

SHOP NOTES King Midget Maintenance and Restoration

D-17 Brake Mistakes *By Bob V.*

MANY YEARS AGO when I was relatively young, limber, and poorly informed, I overhauled my Model 3 brakes. Mistake number one, I should have replaced the master and wheel cylinders instead of rebuilding the old ones.

Anyway when the job was done, I inserted myself upside down into my Model 3 and filled the master cylinder. An amazing task! No wonder the King Midget manuals (even the big one from 1968) ignore the matter!

Some people get so frustrated they rebuild the front hood to create better access. Not me, I squirmed, splashed brake fluid all over my then-new barn floor and said, "Never again." That was mistake number two. *Please check your brake fluid!*

These cars are old. Things happen. You *really* should check your brake fluid from time to time, because if it's gone, your brakes are gone. That's why American Motors pioneered the dual-cylinder master brake cylinder that soon became an industry standard. Too late for King Midgets.

I was telling a friend how much fun a King Midget can be, and he admitted he'd always wanted one, so I told him of two I knew of for sale in the state. "I'm heading off on vacation," he told me, "Just buy whichever is the best value and I'll pay you for it when I get home."

"No," said I, "these are quirky little cars, and you should never buy one sight unseen. And by all means take a drive if possible. Come out to my place and drive mine before going any further."

He showed up, I fetched my M3 out of the barn and he nervously took the wheel. Who can blame him? A lap or two around our circular drive and we headed for our driveway, launched ourselves down the quarter mile down the hill. As we started down the hill, my buddy said, "I'll just test the brakes."

Just as well. There were none. The pedal went right to the floor and my trusty M3 kept gaining speed. "The emergency brake is that handle just to your left." I pointed out. White as a sheet, he stopped the car, turned it over to me and has never raised the subject of getting a King Midget again.

Bummer. Yet another mistake by yours truly, and it cost us a good KM fan. Just a leaky wheel cylinder and lack of attention to details.

When making that repair, I set out to devise a better method of checking and filling the master cylinder. Yay! I found one, and planned to write an article for this newsletter on just how to go about it.

Do you know what a "round to-it" is? I never got around to it. Nor did I ever get around to checking that master cylinder again—until very recently.

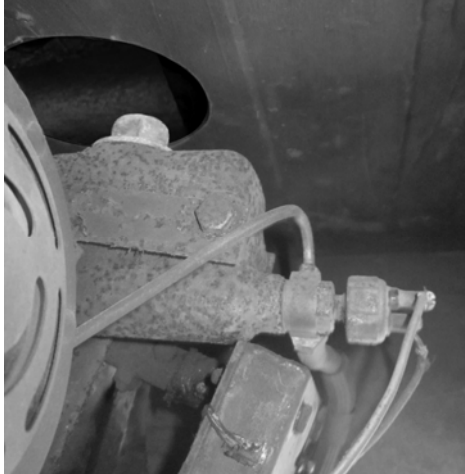
At our recent KMW meet at Lompoc, CA, we drove our KMs over a couple of smallish mountains to Jalama Beach to sample their famous hamburgers. I was following Don Nichols, since we were trying to figure out why his Kohler was slower than mine. Lots slower, as it turned out, when he stalled out near the crest of one of those hills. After loading his car on the service vehicle, Don jumped in with me for the rest of the journey.

As we were coming down the last hill toward the Ranger's toll gate and barricade, I said, "Don, my brakes are squishy. I hope I can stop before we get to that Ranger." With help from a couple of speed bumps, we just accomplished that task and joined the rest of the group munching burgers.

The service trailer was loaded, so I decided to drive my M3 back to Lompoc, but did suggest Don find another ride. Long story short, I lived to tell the tale.

Parked in front of Gert's garage, I contemplated that empty master cylinder, its location and my aging frame. It seemed I'd read an article somewhere suggesting that nasty job could be accomplished from under the car. (I'd written the piece myself, with help from Jim Owen; *Shop*

SHOP NOTES King Midget Maintenance and Restoration



Notes (D-12).

But none of us had our copy handy.

Somebody suggested I get a little pump from Harbor Freight to put the fluid in. Well, that idea was suggested by Art Adkins, *Shop Notes (D-14).*



There it is, easy to see and reach from under the car, above the steering box and beside the horn. But you can't get a funnel into it, and if you could, you'd not be able to pour in brake fluid.

I finally found one half as good from the parts house where I got the brake fluid—and paid twice as much.

The kid at the store assured me the pump fits right on the can of fluid. Looks like it would. It doesn't.

We were still at Gert's garage. Neither he nor Don had a big enough wrench to remove the master cylinder cap. (*Shop Notes, D-12* points out that it's a 1 1/16" wrench),

which we laboriously figured out and Gert borrowed from another garage.

Once the cap was off, it was easy enough to stick a finger in the hole and find it completely dry. Even with my clunky pump, it was easy to fill from the bottom.

Hey, maybe somebody should put all this good information in a book for us simple souls!

I still have no idea where my brake fluid went, but after being chided by Lee for not doing so originally, I promised to install new master cylinders and wheel cylinders, and I did (see preceding Letters column).

Marge says, "Take that manual along!"



That's me, left, under the front with Gert Gehlhaar supervising? Handing me that big wrench he'd borrowed? No, nothing as simple as that. At right, because the dumb pump won't fit the brake fluid can, it took three hands to fill the master cylinder from below. All because we didn't read Shop Notes to get the right pump!

D. Brakes