

An MG in Emerald Pt 2

Trips from Emerald to Rockhampton, and occasionally to Brisbane, were rarely uneventful as it was most unusual to do such a trip without at least a puncture. Prior to one trip to Brisbane, the battery had started to lose its charge when idle for a few days. As batteries were far cheaper in Brisbane I endeavoured to sustain the charge using a borrowed charger. The theory was that it wouldn't cause a problem on the long run. It didn't. Initially! Just before it began to get dark, the generator ceased to charge and as I could see nothing obviously wrong, I returned the short distance to Miriam Vale to seek professional assistance. The diagnosis was that the generator bearings were so badly worn that the armature was hitting the pole faces leading to a lack of charge.

As there seemed little point in continuing in the dark, I obtained a room at the hotel for the night and got underway early in the morning. To prevent further damage, the fanbelt was taken off in the hope that the air speed would keep the fan on the water pump turning and keep the motor cool. All went well until just outside Childers, at a place called Apple Tree Creek, where the engine began to cut out.



Even though the suspect battery was easily up to the task of cranking the engine, it still wouldn't fire. It seemed as though there was a short on the ignition system somewhere. At that stage I took time out to think and to take a photograph. For some inexplicable reason, the car went when I again tried to start it.

Trouble at Apple Tree Creek

About 20 km south of Maryborough, after about 80 km of trouble free motoring, the problem reoccurred. Fortunately I was able to pass a message to an RACQ Patrol Officer who had been helping another stranded motorist closer to Maryborough. It was the same problem, a short on the ignition system. With the limited test gear at our disposal, we couldn't locate the cause of the trouble particularly as it was intermittent. By disconnecting most of the auxiliaries and providing a direct lead to the ignition system with a piece of wire and an alligator clip we got things going again. It was a bit inconvenient as it meant lifting the bonnet each time I wanted to stop the engine.

At Gympie I decided to get the battery fast charged in the hope that it would last out the remainder of the trip. Besides, I was getting hungry. The garage proprietor wasn't keen

on the idea of a fast charge as he reasoned it could ruin the battery. At that stage it seemed the least of my worries. All I wanted was enough stored electrical energy to get me to my parents' home at Woodford. Depending on which road you take, Woodford is between 25 km and 30 km from the main highway. As it was again getting dark, as I approached Beerwah I opted for the longer route via Caboolture. The road from Beerwah climbs a range overlooking the Glasshouse Mountains and despite its twists and turns would have been a pleasant enough drive had I been sure of having headlights. When it got really dark I had to use the headlights until a car passed me and I was able to drive behind using only parking lights. When Caboolture was reached, the highway now bypasses it, I turned off and drove without lights to the outskirts of the town. I continued on my way, after turning on the headlights, and arrived at Woodford without further problems.

The following morning the fault was proved to be into the wiring to the stop light switch, located and a repair made. Preparations were then made for the trip into Brisbane on the Monday morning to purchase a new battery. To keep the fan and water pump assembly engine driven, I cut the fan belt, shortened it and joined the two ends together with a couple of loops of soft copper wire laced through the holes drilled into the two ends of the vee-belt. Having purchased a new battery in Brisbane, the generator was taken to a repairer in the hope of getting an exchange unit. This was not possible as any TC owner can tell you that the generator on a TC has a special housing at the rear for the rev-counter drive. This meant a delay of at least a week for the unit to be fully reconditioned. Surprisingly, both the joined fan belt and the battery charge survived until the generator was refitted.

On one occasion I drove the 960 km from Brisbane to Emerald in a little under 15 hours with only three stops at Gympie, Gin Gin and Rockhampton. I arrived at Emerald just after midnight and sat in the car for a few minutes. When I shut my eyes I could still see the trees and guideposts going past and the seemingly endless corrugations unfolding before me. It may seem a slow trip by current standards but in those days there were still hundreds of kilometers of corrugated gravel roads and a TC had a maximum speed, in top condition when tested by "The Autocar" in 1947, of 120 km/h. On the road bypassing Bundaberg, a saving of 52 km, there was a creek crossing almost always covered by running water. There is photograph illustrates the scene.



There was also a spot on the same gravel stretch where the road turned sharp left as you crested a rise. After a few trips I got to recognize it by a tall dead tree which appeared to be in the centre of the road as you came up the hill. As soon as you recognized the tree you prepared for the unexpected turn just ahead. The section is now a good bitumen road but no longer goes through a small town where steam locomotives were sometimes still seen hauling strings of wagons laden with freshly cut sugarcane.

There was also a road in the early fifties which bypassed Gladstone. It was little more than a track winding in and out between the trees and diving into and out of gullies and creeks but it saved almost 30 km. It was certainly not recommended in wet weather and like many others has now become a well made bitumen road. The gates at the railway level crossing which had to be opened by the gatekeeper have also been bypassed. On one occasion I passed through just prior to Christmas and the gate was opened, after a train had passed, by the gatekeeper's young son. While I was waiting he told me he had been doing very well for his Christmas stocking.

