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LONDON - INVERNESS
T-RUN - Part 1

SUMMER REFLECTIONS

in a Midget

by David Saunders

An overcast Summer afternoon in 1946 and with the threat of rain heavy in the air the editor of Motor magazine, Christopher Jennings, and his wife, Rene, prepared to set off for the Scottish Highlands at the invitation of the MG Car Company. The prospect of escaping from the confines of his office for a few days and rediscover the pleasures of open road motoring in a car designed specifically for just such a purpose, but which the restrictions of wartime had denied everyone for the past six years, was indeed a moment to be savoured whatever the weather. The purpose was to road test the latest version of Abingdon's famous Midget sports car, the TC. At 5.30pm on Thursday, June 27th, the Jennings set off from London on a journey that would see them cover well over a thousand miles in little more than two days in atrocious weather conditions that necessitated utilising both hood and sidescreens for virtually the entire trip. To consider that a journey of this length could be undertaken in such a short duration of time on roads which would be in questionable condition in that immediate post-war period makes such an achievement even more remarkable.

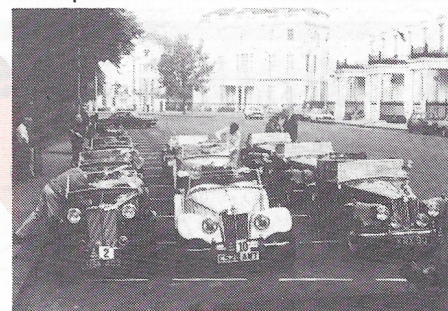
Little can the Jennings have realised at the time that what for them was a relatively insignificant moment in their lives would be commemorated forty years later in a re-enactment of that journey. Yet, on Thursday, 26th June, 1986, ten T types assembled in Belgrave Square as part of the T Register's 50 years of T types celebrations for the express purpose of re-tracing the 1946 road test route from London to Inverness and back and, wherever possible, staying at the same ports of call. This time, however, the pace was to be a 'leisurely' four days (in deference to the drivers rather than the cars!) and cars representing the entire twenty years of T type production would be participating. An event for which the seed had been sown two years earlier at a T Register committee meeting was about to come to fruition — and Motor magazine was coming along as well to observe the durability of these little cars; could they stand the test of time? However, for the purpose of ensuring a full report, John Simister and photographer, Maurice Rowe, decided to opt for the more up-to-

date specification of a Naylor TF 1700.

At 6.15am the RAC's Special Events Executive, Peter Stayner, observed the first of the T types arrive for the start and before long everyone was in position for a prompt 7.00am departure. My own journey had, in fact, begun in the wee small hours, leaving Cambridge at 2.00am to collect my travelling companion for the weekend, Henry Stone, whose involvement with both the production and competition aspects of Abingdon's colourful history has bestowed upon him the honour of 'a living legend' by many an MG enthusiast. This excursion via Abingdon meant that I arrived at the start deprived of a night's sleep, with 130 miles already under my belt and my bed for the following night waiting more than 300 miles of hard driving away. However, whilst my own efforts of endurance bordered on the foolhardy, the enthusiasm of others proved that no obstacle would be allowed to stand in the way of them being a part of this unique and historic occasion. Robert McGillivray drove his ex-Pat Moss rally TF down from his home base in Scotland for the sole purpose of driving back — and then back again! Two Swiss entrants, Roger Righini (TD) and Raymond Sunier (TF) drove to England for the Silverstone concours and then left their cars garaged at Brown & Gammons for the five week intermediate period. Mike Lugg decided to enter his newly restored TC devoid of a co-driver, the car having clocked up only a couple of hundred miles after being laid up for fifteen years, whilst Oxford vet, Simon Gibbard, managed to persuade his wife, Joyce, to accompany him in his similarly unproven TA Tickford, which had only recently seen the light of day, having been subjected to an intensive rebuild after being saved from the breakers yard. Peter Best, unable to go himself, ensured that his TF would be a part of the event by installing wife, Marian, in the driver's seat unchaperoned! Last, but by no means least, there was David Peebles and son, Graham, in their TC, a former Silverstone Concours winner and Ian Lloyd with wife, Rosemary, a fellow T Register committee member, without whose help I would have been hard pressed to complete the organisation in time.

