the original vinyl material for the picky owner. I ordered a tonneau with 3 "lift the dot" sockets installed to fit the LTD (Lift the Dot) pegs on the dash top. The tonneau arrived within a week and I was really excited at the quality of the material and finish. It fitted the clips and ltd pegs perfectly on the back of the car but the ones on the dash didn't line up.

I always thought my current tonneau, (which is over 20 years old and came with the car) was original, as were the LTD pegs on the dash. Unfortunately for me that is not the case. I've checked the peg placement on a couple of other early MGBs and my LTD pegs are not in the correct place. I have no idea why that is, but my new tonneau doesn't fit. So if you're reading this and have an early MGB and are looking for a new tonneau, give me a call.

All the best and keep safe in these strange times.

**Andy**



New member Boback Emad enjoys his first British car, his recently purchased TD, in Pacifica.

Photo from Boback

# MG Beneath the Dashboard, An Odyssey

From the 'net, Compiled by Dan Shockey

Reading the thread about brake light switches and reminded me to ask everyone about how they go about working under the dashboard. I recently fitted a relay system under the dash to replace the mechanical dipswitch.

This meant that I was on my back with my head and shoulders under the dash with my stomach (some may say beer belly!) wedged beneath the steering wheel and with my legs and backside hanging out of the car. I must admit that in this position, you would be very vulnerable to pickpockets and any passing shoe or trouser thieves!

It took quite some time to get myself into that position and even longer to get myself out of it! You have to carefully plan in advance which tools and parts that you will need to save the annoyance of just getting into position and then having to wriggle out again if you have forgotten something. I think I invented some new swear words on that day.

I have tried taking out the seat base to make more space but then I found the seat frame was too uncomfortable to lie on. I have thought of making up a temporary padded platform the same height as the sills. This would fit just outside of the car next to the sills and would hopefully be much more comfortable than having your back bent backwards over the sills.

Has anyone else come up with a way of making this any easier?

## Colyn Firth, UK

Removing the steering wheel is too obvious. I never bother and struggle like you do but will put towels or pillows on the seat frame. Kneeling on a towel on the garage floor next to the car with the driver door open and stretching and reaching under is another way, or reaching over from the passenger side.

So no simple way. How did they build these things?

## Ted Persons

The easy way is an old thin chair cushion or pillow over the seat frame, gives a few inches of space compared to lying on the seat base. If is going to be a longer job (like rewiring an entire car), I put my legs up over the back of the seat.

Or you could (cough) lose some inches on the waistline ..... probably the healthier option in the long run

## Dominic Clancy

My legs aren't long enough to reach over the back of the seat.

## Vin Rafter

Dominic, I really take Health and Safety seriously with my MGA. I have recently retro fitted seat belts into it. That was a fairly quick and easy process.

However, it has taken me many years of dedicated time effort including the lifting and emptying of countless numbers of brim-full 1/2 litre liquid containers to help me to develop my own "personal built-in air-bag system." Ok, some may still call it a beer-belly but it works for me!

Have is there picture of you inverted in your MGA with your legs up and over the seat, Dominic? It would make for a great "Caption Competition"

## Colyn Firth

So much for a "Yorkshire Airbag" - I think most prefer the Bulgarian variety that also makes a very suitable cushion but would not solve your space issue.

## Dominic Clancy

Colyn, I use two up turned plastic beer crates that I line up end to end outside the door at about 45 degrees to the car. They are exactly the same height (11 inches) as the sill and provide a very comfortable bed to lie on.

## D. Townshend

Now that sounds like the ideal solution! Buy a couple of crates of beer and use them upturned to lie on when I want to be able to comfortably access anything under the dash board.

And, as a bonus, drain the bottles to help maintain my "personal airbag"! Perfect.

## Colyn Firth

I feel your pain, Colyn! I usually feel it double on the next morning. I'm fairly large, and pretty much need to remove the seats if I'm to be crammed in there for any length of time. I usually remove them by unbolting the lower tracks, giving a bit more comfort to my back, and often I raise the level up to the sill tops with cushions and towels.





Finally, the greatest boon here has been my patient wife, who kindly hovers in the vicinity to fetch whatever tool I may have forgotten. Sadly, it's not becoming easier with practice.

#### **Ken Korey**

The worst part is that my bifocals are miss-calibrated. Everything in this position is exactly the wrong distance away and I can't see well no matter what I do.

