Story submitted by member Ralph Poupard

Changing The Carpets In My MGB (The Hard Way) Part 1

First off I will touch on some history of my Damask red 1973 MGB. I bought this car new from Downtown Motors, the BMC and later British Leyland dealer in Windsor, Ontario in June of 1973. I went there intending to buy an MG Midget, which was closer to my price range, and the salesman took me to the MGB section. In the corner parked next to the fence (which now is a Tim Horton's drive thru) was a dark red MGB with a navy blue interior. That was it, I was hooked and signed on the dotted line, calculating in my head whether I could afford it along with rent and maybe having some food to eat. Thankfully I did not starve or end up sleeping in the MGB.

It now has 189,000 miles on it (about 7.5 times around the world). Kathi and I took it on our honeymoon, a kind of '70s version of the classic movie "Two For The Road". I drove our daughter, Jennifer to her wedding ceremony in the B. It has been on many road trips, and to the cottage on Skeleton Lake at least several times a year for 44 years. I also used it for my year round daily driver from our home in Gesto to Windsor for work. It had been driven to weddings, funerals, graduations, parties, and concerts at Pine Knob just to name a few places. It had become a mechanical part of the family, if you believe in the concept that machines can take on human qualities. (Which I have been known to do) All that salt and abuse, since at that time our road was gravel, took its toll on the MGB. By the early 1980s it was retired from year round driving being replaced by a GMC van. The MGB still ran well, but wasn't looking too good, with rust appearing on the outer sills, front wings, and rear wheel arches. In 1982 I decided to do some body repairs. Money was tight, we were paying down our mortgage, had two young daughters, and the MG factory had closed with no more MGs to come. I did the work myself spending late nights in the garage. At the time I thought that the part supplies would dry up and it would be difficult to maintain at some point. So I thought, "I'll do this fix up, drive it till the end, and that will be it". Boy, was I wrong! The MG community was so dedicated that as everyone knows, many aftermarket suppliers came on board and I never needed to worry about that at all.

So, I did that repair without really knowing what I was doing, which is not that unusual for me. I bought some aftermarket outer sills and brazed those in. They were only the section between the front and back wings, not the full length outer sills. The original front wings were badly rusted, so I looked for new ones. Since they were less expensive I ended up buying fiberglass wings. Later on I regretted that, but they never cracked and never rusted and were on the car till I performed this restoration. They never really fit that well, much of which I corrected with copious amounts of plastic body filler (no exaggeration). I know it sounds back alley, and looking back I guess it was, but I never dreamt I would be driving it all these years. Armed with a Haynes Auto Body Repair manual, I assembled it all, brazed in patches around the rear wheel arches, filled, sanded, and primed it. On a Saturday in October I painted it in my garage, of course Damask red, with acrylic enamel paint. It was a bit too cool that day and I ended up with a sag in one spot, which I sanded and polished out. It actually turned out pretty nice. It stayed that way with no exterior rust returning. But hidden inside those replacement sills, fiberglass wings, and castle rails, rust was silently consuming the MGB. In 2011 on the way to the Rallye to Reno you may remember that a big Dodge Ram pickup backed into us while waiting in line at US customs about 30 minutes into our trip. The bonnet and grille were

bent, but we were able to complete the trip. When we got home I had it repaired and had them repaint the rest of the car since they gave me a good price, and the new paint would never match the 29 year old paint. At this point the outside of the car looked very good, but the underbody and inner sills were becoming badly deteriorated. Funny, it still drove well and the doors closed well, but going over railway tracks and large bumps was not confidence inspiring. I could feel body flexing and sometimes the doors would “bonk” around against their latches.

Which brings me to the carpets. The car had come with the rubber mats and sill covers, which I never liked. I thought I would replace the mats with a new navy blue carpet kit. As I began unsnapping the mats I noticed that the part of the snap that was fastened to the floor was coming off with the mat! The floors had become badly rusted and there were numerous small rust holes and weak spots. I briefly thought about patching them, but I decided the time had come to “do it right”: as Mike Holmes would say. So I ordered new outer sills, diaphragms, inner sills, floor pans, castle rails, steel front wings, replacement outer crossmember sections, jacking points, etc., running up a nice sized credit card bill, and began disassembling the car. I had no delusion about how much work this would be. I thought if I ever wanted to give it to one of our daughters, it would never pass the Ontario safety check for used cars because of the weak underbody. The body has to be structurally sound, and any body repairs have to be made in the manner in which the car was originally built, ie. no pop rivets, screws etc. So I removed everything off the exterior of the car, windshield assembly, and the interior. Already there were signs of much more trouble since under the rubber sill covers were rust holes, where I could see right through to the garage floor, a preview of things to come.

