

January 2017

The

Magazine



Ulster



Centre

From the Chairman



I have been asked by the Editor of our new MaGazine, Simon Johnston, to scribe a few words as way of an overview of what the MG Car Club Ulster Centre is about, and hopefully over the course of these MaGazines you will be able to see how it all started and be able to put names and faces to those who are responsible, and who to blame!

My name is John Clarke, and I am the current Chairman of the Club. I am older than the Club, but only just! I have only been involved with the Club for ten years and am still learning how and who not to offend, so please bear with me...

Even in my short time with the Club and Committee I have seen people come and go, and it is to that end that we have decided to start this initiative to get members more involved within the Club. The Club is for its members and needs to have things that are relevant to all.

Recently the focus on the Club has been competition biased - this is not a failing. We have developed a reputation for providing some of the best Clubman motorsport events, such as Autotesting, AutoSolos, the Ulster Classic Trial and the Derek Walker Trial (now in its 28th year) and are forefront in developing new driver talent

The social side of the Club has not been as well supported of late, and has been reduced to a few events per year, although 2016 saw more and more of you turning out for these and we hope to get back to the good old days, but need your input and support to do so.

With the introduction of our Jubilee Team, the Club is providing the facility for old and new members and friends to get together and be all things MG!

Our goal is more than providing a Jubilee Tour and Formal Dinner, it is to get everyone back together. There will be more Natters, more Social Runs, and definitely more discussions on how to improve Our Club.

I hope you enjoy the new format of the MaGazine and your opinions matter. If you want to get even more involved within the club come to the AGM and take up a role on one of our committees, it is your club after all.

The MG logo stands for the Marque of Friendship, and this Car Club means to prove it!

John Clarke.

The azine Editorial

By **Simon Johnston**

Welcome to this, the first Issue of the new bi-monthly Ulster Centre azine

The Ulster Centre celebrates its Fiftieth Anniversary next year and in order to properly celebrate this the Centre Committee decided that planning of suitable Golden Jubilee events needed to start well in advance. To that end, a small Golden Jubilee Committee was set up in October 2016, chaired by Mike Wilson and with Mike Armstrong, Noel Cochrane, Gordon Buckley and myself as members. We introduce ourselves overleaf, but suffice to say here that, between us, we have over two hundred years of MG and MG Car Club experience! Yes, some of us really are that old!

One of the first things we recognised was that we needed to re-establish regular communication with you, the Members. This was for several reasons: first, we want to raise awareness about our upcoming Golden Jubilee. Some of us were there at the beginning, but for lots of Members, 1968 is just too long ago to have any relevance.

Second, we felt that it was important to try and generate interest among Members not only in the Ulster Centre and its history, but also in MGs generally and their place in Ulster motor sport.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, we want to encourage as many of you as possible to use and enjoy your MGs.

Hence this azine

Of course, to use and enjoy your MGs, you need events that will entice you out. Most of the Jubilee Committee's work, therefore, will be directed at exactly that: devising events for our Jubilee Year that will appeal to MG owners, whatever type of MG they have. However, rather than wait until 2018 to launch new events, we felt that we should get some new activities underway this year so that we could gauge what works and what doesn't. In this way, we should have a range of Jubilee activities in 2018 that will have wide appeal.

Mike Armstrong, our indefatigable Jubilee Secretary, will be doing a regular Events column in

each issue giving information on planned events. As you'll see from his column in this issue, good progress has already been made on planning some pretty exciting activities and we can assure you that there's lots more to come.

As well as looking forward, however, we are also taking the opportunity to look back at the history of the Ulster Centre. Thanks to the foresight of Mike Armstrong, who has kept copies of many of the Newsletters that used to be a regular feature of the Ulster Centre, we are going to be going through the archives, decade by decade, starting with the 1960s. We don't have any Newsletters from 1968 as the Ulster Centre was only formed in October that year, but the ones from 1969 can be found online by clicking [here](#) where they can be downloaded for offline reading.

Mike Wilson, our Jubilee Committee Chairman, was the first Chairman of the Ulster Centre from 1968 to 1970 and he will also be doing a regular column. For this first issue, we've asked him to give us his reminiscences about the origins of the Ulster Centre.

For many of us, MGs have been an important part of our lives for more years than we care to remember, so we thought that it might be of interest to Members to learn how MGs can be more than just 'cars' for some of us. Mike Armstrong kicks this theme off with Part One of an article on the Armstrong 'MGenes'.

Finally, I've mentioned the significance of MGs in Ulster motor sport and we are going to be doing a series of articles on *Ulster MG Heroes (and their Cars)*. The first of these is on Victor Ferguson (brother of Harry Ferguson of tractor and four-wheel drive fame) who, you may be surprised to learn, was a significant figure in the MG world in Ulster and beyond.

I hope that you'll find something (lots?) to interest you in these pages and if you have any reminiscences about the Ulster Centre, or photos from years ago that you'd like to share, **do please get in touch**. We'd love to hear from you.

Golden Jubilee Committee

Mike WILSON, Chairman.

Mike Wilson was one of the founder members of the Ulster Centre and was its first Chairman for three years from 1968 until he stood down in 1971. It was, of course, pure coincidence that at the AGM that year it was then decided that the Chairman and Honorary Secretary shouldn't serve for more than two consecutive years!

His first MG was a TF 1250 which he bought in 1963 and he has owned his current TF 1500 since 1969 which must make the two of them the longest 'marriage' of driver and MG in the Ulster Centre. As well as the TF, Mike has an MGA 1600 Mk II and over the years he has had two Midgets, three MGBs, an MGB GT, a PA and a J1/J2. As he puts it, fifty plus years of misspent youth!

Mike has raced, rallied, hill climbed, sprinted, and autotested the TF and has done more than most to promote using and enjoying your MG. He has been a member of the winning Ulster Centre autotest team competing for the California Cup¹ at MG Silverstone on several occasions and, not content with competing, has also organised and marshalled at numerous Ulster Centre events over the years. He was also active in the organisational side of the Circuit of Ireland Rally for many years.

