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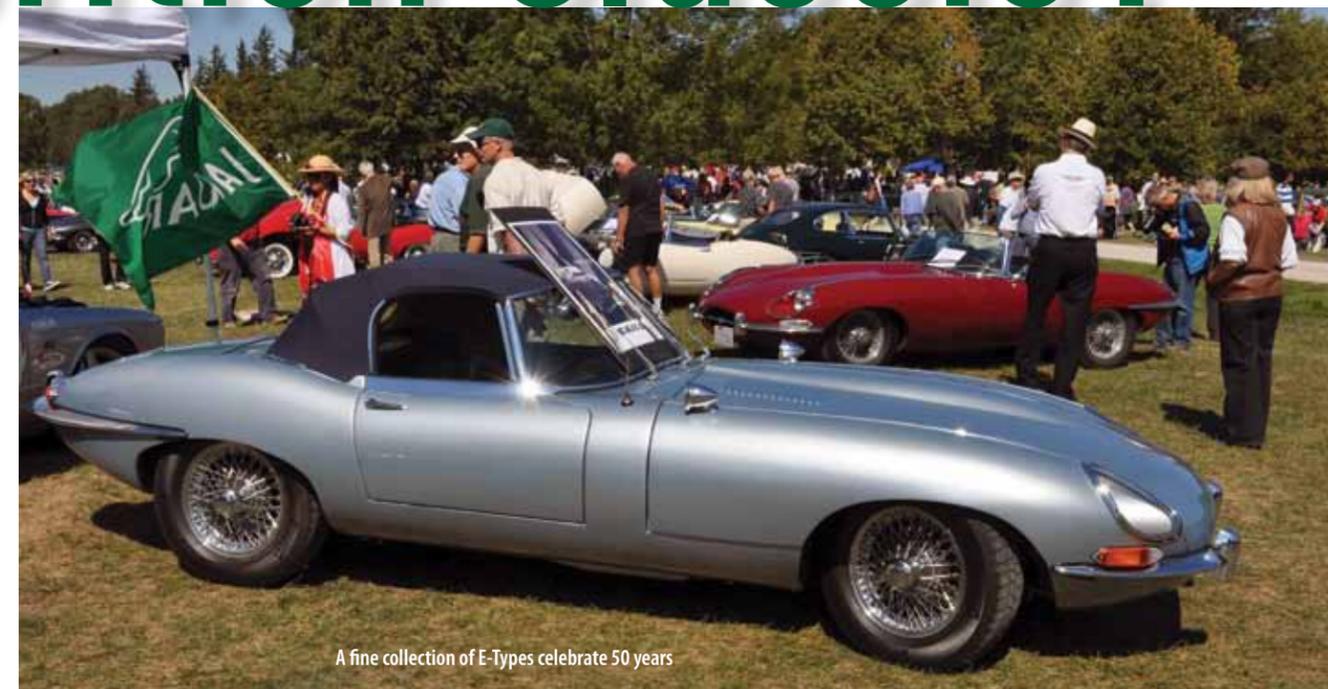
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club events

# My Next British Classic?

BY TERENCE MCKILLEN



A fine collection of E-Types celebrate 50 years

The 28th annual British Car Day at Bronte Provincial Park in Oakville is over for another year. The organising committee and the host of supporting volunteers did a wonderful job on behalf of the club. The organisation exhibits a high level of professionalism and one can see how BCD has become one of the pre-eminent gatherings of all things British.

Since its inauguration in 1984 it has experienced continued growth and this year drew almost 1,100 entries and 9,000 spectators. Once again, the weather gods prevailed and we had a beautiful sunny day with temperatures in the high teens. Walking around the Bronte exhibition field permits one to take a journey

through time and literally see the A to Z of the once prolific British automobile industry, even though one can actually only achieve that with models from Ford (Anglia to Zephyr or Zodiac!)

The featured marques were the E-Type Jaguar, the MG Midget and the Triumph TR4, all three celebrating their fiftieth birthdays. It is absolutely amazing that the style and design of the E-Type (or XK-E as it is sometimes known in North America) is still as fresh as ever, holding its own, in my mind at least, against its younger siblings, such as the current XK-8.

It is an interesting exercise to think back to what we were doing in 1961. It was a simpler time, but tensions in the cold war

had escalated and it was still a year before the Cuban missile crisis. The USSR continued to openly test atomic bombs. The East Germans started the construction of the Berlin Wall. John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President of the United States. The Soviets put Yuri Gagarin into space. In the UK, Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister and Britain applied for membership of the EEC, but didn't actually become a member for another 12 years. In Canada, John Diefenbaker was Prime Minister and Tommy Douglas was elected leader of the newly formed NDP. At Monza, during the Italian Grand Prix, Wolfgang von Trips crashed his Ferrari onto an embankment killing himself and 14 spectators. Let's Twist Again,



Blue Moon, Michael Row the Boat Ashore, and Hats off to Larry were the big hits of the year. The Beatles were performing at Liverpool's Cavern Club, but were still two years away from hitting the charts!

