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The

Magazine

Photo by Leslie McMullan



Golden Jubilee

Ulster



Centre

1968 - 2018

Ulster Centre Magazine Editorial

Simon Johnston

Well, that's almost it. We've just about come to the end of our Jubilee Year and our Gala Dinner was pretty much our Jubilee Committee swan song (but what a swan song!). The Committee will be winding down its activities and in fact I've already stepped down as I have a busy period coming up with editing the MG Car Club Triple-M Register Yearbook, not to mention getting the J2 finally back on the road after a lost summer when I should really have been enjoying the car in the fabulous weather we had. It has been a case of one thing after another as I stripped the engine and then started putting it back together again. It's amazing how much time is involved in assembling everything correctly and making good the things that should have been done properly by the 'experts' who have built the engine three times already. Perhaps now it will finally run properly and reliably.

But enough of my problems! We have a packed issue for you this month. Last year we instigated *MG Day* which we held at the Transport Museum at Cultra. Given the work involved, we felt that it was too much for us to take it on board again in this, our Jubilee Year, so we were delighted that the MG Owners' Club agreed to take over the running of it with a new location at Carrickfergus Sailing Club. Mike Dowey acted as link man between the two clubs to ensure that it got maximum support and he has provided a great account of the day. If you weren't there you missed a treat.

As usual, Gordon Buckley has come up trumps with his reports of the competitive events, getting last Saturday's trial and grass slalom report, complete with photos to me the very next day. As Mike Armstrong comes close to the end of his fabulous *My MGenes* series which we've run since issue 1 in January last year, Terry Ingles has stepped up to the plate with the first episode of his life with MGs. He kicks off with a great account of life with MGAs and Midgets in the 1960s and 70s which you'll find right after Mike's *My MGenes* article.

Terry and his wife, Linda, were stalwarts of the Ulster Centre in the 1970s and 80s and we're

delighted to see them back in the fold. Not that they ever really left as their 50 Year membership badges attest, but they have certainly been more low profile than they used to be in the good old days. Good to see you back, guys!

If you should be a member of the Ulster Vintage Car Club you'll have seen that my daughter Emily did an interesting article on towing, a seemingly straightforward topic until you read her article. Les Murray, the UVCC President, suggested that we might also use Emily's article, so I asked her to revise it slightly for a more modern, well, an MG, audience. I think you'll find it interesting and informative – I know I did.

At our Gala Dinner our Club President, John Day, tempered his warm words of congratulations for having survived fifty years with some words of warning about the future and about being too reliant on, yes, you guessed it, autotests. His address can be found later in this MaGazine and in it he reminds us that it was just such a reliance, to the exclusion of just about everything else, that resulted in the closure of the Scottish Centre in 2007.

It was similar concerns that informed the thinking of the Jubilee Committee over the last two years. Before we started in late 2016, and before the first issue of The MaGazine was circulated in January 2017, there hadn't been a single Newsletter or any similar publication for members for some two years. Plenty of autotest regs, entry forms and results, but precious little else. And during 2016 apart from the New Year's Day Run there wasn't a single non-competitive social motoring event of any sort. Not one! And the previous year saw only one or two.

With this in mind, the Jubilee Committee has tried to find a mix of social motoring events that would appeal to like-minded MG owners amongst the membership but even after two years of proselytising we still struggled. By way of example, in August this year we organised a visit to Whitehead Railway Museum followed by a tour around east Antrim finishing up at Whitehead Golf Club for a splendid carvery dinner. We managed to attract about fifteen people, but few of them in

MGs. I plead guilty straightaway as the J2 was still *hors de combat* .

By way of contrast, at the last minute the UVCC had to cancel their Autumn Rally in September so Mike Dowey and Mike Armstrong helped them out by offering the arrangements we had for our August run and Mike A even modified the route slightly for them. And guess what? About thirty vintage cars and sixty or more people turned up (including some MGs!). I wasn't able to make the UVCC event either but in this case the lack of one car made no difference given the turn out.

So I think we have to ask ourselves why the UVCC can consistently get these sorts of numbers (including MGCC members who rarely if ever come to our events) and we struggle to get a handful.

Many years ago, when MGs were regarded as *infra dig* by certain members of the UVCC it used to be said that the UVCC was 'a club for cars I like owned by people I like'. I'll not say who the 'I' was and while it was meant as a bit of a jibe, in many ways that's exactly what a club is – a group of like-minded people who enjoy each other's company. That's certainly what the Ulster Centre was at the outset, and for a good many years thereafter. You only have to go back and read some of the Newsletters from the 70s and 80s to see that. (I've now put online [here](#) all of the old Newsletters that we have.) But we've completely lost that with our emphasis on autotesting to the exclusion of just about anything else – Classic Trial and Derek Walker Trial excepted.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I penned what I called *Ulster Centre Musings* which you'll find in this issue following John Day's Gala Dinner address. It was written back in August for the Jubilee Committee, so some two months before John's comments at the Dinner, but if you read both pieces you'll see that we're singing from the same song sheet. So much so that at the Dinner my daughter, Emily, asked her mother if I had helped John Day write his speech! I hadn't, but I agreed with his every word (except that my parrot joke is rather ruder than his!)

As a club, i.e. a group of hopefully like-minded people who enjoy each other's company, we are dying if we don't get our act together. The Centres in GB are booming. Have a look at their websites and see just

how many social and touring events they run (and how relatively few MSA events). And then compare that with the Ulster Centre.

I think it's worth remembering exactly what the objectives of the MG Car Club are and they are to be found in the Club Rules, namely:

R1.5 *Develop, maintain and provide services and privileges to all classes of Club Member.*

R1.6 *Encourage and support the continued full use of MG motor cars and the sport and pastime of motoring in all its forms.*

R1.7 *Develop opportunities for collaboration, sharing of knowledge and fellowship between Members, and kindred associations and clubs.*

Note the emphasis on 'Club Member' and 'MG motor cars'. I personally think that the Ulster Centre has largely forgotten these important points over the last number of years.

In my introduction I mentioned Terry and Linda Ingles as stalwarts of the Ulster Centre in the 1970s. Linda took over from Karl Murray as Hon Sec in November 1972 as Karl had to stand down after two years following the 1971 decision of the AGM (never rescinded) that the Chairman and Hon Sec should serve no more than two consecutive years in office. Linda did her two years (and was an outstanding Hon Sec) but had to stand down in 1974 and was replaced by Trevor Moffett.

You can see how it all worked out over the years in the May 2017 issue of the MaGazine which can be found [here](#) and which lists all the office bearers in our first fifty years. We pretty much managed to stick with this rule, give or take a year or two, for nearly thirty years. I personally think that it contributed to the vitality that the Ulster Centre had then as we had to find someone to take over as Chairman and Secretary every couple of years or so. That rule fell by the wayside, and, in my view, the Ulster Centre has suffered as a result.

