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Before I started.

Confessions of an Unbeautiful Mind

Article and Images By Dave Luukkonen

Over the last year or so I've been pondering the future of my little red MG. A lovely car, but perhaps one I've owned too long. My wife tells me that it's my car and my choice. My best MG friend, Bea, a dab hand with a wrench who has made my car her hobby as well, insists the car is on the 'cusp' as she calls it, of greatness. At the same time, I'm plagued by an 'inner voice' I think of as Other Dave. (Bea just calls him "cheapskate Dave") who thinks the MG is a money magnet. Other Dave wants me to sell the car and stop the bleeding!

As Bea and I ate lunch at our favorite watering hole, a car nut hangout called the "Busted Piston", our debate lurked in the background. I glanced at Bea as I carefully cut my hamburger into two identical halves. She sat quietly, just a cup of tea in front of her on the chequered table cloth, not wanting

to be the one to renew our debate. I looked back to my plate, and carefully poured a bit of ketchup on the side, being careful not to let it touch either the fries or the burger halves. Perfect! A lovely cheese-only burger with perfect fries and upscale ketchup. I believe in precision and quality. Why settle for generic ketchup if you can get bespoke ketchup? "Bea, I asked, "aren't you a bit hungry? Are you sure all you want is that Tea? She looked up. "Oh, I'm fine", she said in a tone that implied the opposite. I sighed. "Ok, what is it?"

She leaned forward; arms crossed – a posture she affected when preparing for a fight. "I can't believe you are considering selling. We've been together on this since the day you took ownership. I should have some say in it!" It was only the truth. She'd been passing me wrenches and helping on the car as long as I've had it. I'd go so



Dash and steering wheel installed.

far as to say that without Bea, I might have lost the ambition to restore the MG years before. I mean, it's tough to sustain that desire when the project has gone on for a few... decades. Her eyes were narrow as she leaned forward to await my reply.

"It's a quandary alright," I replied as I speared a fry, "but maybe it's time to let it go. It's in nice shape now, and I'm only a bit upside down on it." I chewed slowly on the fry – twenty chews, then swallow, then a bite of the burger. Every job has its perfect process. Mastication is no exception, and your digestive tract will thank you for it.

In the background of my mind, Other Dave was grinding his metaphorical teeth. "SELL! SELL! Get the money out! Don't listen to the crazy woman!" I felt my temper flare a bit. "Quiet you!" I muttered, only realizing after the fact that I'd done so aloud. A younger couple at the next table over glanced at me curiously.

"Oh Dave", murmured Bea sadly. "That other voice again?" I nodded. Embarrassed. People at other tables were staring at us. I didn't mind for myself, but Bea deserved better. We'd been messing about with the MG for twenty years, and she hadn't aged at all. I look in the mirror and see a chunky – ok, fat – middle-aged man. But Bea? Honest to God she seems younger and more vital every year.

"Dave, Dave, Dave. My poor Dave. You know that voice is just you right? He's not a real person, he's just a manifestation of your cheap... I mean prudent side."

Other Dave seethed in my skull. "Oh that miserable..." (he caught himself before he used the 'B' word to describe my friend). "You should cut her loose too". I slammed my palm on the table, rattling the plate and my coffee cup. A fork ran to the floor in a clanging retreat. "NEVER!" I declared. Bea looked satisfied but a little embarrassed too. S

was I. The couple beside us looked a bit less interested, and a bit more alarmed. An elderly couple suddenly arose, the meals untouched as they headed for the till to pay. "Strange", I thought, "the food here is pretty good generally. Maybe it's too spicy for seniors."

Sipping my coffee, I gathered my thoughts. I drummed my fingers on the table. I considered my fingernails. I noted with some satisfaction that they were a bit the worse for wear after an hour of fumbling around trying to get a new distributor into the MG – an emblem of wrenching dedication. I sighed. I couldn't keep sitting on that fence – it was starting to feel a bit barbwirey, if you know what I mean. Finally, I ventured, "Well, it's time to make the call. Do we sell the MG or keep it?" "SELL! SELL!" screamed Other Dave. "Let's take it to the next level!" Bea smiled at me. "I don't want to have to find somebody else to wrench with!"

