

## Reviving a Barn Find MGA

As some of you know who were here for the Spring Tech Session, last fall I purchased a pair of MGAs in Harvard, MA that have been sitting in a barn since 1990. So, one can question what is a "barn find" as many apply different definitions. Don Tremblay had a true Barn Find back in 1988 (that is when I first met Don). He and two others purchased 18 MGAs in a barn in Amesbury, MA. Many of the cars just needed the dust washed off of them and a few minor things like a battery and fresh gas to start being driven again. Others were not in such good condition. So, a Barn Find can run the gamut of condition. Just because it was found in a garage sitting for many years does not constitute a Barn Find in my mind. In my case, even though I call it a Barn Find, the car was cobbled together back in the 1970s or early 1980s. It probably looked quite nice back then with fresh paint and interior and running well. The previous owner bought it in 1983, drove it for 7 years, and then parked it. It is a 1959 MGA 1500 with a 1600 engine. Looking at the condition now one can see that the nose had a clip done (not that well) with at least one replacement fender and there is Bondo in the rear as well. The hood is AMCO and actually still presents well. The leather seats are serviceable with some leather conditioner, but they are pretty flat in terms of cushioning.

After washing it off I drained the fuel which actually did not smell that bad. I installed a new fuel pump, changed out the carbs with a fresh pair I had on hand. A compression test showed a little low on #3, but that may be from sitting. I will have to see if it gets better after running a while. I installed a new exhaust system as the old one had some small holes in the pie and the muffler. I changed the oil and installed a new spin on filter. I lubed all the grease fittings and all the suspension rubbers were still in good condition. I changed all the coolant hoses, heater valve and water pump and filled it with fresh coolant before going further. I discovered that the wire had fallen off the ignition switch, so, I fixed that. There was also a fuel pump cutoff switch which I had to find. I installed a fresh battery (the battery tray had been modified for a 12v battery). I cleaned up the distributor and using a timing light started checking for spark on each plug. I had intermittent problems on several plugs and fiddled around for a while before just changing out the entire distributor. What I finally ended up discovering was that the choke was giving it too much fuel. I quit using the choke and held the throttle open while cranking the engine and it fired up and ran!

I then started tackling the hydraulics. There is a sticker on the top of the brake and clutch master cylinder that says "Caution, Use Silicone Brake Fluid Only". I have never seen one of these before. So, looking at the brake and clutch components I realized that it had had recent work done just before it was taken off the road. All the brake components still looked new and when I too the clutch slave cylinder apart (they are usually full of dried crud after sitting that long) it was still perfect inside! I just cleaned it a little and put in a new seal. I then took the master cylinder apart and it was still perfect inside as well, so, I put in new seals and bled the systems and now there are brakes and clutch hydraulics! I can drive it around in the driveway and in and out of the garage now, so, that makes it a lot easier than having to push it around (I am getting too old for that!)

I noticed that the ignition light was staying on when the engine was running, so, I checked the generator and regulator and discovered the regulator (control box) was faulting, so, installed a good one I had on hand. Now the generator was charging the battery and I started checking other electrical systems. The turn signals all worked, but I could not get the headlight switch to work (it was stuck). So, I removed it from the dash and lubricated it and got it to slide in and out again. I also discovered that the red wire terminal for the dash lights and running lights as loose (the rivet had come loose), so, I drilled out the rivet and tapped the terminal block with 4BA tap and installed a screw and washer to repair the terminal. I reinstalled the switch and now all the lights work. Even the brake lights work!

I am now in the process of refurbishing some bumpers for it as those came on it are in pretty bad shape. I also replaced the front valance as it was badly rusted and dented. It is beginning to come together and I hope to offer it for sale in the near future. As a side note, Dick Phillips still has his 1958 MGA 1500 for sale in Maine for a very reasonable price! Please let me know if you need his information.

Mike McPherson is also in the process of bringing his MGA 1600 back to life after being away for the past 25 years or so. We have been corresponding back and forth for a few months as he goes through the systems as I have done on my MGA project. He just got the fuel system sorted out and he has already done the brakes and clutch hydraulics, so, now he is at the starting it up stage and sorting out things that are still not working.

There is a 1973 MGB that I have been working on off and on for 25 years and last fall we left it after going through the carburetors believing that we now have a distributor problem since it was backfiring through the carbs and did not want to keep running except at higher RPMs. Well, I took a look at it again a week ago and we then had a carb flooding issue which had to be resolved before going further. He had changed the distributor cap, but that was it. So, I put a timing light on it and found the engine was firing at Top Dead Center, which I know is way too far retarded. I reset the timing and decided to also swap out the condenser for good measure and back when I did the tune up on this car there was a spate of bad condensers where they fail after about 300 miles or so. This car has not done a 100 miles in 30 years or more! While changing the condenser I noticed that the points plate was moving and then noticed that the vacuum advance spring was broken and allowing the timing to vary in a very large way. So, we are at the point of buying a new vacuum advance unit and we should have the car on the road pretty soon.

One last technical thing I will mention is that I recently redid the rear brakes and master cylinder on a friend's MGB and discovered two things. The parking brake would not operate the rear brakes because the pivot points that expands the brake shoes on an MGB were



completely rusted and frozen. Once these were lubricated and made operable again the parking brake now works. Also, when replacing the rear brake cylinders it is very difficult to get the retaining clips (E ring) over the part where the brake line screws in. I discovered that some outside circlips work great for this retainer. But one must have circlip pliers!

I did not attend British Car Day at Larz Anderson Auto Museum as I had just been there the day before for the Celebration of Life for Dennis Eklof. It was a well attend send off for our club member and lots of stories about Dennis and his life. Our hearts still go out to Prebble and his surviving children and grand children. I don't know who attended British Car Day, but I understand the weather cooperated and that there was a good turnout of British Cars. I was going to attend the Tanks, Wings, And Wheels at the American Heritage Museum in Stowe, MA, but the weather was not looking good, so, I skipped it. Also I missed the Central Mass Steam Gas and Machinery "Engine-Uity" show in Orange, MA this year because of bad weather. I have been attending the weekly "Car Guys Lunch" with Roy Crane and that is always fun to talk cars and enjoy car people. I hope to see everyone sometime over the summer at an event. We still have time for "flash" events if the weather will cooperate!

Safety Fast,

Jack Horner  
President, Bay State MGA Club