

MIDGE MAGAZINE



Winter
2019



MOBC. the Midge Owners and Builders' Club

John B's Midge



Hello All.

Ah Winter, don't you just love the crisp snow, the starry nights, the exploded radiator...checked the antifreeze then? ...and then there's the gritter lorries. Sad that they stop you sliding around and damaging your mudguards, by destroying your mudguards, but that's life.

It might not look like an upside, but tin-worm, wear, tear and mycelium do mean we have, periodically, to do a bit of repair work. Sometimes a complete rebuild. While anything that isn't completely dry, serviced and protected will disintegrate over a few years, some of the best cared for Midges are now old enough to need quite a bit of attention, and this is where we have the advantage. Like the fabric and wood aircraft, the ply Midge can be refurbished (given the occasional new chassis) to the point where little of the original remains. Just jack up the VIN and the number-plates and carry on. Only fair really as I'm told the human body is replaced every 7 to 10 years on a cellular level. Many Midge owners consider their car to have a complete personality with just as many endearing qualities and annoying habits as their partners...though probably best keeping these thoughts under a tarpaulin. Remember to keep checking the brake fluid though, just in case one of your loved ones turns homicidal.

And on that note, Happy Christmas everyone and a Happy new year
JH.



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Stories and photographs to Secretary Jim Hewlett at
jim@jimhewlett.com or The Old Manse, Tarbrax, West
Calder, West Lothian, UK EH55 8XD

Welcome to Martin Meffert, Mike Carter and
Peter Hubbard

Well, first off let's see how Mark Powell is doing.

Oct 7

I've finished the basic construction and have now disassembled the body and manoeuvred it on to a platform constructed on and above the chassis. 'Rolled' on to its side, it awaits the two pack sealant...

Sept 28

Some further progress...

I have completed the drivers side door and flank woodwork, sorted out the bonnet location points and drilled the footwell top for the pedal assemblies. I temporarily fitted the pedals and with the drivers seat sitting on the floor, tested my foot space... It all came back to me and I will go ahead with the positioning!

Next was the dummy fuel tank. I had salvaged the aluminium cover and side pieces from the rotten structure, so it was a case of making up a new ply structure to match the old aluminium. Once done, the ply was treated to two good coats of Sadolin and the ply and ally were reunited.

Offered up to the rear of the tub revealed that it will need to be spaced away by about 4mm. to enable it to match up to my spare wheel mount.

Tomorrow is another day...

...Tomorrow has been and gone... Vile weather outside and decided to have a tidy up in the garage. I think I can probably find everything now.

Oh, and the steering wheel etc is almost where it should be, the steering shaft hole in the bulkhead will need opening out a bit.





A little more progress.. I've skinned the drivers side and fixed the ally edge trim to the bottom edge.

I will address the front bulkhead firewall panel next, it will be skinned in aluminium, likewise the top of the footwell panel and continuing up the upper bulkhead.



The strange cutouts on either outer side of the firewall panel are for the Ripault bonnet catches. They had to be recessed because of the difference in the panel position and the re-use of the original bonnet assembly. (On the original build there



per old photo.) I set the pedal fitting points fractionally further inboard from the new pattern positions. That gives me just the space I need for my right foot movement between go and stop...

