

## An M.G. on the other side of the world: Ceylon

In the fall of 1996 we travelled to Sri Lanka for our holidays. Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is famous for its aromatic tea. It was a British colony until its independence in 1948. As many Brits stayed in the country until the disturbances between Singhalese and Tamils, we hoped for a chance to see an M.G. there. The streets today are a mixture of Japanese minivans and masses of Indian Tuk-Tuks (three-wheeler-mini-taxis) all of them using their horns loudly and often. Pedestrians, bicycles (with up to 4 people!), cars and motor cycles have a hard life in the streets. Driving is on the left side of course. But some classic cars have survived in this lawless chaos. Morris Minor, Volkswagen Beetle and old Opel cars are strong enough for these circumstances. By chance I found an M.G.: On a walk near our hotel, I discovered a well known shape of a cooler in an antique store: a wine red M.G. YA Saloon. After a short chat with the vendor I had the chance to contact the owner of the M.G. Mr. Ranjith Wijesinghe. As he was very interested to talk about his car we met for a chat on the same evening.

I learned that Ranjith is the owner of several antique stores at the west coast of Sri Lanka. The former teacher made his passion of collecting antiques into his job. People with interests in porcelain, jewelry or antique clocks should pay him a visit.

Ranjith is the owner of a small collection of classic cars and (since 1990) is the 11th owner of the YA, complete with all the paperwork. He is very pleased with the car's road holding: on the first test-drive he was surprised how easy to handle this old car was. It is a pity that the value of the car is completely ignored by the people in traffic. To most people his car is an old heap and they are completely heedless of it, so he only risks driving the car on a very few days in the year. Ranjith is in contact with the other classic-car-owners, they have each all rescued a 'motorized beauty' (Mercedes 190, Triumph Herald etc.) from the good old times

to the present day. There are small meetings in the country, for example, on the forecourt of the Mount Lavinia Hotel of colonial vintage (see picture). The hotel is famous as the temporary hospital in the movie "The Bridge on the River Kwai". Members of the Octagon Car Club know of the lively local scene. Nearly every issue of the 'Bulletin' includes a picture from Sri Lanka.

The car itself was delivered in a bright light



green paintwork and was bought by Abeyratne C. L. Ratwatte, member of one of the most famous families in Sri Lanka and first registered on the 26th November 1947. Mr. Ratwatte is direct relative of the first female Prime Minister in Asia, Mrs. Bandaranayke (1960). A history of this kind is really extraordinary. Facts for the historians: The listed chassis number is Y-0657 and the engine-number is SC/X/10433, no technical parts have been changed so far. The car is in original condition except the paintwork was changed previously. There are no special modifications for Ceylon because it was a British colony in that time. A special specification is an adjustable steering column. All 11 owners of the car did manage to drive without accident in the traffic and rescued it to the present time. Really a proof of love and care of the owners but a sign of quality and sturdy design of the old techniques too. M.G. Forever!

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