

Member Featured Car of the Month May 2011

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Steve Ramsey's 1968 MGB (Salsa Red)

by Steve Ramsey

Currently, the '68 B is the only car we have on the road. The '77 Midget is in great running shape, but is in storage. We plan to undertake some minor cosmetic work on it this spring and look forward to bringing it out on a few runs. The '50 TD (RHD) is in storage in Virginia awaiting restoration. The recent economic downturn has shifted our immediate priorities, so restoration will have to wait. As resources become available we look forward to jumping into that project head first.



I acquired the 1968 MGB in 1994 from a retired Navy veteran in Nitro, WV, who had purchased it five years earlier for his twin grandsons. The car was very solid and showed no rust. It was running when he purchased it in 1989, but had sat untouched under a tarp awaiting the grandsons to turn 16 and get excited about the restoration project. When their magic birthdays arrived in 1993, they finally told their grandfather that not only were they not interested in sharing a single car, they also had no interest in the time and resources required to restore what they considered an outdated and "uncool" antique. He begrudgingly listed it for sale.

I was looking to replace my citron-colored 1975 MGB which I had spent 18 months restoring but had lost in an accident in June 1994. The damage appeared relatively minor, but once the insurance company learned the frame was twisted it was declared a total loss. I decided immediately to invest the insurance proceeds in another MG and the search began. I responded to an ad reading "Black 1968 MGB convertible. Good condition. \$1000."

When the elderly Navy veteran pulled the tarp back I was not too impressed. The car would require major restoration work and I only had three months before I would have to return to college. I looked the car over and noted its solidity. However, it would need some engine work, brakes, tires, top, interior, paint, and I had no doubt plenty of surprises awaited. I offered \$600 and within minutes we agreed to \$800. I called for a flatbed and had it hauled to my parents' house in Charleston, WV, about 30 miles from Nitro.

My dad and I spent the next three months completely stripping and redoing the car. We took the paint down to metal, and with the front fenders removed we confirmed it was in fact an exceptionally solid car. To save time, I dropped in a completely rebuilt engine from a 1969 MGB project which had stalled some years before for various reasons. (Long story there.) With all mechanical issues addressed, including new U-joints, new

brakes, new clutch, and much more, we took the car to paint, sticking with the black in which it had come to us, although we had discovered during the project that it had come from the factory in white. The car came back in a beautiful deep black base and clear coat finish. We installed all the bright work, put the windshield on and door windows in, addressed the lights and electrical, and installed the interior. The day before I had to leave for school we spent ten frustrating hours installing the new top. The next day the car got its first real road time with a four hour drive to Cincinnati. Apparently we had done everything reasonably well in the short time allotted. The car performed beautifully the entire trip.

In January, 1995, I traded paint with a US Mail truck on a Monday morning on my way to class. The damage to the right front fender was minor. The headlight remained intact.

However, the impact must have disturbed something deep within the car. From that day forward it began to rust.

I drove the car the rest of my college career and parked it in 1998. In 2000, my nephew decided he would restore it and I sold it to him for \$1000. The rocker panels were basically gone at this point, and major rust was starting to show



above the rear wheel wells. Undaunted, my nephew located a body shop and had the car towed. There it languished for several years. It was not the shop's top priority, and my nephew struggled to fund the project. Consequently, a less than professional job was left uncompleted. My nephew collected his now bright red MG and it sat unfinished in my sister's garage until 2008.

Finally I decided something had to be done. To help offset his expenses, I paid my nephew \$4000 for the car and had it hauled to a restoration shop in Virginia. To honor my nephew's efforts, we decided to stay with the bright red he had chosen. They spent the first several months undoing everything that had been done to the car by the previous shop. As the project progressed, my resources for it dwindled. In June, 2010, with much new steel and the car 90% complete, I issued a work stop order and drove to Virginia. With a rented trailer I towed it to my dad's house in West Virginia where I spent several weeks finishing the front suspension, bleeding hydraulic systems, starting and tuning the engine, and installing the top, interior, and various other sundries. In August we hit the road for the 220 mile drive to Dayton. Outside of some minor vibration from the tires which had been sitting for too long, the car drove and performed wonderfully.

Unbelievably, within three hours of arriving in Dayton, a shovel fell off my garage wall and dented the top of the right front fender. With paint left over from the restoration shop, this mar was quickly and expertly repaired by Tom Dworetsky of Superior Finishes in Trotwood, OH, (superiorcustomfinishes.com). Tom also addressed some minor

alignment issues with the doors and hood and the Salsa Red MG left his care looking better than ever.

We enjoyed several hundred miles of motoring this past season. The 1969 engine still powers this '68 B. With 40,000 miles accrued since its rebuild 20 years ago, it still exhibits excellent performance. Some minor ignition system problems cropped up but were quickly and easily resolved, stranding us only once a mile from home. Fortunately, our insurance provided a free tow.

Why an MG?

It has been a family affliction from an early age. In 1980, when I was 9 and my brother 16, my dad brought home the first MG to enter our lives: a '73 B in Damask Red. He had purchased it for \$500 from a coworker who had allowed it to sit garaged for several years after blowing the head gasket on a trip to South Carolina. The car was driven from SC to WV with the blown gasket and the head and blocked were burned beyond repair between cylinders 3 and 4. With an engine salvaged from a derelict '65 B, the family put many thousands of enjoyable miles on this great little car. Before it became mine exclusively to drive, it was for several years my brother's main transport between Charleston, WV, and Camp Lejeune, NC, where he was stationed in the USMC. I maintained and drove the sprightly little B throughout high school, but, alas, I lost it in an accident near the end of my senior year. Hooked, I immediately sought another B and ended up restoring the aforementioned citron '75 B. From that point forward, for better or worse, there has been no turning back.

