

A Tale of my two MGB s

I know where it started. I was coming back from up north and I was at the mid north coast on the (old) highway heading south. It was night and all of a sudden I was overtaken by a B.....and everyone seemed to be squashed in, but having fun.

Some months later, about June 1969 I ordered my (MGB mk 11 OD). Cost was about \$3300.

THE day came.

As I walked into Ron Wards of Strathfield, there it was. Sandown Red with my order of radio, tonneau and a cig' lighter. These days, people call it a power socket <why I ordered it>. A walk around showed the odd curved down exhaust pipe and the perfect exterior. In the boot was the spare Olympic GT and tool kit containing jack, hub nut spanner etc. Inside there was plastic on the seats, and MG key fob with BMC keys and a full tank of petrol.

You have to remember that mechanically, cars weren't advanced like today. However, as I pulled out onto Parramatta Rd, that long stroke 5 bearing motor was smooth and the car felt great. Well, I was 23 and this was my first new car. There was a subtle quality about it though. Time proved this correct. The quality PVC seats, dash, instruments, alloy windscreen and even a chrome on brass grille. Mechanically it was old technology, but I told myself that this was MG history carried forward.

To introduce my car, my mate Pete and I dropped into a friend's house at Stanmore.

She didn't believe it was mine until I showed the papers.

"When are we going out?" she said (my first introduction to the other benefits of sports cars !).

That 1969 and the year that followed, I roamed the beaches with Joan who I met in December at Manly. Weekend drives to Gold Coast three times and Echuca and back with friends including Pete. Each was an excuse to have company and get away in the 'B'.

Sometimes, you can't believe your luck.coming south of Tweed Heads, we rounded a corner and there were two girls with luggage.

"I'm game if you are" says me.

I can attest that four in the front is tight...still Pete was driving and why would I care?

I had AME(471) for a year but it was at my \$ limit, so to start some travel, I sold her. Still with the plastic on the seats. For those interested, my AME had slight orange peel baked enamel paint (all of them had peel?), both had a radiator cap with 'Turn down tight' –not just 'turn tight'. Later I learned that BMC replacement parts for MGB's might not be identical. As in, slightly different size heater knobs, serated brake hoses replaced with plain rubber ones. I

didn't impress MG spares at Thornleigh once, about the hoses. I got the right ones though... on his second trip out back.

But does it matter? If you can't get the exact ones then you can't do much.

But as they say - "it's only new once".

AME had gone and as Joan was overseas, I started my trips. No car. Just cruises.

One friend from a cruise had a car and I drove her and her mini deluxe back from Adelaide..... and had the use of it.

I suppose it was reasonable for her to take it back after we split.

The next friend wanted me to get a car and so I was in a Mk 3a Sprite for 6 months. That nearly ended badly with an oncoming truck, on a bend. Rock wall one side and him the other. He had the wheels locked up. I know because I saw the spinning tyre letters up real close. Talk about being caught between a rock and a hard place! I got out and waved to let him know I was ok. Lucky, the paint wasn't thicker!

AVA-068

Fortunes had turned by December, 1971 and I bought a second-hand 'B' Mk2 which was two years old (69) with a J&S hardtop, chrome wires, radio, heater and this model had useful reclining seats. It was Jet Red. I think it was a later 1969 also with o'drive, 5 bearing motor and all-synchro gearbox. My first was mid-1969.

I came to discover that the owner had fitted a stage three head which caused running on and I came to realise that it had to go. The head that is. It also had the MG BL black grille fitted. There were some changes to be made. Of course, back then you could get anything for the car.

Sometimes in life, you do silly things. AND the unexpected can happen.

I thought that I would roll the soft-top back to the **first** bow which were all still in the normal erected position.

I had a cabriolet !!

Down near the chocolate factory at Stanmore it unfolded !!

It hit me on the head and fell almost into my lap !!

Sore and blinded I steered to a gutter stop.

There was a smell of....chocolate.....I think.

I never did that again.

AVA with the Stage 3 head was actually, fast enough to surprise..... as a Mazda rotary and an XU 1 found out at the lights at Parramatta Rd, Five dock lights. Up to 60 mph anyway...and the XU-1 was right next to me. When coming back from a trip, and me overtaking a Falcon, for the driver to have fun and see that I was stuck out there with oncoming traffic as he floored it. Not nice. A change down from 4th overdrive convinced him that I had gears for every occasion. I barely edged ahead though.....at 93 mph. Must've sounded impressive. Battle won (Well, he started it).

In derestricted days (a circle with a diagonal line) way out in the country, I did 118 mph indicated (St 3 head) and on another, Inverell to Glen Innes I averaged 86 mph... indicating 90 plus all the way. The back of the hardtop window used to lift, giving flow through air!

(Remember, this was not a Cortina with eye-ball face vents and extraction).

My grandmother (b1898) had a saying. "You need your head READ".

The MG club had an outing and one of the blokes had a light plane.

It seemed like a '**Good idea**'. So, new wife and I went up. I was in the front and as we were diving through cloud, I asked if we were under some sort of Tower Control. "Nope".

So, we're diving though cloud undirected with no radar or ground monitoring.

May I remind you of my grandmother's saying.

I have never, ever done that again.

If you EVER have a new '**Good idea**'remember her words and beware (in the 1800's where people thought they could read the head outside & read the persons mental state).

I never had a 'moment' with those huge brakes and lovely steering that 'walked' with the road over undulating surfaces. The best steering I've ever had in a car. That said, you had to be aware of the rest.....such as leaf springs and lever arm shocks. On bumps (or expected ones), a newer car like a Capri or Charger would have the confidence to stay ahead of you - and did so.

Both cars never let me down in any way on these trips. I never had a problem with AVA when I was away. It never let me down over the ten-year period.

By 1974, I was working at an Apprentice Training School and over the years had some work done. My second car, with a new paint job, AVA (068) won the 1977 MG Concours 'Road going class'. For any Concours only I had, by this time, the total books, receipts, brochure etc displayed inside, and a proper chrome grille, original steering wheel (replacing my leather Moto Lita), new tool kit and engine displayed with original coil, 'L' shaped spark plug leads etc and the foam around the radiator! (it was light grey foam, by the way). If I ever judge your car. I will expect it.

At 90000 -100000 miles it dropped a piston and later blew a hole in the diff. I had both overhauled (including re-bore, new pistons and engine paint). I mention this because out of the factory, the engine was painted a light rust red colour (all over the rubber hoses too) but in time it darkened. My match at the time to a darker colour was 'Damask Red'.

But really, it was a great run of reliability (hundreds of thousands of km's on your car engine was something that happenedin the future).

The gearbox and overdrive were superb and never gave a single problem. The universal joints on the tailshaft occasionally wore, which once actually dropped the rear tailshaft on the ground one time and the engine and diff only once as said before. Later I thought "I wonder what happens if it's the front uni dropping onto the road?".

By 1981 my new son was in his basinet in the back parcel tray! I tried to keep AVA, as well as my general car but seeing her sitting there unused, made the decision to sell.

I had paid \$2400 in Dec 1971 and sold for \$7100 Oct 1981 without the already sold hardtop. After a marvelous 10 years. That's eleven in both cars.

The only sports car I've had afterwards is a Lucalia clubman Lotus 7 type from Tassie. I'm not counting 205's and an Audi TT amongst the many cars I've had.

The above-mentioned son went on to work for PRB (the Australian Lotus 7) as their only apprentice and made his own alloy 7. It sits happily in my garage taking up the space of the memorable AVA.