

# The restoration of my MG "J"



On the road. April 2024

Presentation to The Crankhandle Club by Peter Hills. Photos Charel Olivier and Viv James and others...

The MG 'J' Series is a world first, prior to its launch there were no specifically designed "sports cars". Most cars' axles were positioned under the main suspension, but the J series reversed this by lowering its centre of gravity. The 1933 J2 set the mould for all future sports cars.

The J2 weighs 600kg. Compare this to my 1929 Morris Minor Four Seat Tourer at 800kg. Around 2500 J2s, road-going two-seaters, were made. Early models had cycle wings, which were replaced late 1933 by the full-length type typical of all sports MGs until the 1950s TF. The top speed of the standard J2 was stated at 65 mph (105 km/h). A specially prepared car by The Autocar Magazine reached 82 mph (132 km/h). The car cost £199. This 2-door sports car used an overhead camshaft except with crossflow engine, unlike that fitted

to the 1928/9 Morris Minor and Wolseley 10.

The most serious of the J2s technical failings was that it has a two-bearing crankshaft, many failed if over-revved. The overhead camshaft is driven by a vertical shaft through bevel gears, which also forms the armature of the dynamo. Any oil leaking from the cambox seal enters the dynamo brushes affecting charging and perhaps a fire hazard? Braking with Bowden cables to each 8" drum; later vehicles are fitted with 12" drums.

### My story

My 1929 Morris Minor was on a Carnet so had to be returned to UK. The dilemma was how would I participate in CHC events without a car? Early in 2021 I mentioned to Viv James that I was looking for a project. On 16th April

2021, I was invited for coffee at Martin's Bakery where I met a bunch of MG nuts: Viv James, Feliciano Martins, Ted Borcherds, Chris Champion, Denis Marsh, Rodney Green; members of the Triple Ms (MMM). I was told that a certain Steve Grover in Boksburg had a J2 for sale and: "we have chosen you, Peter, to restore this classic!"

The J2 was delivered from MG Abingdon-on-Thames on 21st June 1933 to Colin Macualay, London, England. First Reg: WN7573. The date that it arrived in South Africa is not known but it appears that many parts were subsequently removed until the five owners realised this car was important. The five owners had assembled lots of spares but in particular this:



After the price was agreed I flew to Johannesburg to Boksburg to view my unseen investment on 8th May 2021. Dirk Koetze delivered it but sadly passed away three weeks later due to Covid.

I had learned a number of lessons from my previous restoration. My 1929 Morris Minor took 22 years to complete. I

changed home 6 times and countries, and, during outsourcing, I lost 6 years access to it. I spent too much time cleaning parts and I ended up restoring non-standard fittings and repeating much of the restoration. After six weeks, I assessed the condition of what I had purchased before returning to UK on a shopping spree.

The J2 was going to be a different restoration.

I maintain a diary of work and expenses and I photograph before and after; its motivating. I outsourced all cleaning. Chassis shot blasted and all other elements aquablasted then jet pressure washed to remove any residue glass beads. Despite the myth that powder coating results in peeling and hidden corrosion, my experience is to the contrary. A clean car goes better! Immediately after shot or sand blasting, powder coating painting must be done. When the first coat is still warm the second coat is applied.

The first job was getting the chassis on the wheels. A new experience for me. I endeavoured to maintain originality, in the J2's case all nuts and bolts are BSF. My main deviation is to use stainless steel fixtures on non-stressed attachments. I outsourced body painting and upholstery and have found that getting specialist engineering done here is so much



Douglas Bader - the famous WWII pilot was a J Owner





*Delivery of the J*

easier than overseas. Viv James advised me to replace the Half Shafts with tapered ends. These were made in UK. All wheel bearings are tapered type.

Then the body was assembled and prepared for painting by SG Garages.

Now the hard work began as I wanted to add the J2 to the Annual Car Show on 21st January 2024. I had to assemble and fit the engine, floorboards were cut and shaped from marine ply, the body was upholstered by Peter Crowley and missing materials were obtained from the UK. Much rework was done as we learned about the sequence and order of assembly, and we wrestled with the electrical system.

The chassis, front and rear axle wheel hubs, gearbox and diff are original; almost all other parts are either new or scavenged from other cars but in period. At some time the car's engine was removed and what I inherited was probably an M-Type block. The head studs were upgraded from 5/16" to 3/8". All OHC elements are new. The tub, bonnet, wings, side panels, radiator core, clutch and wiring loom are all new. These came with the original purchase but supplied from UK. Cosworth pistons, Carillon con-rods, a billet balanced crankshaft are fitted. The flywheel was lightened by 2.5kg with a new ring gear.

Car restoration is always in the detail. The engine had run on the



*The custom steering wheel and dash on display*

Starter Motor to prove all oil ways. Copper fuel pipes needed connecting and forming to the Carbs. The original Petrolift pump was replaced with an SU Electric Pump. We found a weep in the fuel tank so that delayed starting the engine. Final wiring to the instrument panel and remote Indicator, Dip and Horn button and upholstery had to be completed.

The green leather came from Woodheads in Cape Town. We selected 4 out of 20 hides. The materials for the hood and tonneau cover, side screens and plastic windows came from the UK as well as a complete kit of fittings from UK, while Peter Crowley supplied the carpeting.

This restoration was never a race to completion, but I wanted a car to participate in the CHC events as soon as possible. Being given the time and energy to dedicate to this restoration I must first thank Sandy for all her support and at times for being a car widow! My brother-in-law Graham Lowden has a large unit that enabled us to establish a spacious workshop. His contribution towards this project cannot be over-emphasized, we work together as brothers.

Technical assistance has come from many sources but especially: Ted Borchers, Viv James, Rodney Green, Chris Champion, Simon Johnson (Belfast NI) and John Emmet (London) S&V UK and several others.

Engineering sources included Dennes Eng, Basticks Engine Reconditioners, The "Beetle Man" Aubrey Springer and Peter Crowley for upholstery. General assistance and trailer and transport came from Feliciano Martins, Brian James, Graham Pringle and the ever-helpful Peter Truter.

Thanks to the Crankhandle Club Members for all their support and encouragement.



*March 2022, back on wheels*



*Peter Hills presenting the MGJ to the CHC members*



*Viv James sets up for a photo opportunity*



*Great restoration work Peter and team*