"Wait... if I sell the B, you walk away? After all this time?" "Dave", she looked resolutely at me, "I'd have no choice. If the MG goes, so do I." "Oh great, emotional blackmail!" I pushed Other Dave down in my mind. "Wow", OK." Bea's threat sort of raised my hackles. IF she was going to be like that, to hell with it ("YES!") I mentally stared down Other Dave, while I considered Bea, sitting opposite from

me, her tea cooling and untouched. I needed to think twice before I spoke once and maybe said something I'd regret. As I was stuck there, thinking in circles, I heard a familiar voice. "HEY DAVE! How goes the battle?" I looked up and saw my pal Rudy walking towards my table. Rudy was another MG addict – also currently in the midst of a project. Just like every other member of our Brit Car club.

"Hey Rudy, glad to see you pal!" I called back, "pull up a pew, and I'll tell you a likely story." "I will indeed," he said as he started to sit – right on Bea's lap! "Oh boy", I thought, "he should know better than that! Before I could shout a warning, Bea managed to sort of teleport sideways into the next chair while favoring Rudy with one of her best glares. He remained oblivious – lesser men would have wilted. Well, you can't own British sports cars without being resilient.

Rudy picked up Bea's tea cup. "Anybody still drinking this?" Bea shook her head. I nodded permission for him to take it. "AH!" he sighed. "That's good. Earl Grey isn't it? So, what's up?" "Not much Rudy. I'm still debating – do I sell the MG and buy something else, or keep working on it

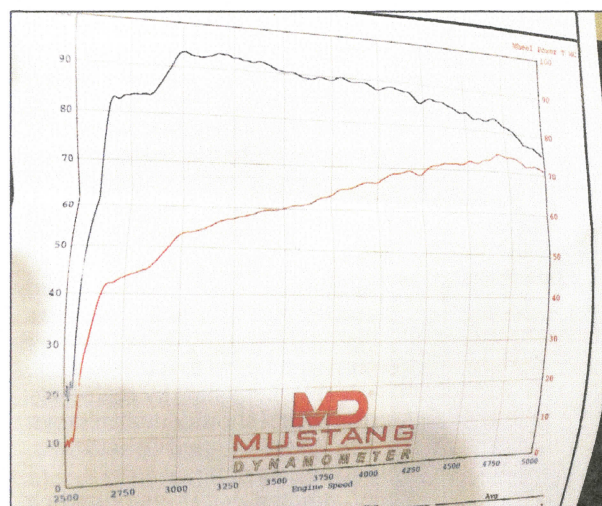
to make it perfect?" He slurped the tea obnoxiously. "Well, hmm. It seems to me that you might do a bit of both. Fix it up a bit more and you'll get a better price for it." Bea stared icicles at him.

"NOOOO," whined other Dave, "NO MORE upgrades! Just sell it! Sell! SELL! SELL! Stop throwing good money after bad!" Wonderful, a compromise – not a great compromise but none the less... there were possibilities emerging in my mind. Bea was still glaring at Rudy. I chastised her

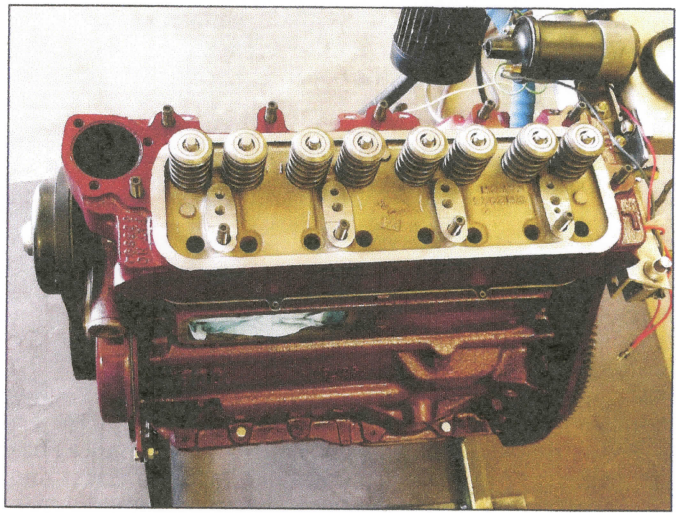
"Stop staring, it's rude!" Rudy started in his chair. "Sorry Pal, I didn't realize I was!" "Not you!" I said. He nodded, but still looked around, a puzzled expression on his face. "As for you Other Dave", I insisted silently, "stop being a cheap putz. It's so Canadian! You can't get something for nothing!" Evidently remembering all the times we'd gotten colds, fevers, and diarrhea at no charge at all, he riposted, "Sure you can! Remember the bathroom this morning" I huffed. "That," I insisted, "was just a bit of gas. The fact that the custodian refused to come in and unplug the toilet was beside the point." I decided to ignore Other Dave. Not that he'd get it. Other Dave is immune to subtlety. I looked up- Rudy was watch-

