



# NEWSLETTER

Vol 39 #2 February 2021



**The Gathering; MGVR FOCUS RACE, SUMMIT POINT 2013  
COME OUT OF THE CLOSET WITH YOUR CAR  
MGVR 2021 - VIRGINIA INT'L RACEWAY  
APRIL 2-4**

# From The Editor :

**The new year is off to a start. The Daytona 24 hour and 500 are history as well as a Daytona road course event. The Sebring 12 hour is set to run in March and the SVRA vintage race happened last weekend. It appears as if the racing world has stopped looking back at a virus and is looking ahead at getting back to a life.**

**And for goodness sake, let's get your racecar ready and support the marque at VIR on April 2-4. We already have 26 cars entered – we must get over 30.**

## In This Issue

**An article from long ago in MG Magazine about the Man who made the Twin Cam go, Sherm Decker.**

**A two part story from founder Greg Prehodka on the top 10 MGVR races he can recall. And those of you who know Greg, also know he has seen it all. Part one in February, Part two in March.**

**Items For Sale. A very interesting collection from Robert O'Meara including a very rare MGR V8 and MG powered Cisitalia built by none other than off road legend Mickey Thompson.**

**Charles Bordin** from the VSCCA lets us know that Lime Rock is back in action with the Empire Cup on June 4-5

**While it may seem a stretch – did you know that the MGTC made a huge influence on the first Corvette? And they want YOURs for the museum**

**Steve Konsin** let's us know the July 15-18 race at Road America has a special deal and encourages our T types and pre-wars to enter.

# MG TC and TD Breathe Life into the First Corvette

By [Corvette Museum](#)  
October 28, 2020

By Bruce Troxell



The design of the MG TC was about as far away from the original Corvette as one can get. The classic appearance of the TC design originated in 1933 and by 1946 it looked antiquated. It's small two-place body with an upright grille, flowing front fenders, cut-down rear-hinged doors, running boards, and a fold-down windshield rode on spindly nineteen-inch wire wheels. The Corvette did not include any of the visual design cues of the TC or TD, yet, without the MG's presence in the United States, it's quite possible that Harley Earl's Corvette never would have seen the light of day.



## **MG TC**

### **The MG TC Aroused Strong Emotions**

The MG TC had a something extra beyond its quirky looks that played on the emotions of sports car people, even if they didn't yet know they were sports car people. Famous race car driver and journalist Denise McCluggage, in her book *By Brooks Too Far for Leaping*, describes her first encounter with an MG TC in the late 1940s: "And there it sat in [the] showroom, stunning my every sense. A loose roller-skate of a car. Perky. Absurd. Black. Swoop-doored. Red upholstery. Walnut veneer dash. Bumpers like tiny goalposts. And all incredibly there. Immediately, I ached with a hankering I had not known since childhood. I wanted that car!"

Enthusiasts around the world shared Denise's attraction to the car. About 10,000 TCs were built between late 1945 and 1949. With Britain's economy in dire straits immediately following World War II, the government encouraged its manufacturers to export as much product as possible to bring much-needed cash into the British economy. MG did its share, exporting the TC to South Africa, Australia and the United States. The U.S. was the biggest market with 2,000 cars imported from the manufacturer and an additional 1,500 cars imported privately. Many American military personnel fell in love with the TC during their time in England and brought TCs home with them.



## **MG TC**

Exporting continued with the TC's replacement, the MG TD. Between 1950 and 1953, 29,664 TDs were made with almost eighty percent (23,488) coming to the U.S. The TCs and TDs, and to a lesser extent, their British cousins from Triumph and Jaguar, sparked a sports car boom that changed America's automotive milieu. In their driving zeal, sports car owners created clubs and organized sports car activities such as rallies, autocrossing competition, tours, and racing events. Sports cars had caught America's attention.

### **Sports Car Racing Flourishes in America**

The Sports Car Club of America was formed in 1944 as a car enthusiast group to organize sports car activities on a national level. The SCCA took the spark in sports car interest created by the TCs and TDs, and turned it into a full-fledged conflagration. When the SCCA began sanctioning road races in 1948, it brought road racing and sports cars into national focus. The inaugural 1948 Grand Prix in Watkins Glen, New York saw eight MG TCs among the 15 starters. A crowd of 10,000 spectators saw 10 cars finish the race, including all eight TCs.

