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# BVAC News

## June 2020

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### Editor's Ramblings

Welcome to the third lockdown edition of BVAC News. Now that the show season is with us, we ought to be busy preparing for the big event at Thirlestane and visiting other shows round about. (Just as a reminder, these pictures are from the 2017 event.) The latest cancellation to be notified is Duns, where for the last several years Tim Jackson or I have run a small car show within the Berwickshire County Show. They had been hoping that the planned date of 1<sup>st</sup> August would be late enough to allow them to go ahead, but by May the organisers had bowed to the inevitable and cancelled.

It's great to have a variety of tales of club members and their cars to publish this month. Lockdown seems to be encouraging all the budding authors out of the woodwork. Keep it up! This

month, thanks go to Robin Wild who penned this article last year about the MG which has been in his ownership for over half a century, to Helen Kirkness who's added some history to last month's picture of her Mini and to Rod McLachlan with his salutary tale of rot under shiny paintwork. I can only remark (with apologies to Michael Crawford) – Oooh Betty!



### Message from our Convener

For those in a Car Club the formula of 'garaged, immobile and restricted' gives no pleasure at all. Nonetheless we are destined to hunker down at home for some time yet finding what solace we can from hobbies, newly developed skills, fixing that long running problem on the 'Classic' and pottering about the garden.

In BVAC we must wait to be allowed to meet in groups, to travel more than a few miles, for places to be Open and, let's not forget, loos to be available. The wait is beginning to tell on many of us but we should be hopeful for the future. I have read the Scottish Government's four stage plan for easing lockdown – the entire document, not just the edited 'highlights'. There are chinks of light, little beams of sunshine and a realistic prospect of being able to resume some Club activity by late summer or early autumn.

The Programme of Activities for this year was rapidly put on ice but not forgotten. A good deal of preliminary work was completed for a number of events and some were at the stage of being ready to go save for last minute details to add. We are determined that this work shall not be wasted. For example, the Scenic Run to Dawyck Botanical Gardens, though we have missed the Spring Azaleas, could be equally beautiful as a visit to take in the Autumn Colours of their magnificent tree collection. Some meets and Runs will surely become possible and we will be able to get together again to enjoy life, friendship and our lovely cars.

Those of us in the Club Management Group will be doing everything we can to deliver some enjoyable activity before the year is out – 'second spike' permitting.

Chris Biggs, Convener.

## Robin and Daphne's MG by Robin Wild

I bought our 1953 MG TD in 1965 as our second car for Daphne to use. We had bought it in a village about 30 miles away from Scarborough where we lived at the time, and we went to collect it one November Friday evening. Daphne drove our other car (an almost new Sunbeam Rapier) home and I followed in the MG. it was getting dark and it started snowing and the wipers (top hung on the windscreen) were not



very effective against the snow. In the end, I had to lean out over the door with the sidescreen off to see where I was going. All of that was an inauspicious start to our ownership but it has been with us ever since.

I bought winter tyres for it and Daphne used it all year round for many years, doing her shopping and the school runs with our first daughter. When our next offspring arrived in 1977, we needed something more capacious so a Morris 1000 Traveller took over.

By then, the constant all-year-round use had taken its toll on the MG so, in 1980, it was given a minor rebuild. The lower body timbers needed to be replaced, it needed a new windscreen, some new trim and hood, some chroming and paintwork. The windscreen gave problems

because the screen itself is secured to the uprights by long set screws. Having had the screen reglazed, I screwed it back to the uprights and one of the screws was just too long and the last turn cracked the new glass so it all had to be done again.

It was a useful lesson because I have done similar screens since and have always taken great care to check the screw length before reassembly. At this time the car got a new double duck hood, side screens and full length tonneau. It went to the 1982 Mellerstain show in its new finery with its new tonneau cover, but the steam lorry which used to go to Mellerstain ploughed up and down past the cars, covering the new tonneau in sooty marks which I have never been able to remove completely.

