

July 2017

The

Magazine



Ulster  Centre

Ulster Centre Magazine Editorial

Simon Johnston

Oh dear, sackcloth and ashes time: despite all my good intentions this issue is rather overdue but as I write this it should just sneak out before the end of the month. My excuse is the frailty of my J2 which decided to shear an oil pipe when on the Sentry Hill run and pump Castrol R at 60 psi all over the engine, including the exhaust manifold. This was ten days before Mrs Editor and I were due to drive over to the Pre-War Prescott event at Prescott Hill Climb near Cheltenham at which many Triple-M cars would be present, so a busy time was spent in the garage getting the car repaired. All went well on the journey until a failure of the condenser left us stranded five miles from the bed & breakfast where we were to be staying.

It would seem that these sorts of electrical failures are not uncommon these days but I can't recall ever changing condensers in any of the myriad of scruffy MGs I drove back on the 60s and 70s and 80s. I guess the quality isn't what it used to be and for sure you need to carry spares with you as you can't stop into your local service station and buy one anymore.

Anyway, we got going again a day or so later and made the journey back without any more drama (apart from a leaking top hose!) but I'm not sure I'd tackle the same sort of journey again. Must be old age!

And speaking of such journeys, Stena offer a 10% discount to ANICC club members heading off to motoring events and if you get in touch with Carol Willis she'll let you have the discount code as Stena have asked that we not make it available on the website or in publications like this.

Leaving my motoring woes aside, as you'll see in this issue, it has been a pretty busy couple of months with two social runs – one to Greyabbey House and one to Sentry Hill house – a top quality autotest at Morrow Contract's premises at Gilnahirk, and, of course, MG Silverstone, or *MG Live!* as it's now known.

Our intrepid autotest team of Stephen Dawson, Bryan Mutch and Gordon Buckley came home from

Silverstone with the California Cup (metaphorically speaking as such a valuable piece of silverware isn't permitted to travel to the provinces). Just to explain, the California Cup is awarded to the Centre Team of MGs that wins the autotest competition at *MG Live!*. As you'll read in Stephen Dawson's splendid article about the event, the competition was stiff and the result was by no means a given. But the lads did well and put down a marker for next year when I gather we plan to clean up in our fiftieth anniversary year.

Gordon Buckley rounds off the competition reporting with his article on the Morrow Contract autotest in May and this shows just what a high standard of expertise is required to compete at this level.

Mike Armstrong continues to delight us with his *My MGenes* articles and Episode 4 brings us up to more 'modern' Midgets, MGBs and MGCs. Another cracking read.

I had hoped that another of our past Chairmen, Trevor Moffett, would have been continuing on from Mike Wilson's articles about the early days but while Trevor was more than agreeable to doing so, we haven't yet got his input. Watch this space!

Looking ahead, along with this MaGazine you'll find the flyer for the *Run and Roast* on Sunday 13 August. This is very much a family oriented event kicking off at 2.15 in Comber at the large car park behind the SuperValu supermarket on Castle Street. There will be a simple treasure hunt type run to take us to Gordon and Ruth Buckley's house at Ardmillan where we will be having a hog roast to round off the afternoon. The cost is a very reasonable £10 per adult, £5 per child under 12 and the little ones under 5 get for free. Soft drinks are also included in the price.

As Mike Armstrong says in his *Dates for Your Diary* **PLEASE LET US KNOW THAT YOU ARE COMING.** We cannot organise such an event without knowing how many will be there.

So – DO IT NOW! YES-YOU!

Next up will be a new venture for the Ulster Centre, **MG Day at Cultra** on Sunday 3 September. I think for many of us, car shows have never been our 'thing' – we much preferred to drive and compete in our MGs than polish them for others to admire. But that was then, and this is now, and we have to accept that the cars that some of us used to drive on an everyday basis – just read Mike Armstrong's *My MGenes* - are nowadays objects of fascination for many people.

So we've decided that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em and we're putting on our first ever 'car show' in the grounds of the Transport Museum at Cultra. **MG Day** is going to be a fantastic showcase for MGs as well as an opportunity for MG owners to enjoy the company of other MG enthusiasts.

There'll be MG models from every one of the ten decades of MG models (yes, TEN decades) and that means from the 1920s right up to the present day. With the enthusiastic support of the Northern Ireland MG Dealer network we'll also have examples of the latest MGs on display and even if you don't know an M Type from an MGB or an MG GS (and even if you do) this is your opportunity to see a huge variety of MG cars and meet the people who own them and drive them.

Admission to the show is free and if you come in your MG and join the display, you and your passengers will also get free admission on the day to the Transport Museum. How good is that?

The show will get underway at 11.00 am but if you want to join in with your own MG, come along before that so that you can get parked in the display for your model of MG. And don't forget to bring your picnic lunch and make a day of it!

Let me say here a word of appreciation for Mark Kennedy, the Curator of Road and Rail Transport at the Museum. He is very supportive of all things MG, despite being a Riley man at heart, and has really gone out of his way to help us make this event a success.

In planning **MG Day** we've worked closely with the other MG clubs in Northern Ireland and one of

Front Cover: The Mutch equipe enroute to MG Live!

Back Cover: Four year old David Armstrong directs his blindfolded mother, Jen, backwards at a Gymkhana at Maghaberry in the early 1970s.



them, the MG ZT and Rover 75 Club, have invited us to join them at their 7th Annual MG and Rover Day at Tollymore Forest Park on Sunday 28 August. Everything Rover, MG, Landrover, Jaguar, Austin or has a BMC/BL link is all welcomed in the day, variety makes it more fun for everyone! Any car arriving on the day must have an MOT and be taxed (unless classed as an Historic Vehicle) and be insured as this is a family camping and caravan site, the organisers encourage speed to be kept to 5mph traveling through the site. Admission is, I believe, £4 per car (TBC).

So plenty to keep us busy with our MGs in the coming months and I hope to see lots of you, and your MGs, at Cultra on 3 September.

Dates for Your Diary

Mike Armstrong

Just to make sure that you don't just idle your summer days away, we have arranged a couple of extra things for you to enjoy.

