

Spark & Spanner

The Official
Publication of
the South
Alabama British
Car Club

March 2026



From the President

Ben Cummings

John Twist is a nice guy. He also knows a lot about MGs. We are fortunate to have made a friend of John. John recently spent time vacationing in our area as he has done for the past five years during the winter months. He is a Snowbird from Michigan and a nice bird indeed.

While he is vacationing here we take the opportunity to have him teach a technical seminar. This year's seminar was a Rolling Tech Session. On March 7th John wowed us again with his mechanical skills but also with his knowledge of MG history. He is a great entertainer, a great storyteller. While working on the cars he told stories of Lord so-n-so and of Cecil Kimber and how the little MG Car Company was never given the respect it deserved. Fascinating stories. And talking to him is like talking to a life-long friend. He makes you feel that comfortable. Thank you, John, for another great tech session.

Our Rolling Tech Session was just one of the many British car activities this Spring. The MGMG display at the Fairhope Arts and Crafts Festival, the New Orleans (Covington) BMCNO show, and the Pensacola PBCA Brits on the Bay festival are all worth attending.

But there are so many other car shows now. I think there is a car show just about every weekend for the next several months. If car shows are



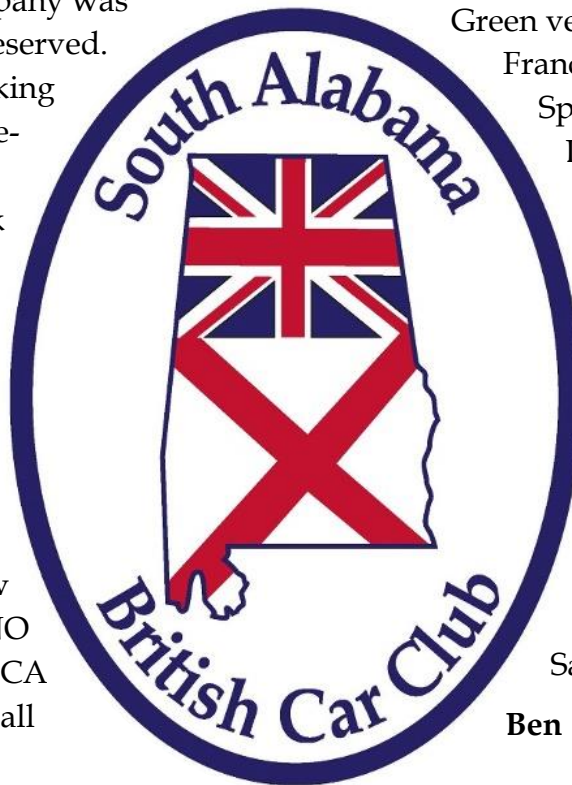
Ben Cummings and John Twist arrive in Ben's Midget for the

your thing, then you have plenty to choose from. There's the Silverhill show, the William F. Green veterans' home show, the St. Francis Xavier Spring Festival in Spanish Fort, and the St. Patrick's Day show in Robertsedale. And of course, we mustn't forget about our upcoming Spring Picnic.

I hope to see you at some of these shows and events. But please make a special effort to attend our sister clubs' events. We always get a good turnout from them at our show. So, let's return the favor.

Safety Fast,

Ben





North American MGB Register

P.O. Box 876
Downers Grove, IL 60515-0876

Thank you for your inquiry into the North American MGB Register. We are the official register for MGB, MGB/GT, MGC, MGC/GT, MG V8, Midgets, MG 1100/1300 sedans, and all Post Abington MGs.

As a member of NAMGBR, you will receive:



The MG Driver

This bi-monthly magazine is packed with over 60 pages of useful information with the right mix of Technical and Member information.



Mutual Aid Directory (MAD)

Many members list their contact information to help fellow NAMGBR members in the event they break down in their area.



Club Insurance

Does your club sponsor a car show, driving event or meeting? Many venues require insurance to hold the event on their property. If your club has 8 NAMGBR members and is a Chapter of NAMGBR...you're covered for free!



Member Classified

NAMGBR offers a free classified section in both the MG Driver and the website. Have an extra MG or parts you want to sell? Target your advertising to the people you know are buying MG.



Technical Help

NAMGBR has assembled a group of technical experts to answer your questions.



