



COLLECTOR'S EDITION

MGA

THE ICONIC SPORTS CAR THAT TOOK THE WORLD BY STORM





RIMMER
BROS EST 1982



A BRITISH COMPANY SUPPORTING BRITISH CARS

MGB - MGB GT - MGF - MG TF
MG MIDGET - MG ZR
MG ZS - MG ZT - MONTEGO - MAESTRO



ALL THE PARTS YOU NEED



FROM THE SMALLEST
NUT & BOLT TO AN ENTIRE
BODY SHELL & EVERYTHING
IN-BETWEEN



QUALITY PARTS & ACCESSORIES

FAST & RELIABLE WORLDWIDE DELIVERY

EXTENSIVE WEBSITE

VAST STOCKS AT 100,000 SQ FT HQ

KNOWLEDGEABLE STAFF

FREE COMPREHENSIVE CATALOGUES



ASK US FOR A
FREE CATALOGUE

PRICE MATCH

TRADE & WHOLESALE
ENQUIRIES WELCOME



WEB - www.rimmerbros.com
EMAIL - sales@rimmerbros.com
TEL - +44(0)1522 568000

SEE OUR
SOCIAL MEDIA



Rimmer Bros., Triumph House, Sleaford Road, Bracebridge Heath, Lincoln. LN4 2NA.



COLLECTOR'S EDITION

MGA

Kelsey Publishing Ltd, The Granary, Downs Court,
Yalding Hill, Yalding, Kent, ME18 6AL

EDITORIAL

EDITOR Sam Skelton

ART EDITOR: Lee Caple

CONTRIBUTORS: Simon Goldsworthy, Jack Grover, Rob Hawkins, Mike Peters,
Steve Pountney, Malcolm Robertson, Graham Robson, Mark Rouse, Mike
Taylor, Iain Wakefield, Paul Wager, Neil Watson

ADVERTISEMENT SALES

ADVERTISING SALES Talk Media Sales Ltd, Natalie Excell
01732 445674, natalie@talk-media.uk

MANAGEMENT

CHIEF EXECUTIVE Steve Wright

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Phil Weeden

MANAGING DIRECTOR Kevin McCormick

SUBSCRIPTION MARKETING DIRECTOR Gill Lambert

RETAIL DIRECTOR Steve Brown

PRINT PRODUCTION MANAGER Georgina Harris

PRINT PRODUCTION CONTROLLERS Kelly Orriss and Hayley Brown

DISTRIBUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

MARKETFORCE (UK)

3rd Floor, 161 Marsh Wall, London.E14 9AP

Tel: 0330 390 6555

DISTRIBUTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

NEWSPREAD

Tel: +353 23 886 3850

PRINTING

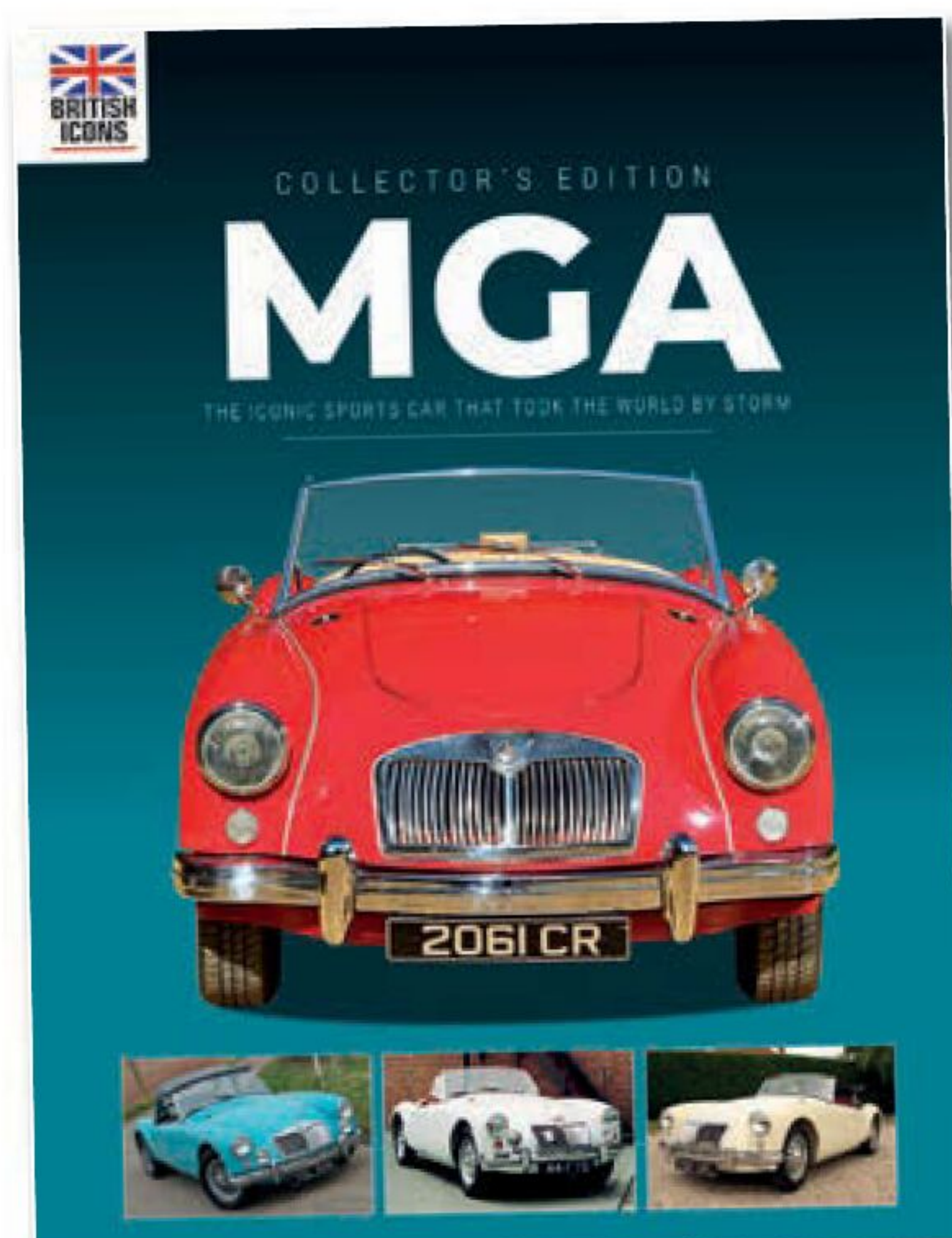
Pensord

Kelsey Media 2023 © all rights reserved. Kelsey Media is a trading name of Kelsey Publishing Ltd. Reproduction in whole or in part is forbidden except with permission in writing from the publishers. Note to contributors: articles submitted for consideration by the editor must be the original work of the author and not previously published. Where photographs are included, which are not the property of the contributor, permission to reproduce them must have been obtained from the owner of the copyright. The editor cannot guarantee a personal response to all letters and emails received. The views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Publisher. Kelsey Publishing Ltd accepts no liability for products and services offered by third parties.

Kelsey Media takes your personal data very seriously. For more information of our privacy policy, please visit <https://www.kelsey.co.uk/privacy-policy/>. If at any point you have any queries regarding Kelsey's data policy you can email our Data Protection Officer at dpo@kelsey.co.uk.



www.kelsey.co.uk



WELCOME

WELCOME

The MGA is among Britain's best-loved historic sports cars, and with good reason. It had a hard task ahead of it at launch; to replace the T-series Midgets not only on the showroom floor but in our hearts to boot. And it succeeded, with 101,081 produced over a seven year production life. It brought sophistication to a brand more used to antiquated technology; a brand whose biggest sellers harked back in technological terms to before the war, and a brand that needed dragging into the future. The MGA was the car to do that, with a whole new drivetrain and a swoopy, aerodynamic bodyshell.

And while its successor, the MGB, may have sold vastly more units over a far longer timespan, nobody who has driven both can argue that the MGA isn't a superior sporting experience today - the MGB may be more refined but for raw automotive enjoyment, its predecessor has it beaten. Whether you like the early 1500s, the raucous Twin Cams or the elegant Coupes, there is an MGA model suitable for each and every type of enthusiast and they're all worthy of adulation today.

And that's why we've produced this

bookazine to celebrate the MGA in all its forms; the small sports car that showed cars like the Austin-Healey 100 that a compact alternative could be just as fun as a big sports car. Arguably it was the success of the MGA that led to the creation of the Austin-Healey Sprite, the new MG Midget model and even the Triumph Spitfire as an alternative to the hairy TR range. In that sense, it revolutionised the sports car market and helped to make Britain the biggest international player in sports car design.

It isn't just us, either. The MGA is popular around the world, with particularly large fan bases in America and Australia - several of the cars featured in this title reside in foreign climes. And all those enthusiasts can't be wrong, and their voice deserves to be heard. We've got restorations, we've got history, we've got test drives and we've even included a buying guide, just in case this title tempts you into spending the rainy day fund on some summer fun instead.

Thank you for buying this bookazine. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it. ■

SAM SKELTON EDITOR



048

CONTENTS

006 GROUP ROUNDUP

Iain Wakefield looks back at the best sports cars Britain could offer in the 1950s, from MGA to Aston Martin.

014 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Our guide to the MGA behind the scenes - titbits of trivia and forgotten facts that every enthusiast should remember.

018 RESTORATION

Restored, modified, and then used daily for 25 years, Steve Gyles's ex Californian MGA is no trailer queen.

028 BUYING AN MGA

Have we tempted you? Jack Grover guides you through everything you need to know to buy the best.

038 INVENTING THE MGA

Graha Robson guides us through many of the influences behind the MGA, and interesting aspects of its history.

048 MGA TEST DRIVE

Paul Wager takes an MGA 1500 out to find out exactly what it is that enthusiasts love about the first B-series engined MG sports car.

054 KELLY'S CAR

While her husband enjoys Australia's finest classics, Kelly Lyons felt that something British and sporting would suit her better.

062 SEBRING MGA

Found in a Florida scrapyard, Ian Prior had to rescue this former Sebring competitor - but it took over 25 years for work to begin!

070 A PASSION FOR MG

Steve Pountney owns a modified MGB GT V8 and an MG ZT260 as well as his MGA - his two classics are like chalk and cheese.

078 RACING HERITAGE

Mike Peters was vetted before he was allowed to buy the Rivers MGA - and his restoration lives up to the promise,

086 MGA/CORVETTE HYBRID

What do you do when you have a dead Corvette and an MGA project? Well, what Keith Raphael did was combine the two!

094 SAVED FOR POSTERITY

We all kid ourselves that cars will be easy restorations. But this sight unseen eBay purchase couldn't have been less so.



014



094



006

MGA



028



062



018



078



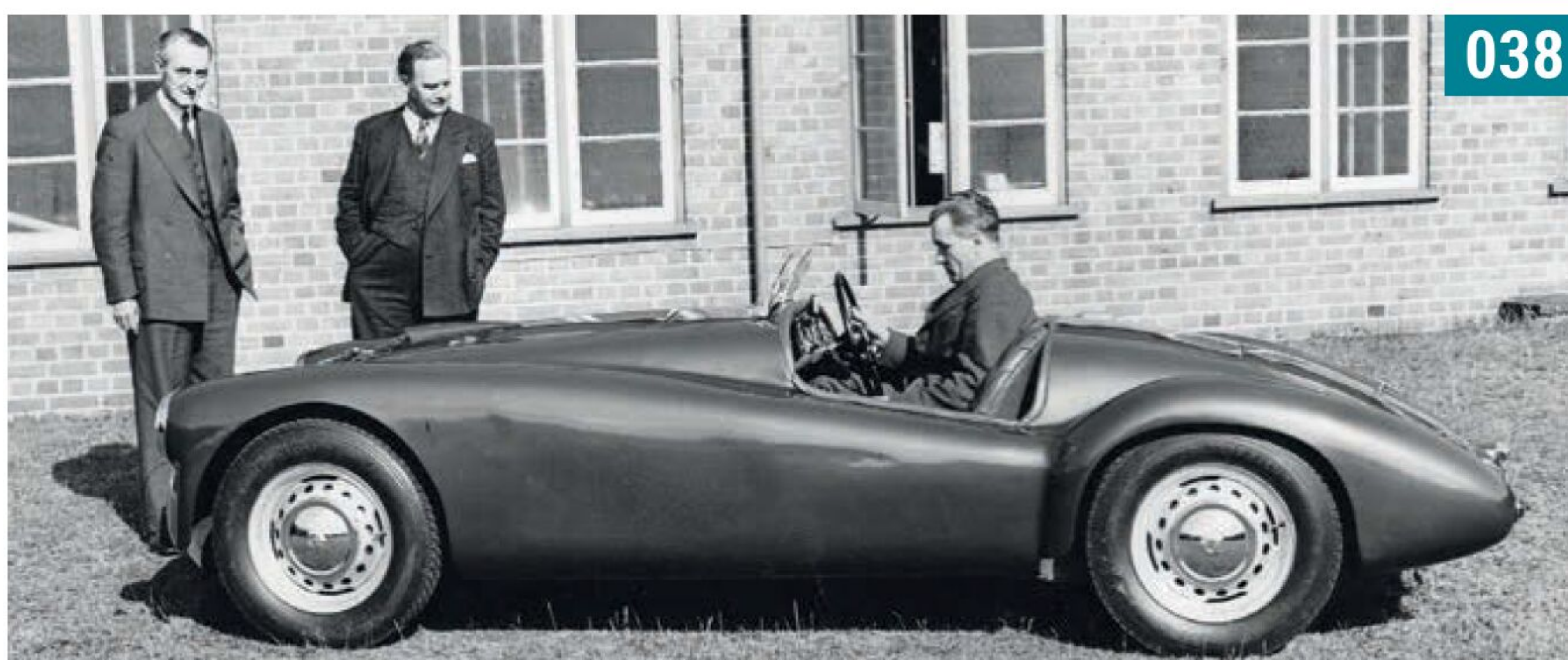
006



070



054



038

ROUND-UP 1950S SPORTS CARS

Throughout the 1950s, a plethora of traditional sports cars catered for all tastes and budgets. We look at a selection of volume produced roadsters and coupés that trail blazed an important sector of our motoring heritage during the age that brought us Rock 'n' Roll.

WORDS: IAIN WAKEFIELD







ASTON MARTIN DB2/2-4/MK3

The first all-new model to be built under David Brown's stewardship of the long-established company was the May 1950-launched DB2 coupe. A drop top version quickly followed and power for the two new models came from a Lagonda-designed 2580cc straight six rated at 105hp at 5000rpm.

A lightweight version went racing as the DB3 and from 1951 the factory offered a DB2 fitted with a 125bhp high-compression Vantage

engine fuelled by bigger carburettors. In October 1953 the DB2 was superseded by the restyled DB2-4 featuring a wraparound windscreen, repositioned headlights and a plusher interior. Body styles included a two-plus-two with an outward-hinged panel incorporating the rear window, fixed head coupé and a convertible.

It was all change again in 1957 when Aston Martin replaced the 2-4 with the revised 2.9-litre DB Mk3. Early models were produced strictly for the export market and Aston Martin continued to

produce the luxuriously equipped Mk3 until the revamped Mk3b took over in 1959.

WHAT'S GREAT: All early DBs feel reasonably sprightly to drive, but examples fitted with the higher compression 125bhp Vantage engine offer a significant increase in power. If you're feeling brave, a well-tuned Vantage powered DB Mk3 can still hit 120mph and the Aston Martin name is certainly one that echoes style and performance.

WHAT TO WATCH: The engines in these cars are strong and reasonably unstressed. However, when things do go wrong the services of an expert are definitely required. There's nothing too unfamiliar with the suspension other than it requiring regular attention from the grease gun. Locating spare parts and replacement trim for these cars can be almost impossible, so think twice before buying a project.

WHAT TO PAY: Unfortunately, the DB2's fine sporting pedigree obviously comes with a massive price tag and a smartly presented coupe will cost anywhere between £130,000 and £240,000+. Convertibles are even more expensive – expect to pay over £250,000 for a barn find car requiring a total rebuild.



AUSTIN-HEALEY BIG HEALEY

Originally displayed as a prototype at the 1952 Earls Court motor show, the Healey '100' made a good impression on Leonard Lord, head of the

newly formed British Motor Corporation and an agreement was made with Donald Healey to put the car into production.

The result was unveiled at the following year's motor show badged as the Austin-Healey 100-4. Stylist Gerry Coker was responsible for penning the 100-4's flowing bodywork and design for the BN1 Healey's heavyweight ladder frame chassis was credited to Barry Bibie.

Power for what is now described as the first of the big Healeys (BN1) came from a 2660cc inline-four driving the rear wheels through a three-speed gearbox fitted with overdrive on the top two ratios.

BMC introduced the revised BN2 big Healey in 1955 and the new 100-4 now featured a four-speed gearbox, upgraded rear axle and slightly flared front wheelarches. The high-performance 100M was introduced during the same year and mechanical upgrades for this model included larger carburettors, a high lift cam and high compression pistons.

A major redesign in 1956 resulted with the launch of the six-cylinder 100-6. The revamped big Healey now had a longer wheelbase, which allowed for a slightly more streamlined bodyline and the 100-6's C-Series inline-six had a swept volume of 2639cc. It was all change again in 1959 when BMC took the covers off what is now referred to as the Mk1 Austin-Healey 3000.

FROGEYE SPRITE

From the late 1950s Donald Healey and BMC had been discussing the idea of producing a back-to-basics sports car and the result was the 1958 'Frogeye' Sprite. The new Healey featured a monocoque bodyshell with amphibian-style headlamps on a single-piece bonnet and to keep the overall price low, a lot of components came from various BMC parts bins.

A 948cc A-Series engine drove the Sprite's rear wheels through a four-speed gearbox and the car's live rear axle was supported on quarter-elliptic springs. Although the Sprite's interior was basic, the cabin was reasonably spacious and wet weather gear consisted of removable plastic side screens and a folding canvas hood.

WHAT'S GREAT: With its simple sweeping lines delineating what a traditional open-topped sports car should really look like, the big Healey in any guise is great fun to own and drive. A well-sorted Frogeye Sprite on the other hand delivers an equal amount of fun at a lower cost and parts supply and club coverage for both these traditional 1950s sports cars is second to none

WHAT TO WATCH: The big Healey's steel and aluminium body is mounted on a sturdy ladder frame chassis and both these structures corrode badly. Repairing a big Healey's rotten chassis

is a body-off job but the good news is that the simple mechanicals are tough and can be fixed by a DIY owner. Frogeyes rust equally badly – especially around the rear spring mountings, rear wheelarches and the corners of the large one-piece bonnet. Again, mechanicals are basic and plentiful, as are specialist repairers for both models.

WHAT TO PAY: Prices for big Healeys are still slowly climbing and a tip-top 100/6 will change hands for £75,000 plus. £60,000 should be enough to bag a very nice BN1 100 (add twenty grand for a 100M), while the Mk1 3000 is a tad more affordable at around £50,000 for a spot-on example. When it comes to the Frogeye, decent examples are currently selling for over £20,000 and a tatty Condition 3 Sprite will change hands for around £4500-£6000.

JAGUAR XK120

Jaguar took the covers off the futuristic looking XK120 Roadster at the 1948 London motor show and the stylish coupé eventually joined the line-up in 1951. Two years later the covers came off the convertible and power for all three models was delivered to the rear wheels by the recently developed DOHC XK engine, an alloy headed 3.4-litre inline-six rated at 180bhp at 5300rpm.

Although the first 242 production Roadsters utilised aluminium body panels mounted →





on a sturdy chassis, subsequent models had all steel bodywork. The 120's suspension set-up comprised torsion bars at the front and semielliptic leaf spring at the rear, while all round drums provided the stopping power.

XK140

In October 1954 Jaguar introduced the restyled but very similar looking XK140 featuring a heavier looking front grille and bumpers. The Coupé now had a extended roofline that

provided more space behind the rear seats and the extra cabin space was also available in the Convertible (the Roadster remained a pure two-seater and retained removable side screens for wet weather gear).

Other changes introduced across the range included fitting rack and pinion steering and a power hike boosted the power output of the 3442cc XK engine to 190bhp on standard versions and 210bhp for cars ordered with the special equipment package.

XK150

The radically revised XK150 arrived on the scene in 1957 and again Jaguar offered the XK-badged sports car in three different formats: Roadster, Fixed Head Coupé or Drophead Coupé. The XK150 Roadster now featured more practical wind-up windows and thinner doors fitted across the range provided more elbow room inside the cabin.

The restyled XK150 was easily identified by its wider grille and one-piece windscreen. Disc brakes were fitted to the more powerful 3.4-litre 150SE and a triple SU carburettor fuelled 3.7 litre version of the SE was introduced in 1959 (a triple carb set-up had previously been fitted to the uprated 3.4 litre 150S). The most powerful roadgoing XK150 Jaguar produced was the 265bhp S and in 1961 the now very desirable (and expensive) Jaguar XK150 gave way to the E-Type.

WHAT'S GREAT: The XK120 had genuine top speed of 120mph and was regarded as a 'supercar' of its day. Jaguar managed to retain the distinctive XK look through all three models, despite the 150 being a very different beast under the skin. Racing versions brought home the silver and today Jaguar's series of XK designated sportscars are motoring legends.

WHAT TO WATCH: As with all cars from this period, rust and poorly repaired accident damage are the major points to look out for. A lot of



examples will have been repatriated from North America and converted to right-hand drive, so it's essential to inspect the paperwork and be aware of the car's provenance. Parts supply for all models is excellent and clubs are able to offer a lot of help with pre-purchase and ownership advice.

WHAT TO PAY: Prices for excellent examples have gone through the roof and today there's no such thing as a cheap Jaguar XK. You'd definitely need a Lottery win to buy a good one, as a professionally restored XK120 Roadster can cost up to £190,000 and the price for a decent coupé won't be that far behind. XK140 Drophead Coupés can exchange hands for up to £135,000, more for cars with an interesting history and the same amount should be able to secure a decent XK150 Coupé. S and SE badged XKs will cost more and with projects going for between £30,000 and £40,000 it's obviously best to buy at the top, or just above any set budget.

MG TD

MG entered our chosen decade producing the TD two-seater, a model it developed on a shoestring budget but which still managed to offer a huge technical leap forwards over the outgoing TC. The styling was similar enough, but looks were deceiving because underneath was a brand new chassis derived from the Y-Type saloon. This

brought with it independent front suspension as well as rack and pinion steering, improving both comfort and handling.

The body was new as well, still pre-war in styling but now with yet more elbow room for the occupants and left-hand drive became an option for the first time. All of this came with a weight penalty though and with the same XPAG engine, the new car was initially slower than the all-round cart sprung TC had been.

There was also a Mk2 that gained more power and better handling at the expense of a stiffer ride and this mechanical specification was carried over to the TF in 1953.

TF

This was the model that MG never wanted to produce, as they were itching to introduce the radically different MGA to compete with the likes of Triumph's new TR2. However, the masters at newly formed BMC didn't want MG to compete with the Austin-Healey, so they had to make do and mend.

The TF received a more sloping front and a lower bonnet line with the headlights now being faired into the front wings. The rear was tidied up too and the cockpit got individual adjustable seats instead of the previous bench plus a centrally mounted instrument panel with new octagonal dials.

In late summer of 1954 the TF's engine was enlarged to 1466cc in an effort to keep the ageing design at least within sight of the competition and the new engine was designated the XPEG. The body now gained 1500 badges and the TF finally bowed out in 1955.

MGA

Initially the pioneer of a new UA-series, the new MG two seater was launched in September 1955 as the MGA. Having reached the designation Z-type with the previously launched Magnette, MG had little option but start again at the beginning of the alphabet, leaving some enthusiasts disappointed the new car wasn't badged a Midget, a name used by MG since 1929.

The timing of the MGA's launch was spot on, as by late 1953 a new 1.5-litre BMC B-series engine was just going into production and fitting the new engine into the new sports car did away with the large bulge that designer Sid Enever had to put in the prototype's bonnet to accept the taller XPAG engine.

The coupé came along a year later and in 1958 MG introduced the 108bhp MGA 1600 Twin Cam featuring all round disc brakes and centre lock disc wheels. MG launched the single cam 1600 in 1959 and went on to produce a MkII version of the 1600 prior to the A being replaced in 1962 by the MGB





WHAT'S GREAT: There's always a good selection of MGA Roadsters and Coupés to choose from and as the majority of cars went Stateside, a lot have returned home and been restored to a very high standard. Twin Cams are quick but the engine can unfortunately be temperamental. Spares are usually easy to obtain for most models and a very active club scene covers all MGs in great detail.

WHAT TO WATCH: Series body and chassis rot in all the usual places will be the main issue to consider when checking a MGA. B Series engines are notoriously long lived providing they've been serviced correctly and all the running gear on the A, with the exception of the Twin Cam's power unit, its straight forward to work on.

WHAT TO PAY: The most affordable MGA is the 1500 Coupé and professionally restored, rust-free examples can be bagged for under £20,000. Add on around £3000 or £4000 for a Roadster and half again for a late 1.6 litre powered example. A fully restored Twin Cam can easily command up to £45,000 and even a basket case or barn find example will cost over £10,000.

TRIUMPH TR2

The Walter Belgrove-designed TR2 was introduced in 1953 and the sportcar's steeply raked doors, deep recessed 'grille' and bulbous headlamp housings gave the new Triumph a distinctive look that would make the car an instant success.



A 1991cc Standard Vanguard engine fuelled by a pair of SU carbs rated at 90hp at 4800rpm drove the TR2's rear wheels through a four-speed gearbox (overdrive was an optional extra) and provided the new Triumph with a very respectable top speed of 103mph.

Later TR2s were fitted with shorter doors, as the originals hit the kerb when being opened and these models are now referred to as 'short door' and earlier TR2's as 'long door' cars.

TR3

Triumph unveiled the TR3 at the 1955 Earls Court Motor Show and although the new sports car was visually externally identical to the outgoing model, the new TR now featured a full width slatted grille and had more space behind the rear seats.

The TR3 enjoyed the benefit of a more powerful 95bhp engine and from 1956 the TR's a pair of discs replaced the front drum brakes. Triumph went on to increase the TR2's power output to 100bhp at 5000rpm and the TR3A came on the scene in 1957. Later cars were fitted with a 2138cc engine and further changes in 1961 resulted in US bound cars being designated the TR3B.

WHAT'S GREAT: Any 1950s TR is a delight to own and drive and our two featured examples are still reasonably affordable when compared to other cars we've looked at from this period. The supply of parts is probably better now than when the cars were in period and there's a huge network of specialist repairers to help if things do go pear shaped.

WHAT TO WATCH: Again, its rust that's going to be the major enemy, so it's vital to check all the usual places where a body on frame car from this period usually corrodes. Any serious panel repairs will require the body to be removed – a job that's definitely not for the faint-hearted or novice weekend tinkerer.

WHAT TO PAY: Once very affordable, these early TRs have now joined the premium classic stakes and good examples are getting very expensive. First class examples are now changing hands for up to and beyond £28,000 and even a complete project requiring a major restoration will cost between £7000 and £9000.

MORGAN 4/4

First introduced in 1936, production of the 4/4 was revived in 1950 and power came from a 1267cc Standard 10 engine. Overall styling was virtually unchanged from 1939 and the standard 4/4 left the factory equipped with steel disc wheels and mechanical brakes. Morgan introduced a Series 2 version of the 4/4 based on a bigger Plus 4 chassis in 1955 and the reintroduced model was now instantly recognisable by having a cowled radiator blending into the bonnet line.

The revised 4/4 now benefitted from hydraulic brakes although the car's independent front suspension retained the company's traditional sliding pillar set-up. Power came from a 1272cc Ford sidevalve 100E engine producing 35bhp driving a leaf sprung live rear axle through a three-speed gearbox.

Morgan introduced the revised 105E overhead valve powered Series 3 4/4 in 1960 and apart from a break in production during World War Two and between 1951-55, the 4/4 is currently recognised as having the longest production run in history.

PLUS 4

Morgan commenced production of the Plus 4 in 1950 and these early examples featured drum brakes and were powered by a version of the same 2088cc straight-four that could be found

under the Standard Vanguard's bonnet. Plus 4s built from 1953 had a redesigned front end featuring a cowled radiator grille and power for the revised Plus 4 was produced by a 1991cc Standard engine similar to the one used in the Triumph TR2. Front disc brakes were offered as an option from 1959 and Morgan produced the original Plus 4 for another ten years.

WHAT'S GREAT: All Morgans continue to enjoy a dedicated following and 4/4s and Plus 4s produced through the 1950s are no exception. A lot of parts for both models are still available through the factory, as well as an impressive number of specialists and as would be expected, the Morgan club scene offers a warm welcome to new owners.

WHAT TO WATCH: All Morgans are built around a wooden frame mounted on a sturdy steel chassis. The timber can rot badly, especially along the sills and over the rear wheels. To make proper repairs to these areas the outer panels will have to be removed and this is a very specialised job. Mechanicals on both models are straightforward to work on and maintaining a Morgan at home is part of the joy of ownership

WHAT TO PAY: Unfortunately Morgan ownership doesn't come cheap and a Condition One post-war flat grille 4/4 will cost between £35,000 to £40,000. Later cowled grille 4/4s are more affordable and a decent Series II can be picked

up for around £18,000. However, a restored flat grille Plus 4 will cost around £28,000, while prices for versions with a traditionally shaped grille will start at around £25,000. Projects can be picked up for under £10,000 but these are only really for the brave. ■

OR HOW ABOUT?

Sadly, we've not included anything from Lotus in this review of 1950s sports cars, mainly because the surviving number of original all glass fibre Elites is very low and the kit built 100E powered Seven isn't to everyone's taste. Nor have we included any sporting Allards or Sunbeams, as these models were produced in very low numbers and survivors are rare. We've concentrated on a selection of volume produced British built sportscars but had space allowed, we would have included Continental offerings such as Alfa Romeo's Giulietta Spider or 2600. There are obviously a few more models to consider when planning to purchase a traditional sports car from the 1950s, including a whole raft of now very rare survivors from kit car manufacturers such as Berkley, Rochdale or Fairthorpe, etc. We wish you luck with your search.