Mike can be contacted via email at mike.wilson@summerseatmarino.co.uk or by phone on (028) 9042 1409



Mike ARMSTRONG, Secretary

Mike Armstrong was also one of the founder members of the Ulster Centre and was its first Honorary Secretary in 1968 and 1969. He took over from Mike Wilson as Chairman in 1971 and 1972 and stepped up to the plate again over twenty-five years later as Chairman in 1998 and 1999. A tireless supporter of the Ulster Centre, he also stepped into the breach to produce outstanding Centre Newsletters over the years (over the decades!) to pick things up when it looked as though the Centre was running out of steam.

It's hard to be sure exactly how many MGs Mike has had but a rough head count looks like this - M, J2, TA (x2), TB, TC (x2), TD (x2), MGA, MGB, MGB GT, MGC (x2), MGB V8, Midget (x3), Metro, MGF, MG TF. His current 'active' MG is his TD which he's had for over forty years, supplemented by an MGB GT and an MG TF (modern variety).

Mike has also been part of the winning Ulster Centre California Cup autotest team on several occasions and he has also raced, rallied, sprinted and hill climbed in a variety of MGs over the last sixty years.

Mike can be contacted via email at mikejarm@btinternet.com or by phone on (028) 9267 5023



¹ The California Cup is the autotest trophy for teams of three drivers from the same geographical Centre entered in the name of the Centre and driving MGs of any type.

Gordon BUCKLEY

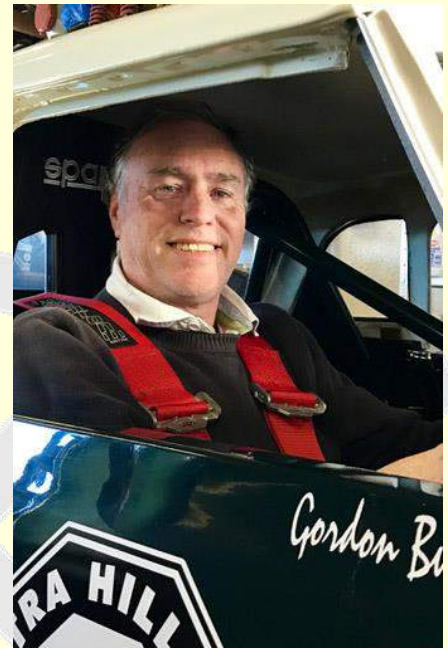
Gordon Buckley is our most recent past Chairman having held the position in 2014 and 2015. He was also Honorary Secretary in 2001 and Competition Secretary for a number of years before that. Gordon first got the MG bug when he attended the Ulster Centre Twentieth Anniversary race meeting at Kirkistown in June 1988. He decided that this MG stuff looked like fun but rather than buy a running MG like any sensible chap would have done, he bought a rotten Mk. II Midget and then spent the next six years rebuilding it.

This is still his regular MG mount today but in the intervening years he also acquired, and competed in, the 'Fidget', a two-litre twin cam Fiat-engined Midget that Noel Cochrane built in the 1980s, and has owned a concours standard MGB GT V8. He still has the Fidget but, as he says, it's now outgunned by K- Series and Zetec-engined Midgets.

Gordon has been a member of the Ulster Centre California Cup autotest team five times, helping to bring home the silverware on four occasions, and on the fifth, retiring with a broken half shaft.

Away from MGs, Gordon competes in his Mk. I Escort on the hills and in his Radical in sprints, taking numerous class wins and podium places in both disciplines.

Gordon can be contacted by email at tightgit@talktalk.net
or by phone on 07751 605033



Noel COCHRANE

Noel Cochrane joined the MG Car Club in 1981 and was a very active autotester during the 1980s and 90s in his Midget. He has continued to be involved in all aspects of the Ulster Centre and was Chairman from 2011 to 2013.

Like Mike Wilson, Mike Armstrong and Gordon Buckley, Noel has been a regular member in the past of the Ulster Centre California Cup autotest team at Silverstone, helping to win the Cup more than once. He has also taken the award for fastest overall on a number of occasions.

Noel has also been a member of the Ulster Team in the prestigious Ken Wharton Memorial Trophy Autotest competition.

With his original Midget, complete with Fiat engine, passing to Gordon Buckley, Noel has acquired two more Midgets, as well as an MGB GT built in the style of the Sebring MGC. He also has a PB special with a lightweight pointed tail body which he acquired some twenty years ago. He says that he got it to use for motor sport when he got too old for the Midgets but so far it hasn't been pressed into competitive service and he uses it mainly for touring events.


Noel can be contacted by email at nscochrane@hotmail.co.uk
or by phone on 07794 653150



Jubilee News & Dates for Your Diary

By Mike Armstrong

Some 50 years after being the first Honorary Secretary of the Ulster Centre, I find myself acting as a Secretary again – this time to the Golden Jubilee Committee of the Ulster Centre. My role is to keep you informed of the various plans we are introducing to help the Centre Committee suitably celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Ulster Centre in addition to the regular Centre events.

All of us on the Jubilee Committee invite you to participate in these events and to enjoy your MG to the full. I will keep you informed through this new  of forthcoming events, provide help with entries, and relay results. But remember, all of the effort is only worthwhile if we see you and your MG at the various events.

I have managed to keep virtually all copies of “Safety Fast” since 1963 and I will be dipping into these for the odd snippet that “catches my eye”. As a pure indulgence, I will also be writing a series entitled “My MGenes”, Part 1 of which appears in this issue.

So - what is coming?

February 4, 2017

The Derek Walker Trial

The Derek Walker Trial is our flagship event, being a multi-venue mixture of autotests, trials in muddy fields (conditions permitting) and the odd special test, all on private land with some road mileage to link them. This year brings a change in venue; from the drumlins of County Down we return once more to the relatively flat terrain of County Antrim.

Our base for the event will be the Transport Training Services facility at Nutts Corner. Start the day with a bacon butty breakfast and return for lunch and later some tea and results. Oh, and about 20 tests throughout the day. Nothing better, so don't miss out. Regs and entry forms are now available on the website – click [here](#). But a word of caution, don't delay as this is a hugely popular event and entries fill up fast!

