

## Midge Owners and Builders Club Summer 2014

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*Dear Members,*

Welcome to the summer issue of the Club Newsletter. In between the thunder storms the weather is being kind to us and we can once more enjoy our Midges on the road. All we have to do is pass the MOT test, buy the Insurance, and perhaps pay for the Road Fund Licence if we're not lucky enough to have a Road Tax exempt car.

Fortunately our cars provide one of the cheapest ways of enjoying open top motoring, and I've noticed a number of Midges coming up for sale recently where a road legal car can be obtained for about £3000 and that must be a bargain. There are others which may require work and can be bought much cheaper, but as most Midge owners are mechanically minded this is no deterrent to future enjoyment. In a world where house prices are going crazy and the price of some classic cars is going through the roof, it is good to know that we can still enjoy our hobby for little more than pocket money. I for one would be very sorry if the price of a Midge escalated beyond the means of the average enthusiast.



This Midge appeared recently on eBay

The original concept of the Midge was to provide a car which was enjoyable to build, mechanically simple to maintain and to allow the user some discretion in how the car was completed. A look at the gallery section on the Club Website will show how this has been achieved because no two Midges are the same. May we still be able to use and enjoy our cars despite what the EU is trying to do to prevent us!

On a personal note, this is the final Newsletter that I shall be sending from my current address in Burbage as we move house in early August. My email address will remain the same and I will let you have my new location in due course. In the meantime, can anyone offer any advice about driving a Midge on a busy motorway (apart from 'don't!')

My best wishes, *John*

### MORE DETAILS ABOUT ROAD TAX EXEMPTION OR VICTORY AT LAST!

Classic enthusiasts have welcomed the Government's decision to bring back rolling tax exemptions which will affect around 10,000 owners, typically saving them £230 each a year.

Chancellor George Osborne announced in the Commons that on 1 April a rolling exemption on Vehicle Excise Duty will be brought in for all vehicles over 40 years old, meaning that owners of classics made throughout 1973 will be the first to benefit.

It follows years of campaigns and petitions from classic car owners to bring back rolling tax exemptions, which were repealed by Tony Blair's Labour Government in 1998.

Sir Greg Knight MP, chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Historic Vehicles Group, said "This is tremendous news for classic owners - George Osborne is a great friend of the classic car movement and is always asking me about what issues

are affecting owners of older cars, so I'm delighted that he's decided to bring back the rolling tax exemption.

"It hardly seemed fair that the owner of a 1975 Triumph 1500 had to pay to tax the classic car they cherish, whereas the owner of the 1972 model didn't have to pay. Now, however, classic owners have finally been given some justice. Overall it's a tremendous result. Three cheers for the Chancellor!"

*I'd give the Chancellor one muted cheer because we are still faced with some members having to pay for Road Tax, particularly those with Ford based cars or those which are 'Q' registered.*

### INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

*This article is included to show the opposite end of the scale from the Midge. It tells of rich owners buying classic saloon cars and converting them into sports cars. That's just what we've been doing for years, but no one has complained about our activities!*



We all like a barn find, or so it seems, and there are plenty of buyers who like a restoration project. What's not quite so popular, especially in the UK, is the creation of a 'special' from a pre-war car. Sadly there's a strong connection between the barn find and the special, because far too many delightfully original - and yes, in some cases scruffy - cars end up being made into a 'special'.

But what is the point in creating a nasty pastiche of a car that probably never was? The problem lies in 'specials' being bought by those who don't really know a lot about cars, or motoring history. And along with so many pre-war cars being sacrificed, it's frightening to think just how many Bentley R-Types and their MkVI predecessors have been

carved up to make some nasty looking pastiche of a 1930s car.

Why do it? In the case of the R-Type and the MkVI, here is a perfectly sensible, usable car that is just as acceptable in scruffy, patinated form as it is in immaculate guise. Yet there are still some 'enthusiasts' who think these corny and often crudely-constructed look backs deserve credibility. The real enthusiast, however, is wise enough to have contempt for these motors, even if they don't always show it.

Yet while these lovely post-war Bentleys are being lost to 'specials' builders, that's nothing compared with the travesty of pre-war cars being carved up - and especially by German companies - to create something that's thought to be appealing. The Vintage Sports Car Club website has a thread permanently running named "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" and there was never more appropriate a title for a thread. On a regular basis it will show cars - often charming saloons - that are being carved up to create a pretty ghastly-looking fake of a 1930s sports car.

