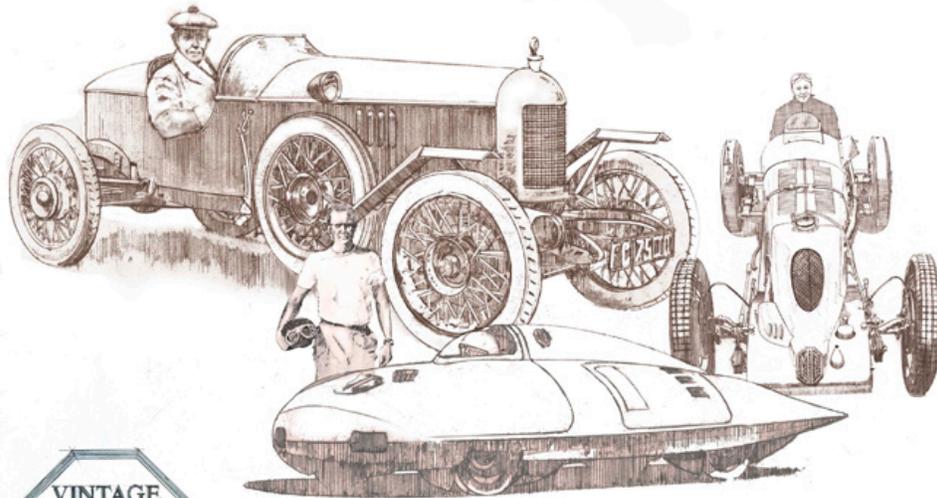


VOLUME 41 #1 JANUARY 2023



# LIME ROCK CELEBRATES MG's 100TH ANNIVERSARY

SEPTEMBER 1-4 2023



*Safety fast!*

*Ben Collins*

# From The Editor:

Happy New Year to all. The racing season got underway this past weekend at the Daytona 24 hour. I had not been to Daytona since the late 80's and the changes are remarkable. The complex itself is even more enormous than back in the day. The cars are, in comparison, amazing. From the new Daytona/LeMans hybrid cars down to the GTD cars, all are incredibly complex. My only criticism is the noise is gone. The howling Ferrari V-12, the throaty Detroit V8's and V10's, even the growling Porsche 6's are all much quieter. But they are fast !

The MG 100<sup>th</sup> year is now here. Our marque was created 100 years ago and as you know we are planning our huge Lime Rock celebration. Registration is open and Skip Barber told me last week that 20% of the entire registration are MG's. You can register now at <https://www.motorsportreg.com/events/historic-festival-41-race-car-entry-lime-rock-park-687269>

A legend in racing, Paddy Hopkirk, passed away recently. We're inserting a great history of this MG racer from the August 2022 Safety Fast magazine.

A true MG man, Ted Rounds was not a famous international racer, but a true MGVR kind of man who loved to race, prepared his own cars and was a friend and mentor to many. David Cathers writes the story of Ted in his article "Because I Had A Car"

Our Indiana brothers are organizing their own 100<sup>th</sup> celebration at their GOF in June. The info is on their very neat page.

While ignition problems don't happen often in new cars, they sure do in our classic MG's. "When the fire goes out" might help.

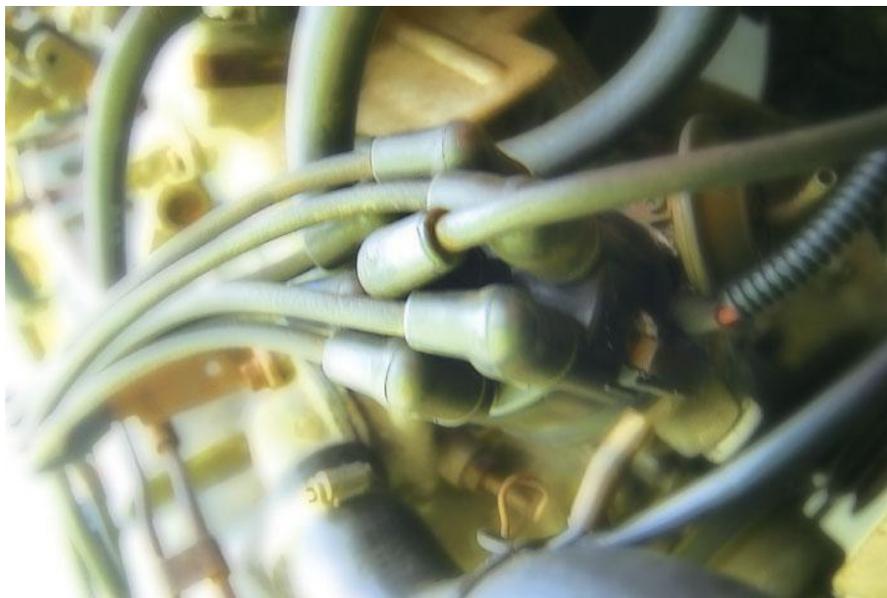
## When the Fire Goes Out: 9 Easy Steps to Diagnosing Ignition Problems



By Carl Heideman

Dec 29, 2022 | [Spark](#) | Posted in [Drivetrain](#) , [Electronics & Electrical Systems](#) | From the Nov. 2005 issue | Classic Motorsports

If there is any ignition component that gets an unfairly bad rap, it's the coil. Coils are very quickly blamed for ignition problems, yet almost universally they are not at fault. Coil manufacturers must love this, however, as it sells a lot of coils.



We discussed the theory behind an ignition system in our last issue, and now it's time to troubleshoot common problems. Ignition problems generally fall into two categories: Things that cause the car to not run at all, and things that make the car run poorly.

A 12-volt test light is your best friend when diagnosing ignition problems that keep a car from running. If your car still has points, a tach/dwell meter and a timing light—preferably a dial-back type—are pretty important cousins to your test light when it comes to figuring out why it's running poorly.

A little common sense will also go a long way. Always keep your fingers and other appendages clear of a spinning cooling fan—if it's thermostatically controlled, remember that it can turn on when the engine is off—and don't forget that a coil can pack a wallop.

Let's start with a diagnosis plan that should uncover most ignition problems found.

## If the car won't run...

### 1. Is There Spark at the Plugs?



When looking for troubles, it's usually best to start at the spark plug-end of the ignition path and work backward. The first thing to do is to pull a spark plug wire while an assistant cranks the engine and check for spark. Before having the assistant crank the engine, insert a

spare spark plug or screwdriver into the plug boot and then position the plug wire near a ground source.