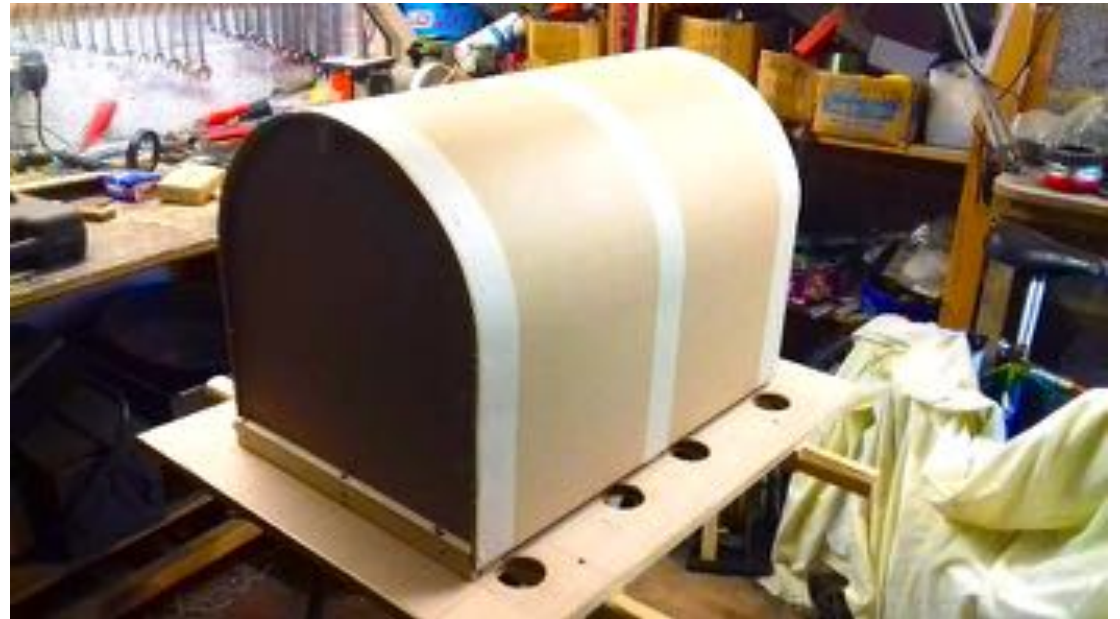
Further news when it happens...

MP

Next up, an article from Roger England who recently discovered that the Midge he sold 3 years ago for £4950 is now up for sale again in France for €25,000!!! He also discovered that flexible ply is expensive but very useful. But I'll let him continue...

There are times when decisions made are regretted, and one I regret is selling my Midge. However, the world moves on and new projects appear. My current interest revolves around a friend's 1929 Armstrong Siddeley base which is to become a 1920s style racer. Little remained of the body at purchase – the rolling chassis with engine, pre-selector gearbox, and rear axle, radiator, bonnet and scuttle. To complete the picture, a motley collection of wood-worm infested floorboards. Surprisingly, the chassis was very sound and so the rebuild started using that once sand blasted and painted.

In looking to create a body, it was hoped to have some curved panels to create a rather more interesting shape so I looked at bending standard plywood. My trial proved to be a disaster as the steamed and dampened ply merely sprung back into its natural (flat) state as soon as it was released from the curved buck I had made. I did a bit of research and discovered various “flexible” sheet products in plywood, and MDF. Perhaps I could use flexible ply? As a trial I decided to make a pair of bucket seats so purchased a sheet (2440 x 1220mm) of 8mm flexible ply wood. The buck holes in the photo on the right are to allow the ratchet strap to encircle the buck tightly



Flexible ply comes in various thicknesses and with either the grain running down the length or across the width. It depends what you're doing as to which you need, but basically, the long grain gives you the ability to create curves across a greater width than the cross grain. In its manufacture, flexible ply has the grain running in the same direction for all the layers, rather than alternating between cross and long grain as in standard ply. This give the flexible plywood the ability to bend – a full sheet of cross grain will roll into a cylinder about 600mm in diameter. However, if you shape the ply on a buck, for example, and then glue another layer on top, it will maintain the shape created – and be quite rigid too. It isn't cheap though. A full sheet is around £50. On the Armstrong Siddeley, flexible plywood was used for three areas – two bucket seats, the four wings, and body sections comprising the scuttle top, rear tub body, and a sloping rear end for the car.

Bucket seats

I had already made a buck which sits on a base of 18mm plywood. The curved part is made of flexible MDF. The idea was to lay a suitably shaped sheet of ply over the buck, and then glue another sheet to it. The two sheets would be clamped together using ratchet straps that ran round the whole buck and baseplate.



