

A Change For the Better

What finally made me decide to order an MG A shortly after they seemed likely to become available remains unclear. At the time I was working shift work with regular overtime and it's likely that the ability to pay for a new car was a prominent factor plus the fact that I was still single. There must have been some publicity in the Australian press at the time because I placed the order on September 10th 1955 and the first road test did not appear until the September 23rd issue of the English magazine "The Autocar".

I still have a copy of the road test and the one from "The Motor" published on September 28 1955. The deposit paid was \$40 known then as twenty pounds. The order was placed with a good friend, the often mentioned Fred Dyke, at his Nuffield dealership the Swift Service Station of Wynnum Road, Morningside. There would be a lengthy period of waiting before I would get to drive the "MGA" I had ordered and when I did drive it I was not the owner!



My shift work hours allowed me to be off duty from 4 pm on every second Friday until 3 pm the following Monday. This was fine when the motor sport events were on that weekend. On alternate weeks the hours were 3.00pm to 10.20pm Mon to Fri, 1.00pm to 10.20pm Sat. and 1.00pm to 10.20pm on Sunday. On those weekends some cooperation from fellow workers was necessary to allow me to compete in motor sporting events. When I was off duty and competing I would usually stay with friends in Brisbane overnight and go home to Toowoomba on Monday in time to start work at 3.00pm. This was usually after a visit to the Swift Service Station for a chat to Fred and his wife or any MG enthusiasts who dropped in. The subject of availability of the MGA came up frequently and usually involved a phone call to the state distributors. On one such Monday, after the usual unsuccessful call, Mrs Dyke said to me, "Ken, why don't you have a look at that Triumph TR2 belonging to my nephew? We still have it here for sale and I'm sure you would love it". Fred then chimed in to say, "It's time we put it in the showroom again so why don't you drive it around the front, put some petrol in it and go for a run. It will do it good. When you come back we can put it on display." Before I could do these things I had to pump up a flat tyre and fit some trade plates. Then I took it for a run. First I drove it around the suburb of Cannon Hill, then almost to Wynnum and

around and about neighbouring suburbs. When I got back there were only three basic questions to be answered:

- (1) How much will you give me for the TF?
- (2) Will you refund the deposit on the MGA?
- (3) How much extra will I have to pay?

By now it was time for me to return to Toowoomba to start the 3 pm shift. The TR2 was serviced and registered on Monday March 5 1956, the same day the decision was made. When I arrived back the next morning, it was discovered that the relay controlling the Laycock de Normanville overdrive was inoperative. While there was time to obtain a spare from the city dealer, time was again running out and my first drive to Toowoomba in the Triumph was made without the pleasure or benefit of using the overdrive. Overdrive on the TR2 only operated on top gear but the TR3 which followed had it accessible on second and third gear as well.



The MG TF and the TR2

The MG TF was traded in for \$1400 and \$194 cash paid leaving the remainder to be paid out at \$23 a month for the next two years. As part of the deal I was allowed to take a couple of Trak Grip tyres off the TF which I had fitted for a gymkhana on the Sunday just past. I have two records of the purchase price. One says \$2200 but the insurance taken out a few days later shows a purchase price of \$2100. The final instalment was paid on March 7 1958. It did not take long for me to realize that I had made a change for the better. There was more room in the car, there was a separate useful boot, the performance was better and overall the TR2 lost nothing by comparison so far as my needs were concerned. I had finally got the red sports car I had always wanted and as well it was a car I had aspired to and never really felt I would own.

It was to give me a great deal of pleasure and I have never regretted the day when Mrs Dyke made the suggestion that I buy the "TR2". At some time in 1957 I took the TR2 to Maryborough to compete in a gymkhana. On the way back to Brisbane I drove the MG "MGA", which would have been mine, most of the way from Maryborough to Beerwah,

a distance of about 190km. There seemed no reason to change my mind about the "TR2". At the time the "MGA" belonged to Vince Jordan and had been taken to Maryborough by Fred Dyke and his wife to compete at an interclub gymkhana in the local showgrounds.

