A Smashing Good Time—Rallye To Reno and MG2011

By Ralph Poupard

As the details began to emerge about MG2011 and the Rallye to Reno, I knew we had to go on what promised to be another grand adventure. This time I decided to take the MGB, since it has more power, improved comfort, and more room that the MGA. We packed a stack of spares and tools, and there was still ample room for luggage.

We left early Sunday, June 5. While we were waiting at US Customs behind a huge Dodge Ram pickup, he decided he wanted to change lanes and backed up into the front of our MGB! We had screamed and I laid on the horn, but we were trapped. It was a hard hit. His high chrome bumper had gone completely over our bumper and bent the hood and grille. I opened the hood, but could not latch it again since the grille was pushed in about 2" . I performed a few precision adjustments to the grille (pried it back out with a tire iron), and the hood then opened and latched properly. Since we could see no other damage we decided to continue on. This had become a real rallye. Damage the car, makeshift repair, and get back on the road!

That evening, we arrived in Newport, Kentucky to meet the rest of the Rallye to Reno. I saw Steve Finch with his MGA and Mike Gideon with his B. The Local MG club brought a keg of beer to the hotel parking lot for us. I sure needed that.

The next morning we got a late start for St Louis. As we passed back into Ohio, our GPS began to play games with us. It pointed us to an exit that should have been US50, but it kept telling us to make a U turn. We found a backwoods bar with a grizzled looking fellow sitting in front and asked where US 50 was. I told him that the GPS kept telling us to make a U turn, to which he replied "That's what you get for listenin' to a machine!" He set us straight. We blew through the lush green states of Indiana, and Illinois arriving in St Louis in the afternoon. The St. Louis club had arranged a gathering for us at the Dubliner, a great Irish pub. It was a fine night.

The next morning we all met on a parking deck near the famed St Louis Arch for an aerial photograph. There were 61 cars in the picture, We drove through Missouri and stopped in Lenexa, Kansas for the night. Lenexa is the home of Victoria British and they held a fantastic "Kansas Style" barbeque for us. We got a tour of the warehouse and the Kansas City MG Club came out to greet us. To this point it seemed like most of the cars were holding up well, but with few "parking lot repairs" at the hotel.

Wednesday we headed to Dodge City, Kansas. It was a hot day, about 104°F when we arrived. The town had arranged for us to park all the cars just off the main street. By this time we were 80+ MGs. We got vouchers for a country style dinner, and stage shows in their 1870s replica town. I have to say: "folks sure are friendly in these here parts". Back at the Dodge House hotel, the miles were now starting to take their toll, with bonnets open, points being changed, etc.. John Deikis from Chelsea, MI, had to leave behind his TD at a local MG owners' home after suffering electrical issues on the road, repairs in the parking lot 'til midnight and what appeared to be a major engine problem .He carried on to Reno as a navigator in an empty MG seat, then flew home and later retrieved his car.

Thursday we drove along with Elvin and Janet Davis heading toward Colorado. Our destination, Cañon City, is the home of the Royal Gorge Bridge, the highest suspension bridge in the US. We took the tour on the Royal Gorge Railroad that runs along the gorge directly under the bridge two miles above! The bridge is an engineering marvel.

Friday we headed for Grand Junction Colorado. Driving for several hours through the most amazing rock "sculptures", we were gaining altitude. We crossed the Great Divide at Monarch Pass, 11,300 ft. The B took the climbs in stride. We took a side trip on Hwy 65 over the Grand Mesa, a US National Forest and the largest flat top mountain in the world. Back up to 11,000 ft with ten foot snow banks along the roadside. One good thing, the cold air kept the M.G. engines nice and cool. In Grand Junction, Classic MG Magazine hosted a BBQ dinner with an open bar.

Saturday took us through Utah and into Nevada. Much of Utah was dry lake beds and salt beds. US 50 was really quiet and at one point I didn't see one vehicle going in either direction for over 30 minutes! We took a tour of Lehman Caves. It was the first time I had ever seen stalagmites and stalactites. Their colors and textures were amazing.

Sunday we started early on "The Loneliest Road In America", US 50 between Ely and Fallon, Nevada. True to its name, there aren't many signs of humans along here. Far from boring, there was a beauty to it that I didn't expect. The desert was alive with plants and flowers, and snow capped mountains were constantly in the background.

We all met at the Carson City High School at 4:00 PM to caravan into downtown Reno and a grand entrance under the famed "Biggest Little City In The World" arch. Over 100 cars arrived at the closed off main street. It was quite a sight, MGs three and four abreast, bumper to bumper for a couple of blocks.

Monday was registration day for MG2011, and the vendors were there in force. Our own Jeff and Jan Zorn were there with LBCarCo. Monday night we all went to the National Automobile Museum (formerly Harrah's) for a dinner and tour. This museum was fabulous. Amazingly, nearly every car is in running condition. There were many one of a kind, and first and last examples of a model.

Tuesday we took a self guided tour to Virginia City. On the way we stopped at a scenic lookout. Virginia City was a look back in time, with wooden sidewalks and historic 100+ year old buildings.