In practice this worked well, although I did need to have a point of registration to ensure the two layers stayed in their required position on the buck. I merely drilled a hole into both layers of ply at the centre line and 25mm from the top and screwed the two layers to the buck. I used Gorilla glue which I found to be ideal and after 12 hours released the ratchet straps and unscrewed my registration screw. One nicely formed seat back appeared and was very firm. A shaped 18mm ply base was screwed to the ply sides. After the success of the first, a second seat was fashioned in the same manner. I made a ply insert for the base and covered that with green leather I salvaged from an old three-piece suite, but felt my upholstering skills were not up to covering the back so gave

that job to a local trimming company. The end result was very pleasing, and remarkably comfortable.

I'll just wedge in here, a note that Roger has a blog about this at <https://upperstondon.blogspot.com/>

Wings. One advantage of recreating an older car is that designs tend to be more simple. This is so with wings which were often two-dimensional. Using flexible ply would be ideal for this purpose but first a jig or two would be needed.

The front wings were quite simple in design, having two opposing gentle curves, whilst the rear wings would follow the diameter of the wheel from the front over the top, but be swept up with a flourish at the back!

Front wings The front wing jig took a while to build but worked well. It can be seen in the picture on the left.

The jig comprised a 5mm ply base with the desired wing shape marked out on it. Small wooden blocks were cut and screwed to the base either side of the wing shape marked out, leaving a gap slightly greater than two widths of the flexible plywood. Two pieces of flexible ply were cut out and glue applied to one surface. The other piece was placed on the first, and the pair inserted into the jig between the wooded blocks. Due to the shape, pressure was exerted right the way round the lower edge of the ply to ensure the two layers were pressed together. I used small clamp clips on the upper edges to ensure these stayed locked together. Once the glue had set, the end result was removed from the jig and a curved end cut at one end. The other end is being left for the moment until the exact style is decided. I've used Cuprinol "Clear" as a sealant so gave the wings two coats.

Rear wings The rear wing jig followed a similar pattern to the front with small wooden blocks screwed to a ply base. Once again two pieces of flexible ply were cut to the required size, glued together and fitted into the jig, and the same method for clamping used.

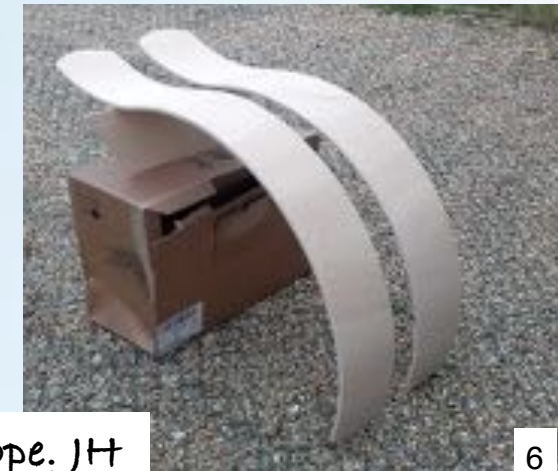
Rear wing Jig



Front wings after removal from jig



The end result

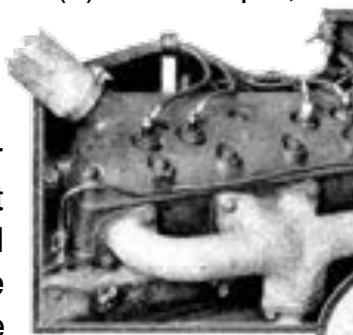


More later I hope. JH

That "Odd" Sparking Plug may cause engine vibration and a loss of power

By W. M. RUDBOON

I HAVE taken part recently in a series of experiments which demonstrated without question that appreciable deterioration in the running of an engine may be caused by using an "odd" sparking plug, or more than one, in either a four cylinder or a six-cylinder engine. The tests showed conclusively that to secure the best results in acceleration, speed, hill-climbing and freedom from engine vibration it is necessary to use a full set of four or six plugs all of the same "reach" and preferably all of the same make and model. Before giving a few details of the experiments in question and the observed results, let me recall that sparking plugs of various makes and models differ in regard to (1) the shape, thickness and design of the electrodes, (2)



the length of their reach (i.e. the extent to which they project into or towards the combustion chamber), and (3) the number of "points" across which the spark is at liberty to jump, as well as in the material and design of the insulator and body. The tests were concerned mainly with the variations enumerated, and the object was to determine, as far as possible on the road, whether and to what extent the running of an engine was affected by using odd plugs, differing in respect of those three general characteristics.

