



A-Antics



GT-40 is coming up fast-get ready for a "Great Time"!

Photo by Bruce Mann.

*MG comes to America, plus Review
of Magnettes and Twin Cams*

*GT-40 Report
Tech Tips*



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History: The Chapter was established August 14, 1976. It was NAMGAR's first chapter. We are a low-key club, dedicated to the preservation and enjoyment of our MGA's/ Anyone is welcome to join our chapter and they are asked to join NAMGAR as well.

Chapter Dues: \$25 annually (\$40 for printed newsletter)

Nickname: Rowdies

Motto: People First!

Rowdies Site:

<http://www.mgcars.org.uk/michiganrowdies/>

MG Car Council Site: <http://www.mgcars.org.uk/mgscouncil/>

NAMGAR Web Site: www.namgar.com

Past Chapter Chairpersons:

1976-1980	Bruce Nichols
1981-1982	Tom Latta
1983-1984	Dick Feight
1985-1988	Dave Smith
1989-1990	Dave Quinn
1991-1994	Mark Barnhart
1995-1995	Herb Maier
1996-1996	Tom Knoy
1997-1998	Neil Griffin
1999-2002	Bruce Nichols
2003-2004	Bob Sutton
2005-2008	Gordie Bird

MEMBERS PAGE

Rowdies Website: Larry Pittman, Webmaster

<http://www.mgcars.org.uk/michiganrowdies/>

Larry Pitman's Database Report: 67 Active and Paid-Up Members

Deadline for submitting material for the next issue is: March 20, 2015

Classified Ads: For Sale. 1959 MGA Roadster. California Car-No rust. Rebuilt MGB motor (27K miles), rebuilt transmission (6K miles). Rebuilt brakes, new cylinders, including master cylinder, new lines, rebuilt suspension (front and back, including new rear springs), 3:90 rearend. Tires and top are 4 years old. Chrome wire wheels. Original engine goes with car (45-50 psi oil pressure-hot, 6 K miles since valve job) , original transmission goes with car (good synchros). MGB alternator (original generator goes with car). Make an offer. Bruce Nichols 269-273-3118.

Letters:

Enthusiast Editorial

What has happened to the British motor industry????

MG – Our favorite car is owned by the Chinese government, who are communist!!!

With the research that was done and published in our last A-Antics, volume 40, No.1., I decided to check other British motor manufacturers and their current ownership.

FORD: - Once a major British manufacturer, is now based in Germany.

GM: - Once a major British manufacturer, is now based in Germany.

CHRYSLER: - Once a major British manufacturer, sold by Mercedes Benz, is now owned by FIAT of Italy.

ROLLS ROYCE: - Still manufactured in the United Kingdom, but currently owned and engineered by BMW AG of Germany.

BENTLEY: - Owned by Volkswagen AG of Germany.

ROVER (LAND ROVER): - Originally British Leland, then FORD owned, now TATA GROUP of India.

TRIUMPH MOTOR: - Originally British Leland, now owned by BMW AG of Germany.

JAGUAR: - Originally British Leland, then FORD, now owned by TATA GROUP of India.

ASTON MARTIN: - FORD still owns 8 – 10% of company, majority now owned by ADEEM INVESTMENTS CO. a Kuwaiti company.

MORGAN AUTO: - The original Morgan family still owns 100% of the company (British owned).

TATA GROUP: - This India owned, family group, owns Jaguar & Land Rover. The Tata Group also owns Tetley Tea Company, an old British firm who exported tea all over the world. I remember my mother buying Tetley Tea in Canada.

The information I was able to retrieve says that the only British owned manufacturer of automobiles is Morgan. At least it is still owned 100% by the Morgan family.

So what has happened to the British motor industry? Management at FORD Motor Co. told me privately that the British labor unions and the British government requirements, forced on the industry in general, caused FORD to move to Germany. Was GM in the same situation? We will probably never know. What a shame, a crying shame!

John McMullan

Enthusiast, Take Two

Re: A-Antics Volume 40, NO. 1, Binding Brakes

I read with great interest “Binding Brakes” - reprint from Chicagoland MG Club tech tips. Having spent a number of years in the brake business I am always interested to learn new information.

The information relayed was very true regarding the binding of the brakes causing the pads/shoes to start slowing the vehicle down. That means there is a residual pressure on part if not the whole of the brake system. I will explain. As stated, in the master cylinder, the piston cup must pass over the orifice into

the reservoir so both the fluid and the fluid pressure can be relieved from the brake system. If the brake system's pressure is not relieved, there is a residual pressure left on the brake system.

I agree that a maladjusted master cylinder push rod can be at fault. That remedy is explained in the workshop manual. Regarding the hole in the cork gasket or a brass shim between the master cylinder casting and the cover, I believe the spring inside the master cylinder pushing the piston back may be at fault. In other words, the return spring has become weak, not allowing the cup and piston to relieve the system pressure through the master cylinder reservoir.

Now another problem could be presenting itself. This residual brake pressure, is it causing one of, or both front brakes to "Drag"? Or is this residual brake pressure limited to the rear brakes? The problem causing the residual brake pressure could be one to four problem areas. The first three problems could be the brake hoses.

What I have seen is a hose collapse into itself. A brake hose is made up of a number of layers of high pressure, flexible special rubber that is compatible with brake fluid. What can happen is one of these layers of internal brake hose can collapse, shutting the hose off. There is a vacuum created between the inner layers of the hose and the outer layers of the hose, shutting the hose off which does not allow the residual brake pressure to vent off into the master cylinder reservoir. The hose in effect becomes a check valve. The hose will overcome the initial brake application (the master cylinder will create in our MGs as much as 500 psi pressure), but the collapsed hose (said vacuum created) will hold a residual pressure on the system.

The fourth possible problem could be dirt or rust in the lines. After pressure is relieved because your foot is off the brake system, the rust/dirt acts like a check valve, not allowing the pressure to be relieved. Remedy is a complete flush of the brake system with either brake fluid or denatured alcohol, NOTHING ELSE, repeat nothing else, then the system must be blown out with air pressure. New brake fluid must then be bled into the system and bled

through the calipers/wheel cylinder bleeder screws. Any "mushiness" in the brake pedal says there is still air in the brake system.

Remember, the brake system is the most important part / system of the car. It keeps us alive to enjoy our driving experience. A 1000 horsepower engine is also fun, too. John McMullan

Thoughts About Detroit Steel-Dave Quinn

Three of us braved 80 miles of nasty weather (passed at least 10 cars in the center media) to attend what I found to be the best Detroit Auto Show I've ever attended.

