

# MAGGIE

## MAY

### MAIDSTONE TO MONACO AND BACK

Paul Saunders

Sometimes things happen for a reason. Back in 2011 I bumped into the dad of a boy I used to coach football.

'What happened to that old MG you had John?' I asked. 'Oh' he replied 'it's at my dad's and I must get rid of it, you don't know anyone that wants it do you?'

I have had a few cars in my time, including a couple of MGBs and a Midget. I also happen to be working with Martin White, a guy that knows more about MGBs than he does about most other subjects. I took half a dozen pictures into work and Martin looked at them and concluded that it would be a good fun car to own, so a price at £200 was agreed.

The clock rolled forward and Martin and I started our own company having fallen out of love with banking. It's time to tell you a bit more about Martin. His 1965 MGB is his pride and joy and knows all there is to know about MGs.

Eventually Martin persuaded me to get the BGT down to him so that he could work his magic. He went through it over the next few weeks and delivered back a really good little car with lots of shiny new basic parts. 2013 was good for Maggie, she entered the East Kent rally, and we met some nice new people and

had a great day out which even my wife agreed was fun. Although this fun was somewhat overshadowed by complete brake failure on Hollingbourne Hill one of the larger hills in Kent. Thankfully the handbrake and a modicum of skilful driving got us home without further calamity.

Out of the blue I get an email from a charity called Fields of Life, inviting us to enter a banger rally from Maidstone to Monaco. The criteria are simple: find a banger, purchase price up to £350, get it roadworthy and raise £1000 for the charity, in this case the Parenta Trust, building schools in Uganda and changing the lives of children permanently.

All of a sudden those random strands of my life come together. This is why I bought the MG, this is why Martin and I were thrown together as colleagues, then business partners and good friends, this is why we are both interested in MGBs. As I said things happen for a reason. We had the right car, and we were willing to risk driving it over some of the toughest terrain in Europe, including the notorious Furka Pass and the Route Napoleon down to the south of France.

Entry fee paid and bravado turns to reality as we contemplate a 2000 mile

journey for a car that has barely covered 50 in the last year. MoT goes well as the senior technician actually knows what he's doing, while new tyres immediately improved the ride and handling.

It's the 24th of June and we are set to go and both of us are feeling quite nervous. We were amazed at how much you can get in to a BGT, including our tents, boxes of spare parts and other essentials. Already respect for the car is growing as we head off down to Dover to pick up the ferry.

Day one was relatively kind with only 455 kilometres. After the initial briefing on the ferry and meeting all of the others it is clear this is going to be a fun trip. We stand out like a sore thumb as everyone else is in BMWs, large Volvos all capable of 100 mph plus and there's even a guy in a Range Rover Sport. There is much respect for us on the ferry, many are surprised that we'd made it to Dover. We arrive in the sunshine in France and head out of Dunkerque toward Metz via Belgium to avoid the tolls. Most of the drive is motorway just to get us to camp and Maggie is somewhat shocked by what has been asked of her and starts to cough a bit. We're greeted with a hearty welcome and our pride is difficult to disguise.

On day two we had just 703 km to cover, heading through the Black Forest down to Switzerland near Zurich and then over the legendary Furka Pass, before dropping down into the town of Visp. All is going well until the coughing of the previous day returns, this time more persistent and accompanied by the odd jolt. Martin has already devised a sequence of procedures and we start with the rotor arm. This makes little difference and we conclude that it's time for minor



Waiting to board ferry at Dover. Paul on phone



Paul and Martin, at the campsite on day 2



Martin replacing points in Barden Barden, Germany



Maggie with the lead car, Ghostbusters

surgery. We find a suitable lay-by right outside an open-air pool, which provides me with some pleasant scenery whilst 'Dr Martin' opens up the bonnet. This time we are looking at the points, which seem fine but suspicion lies around the condenser. A new one goes on and Martin times the ignition as best he can. We are up and running and head on to the autobahn. Maggie feels OK, not great, but for now she is running OK.

Yes, the local drivers really do go at any speed on the autobahn and any attempts for us to overtake have to be planned well in advance. We come off and head up towards the Furka pass. It is evident that Maggie is not completely happy. As we start to climb the power just drains away. Stress levels are rising and with me at the wheel and I'm really not sure we should be pressing on but the alternative is a very long drive into the night to avoid the pass.

We stop at the sign which says 'Start of Furka Pass,' to debate the pros and cons of pushing on. Martin thinks the ignition timing needs advancing 1 or 2 degrees. I guess after all those years of tinkering you get to know what is needed just by listening to and feeling what your car is telling you. Spanners out and 5 minutes later she is revving like a race car. We are both smiling again and our decision is made, we push on.

The pass has breathtaking hairpins, twists, turns and every bit of you feels alive. A lack of barriers gives an incredible view of the drops below, which heightens the senses even more as coming off the road would be a 'life changing' event. With a combination of adrenalin, a car now in top condition and the spectacular beauty of the pass we both agree that

this really is something special. We stop to gather a snow sample in June, which in itself is amazing. No wonder Messrs Clarkson, Hammond and May use it so frequently.

We are greeted at campsite like returning warriors, three hours later than the others but with real camaraderie as they share our achievement, erect our tent and cook us dinner. We sip beer and realise this was a special day; we had overcome adversity and taken on one of the best driving roads in Europe.

