

Bob Olthoff and his MGA Twin Cam revisited: Part One

By Edward Vandyk



Robert Jacob 'Bob' Olthoff (1937–2004) is a name that often features, if only briefly, in any history of MG. Both Bob and his car deserve more than a passing mention, not so much because of the results he obtained racing his MGA Twin Cam, but because his car was the only standard bodied Twin Cam that competed in period in an FIA International race with the 1762cc, or Le Mans, Twin Cam engine.

I researched Bob, Bob's car and the history of the 1762cc Twin Cam engine with a view to building a replica of Bob's car. This threw up as many questions as answers particularly about the relationship between MG and Bob, their approach to the 1961 season and Bob's challenges in trying to break into the UK motor racing scene in the early 1960s.

However it was Bob's 'Phoenix Park' letter in the 18 August 1961 edition of *Autosport* which led me to take another look at his story and, in particular, those parts of it which seemed difficult to take at face value. More of that letter and the circumstances surrounding it later.

Bob's story appeared in the March 1962 edition of *Safety Fast!*, his car having been featured on the cover of the January edition.

A road test of Bob's car by Paddy McNally was published in the 9 March 1962 *Autosport*. The March 1962 edition of *Motoring*, the BMC house magazine, also ran an article about Bob and his MGA.

Bob's story has essentially always been – as told by Bob – and needs to be reviewed in the context of his situation in March 1962. This article is both a précis of that story and a commentary on certain aspects of it based not only Bob's story, as he told it, but also on other information that has come to light.

Bob campaigned with his MGA Twin Cam (YDH5/929) in South Africa, the UK, Ireland and Germany from 1959 to 1962. In 1959 Bob took delivery of the first Twin Cam to be assembled in South Africa. He raced it in South Africa with some success. In March

Phoenix Park

IN your report of the Phoenix Park races in Ireland you state that my M.G.A. Twin-Cam was 1,762 c.c. I had entered with this engine size but due to a "technical hitch", a large hole in the block, I no longer have a 1,762 c.c. engine and in fact I was using the normal 1,588 c.c. engine in Ireland!

I think I must now hold the record for "turned down" entries this season. My entries have been turned down six times this season, for three International and three National events. I always get the letter saying that the event is oversubscribed but when you see the performance of the cars that actually start, it becomes obvious that I do not spend enough time in certain well-known clubs.

I think it is time that organizers of so-called International events try their hand at getting together an International entry. I am a South African; maybe the political situation has something to do with the entries.

We all know, of course, that if you own a well-known, sought-after motor car, your entry will never be turned down but we cannot all afford, or get, these cars.

It is, in my opinion, silly when an organizer runs six or seven cars of the same make in a G.T. race, some of them not even homologated.

To make sure that the entrant believes that the entry was oversubscribed the organizer does not send his little letter off until it is too late to enter for another meeting, and naturally we cannot enter for two meetings on the same day for that would upset the organizers.

For one meeting this year five cars were accepted that had not even been delivered, and my entry was turned down. Five days before the meeting the organizer phoned and told me there had been a mix-up and asked if I would like to compete.

I am sure that there are a lot of people that feel the way I do and it cannot be anything else but harmful to the sport.

J. R. OLTHOFF.

OXFORD.

1960, aged 22 and to further his racing career, he flew to the UK with his new wife but without his car.

In the UK he got a job with MG in Abingdon, sent for his Twin Cam from South Africa and competed in it with, necessarily unofficial, factory support in

1960, 1961 and 1962 with moderate success.

Bob was the MG reserve driver and mechanic at Sebring in 1961 and actually drove there in 1962 as well as being Ted Lund's co-driver in the special bodied MGA, SRX 210, at Le Mans in 1961. Bob was a talented driver and his coming third in the 1961 Autosport Championship was an achievement, nevertheless this was probably the least successful period of his racing career. It was however key to creating motor sport opportunities for him in the years ahead.

Bob's March 1962 story necessarily ends at that point, the conclusion being that he had finished racing his MGA Twin Cam and that he was looking beyond MG and BMC for a works drive. He also sought to explain why his car had been competitive in 1961 when essentially no other MGA Twin Cam had been. A few subsequent articles, mainly written in conjunction with him, appeared 20 or more years later.

The question as to what capacity engine Bob had been running in 1961 was highlighted by the Autosport letter yet, surprisingly, there was no mention of engine capacity in any of the March 1962 articles, nor of any holed block.

