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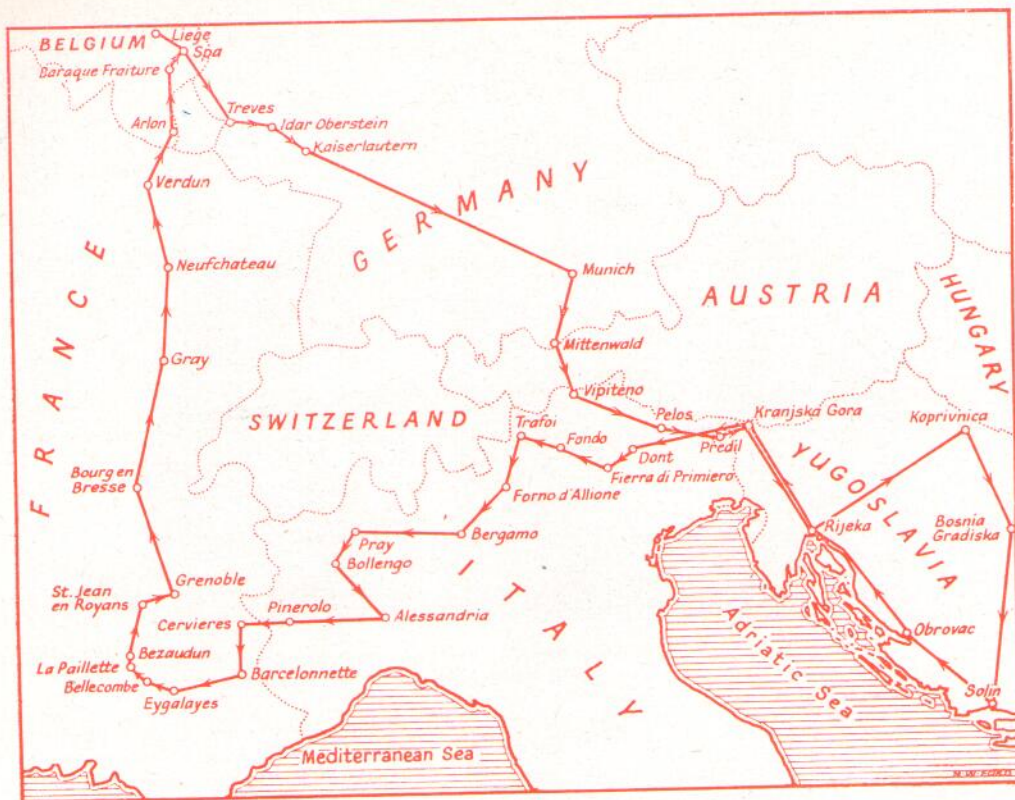
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TEST

An account by the
leader of the B.M.C.
Competitions Team
of the debut of the
Twin Cam 'MGA' in
International Rallies



MANY readers possibly regard the Rallye Monte Carlo as the ultimate in rally severity, but to the *cognoscenti* L-R-L means the 'Marathon de la Route', truly the toughest motoring event run in Europe.

It is approximately four times as severe as the 'Monte', being over 1,000 miles longer, run at a higher average speed over more difficult country, yet taking 96 hours on the road as against the 'Monte's' 72.

It is therefore the supreme test of the car and the B.M.C. Competitions Department rightly regard it as a 'must', particularly valuable as a test-bed for a new design.

I was not altogether surprised when Marcus Chambers, the B.M.C. Competition Manager, affectionately known to us as 'The Poor Man's Neubauer', told me that I was to be a lone wolf in the 1958 'Marathon' as I would be driving a Twin Cam 'MGA' whilst the rest of the 'works' team would be on Austin-Healey 100 Sixes. My 'brief' was to finish at all costs and to find and report on any 'bugs'.

