

# THE SQUARE RIGGER



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF  
THE CHESAPEAKE CHAPTER OF THE NEW ENGLAND MG-T REGISTER

[www.chesapeakechaptermgclub.com](http://www.chesapeakechaptermgclub.com)

**DECEMBER 1, 2012**

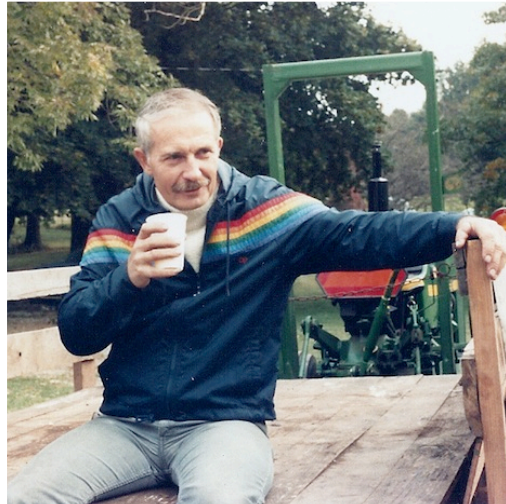
**Dear Chesapeake Chapter Members,**

**In this Special Edition of our Newsletter,  
we commemorate the life and mourn the  
passing of our friend and Chairman  
Emeritus, Len Renkenberger.**

# In Memoriam

## Leonard Renkenberger Jr.

November 11, 1934 — November 18, 2012



Longtime Chapter members will cherish the memory of Len Renkenberger, whose great interest in and enthusiasm for vintage British cars led him and his wife Ruth to join our club in 1972 and become our Co-Chairpersons in early 1973. Together, they would lead us with industry and effectiveness almost without interruption for the next 24 years, presiding over our Chapter's steady growth and supervising the planning and conduct of our many activities. Our History Archive bears impressive witness to their achievements, as well as to the warmth and generosity that characterized their personal relations with the many friends they made along the way. Ruth handled, among many other things, the early development of our Newsletter, *The Square Rigger*, whose Index contains upwards of 70 technical articles written by Len on virtually every conceivable aspect of MG T-Series maintenance and repair. (Many of them are reflected in his "Tech Notes," a 1982 manual that has recently been installed on our Chapter's web site). They are eminently readable and enjoyable thanks to Len's penchant for clarity and his erudite sense of humor.

Len retired some years ago after a long career at the Pentagon's Defense Nuclear Agency, where he served as a facilities engineer. He also served on the Talbot County Public Works Advisory Board and was active in the Ingleton Miles Association.

As we commemorate the life of our friend, Len Renkenberger, we join our Chapter members in offering heartfelt condolences on his passing to Ruth and her family — including son Leonard R. Renkenberger and his wife Janet, of Germantown, Md.; daughter Shirl and her husband Sean DeLawder, of Frederick, Md.; two grandchildren, Alexis Marie Hundertmark and Sean Jordan Delawder, both of Frederick, Md.; and a cousin, Margie Turner, of Weirton, Pa.

Len's family will lay him to rest today in a private service on the Eastern Shore. A memorial service is being held today at 2:00 p.m. at the Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home, 200 S. Harrison Street in Easton, Md.

## Remembering Renk

By Mike Hughes

Recently I wrote of the passing of an old friend, and now I find myself writing of my memories of one of the first persons he introduced me to: Leonard (Len) Renkenberger, known to his many friends far and wide simply as "Renk".

Renk taught me a number of things, some of which might be called "life lessons." Among them: You don't lean on cars (or stand on them, but that's another story!) . . . Old cars are meant to be driven, NOT trailered . . . It's O.K. to ask for help — one day you'll be able to give it . . . A man's tools are like his wife — you only take them out with permission, and you don't bang on them!

Now, since you're reading this in an MG club newsletter, you might mistakenly think Renk was an MG enthusiast. Far from it, but in the nicest possible way! He liked his trouble in much larger doses than just MGs could possibly satisfy. He and Ruth had roots in Pennsylvania, where sturdy Studebakers were and still are revered, so naturally he had Studebaker trucks and Studebaker cars — like one of those Wagoneers with the retractable roof panel so that it could be used like a pickup. That one had a 327 V8 and ran like the dickens. I'll bet he would have had a Studebaker Conestoga Wagon or maybe its sports car equivalent, a Studebaker Doctor's Buggy, in his stable if there had been some place for him to keep the horses! After all, there would have been no point in having them if he couldn't drive them. . . .

And he drove! Some of his trips became legendary in the retelling. Like the time he found a '46 Bentley Mulliner saloon half-exposed in a decaying barn near Charlottesville, Va. and drove it home to Derwood, Md. with no brakes, or the time he and a friend took part in a "T" Register rally through the original thirteen colonies during the Bicentennial and lost a rear wheel at speed on the Interstate. Or maybe the time he and Ruth drove their freshly restored MK II Deluxe MGA, "Albatross," across the continent and back during one of the hottest summers then on record to attend a NAMGAR GT.

