MG SA Restoration

By George Rome

Back in September of 2000, my wife informed me of a large MG saloon that was sitting neglected in a barn near my home in Kilmarnock. I believe the appropriate headline could have read: 'rare barn find in need of total restoration'. Some weeks later the haggling was completed, and a dilapidated 1936 MG SA saloon was pushed slowly out from its home of many years between two beautifully restored Field Marshall tractors, and carefully loaded and trailered to my workshop nearby.



Having restored some previous MG T types many years before, and knowing what evils might lie beneath the paint and filler, my philosophy is 'expect the worst and you will not be disappointed'; similar to a blind date I imagine. With the dismantling underway, I was amazed to find two fuel tanks, one behind the rear axle and another in the large boot. This must be a thirsty beast to need two tanks, I thought.

The aluminium bell housing had more cracks than Frank Carson on tour.

Work was also started on the large six-cylinder engine, which had been out of the car for many years. The engine was completely stripped and was not a pretty sight. Despite three small holes, the sump had still managed to fill with a sludge of water and oil, there were twelve broken studs, the rocker shaft and bushes were worn away, and the aluminium bell housing had more cracks than Frank Carson on tour the list was endless.

Fast forward to December 2006 when Dave Stewart and Keiran Boyle of Couston Classics were called to the rescue. Dave took the project to his workshop in Fife for work to begin in earnest. I frequently commuted between my own, and Dave's home to help whenever possible with the restoration. He must have been sick of the sight of me over the next few months. Towards the end of February an unlucky Ian Lindley called in for a chat and ended up helping us to remove the body. Before February was over the chassis had been completely stripped, sandblasted, and painted with all components; springs, axles, etc, back together again. March, and sadly the spokes of the wire wheels had sandblasted away to a distant memory. Consequently, these had to be completely rebuilt and fitted with new Blokley tyres before going back on the hubs.

By the end of March the engine was transported through to Dave's to be installed into the chassis. Things had come a long way during the previous three months and the whole project was looking pretty good. Dave and Keiran started work on the body tub for which they had made a metal jig on a mobile cradle to wheel the body around the workshop. When not required at Dave's, I worked at home on the interior woodwork replacing the inlay and varnish. Many a happy hour I spent looking for small pieces of inlay scattered around the room. Keiran spent the next few months repairing and welding the body and wings. It emerged that a previous owner had utilised a fence post to support the boot floor, good to see that improvisation is still alive and well. The engine bay had also been modified to fit a diesel engine, which solved the riddle of the two fuel tanks. The one in the boot had obviously been for diesel fuel. Unfortunately these modifications gave the team a number of problems reinstating the engine bay and bulkhead back to the original specification. The rapidly growing list of missing parts and technical information were obligingly sourced by Peter Ratcliffe of SVW, with Gary Perry of the MG Car Club also a great support.

Around mid October Dave phoned me to report for work again, and all three of us began sanding and preparing the body and wings for painting. As each day drew to a close, we would patronise each others work with good hearted banter that added to the camaraderie surrounding the project. In December, we hit a major obstacle, finding that the right hand top of the huge bonnet was beyond repair. After a number of weeks we were still unable to find an alternative, or even anyone willing to tackle making a replacement. Keiran eventually decided to have a go at this himself, and with a new piece of sheet metal cut to size, he painstakingly formed the curve, over a scaffold pole I believe. He then cut the original hinges off and welded these onto the new bonnet. Thank goodness for enterprise.

By the beginning of February 2008, the body and wings were rebuilt and back on the chassis to ensure they were still a good fit. After that everything is disassembled once more and taken to the painter. While waiting on the return of these, we start the engine up. It runs beautifully only to find that the clutch has stuck on the flywheel. Oh well, gearbox back out to free the plate. Then another hiccup – the chrome rocker cover is leaking oil very badly and is found to be twisted. These are extremely difficult to find, but again thanks to Gary Perry who sources me one from America.

April, and the body and wings are back from the paint shop and fitted.





Keiran starts to trim the interior, and as this had been removed previously I need to find some information for him. I find a similar car under repair near Glasgow and the workshop owner was kind enough to allow me to take some interior photographs to help us. Meanwhile Dave is having nightmares about the wiring. Unfortunately, photos were not able to help here.

By October, the car is finally ready to drive. It has been my goal to drive the car back home, and after a few days of test driving around Fife and enjoying the beautiful scenery, she does the 60 plus miles home running superbly on the first decent day before the winter salt hits the roads.

Many thanks to all who helped with this restoration: Dave, Keiran, and Mary who kept us fortified with tea and biscuits, the Car Club, and SVW supplies. Also to my own long-suffering wife, who must have been sorry at times that she mentioned the car in the first place, but gave me encouragement and inspiration throughout the project. Would I ever do it again? Who can tell? Something not quite so large, perhaps, but then again, why not when the end results are so impressive.



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AYRSHIRE CLASSIC CAR CLUB ANNUAL SHOW AUGUST 30



Ayrshire Classic Car Club held it's 5th annual Show in the Dean Park in Kilmarnock on Sunday 30 August. The number of entries has increased throughout each of these years and a total of around 150 cars were on display. **JOHN McPHERSON** was there

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Right: Chris McMaster stands beside his splendid 1967 Vauxhall Viscount 3.3 Powerglide. It spent the first 15 years of its life in Australia before being imported to an owner in Hull, which goes some way to explaining its fine condition. Chris has had it for three years and apart from a brake overhaul and regular servicing it has given him trouble-free motoring. And it's sailed through its last three MoTs. How many of us can claim that?

Above: This extremely rare 1936 MG SA Saloon is owned by George Rome, and to say it's in immaculate condition is an understatement. Off the road for 40 years before George bought the car in 1999, it's since undergone a ground up restoration. A class-winner at various classic events around Scotland, George hopes to take the SA to some shows south of the border next year. It'll likely be at Ripon, so if you're there prepare for a treat!

Right: Stuart Smith from Troon and his 1991 Honda Beat is frequently on display at Scottish classic car events and never fails to draw lots of interest from the visitors. He told us that these little roadsters are rare sights on UK roads and knows of only two others in Scotland. Its 660cc, naturally-aspirated engine returns over 50 mpg.



Above: Eric Johnston's 1952 Standard Vanguard Phase 1 Beetleback is well known in classic car circles in Scotland. When he bought it 5 years ago, it had already been painted and some mechanical work had already been done. But Eric, who clearly has magic wands for fingers, has restored the car to absolutely pristine condition. At the four major classic car events held in Scotland each year, it's won 'Champion of Champions', 'Overall Best Classic' (twice) and 'Best in Show' (also twice).



MOTOR enthusiasts made a racing line for Kilmarnock's Dean Castle for the annual Classic Car Show.

There were marvellous old machines and flashier sporty numbers for car fans to feast their eyes on, and the finest of the lot was George Rome's 1936 MG which won Best in Show.

It was a great event for all the family, and here's to next year's being just as successful.



WHAT A BEAUTY: Fans admire this vintage MG. sfkst300809Show-2



UNDER THE HOOD: Car enthusiasts take a closer look at one of the cars on show. sfkst300809Show-3



DIY MOTOR: Bruce Symon from Mauchline with his home-built Sportster. sfkst300809Show-1



WHERE'S THE REST OF IT? It looks like this little machine has lost its rear wheels. sfkst300809Show-11



BEST IN SHOW: George Rome from Kilmaurs won Best in Show with his restored 1936 MG SA saloon. sfkst300809Show-10