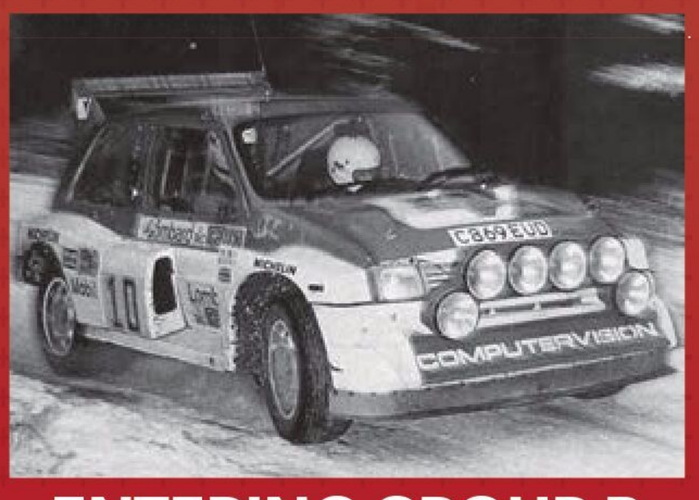
MG
MEMORIES

COLLECTOR'S EDITION

MG IN MOTORSPORT

EARLY TRAILS

RACING AT LE MANS



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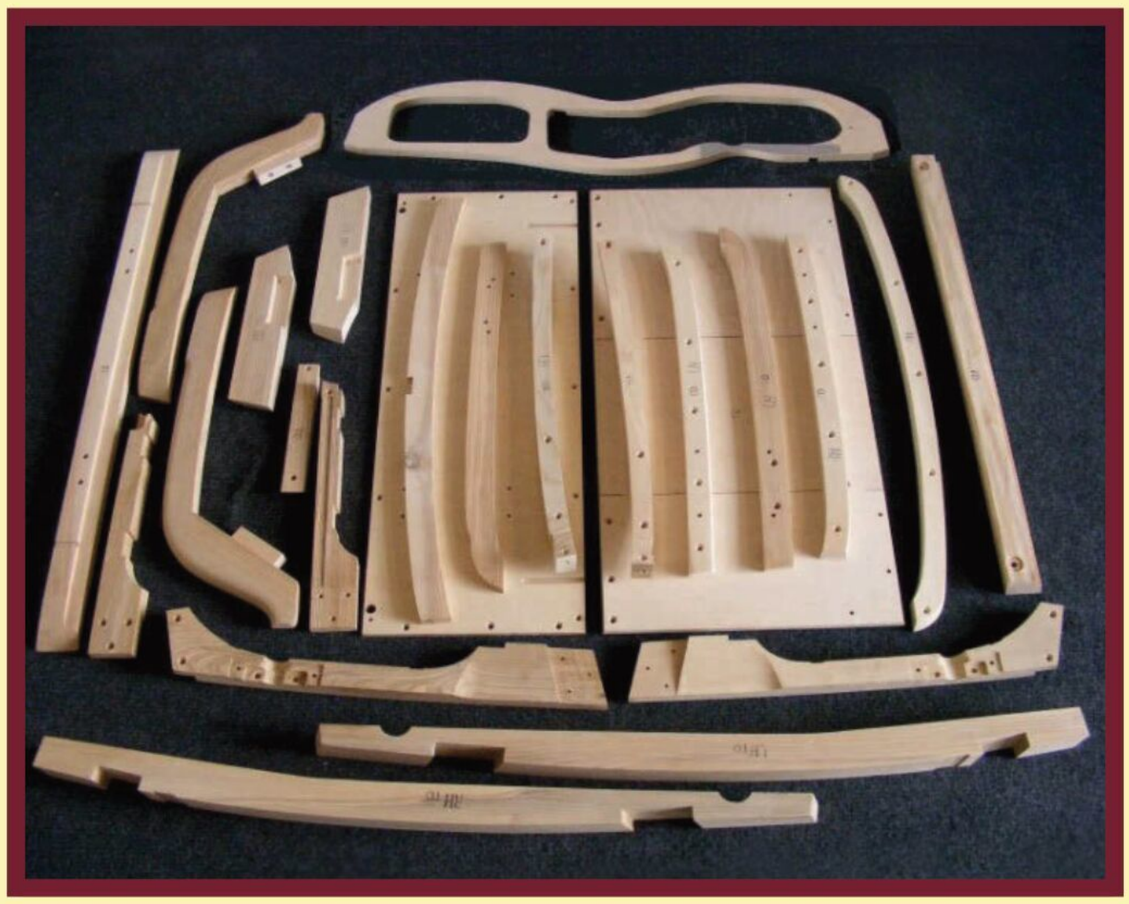

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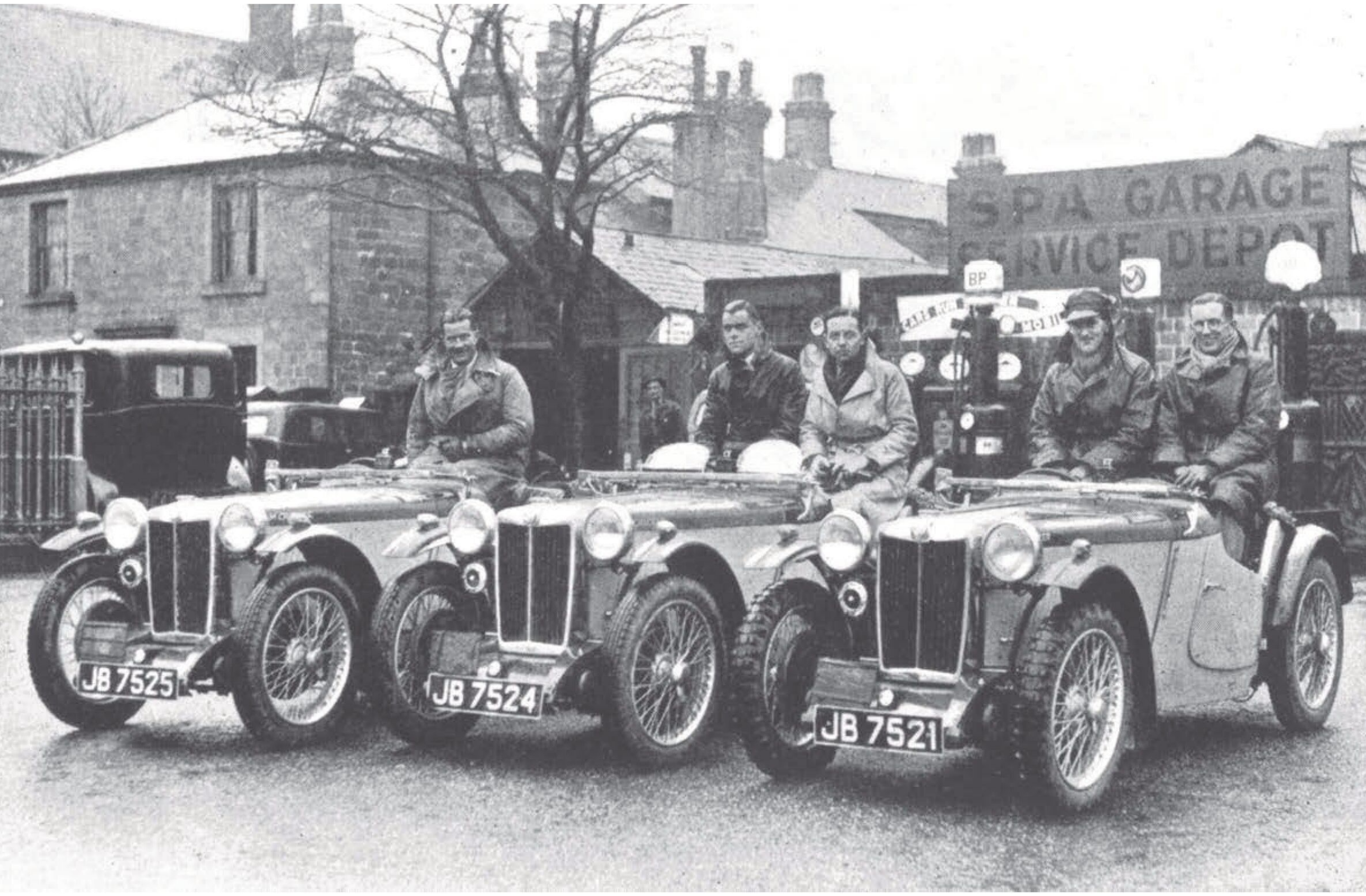
MG IN MOTORSPORT



Welcome to issue five in the MG Memories series and it's a goody! This issue we are looking at the wonderful world of motorsport and MGs involvement, from the early days of trails and single seat racers, to full-blown, knobbly-tyerd MG ZRs.

Away from the line first is a history of MG's entrance into the Le Mans 24-hour race, from 1935 to 1965. Competing in such a demanding race, alongside some of the more successful and well funded manufactures, MG didn't just arrive to make numbers up. As a team, they quite often held their own with competitive average speeds and eventual finishes.

Moving Stateside, we interview Den Green who was part of the team developing the Sebring MGs, before we head to the bottom of the globe and Australia to feature a special Midget, which was race-prepped in just three weeks to take part in a 12-hour endurance race.

More track focused MGs follow the lead two with an ex-Works MGB and a racing Metro from the 1980s. We also have a word with Abingdon's Special Tuning Department spanner-wizard, Basil Wales.

However, it wasn't all track-focused racing for MG. Long before the Mulsanne Straight was drawing the manufacturer in, country lanes and hillsides were attracting pre-war competitors and large crowds to the ever-popular trails and hillclimbs.

Into the mid-century and MG and their drivers were entering rallies all over the world, with much success.

Things really ramped up in the 1980s and the introduction of Group B. Not one to be left out of this nutty party, Austin Rover decided to use the newly launched Metro as the basis to develop a car to compete, and so the 6R4 was born.

Our rallysport journey concludes with a Longbridge special MGF and a history of MG entering back into forests with the ZR and TV presenter Tony Jardine.

With all this seriousness however, we do round this issue off with a small helping of bonkers! Take one MGB V8, nitrous oxide, fat tyres and 1/4 of a mile Tarmac strip and you get Perry Stephenson's mental dragster!

Enjoy the issue everyone, and keep safe.

Paul Sander
Editor, MG in the 1990s

MG IN MOTORSPORT

A look at the cars, histories and development stories of some of the most iconic MG racers.

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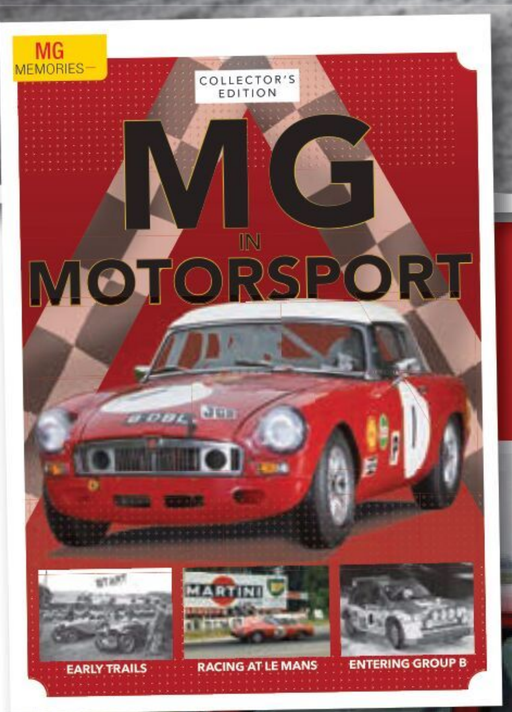

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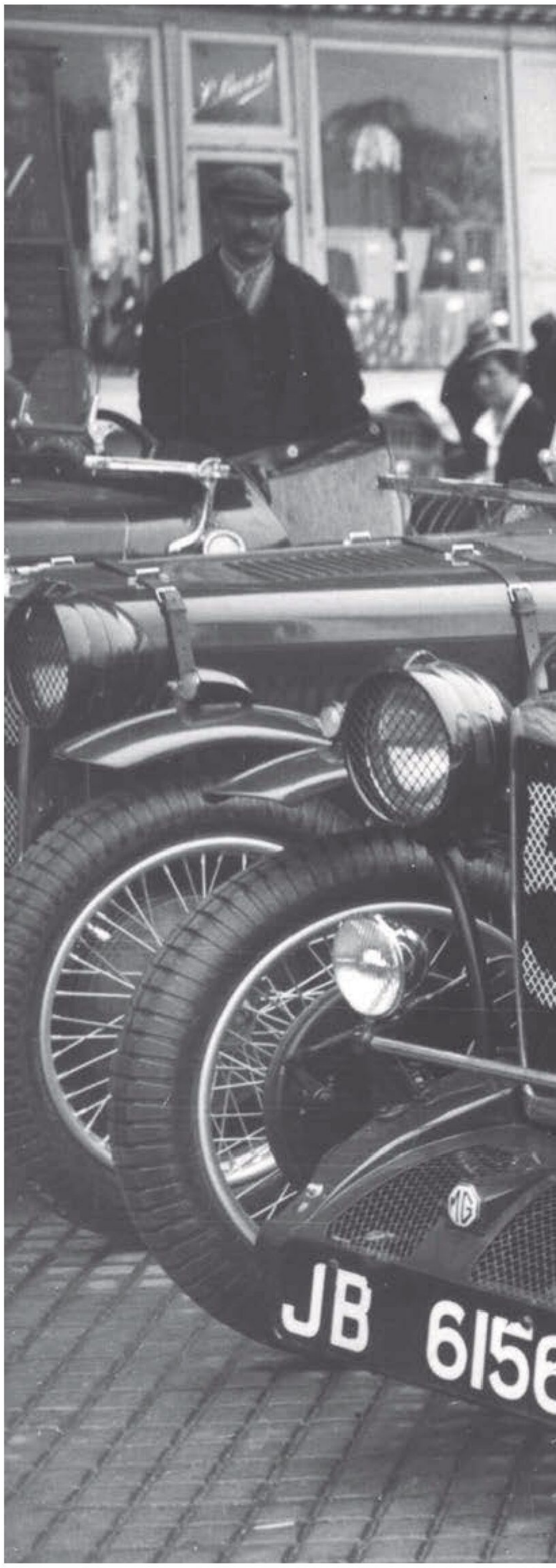
24 hour racing: 1930 to 1965



Mrs. Chetwynd's car had already been taken out of the race when the engine stopped out on the circuit.

The annual twenty-four hour race at Le Mans has always held a fascination for British motor racing fans. In earlier years every running of this event was covered in detail, both by the motoring press and the daily newspapers; more recently it has attracted less attention from the general public. However, a great many fans still make the trip across the channel for both the main race and also for the separate historic event featuring cars that would have competed in earlier years. Those undertaking the annual pilgrimage do so not just for the chance to see what is still one of the most spectacular and dangerous events in the calendar, but also to participate in a weekend-long festivity where feats of endurance on the track are matched by those of the spectators watching the race from the many vantage points, or partying all night in the camp sites.

Outright victory at Le Mans has always been the preserve of the larger-capacity sports cars and out-and-out sports racing machinery, but MGs competed there as early as 1930 and in the MGB era surprised many by recording high average speeds and good reliability. A study of their role reveals that the MG entries were far more than mere also-rans. The success of the race itself led others to emulate the formula and at Brooklands there were the double twelve-hour races in the 1930s where night racing was banned because of the vociferous residents of nearby St. George's Hill.

Possibly the event holds such fascination for British enthusiasts because, despite the French origins of the race, Bentley won in 1924, 1927, 1928, 1929 and 1930 and Jaguar had successive victories in the 1950s. MGs involvement started in 1930 when two M-type Midgets were privately entered. The cars were specially prepared by the factory and fitted with modified bodies with a flared scuttle. The pointed tail housed an 18gal fuel tank, displacing the spare wheel to the nearside of the car. Staggered seats were fitted for driver and riding mechanic, together with a full-width folding windscreen.

F.H.B. Samuelson and Freddie Kindell drove one MG, R.C. Murton-Neale and Jack Hicks the other. The race started at 4 pm on the Saturday afternoon and by just after nine that evening the Samuelson car was out with bearing failure. The second M-type fared little better. Murton-Neale had a contretemps with the fencing on one of the corners after skidding on sand placed by locals to stop such incidents occurring. So incensed was he by this that it was reported that he flung the remains of the fencing at the troops guarding that part of the course. The car was eventually taken out of the running when the crankshaft broke.

In 1931 there were again two MGs entered, this time the new Montlhéry C-type Midgets were used. One was driven by the 1930 team of Samuelson and Kindell, the other by the Hon. Mrs. Chetwynd and Stisted. Both unsupercharged cars were modified to comply with Le Mans regulations and fitted with larger fuel tanks. History relates that neither car featured in the final results but that was not for want of trying. The Samuelson car was only robbed of third place on formula by a miscalculation of the time allowed to complete the last lap.

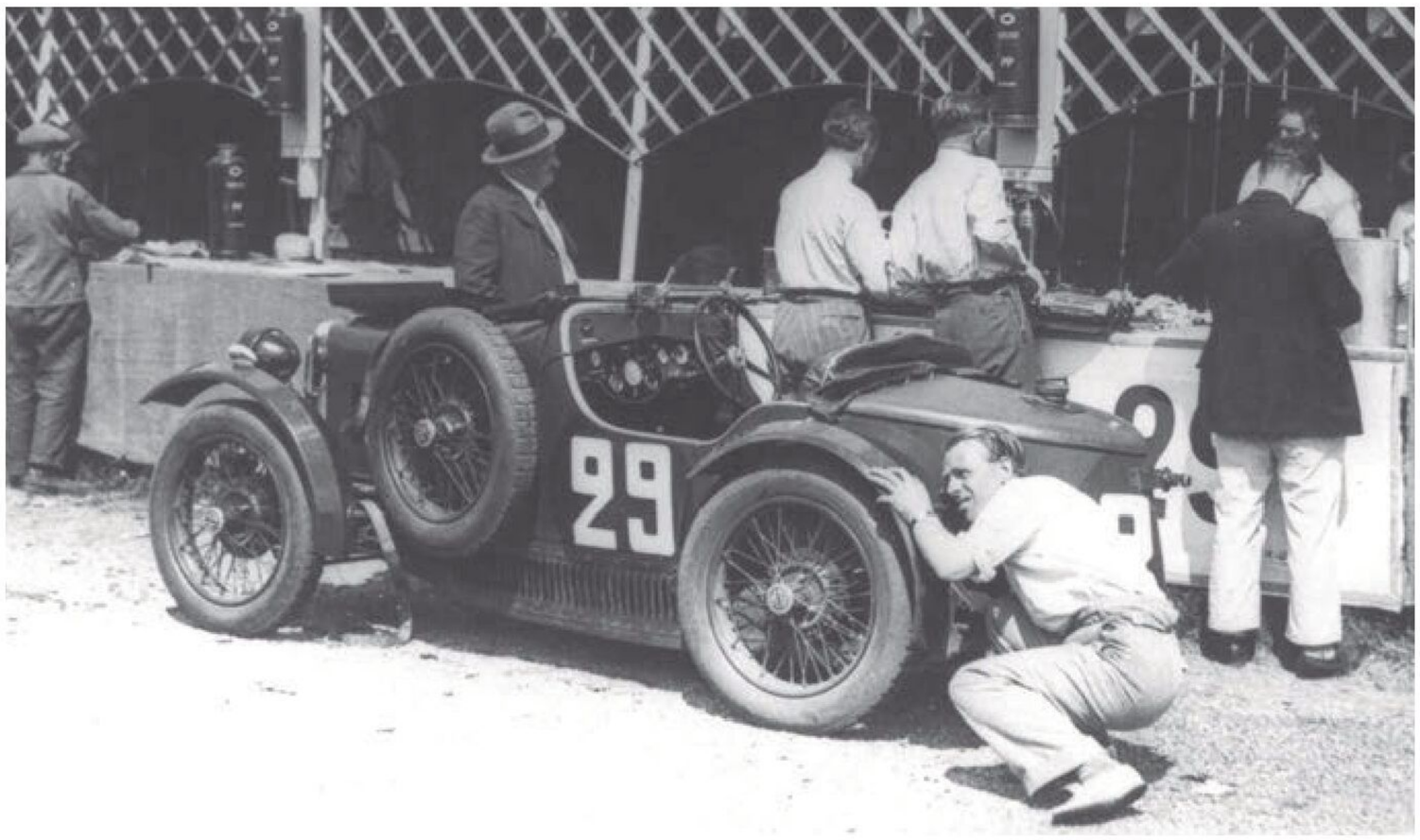
The same MG drivers were entered in the 1932 race, but only Samuelson's car actually started. The experienced Norman Black was his co-driver, included on the advice of MG boss, Cecil Kimber. The car

In the town of Le Mans before the 1935 race are the P-type all-lady team of Barbara Skinner, Doreen Evans, Mrs. Gordon Simpson, Joan Richmond, Mrs. Hugh Eaton and Margaret Allan.

was carefully prepared and, in a race when a number of the faster cars were eliminated by accidents, by midnight the MG led on handicap. Unfortunately, that was as good as it got. Norman Black suddenly realised that the car was down on power and pulled into the pits to discover that he was out of fuel. A bolt holding the tank to the frame had pulled out, releasing the fuel onto the track. As there were minimum distances to be covered between refuelling, their race was over.

In 1933 two supercharged Midgets were amongst the twenty-nine cars starting the race. That year there were fresh drivers involved in the MG efforts; one car was manned by Gordon Hendy and H. Dines Parker, the other by J. Ludovic Ford and Baumer. Both cars were prepared at Abingdon with the Ford car benefiting from a minute inspection, a precaution the team felt necessary following their previous experience of the race.

Practice periods were held every day during the week preceding the



Freddie Kindell, who worked for MG, attending to the car shared with Samuelson in the 1930 race.

Before the 1934 race with some of the MG entry by the pits.

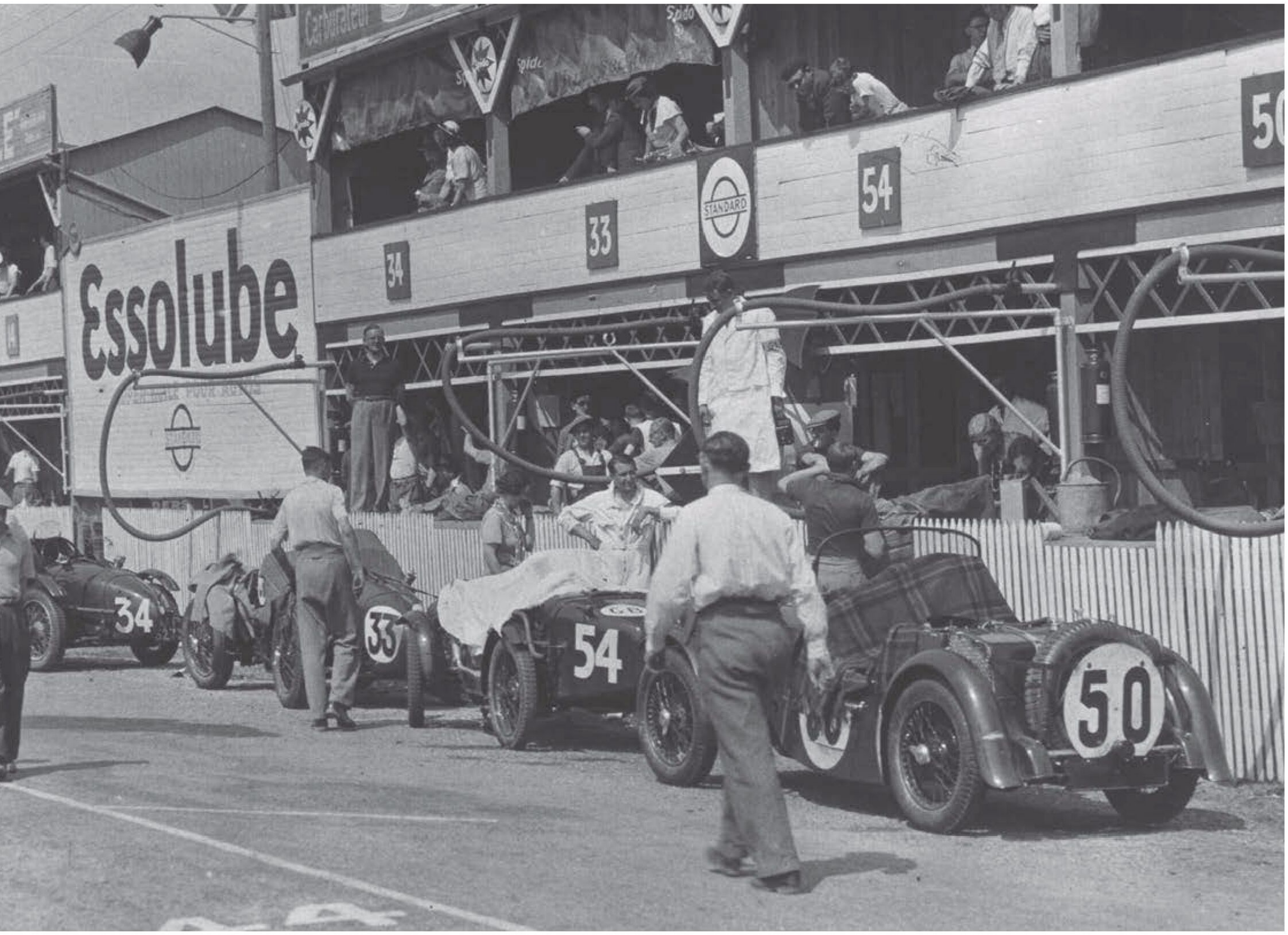
race but, as the event was held on roads usually in public use, were confined to between nine in the evening and daybreak. What local residents thought of having their sleep disturbed isn't recorded. Ford and Baumer practised in the Mercedes they had used to accompany their MG on the journey to Le Mans, preferring to save their MG for the event. As the previous year, one of the MGs sprung a leak in the fuel tank, but this was temporarily plugged with chewing gum before much fuel had escaped. However, they had lost ground to the other MG which was lapping at an average speed well below its full capability. In trying to make up the deficit the drivers put in laps some 10mph faster than the Ford/Baumer car and the bearings failed with just over four hours to go to the end of the race. As a reward for their efforts, Ford and Baumer brought the MG home to record the marque's first Le Mans finish, taking sixth place overall.

In 1934, following successes recorded in other events, two six-cylinder K3 Magnettes were entered, these being joined in the programme by a French entered P-type Midget. The Le Mans course had undergone modification for the race, including the building of a two-storey pits complex and the installation of pressurised petrol pumps for refuelling the cars. The organising club provided all the fuel for the race but teams were permitted to add Benzole or oil to their supply should they wish.

In the race, run in warm, dry conditions, the K3 Magnette driven by Ford and Baumer ran well from the start and its performance stunned spectators unused to seeing an 1,100cc car challenging for outright victory against larger-capacity machinery. At one point they were actually lying in second place, led only by the Alfa-Romeo piloted by the experienced team of Etancelin and Chinetti. However, fate intervened once darkness fell and a spin by one of the Tatras saw both the MG and a Bugatti forced off the road. The second K3, driven by Martin and Eccles, fared rather better and after a steady race was placed a creditable fourth overall. The P-type circulated steadily and took seventeenth place at the end of a gruelling twenty-four hours of racing.

The popularity of the endurance race was growing year by year and for the 1935 event there was a larger entry than for any of the previous races. British cars dominated the programme, thirty-seven out of the fifty-eight cars that started had crossed the channel, and there were no less than nine Singers, seven Aston-Martins and seven MGs competing. The MG entry attracted a lot of attention, not least because of the all-female team driving three P-types entered by George Eyston. Then, as now, there is substitute for a pretty face to guarantee good coverage in the daily press. Three Magnettes joined the three P-types and another Midget in the race and after the previous creditable performance by the marque the many British spectators who had made the journey to France expected a repeat.

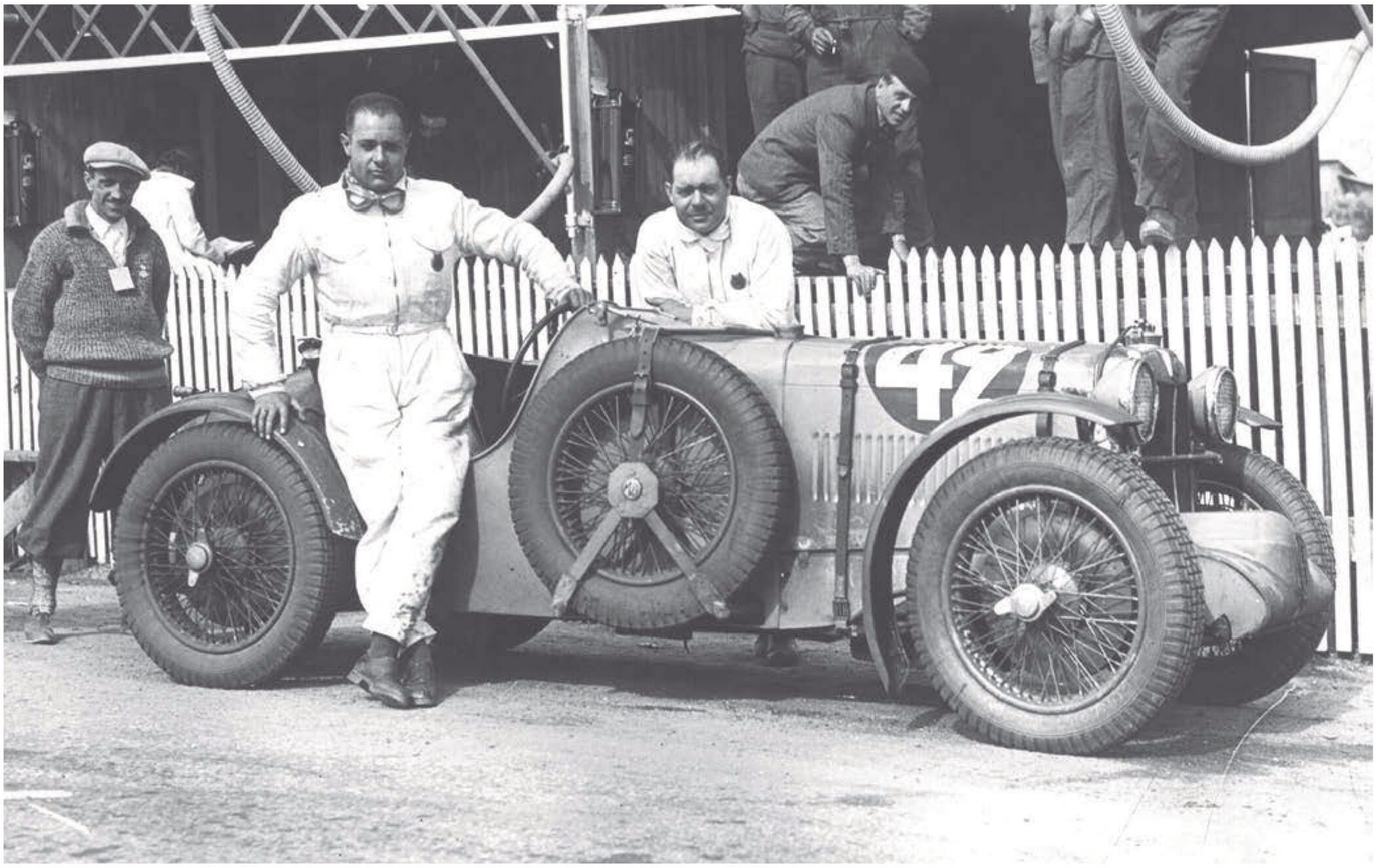
In contemporary reports the three P-types were described as being standard specification, except for having twin fuel pumps. However, a glance at the factory records for the cars reveals that they actually received quite a lot of additional attention before being shipped to France. Engines had been completely stripped, con-rods, crankshaft, pistons, balanced, ports and combustion chambers in the cylinder head polished. Engines were assembled using racing valves and



Samuelson and Kindell being congratulated at the finish of the 1931 race before they were robbed of third place on formula by a miscalculation of the time allowed to complete the last lap.

springs and then mated to standard P-type gearboxes with J-type gear ratios. The cars were given Q-type brakes and NE shock absorbers for the front axles. The standard bodies were carefully checked to see they complied with the regulations and the rear compartments had various clips, etc. fitted to hold spares that may be needed in the race. Windscreen glass was removed and substituted with a mesh screen to protect the drivers from stones thrown up by other cars. K3 cycle wings completed the picture.

Thus prepared to the high standard that had become the trademark of the Abingdon Competition Department, the cars ran faultlessly in the race and finished in eighth, ninth and tenth places in the 1-litre class. Of the other MGs. a K3 Magnette driven by Maillard Brune



The Maillard-Brune and Druck K3 Magnette by the pits in the 1935 race.

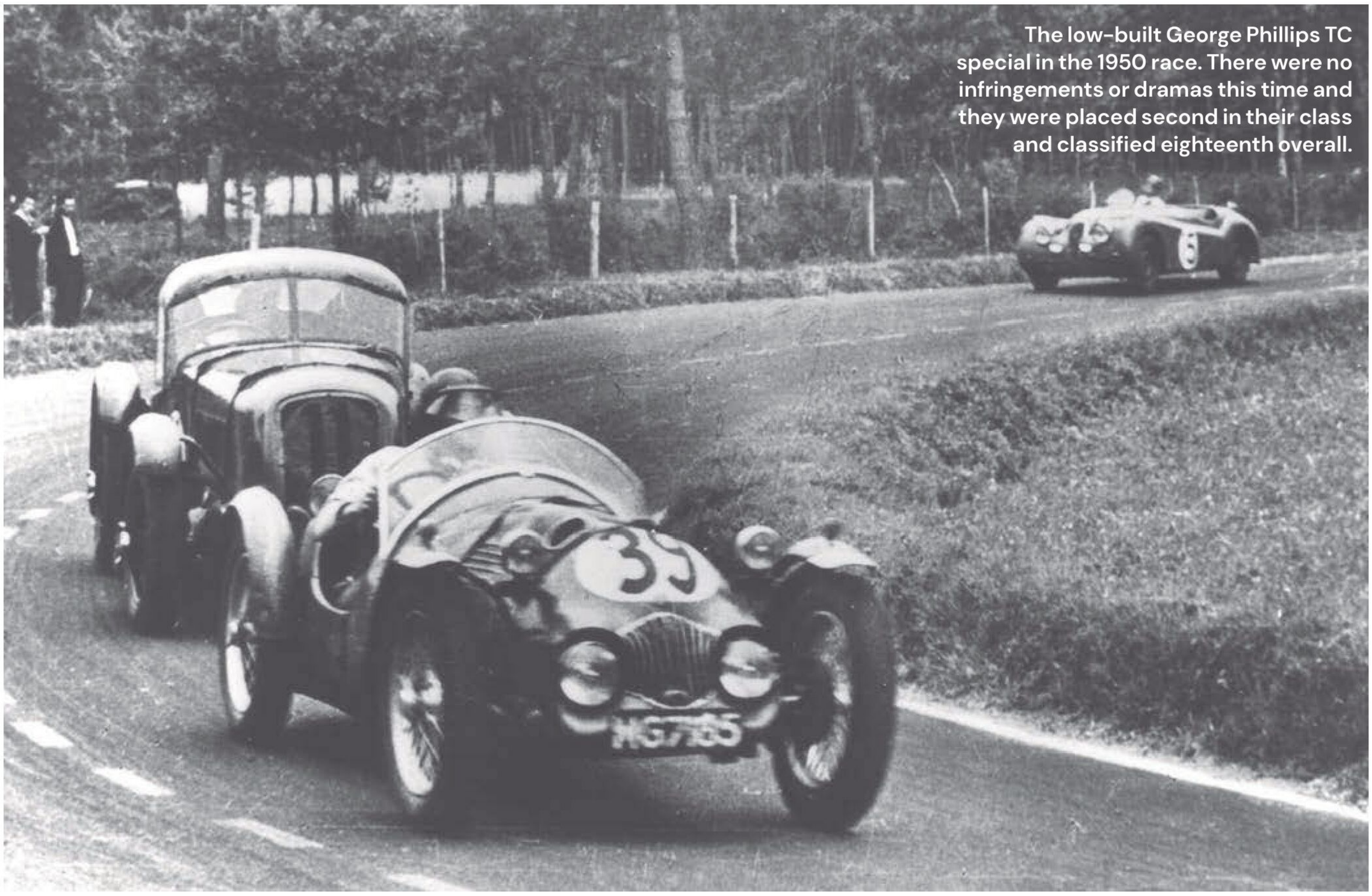
and Druck ran in the two-litre class because its 1,100cc engine was supercharged. They finished the race at an average speed of 70.79 mph and were placed first in class, a great result. Magnettes piloted by Hertzberger and Ford retired during the hours of darkness, one through failure of the supercharger and the other after a piston expired. The Midget of Debille and Viale also went out with supercharger problems.

However, the efforts made to get the MG team to the finish intact in order to qualify for the 1936 race were to no avail. Not only had the factory withdrawn from official support of racing by then, but the race itself was cancelled just a week before it was due to run because France was in a period of civil unrest and the effect of the communist-led strikes was to paralyse much of industry, including the car factories and it was thought unwise to try to run the race, especially as many of the French entered cars were locked away in heavily picketed factories.

The current MG models in production by the time of the 1937 event were not really suited to participation in twenty-four hour endurance racing. The highly-developed OHC four- and six-cylinder engines that had given the MG marque victories in many sporting events during the previous few years had been replaced by worthy, but unexciting, push-rod units. Enid Riddell and Dorothy Stanley-Turner driving a privately entered PB Midget upheld MG honours and were in the running for the Biennial Cup. Overall British cars did not do well in a race that saw two drivers lose their lives and the highest-placed was the Aston-Martin of J.M. Skeffington and one-time MG competitor, R.C. Murton-Neale.

Despite the dangers of racing through the night, and a number of serious crashes over the years, there had been no driver fatalities between 1925 and the 1937 race. The crash that killed the Bugatti driver, Kippeurt, and inflicted on Pat Fairfield in the Frazer-Nash-BMW injuries from which he later died, happened on the ninth lap at the fast White House Corner just before the pits. The Bugatti skidded up the bank and crashed onto the road just ahead of a string of cars travelling at 100 mph. Roth in a BMW deliberately ran off the road to avoid the Bugatti driver, who had been thrown from his car, but Fairfield ran into the wreckage and was rammed from behind by a Delahaye, a Talbot and a Riley. A truly horrific crash at a time when there were no safety belts, roll cages or even effective crash helmets.

The MG drivers were both experienced MG competitors and the little car ran steadily for the majority of the race. As is often the case at Le Mans, the weather played a part and torrential rain in the evening and during the night made driving fast during the hours of darkness a hazardous occupation. By breakfast time on the Sunday morning the MG was leading the chase for the Biennial Cup; but then clutch problems and other minor niggles meant spending some time in the pits and dropped them behind the Morris Goodall



The low-built George Phillips TC special in the 1950 race. There were no infringements or dramas this time and they were placed second in their class and classified eighteenth overall.

Aston Martin and they had to settle for second place in the cup and sixteenth overall.

Dorothy Stanley-Turner must have enjoyed her time at Le Mans in 1937 because she entered a PB in the race the following year with Arthur Dobson and Elsie Wisdom as drivers. Madam Anne Itier, who had driven the P-type in the 1934 event, again entered a PB Midget, partnered by M. Bonneau. The British-entered PB developed severe clutch slip quite early in the race and as a result overheated its engine. Despite calling at the pits repeatedly to refill the radiator with water, by the time dusk fell the engine had given up the unequal struggle and the car retired. The second MG fared better. By ten-o-clock on Sunday morning all but eighteen of the forty-two starters were out of the running but the PB was going well in fourteenth place, and at the end was twelfth overall and in tenth position on formula.

Although the participants were not to know it, the 1939 race was the last to be held at Le Mans for ten years. Once again there were two P-type MGs entered, a Belgian entry piloted by Bonneau and Mathieu, and an American entry in the capable hands of Miles Collier and Leroy Kramer Jr. The latter car was an old friend at Le Mans as it had been one of the three P-types run as a team in 1935. After a spell as one of the Musketeer trials cars, it was sold to Collier, who had it supercharged and shipped to America. There it was raced, but then damaged on the road in a crash with a taxi. The rebuild saw an attractive, streamlined body created by aircraft engineer, John Olivieu fitted to the car, which still survives.

The PB was shipped to France for the race where the streamlined body allowed full use of the 76bhp produced by the supercharged engine. For over seven hours the car ran faultlessly at an average speed of 71.77 mph, but then the driver unexpectedly had to call at the pits for more fuel. A couple of laps later he was back again with a near-empty tank and he discovered the bumpy circuit had caused this to split. As taking on more fuel after so few laps was forbidden, there was no alternative but to retire the car. The other MG fared little better and was forced out with a broken carburettor mounting.

Although the Le Mans circuit was largely public roads, during German occupation part of the Mulsanne straight was used as a runway for a military airfield. The whole area suffered badly from allied bombing and destruction by the retreating enemy during liberation. Thus there was much clearing up to be undertaken and it was 1949 before the twenty-four hour race once again took its place in the racing calendar. Although the actual track plan was unchanged, the grandstands and other facilities were renovated or rebuilt, and the circuit looked rather different. The track and been resurfaced, and widened in places, and much of the forest that surrounded the pre-war circuit had been felled during the conflict and this made the whole area more open.