# GRAND PRIX

WATKINS GLEN, N.Y. OCT. 2, 1948



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THE VILLAGE OF WATKINS GLEN, NEW YORK  
AND THE SPORTS CAR CLUB OF AMERICA.

The following year, attendance at the Watkins Glen Grand Prix jumped to about 50,000 spectators who saw 18 MG TCs in the starting field of 43 cars. Thirty cars finished the race, including 15 TCs. The Watkins Glen Grand Prix continued to grow in 1950 and 1951 with spectator attendance growing to over 100,000 in 1950 and topping 200,000 in 1951.



## **MG TD**

Watkins Glen was not the only hotbed for sports car road racing. In Bridgehampton, New York public roads were used for sanctioned sports car racing beginning in 1949. The next year, the Chicago region of the SCCA used roads around Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin for sports car racing. Racing took hold across America with races in Pebble Beach, California and Sebring, Florida in 1950, and races in Torrey Pines, California in 1951. America's initial major endurance race, The Twelve Hours of Sebring, began in 1952. Sports car races across the U.S. attracting thousands and thousands of spectators, along with the increasing presence of sports cars on American roads was bound to catch the attention of astute American automakers.

## **General Motors and Harley Earl**

General Motors didn't become the largest automaker in the world by being asleep at the wheel. When the General Motors brass became aware of the flourishing sports car interest in the U.S., they tasked vice president Harley Earl with exploring the potential market for an American sports car. Earl was the right man for the job – he made a point of attending the major European auto shows to keep an eye on the latest features and styling trends. He also routinely attended U.S. sports car races at Watkins Glen and Elkhart Lake in the late '40s and early '50s usually accompanied by his latest concept car to get feedback from the racers, organizers and spectators. Reportedly, Earl was impressed by the passion Jaguar, Ferrari, and Alfa Romeo owners had for their cars.



## 1953 Corvette

As reported by *Super Chevy* magazine, it was at Watkins Glen in 1951 that Earl began developing his idea for an American sports car. Upon Earl's return to Detroit from Watkins Glen, he launched "Project Opel" in a small clandestine styling studio closed to GM upper management, choosing young designer Bob McLean as the stylist. For the project benchmark, Earl selected the Jaguar XK 120. America's sports car project was alive!

## MG TC and TD Performance

Power and speed were not the MG T series' forte, but what they lacked in get-up-and-go, they made up for in nimble handling and driving fun. The TC weighed about 1,800 pounds and the four-cylinder, 1,250 cc engine drove the rear wheels via a four-speed manual gearbox. Elliptical springs provided the suspension, which along with the TC's skinny tires, made cornering an adventure. The TC had a top speed of about 75 miles per hour and a 0 to 60 mph time of 22.7 seconds. The four-wheel drum brakes gave

respectable braking performance for the time. A major factor in the TC's success was the light, nimble handling that the then-typical big and heavy U.S. cars could not match.



## **MG TC engine**

The MG TD bore a family resemblance to the TC, but was modernized with smaller 15-inch steel wheels, a coil-spring independent front suspension, rack and pinion steering, and a new four-speed transmission. While the TD had about the same horsepower as the TC, it was a bit slower due to its increased weight. The TD was also available in a competition model, the TD Mark II. The Mark II had a higher output 1,250 cc engine producing 57 horsepower, a higher rear-axle ratio, increased compression ratio and bigger valves. The Mark II was visibly distinguishable from the regular TD by a bulge in the hood over the carburetors, “Mk II” badges on the hood, and chrome grille bars instead of the regular colored bars matching the interior color. About 1,700 Mark II models were built during the TD’s production run.

## **MG T Series Entices General Motors into the Sports Car Arena**

Great MG TC and TD sales figures in the U.S. in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s, thanks to reasonable prices and the large number imported into America, gave sports cars a previously unseen presence on American roads. The MGs also were major attractions at early sports car races helping to attract thousands of spectators. The car sales, and the enthusiasm of large numbers of racing fans enticed General Motors to investigate the sports car market possibilities and, as they say, the rest is history—Corvette history.



