

Bay State MGA Club goes to the British Invasion at Stowe, VT.

On Thursday, September 15th, members of the BSMGAC met at FitzWilliam, NH to caravan to the British Invasion at Stowe, VT. Since hurricane Irene had made several for the usual back roads routes up passable, we decided to take NH 12 and 12A north through Keene, NH and up to West Lebanon, NH where we stopped for lunch at the 7 Barrels Brew Pub. It started raining just north of Keene, so, it was a very wet ride, even with the tops up and side curtains in. I think Steve and Laura Fabrizio in their TR6 and Judy Pruitt in her MGB were the only ones to remain dry! While at lunch, some other friends from New England Triumphs arrived and Phil Brzozowski bemoaned the fact that his clutch slave cylinder had just given out, so, he and Linda had to rent a car for the rest of the drive up (fortunately Phil was able to get the part in to the local garage and was able to pick up the car the next day.) Our group continued up VT Route 14 which parallels (sort of) Interstate 89 almost all the way to Waterville, VT. There were several places where the White River had damaged the roadway, but it had been filled in with dirt and stones and was passable. We noticed a lot of damage along the way, but it appeared that those resilient Vermonters were recovering. Since the ladies of the group wanted to have their own transportation while at Stowe, part of the group parted ways to go into Barre, VT to rent the car while my twin brother, Ed, and I continued onto I-89 along with Judy Pruitt and headed to Route 100 and into Stowe. No problems with any of the cars, they were all running strong, although Jim Guyot and Dick Fabrizio were complaining that they had trouble keeping up with me (my MGA has an MGB motor in it).

We made it to our rented vacation house up a vary steep hill that overlooks the ski slopes of Mt Mansfield. After getting things unloaded Ed and I made a run to the liquor store and returned to the house and relaxed. The rest of the guests arrived and we ordered pizza from a local venue. The next day Ed and I got up and prepared to hike up Mt Mansfield on the Long Trail. When I started the MGA, it seemed kind of

cold blooded and was lacking power, but I just thought it was still cold. I managed to make it up the slight hill out of where the house is located and went down the long steep hill to Route 108. When I tried to turn right up the hill, the engine had no power and I had to back down and pulled into the convenience store at the bottom of the hill to investigate what might be wrong. I determined it was firing on all four cylinders but it still had no power. We decided to limp down the hill to the Stowe Garage on Route 108 (the Shell Station) to borrow a plug socket since I did not have one. I could get the car up to 40 miles per hour, but there was still no power and very slow acceleration. It seemed to run better at idle as long as there was no load on the engine. The mechanics at the Stowe Garage were very helpful and provided lots of advice and tools as needed to investigate the problem.

It was a real puzzle why the car ran beautifully one day and would hardly run the next day! I changed all the plugs, the cap, rotor, points and the coil and it still acted the same. While changing the points I found the internal grounding wire to the moveable plate that the points attach to was nearly severed, so, we made a replacement. I had also noticed that the cap was burned by each contact which indicated that the timing may be off. We checked the timing and it seemed to be reasonable, but we did not check the advance. This distributor was mechanical advance only. Since we did all these things and it did not change the symptoms, I decided to drive over to the Golden Eagle where I knew some of my British car friends who may have some ideas as to what is wrong. We limped down the road and pulled into the parking lot and as luck would have it, there were several of my friends there. We discussed the problems and I decided to pull out the distributor and look at the weights. When I pulled it out and took the mounting plate off I noticed that the plate that holds the points was moving back and forth (no spring from the vacuum advance to hold it in place. This is a problem because the timing will always be changing, so, I got a piece of wire and twisted it around the stub for the spring and locked it in place. Also, I noticed that the weights were very "sticky" where they could go out, but not

return back to base position. I decided to see if I could find another distributor with the parts vendors on the show field since this one obviously had some issues. I put the distributor back together and drove over to the show field parking area (still running badly). Sam at Brit Bits has an after market reproduction of the 45D Lucas distributor, so, I bought it and took it back to the car to install. It turned out that the replacement distributor drive dog was 180 degrees off from where it should be, so, I had to switch the position of #1 cylinder wire with that of #4 and go through the firing sequence from there. I also verified static timing so ensure nothing had been changed while replacing the distributor by using a test light across the points and the timing mark on the damper pulley. Once this was all set up it was time to try to start it.

This is where I ran into an additional problem. The new (last year) reproduction starter switch decided to go wonky and the starter did not want to engage. Ed and I decided to push start it on the show field as there was a straight stretch of dirt road that was level. We pushed the car over there and we pushed it and I jumped in, put it in second with the ignition "on" but when I popped the clutch, it just came to a stop and did not start. I got out and then a fellow over by the fence with an SUV asked if I wanted to borrow his car jumper battery pack. I said "sure" and so, we jumped the starter switch contact to the starter and the engine fired right up. I thanked the stranger profusely and then went to test out the performance of the engine. Well, the engine idled and rev'ed great, but as soon as a load was put on it, it behaved exactly the same way! At this point I was at my wit's end as I still believed it was something in the electrical side of the engine rather than fuel related. Ed and I limped the car back to the Stowe Garage and dropped it off for the mechanic to take a look the next day (Saturday) to see if he could figure it out.

