

Breckenridge or Bust (Make that Breckenridge and Bust)

By Ron Parks

Fate—Luck—Guardian Angel? You decide. But, first let me digress and tell you about our trip to MG2009 in Breckenridge Colorado from the beginning. There would be seven (7) MGs traveling together, although it almost seemed like eight (8), as Eddie Cole was in constant contact with his brother Jim, who was driving his MGB V8 from Oregon, traveling almost the same distance that we were from Ohio. On the morning of Sunday June 21, 2009; the Loofts, Terry, Carole and their son Ryan; met up with Eddie Cole in Cincinnati; Eddie lives in Kentucky. Torey Looft and Sandra were to and did meet us at our first overnight stop in Concordia Missouri. Dar Planeaux met me in Englewood and after a quick breakfast at McDonalds we headed towards our rendezvous with the rest of the group at the first rest area west of Indianapolis on I-70. Bill Hammond was to have gone with us, but did not feel comfortable being away with his home on the market. Mike and Kay Maloney were considering making the trek with us as well, but had just returned from the MG V8 meet. You guys missed a good one!



Dar and I pulled into the rest area to find MGs already there. They had arrived only moments earlier. We all had our tops down at this point, except for Eddie Cole who had his back window unzipped. More on Eddie's back window later. We proceeded onward, stopping at a Jack n the Box Restaurant for lunch. It was very hot. Some of the tops went up, Terry and Carole's among them, of course, with their air conditioning on (Smart alecks, or maybe just smart?). The rest of the day was uneventful with Ryan Looft leading the pack; he and his GPS guiding us to our first night's accommodation at the Days Inn in Concordia Missouri. Torey and Sandra were already there when we arrived and after checking in and freshening up a little, we all went next door to Pizza Hut for



Beer and Pizza. A good first day was done.

Day 2, Monday—We awoke to ominous dark clouds to the west and radar was showing thunderstorms. We all put our tops up and zipped up the back windows. Remember Eddie's back window zipper? I believe he may have gotten it zipped up this time, for the last time. The thunderstorm lasted only a few minutes, after which the back windows were

unzipped although the tops stayed up. Kansas was very hot with outside temperatures at times exceeding 100 degrees. Somewhere near Salina Kansas we came upon a windmill farm. We drove the extra 20 miles south to see Monument rock. These are actually interesting looking chalk rock formations sticking up in the middle of a valley. They appear from quite a distance and we felt it was worth the 5 mile drive on a gravel road to reach them. We posed our MGs, as nature intended, for several photos before retracing the 20 miles back to I-70 in our dust laden



MGs. We reached our stop for the night at the Howard Johnson's Motel in Goodland Kansas well before dark. We all kind of foraged on our own for the evening meal. While Dar and I were washing our cars, a man approached and began taking pictures. He was from Collector Car magazine; or was it the Goodland Star-News weekly newspaper. Oh, Yah, that's right. It was the latter. Someone from the hotel had phoned him to say there were some MGs staying for the night. He interviewed several of us and took several photos. While the article may not be factual: we didn't know there was such a thing as a 1977 MGA or that Dar Planeaux resides in Dearborn rather than Fairborn, and leaving Eddie Cole unsupervised with him turned many of our cars into Limited Editions; his heart was in the right place and we got coverage in the Goodland Star-News. If you would like to read the article, search/google—Goodland Star-News, Click on Goodland Star-News, open Archived Pages at the bottom left of the home page, click on Goodland Star-News Pages 2009, Click on gsn pages/06 Jun, Click on Week 4, Click on Friday, Click on news pg3 6-26.pdf. Be patient, this page takes a while to load.

Day 3, Tuesday—This was to be a relatively short driving day: 185 miles to Colorado Springs for a drive up Pikes Peak and a visit to the Garden of the Gods Park followed by an 82 mile drive to Golden. The drive between Colorado Springs and Denver is one with which I would become very familiar, referring back to that “Fate—Luck—Guardian Angel?” thing. More on that later. Anyway, it wasn't meant to be. Just inside Colorado, Dar's MGA began running rough and lacked power.



