

## **A Magnificent Obsession.**

Penned by Rod Hiley for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vintage Car Club Qld., in 2005. It was titled simply; M.G.s in the V.C.C.Q. The heading above is more appropriate.

Having been approached to provide an insight to M.G.s in the V.C.C.Q. on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I thought "what a piece of cake. There has hardly been any, particularly vintage". Then when I sat down and wrote a list of the PVT M.G.s that have passed through the club it was a different story.

I must apologise that this is also a personal journey as many of the vehicles passed through my ownership. I guess that is why I have this job. As an M.G. 'addict' or devotee for some 45 years perhaps I may be forgiven if I diverse briefly to explain my personal interest and why it developed around the M.G. marque.

At the tender age of 15 I bought a paperback copy of Kings of the Road by Ken Purdy; an American writing about many of the greatest marques of motor cars in the world. The M.G. came out as the underdog British sportscar that could show its heels to the US tin tops when it came to a few corners – not much has changed! With research I realised that the fledgling M.G. Car Company controlled by Cecil Kimber under the patronage and ownership of William Morris, later Sir William and Lord Nuffield, achieved milestones in motoring history way beyond their totally under-funded ability. Cecil Kimber with his loyal staff at 'Abingdon-On-Thames' produced his 'poor man's sportscar' to go on to win innumerable races and numerous class speed records with EX120 and EX127 usually driven by George Eyston, a name synonymous with record breaking in the '30s.

M.G. captured most, if not all, of the class records for 750cc and 1100cc engines on shoestring budgets during this period. Their crowning achievement was to hastily prepare a team of three supercharged K3 Magnettes to challenge the 1933 Mille Miglia, a 1000 mile open road race in Italy, winning the team prize for their class. Just think about the logistics in 1933 – no jumbo jets then!

But I digress – this is a story of M.G.s in the V.C.C.Q. Sadly not enough as Queensland was not blessed with an influx of M.G.s pre-war.

Having been in the M.G. scene for the past 45 years I shall draw on my personal memory, supported by friends and associates, to compile a near accurate a record for this 50th year publication.

When I joined the V.C.C.Q. some 40 odd years ago the pre-war M.G.s were few and far between. One of my earliest memories of an old 'M.G.' was Jim Finn's Bullnose 14/28 model. A friend, Neil Cowan, introduced me to Jim who lived in Logan Road, Holland Park in the early '60s.

A visit was arranged and his vehicle duly viewed. My limited knowledge of early M.G.s made it difficult to decide whether it was an M.G. or a Morris Cowley and I am not sure to this day as there was no badging to indicate either way. I recall my conclusion was that it was probably not an authentic M.G. Jim has long since passed on and I recollect that the family may have sold the vehicle in Canberra.

Ted Gamlen had a 1938 M.G. SA (SA 2551) and a 1934 M.G. PA (PA0990). David Barnett had a 1936 M.G. SA (SA1948) and I think Peter Baker had the 1937 M.G. VA Tourer (VA0838). Harry Fletcher of Bulimba had an M-Type (M1524) in pieces under his house, cannot recall if he was a club member. Eventually these pieces were acquired by Alan Robinson who has since restored the car in double quick time and is a current V.C.C.Q. member.

Doug Partington unearthed a very original M.G. M Type (M1523) from under a house at Annerley in the early '60s. I don't remember it ever running, and I think Doug

took it to the near-north coast and it may have been one of the vehicles in the Cox's Pioneer Museum at Bli-Bli – now long defunct.

Then there was an M.G. J2 (J4112) languishing under a veranda at Kedron, which I think is the one now owned by club member John Byrne – the J2 not the house. It is an Australian-bodied example but to my knowledge has not made a noise for some 50 years.

Around 1965 I heard of an L-Type M.G. (L0638) owned by club member Angus McBain of Sherwood. I duly tracked Angus down and he kindly permitted me to view his vehicle. He told me he picked the pieces up at the local dump one day when a couple of guys were dumping it. Parts included chassis and suspension, I think wheels and, from memory, the engine was there maybe without conrods as Angus had a set of alloy Hornet ones to fit. There was no body and Angus was fitting a TC radiator and bonnet. Years later I met David Marment when I bought his M.G. TF and he confessed it was he and his brother who dumped the L-Type bits.

