

August 2018

The

# Magazine

Photo by John Watson



Golden Jubilee

Ulster  Centre

1968 - 2018

# Ulster Centre azine Editorial

## Simon Johnston

After the excitement of May when the editorial J2 was in action on the Triple-M Tour in Scotland, the UVCC Percy French Rally to County Cavan and, of course, the Ulster Centre Jubilee Tour to the North West, I was hoping that June would prove to be undramatic but my hopes were dashed when the J2 went onto three cylinders after being stuck in heavy traffic in Ballynahinch on my way to Will Corry's establishment at the Spa. It recovered, more or less, but once back home I checked out the newly fitted distributor lest it be the culprit and found, to my amazement, that there was no carbon brush and since there was no sign of any bits of carbon in the distributor I can only conclude that it had fallen out when fitting the cap and I hadn't noticed.

Assuming that this was the cause of the misfiring I ordered a new cap (I had noticed that mine was cracked, presumably as a result of the arcing that must have been taking place in side the cap with no carbon brush) and thought no more about it. The new cap duly arrived and after fitting it I started the car to make sure all was well and was dismayed to see smoke pouring from the oil filler neck on the side of the crankcase. (If you're interested you can see a video of it [here](#).)

Clearly there was more to this than just a missing carbon brush and a compression test revealed the bad news. Three cylinders had 150 psi but one was only 25 psi. Nowt else for it but off with its head but this didn't really help as there was no obvious piston or head damage. So out with the engine, and a strip down revealed that the cause was stuck rings on the offending piston. In addition at least one ring was stuck on each of the other three pistons.

With the engine out I also noticed that the splines on the gearbox input shaft were badly worn, despite being newly fettled about 5,000 miles ago. So clearly not a happy state of affairs.

Our plans to participate in the Vintage Minor Register's event at Prescott Hill Climb at the end of July were well and truly scotched as replacement piston rings had to come from Kawasaki in Japan (yes, really!) and didn't arrive until late July. But I think I've got everything I need now so once this

MaGazine gets finished I'll be back to the garage to try and get it all put back together again ASAP.

The disheartening thing about it all is that this is actually the fourth time this engine has been built in less than 12,000 miles. The other three times it was done by Triple-M specialists at not inconsiderable cost. Hopefully by doing it myself I'll get it to run properly and reliably.

Having said that, sadly there's really little opportunity to use it on Ulster Centre events as they cater primarily for more modern cars, and not just more modern MGs. I was amused to note in Gordon Buckley's advance information about the Ulster Classic Trial next month that there'd be no Mazda MX5s and only an MG could win. Makes me wonder why all our events aren't like that. Checking back at a couple of our autotests I see that fewer than half of the entrants are MG Car Club members and I recall that I did a Trial in the J2 a few years ago and out of twenty-four entries mine was the only MG; but worse than that, two thirds of the entry weren't even members of the Club. So we seem to be acting as the motor sport arm for other clubs, and to what benefit?

Answers on a post card (remember those?), please!

On a more positive note, the big event which more or less wraps up our Golden Jubilee Year is the Gala Dinner in the Titanic Hotel on Saturday 29 September. You'll have got an invitation to this included with August's *Safety Fast!* and your Jubilee Committee hopes that members and friends will make a real effort to join our celebrations.

Those of us who were around Belfast with our T Types in 1968 probably never thought we'd make it this far, and certainly never thought that we'd still be mad enough to be messing about with MGs. But here we are, still messing about with them. I called over to see Mike Armstrong a few days ago and where was he? In the garage. And what was he doing? Starting a new rebuild of a TC. Yep, starting yet another rebuild. And I thought I was bad!

*Front Cover: Just to show there's no bias against modern MGs, here's John Watson's new MG ZS*      *Photo: John Watson*

# Dates for Your Diary

We've had a few months of calm after our Jubilee Tour but there's plenty coming up to tempt you out. The big event in the coming months, of course, is our Fiftieth Anniversary Dinner at the Titanic Hotel on Saturday 29 September. You'll have got details about it with **Safety Fast!** this month and these are repeated elsewhere in this MaGazine. Before that, however, we have a packed programme of both social and competitive events.