Next time: The grunt work begins.

to be continued...

Ralph and Kathi at the Bonneville Salt Flats

Story submitted by member Ralph Poupard

Changing The Carpets In My MGB (The Hard Way) Part 2

Last time I had removed all of the exterior parts, the interior, convertible top and the windscreen. I was totally unfamiliar with this major MGB rust repair and I learned as I went along. Google was a great help. The next two parts are how I performed the repair. I came up with a plan on how I was going to proceed, knowing full well that the plan would need many revisions. I left the dash in place since removing and replacing it was going to be a lot of work that I would rather not do. I was able to remove the windscreen and front wing inner bolts by removing the glove box, and the brake warning light on the left side. Certain ratchet extensions and combination wrenches did the job. I jacked the car up as high as I could and set jack stands on the front control arms as close to the outside as I could and on the rear axle and removed the wheels. I then made two braces from 1" square steel tubing and ¼" steel plate for the top of the car. One ran from the bottom windscreen threaded mounting hole to the three mounting holes for the convertible top via a ¼" plate welded to the steel bar. A second steel brace ran from the top of the first brace to the other three convertible top mounting holes with another ¼" steel plate welded to it. I decided to leave the doors on, that way I could easily check to see if anything was moving rather than taking them off and reinstalling them to check the door fit. I had assumed that if the door gaps and height did not move then things would be going well, or at least I wasn't creating problems. I made some wooden spacers to use as gauges between the rear of the door and the edge of the rear quarter panel. Finally I put masking tape on the rear quarter panel and on the door and drew a line across to see if the door height was changing. It sounds excessive but I wanted to know exactly how it was, rather than try to remember later. I placed 3 jack supports under the car, one on the front frame member, one under the center crossmember, and one at the rear leaf spring front mount for support. They were just touching the car, not lifting at all. I also marked the locations of the brake and fuel lines, positive battery cable and wires on to the top of the floor pan, so I wouldn't accidentally cut them.

I started on the passenger's side of the car. I removed the fibreglass front wing, and it revealed the most of the outer sill that extends along the side footwell was rusted away. A small area on one side of the bottom of the A pillar was rusted also. The "trumpet" section on the top of the inner wheelwell was had some rust holes on the top as was the area where the bent tab of the castle rail was welded to the front footwell. Amazingly areas a few inches away from the rusty areas had no rust and were like the day they were made. I decided I would remove all of the parts to be replaced, then do any repairs to the structure before welding in the new sheet metal parts.

I began by cutting the floor pan along a line about 4 inches from the (box section) inner sill with an air operated die grinder with a 3" abrasive cut off wheel. I thought I would leave the rest of the floor pan in until later to maybe give a bit of support while the sills and castle rail were gone. Then using a reciprocating saw with a long metal cutting blade I cut through the entire sill assembly including the castle rail just behind the A pillar, and just ahead of the jacking point to remove it in one piece. As it began to get near the end of the second cut the entire car began to shake as the sill section vibrated. Looking under the car there were piles of rust and pieces of rusty steel that had fallen off. I guess you had to be there, but it was pretty funny. I repeated this behind the jacking point ending near where the inner sill repair section would be welded on. I then cut off the center crossmember

and jacking point leaving enough to trim later to weld in the crossmember repair piece. The remainder was drilling out the spot welds around the A pillar and at the rear of the sill assembly where it was welded to the side of the rear bulkhead shelf. I found this part difficult with little room to work and the side of the rear bulkhead shelf was heavy material and hard to bend out of the way to remove the sill assembly. After swearing, vice grips, chiseling, and hammering I got it removed. Not wishing to go another round with a row of spot welds I cut the footwell side along the top of the sill assembly intending on welding a new strip to replace the part I cut off. I cut the front footwell around the bent tab of the castle rail since it had rust holes in it already. The rear of the castle rail I ground down with a coarse disc on the disc grinder until the spot welds on the castle rail were very thin and could be “peeled” off with a sharp chisel. I did this in order to not damage the structure that it was welded to by drilling out the spot welds. At this point everything was out of the passenger’s side of the car except for the part of the floor that I had left in. The spot welds were amazingly strong and tough to remove, some lined up right next to each other.

