"It's not about how fast you are going, it's about how you are going fast!" – A day with PRU.

Born in industrial Birmingham in 1950 I was steeped in the tradition of buying British. In '72 I thought souped up saloons lacked the cache of a true sports car and ordered a new MGB GT, with some discount it was £1475. I remember having to give a second choice of colour and trim as there was no guarantee of your first choice. In reality the only other tin top sports car you could buy was either a Triumph GT6, which I thought very cramped or an Alfa Romeo GTV. Even as late as the 1970's buying a foreign car was a departure from the norm, they were expensive, considered unreliable and parts very expensive. The Datsun 240Z was also foreign and very ugly. I discounted fibreglass bodied cars as they suffered electrical problems and specialists required to undertake any body repairs. When the BGT V8 was announced it was far too expensive for a 23 year old budding executive, but was lusted over. I have had many MGB's and GT's and bought my V8 in 1991. I have had many cars including Porsche 911's. In fact I have always thought the '72 911E I owned for several years was very similar in performance to the V8, equally exciting to drive, but less stable.

A little while ago I answered a call from a long time petrol head friend asking my opinion on Howard Guiney's multi award winning concours Factory V8 #0528 that had appeared for sale on the V8 Register web site. My reply was simple: "I saw it at MG Live 2016 and it is probably the best I have ever seen." Next day he called and said "I have provisionally bought it. You know your MG's, would you go and check it over?" I agreed to go, inspect the car and drive it back from Northumberland. Now that's a long drive.

On the day, a bacon sarnie to set me up, sat nav –check, camera – check, magnet – check etc. etc. The day was going to be sunny all day, perfect for a classic drive. Driven to Derby station I embarked my first express train journey in 50 years. My how they've changed, a comfortable seat, a drop down tray, even a 13 amp plug for your laptop. The ride was superb. Although somewhat of a computer [PC] expert, I am a Luddite when it comes to mobile phones. I am learning to use a new-fangled iPhone. Wow this new piece of technology turned the 3 hour journey into a pleasure, podcasts on the lives of Irwin Rommel, Lucile Ball and others kept me amused as I gazed over the rolling green landscapes at speeds of up to 125 mph. After a change at Newcastle I arrived at Morpeth to be greeted by Howard. With a cheery disposition and our mutual love of the V8 we immediately got on. He was having a good day free from his recurring severe knee pain which has prompted the sale of his pride and joy. Oh how I know how he feels. We got in his modern small sporty hatch and I observed his spirited but entirely safe and precise driving.

On arrival I was invited onto his patio to grab a very welcome cuppa and to wind down talking over his restoration and viewing the paperwork. The viewing, inspection and test drive followed. Howard pushed the car out and beamed with pride as he popped the bonnet to reveal that spectacular engine bay. For a moment I am in a MG showroom in 1973. No over restored polished bling here, just that ultra-clean Buick derived V8 in standard tune +20 thou over bore with new internals and new old stock cast manifolds. A check of oil and fluids and a hand on the rad to make sure it is cold. A little choke and it sprang into life at the first touch of the starter and settled to a fast even tick over. I waited while he locked the house and shut the door to his exceptionally neat garage with spanners in order on the wall and carpet on the floor.

Reversing carefully off the drive I then shamed myself by kangarooing up the road. As you would expect the test was great after getting used to the sensitive throttle. No smoke, the usual stop start fast slow gear changes, fast bendy bits etc. etc. The 20 odd mile test drive over I was satisfied with the performance the only thing of note was a blown N/S indicator warning lamp. All the boring checks came next. The magnet in the cloth, feeling here and there, you know, lifting the carpets and the rest, ticking off the items on my checklist. All done, a call to the buyer and wait for the transfer to take place. Time for another cuppa before I set off.

We discussed our mutual V8 fetish and the trials and tribulations of finding quality parts for our steeds. For example we both lamented the fit and quality of new replacement grills. I remember the originals fit well but were thin anodised alloy instead of the older chrome on brass items and the finish was not long lasting. Howard and I had used the same approach, get a good quality original type, remove any marks and dents, re chrome it and fit the later honeycomb inserts. He had spent many hours sourcing new old stock items for the car including those priceless manifolds; correct badging including the curved rear V8 badge. Such was his attention to detail.

All done and dusted we shook hands and I started the best part of the whole day. Now many of us take on a long journey in our classics with just a little trepidation. Remember BL's questionable build quality and the Prince of Darkness? A 50 year old design can it be any good? With a good specialist restoration and new found respect for Lucas parts, I had no such qualms. I would be driving perhaps the most original carefully built V8 around today. It was just like driving a new 1973 MGB GT V8. A caveat here, mindful of driving a concours car I kept my distance at all times, resisted the temptation to floor it and went for the smooth powerful drive.
I tootled off on the local urban roads to the fuel station, almost a full tank of the modern low RON unleaded in the tank and off towards Newcastle in the rush hour. The car felt very tight, it is just run in at 3K miles since completion and it sat at 30 mph in top gear beautifully. The low speed steering was strangely not as heavy as usual. As I approached the queuing traffic my mind turned to the engine temperature, the gauge sat firmly at seven o'clock. Remember this is a totally stock cooling setup just filled with Castrol waterless coolant. The gauge rose to around six o'clock and the very quiet fans kicked in, gently bringing the temp back to its normal. I got the occasional thumbs up and was waved into lanes by tired people in their expensive motors. After what seems an age I headed out onto the A1 and started to really test its legs. At speed the car was absolutely stable, the corners were dispensed with aplomb and the suspension was almost totally devoid of the usual harshness. The gearbox was slick and positive, very quiet and the overdrive in 3rd and 4th slipped in and out instantly. At 70 mph the temperature reduced to around seven thirty and stayed rock steady. The oil pressure was 25 psi at idle and nudged 50 over 1200 rpm. The exhaust note was almost subdued, but "to die for" with a gentle burble at tick over, an unmistakable dull growl on acceleration and at speed it quietened down to a comfortable hum. A perfect long distance tourer then? Shall we call it a true GT?

