

My Second MG

Having made the decision that the MG "TC" should be replaced by a new model MG a visit was made to the local agents who were trading as "The Bay Road Garage and Service Station". It was April 1954 and a number of the latest model MG, the 1250cc "TF" were becoming available. I had read a great deal about them in the pages of the English motoring magazines "The Motor" and "Autocar". While the writers' comments were not all favourable, the car was obviously better than the "TC", which was two models earlier, and an improvement on the intervening model the "TD".



A TD in the ditch at Whites Hill Hillclimb

The first MG "TD" I ever saw finished up in a ditch at a hill climb at Whites Hill in Brisbane. The "TD" was the first of the series with independent front suspension and it had disc wheels as standard. This latter feature was not well received by Australian MG fanatics and in some quarters they were referred to as "Pansy Wagons!" As a result the TFs delivered in Australia had the favoured "knock off" hubcaps and wire wheels. The TF's you may see with disc wheels have, I understand, been privately imported.

The salesman at the garage wasn't very interested in MG cars but consented to look up the price which was about \$2430. He responded with a look of amazement when I raised the question of a deposit and said "Do you want to buy one?" Having got an answer in the affirmative he added the remark, "We haven't sold an MG in almost fifteen years!" I was prepared to accept the fifteen years but I certainly couldn't see that he had sold this one.

I paid the deposit of \$50 on April 23rd 1954 and stipulated red upholstery, preferably in a red car or, as second choice, in a black car. It was almost three months to the day before I took delivery. The "TF" was picked up on behalf of the dealer, from the Brisbane depot of Howards in Nudgee Road, Eagle Farm on Saturday morning in late July, 1954. Their city showroom was in Adelaide Street between Creek and Wharf Streets. The first trip of a reasonable length was made the same day to take in the sights of Tamborine Mountain.

The following day I made the return trip to Maryborough and on the Monday morning took it to the dealers for the 500 mile (804km) service, much to their surprise. The noisy valve year which had developed in the first few hundred kilometers was silenced at this free service, but only for a similar distance. The car was registered as Q 649 302 on July 26th 1954. It had Chassis No.TF4304 and Engine No.XPAG TF 34205 and was of 1250cc capacity. The 1500cc versions were still not available. The upholstery was the requested red, as it had been in the "TC", but I had to be satisfied with a black car. The compulsory Third Party Insurance Policy described the car as a "Morris MG Sports Roadster" and the cost was five dollars. Please don't check your current registration to find out what the third party component is now because it will only upset you. Payment was financed through the Commonwealth Bank and the agreement paid out on 27th October 1954 after I had sold the "TC" for \$900 to the man I had bought it from. This was only \$160 less than the purchase price of \$1060 in November 1950.

The noisy tappets had to be adjusted for the third time at 1600km and the dealer was finally persuaded to remove the valve gear for checking. Close examination disclosed one pushrod with a cracked cup and another with a ball end which appeared to have missed the hardening process. The ball had a uniformly grey colour like a freshly ground valve and the pushrod was visibly shorter when matched up with the remainder of the set. They were replaced free of charge but later still two other pushrods had to be replaced because the cups were loose in the tubular part of the pushrod. It was not possible, by adjustment, to permanently quieten the valve gear but I was advised that the only cure was replacement of the cam followers. This was something I never got around to. Prior to the valve gear problems one of the flexible petrol pipes split followed by another only a few months later. Later still the flasher unit for the turn indicators also failed! At some stage, the bracket at the motor end of the engine steady rod broke and as the Queensland agents could not supply a new one I had to make one from a piece of angle iron. It never broke again but the bracket at the other end did and had to be welded.

In an article I wrote in 1955 and later sent to an MG club magazine the story of further troubles said: "At present I am unable to obtain in Queensland a set of valve springs and previously waited eight months for a windscreens". Fortunately the windscreens had only a small star and a low vertical crack which was not in front of the driver. Later still I was to complain: "In common with most other TFs, the speedometer floats about over a range of about 50km/h at any speed above 30km/h. This was not cured by overhaul of the instrument or replacement or rerouting of the drive cable. The screenwiper switch quit at 40 000 km and was replaced by a push-pull switch, leaving the wipers in permanent engagement. It is far better than twiddling in the glove box for the original control knob. Water comes in the door and runs over the side of the lock and a few drops always find a way to fall on my legs. Generally speaking the hood and sidescreens are satisfactory but the method of flat storage for the sidescreens limits the luggage space. It also makes them difficult to get out when luggage is being carried."

Petrol consumption was usually in the range of 8 to 10 litres per hundred kilometres. At almost 50 000km, I was on my fourth set of tyres due more to the driver than any failing of the car or the tyres.