Attendance was much lighter than normal (that was great for us) and the remodeled Cobo Hall made viewing and getting around super easy. Sorry, but at the last minute I decided I didn't want to be bothered with taking pictures and left the iPhone at home. I didn't realize I could have taken many great ones without fighting people to get full shots of the cars.

We saw everything on my must-see list starting with the Ford GT. OMG it is outstanding from every view. The body shape from the cockpit back is almost identical to Lewis Hamilton's F1 racecar. The two prior generation cars were just a couple steps away.

From there we went straight to Honda's 1965 F1 car that was displayed so one could have touched it from any side. Couldn't have gotten much closer if we had sat in it. We spent at least 30 minutes soaking in those first two cars!

Funny, the modern race-cars didn't draw nearly as much attention as the older one's like a '65 Shelby GT350. Oh, yah, the new Shelby is sweet.

Here's a quick list of some impressions....

-The white Mercedes-Benz AMG coupe was a knockout. I loved it. No price yet but clearly out of my price range.

-Sat in a John Cooper Works Mini - - I want one. Even with Michigan's crap roads.

-Sat in a Tesla -don't want one. Low roofline, high doors, and high sills made getting in and out a pain.

-For some reason both Audi and Porsche thought Red was the color to wear. Almost every model of both manufacturers was in red. A turnoff for me, and those with me. But the model showing the red Viper was a knockout.

-The wide ass smiley face NSX didn't do much for me. They had it in a rotating corner display which we thought was dumb since it limited viewing if any were interested and a few were. Unlike the Bolt that did not have a single person looking at it, even though it was like a road block and you couldn't miss it. Someone has got to change the 50 mpg requirement.

-Lincoln butterfly grills are as bad as Acura's smile. They had several new Vette's and some looked great and some over-done. The one's with a shiny black vent behind the front wheels, didn't

make it for me. The four large organ-looking exhausts out the back were another turnoff.

-Cadillac styling looks dated and their seats still suck. No wonder they aren't selling.

-The Maserati looked great. The Jag didn't stand out like I thought it might. The 2016 Miata looked nice but didn't really excite me.

-Clearly every manufacturer feels they must have a string of LED lights around the headlights, which I found to be generally distracting rather than adding to the lines of the cars.



Mercedes



Mini Cooper



NAMGAR GT-40

June 15-19, 2015 • Frankenmuth, MI



<http://gt40.namgar.com>



Don't forget to register for **GT-40 June 15-19, 2015** in Frankenmuth, MI, known as Michigan's Little Bavaria. The town takes great pride in preserving its German heritage. You'll also find flowers and greenery blooming in an area that has what many visitors describe as the most authentic Bavarian architecture to be found anywhere in the United States. The host hotel is the Bavarian Inn Lodge, a German themed hotel that has lots of extras to keep any visitor busy during their stay. In addition to some planned unique events, GT-40 will also celebrate the 60th anniversary of the introduction of the MGA 1500. Details and registration form are available at <http://www.gt40.namgar.com/>

2015

ROWDIES 2015 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL

11 KIMBER BIRTHDAY PARTY-Delhi Cafe, Holt, MI-Meet at 11:30, lunch at noon.

JUNE

15-19 GT-40 in Frankenmuth at Bavarian Inn

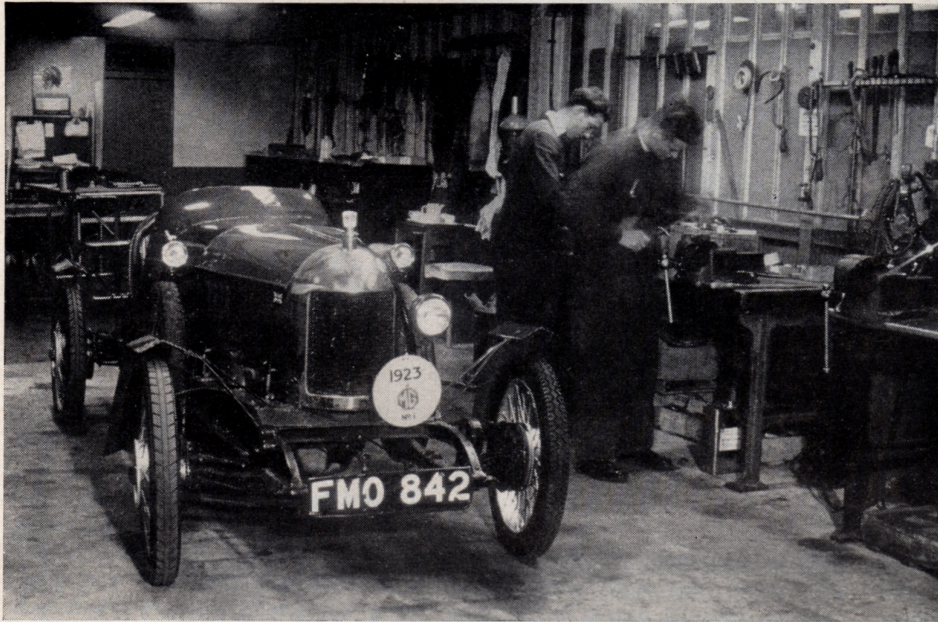
Register Your MGA With NAMGAR!



Join over 2,000 enthusiastic owners in the restoration, preservation, and sheer enjoyment of driving an MGA, Magnette, or variant of this noble breed. You'll receive six bi-monthly issues of MGA!, our full-color, award winning magazine, invitations to National and Regional Get-Togethers throughout the U.S. and Canada, plus a knowledge base and support group second to none. All this for just \$37.50 per year (North America), or \$52.50 (International). **Get more information at <http://www.namgar.com>, or contact registrar@namgar.com.**



Photographed by Brassai



THE first MG, vintage 1923 (left), was a stripped-down and souped-up Morris Oxford with Hotchkiss engine, cycle fenders, racy lightweight body and a top speed of 80 mph—a far cry from the streamlined version in the inspection shed on the right.

**Reprinted from Sports Illustrated
Feb 22, 1959**

England to America— the Nimble MG

Three-fourths of the total production went to the U.S. last year, providing keen sport—and a seat for the girl friend

IN 1084, we are told, William the Conqueror celebrated Easter at Abingdon, a town situated where the river Ock, which drains the Vale of White Horse, joins the river Thames. Enthusiasts of motor sports couldn't care less. The thing that really matters about Abingdon, as they know, is that it is the home of the MG sports car, a perennial bestseller in the U.S. On the right, where just-built MGs are receiving final inspection, and on the following pages, the camera of the renowned French photographer Brassai shows the MG in its native habitat.