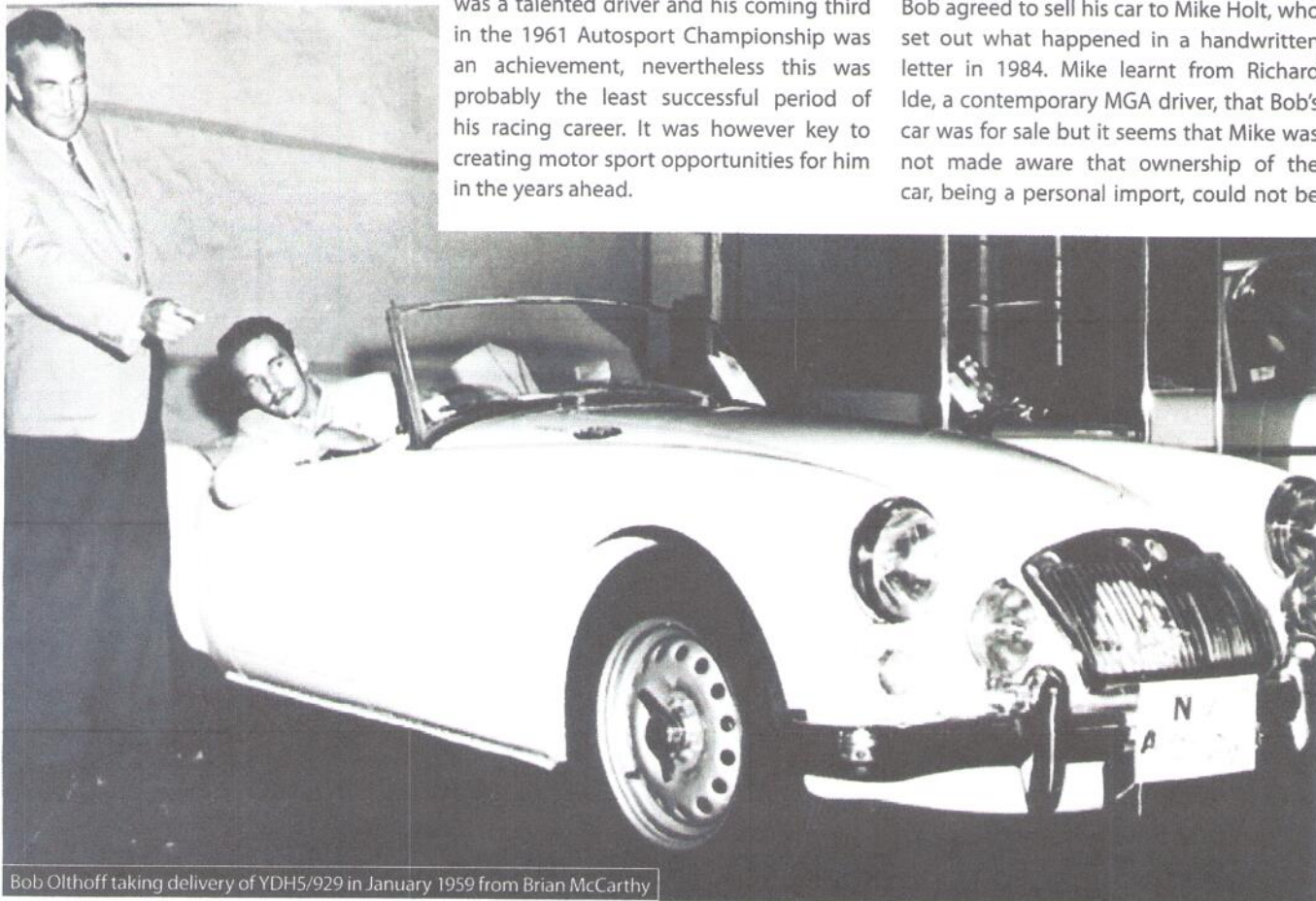
March 1962 and beyond

Bob's exploits with his MGA did not end in March 1962. He competed in the May 1962 Nurburgring 1000km race. He had all sorts of dramas in practice, and a major engine failure meant he did not finish. As in 1961 his co-driver was John Whitmore. He entered and raced in the Sports and GT Prototype category at 1762cc.

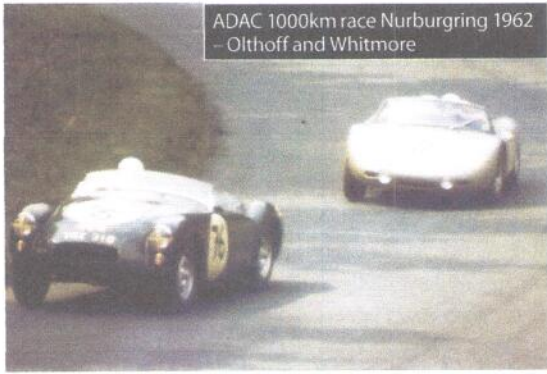
Bob last raced in his car in July 1962 at Snetterton, entered at 1588cc, and used it as everyday transport until September 1963.

To sell or not to sell

After the 1962 Nurburgring 1000km race Bob agreed to sell his car to Mike Holt, who set out what happened in a handwritten letter in 1984. Mike learnt from Richard Ide, a contemporary MGA driver, that Bob's car was for sale but it seems that Mike was not made aware that ownership of the car, being a personal import, could not be



Bob Olthoff taking delivery of YDH5/929 in January 1959 from Brian McCarthy

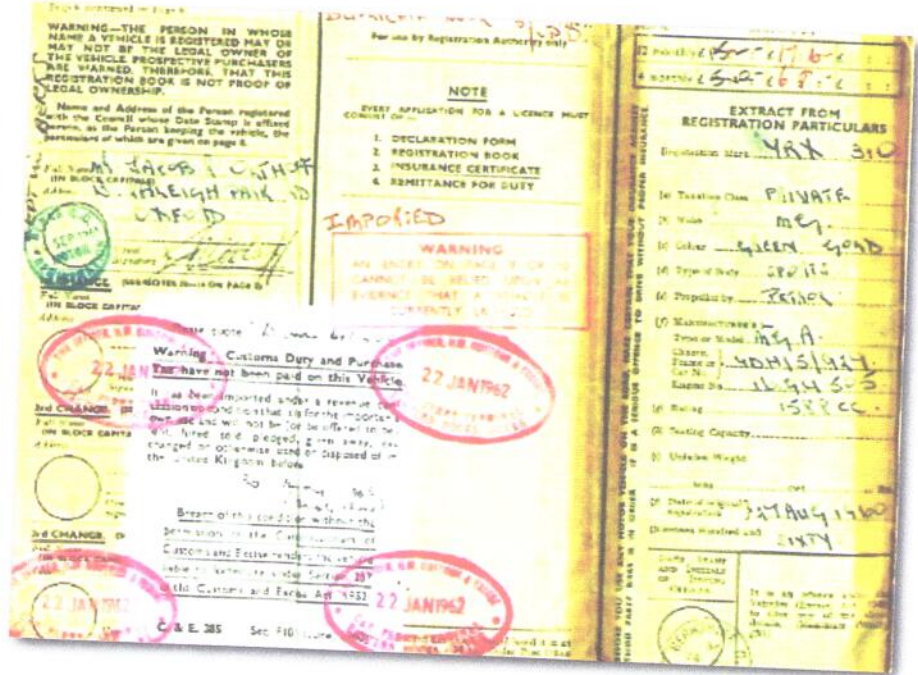


ADAC 1000km race Nurburgring 1962 - Olthoff and Whitmore

transferred until May 1963.

Bob took Mike for an alarming test drive around Oxford, visited Syd Enever, looked at the prototype MGB and shook hands at £1,100, with delivery set for some weeks later. Bob subsequently told Mike that he had agreed to lend the car to Paddy Hopkirk to compete in a race at Phoenix Park in Dublin on 14 July 1962. In fact the car was never entered for the Dublin meeting. The story continues, the car was seemingly shipped back to Liverpool from Ireland and a mechanic sent from the factory to collect it. The mechanic apparently mistook the radiator header tank for the oil filler and there was another failed engine!

Whatever really happened, the sale fell through. Interestingly, when Bob sold the car to Roland Greenwood in 1963 for £650 there was a racing head with oil residue in the water passages and Roland tells the



story of degreasing it in a bath at an Officers Mess in Germany. The engine failure at the 1962 Nurburgring 1000km may well have left Bob with an oiled-up head.

There is a photograph of Bob's car competing at Silverstone, driven by Jack Paterson, on 14 July 1962, the same day as it was supposedly in Dublin.

So why the Irish yarn? Perhaps Bob recognised he could not complete the sale because of the import restriction, and wanted to present this as 'force majeure'

rather than going back on his word. His relationships in 1962 with his motor racing peers may have dictated the embellishment.

