

# Let's not forget our roots.....

By Philip Wiltshire

I was looking through my collection of MG literature and found several British Leyland Motor Corporation Limited press releases for MG from the early Seventies. At that time, BLMC owned the MG marque as nearly all British car manufacture was state controlled and funded or “nationalized” as we called it.

I read the following piece and thought you might find it interesting. For those of you new to our club, I hope this makes it clear why we celebrate Mr. Cecil Kimber's birthday every April. For those of you old hands, it's nice to remember our roots.

## MG – HALF A CENTURY OF SPORTS CARS – Press release, issued 9 May 1975



The MG Car company was formed out of the enthusiasm and skills of Cecil Kimber, manager of William Morris's Morris Garage in Oxford. Kimber began re-bodying standard Morris models in 1922 and gradually established the MG – the initials of the garage – as a marque in its own right. He built his first two-seater sports car in time for the 1925 Land's End Trial.



By 1929 MG had outgrown its Oxford premises and moved to nearby Abingdon, with Kimber as Managing Director. The MG factory nestled unobtrusively between a churchyard and an orchard, and from it came the first of a long line of Midgets, the M-type. Within two years MG had established an unrivalled reputation as a racing equippe.

During the Depression when many small sports car manufacturers were forced out of business, MG embarked upon a racing programme which brought world-wide success – and many orders – for such models as the Montlhery Midget, J4, K3 Magnette and the R. The company withdrew from racing in 1935 – but the firm's reputation in the competition field had been kept high with the successes of many thousands of private owners who have won awards in all parts of the world.



*Phil Hill and the XK 181*

By 1932, MG had captured every Class H international record and the 750 cc Midget was the first car in its class to achieve 100 mph and cover 100 miles in an hour. From 1930 to 1959 – when the famous streamlined EX 181 was driven by Phil Hill at 254.01 mph – MG dominated record-breaking attempts in numerous international classes.

After the company withdrew from racing, the MG range was rationalized and the TA Midget announced in July 1935. Then followed the VA, WA and the TB before war broke out and Abingdon turned to military work. Kimber suddenly resigned in 1941 in a dispute with Lord Nuffield over the allocation of war work. He died in a railroad accident outside King's Cross Station, London, in 1945.

Immediate post-war production centered on the TC – a modified version of the TB. Then followed the Y-type, a 1250 cc saloon and the TD, which sold extraordinarily well in America from 1949 to 1953. The TD became the TF as a stop-gap until the MGA, a new model with a streamlined body, appeared in 1955.

MG had become part of a larger grouping in 1952 when the Nuffield Organization and Austin combined to form the British Motor Corporation (BMC). It was the BMC B-type engine of 1489 cc that provided the power for the MGA. MG had gone right through the alphabet for model designations and decided to start again. The MGA – despite criticism from traditionalists who disliked its shape – set a world record for production of one basic sports car type with more than 100,000 being built in seven years.



From 1957 Abingdon became the BMC sports car division and production of Austin-Healeys, including the Sprite, was transferred



*The Y-type*



there. An MG version of the Sprite was announced in 1961 and the name Midget revived for the model. The following year the MGB was launched and has become the world's best-selling sports car.



In 1973, a lightweight V8 engine went into the MGB GT to make it one of the world's great high-speed long distance expresses. For the 1975 season, deformable front and rear ends brought major differences in styling. In 1968, MG became part of Britain's largest motor manufacturing organization, the British Leyland Motor Corporation (BLMC), which was formed with the merger of British Motor Holdings and the Leyland Motor Corporation.

The Abingdon factory continues to be a sports car manufacturer in its own right. More than 80% of MG's produced at Abingdon are exported with most going to the United States – where the MG has long been popular and forms the basis of many competition teams. The factory is also the home of Leyland ST (Special Tuning) which develops performance equipment for the British Leyland car range.



*Philip's own MGB-GT V8*