

My First Car

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The Purchase

I was 17. At that age what do most guys dream of? A car, of course. Believe it or not, my first car was a 1962 MGA Mk II. I found the car through a high school friend who grew up in a car-dealer family. Rick and his family loved cars, his brother drove a Mustang Mach I and his friend a Porsche 911. I was always drawn to the Porsche, but knew that it was beyond my reach. As I began to look for a car to buy, I knew I wanted something sporty and unique. Never did I imagine that my life would be so impacted by owning an MG. I was working at a gas station at the time and was always intrigued and excited when a Porsche 911 or Mercedes SL 190 was being worked on in the shop. We didn't see an MG that I recall, but were soon to have one grace the lift; that one would be mine.

Through his family connections, Rick became aware of an MGA for sale. The car was owned by a guy that drove a Jaguar XKE and ran a small repair shop. The car was located in a field, behind the shop, where these fine automobiles were being serviced and stored. I had never seen an MGA, nor did I even know what one was. When I first saw the car I thought it was so amazing. The lines of the MG were superb and a two seater sports car was beyond my wildest dreams. It apparently had been raced, as the MG still sported Firestone Sports Car 200 race tires. My initial thought was this thing must be really fast. The car color was a mix of BRG and grey primer. It needed rocker panels (no surprise) and had a significant dent in the right rear fender. It didn't matter; I knew this was the car for me. Of course I still had to convince my father that was the case.

Since my skill driving a stick shift was limited to driving a truck on a farm where I had worked, the owner offered to take me for a ride, which I gladly accepted. Wow, was I in for an experience. Paul had obviously raced this car and took me around the lot. He cornered so tightly I think I may have turned green. I couldn't believe how well the car drove and accelerated. Never had I experienced anything like this before, and to think I could be the owner of this classic beauty.

I'm sure my excitement was evident when I told my dad about the MGA for sale. Now, my dad was a pretty easy going guy and when he saw the car he stood there motionless with his hands in his pockets, wearing his signature khaki shirt and pants with a plaid vest. After a few minutes he asked if I realized all the work it would require. Finally he agreed, as long as I covered all the expenses and insurance, it was okay with him. I think in his heart of hearts he was almost as excited as I was. I bought the car that day for \$250. The best \$250 I ever spent. We used a rope to tow the car home behind my mom's 1966 Buick Special, about 1.5 miles.

The Restoration

I guess when you're 17 years old, restoration of a car can take on several meanings. With limited funds, and almost no experience, my friends Rick, Dewey, and I set out to turn this purchase into something that looked as good as it drove. The car was actually in pretty good shape for being about seven years old; the mileage, I can't recall. We repaired any rusted areas with screen and lots of bondo. Rick



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spent hours block sanding the right rear fender to restore its curvature. There was no hesitation to use screws or any other hardware to secure the new rocker panels. Those were the days. With little concern for the longevity of the repairs the goal was to get this car finished and on the road. After several weekends of repairs, and spray can primer, we towed the car up to the paint shop; a little single bay garage behind a liquor store. We provided the paint (BRG of course) and for \$150 we got the car painted. We did minimal hand buffing. It didn't matter, it looked great to us.

The "Fun"

Now the car was ready to enjoy. The MG was entered in a number of SCCA road rallies. In fact, a friend of mine, Roger, and I designed a rally and it was called The Only Rally. Once we understood the amount of work involved we decided it would be the "only rally" we would ever organize. It was always fun to be out cruising with the Austin Healeys, MGBs, and Sunbeams on back roads. Rally results were pretty good, as I recall; as was meeting up at the end for food, beer, and trophies. It didn't matter to us if the roads were dirt and stony, just participating was a blast.

The A was autocrossed at the Lancaster Speedway. I remember advancing the timing to try to get a little more acceleration out of it for my final run. I wasn't a great driver but adjusting the timing did help and I was able to place 3rd in the event. Cold winter days were not avoided. With side curtains in place the MGA was driven year round in the snow and cold. On those cold winter days I would occasionally sport my leather racing cap to keep my ears warm.

I remember being out one night in the snow with no top. The heater never worked, or if it did, you didn't know it. The lack of heat was one of the reasons the A was eventually sold, a decision I regret to this day.

Summer trips were usually spent driving the back roads in Wyoming County or driving up to Olcott, NY for fun with my friends, eating at the Seafood Bar and frequenting the beach, bars, and bumper cars.

The amount of fun had with that car exceeds what I can write about, but I assure you that level of fun can still be obtained with our LBCs. So this year, drive your cars a little bit more, enjoy the rides, picnics, sight seeing, cruises, and what ever you want to do in your British sports car. You won't regret it. Memories are still out there waiting to be made. •