Back to the Log Book

Having imported his MGA, Bob registered it as YRX 310 on 27 August 1960 and a duplicate Log Book was issued to him on 14 September 1961. The duplicate sale restriction was added in January 1962. The 310 number may have a significance in the

14 July 1962 Silverstone - J S Paterson driving



Nürburgring 1000km

Ferrari (9min 25.5sec), the Mairesse-Parkes 4-litre Berlinetta (9min 34.8sec), the Bonnier-Gurney Porsche (9min 36.4sec), the Rodriguez brothers' Ferrari (9min 40.5sec), the Hill-Herrmann Porsche (9min 42sec), and the McLaren-Maggs DBR1-300 Aston Martin—which, also entered by John Ogier, was alleged to be on loan from the Montagu Motor Museum!

Practice brought its spate of stories. The Lumsden-Sergent E-type Jaguar coupé was relegated to the Prototype class for having Weber carburetors. Its manufacturers assured the drivers that application had been made to the *Commission Sportive Internationale* for homologation in this form, yet a 'phone call to M. Schroeder, secretary of the C.S.I., resulted in an assurance that no such application had been received. Foitek's very fast Giulietta, too, was relegated to this category for having disc brakes, as was Hobbs' Lotus Elite for having a Hobbs transmission; last year, before the Prototype category came into being, it was put into the Sports class for the same reason. One of Ian Walker's formula Junior Ford-engined Lotus 23s required new suspension springs. A local firm worked all night machining material that was too thick, and making new springs—all without charging a penny! The Olthoff-Whitmore 1,760 c.c. M.G. Series MGA, after dropping a valve and breaking a piston, managed to reach the starting line following the burning of many gallons of midnight oil.

Despite grey, cold, overcast weather throughout practice, together with intermittent rain, the crowds continued arriv-

a specific car has to be done 'as entered', rather than 'as ran'. Consequently any infringement of the rules in period will not get sanctified later by the subsequent issue of an HTP.

Bob's car had run in three FIA International, and thus HTP qualifying, races, namely the 1961 and 1962 Nurburgring 1000km races and the 1961 Goodwood Tourist Trophy. In both of the 1961 races Bob entered in the GTS, or Class 3, category of the then current Appendix J of the ISC. This required the car to run at the homologated capacity of 1588cc although, paradoxically, it did allow the fibreglass wings. Regardless of the capacity at which he actually ran in 1961 an HTP at 1588cc only would be attainable in respect of that year. Period E runs up until the end of 1961 and thereafter it becomes Period F. Different periods impose different safety requirements, for example, a Period F car requires a Roll Over Protection System and a foam filled fuel tank whereas Period E does not.

This only left the 1962 Nurburgring 1000km race which Bob had entered in the Sports and GT Prototype, or Class 4, category. That category would have allowed an entry

at 1762cc, unlike the Period E races, so now it only remained to prove his car had entered and run at 1762cc.

After an initially fruitless search I tracked down an Autocar report of the 1962 Nurburgring race which referred to Bob running at 1760cc. However Appendix K states in period reporting requires two such articles in order to validate a specification. ADAC organised the Nurburgring 1000km races and their programmes delineate only the class and not the capacity. ADAC were adamant they kept no archives but since the Germans have always been meticulous record keepers I persisted. My breakthrough came when a German motoring journalist came to know of my quest through a mutual friend. He managed to convince ADAC that their statement that they did not keep records was, at least, suspect and was allowed a trawl of their basement, which threw up the class entry sheet for the 1962 race showing an entry for a 1762cc MGA Twin Cam. Bob's car was the only MG in the class and the only MG which participated in the race.

I had the evidence I needed, now what to do with it – to be continued. ●

1762cc story but, again, more of that later.

Bob raced the car, and used it as everyday transport, under its South African registration of TK13320 up until 16 September 1961, over a year after he should have changed it to YRX 310. Quite why he did this will never be known.

Why Bob's car and why an HTP?

I wanted to get an FIA Historical Technical Passport or HTP for a standard bodied MGA Twin Cam at 1762cc rather than the homologated capacity of 1588cc. I was aware others had tried and failed. I identified that replicating Bob's car was a possible route to doing this. His car also had fibreglass front and rear wings which were homologated for the MGA 1600 MkII but not the Twin Cam.

An HTP validates the car's specification, whether an original car or a replica, as being how it ran in period in an FIA International Race. In researching the specification of Bob's car, I ended up researching both Bob himself and his time with MG from 1960 to 1963.

To get an HTP at 1762cc I had to prove that Bob's car ran in an appropriate race in period at the 1762cc capacity and replicate it exactly save for the safety requirements imposed by the FIA. The rules for obtaining an HTP are set out in the current Appendix K of the International Sporting Code, or ISC, relating to historic motor sport. This document runs to over 80 pages! Appendix K is quite clear when it says replicating



Some of Bob Olthoff's races in his MGA Twin Cam 1960-1962



The Replica, YRX 800

Bob Olthoff and his MGA Twin Cam revisited: Part Two

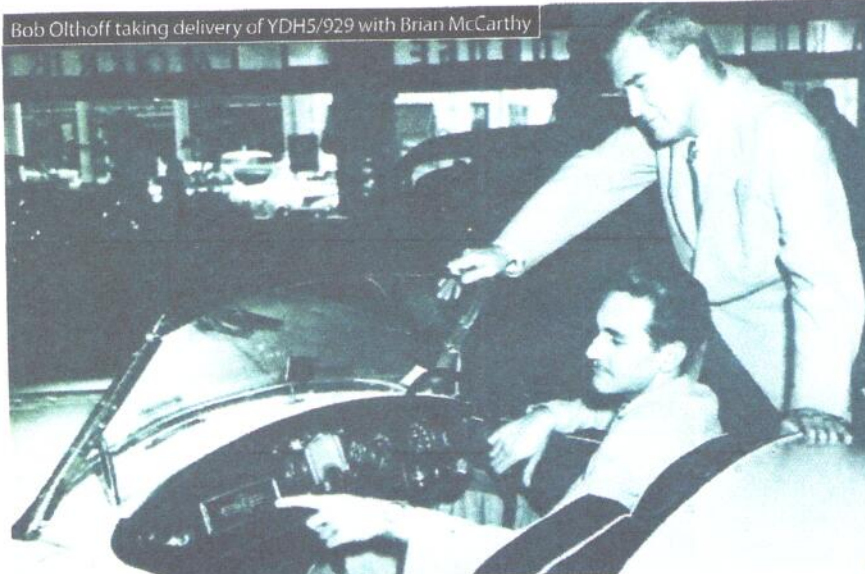
By Edward Vandyk

The first part of this article included a précis of Bob's story, looked at some aspects of it, and set out how I proved Bob ran with a 1762cc engine in the 1962 Nurburgring 1000km race and how to go about getting an HTP if I built a replica of Bob's car.

