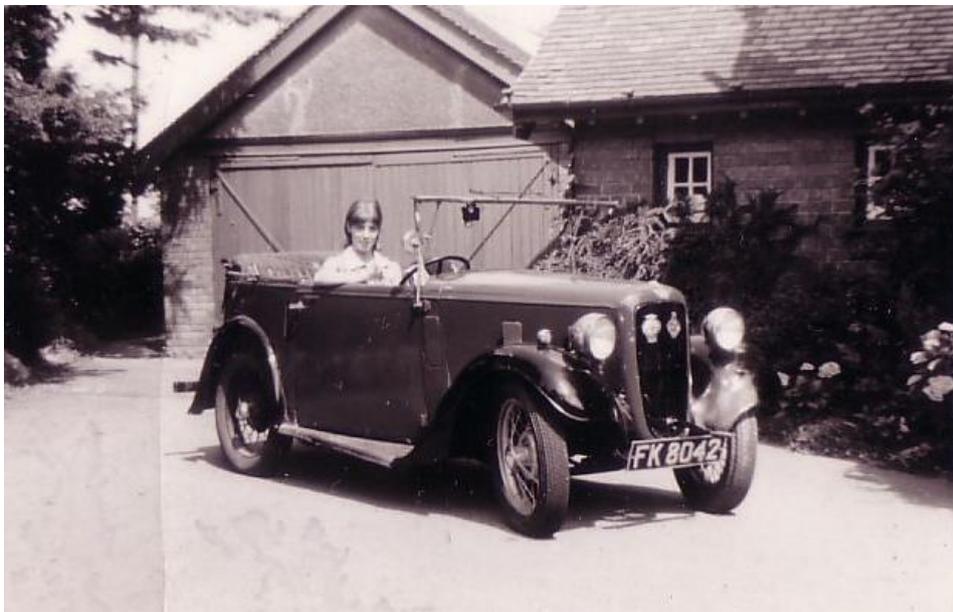


I am a returnee to the Austin Seven community. Here is a little background as to how I arrived here today, penning these thoughts to you all.

In 1965, when I left school, I had no firm idea as to what I wanted to do with life, so my father arranged for me to be apprenticed as a motor mechanic to Westgate Motor House in Gloucester. This garage was a Standard Triumph dealership, and also had the distinction of at one time being a de Havilland aircraft dealership as well, this being advertised by a plane installed on the roof of the building. I believe the plane was removed in the early 1960s. This was a wonderful time in my career, not only the fascinating jungle of life in the motor trade, but of course the social entertainment in the latter part of the 1960s.

During this period I was given an Austin 7 Ruby Tourer which had been lying fallow in an orchard for many years.



A coat of Dulux paint and it looked as good as new. Somehow it passed through the MOT and happy transport it was as well. Following an incident with a broken crankshaft, I rebuilt a fresh engine for it, carrying out the rebore myself at Cinderford technical College in their machine shop, and scraping the white metal bearings in as well. That engine worked well I am proud to say. The only fly in the ointment, as mentioned, was that the car was a tourer and had no hood frame. So I bent some thin tubes, and covered them with some plastic sheeting I bought from Halfords and there was the wet weather protection - until it blew off as I was driving along. So after that, I did without any weather protection, which impressed my nice new wife - not at all! Her take was, that if one is going to sit in a traffic jam in Gloucester in the pouring icy rain in January, then it would be better to do that in car which looked as if it should have the hood down all the time. There was also an incident following a lunchtime pint, when two largish friends settle down comfortably on the back seat, stretched, and the body broke its back and both doors swing open, and thereafter had to be chained shut.

So the Austin 7 was sold for £27 and an MG TC (£100) took its place, and that is another story.



But the experience did mean that I was set for life in enjoying older cars. Not that they really were so old, the MG was a mere 20 years old and the Austin 30 years old, when I got them. Putting this into perspective, that would now be a car from 1992 and 1982, which really seems quite modern days to me now.

I left the motor trade in 1971 and went into the computer industry joining ICL who made British mainframe computers. Before you all yawn, some of the equipment was older than the Model A! There was an IBM card verifier I would sometimes go and fix at Berkeley Nuclear Power Station. This was built in 1927 and had all its original factory build documents in its base. A mad professor had purloined it and converted it into a card reader to attach to their mainframe. There was also still in service quite a lot of pre-war data prep punch card machinery - Queen Ann legs and polished mahogany sides - quite right too! It made for happy relief from the grown up world of mainframes, to go off and fix these venerable machines.