Annual Convention

In conjunction with a NAMGBR Chapter, we sponsor a convention highlighting a different part of the United States or Canada. This 4 day event features driving tours, a car show and a taste of the local food and drink. In 2026, MG2026 International will take place in Sandusky, OH



Regalia

We have a number of ways you can show your NAMGBR membership to the public.



Car Insurance

NAMGBR is the first MG Register to offer members the 5% Hagerty Collector Car Insurance Discount. Being a member of NAMGBR can save you money on your insurance.



Dash Plaque

To commemorate your membership in NAMGBR, you receive a dash plaque to display in your car, home, office or where ever.



100,000/200,000 Mile Register

Has your MG gone the distance, and traveled over 100,000 or 200,000 miles? NAMGBR honors this achievement with a dash plaque your car can wear with pride.



Window Sticker

Proudly proclaim your membership in NAMGBR with this attractive two sided window sticker.

Do you want to know more about the North American MGB Register? Check out our website at: www.namgbr.org

Do you want to be a member in the largest club in North American dedicated to the MGB, MGB/GT, MGC, MGC/GT, MG V8, Midget, 1100/1300 Sedans and Post Abington MGs?

Go to the website and either download a PDF membership form and mail with a check or instantly join via Credit Card



We look forward to having you as a member of NAMGBR!

SABCC is a Chapter Club of NAMGBR, and they provide insurance coverage for SABCC events.

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Spark & Spanner is the official publication of the South Alabama British Car Club and is published monthly for the benefit of SABCC members. Permission to use this material by other British car club publications is granted provided credit is given to *Spark & Spanner*. Address comments or submissions to SparkSpanner@gmail.com.

Membership in SABCC is open to anyone with an interest in classic or modern British cars, and dues are only \$20 per year [*Inflation? Tariffs? Not here!* – Ed.].

British Car Festival is supported by



NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL OF MG REGISTERS
Invites ALL MG Owners
to join us August 24-27, 2026
in the Sandusky, Ohio / Lake Erie area
for the every-five-year ALL-MG Event
mginternational2026.org

SHORES & ISLANDS OHIO
CEDAR POINT SANDUSKY PUT-IN-BAY

Registration opens
year-end 2025

INTERNATIONAL 2026 SANDUSKY, OH

North American MG Register, New England MG Register, North American MG Register, MGB

103 MG FEST
1000 ISLANDS 2026

The MG Car Clubs from Ottawa and Toronto invite you to
MG103Fest.

Join us for a weekend of fun and camaraderie in scenic Gananoque. Gananoque is located in the Thousand Islands near the US border. This weekend gathering of MGs is open to all enthusiasts.

<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Tailgate Pizza Party	Group Scenic Tour	MG Car Show
	Pub & Trivia Night	

tinyurl.com/mg103fest
AUGUST 14-16, 2026

Ottawa MG Club, Gananoque

Around the Bend

Upcoming Club Activities



March 10, 2026

British Car Festival Planning Meeting

Pier House Restaurant, 5872 Battleship Pkwy, Spanish Fort – 6:00 to eat and 7:00 to meet.

March 21, 2026

Fairhope Arts and Craft Festival Display

Informal car display on the grounds of Coastal Alabama Community College, just a couple of blocks from the Festival. Organized by Mardi Gras MG Club. Arrive around 9:00.

March 24, 2026

Monthly Club Meeting

Don Carlos Restaurant, 29699 AL-181, Daphne – 6:00 to eat and 7:00 to meet.

March 28, 2026

BMCNO Car Show

Covington Trailhead, Covington, LA. Details and online registration [here](#).

April 17 and 18, 2026

PBCA “Brits on the Bay:” Car Show

Downtown Pensacola, Fla. Friday Dinner starts at 5:30 at the Museum of Commerce, 201 Zaragoza St; show opens 8:30 Saturday in Seville Square. [REGISTER HERE](#)

March 2026

SU	MO	TUE	WE	TH	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 BCF PLAN.	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 FAIRHOPE ARTS
22	23	24 CLUB MEETING	25	26	27	28 BMCNO SHOW
29	30	31				

April 2026

SU	MO	TUE	WE	TH	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17 PENSACOLA BRITS ON THE BAY	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Sparks

Club and Member News

Scavenger Hunt

story by *Ben Cummings*

The cold dark days of winter are over and the itch to drive our little British cars was satisfied on the last Saturday of February with a drive and scavenger hunt. The day could not have been any better. It was a bright blue warm day that made driving our cars a joy. Thank you, **Don Pritchett**, for organizing the event.