We pulled into a rest area and began eliminating possible causes, with Dar saying all

along it was a blown head gasket. The one instrument that Terry Looft did not have in his voluptuous trailer overflowing with parts and tools and does have now, since Ryan went to the nearest NAPA store and bought one; was a compression tester. See the article by Dar Planeaux elsewhere in this issue where he tells the complete story in his own words. While we were working on Dar's head gasket, Eddie Cole was using his North



American MGB Register Mutual Aid Directory to locate an upholstery shop in the Denver area to get a new zipper installed in the back window of his convertible top. After several phone calls, he located someone to do the job and drove on ahead by himself to Golden CO to have that job done. The rest of us, of course, abandoned our

plans to visit Pike's Peak and Garden of the Gods and traveled onward directly to Golden. In Denver, Torey Looft's front left brake locked up. Ryan, leading with his GPS, led Dar and me to the hotel in Golden, and then went back to find that Torey's brakes were functioning again after having been bled. That evening I had a nice dinner with friends who live in Golden, with whom I made plans for a bicycle tour the next week. My plans



were to stay over a few days after MG 2009 to visit several friends and relatives in the Denver area.

Day 4, Wednesday—After breakfast we gathered at Mimi's restaurant where the Gateway tour of the Rockies to Breckenridge began. It was a beautiful tour starting with the switchbacks up Lookout Mountain above Golden and the Coors brewery. Buffalo Bill Cody's grave site is at the top of Lookout Mountain with views of snow capped mountains in the distance. This is where Jim Cole's clutch



hydraulics went out. The hose had worn through. Terry Looft and others worked to make the repair in some fashion and we were soon on our way again. The tour took us through Squaw pass and over Loveland pass where we crossed the Continental Divide at 11,990 feet. We stopped to take pictures. We stopped at some point to put our tops up in the rain. It was a beautiful drive! After settling into our rooms,



we all met at the bar for some dinner and drinks. It was during dinner that we realized we had not called Skip at the MG Car Club meeting in Dayton. I guess we were just having too good of a time to take time to call to say we were having a good time.

Day 5, Thursday—Having observed bicyclists riding on the bike path as we drove into Breckenridge, Torey, Sandra and I decided to rent bicycles and ride to Frisco, the village about 10 miles down the valley. The altitude told on us a little, Torey and I more so than Sandra who runs marathons. The few hills we encountered were not terribly steep or long, although the return trip was a gradual uphill ride. It was an enjoyable ride, even with some rain part of the time. While we were riding bikes, Terry, Carole and Ryan Looft were touring the Coors brewery in Golden and enjoying free beer. It was reported that Carole didn't drink that much, but that Terry and Ryan took up the slack. They had a good time. Later that afternoon, while I was washing my car a couple walking by saw my Ohio plates and asked what part I was from. "Dayton," I said and they asked if I know Ed Hill. Sure, "Fast Eddie," I said. The guy handed me his ear piece and said "Here, do you want to talk to him. Ed said he was on the other side of the building headed my way and would be there soon. The couple was Ed's brother and sister in law, who had their rubber bumper B at the show. Eddie had flown out there with



his Mother.

Day 6, Friday—Rally time. Ryan and I teamed up for the Time, Speed, Distance rally.



Ryan drove his car and I was his navigator. Terry and Carole participated in the rally too. Our car number was 23 that meant we departed at 8:23 am. Terry and Carole were car number 18, which meant we should have seen them at some of the layovers, but we never saw them again after the first check point? The rally retraced some of the territory we had already seen and some new areas too. We had a layover at Loveland pass, where we took a picture

of Ryan and his car by the Continental Divide sign. We felt like we were doing pretty well as we drove the rally. We didn't miss any turns and we pretty much averaged the speed indicated on the rally instructions. We applied for an adjustment of 6 minutes and 50 seconds because of a construction delay. For every second we were early or late, and we were always early, one point was deducted from your score. We took third place in the rally with 327 points deducted. The winners had only 47 points deducted. This was an 80 mile rally. We all went to dinner together that evening at a very good Mexican restaurant.



Day 7, Saturday—This was car show day. The gates opened we went in, prepared our cars, got our chairs and everything out of the cars, set up in the grass. Then the sprinklers came on; a detail someone had overlooked. Needless to say, our stuff got wet before we could get it all moved. After 15 minutes or so the sprinklers were turned off. The weather was nice for the car show. It was the only afternoon it didn't rain in



Breckenridge. Someone said there were well over 250 cars in the show. There was a supercharged MG TF, lots of MGB V8/V6 conversions and even a V8 MGA. There were 10 or 12 Limited Edition Bs and a dozen or so Bs in each class. I was fortunate enough to place third in my class, MGB 73-74



Honeycomb Grille. We were disappointed that Dar did not win an award with his MGA. There were several nice MGAs there and one, a red one, was a fresh restoration. Still, we thought Dar's was as nice as any on the show field. Our club banner was on display under the Loof's push-up most of the afternoon and became our gathering place. The food was good at the awards banquet where we were served at our tables.

