



VOL 41 #2
February 2023



SEBRING 1961. THE ANNUAL 12 HOUR IS NEXT MONTH

From The Editor:

The Sebring 12 hour race is full of MG history. None of our beloved MG's have raced in the 12 hour since the late 60's, unless one counts that wonderful MG Lola in 2001-2002. It seems unlikely the factory will return anytime soon, but in truth there is no place for a production car like an MGA or MGB or MGC to race in international competition.

All that aside, the vintage season has started. The SVRA race at Sebring just finished and sadly just one MG midget was all that represented the marque. The face of vintage racing has changed. Those of us still racing MG's grew up in the 50's and 60's and wanted one of those sexy MGA's or MGB's or that cute little midget. And as we grew and prospered, we bought one and raced what was our dream car. Today's generation of vintage racers grew up with Mustangs and Camaro's and Corvettes and as they replace us those are the cars that fill the grid.

Somehow, it is our job to bring young ones into our MGVR. Don't let your racecar sit in some dusty garage or barn slowly going to seed. Start it up, make it shine and convince a younger racer this is the car they need. We have to get our cars back on the battle line and out into the sunshine.

We're all aware now that 2023 is the 100th anniversary of MG. MGVR is having what will probably be the biggest celebration at Lime Rock over Labor Day weekend, Sept 1-5. But many others are also holding races and gatherings and we'll show those in this issue.

As of late February we have 21 MG's entered for Lime Rock. What are you waiting for? The entry is open and you won't be charged until June. Let's show the world we will fill the grid. We need a minimum of 50 cars to race and that many for the concours. Do it today.

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

A great story of a legendary Lester MG that lives today is one feature along with two stories by Mr. MG Magic Bob Vitrikis

Norm Ewing is, to many, Mr. MG. Norm lives in South Africa but has traveled and done more than any MG enthusiast has. Here is one of his many stories.

My Most Treasured Safety Fast!

by Norman Ewing

I was born a child of the British Empire and brought up to love King and Country. Then at the age of seven, having seen the lovely Princess Elizabeth drive past our home Kingsway Mansions, with the rest of the family in an open Armstrong-Siddeley Hurricane, as I stood there waving my little Union Jack, I would be a Royalist for life when she became my Queen!

At an early age I grew up with Beano's Desperate Dan and Biggles as heroes, progressing in the early fifties with the onset of Pan soft cover books like 'Wooden Horse', 'Dam Busters' and 'Boldness Be My Friend' to Paul Brickhill's, 'Reach for the Sky', and the real world, thus introducing me to a whole new group of boyhood heroes. South Africans like 'Sailor' Malan and Marmaduke Pattle, but also the likes of Douglas Bader and Johnnie Johnson whom I longed to meet in my youth and years later.

Being an avid collector of all things maritime in my early years, I soon became an expert in my subject, displaying and talking about my collection of ship post cards. However what really interested me, was people, in particular my boyhood heroes. My interests were to grow even wider as my interest in cars, and in particular MGs grew, and again it enabled me to approach, and then invite the likes Phil Hill, Stirling Moss, Paddy Hopkirk and Henry Stone to visit South Africa. However what REALLY excited me, was when I read in the evening papers, that Johnnie Johnson the 'Battle of Britain' fighter ace would come as a guest of the South African Airforce for a special event. Not only was he the top scoring RAF fighter pilot, but he was Douglas Bader's wingman, so this would be really special!

Henry Stone had us all in fits of laughter when he stayed, describing how the apprentices at Abingdon had been tormented when the Bader MG arrived for a service. Because he had lost one leg above the knee and one below, it had been found beneficial by Henry to change the pedals around, which information he kept to himself with obvious consequences!

Telling the apprentices when they lost control, that "The only way to drive that car is to cross your bloody legs!"

So now, besides getting Johnnie's two books "Full Circle" and "Wing Leader" signed, I really wanted to know if he ever went in Douglas Bader's MG. I was determined to meet him.

Having used the entire Johannesburg Sun for our MG Indaba the year before, it was easy to confirm where the Johnson's were staying. I made telephonic contact only for him to tell me that meeting was impossible, as they were shortly off to Pretoria. The second call was met with a similar rebuff the next day, so not to be beaten, the last attempt I made was from the Hotel foyer, using the house phone. I was told they were leaving in fifteen minutes. I was at the door in less than half!

I was greeted with "You really are a persistent little bugger!" I just smiled and said "You got the 'little' bit right!" His wife, who was sitting at a small table against the wall putting on her make up, burst out laughing and told me to "Come in."

I produced both books which he then signed. Then I asked him, as he was Bader's wingman, if he had ever been in his MG. "Yes often" he replied. "Did you ever drive it?" He shook his head and laughed when I told him what Henry had told me. "Well that is maybe why he never drove mine" he said. "YOU HAD AN MG?" I responded. He smiled and said "It was almost obligatory to have an MG in the RAF...it was THE CAR!" I produced my copy of "Safety Fast!" with a cover picture of a TC and a Spitfire, asking him to just write something on it.

He took it, sat down on the stool beside his wife and wrote

"To a fellow MG Driver Johnnie Johnson 3 May 1987"

I was overjoyed! I had just met the great Johnnie Johnson and his lovely wife! AND Air Vice Marshal James E Johnson CB, CBE, DSO & Two Bars, DFC & Bar, DL had just greeted me as a "fellow MG Driver"...how fantastic was that! In my book that really was a coup...or in his terms a 'kill'. I was thrilled with my MG Trophy, and years later I was able to tell another RAF Ace and friend, Andy Green the story when he came to stay in 2000, but I could not find that "Safety Fast!"...
...I found it today!

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CSRG - NOVEMBER 3-5, 2023 - THUNDERHILL RACEWAY
Celebrating 100 years of MORRIS GARAGE



The Duncan Black / James Shoup Miller 1949 Lester MG

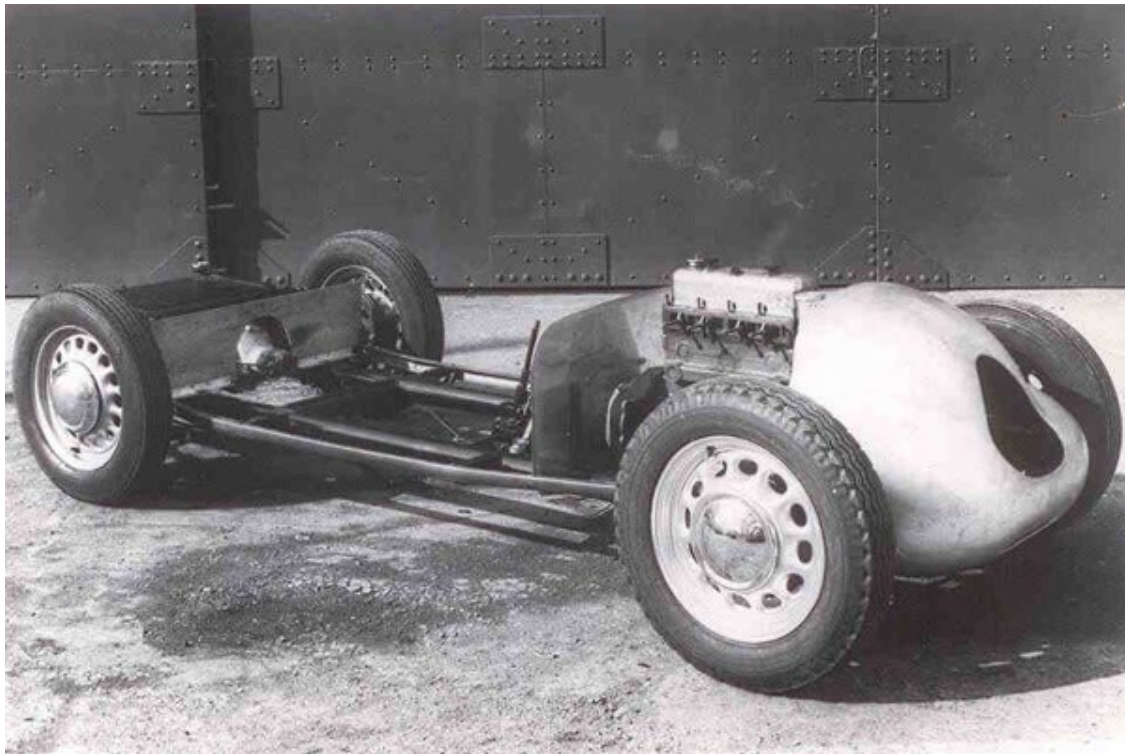
Owners: Doug Schirripa & Tom McCormack
City: Troy, New York
Model: 1949 Lester MG
Engine: 1958 MG 1.5L
Race prepared by: Schirripa & McCormack