Of course, YMMV (Your Mileage May Vary) so please feel free to let me have your thoughts **for publication** in the next issue of the MaGazine (which could well be my last as I've done my two years ☺)



Wendy and Trevor Faulkner ready for the 'off' in their MGTF

Visit to Whitehead Railway Museum, 19 August

Stephen Dawson

Mike Dowey organised an excellent visit to Whitehead Railway Museum on Sunday, 25 August. We had 15 members and friends meet up at Newtownabbey for a brief run to Whitehead where we were treated to an escorted Museum tour with refreshments. We viewed the steam and diesel locomotive exhibits along with assorted carriages and memorabilia. They looked to be in good shape and ever-expanding under the good auspices of the volunteers of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland. Their skills in bringing the old engines and rolling stock back to life are amazing. One locomotive was out on duty that

day pulling the Portrush 'Flyer' to the north coast.

From Whitehead, Mike had drafted a Tulip Run to the wilds of Buckna and back again taking in Slemish and Gleno waterfall. With MGA, Bs, TF, MG3 plus Robert Holmes's recently acquired rare and pristine MG Metro; there was quite a cross-section of MGs. The route took in some great driving roads so the cars were well exercised. We ended the run with a splendid carvery at Whitehead Golf Club. Thanks again to Mike for his efforts in putting together a grand day out.



MG Day, 2 September

Mike Dowey

The idea for an MG Day originated in 2016 as a part of the upcoming Ulster Centre Jubilee celebrations in 2018. This resulted in us having the first MG Day at Cultra last year where we were joined and supported by the N. Ireland MG Owners' Club.

This year, with so much going on with our own Jubilee celebrations, it was felt that the MG Owners' Club (MGOC) should take the lead in organising the event and that we would support them. The MGOC were happy to do so and decided that it would be a charity event in support of the RVH Liver Support Group.

Following discussions with David McCabrey, Commodore of the Carrickfergus Sailing Club, it was decided to hold the event in the Club's car park. This turned out to be an excellent location because we were able to make use of all their facilities including the annex boat storage building. The planned layout was for 90 MGs, six trade stands, two MG new car dealer stands and a charity autojumble.

In addition, as with last year, it was felt that a souvenir brochure, funded from advertising, would be appropriate and that each MG would get a copy free upon entry.

The actual day started dry but rather cool and dull. It was a slow start but by around 11.30 am or so the car park was full of MGs and the

sun had come out. MGBs were out in force but, as expected, we had a good variety of other MGs covering most years together with some of the rarer models such as the MG Metro 6R4 feature car. Noel Corry brought along his MGA Twin Cam and gave a talk on the car to an assembled audience nearby. As well as MGs we had invited those with other makes of classic cars to come along. They were required to park in the overspill area at the Premier Inn but we were pleased to see some 25 other classics turn out.

The annex building contained the new MGs on display from dealers Logan and SERE as well as the charity autojumble stall. Outside there were the trade stands and they were joined by the PSNI with their Mitsubishi Evo. This proved to be a great crowd puller especially with the younger generation. Another crowd puller was Rambo the dog who sat for most of the day on the seat of his owner's tractor in a pose that looked as if he was about to drive it away.

The big attraction of the event was Fuzz Townshend. Fuzz is the star of TV's Car S.O.S. programme which seeks to restore classic cars for deserving owners. Fuzz flew over from England for the event and was very well received. He held court in the annex building and was full of stories and background



over £2000 towards the chosen charity. The autojumble alone (*pictured left*) took over £600 and our thanks must go to all those who donated items to sell and to Carol Willis and Mike Armstrong for managing the stall so well.

Thanks also to the marshals who, as always, work tirelessly in the background to ensure that the day runs smoothly. The marshals had an important role in ensuring that only MGs reached the gates of the Sailing Club – all other makes being directed towards the Premier Inn car park.

Thanks to Sam Carruthers, Desi Boyd and the MG Day Committee of the MGOC and to Mervyn Mackie who printed the brochures, for all the hard work they put into making the day such a great success.

information not only from the TV shows but also from his own life. On his walkabout he was only too willing to stop and talk to people or pose for that important selfie.

On top of the excellent turnout of around 95 MGs we also had remarkable attendance from the general public. Helped by the good weather and a central location in Carrickfergus we estimated over 500 people attended the event. This resulted in an incredible yield of

A special thank you must, of course, go to the Carrickfergus Sailing Club for hosting the event. This location and its facilities were a fundamental part of the wonderful day we all enjoyed.

There have already been calls to have another one, but it probably won't be for a couple of years.

Noel Corry's TF on display at MG Day



Gala Dinner, Titanic Hotel, 29 September

Simon Johnston

Well, we pretty much rounded off our Jubilee year with our Gala Dinner at the splendid Titanic Hotel which was formerly one of the drawing offices of Harland and Wolff. Back in 1968 I worked at the BP refinery in the harbour estate and would have driven past the drawing offices in my TC when they were still in use. How times change, so it was a bit of a trip down memory lane to find so many old friends and acquaintances turn up to celebrate our Jubilee. There were folks there whom I haven't seen in maybe forty years (or more) and it was just fantastic that they came along.

The event was entirely organised by Mike Armstrong and Mike Wilson and the only thing we Jubilee committee members had to do was agree on the dinner menu choice – everything else was in the hands of the two Mikes. And what a great job they made of it.

Over seventy of us sat down to a great meal after which our guest, Club President John Day, offered the warm good wishes of the main Club, albeit tempered by words of warning for the future. (You can read John's address elsewhere in this MaGazine.) Another guest, Ronnie Trouton, an old friend of the Ulster Centre, spoke warmly of the Ulster Centre and his MG experiences and Mike Armstrong rounded off the speeches with his usual humorous anecdotes.

We were also delighted to have as our guests Richard Colston, the Club Director with responsibility for the Ulster Centre, and his wife Christa along with the MG Owners' Club Chairman, Thomas Lyttle, and his wife Irene and Sam Carruthers, MGOC Secretary, and his wife Vivienne.

Fed and watered, we then enjoyed the foot-tapping music of the Martello Jazz Band. In years gone by, Mrs Editor and I would have been up on the dance floor tripping the light fantastic but those days are long gone I'm afraid. In fact, in the good ol' days we'd have been there 'til all hours, but we headed home at a reasonable hour, chauffeured by our daughter, Emily, with our good friends, Will and Lorraine Corry, who were staying with us rather than have a late night drive back to Ballymena. But then, once home, we put the kettle on, made a pot of tea and sat chatting at the kitchen table, just like the old days, and headed to our beds much later than we've done for ages.

What great crack we had! (None of this 'craic' nonsense, please!)

(Unfortunately, we didn't think to organise a photographer so I'm very grateful to Margaret Murray for these photos. Margaret's late husband, Karl, was Hon Sec and then Chairman in the early 1970s.



Stalwarts of the Ulster Centre in the 1970s and active with us once again, Linda and Terry Ingles.



More from the 70s, (L to R) Margaret Murray, Lorna Chambers and Peter Minnis.

Dates for Your Diary

We're almost at the end of our Jubilee year so 'Dates for your Diary' is getting a bit depleted as the events for 2019 have not yet been decided upon. On the competition side, we still have one more autotest on 20 October and the last event of the season is the AutoSOLO on 3 November. As we go to (digital) press the venues for these two events have not yet been finalised but you'll get entry details by email in due course.

On the social side, the Nosh 'n' Natters continue at the Poacher's Pocket in Lisbane. It has been decided that sticking with a regular

venue every other month is best as moving things around could just cause confusion as to what's on and where. Having said that, the next one will not be in December as the date would clash with our Mince Pie Night so we're going to skip December and have the next Nosh 'n' Natter on Wednesday 9 January 2019.