It was evident that we are ready for spring and anxious to drive our cars by how early people arrived and by how many people participated. The plan was to meet at Mardi Gras Park in downtown Mobile at 9:30 Saturday morning. Don said he was excited and wanted to get there early to prepare. But by the time he arrived at just a few minutes after nine there were already five cars there. And then another and another and another car showed up.

In total there were thirteen cars. Each car had a driver and a navigator. So, there were a total of 26 people at the hunt. Don handed out the drive course, the questions and the scavenger items. A gun start would have been exciting but likely frowned upon. Instead, the drivers jumped into their cars and sped off on a two-hour course through some of Mobile's historic districts, along the waterfront, and around Brookley Field to view the construction of the new airport.

Does anyone know which president stayed at the Oakleigh Home? I do now. Does anyone know what is illegal to do at McNalley Park? Thanks to Don, I do now. And Don had a little fun by sneaking in a trick question. How many speed lumps are on South Boulevard? I thought I drove over three, but there are none. On South



Boulevard there are speed humps, not lumps. @!#%&\$@!!!

Scores were tallied at Arlington Park and then everyone enjoyed lunch and an awards ceremony at Wintzell's. Congrats to **Bob** and **Ching Walters** for scoring the best. Don awarded them one of his special trophies and the club bought them lunch. The Walters scored 29 out of 33 possible points.

Even though no one scored perfectly, collectively all questions were answered correctly. Fun was had by all and not a single car broke down. Which made it a more enjoyable day. We saw some old friends and some regular participants, and everyone was happy. Great job Don!



Top, some of the cars lined up and ready to go; bottom, along the route (photos by **Don Pritchett**).

John Twist Rolling Tech Session

photos by Robb Ogletree

VP of Activities **Michael Bertagnolli** and his wife **Andrea** hosted this year's annual **John Twist** event, and instead of his usual presentation, the format was a rolling tech session. John is famous for conducting these at venues across the country (and even in the U.K.!) and seeing him work on four cars in a bit more than four hours was highly informative and entertaining.

After the usual exchange of pleasantries, consumption of coffee and doughnuts, and review of logistics (i.e., where's the bathroom?), John was set loose on the cars, who had lined up first come, first served on the morning of March 7.



John Twist with Gil Stuart's car.

Gil Stuart's 1969 MGB was at the head of the queue, and his problem was ignition timing. John took the time [*groan-Ed.*] to explain distributors, static and dynamic timing, and vacuum advance. He timed Gil's car and Gil came back from a test drive highly pleased.

Next up was **Robb Ogletree's** 1962 MGA, which has a 1.8 liter MGB motor, but all the peripherals original to the car, including twin SU carbs. John first set out to try to find an annoying rattle under the bonnet, but never quite isolated it, so he moved on to the carburetors, which were not performing up to par. His at-

tempt to adjust the forward carb was not successful, so he was forced to remove the air cleaners and partially disassemble them. The problem became quickly apparent when he removed comically-long piston return springs from the



David Pierce listens intently as John makes a point about his B.

dashpots. Fortunately, Michael Bertagnolli had some spares, and with them and a few more adjustments, the car ran far better – and Robb returned from his test drive smiling.

My car (*Ed.*, also known as **Michael King**) was next; please see page 17 for its story.

Finally, **David Pierce's** 1968 MGB was addressed. As with *Ed.*'s car, his engine is fitted with a Weber aftermarket carburetor, and even though John is not a fan of this common modification, he adjusted it, resulting in significant betterment.

Pity poor **Ben Cummings**, whose MG Midget was last in line, needing a handbrake adjustment. We had gone over the allotted time, so his car had to wait. Besides, everyone was ready to enjoy lunch at David's Catfish House.

John's events are always well-received, and the more than 40 attendees this year were not disappointed. Our British Car Festival makes them possible, and we are already looking forward to seeing John next year.

Spare Parts

Abingdon and Lucas . . . Tools?

story and photos by Rodney McDonald

One of SABCC's activities in the past was a trek to Magnolia Springs to attend the St. John's Catholic Church lawn party in May. The event welcomed our display of classic British cars. In addition to the fine food, music and antique agricultural equipment on display, there was always a fascinating display of antique tools brought by one of the parishioners. While it was only a small part of his collection, the variety of tools on display was astounding.