## Tuesday 14 August

***Nosh 'n' Natter, Poacher's Pocket, Lisbane From 12.30 onwards***

These lunchtime get togethers are proving to be very popular and the Poacher's Pocket venue seems to be ideal as the food and service are good, there's plenty of parking and plenty of room for everyone. Please let Carol Willis know if you'll be coming so that she can give the restaurant some idea of numbers. Tel 07831 345560, email [carol.mgulster@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:carol.mgulster@hotmail.co.uk)

## Sunday 19 August

***Visit to Whitehead Railway Museum.***

I'm pleased to say that we have enough folks signed up for this visit for it to go ahead and more details can be found elsewhere in the Magazine. More information about the Museum can be found on the website of the [Railway Preservation Society of Ireland](http://www.railwaypreservation.ie)

## Sunday 2 September

***MG Day at Carrickfergus.***

After the success of our inaugural MG Day at Cultra last year, we've handed the baton over to our friends in the MG Owners' Club who are organising this year's event. This is going to be held at the Yacht Club at Carrickfergus and more details will be available as things get finalised. In the meantime, put the date in your diary to bring your MG along. We had nearly 100 cars at Cultra – let's try and double that this year! And if you can't bring your MG, then do please offer your services to help marshal the event. See also the flyer included with this MaGazine for the Charity Stall autojumble. Now's the chance to clear out those unwanted bits and pieces!

## Friday 7 September

***Classic Trial***

This kicks off at 17.30 hrs at McKee's Farm, Strangford View, Holywood Road, Newtownards, BT23 4TQ. The regs are available [here](#) and online entries will shortly be available. Check the website for details – [www.mgcculstercentre.co.uk](http://www.mgcculstercentre.co.uk)

## September

***Trial, date and venue TBA***

## Saturday 22 September

***Autotest, venue TBA***

## Saturday 29 September

***Golden Jubilee Anniversary Dinner/Dance***

This is being held at the delightful new [Titanic Hotel](#) in the Titanic Quarter of Belfast. This is a splendid venue utilising the old drawing offices of Harland and Wolff. This event will pretty much wrap up our Jubilee Year celebrations and we hope to see lots of members and friends helping us celebrate the occasion. One not to miss. Keep the date in your diary.

## Saturday 6 October

***Trial, venue TBA***

## Saturday 20 October

***Autotest, venue TBA***

## Saturday 3 November

***AutoSOLO, venue TBA***

# Ulster Centre



## Golden Jubilee 1968 - 2018

*The President, Vice-President, Chairman and Committee of the*

***ULSTER CENTRE OF THE MG CAR CLUB***

*Request the Pleasure of Your Company at the*

***50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER***

***on SATURDAY 29<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018 at 7.00 pm***

*at*

***THE TITANIC HOTEL, BELFAST***

***Dancing afterwards to the MARTELLO JAZZ BAND***

**Tickets: £35 per person**

**Dress: Formal or Lounge suits**

RSVP (indicating any dietary requirements) by 1<sup>st</sup> September at the latest to:

M. Armstrong, 32 Clogher Road, Lisburn, BT27 5PQ

Cheques to be made out to: "MG Car Club (Ulster Centre) Ltd"

# Competition Corner

## Gordon Buckley Report

### Evening Autotest at TTS, 14 June 2018

With a maximum entry of 30, we enjoyed three tests of differing character at our evening autotest at TTS on Thursday 14th June. The first test, in front of the TTS building, was a fast flowing run close to threatening kerbs with a couple of reversing manoeuvres to add some technicality, not to say bravery.

The 2nd Test had the potential to rearrange the bodywork as cars weaved quickly through concrete blocks. It was at this point, for the Midget brigade, that a heavy shower turned the test into a bar of soap. Again a nice flowing test with a couple of nice reversing manoeuvres to add some interest.