Sunday 13 August "Hog Roast" at Gordon and Ruth Buckley's home at Ardmillan. "HUNT AND HOG".

No! – you don't have to hunt for your pig! This is a "Run and Roast". Just come along at 2.15p.m. to the large Supervalu Car Park in Comber to join an interesting drive to Gordon and Ruth Buckley's at Ardmillan for a "Hog Roast". (See separate flyer with this MaGazine for more details.)

BUT – PLEASE LET US KNOW THAT YOU ARE COMING. We cannot organise such an event without knowing how many will be there.

So – DO IT NOW! YES-YOU!

By email to Carol Willis:

carol.mgulstercentre@hotmail.com

Or Mike Armstrong : mikejarm@btinternet.com

Or Gordon Buckley : tightgit@talktalk.net

Price is £10 per adult and £5 per child under 12.

Under 5 free

Sunday 3 September 2017 MG DAY and Picnic at the Ulster Transport Museum, Cultra.

This will be a very special occasion. We call on all owners of an MG or MG's to bring their car/s whether they belong to an MG Club or not. Models of all ages are welcome and will be on display – including the current new MG3 and MG 'GS' sponsored by the MG dealers. The start is at 11 a.m. and will finish by 4 p.m. Bring your own Picnic. Entry is free and entry to the Transport Museum for MG owners is also free. (See separate flyer with this MaGazine.)

MG is the "Marque of Friendship" – come and enjoy it.

See you there!

Nosh 'n' Natter on an evening in October

Following on our successful lunchtime Nosh 'n' Natter at Hilden Brewery we will have an evening one for those who can't get during the day (and also for those that CAN) – at a date and venue TBA.

**Finally – don't forget the BIG ones
next year.**

20-24 MAY 2018. GOLDEN JUBILEE TOUR

We've now got more than 70 expressions of interest so if you think you'll want to join the Tour you'd better get your name down now. Entries will open in September but please don't wait until then to express an interest and risk being disappointed. HQ will be at the lovely Roe Park Resort in Limavady. You don't have to make a commitment now but do express an interest for a priority entry to

mike.a@mgculstercentre.co.uk

**Once the entry is full – that's it. Don't
be disappointed.**

Saturday 29 September 2018 GOLDEN JUBILEE GALA DINNER AND DANCE at the Stormont Hotel

Competition Corner

Autotest at Morrow Contracts, 16 May

2017

Gordon Buckley

We simply could not have asked for a better evening for our autotest at Morrow Contracts on Tuesday 1 May. The sun shone throughout and there was little to complain about except, of course, to kick ourselves for our own self-inflicted mistakes.

Morrow's Yard is tricky at the best of times. In the wet it is lethally slippery, but in the dry it is even more challenging as the surface is grippy in some parts and slippery where the concrete dust is lying in a layer upon the surface.

We ran three tests three times each, the maximum possible for an evening test in May. The turnout was a perfect number of 24 competitors, which allowed equal sets of cars to complete the respective tests in turn. There is always a bottleneck of cars starting and finishing Tests 2 and 3 in the main yard but this was handled with ease by Stephen Dawson's planning so that cars came and went without tripping over each other.

Although getting marshals for the event initially proved difficult, we were delighted to see Eoin and Bronagh Regan and Bill McMahon who offered their services to marshal on Test 2, plus the usual suspects in the form of Chairman John Clarke, Garth Maxwell, Trevor Reid, Tom McConnell and Alan Cree. The McKee family, namely Wallace, Lucinda and Ben, saved the day by arriving as a pre-formed TSCC marshalling unit to look after their now traditional spot at Test 1.

And so we were in business. All points covered.

Test 1 was incredibly grippy and getting the car to break away when needed, proved quite difficult. The technical manoeuvres at Test 1 in the front yard were fairly demanding but even the larger MX5s got round without any major problems. Their reward was to have a spirited tail throw between the garages followed by a nice forwards-only

looping section around the cones before returning to the yard for a technical finish.

Test 2 had all the elements. Some nice looping of pylons was followed by a tail throw through the line and then through a tight section involving a couple of nose throws to a 360 pylon and finish. This was a tricky test, largely because of the varying levels of grip, summoning all the skill competitors could find. Lots of room for mistakes.

Test 3 was fairly simple – or that's what I thought! For the first manoeuvre, we just had to drive into a gate and reverse out. Simple. However, I didn't notice the loose concrete dust until I was sailing into the pylon and demolishing it, followed by an eternity of time while trying to extricate myself from this mess. The rest of the test was fun though but that's autotesting. Going nicely one minute and then one mistake leads directly to another... and another.

And that is why we in the MG club choose to hold a tighter and more challenging type of autotest. It sharpens the skills and provides the basis needed to progress to Clubman and Championship levels.

And indeed, those championship level skills were amply demonstrated by our winner Paul Lowther in the orange Stryker who won comfortably. Second overall in the 'heavy' Mini was Richard Earney with his usual neat and tidy driving style producing a great result. Final podium place was Crawford Ewing in the very hot Nova, and fourth was Gordon Buckley in the rather strange little Cox GTM.

First of the MX5s was Mark Francis with his usual skill and flair in the larger car, from Andrew Earney, kicking up the dust in the standard gold Yaris. Impressive, as always.

Seventh overall was Jimmy Dougan in a great drive in the Micra, then Rodney McCready in the MX5,

Brian Glenn in the very tidy red Mini and finally, making up the top 10, Ian Campbell in the ubiquitous beige Mini.

Class winners as follows:

Class 4 – Mark Lemon; Class 5 – Richard Earney; Class 6 – Mark Francis; Class 7 – Crawford Ewing; and Class 9 – Kevin McNamee

Unfortunate retiree was Jack Brien whose MX5 expired. He was able to continue in dad Simon's K Series Midget but, having changed car, couldn't count towards the results.

So, a very enjoyable evening, well run by the club. Three tests that challenged all the skills and produced some very high-level driving.