My daughter was standing by to fetch the tools, etc., bless her.

#### **Jim in NH**

That's a great picture, Jim; you look really comfortable in there. How did you get out? It seems that the way to get comfortable when working under the dash is as follows:

1. Lie with your back on the seat cushion with your head and shoulders under the dash and with your legs resting on the rear tonneau area of the car.
2. Remove seat cushion if, like me, your built-in airbag jams under the steering wheel.
3. Fix up a couple of upturned beer crates just outside the car, the same height as the sills, to make sliding into the car more comfortable.
4. Most importantly of all, have an assistant within easy reach who can pass you any tools and parts, etc. that you can't reach.

Who can make suggestions if you run out of swear words and pass you a constant supply of beer bottles that have fallen out of the upturned beer crates?

And finally who will cover you up with a blanket when they realize that you are comatose after consuming 2 crates of beer!

To be honest, I am starting to actually look forwards to my next under dashboard project! Cheers

#### **Colyn Firth**

Thanks Colyn...I think it might be time for an update on the ol' prescription, even though this one is less than 1 year old, IIRC.

I take the seat bottom out and put a folded up moving blanket on the floor to make the seat base front tube a bit more comfortable on the small of my back.

**Jim**

# A Top for All Seasons (and Reasons)

By Dan Shockey

## Part I - Then

Living with an old sports car in Illinois was a particular challenge. For me this was in college in the early 1970s. I took a lot of abuse from those of the muscle car culture all around me. Then there was a lack of parts and expertise readily available. And the weather was really a challenge.

In the summer, sudden rainstorms required a very quick erecting of the top. (I got fast at it.) The car was low and did not ford streets well that were filled with water. I can remember water pouring over the doors on my TR3. The roads of railroad viaducts were the most often flooded.

The summer heat and humidity was miserable in the not air-conditioned car. At least being a convertible, there could be lots of airflow so long as you could keep moving and not get stuck waiting in traffic or for a frequent slow train. The vinyl seats got very hot and sticky left in the sun.

In the winter, well it got cold and icy and snowy. I was actually fairly healthy because I had to always dress for the cold. The TR3 had a heater which might raise the temperature about 20 degrees at best. So if it was 10 degrees (F) outside, it might be 30 inside, depending on the wind strength and direction. I would bundle up with all my warmest gear, especially some long ski gloves and insulated big boots. It was hard to drive the TR with those wide-track boots. With all that

gear, the car seemed quieter than usual, at least, providing of course there was no sleet or hail. I slept in it one mid-winter night in Wisconsin but that's another story.

While driving across campus one day, an attractive co-ed ran out to me asking if I wanted to buy a hardtop for my car. She had a factory hardtop and sold it to me for \$75. I really liked that hardtop. It did make winter use of the TR more bearable. I remember one time scraping ½" of solid ice from it. I remember another time digging the TR from a snow bank. I only found the car by the radio antenna sticking out.

One thing I liked about the hardtop was the varied look it gave the TR. I could have the top down, the soft top up, the soft top with side curtains (JC Whitney's finest – many many years before), the hardtop on, with and without the side curtains. I painted the hardtop to match the car so it gave it a coupe look. It not only looked different, it felt different to drive. I never could afford a tonneau in those days but used beach towels over the seats as required. The poor TR was very exposed to the elements parked at night with no top.

I worked for a man who had an MG Midget. He wanted some protection in winter so made his own fibreglass top by laying fibreglass right over the soft top. It got pretty



Dan's College TR in Winter



heavy by the time he was done and still looked like an old soft top.

Hard tops had another practical purpose. In looking for photos of Sterling Moss, I saw those of the Sebring Sprite that he drove at LeMans and elsewhere. The purpose there was two-fold, to attempt to smooth the airflow over the car (lower wind resistance) and to make the car more bearable for a long race in various conditions of hot sun and cold rain.



## Part II – Now

Many open sports car owners never put up their top (or 'hood' in UK parlance). Some don't even have one. A tonneau cover can help with that, to cover the car at night or to drive partially covered. I found with my TD and PA that I sometimes want a top as protection when the sun is really burning hot. But then you cut off the airflow. The zip-down rear windows in the later MGBs and Midgets was a great idea and can be used for the earlier MGs

I found with the TD, in particular, that the noise was a second concern with the top down. This is the case on the busy freeways here. You really feel bombarded by the noise and can't talk. I had considered getting a hardtop for the TD. Instead I sold the TD and bought an MGA Coupe. (The TD was a good driver but needed restoration.)