ing me with a strange expression. He eased his chair back from the table, and lurched to his feet, nearly elbowing Bea as he did so. "Gor blimey, Rudy," I cried, "watch the elbows!" Rudy looked around. Then he looked at his bare wrist, as though he had a watch on it. "Oops, gotta run! Time to get back to work." He's a weird guy.

"Ok," I replied, "we'll hang out here for a bit. Maybe stop for coffee at your shop later." Rudy nodded assent and backed away towards the door. I looked at Bea.



Dyno results



Finishing engine rebuild.

"Ok you can have your seat back." (She could be anal about some things. Her choice of our table and her chair was one of those things. She slid back over and sighed with evident relief. "Would you like another cuppa?" I didn't think she'd relish sharing Rudy's germs. Bea

her. The Busted Piston suddenly seemed quieter than usual. I let Bea 'win' and looked up. For some reason, the folks around us started edging away. A priest, mumbling something about exorcisms, crossed himself at me as he backed away. A lady, covering her little boy's eyes, hustled him past me.

I looked at my watch. 12:45 in the lunch hour. I guess they all had to be back at work early. "You know Bea, everyone is in such a hurry!", I murmured. "That's the problem with the world today. Nobody takes the time to linger over a fine luncheon". As I sat, finishing my coffee in the strangely deserted restaurant, I came to a momentous decision: I looked directly at my lunch partner. "Bea", I said, I'm going to sell the MG. Bea's eyes narrowed, and her lips thinned. "YES!" exclaimed Other Dave. I continued "but first I have to make it more saleable. Let's start by replacing that brutal shoulder harness system. (NOOO! cried Other Dave - "don't start"!)

I hated that three-point belt. It was too short for comfort. I could hardly get it done up. Of



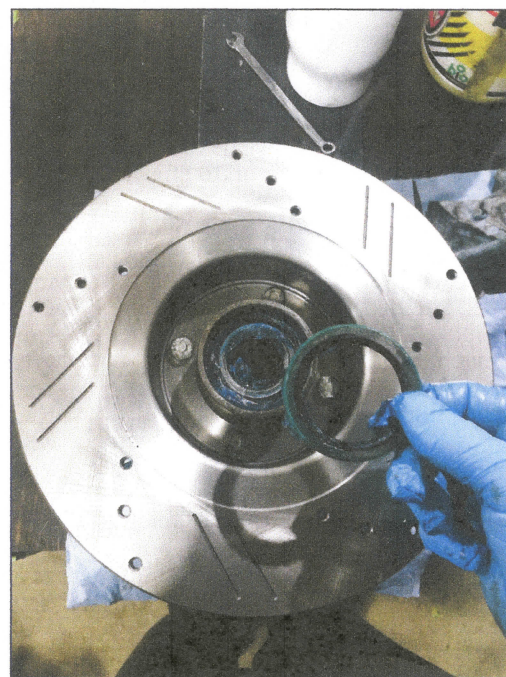
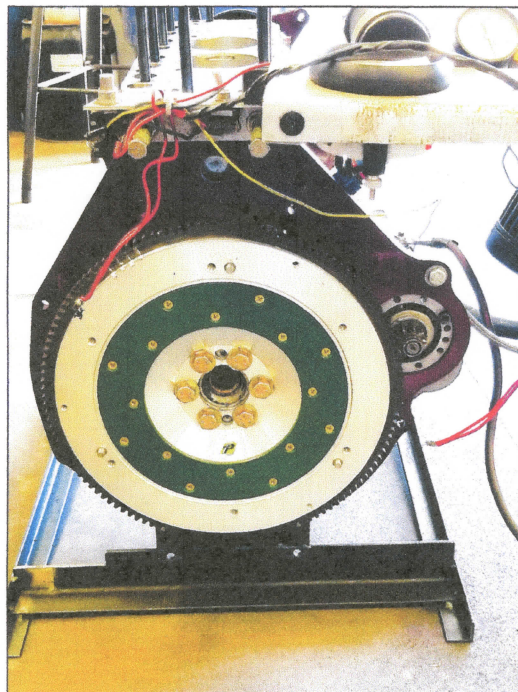
course, my waistline is probably best described as ... um... generous, but even so, the seatbelts needed replacing. (I had tried to teach my friend Cecil's granddaughter how to drive the car, and she was so petite that when we moved the seat forward enough to get her feet to the pedals, the belt would not comfortably close for her either. Anyhow, if you want to sell, you have to cast a spell. Or at least provide better seatbelts.