Harry Lester and "The Monkey Stable"

Between 1949 and 1955, Harry Lester of Hertfordshire built about ten racecars based on MG drivetrain and chassis components but featuring stiffer and lower swept frames made from round tubing, streamlined bodywork, and larger engine displacements. Harry Lester was already a well established MG specialist and racer. Before World War II he had modified and raced an MG PB (serial number PB1237, registration number GUR 963) and after the war he resumed racing with an MG L-type Magna (registration number HRO 33) in 1948 and an MG TA (serial number TA2460, registration number KJH 114) in 1949. Throughout the era he also modified and race-prepared an unknown number of MG sports cars for his shop's customers, but Harry Lester's tube-chassis racers were his most distinctive and successful product.

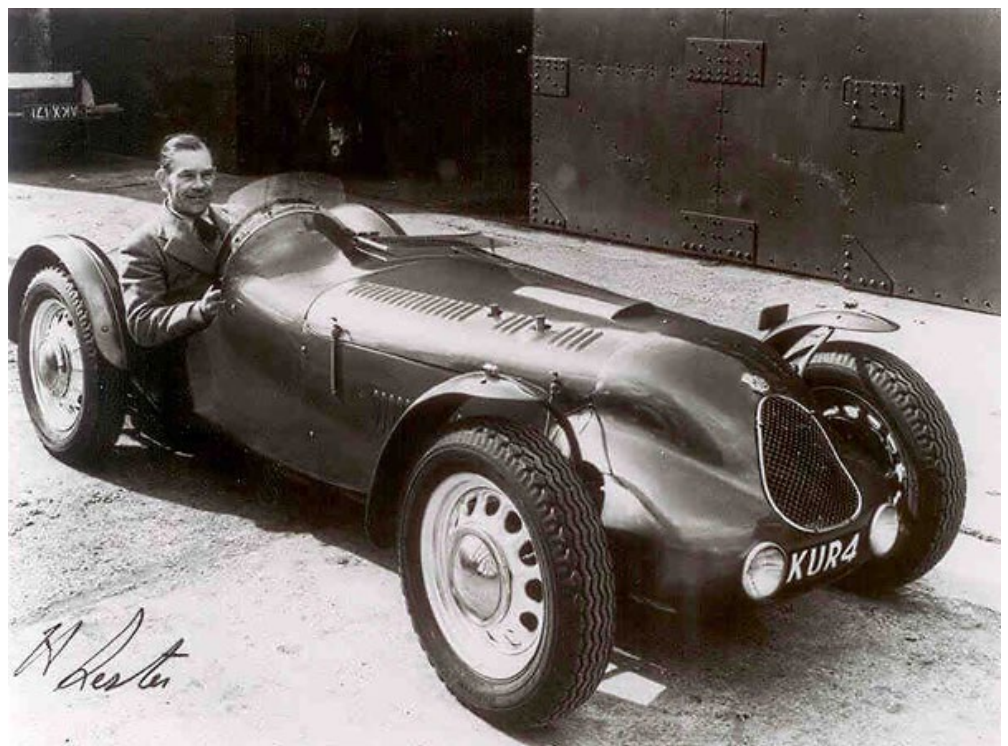
The earliest racing appearance of a tube-chassis Lester MG racecar that we've been able to document was at Blandford on 27 August 1949. Harry Lester's entry that day was identified in race reports as a "Lester T51 MG" with registration number KUR 4. He finished in third place. Again with KUR 4, Harry

placed third in a Members Handicap Race at Goodwood on 17 June 1950. Lester returned to Goodwood on 12 August, and this time drove KUR 4 to victory. During the 1951 season, race reports mentioned several different Lester MG racecars including KUR 4, Reg Croysdill's KRO 548 and Jim Mayers' NNK 526. Harry Lester and Pat Griffith both entered MG 6850 on occasion. Late in the season, KUR 4 was sold and shipped to North America where it was entered in at least two races before the end of 1951.



KUR 4 and subsequent Lester MG racecars feature lightweight, low-slung, round-tube frames.

Harry Lester shows off his newly completed racecar: KUR 4.



Through this period, a partnership developed between Harry Lester and wealthy racing enthusiast Jim C.C. Mayers. Together, they entered Lester MG racecars in a number of British National races and their success and reputations grew together. For the 1952 racing season Lester and Mayers planned a three-car racing team which they called "The Monkey Stable." Their first season was notably successful within the class they competed: 1.5L Sports Cars.

Undoubtedly, The Monkey Stable's most memorable race was the heavily promoted, inaugural, BARC News of the World International Nine-Hour race at Goodwood. Running from 3pm until midnight, it was Britain's first after-dark endurance race. Many people remember this famous race as an eventful duel between Aston Martin, Jaguar and Ferrari works teams for the overall victory. However, The Monkey Stable managed an impressive sweep of the first three places in the under 1.5L class! Co-drivers Jim Mayers and Mike Keen finished sixth overall in NNK 526, co-drivers Gerry Ruddock and Rodney F. Peacock in NPO 20 finished seventh overall, and co-drivers Les Leston and Tommy Line in MG 6850 finished eighth overall. (Pat Griffith was unable to drive for The Monkey Stable on that particular day because he had previously committed to Aston Martin. As it turned out, Griffith was co-driver with Peter Collins of the Aston Martin DB3S that won first place overall.)

New cars would be required for Mayers and his team to stay truly competitive in 1953, but Harry Lester was unable to develop and produce a new chassis quickly enough. Instead, he prepared MG engines for three Kieft race cars, and on the side he also personally raced the latest Lester MG (HJB 790) on five occasions. Lester's races in HJB 790 gave him an opportunity to test some of his newest design ideas. The Monkey Stable team's 1953 results were disappointing in every respect, and at the end of the season Mayers sold the three cars. The Monkey Stable team then sat out 1954 while Harry Lester made plans for 1955.

