



&



FARINA
REGISTER

Newsletter

*For the enthusiast of the
BMC Farina Riley 4/68, 4/72;
MG Midget Mk 3 and Mk 4*

ISSUE 40

JUNE, 2003

MG STREET ROD



This picture dates back to the early 1970's and the 'Street Rod' scene in California, USA. See inside for more details.

MG & RILEY FARINA REGISTER

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the June *Newsletter*, the 40th issue that either myself or Neil Cairns have put together.

I hope the front cover shot has not offended any Farina purists! It was the early 1970's with the drag racing and street/hot rod culture at its height after all. Craig McCracken from California sent me his Magnette memories from owning a number of our cars in the sixties and seventies.

Car discovery wise it has been a very quiet period with very little MG information to report. As has occurred in the past though, car discoveries can be like buses, when they all arrive at once! We did get our first register entry from Trinidad and Tobago though, in the West Indies.

Many of you will have enjoyed Mehmet Necdet's article in the last issue, telling not only about his Riley, but of the troubles and division of Cyprus. The great news for him and visitors to the island is that the borders have now been opened up so he hopes to meet with the many Farina enthusiasts in the south.

Material has been very thin on the ground for this issue and I have received next to nothing at all! So some help with material would be good.

One piece of material I have is from *The Sun*, where a freelance journalist decided it would be a great idea to rip our cars to pieces for no apparent reason! See inside for details and how we fought back!

Regards,

Mick

DRIVING EXPERIENCES:

THE PLUSHEST 1622 FARINA

v.

THE MOST BASIC 1489 FARINA

(Continued from Issue 38)

THERE ARE many trim/fitting differences between the cars. My Austin being a 1959 model has the front door cut-out (shared with the other variants) and flying A on the bonnet. There's no kicker plate on the top of the sill as you open the door. The door opening interior light contact pin is much longer and differently positioned. You only get an interior light on the driver's side, by the way, on the A55 Mk II although other fittings such as the heater and interior bonnet release are identical to the plusher versions. You also quickly notice that you sit lower down with a more laid back driving position but the seats are extremely soft and comfy.

Although the Austin has a simple painted metal dash, I like it equally to the Riley's wood veneer finish. There is no boot light in the Austin and being a very early car the rear number plate light is the small circular one.

The gear lever on the early Austin, Morris and Wolseley Farinas is charming—a cranked affair which feels much close to your hand (no doubt partly because of the lower driving position) than the later cars. The gear change has a very different feel to it initially—the gate is such that it is easy to go from 1st into reverse by mistake instead of 2nd, and likewise changing down from 3rd to 2nd you notice the offset, shorter gate compared with the later cars. The gearbox is, however, a delight to use and the synchro on mine is still working well. If anything, I would say from talking with owners of the various cars that the later car gearboxes are more prone to problems. I tried three second hand gearboxes out on the Riley (the one fitted to the car when I bought it growled in first and reverse and leaked oil) all of which were either noisy, leaking oil, had worn bearings or worn synchro, and so I ended up having one reconditioned. If undertaking a swap by the way, remember that the gear box is interchangeable with the other 1622 Farina variants but you will need to take off the top adaption plate for the reverse light electrical connector which is not fitted to the Austin or Morris versions.

The clutch on my Austin is considerably heavier than the Riley but this might just be down to a stronger return spring or defect in the master to slave cylinder linkage. It may even be that a heavy duty estate-type clutch was fitted at its replacement about 15,000 miles ago.

The A55 Mk II with one up has a rather smoother ride than the 4/72 and

irregularities in the road surface—of which there are many in our poorly maintained West Riding roads—are soaked up better. I think much of this is probably due to the fatter tyres, as I replaced the front dampers on my Riley earlier this year.

