

ONE COOL MG

When Richard Thornberry's wife told him to get a hobby in 2003, he couldn't imagine what the next chapter of his life would look like. However, his journey probably isn't a whole lot different from most British car owners/restorers.

After his wife vetoed a motorcycle (too dangerous) and rebuilding a classic Mustang (too expensive), Thornberry took the advice of his longtime best friend Rick Rogers who owns British Steel Restorations, and bought a 1971 MGB. The car had 88,000 miles on the odometer when the title switched hands.

He decided to name the car for the lady in the picture hanging above the car in the previous owner's garage — Princess Diana. The personalized license plate for "Diana" reads MGB2DI4.

The usual litany of "fix it 'cause it broke" projects and upgrades came next. A bum fuel pump that once left the car on the side of a road was rebuilt and the fuel tank was replaced. One of the 22-year-old tires shredded on the freeway, resulting in the new tires and rubber bushings on the rebuilt front end. Constant scraping over speed bumps led to an improved exhaust featuring a straight pipe and glass pack muffler.

With the major issues addressed, Thornberry looked at improving the car in other areas. He modernized the drive train with a five-speed transmission, and did a minor engine rebuild with a mid-range cam to increase the power and make freeway driving more enjoyable. An entire new interior and tonneau cover with R-Blox to block noise and heat improved the looks of the car.

The modification Thornberry loves most is the Moss Motors air conditioning system since he lives in California's San Joaquin Valley where days over 100 degrees are common. It took only one day to install it, although he admits it was a long day.

During all of this Thornberry's wife wasn't merely sitting at home or at a quilting guild—she loves to ride in the MGB too. Together they've clocked 12,000 miles on the odometer. As soon as he bought the car they joined their local Valley British Auto Club and now attend car club events, drives, meets and shows. Diana has won six first place awards, three second place awards, two merchant awards and numerous participation awards.

Currently Thornberry is working on a 1972 MGB GT named Frankie that was parked in 1995, and the restoration is almost complete. Thornberry says the GT is a similar car on paper but is different in many ways. He explains that the GT is better for colder weather, and keeps his (and his wife's) hair neater than the roadster. It's also better for appreciating music from the stereo. He's trying to decide whether to pull the air conditioning out of the roadster to install in the GT, or buy a second unit so both cars are comfortable hot-weather rides.

Thornberry notes that he owes a lot of gratitude to his wife for her patience and support; and to Rogers from British Steel for the hard work, the parts from Moss, and his guidance and friendship. For more pictures and information, check MG Experience online under user name MGB2DI4, britsteel.com or valleybritish.org. **BM**



When Richard Thornberry decided to restore and enhance an MGB, his new hobby turned into a lifestyle. A five-speed transmission, rumbling exhaust system and air conditioning puts a smile on his face while driving.