

HISTORY - MG F Type Special

Tim Shellshear has been researching the history of his F Magna...



I spent a large part of my working life researching the history of old buildings and know my way around archives, but after twelve years of research using Trove, Ancestry.com, reading every page of the cars for sale in the Melbourne papers from 1930 to 1956 and two Freedom of Information searches of Vic Roads this one almost has me baffled. Despite this F type being in Victoria, almost certainly since the mid 1930s, its history seems determined to remain largely a mystery and I have not yet acquired a single photo of its early life. What I do know is this:

Factory records show the car to be issued on the 26th April 1932 with engine No 1512 AF. Factory built sheets held by the MG Car Club at Abingdon show the car was delivered in chassis form to Jarvis and Sons Ltd of Wimbledon on the 30th April 1932. The register sheet from Jarvis and Sons records that the car was purchased by Mr J Elvet Jenkins of 18 Bellevue Street Barnes SW13 on the 7th May 1932 and was completed on the 12th May 1932. There are no other English records. The Jarvis built

sheet shows a question mark under model and mark. The Triple M register in the UK feels this probably means the car was taken as a chassis and was exported in that state. One other theory is that the chassis may have been fitted with a pre made Jarvis body in that time.

An engine number search on 1512AF was carried out by the AOMC in Melbourne in 2006 for me showing that the car has been registered in Victoria since at least the mid 1930s and has carried six different Victorian number plates, these being: 101 267 approx 1933-1937, 252 279 1937-1941, CX 358 1941-1944, GZ 283 1944-1950, RV 232 1950-1955, GLA 806 1955- approximately 1962.

The earliest information I have managed to obtain came via a chance find of an ad for the car bearing one of the number plates above in AMS 1948 and then about a year of tracing Mr Lewin in the ad, who turned out to be Noel Frederick Lewin, during which time I rang every one of the 63 Lewins in the Melbourne phone book without success. I finally found him retired in Buderim Queensland and he told me, after getting over his surprise at my announcement that I was ringing about the car he had advertised, that he had bought the car from an attractive young brunette living at Carrum on the bay. This lead me to finding the very ad he had responded to in the Argus 27.12.47: "MG Sports Roadster. Reg. 1934. good condition. Accept P.P. £175. Ring Chelsea 136 Miss Darke. 605 Pt. Nepean Road Carrum." Miss Darke turned out to be Lorna Lilian Darke who was the daughter of Ernest Darke, a Collins Street eye doctor and was a singing student at the time.



F1254 under rebuild in the 1980s...
Photo from David Price



...and on a wet VSCC run in 2017.
Photo from Tim Shellshear

I visited Noel in Queensland in 2011 and showed him numerous photos of MG bodies in an effort to identify the original body maker as he had long ago lost all his photos. Noel described the car as having a two seater aluminium body with swept steel guards and slab tank with spare wheel on the back, and in his view, almost certainly made in England. It was painted black with red wire wheels and he was sure had a badge on the bonnet side saying 12/90.

Noel was remarkably like Alan Tomlinson in age, appearance and modest manner and took great pleasure in describing his war years as a tail and underbelly gunner in Liberators. No wonder motor racing seemed safe and he raced for many years after the F type using a TC, an Austin Healey and finally a Riley. Sadly he passed away in 2014.

Noel at first used the Magna in a few club events such as the Victorian Sporting Car Club's Mid-Winter Trial in June 1948. The records show the MG had a ¼ mile time of 27.8 secs. In Australian Motor Sport August 1948, Noel advertised the car: "For Sale – M.G. Magna, sports roadster, GZ 283, damaged front assembly. Outright sale, best offer, P.P. £200 Lewin, Tramway Pde., Beaumaris, Vic. (Chelt. 782)." This ad was my first break as noted above. In AMS March 1949 under the Australian Motor Sports Club Speed Trials, Noel recorded much better times of 77.1mph in the flying start and this time 21.2 secs for the ¼ mile.

Misfortune struck for Noel in 1949 when the car caught fire in the garage in the back yard at night with the aluminium body melting and immense damage done to anything flammable. The car was then rebuilt as a bare

chassis with new wheels and tyres (from Wally Feltham's P type), mechanicals refurbished and a single ex aircraft seat installed.

