

## **Origins of the sacred Octagon**

by Graeme Walker

Ever wondered where on earth all of the great marques symbols and motifs came from? Perhaps you are aware of some of them including Henry's ubiquitous blue oval, the General's lion, BMW's "spinning propeller" (stolen, I should add from a 1912 Robert Delaunay painting; a Frenchman no less), Mercedes Benz's elegant tri-star, Citroën's chevron cut-gears; the list is endless and they invariably have their own beautiful little tales to tell.

But what of the sacred octagon, a motif unmolested by the ravages of time and stylistic abuse committed in the name of updating or modernizing?

Try this one out. Ask any MG nut to name who was actually responsible for designing the deceptively simple octagonal motif containing a very angular MG? They may offer Cecil Kimber, the man almost responsible for so much MG folklore; the more thoughtful may admit uncertainty and the very considered may reply that no one really knows for sure.

It's an interesting question and one not fully explored that I'm aware of.

Cecil Kimber was largely responsible for the total marque image; remember that initially Morris Garages was a minor off-shoot of a burgeoning empire that "old-man Morris" was rapidly expanding during the post great-war period. Kimber essentially inherited, in a business sense, Oxford Garages (soon to be renamed Morris Garages) which was essentially all about marketing. The first MGs were effectively badge-engineered Morris Cowleys.

The marque's elevation beyond that is an extraordinary story in itself, and speaks volumes for Kimber's ability to surround himself with the right people and effectively deploy them to achieve their greatest potential. In doing so he gave rise to the legendary Marque. Kimber, apart from having a marvelous sense of design, was an extremely talented organizer of men and materials.

Kimber had octagons on everything, from dip-stick ends to oil tank lids, radiator caps to instrument bezels; they were embossed in upholstery, chromed, paint-filled, printed and stamped. If this wasn't enough, the

octagon theme was even pushed (screaming in some cases I should add) into the third dimension with semi-octagonal tappet covers, artfully splayed (but possibly uncomfortable) octagonal gear change knobs, highly sculpted octagonal aluminium gear change extension casings, the litany is endless..

This obsession didn't stop on the cars, either. MG's famous executive lunch room had octagonal napkin rings, embroidered linen napery and placemats. These chaps pre-dated contemporary image saturation by about 70 years.

But who actually came up with the Octagon and developed it into the motif we all know?

There are lots of folkloric suggestions as to who actually designed the octagon - company illustrators, outside cartoonists and designers - would you believe a cost accountant employed by old man Morris !

According to an article I chanced upon by the late Jonathan Wood, in the March 1982 issue of "Thoroughbred and Classic Cars", a young man called Ted Lee had been employed by William Morris at about the same time as Kimber (1922-3) and it was Ted who designed the sacred octagon. Ted was known to Kimber prior to this, and Kimber had assisted Lee by paying half of his accountancy tuition fees. Apparently, after discussing plans for Kimber's latest project in 1924, Ted set to drawing-up the very first octagon, with a little ruler that he had bought during high school (wonder if that "little ruler" and that scrap of paper is still around in a museum case somewhere?) Kimber saw the motif and immediately said "that's just the thing", it's angular art-deco style reflecting contemporary fashion. William Morris was then presented with the design and Lee remembers him saying it was "the best thing to come into the company", adding "and it will never go out of it".

Truer words have seldom been spoken. Now over 80 years later the octagon survives petty much just as Cecil Kimber first saw a small drawing made by an accountant.

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Want to knit an MG jumper, beanie or whatever and incorporate the octaton into it? Delia Rayment has made the MG Octagon pattern available. The recommendations that come with the pattern are:

Use any standard raglan-sleeved pattern using 8 ply yarn. Proceed as

