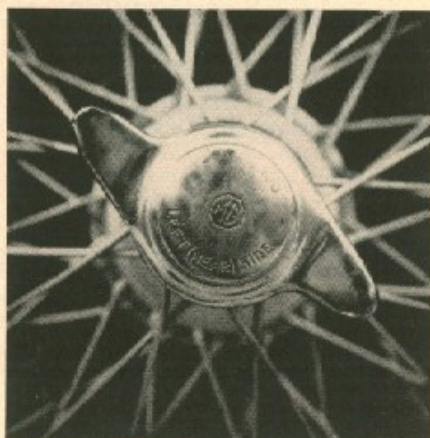


M/G/TC

THE M/G/TC
TAUGHT A WHOLE
GENERATION
OF DRIVERS
WHAT AUTOMOBILES
ARE ALL ABOUT.
NOW A NEW
CROP OF CONVERTS
IS SPREADING
THE TC MESSAGE.



There is a secret country to which no airline flies. Its borders are ever safe from the likes of me because they are guarded by Youth. No one over 30 can break through these defenses. Why mention this wonderful place then? Well, it produces a car . . . sort of the national vehicle. Of course, it's not exportable. You can't even buy one for money.

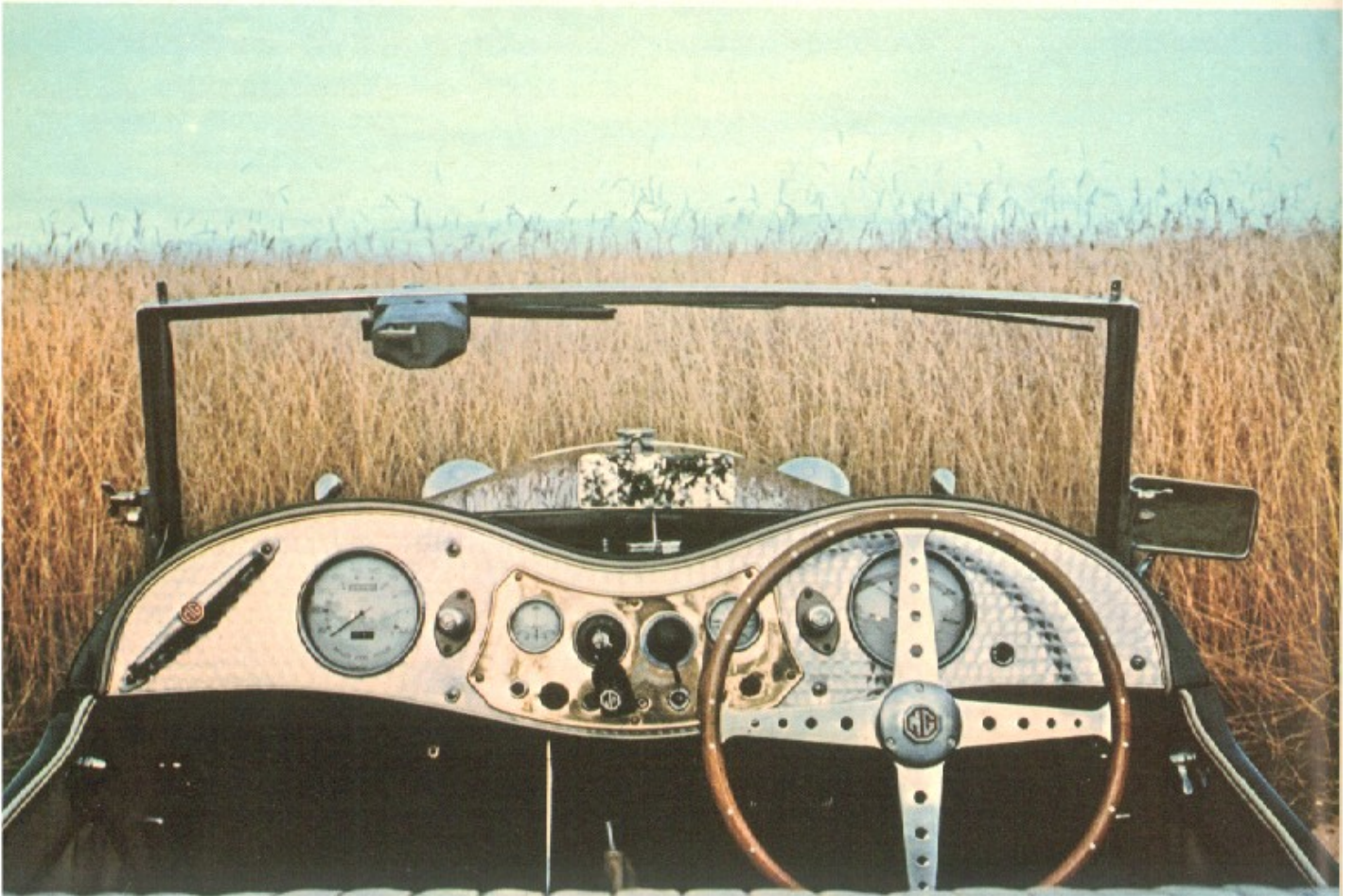
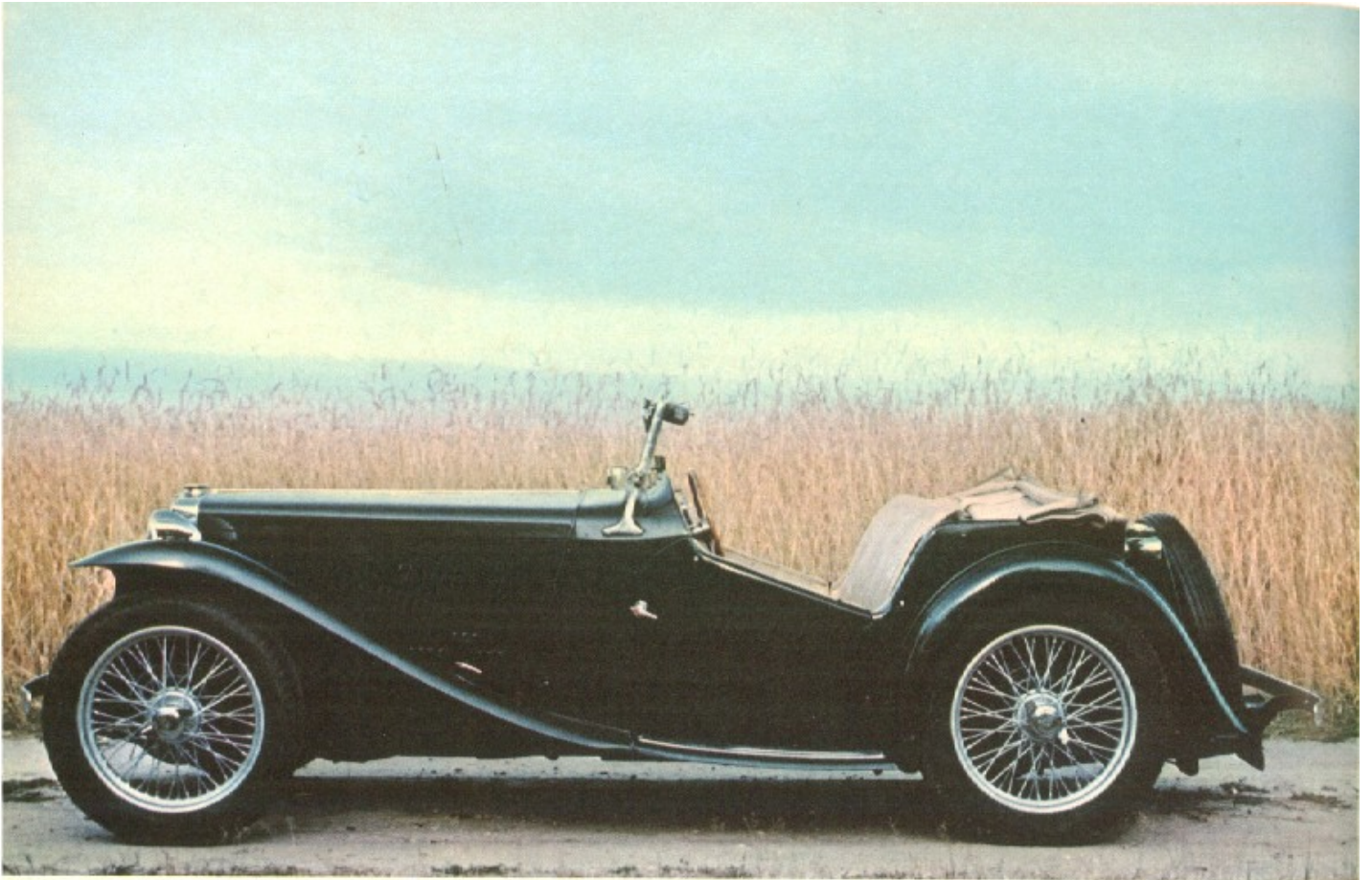
I was eligible to buy one yesterday. Yesterday was 1949. Sitting in the cafeteria of Fordham College, drinking one black coffee after another, the M/G-TC made itself known to me via the pages of *LIFE* magazine. While

arguments swirled around my head as to the best way of getting through school and on with the job of building the brave new postwar world, I was riveted by an article about a group of Californians who drove spidery little cars. Odd people. They had formed a club based on mutual interest in these funny machines. Club members went on rallies (what's a rally?), drove their cars in races—in races!—and did all sorts of nutty things. Proof was a picture of a club member driving his car under one of those high-rise lumber carriers. This was to show how low a "British-built sporting car" was. Sporting car . . . that had a certain ring to it. They had a lock to them that was different. Who made them? M/G. Never heard of that company. Sure made the old gray Plymouth look fat. Made 1940 look fat too. Wonder where I could see one here in New York?

