



John Day's 1929 MG 18/80

Seeking More Power – a cautionary tale by John Day

One of the joys, and frustrations, of using a very old car today is the need for constant fettling to ensure the mechanical parts are up to the job. As our dear old MG is an 18/80, made in July 1929, I am sure you can imagine the difficulties one comes across in keeping everything in top form. There are precious few spares available and parts that wear out have to be made especially for the car.

When WL 7196 was first registered there were very few roads in the country that were straight enough to allow the 2.5-litre 6-cylinder engine to attain its top speed of around 75mph. If one wishes to cover a lot of miles on today's roads the car must be capable of cruising on the motorway at 60 miles per hour to avoid being constantly overtaken by heavy goods vehicles. The engine and its cooling and lubrication systems were not designed for this particular duty and, if you use an 18/80 for long-distance touring, steps have to be taken to bring the car up to modern standards. I have been developing my car for 13 years now and I have written an article about all the mechanical updates which will be published in *Safety Fast!* at a later date.

Here I want to talk about my specific goal to increase power following a decision to rebuild the engine in early 2008. The Vintage MG group had organised the manufacture of new pistons for the few 18/80s left on the road. We used Omega Pistons and they produced a top-class job. The new pistons were designed to increase the compression ratio from 6 to 1 up to 8.5 to 1. This was thought to be a good idea to give a modest power increase and overcome one of the problems with using modern petrol, which is designed for today's relatively high compression engines.

I had everything back and working for the beginning of last season which culminated in driving the car to the MG Car Club Event of the Year in Zug, Switzerland. At first I thought the engine seemed be more powerful, but as the running-in period came to an end I became aware of a serious limitation to its power characteristics. Acceleration was definitely better and it was possible to cruise at 65mph on the flat but when tackling long, gentle inclines, like you find on many continental motorways, the engine responded in a very odd way. Speed dropped off and the only way to keep going was to REDUCE the throttle setting. I managed to drive the car to Switzerland, get it up the Klausen Pass and home again,



Original piston and new, higher compression design made by Omega.

Yours truly with the rebuilt engine ready to go back in the car.

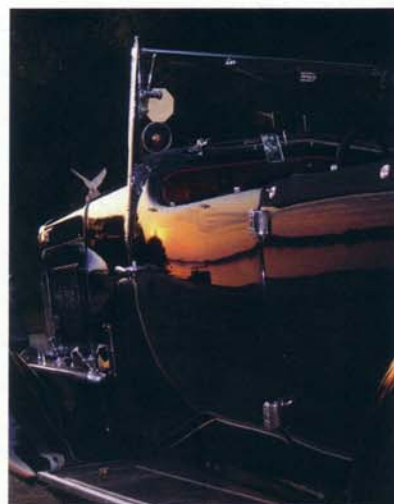
but I have to say it was a struggle and certainly not what I expected from a rebuilt, up-rated engine.

I have just returned from a two-week holiday with WL in France and, despite my best efforts to solve the problem last winter, I have to tell you it is much the same. It works well until you call for mid-range power. I have

talked to a number of experts and the suggestion is to put the car on a rolling road and explore the engine characteristics over the power range. The evidence suggests that the standard needles in the SU carburettors are giving a very weak mixture under some conditions. Nothing, it seems, with an old car is ever straightforward!



WL 7196 outside Chateau Montgeoffery near Maze in the Loire region of France.



Reflections of a sunset. Taken at Le Menitre beside the Loire at Sunset.