The brakes were converted to hydraulic at this time as the original drums with aluminium bands, and indeed also the aluminium gearbox remote, were also ruined. Noel then ran for a couple of years both on the road and in competition without any body at all and the car was not rebodied in Noel's time. Noel's rebuild is evidenced by the occasional ad such as in AMS October 1949: "Wanted M.G. Radiator complete or M.G.Cowl, any type, to fit Magna. N.Lewin, Tramway Parade, Beaumaris, Vic. Phone Chelt.782."

Being by then a single seater with no body Noel ran in the racing car class in events such as at the Western District Car Club grass track race meeting at Nash Park Corio in October 1950 and Rob Roy in March and November 1950. Noel's best time was 38.74 secs.

In the Melbourne Age Saturday 12 May 1951 Noel again advertised the car: "MG Magna, chassis, 6 cyl., 1300cc. This car has been completely rebuilt at great expense. All accessories, lights, fuel pump, batteries, &c., brand new. Special O.S. valves fitted, hyd. brakes, E.N.V. racing gear box, all new tyres, tubes and wheels, reg 6 months; must sell. £295. Phone XF1782 N. Lewin for inspection during week end." Noel sold the car and he told me he never saw or heard of it again.

The registration application by Noel (RV 232) in 1950 describes the car as chassis only with no mudguards, seating for one and a weight of 10.2 cwt. The later application in December 1955, name obscured thanks to our crazy privacy laws, (GLA 806) indicates the body to be red with two seats and having a weight of 15 cwt 2 qrs. So another two seater roadster body of some description, but about 5cwt in weight, i.e. the same as a TC body, had been fitted to the chassis.

The next reference I found was an ad in the Argus 17.11.62 "MG Magna F. 6 cyl OHC. dismantled. No body. reg. good tyres. will wreck. 651181 15 Steele Street Newport." On this occasion the car was purchased by Bill Lockington to transfer the registration to his NE (NA0516). The transferred number was GLA 806 which then graced the NE for several years and a photo of this is on our newsletter cover for 1/2005. Having got the registration Bill Lockington then sold off the Magna in parts, the recipients being forgotten with time.

In the late 1960s, Bill Atherton, a long time Melbourne MG enthusiast, was advised by Wally Magilton that a bare F chassis, together with a bare J3 chassis were lying on the dirt floor of a house garage in Sandringham due to be demolished and that he should grab them. Bill thus saved them from the tip and these were F1254 and J3763 now reinstalled in the J3 owned by Ross Kelly. Bill ultimately gave F1254 chassis to a friend as part of a larger swap and then lost track of it.



In about 1979 the chassis and assorted parts were acquired by Peter Thomas, from a newspaper advertisement, who set about collecting enough parts to create a car. In 1979 Peter sold these parts on to David Price who then constructed the car in its current form using all used MG parts. The car was on the road by 1983. The engine, being a late model NB number 1194A164N, was acquired from Bill Lockington as were various parts associated with the supercharger prepared by Derry George when the NE was blown in Barraclough's time.

The NB motor was brought to Australia by Pip Bucknell, but was kept as a spare for Bill's NE. David built this engine up with a Gordon Allen crankshaft and a Marshall J100 supercharger. The car has recorded 18.4 at Geelong Sprints in stripped form and just under 20 seconds in its present road going form. The English P type body tub also came from Peter Thomas via John Cummins and originally was mounted to PB 0749 (Ian Mawson's car) when owned by Geoff McGrath.

The swept guards, bonnet and sides were skilfully stretched to fit the longer Magna chassis. The front apron and supercharger cowl comes off the NE from the George/Barraclough time and is still painted the dark blue NE colour underneath. The front guards were originally on PA0595 now owned by Graeme Jackson. An L type radiator surround is used. David Price designed and constructed close ratio all synchro gears which are within the original P type gearbox casing.

And that's all the facts I know despite a very fat research file. If any of the information above rings a bell with readers, or if any of those registration numbers can be found amongst the vast collections of old MG photos, I would be delighted to hear from you.



*Tim Shellshear in F1254 at Winton - May 2018.
Photo from Malcolm Robertson*



*David Price working on the construction of F1254 at his home in the 1980s
Photo from David Price*