

Domino effect

What started out as a schoolboy dream has now become a family passion that involves both work and play.

Words and pictures: Dave Bowers



owning classic MGs can have a domino effect, as demonstrated by the Hardy family, who one by one have acquired a fine selection of MGs over the years. Their current steeds include a trio of J-types and a lone TC, with the result that their Sunday drives *en famille* through Yorkshire's country roads suggests a classic car road run is in progress.

So how did the domino effect first come into play? This can be traced back to when Richard and Daniel Hardy were at school. The brothers would watch on with envy, glancing up from studying calculus and other abstruse subjects, as any pupils of less academic ability were having lots of fun pushing an old MG around the schoolyard. Richard and Daniel had set their sights on this MG when they'd first seen it in the school's boathouse at Cottingham High School, near Hull.

The car was a late model J2 dating to September 1933, and was owned by the boys' technical drawing teacher. He had rescued it in 1957 from on top of a pile of four wrecks in a Hull scrapyard and in the time since then, several other locals had

been unsuccessful in their attempts to buy it from him. With some financial assistance from their dad, Trevor, Richard and Daniel succeeded where the others had failed though – knowing their teacher was a bit tight, Daniel approached him in 1983 with a wad of fivers fanned out for effect. When his eyes lit up, the brothers knew the car was theirs.

MG J2

The J2 was in a fine old state when the boys got their hands on it, and lifting the bonnet revealed what had been a common solution in the 1950s and 1960s for a worn and fragile 847cc, overhead camshaft MG motor – a side-valve Ford Pop engine had been fitted instead. However, the brothers set to, gathering whatever parts were needed over the following years. Progress was slow given their limited budget, but sourcing two engine blocks was a step in the right direction. It was also something which had so frustratingly eluded their tech drawing teacher in 1957, as Richard explained: 'He was rather eccentric and devised unusual punishments for wrong-doers. When a pupil

forgot to bring along his apron for example, he was ordered to continue on from where the last offender had finished off sawing a J-type engine block in half using only a hacksaw.

'Imagine how our teacher felt after arranging for this engine to be ruined when he then bought a J2 with a Ford engine. He was also rather upset when he read that a J2 in faultless condition had sold for £14,000 just after we'd bought his car. It's true that was a lot of money, but that car was perfect, whereas ours needed so much work.'

Some of that work was the result of vandal damage, as when the J2 had been left in the scrapyard, a lighted banger had been dropped in the petrol tank, blowing the tank apart and ripping off the rear wings. So finding a replacement slab fuel tank was a priority, as well as new wings to replace the crudely made set that had been tacked into place. The front wings were also replaced, and these are of the swept wing style, as required for late J2 models, and later adopted for the P-type.

At the age of 21, Richard set about making the ash frame from three planks of wood, using a band saw, chisels and a

spoke shave, whilst using the old timbers as templates. The chassis was also dismantled and straightened where it was kinked along the nearside rail, and the suspension was built up, including new friction dampers.

Building the body tub up started off with the scuttle and rear door post. This was followed by refitting the door frames, which then meant work could proceed with the rear of the body tub after checking the doors opened and closed properly, and ensuring perfect alignment with the chassis. To ensure a degree of flexibility in all the joints, these were sealed and secured with zinc-plated screws rather than glued together. Five coats of Cuprinol on the frame helped keep future rot at bay.

Stripping paint away from the original body tub had revealed the name *Ascapilos*, meaning *God who brought people back to life*. Perhaps a previous owner had been a doctor, or maybe the fun of driving a J2 has much the same result. This name may date back to the car's competition history, as it took second place in the 1934 Lakeland Trial.

Alloy would have been the easier option for re-skinning the

Above: The Hardy family's passion for early MGs is obvious from this superb line up of their cars: TC, J1 four-seater, J2 and J3/J4 racer (from left to right).



Above: The car that started the family passion, although it was rather neglected when schoolboys Richard and Daniel bought it.

Right: The ash framing for the body was painstakingly recreated by hand and interior fitted with replacement instruments.



