

Wires & Tyres

April 2021



www.memphisbritishcars.org

British Sports Car Club, LTD Memphis, Tennessee

BSCC Officers 2020-2021

President	Terry Roberts
V. President	Jeb Blanchard
Treasurer	Jerry Farrar
Austin Healey Marque Leader	Jim Hofer
Empire Marque Leader	Tom Wilson
Jaguar Marque Leader	Dave White
MG Marque Leader	Paul Burdette
Triumph Marque Leader	Jon Brody
Lotus Marque Leader	Chris Irving
Secretary	Jim Duke

Membership Meetings

Coletta's Italian Restaurant
2850 Appling Rd.

3rd Monday of each month
6:00 p.m. if you wish dinner
7:00 p.m. for our program

Mark your calendar - **Monday, April 19, 2021**



We're baaacckkk!

The BSCC Board met March 31st and voted to resume normal club activities – albeit while recognizing a continuing need to socially distance, wear masks, etc.

Mark your calendar for 6:00 p.m., Monday, April 19, 2021 - the first membership meeting since February of last year. At Coletta's Italian Restaurant, as usual, drive your British car, you might take home a prize.

Actually, we're picking up right where we left off – the last Board meeting was on March 9, 2020, and plans were made to reprise a club presentation on spring gardening, so that is on our calendar for April 19th. Pam Irving will deliver a slide presentation and program on ornamental gardening.

And, plans were started on a trip to the Landers Center, I-550 & Goodman Rd., to observe and participate in SCCA Solo / Autocross. And, a fun rallye! Stay tuned for later details.



Catalytic Converter Theft

Trying to clean up their awful air pollution, China has helped make your car less secure.

Because China with 30% of global new car buying, along with virtually everywhere else, is after cleaner air, the demand for the precious metals in catalytic converters has skyrocketed. Supply and demand, folks; prices for palladium and rhodium have soared to record highs.

From about \$500 an ounce five years ago, the price of palladium has quintupled to hit a record of \$2,875 an ounce last year, and is now right at \$2,650 an ounce, more than the price of gold (\$1,750). Rhodium prices have soared more than 4,000 percent from about \$640 an ounce five years ago to a record \$25,850 in late March when this article went to press – making it nearly 15 times more precious than gold.

Demand yields supply - in St. Louis, catalytic converter thefts jumped more than eightfold, from only 50 in 2019 to 420 last year, with the trend gaining speed near the end of the year into



early 2021. In Lexington, S.C., sheriff's deputies responded to 144 catalytic converter thefts between July and December, nearly triple the number of cases over the year before. Converter thefts in Wichita, Kan., also almost tripled in 2020 compared to the previous year, to 547 cases from 191, and the pace picked up in January, with 102 reported cases just that month.

The most commonly hit vehicles are SUVs and trucks, especially late-model Toyotas, because they sit higher off the ground (making for easier access underneath) and the bolts that connect the converter are easily removed. Police have been seeing more Nissans targeted, as well.

While most of us don't give much thought to our catalytic converter, those with vehicles high off the ground might want to think twice. It's always wiser to park in well-lit or protected public parking lots, and to park your car in your home garage if possible. Owners whose vehicles have easy clearance underneath might want to take it a step further with an aftermarket product.

Taking these precautionary measures will hopefully deter thieves and keep your car running smoothly – and quietly.



We're Bringing Sad News Again

Sabine Schmitz, the first and only female race car driver to win the annual 24-hour race on the famed Nürburgring circuit and a renowned TV



personality, died March 16th. She was 51. Schmitz had been ill with cancer since 2017 but continued racing until 2019.

Schmitz grew up near the Nürburgring, a fearsome track that winds through the hills of western Germany. Its 13-mile Nordschleife section, often called 'The Green Hell', is considered one of the most demanding and dangerous tracks in the world. Schmitz advanced through multiple racing categories before winning the 24-hour race in 1996 and 1997 as part of a team driving a BMW M3

In 2004, Schmitz was featured on the British motoring TV show "Top Gear" in a segment about the Nordschleife. She soon became a regular guest star and fan favorite, and from 2016 was part of the show's regular team. In one notable appearance, she piloted a Ford Transit diesel van to a 10:12 time on the Nordschleife.