Eventually Angus sold the rolling chassis to Robert McVicker, who passed it on to Col Conway and thence Ron Gaudion, who onsold it to John Butterfield, who despatched it to Melbourne with instructions to build a supercharged special. With the passing of John Butterfield the family offered the vehicle for sale and Brisbane enthusiast Ross Kelly purchased it in 2004 and returned the vehicle to Brisbane for completion.

My M.G. ownership commenced at age 17 with the purchase of a 1949 M.G. TC, which I drove daily for some 4 years including grocery deliveries towing a wire wheeled box trailer. The first pre-war M.G. I owned was a 1939 M.G. TB Tickford-bodied drophead coupe (TB0402). This was purchased in 1962 from a RAAF chap at Amberley and restoration completed in 1977 when it won the outright concours trophy at the 1977 M.G. National Rally at Katoomba.

My second pre-war M.G. was a very original 1937 TA (TA1744) purchased from Connie Karhula (nee Jordan) in 1966. She had raced it at the 1949 Leyburn Grand Prix meeting – a remarkably talented lady.

By fortuitous circumstances in 1967 I had acquired the 1932 supercharged M.G. J3 (J3756) record breaking vehicle driven by George Eyston, Bert Henly and Tom Wisdom at Montlhéry where it completed 24 hours at over 70 mph – engine capacity 750cc. Tom Hollinrake who had been an Aussie working at the M.G. Abingdon factory at the time, brought it to Australia in the '30s. It had fallen into disrepair when I collected the bits from Victoria, but a total restoration was completed by 1980 and I can still recall the look on Tom's face when I drove it into his driveway in Melbourne in 1981. Tom was well into his 80s by this time, but the memory remained.

On joining the V.C.C.Q. circa 1965 I befriended Ted and Pat Gamlen, owners of the 1938 M.G. SA saloon (SA2551) and the PA sports (PA0990). They had owned both vehicles for many years but the PA was dismantled and the SA had not run for years due to a failed big end bearing. I always coveted their SA and approached them regularly to sell, only to be told by Pat 'over my dead body'; well thankfully that was not to be.

In desperation I located a pair of tired M.G. SA saloons for sale at Beecroft in Sydney and purchased both.

It was a nightmare trip with two tandem trailers behind two HR Holdens to bring them back to Brisbane. That was 1969 and the prospect of restoring such a monster was daunting.

Then Ted phoned in 1971 to say that the time had come to move house and there was no room for M.G.s. | well recall Ted's asking price was most generous. An engine rebuild was immediately undertaken but the vehicle was in such extremely sound original condition, other than some new carpets | was reluctant to restore it, so enjoyed many happy miles of elegant motoring.

1977 was a busy M.G. year for me as | had always admired the 1933 M.G. K3 (K3016) owned and raced for many years by Victorian Otto Stone. | first visited and met him in 1971 when he was detuning the K3 back to street use, as he considered it no longer competitive. | didn't make a bid to purchase the vehicle at the time but when Phil Vickery of Sydney asked the question in 1973, Otto said yes.

When | asked Phil how he convinced Otto to sell, he said it was a phone call to Otto one morning, asked Otto the question and received a 'maybe'. Then asked Otto what he was having for lunch that day - jumped on a flight to Melbourne and came home that night owning a K3 - did | learn from that!

Next time | was in Phil's office in Sydney | asked him for first refusal on the K3 if he ever decided to sell. He agreed saying it wasn't likely but, in 1977, he tracked me down in London and offered me the K3 so he could fund a new home. A deal was struck instantly by agreeing to his asking price. Over the years I've found this works almost every time.

That left me broke and in debt but couldn't resist the chance to purchase a 1930 M.G. 18/80 (6670) speed model owned by Jim Bowman deep down in the lanes of Devon. Jim very generously let me pay the vehicle off over the next few months and we have remained friends to this day.

As if that wasn't enough, when I returned to Australia Phil Vickery told me Bill Lockington of Melbourne had just offered him his 1934 M.G. NE (NA0516) (one of only 7 built ~ winner of 1939 Bathurst 150 - or thereabouts). | was in Sydney at the time and decided to do a 'Vickery' so rang Bill Lockington and asked what he was having for dinner. A bit embarrassing as he was hosting a dinner party and | wasn't invited. Unperturbed | told him | would arrive at his house that night about 9.00 pm to discuss purchase of his NE. | wasn't as good a negotiator as Phil and came home sans NE but agreement to negotiate, which we did over the next couple of months to Bill's advantage.

