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■ ■
British Motor Heritage Approved - founded 1966

#### THE SPORTS CARS



hat does the term 'sports car' mean to you? Speed? Open-top motoring? Bulging arches and raucous exhaust note? Or is it simply a car that is a cut above the humdrum-mediocrity, a car that makes every countryside jaunt an absolute joy?

Welcome to issue six of MG Memories, where we will be looking into this very conundrum and finding out how MG and their cars solved this issue for over seventy years.

With MG's rich heritage of pre-war cars, we kick this issue off with a look at a fabulous TF. The final instalment in the T-type Midgets, some would argue this car represented a greatest hits of its predecessors, by continuing to give the driving public the beautiful sweeping lines but with added power – a whopping 57.5bhp!

Those majestic curves were modernised entirely in the 1950s with the introduction of the MGA. Taking the motoring world by storm, the MGA demonstrated the new direction MG was heading. In roadster, or coupe form, the MGA was, and still is, hugely popular, with nearly 23,000 cars being produced at its peak in 1959.

This leads nicely into the ever-popular Midget and MGB. If ever there were two British sports cars that encapsulate sporty motoring, they are it. Hood down with the wind in your hair, period advertising at the time showed couples enjoying all there was to love about life with their MG. Even in GT form, the B allowed drivers a slice sports car heaven without the price tag of an Aston or Jaguar. However, with US safety restrictions defining the pair's looks at the end of their productions, their effortless beauty was lost for good.

After a decade or so in the sports car wilderness, MG returned with aplomb. Enter the MGF. After the world had witnessed Mazda's MX-5 recapture all that was meant by two-seater motoring, MG delivered their own mid-engined masterclass. Designed on the tightest of budgets, the MGF, and subsequent TF, went on to resurrect the MG brand and become a sales success all over the globe.

Today, all of these sports cars are enjoyed by not only long-serving MG enthusiasts, but also new fans of the marque, and long may it continue.

Enjoy the issue everyone, and keep safe.

**Paul Sander Editor, MG Memories** 

### MG MEMORIES: THE SPORTS CARS

A look at the cars that have made MG motoring thrilling to millions









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## The end of the line

Mike Taylor traces the history of MG's TF, arguably the best of the T-type Midgets. Taking one for a test drive he talks to its owner, Tony Simmons.

A nyone visiting the MG Motor Company stand at the Earl's Court Motor Show in 1952 would have been confronted by the current models to emerge from the well known factory in Abingdon; the MG TD Midget (which could trace its antecedents back to the J2, launched in 1933) and the 'Y Type' saloon. By complete contrast, alongside was the sleekly-styled

record breaker in which Lt. Col 'Goldie' Gardner triumphed at Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah, where he collected a handful of international class records and a number of American national class records. On one occasion, travelling at 150mph, he spun, hitting a marker post, causing the sign atop the pole to fall on to the Plexiglas cockpit cover and hitting Gardner in the face.

In stark contrast to the ultrasleek record breaker, the TD sports car and the four-door YA saloon looked decidedly pre-war in style. However, underneath, the front suspension and steering comprised contemporary independent coil springs, wishbones, lever arm dampers as well as rack and pinion steering mounted on the traditional separate MG chassis frame. At the





Despite being outdated compared to its opposition, the TF sold fairly well.

rear were conventional leaf springs with live axle and there were drum brakes all round. Both cars shared the sturdy 1.25-litre MG XPAG engine with a single SU carburettor for the saloon and twin SUs for the open TD.

At the same show, a year later in 1953, observers and enthusiasts could be forgiven for being somewhat disappointed. While saloon buyers could now choose the elegant new Gerry Palmer-designed Magnette with its full width body shape, powered by the new 1.5-litre BMC B-series engine, the TF was clearly based on its predecessor, the TD. Only the angled front grille, which in turn caused the bonnet line to drop gracefully forward, gave the TF an improved silhouette while the



#### MG TF 1250 MIDGET



headlamps were now encased within the wing panels.

Significantly, MG's plans for the TD's successor had been far more radical and were based on the Le Mans racer of 1951. Called EX175, the latent MGA had been shown to MG's new masters at BMC's headquarters in Longbridge as MG's proposal for the next generation of sports car and would signal a major step forward in design. Critically BMC's Chairman, Sir Leonard Lord, had only recently agreed a deal with his friend Donald Healey to manufacture the Healey 100, branded 'Austin-Healey 100'. Lord saw MG's proposal as a direct competitor and Abingdon was told to continue making the TD. The directive was clearly a bitter blow for MG's General Manager, John Thornley, and his team. However, a little leeway over the design concept was allowed by MG's masters and, for 1953 the 'compromise' car was called the TF. Sales to foreign markets, and the USA in particular, absorbed a major slice of production.

In developing the TF, MG's engineers left the TD's chassis frame with its sturdy box-section side members largely untouched, preferring to concentrate on increasing the power output of the 1250cc XPAG engine from 54.5bhp to 57.5bhp. This was

achieved by raising the compression ratio and fitting slightly larger inlet valves with wider tracts, stronger valve springs and installing larger 1½" twin SU carburettors. Why not just fit the 1489cc BMC B engine as installed in the Magnette, critics may well have asked? The disingenuous corporate answer was that the B-series supply was limited and BMC could not keep up with demand if it powered the TF as well.

As for the body styling changes these focused largely on the frontal treatment while the interior now boasted an angled dashboard with three octagonal-shaped Jaeger instruments encompassing speedometer, rev counter, water temperature, oil pressure and a tiny clock. There was even a small map reading light. Seat squabs and back rests were deeply padded to give the TF's driver and passenger a wellcushioned ride. Overall, despite its traditional looks, the TF continued to offer non-competition-minded buyers good value, handling and performance for their money. Indeed, in the face of stiff competition from the likes of Triumph and Morgan, the TF was clearly a sports car from another era. Its T-series lines which, by 1953, were beginning to look

decidedly dated, occasioned less then complimentary comments from the press.

The early months of 1955 saw a hive of activity at MG's Abingdon headquarters, largely based upon BMC's decision to establish a motorsport department within the factory, run by pre-war racing figure, Marcus Chambers. It was a decision which was to bring huge publicity for the company. Just months later, the MG TF became the '1500', the old MG XPAG unit giving way to the new XPEG derivative. It was a long overdue upgrade but failed to put the TF at the top of its class in terms of performance.

The increase in cubic capacity was achieved by using a new cylinder block casting in which the bores were increased from 66.5mm to 72mm, retaining the XPAG's 90mm stroke, for a capacity of 1465.8cc. Bore centres of cylinders 1 and 2, and 3 and 4 were closer together. Power was increased marginally to 60bhp at 4600rpm with maximum speed increasing rather disappointingly from 80mph to 84mph.

Even this stop-gap was not enough to stave off the MG TF's more modern competition from other manufacturers so BMC gave its approval for the "Body-styling changes focused largely on the frontal treatment..."





#### MG TF 1250 MIDGET

B-series-powered MGA to be launched later that same year. Its graceful curves brought a huge wave of orders, securing MG's place among the world's sports car manufacturers.

#### TONY SIMMONS AND HIS 1954 MG TF 1250

"I was born in south London, in 1940, and none of my family or my parents had a car or were interested in cars," reflects Tony Simmons thoughtfully. He is the owner of the delightful cream coloured MG TF featured here. "In fact, when I was a kid, there was only ever one car parked in our street. Later, a friend of my brother bought a Triumph TR2 and I went for a ride in it. I was smitten and never looked back although my first love was always motorbikes and motorcycling, which even continued after running cars, until I fell off once too often."

In 1960 Tony passed his driving test and he bought an early Ford sidevalve saloon. "Sadly, one cold winter's morning, I went out to start it and found the cylinder head had cracked. I'd forgotten to put anti-freeze in the cooling system."

After this experience Tony was without a car until he got married in 1961. "At that point I bought a Mk2 Ford Zephyr and, from then on, it was always big saloons like Austin



Westminsters, Vauxhall Victors and so on. Throughout my life my job had always been involved with lorries and cranes, until I moved into management, so I'm used to handling heavy vehicles."

After giving up motorcycling, around 2005, Tony's thoughts turned to Bentleys. He and his wife Sally went to have a look at an S2 model for sale in Sevenoaks, Kent. "The owner wasn't in the showroom so I couldn't complete the deal which, in the event, turned out to be fortuitous. I found the MG TF on the internet and I said to Sally: 'do you like MGs?' and showed her a

photograph of the car, to which she said: 'that looks pretty'. It was for sale at Classic Chrome, a classic car specialist based in East Sheen." Tony and Sally went to have a look at it, took it for a test drive and bought it.

During their first year of MG TF ownership they joined the MG Car Club and the MG Owners Club.
They began making new friends and their life became very hectic. "We always had something to do," Tony continues. "Then we went on our first continental trip in it, to Royat in southern France, in June 2006. Of course, I'd driven on the continent





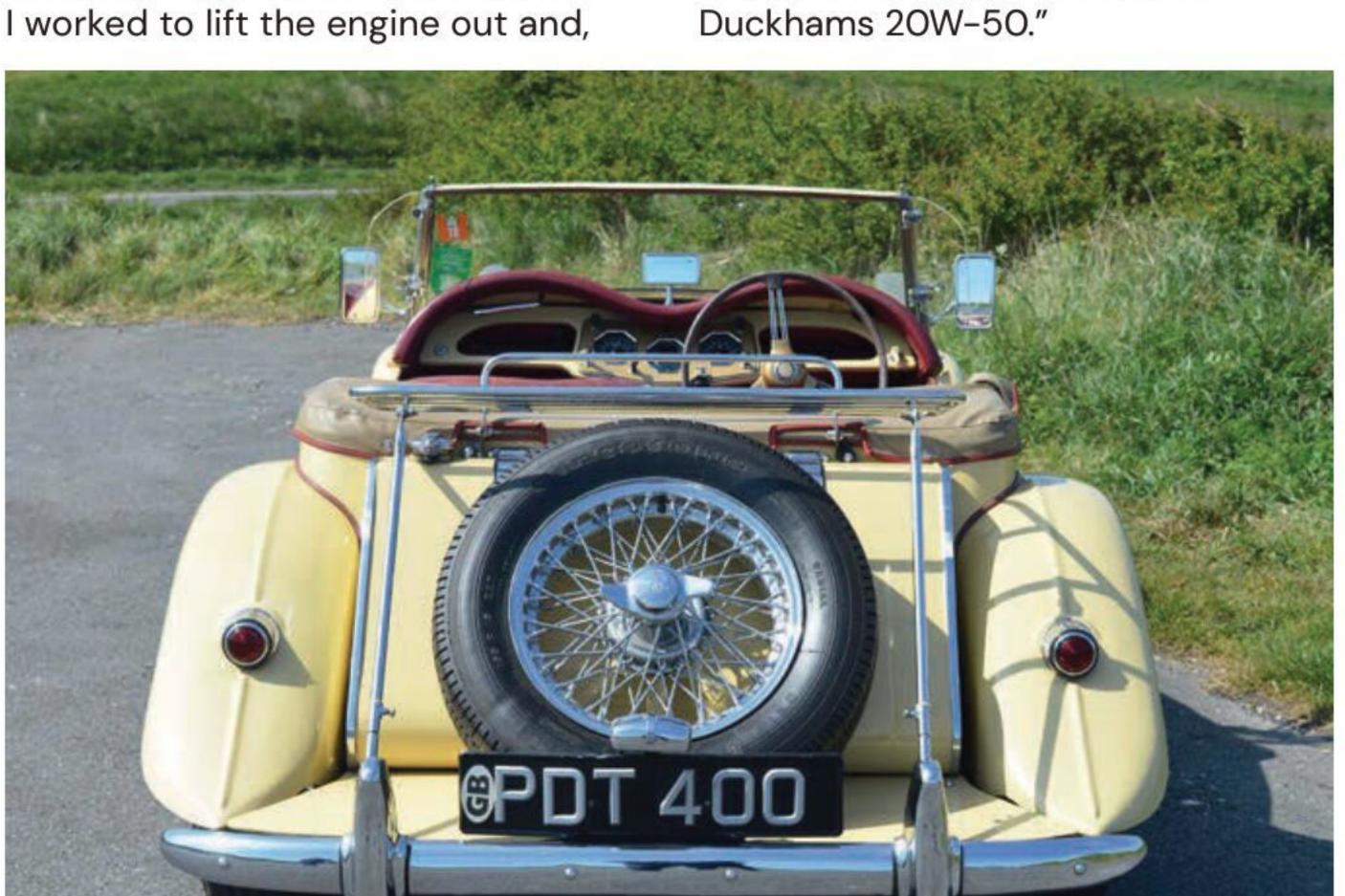
The TF is powered by a 1250cc XPAG engine, fuelled by twin SU carbs.

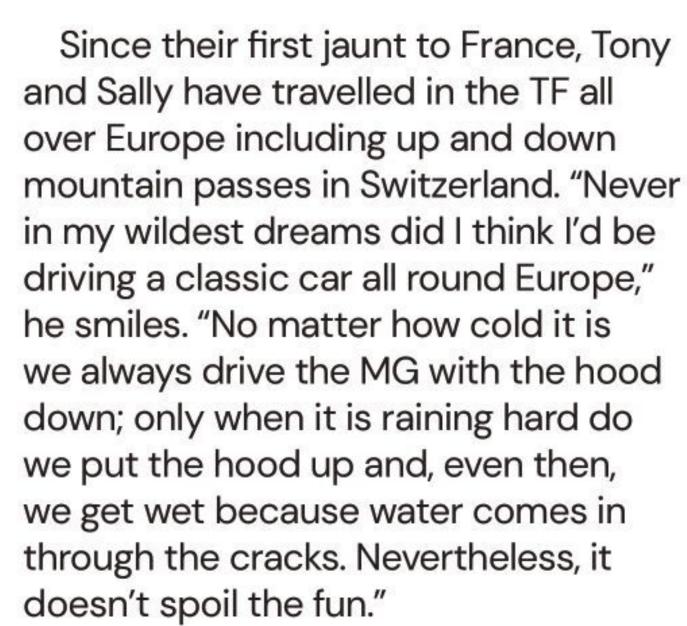
to places like Spain and Portugal in other cars but I didn't know how reliable the TF was going to be. I took several spares such as a water pump, distributor and so on with my tool kit although, in the event, I never used it."

One thing the trip to France did reveal was the MG's propensity to overheat. That year Tony changed the gearbox to a modern Ford Sierra 5-speed type and the problem was solved. "The box came as part of a kit with a propshaft and all the necessary nuts, bolts and washers. I had the facilities where

together with a friend, we were able to make the change. It was quite straightforward. I was very pleased with the result and, in addition to curing the overheating problems through reducing engine revs at cruising speeds, it made the car much quieter."

Sadly, one problem Tony did encounter with the TF many years later was when the crankshaft failed. "It was because I'd put semisynthetic oil in the sump and, over a period of time, it had taken its toll. Now I use only conventional





Is there anything left for Tony and Sally to experience with their TF? "Not really. We've been round Hockenheimring, at one point on two wheels, as well as Mallory Park and Royat, which is another old Grand Prix track. We'll just continue to enjoy it."

What plans does he have for the TF's future? "The steering is quite light until you come to park it," he reflects. "I was going to put electric power steering on it but then I bought an MGC GT, which is a really great car too, and I fitted the power assistance pack to that instead. It's made all the difference. I'd like to fit the TF with an alternator, which will keep the lights and the wipers going in the dark. Perhaps I'll even have it re-sprayed but that is a long job."

Concludes Tony: "Sally loves it. As for me the TF has made me into a better driver because I take things much slower than I've done in the past. It's that kind of car."

#### MG TF ON THE ROAD

Looked at in the bright summer sunshine the cream-coloured MG TF is a composition of straight lines and curves. Inside, the cockpit too has its profusion of varying shapes: the

#### MG TF 1250 MIDGET

convex scuttle top, with its twin semicircular cushioned edges, contrasts markedly with the hard-edged octagonal instruments. Either side of the instrument nacelle are two useful compartments for gloves, maps and the other profusion of paraphernalia we all accumulate while touring.

Access demands the driver feeds the left leg in under the 16.5" diameter mottled light brown Bakelite steering wheel while dropping weight down onto the substantial seat squab. Finally, the right leg is twisted between the seat and the A-post before finally placing both feet on the pedals. Once inside the TF feels compact rather than cramped, even for taller drivers, and it's easy to see why the appellation 'Midget' was continued on this, the last of the line of MG's T models. The dashboard controls fall easily to hand so there is no stretching to operate switches and ignition.

The pedals are set close together in true racing tradition. Twist the ignition key, pull the starter and the engine leaps into life. The change pattern of the Sierra gearbox follows Ford's conventional 5-speed pattern. Drive take-up is delightfully smooth although

the throttle pedal has a tiny wheel at its tip which sits below the ball of the driver's right foot and calls for care when initially pressing the pedal from its closed position; too much pressure, the pedal succumbs and the car leaps forward in a very ungainly fashion. It's a matter of practice.

Up through the box the little MG appears to revel in being hustled through corners and hurried along straights. It's as though there's a gear for every situation; a sharp bend approaches, you drop down a gear, dab the brakes and set the car up before powering round and then up through the box again, the whole operation being helped considerably by the smooth clutch action. There is little roll from the suspension and grip is enhanced considerably by the 165/80R15 Vredestein T-Trac 2 radial ply tyres.

Underway, the rack and pinion steering is pin sharp and enables the driver to position the car accurately. If there is a shortfall it's the size of the steering wheel, which in comparison to the limited diameter of modern steering wheel sizes needs familiarisation. In contrast the brakes demand firm pressure. In fact,

in view of the TF's performance, on occasions the brakes do appear to be borderline and may well prove inadequate on the larger-engined 1500 model. The addition of a servo might improve the feel.

The ride quality from those coil springs on the front is smooth over most surface conditions and body roll through bends is nicely damped adding to the car's enjoyment, aided no doubt by the well-padded seat squabs.

Tony and his wife Sally have taken this car on many long-haul continental trips, enjoying every minute. This model was widely perceived as outdated even at the time of its launch, and it was outgunned from day one by Triumph's 2-litre, 107mph TR2, but today it can be appreciated as the most refined iteration of the T-series Midgets and its rarity certainly makes it an attractive prospect for investors. It's greatest advantage was its reasonable retail price in the USA. When American motoring magazine Road and Track tested the MG TF 1250 they enthused that: "the MG TF is still the greatest sports car, for the money, available today."





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#### MGA DEVELOPMENT STORY





## 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

his, 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.