Ed and I walked back to the show field as it was now time for the Reception Party at 4:00 pm. We had a beer and some hors d'oeuvres and checked the vendors for a replacement starter switch. It turns out that my friend Geoff Rogers had two original switches of unknown reliability

which he loaned me to test out and see if they worked. He said "they are worth a lot if they work, but free if they don't!" (I have still not addressed that issue, so, Geoff, I will test them and let you know by email when I can). Steve Fabrizio picked up up at the field for a group dinner at the Firefox Inn and we had a nice Italian dinner. Afterward, since it was a quite cool evening and it was getting towards 9:00 pm, we decided to skip the Main Street event where the cars line up on Main Street and there are food vendors and a British music band. We headed back to the house to have some drinks and relax.

The next day Ed and I got a ride to the Stowe Garage and we arrived about 9:30 am. The mechanic had already gone through checking the spark plug gap, points gap, timing, etc and setting them to 1959 MGA specs (which is not quite right since it is a 1970s MGB engine and ignition), but it would not make that much difference with this problem. He took it out for a spin and the problem remained. I have a Weber DCOE 45 carburetor on the engine. The mechanic decided to examine all the jets in the carburetor and everything looked good. He thought the car was running rich, but when I looked at the tail pipe, it was not black and sooty like other rich conditions I had seen in the past. He kept feeling in the rear barrel and saying it felt "wet" (with fuel), but I checked it and it looked normal to me. Then I felt inside the front barrel and I could feel something moving inside which was not happening on the rear barrel. We pulled the intake manifold with the carb off the head and tipped it up so that we could look inside the barrels (since it was difficult to look inside in the small engine compartment where the DCOE comes almost to the inner fender and the cowl covers access to the front of the carb.) We discovered that a lock tap had not done its job to keeping the main jet (which centers the flow of fuel into the middle of the venturi) in place and the jet was revolving and moving in and out, sometime blocking all fuel from number 1 and 2 cylinders and sometimes allowing fuel to flow freely into the barrel, but not in the center to be mixed properly with the air. This was our "ah ha!" moment. Since this is a metric carb it was going to be difficult to get the right part

on short notice. The mechanic took the same bolt from the rear barrel and went to match it with something that they might have around. It turns out that the brake bleeder screw was a perfect thread match. He had to modify the end that goes into the carb so that it would go into the venturi part and lock it in place. He was able to grind it down that it would fit in. Our next concern was how to lock it in place so that it would not vibrate out like that last one. We reused the lock tab, but also he took a tire valve cap and cut off the end and it threaded onto the bleeder like a lock-nut and so, it looked like we were in business. We bolted the carb back onto the engine and fired it up and it was running smoothly. He took it out for a spin and it run great he said, so, he asked me to take it out for a short test drive.

I hopped in and drove out of the station onto route 108. I revved to 4000 RPMs in first and shifted into second (I could not get these RPMs before!) I then ran it up to 4000 RPMs in second and shifted into third gear. Then as I accelerated the engine began to falter and the symptom was back! I limped the car back to the garage and give the mechanic a thumbs down. We popped the bonnet again and then the mechanic remembered he had removed the bolt from the rear barrel and had not put it back in (we were so excited about the front barrel fix he had forgotten!) So, we put the bolt into the rear barrel venturi and repeated the test run and now the car ran great. The only issue I noticed was that the engine "pinked" a little under heavy load (even though I was running premium fuel.) But, I could explain this by the fact that all the timing and gaps were set to 1959 standards instead of what they needed to be for this engine. I was willing to live with this slight problem until I got back home and made the proper adjustments. So, I paid my bill (three and a half hours of labor) and Ed and I went to lunch at a little cafe and then to the show field for the rest of the show. We walked around and looked at a lot of the cars. We ran into a lot of my friends with their cars and I introduced Ed to all those who had not met him yet. Since I did not have a car on the field and it had been a long day of tinkering on the car already, while the awards were being announced, Ed and I decided to

head back to the house and try out the hot tub. It was beautiful weather and the water was just right, so, with drinks and cigars we enjoyed to hot water while we waited for the rest of our club members to arrive for dinner.

The club has sponsored a barbecued steak dinner for a number of years at whatever venue a group of the club members has been choosing for their accommodations at Stowe. So, this year (and last) it was at the vacation rental house. This year it was a smaller group, but, including the group staying at the house, Larry Mazoway came for dinner with his yellow MGA. Dick did a great job on the steaks and the portabello mushrooms for Ellie. The group repaired to the game rooms after dinner and with the music blasting current rock music there were challenges for pool and ping-pong and there was a stuffed plush bear and a deer's head that had mysterious appearances throughout the house.

Sunday morning I got a call from Larry that his car would not start and he asked that I stop by on my way out of town. Ed and I packed up and headed out early as we wanted to get back for an afternoon event back in Westford, MA. We stopped by to see Larry and although he had fuel and spark the car would not start. I examined the spark and it appeared very weak (light orange instead of blue-white), so, I suggested that he try another coil. He had just installed the new epoxy based coil at our Spring tech session at John Hall's garage. He installed the old Lucas coil and the engines started right up! He and I both carry a spares of this sort for figuring out problems and getting back on the road.

After Ed and I were on the road home I got a call (that I missed) that Dick was also having trouble that morning and his engine did not want to turn over. He was able to get a jump start and was able to make it home OK. He did some troubleshooting and found his battery to be weak and not taking a good charge. It is amazing that these old cars continue to perform at all with these issues, but with just a few tools and spare parts they usually will get us to and from our events and are not

costly to repair. With simple preventive maintenance they continue to provide great driving experiences and remain a thing of beauty for everyone to behold.

Enjoy the rest of the driving season with our great New England Fall colors!

Safety Fast,

Jack Horner  
President, Bay State MGA Club



Jim Guyot behind his MGA next to Dick Fabrizio's