While Other Dave fumed between my ears, I called my friends at Moss Motors, and they kindly sold me an excellent pair of inertial reel shoulder harnesses. Surely that would make the MGB more saleable! And it was only a slight additional expense. Reasonable even. Other Dave, moaned. "This," he said to me bitterly, "this is how it always starts". I burped. The last customer in the store moved a table further from us.

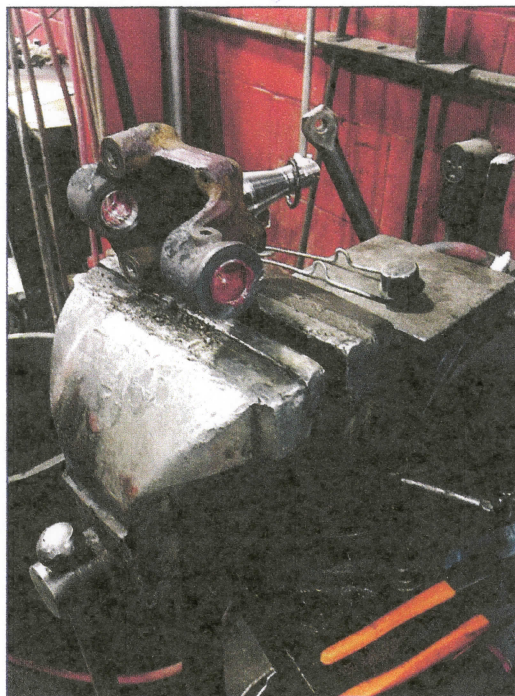
I had another brilliant thought! "Hey Other Dave!" (a passing waiter dropped his tray- Bea had to jump up to avoid getting the contents in her lap. I glared at him, and then continued my thoughts to Other Dave: "How about this... As long as they have to install new belts, might as well get bespoke carpets too! The silence in my head resounded. Hello? Other Dave?"

"Oh. Oh. Oh.", moaned my Other Dave "this is how it always starts. Please, I'm begging you... just sell the MG and get a nice completed sports car that SOMEBODY ELSE has already spent too much money restoring. STOP... DUMPING... MONEY... INTO... THAT... MG!"

"Oh pish!" I said. "And tosh!" I added. "This will just make the car more desirable. And furthermore, Other Dave, you just have no sense of the market and the



New brake disks



Rebuilding the front spindles

need for presentation!" I smiled at Bea. She smiled back. As far as she was concerned, she'd won. She was counting on my famous lack of restraint to keep us busy on the MG for years to come. I zinged an email order off to England for the carpets, bespoke of course. "No, no no! Before it's too late, just SELL THE MG! Bea leaned forward, "Now we're talking!" she laughed.

I laughed with her and added a bespoke leather panel kit to my order. I mean, might as well right? Other Dave, sulking, mumbled his discontent- "might as well,, might as well. Gawd. You're killing me!- Just give in and buy that MIATA. It will be cheaper and just as much fun in the long run!" I banged my fist on the table again. Other Dave had finally gone too far! "NEVAH! I exploded. "Just shut up a bit, will you? Good grief, let me place this order!" Bea looked shocked. Apparently once again, I'd spoken out loud.