If you see a strong spark, keep trying this with all the plug wires. If there's a good spark at each wire, you've either got a fuel problem—remember that 5 percent of all carburetor problems are actually carburetor problems, after all—or you've got your timing set way off. There's also a chance that you've got your plug wires on in the wrong order.

### 2. Is There Spark From the Coil?



If you don't have spark at the plug lead, the next thing to check is whether you're getting spark from the coil to the distributor. Pull the coil wire from the distributor and hold it near a ground. Again, have your assistant crank the engine and look for spark from the coil

lead.

If you have spark, you likely have a problem with your distributor rotor or cap, so you may want to replace them. In recent years, rotor problems have been much more common than cap problems, so you probably want to start with a rotor.

### 3. Is There Power to the Coil?



If you don't have spark from the coil lead, you'll need your 12-volt test light for the next test. Attach the ground clip of the light to a good ground, and then touch the point to the positive side of the coil while the ignition switch is turned on. (This is assuming a negative-ground car.)

The light should glow. If not, you'll need to trace this part of the ignition circuit to determine why the coil isn't getting power. (Note: For positive-ground cars, switch the polarity on this test procedure.)

### 4. Does the Switching Mechanism Work?



If you have power to the coil, hold the pointer of your light to the negative side of the coil while your assistant cranks the engine. Your light should flash on and off as the engine spins over, telling you that the switching mechanism in the distributor is working. (This is true whether the car has points or an electronic ignition.)

If the light glows steady or not at all, it's time to get into the distributor. If working with a positive-ground car, don't forget to switch the polarity on this test procedure as well.

To determine why your distributor isn't providing the switching for the coil, you'll need to get out the manual for your car or ignition system (if it's an aftermarket system) to go through the testing procedure for your points or electronic switching mechanism.

## If the car runs poorly...

### 1. How Are the Plugs?



As obvious as this sounds, pull the plugs and make sure they're the right ones for your engine. Also make sure they're not wet, oil-soaked, or just plain gunked-up. If they look bad, don't worry about it just yet, but either replace them or thoroughly clean them. Rarely

will plugs be bad, but they need to be the correct ones and in good condition for many of our subsequent tests.

### 2. Is There a Strong Spark?



If your car is hard to start or runs poorly when it is starting, the first thing to check is spark quality. Using an assistant, repeat the previous test for spark at the plug wire. Do you see a sharp spark that will jump a gap of at least a quarter inch? Can you see it in broad daylight? Can you hear it crackle? If not, it's probably too weak as the result of electrical losses along the spark food chain.

The easiest way to start looking for these losses is to reconnect all the plug wires and start the engine. Ground your 12-volt test light and then use the pointer to follow each plug wire from the distributor cap to the plug—and don't forget to check out the ends of the plug wires, too.

If at any time you get a spark from the plug wire to the test light, you have a bad or dirty plug wire that is giving the spark a second path to follow to ground. Make sure to test the coil lead as well. (If the test light briefly illuminates while following the plug wires, that's

also a sign that the wires aren't doing their job to contain the electricity.) If the plug wires pass the test, move the pointer of the test light around the distributor cap and see if you can catch any stray sparks. Then repeat the test around the coil, especially at the top, where the terminals are located. If everything still passes this test, take a spray bottle filled with water and mist the plug wires, the distributor cap and the coil. Then repeat the test. The water may help bring out some stray sparks—in fact, you may not even need the test light once things are a bit damp.

### 3. Is the Distributor Shaft Worn?



Remove the distributor cap and rotor and wiggle the distributor shaft. If you can feel any slop at all, the shaft or bushings in the distributor are worn.

If you're still using points, this will result in inconsistent point gaps and timing issues as a result. Worn distributor shafts cause fewer problems for electronic ignitions, but either way you should rebuild or replace the distributor if you want the best drivability and performance out of your car

### 4. Good Condition and Set Correctly?



Points are the switching mechanism for the spark, and if they are worn, corroded or not set correctly, poor running will follow.

If your car is still using points, visually inspect them and look for a clean, smooth surface. If you see corrosion or pitting, replace them. Set them to the gap or dwell angle specified for your car and then set the timing again.

## 5. Is the Timing Properly Set and Consistent?



Make sure you're properly setting the distributor's timing and that the advance mechanism is working. When checking the timing at idle, are you disconnecting the vacuum advance as the manual says? Are you using the right timing marks on the timing tab? Is the advance going through its curve properly and achieving the proper amount of advance at high engine speeds?

Make sure you check all of these things before getting more drastic and blaming the carburetor. We discussed how to properly set a distributor's timing in our last issue.

When you set the timing, whether at idle or higher engine speeds, you should see a very steady, consistent reading at the timing mark. On engines with worn distributors, you may see a variance of as much as 10 degrees. If the timing is bouncing all over the place, it's time to rebuild or replace the distributor before the engine runs well.

### **Problem Fixed?**

Even though there's a lot going on regarding a car's ignition system, some detective work can usually solve the problem. Before blaming the carburetor for a poor running engine or replacing a bunch of hardware, first check all of the basics. A methodical approach should uncover the problem.

# GOF CENTRAL

*Gathering of the Faithful*  
*Celebrating 100 years of MG Sports Cars*  
*South Bend, IN June 20 - 23, 2023*



The *Olde Octagons of Indiana* and *Hoosier MGs* present another great  event for you. GOF Central combines special friends, activities, and food for an  centenary birthday party to remember! The Embassy Suites in South Bend, Indiana is the guest hotel and headquarters for GOF Central. All s and enthusiasts are invited!

For details and to register, visit [GOF2023.com](https://www.gof2023.com).  
Be sure to watch the video!



# “Because I Had A Sports Car” Ted Rounds, 1931 – 2021

By David Cathers

In 1950, nineteen-year-old Ted Rounds bought a new MG-TD. Later that year he raced it. In his second race he came in second. He was not yet twenty. You may not know his name, but – to many – he was a uniquely important man.