10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE MGA

Like a steel magnolia, the MGA's achingly pretty exterior hid a heart that was as tough as old boots. It brought MG's sports cars into the modern era in the 1950s, and is a staple of the classic scene today. Here are a few snippets we've gleaned from that journey.

Report: SIMON GOLDSWORTHY



ABOVE LEFT: The prototypes ready to tackle Le Mans in 1955. ABOVE RIGHT: A wonderful press photo for the launch of the 1500, a time when his flat cap and blazer were not in any way cliché!

In fact MG had built two EX175 chassis, and when their production proposal was turned down, they drilled holes in the second one to lighten it and fitted a super-sleek body to create EX179. Fitted with an XPAG engine stretched from 1250cc to 1466cc to create the XPEG unit, in August 1954 it was driven to 153.69mph by George Eyston on the salt flats in Utah and averaged 120mph for 12 hours. That XPEG engine was then fitted to the TF to create the TF1500, the last gasp for the MG square-riggers before the sleek new MGA finally got the green light and took the company forwards in 1955.

Meanwhile, EX179 returned to Utah in 1956 with a prototype twin cam engine developed from the B-series unit, and bettered 170mph. Even that was not the end of the record-breaking story, because in 1957 a new chassis and body was built to create EX181, the so-called Roaring Raindrop. This had a supercharged version of EX179's twin OHC engine in the back, and was driven to 245.64 by Stirling Moss on 23 August 1957. In 1959 and with the capacity stretched slightly

to 1506cc, Phil Hill went even better and recorded a top speed of 254.91mph.

Meanwhile, back on the world of real motoring, the MGA was unveiled to the public as a two-seat roadster at the Frankfurt Motor Show in September 1955, quickly followed by Earls Court in October. The delay in production meant that instead of the XPEG engine, it was powered by the new 1489cc B-series engine.

At the 1956 Motor Show, MG introduced the hardtop MGA Coupe, which was actually faster than the Roadster thanks to its better streamlining. The MGA Twin Cam was next to arrive, announced in July 1958 but enjoying only a brief life and being discontinued in April 1960. By then, the MG 1600 had taken over OHV duties with the B-series stretched to 1588cc and disc brakes added to the front wheels. In 1960 a 1600 De Luxe was added to the mix, essentially a ploy to use up chassis and other parts such as the all-round disc brakes that MG had ordered in greater quantities than it turned out they needed for the Twin Cam, but fitted with the OHV →

The MGA might have represented a brand-new start for the marque's sporting line in 1955, but it still had roots back in the previous T-Types. We'll take as our starting pint for this brief summary the special body that Syd Enever at MG built to go on a TD that George Phillips raced at Le Mans in 1951. This was a sleek affair that boosted top speed of the TD underpinnings from the 80mph achieved by a standard car to a whopping 120mph.

Registered as UMG 400, Phillips' car suffered engine failure in France, but was so promising that MG built another, EX175, in 1952. The crucial difference this time was that to enable the occupants to sit lower in the car, a new chassis was developed with the side members spaced further apart. MG wanted to put this into production right away, but BMC's top brass turned it down because they had just signed a deal to build the Austin-Healey and saw this as too much internal competition.



The Fiberfab Jamaican was a sleek and stylish kit car that could be fitted to an MGA chassis.

engine.

The MGA 1600 MkII of June 1961 saw a revisions and improvements to the running gear, including an engine stretch to 1622cc to give more power, more torque and – with revised final drive ratios – a more easily attainable 100mph. The rear lights were also changed, Mini units being used, but turned on their side to sit horizontally.

The 100,000th MGA was built in spring 1962, and by the time production ended in June that year and the baton was passed to the new MGB, 101,081 had been produced. Here are a few more MGA factoids to tickle your trivia tastebuds.

1 The first prototype of the new car for production was given the experimental number EX182 when it was unveiled to the public just before the 1955 Le Mans race for which a team of three were entered. It had been planned for the MGA to start production in the April, but delays due to the body presses meant that the Le Mans cars had to run in the prototype Class rather than the Production Class. When the production model was launched at the Frankfurt Motor Show that autumn, it was called the MGA – MG had reached the end of the alphabet with the Z-Type Magnette, and simply started again at the beginning. In many ways it was an inspired decision because not only did it indicate that this was a totally new beginning for the company's sports car, it also made it virtually impossible to talk about the model without including the letters MG!

2 At this point, MG's competition cars were painted British Racing Green, but it had been noted on the Mille Miglia in Italy that level crossings tended to close suddenly unless the car approaching was painted in Italy's racing colour of red. So for the 1956



The hardtop Coupé was more aerodynamic than the Roadster, so it was faster too.



The Twin Cam engine was not quite ready for use on the road when launched.

event, the MGAs were painted Alfa red. Later, when the Comps Department started using the hardtop coupes, their roofs were painted white to help keep the interiors cooler, and an iconic colour scheme was settled which would carry on through to the MGB.

3 Remember the twin-cam engine that propelled EX181 to 245mph in 1955 and which we mentioned in the introduction to this feature? A version of this was duly

fitted to the MGA in 1958 to produce the high-performance Twin Cam model. For this, it was bored out from 1489cc to 1588cc, and the performance gains were startling. However, it also needed high quality fuel plus meticulous tuning and servicing, all of which could be provided on the race track but which were more likely to be in short supply on the roads. As a result, the engine proved troublesome in service, and the Twin Cam was pulled in April 1960 after just 2111 had been built. Now, of course, it is the most valuable production MGA model on the market. It was a very tight squeeze in the MGA engine bay though, and eventually removable access panels had to be cut into the front wheelarches. It was partly with the intention of accommodating the Twin Cam engine that the MGB was designed with such a capacious engine bay which later made fitment of the Rover V8 possible.

4 One pre-production MGA had an unusually long and varied career with the Development Department. Registered as KMO 326 in 1954, it started out life as a 1500 Roadster, later became a prototype Coupé before being rebodied as a 1600. It was used to develop the front suspension and brakes for the MGB, and was even used with an MGB engine for back-to-back speed testing against the forthcoming model using optimal tyre sizes and final drive ratios – the MGA was 4mph



The OHV B-series may have been less glamorous, but at least it was bulletproof.



modifications they carried out to the MG were moving the spare wheel to the bonnet and fixing another to the fibreglass hardtop, fitting a 30 gallon fuel tank in the boot (in addition to the standard tank), adapting the passenger seat so it converted into a bed, and having a trailer designed to carry their own gear and additional spare parts. The journey took them 47 days, in which they covered 12,688 miles and used approximately 600 gallons of petrol.



Large add-ons to Lancashire police cars would not have improved the MGA's top speed.

9 MGAs might not seem like the most obvious candidates for police car duties, not least because of their extremely modest carrying capacity for equipment, but some forces managed to press them into service. According to Andrea Green in her book: *M.G.s on Patrol*, the police forces of Oxford City, Glamorgan and Berwickshire all used MGAs, but by far the most prolific user was Lancashire who used to give synchronised driving displays using 18 of them at local events. In Lancashire, the MGs proved adept at policing the newly opened Preston Bypass from 1958, widely regarded as Britain's first stretch of motorway and now part of the M6. In her book, Green quotes former policewoman Pat Buck as saying: 'The MGs were nice to drive when it was warm, but were freezing cold in winter because the radios were where the heaters should have been.'

quicker. In 1964 it was sold off and given a chassis number of 109,071, one digit higher than the 109,070 of the last production car, creating the curious situation whereby it was both the original prototype and also the last MGA to be sold.

5 An aluminium hardtop made by Vanden Plas was offered as an optional extra in June 1956. To stop the rear window being sucked out at speed after the roof bulged, tie straps were incorporated which made the window look like a three-piece affair. Even though the Coupe had been introduced in October 1956, a fibreglass hardtop was launched for the Roadster along with the MGA 1600. Shipping this to the USA was costly, so dealers there would order a subsequent car with the hardtop and then take that off on arrival and hand it to the rightful owner.

6 The 100,000th MGA was built in May 1962. It was painted a special metallic gold and fitted with a white leather interior, then shipped to the USA on the Queen Mary liner. It was meant to be for display purposes only, but was inadvertently sold by a dealer in Nashville. The new owner insisted on taking possession of the car, but only drove it for 8000 miles before abandoning it outside on his farm for the next 35 years. Fortunately it was then acquired and restored by his brother.

7 In 1985, 18 white MGAs were assembled in Yorkshire to film a TV advert for cigars. It took four days of filming to secure just a few seconds of footage, and unfortunately for two of those days one of the cars was submerged up to its waist in water on a flooded road. It survived this indignity, was dried out and sold on to continue its life on the road.

8 MGAs have always proven to be highly durable in long-distance racing and rallying, but few journeys can compare with the one taken by friends David McMullen and Norman Tosh in 1959 – they drove David's 1957 MGA Roadster from Greenock in Scotland to Sydney in Australia. Among the

10 There was a long and rich tradition of coach-built MGs and specials in the pre-war era and with the post-war T-Types, but the same thing didn't happen with the MGA. However, the Jamaican was a super stylish kit car from the American Fiberfab company. Built from 1968 and looking like an Italian exotic from the likes of Bizzarrini, it was designed to fit on the chassis and running gear of a number of British classics. The example pictured on these pages has been built on an MGA chassis, and it is fun to play a game of 'spot the part' – the front screen is from a Chevrolet Corvette, the rear glass is Porsche 911 and the door glass is from the Karmann-Ghia. ■



LEARNING CURVES

Steve Gyles restored and modified his MGA in his spare time, then used it every day for nearly a quarter-century

Words and photos: **ROB HAWKINS**







Steve Gyles is no run-of-the-mill classic car owner. He has used his MGA as daily transport for several years and that's without a hood. He's no stranger to the MG sports car life, having owned a TC and PA in the past, and has also been a veteran in other ways, as a fighter pilot for 25 years.

It was back in 1993 that he decided to restore an MGA. He realised he needed some car-related skills, so he enrolled on evening classes at his local technical college. "I did courses on welding, metal fabrication and body refinishing," he recalls. Subsequently he purchased a MIG welder, compressor and spraying equipment.

He approached California Classics of Hull (CCHL) for the starting point of his MGA restoration. CCHL has been importing MGs

and other classics from the drier climates of the world since the '80s. During October 1996, Steve inspected some photos of a Mk1 1958 MGA that had been abandoned in a barn for 22 years. At the time, UK-based MGA restoration projects were selling for around £4,500 and were generally in need of new panels and lots of welding. CCHL was offering a sun-dried MGA that needed a full restoration, but little or no replacement body panels, for £6,000 (including import costs and a Heritage certificate) which came with drum brakes all round and a 1489cc B-series engine.

Steve paid his money and, on 16 December 1996, he travelled to Hull in a borrowed Land Rover Discovery with a trailer to collect his restoration project. Upon initial inspection, he recalls: "There was no deep rust but it was

massively tarnished from Californian weather. It had been heavily eaten by rodents and there was a cracked cylinder head in the boot. I transported the car home and wheeled it into the garage alongside my MG TC. There it stayed for 10 days until after Christmas Day. On Boxing Day, the restoration started.

"I had read articles on restorations never getting finished so I set myself a target date of mid-April 1998, sixteen months away. One week later, the car was totally dismantled. The biggest surprise was to find a rodent nest inside the gearbox tunnel. At the time, I was concerned it might have been a snake in there, having travelled all the way from the US."

The good news was that the panels were straight and there was no sign of deep-rooted rust. His welding classes had yet to come →

"I DID COURSES ON WELDING, METAL FABRICATION AND BODY REFINISHING..."

The Restoration



Collected from CCHL in Hull, Steve's imported MGA arrives at his home. The restoration proper began in earnest on Boxing Day, 1996, with an end target date of Spring 1998.



Animal nest found atop the gearbox had Steve wondering if a snake had been imported. Luckily it turned out to have been a rodent, which had clearly moved out back in the USA.



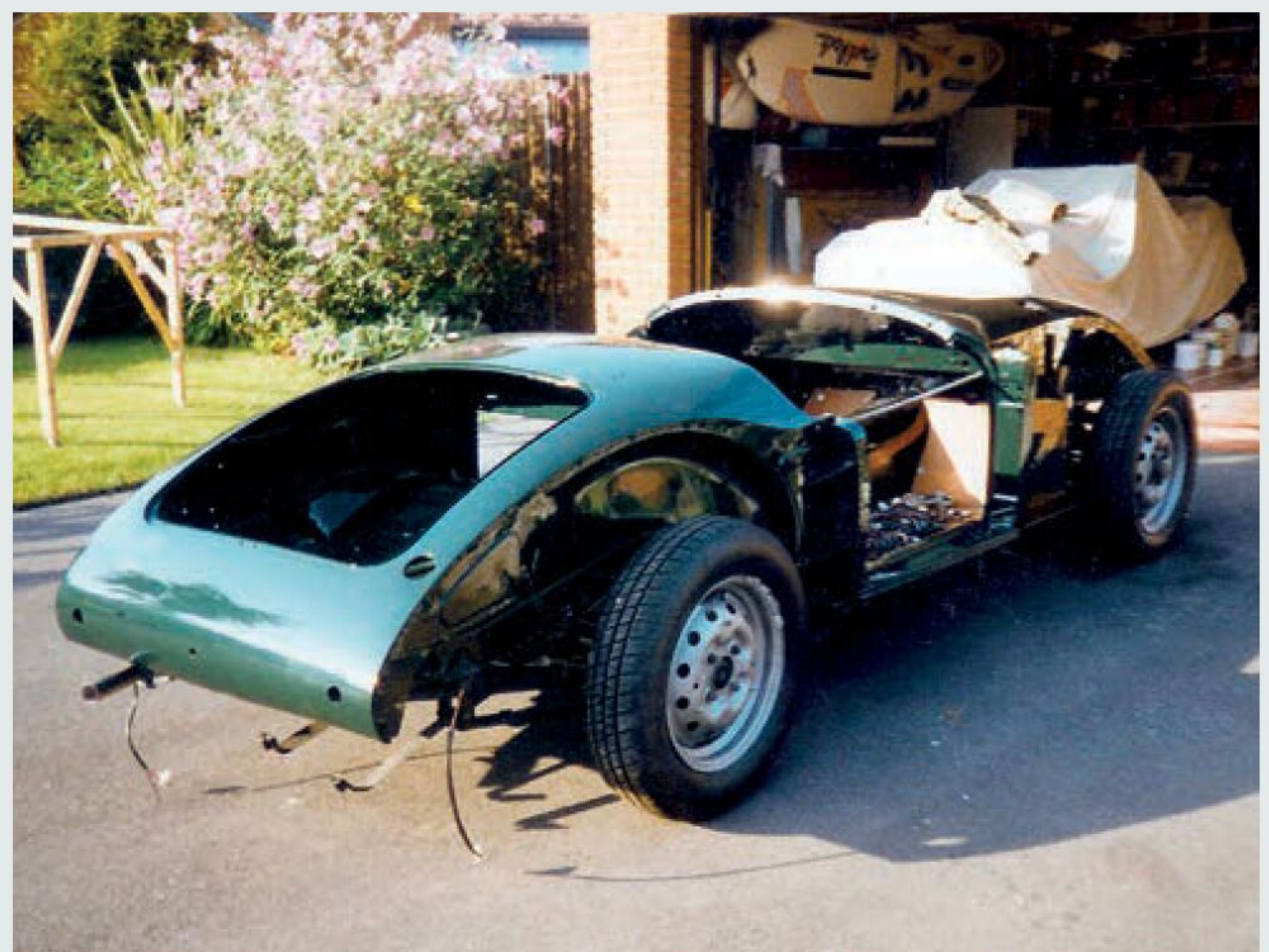
Steel body tub was transported to his night class college to be repaired, providing plenty of hands-on experience, and thence to the professional body shop to be top-coated in Jaguar BRG.



Contrary to advice but according to Steve's plan, the rolling chassis was completed prior to tackling the bodywork. Original equipment 1500 B-series engine was initially reused.



Returning from the body shop to a warm reception; the body tub now top-coated. Steve fabricated his own support frame to allow the tub to be safely transported on a trailer.



Final reassembly took from Autumn 1997 to May 1998, with some help. He kept the MGA to standard specification at first but has since made modifications to suit his own use.



in useful so he decided on a plan of action: “The best advice I had read was to do the difficult stuff first: the bodywork, and the easy stuff last: the rolling chassis. Many restorations, I had read, tend to get abandoned if done the other way round. I ignored this advice so that I could get a mobile rolling chassis and make better use of my garage space.”

By the end of January 1997, the chassis had been stripped and repainted. The 1500 engine went to a specialist for a re-bore and crankshaft polish. “At the same time, I made the acquaintance of Bob West, probably the best MGA specialist in the UK, and brought back the first load of new engine parts, plus suspension and brake bits,” he recalls. “Despite low winter

temperatures, I was out in the garage most evenings and weekends.”

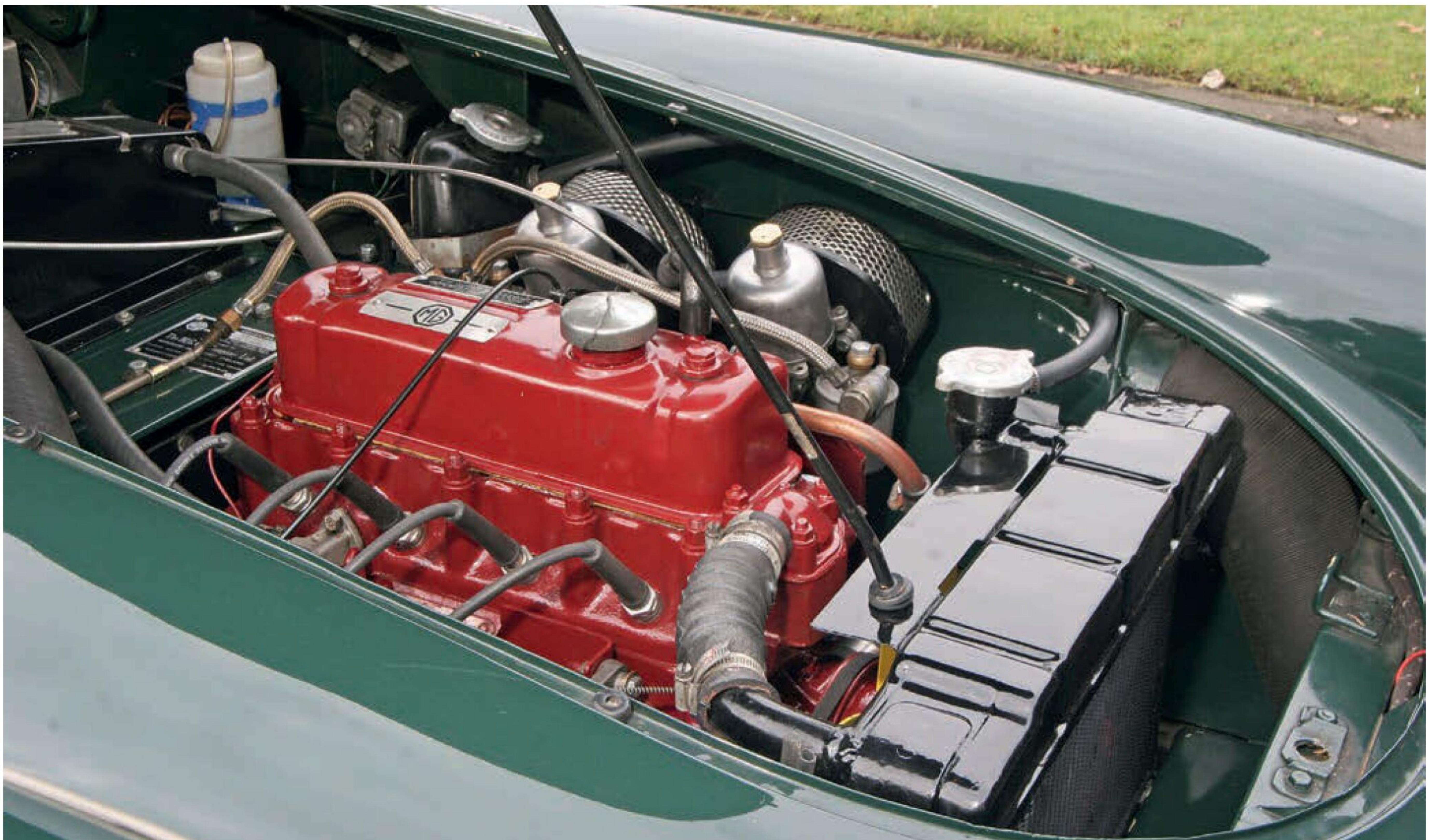
Whilst he was busy restoring his MGA, he was also attending evening classes to learn about bodywork and painting. This proved useful as he could take panels along to the classes to be stripped, etch-primed, filled and undercoated.

By the beginning of March, the engine, gearbox, axle, suspension and wheels had been cleaned, painted and bolted back on to the chassis. “My knowledge on the gearbox and differential was negligible so restoration of these parts was limited to oil seal replacements,” he says. “My LHD steering box was sent to a specialist who was able to take parts from it to make a RHD box.”

The evening classes continued and he started feeding the larger panels through the local shot blaster, collecting them on the way to college. The body tub was the bulkiest item to transport so he made a frame to fit onto his trailer and also made a frame for his garage so the tub could sit over the rolling chassis.

“The MGA has aluminium doors, bonnet and boot. These I stripped at home in the conventional way with Nitromors and took them into college to etch prime using their spray ovens and professional breathing gear. What I could not complete at college I continued with at home. By the beginning of August, I had some 29 panels, including the main tub, ready for the top coat.”

He chose a local spray shop, Trident →



Paint and Body Centre at Lytham St Annes, to paint his MGA in two-pack Jaguar British Racing Green (RM7414). Although he had gained good experience with the spray gun at college, he felt that he could not guarantee the high-quality topcoat finish he desired. "The owner said he would only do the job if he could see my preparation. He made regular visits during that period of March to July 1997."

Steve finally sent all the exterior panels to Trident in August that year. "At the beginning of September all the panels were back home and they looked great," he says. "A couple of friends helped lift the body tub into place."

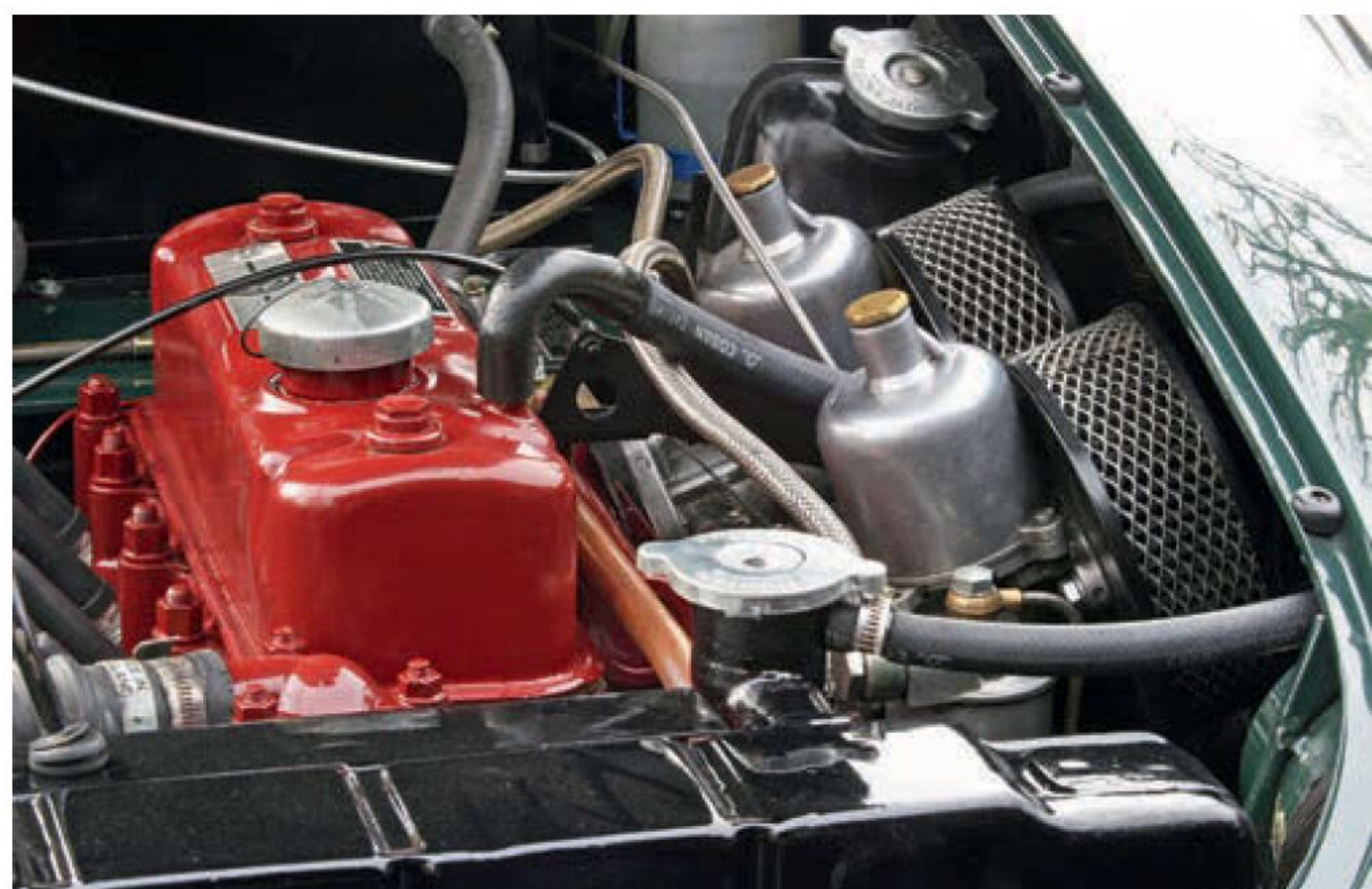
Nine months into the rebuild, he had the beginnings of a new car. It was now a case of a slow but steady installation. The wiring loom, petrol tank and piping went in first, followed by the rest of the panels.

"Panel fit and gapping in the MGA is probably among the most difficult of any car to make good but, by mid-Autumn, it was done. New floorboards were made out of marine ply, using the old ones as templates."

That deadline of April 1998 was soon on the horizon. In the winter of 1997, he retreated to his lounge to rebuild his MGA's seats and work on the windscreen. "I fitted out the seat frames with

Connolly leather and re-glazed the windscreen. During all this time there were regular trips over to Bob West to get all sorts of bits such as new bumpers, a new distributor, reconditioned carburettors, a carpeting set, hood frame, hood and tonneau. The list was almost endless."

On the first day of May 1998, he drove his MGA to the local MOT station and it passed the test. "The car was now in close-to-original specification," says Steve, who appreciates that purists won't like his choice of non-standard Jaguar BRG paintwork. "I had seen a car in this colour, with a Magnolia trim, when I visited Bob West on one occasion. I fell in love with it but was





“...HE COULD TAKE PANELS ALONG TO THE CLASSES TO BE STRIPPED, ETCH-PRIMED, FILLED AND UNDERCOATED.”

worried about it being non-standard. I remember Bob's words to me: 'If you are building it to sell on, keep it original. If you are intending to keep it, paint it in the colour which gives you most pleasure.'

Since then, he hasn't wrapped his MGA in cotton wool. He has used it as his daily commuter to work and he rarely puts the hood up, even when it rains. "My first modification was to fit wire wheels. This involved new centre-lock hubs on the front and back and new driveshafts plus, of course, the wire wheels."

Initially, he undertook a lot of motorway miles so he decided to uprate the engine and gearbox. "The MGA was built before the advent of motorways so gearing is optimised for acceleration rather than sustained high speed. Therefore, at 70mph on motorways, the engine is revving very high for a long stroke engine of its era." His MGA's early B-series engine was changed for a later 1798cc from the MGB.

This was mated to a Ford Type 9 [five-speed] gearbox using one of Hi-Gear Engineering's early conversion kits.

"Fortunately, the MGB's B-series five-main-bearing engine is almost identical externally to the earlier MGA version so it was just a case of transferring across the MGA's front plate with engine mounts, generator, distributor, oil pipes, carburettors and manifolds. The engine rear plate was from the MGA 1600 variant. This was needed to mate up with the Hi-Gear bell-housing for the MGA because there's a different starter motor position on the 1500 backplate. The plate had to be milled to take the MGB crankshaft rear oil seal."

The MGB engine transplant resulted in Steve removing the MGA's standard mechanical tacho and fitting an electronic MGB unit as there is no mechanical take-off on the later B-series. More recently, he fitted an MGB 3.9:1 rear end, which has helped to achieve low rpm cruising.

"Now I had more power I needed better brakes so in went the MGA 1600 front discs and MGB calipers. The improved braking was very noticeable, with no fade. On the first test drive the passenger seat folded forward."

He found the 16.5in diameter standard steering wheel to be too large and cumbersome for his driving style so he changed to a 14in item. "It really gives you the feel of the car. The only drawback is the heaviness at very low speeds but you feel at one with the car as soon as the speed gets above about 15mph."

He retained the MGA's cooling system, which featured what he describes as a 'lost overboard' system, despite fitting the MGB engine. He soon decided to opt for a later expansion tank design and, at around the same time, he changed the dynamo for an alternator. Fortunately this was an easy modification, being well documented by Moss Europe using instructions downloaded from its website. →



One of the most noticeable modifications Steve has completed on his MGA concerns the windscreen. When he finished the restoration, he had a standard, full-sized windscreen. His MGA has some racing history and, considering he isn't a fan of driving with the hood up, he decided to make his own sports windscreen from Perspex. "This is a cut-down MGA screen and more raked, using side supports cast from an original Le Mans set. I cannot now use the hood and side screens so they reside in the attic, to save weight."

