

Your Cars

Continued from page 48

has more body. Then came filler, red primer, undercoat and last six aerosols of Holts Black cellulose. In between were hours of finger wearing rubbing with T-Cut. To my amateur eye it all seemed absolutely smooth but spraying soon revealed a multitude of minor plateaus. And a black painted car, more than any other colour tends to exhibit even the smallest blemish. Eventually the whole body will have to have what must be an expensive respray and much of the brightware rechromed also. Meanwhile hardly a day passes without some small item being added to that jobs to be done list. Obviously there is not going to be much time for thumb twiddling in the future and even so I doubt we shall ever reach the "as new" condition hoped for. But as the philosopher says it is sometimes better to travel hopefully than to arrive, or if you prefer it in verse:

If what shone afar so grand
turns to nothing in the hand
On again! the virtue lies
in the struggle not the prize!

I cannot remember the author. It should have been from Kipling's "IF" but is not.

In the last few days the Magnette has covered a lot of ground conforming to good mechanical state. Overheating was cured by removal of the thermostat. Petrol consumption established as 27mpg overall, with 30 on a long run. Oil: no sump gasket was available at rebuild and there is some leakage so 300 miles to the pint is reasonable. During a month of ownership my opinion of the car has changed with experience. After consulting fond memories of twenty years ago and reading *Autocar's* laudatory road test of 26 November, 1954 my first impressions by contrast were depressing. The tester found the road holding remarkable "... under appallingly wet weather conditions, the Magnette negotiated a right hand corner ... at a higher speed than any tester had driven through these in rain or shine". He praised the smooth quiet engine and gearbox - not at all like the later tappety 1500 and stiff gearbox of my Cambridge from the same organisation. Now in 1974 I thought the car no longer sleek and graceful but stubby and narrow. The "just right" driving position seemed more suitable for a bus driver after the Alpine and the seat itself ill-fitting with poor support for the thighs. My unease made cornering tentative resulting in an occasional disconcerting lurch. Performance all round seemed very mediocre. Applying the "what will she do" yardstick I noted 0-60mph five seconds slower than the most humble Escort and top speed a mere 80. But as the days passed the Magnette, like those roses, grew and grew on



Artist Gordon Horner at the wheel of his original MG Magnette.

me: I considered that other yardstick "How does it do it?" and warmed to rack and pinion steering with minimum play after 106,000 miles, synchromesh that still cannot be beaten, the engine that, although providing only moderate performance, at least does it with remarkable quiet and smoothness. And now with the bit properly between my teeth I realise that roadholding is at least up to today's average. All in all a car worth preservation, a model perhaps underrated and undervalued.

In the way of things, the very day after purchase, an identical but immaculate sister car visited our village. With under 60,000 on the clock and in mint condition it was going for £450 - less than half the price of the aforementioned Escort. Absence of chassis frame and excessive popularity with the stock car racing fraternity must lead to rarity. The spares situation is good, only kingpins seem a problem and since the MG Car Club has formed a Z Register one can expect the manufacture of pattern spares for these and other items in the future. ● **Gordon Horner**
Finally, PGX 469, where are you?!

CLASSIC OF THE MONTH

Swallow Doretti

THE TR2-powered Swallow Doretti was a valiant attempt by the Walsall based Swallow Coachbuilding Co (1935) Ltd, to break into the lucrative American market.

Despite the fact that the Swallow was Triumph powered, the chassis was tubular (rather more akin to the AC Ace than the TR2). This chassis was composed of a simple longitudinal ladder, based on two three-inch diameter 50 ton chrome molybdenum tubes with a channel section pressing welded above and below in the centre section.

The bodywork was of particular interest being double skinned. Out riggers supported the inner skin of the wheel arches and a rectangular tube formed the front bulkhead support. The body sides were formed as a single plate each side, with cut-outs for the doors, sheet steel pressings. This unusual double skinned bodywork was probably a reflection of the fact that the company worked extensively for the aircraft industry, the inner skin being steel and the outer aluminium.

The 2-litre Triumph engine was

mounted well back in the chassis, leaving room in front for a substantial cross member and making a modified three-piece track rod steering set up essential. Front suspension was the same as the Triumph, but at the rear radius rods were added to the basic leaf spring axle location.

Although the company claimed that the Doretti was better aerodynamically than the similarly powered TR2, it could manage only a maximum top speed of 97.3mph, compared with the Triumph's 103.5mph flat out. The fact that the Swallow Doretti weighed 56lbs more than the Triumph was no doubt a contributory factor to this state of affairs. The Doretti (so named after the daughter of the company's American importer, it is said) came in for some criticism when *The Autocar* came to road test it. The lack of leg room (no doubt caused by the engine being moved back in the chassis) came in for adverse comment, while the lack of luggage space was another bad point.

However, it was probably the price of £1101 that prevented the Doretti selling in larger numbers, particularly when it is remembered that the TR2 cost, by comparison, £844.

In view of this, it's not surprising to find that production ceased in 1955. All the cars were open two-seater, with the exception of a solitary fixed-head coupé. Nonetheless the Swallow Doretti was certainly an interesting variation on the TR2 theme, though I doubt whether many TR enthusiasts would agree! ●