Day 8, Sunday—It was time to leave after a fun week in the Rockies with our MGs. This was a very well organized event all through-out the week, right up until the last morning. There was supposed to be a continental breakfast, but everything was gone when we got there and we were not all that late either. That and the sprinklers at the car show were the only two slip-ups we can cite. The rally and tours were very well planned and well manned, and



womaned. The display of MGs in the hall was just spectacular. It is amazing that Colorado club members collectively own one of almost every MG ever made! Hats off to the MG 2009 committee, for a job well done! We look forward to 2010 in Ontario!

visit friends in the Denver area. The rest of the group headed east on I-70 shortly thereafter for the trouble free, three day trek back to Ohio. I'm told there were some walls of adult beverage cans built in the motel parking lots in the evenings during the group's trip home? I was off to



meet my sister in law, Valerie, to retrace the first half of the Gateway to the Rockies tour. We did and the scenery was just as spectacular as it was the first time. This was my second time up Lookout Mountain overlooking Golden; my third would be on a



bicycle. After a nice lunch in Idaho Springs, we headed back to the Denver suburb of Aurora.

Day 9, Monday—This was another day of touring with Valerie. Our plan was to drive to the summit of Pike's Peak and then visit Garden of the Gods. We headed to Colorado Springs and stopped near the Air Force Academy to take some pictures and watch some



gliders soar around the mountain tops. The MG was running fine. We were cruising comfortably with the top up and back window unzipped. Upon arrival at the entrance to Pike's Peak, I noticed the sign warning me to have at least ½ tank of fuel. Obey this sign! The trip up the mountain in low gears takes a lot of fuel. My fuel gauge is a little off, but judging by the mileage, I should have had plenty of fuel. The trip up was fun. Valerie was

snapping pictures; I was watching the road which had no guard rails. We stopped at the little lake half way up and a few other spots for photos. We made it to the summit; took all the obligatory pictures: the sign 14,110 feet, the MG at the top of the world, walked around some and headed back down.

The car was running OK at the beginning, then started running rough and died. I assumed, correctly, that the plugs were fouled, what with the thin air and down shifting. After stopping to clean the plugs, the car started and ran long enough to make it past the only up hill stretch during the descent. This time I chose to coast to the bottom, which we did just fine, using the brakes and down shifting. I stopped short of the entrance to clean the plugs again and



warn the ranger that we needed to keep moving and coast to the Winery restaurant by the highway. He directed traffic and we did just that, thinking we were merely out of gas. After a good lunch at the Winery, one of the restaurant employees agreed to take me to buy a gas can and some gas. After pouring in the gallon of gas the car started, but I noticed the back carburetor overflowing into the charcoal canister. I had drilled a vent hole in the top of the charcoal canister the last time it caused an overflow problem, so the problem must have been the float or the Grose Jet? It quit leaking, so we began driving the four miles to the nearest gas station. Two miles into it we were out of gas again. I played my Hagerty card, calling to request gas. At this point I was still optimistic that we're just out of gas. Before Hagerty service arrived, a man driving a red Corvette

stopped. I explained our plight to him and he happened to have a two gallon can of gas with him. Starting the car after putting gas in the tank, revealed the back carburetor squirting a steady stream out the overflow. What to do?

Now we're getting back to that "Fate—Luck—Guardian Angel?" thing. It so happened that this man, Howard Dawson, had owned a 74 MGB and had sold it just a year ago. He



mentioned in passing that he had put a Weber carburetor on it and got 33 mpg. This didn't seem important at the time. Howard offered to let me have the car towed to his house, just across the highway from the Winery restaurant. I could work on it there and use any of his tools. So, that's what we did. I took the back carburetor off, checked the float and the Grose jet. Everything looked good. The float floated in water and when held under water,

produced no air bubbles. I could blow through the Grose jet and stop the flow with my finger. I thought there had most likely been a piece of dirt in there and now it's gone; I'll put it back together and everything will be fine? It still overflowed. By this time it was getting late, Mrs. Dawson was feeding Valerie hotdogs and offering them to me and then Howard offered use of his old Mercedes station wagon for our trip back to Denver, so that Valerie could go to work Tuesday morning. What a generous couple! We can't thank them enough!