Joey V, the manager of the res-

taurant, helped me to the door - a most considerate chap. But rather inclined to too firm a gri on one's elbow. "Dave", he said firmly, "lunch hour is over." As I stumbled out, he handed me a small business card. "Ridiculous! I thought. "I already know about his café." I glanced at the card. It was actually for a mental health office of some sort. A headshrinker's card! "Sheez!" declared, preparatory to mixing a metaphor, "That's a cry for help if I've ever read one! I'll call them tomorrow and encourage that Shrink to contact him." Clearly, being a restaurateur is a stressful occupation.

As usual, Bea refused to rid in my Audi S5. I had to hand it to her, she was committed to Brit cars. So, alone, I got into my boringly competent and comfortable Audi, (seriously - a car that goes fast AND never breaks down? Where's the fun in that?) and pulled away from the curb still mulling things over. Sell

the car, Keep the card, call the number Use the handsfree. Please, CALL the shrink! Stop distracting me" I warned Other Dave. "I'm driving here!"

As I accelerated through the blushing lights, another thought came to me! "Eureka!" shouted I at the windshield! "A bit more performance would make the MG even more marketable!" Other Dave just hummed the theme from Jaws through what sounded like gritted teeth. The next day, as I had coffee with Bea in the garage with the MG, I called my friend John at his American speed shop and discussed how badly I needed new Mikuni carbs! No more old school SU automobile carbs! I need... old school motorcycle carbs! I ordered a pair of those in as well! Bea nodded wisely. "Up to 30% better flow into the head - good move Dave!" "Get her out of here" grimaced Other Dave.

Then I had another epiphany! With new efficiency for flow into

the engine. What about better flow OUT? AHA! The answer was as plain as day! "Ceramic Header!" I declared. "Good thinking!" By Bea's standard, I couldn't get higher praise. I smiled with contentment, as I dialed another supplier. I conveniently had a few (dozen) of them on my speed dialer. "hm," I pondered. "maybe I should edit the speed dialer list so I have room for Marie on it. Other Dave tried to knock my head against the wall. Fortunately, I am always in complete control.

At work on Monday, as I sat at my classroom desk, (did I mention I teach High School? No wonder I have so much disposable income!) I found myself drawing cartoons of short people with large heads. Very large heads. Other Dave drew nooses around their necks. I took no notice. I was mesmerized by a vision: "Heads... big...heads... big valves... must have... big valve head!" I jumped to my voice shrieking! "ALLOY HEAD! Must have more flow!" One of my more sensitive students suddenly slumped to the floor, apparently asleep; two others declared a sudden need to go to the bathroom. Kids today; they drink way too much pop, and they just don't get enough rest. Their brains are still developing. The cerebral cortex, which helps people make decisions about risk versus reward, doesn't complete development until around age 25. "HA!" snickered inner other Dave, "for you... how about age 60?" Out of patience with him, I remonstrated, "Be quiet!" The kid on the floor slumped a little lower.

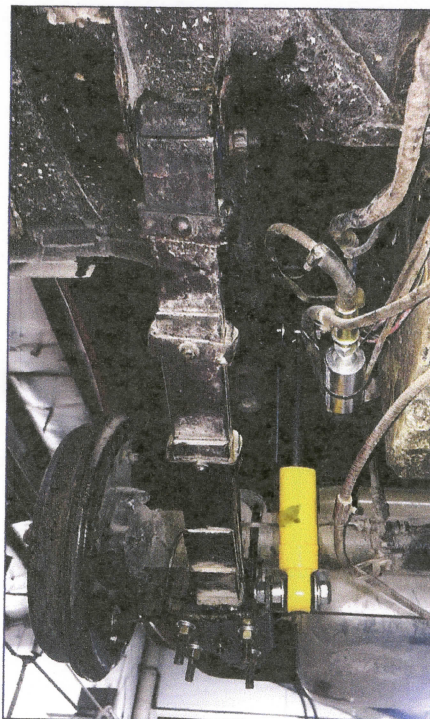
At lunch, I made a quick call to British Parts Northwest, another supplier on my speed dialer, and I ordered (on sale at a very reasonable price) a nice new big valve alloy head. "Did I want the gasket set as well?" asked the clerk. "Did I? Send it all!" "Great," he replied, "I may close early today!" I hung up, happy with anticipation. Those guys sure like me. I sipped my coffee, sublimely content in the anticipation of a much improved and therefore (theoretically at least) more



Polyurethane bushes installed on the leaf springs.

valuable MGB. Other Dave sighed audibly. "Oh. Oh. Oh. he groaned, "you have us so upside down on this car that when we look up, I see dirt." Did he groan out loud? I hated when he did that. It made me sound like I had gas. Clara, the lunchroom lady, offered me a TUMS. I accepted it gratefully. It was burrito day at school, and they really can make the ol' tumbly rumbly.