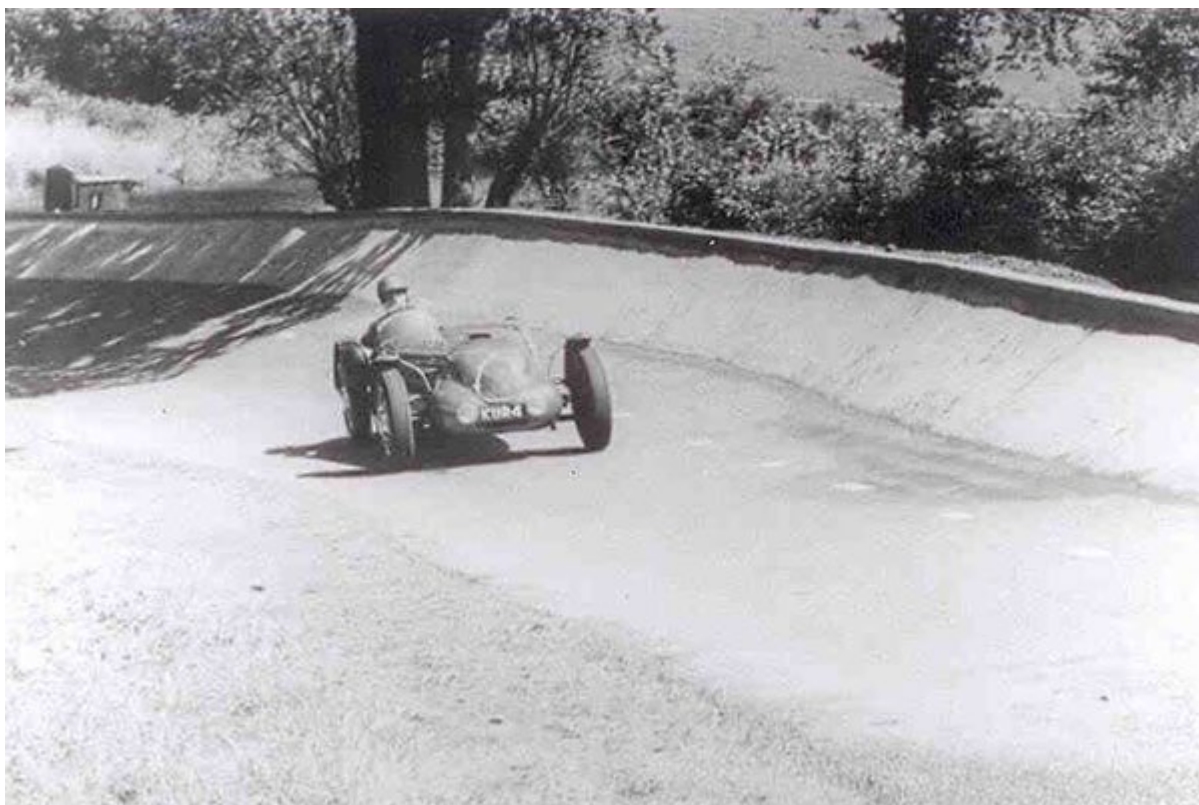
To suit a variety of races and classes, Lester envisioned two distinct M-series models: the Lester M-11 would have Coventry Climax FWA 1098cc engines whereas the Lester M-15 would have MG 1.5L engines. Fiberglass spyder and coupe bodies were planned and there was talk of putting the design into serial production (following the lead of Turner Sports Cars, Ltd., and others.) Harry Lester built a prototype and the Monkey Stable shop built two additional M-series chassis. Probably no more than two M-series cars were ready for use during the 1955 season: an M-15 coupe (registration number 5 EME) was driven by Jim Mayers on one occasion and by Michael R.G. Llewellyn on seven occasions. An M-11 coupe may have been raced by John Shove, but we've had difficulty documenting the details.¹

The Monkey Stable team came to an abrupt end in September 1955 when Jim

Mayers was killed while driving a Cooper-Climax at Dundrod in the Tourist Trophy Race. The team's assets, including at least one uncompleted M-series racecar, were sold off at that time. Harry Lester quit racing, quit building cars, and focused his attention on his garage business. At least a half dozen Lester race cars still exist today. Most, if not all, have been substantially modified.



Harry Lester drove KUR 4 to a 3rd place finish in a National race at Blandford on 8 August 1949. Starting in 1948 and continuing for about a decade, races were held on the 3.14 mile long perimeter road around the Blandford Camp military base. The base is located in Dorset county, near Poole.



KUR 4 at the Great Auclum National Speed Hill Climb which was held from 1947 to 1974 on the grounds of a private country home near Burghfield Common in Berkshire. In two respects it was the shortest event in the RAC Hill Climb Championship: ~440 yards long and with both downhill and uphill sections.

Lester's Engines

Enlarged engines were an important feature of the Lester MGs. Ordinary production MG "XPAG" engines of the TC and TD models have a 66.5mm cylinder bore and a 90mm stroke, which works out to a displacement of just 1250cc. Harry Lester boldly bored-out MG engine blocks, cutting so deeply that he was into their water jackets, and then he pressed in cylinder sleeves with an inside diameter of ~72mm to produce a displacement of ~1467cc. He completed these engines with Harry Weslake cylinder heads, special camshafts, and lightweight flywheels. As configured, static compression ratio was reportedly raised from 7.25:1 to ~10:1, and engine output was reportedly raised from 54.4hp at 5200rpm to just over 100hp. Carefully balanced and tuned, Lester engines revved freely to over 6500rpm.

With their enlarged engines, Lester MGs could be very competitive in Britain's "1.5L Sports" class. When Lester MGs raced in North America, their oversized engines bumped them up into the Sports Car Club of America's F Modified class. Most other MG specials raced in SCCA's G Modified class.

Duncan Black's Lester MG

In this article, we're featuring the best known and most successful Lester MG racecar: KUR 4. As mentioned above, this was the first purpose-built Lester MG racecar. After just a handful of races in England, it was the first Lester MG to be shipped to the United States. About half of Harry Lester's production would follow its journey. No other Lester MG would equal its results.

After arriving in North America, KUR 4's first known appearance was to be in the hands of Perry Boswell in the Sagaponack Trophy Race at Bridgehampton on 9 June 1951. A clutch failure caused an early retirement. KUR 4's second known appearance was in the Queen Catherine Cup (under 1.5L) race at Watkins Glen on 14 September, 1951. On that occasion, David C. Viall drove KUR 4 to a second place finish!² David Viall also entered his Lester MG at the Second Annual Road Races at Palm Beach Shores Florida which were held December 8-9, 1951. In the Sunday afternoon two-hour endurance race Viall finished first in class and seventh overall of fourteen starters.

KUR 4 made at least two appearances in New York State in 1953, while owned by Donald E. Millians of Baltimore Maryland. The first of those was an SCCA National under 1.5L Modified class race at Bridgehampton on Long Island, on May 23rd where Millians finished fifth of 31 starters. (Briggs Cunningham won, in an OSCA.) The second was at Watkins Glen on the September 18-19 weekend. At Watkins Glen, Millians loaned his Lester MG to a young driver named Duncan Black who drove it to a fifth place finish of 29 starters in the 1953 Queen Catherine Cup race. (George Moffett won, in an OSCA.) Sometime after this, we're told Duncan Black blew up the Lester's MG engine but made things right by purchasing the car. We have not been able to confirm this story; but it's clear that Duncan Black acquired the car.

