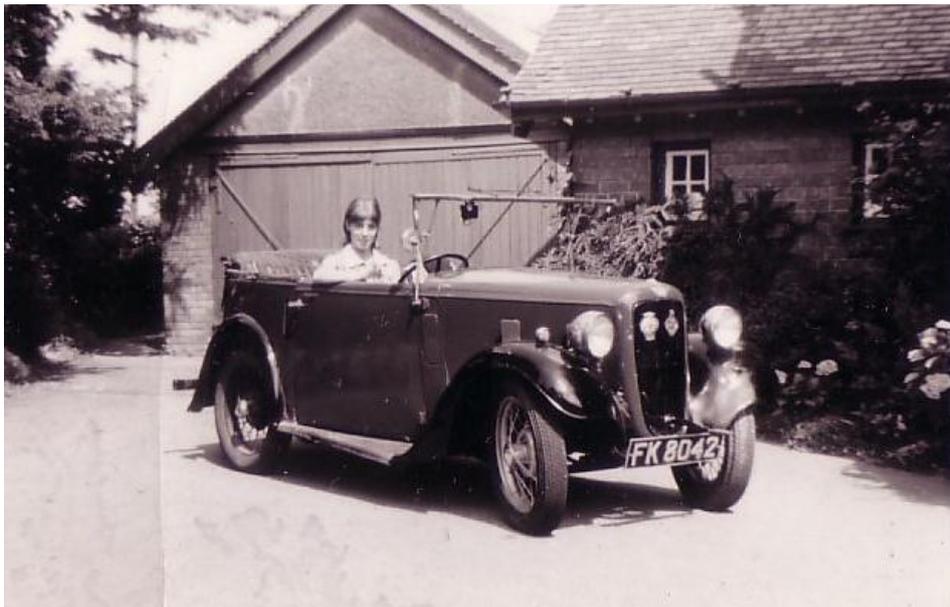


I am new to the Model A fraternity, and indeed it is purely by chance that I found myself the owner of a 1928 Tudor. Here is a little background as to how I arrived here today, penning these thoughts to you all.

In 1965, when I left school, I had no firm idea as to what I wanted to do with life, so my father arranged for me to be apprenticed as a motor mechanic to Westgate Motor House in Gloucester. This garage was a Standard Triumph dealership, and also had the distinction of at one time being a de Havilland aircraft dealership as well, this being advertised by a plane installed on the roof of the building. I believe the plane was removed in the early 1960s. This was a wonderful time in my career, not only the fascinating jungle of life in the motor trade, but of course the social entertainment in the latter part of the 1960s.

During this period I was given an Austin 7 Ruby Tourer which had been lying fallow in an orchard for many years.



A coat of Dulux paint and it looked as good as new. Somehow it passed through the MOT and happy transport it was as well. Following an incident with a broken crankshaft, I rebuilt a fresh engine for it, carrying out the rebore myself at Cinderford technical College in their machine shop, and scraping the white metal bearings in as well. That engine worked well I am proud to say. The only fly in the ointment, as mentioned, was that the car was a tourer and had no hood frame. So I bent some thin tubes, and covered them with some plastic sheeting I bought from Halfords and there was the wet weather protection – until it blew off as I was driving along. So after that, I did without any weather protection, which impressed my nice new wife - not at all! Her take was, that if one is going to sit in a traffic jam in Gloucester in the pouring icy rain in January, then it would be better to do that in car which looked as if it should have the hood down all the time. There was also an incident following a lunchtime pint, when two largish friends settle down comfortably on the back seat, stretched, and the body broke its back and both doors swing open, and thereafter had to be chained shut.

So the Austin 7 was sold for £27 and an MG TC (£100) took its place, and that is another story.



But the experience did mean that I was set for life in enjoying older cars. Not that they really were so old, the MG was a mere 20 years old and the Austin 30 years old, when I got them. Putting this into perspective, that would now be a car from 1992 and 1982, which really seems quite modern days to me now.

I left the motor trade in 1971 and went into the computer industry joining ICL who made British mainframe computers. Before you all yawn, some of the equipment was older than the Model A! There was an IBM card verifier I would sometimes go and fix at Berkeley Nuclear Power Station. This was built in 1927 and had all its original factory build documents in its base. A mad professor had purloined it and converted it into a card reader to attach to their mainframe. There was also still in service quite a lot of pre-war data prep punch card machinery - Queen Ann legs and polished mahogany sides - quite right too! It made for happy relief from the grown up world of mainframes, to go off and fix these venerable machines.