Writing of the appeal of early sports cars, the MG general manager, John W. Thornley, has said, "The motorcyclist knew the meaning of response to his controls, had experienced a surge of power when he opened the taps, had learned the importance of balance and of placing his wheels to a hair's breadth, [but] felt perhaps

that to keep the girl friend on a bracket behind him was a bit of a waste."

In America, during the great revival of interest in sports cars since World War II, capped and jacketed MG owners have indeed thrilled, charmed or scared the daylights out of a generation of warmly adjacent girl friends. More important, the MG has become perhaps the best-known symbol of what a sports car is. Last year the tea-drinking artisans of Abingdon built 20,037 streamlined MGA models (each an outrage, by the way, to the conservative types who cherished the previous squarish MGs), of which a full 15,492 were shipped to America.

Mr. Thornley thinks this is jolly good.

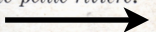
"If we knew all the answers to why Americans buy MGs," he says, "we should be home and dry to the end of time. The real attraction undoubtedly is that once the driver sits in the seat and takes hold of the steering wheel, he feels that he is in complete control, that he can wring the car's neck if it doesn't behave. At all times an MG is stable and predictable; it gives notice of its intentions through the seat of the driver's pants."



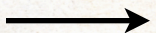


Sleek MGs move toward completion on the assembly line at the Abingdon works. The crane overhead drops a body shell onto a chassis every seven minutes. The line stops as the workers take 10-minute tea breaks at 10:20 and 4:20.

Ducks watch from the pleasant bank in the foreground as an MG unhurriedly crosses the quiet Thames by antiquated ferry near Abingdon. As Photographer Brassai noted, the historic waterway is at this point *une petite rivière*.



Finished cars are arrayed in bright patterns in the big export car park at Abingdon, awaiting shipment overseas. White MGs are in foreground; standard Austin-Healeys and Sprites, which share the Abingdon assembly line, are beyond.





GT-40 Planning Committee

It may have been a quiet week at Lake Wobegone lately, but your Rowdie team of GT-40 planners have been working quietly like little beavers to get all plans in place to make sure that GT-40 will be a bang-up GT, long remembered by NAMGAR members across the country. This is the 60th year celebration of the introduction of the first 1500 series MGA, and the 4th decade that Michigan has sponsored a GT. Larry and Mitzi Pittman have been working long hours into the night supervising this event and deserve a hearty round of applause for their efforts. They hope to see every available Rowdie in Frankenmuth for a Gemutlich Gut Time come this June. Don't forget to register for the event by May 1st to avoid a late fee. And the operators at the Bavarian Inn are standing by now to take your call and assist with your reservation!



Photos by Ken Nelson



CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER

by Dave Quinn

Digital, digital, digital was the clear message a few years back for publishing A-Antics. Move beyond the old world of paper newspapers and embrace the new world of

Internet communications and social media. Thankfully, the Rowdies thought, "Don't be so quick to change horses. Traditional media isn't dead." So several years ago we elected to offer A-Antics in both a printed version and online version. Some might say that it was a curmudgeon view to retain the printed newsletter, what with everyone so focused on the millennial view of the future. However, those of us 50 years old or more remember when computers were introduced with great fanfare into the work place on the promise that PC's would soon end the paper world. Didn't happen. Traditionally, since offering the two options, our club membership has been split 50/50 on the media selected. Those of us signing up for the all color printed version will get the best of both worlds since we get the online as well, so I was extremely pleased to see the club embrace the transition to an all-color printed newsletter. I know the couple sample issues we did were very well received. Maybe someday we will all be happy reading A-Antics on a smartphone but I love reading the magazine version and look forward to a year of color. A-Antics is the glue that holds the club together and I hope you appreciate the time and talent of our editor to put out a first rate publication no matter how you receive it. Thank you Ken.

The March 1st due date for everyone to have paid their 2015 dues will be over by the time you are reading this. Larry Pittman handles the mailing of the dues renewal notice. Jeff Zorn handles the payment deposits and the transmission of membership updates back to Larry. Then Larry updates the membership database, the membership listing on our website, and

the newsletter mailing list that goes to the printer. Thanks Jeff and Larry for these "behind the scenes" tasks. Thanks to all of you who sent in your payment by the due date. Any delays in paying dues means a lot of extra work for these two volunteers, so do not delay if you forgot.

Dave Quinn

Editorial Thoughts

I have to second Dave Q's thoughts about reading a printed copy of the A-Antics instead of an electronic version. Holding a printed copy of a magazine along with my morning coffee just seems easier on the eyes and mind than racing through a computer page wondering what will happen if my coffee spills.

See Dave's comments on the Detroit auto show as well in this issue. Sadly, we still don't have a new MG sports car on display, but there are still some sporting machines to be had. Dave was impressed by the Ford GT, but I was amazed to see a new BMW i8 hybrid sportscar drive past me in the heart of our subzero winter recently. Amazing machines, but at well over \$100,000 not for the likes of most mortals on this planet. Hopefully more affordable will be a Ford Shelby GT350 Mustang later this year.

This issue of the Antics I have reprinted 3 MG articles from years past; the 1st highlighting MG's introduction and export to America, the next covering a review of MG's sporting 4-seater Y and Z type Magnettes, and finally a review of the MGA Twin Cam.

I would also support Dave's request to thank all of the volunteers who make our club as great as it is. Larry and Mitzi Pittman, as well as Dave and Donna Quinn continue to do a fantastic job providing leadership for our club and the upcoming GT. Meanwhile, the picture below represents a bit of "California Dreaming" on my part.



BMW i8

*Reprinted from Classic and Sportscar
October 1989*



Old faithfuls...

The Nuffield-designed and MG-built Y-Type and Z-Type saloons were long-time favourites with the sporting motorist, but the BMC-built Farina Magnette and MG 1100 were regarded with some cynicism. Martin Buckley sees if the cars live up to the MG name. Photos: Julian Mackie, David Goldman, Keith Russell

The post-war saloons to wear the MG badge were parts-bin cocktails – there's no way you can get away from that.

Although they were designed at Cowley, the Y-Type and its replacement, the Z-Type Magnette, did however have a distinctive MG character, and were actually assembled at Abingdon. In contrast, the BMC cars, the Magnette Series III and IV, and the MG 1100 and 1300, were nothing more than badge-engineered specials, assembled on BMC's mass-production lines.

