





John Batterton

1980 MG MGB Restomod Boise, Idaho

A Love Affair

From first sight to rekindled romance, the buzzing B has always been there.

In July 1966, I was walking through an MG dealership in Cleveland when I saw a new white MGB with black leather seats. It was parked outside in an overgrown lot, and an impressively large weed was coming up through the battery access door, tickling the inside of the top. Despite the car's forlorn state, it was love at first sight.

That was the beginning of my devotion to British sports cars. The thrill of driving an MG was addictive, with handling beyond anything I had ever experienced. I drove that car in gymkhanas and road rallies. I drove it in hailstorms and blizzards. I drove it on my honeymoon. Yes, I had all of the usual problems with its electrical system. And yes, the day I sold it, I was miserable.

Years passed and life changed, with family and a career. Shortly after I retired, I decided to rekindle my passion for British cars, so I bought an Austin-Healey 100 M to restore. I was pleased to see that parts were easy to come by. I also spent a decent amount of time on eBay finding the not-so-easy parts. I finished the Healey and won the first of several awards from various events. I was hooked for good, and I completed a succession of concours restorations, including an MG TF 1500 and a Morgan Plus 8. I rarely drove the cars I restored to concours levels. They were perfect, and most seat time was limited to parking them on show fields. I viewed them as objects of beauty, only to behold.

Following a cross-country move to Boise, I bought a Sunbeam Tiger in rough shape. By this point, my age limited my involvement in its restoration, and being more hands-off allowed me to see that

car differently. Rather than planning to make it perfect, I started thinking about how to make it better. Thus began my own "restomod" phase.

The passion is deep in my family, and concurrently, my son purchased a 1967 MGB to restore. He, too, wanted to improve the experience and included many suspension parts from aftermarket suppliers. Then it hit me: Why not do a thoroughly modern version of the MGB? I searched for potential partners, knowing that I would not be doing the actual mechanical work. It turned out the company that was rebuilding my Tiger's V-8, Throttleworks, right here in Boise, was interested, and we entered into a relationship to develop our own version of an MGB.

Throttleworks specializes in tuning, fabrication, and development of vehicles both domestic and foreign. Our personalities were compatible, and Throttleworks was willing to take on the business risk with me. Our shared vision was simple enough: Keep the look of the classic MGB but transform it in all other ways with modern performance, reliability, and creature comforts so it could be fully enjoyed on today's highways. Our new enterprise, Snake River Classics, began with the purchase of a 1980 MGB, and immediately, we dismantled the entire car.

We did a pencil study to determine which engines would fit in the B, and the GM LTG 2.0-liter turbo emerged as the logical choice because of its availability, tunability, serviceability, weight, cost, and fit. It was compatible with two excellent transmissions (a five-speed manual and a six-speed

John Batterton's MGB has been thoroughly modified and modernized for his new venture, Snake River Classics.



automatic), and the power potential of that engine was more than adequate—no need to shoehorn a V-6 or a V-8 that would change the basic character of the car. Plus, an MG-GM pairing just had a nice feel to it.

It would have been easy to simply select suspension components off the shelf, but we determined that the power generated by the new engine would require a complete redesign of the suspension given the torque generated at low rpm. We used computer modeling to engineer thoroughly modern

front- and rear-suspension systems that were not limited by the original geometries of the decades-old setup.

All the other systems (brakes, electrical, etc.) were assessed and redeveloped. The body was reshaped to incorporate flared fenders in order to support the increased tire width. The dash was redesigned to be a variation of the original, younger-looking first-generation MGB. And other details were designed to enhance the look of the new body structure yet remain

consistent with the look of the original MGB.

The development process of our 1980 roadster took three years and included fully documenting the transformation for follow-on vehicles. This was a time of great patience as the work started to come together. The old mantra, “Do it once, do it right,” is the only way to go. And yet, my own anticipation grew weekly as we started to put everything together.

The moment of truth for me was the first time I got behind the wheel of the nearly



Batterton's MG utilizes modern suspension geometry in order to harness the power from its 2.0-liter turbocharged GM LTG motor.



completed car. It had no windshield, so the tears streaming down my face as I accelerated hard were a mix of the wind and my own joy. The raw power and incredible handling of this essentially brand-new MGB were overwhelming. And even in its incomplete state, the build quality was outstanding, and I could tell this was something special. Dyno tuning (260 horsepower/270 lb-ft) and autocross testing took place as the build progressed until, finally, it was ready for an all-important photo shoot so we could

get a website up and running. Snake River Classics was now live.

In the meantime, we started transforming a second car, this time a B GT, to test the reproduction process. Our first outing of the prototype and the 385-hp GT (in process) was for the Idaho British Car Club in 2021. I felt incredible pride showing off what we had developed. The Portland All British Field Meet, one of the larger British car shows in the U.S., followed, where we received so much positive response.

Driving the Snake River MGB is a blast, with confident handling and exhilarating acceleration MG never dreamed of. The sensation of disbelief takes me back to my first drive in the white '66 so many years ago.

It would seem my love affair with the MGB has come full circle. And even though I am not physically doing the work anymore, I take great pride in helping other enthusiasts enjoy the rush of a modern, dependable classic sports car. To those who look down on the MGB, we will see you in our rearview mirror!