

# NEWSLETTER



The WESSEX MG CLUB  
At the Bell on the Common Broughton Gifford

## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

“Spring has sprung, the grass has riz”. We have crocus and snowdrops in the garden and the birds are full of song. It is hard to believe that we were shivering under freezing conditions just a few weeks ago. If you haven't already done so it is time to see if the old girl still starts and goes. The MG that is, just to clarify.

The Wessex year got under way with an enlightening talk by John Bishop about his model auto gyros and he brought along some samples of his model making skills to provide a very interesting evening. Thanks John for a very enjoyable talk.

Last night, eighteen romantics from the Club took pleasure in a St Valentine's Dinner at The Bell on the Common. This was the first meal we have had there since the new Landlord, Wayne, took over just before Christmas. It turned out well – good pub grub at a reasonable cost, and whereas some may have thought the service was a bit slow, I personally thought it was okay. Stretched out over the whole evening with longish breaks between courses, French style, perhaps is what we should be aspiring to instead of the hurried mode of life that has developed in recent years.

At the forthcoming meeting there is to be a debate, the motion for which

remains a mystery until the evening. A debate breaks new ground for the Club and promises to be a rollicking good evening. David Whitely has put this in train, so come along and be sure to take an active part.

The Club's spring weekend away goes to Buxton in Derbyshire this year. A small band have already booked up but at the time of writing there is still availability at the hotel, so if you are having second thoughts or thought you had missed the deadline and wish to join us then let me or Paul Wheel know as soon as possible.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to welcome four new Members to the Club. They made their first visit at the January meeting and signed up there and then. Please, would you all make them welcome and get them involved in our activities. They are David and Donna Williams, Malcolm Taylor and Sandy Milne.

And news hot off the press. Congratulations to Nancy and Tom on the birth of their second daughter, Amelia Barbara - to be known as Millie. Millie arrived on Saturday 18th and weighed in at 7lbs 8oz.

**Gordon**

For your diary in the coming month

### February

27th - **Club Night** - Debate. See page 10

### March

26th March - **Club Night**.

For details see page 8.

**WHY I BECAME AN MG ENTHUSIAST (Part 2)**  
**(or confessions of a former Austin Healey Sprite Mk IV owner)**  
**The French Connection**

Readers of this newsletter may remember my previous account of adventures with my first Spridget, including a brief parting of all four of its wheels from the ground, the loss of several exhaust systems and its unexpected appearance inside the officers' mess at RAF Church Fenton. Having sold the car, spent all the money on a plane ticket and spent a year studying in Canada, I returned home in 1976 carless, but much better educated, and began training as a teacher at Bath University. My girlfriend at that time, Priscilla, was studying in Exeter and it quickly became apparent that travelling courtesy of British Rail was both expensive and time consuming so – and you're way ahead of me – I had the perfect excuse to buy that red MGB that I hankered after.

LMG 80K (and if you know where this vehicle is or actually own it do please get in touch!) was tracked down in Surbiton, South London and outwardly exuded the appearance of having been cherished. In reality it was not an MGB but a shiny Mark IV 1275 Sprite with 42k on the clock which seemed affordable at £800 and was immediately available; as always I was too busy to chase around looking at a string of cars before buying. If I had known when I bought it that I would travel 90,000 safe miles in it, go on honeymoon in it and love it more than any other car I have owned I would have handed over my meagre savings with rather more enthusiasm. This is odd given that it broke down and

needed more serious repairs than just about all the other cars I have owned combined and was not red, but an orange colour of dubious merit called burned sand – a case of young love, I guess!

Things began well. I used the Spridget both to whizz down to Exeter at weekends and to explore the by-ways and pubs of Wiltshire after lectures. Photographs from the period suggest that the top came down as often as possible, even on a Boxing Day outing with Peter, later to be my best man, when the temperature was below freezing. Having always for some unaccountable reason enjoyed driving through fords, I was sorely tempted to attempt the crossing of the River Barle at Tarr Steps on Exmoor one autumn weekend – fascinatingly, myth has it that the Devil built this ancient clapper bridge and still has sunbathing rights on its stones. Had I been foolish enough to risk this wetting I suspect that I would have discovered that Spridgets float fairly easily in swollen autumnal waters. The photo-shot was lost alas, but perhaps I was learning the dull art of self-restraint at last. This latter quality was, however, clearly lacking as I drove home from central London with the radio blaring one evening before Christmas. It was late in the

evening, Piccadilly was quiet and the underpass beneath Hyde Park Corner totally empty. Emerging the other side I was beckoned in by an industrious traffic policeman who informed me that I had been doing 43mph in a 30 limit and had just emerged into one of the world's busiest junctions (although at the time it was pretty well deserted....). This was followed by

one of those cautions that up until then I had only heard policemen say on the television. Duly chastened, admonished and having pleaded guilty with mitigating circumstances, I waited until my case came up at Bow Street Number 1 Magistrates' Court.