23 years on from the rebuild, Steve still has his MGA and maintains it in good running order. He's recently fitted a high-torque, pre-engaged starter motor which he highly recommends. "One of the prime benefits is that it removes the high current from the starter pull switch; an item that forever causes problems." The standard engine-driven cooling fan was replaced with a seven-blade asymmetric fan from Moss, and he designed a



“IF YOU ARE INTENDING TO KEEP IT, PAINT IT IN THE COLOUR WHICH GIVES YOU MOST PLEASURE.”

pair of carburettor stub stacks that fits inside the original filters. He had a batch of 120 made, quickly bought by fellow MGA owners.

Now retired from flying fighter jets, when he's not driving his MGA, Steve is developing a website (www.classic-british-car-jacks.uk) that caters for British car jacks and helps classic car owners to collect original toolkit items for their cars.

Several years ago, he managed to contact the previous owner of his MGA, who still lived in

the US. “He said that he bought the car at high school. He met his future wife through the car, got married and went for honeymoon in the car. He brought their first baby home from hospital in it. Then he lost the car to her when they got divorced. The owner prior to him had been killed racing the car when he rolled it.” Being the third owner, Steve has thankfully had better luck with this MGA and he surely deserves an award for bringing it back to life and using it in all weathers. ■

THANKS

Steve Gyles would like to thank Bob West, MGA specialist, (+44 (0)1977 703828, www.bobwestclassiccars.co.uk) for all the replacement parts; Blackpool and The Fylde College for body refinishing and Trident Paint and Body Centre (+44 (0)1253 729103, tridentbodyshop.co.uk) for the final coat of paint.



MGA 1500, 1600, MKII AND TWIN-CAM BUYERS' GUIDE

The MGA marked a new departure for MG and became one of the prettiest British sports cars, combining elegant looks with simple, durable mechanical parts and an accessible, wind-in-the-hair driving experience.

WORDS: JACK GROVER PHOTOS: KELSEY AND JIM JUPP ARCHIVE







It really was very appropriate that, by the time MG unveiled its new sports car in 1955, it had used up most of the letters of the alphabet on its previous models. In 1953 had come the Z-type Magnette, which raised the question of what the next MG was going to be called. A new naming scheme was only proper for a car which redefined the identity of MG sports cars.

The new MGA was longer, wider, heavier, more spacious, more comfortable and more refined than any of its MG sports car predecessors. Gone was the pre-war styling, replaced by arrestingly pretty and streamlined, full-width bodywork, sweeping, blended wings, integral headlamps and a slanted grille.

The new body was supported by a brand new

chassis with the seats mounted between, rather than on top of, the rails, giving the car a lower centre of gravity and a low-slung stance. Power now came from a BMC B-series of 1489cc, making 68bhp. The four-speed gearbox was also from the BMC parts bin, bringing with it a remote, floor-mounted gear lever. Faster in acceleration and top speed than the outgoing TF 1500, the MGA was also a vast improvement in terms of handling, road holding, ride and refinement. There was no doubt that the octagon was back and on fighting form.

It was a huge success, commercially and in motorsport. Over 100,000 were built in seven years, meaning it sold double the amount of all the T-Type models and in a production run only half as long. It was especially a phenomenal

success in North America and other export markets, with fewer than 6000 examples being sold on the home market. Today this means that many of the cars available are repatriated examples, either in their original left-hand drive form or subject to a conversion.

In 1956, MG listed an optional extra hard top, with aluminium-framed side screens fitted with sliding Perspex windows. Later that same year MG expanded the MGA line-up by offering a factory Coupé model with a fixed, all-steel roof boasting a wraparound rear window and an enlarged, curved front windscreen, a restyled, Rexine-covered dashboard plus winding side windows, quarterlights and external door latches on the Coupé's redesigned lockable doors, when the drophead version still had detachable

“THE NEW MGA WAS LONGER, WIDER, HEAVIER, MORE SPACIOUS, MORE COMFORTABLE AND MORE REFINED THAN ANY OF ITS MG SPORTS CAR PREDECESSORS.”

The grille of an MGA Mk1 model. Note that it sits flat to the surround.



Perspex/fabric side-screens and a collapsible hood. The Coupé also proved to be fractionally faster and, in testing, showed it could reach the magic 100mph.

With competition from Triumph's TR2, MG had to up its game. Following a successful speed record attempt, using EX181 with a 1500cc version of MG's new engine configuration, the new high-performance 1588cc B-series was introduced in 1958, with a cutting-edge, all-new aluminium alloy cylinder head featuring twin overhead camshafts. With the addition of raised compression ratio this produced 108bhp, giving the MGA Twin-Cam a top speed of 115mph and a 0-60mph time of 9.1 seconds; both figures being superior to those of the more expensive Austin-Healey 100/6 offered at the same time. The Twin-Cam also featured four-wheel Dunlop disc →



Mk1 MGA.



causing fuel in the carburettor bowls to froth and lean out the mixture; a problem addressed in the years since by the introduction of flexible carburettor mounts. Today, while a Twin-Cam model still requires care and specialist attention, it also offers by far the finest MGA driving experience.

From May 1959 the standard MGA model received the same 1588cc block as the Twin-Cam and became the MGA 1600, taking power to 79.5bhp. At the same time front disc brakes became a standard fit. The MGA 1600 also gained new side/tail lamp units with separate indicator lamps front and rear. A small number of 1600s (70 Roadsters and 12 Coupés) were built to 1600 Deluxe specification, with the high-performance model's four-wheel disc brakes and unique wheels.

The 1600 MkII MGA was introduced in the spring of 1961 for the final year of production. The engine was enlarged again to 1622cc and gained a new, large-port cylinder head, taking power to 90bhp and top speed to 105mph. These cars also had a higher-g geared final drive for more relaxed cruising as the model was never available from the factory with an overdrive. The key visual identifier of a MkII is the inset grille with vertical, rather than sloping, bars. At the rear are combined indicator/tail/brake lamp units from an early Mini but mounted horizontally. Some MkIIs (313 in total) were built to Deluxe spec., fitted with Dunlop knock-off steel wheels.

brakes (standard MGAs started off with drums on each corner) and Dunlop knock-off ventilated steel wheels. 2111 Twin-Cam MGA left the factory in both Roadster and Coupé styles, of which 323 were made of the latter.

Unfortunately the twin-cam engine proved prone to severe problems with piston failure,

detonation and poor running. High oil consumption, overheating and issues with the valve train also surfaced. The mechanical issues were solved, but the running problems continued so the MGA Twin-Cam was dropped in 1960. A major problem proved to be the unknown issue of high-frequency vibrations



Luggage space is an issue, as the spare wheel takes up most of the boot.



BODY AND CHASSIS

Virtually all surviving MGAs will now have had some sort of restorative work carried out, although those that were restored in the 1980s may now be seeing age-related problems surface for a second time round. Beware of accident damage and poor-quality restoration work, usually more difficult to put right than 'simple' rust in an otherwise decent car.

The door pillars (ahead of and behind the doors), sills and lower part of the front wings are the main areas to check for corrosion in the body. The wings should be inspected around the headlamp bezels, the wheel arches and the seam where the wing joins the central bonnet/

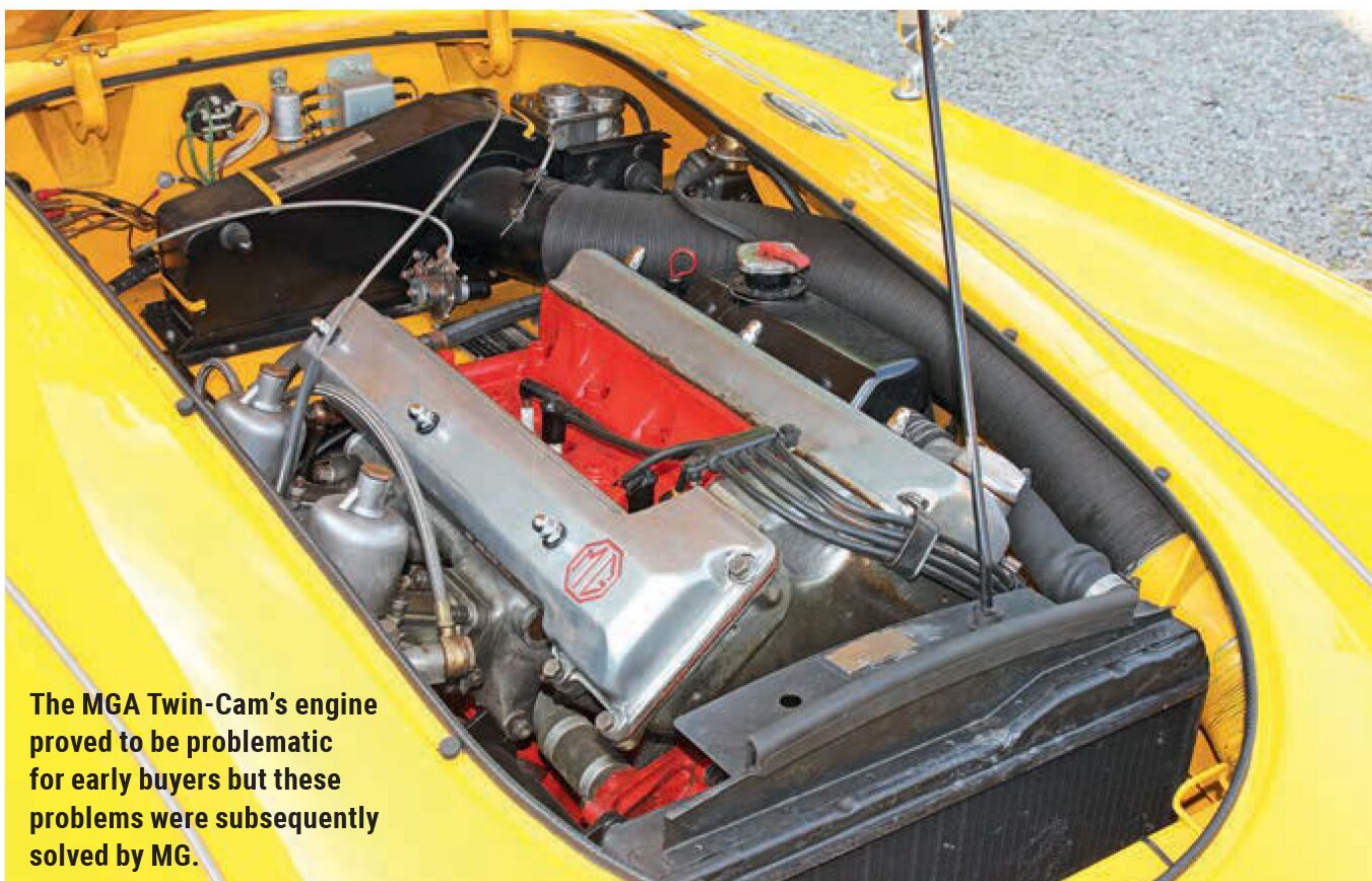
grille surround panel. The rear wings are prone to rust in the tapering section aft of the rear wheel. Check from outside and from within the boot compartment. The doors are aluminium alloy on steel frames so are prone to electrolytic corrosion, especially around the lower edge. The cockpit floor consists of wooden boards supported on steel rails; both parts are prone to rotting out with age so check the integrity on both sides. Also try and check the state of the two battery trays under the rear seat/luggage compartment.

The MGA's flat sides and flowing wing line makes spotting wonky gaps or badly-fitting panels quite easy. Fit and finish from the factory

were decent and a high-quality restoration, with good parts and attentive work, can achieve excellent results. An issue with a lot of MGA body panels is that, while they are available, they often need a lot of nipping, tucking and trimming to obtain a truly good fit, which adds to the cost. It's not worth buying a very sub-standard car and then paying a specialist to put it right. If a professional resto is your goal then buy an MGA that's spot-on in the first place. On Coupé models specifically, check the seam where the rear of the roof joins the rear deck of the body as this also breeds rust and is very expensive to rectify.

The chassis needs to be checked in its main rails under the bulkhead and where the body sills attach, as well as around the hangers for the rear springs. The inside face of the main rails under the floorboards is also a rust trap. Many (if not most) cars have had repairs made to their chassis to put right rot or crash damage. Be sure that the work has been done to a good standard and that the chassis is still straight and true – make sure that the bumpers sit level with the ground, that the wheels are in line and that the bonnet and boot lid sit squarely and evenly in their apertures.

New chassis are not available complete, and only a few repair sections have been remanufactured so availability is patchy. This means that chassis repairs require a lot of expensive fabrication. As with the body, it is not worth taking on an MGA with a tatty chassis unless you are looking for a long-term project to test either your DIY skills or your bank account. Brightwork such as the bumpers, grilles, air vents and badges are available new, but quality varies so check the fit and finish of such items. →



The MGA Twin-Cam's engine proved to be problematic for early buyers but these problems were subsequently solved by MG.

As with many early MGs, getting into the Coupé is not easy but, once inside, the cabin feels amazingly spacious, with curved screen and wraparound rear screen.



ENGINE

The standard B-series engine is well-known to generations of mechanics and is found in a vast range of classic vehicles, so spares and knowledge aren't an issue. It really only needs to be checked for age-related faults. Oil pressure should be at least 50psi with a warm engine at cruising speeds, dropping to no less than 20psi at idle. The pressure should rise smartly after start-up. Watch for blue exhaust smoke from worn bores and listen for rumbling sounds from the bottom end when under heavy load or acceleration. Beware of loud rattles from the timing chain.

Modest drips or oozes of oil from the underside are expected but oil raining off the bell-housing or chassis rails is a sign of a tired engine, especially if accompanied by heavy breathing from the oil filler cap. Running issues are usually down to tuning or balancing problems with the twin SU carbs, which can be rebuilt and set up for around £200. Plenty of MGAs have had performance upgrades or had later 1.8-litre engines from an MGB installed (sometimes with other upgrades on top of that). These aren't essential as the standard engine is perfect for touring and occasional use.

The Twin-Cam is a lovely engine when in good form, and feels much more modern and zingy than the B-series. However, it is a specialist item and although the failures that blighted it when new have been eradicated, it still needs correct set-up and maintenance to avoid trouble. If your heart is set on a Twin-Cam, the engine has to be spot-on. Rebuilds can cost £10,000-£12,000. Half-hearted or botched rebuilds can be a nightmare to live with and to sort out. You want to see proof that a rebuilt engine has used the improved tappets, modified valve springs and steel valve seats. With an alloy head on an iron block, the cooling system



The Mk1 MGA grille slats, on the car on the left, sit flush to its grille surround. The slats on the Mk2's grille, right, are more vertical and recess into the grille's base.

and the condition of the coolant have to be first rate. Any signs of oil burning, high crankcase pressure, slapping timing chains or knocks and rattles from the innards should be a reason for rejection. A full and recent service history from a reputable specialist is ideal.

TRANSMISSION

The gearbox is fundamentally strong but suffers from inadequate and fast-wearing cone-type synchromesh which can lead to crunchy down-changes (especially on third gear, which gets the most abuse) and, at high mileages, droning bearings. Some chatter from the gears in neutral is normal for all but the freshest boxes but whining or shrieking from the bearings under way is not good. However, don't let a tired gearbox put you off an otherwise good car, as it's not difficult or expensive to track down a replacement unit that would be at least an

improvement. Alternatively the parts are readily available for a DIY rebuild and this is a fairly simple job if you have a decent set of tools and the right workshop manual. If not, specialists can overhaul a box for around £400-£500.

Some MGAs will have the later MGB box (especially those with an MGB engine as well) which is basically the same unit but with stronger internals. These can also be fitted with overdrive which is a welcome feature for using an MGA today. You may also find cars fitted with five-speed gearboxes, either Ford Sierra or Mazda MX-5 sourced, which also make a big improvement for not only giving the car extra 'legs' but for having a smoother, easier shift and full synchromesh too.

Problems with the final drive are rare and rebuilds/replacements are easily and cheaply available. Just look out for excessively noisy or rough-sounding bearings. Check for excess free-play in the pinion gear or propshaft joints by coming on/off the throttle a few times and listening for clonking sounds. This is not a major problem but is undesirable and a good bargaining point.

SUSPENSION, STEERING AND BRAKES

The front suspension consists of lower wishbones carrying the spring to top-mounts on the chassis, while an upright kingpin carries the wheel hub and connects to the top link, which is also the arm of the lever-arm damper. The main issue is wear in the kingpin, which usually needs renewing every 50,000 miles or so, but can be much shorter-lived if regular greasing is neglected; there are three grease points per side. Watch for wobbling or knocking through the front wheels and excessive play at the steering wheel when under way. Ideally you want to get the front wheels off the ground and rock them in both dimensions to check for slack in the →



MGA body-coloured dashboard differs from the Coupé version, with the latter being trimmed as well as having wrapped ends that curve under the A-pillar.



ABOVE: This 1960 MGA 1600 example sports a 1588cc B-series engine which produced a claimed 79.5bhp. It has SU twin carbs and aftermarket air filters.

from lack of use, leading to rust, perished seals and flexible hoses. On cars with rear drums, beware of signs of oil getting into the drum from failed axle tube seals. The master cylinder does double-duty for the brakes and the clutch, so has to be in good condition with regard to its seals and the cleanliness of the fluid within.

INTERIOR AND ELECTRICS

In contrast to its successors, with their vinyl seats and crackle-paint dashboards, the MGA's cockpit was very well trimmed, which is one of its great attractions. A well-kept interior is a major plus-point; a shabby one will cost a lot to bring back to its original glory. This goes all the more for a Coupé.

There is also a difference between an MGA with a good interior (many examples) and the correct interior (surprisingly few) and the latter fetch a significant premium. Many cars will have had their original leather seats or dash coverings replaced by plastic at some point in



kingpin. This also lets you check for wear in the wishbone trunnions, which is less common but more difficult to fix. Uneven tyre wear, or wear on the tyre shoulders, also point to excessive slack in the front suspension.

The rear suspension just needs checking that the leafs themselves haven't rusted into a single mass (shown by an overly harsh and jolty ride if it's not visually obvious), that the springs haven't sagged (MGAs should sit level and certainly not tail-down) and that the bushes at each end of the spring and in the rear hanger are in good condition.

There are lever-arm dampers on each corner. While not as effective as modern dampers, they should still bring any body motion to a stop within a single up/down cycle when a corner is bounced. Watch for leaks from the arm spindle seals or the filler caps. New or properly rebuilt damper units are not expensive or difficult to replace.

The steering rarely gives problems. While heavy at low speeds, it should lighten up once

on the move and always be pleasingly accurate. Excessive free play is usually down to worn balljoints rather than the steering system itself. Originally MGAs had joints which needed regular greasing but many (if not most) cars will have been fitted with modern 'sealed for life' types. If the older types are present, check they're not running dry.

In terms of brakes, the early, all-drum system is the easiest to deal with but offers only adequate stopping power. The all-disc Twin-Cam and Deluxe system is excellent, but is harder to set up and keep right (and some parts are expensive these days) while the front disc/rear drum system is perfectly acceptable on both counts. Many early MGAs have been upgraded with front discs, and kits to fit rear discs (but not the official Twin-Cam system) have been available for many years. In all cases check for vibration, grabbing and noise from warped discs/drums and look for leaks from the wheel cylinders/calipers. Discs should be checked for excessive wear or rust. Most MGAs suffer

their lives. When new, colour-coded interiors were also available but many cars have now lost their colourful cockpits in whole or in part (the standard black trim parts are easier to find and cheaper to buy) and a car that's been resprayed may no longer have an interior of the correct colour. MGAs with colour-matched interiors of the correct shade, and with all parts present and correct, are rare and command higher prices.

The hood on an MGA is a 'bundle of sticks' rather than a true convertible and many owners rarely use it, relying instead on the easier-to-use tonneau cover. Check that the hood hasn't become moth-eaten or damaged and that all the parts of the frame are there and not bent or broken. Be sure that the side-screens are present and fit properly. New hoods are not too expensive (£500) but reproduction frame and side-screen parts are.

The electrical system on an MGA is simple and straightforward. Check that the charge warning light goes off at all but a low idle, and that the headlamps stay bright. While most of

the electrical components are from the BMC parts bin and so readily available, some of the interior switches are MGA-specific and so must be present and correct. Check the condition of the wiring loom and its connections, as these degrade with age and can cause all sorts of headaches, although new looms are available and not too difficult to fit.

WHAT TO PAY?

Coupé models top out at the lowest prices, with a really good example rarely commanding more than £25,000 and an average one available for £15,000. A standard Roadster goes up to about £35,000 – perhaps more for a really first-rate restoration – while the more everyday cars are currently sitting at around £18,000-£22,000. Sorted Twin-Cams are expensive, with the very best worth up to £50,000 and a budget of at least £25,000 needed for a decent one. Twin-Cam Coupés are worth only slightly less than the Roadster variants. Deluxe-spec 1600s and

MkIIs slot in between the Twin-Cam and the standard cars as long as they're genuine and not reproductions. Viable projects start at around £5000 for a B-series car and £10,000 for a Twin-Cam. ■

USEFUL MGA CONTACTS

Spares and cars:

Brown and Gammons - www.ukmgparts.com

Oselli - www.oselli.com

Former Glory - www.classicmg.co.uk

Beach Hill garage - www.beechhillgarage.com

Spares:

MGOC Spares - www.mgocspares.co.uk

Moss - www.moss-europe.co.uk

Rimmer Bros - www.rimmerbros.com

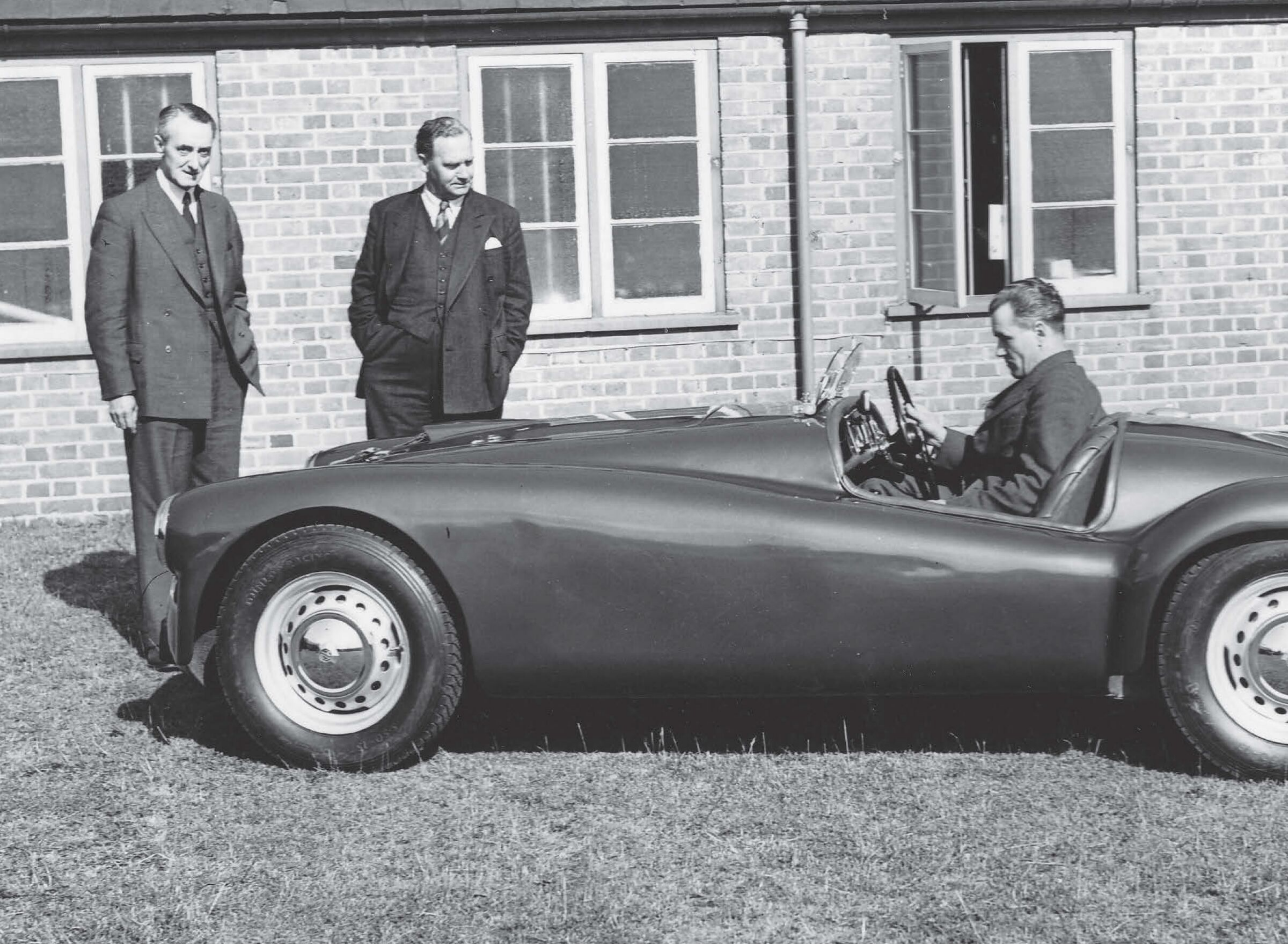
Vitesse - www.vitesse-ltd.com

NTG Motor Services - www.mgbits.com



The MkII MGA on the left can be distinguished from the MkI MGA on the right due to its rear light units which are the same as those on a Mk1 Mini.

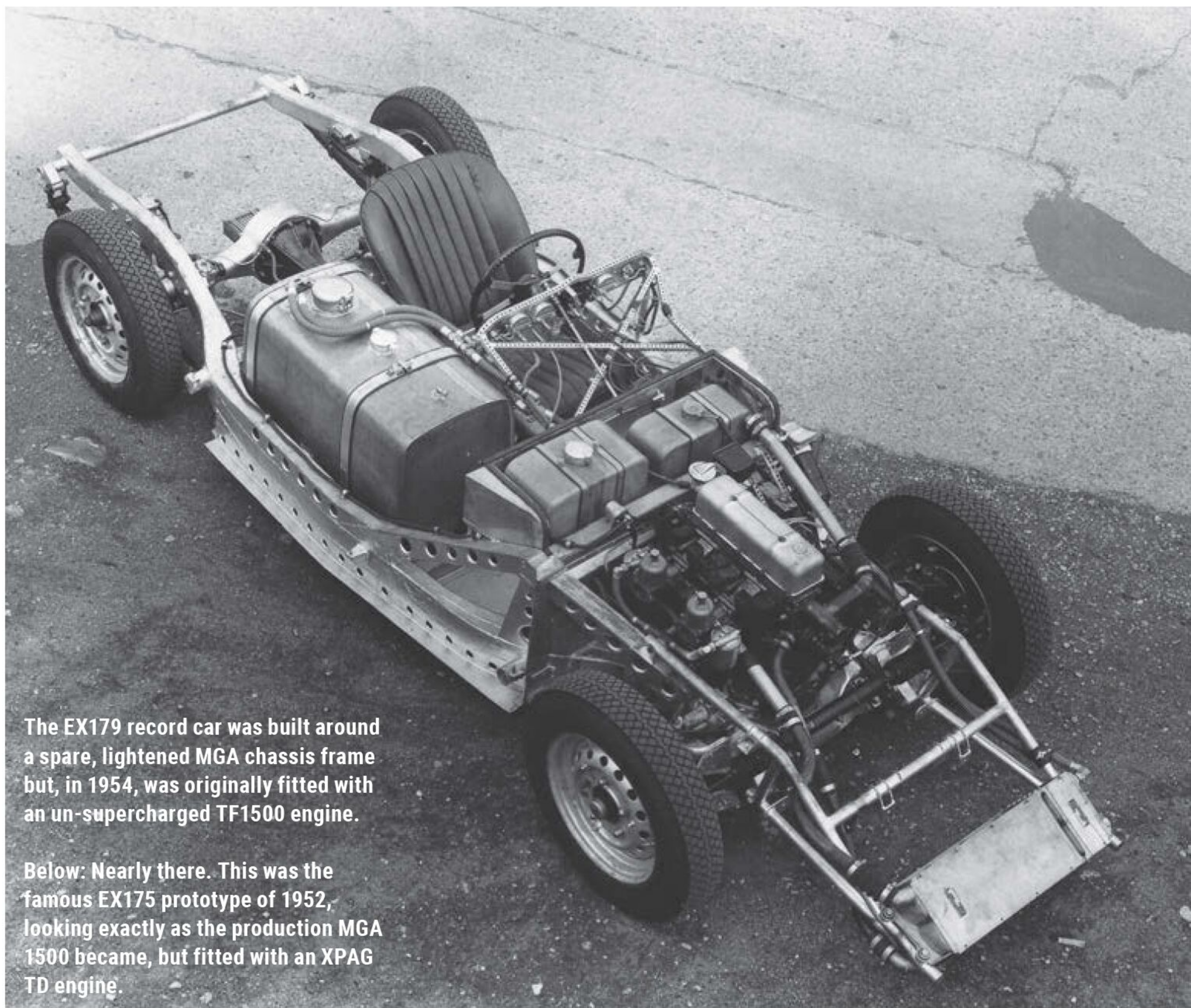
An MGA? Well, not really, as this is the 'George Phillips' TD, which had been rebodied for Le Mans in 1951. Note that there is a lack of a door!



INVENTING THE MGA

The MGA was Abingdon's greatest post-war sports car. Produced from 1955 to 1962, over 100,000 were built – of which some were very special.

WORDS: GRAHAM ROBSON PHOTOS: GRAHAM ROBSON ARCHIVE



The EX179 record car was built around a spare, lightened MGA chassis frame but, in 1954, was originally fitted with an un-supercharged TF1500 engine.