I built the replica, based on YD1/1282 and registered as YRX 800, of Bob's MGA Twin Cam, YDH5/929 registered as TK13320 in South Africa and later YRX 310 in the UK. It replicated Bob's car as it entered the Nurburgring 1000km races in 1961 and 1962 and the 1961 Tourist Trophy. I obtained an HTP with two alternative engine capacities, 1588cc and 1762cc.

Bob's original car, YRX 310, is owned by Michael Eaton in the USA and I am indebted

Bob Olthoff taking delivery of YDH5/929 with Brian McCarthy



Bob and workmates. Tim Binnington top row left.



to him for his support, encouragement and for the many hundreds of photographs, emails and measurements he sent me which enabled me to build my car.

Building the replica, and the challenges that created, is a whole other story.

Back to Bob and his story.

Bob's big break

Bob's really big break was landing a job at Abingdon, and not only a job, but one that gave him both time to work on his car and the parts to make it competitive. In reality it made him a works privateer.

Bob came fifth in his first South Africa race in 1959 in his Twin Cam, a race run with Abingdon support. He was inveigled into buying his car and entering this race by Noel Horsfield, who promised him that he could jump the queue and get the first CKD MGA Twin Cam in South Africa by agreeing to enter. Horsfield was sales director of the South African MG agents and a friend of John Thornley, the MD at Abingdon.

Bob flew to the UK with his new bride, Helene, in March 1960 with seemingly limited funds and with the sole intention of furthering his racing career. Bob requested

Phoenix Park

IN your report of the Phoenix Park races in Ireland you state that my M.G.A. Twin-Cam was 1,762 c.c. I had entered with this engine size but due to a "technical hitch", a large hole in the block, I no longer have a 1,762 c.c. engine and in fact I was using the normal 1,588 c.c. engine in Ireland!

I think I must now hold the record for "turned down" entries this season. My entries have been turned down six times this season, for three International and three National events. I always get the letter saying that the event is oversubscribed but when you see the performance of the cars that actually start, it becomes obvious that I do not spend enough time in certain well-known clubs.

I think it is time that organizers of so-called International events try their hand at getting together an International entry. I am a South African; maybe the political situation has something to do with the entries.

We all know, of course, that if you own a well-known, sought-after motor car, your entry will never be turned down but we cannot all afford, or get, these cars.

It is, in my opinion, silly when an organizer runs six or seven cars of the same make in a G.T. race, some of them not even homologated.

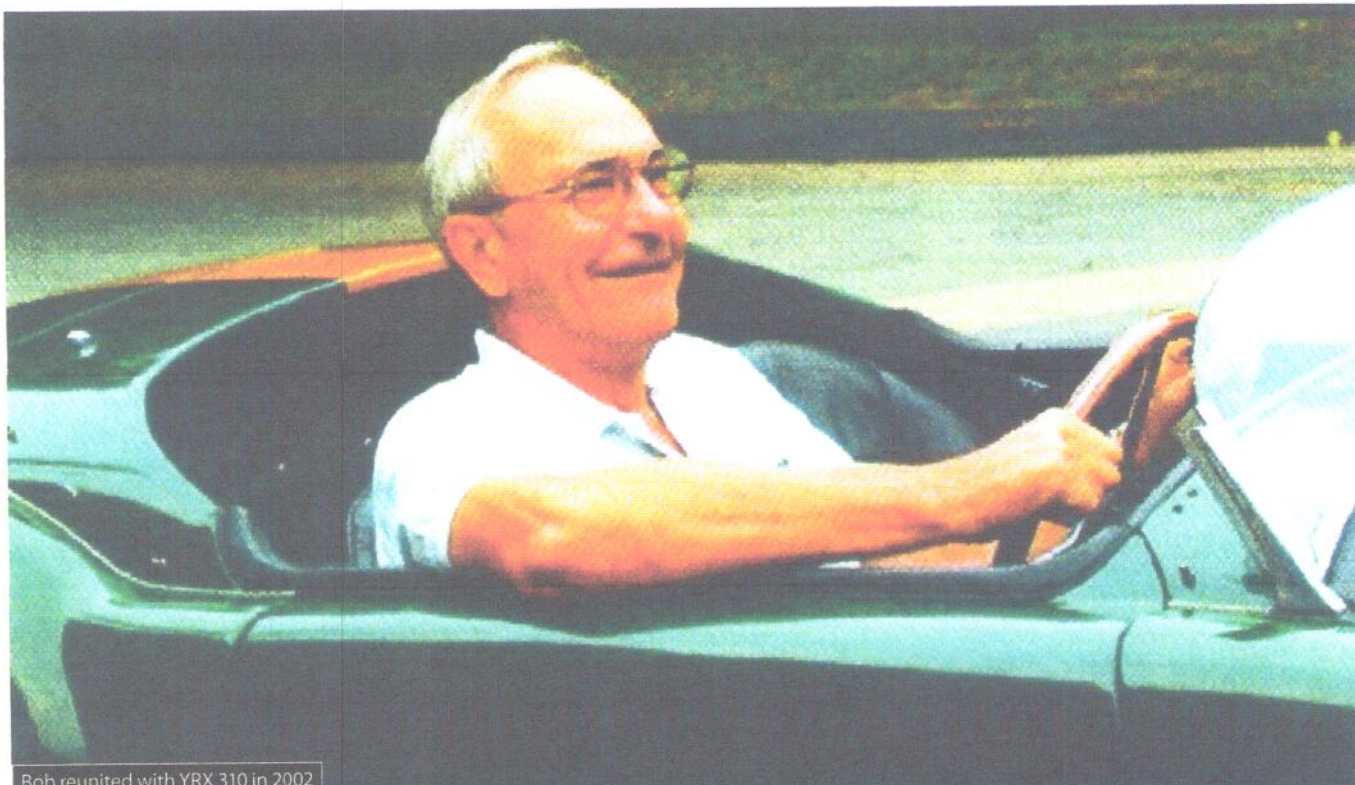
To make sure that the entrant believes that the entry was oversubscribed the organizer does not send his little letter off until it is too late to enter for another meeting, and naturally we cannot enter for two meetings on the same day for that would upset the organizers.

For one meeting this year five cars were accepted that had not even been delivered, and my entry was turned down. Five days before the meeting the organizer phoned and told me there had been a mix-up and asked if I would like to compete.

I am sure that there are a lot of people that feel the way I do and it cannot be anything else but harmful to the sport.

OXFORD.

J. R. OLTHOFF.



Bob reunited with YRX 310 in 2002

money for their trip in lieu of wedding presents and left his Twin Cam behind in South Africa.