As we assembled for the start of this historic trip my mind was transported back

to that day forty years before when the Jennings were about to embark on the same journey. The early morning sun beaming on our immaculately turned out cars from a clear blue sky, in the lush green setting of that Georgian square, contrasted sharply with the dismal conditions that must have confronted 'Motors' editor in the austere surroundings of a war-ravaged city. How they would have loved to have been a part of our own endurance run, even if only as spectators, but sadly both had departed this life some years previously. Even so, I couldn't help but feel that, somehow, they were with us throughout the trip.



Lining up for the start in Belgrave Square with KRX 90 (the ex-Pat Moss rally car) appropriately in pole position!

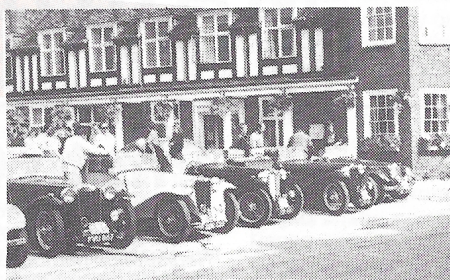
At 7.00 precisely the order was given "Start your engines" and the music of finely tuned Abingdon engineering rang out across the square. As the convoy set off round Hyde Park Corner for the first battalions of office workers were already in evidence and, noticing their startled gazes, one wondered how many would have willingly swapped their formal attire for a T-shirt, jeans and the open road on that summer's morning. Familiar landmarks like Marble Arch and Lords Cricket Ground quickly made way for the Great North Road and before long it was full throttle motoring as we headed for breakfast that was awaiting us sixty miles away.

Once we were really motoring my thoughts turned to our T type counterparts across the Atlantic who had embarked on their own much more ambitious endurance event a week earlier and would still be going strong long after our cars had cooled down from their four days hard work. Such thoughts must also have been very much in

the mind of Ron Embling, a staunch member of the New England T Register but over in the UK on a one year sabbatical from his lecturing post in up-state New York and so deprived of participating in the Ocean to Ocean T Tourist Trophy. However, far from playing the role of bystander, Ron was in a state of euphoria; not only had he been invited to join us on the Inverness run, but Marian Best was in need of a co-driver. To drive a TF and have a female companion as well was just too good to be true! Even so, Ron's active role was a most important piece of the jigsaw for our party as two T Register members had gone to America specifically to participate in the Ocean to Ocean.

No problems were encountered during the first sixty miles and we made our breakfast appointment on schedule, much to the relief of our welcoming party whose taste buds were being subjected to the aroma of bacon and eggs being prepared at The George Hotel, Buckden. There, to put the seal of approval on this T type

testimonial was the club chairman, Ron Gammons with wife Valerie, T Register secretary, Glyn Giusti and 'Safety Fast!' editor, Paddy Willmer (who had to do little more than just fall out of bed, such is the close proximity of his home to this historic watering hole!). The George had provided the Jennings with their evening meal prior to an all-night trek up the A1 and across the border in driving rain on desolate roads. What a contrast to the prospects that



Breakfast time at The George Hotel, Buckden. (Photos: Mike Lugg)

confronted us! By the time we were ready to leave at 10.00am the strength of a mid-summer sun was already most effective and the specific problem for all of us that day was clearly in evidence — to keep both car and occupants cool!

However, as we set off north we now had peace of mind against mechanical failure thanks to the final two members of our group who had arranged to rendezvous with us at Buckden. Ron Gammons had kindly donated a B & G Sherpa van and trailer for the trip, complete with a wide range of T type spares that might be needed, but which also proved to be most useful for off-loading some of our luggage! Tony Dickinson and wife, Barbara, were to be in charge of the back-up vehicle, garage proprietor friends of David Peebles from Leverton near Boston, so we knew we were in good hands should the worst happen. The party was now complete, the serious business of the weekend was ahead of us — from this point we were on our own.