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SUMMER REFLECTIONS
Part 2

SUMMER REFLECTIONS

in a Midget

by David Saunders
(Part 2)

Heading north over the wide open spaces of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire our party soon fragmented into small groups as fuel stops started to take effect. However it was the job of the back-up vehicle to keep a close watch for any such stationary car so that no straggler was left behind, Tony and Barbara shepherding us with a high degree of professionalism that quickly gave me confidence in them, which was just as well because the "gremlins" were getting ready to make their first strike around midday. The 'Pat Moss' TF had ground to a halt near Clumber Park on the edge of Sherwood Forest, an appropriate place for this historical car to stop I suppose, bearing in mind the area's connections with the Lombard RAC Rally! A carburettor banjo belt had worked loose and was now lying lost somewhere back along the A1. The only answer was to run the car on a single carb for the rest of the day and for Bob McGillivray to ring home for a replacement to be waiting for him en route.

By lunchtime the strength of the sun was beginning to have its effect on the drivers (with the exception of the Tickford's occupants, Simon and Joyce, taking full advantage of coup de ville motoring) and it is only then as you travel the lonely expanse of South Yorkshire that you realise the A1 now by-passes not only the towns but all the 'watering holes' that have served as a travellers' rest down through the ages. Oh for a glass of the amber nectar yet 'opening time' was ticking by and when Wetherby was reached with still no sign of life, Henry and I were getting desperate, yet there was no time to stray from the beaten track. Maybe we should have resorted to the motorway service area at Doncaster after all! Then, like an oasis in the desert, appeared The Bridge Inn, just south of Boroughbridge, which I both mention and recommend for the sake of fellow weary travellers who find themselves in a similar plight on a hot Summer's day with no desire for plastic fare. The sight of one resting MG with bonnet up in the car park quickly drew forth others and an extended lunch break was greeted with a unanimous vote of 'yes' — thirsty work, this endurance stuff!

The afternoon saw us not only refreshed but driving through the much

more agreeable countryside of North Yorkshire, enhanced by the prospect of a free fill-up of petrol at a pre-arranged rendezvous courtesy of BP, who were to take publicity photos. This had been arranged by Mike Lugg, an employee of the company who had managed to achieve what I had failed in as a mere mortal of the human race. My sincere thanks to both Mike and British Petroleum for their generous support of this event which was much appreciated by everyone.

At Scotch Corner we left the A1 for the A66, heading over the Pennines towards Penrith and Carlisle, just as Christopher Jennings and his wife Rene had done with the Motor road test car forty years earlier. However, whatever problems they might have encountered by that stage of the journey, they were certainly not the same as ours, the Tickford by now wilting, if not its passengers and several others including my own proving increasingly difficult to restart once stopped, due to fuel vapourisation. This common TA/B/C fault in fact proved to be severely aggravated by incorrectly aligned radiator slats on all the cars, spotted, naturally enough by an eagle-eyed Henry Stone who was already proving his worth as 'riding mechanic'. (This technical topic will be dealt with in the T Register's 1987 Year Book to be published in May).

Our first overnight stop was reached soon after 6.00pm and not a moment too soon, everyone agreed, having covered the greatest distance in the hottest conditions that we were to encounter during the entire trip. However, after a freshen-up the entire team was able to enjoy an excellent evening meal and good conversation, recounting the day's experiences in surroundings most appropriate which can have changed little since 1946. The Kings Arms Hotel at Lockerbie is indeed worthy of a visit by anyone who enjoys a step back in time without necessarily sacrificing adequate facilities: good food, a homely atmosphere and a warm welcome are assured from John and Shirley Maddock, the proprietors.

Friday morning greeted us with another sunny day and we were soon on our way up the A74 driving through what is

referred to as Burns' country — bonny Galloway, rolling hillsides that invite you to stay. We soon came upon Abington, nothing much more than just a point on the map, but where I recalled Jennings having made a dawn stop after their all-night drive: "The Scotch Express toiling up the main line gradient was the only sign of life, and we would certainly not have exchanged the rows of first class sleepers for our all-night journey in the MG".

Unfortunately we were considerably delayed by road works and, due to poor temporary signposting, missed our intended route to the Erskine Bridge avoiding Glasgow. We therefore found ourselves routed on that city's freeway from end to end, not exactly the most inspiring experience of the weekend and an unbelievable contrast between the Lowlands left behind and the Highlands waiting to greet us. One wondered how such an eyesore as Glasgow was ever allowed to develop amidst such beautiful surroundings.