Right: The car was bought with a Ford Pop sidevalve motor under the bonnet, a situation that has since been rectified by the Hardy boys.



body tub, although steel was chosen, as it had been used for the majority of the original panels. This work was professionally done by an aircraft panel-beater, which then left the way open for reuniting the tub, chassis, wings and side panels, and then refitting the dashboard with replacement instruments.

Richard and Daniel built up an engine to include fitting a J4-style front housing with a C-type/J4 water pump and a fully counter-balanced Phoenix crankshaft, also new pistons, P-type con-rods, and valve gear to competition spec. Non-standard fittings were restricted to larger, 12in P-type brakes and bucket seats before the restoration was completed in 2005.

MG J3/ J4

Partway through the restoration of the J2, the domino effect started to kick in, and it was agreed Daniel would take over this car's ownership, allowing Richard to proceed with a new MMM project car, which looked more like a 1950s Special when first seen. 'I heard about this car in a roundabout way from another enthusiast, whose wife overheard a conversation at her local hairdresser's about an old vintage MG in a shed,' Richard explained. 'The car was owned by a builder in Surrey, who had accepted it in lieu of payment for work done. But it then stood for years without anything happening.'

'It had previously been fitted with a TR3-style homemade body which was so heavy, this was the first thing I junked. Originally this J-type had been built in 1933 as a J1 four-seater, which were available in open-top or closed saloonette form. Records revealed its original identity as a saloonette, which had a tendency to fall apart due to such a heavy body on a lightweight chassis.'

'It was not a popular model, being somewhat overweight for a 36bhp engine. Only 117 saloonettes were built, and this car, MG 2503, spent months in the showroom of University Motors of Wimbledon until sold in 1935. Later modifications included smaller 16in wire wheels and Wolseley Wasp hydraulic brakes. As for what lay beneath the bonnet – this was predictable after buying the J2 – a lowly Ford Pop engine coupled to an MG gearbox.'

Richard set about building a replacement engine up to a sportier J3 spec. However, the project took an unexpected turn of direction, which he described as follows: 'I arranged for a J3, four-branch, *bunch-of-bananas* exhaust to be made, but there was a misunderstanding and I received a J4 exhaust which sticks straight out of the bonnet, running down the side of the car. This prompted a complete U-turn on the project, as I then decided to go for the racing J3/J4 look. So the project now included incorporating a supercharger and 12in brakes to stop the car. It was unfortunate that by this stage the new body tub had been built and was fully skinned and fitted with doors, so it was too late to remove the doors and fill in the door frames for a more authentic racing look.'

'I didn't feel constrained to adopt the smaller 746cc, J4 size engine used for racing, and after finding a factory prepared surplus J4 engine block (previously fitted to Mel Jones's car which was arguably the fastest MMM car campaigned in the 1960s), we fitted this engine with 57mm liners for the standard,

847cc engine size. This was advantageous, as I didn't want the engine to be too busy or high revving for normal road use, and the larger capacity allowed more usable torque.'

Over a few months, the engine block was assembled with a counter-balanced racing crankshaft, custom-made lightweight flywheel, racing pistons and valves, Carrillo conrods, gas-flowed cylinder head with balanced chambers, polished ports and tapered valve guides. Richard added: 'The tuning of these highly stressed engines is most important; that's where the performance output comes from combined with a whole host of meticulous setting up procedures. The engine's valve timing design principles follow those used for Hispano-Suiza aero engines of World War One, which proved to be a winning design when properly set up.'

The correct ENV manual cross tube gearbox was installed, as used for C-type and racing J4 models, and the rear axle was strengthened. 'I uprated the rear axle using the diff, crownwheel and pinion with tapered roller bearings from a Y-type,' Richard explained. Further engine improvements included a C-type/J4-type water pump and housing – with all those engine modifications and plans for a supercharger, the original thermosiphon system was unlikely to be up to the job.