There have been at least four famous men named Duncan Black. Our young Duncan Black earned his reputation as a racecar driver. He won three SCCA National Championships with his Daimler SP250 ("Dart") between 1958 and 1963. He should not be confused with his father; Duncan Black Sr. invented the pistol-grip portable electric drill and co-founded the Black & Decker tool company.

Duncan Black's Lester MG was powered by a race-tuned MG TC engine for the 1954 season, and programs from that year give its displacement as 1466cc. At that displacement, the car fit into SCCA's "F Modified" racing class. F Modified was a very tough class, dominated in many national races by new OSCA racecars. Still, Duncan Black had some memorable performances. In coverage of May 16th races at Cumberland Maryland, journalist Stuart Turner wrote:

"Duncan Black, in one of the Lester MGs made it into the first corner well ahead of the pack. He maintained his lead for the first half dozen circuits with the little engine sounding fierce and showed no possibility of being headed. Then he was flagged off the course for riding with his safety belt unfastened. When he returned to the race the Uihline Special and the other Lester (driven by Don F. Marsh) had lapped him three times."

On May 9 at Suffolk County A.F.B., Duncan Black finished fourth overall and second in class of 29 starters behind two E Modified Maserati racecars and Sherwood Johnston's OSCA.

On June 13 at Westover A.F.B., Duncan Black finished first in class and fourth overall in "The Clipper" 65-mile race for Production cars under 3L and Modified cars under 2L. 43 cars started that eighteen lap / 65 mile sprint race. Later in the day, Black entered the Steve Canyon Classic 47 lap / 175 mile unrestricted enduro. He finished third overall and first in class from a diverse field of 57 starters. Two Ferraris finished ahead of him. Behind him? Fourteen Jaguars, ten Austin-Healeys, six OSCAs, four Allards, and one Aston Martin (driven by Walt Hansgen). It was a tremendous performance!

One week later, at the Equinox Hillclimb on June 20, Duncan Black again finished first in class and fourth overall with an elapsed time of 5:20.6. (The overall winner was Bill Lloyd, who covered the distance in just 5:04.0 with his Ferrari 2.7L.)

At the Giant's Despair Hillclimb, Duncan Black and Don Marsh got a chance to race their Lester MGs together again. Black took first place over Marsh in Class F by barely more than half a second: 1:12.12 compared to 1:12.89! On the following day, on the narrow Brynfan Tyddyn road course, even stiffer competition arrived. In one report, journalist Ozzie Lyons summarized the results: "Duncan Black's Lester MG nibbled at the heels of Otto Linton's OSCA all during the feature race, only to run out of fuel on the last lap."

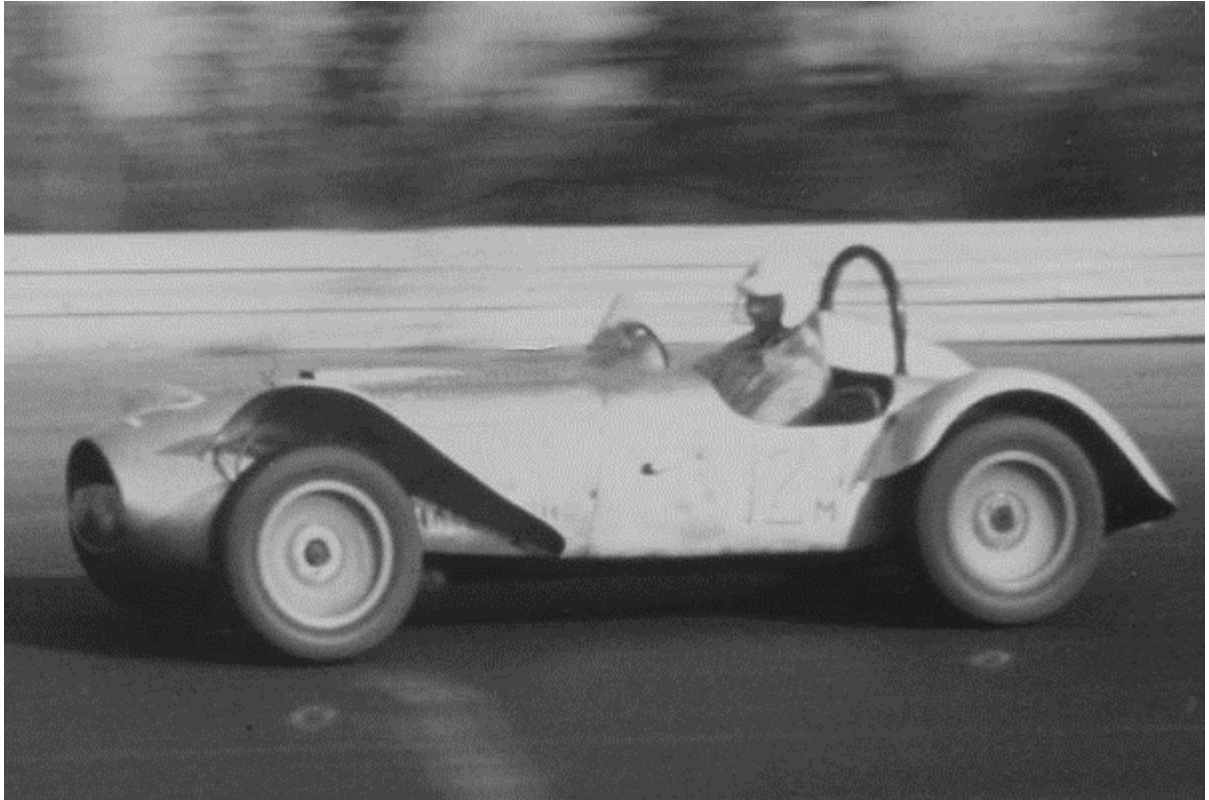
At Watkins Glen in September, Black finished fifth overall of 35 starters in the 1954 Queen Catherine's Cup for cars under 1.5L.

The 1954 season came to an exciting end for Duncan Black at Thompson Raceway in Connecticut on 14 October, where he valiantly chased Briggs Cunningham's OSCA but came up just a little short. Black's strong second place finish was comfortably ahead of Roy Thorpe in a Ferrari, Jackie Cooper in an Austin Healey 100S, and Fred Procter in a Maserati.

In summary, Duncan Black and his Lester MG were very competitive through

1954. In terms of SCCA's National Championship points race, he had one disadvantage: some of his competitors were able to travel wider and participate in

more races. Ultimately, he finished fourth in class, nationally! (First place went to Briggs Cunningham.)



For 1955, Duncan Black replaced KUR4's original cycle-style fenders with flared fenders to meet new SCCA class rules. This photo actually shows James Miller in one of his first appearances after purchasing KUR4. This photo was taken by Maryel Miller at Marlboro Raceway in Maryland, probably in August 1957.

Between the 1954 and 1955 seasons, Duncan Black had the Lester MG's original cycle-style fenders replaced with newly custom fabricated aluminum fenders that flared back to the body. This was necessitated by a rule change: SCCA decided cycle fenders would no longer be permitted in its "modified" classes. The change increased the Lester MG's frontal area and it certainly didn't improve the car's coefficient of drag, so there's no question that the rule change made the Lester MG less competitive in an era when other cars were rapidly becoming more streamlined. Incidentally, some other body modifications would be made to Duncan Black's Lester MG later, but through 1955 he continued to use the car's original aluminum nose section, which featured two headlights faired-in below the radiator opening.