Below: Nearly there. This was the famous EX175 prototype of 1952, looking exactly as the production MGA 1500 became, but fitted with an XPAG TD engine.



This, I promise you, is not meant to be a routine history of the MGA, which we all know was a great car and a huge success. This time around, I thought I would bring you some of the influences which led to the launch of the new car and how they affected its public image; also some often-ignored off-shoots of the mainstream design and some of the events surrounding the MGA's remarkable seven year career. It's important to remember that the MGA, which went on sale in 1955, was rather different from the car which Abingdon had conceived some years before.

Let's start, then, with this pretty little one-off machine. Superficially it might look just

like an MGA but, under the skin, it was pure race-specification MG TD. Abingdon built it to make George Phillips' private Le Mans entry of 1951 a better aerodynamic proposition than it had been in 1950. Registered UMG 400, it could reach 116mph and lapped Le Mans at 80mph average – before the engine blew.

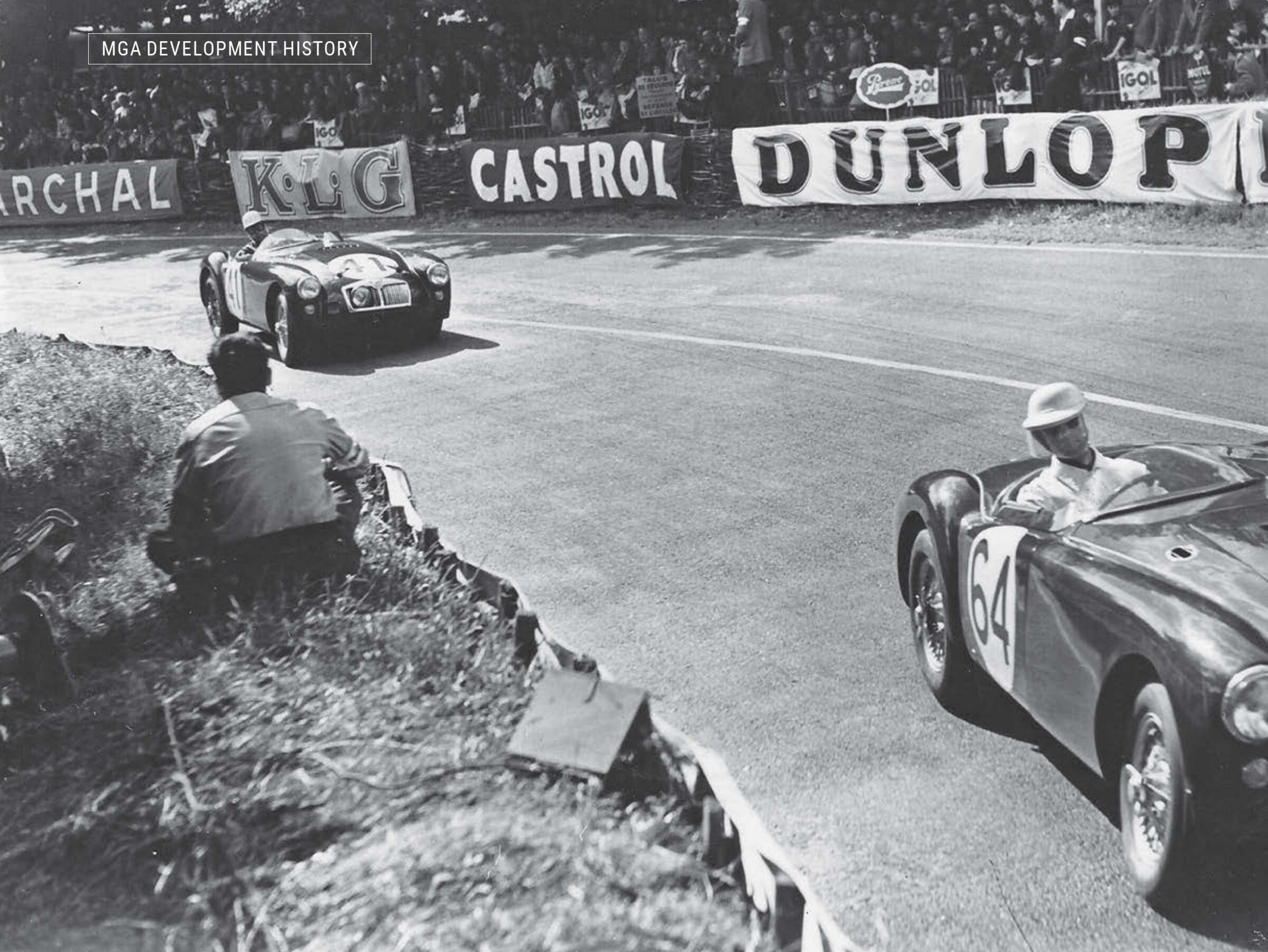
In some ways, though, this was definitely the inspiration for the MGA's real ancestor, EX175.

Irritated by the fact that UMG 400's chassis had made its race driver sit up too far into the air-stream, chief engineer Syd Enever then sat down and drew up a new chassis frame – lower, wider, and sturdier than before. He saw it equipped with the latest in TD running gear (including the 1,250cc

XPAG power unit) and had his team craft a production-style evolution of UMG 400's body. He put it on the road, registered HMO 6, by the end of 1952.

Then came one of MG general manager John Thornley's biggest disappointments: in the autumn of 1952, he took the car to Longbridge to offer it for approval to his new BMC boss, Leonard Lord, but found it rejected because Lord had just given the thumbs-up to the new Austin-Healey 100. If the demonstration had taken place three months earlier it might have been a different story.

Two years later, with the EX175 project on the back-burner, Abingdon decided to build a new-generation record car, for use on the Bonneville Salt Flats in the USA in 1954, →



This was how Abingdon re-prepared an EX182 Le Mans prototype, with low-mounted headlamps, to see if the aerodynamics were improved.

calling it EX179.

Aiming to do everything better than their famous EX135 and using the 'waste not, want not' principal, they based the entire car on a surplus chassis frame from the EX175 project, lightened it considerably, but used a TF1500 engine as the original power plant. EX179 was enormously successful, being re-engineered and re-engined several times in the next few years. It still exists and is displayed at the British Motor Museum, Gaydon.

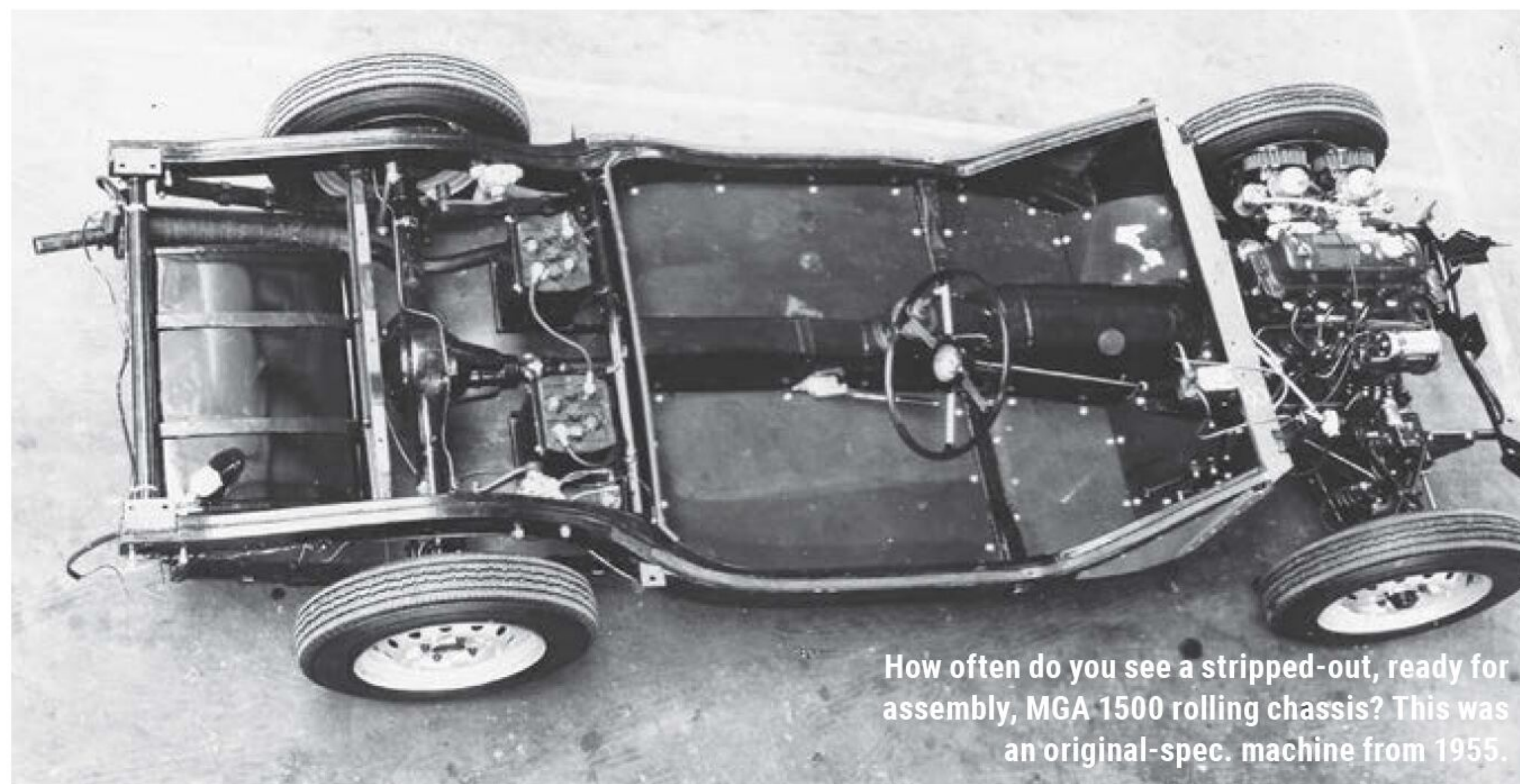
Even before the MGA was launched, Abingdon found time to race prototypes at Le Mans, with cars which looked like production cars. Later in the year one of them was re-designed with low-line front wings and repositioned headlamps.

Three prototype EX182 cars (light-alloy-bodied MGA prototypes) competed at Le Mans in 1955.

Two of them finished fifth and sixth in their capacity class, with the fastest averaging 86.17mph (and covering 2,082.78 miles). Unhappily, Dick Jacobs' car crashed out, →



Two of the three EX182 prototypes seen racing at Le Mans: the Lund/Waeffler car is powering ahead of the Lockett/Miles car.



How often do you see a stripped-out, ready for assembly, MGA 1500 rolling chassis? This was an original-spec. machine from 1955.

“TWO OF THEM FINISHED FIFTH AND SIXTH IN THEIR CAPACITY CLASS, WITH THE FASTEST AVERAGING 86.17MPH...”



LBL 303 was the third of the EX182 prototypes which raced at Le Mans, this car finishing 17th. The driver is Harold Holt of The Autocar magazine.



The MGA Coupé, complete with a steel bubble-top and the luxury of wind-up windows. It was a fantastic car but, sadly, it was noisy and rather hot in that cabin so it didn't sell well.

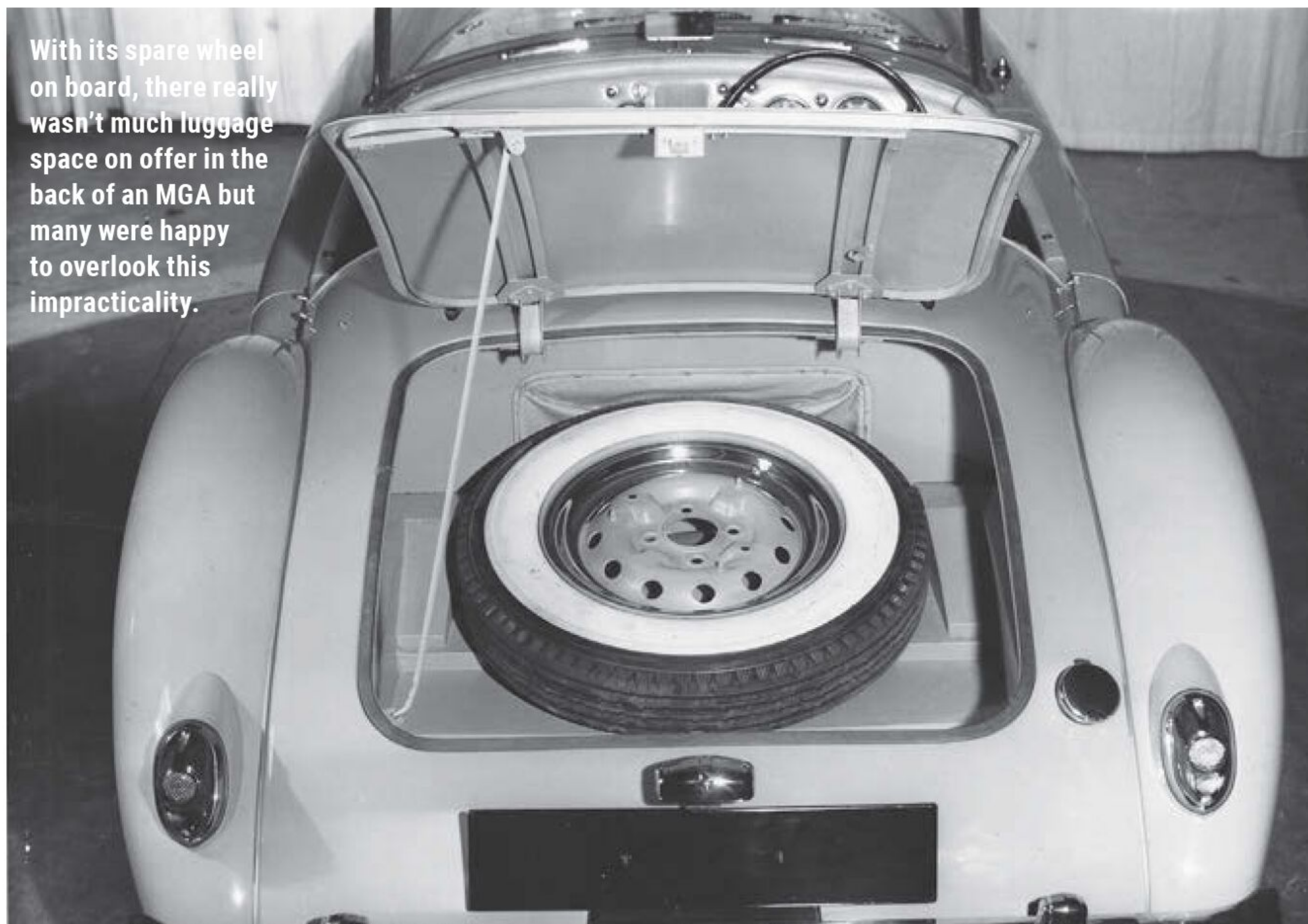
severely injuring the driver, but thankfully he made a good recovery.

MG was so proud of the initial performance of these cars (which was made in the full glare of publicity, even before the MGA production machine had been revealed) that they were happy to loan the class sixth car (the first driver of which was Ted Lund), to *The Autocar*, whose driver, Harold Holt, wrote a rather breathless test in the issue of 29 July 1955 when LBL 303 had already been prepared for the Alpine Rally, subsequently cancelled.

Among Harold's comments: "The suspension and roadholding are of a very high order... as the speed rises the suspension is remarkable..."

The MGA's chassis is rarely seen. This is the complete rolling chassis of a 1955-6 model ready for the Morris Bodies Branch, and the supplied bodyshell to be lowered into place. The two six-volt batteries were located →

With its spare wheel on board, there really wasn't much luggage space on offer in the back of an MGA but many were happy to overlook this impracticality.





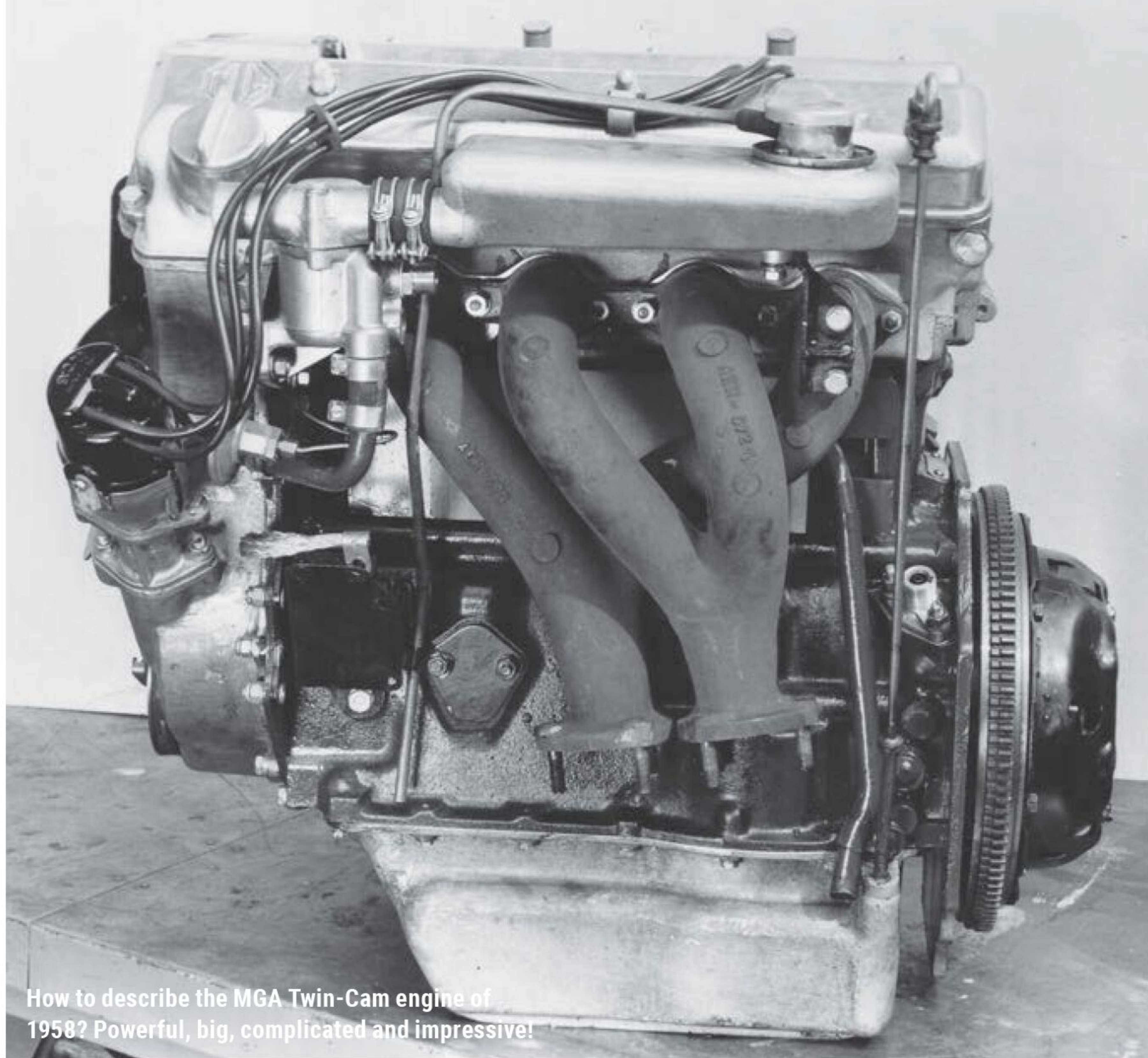
“CLEARLY THE ALL-NEW MGA WAS SET TO BE A SUCCESS FOR 13,410 WERE MADE IN THE FIRST FULL YEAR OF PRODUCTION (1956).”

Ted Lund's MGA Twin-Cam was raced at Le Mans in 1959, 1960 and 1961. It is pictured here in its 1960 incarnation which, equipped with a 1762cc engine capacity, went on to be triumphant in its class. Note the quirky under-grille spotlamps.





MG's Abingdon factory looking as busy as usual in 1955/56. We are able to see MGAs on one assembly line, ZA Magnettes on another and Riley Pathfinders behind the pillars.



How to describe the MGA Twin-Cam engine of 1958? Powerful, big, complicated and impressive!

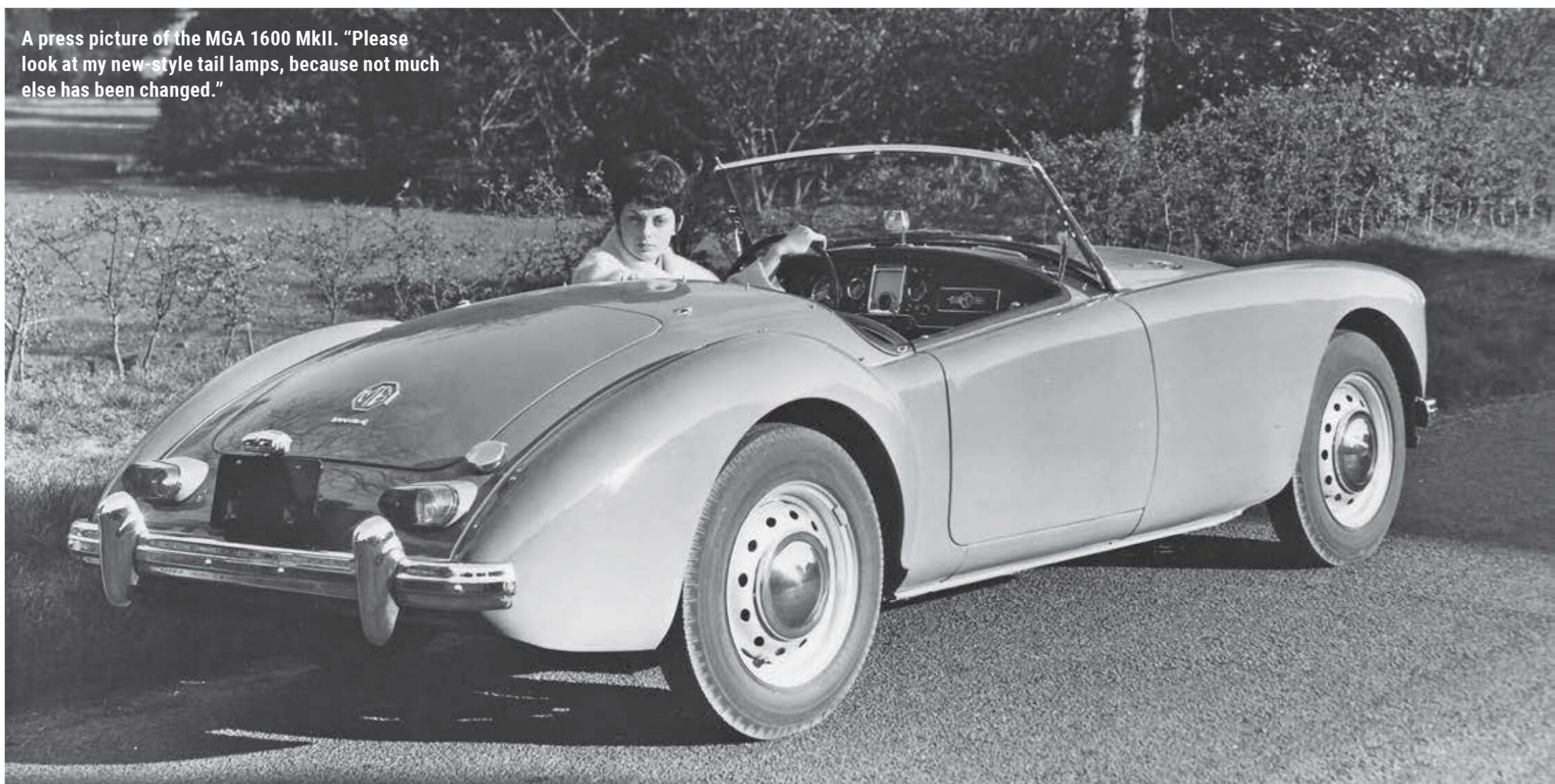
customers were trading up from a TD or a TF where there was no enclosed luggage space of any sort.

In any case, with a British sale price set at £844 in 1955, which was only £64 more than that of the final TF, and no less than £78 less than the price of a Triumph TR3, no one seemed to be complaining. Clearly the all-new MGA was set to be a success for 13,410 were made in the first full year (1956) and 20,571 followed in 1957, which completely outstripped the figures ever achieved by the TD or the TF.

Success like this, of course, was significantly enhanced by the arrival of the MGA Coupé in the autumn of 1956, with its neat steel bubble-top roof, allied to doors which had wind-down window glass.

Not only this, but the windscreen was larger, and bowed, also there was a wrap-around rear glass window too, external handles for the doors and opening quarter-lights in the newly-glazed doors. All →

“AT ITS PEAK IN 1959, MGA ASSEMBLY EXCEEDED 23,000 A YEAR, ALL ACHIEVED WITHOUT ANY POWER ASSISTANCE ON THE ASSEMBLY LINES.”



A press picture of the MGA 1600 MkII. “Please look at my new-style tail lamps, because not much else has been changed.”

All in all, 101,081 MGAs were built, with the 100,000th going down the Abingdon assembly lines in March 1962. It was on its way to the USA.



this made such a car, perhaps ordered with the optional wire-spoke wheels, look very desirable. Although there were some complaints about the ventilation and the noise inside the cabin, it was a style which would persist until the MGA was finally discontinued six years later.

Although the MGA Twin-Cam, which first appeared in the showrooms in 1958, was not a commercial success, the engine itself could be made remarkably race-reliable in so many ways – not only for rallying and long-distance record breaking but for use at Le Mans in the prestigious 24-hour race.

**“THE MGA HAD
BECOME ABINGDON’S
MOST OUTSTANDING
SUCCESS...”**



23,000 a year, all achieved without any power assistance in the assembly lines, which used only 'man power' to achieve movement.

Even so, what a pity it was that the rugged-looking Twin-Cam engine of 1,588cc was not a lasting success.

Designed and developed at Morris Engines in Coventry, it had a breathing layout very similar to that of the Jaguar XK and Coventry-Climax FPF power units, both of which were also Coventry-based. Unhappily, in detail it did not achieve their sort of reliability, it seemed to have a very high-octane requirement and, after a series of service complaints from the USA, it was discontinued. Only 2,111 Twin-Cam-engined MGAs were produced.

By the early 1960s, work on the MGA's replacement, the MGB, was well-advanced but there was just time for one minor re-vamp to be made. The MGA, as the 1600, had been built from 1959 to 1961 (during which time 31,501 cars were produced), but competition from rivals like Triumph (TR3A) and Sunbeam (Alpine) was intense. The final update therefore was the MGA 1600Mk II, which was revealed in the UK in June 1961.

The major update was the enlargement of the engine from 1,588cc to 1,622cc, the increase in engine power to 86bhp, and a top speed over 100mph.

By 1962 everyone, including MG enthusiasts, seemed to realise that the MGA's career was drawing gracefully towards its close, though demand never dropped away. Even so, at the end of March, BMC was happy to announce that the 100,000th example had just been built at Abingdon, this being specially finished in gold paint, with cream trim, chrome-plated wire-spoke wheels and white-wall tyres. It was immediately shipped out across the Atlantic for exhibition at the New York Motor Show. All in all, more than 70,000 MGAs had been exported to the USA since the summer of 1955 and the last cars of all left the Abingdon factory in July 1955, by which time production of the new MGB was beginning to ramp up.

At this time, by any standards, the MGA had become MG's most outstanding success, both in sales and in profits made. One wonders just how much more outstanding these achievements would have been if Len Lord had approved the prototype which he first saw in 1952. ■

Even though BMC could not officially enter the Le Mans race at the end of the 1950s (following the horrendous accidents during the 1955 race the BMC Board had banned entry to Le Mans) ways were found for Abingdon to build a new car, with an all-aluminium body shell, for Ted Lund to use. In 1959 this 130bhp-engined car had to retire from the race after it collided with a dog at high speed and ruined its cooling system. In 1960 it was rebuilt with a special coupé-style (including some coupé panels and doors), won its class, averaged 91 mph and was seen to achieve more than 130mph. In 1961 it

lapped at 101.66mph before the engine failed.

Right from the start the MGA was a great sales success, as any photograph of the Abingdon assembly lines made clear.

In its first year the MGA had its own dedicated assembly line which ran alongside that of the MG ZA Magnette saloon, and another for the Riley Pathfinder, but from 1958/1959 there was a complete upheaval, with Riley and MG saloon assembly moving out, Austin-Healey 100-Six and Sprite moving in, and Abingdon moving up towards the construction of 50,000 vehicles a year. At its peak in 1959, MGA assembly exceeded

MGA PRODUCTION 1955 TO 1962

MGA 1500	58,750
MGA 1600 MkI	31,501
MGA 1600 MkII	8,719
MGA Twin Cam	2,111
Total:	101,081

A GRADE

We revisit an affordable entry into the glamorous world of 1950s sports cars courtesy of the last separate-chassis MG.

WORDS: PAUL WAGER PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT WOODS







A recent session updating the price guide in our sister weekly title *Classic Car Buyer* prompted a discussion about how values of 1950s cars have inched up noticeably in the last few years – especially for anything with sporting pretensions. An XK Jaguar is an ambitious goal these days and even a Frogeye Sprite is now an expensive toy, but in comparison the MGA still seems like an attainable proposition. Its elegant curves are every bit the equal of the XK120 and although it may not offer the 120mph pace which gave the Jaguar its name, it still offers enough performance to be fun. In comparison with many of its contemporaries, the MGA is a much easier car to drive and also feels surprisingly modern in many respects. There's a delicacy to the controls which you won't find in a Triumph TR3 of the same vintage or even the Jaguar which can be hard work to get the most from.

