

“And then it just wouldn’t start....”

- By Dave Stein

How many times have I read that line (or some variant) in articles about classic cars! Being relatively new to the world of classic motoring, I had not uttered these words myself until recently. I decided to drive my MG TD to run a few errands. The car seemed a bit sluggish and I could smell raw gasoline. I decided I needed to look under the bonnet when I got to Home Depot. I opened the hood and peered at the carburetors – yup, still there. I could definitely smell gasoline. I had just rebuilt the carburetors last winter, so I didn’t think it couldn’t be too serious. I closed the hood, did my shopping, and hopped into the car to go home – “and then it just wouldn’t start....”



I could hear the fuel pump running and running - a bad sign. I opened the bonnet and gasoline was pumping out the top of the float bowl on the front carb. OMG! Realizing my problem was somehow related to the float; I grabbed a screwdriver and tapped the side of the float bowl to try to free up the float. No luck. I would have to take the carb float apart. I got the cover off and there was my beautifully polished new brass float sitting on the bottom of the float bowl. I used my screwdriver and pocket knife to work the float up and out of the bowl. A quick shake confirmed it – full of gasoline. I needed to drain the gas out of the float and reseal it so I could get home. I poked a hole in it with my pocket knife and got 90% of the fluid out. But, now I needed to plug the hole that I made. A bit of wood carved to the size of the hole would work. I looked about for a twig or something lying in the parking lot - nothing. I noticed the trees along the edge of the parking lot. There were wood chips under the trees - perfect! After a couple attempts and “design” changes, I had a carved sliver of wood jammed into the hole in the float well enough to get me home – I hoped. Now most of you are probably asking yourself “Why didn’t the idiot just go into Home Depot and buy some sealant?” I guess for the same reason I own a car with Lucas electronics and SU carburetors – I like a challenge.

I hopped into the car, she fired right up, and I drove home without further incident. I took the old floats (never throw “old” parts away) and submerged them in a glass of water overnight. The next day, one of them had a little water in it, but the other was watertight. Of course I polished the watertight one before replacing my “customized” float.

So, be warned – just because it’s a new float, doesn’t necessarily mean that it actually floats. *Happy motoring!*