

Bringing Home Ray's C

By Fran Lewis

Ray immigrated to the US from Britain in 1972. He had a degree in mechanical engineering and lots of experience doing maintenance on British cars.

We became interested in acquiring a British sports car in the late 1970s and bought an MGB-GT and soon joined a local MG club. Parts were easy to get locally at an MG dealer a few miles from our house. We had fun driving it and going to shows.

We saw a few Cs at some of the shows and, by the late 80's we decided that it would be fun to have a C and started looking. Even then they were hard to find as they approached 20 years in age.

Ray traveled frequently to the West Coast on business and started looking for a C in California reasoning that he would be more likely to find one there that was rust-free. In December 1988 he found a 69 CGT in the LA area and put down a deposit contingent on the car being mechanically sound enough to drive back to Michigan. He completed the purchase in August 1989 and I flew out to meet him with our plan being to take 2 weeks vacation to see the sights on our drive back to Michigan. Neither of us had ever done a car trip across that part of the country and, despite my trepidation to be driving such an old car, was looking forward to it. We picked up the C on Monday, August 28th and, my first sight of it was a shock!

The car was horrible looking! It had 1,273 miles over 100,000 on the odometer, had been painted silver over white and then white again at some time. The tailgate was a different color (red) as Ray had requested the seller to replace the original as that was the only place on the car with any rust. The dash was cracked, the passenger seat split and all the rubber seals perished as the car had probably sat outside in the hot California sun for quite some time. Someone had put white shag carpet in it. The engine was the best looking part of the car as the seller had worked on it and detailed it.

We loaded our luggage, dropped off the rental car and were on our way for the start of our nearly 4,000 mi driving adventure. Our luggage included Ray's stuff from his business trip, his tool box, a few spares, plastic jugs of water, and a cheap Styrofoam cooler. I knew there wouldn't be much room so had a small duffel with shorts and T shirts. It was lucky I'd brought a beach towel and had something to sit on other than that ruined passenger seat cushion.

Our first leg was a short hop to Lancaster to overnight with friends, starting out the next morning across the Mojave Desert. It was hot and, I noticed liquid creeping up



Ray's C "Before" - a bit faded but no rust.

the bonnet. We pulled off the road into the only shade available—an overpass. A top hose had cracked and Ray had spare hoses so we were soon on our way. We made it into Nevada and were approaching the first traffic light in Boulder City when Ray discovered that the brakes had failed. He did manage to stop the car without hitting anything and we pulled into the first motel a few hundred feet up from the light.



An interior that would have Austin Powers screaming "Shagadelic Baby".

The next morning, Ray jacked up the car, found that the rear left brake seal had failed. Being an engineer, he hammered the line shut so we would have pressure in the system and we had 3 working brakes to see us the rest of the way home.

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"What was I thinking?!"

We were on our way again. The sights we saw! We stopped at Hoover Dam, the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, the Four Corners area. We made a side trip on a dirt road to Lake Powell as I thought the scenery would be awesome. Well, it was 28 miles of red dust and the lake was VERY low and not at all scenic.

In Colorado, we went to Mesa Verde and pulled into Durango on Sunday afternoon hoping to get tickets on the narrow gauge railroad. On Labor Day weekend without reservations. Well, we did get out tickets after being something like 112 on the waitlist. We had waited, but lots of folks hadn't. The train trip the next day was great.

On our way through the mountains, we made one last stop at a National Park - the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. When we saw it, we could understand why it hadn't been explored until the 20th century. Once we left the mountains behind, we picked up I-76 to I-80 and motored for home.



A familiar sight!



The finished product and a rolling tribute to Ray.

It was 2 and a half days from Denver to Dearborn Heights. We had driven a total of 3989 miles and averaged 26 mpg.

Ray restored the car in 1990, doing the interior and mechanical work himself. The paint was done professionally. Ray said that there was still red dust everywhere in the car from our dirt road excursion to Lake Powell.

Ray passed away in January 2001, but the car still reminds me of lots of shows and road trips we did together over the 10 years that it was Ray's C. ■