Difference in Electrodes

As regards the shape and thickness of the electrodes and the number of sparking points, it was found that these factors of difference were relatively unimportant. Personally, I could not detect any difference in the behaviour of the engine when an odd plug or plugs differed from the remaining units of the set in use in those respects only. But when the odd one or more differed appreciably from the others in length of reach, there was unquestionable deterioration in engine performance. The greater

the difference in reach, the greater the deterioration. True, the reduction in maximum speed was not really worthy of serious consideration; at the worst, the loss was no more than 3 m.p.h., while hillclimbing and acceleration were evidently affected only when the engine speed fell below that represented by about 30 m.p.h. on top gear. Smoothness of running was, however, so obviously affected that there can be no question as to the desirability of using four or six sparking plugs of identical make and type in a four-cylinder or six cylinder engine, as the case may be. If one could be quite sure that an odd plug had precisely the same reach as the others of a different make and model, no deterioration in performance might be observable with it in use. But otherwise, the car owner who wishes to equip his engine to the best advantage is well advised to have the full set of plugs identical in every respect. With all plugs exactly alike, the six-cylinder engine was commendably smooth in running at all reasonable speeds, except that it had a "period" of vibration—not at all serious—at 35-40 m.p.h.

One Odd Plug

But even with only one odd plug having either an appreciably shorter or longer reach than the others, the running was distinctly "rough" by comparison at all speeds up to 50 m.p.h. or so; at 35-40 m.p.h. the vibration made everything on the car rattle and drum that could

possibly do so, the view through the rear mirror was reduced to a horrible blur. With a four cylinder car the ill-effects were very similar and perhaps a little more noticeable. It is of interest, too, to mention that an odd plug or plugs of longer reach than the majority caused the engine, additionally, to "pink" more readily at low speeds and while accelerating, and that the greater the difference in reach between the odd plugs and the others, the more "vicious" the pinking, unless the spark was retarded abnormally.

borrowed from the May 1933 Morris owner magazine JH

And since I have absolutely no shame, I pinched this too.



Superior Motorist (buying road map): "This one showing second-class roads would be of no use to me. I travel on nothing but the best."

UK 2019/20 Events

The Car and Classic site does event prediction so much better than I can, there seems little point in copying their web page, especially as they can update as the months go by. If you go to

http://www.carandclassic.co.uk/car_events.php

You can get the information direct, that's where I get it. If something you know about isn't on it, tell me and I'll add it to our pages.



Peter Vivian's Midgelet Soon in the January Triumph Sports six club Magazine and Photographed by Octane

Those of you of a similar age to me might remember a BBC children's TV program in the late 60's ' called Picture Box. One episode showed our hero building a car from bits of cars he picked up from a scrapyard, remember those? This stayed with me throughout my teens and into my twenties when I became keen to own something a bit different from the rest and I discovered a plan built car called the Burlington Arrow with the faintly derogatory tagline that went something like "...have you seen the price of plastic bathtubs?". I bought a copy of Kitcars and Specials and found the Burlington wasn't the only plan built car available, a local guy by the name of Roy Richards had built something called a Triumph 'Midge' using nothing more than a couple of sheets of ply and a Spitfire chassis. No money to buy a 'plastic bathtub' it looked like this was my only route. I visited Roy to get some hints and tips and found he was selling the original engine for £90 so the build was on! I managed to score a chassis from a nearby farm where someone had mixed concrete in the boot which had eaten the rear bodywork, I didn't need this anyway so I called in a favour from a friend with a flatbed and crane

and got it home to my single lock up with no heat, light or power. The chassis needed a few modifications and the body was cut out of three quarter inch ply using the full size paper patterns purchased from John Cowperthwaite. The tub was skinned in thin Aluminium and it was time for paint but what colour? Roy's was red so that was out, then I saw a car on the front cover of another Kit car magazine and managed to contact the owner who told me the colour of his MG replica featured was Jaguar indigo blue, the decision was made.



