

*Going Green
with the
Lady in Red*



For Vicki

MGB

**Roadster
1971**

Registration Number KJD 433 K

Chassis Number GHN5 258016 G

Engine Number: RS 35596 [Recon]

Gearbox Number: 1071 [Original]

Colour: Green Mallard

**British Motor Industry Heritage Trust Certificate
Number 2006/8755**



Cover. The date and ownership of the car at the time of this photograph is unknown

THE RED LADY

Who could mistake the unique sound of a Rolls-Royce Merlin as immortalised by the Spitfire, Hurricane and Lancaster aircraft of WW11?

Having trained in the Royal Air Force as an engine fitter, the liquid cooled piston engine module of the training course was indeed carried out on the RR Merlin. To this day the sound of aircraft from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight with the high pitched whistle of the supercharger rising above the roar of that mighty V12 engine is like music to the ear conjuring up visions of the aerial dog fights of 1940.

Other engines, too, have their own signature tune. A Manx Norton or Triumph Bonneville are recognisable by their sound and so too is the MGB. I discovered this sound when I purchased my first MGB GT., twenty odd years ago, and subsequently at numerous events with the MG Car Club. Even as a boy at school, I aspired to own an MG but as in life some things take most of a lifetime to achieve. My first and second cars ended up as basket cases and the third, a beautiful GT with the most unusual colour Mirage topped by a black vinyl roof. The fourth was a 1972 Roadster in Teal Blue. These had to go when my circumstances suddenly changed in 1994, when redundancy reared its ugly head. It has taken twelve years to recoup and to me, this is it.

This is my account of the re-birth of my childhood dream and that of the Red Lady, a 1971 MGB Roadster, KJD 433K.

According to the certified copy of factory records as provided by British Motor Industry Heritage Trust, she was built 6-9 July 1971 as a pre production 1972 model and was finished in Mallard Green. Although the original engine has been replaced the gearbox is original sporting the serial number 1071. She was shipped to Romford Motor Company on 11 November 1971 and first registered on 13 December 1971. The registration number KJD 433K indicating Greater London.

I have known the previous owner, Trevor, for several years and also know that he drove the car daily to and from work, often covering more than a hundred miles every day. I have no recollection of him ever being let down. Although the car did look a little tired, she was in fact a reliable workhorse. Because of my interest in MG's, Trevor and I often engaged in conversation about the car and I know that he would have liked to have restored her to something of her former glory himself but when the time for MOT came round it was obvious that without some major surgery which would take some time to complete, a new certificate was unlikely to be issued and he therefore decided to sell, thankfully giving me the first opportunity to buy. This was a one off, too good to miss offer, and thus started my re-introduction to all things MGB.

It was one of those grey and damp miserable mornings that often precede Christmas when I turned the key to start the engine and as if to greet this new

phase in her life, the engine burst into song, yes, that sound waffling from the exhaust, like music. Selecting first gear and easing out of the parking bay, my immediate thought was of how heavy the steering felt after years with power assistance. Then, gently out of the car park on to the public highway, we were going home.

Through the busy morning traffic of Portsmouth, on to the Eastern Road heading north we waffled our way out of town and on to Cosham to join the most spectacular road in the area, across the top of Portsdown Hill. Then suddenly the weather brightened and there was the view that makes this road so spectacular, in the distance the Isle of Wight, the Portsmouth harbour entrance with the Spinnaker Tower to the left and Gosport on the right. Ahead was Fort Southwick and in the far distance it was just possible to see Fawley oil refinery on Southampton Water. Turning left we descended into the outskirts of Portchester and finally home.

What a pity that I had to restrict the journey to the eight miles home, but without an MOT certificate I was already taking a great risk. Nevertheless, we made it and I introduced the Red Lady to her new home, I wonder what she thought being thrust into this strange place without the continuous pounding of the elements on her delicate structure. The garage suddenly seemed exceedingly small and thus started the relentless disposal of junk amassed over the years. I even had to buy a another shed to house the family bikes, and items of furniture, thankfully collapsible and things that even now I wonder if they will ever find a use in my life.

The next morning dawned a lot brighter but I wasn't really taking much notice of blue skies and fluffy white clouds, there was work to be done and whilst I contemplated the best place to start, I armed myself with a notebook to record any defects that I found and also a large bottle of T-Cut. As the colour changed from red to brighter red and my note book began to look far too small for the task in hand, I was thankful that I hadn't disposed of all of my tools in one of those moments of folly that beset some former mechanics.

