

## V8 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 2008

A week of events to mark the 30th anniversary of the V8 Register is planned for June. The concept of the week is a relaxed mix of social and technical events which members and their friends can attend either as a complete programme or simply pick and choose events according to their interests and the time available. The week includes interesting events that will appeal to wives or partners who may not share our more technical passion for V8s - a relaxed visit to Rousham House in Oxfordshire, a guided walking tour of the centre of Cambridge, a river boat trip on the Thames and a walk on the Berkshire Downs. Two technical events are a V8 Maintenance Day to start the week on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June and a visit to the British Motor Heritage Body Plant at Witney. On Friday 13<sup>th</sup> the anniversary week will conclude with a V8 Dinner at the art deco clubhouse at Sywell Aerodrome not far from Silverstone Circuit. It will have many of the traditional features of some of the memorable V8 Dinners held in the 1980s and of course our last V8 Anniversary Dinner in 2003.

The week conveniently rolls into the Club's annual International MG Meeting at Silverstone over the long weekend, so it should enable many members from home and abroad to plan some time off to join at least one or two events during the anniversary week. An outline of the V8 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary programme is alongside and further details and online booking facilities are available on the V8 website.

This year is also the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of the MGBGTV8 in August 1973 so many longstanding V8 enthusiasts have indicated they plan to be at Silverstone this year to meet up with more recent owners.

## V8 Marquee at Silverstone

For the Club's International MG Meeting at Silverstone we will have our usual V8 parking area and marquee as a gathering point for V8 enthusiasts over the long weekend. The Club's event planning team will probably locate the parking area on a section of the circuit - the Club Straight under the main access bridge to the centre of the circuit - as in 2007 because the circuit owners are very concerned that if the grassed areas are wet, serious damage might result from cars driving on the grass which would not recover in time for the F1 Grand Prix that follows only a matter of a few weeks after the Club's event. However the V8 Marquee should be in the usual prominent position so will be easy to find. Again full location details will be on the V8

## V8 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 2008 Week of Events

### Sunday 8th June 2008 - all day

#### V8 Maintenance Day

Presentations on interesting maintenance topics for MGV8 and RV8 enthusiasts at the clubhouse at Sywell Aerodrome near Northampton.

Coordinator: Victor Smith 0208 392 9434

### Monday 9th June 2008 - morning

#### Visit to BMH Body Plant at Witney

An opportunity to see first hand how replacement parts are made with a real attention to quality by the skilled workforce at the BMH Body Plant.

Coordinator: Mike Russell 01628 531343

### Monday 9th June 2008 - lunch & afternoon

#### Route over the Berkshire Downs

Lunch in the village of Woolstone near White Horse Hill followed by a visit to Uffington Castle (the ancient hillfort and the white horse nearby), then a walk on the Ridgeway, ending with a cream tea at a farm nearby.

Coordinator: Allan Doyle

### Tuesday 10th June 2008

#### Visit to Rousham House in Oxfordshire

Rousham is a particularly attractive, privately owned house with an exceptional garden. Arrive from late morning for a picnic lunch followed by a tour of the walled garden and a special guided tour of the house.

Coordinator: Al Barnett 01306 875786

### Tuesday 10th June 2008 - morning

#### Tulip Route to end at Rousham House

A 50 mile road tulip route through Oxfordshire taking 2 to 3 hours and ending at Rousham House for a picnic lunch and a tour of the walled garden.

Coordinator: Al Barnett 01306 875786

### Wednesday 11th June 2008 - all day

#### Visit to Cambridge

Scenic route to Cambridge, then a guided walking tour of the centre of Cambridge followed by a cream tea in the village of Southoe west of Cambridge.

Coordinator: Ian Quarrington 07769 856101

### Thursday 12th June 2008 - afternoon

#### V8 Riverboat Trip on the Thames

Starting from just downstream of Boulton's Lock near Maidenhead the boat will cruise down the Thames towards Windsor and then return with a cream tea onboard.

Coordinator: John Bolt 01296 435050

### Friday 13th June - morning

#### Visit to the Hook Norton Brewery

Two hour guided tour of the 8 storey brewery with a beer tasting at the visitor centre, followed by an informal lunch at the Pear Tree Inn nearby.