For many years I ran a ceilidh/barn dance band called the Mothy Band, and as all things come to pass, I put the band to bed and I had mainly stopped playing. There were various reasons for this, I had moved away from some of the other band members, but also I really had got fed up with carrying the PA system around - it's funny how the rest of the band appear just after one has carried all the gear into the hall on one's own..... Moving ten years on, amongst the instruments I played, were a couple of concertinas that I had purchased in the 1970s and had restored and tuned. For those who are interested in detail, one was a Jeffries and the other was a Crabb. I think the total outlay including rebuild would have been around £350. As arthritis began to set in I knew that I would never be able to play them to the same level as I had used to, so I put them up for sale. This sale proved to be somewhat of a surprise to me, as I moved them on to a dealer I had known since the 1980s who gave me far more for them than I was expecting - £6,500. Of course the very best quality demands the best prices. Five years on, they probably will have now doubled in value again.

So I now had a fighting fund to waste as I saw fit. Previously I had owned all sorts of interesting cars, but they were also everyday transport. So if anything went wrong it had to be fixed by Monday morning so that I could get to work. Now I felt I could have the luxury of owning a second car that I could enjoy without the concerns of it having to be functional every day. This sets the scene now for what I have done during the last 5 years to bring myself up to Model A standard.

The fighting fund was partially spent on an eBay purchase of a 1972 MG Midget, I loved it, and it went like a rocket and sounded glorious. The only setback was that my wife Niki refused point blank to have anything to do with it. Maybe she thought it too small and fragile. My dog didn't mind though.



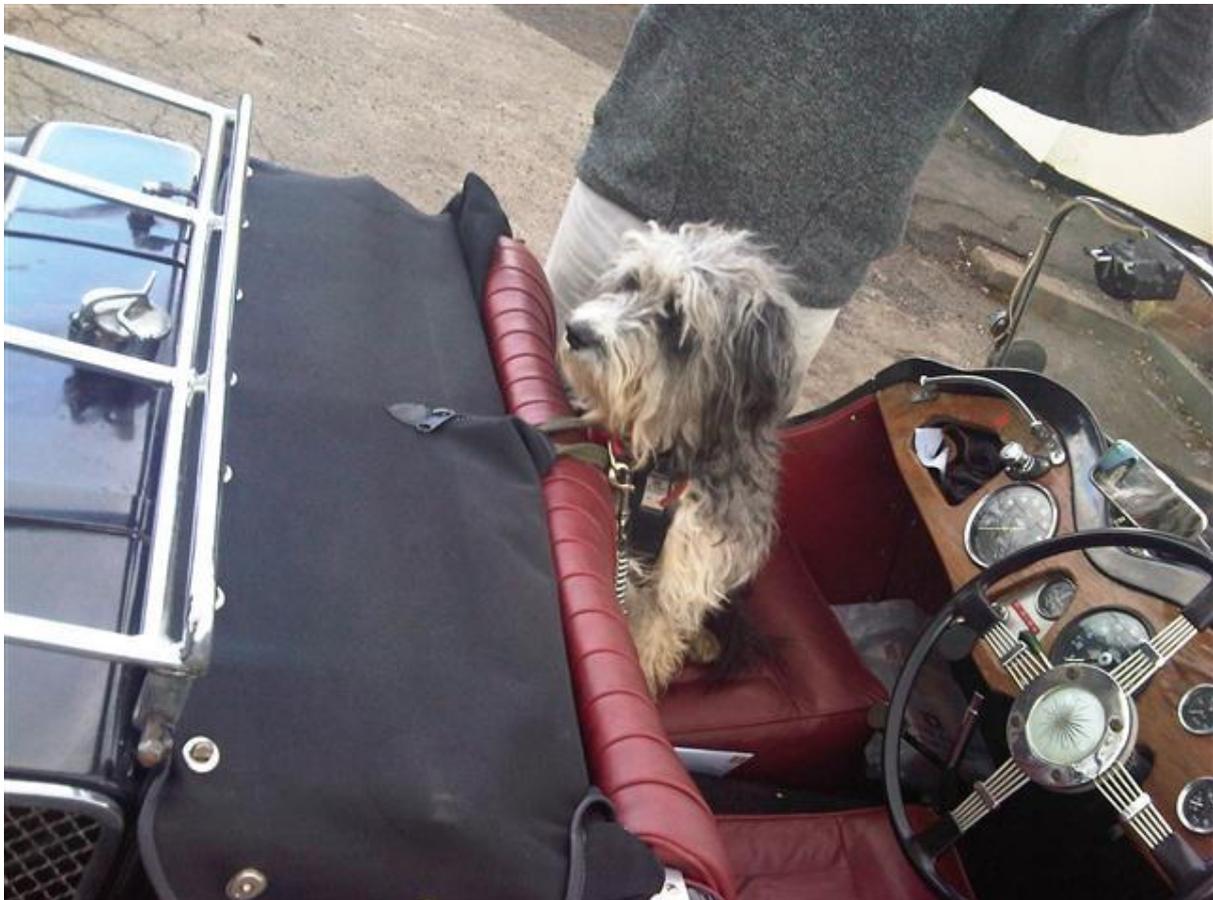
When I took early retirement I thought it would be nice to have a Triumph TR4 as that would have been one of the first cars that I worked on when I started in the motor trade. So I found one for sale in the TR club magazine, and bought it and sold the MG.



