

PART I

J2 MIDGETS

Alan Scott



It was he who registered the car MMM 422.

However he was an Austin 7 man and sold the car to Miss June Wills who as an art student was somewhat impoverished. To her credit she actually started work on the car and did a considerable amount of dismantling so that when I saw it had been exposed to the weather for some two years I spread the word around that I might be interested if she wished to sell. The final transaction was something like this

"I understand you are interested in buying my car?"

"Er, yes. How much do you want for it?"

"Oh about £15"

"How much?" My voice had risen in incredulous tones"

"Oh well £10 then." - very resigned.

Long silence "£8"

"O.K. I'll meet you at Mike Johnstones"

and that was it. I should explain that prices were already soaring to dizzy heights.

At Christmas 1965 we pushed this car by hand two miles to a lockup garage and stripped it right down to the chassis. The engine bottom end had been greased and was free to rotate but the head was very badly worn and in need of attention. The brakes were siezed inevitably and various bits of body work were in need of repair. Rather oddly the normal twin carburettor manifold was fitted with a pressure relief valve and the exhaust system passed through the left hand bonnet panel. Frantic work brought the car to such a state that we entered it for 1966 Silverstone. This proved to be rather optimistic, but we did take it to B.A.R.C. Firlie Hill climb on May 29th.

The car was dismally slow and would not exceed 60 mph on the road. It climbed Firlie in 48.25 secs. but the head core plug went and filled the sump with water. The event served its purpose however, so that when the M.G.C.C. Firlie came along on June 19th the car went well enough to take the unblown MMM class, climbing in 39.5 seconds. We could also achieve 78 mph on the road but another

lesson had been learnt at the B.A.R.C. event.

From now on the car travelled to meetings in lofty luxury perched on the back of a Commer pickup truck. This did have its clangers and more than once it fell off the loading ramps. In July we took it to M.G.C.C. Brands Hatch where it won yet another award. I see it lapped 4 secs faster than Mike Hawke and even 1 second faster than Malcolm Beer's Q type. Strange to relate I never recollect seeing more than 65 mph indicated anywhere. In October we were off to Brands again. This time we lapped in 1 m 26secs. and won the MMM unblown award. Geoff Coles lapped the red J4 in 1m 15s at this meeting so I suppose it was a bit damp. Over the winter a lot of work was put in eliminating worn components from the head and fitting a stronger clutch. When we ran it again it was March 1967, the car would now exceed 80 mph but ominous rumblings could be heard in the engine. It was still a standard J2 engine at this stage. In the month before Brands we tried to cure the handling vices. In the dry the car was neutral with a touch of oversteer but the angle to which the tail could be flown before breakaway was very fine. In the wet the characteristics were more marked, quite lethal in fact. I prefer understeer but I wanted to improve the grip with the tail hung out. Safety First remember? Spring rates were 290 lbs/in front and 230 lbs/in rear and 36 PSI tyres all round gave the most predictable handling. We ended up with C type front springs at 340lbs/in with very tight dampers whilst retaining the J rear springs with rather slack dampers. The rear tyre pressures were lowered to 32 PSI and the car then did what was wanted! As it happened Brands Hatch was wet. Coming up Death Hill you could see the black cloud right over the circuit with rain falling to form a mist. I signed on and took the car to scrutineering. Old Fred Matthews was very kind; he only wanted a second throttle spring. However he pointed out a loose exhaust pipe, steering play and some dead spokes in the rear wheels. Just the ticket to give me confidence before a wet drive. The tummy butterflies really started then.

The R.A.C. steward reported me for removing the lights and passenger seat and said if any one objected I

would be disqualified. Even ancient cars must obey international FIA rules. I pointed out that I was entered in a handicap race and heard no more. I watched some of the Register Cars through scrutineering, a beautiful MGPA Ellerton having track rod and trouble, my old TB Geoff Gillet having no second return throttle spring, and a Riley Falcon Pat Gardener was leaking oil. The lady signwriter then came and displayed her artistic figure work on the car. She painted numbers on it too.

I checked the car before going out to practice and found an oil pool forming from a broken pressure gauge pipe. I turned the tap on the block off. Practice started well and I never saw another car until a J4 roared past on pit straight. This really upset my car and it started misfiring. I was passed by a Cobra, some Imps, some quick Minis and stopped at the pits. Water was leaking from the block. The handling had been terrible in the wet and I had nearly spun at Druids Hill bend, Paddock bend and Clearways in quick succession. I examined the rear wheels and found they were coated with oil and not from my car! The Cobra had lost its oil at Druids Hill bend. I cleared up the wheels and continued practice still misfiring. This time I caught and passed an ND Ian Barlow, and a PA Ellerton, but at Druids Hill I spun on the oil hit the bank backwards and stalled the engine. The engine began to rumble ominously and I was pleased when practice was over. During lunch we tried to seal the cracked block, being very successful. Then the handicapper appeared and wanted to know if my car was standard. I showed him the engine and brakes and he went away looking puzzled. My practice laps in the rain were as fast as my last year's winning time in the dry. The brakes very standard J2 ones, worked well enough, but needed adjustment after ten laps.

