

# **THE MGC REGISTER of NEW ZEALAND**



**MG Car Club (Auckland Centre) Inc.  
P. O. Box 90456, Victoria Street West,  
Auckland 1142, New Zealand.  
Website: [www.mgclub.org.nz](http://www.mgclub.org.nz)  
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## **The MGC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations North Island Meeting**



**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> and Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017  
Rex Benns' Museum, Drury**

Some of you may have noticed that we have gone **BLUE** for this year to coincide with the UK event and the colour of the special **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary polo shirts and caps**. These are available for ordering now and look very smart. Your Kiwi team attending the UK event, **Ian Grant, Harvey Heath and Peter Dunlop** will of course be sporting these fine shirts for the four-day celebration.....*here's hoping there's a laundry service available!!*

We recently sent out our "**Expression of Interest**" forms, which we hope escaped being deleted from your computers, but if you did don't worry you'll find it at the end of this newsletter.

So if you are thinking of joining us fill in the form and send it back to **Ian Grant** as soon as possible. We need to get an idea of how many people will be attending. It will be a great weekend with plenty to see, do and enjoy. The aim is to top our best turn out of MGCs seen so far, which was ten cars at **Hampton Downs** in March 2013, so please let us know if you are coming and book these dates in your diary now. These dates are significant in that the **MGC** made its first public appearance at **The Motor Show in Earls Court** which was held from **18th to 28th October 1967**, so our event will be exactly 50 years to the day.

The programme we hope to run for the weekend is:

### **Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2017**

Middy: Arrive at BP Autobahn, Papakura (south access only); Registrations;

12.30pm: Depart for Register Run to Glenbrook;

1.30pm: Arrive at Glenbrook Vintage Railway, train departs at 2.00pm and 3.30pm;

4.30pm: Depart Glenbrook for home or accommodation for those visiting;

6.30pm: Register Dinner at a South Auckland location, Fun Event.

### **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017**

10.00am: Arrive at Rex Bennis' Kiwiana Museum, 30 Elizabeth Place, Drury;

Registrations for new arrivals;

11.00am: Guided tour of the museum by our host, Rex Bennis;

12.30pm: Picnic for lunch – BYO food and drinks;

1.30pm: "Pride of Ownership" competition;

2.30pm: Prize-giving and farewell;

3.30pm: Depart.

### **Special Issue MGC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Regalia**



As we would like to make this year's event something special, here is a reminder about the regalia the team in the UK have put together for the anniversary. Please let Ian know if you would like one or more of the items and we will endeavour to procure them for you on our trip and bring them back with us, if possible.

**Polo shirts:** men's & women's style, blue only (as shown): roadster or GT, £18 each;

**Caps:** one colour only (as shown) for either roadster or GT, £10 each;

**Grille Badges:** 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, £25 each;

**Leather Key Fob:** £5 each;

**Pin Badge:** £4.each.



All prices are in GBP Sterling and will be plus shipping. An indication to shipping costs will be advised before we confirm your order. All orders must be paid for in advance.

**Please Note:** Grille badges, key fobs and pin badges have been made for both roadster and GT and the car colours are black, blue, green, red, white and yellow. A grille badge, key fob and pin badge has also been made for the MGC GTS.

**So, can we tempt you? If so, please contact Ian Grant.**

## ***The Voyage of Discovery Continues.....Ian Grant***

Since the register was revived six years ago we have published 18 newsletters and each one has contained a section entitled "The Voyage of Discovery Continues". Considering what we have achieved over those six years, I would have thought we would have run out of things to "discover" but not necessarily. We have uncovered the locations of one more MGC (see below), but there are still a few out there that we know about but haven't found yet. I have written to the NZ Classic Driver magazine and a letter about our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is in the May / June edition. Hopefully from that we will hear from current owners of those MGCs we haven't located yet, people who have owned MGCs in the past and just maybe from current owners whose cars we don't know about at all. Fingers crossed that we get some information that will keep "Voyage of Discovery Continues" running for a few more issues.