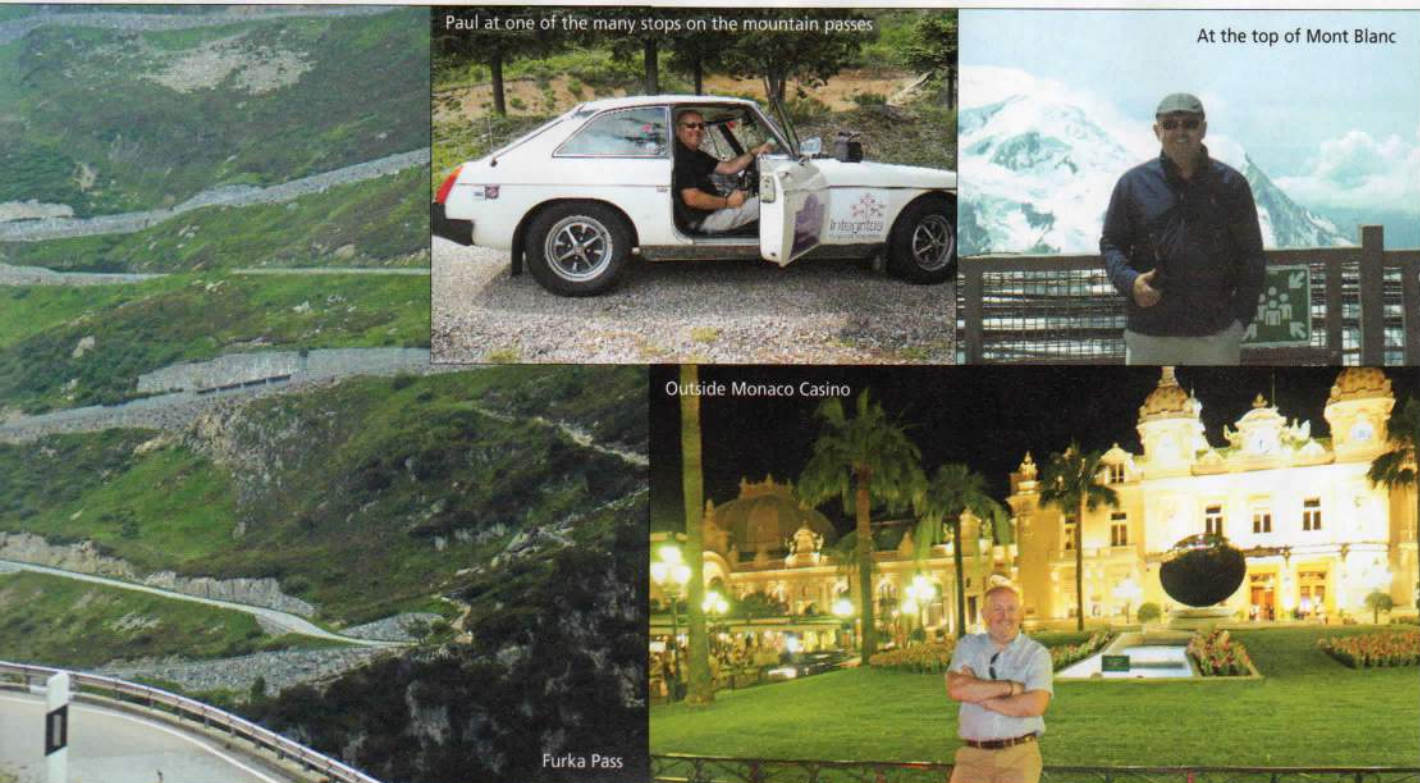
Still bursting with pride we head off on the third day to cover 353km at a leisurely pace, having taken a few pictures of Maggie in our pretty campsite. We head up towards Chamonix and inevitably we need to climb. It's a hot day and Maggie is also feeling the strain of continuous hairpins. Eventually we stop to allow her to spit out a bit of coolant whilst we sample some local French apricots and meet a lovely lady, who owned a MGB 25 years ago and clearly has fond memories of the car. We did not see another MGB during the whole of our trip which explains why the French are so keen to look at you as they pass by. We had many toots, waves and smiles as we worked our way through France which adds to the whole experience.

The fourth day was Martin's favourite, slightly tarnished by driving the wrong direction into what felt like the inside of a mountain and being stuck for about two hours before coming out pretty much where we started. With this disaster behind us we are heading for a place called Die. Thankfully we travel through unaffected and then onto the Napoleon Pass down to the coast at Nice. Martin is driving, the car is in peak condition and

rarely have I seen him look happier. We eat up the miles in some of the most enjoyable roads on the whole journey and arrive down at Cannes. The coastal road through here is spectacular and we take our time to enjoy the sites and sounds of this idyllic coast before heading into Monaco. As ever we are late but are somewhat surprised by the number of people taking pictures of us and ignoring the slightly more powerful Bugattis and Ferraris that are strewn around Casino Square like confetti. The phone goes and our team confirm that they have heard and seen Maggie arrive, I forgot to mention the sports exhaust, possibly her best redeeming feature. A night in Monaco is not cheap but once again we are greeted like returning heroes and a beer is thrust in our hand.

The return journey on the fifth day was a 15 hour drive from Monaco to Dunkerque, plenty of time to reflect on the tour and the achievements. So what have we learned? I guess to sum it up there is little more satisfying than taking something old and in need of a little TLC and nursing it through some of the toughest terrain in Europe, I am referring to the car of course although the drivers probably qualify. We learned a lot about each other, have a massive respect for Maggie who without a doubt was the star of the show and has now become a cool little car, with a bit of rally pedigree, instead of a tired old MG sat on the drive.

I hope you enjoyed our story and feel inspired to make your own road trip however big or small. Top tips would be take plenty of spares and someone who knows what they are doing, the rest is up to you.



Paul at one of the many stops on the mountain passes

At the top of Mont Blanc

Outside Monaco Casino

Furka Pass