Like so many significant classic cars though, the MGA was born out of adversity and indeed almost never happened at all. The accepted version of events is that although MG was desperate to introduce a new model to reduce the reliance on the T-Series cars which were based on a prewar design, BMC's then-chief Leonard Lord wouldn't sanction the project. In what seems like an entirely predictable turn of events though, the ageing style of the T-Series

cars meant that as the 1950s dawned, MG sales rapidly began to tail off in the face of increasingly modern competition. Although much evolved, the T-Series cars looked like a reminder of the prewar era rather than a pointer towards a bold new high-tech future.

When the world's first jet airliner, the De Havilland Comet entered service in 1952, the need to update the company's sports car offering became obvious and it was at this point that the first prototype was displayed to Lord. This essentially consisted of a sleek new body, originally penned by Syd Enever for a Le Mans entry the previous year, on a TD chassis. The timing was unfortunate for MG since Lord had just signed off on a deal with his new best friend Donald Healey which would result in the Austin-Healey 100 and later the Sprite, so he didn't want to create an in-house challenger. MG sales continued to slide though, so just a year later Lord backtracked and gave the green light to the project which was intended to be the first in a 'new line' of MG cars – hence the 'A' to signify the beginning of a series.

Development work proceeded at a brisk pace and the result was that a show car was ready for the MG stand at the Frankfurt show in 1955. Enever's neat bodywork sat on a chassis featuring more widely spaced frame rails which allowed the driving position to be lowered between the chassis members for a more modern

look, while the suspension was largely lifted from the TF. Under the bonnet though, Leonard Lord's indecision had provided an unexpected bonus and one which would give the new MG crucial showroom appeal. Gone was the old XPAG engine and in came the newly-developed B-Series as used in BMC's saloons. In 1489cc form it was good for 68bhp and also meant the unsightly bonnet bulge needed for the older engine could be removed.

For 1956 this was updated to 72bhp and in July 1959 the car gained the 1588cc version of the engine which was good for 80bhp and gave the car genuine 100mph pace. In June 1961 capacity jumped up again to 1622cc, providing 93bhp and 102mph, with production finally ending in September 1962.

To drive, the MGA is a curious mix of 1950s and the modern era and it's easy to forget that although it retained a separate chassis design, the MGA was in many other ways a thoroughly modern design at its launch. The doors may be opened by reaching inside and pulling on a cord, yet the latch also features a double safety catch just like a modern car. An MGA roadster of this vintage also uses slot-in side screens with sliding plastic windows instead of wind-up glass windows, but on the other hand the hood – a new item on this car – seals nicely and is no noisier at moderate speed than an MX-5. You sit low in the MGA, but not uncomfortably so and with

the car lacking the high-set tunnel and console typical of more modern sports cars, it feels like a roomier place to be than an MGB for example. The key ignition is paired with a starter button of course and a quick pull has the 1500 motor whirring away happily. On a warm spring day it needs little choke to get into its stride and pulling away I'm reminded of how easy the MGA is to drive – especially this example which benefits from an electronic ignition conversion to even out the power delivery under load. The clutch and gearshift are nicely weighted and although the steering is heavy at parking speeds the big rim gives you the leverage you need. Many cars of this age are physically hard work to drive, but the MGA will seem familiar to anyone who has stepped straight out of a 1990s hatchback.

Before setting off, I remind myself of the MGA gearbox's reputation for fragile synchromesh on second gear which makes it all too easy to crunch when coming down from third unless things are taken slowly or you employ some fancy double-declutching footwork. Rather handily, the same problem also afflicted Alfa Romeo gearboxes and my own Spider has always behaved similarly, so it's become second nature. Joining the traffic on the main road, the MGA acquits itself well. After all, nearly 70bhp from a 1500 engine was pretty good going back in the late '50s and isn't bad today, while the MGA's kerb weight of 890kg makes it



30kg lighter than its successor the MGB which translates into a 0-60mph time of 15 seconds. To put it into perspective, that's just shy of a 1600 Cortina, so the MGA is easily capable of holding its own in modern traffic and is brisk enough to be fun. As with most cars of this age though, getting the most from the MGA demands concentration and some degree of mechanical sympathy: the B-Series has never been a high-revving screamer, but with 77lb.ft torque at 3500rpm is usefully torquy and you do need to be in the right gear at the right time to maintain smooth progress.

Of course these days you don't drive a 1950s car on the ragged edge of its performance envelope and so the enjoyment to be had with a car like this is in the pleasure of driving it properly and B-roads are the MGA's natural habitat. With the crisp B-Series bark echoing

back from the hedges and walls, it's a pleasure at modest speeds and its compact size makes it easy to avoid aggressive oncomers in assorted Chelsea tractors who don't appreciate that you may not want to put two wheels of an immaculate 50-year old car onto the muddy verge.

The 15-inch wheels soak up the potholes better than many a modern car on low profile rubber and the rack and pinion steering makes it easy to place the MGA without the constant sawing at the wheel of a well worn steering box. The modern radial tyres give the car a useful boost in precision over the crossplies it would have worn originally and the age of the basic suspension design is shown only in the bouncy ride over dips in the road surface. In that respect though the MG rides far better than the Triumph TR of the same age which with its short wheel travel →





can be tiring on certain roads.

In fact both cars remain closely matched as an ownership prospect in 2019: the MGA and the TR3 both enjoy superb spares support, largely as a legacy of their export success into the USA and they're both very DIY-friendly, with their simple body-on-chassis construction and saloon car powerplants. The two are even closely matched when it comes to values, with the MGA kicking off at £25,000 and the TR3 at around £20,000 for a presentable and usable example. There are of course legions of Triumph fans out there who will consider the TR to be the more serious sports car and I look forward to the barrage of emails

from disgruntled owners telling me just how wrong I am. But for now I'm sticking to my guns with the verdict that if you want an affordable 1950s sports car with the glamour of the era and the pace to be enjoyable in 21st century daily use then the MGA takes some beating.

BUYING THE MGA

The separate chassis keeps things simple but it's wise to lift the carpet to check on the inside of the main rails where they meet the wooden floor panels. The condition of the tubular chassis crossmembers is also important, as are the metal fuel tank retaining straps and the twin battery

boxes. Doors, bonnet and boot are aluminium so check for dents and also for electrolytic corrosion where they meet the steel bracing. Give the boot and bonnet a squeeze by hand to check that the wooden reinforcement isn't rotten.

If the doors drop on opening, check for hinge wear or suspect rot in the A-pillars. The sills are known to rust, too. Engines are robust (the rare Twin Cam aside) and with regular maintenance will go on and on. Look for oil pressure of 50-60 psi at speed. Gearboxes are never particularly quiet and there's no synchro on first either. Wire wheels were an option and are often retrofitted during restoration, so a clunk when ■



Classic Car Insurance the Goodwood Way



IT'S A PASSION WE SHARE

From the moment we fall in love with the joy of motoring, to owning the models we dreamt of as children, our relationship with cars shifts gear as life unfolds. No matter where you are on the journey, you can rely on Goodwood Classic Solutions to take care of quotes and policies, leaving you to enjoy the ride. Because Goodwood understands that insuring a classic car is about more than just cover; it's about protecting your lifelong passion.

GOOD WOOD

CLASSIC SOLUTIONS

01243 913333
goodwood.com/insurance



KELLY'S CLASSIC

Kelly Lyons has always loved classic cars and Malcolm Robertson teases out the story about how she decided the time was right to buy one...

WORDS AND PICTURES: MALCOLM ROBERTSON



of earlier days when the focus was on design elegance, rather than electronic gadgetry.”

Kelly’s MG journey began over five years ago when she and her husband Glenn, also a classic car enthusiast, were looking at retiring to Norfolk Island, several thousand kilometres off the mid-Australian eastern coast. At that stage, both were working in the Royal Australian Air Force but retirement was beckoning and Norfolk Island was in their blood, literally.

Glenn is originally from the beautiful Norfolk Island which is known for its British penal settlement when the British arrived in 1788, but also the *Bounty* mutineer who took up residence many years after the British had left, and Glenn is a direct descendant of the Pitcairners. Kelly is descended from two convicts who were incarcerated there and bore a daughter (Kelly’s foremother). For both of them, the Island was exerting a strong pull. They had decided to sell up their current cars and buy something cute and classic to potter about the very few miles of roads that Norfolk Island boasts.

“My first thoughts were something like an MG TF or TD, maybe even a TC, and I had been keeping my eye out for one,” says Kelly. “They come from an era we loved and liked to live in our own lives (furnishings, music, attire, etc).”

But Norfolk Island was not to be and the Lyons ended up with their feet firmly in Australia. The idea of a classic car lingered in Kelly’s mind and they continued regularly to attend classic car shows with Glenn’s 1964 Aussie built Falcon XM Coupe.

Kelly says she was still looking at the T-types, or possibly a 1969 Camaro (her favourite) and, in her ignorance of the long model history of MG, she was unaware that the MGA existed. That was until she saw a pair of stylish classic cars, an Austin Healey and an MGA, on a busy Sydney road ahead of her.

“Seeing an MGA on the road was the →

We all have different stories about how we came to own and love MGs. For some, the introduction came as first cars; cheap and cheerful and suitable for a student or apprentice income, cars often traded in or left behind as life and circumstances changed but whose memory lingered. For others they were the cars that couldn’t be afforded when they were new. In later life, owners previously thwarted can indulge.

And for some, ownership of a classic

car is often driven by that tinkering urge nurtured from a young age by Meccano kits and Matchbox models. They are unfazed by being stranded on the side of the road with their toolkit out and hands grubby. For many others, however, it is simply an urge to drive something different, preferably something that isn’t going to break down.

“I have always loved classic cars,” enthuses Kelly Lyons. “Everything from the classic muscle cars, like the Chevy Camaro, to Morris Minors... I love them. They remind me so much



defining moment. I truly fell in love," she says with a wistful smile. "The MGA was so beautiful, so sleek and feminine, sporty and curvy. I was smitten!"

And so the search for a well-presented MGA was on, not exactly fast and furious but, over the next four years, she looked at MGAs in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne, finally selecting the car you see in these photos (a 1959 MGA 1600, car number 8/71423/560, engine number 16GAU/2834) from an older gentleman in Melbourne who had decided to sell it after many years' ownership.

As many readers will know, when it was introduced in 1955, the MGA was truly a defining creation for MG. Suddenly, here was a car with up-to-the-minute styling rivalling Jaguar's XK models and anything the Italians could produce in looks. And while many love the old "square-rigger" styling of all the previous MG models, by 1955 even the sleeker TF was looking quite dated, with its design clearly dating back to 1932.

The MGA also introduced new BMC mechanical components to MG sports cars: the robust B-series engine, a slick new gearbox and a host of other features. Importantly, for today's owners in Australia and North America, at last here was a car that could cruise comfortably all day at 80 mph with the engine turning over at a much more reasonable rate than the superseded TF1500, whose old XPEG motor



was ran at over 5,000rpm at a modest 70mph. No wonder five-speed conversion kits are so popular on the T-series cars these days.

"I think it's important to do your homework so, when you do find a suitable car, you almost immediately know that she is the one. A bit like choosing a husband," says Kelly, with a cheeky glance across at Glenn.

In the case of their chosen MGA, the car was gleaming in BRG paintwork in a carpeted, double garage alongside a matching BRG XJ6 Jaguar. The previous owner clearly knew how to look after both and the MGA passed all Kelly's inspections of its critical points. It had a special place in the seller's life as it reminded him of his late wife and the deal for Kelly to become the car's new custodian was welcome but somewhat emotional. "I christened her Ivy," says Kelly, with a smile. "She was exactly the colour of that lovely vine and she deserved





Kelly's plans include retrimming the MGA's interior in tan leather. The three-spoke wood-rim wheel adds a little extra class.



a name.”

As it turned out, Australian MGA Register records (see footnote) show that Ivy was one of a batch of eight CKD MGAs collated on 3 July 1959 at Cowley, UK, and dispatched to Australia on 10 July the same year. She had been assembled by Pressed Metal Corporation at Enfield, in Sydney, on behalf of BMC Australia, in mid-December 1959 and sold new on Christmas Eve 1959 to W.H. Ashley in Sydney. MGAs were in high demand in 1959 so they did not stay on the showroom floor for long. Ivy would have been a stunning Christmas present. Kelly likes to think her first owner was a woman, surprised on Christmas Eve by an extraordinary present from her loving husband.

In the 1950s and 1960s, BMC Australia had its own palette of colours for the CKD cars and for those built in Australia. Some snappy Australian names were made up for some of the colours to give a local flavour while still following the colours offered on the same cars in England. Ivy's original colour was *Bardiman Grey*, almost an Old English White, and her upholstery was red with light grey piping. Aussies like their light-coloured cars (they stay cooler in the summer) and *Bardiman Grey* was quite common on Australian MGAs. The Register doesn't know when Ivy was repainted but her current British Racing Green paintwork was not introduced on the MGA →

until sometime in early 1960. To Kelly this is unimportant.

“I like that she is painted an original colour but I’m not too fussed that she is not, in herself, original to the letter,” she says. “I do understand but you can get too obsessive about originality. She still has her original engine which is important, I think, but I’m very happy with her BRG colour scheme. It’s one of the nicest on the MGA.”

At the time Ivy was purchased in 2018, Glenn and Kelly were living in Sydney and Ivy was trucked to Sydney by a company who subsequently did a considerable amount of damage to her bonnet and mudguard. A loading ramp was dropped straight onto her front end and someone had managed to jimmy off the MG grille badge.

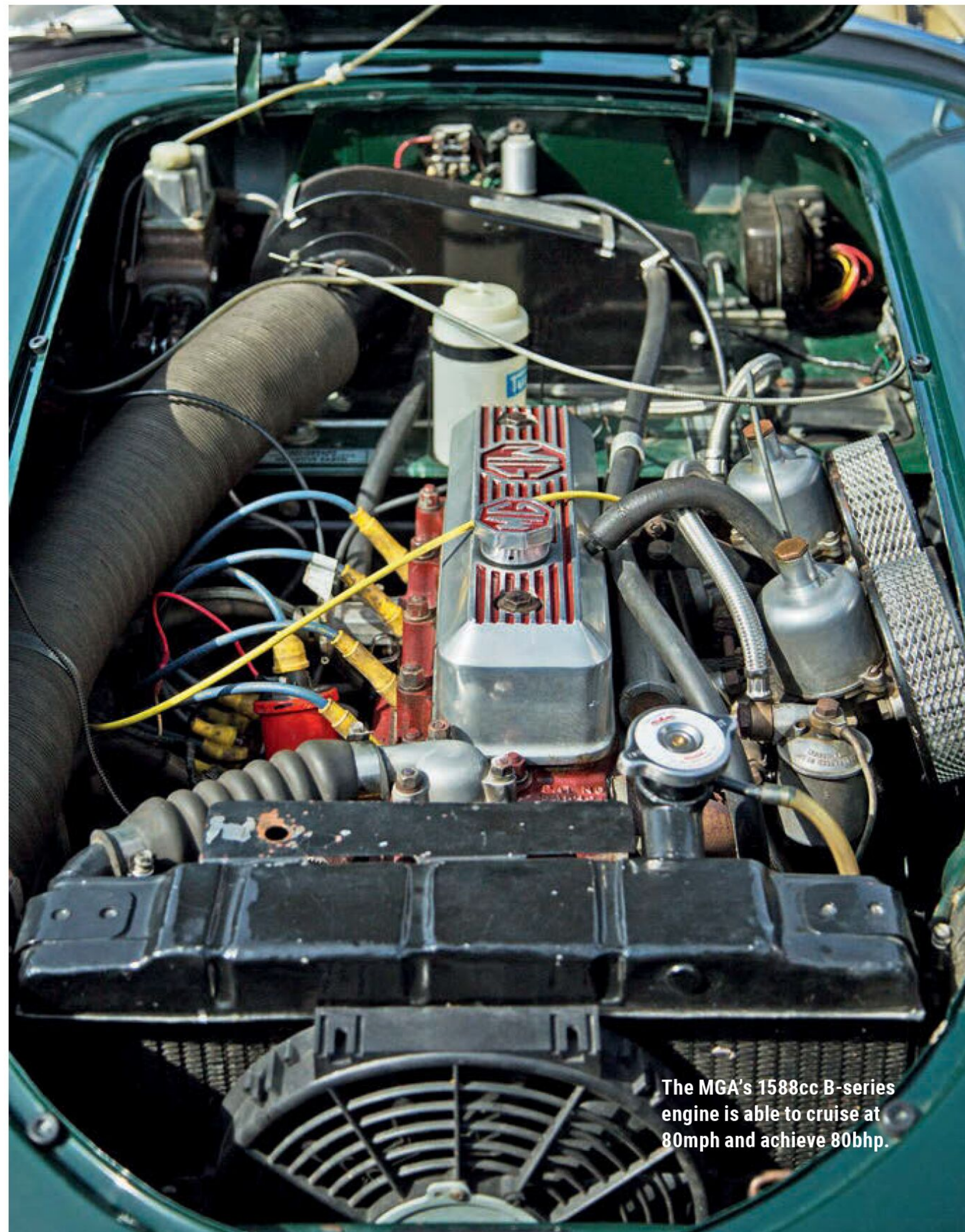
Kelly was devastated. After much stressful fighting over compensation, Ivy was trucked to a classic MG restoration business (Nepean

Classic Cars), in Sydney’s west, where she was carefully mended and given a facelift before Kelly and Glenn brought her on a trailer to their latest posting in Canberra.

“I did not trust anyone else to touch her again so we did the transport ourselves this time,” smiles Kelly, wryly. She was born in Australia’s national capital and the return for Glenn’s final posting has been something of a home-coming for her. She has joined the local MG Car Club and Ivy has become a feature at its events, including displays, runs and weekends away.

Now, with a career in the security forces behind her, and an empty nest in which to enjoy her own interests and hobbies, Kelly is rolling up her sleeves to enjoy making Ivy even more glamorous than she already is. “We have always lived an itinerant life-style,” says Kelly, “and our next move is to an old waterfront home in Queensland for a well-earned retirement.”

The workshop beneath their 100-year-old



The MGA's 1588cc B-series engine is able to cruise at 80mph and achieve 80bhp.



Queenslander house is being given a makeover to house Ivy, as well as Glenn’s two classics (the aforementioned Falcon and a 1939 Mercury V8, both lightly modified), and plans are afoot to refurbish Ivy’s interior trim in tan leather, bringing her more in line with what an original BRG MGA might have been like. A complete new wiring loom is also planned to improve reliability, after a recent ignition failure, and there is bound to be some other tinkering to do.

Kelly has the last word. “The workshop is actually big enough to accommodate some future MG purchases as I would still love an MG TD or TF,” she says. “Besides, Glenn already has two so it’s my turn to buy one next!”

According to the Australian MGA Register, the MGAs that BMC Australia imported and sold are described as follows:

- MGA roadster: 120 completely built up (CBU)



While some readers might be more at home tinkering with their MGs and collecting model cars, Kelly enjoys dress-making and collecting and restoring sewing machines. She has been seriously sewing for over 30 years. She designed and made the stylish mid-50s period outfit she is wearing in the photos, in just two days, fitting in with the MG’s 1959 vintage.



- MGA roadster: 2040 completely knocked down (CKD)
- MGA Coupé: 200 approximately, CBU
- MGA Twin-Cam: 75 CBU

The Register is maintained by Garry Kemm in Melbourne. Garry can be contacted by email (mg.kemm@outlook.com) and maintains

chassis number records for every Australian-delivered MGA, with some cars having more detailed information than others. Typical information includes despatch dates from the UK, chassis numbers, engine numbers, Australian build number, original registration number and date. ■

TECH SPEC

Engine	In-line four cylinders, overhead valves, two per cylinder
Engine Type (BMC)	16G, known as the B-series
Bore and stroke	75.4mm x 88.9mm
Capacity	1588cc
Compression ratio	8.3:1
Power	80bhp@5600rpm
Fuel System	Twin 1½ inch SU H4 carburettors, SU fuel pump, 10-gallon tank
Clutch	Single-plate 8" dry clutch, hydraulic operation
Gearbox	Four-speed manual with synchromesh on second, third and top gears
Compression ratio	8.3:1
Final drive ratio	4.3:1 (10/43)
Chassis and Suspension	Front: coil springs, wishbones, hydraulic lever arm dampers; Rear: live axle, half-elliptic springs, hydraulic lever arm dampers
Steering	Rack and pinion
Brakes (front and rear)	Hydraulically-operated Lockheed discs at front, drums at rear
Wheels and tyres	Spoked wheels to take 5.60x15" tyres
Wheelbase	7' 10"
Track	3' 11.5" front 4' 0.75" rear
Length	13 ft inches
Width	4' 9.3"
Weight overall (approx)	1988lbs (902 kg)





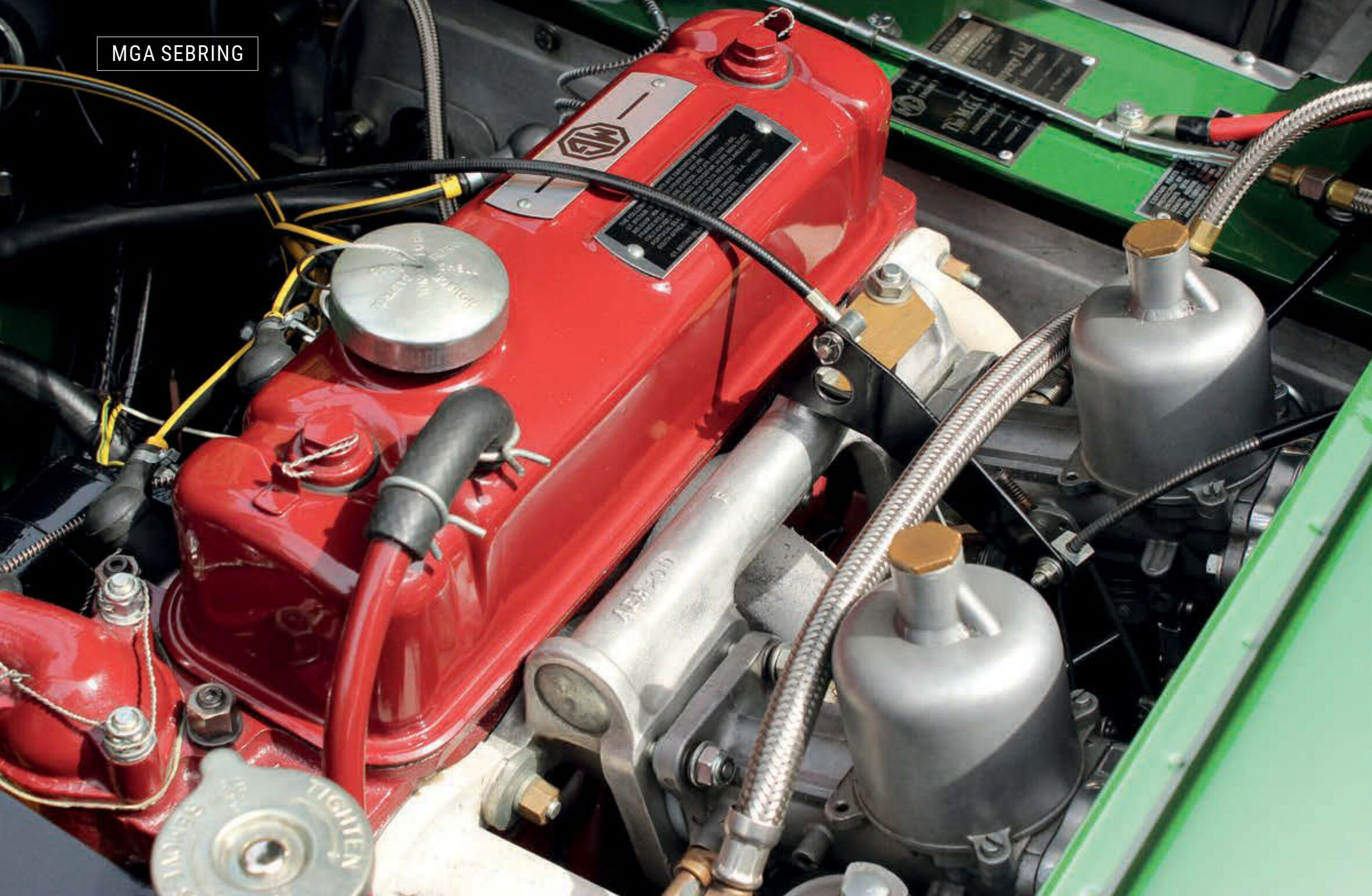
SAVED FOR POSTERITY

This was one of the most successful MGAs of all, yet current owner Ian Prior had to rescue it from its near death in a Florida yard 40 years ago.

WORDS AND PICTURES: NEIL WATSON







It sat there, a forlorn hulk, its body blackened and rusty from the elements, its chrome faded and lacklustre, the damaged grille half hanging off. The car almost looked like it was being reclaimed by the earth. It leaned to one side; one of its front wings lying on the ground beside it which gave it an odd Cyclops-like appearance; its bonnet slightly ajar as if silently trying to call for help.

The average person would never have picked it for a champion racing car, let alone one of the most successful MGAs built in the hallowed halls of the Competitions Department. Yet Ian Prior saw the car and immediately fell in love. Ian and his wife Pam were travelling around the US in a VW camper and had only stopped in to the little town of Titusville in Florida to visit a fellow MG enthusiast and NASA engineer, Art Floyd,

and to see the tourist Mecca of Disney World a little further down the road. Art had a workshop where he was fitting a Buick V8 to his MG Y-Type, next door to where the MGA lay. It wasn't for sale, but Art promised Ian that he would keep working on the owner of the MGA to get him to sell it.

'It was 1977,' Ian explains. 'Pam and I had taken a year off work to see the world, and the first three months were spent touring the States in the VW Kombi camper. We did a virtual circumnavigation of the States, 18,000 miles in total. We'd seen the MG near the start of the trip, and by the time we got to Chicago, after six weeks of negotiation the guy had said he would sell it. We finished driving all around New England and then DC, then hurtled back down to Florida to get the car.'

The owner knew exactly what he had. It was

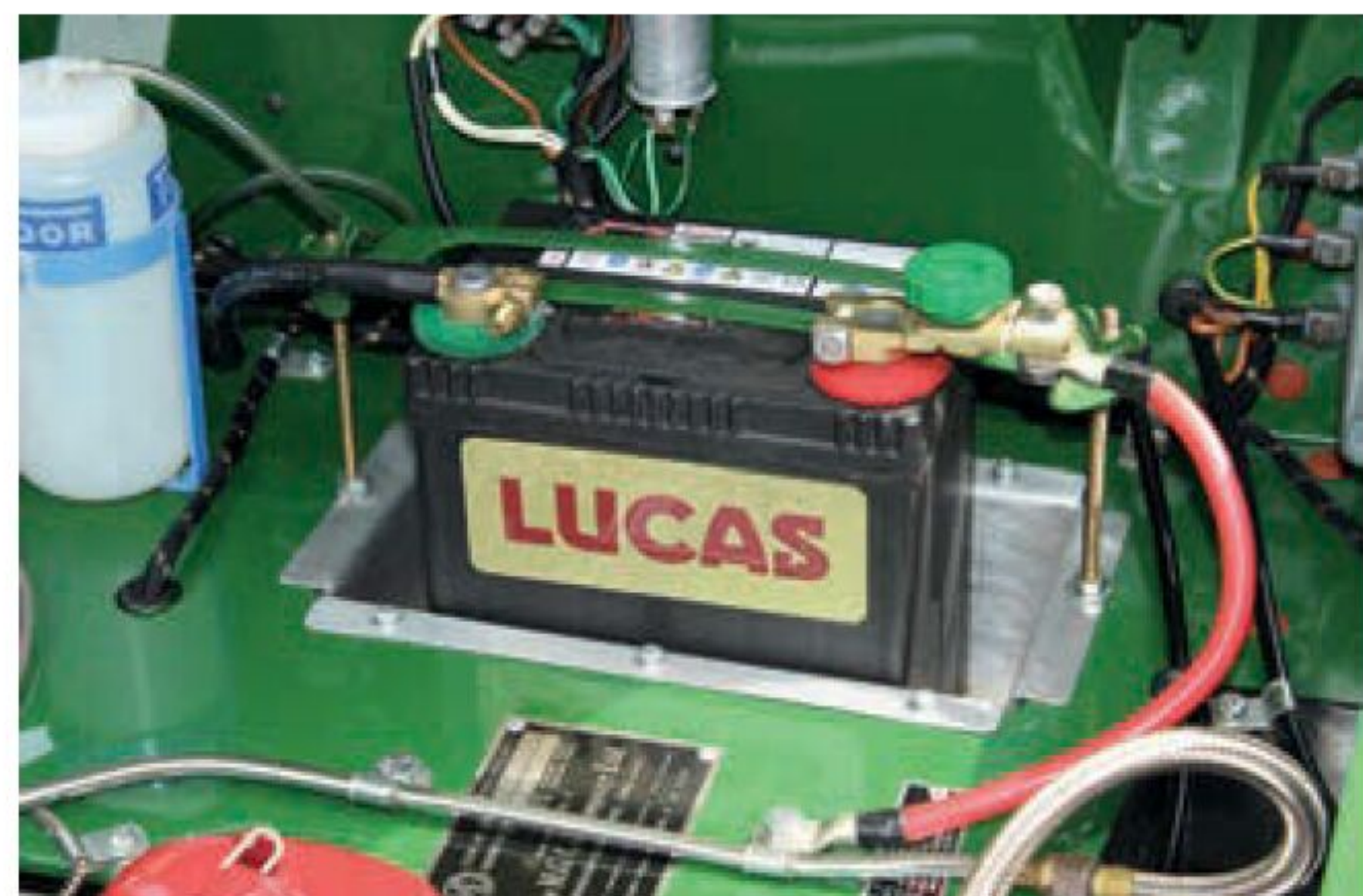
he who had told Ian in the first place that the car had raced at Sebring. But in the mid-1970s a rusty old MGA, regardless of any racing pedigree, was not worth a great deal and for the sum of \$500, plus \$50 for the original special head in the boot, it was Ian's. 'We loaded it in a U-Haul truck and shipped it back up to Charleston,' he recalls, 'which was the closest port where we could put it on a boat back to Australia.'