The 3rd Test was a power forwards only slalom with a tricky tail throw in the middle where momentum was hard to find to carry off the move. Harder than it looked.

Rather predictably Ashley Lamont took the honours with a perfect drive in the Vauxhall

powered Special. Well done to him. Looking calm and controlled, Ashley put in a convincing win from Andy Blair who, unusually, was proving that he could also do rear wheel drive in dad Paul's Stryker. Andy picked up the class win forfeited by overall winner Ashley.

A stellar drive by Crawford Ewing in the Nova Special earned him a terrific 3rd place, pipping David Jenkins by several seconds

First MG home was Gordon Buckley in a very close battle with Michael Reid.

Class winners were as follows :

Class 4 – Gordon Buckley

Class 5 – Andrew Earney

Class 6 – Mark Francis

Class 7 – Andy Blair

Class 9 – Redmond McNamee

FULL RESULTS HERE: [tts results 2018 06](#)

## Upcoming Events

We had hoped to run a Trial in August but the lack of venue has knocked that on the head. Hopefully we'll have a venue sorted out for the September event.

### Ulster Classic Trial, 7 September 2018

Well, how our excellent summer is flying by and we now look to September which, of course, means Noel Cochrane's Ulster Classic Trial. It takes place on **Friday 7th September from McKee's Farm, Strangford View, Newtownards.** This is almost the last remaining classic-only autotest and trials event left on the motorsport calendar. No MX5s in this one and it can only be won by an MG. (*Why aren't all our*

*events like this? Ed.)* So have a look at the regs [here](#) and start preparing your classic to compete in this superb event. Noel always has a few surprises up his sleeve so don't miss this one. Entries will be through Rallyscore but, as always, members and regulars will be given advance notice as to when the system will go live. Please support this unique event. Hope to see you there.

# Whitehead Railway Museum

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August**



Take a fascinating journey through the history of Irish railways at the Whitehead Railway Museum.

The museum showcases a large collection of heritage trains many of which have been restored to their full glory.

There will be an hour-long guided tour where you can get up close to some magnificent steam locomotives and vintage carriages - step aboard the dining car which houses an exhibition about meals on the move or go inside the signal box where you can pull the levers.

After our tour we can relax in the award-winning Edwardian Tea Room where we will be served tea/ coffee, scones and tray bakes.

Leaving the Railway Museum at 3.00pm we will then go for a mystery drive around East Antrim arriving back at the Whitehead Golf Club for the evening meal – a two course carvery.

We are able to accommodate some last minute entries so those who want to take part need to commit by way of the included application form which must be sent, along with payment, to Carol Willis by Friday 17 August.

**We will meet at Hazelbank Car Park, which is off the roundabout at the end of the M5, at 12 noon for a 12.30 pm drive off**

**MG Car Club**  
**Whitehead Railway Museum Run Form**

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

**Meet at:** Hazelbank Car Park – located just off the roundabout at the end of the M5

**Time:** 12.00 noon for a 12.30 pm drive off.

**Venue:** Whitehead Railway Museum. Cost, including tea/ coffee, scones and tray bakes is £8 per person.

**Evening Meal:** Whitehead Golf Club. Cost is £13.95 per person payable on the day directly to the Golf Club.

Main course carvery with choice of 3 or 4 meats. Vegetarian option available by request. You will need to preselect your dessert from the menu below.

Main Course: Carvery ( ) Vegetarian ( )

Dessert: Apple Crumble ( ) Sticky Toffee Pudding ( )

Chocolate Fudge Cake ( ) Lemon Meringue ( )

Strawberry Pavlova ( ) Cheesecake of the Day ( )

**oo0oo**

Number of persons @ £8 each .....

Total Enclosed £.....

Cheques should be made payable to MG Car Club Ulster Centre

**oo0oo**

Name.....

Signature.....

**oo0oo**

Please complete this form and send it, with your payment to: Carol Willis, 68 Shandon Park, Belfast, BT5 6NY, to reach her no later than 17 August 2018.