Coordinator: Victor Smith 0208 392 9434

### Friday 13th June 2008 - evening

#### V8 30th Anniversary Dinner

The key social event to conclude the anniversary week and link with the Club's long weekend International MG Meeting held on 14th and 15th June at nearby Silverstone. The dinner will have the feel and traditions of many of the earlier V8 Dinners. This year it will be held in the clubhouse at Sywell Aerodrome, an attractive art deco building near Northampton.

Coordinator: Victor Smith 0208 392 9434

For full details see [www.v8register.net/V830th.htm](http://www.v8register.net/V830th.htm)



website.

For members who have recently joined the V8 Register, the V8 Marquee is a popular gathering point for V8 enthusiasts throughout the two days with copies of the workshop notes CDs and V8 Regalia available, a stall manned by Clive Wheatley and his team providing spares information and technical advice and as usual supplies of traditional V8 refreshment. New members are very welcome, so do please make yourself known when you visit the V8 Marquee. You will find it is a useful base from which to explore the range of attractions in the Main Club Marquee, the traders' stalls and the motor racing on the circuit on both days. The V8 Parking Area is also a convenient place to park up alongside fellow V8 enthusiasts. In 2006 there were well over 150 V8s there on each day, although with a wet Silverstone in 2007 the numbers were lower. If you are unfamiliar with Silverstone, there is a guide via a link on the Rolling V8 Calendar on the V8 website which shows you how to get there and where to find the V8 Parking Area and marquee at the circuit.

**On Saturday evening** there will be another V8BBQ with the catering provided by Clive Wheatley's team of volunteer cooks. Last year they provided over 100 suppers and members enjoyed supplies of free wine and beer generously donated by Al Barnett, David Waterton and Victor Smith! Al Barnett will be coordinating this very popular event this year and full details and booking arrangements will be posted on the V8 website. If you do not have internet access, then you can call Al on 01306 875786 for more information and to make a booking. V8 members' friends are very welcome to attend the V8BBQ.

**On Sunday** the V8 Marquee will be active throughout the day and at 12.30pm the V8 AGM is held outside the marquee. It is a democratic process when the whole of the V8 Committee stands down, a temporary chairman of the meeting is appointed and the members present elect a new committee for the coming 12 months. We usually have well over 60 members present and it is a convivial and well supported occasion.

## Forthcoming V8 events

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> April lunchtime, a V8 Gathering at the Shoulder of Mutton on Hazeley Heath, just north of Hook in Hampshire – call Bryan Ditchman on 0118 932 6346. Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> May, the 25th Annual Regency Run to Madeira Drive on Brighton's seafront. Start is usually at Brooklands although this year it may be in Central London – call Ian Quarrington on 07769 564755. Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May, V8 Gathering at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford just off the M11 near Cambridge to see the recently restored Avro Vulcan flying. Full details will follow – contact Ian Quarrington. Wednesday evening 30<sup>th</sup> July, Classics on the Common is a very popular annual evening event, held on the common in Harpenden – contact Ian Quarrington. Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September, V8 Track Day at Castle Combe – contact Victor Smith on 0208 392 9434. The V8 Yorkshire Tour 200, over the long weekend from Friday 26<sup>th</sup> to Monday 29<sup>th</sup> September, will be based at the Ripon Spa Hotel. Details are on the V8 website and bookings can be made with Robert and Stella Crowson on 01765 620340.

## Where can I get a set of clean number plates?

Robert Crowson (Woodcote Green 1147) from Yorkshire posted a query on the V8BB "needing new registration plates for my RV8 I asked my local garage to sort me out a new pair. When they arrived they had the maker's name across the bottom. I don't want 'ABC Autoparts Ltd.' across the bottom of the plates but my garage says that is the law now. Are they correct?

**Rob Collier** responded: The supplier's name and postcode should be shown, however my everyday car has 'Bristol Audi' but the lettering is so small as to be insignificant. Try the supplier [myshowplates.com](http://myshowplates.com) who supply standard plates made without any name or

postcode. Strictly not legal but I doubt if you would fail the MOT and you could always save your ABC plates for MOT time. In less than four hours Robert posted a note: thanks for the advice Rob, the new plates are in the post from [myshowplates.com](http://myshowplates.com).