February 18, 2017

Annual Dinner and Prize Giving at the Ivanhoe Inn, Saintfield Road, Belfast

Details regarding the Ulster Centre Prize Giving Dinner for the season 2016/17 have just been released. It will be held at the Lagan Suite in the Ivanhoe Hotel & Restaurant, Saintfield Road, Belfast on Saturday, 18 February 2017 at 7.30 for 8.00pm.

Tickets (Price TBA) will be available from Carol Willis so please register your interest in attending with her now (at carolmgulster@hotmail.co.uk or phone 07831 345560)

February 20, 2017

Film Night at the Tudor Cinema, Comber

The Ulster Centre will again be holding a Film Night at the Tudor Cinema, Comber on Monday 20 February, at 7.30 pm. Entry will be free of charge but we would ask for a minimum donation of £2 per person which will go towards the charity supported by Noel Spence, owner of the Tudor Cinema. Ruth Buckley will be on guard duty at the door to make sure no one tries to sneak in without paying!

The films will all be motorsport themed and include footage of 70s rallying, a feature on the MGB, some memories of the Ards TT commemoration event in 2003, and some period club autotesting. Please note that the compilation of films is very much ‘work in progress’ and the listing may change.

Information on how to get to the Tudor Cinema can be found on the website – see [here](#) – or contact Gordon Buckley (email tightgit@talktalk.net or phone 07751 605033).

March 23, 2017


Annual General Meeting at Shandon Park Golf Club, Belfast at 8.00 pm.

The AGM is your chance to have your say about your Club. Agenda and nomination forms for Committee will be circulated soon.

March 29, 2017

Lunchtime “Nosh and Natter” at the Hilden Brewery, Hilden, near Lisburn


This is Ireland's oldest independent brewery with a great reputation - and lovely beer! We have reserved 20 places for lunch at present (but can take more with prior notice). Lunch price is £12.95 per head and a tour of the brewery is optional at £10 per head.

You don't have to come in your  but why wouldn't you?

Please contact Mike Armstrong (phone (028) 9267 5023 or email mikejarm@btinternet.com) to book your place.


May 21, 2017

Visit to Rosemount House, Greyabbey

Rosemount house is a delightful historic house hidden away in the village of Greyabbey. We will have a tour of the house and gardens followed by afternoon tea. We may even unearth the Karl Murray Concours d'Elegance Cup and make this an  concours event. More details in due course in the next issue, and of course on the website


June 17 – 18, 2017


MG Live! at Silverstone


This is the main  event of the year for many people, with a full programme of events including, of course, the California Cup autotest competition. Give the high standard of autotesting on display at our many events, we are cautiously optimistic that we can put together a California Cup winning team.

More details about *MG Live!* can be found on the MG Car Club's website www.mgcc.co.uk Nearer the time we'll have more information on who's going, how to get there, where to stay, etc., and hopefully details of ferry discounts as well.

September 3, 2017

 Day at the Ulster Transport Museum, Cultra


This will be a first for us, but to try and bring MGs to the attention of the wider public we plan to have an  Day at the Ulster Transport Museum at Cultra. We are very grateful to Mark Kennedy, the Curator of Road and Rail Transport at the Museum, for supporting us so enthusiastically and making the Transport Museum estate available to us for our event (especially as he is a Riley man at heart!).

We hope to have as wide a range of  cars as possible on display. More information for you in the next issue and in due course on the website.

2018 – Golden Jubilee Year

May 20 – 24, 2018

Golden Jubilee Tour based at the Roe Park Resort, Limavady

This Tour will start on Sunday morning, May 20, 2018, and follow a scenic route to Limavady.

Over the following three days of touring we plan to take in the Sperrin Mountains, the North Coast and the Inishowen Peninsula of Donegal. We wouldn't expect to do more than around 100 miles each day so a relaxing Tour, not a Rally!

Departure will be on Thursday, May 24.

We have booked 70 rooms at the Roe Park Resort, Limavady which will act as our headquarters for the event. The entry fee hasn't been determined yet, but the cost of accommodation for four nights is £576 per double room (2 persons) to include B&B and Dinner each night. A single room will be £388 for 1 person. The Roe Park Resort is a first class hotel and more details can be found at www.roeparkresort.com


Note: Please don't try to make a reservation at the hotel until entries have opened (in early January 2018). Once entries have opened, and you have made your entry, you will receive your own unique hotel booking code but without this you won't be able to get these preferential rates.

Register your interest now at jubileetour@mgcculstercentre.co.uk As of January 7, 2017, there are 54 rooms left so early registration is strongly advised as we expect that the event will be fully subscribed. Once registered, further details and information on the booking procedure will follow in due course.

September 27, 2018

Golden Jubilee Dinner and Dance at the Stormont Hotel.

More information and details in due course

Write the dates in your diary and keep an eye on the Centre website and, of course, this azine

For now – Happy New Year, and

GET THAT  OUT!!!

New Year's Day Treasure Hunt

By Ian Campbell

New Year's Day 2017 saw the annual running of the Ulster Centre Treasure Hunt. This year's hunt was planned by Josef Connolly, ably assisted by his pal Eamonn, and the rendezvous point was the car park at B&Q complex, Sprucefield.

The day was cold, but clear blue skies and bright sunshine brought out 24 teams (which was slightly up on last year's event), two of which brought their MGs out to play. My dad, Cyril, and I used my daily drive MG ZR 105 and Kenneth and Helen Irvine appeared in their MG TF; these were the only two MGs out.



Kenny Irvine ready for the off in his TF

With the start time of 2pm most began to meet up from 1.30 or so to sign on, collect quiz sheets and have a chat and catch up before heading out on the hunt.

Josef had a fantastic route designed that took us through to Hillsborough and across the rolling drumlins of Co Down, stopping off at the Harry Ferguson Memorial Garden to allow the stretching of legs and to hunt for a number of answers to the quiz on the information boards in the garden.