The engines are very different on paper in terms of power output and this shows markedly on the road, especially around here where there are lots of hills to negotiate. On a fast main road the A55 Mk II is quite happy to cruise at 60-65 mph although overall there is a bit more road and wind noise than the 4/72. It's on uphill where you notice the difference. The Riley bounds up quite steep hills in 3rd gear, whereas the Austin is still good but you need to change down to 3rd very early on and keep the revs up. The Riley, when properly warmed up on the flat, has quite an impressive surge of top gear power from 30-60 mph; it is so good that it can catch drivers of modern vehicles unawares. The Austin by comparison, will keep up with modern traffic but has to be driven much harder to do so.

There is no penalty in fuel economy for the Riley's much sprightlier performance. In stop-start urban conditions both engines average 26-27 mpg. The Riley can be economical when driven gently on a longish summer run; the most notable occasion being the 165 mile return trip to the Lakes National Rally last year which was done with 4.5 gallons of fuel, giving over 36 mpg. The plus point with the Austin is that having only one carb it is easier to tune and unlike the 4/72 is not prone to spitting back through the carb for the first mile or two on chilly mornings. However, both engines give a prompt start even on a winter's morning. The choke actuating rods on the twin carb Farinas are prone to seizing up without regular freeing off and this results in gradual loss of mixture enrichment for cold starting. Provided they are properly maintained and with a sound choke and unperished diaphragms, a twin carb Farina will start just as well as a single carb version, ie. first time on the button without hesitation.

On oil consumption the Austin is superior. In my ownership up to May 2003 it has covered 2000 miles since an oil change and the reading on the dip stick is still above the maximum. The 4/72 is good, but not quite as good as the Cambridge. Although all the seals and gaskets have been replaced at its 68,000 mile overhaul when the crankshaft thrust washers and bearings were renewed, the engine still consumes a pint every 1000 miles irrespective of the type of driving, whether fast or slow. Both engines are quiet and smooth but with the Riley's higher state of tune you are much more conscious of the gap between 2nd and 3rd ratios.

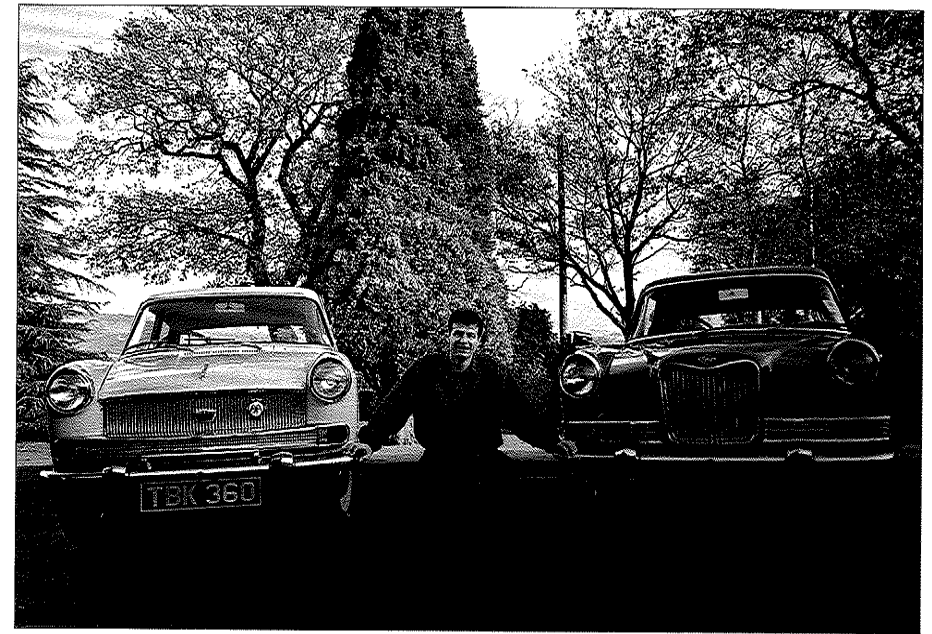
Early Farinas had a different steering box and rod linkage compared with the later models. The ratio is a little different and the steering wheel has to be turned slightly further to produce the same amount of movement in the road wheels. Each car tends to have a slightly different feel, but certainly when cornering, my Austin feels less rigid than the Riley. It rolls more and a

bit more wheel turning is required to keep it under control. No doubt, the higher suspension height of the early cars makes them a little less agile, although I have always been sceptical whether the anti-roll bars make much difference.