Now I had some patching to do before welding in the new parts. I butt welded in a rectangular patch in the front of the footwell where the castle rail had been welded. I had to replace the strip with the welded nuts that the front fender baffle bolts to since half of the nuts had rusted off the original one. Using the remaining nuts in the old one and the new fender baffle I made a template of the new strip, fabricated it and welded it to the side of the footwell. The front mount of the rear leaf spring needed a little work. I added a .062” thick triangular reinforcement to the triangular plate at the back corner of the floor. I then plug welded the plate to the ears of the spring mount. The mount itself and the vertical area where it was welded to the rear bulkhead were in good shape. I made a plate for the side footwell section that I had cut off and welded that in place as well as a small patch at the bottom of the A pillar. I made a sheet metal section for the top of the trumpet section, cut the rusty section out and welded the new section into place. The side of the trumpet section was fine. When I had installed the fiberglass fenders back in 1982, I had troweled thick undercoating on to the tops of the trumpet sections, which must have saved them for the most part. Checking the door fit with the rear wing, nothing had moved so far.

A frightening look at what was left of the front of the outer sill and diaphragm

The floor rusted out along the inner sill

The sill section, castle rail and jacking point gone

Next: Putting it back together.

to be continued...

Story submitted by member Ralph Poupard

Changing The Carpets In My MGB (The Hard Way) Part 3

I had cut out the rusted areas and made repairs necessary to the main structure. Now it was time to start replacing the parts that I had cut out. First I mounted the new castle rail. The back location was easy to locate, since I could see the outline where the old castle rail was mounted. On the front, I had made a wooden gauge for the side position of the castle rail and clamped it in place. To make sure it was right I trial fit the diaphragm and outer sill. It looked good, so I welded it in place. Next I drilled holes in the diaphragm and outer sill for the plug welds. The first of many hundreds of holes I drilled. The diaphragm was plug welded to the castle rail, front footwell, and rear bulkhead side after checking its height position with the outer sill. I ground down the welds on the diaphragm and then welded the outer sill into position along the castle rail / diaphragm at the bottom and the diaphragm at the top, grinding the welds down again. I then trimmed the crossmember to the correct length to weld the new outer repair section into place. After that I plug welded the new jacking point into place, which fit quite nicely. The reinforcement for the jacking point goes between the diaphragm and the inner sill (box section). So I welded that into place planning to drill plug weld holes in the inner sill to attach it there. I don't use the jacking points, I don't think they are a good design, but I assembled it correctly anyway.

Next I plug welded the inner sill into place, and through the plug weld holes to the jacking point reinforcement. Again, I ground down the plug welds. Now the floor pan was next to be installed.
I cut out the remainder of the old floor pan at this point. After drilling several hundred plug weld holes in the new floor pan I plug welded it into place. Welding down in the footwell was difficult since it created smoke and fumes. I wore an N-95 mask (that was when you could get them) and held my breath a lot while doing this, as well as using a fan to help pull the fumes away. It was also a tight area and difficult to get in a comfortable welding position. Next, I welded in the dogleg repair piece followed by the end filler piece. Through all of this the door fit remained OK.I then mounted the new front wing. It was a British Motor Heritage part, but still required several trial fits and mounting holes opened up until it fit well. I was concerned at first, as there was an excessive gap to the front of the door. But I found I had to use a hydraulic jack to raise the bottom edge behind the wheel to insert the screws at the bottom. When I did that, the wing edge moved towards the door into a nice gap position, so that was lucky.