From here the route continued through the countryside to Dromara, with the finishing point at O'Reilly's Pub & Restaurant where many stayed on to enjoy a New Year's Day dinner.



The Harry Ferguson Memorial Garden

A huge word of thanks has to be given to Josef for organising and planning such a fantastic route and fun quiz which was full of a wide range of difficulty levels (some maybe even cryptic clues) which was the perfect remedy to get the old brains working again after a week or so of food and festivities.

Joint winners were the McKee/McLaughlin team and Team Campbell (Ian and Cyril) in their MG ZR and both teams received a box of chocolates for coming first and The Irvines can cook up something tasty with their wooden spoon. As a special reward, both winning teams were excluded from having to set the 2018 Treasure Hunt but Roger and Angela Fynn were duly drawn to carry out that task.

Here's to what the rest of 2017 will have in store for us and our MGs, and we are already looking forward to our next annual event which will be the Derek Walker Trial on Saturday, 4 February.

Happy New Year to everyone and happy motoring.

The History of the Ulster Centre of the MG Car Club

PART 1: The Swinging '60s!

By Mike Wilson

In the mid-1960s there was a group of MG enthusiasts around Belfast who owned mostly well-worn T-types. This group called themselves the "The Ulster MG T Owners Club" and were 'encouraged' by a gentleman called Charles Batham. They even had a badge designed and produced – a real collector's item today, if you can find one.

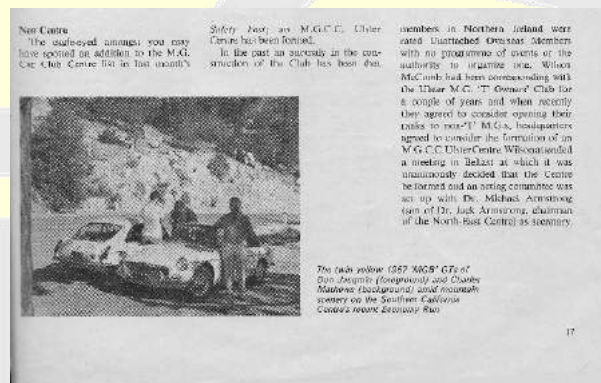
Most of the members of this group were in their twenties (*I seem to recall at least one was still in his teens – Ed!*) and all were impecunious, but these cars were 15 to 20 years old and could be bought for as little as £50 to £100. Happy days indeed!

The first meetings of this group were of the social variety, with runs to Kirkistown and other motorsport events. Much fun was had but soon the spirit of competition became evident so it became obvious that the group would have to become organised under RAC Motor Sport rules if they wanted to be able to organise their own sporting events.

Several members of the group were members of the MG Car Club, but were designated as "Unattached Overseas Members", as there was no local Centre over here. The obvious solution was to form a local Centre and become fully affiliated to the main MG Car Club and thus be recognised as a bona fide motor sport club.

In July 1968, Wilson McComb - an Ulsterman and at that time the General Secretary of the MGCC - and Dr Jack Armstrong - another Ulsterman and Chairman of the North-East Centre - came to a meeting in the Stormont Hotel to discuss the possibilities of forming a local Centre of the MG Car Club.

Those present at that meeting resolved that an Ulster Centre should be formed, and this was ratified by the Main Club at a meeting of Club Directors in October 1968.



Safety Fast, October 1968, announcing the formation of the Ulster Centre

The inaugural General Meeting of the Centre was held on Monday 11th November, 1968 in the Stormont Hotel – a memorable date! Mike Wilson was elected Centre Chairman and Mike Armstrong was elected Centre Secretary and Treasurer.

Committee members elected were Bill Sherwood, Ivan Wallace, Alan Hailes and Gordon Jackson. Other members present at the meeting were Dr Sidney Armstrong, Michael Thomas, Vivian Scott, Miss Margaret Erskine, Ian Dunlop, Norman Greer, Barry Quinn and David Murphy and the topics of discussion included how to increase the membership and events for the coming year.

(Of the 14 members present at this first meeting, only Mike Wilson and Mike Armstrong are still active MG owners and Centre members.)

The first Committee meeting was held on 25th November, 1968 and a programme of events for the following year was drawn up. Some of the more interesting ones are listed below.

Mike Armstrong produced a bi-monthly Newsletter, which was POSTED (no new-fangled email then!) to every member. (*These are now available online on the Ulster Centre web site – see [here](#) – and make fascinating reading nearly fifty years later - Ed.*) There were also monthly "Noggin n' Natters" in the Stormont Hotel.

Two Gymkhanas were held at Maghaberry Airfield (changed times).

On 9 April, the Centre's Inaugural Dinner was held in the Drumkeen Hotel (remember there?). The "Enthusiast's Trophy" was presented to the Centre by Jack Armstrong on behalf of the N.E Centre and Archie Philips presented the "Leslie Porter Trophy" on behalf of Leslie Porter, Ltd, who were the Main MG Dealers at that time.

Other social events for members in 1969 were a film show and a social run to a Bishops court race meeting for which we met up at the Ivanhoe Inn which was a popular meeting place for us in those days. It is interesting to note that the participating cars (in the social run, that is, not the race meeting) were all T Types, MGBs and an MGC, with not a Midget in sight!

Pictured below are the T Types that were there that day and from right to left we have: a TD (MZ 8338); a TF (LZ 5330) which moved to Canada with its then owner, Tom Campbell; a TC (ESP 987), owned by Margaret Erskine, one of our founder

members; a TD (HZ 6527); plus another three TDs and my own TF 1500. I think (but can't be absolutely sure after nearly fifty years!) that two of the other TDs were PZ 1167, owned then by Patrick Johnston (our Editor's older brother) and now owned by Mike Armstrong; and 1900 IL which was owned for many years by the late Ivan Wallace.

We also organised a picnic outing to Castleward and a barbeque and mystery run to Crawfordsburn.

Although the Ulster Centre had been formed the previous year, and was part of the MG Car Club, we were not allowed to organise competitive events until the membership reached 50. The magic number was reached in August 1969 and the Centre was recognised to organise motorsport under RAC rules later that month.

