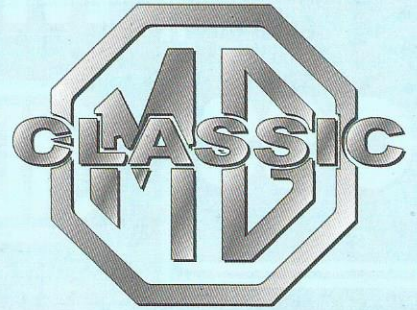


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The MG supercar of which dreams are made

Like other teenagers growing up in the '60s and the muscle car generation, Ron Neal was smitten by the likes of Chevrolet Chevelles, Ford Mustangs, Plymouth Road Runners and Pontiac GTOs.

As a matter of fact, the first car he bought was a pavement-pounding 1966 Chevelle Super Sport 396, with the high-horsepower L34 option. Equipped with gobs of power, the Chevelle was an incredible straight-line performer.

But it didn't take long for the amiable Neal to discover another generation of automobile, from another part of the world.

"In 1967, I saw an ad for a 1963 MGB about 30 miles from home. It was owned by a student at Monmouth College and had a homemade intake manifold with a 4-barrel carb and dual megaphone exhaust.

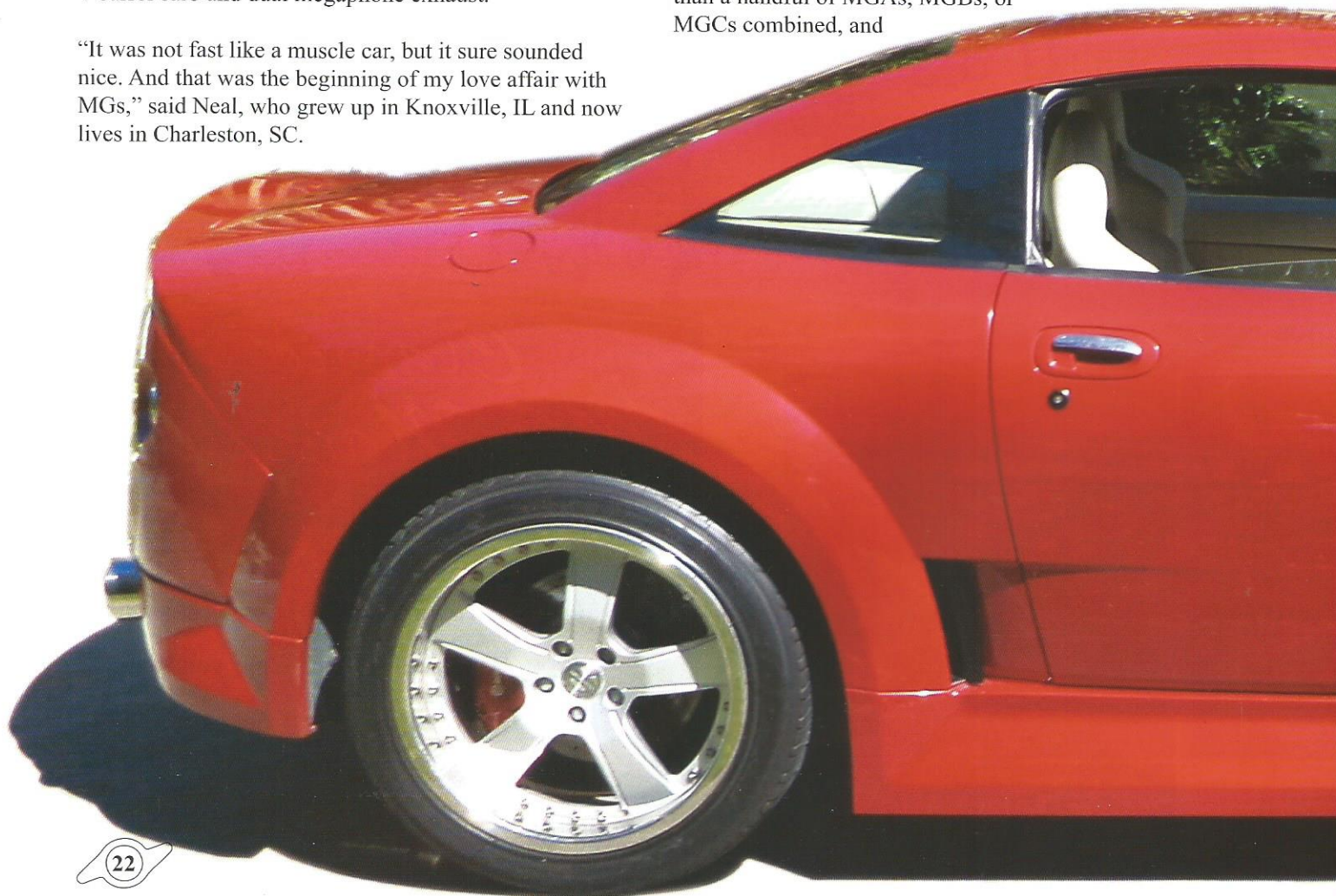
"It was not fast like a muscle car, but it sure sounded nice. And that was the beginning of my love affair with MGs," said Neal, who grew up in Knoxville, IL and now lives in Charleston, SC.

