



The Dashpot

May 2018

Near the end of April, I received an email note from Carole Earle. Carole is the widow of Hugo Leech (one of the Founders of the Ottawa MG Club, and the OMGC's 1st President [1990-1995]). Carole told me she recently found several pages of notes, written by Hugo, about the various cars he owned during his lifetime. She has shared these notes with me and hopes club members enjoy the story in this edition of *The Dashpot*.

April Meeting News:

One more BCCI Long Distance Award plaque was presented to club members, having accomplished the necessary 3000+ miles in 2017. Membership renewals were accepted and those folks that did renew received their copy of the OMGC full colour calendar for 2018-2019. A wide variety of bits of information about upcoming events was announced.

OMGC Driving-Season Kick-Off Get-Together held on Sunday, April 22nd.

The weather had improved significantly from the week before and many folks came out to get the driving season underway. Games and puzzles were enjoyed by everybody. Snacks and munchies and a cash bar was available.

[Click on this link to see some of the pictures of the event.](#)

[OMGC Silver Jubilee Grille Badges are available for sale at special prices. Click here to see the information.](#)



I'm pretty sure you will enjoy watching this video about "Two Classics: One Wonderful Car and One Wonderful Lady"

[Click here to watch the video.](#)

The next Regular Monthly Meeting of the Ottawa MG Club is **Thursday, May 17th** at to be announced

Announcements



MGVR 2018 FOCUS EVENT



VARAC VINTAGE GRAND PRIX

The *MG Vintage Racers* (MGVR) have selected VARAC's "Vintage Grand Prix" at the *Canadian Tire Motorsport Park in Ontario, Canada*, (Northeast of Toronto) the weekend of June 14-17 for our 2018 "Focus Event".



Looking Forward:

May 17:
[OMGC Monthly Meeting](#)

May 26-27
[Antique/Classic Car Club of Canada Show & Flea Market](#)

[Lombardy Fair Grounds](#)

May 26 - June 3
[British Car Week](#)

May 27
[Hudson Car Show](#)

June 9
[TRIO Day @ Robert Auto Parts](#)

June 13-17
[NAMGAR GT-42](#)
[Richmond VA](#)

June 14-17
[VARAC 2018](#)
[@ Mosport](#)

June 16
[Vintage Wings Canada – Fly In Breakfast – Planes & Cars Display](#)

June 17-22
[NAMGBR's MG 2018](#)
[Gettysburg PA](#)

June 23
[Show & Tell Car Display](#)
[Madonna Long Term Care Home](#)

June 24
[Wheels on the Mississippi Car Show](#)

July 1
[Return of the Gumball Rally](#)

check the website for updates

Volunteers needed for the All British Car Day (July 14th). [Click here to read about it](#)

"CARS IN MY LIFE"

by Hugo Leech,
President , Ottawa MG Club

"If it's old, it's good " seems to be the attitude towards cars nowadays. Somebody out there somewhere, has a low mileage Phase 1 Standard Vanguard in immaculate, original condition which is his or her pride and joy. This is a good thing because that model, which like some others, were regarded with some misgivings when new, might otherwise have disappeared for ever. The downside of this enthusiasm for older vehicles is that prices have long since gone through the roof and often bear no relationship to the quality or characteristics of the car. Most ordinary folk will never get the opportunity to drive let alone own, a classic car of the Twenties and Thirties and that is a great pity.

I'm lucky to have lived back in a time when the attitude was "If it's old, it's cheap". In Britain in the early 50's, you could buy a thirty year old Type 35 Grand Prix Bugatti for less than the cost of a new Morris Minor. I couldn't afford either of them, I have to say, but I did manage to own a lot of other cars that were unforgettable. They were all old, all cheap and some were good while others were pretty terrible.

My first car was a 1925 Citroën tourer, which was 27 years old when I bought it. Despite the fact that a previous owner had replaced the original front fenders with a racy cycle-type pair, it cruised at a genuine 20 MPH, which was about right for its brakes which were fitted to the rear wheels only. Actually there was another brake on the drive shaft, but this had a tendency to catch fire if you used it, so you didn't. It was a lot safer and more fun stationary than moving. All the fittings were made of brass and were lovingly polished every day. I think I got through more Brasso than 'petrol' when I owned it.