First of our quartet, the Y-Type MG 1¼-litre saloon used a bored-out 1250cc version of the all-

new ohv four introduced in the Morris Ten Series M of 1938. The chassis was a fresh design, with coil-and-wishbone independent front end and rack-and-pinion steering.

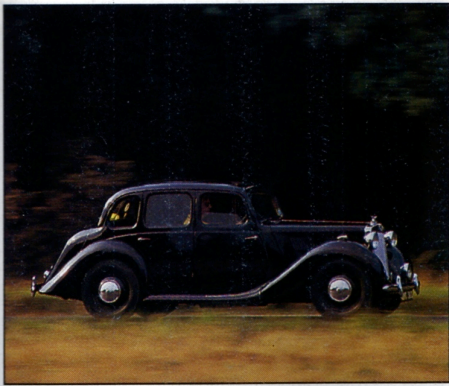
The ZA Magnette which followed the 'Y' shared its basic Gerald Palmer design with the Wolseley 4/44. Thus it had monocoque construction, and similar front suspension and steering to that on the Y-Type, but had a 60bhp twin-carb version of the 1489cc BMC 'B' series engine.

In October 1956 came the ZB, with 4bhp more, and a simple horizontal chrome strip on each side. Introduced alongside it was the ZB Varitone, with

duo-tone paint and an enlarged rear window.

The Magnette Series III which replaced the ZB was nothing more than an Austin Cambridge in fancy dress, and thus had cam-and-peg steering rather than the preceding cars' precise rack-and-pinion. 16,676 were sold between 1959 and 1961, which wasn't too bad, but the 1622cc Series IV which followed had clocked up only 14,320 sales by the time it was discontinued in 1968.

In complete contrast was the MG 1100. Sold in the US as a two-door, it was optionally available for a few months in 1967 with the 1275cc engine, before the MkII 1100 and 1300 came along in October 1967.



The Y-Type's well-proportioned styling is by Gerald Palmer, around the Morris Series E centre-section; sliding roof was standard



car that's only just beginning to show its age in certain areas where the paint has rubbed through due to over-zealous polishing... Trevor just enjoys owning and using the car carefully, all year round.

So what is the attraction of the YA? "Well, I've owned a series of old cars in the past and I am getting to the stage where I want something that is reliable and that I don't have to spend every spare moment of my time working on. One of the things I find particularly pleasant about it is that I can do quite a lot on it myself: everything is fairly accessible, apart from checking the master cylinder and rear axle."

The biggest problem with the YA is scuttling out of the way of other traffic. Pulling out of a road junction has to be a well planned manoeuvre because the acceleration is so meagre. But it's such a sweet little thing, the engine a willing, if ineffectual, performer, smooth and not even particularly vibratory or noisy. It feels happiest thrumming away at a cheerful 45mph. I couldn't imagine doing 70mph, and going around some of the twisty up-hill roads near Box Hill, it began to feel distinctly lacking in puff, hardly having enough in reserve to pull it out of corners.

The gearbox is a beautiful clock-pause-click affair, with a very satisfying short mechanical action. The steering was crisp and direct, and the general handling of the car felt positive and tight as long as the roads were good, but show it a decent pothole and it would bounce all over the place.

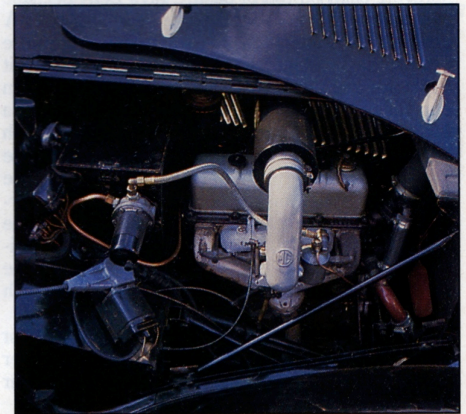
Owning a YA is as much about the interior as anything else: the green leather, the wood, the twee octagonal dials that immediately get you into the car's pipe-slippers-and-cricket-on-the-village-green character. The cockpit is very narrow, but lightened by a larger, sliding Weathershields sunroof, and rear passengers even of average height have to wrap their legs around the seats. Were people smaller in the forties?

There are lots of nice details, like the semaphore indicators worked by a clockwork dial on the steering boss, the very complete tool kit and those amazing hydraulic jacks that send the car up on four little stilts. Somebody has even fitted a Festival of Britain badge to the front bumper and there's another in the centre of the fascia.

I can see the appeal of the YA. It's a gentle, civilised car belonging to an era that only ever existed in people's minds.



Lovely octagonal dials on 'Y' – Kimber would have approved! Front screen opens. Engine, derived from Morris Ten unit, is of 1250cc



Funny little things these Y-types. Underneath, it has an elongated TD chassis and 1250cc engine and box, but the centre of the body is Series E Morris 8, of all things, with restyled nose and tail sections.

Thus, it's a very pre-war car in shape – it was to have been introduced in 1941 – but handsome in an austere way, with its big wheels, sweeping wing line and fine, upright MG grille. Between 1947 and 1951 they produced 6158 YAs and 1201 YBs with twin-leading shoe brakes and hypoid axles up until 1953.

Trevor Austen's black YA is a 1951 car in almost totally original condition and Trevor, who became custodian of the car in 1986, can account for its entire history.

"It was bought by a rich Belgian steel fencing manufacturer for his wife, who already owned a secondhand one. They sold it in 1956 to one Mr Mercer who was a real fusspot, and treated the car like a baby: nobody was allowed to sit in the back seat, and apparently there was nearly a divorce when his wife accidentally scratched the door with her ring when getting in. He owned the car for 25 years until he had to sell it in 1980, due to ill-health. The third owner, Mr West, was hardly any less precious about it although he did make one or two modifications such as flasher units to back up the semaphores, an external oil filter, and a towing attachment."

Every bill and tax disc is still with the car and about the only mechanical item that has been replaced in 48,000 miles is the dynamo. It's a uniquely original



Styling of Z-Type Magnette was also by Palmer, and was shared with Wolseley 4/44. Hockeystick chrome trim identifies the ZA



Of the MG foursome, the ZA Magnette is the car for which I had the greatest affinity. A balanced personality, and a high sporting credibility rating, set the ZA apart. Gerald Palmer's rounded, italianate lines are still superb – simple and unadorned. The twin carb B-series always motored the car along well

and – believe it or not – these things actually handled! They were comfortable, too.