Today, he owns more than a half-dozen examples from the Morris Garage stable, plus one very special MG, which was constructed after the fall of Abingdon. It's also the only one of its kind in the United States.

Ironically, his 2004 MG XPower SVS more closely resembles his American muscle car of decades ago – at least in terms of power.

The low and slippery carbon fiber bodied XPower cars, with their front aerodynamic splitter, rear air diffuser and side air vents, came in three versions – SV, SVR and SVS. The SV stands for Sport Veloce.

Neal owns the fourth SVS model built and the first to be supercharged, "a pre-production trim and test car." Like the other MGSVS models, it's equipped with a Ford-based V8 and supercharger, and creates more horsepower than a handful of MGAs, MGBs, or MGCs combined, and



also more than his Chevelle SS of years ago.

This special supercharged model originally produced 395 horsepower, but Neal added a smaller supercharger pulley for additional boost. He believes his car now churns out about 425 horsepower.

Step inside the car, via the right hand door, get comfortable and press the start button on the console. The car instantly comes to life with a burble of activity. Shift with your left hand and the MGSVS quickly sends a smile to its driver.

“The car has plenty of torque and it’s easy to break loose the tires,” Neal said. “I don’t have any performance figures, but there is little that compares to a supercharger. It just keeps pulling and pulling.”

He’s confident the car will top out at about 180 mph and travel from zero to 60 in four seconds, give or take.

While the power of this incredible MG is noteworthy, so are its beginnings. These incredible post-Abingdon MG XPower cars were designed by Peter Stevens, who won international acclaim for his design of the McLaren F1.

Stevens spent five years as chief designer at Lotus Cars in

the 1980s, before becoming Chief Designer at McLaren Cars where he was responsible for the design of the McLaren F1, launched in 1993. He also served as chief designer at Lamborghini, before returning to the United Kingdom working for Prodrive, BMW, Williams, Toyota and the MG Rover Group.

Only 86 MG XPower cars, in both left-hand and right-hand drive, were produced by MG Sports and Racing, a British automotive company based in Eardiston, Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire, according to historical accounts.

The company was founded by William Riley, who acquired assets of the MG Sport and Racing subsidiary of MG Rover Group after its demise.

Riley’s use of the MG trademark resulted in a legal dispute with Nanjing Automobile Corporation, which also had acquired assets of the defunct MG Rover Group. This case was won by Nanjing in February 2010.

Later, China’s SAIC Motor purchased Nanjing and is producing vehicles with the MG badge. SAIC also has partnerships with GM and Volkswagen.

“Central to the car’s DNA is a finely tuned chassis designed along race car principles bonded to a light-weight carbon fiber body with integral rollover cage,” according to the MGSV-Club website.