As Bob told it in 1962, in the fortnight after arriving he asked Colin Chapman of Lotus for a drive with no success and he may well have approached others. He then travelled to Abingdon and met Thornley. MG themselves did not race so any request by Bob for a works drive would seem somewhat unlikely. Nevertheless after a factory tour and a cup of tea Thornley offered Bob a job in the Show Shop under Tim Binnington. When Bob did not turn up at Abingdon to start work as anticipated Thornley enquired as to why not. It transpired Bob had a £30 unpaid bill at the Overseas Visitors Club in London which he could not settle. Thornley paid Bob's bill, Bob moved to Abingdon and then subsequently to Botley, near Oxford.

Bob says he sent for his Twin Cam which his father shipped to him and it duly arrived, damaged in transit, sometime prior to the beginning of June 1960. Bob, having competed in South Africa on 18 March 1960, was back out on track again on 3 June 1960 in an MGCC event at Silverstone. Not only was he out on track with a repaired car and a rebuilt engine but he was leading the race until his visor fell off. He finished second. The engine was rebuilt and the in-transit damage repaired at Abingdon, although how the impoverished and newly employed Bob, on £12 a week, paid for this work, always assuming he did pay, must remain an open question.

This sequence of events, as Bob told

them, whilst entirely possible, is somewhat implausible. Bear in mind that Bob would, back in 1962 and as an ongoing MG employee, have had to relate his story very much from the standpoint of MG not supporting works entries. This included Bob maintaining an image as a privateer rather than MG employing him as a works entrant.

It is also possible, even likely, that Bob's potential employment at Abingdon was an option set up prior to Bob leaving South Africa. The advantages it offered both parties, particularly MG, cannot be overestimated. Whilst Bob may well have preferred a works drive, the fallback position at MG offered him a job which paid him and gave him racing support. MG, on the other hand, got far more.

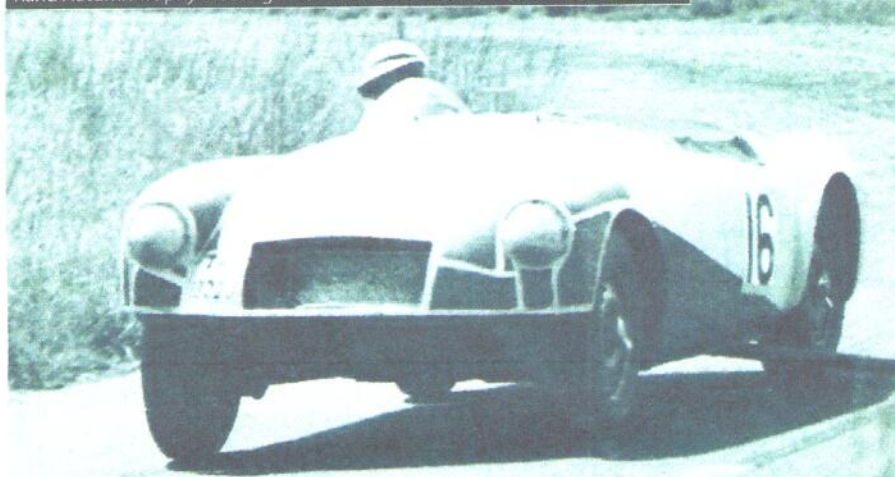
MG acquired a shop floor employee in a role that could be both afforded and, if

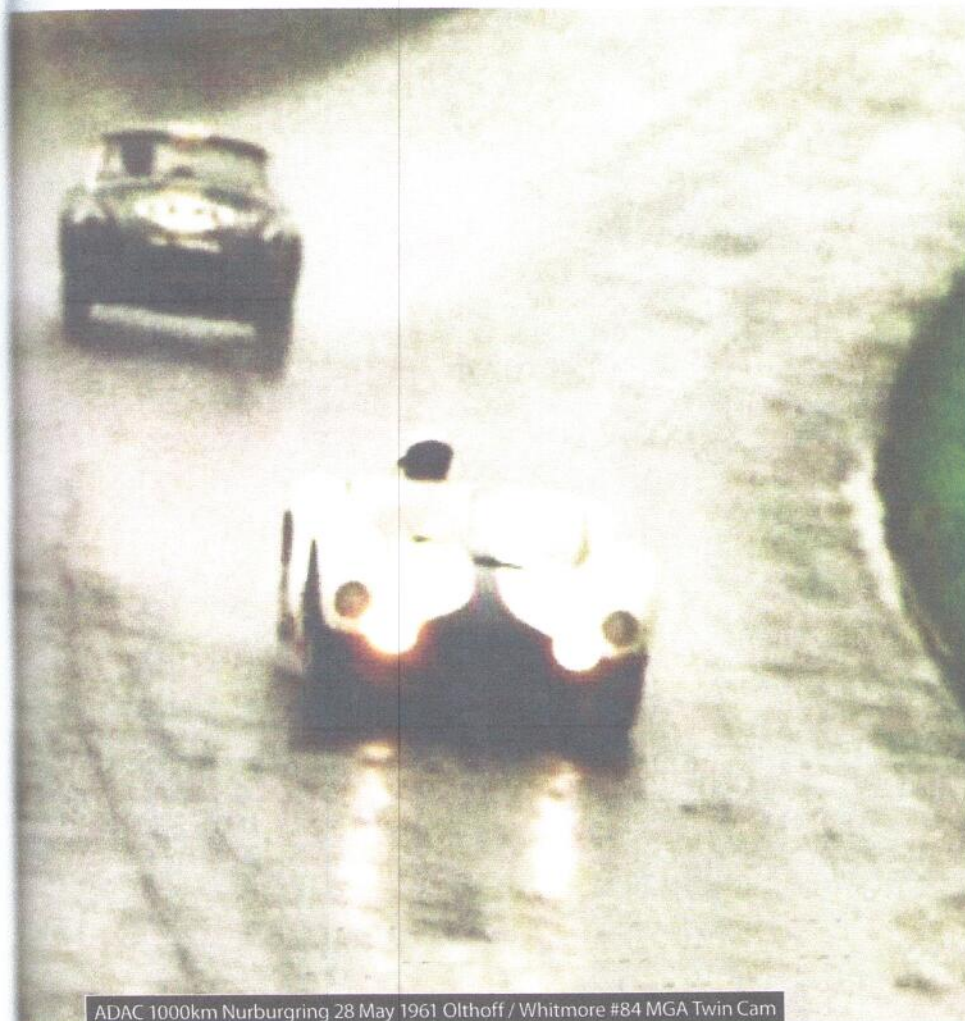
necessary, hidden. An employee who was a racing driver with both a track record and a competitive car. Bob was also an experienced mechanic who could work in the factory and on his own car.