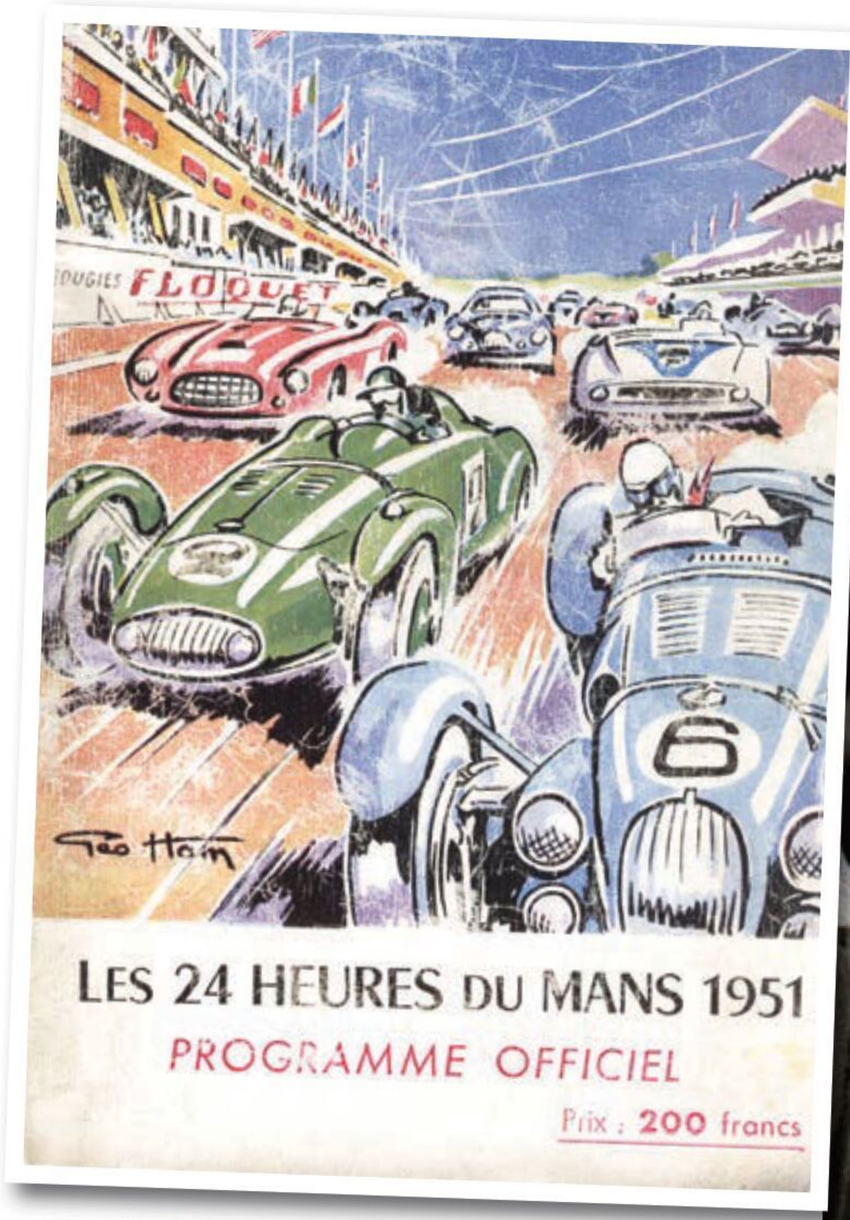
That MG took any part early post-war races was due to the efforts of one man. In 1949 George Phillips, professional photographer and

TRACK: MG AT LE MANS

motor racing enthusiast, was the sole entrant driving an MG. George had been one of the lucky few able to get his hands on a brand new TC and must have been in a position to jump the long queue of people waiting to get their hands on a new car of any sort. As part of the deal he was obliged to sign a covenant agreeing not to sell the TC for at least two years. For MG fortunes this turned out to be a blessing in disguise as his initial impressions of the car were not favourable and he may otherwise have been tempted to dispose of it.

He was less than happy with either the performance or steering and with competition in mind for his MG he decided to try to improve the power output of the engine. George set about polishing the inlet and exhaust ports in the cylinder head and matching the inlet ports to improve gas flow. Despite the relatively minor improvements, George managed to take second place in his class at the 1947 Brighton Speed Trials. Thus encouraged, he looked at other ways to make his MG more competitive and decided to reduce the overall weight of the car. With the TC much of its weight is accounted for by the ash-framed, steel clad body tub and the heavy-gauge steel wings. George stripped his car down to a rolling chassis and sold the body, wings, trim, etc. Harry Lester, who was already building up quite a reputation as a builder of MG specials, provided George with a racing body and wings that weighed considerably less than the originals. Additionally, the engine was again stripped, the rods, etc. polished and balanced, and the cylinder head skimmed to raise the compression, and fitted with larger valves.

In the 1948 Manx Cup race on the Isle of Man, although he was outclassed by larger-capacity machinery, he finished fourth overall. Having proved the car, he competed in many other events during that year, including the Ulster Trophy Handicap Race where he was again



The 1951 race programme.

placed fourth. He also competed at Montlhéry in a twelve-hour race, partnered by Oscar Moore, and finished fourth in class. The season ended with yet another run at Brighton, plus an entry in the first ever Goodwood meeting where he won the 1,500cc class in his race.

To comply with the regulations for entering the 1949 Le Mans the car would have to be fitted with a new body. Constructed of a framework of tubular and flat-section steel strips clad with 20-gauge aluminium sheeting, the result was a car that met the criteria of the race organisers, but was lightweight and had a small frontal area. For the drive to the circuit, the Phillips' party consisted of his co-driver, Curly Dryden and a mechanic travelling in a tender car and George with his wife, Barbara in the TC.

During the race the TC special ran faultlessly for almost all of the twenty-four hours before an infringement of the rules forced their retirement. At Le Mans, in the race all work on the car had to be carried out by the driver using tools and spares carried in the vehicle. The car stopped some distance from the pits with an ignition fault and the mechanic was sent to advise Dryden about repairs and to try to pass him a magneto without anyone seeing. Stupidly, not only did the

unfortunate man repair the car himself, he also cadged a lift back to the pits. The car was rightly disqualified.

For 1950 race the team consisted of George and Barbara Phillips, co-driver, Eric Winterbottom, and Denis Jones as mechanic. In preparation, he built up an engine balanced by Laystall and fitted with chrome-plated cylinder liners. At the circuit, despite the car passing the previous year, the officials insisted that the front wings be modified and additional headlights fitted. The car ran faultlessly, maintaining an average speed of 73mph over the twenty-four hours of the race. This time there were no infringements or dramas and they were placed second in their class and classified eighteenth overall.

The four MGA prototypes prepared for the 1955 race at the factory before the event.

George sold his TC special at the end of the 1950 season and wishing to see an MG in the race, Abingdon decided that a modified and re-bodied TD would be prepared for George on an unofficial basis. A standard TD chassis was fitted with an all-enveloping body designed by Sydney Enever and the tuned TD engine and a higher rear axle ratio gave the car an estimated a top speed on the Mulsanne straight of 116mph and a lap of over 80mph. Once again the Phillips family made the pilgrimage to Le Mans but the 1951 race was to be a disappointment for them and the MG factory. In practice the TD performed as expected, lapping faster than the TC special managed the previous year. Allen Rippon was co-driver and the TD special attracted considerable spectator attention. At first, the car ran well and recorded respectable lap times, but towards the end of his first spell, and after George had just reduced his lap time to below six minutes, there were ominous sounds from the engine compartment. He returned to the pits to find that a valve had dropped and holed a piston.

Thus ended the efforts of George Phillips and MG at Le Mans. There were no MGs entries for the 1952, 1953 or 1954 events. Although the 1951 TD special had been a disappointment, the seeds had obviously been sown and when the MGA eventually went into production it was to this famous motor race that the factory turned for its competition debut.

The standard MGA chassis and suspension were used, although a higher rear axle ratio was necessary in view of the high speeds attainable on the Mulsanne straight. The bodywork looked standard, but was made entirely from aluminium; the production cars had steel bodies with aluminium doors, bonnet and boot lid. The BMC 1.5-litre, B-series engines were tuned to improve gas flow by fitting larger valves and extending the inlet tracts through the cylinder heads to balance pipes on the opposite sides of the engines. 20gal fuel tanks were used and the full-width windscreens replaced with Perspex air deflectors.

The story of the horrific 1955 accident has been told so often that

The 1960 MG entry was the twin-cam coupé driven by Ted Lund and Colin Escott. Here the car heads an AC - Bristol through White House Corner.

no further reference need be made here, save to say that the adverse publicity reduced the effectiveness of the MG efforts to promote the forthcoming MG. Understandably, most popular papers were full of stories about the accident and it was left to the motoring press to cover other aspects of the race. MG had three cars running and the drivers were Dick Jacobs, Joe Flynn, Johnny Lockett, Ken Miles, Ted Lund, and Hans Waeffler.

The race started well with all three MGs leaving the starting grid without any last-minute dramas. In the first couple of hours the MG drivers settled down to lap steadily well within their prescribed times. Led by Ted Lund in car 64, with Lockett in 41 just ahead of Jacobs in 42. The big accident happened when the race was just over two hours old and the MGs were due to make their pit stops. About the same time the Dick Jacobs car was involved in an accident at White House corner, causing him life-threatening injuries that terminated his career as a racing driver. At the end of their first stint at the wheel, the other two drivers came in for their routine pit stops and were relieved by Ken Miles and Hans Waeffler.

The two MGAs continued to circulate at steady speeds with Ken Miles posting the fastest lap at an average of 94 mph, recording 117.39mph on the Mulsanne straight. In the early hours of Sunday morning Ted Lund had a minor accident at Arnage, denting a front wing against the tail of a Jaguar stranded in the sand. When the chequered flag fell at exactly 4pm, it was actually Ted Lund in seventeenth place who was first over the line. The other MG was still twelfth and had it not been for the accident to Dick Jacobs car, and the horrific Mercedes crash, this could have been a cause for real celebration on MGs return to front line, factory supported racing. As it was, the cars themselves had stood up well and no significant flaws in the design had been exposed.

Perhaps because of the adverse publicity from the crashes, BMC management decided against further MGA entries at Le Mans and it was not until 1959, when Ted Lund decided he would like to try again, that there was an MG in the entry lists. He was able to obtain a lightweight body of the type used for the 1955 cars and, with much help from Abingdon, this was mated to a 1959 Twin Cam chassis fitted with a close-ratio gearbox and a 4.1:1 rear axle. The car was entered in the name of the MG Car Club and Ted's co-driver was Colin Escott. For the drivers of the sole MG, the 1959 race started well enough with the car performing to plan. However, fate intervened at the end of the Mulsanne straight in the shape of a stray Alsatian dog, which the MG hit at high speed. The car was seriously damaged and the dog was in an even worse state. In the pits some hasty repairs were carried out but distortion of the front of the body affected the airflow through the radiator and this eventually caused the engine to overheat and expire.

Ted returned in 1960 with the repaired car converted to a coupé and with steel front wings replacing the damaged aluminium ones. MGA coupé doors with Perspex side windows had been fitted and the roof was neatly blended into a fixed, sloping rear section. The twin-cam

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Paddy Hopkirk and Andrew Hedges drove DRX 255C in the 1965 race. The last one in which an MGB was entered.

engine installed was bored out from 1,588cc to 1,762cc, taking the car into two-litre class. Practice was wet, but the race started in the dry and the MG crew soon settled down to complete each lap in around 5mins 10sec, about 95mph. Unfortunately, heavy rain set in on the Saturday night and this revealed the only serious fault on the car, the wipers started to misbehave. In the end the car was placed first in class, averaging 91.12 mph, and took twelfth position in the overall classification.

Encouraged by this success, Ted entered the car for the race the following year. It still had the larger-capacity, twin-cam unit, but power was boosted to 128bhp at 7,000rpm by fitting larger carburettors. To improve air penetration the radiator inlet in the front panel was reduced in size. South African Bob Olthoff was chosen as co-driver. The race started well for the MG contingent and the car was lapping steadily in thirtieth place when disaster struck. A few laps into the race the engine destroyed itself on the Mulsanne straight and later examination found a failed big-end bolt to be the culprit. Before the car stopped Ted had managed a lap at 101mph. This was the fastest-ever lap in an MG up to that time and perhaps rather faster than was prudent so early in the race.

Ted was unable to get an entry in 1962 and the next MG at Le Mans was to be one of the then-new MGBs that had been entered by the factory for the 1963 race. The sole MG entered was roadster 7 DBL and as there was still officially a company ban on MGs racing, at least in Europe, it was nominally a private entry by one of the drivers, Alan Hutcheson. The other seat for went to rally ace, Paddy Hopkirk, who was also highly regarded as a driver on the track. For the race the push-rod BMC B-series engine had been bored to 1,803cc and fitted with a high-lift camshaft, single Weber carburettor, 10.4:1 compression, polished and gas-flowed cylinder head, and large-bore exhaust system. Equipped with a close-ratio gearbox and 3.3:1 gearing in the axle, top speed was around 130mph and the team were confident of achieving qualifying lap times. A further modification was the addition of a longer nose section to aid air penetration at high speed.

An estimated 340,000 spectators were at the track when the flag dropped for the 4 pm start of the 1963 Le Mans. It is interesting to see that BBC television were devoting a total of ninety minutes on the Saturday and seventy-five on the Sunday to live reports from the race, in addition to over one-and-a-half hours of radio coverage on the light programme. How things have changed. Main interest centred on the faster cars and it was the Ferrari/Cobra/Jaguar battles that gained most coverage. The lone MGB was matched against Porsches and Sunbeam Alpines in the two-litre GT category and received much support from British fans, many would have travelled to see the race in their own MGs.

In the heady excitement of his opening stint at the wheel, Alan Hutcheson ran wide at Mulsanne on the twelfth lap and ran into the sand trap. The MGB immediately bogged down and Alan spent the next ninety minutes frantically digging a pathway through the sand, while keeping a watchful eye for any other cars that looked likely to join him. Eventually he managed to regain the track and from then on the MGB ran almost faultlessly for the remainder of the race. Unfortunately, there was no way they would have been able to regain so much lost time and their 92 mph average for the race was below expectations. The fastest lap was 104.14 mph and the team had hoped to average close to 100 mph. Luckily,

In 1964 the Paddy Hopkirk/Andrew Hedges MGB is passing a Rene-Bonnet. The MGB performed faultlessly in the race, setting a near-100 mph average speed and gaining the Motor Trophy as highest-placed British car.

their immediate competitors fared even worse and the MGB scored a creditable class win, finishing in twelfth place overall.

The modest success enjoyed by the MGB meant for the following year there was an official entry from the BMC Competition Department. This was again an MGB with an extended nose section and the drivers were Andrew Hedges and Paddy Hopkirk, with Pat Vanson as reserve. There were no wild excursions to disturb things and, apart from one unscheduled stop to replace a slightly bucked wheel and some extra pit time to fit a replacement fuel filler cap, all went to schedule. Unfortunately, there was to be no class victory as the opposition from Porsche and Alfa-Romeo was far too strong for a near-standard road car. Their target was to be the first British entry to finish and this they achieved, taking the Motor trophy in the process. The average speed for the race was 99.945mph, just below the magic 100mph.

Having had two good results from two starts, it was decided that a lone MGB would run again in 1965 in an effort to score a hat trick of finishes. A new car was prepared to similar specification as previously and there is little doubt that it was probably closer to road-going trim than any other car in the race. Apart from engine tuning and different gear ratios, only the extended nose and some lightweight panels distinguished DRX 255C from any other MGB. Andrew Hedges and Paddy Hopkirk were to share the driving.

This was the last year that a near-standard production MG sports car was to run in a race that was becoming ever more geared towards providing entries solely for racing machinery. The MGB maintained its unblemished Le Mans record by running for twenty-four hours at near maximum speed with only one failed component, a light bulb. The car achieved the highest-ever post-war placing for the marque, finishing in eleventh place, and was second in class. They also took the Motor trophy for the highest-placed British entry. So there ended a chapter in MG history that saw the marque win honourable awards in one of the toughest motor races in the world.

Ted Lund Special

After many years in storage, this MG PB resurfaced and was established as the one which Ted Lund, famous MG Works driver of the late 1940s to early 1950s, once drove to a string of notable successes.

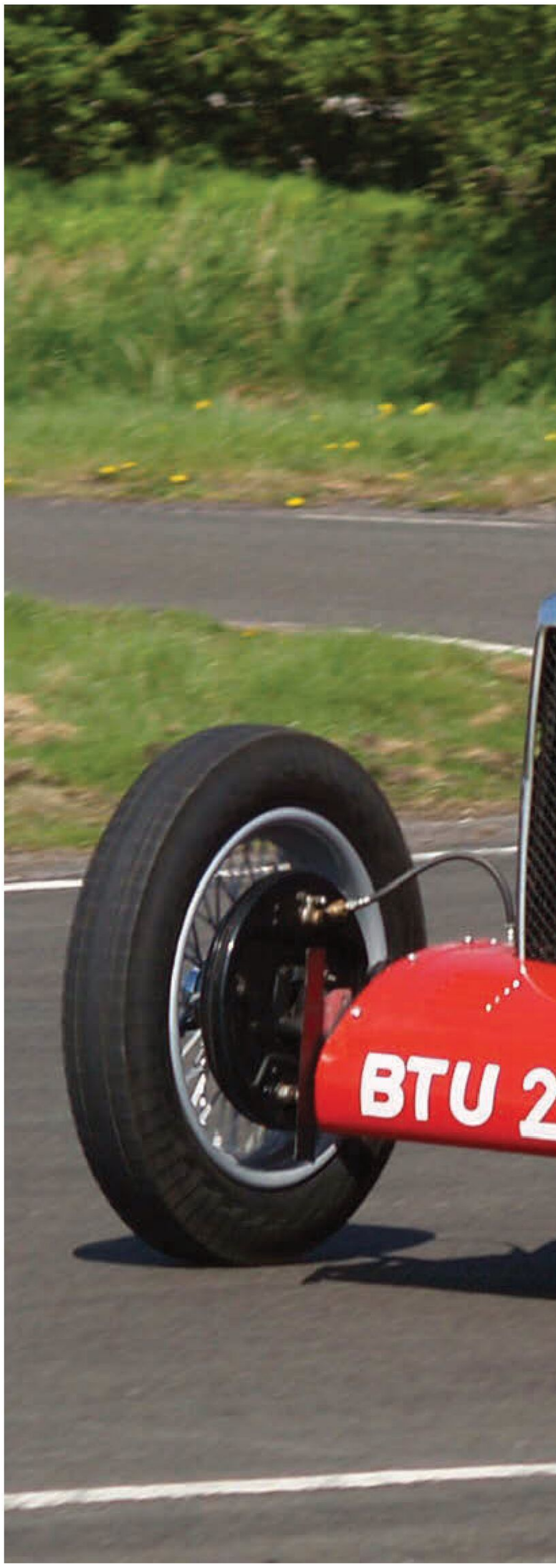
A car with established history possesses a certain allure for enthusiasts of any marque, particularly if there is a connection with a famous motorsport figure such as Ted Lund. Ted grew up with a family connection to MG that dated back to Cecil Kimber being a schoolmate of his father, with the pair of them being active members of the Manchester Motor Club. Later on, Ted was invited to join the MG Works team by John Thornley, MG's general manager at the time, together with other famous drivers of the day such as Dick Jacobs and George Phillips.

Ted competed in the last of the T-series MGs to be entered in competition, and then made the transition to the first works-prepared MGAs, which included one of the three famous prototype, alloy-bodied EX182 cars entered for the 1955 Le Mans race. Here Ted partnered Hans Waeffler and took 17th place. He also drove a specially prepared MGA at Le Mans in 1961, winning the two-litre class, an outstanding success which he shared with Colin Escott in the adapted fastback MGA registered as SRX 210.

The car we are looking at today, however, is a PB. It has been restored by John Seber, someone whose competition-modified cars have featured in this publication previously – the MG P/N Special in August 2008, and the MG PA in March 2012. With such experience, it didn't take John long to establish this car's history and its connection with Ted Lund. The car was originally built as a four-seater in 1936 for its first owner, but it was damaged in a crash during the following year. It was then bought in a thoroughly battered condition by Jack Terras of the Bucklow Garage near Knutsford in Cheshire, who was interested in adapting the remains in a number of ways for motorsport. Jack removed the four-seater body and swapped this for a lightweight J2-type one. He then campaigned the car as part of a three car team, named the 'Nor' West', in trials and speed events in that part of the country. It is believed by John that the Brooklands-style twin fillers may be the original 1930s fittings dating to Jack's ownership.

In 1946, Ted Lund bought the car when he was working for the family business, E K Lund of Coppall. Some years later in 1950, this firm became an MG dealership, which no doubt had something to do with Lund's involvement with the MG Works team. Successes in the privately-entered PB, which still bears the original registration BTU 260, included taking the Jeans Gold Cup, the Daily Courier Cup, the Kimber Trophy, the Rhodes Cup in the Colmore Trial, a first-class award when competing in the Gloucester Cup, and first place in the Evening Gazette Cup Race on one occasion. In addition, Ted also raced the car in the sand events held locally at Wallasey.

The car was also a regular at hillclimbs such as Shelsley Walsh, Bo'ness, Prescott and the aptly named Rest and Be Thankful! A choice of engines were available, as an 850cc and a 1000cc motor were prepared for blown and unblown events respectively. Ted also took the car abroad, and it was entered in the Grand Prix de Frontières at Chimay in Belgium, where it came fourth in the under two-litre class. It was then



whisked away to complete a few hundred more miles touring Europe.

Further developments included fitting an MG Magnette body that came from Kenneth Evans' 1935 Tourist Trophy car. A pre-selector gearbox was also installed, but then removed as it absorbed too much power and the original, reverse

pattern manual gearbox put back in. The car also competed in the Isle of Man Mannin Beg road races in 1947 through to 1949, although it had been offered for sale in 1948, no doubt as a consequence of newer, faster cars coming on stream.

A buyer was eventually found in 1950 when Tom Blackburn of Preston became the new owner, and with assistance from Ted Lund with preparation, the PB was then entered in the 1951 Scottish Rally. It also saw race action at Silverstone, Goodwood and at Charterhall in Scotland. Tom also took the car for a return trip to Chimay in 1951 for a re-run of the Grand Prix de Frontières.

The car was then sold on to a Mr E Higgs of Sale in Cheshire, then to a Mr E Wilson of Withington, Manchester, before Ray Masters bought the car in 1961. It was then rebuilt in preparation for taking part in Vintage Sports-Car Club events, its first post-rebuild outing being at Silverstone in 1963. This was soon followed in September

TRACK: TED LUND SPECIAL

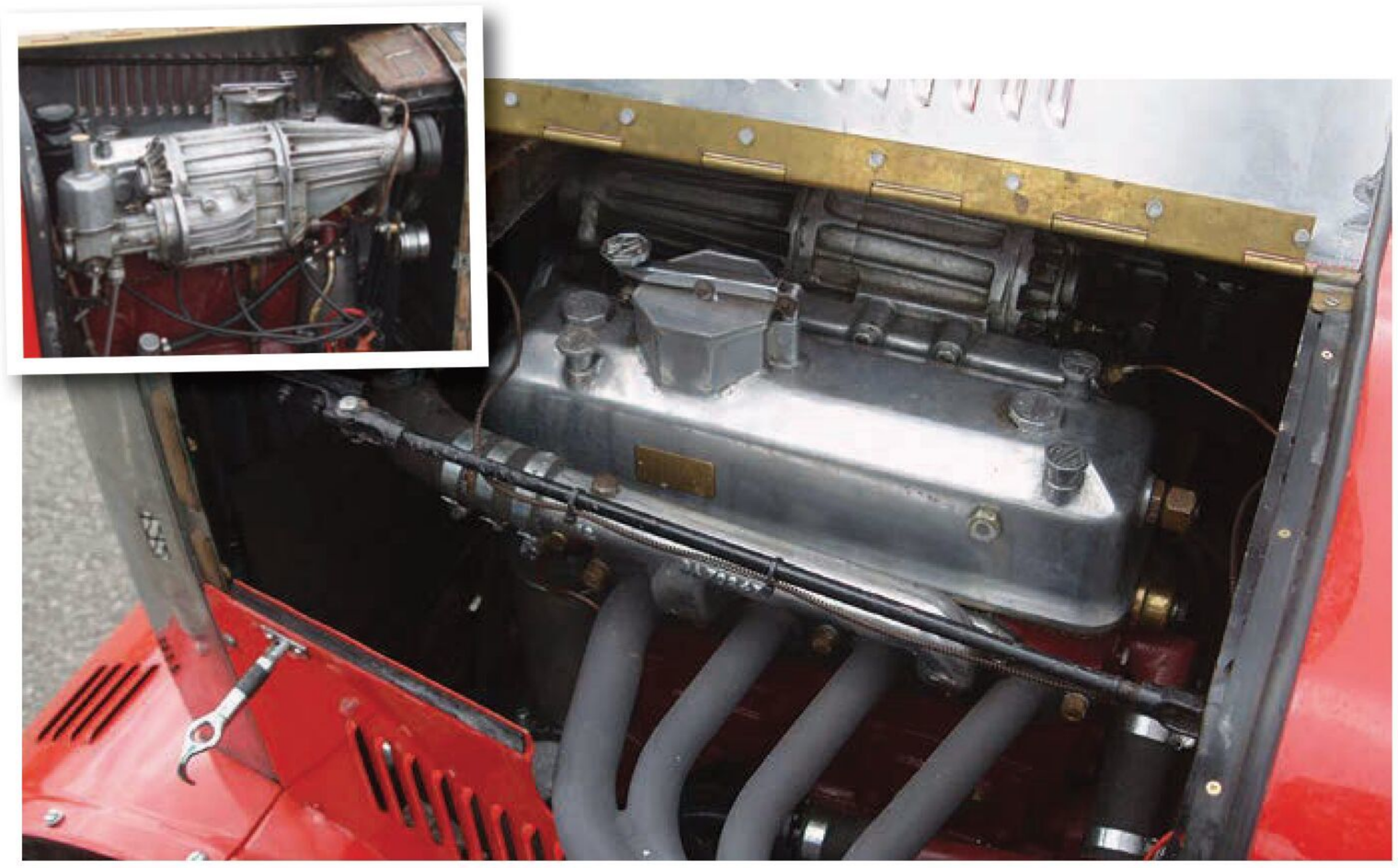
by a visit to the newly opened Curborough sprint course – a venue where we photographed it for this feature to show its present, revitalised condition. In 1970, Nev Churcher became the new owner and the PB competed at Thruxton, Silverstone and Ditcham hillclimb, with torque reaction rods added to improve braking action. However, after many years of competition use since Ray Masters last rebuilt the car, the white metal bearings failed, so the car was retired from competition before eventually finding a new owner in 1975 – Norman Willett of Romford in Essex.

Norman sadly passed away, but he had been a business partner of John Seber, and their paths also ran alongside each other in terms of their affection for old MGs. Norman had started restoring the PB and in his memory, his widow, June Willett, asked John to complete the restoration of the car that Norman had started. This was done to John's customary high standards, and the car was track-tested for performance and reliability across the 2013 race season.

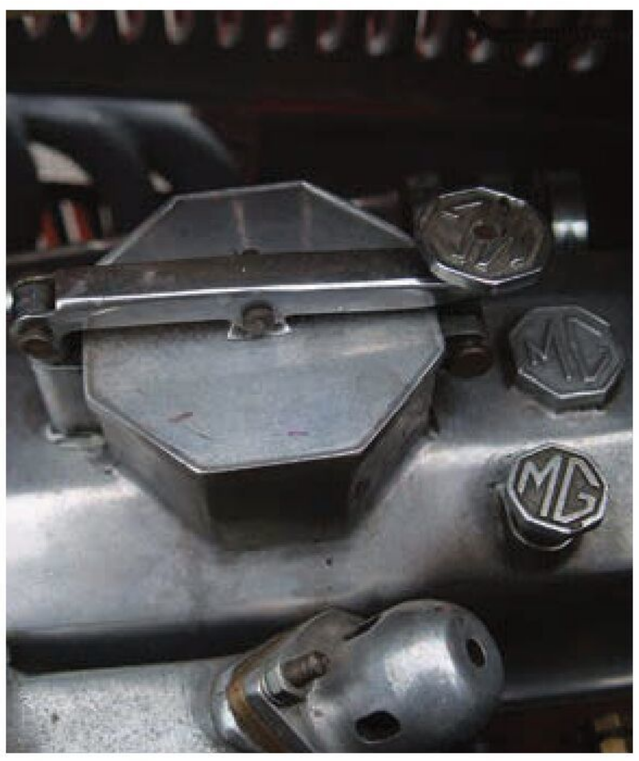
'This car has over a hundred awards to its credit,' commented John, 'and June asked me to rebuild the car where this was necessary for her grandsons to drive. The car's chassis is all still original, although the 950cc engine has been rebuilt with a new Baynton Jones cylinder head to the original MG design as well as new high compression pistons, a Phoenix crankshaft and con rods. The supercharger is original and this had probably not been touched since before the war.'

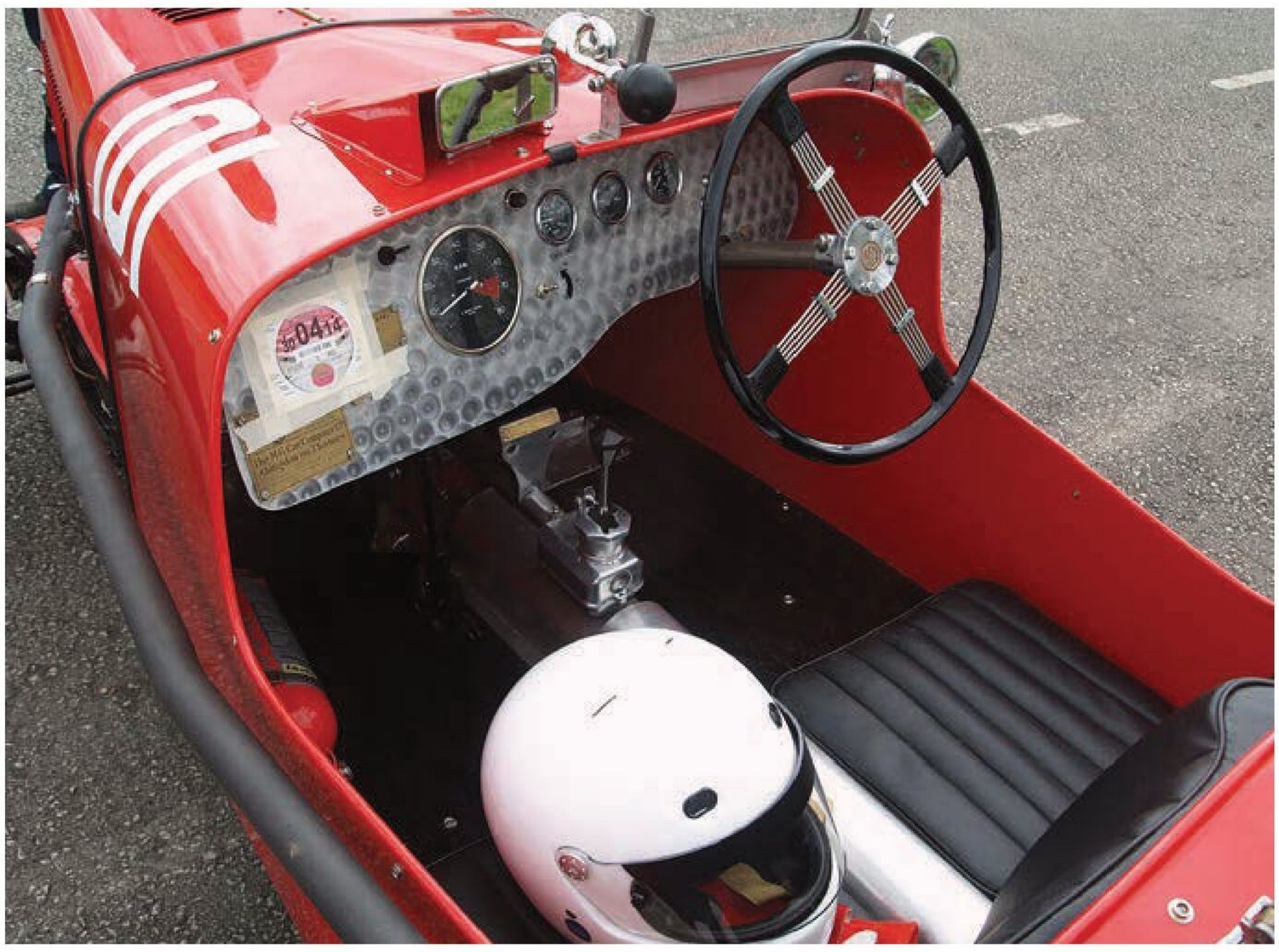
Norman had previously fitted a Colvin Gunn-supplied, authentic MG-style body in 1988, which John tweaked for a better fit on the chassis frame. The main advantage of this is that the body can be easily removed now to get at the underlying chassis and other concealed parts. The chassis was shortened in the car's first competition metamorphosis back in the 1930s by the removal of a few inches together with the rearmost crossmember when the car was converted from a four-seater PB, although not to the detriment of chassis stiffness, as John confirmed after competing in the first practice runs at Curborough. This car was also driven at this sprint by Chris Broad, Chris being John's neighbour who assisted with the rebuild when a second set of hands was needed on occasion – assistance that seems to have paid off most handsomely with an invitation to drive the car at Curborough and also the VSCC hillclimb at Shelsley Walsh!

John had already driven the PB at Silverstone for the VSCC Spring Start in April, an outing that didn't go all that well owing to the engine refusing to climb to the top of the anticipated rev range of about 6500rpm. John was determined to sort this out on the much shorter Curborough sprint course where there is a strong demand for peak revs when rowing up and down the gears. But if the engine was reluctant to give of its best, the car's roadholding seemed just right – the springs not having been adjusted in any way, although John likes to tighten up the front end as much as possible with the period friction dampers screwed up to the max, making the front suspension taut and almost totally rigid.



The 950cc engine has been rebuilt with a Baynton Jones head and is still fitted with its original supercharger from Ted Lund's era.





Colvin Gunn-supplied body fitted in 1988 is faithful recreation of MG's period style.

The car's braking system also came in for favourable comments at Silverstone and Curborough, this being based on a period modification by Ted Lund involving a set of hydraulic brakes from a Wolseley Hornet of the same era. John simply changed the linings and the rubbers in the brake slave cylinders; he also fitted a new stock master cylinder of the correct Wolseley Hornet type.

Chris's inaugural experience driving a pre-war racer was not the smoothest, with the engine still refusing to rev to its full potential even after the petrol/air mixture had been altered. This resulted in yet more exploratory adjustments to make the engine rev to 7000rpm rather than cutting out at 5500rpm, with the need to back off the throttle ever so slightly to stop the engine spluttering to regain the lower rpm figure.

John had argued that the steering was a bit too responsive bearing in mind the heavier steering response he is used to from the Wolseley special which he normally drives, although Chris is not convinced. 'The steering is so direct, almost as if you look in a new direction and off the car goes,' he said. 'It's much the same as I've experienced driving my Lotus Elan. Driving this car was much better than the last old MG that I drove, an M-Type, which was a real little pig as you had to go on climbing up and then down the gears to keep the engine on song. This car's gearing seems just right for driving a sprint course such as Curborough.'

Checking the oil viscosity in the 1½in SU carburettor damper didn't seem to make much of a difference to the running, and although fourth gear should maybe have been attainable on the final straight, the low revving dictated second and third gear all the way round. Checking the spark plugs for an over-rich mixture proved that this wasn't he problem, as the soot deposits found at Silverstone were absent and the correct shade of light brown attained suggested the fuel to air mixture was correct after the latest bout of pre-event tuning.

Freshly restored and back in action at Curborough sprint course, this PB has a long history of competition.

Further tuning refinement then took place before the Shelsley Walsh hillclimb, which seemed to be most successful. 'John had increased the fuel mixture strength,' reported Chris, 'and the car was quite a different little beast. Although the car is road registered, it is a racing car so it wouldn't feel all that comfortable on the road. With a supercharger installed, you touch the throttle and the car then comes alive. This old beauty has real racing pedigree!'

Chris has also been involved with John's car by assisting with repairs and adjustments in the pits, although no such work was needed for Shelsley Walsh as Chris and John merely sat out the intense summer weather while eating ice creams. But John's main competition interest concerns race track events, which is something that Chris has yet to experience. Having said that, he describes driving up Shelsley Walsh as 'my best experience in the car to date. This was brilliant, as I preferred hill climbing to a competition sprint event. Going up a hill as fast as you can was a lot more challenging, and I found it easier to make progress each time by knocking off a few seconds. At the Curborough sprint I found it more difficult to improve on my times.

'The MG drove pretty well flat out today as far as the first real bend, and I feel that I could have pushed it harder through the corners. But it is not my car, so I eased off slightly when some tyre squeal warned me to do so. The attention paid to the carburettor has really paid off though, and this car feels so well put together.'

All in all it is great to see this car back in action, a car that was already quite old when Ted Lund took it on and used it to his advantage as a much needed first stepping stone to becoming a member of the MG Works team.

The twin fuel fillers are believed to date back to Jack Terras' ownership in the 1930s.

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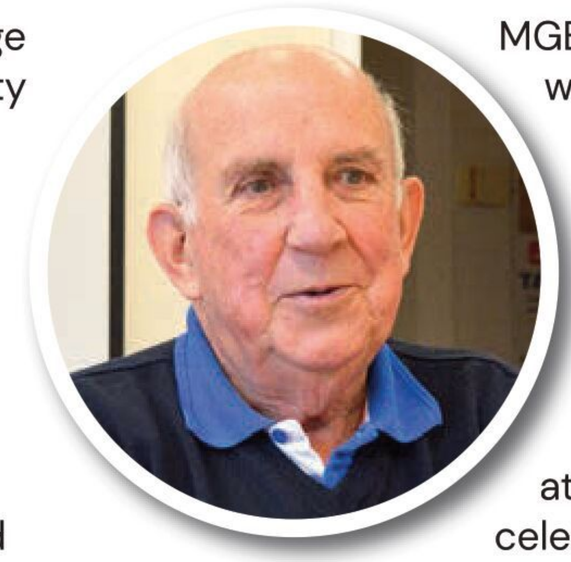
Den Green and the Sebring MGBs

Mike Taylor talks to ex-BMC Competitions Department engineer Den Green and homologations expert Bill Price about preparing the MGBs to race at Sebring.

The 1950s saw a huge rise in the popularity of sports car ownership, and racing in particular, on both sides of the Atlantic. Just over 100,000 MGAs had been built by the time production ceased in 1962, but its successor, the MGB, sold 512,112 units in both tourer and GT form, marking it out as the UK's top selling sports car and the first to reach half a million units. Critical to the MGB's sales volume was the American market, with some 75% of all production reaching the US shores.