To this I added a private resolve—to be the highest-placed B.M.C. driver for the third successive year. This was no mean task as the 'MGA' was giving away over a litre and a lot of horsepower to the Healeys, which were crewed by such 'aces' as Pat Moss/Ann Wisdom, Nancy Mitchell/Ann Hall, Gerry Burgess/Sam Croft Pearson, and Joan Johns/Sam Moore.

When my co-driver, Ray Brookes (Tulip Rally winner in 1956), and I had gone carefully over the regulations we came to the conclusion that the trip was going to be even tougher than usual. The route was just over 3,300 miles long through six countries, but no less than 1,050 miles would be in Yugoslavia, nowadays Europe's motoring testing-ground *par excellence*. In addition there would be 12 timed tests—242 miles in total—over the most notorious passes in the Alps and the Dolomites and even a second's lateness at some controls would mean exclusion. In comparison, the 'Monte' allows up to an hour's lateness before this awful fate.

The opposition was pretty formidable, too, for the entry of 108 crews included the top rally drivers on cars either entered or sponsored by Europe's leading manufacturers.

As usual, our 1300-1600 c.c. class was the largest, with 27 cars, chiefly Porsches (the M.G.'s ancient foes), led by Reiss/Wencher,

the German champions and runners-up in the 1958 Rally Championship, and Buchet, who last year shared the winning car with Storez but who this year was driving with Strahle.

The organization of the 'Marathon' is terrific. It opens with a police-escorted drive, over closed roads thronged with excited enthusiasts, from Liège to Spa, where the crews are released at minute intervals.

Heartened by an amusing telegram from my wife which read, 'Good luck. May the M.G. Lone Wolf shake off the Healey Pack', Ray and I left Spa at 10.18 p.m., Wednesday, 27 August.

At 8.15 p.m. the following night we were on the Yugoslavian border, 730 miles away, having crossed Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Italy. This was not a bad day's motoring, but the 'Marathon' was just beginning. For nine crews, including Monraisse/Feret, it was already over!

I retain rather mixed feelings about the next 24 hours' motoring in Yugoslavia over roads varying from the superb to the inexpressibly bad. The first timed climb over the Moistrocca Pass was disappointingly slow, probably due to the fact that we were carrying 1½ cwt. of petrol because petrol stations in Yugoslavia are few and far between and their contents are worse than the unlamented 'Pool'.

However, on the Autoput out of Zagreb (superb) I got an easy 7,000 r.p.m. on top gear which, on the 4.55 axle we were using, gave us around 112 m.p.h. This surprised the Triumphs and delighted us.

It was as well that we started the next stage to Solin in good spirits, for this came into the Inexpressibly Bad category. The roads were dirt, with appallingly rough, pot-holed or washboard surfaces from which each car threw up clouds of dust which hung in the tropically hot air. The Twin Cam took a merciless beating, for over this we had to average nearly 40 m.p.h. Our two petrol cans on the grid broke an elastic octopus grip and two stout leather straps and vanished into the dust. As our petrol consumption was around 20 m.p.g. this was not a crippling blow. Much more serious was the fact that the vibration slackened off the distributor clamp bolts so that it retarded itself badly and the engine continually cut out on the timed climbs. Very worrying—for we could not stop to trace the trouble.

BY MARATHON

BY JOHN GOTT

As a result, we came out of Yugoslavia in twenty-sixth position, with our morale rather low and overwhelmed by the Healey Pack (less Joan Johns, who had retired after an accident).

At just over half-distance the Lone Wolf had been caught. But all was not yet lost. We had survived Yugoslavia, which had accounted for another 34 cars and the distributor trouble had been located and cured.

The Dolomites proved to be just right for the Twin Cam's gear ratios. We fairly tore up the 9,000-foot Stelvio and its even more deadly colleague, 8,600-foot Gavia, to return one of the few unpenalized climbs. We just failed to do the same on the infamous Vivione by a bare 18 seconds.

In the morning we made up enough time for Ray and I to have a wash, shave, and swim in an icy mountain stream, which effectively drove off the fatigue of over 62 strenuous hours, and in the afternoon we managed to steal enough time to get the Twin Cam greased and sprayed with penetrating oil.

