



V8 reminiscences

Mike Pilgrim was digging out some old paperwork and found a letter he had received in March 1979 when he first joined the V8 Register. It read "the response following the formation of the V8 Register on 1st November 1978 has been tremendous and the number of registered members has now reached 111". Mike wondered how many people have become members over the many years? Mike later let his Club membership lapse after selling his first V8 in 1983, but later re-joined when he bought his second V8 in 2004. He was given back his old membership number, 45144 by the Club membership secretary. Here Mike recalls a number of interesting issues he has encountered with his V8s.

Overdrive

When our 1969 4-Cylinder MGB-GT approached 10 years old and 100,000 miles, the bodywork began to deteriorate and we replaced it with a 1973 V8 (Harvest Gold 1172). I was younger then, and I don't think that V8 was ever overtaken whilst in our ownership. On one occasion we covered the 250 miles from Liverpool Cathedral to our Suffolk home in 3 hours 21 minutes, but, then, traffic was light on that Sunday afternoon, and we wanted to get home to see the Formula 1 Grand Prix on TV. An early problem concerned the overdrive, which would disengage on any attempt to accelerate at over 100mph. I took it to our local BL garage, affectionately known as 'Fairhead & Sawdust', a close approximation to their real name. The reception engineer and workshop foreman, each about 5ft 4in tall, resembled Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-Dee. I explained my problem. "Come here Roy, would you, we have a customer with a problem". "Right, now please explain your problem again", so I did "... at over

100mph". Turning towards each other, they exchanged glances, shook their heads solemnly, and said "We're afraid we can't help you".

I approached the garage who had serviced the car for the previous owner. "Did you ever have trouble with the overdrive?" "No, but I remember one day, when we cleaned the overdrive filter, the ball bearing dropped out and went down the drain. But no problem, we just popped in another one." That was it - clearly the replacement was larger and would not adequately sustain pressure in its conical seating. I phoned the nearest BL Main Agent for an authentic part. "Sorry, we don't stock those." "But I need one, and you are the Main Agent." "No, we won't get them. They come only in packets of ten, and we'd never sell the rest." "How much do they cost?" "Twenty pence for ten, plus VAT." "OK, I'll buy ten then, so please order me some." "Can't do so unless you leave a deposit."

After much argument involving what it would cost me in petrol to visit them to deposit such a paltry sum, the Parts Manager eventually relented, accepting that I would not request them unless I had a need, and he agreed to place an order. "They'll be here in two weeks."

When I called to collect them the Manager was on holiday, so an underling dealt with me. "Your name please! Ah - here's the packet, with your name on it. Oh, there are ten in here, how many did you want?" "I need one for the car." He opened the packet and sold me one, Part No. BLS-106, for three new pence. I wonder how he explained that later. After all, he had asked how many I wanted, and I had answered truthfully. Thereafter the overdrive worked fine.

Propshaft U-J

A noise from the propshaft began to be quite noticeable. Investigation revealed that not only was the front Hardy-Spicer joint worn, but that the spider had worn its way completely through the bearing cups and half-way through the wall of the yoke too!

Starter motor

Then the V8 had a starting problem. The engine would start from cold, but was very reluctant to turn over when warm. I ensured the battery was fully charged, and checked the specific gravity and all was OK. But the problem persisted. Back to Fairhead & Sawdust, our local BL garage with its kindly experts. "Oh, it'll be the battery." "No it won't, I've checked that" I replied and I explained again in detail. "Leave it with us!"

After work I called to collect the car. "No problem Sir, we've charged the battery and it's just started fine!" Of course it had, it was cold, having been standing all day. But the battery was VERY warm and fizzing. Getting nowhere with them, the only alternative was DIY. The starter seemed to be the last part to come out as one dismantled the car. The commutator end bush was so worn that the armature was rubbing on the field pole-pieces. This friction produced so much drag that the extra compression, from well-lubricated piston rings in a warm engine, was just too much for it. A new bush solved the problem.

When our two small boys outgrew the rear seat, in 1983 the V8 had to go, to be replaced by a Reliant Scimitar GTE SE6. That was much the same shape, had the interior space we needed and, although rated as a fast sporting car, felt very sluggish after the V8. And the gear-lever travel had to be experienced to be believed. One consolation was its colour. It was off-white, with a wide bright blue stripe along the side. In a rear-view mirror it must have looked like a police car, as many drivers pulled over to clear the way!