And of course we'll be kicking off the New Year (can it really be that close?) with our New Year's Day Run which is being organised by Brian and Liz Patterson. Details of the start will follow in due course.

Saturday, 20 October

Autotest, venue TBA

Saturday, 3 November

AutoSOLO, venue TBA

Tuesday, 11 December

*Mince Pie Night, 7.30 pm
Shandon Park Golf Club*

Tuesday, 1 January

New Year's Day Run

Venue TBA

Wednesday, 9 January

*Nosh 'N' Natter,
1.00 pm Poacher's Pocket, Lisbane,*

Competition Corner

Gordon Buckley Reports

Ulster Classic Trial, 7 September 2018

Will Corry and Pete Moreland-Moore have once again won last month's MG Ulster Classic Trial. In a stellar drive in the gorgeous blue K Series powered Midget, the pair really made this event their own. Second place overall was secured by David Cochrane (Midget) and third by Sam McCurry in a Mini. Well done to them and they

became winners of Classes C and D respectively by virtue of Will winning overall.

This event, of course, is the brainchild of Noel Cochrane who this year excelled himself with superb tests in the most amazing locations in the Craigtantlet area. So many crews expressed their delight to me as they passed,

acknowledging that this is a unique event in that it is only for classic cars. There is no modern class beyond 1974. Noel, as an outstanding autotester himself, knows just how to provide the tests of driving skill and nostalgia that no one else can replicate.

This 2018 Trial had it all and it is a tribute to Will & Pete and the class winners for driving so skillfully (have a look at Will & Pete's excellent in-car footage on Facebook¹ and [YouTube](#) to see how a Midget should be driven).

The results can be downloaded here: [mg-ulster-classic-trial-results](#)

And from Noel Cochrane, the event organiser.

The 15th running of the MG Ulster Classic Trial was held on Friday 7th September. Start and finish were at Spring Cottage Crafts outside Comber. We had an entry of 28 cars, 23 of which were Midgets, Sprites, MGBs as well as five minis with competitors from as far afield as Armagh, Garvagh, Ballymoney not to mention Paul Beardmore from Stone in England. Action started at 6.45 pm with a gymkhana style parking test to avoid cars travelling in convoy to the first test.

Timed tests were all in the Dundonald and Craigantlet area at four different sites with 18 tests in total. All tests were done twice except two. By the time darkness started to fall

competitors had done all the tests in daylight so were on the boil for the second loop. Real nostalgia now, dry evening, lights, engines, straight-cut gears and cars from the sixties and seventies (some drivers also!).

First car arrived back at the finish shortly after 9.00 pm with an excellent supper provided by Beth and Johnny Reid of Spring Cottage Crafts. Very special thanks to all landowners, marshals and everyone who helped in any way before and after with this unique event.

Congratulations to Will Corry and Peter Moreland-Moore who were clear winners in their Midget.

Trial and Grass Slalom, 6 October, 2018

We were so lucky to get the weather we did for the trial and grass slalom. We had a new venue in a magnificent stubble field off the Ballymiscaw Road at the top of Craigantlet hill. The sun shone and the view over Strangford Lough and Scrabo was beautiful.

We had a small but enthusiastic gathering of cars, affected somewhat by the clash with the Larne MC lanes rally. What we did have though was a terrific, friendly atmosphere and a range of cars including the unexpected appearance of a lovely 1966 Ford Mustang.

We held three trials tests, with varying levels of difficulty. Test 1 was by far the tightest and clean score cards were not just so plentiful.

The grass slalom was two laps of a snaking course over a superb and stone free field and against the clock. Terrific fun thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

Left: the Midget of Mark Lemon and the TD of Mark Brien with a 60s Mustang Coupé in the background. (The white Audi belongs to Trevor Reid who, as always, was there to marshal.)



Some latitude was afforded on Test 2 to make it 'do-able' for the competitors and, as the breeze dried out the fields, the scores got better.

Winner overall was Bailie Thompson, followed by son Will and Crawford Ewing. First MG (Midget) was last event's winner Mark Lemon who tied for 4th place with Crawford (Snr). Enthusiastic, as ever, were the grandad/grandson duo of Mike Armstrong & Zak (*pictured right*), along with Kevin McNamee, Mark Brien in his lovely MG TD and young newcomer Denis Bell. We also welcome James Greer and his entourage in the Clio. You are all very welcome.

The winner was again Bailie Thompson, closely followed by Crawford Ewing (Snr) who tied with Will Thompson. Fourth was Crawford Ewing (Jnr). First MG, in 5th place, was again Mark Lemon.

So that's it for this year. We had a lot of fun with the trials & sloms and look forward to next season.

Thanks, as always to our COC, Stephen Dawson, Trevor Reid and Carol Willis for putting it all together. And finally, I enjoyed a comment from Mike Armstrong. We were finishing up and looked around and Stephen Dawson had gone to the tests during the running of the slalom and had lifted and packed away all the pylons and equipment. Mike said "There goes both the Treasurer and the treasure". I enjoyed that.

See you at the Autotest on 20th October.



Mark Lemon (Midget) reaches the top without penalty



Ulster Centre 50th Anniversary Dinner

John Day, President of the MG Car Club

It is lovely to be back in Ulster, my 2nd visit this year. The first was to the 50th tour in May which Janet and I thoroughly enjoyed. The organising team did a superb job so well done for putting on a tour that showed Ulster at its best!

The Ulster Centre and its members are fantastic supporters of MG and the MG Car Club. I was very proud to represent you on the Main Board when I was Chairman, and this responsibility is now looked after by Club Treasurer Richard Colston who is also here tonight

Before coming to the dinner I did some research on the number of times teams from Ulster Centre have won the Californian Cup Competition at MG Live! It is well known that your drivers excel in auto-testing but even I was surprised to learn that you have won the cup 14 times since 1960. This is proof of your famous skills in handling sports cars but this success comes with a health warning: if any Centre concentrates on providing only sporting events there is a risk of losing those MG owners who are only interested in using their cars for social purposes.

I would like to remind you about what happened to the Scottish centre. It was also a very successful centre for auto-testing and the training ground for some famous drivers like Jim Clarke and Jackie Stewart but in 2007 it was my sad duty as Chairman of the club to close the centre. It had concentrated on one aspect of owning an MG and failed to support those members who wanted social events. History therefore shows us that you ignore these members at your peril but I think you understand this in Ulster Centre and are trying to get the balance right.

The success of your 50th Anniversary Tour shows this to be true. A good test for if you are getting the balance right is to ask yourself this: If Cecil Kimber himself was transported to your centre today would he think you were helping

all MG owners to enjoy their MGs? I think he would, so very well done.

“MGCC, the Marque of Friendship”

During my seven years as President and four years as Chairman before that I have witnessed the MG Car Club at its absolute best and living up to the sentiment expressed in this slogan. However, I have to tell I have also seen the club at its worst when politics and disputes have caused much upset. At these times our motto seems to go out of the window for some members and I have been shocked by how aggressive some people can be when they get into a dispute, especially when using email and forums. People are very brave sitting at their computers, whereas most disputes melt away if people face each other with their issues. Disputes; they happen but this is a club that sets out to help members enjoy their MGs it is not the United Nations. Thankfully none of these comments apply to Ulster Centre but it is something to bear in mind. We all have to work harder to try and see each other's point of view when we get into a dispute.