Len Pitt, BEM, has owned his ZA Magnette since 1966, swapping for it a Vauxhall Victor which he detested. It is a famous car in the MG Car Club, and over the last 23 years Len has done every possible job on the car you can think of: countless resprays, sill replacements, and many different engines.

“The old three-bearing cranks don’t last very long” says Len, “and I’ve put paid to quite a few in my time, because I’ve got a bit of a heavy right foot. This one isn’t going too well. I’m running on the correct 1¼in SUs but they aren’t set up for the MGB camshaft I’ve got in it, so the performance is a little putrid. At one stage I had a balanced engine with flat top pistons and an MGB camshaft, and I pushed a hundred out of it with that combination, but it was frightening! I don’t like going much above 80mph now and my days of excitement are over.”

Although Len shows the car, it is his only form of transport, and it certainly has to work for its living. “I use it every day for shopping, carting muck around, everything, and now and again my son uses it for work when his car starts playing up.” Years of road-side brakedowns have taught Len to carry a very complete set of spares in the pokey boot: two spare petrol pumps, two coils, the lot.

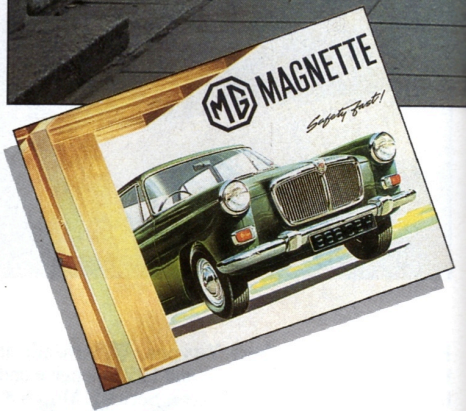
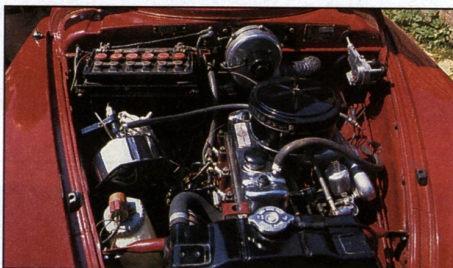
Although the car is rust-free, the paint is beginning to crack in places. “It doesn’t pay to keep spraying paint on top of paint,” says Len “because eventually it fatigues. My next job is to strip the ZA down to bare metal and start again”. Given more power, the ZA Magnette gives the impression that it might be good fun, but even as it stands, it is an entertaining and nicely balanced machine. You get a good feeling about it as soon as you get in. The dash is covered in really lush walnut, and set in front of the driver is something akin to a domestic fifties valve radio set – a 100mph semi-octagonal speedo surrounded by four small square extra gauges, plus the heater controls, and a scattering of largely unidentifiable switches. You press one of them to start the engine, a surprisingly distant-sounding unit with obvious sporting inclinations.

It’s the sort of car you could happily drive for hours at a time. With that comforting view out over the shapely little snout, it’s a snug, cossetting car

with a good nature. The unit is tappety – but you can talk normally at 65mph, and although the low-down performance is mediocre, the car begins to feel quite frisky once it is turning quickly and beginning to climb on the cam.

And what a great gearbox! A really slick movement with just the right amount of resistance, helped by a well-placed short lever and a smooth hydraulic clutch. The offset, oddly angled steering wheel is big, and it needs to be, because the rack and pinion steering is heavy until the car is really moving, but it is precise, with just the right amount of road surface feedback. Len reckons that the ZA “rolls like a battleship” on corners, but it felt fine to me. The body lean is very well controlled by fifties benchmarks with a build-up of safe but moderate understeer. Due to tiring high pedal pressures, a servo was fitted to the hydraulic drum brakes, so bite is reassuring. Like all these saloons, the ZA felt ill at ease on the motorway because it is desperately undergearing. An overdrive would sort it out, but the ZA was built years before Britain had any motorways.

The Z-series cars are the classic MG saloons, despite being kissing cousins with the yawn-inducing Wolseleys that use the same bodyshell. Good looking, nicely finished, and interesting to drive, they are characterful all-rounders worth taking seriously.



Above right: ZA facia looks like fifties radio set with half-octagonal speedo. Right: Early B-series 1½-litre engine gives willing 60bhp, with twin SUs supplying the mixture



Left: The Z Magnette’s smooth, rounded lines still look superb and are shared with sober Wolseley 4/44. Below: Both 1100 and ’59 Magnette have Farina-styled bodywork



Technical Tips-Bullet Connectors

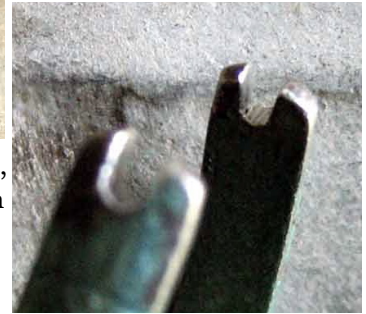
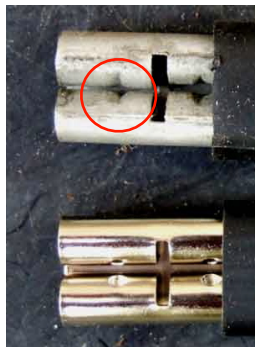
Solder the bullets for use with MGA connectors. Don't use crimp-type connectors. In the picture below, the red ones are too small and the blue ones too large to fit



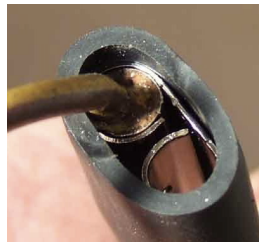
Lucas push-in connectors. Typical original (top) and current stock (bottom) bullet connectors are shown at right. The original have rubber sleeves slightly smaller than the metal part so it is a tight fit. Modern stuff uses plastic sleeves of the same size so the metal part can easily slide out of the insulator and short out on surrounding components.



Original connectors have a pronounced dimple (circled) that the head of the bullet must be pushed past to snap into position, which also retains it very firmly. Modern connectors have a much less pronounced projection so the bullet can be pulled out more easily. Original connectors have another projection in the middle of the metal part (arrowed) which helps prevent one bullet being pushed too far in, so preventing its opposite number being pushed in far enough. Modern connectors don't have this. For ease of



assembling, cut a notch in the handles of a pair of pliers just large enough to slip over the wire but still press on the back of the bullet. Pictures below show preparing to push the bullets in squeeze until the outer covering is compressed and the back of the bullet is flush with the end of the metal part. 'Odd' bullets, i.e. only 3 wires, are dealt with in the same way.