When the verdict arrived by post I was further embarrassed to read that I had pleaded in my defence that "I must have got carried away listening to Handel's Messiah on the radio". I was duly fined £8 and given points on my licence. I guess that it had the desired effect. To this day that was my first and last speeding fine.

First gear had always growled a bit, but as the year progressed so did the growling until unpleasant grinding noises convinced me that a new gearbox was needed – I cursed the first owner who had clearly enjoyed flooring the throttle in London traffic to en-



joy the car's punchy acceleration. So at Easter a hoist was duly hired and my father helped me to pull the engine out, replace the offending gearbox and pop in a new clutch at the same time: so began my more intimate acquaintance with the Spridget's innermost parts. LMG 80K proved to be fairly reliable in failing its annual MOT, this time because of leaking slave cylinders, and so began my initiation into hydraulics – I remember devising a nifty system of bleeding the system afterwards using a suitable length of rubber tubing and a small jam jar which I popped into the tool kit for possible future use.

Summer came, my savings were all but exhausted, we both qualified as teachers and loaded up the Sprite to whizz down to the Dordogne in France where Priscilla had secured a job looking after a new baby for a couple of French doctors. I was invited as long as I was willing to be an odd-job-man – fair enough! Their



summer retreat in the small Dordogne village of Vanxains took the form of a medium-sized and very beautiful chateau called La Brangelie dating from the middle ages; we were generously offered an entire stable block in which to garage the Spridget. Priscilla duly threw herself into

the post-natal routines of preparing biberons (bottle feeds), burping, nappy changing and other delights whilst I was given various gardening duties, along with having the private swimming pool in which to cool off.

Time off was precious, so when relieved of duties we headed out via Perigord and several steep-sided valleys to visit Rocamadour which attracts visitors for its dramatic setting in a gorge above a tributary, beside which we camped, on the Dordogne river. The brakes had seemed a trifle spongy on the way out, but a couple of days later on the way back after several more even steeper-side valleys I reluctantly admitted to myself that the brakes seemed to be failing. Not wishing to alarm Priscilla, I kept things going for a while by judicious engine braking and finally, and rather more obviously,

by pumping the pedal up and down to create enough pressure in the system to slow us down. Did we have breakdown cover? Of course not: I was a penniless student rendered even more penniless by having bought the car. Inevitably it was getting dark and we were stuck out in the back of beyond, so I think that we conducted experiments with the handbrake to see if that would assist in the business of slowing us down – and it did, just a little bit! As I recall we plotted ourselves back on deserted country roads avoiding insofar as it was possible annoy

ances like traffic lights which can require you to stop more rapidly than current circumstances allowed. The steep-sided valleys seemed to be even more threateningly steep, but by shoving it into second and then first gear and yanking on the handbrake, we were relieved eventually to bump our way up the chateau's



driveway and deposit our stricken car in its stable. Phew!

We woke up the next morning to blue skies and the problem of having a brakeless car, precious little money to fix it and the awareness that the Dordogne is quite a long way away from home. A quick inspection of backs of the car's wheels suggested that the slave cylinders were not leaking, so it had to be the master cylinder. Our French host was offering to call the local garage and various breakdown services, but with no money to pay the bill I rummaged through the toolkit in the vain hope that I'd had the good sense to pack a kit to re-rubber a master cylinder and.....would you believe it....I actually had! The earlier slave cylinder replacements had taught me to be confident, so as the temperature rose into the nineties I removed and duly rebuilt the offending part using the jam

jar and rubber tubing to get the air out of the system to complete the job. Obtaining supplies of the correct brake fluid in rural nineteen seventies France proved to be a challenge which doubtless helped to improve my French language skills.

Bingo, we were back in business! Great rejoicing! It's amazing how we take things for granted – something as simple as being able to



stop your car when you want to! My back was a bit sore from the sun that evening, but plenty of local wine helped to soothe that. The next day I expected to feel on top of the world after my mechanical triumph, but was instead experiencing an unhealthy combination of sickness and light-headedness. So absorbed had I been fixing the brakes that I had ignored the ninety degree temperatures and baking sun and given myself mild sunstroke. Eh bien, c'est la vie!

