

# A French MG In America!

By Kevin Thompson

As a kid growing up in rural Washington State (just outside of Spokane), I almost never saw a Foreign Car. Our local car shows were almost exclusively “The Big Three”, with maybe the odd Studebaker or International thrown in. Then one day while I was in high school, I ended up visiting a friend of a friend whose dad was a wealthy real estate developer. This new friend told me he had to finish cleaning his dad’s prized car and invited me to hang out in their immaculate, fancy garage, where I laid eyes on the first Jaguar I ever saw in person. It was a Series 1 or 2 XJ6 sedan, resplendent in Old English White with red leather interior. It was like nothing I had seen before. The lines and stance of that car, the wooden English Clubhouse interior and heavenly smell of freshly-oiled Connolly Hides stirred something deep in my soul, and I just knew I had to someday own a British Car.

I moved to Los Angeles in 1987 at age 19, and managed to always own at least one vintage car or motorcycle, as prices back then somehow didn’t seem to be as out of reach as they are today. I never spent more than \$3500, yet over the years I owned a ‘51 Mercury, ‘55 Chrysler Hemi (both sedans - coupes WERE out of my price range), some Cadillacs, various VW Bugs, Karmann Ghia’s and one of my all-time favorites - a 1972 Porsche 914, purchased in very sorted condition for the Princely Sum of \$2200!

But at the same time, I always dreamed of getting that elusive British Car, and I spent an inordinate amount of my pay at Autobooks in Burbank, racking up a huge collection of books and magazines featuring the cars I most lusted after. One of my favorite books was “Original MGB”, and I spent hours staring at the detail photos of the Mk I ‘B’ in Tartan Red - my absolute Dream B. I loved everything about that car - the low back black seats with red piping that reminded me of my childhood dream car (the Barris Batmobile), the classic crinkle black dash, large banjo steering wheel with the ruby red reflective horn button, the gorgeous polished engine compartment, the timeless body shape and the heritage - it personified everything I wanted in a sports car.

Flash forward to May 2016. I had been recently married to a really wonderful and supportive wife who happened to share my appreciation of all things mechanical. I had previously managed to finally own a succession of semi-modern (i.e. Used) Jaguars - several XJ sedans and a beautiful early XK8 convertible. These first British cars had come and gone and I really enjoyed them, but deep down I still most wanted to own a classic British

Roadster. My kids were approaching driving age, and my only current classic was my 1974 Norton 850 Commando (raising kids is Expensive!). I really didn’t want to encourage motorcycling to the kids (far too dangerous since the advent of Smart Phones), though it was very important to me that they learn to drive stick. We attended the famous and wonderful “Queen’s English” show put on by the Amazing Tina from Autobooks. I spent years trying to foster in my kids the same passion I always had for mechanical history and joy, and this show was a yearly Must Go. At the show, I took a picture of what I thought was the most perfect MGB I saw - a 1966 model in Tartan Red, all stock and exactly what I’d dreamed about for decades. But I knew a car like that was out of my price range. I was looking for something nice I could afford, and had convinced myself I could love a Rubber Bumper B if I found the right one, so I was searching.

Then in July, my family (including my father-in-law, himself the proud original owner of a 1981 DeLorean) attended the 2016 Central Coast British Car show at Channel Islands Harbor. It was there I ran into that same lovely red car, only this time it had a discreet card on the windshield advertising it For Sale! My heart skipped a beat! The card was small, and there was no price listed. “Just as well,” I told myself - “I’m sure it’s way beyond my range.” Nevertheless, I sought out the owner, a very kind man named Ron Fine, a retired attorney who was currently focused on his gorgeous Austin-Healey 3000.



