

The MG History of John Grant

(with assistance from long-time navigator Jeanette)

John was born on the Wirral (North West England) in 1935. Half way through his mechanical apprenticeship, his father's firm sent him to Toronto in 1953. Two years were spent in Canada before moving to New Zealand.

In Canada John was able to drive on his English driving licence for six months. He purchased a 1949 MGTC, one of only about five in the whole country. It was a proper sports car, which even in the Canadian climate spent nearly all its time with the hood down. It was so small that he was able to house it in the packing case the family furniture had come over in.

The day of his appointment to take a Canadian driving test was a cold -20F. He drove up to the office of the private testing authority, parked the car (with the hood down of course) and went in. The examiner put on his coat and came outside with John. When he saw his car, his reaction was

“What the hell do you think I am, a bloody Eskimo?”

He went back inside and scrounged a couple of extra coats from somewhere. He squeezed down into the car and said “ now let's make this quick”. He directed John round the nearest block, got him to park in an empty area, four or five car lengths long and said “let's get back quick”.

They did. Back inside the building the examiner headed for a heater. It was really hot inside! The roads had been very slippery with a lot of ice on them and he said if John could handle it under those conditions he could handle it anywhere and he gave John a fine pass.

John arrived in Auckland mid 1955 and initially joined the Auckland Car Club. Membership of the MG Club followed shortly after. John



and Jeanette were married in 1967. Early days in New Zealand involved Peugeot cars .

Arrival in Auckland was not long before the North-western motorway was opened. Prior to the official opening one of the big car clubs had managed to have sprint races - a standing and flying quarter mile - on a stretch near Te Atatu. Imagine that now on any new motorway?? John noticed a TC going very quickly in an event. It belonged to Dell Dawson and John asked him for first refusal if he ever decided to sell. Six weeks later it was John's.

It was an ex- works racing car which had been factory racing in Ireland in the Tourist Trophy races at Dundrod and reputedly also raced at Goodwood. It had serious reliability issues which took time to remedy. Usual top speed was 75mph but John was able, with a higher state of tune, to reach 120mph.

The main reliability problem was blowing head gaskets. In the end John threw away the gasket and filled all the water passages between the head and the block with bronze. This was not easy as the whole head had to be brought up to temperature so it wouldn't crack. The water was then bypassed round the back of the motor and the head was lapped onto the block with just a bit of sealer around each cylinder. As

a result the head only had to come off every five or six meetings rather than after every meeting.

For its last two seasons John supercharged it!! The first year it was too highly tuned and proved brittle. It broke conrods, crankshafts etc. He had some outrageous blowups but it never totally destroyed itself.

John says this type of racing was great fun but needing a low tide. Spectator numbers were low because of the beach access. It was four miles up the beach.

In the car's last season the compression



Beach racing - Muriwai Beach 1957

ratio was lowered to 9.1 (standard was 7.1). In its non-supercharged form it had been running up to 17.1 - it was giving out up to 157 horsepower (in 1961).

The car competed in hillclimbs and sprint meetings all over the North Island as well as in club races at Ardmore, Ohakea and Levin. In his last season John entered the car in the Grand Prix but did not make a good enough time to qualify.

John finally sold the TC in 1962. It had

become obsolete.

After John and Jeanette returned from the UK in 1967 they remained members of the MG Club, although not owning an MG.

In those days the Club meetings were held at the Tamaki Yacht Club with attendance numbers up to two hundred members.

With a growing family the main interest changed to Rallies and Trials but with Peugeot vehicles. John was involved with founding the Peugeot Car Club in New Zealand (1979).

In the mid-1990s MG organised a couple of weekend long rallies and John heard about these and competed in them, in his Peugeot 203. He discovered that many of the members he had known over twenty years earlier were still active, in many cases with the same car. So he rejoined the MG Club and started looking for an MG. In 1995 he acquired his present car, a 1979 MGBGT.

It took many years before he had it looking and acting as he felt it should. John and Jeanette you are an inspiration to us all, well done.

These comments have been prised from the huge inventory of John and Jeanette's experiences, much of it involving MG.

Peter Crawford