The rest of the month passed relatively uneventfully as Priscilla honed her skills in burping babies, singing nursery rhymes in French (there are still days when she insists on singing these again in their entirety en francais) and produced various English deserts such as apple crumble much to the delight and entertainment of our hosts. Another short break allowed us to visit a local chateau which we duly did a little late in the day, and were returning top-down when the weather turned nasty and it began to pour. I re

call that we sought shelter in the next village, fortunately finding a building with huge overhanging eaves which afforded the whole car temporary shelter.

As they say in French “il pleuvait des cordes”, or it was raining ropes rather than cats and dogs as the English idiom has it.

As we reluctantly put the hood up it became apparent that this storm was pretty much tropical in its intensity, what we now call a flash-flood: the run-off water was deluging down our street towards the river a couple of hundred meters away with enough force to start lifting the tarmac surface. Anyway, we survived.

Much delayed we headed back to Vanxains, rather cautiously as it was now dark, via the steep-sided valleys and dripping forests. Then suddenly and inexplicably, miles away from the nearest village, the headlights suddenly failed – both of them together. As they say it never rains but it pours, or am I getting carried away with weather metaphors? Could two bulbs have failed simultaneously? Oddly, it never had never crossed my mind to join a motoring organisation with breakdown recovery because that cost money that I didn't have, but I had purchased a workshop manual before carrying out the gearbox job. Somehow we found enough light to read it, check the

bulbs, use emery cloth to clean the ends of the fuses and in desperation use the wiring diagram to check out the system. I noticed more by luck than judgment that there was an earth connection easily accessible on the left hand side of the engine bay. I found it, used emery cloth on the contacts and re-assembled it. Once again it was bingo time! Two working headlights! Mercifully, the rest of the journey was uneventful.

At the end of the month, still penniless but having enjoyed free board and lodging in some style for a month, I left Priscilla changing yet more nappies in France and drove the Spridget back to England on my own using *routes nationales* to avoid expensive motorway tolls. My overtaking manoeuvres were interesting, but the gearbox was fine, the headlights worked and the brakes seemed better than ever! Upon my return I desperately needed to earn some money, prepare for my first teaching job in Cambridge, and to find us somewhere to live. Perhaps the Spridget would even stop breaking down for a while....

to be continued....

**John Bishop**

**MYSTERY CAR**

Many Congratulations to Ken Scott for correctly identifying the Dellow. Ken, you win absolutely nothing of course, other than a warm glow inside for getting it right.....

Another chance to do a little research during these dark wintry evenings. It's got to be better than watching television. I snapped this little beauty at the Goodwood revival meeting last

September. It must have been the only day it didn't rain.

**Ed**



**TECH TALK**

- 1) After nearly 3 years of intermittent use, my 6 volt batteries from MGOC have nearly died despite addition of BattAid tablets. MGOC (and MGB Hive) are charging £166 for replacements including very expensive acid packs, delivery and only a one year guarantee! For £3 less you can get UK made, classic rubber moulded ones with a 3 year warranty from Alpha Batteries. However I've found that Lincon batteries can provide UK made 421s with acid pack, delivery and a 2 year warranty for £135! As always, it pays to shop around.
- 2) The previous owner of my B fitted gas struts in 1993 to the bonnet and boot which originally were used by Leyland on their Austin Metro and Princess (so the detailed log tells me). The bonnet ones have become rather weak resulting in the bonnet falling on my head – and hence presumably the other use of the word bonnet – something on your head! Strangely these particular struts are no longer available (!) but I've managed to find a very close equivalent with the help of SGS Engineering who are charging only £18 each. So if you need replacement struts ring 01332-226290 and give Steve the full number on the strut.

Perhaps Technical & Sourcing Tips could be a regular magazine item so we can all benefit from shared knowledge.

**Jeff Rattle**

**MGB ROADSTER RETURNS TO ABINGDON**



Thursday 1st December - crowds gathered in the Market Place to witness Abingdon's last MGB Roadster produced in the town, return home. The car was dramatically lifted high into the air, much to the delight of the spectators below ..... and much to and much to the nervousness of the engineers and staff involved! It was finally winched in through one of the narrow ornate windows with millimeters to spare, followed by a round of applause!



British Motor Heritage Limited of Witney generously sponsored this task. The car had to be stripped down to the body shell and supported on a special cradle which turned onto its side before being raised up to the window on a 30 tonne lifting platform. The car and cradle were gently rolled in through the window opening before being re-erected in the Gallery. This actual car, one of a small number painted bronze, rolled off the line at the Abingdon MG factory on the 23rd October 1980, and



became part of the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust collection at the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon. It's return will see it take its pride of place within the County Hall Museum, ready for when the building reopens in Spring 2012.

