

Member Featured Car of the Month

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Jack & Donetta Bantle's
1960 White MGA 1600

by Jack Bantle

Every car and every car owner has a story. It only gets interesting when they meet and a relationship develops. My car's story is very simple. It is a 1960 MGA 1600 that was originally done in Old English white and along the way somebody painted it GE refrigerator white. Its story is that it was first sold in Stuttgart Germany. Then it was acquired



by an American airman and shipped to Tinker Air Force base in Oklahoma. You can only tell its lineage by the coolant temperature gauge that reads in centigrade instead of Fahrenheit and the I.D. plate that starts with a number instead of GHNL as with most American market MGAs. The only modification I made to the car was the addition of an oil cooler to deal with the Oklahoma heat. What a life saver that was.

My journey towards owning the car was somewhat more complex. It was my wife, Donetta, who introduced me to British sports cars. When I married her I thought that my only job was to love her and provide for her. It was only in stages that I first learned that more was required! It became my task in life to give ALL the things her father denied her when she was growing up. Therefore, the horse's name was Ginger and the dog's name was Cinnamon, but the sports car story was a little more involved. In the 1960s Donetta's friend offered her a big Healey for a real low price to support his flying habit. Donetta's dad, a GM engineer, nixed that in a great big hurry. After we married that was the first paternal slight that she remedied even before she got the horse and the dog. After "encouraging" me over a period of several months, we bought a brand spanking new 1972 MG midget roadster in the orangey-gold color that defied a more apt description. The navy blue interior confirmed the fact that MG employed no women in the color and design department. In a family incident that is still vividly remembered by her today, I totaled it in 1977 by hitting a good old boy in truck in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Years passed I thought we were out of the hobby until she clapped her eyes on another Midget. We were about to reenter the hobby.

I wouldn't let her buy that Midget because I reflected on how the last one folded up like an accordion upon hitting the truck at only 13 mph so I insisted she buy a 1974 ½ MGB. This decision was rewarded by about 15 breakdowns during the first two weeks of ownership. My skill as a mechanic began to grow as did my interest in these cars. We subsequently bought two more "Bs", a 1979 MGB in carmine red and a 1980 MBG

limited edition for our daughter. In reading about MGs I kept looking at the photos of MGAs and remembered that two of my cousins had bought ten of them in 1964 and 1965 for only a couple hundred bucks apiece. People were dumping them for new MGBs! To me the lines of the MGA were classic. With a new found interest I attended a 1986 all British car show in Oklahoma City and gushed over the MGAs that were lined up. Sure enough my future MGA was being sold by the head of the MG car club so that he could restore- You guessed it- a 1964 MGB. I thought him an idiot until I finally saw his completed MGB in British Racing Green. Wow! Now my other hobby is flying and I could always depend on a less than enthusiastic approval from my wife for anything aeronautical, but for the MGA she simply said- Buy it!

As with any recently acquired MG, the first few months with it saw the need for a lot of mechanical attention. My skill as a mechanic and my vocabulary of swear words grew exponentially. I even had my daughter swearing pretty well in a month or two as she owned the limited edition MGB. The local towing company got to know me so well that all I had to do was say- Hi! It's Jack and the car is on the corner of Main and Elm. Without further explanation or even a credit card number, they would tow it home for me and bill me later. Try doing that today.

My low point with the car was when my son and I drove from Stillwater, OK to Indianapolis, IN for an MGA convention. I forgot the gasket between the top of the window frame and the convertible top. It fell to my 10 year old son to wipe the incoming water from the inside of the window. It rained nearly all the way causing an MG aversion in my son that lasts to today. The worst of it was I lost the water pump at Terre Haute. In the driving rain I change it out and filled the radiator back up with fluid. I had the shakes to two hours in the cold rain. My son sat inside and watched the water level rise in the cockpit. Just to make sure I had paid my dues, the generator died in Indy.

I eventually solved most of the mechanical issues and had a lot of fun with the car. The dog loved riding in the car and would wait hours for a test hop after I fixed it. Over the years three things stood out from the rest. Invariably little kids upon seeing it for the first time, think that it is some new model sport cars. Also, most people when seeing it thought it was real expensive when new. I didn't have the heart to tell them that graduating high school seniors in Grosse Pointe, Michigan (where I grew up) were getting them as a graduation gifts in the late 50s and early 60s. The car also gave my 15 year-old son an object lesson on marriage. He and I were walking back to my MGA in a store parking lot and I happened to be educating him about boy toys. He wanted a sports car for his first ride and I was going to let him have one. When asked why I was about to do a thing my insurance agent thought was crazy and suicidal, I replied that most wives would consider such a car competition for resources and affection and not let him have it. So it was better to let him have it now before he got married. My son was expressing great skepticism, when another man leapt out of his car and ran over to my MGA. He poured over it excitedly and when we got there he said. Is this your car? I had one years ago but my wife made me get rid of it when we got married. Case closed and my son looked at me like I was a prophet. Who said the car hobby can't teach you about life?



Photo of Jack and Donetta Bantle with their MGA at the Valley Vineyards and restaurant, fall tour October 18, 2009.