



NEWSLETTER

Special Edition 2020

IN MEMORIUM



Two very special MGVR members / racers / great guys recently passed. Rather than put their stories inside the usual newsletter I felt these men deserved an edition of their own. Please enjoy the memories of Hugh Burruss and Blair Engel

Hugh M. Burruss Jr.
February 3, 1941 - June 18, 2020

NAMGAR member Hugh Burruss was one of life's unforgettable characters. Hugh loved cars but he loved people even more. He gave others opportunities they could only have dreamed of, but best of all friendships and memories that have lasted a lifetime. We would like to share some of our memories with you and give you an appreciation for this remarkable man.

First Ride With Hugh
By Bruce Woodson



If there ever was a "Car Guy," it was Hugh Burruss. He loved not only MGs, but all types of cars, new and old.... And especially old race cars! Hugh loved the people associated with cars too. Put him in a room with car enthusiasts and he was like a kid on Christmas morning. Take him to a car convention and he was hoarse by the second day. He just couldn't stop talking about cars. And that's just how I met Hugh Burruss

I was 16 years old when Mr. Burruss called to say he would be my On-the-Road driving instructor. A few days later I was paired up with our high school football star who immediately pushed me out of the way so he could drive. I got in the back seat and Mr. Burruss instructed the football star to drive to a local Porsche restoration shop.

After a ½ hour wait in the driver's ed car, Mr. Burruss returned with a box full of engine parts. From the back seat, I started asking questions about the Porsche engine parts and Mr. Burruss said they were for his 912. From that conversation he could tell I was interested in cars. So, we talked cars the rest of the afternoon.

The next day, the football star pushed me out of the way again and started towards the car. Hugh said, "Son, let the other boy drive today." With that, I drove us to see several private car collections, all while someone who usually got his way pouted from the back seat. On the third day, the football star didn't even show up! So, we had the afternoon to ourselves to see more car collections. And that was the start of a lifelong friendship. In 1981, Hugh sold me the white MGA that I still have and let me keep it in his garage for 2 years while I restored it. Through the years we had lots of great car adventures, and I treasure all the memories.

I am indebted to Hugh for all the generosity he showed me and trust he put into my restoring his Factory built MGA Sebring race car. On one special trip to Watkins Glen where Sebring cars were featured, Hugh invited me to take the number 52 out and participate in the historic recreation of the race around the original road course. He was always generous like that.

I'll miss Hugh and his stories, but I will never forget his enthusiasm and integrity. I know he's happily telling stories to a whole new audience now. It's what Car Guys do

Driving Hugh's Dream

By Bob Vitrikas

As a lifelong lover of things MG and especially MGAs, I was humbled when Hugh asked me drive his dream car, an irreplaceable historic MGA factory racer, at the 2002 Sebring Historic Races. It would be the 40th anniversary of the car's appearance at the 12 Hours of Sebring where it finished a creditable 4th in class and 16th overall. The invitation came in December 2001, just 100 days before Sebring! Anyone who has restored a car, let with alone an historic race car, knows that to do a frame off, nut and bolt restoration and put the car safely on the race track is just about impossible. Mission Impossible indeed!

the car would be ready for the race. He trusted Bruce Woodson, former NAMGAR Chairman and current Technical Editor, with that daunting task and he and Liz supported and encouraged him. Hugh trusted me to get the car accepted in the race, pass tech inspection (with no roll bar or fuel cell), and drive it the "Safety Fast!" way.

After an all mighty herculean effort, the car was running at Sebring! But during the first practice session my heart sank as I saw the engine oil pressure slowly drop. Heartbroken, I shut it off and coasted into the pits. The engine had spun a bearing.

That could have been the last straw and Hugh could easily have said, "Let's pack it up and go home." Hugh's response was just the opposite. After consulting with Bruce, he, with Liz' support and encouragement, made the decision to complete what they had set out to do. Parts were ordered and Bruce, Larry Smith and others worked like demon's in the hot Florida

sun to get the car repaired in time to do a parade lap with Hugh at the wheel. Mission accomplished!