Later that evening, following my usual evening routine, I poured through magazines, and printed up internet stories, posting the articles on the walls of my garage, trying to align the evidence to finally nail down my conspiracy theory – that Mazda and Datsun, now Nissan, had colluded with multiple governments to crush the development of the MGB in the 80's. Suddenly, as I was drawing my logic lines connecting the articles in a huge spider web of deceit, I realized that the arrival of the new alloy head would leave me with two heads, presuming the old iron head was good



Tube shock conversion on the rear.

(as I was certain it was). After all, I'd just had the car dyno'd (another piece of work purely designed to help sell it) and the MG had tested out nicely, nearly new horsepower at the Fly Wheel and at the rear wheels. A good solid head, I thought, on a good solid engine. I said so in a note to my British car club email list, offering a 'good, solid head', at an undefined price. I had no idea what these things were worth, but I didn't want to either give them away, or, more importantly, rip any of my club fellows off. In general, the guys and gals in the club tended to be pretty reasonable with each other. At least as much anyone belonging to a club called the "Perfidious Albions" can be.

One of my pals replied promptly, "I'll take the head" he wrote. I wrote back, "Excellent! It's a good solid head". "Fine!" he wrote back. "yup", I wrote again, a good solid head. "Hmmm" he replied, "what does that

mean exactly?" I looked up from his email on my iPhone. Bea stared at me blankly - no help there. Thanks a lot partner. Finally, in return I typed, "Well, it's good, and it's cast iron. It's Good, and it's solid." Within minutes another email asked, "Do you have the numbers off the head?" "Wait", I responded... "There are numbers?" Bea remained unhelpfully silent, just shaking her head. Eventually, he... I mean we agreed that he might be better off with a different head. I put down my stapler and started polishing the MG - hey shiny is good. Really shiny is better. After an hour or so, I left Bea to finish and went into the house for supper with Marie.

After supper, sitting at the table sipping a coffee, Other Dave just couldn't let it go. "good and solid...Good and solid" he mimicked me. That's priceless. We'll never live that one down."

"AH SHUDDUP you!" I ordered Other Dave. "WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?" asked my lovely partner dangerously. "Just talking to myself dear!" I made a joke of it. "I find I'm pretty



Front tube shock conversion.

good company! “Oh,” she looked at me doubtfully for a moment, and went back to the paper. As the evening went on, I noticed her peering at me over the paper and shaking her head.

I called the rebuild shop the next day to get the numbers off the head. If there are numbers, my guy should know them. I put the phone on speaker mode as I continued pasting up various articles and pictures, (I am frustratingly close to cracking that conspiracy. Take that MIATA mugs!) Bea thinks I might be onto something. “It all makes perfect sense!” she murmured from beside the MG. I spend a lot of time in the garage. My wife thinks I’m renovating it. I know this because I heard her tell a friend that she was worried that “I was getting to be a few bricks short of a load.” Really, if she paid attention, she’d know the garage was made of lumber, not brick. Anyhow, Randy the shop boss, gave me the number off the head. I wrote it down. As it turned out, my iron head was of casting series 12H2923, nicknamed the “big valve series”. According to one expert MG site, it’s sought after for racing head modification. According to another, it’s basically crap.

Bea looked at the number. “That’s a good head with a bit of work it will be awesome!” “She’s nuts. Two articles, two different opinion! That is



Installing new windshield.

why I want us out of the MGB. Nobody agrees on anything about them!” “Au contraire, Other Dave”, I countered, that’s what makes the MGB fascinating. It’s like solving a huge puzzle”. I finished cutting an article and looked for the perfect spot on my walls; they were getting a bit crowded. “Yeah. Sure. A fun puzzle.” There was blessed silence in my head for a moment. Then Other Dave finished his thought. “Every darn thing about it is a crap shoot. Well, It’s cheaper than Vegas.” My eyes lit up. “VEGAS! BRILLIANT! You



Replacing the windshield.

are a GENIUS Other Dave! I'll go to Vegas and win enough money to pay for a new suspension all around! And maybe a higher capacity radiator. And fancy aftermarket ... wait... a SUPER-CHARGER! That's the ticket!"