Racing success contributed a great deal to that sales volume. In mid-1962 the BMC Competitions Committee convened in Longbridge for their annual meeting to discuss the coming year's list of events, and the budget necessary to fund the programme. With the MGB launch planned for the Motor Show that month and the huge sales potential in America, entering



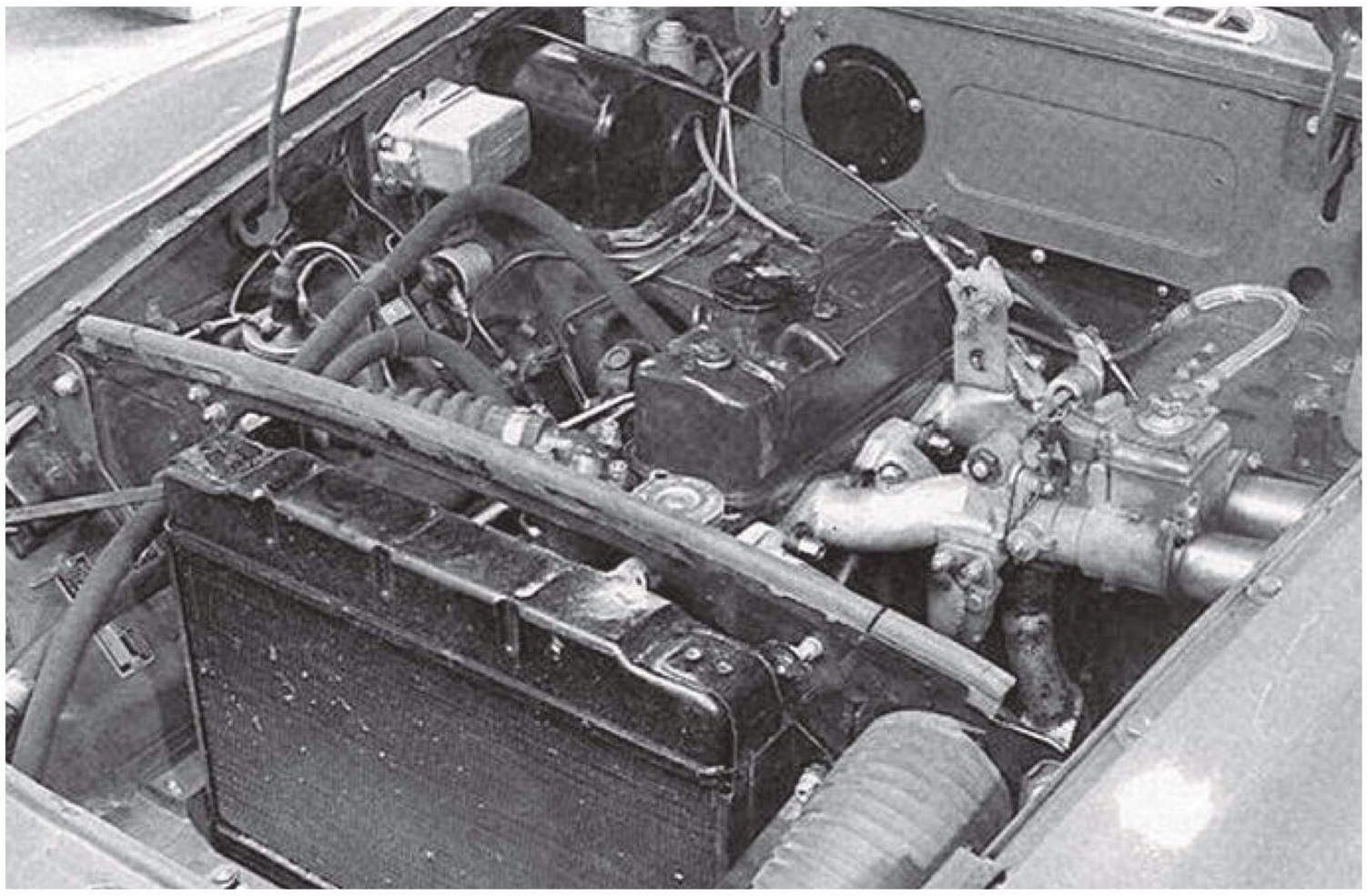
MGBs in Sebring in March was seen as prerequisite to its competition calendar starting in 1963. Interestingly, this prestigious event was specifically chosen since it had the additional bonus of attracting the occasional celebrity driver of the day, such as film star Steve McQueen.

A budget was assigned to build three cars – two racers and a third as a practice vehicle. These were prepared by the Competitions Department, and Den Green was a member of the talented group of mechanics whose job it was to build competition cars to take part in events around the world.

'I was born in 1933 in Wolvercote, then a small village on the northern outskirts of Oxford,' says Den. 'In those days it was not unusual to attend the same school from infancy until leaving as a teenager. When evacuees began arriving after the outbreak of war in 1939, the classes were so full that we attended mornings only one week and afternoons only the next. The situation was hardly ideal for our education, though I don't think I suffered as a result.'

Den's brother Reginald, 18 years his senior, was already working in the car industry when Den left school, which in part was responsible for triggering his interest in cars. 'Like most boys who were passionate about all things mechanical, I had a Meccano set,' continues Den. 'This, and looking at Reginald's collection of car books, fired my imagination.'

There were quite a few garages locally, and in 1948 Den found a job working for a Vauxhall, Bedford and Jaguar dealership called City Motors. He tells us: 'One of the mechanics had been in the RAF and waxed lyrical about his experiences. I completed a comprehensive five-year apprenticeship, and then broke off temporarily to undertake my National Service. When it came to choosing



The MGBs were fitted with a Weber carb rather than SUs for Sebring.

which service, naturally it was the RAF and I found myself at RAF Scampton, renowned as headquarters for 617 Squadron, the Dam Busters, where I worked on military vehicles. My arrival coincided with the making of the feature film.'

At the time some of Den's relatives worked for the MG Car Company in Abingdon. So, his stint of National Service over in 1956, Den applied there for a job. 'But, this was at a time of stringent petrol rationing and employees were being laid off,' recalls Den. 'So I returned to City Motors, staying for ten months before I was contacted by MG advising me that there was a vacancy in the test and inspection department, which involved road testing cars before delivery.' So in 1957 Den found himself back at Abingdon for an interview, where he was asked if he had ever been involved with preparing competition cars. 'I explained that at the garage where I worked we built a Vauxhall Velox for rallying, trying to make it more competitive,' says Den. 'I was then sent over to meet Marcus Chambers, BMC's Competitions Department manager.'

At the time Competitions and Experimental were based side-by-side in two small workshops located in B Block. 'Walking into the Competitions Department for the first time was extremely exciting,' grins Den at the memory. 'All around me was a hive of activity with mechanics working on cars like Big Healeys, MGAs and even Austin Westminsters in various stages of preparation for rallies with extra driving lights, while inside were special rally seats, additional instruments and navigation aids.'

Den was ushered into Marcus Chambers' office, which was located at one end of the busy workshops. 'Marcus explained that the opportunity had come about because someone was leaving the department and that there would be quite a lot of travelling abroad. As I had just got married, the idea of earning extra cash was a huge incentive. He also asked me about my background and previous experience, as well as my time with the RAF. Marcus then said he'd invite his workshop foreman, Doug Watts to have a chat with me. Doug proceeded to ask me quite a lot of searching questions, including details about what vehicles I'd worked on.'

In fact, some 12 people from within the MG factory had applied for the post so competition was fierce. 'I expect the reason I was selected was partly because in addition to completing an intensive five year apprenticeship, I'd also worked on vehicles in the services and had the experience of preparing the Vauxhall for rallying,' says Den.

When he arrived at MG in 1957, in addition to Doug Watts and deputy foremen Doug Hamblin and Tommy Wellman, the team comprised some ten mechanics, each of whom had his own workbench. This formed part of a bay where individual cars were prepared, the mechanic working to a specification sheet produced by Doug Watts and Tommy Wellman. 'It was policy to supply your own tools, so when I moved to Abingdon I brought all my own equipment with me,' he adds.

At the outset it was a Competitions Department rule that the preparation of each car would be the responsibility of one mechanic, who accomplished everything including building the drivetrain to competition specification, modifying the suspension and brakes, and uprating the interior around the rally driver and co-driver's requirements. The only aspect of the work that was farmed out was the additional wiring required for the electrical components, this task being performed by representatives from the Lucas Racing division.

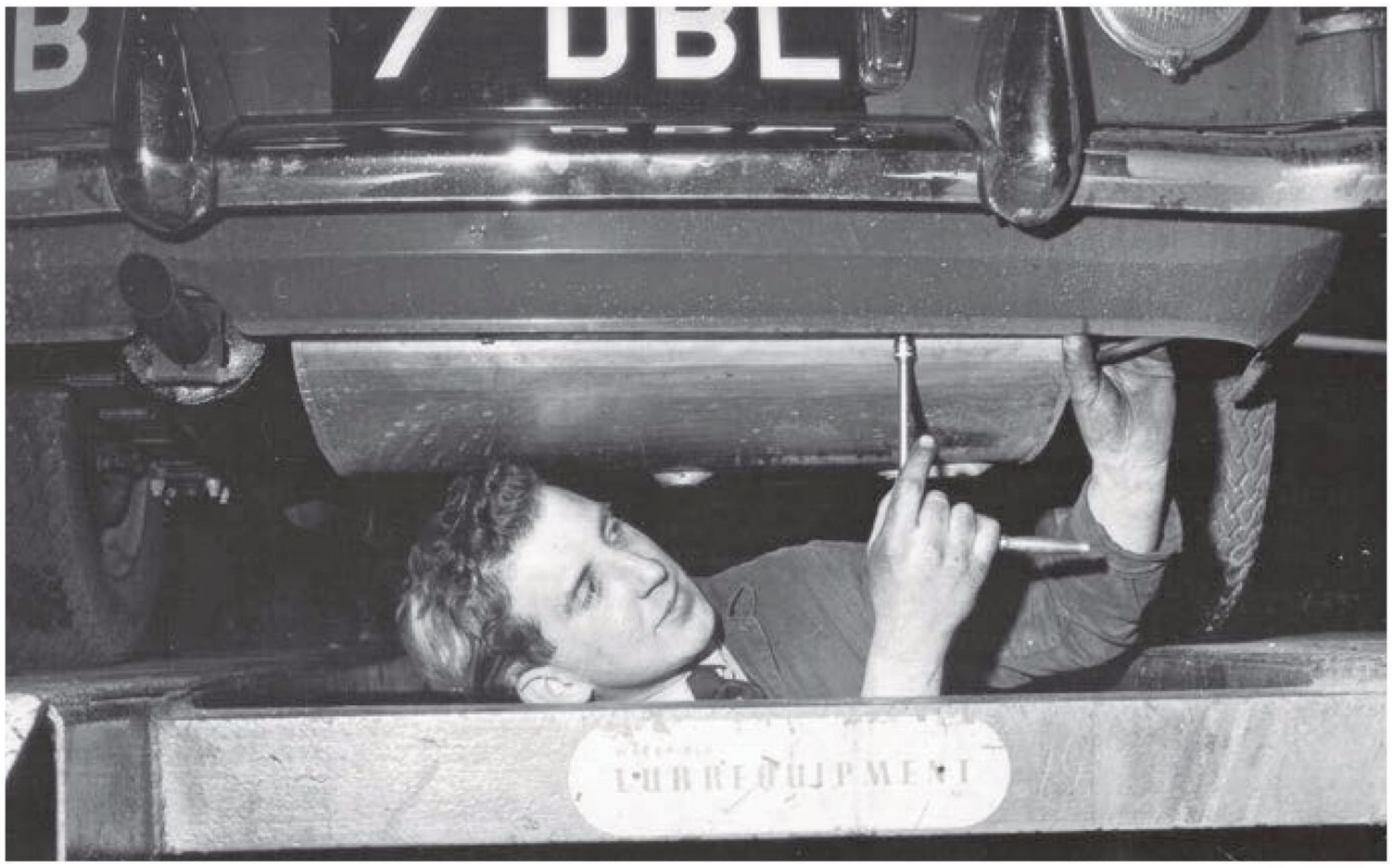
'The first car I worked on was a Wolseley 1500, turning it into the more sporty Riley 1.5 mechanical specification, which had a twin SU carburettor engine and was about to be launched. My job was to prepare it for the Monte Carlo Rally of 1958,' recalls Den. His own introduction to participating in rallies was on the Alpine in which he prepared one of three MGAs, working alongside another mechanic, Jonny Organ. 'On the rally we took the old dark green transporter, registration number LBL 405, and spending a day behind the wheel of that vehicle was really hard work as it had no power steering,' he relates. Reflecting on those early days in the department, Den adds: 'I learnt a lot about preparing cars to take part in international events. I spent around 12 months working before I was allocated my own bay next to Knobby Hall, perhaps one of the best engineering tradesman I ever knew.'

Marketing and publicity was a major aspect of promoting BMC's products. To provide umbrella coverage for the five marques of MG, Austin, Morris, Wolseley and Riley, a rosette shaped logo was designed with the words BMC embossed across the centre, every car coming off BMC's production lines carrying this emblem affixed to

its windscreen. Marcus Chambers chose the words 'Ecurie *[French for team]* Safety Fast' as the licence name to register cars taking part in events such as Sebring. He then asked one of Abingdon's youngest designers, Peter Neal, to use the rosette logo, redesigning it for use on competition cars with the words 'Ecurie Safety Fast' stylised across the centre.

Like the MGAs entered at Le Mans in 1955, the three MGBs destined for Sebring were all assembled using detailed multi-page build sheets. However, there was a significant difference between the build programme for the Le Mans MGAs and the Sebring MGBs; the former were prepared by Jimmy Cox and his colleagues in the Experimental Department since the entry at Le Mans was to be the MGA's first race and signalled the launch of the car onto the open market. The MGBs were to be prepared by BMC's Competition Department next door – by then this section had been preparing and entering competition cars for some seven years and the skilled mechanics were more than versed in the task.

Meanwhile, an agreement was reached with BMC North America over entering the two MGBs (6 DBL and 7 DBL) in the Sebring 12 Hours event, with a third car (8 DBL) acting as a practice vehicle. The race cars were registered under the name of Ecurie Safety Fast, 6 DBL to be driven with the race number 48 by Christabel Carlisle and American race driver and journalist Denise McCluggage (who had won the Grand Touring class of the Sebring 12 hours in 1961 driving a Ferrari 250GT) , while 7 DBL (car number 47) would be driven by US race drivers Jim Parkinson and Jack Flaherty, veterans of several previous Sebring efforts in factory MGAs.



Den Green working at Abingdon on the Sebring MGB to be driven by Jim Parkinson and Jack Flaherty.

To stimulate media interest, on 29 November 1962 a standard MGB was taken to Silverstone where Christabel and fellow female race drivers Liz Jones and Pauline Mayman performed timed laps for the press.

The bodyshells of the MGBs destined for Sebring were left largely standard. However, an easily achievable weight saving was the addition of aluminium door skins, bootlids and bonnets manufactured by Pressed Steel in Swindon. 'More weight saving was achieved by removing all the interior trim,' says Den. 'Then we fabricated a special dashboard to accommodate the all-important instruments, with a large rev counter mounted ahead of the driver's line of vision, while the driver's seat was replaced by a bucket type racing seat. A full harness safety belt was also installed. Finally, we fitted all the MGBs with white GRP hard tops, removed the bumpers and added twin spotlights, clear plastic aerodynamic lenses to the headlamps and quick release bonnet straps.'

Underneath, the suspension was left unaltered except for the addition of stiffer shock absorbers. As for the brakes, these remained unassisted with the disc/drum set-up being fitted with harder pads and linings. Next, the drivetrains were winched out of the body shells and placed on the workbench so that each engine, clutch and gearbox could be separated. The engine was then dismantled so that every component could be carefully inspected.

First, the cylinder heads were changed for gas-flowed ones supplied by Weslake of Rye, Sussex. These had a compression ratio of 9.5:1, nimonic faced valves and competition valve springs to allow the engines to rev to 6000rpm. The crankshafts were left unchanged, though MGA Twin Cam type

Christabel at RAF Finmere during pre-Sebring testing. *(Photo: Bill Price)*

Two mechanics (seen here with Christabel) were sent to Sebring to help Doug Watts maintain the MGB. *(Photo: Christabel Carlisle)*

connecting rods replaced the original items and the pistons were upgraded to Wellworthy flat tops. Significantly, at the time the Experimental Department in liaison with Glacier Bearings were researching an aluminium/tin bearing surface compound for use with conrod and crankshaft main bearings to assess their capability of withstanding prolonged heavy loads and resistance to corrosion. As part of the programme, it was decided to fit the connecting rods and crankshafts of all three Sebring MGBs with this type of bearing to measure their performance in the race.

The rocker shaft brackets, camshaft sprockets and crankshaft sprockets were changed to steel versions, while camshafts using Formula Junior type lift and overlap profiles were substituted for the standard components. Another deviation from standard practice was the replacement of the twin 1.5in SU carburettors with a single Weber 45DCOE type to improve performance at high revs. With the engine still on the bench, the flywheel was lightened and a Borg and Beck 8in competition clutch was added. The exhaust manifold was left standard, as was the oil cooler.

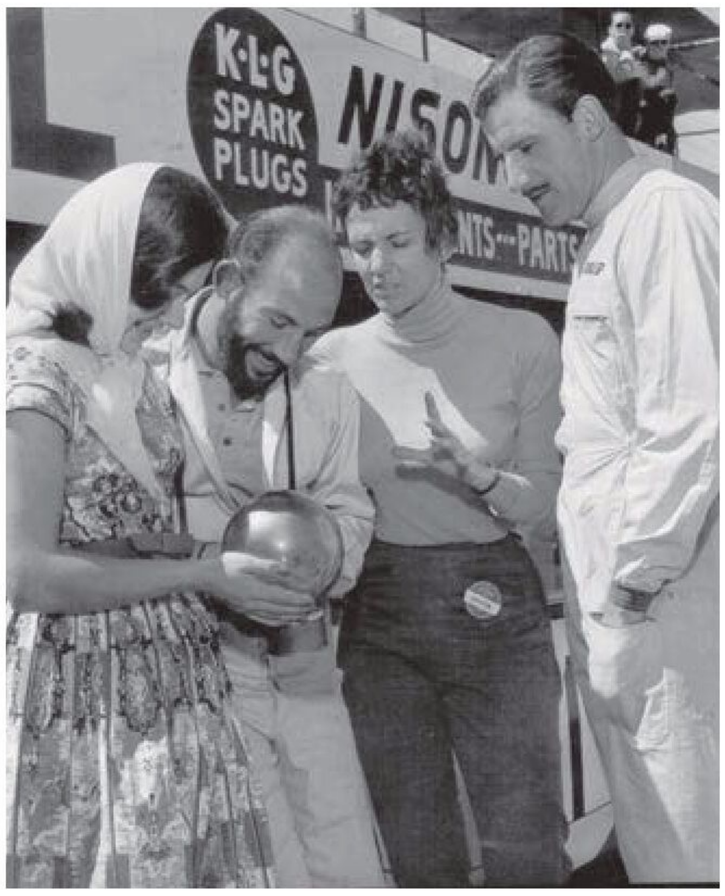
Other modifications included fitting a Lucas C40 dynamo with a larger than standard diameter pulley wheel, while the cooling fan was left off. Next, the gearboxes were stripped and clusters of close ratio gears were installed instead. When the work was completed, the engines and gearboxes were filled with Castrol XL 30 oil and the sump plugs were wired to prevent vibration shaking them loose. In this state of tune, each engine was run up on the dynamometer where they were found to produce 125bhp at 6000rpm.

'When the engines, clutches and gearboxes had been re-assembled, the units were then reinstated in the cars and made ready for testing by Doug Watts, who would road test each vehicle and before signing off the build sheets to indicate that the cars were satisfactorily completed,' continues Den. 'The winter of 1962/63 was especially severe, so testing the race MGBs could not be undertaken at the Competition Department's usual test and evaluation venue of Silverstone. As a solution it was decided to try the old RAF station at Finmere near Buckingham, which was used by BMC's Advanced Driving School.

'The whole airfield was covered in snow, so we borrowed a BMC Mobile Training Unit vehicle from the Advanced Driving School, which was driven round and round by mechanics Cliff Humphries and Robin Vokins to help break up the snow and clear a track sufficiently wide for the MGBs. Christabel Carlisle and Donald Morley then drove the three cars on the track, although the slushy conditions were hardly ideal and they were unable to circulate at speeds anywhere near replicating those possible at Sebring.'

Among his many tasks, the man responsible for the homologation paperwork for the cars prepared by BMC's Competitions Department was the capable Bill Price. Each homologation booklet comprised some ten pages covering essential aspects of the car's specification, accompanied by photographs to illustrate the details and a letter signed by a BMC Director certifying that 500 complete motor cars had been built in 12 consecutive months. Says Bill: 'My records show that the MGB was first recognised and homologated by the FIA on 9th October 1962, the Sebring MGBs being entered in the 1600-2000cc GT class. When Stuart Turner attended Sebring

Christabel talks to Stuart Turner during a break in practice at Sebring. *(Photo Christabel Carlisle)*



Christabel Carlisle with Stirling Moss, Denise McCluggage and Graham Hill pictured at Sebring in 1963.

the following year, he would have taken a copy of the FIA Homologation Form with him.'

Some six weeks before the race the three MGs were shipped from Liverpool to America, the handling being undertaken by Hambro Automotive New York, the BMC importers. A further six cars were also shipped, three Austin Healey 3000s (including a practice vehicle) and three Austin Healey Sprites (though one would be re-badged as an MG), all entered under the name of the Donald Healey Motor Co. Later, Stuart Turner – accompanied by Christabel and foreman Doug Watts who would be responsible for maintaining the MGs helped by two mechanics from BMC Canada – flew to Florida by BOAC. Other British entries in the race included E-type Jaguars – with Lucas fuel injection – three Triumph TR4s and two Sunbeam Alpines.

Held in almost perfect weather conditions on 23rd March 1963, the Sebring 12 Hours was one of four races held at the ex-USAF base in Florida that day. The 8.369km long circuit still retained much of its concrete block surface left over from its Flying Fortress days, giving drivers and cars a hard ride. Come 10 o'clock the flag dropped for the start of the 12 hour long event, which witnessed one Sunbeam Alpine scorch into the lead. Not surprisingly, it was soon briskly overtaken by the hugely powerful V8s, one of the AC Cobras leaving long tracks of rubber on the concrete from its fierce acceleration. Then, not long afterwards, McCluggage came into the pits with her exhaust system trailing along the track.

Sadly, by 12.25pm the Parkinson and Flaherty MGB was out of the race after completing 45 laps, joined at 13.15pm by its sister car with McCluggage at the wheel after completing just 35 laps. Both MGBs had apparently suffered from engine main bearing failure. The event was won by John Surtees and Ludovico Scarfioti in a Ferrari 250P.

Stuart Turner said of the MGBs at Sebring: 'John Thornley and Syd Enever's view at MG was that Sebring was a very important place where our cars should be seen competing and that the company should support it. I'd been to Sebring the previous year when we had a team of MGAs running. However, against Porsches and Ferraris, sending MGBs to Florida was always going to be class chasing, we were never going to win. Obviously the performance of the MGBs in the race was very disappointing, but you cannot stipulate that you'll win a race or rally, all you can do is ensure the team and drivers do their best. After the event, I had to rush back to the UK as we had to prepare for the Alpine Rally on 20-25 June. '

Later the green light was given to enter a single car at Le Mans in June, and the Competitions Department went ahead and prepared a B to be driven by Paddy Hopkirk and Alan Hutcheson. A special, sleekly-styled sloping bonnet was designed by Syd Enever with encased headlamp lenses, the effect of its aerodynamic efficiency being reckoned to markedly increase top speed. The car was also fitted with a GRP hard top. With a tall 3.307:1 final drive, the gearing allowed for a top speed of around 130mph at just over 6000rpm.

At the start it was Hutcheson who took the wheel, but almost before the engine had reached operating temperature he went off the track and into the sand pit at the end of the Mulsanne Straight. Under the code of practice laid down by the organisers, he was left to his own devices to dig the car out, losing some 90 minutes before getting back on circuit. Nevertheless, the stalwart pair won their class at an average speed of 99.9mph for the entire 24 hours, giving MG their fifth and final class win in this prestigious event and coming home 12th overall, 75 laps behind the winner.

'Working in the Competitions Department during those years was hugely exciting, it was a way of life, preparing cars and going round the world as a mechanic to support the cars and drivers on international rallies,' concludes Den. 'I was put alongside some very capable engineers and together with Doug Watts, who became a close friend, I learnt a great deal.'

The long nose Le Mans MGB, showing details of lights and the quick lift jack points.

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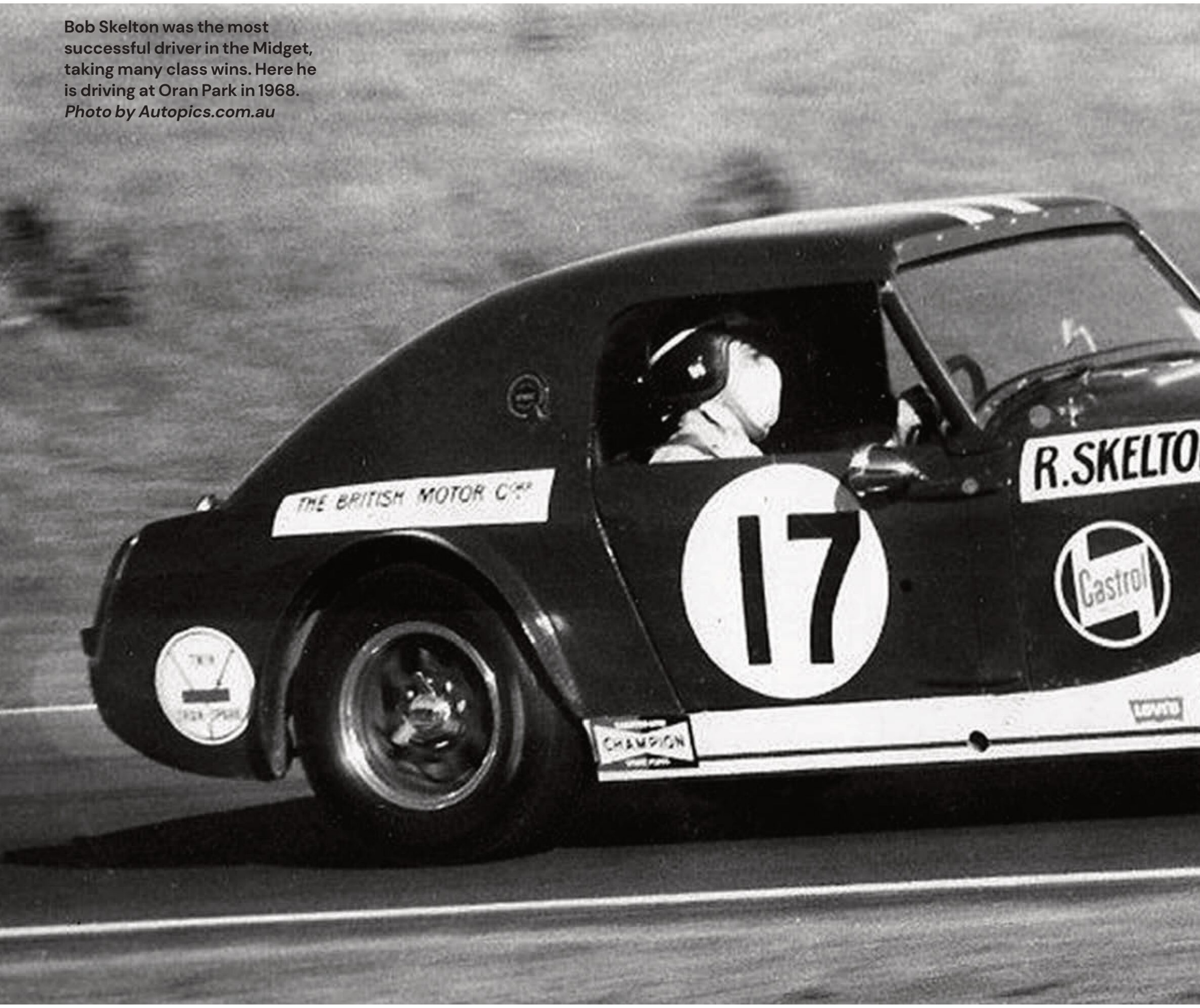


Bob Skelton was the most successful driver in the Midget, taking many class wins. Here he is driving at Oran Park in 1968. *Photo by Autopics.com.au*

Aussie pocket rocket

Built in only three weeks, this racing Midget not only surprised many people with its out of the box performances, but helped wave the Midget flag for the new Australian market. Craig Watson fills in the background and details its first two years of life.

On 3rd September 1967, Surfers Paradise was to play host to the second running of the Rothmans 12-Hour Sportscar Race, billed at the time as the longest endurance race in Australia. BMC Australia had already entered its lightweight Mini, driven by Bob Holden and Don Holland. Almost at the eleventh hour, BMC Competitions Manager Alan Kemp decided to enter another car: a lightweight racing MG Midget, mainly to promote the soon-for-Australia road version.

Privateer Sprites had been competing successfully in Australia since they had first arrived in the country, so it was no surprise that the

Competition Department at Waterloo felt that a factory-prepared car could be at least as successful. The chosen drivers were Brian Foley and John French, a logical pairing because they had driven the lightweight Mini in the previous year's event, finishing sixth overall.

A box of special competition parts duly arrived from Abingdon. Included were numerous aluminium panels, a dry-sumped competition engine and close-ratio gearbox, adjustable competition shock absorbers and a set of knock-on Minilite magnesium alloy wheels. It is a common belief that Brian Foley brought the parts back from the UK on BMC's behalf. Foley certainly made numerous trips to the UK and regularly brought back parts for his Minis, but says he has no recollection at all of organizing parts for the Midget. Alan Kemp, Terry Douglas and John Cotter believe the parts came directly from Abingdon, and Kemp believes it was probably BMCA's publicity chief and rally supremo Evan Green who organised them.

Terry Douglas and John Cotter were the two mechanics responsible for building the car. The chassis was probably a former press test car (which would mean an earlier model Sprite) that had been sitting around for some time in the Experimental Department. As the race was late in 1967 and the decision had already been taken to discontinue the Sprite in favour of the Midget, it was decided to make the car the MG version. 'It was a very basic car,' Cotter recalls. 'We built it from a bare chassis, minus all the wings, with the rails out the front. It was the firewall, floorpan and boot type of thing. No rear wings on it at all.'

Looking at the one photo that exists of the car under construction it is clear that the aluminium panels included at least the front wings, the front panels and the bonnet shut panel. The doors were flimsy, single-skin aluminium with a box section frame. The engine appears to have been built to Group Two specs in the UK, bored out to 1310cc or 1330cc with, according to *Sports Car Word* magazine: 'Cooper S type bottom end and head, 12:1 compression and the factory rally cam – No 648.'

Since the decision to enter the car in the 12-Hour had come only three weeks before the race, a marathon effort was required just to get the car built. 'It was bedlam,' Cotter remembers. 'One night I slept in the storeroom of the Competition Department, on a pile of rags, because we finished at 4 o'clock in the morning.'

Despite the short time frame, there were areas on the car that came in for some serious modification – MGB disc brakes at the front, with Austin Lancer (Wolseley 1500) rear drums and front anti-roll bar for starters. The front coil springs were replaced with torsion bar suspension. Alan Kemp remembers this as being Terry Douglas' idea, as Douglas also recalls. 'I don't know what I was thinking, I just got this notion in my head that said forget coil springs, we're going to go torsion bar. Alan just said if you want to do it, go and do it.'

The fibreglass hardtop was made by J&S Industries, who worked with BMC on many projects and had a range of hardtops available for MG and Austin-Healey. With the Works lightweight Mini already on its way up to Surfers Paradise, it was touch and go as to

In an effort to keep the car competitive, Skelton ran it in late 1968 without roof or windscreen. *Photo by Autopics.com.au*

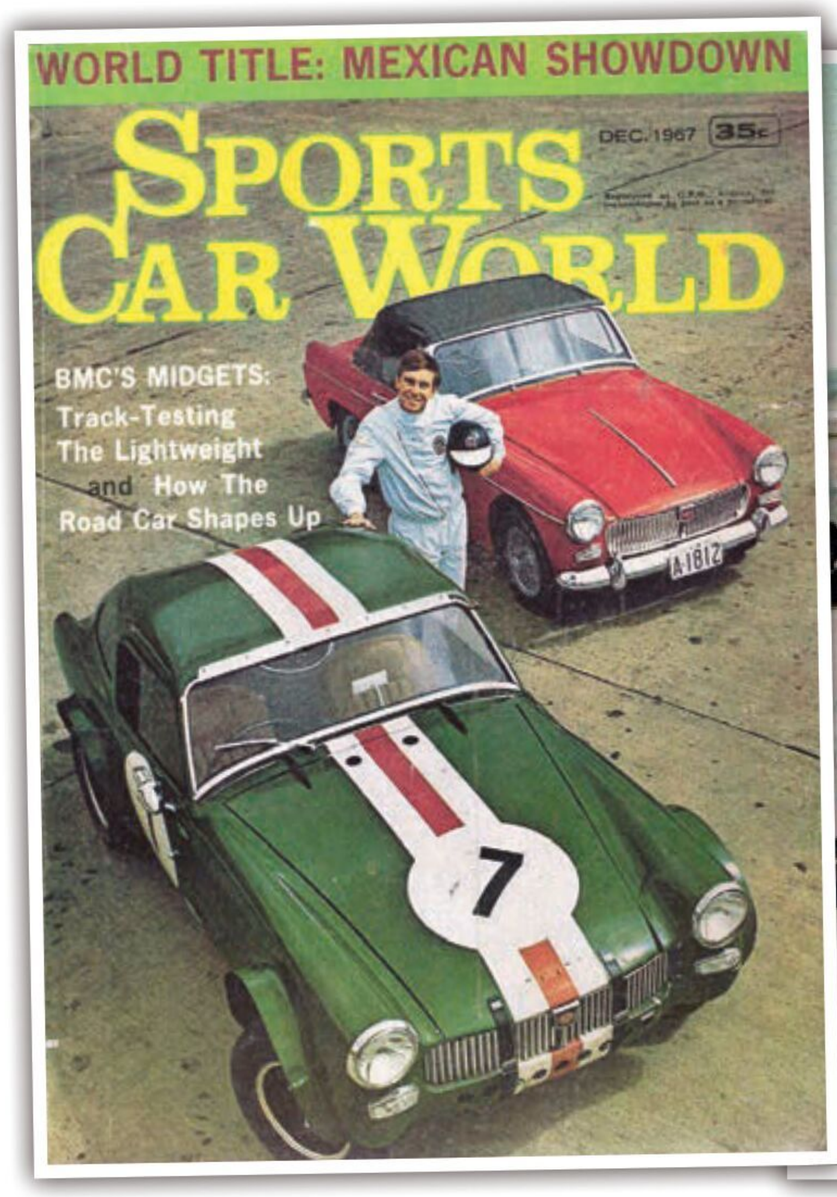
whether the Midget would be ready for the big race. The MG was finished (or at least put together) by early Friday morning, and the team packed up and drove straight to Surfers, arriving Friday evening. 'It was a great relief to see the hastily prepared MG Midget arrive late on Friday,' RCN reported.

Douglas recalls Foley driving the car for the first time. 'He was amazed. He said he got down the straight to the first braking marker, put the brakes on then accelerated again [before the corner]. Then the next lap he went down to the second braking marker, still stopping well before the corner. He said: "*The brakes on this thing are unbelievable.*" It proved itself time and time again. What you lost down the straight on the top end, you made up for in braking. We had the big wheels on it, of course, and with big fat rubber it didn't lock brakes or anything.' The major problem found with the car was a tendency to lift a back wheel, which caused axle tramp. This was reportedly cured by setting the rear shocks to their maximum hard setting, but the car remained difficult to handle and often then lifted a front wheel on cornering.

The only known photo of assembly of the Midget at BMC Australia's Competition Department, showing the roof and some of the aluminium panels being trial-fitted. The team mechanics were John Cotter (left) and Terry Douglas.
Photo courtesy John Cotter.

Despite having been built virtually from scratch in three weeks and arriving untested at Surfers Paradise late on Friday, a few practice laps on Saturday saw some tweaks, but otherwise the car was looking very promising. According to *Racing Car News: 'Alan Kemp appeared quite pleased with his little special... The car was quickly sorted, and consistent lap times around 1:25 for both drivers augured well for the coming marathon.'*

That time was good enough for fourth place on the grid, four places higher than the Mini (at 1:29.7), but because of its late arrival the Midget had not actually set a qualifying time



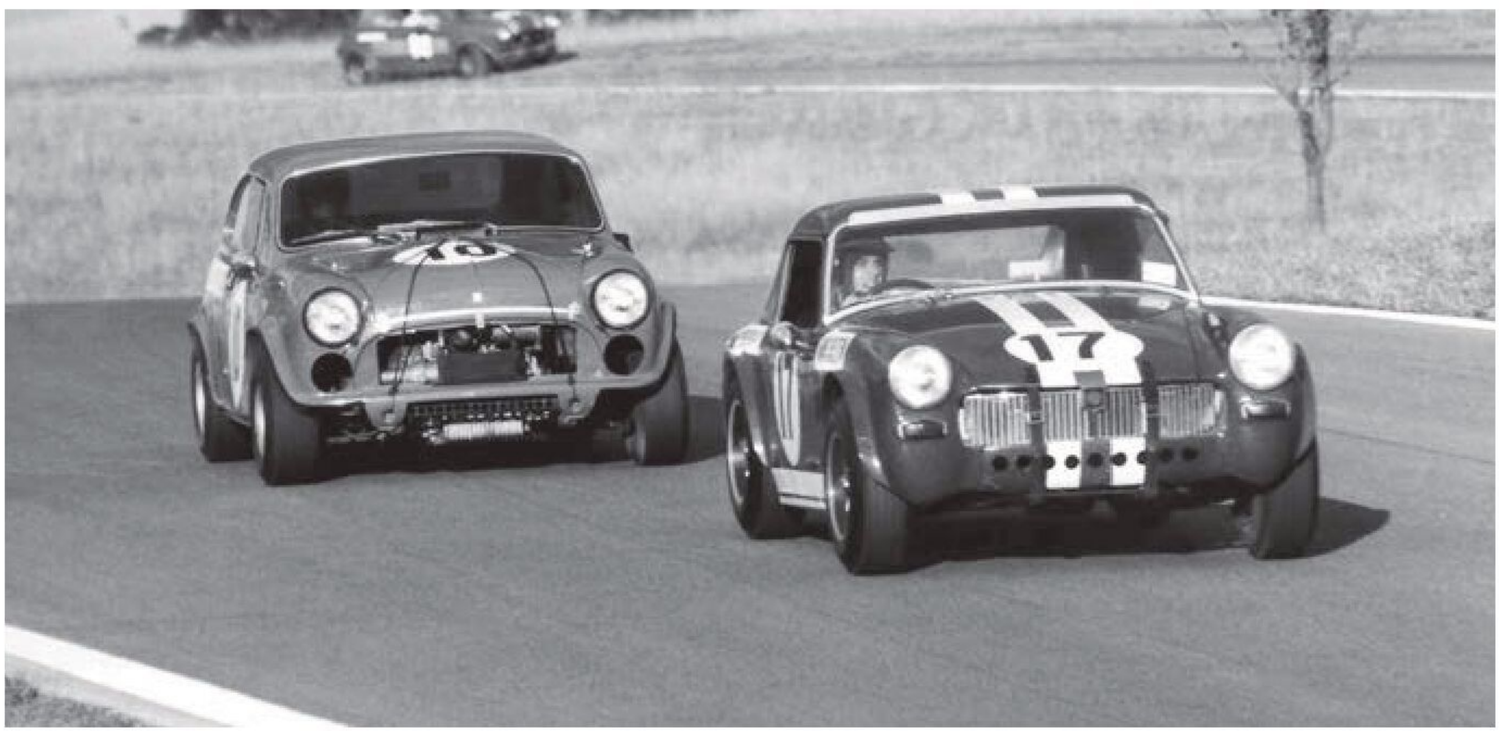
Left to right: Brian Foley featured with the Midget on the cover of Sports Car World in December 1967. The only known colour photo of the car during the Surfers Paradise 12-hour – then billed as Australia's longest endurance race – here seen in the paddock before the race *(Photo courtesy John Cotter)*. Programme cover for the Surfers Paradise Speed Week, which culminated in the 12-Hour.

and had to start from the back of the grid. The race featured a Le Mans type start, and John French got cracking. He was in the lead pack as he crossed the start-finish line level with the eventual winning Ferrari. Just for fun, there was a Dymo label message stuck to the top of the Midget's dashboard, which read: '*Please sound horn when passing Ferrari.*' Unfortunately there wasn't much likelihood of the horn getting any use, with the Ferrari lapping around ten seconds faster than the Midget.

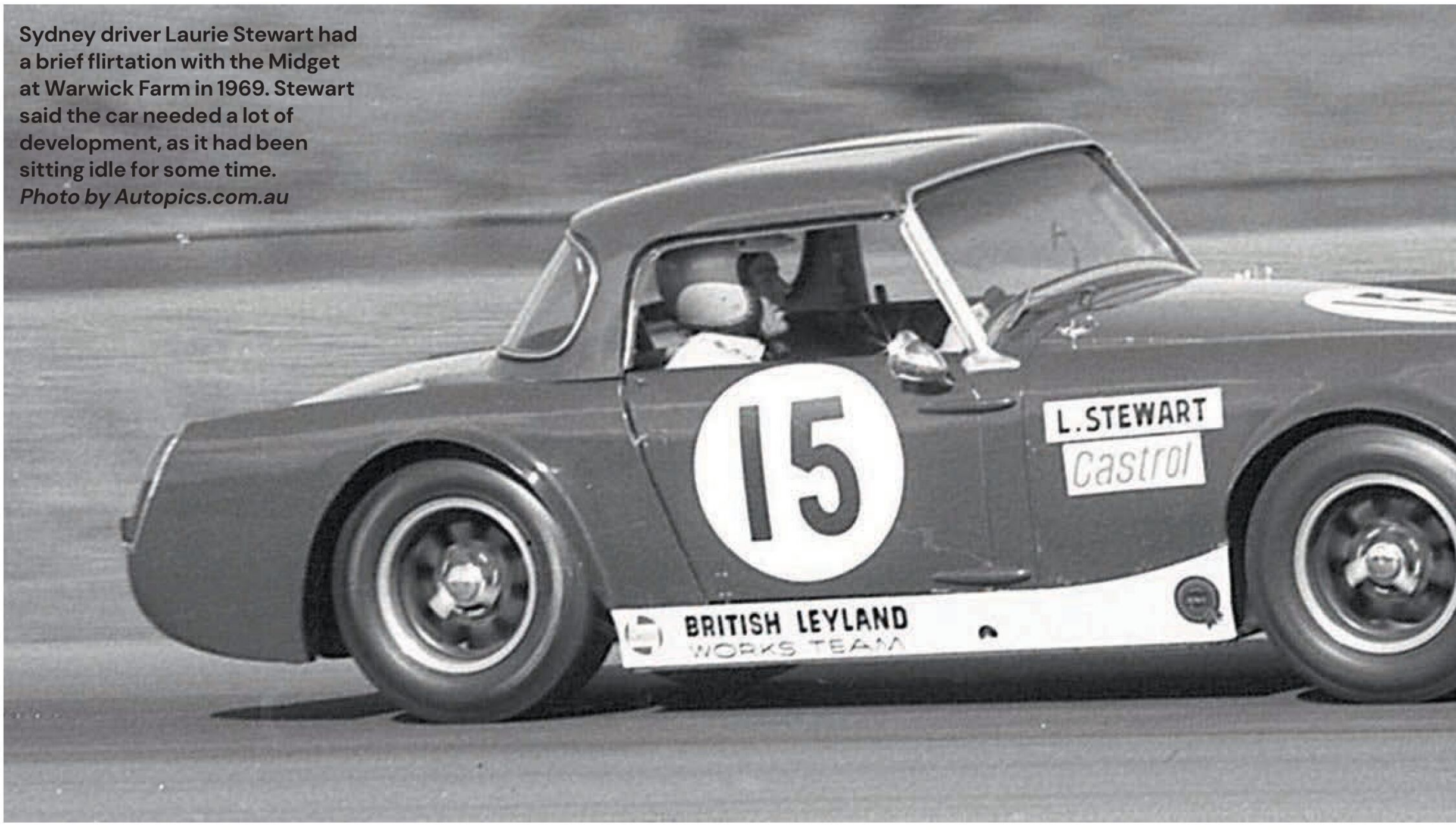
French soon settled into sixth place, but a broken fuel line early on caused the loss of a lap. Another stop caused by a broken rocker shaft saw the Midget slip further down, but French charged back through the field. By 1pm he was in fourth place, three laps ahead of the next competitor.