Fabio Filipello, the much loved President of the MG Car Club d'Italia, sadly died on the 11 February 2017. I knew Fabio well and counted him as one of my closet MG friends. He worked at the United Nations for many years where he learnt to work with, and encourage peaceful, settlements in International disputes. In retirement from these duties he was a wonderful ambassador of the MG Car Club and he always ended any speech he made with the following statement; *“You must all carry on, enjoy your MGs whilst you can, make friends, keep friends and be kind to each other.”* In my role as President of the UK Club I try to live by these words and I encourage you to all do the same.

The other problem I sometime see is that power can go to some people's heads. Give them a title and they start to get above themselves. To illustrate what I mean about job

titles I will finish with a true story that happened to me when I was first elected as President.

A “friend” in the MGCC (who shall be nameless) called me one evening and said; “Now you are President it’s time I told you my parrot story.”

A man walked into a pet shop and said; “I want to buy a parrot, how about that one there.” The assistant said; “Now that is a very good parrot sir, he speaks two languages and can do simple arithmetic, he is also young and very handsome. He will cost you £10,000.”

“I am not paying that much how about the one sitting next to him?”

“Ah said the assistant I can see you have a good eye for a parrot that one is £20,000.”

“What.” said the man, “How can a parrot cost that much money?”

“Well,” said the assistant, that is an extraordinary ordinary bird he has a First in Physics from Cambridge University and can speak 4 languages.”

“I don’t care how well qualified it is, I am not spending that much money on a bird.” At that moment he spotted a tired old looking parrot sitting in the corner, his feathers were moulting, he was sitting all hunched up and he looked grumpy. “How much is that one,” he exclaimed.

“That one is £50,000 sir,” he said. The customer was almost speechless and just about managed to ask; “What in god’s name makes him so special.”

“Well sir it’s a mystery. He can hardly say two words, cannot do simple arithmetic, he sits there being grumpy all day but for some reason the other two call him President.”

The moral of this story is that whatever job title you are given there is always somebody who is better qualified than you to do the job.

Thank you so much for inviting me to your lovely Dinner tonight and I will now get back on my perch.

Ulster Centre Musings

Simon Johnston

The world has changed more than a little since the Ulster Centre was formed fifty years ago. Back then, young men (and it was almost exclusively men) drove scruffy old cars because they couldn’t afford anything better and if they fancied something sporty, then a fifteen or twenty year old T Type MG could be bought for a few hundred pounds, and older models for even less. These weren’t seen as “collectors’ cars” – they were simply inexpensive, indeed cheap, transport. But they also provided a common interest amongst like-minded lads who enjoyed the fun and camaraderie of getting together with other MG owners. Thus a club – the Ulster T Owners – was formed. In those days, clubs were a common feature of the social life of young people. Whatever your interest, be it photography, cars, golf, bird watching or whatever, you could find a ‘club’ and through it meet other people who shared your interest and who perhaps became friends beyond just the club activities. For many of us who knocked around with MGs in the 60s and 70s, that was indeed the case as the Ulster Centre (as the T

Owners’ Club had become) provided a welcome source of normal social activities at a time when life in Northern Ireland was far from normal.

In the years since its formation the Ulster Centre has waxed and waned, as most clubs have. In the 70s and 80s, hill climbing and racing were very popular and we even co-hosted races at Kirkistown with the 500 MRCI. Our big twentieth anniversary event was a full race meeting at Kirkistown which included rounds of some of the main Club championships, but increasing costs and more stringent MSA requirements meant that fewer and fewer members found such ‘hard core’ motor sport viable and the racing and hill climbing more or less withered on the vine.

Right from the outset, however, the Centre has always had a strong autotest culture, and indeed it was the desire to run autotests, or ‘driving tests’ as they were called then, that prompted the establishment of the Ulster Centre as part of the MG Car Club and thus MSA (or RAC in those days) recognised. So while speed events waned in popularity, autotesting

became more popular and the Centre has run four or five autotest events a year for many years.

But once again, the situation has evolved and whereas in the 70s and 80s autotesting was primarily attracting T Types and Midgets, with the odd MGB, by the 90s we were starting to see other marques competing as the MGs were getting a bit 'long in the tooth'. Ulster has always had a big autotest following and so the Ulster Centre found itself offering events that members of other clubs wanted to participate in. To some extent we got caught up in a virtuous (vicious?) circle where our well run events attracted other, non MG, drivers who raised the bar in terms of performance and skill which then attracted an even higher calibre of competitor until we reached the stage we are at today when we even run a round of the ANICC championship and offer tuition to aspiring competitors. But, and there's always a 'but', these people are not driving MGs, they have almost certainly little or no interest in MGs and in many (most?) cases are not MGCC members. One inevitable consequence of this is that those Ulster Centre members who might enjoy the odd 'driving test' event are not going to want to enter their cars in a fearsomely competitive environment where they really won't stand much chance of even modest levels of success. You only have to see the turnout of T Types at UVCC events to see that the potential is there, albeit in this case for the older MGs.

So a lot of Ulster Centre effort is devoted to running five or six autotest (or autosolo) events each year, but to what benefit? They may bring in extra income and the paradox is that we do better by having as many non MGCCC entrants as possible as we can, and do, charge them more and the Ulster Centre benefits directly from this extra income whereas the Centre gets no financial benefits whatsoever from encouraging people to join the MGCC. So the better quality our events, the more people we attract who aren't members and thus earn us income. But for what purpose?

Much the same approach is adopted with our trials, i.e. encourage non MGCC members and increase numbers to gain more income. But once again, the consequence seems to be increased numbers at the expense of Ulster Centre participation and MG participation. The reasons here, of course, are not the same as

with autotesting as any MG can be competitive in a trial. So perhaps the format doesn't appeal?

As well as these seven or eight MSA permit events we run two what I might call 'flagship' events – the Classic Trial in September and the Derek Walker Trial in February. Both of these are enormously popular and successful and it's perhaps worth reflecting on why that is. The Classic Trial is very much MG focused and the style of event suits a wide range of models and skill levels. It also involves more than just the driver as each car needs a navigator. So there's a 'team spirit' about participating in it – fathers and sons, fathers and daughters, grandfathers and grandsons – which is getting back to the core values of the MG Car Club. The same can be said about the Derek Walker although I get the impression that it is verging on becoming too 'hard core' and could perhaps be running the risk of discouraging the 'amateur' family teams who don't feel that can compete with, or don't wish to compete with, the 'professionals'.

So as we come to the end of our fiftieth year, where is the Ulster Centre going? The focus on autotesting for so many years has meant that MG enthusiasts who used to be happy to be involved in the Committee have walked away and we have ended up in recent years with Committees predominantly, but not exclusively, comprised of people who have little or no interest in MGs and every interest in autotesting.