Our friends in **Australia** sent me an update of their register and considering only three MGCs were exported new there (refer our newsletter dated October 2013 at [www.mgclub.org.nz](http://www.mgclub.org.nz), Information, MG Registers, MGC Register, Newsletter Archive for the reason why) there are close to 100 confirmed MGCs across the Tasman, a lot of which have been brought in from the **USA**, and another 70 or so unconfirmed. When browsing their list one MGC in particular stood out as the chassis number

rang alarm bells. A quick look at our register confirmed we have lost another NZ-listed car to Australia. This one, a green GT and a late one in the production cycle, has been restored and was originally shipped to **Los Angeles** and has been converted to right-hand drive as, it would appear, have a lot of the ex-USA cars that are in Australia. I have a copy of the **NZ Classic Driver** magazine dated April 2009 which includes a seven-page article on this particular GT. It has been well publicised that we received superb support from **Brett Robinson** when Peter and I revived the register which gave us such a solid base to start with. But there was someone else back in those early days who liaised with Brett and between the two of them they recorded sightings and information about MGCs. At the time, in the early- to mid-1970s, **Steven Marshall** was living in **Wellington** and owned a red roadster. He retaining the ownership of the car when he ventured overseas on his OE and not long after returning to New Zealand he was married and the roadster featured prominently at the wedding. As this year is the MGC's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary I thought it might be worth trying to track



Steven down, knowing that he had moved to **Canterbury** on returning to New Zealand. I made a call to a Marshall and bingo!!! First phone call and found!! Steven was very pleased to hear the register is alive and very well and because of his efforts in the past we will be inviting him to be our VIP guest at our South Island get-together next March. Photo above **Steven Marshall** on the big day.

## ***Check Out the MGC Register Website Update***



The MGC Register page on the **MG Car Club (Auckland)** website is constantly updated with additional information including details of newly found cars. The site includes many interesting facts and figures so why not click on [www.mgclub.org.nz](http://www.mgclub.org.nz), then go to **Information**, then **Registers** and click on **MGC Register** to find out more.

## ***Classic Driver Magazine to Feature the MGC's 50<sup>th</sup>***



Great news folks, the well-known **NZ Classic Driver** magazine will have a cover story on our MGCs in the September / October edition. Two roadsters and two GTs will feature with the photo-shoot already done on the banks of **Lake Karapiro**. A full report will be in the next newsletter.....*Fame at last!*

## ***Happenings Across the Tasman.....Ian Grant***

In preparing for my trip to the UK four years ago, I looked up all of the MGCC centres in **Australia** with a view to finding any **MGC registers** and found South Australia was the only one with any such reference. I sent an e-mail to the MGCC secretary in **Adelaide** and he in turn gave me the contact details for **Ian Hobbs** (pictured), who looks after that centre's register. I asked Ian if he would like to send me a list of the cars that he had and I would research the factory build records on his behalf. This he did and he now has the details on the 30 MGCs that were on his list. Just before Christmas 2015, Ian and his wife **Frauke** came to New Zealand and we had the opportunity to spend some time together and Ian had a good look over our register information. Since then some serious work has been taking place in Australia with great strides being made in creating an **Australian MGC Register** with a lot of owners responding favourably with information on their cars.



**John Craven**, with **Ian Hobbs'** support, has done a fantastic job in putting this together. The other project taking place, which Ian is driving, is a book which will probably have the title "**MGCs Down Under**" and is shaping up to be a definitive history of MGCs in this part of the world. New Zealand certainly hasn't been left out of this project and we have provided some interesting stories on the **NZ Early Days** (with **Brett Robinson's** invaluable input), the **Revival**

of the NZ MGC Register, a couple of personal stories and tales of what we went through in tracking some of our cars down. We will let you know more as this develops further.