He got two lucky breaks in quick succession in the fourth hour, when the leading Porsche Spyder slid off the track into Armco and the third-placed Lola T70 had to pit with overheating problems. The Midget was suddenly in second place outright! *RCN* continued: *'Foley took over the MG Midget at 1.35 (PM) after a quick brake check, and the car, despite its hasty preparation, was running splendidly and seemed set for a high placing.'* Then disaster struck. Coming up to 4pm and the halfway point of the race, the Midget suddenly lost oil pressure and headed into the pits. The problem was diagnosed as failure of the oil scavenger pump in the dry-sump system.

The engine was quickly converted to wet-sump and the car sent out again, but the damage had been done and Foley brought the car back into the pits, officially retiring at 4.20pm. Works mechanic John Cotter explains what happened. 'A scavenger pump was fitted onto the back of the block, where a mechanical fuel pump would normally bolt on. It had a little gear on the shaft of the pump that ran off another little gear on the camshaft. There was a little roll pin that went through the gear and that roll pin sheered off. We don't know why. The pump never seized up or anything as was reported, it was just a minor thing. Getting it back out was just a matter of changing the hoses as it still had the other oil pump in the back of the camshaft, so it was only a matter of plumbing to convert it straight over.'



Bob Skelton leads the Buckle LMS lightweight Mini of Lakis Manticas in a Sports Car race at Oran Park in 1968 – the site of many of the Midget's class victories in that year. *Photo by Autopics.com.au*



Sydney driver Laurie Stewart had a brief flirtation with the Midget at Warwick Farm in 1969. Stewart said the car needed a lot of development, as it had been sitting idle for some time. ***Photo by Autopics.com.au***

Meanwhile, the Mini continued on reliably and finished a very credible fifth outright and second in class. Although it had retired, the Midget had shown its potential and had been ahead of much more favoured cars – including Porsche, Lola, Lotus, MGB, Cobra, TVR and others – before its failure. Having been prepared in such a short time, it speaks volumes for the work by the BMC Australia mechanics and the drivers, that the Midget did so well, particularly as it was a part from the UK-sourced engine that had let the car down rather than anything done locally.

After the race, the Midget was returned to Waterloo, but delays in more parts from the UK meant it was some weeks before repairs could be made or the handling issues sorted, as explained by *Sports Car World*, who had tried in vain to organise a full test of the car. '*The parts for the Midget, together with the engines the overseas drivers had ordered for the Total Rally, were off-loaded at Bombay because of a bomb scare*,' they reported. '*The result was a completely immobilized Midget and little chance of a test before our magazine deadlines finally expired.*'

Some time in late 1967 or early '68 a test day was held at Oran Park, with a number of BMC-supported drivers given the chance to drive the Midget. Don Holland, who had started racing in a Healey but was best known at the time for his success in Minis, said the Midget was a complete handful. 'I had a drive of it, but I couldn't. Everybody who had a drive kept spinning it, and I spun it once. Skello [Bob Skelton] and Laurie Stewart were the only ones who could drive it. Then Graham Jackson, who was helping me at the time, went out with them on another test day. He swapped some wheels around and that seemed to fix it. I never drove it after that was done, but I think that made a better car out of it.'

Bob Skelton admits the car was a handful in the beginning, but it was quickly sorted out and he was selected to campaign the car for BMC in the 1968 season. It certainly seemed to suit his driving style, described by *Racing Car News* as '*aggressive.' 'If ever a driver was underestimated by the Australian*

Bob Skelton and the Midget tackle a race for Sports Racing Cars at Oran Park in 1968. ***Photo by Autopics.com.au***

BMC also loaned the car to journalist and racer Midge Whiteman for a number of events in the Ladies' Championship at Oran Park in 1968. Here she follows Christine Cole in a lightweight Mini.

public, it was Bob Skelton,' the magazine mused in 1986. '*The man had the ability... to drive to its limit almost any car he put his bum into.*'

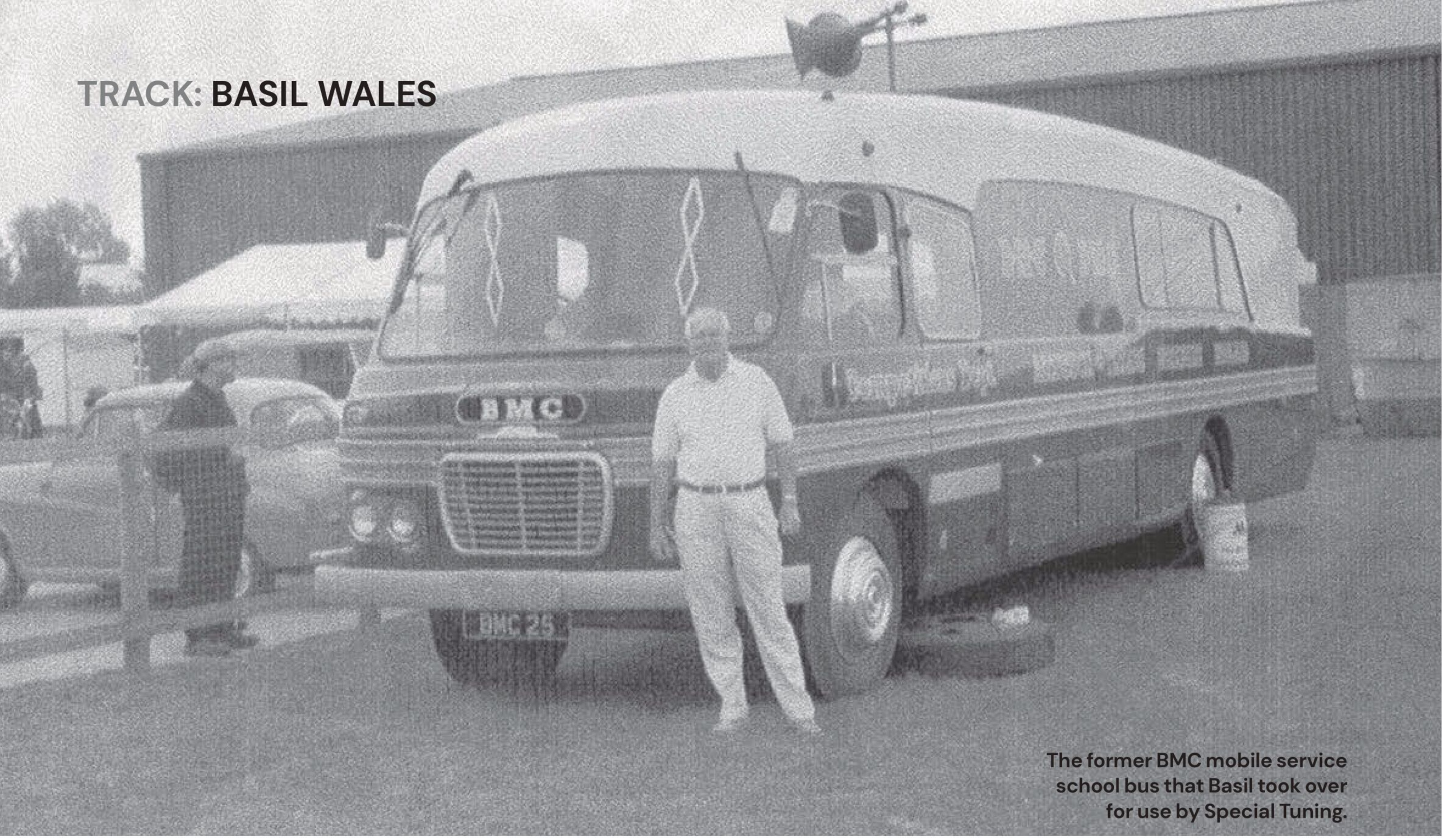
Skelton certainly had many successes in the Midget, mostly in its class, but there were numerous outright results as well. Sprite racing and tuning legend Bob Rowntree, who raced against Skelton at the 1968 Bathurst Easter meeting, vividly remembers Skelton driving the car, saying: '*He was competing against some very well prepared and well driven Lotus 23s and he was level pegging with them all the time, they couldn't get away from him. It was absolutely fantastic that car, and he was a real eye-opener. The car always went fantastic with Skelton driving it.*'

But Skelton wasn't the only person behind the wheel of the Midget in 1968, with a number of people being given one-off drives. These included Leyland Works Mini drivers James Smith in Victoria and John French in Queensland. Timo Makinen was also listed to drive the car at a night meeting at Oran Park in October 1968, but is not listed in the results. Journalist and racing driver Midge Whiteman did drive the car, though, and continued in it from time to time in the Ladies' Championship at Oran Park.

Even the Aussie actor Leonard Teale had a drive of the Midget, organised by BMC publicity maestro Evan Green. 'I think he raced a production car himself, and he showed some interest and we thought the publicity he would generate warranted it,' Kemp remembers. 'That was at Castlereagh drag strip,' adds Cotter. 'We just took it up there and the drags were on, but it was a one-off.'

However, when Leyland took over BMC in 1968 and early 1969 they closed down the Competition Department at Waterloo, New South Wales. The car languished for a while before being taken over by Brian Foley Motors for Laurie Stewart to drive. That said, with the quick pace of race technology and development money needed, the Midget was packed up and sent back to Leyland, the project abandoned.

Victorian Works driver James Smith giving the Midget a run at Sandown Park in 1968. ***Photo by Autopics.com.au***



The former BMC mobile service school bus that Basil took over for use by Special Tuning.

Special Branch

Mike Taylor talks to Basil Wales, the man behind Abingdon's Special Tuning Department, and asks him what it was like to roam the world fixing BMC's sports cars.

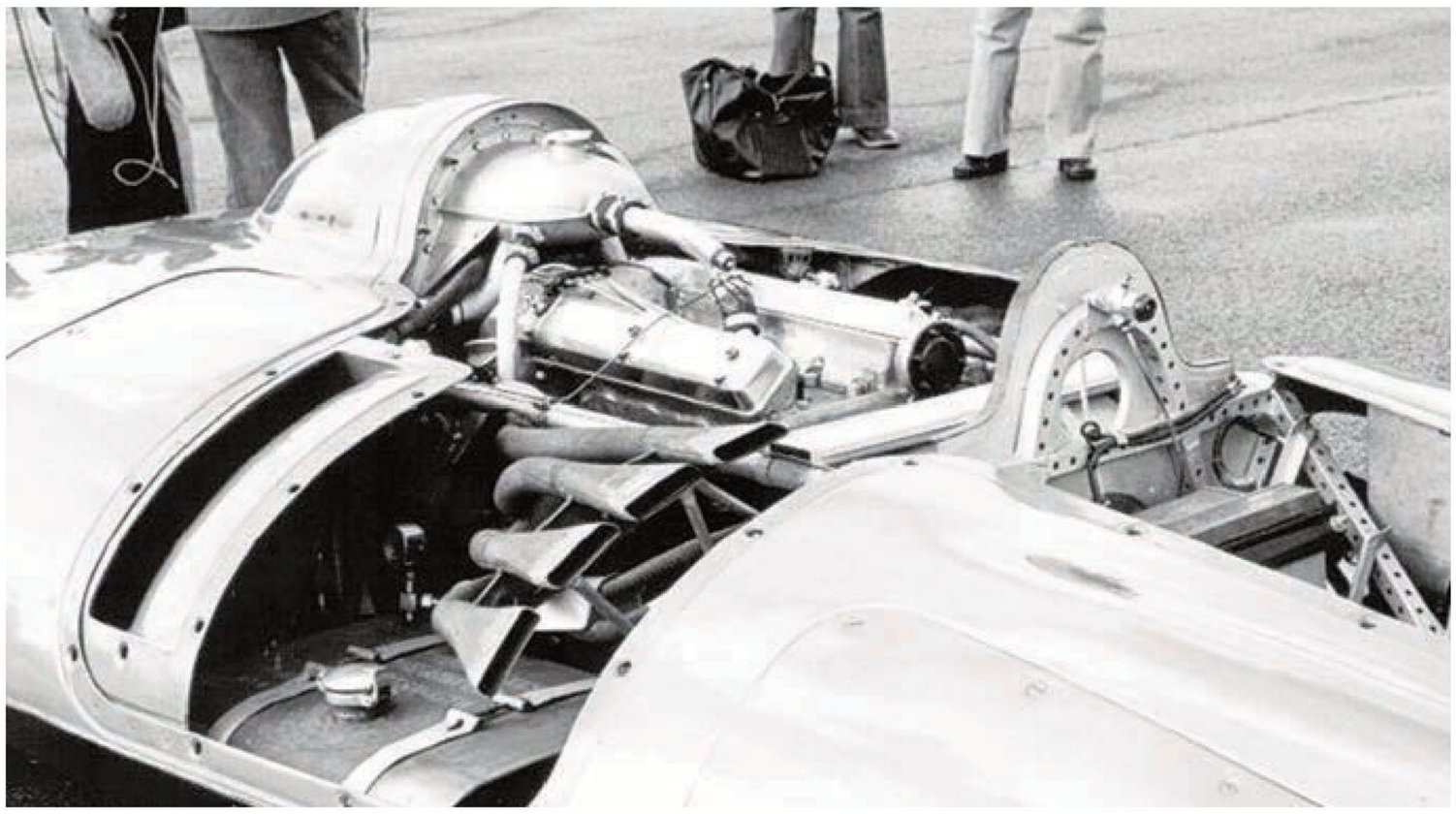
'I was born in 1934 in Brentwood, Essex and attended Brentwood Grammar School,' recalls Basil. 'My interest in engineering is probably in my genes because my father was a Chartered Civil Engineer. The war took him away for the entire six-year period, and during that time I learnt a lot about practical engineering from the son of my next door neighbour. My father had an old Armstrong Siddeley and when he came home in 1945 I helped him to put it back on the road, grinding in the valves and replacing a broken halfshaft. Then I used it to pass my driving test.'

His schooling over, Basil applied to a number of companies for an apprenticeship including AEC, Vauxhall, Allard and Morris Motors – though perversely, not to Ford who were his local company in Essex. All replied with offers, though it was Morris which drew his attention. 'It sounded interesting, so I applied and was taken on as a Tool Room Apprentice. Out of a number of options, I chose Engines Branch at Courthouse Green in Coventry,' he explains. Soon after he joined the company in early 1952, it became part of the newly-created British Motor Corporation.

Without strong parental guidance throughout his wartime school days, it was only later that Basil realised he had to work on Maths, English and Science to gain entry into engineering. 'In those days apprenticeships included attending Day Release at Technical College; when I eventually started I was six months behind everyone else.' Undeterred, he carried on to pass his Higher National Certificate with endorsements in Mechanical and Automotive Engineering. 'I had the chance to go to university, but turned it down because I've always preferred practical work,' he admits. 'But, with hindsight, hardly anyone has really appreciated my technical qualifications anyway, or even realized their value.'

The link between MG and the Experimental Department of Morris Engines can be traced back to the early days of motoring. The MG (a foreshortening of Morris Garages) Car Company was founded in the early 1920s and owned by William Morris. In 1935 Morris sold the business into his holding company, Morris Motors Limited. It provided MG with a supply of engines and the benefit of the Morris research department at the Coventry-based factory. Head of the Experimental Department in the 1950s was Eddie Maher.

'As a result of demonstrating my enthusiasm, I had my apprenticeship upgraded from Tool Room to an Engineering Apprenticeship,' explains Basil. 'That gave me the scope of the



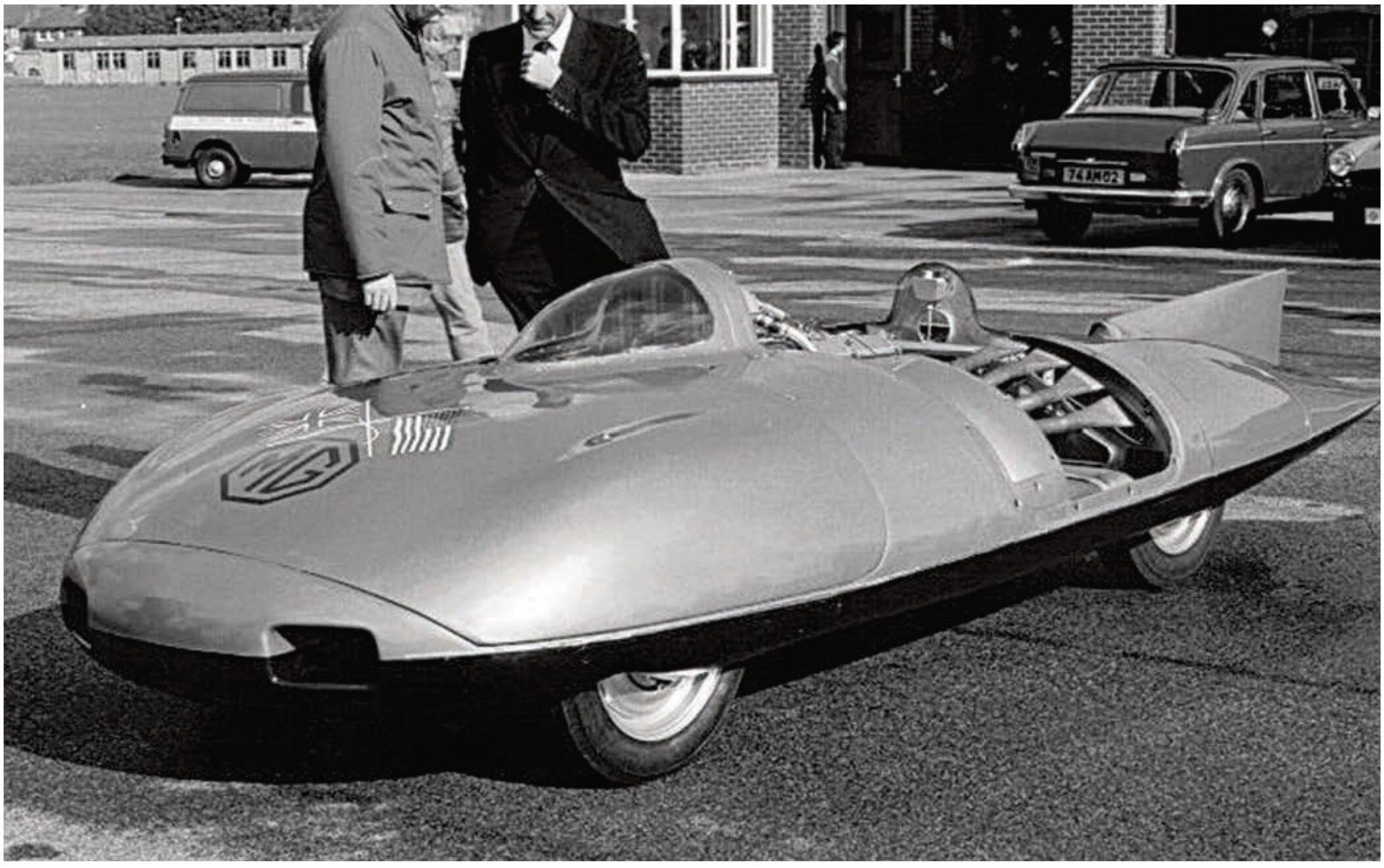
A shot of EX181's engine bay showing clearly the four minimal exhaust pipes.

factory and as part of that I went to work for Eddie. He, and later Stuart Turner, became two key men in my life.'

From the outset, Eddie took Basil under his wing. 'I think he recognised my potential. I was happy to work at weekends, and in return he gave me the most interesting work imaginable,' says Basil. This period in BMC's history coincided with the development of a new Twin Cam engine for the MGA. At the outset, the Twin Cam programme would involve two projects running in parallel. 'Our Chief Draughtsman, Derek Frost, and Tony Jennings began investigating various cylinder head designs while Longbridge worked on a similar engine, but with different valve angles. Both engines were fitted into cars entered at Dundrod, the motorsport street circuit in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. The cars were entered in practice, but before the race the Longbridge unit was replaced by a pushrod engine. Following various reviews, the Engines Branch version appeared to be the better unit.

Soon after, the MGA Twin Cam programme moved into high gear and Eddie entrusted the task of undertaking the Coventry factory road testing to Basil. 'I did a lot of road miles in the Twin Cam, all with the original 1500cc engine,' he grins. 'However, just before production began it was decided to increase its capacity to 1600cc.'

Next, in 1957, work began on the sleekly-shaped Land Speed Record car, EX181, under Syd Enever, MG's Chief Engineer at Abingdon. The chassis was a tubular ladder frame structure clothed in a beautifully sleek alloy body complete with removable canopy. Nicknamed the Roaring Raindrop, it was designed by MG's talented draughtsman, Terry Mitchell. 'To significantly increase power it was fitted with a huge supercharger, which was driven off the front of the engine and fed by twin 2in SU carburettors.

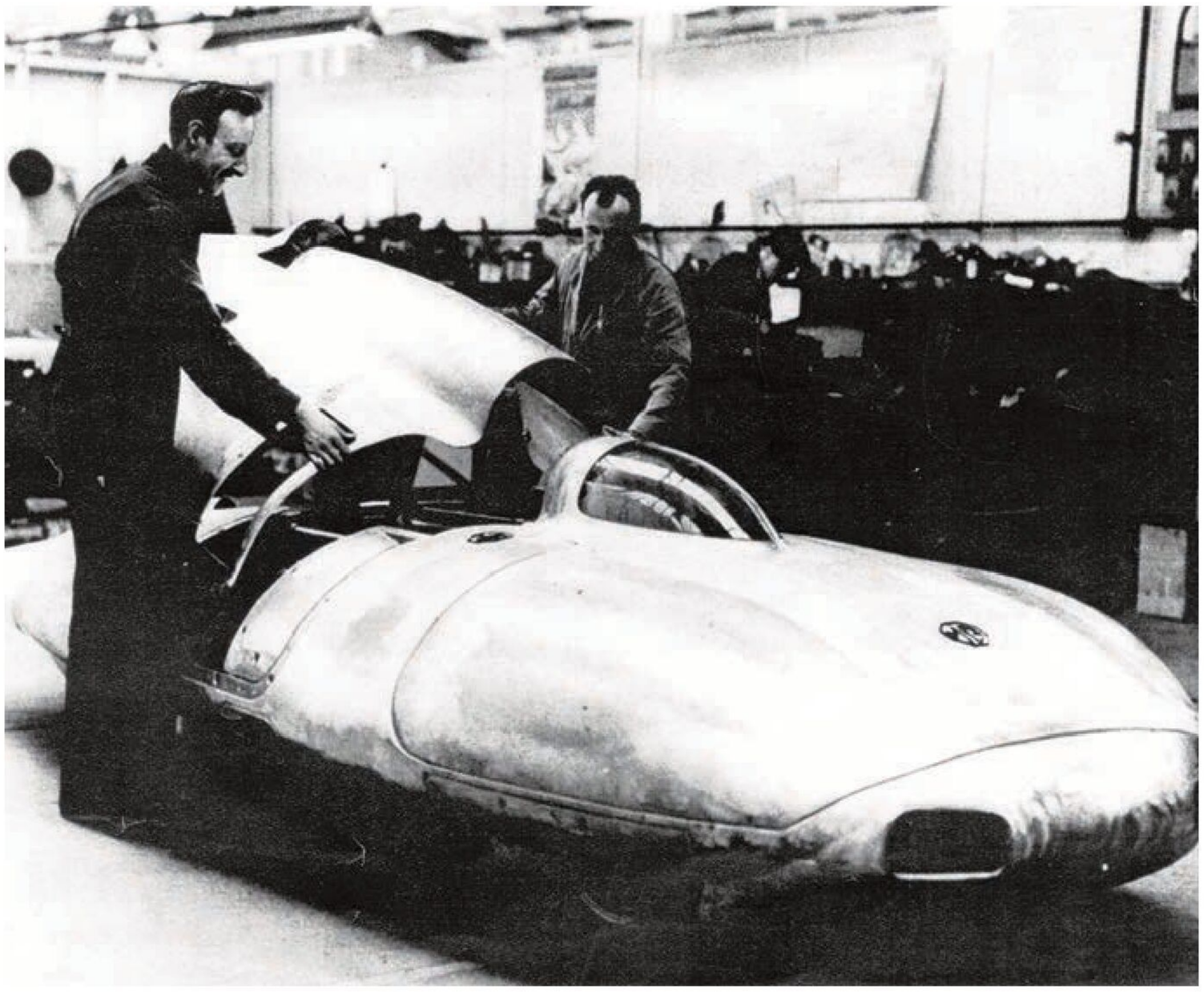


EX181 at Abingdon some time after its record-breaking run – note the rubber bumper MGB just nosing into the background.

TRACK: BASIL WALES

We worked closely with Shorrock, and I designed the mountings to take the engine. Then Eddie said that as nobody else had run an engine with a supercharger, I might as well get the experience. There were just three of us working on the engine. We did a lot of work in profiling the correct carburettor needles, which involved numerous trials on half and full power.'

Two engines were built of 1489cc capacity and running on a 30% mixture of benzene, methanol and Shell they produced 290bhp @ 7000rpm on the dynomometer. Once completed, they were transferred to Abingdon for installation, the car and the spare engine then being sent to the States. 'Initially, Stirling Moss was tied up so Phil Hill did a test run and achieved the record. Then Moss arrived and broke third gear, so there was doubt whether he could get the award.' But he did – on 23rd August 1957 he reached 245.64mph, taking the record in the Experimental 1100-1500cc class. Later, the engine was bored out to 1506cc, this unit developing 300bhp @ 7300rpm using the same mixture. On 3rd October the car achieved 254.91mph with Phil Hill at the wheel, taking the record in the Experimental Project 1500-2000cc class.



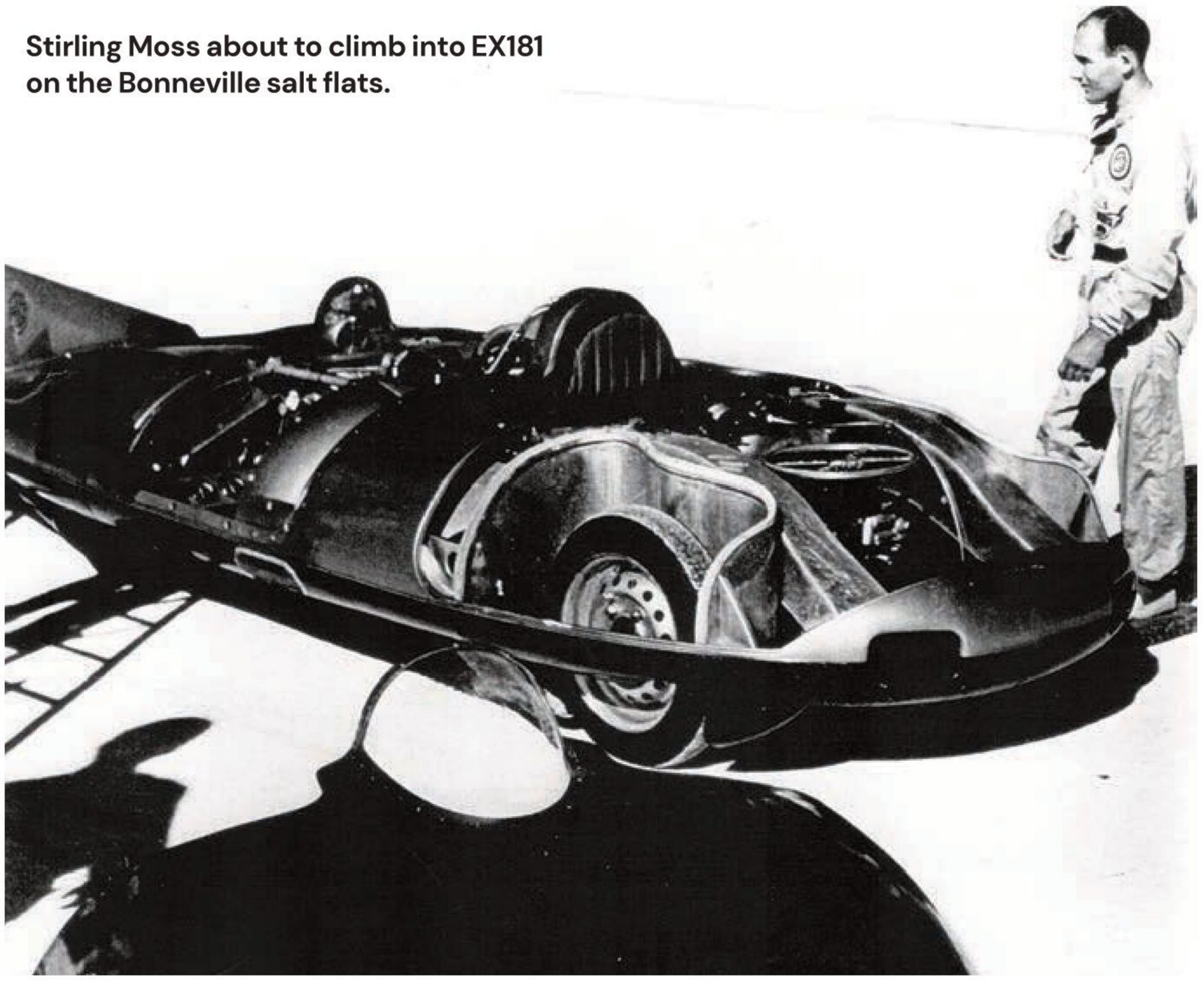
Henry Stone and Dickie Green with EX 181 in Experimental.

In recognition for his efforts, Eddie arranged for Basil to temporarily join the newly formed BMC Competitions Department for the Liège-Rome-Liège Rally. 'In 1956 I spent a week getting to know the four MGAs and their drivers: team leader John Gott, Nancy Mitchell, John Milne and Sam Croft-Pearson,' says Basil. 'For the weekend I was loaned a very fast Austin A55 with a tuned MGA engine to drive back to Coventry. For someone who had not been abroad before, it was a wonderful experience.'

Other apprenticeship experience involved preparing FJ engines based on the A-series engine. 'I'd build the units to a specific specification, put them on the test bed to check the power output and then wait for them to be collected. However, I noticed that on the majority of occasions the vehicle which collected them was a commercial tractor and on the side was written: K Tyrell. Obviously, Ken was building race cars for John Cooper fitted with our engines.'

After completing two years National Service, Basil returned to Coventry and was told to join the BMC Service Department at Cowley for further training. This would prove the precursor to becoming the company's sports car specialist based at Cowley, starting in 1959. The role entailed trouble-shooting on all BMC's sports cars, including MGs and Healeys. 'Immediately, I was given a protracted training period which involved learning about manufacture and sales,' he recalls.

Stirling Moss about to climb into EX181 on the Bonneville salt flats.



Special Tuning could supply customers with many parts used by Competitions.

'My first job was to sort out a taxi in Bournemouth which had very poor fuel consumption. It turned out to be a faulty automatic transmission system.' From then on Basil travelled to Germany, Holland, Monte Carlo, Canada and the US as well as a day trip to the Bahamas. His job also included making recommendations for changes to production processes, which he says were undertaken swiftly and with good grace by the Abingdon management.

'When BMC were on the verge of launching the MGB onto the North America market, Syd Enever became concerned that there could be complaints about high oil consumption because of prolonged motorway driving. To eradicate the problem, the decision was made to change all the pistons on every car for some fitted with different oil control rings before it was sold, the connecting rods being released from below and the head, manifolds and pistons being taken off the engine to effect the change. I had to plan the project, arranging for boxes containing four replacement pistons and all the necessary gaskets for every car.' Basil, accompanied by two engineers, followed on arranging for the work to be done.

In 1963 MG's Service Department, whose team had been invaluable in helping Basil solve problems on some of the more troublesome sports cars, was closed down and a new division established called Special Tuning Department. 'John Thornley realised that the small parts department at Abingdon could be turned into a unit specializing in tuning information and parts. The title came as a result of Syd Enever writing some A5 booklets describing the tuning process for MG cars.' Also, the Competitions Department had become totally overwhelmed with requests for help from private entrants. The function of Special Tuning was to act as a customer query service point.

'Abingdon was very much on the periphery of BMC and without doubt relied heavily on specialists elsewhere in the organisation. When I took over Special Tuning, I made use of this. When a particular part broke regularly on customers' MGs, I knew who I could ask to make a stronger version. We would then use it on the

Minis filling the busy interior of the Competitions Department in 1966.

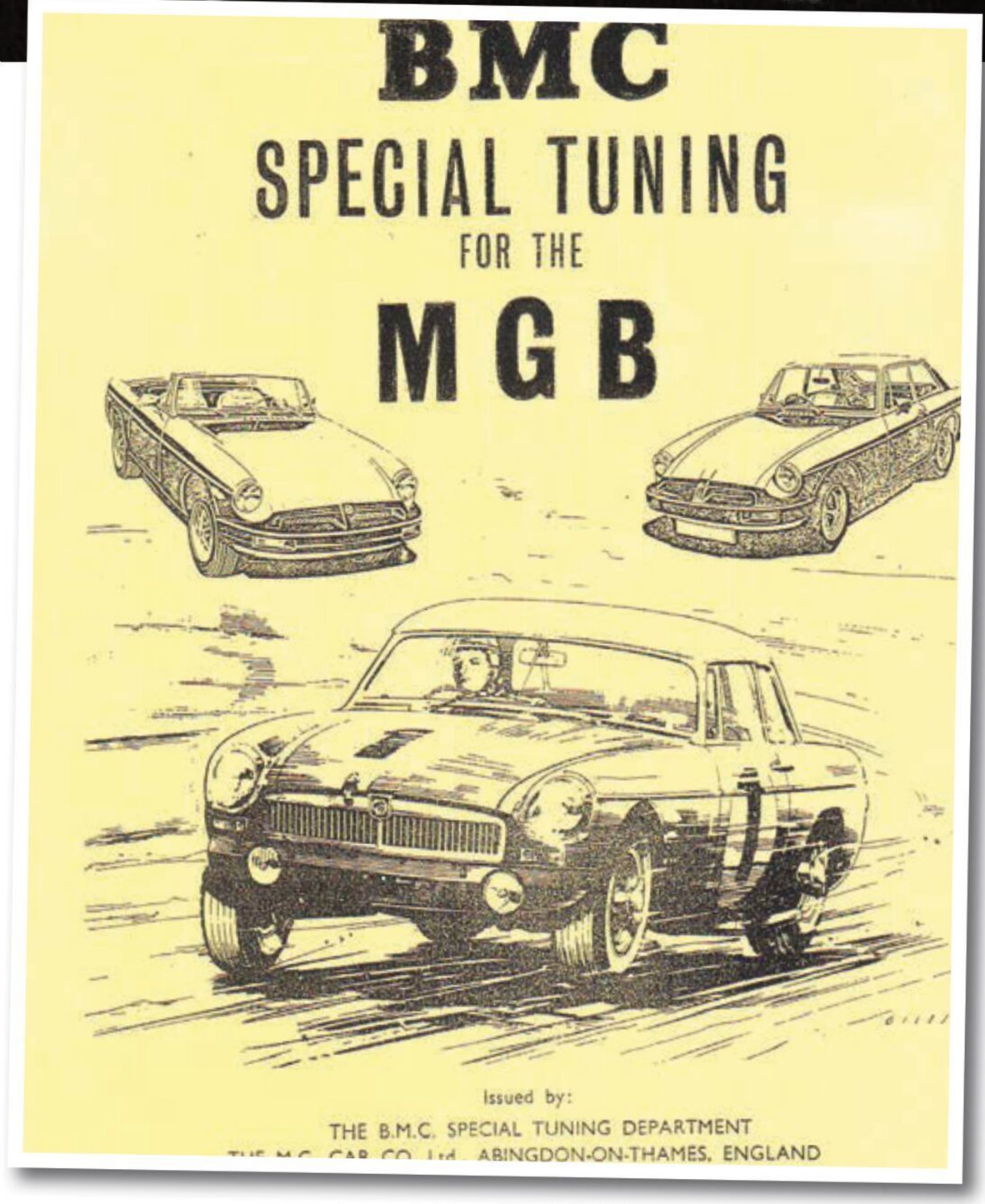
Preparing for the 1963 Monte Carlo Rally.

competition cars, and I could sell it to members of the public through Special Tuning.'

Basil also relied on Syd Enever to keep him up-to-date on any improvements he'd developed using the local engine test bed at Abingdon, which could then be included in the latest tuning booklets. 'I went on to publish information on other BMC vehicles and made the booklets of loose leaf pages, which could be produced fully up-to-date much more cheaply than republishing the whole book.'

During his trips to America, Basil had seen the range of domestic DIY kits of parts available there with the packaging including all the necessary parts to do a simple job. He soon realised the benefit of this niche market in the UK, using upgrade kits which were to be marketed for BMC sports car owners to fit themselves. 'For example, if a customer bought an MGB and wanted an oil cooler, they'd have to buy the radiator, the pipes, the clips, the bolts and so on. I put all the necessary items into a box and sold it as one item available through Special Tuning and BMC's dealers.'

Basil astutely selected components, accessories and specially-made parts which the competitions team used, adding these to his list of Special Tuning options. 'Competitions had a superb chromed Mini lamp bracket that was located with three bolts and designed to take four auxiliary lamps. I realized my customers would not be keen to pay for chromium



Special Tuning booklets were essential reading for many owners.

Basil did pre-production MGA Twin Cam road testing car with a 1500cc engine – production versions had a 1600cc unit.

plating, so I had the Special Tuning versions zinc passivated so they didn't rust and that's how they were sold. Competitions also made various sump guards. I thought they'd be saleable items, so I had a friendly blacksmith make them up for me.'

Another example of fully assembled items sold through MG's Special Tuning were modified cylinder heads, supplied from Downton. 'Then Daniel Richmond came up with what he called the Stage 1 kit and Longbridge agreed that I could market this and offer warranty, though they were only supplied for saloons.' In contrast the Stage 1-6 specifications as outlined in the Special Tuning booklets for BMC sports cars such as the MGB were not covered by warranty.

Another component of Special Tuning's service was provided by a promotional transporter. Built in 1959, the BMC 5-ton PSV chassis was one of approximately 20 similar vehicles commissioned by BMC to serve as mobile Service Schools for training dealer mechanics. Designed by Pininfarina and built by Marshall's of Cambridge, they featured an aluminium body and were fully equipped. When the training function ceased, Basil took one over and used it to store and transport boards promoting Special Tuning parts which were taken to race events and put on display. The adage Win on Sunday, Sell on Monday still held true and when MGs won races, the resultant publicity sold motor cars.

'Toward the end of the MGB's life there was still demand for it in the States, which the company ignored,' says Basil. In 1970 the Competitions Department was closed, but senior BL managers thought there was a continuing need for the services of Special Tuning, so its responsibility was moved to Longbridge. 'In the early 1970s I became involved with developing and testing the Marina for rallying, ultimately winning the 1300cc class in the 1968 RAC Rally and then the World Cup. But I didn't feel comfortable with the Longbridge management so when, in 1973, Sir John Egan offered me a job at Unipart based in Cowley, I jumped at it.'

Next came a period involved with Service beginning as Problem Solving Manager for all BL's production, and later with Honda when the two companies forged links. (Basil visited Japan on 12 occasions to facilitate service liaison over the Honda/Rover 800 range.)

