

# Jack and Jim's (and Janey and Sharon) Excellent Adventure At MG2008

Or

**How The Four of Us Spent Ten Days and 2500 Miles In Cramped, Hot, Noisy Cars,  
Saw Ben Franklin, the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, Betsy Ross' Home, an Amish  
Auction, Gettysburg, the Shenandoah Valley, Drove Through Parts of Five States,  
Made a Emergency Car Repairs, and Stayed in a Home Built in 1690!**

It was all Sharon's idea. She's the one who thought it would be grand to combine visiting historic Valley Forge and Philadelphia with participation in a national MG gathering. It seemed awfully far, but maybe if we could get other BSCC members to go . . . .

It was too late to get rooms at the host hotel by the time we finally committed to going, so Sharon hunted up a reasonably priced Bed & Breakfast only about five miles distant from King of Prussia, PA where all the MGs would be gathering. Then she recruited Jack and Janey Reynolds to join our short caravan. Though she tried, Sharon was unable to ~~reek~~ convince other BSCC members to join in.

So, it was set. The two MGs (Jack's 1967 and my 1977) would leave Memphis Sunday morning, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, spend 3+ days driving the 1100+ miles to Valley Forge; spend 3+ days at Valley Forge; leave for home on Sunday, June 29<sup>th</sup> aiming to get home on Tuesday, July 1<sup>st</sup>.

We didn't have rigid plans about the route we'd take, but wanted to drive some of the way on both the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Skyline Drive, both in western Virginia. So, we met at the I-40 / Canada Road intersection and headed east on the Interstate aiming to reach Morristown, TN Sunday evening. For the few of us who haven't driven all the way across Tennessee on I-40, it is a long way, and it was hot, and we had the tops down on our MGs. Now we've driven tops down before, and are smart enough to apply a good sun screen.

There are two or three long steep hills to climb ascending the Cumberland Plateau between Nashville and Crossville, TN. Jack's 41-year-old MG ran a bit hot maintaining 65-70 mph up those long grades, but it quickly cooled to normal operating range one level ground was reached. After a spot of worried discussion we decided that a watchful eye on the temperature



Lakeside Dining with Jerry McDuffie

gauge would be a good idea as we pressed on, while ascribing the engine heat to undue work climbing the grades.

Bypassing Knoxville (I-40 is closed through the town anyway), we reached Morristown about 6 p.m. and were joined by a colleague from my days as an employed person. He is a Morristown resident and volunteered to lead us to a good local restaurant with a delightful lakeside view –it sure beat what we strangers could have stumbled onto along the freeway. Maybe it was a product of his East Tennessee good manners, but he didn't say anything about our sun-reddened faces (even the best sun screen doesn't account for missed spots or hours of sweating) or wind-tousled hair. After good food, an hour or so of good conversation, and a couple glasses of wine, we returned to our overnight motel to prepare for another day on the road.

Monday dawned fine and mild as we headed northeast on I-81 into southwest Virginia, passing Abingdon (isn't that the birthplace of MGs?) before jumping off the freeway to head down Virginia Hwy 52 stopping in the quaintly named Hillsville for lunch at the Hillsville Diner



1 Hillsville, VA Diner

Continuing on Hwy 52, we aimed for Fancy Gap, VA where we joined the famed Blue Ridge Parkway.

Equal to its reputation, the Blue Ridge Parkway is hilly, little traveled, and scenic with frequent pull-outs for spectacular vistas.

Mountain laurel and rhododendron were in bloom, along with several other species of roadside wildflowers. Speed is limited to 45 mph along the Blue Ridge, but sharp curves, fairly steep hills, and scenic beauty made that pace very acceptable most of the time.

We left the Blue Ridge Parkway at Roanoke for overnight lodging. The electric overdrive in my MGB failed to return to duty after a fuel stop. A recent experience with erratic overdrive performance due to low transmission lubricant made that my first thought as the cause - it proved not to be the case. Eventually a broken wire was found, but was in a difficult location so the balance of our trip was completed sans overdrive – higher operating rpm means higher noise



2 Blue Ridge Vista

level in the cockpit.

After a visiting downtown Roanoke for dinner at the world-class 'Tavern on the Square', and a good night's rest, we opted to abridge the Blue Ridge Parkway for a while and headed north again on I-81. Then, at Harrisonburg, VA we again left the Interstate and rejoined the Federal Parkway – the Skyline Drive, this time.