### ***BOP Classic Car Group Day Out.....Ian Grant***

Despite us having a non-existent summer, Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April dawned fine and it was all go for the **Bay of Plenty Classic Car Group's** trip to **Chris and Helen Empson's collection** near Te Awamutu. The classic car group sees members of different clubs get together and it gives everyone the opportunity to have a close look at various marques and models and learn more about other owners' cars. As with the run in spring late last year, over 30 cars turned up covering pre-war to later classics. In attendance were Rovers, Triumphs, Jaguars, MGs, a



Morgan and an Austin Healey as well as a beautiful Ford Zodiac MKII and an interesting Riley Elf Station Wagon among others. The MGC Register was well represented with **Rob and Jill Sherman's GT**, the GT of **Ray Davies and Rosalie Smith** and my roadster. It is always fascinating to see the interest that is generated when the bonnet of an MGC is up. On certainly more than

one occasion at various events I have heard the comment, "I didn't know they had a six cylinder in an MGB" and that was no exception here either. It was great to see Ray and Rosalie's GT as it has now had a lot of the cosmetic work completed which it needed when they bought it late last year. I managed to slot in behind them for part of the outward trip and did the same with the Shermans on the way home, so it was rather nice having the road ahead full of MGC for most of the day. The Empson Collection includes **Jaguars, Triumphs, Rovers, a Jensen Interceptor** and a **Jensen Healey Estate** to name a few. There are car magazines galore and a fascinating collection of models in various scales, some of which look to be rare examples. A thoroughly enjoyable day out, lovely drive, a picnic lunch under the trees with interesting company and great hospitality from our hosts who are only too happy to open their place for clubs to visit.

### ***British Car Show, Te Awamutu.....Ian Grant***

Having had the C out for the trip to the **Empson's Collection** on the Saturday, I had the pleasure of touring the countryside again the next day to join the **MG Car Club** display at the **British Car Show** in Te Awamutu, an annual event that is run by the **Triumph Car Club** as a fund-raiser for the **Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service**. Over 100 vehicles adorned the Te Awamutu Rugby Club's grounds under overcast skies, but the rain stayed away making it a very



pleasant day. The **Triumph Car Club** was well represented with a very nice variety of saloons and sports cars as was the **Rover Car Club**, the P5 saloons in both coupe and saloon form attracting a lot of attention. The MG Car Club was well represented, so much so that the club won the "Best Visiting Club" award, the line-up comprising a PA, TF, A, several Bs including four BV8 conversions, an F, an RV8 and my C roadster. I had prepared an A3-size laminated notice advertising the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary which was held in place by the wiper blades and this prompted a number of conversations with passers-by. Lots of people to talk to and I had a very enjoyable conversation with **Chris Empson**, whose collection the **Bay Of Plenty** group had visited the day before. So, two days of top-down MGC driving covering just on 200 miles. The only downside was, while in traffic and concentrating on the road, I missed the five numbers on the odometer rolling over to 60,000 miles.

### ***Andrew Hedges.....Feedback from Charles Tisdall***

Following the article we published in our last issue on works driver **Andrew Hedges**, we received the following correspondence from **Charles Tisdall**, a member of **MGCC Auckland** and the owner of a very tidy **MGB** roadster and his project car, an **MGBGT**.

*"I was very interested in the article about **Andrew Hedges**. I met Andrew in New Zealand back in the early '90s when he was staying with a friend of mine in the Auckland suburb of **Parnell**. They popped over for a cuppa and I had my then red MGB roadster parked outside. Conversation started about the car, then MGs in general, a recollection about his friend **Paddy Hopkirk** and then I realised the legend himself was chatting to me!! I raced and got my MG books and Andrew pointed out that he was the driver in some of the photos. We chatted for hours. He told me he no longer raced as he had had a minor stroke. I was aware that he had sadly passed away but it was certainly a great experience to meet him, that's for sure."*



**Thank you** for sharing this with us **Charles**, Photo: **Andrew Hedges and Paddy Hopkirk**

### ***MGC50 International and Local Celebrations***

By the time you read this the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will have been celebrated by our friends in **Australia** over Easter in **Adelaide** as part of their national MG meeting. The UK event, with many travelling from far and wide will be in June and now has **200 registrations** and your New Zealand contingent will get the opportunity to develop the overseas relationships further when we meet the owners that we already correspond with by e-mail. In the **USA** the anniversary will be held in late September in Abingdon, Virginia which is Abingdon-on-Thames sister city. Our New Zealand celebration will be on Labour Weekend, the details of which are shown earlier in this newsletter.

The "Expression of Interest" form can be found on our web page at [www.mgclub.org.nz](http://www.mgclub.org.nz), Information, MG Registers, MGC Register. This is a one-off event so we would really like to see a great turnout of MGCs and even if your car is not on the road, we would love to see you there, so please come along and join the celebrations.