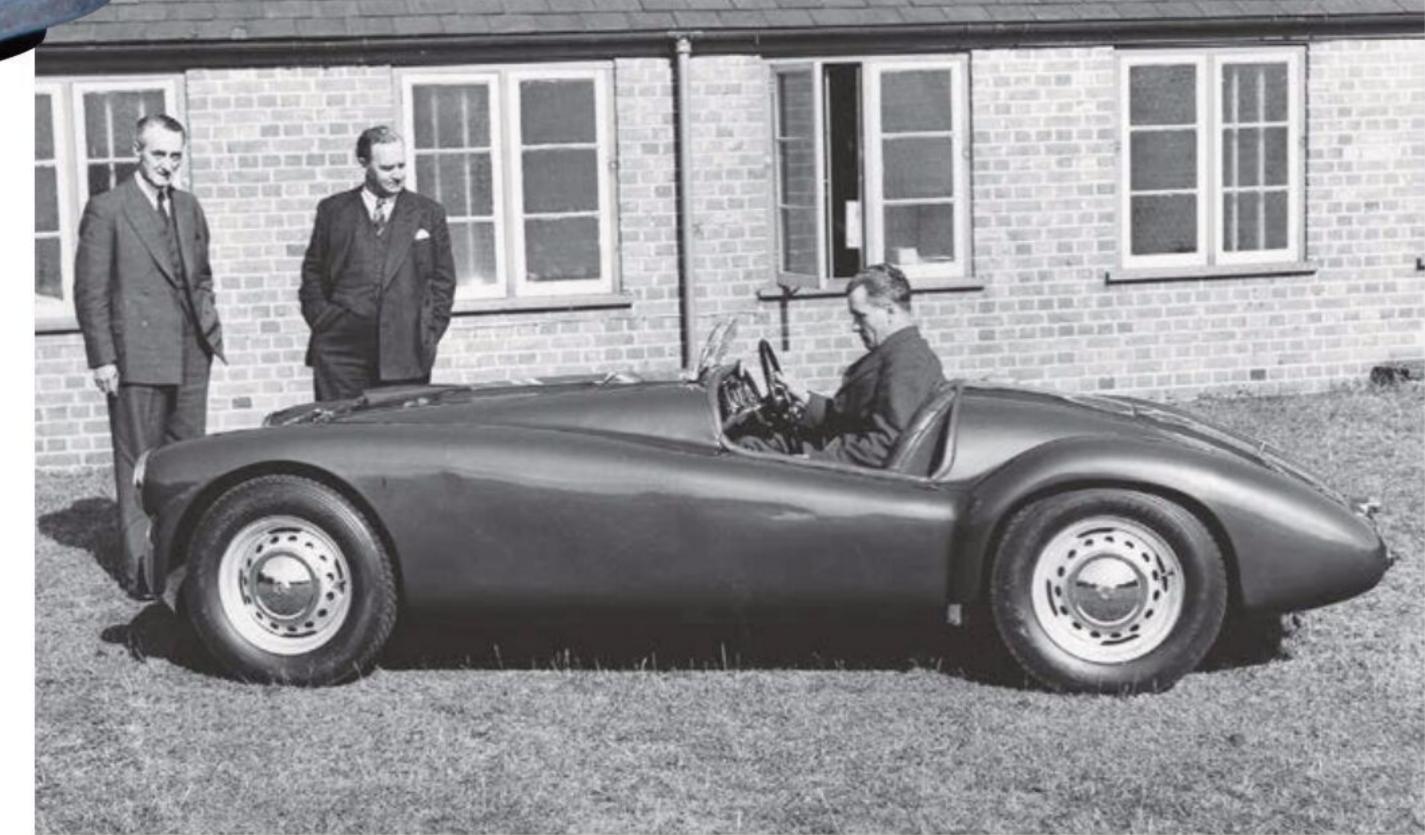
Let's start, then, with the pretty little one-off machine below. Superficially it might look just like an MGA but, under the skin, it was pure racespecification MG TD. Abingdon built it to make George Phillips' private Le Mans entry of 1951 a better aerodynamic

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.

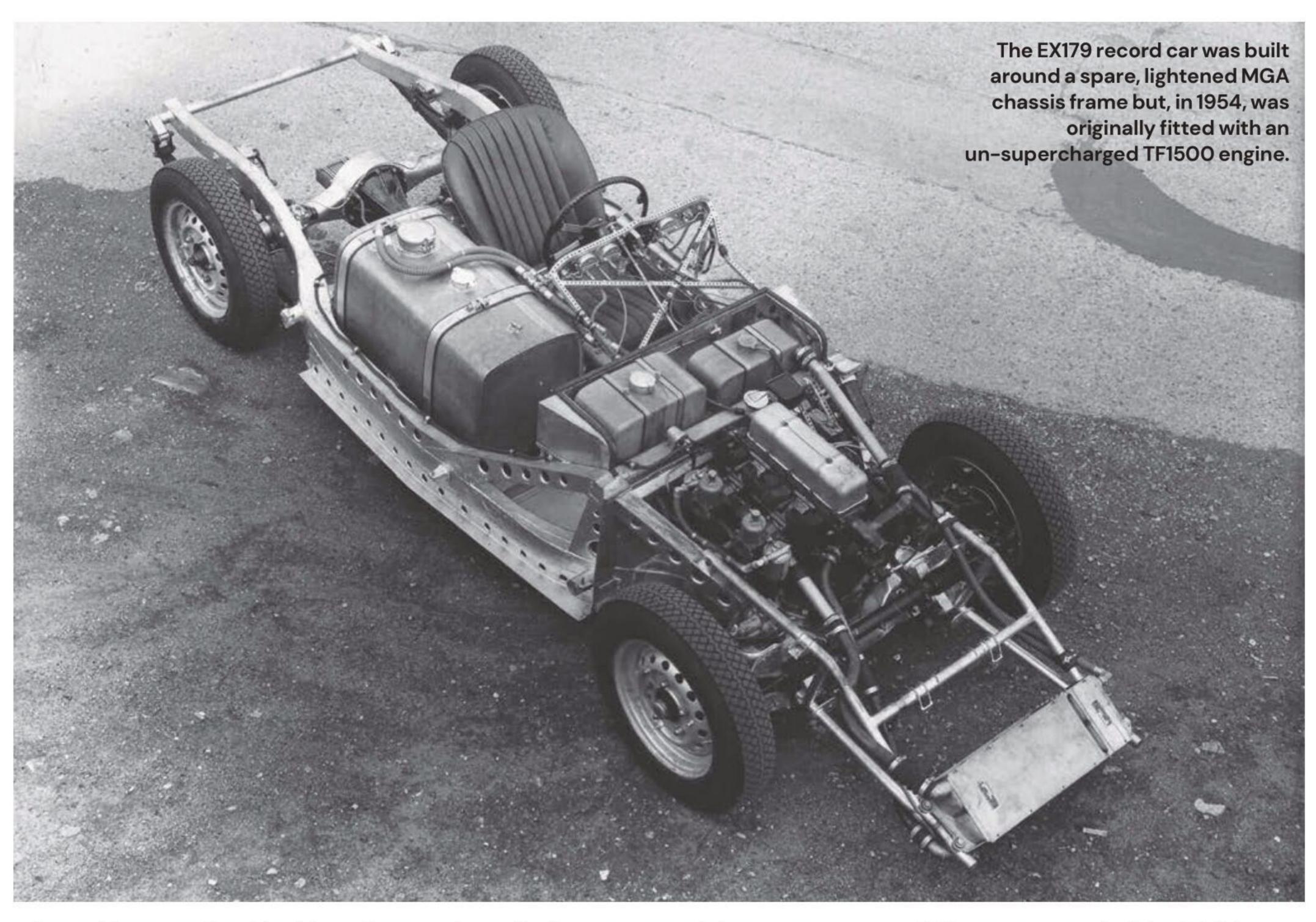
Irritated by the fact that UMG 400's chassis had made its racing driver sit up too far into the air-stream, chief engineer Syd Enever then sat down and drew up a new chassis frame that was lower, wider and sturdier than before. He saw it equipped with the latest in TD running gear (including the 1250cc 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



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!

#### MGA DEVELOPMENT STORY



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, 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 in the British Motor Museum at 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, 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.



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

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

The MGA's chassis (p20) 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 neatly behind the seats, ahead of the rear axle, though access for checking and topping up battery fluid cannot have been easy. Syd Enever's rationale for devising a chassis frame with wide-swept side members is clear.

The only shortcoming of the attractively swept tail of the MGA was that, with the spare wheel in place in the boot, there was not much space for any but 'soft' luggage around it.

This does not seem to have hampered the car's sales prospects, especially as many customers were trading up from a TD or a TF where there was no enclosed luggage space of any sort.



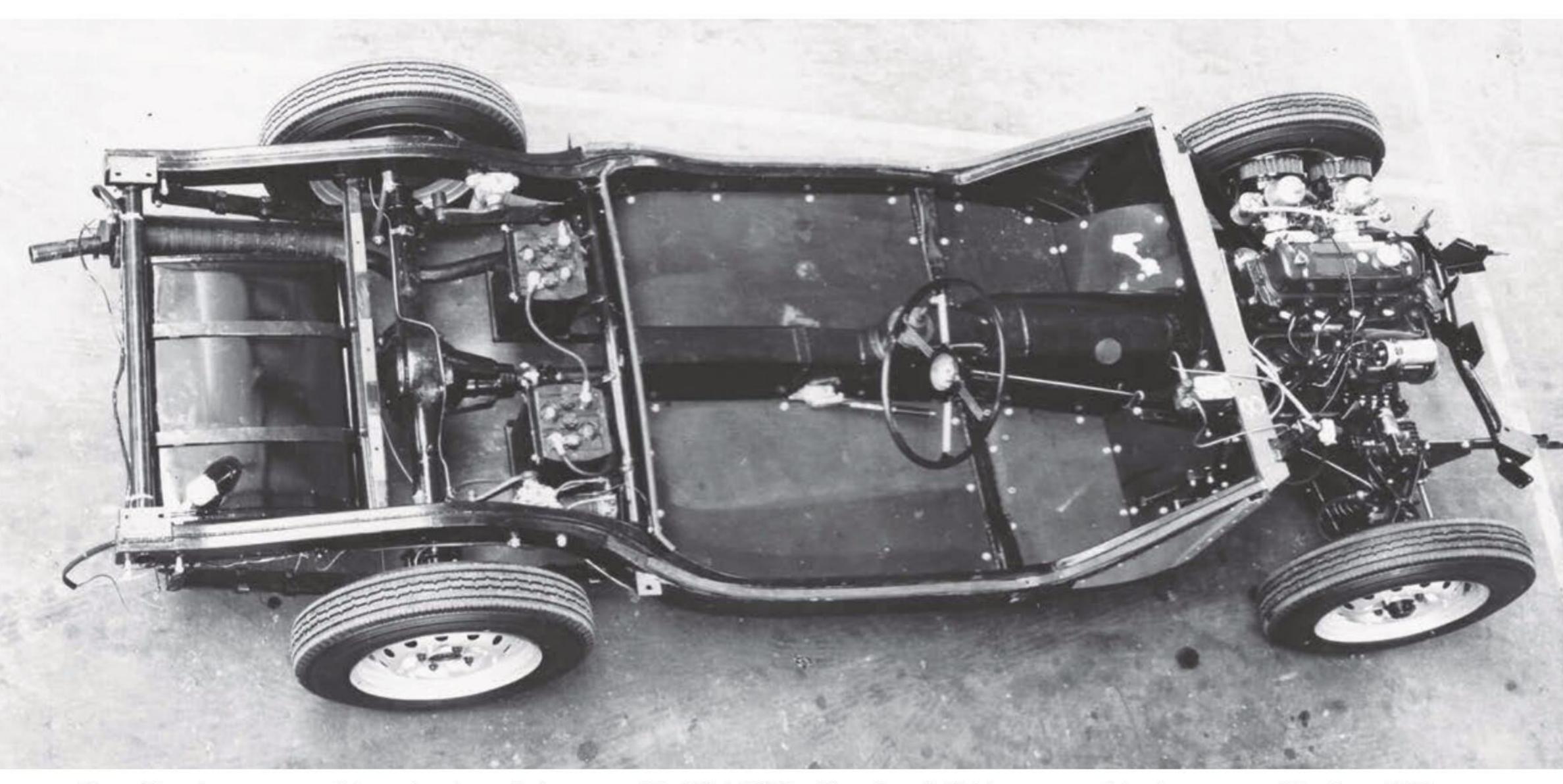
LBL 303 was the third of the EX182 prototypes which raced at Le Mans, finishing 17th, driven by Harold Holt of The Autocar magazine.

#### MGA DEVELOPMENT STORY





#### MGA DEVELOPMENT STORY



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

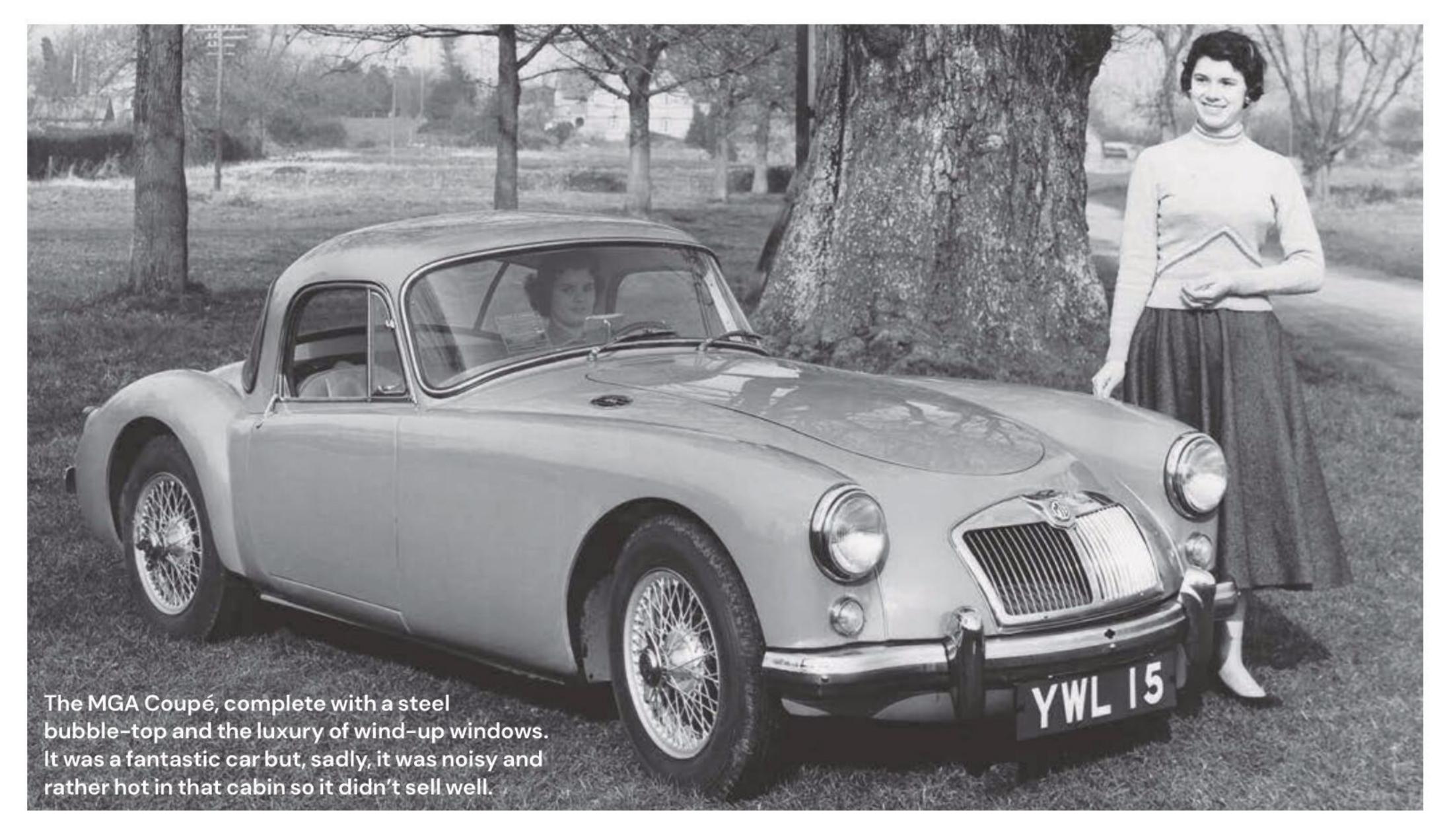
In any case, with a British sale price set at £844 in 1955, which was only £64 more than that of the final TF, and no less than £78 below the price of a Triumph TR3, no one seemed to be complaining. Clearly the allnew MGA was set to be a success for 13,410 were made in the first full year of production (1956) and 20,571 followed in 1957, which completely outstripped the highest 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 winddown window glass. Not only this, but the windscreen was larger, and bowed, also there was a wrap-around rear glass window, external handles for the doors and opening quarterlights in the newly-glazed doors. All 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



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.



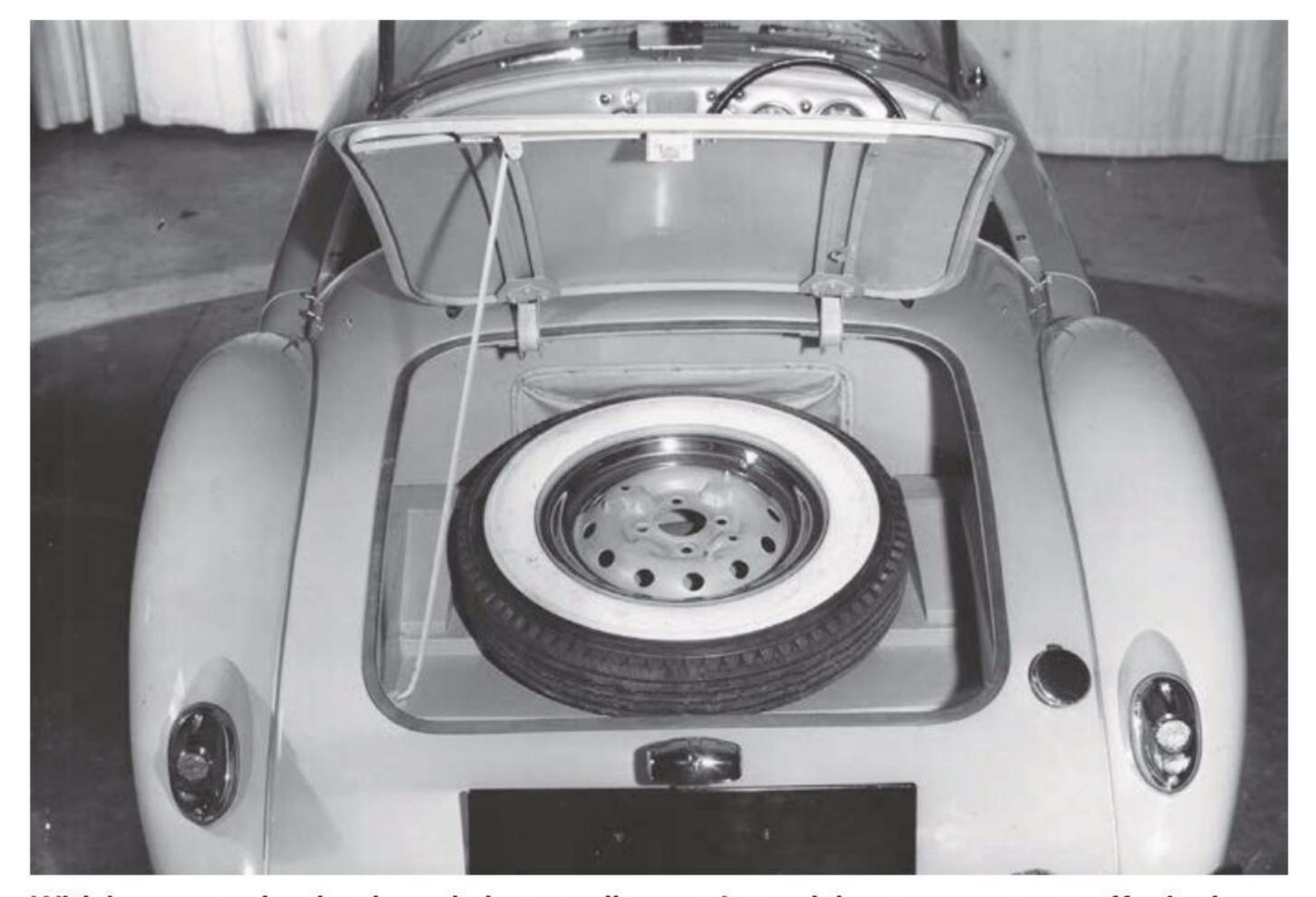
showrooms in 1958, was not a commercial success, the engine itself could be made remarkably racereliable in so many ways - not only for rallying and long-distance record breaking but for use at Le Mans in the prestigious 24-hour race.

