



Second time around

JOHN KENT bought his MGB twice – once in 1975 and then again in 2023. It must be a good one, then!

It's some time in January 1975 and I've just tried opening the bootlid of my Lotus Elan Sprint. It's only three years old (I've had it for just three months) and the lock is jammed. Of course, the car lives outside as I'm only 22 and share a flat with three other lads. Plus I'd sold my Mini 1000, then bought the Elan and when the insurance renewal came through it was a huge £240 for third party, fire and theft cover. I really couldn't afford it, so I took the Elan over to the London Sports Car Centre in Edgware, the nearest Lotus dealers, to get a new lock. 'Sorry, but you need a complete set of locks.'

That was it – the Elan had to go. So I went around to the sales department and the salesman showed me a nice 18 month old MGB. It was Blaze orange with wire wheels. I didn't really want Blaze or wire wheels, but it had only been owned by British Leyland as a company car. It had done a reasonably busy 19,244 miles, but a deal was done and they took the Elan in part exchange and I gave an extra £265, making the purchase price £1265. I know this because I still have the purchase invoice from 1975!

Now I had something I didn't have to worry about breaking down, and it was a great car. So good I kept it for over seven years. I was lucky to have some company cars, so the MGB was just

my weekend toy with only a modest mileage added every year. When I did finally decide that it had to go, the first person to see it agreed £2100, but the deal fell through and I re-advertised the car, finally selling it for £2200 to a gentleman who lived in central London. I still have that receipt, too!

Every so often I would drive past the square in which he lived and there would be my old MGB. Over the years I checked with the DVLA and sure enough it was still taxed and on the road. I always thought about buying it back, and was so keen that in January 2023 I ran a wanted ad in *Enjoying MG* just to make contact with the owner. There was no reply, but fast forward to 12th December 2023, the evening of the Olney Classic Car Club Christmas BBQ, and I got chatting MGs with my friend Derek, owner of a lovely BGT.

'I could even show you a picture of my car,' I volunteered to Derek, as Googling my old car usually brought up some pictures taken by random people. Within moments, there was my car – but posted in the For Sale section of the MGOC! I just could not believe it, and the ad was very recent too. 'Just two owners, and the last for over 40 years - Condition 4.'

Next morning I called the MGOC and was given the number of the seller. The gentleman who answered

explained that his brother, the owner, had died in June and he was handling his affairs, including the sale of the MG. When I explained that I was the original owner, he was shocked. When he sent me the copy of the original V5 showing my name and address from 1982, I was almost as surprised as he was! I was even more surprised to see that I was recorded as the first owner, even though I know that BL owned the car before I bought it.

Two days later I was installing a new battery at Rod's house and the old car fired up. I thought the speedo reading of 23,000 miles was too good to be true. 'It's been round the clock twice,' explained Rod, who had checked through the incredible stack of invoices, every one since 1982. He also put me in touch with Robert, owner of the north London MG specialists who had looked after the car for the last 25 years. He had become a firm family friend over the years and was also pleased to hear from me.

Now, a car that has lived outside in Hyde Park Square for over 40 years was never going to be pristine, and sure enough a huge amount of welding and new parts had been fitted, plus it had a couple of accidents over the years. Robert also explained that some more welding would be required and had agreed £1200 at the next service. On my checking the car, I had seen the rotten front inner wheelarch and footwell on the passenger side,



Sure enough, on the ramp it looked old but not decrepit and David explained that it needed a new engine, the gearbox and overdrive needed rebuilding, the suspension and steering needed totally overhauling, the diff and back axle needed attention and so on. But the good news was that although there was rust, it didn't need a new bodyshell! Of course, I knew before even visiting Oselli that I was

going to have the work done. It was never going to be financially sensible, but then who else gets the chance to buy back the car they originally bought 50 years ago? So we agreed that David would give me a complete list of works that needed doing, and I was keen that we introduced some tasteful and sensible upgrades to make it a realistic daily driver. Not that it would ever be my real daily driver, but one I could at least just get in and drive as reliably as a new car.

The first thing was to totally strip the car, exposing all the rot which was confined to the passenger inner wheelarch, the bulkhead area around the heater and also the offside rear suspension mounting. I guess I was fortunate that although my car had lived in London, it wasn't used every day, and when it was used, it did long journeys to nationwide football grounds. Over 40 years Jeremy averaged 4750 miles a year.

It was then sent to Olney and by another amazing coincidence to a bodyshop I know very well. Mark is a proper old school bodywork man and he undertook all the welding and prep work. My car had to have the same colour scheme as when new, so it was finished in Blaze orange with the appropriate navy blue interior. Mark has done a brilliant job, and everyone admires the quality of the paintwork.