Forty years ago the only means of crossing the Clyde was by ferry, a far more agreeable means of experiencing the transition between the two Scotlands than the bridge that has now replaced it. The ferry is now long since gone so a choice was not available to us. However, once on the northern shore of the Clyde, the change is instant and dramatic. Loch Lomond is but a few miles away, but even before that view comes into sight one is conscious of being in a different world. Our coffee time halt was on the banks of the loch at Lush where everyone was soon engaged in conversation with tourists, villagers and even the local constabulary. For a few moments a line up of ten gleaming examples of the T-type marque were to take precedence over the normal local attraction. On occasions like this it appears that everyone in the world is a car enthusiast!

One of the problems with an endurance run is that you can very easily forget the business of the day and drop into a leisurely pace where time is of no importance. So it was at Lush when Ian Lloyd suddenly pointed out to me that our lunch appointment at Ballachulish was at least two hours of hard driving away and it was already mid-day! So, the cars were

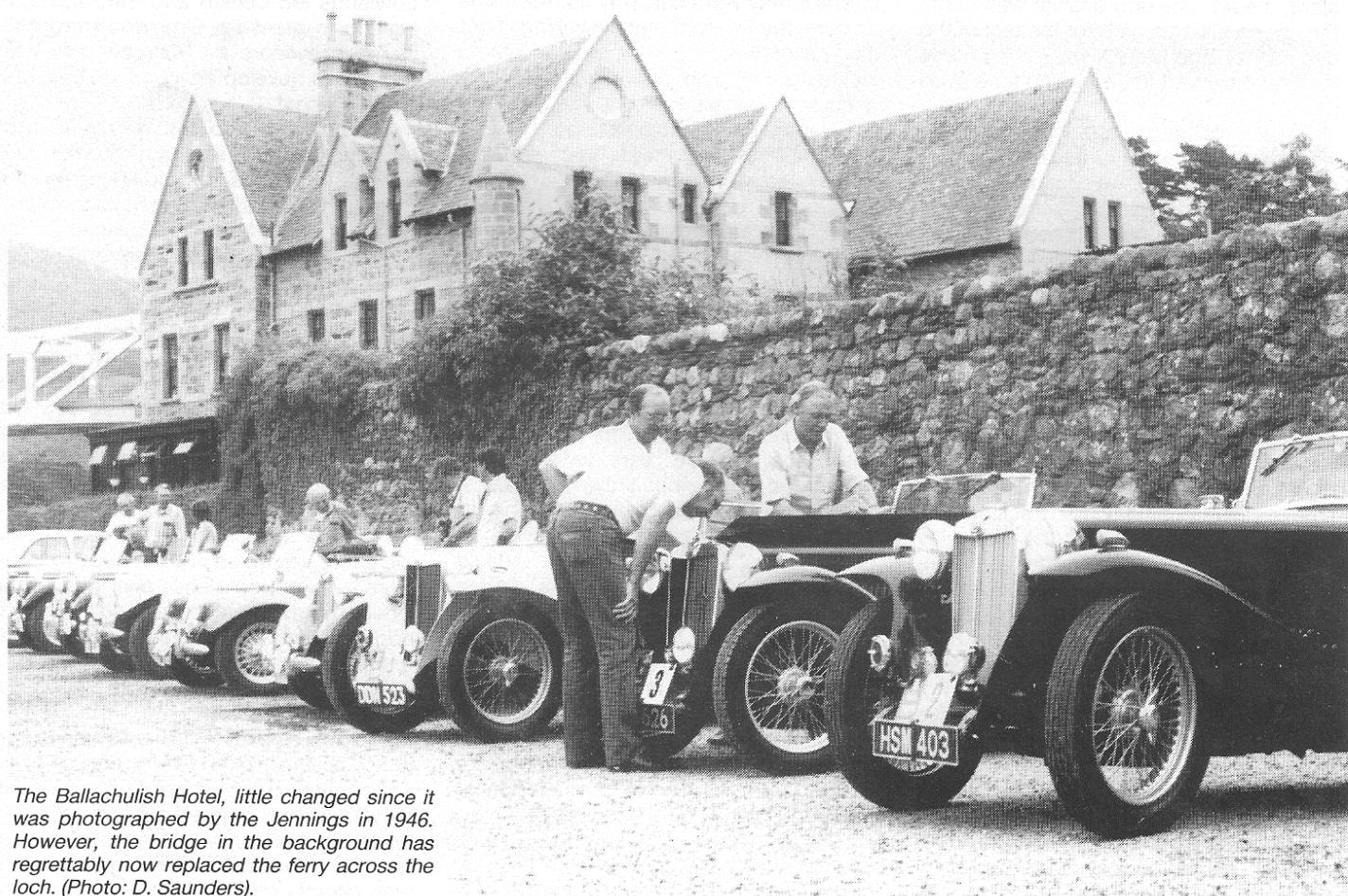
quickly fired up and away, an awesome sight indeed as a long line of T types in close formation roared up the twists and turns of the road bordering the loch with the steep craggy slopes on the left hand side echoing the exhaust notes out over the water. This continued for about fifteen miles before venturing out into open country with the mountains looming up ever larger on the horizon. Arriving at Glen Coe several of our party wanted to pull up for pictures so the complete entourage ground to what was intended to be a momentary halt, only to be greeted by a coach party of American tourists and a photographer from the Glasgow Herald. The lunch date at Ballachulish was getting pushed ever further back into the afternoon, after which we still had to make Inverness that evening. Even so, we had to be thankful that the view was at least there to be enjoyed. The Jennings had spoken of "great gusts screaming down at gale force and the rain hose-piped over the car, while all forms of life and livestock seemed to have gone for shelter rather than face such abnormal Summer conditions".