Ted was born in Binghamton, NY, on November 2, 1931 and grew up in the nearby town of Vestal. His family owned a coal yard, and as a young teenager he learned to drive in a 1938 Chevy ton-and-a-half truck with a four-speed non-synchro gearbox. He was adept at double-clutching by the age of thirteen or fourteen, when he began to work in the family business, delivering coal. He loved cars, boats, and airplanes, but he focused on cars because that was what he could afford. At some point an aunt gave him a copy of *Fortune* magazine, an issue with an article about British sports cars. In our conversations we could never quite figure out exactly which issue that was, but it was very possibly July 1946 when the magazine published a long, illustrated piece titled “Morris Motors Ltd.” As the article said, the “M.G. is a highly specialized, low-volume job for the sporty and mechanically sophisticated young...male. It is tiny, underslung, hard to get into, and you drive it almost supine, with the steering wheel close to your chest. It can run nearly eighty miles an hour.” Whichever article Ted read he was hooked, and he started saving to buy an MG. Obviously financially astute at a young age, he learned that England devalued the pound in 1949 and that reduced

the car’s price in the USA to \$1800, an amount he had already saved. The following year, the new, green TD was his.



*An illustration from the article “Morris Motors, Ltd.” published by Fortune magazine in July 1946. This was likely the article that fired Ted’s yearning for an MG.*

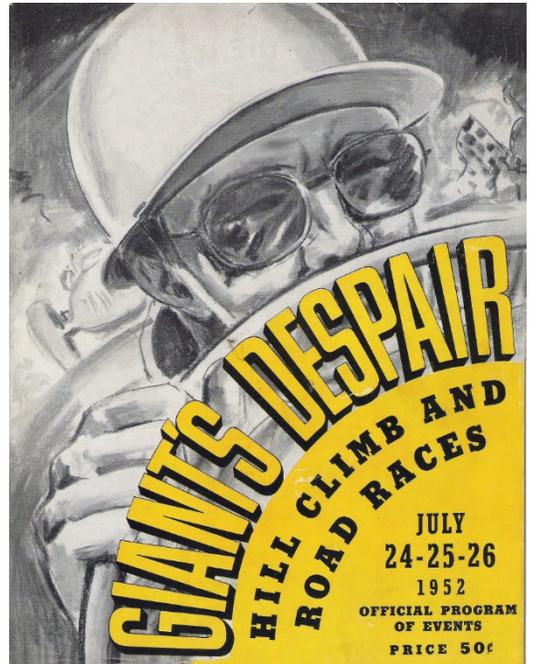
Not content with “nearly eighty miles an hour,” Ted made a few modifications, work he knew how to do because he was enrolled in the challenging Automotive Technology course at Broome Tech in Binghamton, alongside his great friend Sherm Decker. Ted bored out his TD’s engine, increasing its displacement from 1250cc to 1325cc and installing high performance pistons that he bought from JE, a California firm that continues in business today. With that boost, Ted told me, “The car would run right by a stock MG-TD.” He also replaced the clamshell fenders with cycle fenders, removed the front and rear bumpers, and deleted the stock windshield, replacing it with a plexiglass windscreen that he said, “Was small but big enough to cut down on the buffeting.” For safety he wore a helmet with a face shield to fit over his glasses, but he had no kind of protective clothing. He bought a surplus seat belt at an Army Navy store, and he was ready to race.

I was surprised and impressed that Ted had bought his first MG, modified it, and in practically no time took it to the track. So I asked him, “Why did you start racing?” There were a few moments of silence on the other end of the line, and I instantly realized I had asked a dumb question -- and Ted was too much of a gentleman to point that out. Then in a completely matter-of-fact voice he stated the obvious: “Because I had sports car.”

In order to race he had to join the Sports Car Club of America and get an SCCA racing license. This didn’t involve any formal training. As Ted explained, “They didn’t have driving schools in those days. You had to learn by yourself, going out on your own and driving fast on back roads.” And although he loved racing he didn’t really feel at home in this group because “The SCCA was pretty much a rich man’s club in those days,” and Ted wasn’t one of them. But he was determined to race and so he joined.

“There weren’t many tracks then,” Ted told me, but he ran twice at Thompson, in northeastern Connecticut, in July 1951, coming second in his second race. In that era Thompson was a half-mile banked oval, and Ted told me how best to drive it: “The fast way around was to stay in the center lane, and that made passing very difficult. On the high banking you’re climbing a hill going into the corner and that slows you. But if you go in low you’re climbing a hill going out of the corner. That slows you too.” He also explained how qualifying worked: “There was not enough time to qualify because there were so many classes. You qualified by drawing a number out of a hat, and so where you finished kind of depended on how lucky you were with the hat. Not a great track, in other words.” In our conversations Ted often downplayed his driving skill, but he probably earned that second-place finish by quickly mastering the racing line -- it was not just the luck of the draw.

The next year he skipped Thompson and headed for Pennsylvania, where he drove the Giants' Despair hill climb on July 25, and then the following day won his class at the newly opened Brynfan Tyddyn road course. Two weeks before this race the Wilkes-Barre (PA) *Times Leader* reported that the three-and-a-half-mile long track was "Generally hilly, with one very steep up-grade with a sharp turn at the top and one down-grade with a hair pin twist... everything for drivers to display their skill. The longest straight stretch is only six-tenths of a mile." Ted remembered that the track surface was oiled dirt, and because the course was entirely on public roads it had a high crown: "It was tricky." Maybe so, but he excelled at this track.



Ted stopped racing after the 1952 season, finishing college and then joining the Army. By the end of the decade he was racing again, now in MGAs, and, with typical understatement, he told me, "I had two good seasons, 1959 and 1960." In 1959 he ran his beautiful ex-Sebring 1957 MGA, winning his class at Lime Rock

on three separate occasions and coming a strong second at Watkins Glen in August.



On August 1 of that year he had his greatest triumph, not only taking a class win at Berwick but coming first ahead of the formidable Bob Bucher driving the fast, famous MGA #029.



In 1960 Ted drove a black Twin Cam, challenging the best MG racers at Marlboro, Cumberland, Dunkirk, Bridgehampton, Watkins Glen and Lime Rock.

By 1959 he had opened a Mobil station in Vestal, NY, and later had a second one in Endicott, NY. He serviced foreign cars,

specializing in MGs and buying parts from Gordie Morris's Morris Garage.

