

POPULAR *Classics*

SEPTEMBER 1992 £1.80 US \$4.95 AUS \$2.95

MGA
RESTORED



FORD POPULARS
A SIDEVALVE LEGEND

Jaguar XK/Bentley Continental

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

- *Rover P5 v Humber Super Snipe*
- *Vauxhall Cresta* ■ *Triumph TR3*
- *Renault Dauphine*
- *Austin Westminster*





Blind date

The MGA restoration project Ray Myring bought over the phone from a dealer turned out to be 50 times worse than he'd expected. Now, after five years' work, it's a national concours winner, as Nick Larkin discovers

Photos by Glyn Barney

I DLY leafing through a classic car magazine while on holiday, Ray Myring's attention was taken by an advert for an MGA restoration project offered by a specialist.

'I had wanted an MGA ever since I saw a brand new one while at school in the fifties. It looked so sleek and different from anything which had gone before that I thought it was a racing car with numberplates,' Ray recalled.

Blame the heady holiday

'It was a heap of rust, with a few spares packed in boxes'

atmosphere if you like, but Ray, not normally given to such indulgences, decided to buy the advertised MGA for £950 over the phone.

The 1959 car, or what was left of it, was duly trailed to Ray's Cambridgeshire home. 'I

took one look at it and got a shock. The car was much worse than I'd imagined. It was a heap of rust, with a few spares packed in boxes.'

This initial impression hardly improved when Ray, 49, a self-employed mechanic, had

removed what remained of the shell, including the two glass fibre wings. The body promptly fell in half, due to severely rotted sills and a corroded right-hand side of the chassis.

'I thought I'd never, ever get it back together and felt I'd just wasted the money,' Ray recalled.

He left the car alone for a while but as time went on the initial setbacks almost fuelled his determination to end up with a usable MGA. 'If I hadn't been able to do the mechanics





Though it is a concours winner, this MGA is regularly used

side of things I don't think I would have attempted it, but I thought I might as well have a go,' says Ray. 'I'd still have to do a lot of tasks I'd never done before.'

Ray made enquiries and discovered the car had been lying in a London garden for 12 years.

He removed the engine (seized) from the rotting remains and decided to get the chassis in order first, MIG welding in pieces of 14-gauge steel where appropriate, and making up new outriggers.



Once he'd got the chassis as true as possible, it was derusted and given a couple of coats of Hammerite.

Both the car's A- and B-posts had rotted and Ray managed to locate replacements. The front bulkhead was just about non-existent. 'It was so badly rusted that the heater assembly had fallen through.' Luckily a specialist offered to provide one for £50.

Ray next turned his attention to the bonnet shroud - the piece fitting between the bonnet and the wings. 'Much of it was missing and of course another wasn't available. One specialist quoted me £1000 to make a new one, which was totally out of the question. There was no alternative but to do the best I could with the old one. Welding it up and grinding it piece by piece took a good six months as it was a major task.'

Although seized after a total of 17 years out of use, the 1600cc engine was in

After 12 years in the garden of a London house, Ray's MGA was in a parlous state



All the body panels were rotten but extensive welding saved the chassis



The front bulkhead was so badly rusted that the heater had fallen through!



reasonable order. Ray decided to have the unit bored to +40 thou' and fitted oversize pistons. The crankshaft turned out to be in perfect condition, and the cylinder head was reusable after four new valve guides were fitted. The original valves could be salvaged, however.

The carburetors were built with new jets, gaskets and screws, and the car benefited from a new clutch and water pump.

Ray immediately rang his wife to tell her when the engine was finally running. 'Not surprisingly she wasn't very pleased. I had no idea it was 2am!' he recalls.