Our thanks, as always, to John Morrow (a racing car enthusiast himself) for letting us use the premises. The yard is in use 24/7 for emergency road repair work and we have to allow lorries to pass through our tests throughout the event. This caused little disruption on both sides and everyone was accommodated with a smile. Thanks again to all our marshals, to COC Stephen Dawson, to John Clarke who had flown in specially from England to assist and, finally, to Carol for all the admin and taking our entries.



Autotest at Carlisle's Oils, 22 June 2017

Gordon Buckley

Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention and necessity it was that inspired us to look for a suitable venue for our June evening autotest. We felt that we were temporarily unable to use TTS for the event and were looking for an alternative. It then occurred to us that we had used Carlisle's Fuel for our Derek Walker Trial in recent times and had always intended to run an evening event there. This was our moment.

We were able to put together three tests in the space of the yard. Test 1 was a wide open two lap blast round the large shed with a figure of eight in the loading bay and a wiggle woggle on the long straight to slow down our feisty customers. This still allowed a turn of speed through the final corner that competitors certainly enjoyed, if the width of the grins was an accurate measurement of the entertainment. As I was competing, I only

got to see my own batch of cars and, I apologise, could not take photos or, alas, comment much on the other two groups. However, I do have abiding memories of Angus Johnson 'full of the rack' on his way to the finish line. Great stuff Angus. I wouldn't have thought that a Frogeye Sprite on wire wheels would have been capable of such things. Similarly, Matthew Walker in a MX5 used the full width of the road in fine drifting style.

Test 2 was a lovely combination of fast flowing sweeps of the pylons combined with several quick tail throws and a nose throw. The result was a fun test concluding with a couple of ever decreasing circles leading to the finish.

Finally, Test 3 was the technical test. It was more complex and limited in space to carry off the required manoeuvres. This test 'separated the men from the boys' as it was tight and technical, but was amply demonstrated by some competitors as 'do-able' in the right hands. The three tail throws, two of which were into a box, required full commitment. Any wavering in the mind of the driver was going to end in a car pointing at right angles to the lines instead of reversing through them. However, watching Mark Francis in the larger MX5 showed what could be done with good strategy and that essential commitment.

Congratulations to Richard Earney for winning overall in his Mini saloon in convincing style, from Gordon Buckley (Midget) and Andrew Earney (Yaris). Mark Francis came in a creditable 4th.

Great job too by Redmond McNamee and Sam Dougan, the latter being his first competitive event. We wish you both every success in motorsport.

Class winners were as follows:

Class 4 – Gordon Buckley

Class 5 – Andrew Earney (Richard forfeiting the class win)

Class 6 – Mark Francis

Class 7 – Crawford Ewing

Class 9 – Redmond McNamee

We are indebted to William Carlisle for letting us use this superb yard and to his staff for being so helpful in moving pallets, lorries etc. around to make room for us.

Many thanks also to our marshals, Alan McClelland, Andy & Jenny Frater (Test 1), Ian Regan and John Clarke (Test 2), and Trevor Reid and Tom McConnell (Test 3) and to our COC, Stephen Dawson. Thanks, as always, to Carol for taking our entries and doing results.

Finally, well done everyone for behaving so well and keeping it on the track.

Full results are available via this link: [Carlisle Results 22 June 2017](#)

As indicated, I was busy competing (and was rightly given a wiggling by John Clarke for taking photos when I should have been starting a test). So, alas, I only have a few photos of the cars in my own batch and I apologise for that. The photographs I have are on the [Gallery](#) on our website.

Leslie McMullan attended the event and I have now added a number of first class photos from Leslie's post on Facebook. Thank you Leslie, we are indebted to you for these.

If you have any good pictures or videos of your own, please let me know or send them to me and I will be delighted to put them up in our gallery.



Gordon Buckley in action in his Midget just a few days after it saw action at Silverstone in the California Cup.

Cultra Hill Climb, 3 June and *MG Live!* 17-18 June 2017

Stephen Dawson

Cultra has always been a place of significance for me as, coming from the Belmont area of East Belfast, during my childhood we regularly went there for walks along the coastal path, past Cultra Yacht Club. The way home frequently included a stop-off at Tog's Ices in Holywood for a '99'. I had a fibreglass dinghy and Cultra was inevitably the place it was first launched; we couldn't get the new (then!!) Seagull engine to run properly so it was a very brief inaugural trip involving a row back to port. (I still have the engine if anyone would like to make me an offer for a very unused 1960s '40 Plus' which does actually go!!). During my later school days, I learned to sail in the summer term at Cultra in two ropey old dinghies which the pupils spent an inordinate amount of time in a dark and dusty old Nissen hut sanding, priming and painting to make them seaworthy for the summer term's water activity. It's a wonder we all didn't go down with pneumoconiosis. At that time I was unaware of the significance of the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club as the start of the oldest hill climb in the UK, first run on 6th May 1905 or that I would later have a charge up the hill myself in the future.

Time moved on and Cultra townland became our next door neighbour as 20 or so years ago we moved to Holywood. Being within walking distance of home, the Folk and Transport museum was a haunt for the odd Sunday afternoon out with the children. When I eventually bought the MGB, the council's North Down Classic Car Run which I occasionally entered with a friend with another 'B', was still being run. I remember on one occasion there was an almighty hail storm mid-afternoon. I had parked the MG, top down, underneath the 'Result' – the black schooner at the lower part of the museum. Within a few minutes everywhere was white and everyone was scrabbling to make their cars snow-tight. Fortunately, my car, in its sheltered position, remained unscathed but the sudden cold and snow put an end to the run that day; the event was abandoned and the entrants had to push and slither their cars back up the hill to get out of the Museum.