Membership of the Association of Northern Ireland Car Clubs was then sought and much encouragement was given by their Secretary, Ronnie Trouton, whose support has always been, and is even now, appreciated by the Ulster Centre.



An early outing of members of the newly formed Ulster Centre to Bishops court racetrack on May 10, 1969

My MGenes

by Mike Armstrong

Part 1: In the Beginning

I was idly pondering my passion for MGs recently. Was it because they are beautiful? Or fast? Or desirable? Or what? In the end, I came to the conclusion that it was genetics. Somewhere in the myriad of chromosomes there are some 'MGenes'. How could this be and could it really be hereditary? Over the next few months perhaps I can tell you.

In the beginning – my paternal grandmother, Maria, was born in Gargary, County Down, in 1882 and was the eldest daughter of Dr James Rowan who was a General Medical Practitioner, Surgeon and Apothecary. The only transport was on horseback or horse-drawn vehicle although there was a railway nearby.

After qualifying in Medicine at Queen's College, Belfast, in 1906, she married Dr John Armstrong of Ballymena. They set up Medical Practice in Ballymena where Dr John was also a General Surgeon at the Cottage Hospital, and then at the new Waveney Hospital. Travel was essential and even by 1909 motor transport was still pretty primitive. My Grandmother initially did her home visits on horseback or on a motorcycle with wicker sidecar. Later she had a three wheel Morgan. Other vehicles included a Clyno, a Citroen Cloverleaf and probably several others before her final car – an Austin A40 Devon.



Dr Maria with the three wheel Morgan and "Jack" at the wheel, about 1920.

Dr John also had a variety of vehicles but I remember his last one – a 1930's Austin 12, registration DZ 4545. He was not fond of changing gear and was inclined to slip the clutch when the

engine revs began to flag on a hill. I remember borrowing this vehicle after his death and it was unbelievably awful with extremely vague steering.

In his earlier years, he must have been a keen motorist and he told me stories of participating in the Ireland "End to End" Trial on a motorcycle. Run initially by the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland, the Trial started at Mizen Head, in south west Cork, and finished at Fair Head in north Antrim, a distance of some 395 miles.

The roads were rough and potholed and punctures were frequent. He described how they used 'butt-ender' inner tubes. These were rubber tubes closed off at each end which could be quickly inserted by taking one rim of the tyre off and stuffing the tube in like a sausage with no need to remove the wheel. This meant that a puncture could be repaired in a few minutes. The roads were so bad that sometimes they ran out of these tubes and had to stuff the inside of the tyre with grass.

In the first Trial in 1909 there were 16 starters – 11 reached Dublin and 9 riders finished in a time of just under 21 hours. There were seven sections to the route and time penalties awarded for late arrival at checks at the end of each stage. The six who finished with no penalties competed in a hillclimb at Ballycastle with the fastest being the winner. The Trial was run 14 times between 1909 and 1930. Motor cars also competed subsequently. Penalty free runs were awarded a gold medal, one of which John won (unfortunately lost after his death).

Dr John and Dr Maria had seven children, the second one being John Killen Armstrong. He was born in Ballymena in 1911. Educated at The Royal School, Dungannon, he entered Queen's University, Belfast, in 1928 and graduated in Medicine in 1933. From an early age, he was keen on motor cars and initially rode a motorcycle. He and his older brother, James, rode their bikes all over Ulster. John Killen was known as "Jack" and was an enthusiastic motorist. He frequently drove

his parents' cars and was what one might now term a 'petrolhead'.



He learned to fix the cars such as this Salmson which he had bought for £15.



In an article for the North America MMM Newsletter (Volume 1 No.2) he wrote:

"One of the earliest M Types to be imported into Ulster in 1930 was BZ 277 and was owned by a fellow medical student. After I qualified in 1933 my mother said she would buy me a car to replace the very tatty old Salmson which I had bought for £15 some years earlier. I found BZ 277 advertised and looking a bit the worse for wear (*and this at only 3 years old!*). The price of £55 was £5 over my mother's limit but I managed to acquire it. It was dark blue with cycle type front mudguards which often fell off until new stronger stays were fitted."

He drove this car constantly – coped with oiling up of plugs and an oil leak into the vertical dynamo,

and moved the spare wheel from inside the "boat tail" to mount vertically on the rear.

He courted Muriel Ferris, who was to become my mother, and they travelled widely in the wee car.



M-type ('sans' front guards), Antrim Coast Road circa 1934

This was the first introduction of an MG into the family and an 'MGene' was born. Jack moved with the M Type to Yorkshire in 1936; fell in love with a sleek black 2 seater MG NA Magnette, YG 7284; married Muriel; and drove all the way round Ireland on their honeymoon in the NA.



The NA Magnette, which was run for a couple of years and then changed for an SA saloon (registration JX 5015) just like this one seen at Silverstone.



The NA had more room, more comfort, and much more power than the M Type and was altogether more suitable for a budding GP in the Yorkshire Dales

He ran it for a couple of years until my arrival in early 1938 when he changed it for a very handsome 2-tone green 2-litre MG SA. It was this car that was my earliest introduction to all things MG.

After World War 2 started in September 1939 the car was initially used in the Practice. Jack was "called up" for service in December 1940 and joined the RNVR as a Surgeon Lieutenant. The car was set up on bricks to preserve the tyres while Jack went off to war. Over the next couple of years or so, I remember sneaking into the garage and exploring this beautiful machine. I seemed to have free rein – or perhaps my mother didn't know where I was as my sister was a small baby and my mother was also busy with her ailing father who had come to stay.

I remember the special creak in the sprung door hinge as it was opened – the smell -- the comfortable leather pneumatic seats – the dashboard with the gold rimmed instruments – the large steering wheel with a quirky little lever that turned the trafficators (i.e. lever arm indicators) on and off -- the long, long bonnet with big chrome headlights on each side of the chrome radiator, and a winged "Icarus" on the radiator cap -- the shiny bumpers with a curled bit at each end – the window blinds with little tassels – BLISS!!