A Tale of Tyres

At the Beaulieu Autojumble in 2004 a postcard advertised a 1974 V8 (Damask 1598). I had been sorry to part with our first one 21 years earlier, and as our sons had flown the nest, we no longer needed a back seat for them. The vendor would not warrant that the 77,000 odometer mileage was correct, but produced a sheaf of bills showing extensive repairs to the structural parts that matter. All appeared fine, except a sticking oil gauge, and the tyres looked good too. A deal was struck, including a 200-mile delivery to my home. The

accompanying paperwork included a full set of MOT certificates showing the mileage to be genuine.

The road from our house has several right-angle bends. On my first trip out, on rounding the last bend, I opened up in second. In a flash I was facing back the way I'd come, fortunately not touching anything beside the traffic-free road. Embarrassingly, the penny didn't drop as to the cause.

Soon afterwards I visited Le Mans with a friend. With time to spare on the way down, we opted for lesser, cheaper, roads rather than the Autoroute. For a long way we were stuck behind a slower vehicle, and crossing the single solid line seems to be a capital offence in France. At last, on exiting a roundabout, visibility was clear, nothing coming, and I accelerated briskly to pass. After a while a slight vibration became noticeable. On arrival we checked the tyres, but found no lumps or bulges, nothing appeared amiss. With the car on show at the weekend, bonnet raised, a Frenchman observed that one HT lead was not pushed fully home in the distributor cap. So that was it, we must have been firing on seven.

Travelling back home, we had just surmounted a steep incline when, all of a sudden, all hell was let loose underneath the rear. We pulled over, and quickly fitted the spare wheel. The steel 'cords' had burst out through the tyre tread and thrashed around within the wheel-arch. Back home my local tyre depot pronounced that, despite the deep low-mileage treads, the front tyres were 10 years old and the rear pair 20 years old. The spare, a Goodyear carrying no date marking, appeared to be the original from 1974! A new set of Continentals transformed the handling too. In retrospect, accelerating hard from that roundabout must have caused the cords to fail and start the vibration.

Battery terminals

For a trip to the 2008 Le Mans Classic in the V8, we bought tickets through a well-known UK club for old motor cars. Naturally we sought out their assigned parking area at the circuit. Due to some quirk of their organisation, not the MG Car Club be it noted, the space indicated on the plan was a rough grassy bank, quite unsuited for the purpose. Nevertheless we left the car there, and spent a most enjoyable day at the event. By 1am we had had enough, and returned exhausted to the V8, to return to our lodgings, and bed. Turned the key, nothing. No lights, no starter, nothing. Our lead-lamp carried on board for use in times of breakdown was no help – no power even



from the cigar-lighter socket. This must have been one of the few occasions in our lives when neither of us carried a pocket torch. Happily a kind camper pitched nearby produced a torch, enabling us to find the problem.

I never liked those battery terminals with a self-tapping screw through the top! But a chocolate bar foil wrapper provided a temporary fix, enabling us to return to our bed.

Back home I changed those battery connectors for clamp-type ones, but found these much less corrosion resistant, and now I have a rubber sheet, cut from old inner tube, to isolate them from vented acid spray.

How not to maintain your battery

My V8 sometimes spends some weeks unused in its shed, especially in winter. I lifted the battery cover beneath the rear seat, checked the electrolyte level, and connected my intelligent battery conditioner, by means of its crocodile clips. The mains lead passed out easily through the almost fully closed side window. Unfortunately, rural rodents must have detected the whiff of leather, entered via the displaced battery cover, and had a meal. Repairing the side panel of the seat cost £48.

Chastened, and wiser, the conditioner is now connected via the cigar-lighter socket, and nearby 13-amp outlets carry small units which emit ultrasound to repel such unwelcome visitors.

Speedometer

On a trip to the 2012 Le Mans Classic our V8 speedometer needle began to swing about a bit. It gradually got worse, and on our return it was swinging wildly, the mean indicated speed being 100mph plus. And this was on French country roads, driving along with local traffic observing, pretty much, the 90km/h speed limit. Back home I dismantled the instrument and contacted well known spares and services suppliers. They had no exchange units, but could repair my own for £130 plus carriage plus VAT. Hmm, sounded a lot. So I consulted the MG Car Club "Trade Membership Directory" and contacted a specialist listed therein who claimed to do such work. As luck would have it, we would soon be passing nearby, as my wife wanted to do a spot of family history research at Hambleden. Well, what luck. For £70 all-in he repaired the instrument and returned it to me by insured post. There must be a moral in this story.