This guy simply loved old cars, and he could make them sing. Of course, he also liked old trucks, old boats . . . you get the picture. He was fortunate to have in Ruth a life partner who absolutely shared his enthusiasms, and they raised a pair of kids, Lenny and Shirl, who've had the old car bug since infancy. When they were old enough to drive, Shirl eventually got her own MGA, and Lenny developed a love for TVRs.

Renk cut his British car teeth on Triumph TRs. An early "small mouth" TR led to an early MG — in this case a decrepit TC — which he brought back to life and ran for decades. In 40 years, I never saw this car with its top up. His preferred "daily drivers" for years of 75-miles-a-day commutes were a succession of TR6s, patiently rebuilt, welded up, whatever, each of which went hundreds of thousands of miles until they collapsed completely. We'd wave on the Beltway occasionally when we happened to be going the same way. When the kids got too big to ride around in the back of a "T", he built a four-seat TR6 out of bits from his old commuter cars. He found and restored a slightly more modern TD for Ruth, so that she could drive to events in an MG with the top up if it rained. This led him to MGAs and then the Bentley and finally the Turquoise Texas Rolls Royce. It would be hard to list all the cars he and Ruth owned. Apart from a couple of fairly modern Mercedes-Benzes and the Studebakers, there had to have been a Jaguar or two in there somewhere, and I know he liked Healeys, but maybe that was before my time!

With apologies to Ruth, any memory of Renk will not be complete without some mention of "Boschman." Put simply, "Boschman" was a manifestation of Renk's zanier side. Back in the 60's and 70's one got a prize inside the package when buying a set of Bosch sparkplugs, kind of like what came in a box of Cracker Jacks. Sometimes it was a bright yellow-hooded plastic cape with the word "BOSCH" emblazoned in black on the back, I guess to wear at the track if it rained. Most folks threw it away. But Renk kept his folded up in the door pocket of his yellow TC to wear when it rained, because he would never put the roof up. We used to drink a little at car events before it became politically incorrect. One time, at a Chesapeake Chapter MiniGOF in Williamsburg, Renk suddenly appeared, buck-naked except for a pair of Ruth's panties and the yellow-hooded Bosch cape and ran screaming at the top of his lungs into the motel pool! "Boschman" had been born. From that time forward "Boschman" would appear at every MG event that Ruth and Renk attended, if there was any body of water nearby. Swimming pools, off the end of a dock, the fountain at the Casino at Saratoga Springs were all magnets for "Boschman," to the delight of onlookers and the embarrassment of Ruth, who over time (and with varying degrees of success) went to greater and greater lengths to hide her undies and the yellow "Bosch" cape from him at events, until Renk eventually gave up and retired "Boschman" for good.

If you go to all-British car shows, you owe it in part to Renk. Because of their far-flung automotive interests, he and Ruth belonged to so many different British car clubs that it was easy for him to generate enough regional interest to make one happen. So he and several others in the Chesapeake Chapter organized the very first all-British

car show in the U.S. at the British Embassy in 1976, which moved to larger quarters at the Naval Academy the following year, and then on to Allen Pond Park at Bowie. Thus was born The Original British Car Day.

If you own a T-Series MG and belong to the Chesapeake Chapter, Ruth and Renk were founding members, past Chairpersons, did the “Square Rigger” newsletter, hosted Chapter events big and small, helped to establish The Original British Car Day, and energized the older MG scene for decades. They also belonged to the Vintage Triumph Register, the Rolls Bentley Owners Club, the TR6 Owners club, the Studebaker Owners Club and countless other organizations. When they moved to the Eastern Shore, he found and restored a vintage Penn Yan wooden motorboat. If there was a Penn Yan boat club, or a wooden boat society, or a vintage outboard motor club I’m not sure he didn’t belong to it! [Ed. Note: He did. They’re called the Chesapeake Bay Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society, and the Old Bay Chapter of the Antique Outboard Motor Club.]

However, if you own an MGA and belong to the North American MGA Register (NAMGAR), you owe Renk a particular debt of gratitude. It was his idea. He had suggested to the directors of the New England MG-T Register that they should expand their “Variant” classification to recognize the post-XPAG/XPEG MGs of the 1950s, such as the ZA/ZB Magnettes and the MGA and MGA Twin Cam, much as the T-Series Register had earlier recognized and brought into the fold the pre-war MGs. No Dice. So he talked to a bunch of his MGA-loving and MGA-owning friends about how to respond to this, with the result that a Sunday afternoon meeting took place at John and Linda Wright’s home in Temple Hills, Md. at which NAMGAR was formed, organized along the lines of the T-Series Register. My friend and neighbor McGhee “Mac” Spears became the first chairman, and I became AM #2. Ruth did the NAMGAR newsletter for years.

Of all the life lessons Renk taught me, the best one is not to be a “tunnel vision” enthusiast. Today I still own some of the MGs that first brought me into the hobby, but I’ve expanded to include a Jaguar, a Merkur, a classic Mercedes-Benz, and even a ‘50s Dodge V8 Pickup. Renk, who loved a sturdy Studebaker pickup, would be proud of me.