I did some study on TD hardtops before selling it and reported on them in the May, 2018, issue of **The Octagon**. I think it is a fun and practical idea.

I still like the idea of an interchangeable top. Those winter days are ingrained (branded) in me. As are those sunbaked days. Back in the 1960's, companies sold an aftermarket "bikini" top for the TR3. Its top



You might

wonder how much it would help airflow. The MGA coupe was faster than the MGA roadster despite being a bit heavier. It was the first production MG to break 100mph. Ideally the hard top should be as low as possible and flow to the back as far as possible for the smoothest airflow. The MGB/GT was a good solution – but the top was not removable, of course. At various times, the presence of a fixed top placed the car in a different racing class so the hard top might be used in that case. The Sprites and Midgets were a good case study for hard top use on a small sports car.



was completely removed (stowed in the boot) so a top just for shade cover was a viable option. It was a minimalist top with no windows. It provided shade but did not restrict the airflow. And it looked cute with its bikini style. You could do it in a bright color, a striped fabric, a Stars-and-Stripes or a Union Jack design.

A friend in hot Kansas with a PA like mine made a shade-cloth top for his. The shade cloth extended all the way down at the back since you can see through it. (However he did miss seeing an 18-wheeler hard on his tail one time.) His was black and rather disappeared visually. We drove 300 miles to an event together. I had some leftover shade

cloth and copied his for fun! (See pic.)

I checked on the bikini tops and found that some TR3 guys like a "Bimini" top now, copied from boat tops. It covers only the frame top and doesn't come down to the back and side, even with a bikini strap. I am thinking to make a bikini top for my PA. It will take less room in the car when folded and can even make the tiny car more visible with a bright color.

But a hard top still intrigues me. The P-type MG was offered in a rare Airline Coupe form that is much admired. I have wondered

if I could make a removable top in that style. For me now, that would be more for fun than any practical use. I don't plan to move back to a cold climate and wouldn't use the open MG there in winter weather in any case.

I have wondered about construction of such a top. Perhaps I would do a simplified version that does not go all the way down around the spare tire. Maybe aluminum sheet over a wood frame? Maybe fiberglass over chicken wire? Or model airplane style, rice

paper  
over  
balsa. I  
rather

like the idea of *Paper Mache*. However with the present TP paper shortage, that may have to wait.

Alternative tops for an open car can add utility and variation to its look and feel. A tonneau is probably the most useful, especially for California, but there are other options. Enjoy!

(Photoshop test left)



Bimini  
Top



Welcome shade at a  
show



Brian Kelly with  
PAs in Indiana





# New High Efficiency Engines and MGs

Compiled by Dan Shockey

Info from articles in **Road & Track** and **Hot Rod**

With few exceptions, our MGs use cast iron blocks with pushrods, 2-valves per cylinder, and operate at relatively low RPM. We've been told for decades that high-rev'ing overhead cam engines are far superior for power and efficiency. Most modern engines use multiple overhead cams, multiple valves per cylinder, aluminum blocks and heads, and turbo chargers, along with lots of microprocessors for variable control.

The flagship engine for Ford's F-150 trucks is an all-aluminum, twin-turbo engine. So why is its brand new, heavy-duty truck V8 built of cast iron with push rod activation of its 2-valves per cylinder? Ford stopped making pushrod motors 20 years ago. And why has GM stuck with pushrod engines for its trucks, Camaros and Corvettes as well? Ford says it is for better efficiency and long life. So have we been told wrong all these years – and are our MG engines not inferior after all?

Pushrod engines offer numerous benefits, despite their perceived archaic engineering. In fact, the overhead cam design is just as 'archaic' but push rod designs won out in the 1930s. To start, they're significantly smaller and easier to package. And with a smaller overall footprint, the vehicle carries less mass. Pushrod engines are also less expensive to produce.

Pushrod motors are narrower than OHC (over head cam) V6/V8 motors, so making the 7.3L an OHV (over head valve) design let Ford engineers fit it into a range of different vehicles with only slight changes for each model. Redesigning or repackaging wiring harnesses and oil dipsticks is a lot easier and cheaper than wedging a thick engine into a range of different truck models. This compactness means there'll be lots of room in the engine bays, which Ford said also helps with cooling.

