

HISTORIANS PERSPECTIVE: Great Expectations!

by Bob Vitrikas

Happy New Year everybody! This New Year is extra special to MG enthusiasts as it marks the 100th anniversary of the MG marque. Starting in May 2023 and running until mid-2024, there will be centenary celebrations around the world to commemorate this event, and the SVBCC will join in the festivities by featuring MG in our Annual British Car Festival to be held on October 7, 2023. Coincidentally, 2023 is also the 100th anniversary of the Triumph Motor Company. Leading up to the car show, I plan to provide a series of newsletter articles detailing the interesting and varied history of these important British sports cars. Keeping with our show's theme "Back to the Future," it is my intention that you learn a bit about Triumph and MG's histories. By year's end, we may have a peek at what the future holds for MG by way of an electric, albeit Chinese, marque.

Here are some resources for your consideration:

- Here's a link to The MG Car Club's listing of centenary celebrations.

<https://www.mgcc.co.uk/mg100/>

- Here is this announcement from the MG Owners Club, UK highlighting the British Motor Museum event on 27 May 2023. <https://www.mgcentenary.co.uk>. This will be the kick off of all MG Centenary events around the world and promises to be an unforgettable experience!

Despite my efforts roaming the Internet, I have not been able to find much in the way of Triumph centenary celebrations in the U.S.. I'll keep looking and if you find out about one, please let me know!

In addition to the 100th anniversaries, 1953 and 1963 were hallmark years for American and British cars as well. Here are some that come to mind. Can you add to this list?

- 1953: First Corvette model introduced. Got off to a slow start with just 300 1953 models sold. No surprise since it only came with a straight six and two speed automatic. Just one color combination was offered, Polo White with red interior. Every year since, the same color combination has been offered.



- 1963: The long awaited all new Corvette Sting Ray (two words) was introduced, and it was a stunner, especially the first ever Corvette coupe which featured a controversial split rear window body style. It was about this time that rumors started about a mid-engine Corvette coming out soon. Well, it was a nearly 60 year wait but the mid-engine Vette finally made its appearance in 2020. Better late than never I guess.



- Another one of my GM favorites, the Buick Riviera, also made its appearance in 1963. Originally planned as a Cadillac LaSalle, Buick picked up the option to produce it when Cadillac reneged. Regarded as one of the most beautiful American car designs ever, it has attracted a strong following. Simple and elegant with a minimum of chrome, a great big torquey V8, smooth shifting transmission, a beautiful four bucket seat interior, it has aged well.



- Studebaker was on its knees and needed something to draw buyers into its showrooms and the Avanti was the result. Designed by three guys in a rented house in Palm Springs in just three weeks, the Raymond Lowey “love it or hate it” inspired design drew a lot of attention. Sadly, the fiberglass body factory in Ashtabula, Ohio was over-loaded with orders for Corvette Sting Ray bodies. Guess which one won out; GM or Studebaker? Studebaker closed its South Bend, Indiana factory on 31 Dec 1963. Sigh.



- 1963: The first model year of the MGB was the beginning of something really special. Featuring a unibody construction, roll-up windows, a decent size trunk, and sparkling performance from its robust four cylinder engine, it would be equipped with electric overdrive for high speed cruising more suited to U.S. interstate driving. In its day, the MGB was the best selling sports car of all time and still has a strong, enthusiastic following.

Body styling? A picture is worth a thousand words.

Choice of disc or wire wheels.

Five free, disc brakes up front are competition proved. Folds are shielded from sludge and grit.

You couldn't wish for better except comfort and layout. Everything's there! Even the pedals are spaced for size twelve.

The new MGB front office is all business. Displacement has been increased to 1600 c.c., resulting in more horses, quicker acceleration and better top speed in all four forward gears. Oil cooler is standard.

Big trunk? You said it.

There are two choices of vinyl seat tops. The standard, a just jack-away top, can be removed completely, stored in the trunk or left at home. Optional is an attached folding top which lowers into the carpet area back of the seats. Incidentally, this generous space will accommodate a lot of shopping, extra luggage or an occasional passenger.

- 1963: Aston Martin DB5: A contender for the most well known cinema car of all time, James Bond's DB5 quickly became an icon. Better have deep pockets if you want to own one!

- 1963: I don't know what it is about that year but there are so many exciting cars that hit the market around the world that year. How about this list; Ferrari 250 GT Lusso, Rover P6, Porsche 901 (later changed to 911), Mercedes "Pagoda" style SL 230/250/280 series, and the beautifully designed Jaguar "S-type" sports sedans. And how about that Checker Marathon and Chrysler Turbine car?

In 2023, we find ourselves on the cusp of a sea-state change in car propulsion from internal combustion to electric (or hydrogen or fuel cell...) power. I can't predict what the future will bring, but I know it will be exciting. Maybe as exciting as 1963? It's hard for me to imagine a more 'vintage' year, but time will tell. Happy New Year indeed!