The birth of the featured models certainly takes me back to the years well before I could legally drive, but I can clearly recall the day when I first saw an E-Type Jaguar. It was in Paris in the spring of 1961. I was on a school trip to France, my first visit to what we called "the Continent" and was enjoying seeing some quite different car models from the British offerings normally seen on the roads at home. Some of the Gallic designs from the likes of Citroën, Facel Vega, Panhard, Peugeot, Renault, Simca and Talbot were quite appealing.

In the early 1960s, before traffic congestion and city grid-lock contagion, young Parisians, and even the not so young, would turn up most evenings to show off their automobiles, motorcycles, mopeds and/or their women on the Champs Elysée. Drivers would motor up one side of the tree-lined thoroughfare and then race around the gigantic traffic circle at the Arc de Triomphe (or toile) and back down the other side to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Circle to repeat the circuit over again. One evening, while out for a stroll, we encountered our first glimpse of the new Jaguar. It was in bright red with wire wheels and top down – it caught everyone's attention or perhaps it was just the blonde, fur-clad Brigitte Bardot-type in the passenger seat that caused the crowd to gather and stare?

All of this has left me musing about what my next British classic car might be. As a Triumph aficionado, it has to be a Stag roadster. Although born of the 1960s, the Stag didn't enter service until 1970. I have

always thought that the Stag had the most beautiful styling of any of the Michelotti designed Triumphs. The car had its origins in a styling experiment with the Triumph 2000 Mk I saloon and Triumph management liked the prototype so much that they not only gave the go-ahead for the Stag development, but also carried the same styling lines into the later 2000 Mk II and 2500 saloon and estate models.

When launched in 1970, the Stag was two years behind schedule due to a number of issues including financial constraints imposed after the BLMC merger, but also development of a suitable engine took time. Technically the car was very advanced for its day, powered by a three litre V8 OHC, with all round independent suspension, servo-assisted brakes, power steering and electric windows. There was a choice of a 4-speed manual gearbox with overdrive or a Borg-Warner 3-speed automatic transmission.

The Stag was marketed as a luxury sports touring car and was seen as a direct competitor of the Mercedes SL models, particularly in the targeted US market. The Stag offered four-passenger seating in a convertible coupé. However, in order to meet U.S. rollover standards and for structural rigidity, a B-



pillar roll bar or "hoop" was connected to the windscreen frame by a T-bar, resulting in what is known as a semi-convertible.

While I kept one eye out for a possible shot at an elusive Stag, the Aston Martin DB4 at BCD looked fantastic, as did the much more modern Lotus Elise, and one shouldn't forget the 1950s vintage Jaguar XK120 and XK140 models, both great examples of pre-modern British sports cars. Who could resist that quintessential of British sports cars, the Austin Healey 3000 MkIII? I have recently noticed one of these, in British Racing Green finish, has cropped up in the showroom at my local independent auto centre. It would be interesting to see if they would let me take it out for a spin.

One tends to think of sports cars only when considering classic cars, forgetting that there is a whole range of options out there if one is prepared to consider saloon cars or utility vehicles. I've always liked the 1960s era 3.8 litre Jaguar Mk II saloons (à la Inspector

Morse TV series). A neighbour of mine has been completing a frame off restoration on one for several years now.

Wandering around the show, my eye was attracted to what I think was a 1930s era Rolls Royce 25/30 (or was it a Silver Wraith?) I've noticed in recent web browsing that 1960s and 1970s vintage Rolls Royces and Bentleys are relatively plentiful and not too badly priced, all things considered. I am just not sure if one would fit in my garage and it is probably totally non-usable to even consider doing one's own servicing or repairs on a Rolls Royce. As I understand it, especially with the early Rollers, they weren't particularly built for the driving experience, as the driver was expected to a liveried, below stairs, chap.

So where is all of this leading? Who knows? But it could possibly be back to 1961 and the E-Type Jaguar, which must surely be the undisputed icon of 1960s motoring. When introduced at the Geneva Motor Show, Enzo Ferrari is reported to have said that the E-Type was, in his opinion, "the most beautiful car ever made."

I would love to own one, but those that know tell me that acquiring and keeping such a cat can be a very expensive proposition. How-

ever, one can always dream.

Meanwhile, as I keep half a watchful eye open for a Stag to cross my path, I am perfectly content to enjoy my current piece of British motoring history – a '73 TR6, although my two dogs keep asking when the extra leg and shoulder room is going to appear! **RAGTOP**