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 bodyshell, for Ted Lund to use. In 1959 this 130bhpengined car was forced to retire from the race after it collided with a dog at high speed, resulting in cooling system damage. In 1960 it was rebuilt

with a special coupé-style (including some coupé panels and doors), won its class, averaged 91mph 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 the 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 23,000 a year, all achieved without any power assistance on 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 1588cc 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-



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)."





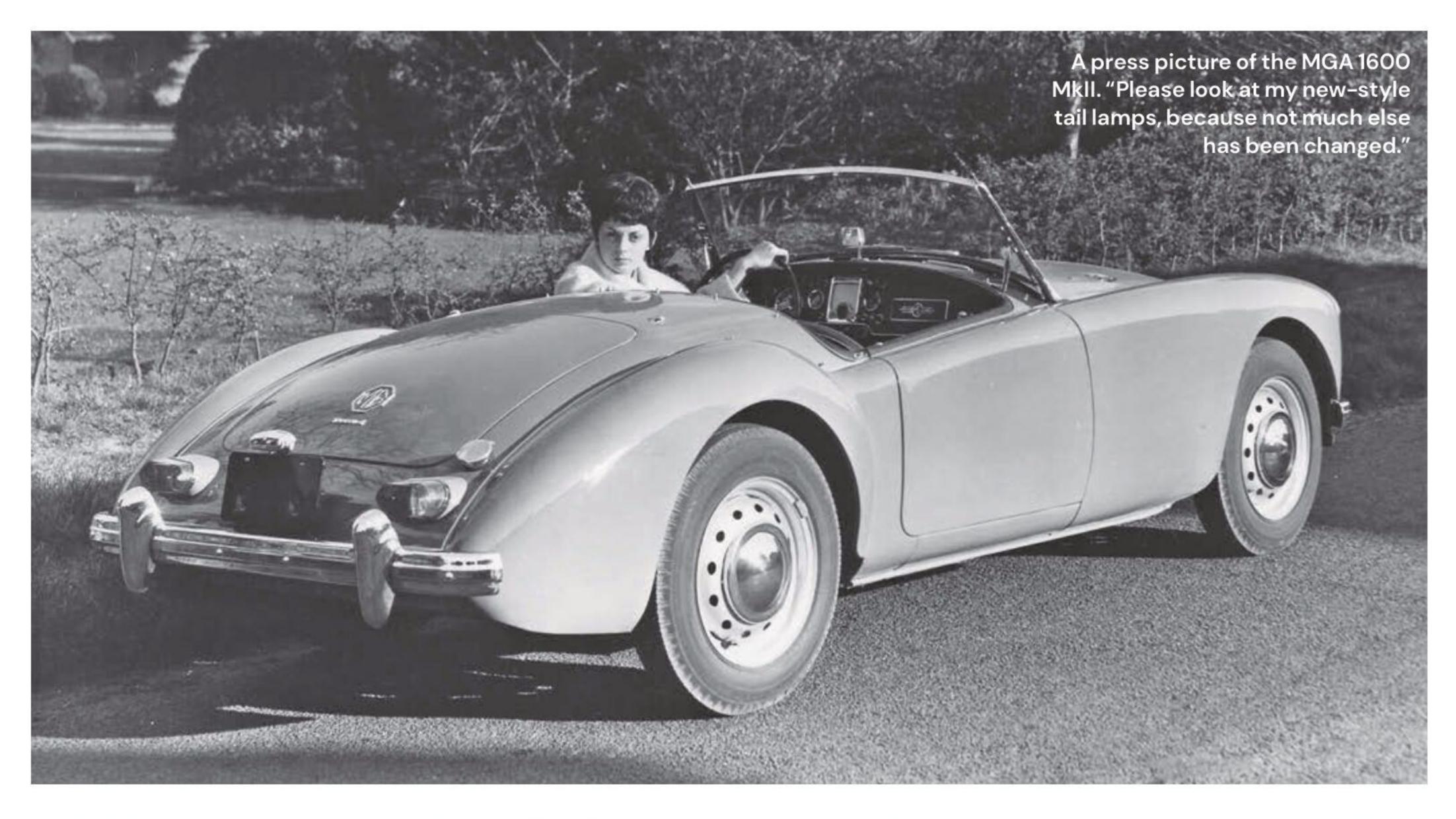
How to describe the MGA Twin-Cam engine of 1958? Powerful, big, complicated and impressive!

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-Camengined 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 1600 MkII, which was revealed in the UK in June 1961. The major update was the enlargement of the engine from 1588cc to 1622cc, 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

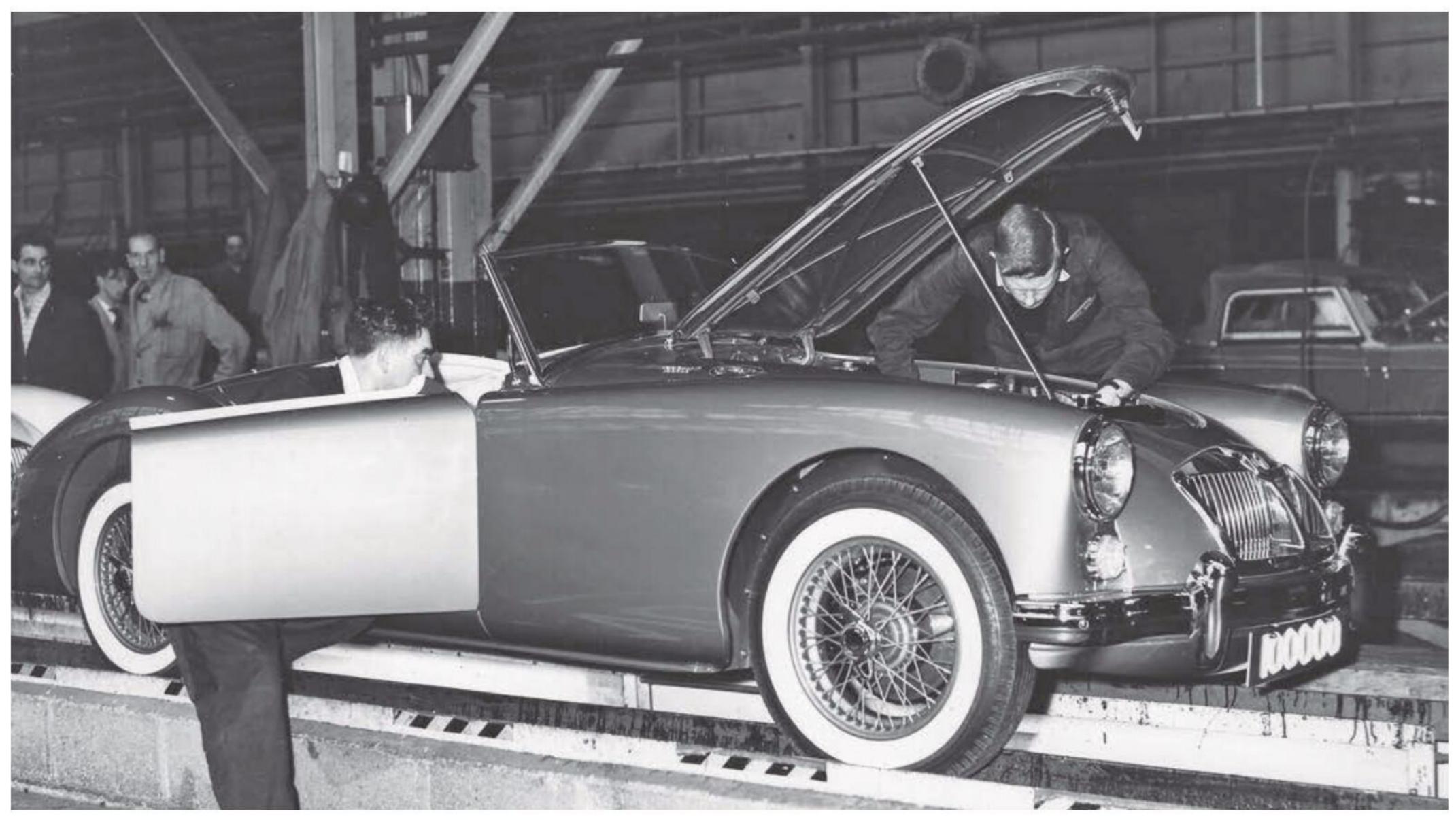
#### MGA DEVELOPMENT STORY



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.

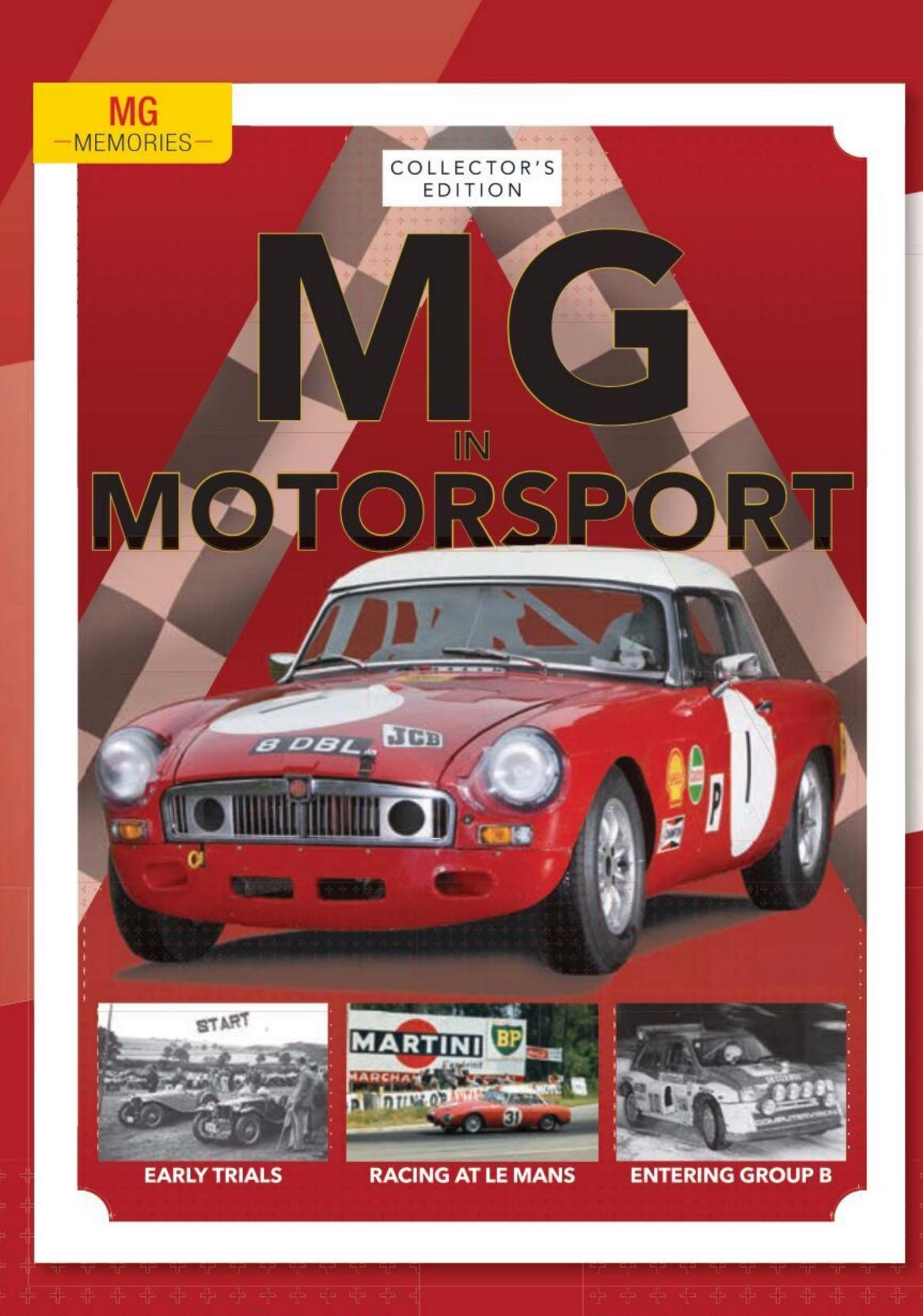


All in all, 101,081 MGAs were built, with the 100,000th going down the Abingdon assembly lines in March 1962. It was on its way to the USA.

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# The story of the ADO 47 Midgets

MG's ultimate Midget range entered production at Abingdon 60 years ago, in the summer of 1961. The much-loved, compact MG went on to sell nearly a quarter of a million examples in a production story hardly less impressive than that of the MGB.

Words: David Knowles

he origin of the MG Midget name dates back to around around 33 years before the Midgets described in this article. There has been debate about whose idea the name was but the wise money is with Cecil Kimber, who was the genius behind most of the early marketing successes at Morris Garages; certainly Syd Enever said as much in an unpublished 1974 interview.

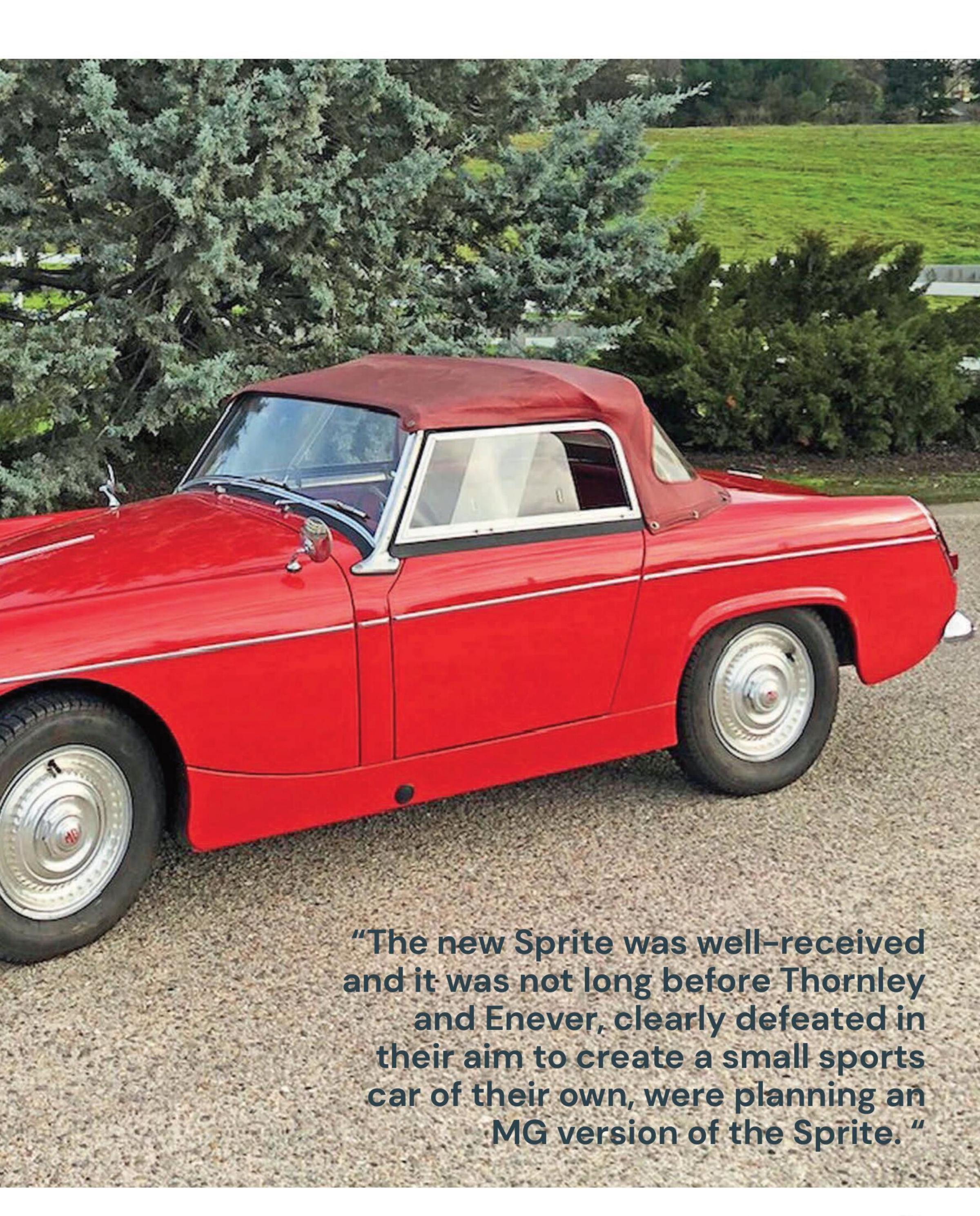
Kimber's real desire was to see MG move up-market from its humble origins as a fettler of Morris products and, with that in mind, he championed a kind of 'junior Bentley': the MG 18/100 Tigresse. Whilst the prototype of this impressive motor car disgraced itself upon its 1930 race début, the ubiquitous Morris Minor-derived MG M-type Midget rapidly became the de facto choice for light sports car racing. So began a series of models which cemented the Midget name in the worldwide sports car lexicon.

Whilst the 1930s MG sports car range grew to encompass Midgets, Magnas and Magnettes, by the time that the post-war export drive led to rising sales in North America, MG's sports car line was back to Midget alone, in the form of the T-types: the TC, TD and, ultimately, the TF, each sharing the well-regarded Nuffield 'XPAG' 1,250cc four-cylinder engine. Whilst the TF began as a 'Midget', its engine grew in size to 1466cc when it became the 'MG TF 1500' in 1954 and the Midget name fell into abeyance.

That does not mean, however, that Abingdon's enthusiasm for the idea of a baby sports car had evaporated; rather that 'Midget' had for the time being become a name in need of a new incarnation. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the 1952 BMC merger which brought Austin and Nuffield together, there were two rival sports car camps to contend with, each with their own objectives and competing vehicle lines. Donald Healey had cannily created the Healey Hundred, which was adopted by BMC's chairman Leonard Lord as the 'Austin-Healey 100/4' for production at the Austin plant at Longbridge and, soon after, he rejected MG's 'EX 175' proposal for a new sports car to replace the TD Midget.

If nothing else, this dual-fishing line sports car approach created rivalry between MG at Abingdon and the Healey family at Warwick, with both camps keen on securing their own futures under the BMC umbrella. Donald Healey was keen to build on the success of the BN1/BN2 Austin-Healey and began studies into a possible smaller sports car, using the new 948cc A-series engine of the Austin A35 and Morris Minor 1000. At the same time, John Thornley and Syd Enever were determined not to be left out of this exercise. From the mid-1950s there were various attempts to create a new, small sports car to sit below the MGA.





#### **ADO 47 MIDGET DEVELOPMENT STORY**

The challenge was finding a way to finance a different, smaller and cheaper sports car, the profits on which would clearly be harder to eke out, and in an international market where arguably what many overseas enthusiasts really wanted was something a little bigger, faster and better on the race circuit. MG looked at a cheaper version of the MGA, using the A-series engine and other lighter components, but the considered opinion at Abingdon was that it was a pretty miserable creation that would not prove very much cheaper than the donor model.

