

The First London to Sydney Marathon Car Rally

November December 1968

Compiled by Richard Ashton

The London to Sydney Marathon event started in London Earls Court November 24 1968. One of the entrants was an MGB No. 47 being entered and driven by Jean Denton and co driven by Tom Boyce.

Jean was no newcomer to long distance racing and rallying. She as a member of the BRDC racing in Cooper formula 3 racing in 1966, became British women racing champion in 1967 and 1968, and driving an MGB in the Nürburgring 1000 km sports car race in Germany.

The Rally was route through Europe. Paris, Turin, Belgrade to Istanbul across the Bosphorus by ferry, then on to Asia via Kabul, to Delhi on its way to Bombay India. On December 5, they were transported by sea to Fremantle, arriving at 10 am December 13. The MG had had an uneventful run through to Fremantle.

Here in Fremantle, just about all the member of the MG Car Club met the ship and convoyed the MGB to Winterbottom's service division. Later the MG was driven to Gloucester Park trotting ground ready for the restart the next day at 6 pm.

Earlier in 1968 a call from the MG Car Club headquarters in England had come to the club, could we help entrant no. 47 while in Western Australia. The Club had enthusiastically agreed to be of service and provide assistance if required at check points for them all the way to the WA border. Here they where handed over to members of the South Australian MG Car Club to help them on their way to the finish in Sydney. In each state MG members followed the cars progress and maned check points at each of the rally stages.

We divide up the crews depending on the time they had available. The first check point was at Youami a deserted old mining town, 7 hours away from Perth. Some of us went there to be on standby. The second group were split into two and three. One group were to go to the end of stage two at Marvel Lock for 5 am onward the following morning for an expected 7 am arrival of the MGB.

The second group would go on to Norseman, to be on stand by from an anticipated 10 am arrival. Although it was not an official check point, it was a stop for fuel and a service point, before the big crossing through to Ceduna in South Australia on the old road, a journey expected to be some 6 hour and 18 minutes.

From the start at Gloucester Park at 6pm for the first cars, it would be 1 am for the MG to reach Youami. A further 4 hours to Marvel Lock by 5am. Then on to Lake King by 7am. Considering that it would take the field about an hour to get on their way, we had adjusted times for us to be in place.

50 kms after leaving Lake King on the way to Norseman, Jean and Tom and the MG became briefly air-borne over a “jump” section, they were going a little too fast and applied the brakes too suddenly, when the car hit the road, the engine kept going and the fan went through the core of the radiator.

They patched up the radiator as best possible, and sent forward a message to us who were anxiously waiting at Norseman. Finally the message came through via another competitor that they were in trouble half way across from Lake King.

At the toss of a coin which I lost, my radiator was sacrificed to the cause, and quickly removed from my car. Away we went; about six suddenly MG Car Club radiator experts were sandwiched into two cars, complete with a dripping radiator a toolbox and water.

We found them about 30 miles into the Lake King Norseman track. Jean and Tom were running slowly toward us, after having blocked off the engine water pipes, they had had no success with trying to patch up the radiator. They had crawled along mile after mile with the heater going full bore. When the engine frequently got too hot, they would stop and wait for things to cool down and slowly move on again.

Found, the radiator team were happily greeted, and Tom who got quickly into action.



MG Car Club President Peter Briggs talks to driver Jean Denton as co-driver and mechanic Tom Boyce fits my radiator. Standing at right is club member Pat Reid, John Keenan at the water supply canisters.



The holed radiator is resting against Jean Denton's legs; it had been un-successfully repaired with Plastibond. Tom Boyce continues fitting my radiator to the MG. Next to Jean in the bright shirt is Club Treasurer Jeff Cohen

With repair quickly made, MGB No. 47 was quickly on its way. We also reversed and made our way back the way we came.

Back at Norseman, with Jean and Tom well gone; we caught up with our remaining MG crew. They had seen them through on their way to cross the Nullarbor.

Ronda and I in my 'radiatorless' MGB were towed through to Esperance, after receiving promises that a new radiator would be sent down on the overnight trucking service from Perth. It's amazing how cold a car can become with no engine heat from up front.

MGB No 47 got through to Sydney and finished in 42nd place.

After leaving Ronda and me to wait for the radiator, the rest of the MG Car Club team drove back home to Perth the next day. We had a forced but happy break at Esperance, even though we were on shanks pony and forced to live frugally owing to not having much cash with us, waiting for the R&I bank to open. Three days later a new radiator turned up after much telephoning through to Perth. Radiator fitted we were on our way back home.

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In April-May in 1970 Jean Denton entered the six weeks long World Rally London to Mexico Rally driving a Morris 1800. She and her two other lady crew were placed first women drivers and 18th place overall.

Jean Denton's title was Lady Denton of Wakefield. After motor racing and rallying, she became business woman in promotion and publicity companies with Heron Drive a car leasing company and marketing director Huxford Garages.

She became marketing director and external affairs director for the Austin Rover Group, and also connected with Heritage Motor Centre, Gaydon. Amongst other appointments she was a board member of British Nuclear Fuels.

Always interested in the women's movement she was honoured with a CBE in 1990 was appointed Baroness Denton in 1991.

After a life in business world she entered political life for a short time appointed Government Whip in the John Major government. She became Minister for Northern Ireland in the House of Lords

Jean passed away 2000 aged 65 after a long battle with cancer

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Originally Overseas MGCC member, Local MG Car Club No. 31, Committee member, Competition Secretary, Vice President, President, CAMS State Councillor, Life Member.