

PART TWO

A Different Kind of Affair

BYL 259H

When I See You Again



It had been thirty-five years or more since I last had news on the MG that I purchased in 1970 – therefore the Facebook message I received from the new owner, three days before Christmas 2025, to view the car came as quite a surprise – actually, surprise doesn't even begin to cover it. Now, in warmer climes, we are about to take up his invitation and setting out to meet with BYL 259H again.

It is the end of May 2026 following six days of temperatures hitting thirty degrees plus. Our seat belts are fastened, and I fire up the engine. Jean is sat beside me, and we are ready to go. I reverse off the drive, across the pavement and onto the road. It annoys me to have to pay to park our car in the road outside our front door – not that I park there anyway, it's just the thought that annoys me. But then again, worst things have happened in the world of motoring in the last fifty years, I have no doubts about that.

A hundred minute drive up country, means there will be lots of time to run expectations through my grey cells. But I don't want to overthink it in case I head for a fall – so instances of parking situations during my MG days could be an acceptable distraction to occupy my mind during the ride.

I give the subject matter more thought as I head towards the motorway. It is mid-morning in a school holiday week and traffic is light. I make good progress. North of Epping, I transition to the M11. Driving on the freeway will give me freedom to think. Smooth Radio accompanies my thoughts even though I am not processing the lyrics. I come to a decision. Parking fits the bill. So play safe and think parking – what could be safer than that. I'll find out.

I look ahead. The road is straight and the traffic isn't bunched up – a steady seventy mph feels about right to free up the cells and I begin to churn through those MG days in no particular order.

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The first memory that pops out from auto-select is scary: the consequences chilling. Best get it out of the way – hopefully more agreeable memories will follow.

I had parked close to Daniel Farson's pub, 'The Waterman's Arms', on the Isle of Dogs in East London. I was meeting friends – a social gathering. It was one of the pubs on our circuit.

As I secured the door, a young lad appeared from nowhere and said, 'Mind your car for you, mista?'

I shudder at the thought of what might have happened if it had not been for the concern shown by this caring chap.

Huh. Now I get real: the cheeky blighter... and a gangster to boot – almost certainly a billionaire by now. Inwardly I smile to myself.

Of course it is all tongue in cheek, but Jean is giving me the look. There are a number of varieties. This is the 'why are you smiling', look – it must have slipped out, the smile... sometimes happens that way. I share the story despite the possibility she may have heard it before.

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We say goodbye to Essex and hello to Hertfordshire. I raise my hand. It is an old habit of mine carried over from my travelling days. I greet counties, as I did then, with a raised hand. At some stage, unknowingly, it must have morphed into a safe passage superstition. I need help.

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I am enjoying this reminiscing already and for reasons unknown to me what pops up next is Kensington, the polar opposite of the Isle of Dogs.

In '71, somebody I knew took on a franchise for a business in Kensington High Street. He asked if I would help him by working Saturdays for a month or so while he set up his staffing arrangements and business affairs – which I duly did.

Living in London, driving in London, from experience I found it relatively easy to navigate my way around Town with its myriad of main roads – and so I would drive the MG there on a Saturday morning and park up in the back roads in amongst those grand buildings at a cost of fifteen pence a day.

That's got me thinking: back in those days, petrol was thirty-four pence a gallon (four and a half litres) so maybe not quite as cheap as it sounds.

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Thinking of grand buildings makes me recall some of the nice hotels I stayed in when I was working in places where an overnight was required.

This would be when I worked at two locations within one town or two places relatively close together: for instance within Nottingham or Southampton and Boscombe; or any permutation of two from Birmingham, Worcester, Evesham, Bath, Bristol, Gloucester or Cheltenham (I often stayed at the Majestic in Cheltenham). No problems parking there.

As these locations scroll through my mind one upscale hotel in particular stands out amongst all the others: it was in Southport, Lancashire where I worked for one weekend only.

I remember driving along the front of the hotel and there was a man in uniform stood outside the entrance. I pulled up and after a brief exchange in which I explained I had been booked in at the hotel he asked if I would like him to park the car. Not an everyday occurrence – it had never happened to me before. I suppose a bell cart for my bag would have been asking too much!

But on the downside, Southport was also memorable in a far less favourable way. Driving home from there on the Sunday evening I suffered my worst ever 'got lost' in all my time at the wheel of the MG.