In one way, May 15, 1955 was the high point for Lester MG racing in North America: four Lester MG racecars gathered to participate in the 1955 Cumberland National Sports Car Races. 43,000 spectators crowded around an

airport circuit, marked out with hay bales. The most successful Lester MG driver that day was Chuck H. Dietrich Jr., who won the G Modified class trophy. Three Lester MG racers - driven by Duncan Black, William A. Eager III, and R.D. Ryder - came for the F Modified trophy, but all three were outrun by Tippy Lipe in his Pooper (Porsche powered Cooper) and Phil Stewart in an OSCA.

The inaugural race at Marlboro Motor Raceway in Upper Marlboro, Maryland was held on May 22, 1955. It was organized by the Lavender Hill Mob Racing Association and sanctioned by the SCCA. Duncan Black drove his Lester MG to a first place overall finish in the under 2-liter main feature race: "Duncan Black, in the Lester that never seemed to be going flat out, gobbled up the first..." Later in the day he entered another race for all modified classes, combined. "Here the Lester showed its teeth and before the pack had made the first turn onto the oval was well in front and stayed there without ever developing the characteristic scream that it has when being really pushed." (Both of these quotes are from a fascinating and well illustrated article in Sports Cars magazine. No specific author was credited.)

Duncan Black raced KUR4 in the 1955 Mount Equinox hillclimb, finishing 11th overall and third in class. He also entered KUR4 in the 1955 Giants Despair / Brynfan Tyddyn event on the July 21-23 weekend.



After the 1955 season, Duncan Black sold the Lester MG to James Shoup Miller. Duncan Black drove a Lotus in G Modified in early 1956, a Mercedes 300SL on one occasion in August, and a Ferrari 4.5L late in the season.

James Miller and Lester MG Registration Number KUR 4

From 1956 through 1961, KUR 4 was raced by James Miller. It stayed in Miller's possession until about 1992. During James Miller's ownership, the original MG TC engine began having major problems related to its oversized cylinder sleeves. Miller decided to remove the MG TC motor and instead install an MGA engine. At 1500cc, the MGA engine obviously didn't represent a significant change in displacement and the car stayed in F Modified.

Date	Event	Classes Participating	Result	Comments
8/18/57	SCCA National at Montgomery AFB	(FM+GM)	9th of 18	
8/17/58	SCCA National at Montgomery AFB	(FM+GM)	10th of 14	
9/1/58	SCCA National at Thompson CT	(BM+CM+DM+EM+FM)	10th of 13	
11/16/58	Washington Regional (preliminary)	(BM+CM+EM+FM+GM)	6th of 11	(5th <1500cc Mod.)
11/16/58	Washington Regional at Marlboro MD	(BM+EM+FM+GM+BP+CP+DP)	8th of 17	(4th <1500cc Mod.)
9/9/59	SCCA National at Montgomery AFB	(BM+CM+DM+EM+FM)	16th of 21	
6/5/60	6 Hour Enduro at Marlboro MD	(all classes)	5th of 18	(co-driver Joseph G. Dodge Jr.)



James Miller replaced KUR4's crudely-modified original aluminum nose cone with a fiberglass part. Fellow racer Bill Rutan had previously had a custom aluminum nose cone fashioned for his own Lester MG, featuring an enlarged radiator opening. Rutan's aluminum nose cone was used as a model (i.e. a "plug") to make a fiberglass mold and probably two fiberglass replacement nose cones. (Photo by Maryel Miller.)

So configured, James Miller raced his Lester MG in regional events until late in 1961, when it was crashed. The crash damaged the frame badly, but did remarkably little harm to the body. From 1961 through 1975, the Lester body set in the rafters of James Miller's barn in Orangeburg, New York. Miller had kept all the car's other components, except the original frame.

Then, James Miller decided to put KUR 4 back together on a replica frame. One particular vintage car race - a "Double 3 Hour" endurance race at Lime Rock Park scheduled for 1977 - was selected as both goal and deadline. Miller's friends Doug Schirripa, Joe Dodge and Ernest Cassis pitched in and helped with the restoration project. Charles DeLisle contributed an MG TC engine, complete with Lucas-Laystall aluminum head; this was a very big help since the original MGA motor wasn't ready in time. Unfortunately, the MG TC engine dropped a valve during the race weekend, and KUR 4 went back into storage for about fifteen more years.

Vintage Racing a Lester MG

Doug Schirripa and Tom McCormack have been buddies since college. They own and race several cars together, even while Doug lives in Orange County California and Tom lives in Troy, New York. In the early 1990s, when Jim Miller decided to retire and relocate, he offered Doug Schirripa the Lester MG. Doug returned to New York from his home in California to retrieve the car. Doug didn't make any immediate plans to race KUR 4 though, until he learned that a vintage event was being planned for the nearby Tustin Marine Air Base. It was scheduled for the summer of 1996. Again, a specific race provided motivation for pressing the car back into service. Although the 1996 outing wasn't successful - the Lester MG scored a DNF - Doug was motivated to meticulously race-prep KUR 4 and to start actively vintage racing it.



Jim Mayers (#2 Lester MG, KUR 4) appears to lead Stirling Moss (#22 Frazer-Nash LeMans Replica) and M.J. Pople (#7 MG TD) in the British Empire Trophy race on the Isle of Man, 14 June 1951. Lest the photo be a misconstrued: Mayers was obliged to retire from the race due to engine trouble and, with his powerful 2-liter Bristol powered racecar, Moss managed to lap Pople's 1.5-liter MG three times in the course of the 135-mile race. (Note: Stirling Moss autographed this photo for Doug Schirripa in 1998.)

In 1997, Tom visited California to drive KUR 4 in the 1997 Tustin Thunder race and in the 1997 LA Times Grand Prix through the streets of downtown Los Angeles. The LA Times Grand Prix seemed to offer an opportunity for KUR 4 to race with a Frazer-Nash LeMans Replica it had first competed with back in June 1951. Racing great Stirling Moss, who had piloted the Frazer-Nash to victory on that occasion was on hand to share his memories of the original race, and of the

Lester MGs too. In an interesting twist, we now know Moss actually raced his LeMans Replica against a replica of KUR 4 back in 1951.³

In 1998, Tom drove KUR 4 at Button Willow's British Extravaganza. Unfortunately, throughout this period KUR 4 was rarely recognized by West Coast fans. Remarkably, contemporary fans often mistook the Lester MG for Ken Miles' famous Flying Shingle. The history of Harry Lester, of Duncan Black, and of KUR 4 specifically weren't really appreciated in California.

In 1998, Doug decided KUR 4 should return home to the East Coast. Driving it, Doug placed third at the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix and Tom qualified for pole position in the 1998 Vintage Fall Festival at Lime Rock. On the following weekend the team took KUR 4 to Watkins Glen for an MG Vintage Racers focus event. However, when Doug took KUR 4 out for practice he realized it was going to be a very long day. With the car's 5.125:1 rear end ratio, he ran out of revs before leaving pit lane. During 1999, KUR 4 was entered in two events: the Pittsburgh Grand Prix (DNF) and the Vintage Fall Festival (first in class in the pouring rain).

