

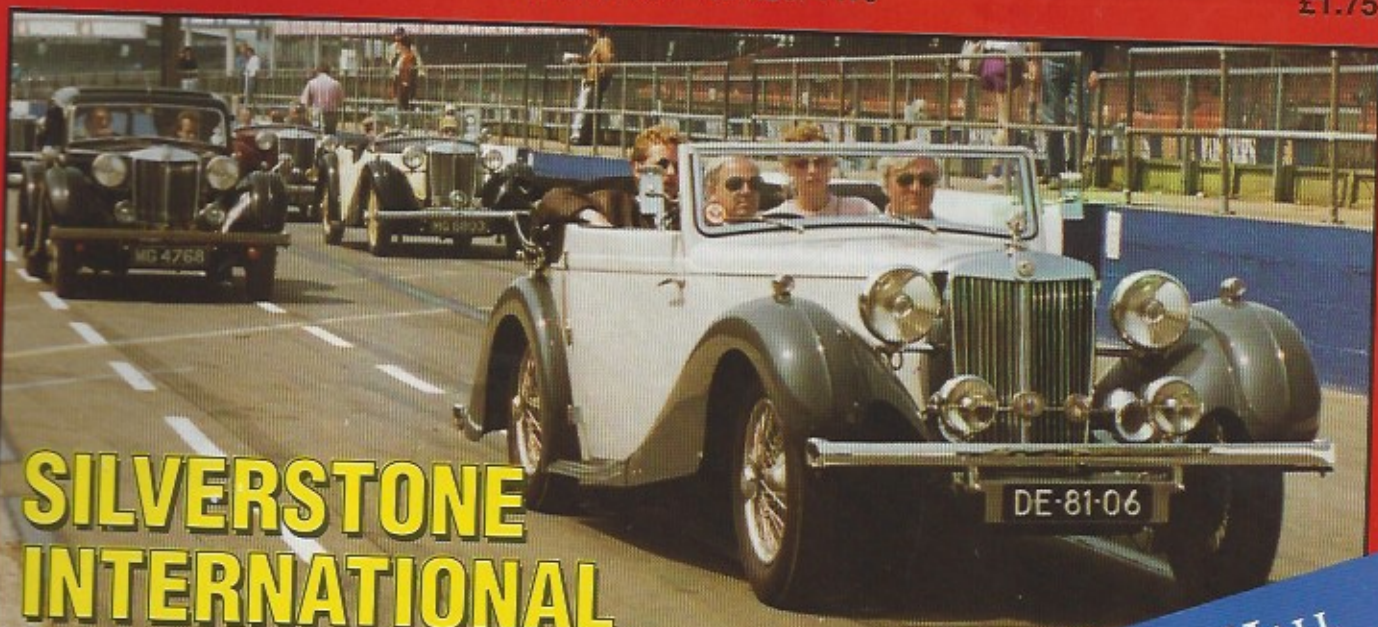
# MGenthusiast

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**SILVERSTONE  
INTERNATIONAL**  
Full report and pictures

**MG RV8 – FIRST  
PHOTO INSIDE**

PLUS MGs ON EURO-DISNEY • REGENCY RUN • STANFORD HALL



**MILLE MIGLIA MGA REBUILD**





# LADY IN RED

"How on earth did they hear each other?" shouted Bob just inches from my ear, the big rev counter showing 5,000 rpm as he aimed 'Mable' surely down the straight. "They wore helmets with visors," I bawled back from behind the tiny half-moon of glass that screened the blast.

They were Nancy Mitchell and Pat Faichney and we were riding a vibrant piece of MG history – the Mille Miglia MGA, MBL 867, which Bob West and partner Mike Horner have painstakingly restored in the five years or so since *MG Enthusiast Magazine* revealed their discovery.

Then their comments regarding the oldest and most raced MGA in existence and their intent to perform a worthy restoration may have sounded optimistic to those not acquainted with their knowledge of and dedication to the MGA. From our rip-roaring ride in the car and as you can see, there can be little doubt they've recreated a superlative MG.