Finally make sure the metal part is centralized in the outer covering. Various after-market crimp bullets don't fit the original



bullet connectors. British Wiring at <http://www.britishwiring.com/> can supply proper bullets and connectors.



Drive an MGA Twin-Cam and it feels so good it *has* to have been right. Yet it's the MG you shouldn't touch with the proverbial barge-pole. It's the MG with the fancy engine which blows up on you, isn't it?

Or is this all baloney? To find out more, it was off to spend an evening with Nick Cox, Twin-Cam Registrar of the MG Car Club, and Don Smith, who's one of the Grand Old Men of the Twin-Cam world, and has owned his T/C since 1964.

The first point to make is that the Twin-Cam really is a gorgeous car to drive, as a good thrash around Kentish lanes in Nick's car soon made clear. Quite simply, the Twin-Cam engine makes the MGA. I've always had a soft spot for the 'A', with its elegantly simple lines and its crisp, firm, responsive chassis. The good-natured handling, the precise steering, and the lack of any trace of flabbiness in its behaviour, make it a far more endearing car than the softer and more refined MGB. What it needs is an engine to match: although the 'B' series offers a respectable performance, it's not a unit with any real flair.

Crisp, punchy, the Twin-Cam is an engine which howls 'sports car' at you. It feels solid, instantly responsive, and makes All The Right Noises.

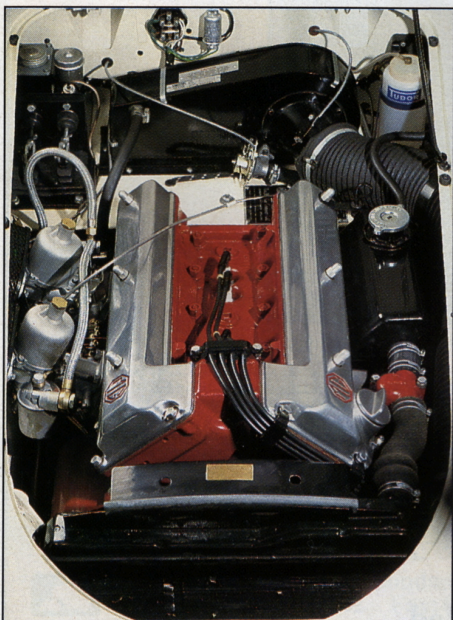
Your smile comes on cam with the engine, as it springs alive at 4000rpm, with that 'hammer, hammer' of a tuned engine doing its business. The sound as you push it to 4500rpm, and then beyond, is glorious, and the performance matches: it's not all noise and no go – there really is punch. And no, it's not inflexible, although it clearly prefers to be kept at higher revs. Imagine an Alfa twin-cam with a more carved-from-the-solid feel, and you've got it.

But the MGA Twin-Cam was a flop. Introduced in July 1958, it was withdrawn in April 1960, after only 2311 had been built: Abingdon was no longer prepared to live with the reputation the Twin-Cam had gained for holing its pistons, running on, fouling its plugs, and generally being a temperamental brute. MG's fine name was at stake...

The MGA Twin-Cam is simply a slightly modified standard MGA, fitted with a twin-cam adaptation of the normal 'B' series pushrod engine.

The alloy twin-cam head has chain-driven camshafts, and the valves are actuated by inverted bucket tappets, with 'biscuit' shims. Unusually, and

Twin-Cam engine (below) is tight fit, but servicing isn't quite as bad as it looks; removing top hose aids access to distributor. Unit gives glorious, crisp performance



to cause minimum departure from the pattern of engine block used on the pushrod 'B' series, drive from the crank is by shaft and gears rather than by chain: a gear is fitted to the nose of the crank, meshing with a jackshaft running where the cam would be on the pushrod block, and from the shaft drive is taken to the camshafts by chain. Drive for the oil pump, distributor and rev counter is also taken off the jackshaft.

**The Twin-Cam howls 'sports car'.
It feels solid, instantly responsive,
and makes All the Right Noises**

The engine is bored out to 1588cc, as against the 1489cc of the then-standard MGA, and the crank features narrower main bearings and an extended nose to take the timing chains. The SU carbs are slightly larger, at 1 3/4in, there's a four-branch exhaust, and the alloy sump is finned and baffled. Interestingly, the intake camshaft was designed to drive an SU fuel-injection pump for what today we'd call 'throttle-body' fuel injection...

The result of all this is 108bhp at 6700rpm, an increase in power of 33 per cent over the pushrod '1500', and a maximum torque of 104lb ft at 4500rpm. This translated into a 0-60mph time of 9.1sec for *The Motor*, as against 15sec for the 1500; maximum speed was clocked at 115mph.

Externally, the Twin-Cam is characterised by its pressed steel centre-lock wheels, located by pegs rather than the more usual splines. These wheels hide all-round Dunlop disc brakes, and other mechanical changes include a modified chassis with improved bracing, a steering rack moved a little forward (giving a wider turning circle), and uprated front springs. Inside there are deeper seats and a Vynide-covered dashboard. At £1265 for the roadster and £1357 for the Coupé, in 1958 it was £270 more expensive than the pushrod cars.

The story goes that the new engine came about when BMC needed an engine for continuous high-revolution testing of bearings, in 1953, following bearing problems when seeking to uprate the 'B' series. It seems that John Thornley of MG got wind of the project, and decided this was just what Abingdon needed.

Initially there was an Austin-built version, using

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Double trouble?

The MGA Twin-Cam had a reputation for being a bundle of trouble. Jon Pressnell tells the story of the car, and talks to two experts about the truth behind the myths. Photos: Tim Andrew



an all-new block, and having a tighter angle between the valves, and a Morris-built unit with a wider valve angle and a block based on the standard 'B' series.

The Austin unit was less powerful, and when the go-ahead was given to put the engine into production, the Morris-conceived variant was chosen, following a brief showing in the 1955 TT – with the stipulation that the 'B' series block be retained. This was a fatal mistake – and John Thornley knew it.

“For all the wrong reasons we were tied to virtually those bore centres and that stroke. We knew therefore that the engine was going to be tricky, although I think time has shown that in the hands of someone who knows what he’s doing, it’s a completely satisfactory and reliable job.

“With this in mind, I decreed that we should make only 25 a week, and with luck we should then be able to steer them into the hands of capable people.”