By 1956, however, Donald Healey and his engineer son Geoffrey had formulated a concept which took some inspiration from, of all things, the Jaguar D-type racing sports car, using a strong lightweight central monocoque body tub with quarterelliptic rear springs and an enclosed tail structure that dispensed with the idea of an opening boot lid. By 1958 this diminutive sports car was entering production - at Abingdon rather than Longbridge as originally intended – and the MG factory became the BMC corporate sports car plant. The introduction of the new

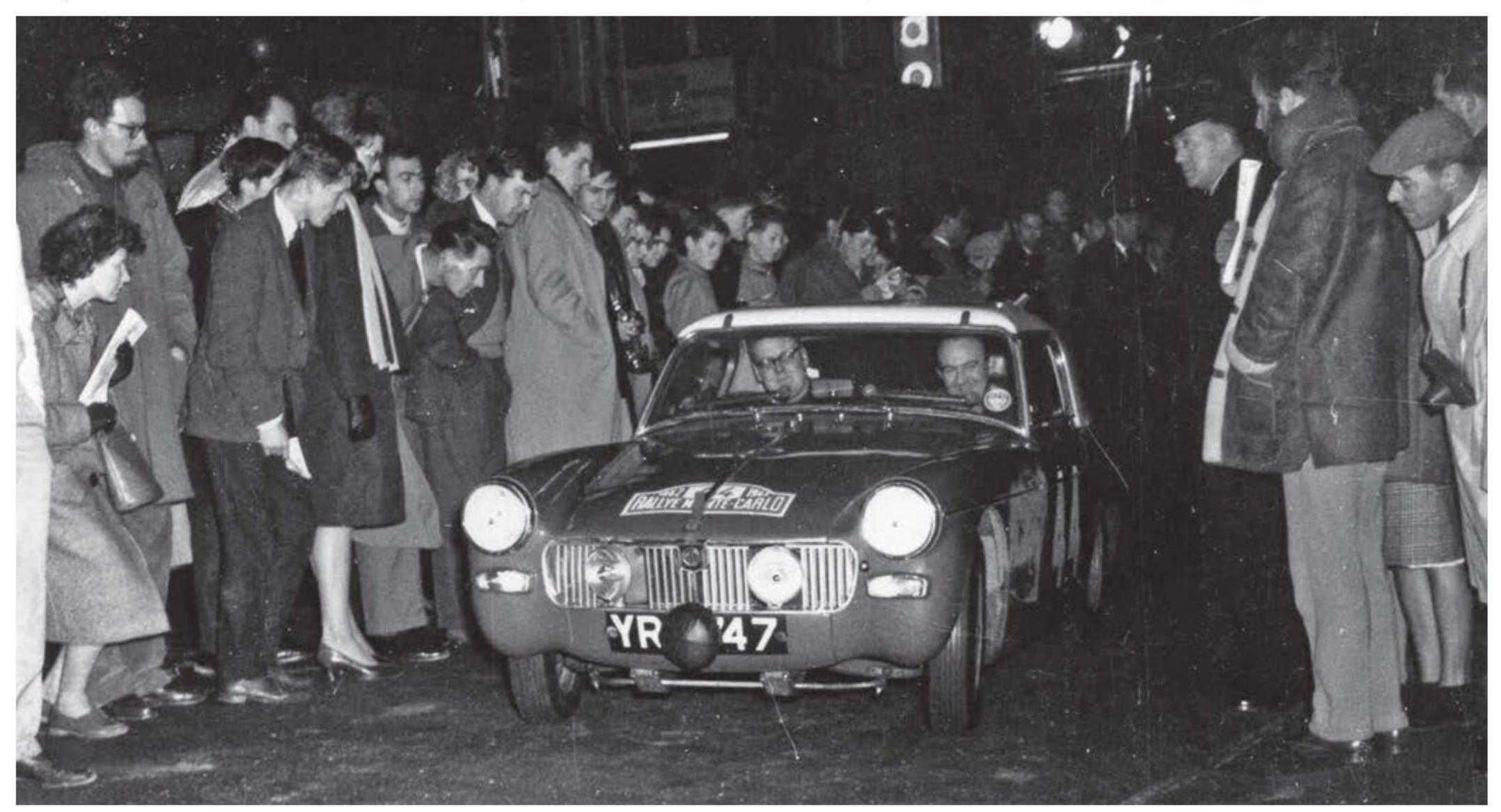


The 1961 Midget was introduced with the slogan: 'The car that starts ahead'.

model, the ADO 13 Austin-Healey
Sprite, was not without problems;
early testing revealed a fundamental
structural weakness in the body
structure at a time when the first
cars were being assembled; Syd
Enever had to instigate a reversed
production line to deal with part-

built cars which had to be stripped, strengthened and rebuilt.

Notwithstanding this hiccup, the new Sprite was well received and it was not long before Thornley and Enever, clearly defeated in their aim to create a small sports car of their own, were planning an MG version of



MG Midget YRX 747, campaigned by Peter Riley and Mike Hughes, competing in the 1962 Monte Carlo Rally. The Midget, wearing rally number 44, finished in 33rd position and first in its class. It also won first in class on the 1963 Monte Carlo Rally.



the Sprite, the model name for which was hardly difficult to guess. For the design of the new bodywork, Enever turned to Senior Body Draughtsman Denis Williams, a key member of the team led by Jim O'Neill. As much as Don Hayter is recalled for his work on the lines of the MGB, it was Williams who led on ADO 47 - the code name for what would become the new generation MG Midget that was finally launched, to much fanfare, on 20 June 1961.

One of the major changes between the original ADO 13 Sprite to ADO 47 (alongside the Austin-Healey Sprite Mark II, codename ADO 41) was the provision of an opening boot lid and a pair of vestigial tail fins and upright tail-lamps which were similar to those of the MGB, then still a year away from introduction. At the sharp end, the MG Midget received a neat, rectangular, plated grille with vertical slats, divided in two by a plated vertical centre rib surmounted by a shaped integral plinth to carry an MG shield badge. Again this design presaged that of the future MGB and, in fact, the Midget was the first MG to receive the new translucent plastic grille badge that would be seen again in the autumn of the following year on both the MGB and the MG 1100. At the time of the



This photograph shows a pre-production MG Midget Mark I.

Midget's arrival, showroom space was shared with the MGA 1600 Mark Il and MG Magnette Mark III, both of which still had the older-style enamelled badge on a cast plinth.

Although the original ADO 47 Midget featured a 948cc A-series engine (and much was made of the fact that this was the first MG Midget with an engine of less than onelitre capacity since before WWII), the Midget and its contemporary Sprite Mark II sibling soon received the 1098cc A-series powerplant,

although this did not in itself prompt a change of 'mark' numbering. The bigger changes came in 1964, when the Midget became 'Mark II' (and the Sprite 'Mark III') which brought the increased sophistication of winding windows and opening quarterlights, and the abandonment of the original quarter-elliptic rear suspension in favour of a more conventional semielliptic set-up.

By this stage, the Sprite and Midget, popularly known collectively as the 'Spridgets', were selling

#### **ADO 47 MIDGET DEVELOPMENT STORY**

strongly as the entry into BMC sports car ownership. With the range a great success, in export markets especially, the next boost came with the switch in 1966 to the 1275cc A-series engines for the Mark III Midget (Sprite Mark IV). It was effectively a detuned Mini Cooper S unit. The facelift also brought with it a much-improved folding hood designed by Healey's Les Ireland. For many MG Midget purists, this 'GAN4' model of the period 1966-1969 is the pinnacle of unadulterated Abingdon perfection.

By the late 1960s, the Midget was caught in the same cycle of Federal legislation which impacted the larger MGB and MGB GT models. Emissions laws increasingly offset the performance advantages previously gained by the engine capacity increases and safety standards led to structural changes. In addition, changes at the top table saw new design management and priorities. With this came some controversial facelifts which mirrored those of the MGB. A curious interlude saw the rear wings of the Midget expensively re-tooled to create rounded arches, only for these changes soon to be abandoned. For some Midget fans, the 'round wheel arch' model, with its Rostyle wheels and split rear bumpers, is the most desirable variant.



New fun for the fast-moving pleasure set. The exhilarating MGB now with overdrive on top and third gears. The all new MG Midget with a 1275 cc. engine that spins out 65 b.h.p. - giving it an outstanding power to weight ratio. Get with the pleasure set in the latest, greatest ways of going places... Test drive at your B.M.C. Sports Car Dealer.



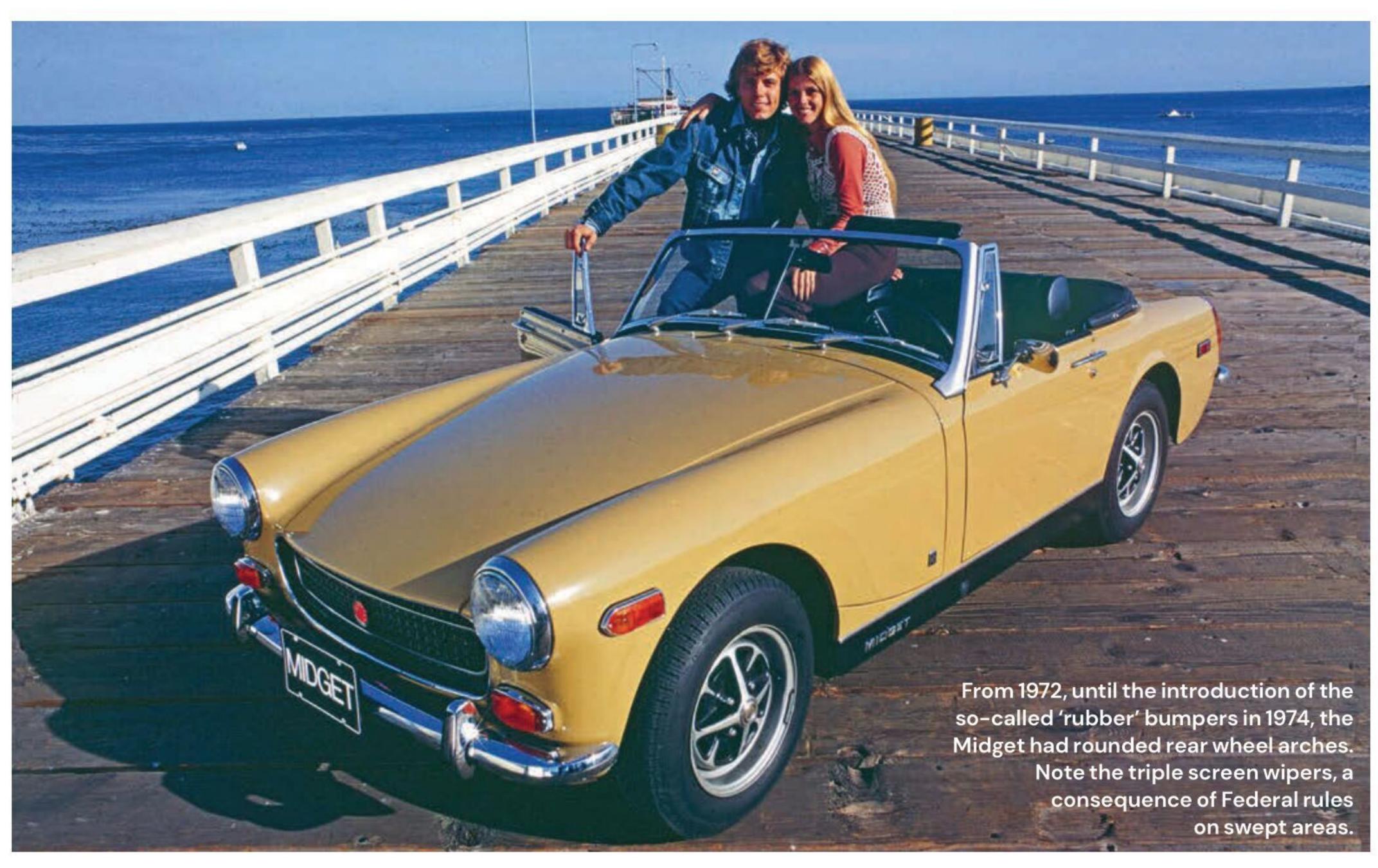


Marce Mayhew was the creative director at Austin-MG; this is one of his photos of the 1969 US Midget.

The Midget and MGB were imported to Australia as CKD kits. This is a local advert from 1967.

By this stage, the Austin-Healey Sprite, which had been reduced to a slightly cheaper version that was largely identical to the MG version, had been dropped. The abandonment of use of the Healey name was soon followed by withdrawal of the resultant 'Austin Sprite'.

Matters all came to a head in 1974 when the most dramatic change of the entire Midget run saw the fitment of polyurethane impact-absorbing bumpers, raised suspension height and - to the



"For many MG Midget purists, this 'GAN4' model of the period 1966-1969 is the pinnacle of unadulterated abingdon perfection."



#### **ADO 47 MIDGET DEVELOPMENT STORY**

horror of many MG fans – fitment of the same Triumph 1500 engine found in the contemporary Spitfire.

Purists and magazine pundits alike decried these changes but the Midget still sold well enough, as the production table overleaf proves; some 73,899 were sold in the model's last five years of life. During this period, Federal emissions requirements, which changed year by year, progressively eroded performance and worsened fuel consumption to pitiful levels. Sales were boosted by a combination of low retail prices and clever marketing, the latter targeting the youth market including the so-called 'campus kids' in the USA, linking the image of the Midget to new sports and pastimes such as skateboards, wind-surfing and other outdoor activities.

Tough decisions were being made in the late 1970s as all past efforts to create new baby sports cars



Pat Drew of the MG office was known as Miss MG' when she posed for this MG sport car 'family photo'. Note that all three of the cars pictured have the short-lived 'Sabrina' over-riders which were used on North American MG cars during 1974.



Michael Hart owns one of the last batch of 500 black MG Midgets, which were only sold in this guise on the home market.



The bodyshell for the last MG Midget is ceremoniously carried aloft by 'pall-bearers' at the Pressed Steel factory, Swindon.

"...In a similar manner to the North American MGB 'LE' of 1979, the final 500 batch of UK-specification MG Midget 1500s were finished in black."



Here it is again at Abingdon on the production line in December 1979.

had fallen by the wayside and there seemed little merit in keeping both the Midget and Triumph Spitfire on sale, especially when they shared largely the same powertrain. In 1978 it was decided that the Midget would be phased out and, in a similar manner to the North American MGB 'LE' of 1979, the final 500 batch of UK-specification MG Midget 1500s were finished in black. This body colour matched that of the polyurethane bumpers and, even if dynamically these Midgets were arguably a shadow of their predecessors, they are also one of the variants that capture the collector's eye.

The very last MG Midget went down the line in December 1979, by which time an announcement had been made that the MG factory would soon cease all sports car manufacture. Perhaps because the end of the Midget had already been announced, its demise prompted less of a fuss than the closure of Abingdon. The fact remains, however, that the last MG Midget had brought economical sports car fun to a great many enthusiasts.

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MG B Roadster, 1972, Tartan Red, Automatic, Rebuilt on a new Heritage bodyshell. fully rustproofed. Total bare metal respray just completed – October 2021. Drives great, good oil pressure, no smoke and BW35 auto. Minator minilite style wheels. Lumenition Optronic Electronic ignition. Goodrich stainless brake hoses, Kunifer solid lines, stainless exhaust system, chunky grip Mota-Lita steering wheel.



MG B Roadster Mk1, 1963, ONLY 2 owners from new: Possibly 32k miles from new!! History file back 40 years. Body restoration in 2021, which included new castle rail sections, new inner and outer sills, rear wings, and front wing panels, finished off with a bare metal respray. 3 bearing engine, non overdrive gearbox, original non prefix number plate. New red leather interior and hood just fitted; New hood frame; New chromework; New wire wheels with new tyres!. £16,500



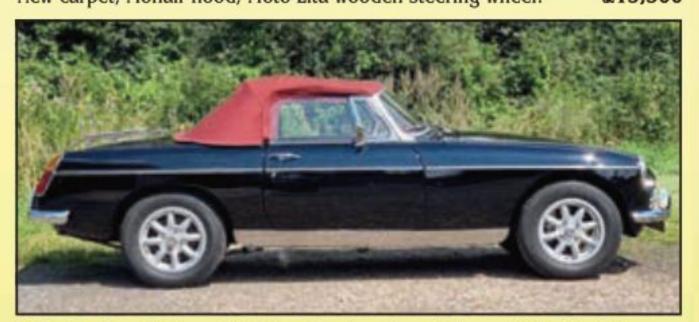
MG B Roadster, 1971, Rare Blue Royal paintwork, 5 Speed Gearbox, 15" Chrome Wire Wheels, Leather. Floorpans and sills replaced, bare metal respray carried out this year! Twin choke 45 Weber carburettor! Telescopic Spax rear shock absorbers, Cross chassis stabiliser. Uprated manifold/ exhaust, Electric windows, Central locking, V8 bushes. Grey leather interior; New carpet, Mohair hood; Moto-Lita wooden steering wheel. £15,500



MG B Roadster, 1972, Primrose Yellow, Overdrive, Chrome wire wheels. Bare metal respray completed in 2021; New floorpans, castle rails, inner & outer sills, and inner wheels arches fitted. New brake discs/pads, reconditioned steering rack; Unleaded engine. New black leather interior, piped in Primrose yellow; New mohair hood. New chrome wire wheels; New chromework including a new grill. £14,500



Mini Cooper Sportspack, 1999, Genuine Mini Cooper Sportspack, mpi, 1275cc, Signal Red. Bare metal restoration just completed! No rust on the body panels; Immaculate paintwork. New chromework; New grill, Full service history.



MG B Roadster, 1980, Black, Overdrive, Walnut, Chrome bumper, Red Leather, Lovely paintwork, no rust bubbles, Engine removed and all oils seals and gasgets replaced; New clutch - 2021, Gearbox cleaned, new oil seal fitted 2021, still slight 

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MG B GT, 1972, Trafalgar Blue, Overdrive. Originally commissioned for the Earl's Court Motor Show in 1972; 35 years service history and old MOTs. Full body restoration by Cotswold Classic Car restoration specialist at a cost of around £11,000 in 2016 and only done 6k miles! Engine and overdrive gearbox in excellent working order; Front suspension has been uprated



MG B GT, 1974, Harvest Gold. Overdrive gearbox, bodywork in excellent condition, lovely paintwork; Seams on wings are very good as are all the panel gaps; The front spoiler can be removed and replaced with a standard valance. Runs lovely and sounds great with a cherry exhaust. Wolfrace alloys x 5 with new tyres if preferred (see photos). Just been serviced, new distributor, starter motor, and alternator. Webasto sunroof is colour coded to match



MG B GT, 1974, Harvest Gold. Overdrive gearbox, bodywork in excellent condition with lovely paintwork; Seams on wings very good as are all the panel gaps; Front spoiler can be removed and replaced with a standard valance. Runs lovely and sounds great with a cherry exhaust. Refurbished Rostyle wheels with new tyres. Just been serviced, new distributor, starter motor, and alternator. Webasta suproof is colour sounds to match the and alternator. Webasto sunroof is colour coded to match the body colour. Le Mans front spoiler. New interior £9,500



MG B GT, 1974, Bronze Yellow, fitted with overdrive and leather. In need of a few cosmetic improvements on the paintwork. New carpet; Brown leather interior. Drives really well. A good investment at this price. £7,500

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MG B GT, 1971, White, Overdrive. Photographic record of MG B GT, 1974, Teal Blue, Teal Blue MGB GT with complete body rebuild in 2007, In need of a few cosmetic improvements on the paintwork. £7,500



overdrive. In need of a few cosmetic improvements on the paintwork. New carpet; Brown leather interior. Drives very well. A good investment at this price. £7,500

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#### THE MGB STORY





### The stalwart classic

Chronicling the MGB's life may be an old chestnut but after almost six decades, and with 18,000 examples still licensed at the DVLA, it's a story that improves with telling. Words: Jeremy Satherley

ngine and front suspension dating back to 1947, rear cart springs from the year dot... sounds like one of those fifties kitcar specials. But it was a formula that made the B what it is - a straightforward, affordable

sports car that appealed to over half a million owners in 18 years. Over 60 years later that appeal is undiminished, survivors of the breed providing an escape route from electronics, black boxes

and inaccessible engines, thus earning the model one of today's biggest classic followings.

The MGB was a car that succeeded in spite of what its manufacturers couldn't or wouldn't do to develop it. In the late sixties BL ended its motorsport career and would really like to have banished the B altogether after 1969. But with continued strong demand from the USA, it survived a final decade of cosmetic meddling, an affront to its power and handling and the denial of a more modern engine. As such it appealed to our British fondness for underdogs, so that despite flirtations with sixcylinder and V8 engines, it was the game old 1,800cc hound that won the day.

