

**MGA 'Fake News'**  
**Sebring 1961 and 1962**  
*(As appeared in March 2017 Safety Fast!)*  
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Fake News, along with Alternative Facts, have been topics in vogue recently so, not to be Trumped so to speak, here is a bit of MGA Fake News contained in a headline which never, of course, appeared. ***MG Entries for Sebring 1962 Excluded***. Indeed the headline could have read ***MG Entries for Sebring 1962 Excluded - Again!***

Whilst researching an article about the MGA with the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option, the De Luxe colloquially, and, at the same time, applying for an FIA Historic Technical Passport on a 1960 MGA Twin Cam as well as answering a *Safety Fast!* reader's query about whether glass fibre wings should be allowed in competition I stumbled across what appears to me to be the challenge of the RAC / FIA homologation of the MGA.

The Sebring 1961 and 1962 stories are well documented. Two MGA were entered in 1961 by the US distributor and the three MGA in 1962 were entered by MG themselves heralding their return to circuit racing for the first time since 1955. All the cars were prepared at Abingdon and all had the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option fitted.

The cars ran in both years in the Grand Touring Class, Category 9 at 1588cc. To run in the Grand Touring Class the cars had to have satisfied certain criteria of Appendix J of the FIA International Sporting Code, in French with an English translation, which criteria were the same in both years. The key criteria being that they had to be homologated meaning that they were of a specification, including options, fixed and recorded in writing by forms produced by the RAC on behalf of the FIA. Homologation required that more than 100 identical models of the car, as offered by the regular sales department of the manufacturer, had to have been produced in a twelve month period and that options likewise available, but with seemingly no stipulation as to numbers built with those options, could be listed in relation to the model. A model for these purposes being either the MGA 1600 or the MGA 1600 MkII.

Satisfaction that the Appendix J eligibility criteria had been met was originally left to the manufacturers themselves who produced their own rather short Forms of Recognition but the 1960 Appendix J introduced homologation based on the Forms of Recognition, often with the manufacturers forms attached to the homologation. The homologation was in a standard 8 page format with photographs. Trying to interpret the various Appendices J from that time seems to only lead to one conclusion namely that what the English translation of the French said and what actually happened in period differed materially not so much in how the cars were presented but rather more in how the homologations themselves were constructed. In other words the cars complied generally with the homologation but the homologations themselves were simply inaccurate as to their contents.

I guess this is hardly surprising given the transition from a manufacturer based system to an FIA / RAC system which would have taken the opening position from the Forms of Recognition and manufacturer definitions for the rest of the eight page form.

Homologation starts with generic VIN number and engine number formats relevant to the model.

The homologations for the MGA, excluding the Twin Cam, are with dates granted, No. 29 (17/9/1959), 51 (16/1/1962) and 56 (20/3/1962).

So far so good! The 1961 Sebring entry would, I believe, have to have been made under then existing Homologation 29. However this is where I believe the challenge starts and, in that challenge, possibly why the Sebring 1961 entries should have been excluded.

The Form of Recognition produced by MG themselves attached to Homologation 29 is a double sided single sheet document dated 4/9/1959 and relates to the MGA 1600 in both Roadster and Coupe form. It does not, and indeed could not at that date, include the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option. However Homologation 29 itself relates solely to the 1600 Roadster and not the 1600 Coupe but does include the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option which would invariably had knock-on disc wheels. Since Homologation 29 is dated 17/9/59 and the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option was not introduced until 1960 one has to assume that homologations could be updated for specification without updating their date! The exclusion of the 1600 Coupe from the homologation could have been because the Form of Recognition has the Coupe designated incorrectly as GHO not GHD.

The 1961 Sebring MGAs were standard Coupes GHD100148 and GHD100149 and the production records show they were built up in the Competitions Department where they must have had their Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round fitted. They are however not shown in the production records as being cars fitted with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round. Such cars are identified in the production records by part of the entry, relating to the body, trim and (if applicable) hood colours being in a different colour, brown or green, for Coupe and Roadster. A standard car is also likewise identified in red for a Coupe and blue for a Roadster.