According to Ford engineers, vehicles with a GVWR over 8500 pounds tend to tow and haul a lot, which means they're using a lot of their horsepower a lot of the time. In vehicles with 14,000-plus-pound GVWRs, Beltramo told us it's critical for an engine to operate at peak power with an optimal air-fuel ratio (stoichiometric combustion). From there, Ford worked backwards. (Joel Beltramo, manager for V-8 gas engines at Ford.)

"We built a map of where an engine can run stoichiometric air-fuel without a bunch of spark retard," Beltramo said. "That led us to a torque-per-liter value and a power-per-liter value, [which] knowing that, boxed us to 7.3 liters."

For fuel efficiency's sake, Ford engineers determined they wanted the engine to generate peak power at what Beltramo considers "relatively low" RPM. "That's what led us to a pushrod two-valve. It really is the optimum solution for the over 14,000-pound [segment]."

Typically, a pushrod engine makes lots of torque at low RPM, while an overhead-cam engine—like the 5.0-liter Coyote in the Mustang—does its best work from the middle to the top of the rev range. When towing/hauling a big load, a truck's engine needs to be making peak power, and if it's doing so at relatively low RPM, it won't use a lot of gas.

"If you used [the 7.3-liter] in an F-150 or something, it would not return the fuel economy at light load as some of our other engine offerings," Beltramo said. "But when you start talking about running day-in day-out, at high weights, the displacement brings a big fuel-economy benefit."

We needed a relatively compact package with low cost and high reliability. It made sense to do a pushrod V8 for cost to the customer and maintenance. "We wanted to have a relatively good performance potential for the engine, so it has large bores. This is good for cylinder head flow and creates slower piston speed during cruise modes for better efficiency," said Ramey. (Blaine Ramey, supervisor of large gas and diesel engine performance development at Ford Motor Company. Ramey is also a hardcore drag racer, who pilots a modern Cobra Jet Mustang.)

This 7.3-liter should be pretty durable, too, thanks to a cast-iron block, a forged steel crankshaft, and oil jets to cool the pistons. (Old MG engines have that, too!) Generally speaking, pushrod engines are a lot simpler than their overhead-cam counterparts, so there's a lot less stuff to break.

It's funny that when automakers have to perform standardized fuel-economy testing, they started making more small, turbo motors. But when Ford tried to get better real-world fuel economy in its bigger trucks, it came up with a big honking V-8. "It makes perfect sense."

So don't let anyone tell you your MG motor is inferior to any other engine. Don't believe their biases. It all depends on what you seek from a motor. For me, longevity, power at low RPMs, ruggedness should it overheat, ease of maintenance and inexpensive components are most important and define what is quality and reliability in a sports car.



# The Mystery of the MG Grille

By William T. Doyle, "Tom"

Pictured at right is a piece of a MG grille that was found this spring in the back of the garage at the Vikingsholm Mansion on the shores of Emerald Bay at Lake Tahoe, CA.

What model MG did it come from? What happened to the rest of this MG and how did the grille come to be stored at the Vikingsholm Mansion?

Put on your creative hats and come up with a good story and send your responses to Dan Shockey or Andy Preston and your response maybe be featured in a future version of **The Octagon**. Your story will be judged on creativity.

## The Castle History

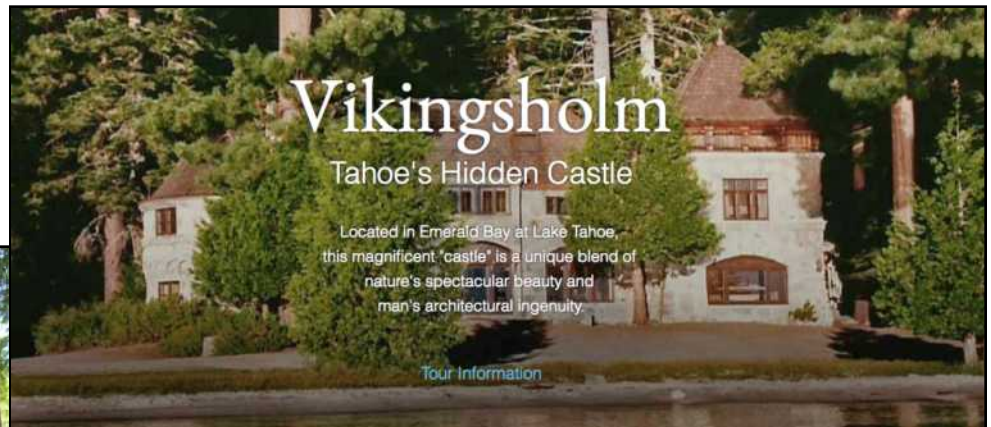
Emerald Bay provided the setting for one of the first summer homes at Lake Tahoe. Ben Holiday, stagecoach magnate and early-day transportation king, constructed a home there in the late 1860s. His land was eventually sold to Paul Kirby in 1880. The Kirbys built a number of cabins, intended for resort use, on the parcel of land where Vikingsholm now stands.