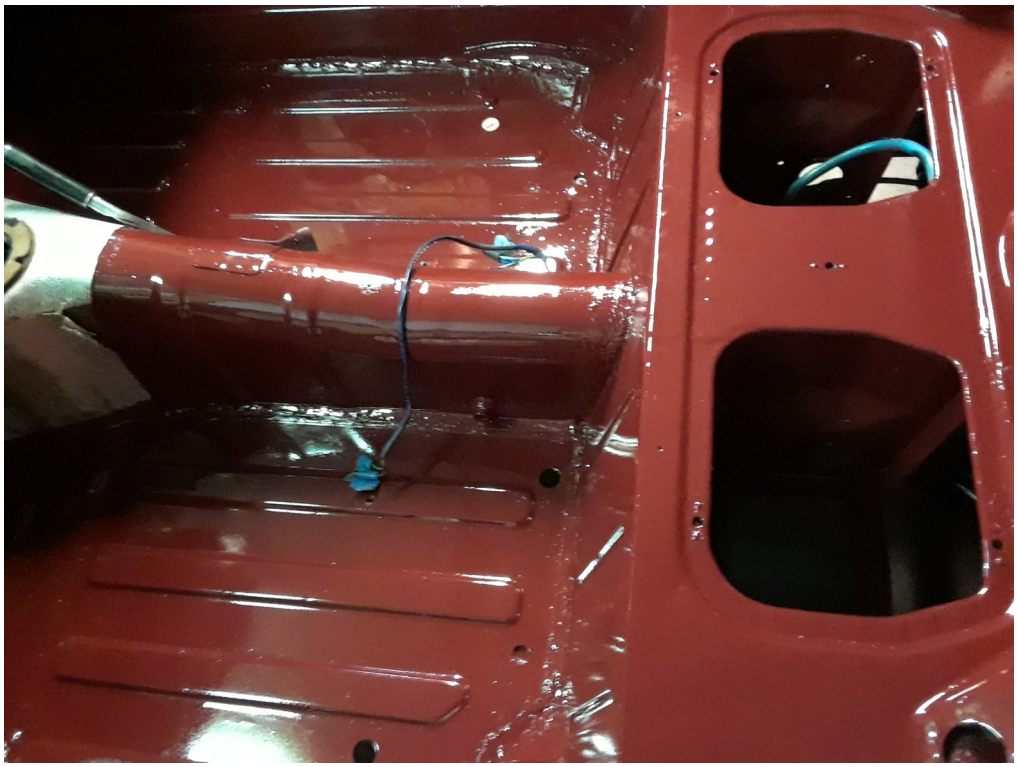
All of this may or may not sound like a lot of work, but believe me it took months! Checking and rechecking alignments, more than a dozen clamps, weights to hold the floor down for welding, grinding welds etc., it was quite a process. I also learned why welders quite often wear skull caps. You learn that very quickly when a piece of molten weld lands on your head! The left hand side of the car was pretty well a copy of this side, since it contained about the same amount of rust except the inner sill had a much larger rust hole near the front, but I was replacing that part anyway.

My next task was to finish cleaning the underside of the car to prepare to paint it. Pounds of dirt, old undercoating, grease and filth were removed from the bottom of the car and deposited on myself and a plastic sheet on the floor. I'm not sure if I have ever been as filthy as when I did this job. It ended up the cleanest it had been since the car was new. Painting the underside of the car demonstrated why I should have had the car raised higher when I set it up to work on it. I had to use a smaller spray gun that didn't hold much paint, since the larger capacity gun just wouldn't fit properly under there. So, I had to do a number of refills of the paint cup but it turned out nice. I researched it and the underbodies were body colour except for the suspension and axle. So I sprayed it Damask red using a polyurethane single stage enamel. I then painted the inner wheelwells, the insides of the front wings, the front splash shields, the inside of the front apron, the inside floor pans and inner structure of the car, and the inside of the boot lid. More pages came off the calendar as the months passed.

I refit the front wings for the last time, and also refit the front apron and boot lid. I then filled, guide coated, and block sanded the areas of the doglegs that I had replaced and some shipping dents that were in the front wings. I had the spots fairly decent, but I had decided that I would leave the final blocking and filling to the paint shop. My wife tells me I worry too much, but I have to admit that I was worried when starting this project that there would not be enough good steel left on the car to weld the repair sections to and my MGB would essentially become a parts car. Fortunately this was not the case, and it was solidly welded together again.