It rained and blew and rained some more, really pouring as racing started. We lined up in the paddock in handicap order and I led the pack out onto the track for the warmup lap. Coming into Bottom Bend I changed up too early and the crankshaft broke, the car skated wildly until I slipped it out of gear. The pack streamed past and I was left at Clearway as a spectator.

I had no idea of starting order because there was no loudspeaker near me and my programme was back in the paddock. However assuming a normal handicap start by times and groups the handicapping appeared reasonable because by lap seven the cars were very closely bunched. Notable were a supercharged PA Peter Bentley, a concours PA Ellerton, travelling close and steady. A J2 supercharged model Fred Dunkeley sounded lovely and was really catching the other cars until he spun at Paddock bend. The ND and my old TB were extremely stable on the corners and Geoff Coles mistimed and retired with petrolled-up plugs. The float had sunk in the carburettor. The handicapping was good and Bentleys PA led from Dunkeleys J2 followed by the tightest pack of T types I have ever seen. Just prior to this event I had purchased another J2, KV 4260, this one had a 12/12m engine; it also had the most effective brakes I ever come across on a J2. This was to be my road car whilst MG 2657 got ever wilder. However my Brands crash necessitated stripping the latter car right down to, a) straighten the chassis and b) repair the engine. It was then I suspected the car was not a J2 at all but a J3. I bought yet another J2 chassis,

ABP 92, from Nigel Musselwhite as a spare. MG 2657 was back in one piece albeit with a 12/12M engine and the body from KV 4260 in time for M.G.C.C. Firth in June. It was much smarter in keeping with its new found status.

The car climbed faster than ever before in 37.5 sec in practice but the heavens opened and the meeting was washed out. I was surprised at the performance because the car was now heavier and apparently had a less powerful engine than previously.

July took us to Prescott and for this we fitted the J2 head on the 12/12 engine. This was a disaster, we ended up unable to start the car and with a sump full of water so we retired.

In August we went to Beaulieu Concours but ran a big end returning and were towed home by Bob Hudson's KN tourer at speeds in excess of those I could normally achieve. This was obviously the aftermath of water in the oil.

We were in operation again in time for Bentley Drivers Club Firth. The car climbed faster than ever before, 37.4 secs, even though it was in 12/12 M form again.

Phillip Boyne Powells ND was fastest MG, out of a class made up of J2, PA, MGB, MGA, MG1100 and supercharged modern Midget.

The final event of the 1967 year was Silverstone Sprint MGCC. I ran out of petrol and burst the clutch. I finally drove the exDon Pitt PB which actually won the event in Nev. Churcher's hands. The supercharged class was won by Syd Beer's Monaco K3, another ex Don Pitt car.

I had by now decided to build a proper J3 out of MG2657 since it had been confirmed that the chassis number was right. The big mistake I made was in not ordering a 750cc crank when Laystalls made their batch. After all an 850cc engine is still a J2. But that is another story. It never ran again in unsupercharged form.

KV4260 was fitted with a P type engine and the light-weight body from MG2657. It was intended to run this car blown as well, but the member concerned in the partnership backed out and the car was sold. The 12/12M engine which went so well was sold to Geoff Coles to help pay for the Laystall crank.

PART II

MG 2657 'J3' REPLICA

Alan Scott.

Having decided that MG 2657 was a suitable subject for a J3 rebuild I spent the winter of 1967-1968 creating a replica. I always maintained that a replica should be more original than the real thing so there should be no doubt what it is intended to be. I contravened this rule in almost every respect.

Just before I broke the crankshaft at Brands Hatch I had placed an order for a Laystall crank. Unfortunately I specified an 83 mm stroke thus perpetuating the J2 engine size. It was too late to change the order but of course it wasn't going to provide that essential 750cc engine. After the crash I had already changed the rear axle case for an M type one, the front axle was bent and was changed for a P axle. The body came from a J2 but I had a special bonnet made of aluminium which was non-standard in appearance. The front springs had already been changed for C type which are nothing like J3.

but instead of a Power-Plus 6A unit I used an Arnott 1600 drawing air via an Arnott 1 1/4" carburettor. To cope with the anticipated performance increase I fitted 12" P type brakes. This was doubly unfortunate because they didn't work as well as the J brakes and they weren't standard wear on a J3 anyway. Finally I fitted 5, 50x16 wheels and tyres all round. They may have helped the handling but the steering was a bit heavy. So as you can see the only J3 part was the chassis and that was still slightly bent.