Not only had MG acquired a works privateer but they had acquired one with no connection to the motor racing establishment.

Bob's relationship with MG was unique in so far as no UK driver, because of the 'class or money or both' issue as pointed out later, could or would have taken a factory floor job. The reference in Bob's 1961 Autosport letter, when complaining about not getting race entries, to "... not spend[ing] enough time in various well known clubs" says a great deal. Bob was an outsider and the Autosport letter, if taken at face value, makes it clear he felt he was treated as an outsider.

Rand Autumn Trophy Meeting – 19 March 1960 – Bob's last race in South Africa





ADAC 1000km Nurburgring 28 May 1961 Olthoff / Whitmore #84 MGA Twin Cam

Although Bob did some regular factory related work, as well as some competition developments, he also worked on his own car which further supported the 'MG do not race' position.

Whatever Bob's and MG management's expectations when they started out together in 1960, I suspect that by 1961 the relationship had become closer and it is against this background that events in 1961 should be viewed.

Revisiting 1960 and 1961

Researching Bob raised as many questions as answers. Why the Holt story, and why the delayed registration in the UK, are but two examples. A bigger question however lay back in 1961. To put that question into context it is helpful to look not only at how Bob and MG came to work together, but also at the various factors affecting MG and both the domestic and international scene at that time.

MG had not competed in circuit races since the 1955 Le Mans tragedy followed by the deaths at Dunrod later that year. Although MG competed in rallies with considerable success, nevertheless after 1955 circuit racing remained embedded

in the MG culture and brand image. In fact MG did race in this period but they did it by proxy and they did it clandestinely.

MG supported entries overseas and in the UK. The possible exception to the racing ban was Sebring, but even that was largely handled through the North American agents rather than as factory entries. From 1959 through 1962 the factory prepared a full complement of works cars for the race which was very important to MG's largest export market. The 1960-1962 cars were even tested in the UK prior to the race. In 1961 Bob was part of the testing and joined the team at Sebring as a reserve driver and mechanic. By 1962 it seems the racing ban was relaxed somewhat and the cars were entered by Ecurie Safety Fast, UK. Although he did not get to drive in 1961, he returned in 1962 with the factory entry as a driver. Both the 1961 and 1962 efforts were push rod 'Deluxe' coupes.

Bob's first race in his Twin Cam in South Africa was in a six hour race where there was an MGA Twin Cam team entered by the local agents with competition parts shipped over from Abingdon for the race.

Ted Lund's entries in SRX 210 at Le Mans in 1959, 1960 and 1961, although notionally

entries by MGCC North West, were in practice fully factory supported.

Favoured privateers such as John Gott or Dick Jacobs, with his 'MTW' Twin Cams, and a number of others received factory support to varying degrees.

The budget for this clandestine activity was often hidden in the EX system used by MG to document and account for various engineering initiatives. In the case of the Twin Cam this was the EX187 file.

In 1960, when Bob joined MG, the Twin Cam had just been discontinued, sales of the MGA were beginning to slow and the MGB was still two years away. MG would have been keen to maintain the MGA's competition image.

Over the same period the MGA had become uncompetitive. In 1960 SRX 210 had a great result at Le Mans and Dick Jacob's team did likewise domestically in the Autosport Championship but by 1961 this was history. The serious privateers had largely moved on, Dick Crossfield being a notable exception, and Bob's car was in essence the only competitive MGA Twin Cam in evidence in anything approaching serious races. That having been said, Richard Ide raced a push rod car in the 1961 Nurburgring 1000km but that was as much about endurance as speed.

At that time UK racing drivers formed a pretty homogeneous group based around both class and money. If you had either, and preferably both, the perception and the reality was that you were admitted to the 'club', got race entries and people acknowledged your existence. Otherwise you struggled. Talent had the potential to overcome these challenges but to demonstrate talent you needed opportunity, and opportunity was hard to come by if you were not in the 'club'. Bob was not in the 'club' initially and struggled to get into it. Being elected a member of the BRDC in 1962 was a big step along the way, hence possibly the Holt story. Whether Bob was ever fully accepted by his peers we will never know.

Another factor was the international picture where Apartheid had become a significant issue, especially following the Sharpsville massacre in March 1960. Apartheid was seen as a principally Afrikaner issue and Bob was an Afrikaner.

The above, along with an analysis of the circumstances leading to the Autosport letter of August 18 1961, the day before the prestigious Tourist Trophy at Goodwood, may help explain both MG's and Bob's approach to the 1961 season.

To be continued ●

The earlier parts of this article looked at Bob's story and the context against which it should be viewed. The more difficult aspects of Bob's story were explored and the background to MG's and Bob's approach to the 1961 season was highlighted.

1960

Bob, following his debut at the MGCC event at Silverstone, seems to have had a pretty unremarkable year for the rest of 1960. He only recorded races where he finished

in his 1985 letter to Simon Robinson so the 1960 record is sparse. It is clear from period photographs that Bob was busy modifying his car. One incident in 1960, which he does not relate himself, was his exclusion at the last minute from the 1960 Silverstone 6 hour relay because he only had a South African licence; whether discrimination or a proper enforcement of the rules, will never be known. It is clear Bob always felt, probably with some justification, discriminated against. This comes over in the Autosport letter with

Bob citing the political situation along with his being South African as another possible reason why he was not getting race entries.