Other Dave's moans became that of a man living a life of quiet desperation; "NO NO, he whined... Forget Vegas! The house! The house always wins. You can't beat the house!" I stopped in mid-stride, glue stick in hand. "House... HOUSE! Even better! Other Dave, you have inspired me! I'll sell the house. Then I'll be sure to have enough money to restore the B properly, and I won't have to gamble at all!" Other Dave gasped. "OH My god! Find the card! FIND THE CARD! CALL THE SHRINK!" I just smiled tolerantly. A prophet is never respected in his own town. Or in his head, apparently. I took a break and made an appointment with a Real Estate broker. Briefly, I wondered what my wife would say? Well, what could she? It's clearly the best way for forward! Marie would understand.

For the next week, as I waited for all the parts to come in, ("It's like waiting for Christmas!" cried Bea. "More like waiting for your Visa bill" muttered Other Dave.) I went back to pasting and stapling up pictures and charts and connecting them – if I could JUST find the pattern, I could solve the Miata conspiracy and restore the MG marque to its rightful place. It's never too late for Justice! God speed the day! Oh, the adulation! The adoration! What laurels would be mine! The bells would ring, the (bespoke) carpets would roll! And I'd still have a HUGELY valuable little red car. In the background of my mind, I heard a quiet sobbing. It went on for a very, very, very, long time. It was the sound of a life of no longer quiet desperation.

However, I was too busy to worry about Other Dave. I

was frantically making phone calls for more parts and pasting up more and more evidence. The walls were pretty much covered, and I was just going up a ladder to continue pasting on the ceiling when my wife came to get me for supper. I was too tired notice the men in white coats beside her. Bea tried to stop them, but they brushed her off like she wasn't even there. I guess I was a bit unwell for a time after that. As they hustled me into a van – "Hey that seatbelt is kind of tight isn't it? Is it supposed to lock my arms to the sides?", I saw Marie talking to a man in a dark suit.

Marie stood watching the ambulance pull away. A single tear fumbled its way down her cheek. "Doctor Mazder, I feel awful about this! The tall man put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Marie," he murmured, "what else could you do. He's clearly delusional beyond mere eccentricity. He tried to sell your house to support his obsession." She shook her head.



New shift knob to match wood overlay kit.

"I know. It was ...I mean, where did he think we'd live? When I broke the lock on the garage and saw what he's been doing in there, I..." "Unable to continue she stood, staring at the ground. "Marie, he's going to get the best care we can provide. We can help him. But... is there anything you can tell us about his friends?" "He has no real friends, just that darn MG". He watched her carefully; "What about this "BEA" he keeps talking about?" Marie started. "Bea?" She cried, "He doesn't know anyone named Bea. The only B in his life is sitting right there!"

Mazder looked down her arm at the object of her gesture. Dave's MGB sat there, polished, shiny, beautiful. The two looked at each other, and sadly left the garage, closing the door and replacing the padlock. Inside, in the dark, the Red MGB's lights flickered and the engine purred to life briefly. One might be forgiven for thinking this car was something more than the sum of its parts.

Three months later...

-It's been weeks, but I'm feeling a bit better every day. And it's comforting to know that when they let me out of this funny, soft-walled room, my MG, and assorted bespoke components and parts, will be waiting for me. I couldn't get EVERYTHING I wanted, as Marie wouldn't allow me to sell the house. She was committed to me though. I know that because a doctor told me she had committed me. Same thing, right? I take a lot of pills now. I haven't heard from Other Dave for quite some time. It's been peaceful, but a bit dull in my head. I understand now that there is no conspiracy. I really believe that. Honestly. Please let me have my stapler and glue again. I hope Bea is still there for me. We've got a lot of work to do. What a journey this has been! It will be worth it in the end, I'm sure. After all this effort I'll give my MGB a nice new name after all this. Something Feminine, but somehow ... powerful. Is 'Christine' taken?



Nearly finished