By way of background which I'm sure you are all aware ( and I needed to fill this column!)

The founder of MG was Cecil Kimber, the General Manager of Morris Garages (from which the car takes its acronym). Kimber's notion was to modify some of the Morris cars to make them more fun and exciting to drive. The idea was a success and production of the cars soon outgrew the company's Oxford premises. In 1929 a disused factory in Abingdon was chosen to take over production and the name MG was coined. In 1930 the MG Car Company severed its links with Morris.

**Ed**

MG RETURNS TO RACING IN THE BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP



For those of you who take an interest in national motor racing, particularly where MG are involved, you may remember that the MG ZS scored 15 wins in the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) between 2001 and 2006. MG didn't however manage to win the BTCC. But now MG has linked up with the team – Triple Eight – winners of four of the six drivers' titles on offer during that period and the most successful driver ever in the championship – Jason Plato, to go racing. The team will be known run as MG KX Momentum Racing.

That's the good news. The main challenge Triple Eight and Jason Plato face now is one of time. They have until the opening race at Brands Hatch on April 1st to put together a competitive operation from scratch. To make things marginally easier they have opted for a Next Generation Touring Car (NGTC) specification MG6 GT for the Chinese-owned manufacturer.

Now I find the NGTC a little confusing. The goal of the NGTC classification is to allow more

manufacturers and privateers to race in the BTCC by reducing the cost of a competitive car and to reduce reliance on the increasingly expensive Super 2000 equipment. The NGTC provides control equipment ie engine, drive chain, suspension, brakes and electronics. But the base vehicle must be freely on sale in the UK through the manufacturer's normal dealer network, by that I assume the body shell and floor pan. So the car will look like a MG6 but under its skin it will be a kit of parts.

Well there you have it – what you see is not necessarily what you get. But like the US NASCAR series, the average Joe doesn't care about the technical aspects of a series as long as there is good close racing and the cars resemble those seen on the road. The old adage still holds true 'Win on Sunday sell on Monday'. I'll keep you up to date on progress.

**Ed**

**CLUB NEWS**

The WESSEX MG Club 2012 EVENTS LIST				
Date	Event	Club Event	Venue	Additional Information
23 Jan	<b>Club Night - 'Autogyros'</b>	Yes	The Bell	<i>John Bishop. 01225 755319.</i> A talk about John's long standing hobby building & flying model aircraft.
14 Feb	St.Valentine's Dinner	Yes	The Bell (Provisional)	<i>Gordon Newman. 01225 755645.</i> Details to follow.
19 Feb	International MG Show & Spares Day	No	Stoneleigh Park, Warks.	<i>Vic Wright. 01380 859618.</i> 8.30 am Esso Filling Station north of Chippenham on A350.
27 Feb	<b>Club Night – Debate</b>	Yes	The Bell	<i>David Whiteley. 01380 828806.</i> Motion to be revealed on the night. Prop. John Bishop; Sec Paul Wheal; Opp. Roger Binney; Sec Jeni Wright. Audience participation.
26 Mar	<b>Club Night - Games Night</b>	Yes	The Bell	<i>Jackie Court. 01249 462013.</i> Bingo & Paper Aeroplane comp.
? Mar	Skittles Evening	Yes	TBC	<i>Vic Wright. 01380 859618.</i> Details to follow.
6/7/8/9 Apr	<b>Easter Bank Holiday</b>			
8 Apr	Brooklands MG Era Day	No	Weybridge	Details to follow.
15 Apr	Gaydon MGB Organised by MG Car Club/MGOC.	No	Gaydon via Abingdon	<i>Vic Wright. 01380 859618.</i> Depart 8.30am The Wharf Car Park, Devizes. Make application to MGOC.
21/22 Apr	Bristol Classic Car Show	No	Shepton Mallet	For information.
23 Apr	<b>Club Night – 'Decorated' Prod &amp; Poke</b>	Yes	The Bell	<i>Gordon Newman. 01225 755645.</i> Give your car an 'Easter Bonnet' Chips in the pub afterwards. More details to follow.
?? Apr	Club weekend Away	No	Derbyshire (Provisional)	Investigation currently in hand. Details to follow.
6 May	Abingdon Air & Country Show	Yes	Abingdon	Details to follow
7 May	<b>May Bank Holiday</b>			