Schmitz was a Nürburgring specialist with at least 20,000 laps of the track on her own and in "Ring Taxi" rides for tourists. She also ran her own team, Frikadelli Racing, with her husband.

"Sabine radiated positivity, always wore her cheeky smile no matter how hard things got -- and was a force of nature for women drivers in the motoring world," executive producer Clare Pizay told the BBC.

Bruce Meyers, who combined art and boat-building skills to invent the first fiberglass dune buggy, igniting the late-1960s craze for off-road riding, and thrived until copycats flooded the market, died on Feb. 19 at his home in Valley Center, Calif. He was 94.

For 18 months, he worked in his small garage in Newport Beach to create the Meyers Manx - named for the cat with a stub



of a tail. He removed a VW Beetle's body, shortened its floor section, then bolted on a one-piece fiberglass shell - with fenders, sides and a front hood area. Meyers's invention got a big promotional boost when he and a friend drove the Meyers Manx to a record time over nearly 1,000 miles of the rough roads of the Baja California Peninsula in 1967. The victory proved the vehicle's viability and made an aging beach boy the darling of off-road devotees.

Bruce Meyers dropped out of high school to join the merchant marine and volunteered for the Navy during World War II. He was serving aboard the aircraft carrier Bunker Hill when it was attacked by two Japanese kamikaze aircraft on May 11, 1945, near Okinawa. He jumped into the water as the burning carrier started to sink; he gave a sailor his life jacket and helped a badly burned pilot until they were rescued by a destroyer hours later. 346 sailors and airmen died in the sinking, 264 were wounded and 43 went missing.

In 2014, the Meyers Manx was the second significant car, (after the 1964 Shelby Cobra

Daytona Coupe) inducted into the National Historic Vehicle Register, a project detailing the historic and cultural significance of American vehicles. The register is a collaboration between the Historic Vehicle Association, and the Department of the Interior. The register says Meyers and the Manx was "the inspiration for over 250,000 similar cars manufactured by other companies, and is thus the most replicated car in history."

Neither Bruce Meyers or Sabine Schmitz have much to do with British cars, but the absolute joy and enjoyment they got from cars and shared with us makes their passing well worth noting here.



Off Topic

Operator: 911, what's your emergency?

Man: A guy just got hit by a car, I need an ambulance.

Operator: What's your location?

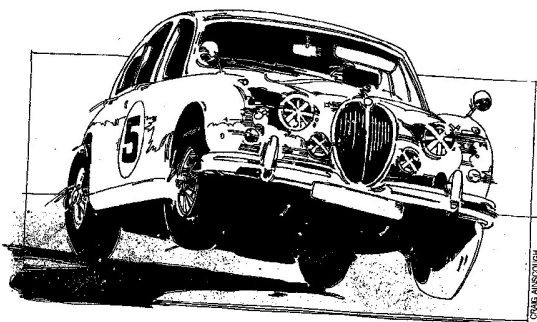
Man: I'm on Eucalyptus street.

Operator: Can you spell that for me?

Man: (long awkward pause)

Operator: Sir? Are you there?

Man: I'm gonna drag him over to Pine street and call right back.



My First British Sports Car



Our second child arrived in 1973 while we lived in Indianapolis. Suddenly, a single family car wouldn't fit any longer. And, we'd just bought our first house. Like most young families, money was tight so that second car had to be cheap, real cheap.

Despite driving a four-door saloon (sedan) at the time, my desire for something sporty lived on. Only a few years earlier I'd negotiated for a split-window Corvette coupe but the dealer wouldn't meet my price. Then, I'd briefly but seriously considered a brand new AC Cobra on offer at (my recollection) less than \$8,000 from a Ford agency in Illinois – my annual salary was something like \$7,000 at the time.

Now, Cobras and Corvettes were out of the question, as I set out to find a cheap car to possibly sate my sporty desires. Remember that eBay, Bring-A-Trailer, Craig's List and the internet didn't exist so want-ads from the Indianapolis Star, the 'Sports and Imports' section (remember them?) was where I ran the hunt.