Day 10, Tuesday—My first phone call the next morning, using my North American MGB Register Mutual Aid Directory was to Curtiss Allen, who referred me to Sports Car Craftsmen. (I have nothing but high praise for their work!) This was the right place to call, however, Paul Dierschow, the owner told me that they were completely out of floats and needles, what with all the MGs from lower altitudes, attending MG2009, having had the same problem. He was expecting a shipment in on Thursday, the day I had planned to leave. He offered to have parts flown in on Wednesday, for which I agreed to pay. Then I was kicking myself, wishing I had brought my carburetors with me. Oh, well, I'll just have to drive back to Colorado Springs and get them. Remember, I said that I would become very familiar with that stretch of road? Driving down there, I thought I'd better call Howard and let him know what the plan was. He answered the phone and told me that he had found the HIF4 SU carburetors that had been on his MG; prior to installation

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of his Weber carburetor. He had cleaned them up and they looked pretty good. I could borrow them to drive my car to Denver and then ship them back to him, if I'd like. I just can't thank him enough! I installed his carburetors on the car. It started, did not overflow; didn't idle all that great, but it got me back to Denver.

That evening I stuck to my plan to visit a school friend who lives in Littleton. Drove to his house in the afternoon to wash the MG in the shade of his front yard. Went back to the hotel, showered, changed and drove back to Dan's to go to dinner with him and his wife, Erlinda. When I pulled in their driveway, my brake pedal went nearly to the floor. I almost hit his garage. My master cylinder had failed. It had plenty of fluid in it, but it was sloshing past the piston apparently. One more thing for Sports Car Craftsmen to fix. Nonetheless, we had a nice dinner and visit, after which I nursed the car slowly back to my hotel in Aurora, carefully down shifting and using the hand brake. Did the same the next morning, waiting until after rush hour, to get the MG to Sports Car Craftsmen in Arvada.

Day 11 Wednesday—My parts that we had flown in arrived at Sports Car Craftsmen before me. After looking over the spacious, clean shop and looking at all the cool British Sports cars there, I began removing Howard's carburetors from my engine while the mechanic, Ted Ax worked on mine. He replaced the floats and float needles and generally cleaned the carburetors. After reinstalling them, he had trouble getting a good smooth



idle and getting them balanced. Inspection after the second of three removals revealed that the butterfly in the front carburetor was undersized, allowing air to pass. Some throttle shaft problems were fixed as well. The last item needing attention was to center the jets. The electronic analyzer gave very good readings and Ted attempted to set the carburetors rich for Ohio driving, but I had to enrich them a couple of times during the trip home. To the credit of Steve Miller of MG Automotive, the electronic analyzer indicated that my engine is very strong, as it should be with only 20K miles on it. My MG runs so well now with the carburetors balanced and tuned, after driving from Denver home, I got back into the car Sunday for an evening cruise with Linda. The car is like new and just such a pleasure to drive!

That evening I stayed with my friends in Golden. Steve and Robyn, his bride to be, loaned me a bicycle and rode with me to the top of Lookout Mountain, a five mile ride that climbs 2,000 feet. We took our time, with rest breaks to take pictures along the way. It took us an hour and ½ from start to finish to reach the top, 40 minutes actual ride time. I'm sure I held them back? The ride down was 15 minutes of pure fun!



Day 12, Thursday—I departed for home on I-70. I decided to keep my reservation at the hotel in Warrenton Missouri, cancel the one in Russell Kansas and drive two days worth the first day. It was a long day, but OK. Other than stopping to enrich the carburetors, the drive was uneventful.



Day 13, Friday—Using the piston lifting pins on the carburetors the next morning I determined that the back carburetor was still running a little lean; enriched it, got a good idle and hit the road for the last leg. I decided to stay on I-70 through St. Louis and so got some good pictures of the arch. I arrived home to find my Daughter and Granddaughter visiting from Cleveland. What a joy! It's good to be home!



Throughout my ordeal, a lot of things could have gone wrong and didn't. The MG could have failed to keep running to get past the only up hill on the trip down Pike's Peak—it did not. Our timing could easily have been such that we would have missed

Howard Dawson, who stopped to help us—it was not. Howard might not have had the gas can full of gas with him—he did. My brakes could have failed coming down off Pike's Peak, with disastrous results—they did not. My brakes could have caused me to run into my friend's garage, damaging my car and his garage—they did not. This brings us to the question: was it Fate—Luck—Guardian Angel? I don't know, but remember this: I was fortunate; the first person who stopped to help me had a set of HIF4 SU carburetors setting on the shelf in his garage. Sometimes you can wait all day for that to happen!