His focus shifted away from driving, and in the words of racer / writer Dave Nicholas, "His knowledge of mechanics was so strong he easily earned his nickname: The Legend." Ted's love of cars remained unabated, and after parting with his 1957 MGA he owned a number of coveted cars: a TR-2, an MGA coupe, a Porsche Super 90 ("That was a flyer!"), a Lotus Europa John Player Special ("It was like a motorcycle. It was so sensitive"), and an AC Aceca ("The best-looking car I ever owned"). And he was immensely proud that his ex-Sebring MGA and the Twin Cam have been restored and exhibited at the International Motor Racing Research Center in Watkins Glen.

In late October nearly a month had passed since I last spoke with Ted and so I phoned him a few times, getting only voicemail. Then in early November I learned from Gordon Ruston, one of Ted's longtime BARCBOY friends, that Ted had died just a few days after his ninetieth birthday. I never got to meet him in person, and I regret that. In my experience he was a kind man, he had a keen intellect, a passion for cars -- especially MGAs -- and until November 2021 he was that rare survivor: a fine driver and mechanic who drove a Twin Cam in the 1960s but had first gone racing in a modified TD seventy years ago, at the start of the 1950s.



TED ROUNDS' MOBIL STATION, 175 Vestal Parkway at the corner of Clayton Ave., specializes in servicing all type sports cars and in particular MGs. Ted Rounds, owner-manager of the station said, "We offer service for those to whom a car is more than just transportation."

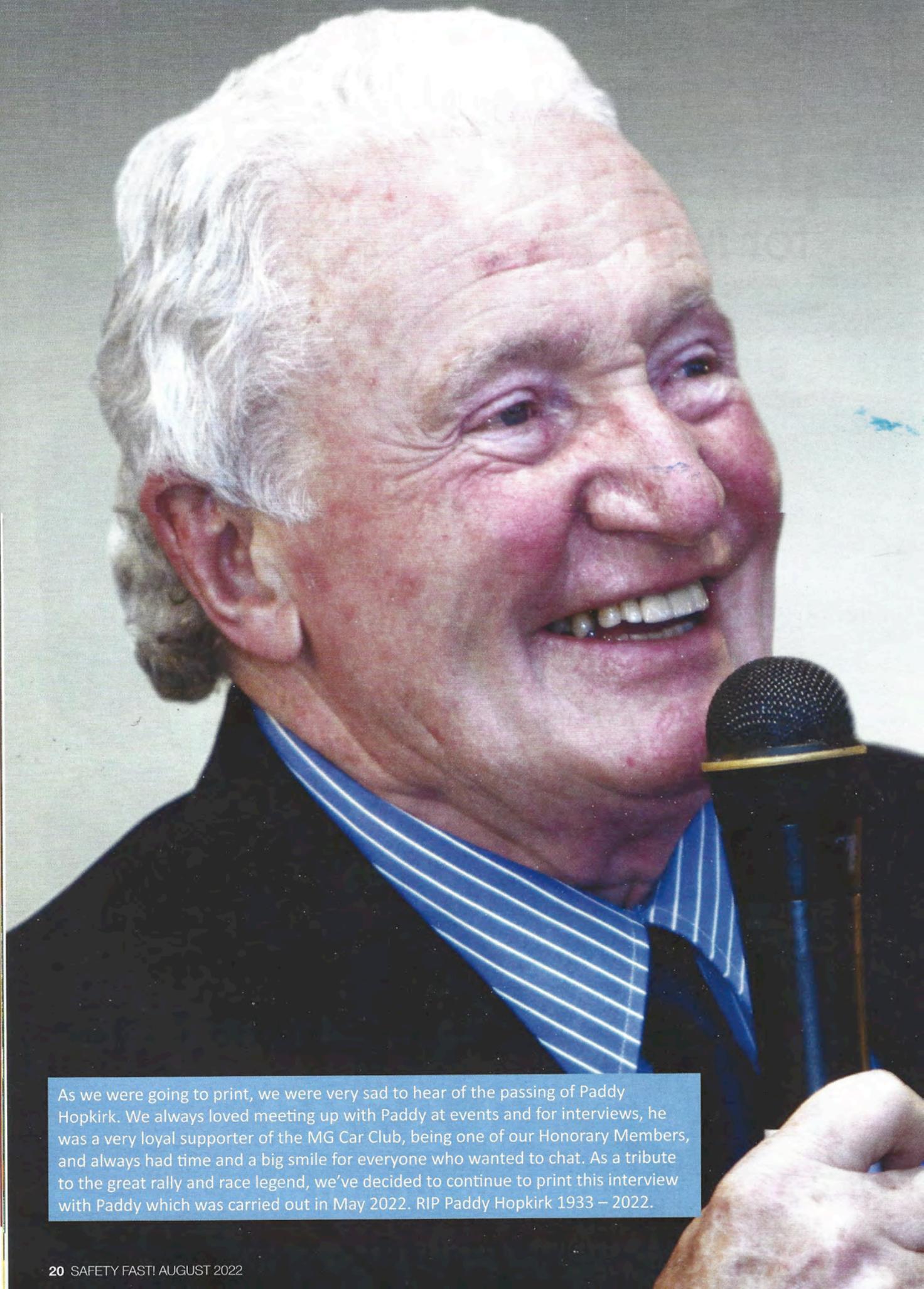
### Spring Tonic For Your Car At Ted Rounds'

Whether your car is a late model or new you'll want to keep it in top shape and the best way to do that is by driving in regularly to Ted Rounds Mobil Station in Vestal. Located at the corner of Clayton Avenue and Vestal Parkway East, just opposite Hi-Way Fruit Market.

You'll find your friendly Mobil Dealer, Ted Rounds, has an automatic 5-minute Car Wash that only costs one dollar and makes that auto really shine. In the important engine denar-

flers on hand and can quickly install one on any make car.

One of the big features at Ted Rounds is the Satisfaction Guarantee offered with Delco Shock Absorbers. You can try these shocks for 90 days and if not completely satisfied with results, they will replace your old ones and it won't cost you a penny. This is possible because of the famous Delco policy and Ted Rounds policy of customer satisfaction. As Hoby Gilman says on "Trackdown," (Channel 40-Wednesday night), "You're miles ahead with Mobil," as proven by the Mobilgas Economy Run Mileage Results. You'll be miles ahead, too, by stopping regularly at Ted Rounds Mobil Station in Vestal. Open every day from 7 a. m. to 10 p. m.