In consequence, with one or two honourable exceptions, most of these Committee members were largely unwilling to get involved with anything other than autotests, and those Ulster Centre members who might have been willing to help organise other events were largely ignored and excluded and simply gave up. One consequence is that for the MG owner interested primarily in more social activities, the MG Owners' Club has offered more attractive possibilities, even if these amount to little more than convoy 'runs' with, of course, no possible competitive element as the Club isn't an MSA one.

At present, the Ulster Centre is at the opposite end of the scale from the MGOC, i.e. where the MGOC offers only social events, the Ulster Centre has been primarily offering only fairly 'hard core' competitive events; not exclusively, of course, but I do think primarily. And in consequence we are not appealing to the

vast majority of our membership. And we have to wonder, why do people join the MGCC and pay the not inconsiderable annual fee, and yet not participate in any of the events we do offer?

I think there are some clues to be found in how the last two years have worked out.

First, there is still an underlying group of members who are MG enthusiasts. They may be predominantly in the older age bracket, but they're there and they are starting to come out of the woodwork as the encouraging numbers at the Nosh 'n' Natters would suggest. They are in the MGCC because they are MG enthusiasts, not because they can enter our autotests. We need to do more for them.

Second, many of these older members, while not remotely interested in autotesting, can/could be persuaded to bring their MGs out for some light competition, if we can just find the right formula. They know that only the Ulster Centre is able to run events with an MG focus, even if it isn't at the moment all that willing to do so.

Third, there is some evidence to suggest that some younger members are starting to appear with MGs and are entering, in particular, the two flagship events – the Classic Trial and the Derek Walker – which would suggest that there is an undercurrent of support for competition across the age range, but not just any sort of competition.

So, what to do?

As has been said many times by others, we run far too many events and, in my view, the wrong sort of events. No other UK Centre attempts to run so many MSA events. When I looked at the Centre websites last year when preparing for my presentation to Council I noted that only two or three Centres run any MSA events and none more than two or three. And yet we run ten! Madness!

So I think we have to both reduce the number of events and refocus them better to meet the needs/hopes/expectations/aspirations of the membership. And let's be realistic here. My suggestion is that we aim to have no more than four MSA events per year; yes, four. That's still more than any other Centre, but that aside, we need to go for quality and not quantity and by quality I mean of a type that has a realistic prospect of appealing to a wider range of the membership. To that end I think that the Classic

Trial and the Derek Walker should continue to be our 'flagship' events but with perhaps a slight restructuring.

Never having competed in either I can only go on what I read and hear but in relation to the Derek Walker it would seem that the tests are predominantly 'autotest' ones, albeit with the passenger on board, so perhaps this event should be the 'flagship' autotest event. It attracts a huge entry of mainly non MGCC members but I'd scrap that and make it much more like the Classic Trial. And as noted above, we perhaps need to try and scale it back a little to avoid it becoming too 'hard core'. Even relatively easy tests will still produce a winner!

Regarding the Classic Trial, is it then feasible to make it more of a trial (formerly PCT) type of event and perhaps make it a one-day event rather than just an evening one?

When I look at some of the GB events (not just MGCC) I see that there are quite a few prestigious events that are just one-day events but highly regarded nonetheless, e.g. Lakeland Trial, Cotswold Trial, Kimber Trial, California Cup. Could we not adopt the same approach here and bill these two events as our premier competitive events, one with a driving test/autotest focus and one with a trialling focus?

We might then take a leaf out of the UVCC's playbook and have a one-day (loose surface?) autotest/driving test event combined with a picnic? And then perhaps a scatter rally for those who don't fancy timed competition? (A scatter rally is a bit like a treasure hunt in that it has questions to be answered as you drive along, but the route you take to find the clues is not specified. The location of each clue is given by map reference and the clues have different values in terms of points scored. You only have to visit 75% of the clues and it's up to you to decide which clues to visit and what route to take.)

These four very different competitive events would be complemented by our bi-monthly (and hopefully monthly in due course) Nosh 'n' Natters and two or three purely social events throughout the year. Perhaps we could even revive the BBQ and Gymkhana?

And that, I think, would be plenty. You can overdo it!



Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Towing But Were Afraid To Ask!

Emily Johnston

Members of the MGCC of a 'certain age' (many of whom seemed to be at the Gala Dinner last month 😊 – just kiddin', Dad) probably give no thought to towing their MG on a trailer as they've had their driving licence for many (many!) years and have full entitlement to tow trailers of just about any size. When my Dad suggested that he might buy a trailer to haul the J2 on for events across the water, and that I could help out with driving the tow car, I had to point out to him that with my licence, issued in 2005, I almost certainly wouldn't be able to. My work brings me in contact with guys who haul trailers for a living and I know that

they have all passed a specific trailer-towing driving test as it is part of my job to check they have.

Since my Dad didn't know that there were any restrictions on towing we decided that a bit of investigation was needed as, having some knowledge of what was involved, I wasn't keen on completing the trailer-towing driving test myself!

We figured our situation would probably be one that many families in the MGCC would face so we thought I should share what I found out.

There are two issues to consider: what category or categories of vehicle your licence

entitles you to drive; and what weight you can tow within those categories. Starting with the vehicle categories, the ones we are interested in are B and B+E. Category B vehicles are passenger vehicles up to 3,500 kg (which are allowed to tow trailers up to 750 kg, making a total weight of 4,250 kg) or a passenger vehicle and trailer combination where the trailer weighs over 750 kg and the total weight of tow car and trailer does not exceed 3,500 kg.

Category B+E covers Category B vehicles towing a trailer over 750 kg. For all practical purposes the upper weight limit allowed for such a trailer is 3,500 kg.

A word or two of explanation about weights is necessary at this point. When talking about vehicle or trailer weights in the context of driver licencing it is the manufacturer's maximum permissible weight of the vehicle or trailer when fully loaded which is being referred to. It is often referred to as 'Gross Vehicle Weight' or more recently 'Maximum Authorised Mass' usually abbreviated to MAM. The MAM can be found on the VIN plate on a car (usually fixed to the body under the bonnet) and on a similar style of plate on the A-frame of a trailer.

Anyone who got their licence before 1 January 1997 is permitted to drive both Category B and Category B+E but for those of us who passed our test on or after 1 January 1997, things are not so rosy. Unlike many of our parents, we don't automatically have B+E entitlement after passing our test for Category B so we are restricted to either a tow car MAM of no more than 3,500 kg and a trailer with a MAM of no more than 750kg, or a tow car and a trailer over 750 kg with a combined MAM of no more than 3,500 kg.

A trailer with a MAM of 750 kg isn't going to be of much use for carrying any MG so we have to operate within the combined MAM of 3,500 kg for the tow car and trailer combination. This means that the MAM of the trailer has to be no more than 3,500 kg minus the MAM of the tow car. The Volvo that my Dad plans to use to tow the MG has a MAM of 2,030 kg which means that if I am to be able to drive the tow car under my Category B entitlement, the trailer has to have a MAM of no more than 1,470 kg (3,500 kg minus the MAM of the tow car, 2,030 kg).

Most trailers weigh around 500 to 600 kg so the payload permitted to keep within a MAM of 1,470 kg is going to be of the order of 800 – 900

kg. Our little MG J2 weighs in at around 650 kg, a Midget is 100kg heavier and T Types another 100kg heavier, so they'd be OK – just – but an MGB weighs in at just over 1000kg which would push the laden weight of the trailer over the allowable MAM. So clearly the Category B licence will limit the size of car that can be towed on a trailer.