The William Henry Armstrong family acquired the property in 1892 and they used the cabins as their summer residence for over 32 years. In 1928, Mrs. Lora Josephine Knight bought the Armstrong's land with the desire to build a summer home that would compliment the magnificent natural surroundings. Emerald Bay reminded her of fjords she had seen on numerous travels to Scandinavia. She commissioned her nephew by marriage, Lennart Palme, a Swedish architect, to design the home. Vikingsholm was completed in the fall of 1929.

After Mrs. Knight's death at the age of 82 in 1945, the estate was sold to Lawrence Holland, a rancher from Nevada. He subsequently sold it to Harvey West, a lumberman from Placerville, California. In the early 1950s, Mr. West, a noted philanthropist, negotiated with the State of California and the house and property were acquired by the State.

Vikingsholm is considered one of the finest examples of Scandinavian architecture in the United States. It is now a part of the Harvey West Unit of the Emerald Bay State Park. The house is open for tours during the summer months.

The tour goes into the courtyard where the guide explained all about the road the owner put in, and where the hired help lived. You have the opportunity to see the old cars that are still in the garage as well.





# Keep Planning for 2020 ... (2021?)



## SUMMER - FALL

Sat., July 11, SSTS Tune & Spoon, Lafayette,

**Sat., Aug. 22, MGOC Annual Picnic, Tilden Park, Virus Permitting, Marcia & George**

Sept 4-6, Sonoma Speed Festival, Sears Point,

Sept 5-6. Scottish Highland Games, Kirk Prentiss, Display your MG, MGOC welcome

Aug. 8-9, Pre-Historics Races, Laguna Seca



## FALL - WINTER

Aug. 13-16. Monterey Historics, Laguna Seca

**Sat., Sept. 19, MGOC Tour, TBD**

Oct. 4-8, Golden State Tour, Classic Motorsports, Based in Calistoga

Oct 11-13, Sea-Air-Ahh Tour, SSTS, Jim Brady, Kirk Prentiss, MGOC welcome! Virus permitting.

**Sat., Nov. 14, Sonoma Tour, MGOC, Marla & Andy Preston**



The Southwest Idaho All British Field Meet, scheduled for September 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> is still on. Registration is low, however, so they are asking that you register as soon as possible.

You can find out more here:

<https://swiabfm.idahobritishcars.org>

... and register here:

<https://www.idahobritishcars.org/swiabfm-reg/>

# MG EX257: The Car That Could Have Won LeMans

Small, light and agile, the MG-Lola EX257 could have taken the fight to mighty Audi at Le Mans at the turn of the (21<sup>st</sup>) century. If not for one, vital component: money

By Neil Briscoe for Autosport PLUS, July 11th 2018

**Audi's dominance of Le Mans in the early 2000s was complete. While winning the greatest of endurance races was never as easy as it looked from the outside, the Audi team in its various guises romped home every year from 2000 to '14, aside from solitary wins for Bentley ('03) and Peugeot ('09).**

Could it have been different? Well, maybe. With one or two better decisions and a slightly larger budget, Audi's winning streak could have been stopped before it really got started. Toppled by a tiny team running a tiny car, the MG-Lola EX257, which came about because of a chance conversation.

Martin Birrane, the Irish-born owner of Lola from 1997, told the story shortly before his death in June: "The car came about following a meeting I had with Alain Bertaut, who was the vice president of the Le Mans organiser l'Automobile Club de l'Ouest at the time, at Sebring.

"I'm standing looking out over the paddock with him, and he turns to me and says, 'I wonder why no one has ever done an LMP675 car?' And I said that, well, I'd been around motor racing for quite some time, and if I'd never heard of a 675 car, then probably no one else had either. And what is a 675 by the way?"