As we were going to print, we were very sad to hear of the passing of Paddy Hopkirk. We always loved meeting up with Paddy at events and for interviews, he was a very loyal supporter of the MG Car Club, being one of our Honorary Members, and always had time and a big smile for everyone who wanted to chat. As a tribute to the great rally and race legend, we've decided to continue to print this interview with Paddy which was carried out in May 2022. RIP Paddy Hopkirk 1933 – 2022.

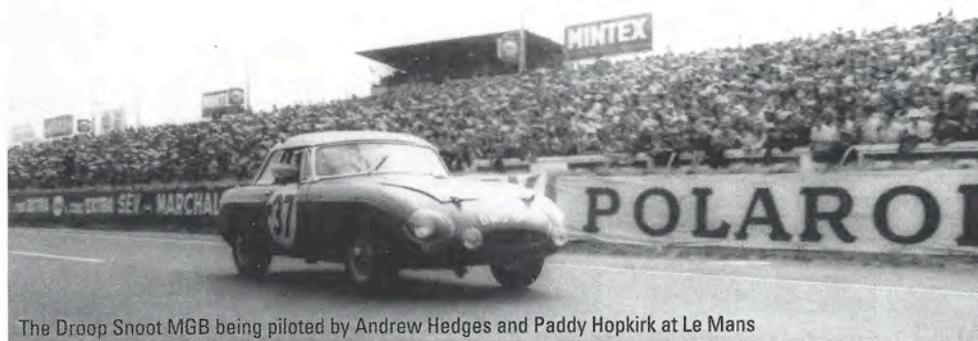


Consummate, extremely professional and very successful, Paddy Hopkirk is, quite rightly, synonymous with, and has been long-lauded for, his giant-killing exploits with a succession of very quick Minis. Ones that, typically, sported the famous, and coveted, 'Cooper S' moniker.

Yet in many ways it's this very success that has, unwittingly, thrown something of a cloak of invisibility over his many impressive achievements with other marques. Marques such as Standard-Triumph, Rootes, and, of course, MG. Indeed, Paddy tasted victory in the MG Midget's precursor, an Austin-Healey Sprite, before the first Mini had rolled off the production line. In fact, for a time, the Sprite was Paddy's car of choice for rallies, races, hillclimbs, and, in particular, driving tests.



BMO at Le Mans in 1964



The Droop Snoot MGB being piloted by Andrew Hedges and Paddy Hopkirk at Le Mans

#### Testing Times

"In the 1950s and early 1960s, many rallies included a driving test," explains Paddy. "The Irish have always done well in driving tests. Gradually, this became a sport in its own right, developing into what became known as autotests, and championships were established.

"I became particularly proficient and was selected to be part of the team that represented Northern Ireland in the Ken Wharton Memorial Team Trophy. I used a Supercharged Sprite for a time, then Midgets. The events were televised by

the BBC; the commentator was Raymond Baxter. There were teams from Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland, Northern England, Southern England, Scotland and Wales. It was held annually and we used to win every year.

"However, as much as I enjoyed autotesting, rallying was my passion. I'd driven for works teams and done well, but I was eager to get a full works contract. In 1962, I sent a letter to Stuart Turner, who'd recently been appointed as BMC's Competition Manager."

# PADDY HOPKIRK

## MY MG MEMORIES

By Martyn Morgan Jones



BMG 541B being chased by exotic machinery at the 1964 Le Mans

### Given the Works

"I'd known Paddy for years; first when he drove for Standard-Triumph... we were both in the Standard-Triumph team on the 1958 RAC Rally, and then for Rootes," reminisces Stuart. "Paddy, who'd had a brief go in Pat Moss' Big Healey, wrote to me, saying he wanted to get his hands on one because he wanted to drive cars capable of winning 'even if I'm not!' So modesty showed through at times!

"Of course, Paddy – who'd won events such as the Circuit of Ireland for Rootes and had a class win on the Alpine Rally... also for Rootes, and raced for them too, driving Rapiers at Le Mans – went on to find fame in Minis and would become a household name. But he did well in Healeys... MGs too, and was a joy to work with. There's no way of quantifying the benefit, but a good team spirit helps a team succeed. Having a genial character

like Paddy on board can be a great help.

"A first-rate driver, Paddy could be relied on to deliver the results. Although he retired his Big Healey on the Liège, due to a broken rear spring, on the RAC Rally in 1962 he rewarded us by taking his Big Healey to 2nd overall. He was very instrumental in MG's success too."

Charismatic and capable, the Big Healey had been developed into a superlative rally weapon, particularly on the gruelling endurance events that proliferated in Europe. Nonetheless, it wasn't an easy car to master... even for someone of Paddy's skills.

"The Healey, in its ultimate form, was very quick," mentions Paddy, smiling. "But, it was far from easy to drive, especially on tight and loose surface, downhill sections. I'm not ashamed to say that there were many occasions when I was scared!



Paddy Hopkirk by the works Midget which he drove in July 1962, when he had just been signed as a BMC works driver

"Stuart Turner was a very clever man, though. He and the team, and Bill Price in particular, assistant to Stuart in the Competition Department, and later Peter Browning, helped me hugely, providing cars that had been prepared to the highest standards, and provided the very best support."

### Racing Forward

Even though BMC would continue to campaign the Big Healey for quite some time, as the 1960s unfolded, most of the team's efforts were being directed towards the Mini, which was becoming a force to be reckoned with in rallying. The team had also started fielding Sprites, Midgets and the recently-launched MGB in races, but usually shied away from using them in rallying.

"Realistically, the MGs were never potential winners on rallies, which is why they had to take second place to the Minis," admits Stuart. "Yet they were class winners and also performed exceptionally well in endurance events. BMC was keen to promote MG, so I started entering Midgets and MGBs in endurance races, beginning with Le Mans."

### 24 Hours of Le Mans

**1963:** The aftermath of the 1955 disaster endured, and, sensitive to the feelings and emotions that still resonated, BMC had banned any official entries in long-distance races. This explains why the 1963 entry, MG's return to post-war racing, which challenged that ban, was a works-supported, semi-private entry made in the name of Paddy's co-driver, Alan Hutcheson.

"Stuart asked me to partner Alan Hutcheson for the 1963 Le Mans," recalls Paddy. "Alan was a part-time driver for BMC and had quite a lot of saloon car racing experience. I'd done some racing for Rootes, including Le Mans, and had recently raced a Cooper Car Company Mini Cooper 997 in the Silverstone International Trophy meeting."