The only square lines on an MGA are in the windscreen and Mable, as she's affectionately known by her saviour, sports only transparent eyelashes to show her seductive curves to best effect. This lady in red was created in May



**KEVIN WISE reports on the painstaking rebuild of a piece of MG history by dedicated MGA enthusiasts and partners Mike Horner (left) and Bob West.**

1955, chassis number ending 105, the fifth production MGA Roadster and – as the first four cars were the alloy-bodied Le Mans type – the first steel-bodied MGA. One of two prepared by the factory for the 1956 Mille Miglia, her partner MJB 167, was raced by Peter Scott-Russell and Abingdon test driver Tom Haigh. Bob knows because, in addition to having every article ever written on the car, both the MGCC historian and British Motor Heritage's A. D. Clausager have helped verify this special MGA first registered in February 1956.

He admits his research and sourcing

of parts for MBL have been harder than the actual nut and bolt rebuild. "Take the aero-screens, for example, on stripping we'd noticed sets of weld-filled holes arranged in a triangular pattern on top of the bulkhead. At a meeting with Nancy, three years ago, she showed us her 1956 works album, containing photographs revealing the unique aero-screens with their triangular mounting pattern.

"We were just thinking about making some up when, a year ago, we spotted a pair of Auster screens at a Newark

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autojumble. Considering the car came from the Leicestershire area, it's not inconceivable that these were the original equipment. I've never seen another set anywhere," says Bob.

His research showed that the first five MGAs were painted Tyrolite Green – a distinctive light green rarely seen today, and sure enough, on stripping the Canary Yellow and five or so other layers of paint from MBL this original colour scheme was reached. After six months the car was re-painted Alfa Red for the Mille Miglia where partisan preference was given to the racing red favoured by the home teams.

As we reported after our first meeting, four factory steel wings had been obtained to replace the fibre-glass items the car came with. Small black tape patches covered the two rectangular square screen mount cut-outs and Mike explained: "These cars were driven to the event with windscreens attached, to be removed for the race," his comments serving as a timely reminder that this was basically a road-going production car – albeit one exquisitely prepared to finish a 1,000 mile race.

This Mitchell MGA looked marvellous from any angle, its cut-away grille holding a large Lucas Flamethrower driving lamp in support of stone-guarding headlights and bumper recesses sprouting two Altet electric horns amongst the cooling cut-outs for oil and brakes. Purpose almost matched by the rear aspect where a massive quick-release filler cap protruded from the boot lid cut-out. This feeds a special 20 gallon fuel tank mounted through the boot floor and accessed by pulling a remote lever found behind the co-driver's seat.



**Peter Scott-Russell, Tom Haigh, Pat Faichney and Nancy Mitchell pose for the camera upon collecting their cars from Abingdon.**

Says Bob: "We were lucky with the tank in that we could use the works-type in RMO 101 as a pattern. In Mable the original cut-out had been covered by an aluminium plate by a previous owner and the tank mountings had also to be remodelled."

From this tank the fuel lines stay internal – like the brake pipes – and join the thick barrel of the SU electric fuel pump bolted to the offside inner rear wing. Viewing part of the new wiring harness Mike added: "When the factory did these cars they put heavy-duty electrics in them: wiring harness, dynamo and regulator." A tool kit, too, and this was in place strapped over the tank.

Opening the bonnet is always interesting and here Mike pointed out the

different resting position for the bonnet stay-rod, midway along the left side of the cut-out rather than at the front to make for easier access. The spare set of plugs looked neat on the bulkhead in one of the few spaces not filled by Aldon's carefully assembled, blue-printed painted and polished block that with mild cam and high-ratio axle give a tractable 73bhp at the rear wheels.

In Italy the girls claimed 108mph on the longer straights: "Surely near to 6,500 rpm; we usually take it to 5,000," stated Bob

Our short run was a thrill as the well-rounded song of Aldon's A-Series 1500 blended with the background rush and balanced behaviour of this living legend on the smooth country B-roads. It certainly confirmed Bob's view that MBL is now a good car in its own right; regardless of its racing history. One would give endless satisfaction to someone without the slightest idea of its past and this is a credit to the rebuild performed by Horner & West.

