

My First Car Part 1 by Ken Ebeling

There is obviously no point in having a car unless you have a driver's licence. In fact my first licence was actually a motorcycle rider's licence obtained in Rockhampton in April 1948 after purchasing my one and only motorcycle. It was a 1948 Triumph 500cc Speed Twin. A driver's licence came not quite a year later.

Before taking delivery of the motorcycle I obtained a learner's permit and was given a few riding lessons by the proprietor of Meteor Motors the Triumph agent. This added to the limited experience gained on the two stroke Excelsior owned by a workmate. The test to obtain a licence consisted of a ride from the police-station, which was on a corner, up to the next intersection, the making of a "U" turn and the return trip to the police officer standing on the footpath. It certainly would have been a foolhardy move to sit behind me. When I come to think about it there hadn't been a pillion seat at the time. Having successfully completed the manoeuvre I was issued with the necessary licence to ride a motorcycle. When the time came to renew the licence a year later I was working in Blackall. During the renewal process the local police officer asked "Don't you drive a car?" I replied that I had obtained a learner's permit and drove my father's car while at home on holidays. The response was "In that case I'd better make it out to drive a car as well!". You will agree, I'm sure, that the system needed a bit of tightening up.

I didn't really set out to buy a motor car one Saturday morning in 1950. After about three months of dithering I was on my way to Markwells to order one of the new Matchless 500cc twin cylinder motorcycles with telescopic front forks and swinging arm rear suspension. By now my 1948 5T Triumph Speed Twin motorcycle had undergone one rebore and was sufficiently worn in other places to make its replacement cheaper in the long run than the major overhaul it needed. The landlady of the boarding house watching me prepare to depart, and being in a helpful mood and probably tired of wet clothes lying about and grease on the pathway, had a suggestion. "Why not have a look at some second hand MGs? You're always talking about them." My previous decision went out the window and a swap from two to four wheels was again a possibility.

The first MG I looked at had a very rowdy exhaust, worn tyres and a battered hood. The wire cable to the starter switch broke on the demonstration run but to my limited knowledge the car seemed reasonable. A trip around the car yards brought to light a couple of other "TC" model MGs which looked worse and cost more. The first car looked at was decided on and arrangements made for an RACQ inspection on the understanding I would join up when I brought the car in. At this stage I hadn't paid a deposit which was probably just as well.

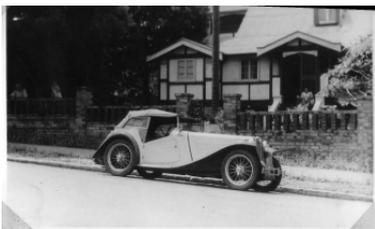
By this time the word was out at work. "Casey's buying an MG!" This brought forth lots of advice about saloon cars, four seats and all the other advantages which, to a true sports car lover, are far outweighed by the things that other motorists don't appreciate. One of the advisers did however point out an advertisement in the morning paper for an MG TC. There was also a phone number which was soon ringing and arrangements made for a trial run. During the trial I had with me a friend, a hard headed businessman,

who also drove the car. He advised me to stick out for \$40 less than the asking price of \$1100. At the time, of course, the figures were £20 and £550. The price came down \$20 with a statement that he "Really wasn't prepared to knock anything off and wouldn't make it more than that!" The seller drove off, leaving a trail of smoke, as I suggested "You know where to find me if you reconsider."

When I arrived home from work the next day I was surprised to see the car parked outside the boarding house at the corner of Vulture and Leopard Streets, Kangaroo Point. It was available at my price. Not being able to trade the motorcycle created a problem as it left me somewhat short of the total amount needed. A hurried phone call was made to my parents, who were living at Gunalda, and the following morning brought the hoped-for Telegraph Money Order. In those good old days the Post Offices were open on Saturday mornings but the counter officer at the Woolloongabba Post Office gave me a horrified look when I presented the money order for \$500 (£250). He then suggested that I call back just before closing time when he might have enough money to pay me. He made it with the help of many one pound and ten shilling notes. The seller of the car probably thought I'd raided my piggy bank and wasn't far wrong. The Compulsory Third Party Insurance at the time of purchase was one pound five shillings. That's \$2.50 in today's decadent currency. The receipt was signed by Ken Richardson who, in later years, drove a Lago Talbot at a race meeting on the old Leyburn airstrip circuit outside of Toowoomba.

Having taken possession, my hard headed friend gave me some additional driving lessons to supplement the ability implied in the licence obtained in Blackall.