The car selected for Le Mans was an MGB (7 DBL). To garner a higher top speed, it sported a fibreglass hardtop (designed and sold by MG, and always used on race and rally cars) and a reshaped 'droop-snout' front, crafted in aluminium, complete with Perspex headlight covers.

The Stage 5 B-series engine (mildly-tuned in comparison with its opposition), which inhaled via a Weber 45DCOE carburettor, produced around 130bhp, and the very tall 3.307:1 axle ratio would permit 126mph at 6000rpm. A high top speed was essential at Le Mans... as was a brisk start.

Due to safety concerns, the iconic 'Le Mans' start ceased to be a part of the event from 1971 on. Nonetheless, until then it was not just pivotal, it required lots of practice. Paddy, who'd been chatting with Stirling Moss about the best technique, had been limbering up.

"Drivers had to sprint across the track, jump in the car and roar off," explains Paddy. "I'd been practising a lot, and getting fit, too. Stirling advised me to leave the car in gear, dispensing with the need to use the handbrake. Once in the car, all I had to do was depress the clutch, start the engine, let out the clutch and roar away. But Alan kept on badgering me to let him do the start. I think he wanted to impress his girlfriend. So I let him... and soon came to regret this.

"Unfortunately, he was hyped up. Not only didn't he make a particularly good start, but at the end of the Mulsanne Straight, he put the MGB into the sandbank whilst trying to out-brake a Ferrari! In his defence, he spent almost an hour digging



Paddy and Andrew by the MGB in the Le Mans pits

it out using his bare hands and his helmet, and got the car back to our pits with just one minute to spare before we'd have been disqualified. I jumped in and set off as quickly as I could. The car seemed fine, but there was sand everywhere!"

Although not particularly powerful, the sand-laden MGB was able to keep up a good pace, especially during the night and when the weather conditions were bad.

"At the time, few racing drivers had much experience of racing in the dark, or when it was foggy or misty," tells Paddy. "To rally drivers, though, driving at night, or when visibility is compromised, is quite normal, and I was able to use my

experience to cut back some of the time we'd lost."

Paddy did indeed reduce the deficit, and 7 DBL crossed the finishing line in 12th place, 1st in class. A fine result.

**1964:** Again, MG fielded a single, mildly-tuned, high-g geared, sloping-nosed MGB (BMO 541B), which was driven by Paddy and his good friend Andrew Hedges. Hedges, an accomplished racer, was Sales Manager at Universal Power Drives, the company responsible, amongst

Peter Browning, Paddy Hopkirk and Andrew Hedges study notes at Le Mans





Paddy by the Works MGB at Abingdon



One of the three aluminium-bodied MG Midget Coupes. Paddy and Andrew Hedges drove 771 BJB in 1965

other things, for the diminutive and delectable, Mini-based, Unipower GT.

"Andrew was an excellent driver; and could be relied upon to get the best from the car and bring it home," says Paddy. "I'd also become more adept at slipstreaming, and some laps were done at an average of 105mph."

BMO 541B slipstreamed its way to 19th place, 5th in class, completing the race at an average of 99.9mph. Not only that, as drivers of the highest placed British car, Paddy and Andrew were awarded the coveted *Motor Trophy*.

"Finishing at Le Mans is an achievement in itself," remarks Paddy. "But to also be awarded the *Motor Trophy* is something I'm extremely proud of. It's one of my career highlights."

**1965:** Once again partnered with Andrew Hedges, Paddy would find himself behind the wheel of another MGB (DRX 255C). Peter Browning (soon to become Competitions Manager) was in charge.

The B-series engine was in much the same tune as in previous years, the car had the same very high axle ratio and the slippery snout. Again, 126mph was possible along the Mulsanne Straight, although this rose to 132mph when

Paddy managed to bag a tow from Jack Sear's ailing Cobra. Nevertheless, despite finishing in a highly-creditable 11th place, the *Motor Trophy* was plucked from their grasp by Graham Hill and Jackie Stewart, who'd beaten them... just, in the Rover-BRM gas-turbine car.

"Not to be awarded the Trophy was a shame, but we'd been held up by several unscheduled pit stops and issues which were beyond our control," muses Paddy. "Andrew had a blow-out and did at least half a lap on a flat. Then, towards the end, a caliper seal blew. Until the brake issue, we'd been catching the Rover-BRM, gaining 21 seconds a lap. That said, it was a good result for BMC, in what was very much a production car."

#### Speed Counts

And there's the rub. Like 7 DBL and BMO 541B before it, DRX 255C was very much a production car. Abingdon prided itself on building cars that were truly in keeping with the spirit of Le Mans; cars that used off-the-shelf tuning parts readily available to any owner. As such, the racing MGBs were reliant on production-based underpinnings and the trusty but somewhat underpowered (compared with their racing

opposition), OHV, B-series engine.

The harsh reality was that the MGB, which competed in the 2-litre class, was outpaced by thinly-disguised and lightweight racing cars. Of even greater concern to Abingdon and its drivers was that it was becoming ever more difficult to meet the class qualifying time during practice. The speed simply wasn't there. Which, in addition to preventing good lap times, had safety implications.

"To be honest, the speed differential between us and the high-speed cars was becoming huge," remembers Paddy wistfully. "You had to be very careful and keep your wits about you, otherwise you could be involved in a terrible accident."

Not that Paddy had quite seen the last of Le Mans. In 1966, he and Andrew Hedges returned, except on this occasion they had a Donald Healey Motor Company Austin-Healey Sprite. It retired, with engine problems.

#### Bridgehampton 500kms

Having bid 'adieu' to Le Mans, BMC looked for other venues where it could display its wares in a motorsport environment. And where better than North America?



The MGB raced in 1963. To garner a higher top speed, it sported a fibreglass hardtop and a reshaped 'droop-snout' front, crafted in aluminium, complete with Perspex headlight covers





Paddy Hopkirk and Henry Liddon featured on the TV show 'Sunday Night at the London Palladium' hosted by Bruce Forsyth in 1964 after winning the Monte in a Mini

**1965:** The North American market had long been crucial to MG's success, and it was with this firmly in mind that BMC entered three cars in this prestigious North East event. Support and financial assistance were provided by the Hambro Automotive Corporation, the company that represented BMC stateside. Paddy would be in an MGB, with teammates Rauno Aaltonen and Timo Mäkinen driving race-prepared production Midgets.