I’m gonna miss you, Boschman!

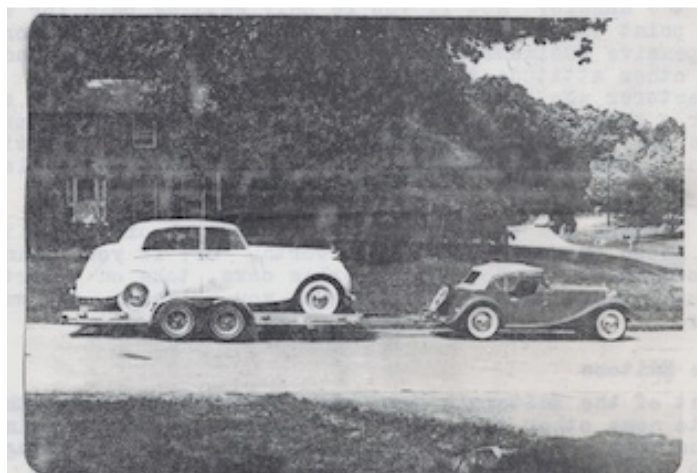
Here’s a good example of Renk’s passion for the hobby and his wry sense of humor, taken from the July 1979 issue of *The Square Rigger*:

## Renk on Trailering

It has been called to my attention that many members of the MG fraternity feel that I have a very intolerant attitude toward trailering with a “T” Series.

It has been further suggested that the only reason I have such an aloof attitude is that I am a master mechanic and do not have to take the whole family along on “T” trips. Anyone who has seen me on the roadsides of Virginia, Colorado, Kansas, or Florida with the bonnet up can dispose of this first point quickly. Secondly, we are a very close family. When one goes, we all go — usually in old MGs. But on other occasions we have taken turns driving the fun car (MG) and drudgery car (closed modern). However, there are many occasions when we wish to take two cars, with two drivers sharing the comfort of one car as many of my critics do. In such instances we trailer with our “T”.

As positive proof that I do believe in trailering with a T-Type and do actually practice such, I submit this photograph.



## Thinking of Len

By Bob Vitrikas, Historian  
North American MGA Register (NAMGAR)

I knew Len thru NAMGAR and would like to offer some thoughts for *The Square Rigger's* memorial article. I'm sure the NAMGAR magazine, *MGA!*, will also run an article on him, but I want offer my thoughts here as well. Thanks for putting your memorial article together. Len was a great guy.

Len was always ready to help an MG owner in distress: I met him in July 1976 during my first outing with my newly restored MGA. A brand new brake hose had come apart, stranding me 60 miles from home with no brakes. None of the British parts suppliers had the hose in stock, so there I sat. Len came to my rescue and offered to take one off a car he had at home, only a few miles away. I was amazed: this fellow who I had never met would take a brake hose off his perfectly good MGA to get me on the road and homeward bound.

Len was a recruiting agent for NAMGAR. In the process of retrieving the hose, Len told me about this new organization dedicated to MGAs called the North American MGA Register and suggested I should join. How could I refuse this kind fellow who had just handed me the brake hose from his MGA and helped me install it on my car? I sent in my NAMGAR registration as soon as I got home and have been a member ever since.

Len was innovative. I recall a conversation one day in which he explained how he had fixed his TR-6. A daily driver, one end of it was in need of serious repair so Len bought another TR-6 that had one good end, the one he needed. As he lined up the cars in his driveway to begin swapping parts he thought, "Why go to all that bother? I can just cut the two cars in half and weld the two good ends together!" Len did just that, taking care to align the frame by closing the doors. He then proceeded to drive that two-tone TR-6 for several more years!

Len did things his way. Another wonderful Renkenberger story involved painting his post-war Bentley. A normal person would take great pains in painting this precious car in a climate-controlled paint booth that is kept as clean and dust free as an operating room. Not Len. He used a bug sprayer to apply the paint, and he and Ruth spent the better part of the afternoon catching leaves before they fell into the paint. (It was Fall).

Len changed my life. As the newly appointed Historian for NAMGAR, I decided I would write a book on the MGA to help spread the word on this wonderful car. I kicked this idea around with Len and asked him for advice on how I should proceed. Len suggested I contact Dick Knudsen, since he had written several books on MG T-Series cars. I contacted Dick, and he kindly served as my mentor as I researched, wrote and got my book published. As a result of writing the book, I have made lifelong friends around the MG world. Those MG enthusiasts have enriched my life beyond measure and helped me define who I am. Len, I can never thank you enough for what you did for me and other MGA enthusiasts.

Enjoy your ride on the last open road!

Octagonally,  
Bob Vitrikas ☐

## A Thought from from John Tokar

Chairman of our Chesapeake Chapter, 2003-2008

The above eulogies present a very fitting tribute to a great man who dedicated his life to preserving the legacy of the British car. Renk has certainly been an inspiration to me every time I have driven or worked on a British car. His memory will live on in our hearts and minds for many years to come. ☐

