

BSMGAC goes to GT43 (or Jack and Don's Excellent Adventure with Cecelia)

It started out with me deciding to go to North American MGA Register (NAMGAR) GT43 in Richmond, VA this year. It has been a number of years since I have been to a GT and this is the year to return. I have just finished getting Jan's MGA Coupe on the road and some of the bugs worked out and GT43 was featuring the MGA Coupe. I made my reservations at the Virginia Crossing hotel in Glen Allen, VA. Since they did not have any remaining handicap rooms Jan decided not to go with me. When I mentioned to Don Tremblay that I was going, he decided to go with me. This was all in March and April. I planned to trailer the car as it is a long way on a car that has been off the road for 25 years and not tested for a long drive.

About a week before we were planning to leave for the GT I got an email from Cecelia Bruce of Scarborough Faire asking for me to call her. As you may remember, Don, Angus Ross, and I visited her store last winter and I picked up some parts for the Coupe. She also showed us pictures for the MGA Coupe she is restoring (the the help of Bill Mack (of Mack Motorsports in Bristol, RI). Well, it turns out that there was a problem with the motor in her MGA and she was not going to bring it, but she needed a ride to the show because she had an eye operation and the doctor said she can't drive or fly for while. So, we made arrangements to meet in Sturbridge, MA on June 12, 2018 when Don and I were driving to VA in the truck, towing the MGA on the trailer. Ken and Cecelia met us and we unloaded their truck into the back of mine (it was very full of parts for vending at the show). She even brought along the rusty nose of her old roadster to show how her new grille fits perfectly on an original MGA nose.

Cecelia got into the back seat of my truck (my Ford F250 is a no frills bench seat in the front with the half doors and small bench seat in the back) with her pillow and blanket. She said she had not slept well last night and said she'd like to take a nap as we drove. Don and I said fine, we can entertain ourselves while you take a nap. Well, as it turned out we got to talking and Cecelia never did get her nap in while we drove to VA! She has a wealth of knowledge about MGAs (and other MGs). We talked about cars and car parts and Don and I were able to add some additional tidbits of knowledge about MGs that she did not know. She told us when she started making some of the parts that no one else was making such as the MGA 1600 emblems. She shared how she went through several methods and manufactures as prices changed as well. We heard much of her life story as we drove.

I decided to take a more inland route to VA as I don't like driving on I95 during the business week. We took I84 to I81 south into VA and then cut across toward DC on I66 and then VA Route 17 to I95 south of Baltimore. We arrived late afternoon at the hotel and checked in. Unfortunately, Cecelia had not booked a room for that night (she had planned to arrive on Wednesday) so, the hotel was booked solid! Don said he was not giving up his bed, so, Cecelia would have to share mine since I invited her to come with us! There was a fellow standing in line behind us who was checking in and he overheard our conversation with the clerk and graciously gave up his room to Cecelia and he would stay with some colleagues at another hotel. This solved the bed problem! After getting checked in Don and I unloaded the MGA from the trailer and unhitched it and then helped Cecelia get her boxes of goods into the vendor's room and we left her to set up. We found a BBQ restaurant not too far away and had a quick dinner there. When we got back we looked at many of the MGs that had already arrived. Walking around in the parking lot we looked for the cars with the most original (not reproduction) parts. My Coupe was one of the few with original grille and headlamp rims. Yes, there are many good quality reproduction parts, but there are many that are poorly made. I have bumpers from Scarborough Faire on both my MGAs as they are the best I have found in form.

Breakfast was included with the room, so, in the morning we went to the dining area and had breakfast. There were lots of MGA people from all over at various tables and we met several of

them. At 10 am Don and I attended our first tech session (actually a history lesson) on “The attack at Petersburg” which was very interesting since we are both interested in history and this is an historic region of the US Civil War. We then drove the MGA Coupe to the Civil War Museum in Richmond, VA. We were following some other MGAs but got separated at a light and ended up getting lost and using WAZE to navigate to the museum. It turned out that we actually got there before many others because they took a route that took them through many congested streets. I was sorry to miss some of the sights that the route was supposed to take, but I am glad we missed the traffic. After we returned to the hotel there was another tech session on Fuel and Oil for MGs presented by NASCAR’s Lake Speed, Jr. Don shared with me a very interesting website about oils that really helps understand oils: <http://www.bobistheoilguy.com/forums/ubbthreads.php?ubb=showflat&Number=3124298>. Lake spoke about some of this information, but not about the pressure that the oil needs to withstand. The next tech session we attended was about upgraded electrical and lighting on the MGA by Bruce Woodson (MGA! magazine Tech Editor). It was very interesting, but Don and I both kind of prefer to keep our cars as original as possible. There was a Happy Hour in the courtyard of the hotel and some of the first timer cars were there on display. We then picked another restaurant for dinner; this time we went to an Italian restaurant a little distance away, but since we were in the truck with AC, we didn’t mind the heat and humidity.