"MG was very well known in America, and BMC wanted to maintain the marque's high profile," says Paddy. "Bridgehampton was very fast, open, and had lots of sand dunes. It was much like Zandvoort."

Paddy finished 4th overall, Rauno 6th. Timo, having had to stop to get his Midget's exhaust welded, battled through to 11th. It was a good day for MG.

### 12 Hours of Sebring

Although Bridgehampton undoubtedly had its appeal and was beneficial from a PR perspective, the standout circuit was, and still is, Sebring; the first and the oldest European-style endurance race in the Americas.

**1965:** Paddy, partnered with Timo Mäkinen, had a Sebring Sprite, running under the aegis of the Donald Healey Motor Company, as was the similar car of Clive Baker and Rauno Aaltonen. Paddy and Timo finished 18th, in a race that experienced rain of Biblical proportions.

"Some five hours before the end, the heavens opened," grimaces Paddy. "So much so, the pits were flooded and we were treated to the sight of wheels and tyres floating away. Timo, who was driving at the time, had to keep opening the passenger door to let the water out! Even so, he managed to make up two laps on the leaders. He was a lovely man and a great friend. And the best-ever rally driver. A supreme talent."

**1966:** For this year, two MGBs had been entered, and Paddy, once again, would be partnered with Andrew Hedges. Their MGB (8 DBL) was listed as having a 2004cc engine in order for it to run in the 3-litre Prototype class. It was actually running an 1860cc engine that produced 138bhp. Sadly, on this occasion, the usually reliable B-series threw a conrod.

**1967:** Keen to promote the recently-introduced MGB GT, North American dealers launched a Special Edition version fitted with trim upgrades and plaques (supplied via Hambro). BMC, also keen to further the MGB GT's cause, entered one for Paddy and Andrew (LBL 591E). Except, as the GT had only recently entered production and wasn't yet homologated for Group III, it was classified as a Prototype. What's more, Paddy needed to do a quick turnaround.

"I'd just won the Circuit of Ireland, but within an hour of finishing I was on a plane heading in the direction of Sebring!" smiles Paddy. "The team had prepared one of the new MGB GTs. It was a lovely car. Winning its class was great publicity too."

**1968:** With the MGB GT now well established, it was goodbye 'B, hello 'C. Abingdon had given serious consideration (in production terms) to a more powerful MGB as early as 1964. Donald Healey had tried to counter this by slotting a 4-litre Vanden Plas Princess engine into an Austin-Healey MkIII. But it was all to no avail, as management eschewed what would have become the Healey MkIV and eventually decided on a 2912cc version of the MGB, namely the MGC.

Hopkirk and Hedges, who'd long been a go-to pairing, were given MBL 546E, the same car they'd used in MGB GTS form (GTS standing for GT Special) on the 1967 Targa Florio. Except, for this year, it had been designated as an MGC GTS. As such, it had the mellifluous and correct six-cylinder, alloy-head, iron block engine, bored to 2968cc, which thumped out a very decent 200bhp. It had proper race car pace... if not quite the handling to match.

"The big engine was great for power," impresses Paddy. "Unfortunately, there was a lot of weight over the front wheels and it understeered like hell. It was a car you had to wrestle with."

The duo certainly wrestled with the MGC... successfully as it transpired, finishing 10th overall, earning BMC its best-ever result at Sebring.

**1969:** With regular co-driver Andrew Hedges, Paddy was once again in an MGC GTS, only this time it was RMO 699F. It finished 15th overall. A great result considering the pace and the quality of the opposition, and a fine way for MG to bow out at Sebring.



Promotional shot of DRX 255C in the MG Abingdon compound, surrounded by MGBs destined for the UK and export market

The two Works Sebring GTS MGCs, used in a promotional shot by MG Rover in 2002.

"The MGC wasn't a particularly great car for racing, even less so for rallying, but it was powerful and torquey, strong, and reliable," mentions Paddy. "The reason it did so well was due to the team at Abingdon. It wasn't a great car for the job, but they made it as good as possible."

### The Long and Winding Road Targa Florio

With its hugely demanding corners, a plethora of natural obstacles, duration, and so much more, the Targa Florio, the world's oldest endurance race, based in Sicily, quickly established itself as the sport's most demanding and most important event. In its early years, the race involved a circuit of the entire island, but by the time it became integrated into the FIA World Sportscar Championship (1955) it had been shortened to 11 laps of the 45-mile Circuito Piccolo delle Madonie, in the Madonie mountain range.

Shortened, but not emasculated. Right up until 1973, the final time it was run, the Targa Florio remained the gruelling, immensely difficult and car-breaking event it always had been. As Paddy Hopkirk and his co-driver Tommy Wisdom found out.

**1964:** "I was partnered with Tommy Wisdom, and we'd been given a special-bodied Donald Healey Motor Company Austin-Healey Sprite (693 LAC)," remembers Paddy. "Although not as nicely finished as the Abingdon cars, it was a good car. Sadly it broke a halfshaft and we had to retire."



MBL undergoing some work in the Abingdon Competitions Department

**1965:** It may have retired, but the Sprite had shown enough potential for John Thornley to give Abingdon the go-ahead to build three aluminium-bodied MG Midget Coupes. One (771 BJB), was made available to Paddy and Andrew Hedges.

"For practice, we used a Fiat hire car, and drove it so hard we had to take it back to have new tyres fitted. Twice, I think! Even so, despite lots of practice, because each lap was around 25 miles in length, it was a difficult circuit to memorise.

"However, Andrew had the brilliant idea of marking prominent stones and kilometre markers at the side of the road with painted letters that displayed how severe the bend was. I remember him painting FL for flat left etc. But Lancia sent some of their team out that night to apply

their letters. Not that they were playing unfair, they just wanted their information. It all got a bit confusing as there wasn't enough room for two sets of instructions! Confusion aside, the Midget performed admirably, and we finished 11th overall, 2nd in class, and came ever so close to beating the Abarth."

Very close. The Abarth-Simca Bialbero, driven by Salvatore Calascibetta and Giuseppe Virgilio, was only just over a minute ahead at the finish. To illustrate just how well the Midget had performed, its Formula-Junior enhanced engine produced around 115bhp and 115mph was just about possible. By contrast, the Abarth-Simca Bialbero had rather more 'brio' as its bespoke DOHC, 1288cc engine was blessed with 138bhp. Thanks to this



Safety Fast!