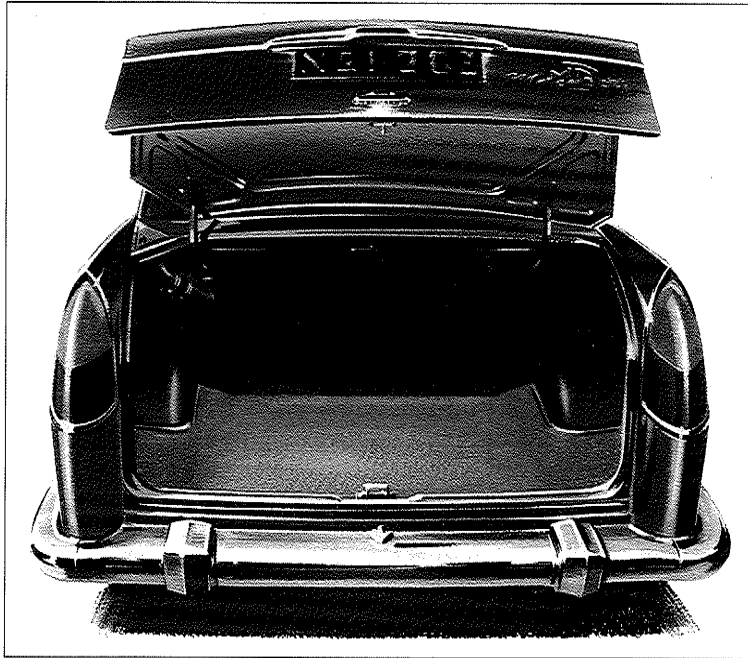
When turning into my designated under-cover parking bay at work, I noticed that the Austin's fight-hand turning circle is a bit larger than the Riley's, by nearly one foot. The left lock by comparison seemed better and when I compared them, the two cars are within a couple of inches of each other. Why is this? Well, I reckon one reason is that the Riley has the adjustable right-hand track rod which increases the possible tracking settings, whereas on the early cars you can only adjust this with the central trackrod. I also think that each steering box is set up slightly differently, hence manufacturing tolerances. Interestingly, BMC did quote an extra six inch turning circle on the early cars, but the road test figures would suggest that this was not the case in practice.

I have included a photo of the two cars side by side. The Austin has an attractive two-tone paint scheme in Horizon blue over Farina grey with a matching pale blue interior. Catherine and I like the Riley equally though, with the Almond green which is a strong colour and sets off the chrome nicely.

ANDREW IDLE



Andrew crouched proudly between his A55 Mk 2 and Riley 4/72 Farinas.



There is 19 cu.ft. (0.538 m³) of luggage space and every cubic foot is fully effective. The deep, box-shaped boot is completely free from obstruction and extends to the full width of the body. Lid opening is torsion bar assisted. The spare wheel is housed in a separate compartment beneath the floor. Rear lights and flasher bulbs are installed from within the luggage compartment; changing is quick, clean and easy.

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CALIFORNIA MAGNETTE MEMORIES

Craig McCracken contacted me, looking for a good reverse lamp (not pitted) as he was planning to make a Midget sofa!

Here are his thoughts and memories of Midgets.

I NO LONGER have the car itself—only the rear clip! I am thinking of making a couch (love seat) out of it. I want to be able to close the couch using the deck lid. Sometimes when you have the money and time you get a little weird, you know. This is buried so deep in storage that I don't think I've seen it for about ten years, but the trim was sitting in my garage and I just happened across it.