Recollection of my budget limit is hazy, but it certainly was below \$1,000 so pickings were slim over the weeks the want-ad search lasted. You know how it went, read the want-ads, circle possibilities, then call to ask about the car on offer. Good prospects seemed to evaporate before my call reached the seller. The first car I went to see was a TR4. It turned out to be a former SCCA race car being repurposed back to road use. It was inviting, but a sketchy venture

for someone whose mechanical skills were pretty much limited to changing spark plugs and setting ignition timing.

So, the search went on. Eventually, a 1964 MGB was advertised. The interior was worn and tatty but serviceable; the engine started and ran smoothly, it had wire wheels and a tonneau, while the body was presentable if not shiny. The exhaust was throaty, actually a bit loud – the middle section of the MG's 5-piece exhaust system had been replaced by a flex pipe. It was mine for \$450, so I brought home my first British car.

That red MGB went everywhere with me for two years around Indianapolis, daily commutes, runs to the grocery, even family picnics. There were a handful of misadventures – first was the occasion when the battery failed and I tried jumping it from our family car. My ignorance of positive 'earth' nearly killed both cars. Another time there was a persistent 'clunking' from the rear end commuting from work along the freeway. Oddly, the noise quit when brakes were applied. A quick diversion to a repair shop revealed the right rear axle was abandoning its home in the differential. Surprisingly the repair was both quick and cheap enough for me to afford.

Then came a job transfer – from Indianapolis to Cheyenne, Wyoming. The family had to remain in Indianapolis for a couple of months while I went ahead, got settled in the new job and located us a house. The MGB was long in the tooth, needed maintenance which I couldn't provide, and hadn't been as reliable as might be needed for a daily driver. Still, you gotta dance with who brung you. So, a quick tune up and fresh tires were applied, then with as much

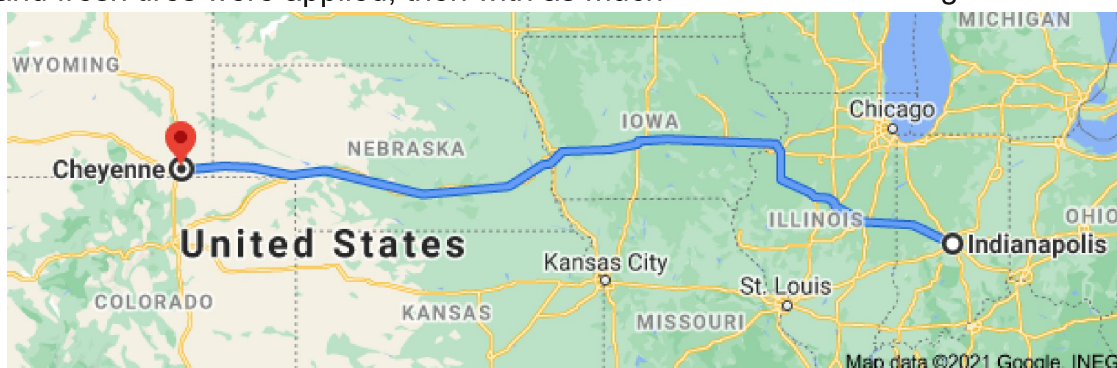
packed into the MG as possible and a few things strapped on the luggage rack, that MG took me west 1,100 miles along Interstates 74 and 80 from the capitol of Indiana to the capitol city of Wyoming. It was worrisome journey – a breakdown in the wilds of western Iowa or Nebraska, not to mention



the high plains of Wyoming could be a disaster. But, like a reliable old friend, that MGB purred along.