In June of 2019 it was ready to go out to the paint shop. It was supposed to take about 3 weeks,

Right hand side cockpit nearly finished being welded



Going out to the paint shop

Next Time: Paint and reassembly

to be continued...

Story submitted by member Ralph Poupard

Changing The Carpets In My MGB (The Hard Way) Part 4

The MGB was finally ready for paint in early June 2019. I had someone come from Beau's Autoeverything in Essex, Ontario, a shop that I had used to paint the MGA and repair the MGB after the pickup truck had backed into it in 2011. He quoted, what I thought was a good price, so I arranged to have them come with a flatbed to move it to their shop. Included in the quote was the flatbed delivery there and back, which made it even better. He said it would take about 3 weeks. They picked it up on June 11th, 2019.

I know how they work. They are in reality an insurance repair shop, not a job shop. They have the skills needed for classic cars, but that is not their business model. The plan was that they would work on the car when the insurance jobs were slow. There must have been a lot of crashes last summer because 3 weeks turned into 10 weeks. I was up at the cottage on Skeleton Lake and we took a road trip with the MGA to NAMGAR GT-44 in Dubuque, Iowa, so I really didn't care that it took longer. As long as it came by fall, so I could maybe get it finished before the snow hit. When it came back the paint job was beautiful. They did a great job.

Well, any hopes of finishing it by fall were dashed when life got in the way, things took longer than expected, and I had problems installing the rubber seal at the bottom of the windshield assembly, causing a delay when I had to order a new seal after ruining the first one. I replaced all of the light assemblies with new parts except the tail lights. To help eliminate (hopefully) future electrical problems, I replaced and/or cleaned the bullet connectors for all of the lights on the car, while they were more accessible before installing the grille and light assemblies. I spent a lot of time aligning the side window tracks to make the windows easy to wind up and down. The passenger's window had been especially stiff to wind up, which I had been reminded of many times by the navigator. I also spent time adjusting the vent window assemblies in an attempt to not strike the side of the windshield assembly too hard and hopefully not cause the "crack of doom" in the door skins. Gradually the exterior went back together, and I hadn't nicked the paint.

I finally installed the carpets (Remember the carpets? This has been a story about changing carpets) and interior panels after Christmas. There was another delay since there was an error in the interior panel kit where the new door capping material that had been supplied with the kit was black instead of navy blue. Jeff Zorn of Little British ordered a new set of material from the UK, and I was able to complete the interior. Finally, I charged the battery fully, and turned the key and after 2 years, it stumbled a few times and then started up, running fine. I had put marine stabilizer in the fuel when I started the project, which was supposed to have a 2 year life. Feeling like I was on a roll, I changed the reverse light switch on the gearbox, and the reverse lights now work, for the first time in about 25 years! I had just never got around to changing the switch, and now that the gearbox tunnel was clean it was a much easier task. I also cleaned the engine compartment and painted the engine while it was in the car. I couldn't drive it just yet, since I needed to have it appraised to have it put back on classic car insurance. Out of the 2 years, between being at the cottage, and visiting family etc. I was away probably close to 8 months.

In late February while I still had a few things to finish we went on a trip with my sister and husband to the Isle of Palms, near Charleston SC. We had a great time, and while we were away we were watching the news about the Corona Virus. We returned to Canada on March 1st, just under the wire before everything started being shut down. Because of the lockdown I have only driven the MGB, (or MGA for that matter) on a few short trips. The B seems to drive fine, feels solid and handles well.

So in the end everything worked out well. From a distance it doesn't look a lot different than it did, but when close it is evident that the panel fits and paint finish are much better, everything is clean and painted, new interior, and it is solid and safe. While it is very nice, I never intended to turn it into a museum piece that I would be afraid to drive. I am happy with it. As it approaches the 47th year that I have owned this car it feels great to have given it a fresh start. I will drive it as much as I can during the pandemic, and hopefully by next year we can take it on an MG road trip, maybe to the all MG meet in Atlantic City, or another trip, because, as you know, MGs are for driving.

Back from paint

All Done. Hurray!
(Remember, No Hunting)