The crankshaft problems started with price changes immediately after ordering which did not put me in a conciliatory frame of mind for what followed. They were late on delivery of course and appeared to be an impressive and workmanlike job. Closer examination revealed that the No. II Woodruff keys for the nose and ring nuts were missing. The web plugs were loose although this was probably intentional because the oil ways contained swarf. These same plugs when screwed home fully obstructed the drilled oilways and the crossbolts were so rough that they did not seal the caps. They were neither drilled nor splitpinned and the caps had a very sharp edge to act as stress raiser. I sent the crank back - an action which ultimately resulted in the whole reciprocating components being balanced for 30/-.

I sent a set of polished P type rods to be white-metalled and bored. I went to collect these and found that the bearings already had surface cracks which was bad but even worse the rod H sections were crushed adjacent to the big ends. I raised hell over this and they cleaned up the rods, crack tested them and remetalled them. Then I sent them to Laystalls for balancing. They weighed 13oz, 12.6oz, 12.4oz and 12oz so they needed it. Pistons and gudgeon pins were done also.

Laystalls returned the crank and I did a trial fitting in the engine. The front crank web fouled the front bearing housing so Laystalls machined it whilst I stood and watched. We took the precaution of checking balance again. Yes, it was out of balance. They did the flywheel too, it was lightened and re-balanced.

To get the crank into the engine was a Chinese puzzle. It was necessary to machine away 15mm over

from the crankcase front. A P type oil filter was added to the crankcase which I thought would be a useful mod. To counteract the anticipated torque effects a steel bracket was made to connect the water jacket bolts to the small flat platform on the flywheel housing. It was no longer possible to get a dipstick in the engine because it was full of crankshaft so I added one to the sump "A la P type".

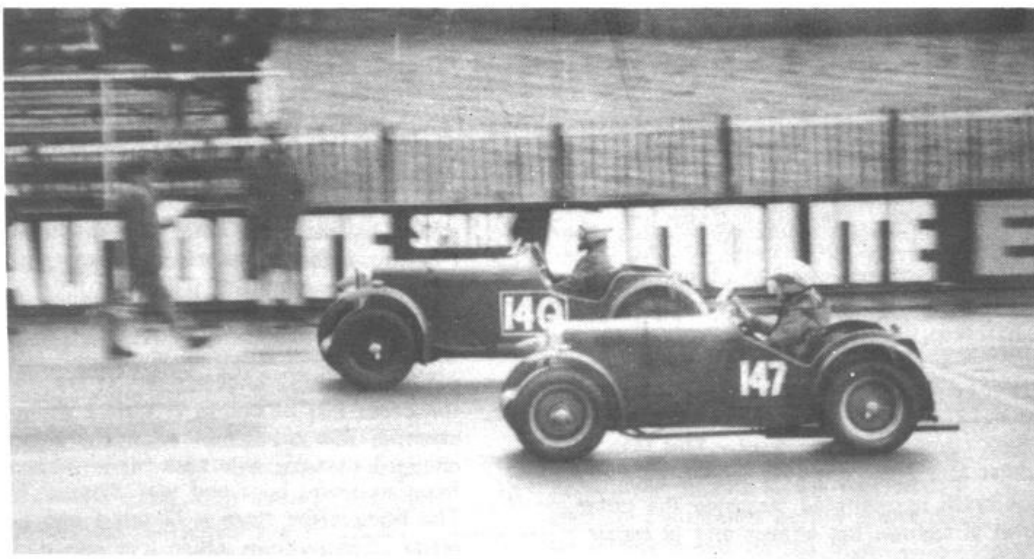
Fitting the blower was simplicity personified. A pair of plates mounted one at each end of the blower can be held by 1 1/4" U bolts to the front cross tube and another tube immediately in front of the radiator, found only on supercharged cars. The drive was taken by two rubber couplings from the crankshaft allowing a certain amount of chassis whip. This proved entirely satisfactory. Plumbing from the blower to the head passed under the radiator to a "Jackson Manifold" copied directly from the late Geoff Coles J4. This was to eliminate the dreaded plug wetting which I was assured would occur with a standard design. A nice flowed exhaust system took care of that end.

Starting the engine was very simple but it was obviously running very weak even on full choke. A needle change, a bit of fiddling and then the exhaust crackled and some boost appeared. It overheated very quickly but I knew then it was going to work. When the mixture was correct you could stand a threepenny bit on the rocker cover.

Oil supply to the blower was a very clever Arnott design. An oil tank was fitted adjacent to the blower. The tank was pressurised from the blower forcing oil via a metering valve into the blower bearings. On the overrun it sucked oil, it used about a pint every 300 miles.