Many hours were spent in this car and I loved it. It disappeared after a while when my father persuaded his Commanding Officer (Commander R.E.D. Ryder VC who had commanded the raid on St. Nazaire with HMS Campbeltown) that it was required for active service! This was when he was posted to a Special Support Group in the south of England and was required to travel backwards and forwards along various coastal units to look after Navy personnel. He had argued that it would be simpler and quicker if he was able to use his own transport (viz. the MG SA). Ryder agreed to the request and gave Jack a "chitty" for 12 gallons of petrol to collect the car from Yorkshire. The Quartermaster refused the request – "there's a war on y'know"!

On hearing this, Ryder issued a chitty for 1200 gallons of fuel to take two Motor Torpedo Boats round the coast to the main fuel depot to collect the 12 gallons originally requested. Jack suddenly got the 12 gallons and enjoyed the use of the MG

for some months before being posted to Chatham and then to the Far East on a hospital ship.

I continued the use of the SA when it was returned to the garage in Yorkshire. By now I was six and much more inquisitive. I found, in the garage, a tin of white cellulose and a paint brush and proceeded to paint a 'coach stripe' round the MG at mid height. It turned out beautifully as a wavy line of varying thickness and with several downwards runs. I think my mother must have intervened to save my life!

The upshot was a complete respray in black – because that was the only colour of cellulose available at the end of the War. On resumption of General Practice, the car was used extensively until 1947 when it was sold and replaced by a new Austin 16.

Then followed three years with no MG (the only break) until a second-hand TC was seen in Desmond Montgomery's showroom in Ballymena while on holiday in 1950. The car was cream with green upholstery, built in 1949, and had a Kent Registration, LKO 446.

It was with this car that my love of MGs really began. My Dad rallied it – doing four Circuits of Ireland, the London Rally, and several MG rallies - and even raced the car a couple of times. I spent hours with him holding spanners while he worked on it. I navigated for him on many of these whenever I was at home from boarding school.



1949 TC LKO 446

In 1954, when I was 16, he bought a 1934 side-valve, 2 seater Morris Minor for £40 which needed rebuilding.

Some 24 hours after the photograph below was taken, the car was completely disassembled and residing in the house cellar, ready for rebuild.



1934 Morris Minor on arrival prior to complete dismantling within 24 hours

There were many boxes of vaguely labelled bits. Although not quite an MG, it had the same chassis as an M Type and was not dissimilar in looks.

It was over four years before the car was finally finished and resplendent in a brush painted Oxford Blue – and it was mine. I was then in my Third Year at Queen's University, Belfast, studying Medicine.

Although I had acquired this little car when I was 16 - and it was to be some years before I could



The rebuilt Morris Minor circa 1958 (note 'Icarus')

drive it - it became a large part of my life and I would like to tell you a little more about its adventures in the next episode.

In the meantime, in 1955 when I was just 17, while trying to pass my exam into "Queen's", I cut my teeth on a new TD round Co. Antrim, and I also had the use for the summer of my Dad's TC which I drove all over the Yorkshire Dales. What a dream!

That is the end of "The Beginning" - more next time!

oOo

MG Car Club Ulster Centre Annual General Meeting Thursday, March 23 at 8.00 pm

The Ulster Centre AGM will be taking place on Thursday March 23, 2017 at 8.00 pm at Shandon Park Golf Club. AGMs are generally not very well attended but this is the one chance you get each year to have a real say in the running of your Club so why not come along and join in?

Years ago, we used to take nominations for Committee from the floor on the night but nowadays we're obliged to seek nominations in advance. To that end the Honorary Secretary, Carol Willis, will be sending out nomination forms in the very near future and, in due course, the Agenda for the meeting.

We hope to see as many Members as possible come along and take the opportunity to have their say in the running of the Ulster Centre. See you there!

Ulster M.G. Heroes (and their cars)

Victor Ferguson



Photo: Northern Whig

Introduction

The first recorded entry of an M.G. in competitive motor sport in Ulster was that of an M Type entered at Craigtantlet Hill Climb in August 1930 by W.M. Cameron, but nothing further was heard of him, at least as far as M.G.s were concerned. In May 1931, D.C. McMullen entered an M Type in the Red Brae Hill Climb and won the Private Owners' Handicap, but once again nothing more is known of either car or driver.

In August that year, however, M.G. launched their first assault on the Ards TT and the entry list saw no less than twelve supercharged C Types, plus one

unsupercharged one. As part of a 'Speed Week', Craigtantlet Hill Climb took place on the Saturday before the TT, the hope being that entrants to the TT would take the opportunity to compete at Craigtantlet as well. However, only two TT M.G. entrants tackled the hill - S.W.B. (Stan) Hailwood in a supercharged C Type and F.M. Montgomery in the unsupercharged one. One other name, however, featured prominently in the results - that of V. Ferguson, driving a 746 c.c. M.G., who won one Class (beating Stan Hailwood), came second in another, and third in yet another.

Nothing further is heard of Ferguson until June 1933 when he cleans up at the Ballybannon Hill Climb, this time in what was supposedly a standard J3. He and the 'J3' appeared again at Craigtantlet that year and after that . . . nothing more is heard of him on the tracks.

So, who was V. Ferguson, how did he have access to such cars (and which cars were they), and what became of him?

Humble origins

John Victor Stanley Ferguson was born on 2 September 1893 to James and Mary Jane (Minnie) Ferguson, farmers in Growell, County Down. He was the second youngest of a family of eleven: eight boys and three girls. At the age of seventeen he went to work as an apprentice for his oldest brother, Joseph Bell Ferguson ('J.B. '), in his engineering business, J.B. Ferguson Ltd., located in Chichester Street in Belfast. (J.B. was the designer of the Fergus motor car.)

After the Great War, when he served in the Royal Naval Air Service, Victor joined his brother Harry (of tractor and four-wheel drive fame) as sales manager for Harry Ferguson Ltd., Austin distributors in Ulster, and from 1920 to 1930 he was responsible for the management of that firm. He then set up in the trade on his own account in

Howard Street in Belfast under the name of Victor Ltd.