Driving
the
dream.
My
smile
says it
all.
Thanks
Hugh

Hugh's Last Lap

By David Harrison

My wife, Una, and I met Hugh and Liz Burruss through Una's theatre program. Their daughter Macrae studied drama with "Auntie" Una at Virginia Commonwealth University back in the 90's. The ensuing 25 years that we have known Hugh and Liz have been wonderful years. Hugh had a personality Una and I admired. Hugh was extroverted, jovial, and jokey and would instantly make friends with people he met. Una and I became close friends with Hugh and Liz. Hugh even showed me his extensive toy collection, the little ones from his childhood and the big ones, Ferraris, Porsches and the like.

Hugh raced back in the days when you could drive your car to the track, stick on your number, race the car then drive it home. Somewhere along the line he acquired a derelict 1962 MGA Sebring MGA, car #52. I reminded Hugh when it's 40th Sebring anniversary was coming up, that maybe he should restore and race the rusty wreck. Bruce Woodson and friends turned British racing rust into British Racing Green in record time and took the car to the Sebring track in March 2002, where it was driven by Bob Vitrikas.

This was the start of many happy times with Hugh and Liz and car #52 including Watkins Glen, Sebring, Virginia International Raceway, Summit Point, the Amelia Island Concours, and many other car shows. Three years ago car #52 competed at the prestigious Monterey Historic races at the Laguna Seca track, driven by Larry Smith. We didn't break any lap records, but we all had a great time. Una and I will always remember the wonderful experiences and friendship we had with Hugh, Liz and friends.



Wild Rides with Hugh By Larry Smith

I knew Hugh fewer years than many, but in the time I spent with Hugh we have had many adventures together. Our first meeting was in Bruce Woodson's shop during the final stages of preparation of #52 for its Sebring reunion in 2002. I joined the restoration effort late in the process and had no who Hugh Burruss was. When he and Liz walked into the shop one of the days I was there, they made a big impression. I hadn't started racing yet and somehow I convinced Bruce and Carol that I should accompany them in their motorhome on the run down to Sebring for the car's return to the racetrack. Others can tell the story of how that hot weekend turned out or better yet you can watch the video that Hugh's son filmed that tells the story in detail. One memory of the trip was laying under the car on a blue tarp to assist Bruce as he replaced the #2 rod bearings. Years later I named my racing effort Blue Tarp Racing in memory of that weekend.



Hugh loved racing and loved to tell of his third place finish at VIR in the early 1970's. A silver platter awarded for his podium finish has been present at every Burruss Thanksgiving dinner since then, probably topped with cranberry sauce or some such dish.

I owe a lot to Hugh. Hugh, #52 and that trip to Sebring in 2002 was the inspiration for me to get my racing license and in 2003 purchase a MG Midget for vintage racing. In 2002 I never imagined that someday I would be piloting Hugh's Sebring MGA at historic race tracks across the country, but that's what happened. After the two Bobs, Vitrikas and Watkins, had their stints behind the wheel, Hugh asked me to race the car. I was honored to be asked but not quite sure what I was getting myself into, both with racing a car so different than my Spridget and the events I was about to experience as part of "Hugh Burruss Racing".

Wherever Hugh was, Liz was there too. She was always very patiently by his side as he told someone he just met a story that I am sure she heard a thousand times. Liz is an angel and made sure Hugh always had what he needed to make his way through the day. And Liz made sure any thirsty member of the crew would get one or more of her dirty martinis she made with her special shaker at every track we raced.

Hugh never met a stranger, and everyone was a friend. Each of us got to (had to?) hear his stories and they were to be told over and over again. Hugh reveled in his stories and laughed as much as he did when he first told them ten, twenty, forty or fifty years ago. When I think of it now, I am not sure I ever saw Hugh actually spend any money. Maybe it is because he always seemed to be out of cash. I know this not because I ever saw his wallet but because most times I was with him he would ask if I could give him \$50. When my wife and I last saw Hugh we listened to his stories one more time and I gave him the fifty dollar bill he had asked for many times. I will surely miss you Hugh, and thanks for those wild rides.



