

Featured Car of the Month:

“My Little Margie” Dennis Gates’ 72 MG Midget

by Dennis Gates as interviewed by Ron Parks

While cruising FB Marketplace in the Spring of 2021, I found what was once a “72” MG Midget in Washington Court House Ohio owned by a man who was conducting an Estate sale for his recently deceased father. It was in an old barn that was definitely not climate controlled and had been setting there for 28 years. It had become a shelf for setting things on for most of those years. There was a rat’s nest in the glove box. That gentleman had bought the car from another man’s estate in Columbus who had begun restoring it and passed away before completing it. Knowing that two recent former owners of this car died during the early going of its renovation was not a good omen for me but I was determined! Therefore, through the two previous owners, the car remained semi-disassembled and rusting away collecting other pieces of junk as a table. When I inquired about the car on FB, they didn’t even know what kind of car it was; only that was an MG. I paid \$400 for the Midget and all the parts in boxes and the engine setting on floor in another part of building. I brought it home on a trailer and put everything in the small, detached garage that I had built specifically for the purpose of rebuilding this car. I even bought and installed a lift. I immediately named my new wheel-less friend “Margie” after my recently departed dear Mother. It was time to attempt to breathe new life into “Margie Midget”

Rebuilding Margie was to be my first major retirement hobby and since I had never rebuilt a car before, I joined the British Car club of Greater Cincinnati. (BCCGC) in hopes of getting some help and advice. This was a good decision, as several members came to help get me started. Specifically, I



want to thank Tom Leurck, Dave Connit, Brad Lucas, and Ron Ramer for their tremendous help, advice, expertise and most of all friendship!

With all the loose parts stored on shelves and the garage floor, I began working on the body. The body color was orange and rust; a lot of rust!. The first major chore was to bring the body out of its rusting state. I did most of the body work, welding & rust removal, myself. I learned how to weld on the spot with the great of help from Tom and welded the new floor pans in place. I do not do painting myself,, so I found a friend of a friend Joe Stockdale, who custom paints motorcycles in Dayton. He offered to prep and paint the car in a friend's garage up the street. I chose Midnight Blue, a color that was only available for 72 & 73 models and blue was my mother's favorite color. The split rear bumper was another feature unique to these pre-model 74' model years.



After the painting was done and the car was returned to my garage, we began installing the new wiring harness. We found a good wiring diagram online and hung it on wall for reference right next to the dry erase board that served as a seemingly never ending “Yet to do List”. We traced every wire with diagram and found the new harness to be 95% correct.

I ordered most of my parts from Moss Motors and some from Cincinnati Winners' Circle, where the owner, Jeff, has a collection of old British Car parts in an old warehouse. He also has some old MG s on site that I used as examples,



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visiting several times during my restoration to see how things were supposed to be put together.

I hung a big screen TV on the wall connected to the internet and found “YouTube University” to be a very helpful source of “How To” informational videos.

I sent the SU carburetors to New York for rebuilding by Joe Caruso. The wait list was 1 year long, which was OK and fit with my restoration schedule.

The list of all that we did to bring Margie back to life is exhausting (pun intended) but here are the main things...we installed all new brake lines, clutch line, fuel lines, new gas tank and new fuel pump, clutch plate, brakes, brake/clutch cylinder, mirrors, steering wheel, head and tail lights, window and door seals, wiper motor, etc...

The transmission and rear differential looked ok but caked with thick black crud that had once been serving as lubricant. We replaced the clutch hydraulics, disc & pressure plate and throw out bearing.

A good cleaning restored the seats to nearly new condition. I installed a brand new black vinyl top. The carpeting and interior panels were all replaced.

A handwritten note that I found, in one of the boxes indicated that the engine had been sent back to England for a rebuild some 30 years ago. The bottom of the oil pan was painted a gold color, which is what was done in England to indicate a rebuild had been done. Internal Inspection of the engine confirmed the rebuild. It was very clean!

Finished up with new tires on new chrome wire wheels with octagonal knockoffs and a stainless steel exhaust.

The odometer showed 40K miles when I bought the car and I have put 400 or so miles on it since completing the restoration.

The car has done well at shows. Won Best in Class at Cincinnati and Dayton shows.



This is just a part of a long learning adventure that helped bring new life to a car on the brink of the junk yard...and brought me a world of knowledge and lifelong friends.

Epilogue:

What follows is a cool little story that reminds us why we own these cars. And, that is to bring joy to us and others.

2 ½ months ago received a text from a guy in Cincinnati, with a strange request. He said that someone told him that I owned a 72 MG Midget that was pretty nice. Is that so? I acknowledged it was true. He went on to say that his Mother and Father would be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary in March and that they had driven a 72 MG Midget on their Honeymoon 50 years ago from Cincinnati to Florida. He wanted to surprise his parents and have my 72 MG Midget on display at their reception for their reminiscing and I agreed to bring it down there.. We exchanged pictures of the cars. And I never heard anything for two months. Then I got a phone call from him confirming that we are on for this weekend on Saturday. Well, I said that I hadn't heard anything since our initial texting and didn't know if we were still on or not. He apologized and said that he had intended to call earlier but time just "slipped by". It was short notice, but I agreed to bring the car to the reception hall in Montgomery as we had discussed before. Then he went on to say his parents were renewing their marriage vows at a church right around the corner from the reception hall and asked if could I bring car there for pictures around 12: 30 that Saturday afternoon. And then stretched the request further,... "what if they would like to drive the MG from the church to reception hall...would I be OK with that? Again, I agreed and it was well worth it in the end.

The day came and keep in mind, this is March in Ohio and the temperature was in the 40s. I had not had the top up since I installed it and at this temperature, it would not snap closed. So, I bundled up and endured the 45 minute drive in the cold... people looking at me and waving as they passed. It did warm up into the 50s later in the day. When the couple came out of the church and saw the MG Midget, their honeymoon car, they were both overcome with emotion and cried. As they drove to the reception hall in my MG Midget with a "Just Married" sign and tin cans dragging from the back, I followed driving their car. Right around the corner turned into 5 miles. And that was OK. Driving their honeymoon car made their day and mine too for that matter!.