#### WHY AN MGB?

The gracefully-blended curves inherited from the one-off TD and three EX182 team cars in the 1951 and 1955 Le Mans gave the 1955-62 MGA an immediate air of sporting pedigree. It became the most popular MG to date, with 100,000 cars sold over seven years. Apart from a digression with the more demanding '58-'60 Twin-Cam, BMC bothered to improve the A's engine threefold, from 1,489 through 1,588 to

> sixties, hastened by the arrival of Triumph's TR4, sales were falling off. In a mass market where no Morgan owner would tread, yesterday's styling was a drawback, and the all-important US market too was ready

1,622cc. But by the early

for something new. To restore MG's position in the marketplace and justify the investment involved, the new model's appeal would have to be broadened beyond traditional flatcap owners. This was done by uniting a carefully-blended mix of familiar components with new ideas never before seen at Abingdon.

#### LOOK, NO CHASSIS...

Proposals for an MGA replacement began as early as 1956, with Chief Engineer Syd Enever and designer Don Hayter looking at a mock-up under project code EX205, reflecting the latest American styling trends of wraparound windscreen and tail fins. Italian coachbuilder Frua was also commissioned to provide something similar on an MGA chassis. His Maserati-like result looked good, but highlighted the fact that re-bodying on the existing frame would penalise weight and performance. Inspired by the monocoque construction of the new Austin-Healey Sprite that, as it happened, was being assembled

#### THE MGB STORY

at Abingdon, the MG design team decided to ditch the separate chassis. It was an idea already making sense over at Rootes with their new Sunbeam Alpine using a Hillman Husky floorpan, except in MG's case they had to create a hull from scratch.

#### SUBFRAMES AND SUSPENSION

Starting again under project number EX214, Enever's team concentrated over 1959 on devising a stiff monocoque composed of sturdy double-box-section sills and a large central tunnel spanned by crossmembers. Attached to this by four bolts was a front suspension subframe carrying the traditional double-wishbone arrangement first used on the forties Y-type and latterly the MGA, with the top wishbone doubling as part of the lever-arm damper. The rear suspension was originally meant to be an independent trailing-arm/ coil-spring arrangement. But after an accident trying the system in

an MGA, there was a reversion to the existing leaf-sprung axle with lever-arm dampers. The spring leaves themselves were 2½ inches longer than the A's for a softer ride, with the body lengthened by an inch to accommodate the anchorages.

#### **ENGINE AND GEARBOX**

BMC's B-series engine was descended from a similar-design 1,200cc Austin unit, first used in the forties Austin Devon. By the time it appeared in the final MGA from June 1961, it had grown to 1,622cc, and the MGB would have inherited this unit, after exciting proposals for a range of new V4 and V6 engines were dropped. But goalposts shifted again when, with the Austin 1,800's announcement only two years away, it was decided to stretch the 1,622 engine to 1,798cc - both for the MGB's benefit, and as something 'oven-ready' for the Landcrab later on. By boring out the '1,622' from 76.2 to 80.26mm, with the stroke unchanged at 88.9mm

and twin 1½ inch SU carburettors retained, output was 95bhp at 5,400rpm – a 5bhp increase over the A's figure. While this didn't make much difference to the top speed (103/105 instead of 101mph), the main advantages lay in acceleration – at 12.2 seconds, over a second off the 0–60 time – and torque, increased from 97lbf.ft at 4,000rpm to 106lbf.ft at 3,600rpm: changes that resulted in a more powerful car, and one that was 'softer' and more flexible to drive.

Apart from a slightly lower first gear, the four-speed gearbox was as before, including the lack of synchro on bottom (until 1967), as was the banjo-type hypoid rear axle. The final drive ratio was raised to 3.9:1 now that the car was running on 5.60–14 (as distinct from the A's 5.60–15) wheels, and braking continued the final MGA's Lockheed front-disc/rear-drum setup.

#### **BODY**

'Going monocoque' had revealed an extremely stiff structure in testing,





1962 MGB brochure. The writer was 14 when he picked up this version marked 'Preliminary Specification – Confidential' from a Kennings showroom in 1962.



requiring only an additional tube inserting behind the bulkhead to alleviate minor scuttle-shake. If anything the shell was overengineered, particularly in the sill and central tunnel areas, but that only enhanced the car's good showing in crash tests. Where panelling was concerned, the engineers wanted to repeat the A's use of aluminium for doors, bonnet and bootlid, but cost restricted this to the bonnet only.

'Maintaining the breed with streamlined power' was the B's challenge after its predecessor's well-co-ordinated curves. Nevertheless, simple elegance was achieved by Roy Brocklehurst and Don Hayter in-house, without involving an Italian consultant. There was a bigger boot, a roomier cabin that was easier to climb into, and moving the toeboard and pedals forward by six inches relieved the A's more cramped driving position. Not only that, but the Roadster had the luxury of wind-up windows, exterior door handles, and you could actually lock the thing from outside. The B looked bigger than the A from some angles, yet was fractionally lower,

shorter and barely two inches wider, a measurement accentuated by its shallow, thrust-forward grille where the A's had leaned back flush with the airflow.

This front-end treatment had ruffled Renault after Syd Enever was observed intently studying the Floride's sculptured prow on the Régie's stand at the 1959 Geneva Show. When the B appeared, Renault claimed MG had copied the Floride's treatment, but this was apparently refuted by Cowley's legal department. In any case Renault was on thin ice, considering that the 'pocketed' headlight and thrust-forward grille panel was flaunted by several British cars well before the MGB appeared. Look at the 1959 AC Greyhound, 1959 Ashley Laminates Ford 8 specials and particularly the 1959 Falcon Caribbean kit car and 1962 Reliant Sabre GT, and you'll see there was nothing new under the sun...

#### THE CARS MKI - 1962-1967

Production cast off in May 1962 with a few export models, before building up stocks for the 20th September début. As originally launched, hubcapped steel wheels were standard fittings, with wires at £34 (that's for a set of four!) extra. Also optional initially was an oil-cooler at £9, a standard fitting on export cars. Colours were Tartan Red, Old English White, Chelsea Grey, Black and Iris Blue, this last colour depicted in many of the early publicity shots. By January 1963 a Laycock-de Normanville overdrive on top and third gear costing £60 was added to a growing options list that included a £72.50 glass-fibre hardtop, badge bar, effete mock-ocelot seat covers and travel rugs in 'authentic clan tartans'.

In the rush to publicise the model in competition, two Bs entered for the March 1963 Sebring 12 Hours but both their big ends failed. Problems like this, and a number of warranty claims for new engines, prompted a switch in September 1964 to a five instead of three main-bearing crankshaft after chassis number 48765. The oil cooler became standard on homemarket cars, and an electronic rev

#### THE MGB STORY

counter replaced the mechanical version. Some say the three-bearing cars are livelier than the five-bearing equivalents, although performance figures quoted for the five-bearing version all show a higher top speed by 3-4mph with only fractional losses in the 0-60 time, while the gains in refinement and reassuring robustness surely outweighed any disadvantages.

#### **ENTER THE GT**

With US sales successfully underway, MG management achieved its ambition for a coupé version to broaden the MGB's appeal. Pininfarina was engaged to work his magic on a Chelsea Grey roadster in February 1964 and the result after only four months' work was rapturously received at Longbridge and Abingdon, particularly for the way the profile had been created without sacrificing the glass area, and the ingenuity – for those days – of a one–piece lift–up tailgate.

Despite a few deliberations at sub-assemblers Pressed Steel over welding-in the new roof panel, the Farina proposal was productionised with little alteration and the BGT was an eve-of-Motor Show surprise on 19th October, 1965. Apart from its hatchback convenience, the interior was otherwise unchanged except for



additional piping to the door trim. There was still no standard-fit heater, but the model's introduction coincided with the fitting of a stronger Salisbury rear axle across the range, and there were some new colours. Although slightly heavier than the roadster, the GT was well received and won over many women buyers. It remained in production until the end.

MkII, 1967-71
Succeeding the MkI in October

initially. Abingdon's big news was the announcement of the identical-looking (apart from the bonnet's 'power-bulge') MGC. MG had made the B's engine bay long enough from the start to accommodate larger engines in future; here was the first expression of it, intended as a big Healey replacement using BMH's revised 3-litre, six-cylinder unit. Unfortunately the car failed to impress and died after two years,





but a positive spin-off for the B was the C's all-synchromesh gearbox a welcome improvement, except the transmission tunnel had to be widened to accommodate it. With the MkII, home-market heaters were now standard. Electrics became negativeearth and an automatic gearbox option was offered. But although the US should have been the ideal market for it, self-shifting wasn't sold there for fear of the cars under-performing.

One version that was plugged 'over there' during 1967 however was the MGB/GT Anniversary Special, commemorating the first year of the GT's existence in the States. A 1,000-car limited-edition, it came with a dealer-installed package of whitewalled wire wheels, woodrimmed steering wheel, 'vibrationless' racing wing mirror and a union-jacked, 'MGB/GT Special' wing plaque. These cars became collectors' items in the US, afforded their own section of the American MGB Register. The Special however marked a harmless beginning to how the American B was going to differ in future from the home product. In late 1967 the first style violations came with legally-enforced facia crash padding, nick-named the 'Abingdon Pillow', which banished the glovebox. There was also an energyabsorbing steering column and wire wheels lost their 'eared' centres in favour of octagonal nuts.

After British Leyland Motor Corporation's formation in early 1968 the new group began revising sports car priorities to favour Triumph, while newly-recruited Ford talent began flexing its muscles with cost savings and new styling trends. The B's sidelight/indicator units were moved nearer the grille for 1969, during which year the bonnet panel changed from aluminium to steel. More obvious economising came in October, when the B appeared with the controversial Mustang-inspired 'black hole' grille. This dispensed with the chromed slatting in favour of a black mesh recess, highlighted by a rectangular bright-metal insert and central MG badge. Fashionable Rostyles replaced the standard drilled wheels (wires still extra), while

leather upholstery gave way to 'knitbacked vinyl' on reclining seats, and bold Bronze Yellow and Flame Red typified the colour choices. The new grille saved pounds in production costs, but pleased no-one at MG except BL's accountants.

#### MkIII, 1972-80

Much happened to the B in MkIII form, some of it good, some of it indifferent. As the seventies progressed, the MGB was increasingly harassed by US legislation which threatened the future of open sports cars and imposed power-sapping pollution-control equipment on the B's American-spec engine. At least American-export versions of the new MkIII from October 1971 benefited when US legislation relaxed enough for MG to delete the 'Abingdon Pillow' padding, and revise the facia for both home and export models. A narrow storage box appeared between the seats, navy interior trim replaced the funereal black, and vinyl upholstery featured brushed-nylon inserts for the 1972 model-year only.

#### THE MGB STORY

Rubber-tipped overriders also appeared on MkIlls, and in August 1972 enthusiasts applauded the return of the traditional divided grille, now looking good with black crossmesh inserts. Air intakes appeared under the front bumper to improve radiator cooling, radial-ply tyres were standard, and the steering wheel gained a leather rim. Overall, it was the last opportunity to buy an off-the-peg B with all the right-looking features, before radical changes affected the model.

August 1973 saw the MGB GT V8 appear, using the Rover 3.5-litre V8 unit in the B GT's bodyshell. It had been a long time in coming, despite the obvious feasibility of the Costello roadster conversions from years before; too long in fact, as the fuel crisis soon made a nonsense of its existence, while company politics and dealer logistics aborted its availability in the US. Dropping the US plans for the V8, which would have included an automatic version, also affected the MGB's options, with no more automatics after late 1973.

By the mid-seventies it was obvious that the next new sports

car would be a Triumph and the next grand tourer a Jaguar. This left precious little funding for the MGB's development, now kept going largely for an American market that was about to bite the hand that fed it with more unwelcome changes.

#### THE 'RUBBER-BUMPER' CARS

It was the USA's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that did it, imposing new bumper regulations in 1974 that required a 5mph impact to be absorbed into solid beams front and rear. With the US as the MGB's main export market, BL had no choice but to comply from car number 360301. Familiarly known as 'rubber-bumper' MGs, the external fittings, styled by Austin-Morris's Harris Mann, were actually fashioned from Bayer Bayflex polyurethane and concealed a hefty steel beam. Black was the only colour available, as colour-keyed polyurethane was a little beyond seventies paint technology. A valiant attempt was made to blend a divided grille surround into the front moulding. But complying with bumper height regulations involved raising the

ride height by 1½ inches which compromised the handling, especially now the anti-roll bar was deleted on the roadster. Ironically, home-market and non-US export cars needn't have incorporated these changes. But with MGB development cash so short, what was good enough for its best export market was good enough for everyone else, and BL wouldn't run to producing two versions.

At long last the twin six-volt batteries were replaced by a single 12-volt. A brake servo was now standard and there was a new cylinder head with smaller inlet valves. A 105mph maximum and 0-60 in 12.1 seconds was still being claimed, but there was no such panache for the American-market cars, where further US emission legislation in 1975 reduced power to 65bhp, twin SU carburettors giving way to a single Zenith-Stromberg 175CD5T instrument. This dumbingdown, including a revised inlet manifold, unleaded cylinder head and catalyst for California cars (adopted US-wide in 1976), resulted in a mere 90mph top speed and 0-60 in a miserable 18.3 seconds.





These measures also saw the end of the GT in America, as its extra weight over the roadster placed it in a different emissions category, where assessment was tougher. Yet no matter what was done to one of their favourite imports, American customers went on buying MGBs.

Back home and with 'rubberbumper' cars here to stay, BL sweetened the package in 1975 with 750 GT Jubilee (or Anniversary) models, commemorating 50 MG years with British Racing Green paint, set off by a gold side flash above the rubbing strips, matching Dunlop wheels à la V8 and gold-highlighted badging. More significantly, overdrive was standardised on all models in June 1975, but the following year, with the fixed-head TR7 now on stream, sales of all LHD GTs ceased, in company with the V8's demise. Better news came for the 1977 model year with the fitting of front and rear anti-roll bars, which certainly improved the handling. Facias were

redesigned, the overdrive switch moved to the gearlever top, there was an electric fan (two fitted on US and Japanese market cars) and H4 halogen headlamps, plus tinted glass for the GT, and – oh yes: the radiator core was moved forward in the engine bay. The downside was a less attractive steering wheel and 'deckchair' striped fabric seating, but you couldn't have it all, except the Americans successfully retained their Ambla upholstery - a consolation for being stuck with legally-imposed non-halogen headlights.

#### THE END

Beyond 1977 any changes were mainly cosmetic; GKN five-spoke alloy wheels became an attractive option for instance, in 1979. Anticipating the O-series engine's availability (already fitted to the Marina and Princess range since 1978) modified crossmembers began appearing in MGB engine bays from January 1980. But behind

the scenes, all was not well. The famous octagon had been sucked into the corporate purge conducted by BL's new-broom chairman, Michael Edwardes, who claimed that the company was losing £900 on every MGB sold in the States. Soon after, to widespread protest, it was announced that MG production was to end and the Abingdon factory closed. All heavily ironic, considering that Abingdon had the best-behaved and loyal workforce of any in the BL conglomerate, and that the nextgeneration sports car, the Triumph TR7, had been the epicentre of a bitter labour relations storm that had prevented a continuous and settled production plan. Comparing MG's sales with Triumph's at the time, Motorsport's John Sprinzel said it all: 'Last July [1979], usually a peak month for sales, the number of models sold was 300 for the soft top, and 250 for the hardtop TR7. The figures for the same month for MG? More than 4,000. And that is despite

#### THE MGB STORY



the 20 odd years of its design, and carrying all the weight of American-specification garbage.'

Outside efforts to save MG proved fruitless. The US dealers' attempt to counter the axe with an order for \$200m-worth of cars was soon thwarted by BL politics. Then Alan Curtis, Aston Martin Lagonda's chairman, weighed in with a rescue consortium. But it was unable to raise enough funds, and with factors such as the rise in Sterling and a collapse in the US car market threatening AML's own position, the initiative was aborted in mid-1980.

With Abingdon's fate sealed, activities were concentrated on finalising MGB stocks for home and export that would last into 1981. As a final gesture from August 1980, 421 Limited Edition (LE) Bronze-metallic roadsters and 580 Pewter-metallic GTs were offered alongside standard cars, all the GTs and 213 roadsters fitted with 5Jx14 five-spoked alloys. An LE GT (car no. 523002) was officially the last B to leave the line on 22nd October 1980, although legend suggests that the absolute final-final car was a white example for export to Japan.

#### MGBs IN COMPETITION

With North America its most important customer, MG was anxious to prove the B as soon as possible in competition, given that its TD, TF and A predecessors had all figured gamely from the early fifties onwards among many more powerful cars in the Sebring 12-Hour endurance event.

So two cars were entered for the March 1963 Sebring 12 Hours, to be driven by Christabel Carlisle/Denise McCluggage and Jim Parkinson/Jack Flaherty. But with practice restricted by bad winter weather in the UK, a potential oil surge problem went undetected until the big ends failed in both entries during the race. Sump design was quickly revised in time for that year's Le Mans, when a single works car masquerading as a private entry (in case MG got egg on its face again), registered 7 DBL and fitted with an aerodynamic nose-cone, came in a respectable 17th. Encouraged, the works openly entered 7 DBL, now reunited with its original front, in the 1964 Monte Carlo Rally, driven by the Morley brothers into 17th place. That year's Sebring brought yet another 17th place and a second-in-class for Americans John Dalton and Ed

Leslie – more impressive than it sounds when you consider that the B was higher placed than cars like the Corvette Grand Sport, Porsche 2,000GS, Iso Grifo A3C and AC Cobra in a field of 40 finishers. Paddy Hopkirk and Andrew Hedges managed an almost brakeless 19th in the 1964 Le Mans, while 1965's Sebring proved the clockwork staying power of two Bs in heavily-rainstormed conditions.

The 1965 Le Mans was the MGB's last and best. With the handy nose-cone once more in position, Hopkirk and Hedges came 11th. But the model's finest hour came in the 1966 Marathon de la Route, when Hedges and Belgian MG dealer Vernaeve won this gruelling 84-hour endurance race on the Nürburgring outright in GRX 307D. Not even MG's Competitions department could believe it at first!

Behind the scenes at this time, experimental work had been progressing with boring-out the 1,798cc engine to two litres. The first engine, stretched to 2,009cc and installed in a roadster, borrowed Big Healey valves and MGA Twin Cam conrods, but the car put a rod through the block at the 1966 Sebring. Undeterred, a GT with a 2,004cc unit



was entered as a prototype for the following year's Sebring, rewarding drivers Hopkirk and Hedges with an 11th place. Then there was MBL 546E ('Mabel'), a B GT clothed in aluminium panels and most likely using an 1,892cc unit, which acted as a test bed for the forthcoming C's front suspension in Sicily's 1967 Targa Florio, coming 9th. Known as a GTS, it was subsequently fitted with a 2,968cc MGC engine for the rest of its works career, and survives today.

By 1968 it was the MGC bringing home the bacon, with a 10th at Sebring and 6th in the Marathon de la Route. But Abingdon's jubilation was short-lived. 'Comps' policy was changing under new masters BLMC, with chairman Donald Stokes halting MG's programme and switching the competition emphasis to the Corporation's saloons. As if to rub it in, a works Austin/Morris 1,800 came 4th in the 1968 London-Sydney Marathon, and a sole MGB entered by Nova magazine, 42nd. Fortunately attitudes were different in America, where thanks to the support of US BL distributors, dealers and privateers, the MGB's Stateside competition career was far from over.

#### MGB IN THE MARKETPLACE

When introduced in 1962, the B's closest rivals were the Triumph TR4 and Sunbeam Alpine. Of these, the TR had been of greater concern to BMC in their need to replace the MGA. Introduced the year before, the TR4 wore a Michelotti makeover to disguise its 1950s origins, and came with a bomb-proof 2,138cc version of the old Standard Vanguard engine. While an early B might occasionally manage the dizzy heights of 108mph, this was a breeze for the TR4 which was also two seconds faster to 60, slightly more economical, and, some say, more prestigious and better finished. However, its separate chassis betrayed the age of its design. It was noisy, had a less comfortable ride, the rear axle hopped about and it cost £70 more.