The Skyline Drive is a true National Park. We had to stop at the guard gate and pay a fee to enter where we had a curious encounter with the Park Ranger manning the gate. Jack's MGB was behind ours when we stopped to pay the fee, and after seeming to discourage us from entering the park (she informed us that the Skyline Drive was under construction along its entire length, that speed was limited to only 35 mph, and that there was a \$15 fee to enter the park - after which she asked if we were sure we still wanted to go), the ranger allowed Sharon & I to purchase a permanent 'Senior' pass for \$10 after we proved we were old enough. I jokingly told her that the elderly gentleman in the car behind was way older than me, so he would easily qualify for the \$10 permanent pass, too. But, she didn't even offer the senior discount to Jack, and he had to pay the full \$15 for a one-time pass.

You may think the 35 mph speed limit was too restrictive, but it wasn't. The winding, hilly (actually mountainous) road won't permit too much faster. Pull-outs for scenic vistas were frequent and compelling, so travel was slow and enjoyable. The Skyline Drive is aptly named, traveling along the higher spine of the mid-Appalachians at elevation between 3,000 feet and 3,600 feet. While the calendar showed June 24<sup>th</sup>, the temperature was quite cool at elevation, causing us to occasionally wish for long

sleeves. In addition to scenic beauty and a pleasant road on which to drive, there were wildlife glimpses.



3 Sharon Shivers in Skyline Chill

The Park Ranger's dire warning about continuous road construction was an over statement. We encountered only a handful of work areas and were not caused to slow or stop any appreciable amount. Still, with frequent stops to admire the view, or to take

snapshots of fauna or flora, two hours of driving only netted about 30 miles of travel.

So, we exited the Skyline Drive at Luray, VA and followed Hwy 340 north to Front Royal, VA where we again hopped onto I-81 to finish the day at Chambersburg, MD. Gordon Gold, and other Civil War experts will remember Chambersburg as one of the sites associated with



4 Skyline Fauna

the battle at Gettysburg. Surprisingly, Chambersburg was also a player in the so called French and Indian War, the Whiskey Rebellion, and is where John Brown gathered arms and supplies in preparation for his assault on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

Starting from Chambersburg, we headed east on Hwy 30 on Wednesday. We had only about 130 miles left to travel, and were optimistic of an early arrival at our Bed &



5 Gettysburg Street Scene

Breakfast destination. Going east, we stopped first in Gettysburg, a beautifully quaint and attractive city. Its one glaring flaw was traffic. Trucks, cars, SUVs, pickups, dump trucks, semis – everything with wheels roared through while we were there. A simple conversation was sometimes difficult due to the constant rumble.

As we parked street side, we encountered the first MGBs seen headed toward Valley Forge – a

convoy from Dayton, OH who waved and stopped briefly. We'd traveled right at 1,000 miles and hadn't seen another British car other than a handful of late model Jaguars. And, we didn't see another until our arrival at the host hotel!

Continuing east through York and Lancaster along Hwy 30, we had our most difficult day of travel. U.S. Highway 30 is so congested, heavily traveled, and stop-light riddled as to make it downright an unpleasant route to drive. We spent nearly six grueling hours driving the 130 miles from Chambersburg to Valley Forge – all in increasingly hot weather. Finally, though, we arrived at 'The Great Valley House', our B & B, around 4 p.m.

We'd read that the house dated to sometime in the 1700s, so we were surprised when our innkeeper told us that the dwelling actually was built (the first room of the existing house) in 1690, if not a bit before! It is the oldest house in Pennsylvania and there are only four other homes of such vintage in private hands in the United States.

Originally, the house was a simple stone constructed one-room structure. The single room was about 15 X 20 feet in dimension, and contained the fireplace – a massive

opening that I'd estimate to be 5 feet tall and 6 to 8 feet wide – and a stone sink – essentially a large flat rock cantilevered from one wall. There was a sunken area about two inches deep carved into the rock to create a basin,



6 Great Valley House B & B

and a drain that opened into the wall. The innkeeper said a wooden plug was inserted into the drain to retain water, and pulled to drain the water through the wall to outdoors.

A ladder swung from the raftered ceiling, allowing the children access to their attic sleeping quarters. The parents slept in a tiny room alongside the fireplace (warmth!). Originally the floor was dirt, but we enjoyed wide random-width planking which had been added during the 300+ years of the house's life.

As can be seen in the photograph, the house sits on a hill. There are, essentially, two flights of stairs from the parking area to the front entrance. Our rooms were on the third floor, so we had to climb, and descend four flights of stairs every time we entered or left. Whew! We had to stoop to pass through the older doorways, and ceilings in our rooms sloped enough to cause even more crouching. While our rooms were air-conditioned, the main parts of the house were not. Lighting was dim by modern standards, and furniture rather rustic.