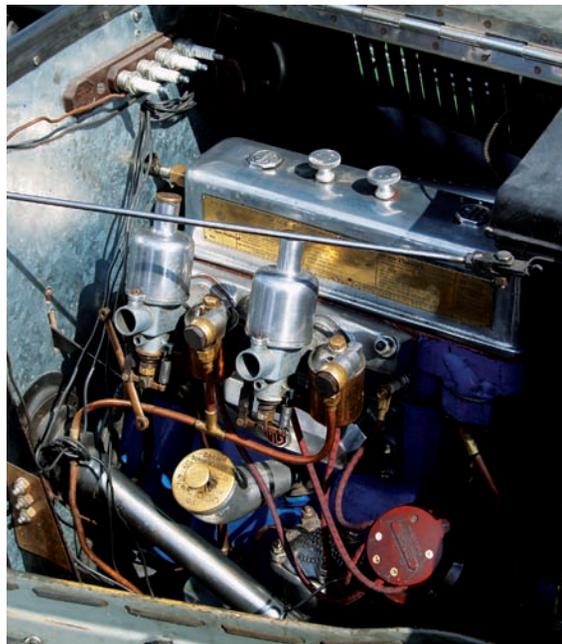
After rebuilding a Scintilla Vertex NV4 magneto, Richard was gratified to see this could produce a spark measuring an inch long. Unfortunately it was earthed to himself at the time, and very painful! With so much power now on tap, flywheel housing torsion brackets were installed between the C-type flywheel housing and the engine block – with the engine torqueing one way and the gearbox turning in the opposite direction, he wanted to avoid a break in the oil seal between the engine and gearbox, resulting in a loss of oil and disastrous consequences. Installing a Godfrey Marshall Mk21 supercharger producing 15lbs boost completed the final stage of this high specced, race prepared engine.

Once again the chassis was stripped in the same way they had tackled the J2. It was then carefully built up, replacing any parts where necessary. They also fitted front axle torsion brackets to help prevent the front springs from deforming under heavy braking, and racing type, Duplex multi disc Andre Hartford front dampers.

