

John T. Blair

Biography

I guess it all started around the time I was 3 years old. I had to have my tonsils out, as I'd lost my hearing. The doctors said there was a 50/50 chance that I'd regain my hearing if my tonsils were removed. After the operation, my parents gave me a Mickey Mouse watch as a present. While I was recuperating in the hospital, I regained my hearing, and after 3 days of listening to the watch tick, I had to see what made it work. I've been taking things apart ever since. (Note: I think that watch is the only thing I've taken apart and not gotten back together. My Mom saved all the pieces and some 25 years later found a watch maker that could put it back together. She gave it back to me on my 30th birthday.)



When I was about 13-ish, I was out for a ride with my dad and we saw an MG TD. I told him, "It's a shame they don't make cars like that any more." He told me they do, and it's called a Morgan. So we went by a local dealership that sold all kinds of "foreign" cars. We walked into the show room, and there in the back were a Morgan and a Volvo P1800. My jaw dropped open. I pointed to both cars and said, "I want them!"

Move forward about 3 years, I turn 16. That means "Driver license"!!! So for Christmas that year in addition to the other items Santa brought me, I got a set of keys to the family's '58 Chevy Belair, 348 c.i. with a 4-barrel carburetor and a turboflight (?) transmission. I also got the keys to my dad's tool box. He told me, "if you're gonna drive it, you're gonna fix it". Thus was the beginning of my excursion into auto mechanics.

Remember the days of only 1 car in a family? I drove the Chevy evenings and weekends, when my dad wasn't driving it to work. It lasted until '67 when the transmission died. Before this, I'd struck a deal with my dad, I was going to buy a TR3 when I graduated from High School and my graduation present was his financial backing to restore it. Dad needed a reliable car to drive the 15 miles to work. So we went looking for a "reliable" TR3 or TR4. We couldn't find anything dad thought would last the 6 months until he got his '67 Oldsmobile 98 Luxury Sedan. So we ended up back at the sports car dealer and bought me a brand new '67 Spitfire! I drove that my Senior year of High School and my first year in college. I rallied and auto crossed it almost every weekend.

By now I had a lot of friends with cars, many of them British cars. So Saturdays everyone came over to my parents' house, lining the street with sports cars that needed work. I'd walk up and down the line of cars telling each owner what/how to do what ever needed to be done on his car.

I should also mention that my dad had a fascination with sports cars also. The first one he bought was a '59 Bug-eyed Sprite. He sold that to buy a '56 Porsche 1600 super speeder, which my mother hated. But that's another story. Sometime around 1964 he sold the Porsche and bought a Triumph TR-1800. After driving it for several years, the engine needed to be rebuilt, so he started a restoration on it. (We still have that car also.)

With my friends coming to see his progress on the TR-1800, I got jealous. So in 1969 I started buying TR-3s and was going to build up a Fiberfab Banshee - a gullwing kit car.

In 1968, I was asked to take a leave of absence from college by the school (I flunked out); Uncle Sam's Army decided I was a good prospect to fill some of their vacancies caused by the brawl going on in South East Asia. OK, I didn't like to camp out because of the bugs, snakes and other creatures of nature; I decided to enlist in the Navy. After boot camp, I came home on leave and took the Spitfire to see my girlfriend. On the way to her house, a gentleman in an Olds Jet Star 88 decided to remodel the car. He lost his brakes at 40 miles per hour, while I was stopped for a traffic light. Needless to say, the Spit was totaled.

After I got the insurance check, I started looking for a new car. To my surprise, there was a Morgan for sale. The owner

had the Morgan and an older car. His wife had just totaled the older car when the accelerator stuck. Luckily, neither she nor her baby was hurt, but she decided all the junk would go and they would get a new car. I called the owner, and headed to his house. I didn't pass go, didn't collect \$200, but just gave him a deposit on the car! I had the Morgan for 3 days when I was hit in the rear again (I was stopped for a traffic light). Two cars totaled in 21 days should be some kind of a record. My dad and I spent the next year restoring the Morgan.

While I was in the Navy, I didn't want the Morgan to rot on the piers, so I bought a '55 Chevy 2 door Belair with a straight 6 and "3 on the tree" as a beater. I kept the Chevy after I got out of the Navy and drove it to college when I went back to Engineering school in 1971.

In 1972 I found a decent Volvo P1800 for sale in the newspaper. Went to look at it and drove it home. I spent the next year restoring her. Driving the '55 Chevy to school and the Morgan in the evenings and on weekends. The summer in 1973 I sold the '55 Chevy to get money to finish the P1800. Finally a dream from when I was 13 was realized, owning both a Morgan and a Volvo P1800!

I graduated from college in 1976, and got married. My wife, MAC, had purchased her dad's AMC Hornet. When the engine died in the Hornet, we bought a used Honda 1300 hatchback. And then we started having kids. We needed something a little bigger than the 2-seater Morgan, 2-seater P1800 and the little Civic 1300. So I sold the P1800 and bought a 1980 Accord.

I took some time off from playing with cars from about 1978 until about 1985-ish. After we moved into our 2nd house I started thinking about cars again. I found 2 Austin Martins for sale. One a "James Bond 007" one. But I just couldn't quite swing it. I'd been keeping my eyes on Bricklins and DeLoreans. I'd seen a Bricklin near Miami, Florida go from \$9,000 down to about \$4,000. Out of the blue, I was sent to Jacksonville, Florida on business. This must have been a sign. So I started trying to find someone that knew something about Bricklins. My plans were to fly down to Miami and check out the car, and possibly drive it back to Jacksonville, and then back to Virginia Beach after I finished the job. This is when I met Scott Garfinkle. He knew the car and told me to stay away from it. He told me to call Terry Tanner in Bedford. It's only a 5 hour drive from "the Beach". So I did. In 1988, I purchased VIN 887 from George Sparks via Terry.

I'd dragged my Morgan out of mothballs, and had been driving it. The more I drove it the more I found wrong. Then I found the crack in the chassis. I asked Terry if he could hold 887 for a couple of months until I could get the chassis of the Morgan welded. He said sure. Well that turned out to be 4 years, as I had to replace the chassis and completely restore the Morgan. In 1995 I finally got 887 out of Terry's place and drug it home. I've been working on her ever since.

In 1997, I was asked to run for the office of Vice President of Technical, for Bricklin International. Once elected, I was told that I'd be editing/publishing The Brickline. My first issue was the October 1997 issue. The Brickline has won 4 of Old Car Weekly's Golden Quill awards, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004.