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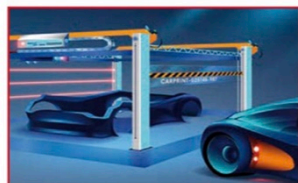
Living the Dream

They sold a 'gentleman' SLK to buy this 'thug' of an SVR

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Living the Dream

Richard Fanshawe loved the look of the MG SV the first time he saw it in a magazine. He didn't see one in the flesh until a decade later, but the model had lost none of its allure.

• WORDS AND PICTURES: SIMON GOLDSWORTHY



When I met Richard and Charlotte Fanshawe with their striking SV-R, the subject of a Mercedes SLK55 AMG cropped up once or twice. That's because they had to sell just such a Merc to fund the MG. That kind of conquest sale would have been music to the ears of MG's sales and marketing gurus back in the day, but sadly that day had long-since passed when our story begins in 2012.

'I had no sports car history,' says

Richard, 'we'd only had sensible family cars up to that point, but you get to that stage in life when you just want to have a bit of fun – I think they call it a mid-life crisis! I was very fortunate in that I got an unexpected little windfall and so I was able to indulge this desire.'

Richard just wanted a fun car and had never even considered a Mercedes, but it was Charlotte who suggested an SLK. Having convinced Richard it was not the hairdresser's car he thought it was, they went looking and bought one. The

German roadster was an immediate hit, and they had two very enjoyable years with it before fate stepped in to mix things up a bit. In this instance, fate took the form of a visit to the Heritage Motor Centre (as the British Motor Museum was then called) in Gaydon.

'When the SV was first launched, I immediately loved the looks,' relates Richard. 'I always wanted one, but never thought it would happen as the money they were asking when new was just crazy. Then I completely forgot

about them, until a couple of years ago when I went to Gaydon. They have an SV there, and I was so transfixed by it that I was standing looking at the car when one of the staff tapped me on the shoulder and said: "Excuse me sir, but we have actually closed."

That was the first time Richard had seen an example of the SV in real life. Obviously, the minute he got home he logged straight onto the internet to see what they were going for. Suffice to say, it was considerably less than

MG had been asking back in 2004. The only problem was that there are never very many SVs for sale at any one time. It took a couple of months before Richard found a potential candidate, a blue car for sale in the Midlands, but although he phoned, they weren't sure whether or not they wanted to sell and eventually stopped returning his calls.

'It was a very odd situation,' says Richard, 'but sometimes these things are meant to be and I am very pleased that I didn't get that car, because I

ended up with a better one instead! It took about nine months for it to pop up for sale, but it was just 15 minutes down the road from me. And it may have been Hobson's choice, but I'd always thought that Orange Fire was the best colour for an SV. They only made one RHD car in that colour – and this SV-R was it! I bought it on the spot.'

Naturally the Mercedes had to go in order to fund the purchase of the MG, and full credit must go to Charlotte for not putting her foot down at the

SV-R

« prospect of swapping their beloved SLK (which she describes as 'a gentleman of a car') for an MG which she likens to 'a bit of thug.' She has since warmed to the MG after seeing the reaction it gets, but does still miss cruising in the Mercedes with the roof down.

Before looking further at their SV-R ownership experience, perhaps we should first explain briefly the significance of the R, and the background to this particular car. The MG XPower SV with its 320Ps 4.6-litre, quad-cam, all-aluminium Ford V8 engine had been unveiled at the British Motor Show in 2002, although the first customer car was not handed over until March 2004. The company always promised a higher performance variant too, and this was duly unveiled as the SV-R at the NEC during the British Motor Show in May 2004.

The most obvious external marker for the SV-R was a large boot spoiler (a delete option), but under the bonnet was a 5-litre version of the V8, hand-built by Sean Hyland in Canada. This raised power to 400Ps and reduced the 0-60mph sprint time to under five seconds, but also pushed the list price up from £65,750 to £82,950. An SV-S was also planned with a supercharger on the 4.6 engine to produce similar performance to the SV-R but at a lower



build cost, but time ran out for the company in 2005 before production of this could get properly underway.

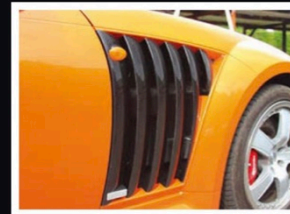
Richard's car was built by MG XPower in 2004 and shown alongside the Rover 75 Coupé and MG GT (a TF with a coupé hardtop) in an effort to convince potential investors that there were still exciting developments and designs waiting in the wings. The first owner was Phoenix Venture Motors, so essentially it was retained by the factory for showroom displays and customer demonstrations.

It then got transferred to MG Sport and Racing Ltd on 1st August 2005 – that company had followed MG-Rover into administration, but the administrators were trying to sell it as a going concern before admitting defeat

and auctioning everything off in March 2006. By then, MG54 SVR had already been sold to its first private owner, but not before being used for press photographs and loaned to journalists. As such, Richard's car was featured in several magazines and press releases.

