

An MG Life

(with Club member Ernie Martin)

When I was at secondary school (St Peters College) I used to ride my bike past Ross Jensen Motors, where I noticed MGs and Austin Healeys that rather took my fancy. I also noticed a cream TD with green upholstery that used to drop off a girl at nearby Hilltop School for Girls. Then there was Mrs Seabrook's beautiful pale metallic blue Austin Healey... I fell in love with both! The next car I took notice of was Adrian Robinson's M.G. TD when Adrian was a regular visitor to a girl in the street where I lived.

My first car was an M.G. TD purchased in Whangarei in 1959, soon after meeting Sue. At



Ernie and TD

that point in my life one of the most exciting things was when my good friend Warren Paterson and I headed to Rotorua and Taupo in our very own M.G. TDs. High living indeed! Dren Errington was the next of my friends to purchase a TD and with our girlfriends Sue and Di, we began the start of our MG adventures. Many race meetings were enjoyed especially seeing MGs racing on Grand Prix days such as Dick Alder - MGA, John Grant - TC and Frank Wilkin - Austin Healey 100S.

I endured a time without a British sports



TF restorer, and the restorer's helper

car, at a time when I was studying and had an expanding family, when I read an article published in the *Australian Sports Car World* showing a TF1500 under restoration in a carport... I was hooked! In my opinion this article started the great T-Type revival down-under. Marking the birth of our second child Bevan, I purchased the M.G. TF1500, that we still own today. The car was in very poor condition but after some necessary attention Sue was soon campaigning the TF in Club events. The TF doubled as a car for me to go to work as well as enjoying sporting activities. Not helped by Sue's breaking of too many spokes in sealed motorkhanas, it inevitably resulted in the TF coming off the road for its lengthy restoration.

I met Denny Hulme in Rotorua who was restoring his TF at the same time as I was restoring mine, which proved useful when comparing various parts during the rebuild process. Thanks to Dave Dodd, the catalyst for joining a panel-beating class, I was able to



Ernie & 'Old Blue' - MG National Rally Cheb

carry out the panel work on the TF myself. When Sue was showing signs of impatience with the rate of restoration progress, a rather battered MGA Coupe was purchased. I promptly overhauled the engine and Garth Bagnall overhauled the gearbox. And so began the great trips we have enjoyed with family and MG friends. Since the completion of the TF restoration (now 26 years ago) the car has travelled the length and breadth of NZ many times over, as has 'Old Blue' our MGA Coupe. Fellow MG enthusiast Craig Hickson once



Sue competing the Twin Cam at Taupo track

said to me "there is always room for one more" and so it came to pass that there was indeed room for one more! I always wanted something different or a little more special and when an MGA Twin Cam of Canadian racing and hillclimb history, and later in New Zealand, became available it was purchased. It took some 13 years to complete the Twin Cam restoration (which incidentally was faster than the TF restoration) although in-between times I did build our current home and holiday home as carpentry work proved to be beneficial as 'in-between' therapy.



Ernie in Healey 100/4

In the early days of the Auckland Centre the MGCC was the official club for Austin-Healeys and after selling my TD to school friend Terry Patterson, I purchased an Austin-Healey 100/4. This is the car Sue and I drove on our honeymoon. I owned the 100/4 for a number of years and sold it to purchase a section on which we built two townhouses. I will admit that my biggest indignity was being towed up the motorway by Sue in her Standard 10 and me in my (non-functioning) Healey! However, I did purchase a replacement Healey 100/4 which we have owned (like my TF) for a very long time! I also purchased my father's 1967 Mark II Jaguar from his estate, which incidentally was the car I entered in the very first Intermarque Concours in Cornwall Park (I think the year was 1971). This is the lowest mileage of any of our cars and has only covered 44500 miles since new.

Memorable Events

- Being elected Chairman of the T-Type Register in the late 1960s (if I recall)



Sue & 'Old Blue' enjoy a picnic at Wanaka

correctly) and organising the first Wenderholm Run (later to be known as Winter Woollies) which was led by Chip Stevens in his J2 with a wicker basket on the back, and with the furthest travelled being Gordon Vogtherr from Hastings in his 1937 VA. This event received television coverage.

- Being elected Chairman of the Pre '56 MG Register, which this time encompassed

MGAs, ZAs and ZBs. Great memories of super weekends away e.g. Okoroirie Hotel.

- East Cape Tours and all the National Rallies and the adventures getting there.
- Dick Knudson, Chairman of the New England T-Register coming all the way from the USA in 1991, staying with us to take part on the inaugural convoy to the Pre 56 MG Christchurch Rally when we had thirty-nine MGs lined up on the wharf at Wellington to cross to the South Island, which made a great spectacle. I recall Garth and Gill Bagnall with J2 having need to change a clutch south of Blenheim on route to the Christchurch Rally.
- In 1993, thirty North American "Sacred Octagons" returned with Dick Knudson when Sue and I hosted a Welcome Function at our home and then later took off in an MG convoy to our holiday home at Wilsons Bay, Rotorua to host 65 MG enthusiasts to lunch on the lawn. All great fun! Then staying at National Park when Gordon Dearlove with bagpipes gave us our musical morning wake-up treat.
- Fabulous Kimber Birthday sunrise breakfasts and especially when MG founder Cecil Kimber's daughter, Jean Kimber Cook, made a trip to New Zealand to celebrate her father's birthday with us.
- The fabulous memories Sue and I have of travelling through New Zealand with Jean Kimber-Cook, Mike and Ann Hawke and Di and Dren Errington are very special



Simon Lowther, Ernie and Denny Hulme

memories indeed!

- Daughter Kristin, who wanted to drive Old Blue, but thought it 'hot and noisy' however, changed her mind when her pony club friends called it a 'cool car'... 'nuff said.
- Simon Lowther and John Buxton who helped preparing our TF and Twin Cam for Ellerslie Concours d'Elegance and on one of these occasions Denny Hulme came to see the restored TF.
- I recall the excitement at the TF's restoration time when the battery was connected and the ignition light glowed red for the first time in 17 years.

I can't write about 'my life' with MGs because everything I have done has always been with Sue, so this is about 'our lives' with MGs. While Sue has won many trophies, I am the one who has kept the cars 'going'. You see I am a fiddler having only had a brief track and hillclimb career. For me, the most important thing has been the wonderful MG people I have met. The cars are merely the 'vehicles' for making such fabulous and life-time friendships. Having been actively involved with the MGCC since those early days I am grateful to be the recipient of Life Membership.

Ernie Martin