LBL on display, and out on track in 2015 at an MGCC event to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the BMC Competitions Department

potency, and the car's slippery shape, the top speed was a mightily-impressive 142mph!

**1967:** No entry was made in 1966, but Paddy returned the following year, only on this occasion he was given MBL 546E and partnered with Timo Mäkinen. The car was something of a hybrid, sporting as it did a lightweight, wide-arched, aluminium panelled MGC bodyshell (six of these special bodyshells had been built at Abingdon) and an MGB engine. Bill Price, Assistant Competitions Manager, remembers it well.

"MBL 546E was the first MGC GTS to be built," he recalls. "With the delay in the launch of the production MGC, it was decided to enter the car with an MGB engine to deflect press attention! As before, we'd listed the engine size as 2004cc. This was to take it out of the up-to-2-litre class. I think the engine was actually 1860cc, and it ran two 2-inch SU carburettors.

"The bodyshell was red, but when the Targa regs were received we found that cars entered as prototypes must be painted in the national country of the entrant... which of course was green. So, at the last moment, the exterior was painted green. We just didn't have the time to paint the inner panels. They stayed red and it retains its dual colours to this day."

Regrettably, the patriotically-hued MGC GTS ran into brake problems and the time limit was exceeded, meaning that it wasn't classified. A great shame, as until the malfunctioning brakes drew a premature halt to proceedings it had been holding 9th position.

**1968:** "The Targa, which was more like a rally than a race, had become my

favourite event," enthuses Paddy. "It was a racing circuit for rally drivers and I loved it. The driving challenges were so varied, and it was like a very long special stage."

LBL 591E, the car used in 1968, achieved 12th overall, 2nd in class, one place behind Lancia ace Sandro Munari in a Lancia Fulvia Zagato. Paddy, Andrew and the team had delivered yet another great result, one that drew a line under MG's association with the Targa Florio in marvellous style.

#### Teamwork

The team at Abingdon performed mechanical alchemy, turning base metal into endurance racing and rallying gold. Their cars were also driven by the best. And the best was, unquestionably, Paddy Hopkirk. From 1958 to 1969, he put MG on the national and international podiums.

"Life as a professional driver was fun but very hectic," recalls Paddy. "For quite some time I'd been juggling my race and rally career with my business interests, such as the driving schools, my Austin-



Healey, Toyota and Skoda car dealerships, TV promotional work, and the Paddy Hopkirk range of motoring accessories, of course. I married Jenny in 1967, and family life ensued. I loved competing, but at the end of 1969 I felt it was time to hang up my racing overalls and helmet, although I would compete in many events over the years, usually as an invited celebrity driver.

"I really enjoyed my time with MG, which gave me many great results and experiences. The team at Abingdon were meticulous in their preparation, were utterly devoted, and had huge pride in what they did. Great cars, great people, and great times." ●

The MGB driven by Paddy Hopkirk, DRX 255C, here being campaigned by the late Barry Sidery-Smith at MGLive! in 2012





## **MGVR celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MG**

The MG Vintage Racers group, in conjunction with the 41<sup>st</sup> Lime Rock Park Historic Festival will host a grand celebration for the MG marques 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The dates are Labor Day weekend, September 1-4 with 3 days of racing and the now famous Sunday In The Park concours on Sunday September 3. There is no racing on Sunday at Lime Rock and the substitution is a world class judged concours, swap meet, a field full of automotive vendors along with the Gathering of the Marques which attracts 500+ autos of every kind that park on and around the race track. This year MG will get position 1 on the Sam Posey main straight.

- Competitors will be invited to the Friday night dinner which will feature significant MG people in a forum sure to bring tall tales and great stories from the past.
- The MGVR will have a paddock area specified for MG competitors and a hospitality tent and area to meet and relax.
- Sunday morning, we will have a typical Full English Breakfast buffet created and prepared by MGB racer and chef Andy Moore.
- There will be an all MG feature race on Monday afternoon to include every MG entered. During the Friday, Saturday and Monday Festival races, each competitor will have two sessions a day. T's will race with pre-war cars, A's, B's, C's, V8's and midgets will race in their respective classes. Should we have enough of the newer cars, Skip Barber has promised separate MG races just for the faster classes.

Lime Rock Park has a big infield camping area with showers for MG enthusiasts or competitors who wish to camp. While there are many hotels and guest houses in the area, those planning on coming should make plans early.

With so many activities happening during the weekend, an outline by day may make the organization of activities easier to understand.

Thursday, August 30 – Vintage Racecar & Sports Car Parade, 4:00 pm – A 17-mile tour through local towns and some of the most scenic roads in northwest Connecticut. The Parade concludes in the town of Falls Village with a Street Fair. Participation is limited and is by application only. MG's will have preference.

Friday, September 1 – Action on the track with all classes and groups having practice sessions in the morning and qualifying sessions in the afternoon. A swap meet (we would term autojumble) begins in the infield. A Friday night competitors' dinner on the hill featuring a forum of MG personalities.

Saturday, September 2 – Action continues on the track with race #1 for all classes in the morning and race #2 in the afternoon. Swap meet/autojumble continues.

Sunday, September 3 – No racing due to a noise ordinance, however, the track will be filled with cars. Two major shows will have cars displayed around the entire racing surface. "Sunday in the Park Concours" is by application only, juried car show. This year there will be a judged MG class in the Concours. "Gathering of the Marques" is the other show, lining up cars along the edge of the racing surface, grouped by marque. MG will be the featured marque for 2023. The MGVR Full English Breakfast buffet held in the paddock.

Monday, September 4 – A full day of racing with Race #3 in the morning and race #4 in the afternoon plus an All MG feature race. Swap meet/autojumble continues.

We look forward to having literally hundreds of MG's at Lime Rock Park. Not just race cars or show cars, but as a huge Gathering of the Faithful. To get a glance at the Historic Festival <https://limerock.com/events/historic-festival-41/>

For driver information: <https://limerock.com/events/historic-festival-41/hf-driver-information/>

To enter: <https://www.motorsportreg.com/events/historic-festival-41-race-car-entry-lime-rock-park-687269>

For questions on anything feel free to contact Dave Nicholas [mgvr766@gmail.com](mailto:mgvr766@gmail.com)



**Parting Shots**