The TR was good fun, and I did a partial rebuild of the engine as the pistons and rings had suffered damage from thermal impact, so I took the opportunity to change

the liners and pistons. That was an interesting project in itself in persuading the wet liners which had been in position for 45 years to come out of the block. Then two years ago while attending a small classic car show in Birlingham, Worcestershire, one of my long-time friends who owned a 1934 Singer Le Mans asked me if I knew anyone who wanted to buy it. That would be me of course, so the TR had to be sold to finance that purchase. I advertised the TR globally on the internet, and as is the way of life, someone from the next parish came along and bought it. I see it around and it is in good hands.

The Singer is a super car to drive, with maybe a little bit of the “rat” because it has a Morris 1000 engine and gearbox installed, and “breathed” upon.... I do have the original engine and gearbox; they were supplied with the car. The engine change happened about 30 years ago when the then owner needed good reliability to drive the car into Europe, without the head gasket blowing or the crankshaft snapping, both of which can be endearing Singer traits. Naturally the increased power of the A series engine makes the little car sparkle. The other downside to the Singer is that I could only fit one dog at a time into it, which of course means that there is always one disappointed doggy face left behind.



Now my wife was happy to come and ride in the TR, but the Singer is a complete no no! Niki announced that the Singer was even more hazardous than the MG Midget, because of its ash frame body; with low cut doors that she felt she would fall out of.



One day we were wandering around a motor museum in Pembrokeshire, and Niki indicated that she would not mind riding in “that”, indicating an MG MGB Tourer. So I took that as “sign off” for adding to the fleet, and again from eBay I bought a 1972 MGB Tourer, and that was nice having Niki come out again. Except, in twelve months she probably only rode in it six times. I have had MGBs years back and this one was no different - in not quite satisfying me as a car I enjoyed driving. So there was always going to be doubt about its future.

Now finally we are approaching Model A country.... One night I went to pick up a pal in the MGB, to go out for a pint. As we were both struggling to put our seat belts on around our age expanded waists, we looked at each other and said “it’s got to go”, and “we need something which is bigger in the cabin and does not require seat belts”. The MGB sold without being advertised, I just mentioned I was thinking of selling, and someone came along and persuaded me to let them have it. I now had a fresh fighting fund in the war chest.

But what to get? I was thinking Austin Seven, but maybe a little small for my expanded girth these days. Then one of my friends who owns a pub had to shut the doors and cease trading, and he happened to mention that he had two “old American” cars that he was going to sell. One was a 1929 Nash 6 Sedan. And the other was the 1928 Ford Model A. Having looked at the pictures of them I said I would not mind buying either of them. Probably the Nash was the prettier car and had been commissioned back on to the road, the Ford had not been MOT’d for over 10 years, and did need maintenance work to ready it for the road again. Common-sense told me the Ford was the way to go due to good spares availability and lots of technical support. So the decision was obvious and the deal was done, and a couple of weeks later I had the Model A extracted from storage and trailered home. What had I bought? Six years of accumulated dust for starters!



Well this car was built in Canada about September/October 1928 and then exported to New Zealand where it was first registered in April 1929. What happened after that is unknown, but in the 1980s it was purchased as a pile of rusty bits from a barn. It was restored with lots of thought to originality, and I understand that a lot of work was applied to getting the correct spares and materials for the rebuild. I have been in touch with the then owner in New Zealand, and he was very pleased to hear that the car is well and in use again. I also had helpful advice and suggestions from Les Pearson in NZ, who naturally took the opportunity to promote his new book "The Right Hand Drive Ford Model A", which I have managed to get hold of.

The car was in very original configuration, and that means there was just a single rear light, and naturally no indicators. As I intend running the car at night, I have now installed flashing indicators, additional orange indicator lamps on the front, and a pair of additional duolamps on the rear for lights and indicators. The tyres were clearly marked as being made in New Zealand, and therefore were over 20 years old, so they were replaced as a matter of course.