When Ian eventually got back home at the end of his year-long sabbatical, he was eager to get started on the restoration. He'd been a life-long MG enthusiast and has owned a wide range of models, from TC to MGB, Y-Type and various MGAs.

But when he had a so-called expert muck up the body repairs to his latest project, Ian became slightly disillusioned and the car sat unrestored for many years.

'In a way this was good, because I was going to race it and I probably would have bugged it, so I'm glad I sat on it,' he admits. 'It meant I was able to get so much more research done in the intervening years, so I could do it right back to how it raced at Sebring, and the car is so much better for that.'

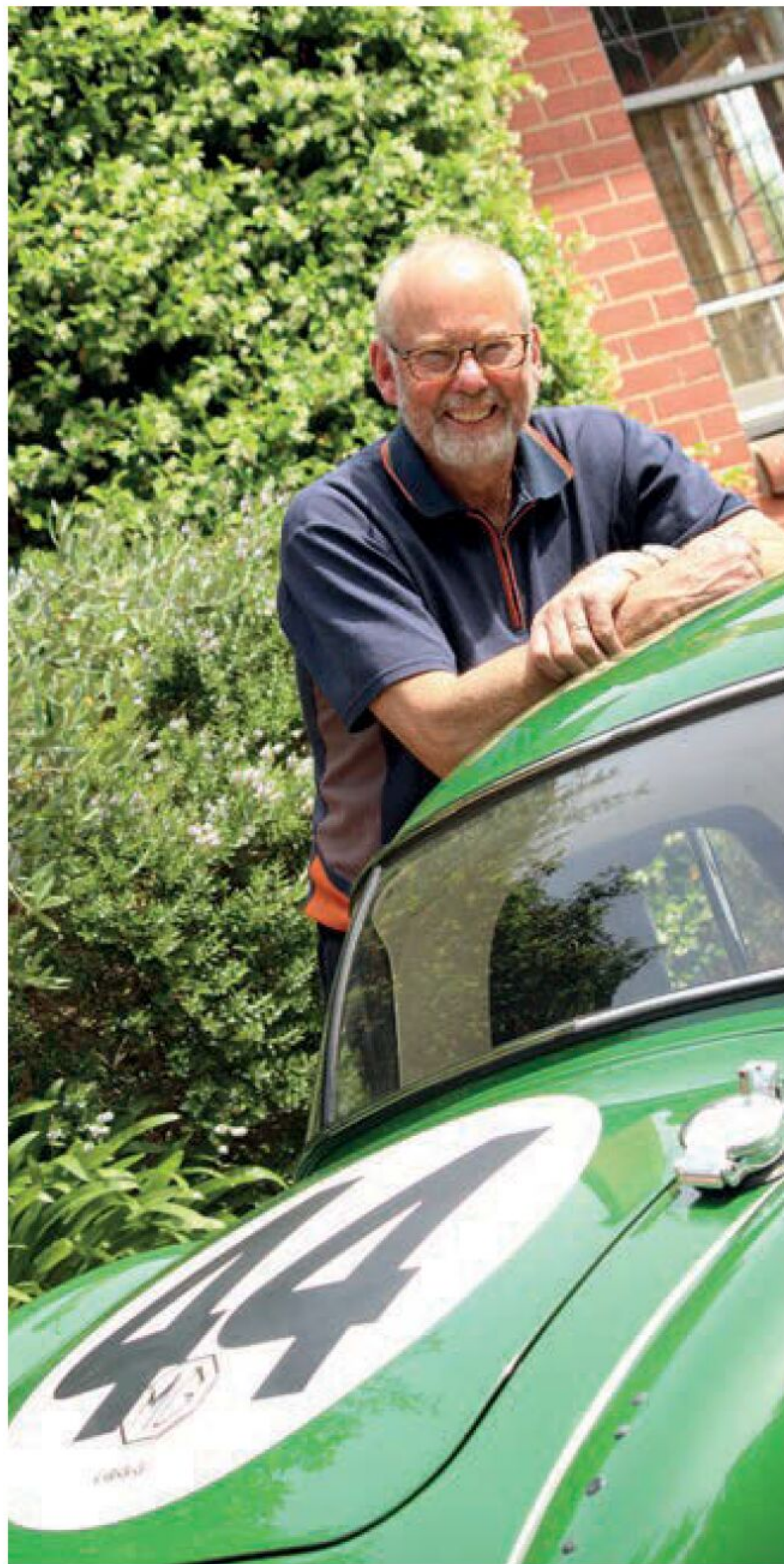
That research enabled Ian to identify exactly which car he had and its unequalled history. Between 1959 and 1962 MG entered 11 MGAs at Sebring – three each year except for 1961 when it only entered two. Nine of those cars

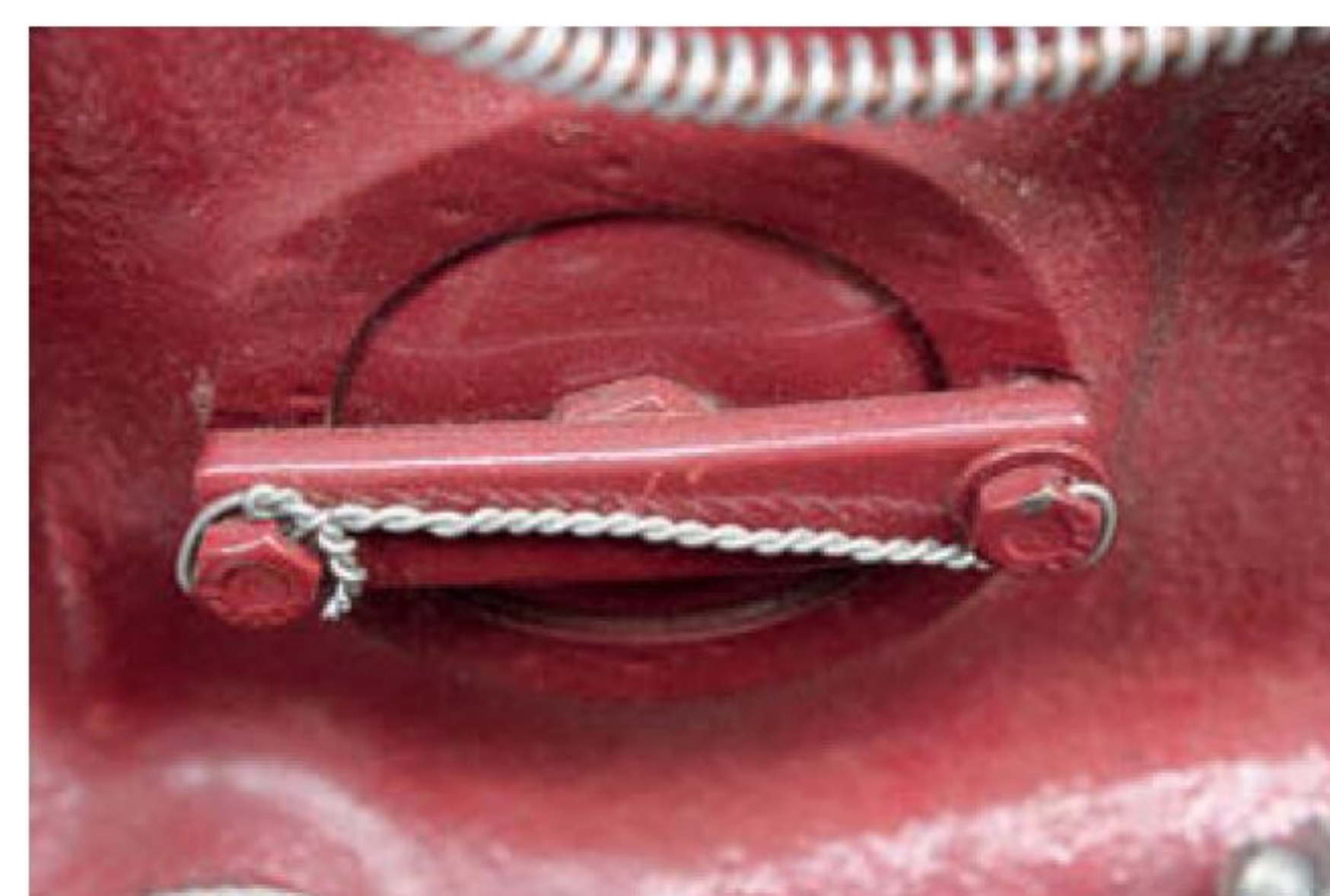


are now accounted for, and Ian's is one of the two 1961 cars. It is the car that wore number 44 in the race and, driven by Americans Jim Parkinson and Jack Flaherty, finished first in its class and 14th overall out of a field of 65 cars. The sister car, number 43 driven by Peter Riley/ John Whitmore/Bob Olthoff, was second in class, making 1961 MGA's most successful trip to Sebring.

Only two other MGAs could lay claim to an equal, or maybe better, result: the privately entered Twin Cam Coupe of Lund/Escott, that won its class and finished 12th overall at Le Mans in 1960, and the Works entry Coupe that won its class and was 28th overall in the 1962 Monte Carlo Rally.

Ian's car, chassis 100148, and its sister chassis 100149, were hand-built in the Competitions Department at Abingdon specifically for the 1961 12 Hours of Sebring. They were built to Stage 6 tune, which included the optional centre-lock disc wheels, Dunlop disc brakes on all four wheels, ZF limited-slip differential, long-range 17gallon fuel tank, extra cooling ducts for engine and driver, re-routing the main electrical cable, fuel and brake lines inside the cabin, and numerous extra creature comforts. There was also identification lighting that was required by the Sebring regulations, and the chassis was lightened a little as well. Although the cars →





began life as Twin Cams, they carried highly-modified 1588cc push-rod engines for Sebring.

Following Sebring, as was the norm, the cars were sold off locally. However, it took some nine months before #44 was sold, being eventually bought by Fred Ball, a DJ at the local Titusville radio station WRHF. Ball had actually test-driven both cars, but chose #44 as it seemed to be in better condition and, as Ian reports, it was after all the class-winner!

The MGA was sold as a new vehicle, with Florida registration plates 19D 3007.

Ball used the car in local autocross and rallies, winning the 1962 Orlando Nocturn Dusk to Dawn Rally. However, it developed a few mechanical issues, including clutch failure and head problems. According to Ian: 'To help finance the repairs, Fred entered into an arrangement with a local MGA Twin Cam racer and Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) driving instructor Herb Burns.

Herb agreed to maintain the car in return for the opportunity to race it.'

Burns only entered the car in two events. The first was the SCCA meeting at Osceola Florida, where it ran in Class E modified, making it totally uncompetitive. The other event was the 1962 Daytona SCCA Divisional Run-offs, but a puncture on the first lap eliminated any chance of contention. However, fearing the financial consequences of an engine failure or crash, Ball decided to sell the car, trading it in on a new Saab.

The next owner, Richard Robson Jr, bought the car in November 1962 and drove it in a number of SCCA events between 1963 and 1965. While the details of most of those events are not known, two significant events the car ran in were the 1964 and 1965 Daytona Continental 2000km races (which became the Daytona 24-Hour in 1966). In the 1964 race the car completed 101 laps before engine problems forced it out, while in 1965, now painted blue, it managed only 42 laps before retirement.

Due to no longer being competitive, it was used as a road car before being damaged in a minor crash. In about 1968 it was parked in the back yard of a panel-beaters in Titusville where, nine years later, it was spotted by Ian.

Ian described the condition of the car when he got it as 'just shocking,' with rusty sills, chassis, window surrounds, joints between the guards and body and various other places. The front valance was missing, but the dashboard was complete and the original steering wheel and all the special racing fittings remained. Most importantly, the car retained its ID plate, the chassis number matched the known history, and the car's provenance was without question.

Despite needing extensive repairs, Ian says



that all of the chassis and the running gear, as well as about 70% of the body, is original. Luckily the sister car turned up in the mid-1980s and Ian made contact with the new owner, Frank Graham. 'We were very fortunate,' Ian admits. 'Frank's dash had been knocked around and he was missing his tacho and stuff like that. My front valance was missing, so I could do a copy of that. There were lots of detail things like that with which we were able to help each other.' In 2003, Ian managed to locate the car's first private owner, Fred Ball, who was able to help with further details regarding the interior.

Although he had much of the bodywork, the engine and upholstery done professionally, Ian did as much of the work on the car himself as he could, including all the stripping and reassembly, with some help from his brother Richard.

The restoration really only got under way in 2004, being finished just in time to take the car to England for the 50th anniversary of the BMC Competitions Department and MGA combined event. Ian also took the car to Sebring in 2012 for a reunion to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the last running of an MGA at the historic circuit. There the car was reunited with its sister, No 43, and another five of the other seven surviving Sebring MGAs.

Just prior to that event, Ian had another stroke of luck when the original engine block turned up after the owner saw a story on the car in *Safety Fast* magazine and realised the engine sitting under his work bench was the original, with engine number EX 178/44. That



engine was rebuilt and fitted to the car before that Sebring trip.

'The block was very special, with no water jacket holes to the head and a by-pass elbow for the separate water jacket in the head,' relates Ian. 'All the wired fittings were still on the block, including the Welch plug retainers. I rebuilt the engine, with machining and advice from Ian Shugg at Crankshaft Rebuilders. Clive Cams produced a copy of the original 713/12 cam – it

paid to have the original factory build sheets.'

Although Ian has driven the car in Regularities and club sprints a number of times, he is not interested in risking it with full-on racing – and he doesn't want to spoil the authenticity by fitting a roll bar, which that would require. Instead he is just fortunate to have a car with such an illustrious history, and the rest of the MG community is lucky it was discovered by him before it returned to the earth as a pile of rust. ■





BROWN & GAMMONS



FIRST FOR EVERYTHING MG!

CLASSIC MG SALES



Classic MGs bought or sold on commission basis

- Finance Available - call for offers
- Part exchanges welcome
- Phone or see our website for latest stock

MG WORKSHOP

- Service & MoT
- Accident repair
- All warranty & insurance work
- Full Diagnostic Analysis
- Performance Upgrades
- Accessory Fitting



CLASSIC MG PARTS



MAIL ORDER WORLDWIDE

- Over 25,000 lines in stock
- Ongoing remanufacturing programme
- Approved British Motor Heritage stockist



NEW MG SALES



Main MG Dealer

Phone or see our website for latest offers

- Bodywork
- Paintshop
- Tyre fitting on site
- Wheel Balancing (inc wire wheels)
- Full or Part restorations
- Car Storage

MODERN MG PARTS



- All service parts
- Body panels available to order

WWW.UKMGPARTS.COM

Car Sales, Parts Sales & Workshop

Fax: 01462 896167 sales@ukmgparts.com

18 High Street, Baldock, Herts, SG7 6AS

Established 1977

01462 490049



To celebrate and mark 60 years of Oselli Engineering we are introducing the 'Oselli Anniversary limited edition MGB GT'. This is a limited-edition production of just 10 vehicles, at a cost of £65,000 each. All options and specifications are available. Please contact us for further information on specs available.

MGB

Engines

1800cc Lead free	£2800
1800cc Fast road balanced	£3200
1840cc Balanced stage 2	£3650
1950cc Standard lead free	£3495
1950cc Fast road stage 2	£3850
2200cc high spec fast road	£6750

Heads

Standard lead free	£825
Stage 2 lead free	£925
Stage 3 lead free	£1015
Stage3A lead free	£1095
Stage 4 comp head	£3750

Other

Tubular long branch large bore exhaust,
Oselli cast rocker cover, Weber carb kit,
Performance distributor
Head and engines supplied on an exchange basis
Prices subject to VAT



ALL OUR ENGINES ARE NOW
INCLUSIVE OF WATER PUMP &
FULLY TESTED BEFORE DISPATCH

Midget/ A Series

Engines

Standard lead free	£2800
Standard fast road balanced	£3200
Stage 2 fast road balanced	£3650
1293cc fast road stage 2	£3760
1380cc fast road stage 2	£4195
1400cc fast road stage 2	£5050

Heads

Standard lead free	£825
Stage 2 lead free	£925
Stage 3 lead free	£1025
Stage3A lead free	£1200
Stage 4 Comp head	£9450

Other

Tubular long branch exhaust,
Oselli cast rocker cover, Weber carb kit,
Performance distributor
Head and engines supplied on an exchange basis
Prices subject to VAT

www.oselli.com

Engine building and Machine work • Servicing and MOT • Diagnostics and Repair
Sales & Acquisitions • Fabrication and Body • Restorations • Parts and Merchandise
Dyno and Rolling Road • Storage • Motorsport

Oselli Ltd, Greenway Business Park, Winslow Road, Great Horwood, MK17 0NY
Telephone: (01993) 849610 • E-mail: david.eales@oselli.com • www.oselli.com

CHALK AND CHEESE

Steve Pountney has a number of fine MGs in his collection, but when we visited him in Hull to take a look, it was these two very different examples that caught our eye. We asked Steve to tell us the story behind them.





I inherited a passion for cars from my father and grandfather. My grandfather was one of the first to have a car on his street (he was a Rep for a biscuit company), and my dad always had nice BMWs when they first started coming into the country. I've always loved cars, and as soon as I got to 17 I passed my test and bought a Saab 96 with the V4 engine. I got my first MG when I was nearly 20, a blue MkI MG Metro, and I've had an MG of some sort ever since.

My first MG that wasn't Metro-based was a ZT V8 in Typhoon Blue. That was an absolutely amazing car, and I had a Kenne Bell

supercharger fitted. But I do get bored quickly, so sold the ZT to get a Porsche. Three years later I sold the Porsche and bought the ZT back, keeping it for another three years or so.

Then I got the MGB GT. It came from a friend who I've known for maybe 25 years. He had used it for sprinting, which was why it had been fitted with a 3.9 V8 engine. It was built for sprinting and a very quick car, but not used on the road which was what I wanted to do, and it needed a lot of work to bring it up to scratch for general use. I got it because I had always wanted to create a car of my own, and this seemed like a great candidate. →





What I had in mind was something that is in your face, that looks like a very basic race car at first glance but which has a lot of technology packed underneath. I'm not mechanically minded, so my role was to come up with the ideas, to strip the car down and do the detailing on the rebuild, but to have all the major body and mechanical repairs done professionally, but to my ideas.

So, for example, the wide arches were essential for that racing look. The fibreglass panels were bonded to the steel wings by Steve Bryant from South Cave, while the paint was done by Dan Griffiths at Cleckheaton Bodyshop. I had it finished in Gulf racing colours because that had always been what I pictured in my mind, and it has turned out exactly as I envisioned it.

Mechanically it's got telescopic dampers, anti-tramp bars at the back and negative camber at the front – it came like that when I bought it. The RV8 spec engine, gearbox and back axle had been fitted previously as well, though I chose 8in x 15in Minilite wheels.

It was in the detailing where I really went to town, though. It's got a full media system, electrically heated seats, central locking, electric windows... None of that is obvious from looking at it, as your first impression is that it is much more hardcore. However, spend a little more time looking at it and you start to notice some of the details. There's even a reversing camera

below the rear valence, the rear is cleaned up with LEDs for the number plates and there's no chrome handle for the tailgate etc, but all these are very discrete mods.

Other changes are more obvious. I've moved the fuel filler up to the C-pillar, and the spare wheel is such a snug fit below the rear screen because underneath it I've put the speaker and amp for the stereo. The roll cage was in the car when I bought it, but I took that out and

had it resprayed orange. I've also detailed the engine bay with lots of orange touches under the fibreglass bonnet, and it's got the obligatory bullet mirrors of course.

This is a MkI dash, but fitted with all new switchgear. The dash itself has been taken apart, welded up (there are no vents in it any more – did you notice?) and painted. There is no heater because I have fitted an electric front screen to take care of demisting – the screenwash and



expansion bottle now sit in the engine bay where the heater used to be. The vent on the roof is functional, and does help cool down the cabin.

The car was at the bodyshop for a long time, meaning that the project took about five years and a lot of money to build. It was only finished a couple of years ago, and to be honest I haven't driven it too much since then. The seats are not comfortable enough, and I need to replace them with something that fits me better. Having said that, I've done around 700 miles, and although it was originally modified for hillclimbing, it is not too harsh on the road.

However, not everything worked out entirely to plan. Originally we were going to put door poppers on rather than handles. We did that and got them working, but found that there was so much pressure they started splitting the door, so we had to revert to conventional handles. Other bits have worked out better than I hoped, though. And the little details are important – the electric window switches from Moss look like a factory fit, and I've put a TF tweeter in the hole in the door card where the winder handle used to go.

Meanwhile, I bought the MGA a few years ago, which is so very different to the BGT in that it looks very standard and typically elegant. It is not totally original as it came with an MGB 1850cc Stage 2 engine with a Ford five-speed gearbox, making it a delight to drive on the →





road and happy to cruise at the legal limit all day long. Those are pretty well-accepted and discrete modifications on an MGA though, so I don't think too many enthusiasts would quibble with them.

It is a 1956 car and would have been a 1500 originally. I bought it around five years ago while the B was a project, simply because I've always loved the A. I think it was one of the prettiest cars MG ever made. I bought it on an impulse, and it has been absolutely brilliant. Apart from when it caught on fire...

We'd just finished an MG social run, and on the way home one of the fuel pipes fractured. The resulting petrol leak caught on fire, and the front end got quite badly damaged. It had to have a full respray and some re-wiring, but fortunately we got the fire out before it had done any structural damage. It was insured with Peter Best, and I must say they were fabulous about getting it sorted out.

The MGA is a very different car to the performance models I've always had, but I have always been mad on cars and never stuck to only one make or model despite being such a serial MG owner. It came with the engine and gearbox mods already done, all I've had to do is the fire repair and to put in a decent sound system – I can't be doing without that. The seats are not exactly pristine and people say I should replace them, but I think it was restored a long time ago and they now have some patina. I like that and don't want to lose it. Besides, it is a lovely comfortable car to drive – I've taken it to Le Mans twice and it was superb.

The car did come with a lot of history, but to be honest I haven't spent the time to read through it all. Some people love that side of ownership and I have got involved with tracing the history of my

SV, but with the MGA I haven't really bothered. I do know it went to Ireland for a few years, and I do know a lot about the B because I bought it from such a long-standing friend.

When choosing between the two cars for a run, the MGA usually wins hands down. The only time it gets trumped by the B is if there is a motorsport connection – we've been to Silverstone and Croft with that, but I have never been on a track myself and don't see myself as a fast driver. Besides, I wouldn't want to take the risk of it getting smashed. A timed lap if I was on track alone might be OK, but I am not too bothered and I really don't like the idea of being out on track with other people.

All in all, the BGT is an unusual mix of

performance, power and luxury. The changes might upset some purists, but I don't think the BGT is an endangered species and so people should be able to do what they want with one they own. I certainly had a lot of fun coming up with the spec, and am very happy with how it has turned out.

Everything is for sale at the right price and no doubt this car would be no different, but I'd be loath to sell it because of the hours I've spent on it. If I don't try and value the time, I've probably spent £15,000-£17,000 on the work. It may be more, but I don't think it would be over £20k. My wife Wendy loves the MGA though, and I think she would be quite upset if I ever thought of selling that. ■





established 1982

THE MGB SPECIALISTS



The MGB HIVE

Marshall's Bank, Parson Drove, Wisbech PE13 4JE

Telephone: 01945 700500 Email: sales@mgbhive.co.uk



PROUD TO SUPPORT BRITISH MANUFACTURING



We have everything you need for your MG, either brand new or second hand...



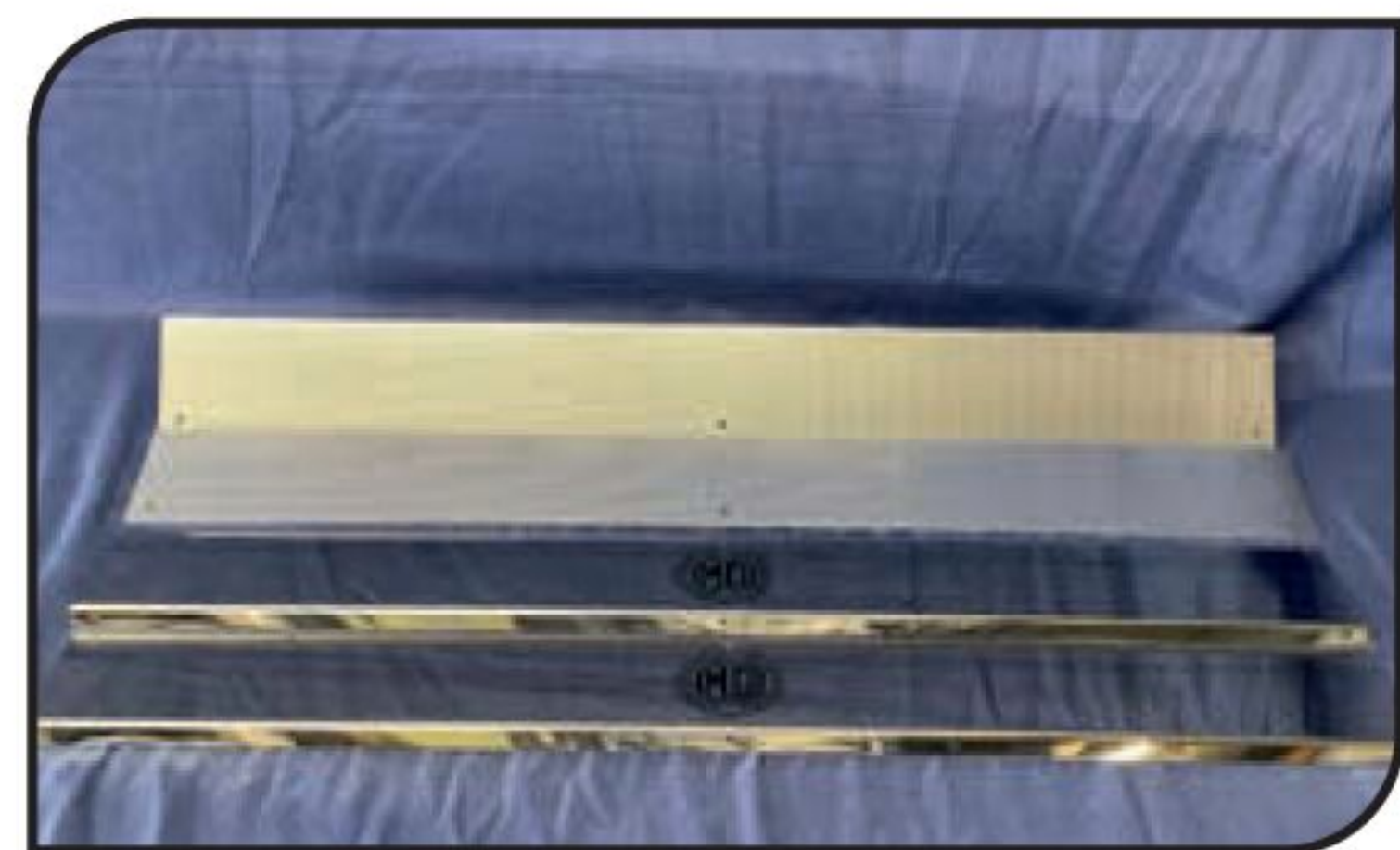
ALLOY ROCKER COVERS

MGB kit..... £59.95
Midget 1500 kit£38.95
Midget 1275 Kit..... £48.50



K&N KITS

MGB, 1275 and 1500 Pancake
..... £195.00
MGB with Alloy Plate£139.95



THRESHOLD PLATES

MGB OE£23.50 pair
Stainless Steel..... £24.95



STEERING WHEELS

Leather semi dished with boss £79.96
Leather polished spoked with boss £124.96
Wooden with boss£129.95
Chrome centre boss..... £24.95



ACCESSORIES

Chrome lidded ashtray .. £34.96
Pair chrome winder £16.50



OIL & ADDITIVES

Duckhams 20/50 - 5lt.... £29.95
Fuel additive £12.95
EP80/90..... £10.95

ALL PRICES INCLUDE VAT

For all your MGB, C, V8 & Midget requirements please visit www.mgbhive.co.uk

PROUD STOCKISTS OF THESE BRANDS



AUTOMECH



MGOC WORKSHOP



BASED AT THE MG OWNERS' CLUB HEADQUARTERS IN SWAVESEY, NEAR CAMBRIDGE, THE CLUB WORKSHOP OFFERS A COMPLETE RANGE OF SERVICES TO MEET ALL YOUR MG REQUIREMENTS

- 4 WHEEL LASER ALIGNMENT EQUIPMENT
- AIR CONDITIONING SERVICE & RECHARGE
- TYRE FITTING & BALANCING
- TUNING & ENGINE MODIFICATION
- VEHICLE INSPECTION
- FULL OR PART RESTORATION
- BODYSHELL PREPARATION & PAINTING
- ACCIDENT RECOVERY & REPAIR
- ALL TYPES OF ELECTRICAL WORK
- RADIO FITMENT
- WINDSCREEN REPLACEMENT SERVICE
- FULL RETRIMMING SERVICE
- LOAN CARS
- OTHER CLASSIC MARQUES WELCOME

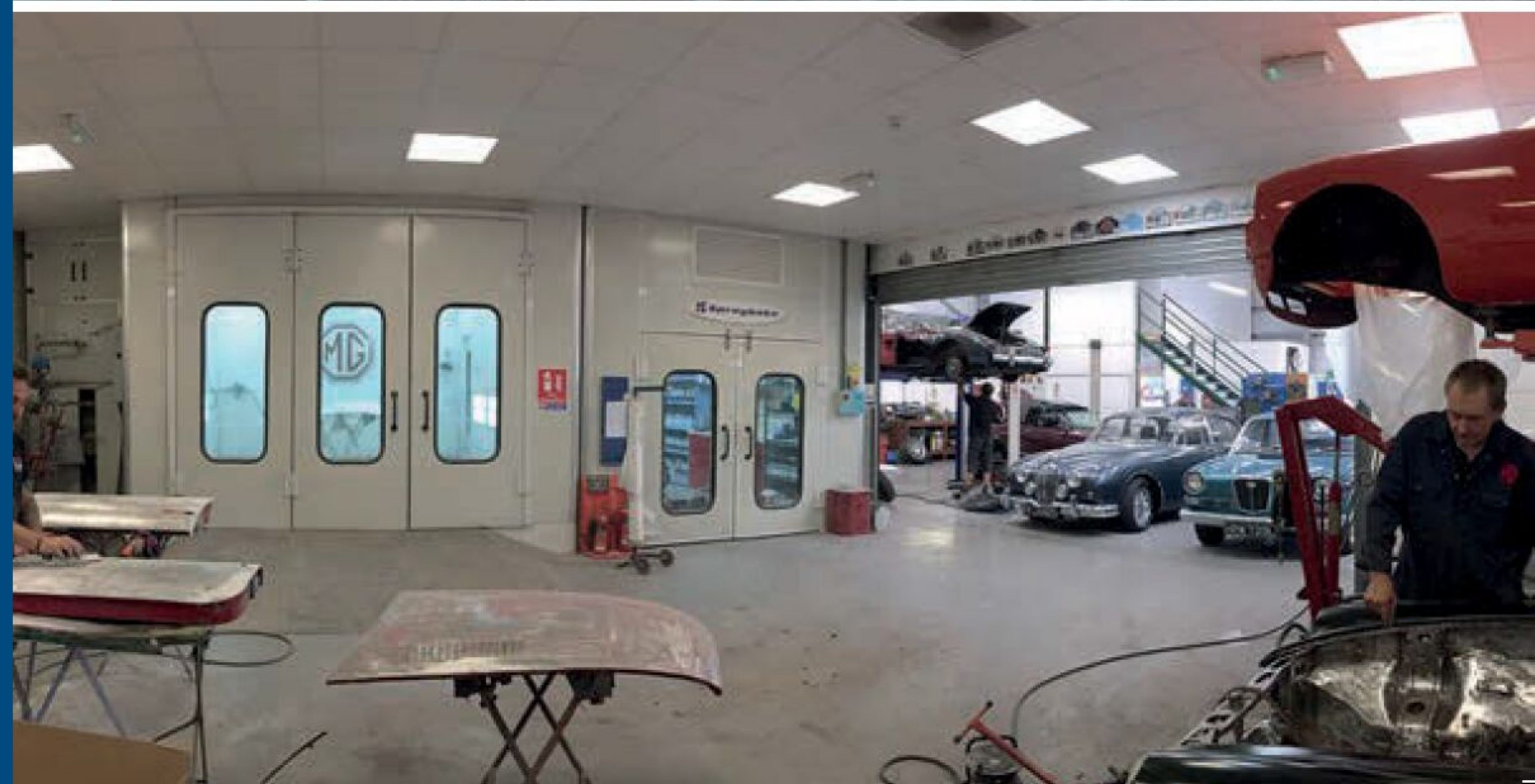
MG Workshop
Octagon House
Swavesey
Cambridge
CB24 4QZ

Mon – Fri: 8.00am – 5.30pm
Saturdays by prior appointment



01954 234001

mgworkshop@mgownersclub.co.uk
www.mgworkshop.co.uk



RIVERS' MGA

Mike Peters had no idea just what a responsibility he was taking on when he first went to look at an MGA Coupe for sale. It turned out PRX 14 was a high-profile car with a treasured past, and that made its restoration last year something of a delicate balancing act.