The debut of the 1953 Corvette

## The National Corvette Museum is Looking for MG T Series Cars

The National Corvette Museum is very interested in having an MG T Series car or two in their collection or being able to borrow an MG TC or TD for future displays. Should you have a TC or TD in your stable and are interested in either donating the car to the Museum, or loaning the car to the Museum for public display in one of their exhibits, please contact the NCM Director of Collections/Curator [Derek Moore](#).

## **FROM Charles Bordin, VSCCA**

### **SCCA Empire Cup – Lime Rock – June 4 & 5, 2021**

Yes, there is snow on the ground and covid is in the air. But, Spring is in the air and before you know it you will be longing for some track time. Don't lose out on this great un-muffled event with plenty of track time. Now is the time to sign up for the VSCCA Empire Cup event at Lime Rock this coming June 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>. We already have over 25 entries for the event. In the past we have had to turn away entries because we run out of room.

This is a two day Race event with Timing & Scoring. The event is un-muffled so your car can be as loud as you want. As always we use professional SCCA corner workers at all stations. The stewards and grid people are also SCCA professionals. Each group gets 4 sessions on one day 3 sessions on the other day, more if possible. We have use of the race track from 9:00am till 6:00pm each day. Sport Racers through the early 1970's is the featured group. This is one of the few events on the East Coast where you can bring your Sport Racer and be in a group with only like cars.

At this event we will be accepting both Production cars and Sport Racing cars under 2 liters on treaded tires through the early 1970's. The driver must have a valid license from a Vintage Motorsport Council club or equivalent.

As the many entrants from last year know -- Last year's event went off very smoothly. Lime Rock staff did a wonderful job keeping the facility sanitized and maintained social distancing. Even with all the anxiety of coming to the event everyone had a good / safe time. I received many positive e-mails about the event. This year will be no different; we will be wearing masks and social distancing etc. We want everyone to have a safe and enjoyable time at Lime Rock. If the Government allows us and we deem it to be safe we will have a party at the track Friday evening.

You can save \$50 by entering before May 21. Go to Motorsportreg.com and enter online.

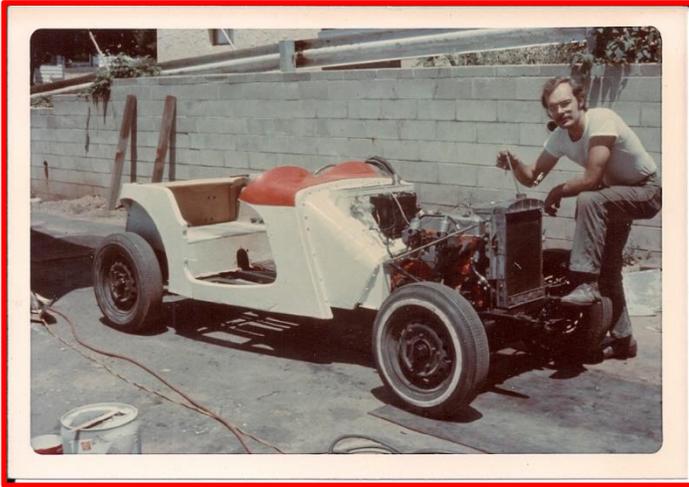
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## **FROM Steve Konsin**

The Weather Tech event at Road America July 15-18<sup>th</sup>...They have a pre war group entry fee of \$250 bucks. It's a great event with 5 sessions on an epic track.. The mid-west prewar guys are looking for more entries. For information and to enter; <https://www.roadamerica.com/weathertech-chicago-region-scca-june-sprints>

## Thanks for the Memories! Greg Prehodka

Where have the years gone! I purchased my (*not running*) MGTD (*in sad shape*) in 1967 for \$350 while I was in college, - against my dad's advice. Over the next 9 years, I slowly restored it. Since 1976, I've raced it in over 100 events, rallied it, street driven it, and showed it.



There were many wonderful adventures along the way as I made so many friends! With not much racing, or car events happening this past year, I thought it might be interesting to reflect back on my "**best memories**" from those adventures. It was hard for me to select the "**most significant**" ones. Each one had a special reason to rise to the top. I never had a "**big plan**" or vision – the adventures and opportunities just sort of came along, and sometimes my timing was just luck. So as the dust settles, here are my choices in "**date order**" along with a few brief comments.