**Chris Armitage** with an MGBGTV8 added: Or you can try Framptons at [www.buy-a-plate.co.uk](http://www.buy-a-plate.co.uk) from whom I recently bought a pair of plates for my 1975 Factory MGBGTV8. They were correct in-period ones, reflective yellow/white with raised black plastic digits. No horrible postcode or vendor name on the bottom. They will also do the modern acrylic plates in the old, slightly broader 'font' as was used in around 2000, again without postcodes and manufacturer's name - so perfect for RV8s.

**Chris Hunt Cooke**, a former RV8 owner now with a V8 Roadster noted: As a matter of interest, the MG Car Club now sell badges which can be used on number plates. If you have the blue block with GB and the EU flag on the LHS of a modern number plate, and you are not particularly enamoured of the flag, they are just the right size to stick over it! You might even persuade the number plate maker to put it under the top surface of acrylic as he makes up a new plate.

## V8 Curry

The annual V8 Curry, held again this year at the Curry Centre in Cambridge, proved popular again as it is a central position for southern England. The long distance award went to Robert and Stella Crowson who drive down from Yorkshire. The following day many members went over to the Stoneleigh MG Show in Warwickshire which was larger than ever. Clive Wheatley's stand was opposite the main entrance and a popular place for V8 members to meet up. John Hoyle also had a stand with very useful displays of his V8 and RV8 suspension modification kits. Visitors from overseas at Stoneleigh included Victor Rodrigues from Switzerland (who many V8 members will see at the European Event of the Year in August later this year) and John Targett over from Ohio USA towing a roller bag for all his purchases! It was good to see John Yea was there looking fit after his heart operation in 2007. V8 members attending the BMH Body Plant visit in June will meet him again when he greets the visitors.



## The Late Great RV8 comes to the States

From the Fifties through the dawn of the Eighties, 70 to 80% of MG production rolled off the line at Abingdon, out to the Export Compound and onto ships bound for North America. MG became the enduring 'Sports Car America Loved First'. American enthusiasts of the MG marque were as dedicated as those anywhere, but while the closing of Abingdon proved to be only a temporary hiatus in Britain, in the U.S. and Canada it has now stretched out to be 28 years without MGs. The return of the MG name in 1982 was exciting to hear about from afar even though there was no consideration of returning to the North American market. Then during the summer of 1992, some of the most exciting MG news since that return started appearing in the automotive press. June brought broad hints of the re-emergence of MG sports cars. The revival of production of the MGB body shell in 1988 by British Motor Heritage on the relocated original tooling laid the groundwork for the emergence of a phenomenal new MG sports car at the Birmingham Auto Show that October - the MG RV8.

Across the Atlantic, Tom Raddatz of Chicago was one of many American enthusiasts who shared in the excitement of seeing MG become a sports car marque again. He still has the yellowed pages of the magazine with one of the first articles about the new car. Those pages became the inspiration for a long term quest - to own an RV8. This quest wasn't easy. First, the car was conceived as an exclusive, low-production model to regain traction as a sports car marque. The RV8 was intended to be limited to a production run of no more than 2,000 cars and all in right hand drive. So there were no RV8s to be had in North America. But what a car!

### Tom's first thought was to clone the car

The basic body structure may be MGB but with its beautifully flared fenders, re-designed bumpers, a 3.9 litre 190 BHP Rover aluminum V8, redesigned suspension, a Connolly leather interior and elm burr trim - it was a gorgeous package. The £25,000 launch price was stiff and a bit out of the 'everyman's sports car' range, but not unreasonable. The October introduction prompted Tom to send a US\$2,000 cheque to a London dealer and try and place an order for the car. The cheque was reluctantly returned with a nice note regretting the lack of a North American market version the dealer could sell him. Three years later, on a



trip to England, Tom was able to persuade another English MG Rover dealer to let him test drive an RV8 even though it was readily apparent that he was not in a position to buy one. But that drive set the hook even deeper.