Five handbuilt Twin-Cam units a day thus rolled out of the Morris Engines branch in Coventry, with the intention that the cars be directed mainly towards trusted Abingdon customers, principally on the amateur racing scene. But demand from the States was so high, with £2m of orders even before the car was announced, (or so the story goes) that Thornley’s ‘play-it-safe’ policy was over-ridden by BMC management and production was cranked up to 75 per week, with most of the first seven months

of output going to the States to bring in the dollars.

“That meant that 50 a week went into the hands of BFs,” recalls Thornley. “The pistons started to give trouble, and the reputation of the vehicle fell to bits.”

“A lot were ordered by American servicemen in Germany,” says Nick Cox. “I met someone who used to work in the warranty department, and he was going out once a week to Germany with a set of pistons in his baggage, because some heavy-footed Yank had burnt a hole in his...”

“I decreed we should make only 25 a day... and steer them into the hands of capable people”

“The trouble in the States was that there was little after-sales service. Basically, all the dealers were interested in was selling the cars and forgetting them. There were hardly any proper dealers, and there was no real back-up – they reckoned there was even a shortage of manuals for a while”.

And so the plug was pulled – so suddenly that Abingdon were left with piles of Twin-Cam chassis and other special components. These were apparently all built into the MGA 1600 De Luxe model, a Twin-Cam in all but its pushrod engine. It’s not quite



Nick has completely restored his white car, while Don has run his blue Twin-Cam since 1964, most of the time as his regular car, and with two rebuilds during this 25-year period



that simple when it comes down to it, says Nick.

“This term ‘De Luxe’ is really abused. I think they made about 50 real De Luxes, using Twin-Cam bodies and chassis, and just putting in the pushrod engine. But as late as 1962 they’d still got the Twin-Cam wheels and back axles – so they were selling an MGA with all-round disc brakes and centre-lock pressed wheels available as a competition extra.

“It was a way of using up the wheels and brake sets and back axles – but by that time they were using a standard MGA chassis, just putting on the Twin-Cam steering rack bracket. This was because the front suspension on the Twin-Cam was different from the kingpin out, and so they had to use the revised steering. The total number of Twin-Cams and cars with all-round discs and steel centre-locks comes to 2500 or so, so I reckon they must originally have ordered 2500 sets of brakes and wheels.

Almost 30 years on from the Twin-Cam’s demise, Nick and Don aren’t bothered by the car’s reputation, and both use their Twin-Cam to the full.

Don, who’s in the insurance business, has covered 133,000 miles in his car since he bought it in 1964 at a cost of £345 – complete with an almost new Gold Seal engine.

“We’ve never raced or rallied it, but we use it fairly hard, and I think that if I say that I get around 20,000 miles out of a set of Michelin XAS tyres, when everyone else gets around 38,000...”

“It does get used hard, then. But the considered view of a number of us in Kent who have Twin-Cams is that they’re best when they’re used hard!”

For many years the Twin-Cam was used as an everyday car, especially by Don’s wife, Jan, and it’s still in regular use today. Of recent years it has also been on numerous continental tours with the MG Car Club, including a fair bit of pass-storming in Austria and Italy.

“It was quite normal, it seemed, to use it as an everyday car,” says Jan, who after having helped on two rebuilds of the car is something of a Twin-Cam expert in her own right. “I had no hassles apart from oiling up of the plugs. I got quite adept at changing them, and I knew which to go for once it was oiled up.”

Don has never had the crank out, but he’s fitted a

new set of pistons, after one holed, and he's also fitted new big ends and rebuilt the head – not bad going, in 25 years.

Nick, on the other hand, has carried out a complete no-holds-barred restoration on his Twin-Cam, which is doubtless why it currently has a valuation of £19,000. An aircraft engineer, he bought the car in 1984 as a collection of bits, as a successor to his pushrod MGA 1600, and having made sure that all the special bits for the engine were present.

“My difficulties were mainly with the engine, though. It had been badly rebuilt 10-12 years previously, and they'd basically boded everything.

“It had funny pistons – two were Hepolite, two were BMC, and they were all different weights. And they'd overground the crank and put funny thrust washers on it, and then the car had been well and truly thrashed and the crank had been virtually jumping around in the block. It ruined the crank, which had a massive great crack in it and had spun its centre main bearing. One of the gudgeon pins had scored a bore, too, so it was quicker and easier to try to find a new block.”

With the engine, Nick had help from well-known Twin-Cam specialist Peter Wood. “He knows Twin-Cams back to front, and inside out, and has the biggest supply of Twin-Cam parts anywhere in the

world. It just took time. Because I didn't have a lot of money, I just had to be patient, and in the end Peter just appeared with things.”

“I had no hassle apart from oiling up of the plugs. I got quite adept at changing them!”

But what's it all about, this appalling reputation which the Twin-Cam suffers? Much of it centres around the original fitting of special high-compression pistons, giving a compression ratio of 9.9:1. Not only did this demand five-star petrol, but it also became crucial to use cool, or 'hard', plugs, to keep combustion temperatures down. Ignore these requirements, and you'd get pinking from the low-octane petrol, higher combustion temperatures from the use of ordinary plugs, and the combination of the two would soon blow a hole in a piston... as careless Americans didn't take long to discover.

A change by MG to lower-compression 8.3:1 pistons effectively eliminated the problem and improved tractability, but that was only half the story as far as the pistons were concerned, says Don.

“The chrome top rings needed a good quality bore

machine and if they didn't get it, because sometimes BMC was a bit 'iffy' with its machinery, then the rings just didn't seal properly. So the oil was going straight past the rings and burning. That was how the cars got their reputation as an oil-burner. To cure the problem all BMC did was to change over to an iron ring.

“Another problem was that the pistons were the solid skirt racing type, whereas if you get hold of an ordinary 'B' series piston it'll have a split skirt, with the cut-out.

“These solid-skirt pistons swell up a lot more when they get hot, so most people recommend a good five thou' clearance between the piston and the bore, without rings, to allow for the expansion. But they didn't give enough clearance. They set them as on a standard 'B' series and people just got hold of them and thrashed them from the word go, and basically just chewed through the pistons, breaking them, cracking them, badly scoring them with the chrome rings because the rings were acting as a broaching tool, as they didn't wear. That's when BMC came out with the iron rings...”

On top of this, early engines also had problems with the bucket tappets sticking in the head and then shattering. This didn't do the valve timing much good, with inevitably catastrophic results. Revised





tappets running in steel guides solved this one.