In 2001, Tom drove KUR 4 in the Mt. Equinox hillclimb. He also loaned the car to former Lester MG racer Bill Rutan for a run up that famous hill. In the paddock at Mt. Equinox, Tom and Doug were visited by Don Millians, one of the early owners of KUR 4 who lived nearby at the time. It was the first time Millians had seen the car since he sold it to Duncan Black in the early 1950s. KUR 4 put smiles on a lot of faces that day.

Every autumn since 2001, KUR 4 has been entered in Historic Festivals at Lime Rock Park in Connecticut. Depending on the year, it's been grouped with pre-war Grand Prix cars or with early MG racecars. Particularly at Lime Rock, every year fans visit this distinctive car in the paddock and tell stories of having seen Duncan drive it back in the day. KUR 4 is a true vintage race car, not a vintage car that has more recently been converted to racing. It has an interesting history and it's actively campaigned as it appeared toward the end of its original racing career.

Features and Specifications

Engine:	MGA 1.5L engine. ~12:1 static compression ratio. HRG crossflow aluminum cylinder head. HRG intake manifolds. Dual S.U. H6 (1 3/4" bore) carburetors. Lucas distributor with Pertronix Ignitor breakerless ignition module. Pertronix Flame-Thrower (0.6 ohm) ignition coil. MSD spark plug wires. Mocal 13-row oil cooler. Fram spin-on oil filter.
Cooling:	custom copper and brass radiator by Tom's Radiator in Orange California.

Exhaust: custom three-into-one header.

Transmission: MG TC 4-speed gearbox. Custom aluminum engine plate and welded steel adapter ring (circa ~1959) to suit the MGA engine.

Rear Axle: MG Y-type rear axle. (Similar to MG TC, but slightly wider and with 5-lug hubs.) 5.125:1 ring and pinion.

Front Susp.: MG TD front suspension and steering rack. Armstrong lever shock absorbers.

Rear Susp.: 7-leaf leafsprings. Monroe Magnum telescoping shock absorbers (part# 36047).

Brakes: Alfin finned drum brakes, front and rear.

Wheels/Tires: vintage Halibrand "Smoothie" magnesium racing wheels (15"x4.5"). Dunlop Racing - CR65 Mark II (5.00L-15 front and 5.50L-15rear).

Electrical: Odyssey PC680 dry cell battery. Lucas starter motor.

Instruments: (left to right) Smiths dual oil pressure (0-100psi) and water temperature gauge (90-230F), Jaeger oil pressure gauge (0-160psi), Smiths Chromometric tachometer (500-8000rpm), ammeter (+/-20 amps).

Fuel System: custom Fuel Safe 8-gallon fuel cell. Purolater "cube" solid state electric fuel pump.

Safety Eqmt: G-Force Pro Series five point cam-lock safety harness. Phoenix fire suppression system.

Weight: ~1300#.



MG: How it all started

by Bob Vitrikas

A quick scan of our Club's 2022 roster shows that half of our membership owns either an MG (25) or a Triumph (21). By happy coincidence both of these beloved marques are celebrating their 100th anniversary this year and we will celebrate right along with them. I am unabashedly an MG enthusiast so I'll exercise editorial privilege and start the ball rolling with a series of articles on the MG. Ready? OK, here we go!



Where it all started, the original Morris Garage on Longwall Street in Oxford. Workshop General Manager Cecil Kimber took the initiative to transform mundane Morris cars into sporty cars that appealed to the automotive enthusiast. They were modified in a corner of this workshop. Sadly, this building no longer exists, having been torn down and replaced with town homes.

We are a British car club that welcomes all British marques and body styles, not just sports cars. The fact is about 90% of our members own at least one sports car and MG and Triumph are the embodiment of that genre. So let's start with the basic question, and a hotly debated one at that, "What is a sports car?" Colin Campbell, an automotive engineer for over 35 years, answered that question rather simply, "A sports car is any road vehicle in which performance takes priority over carrying capacity." Hmm, that definition leaves me rather cold. I prefer a more emotional description. Sir Osbert Sitwell's book "Left Hand, Right Hand" describes motoring in the early 1900s in a more colorful and emotional manner, painting a beautiful word picture of the sensations many

of us experienced on our first drive in an open top sports car such as an MG or Triumph. Maybe we were fortunate to have our girl friend or wife along like the author did. As you read this I hope it brings back a flood of memories to warm you on cold winter day and something to look forward to on a SVBCC drive to come in a couple of months.

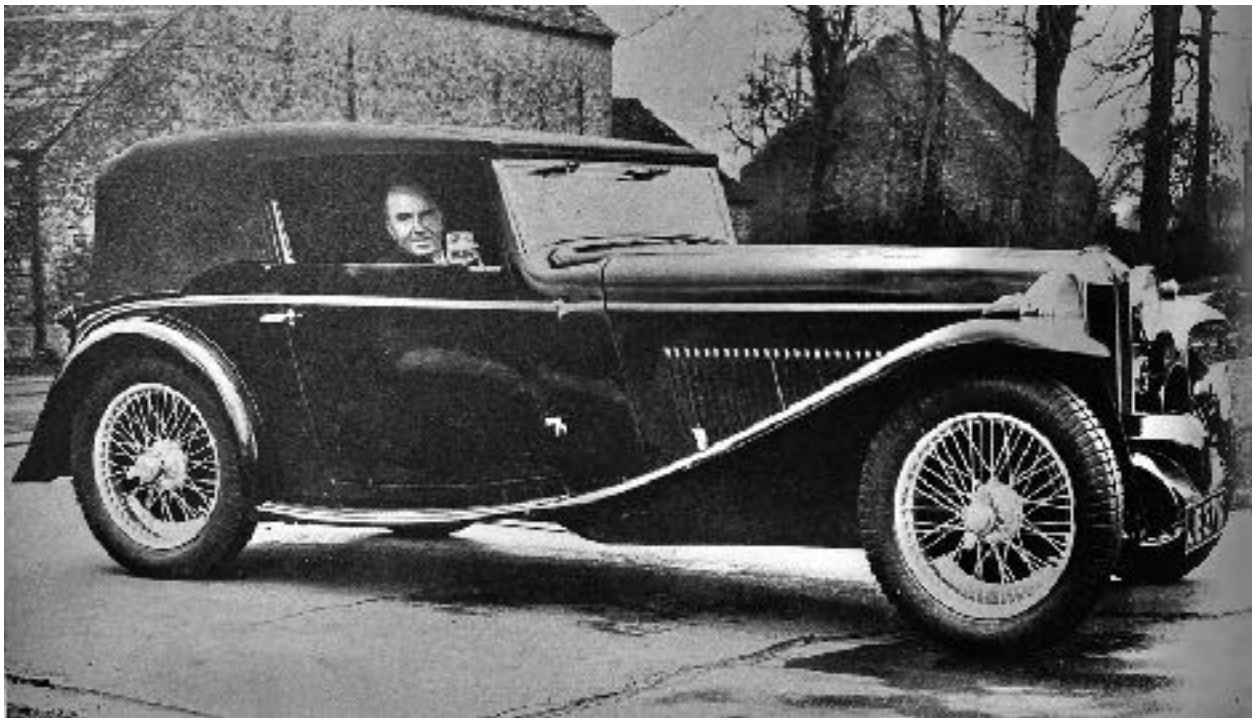
“They would sit together, the two of them, the man at the wheel, the girl beside him, their hair blown back from their temples, their features sculptured by the wind, their bodies and limbs shaped and carved by it continually under their clothes, so that they enjoyed a new physical sensation, comparable to swimming; except that here the element was speed, not water. The winds — and their bodies — were warm that summer. During these drives, they acquired a whole range of physical consciousness, the knowledge of scents, passing from one into another with an undreamt of rapidity, the fragrance of the countless flowers of the lime trees, hung like bells on pagodas for the breeze to shake, changing into that of sweetbriar, the scent of the early mornings and of their darkness, of hills and valleys outlined and tinged by memory; there was the awareness of speed itself, and the rapid thinking that must accompany it, a new alertness, and the typical effects, the sense, it might be of the racing of every machine as dusk approaches, or the sudden access on a hot evening of cool waves of air under tall trees; all these physical impressions, so small in themselves, went to form a sum of feeling, new in its kind and never before experienced. Even the wind of the winter, at this pace snatching tears from their eyes, and piercing through layers of clothes, was something their father had not known.”