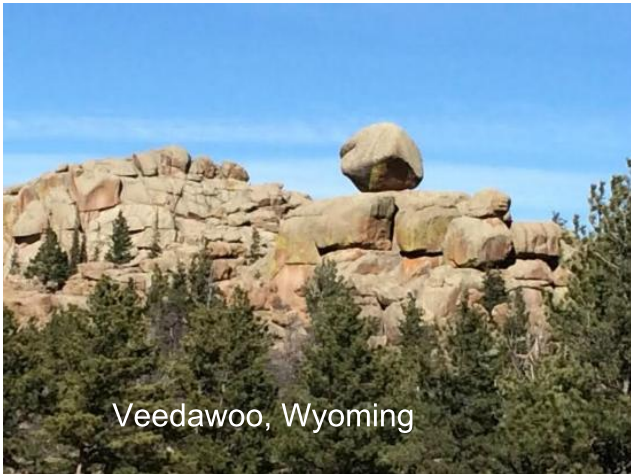
And it kept on purring after the family was settled. The B took the family on day trips over the mountains west of Laramie (upward of 11,000 feet elevation), across the high plains around Cheyenne, down to Denver, and all around the southeast corner of the Cowboy State. The SUs surely needed the air/fuel mix adjusted (heck Cheyenne sits at 6,100 feet elevation), but I didn't know how nor had the time to undertake – work, home maintenance, and raising a family kept us busy! Still that old MG purred along.

There were trips to the amazing rock formations known as Veedawoo where the kids clambered among the rocky nooks and among the balanced boulders while adults relaxed in the high-altitude sunshine. There



were drives along Happy Jack Road up to the ghost town of Sherman, WY – the highest point on the old

transcontinental railroad. Out on Happy Jack Road we could see traces of the old stagecoach road north toward Douglas, WY



and on to Deadwood, SD where Wild Bill Hickock met his end. That trusty MGB took us everywhere.

An isolated thunderstorm would occasionally boil out of the summer sky. Rather than stop to put the top on, we'd hunker down and drive faster with raindrops flying over our heads. Even winter snows didn't stop the MG. Somehow that car conquered the worst of the Wyoming snow, even the time schools were



unexpectedly closed at midday due to a blizzard and our second-grader needed rescuing. Our little red car soldiered through snow up to the door bottom to bring her safely home.

All good things end. After three years in Cheyenne, work again send us packing – to Atlanta that time and I feared the MG no longer

trustworthy for that long journey. So, a 'for sale' want ad was placed, this time in the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle, and our beloved MGB found a new home; this time for \$250!

Though gone from our garage, the MG wasn't gone from our heart. Eight years on, another job move brought us to Memphis where



another red MGB quickly found us. That version remains in the family 35 years later, albeit in our now grown son's garage in Nashville.

There's something infectious about British cars, particularly MGs. Whether an MG PA, a Magnette, an MGA, or an MGB they are fun to drive, simple, dead reliable, and can make the most mundane trip a fun adventure.



The police rang our doorbell yesterday and showed a picture of me to my wife and asked, "Is this your husband?"

She said, "Yes."

The policeman then said, "It looks as though he's been hit by a bus."

My wife replied, "Yes, but he has a good sense of humor."

Falling in Awe with British Cars

Part One

Jim Gallagher

I grew up in New Jersey as a strictly American car kid. I learned to drive on my father's car built by American Motors, a 1963 Rambler 330 with a flathead four cylinder engine and a three-on-the-tree transmission. My first car was a used 1961 Ford Falcon that got me through high school but failed to last me into college. Until I was beginning my fourth year of school at the University of Oklahoma, I was without a car; it was then that I took my parents' 1966 Rambler Classic 660 from New Jersey to Oklahoma.

In New Jersey I had no real exposure to anything but American-made cars. During college, in Norman, I fell under the bad influence of two of my best friends who introduced me to British cars. Eric was the primary British car fanatic. I can't tell you all the British cars he had during that time, but the first one that was truly memorable was an old "Bugeye" Sprite that was



Painted green. From the front it had a certain frog quality, so she was known as Kermit. We worked on that car a lot. What I liked most was the way the hood operated. We could raise it up, remove it from the car, and set it aside. This gave us full access to every component of the engine area.

The other aspect of Kermit that was memorable was that the plastic side screens did little to protect the occupants. The lack of a heater only made it worse. There was many a cold night we drove to and from Oklahoma City with frozen

appendages. When it was raining or snowing, it was, of course, that much worse. Looking cool -regardless of how uncomfortable- is more important when we are young.