As soon as the Post Office opened I joined the usual lengthy procession of customers and applied for a SORN and also registered the Red Lady in my name. It was 34 years to the date of first registration 13 December 2005.

Being an eternal optimist, I dreamed of having the car refurbished and back in its rightful place on the highways and byways within a year but there is much to do and although it would be nice to have her finished and re-christened with a new tax disc issued on 13 December 2006 exactly 35 years to the day of first registration, I fear that it was a romantic notion that had to be consigned to the dream library.

The road to restored health began with the undignified ride on the back of a flat bed recovery truck, but as if to welcome all this new found attention, drove on under her own steam without a murmur, heading for a place where some other elderly ladies were receiving some cosmetic surgery in the capable hands of Doctors Keith, Steve and Ben.



It was now 16 January 2006, the New Year celebrations seemed a long time ago and every day had become a ritual of cleaning and tinkering, making notes and lists of parts that needed replacement. Now, as the Red Lady disappeared from view, I couldn't even tinker so thoughts of summer hood down motoring were foremost in my mind and as my aforementioned eternal optimism took hold, I set about planning a summer holiday in France, but not this year unless there is some miracle.

My arrangement with Keith was that he would carry out the actual repairs required, slotted in between his normal work, keeping costs to a minimum, so bearing in mind that Station Body Shop is a vibrant and busy vehicle repair and restoration business, it was clear that to specify a lead time was almost impossible.

Keeping a lid on my impatience was very difficult but I knew that the end result would undoubtedly be worthwhile. It was prudent therefore to make alternative arrangements for the holiday but never mind, there is always next year.

The purchase and delivery of replacement panels and components was to be my responsibility through a variety of sources to take advantage of club discounts and as the house started to resemble a motor factors, it soon became apparent that a stock control system was necessary prompting my wife Gina to set up a

data base and as the bits and pieces were delivered they were booked in, tagged and binned for easy access. The benefit of maintaining a data base is also the on going record of costs, albeit, frightening.

My intention was to make a photographic record of the restoration progress so regular visits to the workshop were necessary, this also gave me the opportunity to see the extent of the problems, many of which will be illustrated later. Also during these meetings we would provision for the next stage of the work but as the months went by it was proving to be a slow process.

Like most restorations, you can never anticipate what is lurking behind the façade so to find that an earlier sill replacement had been bodged is an understatement, then to see the appalling state of the inner wing reinforcing panels defies description. As the offside floor pan was being removed, Keith found not one, not two but four which had been welded in, on top of each other. The bracket which supports the accelerator pedal was virtually rotted away, hanging by next to nothing and the holes in the inner wings and bulkhead served to enhance the air flow into the foot wells. Not surprising then, that the cables to the heater and air controls were disconnected, ventilation was not an issue.



Getting undressed



What's left of the inner wing

start with. Note the accelerator cable as it passes through the top of the drivers' foot well.

In the next photograph, the pedal arm can clearly be seen but there is little or nothing supporting the assembly which must have created a lot of movement other than that required to operate the accelerator. Little wonder therefore that the accelerator had a tendency to stick and not return to idling.

By this time I guess that any sane person would have seriously considered a change of plan and priced up a Heritage Body Shell, but I do not give up that easily and I could not in all honesty come to terms with removing the chassis identification plate from the original and pop riveting it to a new vehicle. I know that there will be much new panel work to be done but the vast majority of the car will be as original, something which to me is important.





Isn't this fun? What a mess?

In these photographs the accelerator pedal arm mounting bracket is hanging on by no more than a sliver of iron oxide.

Incidentally, you may remember from chapter one that I said that the original built colour was Green Mallard, well it is this photo that has picked up on one of the very few areas that the original colour can be seen.

There may well be economic benefits to have the car resprayed in the existing red but I would like to return the car to some semblance of the original. My decision therefore is to go Green.

The next area of concern was the sills, which as any owner of an MGB will know, that with the car being of monocoque construction these are the

major part of the strength of the car. The nearside proved to be sound but it was a different story with the offside, in fact the inner sill was completely disintegrated into a pile of rust. The next two pictures show the castle section but the whole area had been swept clean by the time they were taken.

As previously mentioned, earlier restorations or bodge jobs had been carried out and it was with some dismay that the offside contained four floor pans all welded on top of each other so it was no surprise that Keith commented; "that the reduction in all up weight of the car on completion may add a mile or two to the speed and possibly better fuel economy.



Not much left?



Without floor pans it's just a run about?