Forty five thousand miles and some 20+ years later it had started to look a bit tired, then the gearbox failed on the way back from a great day at Wilton House Super car Sunday so I took it off the road and decided to re-body it with a restyled 'boat tail' rear end. Rather than flat ply panels I designed and built an Ash frame and which I covered in 1.2 mm Aluminium. The only double curvature work was the boat tail section and after receiving quotes for just the two top halves ranging from £800 to £2k I thought I'd have a go myself. I bought a sandbag and turned a bossing mallet on my lathe and started beating the Aluminium into something resembling the curved panels. I got the shape somewhere near but it looked a bit like a raspberry! A wheeling machine seemed to be the answer so I made a small scale version just big enough to accept the two halves, it was a steep learning curve and whilst they're far from perfect I was reasonably happy with them. In its first incarnation the interior had gone from beige to grey but I was never entirely convinced, this time it was to be red. My mum had helped me with the first two but as she was sadly no longer with us I had all the stitching professionally done. The original engine had long been replaced with a 1300cc Spitfire version of the 1147 Herald but I was after a bit more performance so after 5 failed attempts to find an engine builder I had it updated with a Piper fast road cam and a lightened and balanced

flywheel. It was repainted in the same colour by the same painter! It's rolling on 14 inch MGB wheels with a stainless one piece custom exhaust which everyone tells me is a bit loud but I think it's just fine! I'm still running it in and sorting out a few minor teething problems but it goes quite well and is much more comfortable than previously. Future jobs include replacing the cast exhaust manifold with a second hand tubular one I have in the garage. I have an old Landie and a Harley to restore but I think I might still have another build in me, but I'll never sell this one, there is too much of me in it!



Owing to a change of plan, Peter decided against fitting the folding windscreen (below) he'd had made up. He adds:-

For sale One-off chrome on brass folding windscreen, fitted but never driven, change of plans mean I went with aeroscreens. It cost £550 including glass but will accept £300 OVNO. Comes with 2 different wooden mounts but will need modifying to suit your application. Please email me on petervivian5@gmail.com for further information.



Peter loaned a build record of the first version of the Midgelet to a couple near BournemouthIf it was you please get in touch, he's missing it. JH

There you go, perfect for Christmas. Just leave the magazine open at this page or up on your computer screen for the family to see. I would suggest a pillow case rather than a sock. JH

What's a Midge worth? By Roger England.

I know Jim has prepared an excellent table of values based on a variety of options/conditions. What I have done is to review the “fate” of one particular Midge that I owned for a couple of years.

The car I bought was based on a 1200 Herald chassis/engine and had been a little neglected when I bought it, but I do know that the previous owner to me had seen it languishing in a front garden for some time and eventually approached the owner who agreed to sell. I'm guessing this would have been around 2010 and its condition can be seen in the picture below.



I've no idea what was paid at that time. It required a fair bit of fettling but did benefit from the mechanical work and had a repaint in a slightly darker shade of green. Thus, looking much smarter, the car attended a number of shows in its new guise and with a new non-age-related number plate. (above)

The owner had a greater interest in micro cars and sadly, over time, the Midge was little used and sat in his front garden under a purpose-made cover until he decided to sell it (2014).

Enter stage right – me! I could see the potential so agreed a price - £2800, and off I went to arrange insurance.

The owner insisted on delivering the car to me and so it duly arrived on a low loader, the reason for which became apparent when I tried the brakes – not very effective. Nevertheless, it started, sounded OK and moved through the gears.