Since that rebuild, the car has had a more gentle life, being used for high days and holidays. In all the time we have had it, it has needed very little mechanical attention apart from the normal maintenance. That is until about six or seven years ago when it started overheating. To cure it, I had the radiator rebuilt. In fact the TV show about Thirlestane that year included an interview of me in my garage with the radiator-less MG behind me.

However, the new radiator and hoses did not cure the problem. MG people said that I should fit an MGB fan so I did - the six bladed light plastic fan in place of the heavy four bladed metal fan makes the engine seem much sweeter - but that did not cure the problem either. I adjusted the carburation and the timing but those did not solve it. I removed the old thermostat entirely and blocked the bypass hose but that did not help either. People said that the block must be choked but the drain tap at the back of the block always ran clean and clear. I was getting desperate even thinking of including the car in my downsizing sale of motor cars. (Eight have gone so far in my downsizing.)

The only thing left was the water pump which was certainly turning. However, taking it off at last disclosed what was causing the problem. The vanes were completely choked with silt. In fact, the pump is still absolutely operational once the vanes were cleared, but I had bought a new pump anyway so that has gone onto the car. That was done at the end of the summer and thank goodness, all is well again at last. The temperature has never climbed above 80'C which is what it used to do. Even on recent cold days, the engine warms up quite quickly without the thermostat but I think that I will replace it in due course.

So the little car is no longer in disgrace and will continue its life with us as Daphne's favourite car.

## Early Garage Experiences with Minis by Helen Kirkness

Following the 1970s photo of me with my Mini (and Afghan Coat) I've put down on paper my garage experiences with my first two Minis - they're good tales and perhaps explain why I'm a bit nippy in garages!!



When I was 21, I inherited £200 from a great aunt and I blew the lot on a 1965 Morris Mini 850 that I bought from an impoverished Irish vet at Stirling Uni. I had to import her from Eire and in those days, DVLC gave a car the registration of the year it was imported - so it was a Mk 1 Mini, with 55,000 miles on the clock, but sporting a 1973 registration. There was often a crowd of pedants round her, asking why a Mk 1 had an 'M' reg.

Anyway, my dear father disapproved of me spending the £200 on a car and didn't speak to me for a month - until he had to go into Edinburgh for a meeting and his car wouldn't start. He asked to borrow Irish Min and I nobly lent her to him. Whereupon he thrashed her into town and blew the head gasket - which he then strenuously denied!

The car needed a head gasket and I was a penniless student - but all was not lost. The boss at the local garage, where I served petrol during the hols, said they would do it at cost price to help me out. The young apprentice had just qualified, could now work on his own and the boss said he should be able to do a Mini head gasket in under 4 hours, so it wouldn't be horrendously expensive.

I turned up at the end of the day as the young lad was checking the tappets. Bossman then said 'start her up' - he had the radiator cap off - and when the engine started, a great gout of water shot up out of the radiator. Me and another customer looked into the engine bay to see a waterfall of gunge running down the block - the daft laddie had forgotten to fit the head gasket!!!! The boss hardly ever swore, but he did on that occasion, telling the lad to go have his supper, then 'get back here and sort out this \*\*\*\*\* mess.' I got the car back at 11.30 pm.

As she was running well, I popped in the next day to tell the boss so and he asked me not to spread it around the village - he'd got the other customer sworn to complete secrecy too. Now, the daft laddie was a bit of a cheeky so & so and could be lippy in the pub. The best way to silence him was to say 'don't be a such silly gasket' and he'd go very quiet as he didn't want his pals to know just how much of a silly gasket he'd been!!

My second car (Irish Min was written off after an eedjit drove into her) was a 1967 Austin Mini 1000 called Shoogie, as he had a few shoogles. He had done 73,000 miles when I bought him from Sonny Swinton and did the daily commute from West Linton to Dalkeith faultlessly - until about a couple of months before I was due to get married and sell him. Now this is what happened, in the order it happened, and I don't really know enough to know if they're all related or not - you can decide.