After I began driving the "TR2" I had a feeling that the road manners of other motorists had mysteriously improved. Previously drivers coming towards me often overtook other cars in what seemed to me to be suicidal places which required me to slow down and occasionally take evasive action. In the "TR2" this happened far less often. After some thought I put it down to the colour as the red car was far more visible to oncoming traffic than the low black MG which was frequently driven with the hood down. Despite the more conspicuous appearance of the "TR2" there was still an occasional heart stopping moment. One Friday afternoon I had as a passenger a secretary from the local RACQ office. The Toll Bar Road down the range from Toowoomba had at the time only one lane in each direction. It used in part the upper section of the present twin down lanes. On the way down on a sweeping "S" bend I glimpsed, behind a group of vehicles coming up the hill, a large utility pulling out to overtake and starting to use my side of the roadway. Fortunately there was a wide gravel verge and I was able to slow down on the bitumen and pull off the road and stop. As the Dodge light truck, classified at the time, as 15 cwt utility, came by it was still on my side of the road. By this time I had my door open and with one foot on the roadway said, or rather shouted, as he went by "You stupid ----- ---- !" completely forgetting my lady passenger. As soon as I had calmed down I apologized to my passenger and continued the trip to Brisbane. On the Monday my friend from the RACQ office who had arranged with me to take his secretary as a passenger rang me. After discussing the weather he said "I believe you had a spot of bother on the way to Brisbane," I told him what had happened and what I had said. I then asked him what his secretary had said about the incident. His response was that Helga had said that "Mr Ebeling was most upset". It was very much an understatement.

Mechanically the "TR2" gave me mostly faithful service and held me up on the road, apart from punctures, only twice. Both happened on the way to Charters Towers in May 1958. Other problems, which had occurred earlier, were big end bearing failure during competition (dealt with elsewhere), fracture of the timing chain tensioner, a broken windscreen, a ruptured brake hose, a broken handbrake cable and a clutch problem. The problem which stranded my wife and me by the roadside for quite a long period in late April 1958 was a combination of two things. These were a stretch of deep fine sand and the low ground clearance of the Triumph. We had spent the night in Rockhampton and made an early start for Emerald next morning. The intention was to visit old friends in Emerald and then to make Clermont an overnight stop before continuing on to Charters Towers where my mother and sister lived. As I had covered the section in the MG "TC" and the MG "TF" without trouble, some of it more than once, no problems were anticipated on this occasion. After two and a half hours driving we had covered 188 km of which only about 30 km had been bitumen. It was 11.06 am and we were just a few kilometres short of a place called Bluff when trouble struck. Bluff is about 14 km east of the better known town of Blackwater which was even then a coal town but was yet to experience the boom of open cut mining. The problem stretch of road was little more than a number of sets of wheel tracks in a stretch of fine loose sand. Half way into the stretch,

in a particularly deep section, sand was thrown up over the bonnet and the engine stopped. Despite the engine turning over quite freely it would not fire. On lifting the bonnet there seemed no apparent reason for the failure to start despite there being sand everywhere. As there was sand on the oil wetted gauze of the air cleaners and over the carburettors it was considered prudent to clean things up before trying again. When the air cleaners were taken off to get rid of the sand I found sand piled up against the pistons of the two SU carburettors. After the clean up the car would still not start despite there being no shortage of petrol or sparks. A group of travelling entertainers in a large van stopped to render assistance but even with a tow the car still refused to start. As they had to present a show in Rockhampton they had to leave but not before one of the party gave me a card giving his name as Ted Pearce and billing him as "Australia's Most Versatile Stage Artist". Another traveller also stopped, one of many going in the right direction to do so, and agreed to carry a message to a garage in Blackwater.

Up to this stage my wife had been keeping a record of the trip which says, "Sand, sand and more sand, car won't start, Ken is swearing. We asked some young lads to stop at the garage." There were no further entries in her diary for the rest of the trip.

When the mechanic arrived he checked the petrol and ignition and announced it should start. It didn't. This was the same conclusion I had reached at least twice previously. Further checking, with a thumb over a plug hole, indicated there was very little compression and a check with a gauge showed no cylinder could better 50 pounds per square inch. If you really must know that's nearly 350 kilopascals. Apparently the sand had penetrated as far as the valves which were not seating properly. The only solution now seemed to be a tow to Blackwater for some serious mechanical work. After hooking up the tow rope the mechanic suggested we try to tow start once again. It didn't work. Once out of the sand he suggested another try and to our amazement after a few coughs and splutters the car started. He followed us to the hotel at Bluff where we settled accounts over a cold beer. We had been stuck in the sand from just after 11 am until 3.06 pm. On arrival at Emerald, while we freshened up, ate lunch and visited friends, the car had an oil change and a grease. It showed no signs during the rest of the trip of its rather gritty meal. We arrived at our scheduled overnight stop of Clermont at 8 pm., a little later than anticipated. An anticipated really good night's sleep didn't eventuate as there was a birthday party being held at the hotel which went on until well after midnight. Our room being the one at the top of the stairs didn't help.