'I think I have sourced just about every magazine it has appeared in,' he says. 'The general consensus was that it was a good car to drive and well set up, but build quality was patchy and the price was totally unachievable so it was doomed to failure from the start. One thing that always makes me nervous is that it was driven by *Autocar* from Modena to the UK, and they ran out of fuel on that journey with the fuel gauge still reading 1/4 full. I guess forewarned is forearmed, though.'

That trip back from Modena must have counted for a good percentage of



The colour of this car changes with the light, but one thing is a constant – the R signifies power that propels the SV into true supercar territory.



the 4100 miles on the clock when it was sold out of the company on 14 October, 2005. That first buyer paid a whopping £57,500 and kept it until 21 May 2009, by which point the mileage had only crept up as far as 5300 miles.

'The next owner kept it until I bought it on 10 April, 2014,' relates Richard. 'By then the mileage was still only 6500, though it is now up to 8500 so I've probably done more miles in the car than anybody else. I love the way it handles – the ride is amazingly good for such a quick car, and the big Brembo brakes are excellent. The original reports about patchy build quality had some merit to them, however. I haven't come across any serious gremlins, but the anti-lock brake light has a mind of its own, and when you leave home the electronic display goes completely blank after five minutes, only to come back on again five minutes later and then you know it will stay on for the duration.'

Wisely, Richard has decided to call those

foibles 'character' and live with them because it could cost a fortune to track down and correct them. Fortunately the only mechanical issue has not been too serious, and in fact can't be blamed on the car at all. What happened was that Richard took it to a dealer for a service after a year. They changed the coolant, but it turned out that somebody in the past had filled it with the wrong type of antifreeze so the two reacted and turned to jelly. Since then he's had the system drained and refilled twice.

Richard is lucky in that his local garage may be a tiny place, but one of their mechanics used to work for Tom Walkinshaw and did some development work for MG-Rover, so he worked on the SV back in the day and knows his way around it. Mind you, because the garage works on many exotic and classic cars, they are a bit blasé and to them the SV is not the amazing beast that it is to most casual observers.

'One of the best things about owning an SV is that everybody else is so interested in it,' explains Richard. 'My daughter came with me when I first collected the MG and after driving back through the town of Burford, she said to me: "Dad, you do realise that everybody was stopping to look?" I hadn't noticed at the time, but have since seen how people on the motorway pause to look and take pictures. I'm generally a shy person, certainly not an attention-seeker. Charlotte says she can't understand why I bought a car like that, but I just love the look of it and the sound it makes.'

And it is not as though Richard and Charlotte use their MG as a daily driver. It generally only gets used for car



« shows and events, though these run the full range from local gatherings to the likes of Goodwood's Supercar Sunday. They've also taken it to the Salon Privé at Blenheim Palace, where it created so much interest in the overspill car park that Richard was asked to move it into the primary display area instead.

'Often visitors tell me that they come to those events to see cars like my SV-R,' he says, 'which is gratifying to hear. And it is a very rare beast – often we are the only one, whereas there can be a whole row of Aston Martins or Porsches. I have booked my tickets for the Festival of Speed next year. Previously the organisers wouldn't accept the SV-R for what they called the Supercar Parking (it is now renamed Performance Car parking) as they have a very defined list of models that they will allow in, but for some reason the SV was not on it whereas many lesser cars were. Then last year they finally added the SV-R to their list, so I thought I may as well oblige by taking mine.'

The only thing Richard has been a bit wary of is the reception the SV-R would get from true MG enthusiasts, as he feels it could be seen as effectively the car that finished MG-Rover. He needn't have worried though, as predictably the reactions have been very positive even among the MG cognoscenti. At Brooklands for the MG Era day, for example, the guy on the gate said: 'Oh, we haven't had one of these before,



I don't know quite where to put you. You'd better go down there with the V8s.' So Richard parked up with them and got a really good

reception. Amazingly, an SV and an SV-S also turned up, so visitors were able to admire all three variants.

'I don't do as many miles in the MG as we used to do in the Mercedes,' admits Richard, 'largely because I am worried of it being pranged. Fortunately I have now learned that the body panel moulds are safe and should the worst happen, new panels are available from SV Power Retro Sports & Racing in West Yorkshire. In fact, owning the SV-R has been something of a steep learning curve in general. Fortunately the other owners are all hugely enthusiastic and so very helpful. It amazes me that given the small numbers involved, you can ask just about any question on the forum and somebody will get back to you with the answer.'

'I don't know what will happen in the future because you can never say never, but so far owning the SV-R has certainly lived up to the dream. If somebody came up and made me an offer I couldn't refuse then I would probably sell, but what could I buy to replace it? Charlotte would quite like to go back to a convertible, but because I don't do too many miles in the MG, I have also bought an Audi TT Quattro Sport for fun and hillclimbs, and Charlotte seems to drive that more than I do.'

'My daughter thinks the SV-R is her wedding fund and will be sold to pay for that, but I have disabused her of that particular notion! Perhaps she could borrow it as wedding transport, though. It may not be your ideal wedding vehicle, but Charlotte and I drove away from our wedding in an AC Cobra; mind you, I wasn't allowed to drive that so she had to sit on my lap in the passenger seat. That was easier – so the Cobra because there was no roof – so we are back to that old chestnut!' ©