Tom's first thought was to clone the car. The most practical thing for an American MG enthusiast seemed to be to start with a solid MGB shell, the same basis as the production item, and obtain the redesigned fenders and other gear that updated and uprated the RV8. Such a British clone seen in a magazine piece was impressive, but looked slightly odd sporting a standard MGB windscreen rather than the more integrated unit on the RV8. Tom met English MG parts supplier Mike Satur at the North American MGB Register's MG '95 convention which lead to discussions of this possibility. Tom still has advertising circulars from Mike illustrating a lefthand drive version of the distinctive RV8 dashboard. But this proved to be an expensive and not a practical route. The parts needed were elusive and pricey. And shipping overseas added to the difficulties.

So the RV8 remained mostly unseen in the States. Tom eventually discovered Jim Dolbel's RV8 website and began communicating with him and asked if he might know of a damaged or salvaged RV8. This inquiry resulted in a lead on two RV8s in the Cayman Islands that had suffered damage in Hurricane Ivan. The RV8 was originally one of many RV8s sold in Japan. From Japan it had been then been exported to the Caymans. His first contact was

Craig Fulton, whose insurance company had already totalled his car. But Craig put Tom in contact with William Nixon who also had an RV8 that was swamped in the hurricane. A deal was struck and Tom finally thought he had his car. Speaking to Craig Fulton again, Tom was told that Craig had heard William had sold the car. Tom thought this referred to himself, but no - he found that it had been sold to local Cayman squash champion. Tom immediately contacted the new owner and offered to double his money but was told no sale. One month later, he relented and committed to selling the car.

Tom carefully considered the economics of the transaction. An RV8 bodyshell sourced from England would cost US\$12,000 plus shipping to the East Coast, then require further transport to Chicago. The shipping cost would be cheaper from the Caymans to Miami than from England to New York, Boston or Baltimore. As Tom vacations in Key West, Florida that put him in a familiar neighbourhood to pick up the car. So in November 2005 Tom and his business partner journeyed to Grand Cayman and he got his first look at his purchase. The car was complete, but suffering the effects of two days with salt water immersion inflicted by the hurricane.

A local body shop was rented and utilized to dismantle the car. Working after business hours overnight, they set about dismantling the entire car. In the morning the shop opened so they had to get out, so they went scuba diving. The diver/car dismantlers returned after the shop closed again for the day and

finished the job. In a total of twenty working hours, the complete car was reduced to 'salvaged car parts'. The body shop owner was paid to crate and pack a Miami-bound container. Tom had a major shock upon receipt in Miami to find the crating did not take place and saw his treasure had been haphazardly stuffed loose into the container. His words about the individual engaged to do the crating are not kind. It took two different carriers and several different brokers to arrange the transport of the container from the Caymans to Miami. And a brokerage house to take the car off of the docks and to a trucking company. The Bill of Lading had to list every part and ran to ten pages. Tom and his business partner drove from Chicago to Miami in Tom's truck, bought a used trailer there, went to the trucking company lot to offload from the container to his trailer. They then made their way back north. "Logistically it was a nightmare" says Tom "So then we got it back - and that was the easy part. And now I had to rebuild it!"

Jack Hawkins of Bishop Hill, Illinois, who had done the bodywork and paint on an MGA for Tom said he was not doing MGs anymore. But when Tom explained the project, Jack relented and did a beautiful job. The original Woodcote Green body was resprayed in Nightfire Red, carefully matched to the original Rover colour. Then he needed to do the mechanicals. Tom says "I can put things back together, but I never claimed to be a mechanic". Fellow Chicagoland MG Club member and racer Scott Fohrman recommended Dick Luening of MGs Limited in Greenfield, Wisconsin. Dick was engaged to refurbish the 3.9 litre Rover V8 engine which got a .020 over bore and new pistons from Germany. "Basically we had a coffee can of salt and sand in each cylinder because the car had been swamped". Dick did all the driveline mechanical refurbishing work and his shop did the overall reconstruction. Despite finding sand and salt crammed everywhere "Sand in the differential, sand and salt in the transmission and in every nook and cranny of the car". The car was cleaned up and

made serviceable again. A search for a replacement wiring loom was unproductive and it fell to fellow Chicagoland MG Club member Dino Perez to coax the electrics back to life, saving the original loom despite its saltwater bath.