In 1991 Basil took early retirement, which provided him with the opportunity to establish the BMC/BL Ex-Works Special Tuning register and drive Minis on events which have taken him to Monte Carlo, Trento in Italy and Ireland. 'After my apprenticeship, none of the other jobs gave me the same sense of satisfaction as running Special Tuning at Abingdon,' he concludes. 'When I was there it was like working with the gods of the industry, with Eddie Maher and Stuart Turner. I've had such a wonderful career and only ever applied for one job – and even that I realised I didn't want! Now retirement continues to keep me mentally and physically active.'

The one to beat

The MGB, registered 8DBL, has had an interesting 50 odd year history changing ownership and having varied fortunes, however, what Motoring Memories brings you is the story of the car today, and the successes it has enjoyed most recently. Simon Goldsworthy continues the story.

The ex-Works MGB, 8DBL, is owned by Sir Anthony Bamford, Chairman of JCB. He originally bought it direct from the BMC Competitions Department in 1966, raced it for a couple of seasons and then sold it on after a bad crash in 1968. Then, after many years of patient waiting, he succeeded in buying it back at the end of the 1990s. Since then, Sir Anthony's son Jo has learnt his racing craft in 8DBL, and the car has made occasional appearances at the likes of the Goodwood Revival. But the MGB's 50th anniversary year in 2012 proved to be a landmark for not just the model in general, but for 8DBL in particular. That is because it was driven for Sir Anthony by Andy Newall in the Historic Racing Drivers' Club MGB50 race series, contesting four of the series' six races. Proving that 8DBL still had what it took, the pair won each of the races they entered, as well as qualifying on pole and setting the fastest lap on each occasion. Unsurprisingly, that was enough to secure them the crown. So at the kind invitation of Sir Anthony, we headed over to the JCB test track in Staffordshire to meet him, his car and Andy Newall.

I first ask about preparing 8DBL for the MGB50 race series. After all, I assumed, it must have come as something of a rude awakening to be pulled out of comparative retirement and put into a full race series? But apparently the old warrior didn't need much persuading, and Andy says that he serviced the engine, but did not rebuild it. In racing terms, however, a service can get a bit more involved than one for the road. The valve clearances were checked and all the fluids were changed, but the old oil filter was also cut open and examined for traces of swarf. The gearbox and

Left: Sir Anthony with the car he bought directly from the Comps Department in 1966, sold in 1968 and bought to keep in 1998.

JCB
DBL
SHELL
Castrol
CHAMPION

Ace driver Andy Newall at the wheel around the JCB test track in Staffordshire.

differential oil were sieved to check for the same thing. The rotor arm was checked to make sure it was a good one, the petrol tank washed out, brake shoes and pads replaced and the rear springs soaked in old engine oil to give them a little extra compliance. A new seat, harness and fire extinguisher were fitted as the old ones had passed their homologation sell-by dates, then the camber, caster and toe-in were checked and new L-section Dunlop tyres fitted. Finally it was off to Mallory Park for the first race – without any testing!

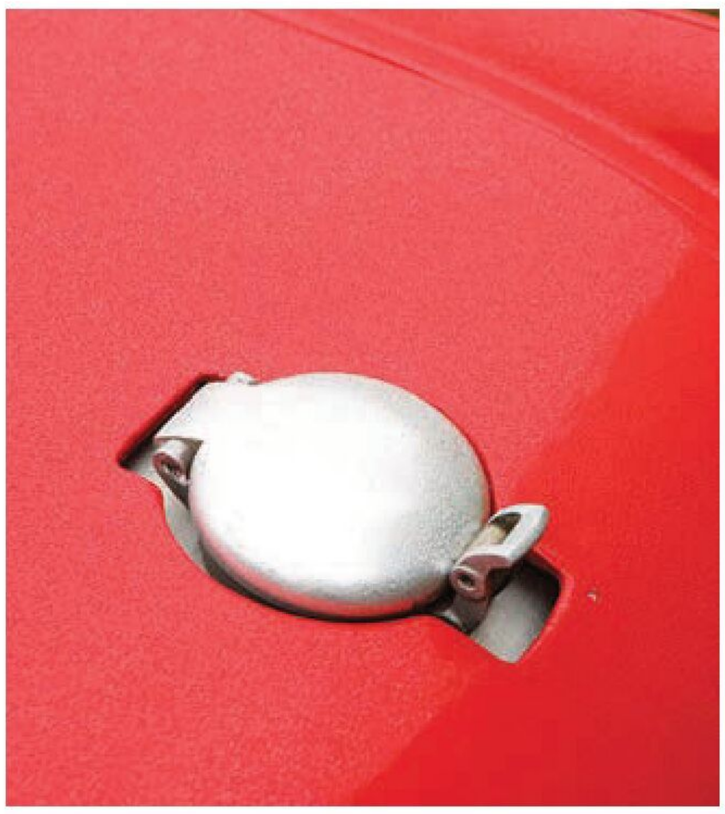
I ask Andy to talk us through how 8DBL feels on track, and he is happy to oblige, saying: 'It's got a very tall first gear, so I always make a poor start, especially when you couple the gearing with the fact that I am conscious of not wanting to damage the diff. But that tall first does mean I can hold it longer than some of the others, and I claw back the lost time when they have to reach for second and get momentarily bogged down. When the engine is running cleanly I will take it up to 6800rpm, but when it is getting tired I'm more likely to limit it to 6200rpm. But this car is not about being caned in a straight line, it is all about the corners.

'I drive the B in a really old fashioned way: braking, changing down the gears and doing whatever before turning the wheel so that all the messy bits are done in a straight line – there is not enough downforce and grip to do all of that when you are in the corners. I then have my foot to the floor by

the time I start turning. There is a tendency to oversteer as the tyres start loading, and I steer it round on the throttle. It is all so totally different to a modern car where the corner is viewed as an obstacle and you hold the braking as far as the apex to lengthen the straight. When you are against modern cars in the B, they go past you into the corner, but then they are holding you up by the time you reach the apex.

'The B is always a bit boggy low down, but once it clears its throat, then it will pick up and go. It's all down to the cam. Long straights are generally quicker than the car, so that is a time to glance at the gauges while you wait for the next corner, where it all comes together once more. It is testament to the basic design of the MGB that we are putting twice as much power through it as the car was originally designed for and it is still so reliable and good to drive.'

Twin choke 45 DCOE Weber feeds the engine. Note matt black paint on oil filter to aid quick removal.



Appendix K has to balance originality with safety, so the flip-top Monza fuel filler cap is still there...

...but it is not connected to the aluminium fuel tank in the boot built to the very latest safety standards.

A race car is about speed more than aesthetics – why carry a full dash when half will do?

Plaque on the driver's door pays tribute to 8DBL's most famous win.

'This car is on Dunlop L-section tyres,' adds Andy, 'and it was made for them. You sometimes see other drivers weaving from side to side before a race to warm up the tyres, and you wonder why they are doing that because none of us will have any grip left by lap three! The Bs could run on M-section tyres in Goodwood's Fordwater Trophy and were a second a mile quicker in the dry because of the wider contact area, but in the wet it made no difference at all. But that is where the B excels because it may slide about, but you can feel everything and it always feels under control. Of course it will spin eventually, but it gives so much feedback and warning, plus it is so compliant, that you can usually pull it back before the worst happens.'

I am no racer, but I can confirm all of this from my own laps as a passenger with Andy at the wheel. The noise is indeed the first and most obvious assault on your senses. There is no sensation of neck-snapping acceleration, but then again Andy is not giving it 100% on this greasy track covered in rain and leaves, and with a choice between trees and a lake in terms of run-off areas. But as we go through the corners I can feel the tail slide a bit before being twitched back into line with a dab of the throttle and a flick of the wheel. Then it slides again and although I know Andy is demonstrating what the chassis will do, I wonder if he has taken it a little further than planned as we slide towards a rock face. He hasn't, of course, and the B flicks obediently back into line the moment it has used up the last inch of available track width. And so it goes on around the twisty circuit, Andy putting the MGB into a slide and then pulling it back out seemingly at will, more often than not with his foot planted to the floor. It is exhilarating beyond belief, and always under total control. No wonder, then, that Julius Thurgood, Race Director of the HRDC, always points newcomers to the sport in the direction of an MGB.

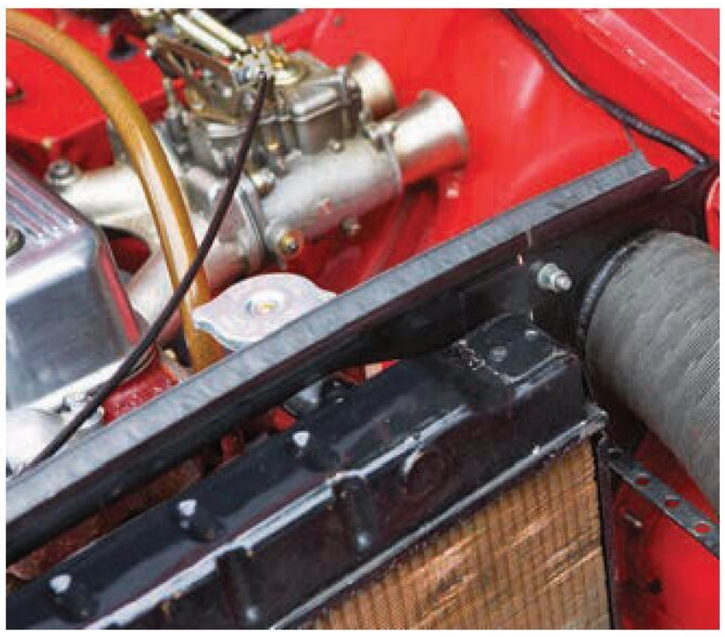
Inevitably, Andy Newall's dominance in the MGB50 series with 8DBL led some people to throw doubt on the car's specification. The situation is not helped by the fact that 8DBL's Works history includes racing at Sebring in the prototype class with an engine bored out to over 2-litres. Since then, of course, it has had any number of different engines under the bonnet, but I feel obliged to put the question of engine size to Andy.

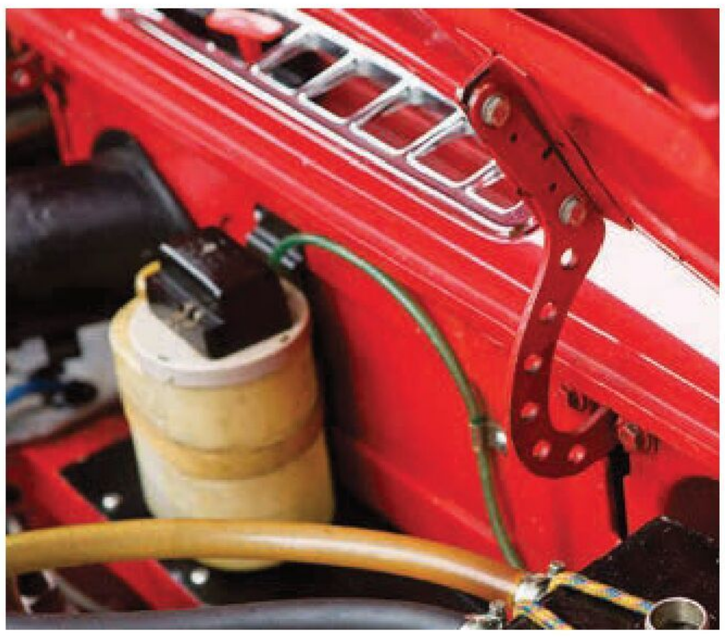
'The car is running to Appendix K specifications, which means it is

1840cc,' he replies unequivocally *(Appendix K is the FIA category that endeavours to keep cars standard to their period and which covers 1962-1965 for the MGB, though cars up to 1967 are also eligible thanks to their unchanged specification)*. 'We did build a 2.1 engine once for use in categories which allowed that, but it soon grenaded. If we had that sort of engine in the car today, I would be able to out-drag the opposition down the straight, but that is simply not the case. It is through the corners where we gain the time, because 8DBL is such a lovely handling car; it just sticks to the road.'

Talking later to Julius Thurgood, he confirms that all FIA Appendix K MGBs have to run with 1840cc engines. 'There was a time when the rules were getting lax and some people were running with engines as large as 1950cc,' he says, 'but a few years ago the FIA started enforcing them strictly and at least half of the cars being raced had to have new engines. Going up to 1950cc was not just a capacity change, it also opened up all sorts of tuning possibilities. If everyone ran with a 1950cc engine then it wouldn't bother me in the slightest, but we are running to Appendix K and so 1840cc is the rule that enforces a level playing field.'

So why, I wonder, did 8DBL outperform all the other Appendix K MGBs in the MGB50? Perhaps it was the extensive use of aluminium panels that gave it an advantage? After all, you are only allowed to run aluminium panels that were fitted in period and





while standard cars are limited to an aluminium bonnet, Works cars such as 8DBL can add lightweight wings, doors and bootlid to that list.

'I would expect a Works car that is correctly built and with a good driver to have the edge against a standard FIA car built to a similar specification and with an equally good driver,' replies Julius, 'but it would be a marginal edge, not wholesale assassination. A lot too much is talked about this and to be honest, I would be just as happy competing in a steel bodied car as in a lighter Works one.'

That must mean, then, that 8DBL's great success had to be down to the driver as much as the car? Cautioned not to indulge in any false modesty, Andy replies: 'I do have a huge advantage over many of the other drivers in that racing is a big part of my job and I am on track at least twice a week – that's a huge advantage.'

Clearly not one to blow his own trumpet too loudly, it is left to Julius Thurgood to spell out: 'What you see in Andy Newall is a consummate driver, and his success is down to being one of the very best. He doesn't bring an ego to events, he brings his family and enters into the spirit of the occasion. As an ambassador to Sir Anthony, Andy is fantastic. But then again, one of the reasons why Sir Anthony has been so successful is that he won't field a car in poor condition and he doesn't hire poor drivers. And yes, he is in the fortunate position of being able to do this, but I must say that he is also a good sport, a great benefactor to racing and a lovely person – his enthusiasm and affection for 8DBL is obvious and genuine.'

This last point cannot be over-emphasised. The privilege of being driven in 8DBL is not something I will forget, but the enthusiasm for the MGB from everybody who has ever raced the model. Andy Newall also drives a 900bhp McLaren that has more power on tickover than 8DBL has on full chat, but still loves driving the B. And the charming and down-to-earth Sir Anthony, who can count far more exotic and powerful cars in his collection, still has so much obvious affection for 8DBL. In my book, that must rate as an achievement to equal any win on track.

Andy Newall steers 8DBL round a greasy track, using the throttle for total control through the corners.

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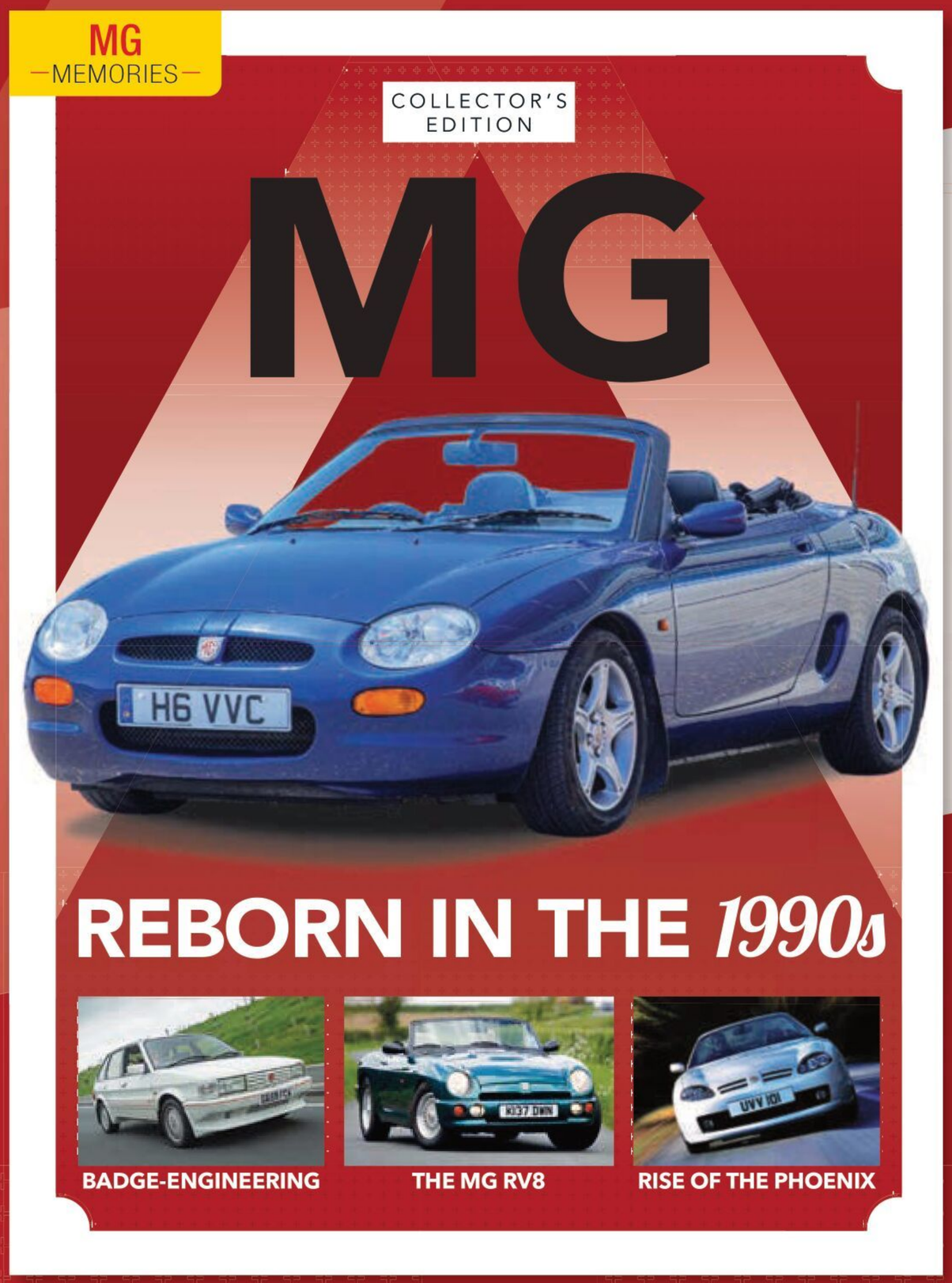

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The long-lost giant slayer

MG Memories encounters a 1980s BSCC Group A MG Metro Turbo, as raced by Robin Brundle, and discusses these impressive machines with Robin's former teammate, BTCC driver Patrick Watts.

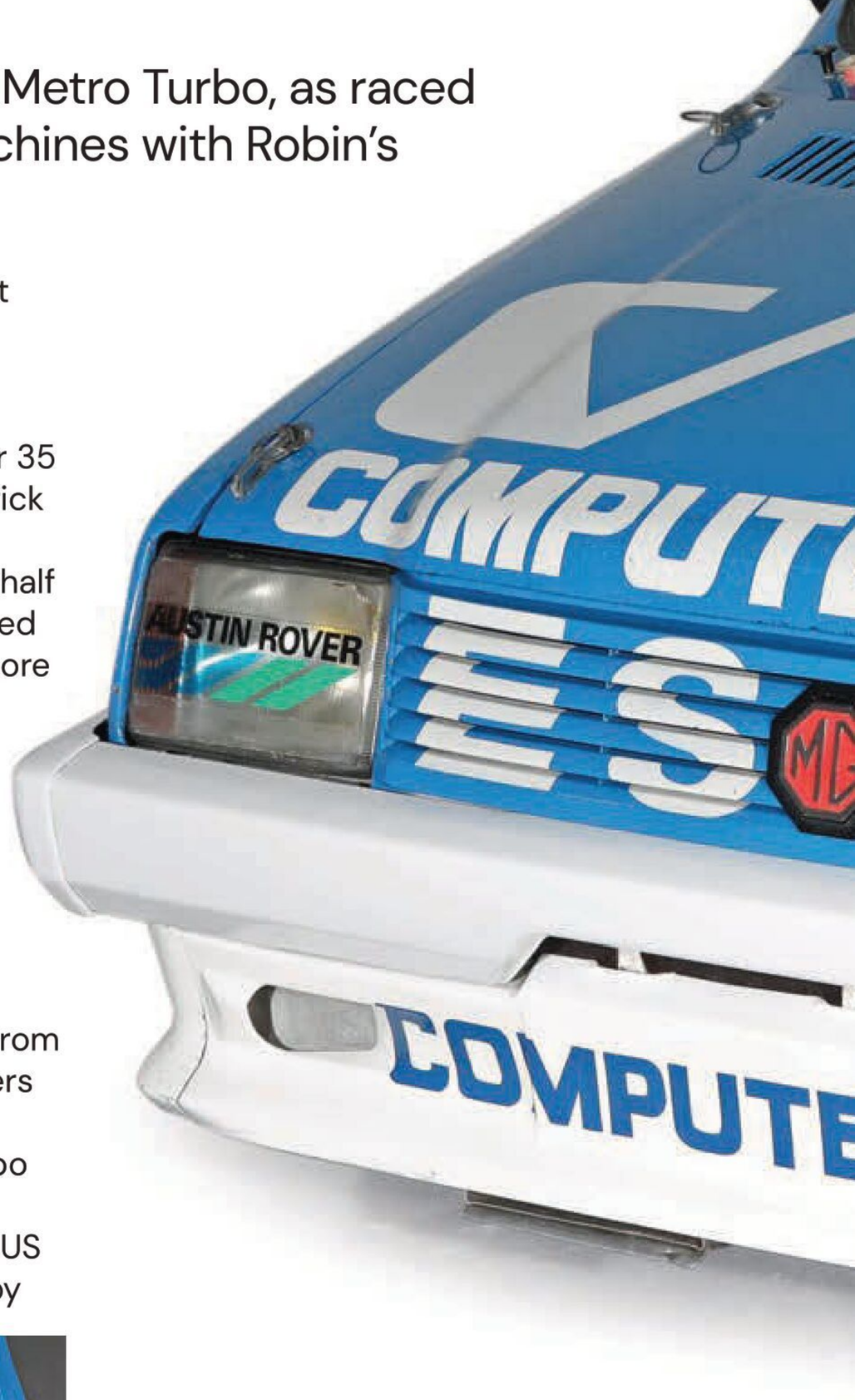
Racing is at the heart of MG's history and the ComputerVision/Mobil-branded Metros are icons of 1980s UK motorsport. Arguably the best-known 80s MG motorsport Metros were the 6R4s rallied by legends like Tony Pond. However, in 1983, whilst the 6R4 was still being developed, Austin Rover Group backed a team of MG Metro Turbos in Group A Class 2 of the British Saloon Car Championship (BSCC), alongside the Rover Vitesse, battling against Jag XJSs and BMW 635s.

Tony Pond (No.35), who was contracted to drive for ARG, raced in the MG Metro Turbo (MGMT) sponsored by UniPart and the Daily Express in 1983, with teammate Patrick Watts (No.36) in the normally-aspirated MG Metro (Patrick moved up to the Turbo the same year). Both cars were built and run by Roger Dowson Engineering, then based at Silverstone. Martin Brundle (No.37) also raced an MG Metro Turbo that year at the Silverstone round.

The following year, ARG had two Turbos on the grid, sponsored by ComputerVision and Esso; number 35 driven by Robin Brundle, while Patrick Watts drove number 34. "In 1984 Robin and I had two new cars but, half way through that season, ARG pulled out and Roger Dowson built two more cars. Mine was turned into a long-distance car, with bigger tanks, and renamed chassis number 6. Robin had what I think was a new car for TT racing." Robin's ComputerVision MG Metro Turbo you see here is therefore still in the same spec as it was in 1984. ARG's withdrawal stemmed from a controversy with one of the Rovers the year before.

"There is also the MG Metro Turbo that went to Germany and did the DTM and the one that went to the US and did IMSA over there. So that, by my reckoning, makes up about nine cars so which ones were re-named? They actually only built five cars which now exist as: two ETC cars, one BSCC [the car pictured here], one DTM and one IMSA USA," explains Patrick who owns his number 34 and has rebuilt and run two of the cars for customers.

There has been some confusion about the car we are admiring here in the past but it's something Patrick believes he has cleared up. "That car is definitely Robin's 1984 BSCC car, with the short-distance tank. Only the TT cars had the one-hour, long-distance



Dowson Engineering made some interesting changes to the engine bay to keep the Howley-built 1275cc Metro Turbo engine competitive.

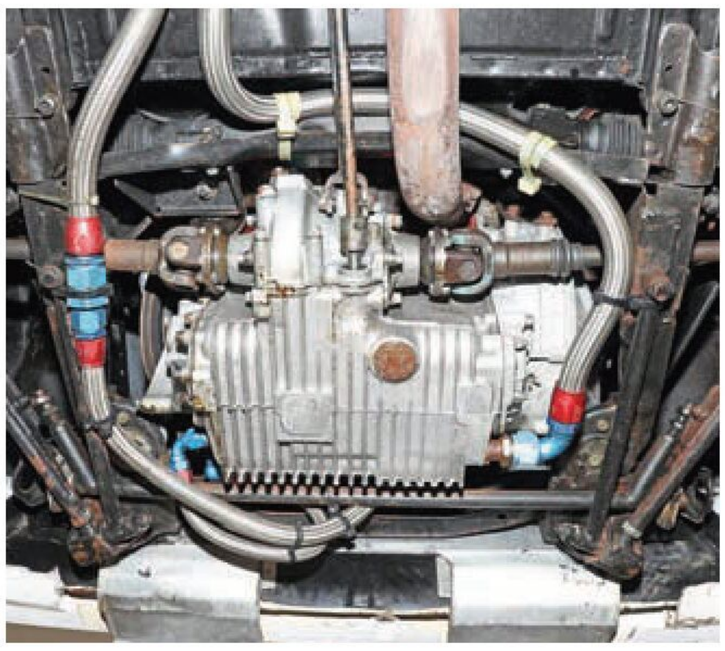
tank and have fuel fillers below the rear side windows on both sides, for refuelling half-way through the race. We didn't need that for BSCC, just the European Championship."

John Davenport, ARG Motorsport Director, contacted the ARG Heritage Trust in February 1985 and passed Robin Brundle's BSCC car onto them, as the factory-backed cars were no longer to be raced. This MG Metro Turbo, carrying the number 35 (which had also been used by other MGMTs in the ComputerVision/Esso team) was first displayed at Syon House and then at the Gaydon BMIHT museum until Ford purchased the museum and cleared some of the display cars, which also included an MG YB, a cross-sectioned 1969 MG Midget and the last MGB GT V8. The Metro sold for slightly less than the B.

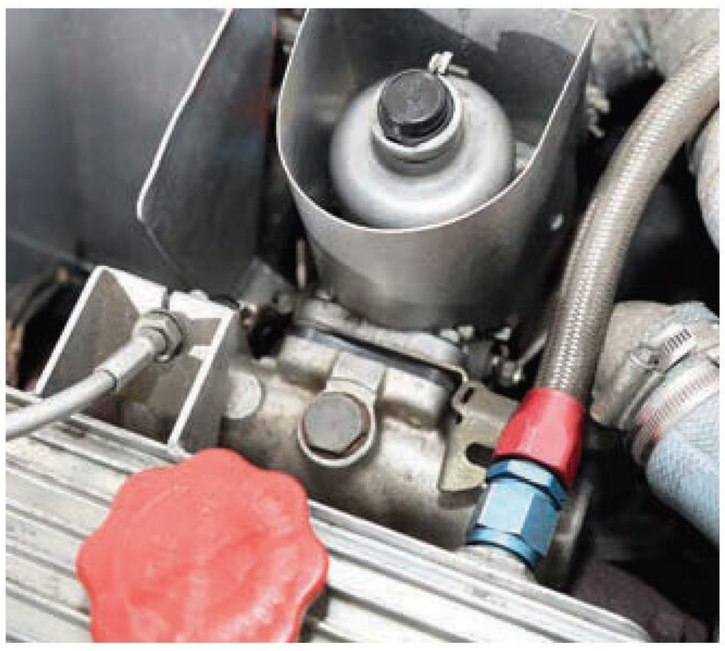
The lucky new owner was a 14-year-old James Bradley whose father, David, bought the car after some brisk bidding. James planned to hillclimb it but, from what we can determine, no track time ensued bar a photo shoot. The Bradleys clearly had intentions for the Metro as it was returned to Roger Dowson in June 2003 for extensive work including an engine and gearbox rebuild, the latter being a Jack Knight unit.

Number 35 then passed to David Titmuss, who bought it at MGCC's 75th anniversary event at Silverstone. He dry-stored it until it was sold to its current custodians, classic car specialists Scott Turner and George Williams. "David is a lovely chap and raced in the Metro Challenge Cup back in the day," explains George.

"We've stripped the brakes, as the seals were drying, and had to replace



To aid cooling, the oil is sent from the sump to a large, rear-mounted oil cooler and is drawn back to the engine by a mechanical pump.



SU HIF44 Turbo carburettor is protected, by additional shielding, from the glowing turbo mounted below.

the two Girling master cylinders," says George. "The rears are AP but I found, when I rebuilt the cast alloy four-pot fronts, that they didn't have any casting marks on them, just L/H, R/H and 005. They are really nicely made," adds Scott. It's possible that the 005 may suggest the chassis number.

Bag fuel tanks were used on all the ComputerVision MGMTs. They have a limited shelf-life so Scott had to remove the tank and the remnants of the foam baffling prior to the car being fired up. It was given a rudimentary service, including fluids and a new battery, before firing up. "I'd love to race the Metro but it would need a lot of money spent on it to make it competitive now and it is such an original car. You'd have to undo all the originality so it's just not feasible for me," explains George.

However, racing these cars is something Patrick Watts is still heavily involved in, with his co-driver Nick Swift of Swiftune. They compete in Historic Touring Car races and still give the bigger cars a hard time, if not more so with improvements Patrick has made to the car.

This MG Metro Turbo went back to Gaydon, now known as the British Motor Museum, in 2020 when Scott and George displayed it during the National Metro and Mini Day. It was amazing to see how much interest it generated. The Metro evokes widespread nostalgia and, even though the ComputerVision MGMTs had a short career on track, the Metro Challenge went on to become a popular series. "And the 80s and 90s race car scene is quite 'on trend'," adds George. Writers like me, of a certain age, remember watching racing on our tellies, in what was to become the BTCC, on BBC's Grandstand. I can hear the opening music now...

Looking through the homologation papers for this car it's quite interesting to see what was permitted at the time. The spec was surprisingly limited when you consider most of today's Works BTCC combatants don't even have an engine from the car's manufacturer. The Safety Devices rollcage seems rather basic compared to today's cages.

Starting with the engine bay, there are clear differences between a standard MGMT, with more prominent induction hose on the nearside ducting cool air to the Garrett T3 turbo. The original cast iron exhaust manifold remains, as does the alloy inlet manifold with built-in fire rings. The plenum is bespoke, as is the T3 turbo's outlet port which connects to a front-mounted air/air intercooler needed to produce the claimed 190-200bhp required to be competitive in 1983, mounted alongside a narrower than OE radiator. Reports at the time stated boost to be 1.1bar (15.95psi), which is considerably more than the roadgoing 5psi which offers just 93bhp and 85lbs/ft with a 9.4:1 CR from the 12H A+ engine.

The engines were balanced and assembled by Howley Racing of Warrington, using Mahle pistons but retaining the original crankshaft and con-rods. Howley also brought the compression down to 7.1:1.

Fuelling is critical for any turbo engine and, as you might expect, even though the single SU HIF44 carburettor is configured for several ARG turbo cars, i.e. sealed, such as the clamp on the dashpot damper, further modifications were needed for the increased boost, including sealing the choke mechanism. The cars ran two fuelling circuits: a low-pressure fuel circuit for starting and a high-pressure set-up used only on track, the latter using twin MGMT fuel pumps.

It's an area Patrick has extensively researched for his own cars, as he explains: "When you accelerate, the intercooler and carburettor are pressurised to about 1.5bar boost, with the Malpassi fuel pressure regulator sending fuel in at 1.6bar. When you take your foot off the accelerator there is a vacuum in the inlet manifold down-stream of the carb butterfly so all that fuel pressure goes in the float chamber, causing

the fuel to evacuate into the engine. Hence, when you put your foot down and accelerate you get a huge flame out the side. For a few moments it hesitates as the engine is very rich." A flame-spitting Metro may be great for the spectators but stuttering into a corner must be quite unnerving when you are racing, even though it clears when back on the power. It's a feature Patrick has resolved on his own cars.

Critically, the two (fuel and air) boost levels have to be within approximately 0.3psi of each other to stay in the safe zone which is why there are two Turbo Technics pressure gauges mounted prominently on the dash. When he serviced the racer, Scott found what must be the skinniest SU needle we've ever seen.

Heat soak can be the enemy for tuned MGMT engines, with the SU HIF's float chamber mere millimetres from the glowing hot turbo, and it's interesting to see how Roger Dowson dealt with these challenges. At the time, no extra vents were permitted in the bodywork. The car retains the OE heat shield under the carburettor but has the addition of an aluminium shield around the dashpot. The large black ducting pipe to the left simply vents heat from the hot cast iron side of the T3 turbo, which sits to the right of a twin-reservoir tank for the Girling master cylinders.

The engine bay, as you might expect, is also awash with stainless-braided hoses for crankcase ventilation and the coolant system. There is also a lot being asked of the oil in this set-up as the A+ engine's cam-driven oil pump supplies the shared oil to a red hot turbo, the engine and gearbox. This car however has a trick up its sleeve as oil is taken from the gearbox sump drain and pumped to the boot, where a huge oil cooler sits across the width of the car. A two-stage mechanical oil pump, driven from the crank pulley, then pulls the oil back to the gearbox/sump. Patrick confirms it was a configuration all the cars ran.

To try and handle the aggressive torque produced by this 1275cc-derived engine Jack Knight gears and gearbox casting were used, which reputedly had thicker walls than OE, with Hewland-type dogs to replace the helical box's synchromesh. The self-adjusting Verto clutch was replaced with an older, pre-Verto clutch and it's not the only regression to tried and tested Mini-sourced technology; the Metro's inner CV pot joints made way for Hardy Spicers and an 11-stud conversion was carried out to the 12G940 Turbo cylinder head, as seen on original Cooper S cylinder heads.

Patrick wasn't keen on the transmission. "The boxes were Jack Knight in period. They weren't very good quality compared with now and would wear out very quickly,

considering they were only doing very short races. It had such a stiff clutch too. It would wear out the thrust bearing after one race. Now we fit a historic Mini clutch thrust bearing and clutch diaphragm as it's lighter and we don't get any clutch slip. We've had near about 280bhp on the rolling road if you turn the boost up. It's still reliable and it beats everybody," Patrick adds enthusiastically.

Suspension was going to be critical in ARG's quest for glory and the ComputerVision Metros had the inside line, as Scott explains: "I spoke to one of the mechanics who built the cars at Roger Dowson Engineering and he said that Williams Grand Prix Engineering designed and built the suspension on these cars." Such helpful links may have been tied in with Williams' sponsorship deal with Leyland Vehicles between 1980 and '82. Williams' ties with the 6R4 are also well-known. To me it is this surprising minutiae that make the car so special. "They have the same hubs as 6R4s, and bearings," confirms Patrick.

Aluminium coil-over dampers and 350lb-rate springs replaced the MGMT's Hydragas suspension but the differences don't stop there as fabricated tubular steel trailing arms replace the Metro's cast items. Adjustable camber brackets and an AP Racing rear disc brake conversion, with knock-on hubs, are mounted on a trimmed-down rear subframe.

Patrick confirms that the wheels were also magnesium alloy at the time, as he's had to have sets remanufactured for historic racing due to the originals showing signs of fatigue.

For me, one of the most interesting parts of the suspension is the adjustable rear anti-roll bar (ARB), which has a blade on one side. Using a control lever mounted just behind the gear lever, the driver can twist the blade, whilst driving, to adjust the stiffness of the ARB. "It was F1 technology," comments Scott. The front suspension is totally bespoke with adjustable rose-jointed arms and tie bars, the latter connecting to a thick front ARB, with adjustable length where it sits over the tie bar.

The alloy front four-pot brake calipers are vented and have grooved cast iron discs, with bells, and small ducting channels mounted on the hubs for cooling.

Even the fuel was cooled on the ComputerVision Metros, courtesy of what looks like an oil cooler mounted behind the nearside headlamp, with ducting. On this particular car there are also two ducts under the front valance, fabricated from sheet aluminium, to force air to the intercooler and front radiator.

Inside the stripped-out interior sits a single Recaro bucket seat and harness, in front of the Metro dash. The dash is modified to display the all- important information on a single pod, next to which sits an in-line rear brake bias valve.

There is a Moto-Lita steering wheel on an adjustable column. The driver also has access to the obligatory plumbed-in fire extinguisher and a bank of switches to control the fan and pumps.

Even with the internal heater retained, an electrically-heated windscreen was fitted by the Dowson team. The screen has small pebbledash marks from close racing, which is part of the car's patina. The same goes for the exterior, with the leading edge of the bonnet showing tiny battle scars from six races during the 1984 season. The cheeky side-exit exhaust would spit flames at opponents as drivers vied for the next clipping point.

"ARG had a huge deal with ComputerVision at the time. The Metro Turbo touring cars were the first to carry the blue and white livery for ComputerVision and I think it's the best livery BL ever did," muses Scott. As with many of MG's racing cars of old, there is so much more to it than meets the eye.

The switch controls for the fans and pumps are mounted next to the single racing seat, along with brake and anti-roll bar adjusters. A Moto-Lita steering wheel replaces the MG Metro Turbo's leather-trimmed original. The combined pod behind the wheel holds gauges which relay critical information to the driver, with the exception of an ammeter which is mounted centrally on the dashboard.

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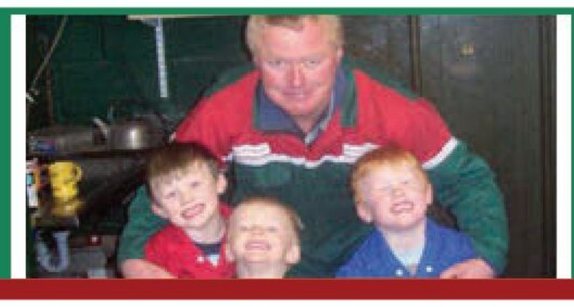

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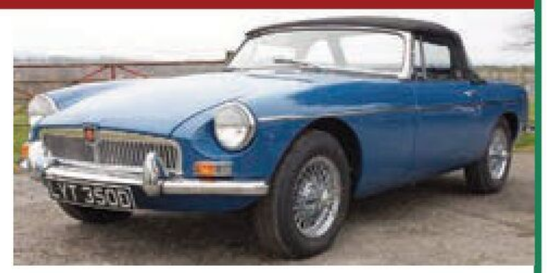

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The factory MG trials teams

Drawing crowds of thousands, often to muddy countryside hillsides, trials were the forebear to MG in motorsport.

The sport of production trials so popular in the pre-war years is a particularly British occupation and one that might now be referred to by some as a bit Marmite; you either love them or hate them. Participants had to sometimes enjoy being either freezing cold, soaking wet or very muddy. Very often they could be a combination of all three. It certainly did not suit those keeping their cars brightly polished and free of the odd dent or scrape as even an event advertised as being non-damaging would sometimes now fail close examination under the Trades Description Act. Perhaps many entrants had been hardened to privations by going to boarding schools where cold showers and the rough and tumble of rugger on wet and muddy fields was the norm!

Some areas of the British countryside with many small lanes, steep hills and muddy farm tracks are ideally suited to the sport. So too are the smaller sports cars the local motor industry used to be so good at making. However, although many entered their standard, as built, cars in trials and enjoyed some success, to really rake in the awards a measure of drastic modification was needed. There were, of course, regulations governing the extent of changes allowable, but competitors always found ways to gain an advantage and stay within the rules, or just about. So we see knobbly, that is heavily treaded, tyres banned at times and supercharged cars promoted to the next higher engine capacity class on some events.

Still, the modifications made to the cars were only half the story. Far more important were the skills of driver and passenger. The ability to assess the conditions on the day and adjust the approach to any section to suit these was vital. In some cases it was advantageous to use all of the power available and just charge up a hill at full throttle. Other times where adhesion on muddy or slippery surfaces was minimal a very gentle approach paid dividends and it was then that the passenger could assist by bouncing up and down to try to increase the tyre grip. Another trick was while in the queue awaiting your turn up the hill to lower the pressure in the tyres and then re-inflating them before tackling the next road section. A further duty for the passenger was navigation using the route cards supplied and the local Ordnance Survey map. There would often be areas where to placate locals competitors had to keep noise to a minimum and there could also be some hidden controls to ensure that participants kept to the stipulated route.

A study of the pictures of pre-war trials, especially the more popular ones like the Lands End, reveals that despite often-poor winter weather large crowds would gather so see the cars tackle the more accessible sections. At a time when car owners were definitely in a minority most would have had to get there on foot, by bicycle or on public transport. Coverage of events in the motoring press was extensive and it is not surprising that manufacturers were pleased to publicise any successes gained by their products. The MG Car Company certainly led the field in this respect and frequently ran advertisements to promote sales of new cars.