I noticed that he had a number of intriguing wrenches on display bearing names such as "ABINGDON" and "Joseph Lucas." Yep, it turns out that it is the same Abingdon and Joseph Lucas that you've heard of before.

The Abingdon on the wrench is the name of a hand tool manufacturer located in Abingdon—the same Abingdon fa-



mous for building MGs for 50 years. Abingdon Engineering made a wide range of equipment including motorcycles, chains and gearboxes. At the turn of the twentieth century, the firm concentrated on hand tools exclusively.

Most British car enthusiasts know the products of Abingdon Engineering by their trade name, King Dick, from the screw jacks

and other hand tools found in the tool kits of classic British cars. You still buy King Dick-branded tools today via the Internet.

The Lucas tool line on the other hand, is not that well known outside the UK. The firm known to us for their automotive electrical equipment and instruments (through its acquisition of the Smiths brand) was a maker of small metal goods in the nineteenth century. One of their main lines was small hand tools such as the Joseph Lucas girder wrench in the photo (*see left*) I shot at Magnolia Springs.

Vintage examples of both these tool brands can be found on various online sellers sites and some of them go for big dollars.



Everyone Loves and Oddball: Episode 3: Reliant

story and photos by Peter Lee

As the lone Reliant owner in SABCC, I am the only one that knows the massive level of skill it takes to drive, nay tame, the three-wheeled beasts. Morgans seem to be close but Reliant drivers have an extra level of crazy involved. But what gets me is the lack of appreciation of the oddballs of the odd balls – the four wheeled Reliants. What? You don't know what I'm talking about? Well here we go with episode 3 of 12.

First is the Sabra. Yes, with an A on the end, if you think you caught an error. This was a limited run of cars built by Reliant for an Israeli company, Autocars. The Israeli ones were built in the UK and finish-assembled in Israel. In the UK, Reliant sold them as the Reliant Sabre from 1961-1964.



Sabre Six



Sabre Four

This Sabre or Sabre Four boasted a 73 hp four cylinder motor and ended up with a total run of 208 cars for the Reliant marque. In 1962 this was then boosted to a 109 hp six-cylinder creating the Sabre Six, which had a less controversial front end. Only 77 of those were built, but the interesting thing is that all were coupes except two convertibles. Talk about rare. Shelby made 998 original Cobras and 6 Daytona coupes. So common.

Now Reliant needed a sporting follow up so we have the first is the one that you probably know, the Scimitar. The most well-known Scimitar ran from 1964-1986 in either a coupe, shooting brake, or cabriolet form and multiple upgraded generations. But they always had a fiberglass



Above, SE4; below, SE5A



(story continues next page)

Reliant, continued

body on a steel frame with Ford power. At first they boasted 120 hp and a top speed of 117 mph. using the straight 6 from the last Sabre.`

In 1968 the redesigned body of the Scimitar, the SE5,debuted. It went from concept to unveiling in less than 12 months. The biggest change was the grand touring estate (GTE) hatchback shape pictured here. These added an automatic transmission in 1970.



SE6

This line was again redesigned in 1975 to the GTE SE6 configuration that ran until 1986, when the final of the series, the SE8 debuted in 1980. It ran until 1986 as a hardtop and eventually a convertible. It did finally swap away from the Ford Essex motor in 1980. because Ford stopped making them, and went to the Cologne motor that was slightly smaller than the 3.0 liter Essex.

Scimitar production numbers by generation :
SE4: 1,000; SE5: 4,311; SE6: 4,284; SE8: 442



SE8

The final Scimitar was a departure from the original concept trying to offer a solution to the small convertible market. The SS1 chassis mod-



SST

els that went from 1984 to 1995 started with power from a Ford 1.4l motor and eventually got a Nissan Silvia 1.8l turbo 4 good for 135 hp, but slow performance, awkward styling, and poor build quality limited its success. It went into a subsequent short-lived SST version and the final model, built from 1992 to 1995, brought back the Sabre name but never caught on.

But wait, there's more. If you are going to build a sports model, you should also build a economy model. In 1964 when the Scimitar was introduced, so was the Rebel. This four wheeled economy car was meant to drive the Reliant brand forward to follow the success of the Mini, and it was the expected replacement of the three -wheeled models. The Rebel was originally



SE8

(story continues next page)

Reliant, continued

launched with a 28 hp 500cc motor, and that motor size was increased over time up to a 750cc 35 hp motor that could push the car to 80 mph and 65 mpg. Rebel production initially struggled due to low throughput of the assembly line and didn't get cracking until it was put on its own production line.