The Thoroughbred Sports Car Club revived Cultra Hill Climb through the grounds of the Folk & Transport Museum around 2000, and as I am a member of the TSCC as well as the Ulster Centre, I have marshalled at the Hill Climb at the Manor House on several occasions. Cultra is unlike any other motorsport event in Northern Ireland although in the rest of the UK there are many hill climbs which take place in picturesque environs of stately homes such as Chateau Impney and Goodwood. The combination of the excitement of 100 competition cars in action, parade and theme cars, static displays and fun for all the family mixed with a hot June day create a motorsport party atmosphere which is hard to beat. I had been autotesting for quite a few years and I thought that it was time to have a go at some hill climbing to add a point or two to my TSCC championship score. Since Croft Hill Climb and Cultra were only down the road (or up the hill?), they were obvious choices for my first outings particularly because if I broke down or hit anything, I could limp home with minimum effort (ever the pessimist). Indeed, I did limp home from Croft Hill Climb last year – at the end of a tow-rope (still a pessimist!). While I do not expect to 'break delft' in my attempts at hill climbing with a road going MGB, the 'run-what-you-brung' challenge of getting the best out of the car, the camaraderie of fellow competitors in the Historic Class and the opportunity to dress up in a funny hat and sleeping bag (black suit + hot day = par-boiled) makes these club events extremely good fun.

This year the MGB needed some work done and I had a three-point plan starting after Christmas to refurbish the back axle internals, fix No 3 cylinder problems and a bit of bodywork to repair a scabby lower front wing. At the same time Gordon Buckley suggested a sortie to *MG Live!* to tackle the California Cup at Silverstone, an 'advance party' ahead of the Ulster Centre's 50th Anniversary next year when potentially a more concerted effort would be made to that hallowed ground. Without thinking too much I said 'yes' so it was time to sort out the car for the summer's events. Stripping the

suspension was relatively easy until I found the O/S spring-eye bolt was seized inside its metalastic bush so the spring wouldn't come off. I therefore had one side of the axle on the floor but the gap between spring and body was too small for the brake drum to slide sideways through. By jacking the car up higher, I managed to get enough of an angle to slot the drum through and with the axle out of the way then an angle grinder released the eye bolt. The axle was treated to new bearings, diff shims to tighten up the play and to some paint. After getting all the parts powder-coated at 'Rustbusters' and new polybushes arriving, reassembly was relatively straightforward and just in time as I had booked the car in to Lemon's in Newtownards for the engine work. The lower front wing had been rusting and I had a repair panel ready for attaching. I have little or no welding skills so on retrieving the car from Alan's, Bodytech, again in Ards, did the wing work along with installing some proper MGB chrome-bumper indicators and a new front Sebring valance.



Tidied MGB Undercarriage

So with a prettier face the 'B' was ready for Cultra and Silverstone so my entries were addressed. I also did a bit of spannering to change oils, set tappets, carbs etc. Due to over-demand for Cultra, my late entry was not accepted and I was placed 8th on a reserve list so I volunteered to marshal instead. Meantime, I booked the Belfast-Birkenhead ferry and accommodation for *MG Live!* in the last available room at Silverstone B & B in the quiet Silverstone village only half a mile from the circuit. The day before Cultra Hill Climb a call from TSCC confirmed that due to drop-outs I was able to compete. On the eve of the Hill Climb I went up to a leisurely Scrutineering and Sign-on at the venue, stuck the numbers and requisite advertising on the

doors and I left the car in its pit-slot below the trees at Cultra for the night and walked home.

The morning of the Hill Climb was dry and sunny with predictions of heavy downpours later. I loaded up the road car with the usual assortment of racing kit, tools, spares, etc. adding a bit of lunch and headed for The Hill. After suiting up, a quick coffee and a chat with the other Historic competitors, a look around the interesting cars including the artistic and very expensive red Maserati 150S and the collection of classic Formula Fords, TSCC's theme car for the timed 'shoot-out' later in the day, we gathered for the usual drivers' briefing. Then it was 1st and 2nd practice where MG-wise, I was out behind Michael Taylor's racing MG TA and several fast MG Midgets of the Brien family, Bryan Mutch and TSCC membership secretary, Chris Wilson. Practice was dry and my times came close to my previous best. Being in an early group up the hill, I had opportunity for a fleeting nip over to the Manor House to watch some of the faster folk in action and view the excellent static displays of historic Ford Mustangs and contemporary Audis. You could smell the aroma of the expensive brown leather interior of the new Audi R8 V10 from several metres away! Also on display among the race cars was the new Crosslé 90F in blue and although the first new Hollywood made Crosslé in many years, it looks stunning and very much a classic shape.



New Crosslé 90F

The first timed run was my quickest for the afternoon but just down on past years. A few hold ups took place due to technical issues with the timing and then some brief spells of rain dampened parts of the course. My remaining two runs were slower with a missed gear change (I am no good at double de-clutching) and a bit less grip

with standard road tyres (stickier Toyos or Yokos required!). However, I survived the damp track (preservation was required for *MG Live!*) where others visited the shrubbery! Of course, the sun came back out after the Historics had had their final run.



Lovely Maserati 150S

With the business complete and being roasted due to the driving and the ensuing warm sunshine, we headed over to Cultra Manor again to watch the final Formula Ford 'shoot-out' and we treated ourselves to a welcome ice-cold drink. What other motorsport venue here can supply these facilities with this much entertainment? The 10 Formula Fords produced an exhilarating final and the race went down to the wire between MGCC members Simon Brien and son Jack in their shared newly refurbished red Crosslé. Young Jack won the day on a very tense, and crowd-pleasing last run. After the awards were over, it was time to pack up and start the ball rolling for *MG Live!* only two weeks away.

Travel arrangements for the Ulster Team for *MG Live!* had been made independently. Buckley and Mutch had rustled up a double trailer from Autotest Drivers' Club's Norman Ferguson onto which they intended to park their respective Midgets for the journey south, being towed by Bryan's faithful motorhome. Ever the pecuniary Scot, Bryan had managed to achieve four discounts for his motorhome and the Midget trailer on the Larne-Stranraer Ferry so Sealink were virtually sponsoring him for the trip! My intention was for son Roger and me to go Belfast-Birkenhead on the Thursday night sailing and drive down to Silverstone; I would compete in the California Cup with Bryan and Gordon on the Saturday and Roger would join us in the Autosolo on the Sunday morning. As we had some time in hand on the

Friday, we also planned a visit to the British Motor Heritage and Jaguar Heritage Museums which are adjacent to each other in Gaydon, Warwickshire, leaving only a short hop over to Silverstone later in the afternoon.

