

MGeometry

Celebrating 90 Years of MG Motoring
and of the MG Badge. By Rick Astley

According to an article by Jonathan Wood, published in *Enjoying MG* in June 1997, the famous MG Octagon was designed at MG founder Cecil Kimber's request by Edmund (Ted) Lee in 1924. Wood's article quotes Lee as saying, ".....I drew out this badge with a little ruler I'd brought from High School. I was good at art and have painted for years. Kimber saw it and said 'that's just the thing'." Wood's article goes on, "I was interested to know why Lee had opted for the eight sided shape and he said there was no particular reason for choosing it. But it should be remembered that such angular designs were very popular in the nineteen twenties and they are what we know today as Art Deco style." There have been suggestions that Kimber was influenced by other Art Deco car badges such as that for Standard Swallow or he just wanted a 2-letter badge like AC, a company for which Kimber had once worked. (Standard Swallow, by the way, changed its name to Jaguar Cars in 1945, because of the connotations to the Nazi SS).

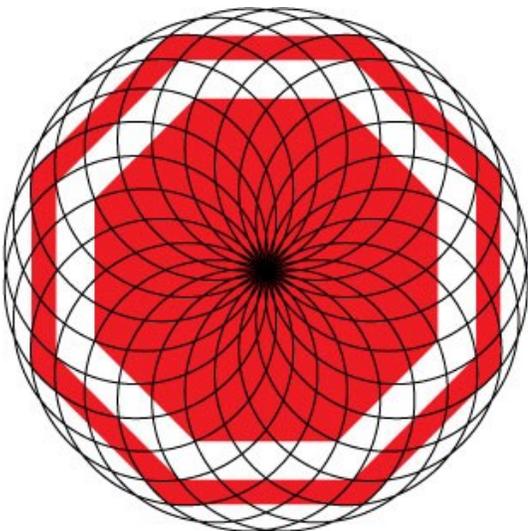


If indeed Lee worked using a "little ruler", it would explain why some of the dimensions of the MG Octagon appear arbitrary, as shown in *MGeometry - Everything Octagonal*, which was re-published at a poster distributed at the *University Motors 20th Annual MG Summer Party* in August 1996 and from which I ripped the title of this article. However, I believe that Lee worked with more than a "little ruler", he had a good compass too, some sophisticated knowledge of geometry and I further think that the dimensions of the MG Logo are not so arbitrary after all.

The MG badge is fundamentally based on 3 octagons with a common center. The outside 2 form the border and the inside one defines the frame in which the letters MG are contained. *Everything Octagonal* describes the size of the inner 2 octagons to be 94% and 80.07% of the size of the outer one; hence the apparent randomness of the of the relative dimensions. However, in my view at least, making a geometric figure pleasing to the eye is more easily achieved if there is a natural proportionality. Unlike Lee, I have a computer that can more accurately draw complex figures than could his ruler and compass, and with it I sought-out a possible way in which he could make the figure truly geometric, and hence seem right to the human eye, even if the person viewing it didn't know why it seemed correct.



There are a number of ways of accurately drawing an octagon, the simplest of which is to put two identical squares on top of one another and then rotate one 45° so that an octagon



appears in the middle, as shown in the image on the right. A much more complicated method involves making 24 circles, each displaced 15° from one another and with their touching circumferences rolling around a central point. That produces a figure like that on the left. This figure allows a number of different size octagons to be made by joining intersects that are an equal distance from the center. In this image I've joined the 3 outermost intersections and find we end up with 3 octagons with the correct relative proportions for the MG badge. More than a coincidence I think, or perhaps, being an artist as well as a technical illustrator, Lee just understood how to draw things in proportions so that they seem "just right".