Sadly, as the thread shows, even the likes of restored 'Derby' Bentleys aren't immune from this treachery. It's heart-breaking to see so many truly elegant four-doors going for the chop just to satisfy some ill-informed, wealthy buyer who thinks they're buying a slice of motoring yesteryear. They aren't - but what they are doing is playing a part in the destruction of a perfectly fine car. Soon there will be very few four-doors left, while, at the same time, the fate of many pre-war barn finds might not be too rosy. The sooner the trade wakes up to the stark truth these modern 'specials' are nothing but tat, the better.



**Surely no one would object to using this tatty Herald for a Midge Donor - if only the EU would allow it?**



**HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT AN AUTOMATIC MIDGE?** Then please take note of the following query from a car enthusiasts' Website

I've been test driving a Triumph automatic. It works in the daytime but not at night. I put it in D for daytime, and it works fine. I put it in N for night time and it refuses to move. Then yesterday, a guy pulled up alongside me and indicated he wanted to test my acceleration. I put it in R for race mode and I hit the car behind me! I think I need a new gearbox. How much do they cost?

## WEBBER VS SU

*In the Spring magazine, our resident technical expert Jim Hewlett dealt with fuel problems in a Midge. In this issue he tells us how he has converted his Ford based Midge from a Webber carburettor to a simpler SU carburettor. Are there no limits to his ingenuity?*

This is going to be of little interest to anybody who doesn't have:-

- (a) A car old enough to need a carburettor
- (b) DIY skills like welding, or a tame welder.
- (c) a degree of (if not in) gung-ho engineering.

Which sounds like most Midge builders

My 1300 crossflow ex Ford escort engine had a twin-choke Webber carburettor, it is a fine design, but very complicated and, when old, fallible, who Mr Webber was, I have no idea, but I'm assuming he was German because the device is efficient, compact, and wildly over-complicated.

That's OK *when new*, unfortunately its complications are beyond my understanding, as it starts with a good idea and adds modifications, intermittent bypasses, compensating valves, parallel boosters, negative feedback loops and balancing devices. All well and good but "worn out, missing bits, and clogged up in some obscure corner", described what I had. Later I shall take some time to disassemble it and find out what it was supposed to do and what went wrong, and caused it to fail.

I decided to try to fit a simpler device. Now I have always been fond of the SU carburettor. It has few moving parts and generally doesn't clog up. I had a chat with a man who knows no fear and has converted LandRovers to SU. He said it could be done and I arranged to have him make up a

conversion kit, down-draft to side-draft, if I could find an HS4 (1.5")

I found a refurbished SU but sadly, before I could take the car to him to evaluate costs etc, the Webber threw a wobbler, no doubt sensing the end of a long career, and refused to leave the garage. I decided that I would have a go myself. Three main components were needed. An adaptor plate to go on the old Webber manifold, another for the SU output and a tube with a 90 degree bend to join them. The plates came from the heat exchanger that was in the old oil burning domestic 'boiler'. Essentially 1/10<sup>TH</sup> inch mild steel plate. I transcribed the shape of the two gaskets onto one and cut them out with an angle grinder, with 1.5 inch holes in the middle of each for the pipe to connect with. The hard work was cutting the holes in the middle, as they were too small for the grinder. The old standby of drilling small holes in a circle and then lots of work with a round file, a good reason for not using thicker plates. Remember to leave a tab sticking out if you want to weld, bolt or screw anything else on. I suggest you don't cut off any metal that isn't getting in the way until you are sure you don't want it. Little sticky-out bits are useful for attaching return springs and accelerator cable clamps. The mild steel bent pipe I found in a metal work-shop, I believe specialist exhaust makers have the same sort of thing in lighter metal, mine is quite thick and actually only has a 1.25" internal bore.

Stage two was a mockup of the mounting arrangements, to make sure nothing hit anything else when in operation, mine is rotated through 45 degrees anti-clockwise from the usual SU position to avoid the air filter hitting the side panel of the engine bay, and to stop the float chamber resting on the rocker-box. I didn't cut out the round hole in the oblong plate at first because I wasn't sure where I wanted it.