## ***Brit & Euro Classic Car Show, Auckland..Peter Dunlop***



On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March, the second of these well supported events saw the **MG Car Club** making its present felt with a wide variety of cars including three MGCs. **Tony Barbarich**, who was part of the event team, had brought along his 1968 GT and the **Dunlop's** also had their GTs in attendance. Good weather and a great turn out saw the MGCC with the largest number of single marque cars on display. Many thanks to all who gave up their Sunday to help with what is fast becoming a major classic car event in the Auckland.

## ***Harvey's Technical Tip #6, Trim Height Adjustment***

This technical tip arises from a personal problem I have had with my MGC GT. The car is now some 49 years old and 35 years since I owned it last and the back end is forever reducing in trim height dragging the undercarriage on every speed bump or uneven driveway in Auckland. This also caused the vehicle view from the side to be low in the tail, and in an attempt to keep it level I would lower the front torsion bar settings. This does not help the ground clearance but I thought it looked better that looking like it was ready to head for the moon! The time came and I decided to do something about it so rear springs and shock absorbers were removed and inspected.



The original intention was to have the rear springs set up to their original height, but in true British Leyland fashion there was never a vehicle trim height stated for MGCs and an MGBGT has a trim height of 11½ inches from the centre of the wheel cap to the lower edge of the rear guard. My car measured 11 inches neat and I knew it was originally much higher than a ½-inch when I owned it new. The old springs had plenty of rust signs between the spring leaves and on some leaves the toe of the spring was wearing on the spring leaf above. This does not stop the springs from being reset by the spring maker, but I have had very mixed results of leaf, and coil springs for that matter, having uneven trim heights between the sides after springs have been reset. The decision was made to fit new springs which were imported from England at great expense but they did not disappoint me. My new trim height is back just as I remember it and there is no difference in the trim height measurement from side to side. There are some very basic mechanical practices that must be followed when refitting or renewing rear springs. Always replace all the shackle bushes, front eye bushes and spring pads. Best to replace them with rubber units unless you are in a 'racey' frame of mind as nolathane bushes are hard and noisy and will transmit that noise into the body of the car. The shock absorbers are easily checked and while they are off the vehicle it is very easy to check their fluid level. Only top up shock absorber reservoirs with shock absorber oil as this copes with the heat without changing its viscosity. While in its upright position the shock absorber should move from maximum stroke to minimum stroke without any hesitations or dead spots. Telescopic shock absorbers are tested in the same way, always hold in their upright position and fully depress and extend without any stops, starts and dead spots (a dead spot is when the shock movement suddenly goes loose, or drops with no resistance). The bush at the front eye of the spring is pressed into the spring

eye and has a centre core which has serrated ends. These bite into the body steel and prevent it from moving and all spring movement is taken in the rubber bush. Make sure these spring eye bolts are tight as this can cause funny noises on the road which are hard to locate. Finally with my new springs in place I was able to raise my front torsion bar settings to bring the body line back level and I now clear the judder bars and the rear suspension does not give me those hard bangs when the suspension bottoms out. All-in-all, a pleasing result, and being an old fella I like my ride firm, but forgiving. **Happy motoring!**

### ***MGCs Gather at Brooklands Historic Race Track***



The **UK MGC Register** has been in the spotlight again being the featured car at the recent **MG Era** event held at the Brooklands Museum in Surrey, England. A great turn out of Cs on a lovely sunny spring day. **Tim Hodgkinson** was there with the 1965 works prototype C roadster FRX692C plus many other stunning looking cars. It may be of interest to learn that the legendary Brooklands circuit and its surrounding facilities are to be restored by multi-million pound UK

lottery funding and racing could be on its way back after more than 75 years. When visiting Brooklands the sight of the concrete banking is still unmistakable even in its current state of disrepair and draws you to look at what seems to be an almost vertical section. The outbreak of World War II meant the track, which was then firmly the home of British motor racing, was commandeered for aircraft production and hangar space. The current museum hangar will be dismantled, moved and rebuilt, allowing some of the old track to be reclaimed and added to the remaining banked sections, sounds very interesting.

