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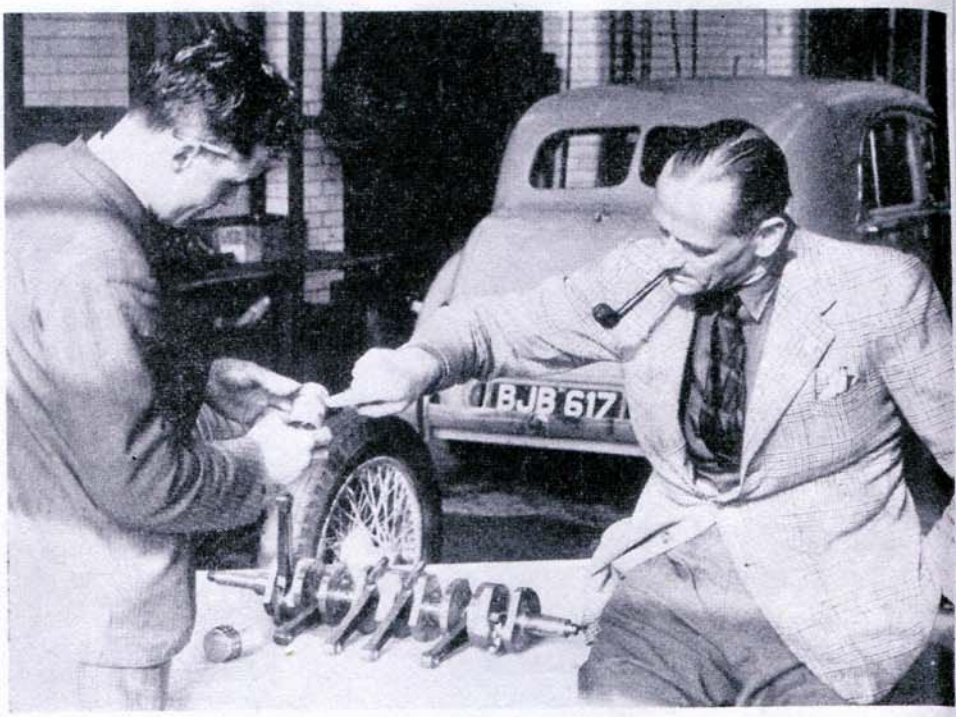
... by the Editor



Lt-Col. Goldie-Gardner (on right) discusses with Sid Enever the preparation of his M.G. 'K3' Magnette-engined record breaker, which topped 200 m.p.h. in 1939. The full story is told on page 14 this month

LE Mans is a magic name to motor-racing enthusiasts. The famous 24-Hour Race was first held in 1923 and has taken place (except for the war years) annually ever since. Its character has changed over the years. Originally it was intended to test ordinary fast touring cars over an ordinary road for 24 hours, day and night, but the circuit has been smoothed out and the cars have mostly become thinly-disguised racers, built specially for this one event.

Nevertheless, it still holds its glamour and M.G.s, Rileys, and (in later years) Austin-Healeys have held their own and often bested far more expensive and exotic racing machines. In 1934, for instance, 1½-litre Rileys finished second and third *overall* to an Alfa Romeo, while an M.G. 'K3' Magnette was fourth and Riley Nines fifth and sixth.

In recent years, M.G.s and Austin-Healeys have still competed regularly and performed impressively. This year at least two Warwick-prepared Sprites will be taking part and a unique opportunity is being offered to *Safety Fast* readers to go to this great race and see it for themselves. Read all about it on page 22.

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ONE of the side-effects of the new American Safety Standards described last month is that the demise of the Austin-Healey 3000 has been hastened. The well-loved 'Big Healey', which has been in production with comparatively minor changes since the Austin-Healey Hundred was first on sale in 1953, has been developed about as far as it would so without a major redesign, but it was still selling well, particularly in the U.S.A.

However, we explained last month the substantial changes that had to be made to the 'MGB' and 'MGC', to make them comply with the American regulations, and it would have been far more difficult and expensive to adapt the Big Healey. So, reluctantly, it was decided that it was not worth the enormous cost of 'Naderising' it, as its days were numbered anyway; and production of it has now ceased.

In competition trim, the Big Healey has been one of the most successful rally cars of all time, and in this issue, Les Needham tells the story of its dramatic career in international motor sport.

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IT is inevitable that many people, when faced with these new 'safety cars' and the international rumpus that has surrounded the development of the Safety Standards, will say, 'Well, if the existing cars were so dangerous, why are European car-makers still selling them in every market except the U.S.A.?'

And this is a very difficult question to answer. There are ways of looking at a car crash. One is to avoid the crash altogether and the other is to minimize the consequences to the occupants if the car *does* crash. At Abingdon we have always designed cars in terms of 'primary safety'; that is, to arrange things so that the car responds accurately and consistently to the driver's commands under all conditions, thus giving him the best possible chance to correct an error of judgement or manœuvre out of an emergency situation thrust upon him. Quick, accurate steering, firm syspension, first-class brakes and tyres—and seating and control layout of the most functional kind.

If, in spite of all this, you have a crash, the most important thing is not to be thrown against the interior of the vehicle, because this is what causes injuries, not the crash itself. So, years before it was required by British law, BMC designed seat-belt anchorages into all their cars and approved the best possible safety belts as optional equipment.

People who do not care to wear seat belts have said, 'Why not simply fit padding around the inside of the car to prevent injury?' But they simply do not comprehend the colossal forces involved in even a minor bump. To avoid injury in an impact at even 20 m.p.h., you would need stiff foam padding at least a foot thick over the whole interior of the car (including the steering-wheel), and this would hardly make it convenient to use; whereas a simple three-point belt will almost certainly save your life in an impact of 40 m.p.h. or possibly more, which no conceivable padding could withstand.