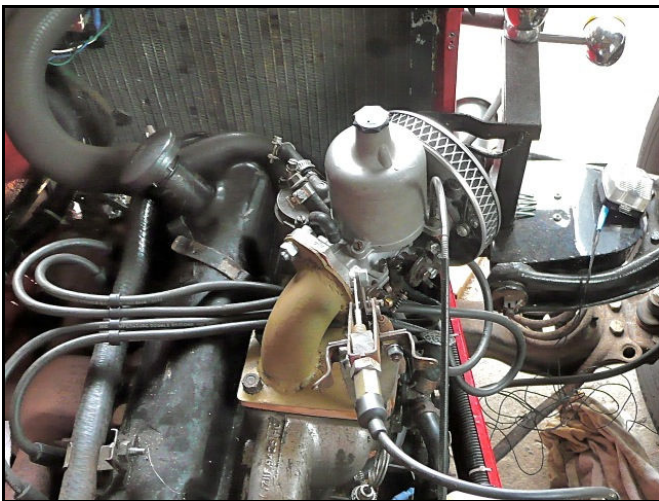
I would add two points here, one was that my SU float chamber is at a different angle (5 or 10 degrees) to the body, which means you want an angle of 80(ish) rather than 90 between the adaptor plates. SU carbs quite often have an upward tilt of the air filter side, presumably so that any petrol dribbles in rather than out. The float chamber should be vertical, but to be fair, the arrangement must be able to operate more than 10 degrees from vertical; otherwise hills, bends and braking would stall the engine.

When I welded it up, it warped a bit, but the gaskets and a little hammer therapy sorted that, and yes, it's a wooden spacer-gasket under the oblong plate, which can also be used to correct any

unforeseen tilts. The accelerator cable is held by the combination of part of a spitfire twin-carb assembly and a piece of metal that used to be the release key of an angle grinder. The only serious bit of adjustment was making a linkage rod out of a 6 inch nail; it needed a 30 degree twist to make it nice.

The choke cable was an awkward fit, so I made a curved device from a large washer cut into thirds and welded two together side by side, after chamfering the inside edges. It looks a bit like the curved head on a 'nodding donkey' oil well pump. That way the choke cable nestles in the slot, which aligns it and gives the longer travel required by the choke mechanism.

I hope to find an inert material to make a better gasket between the adaptor pipe and the manifold, but wood seems to work for now!



### Jim's SU converted Ford Crossflow Engine

Side effects. I may have to run a water pipe around the adaptor tube, as the Venturi effect can cause frosting inside the pipe, an alternative is to funnel air from the radiator or exhaust around it, thereby warming it. As yet it hasn't done any more than develop'dew'. The other problem is that occasionally the float chamber over fills. Engine vibration seems to cure it, so perhaps it's the Ford fuel pump being set to a higher pressure than the SU carb likes, or the needle doesn't settle properly.

There are fewer carbs as simple and reliable as the SU, however there are variables apart from the size and tilt. Here are some of them

The needle in the middle, there are hundreds of different shapes, mine comes from a Wolseley 1300 and seems to suit. a 'Crypton tune' may indicate otherwise. the others are the piston spring and the one under the mixture adjustment. I'm not sure how important they are, but as before the Wolseley

one seems to work for me. There are useful pictures and words on the SU site ([sucarb.co.uk](http://sucarb.co.uk)) especially <http://sucarb.co.uk/technical-h-type-carburettor-diagram>

Since fitting the SU I have noticed a definite increase in power, although it is difficult to separate the causes, not least of which was some oil treatment, and of course I don't know how good the Webber should have been. I'm now quite tempted to do the same with the Herald based Midge, Although I've just replaced the old Solex with a factory recon. We'll see.

For anybody contemplating a similar change, there are lots of useful facts and diagrams on a website called <http://www.sw-em.com/> especially [http://www.sw-em.com/su\\_carbs.htm](http://www.sw-em.com/su_carbs.htm) Much of it is about Volvos, but they have some similarities and the writer has an amusing touch. Good wet weather stuff, and nothing to do with the Swedish Embassy. I should mention Mick who found me the SU HS4 and reconditioned it. (£99 including postage and VAT). They did the same with the Triumph Midge by locating a rather rare Solex B30PSE1 which is running very nicely. (You can get a new PSE1 for your 12/50 from them at £175, though I bought the last factory re-con at £115)

He is contactable at Customer Service URL: <http://www.carburetterspecialists.fsnet.co.uk> Customer Service at: [carburetter@btinternet.com](mailto:carburetter@btinternet.com) Or phone: 01775750166. Their Website is at [www.carburetterspecialists.fsnet.co.uk/](http://www.carburetterspecialists.fsnet.co.uk/)

They seem to be pretty reliable by my experience. No doubt there are others, but I've been pleased with the service there. All this as they say, without prejudice, which means if you blow up your garage, you were the one who took the advice of somebody who makes gaskets out of wood.

*If you would like further details of Jim's carb conversion project, these may be found at <http://www.jimhewlett.com/funwithcarburettors>*

### RETURN OF THE CLASSIC BRITISH SPORTS CAR?

*As far as Midge Owners are concerned, the classic British Sports car never went away. But for the new car enthusiast, things could be a little bit brighter:*

Uncomplicated open-topped fun could be returning to the showrooms as both Mini and MG investigate reviving the classic British roadster

The uncomplicated British sports car as typified by the Austin Healey 'Frogeye' Sprite and related MG Midget could be set to return with signs that both



Mini and MG are looking at reviving that roadster market.