You may think we didn't enjoy our stay, but you'd be wrong. We had a rare opportunity to get a personal feel for life in an earlier time – without having to sleep behind the fireplace or go about by candle light. And, we had very tasty breakfasts served by our hostess Patty Benson.

We came to be part of MG2008, an annual gathering of (mostly) MGBs from North America, and it opened with an evening reception at the host hotel (the Sheraton in nearby King of Prussia, PA). Jack, Janey, Sharon, & I sped over to find a large parking lot already bursting with at least a couple of hundred MGBs. Almost immediately we spotted friends from Minneapolis, St. Louis and Greenville, SC. Sharon & Janey wandered inside while Jack and I strolled the impromptu car show in the parking lot. Fortunately, we'd had the foresight to bring our coolers (door prizes from Blytheville) filled with beverages to give parking lot sustenance.



7 Host Hotel Parking Lot

Eventually, we found the hospitality room

and

reception area where food and an ample supply of Old Speckled Hen was in



8 Reception Scene

abundance. DJ music was old Rock & Roll from the Philadelphia area, boisterous conversation was loud, and handshakes warm. A great kick off for a great event.

We had registered for a guided bus tour of some of Philadelphia's colonial history, so we made it an early night and found our way back (via GPS) to the Great Valley House. We'd already arranged for an earlier than normal breakfast because we had to be on the bus by 9 a.m. the following morning. As it turned out, the event organizers had to put on two tour busses because there was high demand from MGB drivers.

Leaving the Sheraton at 9 a.m. we traveled into central Philadelphia where we met our tour guides (one per bus, and our bus got the best one). Our guide, David Edwards, is a PHD historian, teacher, actor, professional story-teller, and historic re-enactor. He really



knows early American history and relates it in colorful, entertaining, stentorian style. He also kept track of the 36 persons in his care – not an easy task (just imagine herding 36 cats).

Starting with Independence Hall, we saw the Liberty Bell and were given a short dissertation on the bell by a National Park Ranger. Toured both houses of the

Pennsylvania legislature (seat of the U.S.

[9 Tour Guide, David Edwards](#)

government while a national capitol was being

established) where both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were written and signed. Drove past Betsy Ross' home where legend has George Washington bringing a sketch of the new nation's flag for the widow Ross to sew.

We then stopped at the site of Benjamin Franklin's home and print shop – sadly those



structures no longer exist, but we got a glimpse of their foundations. And, we met the learned Dr. Franklin himself in the person of a costumed re-enactor / impersonator. Our society generally underestimates the role and importance of Ben Franklin. He was a highly successful businessman, a patriarch of an important family, a humorist, a writer, a publisher, a noted scientist, a diplomat, an inventor, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. It is fair to say the U.S. would not have gained independence from

England

[10 Dr. Franklin](#)

without the

help of France, and we would not have gained that assistance without the persuasive diplomacy of Dr. Franklin.



[11 Liberty Bell](#)

We learned that most of the legends about the Liberty Bell are false, that the bell was made (initially) in England, that it cracked more than once, that it was broken apart and recast by a colonial tin works, that it again cracked, and was made worse by repair attempts, and that the final crack was not from joyous and vigorous ringing in celebration of our independence. It was named the 'Liberty Bell' by abolitionists due to the verse from Leviticus inscribed on the bell; "Proclaim Liberty Throughout all the Land and Unto all Inhabitants Thereof."

Our final stop, before lunch, was historic Christ Church. Founded in 1695, it was the birthplace of the American Episcopal Church, and was church home to many Colonial American notables – Franklin, Betsy Ross, John Adams, George Washington, and many others. Seven Independence are around the church The present was the tallest the time. Historian "No other church role in our nation's the curator gave a church; I sat in the

We were getting our next stop was on South Street, home to a host of eclectic Philadelphia businesses and eateries. 'Steaks on South' - SOS was our choice, where we enjoyed a beverage and a tasty Philly Cheese-steak. Afterward, Jack & I were forced to seek a brief sit-down from all the activity - we had an evening's hospitality (with Old Speckled Hen in cans and Yen gling Lager on tap!!) in front of us and needed to conserve energy. As the photo illustrates, we're a bit stunned from all the history, heat, and cheese-steak.

