



BOOK NOOK

Earning the American Dream ***A Memoir of the Failure of B.M.C. by Gordon Whitby***

By Dick Lunney

Every MG enthusiast has wondered at one time or another why a company that could produce such enduring classics as MG and Austin-Healey sports cars could fail to move forward and prosper during the import car revolution of the last few decades. It is hard to believe that at one time in the 1950s, BMC was the fourth largest automobile manufacturer in the world!

Now there is a remarkable book by one of the few people capable of chronicling what actually happened with painstaking detail and insight. *Earning the American Dream* by Gordon Whitby is a truly fascinating documentary of what was right at B.M.C. and what was tragically wrong. Whitby is an Englishman who immigrated to America in the early 1950s to work in the California aerospace industry only to discover he had to be a U.S. citizen. Needing a job, he applied at the fledgling Gough Industries, the Southern California Nuffield Car Company distributor, in the service department working on M.G. TC and TD roadsters and Morris Oxford and Minor sedans. He worked under Ken Miles who would become one of America's premier race car drivers and a brilliant automotive engineer whose M.G. R1 and R2 (Flying Shingle) Specials were the most successful racers on the West Coast. Whitby's role as chief mechanic for Miles and his expanding job at Gough caught the eye of Syd Enever, chief engineer and designer at the M.G. Motor Car Company, garnering Gordon an invitation to join the 1956 Bonneville Salt Flat team as the only American race mechanic. He actively participated in both the Austin-Healey efforts led by Donald

and Geoff Healey as well as the M.G. efforts led by Captain George Eyston and Syd Enever that culminated in numerous speed records being shattered. Gordon continued to be invited on subsequent Bonneville efforts in 1957 and 1959, possibly the pinnacle of B.M.C. engineering achievement, but sadly the last such effort.

Subsequently, Whitby's career at Gough continued ultimately replacing Ken Miles as the general service manager and eventually the regional service manager for Hambro, the U.S. Distributor for B.M.C. The book painstakingly documents the technical struggles B.M.C. dealers faced with persistent oil leaks, faulty instruments, and failing S.U. fuel pumps throughout the 1950s and 1960s. His relationship with Enever provided Whitby a unique avenue to report on the mechanical failings and design shortcomings of automobiles produced by B.M.C. and the book provides literally hundreds of letters and correspondence between these dedicated engineers on both sides of the Atlantic. Sadly their efforts to improve the quality of the cars being produced and the top management's unwillingness to design new cars, especially sedans, for the U.S.

marketplace allowed others, most notably Japanese manufacturers, to push B.M.C. and British Leyland out of business.

Reluctantly, Whitby left Hambro and B.M.C. for a career at Nissan in 1967, where he saw rapid improvements in quality and new products designed specifically for the U.S. marketplace like the 240Z and Datsun sedans that incorporated features that he and the BMC dealers had

pleaded for including more powerful engines, all synchromesh transmissions, independent suspension and improved quality. *Earning the American Dream* is crammed with fantastic photos of early sports car racing, the Bonneville record efforts, and Whitby's personal archives that document an era that will never happen again. The letters and

memos that fill over a quarter of the book provide amazing insight into the frustration faced by dealers with a company whose top management failed them on every level. This is much more than a memoir of an auto executive; it is an insider's testament to the demise of a once great company. This book should be a "must read" for every executive at GM, Chrysler and Ford (and maybe a few folks in Washington!).