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Seamlessly, a further memory pops into my mind now as I pose the question – what was the worst example of parking I can recall during those MG days? It's a no brainer. I was stationary at a pedestrian crossing in Church Lane, outside the entrance to Leytonstone underground station. It is located shortly after a bend in the road and it was there that some clown came round the bend and parked his car on my bumper.

I had purchased the car three weeks previously and understandably I wasn't over the moon about the other chap's driving. Anyway, my car was repaired and then there was just the matter of recovering my £35 excess. But as with life, it wasn't that simple.

The first problem: there was a general postal strike in 1971 that lasted for seven weeks; the second problem was that the other party's insurer was Vehicle & General (Savundra); and the third problem was that in the course of those seven weeks, V&G went bust; and the fourth problem was when I received the cheque in the post and presented it to the bank – it bounced.

Many years passed by since that incident and although I did receive a dividend from the liquidator, I needed to be philosophical about my loss. On reflection the best way I could think of doing that was to adopt a half full approach and search for an upside, and oddly enough I found it – adorning the wall of our garage – the original rear registration plate.



Thoughts continue to flood in, but I suppress them and shut down the auto play as I close in on a cluster of juggernauts slugging it out in the first and second lanes. At the moment, they do not appear to be threatening the third – now, that would be naughty. I check the rear view and position myself in the third lane to steer my way clear of the monsters. What is it with them?

The road is clear again and I am about to resume memory mode when I spot a vehicle stationary on the hard shoulder. The driver is standing on the grass bank – the phone in his left hand is glued to his ear. I foresee potential there for National Highways to call for a lane closure and the thought prompts me to go heavy on the gas.

This scene reminds me of the time when I parked up on the hard shoulder of the M40. I was driving to High Wycombe when I noticed the temperature gauge was having a turn. I stopped, popped the bonnet and peered under. I didn't need to be a Formula one engineer to identify the problem: the fan belt had broken.

I waited a while for the engine to cool. Started up, made some distance, parked up again. I must have done this several times – definitely a 'Guinness Book of (World) Records' contender for the number of stops on a single gig. Eventually High Wycombe came into view. Then one last time, I started her up, exited the motorway and coasted down the winding hill towards the edge of town and into 'The Morris Garage'...as if by magic. Someone was certainly looking out for me that day – and I must have been flush because I settled the £1.59 bill for fan belt and labour in cash.



We are in Cambridgeshire now, passing through the counties like nobody's business. Overhead, Red Kites are gliding in the thermals with their six-foot wingspans and flyweight bodies.

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For a few days in '64, I was working in Park Lane, London West One. My mistake, 'Park' must have tripped a wrong wire, but I can't reject it, the memory – short, but pleasant, reprised from those heady days of the sixties and a reminder of the people in those times, and maybe, just maybe, how we felt part of it.

So, I see it through and enjoy the moment once again.

I've never professed to have any style myself, but that doesn't mean I can't recognise style when it is standing alongside of me – as it was that day.

The lady had a staggering ring on the fourth finger of her left hand. It had three sets of different coloured stones that endorsed, but didn't upstage, the style that she exuded. After she (probably reluctantly) left my side and walked out of the door I had to ask the question. The lady was Britt Ekland and she staying at the Dorchester Hotel with her intended, Peter Sellers.

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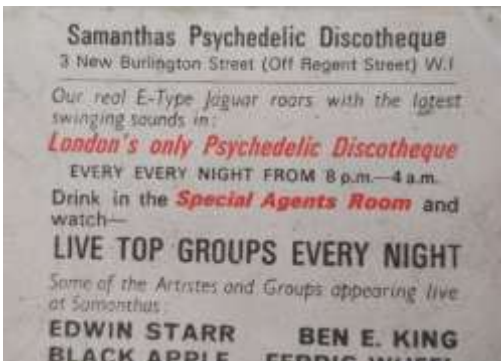
Wow! We are at junction nine already...tempus fugit. I slip off the M11 and onto the A11, the old Roman road where I lived for eighteen years at the London end.

I tune into the music again and my sentimental journey continues as I roll with the random selection of songs. I think back and wonder what life would be like now visiting my old haunts in the modern world of motoring and the parking problems that come with it: the pubs, the clubs, the dance halls, ten pin bowling alleys, the ice skating rink as I continue to retrace the MG movements of yesteryears, some of which predate the days with Jean.