Furthermore, trailers often have a manufacturer's MAM of over 2,000 kg, with many from companies like Brian James, PRG and Ifor Williams having MAMs of the maximum permitted car trailer weight of 3,500 kg. And remember, it's the MAM that determines what can be towed for any given licence category. So with my 'B' licence I wouldn't even be able to tow an empty trailer weighing 500 kg but with a MAM of 2,000 kg behind my Dad's car, but I could tow a fully loaded trailer with a MAM of 1,470 kg. One solution to this conundrum if you are buying a trailer, or own one made since 1982 when plates with gross vehicle weights/MAM were first required to be fitted to trailers, is to get the manufacturer to 'down plate' it to the MAM you need for your particular tow car in order to keep the combination under the 3,500 kg MAM limit, provided of course that the car you plan to put on the trailer isn't too heavy for this option.

For trailers built before 1982 without such plates, or old homemade ones, it would seem (and I use the word 'seem' advisedly) that the MAM is assumed to be the load capacity of the tyres fitted to the trailer. This can be determined from the numeric code that is marked on each tyre, e.g. for a trailer tyre with a specification of 145/80 R10 84N, the '84' signifies a load rating of 500 kg per tyre and the 'N' signifies a maximum speed of 87 mph. On a twin axle four-wheel trailer without a manufacturer's plate this would imply a MAM of 2,000 kg.

It's clear from the above, however, that anyone with a mid-size or larger car is not going to be able to tow it on a trailer if they only have a Category B licence as the combined MAM of tow car and trailer will exceed the 3,500 kg limit. But there is a cunning way round this.

If you look at the paper counterpart of your driving licence (assuming it was issued on or after 1 January 1997) you will see that as well as having full entitlement to Category B you also have provisional entitlement to Category B+E.

So, provided you have L plates front and rear and a qualified driver supervising you, you can tow a large trailer (up to 3,500 kg) on your provisional B+E licence. The qualified driver supervising you must hold a B+E licence, but unlike some other categories, does not need to have actually passed the B+E test, i.e. my Dad who has B+E entitlement because he passed his Category B test before 1 January 1997 could supervise me as a learner with a large trailer on behind. Furthermore, the 45 mph learner speed limit does not apply and you can also drive on motorways while displaying your L plates². But clearly this isn't a practical long-term solution.

These licence restrictions are something that can be checked by police at the roadside as they are based on maximum permissible weights and not actual weights. So a quick check of the MAM of the tow car and the MAM of the trailer will show whether you are within the 3,500 kg limit of a Category B licence.

The actual weights involved are not governed by the Vehicle Licencing Regulations but by the Construction and Use Regulations and these are very straightforward, if rather more difficult to check. First of all, the weight of the trailer and load must not exceed the maximum towing weight specified for the towing vehicle. This can usually be found in the vehicle manufacturer's handbook or sometimes in the V5C document. Secondly, the total weight of the tow car and loaded trailer must not exceed 3,500 kg (Category B licence). For those with Category B+E licences the maximum weight of the trailer should ordinarily not exceed 3,500 kg as trailers with a larger carrying capacity are a different kettle of fish altogether

and subject to different Construction and Use Regulations.

Clearly to determine whether a particular car and trailer combination is legal in terms of actual weight would require a weighbridge and there are public weighbridges located at Toome, Belfast, Loughbrickland, Sprucefield, Nutts Corner and Larne which provide free 'self weigh' facilities that enable drivers to voluntarily check the weights of their vehicles at any time. There are also weighbridges located at Ballymena, Coleraine and Mallusk DVA Vehicle Test Centres but to use these weighbridges, prior arrangement should be made with the relevant Test Centre Manager.

There is one other option that used to be popular – the fixed towbar or A-frame that connects directly to the car being towed which then travels on its own wheels rather than on a trailer. While these might have been acceptable some years ago they are essentially illegal today as the car being towed is considered to be a trailer and, as it has brakes, these must work when being towed which is pretty near impossible to achieve. There are variations of this theme, some of which apparently have some type of braking system, but their legality is questionable unless they are being used simply to remove a broken-down car from a dangerous position. Much better to stick to a trailer.

Luckily we were able to find a small trailer with a MAM of 1,380 kg (so if fully laden, well within the towing limit of 1,600 kg of the Volvo) that can take the J2, and the tow car and trailer together have a MAM of 3,410 kg so are comfortably within the permitted MAM of 3,500 kg of my Category B licence. Perfect!

² These points were all confirmed in writing for us by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).

My MGenes

Mike Armstrong

Part 9: A Bit More Competition



In Part 8 I wrote about competition with a couple of TCs but much more was to come in the 80s and 90s. I described a little of it with the Midget and a blue TC that Mike Wilson and I had built from virtual scrap. However, at the same time, there were two other cars that gave even more fun and one still does.

In the photo above, on one side of the TC 'racer' is a J2 (AUV 334) and on the other is a 1953 TD (PZ 1167) which you last saw on the back page of Part 5 in the October MaGazine 2017 when it was in the ownership of Patrick Johnston.

I am not really sure how the J2 came about but I acquired the chassis from somewhere no longer remembered. These two pictures show the state of it on arrival. At least it was a promising start although I had absolutely NO knowledge of the workings of Triple-M cars. One shows the front of the chassis with what looks like a few extra holes in it and the other shows the rear axle.



The brakes were operated by cable and the rear of the front and rear springs slid in brass trunnions. The engine was 847 cc although I didn't have one at this stage. Shock absorbers were of the Andre Hartford type which had wooden friction discs.

The J2 was manufactured in Abingdon from 1932 to 1934 and some 2061 were made. There were also 262 of the four-seater J1 model and 117 J1 Salonettes. The factory also produced a supercharged J3 with a 747 cc engine of which only 22 were made together with 9 of the supercharged racing J4 model.

I found a body for the car in a lock-up in Castlerock (amazing what you could find in those days!) which, although not exactly as built by Abingdon, was otherwise very sturdy. The main difference was that the doors were deeper which in fact made entry and egress a bit easier. I decided to fit hydraulic brakes from a Morris 8 and the only engine I could find was a 1938 side-valve Ford 10hp – which came from the late Bill Sherwood's P Type when he found a correct engine for his car. Sitting on 18" outer laced wheels at the front and sometimes 16" on the rear it was in this form that the car was reborn and painted in cellulose two-tone blue and looked quite smart.



Here it is at a later stage with the correct 19" wheels and correct cycle type mudguards. It also acquired – at considerable expense – a proper J2 engine with a Phoenix crank (virtually unbreakable) which also had a new alloy cylinder block.

This car gave enormous fun in driving tests, rallies, and Production Car Trials. It also was an introduction to MMM motoring to my son David

with his younger brother, Patrick, as a passenger.

Here are a few photographs.



MJA in a rally



David at a PCT



MJA at an autotest



: A young Patrick Armstrong during rebuild



An older Patrick Armstrong with family packed in.

The car was eventually refurbished and sold to finance the next venture. Like an old song – “Wish I had it back!”