Early cars, in addition, suffered from vibration in the con-rods, cured by introduction of a beefier item. Today, these later Twin-Cam con-rods are popular as racing rods for the MGB, incidentally.

Finally, the distributor's automatic vacuum advance mechanism tended to get out of kilter with predictable effect on the accurate engine timing so crucial to the Twin-Cam's combustion process. A return to the traditional flyweight- and-spring type of distributor was the solution.

And we haven't mentioned plug-fouling, something to which Twin-Cam owners have to become accustomed to a greater or lesser degree.

So what are the secrets to running a Twin-Cam without ending each trip carrying the engine home in the shopping basket?

Timing is crucial, as the factory recognised when they recommended checking the timing by stroboscope. "But once the engine has been set up," says Nick, "there shouldn't be any problem, so long as you keep a note of the mileage at which you should be checking things – say every 3000-6000 miles."

Don stresses the importance of getting the mixture right. "They always like to be a little rich. You always want a nice black exhaust, and when you whip the plugs out they should all be nice and black. If they're white you worry, because then you've got the risk of burning holes in your pistons. An engine tuner would say that's far too rich, but running rich is a safer route to take. If the mixture gets slightly weak, that raises the engine temperature, and you risk holing your pistons."

For the same reason, hard plugs are vital. Don sticks with the originally-specified Champion N-3, while Nick has been satisfied with the NGK B7-ES.

"With these modern plugs I find that if the engine does start coughing and spluttering, if you treat it with a bit of respect it will clear its throat. By all accounts if you run on these NGKs, even with high-compression pistons it cures everything."

But it's all very marginal: there's no room for error, and engine tune has to be spot-on, as Don emphasises. "It all adds up. A bit of weak mixture, a bit of wear in the spindles for the distributor – the distributor gears are very sloppy – and you could be in trouble..."

It's all very marginal: there's no room for error, and engine tune has to be spot-on

So much for the reality. There are also a couple of myths surrounding the Twin-Cam. The first is that the cars are terrible oil-burners.

"The early ones were", admits Don, "but we do about 200-300 miles to the pint, and that's with 140,000 on the engine. I reckon that's fairly good."

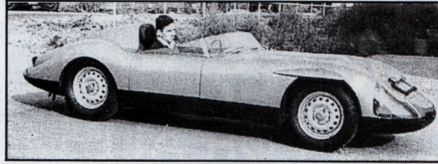
The other myth is that the extra weight of the Twin-Cam engine – only 92lb in any case – has upset the MGA's handling.

"They don't roll as much as a standard MGA, because the front springs are heavier duty... As it doesn't roll into the corner, you have to steer it a little more," reckons Nick.

"Because they handle a little bit differently, there was this feeling that they were heavy at the front end," says Don. "There are definite differences, but not by that much – you just get to notice it relative to an ordinary MGA."

You want a Twin-Cam? "Get it quick, as prices are going up", is Don's predictable advice. "And call on the services of someone who's known Twin-Cams for some while. They can tell you whether it's original and whether or not it's an authentic Twin-Cam – I've come across people who've been trying to sell converted 1600s as the real thing..."

Nick stresses the importance of satisfying yourself over the engine. Nick reckons a professional



EX 186 Twin-Cam intended for '56 Le Mans



Ted Lund's special T/C: 13th at Le Mans, '60

engine rebuild could cost up to £4000, while doing it yourself could come out at £1500-£2000. Pistons are £400 a set, a head £500, and replacing a badly damaged crank £700.

And don't think you can get away with using a pushrod block, if yours has gone west.

"In theory the block is the same; in practice, the water passages are slightly different, and the oil-ways, and a lot of bits were never machined out on the Twin-Cam. And then the bearings are a different size, because of the bigger crank with its bigger webs. It's so different it's a different block really."

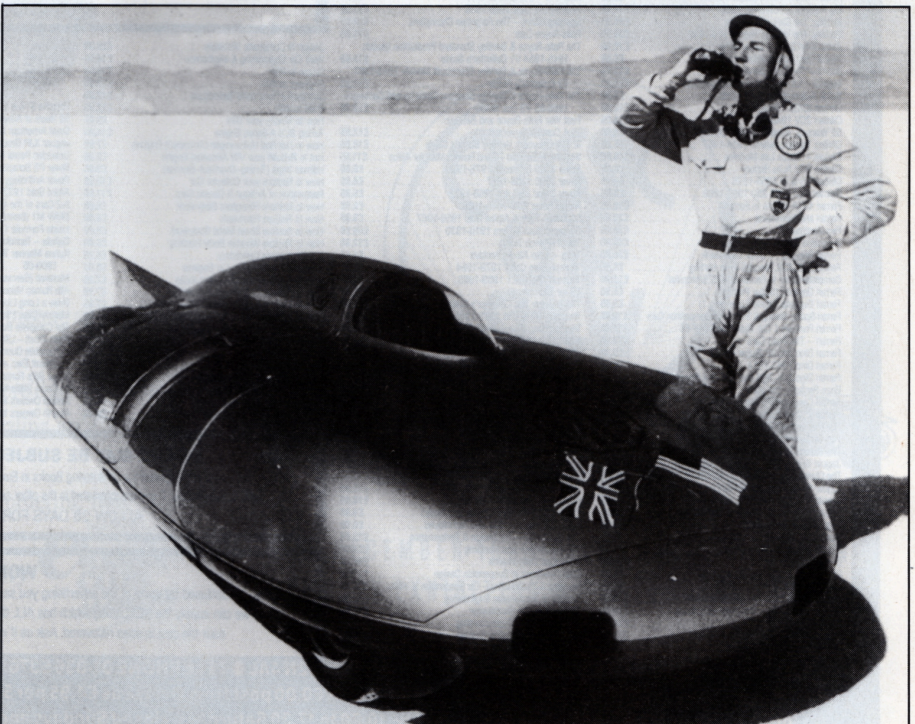
Get yourself a Twin-Cam where such problems aren't an issue, though, and you'll have the basis of a very special car, providing you're prepared to give it the attention its engineering deserves.

"A lot of people are put off because they've heard of the troubles with the car," says Don. "But it's no more complex than say a four-cylinder variant of the Jaguar XK engine."

"Most of the stories about the cars are from people who've never even seen them. I think most Twin-Cam owners are quite happy with the stories, though. They're happy with the cars, and they like to keep it quiet..."



Twin-Cam was also available as coupé – but the heat from the engine made it a hot-house



Mid-engined record-breaker, EX 181, had 290bhp blown Twin-Cam engine, reached 254mph