With the New Year and a new baby daughter, resolution was renewed and I began to strip down the car in earnest. The interior was first, then all wings, doors and what was left of the outer sills were removed. The front valance was easy — there wasn’t one! After several months’ work as a hobby to relieve that busy period, the project would take longer than I had expected. Having reduced the body to a bare shell, I now had to decide whether to remove it from the chassis. As I had visions of body distortion, storage problems, extra work and complications, I was afraid I could not be sure of completing the restoration. There were too many rebuilds enthusiastically begun and not carried through, and far too many of those rebuilds had then ended up in ‘for sale’ columns under abandoned rebuild, etc. So discretion won and I have yet regretted it.

Once the wooden foundations had been removed — I lost count after the 70th securing set screw — I was at last ready to turn my attention to the removal of the engine. At this point my worst fears were realised for everything in the engine bay was inaccessible — little wonder that the body was lowered on to a rolling chassis as soon as assembled! Having successfully removed everything, the task turned to the engine and gearbox. As this combination weighed over 600lb I was anticipating the manoeuvre with some trepidation, but, with a borrowed hoist, the help of a friendly neighbour and some encouragement by my wife operating the crane, we managed the whole operation in just over an hour, and the result was duly entered in my log for the November 8, 1980.

Perhaps I should mention at this point that I had decided to keep a record both in words and pictures — for my own satisfaction as much as to pass it on to others. At this time there was no cataloguing the offending item and it certainly helped to ease my wrist and backache!

During the removal of the outer panels from the car, I had become increasingly intrigued as to its history before my father purchased it, and on the completion of the rebuild front wing had obviously been replaced in that time and that side of the chassis had a deep gouge near two feet long. The offside door was also non-original and both offside wings had evidence of extensive battering over the length of the car while adjustable shock absorbers had been fitted, again indicating something of an active life.

With the engine out and ready to be tackled, I was indeed in the process of exploring its contents and found a small box-like object which turned out to be a small box-like object which appeared to have been fitted when the car was originally built. I was of course not able to remove it, but in doing so I was able to see that the engine was in excellent condition — the pistons were still of the original 9.9:1 cr type — but there was evidence of considerable wear throughout the unit in spite of its relatively low mileage. The big surprise was the “plus 20” stamped on the piston crowns, for to my knowledge the engine had never been rebored. Thanks to the help of Peter Wood, the Twin Cam specialist, and other members of the T-C register, obtaining the new parts needed did not prove as difficult as I had anticipated, even though throughout its productive life the engine received a constant stream of rebuilds — how the dealers must have loved them — and the engine rebuild therefore incorporated most of these.

The most important improvements were the fitting of 8.3:1 cr pistons, phosphor bronze valve guides and a modified distributor. New big end bearings and new connecting rods were also fitted, and, as the exhaust cam needed cleaning up, the MG Twin Cam profile was not available a Lotus one was used instead as it was almost identical. Throughout the work on the engine, a local firm, Taurus Engineering of Bournemouth, was very helpful, balancing the crank, clutch, assembly and pistons. The engine job was the timing of the engine. So much had been written on this subject that it would fill a book all by itself, but in the end the method I used was a common sense procedure which used all the dire warnings were put aside. The task actually took 1 1/2 hours for the first cam and another hour for the second — and apart from needing a great deal of patience, it was fairly straightforward.

At last the engine, freshly painted and complete with its auxiliaries was tied down and prepared for its first run in ten years. Exactly one year to the day after being removed from the car it was started up. My notes record the fact but I remember best the feeling of elation, for not only did the engine run sweetly — so much so that our previous rope-work proved somewhat superfluous and with it still running we were even able to manoeuvre the engine on its trolley — but there were no leaks of any vital fluids either. The only real problem during the first 1 1/2 hours of running was having to hold up and continuously refill the fuel tank as the diesel on the engine was progressing and work on the rest of the car slowly began to show more positive results. With the engine and gearbox out I indulged in the luxury of having the car steam-cleaned, and having seen the result wished I’d had it done sooner. The severe crash damage to the front was attended to first and once again I was fortunate in being able to rely on the help of another good friend, TR enthusiast Brian Toalster. His skill with a welding torch is legendary and once the front end began to resume its proper shape and another chassis extension had been fitted it seemed that real progress was being made quickly.