The car looked quite smart in its two tone colour scheme of cream body and red mudguards. Rather flimsy add on bumper bars were fitted back and front and also a fold up luggage rack behind the rear mounted spare wheel. The latter was fitted with a well made cream cover with the letters MG and a surrounding octagon, both of red vinyl, sewn on. To be truthful, the car ran like a hairy goat due mainly to oiled up plugs and worn piston rings and smoked in sympathy. To help drive home this characteristic, and my inexperience as a driver, Brisbane had a tramway strike.-- Yes! It was that long ago. Needless to say I stalled the motor, due to lack of power and inept handling of the clutch, while at the head of a long line of cars at the corner of Queen and Albert Streets. It was, of course, the middle of the rush hour and among the extra traffic generated by the tram strike. I got going again in a cloud of smoke which came either from the exhaust or the fiery glances of the policeman operating the traffic lights manually to try to speed up the traffic flow.



The newly acquired TC in Vulture St in 1950

The car had Chassis Number TC 4997 and Engine Number XPAG 5601. As "TC" production ran from November 1945 (Chassis TC 0251) to December 1949 (Chassis TC 10252) it seems about right to call it a 1947 model. It was registered Q467-818 and I still have the receipt dated 11/11/1950 "For TC MG roadster free of all encumbrances and as tried and approved". In this day and age, when such cars are very thin on the ground, to have the car would be much better than having the receipt. I sold it in mid 1954 for \$900 only \$160 less than I had paid for it. On the only occasion I saw it again it had been repainted in black and was racing at the old Strathpine circuit north of Brisbane. It was not listed in the register of one of the MG clubs in the late seventies and was probably scrapped many years ago.



On the way to Bathurst, Easter 1951

The engine ran considerably better after the RACQ engineers cleaned and regapped the spark plugs during the test which I had booked for the first MG looked at. The report was most comprehensive as they still are. It included two defects which were never attended to during my three and a half years of ownership as I found them to be insignificant. After a few weeks to allow finances to pick up, arrangements were

made for an overhaul of the cylinder head and fitting of the recommended set of new piston rings. It certainly improved the performance and almost got rid of the smoke trail. In most respects it was a good buy and the pronounced klunk! when going from drive to overrun, was still there when I sold the car 53000km later. It was due to wear on the splines at the differential end of the axle shafts and was quite visible to the naked eye. The new owner obviously didn't consider it a problem when, as stated earlier, he raced it at Strathpine.

Being interested in both cars and motorcycles, an obvious way to enjoy both sports seemed to be to visit Bathurst at Easter. It was 1951 and for many years the cars and bikes had their own race days. The bikes raced on Saturday and cars on Monday with the

previous days set aside for practice. A friend I had met through the Kedron Motor Cycle Club was keen to accompany me and arrangements were made to change the date set for my annual leave. Les Makin who went with me was a highly respected rider of motorcycles on the grass tracks popular at that time. He usually rode for Markwell Brothers the leading Matchless dealer in the Brisbane area. Preparations were not very extensive apart from the assembly of a small wooden box to protect two one gallon (about 4.55 litres) tins. One was for extra petrol and the second for the oil which had to be carried for topping up the sump. The top up period in the interests of safety was about 250km and needed about a litre. In pre-decimal times the oil consumption was spoken of as about 700 miles per gallon.

The route chosen was from Brisbane to Warwick via Cunninghams Gap and then south along the New England Highway. At Tamworth we headed out through Gunnedah and turned south at Mullaley to Dunedoo where we spent the night at a hotel. Next morning the cook gave us an early breakfast in front of a large wood-burning range and we were soon on our way to Wellington and Orange. We arrived at Bathurst on Good Friday, March 23rd 1951 just as they reopened the circuit for traffic after the finish of the motorcycle practice period. We had arranged accommodation at the National Fitness Camp, near the top of Conrod Straight, and were soon settled in for the weekend.

It had been a dusty trip, particularly in the middle stages from Gunnedah to Mullaley where the stretches of bitumen were few and in poor condition. The trip became rather interesting approaching the summit of the Moonbi Range when I tried to catch up to an early Ford V8. One of the spark plug leads came off, a fairly frequent occurrence until I changed the connectors and I pulled off the road in great haste and put the lead back on without stopping the engine. As there was a lack of forward room I had to reverse hurriedly back onto the road. About 100 metres down the road there was a frightful clatter from beneath the car like a string of cans behind a honeymoon car. Another hurried halt failed to disclose a sheet of galvanised iron beneath the car or a petrol drum dragging behind and we took off again. All was quiet for a few hundred metres and there it was again. Another check and still no answer. Careful checking while travelling showed a tendency for the noise to recur after a bump in the road so I drove more slowly until we reached a small township below the range. As it was the Thursday before Easter, the garage owner was too busy to help but we ran the MG up onto to wooden ramp but could still not find anything amiss. The garage owner took the time for a quick look but could see nothing unusual.

