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Ron Gammons

Club Vice President and past Chairman

Ron Gammons clearly enjoys MGs - his contribution to T-Type racing in the 1970s and 80s is legendary, his classic MG rallying wins, his long service to the MG Car Club and the continuing success of the specialist Brown & Gammons MG parts and servicing operation at Baldock underline his commitment to the marque. So I was keen to learn more about a fellow Club member and his enthusiasm for MGs, motorsport and our Club.

Ron began his long association with MGs almost 50 years ago when he bought a red MG TC from Archway Engineering in Manchester for £195. He drove it back to Thorney Island near Portsmouth where he was stationed with the RAF and began a great deal of work on the car, which included getting a damaged wing repaired by Duple Coachworks at Emsworth who made bodywork for the Vanwall racing car. Soon he was posted to RAF Little Rissington in Gloucestershire, then home to the Central Flying School, working as an aero engine and airframe fitter. There he met Valery, who worked in the control tower, and their lifelong partnership began.

Ron was brought up in Bournemouth and developed an interest in aircraft, so as a teenager he decided to join the RAF as a boy entrant to be an aero-engine mechanic. However when they immediately re-classified him as a radar mechanic, his independent spirit showed disappointment with the change, so he was sent home, spending a miserable night stranded on Bristol station. After a period as an apprentice car mechanic in Manchester, he rejoined the RAF in 1955 and was posted to Gibraltar. Five years later he left the RAF and joined ICL Computers at Letchworth as an engineering draughtsman and was soon promoted to their central manufacturing unit.

The original MG TC was sold and replaced by a TA which Ron rebuilt, winning the Longbridge Concours in 1963. That year saw the formation of the T Register with Ron, one of the founder members, soon the register secretary. It rapidly attracted over 1,500 members and published a bi-monthly bulletin edited by Paddy Wilmer. Ron bought a ZB at this time and started rallying when he met Peter Thornley (son of the managing director of the MG Plant) and they entered events with Peter's ex works Mini.

The local MG connection proved very helpful a few years later when one of Ron's MG friends in Letchworth, Mike Vincent, introduced him to a fellow MG enthusiast Ted Best who was a director of a leading specialist contractor carrying out parts of the massive UK gas conversion programme for the switch from town gas to natural gas. Ron was taken on as a manager running their large contract in eastern England and so began more than eight years managing complex work programmes with a workforce in the field and relations with gas consumers.

It was a formative period for Ron providing valuable business experience which proved very useful when he set up an MG maintenance and repair business with Gerry Brown in his garage at home in Letchworth in 1977. Valery's contribution was important too as she made upholstery and trim and provided essential administration for the fledgling business. In 1978 the Brown & Gammons business was moved to the present Baldock site and two years later expanded with a parts operation in the refurbished premises. After more than 15 years developing B&G, Gerry decided to leave the business in 1993 but has remained on good terms with Ron. Today the business is run by Malcolm



Gammons with his sister Louise and wife Steffi, supported by Ron and Valery and a team of loyal staff.

Ron had met Gerry Brown through their mutual interest in preparing and racing T-Types. The first year of the T-Type Championship was 1967 and very rapidly T-Type racing became an exciting and very active part of Club life. In the late 1970s T-Type racing was a truly edge of the seat spectacle at the Club's annual Silverstone meeting with competitors rounding Woodcote Corner three abreast! Ron went on to build and race a lightweight TF which was a spectacular sight on the track. He also bought a Lotus 9 as it has T-Type mechanicals.

In the late 1970s Gerry raced both his TC and John Targett's MGB in the characteristic blue and yellow Oliver Rix colours, while Ron raced his long serving TC before building the TF. In the mid 80s both Ron and Gerry bought MGBs with the intention of racing in FIA events, however historic rallying became the call and Ron rallied his well known MGB (JYH 770D) with great success with various co-drivers but particularly Paul Easter, winning the Marathon classic event in 1992 after a string of top finishes. He also rallied an MGA in classic rally trim in the Monte Carlo Challenge with Paul and winning outright in 1991, 93 and again in 95, and finishing fourth on two further occasions. Other historic rallies included the Liege Sofia, LEJOG, Corse Retro, Targa Espana and many more with both the MGB and the ex works MGC (MBL 546E) with Paul, Ian Bond, Jane Bourne, Robert Ellis and Don Barrow "on the maps". During the 1990s Ron was active racing 1950s' sports cars at BRDC, VSCC and Grand Prix support races with his Lotus Eleven and Lotus Nine, as well as a fearsome 1958 Devin SS with its 400bhp Chevrolet small block engine.

Ron's contribution to the Club is substantial. During his two terms as Club Chairman from 1984 to 89 and 1992 to 93 membership doubled and he led the long process of acquiring, funding and renovating the present Club office which was completed in July 1990. His support for the Club continues as an active Vice President, notably actively supporting Club motorsport for many years as a Clerk of Course and project managing an extension at the Club office in 2006. In recent years he has managed the revival of the Club's motorsport activities and made a very valuable contribution to the major task of organising the Club's annual International MG Meeting at Silverstone.

Flying vintage light aircraft has become a passion for both Ron and Valery. In 1996 their daughter's present to Ron of a trial flight

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rekindled his aviation interest and he soon gained his private pilots licence on Tiger Moths at Marshalls Airfield in Cambridgeshire. He bought a half share in a Tiger Moth the following year with John Halfpenny and rapidly built up his flying hours. Valery also gained her PPL in 2001 and they began looking for a De Havilland Leopard Moth, surely one of the most desirable pre-war touring aircraft. They found one in 2000 and another the following year, both with fascinating histories, so now they have two based at RAF Henlow.

Meeting Ron and learning more of the background which has shaped his life and character was fascinating. He is always a clear thinker with an ability to focus and get things done. He is also someone who has been a generous volunteer for the Club over the years. His passion for MGs from his 18/80 to his MGA and MGB rally cars, together with an MGBGT V8 and modern MGs, is a key part of his life - although flying is something both Ron and Valery really enjoy a great deal together.

Victor Smith

Photo: In action with an MGA in classic rally trim entered for the Monte Carlo 1992 Challenge with Paul Easter, ex BMC Works co-driver, as navigator. (Photo: Late Chris Harvey)