Firstly he started to pink badly, and all three mechanics set the timing - the last being the boss who said of the daft laddie 'Thought you set this? It's miles out!'

Then there was clutch slip - but on a level road in top gear at 45/50 mph. I was told 'That's not when clutches slip, Hen' - the garage did a hill start or two with absolutely no problem.

Next was the oil pressure dropping when you went up a hill. 'It's done a high mileage, don't worry.'

Finally there were funny grinding noises and the engine sounded rough and unbalanced. Then it would just go 'click' and was fine. I spent two months going into the garage about twice a week, but Shoogie never, ever did it for them. They asked me what I thought it was and I said with all the confidence of a 24 year old, that it was the clutch or the bit next to the clutch. They said, not unreasonably I suppose, that they weren't taking the engine out on my say so

- especially as I couldn't afford it!

The day before my first wedding, I was driving to West Linton with the flowers for the church, had just got through Carlops, with Shoogie sounding like a complete bag of loose bolts - when he went clunk, judder and stopped. I started him and boy was he rough, and if I let the clutch out - clunk, judder, engine stopped. Being enterprising, I found that if I rode the clutch, he would go - so I limped the couple of miles to West Linton, riding the clutch. (This was 1976 so no mobiles to phone for help)

Pulled into the garage and went completely ape 'I've been telling you for months there was something wrong with that car and you wouldn't listen and now it's totally knackered and the advert goes in the paper on Monday and I need the money to pay the lawyers for the cottage and ..... and .....

The boss got into the car with me, saying 'You can't let out the clutch without it clunking and killing the engine?' 'Yes' says I - 'I had to ride the clutch from Carlops.' He started the car (it sounded as sweet as a nut) dropped the clutch and Shoogie shot off the forecourt like a scalded cat. The boss headed out of the village and went up and down the gears - all behaving perfectly. You know those times (I seem to get a lot of them) when you just wish the floor would open up and swallow you? Well, this was yet another of them. The boss had just started to say I was a neurotic B\*\*\*\* and there was nothing wrong with the car, when it went clunk, judder and died.

him 'What's that?'

me 'I told you, it's the clutch or the bit next the clutch.'

him 'How are we going to get back to the village?'

me 'Ride the clutch'

him 'That won't help - it's \*\*\*\*\*!'

me 'Just ride the clutch, it'll be fine'

So, he rode the clutch, got back to the garage without a hitch and said they'd take the engine out and let me know. It transpired that the flywheel had been off Shoogie at some time and put back without the benefit of lock-tabs and it had started to work loose. Of course, I asked what a flywheel was - he took a step back and said 'The bit next to the clutch.'

My theory is that as the flywheel worked loose, it would wobble a bit which caused the grinding noises and rough, unbalanced running and then it would click back into place and all would be sweetness and light, until the next wobble. I'm supposing it was so loose and wobbled so badly by the Carlops incident that it stopped the engine, but me riding the clutch must have got it back into place somehow - which is why it was fine when the boss drove it, until it wobbled again!!

Anyway, the crankshaft was completely knackered (unsurprisingly) so the boss found me a reasonably priced 1100 engine from a write-off and fitted it for me - but apparently marrying the gearbox to it was problematical. When I went to pick up the car, the old mechanic took me aside and said 'Don't you be giving him grief about the size of your bill. He's spent hours on that car that he hasn't charged you for - he felt bad, ken, with you getting your engine wrecked 'coz he hadn't listened to you.'

So, there's good guys out there! The engine and labour totalled £110 and I sold Shoogie for £350 - so there was a decent wedge to go to the lawyers for buying the cottage. And Shoogie? Well, he went like a bat out of H\*\*\* with the 1100 engine, but sometimes jumped out of third gear.

Now, I was 24 and had never worked on a car in my puff, but I was amazingly accurate with my assessment - even if I didn't know what a flywheel was. But it was a complete gut reaction, seat of the pants conclusion - all I can say is that you don't drive 40 miles a day for a year in a shoogly old Mini without getting to know it extremely well, including every squeak, rattle and foible. When you get odd things happening you notice and I was adamant it centred on the clutch (or the bit next to the clutch) - purely a gut feeling though. However, perhaps I was wrong about the clutch slip - maybe it was flywheel slip??!!!!