Beautiful don't you think?



Cecil Kimber, the man whose vision and enthusiasm gave birth to the MG sports car. Shown here at his desk at the Abingdon assembly plant.

Great cars often start with men of great vision. Enzo Ferrari, Henry Ford, Ferdinand and Ferry Porsche, Sir William Lyons and Jaguar, Henry Royce and Rolls-Royce, and yes even MG. The inspiration behind MG was Cecil Kimber whose passion for motor sport combined with his organizational skills, propelled the MG marque to become the most popular sports car in the world. Born in 1888, Kimber was the son of a south London printer. Despite his father's urgings, Kimber didn't fancy himself as a printer. What excited him were automobiles and motorcycles. Imagine how exciting it must have been for him as a teenager in the turn of the century (the last century, not this one!) as the horse and buggy were replaced by cars and motorcycles! Being of modest means, Kimber started his motoring journey with the purchase of a motorcycle and rode it enthusiastically I'm certain, until it all came to a screeching halt in 1911 when he suffered a serious accident followed by a two year recovery. At the age of 24, he was left with a limp for the rest of his life. He kept on for three more years with his father in the printing business but his heart wasn't in it. Eventually the strain in their relationship became too great and Kimber left his father to begin work in the motoring business just as World War I was erupting. Following the war, in 1921 Kimber began working at the Morris Garages as Sales Manager and was quickly promoted to General Manager the next year. In addition to his organizational skills, Kimber was an avid sportsman enjoying motorsports competitions, sailing his boat "Fairwind" and fishing. He also had a love of art which he got from his mother who was a painter. His sense of proportion and a beautiful line are evident in his cars, as shown below.



Kimber's personal MG was this magnificent 100 mph supercharged six cylinder Magnette with one-off Corsica drophead coupe body.

His enthusiastic driving was legendary but he did keep true to his slogan "Safety Fast!" and seldom had an accident. Truth be told he did have a serious accident driving his wife and mother-in-law in a factory experimental car which had a new type front suspension. The suspension failed and the resulting crash broke Kimber's nose. History does not record what ill-effects, if any, his wife and mother-in-law suffered. Kimber managed to get the car back to the factory, swapped it for another and continued the journey. He never reported the accident because he didn't want the suspension designer to be blamed for the accident.

Now that I've introduced you to the man behind the marque, what about the machine? The Morris Garages were located in Oxford, a hot bed of motoring enthusiasm with several garages selling motorcycles and offering modified specials in the same manner we have today with AMG for Mercedes, John Cooper for Mini etc. In his book, "Behind the Octagon" Brian Moylan relates that on Sundays hundreds of enthusiasts congregated in Oxford city center where the dealerships would open their showrooms for business with their latest models on display. The County Hall was even opened on Sunday so new owners could register their purchases! William Morris, Kimber's employer, let him carry on with the Morris Garages' business while he (Morris) concentrated on establishing his motorcar business. Kimber began modifying Morris bodies to offer something a little different and more sporting to attract would be buyers. Cecil Cousins, commonly regarded as MG's first employee who joined the company at the age of 17 in 1920, and "hotted up" the engines in a corner of the Morris Garages on Longwall Street.



Cecil Cousins, MG's first employee, shown at the Alfred Lane MG "factory."

After a modest success driving his modified Morris Cowley "Chummy" in the 1923 London-Lands End Trial, Kimber took the bold decision to produce a sports car based on the Morris Cowley with an attractive special body, modified chassis for improved handling and tuned the engine for greater performance. To accommodate anticipated future sales, in February 1923 production was transferred to a tiny workshop in Alfred Lane, Oxford. By tiny I mean TINY, only 20 ft wide and 100 ft long. The work force consisted of just Cousins and two other blokes. Production was started with six sporty bodies delivered by Raworth car bodies in Oxford. MG got off to a slow start. It took a year to sell these six modified Morris cars. Oh dearie me!



A happy couple out for a top down drive in one of the Raworth bodied Morris Cowley "Chummy's."

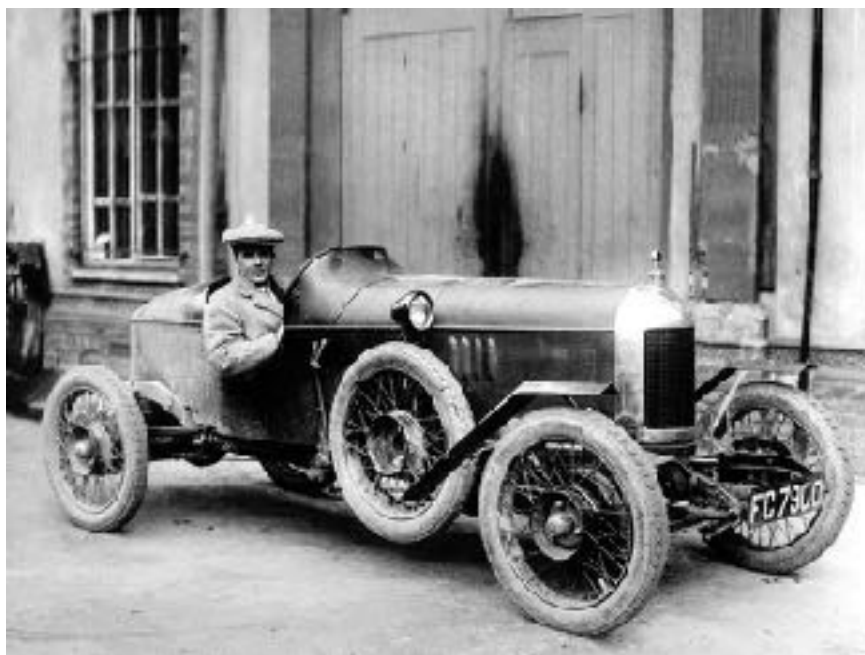
There has been much discussion about when the first MG was built; 1923, 1924, or maybe 1925? I defer to those in whose footsteps I follow, principally my good friend from South Africa and MG historian Norm Ewing whose epic MGA travels you may recall from my previous newsletter articles. Norm has amassed a convincing body of evidence, including first hand accounts from those MG employees who were there, that indeed the first MGs were produced in 1923 and the first one was sold to a Mr. Oliver Arkell in August 1923. Here's how it went down. Mr Arkell originally intended to purchase a Morris Cowley "Chummy" but changed his mind when he spotted a "Chummy" modified by Morris Garages and sporting an eye catching yellow body with black wings. On 11 August Arkell told Kimber he would buy the yellow car and the deal for the first MG car was sealed. On 14 August Mr. Arkell gave Kimber a check as a deposit on the MG. Finally, on 16 August 1923 the first private sale MG was registered and the rest is history. Norm has persuaded the MG community to accept 1923 as the birth year of the marque and hence the centenary year world wide celebrations beginning in 2023. A tip of the hat to you Norman! Here's the advertisement and sales receipt to prove it!



