

Member Featured Car of the Month, September 2009 Graham Cooper's '69' MGB

By Graham Cooper

This 1969 MGB is our second "B" (in the US) we had been working on the first, a '72 car for some months, getting it stripped to get the body restored and painted. We took pictures to various shops to get an idea of the likely cost of the job, best we got was, about \$10,000. So we got to thinking that we could buy a decent driver for roughly half of that, and have a significant spares stock from the '72 car, including an O/D gearbox. The rolling shell is now part of the Looft Collection. When attending the Perrysburg show in 2003, there were a couple of cars for sale and this one looked to be the best. It was originally sold in Phoenix Arizona and had after market A/C fitted by the dealer (not operational) and is also rust free.



When we bought the car, it had a leaking rear wheel cylinder, and was in need of a tune-up but otherwise looked ok. But, since these were the first cars we had looked at, we didn't make an offer, just took contact details. However, when we stopped for dinner on the way home, the other Club members offered plenty of "advice" and encouragement, about getting this car, the wonderful drives in the sunshine, the pride of owning and driving a vintage car, etc. One week later it was in our driveway. Aside from the wheel



cylinder there were a number of other problems that you only find when you live with the car for a while. The batteries didn't hold charge, the front carb jet would stick and cause fuel to go to the overflow, and the carbs did not seem to balance up properly so the car would misfire on acceleration. Gradually all these things were massaged into a reasonable state of operation, but not great. It was becoming clear that the engine was tired and it

smoked on startup. A compression check showed that the rear cylinder was low. We embarked on a complete drive train rebuild. The engine from the '72 car was stripped and carted off to Performance Clinic for a re-bore, new cam bearings and clean up of the crank. I gas flowed the head then took it to get the valve guides and seats done. First the head was crack tested and turned out to be bad, and so was the next one bought on E-Bay. After a considerable search a good head was found and again I gas flowed it and got the unleaded inserts fitted, guides and seats done.



At the same time, the O/D gearbox from the '72 car went to Eric Jones for testing and repair. It would go into overdrive but would not come out. Eric wanted part of the payment made in Scottish pound notes (England no longer issues £1 notes) because he could mail them to UK to pay for magazines and catalogues. I work for a company based in Scotland, making that easy to accomplish.

Purchased replacements for the clutch, pressure plate, throw out bearing, slave cylinder, oil pump and pressure relief spring. Carb bodies went to Joe Curto to get the shaft bearings reamed and new butterflies fitted. Changes were completed with a Peco header and exhaust system. Out with the '69 engine and gear-box, in with the re-built '72 engine and O/D gearbox for a considerable transformation. It took what seemed like an inordinately long time for the oil pressure to come up the first time (with the plugs out), but once it did it pegged the gauge.

First long run after the engine swap was the visit to the Auburn Cord Museum in South Bend IN. There were no problems except for an electric oil pressure gauge which read all over the map, but mostly zero. We put this down to Joe Lucas and swapped the gauge

for a capillary type which shows more realistic numbers. The only two issues with the car since then were the failure of the distributor shaft bearings during the run down to Green River KY. That resulted in a number of chewed up rotor arms before the problem was diagnosed. But luckily I had a spare dizzy so a roadside swap kept us rolling. Since then the distributor has been upgraded to a Petronix electronic unit.



Second was a water pump failure just north of Lebanon that resulted in a flat bed ride back to Milford. Should have changed the pump when the engine was done! This last winter the complete front suspension was freshened up with V8 bushings, new king-pins, steering rack and track rod ends. A-arms and stub axles were powder coated. Handling is much better now in the twisties.

Future plans are to get fresh paint at some point. The amateur paint job (by the previous owner) never was very good and seems to be very brittle since it chips easily and since this car gets driven, it has a lot of chips. That's going to be a hard bullet to bite not just because of the cost but the time the car won't be available to drive. Maybe now's the time to get that B-GT I've been looking for, because you can't have just one MG!

