

The Story of "Old Speckled Hen"

By Dave Stein

I'm sure many of you already know the story of the "Old Speckled Hen" but as a newbie, I learned of the story only recently. "Old Speckled Hen" is a beer that was first brewed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the M.G. Car Company factory in Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. According to legend, when M.G. celebrated its 50 year anniversary, they asked the local brewery, Morland Brewery, to brew a celebratory beer for them. Ian Williams was the personnel officer at MG in Abingdon in 1979 and is the person who thought of using the name for the new ale.



I have heard three different versions of where the name came from. All of them refer to an old MG car which was used as the factory runabout.



One story from Morland Brewery (my favorite), is that the workers would park an old MG Featherweight Fabric Saloon prototype outside the paint shop where it would normally get spattered in paint and so it became known as the 'Owld' Speckled 'Un'. This turned into "Old Speckled Hen" when the beer was unveiled.

Another story is that they were trying out a new painting process that unfortunately failed as it left speckles in the finish. Rather than scrap the car, they used it to run errands at the factory.

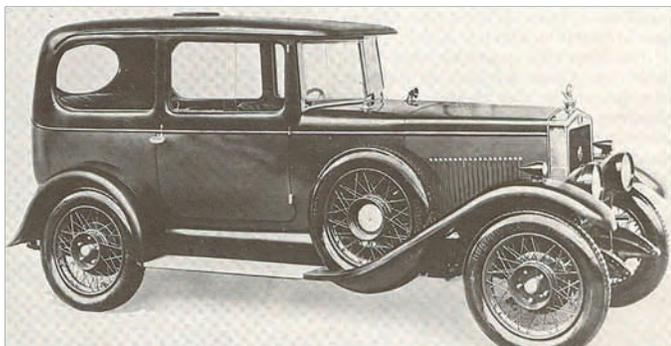
The third version is that the car was a prototype that they wanted to have a special paint job. According to the book, "MG by McComb", this was not a "proximity to the paint department accident" - it was intentional. The car was finished with a "grained black fabric sprinkled with gold dust". After serving as a showpiece, the car was retired into service as a factory runabout and became known as the 'Ol' Speckley 'en'.

However it got its speckled finish, there is no doubt the car did exist and Mr. Williams gave its name to the 50th anniversary beer.

From everything I have read, the car was a prototype of the 14/40 saloon. The 14/40 Mark IV was launched in 1927. It was the first model to carry a flat radiator and an MG Octagon badge; the previous cars had the Morris Oxford badge. The car boasted about 35 bhp. Approximately 851 14/40's saloons were produced.



And the beer? The original label for the beer bore the M.G. colors of cream and brown—the official colors of the M.G. Car Club competition team known as "Cream Crackers". The bottle



dressing was finished with a green foil capsule, which matched the background color of the Borough of Abingdon Arms. The beer was an amber color and was brewed at a specific gravity of 1050 to denote 50 years (i.e. 1929 - 1979) of production of MG cars in Abingdon. After the MG factory moved in 1980, production declined and Old Speckled Hen was almost exclusively available in pubs operated by Morland. In 1990, the brewery launched the draught version of Old Speckled Hen with considerable success.

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