### ***Shipping the CGT to the UK.....Harvey Heath***

The decision to ship my MGC to England for the **MGC Register 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** event was not made lightly, but I am sure **Susan**, my late wife, would still want me to go regardless of my situation. Pressure from other MG club members certainly had an influence and I quickly decided it was a once in a lifetime chance and I did not want to miss it. I could go and attend the festivities but to watch other members driving their cars around and having all the fun did seem like a half-wasted trip, so, to ensure that I missed nothing the car was part of my luggage! On top of all that pressure, the chance to bring the car back to the place that Sue and I had bought it new after 49 years was also something special. The first task was to find a shipping agent who was familiar with taking cars from NZ to another country as I thought this was going to be a rare occasion, but no, there are literally hundreds of cars, some MGs, shipped out of this country and back to the USA or Britain. The club members recommended several to choose from but I picked **Grant Hudson of Aironaut Customs Brokers Ltd** in Parnell who has handling agents and people on the ground at both ends of my proposed journey. There were several special documents



that needed to be filed with Grant and these included copies of the ownership papers, a clearance of any finances owing, and a declaration for the English customs. Any car shipped by this agent to England can be cleared before it goes into its container in New Zealand, and hence is sealed in bond until it is opened in the warehouse in **Southampton**. The advantages of shipping vehicles to the United Kingdom is that with a maximum stay of six months, the New Zealand registration, the Warrant of Fitness or M.O.T, the registration plates remain valid and it can be driven on the New Zealand plates as long as there is a sticker on the rear identifying the country or registration. The agent handles everything relating to the shipment, as in the installation of the vehicle into the container and the marine insurance while it is on the water. He also informs me of when the vehicle is needed and the address of where the loading of the container will take place. Costs are very much set by the size of the container and the number of vehicles in it. I elected to have a container just for my car as I did not have anyone with a car going at the same time or to the same place. Insurance is calculated on the value of the vehicle. The only hassle is that any vehicle registered to drive on English roads must have comprehensive insurance. This is not a bad thing but does cause some concerns when any insurance company in Europe must have a domicile address for the owner in the UK. This can be overcome if a relative or friend is willing to let them use their address but in my case I found **Peter Best Insurance**, who has strong ties to the MG Car Club, happy to allow me to use the club address which was easier than insuring the car with a New Zealand broker. Only requirement is that the insurance certificate must be carried in the vehicle at all times and will not appear on the insurance database for the UK. At the time of writing this short summary, the car is nicely polished and waiting for the message to deliver it to the container depot. Perhaps I can give you a follow up as to the hassles of getting it home again.

### ***Austin 3-Litre / MGC Photo-Shoot.....Peter Dunlop***

**John Vevers** is not only a great supporter of the MGC Register being the proud owner of a **1968 Tartan Red roadster** but also has a very keen interest in the Austin 3-Litre and now owns a brace of these fine beauties. His MGC is a European specification left-hand drive car which started life as a personal export to Denmark, then arrived in NZ in the early-'70s. As John is very much a family man the **Austin 3-Litre** saloon is perfect for taking the family out on country jaunts and picnics. These so called "**Executive Class**" limousines were produced by **BMC** at their Longbridge factory in Birmingham. Interestingly, like the MGC it was also launched at the **1967 Earls Court Motor Show** in London.



Sadly both cars were destined to under achieve expected sales figures with only around 10,000 cars in total being built, a similar number to the MGC. They were quite an expensive car when new selling at around \$5,200 in 1970. The last 200 cars were fitted with black-painted MGC specification engines providing an additional 20bhp to the original specification of 125bhp which was due to a milder cam grind. John's car was built in 1970, has a lovely "Blackberry" paint finish and grey interior. Most of the paint work appears to be original and accident damage nil other than a ding in the rear bumper. The interior is in near original condition reflecting the recorded 51,000 miles. The specification includes a **Borg Warner 35** three-speed auto transmission, special Hydrolastic suspension developed in a collaboration between **BMC** and **Rolls Royce** and an Independent Rear Suspension system which was also fitted with an engine driven hydraulic pump automatically adjusting the rear ride height depending on load. This collaboration resulted in a sophisticated suspension that had been