The car went easily through its first MOT for 10 years, with advisories relating to wheel movement on the rear axle which latterly turned out to just need the axle half shaft nuts to be tightened.

Prior to the MOT I had lots of concerns about driving the car, because it had a centre throttle and crash gearbox. My first drive would consist of driving down a slight hill to the main road, turning right up a hill and round a sharp corner. Would I find the brake pedal OK, would I be able to change gear going uphill without getting it all wrong. Would I, would I, would I?!!! All sorts of demons were waiting to bite me on the bum! Then I found out, it was all a piece of cake and what on earth was I worrying about? On the way to the MOT the light switch fell off the steering box, so I reassembled using a couple of jubilee clips to persuade the bail wire to do its job properly.

Following the MOT, it seemed sensible to train the car to find its way around the local hostelrys which it would now be regularly visiting. For the first trip I collected the previous owner as he had never driven the car ever. When he bought it auction it (at the same time as buying the Nash) it just went straight into storage and that's where it stayed since 2006. All went well on that run until I hit an indicated 50 mph, whereupon the speedo ceased to function. Everything else was fine and it was a pleasure to discover what a nice car the Model A is to drive. Surprisingly to me, the brakes are excellent. The dogs approved of the car as well. The speedo problem was a broken cable due to the speedo head seizing up. Once I had dismantled the speedo and freed it up and put a new cable on it functioned again, albeit reading slow, 35 mph equals an actual 40 mph, still as long as I know....

During the next few weeks I made many short journeys without incident, but my confidence in the car still need to be assured. Then when the new Quail arrived I

saw the notice about the Model A picnic at Bruern Abbey and I thought that sounds fun. I contacted Mike Cobell to make sure that dogs could come and with that confirmation I signed up to come along.

It was to be my first trip of consequence, only 60 miles each way, but the usual concerns were simmering underneath the surface.

Would the car be reliable? - Yes it was.

Would it get up Fish Hill without difficulty? - Yes, top gear all the way.

Would the brakes be sufficient if necessary when descending that hill? - Yes!

Of course the very nature of those questions gave Niki great concern. She even investigated the ease of how to bale out of the car as it hurtled backwards and out of control down Fish Hill. Or was there another way to get to Bicester which did not involve a hill. So I explained it was necessary to discover how well the car did perform with hills prior to using it as a wedding car in September. That venue is in Stroud and the reception is at the Seven Tuns, Chedworth, so plenty of hills to worry about on that run.

Travelling through Evesham we just preceded the passage of the Olympic Flame so there were hordes of happy people waving at us as we passed by. We felt just like royalty!

Admittedly the Model A did not fly over the crest of the hill, as it was down to 20 MPH by then. It was still in top gear, and Niki was even talking encouragement to the car to get up without having to change down and hence avoid the engine thrashing in a rather busy manner. Curiously it showed some signs of boiling on the Broadway by-pass before ascending, but during the ascent the temperature seemed quite settled. It may be that was because it had disgorged some of the coolant, because when I got home and checked the radiator, it took 5 pints of water to top up. I don't know why I did not check the coolant while I was at the event, probably because the motor was running sweetly. I had been doing some work on the cooling and prior to departure I had installed a new water pump and hoses. The old pump dripped and would not stop dripping with fresh packing and grease. I can only assume that the body of the pump had become porous as the drips were not appearing at the shaft or the gland. So maybe something needs tightening now, but I do not see any evidence of leaks. I may have to put a wide headed nail on the overflow tube inside the radiator filler, as I believe that helps with losing water due to slopping around on the move, through the overflow.

It was so nice meeting other owners, everyone was so pleasant and friendly and helpful. I took photos of the front and back of each car so that I could have reference to how other owners use and present their cars. No two cars were the

same! A special thank you to Sterling for his generosity in providing the barbecue and refreshments. It was an outstanding venue, and I really wish that given more time to organise myself I would also have happily gone along on the club trip to France and “Bruern South”.



Overall though the car went well and comfortably, we had both the dogs with us as well, so it was a good load. I found that I was rarely holding traffic up, even cruising at just 40-45 mph. Also using a GPS device as a more accurate speedo, I discovered that my journey time was only about 10 minutes longer than was first forecast. My fuel consumption was 22 mpg, a huge improvement on the 17 mpg I am getting on the local short runs. So I now need to save up the pennies to buy lots and lots of petrol and venture on some really long runs now.

So there we go, not a marathon trip but enough to get the confidence in the car. You can find all the pics of the picnic on Flickr, here's the link <http://tinyurl.com/cgy4da6>

You can also find more pictures of the Ford and the Singer on my website <http://www.mothy.co.uk>

Roly Alcock  
July 2012