The Citroën was followed by a 1926 Delaunay-Belleville. For those of you who might have forgotten, Delaunay-Belleville was a French manufacturer of ships' boilers that took to making large luxury cars in around 1905. The radiators and hoods were of a

circular section, reminiscent of their marine ironware. Possibly their greatest claim to fame is that the last Czar of All the Russias owned a couple. He was more or less obliged to hand them over to Messrs Trotsky and Lenin who used them after the Revolution. Mine had a Maythorne limousine body that was meant to be driven not by the owner but by the hired help. It carried five passengers, in absolute luxury in the back, surrounded by hide upholstery, rosewood inlaid with ivory, and crystal decanters. The crew, sat in equally complete discomfort in the front, on simulated cardboard seats and with no side windows. There was a glass partition in between, to make sure that the two classes didn't get mixed-up. The engine was a large, long stroke four, with dual ignition - a coil worked one set of plugs, and a magneto worked another. The sound effects were magnificent and the reason I bought it in the first place. There was a hole in the muffler which resulted in the car sounding like my dream car, the 3 Litre Bentley. The wheels were of the artillery type, with wooden spokes and high pressure beaded edge tyres running at 90 lbs p.s.i. A blowout was really a blowout in those days.

The doors at the back could only be locked from the inside. In other words, you could lock people out of the car but you couldn't lock them in, if you see what I mean. On one occasion, I managed to entice my dancing partner out of the Summer Ball at Sandhurst and into the car park, so that we could sit in the back of the car and discuss the relative merits of Brahms and Beethoven or whatever. I was not amused to find that a friend of mine had got there first with his lady and locked me out.

My chief memory of the car was that, being an impecunious officer cadet, I was always running out of gas in it. Getting it going again meant priming an Autovac device that sucked the fuel from the back end to the engine compartment, and then pushing the car for a long distance, in gear, to get the new gas into the cylinders. It was a very heavy car for my girlfriend to push and eventually she delivered the inevitable ultimatum. I was sorry to see her go.

After a while the Delaunay had to go too. It was replaced by a 1930 Triumph Super 7. Now, I don't have anything against Triumphs; some of my best friends own them. An early Dolomite is a fine car,

and so are most of the TR's, but a Super 7 was really quite nasty. True, it had the first hydraulic brakes for a car of its type, but in the case of mine, they would only work diagonally and in a random sequence. In other words, you had to be prepared to use a lot of opposite lock every time you wanted to stop. The starter had gone, as had the handcrank, so to get it fired-up, you pushed it a bit, jumped in, engaged 2nd gear and let out the clutch. One learnt very quickly where not to park it. I wasn't quite so quick learning that it was a bad car in which to teach a (subsequent) girlfriend how to drive.

In this case, it was the Triumph that departed, and a 1932 F Magna MG came into my life. I don't know how many F Magnas have survived. Not too many, I would imagine, and certainly not the one that I owned. The body had been cut down into a "boy's racer" with no doors, no windshield and no top. The only protection was a tiny aero screen which looked more effective than it really was. I can't remember who I thought I was impressing with this long low red sports car. London buses would see me off at traffic lights and anyone with any knowledge at all, knew that the F had a chassis made of baling wire and a Wolsley-based 6 cylinder motor of very lowly heritage. But it did have a gearbox that was absolute heaven, with a little stubby lever working in an exposed gate (like a Ferrari's). First and Third were nearest to you, Second and Top were furthest away. That was nice too.

There was then a hiatus in my car-owning life. Being in the British Army in those days, meant going off at regular intervals, to far-flung outposts of Empire where the natives were restless. Transport was mostly provided by early Landrovers which were considered to be a little on the boring side, but not too bad when you lowered the top and the windshield. (This also made them easier to shoot out of when ambushed).

In the mid Fifties I was home on leave and bought a 1925 Bean. This was your average four seat tourer massed-produced by a company now long forgotten. The gear shift was on the right hand side which was fairly common for right hand drive cars of that time. Unfortunately, I had fallen off an army 500 BSA motor cycle and broken my right hand. Every time I missed a gear change, half the

Plaster of Paris cast would be reduced to powder on the car's floor. Also it hurt.