intended for a lower priced Rolls and Bentley using the Austin 3-Litre body and the RR 4R engine. Unfortunately, RR backed out of the project but the Austin has benefited from the excellent smooth hydrolastic suspension and excellent handling. The 3-Litre body shape was finalised in 1963 before the popular Austin 1800 Mk1 was introduced but was not announced until October 1967. Production started in June 1968. NZ sales of the imported, fully built up, Austin 3-Litre were targeted to fill a vacant niche market replacing the Austin A/110 Westminster and the Wolseley 6/110 models and as such remained on sale here until as late as 1972, UK production having ceased in May 1971. It was effectively replaced, during 1971, by the Australian transverse-engined 6-cylinder Austin Kimberley and Tasman X6 models. John estimates that 300 to 400 cars came into NZ which appear to have been distributed throughout the country including small towns where they were sold to mayors, headmasters and farmers. Hence some were virtually Sunday cars, as was his, which have survived in good order. About 15 or more remain in good order in NZ and 5 in Australia. They were never sold new into Australia and around 46 remain on the road in the UK from the total of approximately



10,200 that were built. John is a friend of another 3-Litre fanatic **Neil Kidby**, who runs the **Austin 3-Litre Owners Club** in the UK and wanted a selection of photographs including an MGC for his new book on the Austin which he hopes to publish this year. This gave John and his 9-year-old son **James** a chance to give the car a decent run out from Helensville to Beachlands and the opportunity for us to catch up and talk cars.....thanks for taking the time to visit us John.

### ***Dunlop's Retro Ramblings.....Peter Dunlop***

It is considerably more than 20 years ago today that **Sgt. Pepper** taught the band to play. It is in fact 50 years ago and **Beatles** fans worldwide are preparing to celebrate the golden anniversary of this record often voted one of the greatest albums of all time. So like our beloved **MGC**, Sgt. Pepper turns 50, what a great year **1967** was. We had movies like the **Graduate** and **Bonnie & Clyde**. **Procol Harum** were top of the pops with **A Whiter Shade of Pale**, **John Lennon** received his psychedelic **Rolls Royce** and the world's first heart transplant was successfully carried out. All good stuff but now we must fast forward to 1972 for my featured subject **John Gott** and his ex-works **BMC** rally-prepared **1959 Austin Healey 3000 Mk1**, rego **SMO746**. I know it's not an MGC but these cars are first cousins and it provides a good link into my self-indulgent rambling "**So you want to be a racing driver**".



**John Gott** was born in 1913 and joined the **British Police Force** in 1937. During the **Second World War** he was attached to **Bomber Command** and was awarded the **George**



**Medal** for rescue work during an air raid, and the **MBE** for rescuing the crew of a blazing RAF plane. His early interest in motor sport was nurtured as a riding mechanic at **Brooklands** but his first event as a driver was the **1933 RAC Rally**. From there he 'got the bug' and participated in rallies, hillclimbs, sprints and trials, finishing every **Alpine Rally** from 1948 to 1951 and winning a **Coupe des Alpes** in 1951. From the mid-'50s he was an important member of the **BMC** works rally team, ultimately taking the role of **Rally Captain**. In 1960 he was appointed **Chief Constable** of **Northamptonshire Police**

**Force** and, with the season over, purchased the ex-works **Austin Healey 3000 (SMO746)** and retired as a works driver. He continued to develop the car but, against increasingly stiff competition, it was becoming difficult to keep the wins coming. By this time, SMO746 had achieved a start record of 112 wins, 42 2<sup>nd</sup> placings and 13 3<sup>rd</sup> place-finishes from 184 competition events. John now had almost 40 years of experience in motorsport, was a well-respected gentlemen driver, and always ready to give advice and the offer of technical help, provided by his friend and mechanic **Jock Thin**. I remember chatting to him during a pit-stop in the gent's loo at **Lydden Hill** (a small 1-mile circuit in the **Kent** near **Canterbury**) and thinking, of all the drivers here today, he would be the last one to have a shunt. How wrong I was. It was the **3<sup>rd</sup> September 1972** and John was driving SMO746 in a 12-lapper and was well placed after three laps. I was watching from the paddock banking waiting to get into my car for the next race. Then for some unknown reason the Healey failed to take **Devil's Elbow**, a tight left-hander. He appeared to take no evasive action and ran at full speed straight into the grass-covered, solid-earth banking and his arms flew off the steering wheel into the air. The impact was on the driver's side. After receiving emergency treatment he was rushed to the nearby hospital but sadly passed away shortly after arriving. John's mechanic, **Jock Thin**, subsequently went over the Healey but could not find any evidence of mechanical failure. It was generally thought by all who witnessed the event, including myself, that John had suffered a heart attack or stroke but the coroner was to make a finding of 'accidental death'. A sad and thought-provoking end to what was expected to be an enjoyable club event in the Kent countryside.