On the left notice the use of the MG logo in this early ad. It appeared as early as 1921. The two tone paint scheme announces the sporting nature of the MG marque.

At upper right is the Morris Garages order for the first MG car, “1 Special Morris Cowley Sports.” Oliver Arkell’s signature is at lower left. Notation at upper right reads, “My first car. I believe it was the first MG as the price had not been fixed and was later said to be 350 pounds.”

Gradually sales picked up as Kimber tried different combinations of two door and four door bodies, four and six cylinder engines as well as open and closed body styles. Sales really got a boost when Kimber’s specially modified Morris Cowley; consisting of a gray painted Carbodies narrow two seat body (the 48th delivered to Morris Garages), modified chassis, and tuned engine, won a Gold Medal in the March 1925 Lands End Trial. In subsequent years, this MG has been dubbed “Old Number One” as it started a trend of “cheap and cheerful” fun and competitive two seat sports cars that defined the breed that continues to this day. More on this in later articles!



Cecil Kimber in “Old Number One.” The rear mudguards are missing, perhaps the result of the pounding they took at the Lands End Trial. The copious coating of mud on the rear body panels supports this theory!

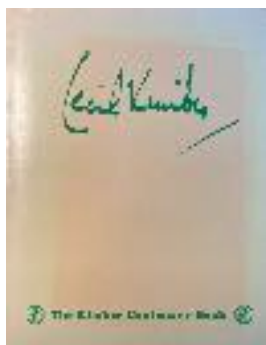
Somehow the MG work force of three men managed to pack 25 cars, work benches, machine tools and parts into the tiny space at Alfred Lane and turned out 20 cars a week! This is how it was done. Chassis were brought from nearby Cowley, modified as necessary with a hand drill, then delivered to Carbodies of Coventry to have the body installed, and lastly bring the completed chassis and body back to Alfred Lane and do the finishing up. An 80 hour week was not unusual. Whew!



The move to Abingdon finally gave MG the production capacity they so desperately needed. Fueled by competition successes, sales soared. More on this next month!

As sales of the MG specials grew, it became necessary to move to a succession of ever larger workshops dedicated to the production of MGs. In September 1925 production was moved from Alfred Lane to a vacant space in the Morris radiator Bainton Road factory. By this time the MG workforce had grown to 50 employees and space was still at a premium. The Works Manager, George Propert, occupied a glass-sided office just 8 ft by 5 ft! In 1927 the Morris Garages trade name was established and in the spring of 1928 the name was changed to the MG Car Company Ltd. The final move was to Abingdon in 1929 where the company remained until its closure in 1980.

If you want to learn more about the early history of the MG, I recommend the following:



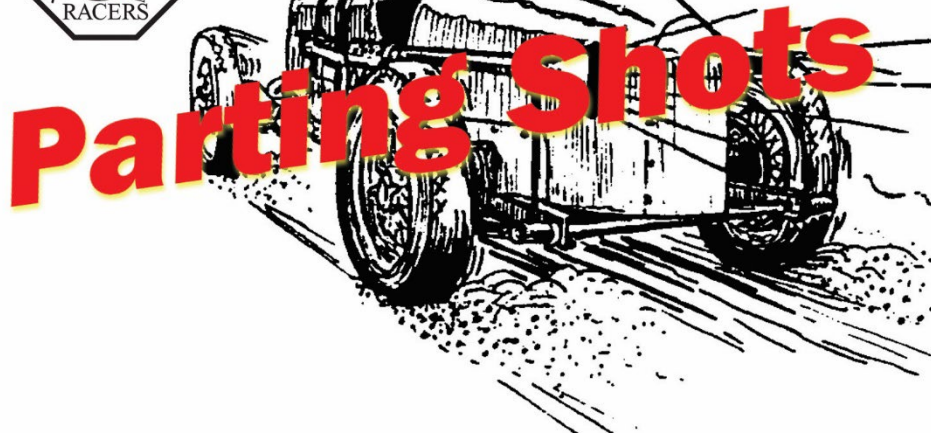
“The Kimber Centenary Book,” Edited by Dick Knudson and published by the New England MG T Register on the occasion of the inaugural Kimber Festival, April 1988, one hundred years after Kimber’s birth. This 208 page book is bursting with interesting stories about Kimber and the beginnings of the MG. Nine chapters are written by Kimber himself and one by his daughter, Jean Kimber Cook. The next Kimber Festival will be held on 28 and 29 April 2023 at the world famous Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum in Philadelphia.



“The Adventures of Imshi; a Two-seater in Search of the Sun,” by John Prioleau, first published in 1922. First editions are hard (and expensive!) to find. Fortunately, due to its popularity, affordable reproductions, such as this one, are available. The book chronicles the author’s four month road trip in his Morris car through Europe and North Africa in the post World War I years. It offers a fascinating insight into the condition of the roads and contrasting cultures Prioleau experienced during his travels. This book did much to boost Morris sales and encouraged Kimber to produce the MG.



“The Story of the M.G. Sports Car,” by noted MG historian Wilson McComb, published in 1972. A later expanded edition, “MG by McComb,” was published in 1978. The copiously illustrated text covers MG history from the earliest days through the late 1970’s. Over half the text covers pre-World War II MG history. A ‘must have’ for any MG enthusiast’s library.



Simple Stuff The Story Behind the MG Octagon

by Bob Vitrikas

The MG logo is instantly recognizable and has remained true to its original form since 1923. It first appeared in an advertisement in the March 2nd 1923 Oxford Times. The octagon was used in advertisements for the MG car to distinguish it from the Morris line from which it was derived. An accountant working for Cecil Kimber at the Morris Garages, Ted Lee, is credited with the design. Simple, easily recognized and timeless. In an interview with Jonathan Wood in *Thoroughbred and Classic Car*, Lee recalled that he took the initiative to design the octagonal logo using a small ruler he had from high school. He showed it to Kimber who exclaimed, "That's just the thing!" In turn it was shown to Sir William Morris who remarked, "The best thing to come out of the company...and it will never go out of it." No truer words were ever spoken! Surprisingly it wasn't until April 1928, one month after the factory moved to Abingdon, that the trademark application was submitted. Beginning in 1927, MG badges, first with German silver letters without the octagon, gradually began to appear on MG conversion radiators. In 1928 the enameled badge we are so familiar with began to appear on MG grilles. Soon Kimber was overcome with 'octagon fever' and the MG octagon began appearing all over the cars; door handles, dash knobs, instrument bezels, shift knobs, valve covers and even the oil dipstick! Kimber had a set of octagonal dishes at his home in Abingdon, "Boundary House", and used them for special occasions. Note: Today "Boundary House" is a popular Abingdon pub. My South African friend Norm Ewing had an octagonal toilet seat made for his home in Johannesburg. Now that's the mark of a true MG enthusiast!