T

his MGA is no stranger to Kelsey Publishing. The car was last featured in the November 2002 issue of our sister title MG

Enthusiast, at which time it was owned by Val Christensen but about to embark on a new chapter in its eventful life. We are now able to bring you bang up to date with this historic vehicle, but before explaining what has happened to it over the last 15 years, we should probably explain briefly what makes it such a high profile MG.

Unusually, although PRX 14 has a genuine Works history, it is best known for the role it played some 20 years later. We will summarise



things chronologically though, and that means starting on 25/26 June 1958 when it was built as a Glacier Blue 1500 Coupe. The car was retained by MG, who used it as variously a demonstrator, a development test bed and a recce/practice vehicle for the Works rally team.

In its developmental role it was fitted with the first of the 1588cc engines prior to the launch of the MGA 1600, then later with an 1800 version of the B-series (overbored to 1840cc) to test that capacity prior to the launch of the MGB. It also picked up front disc brakes and a developmental version of the MGB's front suspension along the way. In its recce role it is believed to have been driven by both →





Nancy Mitchell and Jack Sears. It has also come to light very recently that for the launch of the MGA Twin cam, there were no cars built and so PRX 14 was used as the demonstrator at the press launch.

Sold off by the factory with no fanfare once it had served its purpose and refitted with its prototype 1600 engine, PRX then

became just another secondhand MGA until it was plucked from obscurity by Rivers Fletcher in 1978. He bought it from Brown & Gammons, commissioning them to carry out a considerable amount of mechanical work to prepare it for a life of extensive use on the road and at Prescott Hill Climb.

Like all Rivers' cars, the MGA was painted

Bugatti Blue. It also received a later recessed grille from the MGA 1600, a boot-mounted spare wheel and racing roundels, not to mention a sunroof at a later stage. In this form it was kept constantly in the public eye through Rivers' work as a journalist, plus his popular talks and film shows documenting motorsport from the 1930s to the 1960s.

The MGA was eventually put up for sale once more in 1986, being advertised in the June/July issue of MGE for £3850. It was bought by fellow Prescott hillclimber Valentine Christensen, who regularly loaned it back to Rivers at Prescott and elsewhere until failing eyesight cause him to hang up his driving gloves in 1996.

That brings us back to the MGE article in 2002, which ended with the words: *'... reluctantly, this unique MGA may be for sale to the right buyer, something Valentine Christensen is rightly insistent about. Any intending purchaser must, he says, be sympathetic to the car's background, not only as one of Abingdon's ex-Works cars, but also a link with a significant motor racing personality.'* Current owner Mike Peters certainly fits that bill perfectly, although he was blissfully unaware of PRX 14's history when he saw it for sale.

'I wanted an MGA Coupe as a project,' says Mike, 'and saw PRX 14 advertised for sale at a classic car specialist down south. We went to see it, but stupidly I hadn't asked the price.'



When I realised it had a history, I rather belatedly asked how much it was up for. Obviously it was well out of my price range, so I apologised for having wasted everybody's time.

'Then bizarrely, a while later I was at a race meeting at Cadwell Park when I got a call from the guys selling PRX 14. They told me that Penny Rivers Fletcher (who still had a heavy influence on the car) had had me checked out, knew that I was a proper MG man and wanted me to have the car. Amazingly she'd checked me out with Lord Montagu and Lord March! They didn't know me personally of course, but had asked around to see if I was some sort of chancer or investor. They were able to reassure her that I was a genuine MG guy (I had been racing them for more years than I care to remember) and so it was sold to me at my budget!'

PRX was described as needing refurbishment, but Mike drove it home and then continued to enjoy it on the road for several more years. Finally, after selling his business four years ago, Mike decided it was time to think about that refurbishment. He had hoped a little fettling would do the trick, but closer inspection showed that he had two choices: either do nothing and let the car eventually fall apart, or do absolutely →





everything and do it properly.

'If I had left it alone, I think the rust would have got the better of it fairly quickly,' he says. 'A previous restoration had been done, but economically and it was starting to show signs of distress. So I opted to do the job properly and give it a total restoration.'

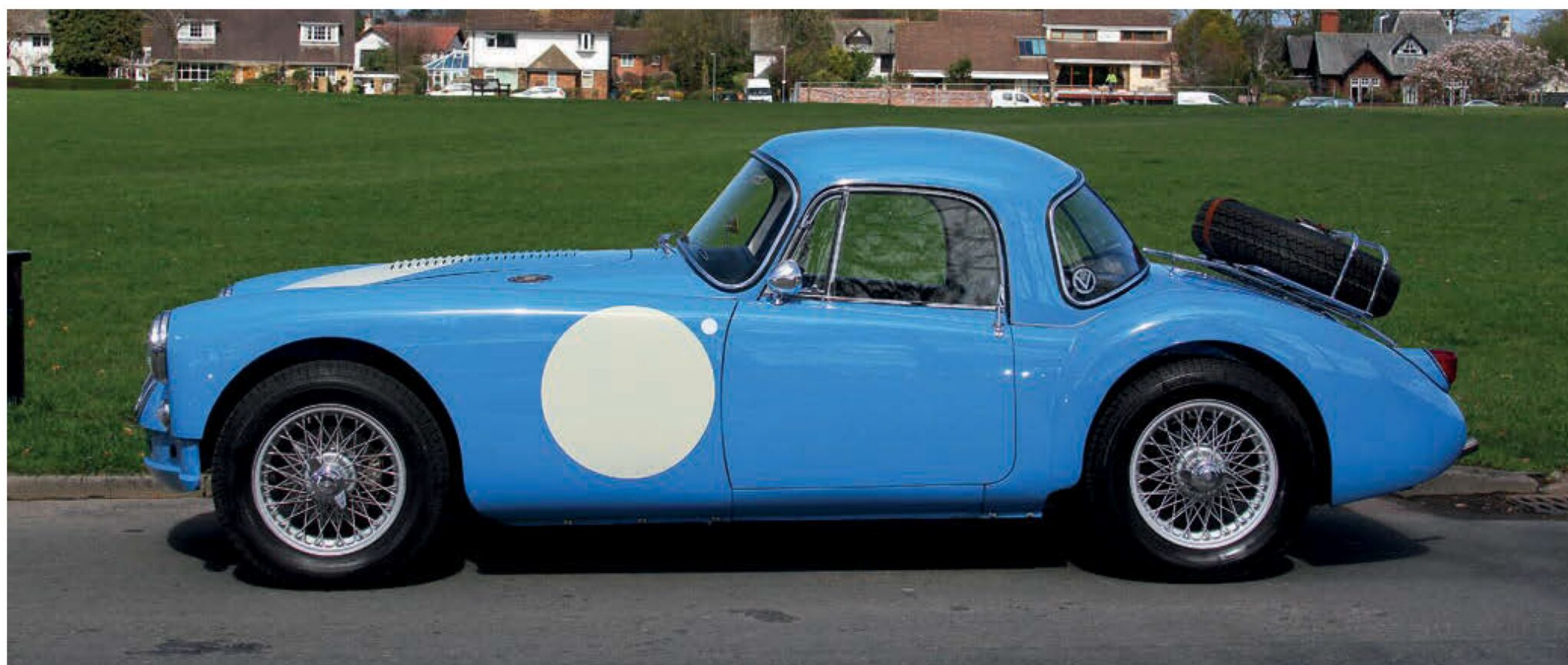
Mike then had a number of decisions to make. First, he had to find somebody he could trust to work on the car. Bob West was semi-retiring and recommended James Horner, who had worked for Bob for 25 years and was now branching out on his own. With Bob's recommendation and having seen the quality of James' work, that was the first decision made.

Next Mike had to decide what stage of its life he wanted to put PRX back to. 'James and I discussed the options over endless cups of coffee,' he relates. 'We had to decide whether it went back to the factory spec, or stayed as a homage to Rivers Fletcher. Most of its documented history over the years had been with Rivers, so we decided on that. However, we then had to decide to what extent we would keep his quirky ideas. I'm thinking here primarily of the rather naff 1980s sunroof, a flat window in that beautifully curved roof – it was effective enough at cooling the cabin down, but really very ugly and we decided it had to go.'

Mike and James also took off the ugly

Beetle rear brake lights, but the whole of the bodywork apart from the wings is original, as is the chassis and the interior. They even had Rivers' logo recreated, kept the peculiarity of a 1600 recessed grille, and took great care to match the Bugatti Blue of Rivers' cars as closely as possible.

It is no museum piece though, so Mike also specified bucket seats and proper harnesses, both of which make the car safer to drive but which are easy to change back again. 'I've kept all the bits that have come out,' says Mike, 'including the engine. I was adamant that the prototype 1600 engine was not going to blow up on my watch, so it will be carefully rebuilt and stored, but we fitted an 1840cc engine





go out in it, but only if nothing else on the drive will start! At least the heater works, though you don't really need that in an MGA Coupe even with Rivers' quilted cover over the gearbox tunnel helping to keep both noise and cabin heat down to more manageable proportions.'

The engine bay can get a bit warm on an MGA too, which is why Mike had a cowl fitted to direct air through the radiator rather than around it. He also found a louvred bonnet to help with airflow for sale at MG Live, saying: 'They were only asking £50 for an aluminium bonnet with the louvres already in, so we took it and ran!'

Clearly Mike and James had a lot of decisions to make when restoring this car, and they have had to make compromises along the way. Personally, I think they have got the balance just right between preserving its history and making it fit for another 50 years of adventure. Little details like moving the mirrors from the wings to the doors, for example, may be a departure from Rivers' day, but it means that the driver can see what's behind him on the road – the rear view mirror shows nothing but the spare wheel on the boot!

Similarly, Rivers had PRX with a front bumper on, but pictures show it at various stages of its life with and without bumpers and with and without a valence. For now Mike gone for the bare look, but again this can be easily changed. Other details like the starter button being a T-handle that says COLD START and the indicator switch being a simple throw left and right are just as Rivers had fitted. That kind of detail is important to Mike. 'I like having so much background to the car,' he says. 'A lot of people like that kind of provenance because it adds to a car's value, but I will never sell PRX, I just love having a car with a real story behind it.. ■'

instead, just as MG did when they were testing it out in PRX for the forthcoming MGB.'

Another big change concerns the gearbox. At some point over the years the car had been fitted with a Twin Cam gearbox and what Rivers Fletcher described as a Le Mans cog in the differential. That made it a very long-legged cruiser, which was not what Mike wanted from it. So James fitted a Ford five-speed gearbox, perhaps the only part that will not be for the purists, but another change that is easily reversible.

'I have restored MGAs in the past, but I cannot take any credit for this car as I wanted everything done perfectly, and that was James' preserve,' says Mike as he proudly surveys

PRX. 'It took around 14 months in total, because as always there was a lot more to do once it had been stripped – a blister always turns into a large hole when you probe, but there were also surprises like A-posts being made out of GRP. There was also a lot of GRP slapped over rust on the rear inner wings.

'It was finished in September 2017, and my first drive was back home to Preston from James' workshop in West Yorkshire. I took the long route – it was a wonderful experience. Even though it has been restored to such a high standard, I still use it all the time, not in salt and snow but certainly for the rest of the year. My wife Jane is not as keen on it as I am because she is not into old cars at all. She will



THE HISTORY

Alec Frances Rivers Fletcher (known to all simply as Rivers) was born in London on 23 June 1912 and died in Warwick on 29 August 1999. Infatuated with motorsport from an early age, he started work at Bentley as a quasi-apprentice after leaving school, and largely because he was 'small and light' was picked as a riding mechanic in Sir Malcolm Campbell's monoposto Delage Grand Prix car at Brooklands in 1928. They won.

At Bentley, Rivers was placed under the tutelage of W.O. Bentley himself. One of the last surviving links to the Bentley Boys of the 1920s, Rivers also got to know many of the top racing drivers from the 1930s to the 1960s, travelling the world to record their achievements with his hand-held camera. These films later provided the centrepieces of his ever-popular talks as a motorsport historian, the projector and other equipment

somehow being squeezed into the MGA as he travelled the length and breadth of the country.

Throughout his career he never lost his passion for motorsport, and was a rare 'double member' of the British Racing Drivers' Club – an associate and patron for his organisational work and a racing member for his successes at the wheel of his GP Bugatti. Rivers was also an accomplished journalist and wrote countless magazine articles and books over the years. PRX was often featured in these writings, the widespread publicity helping to cement its place in history forever as 'the Rivers MGA.'



THE BEST OF BRITISH



- 30 years' experience as a leading parts supplier
- 99% of stock sourced in the UK

If you are a member of a classic car club you can enjoy exclusive benefits including club members' discounts on all parts. Plus from January 2023 we are offering discounted shipping rates. To sign up for club discount or find out more please contact marketing@davidmanners.co.uk.

PARTS FOR MG, TRIUMPH, MORRIS MINOR & MX-5 CARS INCLUDING



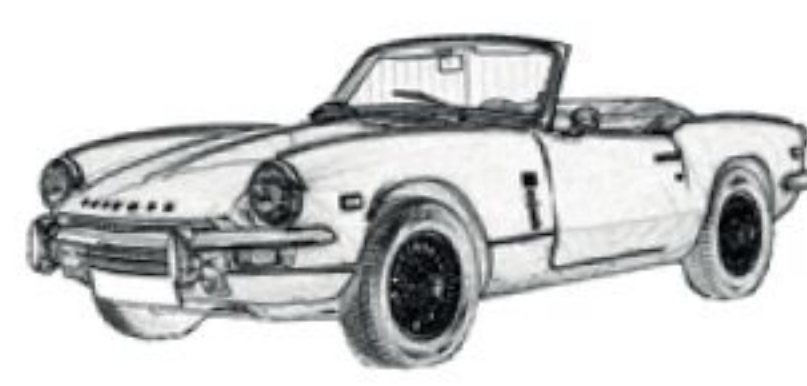
MGB



MIDGET



TR2-6



SPITFIRE



MORRIS MINOR



MGF/TF

To sign up to our DMG newsletter please contact marketing@davidmanners.co.uk.
Follow us on **Facebook** and **Instagram** to join in our weekly banter.



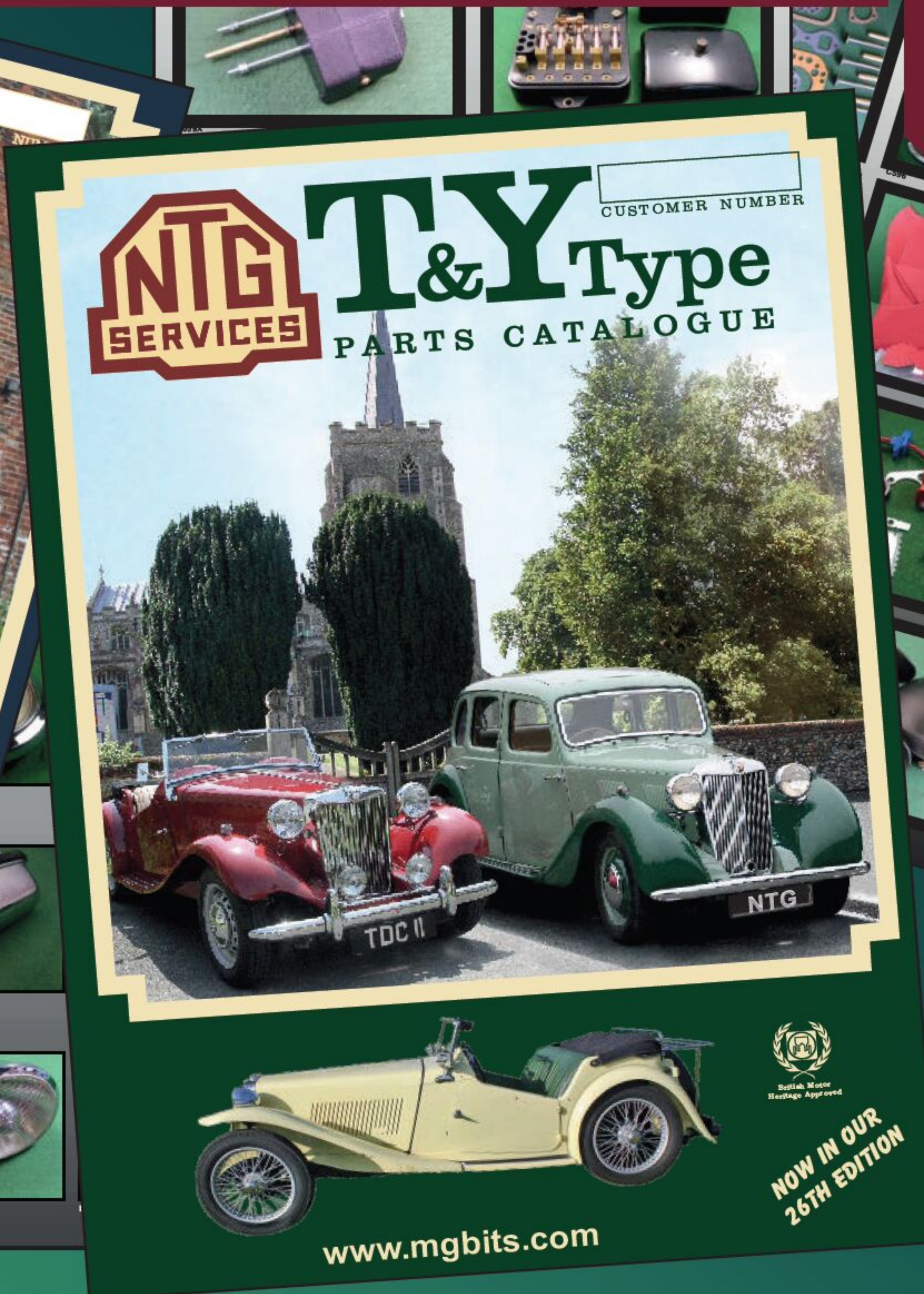
0121 544 4444

E-MAIL: ENQUIRIES@DAVIDMANNERS.CO.UK
991 WOLVERHAMPTON ROAD, OLDBURY, B69 4RJ

WWW.DAVIDMANNERS.CO.UK

PARTS FOR JAGUAR & DAIMLER | MG & TRIUMPH | MORRIS MINOR | MX-5

Parts for TA to TF 1936-55, YA YB YT, MGA & Magnette
 Secure online shopping at: www.mgbits.com or by phone
 ...worldwide shipping



T&Y Type or MGA & Z series catalogues- email or phone for your copy



Exchange shock absorbers available for most models



Disc brake conversions from £780 for TD TF YB ZA ZB & MGA for disc or wire wheeled cars. Further details on request.



B308A Thermostat housing TA/B/C/D/Y with replaceable unit
 £93.60

NTG Motor Services Ltd 282-284 Bramford Road Ipswich IP1 4AY
 Tel: +44(0)1473 406031/2 Fax: +44(0)1473 742087
sales@mgbits.com
 British Motor Heritage Approved - founded 1966

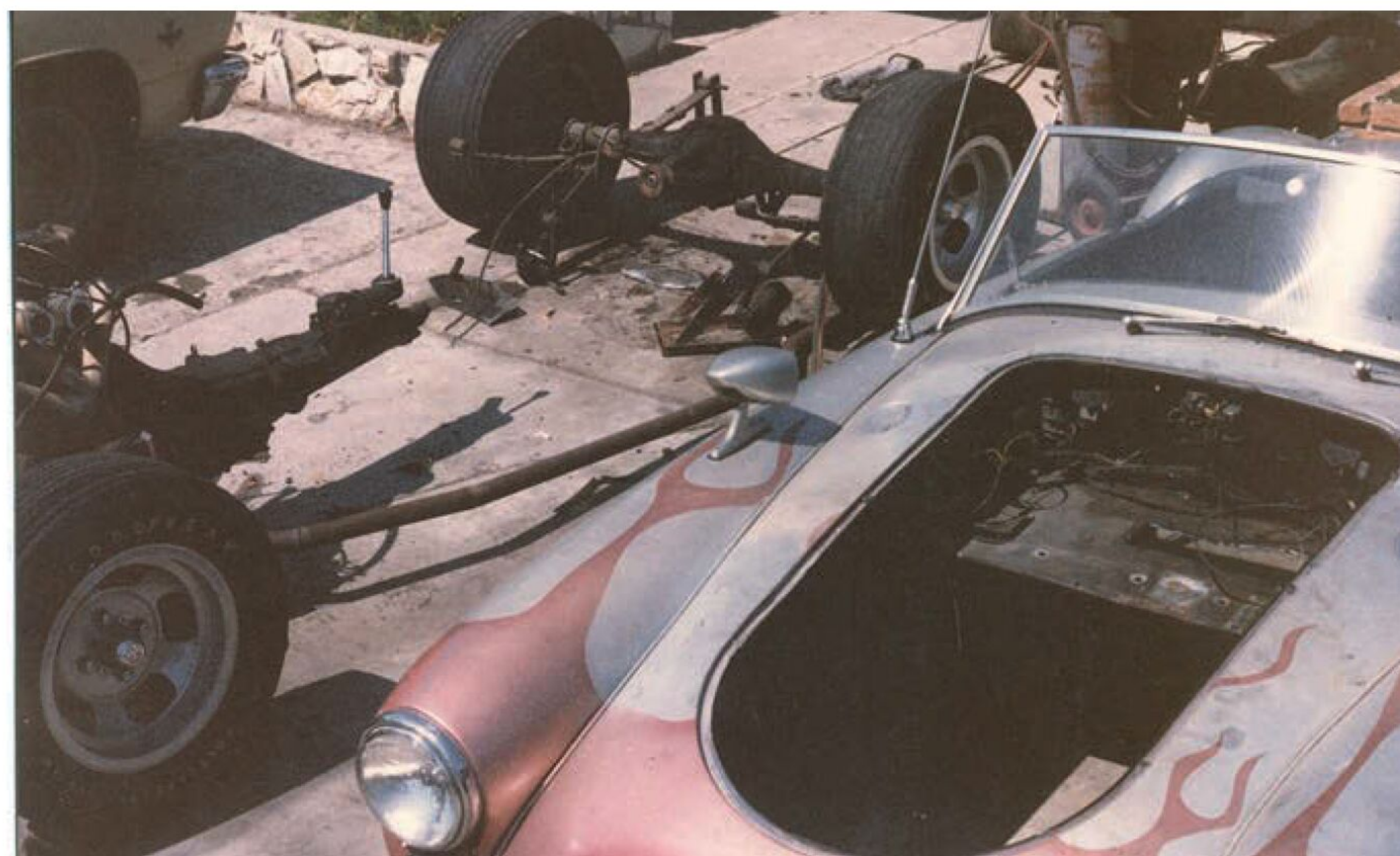
ideas for



CHEVROLET CORVETTE MGA

Sports car enthusiast Keith Raphael, who lives in sunny California in the USA, is the proud owner of an MGA-based Hot Rod that he built and perfected in his own back yard over a 30 year period. He tells Mike Taylor his intriguing story of finding, building and cruising in his MGA V8

WORDS: MIKE TAYLOR



K eith begins his tale by saying: 'I was born in the southern coastal town of Long Beach, California and have never moved very far from the Pacific coast. My first car was the family's 1961 Ford Falcon, given to me to commute back and forth to work. Of course, I instantly threw on some magnesium wheels and tinted the windows, installed a new stereo and attached surfboard racks to the roof. At that time The Beach Boys were my all time favourite music group.'

Later, Keith moved on to owning a Ford Mustang, and then he purchased and modified a Ford Econoline 'surfer' van. 'I fitted it with a V8 motor and painted the bodywork in a pearlescent white with blue flames,' he continues. 'Naturally, the surf racks were attached to the roof. But, I longed for a sports

car. At that time my dream was to own a Ford Cobra, but as a teenager that was financially quite out of my reach.'

In the event, Keith's sports car ownership came via a slightly novel route. 'In 1975 I fulfilled my passion for owning something sporting when I was just 20 years old,' he continues. 'Back then a friend of mine who knew I had a fancy for sport cars told me he had to vacate his home. In his back garden was, he told me, what he thought to be an Austin Healey and would I be interested in buying it? Naturally I was intrigued, and arranged to meet him at his home. He led me round the back with weeds and dead grass knee high. It was not an enticing prospect.

'And then there it was! With no wheels or tyres, it was just sitting there up on milk crates. I didn't need to look more closely to know that

the car certainly wasn't an Austin Healey. I looked at the badge on the cowl and saw the MGA insignia. Not that this told me too much as I hadn't seen a car like this before. No matter, back at my house I just happened to have a set of four-lug (stud) Mustang aluminium wheels in my garage. I went home, brought them back and to my complete surprise, they fitted. I wheeled and dealt and eventually managed to purchase the MGA for \$150 – with a set of exhaust headers (manifolds) included.'

It turned out to be a 1961 model, and one of the last made before MGA production ceased the following year. The little Brit sports car had clearly seen better days, and having completed the purchase Keith then set about working on it for a few hours before he could contemplate trying to get the MGA home. 'A quart of hydraulic fluid was poured into →



the master cylinder and after lots of pedal pumping I was finally able to produce some life in the brakes,' he recalls. 'I borrowed a battery to get it started, and then drove it very unsafely the eight miles to my house. Once there, as I applied the brakes I almost ploughed through the rear wall of the garage as nothing happened. It was clear the whole car needed a lot of restoration.'