Closer in price to the B but still more expensive, the monocoque Alpine was arguably more stylish, but at 1,592cc had the smallest engine of the three. Although power was boosted to 82bhp shortly after the MGB's début, the Alpine in standard form never quite managed a sustained 'ton', even after 1965 with the 1,725cc unit. No grease

points to bother about though, and it was comfortable inside, with an adjustable steering column and walnut dash from 1964. Heavier than the B, it was more fast-tourer in character, while the recirculating-ball steering lacked the MG's rack-andpinion precision.

Peripherals in 1963 included the TR-engined Morgan Plus 4, then unbelievably – from today's viewpoint - £20-odd cheaper than the MGB. A greater fun factor perhaps; but with its thirties styling, acquired-taste flexing bodywork, hard ride and high maintenance, it wasn't a mass-market item. Nor too was the rough-and-ready Fairthorpe Rockette with the Triumph Vitesse 1,600 engine.

By the late sixties most contenders of the MGB's generation had been discontinued, leaving it to weather the seventies a loner among similarcapacity but newer designs such as the Capri 2,000GT, Fiat 124 Sport, Porsche 924, Fiat X1/9 and Triumph TR7. Naturally it was slower and less sophisticated than some of these, but this only emphasised the B's appeal as a no-nonsense British sports car of a type that was fast

#### THE MGB STORY



disappearing. Production figures speak for themselves, with a sixties best of 32,916 in 1966, peaking to 39,393 cars in 1972. Even with the stigma of 'rubber' bumpers, 29,183 Bs were turned out in 1976, while the last full production year of 1979, at 23,490 units, wasn't bad for a swansong. Helping this along was the developing interest in mainstream classic cars during the seventies, with the MGB, like the Morris Minor, being identified as a classic in its own lifetime. Much credit is also due to the American advertising and marketing agencies, who did a great creative job in maintaining brand-awareness in the US, constantly playing up the MGB's sporting associations and achievements to the bitter end -

even dropping cars out of planes to grab attention!

#### **Bs MADE ABROAD**

Besides England, the MGB was assembled in three countries: Australia, Belgium and the Republic of Ireland.

Cars were supplied in CKD (Completely Knocked Down) form and BMC's Sydney facility was the first overseas plant to receive kits, finished examples coming off the line from April 1963 with VIN numbers prefixed with YGHN. Overdrive became standard on Oz cars in 1971, four years before the home product. But despite the fact that the Australians input their own colour schemes, tyres and trim specs, production ended in November

1972 after BL was unable to meet the government-stipulated 85 per cent local content to earn favourable tariff treatment. Over nine years, 9,000-plus cars were assembled – all roadsters, as GTs were only imported complete from England.

In Belgium cars were assembled at Seneffe from May 1964 to April 1968, curiously just for Belgium and the Netherlands whereas France, West Germany and Italy took Abingdon-produced Bs. 1,004 units were produced from CKD kits, all with wire wheels. Between 1964 and 1966 there were also 56 Coune Berlinettes constructed by Brussels coachbuilder, Jacques Coune - classy fixed-head coupés with headlamps further recessed behind fairings, wire wheels and Kamm-tailed fastbacks containing a small bootlid. Berlinettes were conversions either from existing owners' or importer-sourced roadsters, using glassfibred roof, rear wings and tail panel, and were over 1cwt (51kg) lighter than the standard roadster, with a claimed maximum speed of 112mph. Predictably, sales fell away when Abingdon's GT came onto the market.

In Ireland, BMC/BL Dublin distributors Brittain Smith assembled 188 roadsters and 216 GTs from December 1964 to February 1971, all with wire wheels, apart from final cars with chromed Rostyles.



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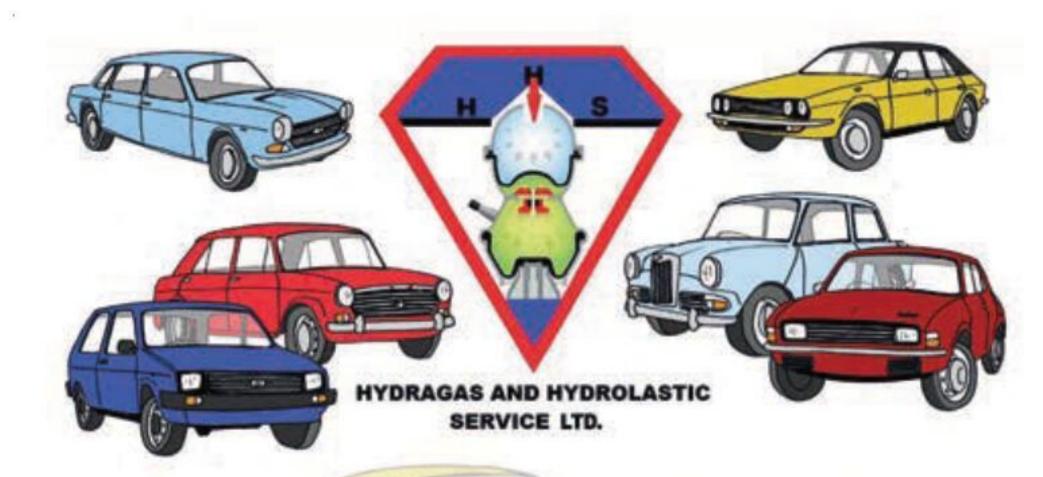


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#### **MAESTRO EFI**



### MG'S GT

The 1980s were a boom time for hot hatches. The MG Metro had launched in 1982 and received a warm welcome from the motoring media. What Austin Rover needed now though was a response to Volkswagen's Golf GTI and the Escort XR3i. Enter the MG Maestro. Words: Adam Sloman

hen British Leyland announced the closure of MG's Abingdon factory on September 10th 1979, or Black Monday as it became known, it seemed that MG was finished, swept away by an uncaring, unsympathetic management. The truth was, however, quite different. BL's management knew that the MG brand was still a valuable one, and they had plenty of plans for the famous old Octagon.

By then, MG's range of B and Midget had been left behind by the likes of Volkswagen's Golf GTI and the Ford XR3i anyway. Austin Rover needed a quick-fire response to the growing hot hatch market and

> MG seemed to be the perfect answer. After all, the MG

Metro of 1982 had been well received by the press and public, so the MG treatment was

> hastily applied to the soon-to-belaunched Austin Maestro with the Maestro's 1600cc

R-series engine being treated to a pair of Weber carburettors and power upped to 103bhp. Development of the

Maestro had begun in the mid-70s, but the continued financial strife of British Leyland meant that it endured a rather strained gestation. Designed at BL's Solihull office by Ian Beech and David Bache (who was responsible for the iconic Rover SD1), the Maestro and related Montego had a key role to play in the company's success or failure. And that is no

exaggeration because without a car to truly compete against the likes of Ford's Escort, Volkswagen's Golf and Vauxhall's Astra, Austin Rover's market share and very existence was all under threat. The MG was built at the Cowley plant and launched in 1983, alongside the Austin version which replaced the outdated Austin Allegro. Unlike the Metro, the response was lukewarm at best - it was a pain to start when it was warm and the VW gearbox made it less than civilised in town. Simply put, the MG Maestro failed to live up to the standard set by the Metro and the 1600's short development time meant there were plenty of teething problems - those carbs drank too much fuel and they were stubborn to start when hot and difficult to keep in tune. Austin Rover revised the 1600 when the R-series made way for the S-series, but the company knew they needed a more complete package to truly compete against their rivals.

Enter the MG Maestro EFi. Out went the 1600cc S-series and Weber carburettors. In came a 2.0 O-series engine and electronic fuel injection, courtesy of Lucas. Visually there was little to distinguish it from the 1600, bar the bold, red EFi decal fitted to the tailgate and a body-coloured grille the MG 1600 had simply reused the Austin grille with an MG badge fixed in the middle, but the EFi gained a proper moulded octagonal grille. At £7279 it was cheaper than many of its rivals, an equivalent Golf GTI coming with a hefty VW premium at £7992. Fiat's Strada cost £7800, and the MG was only undercut by the XR3i (albeit wearing steel wheels) at £7035.

#### MAESTRO EFI



The Volkswagen gearbox, which had drawn its fair share of criticism, was also consigned to the history books. In another demonstration of the increasing strength of the relationship between Austin Rover and Honda, the VW box was replaced by a Honda unit, built in the UK. The gearbox made a huge difference and boasted impressive staying power - it is best known to more modern MG fans as the PG1 and is found in the MG ZR, ZS and MGF. The brakes were beefed up too; already servo-assisted, the 2.0-litre MG gained vented discs. The ride height was lowered too, and there were other suspension tweaks such as the addition of a rear anti-roll bar. The O-series engine brought with it a welcome boost in power, with the EFi covering 0-60mph in 8.7 seconds.

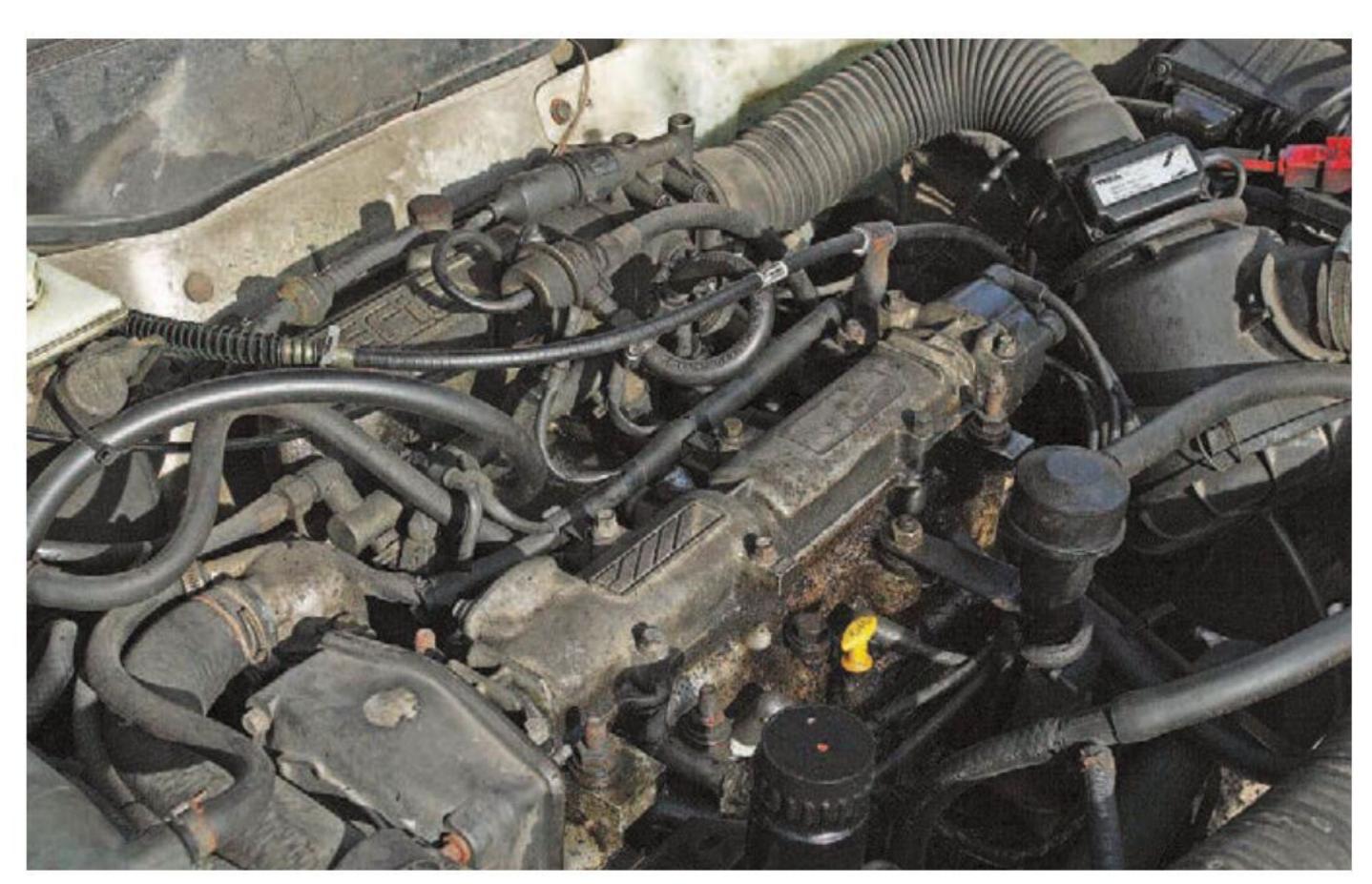
It's a 2.0 EFi that I've been given to sample today. The car is owned by long-time Maestro advocate Martin Street, who's owned it since 2002. Martin's MG is rare, since it features the digital dash and voice synthesiser. The synthesiser became something of a talking point (pun intended) when the Maestro launched, actress Nicolette MacKenzie being drafted in to record a series of phrases warning drivers of low fuel, high engine temperature and unfastened seatbelts. The unit, which was withdrawn in spring 1985, includes a trip computer. It was an expensive option on the Maestro

with a list price of £194.99, a not inconsiderable sum in the mid-1980s.

This Maestro was dispatched to Bristol and the Austin Rover dealer of Binding and Payne in Clevedon in July 1985 and stayed with the original owners, the Saffrey family, until it arrived with Martin via the MG 'M' Group South West in 2002. It looks remarkably fresh, thanks largely to Martin's fastidious maintenance of the bodywork, meaning the Maestro has benefited from new front wings, repaired wheelarches, new front and rear windscreens, a replacement grille and new, original spec alloy wheels. It's been resprayed in the original

Silver Leaf metallic so it looks as good as it did in 1985. Despite caring for the car to an admirable standard, Martin's never been afraid to make the MG earn its keep. 'We toured Wales in it recently and over the years we've packed it full of music gear for our Céilidh band – the boot's a really good size so the car has been hugely practical for us,' he says.

There are plenty of octagonal hints to the Maestro – the way the bonnet and boot curve around and the roof line's profile all bring that famous MG logo to mind. There's a prominent red and silver octagon at the centre of the grille, and as befitting any 1980s



2-litre O-series engine was far better than Weber-equipped S-series 1600.



On the road the EFi is capable of a decent turn of speed, if not the neck-snapping drama of the Turbo.



Owner Martin Street has added a bonnet decal to celebrate 30 years of the Maestro.

hot-hatch worth its salt there's red trim running from bumper to bumper. The final part of the Maestro's MG makeover is the fitment of 14in alloy wheels. 2013 marked the 30th birthday of the Maestro and so Martin fitted a large celebratory vinyl laurel-wreathed MG logo to the bonnet. Other than that and a tow-hitch on the rear, the Maestro remains close to how it would have left Cowley back in 1984.

Inside it's a similar story, with the Maestro's interior being in great condition. Getting settled is easy, the seats offering just the right mix of support and comfort. The Maestro's interior feels pleasingly light and spacious, there's plenty of room to breathe and light floods in through the large front and rear windscreens, assisted by the optional sunroof Martin's car boasts. Visibility is good too, with thin roof pillars creating the minimum obstruction in vision. Whichever way you look at it, it's an impressively packaged car.

With a turn of the key, I can't help but try the voice synthesizer. As a child of the 1980s the digitised tones awake a wave of nostalgia in me - it's undeniably similar to the digitised voices my beloved ZX Spectrum used to emit and while not especially insightful, you can't help but smile the first time it happens. Cycling through 'Time,' 'Fuel used' 'Trip distance,' 'Average fuel consumption' and 'Instantaneous fuel consumption' is an event in itself. Early models warned drivers to fasten their seatbelts, but by the time this EFi left Cowley in 1984 customer feedback meant that this was one command that had been disabled.

The steering wheel is a smart, leather-bound three spoke item, complete with red stitching. Once I pull the (obviously) red seatbelt across myself and latch it, I'm ready to go. Moving off, the Maestro is surprisingly well-refined for a 30 year old car. There's no mistaking the sound of that 2.0-litre O-series engine, but it's not overbearing and I'm able to speak to Martin quite comfortably. The steering is lighter than I expected, until Martin reminds me that he has had power-assisted steering fitted. Despite this, there's

#### **MAESTRO EFI**

still a decent level of feedback from the steering and the MG feels direct and pointy – there's a little body roll but it's well managed, and the Maestro is happily hustled.

As we make our way through the winding B-roads, it feels surprisingly responsive – put your foot down and you can watch the speed and revs increase on the solid-state dashboard. The Maestro doesn't rocket away like, say, a Peugeot 205 GTi might. For that you'll be wanting a Turbo, but the EFi offers an enjoyable turn of pace, doing its best work in the middle of the rev range. The MG's power delivery isn't lost on Martin, who says: 'The performance is one of the reasons we bought an MG. It's got a decent engine with the fuel injection.'

That dashboard proves to be something of a distraction at first; it's

difficult to ignore it, simply because it is so different. On the other hand it's easy to read with the speed being displayed in clear, bold figures. With the rev counter opposite it, the most vital information is visible with just the slightest glance away from the road. As we press on I notice the temperature gauge climb rapidly into the Hot section, followed by two bongs before the car announces: 'Warning! Engine temperature high. Warning! Engine temperature high." Somewhat panicked, I look across at Martin, who is not fazed by the news. 'She always says that,' notes Martin. 'I've replaced every component in the system and she still says it.' No sooner has Martin finished speaking than the temperature gauge settles back to normal and Nicolette has gone back to sleep. The digital dash

and voice synthesiser was prone to foibles when the car was new, so it's one part of the car's originality that has been preserved.

Going up through the gears, I thoroughly enjoy the Honda-based PG1 gearbox. As a champion of what could be considered the Maestro's offspring, the ZS, I think it is a great gearbox. And that link gets me thinking that a comparison to the ZS is an interesting one on more than one level. Compared to the 1.8-litre ZS120 the Maestro develops the same amount of brake horse power, but develops more torque (134ft.lb compared with 118 from the ZS) and it is that which gives the Maestro its mid-range pulling power. And of course the shift is neat and precise making it a pleasure to snick through the gears - even though Martin's car



is past the 100,000 mile mark, it still feels tight and up together.

Passing through small towns and villages, plenty of people seem to notice the Maestro. Despite the fact that the MG version remained in production until as recently as 1990, it's an increasing unusual site on the road, something that Martin has picked up on at the various shows he attends. 'You can get a line of Porsches, and more people will stop and look at this," he says. 'Everybody remembers these, and people can relate to it more easily. And it appeals to plenty of people. My wife Jan loves it because she says she can beat all the boy racers in it!"

It's a sad fact that the Maestro is something of a forgotten member of the MG family, despite the fact that today it arguably ranks amongst the rarest of cars to have worn the













Octagon. Less than 60 MG Maestros are currently believed to be on the road, compared to almost ten times that amount in 2003, which definitely makes it an endangered species. When did you last see one on the road? The same can be said for the Metro and Montego.

As we move to town from country the Maestro's character changes, settling to a quiet amble along the High Street and proving itself to be just as at home in the urban sprawl as it is hacking along a twisting B-road. It's not a blood and thunder hot hatch like many of its more lairy 80s rivals, rather a well-planted, well-refined sports hatchback. The Maestro kept the MG flame alive when it seemed the marque's story had come to an end. It also gave Austin Rover some much needed credibility when throughout the 1970s the company and its products had become the butt of almost every motoring joke. It deserves to be remembered fondly not as an also-ran, but as a fullyfledged GTI alternative. As MG's own adverts said at the time, 'The Golf GTI will be along in a second...'