In the run-up to *MG Live!* weekend, some last minute checking revealed oil running down the engine block behind the exhaust manifold; a loose tappet chest bolt, once tightened, sealed the leak. Thursday afternoon we had a scramble to pack the car with all the clobber – tools, spares, wheels etc. for the autotests and finally enough room was found for a small grip for clothing. The previous times we had been to Silverstone, son Roger had been half his present weight and height so this time the car was well down on the suspension! However, not low enough for Stena to allow us inside the ferry rather than up the 45 degree ramp to the top of the boat outside beside the funnel. Especially as a bloke in a Bentley Continental breezed past us for a prime spot in the bowels of the boat - Blihter! Hey, Mr Stena what's wrong with MGs? Better luck for the return trip. The weather however, was taking a turn for the better and the crossing was a cruise. A bite to eat and reasonably well rested, we were up and off the boat at 6.45 am to make good headway across to the M6 and down the motorway before the morning rush. We settled into a steady tootle, a quick stop for a coffee at Stafford services and then avoiding the 45 minute delays on the M6 around Birmingham by using the M6 Toll which links with the M42, we stopped late morning at the M40 services only a short distance from Gaydon. Mr Bentley was there already!! Anyway, by that time, the sun was out, the air was balmy and it was top-down 20+ degree weather from there until we arrived back at Birkenhead.

The British Motor Heritage Museum at Gaydon is only a stone's throw from the M40 services and is a 'must' if you are in that vicinity, with many significant BMC cars and prototypes on view. These currently include three of the Monte-Carlo winning Mini Cooper 'S's, several racing Jags and a brilliant display of the MG Bonneville record braking MGs.

We were able to grab a quick lunch there before moving over to the even more interesting Jaguar Heritage Museum. This has many significant cars and the 1st and last of many Jaguar models, several MG prototypes including a little known two-seater sports car, a six cylinder Metro and World Cup and London to Sydney rally BMC Maxi and 1800. The knowledgeable volunteer Museum staff will keep

you there taking all day and the piece-de-resistance has to be the museum's restoration bay in which were a magnificent D Type and the racing *Silk Cut* Le Mans Jaguar being prepared for Goodwood Festival of Speed.



Monte Minis



Prototype MG sports sadly never produced

We left the Museum and pointed towards the byways which pervade the Warwickshire and Northamptonshire countryside. The village of Kineton was a few miles from Gaydon and is typical of many such idyllic villages in England with its cross, parish church, flower shop and inevitable village pub. We stopped for refreshment, visited the church and watched as a tank transporter with tank on board negotiated the C road through the village, an everyday sight in the average English countryside! Turned out there's a tank driving range nearby called 'Tanks A lot' where you can have a go in a tank and crush a car of two!

Then we set course for our final destination, avoiding the main roads around Banbury. We had

a quick visit to the circuit and then headed for our B&B mid-afternoon. The accommodation was grand with three MGs already parked on the gravel in front of the old house. The owners had a pristine white MG TF so were MG folk. We met other residents for the weekend including a New Zealand couple who had nie MGs at home and two friends with a *concours* MG Magnette. Then it was time to touch base with the rest of the Ulster Team!

Gordon has described Bryan's motorhome with the double trailer of Midgets as 'Fossett's Circus' on tour. The circus had just arrived and set up camp when we joined the others for a cup of tea. Alison Mutch had obviously done considerable essential shopping for the boys as the *French Fancies* and *Viennese Whirls* and a box of cherries were brought out. Obviously, a dietary performance requirement for autotesting – none of your custard creams for the top Ulster Team. We then set about car performance prep for the Cali-Cup i.e. Bryan brought out some fancy polish and we set about bringing the cars up to scratch. After all, if you aren't going to win, you better look good losing! In the late evening as the sun was setting over the Luffield Stands, we headed round to the Silverstone pits to look at the assorted racers which had arrived for the weekend's sport. These included endurance McLarens, Aston Martins and Porsche Cup cars which had been practising that afternoon. The historic touring cars – Cooper 'S's, Lotus Cortinas and Mustangs were there in profusion. Several teams of MG ZRs were preparing and we were informed by one mechanic that the previous ZR race at Brands Hatch saw a 17 car pile-up on the first lap, 9 of which were undriveable afterwards. He already had had a fire on one of his cars that afternoon which was not a good start to the weekend. It was then time for bed ready for an early start for the next-day's competitions.

After a quick breakfast (an excellent Silverstone fry) and in brilliant sunshine, we met Bryan and Gordon at the camp-site and drove the three cars over the circuit bridge to the central arena where the autotesting was to take place. We parked up with the other 27 competitors many which we had met on our previous visits. These included Jordan and Ena Fox and Dave Stonehouse from Lincolnshire. Jordan had brought along his recognisable ex-Will Corry metallic blue K-series Midget and two of his Lincolnshire compatriots were there with potent Midgets so we were up against it! Noel Lindford and the Tyne Tees team had prepared the tests in a sizeable central arena

and the Car Club had invested in a colourful array of new cones and pylons. We must thank Mark Lemon and his wife from Ulster Centre and Peter Allen from the UAC for their support for the Team. With drones of Mike Brewer and Ant Anstead in the distance, rabbiting on about the merits of a 10-seater Monster Truck, we got ready for the off.



Gordon Buckley and Bryan Mutch around the cones

Initially we had to tackle two adjacent tests with the same set up of pylons; however, the tests had brain-teasingly different routes and you had to complete one and then immediately drive into the next. We went in number order so at No 7, I was first in to bat for the team. I had a neat steady first run and had no faults in the initial tests, settling the nerves somewhat. Bryan, on the other hand, in the ballistic K-series, had to rein in his steed as he showed its propensity for circular rotation! Both Gordon and Bryan delivered the exceptionally quick runs and I tried to keep my runs steady and consistent and make no mistakes. The third test

was long with the initial two sites joined together to make a fast mix of handbrakes and slaloms with a few 'over-the-shoulder' reversing manoeuvres thrown in. By 1.30pm we were finished and we reckoned we were neck and neck with the other Centres. Cold drinks were called for and we changed scene to watch a bit of the circuit racing and Russ Swift on two wheels. Results were at 4.30pm.

