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Octagon  
Car Club

*'The' Club for pre 1956 MGs*  
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# Lal Pari's Longest MG100 celebration drive in the world.



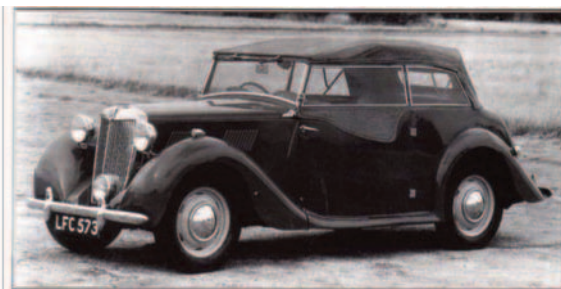
## Dover, UK 26th October 2023

A 73 day road expedition over 13500 kms and 14 countries in a 73 year old car with three generations of one family (aged 75, 50 and 21 years old), one handbag per person for clothes and a support vehicle for food, car parts and camera equipment. This was made possible with a strong vision, intrinsic planning, preparation and a lot of mad passion for Lal Pari. It wasn't just a trip we wanted to take as family but it was representative of something more, a dream fulfilled and how despite the years that go by if there is something you imagine doing for yourself, you make time for it. This journey was about turning bed time stories into real life journeys.

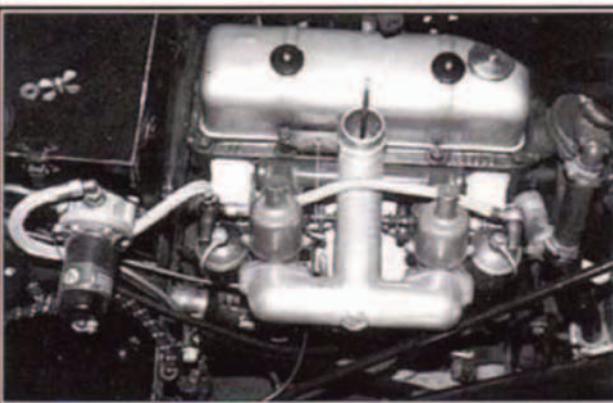
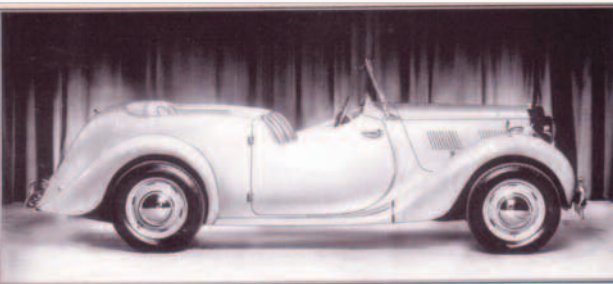
## The Beginning

It was in January 2018 that the idea of taking Lal Pari back to its birthplace- the MG factory in Abingdon got seeded in my mind. I had begun the process of restoring Lal Pari in 2016 and wanted to restore it to its 'factory specification.' From that the thought jumped to, "if we are able to restore it to its factory condition then we should also be able to drive it till we get the factory" Talk about jumping to conclusions. On January 27, 2020 we set up a Whatsapp group named 'back to factory' and that's when we started working on making the idea a reality.

## "Back to Factory" – Original Pictures from MG Factory along with Lal Pari Pictures



This photograph of a right hand drive "V2" was taken on 11th August 1949, and shows a standard pre-



## The Planning

Covid struck and we got delayed by a couple of years. First thing I could think of was that in order to complete the journey I would need parts. This being a rare (904 ever made and only about 100 odd surviving) model I searched far and wide to buy a spare car, finally finding one in Canada. Once we got the car to India (almost 1 year and after paying 300 percent duty on CIF value) we found out that it was 1 of 3 ever made and very original. So I went and bought another one in UK which was sort of a doner car with all mechanicals but not much else.



**Lal Pari with the 1 of 3 ever made YT bought from Canada:-**

**Multiple routes options were contemplated before finalizing a route thru Uzbekhstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and then into Turkey.**

### Original Route





### Final Route

But as we got delayed in our departure (due to technical difficulties with LalPari) we ended up going thru Dubai and Iran and straight into Turkey before joining the earlier route in Greece and Bulgaria.

Documentation for Visa, Carnet De Passage, Shipping, exporting of cars etc. was a constant challenge. Spare parts and tools for the break downs along the journey needed to be planned. Being vegetarians we carried over 100kg of food with us as we were 7 of us for this journey.

### Getting Lal Pari & Saheli ready

Getting Lal Pari ready to be driven for over 10,000 kms was definitely a challenge because one constant memory that everyone in the family has of LalPari over the years is them pushing the car as it would break down frequently. She has a mind of her own, deciding which trial went successful on her own terms. My father and Madhu Uncle, a specialist in fixing such cars, were working tirelessly in the heat of May and June to get her ready to a level where we can start our test drives. But nothing seemed to work fully and at the end of May the engine of the car failed. Now what?