Both car and crew were therefore in good fettle for the French Alps, the most difficult part of the whole Rally. The times set were quite impossible, so that each pass was treated as a speed hill-climb, where loss of even a second was a serious matter, and the time lost on the overall average had to be made up by desperately hard driving.

Our morale was boosted by finding that we had pulled up 15 places in the Dolomites and were now lying eleventh, having reovertaken the Healeys of Gerry Burgess and Nancy Mitchell. Pat Moss and Ann Wisdom, driving quite brilliantly, had risen to sixth place. We could catch them only if they had mechanical trouble and we fervently hoped that they wouldn't.

Only 25 cars were now running, including four out of the five officially entered B.M.C. cars—a ratio no other manufacturer could approach.

The French Alps were extremely tricky for the cols all had loose surfaces, sometimes with grass growing in the middle, and were very narrow with all too many hairpins. In England they would be considered a fairly difficult section for a standard car trial—yet we had to attempt to average 48 m.p.h. over them!

By Grenoble the 'rough stuff' was over and it was merely a matter of covering the 500 miles back to Spa at an average of 40 m.p.h.!

This was no small strain for cars that had been through such a battering and for crews who had been continuously on the road for four days and four and a half nights.

During the 96½ hours of the rally Ray and I lost about 5 lb. in weight—hardly surprising as we had only one cooked meal and lived on nuts, raisins, fruit, and glucose concentrate. We used no drugs (which we find affects our judgement) but drank a lot to replace the liquid sweated out of us.

Yet we felt surprisingly fit as we triumphantly clocked in at Spa at 10.32 p.m., Sunday, 31 August, having explored some of the worst roads in Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, and France.

The Twin Cam took ninth place (fourth in its class), amassed its share of silver- and crystal-ware, and captained the R.A.C. team which brought the Coupe des Associations back to Britain.

To get these achievements in their true perspective they should be considered against the statistics of the non-finishers. Only 22 of that crack entry finished—a record even for the Marathon!

Thirty-seven models representing 22 makes of Europe's finest cars started, but 19 failed to finish at all.

Only two models can claim a 100 per cent. finishing ratio: one was the Peugeot 403, the other was the Twin Cam—on its very first serious outing.

This convincingly demonstrates how essentially right the design is. Having driven 'MGA's in the last two Marathon's, I am probably

in the best position of any driver to give a direct comparison between the Twin Cam and the Single Cam.

Firstly, there is no difference in handling—both are superb and will 'forgive' driving errors. Over the passes the Twin Cam was knocking minutes off the best times returned by the Single Cam. This was in part due to the power of the new engine, but just as much to the wonderful Dunlop disc brakes. These never grabbed, never faded, were always velvety-smooth, and inspired a feeling of complete confidence.

The Twin Cam engine, being meant for competition, is not so smooth or so quiet as the Single Cam unit, but even with its 9.9 : 1 compression ratio it coped surprisingly well with the Yugoslavian 'paraffin', and returned over 20 m.p.g. at 'touring' speeds. However, working on a rev. range of 6,500 r.p.m. on the timed tests, this naturally fell to around 12 m.p.g.

Ray and I fulfilled our official 'brief' (the 'bugs' were almost non-existent) and three-quarters of our private 'brief'.

For this latter failure I have no regrets.

Pat Moss/Ann Wisdom drove superbly to finish fourth (first in their class) and it was no disgrace to join some of Europe's top driver's behind them.

Finally, I cannot forget the glint in Marcus's eye when he added at 'briefing', 'This year we'll finish; next year we'll see about having a go at winning.'

Oh, and in case any knowledgeable readers wish to take me up on rally severity, may I add that this year the 'Marathon' field included drivers who have competed in both the African Coronation Safari and the Round Australia Rally, and they said that neither was so severe a test on a car and crew as the 'Marathon de la Route'.

John Gott and his Twin Cam at the Pelos control. The car was standard except for hardtop, large tank, and 4.55 axle