At roughly the same time as having the J2, which took a few years to build, my father (Jack Armstrong) very kindly passed on the second TD that he had restored. As previously noted, this was purchased from Patrick Johnston and had also been used by your Editor. It was shipped to Yorkshire where a thorough rebuild followed from chassis up. A very nice restoration was received by me with great delight sometime in the early 80's

My father drove it several times in Yorkshire Centre events. Since returning home to Northern Ireland PZ 1167 has had a fairly hard life. Virtually any time that it is brought out it works hard for its living with autotests including several Register Trophy and Class wins at Silverstone, 13 Retrospective Circuit of Ireland rallies, UVCC events, Derek Walker Trials and many others. Here are a few photos:-



“Hard a Port”, Patrick Johnston, Meghaberry 1969



MJA, Silverstone, c. 1990

... That's all for this month. Next time will be the finale and I'll look at “Where's the time gone and what does the future hold”.



Dr. Jack Armstrong who rebuilt the car



PZ with sister TD KZ (ex-Circuit of Ireland winner) and Mike Wilson's TF after a successful foray to Silverstone for the Register Trophy. Taken in Ilkley, Yorkshire



On the DeLorean banking



Somewhere in the depths of Ireland



Grandson Zak enjoys himself as navigator on the DWT 2018



The younger generation with "MGenes"?

A Personal MG Saga

Terry Ingles

Members for 50 Years.

Linda and I enjoy reading the MaGazine edited by Simon Johnston, produced for the Ulster Centre Jubilee and we had downloaded all the archived Centre Newsletters when we realised we also had 50 years of MGCC membership to celebrate in 2018.

Sure enough an invitation arrived from MGCC HQ to attend a reception and presentation at Kimber House, Abingdon in April 2018 to receive our 50 year member badges.

We initially decided that, enjoyable as it might be, it was difficult to justify a flight over, a hire car, overnight stay, reception, then flight back, although we did keep talking about it!

We have always wanted to get back into an MG over the years and I read all the classic car magazines and even went over to the Lancaster Classic Car Show a couple of years ago for the whole three days, I was exhausted. Meanwhile the price of MGs was steadily rising and getting further and further away from our budget. My first love is the MGA, but this model in good driveable condition with bodywork done was, I had decided, out of our range.

I had been seriously emailing a dealer in England over a Mk III Midget that had been stored for seventeen years and had been recently re-commissioned, serviced, MoT'd and for sale at what I thought was a ridiculous price. However, the more I looked at the pictures and description, the more I wanted to have a look at it. It was the sort of car I was after: original; not completely rebuilt, but obviously looked after; a car with a bit of character and one that we could enjoy driving and maintaining for a long time to come.

However, I still looked at all the MGA ads and I came across a 1600 Coupe at a dealer in Oxfordshire. It looked to fit our criteria and I started email and phone contact. Of course it was more than twice the price of the Midget, but we had decided that "you can't take it with you" and the banks were giving virtually zero percent on any savings we might have! The

garage also happened to be on the way from Luton airport to Abingdon, so we replied to our invitation to attend the 50 year member reception, booked a room in Abingdon, flights and hire car and arranged to see the MG – not necessarily in that order!

Mid-April saw two glorious days in Oxfordshire with sunshine and hot temperatures all the way, it must have been an omen. Having taken disposable overalls and gloves, a torch and screwdriver together with camera, I spent most of the day crawling all over and under the car. The dealer handed us the keys and told us to take it for as long a drive as we liked. After perusing the history file, we agreed to buy it and already had a quote from a NI car transport company to bring it over for us, which was cheaper than arranging another journey by air and sea with accommodation and the risk of a breakdown in a car on its first long journey for some time.

The reception at Kimber House the next day was splendid, the first time we had been there and recommended to visit by any member in or near the area, especially if interested in the history of MG and its cars, as the MGCC archive is situated there and can be searched and items viewed by prior arrangement.



MG 1600 coupe at the MG Day, Carrickfergus September 2018

A couple of members at the reception looked at photos of the MGA reg. 1700 PX and confirmed that the dealer had shown it at the NEC the previous year. That was of additional interest and added to the quite extensive history file that came with the car.

We will wear our 50 year member badges with pride.

Back to the 60s

My first car was a 1958 MGA 1500 Coupe, Old English White, reg. DSB 880, bought on HP in 1968. That was also the year we joined the MGCC and the Ulster Centre and did some driving tests at Meghaberry in addition to attending Noggins and Natters. A friend had a 1600 Coupe in blue and we used to go almost every Sunday for a drive (read "race", trying to impress our girlfriend passengers – mine being Linda, now my long-suffering wife!) down to the Twelve Arches, or Dundrum Castle. There was great rivalry between us as to which was the best performing car, the 1500 or the 1600 and our motor engineering ignorance was taken over by our own perceptions. However, needs must and with little money for professional servicing I did start to learn how to service and tune an engine and look after the essential chassis maintenance of both cars. In return my quantity surveyor friend got a site carpenter to make two splendid ramps for working safely under the cars; I have them in my garage today and they have seen much use! Looking at old photos of the car I realise that someone at some time had fixed MGB type chrome strips to the front wings, I cannot remember them at the time? Also there was no rear bumper and the overriders had been bolted directly to the chassis mountings.

I then made a bad decision and decided I need to dismantle the front wings as there were signs of corrosion after ten years of neglect. It was taken off the road for some urgent bodywork repairs! It was riddled with rust, the worst part being the box section behind the front wheels where years of road dirt had been trapped and corroded the metal into lace curtains. My long-suffering parents allowed me to take over the garage and a winter was spent trying to cut out the rusted metal and fabricate, mostly in aluminium and pop rivets, replacement sections, for hopefully, non-load bearing parts of the car. Bodywork was cut out

and copious amounts of filler used to replace rusted metal. The piece de resistance was to hand paint the car in polyurethane paint – believe it or not I had read an article in Car Mechanics or some other magazine that it was entirely feasible. I seem to remember that the two beautiful top quality oval varnish brushes were the most expensive part of the exercise! I was pleased to find that the result was quite reasonable and as far as I could tell showed no brush marks and had a built-in lustrous finish. I often wonder what would happen to the paintwork after I sold it, if the owner had enthusiastically taken T Cut and polish to the finish?



MGA 1500 coupe at Binevenagh 1968

I was beginning to be heavily involved with the Ulster Automobile Club and the Circuit of Ireland Rally. In those days having been involved as a marshal on various teams from 1966 and in 1969 had risen to the dizzy heights of being allowed to run a time control, complete with Longine printing clock, powered by a lead acid car battery and backed up with a very expensive looking leather cased Longine split timing chronometer, all carefully synchronised to the GPO speaking clock in those days and one of the first things the Clerk of the Course checked when calling at the control on the route. Linda only recently threw away a Paddy Hopkirk rally jacket she used for gardening that had been burnt into holes by leaking acid when the jacket had been stuffed into the boot of the MGA alongside the battery which had somehow fitted in with the clock and our "luggage". The

control boards and stakes were lashed to the luggage rack on the boot lid as there was no way they would fit in the boot, or inside the car.

The day Linda and I set off for our first rendezvous on Good Friday, we had only just bolted on the last bits of bodywork. Linda remembers carefully scrubbing the bumpers with a Brillo pad before polishing them off with chrome cleaner – they came up beautifully!