Over the next few weeks it had new callipers, pads, rear brake shoes and wheel cylinders, new brake master cylinder, but it was rather incontinent (oil) so when the chance appeared to buy an overhauled 1200 engine, I jumped at it. A better cam was fitted, the head skimmed, a pair of 1 ¼" SUs replaced the single carb, and a three branch exhaust manifold fitted.

There then ensued a further frenzy of work – gearbox overhaul, new clutch, new clutch slave and master cylinder, extended remote gear extension, new seats, complete interior retrim, period 4 spoke steering wheel, new dash and period instruments, outside handbrake fitted, wings modified, etc., etc. But by the summer of 2016 my priorities had changed and I decided to sell the Midge. This is how it looked then :



I put the Midge up for sale at £5000 and after a very short while was offered and accepted £4900. In hindsight I think the guy that bought it was a dealer. Anyway, he said it was off to France and his Belgian friend drove it away.

I really didn't think much more about it until in 2018 I stumbled across an advert on a French website for a Triumph based MG J2 replica. There was my old Midge being offered by the owner in the suburbs of Paris for the princely sum of €20,000 (about £18,000)! I kept watch on the advert for a few weeks until it disappeared, assuming that it would never sell at that price. Some weeks later I found that someone had posted 82 pictures of the Midge on Flickr or similar – all taken at a classic car event in Paris.

From time to time I checked to see if an advert had reappeared but was not rewarded until November 2019 when I found a new advert for the Midge. By now it had moved to the south of France and was being offered at the even higher price of €25,000 (approx. £22,750).



As advertised in France December 2019

Rather interestingly it had now acquired a new pedigree as it was being sold as a factory-built car! I made contact with the current owner and explained my involvement with the car and he sent me photos of the car in bits due to oil leaks – gearbox and engine. Still, I guess at the price being asked, he's not going to lose money on the deal.

So, my advice is, if you have a Midge for sale, try offering it in France – you might make a fortune!

Roger England

Given the current value you'd expect the British car industry to start remanufacturing Triumph 'skateboards' (chassis suspension and drive train). I suppose there might be a few compliance problems. JH

Well folks that's another year nearly done, and for those of us in the (as yet) UK a busy one. However, this is about the time I promised myself and the data protection act that I'd check the membership. There are currently 152 on the books. Sending a few extra emails to defunct email accounts isn't a problem, but I am supposed to eliminate personal data from my computer if it isn't applicable any more. Deleting addresses is tricky because members often return after periods of absence, usually because of a resurgence of Midge activity, nostalgia, and sometimes because they change email address and fall off the notification list. If I get repeated 'bounced' emails from full inboxes or the equivalent of 'not known at this address' then I take them off the mailing list. There is a list of disappeared members which I try to reduce to name, membership number, street address and midge registration. There are two members who don't have computers but their posted magazines don't come back as undelivered and I regularly hear from Peter H so I know he's still there. There are probably a few who are now beyond contact, although I have occasionally chased one down when all the details have changed except one of the phone numbers and the name.

So with some reluctance (because of the hassle imposed) I will ask everyone who wants to stay in touch to email me back at jim@jimhewlett.com (if you click on that it should open an email for you to send) with Still alive in the subject line and any changed details in the main text box. If you don't notice this for a year or two I can still reinstate you.

I'll accept mobile phone texts to 07766011877 (although I'll not answer them by text) and by facebook. I'll put a posting on the MOBC facebook page for that. I'll not put it in the website on the grounds that people who go onto the website are still interested. If you want to discontinue you can say so, but it isn't necessary as most of the 'non responders' for obvious reasons won't be answering. Anyone who gets deleted can be reinstated at no cost. I think the longest absence was 10 years, but as he had his membership number I was able to retrieve his details from John's archive and put him back in. So sorry about the fuss, it's just data protection really. Facebook members who aren't full members (Hint, only £10 as a one off joining fee) don't get notifications as I don't have their addresses, and consequently don't have to respond. I don't think it's necessary to join if you are selling a car or thinking of buying one.

Meantime, have a thoroughly festive Christmas and an equally prosperous New Year.

Jim H, Secretary and deputy chief parking attendant.