One sunny afternoon we found ourselves at the Jaguar dealer in Oklahoma City with a singular purpose. We went to see this 12 cylinder engine that Jaguar just put on the market. The engine bay was tightly packed with engine components. It was stunning. This recollection would flash back many years later in another chapter.

When Eric was leaving school to enlist in the US Navy, he decided to buy a brand new 1972 MGB from the dealer in Oklahoma City.



It was white with a black top and Navy blue interior. Due to its color scheme and his career plans, this one was named the Commander. Eric was enlisting to take a job that required a security clearance; they wanted to know everything about him. He said they sent an FBI agent to his childhood church to interview people coming out of Sunday services. During one of the last meetings with the recruiter, they apparently wanted to let him know how much they knew about him. The recruiter brought up his car purchase. As an aside the recruiter told him, "You paid too much."

The second friend was Bob. Eric and Bob knew each other longer than I knew either of them. Bob fell in love with Eric's MG and soon went out and bought a twin sister in red. I got to drive both cars, and fell in love with them too. I still feel that the 1972 model was the

pinnacle of MGB design. I would love to have either one of those cars now.

Eric went off to the Navy and I never saw the Commander again. After his career in the Navy, he graduated to a Jaguar. Later Bob sold his B and bought something else. Although I didn't own one, I was hooked on the appeal of British cars.

In the mid 1980s, Bob bought a 1974 1/2 MGB when he lived in the Houston area. It was that ugly bracken color with a black top. At some



point, he decided to sell it to a man who worked for him. The new owner offered to buy it and make payments. After a while, the buyer stopped making payments. Bob had kept the title and a copy of the key, so he simply found the car and drove it home to his garage. He didn't want the car and was still interested in selling. The truth be told, the car was drivable but in terrible condition.

Bob was a long-time bachelor, and had not yet met his wife. We lived in Dallas, and he would make frequent trips back and forth to visit us. On occasion, we would drive down to his suburban Houston home. Bob was a part of our family. One of the features of this relationship was that Diana would make chocolate chip cookies for his visits and send him home with "care packages" of cookies. Our daughters began to join in on this ritual by the mid '80s.

While talking with him on the phone one evening, the repossession and desired sale of

the car came up. As I said, I really wanted to own one of these MGBs. They were no longer made, so a used car was my only choice. The B was about 13 years old by this time. I asked him how much he thought he could get for the car. He was hoping to get \$1,000. Diana asked him an apparently unrelated question. "Do you think one of my chocolate chip cookies is worth \$1.00?" He replied, "Yes." She then made the offer. "I'll buy your car for 1,000 chocolate chip cookies."

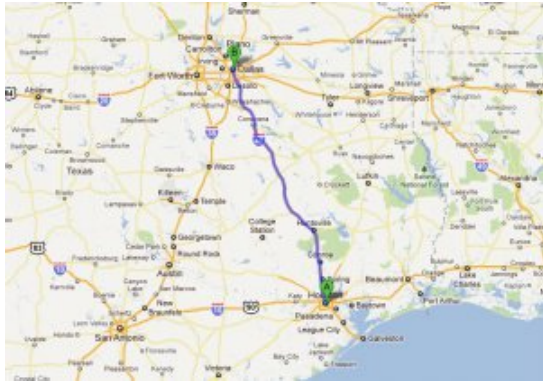
He thought about it a moment and all too quickly agreed to make that deal. While we made plans to drive to Houston to get the car, the intricate details of the deal were worked out. He sent a proposal with his requirements. In this proposal he specified the minimum diameter and thickness of each cookie, and the average number of chips that would be required in each cookie. He also included



a schedule of payments. Due to the perishable nature of the currency, he wanted to be assured that he would not have more on hand than he could consume before they became stale. The negotiations continued for some time before Bob and Diana came to an understanding.

At that point, he sent the draft of the "contract" to Dallas with my name as the buyer. Diana pointed out that I had no cookies and his deal had to be made with her. In his mock chauvinist voice, he told her that since we were in Texas, a woman couldn't make a "contract" on her own or own property. When faced with having to market the worn out car

and the permanent end of his cookie supply, he relented if we didn't tell anyone that he made the deal with a woman. He had his reputation to protect.



