



Dutch Double

Jeremy Coulter
follows the MG Car Club to Holland

ONE might have been excused for thinking that the weekend was going to be a disaster when the clutch pedal went dead for the second time that morning. We'd already limped the stricken car back to base to have a new master cylinder fitted and now here it was without a left-hand pedal yet again. Not only did the car not have a clutch but it didn't have a fan either, so making progress in traffic became a nightmare. Eventually we hit base again and this time a new slave cylinder really did do the trick. At last we were on our way!

Our way was taking us to Zandvoort to tackle a double-headed round of the MG Car Club's popular B/C/V8 championship. The car in question was an MGB and its base was the Baldock HQ of MG specialists Brown and Gammons.

JTH 770D is quite well known in MG circles having been race-prepared from new in 1966 by that demon MG tweaker Bill Nicholson and raced regularly thereafter. It changed hands a few times in the late Sixties before coming to rest in the garage of Barry Sidery-Smith who seems to have owned just about every significant MGB at one time or another. As MG racing became more and more specialised so Barry retired the car from racing, eventually selling it to Ron Gammons. Ron has raced it once or twice but couldn't make the Zandvoort trip, suggesting in a rash moment that I might like to do it in his place.

The car isn't a race winner anymore but from the moment I nosed it out of B&G's yard and rapped away down Baldock High Street with the chain saw whine of the straight-cut gears drowning conversation I knew I was in for some fun.

I recently discovered that back in 1967 *T&CC's* former editor Roger Bell road tested this very car for *Motor* magazine. I was delighted to read there that he timed 60mph in eight seconds and clocked 130mph. JYH has been further modified since Roger Bell's test. It now has the latest Oselli camshaft for example, although the 'traditional' single 45mm Dellorto carburettor remains. Truth be told it's not a 45mm carb at all but a 48mm unit with the eight chipped on the identification casting to make it look like a five. It seems that Bill Nicholson wanted to keep this tweak secret!

The various engine



modifications come together to produce around 130bhp; hence the sparkling performance. With beefed-up suspension the car handles quite nicely too. Not in the Lotus league by any means, but enough to be exciting.

JYH has been lightened somewhat through the removal of trim and the substitution of plastic for glass in the doors, but the bodywork is original steel which is the main reason it isn't as quick as today's glassfibre-winged racing MGs.

Sealink's overbooking notwithstanding we made it to the Hook and an invigorating two-hour drive through a Dutch daybreak saw us among the sand dunes at Zandvoort in plenty of time to unload our gear and pump the tyres up.

Most of the MG contingent had set up shop at the bottom end of the paddock. Twenty-five regulars made the pilgrimage from the UK to what is now one of two foreign visits on their calendar, the other being to Zolder in August.

We were to race as part of the Dutch *Historische Auto Ren Club's* (HARC) main meeting of the year on a racecard that included a round of the prestigious FIA Historic GT Championship, so there were plenty of mouthwatering cars littering the paddock.

Getting to the grid for our race on Saturday was not without its problems because several of the MG team fell victim to a decibel test at the trackside during practice. Frantic bodging with Coke cans and wire wool saw all except Paul Campfield pass a re-

test which was a shame because Paul has a hand in organising the championship and had just finished building his V8.

The grid shaped up pretty much as expected with the front four positions occupied by the fast and powerful full-race V8s of John Lodge, Terry Smith, David Franklin and Colin Percy. Barry Sidery-Smith was the fastest of the rest with his four-cylinder road-going modified MGB alongside the immaculately prepared car of Bill Beadnell. All the field had reason to be grateful to Bill as he'd arranged for Daf Trucks Europe to sponsor us.

I found myself on the sixth row of the grid in company with the similar red and white cars of Peter King and Freddy Yhap. John Tadman's road-going V8 was alongside me as we keyed ourselves up for the green light. Suddenly it came and we were off, charging in the first corner and off round that fast and challenging circuit with ups and downs, chicanes and some very fast corners in its 2.64 miles.

The Dutch crowd seemed to love it and certainly enjoyed the sight of the fast men scything through to lap the slower cars.

When the flag fell after eight exhausting laps it was Terry Smith and not poleman Lodge who took the flag. Barry Sidery-Smith made off with the four-cylinder spoils, but McCune and Beadnell weren't too far behind.

That first day's grid was also used to start the second race on the Sunday afternoon also in glorious sunshine. Terry Smith came out on top, once more

pursued by Lodge but again it was Lodge who posted fastest lap. The track was sandy and oily for this second thrash and with all the spinning and running off that seemed to be going on it was extraordinary that no one sustained any real damage.

The B proved itself to be a remarkably forgiving car and at no point frightened me. JYH is reputed to be set up to oversteer but I experienced little of that; in fact just the opposite. Too much understeer was easily damped by easing the throttle and once the car was settled the pedal could be floored to wind up through the revs, making use of the all-gear overdrive facility to keep things humming. It was fatal to let the revs fall much below 4500 and I chickened out at 6500; after all it wasn't my engine and we wanted to get home. Ron tells me it's safe to 7000rpm.

On the braking front JYH proves how good a basically standard MG disc/drum arrangement can be if it's working properly and has the right linings. There was no fade and the car pulled up straight and true every time.

At the end of the day when everyone had exhausted their tales of that particularly lurid moment or that ridiculous overtaking manoeuvre, we all packed up and headed for home. We piled the spare wheel and luggage plus the can of Castrol 'R' back into the boot, let some air out of the tyres and joined the exodus, firmly convinced of two things. One, that MG racing is great fun and two, that MGBs can be made to go very quickly indeed!