It may not be well known that the production records do not contain the VIN prefix but only the VIN number. The full VIN (prefix and number) you get on an Heritage Certificate is a construct based on a formula inserted in the production records by the then archivist, Anders Clausager. Errors were possible and indeed are known to have occurred. For example the original VIN plate for Twin Cam 2600 reads YD2/2600 (YD2 is a RHD Roadster Export car). It should have been a YDH5 (CKD) car based on the Clausager formula, the car being sent to South Africa as a kit and built up there.

A photograph of the VIN for 100148 is prefixed by GHD, albeit the VIN appears modern. So at scrutineering at Sebring in 1961 Homologation 29, being solely for the Roadster (GHN VIN prefix), should not have been applicable and reverting to the Form of Recognition, if indeed allowed, should not have worked either because it did not include the Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round option. Nevertheless I do not think it would have been that difficult for the organisers to conclude the car was eligible, and there would have been little doubt they very much would have wanted to, based on the two documents read together.

However it is the 1962 entry that is of more interest because there seem to me to be only two explanations available for the events that preceded it. Either there was a series of inexplicable random but pro-active events with no underlying context, purpose or relevance relating to the entries or there was a concerted effort to achieve a perception of the entries which differed from the underlying reality. 'Chaos' or 'Conspiracy' if you like.

If this was a 'Conspiracy' it is not entirely clear how or why it was set up in the way it was.

My starting point is that regardless of how relaxed scrutineering at Sebring may have been in 1961 or 1962 there was always the potential for the French model of strict scrutineering to be applied and entries thus rejected. A manufacturer would not have shipped cars to the US for an event such as Sebring in any other configuration than one which had the best chance of being accepted as an entry without question – why would you do otherwise?

In the autumn of 1961 the MGA 1600 MkII model, with a 1622cc engine, was announced. There would have been no doubt that it constituted a separate model for homologation purposes so, accompanied by a letter from the RAC that at least 100 examples had been built, both Roadster, VIN prefixed GHN2, and Coupe, prefixed GHD2, were homologated with a 16GC engine prefix on 16 January 1962 as Homologation 51. For reasons which have been explained to me but which I find hard to understand Homologation 51 was sought with the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round 'option' as the standard model and with the standard Lockheed Disc / Drums cited as an option along with either standard disc or wire wheels. I suspect the application was directed at the intended Sebring 1962 cars which were to be Coupes with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round fitted. Nevertheless applying in that way was probably in order because, even if the 82 versions of the MGA 1600 built with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round were excluded, over 100 1600 MkII similarly optioned cars had been built by the date of application for homologation.

However I believe someone at Abingdon must have realised some time after Homologation 51 had been received that they could not have entries for Sebring 1962 with a 1622cc engine because it would have moved the cars into a different capacity class in which they would have been less competitive

MG's answer was to fit 1588cc MGA 1600 engines with a XSP engine prefix which were specially built for the cars.



Pausing at this juncture we now have three production line MGA 1600 MkII Coupes with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round commenced on 17 January 1962, the day after Homologation 51 had been given, and finished on 21 February but fitted with 1588cc rather than 1622cc engines. However these cars

would have looked like 1600 MkII cars and 1600 MkII cars, which had been on sale for months, were known to have 1622cc engines. The key distinguishing features apart from the badges being the different grille and rear lights. So here is the first Abingdon move – they ‘phoneyed’ the cars up as 1600 Cars not 1600 MkII cars. They did this, as the accompanying photographs show, by fitting 1600 grilles, with each alternate slat removed and having rear lights which were neither 1600 or 1600 MkII and which used 1600 lenses, without plinths, attached directly to the bodywork replicating the Sebring 1961 entries. The cars were also debadged.

These cars now had to be shipped to the US having been tested at Silverstone by Sir John Whitmore and Bob Olthoff. The cars, uncharacteristically, were not UK registered, had the US clear front indicator / side lights and thus were presumably intended to remain in the US and be sold there, which is what happened – however being right hand drive and heavily modified they were unlikely to be sold other than as racing cars.