I used to have two Midgets. One was a driver and parts car and the other was altered for drag racing and street racing (see photo). They both were the same colour to start but I never got pics of the other. The yellow one was altered to a large extent and they were both 1960 models. The license on the yellow one was California OMJ184 but I don't remember the number on the other one. These have long ago been crushed as far as I know. I had the yellow one from 1960 to 1972 and the other from 1968 to 1972. We bought the one new, and used it as daily transportation until about 1965. We mainly ran Chevys and got off course because the MG looked in many ways similar to a 1957 Chevy, only lighter and smaller. I shaved the the rear door handles to give it a two-door appearance. I mostly gutted the interior and added only the bare necessities. I tubbed the rear wheel wells and added Indy tires for width and I put a straight tube axle on the front end. I then proceeded to install a 425 horsepower 327 Chevy motor and a Muncie close ratio four-speed. It immediately blew the MG rear end out so I had a Dana 44 made to fit (not in the picture). It used to run in the high 10's and low 11's at about 135 mph, as memory serves me, in the quarter mile. As I recall, its best time was something like 10.86 at 131 mph and its fastest was 138 mph—ET and MPH don't necessarily go hand in hand. From a dead stop I could bring the front tires about 13-14 inches off the ground and carry them for about 30-40 feet—not bad in terms of wheelies! A mis-spent youth, but it was fun. I have the pieces I asked about but they are in, at best, rough shape and I was considering either replacement or re-chroming—like you said, lots and lots of pitting. That's why I made the enquiry. I can get both rechromed thru a friend for about \$25 so I think I'll take that route. Thanks so much for your time and the reply anyway.

This internet business has sure made finding stuff a lot easier, I'll say that.
CRAIG.

As a PS I add the following:

I lived in Costa Mesa, Orange County, California, and at the time I had the Magnettes there were only eleven registered in California according to a DMV trace by a policeman friend of mine at the time, and seven were in Orange County. We originally bought this one in Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

At one point I had seen each of the other five in Orange County and two of the others in California, so out of eleven I had seen nine and owned two—not bad! This takes a leap backwards to remember, but as I recall, I had two in Costa Mesa; there was one in Laguna Beach, one in San Clemente, one in Orange, one in Santa Ana and one in La Mirada as far as Orange County goes. I saw the others in Santa Barbara and Sacramento (or nearby). As I recall, four were the light blue, two were black, two were red and one was green (kind of like pea soup). Can't speak to repaints, but they looked stock, except my yellow one which was blue to start.

I sold my blue one to a guy who crashed it, and it met the crusher in Torrance, California. I sold the yellow one in 1972 to a guy who wanted to make an off-road car out of it—he lived in Hemet, California. It sat for about two years as I understand it, and he sold it to another in Palm Springs where it again sat for a couple of years, and then met its demise at a junk yard in Indio, if I've been told right.

I really liked this little car and often wished that I had it back so that I could undo all the things I had done to it and have it as a nice driver. I think more often about that as gas prices go higher. I have trucks now that get from 6.5 to 12 mpg so that's a big thing. Back when I drove the car stock and gas was at about 0.15 a gallon I used to be able to go all over the place for at most \$1.00, but then things have changed, haven't they!

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'HELL ON WHEELS'

ON FRIDAY 9th MAY freelance journalist David Ross had an article entitled 'Hell on Wheels' published on page 62 of the Motors page in British tabloid newspaper *The Sun*. The article absolutely destroyed the Magnette for no apparent reason. It mostly recited what the motoring press said in 1959 with an added sting in the tail. The article was accompanied by a publicity shot of the car from 1959.

I do not wish to reproduce the article in full for breach of copyright laws but here are a few snippets:

'MG have made some of the world's most exciting and beautiful sports cars—but the Farina Magnette was not one of them' . . . 'in 1959, MG came up with the absolutely awful, tasteless and vulgar Magnette Mk3' . . . 'from the blunt, shapeless nose and slab sides to the tail fins, the Farina really was a horrendous sight' . . . 'The car handled as badly as it looked, rocking and rolling with even less style than Bill Haley' . . . 'but it was still a dog's dinner'.