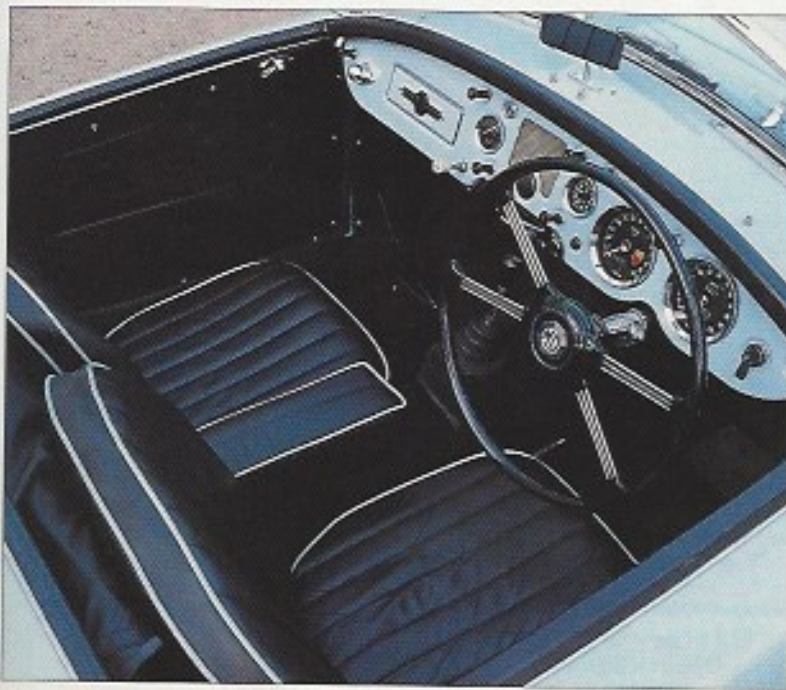
New lights were needed and Ray found Mini ones worked perfectly well. He laid out £5 for a Hillman Imp wiper motor which he reconditioned with new bushes.

Ray had the original radiator refurbished by a specialist and it's now back in its original matt black.

A firm stickler for originality wherever possible, Ray sent the car's tatty instruments to

Tracking down original MGA upholstery proved difficult

Four coats of Iris Blue cellulose paint provide the finishing touch





Finding replacement panels for the MGA proved difficult, particularly front wings. Much painstaking panel-beating work had to be undertaken

Engine was completely seized but did not require too much work to get running again. Car's first concours win came as a complete surprise!

Classic Restorations of Tunbridge Wells, Kent, for reconditioning. The result, as Ray says, is 'a first class job'.

The brakes were overhauled with new front discs and the calipers were serviceable after spending 'three months in penetrating oil'.

A new master cylinder and replacement rear wheel cylinders were fitted and all hoses and pipes renewed.

Stripping the back axle revealed a differential in perfect condition, though Ray replaced all the seals and hub bearings.

The gearbox was dismantled and, to Ray's surprise, turned out to be a rare close-ratio unit – unlikely to be original. A specialist was more than pleased to exchange the innards from Ray's box for a new set of gears, and he built the gearbox up again into the bargain.

Steering replacements were confined to new swivel joints and rubber 'boots' on the rack. Four new exchange shock absorbers completed the picture. Ray now had a rolling chassis to play with.

The MGA's wooden floor was the next item on the replacement list. Specialist Mallick Cars provided new pieces cut roughly to shape ready for Ray to juggle them exactly to size.

Ray was determined that the finished car would not be sporting glassfibre wings and Mallick managed to come up with a rough but repairable front for £20 and rear for £10. 'This was 1986, remember!' says Ray.

He then bought ready-made lower sections for all four wings



All the welding work was undertaken by Ray himself: 'I had to do a lot of tasks I had never tried before,' he says. Wings came from a scrapped car and had to be restored



and proceeded to 'joggle' and weld them in.

The bonnet, which contained a large dent, the boot and rear shroud were painstakingly panel beaten, sanded and repaired. Luckily the doors, aluminium in this car, had remained in reasonable condition.