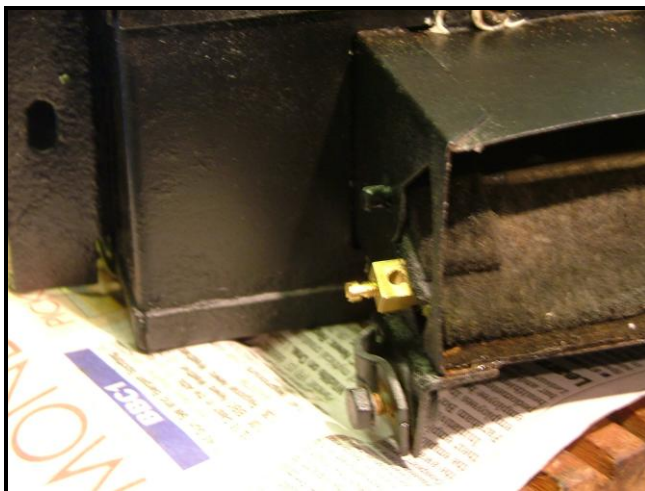


Looking much better?

Spring forward, fall back

Winter passed and my thoughts of the warmer weather to come only served to aggravate my impatience to have my car completed. As I thought of motoring with the hood down British Summertime began with the move forward by one hour to signal the start of the green and pleasant seasons. However, this was not sufficient to speed up the restoration process and time and my weekly visits to the body shop continued.

The heater was stripped and rebuilt which included the improvisation of the control cable clamp on the screen/interior direction flap, and with new seals and coat of paint to finish I began to feel that progress was being made.



Improvised 13 amp plug Earth pin as Control Cable clamp

The wire wheels, although originally chrome plated, had long since lost their lustre and no amount of cleaning and polishing was going to reinstate their aesthetic charm. Fortunately, when I bought the car there was a set of even tatter looking wire wheels thrown in for possible spares and it seemed prudent to have them shot blasted and stove enamelled silver. This was duly carried out by a local Metal Finishing Company and the result is most pleasing, however there can be no comparison with the look of chrome.

As the restoration work proceeds I cannot avoid thinking that to fit a set of untidy looking chrome wheels on to a refurbished car, would to say the least be inept. The decision therefore is to fit the pristine albeit silver wheels and in the meantime prepare myself to spend a few more shillings on a new set of chromes at some time in the future. It has been suggested to me that perhaps re-chrome plating the old ones might be an option but the cost of completely stripping down

to every last spoke and the subsequent rebuilt not to mention the plating process is very much cost prohibitive.



The Cockpit

The BMHIT copy of the build certificate states that the original interior trim was Autumn Leaf, which is another name for Buff coloured. However, I find Black is more pleasing to the eye as a compliment to the Dark Green exterior. I am also less than happy with gaudy piping on seats and carpets so the new carpets are completely Black as are the new leather seat coverings. This colour scheme is enhanced by the new Moto Lita steering wheel which is finished in Black leather on aluminium spokes.





Seats stripped and re – upholstered



New carpets door cards and cappings

Moving on to the crowning glory, namely the hood, there seemed to be no comparison to black Mohair as my preferred material. An acquaintance of mine who incidentally is a retired vehicle restorer, brought me some mohair samples and advised me that Don Hoods in Birmingham would be an appropriate supplier, so after several phone conversations later and placing my order, the new hood plus a full tonneau arrived which I duly fitted on to a new hood frame from Sussex Classic car Parts.

The Engine and Gearbox

Although the bodywork proceeded slower than I would have preferred, the time was useful for me to prepare the engine and gearbox, fitting a new clutch was a priority with the release bearing being almost completely worn away, I can only speculate as to the condition of the clutch plate and mechanism. The new Borg and Beck clutch looked good and all new bushes and clips were fitted on the thrust ring

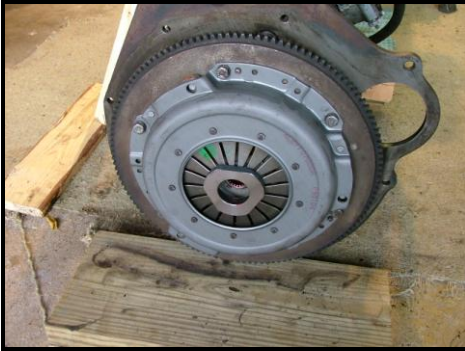
Someone once said to me that when buying on old car, if the bodywork is good one can always replace the engine and gearbox. In this case the opposite applies as the engine is a reconditioned unit from Ivor Searle and whether by coincidence or not the serial number is 1072 which happens to be sequential to the gearbox number 1071 and as original according to the BMIHT build certificate. Although there were obvious running defects, these were not terminal and limited to the ancillary equipment. Various attempts to adjust the carburetion failed to give the desired results. This was largely due to serious wear, not least of which in the linkages, so a new pair of SU HS4 carburettors was purchased from Burlen Fuel Systems. Once the engine was running smoothly it became clear that was a noisy tappet and all attempts at adjustment didn't work.