MG 2009 The Head Gasket Episode

By Dar Planeaux

The sun was up and shining brightly for the third day of the trip to Breckenridge, Colorado indicating another day of temperatures in the high 90s to low 100s, as it had been through the first two days of the trip. Leaving Goodland, Kansas shortly after 8 AM the group of seven MGs pulled out onto I-70 and began the last day's drive with only about 30 miles left in Kansas before crossing into Colorado. As we approached the Colorado state line, I began to hear what sounded like faint exhaust pulses emanating from under the bonnet and a definite loss of power, indicating the possibility of a blown head gasket. This was not the first time that had happened, with similar sounds, but the loss of power was much less than what I had experienced on previous occasions and the sound was not as pronounced, giving me slight hope that maybe it was not actually the head gasket that had failed. The group managed to drive into Colorado and stop at the first rest area and Welcome Center, twelve miles inside the Colorado state line, albeit at a reduced rate of only about 50 mph.

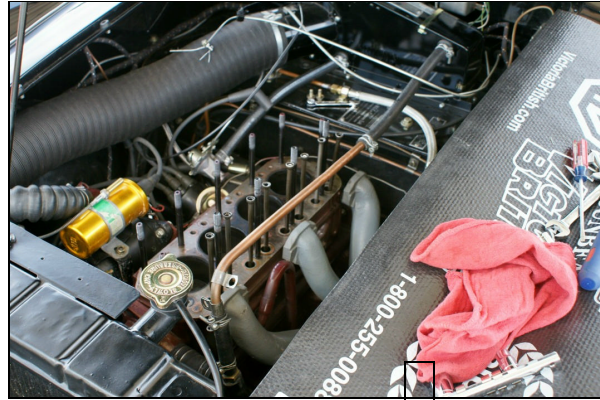
Once the bonnet was up and the whole entourage was gathered around, the different opinions were reviewed, with again the faint hope that maybe it was just an exhaust manifold gasket, or better yet, maybe a carburetor problem, since the noise emanating each time the throttle was blipped, seemed to originate from around the carburetors. After several attempts at adjustments and test drives around the rest area, the problem and the exhaust sounds remained. To prove the problem was tied to the head gasket, a compression check was required, but of course none of us had remembered to include a compression tester in our ample supply of tools and spare parts in all the different tool bags accompanying us on the trip. However, since the rest area was right at the Burlington, Colorado exit, Ryan Loofth checked his trusty GPS and found NAPA and other auto parts store less than a half mile away.





While Ryan was off acquiring a compression tester, a wire brush, additional sets of spark plugs for spares, and a few other needed items, the party/work tent was extracted from the Looft's trailer and setup, so that if a head gasket replacement was needed, it could be at least accomplished in the relative shade of the tent. Once the compression was tested, no pressure was measured in cylinder 2 or 3, indicating the gasket was blown between cylinder 2 and 3 and the teardown began.

After removing the carburetors, I began the head removal and Terry Looft began tearing the front carburetor down to fix the problem of a stuck jet assembly that turned in the seating when the mixture adjusting nut was turned. Once the head was off it was easy to see that as suspected, the gasket was blown right between cylinder 2 and 3. Meanwhile, Terry was successful in freeing the stuck jet assembly and checking both carburetors for easy free play and motion between the piston, needle, and jet. With the problems experienced before with several club members, and the changing of head gaskets required from time to time, I did include with the spare parts inventory carried to Breckenridge, two spare head gaskets.



Once everything was reassembled, I voted to throw the old head gasket away, but I was overruled with the excuse that the gasket needed to be saved for some weird type of show and tell. So it was added to the items that Terry carried in his trailer and will no doubt reappear in some future show and tell.

No other serious problems were encountered during the rest of the trip, except for the high altitude tuning that was required when the altitude approached 12,000 feet at Lookout Mountain and Loveland Pass. Leaning the carburetors by as much as 10 to 12 flats was required in order to keep the spark plugs from fouling in the MGA and then

resetting them back the same amount, in gradual steps, as the altitude decreased on the way back east.

I have to express heartfelt thanks to everyone for their help and support, especially Terry for the carburetor rebuilding, Ryan for his travels to acquire the needed compression tester, everyone for the needed tools required just at the right time and just right for the particular task, and to Ron Parks for his untiring runs from the work tent to the Welcome Center cold water fountain supplying untold amounts of water that kept me working; a great job accomplished by all.

And one final note; this head gasket replacement session definitely did not set a record for the time required to make the change.

Dar Planeaux