To save time, I took a flight to travel to Southampton, UK within 24 hours of the break down to get ‘the backbone of the trip,’ the crank shaft in check in baggage. I made the most of the trip by attending the 100 year celebration of MG at the British Motor museum. Now while this process was going on and we were questioning the approximate time we would take to get the car ready and driven at least 1000kms in different conditions to test its capabilities and if she would be able to endure the journey.

In parallel with this we bought a Tata Winger Van to convert it into our support vehicle for the trip.



### **Lal Pari Ke Saheli (Friend of Lal Pari) getting kitted for the journey**

My mother being an interior designer focused on getting all the customizations required right. We needed space for full kitchen, 90 odd parts plus tools, three bags of camera equipment, charging station, sleeping bags, tent, towing mechanism, and last but not the least for our 3 pairs of clothes. We had a partial window removed and the back seat turned to face the back door so that Vinay (a dear friend and renowned documentary photographer in India) could capture the entire journey.

But despite all the fallbacks, the hard work done came to fruition seeing both our cars together. Also with a story and car so vibrant we had to jazz up the support vehicle in a way that it would catch eyes but also deliver our vision. We ended up naming her Lal Pari Ki ‘Saheli.’

#### **Lal Pari with Saheli**

#### **Flag off in Gandhinagar with Family & Friends**



From an original flag of date of June 1st to 12th of August was a whirlwind trying to finish and pack every last detail whilst preparing for our flag off in Gandhinagar and then drive till Mumbai to have one there on the 15th of August.

The Mumbai flag off was very overwhelming as people from all around the city would flock around us to see the car and initially it was a little scary but then it was their way of showing love to Lal Pari and it felt nice seeing them appreciate the effort that was put in to make the car what was.



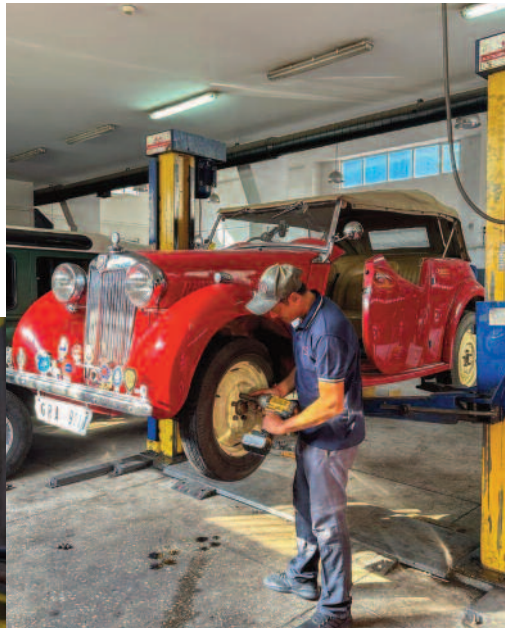
### The Journey

I would be lying if I said I wasn't nervous for the first leg of the trip. Having never taken Lal Pari out for such a long journey and not being able to complete was always on my mind. But for me the main goal was to start and attempt... if we made it then that was bonus. The European nations we were going to go by seemed familiar but I was unsure how Iran would be. Now looking back at it, Iran was something I hadn't experienced before. The love and the hospitality that we received and the passion they have for motoring was a pleasant surprise.

Lal Pari really struggled in Dubai and Iran. The temperatures soared above 42 degree celsius and our air conditioner inside Lal Pari was a red spray bottle filled with water mixed with the dusty wind.

We had car breakdowns in Iran almost every other day, just the intensity of it varied. Madhu, uncle and I were always trying to fix something or the other. We went through three sets of spark plugs and a carburettor. The clutch issue we had in Dubai got rectified by replacing the clutch plate in Iran.

### Repairs in Dubai , Iran and Turkey



But with every problem faced, there was always a solution nearby. Be it the locals or the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran, they wanted to make sure as a tourist we didn't face anymore issues than what we were already facing. That country really grounded us and made us realize how the love for travel and cars can bring so many people together.

Moving on from Iran into Turkey, then Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro into Croatia. Lal Pari was much more behaved and took us through some amazing sights.



**Bandar Abbas, Iran**

**Cappadocia, Turkey**



**Isfahan, Iran**

Iran took us 17 days, Turkey took about 12 days. From 1st October to 25th October 2024 we had to cover the rest of Europe and reach Calais to board the ship to Dover, UK as my visa was expiring in first week of November.







### Gothard Pass, Switzerland

“Instead of going deep into how each country was geographically, architecturally or historically, I would like to share the kind of impact these places had for us.

The kind of interactions we had with people in each country are imbedded in us now. These experiences helped facilitate one, my interpersonal relationships like the ones with my family, because 2&1/2 months and all 24 hours of the day being constantly around your family, definitely has its challenges. On the other hand it gave me a ‘Birds Eye view’ into how different people are around the globe and what gets them going.”