We continued on our way towards Tamworth, coasting whenever possible with a dead engine. We had found that even over the worst bumps the noise did not appear unless the engine was running. We made slow progress accelerating up to 80 km/h before shifting into neutral and stopping the engine. The Tamworth MG dealer offered to have a look on the Tuesday after Easter and one helpful mechanic suggested that it sounded as though the clutch throw out ball race was breaking up. Some months later I found out that the MG had a carbon thrust ring for clutch release. The mechanic suggested we might as well keep going in the hope of reaching Bathurst without a complete failure of whatever was the cause of the problem.

After leaving Tamworth, the noise became less frequent and less harsh and finally completely. Should you have read this far, you certainly don't have a copy of Playboy lying about but, if you are still interested, read on and you will discover what had been making the dreadful clatter. On dismantling the motor some 3000 km later as the oil consumption had got much worse, I discovered that there were three less than the proper number of cushioning springs in the clutch plate assembly. I also found a spoonful of metal chips and a piece of spring about 7mm long in the bottom of the bellhousing. The inside of the housing and the entire clutch assembly, flywheel and ring gear looked as though they had been sand blasted with very coarse sand. Apparently the springs had popped out during my hasty reverse back to the road and had been tossed around inside the housing. After a time they would have settled down into the bottom of the housing only to get tossed up when the car hit a bump and again be put into noisy circulation on striking any part of the rotating assembly. Eventually they must have been chewed up and no longer large enough to be tossed up by a bump. It was truly a most disturbing clatter while it lasted.

While we were driving around the circuit at Bathurst we discovered that beating time on the outside of the doors of the MG made a most appropriate Boom! Boom! Boom! Noise which went with the hit song of the day called "The Thing".



On the way to the Jenolan Caves; 48 Tc and 38 TA

It wasn't preoccupation with this pastime which caused a sudden detour off the road and over a log while on the way to the Jenolan Caves. It was the result of one of those diminishing radii curves, over correction, correction and gutter-washed contents across the surface of the gravel road. Maybe it was my driving, but three in a TC must be considered a bit cramped. Seeing our problem, a group of motorcyclists pulled over and offered assistance. One of their group was hurriedly despatched to catch up to our friends in another car. He didn't anticipate any trouble as even in 1951 green MG TAs were not

exactly hiding around every corner. My MG had finished up tipped over at quite an angle with a twisted log under the left hand rear wheel. I had fallen out of the driver's side door and Les had fallen on top of me while Gordon was hanging onto the passenger door hoping the car would not topple over. We quickly supported the car until Gordon Gillies was able to slide down and over the driver side door. We took stock of the humans first. Les had a skinned nose and Gordon was in good shape but had a 100mm by 15mm dent in his plaster jacket. You may well ask why Gordon was wearing a plaster jacket! It's simple, really. It was because he had been in a motor cycle accident and had been in a plaster jacket from neck to waist since Christmas. I don't know if he hung on so hard that he cracked the plaster or whether the sudden toss threw him against the door or if the door came up and hit him. Having satisfied ourselves that he suffered no ill effects, we proceeded to photograph the situation not for posterity but merely for my photograph album. My chief injury, of course, was to my pride.



All hands soon restored the equilibrium and the radiator hose was refitted and the radiator refilled. The application of my weight on the driver's door restored it to some semblance of a fit. It had been about 10cm higher at the front than the door opening due to it hitting the ground as it swung open from the force of the impact of two bodies.

The car started up without any hesitation but the exhaust note was much improved which only goes to show that the back of a muffler is there for some purpose. By this time, our friends in the other MG were back on the scene and my car was soon back on the roadway it had so hurriedly left some time earlier. There was time to take some more photographs and, after thanking our friends in time of need, we three got back into the MG and went to see the Jenolan Caves. They were well worth the trip. On the way back to Bathurst, by a different route, we had to stop and clean the contacts of the SU petrol pump for the first time. It was destined to cause further trouble a few days later.