For a marque that was to become so successful in the trials field it is fitting that Cecil Kimber, the inspiration behind the whole business, should have had early success in what most

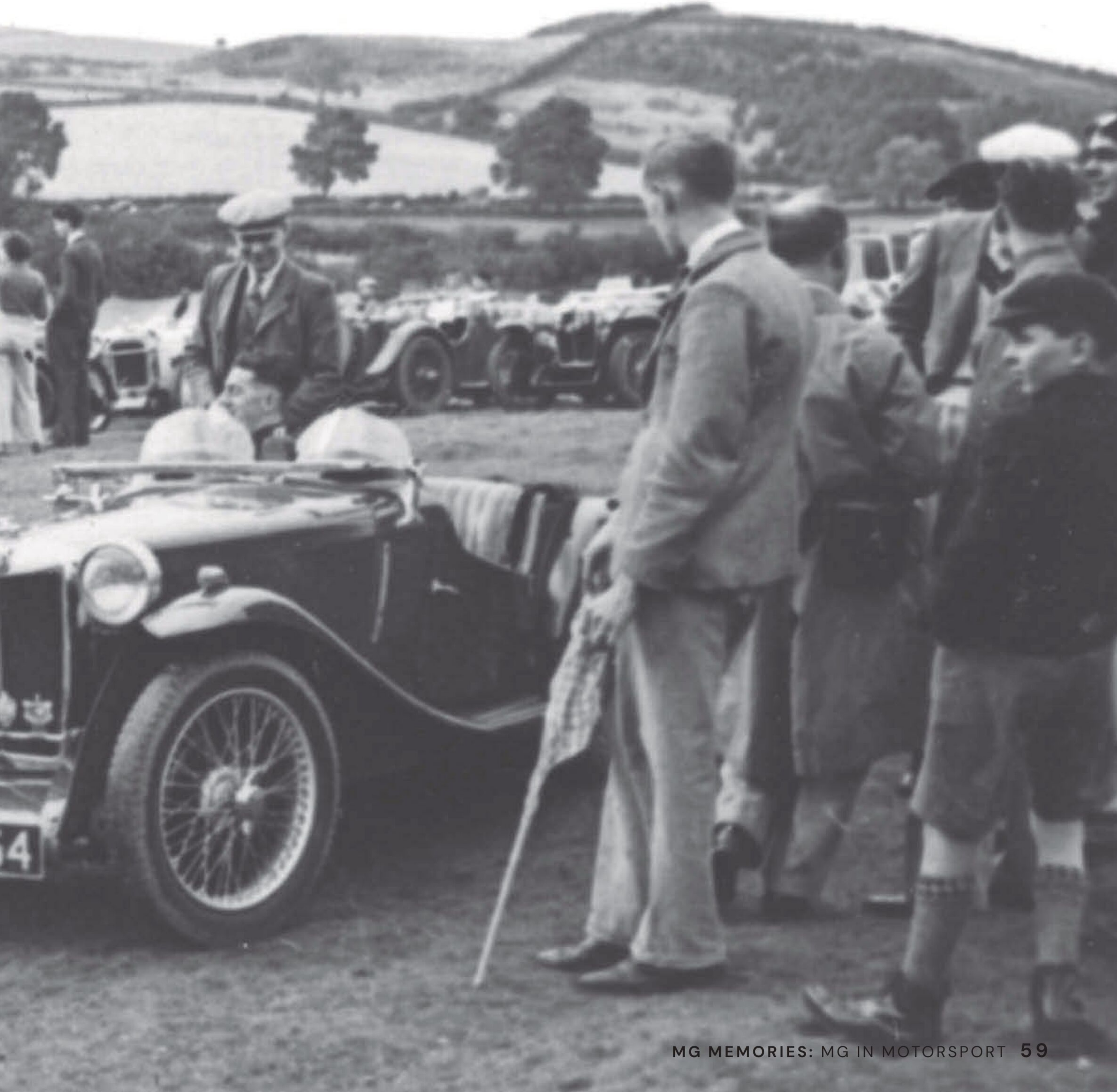
J.M. Toulmin ascending Leckhampton Hill in the 1935 Colmore Cup Trial. The popularity of such events can be judged by the number of spectators in this picture.

9
TJ 5000

RALLY: MG RALLY STARS

ART

Main: MG Car Club Rushmere Hill Climb held near Bridgnorth in 1934. Two of the Cream Cracker PAs, JB 3854 driven by Bastock and TJ 5000 by Toulmin, prior to their repainting in cream and brown. Note the stripes on the sides of the cars.
Inset: Trials were often a muddy affair and occasionally even the best drivers bogged down. Here Jones in the TA needs assistance, even from his passenger.



North West London Motor Club Team Trial 1934. The start at Hartland, North Devon with Toulmin in his PA carrying the cream and brown stripes leads the other two team cars

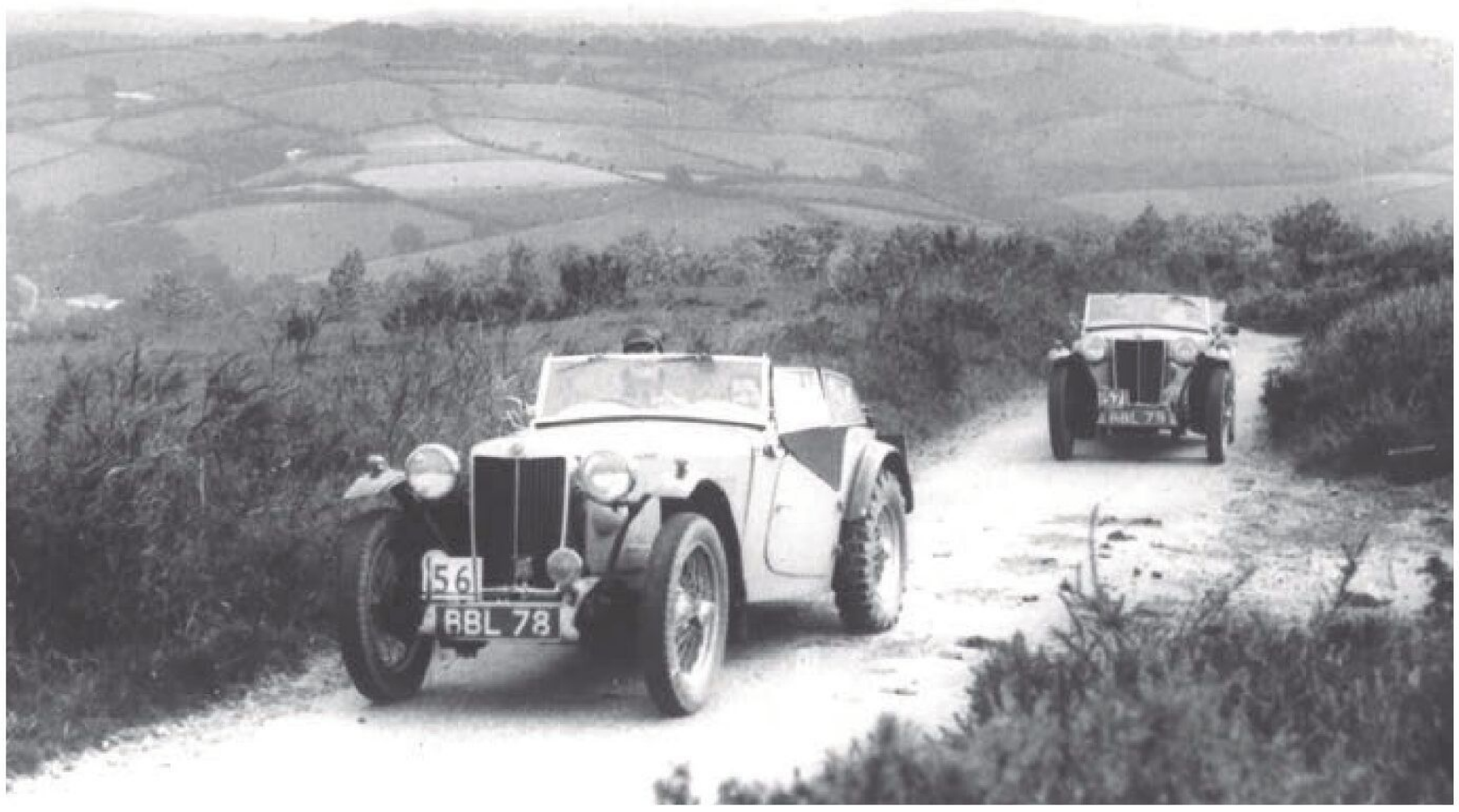
people consider to be the first true sports MG. Old Number One, as the Morris special built by Kimber is known. It was not the first MG car by any means, however it was the first constructed solely with competition in mind. It is believed that work on the car was started over a year before its 1925 Lands End Trial debut where Kimber, partnered by Wilf Mathews, won a first class award.

Even this early in the MG story Cecil Kimber was not alone in competing with an MG car. W. 'Billy' Cooper, who was often referred to by Kimber as his first customer for an MG, was born in 1874 and started a long competition career in 1909 riding motorcycles. He took part in the first Exeter Trial in 1910 and by the outbreak of war in 1914 had won more than 100 gold medals. After the war Billy had three Morris Cowleys, which he used in competition before he took delivery of the MG Sports, registered MF 8068 on 31st May 1924. This car was a four-seater, aluminium bodied 14/28 with a modified Morris Oxford chassis. In December 1925 he entered this car in the London-Exeter Trial gaining a silver medal.

The 1935 MG Car Club Abingdon to Abingdon Trial. Bastock prepares to tackle the driving test in Cream Cracker PA wearing the new cream and brown livery.

In the 1926 Land End the entry list included, in addition to that entered by Billy Cooper, no less than three more MGs. C.R.B. (Russell) Chiesman, who was a family friend of Cecil Kimber, G.E. Gather and I.D. Spooner had all entered their Super Sports models with some success as Spooner won a gold, Chiesman silver and Gather bronze medals. Spooner was to repeat his gold on the Edinburgh Trial a couple of months later. The 1926 Lands End Trial had the largest entry up to that date and the huge crowds that turned out luckily had fine weather. In spite of this by the time the last entries reached Bluehills Mine they had to climb the hill in the dark, aided by just their headlamps and two giant flares that had been erected to help them.

By the end of 1926 MG was gaining mentions in reports as a marque in its own right and all the entrants driving Super Sports in the London-Exeter Trial won awards. The 1927 Lands End saw a reduction in the number of competitors over the previous year but there were three MGs entered and all the crews earned gold medals. By the end of 1928 the six-cylinder 18/80 models were becoming available and for the Exeter Trial in December no less than three of these were entered and in the hands of those experienced



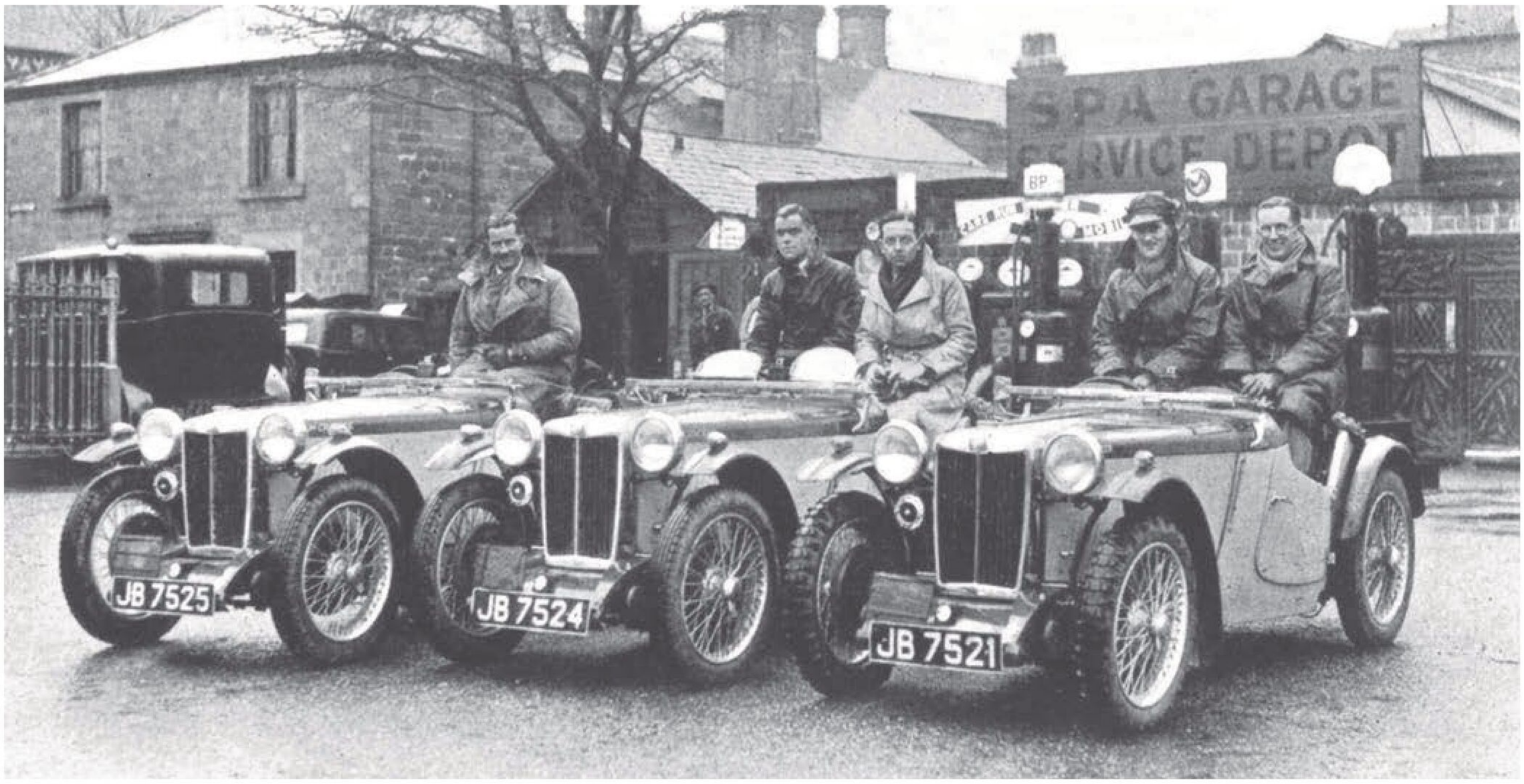
1938 Cream Cracker TAs, BBL 78 Toulmin and BBL 79 Crawford. By this time the cars were fitted with a VA engine bored out to 1,708cc.

drivers, C.R.B. Chiesman, H.D. Parker and C.F. Dobson, all gained gold medals. The performance of the new cars in their debut in M.C.C. trials was remarked upon in the motoring press who thought them very impressive. The earlier models of MGs also did well with gold medals going to W.E. Kendrick and G. Higginbottom.

The 1929 Lands End attracted over 30,000 spectators and a 228-car entry, of which 180 completed the 326-mile course. Dry weather meant that, for once, dust rather than mud was the order of the day. Fourteen MGs were entered including the first outing for four of the brand new M-type Midgets. Of the larger cars there were five 18/80s but only one of these, driven by H.D. Parker, took a gold medal. R.G.T. Bear in one of the 14/40s also took gold. The Midgets did very well and impressed all with their hill climbing ability and agility on the bends and both C.F. Dobson (220) and J.A. Watson-Bourne (222) earned gold medals. G. Higginbottom (221) and D.C. Buckingham (231) won silver medals, Higginbottom losing his gold at Bluehills where he went too wide at a corner and is reported to have scattered the crowd at his second attempt to get round.

However, the days of the larger cars were not quite over and although an increasing number of the new Midgets were being bought, some competitors continued using the 14/40s and 18/80s with success. Although this account of the period has so far concentrated on the larger events, by this time an increasing number of smaller clubs were arranging trials. In the 1930s these continued to proliferate. It was partly the success of the smaller, cheaper sports cars, and the growing general car ownership, that led to the increase in participation in the sport.

MGs in greater numbers participated in all the major trials, and as in the early 1930s the marque grew in stature, the name MG came to mean sports car in the eyes of the public. Consequently,



The 1935/1936 Cream Cracker Team of Jones, Crawford and Toulmin with their PB Midgets.

it seems, almost everyone buying a new M-type or J2 wanted to use it competitively. The MG Car Company were obviously well aware of the sales potential of trials successes and had from the outset given as much support to competitors as finance and Society of Motor Manufacturers rules would allow. However, by the mid 1930s this support became more overt, especially important when in 1935 MG officially stopped racing activities and lost its consequent publicity value.

The factory Cream Cracker team cars made their first appearance wearing the now familiar cream and brown colour scheme for the 1935 Lands End Trial. Although this was the debut for the team of P-type Midgets, newly painted, support for these cars by the factory had been evident well before this. Two of the members of the team, J. Maurice Toulmin and R.A. 'Mac' Macdermid, had acquired their cars early in 1934 and the third team member, Jack A. Bastock, his in September that year. At first the cars remained in their original colours, two painted blue and one green, although later they had brown and cream stripes along the sides of the bonnets. As they were still fitted with the heavy swept wings, and were thus over-weight, they were not as successful as expected and the cars were all returned to the factory for comprehensive modification before competing in the Exeter Trial at the end of 1934.

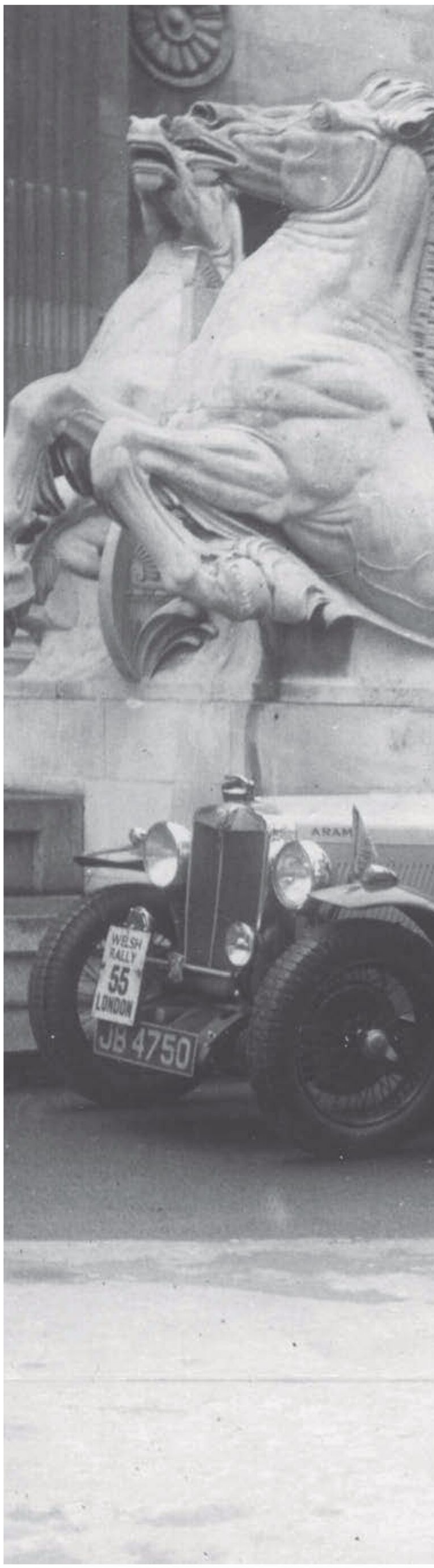
The swept wings were replaced by cycle wings and they were fitted with lightweight aluminium bonnets, the lighter 8-inch brake gear, locked differentials and much of the equipment, such as hoods, windscreens and side-screens, was discarded. Thus modified, the cars were more successful and took two first class awards and one second class award on the Exeter Trial. When they were returned to Abingdon to be prepared for the 1935 Lands End Trial it was decided to call the team Cream Crackers and to repaint the cars cream with brown wings, front apron, scuttle and bonnet top.

By the end of 1935, the factory had replaced the PAs by a team of three PBs, JB 7521, driven by Toulmin, JB 7524 for Ken Crawford and JB 7525 for J.E.S. Jones. The lessons had been well learned and the new cars, although similar in appearance to the earlier PAs, were more powerful, lighter and altogether more effective. In this form the cars enjoyed considerable success, which was exploited to the full in contemporary company advertising promoting the sale of standard cars.

Changes within the company led to the overhead camshaft road cars being replaced in 1936 with the pushrod T-series Midget and to maximise publicity for the new model the trials teams had to follow suit. A new Cream Cracker team of three TAs was formed for 1937 with ABL 960, ABL 962 and ABL 964 for Toulmin, Crawford and Jones respectively. Initially these cars were not as popular with the drivers but eventually they were developed into very effective trials cars. For 1938, VA (1,548cc) engines were fitted to new TA Midgets, BBL 78, 79, 80 and 81, and later the capacity was increased to 1,708cc by over-boring and fitting WA pistons. Gof. Imhof joined as driver of the last car.

In parallel to the efforts with the Cream Cracker cars the company also supported the Musketeers team. Initially they ran three of the specially built NE Magnettes that had successfully competed in the 1934 Tourist Trophy. Running un-blown in accordance with changed TT rules for that year, one of the cars, JB 4750, won the event in the hands of Charlie Dodson. This car was joined in the Musketeer team by JB 4606 and JB 4608 and the three NEs were driven in trials with a great deal of success by Lewis Welch, Freddy Kindell and Sam Nash. For example they won first class awards on the Lands End and Edinburgh Trials and in the Welsh Rally they took the team award and Sam Nash was the outright winner. Although finished in the same cream and brown colours as the Crackers the treatment was slightly different as the whole of the car's body was cream and only the wings, stays, front apron and the car's name appeared in brown.

Following this success, three special cars based on an amalgam of various current components were built for the next Musketeer team of Macdermid, Bastock and Langley. L-type chassis fitted with two-seater P-type bodies were given bored-out N-type engines with side-mounted Marshall superchargers. NA front axles and P-Type rears with locked differentials



The three-car Musketeer team driving NE Magnettes took the team prize in the 1935 Welsh Rally. JB 4750, Aramis was driven by Sam Nash, JB 4608, Pothos by Freddie Kindell and JB 4606, Athos by Lewis Welsh.

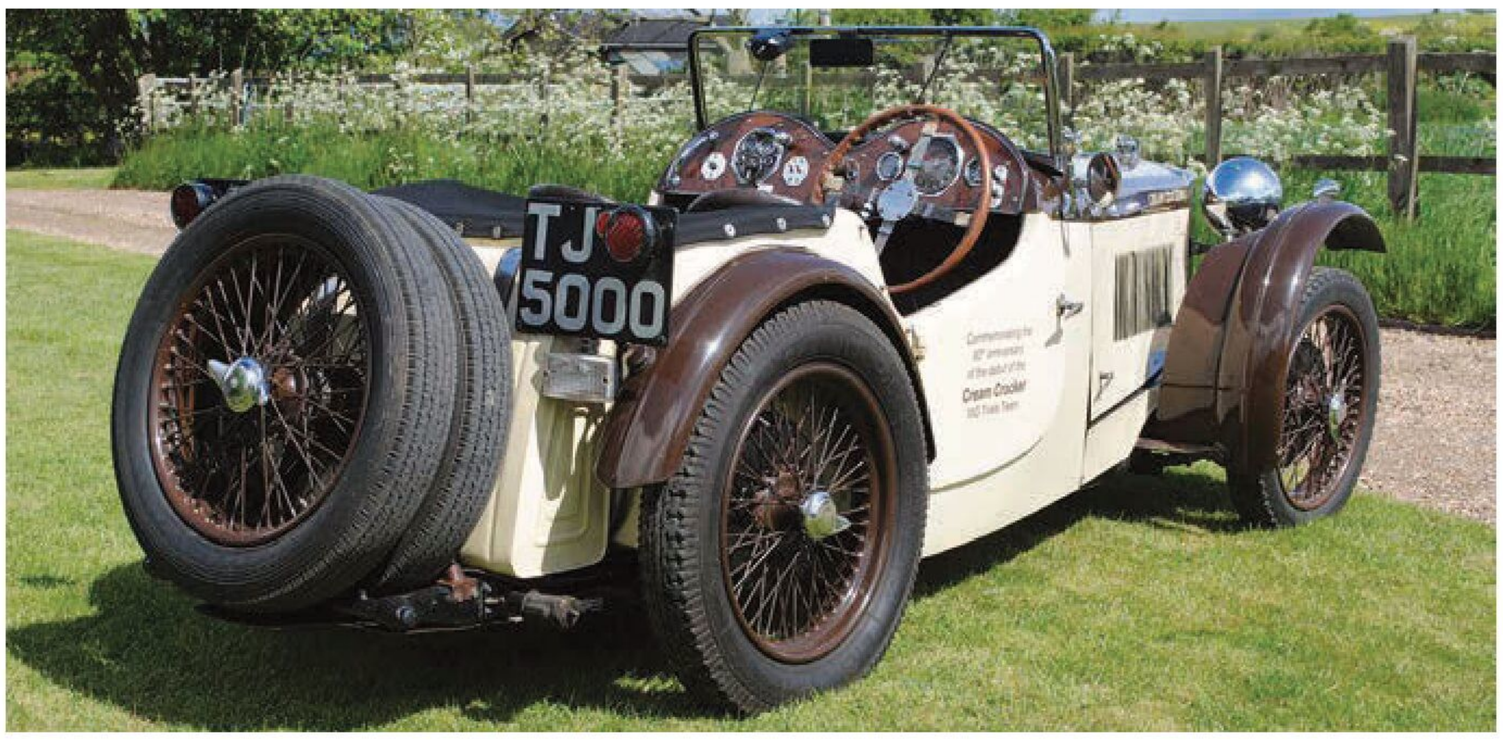
Unlike standard PBs, the Cream Cracker cars were fitted with lightweight cycle wings. This car is still used in competitions, including circuit racing.

and stronger half-shafts, plus 12-inch Q-type brakes at the front, were added to the mix and produced very potent machinery. These cars, JB 6865, JB 6866 and JB 6867, were fast and competitive and the team was very successful. The original plan was for the cars to be an official works team, as distinct from the ostensibly private Crackers team. The nominated drivers were Lewis Welch, Athos; either Alex Hounslow or G.W.J.H. Wright, Porthos; and Sam Nash, Aramis.

However, evidently it was later decided that the team drivers should not be so closely connected with the factory. The cars were tested in the Autumn of 1935 by the Competition Department and entered in a few events. During this period the specification was being refined and arrangements for the 1936 season were considered. The selected private drivers were invited to comment on the cars and their recommendations taken into account. When it was decided that the drivers should be MacDermid, Bastock and Langley consideration was also given to the logistics of the season. Lewis Welch, who lived in Oxford, was named as reserve driver for both the Musketeer and Cracker teams.

Like the other MG team, the Musketeers changed over to TAs for 1937, running ABL 961, ABL 963 and ABL 965 to the same specification as that used for the Cream Cracker cars. Likewise for 1938 BBL 82, BBL 83 and BBL 84 replaced the 1937 cars. In addition, BJB 412 was provided for the new team member, Dickie Green. However this last series of team cars differed from the Cream Crackers as they were fitted with TA engines running with Laystall crankshafts and Marshall 110 superchargers. The later Musketeer cars were painted red, rather than the traditional cream and brown.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 brought all these activities to an end and for mainstream sports car manufacturers, like the MG Car Company, production car trials were never again to receive the prominence and support seen in the 1930s. However, it was certainly not the end of the road as far as the ex-factory cars were concerned and right to the present day some are still prominent in the MCC classic events, like the Lands End and the Exeter, as well as in trials run by the MG Car Club and Vintage Sports-car Club.



PA Cream Cracker, TJ 5000 looks today much as it must have done when prepared at the factory for the 1935 Lands End Trial. The logo on the door celebrates the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Cream Crackers Trial Team. Twin spare wheels were both a necessity in case of punctures and also a legal way to improve traction by increasing the weight over the rear axle.

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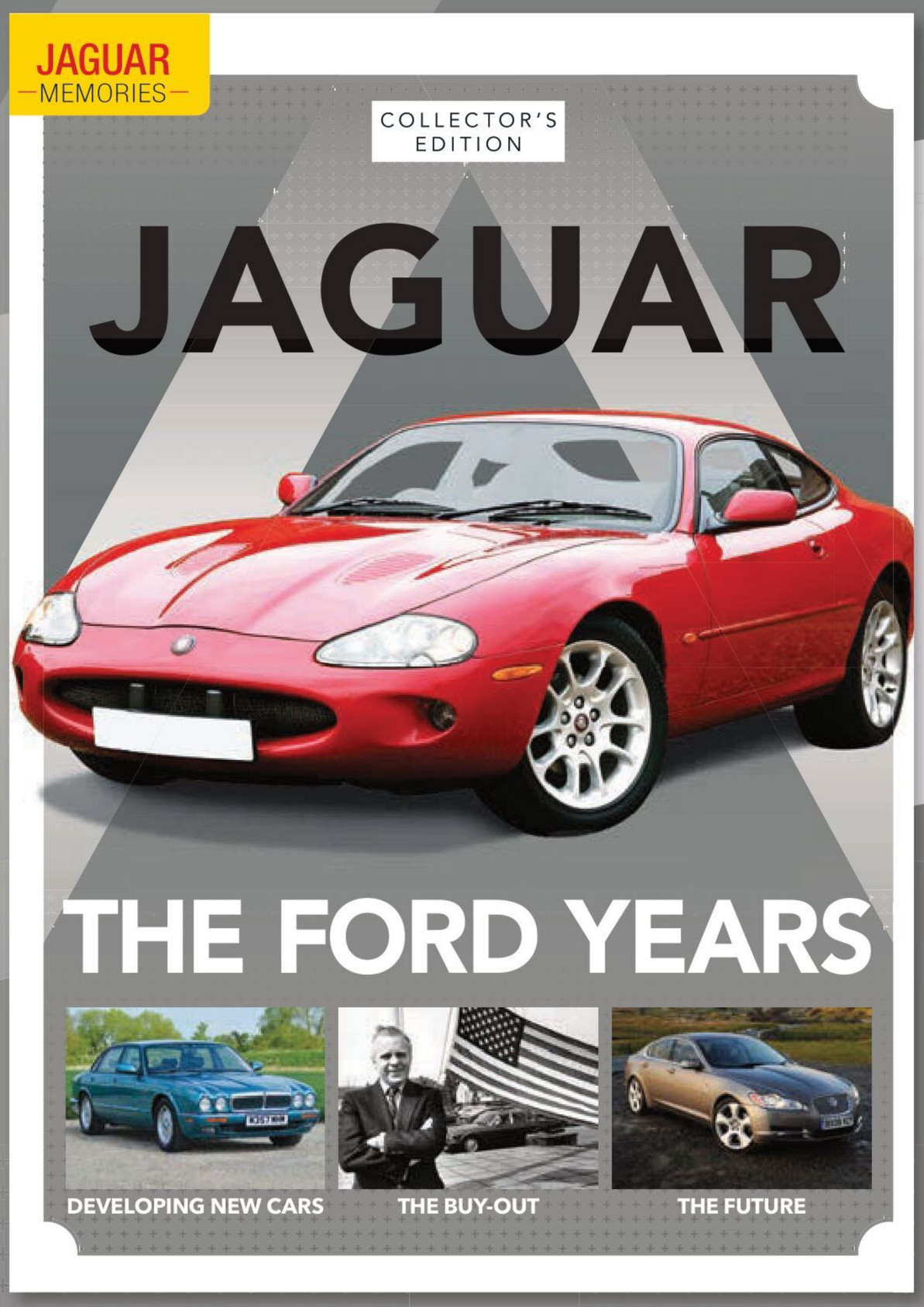

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This was the special long-nose MGB which Paddy Hopkirk drove so spiritedly in the 1964 Le Mans 24-Hour race.

MG rally stars and their great drives

Graham Robson recalls the superstar Works drivers from the golden era of BMC's Competitions Department and recounts their best results in Works MGs.

If ever you had the pleasure of visiting the Competitions Department at Abingdon in the 1950s and 1960s, you might have been surprised by the sheer variety of machinery which was packed into that cavernous workshop. Although this building was located in the heart of the MG factory, you could have looked round to see MGBs, Midgets, Minis, Austin-Healeys, Sprites and, later, Triumphs too – all of which were being built, or refurbished, for motorsport readiness by the same team of experienced technicians. Not only that but service 'barges' from Wolseley and Austin might also have been tucked into a corner.

'Comps' had been set up that way when the Works team was re-activated in 1955. It was BMC, rather than purely MG, finance which kept the programmes rolling and the policy was always to use 'horses for courses'; to send the best possible cars to contest an astonishing variety of events all round the world. This explains why an MGB might be sent to Le Mans, a Mini could tackle the Monte Carlo Rally and an Austin-Healey 3000 might go to the sorts of events where brute performance was going to pay dividends.

It was the same with the drivers. Superstars they might have been but BMC still wanted to be able to move them around from car to car, and event to event, depending on where the prospects were favourable. That's

Pat Moss' very first Works drive for BMC was in this MG TF1500 in the 1955 RAC rally.

why I have had to profile just half a dozen true superstars and (because they never had the joy of driving an MG in motorsport) missed out two or three more.

So, ladies first... let me start by mentioning one of my most famous ever characters, Pat Moss. Yes, of course she will always be remembered for winning the Liège-Rome-Liège in a big Healey, for driving a Mini Cooper as if it were a glorified roller-skate and becoming European Ladies' Champion several times. How many recall that her first-ever works drive had been in an MG TF1500 in the RAC Rally? Third in the Ladies' Category in 1955 was a steady start, as was a similar result on the 1956 event but, after that, she soon graduated to Austin-Healeys and the rest, as they say, is history.

For the first three years, in fact, Pat was overshadowed by an established driver, Nancy Mitchell, who started lifting ladies' awards in MG Magnettes in 1956, took third in her class in the gruelling French Alpine Rally, won the Lyons-Charbonnières and Mille Miglia events and was so reliable in many events that she used MGs (Magnettes and MGAs) to win the European Ladies' Championship in 1956 and again in 1957. All in all, it was a pity that in 1958 she then chose to retire from the sport, to be a popular and gracious doctor's wife in Bournemouth. She could already see the dramatic way in which Pat Moss was progressing so perhaps she thought it wise.

Nancy Mitchell won the European Ladies Championship in the 1950s, often driving MGAs.

Now, though, it was time for the men to get a look in and begin reaping the rewards for all the development work that they had put in with the MGA and its derivatives in the late 1950s. Works boss Marcus Chambers had not yet begun to look for young driving talent to join his team so it was stalwarts like John Gott (the 'motoring policeman' as the national press always called him, for he was a senior copper at the time), Gerry Burgess and Jack Sears, who led the main campaigns.

Although Gott exercised his rights as team captain to use MGA Twin-Cams as soon as they were available, he found abysmal luck with them. He crashed out of a snowy Monte Carlo rally, could not beat an unfavourable

"It was BMC, rather than purely MG, finance which kept the programmes rolling..."

Donald Morley won his class in this MGB in the 1964 Monte Carlo rally.

Famous at BMC in the 1960s: the Morley brothers (Donald left, Erle right).

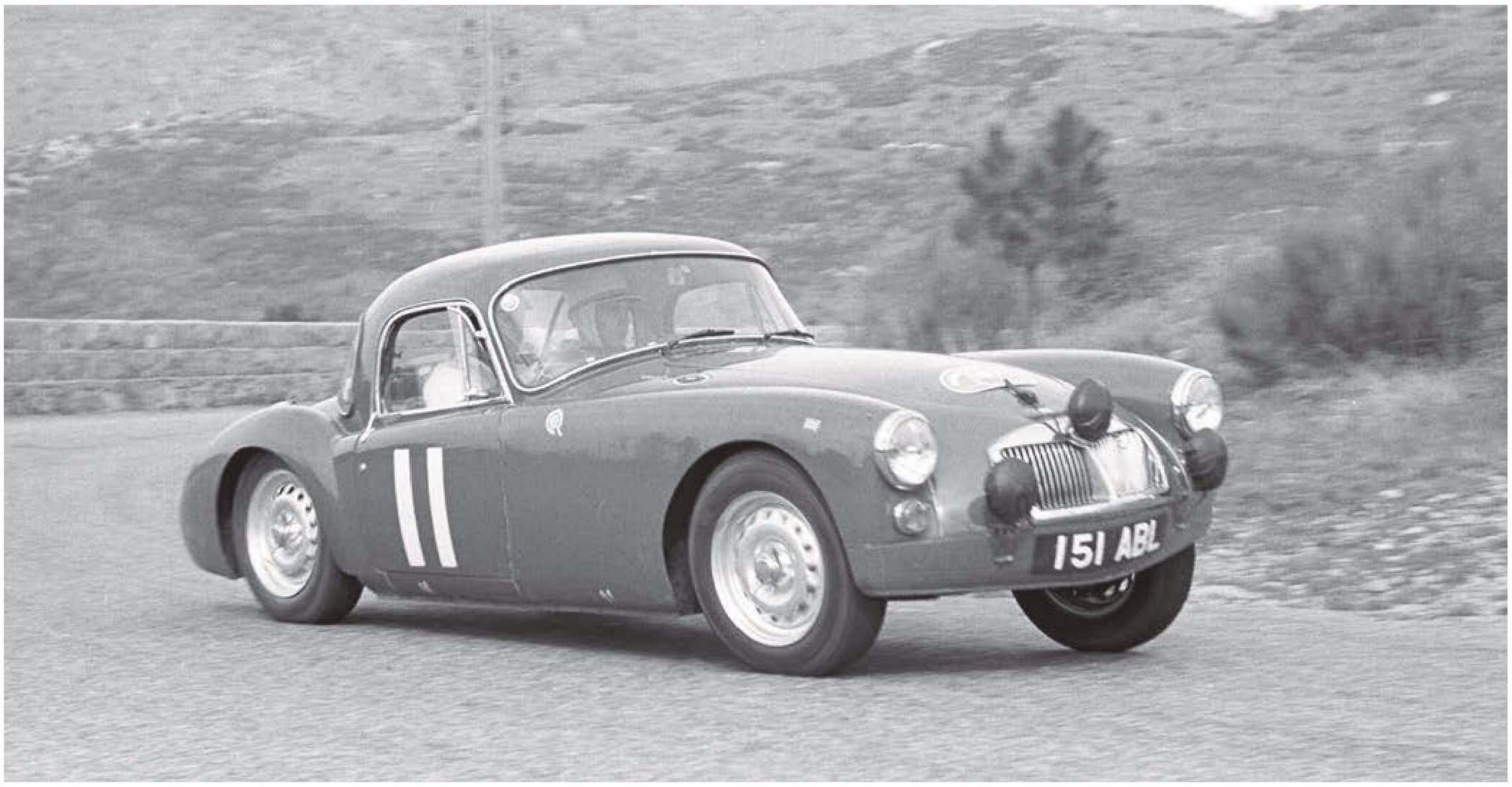
regulations handicap on the Tulip and ultimately gave up in favour of grappling with the big Austin-Healey.

Surprisingly, it was John Sprinzel, having already made several headlines by proving what a nimble and promising little car the 'frog-eye' Sprite was, who then decided that he could tame the Twin-Cam and beat all his more senior team mates. Like his more senior colleagues, however, John could not match up to the handicapping system on the 1959 Tulip Rally. When he took the self-same car (RMO 101) on the fast and furious Acropolis Rally he found that the Greek roads were more demanding than the Twin-Cam could survive and crashed it quite comprehensively. I don't recall it ever tackling another Works appointment.

John might not have been the most successful driver who ever had Abingdon connections but he certainly had a lot of influence. Although often linked with Austin-Healey matters, he and his inventive 'why don't we?' thinking worked wonders for the Midget in particular. Who, after all, has never heard of, sampled or simply lusted after a Sebring Sprite or a Works-spec. Midget? John had more recently been living on an island in the Hawaii group in his retirement, but as the photograph (left) shows, he stayed everlastingly faithful to the Abingdon registration number that he made so famous.

The most modest of all my MG driving heroes was certainly a farmer from East Anglia, Donald Morley. He won the Tulip Rally outright in 1959,

Rauno Aaltonen (left), on his way to winning the 1967 Monte Carlo rally, with co-driver Henry Liddon (right).



Rauno won his class convincingly in 151 ABL in the 1962 Tulip Rally.

in his privately-owned Jaguar 3.4. He was soon co-opted to join the Works BMC team, finished fourth overall in the RAC Rally of that year and became the 'man to beat' in big Healeys or any other product which Marcus Chambers (and his successor, Stuart Turner) invited him to drive.

Donald was so fast and so unflappable when driving Austin-Healeys that he rarely got a chance to excel in MGs. Yet he was invited to tackle the Monte in 1962 in an MGA 1600 Coupé. It was his first-ever competitive drive in an MG but he took to it without fuss and quite serenely won his class. Two years later he returned to Monte Carlo (this time in the MGB, 7 DBL, which had already competed at Sebring, Le Mans and in the Tour de France), and this time won his class and the GT Category. It seemed that you didn't need to be a Scandinavian to excel on ice and snow, just hire a Suffolk famer who rallied everywhere in a sports jacket, shirt and tie, and always kept part of his year strictly private; the harvest was more important to him than was Spa-Sofia-Liège.

On the other hand, it was the exuberant 'I will tackle anything' professionals in the team who had most of the lasting success. Let's start, therefore, by remembering just how many times Paddy Hopkirk brought glory to Abingdon between 1962 and 1970. Historian Bill Price lists no fewer than 16 podium positions (including seven outright victories) in rallying and that is to ignore the number of times he raced MGs with great honour.

