

## Tunnel Vision - From Flat Out to Flat Bed

by Dave Doroghy

My last Dorg's Morg article i

I was heading northbound out of the Massey Tunnel (If you are my age you call it the Deas Island Tunnel). In the column, I explained how my engine just conked-out all of a sudden for no apparent reason. Then, I went onto explain that I am never really in a hurry when I drive my Morgan, so I took it all in a relaxed stride. The initial call to BCAA, waiting for the tow truck driver, and the long haul in the flatbed tow-truck to my mechanics shop were just all part of the Morgan experience I signed up for when I bought the aging car ten years ago.

I realized readers of Dorg's Morg might be curious to know two things: One, what caused the engine failure? Two, a cute little car racing story that immediately preceded my Triumph engine's cardiac arrest. So consider this article the second piece in a trilogy. In it I'll explain the one-minute of high speed, adrenaline-pumping adventure that happened just before my classic tunnel breakdown. Then in the next installment of Dorg's Morg you'll learn what caused the engine mishap. Talk about leaving my readers in Morgan mechanical suspense!

I only drive my Morgan maybe two dozen times a year and am always amazed when she starts, particularly in cold weather. That crisp October morning out in Ladner in front of my float home on the banks of the Fraser River was no exception. I stuck the tiny silver key into the small ignition slot on the wooden dash and after a few false starts, and a couple of very loud ear drum piercing backfires she came to life and I drove off. She was just barely firing on all four cylinders as I turned left off the Ladner Trunk Road onto Highway 17. But by the time I hit Highway 99, just south of the tunnel, she was all warmed up and ready to take on the 15-mile trek into the city.

I hate going through the tunnel in any car. It is truly a 3D experience - dark, dank and dingy. It is noisy even in a hard top. With the top down it is unbearably noisy. Plus, you loose radio reception and in a convertible the exhaust fumes just add to the overall unpleasant brain rattling experience.

As I entered the 629-meter outdated tube, doing about 45 miles an hour, I noticed a late model black and beige Mini next to me being

driven by someone whom I thought was an old high school friend. I just caught a fleeting glimpse of the driver's profile but it looked just like this guy I used to know years ago who I have completely lost touch with. His name was Gary, and I knew that he worked for BC Ferries and lived in Richmond. So it would make sense that he could be coming home from work. I may

never know because he was driving much faster than me, which wasn't too hard considering I was doing a comfortable 45 mile an hour. Also, as just mentioned, it was so noisy and dark and stinky in that tunnel I had a hard time focusing. His speed, combined with those distractions, made a positive ID impossible. But I desperately wanted to confirm it was him, and to wave at him if it was. The strong desire to confirm his identity was nothing more than natural curiosity. The desire to catch up to him, honk my horn, and wave was a combination of two traits that I am less proud of; my vanity and ego. You see it is always fun to be recognized in my cool, cool car, and even more fun when it is an old high school chum doing the recognizing.



So as I listened to the echo of the BMW Mini's deep-pitched expensive muffler roar as he pulled away I decided, "what the heck, I am going to go for it and try and keep up with him." We were at the lowest point of the tunnel and I was about to hit the upward slope. That's when I put the "pedal to the medal" and summoned all the horsepower my 2138 cc Triumph TR4 engine could muster. In what I can only imagine was a vehement protest to my aggressive acceleration, the old gal immediately went into an strong earthquake like "Morgan Shake" that almost had me bouncing off of the tunnel walls at the worst time.

As both cars darted under the Fraser River in the darkness the Mini was gaining on me, driving in a straight, smooth arrow-like trajectory as I did that all too familiar shake, rattle and roll that Bill Haley and the Comets would have been proud of. As I reached the daylight at the end of the tunnel, the "9 on the Richter Scale" shaking finally subsided and I knew that in less than two hundred

and fifty yards I would be on flat ground again. Only on a long flat strip of road did my pure-bread old British classic stand any chance of catching up to the small German/UK hybrid Mini.

I felt a slight increase in speed that I am sure correlated to my rig finally becoming horizontal. With the newly felt acceleration I figured that my old Morgan was kind of like one of those super fast race cars which can only reach top speeds on the Salt Flats. And the proof of that notion was in my speedometer reading, which while going up the tunnel hill, had a hard time hitting 50, but was now almost at a break-neck 55 mph.

Now firmly on flat land I pressed my foot so hard on the accelerator that my right calve began to cramp. I crouched down in the driver seat to avoid any wind drag that my head might create, and at the same time to cut down on wind erosion on the small existing patch of hair that I still have on my ever-balding head. I grit my teeth just because it seemed like the right thing to do when you are squeezing every last rev out of your engine.

I mainly attribute the introduction of the car's recently leveled path, on the flat freeway outside of the tunnel, to my gaining the extra 5 miles per hour that I needed to close the gap on the mystery driver. Thoughts of my grade eight physics teacher, Mr. Nakishima, and a theory about "Newtonian Kinematics" and the effect of that science principle on automobiles speed entered my mind. "Hey, wait a minute, if that was Gary in front of me in that Mini he may even had been in that class with me!" As I viewed the Massey tunnel in my rear view mirror the delta in the distance between us had been reduced to 200 yards, then 150, and five seconds later I was a mere 50 yards behind him.

With the annoying tunnel fumes gone, and now out in the fresh air and on flat dry pavement, I was reaching my hell bent for leather top speed of 60 miles per hour. Indianapolis Speedway here I come! My thin red speed-o-meter needle was erratically bouncing back and forth like a small rowboat in a stormy sea. My engine was making so much noise it sounded like a 747 had missed the airport runway five miles to the west of me in Richmond and was landing on my head. This was really a lot of fun!

With ten feet to go I had a great bead on the back of the Mini driver's head. With five feet separating our two cars I was starting to get a glimpse of his chin and partial profile. Then, as I got within three feet of the mystery driver and possible former Lord Byng class of '76 colleague, my engine completely died and I slowly coasted to the side of Highway 99 and came to a grinding halt. No smoke, no noise, no fanfare. And above all no apparent reason. Talk about a let down? I'll never know just who was driving that little Mini. Within 45 minutes I had gone from travelling flat out to being transported on the back of a flat-bed.

For the scintillating conclusion, where you will learn just what went wrong inside my Morgan's power plant on that glorious fall day on Highway 99, you will have to wait for the next Mogazine!