The steel chassis and double wishbone suspension were fabricated by Vaccari and Bosi in Modena in



collaboration with MG Sport and Racing's chassis development team.

Final vehicle assembly took place at MG Sport & Racing's headquarters in Longbridge, Birmingham, which today is another memory of the MG marque.

The production process was affectionately known as the "1,000-mile production line," Neal said.

"The approximately 3,000 carbon fiber pieces were cut by SP Systems on the Isle of Wight in the United Kingdom and shipped, in a refrigerated state, to Belco Avia in San Pietro, Italy. Once there, they were formed and autoclaved, and then shipped to OPAC Group in Turin, Italy where they were married to the rolling chasses that were transported from Vaccari and Bosi in Modena. Final paint and trim were done at MG Sports and Racing's facilities in Longbridge, England."

Neal's car was purchased by a close friend of his. When it arrived in the United States, the friend was on vacation and asked Neal to take possession of it on his behalf. That's when the life of this MGSVS took a dramatic turn.

"As soon as I saw the car I called my friend and said 'I want it.' And he said OK."

Neal had read about the model in various MG magazines, but thought there were none in the USA. "This car came

to Roush Engineering in Detroit for some testing and stayed here after MG Sports and Racing went into receivership. I purchased the car in 2007 but it has spent most of that time in my garage," he recounted.

Although he made a point of driving it on limited occasions, it wasn't until August 2014 that he took it on its "first real outing." It was there, at the University Motors MG Summer Party Reunion, that the car caught the attention of MG enthusiasts.

Photos of the car taken at the reunion, hosted by John Twist, quickly began circulating the Internet, with comments about its design and questions about its new home in the United States.

Neal prefers not to talk about the title and registration, but emphasizes that the car has "legal standing."

His car is painted "Red Hot" and is equipped with an Oyster pre-production interior. Along with its supercharged Ford 4.6-liter engine, it's equipped with climate control, CD tuner, heated seats, MOMO steering wheel and 18-inch OZ wheels.

Neal owns the specially designed CCW wheels that were manufactured for the supercharged XPower cars, but chooses to use the OZ brand.

The car has a front splitter and rear diffuser along with



side vents, but is devoid of a rear wing, a common site on other XPower cars.

While thankful for the Ford drivetrain, Neal said the electronic and electrical bits “are somewhat different” from what you find in this country. He also is very, very careful when driving.

“If it were to get damaged, the body parts are very hard to find and not cheap. When I purchased the car there was a crack in the windshield ... After exhaustive searches in the UK I found one of the few OEM windshields left on planet earth at considerable expense. So now I worry about rock chips too.”

As far as comparisons with other MGs, there really are none, considering its age and sophistication. It’s even difficult to compare it with cars built in 2004 or 2005.

“Not many other cars at that time had a full carbon fiber body and an FIA-approved integrated roll cage,” he said. “In fact the car was assembled in Modena, Italy and shipped to the UK for paint and trim.”

Even today, years after production, “the SV is a very unique car anywhere in the world... and the fastest production MG ever made.”

As for the future of MG supercars, who knows? MG now is owned by SAIC in China and there’s no telling what

route its new owners will take, Neal said.

Although pleased to own one of these rare MG automobiles, the owner also acknowledged that it is not his favorite MG.

“My all-time favorite is the MGC. Yes, it may have a few warts, but it’s the best road car MG made at the time,” he said.

“Maybe a little front-end heavy, but those issues can be mitigated with a set of good tires and some simple suspension mods. Easy to fix if it breaks, not terribly expensive and parts are readily available. When I get on the highway, I just point it and go.”

“I bought my first MGC in 1982 and drove it daily for almost 20 years. I put more than 250,000 miles on the clock and I still own it.”

His current collection includes two MGA Mk2s, two MGCs, two MGC GTs and his MGSVS. But he also has owned more than a dozen other MGs, of all sorts. ○

To learn more about the MG XPower SV cars, visit www.mgsv-club.com.

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