Fitting the Brooklands-style exhaust that had turned the

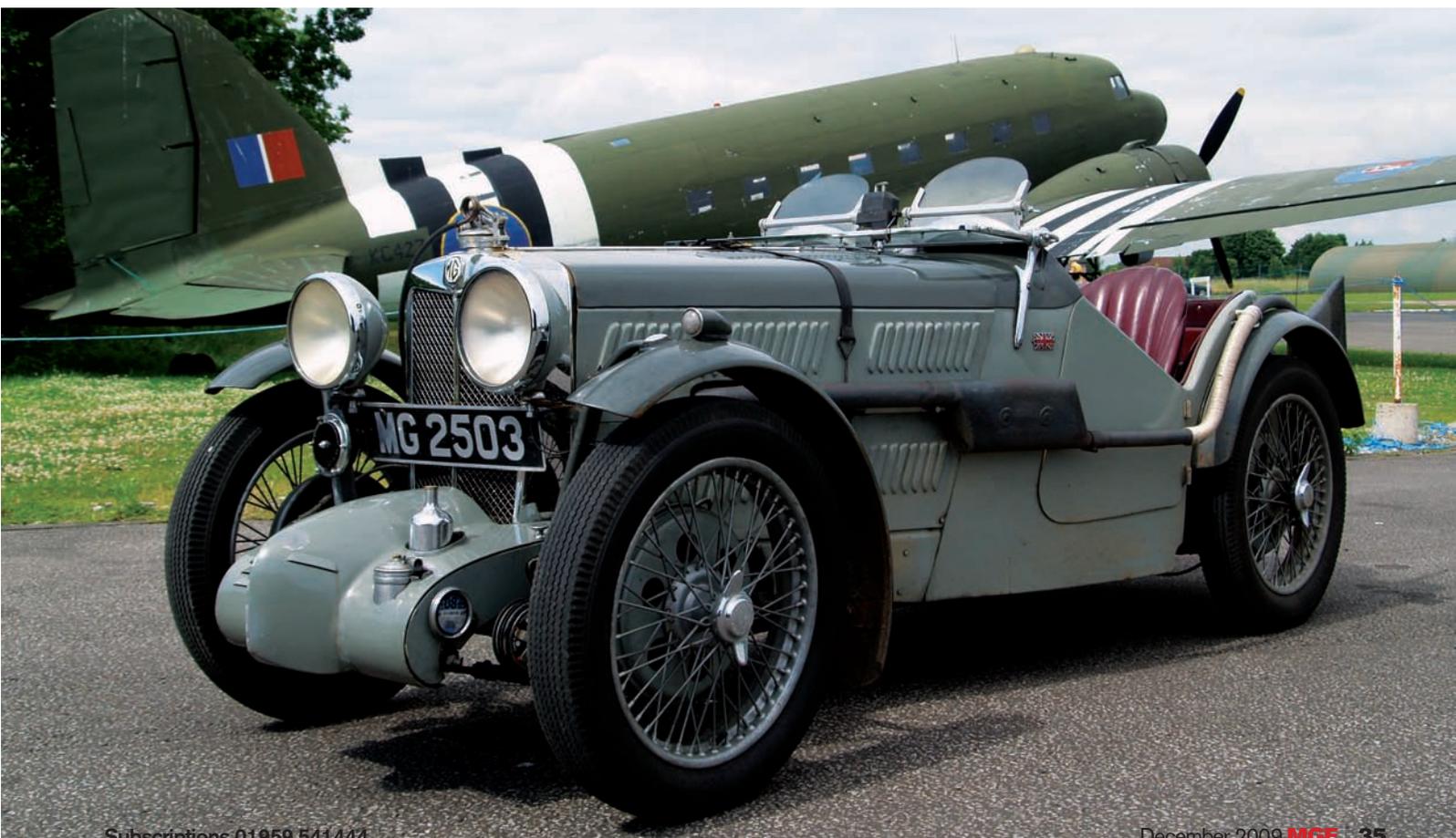


Left: Well-stocked J4 dash was made from scratch. The oval Hobson Telegages for oil and fuel readings are particularly delightful.



Left: A pair of 1in carbs had been temporarily fitted instead of the supercharger at the time of our photoshoot while a new engine was being run in.

Below: A mix-up over the exhaust changed the way this car was restored – the J4 pipe that arrived prompted Richard to go for the racing J4 look. >





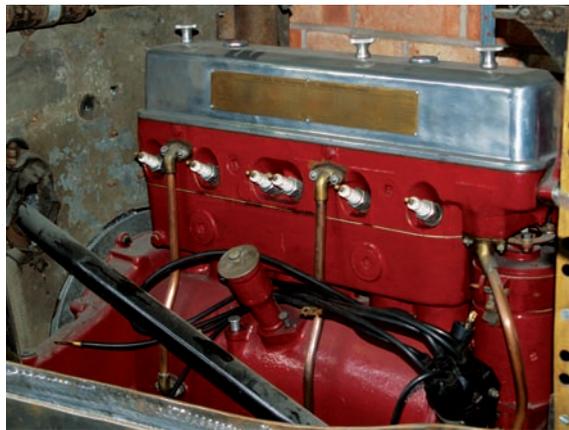
Above: Dad Trevor bought the TC as a retirement present to himself; it came in pieces and in boxes, so he then spent his new-found leisure time rebuilding it.

project on its head from J3 to J4 then vindicated all the work that went into this change of direction. This terminates in a 10in fishtail that's designed to reduce negative exhaust resonance, which assists the outflow of exhaust gases as it furiously vibrates at speed, squeezing every last ounce of power from the engine.

Richard commented: 'The J4 dashboard was a major exercise in itself, which was made from scratch, and includes a pair of oval-shaped, Hobson Telagage instruments for oil and fuel readings, as fitted to the J4. Following on from the J2 restoration, I already had a shell for the radiator, one of ten that we commissioned. The others were given to MG friends by the time we'd completed the car in 2002.'

The car is currently running-in its second engine that's been developed for extra power, although a pair of 1in carbs have been temporarily substituted for the supercharger. The final performance should then be excellent, as 80mph is already achievable – and this can be held for two miles on full throttle out of the village without anything going untoward, except for complaints for neighbours about the noise!.