For many years I ran a ceilidh/barn dance band called the Mothy Band, and as all things come to pass, I put the band to bed and I had mainly stopped playing. There were various reasons for this, I had moved away from some of the other band members, but also I really had got fed up with carrying the PA system around - it's funny how the rest of the band appear just after one has carried all the gear into the hall on one's own..... Moving ten years on, amongst the instruments I played, were a couple of concertinas that I had purchased in the 1970s and had restored and tuned. For those who are interested in detail, one was a Jeffries and the other was a Crabb. I think the total outlay including rebuild would have been around £350. As arthritis began to set in I knew that I would never be able to play them to the same level as I had used to, so I put them up for sale. This sale proved to be somewhat of a surprise to me, as I moved them on to a dealer I had known since the 1980s who gave me far more for them than I was expecting - £6,500. Of course the very best quality demands the best prices. Five years on, they probably will have now doubled in value again.

So I now had a fighting fund to waste as I saw fit. Previously I had owned all sorts of interesting cars, but they were also everyday transport. So if anything went wrong it had to be fixed by Monday morning so that I could get to work. Now I felt I could have the luxury of owning a second car that I could enjoy without the concerns of it having to be functional every day. This sets the scene now for what I have done during the last 5 years to bring myself up to Austin Seven standard.

The fighting fund was partially spent on an eBay purchase of a 1972 MG Midget, I loved it, and it went like a rocket and sounded glorious. The only setback was that my wife Niki refused point blank to have anything to do with it. Maybe she thought it too small and fragile. My dog didn't mind though.



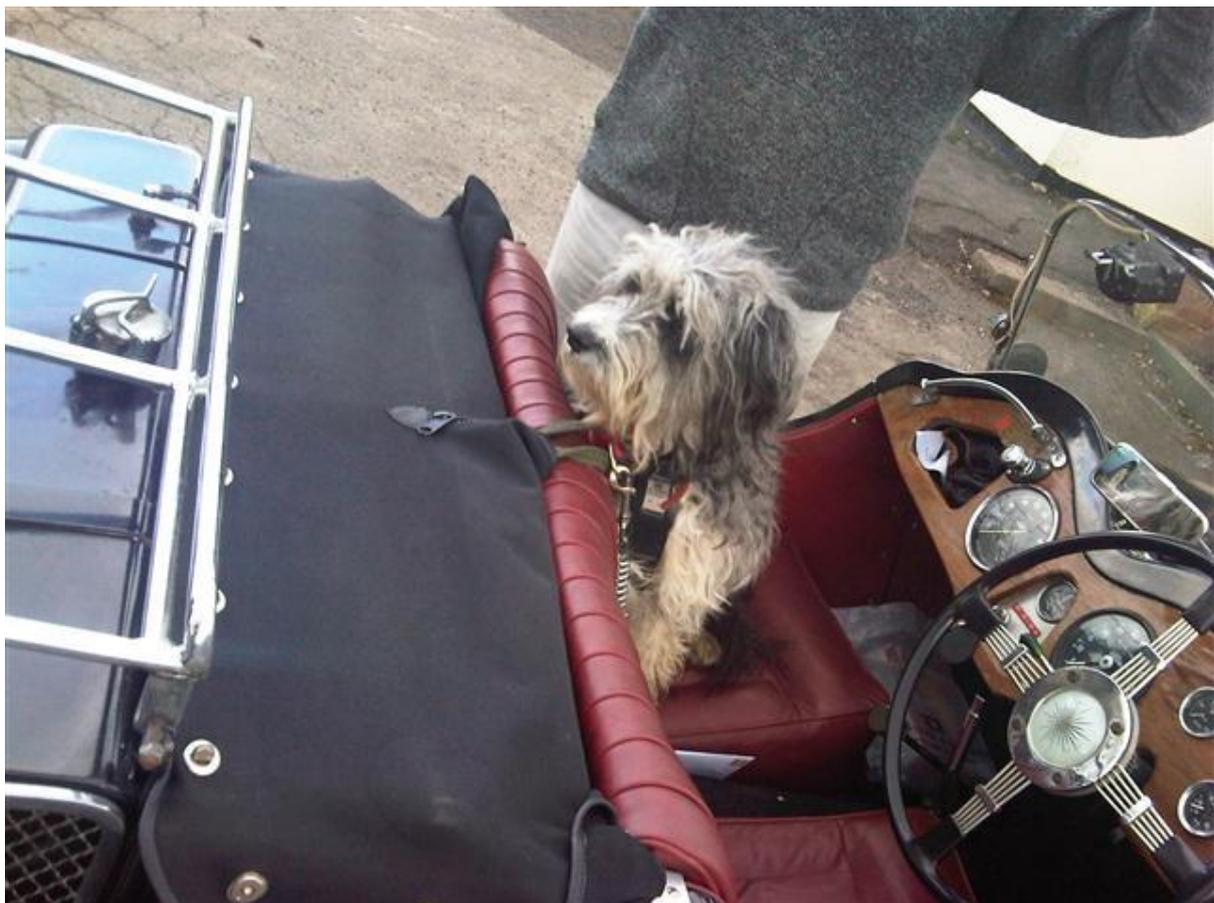
When I took early retirement I thought it would be nice to have a Triumph TR4 as that would have been one of the first cars that I worked on when I started in the motor trade. So I found one for sale in the TR club magazine, and bought it and sold the MG.