The under-30 underground worked just as well then as it does now. It took about two weeks to locate an M/G-TC owner. It was Bob Deshon, and he lived in New Rochelle. This . . . this operator . . . he had cornered his parents into buying him an

(continued)





almost-new example of a "British-built sporting car." By the time I got around to meeting him, and proving that I wasn't just hanging around because he owned an MG, the car had been run in the Linden (N. J.) Airport race. As a result, it was sitting in the family garage stripped of fenders and headlights. It was suffering from a bent pushrod, blown head gasket, and a burnt valve. To me it looked like the greatest invention since the wheel itself. It was so low . . . and those skinny tires were so high! You climbed into it like a World War I fighter plane. It was great. Nothing self-propelled before or since has gripped my imagination like that poor, over-driven, misunderstood TC.

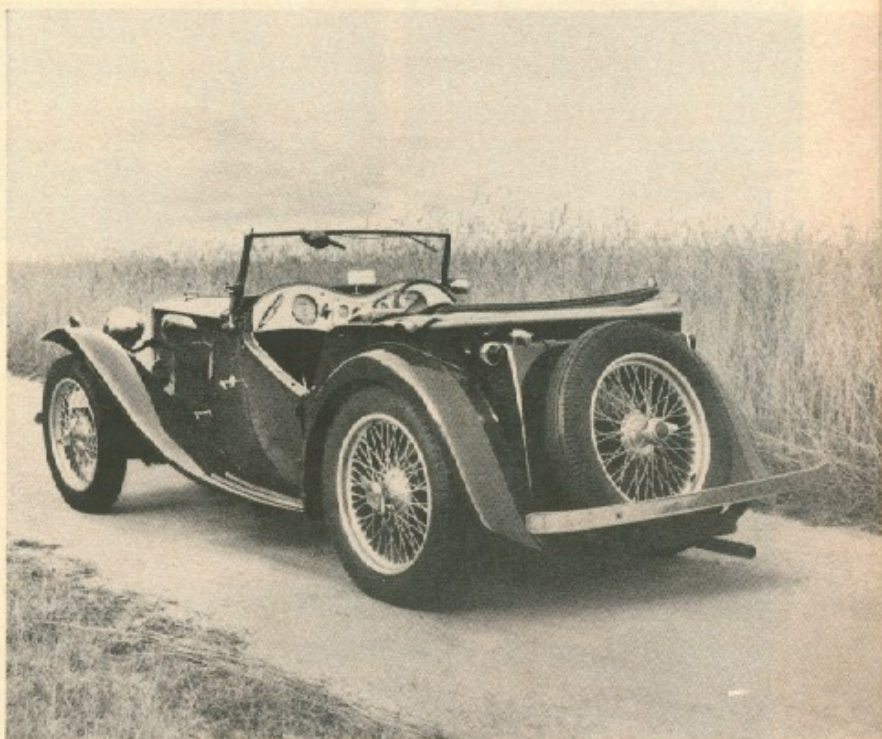
What was it that I was looking at? Well, it was a way of life. A wildly different car that you jazzed around in on week days and raced on weekends. A mobile set of credentials that admitted you to a very select group. A moving spot of color on a still-drab postwar landscape. It could have been powered by compressed air, or stressed bubble gum for all I cared. I simply had to be invited to this party that was just starting.

What was it that I saw those many years ago? What it really was was a tiny two-seater marked by a truncated tail and long flowing fenders (when they were used), all slung between four seemingly too-high, wire-spoked wheels. Power came from a four-cylinder, 1¼-liter engine. In the cold light of 1967, it doesn't seem possible that 54 horsepower was all the power there was. A tall, thin lump of cast iron, the engine lived in the forward section of a long, narrow engine compartment with foot wells, pedals and things taking up the rear section. A driver drove in a bolt-upright position with his eyeballs just above the top edge of the cowl. The seat was indescribably awful—not a bucket by any stretch of the imagination—yet we sat in it and sneered at what we used to sit on in American cars. The ride was hard, but what the hell—so were the drivers. The gearbox, however, was easy. Stirred by a stubby lever, it taught a whole generation of road-racers

and would-be road-racers how to execute heel-and-toe downshifts. The engine hooked to this box was game, but generally had its back to the wall trying to fight off some happy nut who thought he was a blood brother of Tazio Nuvolari. Usually the engine lost the good fight with a twang and thump of bent, tinny pushrods . . . despite two decades of auto writers saying things like, "The MG is as defiant and as tough as a Staffordshire pit dog." They also talked about "cornering on rails," those writers. Only Salvador Dali could have constructed the rails on which the TC cornered. The steering was brutally stiff and totally unresponsive, and the wire wheels were always out of tune—more like potato chips in their contour. And no matter what—not even with the Tompkins roller steering kit—no TC ever proceeded down a straight road in a straight line. But you learned to live with the wandering from side to side, and after awhile you didn't fight it anymore.