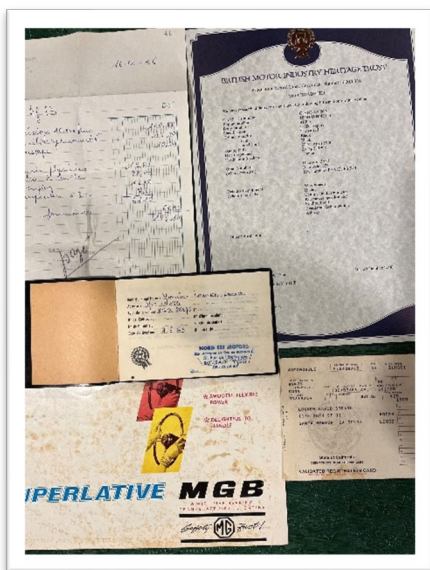
Ron had purchased the MG from the family of the original owner and had done the restoration himself. I looked the car over inside and out, viewed the photo album he had compiled during the restoration process, and I was impressed. Body restored and painted in enamel in 1997, still looking fabulous, and mechanicals done in 2007. Ron spoke with me, patiently answered all my questions, and met with my family, speaking for quite a while with my father-in-law. He told us the money was less important to him than knowing the car would go to a home which would cherish and love it, and preserve it in its original stock condition. Which was exactly how I felt. I

imagined this car as a valued new member of our family, bringing us together on adventures and creating many happy memories.

Evidently, Ron liked my family and our attitude and offered me a price that I could scarcely believe - it was more than I had planned to spend, yet I could actually afford to buy this car! I quickly deliberated in my buzzing brain, and it was my wife who convinced me we could not pass up this opportunity. She said she had very good vibes and positive feelings about this beautiful red roadster, so I immediately agreed to the price and shook hands on it. When some show attendees overheard the price we agreed on, they suddenly descended on Ron, offering to beat that price. I was SO nervous he would change his mind and go for more money, but Ron was as good as his word!

The next Tuesday my wife and I met Ron and his family at their beautiful home in Santa Monica. He proudly showed us his prize-winning Healey 3000, and rounded up all the bits and pieces that belonged to the MGB. He had put the top up for us. We signed the papers, and he gave me a huge cache of documentation that went with the car, detailing its history. Having never driven this car (or any MGB for that matter), I tentatively took off, in an unfamiliar car, in roasting hot weather and heavy Los Angeles freeway traffic, learning his quirks and preferences along the way - a trial by fire for sure.

Yet I made it back to my work in Pasadena without incident and was already loving this car. I had to return to my office, so my fearless wife, who prides herself on being able to drive ANYTHING, took over and brought the car to its new home in Glendale, also without incident. Once home, she and my daughter found the section in the owner's manual explaining how to put the top down in just 103 easy steps! They proudly texted me photos showing their success.



So why do I refer to this car as a “French MG in America”? Ron told me the story, and I went through the history of papers and parts. This particular 1966 MGB was sold to an American Serviceman stationed in France, a man named David Strand Lokken. He purchased the car from a French MG dealer, and the Bill of Sale was a simple small sheet of note paper written in pretty French script. No complicated 30-page contracts back then! David had kept the original bill of sale, the original owner's manual and sales brochure, and many years of records of maintenance. He obviously loved his car!



When originally sold, the car wore unusual small black and silver license plates which were only issued to U.S. Servicemen stationed in France from 1961 to 1968. When David returned to the States with the car, he lived in Santa Monica and was issued Green and Silver U.S. Military plates.



Later, when he left the military, he went down to the DMV and was issued original Black and Yellow California Plates. Many years later, under Ron's ownership, when California made Black and Yellow plates available again, he quickly procured the custom plates that the car currently wears - "1966MGB".



All four sets of plates going back to 1966 are still with the car! One last fun fact: being a French import, this car has its gauges in Kilometers and Celsius. I'm never quite sure how fast I'm going, or what my engine temperature is, but I'm certainly having fun!

This French MG has become an important member of my family. First my daughter, then my son both learned to drive in it. My kids take great pride in being able to drive stick shift confidently. We regularly use the car and it has never let us down or left us stranded. An older British friend assured me the MGBs were robust and indestructible little cars, and so far, 7 years of driving bliss have proven this to be true. My wife drives it to her job as a Glendale middle school teacher, and her students go nuts, begging to sit in it. My son occasionally takes it to high school, where social media instantly erupts asking, "Who brought the Vintage Ferrari??" We drive it around Glendale, surrounded by \$150k and up cars at every intersection - yet it is our humble little roadster that garners the enthusiastic comments and thumbs up every time we leave the house!



Daughter Talia, now age 21.



Wife Betsy and son Stirling.



Kevin and son Stirling, now age 19  
at Queen's English 2023.