The problem was resolved by the installation of a new rocker assembly, valve pushrods and cam followers. The oil cooler was sound and only required a good clean and a coat of paint. When this was reinstalled I took the opportunity to replace all of the flexible rubber pipes with reinforced stainless steel braided equivalents but not before renewing the rubber grommets through the radiator diaphragm. Apart from the purchase of a new aluminium monogrammed MG rocker cover, all other items could be considered appropriate on a typical 12000 mile service.

I couldn't detect any serious problem with the gearbox and confined my efforts to a good external clean and a paint job followed by an oil flush and change. I was somewhat dismayed by the wear to the clutch release bearing and therefore assumed that the clutch would have similar wear. A new Borg and Beck Heavy Duty unit and release bearing was duly purchased and fitted.

The mild steel exhaust system was replaced with stainless steel including a back box with twin outlet pipes giving an added sporty appearance notwithstanding a lifetime guarantee.





The Three R's

Throughout this epistle I have used expressions like 'Restoration' and 'Refurbishment', I now offer a new word 'Repair'. I think of these as the three R's.

Whenever I see adverts claiming 'fully restored' or 'tastefully refurbished' or 'in need of some repair', I become confused. To me these expressions are nothing more than sales speak to disguise the condition of the item being sold.

If I were now to offer my car for sale, how would it be best described? Which of the three R's would be appropriate?

Somewhere along the line I suspect that all three could apply, for example, extensively Repaired using new body panels where appropriate, seating and upholstery tastefully. Refurbished to a high standard, and Restored to original colour as specified by BMIHT build certification. I would also have to admit that my car is and always will be an everyday road vehicle that gives one a feeling of nostalgic well being and style to be envied by most modern vehicle drivers. Not as fast and maybe just a little too rigid in the comfort department, but style nevertheless. No need for exhaust megaphones to enhance the sound, it is after all an MGB; so back to my opening comments we go, "A sound ranking alongside the RR Merlin, the Manx Norton, the Triumph Bonneville".

Gone Green



Here she is back home at last!



And in France with me 2009

The future

The transformation from Red Lady to Green Goddess sounds for all the world like I'm referring to one of those utility emergency fire engines that appear on the streets from time to time, so I will have to avoid using that description in future, but I am pleased with the resultant change in appearance and believe that she does compare favourably when displayed alongside other MGB's although I emphasise not in a concours d'elegance class.

Since the completion of the refurbishment, she has sailed through two MOT tests and completed several thousand miles, without, I'm happy to say letting me down, not least of which was during a visit to France. This relatively low annual mileage is as a result of my being issued with a bus pass. I see little to commend driving just for the sake of it and travel either on foot or by bus. (The bus pass is a wonderful benefit which must be defended at all costs)

So, 'where do we go from here?' I am now a member of the South Hants Vehicle Preservation Society and still a member of both the MG Car Club and MG Owners Club. The future is looking very bright and I am truly impressed by the enthusiasm of classic car owners and the variety of vehicles they own, all of which have their own character and appeal unlike most modern offerings from the automotive industry, with the possible exception of the 'super cars' favoured by the Top Gear presenters.

I believe that there are approximately 17000 cars on the MGB Register, mine being number 6932, not bad for an iconic British sports car that has endured since 1962 and is acknowledged worldwide.

The credit must go to the designers and builders, Syd Enever, Don Hayter, John Thornley and all of the production staff at Abingdon Works and later under the British Leyland banner.

When 22nd Century auto-historians are asked what car epitomises the 20th Century it will most likely be the MGB.

Acknowledgements

None of this would have been possible without the invaluable advice and assistance of many people and I therefore acknowledge with grateful thanks for giving my pride and joy a new lease of life. My family and friends also deserve a mention for without their patience and support I would have been truly scuppered. I can only apologise to them for being a bore and thank you all.

Station Body Shop, Station Approach, Fareham, Hants. PO16 0UT

Sussex |Classic Car Parts, Partridge Green, West Sussex. RH13 8AU

MG Owners Club, Octagon House, Swavesey, Cambs. CB24 4QZ

The Don Trimming Co. Ltd., Hampton Road, Erdington, Birmingham. B23 7JJ

Abingdon Sports Cars (The Barn), Shedfield, Southampton. SO32 2 JF