### ***So You Want to be a Racing Driver?.....Peter Dunlop***

My twin-brother Michael and I regularly watched club races at **Brands Hatch** during the '60s and '70s dreaming that one day, maybe, we would be out there dicing with the best. **MGs, Healeys, Jaguars, Lotuses, Elvas, Ginettas** and Mum's **Morri Traveller** were all seen at full chat on a Sunday afternoon. I was never really one for watching so decided it was time I had a go myself. My **MGB** was sold providing the funds to buy a **Mini Cooper** tow car and a "build it yourself" cheap racer and it didn't get any cheaper than an **Austin 7-powered Jeffries Mk2 750 Formula** race car. The **750 Motor Club's** slogan was "**Low Cost Motorsport**" and this was definitely low cost. So for something like \$170.00 a half-finished project was purchased from a disillusioned punter in North London comprising chassis, wheels, engine and many boxes of bits and pieces



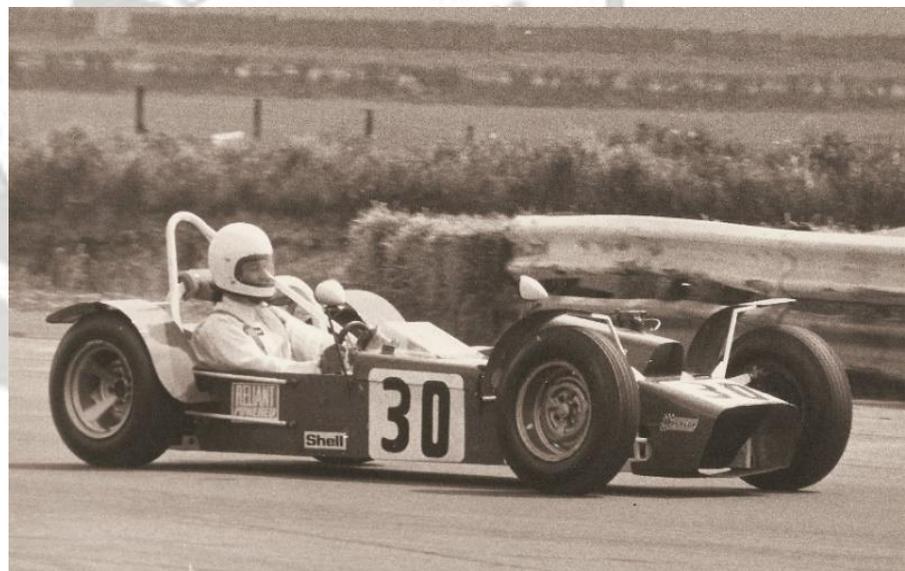
all of which were loaded into the back of a Bedford van and driven to my lock-up garage in sunny Worthing, Sussex. The run home was actually the fastest this car would ever go, I just didn't know it at the time. Twelve months of long nights, cut fingers and damaged thumbs saw the car finished and ready to race, well sort of. I applied for an **RAC** race licence, had a medical, bought a crash hat and posted the entry form off to the 750 Motor Club for their event at **Thruxton**, so all of a sudden I was a racing driver. No driver instruction or tests required, just pay your money and have a go. It hadn't occurred to me that although I had attended



many race meetings I had never actually driven around a circuit and more importantly I hadn't driven this car except for an excursion up the garage driveway.