The TR was good fun, and I did a partial rebuild of the engine as the pistons and rings had suffered damage from thermal impact, so I took the opportunity to change

the liners and pistons. That was an interesting project in itself in persuading the wet liners which had been in position for 45 years to come out of the block. Then two years ago while attending a small classic car show in Birlingham, Worcestershire, one of my long-time friends who owned a 1934 Singer Le Mans asked me if I knew anyone who wanted to buy it. That would be me of course, so the TR had to be sold to finance that purchase. I advertised the TR globally on the internet, and as is the way of life, someone from the next parish came along and bought it. I see it around and it is in good hands.

The Singer is a super car to drive, with maybe a little bit of the “rat” because it has a Morris 1000 engine and gearbox installed, and “breathed” upon.... I do have the original engine and gearbox; they were supplied with the car. The engine change happened about 30 years ago when the then owner needed good reliability to drive the car into Europe, without the head gasket blowing or the crankshaft snapping, both of which can be endearing Singer traits. Naturally the increased power of the A series engine makes the little car sparkle. The other downside to the Singer is that I could only fit one dog at a time into it, which of course means that there is always one disappointed doggy face left behind.



Now my wife was happy to come and ride in the TR, but the Singer is a complete no no! Niki announced that the Singer was even more hazardous than the MG Midget, because of its ash frame body; with low cut doors that she felt she would fall out of.



One day we were wandering around a motor museum in Pembrokeshire, and Niki indicated that she would not mind riding in “that”, indicating an MG MGB Tourer. So I took that as “sign off” for adding to the fleet, and again from eBay I bought a 1972 MGB Tourer, and that was nice having Niki come out again. Except, in twelve months she probably only rode in it six times. I have had MGBs years back and this one was no different - in not quite satisfying me as a car I enjoyed driving. So there was always going to be doubt about its future.

Now finally we are approaching Model A country.... One night I went to pick up a pal in the MGB, to go out for a pint. As we were both struggling to put our seat belts on around our age expanded waists, we looked at each other and said “it’s got to go”, and “we need something which is bigger in the cabin and does not require seat belts”. The MGB sold without being advertised, I just mentioned I was thinking of selling, and someone came along and persuaded me to let them have it. I now had a fresh fighting fund in the war chest.

But what to get? I was thinking Austin Seven, but maybe a little small for my expanded girth these days. Then one of my friends who owns a pub had to shut the doors and cease trading, and he happened to mention that he had two “old American” cars that he was going to sell. One was a 1929 Nash 6 Sedan. And the other was the 1928 Ford Model A. Common-sense told me the Ford was the way to go due to good spares availability and lots of technical support. So the decision was obvious and the deal was done, and a couple of weeks later I had the Model A extracted from storage and trailered home. What had I bought? Six years of accumulated dust for starters!

The car was in very original configuration, and that means there was just a single rear light, and naturally no indicators.



The car went easily through its first MOT for 10 years, with advisories relating to wheel movement on the rear axle which latterly turned out to just need the axle half shaft nuts to be tightened. The Model A did not really suit me, it was quite harsh on my arthritis wrists, and very thirsty (15 mpg). So I sold it on, but had a hankering for a Riley Kestrel. For some reason or other I bought a 1936 Riley Merlin, it was a mistake I just did not like the car. There was nothing wrong with the Riley, it was me.... So the Riley was sold and then I did what I should have done in the first instance, buy an Austin Seven.

The one I have now was advertised in the VSCC Newsletter and belonged to Tim Reynolds who is vice chair of the BA7C. I went and saw him and car, and did the deal. It is great fun, even though in the 9 months I have owned the car I have had the engine and gearbox out to fix the lack of clutch travel. I have had to replace the crown wheel and pinion following an unfortunate incident with a pot hole. The magneto died so is now running with a coil conversion. The dynamo has been rebuilt and now provides a reliable charge. I have one outstanding job and that is the reglazing of the passenger door wind up window, due to an unnecessary and unfortunate incident with a falling G-Clamp. Hopefull the window company will have the toughened glass in stock shortly and will cut and fit it appropriately. Its all good fun and has forced me to intimately discover the ins and outs of the car. It is a brilliant car to drive and copes admirably with the aforementioned fear of my expanding girth! It astonishes my how well 10 bhp can progress the car along. Although getting stuck behind a Ruby in its crawler gear on a steep hill is challenging

as the car can't go that slow without running out of usable slow revs. Along the level,



I find that I do not hold up everyday traffic and am usually following a modern car at 40 mph anyway. I now have sufficient confidence in the car that it will take me as far as I want to go in it. One of the advantages of the Austin over the Singer is that I can take both dogs at once in it, and they love riding in the car. I hope my car wanderlust is now settled and the Singer and the Austin remain the long term occupants of my garage.

Roly Alcock

July 2013