The LMP675 moniker referred to the weight of a potential alternative prototype category at Le Mans - smaller and more lithe than the front-line LMP900 big bangers, but crucially not so slow that they couldn't potentially win. LMP900 cars were allowed more power and wider tyres, while LMP675s had the advantage of being 225kg lighter.

With MG looking to get back into motorsport and talking to Lola, Birrane sensed an opportunity: "The car that weighed 675kg, assuming you could get it down to that, was going to be allowed the same tankage, 90 litres of fuel. If the car was capable of lapping within eight seconds of the P900 cars, then they would dead-heat, theoretically.

"So I said, 'I'm going to see when and if I could use that'. He wouldn't tell me, but I always assumed it was a category designed for maybe Peugeot or Renault, or one of the French teams that they were trying to tempt to come in, who didn't want to spend the money on the top category."

Money would become the defining element of the tale of this particular car, but at first it seemed that Birrane and his team at Lola had created something truly special. The initial work was done at Cranfield, before moving to Lola's current windtunnel and vehicle R&D centre in Cambridgeshire.

"The car was designed in-house at Lola," added Birrane. "It was far from being ordinary, it was what we called a little jewel. A ground-breaking jewel. And you can see that as soon as you look at it. [Designer] Frank Dernie had a lot to do with it. He allowed others to take the kudos for it. These guys are artists really, they can see and reach further."

But the jewel was about to be hitched to a millstone of an engine, thanks to a fateful deal with a resurgent MG. Sold off by BMW, once Munich had decided that nothing could make the Birmingham-based carmaker profitable, MG Rover as the company was then known was, supposedly, on the comeback trail. It had created a new and sporty range of hatchbacks and saloons based on existing Rover designs, and was looking for various ways in which it could promote both brand and product.

"I had an MD [David Bowes] at the time who was ex-Rover, and Nick Stephenson, MG's chief engineer, contacted him to invite Lola to join with Mayflower, the pressed-steel tier-one supplier, and we were already collaborating with them on a potential road car," said Birrane.



MG Engine in LeMans car



Hot Wheels Sponsor



"But, the MG people insisted their marketing department led Nick. He was a knowledgeable engineer, and I was pitching the programme to him, but in the background they were insisting that we had to use an MG engine, even though they really didn't have the capacity to make the right engine.

"They decided to tender out for the engine, and I said, 'Why are you going to waste all that time and money when it therefore won't be a proper MG engine anyway?' They did it all the same. Cost them £2.5 million or something, out of my budget by the way, and the worst thing is that there was an engine that would have done the job reliably. But unfortunately this new MG engine was our Achilles' heel the entire time."

Though there is some debate about the alternative options for the powerplant, for which Advanced Engine Research (AER) was contracted by MG, one possibility Birrane pointed to was a Nissan two-litre engine.

"That Nissan engine, which was the one we should have gone with, was tried and tested," said Birrane. "It had about 20-30bhp less than ours, but that would have been neither here nor there in the scheme of things. Reliability was all that was needed.

"It's not that it was a four-cylinder engine, either. We actually got to within five seconds of the big cars. If you look at the timing, you'll find that the times of the MG-Lola were almost with the Audis, and we only had to be within eight seconds to get there.

"It was more MG not wanting to put their name on another engine. It was a known engine, that Nissan one, although some modifications could have been done - it could have been hijacked a bit by the engine builders, but it was still the base that they started with. That was still the base engine, that they changed, and did lots of unreliable things, which were intended to deliver more power.

"And then when it didn't work they had to bring the turbo back, bring the boost back. It was probably on similar power at the end, when it was going. But too much of the time, it wasn't going. It was on the sideline."

Still, spirits were high when the Chamberlain Motorsport team arrived at Le Mans in 2001. The cars were decked out in a striking green-and-black colour scheme and, better yet, they were a delight to drive.

The driver line-up for those two chassis was a collection of nascent and established British talent, including Anthony Reid, Warren Hughes, Jonny Kane, Mark Blundell, Julian Bailey and Kevin McGarrity.

Reid still waxes lyrical about the car. "The MG-Lola was probably the best racing car I've ever driven. It had tremendous aerodynamics, probably thanks to their experience of racing in Indycar," he says. "So that led to fantastic handling, which then gave you tremendous confidence.

"The car was light, the power-to-weight ratio was high, plus they were working very closely at that time with Michelin, so the tyres helped the performance too. We traded lap times with Audi. The car could run as quickly as the LMP900s."