It was 3 o'clock when we finally arrived at Ballachulish for lunch, but despite this we were still made very welcome just as the Jennings had been received when they told of arriving unexpected and slightly bedraggled. From that point on it would mean hard driving all the way to Inverness if we were to make dinner in time and I could only hope that the reliability which had blessed all our cars so far that day would continue. Unfortunately

it was not to be. The gremlins had their dastardly plan lined up for a few miles up the road and this time it was the author's car that they had their eyes fixed on. Five miles out from Fort Augustus the TC was stationary by the roadside for the sole purpose of 'letting Henry out' (you understand don't you?!). However, all Henry's efforts to restart her based on a fuel vapourisation diagnosis failed to produce any response. A process of elimination on the electrical system revealed a faulty rotor arm, presumably having cracked from the heat being generated under the bonnet over the past two days — one item that Ron had not included in his shopping list of goodies for the back-up vehicle. So, for the first time on the trip the trailer was pressed into service, although I hoped that this would be for no longer than the distance to the next town. On reaching Fort Augustus a garage was indeed found, but when the proprietor learnt of the nature of our need for the specimen sitting forlornly on the trailer, he looked at us with a grimace as if we had taken leave of our senses. Henry was quick to point out that a Mini one would fit, which only seemed to confirm this chap's suspicions about us. However, he happily sold us one, the car roared back into life and we were quickly off into the sunset, leaving the local mechanic doubting his own sanity, but with a copy of our souvenir programme just to prove he had not dreamt the whole thing!

By now it was 7 o'clock in the evening and while the rest of the group were now

far ahead of us we still had the entire length of Loch Ness to travel plus a further twenty or so miles to our destination for the night. We made last orders for dinner with minutes to spare but still not entirely troublefree. Unknown to me at the time the clutch bolt stop had vibrated loose making it impossible to change gear for the last five miles. It was, therefore, with considerable relief that a subsequent inspection revealed such an easily rectifiable solution to the problem. After such an eventful day the remainder of the evening came a welcome opportunity for relaxation. The Jennings' Friday night stay at the Nethy Brige Hotel revealed a temporary break in the atrocious weather conditions for them: "Occasional bursts of sunshine during the afternoon gave promise of a fine evening and at 7 o'clock the sun was beating down on the hotel verandah so that people sat about in the Continental manner and drank their pre-dinner cocktails out of doors". Our own Friday night stay at Nethy Bridge saw us making use of what could well be the very same verandah for after dinner drinks, with Henry now undisputedly the life and soul of the party, keeping us amused till after midnight. It was a warm, balmy Summer's evening and in such memorable surroundings and in such enjoyable company all thoughts of tiredness were forgotten. This was an evening to be savoured to the full. We had all made Inverness in the allotted time and still mobile. We had cause for celebration and a degree of contentment.



The Ballachulish Hotel, little changed since it was photographed by the Jennings in 1946. However, the bridge in the background has regrettably now replaced the ferry across the loch. (Photo: D. Saunders).