## Silver platter

As the MGF celebrated its 25th birthday last year, we serve up a feast of 25 different F and TF variants illustrating the breadth and diversity of the model that put MG sports cars back on the map. Words: Craig Cheetham



n 1995, against a backdrop of financial uncertainty, a new owner in the form of BMW and a nation that was recovering from recession, Rover Group made MG fans very happy. For the first time since the closure of Abingdon, some 15 years previously, the MG sports car was back. It mattered not a jot that the new MGF was constructed largely of Rover parts bin components, nor that it was assembled in Longbridge rather than MG's spiritual home. Here was an affordable, cute, two-seater roadster that was created in the image of the MGs of the past, right down to sharing its powertrain and underpinnings with other cars in the company's stable.

The design was actually very clever. Based on two Rover Metro front subframes, it used interlinked Hydragas suspension and a selection of switches and buttons that were instantly familiar to anyone who owned a contemporary Rover car. The column stalks were from a 200, the heater vents from a Metro and the electric window switches were from the 800.

80th Anniversary was fitted with a Tan hood with matching interior. In addition, the dash

was given wood highlights. Anniversary '1924 MG 2004' logos were fitted to the boot lid and

But the car was neatly styled – the design team led by Gerry McGovern, who went on to become head of design at Jaguar Land Rover – and used a new 1.8-litre version of the K-series engine, found in the Rover 200/400, but developing 118bhp. There was a new 142bhp VVC engine, too.

The F very quickly overtook the Mazda MX-5 to become the UK's best-selling sports car, a position it held until it was replaced by the steel-sprung TF in 2001. The TF was essentially the same car but with simplified underpinnings, a revised nose and a different facia and it, too, became the best-selling sports car on the market, right up until MG Rover's demise in 2005. Even then, though, it wasn't game over, as the TF would reappear in 2009 with MG under Chinese ownership.

Here, then, to mark the model's 25th birthday, is a round-up of the 25 most significant MGF and TF models. Take your pick!

embroidered on the seats. In total, 500 were made.

#### **MGF 1.8i**

The original F came along in September 1995, following its reveal at the Geneva Motor Show the previous March. The car recalled the same simplicity and ease of ownership as the MGB and Midget, with low running costs and an affordable purchase price, coupled to entertaining handling thanks to its mid-engine, rear-drive layout. With 118bhp, the new 1.8 K-Series was quite lively and fun to drive. It was the best-selling MGF and for very good reason.



#### ➤ MGF 1.8i VVC

At the same time as the basic F, MG launched a VVC model using a new version of the K-series with larger cams and variable valve timing. The 142bhp VVC engine was extremely eager, giving the lightweight F a O-60mph [O-96.6kmh] time of just 7.5 seconds. It was distinguishable from lesser models by its star-shaped alloy wheels. The engine was also used in the Rover 200 Vi, the company's first hot hatch since the MG Maestro.



#### **⋖ MGF CHEETAH**

From the car's inception, enthusiasts were trying to make the MGF go faster and the first model came, in 1998, in the form of the SP Cheetah, developed by Rover dealer Stephen Palmer of Palmer Garages, Long Eaton, Notts. As well as a styling kit, the SP Cheetah had a Rotrex Supercharger kit from Turbo Technics and a Milltek exhaust, claiming a power output of around 200bhp.



#### MGF/TF SPECIAL EDITIONS



#### **MGF ABINGDON LE**

The first official Rover MGF 'Limited Edition' came in the form of the 1998 Abingdon LE, a UK-only model. The car's more luxurious specification included beige leather upholstery, a matching soft top and unique Brooklands Green paint, a dark, non-metallic reminiscent of the original British Racing Green.

Other cosmetic extras included an interior and exterior chrome pack, chrome ashtray and lighter, chrome exterior door handles and stainless steel grilles. Also standard, and first seen on this car, were the six-spoke 'Abingdon-style' 16" wheels which were soon to be found on the options list for all MGFs, proving to be an extremely popular design.

#### **► MGF BROOKLANDS LE**

The 1998 Brooklands LE was essentially the same formula as the Abingdon but with a choice of 'normal' or VVC engines and was offered in overseas left-hand-drive markets. Again, it was Brooklands Green with a tan hood and matching leather.



#### **▼ MGF 75th LE**

In 1999, Rover Group launched a very special F to celebrate the MG brand's 75th anniversary. The 75th LE came in three colours: Mulberry Red, Anthracite (a very dark bluey-black) and Platinum Silver, each with a 'Grenadine' hood that later went on to be offered as a premium option. All had leather trim and a numbered badge. A total of 2,000 were made, each with an individually numbered certificate.





2000 model year. Mechanically there were no changes and visually it was little different, save for clear indicator lenses instead of the original F's orange ones, and a larger rear bumper with aerodynamic diffuser. Inside, the original dials were replaced with more modern ivory clocks, while the mechanical odometer was replaced with a digital one.

#### **∨** MGF 1.6i

In 2000, a new entry-level F came along to counter the recently introduced base-model Mazda MX-5, as well as to give the model more appeal in Japan, where budget sports cars were hugely popular. The MGF 1.6i got the 113bhp, 1.6-litre engine from the Rover 400 and had a pared down specification with manual windows, no remote locking and black instead of body-coloured door handles. At £13,995 it was a veritable bargain as well as being cheap to insure.





#### **MGF TROPHY 160 SE**

At the opposite end of the spectrum to the 1.6i, Rover launched the MGF Trophy 160 SE in 2001 to celebrate its new-found independence, following the sale of Rover Group from BMW to Phoenix Venture Holdings. The Trophy SE was the first MG to feature the new 160bhp version of the VVC engine (that would also go into the ZR) and was only offered in MG's two newest colours: Trophy Yellow and Trophy Blue. It also got uprated vented front disc brakes and stiffer dampers.

#### MGF/TF SPECIAL EDITIONS



Introduced in 2000, the MGF Steptronic was an acquired taste but it answered to a demand for automatic sports cars, especially in important markets such as Japan. It used the 1.8-litre K-series engine and CVT gearbox combo from the Rover 45, along with steering wheel-mounted buttons to change 'ratios', or at least alter the power delivery from the naturally step-less CVT gear change system.



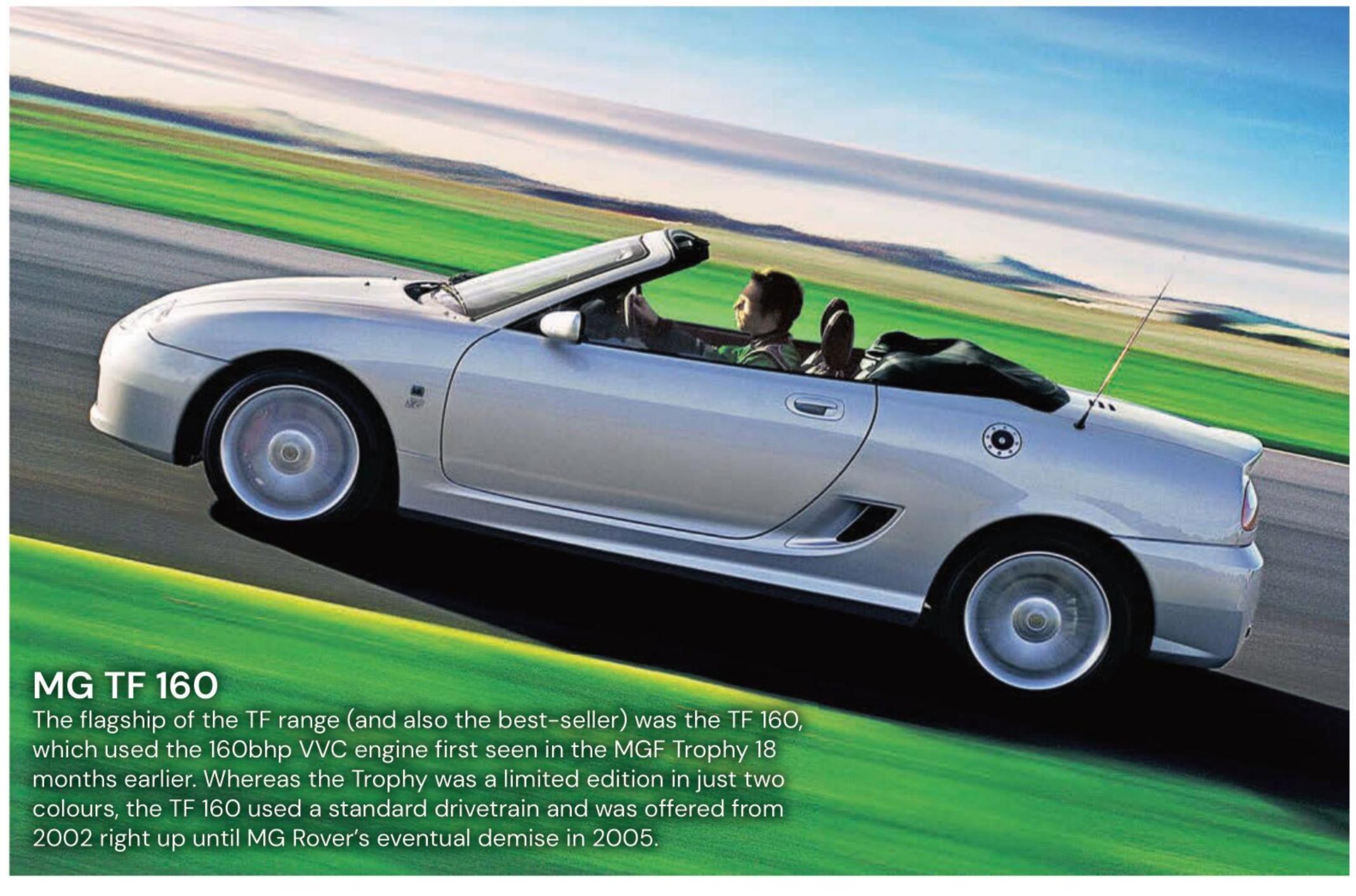
#### **► MGF WEDGEWOOD SE**

The Wedgewood was the first limited edition based on the 2000 MGF. It was launched in 2000 and was only available in Wedgewood Blue, a pale metallic popularised on the Rover 75. It had improved standard specification including leather seats, a CD player, chrome interior and exterior accessories and 16" multispoke wheels, along with a rear deck spoiler that was later offered as an option on F and TF models.



#### **≺** MG TF 120 **STEPSPEED**

At the same time as the 135 débuted, in February 2002, MG Rover launched a TF Stepspeed using the same transmission as the MGF Steptronic. However, MG Rover's engineers deemed that the power increase seen on the TF 135 would be too much for the CVT gearbox, so it retained the outgoing model's 118bhp powertrain.

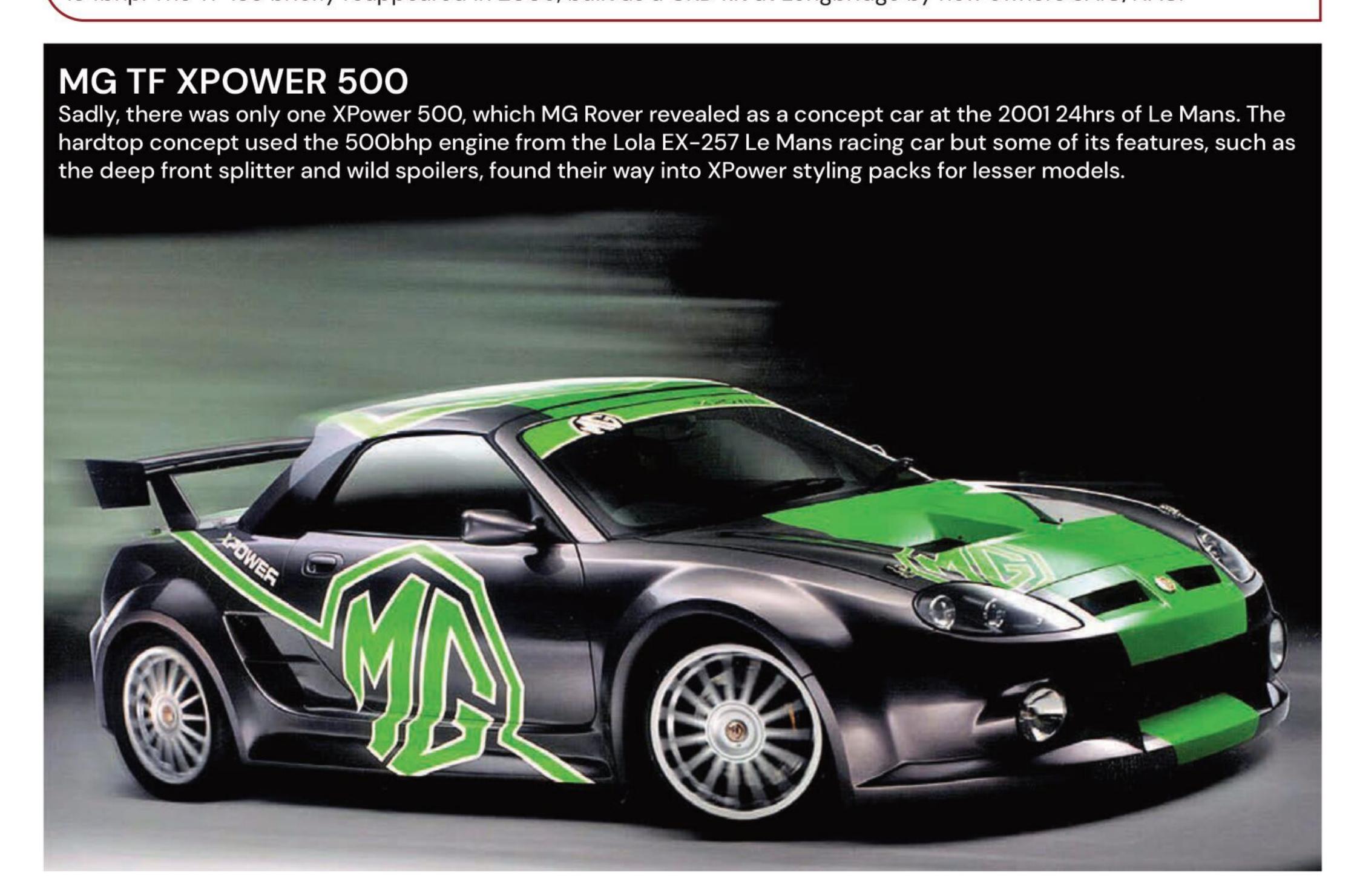


#### MGF/TF SPECIAL EDITIONS



#### ▲ MG TF 135

The TF made its début in February 2002 as the fifth new MG model from MG Rover, following on from the ZR, ZS, ZT and ZT-T. It had steel-sprung suspension that was not only cheaper to build than the Hydragas models but also offered a lower ride height and sharper turn-in. The 1.8-litre, non-VVC engine was tweaked to develop 134bhp. The TF 135 briefly reappeared in 2009, built as a CKD kit at Longbridge by new owners SAIC/NAC.





#### **⋖ MG TF SUNSTORM LE**

Only 500 SunStorm LEs were made, based on the TF 115, 135 and 160 variants. They were offered in Raven Black, Nightfire Red and Starlight Silver and came with a body-coloured hardtop as standard. All got Smokestone Grey interior and Gunsmoke Alcantara and black part-leather seats, a leather steering wheel, Momo leather and alloy gear knob and a single-slot CD tuner. 16" 11-spoke alloy wheels and AP Racing disc brakes completed the standard specification.



#### MGF/TF SPECIAL EDITIONS

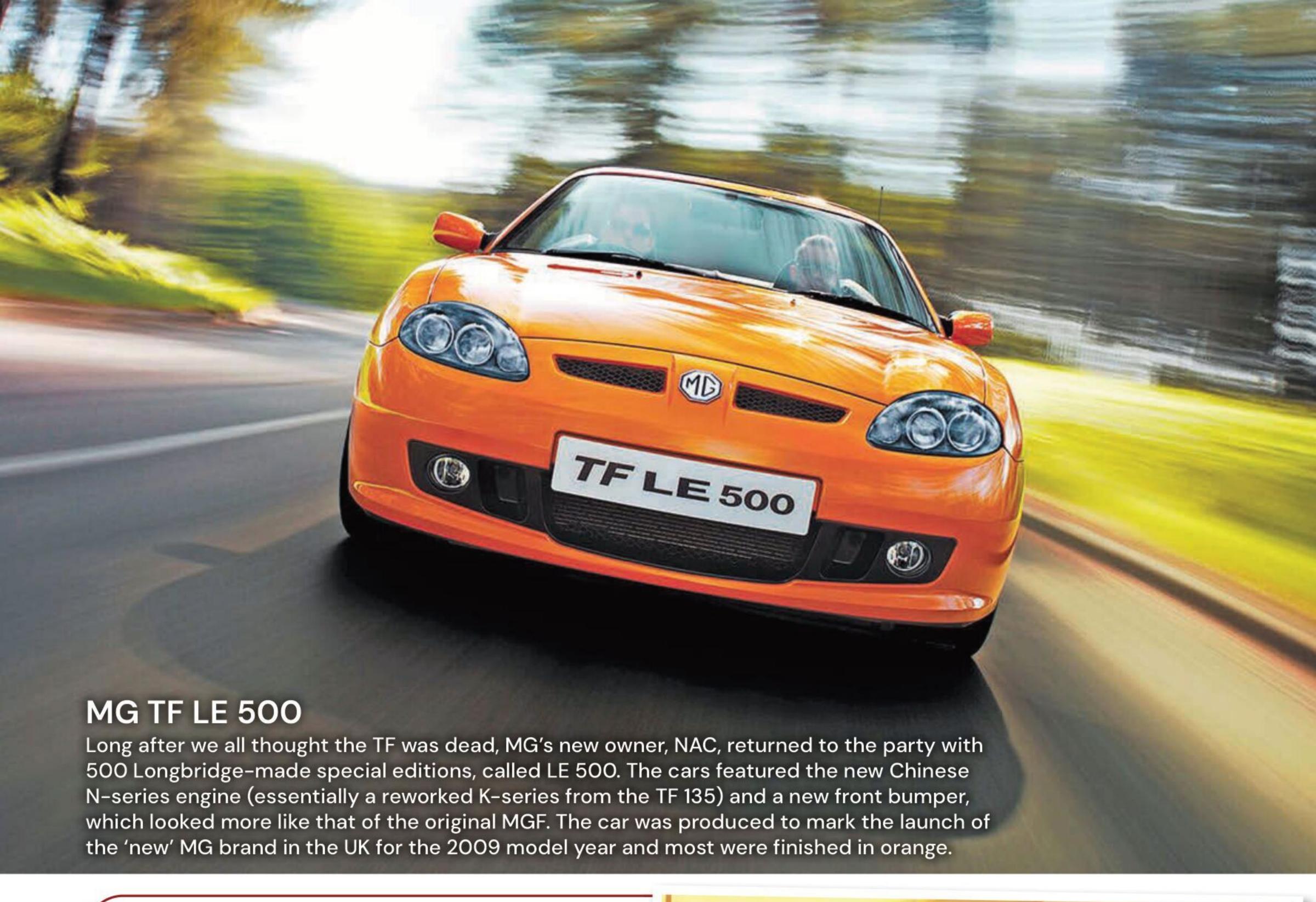


Based on the MG TF 135 and 160, the 2002 Sprint SE received an upmarket interior trim with Gunsmoke Alcantara and black leather seats, Smokestone fascia and door panels. It had a hood that was coloured to match the bodywork, chrome pack and front fog lights. Uprated 304mm front disc brakes and performance calipers completed the specification, along with the 11-spoke alloys seen on the TF 160. Just 600 were made.