### New England MG 'T' Register's "***Bicentennial Rally of the Colonial Capitals***", July 1976.

This was the first event with my MGTD after a nine year (*slow*) restoration of it. A week long rally for MG T types through the 13 original colonies, in celebration of our country's bicentennial. Hey – I painted it red, white, and blue! Some 40 MG's participated. There were many interesting facets to it. It was the first time I got my MG on the road and up to



speed. My navigator Jim Finne and I won its spare tire changing *contest within the event*. The winner of the rally got the brand new **One Millionth MG** made – (an MGB - *British Leyland supported promotion*). The rest of us got these cute little liberty bells. But in the big picture, we were all winners!



Jim & I at the 1,000,000 MG celebration

## New England MG 'T' Register's "**Double Three**" MG endurance race at Lime Rock Park, Ct., 1977.

The T Register ran this event for T types, fashioned after the old "**Double Twelve**" races that were held at the Brookland's race track in England back in the 1930's.

**Format:** Race for three hours, park the cars for an hour and have lunch, and then race them for another three hours. At this point in time the MGTD was **not** an eligible race car within the VSCCA. This was my initiation into vintage racing. From summer of 1976 to summer of 1977, I disassembled my MG (*again*) from a stock car and rebuilt it as an appropriate period MG racer of the early 1950's, with cycle fenders. My brother Barry and I had never raced before and this would

be our entry into racing - starting with a six hour race! I recruited "**Team 53**" to support this effort, and they were most helpful along the way. The only requirements for the race: -a helmet, -a seat belt, -wheels not falling off, and a \$35 entry fee! It got me hooked on racing my MG! **It was FUN!** My brother and I shared the driving chores and by the end of the day we had completed 173 laps of Lime Rock's 1.52 mile track. But I had no idea of what the years ahead would hold for me! **The addiction had begun!**



## **Mt. Equinox Hillclimb, Manchester Vermont, 1978**

Originally run by the SCCA for many years, it is now run by the Vintage Sports Car Club of America (VSCCA). A seriously challenging timed race up the hill against the clock (*like they do at Pike's Peak*). 5.2 miles long, with 41 turns and a vertical change in elevation of 3,140 ft base to summit. The twisty-turny road up the mountain is **unforgiving** if you **err!** Into the woods or over cliffs! It takes several years just to remember approaches to all the 41 turns and how to take them! I ran it for five years, and my daughter Rachel raced it one year. I managed to be the first MG to break the six minute mark: 5:58. The view from the summit is **awesome!**



## Bryar, NH, **EMRA NIGHT Race**, 1981

It was a shared race weekend between the **Eastern Motor Racing Association** (EMRA) and the VSCCA in 1981. EMRA held a special 100 lap tag-team handicap **night race** Saturday night. For it, teams had four cars per team, each doing 10 laps at a time and then tagging off to the next team car, until 100 laps were completed. EMRA invited us VSCCA folks to enter a team. So we did! My TD, a Lester MG, a Turner, and a Formula Junior composed our vintage team. It was an exciting 2-1/2 hours of racing, with action both on the track and in the pits! Then I took the checkered flag for our "**Queen's Color's**" team around 11PM to win the race by a margin of victory of just **11 seconds!**  
Lesson learned: be sure all your car's lights are working and adjusted properly before entering a night race. (*no stadium lights at this track*)



## **Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix**, 1991



Run by the city of Pittsburgh as a charity fund raising event since 1983 this true street racing event has raised over **five million dollars** for local charities. The 2.33 mile, 23 turn road course, is not for the faint of heart! I raced in its inaugural race and again a number of following years. For 1991 they chose the MG 'T's as their featured marque. With MGVR's support, a record breaking 20 MG 'T's entered to race! WOW! It got the nick-name "**The MOTHER of all MG T Races**". We had some great MG parties at night there (*thanks Andy McSwigan*)! But tragedy would strike in 1993 when

David Kuhn died in a freak solo accident racing his TD, as it rolled over a stone wall and into the woods. It was later believed he just passed out while racing on this hot July day and drove off course. Saddest drive back home I ever had. This would influence some MG racers to give up racing. Was it worth the risk? The event is still being run today.