## Rod and Cat's Triumphs by Rod McLachlan

I bought Betty, my Triumph TR4, in 1988 at the age of 22. She looked great and had recently been "home-restored", with polaroid slides to prove it. For the next 29 years I was happy in the belief that under the shiny red paintwork lay an immaculate bodyshell. So I ran around in her on and off, keeping her in various garages while I moved houses around the UK. Engine and gearbox rebuilds revealed some frightening bodes but still I believed the bodyshell was in tip-top order.



Then in 2017, after some long-held shares had taken an upturn, I decided on a full body repaint, retrim and new chrome. The restoration company lifted the bodyshell from the chassis then took a soda blaster to it. I will never forget the January day when I was asked to inspect the results. Epic amounts of 1980s filler had retained moisture beneath the paint and rotted the seams along every panel. The home restorer has riveted a biscuit tin lid (Peek Freans, not your usual rubbish) over a hole in the rear inner wing. Every panel was scrap. The bill for new metal alone was





knee buckling and the quote to finish the car quadrupled overnight. With no option, I borrowed heavily just to get the bodyshell welded, painted and the unfinished car delivered home. Betty is due back in my garage this Summer, over 3 years after delivery to the restorer. The rewiring, fitting-out and trimming will have to be my personal challenge but at least I'll be putting parts back onto a perfect shell.

It's a story that happens to many people, often with sadder outcomes. I hope other BVAC members remember that any number of horrors can be lurking under nice paint. Unless you've seen the bare shell take absolutely nothing for granted. One day I'll look back and laugh. My wife will take a little longer.



One financial option would have been to sell my other Triumph, a GT6 Mk3. My daughter Cat and I have loved doing the BVAC Treasure Hunts and East Fortune Wheels & Wings in the GT6 for the last couple of years. I have such an emotional attachment to it (as does Cat) that I would rather sell a kidney than part with it. A classic "man in a pub" purchase, it lay sadly in the pub car park with a failed clutch. Many years, miles and two children later he was christened "Dusty" by Cat. The rolling restoration approach is wonderful in helping to budget and spread costs while still enjoying the car. It certainly beats the "hand over to a restorer and remortgage your house" approach. Dusty flew through his MoT again last week and gets looks wherever he goes. GT6s are rarer than you think, perhaps a couple of hundred Mk3s

are on the road now, so when a local friend bought one from Yorkshire and brought it round we had to do a double-take. The attached picture shows the cars side-by-side at the Linlithgow Classic Car Day last year, that's Dusty on the right. Note the respective number plates. *[Ed: I fondly remember ogling a neighbour's then 4 year old GT6 when I was just about managing to run an ancient Austin A35 on a student grant and holiday jobs. I always thought they were one of the best looking sportscars of the time.]*



When Betty is back on the road (2021, 2022?) it will be time for Dusty to have a well earned break and some attention and money spent on her. I'm sure the two cars will never be completely perfect at the same point in time but it's actually quite nice to have one runner and one project on the go.

## Thirlestane Going Blue

We may not be having a car show at Thirlestane this year, but Edward and his team at the castle have put on a different kind of show. In common with a number of historic houses, they're going blue to show support for the NHS. Quite an impressive look!





## Help Wanted

Dick Warren has emailed: "I have a neighbour, an engineer and blacksmith, who is restoring a 1950s Foden truck and he is looking for a skilled panelbeater who could help him with replacement door 'skins'. It struck me that some BVAC member might know of someone suitable." If anyone can help, please contact Dick at [dickwarren92@yahoo.com](mailto:dickwarren92@yahoo.com)

Well, that's all for this month, I guess it's back to the garage/garden/house. Thanks for all the contributions, keep 'em coming!

Stay safe,

David