So the Bean went and a 1936 Riley Adelphi took its place. It was a four door saloon, which was not very enterprising for a young single man-about-town . But Rileys, before the Nuffield organization absorbed the firm, were great cars with a fine sporting heritage. Mine, like most of them, had a Wilson Preselector gearbox. You could choose the next gear ahead of time with a lever on the steering column, and shift later, by pushing on the left pedal (which was a "gear change pedal" rather than a clutch). This was very useful when going quickly round corners and the Wilson box was used in a lot of racing cars in the Thirties. It was also great for people with broken right wrists.

The brakes started to bind in a big way, and I subsequently discovered that the rear road spring shackles had gone. All that was holding the whole rear axle assembly to the rest of the car, were the four bolts attaching the propshaft to the back of the gearbox. These would gradually slacken off and the back axle would move aft and apply the brakes, which were cable-operated. It was no big deal, every once in awhile, I would jack up the rear end, push the back axle forward with my foot and take up the slack on the four bolts. It did affect the handling though, because the car steered from both ends.

The Riley was followed by something quite fierce for its time, a 1950 M Type Allard with a drophead body. It had a Ford Mercury engine with two Carter four choke carburetors and went like muck off a shovel. Regrettably it produced this performance in no particularly defined direction. It was murder trying to keep it between the hedgerows at the very high speeds it was happy to travel at. I was glad to see it go, as were all my family and friends who feared for my life. I've never been able to understand the devotion the marque has today. Either mine was a rogue copy or, as I suspect is more likely, the devotees have never had to sit in one doing 95 MPH. I believe though, that the J2X is a different breed.

Next, came one of the zeniths of my motoring life - a 1931 Two Litre Lagonda with Van den Plas style 4 seat touring body. The

Lagonda was then, and I believe still is, a fine British sports car. You could tell the quality by the way everything was constructed and worked - smoothly and accurately. A penalty of all this was that it was a very heavy car. That's one way of looking at it, of course. The other way is to say that it was under-engined. I don't know what the power output was, but my guess would be in around 40 horses. This to propel two tons of motor car.

Acceleration wasn't exactly sparkling, but once you'd got it cranked up to its cruising speed of 65-70 MPH, you could stay there all day. It had been supercharged when new - it still had a guage on the dash saying "boost" and measured in lbs per square inch. The guage wasn't connected to anything anymore, but it always impressed any young schoolboy who saw it. I was very tempted to put a supercharger back on it again until someone pointed out that it would produce another 5 horse power, take 3 horses to drive it, (net gain - 2 hp) and would increase the gas mileage from 13 miles per gallon, to about 3!

Most books on vintage sports cars will mention the 2 Litre's gearbox. Like all other boxes before synchromesh was invented, it was known as a "crash" box because of the sound effects it made when you didn't get the revs exactly right while shifting. It was murderously difficult to use even by the standards of the day. The black art of double de-clutching had to be practised for shifting gears both up and down. In four years of ownership, I seldom went through a whole day without graunching at least one gear change.

I raced it at Silverstone in Vintage Sports Car Club handicap events in the 1960's. Being on the slow side, I would be let go ahead of the field like a sort of mechanical hare. Eventually, everyone else would come by me in one great bunch and I would continue on to the end of the race in splendid isolation once more. It was only rarely exciting and compared with the open road, always safe. You raced against people who took driving seriously and who loved their cars. You were also going in more or less the same direction most of the time.

There used to be a great deal of snobbery and class consciousness in the old car circles of UK. This resulted in my passing

up a number of "buys" which today, give me a lot of financial heartburn. A 1939 SS100 came my way for \$500 and was turned down politely, as was a 1949 M.G. TC for \$200. They were both nice enough cars to drive, but neither of them was considered to be top draw. My attitude has changed considerably since then.

I very much regret to say that marriage changed my motoring habits in a big way. First the Lagonda went. It was initially replaced by a 1951 Mercedes Benz 220, which wasn't bad, but over the next few years, I tended to run around in family sedans of boring demeanor. In Germany, I had four VW Beetles in succession, and a 1965 Fiat 1500, the only new car in my life, and one whose acceleration would see off all MG's, TR's and Healeys but which was very unpredictable on wet roads. In Malaysia I owned a Simca 1000, and a Peugeot 403 (Like Colombo's, but with a top).