**Keep a copy of this form as a record of your order.**

# MG Day

## Carrickfergus Sailing Club

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September from 10 a.m. to  
4 p.m.**

**A large display of MG Cars from 1930s to 2018**

- Trade Stands.
- Charity autojumble stall.
- Meet TV personality Fuzz Townshend from “Car S.O.S.” fame.
- If you have an MG bring it along.
- Open to the public – everyone welcome.
- See the Metro 6R4 rally car on display
- Bar and restaurant facilities
- Parking for non MG classic and sports cars.

Free Admission for All

**All proceeds in aid of Royal Victoria Hospital Liver Support Group**

Organised by the MG Owners' Club, N. Ireland supported by the MG Car Club Ulster Centre and the MG Enthusiasts Club.

[www.mgcculstercentre.co.uk](http://www.mgcculstercentre.co.uk)

Can't seem to find a use for all those spare parts you've accumulated?

Then donate them to the MG Day Charity Stall.



Yes!.... we are having a Charity Stall at MG Day this year on 2<sup>nd</sup> September and we are asking all our members to donate an automotive related item or items – not necessarily MG related.

***We are interested in all the things you would see in regular autojumbles.***

Things such as:

- Car parts – carburettors, instruments, air filters, rocker covers, steering wheels, spark plugs, hoses, etc. We can't cope with heavy items such as gearboxes.
- Car accessories – spot lights, seat covers, etc.
- Garage tools – hand tools, foot pumps, jacks, etc.
- Automobilia – old number plates, badges, posters, oil cans, etc.
- Regalia – scarves, mugs, bags, etc.
- Books and DVDs – motoring history, manuals, etc.
- Unopened tins or bottles – polish, oil, shampoo, spray paint, etc.
- Models of cars – Dinky, Corgi and similar modern equivalent.

Please bring your items to:

**Carol Willis, 68 Shandon Park, Belfast, BT5 6NY Tel: 07831 345560**

Please note that all items are donated and cannot be returned

# My MGenes

## Mike Armstrong

### Part 8: Competition Time



*Photo: From the cover of Safety Fast 1999 – Land's End Trial*

What is the point of owning and driving a great car such as an MG if you don't use it for a bit of competition? It vastly increases the fun of owning the car and allows you to socialize with like-minded people. MGs were designed and made with competition in mind and there is a vast array of motorsport for you to enjoy.

I think that nearly all of the MGs that I have owned – and there have been many – have been used in competition in one form or another, as you may well have gathered if you have followed previous episodes.

For me it started when I was about 15 as back seat navigator in a Morris Minor in the 1953 "1,000 Mile Circuit of Ireland". In those days we followed most of the route on Esso maps which were either free at Esso garages or cost a mere 6d (old pennies). They were pretty basic and of poor quality, but we managed. There were a few ½ inch to the mile Ordnance Survey maps available. I enjoyed the thrill of going fast enough to actually skid going round corners. My main job was in the 24 mph Regularity sections. Stop watches were in short supply so we used an old egg-timer which ran

for about 50 minutes, and we pasted a scale on the face which told you how far you should have travelled in the time at 24 mph. Crude but effective.

Little by little I learned to navigate with increasingly better quality maps and accompanied my Dad in his TC on several North East Centre Rallies during school holidays. Important lessons for a navigator were learned. In one all night rally, while waiting to start and having plotted the route, we noticed cars leaving the start and turning right. My map indicated straight on and that's the way we went. Some 20 miles later I discovered another page of instructions which showed a right turn after the start. Back we went with a driver not best pleased. "Always read ALL of the instructions!!"



*Me and my Dad, North East Rally 1955*

On another occasion we were running a bit late and I noticed a shorter route to the next Control via a ford. Like a good driver my Dad followed his navigator's instructions and entered the ford – even though the far bank was not illuminated in the headlights. With water swirling around the running boards land appeared – but relief was brief. It was an island beyond which was another stretch of river into

which we plunged. A minute or so later land appeared again with a lane ahead – up which we hastened and at the top of which on our left was a Control. Clocking in we continued the rally only to find in the results that we had lost a lot of marks for a wrong approach plus an early penalty for having apparently averaged some 80 mph by taking the shorter route!