A new panel for the inner side of the boot was painstakingly made up and welded in. 'Now, of course, you can buy a complete boot floor. There were a lot of panels you couldn't buy when I was



restoring the car, which have now become available,' said Ray.

Luckily, specialists were able to supply new inner and outer sills at the time, which Ray welded in.

Finally, after weeks of trial fitting, tacking, hammering and welding, the bodyside was ready for spraying, but only after Ray had taken it back to bare metal using paint stripper.

The entire underside was handpainted with two coats of blue Hammerite and, after giving it a couple of months to

'After weeks of trial fitting, hammering and welding, the body was ready for spraying'

harden, this was sanded down as a base for the cellulose.

Etch primer was applied to the aluminium panels and the whole car received two coats of primer filler - this being sanded

down with 1200 grade paper between coats. Finally, four coats of Iris Blue cellulose were applied, returning the car to its original colour.

Fortunately the bumpers and

grille had been well preserved; the previous owner had for some reason painted them black.

Ray straightened these items out as best as possible and sent them for rechroming. The front windscreen surround and original luggage rack were also rechromed.

A complete wiring loom, to factory specification, was fitted to sort out potential electrical problems once and for all.

The car was at the time fitted with MG seats - an MGB example for the driver and a



'I'm not sure if I want to show the car like this,' says Ray. 'I just want to drive and enjoy it'

Midget passenger one! Tracking down proper MGA upholstery proved unbelievably difficult, and eventually Ray had to buy a set of tatty seats from a dealer for £100! Replacement covers from Moss were fitted with a mixture of new and old padding being used.

A new carpet kit was bought and a replacement hood sourced from the London Sportscar Centre.

After respraying the dashboard, Ray refitted the reconditioned instruments to complete the car. It went straight through its MoT test.

'It was incredible to drive the MGA after five years of working weekends and evenings on it. It's a feeling you really can't describe,' said Ray.

He allowed retaining originality to dictate the rebuild. 'You just can't replace an item that a car had on it when it left the factory. I'd much rather recondition something original than buy a new one. To be honest, it's probably cheaper too!'

But Ray decided to allow



himself one departure from this particular car's original spec – a set of wire wheels and attractive knock-on hubs.

up looking a lot better than he'd ever intended but, even with such a superb result, he is in two minds as to whether he'd

'My son-in-law entered the car for the concours without telling me. To my shock, it won'

'They were an option and just set the car off. The MGA is a wonderful shape in any case. It looks good from any angle!'

Ray admits the car finished

have taken the job on had he known the amount of work involved.

'With all those curved panels, an MGA is not the easiest of

cars to restore. It does have a separate chassis, but this tends to rot on the bits you can't see. I have enjoyed a lot of the work, though.

The worst bit was lining the doors up. I had to keep tacking the sills on and removing them. I ruined one set of sills – it was that difficult getting everything right!

Ray advises anyone contemplating an MGA restoration to find themselves a car with an excellent chassis and good front and rear shrouds: 'You'll save yourself so much work and trouble.'

Ray never intended to restore the car to win shows, but on his first ever outing in the car he took it to a South Leicestershire MG Owners Club Rally.

'My son-in-law entered the car for the concours without telling me,' said Ray. 'I'd never even thought for a second of doing so. To my shock, the car won!'

The greatest success so far has been picking up the award for the best MGA at this year's MG Owners Club national concours at Knabworth, Herts.

'I'm not too sure if I want to show the car like this. I'm now using it three or four times a week and just want to drive and enjoy it,' he says.

There speaks a true enthusiast! ■

SPECIFICATION

MGA 1600 Mk 1

Produced	1959-61
Engine	4-cyl, ohv
Capacity	1588cc
Bore/stroke	75.39 x 88.9mm
Max power	79bhp @ 5600rpm
Suspension	Front: ind with coil springs, wishbones Rear: semi-elliptic springs
Brakes	Disc/drum
Fuel cons	25mpg
Top speed	101mph
0-60mph	14.2sec