The first part of our journey became wet. Every time I braked, the windscreen wipers stopped! With not much wiring to check it was found that the fuse – which covers most of the electrics in an MGA, had blown and blew again with each touch of the brakes. We smoked in those days and before long the fuse was reinforced with silver paper, which did the trick all the way round Ireland. Luckily the car did not catch fire and I am not sure that I ever traced the fault, presumably with the brake light switch and associated wiring.

The exhaust silencer fell off somewhere en route to Killarney and was replaced in the car park of the hotel with a Ford item bought from one of the motor factors that used to stay open during the event in the hope of being able to supply parts to competitors, marshals and followers alike. Linda drove on the way home from Donegal or was it Galway – in those five day marathon events, the return to the finish in Northern Ireland started on the Monday morning from Killarney and continued virtually non-stop except for a supper halt somewhere in Donegal or perhaps Enniskillen. I fell asleep and she tells me that she hardly changed gear all the way as she found the lever so heavy. She won't drive the new MG for the same reason, although I must say I have difficulty with first when I don't pay attention. Modern motoring has spoiled us.

Midgets in the 70s

Having sold the MGA in 1970 to a friend of my brother who was moving to England – thank goodness, as he might have been back to complain about the rust and maybe the paintwork too, we bought a used MG Midget, a late 1100 cc Mk II with the larger main bearing crankshaft, with wire wheels, 1849 PZ. That car was my serious introduction to car mechanics and autotesting, as the separate sport of driving tests had become, and was our daily driver from our flat on the Antrim Road after Linda and I married in September. Its spare wheel was the

cause of a three week stay at Musgrave Park Hospital after swinging the wheel into the boot after puncture repairs. In mid swing my back locked up so I could hardly stand or take a breath. The next day after a painful night and a visit to the RVH casualty I started my traction treatment – they don't do that nowadays, thank goodness! In addition to the ribbing from work colleagues about the rigours of the newly married, the two things I remember during my sojourn were visiting John Lyons, rally and autotest driver, lying in bed incarcerated in a plaster corset having had major surgery after a big car crash, and Karl Murray visiting me, setting his bulging brief case on the bed with a satisfying “clink” and unloading the liquid refreshment into my bedside locker!

Nursing in the “healthy end” of the men's orthopaedic ward in those days was a little cavalier, with the male nurse doing his rounds in the evening after visitors had gone home, collecting the unopened third pint bottles of Guinness from the bedsides of the older patients who had not partaken of the handouts from Arthur and re allocating them to the patients at my end of the ward – “Guinness is good for you!”.

My memory of Karl is of a genial, generous, sometimes schoolmasterly (that was his profession after all) man, but a great organiser who liked his photography, MGs and life in general. He was a great asset to the Ulster Centre.

Easter 1971 saw the Midget used and abused on the UAC Circuit of Ireland Rally, this time as our transport in my role as a “team leader” as they used to call the Stage Commanders in those days. The closed road special stages were manned by a team of marshals, most of whom would be recruited by the team leader in addition to other marshals, some from local motor clubs, who would meet at 3.00am at Ballyporeen Post Office or some other landmark and would be led to the stage and left off at their marshalling positions. The team leader would then set off at the appropriate time from the finish end of the stage and “close it” to the public ready for use as a timed special stage of the rally. Hopefully he or she would have left the deputy at the start of the stage to stop cars travelling down the road at an agreed time so the team leader did not meet any traffic coming the other way –

hopefully! On one stage I arrived a little late at the start with Paddy Hopkirk waiting to be allowed into the stage to film an in-car part of "A Dash of the Irish", still a classic and one shown at motoring club film nights to this day. As I stopped, the front disc pads of the Midget went on fire! Paddy Hopkirk did not turn a hair, merely commenting that I must have been "having a bit of a go"!

The Midget did not have much more luggage room than the MGA and the boot was once again stuffed with direction arrows, wooden stakes, a printing clock, battery and other paraphernalia of special stage layout – I cannot remember how we dressed in those days, but I don't think we had much room for a change of clothes! Ulster Centre members of my age will probably remember John Watt, the equipment officer of the UAC, doing his party trick at marshals' meetings before the event describing the wooden stakes as "rare", new and unbroken; "medium", maybe abused a bit and "well done" too short, with the top well splayed out and split after being hammered in to the ground with gusto! Oh yes - the hammers, big one for driving the post in and a smaller one for nailing the arrow, had to be carried in the car as well!

1971 was the year the Ulster Centre sent a team to Silverstone to attempt to take the California Cup from the Scottish Centre, who had a succession of wins led by the Mickel family. As written before in the MaGazine, the team of three Midgets driven by David Bell, Terry Chambers and myself won the California Cup with David winning FTD and me the Novice award.

To add to the Midgets' success, the team of T Types driven by Mike Armstrong, Mike Wilson and Ivan Wallace won the Register Trophy.

Ivan is another member from that time who is no longer with us. He was quite a



Presentation of the California Cup in 1971 by Elsie Cobban, wife of Gordon, far right, who was a stalwart organiser during the MGCC's somewhat precarious state during the late 1960s and '70s.

character and did sterling service as Centre Spares secretary.

Returning from Silverstone we were glad of assistance from Terry Chambers and his "short tow rope". Having told this tale to others in the Ulster Centre, I now find that Terry repeated his rapid recoveries with at least two other members. We were about seven miles from Stranraer heading for the ferry back home to Larne – remember those days, before the A75 "improvements" and the notorious section of road approaching the railway bridge – when the crankshaft pulley split, the rivets having cried enough after the weekend of autotests and the long and (for a Midget) fast drive to Silverstone and back.

We were able to persuade a farmer to tow us to the ferry terminal, knowing that Terry was booked on the same boat. Sure enough he arrived and towed us onto the boat and at Larne proceeded to race off down the Larne-line at an ever increasing speed, with us at the end of his tow rope, which was at most four feet long! We were delivered to the flat on the Antrim Road quicker than we could have driven ourselves, a little nervous and shaken after trying to peer round Terry's car at 60 mph to anticipate the road ahead and avoid ramming him up the rear! Terry was very generous with

his offers of tow assistance; Mike Armstrong tells a similar tale, which may explain the short tow rope, as he says he kept running over it; he mentions another memorably speedy tow by Terry after a Silverstone California Cup meeting when George McCrea had a gearbox breakage during the autotests.

Terry, another early member no longer with us, was treasurer of the Ulster Centre for many years from its inception and Chairman 1996 and 1997 (and one of the first to put an LSD in the back axle of his Midget!).

1970 was the year the Ulster Centre was awarded the Gold Cup and the Midget was

driven again the length of England to join other Ulster Centre members at the MGCC Annual Dinner and Prize Presentation at the Hyde Park Hotel. The hotel doorman did not bat an eyelid as the somewhat scruffy red Midget stopped outside the hotel while he politely gave us directions to the car park for the evening.

Having developed the need for speed – Safety Fast of course - later in 1971 we spotted a Midget of similar vintage, but with some engine modifications including a Reece Fish carburettor. After swapping our Midget's uprated lever arm dampers for the standard items on MTE 651C, 1879 PZ was sold.

To be continued

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