In common with most rusty MGAs both body and chassis, the engine was undercoated with a cold proof undercoat and then covered with the morass of selected plastics to prevent rusting. This was all done by my father, who had been a car enthusiast all his life and he had a deservedly good reputation in the field.

The car was then ready for its first run and it was obvious from the start that everything worked as it should. With the engine breaking in and the last of the rust removed, I was able to start enjoying the car again and, as the years passed, the car became increasingly longer and the rust was completely removed. The car was then returned to its original condition and it has been a joy to drive ever since.
sides were particularly bad around the 'B' post area so all this was cut out, leaving a frighteningly large hole. Then the doors were hung on what remained of the 'A' posts and these were then used to locate all the new panels, when, much to my relief, everything finally fitted.

The coupé roof appeared fixed to the rest of the car more by gravity than anything else and many hours were spent cutting and shaping little pieces of sheet steel at all four corners. Given the choice I know I would re-build a roadster rather than a coupé for a roadster is much easier to work on.

The braking system employed by MG for the Twin-Cam, of four-wheel Dunlop discs, was unique at the time and, in the case of my car, totally useless as everything had seized solid, the discs themselves also being badly rusted. The master cylinder was replaced with a comparative, though non-original, one. The pipes were all replaced with Handy copper ones and, in the course of removing the front discs for skimming, more evidence of the car's early life was revealed. On removal, the offside spring fell into three pieces and the swivel pin was also bent, while the nearside lower trunnion was shaved flat with both lower wishbone arms being bent back half an inch! Nevertheless, after some two years' work, the car was showing undeniable signs of progress; the engine was ready, the chassis and central body structure was rebuilt and the braking system was working well again.

While tackling the various jobs now required to make the car mobile I carried out several modifications which I hoped would make it a more practical vehicle to run. I decided to utilise one 12V battery instead of the usual pair of 6V ones, and many a storeman's eyebrows were raised as I rejected battery after battery on its size and shape alone, finally discovering that the one for a 2.0-litre Cortina was ideal once I had sawn off the lugs. This went in the nearside carrier, the other being occupied by the fuel pumps for the advantages of better protection and easy access.

It was at this stage too that I suffered what could have been a major setback. Soon after the car was crashed in 1971, Marston Radiators of Manchester repaired the radiator, which I was very pleased about as Twin-Cam radiators are almost unobtainable. When offered up for the first time, however, there was no way that it would fit. Scouring the parts book, I found that it had been re-assembled not only upside down but back to front as well. When the men at the local Marston branch heard this, they not only did the job again correctly in 24 hours but would only accept a fiver 'for a drink for the lads,' and a promise that I would show them the completed car when it was eventually on the road. This attitude I found typical — and very pleasing — of many trade concerns I dealt with.

My troubles still weren't over though, for when I came to fit the radiator, I had to shorten the newly sprayed duct panel by two inches and the only way was by using a hammer and chisel!
Once the engine bay was prepared, that part of the car became the first to be sprayed in colour. The original specification was Mineral Blue with black trim, the car being one of only 11 coupés in that colour, but at some time this had been changed to an unknown lighter blue and the roof sprayed dark blue. I wanted to retain an MG colour and fancied a pale blue known as Iris Blue — it looked attractive in the tin, so I was very pleased and relieved when I could admire the gleaming engine bay resplendent in the car’s final colour.

As soon as I could gather together the necessary tools and strips the engine was lifted into the now-completed bay. We made six attempts before the power unit — progressively shorn of its jutting out bits — was eventually dropped into place and the gearbox then mated to it. Again with a view to practical road use I had taken a leaf out of the racing mechanics’ book and greatly enlarged the access panels in the inner wing arches with the result that now it is often easier to gain access to the engine from the side rather than through the bonnet aperture itself.

With the engine installed, a major step forward had been taken. Even so, with hundreds of items still to be fitted, and working an average of at least one hour per day, it was another three and a half months before I was able to reward myself with a drive of the car (minus wings, doors, trim, etc) on the surrounding forest tracks. That first ‘drive’ probably did much more good for my morale than it did for the MG but my enthusiasm received a great boost as the car could now move under its own power after 11 years.