Not being registered the cars must have been exported based on their full VIN numbers. Therein lies the second strange occurrence, not satisfied with dressing up 1600 MkII Coupes as 1600 Coupes Abingdon gave the three cars GHN2, ie Roadster, rather than GHD2, ie Coupe, VIN prefixes. So now we have three 1600 MkII Coupes pretending to be 1600 Roadsters – what was going on?



Could it have been that the Sebring 1961 scrutineering had actually been a little more challenging at the time, although there is no recall of that being the case, and there was thus a need to make these cars fit a specification that would be accepted for entry in Sebring 1962 without question?

Making the cars into 1600 cars ticked that box as would making them notionally GHN2 roadsters because that brought them firmly into Homologation 29 where the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option was cited as an option for the Roadster. Except of course the VIN prefix did not really fit as it had that ‘2’ at the end but more importantly whilst the cars looked like 1600 cars they were Coupes in the metal, not Roadsters.

So I believe Abingdon’s solution was two pronged, firstly put the cars on the boat to Sebring VIN prefixed as 1600 MkII Roadsters, which looked something more like a 1600 Coupes, despite the fact they were 1600 MkII Coupes with 1588cc engines and then also to try to homologate the 1600 Coupe whilst they were in transit. This is what they did.

Armed with a letter from the RAC dated 3 March 1962 confirming that more than 100 units of the car had been built MG applied to homologate the 1600 Coupe with the optional Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round as standard and with the standard disc / drum set up as an option. By this time if the cars were not on the



water they would have been at the docks so the GHN2 Roadster identity die was cast. However how much better would it be if what looked like a Coupe, and indeed was a Coupe despite the GHN2 designation, could be homologated as a 1600 Coupe.

So just eleven months after the last 1600 Deluxe was produced MG made the application for Homologation 56 for the 1600 Coupe relying on the RAC letter which itself was simply incorrect as only 12 1600 Coupe cars were ever produced with the Dunlop Disc Brake All Round option. Even taking into account 1600 Roadsters as well the number is still eighteen less than the required 100.

Homologation 56, which was solely for the MGA 1600 Coupe, was nevertheless granted on 20 March 1962, the day before first practice at Sebring and thereby rectified the omission in Homologation 29.

The fact that Homologation 56 for the 1600 Coupe actually shows MGB exhaust headers and has a picture of the roadster alongside one of the Coupe just adds to the confusion. Whether these exhaust headers were on the cars that raced I do not know but whilst they can be fitted to a RHD car without modification this is not the case with LHD cars.

So all in all chaos either born out of confusion ('Chaos') or a concerted attempt to find a way through scrutineering ('Conspiracy') – take your pick.

The problems lay as much in the homologations as in the way the cars were presented so one final point about homologation of the 1600 and the 1600 MkII cars. Homologation 56 (the 1600 Coupe with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round) actually shows a weight of 901.5 kg (1987.5 lbs), Homologation 29 for the 1600 Roadster shows a weight of 914.4kg (2015 lbs) and the Forms of Recognition attached to Homologation 29 show weights of 2068 lbs (938kg) for the Roadster and 2127 lbs (964.8kg) for the Coupe.

Thus Homologation 56 homologates the 1600 Coupe with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round, of which only 12 examples were made, and does so at a weight 60kg less than a 1600 Coupe on the 1959 Forms of Recognition and about 15kg less than a Roadster in Homologation 29\*\*.

I can only draw one overarching conclusion, namely, that the various MGA homologations are not fit for purpose and do not reflect the reality of what was genuinely capable of homologation and what should not have been. This extends to fibreglass wings and aluminium shrouds as well. From that conclusion arises one question - we are still using the same homologations, including the one for the Twin Cam which was revised in 1994, as the benchmark today so should they be revisited?

Something strange was going on whatever path was taken. Nevertheless where there is a will there is a way, especially in motor sport, and the entries for the cars were accepted. I suspect being MG they would always have been accepted regardless.

So much for Fake News but we do also have the facts – so which is the correct 'Alternative Fact'?

*\*\*Postscript : Homologation 51, for the 1600 MkII Roadster and Coupe with Dunlop Disc Brakes All Round, has a weight of a mere 843kg for both Roadster and Coupe!*