The WESSEX MG Club 2012 EVENTS LIST				
Date	Event	Club Event	Venue	Additional Information
28 May	<b>Club Night</b> – Mystery Run	Yes	Its a Mystery!	Tom Strickland. 01249 447125. Details to follow.
4/5 June	<i>Queens Diamond Jubilee Bank Holiday</i>			
25 Jun	<b>Club Night</b> - BBQ	Yes	The Bell	<i>Gordon Newman. 01225 755645.</i> Details to follow.
15 Jul	Sherborne Castle Classic Car Show	Yes	Sherborne	<i>Gordon Newman. 01225 755645.</i> Details to follow.
22 Jul	Club Summer Picnic	Yes	Studland	<i>Jeni Wright. 01380 859618.</i> Beach games & summer sun fun. Details to follow.
23 Jul	<b>Club Night</b> – Boules Evening	Yes	The Bell	Details to follow.
28 Jul	Salisbury Race Meeting (Provisional, subject to support)	No	Salisbury	Evening meeting with Abba tribute band to follow.
20 Aug	<b>Club Night</b> – Driving Test	Yes	Tom's Field	<i>Tom Strickland. 01249 447125.</i> Details to follow.
27 Aug	<i>Bank Holiday</i>			
8 or 9 Sept	Club visit to Bletchley Park	Yes	Bletchley Nr. Milton Keynes	<i>Peter Hine. 01672 512847.</i> Details to follow.
23 Sept	MGB 50 MGCC/MGOC Event	Yes	Blenheim Palace	Details to follow.
? Sept	Club Treasure Hunt	Yes	Frome	<i>Tony Neale. 01373 465044.</i> Walking Treasure Hunt. Details to follow.
24 Sept	<b>Club Night</b> -			Details to follow.
22 Oct	<b>Club Night</b> – American Civil War	Yes	The Bell	<i>Roger Binney. 01380 830524.</i>
3 Nov	Roger & Lynne's Party	No	Royal Edington Village Hall	<i>Roger &amp; Lynne. 01380 830524.</i> Details to follow.
26 Nov	<b>Club AGM</b>	No	The Bell	Formal notification will be posted nearer the time.
8 Dec (Prov)	Christmas Dinner	No	TBA	Details to follow

WESSEX MG DEBATE - CLUB NIGHT MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY

The much heralded, once postponed, Club Debate is nearly upon us.



The teams, shipped-in from far and wide, have polished their tonsils, honed their wit and are prepared to share their wisdom with you.

The Debate will commence after the Club Chairman has presided over Club business.

The Debate Chairman (the undersigned) will introduce the teams, outline the etiquette of play and introduce the audience to THE MOTION.

The Audience (that is YOU, dear reader) will be asked to vote for and against the motion.

The Debate will then run like this:

- The Proposer will speak FOR the motion for 10 minutes (carefully timed), after which -
- The Opposer will speak AGAINST the motion for 10 minutes.
- This will be followed by The Seconders FOR and AGAINST the motion to speak, in turn, for four minutes.
- The Proposer and Opposer then return centre-stage to sum up their respective cases.

The Audience then will vote again on the motion to see if the golden voices of our speakers have persuaded a change of view.

A further vote will be taken to establish the “best” debating team. The Audience is expected to remain silent during the debate (fat chance of that), avoid barracking (...or that either) and have respect for the Debate Timekeeper (ho, ho).

Come and share the wisdom of our speakers.

**David Whiteley**

## SECRETARY'S SCRIBBLES

As I write at 19:11 16<sup>th</sup> February there is still no baby! All of the usual rumblings and lack of sleep for Nancy – but, no baby. The baby of course is officially ordered for Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> so it may be just be late. We are finally back in our house in Pewsham but I can't get the Magonette out of the Garage or the BGT into it as we have a large skip in the way! Still millions of jobs to do of course but it is great to be back in our own house.

The GT has actually been stranded here for the last few weeks as the starting issue raised its head again and this time when I turned the key nothing happened at all. Then followed a few weeks of lift sharing and wife abandoning that involved me working on the house almost every hour I had left over from work – add to that the BGT was outside in the snow or darkness meant I didn't go near it other than to replace the battery earth lead and terminal clip (cleaning the old clip up had helped last month you will remember.) but no joy. I spoke to Vic and Paul and they both agreed that it sounding like an electrical fault possibly the starter relay or the earthing to the starter itself. I ordered an ebay relay for pennies hoping that I could just swap it over – but unfortunately still nothing. In the end Half Term arrived and I set aside a morning to service and hopefully fix the GT. I spent breakfast pouring over the excellent red MGB electrical book and went out to do battle. I jacked the car up, removed the wheel, crawled under, noticed a hanging wire with spade terminal, slid it back on and..... danced around the garden like a Santa's elf on boxing day. Problem fixed...I hope!

I have had a letter through from Harrogate MG Show which is an annual event – any more information wanted give me an phone or email. A long way to go but could be good?

**Tom**