That was when the rest of the pitlane sat up and started to take notice of what, up to that point, had looked like a flag-waving publicity stunt for MG.

"The other competitors didn't take us seriously at all," reckoned Birrane. "They started taking us more seriously when they saw the lap times. Because, without even trying, the car was so far over what was needed for winning pace, against the other cars.

"They had a huge crowd of people waving MG flags and signs, we sold out of all the gear and clothes, there was a huge response to us in the crowd.

"Bentley was there, of course, with Richard Lloyd, and he was being interviewed and was asked how great it was to have two British marques back there, and he tried to say something about all the Brits being there to support Bentley. And of course I piped up with, 'I wouldn't be so sure about that Richard...' It was a nice little sparring match."



EX257 Scalextric slot cars  
Buy on eBay

There was competition between the drivers, too. McGarrity grabbed the MG-Lola drive as a lifeline for a career that was struggling to break through to the big-time, and wasn't going to let himself be intimidated by bigger names in the squad.

"We were testing at Spa ahead of Le Mans," recalls McGarrity. "And I think Mark Blundell was determined to be the fastest guy in the car at the test. He was quick, no doubt, but I saw the lap times on the readout afterwards and I was actually quicker than him. We still had to say that Mark had been the fastest, though..."

The 2001 Le Mans was horrendously wet, which also helped the lightweight car against the big LMP900 runners. The EX257s quickly moved up from their 14th and 17th starting positions, but the result was a bust, perhaps not surprising given that the cars had only been up and running for about a month beforehand. Blundell briefly got up to third overall before water got into the electrics during the night and engine issues eventually put both cars out.

"The concept of the engine was fantastic - a turbocharged two-litre with 550bhp," adds Reid. "Whether it was budget or the wrong engine builder was used at the time, the combination of those factors meant that it just wasn't reliable enough. The chassis was strong enough and the team was great, but the engine and the drivetrain, the gearbox, were the weak points."

Le Mans the following year should have been so much better, particularly after more work on the engine. The MG-Lola squad returned, this time with more sponsors on the car, but actually even less money in the team coffers.



EX257 at LeMans

we managed to do the work."

The cars qualified sixth and 12th at the 2002 Le Mans. Reid could see that the lack of cash was holding the team back, but frustratingly could also see the chassis was good enough to beat the best that Audi could do with the R8.

"I remember in 2002, I got into the car just before midnight. As I came around past the pits to complete my first lap of the stint, I could see ahead of me, about 200 yards, an Audi, which had just come out of the pits" says Reid. "So I set off to try to catch it up, and did so over the course of several laps, and I could see that it was Tom Kristensen."

"Immediately, you could see the strengths and weaknesses of the car. We were probably about 5mph slower on the Mulsanne Straight, but in terms of braking, and acceleration off the slow corners, we were quite a bit superior. In the fast corners, we were equal to the Audis. Overall, at that moment, we were quicker than the Audis and running third..."



EX257 at LeMans

"It became clear, towards the end of the first year - and we had a three-year contract, because that's usually how long it takes to mature a design and get it winning - we realised that they wanted to get out of the deal," said Birrane. "It was a nasty old set-to. They [MG] didn't break the contract, but they did roughly halve the amount that we had to run the team with. That caused its own problems."

"We could have succeeded in the first year, if we hadn't been tripped up by the insistence on having the in-house engine. I think it was seven months we had for the whole programme, and



EX257 at LeMans



Reid/Hughes/Kane were still in the battle for a podium position when the transmission failed just after one-third distance, while Blundell/Bailey/McGarrrity retired with a broken engine following a gearbox change.

"It really was a lot of fun," Reid nevertheless recalls. "The directors of MG Rover, the Phoenix Consortium, part of their remit was having fun. I liked the sense that we were an all-British company, all-British drivers, we enjoyed ourselves.

"I suppose secretly, at the back of our minds, we were thinking that the budget wasn't enough, that there hadn't been enough development, not enough spent on reliability. Look at Audi at the time, they would run five 24-hour tests over the winter, but we did take the fight to them in terms of speed, and put on a great show."

But it could have been greater still. There are many tales of unfulfilled potential and near-misses in motorsport, but the EX257 unquestionably had the right elements, as was proved a year later.