As a non craftsman but enthusiastic car owner, I was keen to do some of the work myself and David boxed up lots of the chrome parts for me to clean. Unfortunately, many of the parts were really just too pitted, but I am pleased that I was able to totally strip and restore the radiator grille and various other parts. One thing I am particularly pleased with is the



gear knob insert, which was hiding in the glovebox. The white lettering had almost disappeared, but after several hours I'd cleaned off the old black paint and carefully refreshed the gear lever pattern in white paint and then sprayed the whole of the underside with satin black. Even though the plastic is slightly cracked, it's original, and glued back into the top of the leather gear knob it looks just right!

For the engine we agreed an Oselli fast road spec (1950cc) and, after some deliberation, running on SU carburettors. The Weber option might be the sporty version and potentially less likely to go out of tune, but I really didn't want the induction roar that you

get with those. Of course, pretty much everything else under the bonnet is new. One thing that is so important though is the exhaust note. That distinctive sound had to be retained and the Manifold manifold and exhaust are really just perfect, albeit perhaps a decibel or two louder than the original.

For the suspension we discussed all the options, but David recommended we stick with the conventional wishbones and just add adjustable Spax dampers. There are lots of articles about how you can improve the suspension and roadholding of MGBs, but I'm not here to race around the countryside, just to drive and enjoy my MGB in the way I did all those years ago. I was also keen to ensure the car sat on the road correctly as many rebuilds have the car higher than when new. Paul Eales (David's son), who actually rebuilt my car and who builds the MGB race cars that Oselli prepare, made sure, and if anything the back is perhaps slightly lower than it should be, but I think it looks excellent!

The wire wheels were never my favourite option on the later MGBs. I'd always wanted Minilite style alloys, and wanted bigger 15in rims as per the MGC as they look very good, filling the wheelarches just that bit better than 14in wheels. There are actually several options available, but I had to have the centre lock versions and really liked the Minator in silver with fully painted rims. I was also keen to retain the octagonal nut as it was original to my car, and on the alloys I think looks





much neater than the eared spinners.

For the tyres, David is a big fan of Bridgestones (partly because they look period correct) and when Mark prepped the bodywork we got him to thin down the rear wheelarch lip so we could use 195/65 x 15in tyres. They look perfect and handle really well too.

Of course the old windscreen had leaked and had lots of silicon sealant applied, and the front quarterlight windows (stainless like all the later cars) were split, so both were totally rebuilt by specialists. For the hood, it had to be a black mohair and it fits perfectly. The one thing I have found though is that when folding the hood, it really needs to be folded so it fits under the frame as it is lowered rather than folded over the top. I think the fabric is that much thicker than the old vinyl and if folded over the top really doesn't sit down properly. I've yet to think about getting a hood tonneau...

Finally, the interior. It had to be

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navy blue as that's the original colour. However, during my car's life in London it had been squatted in and the old vinyl ruined and replaced by some fairly non-original black, so there was nothing to salvage. My car never had headrests (or a brake servo which was an option when new) so David suggested we use the MGOC Sports Seats which you can buy in navy blue. So that's the colour for all the interior. Interestingly the door cards are vinyl as apparently vinyl works better than leather on those door cards. The door pulls are the original ones and amazingly colour match perfectly, which is surprising as the new navy is much lighter than the original vinyl.

David also covered the centre console in matching blue leather and I think it looks really good. We also fitted navy carpets throughout. Of course, the dash was refinished in black crackle and the instruments checked and some replaced. As you can imagine, a new heater was installed as are all the control, cables and wiring loom. Oselli also fitted two 12v batteries as it provides superior starting energy.

Whilst I still have the original steering wheel, we agreed that a new leather covered Moto Lita wheel was needed and after debate agreed on 14in. Other things to consider included the bumpers. Unfortunately the old ones would have needed dents knocking out, so we decided that rather than rechroming, we would simply buy new. This suited me very well as I was keen to adopt the look of chrome bumpers without over-riders. This caused some more discussion because the rear over-riders house the number plate lights! Paul suggested that we use the number plate lights from rubber bumper cars and they actually look pretty good, although I see that Frontline use some small LED lights for their rear number plate. By the way, Oselli have fitted LED lights throughout the car and I'm very happy that I can drive a 50 year old car at night and properly see the road ahead, knowing also that other road users can see me!

My car was finished right at the end of 2024 and so far I've covered just over 500 miles. It drives beautifully, though Oselli have some snagging to take care of which was of course only to be expected. There is a list four pages long of the new parts they have supplied and I think I have as new an MGB as is possible, but at a fraction of the cost of a Frontline creation. More importantly, it's my old car!

EMG