After agonizing about missing tech sessions that featured MG notables such as John Twist, we elected to spend Friday touring the Amish countryside in Lancaster County (providing we absolutely avoid Hwy 30 which was so difficult Wednesday). Lancaster



12 Christ Church Sign - Still Active Church



13 Eagerly Waiting More Philadelphia Action

signers of the Declaration of buried either on in and or in the church cemetery. structure was built in 1754 and building in North America at David McCulloch says that, has played a more significant birth." We sat in pews while fascinating description of the Franklin family pew!

hungry, and a bit tired. So

County is about 45 miles and about 150 years west of Valley Forge / King of Prussia. We took interstate roads to the town of Lancaster, then struck eastward on a small state highway. We went through interesting villages named Paradise, Smoketown, Bird in Hand, and Intercourse, stopping at inviting Amish stores along the way. Right away, Jack found an Amish bakery that offered sweet buns too inviting to pass up despite the sweltering heat.

At a stop at Intercourse we discovered a lively auction in progress. They were selling all kinds of rural and rustic appliances, mostly it seemed from Amish or Mennonite



14 Jack Finds an Amish Bakery



15 Auction Scene

farmsteads. We watched as the Amish clad auctioneers sold buggies, wagon parts, old one-cylinder gasoline engines, sleighs, and other relics usually found in antique stores.

At one stop, Jack was sorely tempted by an Amish quilt. The Amish women

who ran the shop, and made the quilts could have easily gotten him to spring for one, but their low-key approach let him wriggle off the hook. Another stop was in an Amish furniture store where we fell in love with Windsor chairs, rockers, and cabinets. It took little persuasion to get the proprietor to take us through the door at the rear of the store and into his neat wood shop where most of the furniture was made; spectacular work at reasonable price.

The countryside in Lancaster County is both picturesque and inviting. Small, neat, prosperous looking farmsteads clustered much closer together than we're accustomed to seeing here in the Mid South. Without mechanization, the farms must be much smaller but they seem to be well maintained and healthy. There are a lot of livestock on the farms, something missing from most modern farms – and there's a livestock smell throughout the countryside, probably like all rural areas a century ago. Horses and cows, along with their manure create a distinctive, but not overly unpleasant air. But, one can only imagine what cities smelled like two centuries in the past, though.

Saturday morning brought 'Show Time!' We again hurried to the Sheraton before 9 a.m. to join the caravan of cars headed cross-country about 30 miles to the show grounds. Again, another blistering hot day was obviously in store for us. It probably took about 45 minutes to an hour to navigate from the Sheraton to the site, all at a 35

to 45 mph pace through suburban traffic. Then there was a long line to get through the photographer and to get staged in the correct area. My car was badly overheating by the time it got to its assigned spot, but Jack's car was just dandy.



**16 Show Grounds After Thunderstorm**

The Rube Goldberg electric fan arrangement on the later model MGB had again done me in. The temperature controlled fan switch had failed, just two weeks after being replaced! Fortunately, I was able to jury-rig a jumper to bypass the switch and run the fans continuously. That makes two mechanical failures with my car, so far – the overdrive, and now the fan switch.

More than 350 MGBs, of all stripes in one place. Wow! There were V8 conversions and original V8

models. There were highly original cars, and cars highly modified. A few cars barely qualified as daily drivers, others were real trailer queens. And, there were a sprinkling of Jaguars, Triumphs, Minis, Midgets, and even one Morris Minor Traveler. The one shared characteristic was beauty; all the cars were very nice, well maintained examples. There were two judging methods – popular choice and concours.



**17 Paul Hanley's 1964 Amelia Island Invited MGB**



**18 Brooks Amicot's 1962 Show Winner**

Although only a handful of car owners had registered for true concours judging, those cars were really spectacular examples. One of the judges said he considered Jack's 67 B to be worthy of the concours competition, but it hadn't been entered at that level. Paul Hanley's 1964 was the lone MGB invited to the Amelia Island show this year, and that car was at Valley Forge. But it didn't compete in concours. Instead, Brooks Aminot brought an

incredibly correct, and jaw-droppingly pristine red 1962 MGB on he had finished restoration just two weeks prior to the show. After nearly two hours of inspection, the judges gave that car the highest score in North American MGB Register history – 998 out of 1000 possible points. Maybe they marked off because the engine bay was shinier than had ever come out of Abingdon?

For popular choice, each registrant got one ballot on which to mark their favorite car in each of about twelve classes. Early MK-I MGBs (1962-1967) – the class into which Jack Reynolds' car fell, was the largest class. When they got to later rubber bumper MGBs, like mine, they were slicing the baloney rather thin and only included two years 1977 and 1978 as 'Early' MK-IV. Jack and I wandered the show grounds as thoroughly and hurriedly as reasonable, but we were



19 Pristine Originality



unable to view all the cars and vote in all the categories. We managed most, but there were a few we never got to – there were just too many very nice cars, and decisions were sometimes very difficult. Jack insisted on originality in the cars for which he voted. I went more for bling; guess there's no accounting for taste.