After the comparative luxury of Friday night there was every reason to be feeling on top of the world as we started the long trek home down the A9, besides, the sun was still shining and there was every prospect for another hot day ahead. Once more we were following in the Jennings' footsteps (or should I say wheeltracks?) which thankfully gave us the opportunity to leave the trunk road and head off across country. All the cars were now running with clockwork precision which was just as well because another truly Scottish welcome was awaiting us at Fortingall. The road from Dalnacardoch may have improved in quality of surface since the Motor's test car rode it, but the width made no concessions whatsoever to the modern age of motoring and provided us with a welcome relief to all the open road stuff of the last three days. A short stop to admire the view (two views in fact, one looking out over Kinloch Rannoch, the other of Henry doing a pit stop wheel change on Mike Lugg's TC, both equally enjoyable!) and then down into Fortingall where we were confronted with a cold salad the like of which is sadly most rare. Christopher Jennings spoke of this particular hotel in glowing terms and the passage of time had obviously done nothing to alter things. This was indeed a fitting conclusion to our all too brief visit to Scotland with a meal that would adequately sustain us for our long hard drive down to Richmond in Yorkshire for the final night stop-over. We were now to deviate from the route which the Jennings took home as our presence was required at the joint MGCC/MGOC Donington meeting on the Sunday. In any case I shall always be puzzled as to why the Jennings' route south took them back to Carlisle as our own chosen route via Edinburgh and the A68 through the Cheviots seemed a much more obvious choice.

New, the route may have been, but there was still one unexpected final irony to be enacted when rang incredibly true with the Jennings own experience. To quote from their 1946 Motor article once more: "There is a lot of criticism of British hotels, some of it is unfortunately justified. On this journey, however, no meals were booked in advance and at every stop, save one, the service and food provided were quite astonishingly good. The one exception was an English Hotel which we called upon when returning south and which, from a lofty pre-war standard has degenerated . . . not suitable for the traveller, nor desirable to a nation bent on developing its tourist industry". Our own final port of call shall remain nameless, but let me just say that what promised most in terms of status and price offered the least in service and quality. Having said that I should add that nowhere were we made to feel unwelcome and every hotel did its best to cater for our particular needs, especially in terms of secure all-night parking. At least we can say that we relived all the Jennings' experiences, save one, the rain!

Sunday's formalities saw us arrive at

Donington where a special enclosure had been set aside for us. Following a parade lap of the circuit, we made our way back to London where an official welcoming party had been arranged by Motor magazine in Battersea Park for 6.00pm, where the 'bubbly' tasted very good indeed after the long hot drive down the A5. We had proven that forty years on the T series MG is still capable of being driven hard for

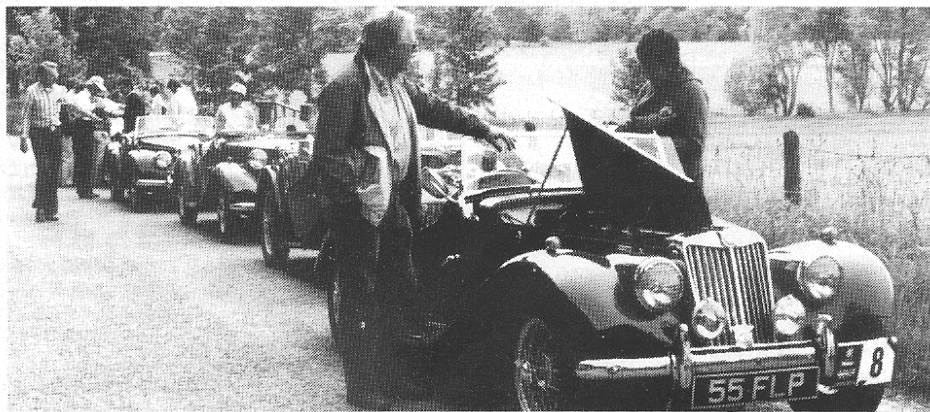


Henry Stone explaining the finer points of Abingdon engineering philosophy to an attentive Swiss audience at Fortingall (L to R): Raymond Sunier, Jacky Handsien, Roger Righini. (Photo: M. Lugg).

sustained periods, a fact which did not go unnoticed by Motor's John Simister when he wrote his report enthusing of the qualities which make T type motoring such a pleasurable experience. The six page colour feature on our trip in the July 16th issue certainly did us proud and brought the MG Car Club to the attention of a section of the motoring public who would not normally be aware of our activities.

In just four days our little group had become a very close knit family in which everybody blended perfectly. One common interest and goal had bound us together, and together we had achieved it. This event will never be repeated. We are all decided on that. But to Christopher and Rene, thank you for providing us with the opportunity and the initiative.

Copies of the special souvenir programme are still available price £1.00 (proceeds to the British Heart Foundation Appeal) from the MG Car Club office. Large SAE please.



Stopping to enjoy the view of Glen Coe, Fort Augustus, Ian and Rosemary Lloyd in the foreground. (Photo: M. Lugg).



Celebrating a job well done with a glass of bubbly at the finish in Battersea Park (Motor's John Simister is on the extreme left of the picture). (Photo: K. Drake).

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