The very first time that Paddy was linked with an MGB came at Le Mans in 1963 when he shared 7 DBL with Alan Hutcheson to win the capacity class and finish twelfth overall. That was the first time a long-nose MGB was ever seen in public, that nose being kept for special high-speed occasions in the future. In fact it reappeared on the Tour de France of that year, where Andrew Hedges did most of the driving but his co-driver was no less than John Sprinzel.

Paddy Hopkirk and Andrew Hedges shared a new MGB (BMO 541B) for Le Mans in 1964 and, though the long-nose was not new, their partnership certainly was. The result was another successful completion of the challenging 24 Hours event. The same MG re-appeared on the 1964 Tour de France, once again with Andrew Hedges driving and John Sprinzel as co-driver.

By this time Monte-winner Paddy had become so much of a 'Mini superstar' that he rarely got a chance to drive an MGB but once again he turned up at Le Mans, with the third of the long-nose MGBs and with Andrew Hedges as his driving partner, and between them they took eleventh overall, averaging 98mph.

Was there more to come? Indeed so, for Paddy then flew out to a race meeting at Bridgehampton in the USA, taking fourth place in an MGB. He then returned to the USA, in March 1966, where he shared an MGB (8 DBL) with Andrew Hedges in the 12-Hour Race, winning the class. Paddy and Andrew clearly got on well together, for they returned to Sebring the following year and won their class again.

Even that was not the end of Paddy's links with MGs for, in May, he competed in the Targa Florio (in Sicily), this being in the first of the very special lightweight MGB GT/MGC GTs. On this outing it ran with a 2004cc B-series engine and finished well. Paddy then had two more MG outings in 1968, both of them in races and shared with Andrew Hedges. These were the six-cylinder, lightweight MGCs officially known as MGC GTS. They won their class at Sebring and took second in class at the Targa Florio. Unhappily, this was the moment at which Lord Stokes' new empire, British Leyland, then set

Tony Fall was a late-comer to MGBs, seen here in the 1968 Monte Carlo rally in a Mini, which was an MG 'sister' car at Abingdon and rather familiar to him.

about dismantling the Works team and Paddy never had another chance to see what more might have been.

His one-time rallying team-mate Rauno Aaltonen had little time to match up to Paddy's MG exploits mainly because he burst in to the Works team in 1962, immediately fell in love with the Mini-Cooper S and spent the rest of his Abingdon career driving either Minis or an Austin-Healey 3000. However in his very first official outing in an Abingdon-built car, in 1962, he was provided with the very best of the MGAs: the 1600 Mk2 to battle with the works Triumph TR4s in the 2.0-litre category of the Tulip Rally. This fight lasted for four hectic days in Holland, Germany and France, resulting in Rauno winning his class. That, for Rauno, was as a one-hit wonder for, as far as is known, he never again competed in an MG, even though he recorded ten outright victories in international rallies for Abingdon.

In the meantime, the last of the emergent MGB rally drivers, Yorkshire born Tony Fall, had made his appearance and provided much excitement along the way. Fall had started by driving a number of Mini-Cooper Ss owned by his employer, Ian Appleyard of Yorkshire, but burst into the team as 'the apprentice' in 1965 before becoming a regular behind the high-profile trio of Timo Makinen, Rauno Aaltonen and Paddy Hopkirk.

If the top three were starting an event, it was sometimes Tony who was drafted in as the fourth member, sometimes driving an MGB. Unfortunately Tony, who clocked up five outright victories for Abingdon in Mini-Cooper S-types, never had any luck in MGBs, though he always said how much he enjoyed driving them.

Is there a lesson to be learned from this story? Perhaps that if Abingdon had had more time to concentrate purely on MG development instead of the others, there might have been an even more glamorous MG story to tell.

Paddy Hopkirk drove MGBs, MGCs, Minis and big Healeys, plus this big Triumph in the 1970 World Cup Rally.

Behind the scenes with the MG 6R4

Mike Taylor talks to John Davenport and David Wood about the exciting yet short-lived 6R4 programme

After 15 years of front page racing and rallying, in late 1970 the Competitions Department based at MG's factory in Abingdon was closed. Activities continued in a much diluted form under Basil Wales as manager of Special Tuning, a facility set up in 1964 to promote and market BMC's tuning products to the public. From a staff of over 40, just three mechanics were offered a place with Basil, the remainder moving to other departments within BL or leaving the company.

In 1974 (the year BL lost assembly of over 150,000 cars due to industrial disputes), BL Deputy Chairman and competitions supporter John Barber bankrolled the appointment of Richard Seth-Smith as Head of Competitions with an invigorated competitions team and remit, and the return of the capable Bill Price as Workshop Supervisor. A contract was signed with Ralph Broad to manage preparing and racing a team of Dolomite Sprints and Jaguar XJC 5.3 coupés, which would last until the end of 1977 when the contract was terminated and Broad sold the business. Meanwhile, to acknowledge the change in status, Special Tuning became Leyland ST. By then Basil Wales had left and effort was focused in Abingdon on preparing Dolomite Sprints and later TR7s for rallying, driven by capable rally stars Tony Pond and Brian Culcheth.

The closure of the Abingdon factory took place in 1980, though Leyland ST would stay behind in the gloom until June 1981 when they held a huge sale of all the unsold special tune parts still on the shelves before operations moved to Harding's Yard in Cowley. That was where an exciting new era was launched, involving innovative cutting edge engineering and a determination to put the octagon badge centre stage on the world's top rallies once more.

And this is where John Davenport enters our story. Born in Hitchin in November 1939, he went to Oxford to read mathematics. It was here that he was introduced into the world of amateur rallying, taking part in a local event as navigator around the Peak District in an Austin A30. Despite ripping off the passenger door, the car came in 21st out of 23 finishers and John had caught the rally bug.

With university behind him, John joined the Harrow Car Club and met the likes of Brian Culcheth, John Sprinzel and Less Needom. He also began submitting rally reports to Motoring News, which led to working for the magazine from the end of 1962. Then followed a string of tough international rallies such as the RAC, the Tulip and the Monte Carlo as co-driver with Simo Lampinen, Vic Elford and Ove Andersson. His big break came when he signed up with Lancia in 1967 – with Ove Andersson he finished 2nd on the Monte Carlo, 3rd on the Flowers, 3rd on the Acropolis and won the Spanish Rally outright. 'By then I was a professional co-driver and Cesare Fiorio, team manager of Lancia, asked me to prepare service schedules for him,' recalls John. 'It provided me with valuable planning experience. Then, in 1968 Ove and I moved to Ford and

Rally star Tony Pond having his very first drive of the MG6R4 prototype.

MG 6R4 001 being delivered to the Harding's Yard AR Comps department.

gave the Escort its first international debut, on the San Remo Rally.'

Into the 1970s and John's hectic co-driver life continued apace, partnering with the likes of Hannu Mikkola, Timo Mäkinen, Markku Alén and Pentti Airikkala. Then, persuaded by his wife to become less peripatetic, in 1976 John joined the RAC Club as Motorsport Executive in their press department. However, the previous year he had been approached by Richard Seth-Smith of BL. In late 1976, after a series of interviews with BL's hierarchy including Director of Product Planning Alan Edis and CEO Derek Whittaker, John was offered the job of Motorsports Director for BL Cars.

With the rest of 1977 to assess the work needed to transform the Triumph TR7 into a rally winner, one aspect of the competitions team that John noticed was the lack of a manager with an engineering background who could interface between the mechanics, drivers and co-drivers and the support services who undertook specialised engineering. The man he selected for this job was David Wood, who became Engineering Liaison Manager.

David had worked for nine years in Ford's Competitions Department at Boreham, with Competitions Manager Peter Ashcroft alongside the likes of Bill Meade and Mick Jones. He left just as the Escort was introduced, and in 1968 founded David Wood Engineering in a mews workshop in Central London. He later moved the business to Mildenhall in Suffolk, where he built cars for ice racing in Finland, but remained very closely aligned with Ford at Boreham.

Sadly, in 1975 David Wood Engineering suffered a major burglary when a valuable stock of Cosworth components was stolen. 'The insurance company took so long to redeem the loss that I closed the business and moved into lecturing at the local technical college when someone took a two year sabbatical,' says David. 'Then I had a telephone call from John inviting me to join his team at Abingdon. I already had a track record with building race and rally cars, and I'd run my own business so I'd demonstrated that I could manage a team. Anyway, John wanted someone to tell Ralph Broad that his contract would terminate at the end of 1977 as we weren't racing Jaguars anymore.'

RALLY: METRO 6R4 DEVELOPMENT

During the remainder of 1977 to the TR7's last gasp rally, the RAC in 1980, David became the critical cornerstone within the Austin Rover motorsports team with his extensive hands-on engineering and management skills. He was also quick to seize opportunities. 'In the late 1970s Harold Musgrove appointed some young senior managers, and they brought a different approach over product planning and marketing to the company,' he relates. 'The Rover SD1 became a race car, and with Dave Price driving, it won its first event. Then the SD1 race programme was passed to Tom Walkinshaw.'

Next, David suggested to John that they maximize on the SD1's racing promotion by putting together an executive version. After building a prototype with a high performance engine and a luxury interior, out went the temperamental Weber carburettors and high lift camshaft to be replaced by Lucas fuel injection, resulting in the smooth V8 delivering 190bhp. With the name Vitesse, the model was launched at the 1982 British Motor Show alongside the MG Metro Turbo.

The success of the Vitesse project laid the foundations for John and David to review the next generation of rally car. 'Renault's tiny Turbo saloon was winning rallies, and in the Metro we had a package about the same size,' says David. 'Our thought process was to forget the constraints imposed by the car's metal bodyshell and simply think of it as a silhouette with a spaceframe chassis and a GRP body.'

Nick Stephenson, Austin Rover's Product Planning guru, had a strong understanding of engineering and competition, and he appreciated what the motorsport team were considering. Through Stephenson, the notion permeated upwards within the company. Motorsports gave two presentations, John outlining the overall concept and David describing the engine concept.

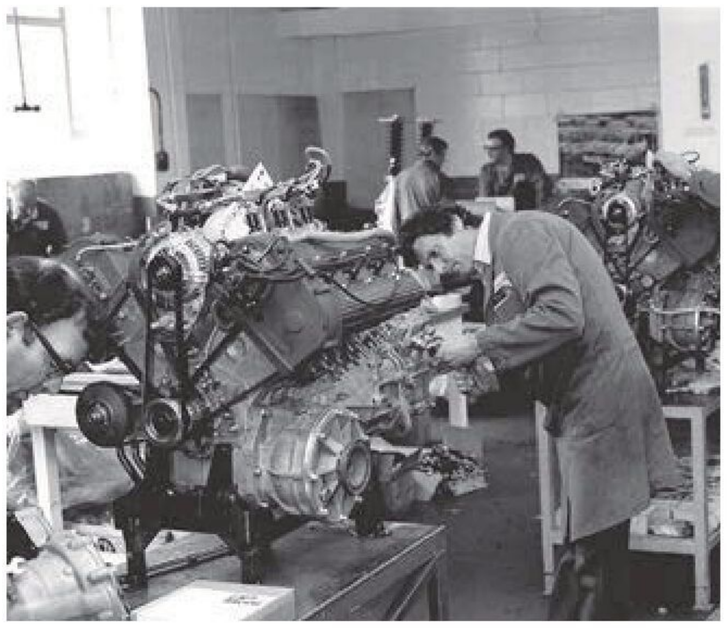
Meanwhile, all the indications in the rally world were that Group B was the undisputed future of the sport. With the launch of the Austin Metro in October, John took the opportunity to chat through the feasibility of using the new car as a basis for the proposed rally programme with Patrick Head, Williams' head of engineering. 'Taking the project in the round, there were certain things that we knew we would have to farm out like fabricating the bodyshell, and things we could do in-house like the engine and transmission,' explains David.

From then on the programme moved forward apace. In mid-February 1981 John had a meeting with Patrick Head and George Koopman, who was Williams' finance manager, to discuss the budget principles for the programme. They agreed to finance the project by channelling whatever cash they had spare in Motorsports at the end of each month into Williams' coffers, with no set overall fee.

At this stage, no thought was given to a mid-engine layout or four wheel drive transmission. 'Austin Rover's marketing people were willing to spend some of their budget on something called a VHPD (Very High Performance Derivative) Metro,' says John. 'Patrick then agreed to speak to Frank Williams. Later that month a critical meeting took place, which included Williams himself, when a formal agreement was reached to proceed with the design and manufacture of a rally car.

At the outset, senior AR manager Tony Ball agreed to an initial injection of £50K into the programme. As for a power unit, this was still under consideration. 'No-one came up with any magic solutions, though it was clear we needed a compact, powerful unit capable of being installed in the Metro's engine bay,' recalls John. 'At the time Honda were about to put a V6 engine into the Rover 800 series. They also had an F2 V6 race unit, so clearly they had a lot of experience with this design of engine and we thought they would certainly be able to come up with a V6-type unit suitable for our rally car.' At that point the drivetrain layout was to be conventional, with a north/south engine and five-speed gearbox driving a rear mounted differential.

'I drew up a plan which involved the assembly of six Honda-based engines,' says David. 'But in the meantime we couldn't get any testing done, so I suggested to John that we



take a Rover V8 and cut away two cylinders. I then had discussions with the power unit engineers at Rover and looked carefully at the cylinder block configuration to scrutinize how removing two cylinders could actually be achieved. It appeared that if we cut through the block, we had to be able to weld the two halves back together to form a V6 by accessing all the surfaces of the material.' It was an audacious plan, but with Wood's skills the unit – called the V62V (Vee six, two Valve) would become a reality.

To achieve this engineering feat David, Cliff Humphries and Gerald Wiffen went to Aeroplane and Motor, manufacturers of the Rover V8 cylinder block castings, who supplied

Above and left: MG Metro 6R4 Clubman production. *Courtesy of Nicky Linden of 6R4.net*

them with a block casting fresh out of the mould. 'The block consists of four off-set vee twin cylinder bores,' David continues. 'We cut through between number three and number two bores and across the centre, which produced a step in the middle. The front and the rear portions of the remaining block were then welded together and the rough cast block machined by BL. Next, we applied the same technique to the cylinder heads. To complete the task we had a V6 crankshaft produced, shortened the rocker shaft and had a special camshaft made.' In this guise the engine was reduced to 2.5-litres.

One of the critical decisions made at this time was to use a normally aspirated induction system since it was clear that turbocharging created considerable lag before the power surge began. The unit was fitted with triple Weber carbs, a water pump from an MGB GTV8 and a distributor with contact breaker ignition points from a Peugeot, the engine delivering some 250bhp.

'It was during 1981 that the Audi quattro really began to make its mark in rallying,' says John. 'This triggered Patrick Head into suggesting a radical rethink of our MG. At a meeting in June he voiced the opinion that the engine should be mid-mounted and linked to a four wheel drive transmission.' By this time the team at Williams comprised Head himself as team leader, John Piper who undertook the work on the gearbox, step-off and differentials with some covert assistance from Mike Endean in his pre-Xtrac days when he was working for Hewland, Robin Herd of March Engineering who was consulted on the rear differential and Stuart Rolt of FFD who was commissioned to provide the viscous couplings for the limited slip unit in the central torque split device in the step-off unit.

In October 1981 the first Wood-designed engine was completed and awaiting the commissioning of the dynamometer in Harding's Yard before it could be run up. However, once testing got underway, during one of their regular trips to the UK a group

Body panels for the production 6R4 were manufactured by Pressed Steel.

from Honda saw the Rover based V62V engine. 'They couldn't believe how it had been assembled,' says David smiling. 'Through Canley we established a strong link with Honda engineering and eventually got to speak to the right man who told us to forget about any plans to use their F2 engine as it had no significant power delivery below 4000rpm, though it would rev to 10,000 – hardly ideal for the stage storming rally car we were planning.' Moreover, Honda's projected timescales for the unit highlighted a completion date of 1986, which was too late for the MG.

This was a bitter blow, but not a disaster if a project to design and build a 'proper' four valve engine could be undertaken in-house. 'The initial estimate for doing one of those jobs (either a Honda based engine or a Rover equivalent) was a modest £50,000, with £10,000 up front just for the design,' explains John. 'Later, once the V64V program had got underway and we were able to do something like a reasonable estimate of costs, a sum of £250,000 was set aside in the 1984 budget for the design and manufacture of pre-production units. Almost a year later the actual cost came in at £240,000, which was a bargain since doing it the normal company way would probably have cost four to five times as much.' In the event the entire V64V engine went from design to working units in eleven months.

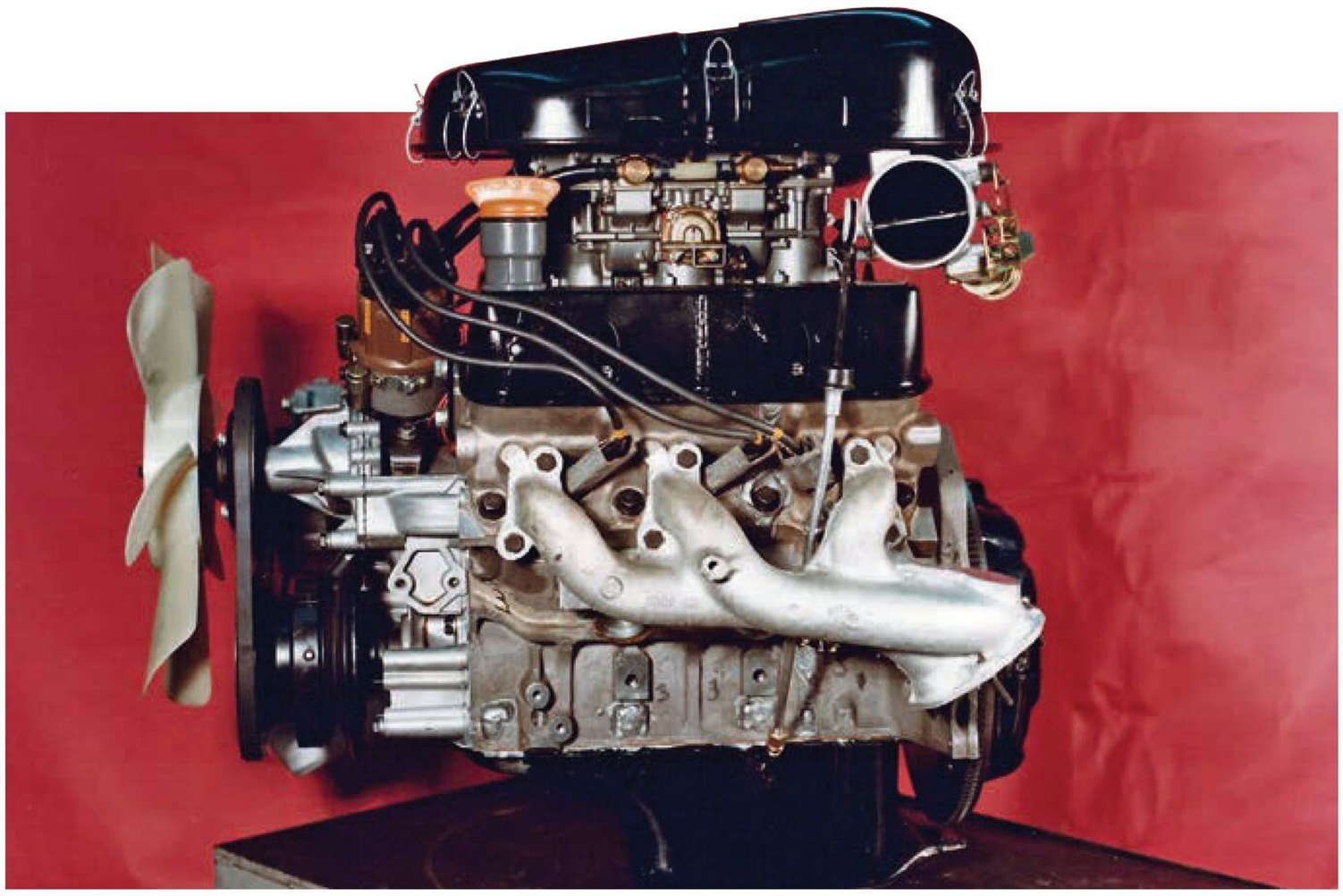
Meanwhile, in January 1982 a meeting took place with the Austin Roger Group's design team head Roy Axe to discuss the components of the MG's styling. With bodywork plans moving forward later that month, John met up with Grant Lockhart of Carbodies to discuss the possibility of that company assembling the necessary 200 rally cars to comply with homologation. Sadly, Carbodies could not support the programme.

By the following month the prototype 6R4 was finished. Brian O'Rouke and John Piper were the first people to drive the car round the car park at Williams' HQ in Didcot.

Two days later Patrick Head took the car to the local weighbridge in preparation for delivering it to Harding's Yard on 7 February, where all the engineers, mechanics and Frank Williams were present.

At this point testing began in earnest, and during an early drive Steve Soper rolled the prototype. Luckily there was little damage done, and MG 6R4 001 was shown to Ray Horrocks, BL's Managing Director who reported directly to Sir Michael Edwardes. From then on the programme intensified, with meetings to arrange publicity and production. The original 13in road wheels were discarded in favour of 390mm versions providing a wider

The prototype, pictured before it was delivered to Austin Rover, closely mirrored the production Metro, but then the rally programme moved into high gear.



Fully dressed, the 6R4 engine produced a healthy 410bhp in 'International Tune' state.

choice of tyres, the turret tops for the coil spring mountings were raised to increase suspension travel while the chassis length was increased by four inches and modified to take a stronger power steering rack. Considerable testing was done at Chalgrove Airfield and MIRA. Motorsport now had its own 6R4 aerodynamicist in ex-BMW designer Bernie Marcus who oversaw much of the work involving air flow and handling characteristics, resulting in changes to the car's appearance that included wider arches.

Williams' involvement with the 6R4 programme officially terminated when the 4th prototype was delivered to Motorsport in late 1983, although their interest was still present as plans had to be drawn up to build 200 homologation cars at the Longbridge factory, a separate programme which was outside motorsport. This was to be undertaken by Mike Barnett, and during 1984 he came to an agreement with body manufacturer Pressed Steel in Swindon. This meant that when the final meeting was held to agree assembly procedure, Barnett could report that the 6R4 body panels were already held in store.

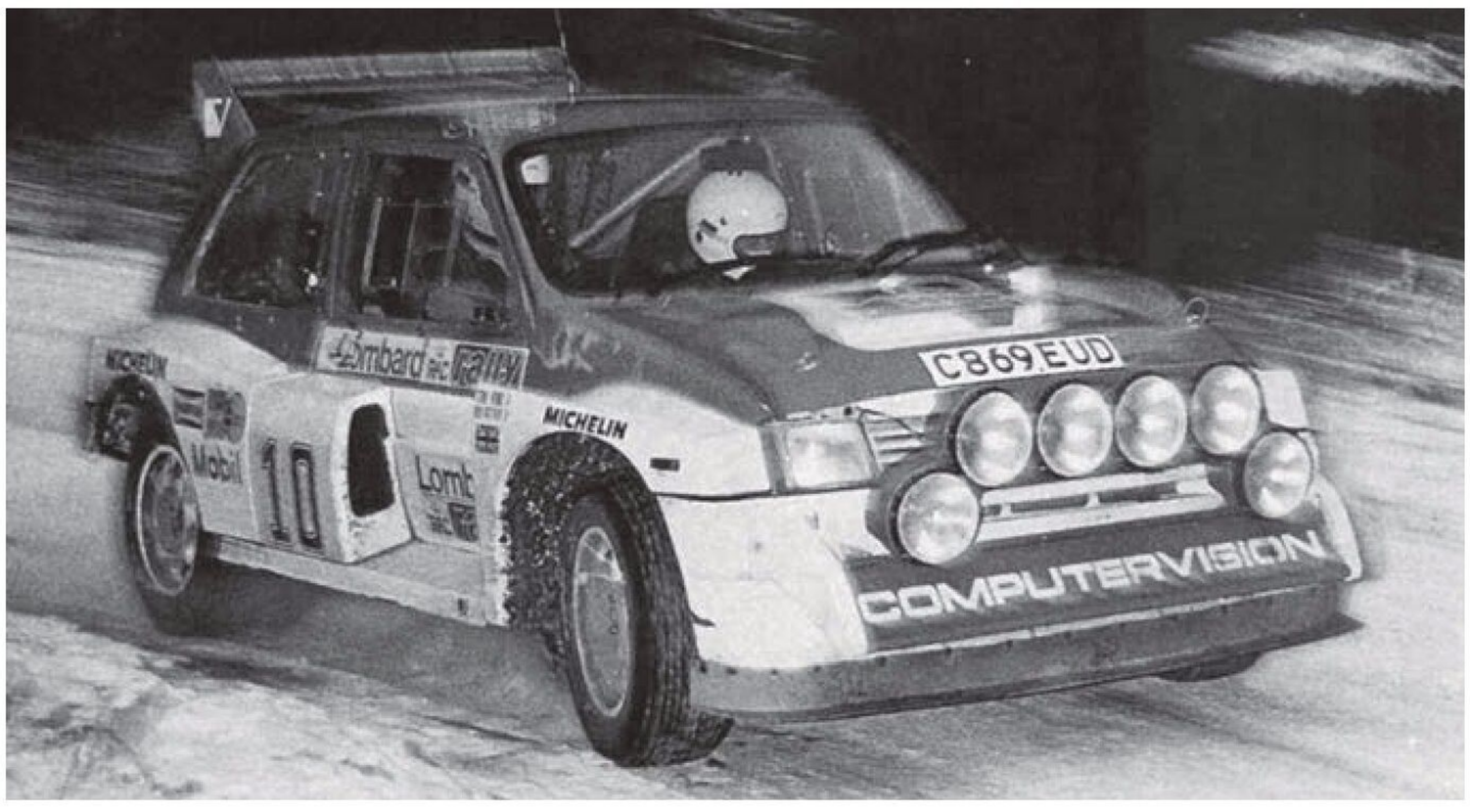
'Sadly, instead of giving us six months to do our testing – which was in our project plan – we'd already set the company's expectations quite high by recording hundreds of trouble-free hours with the engine on the test bed,' laments David, 'and they were urging us to get out there and win.'

In early 1984 Tony Pond drove through a film screen at the Excelsior Hotel in Heathrow to launch the exciting new MG rally car to the world, gleaming in its red, white and blue livery ready to do battle in Group B. Six weeks later an MG 6R4 made its first competition appearance on the York Rally powered by a V62V engine. Achieving scorching times on eight out of the eleven stages, only a broken valve put the car out of the event and certain placing. Into 1985 and the team were now waiting anxiously for the Wood-designed four valves per cylinder 90° V64V engine. With belt driven overhead camshafts, this unit produced a healthy 410bhp in international tune.

The 6R4's WCR debut was on the Lombard RAC held in late 1985 – Tony Pond finished third behind a pair of exceedingly quick Lancia S4s, while Malcolm Wilson's car expired with gearbox issues. Reviewing the 6R4's rally programme, John reveals: 'We didn't stray into competing in events outside of Europe like New Zealand, Argentina or the East African Safari. Nor did we do the Acropolis after an eye-opening test on rough Greek roads showed us that the MG just wasn't strong enough. But we did the rest.'

AR Motorsports rally successes in 1986 included the French, British, National and Scottish Championships. Yet spiralling costs and FISA's decision to ban the ferociously quick Group B cars was blowing a discordant wind through AR's senior management, a situation hardly helped by the fact that only 50 Clubman cars had been sold. For 1987 Group B cars would be replaced by Groups A and N versions limited to 300bhp. Thus with 6R4s in the compound unsold, the decision was taken to reduce their power output, advertising them as Clubman 300s for a paltry £16,000 a throw.

The final hammer blow was the decision to close the Motorsports department in May 1987. That year saw the MG 6R4 migrate into Motocross, while in 1987 a group of owners formed the Rover-sanctioned 6R4 Owners Club. Now, 30 years on, the MG 6R4 can still be seen strutting its wheel spinning stuff in the hands of enthusiastic owners and winning events of all kinds. Despite its short Works rally career, John and David can look back on the MG 6R4 programme with justifiable pride, for few other rally cars can have achieved greatness in such a short time.



Tony Pond and Rob Arthur on their way to 3rd in the 1985 RAC Rally.

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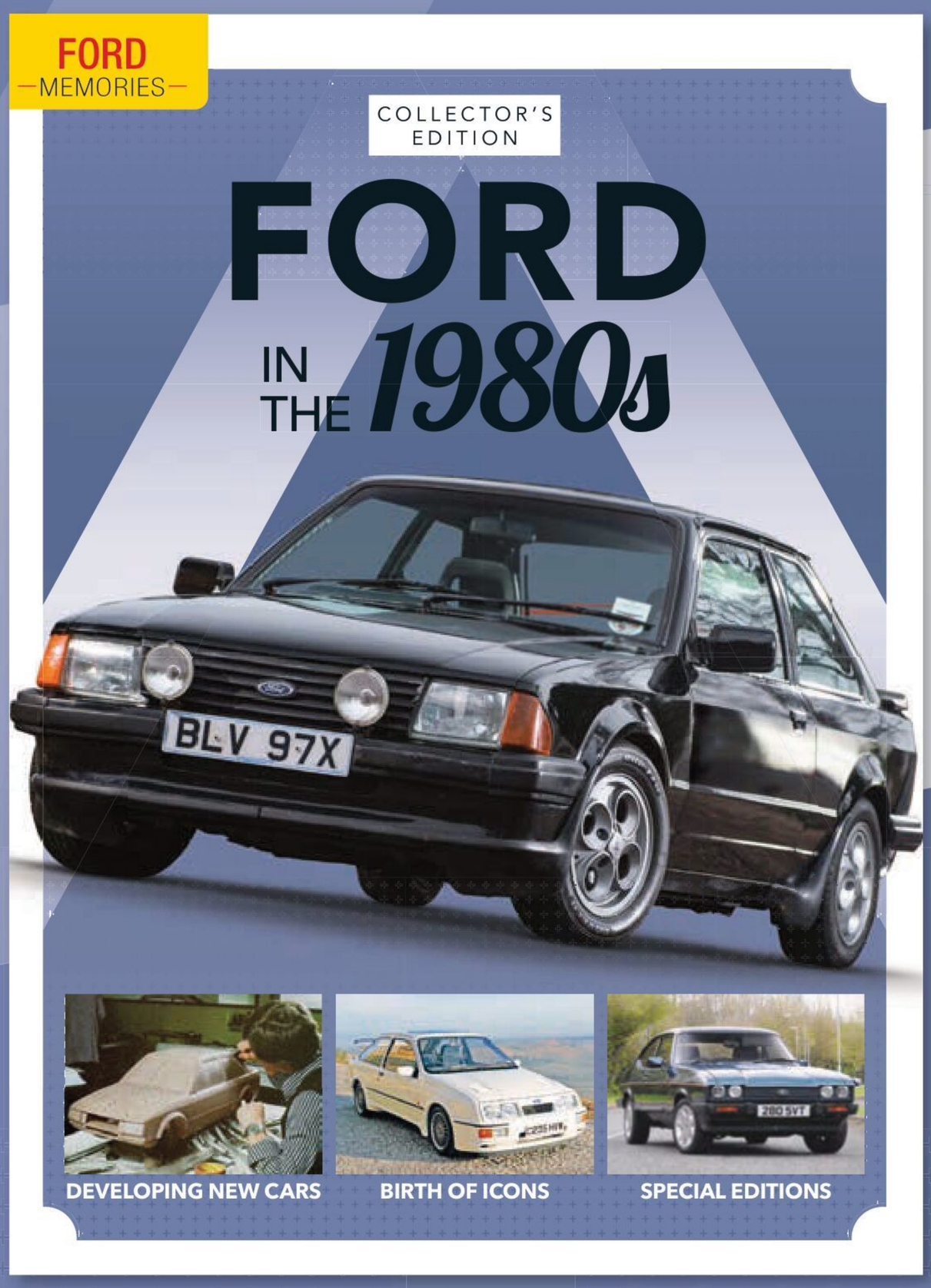

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Team Longbridge MGF

Destined to be scrapped by the factory, this MGF was given a new lease of life as an unlikely rally star under the Team Longbridge banner. It is now back in competition once more, though now in a rather different motorsport discipline.

When the Motoring News ran a feature on this car on 24th April 1996, the author of the piece expressed some surprise at the choice of a sports car for rallying. They were talking to Malcolm Oxborrow, who had entered it with Trevor Shakespeare in the British Tarmac Rally Championship, a national series containing some pretty serious machinery such as Sierra Cosworths and Metro 6R4s. The interviewer asked when they had first considered the new MGF as a potential rally weapon. 'I suppose it was around mid-December, 1995,' was the reply. 'And when,' the interviewer asked, 'did you take delivery of the car?' 'That was mid-December too!' answered Malcolm.

It doesn't take a genius to read between the lines and realise that the choice of an MGF must have been by default rather than planned. And indeed, when we caught up with Malcolm and put that very question to him, he replied: 'I started at Longbridge straight from school as an engineering apprentice, and worked all my life as a quality engineer. Rallying was my love. In 1995 I had been campaigning the Metro, but when production of that ended, I didn't have a whole lot of other options from the factory. The Rover 200 would have been the best car for me because it has proper suspension, but the management didn't want to know about that. The only real way forward was to ask if there was any chance of having an MGF.'

Clearly there was such a chance, as Malcolm was loaned this very early pre-production example, with VIN number 0050 and a manufacturing date of 28th June, 1995. The papers say it was Special Development Vehicle (SDV) 609, and curiously the V5 describes it as a 'Rover three thousand five Sport' first registered on 11th January 1996. It had been built to prove the factory processes on the production lines and to iron out any problems there. It may also have been used as a show car, but was then destined to be cut up and scrapped. And while it might not have been an obvious choice for rallying, as Malcolm says – you never know how it will do until you try it. 'We were short of horsepower,' he explained, 'but consistency is the way to win championships and the MGF was a very reliable car.'

Indeed, Malcolm and Trevor finished the 1996 championship 24th overall and third in class, which was a superb result. But don't let the Team Longbridge name fool you into thinking this was a highly modified factory special. Team Longbridge was the banner used by staff who competed in the company's cars in a variety of disciplines, preparing them in their own time and sourcing their own funding. As such, the MGF was not too far removed from standard. Clearly though, having factory connections was an advantage. 'We had Caterham cams in it because the Rover Group was supplying engines to them,' said Malcolm, 'and a TorSen limited slip diff that was very forgiving, not like a Power-Lok. We were lucky enough to get the engine and gearbox built by the Test and Development department, and even today I don't think the head has ever been off. We never had the gearbox out either in all the time we had the car, and it was used hard.

'We made sure we ran it on tyres that weren't too wide – when you haven't got a lot of power, you don't need tyres that are too wide. It was a bit of a step into the dark for me as I was always a FWD man, but the F was nicely balanced. Even when the back end started to let go, it was very easy to catch because we put classic Mini steering arms on

Oil cooler, plumbed-in fire extinguisher and air horns have all been added under the front bonnet. Full size spare adds weight to the nose.

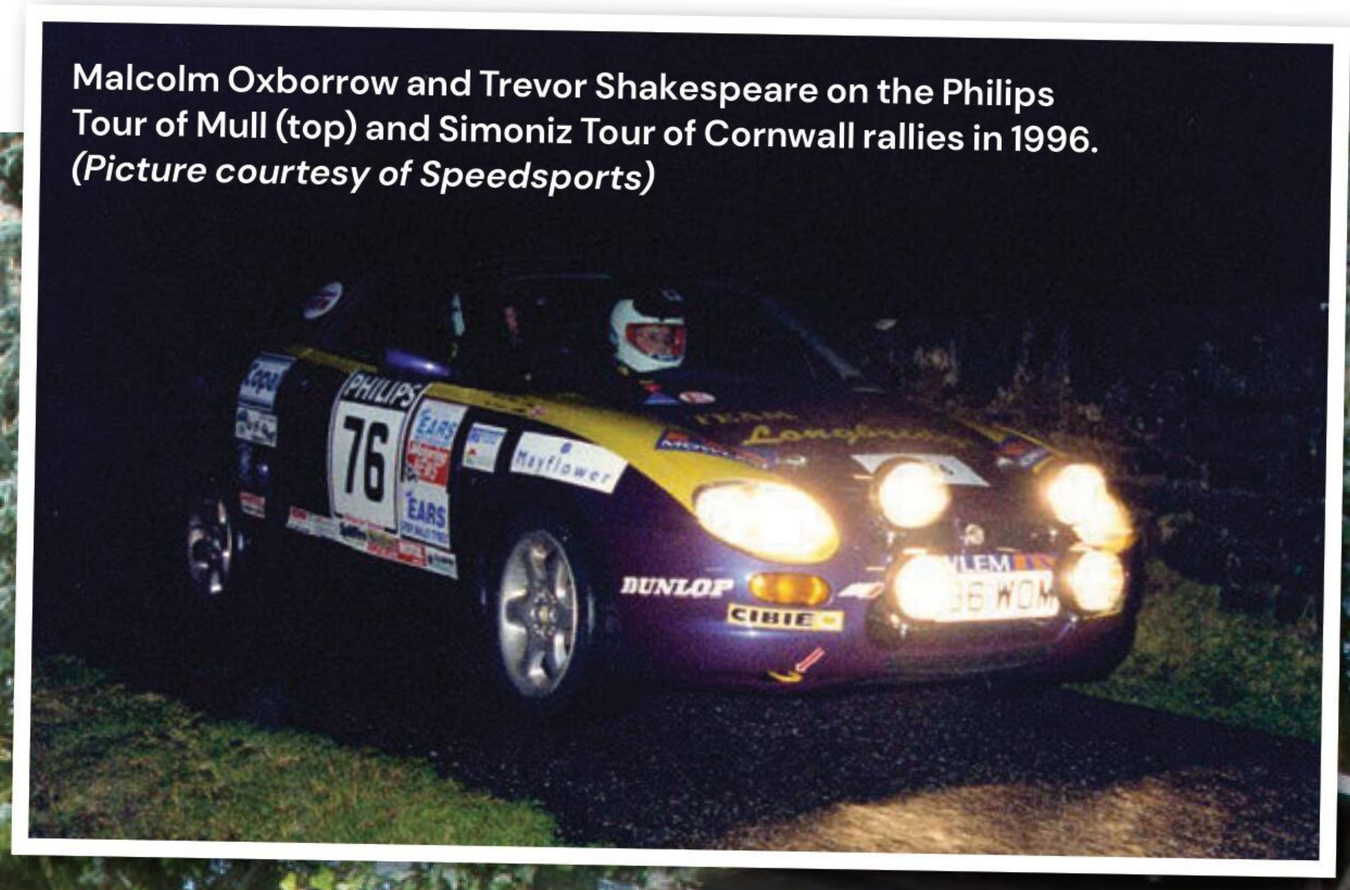
the front hubs. They made the steering so much more positive; heavier, but not too heavy because this car had the optional EPAS system and we kept that – it only worked at slow speed, so was fine for rallying.'

The preparation for rallying consisted primarily of MGF Challenge Hydragas displacers with restrictors in the Hydragas pipes, Bilstein uprated shocks, MG Metro Turbo subframe mountings, a rear damper brace and a Rover Sport hardtop to clear the roll cage. There was also a Janspeed race exhaust and silencer, shorter ratios in the gearbox taken from the MG Montego Turbo and a few other mods which took power up to approximately 150bhp – this from a non-VVC engine, remember.