The rebuild was at last gathering momentum and I was now ready to tackle the wings and doors. Fortunately both the boot and bonnet lids were undamaged and in good condition. Not so the doors, however, for both frames were loose, the bottoms rotten out and the aluminium skins badly dented. These were duly repaired and Brian, the welder, really came into his own where the wings were concerned. As I was unable to afford new ones, he repaired them all with great skill and patience. They were quite bad too, each pair, for instance, requiring the welding in of no fewer than ten separate pieces with each one individually shaped.

More decisions were now taken regarding the practical use of the car. The parcel shelf was cut back to allow more room for my two young daughters and the spare wheel was re-located within the boot. I also obtained second-hand sets of front and rear lights containing orange flasher lenses as the last thing I wanted was to be hit by the confused driver of another vehicle on a dark night. Both these modifications were, of course, identical to the later Twin-Cam specification. For a mere £70 I also obtained a pair of uprated 70W-50W sealed-beam headlamp units — at the Beaulieu auto-jumble — where else?

Another four months passed as the laborious
but all-important task of repairing and then fitting each of the wings and doors continued. A sense of urgency now began to creep into the work for there was a deadline to be met if the car was to be ready for Whitsun 1983 and the 25th anniversary of the start of Twin-Cam production — to be celebrated at the MGCC Silverstone weekend. Still, patience was finally rewarded as the effect of well-fitting panels was very pleasing. It is true, unfortunately, but I think that a re-build can often be spoilt at this stage in the sheer frustration of trying to get panels to fit and the natural desire to get the car completed.

The standard of paint finish on any rebuilt car depends, of course, on the preparation so as a start it was decided to go back to bare metal — at least the car was now all metal! All the previous coats of paint, requiring no fewer than three attempts with paint-stripper, were removed. The shining silver body looked quite impressive — from a distance! The ancient art of lead filling, complemented by its more modern counterpart, were then employed, all the previous work being now rewarded as only the thinnest skim was required to achieve a ripple-free surface. I treated the metal to one coat of ‘Trustan’ and one of ‘Bondia Primer’ before hand-painting it with a high-build primer which sanded easily and gave an excellent base for spraying. The whole of the above preparation was done in two halves, divided at the windscreen but whereas the preparation of the front of the car went well up to and including the primer surfacer stage, the entire rear section, comprising roof, doors, rear body and wings, produced a reaction problem and therefore had to be completely stripped right back to bare metal once again. It’s at moments like this that the famous British stiff upper lip is needed! With just three months to go to Whitsun, the pace of the rebuild had to be stepped up again and long hours were spent attempting to achieve a final body finish reflecting all the effort and attention which had gone into the parts the eye doesn’t reach!

By the middle of March, what was in many ways the most enjoyable stage was reached — fitting out. The windscreens were fitted first (by a local specialist who afterwards swore he would never do a rear window like it ever again!) and then the interior was completed and finished off with a new set of carpets and carpeting in the original grey. The fitting of the chromework was, of course, most enjoyable, for the car really did seem to ‘come alive’ as the paintwork at last had some contrast when all the gaping holes were filled up. It is probably pure anticipation of the final moment which makes fitting out such an excruciatingly long process — as fast as I stuck off one item from my list of ‘final’ jobs, another had to be added so that it never seemed to get any shorter.

At long last however, and one month inside the deadline, the necessary MoT was obtained (all the mechanics stopped work to have a look — most gratifying!) tax and insurance were arranged and once more MGA Twin-Cam no 1629, first completed March 19, 1959, re-built April 28, 1983 took to the road. The feeling of deep satisfaction which comes from actually driving on the open road a car which has been transformed is one which will strike a chord in all those who have ever done it, and it was a proud moment indeed when I parked 33 AFD with the other Twin-Cams at the premier MGCC meeting of the year. It was also particularly pleasant to meet fellow TC register enthusiasts whose advice and help I had sought over the ‘phone and who at last I could meet, as well as to confound those who swore I’d never do it!

Since then I have driven nearly 5000 miles and so far nothing has leaked, fallen off or broken. The car is used almost every day and has proved totally reliable. I ran-in the engine for 2000 most frustrating miles, and spent most of the first two months ‘tuning’ the engine to my satisfaction. The car is good fun to drive: it’s turned out to be faster than I expected, yet returns 25mpg in local driving and 34mpg on a journey.

Was it all worth it? I certainly believe so and I know that, if he was still alive, my father would agree.