The M.G. Connection

Within a year, Victor Ltd. was the main agent in Northern Ireland for the M.G. Car Company and it would seem that Ferguson developed very close links with the factory in a relatively short period of time despite the limited sales market that Northern Ireland must have offered. This was possibly because Harry Ferguson was one of the prime movers behind the establishment of the Ards TT races and M.G. may have felt that having a good relationship with Harry's brother could pay dividends, especially since Harry was in the business of selling Austins, M.G.'s big rival in the racing and record breaking world at that time.

This relationship bore fruit from M.G.'s point of view as, while Harry Ferguson's premises were used for scrutineering for the TT races, the workshops of Victor Ltd. were made available for M.G.'s use and both Nuvolari's K3 and Hamilton's J4 were prepared there for the 1933 race.

M.G. Competition

Victor Ferguson was an active member of the newly formed Ulster Automobile Club and was a regular competitor in the sand races at Magilligan Strand. His first outing in a conventional road race competition would seem to have been Craigantlet Hill Climb in August 1931 where the results show him as having competed in a 746 c.c. M.G.

He came second in Class 5 - Standard Sports Cars up to 1,100 c.c.; first in Class 7 - Standard Sports Cars up to 1,500 c.c.; and third in Class 8 - Standard Sports Cars up to 2,000 c.c. Not a bad performance for his first attempt at Craigantlet.

The capacity of 746 c.c. would suggest that the car was one of the new C Types, introduced earlier in the year, but there is no record of Ferguson ever having owned one. Given his connections to the factory, however, it's not impossible that they would have lent him a car, but the regular factory 'hack' - C0257/RX 8586 - had been badly crashed by Hugo Urban-

Emmerich at Nurburgring four weeks before and wasn't rebuilt until late September.

However, along with the C Types entered for the TT, one additional C Type was also brought over by Goldie Gardner. This was C0263/RX 8306, the works demonstrator and road test car, which Gardner hired from the works to use as a practice car. With the unavailability of C0257 as a result of its Nurburgring escapade, it seems not unreasonable to surmise that C0263 was lent to Ferguson for Craigantlet. It is unlikely that any TT competitor would have lent him their race car with the risk of damage one week before the race, and, apart from the TT entries and C0263, no other C Type is known to have been in Ulster then.

The following year, 1932, C0257 did make an appearance at Craigantlet driven by none other than Cecil Kimber himself (and also by Elsie Wisdom), but Victor Ferguson didn't feature in the results so presumably didn't enter.

By 1933, the C Type was getting a bit long in the tooth and its place in the 750 c.c. Class was taken by the supercharged J4 introduced in early 1933. But M.G. also produced a less powerful (less scary?) supercharged 746 c.c. model, the J3, which was announced in late 1932 and Victor Ferguson was credited with five Class wins in a 'Standard Supercharged J3 Midget' at Ballybannon in June 1933. The photograph below shows him at the start line on the bridge over the Ballybannon river in Annsborough, County Down.

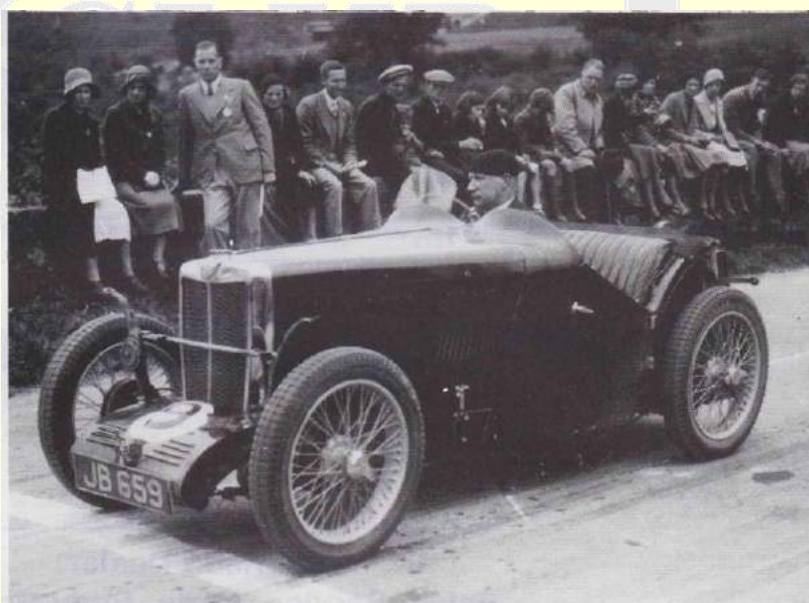


Photo: The Wilson McComb collection

The report of the event says of Victor Ferguson: "Simultaneously with the fall of the starter's flag his car literally swept off the line, with a highly tuned note from the exhaust resembling the sound of tearing calico. His time of reaction appeared to be lower than that of any other driver, and all through his driving was superb."

It turns out, however, that truth in advertising wasn't M.G.'s strongest suit and the 'Standard Supercharged J3 Midget' was in fact a supercharged J2 - J2024/JB 659 - and was, in effect, the factory development car. Clearly Victor Ferguson's good factory connections were still in place.

Having swept the board at Ballybannon, Ferguson went on to tackle Craigtantlet with J2024 in August 1933, but the competition was rather stiffer there (Eddie Hall in a K3 for starters) and the best he could manage was fifth in Class 5 - Racing and Supercharged Cars up to 1,100 c.c.; and fifth in Class 6 - Racing and Supercharged Cars up to 2,000 c.c.

Interestingly, Ferguson was down to compete at Craigtantlet in three Classes for unsupercharged cars in a 1086 c.c. M.G. entered by Victor Ltd. On the day, however, these entries were taken by Eddie Hall driving a K1, AGO 506, which had been lent to him for the event by Cecil Kimber. This would suggest, once again, a very close relationship between M.G. and Victor Ltd., as Ferguson had seemingly kept the entry open for Hall to drive Kimber's personal K1, enabling him to turn up unannounced and 'clean up', which he did, winning two of the three Classes and coming second in the third. Hall also entered his own K3, K3002, and set fastest time of the day - a new course record - and won both Classes for supercharged cars.