Should you be concerned at the current price of petrol, in Brisbane and near city areas of between 46 and 59 cent per litre depending on the state of the price war (Ed: this was written in 1989), you may be interested to hear that in Emerald in 1952-3, it was four shillings and sixpence a gallon and in Rockhampton, three shillings and ten pence halfpenny. In metric terms, that is less than 10c a litre in Emerald and 8.5c a litre in Rockhampton. At the time it was only 7.4c a litre in Brisbane. Whenever I made the trip from Emerald to Rockhampton I tried to leave on the 280 km trip with only enough



petrol, about 28 litres, in the 61 litre tank to get me there. Before leaving Rockhampton for the return trip, the tank was filled to capacity. This allowed me to arrive back in Emerald with about 33 litres of petrol which had cost me \$2.80. The same amount of petrol in Emerald would have cost \$3.30. The saving of 50c gave me a bonus of 5 litres of petrol for the same outlay. To put things in perspective, my annual salary at the time was \$1720.

Some months before I left Emerald, the town gained its first stretch of bitumen road. It ran from near the hospital, on the Clermont road, and began with a fairly long straight. From the outskirts of the town there were three corners leading into the main street with the railway station on one side and the shops and hotels on the

other. The street then led out of town over the Nogoia River Bridge. The bitumen ended at the Springsure turnoff from the road to Rockhampton. It made for a short but pleasant drive compared to the other streets and roads around the town. Unfortunately if a cream MG with red mudguards was seen tearing along the bitumen exceeding the speed limit it would not have needed Sherlock Holmes to find the offender. For that reason its potential for a high speed dash was never fully realized.

Apart from the habit of breaking spokes, the wheels of an MG TC had another problem. This was getting the 19 inch (48 cm) tyres to fit the rims. The correct size according to the handbook was 4.50 x 19 but I cannot recall using them. Perhaps they were not available in Australia as 4.40 x 19 tyres were fitted to the car when it was purchased. Before going to Emerald I was in a job situation which involved a large amount of travel throughout Queensland. Everywhere I went I made enquiries at tyre dealers, garages and even country stores. On one occasion I was able to buy two 4.40 x 19 tyres at a grocery store in Proserpine. They were still wrapped in the strips of paper as was once common. I am sure the proprietor thought he would never sell them. On this occasion I was quite happy to take them both back to Brisbane courtesy of the then Trans Australia Airlines.

One afternoon when staying at my usual Brisbane residence, a boarding house at the corner of Vulture and Leopold Streets, Kangaroo Pt, I decided to go for a short run after fitting a new retread to a rear wheel. Just near the top of a long hill at Morningside there was a loud bang a hiss which caused me to slow down and to pull off the road to change the wheel. All I could see sticking out of my now not so new retread was a small piece of iron which I grabbed with a pair of pliers. Eventually it came out; half a horseshoe! The shoe had worn through at the front and had broken away from the hoof of someone's horse leaving a sharp end to penetrate my tyre. Horses have never been a favourite of mine either before or since.

I did not know at the time that a few years later I would place an order for an MGA at the garage at the bottom of the same hill. The Swift Service Station as it was called was a popular spot with many MG owners but I did not know this until a few years later.



One evening, about 6 pm, I was on my way to my parents' home at Woodford when a bolt 7.5cm long punctured a tyre. As is usual with 'knock off' hub caps, it took only a few minutes to change the wheel. About 16 km further along the way I suddenly thought

of the wheel nut hammer. It wasn't behind the seat in its usual place so where was it? Hopefully it was still lying beside the road 16 km back. A quick trip back showed it wasn't there but as I walked back to the car it turned up! It was only a few centimeters away from its proper place even if a bit unsafe. After you replace the 'knock on' nut which holds the spare wheel of a TC to its carrier, the convenient place to put the hammer is on top of the externally mounted petrol tank. There it stays, on some occasions, kept there by the tyre and the rubbers which protect the tank from the holding straps.

While at Emerald the tyre situation got worse and it became necessary to go to tyres larger than those normally fitted. If my memory is not playing tricks they were, in the old Imperial measure, 5.00 x 19 which is not much bigger than specified. Strangely they looked large by comparison. The roads being what they were, and often having to use retreads, meant that punctures and an occasional blowout were not uncommon. It was fairly rare to manage a trip to Rockhampton and back without one or the other. On one trip to Brisbane, after using the spare wheel, and fixing a puncture and also using a spare tube, I was dismayed to hear the flap! flap! of a tread lifting off one of the oversize rear tyres. As I already had two tubes which needed vulcanizing to provide a proper repair it was necessary to work by the roadside and make a swap. First I had to take the oversize tube out of the damaged tyre, then remove the punctured tube from the tyre on the spare wheel and put the oversize tube in the smaller tyre and fit it to the wheel. This sufficed to get me the 226 km to Maryborough where I was able to get the standard size tubes repaired and restore things to normal. The oversize tube had a few crease marks as a result of it being cooped up in the smaller tyre. I clearly remember the crease marks so perhaps the oversize tyres were in reality 5.50 x 19.