Next morning while packing the boot for the 373 km trip to Charters Towers I found the boot awash with petrol. This was mopped up and found to be coming from a cracked butt weld at one end of the petrol tank. We decided to take a chance and filled up just before leaving, reasoning that before long the level of petrol would be below the crack. The second unscheduled holdup occurred when I stopped to investigate after the ignition warning lamp began to glow intermittently. There had been a particularly rough passage through a diversion around a washed out bridge at Blowhard Creek, 243 km from Clermont. It was only a minor problem which lost us a little time and a screwdriver. The bracket of the noise suppression condenser on the generator had broken and the metal case of the condenser hanging on its wire was shorting out the generator. The road was in

a really bad condition due to lack of maintenance after a particularly heavy wet season. Many of the dry creek beds where there were no bridges had a 10 cm deep gutter at the bottom where the water had cut a channel. On a number of occasions braking too late resulted in a bone jarring thud. Some months later I found one of the front coil springs was broken. Later still the new owner discovered that the other spring had met the same fate. He accused me of selling it with two broken springs. I told him truthfully that I had not known that "BOTH" springs were broken. One section of the road had great holes where semi trailer trucks had been bogged. Some were almost as big as my sports car. They still held the logs and saplings which the drivers had used to help them get out of deep trouble. There are pictures to prove it. On one stretch of road there was flood debris high in the trees but no sign of a watercourse nearby. We ate our lunch on the banks of the Cape River and watched the workmen repairing flood damage to the bridge. We took only 1 hour 20 min to cover the remaining 113 km of mostly gravel road to Charters Towers. We arrived just in time for afternoon tea.

The following day, Saturday, May 3, 1958, was declared a lay day but on Sunday morning the boot was emptied and the petrol tank removed. The tank was washed out with water several times and left in the sun to dry. When my brother-in-law was ready to start welding the crack we reversed the hose on a vacuum cleaner and blew air through the tank to prevent the build up of petrol vapour and any possible risk of explosion. After a check for leaks using water the repaired tank was refitted and gave no further trouble. While in Townsville the following week I purchased a set of big end bearings as I had decided to examine the bearings before returning south. Back at Charters Towers the sump was dropped and the existing bearings found to be in good shape. As an added precaution the oil filter was changed and the sump filled with new oil in preparation for what proved to be an uneventful return trip.

When the timing chain tensioner broke it rubbed a hole in the pressed steel timing case cover so that the first sign of trouble was a motor covered in oil. A few hours work, a new tensioner and a soldering iron cured the problem.

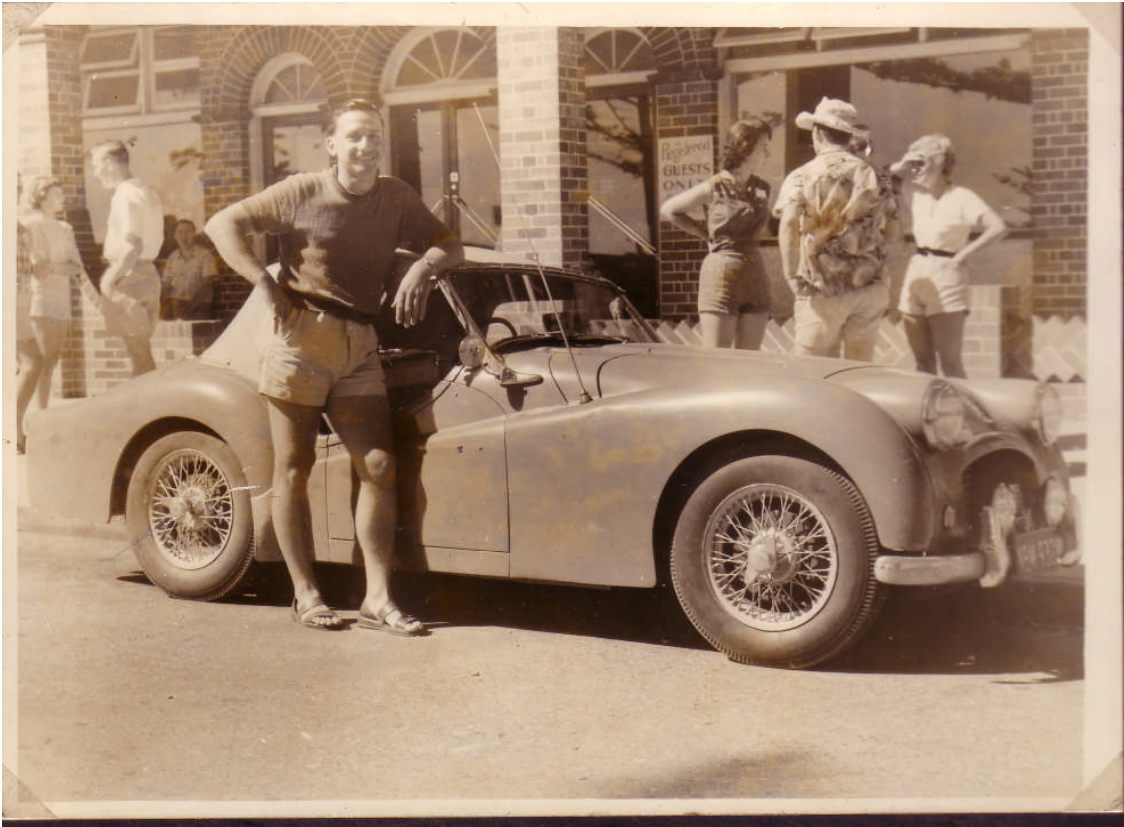
The windscreen was shattered on the way to Leyburn when a stone was thrown up by a car with a race car on a trailer was being overtaken on a section of gravel road. The whole windscreen crazed but didn't fall to pieces until the next pothole in the road. A replacement for the broken windscreen was only made available after I had written to the Australian representative of the "Triumph Sports Owners' Association". During the intervening five weeks the car was driven with the hood down and two aero screens in place. On one occasion my wife to be and I were caught in a heavy storm in Brisbane and must have looked very bedraggled to the tram passengers sitting in relative comfort. One of the screens was a factory unit but the other was home made with a couple of metal brackets supporting a shaped piece of thick clear plastic. Had I known at the time, the proprietor of the Blue Mountain Service Station at the far end of Ruthven St Toowoomba had a laminated windscreen with only a single crack in it. When he was having a clean up he offered it to me but by then I had again changed cars. The proprietor was Les Agnew, often known as "Ag of the Jag" because of his experience and ability where Jaguars were concerned. The screen, Les told me, had originally been fitted to a Triumph "TR"