When we got to Houston to pick the car up, we realized how rough the car was. It was too late to renegotiate the price, but we definitely paid too much for the car. The car had been left outside under a pine tree for many months. Although the top was in place, it offered little protection and clearly needed to be replaced. The tires, including the spare needed to be serviced because there were pine needles that had wedged between the rubber and the rims. This kept the tires from properly sealing. They wouldn't hold air until they were broken down, cleaned, and refilled. The paint was so damaged that it flaked off on the sponge when we tried to wash it. The exhaust system was full of leaks and was very loud. It was more like a hole where the exhaust went with some metal fragments surrounding it. It was so noisy that we were concerned that we'd get stopped on the way home. The wooden steering wheel was so rough that it was difficult to hold it to drive. We had to stop on the way back to Dallas to buy gloves for Diana to keep it on the road without cutting up her hands. The floor under both the driver's and passenger's seats was so rusted that occupants could watch the highway passing by.

We managed to drive it 250 miles home and happily park it in our driveway so we could begin the work. Those difficult miles didn't help Diana develop the appreciation I had, nor my attraction to British cars!

To be continued!

Love at first sight

Wil Wing



31 Carlton Bodied RR Phantom II Continental

Could you fall in love with this car at first sight? Probably not. We all have different backgrounds and ideas about beauty. In the 'sixties my ideas of beauty were firmly planted in the Classic Car camp (the capital letters designate the boundaries of the Classic Car Club of America), foreign racing and sporty sports cars; not poseur cars like early Corvettes or worse, Thunderbirds. There had been no desirable American cars in the formative years of my early 'teens, 1945-50. I never felt guilty about looking away from my native country for interesting cars, since the homegrown were, to my eye, mostly bloated, grotesquely styled, and clumsy family haulers.

The photo shows the old lady as she looked freshly imported to Port Newark, NJ and first spied in the yard of Walter Wolfson, importer and dealer friend/customer, whose business was alongside Route 1 in Edison, NJ. A couple of days later it was mine and is shown parked outside my shop in early 1965. The grille louvers indicate that the engine is cooling off. I sure don't remember what was inside the shop that day, but parked outside we see a smidge of a Jaguar waiting for service. The customer's car at bottom left is a mystery to me. It's smooth fender/small taillight looks French to me, but the bumper is fat enough to be American. Anyone know?

My new love was shabbily hand-brushed with maroon paint, but very complete and original.

The only missing thing was the 'Flying Lady' radiator mascot – they were available from the US RROC in those days. You might wonder how I could afford this car, so early in my new tuning/diagnostic business and coming off of my successful but impoverishing year of SCCA racing. The answer is simple; I couldn't! But the Mini Cooper S had just been sold and I foreswore further racing until the Rolls was finished; the Rolls only cost me \$3000 plus the promise of \$300 worth of free labor for future repairs for Wolfson Enterprises.

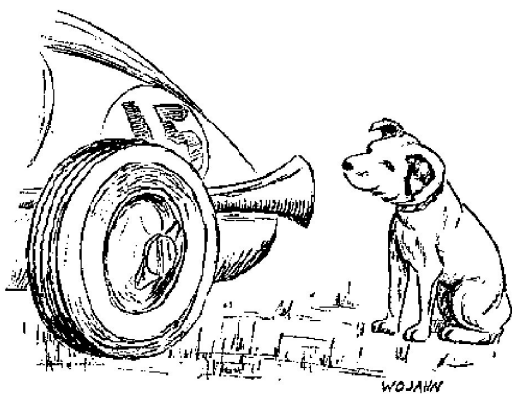


Wyres & Tyres is a publication of the British Sports Car Club, LTD
P.O. Box 38134
Germantown, TN 38183-0134

www.memphisbritishcars.org

Contact the editor via
dukemeteo@gmail.com

I am now quite negative about long-term car restorations, since **this one took me 14 years!**



His Master's Voice