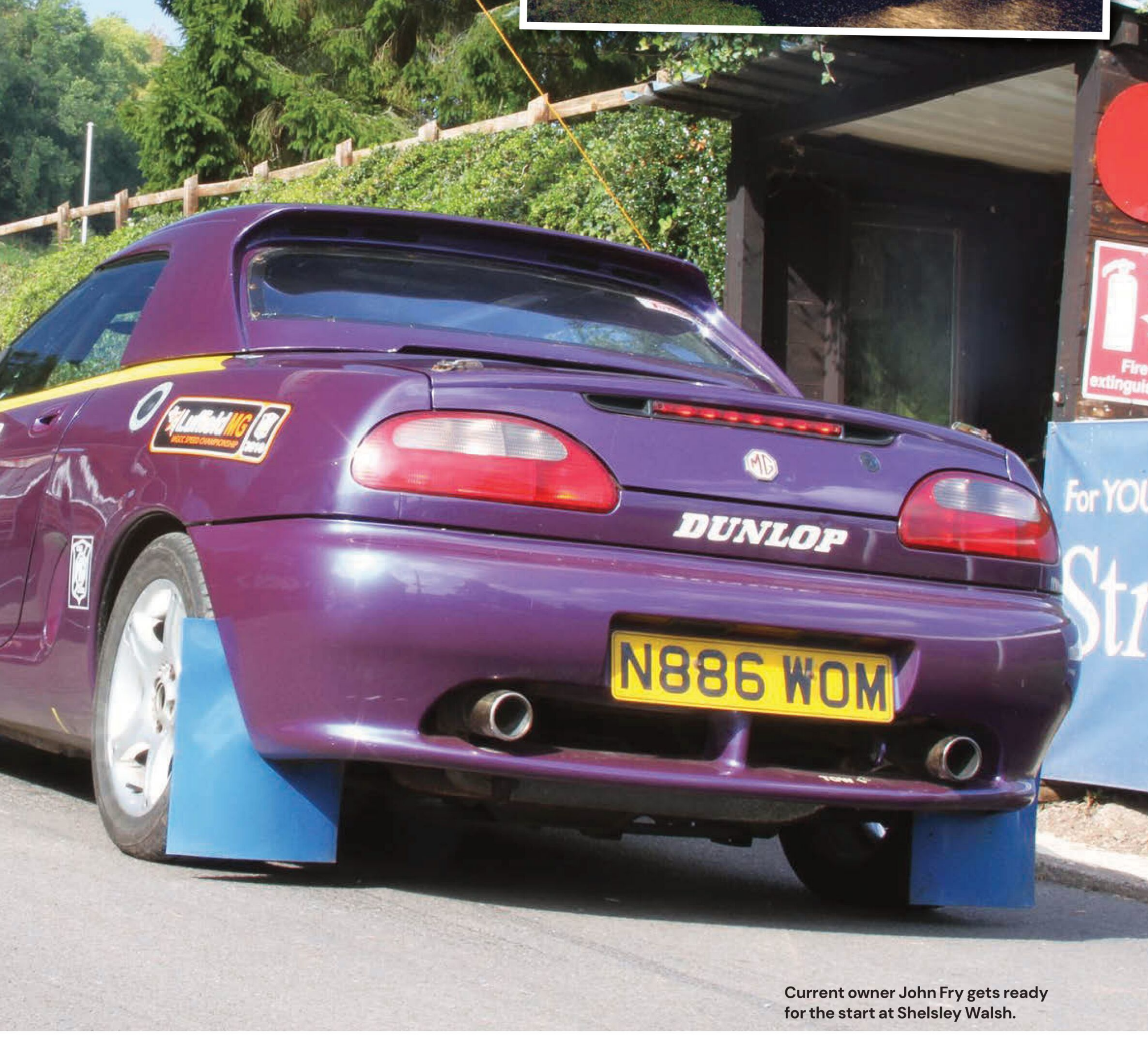
The car created a lot of interest wherever the team went because it was so different. It never set a trend for MGFs in rallies though, probably because there just wasn't enough power. Sadly, Rover didn't really make much capital out of the fine rally performances, and when they decided after a couple of years that they didn't want to tax the car any more, Malcolm bought it from the company. He took off the Team Longbridge and sponsor stickers, then started campaigning the MGF with his wife Elaine in a more low-key regional championship in the Midlands. They did that for a couple of years, but then its outings became less frequent and when John Fry expressed an interest in buying it, Malcolm agreed to sell.

Malcolm didn't know at the time that John would put all of the stickers back on, so when he saw it at the Pride

Stripped out interior may be a little crude and noisy, but the F is fully road legal once you remove the lamps obscuring the number plate.



Malcolm Oxborrow and Trevor Shakespeare on the Philips Tour of Mull (top) and Simoniz Tour of Cornwall rallies in 1996. *(Picture courtesy of Speedsports)*



Current owner John Fry gets ready for the start at Shelsley Walsh.

of Longbridge in 2014 Malcolm was delighted to see it back in its 1996 trim. 'I have tried to put it back the way it was,' John explained. 'I think it loses a lot of its identity without the stripes and stickers and becomes just another MGF. So I found a guy who could reproduce the stripes from photographs, and he did a fantastic job. It helps that if you take Fablon off a car, you can still see where it was no matter how much you polish the paint. But I did change one thing – rather than using Malcolm's name and blood group, I thought I'd better use my own, just in case!'

In the large history file that came with the car, John showed me a copy of Rally Sport magazine from June 1996 which explained how space was at a premium in such a small car and that some shifting around of certain items had to take place. For example, a plumbed-in fire extinguisher had to be mounted under the bonnet, the expansion tank, coil and ECU relocated to the boot, and a non-standard hardtop fitted to accommodate the obligatory roll cage. All these items are still on the car.

'It had been stripped to reduce weight too,' said John, 'even the ashtray and the MG logos from the wheel centres had been taken out. So had the carpets because they have to be removed for rallying or they would be a fire risk. All in all it is a little bit crude, but it is road legal, even though the full race harnesses and high seat backs can make it a bit difficult to see out at junctions sometimes.'

We mentioned at the start of this feature that while this F is still competing, it has changed disciplines. 'I'm not into rallying purely on cost grounds,' explained John, 'but I do like hillclimbing and sprinting. I've got a MkII 1098cc Midget which I have had for 40 years and which I raced at Kyalami when I lived in South Africa, then sprinted when I returned to the UK in 1985. It is supercharged at present, with a Shorrock that cost me £45 brand new in 1976 for a complete kit – I needed that to compensate for the lack of oxygen in the air in Johannesburg which is 6000ft above sea level. But to be honest, the gearing on the Midget is all wrong for Shelsley Walsh. The F's gearing is not perfect either, but it is better. '

So John has now added sprints and hillclimbs at Curborough, Shelsley Walsh, Loton Park and elsewhere in the Luffield Speed Championship to this MGF's illustrious competition history, and also a couple of autosolos. The most recent of those was on a lorry park, and as you can imagine there was a lot of diesel sitting around

Some engine bay components have been relocated to the boot for easy access.

On the Philips Tour of Mull in 1996. *(Picture courtesy of Speedsports)*

on the tarmac. With a heavy right foot John reckons he spent a lot of time with the back end hanging out, which was fun but probably not the quickest way to go about it.

John was kind enough to let me drive the MGF as we headed over to Shelsley Walsh to take some pictures in an appropriate setting, and I was very impressed with how it performed. The engine was tractable from low speeds, but free revving and pulled cleanly for as long as you held the throttle to the floor. It was also remarkably free from rattles and squeaks thanks to the additional bracing, but that does not make it a quiet car.

'It has a very noisy exhaust,' said John, 'though the gas only exits from one of the two tail pipes. Unfortunately the scrutineers have caught on to the fact that when they are measuring sound, one of the tail pipes is a duff one! It generally puts out around 103db, though it does depend a little on how much they ask you to rev the car. That can make it very noisy in the cabin on the open road, but on track a lot of the noise is dampened out by your crash helmet. You do have to take it easy on the road anyway, not just because of the noise in the cabin but also because with the stripes down the side, it lends itself to being pointed out and noticed.'

John is also well placed to compare the ex-Team Longbridge MGF to the TF160 road car, as he owns one of those too. 'That has similar power to the MGF, but taller gearing,' he says. 'The MGF's gearing is not always ideal on hillclimbs if I am honest, but it is all about having fun and a good day out rather than winning. On the road, though, I would say the F is far more comfortable, even with the modified suspension. I've had a couple of road-going TFs and they seem to bounce about and rattle your teeth. Personally I think the F is a better car for driving, though most people prefer the TF for circuit racing.'

In recent years John's MGF has not seen much use because he has been working in Canada, but now he has returned to the UK and is planning to get back on track. 'Curborough is a nice little course and the MGCC do a couple of sprints there,' he says. 'They have changed the course recently and it looks fun, but I haven't tried it yet. It is just a matter of making the decision and getting a licence again. I'd like to, because I love being involved with MGs and with motorsport in general. There are always some great characters and win or lose, if you get involved then you are never short of good conversation.'

John and Judy Fry with the ex-Team Longbridge MGF that now bears their names – and blood groups!

Brand exposure on a budget

A successful MG ZR rally campaign with TV presenter and PR Chief Tony Jardine massively raised MG Rover's hot hatch profile.

When MG Rover announced their hugely ambitious motorsport programme in 2001, the proposals left the audience gasping for breath – MG's return to the Le Mans 24 Hours, a BTCC campaign and finally an entry in the Junior World Rally Championship. It was an undeniably heady programme that most manufacturers would have baulked at, but Longbridge was in a hurry. 'Setting out our stall' was how Deputy Chairman Nick Stephenson described it, because even then in the bright days following the Rover Group acquisition, it was recognized that only an alliance with another manufacturer could ensure a long-term future for MG Rover, as the company was now called.

Looking at this demanding motorsport programme dispassionately over a decade later, even the most ardent MGR supporter would have to concede that it fell short of its ambitious expectations. The two-year Le Mans programme that had shown enormous promise and garnered huge media coverage only succeeded after the collapse of MGR when it was taken under the wing of RML. The Junior WRC programme was really a bridge too far with limited resources, although it did spawn the unexpectedly successful Group N cars.

The BTCC campaigns delivered a high profile with media exposure and some good results, although an outright Championship eluded MG, despite an Independents category win achieved after the official Works programme

The MG team before the Network Q Rally of Great Britain. From left to right they are Gary Sylvester, Rob Gill, Bob McKenzie, Mark Blundell, Gwyndaf Evans, Tony Jardine and Chris Patterson.

Left: Architects of a successful partnership Tony Jardine and MG Sport & Racing MD Rob Oldaker discuss tactics for the Group N MG ZR in the 2002 Rally of Wales. Right: At a service halt for the MG and everyone is pitching in, including team leader and former British Rally Championship winner Gwyndaf Evans.

had ended. However, MG Rover found that being the underdog team was hugely beneficial in raising enthusiasm for the MG brand again after BMW had neglected it during their years of ownership. Spectators and supporters just loved this approach.

MG Sport & Racing was the separate Works organisation that coordinated the entire MG motorsport programme, in addition to its manufacturing and development involvement in the MG SV/SVR programme. At the helm was Rob Oldaker as its first Managing Director and MGR's Product Development Director, while the late Brian Griffin, a key figure in the MGF development programme, was the full time Motorsport Manager.

Other key incoming personnel were John Parkinson, together with Kim Johnson and latterly David Watson. Driver recruitment, liaison with teams including Lola and West Surrey Racing and later RML, contracts with engine suppliers including AER and Judd, build programmes and homologation issues, entry policy, sponsorship opportunities and budgetary control all fell into the S&R remit. Which is where arguably the most successful MG motorsport programme started.

Following the motorsport launch announcement, a conversation between Dick Bennetts, the MD of West Surrey Racing, and Rob Oldaker saw the suggestion that there could be synergy in a link with Tony Jardine, whose high profile in Grand Prix coverage and his successful PR consultancy were coupled with not inconsiderable rally driving abilities and a network of contacts within the sport. He had worked alongside both Honda and Proton competing in rallying at an international level, and also brought personal sponsorship from Sporting Life.com and Michelin.

For MG, who had developed the close-to-showroom specification Group N ZR it seemed that here was a natural fit. Could there be a partnership? Even better would be some extensive media exposure and this was something that Tony Jardine could deliver with his choice of co-drivers, all of whom were media personalities in their own right and able to provide guaranteed coverage. MG Sport & Racing's role was to provide a Works-prepared car and event support, plus handling all of the entries and documentation.

It was no surprise that model and entry policy would be primarily geared to events that could offer the opportunity for class wins and offered high media potential, a route that the BMC Comps Department at Abingdon had successfully taken in the 1960s. For MG Sport & Racing here was an opportunity for regular exposure at minimal cost, with a competitive driver coupled with newsworthy co-driving personalities, a win-win scenario.

So for four seasons, the Tony Jardine ZR Group N entry with full Works support flew the MG flag with considerable success, posting a string of excellent results with numerous class wins. But this was only part of the brand exposure programme that involved MG dealerships and extensive local and regional media coverage before, during and after events. The MG Car Club's Silverstone International Weekend also saw Tony Jardine demonstrating the ZR and providing unforgettable full-blooded rides on the rally stage. But it was the national coverage that the Jardine contacts ensured which provided a value-for-money aspect to the campaign far out of proportion to its modest budget.

The line-up of co-drivers was impressive from both a media and competence standpoint, for this was no free ride. The pressure to not only co-drive but also file major editorial pieces, often on an event like the Network Q RAC Rally after a day of tough stage rallying, was certainly a

The drama and spectacle of the British Rally Championship attracted a huge following for the Bournemouth-based Rallye Sunseeker.

continuing challenge but it did ensure a freshness of approach that readers, listeners and viewers responded to. All the while the sporting reputation of the MG ZR was steadily being built with a car that was close to showroom specification and with which potential owners could readily identify.

Renowned motoring author and journalist Maurice Hamilton filed copy for The Observer with insightful writing that put readers in the hot seat and provided a genuine glimpse into what an event was like. His description of rallying in the Wales Rally GB included an in-cockpit impression of thundering down a gravel stage which he describes as 'the world going into fast forward while giving you the impression that you are sitting in a tumble dryer... our little MG ZR soaks up punishment so severe it's difficult to describe.' Watching in-car camera footage provided graphic confirmation of all he said.

Some of the most impressive coverage came from Kevin Eason, Motoring Editor of The Times and its F1 correspondent. He rapidly became a highly accomplished co-driver with performances that matched his erudite weekly columns in the paper. Just like Maurice Hamilton, he had the ability to 'tell it like it is', as did Bob McKenzie of the Daily Express sports desk who not only took class victory for Longbridge, but also provided a close-to-the-action view of former GP driver and Le Mans winner Mark Blundell taking to the forests in the Network Q RAC Rally. The national media net also included Des Kelly, the Deputy Editor of the Daily Mirror who bravely experienced arctic rallying, and Kevin Piper of Anglia TV who followed in his icy tyre furrows. As Tony Jardine remarked: 'Trust is all-important in the co-driver relationship and we never had problems, however difficult the situation.'

Proving that co-driving was not merely a male preserve – Gwyndaf Evans was also partnered by Claire Mole – Tony Jardine selected TV sports presenter Lee McKenzie to make her rallying debut with considerable success, Lee posting a first in class on her inaugural international outing.

British Rally Championship contenders faced tough stages, like this on the Rally of Wales, with the JWRC MG ZR being put through its paces. The Group N MG ZR would follow in the already rutted tyre tracks on the gravel surfaces, an ongoing challenge for Tony Jardine and Maurice Hamilton.

There was the strongest team ethos, particularly the contributions made by Team Leader Gwyndaf Evans and co-drivers Patterson and Mole. Their coaching, encouragement and mentoring, plus the sharing of information with the co-drivers, resulted in genuine skill transference and a rapid learning curve that helped ensure success from the Group N ZR. Tony Jardine is in no doubt that this played a major part in bringing team members up to speed. Equally significant was the role of the MG Sport & Racing team members and mechanics both at Longbridge and on the rally stages. Cars were always superbly prepared and immaculately presented for scrutineering, while the on-event servicing and seemingly impossible repairs rekindled memories of the all-conquering BMC rally teams of the 1960s.

Selection of events was certainly influenced by the opportunity for a class win, but underscoring this was the media potential and promotional links with the MG dealer network. The British Rally Championship not only delivered a geographically balanced calendar, but also an opportunity for the team to build its experience prior to international events like the RAC Rally in its several guises. Pitting the ZR against challenging conditions like those to be found on the Arctic Lapland Rally or Norway's Mountain Rally had a definite showroom resonance.

First outing for the Group N ZR was the 2002 Rally of Wales, where Tony Jardine was teamed with Maurice Hamilton. This tough Pirelli British Rally Championship event also saw the appearance of the Super 1600 EX258 ZR with the Works pairing of Gwyndaf Evans and Chris Patterson, fresh from

Getting wet on their way to an N3 class win on the 2002 Jim Clark Memorial Rally are Tony Jardine and Bob McKenzie.

its victory on the Pirelli International Rally. But there was to be no repeat success on the unforgiving forest tracks of the Principality, the JWRC MG being forced to retire with engine problems while holding the class lead. There were no such trials for Jardine/Hamilton, their trouble-free debut resulting in a second in the N3 class, an encouraging portent for the future.

Entries were made for the Plains Rally, the Bulldog Rally and the Tempest Rally in November 2002, the final round of that year's British Rally Championship. The result was 19th overall, but more significantly a class win that not only confirmed the Group N ZR's durability, but gave the strongest hint of its future potential as it headed towards the big one, the Network Q.

With the MG Sport & Racing competition programme now firmly in place, it was decided to field four crews for this flagship World Championship rally with a truly international entry of 85 cars. The event saw MG Works driver, F1 pilot and Le Mans winner Mark Blundell paired with Bob McKenzie of the Daily Express. Their mount was the MG ZR Super 1600, with Gwyndaf Evans' similar car being co-driven by Chris Patterson. Tony Jardine and Maurice Hamilton led the Group N MG ZR entry together with Rob Gill of the Sun, co-driven by Gary Sylvester.

Despite its apparent strength, the four-car entry would meet mixed fortunes. The first retirement was Gill/Sylvester, rapidly followed by Blundell/McKenzie forced out with mechanical problems on the fifth stage. The impressive Evans/Patterson pairing were running strongly until Stage 15 with just two competitive sections remaining, before suspension woes put paid to their rally. Sole survivor of the MG Sport & Racing quartet was now the Jardine/Hamilton ZR, but the preparation the pair put in (including spending an hour reconnoitering the loose gravel stages) paid off handsomely, the MG running problem free until the Cardiff finish that saw just 38 finishers. The determined pairing netted 35th place, and the Welsh capital rose as one to the Jardine/Hamilton MG ZR that had taken the coveted N3 class honours and delivered exactly the result that MG Sport & Racing wanted.

The Pirelli International Tyneside Rally had opened the 2003 season for Tony Jardine, co-driven by Kevin Eason of The Times. This was a particularly tough rally with horrendous whiteout conditions in Kielder Forest, but the ZR came through to finish 25th overall and third in class. This was followed by an entry on the Rallye Sunseeker based on Bournemouth. One of the most high profile events in the British Rally Championship, the MG ZR of Jardine/Hamilton was supported by MG dealers Sewards, there was strong media coverage and the established pairing delivered another N3 class win and a creditable 51st overall in a strong field that included WRC cars.

All this was a preamble to the 2003 Wales Rally GB, but there was no place for the Super 1600 ZRs of the previous year. Instead the decision was taken to enter a pair of ZRs running in the N3 category that had proved such a happy hunting ground for Longbridge. Kevin Eason again joined Tony Jardine, but the lead car would be that of Gwyndaf Evans, co-driven by Claire Mole.

The crews knew that the problem for the 2WD close-to-showroom-spec ZRs would be low starting numbers, meaning that they would be following the rutted

tracks left by the 4WD WRC cars, but they rose brilliantly to the challenge. After the first Cardiff SuperSpecial stage both cars started their climb up the order, setting rapid stage times as the rally headed for the Welsh forests. Jardine/Eason would break their sump guard, a repair quickly sorted by the Sport & Racing mechanics, but by the third day the Evans /Mole ZR had battled its way into the top 40 and as light faded they were lying 33rd with just the final day to go. Now MG had the opportunity of getting the only all-British team on the event to a 100% finish. But there would be no cruising, Evans using every ounce of his local knowledge to claw back another six places to finish 27th and take the class win. Jardine/Eason were hampered by a puncture on the final Margram Park stage but they recovered to finish 37th and second in class.

Gwyndaf Evans (who received a huge welcome at the Cardiff finish) said: 'It's absolutely fantastic. I hardly thought we'd finish this rally, let alone finish 27th overall in a World Championship rally in what is basically the showroom category MG ZR. I've had a car that's been 100% reliable.'

Added co-driver Claire Mole: 'To finish 27th is just tremendous...it's been an absolute credit to MG, it's a brilliant little car.' Tony Jardine echoed the comments, adding: 'As usual the car hasn't let us down at all, it's been tremendous. We're first and second in class – MG is delighted with that – and really there's nothing you can fault on the performance of the car.' Kevin Eason was equally thrilled, saying: 'Considering this is the first rally we've done entirely on our own notes I would say it's a pretty outstanding success.'

2004 opened with an entry in the Arctic Lapland Rally with Anglia TV's Kevin Piper joining Tony Jardine as co-driver. In the toughest of conditions the pairing brought the ZR home in 38th place overall out of an 82-strong field. But it was the Wales Rally GB that was foremost in Jardine's thoughts as he introduced a new co-driver in Speed Sunday presenter Lee McKenzie. She could not have had a better mentor than former World Champion co-driver Robert Reid who had navigated Richard Burns, so was well prepared at the Cardiff start.

The onus was very much on the ZR crew after MG's fine showing the previous year, since they were the sole Sport & Racing representation. Where the 2003 event had been virtually trouble-free, 2004 would prove very different. Engine problems hit on the Cardiff SuperSpecial stage, but running with a late number merely added to the woes. A strut breakage was followed by a damaged back axle and a lack of front screen heating. There was no service for four stages, so both Jardine and McKenzie were forced to work under the car to make repairs. Ultimately help was at hand from the MG Sport & Racing mechanics who restored the car to full health. Despite a major off on a forest stage and ending up between sawn-down tree trunks – the ever friendly marshals helped the ZR back on the road – the little MG climbed back up the order to record another Group N title and 41st overall.

It was a finish very much against the odds, and glory for Lee McKenzie on her first international event. Said a relieved Tony Jardine at the Cardiff finish: 'It was a real team effort and an extraordinary achievement by everyone involved... this is probably the toughest motorsport event in the

All the better to see you with – the Group N MG ZR carried a detachable auxiliary light pod for special stages.

Slipping and sliding with its Michelin rubber working overtime on the way to another N3 Class win for the ZR.

word. The MG mechanics have done an amazing job. Lee has got stronger and stronger, and we benefitted from Robert Reid's vast experience as he has been the perfect mentor for her.'

There would be one more outing for the Jardine/McKenzie duo and the faithful MG ZR, in January 2005 when they contested Norway's Mountain Rally and finished 18th in class. It was then back to an old favourite, the Rallye Sunseeker, with Tony Jardine co-driven by Jim Holder, Motorsport News editor, and what would turn out to be a final and fitting hurrah for the MG association as they posted another N3 class victory.

It was to be the end of one of the most unusual success stories in international rallying that had been achieved despite gathering storm clouds – through 2004 and into 2005 intense speculation had been growing about the future of MG Rover, which would culminate in the company going into administration in the spring of that year. MG Sport & Racing would continue independently for a brief while, but ultimately it too would fold and its assets be auctioned, closing the chapter on the Tony Jardine involvement. But for MG Rover and MG Sport & Racing the low key rallying exploits of Tony Jardine and his various media co-drivers had delivered high profile success on a miniscule budget, punching far above its weight in typical MG tradition. Arguably Tony Jardine had become one of MG's most successful rally drivers ever, and all without a full time Works contract!

Summing up his four years of involvement with the MG ZR he says: 'In an odd British way I was extremely proud of the national effort to revive such a famous marque through motorsport. I still am! When you read the results, the realisation of what we achieved in a bog standard car with just safety kit bolted on, it says everything about the MG ZR and MG Sport and Racing's commitment. I thank Rob Oldaker and the much-lamented Brian Griffin who both believed I could deliver on stage as well as in the media.

'It was a wonderful four years during which I revelled in the handling and inherent strength of the ZR which enabled us to score so many great results against the odds and far faster cars. I learned a bit too. Subsequently I have continued both on track and stage, winning the St Mary's Trophy at the Goodwood Revival and taking Group N honours on the RAC (Wales Rally GB) 2013 with Olympic Skeleton Bob gold medalist Amy Williams MBE, finishing 26th overall in a world event! We shattered the media record too, but that's my job!'

For Rob Oldaker it was... 'a hugely successful campaign and certainly raised new respect for the MG brand and particularly for the ZR as a tough performer on the world stage. The Tony Jardine initiative of teaming with well-known journalists proved to be even better than promised, particularly as it was allied so closely to our Works driver Gwyndaf's huge experience. MG Rover were treated to wonderful exposure in all press coverage even if the final result was, occasionally, a failure of some sort – the drivers and co-drivers always gave us the most positive of news simply because the ZR was so good and so well developed and backed by a crack MG Sport & Racing team. Some of the development improvements made to the rally cars found their way into the road cars too – but then motorsport always should improve the breed!'

Less is more

Perry Stephenson and his son Jason have been taking their BGT V8 to Santa Pod since 2002. After a decade of tweaking, tuning and going back to the drawing board, they have shaved off the seconds one fraction at a time and on the day of our visit had a sub-10 second time for the 1/4 mile sprint firmly in their sights. Perry explains how they got there.

Warming up the rear tyres before a run – when the smoke turns creamy, they are ready!

I bought my first MG in 1998, a four cylinder BGT that got me back into the classic car scene after 20 years away from it bringing up a family and getting on with life. I had great fun with that car, but what I really wanted was a BGT V8. Unfortunately there was nothing available that I could afford. Then, just by chance, a friend at work said that his mate had restored one in 1992, then left it in a barn while he went off to university and never gone back for it. That was the car we have here today, and we ended up getting it for £3000 – it had been restored bodily, but none of the mechanics had been done. So it was a tired old engine, the brakes were all seized, the carburettors were gummed up like you wouldn't believe...

Once we got the V8 back on the road, we started taking it to shows and loads of MG events. But then I started thinking that yes it is a nice car, but there is only so much you can do with shining it and putting it on display. We knew there was more in it than that. When I was a kid, I used to come to Santa Pod with my brother-in-law and his Sunbeam Tiger. So we brought the MGB up here one day back in 2002, saw the scene was still quite busy, took it up for a couple of runs (it was running around 16 seconds then) and I got hooked again. That was my first ever trip up the strip, in a bog standard MGB GT V8.

So we started doing a few modifications, nothing drastic just a free-flowing exhaust, Weber carb instead of the SUs, stronger ignition system and stuff like that. After a couple of years, we got the time down to the mid-14s. This was all on the stock 3.5-litre engine with an overdrive gearbox, though of course we didn't use overdrive on the strip.

After a couple of years, we thought we'd gone as far as we could and that to take the next step, we really needed a bigger engine. I hadn't realised this when I'd bought the car, but it is a genuine factory V8. I didn't want to break up the factory drivetrain, so I took that out completely and sold it for enough money to get me another engine. That was a 3.5 too, out of a Morgan I think, but it had been rebored, had a better cam in it and the heads had been ported. Then we had a big decision to make on the gearbox. I wanted to go auto because most drag racers use autoboxes, so we adapted a Chevrolet gearbox to fit the Rover engine, which is easy enough to do with an adaptor plate of 12mm aircraft grade aluminium.

Putting the automatic gearbox in got us from the 14s to the mid-13 seconds, thanks to the quicker gearshift. It is a standard automatic gearbox, but with a manual shifter that will hold it in any particular ratio. From Drive I click once back into second and then again into first ready for the green light at the start of a run. Then off the line I just push it forward when I want to shift up into second, then again for third. So I'm shifting manually with an automatic box and if the linkages are set up right, it is as crisp as anything and you get a nice swift gear change.

In the manual gearbox I used to be in either third or fourth by the end of the 1/4 mile, depending on the day, but I gained about a second and a half with the automatic gearbox, despite only having three ratios instead of four. But of course third is a 1:1 direct drive the same as fourth was on the manual box, and on that you could damage third gear because the engine was so torquey. Especially once we started adding nitrous...

Adding nitrous may sound pretty serious, but this is all just a hobby for me and my son, Jason. In fact, my background is in heating and ventilation. But once you get hooked on drag racing, you are always looking for the next step, a way to shave another fraction of a second off your time. So this would have been about 2004, and with the automatic box in we could really get started on the nitrous. That really lit the car up and with the 3.5 engine, we got down to the mid-12s, which is quick, but that was all we could do with that little engine because it still wasn't making enough torque.

At this point, everything was contained under the bonnet except for about an inch of air filter sticking through. These days it is rather less subtle – we bolt stuff on to make it faster, and we live with how that

Left: Nitrous was the first step to getting more power from the V8, before allying it to a monster supercharger (right).

makes it look. But we were stuck at 12 seconds for year before deciding to go for a bigger engine. My friend Richard Chester gave us a 4.6-litre engine from a Range Rover P38, just a standard engine. It was a bit worn, but we honed the bores until they were sort of round and put in some new rings and bearings. The internals and the compression were all standard, but the engine hadn't cost us anything so we thought we'd just try it and see what happened. What happened was that it ran really well and we easily got into the 11s in the first year.

So then we started adding a bit more nitrous each time until the pistons started to melt. That's when we discovered that the piston ring gaps are important when you are using nitrous. If you gap it at the normal 19-20thou, the blow-by gases can get so hot that the tips of the rings start to glow – it creates a little hot spot for detonation and the piston crown just melts away. We learnt all of this on the free engine, but not before we'd put in bigger ring gaps, up to 45thou. That way we managed to get more nitrous in and got down to around 11.4 seconds on standard pistons, but we had so much blow-by that although we were pumping in more and more nitrous, we'd reached the limit of what we could keep in the combustion chambers.

Next we went to forged pistons, and ran that for a couple of years. We had a whole year of running 11 seconds – we got as low as 11.01, but we just could not crack that 11 second barrier. We tried experimenting with tyres, but as soon as we hit 11 seconds we started breaking halfshafts. If we were gentle off the line we could get about three passes before we snapped one, but if I tried an aggressive launch then both shafts would be gone in ten feet. We developed our own special tool for rapid shaft changes without stripping the diff. We had an endless supply of old halfshafts at that time from guys on the MGOC forum, all totally standard and most of them having covered over 100,000 miles on the road.

I should probably explain that the nitrous is fed in automatically. I've got a switch on the throttle and a very basic pulse controller on a board in the passenger footwell, a little black box which is now 30 years old. The rest of the stuff on that board is my digital ignition, and another module that allows me to set rev limits and adjust timing. It's all home made and all very basic, but so far it has worked.

Once I go to wide open throttle, the controller will start pulsing the solenoids at whatever power I've set. At the moment we have the 150bhp jets in, and I have it set to start at 30%, so about 50bhp. The solenoids pulse quicker and quicker until they are fully open, so you can slowly ramp the power in – we've got it set to come in fully after 1.8 seconds at the moment. If I dumped in the lot off the line, we'd end up with wheels up in the air and the car sideways... With the

The racing buckets and harnesses are clearly new additions, but the interior still has a lot of its original road trim.

Perry and his friends may race side-by-side, but they are competing against the clock.

supercharger and a little bit of nitrous off the line, it is lovely. You get plenty of power, but a nice smooth launch.

It was still too aggressive for the standard halfshafts if I wanted to improve my times, however. The only alternative I could see was to get a stronger back axle, which we couldn't afford. So I spoke to Ian Marshall, the race director here at Santa Pod. He suggested that I could probably have a pair of standard halfshafts copied in the same material as they make the Top Fuel Dragster shafts from. So I shipped a pair over to Moser Engineering in the States and they not only copied the design, but also improved it. On the MGB, the shaft tapers down to the diff and it then gets bigger by 2-3mm for the splines, and that change in section is the shear point. So Moser made the splines about four inches long, kept that diameter the same and then slowly tapered it up to the bearing. They cost £500 including all postage and taxes – much better than the £3000 I'd have to pay for a Ford 8.8 axle with a proper locker, although that would allow us to drive around corners in the pits more easily. As it is we have welded the pinion gears in our diff to avoid wheel spin. They do break now and again, but we have loads of spares back home and it hasn't been uncommon on a weekend for Jason to stay here and change the head gaskets while I drive home to weld the diff back up.

On our first run out with the new driveshafts, we broke the 11 second barrier, running a 10.9. Then of course we wanted more power, so we increased the size of the nitrous jets (they are just brass jets from the Amal carburettors as fitted to Triumph Bonnevilles) and altered the pulse controller. Then we found it wasn't breathing very well, so we took off the RV8 manifolds, cut them back to three inches and put on the exhaust pipes you see on it now. That helped, but then we started having problems with the valve gear. We had to change the valve springs to stronger double ones, fitted a better cam and then went straight out for a 10.7 and a 10.6.

This was about two years ago and the car was starting to get nice and quick. The engine was making 440bhp on nitrous with 601lb.ft of torque, (just 199bhp without the nitrous thanks to the big ring gaps) on regular Shell Optimax or BP Ultimate fuel, but we were running a 300hp shot of nitrous and it was getting very expensive – we were using 3lbs of nitrous each pass, around £20 worth.

So we started looking at alternatives, such as a supercharger or a turbo. Turbos are good, but they need quite a bit of managing whereas with a supercharger, you can simply bolt it on and off you go. And superchargers look better, they give the old school look that I like. Believe it or not, this is actually the smallest blower you can get from this range – it is a GMC supercharger from a diesel engine. This

Automatic gearbox saw an immediate improvement of 1½ seconds.

Perry says that if he raced two weekends a month and did three or four runs each day, the tyres would last an entire six month season.

one is late 1940s/early 1950s vintage, and may well have come from a tank. My friend Nigel Jenkins, who runs UK Blowers, makes them to order – he buys all the old casings he can get from America, refurbishes them, makes the new snouts for the drive and polishes them so they look like this.

I can't remember the cfm rating of this blower, but at 6000rpm it will make 16psi. We are running 13.5psi at the moment, and just on the blower it ran a 10.6 without any nitrous at all. We ran it like that for a whole year – you do have to be patient in this game – and then we started topping it off with a bit of nitrous last July. We still had all the nitrous gear on the car and the solenoids will normally flow up to 150bhp, so we started off with just 25bhp of boost and ran a personal best of 10.24, then upped it to 50bhp and ran 10.23. At that point I said to Jason: 'They are only 150bhp solenoids, just take the jets off.' What I'd forgotten was that I had previously worked on the solenoids and they would actually flow 300bhp. On our first run, I launched with 13psi of boost and a 300bhp shot of nitrous and it just picked the front wheels up, went in a huge arc and nearly crossed the centre line, came back towards the wall and then the engine simply exploded. It was particularly annoying because we'd only just spent £1200 having the engine re-linered and decked.

That little mishap blew the budget, which was why we were off circuit for a year. We only came back in spring this year, but with a 4.9 engine, stronger pistons and rods plus a billet/cross bolted bottom end. It is a lazy engine as the compression ratio is down to 7.5:1, so I can pile in more boost and more nitrous. To get this low ratio, the heads have been ported out to the max, but I also fitted shorter pistons – at TDC they are now 7.2mm down the bores giving me a compression chamber of roughly double the size.

We came out for our first proper shakedown a couple of weeks ago, running 10.9 and 10.6 on the blower. With a 50bhp shot of nitrous we took that down to 10.4 and then 10.2. That put us tantalisingly close to the nines for the first time ever. The engine easily revs to 7000rpm, and that is the key because if you shift earlier, you are limiting the effect of the blower. Then last week we hit 9.96 – twice! So now we knew we could hit nine seconds, we wanted to make it less borderline and get more comfortably into the bracket.

So here we are today. I've softened the settings, having 50bhp of nitrous come in initially and then building up to 175bhp over the first two seconds. I did a 10.0 for my first run which was brilliant, much better than I had expected. So what we will do next time is keep the initial nitrous boost low so that I can utilise high revs for the launch, but bring the build time down from two seconds to 1.5 seconds and see what happens. After that we'll just have to see how it goes. I used to run a 0.8 second build time for the nitrous build before the blower, but at that rate the axle would be tramping, the wheels would be up in the air – so much energy was being expended lifting the front wheels off the line, all energy that we need to channel into moving us down the track, so there is plenty more potential to be mined there.

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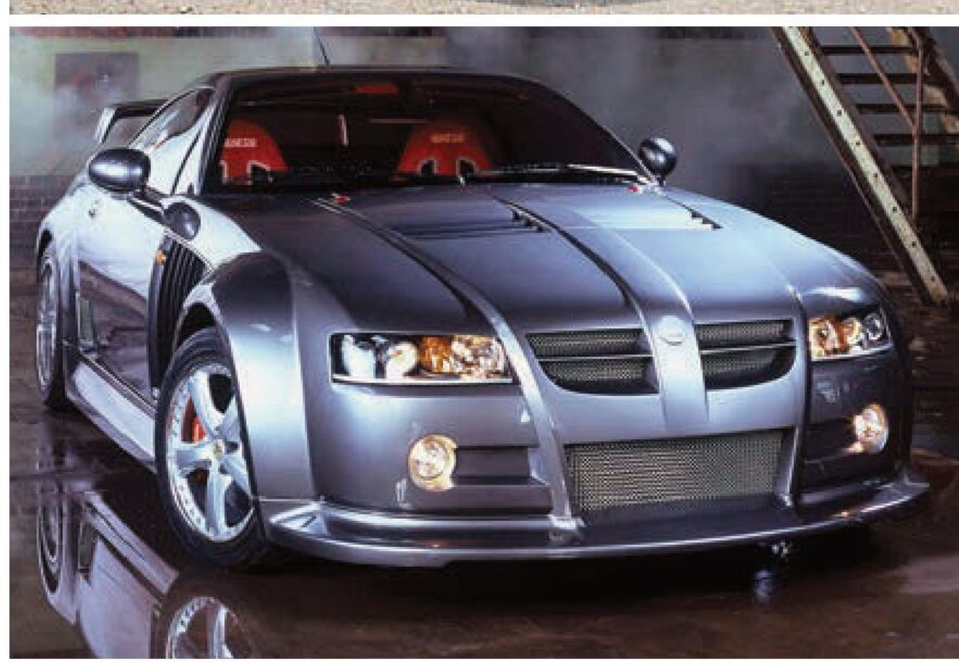

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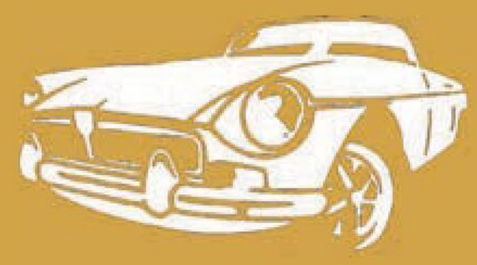

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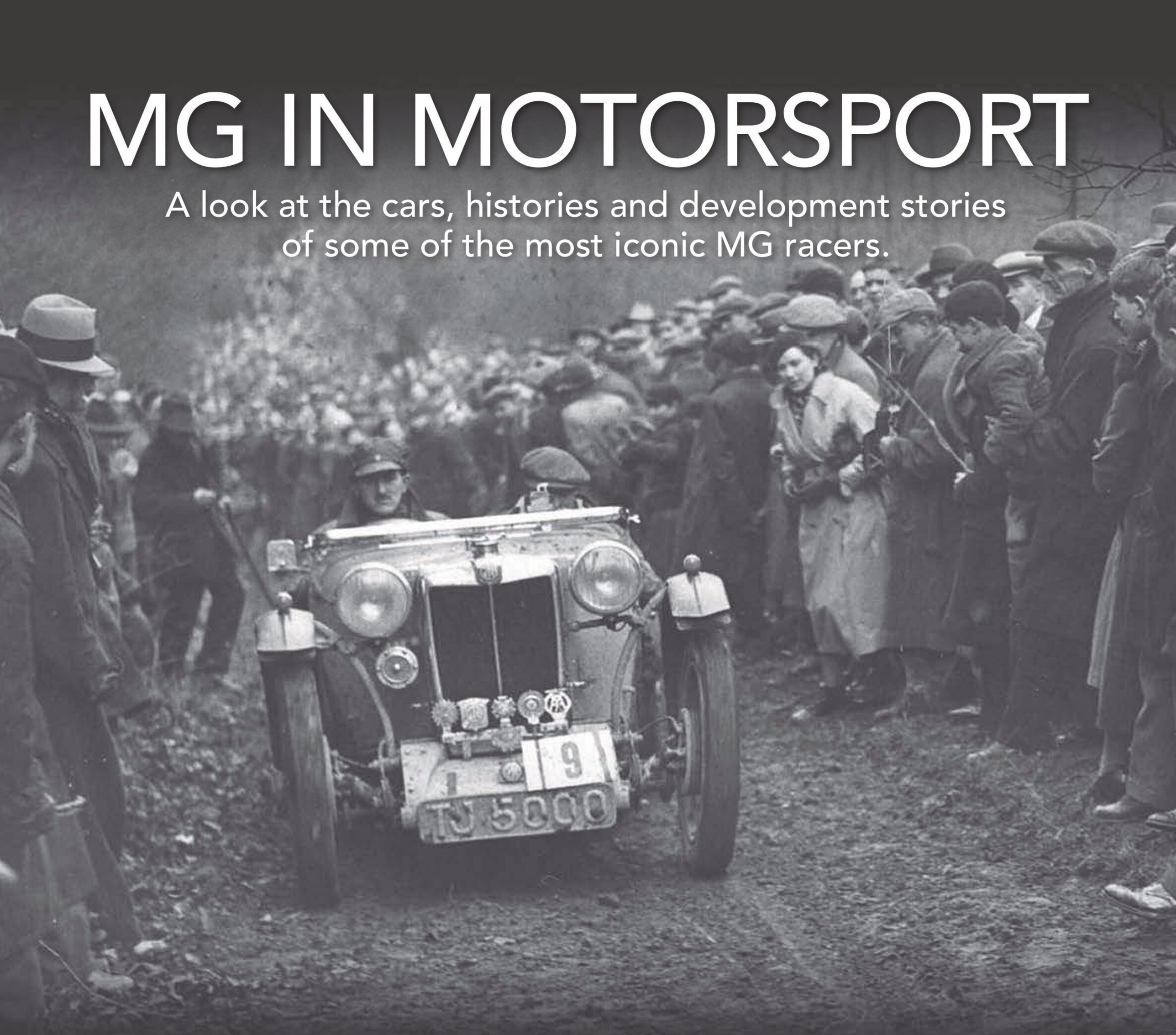

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