Rather like the elections here, the results were delayed due to a number of re-counts but the suspense was eventually broken and it was announced Ulster Centre had won by 20 seconds ahead of the top Lincolnshire Team. The presentation was made by Ian Quarrington, the present MGCC Chairman and Noel Lindford and for a few minutes, we had our mitts on the treasured California Cup and took a few photos of the Team with the cars before the Cup was returned to its polystyrene sarcophagus in the vaults of Kimber House. Bryan also won FTD and I picked up the MGB Register Trophy. Celebrations comprised an excellent barbeque with a glass or two of the house red watching the evening sun setting over the circuit. We later had a ramble down to the Arena area to view the 'Glow-Car' display - a consideration for the Centre for next year's visit perhaps? Get out the fairy lights!

A sunny Sunday dawned for the Autosolo and we met again with fellow competitors at the Arena. Noel Lindford had laid out a forward gear route through 29 gates with two full circles after gates 9 and 21.



Roger Dawson's 1st MGB drive

We were split into three groups, one to drive, one to marshal and the third potentially assisting by navigating for the drivers. The ethos of Autosolo is for all competitors to help with the running the

event and we will have to take this on board when we next hold an Autosolo in NI. The brains of the Cali-Cup veterans had seized up overnight and the three of us miserably wrong routed the first run leaving Roger Dawson as the only Team member with a clear first round.

Roger sat in with Gordon to assist with his 2nd run and Bryan and I were more precautionary to make sure we went the right way. The event was thoroughly enjoyable and while we were not on the performances of the previous day, we all did well enough. Roger, in particular, had not driven my MGB in competition before and he came a creditable 9th out of 23 in the RWD class which was a good first event for him.

With the event over, it was time to gather up the kit and think about the drive northwards to the evening sailing at Birkenhead. After a quick sandwich courtesy of 'Chez Mutch' we packed the car and commenced the journey to the M40 motorway via Banbury. I pulled in to the first service there to fuel up and noticed a substantial amount of fluid flowing out of the engine. I had come with many spares – a full set of hoses etc. but the problem turned out to be failure of the heater valve; I had the heater on to dissipate some of the engine heat during the Autosolo. Fortunately, simply turning the heater off reduced the flow substantially and I acquired a couple of plastic two



Road sign, Silverstone Village

litre milk containers filled with water in case topping up was required later. We had lost nearly an hour with the stop but the journey up the motorways retracing our Friday steps proved uneventful with little further water loss. I must say with the top down on the motorway, the tyre noise from modern vehicles is incredible.

We arrived on schedule at the ferry alongside a beautiful orange Lamborghini waiting there. When we boarded, we were ushered into the lower deck inside the boat this time, so the secret is to arrive at the ferry with the roof down! No sign of Mr Bentley – on the top deck perhaps?



The winning California Cup Team of (L to R) Gordon Buckley, Stephen Dawson and Bryan Mutch

So, another *MG Live!* successfully accomplished, a good win and with little collateral damage. I can only say we had a great weekend, the best weather we could ask for and we hope to repeat the event next year with a bigger Ulster Team for the 50th Anniversary Year so make sure *MG Live!* is in in your diaries for 2018.

See you there!

Championship Placings

We have three competitive championships, namely the Leslie Ardill, which is awarded to the MG car, not the driver; the Leslie Porter autotest drivers' championship for MGs only; and the Vivian Scott autotest drivers' championship for non-MGs. Details of eligibility and scoring were in the May edition of the MaGazine. The provisional situation at the end of June was as follows:

Leslie Ardill

Fine performances by Stephen Dawson at Cultra Hill Climb and at *MG Live!* have put his MGB in the lead with a score of 34 points but with the Midget of Gordon Buckley close behind with 32 points. The Midget of Michael Reid is in third with 26 points closely followed by the Midget of Bryan Mutch with 24 points. This just goes to show how a successful sortie at *MG Live!* pays dividends in this championship.