**STICK AROUND FOR THE NEXT INSTALLMENT COMING IN MARCH**

**For Sale**



**ONE OF OUR OWN, BOB O'MEARA IS HAVING SOME HEALTH ISSUES AND IS SELLING HIS WONDERFUL COLLECTION OF CARS. OFFERED HERE.**

**For Sale - 1952 MG Cisitalia Special, originally built by Mickey Thompson and Bill Burke in CA, then stored in a barn for 60 years!**



**This car is equipped with a TF 1500 engine with Laystall Aluminum Head, extractor exhaust, standard trans, 5 rollbars, Fuel cell, meets all Vintage Racing Specs.**

**Special items, removable AH 100M windshield, Derrington Racing Screens, Set of NOS (yes, really!) Borrani 60 spoke wire wheels (never been on a car before), MGA seats and Recaro racing seat, 10k tach, etc.**

**This is an amazing piece of Automotive History (just oozing provenance), and a very well sorted race car. More info and pics on request, \$145,000 in perfect condition, raced for 4 years and not a scratch!**

**1976 PORSCHE 911S sunroof coupe, 145K+- miles**



Engine rebuilt about 8K mi ago, 2.7 L, 5 speed, fuel injection, repainted dark brown, tan interior, sport plaid seats, tan carpets and dash, interior is all original, instruments and mechanicals are great, car has been meticulously maintained and cared for all its life (Arizona car). No

rust underneath, this is a fantastic driving car with a great sounding sport muffler. It puts a smile on my face every time I turn the key. \$45K

**1994 MGRV8 in original low mileage excellent condition,**

Bought from a car collection in Europe, 26K +- mi, Rover V8 engine, 5 speed trans, BMW wheels, Woodcote Green, pearl leather interior, burled walnut dash, rare chrome instrument rings, speedo in Km, original carpets, top, rear window all excellent condition, new battery, AC, VERY fast, beautiful car – very rare and one of perhaps 2 in the USA, \$38,500. [mgtdva@gmail.com](mailto:mgtdva@gmail.com) or call Bob at 508-943-1447. Car in MA.



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# *The Man Who Made The Twin Cam Go!*

*By Robert C. Ackerson*



During a racing career that began in the mid-fifties and extended into the early sixties, Sherm Decker of Oneonta was one of America's most proficient M.G. drivers. Although the demands of serving as the service manager for a flourishing imported car dealership prevented him from competing in a sufficient number of races, and thus emassing enough points to win a national championship, Decker was a respected and well-liked driver who's knowledge of the technical aspects of race-preparing M.Gs was, like his driving ability, of high level.

Sherm Decker's untimely death in a motor vehicle accident in 1986 was a loss not only to his family but to many people who had experienced first hand his generosity, sense of fair play and competitive spirit. Several years ago this writer conducted an in-depth interview with Sherm Decker on which this article is based. It is dedicated to his memory.

The first time Sherm Decker saw a Twin Cam M.G. was in 1958 when David Ashe of J.S. Inskip drove the first Twin Cam in the country to Gordie Morris' imported car dealership in upstate New York where Decker worked as service manager. Having raced both TF and MGA models Decker was ready for something more potent and shortly thereafter purchased an early model Twin Cam. Moreover, Sherm recalls, "I was probably one of the few individuals foolish enough to own two of them at one time."

Sad to say, Decker's experiences with the Twin Cam were in line with those of many other Twin Cam owners. "There were all kinds of problems", he remembers, "pistons primarily. You just could not keep pistons in them. It became a process of trial and error to determine just how much clearance you could run."

"M.G. came out with one set of pistons after another - I bet there were fifty sets of pistons for that engine. I finally cam ground a set to 0.00125 inches. The engine used a lot of oil but ran well after that. I think it was a poorly designed engine."

"In terms of its cam and ignition timing it was a very critical engine. If you ran it at 7000 rpm you were OK. But if you ran it at 7050 rpm you would balance a valve off the piston." To illustrate this latter point Sherm recalled a race at Danville, Virginia: "During practice on the straightaway another Twin Cam has no trouble walking away from me. This really bothered me and so later I went over to his car and listened to him talk. Sure enough, he had set his timing far ahead of what I dared to do. In the race he proved no threat. After three laps he was out with a hole in a piston."