Liz listens as Hugh shares a story with a "stranger" at the Monterey Motorsports Reunion at Laguna Seca

One More Last Ride With Hugh

By Michael Eaton

One would only have to meet Hugh Burruss once to never forget him. It was not just his jet white hair, it was his infectious smile and southern gentlemanly demeanor. I first met Hugh in the winter of 2001. Bruce Woodson had asked me to come to Richmond to help talk Hugh into restoring his 1962 ex-Sebring factory racer also known as #52. Having recently purchased the 1957 ex-Sebring car, I was all in. So, I met Bruce and Bob Vitrikas at Hugh and Liz's home outside Richmond and we proceeded to show him photographs of his car on track at Sebring and his eyes grew bigger and bigger. I don't recall that it took much convincing, but Bruce got himself into a heck of a lot of work pulling off that restoration in a mere three or so months!

While I could not make it to that first Sebring unveiling, I had the pleasure of getting to know Hugh and Liz more over the years at other Sebring reunions and at vintages races at Watkins Glen and other tracks. Of course some times Hugh would be hard to find as he was always on the trail of hunting down another famous driver to sign the interior of #52. So, if you ever get a chance to see it at an upcoming NAMGAR event or a race, check out the interior and see what names Hugh collected.

I will also greatly miss Hugh's sense of humor. At the last NAMGAR meet Hugh attended in Richmond, he asked me if I could return #52 to its storage facility for him. I could return #52 to its storage facility for him. I gladly agreed and he said that Liz could accompany me and give me a ride back to the meet. He then cautioned me that he knew exactly how long it should take and that I had best not "run out of gas" with his gal! Of course, there is also a very good possibility that this was not a joke as he was so devoted to Liz!



Hugh enjoying giving Jack Van Driel, Sebring MGA driver from the 1956 and 1957 races, a ride in Number 52

Blair Engle 1931—2020

Blair Engle was one of the three founders of The Classic MG Club and served in many leadership roles, including chairing the first GOF South in 1967. Blair was involved with MGs in many ways: leadership in the MG community through clubs; operating an MG business, The Classic MG Shop; racing MGs and being involved in the MG Vintage Racers organization; writing technical articles for MG newsletters; and giving a helping hand to all MG owners. Blair left us on July 6th.

Blair came to Central Florida from New York to work as an engineer at Martin Marietta when their new plant was established. After many years at Martin, he moved to Tallahassee to become part of the faculty of the Graduate Department, College of Physics, Florida State University. He was a researcher involved in lasers, cryogenics, and Molecular Beams. His biography may be best told by Blair himself, written 2008.



“My first car was a 1930 Model A Ford. It was one year older than I was. I drove it all over the Northeast until sold it and bought a 1937 ford convertible coupe. I guess now is the time to say that as a teenager, I was a hot rod fan. I modified the Ford with a Merc engine with aluminum heads, dual carbs, headers and lowering blocks, hydraulic brakes, etc, etc. It was my pride and joy until I sold it just before I (shipped out to the Korean War.)

“In 1951 my dad bought a new 1950 MG TD. He joined The Westchester Sports Car Club which had a lot of SCCA members. I traveled to many races with him. I remember going to Thompson and Lime Rock, Conn. as well as Bridgehampton, Long Island, NY.

“After Korea, my marriage to Lorry, and a move to Fishkill, NY, and a baby or two, I found a '53 TD with the engine apart in a peach basket. I had never turned a wrench on an MG, but bought a set of Whitworth wrenches and re-



Racing through the bridge corner at Road Atlanta

Photo contributed by Greg Prehodka, MGVR

built the engine. This TD served me well until my Dad passed away in 1962 and I sold my TD and bought Dad's TD. It had 68K miles on it. Since 1968 a TD has been my daily driver, as well as transportation to many MG meets and a bit of Autocrossing.

“MG clubs I belong to include The New England MG T Register (I am member #199 - there are now 12,665 members); the Classic MG Club, North Florida British Motoring Club, The Marti Gras Ts, and North American MGB Register. I helped organize the Classic MG Club of Orlando and was Chairman of the 1st GOF South. In 1981 my two good MG buddies Will Bowden and Tony Roth (both of Orlando) convinced me that I should go Vintage Racing. I have to admit, that in the following ten years a had more fun than I can ever explain. I drove this TD with cycle fenders and #99 on the grill, to work every day. On race weekends I would change to the



race engine, install the roll bar and fuel cell and I was ready to go. I raced at Road Atlanta, Mid Ohio, St. Petersburg, and Sebring. I never had a DNF and was fortunate enough to trophy in every race I entered.