And so it went on. The article served no purpose at all and I for one was very annoyed. After getting an earful from my 53 workmates I took action and phoned *The Sun* editorial staff who told me David Ross was a freelancer and his details were on a website. David Ross' name and address were revealed on the website as **HoldtheFrontPage.co.uk** He hails from Aberdeen and writes articles for *The Scottish Sun*.

So I wrote to him and gave him a counter argument pointing out that his article made my job of trying to keep these cars on the road an even harder one. I telephoned Andrew Idle who immediately went out to buy a copy and also dropped David Ross a friendly line or two! I also asked David Ross when he last drove a Farina Magnette and challenged him to meet me anywhere in the north of England for a test drive!

I dare say he might be writing his next article on the Austin Allegro!

CHANGES TO CAR LISTS

MG

New car. Mk 3, chassis 2645. Owner: D. Johnson, San Diego, California, USA.

RILEY

New car. 4/72 chassis 13641. Located in Fyzabad, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago.

New car. 4/72 chassis 24587. Located in poor state on a farm in Devon, England.

New car. 4/72, JWA570C. Located in Scotland. No more details known.

4/72 chassis 23058 should read 25058. New owner: M. Farrell, Urmston, England.

4/72 chassis 24474, SYC134F. New owner: C. Morley, Ilkeston, Derbyshire England.

4/72 chassis 24864, MKU808G. Same owner but now in Melksham, Wiltshire, England.



COOC NATIONAL RALLY

Renishaw Hall, Derbyshire.
Sunday, 6th July, 2003

Contact Steve Turner
Telephone: 01653 693183

BMC/BL RALLY and SPARES DAY

Ferry Meadows, Nene Park, Peterborough.
Sunday, 3rd August, 2003

Contact Mick and Barbara Clarke
Telephone: 01476 572124

COOC SOUTH EAST RALLY

Cranleigh Showground.
Sunday, 17 August, 2003

Telephone: 01306 877557 or 01483 273781

CLASSIFIEDS

PARTS FOR SALE

A friend of Dave Atkings has the following parts available in good condition: Complete dashboard with instruments from 1965 Magnette. Blue vinyl Morris Oxford driver's seat. Pair of used, genuine BL front wings from Magnette Mk4, some slight surface rust but solid; new cords piston rings (full engine set 1622cc standard bore size).

Also if anyone needs any Riley parts give him a try as this could be the year he sorts his garage out!

Contact Dave Atkings, Hamilton, Scotland.

Telephone: 01698 334363 or e.mail: daveatkings@hotmail.com

Bob Metzner of 6 West Hill, Uttoxeter, Staffs, ST14 8BN, UK, has the following parts for sale:

Magnette O/S side lamp indicator units 1x new, £50; 1x used, £25; grille assembly with rechromed surround, £40; boot lid reverse lamp assembly, rechromed but slight pitting, £30; Smiths time clock, refurbished and in excellent condition, £50; second hand front panel, £10; Mk3 Magnette and 4/68 rear door top chrome part N/S rechromed, £10; MG, Riley, Wolseley pair of fibreglass front wings, £40 the pair.

Jason Trevorrow of 65 The Croft, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 0RW, has available a used 4/68 or early 4/72 grille surround at £15 and a rear seat back for 4/72 in Reef blue at £10. He has also found some 4/72's in a rough state on a farm in Devon if anyone needs anything.

E.mail: mail@trevorrow379.freereserve.co.uk

SERVICES

Terry Edwards of Old Car Hydraulics has numerous pre 1980 car brake cylinders, pads, shoes and shock absorbers available.

E.mail: oldcarhydraulics@tiscali.co.uk

WANTED

Early Farina with bench seat style 'curly' gear lever.

Contact Paul Sammut, London. Tel: 0207 515 9290.



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by Neil Cairns

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2	MG Engines, 1935-1998 160 pages with b/w pictures covering the XPAG to the 'O' series.	£11.00
3	Living with the MG Metro 1300 Articles on this nippy little hot-hatch. 85 pages.	£9.00
4	The Cinderella MG and Riley Farina A history of this now rare model. 110 pages.	£10.00
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