The Runaway MGB

(A true MG winter experience)

By Ralph Poupard

Sometimes desperation and frustration can lead to a person doing something outlandish that they would not normally do. Chaining yourself to a 300 year old tree to save a virgin forest from being logged comes to mind, or maybe plastering "lemon" signs all over your oil burning Chevy Vega after the dealer told you the warranty was up and *you* had to pay to have the engine replaced. The desperation in this tale was neither as noble as locking yourself to a tree while lumberjacks stood nearby revving their chainsaws, nor as potentially embarrassing to family members as driving around town in a smoking, lemon stickered Vega. But desperation with a little stupidity thrown in is the only way I have to explain how I came up with the idea that you will soon read about.

After our wedding in 1974, Kathi and I lived near Gesto, Ontario, where we continue to live. If you don't know, (and most people don't) Gesto is just about as close to the center of Essex County as you can get. We enjoyed the country life, especially in summer. In those days I drove the MGB year round. In the winter I installed the factory fiberglass hardtop and the MGB performed valiantly. It always started on the coldest days and could plow through snow drifts that would grind many larger cars to a halt. The MGB rarely got stuck in the winter despite it's low slung stature. One aggravation where we lived was when trouble-making local kids would come along late at night in a large pickup truck or 4 wheel drive vehicle, (the term SUV was yet to be invented), and push down the rural mailboxes along the entire road. Most times your mailbox itself was flattened beyond recognition. This happened twice within the first year we lived here. After the second time I declared war. I went to a salvage yard and bought a length of heavy gauge 4" iron pipe. This pipe had a wall thickness of about 1/4". I then dug a deep hole and cemented the pipe into the ground. And the final "piece de resistance": I filled the pipe with cement. "If one of those clowns hits this with their pickup truck, they are in for a big surprise", I said to Kathi.

The winter of 1976 - 1977 was a fairly tough one. I shoveled the driveway by hand at that time, moving huge drifts of snow as it continually filled in. Our neighbor finally took pity on me and came and scraped it with his tractor. No need to pay him, he was happy to do it, and someday maybe I could do a favor for him. One day I came home from work in the middle of a wet snow and rain storm. I pulled the MGB under the canopy in front of our garage, and left it for the night. I had been doing some woodworking and there was no room in the garage.

The next morning when I came out and started the car it would not move. I discovered that both front tires were sunk into icy ruts, and the rear wheels were sitting on ice with water on top. No amount of rocking would budge the MGB. I tried pushing the car, but the best I could do was to rock it, but not get the front tires free of the ruts. I was upset that I would be late for work.

At the time I was a supervisor at our small company, and I used to try to set a good example. "I've already taken 2 snow days" I grumbled. Then I devised a plan. Not a wise plan in retrospect, but it was a plan. I would leave the car in reverse with the rear wheels spinning on the ice, give the car enough of a push to free the front tires of the ruts and jump back in. What can I say, it seemed feasible at the time. The MG was by now warmed up, so I pushed the choke all the way in and put the car into reverse. I went to the front of the car and started to rock it. Finally it broke free of the ruts. Everything might have gone according to plan, except that as the car was released from the ruts, I slipped on the ice and fell down! **The MGB was backing down the driveway on its own!** I can tell you friends, an idling MGB in reverse moves a lot faster than you'd think. As I scrambled to get back up and chase it down, the B continued to lope down the drive-way. At first I was expecting it to go across the road and get stuck in the small ditch over there. But no, it started to veer off on an angle towards..... you guessed it, my indestructible mailbox! To make matters worse, the open driver's door threatened to get hooked on our lamp post that was about ten feet before and to the right of the mailbox. In the meantime I was scrambling across the wet ice on the driveway, keeping up with the B, but unable to make a sufficient gain to stop the impending doom. What a wild scene it must have been! But as the driverless MGB continued to head off towards the mailbox, fate intervened. It had trouble negotiating the frozen remnants of the snow bank that my neighbor had ploughed from the drive-way. This slowed its progress enough that I was able to catch up to it. I dove in and knocked the gear lever into neutral and the B stopped with about 3 feet to spare before the driver's door was to get bent around backwards by the lamp post!

I laid there for a few minutes, panting. Of course the MGB was again stuck, this time partly off the driveway, with the left rear wheel over the edge of the frozen snow bank. I had gotten so lucky I didn't care, and I was late for work that day after all, as I spent the time to free it by more conventional methods!

MGB with the lamp post and mailbox in the background