#### Says Devanshi... (my daughter)

*“In Bulgaria, while going for an oil change we met Eva. Talking to her we got to know that she is someone who considers India her second mother, has been learning Sanskrit, grew up on Hindi movie songs but also ironically has never visited India. She was so happy to see us and said that she knows we can afford to buy the oil but wants to give to us a gift because that brought her closer to India.*

*After crossing one of the Balkan borders, we met a very fit man sitting outside the grocery shop we went into. Soon into the conversation we got to know he had the similar target of covering 5,000kms a month but was doing that alone and on a bicycle! Meeting him really humbled us but also made us wonder that when you surround yourself with dreamers who have the courage to go after achieving greater heights, it inspires you to dream bigger.*

*The best thing about this journey was that we didn't expect these conversations and every time it was a new personality, a new idea we were getting acquainted with. This led us to see the bigger purpose of the trip. It was about spreading smiles, interacting with the cultures and learning through these experiences.”*

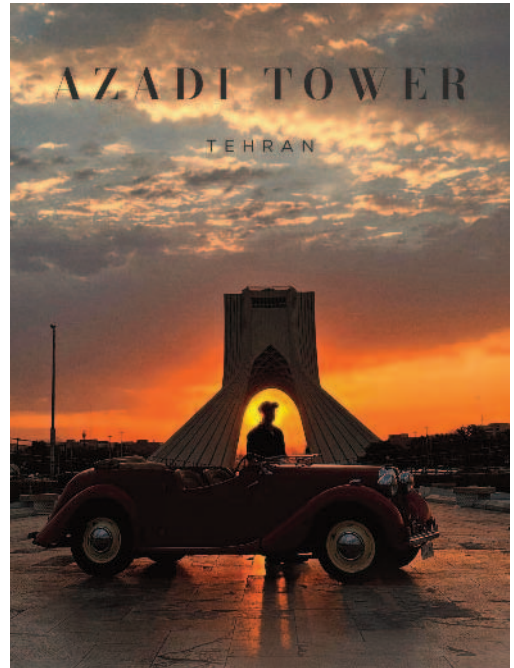




*Seeing the Eiffel Tower and riding right under it, gave goose bumps because London was so close!*



*Along the road we visited Car museums in Turkey, Croatia, Mullhouse, met Car clubs in Iran, Turkey, Italy, Switzerland and UK and saw car repair garages in Dubai, Iran, Turkey, Croatia, Italy and Switzerland.*



*There were butterflies in our stomach when we were on the ship to Dover. Like an explorer discovering new land, one could see the piece of land where United Kingdom starts.*

*I remember counting down from 10 before we touched UK soil and we all could not control our emotions.*



*The first thing papa did was to call my grandmother and share his joy of reaching UK. I could see the years of dreams that were fulfilled in that one sigh. My grandmother was the bed rock of the entire trip allowing us all to do this journey while she toiled away in India taking care of our JCB Construction machinery Dealership business.*

*We could not control our emotions, did not know how to act so we danced, cried, hugged and congratulated each other. It was hard work, passion and love for family is what made this trip possible. Ability to thrive in uncertainty and taking decisions on the go.”*

Daman:- “We had a lovely meeting with the MGOCC who received us at the British Motor Museum. Just 4 months before I was there celebrating 100 years of MG, ogling at all the beautiful MG’s gathered there for the celebrations. Not in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I will be able to get Lal Pari back to Abingdon and would be honoured by a trophy which was a rotating trophy being handed over to us for perpetuity. “



It was finally on 31st October, Sardar Patel's birth-anniversary that we reached Abingdon, and Lal Pari was back to where she was born. Lal Pari has given so much joy to our families and thousands of people over the last 45 years that it was the least we could do for her.



The occasion was all the more special as we handed over this Statute of Unity hood monogram that we had specially commissioned in Sterling Silver to His Majesty King Charles through his representative. It was a sign of respect from Lal Pari to her King and from all the people of India to the people of UK as a sign of our long history and new friendship.



“The amount of gratitude that each of us felt that day was immeasurable but it also gave papa hope that something of this scale is possible and I know there is a question that haunts him since then. Where next?” says Devanshi signing off..

**Daman & Devanshi Thakore**  
**Photography by Vinay Panjwani**

*“Passion for vintage and Classic cars is universal and knows no boundaries.  
It unites us irrespective of our age, gender, religion or nationality.”*

*Daman Thakore*



## ‘Team Lal Pari’

At this point I must just explain the name ‘Lal Pari’. Essentially it is translated as ‘Red Angel’. The name came about as a result of stories made up by his parents of a magical car they would travel in all over the world especially during the holiday period of Diwali.

Daman supplied more photos so I thought I would just place them on this page.

**Three generations of our family - father , daughter and myself.**



My very grateful thanks go to Daman for supplying this article, well I did ‘badger’ him quite a bit!!

His words, and that of his daughter Devanshi, are very much what I had hoped for. A thoughtful retrospective look back at their journey and what it has brought to their lives.

I also had the pleasure of driving him around in my TA when he was here in May sourcing a crankshaft. He had a very wide grin on his face that day!!

**Editor**