Hall's K3 entry and Ferguson's entry in J2024/JB 695 must have been late ones as the cars didn't feature in the published entry list, once again emphasising the value that M.G. got from Ferguson's close links to motor sport in Ulster and, in particular, to the UAC who organised the event. Other entrants might not have been so readily accommodated with late entries and changes of drivers. The results published in some newspapers and motoring journals have also sown confusion



Wins Six out of Seven Events
at
Ballybannon Hill Climb
(Northern Ireland, June 10, 1933)



By courtesy of "Motor Sport"

A Standard Supercharged J3 M.G. Midget won five events and made fastest time of the day.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| SIX FIRSTS | 860 c.c. Class | J. S. C. Cupples... | M. G. Midget... | 51 m.p.h. |
| | 1,100 c.c. Class | Victor Ferguson ... | J3 M. G. Midget... | 62.11 m.p.h. |
| | 1,500 c.c. Class | Victor Ferguson ... | J3 M. G. Midget... | 59.08 m.p.h. |
| | 2,000 c.c. Class | Victor Ferguson ... | J3 M. G. Midget... | 64.08 m.p.h. |
| | Unlimited Sports, Unlimited Racing, | Victor Ferguson ... | J3 M. G. Midget... | 62.88 m.p.h. 62.88 m.p.h. |
| ONE SECOND | 860 c.c. Class | H. M'Gladdery ... | M. G. Midget | |
| | 860 c.c. Class | M. H. Fleming, Jr. ... | M. G. Midget | |
| TWO THIRDS | Handicap Class | G. F. Annesley ... | M. G. Magna | |
| | | | (Status in official competition.) | |

Printed by the Publicity Department of the M.G. Car Company, Limited, Abingdon-on-Thames, Berkshire.
Export Department: Stratton House, 80, Piccadilly, London, W.1.

M.G. Car Company advertisement, July 1933

as, in some cases, the reporters simply used the information from the entry list and mistakenly credited Ferguson as the driver of the K1 and not Hall.

Just two years later, on 25 August 1935, Victor Ferguson died in a road accident near Ballymena. He was returning home from the Ulster Grand Prix at the Clady circuit and was driving a Singer Nine Le Mans in which he had done Road Closing duties at the race the previous day.

Postscript:

A Victor Ferguson Memorial Trophy was instituted by the Ulster Automobile Club in 1936 to be awarded at the end of each year to the Club member making the best performance in the season's competitions.

In recent years, it has been won by a number of Ulster Centre members including past Chairmen Bryan Mutch, Laurence Allen and Gordon Buckley.

As for the cars Ferguson drove, C0263 is alive and well and currently owned and campaigned by Chris Cadman; J2024 has also survived, albeit with a BMC A Series engine installed. It is, however, somewhat of a recluse and hasn't been seen in action for some years.

Simon JOHNSTON

THE PEOPLE I MEET



**GERALDINE
WATERSON**

They're all mad — about those M.G.'s

Not every girl would want to spend her leisure time underneath a car chassis! But for pretty, dark-haired Carolyn M'Devitte, dismantling cars and putting them together again all adds up to fun.

And not just any car will do. For 21-year-old Carolyn is an M.G. girl. At present she and her boyfriend, Peter Minnis, own three.

"Neither of us knew anything about cars until Peter bought his first M.G.T.F. two years ago. We took it apart and rebuilt it completely. That's how our interest began," said Carolyn.

It was Thursday night at the Stormont Hotel, and I was sitting next to her in the crowded lounge bar. The scene was much the same as in any other Belfast pub, but the group of people in our corner all had one thing in common — they were all M.G. car fanatics.

Of the 60 members, 11 are girls and Carolyn is the only one on an otherwise all-male committee. Although she is a girl who will talk knowledgeably about carburettors and fan belts, she is also very clever in the kitchen. "I am doing a post-graduate course in catering," she told me.

Carolyn and Peter work most week-ends on the cars which are affectionately known as "Mr. Pettigrew," "Miss Prudence" and "Joshua."

While we were chatting, bearded Mike Wilson, chairman of the club, joined us.

"Another new recruit?" he asked hopefully. I had to confess to the awful sin of owning a Ford Anglia.

"Never mind. We will soon have you converted," he assured me. "Our aim is to get every single M.G. car owner into the club. But we are not exclusive. Anyone who sympathises with the aims of the club may join."

So what do they do, apart from getting together for a natter over a pint, I wanted to know.

"We organise all sorts of events, ranging from auto-tests and gymkhanas to lectures, films, parties and, during the summer months, picnics for the family," said

the chairman.

When you think of an M.G. do, you perhaps have a vision of a super, streamlined, fast car for the swinging bachelor?

"Members of the club have every kind of M.G., from the early Midgets of the 30's, to the latest M.G.B. G.T.s," secretary Mike Armstrong informed me.

He is a doctor whose own

car is of the T variety. Mike was on the committee of the original T club and was instrumental in gaining approval for the establishment of an Ulster Centre for the M.G. club.

In spite of his heavy professional commitments, he still finds time to do much of the club's organisation.

I learned from Mike that an Ulsterman, Wilson M'Comb, who was formerly

general secretary of the British M.G. club, authorised the founding of a centre in Belfast, just over a year ago.

"We award an Enthusiasts' trophy every year," Mike told me. "Points are given throughout the year and the member who gains most is presented with the trophy."

Presently leading the field is Bill Sherwood who freely

admits, "I am an M.G. fanatic." A family man with two children, Bill is the owner of a P.B. and a J.2.

Next to him was Roger Nethercott, also a J.2 owner. "Bill and I came second in the Vintage Car Spring Rally," he told me.

I came away with the feeling that one of these days I will be trading in that Ford — for guess what!



Members of the M.G. car club at their regular monthly "noggin 'n nosh" at the Stormont Hotel. Front row, third from right, is Carolyn M'Devitte, only woman on the committee. Next to her (on her right) are Roger Nethercott and chairman Mike Wilson.