

Life and History of Upgraded 1958 MGA Roadster, Featured Car

by Dar Planeaux

I bought my MG in March 1964 for the sum of \$595.00 with 16,700 miles and it had 2 extra painted wire wheels that had 2 snow tires mounted on the extra wire wheels. I drove the MG as a daily driver to work every day from 1964 until 1984, changing to the snow tire wheels each winter, and back again in the spring. A couple bags of rock salt helped provide the traction needed for the snow periods. All three of my children learned to drive in the MG. They all wanted to be able to drive a car with a standard transmission. In the spring of 1984, I covered the car in the garage with an MG fitted cover and the car remained covered in the garage for 17 years.

The MG was completed in the UK in October 1957 and dispatched for shipment to the USA at that time. The exterior was black and the interior trim was green. In the spring of 2001, two years before I had planned to retire, I thought it was about time to uncover the MG and begin the restoration process. With the expert work of Steve Miller of MG Automotive, and Tom Dworetsky of Superior Finishes, a two-year effort was initiated to completely disassemble the MG and to repaint, replat, repair, or replace, every part of the MG. That total restoration was completed during the



summer or 2003, with the interior being changed from green to tan leather, and I started driving the MG to different British Car Shows, both local (See Photo Above) and in other adjoining states. After attending several out of state shows, I started to form a plan to initiate upgrades and modifications to improve comfort and drivability of the MG on longer trips at highway speeds.

After driving to GT-33 in July 2008, in Seven Springs, PA, which was the event featuring the 50th anniversary of the MGA Twin Cam, I noticed a significant number of twin cams with 5-speed transmissions. Owners had high praise for the transmission and shortly after returning, I ordered the 5-speed Ford Sierra T9 transmission from Hi Gear Engineering in the UK. The 5-speed transmission made a significant improvement in lower RPM cruising at highway speeds. On the longer trip to Breckinridge, CO in June, to attend MG 2009, a 14-day trip, it became apparent the next upgrade was needed to facilitate better traveling conditions. What was needed was a way to carry more luggage and also more space for a selection of essential spare parts. A reasonably sized trailer was my answer.

I found a fiberglass motorcycle trailer that weighed 180 pounds empty that could carry 2 large roll-on suitcases, ample space for spare parts, could be painted by the manufacturer with the same paint as the MG, shipped without taillights so MGA taillights could be installed, and finally a large cooler installed on the drawbar to carry the required number of adult beverages. In addition, Dayton Wire Wheels made a set of 13- inch wheels to match the MG wire wheels and replace the

12-inch original aluminum wheels. That trailer has traveled on every longer trip since being completed in 2010. (See Photo below)



During the 2013/2014 time frame, the next upgrades almost seemed like a natural progression of improvements. After attending car shows in the mountainous regions of western Virginia, it was obvious that towing the trailer, slowing and stopping on steeper downhills, was a real workout for the front drum brakes. Moss Motors offered a disk brake upgrade for the front brakes on the MGA and that was the next change made, a

very noticeable upgrade on the longer drive to GT-39 in Ottawa, Ontario in July 2014. With the 5-speed transmission and the trailer in tow, even though fully loaded adding less than 500 pounds, hills with moderate inclines required changing from 5th gear down to 4th gear to maintain cruising speed. The answer to that situation was an engine upgrade.

Early in the summer of 2014, a 3-main MGB short block became available and the block, spare heads and components allowed an engine rebuild and the MGB engine installation. Another significant improvement was evident with about a 30 to 35% increase in horsepower and torque. The drive to the British Invasion Show in Stowe, VT in September 2015 was the first long drive with the MGB engine and the driving ease was immensely improved from past drives to Stowe with the original MGA engine.

Although with the MGB engine, it was easier to maintain highway speeds of 70 MPH, it still required maintaining about 3500 RPM to hold the steady speed of 70 MPH. That situation was improved in the summer of 2016 when the MGA 4.3 ratio rear end differential was replaced by the MGB 3.9 ratio differential and with the 5-speed transmission, dropped the RPM from 3500 to 3100 to maintain the 70 MPH highway cruising speed. The result permitted a much more relaxed and comfortable driving experience for the longer road trips.

The most recent modification began in the summer of 2019 with the acquisition of the Moss Motors Supercharger Kit for the MGA. The supercharger installation was a lengthy procedure because the supercharger front drive pulley uses a 5-groove belt, thereby requiring the change of the generator, water pump, and crank pulleys from the v-belt pulleys to the 5-groove pulleys, all supplied in the kit. I had one major problem with the installation that involved the load bearing brace supporting the front of the supercharger that fastens to the front of the engine block. That brace passes under the lower radiator hose to the water pump. The brace pressed against the radiator hose and in time could have caused the hose to develop a leak in the coolant. I ordered several spare braces from Moss, modified the design with a noticeable S-curve in the brace, had a welding shop remake the pieces to avoid the brace touching the lower radiator hose. (See Photos below).

The Octagon News October 2026

That completed the last modification and upgrade. The longest round trip towing the trailer was in June 2017 to GT-42 in Solvang, CA and then on to San Diego, a week later, to MG 2017 for a total of 5207 miles. The longest trip after installing the supercharger was in June 2021 to GT-47 in Colorado Springs for a total of 2770 miles, and the MG drove to the top of Pikes Peak at an altitude of 14,115 feet.



The plan for the future is to just continue driving to regional and national MG events and no additional modifications or upgrades are contemplated.