From 1975 to 1980, came the second generation Rebel. But it wasn't the Rebel. It was the Reliant Kitten. With an 850cc 40 hp motor and a new styling, it again suffered from poor production issues, high price, and eventually became a special-order-only car as the three-wheeled models continued to sell. Reliant would not actively produce them unless an order was received, pulling staff off the Robin line to complete them as needed. This is kind of hard to think about when you are talking what was expected to be a high-volume econobox for the masses.



Kitten

Strangely enough, the car ceased production after a short run, being replaced with the Reliant Fox, basically a Kitten pickup that was available with either a hard or soft top, as an estate car, a van or even a convertible. Produced from 1983 to 1990, the strange thing about the Fox is that it was first produced in Greece in 1979 by MEBEA on a modified Kitten chassis with its usual engine. Then it moved back into England in 1983 after being modified to sell in the UK. It is be-

lieved that 1,000 to 3,000 Greek models were built with somewhere between 600 and 1,000 being UK-built. According to Wikipedia, only 37 currently remain road-legal in the UK.



Fox

So in conclusion, Reliant is much more than three-wheeled cars. The Scimitar was the most successful of the group with even Princess Anne famously owning a few. Sure, everyone knows about the tumbling three-wheelers, but now you know about the rest of the family and can properly spread the word of Reliant. And just to add insult to injury to some of you, Reliant was the second-largest British car company from the 1970s to the 1990's behind only British Leyland. That's not bad for a company that started with a prototype three-wheeler built in a back garden out of Raleigh Cycle Company leftovers.



Ed. can't run an entire article about Reliant without including this, can he? No, he cannot (and yes, the car was rigged.)

Spannering

Tech, Repair, Restoration

A Bugeye Named Lazarus

story and photos by "Bugeye Bob" Willsie,
PBCA

Bob Manske thinks I'm crazy. I showed Bob the video of the 1958 Austin Healey Bugeye Sprite "Lazarus" I am resurrecting. After a few seconds of stunned silence he said something that politely translated meant "You are out of your mind."

I'll let you decide for yourself on my sanity. Here are a few pictures of the Lazarus as "delivered." A huge trend in classic cars today is "Patina." Some people spend a fortune during restoration to have their car body-worked and painted to perfection, then scraped, rusted, and



oiled to give their prize that "distressed" look.

As you can see, Lazarus arrived well distressed. Some people might even say "destroyed" is more appropriate. Those people don't appreciate quality automobiles.

I had been assured by "experts" on social media that everything that looks like rust and body filler was merely well-weathered paint and primer. Also, that which appears to be major dents and collision damage are just the result of a 1967* Louisiana State University Art Student emotion-

ally healing himself through pioneering Neo-Expressionism and not the result several pre-exam all night benders. (*See the yellow 1967 LSU student parking sticker on the windscreen.)



As you can see by the right rear of the vehicle, the student owner made extensive use of multiple mediums and artist's tools. There is considerable impasto technique in his use of Bondo and metalized epoxy mediums (pink/gray, as well as innovative deformation of the substrate through carefully implemented applications of exterior building surfaces, possibly made of granite, and several areas that hint at structural modification of the body with an axe. (See red arrow.)



Special notice must be made to the unique "long term natural degradational design" element chosen for the car's interior. Only a true artistic
(story continues next page)

A Bugeye Named Lazarus, continued

genius would have the foresight and patience to embark on a multi-decades long exploration of a technique that is often seen and experienced in the automotive owner's world but until now never pursued with forethought. The unique "Flow Thru" air balance that results from this artistic brilliance has to result in significant passenger comfort.



One has to commend the artist on his willingness to give up the use of this vehicle for 57 years from 1967* until the time I purchased this work of art in January of 2024. (* Louisiana registration image on windshield shows 1967.) The incredible level of detail the artist put into his work we only get hints of when we look at the engine bay. Note that offsetting the cracked heater fan casing, there is a windshield wiper bottle that still contained fluid after all these



years. Such planning!