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A TRUNCATED
TAIL, TALL, THIN
WHEELS AND
LONG, SWEEPING
FENDERS
ARE THE TC'S
ESSENCE. THE
RIDE WAS HARD,
BUT SO
WERE THE DRIVERS.



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MG-TC

(continued from page 69)

At any rate, Bob Deshon's TC had led a dog's life. I hung around acting as tool passer and gopher (you know, "gopher some cotter pins..." "gopher some gasket shellac...") while it was put back together. Trial runs without fenders or windshield around the icy roads of Orient Point didn't even start to cool my passion for the TC.

Watching as Briggs Cunningham screamed a supercharged TC down the hill at Watkins Glen further fanned the flames. "My God, when Alfred Momo has got everything screwed on right I can do almost 100 mph!" Breathing Castrol R fumes from the edge of a country road in Bridgehampton didn't help either. The plots and plans I went through trying to buy a TC would have put Machiavelli to shame. I even went so far as to talk some nice young girl—who had a job—into co-signing a note for me. Even that failed. The bank was a little too cagey to put up money for a car that only held two. But those wire wheels... that slim-rimmed, quivering steering wheel... those long shafts of light bouncing down a blackened country lane. Oh dear.

Being thwarted in my plan to become an owner/driver, I did the next best thing. I hung around with gents who were. I sat around and watched while people like the Collier brothers, John Bentley, Paul Hee, and dozens of others tore down and field-stripped all the MG models—from TC through TD, all the way to TF—and then put them back together again. I read underground magazines, printed on chocolate-colored tissue paper in faraway places like California, that went on for pages about what you could and couldn't do with an MG. I sent to England for pukka, hard-cover books on the same subject. I spent almost enough on books and magazines to buy one of the little beasts. Three-cylinder war-weary MGs back home after the fray got to be a hobby with me. Better than no MG-ing at all. I didn't realize it then—as I pushed one old, high car after another to race meetings, club meetings, midnight garage post-mortems—that it was the best time of my life. That's the way it's always been with MGs, though.

For example, MGs were the best time of Cecil Kimber's life. He was hired by Morris Garages as General Manager in '22. He helped build the first MG special with his own hands. He went on to build the MG company into the biggest all-sports-car

factory in the world. Despite a leg badly shattered in a motorcycle accident, he drove like mad and was on hand at every important MG win in the Twenties and Thirties. He worked his way up to such a height in the Nuffield empire that he was one of the few people who could successfully argue the doughty old Lord from a "no" to a "yes" decision. Kimber never became a captain of industry. His salary was always modest, but he knew almost all of the early MG owners by name. You couldn't bank that sort of thing, of course. But you could live one very interesting life, because they were a wild crew.

And they still cast their magic spell. Every morning as I clamber into my square-cut sedan, a neighborhood girl mini-skirts it into a battered red Midget on her way to work. I usually wait to see her get under way. Every morning that Midget... with flapping top and shiny-haired driver... clears its throat once, then settles down into a crackling idle. In the next minute it's thrust into the traffic stream with a prolonged burst in first gear. She always wears a light smile as the Midget goes by with a lunge into second. And it's not just the newer models that talk a secret language, understood only by the young...

The 17-year-old TC whose color pictures haunt pages 67-68 spoke very clearly to David Laemmle. Youthful, in college, with a wide range of modern sports machinery to pick from, David Laemmle had to have this TC. A doctor had restored it for his son, and now it owns David. "It's, well—different—you know? When you drive by, people notice you. Girls are interested in it too. It goes—it'll do about 90—but I don't like to abuse it. Beat a Spitfire the other day. I've put it up for the winter... too much salt and stuff on the road." It was like salt in an old wound, listening to that very nice young man talk about his TC. I could go over and help him fiddle with it. Put oil in the SU dash pots... things like that. Or now that I've got the money, I could buy one. Except they probably don't sell them to people over 30. Think what I'll do is wait a little while longer. I know a nice young kid who's going to need a co-signer for an MG in about 10 years. Won't he be surprised when he finds out I know how to replace a bent pushrod. I know I'll remember, because the 1977 MG engine won't be all that different. And a good thing, too, in a world that's always changing. **c/d**