

MGB

In my mid 20's, the idea of owning a sports car was high on my wish list, but I had never really taken any action to make it happen. So when a good friend, Dave, offered to sell me his MGB, I was extremely happy. I sold my existing car to raise the cash to pay for the "B". Back in those days, MGB's were low-to-the-ground, powerful, open top, two-seater sports cars. Despite my 6' 3" height, I fit in it beautifully. Driving the MGB on English roads, both main roads and twisty country roads, was really fun.

A couple of weeks after I took possession of the "B", I decided to drive up to London to visit my Mother. I left early on a Saturday morning and the weather was gorgeous. Naturally, I packed the roof away so that I could enjoy the wind in my hair, which was a new experience for me. Freeways did not exist in those days; I had to drive for a couple of hours on main roads. Most of these roads passed through open farm land before reaching the outskirts of London. After driving for about an hour, I caught up to a police patrol car, which I thought fortuitous as I would not have to worry about my speed (the "B" could top 100 mph without much effort). So I sat about a quarter mile behind the police car enjoying the sensations of driving my open top car with wind whipping my hair around - life was good.

After about five miles, we were just reaching the bottom of a long downhill section when I noticed a small electronic sign on the back of the police car light up "Stop". Wondering what could possibly be wrong, I slowed and pulled off the road onto the gravel with the patrol car just a few yards head of me.

A police officer approached me and enquired "Excuse me sir, do you know what speed you were driving down this hill?".

Quite innocently, I looked up at him and responded "Well, I am sure it was less than the speed limit, 70 mph, as I was simply following you."

He seemed a little annoyed "No, sir. You were driving in excess of 90 mph."

This came as a shock to me, which caused me to arrogantly ask "Why on earth were you driving that fast?"

To which, he simply said "I was responding to an emergency call."

Thinking more logically than legally, I shot back "If you're responding to an emergency call, why have you taken time to stop me?"

He smiled slightly and gave his answer "The emergency call was cancelled a few moments ago."

Feeling somewhat aggravated, my response of "Oh" seemed to end our conversation.

He wrote me out a ticket for speeding and drove off. I continued to my mothers with one eye glued to the speedometer. It was rather disappointing when I truly recognized how slow 70 mph felt after hauling down that hill at over 90 mph. But I had learned my lesson and whenever I had the top down, I kept a careful eye to my speed.

When the paperwork was sent to me, I found that I could either pay the fine or go to court to plead my case. Of course, being in my mid 20's, I chose the latter option, especially after my division boss reckoned I had a case, if I claimed mitigating circumstances.

Several weeks later, I had my day in court, where I told the circumstances of the incident from my viewpoint "Only a crazy person would follow a police car at 90 mph knowingly. I can assure you that I am totally sane. It did not dawn on me that the police car was on an emergency. Thus I claim mitigating circumstances."

The judge had a small smile on his face when he told me that I was guilty as charged and fined me the standard amount. He then told me to get out of his court. But I definitely had a sense that his smile was indicating that he would have come to court too, if he had been in my shoes. As to whether that was true or not does not matter, but that thought took some of the sting out of paying the fine.

Of course, I never told my mother about this incident or else she would never have agreed to be driven by me in the MGB.

About a year later, my Mother was visiting some old friends for a few days. As they lived about half an hour from where I lived in Brighton, she took the train over one evening to have dinner with me. Afterwards, I offered to drive her back as the train service could be a little unreliable later in the evening. She initially agreed but then became a little hesitant when she remembered me having the sports car. Eventually, she agreed and sat in the passenger seat wondering what she was letting herself in for, especially as the top was down. Of course, she was complaining that her hair was getting messed up before we turned the first corner. But on we flew and after a while she realized that any conversation or complaints were lost in the wind that whistled past us. After about half an hour, we arrived at her friend's house, where I helped her out of the car. I will admit that she did look rather wind-swept and not quite like the Mother I had normally come to expect. However, an aspect of her that I had not seen in years shown through: a satisfied look on her face seemed to say "Wow. That actually was fun." The only other time that I saw that look on her face was after she had taken an hour to rest having "survived" a ride on the Thunder Mountain Railroad at Disneyland. She was happy to have done it once and that was more than enough. And indeed, that was the one and only time she ever took a ride in my open top sports car - it had been a thrill and that one time was sufficient.