

# The Long Ride to an MGA

Art Barnes

It has a magical sound to me — Nineteen Sixty-Two MGA Morris Garages Sixteen-Hundred Mark-Two. But driving a speedy British racing green MGA 1600 Mk II wasn't a speedy process. It started back about 1964 as I was graduating high school in Vandalia.

My first car was a 1957 Studebaker Scotsman 2-door station wagon, a \$15 sale from my dad. He gave me a break on the \$20 he would have netted at the junk yard. Of course, it wasn't very cool for a high school senior to be driving a Studebaker wagon. I'm not sure it was wise to trade that drivable car for a more manly 1953 Ford convertible that barely rolled away from the filling station ... and stalled. The car never ran again, and I gave it to a friend who needed a transmission.

I fared better with a 1955 Plymouth coupe for \$120, good running and dependable until I tried drag racing and ruined its crankshaft. There were other short-lived auto selections, but meanwhile, a younger friend in Vandalia was working toward college and the Navy. His dad wouldn't agree to a Sunbeam Tiger that could reach 60 miles per hour in 7.5 seconds and a top speed of 122 mph! Dad and son settled for a calmer deep blue 1962 MGA sports car with smoother body lines and needed 20 seconds to reach a sensible 60 mph and a more lawful top speed.

He drove his MGA through college and then parked it in his high school English teacher's garage when he joined the Navy. He planned to retrieve his sports car after he was through training as an aircraft combat navigator. The Navy, however, sent him to Washington state, Japan and back to Washington ... where he bought an MGB, which was twice as speedy as the MGA wasting away in his Ohio garage.

The blue beauty also waned as he bought a house on picturesque Whidbey Island, Washington, got married and raised a son as the family of three rotated to military assignments for 20 years and settled for good on Whidbey. When "the captain" retired from the Navy, he reached his dream to team with his son and restore that MGA. When they moved to Ohio, he moved his 1962 sports car to his barn-size garage and began taking the car apart, screw by screw and body parts by parts. The teen son, however, didn't have the same mechanical interests as his dad. Sonny preferred to drive



dad's "operating" 1972 MGB in the other garage ... so the 1962 MGA restoration project became a dust gatherer.

The desire to restore the half-disarmed 1962 MGA eased when a friend said he had admired MGAs since his high school years. Yes, Art Barnes qualified to collect Social Security and no longer was supporting two daughters in college. So, he could afford \$3,000 to buy an old friend's MGA in 2013 and move it to the garage of his home on the shores of Lake Loramie, Ohio.



My happy beginning was to dismantle the car that had barely existed beyond my mind. Off came the fenders, bumpers, hood, trunk and doors. The garage floor was strewn with the body parts that had been sand-blasted of their blue color. A worse fate, however, was eight inches of lake flood water covering the garage floor. Fortunately, our house was a foot higher than the detached garage. Unfortunately, the overflowing drench ruined the priming paint on the car parts. -blasting would have been expensive. So I sold the entire project to a restoration garage in Kentucky.



Meanwhile, I had joined the MG Car Club Southwestern Ohio Centre and met member Steve Powell at a club picnic. After I'd sold the flooded blue MGA, Steve pointed me toward a fiery red 1959 MGA restored by Gary Moore, a former club member who had powered the car with an 1800 MGB engine with a single Weber carburetor. Gary may have had a chuckle that, as I drove from his former garage toward mine ... the carburetor stopped pumping and the car didn't look so fiery. Steve quickly said he had a British manifold and a pair of Skinner Union carburetors in his garage. I'd never heard of an SU carb but certainly couldn't out-guess him, seeing as how he owned three MGs at the time!

Steve was good to his word and had the fuel and air proportions singing again. The safety road



entertainment was enjoyable in the car that was bright again ... give or take the task of shifting gears. Second gear sometimes was operable but only occasionally, meaning balking shifts from first to third gear and a smooth fourth. Even Dave Gribler, our MGA club expert, couldn't make the gearbox behave. Then to add melancholy to misery, some sort of front-end knock added grief to gloom. I was disturbed and defeated, so I sold the MGA-B to a guy in Columbus.

Several months later, in July, I stumbled onto an ad for an MG for sale — not just an MG, but a British racing green 1962 MGA 1600 Mk II with smooth tan upholstery. I asked the man why he was selling such a wonderful car. He said he wanted to buy an airplane. The MGA had been a daily driver for 20 years by his brother-in-law, a school teacher in Florida. That meant he could worry far less about rust than we fear in salty Ohio. However, after wasting away in a garage for some 22 years, it needed high-quality restoration attention, including a new coat of paint. My new friend (as he became when he sold the car to me) was a long-time hobbyist working mostly on "hot rods," so he knew what to do before he could sell the car.

When my wife, Cathy looked at the photo of the MGA, she immediately agreed to take a look at the car, just four miles away from our house. Meeting a friendly semi-pro and driving the car convinced me that I was making the right move. I had found the car I'd been looking for since high school. Two years of ownership and driving pleasure, has left no doubt!