However, history it has and in no short supply. That rear-view mirror on the left-hand side was put there with a view to enabling Pat Faichney to see and give warning of quicker cars overtaking when Mable was being driven on the right-hand side of the road in Italy. Just like Jaeger's big chronometric rev counter with red tell-tale and the dipping central rear-view mirror were there to assist Nancy Mitchell in driving as fast as she could day and night on a 1,000 mile loop through the Latin countryside.

The taught handling was aided by the Andre friction dampers, used by the factory before anti-roll bars were developed, and subtly altered brakes featuring Ferodo VG95 lined drums with inboard



**With no protection save for an helmet against the elements Nancy and Pat press on ignoring a makeshift refuelling station thanks to their massive 20 gallon fuel tank.**

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cooling holes and outboard air scoops. These tiny multiple vents being visible through the special Dunlop alloy 60-spoke wire wheels – rebuilt from MBL 867 by Motorwheel Services, London – fanning round the drum.

"We fitted Continental 165x15 tyres because of their similar tread pattern to the Dunlop Weathermaster originals," Mike added, while pointing out the front wheel brake detail.

Inside Mable's grey leather interior makes for a sumptuous cockpit unusual in that grey was not meant for the original Tyolite Green car. Says Bob: "We asked Nancy and she thought it was beige, but one of the colour photos clinched it and we think the grey – which includes the hood – goes great with red." While in the cockpit he showed us the six by four inch hinged panel found in the driver's side of the transmission tunnel for topping up the gear oil – a feature to be found in later BMC production cars. But no trace of an oil-pumping system like Tom Haigh used in MJB 167.

One of the more interesting details uncovered by Bob's research was the use of specially-adapted screen-wash bottles by Nancy and Pat to provide fluid nourishment during the race. Fitted inside the cockpit, behind the co-driver, they fed fluid through plastic pipes. Nourishment, too, as these were filled with Lucozade as one of Bob's pictures shows! Modern bottles are used at the moment, but it's a nice touch.

Their feet, if nothing else, would have been warm, in this wide open car, for heat is dissipated through the front floor and transmission tunnel that would have helped make a hard top very uncomfortable. In the rain storms that bedevilled the April 28th-29th Mille Miglia that top would have been heaven.

Bob, having regaled us with a story of another MGA which wasn't all it was cracked up to be, was keen to get us on our backs inspecting a dent in Mable's



*The lines of the MGA are beautiful to behold from any angle.*



*Nancy Mitchell tops up the girls' drinking bottles with energy giving Lucozade and (right) the bottles have been faithfully reproduced in the restoration.*

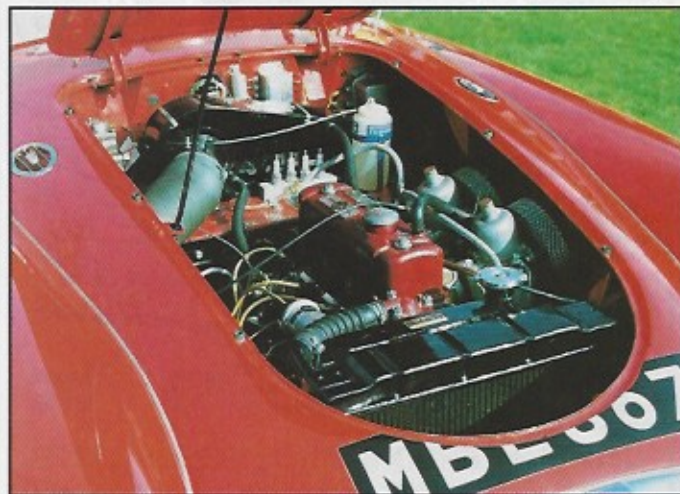


front cross-member. Previous owner, John Jenks, who not only raced the car but got married in it, recognised it, instantly.