Did I say it was hot? It was hot, and no shade except for around the vendor tents.



21 Jack's 1967 B Gets a Judge's Once Over

Whew! We might have finished our ballots, but a sudden thunderstorm and downpour sent everyone scurrying to get tops and windows raised, then for a bit of cover beneath vendor tents. Several of the less hardy variety got in their cars and drove away. The Memphis bunch stuck it out, but the rain effectively brought the car show to an end.

After cooling down and cleaning up at the Great Valley House, we headed

over to the Sheraton for the Awards Banquet and another round of conversation with fellow MGB enthusiasts. The Philadelphia MG Club got much deserved praise and accolades for a splendid and highly organized affair. They had left no detail unturned – daily driving tours of area attractions, shuttle busses to nearby shopping, lists of area restaurants, message boards, nearly continuous tech sessions, multiple hospitality events, a drive-in movie showing a not-yet released feature about restoration and first

drive of an MG, etc., etc. A terrific job, and they had fall-back plans ready to go even when showers disrupted events.

As mentioned, Brooks Aminot's spectacular 1962 MGB took concours honors. Shockingly, to me, a 1977 MGB got the show top choice / best in show award – it seemed hard to believe with so many stunning, and more typically favored chrome bumper MGs present. Jack and I never got around to voting for the best in show car – we just ran out of time when the deluge arrived. A list of award winners is posted on the North American MGB Register web page - <http://www.mg2008.com/>

The next morning, Sunday, we headed toward home, assiduously avoiding the route along Hwy 30 that we found so irritating heading toward Valley Forge. Instead we followed the Pennsylvania Turnpike west to Harrisburg, where we joined Interstate 81 and turned to the southwest and home.

Our first day's travel took us to Wytheville, VA, almost half-way home. Family commitments dictated arrival Tuesday evening, so we couldn't take many excursions to view the scenic countryside, but even freeway driving afforded a few glimpses.



22 Roadside Barn, Wytheville, VA

We hoped, on Monday, our second day to stop at Nashville leaving us a leisurely part day's travel Tuesday. Unfortunately, my 31 year-old car had other plans. The water pump began to grumble as we came down the west slope of the Cumberland Plateau, just west of Cookeville, TN. It gave out completely just before we got to the Carthage, TN exit about 40 miles east of Nashville.

Being broken down along I-40 isn't for the faint of heart, and not a pleasant experience. Happily, though, both Jack and I had coolers with melted ice water which we

used to refill my radiator and engine. With that temporary patch, we were able to limp about three miles to the next exit. Then Lady Luck smiled – there was a decent motel, a liquor store (there are necessities of life, you know) and a couple of restaurants at the exit. A fellow at a service station / grocery (SerStaGro) said a NAPA store was located three miles south toward Carthage. Jack drove me to NAPA where the counterman was able to order a replacement water pump (from Memphis!) with overnight delivery. After checking in at the motel and getting a nice bottle of wine from the liquor store, the four of us had an elegant dinner at Waffle House -it was either there or McDonald's, and it wasn't bad at all. At least the company was elegant.

Next morning, we retrieved and installed the water pump, topped off the coolant with fresh anti-freeze and hit the road. After initial worry and concern, the water pump failure had only cost us about two hours and gave us a chance to grab a few extra moments of rest before completing our journey. The drive from near Carthage on home was uneventful, and we found the roadside scenery rather boring once we were west of Parker's Crossroads.



23 New Water Pump Makes it Road Worthy

In summary, we survived three mechanical issues (failures) with my car – Jack's car ran great even though there were a few fretful moments about engine heat. So, that's how the four of us had a great time as we drove 2,500 miles in cramped, noisy, hot little cars; saw our national birthplace; ate Philly Cheese Steaks; revisited old friends; saw beautiful cars (and beautiful scenery); and arrived home hot, tired, and happy.

Before you ask, yes, we brought home one piece of hardware



24 Proud Hardware Display

– Jack and I were able to defraud enough people into voting for my 1977 MGB to garner a 2<sup>nd</sup> place in class. It took a lot of campaign promises and arm twisting, but we pulled it off! Woo Hoo! Finally, just to show how thoroughly planned the Philadelphia MG Club arranged things, they even had armed guards



25 Armed Guard at Show Ground

for the show.