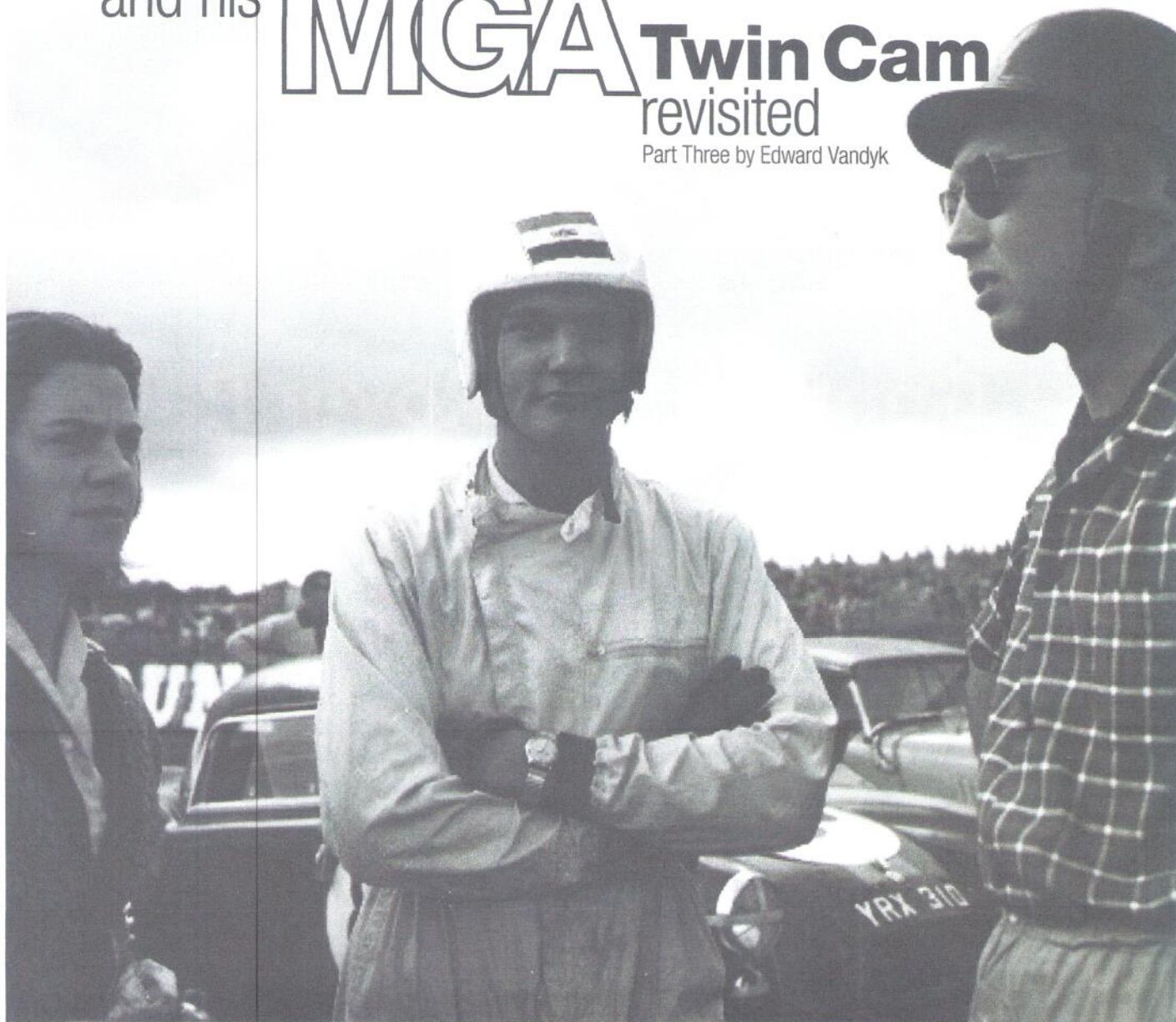
1961 and the 'competitive' car

In 1961 MG needed competition based publicity for the MGA to support the launch of the 1600 MkII. There was a team of 1600 engined cars entered for Sebring. There was Ted Lund's special bodied Le Mans 1762cc Twin Cam entry and there was the 1961 ADAC 1000km Nurburgring entry in Bob's name possibly

Bob Olthoff

and his **MGA** Twin Cam
revisited

Part Three by Edward Vandyk





Silverstone 4 June 1960

obtained with the help of John, later Sir John, Whitmore, Bob's co-driver.

The MGA on the UK domestic competition scene was not much in evidence. Bob entered the 1961 Autosport Championship.

How to make Bob competitive must have been something that taxed the likes of John Thornley Syd Enever and Alex Hounslow. A driver really cannot deliver more than the car's potential and a 'poor show' was little better than a 'no show'.

Bob competed in a race at Goodwood in his white and maroon MGA in March 1961. He then left for Sebring. After his return a much modified, Green and Gold South African racing colours, MGA emerged from the Competitions Department at Abingdon complete with the entry numbers, #84, for the Nurburgring 1000km race already on it.

Exactly when all the modifications were done, and they were overall extensive and largely complete by May 1961, is unclear. Nevertheless Bob's car was still, in essence, a standard bodied Twin Cam roadster unlike SRX 210. The only modifications that can be said for certain to have been done at that time were the re-spray and the fibreglass front and rear wings. Bob said that the engine was again rebuilt at this point.

This was the 1961 'competitive' car modified as explained in some detail in the March 1962 articles which, as noted, make no mention of engine capacity.

Bob and Whitmore then trailered the car to Germany and competed in the GTS category at 1588cc, and came a creditable seventh in class behind the Porsches.

Bob then competed in two races in the UK before co-driving SRX 210 at Le Mans. On his return he entered the support race for the British Grand Prix at Aintree. All these races were entered at 1588cc.

The following two weekends, July 22 and 29, Bob competed in Ireland, first

at Phoenix Park in Dublin where he says he recorded the fastest speed achieved by an MGA of 137mph, and then at Duboyne where he came third in the Holmpatrick Trophy. Both of these events were handicap events and in both cases he entered at 1762cc and was clearly handicapped at 1762cc, when compared with 1588cc Twin Cams also entered, despite saying in the Autosport letter "...I was using the normal 1588cc engine in Ireland!".

Two weeks later Bob is at Silverstone for the 1961 6 hour relay race.

The Tourist Trophy and the Autosport letter

A week after that, on August 19 1961, there was the Tourist Trophy at Goodwood

Bob and MG must have recognised that they now had a potential problem because the race reports from Dublin and Dunboyne appeared in Autosport on August 4 and August 11 1961 respectively. Bob had entered the Tourist Trophy in the GTS class at 1588cc, whereas he was prominently reported in both Autosport articles as running in Ireland in both handicap events at 1762cc, a capacity he could quite properly run at in those races.

Bob could have said he had more than one engine to explain the capacity difference, but an alternative strategy was employed.

Bob, possibly with a little help from MG, got the Autosport letter into the August 18 1961 edition, the day before the Tourist Trophy race.

If taken as correctly representing the actual position it settled the Tourist Trophy capacity question. However it then begs the question as to why Bob unnecessarily accepted the incorrect handicap in Dublin, which he did as compared to other 1588cc Twin Cams entered. The entry for Dunboyne, being a week later, would have been even easier to amend.

If Bob had previously been 1762cc before and at the time of his Irish race entries, what earlier races, if any, had he competed in at the 1762cc capacity? Bob says, "I had entered [Phoenix Park] with this engine size [1762cc] but due to a 'technical hitch', a large hole in the block, I no longer have a 1762cc engine...".

Phoenix Park

In your report of the Phoenix Park races in Ireland you state that my M.G.A. Twin-Cam was 1,762 c.c. I had entered with this engine size but due to a "technical hitch", a large hole in the block, I no longer have a 1,762 c.c. engine and in fact I was using the normal 1,588 c.c. engine in Ireland!