There's no doubt Messrs Horner and West, thanks to their efforts, have a pretty special MG that can be enjoyed on two levels: as a piece of living history

and as an enjoyable sports cars in its own right.

These world-renowned suppliers of MGA cars and parts wish to acknowledge sheet-metal worker Roger Daniels, Aldon engine builder Don Loughlin and thank Nancy Mitchell for being helpful on their visit.



*Note spare spark plugs in the engine bay. Power plant is a tribute to Aldon Automotive who rebuilt the engine to similar Mille Miglia specification.*



*Tell-tale rev counter dominates dash. Note horn and additional rear view mirror on co-drivers side. Grey trim and hood contrasts well.*



# DEATH RACE 1,000

Death and dastardly weather stalked the new MGA Nancy Mitchell and Pat Faichney drove 1,000 miles round Italy. The race was the famous Mille Miglia organised by the Brescia Automobile Club run for the 23rd time in 1956. Constant rain storms were a trial to the two open cars with Peter Scott-Russell and Tom Haigh running an identical works prepared MGA alongside the ladies.

Three lightweight MGAs had won the Team Prize in the previous year's tragic Le Mans 24 Hours when more than eighty spectators were killed. Now in the light of an official withdrawal from racing, just two lightly modified production cars were fielded.

Prepared by the Abingdon Competitions Department's Messrs Watts and Wellman, these cars were copies of the Le Mans MGs and were tuned to give 83bhp. They were tested then driven overland to Italy. BMC rally driver and mother of three Mrs Mitchell ran with hotelier's daughter Miss Faichney in race car number 227.

After 15 hours seven minutes and 28 seconds their ordeal was over. "That poor girl sat besides me for the whole of the race in an open car without even a windscreen – just aero-screens. I think co-drivers are the bravest people," said Mrs Mitchell of her passenger.

The Scott-Russell/Haigh car had finished just five minutes earlier after

## Five people were killed and at least 15 injured in the 1956 Mille Miglia 1,000 mile race which ran in torrential rain for the 12 hour event.

averaging 65mph and the driver of car 229 said: "That little car gave me the chance to become a life member of the Mille Miglia Club."

So wet was it, he'd had to dry the water-logged drum brakes as he motored along the straights: "With all those holes in the brakes the water put them completely out of action," said Scott-Russell. The two MGs had tried for a class win over a Porsche 1500 Speedster, which, according to Scott-Russell, had gained an unfair advantage by stopping to erect his hood. Nevertheless, 70th and 74th places had been secured, with second and third in the Limited Price Class, while Mrs Mitchell won the Coupe des Dames.

Fittingly, five Ferraris took the first five places with Castellotti's 3.5 litre V12 averaging 85.39 mph to finish after 11



Decision to paint the car in 'Italian racing red' helped win over partisan crowd.



Nancy Mitchell's official certificate for completing the 1956 Mille Miglia.

hours 37 minutes and 10 seconds – his goggles ripped from his face by the ferocious wind. Waterlogged and debris-strewn roads made driving treacherous and by the end of the event two drivers and three spectators were dead and many more injured. Even Stirling Moss' Maserati had crashed out while John Heath died after crashing the HWM car he designed! If ever the MG Car Company's slogan *Safety-Fast* had been put to the test it was surely here and by these drivers.

Said Scott-Russell: "It was a very, very nicely balanced motor car, that MGA. I loved it." Tom Haigh drove their car back after the race and Peter Scott-Russell drove the Mitchell/Faichney MGA.

Says Scott-Russell: "Next morning we phoned John Thornley from the Steering Wheel Club in London, told him we had the two MGs there, all covered in Italian mud, racing numbers and stuff – a big plate the Nancy had won for being the fastest woman round the Mille Miglia. I asked if he wanted us to put them into that big MG showroom in Piccadilly; they'd have looked marvellous there." He said: "God no, don't do that – Leonard Lord doesn't even know there were two MGs in the Mille Miglia. Bring them back to Abingdon and we'll put a cutting torch through them." Fortunately though, he didn't.