“MGs have brought me in contact with a great many people who have become very close friends. With the many trials and tribulations of owning and MG, they have brought Lorry and I a group of wonderful friends.”

There are no memorial plans at this time. The family requests that donations honoring Blair sent to Duvall Homes, 3395 Grand Avenue, DeLand, FL 32720; Mailing: P.O. Box 220036, Glenwood, FL 32722. Phone 386/734-2874 LRomano@DuvallHomes.org



Many comments have been received from CMGC members and friends of Blair. All comments are captured on our Facebook page. You can add your tribute there. A few are shared below:

Manley Ford

I knew and loved Blair and had great times with him and Tony Roth and Will Bowden as well as many other members of the Classic MG Club thanks to their connection to my Uncle Tom & Aunt Jan Wager, whose TD I still have.

It was Blair and Tony and Will and others who got me into MG vintage racing back in the early 1980s. Generous beyond belief, when Blair finally gave up rebuilding T-type transmissions, he pretty much gave me (for a pittance or less as I recall) all his leftover gearbox goodies.

Glenn Brazil

Blair rebuilt SUs for my TD in the 70's. He was very knowledgeable and always willing to help. He personified the code of the earlier MG T-clubs. which was to support and help others of the marque and shared the love and enthusiasm.

Pete Rogers

I never knew TD's had a soul. Now, I do. . .

Lonnie Cook

I never met Blair but felt that I knew him through conversations with Will Bowden and Tony Roth. When his son, Craig, called to tell me of Blair's demise, he shared a story. In the early morning of Blair's passing, as a tribute, Craig backed Blair's TD out of the garage and drove past the hospital before emergency personnel left. As it approached, the car stopped and would not start. A tear came to Craig's eyes and mine as he relived the story.



*Researched and Written by Lonnie Cook and Glen Moore
Race car photos on this page contributed by Craig Engle*



BLAIR H. ENGLE - Personal Memories

George Pardee Story and Photos

We first met Blair at the Road Atlanta Vintage GP in 1984, having moved to Florida the previous year. Blair was racing his #99 TD with his son Craig as crew, and the KEGG Racing Team (Kellogg, Engle, Gardner, and Germano). I knew immediately that Blair was a real MG person - friendly, knowledgeable but unassuming, helpful, and instantly a friend for life.



Not long before the MG Feature Race, my TF1500 spit out its water pump. Blair produced a spare, and Craig expertly pitched in to help swap it out (as TF owners know, no minor task, especially in the paddock under a severe time constraint.)

Blair's was a two TD family: his Dad's TD had been in the family since new in 1951 and was maintained in show condition. #99 was his race car **and his daily driver**; he drove it to work every day; before each race weekend, he and Craig would pull out the mild street motor and drop in the full bore race engine. This did not mean that Blair was casual about Racing. On track, Blair was as fierce a competitor as he was a good friend in the paddock. The results for that Road Atlanta VGP show Blair and his friendly rival Tony Roth (whose #48 was a very fast dedicated race car) separated by 1/100th of a second for fast race lap.

By the time of the 1986 St. Petersburg Grand Prix, road racers had discovered drag race tire traction treatment as the "hot tip" - it was quite effective, as we were all running street radials which could use plenty of help. Blair and Tony each showed up with gallons of it, and produced one of the 2 or 3 closest races I can recall from 40+ years of Vintage Racing. Wheel to wheel lap after lap on the tight street course, between concrete barriers with no run-off areas.

Blair's competitive nature and engineering background (he was the Physics Department engineer at FSU, which meant that if the Dept. required a cyclotron, Blair would be asked to build it) informed his car preparation. His



Classic MG Shop was noted for SU carburetor rebuilds & upgrades; the ultimate treatment reduced the throttle shaft to the thickness of the throttle blade for max flow and minimum turbulence. He offered 100 MPH door latches for T-series (mine were tested to 110). I have always considered his masterpiece and ultimate tweak to be his TD **aluminum door hinges**.

All who knew Blair would be happy if we could be able to share a fraction of his enthusiasm, creativity, and generosity with other MG lovers.