Having read all of the complaints you might have got the impression that I was unhappy with the "TF" but that was not the case. In fact during the 21 months of ownership it gave me a great deal of pleasure and enabled me to make a lot of good friends and to participate in a wider range of sporting activities, occasionally with some success. The 1954 REDEX Trial came through Maryborough and created enough local interest for the Apex Club to organize a one day rally to be held on Sunday, October 3, 1954.



Bob Pryer, MGY, Redex Trial, Maryborough, 1954

This was apparently too good an opportunity to miss and arrangements were made for a navigator, and an entry submitted. While I no longer have any clear recollection of the rally I do have a newspaper cutting which lists my entry as Car 37, the name of my navigator (a workmate Leon Gregg) and our starting time. The winner was C.P. Moes (Chevrolet) with a loss of nine points. We were placed equal seventh overall having lost nineteen points and came second in the "under 1500cc" class behind J.A. Casey (Volkswagen) who had lost sixteen points. The winner of the "over 2500cc" class was J.J. Casey (Plymouth) with nineteen points last. The "1500 to 2500cc" class was won by L.N. Jones (Vanguard) who had lost only ten points. There had been 48 entries listed in the paper originally but on the day there were 51 eager competitors at the starting line. There were fifteen manufacturers represented led by the ten Ford entries. Half of these were V8's. There were ten Morris entries, one of which hit a rock hidden in a cloud of dust and overturned. Fortunately no one was injured. There were six Vanguards and Austin and Holden accounted for five each followed by Chevrolet four, Hillman three and Singer two. Other makes were Volkswagen, Jaguar, Humber, Triumph Mayflower, MG and a Commer van. No doubt some of the names would be unfamiliar to many of today's competitors.

A few weeks earlier the "Brisbane Telegraph" newspaper had announced that they would be organising their second annual rally to be held during October, 1954. While I am not sure of the date it is likely that it was held on the weekend of October 16 and 17, as the results appeared in their motoring section on Friday, October 22, 1954. After coming eighteenth out of 214 in the MG "TC" the previous year there was plenty of incentive to try again in the new MG "TF". This time my navigator was to be John Butler from Bundaberg whom I had met through the Motor Manual Goodwill Club. We were car 98 off the starting line. As in 1953 there were a large number of entrants but this time they were split into a Northern and a Southern Division to cover the course in opposite directions. We messed it up a bit early on the first day, as did many others, and fell into a trap set by the organisers. Back on the right track we had to ford a flooded creek. The "TF" didn't miss a beat but when we got through we had maps and bits of paper floating in the water all over the floor. Before the rally the car had smelt of leather and other new car smells but it soon changed.



With navigator, John Butler, for the Telegraph Rally, October 1954

On the second day, running true to form, we got lost somewhere outside of Toowoomba and found ourselves at a flooded creek crossing with two other cars also lost. Their crews were attempting to get another lost competitor up the greasy bank on the other side of the creek. Having got him on his way the creek was not a major problem but just the same one car, a Holden, slid off the road against the bank of the cutting and made things difficult.

Once clear, their crews waited for us to have a go and to our pleasure we sailed through the creek and up the greasy bank in fine style to the cheers of those waiting to give us a push. We now found ourselves on the way to Goombungee. We ploughed along a boggy stretch of road in low gear for quite a while before reaching Goombungee where we decided to take time for a cup of tea with an aunt and uncle of mine who lived there. By this time we considered that we were well out of contention. A check of the instructions, and discussion with my uncle who had lived in the district all his life led us to the conclusion that we should at same time have been on the road from Toowoomba to Crows Nest. We cut across connecting roads and found ourselves in company with other

competitors some with earlier numbers than ours and many with later ones. By following them we were able to work out where we were on the instruction sheets.

Shortly after leaving the bitumen onto a side road we caught up to a long line of competitors waiting to attempt a long greasy hill where a competing car was already in trouble. It looked like being a long wait with a Hillman stopped half way up and sideways in the middle of the road. One driver in a model "T" Ford pulled out of the queue and churned up the hill, detoured off the road among trees to bypass the Hillman, and disappeared over the crest out of view. Despite being successful he wasn't popular with those who had been lined up in front of him. Just the same John said to me "Let's get back to the car". When there he suggested that in view of our earlier experiences the hill should not be a problem and besides we couldn't afford to lose any more time. We pulled out of line, copping a fair bit of abuse from those in line ahead of us, and set off up the hill. When we reached the still stationary Hillman I steered off the crown of the road to get past and drove over the top of the hill without trouble. It was a long time before anyone caught up to us.