Right: A rebuilt 1271cc 1932 F-type Magna engine spotted on our visit represents another exiting project currently underway.



Below: Mike Collingburn re-upholstered the interior – as he has done for all the family's restoration projects.



As Richard had to make many items from scratch for the J2 and the repro J4, he decided there was an attractive business opportunity developing a spares business with the emphasis on MMM models. A look around his well-equipped workshop revealed many specialist parts that have been meticulously researched and machined to the highest standard, which are sold under their trade name, MG Vintage Parts. Richard's wife, Jill designed a website for the business, and this expanding range of products are now being despatched worldwide.

Richard remarked: 'Daniel and I came across our passion for MMMMGs through our favourite subjects at school, Technical and Engineering Drawing. This has served us well in that we are both chartered surveyors by day, and by night and at weekends what we have learnt from these disciplines continues to play a vital role in the design and manufacture of new parts for our customers. It was a natural step from working on our own cars to manufacturing parts for other owners, whose projects would grind to a halt whenever any secondhand parts proved to be unavailable, or were too worn out to be reused.'

MG TC

Having described both of the J-types, it is now opportune to introduce the other family members and their cars – dad, Trevor who owns the TC, sister Madeleine and her husband, John Chesworth, who own a four-seater J1. Trevor's TC is the exception here, as maybe he could have filled in the J-type series gap by owning a J3, the only example missing at present. Although this wasn't to be, he can recall bombing around in a J2 owned by a friend that was great fun in his youth.

Trevor bought his TC in 1992 as a retirement present to himself, which then totally absorbed his newly found leisure time with a rebuild. 'This was a barn find that arrived in boxes, all covered in chicken muck and feathers, bought from a dealer,' he said. 'The car was built in December 1945, the first post-war year of production. I was told this was one of a pair that a wealthy chap in Bolton Percy, near York, bought for his two daughters for their 21st birthdays, and that one of the daughters raced the car which I own today.'

'The body tub frame was made of oak rather than ash, which was most likely due to a shortage of ash after the war. Using oak hadn't done the steel body parts any favours and the woodwork was then replaced. The family's trusted panel beater, the late Cliff Golland of Hull, then set about making an excellent job of the work once again. I asked him to rework a new set of front wings, although it was lucky that I had kept the originals as when he came to size up the job, he decided to restore them instead and I had to retrieve them from where they'd been dumped on my compost heap.'

Trevor arranged for the engine to be rebuilt by Peter Edney to 1350cc, a process that was long delayed when the crankshaft was lost in the post. It finally turned up when the postman's garage was found to contain a hoard of stolen parcels.

To allow for relaxed cruising, Trevor installed a Ford Mexico diff carrier, crownwheel and pinion that raised the gearing, and



Above: Madeleine and John's four-seater J1 was bought already restored, and has proved ideal for sharing the MG passion with the next generation.

as for all the family's cars, Mike Collingburn of Richmond reupholstered the seats and interior, while the steering received a Steering Play Reduction unit to the Bishop cam steering box – a modification now manufactured by Vintage MG Parts.

MG J1

Which brings us on to the last family-owned MG, the four-seater J1, which Madeleine and John bought already in restored condition 2½ years ago. John remarked: 'We thought that we were missing out on something here, so we decided to go looking for our own J-type. One of the advantages of this being a four-seater is that we can bring along Richard and Jill's

children, James who's 12 and Eleanor who's 10. Although advertised as a four-seater, that's rather exaggerating the truth as you'd never get a pair of full-sized adults in the back, but it is just the right size for children of their age.'

Or at least it is for a few more years, until the domino effect comes into play again for the latest generation of the ardently MG inspired Hardy family. 

Details and pictures of the family's MGs are available on the Vintage MG Parts website www.vintagemgparts.com, along with full details of the range of quality products they manufacture for MMM and T-Type models.



Right: Three generations of the Hardy family, who share a common passion for these MGs.

Left: Plenty of room up front in the J1, but only space for children in the back despite the factory's four-seat designation.



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