belonging to one of the Griffith family. The Griffith family were the proprietors of the Toowoomba Foundry a company well known throughout Queensland as the manufacturers of "Southern Cross" windmills and stationary engines, steam locomotives and many other items. The brake hose ruptured at a time which was in some ways opportune as it occurred as I was preparing to drive home for lunch. It was easily fixed.

Just when the handbrake cable broke is forgotten but there was a delay in getting a replacement. A suitably drilled piece of mild steel 25mm by 5mm and about 200mm long, some "U" bolts and some cable clamps were used to overcome the delay. The scrutineers at a Strathpine race meeting weren't too keen on the idea but eventually allowed the car to race. The clutch problem created a bit more work. Over a period of time the clutch adjustment began to disappear until the stage was reached where there was none left. Removal of the gearbox, and the coupled overdrive unit, was not easy in the backyard but once off it became apparent that the problem was not wear of the clutch plate. What had happened was that the threaded pin which screws into the throwout yoke, and projects through the shaft coupled to the clutch pedal, had bent where it entered the shaft. Of course it was impossible to buy a replacement in Queensland. A visit to a local engineering workshop with the battered pin as a sample provided the cure. Apart from my unpaid labour to remove and refit the gearbox the cost of the job in September 1957 was eighty cents. Another problem arose when the sheet of clear plastic fitted as rear window in the folding hood became opaque in the same way as the one in the MG TF. I restored my rear view by fitting a glass frame section into the opaque sheet which was till quite firm.

One afternoon the car was parked in the open during a heavy hail storm and the hail stones punched numerous holes in the remaining plastic surrounding the frame. I had raced out in the rain and hail to cover the hood with a blanket but was too late to save the plastic around the metal frame. The punctured plastic had to be replaced with fabric to match the hood which luckily had not been damaged.

Unfortunately the "TR2" was the only car driven by me which was involved in an accident resulting in personal injury to other persons. I had driven down Ruthven Street, Toowoomba's main street, and had signalled a right turn into a laneway leading into Neil Street. When I was virtually at right angles to the main street a motorcyclist ran into the rear of the rear mudguard and both the driver and pillion passenger were tossed into the air. Fortunately they were not seriously hurt and were released from hospital after overnight observation. It was not a very pleasant experience to look over my shoulder and see them flung to the roadway. No blame was placed on my actions as witnesses had observed the rider and his passenger waving and shouting to some young ladies at a milk bar just before the collision. As well, a following driver confirmed that I had given a hand signal and that the flashing turn indicator was also operating. As a result of legal action by the insurance company I received the sum of \$13.92 as their letter puts it, "being the refund of your excess after the actual amount of settlement and costs have been taken into consideration." Just the same I would rather have had it not happen.



Ken with the TR2