In 1955 I navigated for my Dad on “The Circuit” without great success. The photo below shows Sidney Armstrong’s TD. In the centre of the three people is the late Harry Reilly from Omagh talking to Wilson McComb on his left. Harry drove his black TC “like the Devil”. At the rear is my Dad’s TC.



Taken on 10<sup>th</sup> April, Circuit of Ireland 1955 north of Bantry Bay.

Then I moved to Northern Ireland in March 1955 and I navigated for my uncle Sidney in the 1953 TD MG on many local rallies. In 1956 he and I did “The Circuit” in the TD. In 1957 the Suez Canal was closed by Egypt blockading the canal and the ensuing petrol rationing caused the Circuit of Ireland Rally to be postponed. We did the rally from 1958 to 1961 in a variety of MGAs and manage a 3<sup>rd</sup> and a 2<sup>nd</sup> in our class.

Competition in MY OWN car started in 1958 when I eventually had my little 1934 two-seater Morris Minor (VH 6722) finished and entered several Queen’s University Motor Club short rallies with my sister. Competition was fierce with a Jaguar driven by David Mitchell, a Dellow by Denis Bell, an MG TA driven by Chris Gibson and an Austin A40 “Devon” driven by one Terry Harriman, later of World Rally Championship fame

There was then a gap after I qualified in medicine in 1961 and also got married. The Morris Minor was swapped for a 1936 MG TA (FZ1835) (*top right*) about 1963 and as a

member of the “Ulster T Owners Club” mild forms of competition followed. That club became the MG Ulster Centre in 1968 and more serious competition followed once the club was recognized by the RAC.



By then my chariot had become a red MG TC (ZH914) (*below*). As work allowed this car was used in PCTs and Autotests. It took part in several successful forays to Silverstone for the Register Trophy in the California Cup event. The TC was eventually sold because I needed the money and the proceeds allowed the purchase of an MGC (*overleaf*).

Although used for autotesting the awful understeer made cornering in tight tests very awkward. I used it also in my first attempt at





hillclimbs – notably Glenariff. The power was great but again the corners had to be treated with respect. Eventually it was replaced by a NEW MGB (HAV 921W) in 1980. This car was used a few times for autotesting and PCT's but by this time there were more interesting cars in the stable

The new 'B' is shown below at a PCT in the snow. It had a hard life as my everyday car and then passed on down the family until eventually sold in London. I quite wish that I had it back as it was a great car. I actually got 9<sup>th</sup> overall in it at the California Cup at Silverstone.



Mike Wilson and I built a "TC Racer" (GZ 7852) at a time in the 1980s when the Ulster Centre was participating in MG racing at Kirkistown and, on one occasion, at Mondello. The car was fun to drive and we had grids of up to 20 MG's which allowed handicap racing. An attempt at supercharging turned out to be not a great success and was eventually abandoned.

After lying idle for several years the car was returned to road going trim and was sold to an MG dealer in England. I was surprised to see it for sale at Silverstone in 2017, almost exactly in the same condition as when originally sold but *sans* anti-roll cage and with a different



Registration number. I couldn't afford the £29 K that was being asked!!

Other additions to "the stable" were a J2, a TD, and a Midget. The J2 was built from 'bits', the TD was passed down from my Dad, and the Midget was bought for racing. But more about them next time.



## Parting shot ...

This is the advertisement from the February 1979 Newsletter for our Dinner Dance and Prize Giving. I was the Hon Sec in those days and produced the bi-monthly Newsletter using a portable typewriter to write it and the good offices of Corry Business Equipment to do the photocopying. In those days we actually printed the Newsletter and posted it out to members! Can you believe it? I got a good friend of mine to do the artwork for me. Terrific, isn't it? And at £6 a head in those days, the price is actually pretty comparable to the figure of £35 for our Jubilee Dinner. So, no excuses!