The bank manager stopped buying me lunches and the fire-sale commenced. Two vintage Talbots, two old SAs, a TF, a TC, etc. Bill had given me three months to finalise payment and | took delivery in time to run the K3 and the NE at the 50-year Phillip Island Grand Prix Reunion meeting - still one of the highlights of my life.

So there | was in 1980 with the following pre-war M.G.s - 18/80, J3, K3, NE, TA, SA, Tickford TB, (a total of 22 with moderns), no home and a pending divorce (| guess you can see why).

Some rationalisation was required and a quick assessment revealed that many were no longer required. The SA and J3 were sold to Wal Magilton of Melbourne and Max Henderson and self trailered the J3 to Sydney where Wal collected it. Max had purchased K3004 from Frank Bett, so we trailered it home to Brisbane where it has always remained in my caretakership. Max was a V.C.C.Q. member for a short time so warrants mention here. Ownership passed to Bruce Croft in 1998 and K3004 is currently being restored by Abingdon Motors.

The two other SAs were sold to Kerry Barnes who began restoration but after some years on sold both vehicles in disassembled state back to someone in NSW. As they say what goes around comes around. Bill Gilbert of Sydney purchased the

Tickford TB and the TA went to Ian Phillips of Atherton who still owns it. I kept the 18/80, K3 and NE along with a few modern M.G.s and have enjoyed numerous road and track events in them. There is no doubt that the supercharged six cylinder MG K3 was the epitome of the Factory's success.

Then in 1989 I had the opportunity to negotiate the purchase of K3031, the last K3 built, from Eric Glasby in Sydney (ex South Africa). This car was sold new to Holland, hidden during the Nazi occupation and found its way to Rhodesia in the '50s and hence to South Africa with Eric. The body had been extensively modified for record-breaking at Montlhéry in the '30s so the decision was made to return it to its original 1934 Olympia Motor Show display vehicle condition, not in its brown and cream livery, but British Racing Green. The total restoration was completed in 2004.

My NE was sold to the Rex Collection of Sweden in 1993 and thence to Karl Wiesman of Germany. The red K3 went to Peter Green of England in 2000 to join his ex-Witney Straight K3 and the 18/80 returned to the UK in 2004 to another caring 18/80 owner.

The M.G. VA tourer passed from Peter Baker to Ron Lumar then resided in UK Motors window box for some years and found its way to a chap I only knew as Chip (Hedges). He managed to drive it to the M.G. National Rally in Katoomba in 1977 and ran a big end half way back to Brisbane – old habits die hard. Barry Harvey took him in tow behind his MGB and owned the VA by the time he reached Brisbane. Barry still owns the car but has not darkened the bitumen for many years.

Ted sold his M.G. PA to Ted Pollard, who on sold it to John Byrne to keep his J2 company in storage. My first memory of the Barnett SA was when Jerry Rowlands bought it in the early '60s, selling his TC to buy it. He kept it for a year or two and sold it on to David to buy a family FJ Holden, which promptly broke a stub axle, rolled over and killed him. Plenty of TCs break stub axles but don't roll over. David had the SA for some years and sold it to Gloria French and we look forward to seeing this elegant vehicle back on the road.

Then of course Owen McNeil purchased an M.G. J2 (J2646) in Bristol circa 1962 and shipped it home to father Jim, who commenced restoration to be completed by Owen on his return to Brisbane in the '70s. Owen and Mary enjoyed many miles of happy motoring in this little vehicle which, when relinquished by Owen, found its way to Perth – a growing 'Mecca' for M.G.s – both pre- and post-war. Their dedication over there is really quite remarkable.

A recent arrival in the club was the 1932 M.G. F-Type (F0303) owned by Andrew Wegener. It was ex-Adelaide via Ray Westfield. Last time I saw the vehicle Andrew had it mobile but was still completing the body and paint.

Alan Robinson (M-Type owner) also managed to acquire the ex-Bob Bazzica M.G. SA (SA1137) from Adelaide a couple of years ago. Bob had owned the car for over 30 years and maintained it in sound original condition. I remember him driving it across the Nullarbor for a National Meeting in Perth in 1978.

Pip Bucknell owns the 1935 M.G. R-Type (R0259), which he bought in Ireland, circa 1962 and is again mobile after some 40-50 years. He also has a 1934 M.G. PA (PA1668), ex-UK to Max Henderson in PNG, in bits and pieces. It has been extensively modified to compete in historic events as an M.G. PA special.

I have some concern that my ageing memory may have precluded other owners of eligible M.G.s whilst members of V.C.C.Q. If so I can only but apologise.

Rod Hiley 2005