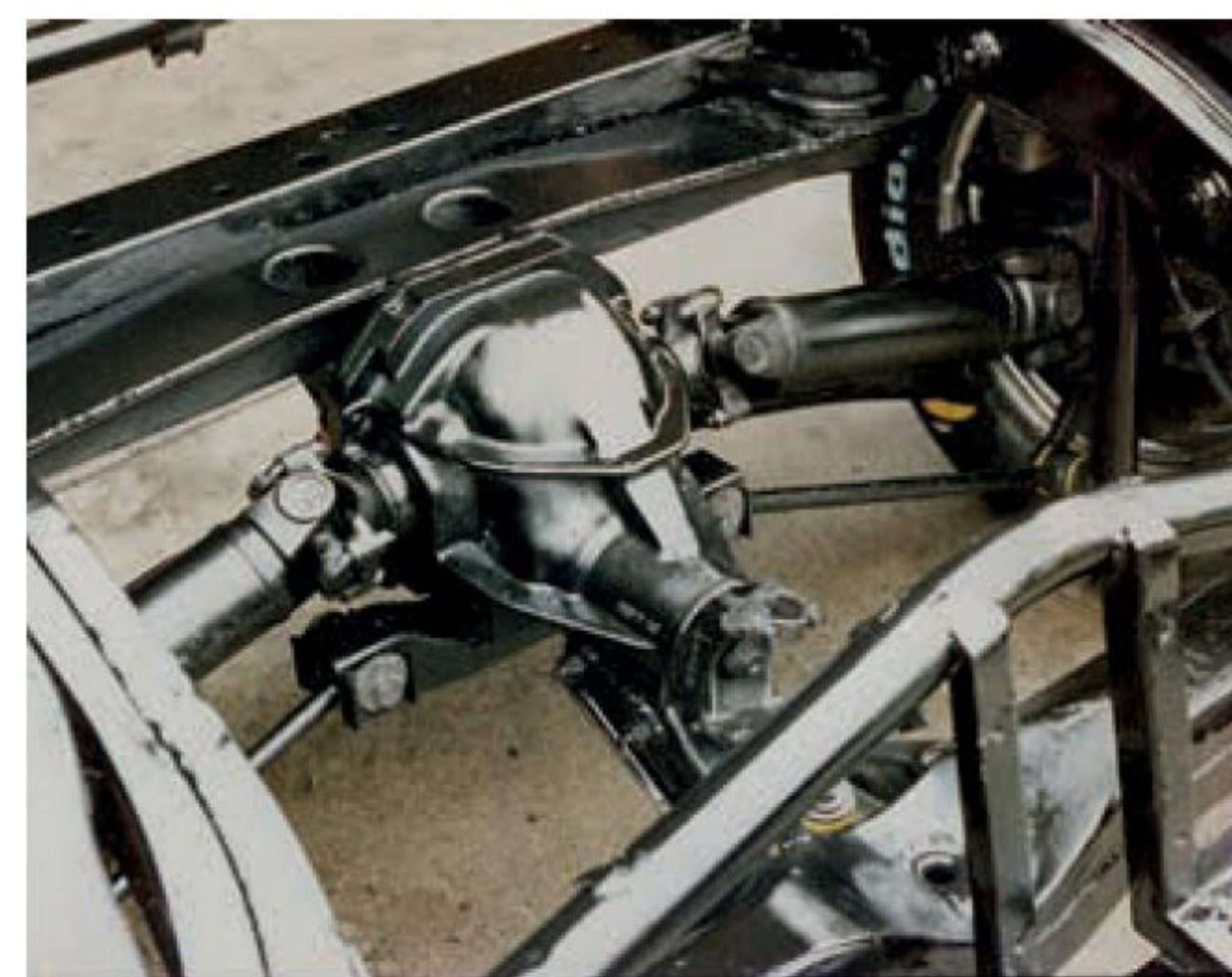
Between 1975 and 1980 Keith spent his time working on the MGA, giving it a sharp new paint finish in metallic silver with red flames and installing a non-functional bonnet scoop. In what he now refers to as the car's GEN 1 period, Keith says: 'At this point it still ran the MGA 1600 power unit, so it wasn't nearly as fast as it looked.' But between 1981 and 1987 he grew steadily more tired of his bright red and silver English sports car from the MG Car Company, lusting after more power and a major step up in reliability. 'I grew increasingly fed up with chasing recurring electrical problems, for which old British sports cars are so famous over here,' he continues. 'It seemed that in addition to the electrics, all the other components were taking it in turns to break down too. It was establishing a pattern of events I just couldn't live with.'

The final straw came when the dynamo stopped working, and Keith decided enough was enough. He parked it in the garage, threw a cover over the top and left it there for five years. During this time the MGA took on the mantle of dog house, step ladder and work

bench, yet all the while Keith constantly turned down offers to buy it. 'I'm going to drop a V8 in it someday,' he'd tell interested folk who turned up to view the unusual MG, a statement that would invariably be met with the laconic response: 'Yeah, right.'

In fact, even Keith himself began to wonder if this was ever going to happen. Yet at the back of his mind there always lurked the desire of

one day owning a Hot Rod, something that was as quick as it looked. As the MGA was worth very little in its current state and Keith couldn't afford to buy a Hot Rod ready built, his only solution was to construct his own. That project got the kick start it needed when in 1988 Keith was called by a friend to see if he was interested in buying what remained of his totalled 1978 Chevrolet Corvette. 'Of the





V8 engine, gearbox, interior trim and mangled body nothing was left, only the suspension, chassis frame and differential remained unscathed,' he recalls. 'Nevertheless, it started wheels turning in my head. I gave my friend \$500 for the heap of splintered fibreglass, went home and got out the drawing board.'

Fundamental to Keith's programme was to utilise the MGA's body as the basis

for the build. This dictated the wheelbase dimensions, which in turn required that the larger Chevrolet chassis be shortened so that the wheel centres aligned with the apex of the MGA's wheelarches. To maintain the Corvette's legendary road holding and handling characteristics, the track was left unaltered.

'The biggest nightmare at this stage was adapting the steering, foot pedals and master

cylinders to convert the shell to lefthand drive,' says Keith. 'This aspect of the work gave me many sleepless nights.' But trial and error plus countless hours spent in the machine shop →



HARD TO DEFINE

Keith has received over 50 awards for the Hot Rod MGA over the years, but what is most unusual is that he must hold the record for winning awards in the most classes. He has received 1st place for the following classes:

- Best of Show**
- Best Hot Rod**
- Best Engine**
- Best Convertible**
- Best Car**
- Best Muscle Car**
- Best Foreign Car**
- Best Sports Car**
- Best Altered**
- Best Custom**
- Best Modified**
- Most Unusual Hot Rod**
- Most Unique Hot Rod**
- Most Unusual Beach Cruiser**
- Most Likely to get a Ticket**
- People's Choice Award**
- Merchant's Award**
- Club Choice Award**
- Exhibition of Speed Award**
- Show Stopper Award**

resulted in a very effective and dependable conversion capable of handling rather more than five times the horsepower of the old in-line four-cylinder British engine. The front and rear Corvette brake discs were operated independently by a dual Hurst master cylinder, while a separate Wilwood clutch master cylinder operated a hydraulic throw-out bearing attached to the transmission input shaft.

Clearly, the focal point of the transplant was the 350cu.in Chevrolet Corvette engine, which now puts out a masterly 500+bhp with aluminium racing cylinder heads and a custom exhaust. Atop the engine is a B&N supercharger producing 7psi of boost, which feeds a mighty 750cfm Holley carburettor responsible for squirting the all important fuel/air mixture into those greedy eight cylinders. Ignition is fired by an MSD electronic ignition system.

Delivering all this power to the rear wheels requires a muscular transmission system. Power is taken through a Tremec five-speed manual transmission with a Hurst shifter, to be fed into the Corvette's independent rear suspension with a 3.08:1 differential. The



bulletproof heat-treated gears are installed in an American Sports Cars assembled differential housing, which easily handles the considerable power delivered by the brutal 'Vette power unit. To place all this energy onto the Tarmac, Keith selected Hoosier Racing tyres. 'It's something to witness when all those horses let go to the wheels,' he grins.

Next came the bodywork changes. 'I welded the front and rear bumpers to the original MG body, gently moulding them into the bodyshell



itself to create a seamless unibody look,' he says. 'I also reproduced the aluminium tail light cluster plinths in steel and moulded them into the rear bumpers. I then re-worked the front apron, widening it to match the integral bumper shape and attached it flush to the MG's nose. Next I inserted a modified MGA grill into the panel for an added flow of fresh air for cooling. Finally, I added the brake cooling louvers let in behind the front wheel arches.'

To accommodate the Corvette's extra track dimensions and the ultra wide wheels and tyres, the front and rear wings were purposely flared out. 'It took three years to arrive at about 90% of my planned transformation, although the car was actually driveable during the last 10% of the project,' relates Keith. It was finally completed in 1991, at which point Keith's MGA Hot Rod emerged into the gleaming Californian sunshine. GEN 2 had taken shape and was completed.

The following year Keith refined and perfected his creation. Ultra wide Porsche 911 Carrera Turbo wheelarches were added, specially seam welded to meet up with the MGA's already flared steel wing panels. 'The overall effect was to give the MGA a wider Cobra look, a car for which it is often mistaken,' grins Keith. 'But people shouldn't be fooled – it takes a tougher than average Cobra to even compete with this MG of 1961 vintage.' GEN 3 was completed and turning heads.

Interestingly, part of Keith's initial design criteria for his brutal beast was that it should retain much of the car's original shape and style. A quick look inside the cockpit reveals the smaller than standard steering wheel and the Hurst shifter stick. The seats are similar to the original MGA type buckets and covered in black hide, while even the windscreen is the low, mean curved job from 1961. However,



closer examination shows the dashboard-mounted VDO instrument cluster linked to an all new wiring loom. Behind the cockpit is a chromed rollover bar for added protection. To top it off, Keith has installed a 180 watt stereo system. 'It's still audible at a wind-roaring 120mph with the top down despite the ear shattering bark from the side winder exhausts that exit from under the doors,' he grins.

However, in 2014 after covering 42,000 trouble free miles since 1994, disaster struck in a big way when Keith hit a guard rail on the highway one damp evening returning from a car show. This almost resulted in the total loss of his creation, but instead triggered a plan to rebuild the MGA Hot Rod and incorporate some of the latest modifications. 'I upgraded the stock Corvette brakes to Wilwood six-piston

caliper disc brakes and dual master cylinders,' he explains. 'I also installed a coil-over front suspension set-up with adjustable A arms using all the latest innovations for the Corvette from the aftermarket emporiums, most of which were unavailable when I first built the car. Also on the improvement job sheet was upgrading the steering and fitting independent rear suspension.' GEN 4 had arrived, probably this remarkable MGA's final fettling.

Since completing all this work, Keith can now reflect on the fun he's had with the car. 'One of our most memorable trips was when we packed the car one morning and drove up the California Coast Highway North for over 500 miles to the Infineon Raceway near the beautiful Sonoma mountains,' he recalls. 'With our luggage still in the boot, we took part in the Historical racing. Then, after a full day on the track, we went wine tasting. The following morning we drove the 500 miles back home.'

Today, Keith will be the first to admit that it's a tough call finding a ready niche that the MGA V8 neatly falls into. He says thoughtfully: 'It is not a kit car, it gets snubbed at the British Shows and it's an outcast at the American-dominated street gatherings. However, one thing is for sure – a ride in this exotic handcrafted open cockpit British classic with its raw American horsepower is definitely a class E ticket ride. Is that a premier drive of your life or what? And we're still cruising up and down California's Pacific Coast Highway 1, vacationing, sightseeing and stopping at any car shows we may find along the way.' ■

Our thanks go to owner Keith Raphael and Carol Shamonsky, Chairman of the North American MGA Register



ISSUE 36 OUT NOW!

ORDER YOUR COPY FROM
OUR WEBSITE

www.carbuilder.com

Contains

Wiring Diagrams
Hints & Tips
Installation Guides
Specification Charts
IVA Approved Products



**7500+ PRODUCTS
AVAILABLE FOR NEXT
DAY DELIVERY**

Contact Information:
01580 891309
info@carbuilder.com
Redlands, TN12 0JJ, UK















98% Positive Feedback from our great customers



We sell everything but . . .



WWW.CAARPARTS.CO.UK

<p>VEHICLE PARTS Keeping you on the road</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>CYCLE ACCESSORIES Keeping you on 2 Wheels</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>TOOLS Trade & Home Workshop Tools</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>ENGINE OILS Lubrication For Your Engine</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>
<p>BATTERIES Ensuring a Great Start Every Time</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>MAINTENANCE Bulbs, Screenwash & Body Repairs</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>WORKWEAR Clothing, Boots & overalls</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>TOWING & TRAILER Tow Balls, Electrics & Trailer Accessories</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>
<p>TECHNOLOGY Electronics, SATnav, In Car Entertainment</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>ACCESSORIES From Air fresheners to Wheel Trims</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>VALETING Keeping Your Machine Sparkling Clean</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>	<p>TOURING & LEISURE Parts, Accessories, Caravan Equipment & Pet Care</p>  <p>SHOP NOW >>></p>

WITH OVER 350,000 PARTS & ACCESSORIES FROM OVER 300 INDEPENDENT MEMBER STORES

CLICK & COLLECT



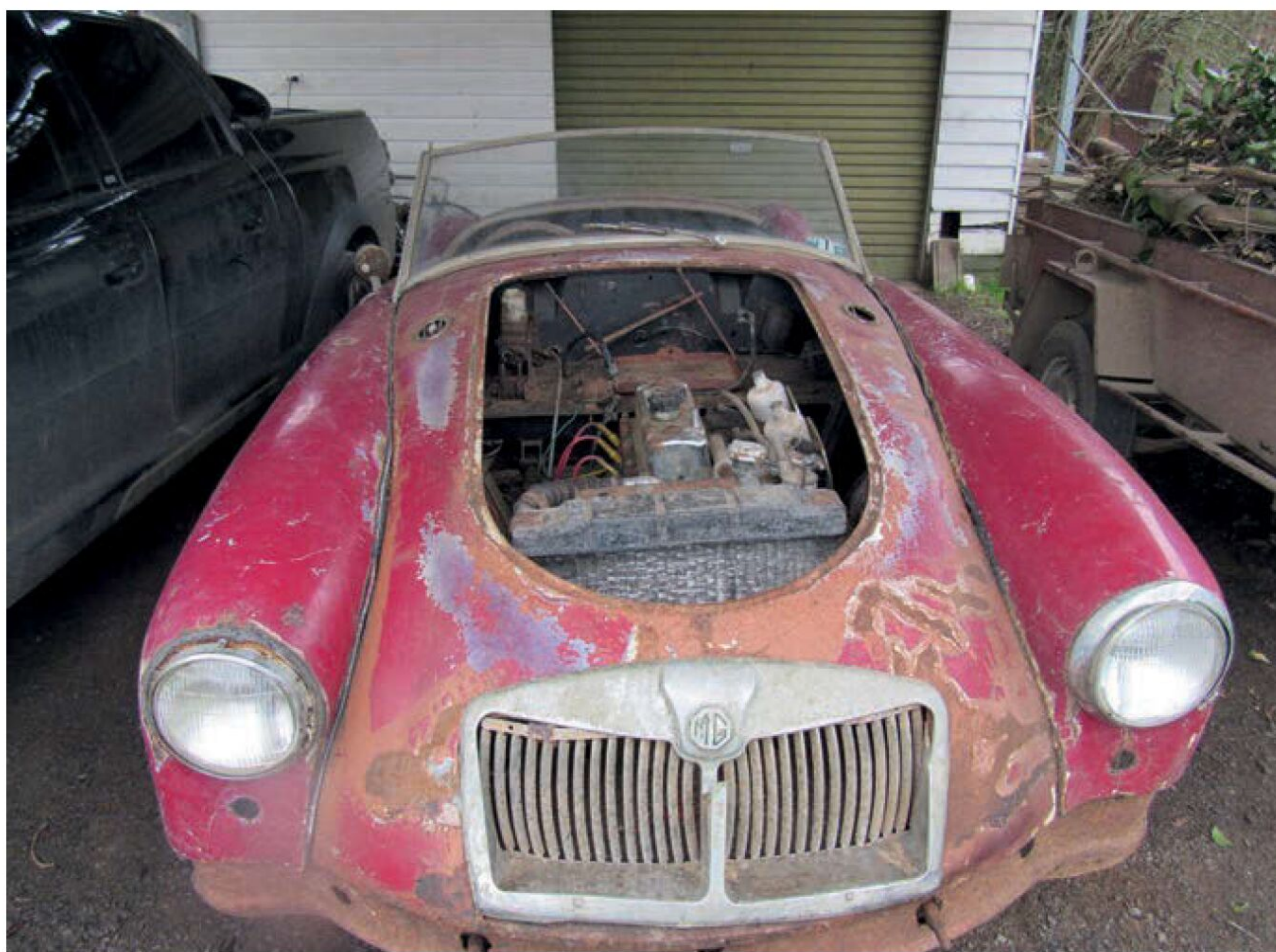
Not all member stores currently offer buy online / collect in store but all stores offer a telephone ordering service.



AN EASY RESTORATION

When Mark Rouse was tempted by a project MGA he found on eBay, he convinced himself (with some help from the seller) that it would be a simple restoration. Hmm, where have we heard that one before...?

WORDS AND PICTURES: MARK ROUSE



The old advice to be wary of buying a car sight unseen, especially via the internet, was never so true as it was with my 1958 MGA. I had the owner send me many pictures of this barn find from a central New South Wales flower farm and it didn't look too bad, so I decided to enter the bidding war for what was billed as an easy restoration. I followed the car right up to the end of the internet auction, and in the last minute I made my move. Ten seconds later, I had bought an MGA.

The owner seemed very pleased that I had purchased the car. I was pleased too, and after many emails and phone calls, I sent a deposit and arranged to pay the balance of the price when I picked up the car. The MGA was near

Melbourne in Victoria, but we live in Burrum Heads which is in Central Queensland. Even in Australian terms, this is a very long way indeed. In fact a round trip of 3728.8km or 2316.9 miles. I convinced my long-suffering wife it would be an adventure to go and collect our MGA. It was then she took on the job of being official photographer of the restoration project.

We hired a car trailer from our local service station and set off on our adventure. Luckily I own a Nissan Patrol pick-up, so towing the trailer and comfort on the drive wasn't a problem. We decided to travel from the central coast of Queensland where we live, through south western Queensland into western New South Wales, then through the centre of Victoria to Melbourne. It was mid-winter, and

inland Australia is very cold at that time of year. We even experienced ice and snow.

Reaching our destination after a few long, cold, wet days of driving, our spirits began to brighten even though the winter weather didn't match them. The chap we bought the car from seemed cheerful and friendly. He took us to a shed where he performed the grand unveiling, and even though we had had many pictures the car in the flesh was... underwhelming.

My MGA had been sitting for a long time. The many layers of paint stuck doggedly to the body in some places, while in others it could be peeled off by hand. The beautiful chrome was dull and pitted. The interior had two non-MGA seats in it. All the instruments and fittings were gone or unserviceable. The engine was in →



place, but that was about all it had going for it. All the body panels were loose or removed. The chassis was in remarkable condition, but the suspension had sagged and the car was very low to the ground. This was not helped by tyres with little or no air in them.

The car was in really poor condition, but we had driven so far and gone to the expense

of hiring a trailer for two weeks, so we had to take it home. We winched it up onto the trailer, which was quite a feat in itself because the MG was so low, I strapped the car down, paid the owner and we began our trip home.

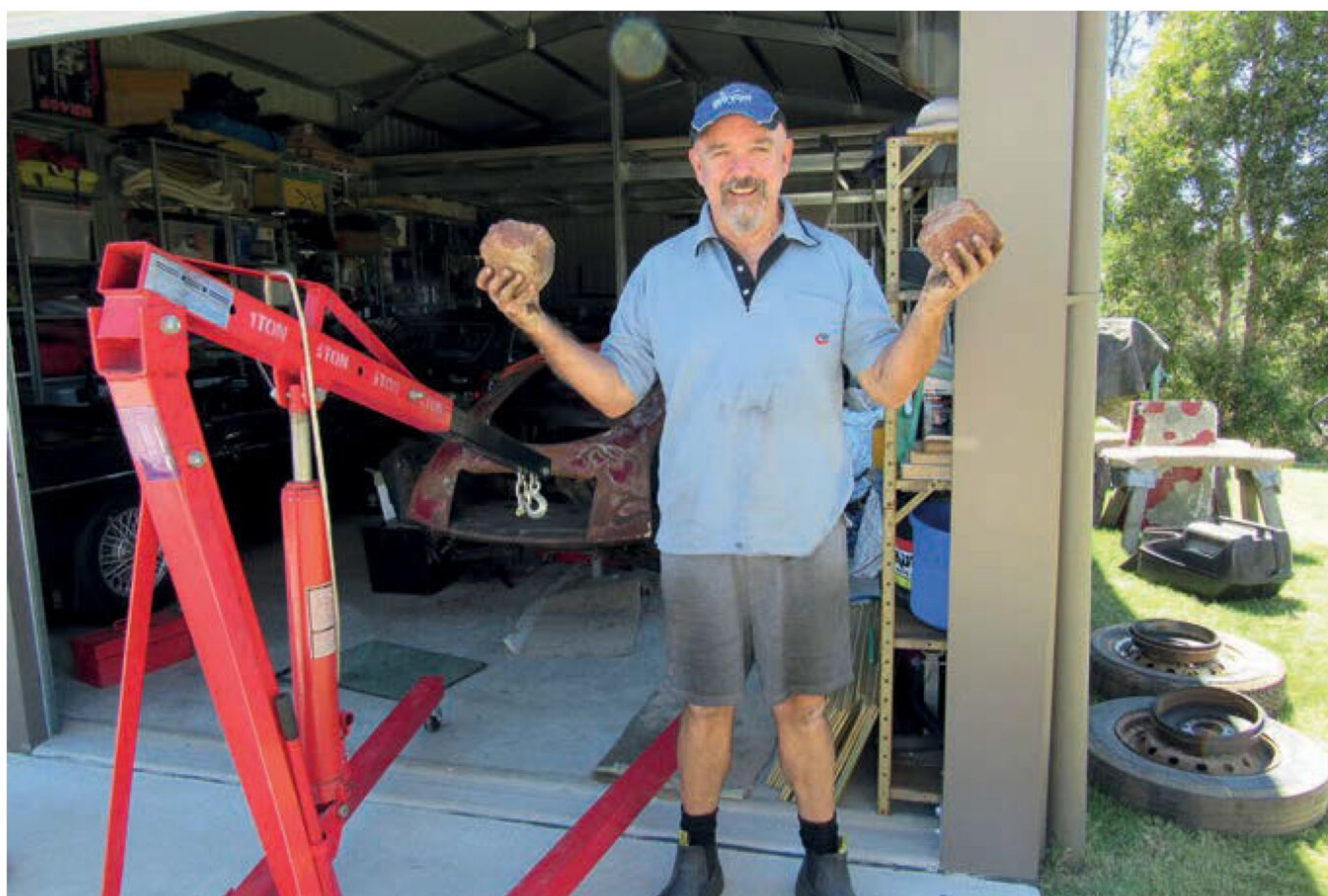
The first stop was in Rutherglen, a fantastic winery region in northern Victoria. By the time we arrived there, the MGA was sitting even

lower on the trailer and the tie down straps were quite loose. There were lots of small stones under the car, so I jacked it up and to my surprise I found that the front springs had been replaced with bricks. House bricks. And now the bricks were breaking up, hence the small stones on the trailer. All I could do was to stop regularly and re-tension the tie downs.

We had driven so far that we decided to make a few more tourist stops on the way home. As our journey home progressed, it became a fine balancing act between visiting our tourist destinations, fastening the car down safely and detouring around flood rains. But we made it in one piece, and so began the process of bringing this 'easy restoration' back to life.

With the car safely deposited in my shed, I started the process of stripping it down. First out were those non-MG seats. Here I got my first break – they turned out to be Austin-Healey seats which I was later able to sell. The trim came out too, but there was not much there to be saved. The wings, panels, boot lid and bonnet all came off easily. In fact everything came off easily because it had been removed and replaced before. Just not repaired.

With all the usable trim and body parts tagged ready for restoration, it was time to turn my attention to the engine bay. This had been stripped of most parts except the engine itself, so out came the engine and gearbox. Under the



guidance of my mechanic friend Jim, we took the motor to pieces. The seller had assured me he'd had this motor running recently, but that would have been a remarkable feat because the con rod in the first cylinder was broken off. In fact it had wedged against the camshaft and broken a huge chunk from the block. My motor would only be useful as a boat anchor.

I managed to find a servable 1500cc motor on the Gold Coast, only about 450km from home. So off we went to get it. My wife and I came to call these many drives to get parts for the MGA our Viking raids, as we would travel many kilometers to swoop in and get the MGA parts we needed and travel home quickly. Fortunately Jim and I were able to refurbish the new motor without mishap.

Very few bolts held the body to the chassis, and they separated with suspicious ease. Once separated, it quickly became evident that the body would need more than simple panel beating skills to rejuvenate it. This is where my paint and panel guru, Terry, took over. Terry needed the body sandblasted, so I put it on my trailer and took it to the local sandblaster. When he had finished, sections of the body looked like Swiss cheese. Then whilst transporting it to Terry's workshop, the body folded in half. It was lucky I had some brought some screws, thick steel plate and a battery drill just in case this very thing happened. I braced the body with the steel and screws on the side of the road. Safely home, I placed the body on a tarp in the back garden and was able etch prime it thoroughly by rolling it over and using a vacuum cleaner to spray paint it.

Once the body was safely at Terry's workshop, I set about taking all the parts off the chassis. It was in remarkable condition and was square and true – to give him his due,



the previous owner had done a good job here. Now was the time to repair, rejuvenate and recondition all the parts I had. Our Viking raids to get the missing parts had taken us all over the place, though as a last resort sometimes I had to buy a new part.

My friends in the local MG club have given me much encouragement and help. This has

taken the form of help and advice with repairs and donation of parts. A good example of this is the gearbox. I ended up with three MGA gearboxes given to me by different friends. This was lucky because my gearbox restorer, Bobby Kostic of Wide Bay Automatics, needed all three to make one good one.

The hours that I have spent working on the MGA have been matched by the hours I have spent online. Without access to the internet to purchase parts and find technical information, the process of restoring my car would have been more drawn out. I also would have missed out on the excitement of receiving all of those deliveries of parts coming in the mail or by courier. In fact, our post lady says she has delivered most of my car.

Finally I had reached the stage where I could start to rebuild the chassis while Terry was busy rebuilding and repairing the body. Engine and gearbox went in like a hand in a glove, followed by upgraded suspension, brakes and axles. The wooden floor had rotted out, so it was replaced with a new one covered in aluminium for extra protection. One of our Viking raids had yielded some MGA seats that were in pretty poor condition, but an MG contact was able to get a motor trimmer in Sri Lanka to make new leather seat covers, supply all the trim leather and make a new hood and tonneau. When all this arrived, my wife made cotton under covers for the seats to ensure the leather fitted without lumps and bumps.

The major chrome feature of an MGA is the windscreen surround. Mine was dull and pitted, so it was sent off to be rechromed. The result looked stunning. I gave my local windscreen fitter the rechromed frame, the rubber seals and some mass produced window frame corners so he could supply and fit a new windscreen. Unfortunately the mass produced window frame corners didn't fit – the holes were in the wrong place and they were too wide. Much →





me something to take my mind away from my health and help me to regain my strength.

Finally I thought I was ready for my first road test. The car started well as it had done when I conducted a short test run on the motor, but this time I let the motor run and get up to operating temperature. Lucky I didn't take it out on the road because all of the core plugs popped out! It turns out I had not been vigorous enough when installing them. I went new plugs on the side of the motor, and a Doreman plug at the rear so I didn't have to take the motor out.

Finally my MGA was ready to register. Well, it was after I fixed a hole in the fuel tank, changed where the wipers were parking, fixed the leaking master cylinder, rewired the indicators and bled the brakes and clutch. Yes my MGA was ready for the road.

The last task in the restoration process was an afternoon tea for all the people who had helped me along the way. Twenty-four people attended, most of them bringing their MGs. We all enjoyed sandwiches, sponge cake and a few beers. Despite all the problems and the mistakes along the way, this has been a fantastic experience which I would recommend to anyone – I am very proud of my car, and also of the friendships and camaraderie that I've gained along the way. ■

internet research yielded a parts supplier in the USA who sent parts that fitted.

Eventually I had fitted everything I could to the chassis. So I put it on a trailer and took it to Terry's workshop, where he had been tirelessly working on the body to remove the many layers of old English white paint, red paint and undercoat from the body parts which were unable to be sandblasted. After a test fit of the body on the chassis, we decided it was time to apply some fresh paint.

The information I had about the car told us it had originally been Glacier Blue, so I decided to go with that. After some research I established the paint formula for Glacier Blue, but a test run revealed I didn't like the colour at all! As a

result I was able to choose a blue that was more pleasant. Soon the body, looking superb in its fresh paint, was reunited with the chassis and it was time to bring the car home. Again. This time though, it looked lovely and I put the car away in my shed thinking it wouldn't be long before I would be driving my MGA on club runs.

Soon after compiling a list of things to do, I realised that my journey wasn't even half over. I methodically began to bolt things on, glue, staple and screw. Just as I began to make progress on the car, I developed septic arthritis in my knee and nearly lost my leg. My illness caused a three-month stop to any restoration work. As my health returned, the restoration work on the MGA proved important in giving





Ausgabe 16/2022



Ausgabe 9/2022



Ausgabe 4/2023



Ausgabe 4/2023



One brand, all solutions

As a world-renowned manufacturer of the highest-quality motor oils, additives, vehicle care products, chemical repair aids as well as service products, adhesives and sealants, we offer you the full range for the technical and visual preservation of vehicle value. A unique variety of products that you can only find at LIQUI MOLY.

With us, you get everything from a single source. This saves you a lot of time and money. A strong argument for retailers, workshops and consumers alike. Benefit from this added value, and take advantage of our product range and product expertise!



COLLECTOR'S EDITION

MGA



BUYING THE BEST



FAMOUS HISTORY



RACING MGA



YOUR CARS RESTORED



MGA CORVETTE HYBRID



INVENTING THE MGA

The MGA is one of Britain's fondest-remembered sporting greats. Smaller and daintier than the big Healeys but no less special for it, the MGA took everything that was great about the traditional MG sports designs and reinvented it with flowing curves and a new drivetrain. We look back at its history, show you everything you need to know to buy one and bring you all the advice you need to bring one back to its best. Join us for the ultimate celebration of a motoring icon.

PRINTED IN THE UK £9.99

ISBN 978-1-914551-41-3



9 781914 551413