Eventually M.G. did develop the engine components needed to make the Twin Cam more reliable but even then life was not easy for a driver campaigning a Twin Cam. "With the Twin Cam", Sherm Decker notes, "You were constantly, constantly working. The rest of the car was fine. The Dunlop disc brakes were tremendous, there were no problems with the suspension even though the solid rear axle wasn't the greatest thing on sharp turns. I personally feel that the MGA was the finest car ever built for the price. It was a fanastic car. A lot of good engineering was in it."

But no matter how great a car the MGA was it always had to reckon with the German Porsches. We asked Sherm about his views of the Twin Cam M.G. in contrast to the Porsche Carrera. "The Twin Cam performed well", he replied, "but there was no way you were ever going to beat a well-driven Porche Carrera. It was lighter and its dual overhead cam

engine put out about 50 more horsepower than the M.G."

"In one race at Lime Rock the E and F-Production cars ran together. This put the Twin Cam M.G., Porsche Carrera, Morgans and AC Bristols all together. I was surprised to beat the Bristols as well as all the Porsche Carreras except Frank Wagonhofer's. He was really hot. This wouldn't have happened on any other course except Lime Rock. It was short and fast and if you swallowed hard in some of the turns you could get around faster than somebody else."

Another competitor of the Twin Cam was the Daimler SP250. Although a rather homely car its 140 horsepower V-8 made it a potent sports car in SCCA competition. "The car was a rather sad affair", was how Decker remembers the SP250. But he also recalls that "it has so much more performance than the Twin Cam."

"Duncan Black used to run one very nicely. It would really upset me to see him pull out on the starting grid and leave the engine idling without fuss or bother. He would be just standing around talking and that thing would just be kicking over. You wouldn't dare do that with the Twin Cam. You would foul the plugs or something would go wrong."

"I would think, 'it must be nice having something that reliable'. The flag would drop and off he would go. We beat the Daimlers several times but we shouldn't have. They had much more power and they were lighter. I wasn't crazy about their suspension but sometimes that doesn't count when you have that much power."

While recognizing that the SCCA didn't always give the M.G.s a fair shake when it came to establishing production class categories Sherm Decker also felt that British manufacturers tended to lag behind its competition by about a year or so.

"I was always a loyal M.G.man", Sherm declared, "and quite a loyal British car man. But I used to get upset because I thought the British and their conservative views allowed the Germans and others to just walk off and leave them."

Sherm Decker gave both the pushrod and Twin Cam MGAs some of their best runs; we were all the richer for it.



Winners at the first Western NY Centre(MGCC) M.G. races at Watkins Glen in 1959 left to right: Bob Bucher, Sherm Decker, Ted Rounds, and Ross de St. Croix.