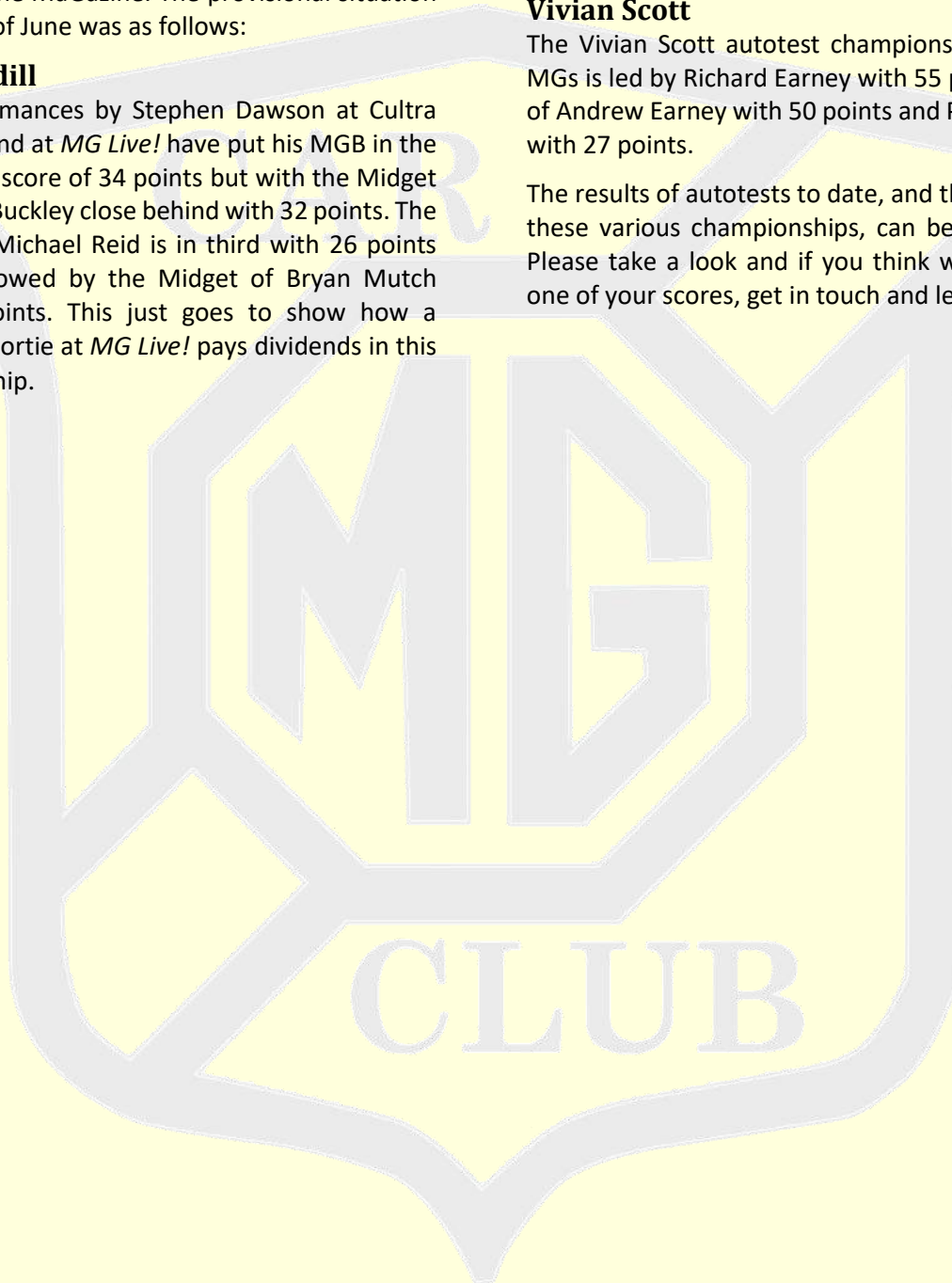
Leslie Porter

Michael Reid in his Midget maintains his lead in the MG only, Leslie Porter autotest championship with a score of 13, well ahead of the Midgets of Gordon Buckley with 6 points, Alex Little with 2 points and Mark Lemon with 1 point.

Vivian Scott

The Vivian Scott autotest championship for non-MGs is led by Richard Earney with 55 points ahead of Andrew Earney with 50 points and Paul Lowther with 27 points.

The results of autotests to date, and the scores for these various championships, can be found [here](#). Please take a look and if you think we've missed one of your scores, get in touch and let us know.



Greyabbey House, 21 May 2017

Simon Johnston

One of the delights of *Norn Iron* is the amazing number of little known country houses scattered around the countryside that can be visited and enjoyed if you know where to look and who to ask. I drove through the village of Greyabbey many times in years past on my way to Kirkistown and never knew of Greyabbey House which has been in the ownership of the Montgomery family since 1607. Noel Cochrane organised a visit and tour of the house and gardens and, I suspect, by coincidence arranged for us to meet at Killyleagh Castle. I say 'by coincidence' as the Hamilton family, who have lived in Killyleagh Castle for over 400 years, regularly fought with the Montgomeries, their near neighbours, when both families first arrived in Northern Ireland the early 1600s.

It had been planned that we would all have lunch in Cuan's in Strangford but we had so many people signed up for the visit to Greyabbey House that at

the last minute the restaurant said they couldn't offer the light lunch for that many people. Well, it makes a change from having to cancel the event because we didn't have enough people!

Some of us brought a picnic, others found somewhere else to eat but we all made it to the Strangford Ferry and headed to Greyabbey in good time for the visit. And what an experience it was. With the superb weather, the tour of the gardens was absolutely wonderful and the house itself was fascinating. Our tour guides were William and Daphne Montgomery themselves and we finished off with cream teas in the dining room.

And as if this wasn't enough we had the largest gathering of MGs we've seen in quite a while with fourteen of them lined up in front of the house ranging from a 1930 M Type to MGFs from the 1990s. A splendid way to spend a Sunday afternoon.





Visit to Sentry Hill, 9 July 2017

Mike Dowey

It was a gloomy Sunday morning that greeted us for the start of our 45-mile Sentry Hill run. The weather forecast wasn't good but, undeterred, all 31 entrants turned up for the start at Hazelbank in Newtownabbey.

It was a short drive from there to Sentry Hill in Carnmoney. This is a 19th century farmhouse which, along with its contents, has survived intact and presents a remarkable insight into rural life during this period. The house has a number of quite small rooms and so our group was split into two. Even so, it was sometimes quite a squeeze to get everyone in – a bit different from the usual stately home.

After some tea and biscuits, it was off on a 40 mile run to Portglenone stopping at the ruins of Cranwell Church and Holy Well on the way. These ruins are situated in a picturesque part of the northern shores of Lough Neagh and have been developed into what is now a picnic area and nature reserve. However, by the time we arrived the mist and rain had closed in and the anticipated views were gone. Most of us just sat in our cars; nevertheless it is worth a return visit if you're in the area.

It was then on to Portglenone and the Wild Duck Inn for the evening meal. The Wild Duck is situated right on the River Bann where there are mooring facilities for customers with boats. It is a very popular inn with a good reputation and it didn't disappoint. The food was excellent and everyone enjoyed the cosy atmosphere.

The day took its toll on our intrepid bunch, with Stephen Dawson's MGB having wiper trouble; Mike Wilson's TF having a puncture (and with a question mark over the spare as well); and Simon Johnston's J2 breaking an engine oil pipe. Unfortunately for Simon and Emily, the J2's condition proved terminal (for the car that is) and the breakdown lorry was duly called take them back home.

Thanks to everyone who took part in the run and a particular thank you to the ladies at Sentry Hill for a warm welcome and a very informative tour of the house. It was just a pity that the weather prevented our enjoyment of the lovely grounds and gardens.





My MGenes

Mike Armstrong

Part 4: Getting Serious

At the end of the last episode I had just parted with my TC to pay for school fees and had enough money left over to buy a MGC Roadster. I cannot remember where I got it from but it was a local car Registration 4838 WZ, circa 1968. It was probably worth the £200 or so that I paid for it. It was, at least superficially, in reasonable condition but needing a coat of paint.