Rather pessimistically we failed to enter for 1968 Silverstone so we spectated instead. The car was pulling 4700 rpm on an 8/39 differential at this stage. Boost was 4 PSI at 3500 rpm but at 4700 the needle fluttered violently. I was very pleased and thought the overall effect was pretty good.

The first competition in supercharged form was B.O.C. Prescott in July. It was an invitation event and was described in the Centre Bulletin which article captures the spirit of the time very well.



Apart from Prescott and Bodiam 1968 was the year we flogged up to Silverstone Sprint in a freezing November fog. We towed the car with a 2A Magnette which was rusting into holes. The cold air intake through these was more than the heater could cope with. We arrived on time and after considerable difficulty, tow started the J type which misfired, blew smoke rings and rumbled ominously. After scrutineering we left the engine running and retired to the cafe. Two hours later it still hadn't boiled. The meeting was abandoned because there was no visual contact between one marshall's post and the next. It was obvious that the car was not feeling well. We stripped the engine over the winter and found that the flywheel sleeve had come loose and then friction welded itself to the crankshaft. I will always be grateful to Syd and Malcolm Beer who spent hours sorting this problem out for me. Mechanical problems, moving house and painting the J type, I almost forgot - I got married too, ensured that the car was not used again till Ditcham Hill Climb. I spent almost all 1969 marshalling.

Following Ditcham we took it to Bodiam but it was misfiring slightly.

1970 was better; I spent less time out of this country and was able to use the car regularly. We entered for MGCC Silverstone and Brands Hatch, which I hardly remember. At Silverstone it was a reasonably fine day. I ran in the High Spectacle with full road equipment and lapped at 1m 27secs. but after eight laps the pipe blew off the blower discharge. By the time the MMM handicap came along I had repaired that the ran the car without wings but an oil pipe came unscrewed and by the time it was cured they wouldn't let me back on the grid. Gordon transferred me to the pre-war MG race and this time it lapped in 1m 25secs. The car was pulling 6300 rpm on an 8/39 differential and showing 9 PSI boost. We went to Ditcham in September climbing in 65 seconds. It was so wet that the meeting was rained off. In the photographs I am wearing an anorak hood over my crash helmet. The last meeting of the year was again Bodiam and since the car misfired badly, I changed to an SU carburetor which stopped the icing tendency which had caused the misfires. It climbed in 33 secs. very quick! My wife won the ladies award 34.5 secs.

Over the winter new valves were fitted. Nothing wrong with the old ones, but they had done a lot of work.

1971 Silverstone was very wet and the misfires started as soon as positive boost appeared. It just

did not go and I was hard pushed to stay in front of the Austin 7's in the pre-war race.

In July we went to Gaydon Sprint; the car went quite quickly to lap in 1m 24secs. but it would not exceed 5300 rpm or 7 PSI boost. The course was rather bumpy and the car nearly shook itself to pieces. Peter Cranage's NE replica lapped in 1m 18.7 secs. August saw us heading North again to Carborough where I managed 48 secs. on a damp course. Cranage did 44 secs.

Ditcham was remarkable in that I had no trouble with the scrutineer and the car revelling in the sunny day pulled 6000 rpm all day. John Adams was fastest with 44 seconds whilst I managed 46 secs.

We also entered the second Silverstone meeting in September. In the High Speed trial the throttle went over centre and I had to drive on the ignition because the throttle was wide open. We had to cover 20 laps non stop in 30 minutes. It took me 32 minutes. Axle tramp was very bad at the front and both front dampers came loose. Fastest lap was 1m 31secs.

Once again I was banished from the pre 55 handicap for that oil pipe and transferred to the pre-war scratch race. Axle tramp kept the speed down to 5000 in top and I was the last supercharged finisher completing 8 laps to everyone else's 10 laps. Cranage lapped in 1m 24secs. and Nev. Churcher's PB s/c in 1m 30secs. Gaydon was next 1m 21 secs. this time whilst Cranage did 1m 18secs. I found that I could enter the turn onto the long straight flat in top at about 5500 rpm but the speed scrubbed off to 4500 rpm in the turn. The next weekend I made the short trip to Blackbush sprint which was poorly attended by the MMM and 'T' circus. The result of this was I was fastest MG with a run of 44 secs.

The last meeting of the year as always was Bodiam. It was also my last event with a J type. It was a fine day but the engine was running very rich and cutting out on full throttle. This combined with clutch slip prevented me bettering 35 seconds. I stripped the engine and renewed the clutch which had shattered. I got it all back together and found that the car was 6th in the MMM car of the year list.

I continued to drive MG 2657 up to the end of 1971 which brought my 6 years competition driving in J types to an end.

ABP 92, the spare chassis is still with me. I am accumulating enough parts to build it up again. I shall enjoy my re-acquaintance with the J type.

MONGOOSE.