Of course, neither brands are British any longer but they retain strong roots here and would be well placed to tap into the UK desire to see us exceed again at a market since claimed by Mazda with the MX-5.

Mini itself has no sports car in its history, but can be forgiven for casting about for new niches to occupy given the lack of variety in its own heritage. Given that Austin-Healey and MG were previous stable mates under the British Motor Corporation it's perhaps not such a great stretch.



**A Mini - but not as we know it**

Like the Sprite, the Superleggera Mini concept has no door handles and that simplicity extends to the interior. The simple dashboard is made from a single, untreated aluminium sheet, and the two occupants sit in bucket seats. *(just like a Midge!)* BMW say this is just a concept with no plans for production, but the company is known to be looking for another body style to replace the slow-selling Roadster and Coupe. If it did make production, expect the BMW-shared 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbo engine that has gained praise in the newest Mini.

Meanwhile media reports out of China suggest that MG is also looking at re-entering the roadster market. The Chinese owners are also tight-lipped on the subject but have always said they want to return to the market vacated when production of the long-running MG TF ceased in 2011.

*Of course there's always the Midge MK2 for the enthusiast who wishes to build his own sports car, and I understand they are now becoming easier to register as the DVLA seem to be relaxing the rules.*

## GOOD NEWS FROM THE DVLA?

Here is some news from John Cowperthwaite about the changes in the way that the DVLA are approving the Midge MK2. It will also be of interest to owners of the original Midge but doesn't change anything because of the 'modified' chassis used in the MK1 model.

Because Swansea has closed all the local DVLA offices the inspection system has now changed. Previously the Midge MK2 could be presented for the 8 point inspection as soon as the new body was fitted. It did not have to be complete or even running and could be trailered to the inspection point. The system has now changed for the inspection to take place when the car is ready for the road. This means that it has to have an MOT first and be insured.

Copies of the MOT and insurance certificates are then sent to Swansea together with the completed form V627/1 along with the V5C and a tax disc application plus the appropriate road tax fee.

Photos showing that the chassis is unmodified may also be helpful but not essential. The DVLA will process the application and either simply send out a new V5C and tax disc or ask you to present the car at a VOSA station for the simple 8 point check. This process appears to be more streamlined and straightforward than before.

*JC has sent details of how the V627/1 should be completed and the builder's own vehicles details are then added in. Unfortunately I can't reproduce them here, but if you would like a copy please get in touch by email.*

## MOBC BADGES

I'm delighted that we had sufficient interest in the badges to send in an order for more. They have now been manufactured and distributed and have been well received. I have a few badges to spare, and they are available for £13 for the two, including p+p. If you would like a pair of badges then please get in touch. They won't be here for long!



## NEW MEMBERS

- **Stan Marriner of Stony Stratford** is restoring his Midge and hopes to be on the road soon. Good luck, Stan!



- **Richard Newman** lives in Ramsgate and has commenced building a MK2 Midge. Do keep us up to date with your progress, Richard, and please see the article on DVLA registration changes.
- **Bob Gooderson from Kings Lynn** is an engineer for ARC Fabrication in Setchey, Norfolk and has worked for them for 10 years based mainly at British Sugar. His Midge is based on a Triumph Herald 1200 and has had 10 previous owners. It is now affectionately called 'Trudy', and was bought last March from Barry Mays from Littlehampton, West Sussex. Bob has wanted a kit car for some time but could never find the right one until the Midge came along. It is ready to run and just needs a few bits of paintwork.



**Bob Gooderson's Midge is now his pride and joy**

- **Bob May from Norfolk** retired 20 years ago after a career as an airline and helicopter pilot working in the UK and overseas in Australia, Africa and the West Indies. His wife allows him to indulge in his hobbies of Sailing, Radio Control model aircraft building and flying, and now his first Replica/Kitcar. Bob looks forward to meeting other Midge owners whenever they are in the area. He would be grateful for any

history or technical information about his Midge which was formerly owned by Rob Garrett.



**Bob May's Midge going topless for the summer**

- **Eddie Daly from Loughborough** has just purchased his Midge which was owned by a former Club Member. It had been stored for several years and he bought the car as a non-runner. The engine has now been coaxed into life with new plugs, points and petrol, and an ample supply of tea and cakes from his wife!



**Eddie's Midge is looking good**

*I'm very pleased to welcome all our members and hope you enjoy being with the Club.*

**Last but not least - this four door Midge is currently being advertised on eBay. Is anyone brave enough to take it on???**

