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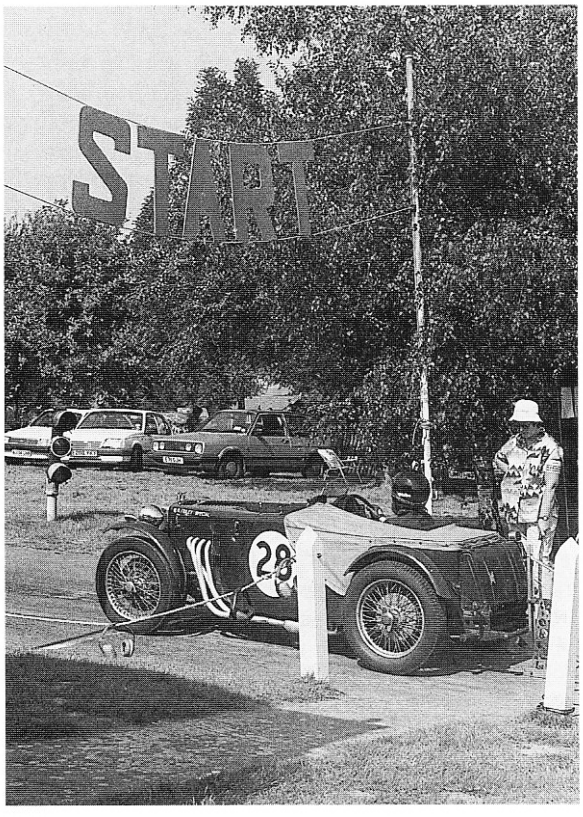
MG-Riley

It is still not that unusual even these days to find a pre-Second World War MG with something other than its original overhead camshaft engine. Most of these conversions were carried out in the 1950s on the J-type Midgets, because of the fragility of their two-bearing crankshaft. The most popular choice of replacement power unit was either the Ford 8 or 10 hp side valve, or the BMC A series engine. The MG-Riley is different in being based on a later P-type model, and has been re-engined with a Riley Nine engine that is even older than the car itself.

In the late 1930s Ray Wills, a friend of the car's constructor, bought a 1936 MG PB from Morgan Marshall, Bristol's MG man. It must have had a hard life as it was subsequently dismantled for rebuilding, a plan that was curtailed when the Second World War broke out. At some time around 1945 the ohc engine was sold to a fellow P-type owner who was in dire need of one, and when Wills acquired a bodyless L-type Magna a couple of years later the body for the PB "kit" was put into use to clothe the new project. Also the PB rear axle was used to replace the L-type unit.

Of the three decades of development that the MG-Riley has endured, the well-ventilated front brake drums and the tubular exhaust manifold are the most obvious alterations.



Around 1948 what remained of the P-type MG, i.e. the chassis, front axle, steering gear, radiator and bonnet, together with the L-type axle, were given to A E Daveney. With the addition of a 1928 Riley engine and all-helical gearbox, plus a new hardwood body frame clad in aluminium, the MG-Riley special was created. It was completed just as petrol became easier to obtain after the abolition of rationing. After the original registration number CKX 297 had been traced and allocated with a certain amount of difficulty, the finished car became the Daveney family's transport from 1952 onwards. As the body was about 4 in longer than the Abingdon original there was enough room to accommodate Daveney Junior, Peter, from the age of eight.

Installing the Riley engine was not without its problems. The outside exhaust was not really planned but lack of space prevented a more discreet alternative. The car is in many respects treated like a model engineering exercise (on a 12 in to the foot scale!), as shown by the elegant inlet manifold with its circular curving passages, and the gear change extension, both of which were machined entirely from solid.

In the late 1970s, the MG-Riley took on a new role as a racing car when Team Daveney was formed with Daveney Senior acting as team manager, engineer and tea boy, while Peter concentrated on the driving. The demands of competition have meant that extra modifications have been devised and incorporated, particular emphasis being directed to roadholding and braking aspects. This is most evident at the front, which now features improved axle location with special shock absorbers, and oversize brakes. These comprise Riley drums with large lightening/cooling holes adapted to fit the MG hubs, and given specially cast aluminium brake shoes. Hydraulic operation is spurned in favour of the original MG cables and brake cams. Under the bonnet, special "Daveney" high-lift cams are used, and the large full-flow oil filter reputedly came from the hydraulic system of a Lancaster bomber's gun turret. As the thermo-syphon cooling system is proving marginal in racing conditions, a water pump conversion in appropriate period style is currently being engineered.

Possibly the most frequently asked question of the car's owner is, "How old is it?". In the instance of the MG-Riley I am assured that the reply is usually, "I don't know, it isn't finished yet!"

MG-Riley

Technical Specification Data

Date of origin: 1930-36

ENGINE
Type: Riley
Capacity: 1087 cc
No of cylinders: 4
Valve operation: ohv
Estimated power output:
Carburation: 2 x SU carburettors

GEARBOX
Type: Riley
No of ratios: 4

CHASSIS
Type: MG

FRONT AXLE
Type: MG
Suspension: 2 x Semi-elliptics

REAR AXLE
Type: MG
Suspension: 2 x Semi-elliptics

BRAKES
Type: Drums all round
Actuation: Cable

WHEELS
Size: 19 in
Tyre Size: 450 x 19 (front)
500 x 19 (rear)

OVERALL DIMENSIONS
Length: 131 in
Wheelbase: 89.5 in
Track: 42 in (front & rear)