I soon found that it had the dreaded “tin worm” in the driver’s side sill. Nothing daunted I bought a new sill and commenced removal of the rotten one. As many of you will know, a rotten sill only hides horrors underneath and, true to form, the inner sill and vertical membrane were severely rusty. I cut away as much of this as I could but had no welder to effect a repair. I purchased my first welder which consisted of a transformer of sorts and two heavy duty cables and clips to attach to a 12 volt battery! With a fully charged battery one got 10 – 15 minutes welding at the end of which the quality of weld was awful. The repair metal came from cutting up an old heating oil tank which at least was of substantial thickness. Enough was tacked on and the outer sill “pop-riveted” on and the whole car was treated to a new coat of Tartan Red which improved its appearance no end.

The MGC has a 2,912 cc straight six engine which was very heavy but produced some 145 bhp at just over 5,000 rpm and had a 0-60 time of 10 seconds. The engine bay was modified from the MGB to accommodate the larger engine and the front suspension was by torsion bar and telescopic dampers. The early cars had a higher back axle ratio and other versions had overdrive fitted to both Roadster and GT models. Meant as a replacement for the Austin Healey 3 litre, the MGC received poor initial motor press reviews due partially to incorrect tyre pressure settings. Good models now are sought after.



This photo of a MGC that I had later shows the sort of “tin worm” to expect and illustrates the big lump of an engine. Front suspension was by torsion bar.

I loved the car and happily drove it for thousands of miles. It was a fast touring car (e.g. Lisburn Road to Killyhevlin Hotel - 80 miles in 65 minutes - to watch number one son rowing). I used it a little for competition. It was not a good autotest car being prone to understeer due to the weight of the heavy engine. I did hill climb it once at Glenarriff which was quite exciting on the sharp corners. Altogether a better touring car! It was not without its problems. On accelerating it hard from start one day I managed to strip several teeth of the 1st gear. This necessitated removal of engine and gearbox – a mighty weight. This was achieved with a Haltrac hoist (one with flimsy looking string and plastic

pulleys) with some trepidation. It was blxxdy heavy! I managed to get a new first gear off the shelf and fitted it. While I had the engine out I took the opportunity to strip it and rebore it. New pistons, new crankshaft and rod bearings, and new valves. To lift the cylinder head –first remove bonnet – disconnect a few bits and pieces - loosen head nuts – clamber up and stand astride the engine and LIFT! One way to prolapse a disc.

Sometime later, on a high-speed run in England on the M1 behind a Jaguar the cylinder head gasket blew in spectacular fashion. I limped in to my destination at Milton Keynes, rang Syd Beer in Houghton, near Cambridge (a well-known MG man, collector and racer) who collected it – fixed it and returned it all for a price more than I paid for the car. Served me right.

At one stage, I fitted an extended hardtop which overlapped the boot area and was better at keeping the rain out. The fact that it was blue didn't improve the looks but I didn't have time to paint it.



In 1980 British Leyland announced the closure of the Abingdon factory and the cessation of production of the MGB. It was time to change the MGC for a new rubber bumper MGB for about £5000. I drove the 'C' to Yorkshire (a lovely fast final run in a time not bettered since) to pick up my first NEW MG supplied by the above mentioned Syd Beer. The MGC was sold to someone – I know not who - and I returned in my lovely new car Registration HAV 921W here fitted with alloy wheels.



Sometime before this I had purchased an MG Midget Mark 3 Registration OSD 519L from a little garage in Upper Dunmurry Lane. As I recall it cost around the £200 mark and was basically in sound condition. It was bought as a competition car and required a few months' work to get it up to scratch. I managed to find a limited slip Salisbury differential in the Belfast Telegraph. I also made up an hydraulic handbrake. At last I had a competitive car and joined in the autotest scene, hill climbs and subsequently the racing scene (more later!).



The car was also sometimes used by my growing sons after they reached 17. As usual life with them was not without – how would you put it – surprises?? One day when Jen and I returned home from holiday in the early hours of the morning, we were met by number one son still up waiting for us. This was not filial concern but, as the eldest in charge of the house while we were away, he felt responsible to report that here had been an "accident". It turned out that he had (illegally) taken the car to Queen's Boat Club one day when

his Vauxhall Viva was out of order. In itself this did not turn out to be a problem – other than he had for some reason refitted the front bumper. Nothing daunted – his younger sibling then decided that he too could use the car (illegally) and had taken it for a “spin” with a mate in the unfastened passenger seat. Somewhere near Minnowburn he had left the road – climbed a bank – almost demolished a telegraph pole and the, to cap it all, had trickled back down the bank to be rear ended by a Volkswagen. The reason for number one’s being up late was to inform me that the VW driver was calling at 9 am to collect £90 to repair the bonnet of his car. The bad news was that the telegraph pole had been in the centre of the car destroying the bonnet and the recently fitted bumper and there was a big dent in the boot. The good news was that no one was hurt and the even better news was that my good friend, Mike Wilson, who had been summoned for advice, had gone through them for a short cut. After a lot more work the car was returned to competition.

Nothing daunted – and again while we were away – “the lads” decided on some handbrake turn practice on our stony drive in Drumbeg. The upshot was that later, when Jen was doing some gardening, a small tree fell down at her feet. A day or two later I discovered bits of safety glass in the cockpit. Even later, a confession was forthcoming as to what had happened. The car had left the drive – knocked down the tree – dented the side of the car and broken the side window glass. The services of one of their friends had been sought, who was known for rebuilding Midgets, and camouflaged

the damage to the car. Responsible this time was one the cousins who now is a sought-after rally mechanic!

Number 2 son used the Midget successfully in autotests and hill climbs and was even part of the winning California Cup Ulster Team on one of the many journeys to Silverstone. (His name is David!) Perhaps another generation of MGenes ?



Eventually the car was given a new Heritage body in the “noughties” and, looking brand new after an extensive rebuild, was sold to the Republic of Ireland where it still thrives.

Apart from all of the above – it was a busy MG time. The stable had grown as shown in this photograph. There was a J2, the racing TC, a 1953 TD, the Midget and an MGB. All of these have their own stories – some of which for next time.