Modern cars are run by computers rather than SU carburettors and Lucas distributors and the RV8 is no exception. The original processor was devastated by the salt bath and a replacement was procured from RPI in the UK. Modifications for greater power and fuel economy trebled the originally quoted price, but proved their worth. The dash was re-veneered in California at Madeira Concepts. Tom sent them the original dash and they pulled it apart and re-veneered it in Burr Walnut replacing the original damaged Burred Elm. Restoring the distinctive interior was the hardest part of the whole restoration according to Tom. The original was damaged beyond acceptable use but proved valuable as it was pulled out and used as a pattern for the fabrication of a new one in Ferrari Tan English leather by Isaac's Custom Interiors in Skokie, Illinois. It's a slightly darker and richer color than the original and nicely sets off the vibrant red of the Nightfire Red paint.

## Sand and salt in every nook and cranny of the car

Recommendations from the V8 Register lead to British parts suppliers Clive Wheatley and Brown & Gammons in the UK which were essential to the project. The parts are not inexpensive. A replacement tail light fixture, a unique item Rover designed and had tooled specifically for the RV8 runs £165 or US\$330. The same item for an MGB runs US\$110 from Moss. The unique headlight surrounds show up occasionally on eBay and go for big money. Says Tom, "The guy I'd like to meet is Rover's acquisition agent to find out where they sourced these parts from all over."

Tom's original objective to have the car together in time to take it to the MG 2006 all-Register convention in Tennessee proved too ambitious. But the car was getting tantalizingly close by the fall of 2007 as the Chicago British Car Festival approached. And after a three day and night thrash session by Tom and Dino Perez, the car made its debut. Tom trailered the car to the show and then drove it onto the showfield.

The sound of the approaching, rumbling V8 and its stunning appearance had a magnetic effect on the gathered throngs and a crowd immediately converged on the car. There is still ongoing work being conducted. There is an issue with heat entering the cabin that needs to be solved. Especially because Tom has elected not to re-install the air conditioning that came factory-installed. Dino is still tracking down some electrical gremlins. The stereo in the centre console is for looks only right now; it's not hooked up. There are still a few original parts that Tom intends to replace, but new ones have been elusive. The seatbelts are serviceable but a bit worse for the wear in appearance as is the gearshift knob. Tom feels he needs a new soft-top, but he isn't too worried about it as he rarely puts the top up on any of his MGs.

On a Fall Sunday afternoon, after attending a car show, Tom came to my home in the car to be interviewed for this article. The new instruments (as-original VDOs sourced from Germany to replace the hurricane-trashed originals) only registered 170 miles since the car hit the road again. The effect of this car rumbling down my street was absolutely electrifying. The custom exhaust system Dick Luening fabricated does an incredible job. The sound alone is worth the price of admission. As Tom turned into my driveway, it brought my hot-rodder neighbor trotting out yelling over anxious to know "What IS that?" The effect of seeing a car in my drive that I never expected to ever see there is stunning. An invitation to sit in the lefthand seat for a ride did not have to be repeated. Tom describes the feel of the car as being like a heavier, well-planted MGB but WAY more powerful. There are some tweaks to be done on the suspension, but it feels great as is. Tom proudly pointed out that backing off the throttle pays off with a magnificent V8 burble. Dick Luening's work on the exhaust pays off with a sound that's way more satisfying than a working CD player.

There was not a lot of discussion of registering and plating. Tom just says there are a lot of rules to be followed. So he did. The car is insured by a major specialty provider. The cost? Well the original deal on the stricken car was for US\$5,000. That quickly doubled when it was sold to Dean Watson. In the end, Tom estimates he has US\$30,000



invested in the car plus the cost of a great deal of driving to collect parts let alone the trip from Florida to Illinois . . . But it is the only RV8 in the country. "If you really want something, you gotta go after it".

By Kim Tonry

Andy,

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Let me know if this feature article needs pruning to fit two pages?

Then I will advise what can be done.

Victor Smith  
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