A timely succession of 70s songs follows as Smooth triggers a rush of venues that floods my veins – dance halls: Hammersmith Palais (London West), Empire Leicester Square and Lyceum (London West Central), Tottenham Royal (London North), Locarno (London South), Harp Club (London South-East), Cranbrook Hall (Ilford).

Now Andy Williams is singing 'The Impossible Dream' reminds me of his sixties number, 'Almost There' which would have been appropriate – and immediately I think of band leaders who could have been playing his music during those days: Joe Loss and Ken McIntosh alternating at the three West London rodeos.

And the clubs follow: local ones like the Kingfisher and the Candlelight: London West discotheques such as the Whisky a Go Go and Samanthas; and in the Finchley Road locality, the Europa Club and Purple Pussycat. Now Steppenwolf is exhorting me: 'We were born to be wild'. Boy, they knew how to step it out. I love that song!



Road signs for Newmarket appear as we move from Cambridgeshire and into Suffolk.

But not for long as I raise my hand again when we cross the Norfolk border and enter the Thetford area: woodland country; and I become transfixed by the amount of roadkill on the roadside. Surely, some being, should alert the kites over the county lines to all this booty freshly laid to rest.

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So, what is the common denominator for these venues? Dancing would be the obvious. But it can't possibly be, because my dancing instructor, Glad, of Jim and Glad's dancing school in East Ham, making a rather rash assessment, said my feet weren't made for dancing – or words to that effect. Nevertheless, it was just a laugh for me. How could I take her seriously when from birth I had been blessed with the talent to jig around – and if that wasn't enough, later I went on to hone those skills at the Ilford Palais finishing school, oiled with pints of brown and mild. Now I'm just beginning to realise what a class act I was.

Surely the answer cannot be parking, the most mundane topic in my motoring compendium, selected with the sole purpose of dampening any false expectations I might have.

But parking it is...why? Because I never considered boarding a bus or a train when I knew I could park in the evening with ease in roads close to my intended venues where my carriage would safely await my return, and be ready to go – although, on rare occasions, the starter motor might fail to function if it had become jammed in the flywheel.

A problem soon remedied. Shift the gear into fourth, rock the offside wing backwards and forwards, that would free the jam and restore normal service. Now I think about it, was it a gentle reminder not to take MG for granted, eh?

The succession of seventies music continues on Smooth Radio. It has dovetailed into my thought process as I surf memory lane. I don't care now what the MG looks like or what my reaction might be. I have reprised the best of the best in a glorious drive and relived the past which the future can never steal from me.



We come off the main drag and enter country lane land: fields and cottages and villages. We are in time warp territory. I see the sign for Rocklands. Rocklands...how cool is that.

I follow the sign instinctively while my mind is still engaged in retro. The Three Degrees are singing – or am I imagining it – it is not coming through the speakers – and the music is not in my ears – the music is in my head.

Memories are piling out of storage. 'When shall we share special moments'...they're singing their 1974 hit which happens to be our song. 'When shall I see you again...' Is this fantasy? It doesn't matter. Does it fit the script etched in my mind? Perfectly!





The new owner, Richard, and his wife receive us like we have known each other for twenty years. Tea and coffee is followed by homemade sausage rolls and scones with jam and cream as we learn how Richard inherited the MG from David Hooper following his death on his birthday in 2024.

The missing years between 1978 and 2025 are not my story to tell but interestingly I have noted the condition of the bodywork – surely a great return on the thirteen pounds I paid to have the car undersealed before I purchased it.

'I've filled the tank, drive for as long as you like,' Richard calls out as Jean and I leave the cottage to set out for a drive in the countryside. We don't slip into the seats like we did fifty years ago. The static seat belts have been replaced with inertia type. There is no synchromesh on the first gear. I remember that for later. I turn the key in the ignition which is located on the centre of the console. It doesn't fire up. I try again, adding some throttle, and the engine growls at me.

The top is down as we come off the drive, onto the road and turn right. I cannot recall ever having driven it so cautiously. At the end of the village we turn left and steam along at speeds of up to forty miles per hour. The Steve of old would have been deeply ashamed of me. We reach the roundabout, a mile or two away, turn the circle and make the return journey, praying that my prized Hard Rock Café cap won't take to the air.

Back safely, I hand the keys to the owner. It is time to go.



I drive away. I don't look back. I leave with a warm feeling inside of me. Like my father, I am a Londoner, as is BYL 259H and it rests easy with me that she should retire to Norfolk – Norfolk, the land of our forefathers!

THE END

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