JOHN TWIST SEMINARS

Richard Ladds

It is not everyday that you get to meet an MG celebrity like John Twist but over the weekend of 22nd to 23rd October we had the great privilege of his company at the MGOC HQ when he presented two one-day MG technical seminars. John is even more entertaining and knowledgeable in person than when he presents in his numerous YouTube videos. He is also extremely approachable and he was delighted to share his expertise with an audience of MGOC members. John's exceptional insight into the maintenance and mechanical foibles of our cars is gained from a lifetime's familiarity with MGs from T-types to MGBs.

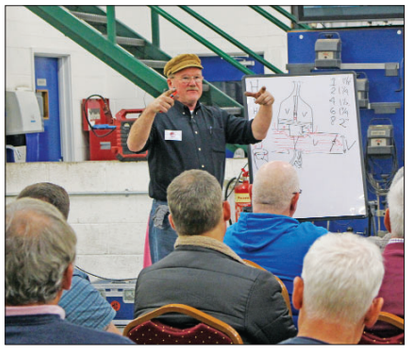
The programme for each day began with a presentation in the boardroom followed by a trip down to the fully equipped modern MGOC Workshop for a hands on practical demonstration using the MGOC's own 1969 MGB on Saturday while on Sunday a 1980 MGB GT belonging to one of the delegates was tuned. On both MGs John demonstrated a complete tune up, with each stage of the operation covered in methodical detail with numerous tips and asides to achieve the best results gained from extensive experience.

John began with the usual health and safety issues which he was able to enhance with various anecdotes that reinforced the message. A working fire extinguisher is an essential requirement, while another priority is making sure you have adequate ventilation because being overcome by exhaust fumes can be a surprisingly rapid process. John also insists when placing the car on axle stands it's a wise move to ensure that it is safe and secure by vigorously rocking the car back and forth.

A familiarity with the workings of the internal combustion engine can be assumed at such gatherings and he went on to outline the ways in which efficiency can be disrupted by air leaks and incorrect settings. John made the point that the vast majority of running problems are ignition and timing related rather than to do with carburettor settings. He then recounted the problems caused by the crankcase breather system which when faulty can cause excessive oil consumption.

Over each day a practical demonstration followed where John showed that a consistent and methodical approach to tuning and problem solving lies at the heart of his tune up sequence. He always recommends that before any attempt is made to tune an engine it is paramount to check the compression of each cylinder, because no amount of adjustment will compensate for an engine that is worn and requires a top or bottom end rebuild. He stressed that it is essential to carry out checks with exactly the same modus operandi for each cylinder and that only if the compressions are all within a reasonably healthy range can the tune-up proceed.

MGOC Workshop provides the perfect setting



John explains the theory behind the SU carburettor

Removing spark plugs

Checking for air leaks

After warming up the engine John checked around the manifolds for air leaks and then carried out a compression test, satisfied that each cylinder was displaying a reasonable level he went on to fit a new set of spark plugs. Then the rocker box was removed so that the head could be torqued down and the valve clearances set. All the while he was adding tips and asides, recounting his own experiences to reinforce the message of consistency, care and cleanliness.

After examining the engine John turned to the ignition system, removing the distributor to check it over, he then fitted new points and condenser. Finally a thorough inspection of the auto advance mechanism, distributor cap and ignition leads was made.

Next the carburettors were dismantled and cleaned, on examination the external float bowls of the HS4 SUs of the 1969 MGB were found to contain deposits of crud and dirt which was quickly cleaned away. An acceptable rate of fuel delivery was verified and then the carbs were reassembled and refitted.

Now with the distributor back in place the timing was set, John explained that during the production of MGBs the marks on the timing case had been re-located making it harder to operate a strobe light on some models. He set the timing to 32" full mechanical advance at 3-4,000 rpm with the vacuum disconnected. Once happy that the timing is correct the SU carbs can adjusted, first balancing the airflow by ear, listening to the intake hiss. The mixture setting can be checked by raising each carburettor's piston damper in turn using the flat blade of a screwdriver inserted at the base and then rotated through 90 degrees to provide identical lift for both carbs and noting the effect on slow running.

John also pointed out that providing you finish off each particular discrete part of the tuning process you do not need to perform a complete tune up all in one session.

Both days ended with the demonstration MGB's engine running sweetly and smiles all around. John provided a non-stop commentary throughout the day and was able to answer the many questions put forward, his explanations and analogies of the more complex processes involved in the tuning process were particularly helpful. One of the members said that although he'd done quite a bit of MGB tuning over the years, he wished he'd had had some of John Twist's insights at his fingertips before he began. He went on to praise John's common sense and good humour in his delivery and demonstrations.

Our thanks to John for an excellent and helpful weekend.