I think I must now hold the record for "turned down" entries this season. My entries have been turned down six times this season, for three International and three National events. I always get the letter saying that the event is oversubscribed but when you see the performance of the cars that actually start, it becomes obvious that I do not spend enough time in certain well-known clubs.

I think it is time that organizers of so-called International events try their hand at getting together an International entry. I am a South African; maybe the political situation has something to do with the entries.

We all know, of course, that if you own a well-known, sought-after motor car, your entry will never be turned down but we cannot all afford, or get, these cars.

It is, in my opinion, silly when an organizer runs six or seven cars of the same make in a G.T. race, some of them not even homologated.

To make sure that the entrant believes that the entry was oversubscribed the organizer does not send his little letter off until it is too late to enter for another meeting, and naturally we cannot enter for two meetings on the same day for that would upset the organizers.

For one meeting this year five cars were accepted that had not even been delivered, and my entry was turned down. Five days before the meeting the organizer phoned and told me there had been a mix-up and asked if I would like to compete.

I am sure that there are a lot of people that feel the way I do and it cannot be anything else but harmful to the sport.

OXFORD.

J. R. OLTHOFF.

The entries for Phoenix Park closed on July 3 so at some time previously, by his own account, Bob was running at 1762cc. Since late May 1961 Bob had run in the Nurburgring 1000km and races at Brands and Snetterton before Aintree on July 15, a week before Phoenix Park, all of which Bob entered at 1588cc.

The extent to which the Autosport letter represents the true position on a number of fronts has to be questioned. For example, was Bob really 1588cc in Ireland and had there really been a 'technical hitch'? Maybe Bob was transposing the fate of the engine in that year's Le Mans entry! If Bob was actually running at 1762cc in Ireland then for how long after that time did he continue to use that capacity? He was running at 1762cc in May 1962 and that engine failed, but Bob reports no engine failure before that, despite describing two engine rebuilds prior to May 1961 and a decock later in 1961.

The Autosport letter, apart from resolving the capacity issue, complains about the inability to get international race entries. Bob in fact obtained entries for two international races in 1961 and competed or was the reserve driver in two others, as well getting an entry for the support race

for the British Grand Prix. Bob only missed out on two international races, neither of which featured a single MG.

The Autosport letter also complains that the favoured few with entries who did not turn up then blocked others from competing. However Bob did precisely that, he entered a race at Snetterton, at 1588cc, the day after the race at Phoenix Park and could never have got both himself with his car to both venues.

Bob refers to being 1762cc again in a letter to Simon Robinson in 1984 where he states, "I also bored the engine out to 1762cc" when talking about his extensive 1961 modifications. There is further mention of 1762cc in a 1996 article.

One other piece of this jigsaw is the photograph of Bob's car taken by the schoolboy Anthony Binnington, Tim Binnington's son, at Aintree on July 15 1961. Tim was Bob's manager at the factory and Anthony has captioned the photograph in the album at 1762cc. Bob and his wife were frequent visitors to the Binnington household.

Why Bob was competitive in 1961 will never be known for sure. There seems pretty convincing evidence based on the Autosport letter, the Irish entries and Anthony Binnington's album that at some stage in 1961 Bob ran at 1762cc, whether in conformity to his declared entries or not.

Bob's mistake, insofar as he made one, was to enter the Irish races at 1762cc, and whether he did this before he recognised the implications must be conjectural.

Bob finished third in the Autosport Championship in 1961. This helped his election to the BRDC in 1962 and effectively launched his career.

Arising from the question of Bob's capacity in 1961 was the extent of MG's involvement.

Whilst Bob may well have been a willing participant, whatever happened in period was only possible with MG's active involvement because of the way the 1762cc capacity engine for the Twin Cam had evolved and was controlled.



Leaving the Competitions Department Abingdon for the Nurburgring 1961



**The 1,762cc (or is it 1,760cc?)
Twin Cam Engine**

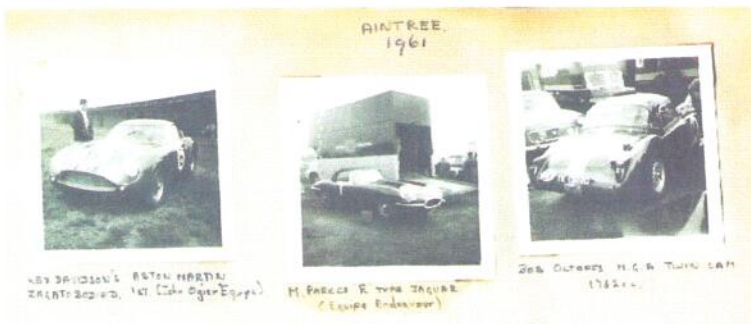
It was initially unclear where and how the 1762cc capacity had originated and thus who controlled its use.

The piston, stamped MOWOG, was a BMC part with a serial number used by Morris Engines in Coventry. There was no record of it having anything to do with Abingdon.

Drawing #310 in MG's EX187 register, dated five days after the 1959 Le Mans, in which SRX 210 with a 1588cc engine had done remarkably well, was then identified. The timing of this initiative may be coincidental as may Bob choosing the 310 number for his YRX UK registration.

The original internal MG Tuning Information Memorandum (TIM#35) issued sometime in February 1961 was then located. This details the piston, the gasket, their supplier and the block boring size for the 1762cc engine.

The 1762cc Le Mans engine was an MG creation initiated in the EX register in 1959 and made an official internal MG tuning modification by TIM#35 in 1961.



“ I had entered [Phoenix Park] with this engine size [1762cc] but due to a ‘technical hitch’, a large hole in the block, I no longer have a 1762cc engine... ”

TIM#35 was produced months after the Twin Cam had ceased production in 1960.

Access to the 1762cc Twin Cam engine was under MG's control and it was only made available to Ted Lund, Bob Olthoff and, in 1961, to South Africa to help sell unsold stock. TIM#35 was an internal factory document and not available generally.

The engine, as specified in TIM#35, was actually 1760cc not 1762cc. The odd 2cc crept in as a result of the 1960 Le Mans scrutineering sheet showing 1762cc, when the underlying numbers give 1760cc, and 1762cc has been perpetuated ever since.

Finally a 1984 letter to *Safety Fast!* raises the possibility that it was Bob himself who built the 1762cc engines at Abingdon.



I now believe that, despite Bob's undoubted talent, it is unlikely that the many modifications to his car which he disclosed in March 1962 completely explain his 1961 competitive performance. I suspect that at that time, like now, there was no real substitute for horsepower. ●

Safety Fast! will be running an article detailing the exact modifications Bob Olthoff made to his car in the Twin Cam Group Supplement in December 2015.