The mechanical skills this student had so early in life must also be noted. Only a true genius in both automotive engineering and artist expression could ever understand the necessity of not merely never changing the engine oil, but also that one must remove all the spark plugs before letting the engine sit for decades through multi-



ple hurricanes to ensure that even areas that most people would never see would receive the same quality level of artistic expression he applied to the body of Lazarus.

[Bob, your sense of humor will serve you well as you work on this project. In case anyone is confused by the preceding as to how a Bugeye should look, here's a vintage advertisement-Ed.]



Auction Roundup: “Bugeye” Sprites

Recent results for the “Brits on the Bay” feature car.

1960 Austin-Healey Sprite



Sold for \$20,000 on Bring a Trailer (Nov. 2025)

Fitted with a Judson supercharger on its 948cc engine, this car was an older restoration that has held up well.

1958 Austin-Healey Sprite



Sold for \$8,200 on Bring a Trailer (Nov. 2025)

Why “just” \$8,200 for a decent Bugeye? Well, this car needed some tidying, but it also had a reassigned VIN, leaving its actual origins in doubt.

1961 Austin-Healey Sprite



Sold for \$22,050 on Hemmings (June 2024)

A “bare-metal nut-and-bolt” restoration was completed in 2016 and a 1275cc engine was fitted, along with other modifications. One wonders if the restorer lost money.

1961 Austin-Healey Sprite



Sold on Bring a Trailer for \$55,000 (Nov. 2025)

Wow, just wow. \$55k for a Bugeye. Of course, it was subjected to a full restoration, and a 1275cc engine – with a supercharger – was fitted, along with a Ford five-speed. Be aware, however, that the restoration cost more than \$100k, paid by the seller, who’d owned the car 54 years.



This photo is from the cover of a 1960 sales brochure (a reprint is available on Amazon [here](#)). Drawings from this era tended to exaggerate the proportions of the car—or perhaps the people were of slight build, which is desirable when driving a Sprite.

Keep Your MGB Cool . . . and Dry

story by *Tim Witzigreuter*

Ever been out in your LBC and had an issue with electrical, tires, carburetors, overheating, (and the list goes on)? Not long ago I was on the way home after dark from the Gallery Night Car Show and noticed the temperature gauge was climbing past halfway and then quickly rising further to almost the red. I immediately looked for the next exit which was a couple hundred yards from me and I exited the interstate. As I turned on to the exit ramp I heard a "pop," and in the inside of the car and around the bonnet I saw steam. I quickly shifted to neutral and turned off the ignition going around the exit ramp and discovered to my surprise my 1977 MGB Roadster has a locking steering wheel. All of a sudden the steam, pop and temp gauge left my thoughts as I was heading for the grass on the off ramp. I turned the key to the on position and regained steering and safely navigated the rest of the exit ramp curve and onto a four-lane road and coasted into a Denny's parking lot.

I just knew that I had just cooked my engine. I opened the bonnet and noticed rusty-colored coolant all over the engine compartment. The 1977 thru 1980 MGB has a radiator without a cap. It does have a fan switch sensor for the cooling fans at the top of the radiator by the top hose that goes to the thermostat. The fan switch sensor had been blown out of the radiator from all the pressure and sprayed the engine bay with coolant. I had a 1980 MGB that had the head gasket blow, and coolant mixed with the oil which looked like coffee with heavy cream.

After allowing things to cool down I hesitantly pulled the oil dipstick with my eyes closed, as I said a prayer, then slowly opened my eyes to see clean, clear oil on the stick at the full line. I truly believe that when the fan switch sensor was forced out it relieved all the pressure and

turning off the ignition after hearing the pop and seeing steam saved my head gasket from blowing. I was able to somewhat relax at this point and now had to figure out how to get my car home. Did I mention it was 10:25 p.m. when this all occurred?

I Googled "tow trucks near me" and made the call. The person that answered asked my location and said I could have a rollback there in 30 minutes. I agreed and thanked him. I walked into the Denny's, washed my hands and ordered a Coke to go. When I exited Denny's there was a rollback pulling into the parking lot. He gingerly and carefully put my B onto his rollback and secured it with straps. I jumped in and we took it to the house. He offloaded it in my driveway just as gingerly and carefully as when he loaded it.