Later in the day our trials and tribulations continued when an oncoming truck tossed up a stone which struck the windscreen. Fortunately it was a laminated screen and the blow left only a long crack and a fairly large star not in the normal line of view. We were now in territory familiar to me and as we came to the turn off to Woodford, where my father was a Station Master on the since closed branch railway, I suggested we stop off for a break and another cup of tea. John whole-heartedly agreed and we lost any time we might have regained. Somewhat refreshed we continued on our way to the finish line without further mishap.

Other people must have had problems worse than ours as when the results were announced we had finished only a little worse than fiftieth with a loss of 136 points. We certainly had not been as successful as my 1953 effort.

The winner in the Northern Division was B. Stevens driving a 1947 Ford V8 with a loss of 24 points. Second was J.F. Herriman in a Commer van navigated by his wife. They lost only 36 points. Third was the Woodford Motors entry of a Ford Zephyr driven by J.C. Webb with a loss of 44 points.

To be fair the efforts of the place getters in the Southern Division should also be recorded. They were in place order, G.K. Harvey in a Morris Cowley utility with 16 points lost, the Falconer Motors (Toowoomba) entry of a Ford Customline driven by Edsel Falconer for a loss of 32 points and A. Larsen in a 1939 Ford V8 who lost 40 points.

The report, in the "Brisbane Telegraph" naturally, had this to say, "The Rally again was won by non-expert drivers, at least as far as competition experience is concerned. They certainly must have been experts to have succeeded." The report went on to state that the higher number of points lost, compared to the 1903 rally, was due to four points being

lost "for each minute or part of a minute early or late at controls (competitors were permitted to be one minute early at secret controls) against two points last year." The route instruction for this event were more comprehensive than for the previous year, two pages of double spaced typing instead of one for each day. The highest average speed mentioned was 71.6 km/h (44.5 mph) but may have been varied at controls.

The make of car was shown only for the first 41 competitors. Of these Ford had the highest number of entries with 13 starters. This included four V8's, one a 1936 model , and one Model "A". The four cylinder Consul was the best of the Fords with five entries. Holden managed seven entries, Morris, including the Cowley utility, four entries. Vanguard and Dodge managed two entries each but the remaining makes, Commer (van), Volkswagen, MG, Renault, Vauxhall, Chevrolet, Pontiac, Hillman, Alvis and Willys had only one representative in the 41 named vehicles. Probably a fairly representative sample of the cars then available.

We had been in the lucky Southern Division and we were able to complete the full course. It was an extremely wet weekend and a river we had been lucky to cross on day one had flooded on day two and the competitors in the Northern Division were unable to continue. While it is not totally clear from the results published in the paper, it appears that only day one was taken into account which means our efforts on day two did not mean anything anyway.

Due to the success of the first rally organised by the Maryborough Apex Club it was only a matter of weeks before a second event was planned. While I have no record of the date there are indications that the event was held late in November. There were 45 cars entered when the draw was made for starting numbers and a further four post entries brought the number to 49. Only 38 of these were to be listed as finishers. Either the course was more difficult, which would account for the eleven non-finishers or the loss of points for being early or late had been increased. The result was that the winning car was to lose 236 points. The driver of a Holden who came last of the finishers lost 949 points. The local newspaper headed the report of the rally, "TOUGH TRIAL FOR CARS". The report went on, "Outright winner of yesterday's Apex Motor Rally, the second held in three months, was Maryborough driver R. Prove who piloted a Vauxhall to lose 236 points. Runner up in the trial, which proved an even greater test of car and crew, especially the navigator, than the previous rally, was another Maryborough driver, E. Barker, who lost 241 points in his Vanguard and carried off the award for the best performance from a car of 1500 to 2500 ccs. Winner of the under 1500 c.cs. section was M.G. driver Ebeling, of Maryborough, whose small sports car performed very well to lose only 243 points and take third place. A major factor to this comparatively small total was the efficient navigating of Miss D. McCaul, well known for her work with the Maryborough Players." We had been lost at least once but obviously far less lost than a lot of other people. One of the officials remarked "Seeing that you had a lady navigator we half expected you to get lost!" In fact the lady had done very well for a first attempt. Holden cars dominated the field on this occasion with nine entries followed by Ford with seven. Then came five Vanguards and three each of Morris Minor and, surprisingly, MG.

Other makes represented were Armstrong Siddeley, Volkswagen, Hillman, Renault, Dodge, Vauxhall and Singer. Certainly no specialist rally cars here.



With Miss D McCaul, navigator for the second Apex Rally