In Malaysia, I met a rubber planter who had a reputation for a collection of old sports cars and for being a bit bushed from living in the jungle too long. I got to drive his 1926 3 Litre Bentley and 1936 Railton and would have driven the Bentley in the Johore Grand Prix, had he not exchanged both cars for an antique grandfather clock, two weeks before race day.

In 1969 I made a number of big decisions. They included changing my country, my profession and my motoring way of life. It was time to leave the army, emigrate to Canada, and to get a good car again. Thinking that it might be difficult to find a car I could afford in Canada, I decided to buy one before I emigrated. Having a wife and a young family seemed to rule out a sports car so I acquired the next best thing - a 1953 R Type Bentley. Although its handling was somewhat ponderous, it was swift enough and gave a lot of driving pleasure by virtue of the Rolls-Royce precision with which everything worked.

My wife and I drove from Vancouver to Ottawa in just under 5 days on one occasion and were as fresh at the end of the trip as we were at the beginning. Bentleys made by Rolls are a little outside the experience of the average North American but even if people didn't know what it was, they sure knew enough to be impressed all to heck. This could work both ways. On the cross Canada trip I was

turned down for a motel room in the Sault. The clerk said that the place was full but I suspected that the clerk didn't like the look (and possibly the smell) of my travelling clothes. Suddenly he noticed the Bentley sitting outside. "Is that yours? It is? Good heavens, I forgot all about this cancellation, I think we have a room for you after all".

On the other hand a boss of mine looked very unhappy when he discovered that one of his minnions owned a Rolls-Bentley whereas he only owned a Cadillac,. Everyone assumed that I must be rich, and didn't pay much attention when I told them that the Bentley cost \$2,000 to buy and ship to Canada and the family Rambler station wagon cost \$2,500.

I made a lot of good friends in the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club when I joined it in B.C. and had some excellent times with them. I did my time as a concours judge and knew how to reduce the owner of a 99.9 point car to tears. I couldn't believe how seriously some people can get about showing their cars. When, at the Pebble Beach Concours, I saw a man punch out a passing spectator who happened to brush against his Pegaso, I decided that the concours thing is not for me.

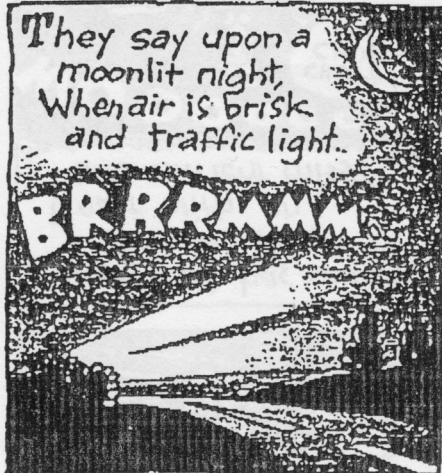
On one occasion I was asked to drive a fellow member's 1923 3 Litre Bentley at the vintage races at Laguna Seca. This was dream sequence stuff. The uphill parts of the race course were a little on the tedious side in a 56 year old car . The downhill bits, including the "Corkscrew" more than made up for any lack of excitement elsewhere. I finished up half way down the field. But that didn't bother me, I had raced with a Formula1 World Champion - Phil Hill, who won in his 4 1/2 Litre Blower Bentley - and could die with a smile on my face!

It was at about this time, that I got to drive a car that I had never paid much attention to - the MGB. It was a 1969 model and it was lent to a friend of mine and myself, for an extended tour on the Olympic Peninsular. I had forgotten completely what open air motoring was all about. Since my Bentley had gone to pay the legal fees for a divorce, I decided that I would get me a "B" as soon as I could. A couple of years later, in 1981, I bought the 1965 model I still own, and at this stage of my life, have every intention of sticking with it.

The Continuing Saga OF Hugo Leech



"Automotive
Anachronism"



An ancient car,
with spindly wheels,
Disturbs the dark
with tire squeals..