I didn't sleep well that night, for some reason, but was up early the next morning. I went outside and opened the bonnet, reinserted the fan switch and filled the radiator with water, which without a cap on radiator had to be done by removing the top hose from the thermostat housing and pouring water/coolant through it. Once it was full I reconnected the hose, got in the driver's seat, put the key in the ignition and once again with eyes closed turned the key to start position, as I said a quick prayer, and it started right up and idled at 800 RPM. After a very short time the temperature gauge started to climb and made its way past halfway and I turned off the engine. I pulled the dipstick and once again saw clean clear oil up to the fill line. I let out a HUGE sigh of relief and replaced the dipstick.

Now comes the repairs. What was I going to need to repair the overheating issue? Jack Cow-sill, a PBCA member that is from the UK and knows LBC's inside and out came and looked at my car. He confirmed to my relief that the head

(story continues next page)

Keep Your MGB Cool, continued

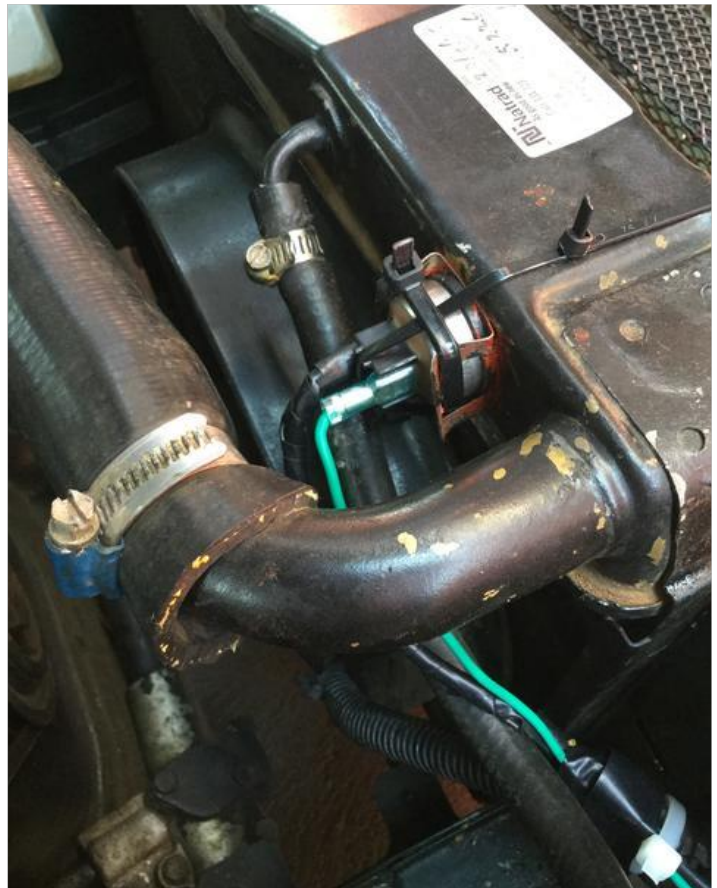
gasket was probably good since the oil was clean, showed me the play in the pulley on the water pump and the leak in the radiator. His suggestion was a new water pump, thermostat, new hoses, new fan switch sensor, new radiator, new expansion tank, and a new exhaust manifold gasket since he noticed a leak. I made the call to Moss and ordered all the parts per Jack's suggestion. The parts arrived and we trailered it to the private shop owned by one of our club members and the next day began the removal of parts.

When removing the thermostat housing we discovered that the thermostat was closed and rusted, not allowing it to open, and the bearings in the water pump were bad. We then flushed the engine with water and the water coming out was very rusty-looking. We flushed until it was almost clear. With Jack's expertise, knowledge, and patience with me all the parts were removed and the new ones put on. The radiator was filled with coolant and we started the car allowing the air bubbles to escape. After letting it idle for a while, the temperature gauge began to rise, made it just before halfway at the first dot on the gauge and then the cooling fans came on. Allowing it to continue to idle, the temperature gauge stayed at halfway and fans came on and off like they are designed to do, and the test drive in traffic passed the test. I was relieved that nothing major happened internally to my engine and was good to go.

When I got home I noticed coolant on the driveway. I opened the bonnet and noticed leaking around the fan switch sensor at the top of the radiator. The engine temperature was normal and stayed at just below halfway all the way home from the shop. I found that it was leaking around the rubber grommet that seals the fan switch. In 1980 they made a clip that slid over the fan switch to help seal it and keep it in place.