Wednesday, we took part in a bus tour of Lake Tahoe, including a lake cruise and a wonderful lunch on the boat. The scenery was absolutely as stunning as was the weather, with not a cloud in the brilliant blue sky. The evening was great fun, with an auction of MG related regalia, and entertainment by the "Morris Garage Band".

Thursday was car show day. Besides the usual MGs that you would expect to see, there was a large contingent of Pre-War MMM MGs, a right hand drive MGF, and a stunning green RV8. In the evening was the awards banquet with over 1,000 people in attendance. The evening went off without a hitch, and suddenly MG2011 was over.

Friday morning the Rallye to Reno group met for a group photo in the Circus Circus parking lot, and goodbyes were exchanged. We decided to drive along with Steve and Donna Finch and their red '57 MGA. This was to be a wise decision. Steve had a to get back for a business meeting on Wednesday so we had some long driving days ahead. About 90 miles from Reno on I-80 our MGB felt like it was wandering. At first I thought it might be the stiff cross winds, but then I knew a tire had lost pressure. By the time I got off on the shoulder I could hear the tire flopping. It was the right rear, that I had pumped up a few days earlier. I had a good spare, but we still had about 2300 miles to go - way too far to run without a spare. We found Jim's Tire Store about 20 miles down I-80 in Lovelock, Nevada and. They had the right size, mounted it up for our spare and we were out of there in about 30 minutes. We spent the night in Wendover, Nevada.

Saturday morning it was a short jaunt to the Bonneville Salt Flats, so we got some pictures of our cars by the sign at this historic site. We headed off down I-80 again, and after about an hour Steve started having problems with his

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MGA. First it was the speedometer cable making whooshing noises and the speedo needle really bouncing. We tied the cable back with a more gentle loop. We drove for another hour or so, past Salt Lake City, when going up a steep hill Steve's car suddenly slowed down. We could hear it sputtering and smelled gas. On the side of I-80 we determined that #3 and #4 were either not firing or had a problem with the rear carb. The sun was so bright it was difficult to see the spark. We decided that we could not concentrate with cars and trucks flying by, and would try to limp to the next exit. Just then, an amazing coincidence happened. An MGB pulled over behind us. It was Jai Deagan, from the Lansing Area British Car Club. He wasn't actually at MG2011. His girlfriend lives near Reno, so he had driven his B out to visit her, intending to go to MG2011, but never got there. He was on his way back to Michigan, and decided he would see if he could help those MGs on the side of the freeway. We limped the MGA about a mile to the next exit and pulled under the overpass to get some shade. They always say check the ignition first, but after spending about 45 minutes on the ignition, we determined that there had to be something wrong with the back carb. Pulling the dashpot off told the story. One of those felt rings that seal the air filter element to the pancake cover had gotten sucked into the carburetor throat. After removing the felt, it was purring like a kitten again. We continued on I-80 again, *way* behind schedule. We were going to push as far as we could to make up some time. But just before Green River, Wyoming Steve's car slowed again, lost oil pressure and before he could get off the next exit within sight the engine started to knock. Sadly, the drive was over for the MGA. He got the nationwide number for U Haul to rent a truck and trailer . Luckily, the UHaul store was less than a mile away but by then it was 5pm on Saturday. Even better, UHaul talked the proprietor into staying overtime for us. We got the truck and trailer, got the MGA loaded, found a nice hotel nearby and ordered a pizza. It was late and we were even more behind.

Sunday, we made good distance, making it through the rest of Wyoming and almost through Nebraska. Just before we stopped for the night, at a gas station, I turned the key and there was just a click. A second try and it started normally. It had never done this before. Monday we made it to Chicago. Again with the click and then it started.

Tuesday morning found us crossing Michigan to a last gas stop at Zeeb Road before we separated ways to get home. After we both filled up, Steve and Donna pulled out of the gas station without us. How ironic, the last stop of the trip and we were alone. Just when it seemed like we might have to give it a push start it sprang to life. By then, Steve and Donna had returned to see if we had a problem.

So, even with some challenges, we made it home on Tuesday. Steve could make his meeting. Steve said the only good thing about the UHaul was air conditioning going through construction zones in Chicago. Our trusty MGB kept its perfect 38 year record of always making its destination, albeit a little battered and bruised, having driven 5,121 miles. Despite the few problems we had, this was another adventure of a lifetime, and I would do it again in an instant.. So would Steve as soon as he rebuilds his engine again.

Seen In Reno at MG2011—M.G. EX 186

- By Steve Finch

My recent trip to Reno and MG2011/GT36 was the M.G. Trip of a Lifetime. There were over 600 cars on the show field. Many were cars that you may rarely or never see. This is M.G. EX 186.

This is a “one-off” race car built by M.G. in the Abingdon Competitions Department from 1956 through 1959. Designed to win a LeMans, it was never raced. To avoid destruction, it was spirited away to the USA.

It was street driven before the engine failed and sat idle in a barn for 15 years. It was purchased in 1982 without engine, gearbox, and sundry bits. These have either been substituted, located, or remanufactured to complete the car.

Based on a relatively standard MGA frame, it has an aerodynamic all aluminum hand formed body. It is Twin Cam powered, with DeDion rear suspension, Dunlop disc brakes, and centre-lock wheels.