So as not to be late, we duly arrived at Thruxton the evening before the race and camped in the car park ready for the big day. This was motorsport on a shoe string, there were three of us in a two-man tent and it rained heavily all night. Needless to say we were first in the queue for the paddock gates to open, it was 7.30 in the morning and my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. I felt like all my birthdays had come at once. The car went through scrutineering without comment, quite amazing really, and we were on our way. Standing beside our pride and joy, sporting its Ferrari- red paint work and gold wheels (Enzo would have turned in his grave) and feeling very proud of our achievements, it suddenly dawned on me that nobody had actually ever driven the car at speed and therefore we should probably try it out, test the brakes and see if it changed gear. I jumped, blasted around the paddock a few times to the waved fists of other competitors, while stamping on the brakes at every opportunity. All good, it went, the gearbox worked and it stopped, so what more could you ask? Practice seemed to be a bit of a blur, one minute I was in the paddock, then on the circuit and then back in the paddock. I think I only did about three laps and came in, why I don't know but I assumed that was what you did. Nobody took any times as we didn't have a stop-watch, so had no idea of how fast or, nearer the truth, how slow I was going. We had lunch and then went out onto the start grid. I was on the second to last row, the last row being those who had not practised, which should have told me something. The flag dropped and being a true boy-racer, used to traffic light Grand Prix, I made a good start. Somebody stalled in front and I was off up the inside like a rat up a drain pipe, so all good so far. This was a 10-lapper and Thruxton is a fast circuit, so why anyone would want to build a race car with an Austin 7 engine was, and still is, baffling. Anyway, I was in heaven, just couldn't stop smiling, I had a grin from ear to ear and here I was in a race car, on a race circuit, just like the other guys.

Although it never entered my mind, 10 laps, even at the back, is a long way to expect a side valve, splash-fed engine to survive. Changing down for the chicane at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> lap a valve head decided to part company with the stem and deposit itself in the top of a piston, which then split the



block. I suspected something wasn't quite right when oily engine parts shot out of the exhaust pipe close to my left ear. My race was run but I was, for some stupid reason, still smiling. I should have been disappointed but knew in my heart that this was all part of motor racing, what a wonderful day out. Unfortunately this set the tone for the whole season and I don't recall ever finishing a race, but then again it was great fun.....happy days.

Photo: just before entering the chicane on the 6<sup>th</sup> lap, look closely and you'll see I'm still smiling. I am actually wearing a pair of Bruce McLaren's overalls, but that's another story.

## ***Oh, How I Wish I Was an MGC***



Spotted in Matamata recently, this Toyota Utility with its standard issue New Zealand registration plates, is making it quite clear it has a desire to be something much, much better.

## ***and Finally .....***

Sitting at the bar staring at his drink was a sad and lonely guy when suddenly a large, leather-clad biker stepped up next to him, grabbed his drink and gulped it down in one swig. "Thanks boy, whatcha gonna do about it" said the biker causing the guy burst into tears. "Come on mate, I didn't think you'd cry. I can't stand to see a man crying, what's your problem?" "This is the worst day of my life" he replied. "I am a complete failure. I was late to a meeting and my boss fired me. I went to the parking lot, my car had been stolen and I don't have any insurance. I left my wallet in the cab I took home. I found my wife in bed with the postman and then my dog bit me. So I came here to work up the courage to end to it all. I bought a drink, dropped a capsule in and I'm watching the poison dissolve, when you show up and drink it. But enough about me, how's your day going?"

***Drive safely, enjoy your MGC and remember C-ing is believing.....***

# *Ian Grant*



## ***The MGC Register Team:***

**Secretary & Historian:** Ian Grant, home: 07 8886429, mobile: 027 6787923

e-mail: [thegrants@actrix.co.nz](mailto:thegrants@actrix.co.nz)

**Technical Adviser:** Harvey Heath, home: 09 8342552, mobile: 021 1721033

e-mail: [harveyheath@extra.co.nz](mailto:harveyheath@extra.co.nz)

**Past Secretary:** Peter Dunlop MBE, home: 09 5364410, mobile 021 02788652

e-mail: [dunlops@hotmail.com](mailto:dunlops@hotmail.com)

**[NB: No calls after 9pm please](#)**

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