Needless to say, the 1977 through 1979 does not have that clip. After watching a John Twist video on the cooling system of a 1977 MGB, I learned a couple techniques to help seal and hold the fan switch in place.

I tried those and still had a small leak around the switch/sensor. More research was done and I discovered when ordering a new fan switch that it comes with the grommet. Unfortunately this is the wrong grommet for the 1977 and is for the 1980. For anyone that has this issue, when ordering a fan switch, if ordering from Moss, the part number for the rubber grommet for 1977 through 1979 is 542-205. The rubber grommet that comes with the switch is part number 542-203. It has been a headache dealing with all of this but now my B is running great and has no more leaks.



The engine cooling fan control switch is a frequent source of frustration for 1977 to 1979 MGB owners. This owner of a 1977 posted on the MG experience a solution using zip ties. Others use various clips. John Twist suggests positioning the hose clamp to press on it..

Weak and Rusty

Michael King, Editor

Near-Disaster

It was a cool and foggy morning as I headed to the Publix market near my home in west Pensacola. I was to lead the Panhandle British Car Association caravan to the **John Twist** Rolling Tech session, and since John's expertise is MGs, I was in my 1979 MGB—a car I drive very little, but I'd taken it out the day before and it seemed fine. I checked the fluids and tire pressures, and headed out.

Now, I've owned this car for nine years, having bought it from the estate of the late **Richard Cunningham**, who had bought it from the estate of a retired Marine, who never saw an MG gadget he didn't like. The car has Spax tube shocks, a Weber carb, a header, and of course a Pertronix "Flamethrower" ignition system. More on that later.

When I got to Publix, I found the "caravan" consisted of PBCA president (and SABCC member) **Tim Witzigreuter** and new PBCA member and British ex-pat Lawrie Alexander. They were in Lawrie's Jaguar XF. Oh well, at least I wouldn't be driving alone.

I'd mapped out a 46-mile route that largely kept us off four lane roads, and we were making good time, but about 15 miles from **Michael** and **Andrea Bertagnolli's** place, I notice my four-cylinder engine was running on three. We arrived safely, however, and I put the car in John's line—not something I'd originally planned, but I did not want to drive home on 75 percent.

When John got to my car, he started by pulling plug wires, one at a time. Cylinder four was the issue. Pulling the plugs, he found that all seemed to be burning cleanly (albeit, the engine is running slightly rich). He then did a compres-



sion test: 140 psi, 140 psi, 135 psi, and 140 psi.

That left the ignition system. The distributor and rotor looked fine. John put everything back together and was trying to find the problem, with the engine idling, and suddenly it quit. And it would not restart.

This revealed the essential problem with electronic ignition modules. When they work, they work great. No points, no condenser, just plug it in and go. But as John recommends, if you have one, you'd better have two—and a screwdriver. Otherwise, when yours fails, you will be dead on the side of the road.

Thanks be to God for Michael B's stash of spares. He lent me a distributor with points and condenser, John installed it, and I was back in business. I made it back to the Sunshine State without incident.

So do I trust the car now? Maybe. After I bought it, I spent months installing a new interior and top, wet-sanding the paint, having the wheels and tires replaced, and fitting a new top—but I did not have to work on the engine, because it was fine—until it spun its bearings on the way from Daphne to the Pensacola show. The late Mike Darby sold me a used engine for it, and it's *seemed* good ever since. But I've now learned my lesson about trusting electronic ignition modules. I need to return Michael's distributor. My next one just might have points.



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Classifieds

1971 Lotus Europa

Mid-engine car with 1.6 liter engine and four-speed transaxle. Frame-off restoration begun; car is mostly in boxes. Purchases include:

- Banks Europa shocks and springs
- Aluminum radiator
- Aluminum flywheel
- Custom pistons
- Intake manifold and Weber carb
- Stainless steel door hinges
- Reground "hot street" cam
- Used windscreen in very good condition
- Four Yokohama tires

Body has cosmetic issues and will need some repairs, Includes Minilite wheels; brakes and suspension complete. All electrical components work. Will need seats and crash pad padded and recovered, and new headliner.

Engine is missing a cylinder liner and head will need repairs. Transaxle is good. Repair manual and service parts included, along with other literature.

Car can be seen in Mobile, Ala.

Asking \$2000

Bob Bulfin

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And now, for something completely different . . .



This probably doesn't deserve a caption, much less an explanation.



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