Thursday, June 14, we had breakfast and again talked with various MGA folks in the hotel restaurant. At 10 am we took the MGA Coupe and drove to the Richmond Auto Museum with the MGA Coupe Enthusiast’s Drive. Of course, all MGs were welcome to participate. This facility is owned by Bruce Woodson and a partner and is a one story building with a lot of inside parking. They bought it as a place to store their car collections as well as other enthusiast cars. There was a nice meeting area inside where we had a box lunch and we were able to walk around the various cars and discuss them with the owners. We then drove back to the hotel for a tech session on MGA Restoration presented by Glenn Lenhard of Glen’s MG Repair in Petersburg, FL. It was an interesting talk, but Don and I did not agree with some of his methods. Of course, are repair or restoration and cover a wide range of meanings to various people, much depending on what one wishes to spend. Sometimes a person is willing to spend a lot more on a car than what it is worth purely for sentimental reasons. We then went outside and attending John Twist’s Rolling Tech Session along with many other folks. John is very entertaining in the way he discusses various issues with how a car is functioning. Many cars had similar issues with how the carburetors are set up and functioning or with cooling issues. One of the things that amazed me was that John would reach in from in front of the carburetors with his arm all the way under the carbs to reach the rear one while the car is running and his elbow and arm never hit the cooling fan! His only method for synching and adjusting the carbs was by listening to the exhaust note and using a tube to his hear to listen to the sound at the throat of the carbs! Don and I went to dinner at a Texas Roadhouse close by and had a poor experience since we asked for no spices on our steaks, but they arrived with spices, so, we had to send them back and it took a long time overall to have dinner. They did make things right, but overall it was a disappointment. When we returned to the hotel we hit the hot tub poolside and then attended the Valve Cover Racing next to the pool area. I campaigned Roy Crane’s valve cover racer which I had used before. It is a very light, low friction racer, but did not do well on the rough course that they had played out. The heavier cars fared better. So, no prize for Roy’s car, but it did tie as crowd favorite because of the way Roy dressed it up and had working battery operated headlights.

Friday started with the usual breakfast with people we had met. Don purchased some raffle tickets and he won a rebuilt fuel pump by Thomas Ball of British Fuel Pump Restorations and Sales. He was very excited about that! We took the Coupe on the Richmond Road Rally where we had to look for clues along the way and write down our answers. We were far from being the winners! The route took us through some beautiful countryside with a stop at a house on the James River owned by a fellow named Nash who owns a collection of Nash cars. I ran into

a former club member there: Steve Essman (formerly of Littleton, MA). It was nice catching up with him and seeing his MGA there. We ended the rally at Maymont Park in Richmond, VA and had a box lunch there as well as a tour of the Dooley Mansion. When we returned to the hotel we hung out at the Rolling Tech Session with John Twist and drank beer. We also attended the Upholstery and Installation Tips presented by Kelvin Dodd of Moss Motors. During the Q&A session Kelvin fielded many questions about Moss Motors and the quality and supply of parts for British Cars. One of the questions that came up was the fitment of the convertible tops on the MGA. There was a MGA 1600 MKII with an original top and we brought Kelvin over to it to show him the proper fitment and discuss some of the finer points and features. He took many pictures and we also sent him many pictures when we returned from this trip. That night Don and I went out for Mexican food and found a nice restaurant a few miles away from the hotel.

Saturday was the big show day. I took the Coupe down to the Lower Carriage Area and washed some of the road grime away and prepared it for the show. The MGA Coupes were lined up in front of the building with the hotel rooms in it facing the courtyard. The other MGAs were assembled in other areas on the lawn around the courtyard as well. Don had been working on Cecelia's infamous "Name the Parts Contest" for a couple days and I hurriedly made my own entry while kneeling in front of the board and writing down my answers. I finished my answer sheet about half an hour before the contest closed. Don and I loaded Cecelia's parts that she did not sell (two less big boxes - Yay!) into the back of the truck and then Don and I hooked up the trailer and I loaded the MGA onto the trailer in preparation of our departure in the morning. Don and I then retired to the pool to cool off and enjoy more beer. That night we sat at a table with some interesting folks (I was seated next to a guy called "Famous Dave", sometimes called "Silent Dave", who ran the audio-visual of the awards. He turned out to be very talkative once I got him going. Very interesting guy! There were many beautiful MGAs, Magnettes, and other MGs at the show and my MGA Coupe did not take any awards. Cecelia presented the award for the "Name the Parts Contest" and Don Tremblay took first prize having all the parts correct (first time this has happened ever!). I made one mistake on a simpler part - the oil pump drive gear - so, I came in second only missing one part! Some folks thought this was suspicious but we really did not discuss the parts or collaborate of anything like that!

So, winding down the story, we packed up early on Sunday and hit the road just before 8 am. It was a long and grueling drive north on I95. We again spent the entire time talking and learned even more of Cecelia's history as well as discussing various parts of the MGA and discussing some parts that are still not available. After Philadelphia, PA we took a little side road that avoided the Garden State Parkway and picked up I287 that took us into CT and I95 north of New York. We drove to Scarborough Faire in Pawtucket, RI and dropped off Cecelia and her parts and then I took Don home to Rutland, MA and then headed home myself. It was a very long day -10 1/2 hours on the road), and I was very glad to get home. We had a fantastic time and it was nice to spend so much time with Don and Cecelia. The MGA Coupe did very well on the drives we took and I am quite happy with the results of the rebuild. This was an adventure and I hope everyone enjoys reading about our trip.

Safety Fast,

Jack Horner
President, Bay State MGA Club

John Twist at GT43 doing his thing



Some of the MGA Coupes at GT43 (Jack's is the white one)



Jack work on the parts contest