With the MG deal foundering, Birrane started offering the car, with back-up from AER on the engine side, to privateers. Dyson Racing took up the offer and at Sears Point's Grand Prix of Sonoma American Le Mans Series round in 2003, James Weaver and Butch Leitzinger made good on the Lola's promise by finally beating the factory Audis (below).

It wasn't a 24-hour race, and it wasn't Le Mans, but for Weaver it felt pretty good to win in the American Le Mans Series. It was the first ALMS victory for an LMP675 machine, as Joest's R8 driven by Frank Biela/Marco Werner and the similar Champion car of JJ Lehto/Johnny Herbert were outpaced.

"When we first got the MG-Lola, that car enabled us to compete against the Audis," says Weaver. "For a small, private team to go up against Audi was an extraordinary achievement on Lola's behalf.

"We'd been getting better and better, and Sears Point is in Sonoma wine country, so it's beautiful around there. The track itself is fabulous because it follows the contours of the land and it really suited our car. Butch had put it on pole and we were quickest in the morning warm-up.

"In the race, the Audis were really strong, but they started getting pickup on their tyres - they were running Michelins. I think Johnny Herbert stopped because he thought he had a puncture.

"But we were on Goodyears and as the race wore on, we were getting more and more competitive and we got past the lead Audi in the closing stages. And we were able to hold them off to take the win. The tyres really tipped it in our favour that day."

It wasn't the last victory either. Weaver and Leitzinger won again at Mosport in 2004, then Mid-Ohio and Mosport in '05 - more than four years after the car's rushed debut.

The last word goes to Birrane: "Speak to anyone you like and they will tell you what a jewel it was. No other car that we made lived up to it, and that was nearly 20 years ago."

*Above: English-owned Dyson racing team had several wins in America over the Audi running both as P675 and as P1.*



Hot Wheels car at LeMans

## MGA Side Mirror

An option that is located well yet requires no drilling

\$100 cobblers sewing machine is very old tech but very capable (below)



## Classified Ads

Ads are free to MGOC members and \$6.00 per month for non-members.

**1934 MG PA 2-seater.** New block, upgraded Phoenix crankshaft. A very original car with a great engine. Many new and restored parts. Car is in Washington State. Looking for \$17k. Brian Sullivan, 425-531-0618 (posted 7/20)

**1959 MGA Roadster.** Purchased by current owner in LA in 1964. Original engine, no rust, always been garaged. Documentation and photos available from previous restoration. Asking \$20k negotiable. Sharon, [sharonrossie413@gmail.com](mailto:sharonrossie413@gmail.com), (408) 332-1701 (Posted 7/20)

**Parts on sale:** Dave Laughlin is clearing many parts at good prices. He has engines and gearboxes; a good pair of MGA rear fenders; tons of parts to sell! Contact Dave at 510-234-6624 (Richmond)

**MGA Aluminum Flywheel:** Fidanza as sold by Moss. Fits MGA and 3-main MGB. \$350. Dan (309) 696-0803 (Posted 7/20)

**MGA Parts:** 5 Alum bonnets, 2 styles, gas tank, leaf spring, 1500 driveshaft, new fiberglass front valence (race), front frame extension, master cylinder sleeved, 1500 engine block. Member Tom Morgan (650) 740-4116 (Posted 5/20)

**Enclosed Trailer for Rent:** Enclosed car trailer for rent (16' x 8'). Trailer has integrated braking system and lights, 12 volt Electric Winch. Reasonable rates. Eric Baker (510) 517-2165

We list ads for 3 months. Advise if you want them extended. For additional ads, see prior issues of The Octagon or [MGOCSE.org](http://MGOCSE.org)



## Camping with Your MG

This family were keen campers, keen enough to have built this light van as a simple caravan; adequate certainly, but hardly luxurious. The towing car is a 1931 M-type MG coupé, which must have had its work cut out with only 847cc to call on. (Pritchard, Hereford)



The trailer appears it may be a pop-up. Glad to see they dressed casually for camping. This MG made 27 hp!

The M-type Sportsmans Coupe was a relatively posh car. See interior pic. (right)

A small motorcycle type trailer might be a better choice now for MG camping (top right)



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**North American MGB Register**



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**Note that mailing of the newsletter has  
been suspended until the Shelter in  
Place order has ended.**



The MG Owners  
Club has temporarily  
suspended all  
activities that do not  
meet the social  
distancing  
guidelines.

We hope to start up  
with the Annual  
Picnic on Aug. 22.

**Stay *Safety Fast!***



**Yep, that's the King!**