# QUALITY



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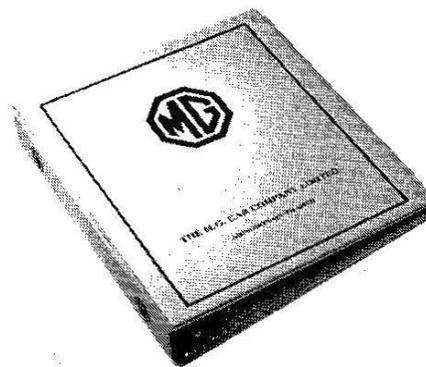
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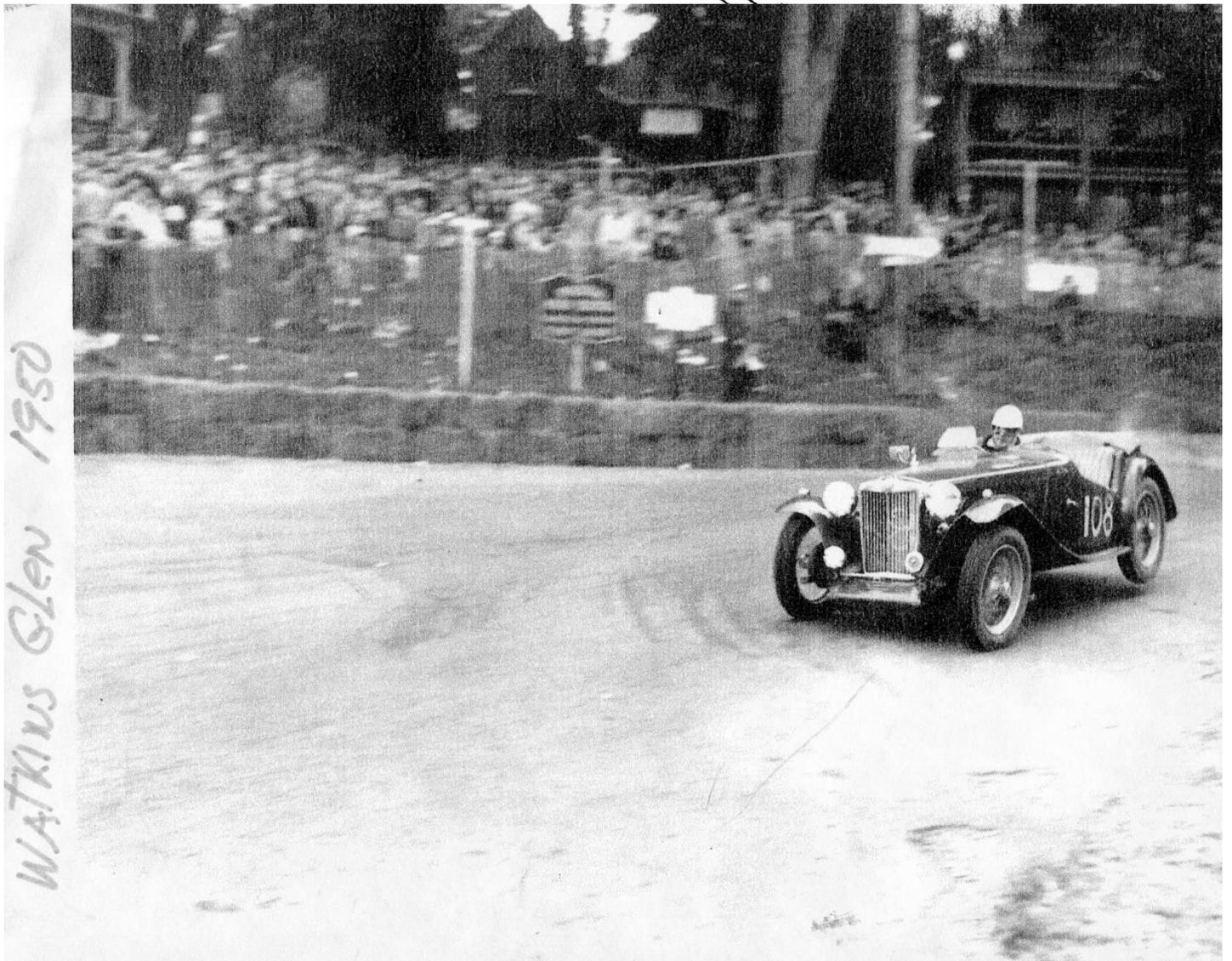
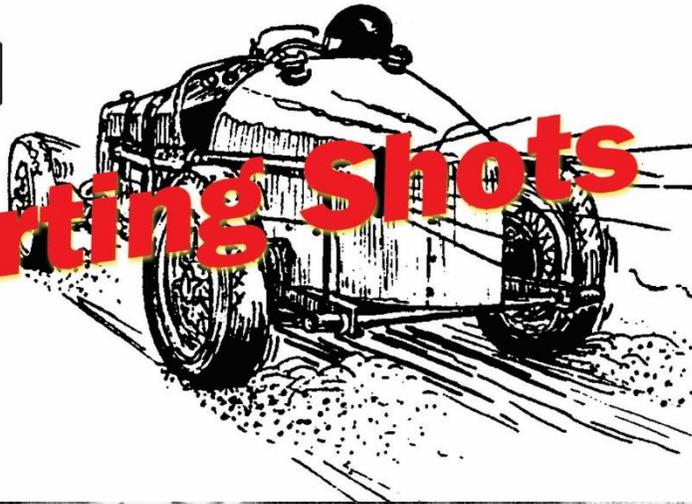
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# Parting Shots



**FRANK DOMINIANNI.** Better remembered for his exploits in Corvettes, Frank raced his TC at Watkins Glen in the Queen Catherine Cup in 1950. A bit of rear axle hop as he 3 wheels it through the streets. Frank was famous for opposite lock well into the 1960's.

Photo courtesy of Joseph Dominianni