Just before I start on the M1 I pulled off and checked oil and fluids again. I popped in an earphone to listen to a podcast. The motorway was boring except for the end of restriction sections when I dropped back into 4th, gently squeezed the accelerator and powered back up to the limit. The mid-range power/torque showed itself here with some drivers displaying surprised looks and I imagined them thinking what the **** has he got in that old car? Half way home I pulled off for a rest stop. I parked next to a modern white with large blue stripe newish US muscle car. I must confess I didn't even look at what it was. But the other side was a family tucking into a McDonalds. On my return a few minutes later, I scurried to the car because there was a small crowd around it taking pictures. The usual "I had one of those years ago, is it really a V8?" conversation ensued with oohs and aahs when I open the bonnet to check the oil and fluid levels again.

Technology stowed, I headed off onto the A roads. This was the best bit, with the light fading I turned on the H4 Lucas's which easily lit the way on the sweeping bends of the natural habitat of this rare breed. I was Rossano Brazzi in "The Italian Job" alps humming to myself "On days like these". The overdrive switch reminded me of a modern flappy paddle and the brakes were perfect. I could go on and describe each power on then off, every slow and fast bend but then I would spoil the fun for when you try a BGT V8. Suffice it to say all you have read about the joyous power delivery is true. Oh and that soundtrack!

I turned into my friends drive and into its temporary garage, switched off and was surprised at the lack of the usual "tick, tick" of an exhaust system cooling. But then I thought PRU has new manifolds and were fitted correctly by people who know what they are doing, no metal tension.

Was it any good then? I'll say so. How many cars designed 50 years ago can hold their own with modern traffic? The B V8 can. Perhaps ignoring the odd white van cruising past at over 100 mph with the driver on the phone eating his sandwiches.

By any conservative estimate this restoration cost in excess of £40K. If you include Howards own labour costs [he did much of the fitting up], his time sourcing, collecting rare parts, fuel plus all the things he has forgotten, it is even more, I think it is priceless.
PRU was off the next day to be valeted and inspected for insurance valuation. She will be treated in coming months to other items which Howard agreed were needed. It will join a few other thoroughbreds in the garage. A DB6, Dino E-type et al. This is not the end for PRU, it is a new beginning. She will be treated to regular runs and if invited will probably turn up at future MG events. As I handed over the keys knowing the company she will be keeping I thought to myself…You've made it to the big time….. Take a bow Lady PRU!

Howard's description of the car
PRU 122M - Concours 1973 MGB GT - V8 Teal Blue 0528
A superb driving car in concours condition; rebuild started in March 2013 and was completed in August 2014...all restoration work carried out by Halls Garage Bourne, mileage shown 39000 (believed genuine) Rebuilt with attention to detail and originality; winner of the concours at MG Live 2015 and Car of the show and premier class winner at Silverstone in 2016 and best concours MG and car of the show at MGOC Northern National, a full photo record of the rebuild along with itemised receipts, a bad knee and a consequent lack of use force a very reluctant sale at considerably less than the rebuild costs for a car that needs nothing doing except driving.

- Car totally stripped...and sent to Pro-Strip Nottingham for chemical dipping then epoxy primed on return and assessed for repairs
- Assessment revealed an incredibly sound chassis with the floors, inner steps and front inner wings 100% OK
- Nearside and offside outer sills replaced as a precaution, although originals turned out to be OK
- Boot floor and front and rear valances replaced
- Both doors, front wings and bonnet replaced
- Both rear ¾ outer wings and inner arches replaced
- Original engine (No 0437) totally rebuilt; +20 thou re-bore with new pistons and bearings, new camshaft, water pump, totally rebuilt cylinder heads, new valves and guides etc, brand new Lucas distributor fitted with electronic ignition and a pair of new old stock cast iron exhaust manifolds
- New Autosparks V8 wiring loom fitted along with new genuine Lucas, BMC and Unipart relays, switches etc
- New Old Stock Weathershields sunroof in blue
- Interior re-trimmed in original Autumn Leaf fabric with correct rubber sill mats etc body painted in the original Teal Blue using 2 pack paint
- Suspension, steering, rear axle and gearbox rebuilt
- Braking system renewed using original new old stock Lockheed parts
- Original Dunlop wheels re-chromed and rebuilt by MWS
- Chassis, under wings etc. etch and epoxy primed, stone chipped and painted in body colour, doors, bonnet and tailgate painted off the car
- Dinitrol rustproofing fluid injected into all cavities to keep it rust free.