#### **▲ MG TF 200 HPD CONCEPT**

If ever there was a car that was too early to market, it was the 2003 TF 200 HPD concept vehicle. It used hybrid powertrain technology to supplement the standard 160bhp VVC engine with an extra 40 electric brake horsepower, similar to today's hybrids which are as much about added performance as they are about environmental credentials. It was a forward-thinking and fascinating concept that quickly joined the ranks of MG Rover's 'if-onlys' and against a difficult backdrop of corporate storm-chasing, it proved that the company's engineers were ingenious and perceptive.



#### **MG TF 115**

In 2003, as part of a new range of entry-level, K-seriesengined MG models, MG Rover introduced a 1.6-litre version of the TF called the TF 115. The spec list wasn't as stingy as the old MGF 1.6i, though, and retained body-coloured trim and remote central locking. It was also incredibly good value at £12,995 on-the-road.



#### **⋖ MG TF COOL BLUE**

Introduced in 2003, the Cool Blue limited edition was available in either the TF 115 or 135 models, and came with a distinctive blue hood, with either Trophy Blue, Starlight Silver or Anthracite metallic paint. All featured a Momo leather and alloy gear knob, leather steering wheel, wind stop and ash grey facia, along with six-spoke 'Abingdon' 16" alloy wheels, front fog lamps, chrome interior handles and vent surrounds. It was a nice package for the £15,995 asking price.

#### MGF/TF SPECIAL EDITIONS



#### **≺** TF SPARK SE

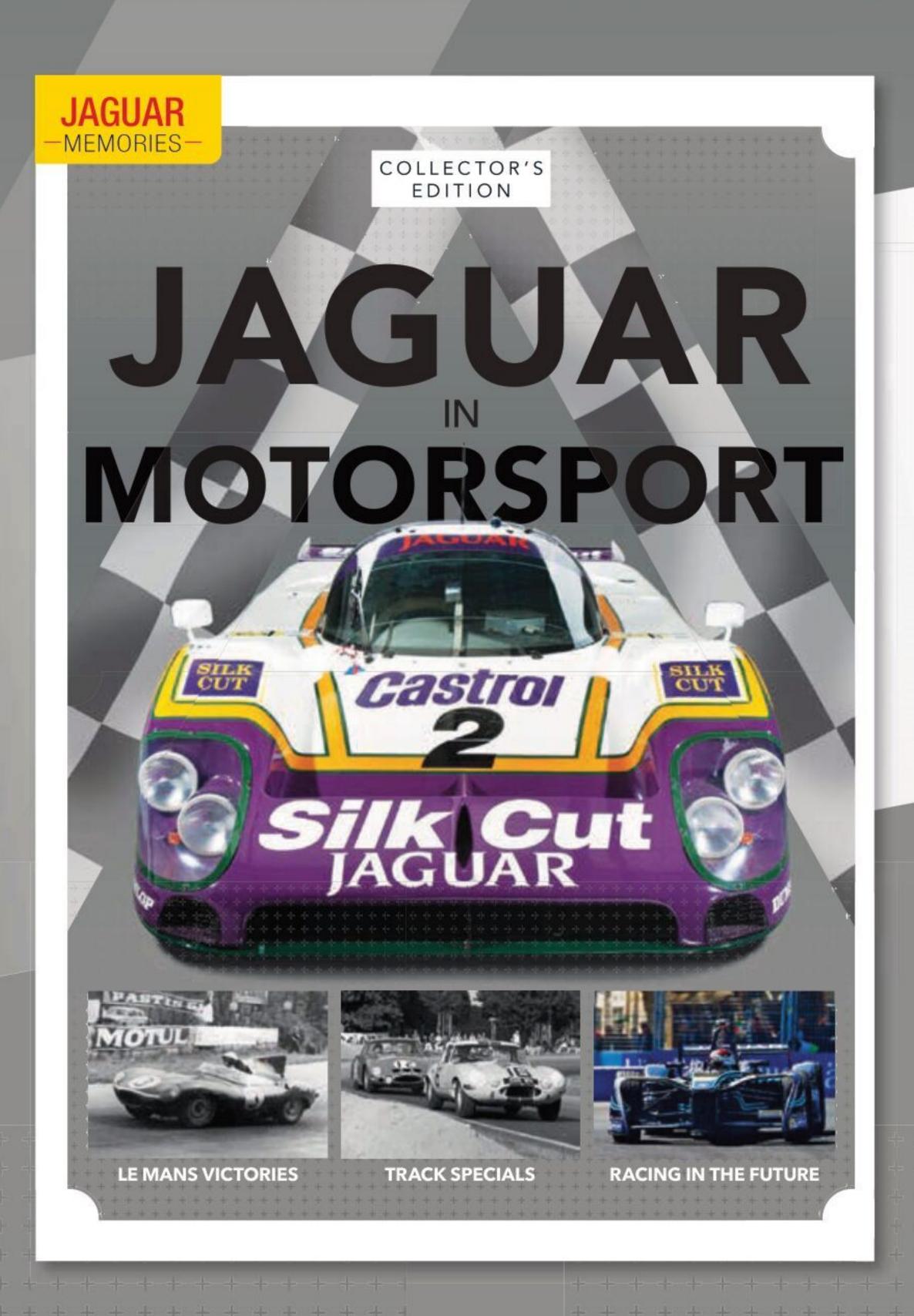
The 2004 Spark SE was the last special edition of the MG Rover era and was focused on achieving retail sales. It could be ordered with any engine variant, with a limited run of 1,000 cars. Inside it got Gunsmoke and Black Alcantara MGlogo embroidered seats, brushed alloy door inserts and steering wheel along with the usual 'Bright Pack' items: chrome ashtray and handbrake button, Momo leather/ alloy gear knob, bright side and front grilles and chrome exterior door handles. They all came with Charcoal Grey hoods.



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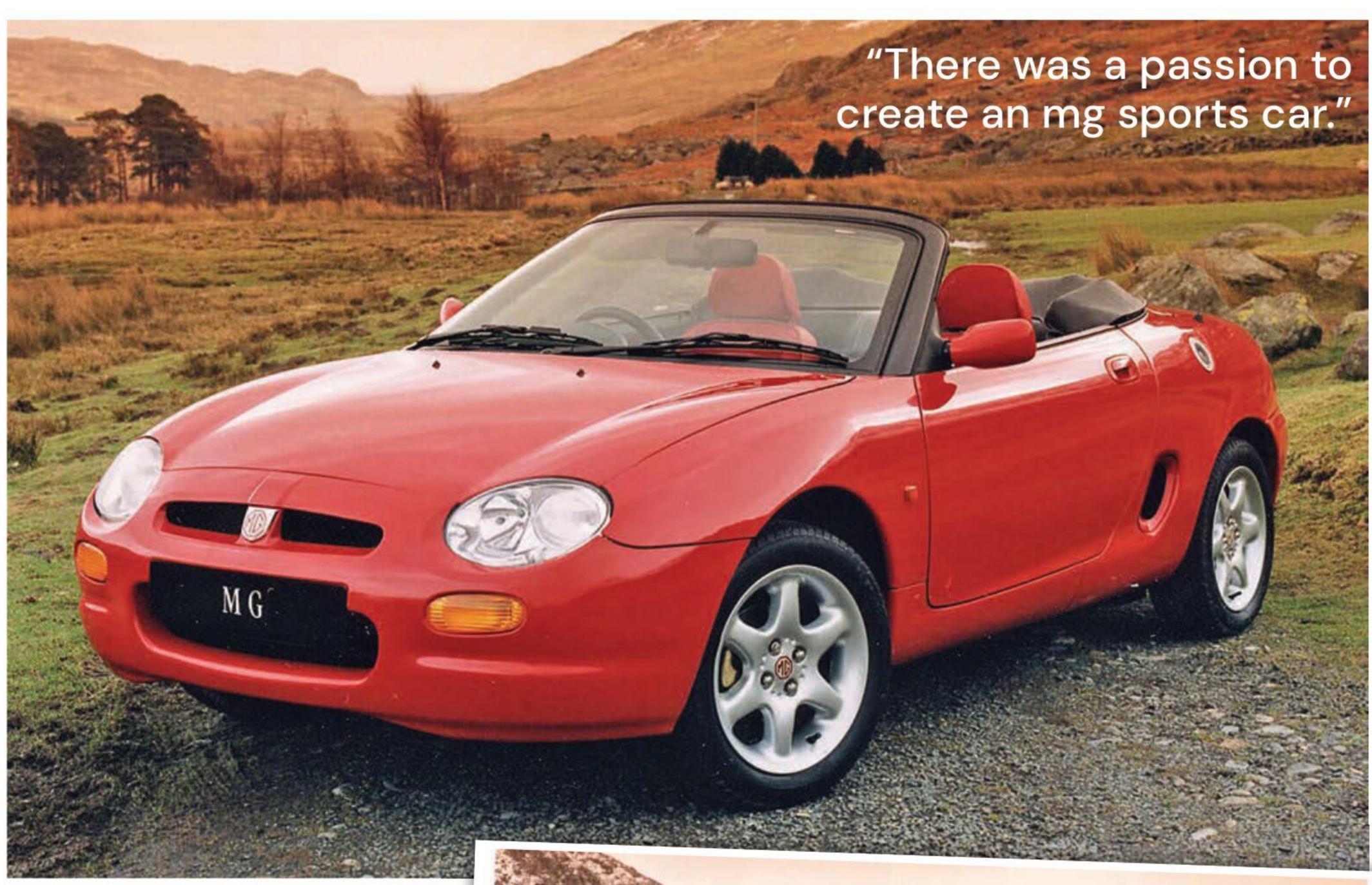
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return of a 'proper' MG sports car had been mooted for a long time, after the MGB's demise in 1981, but it would be another 14 years before a two-seater drop-top once again wore the famous octagon.

Developed on a shoestring budget by Rover Group engineers, the 'F' used as many parts as possible from the existing parts bin, including the K-series engine and a platform made up of two Metro subframes, with interconnected Hydragas suspension - not the most obvious choice for a sports car. Its mid-engined, rearwheel-drive layout made the MGF great fun, while its styling certainly bore cues from MGs of old.

In a rare interview, MG Memories spoke to Gerry McGovern, the man responsible for its looks. He is currently design chief at Jaguar Land Rover and has been in the news a lot lately for leading the styling of the latest Land Rover Defender.

MGF 1.8i Rover Cars External Affairs (0121 782 8000) photograph. Copyright free for editorial purposes only. For any other use, prior written permission is required. Strictly embargoed until 00.01 hours, Tuesday, 7 March 1995

Prior to his time at JLR, McGovern styled a number of Rover Group cars including the R3 200 and Land Rover Freelander as well as the MGF. Here's his story of the MG sports car's return.

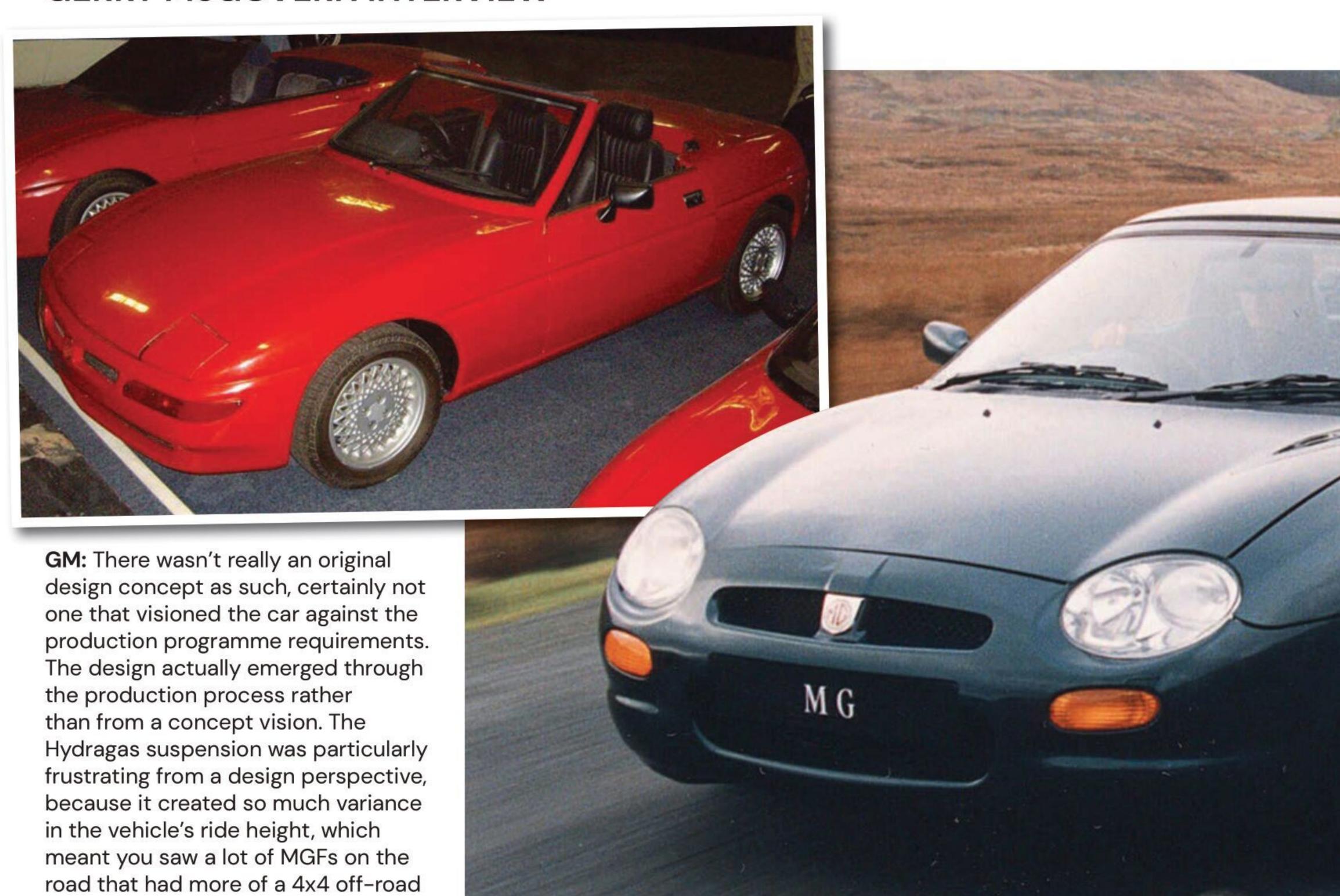
MGM: What were the key design themes with MGF and how do you feel that you and your team executed them?

GM: As I remember, it was a very small design team, certainly nothing

that compares with the design organisations of today. However, there was a passion to create an MG sports car that was modern, simple and fun which, I think, overall was achieved.

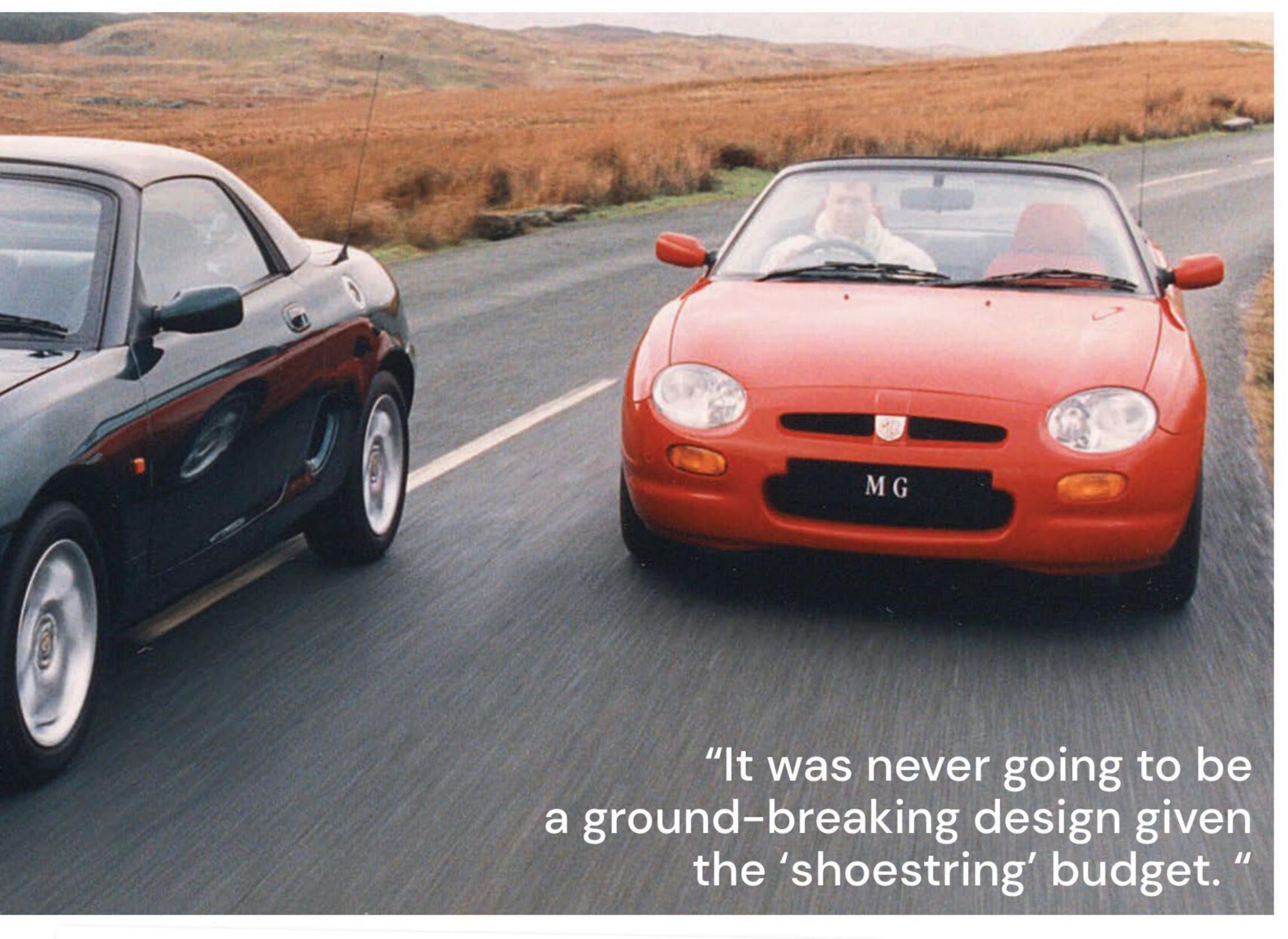
MGM: How close was the production MGF to the original design concept and was this restricted by the need to use Metro subframes and Hydragas suspension?

#### **GERRY McGOVERN INTERVIEW**





stance than a sports car stance.





MGM: Given the tight budget, you must have been very proud of what was achieved and how well received the car was. What do you think was key to its appeal?

GM: There was a lot of euphoria when the car was launched. I think mainly because we hadn't seen a new MG sports car for over 30 years. There was also a lot of good will for the car to succeed, particularly from the press and MG enthusiasts. We were all very proud that we had managed to get it into production. It was never going to be a ground-breaking design given the 'shoestring' budget. However, it did have a characterful personality that struck an emotional chord.

MGM: How closely did design and engineering teams work to bring the car to fruition and how rapid was its development?

GM: I think overall the design and

#### **GERRY McGOVERN INTERVIEW**



engineering team worked very collaboratively together with a shared desire to see MG returned to production. I have some very fond memories of the people I worked with on this project. Brian Griffin was the Chief Engineer. He was a lovely man and a very good engineer.

MGM: If there was anything you'd have liked to have changed or done differently on the car, what was it? GM: It is easy in hindsight to think of things that should have been done differently. Clearly, a bigger budget would have helped and not using a Hydragas suspension system are the ones that come to mind.

MGM: How was the mood at Rover Group when the MGF first appeared, so soon after the BMW takeover? GM: The MGF created a lot of enthusiasm both inside and outside the business. It re-established a level of pride for the MG brand. From an overall business perspective its success was highly debatable. However, it certainly made a lot of people smile and, from my perspective, it was great fun being involved in its creation.

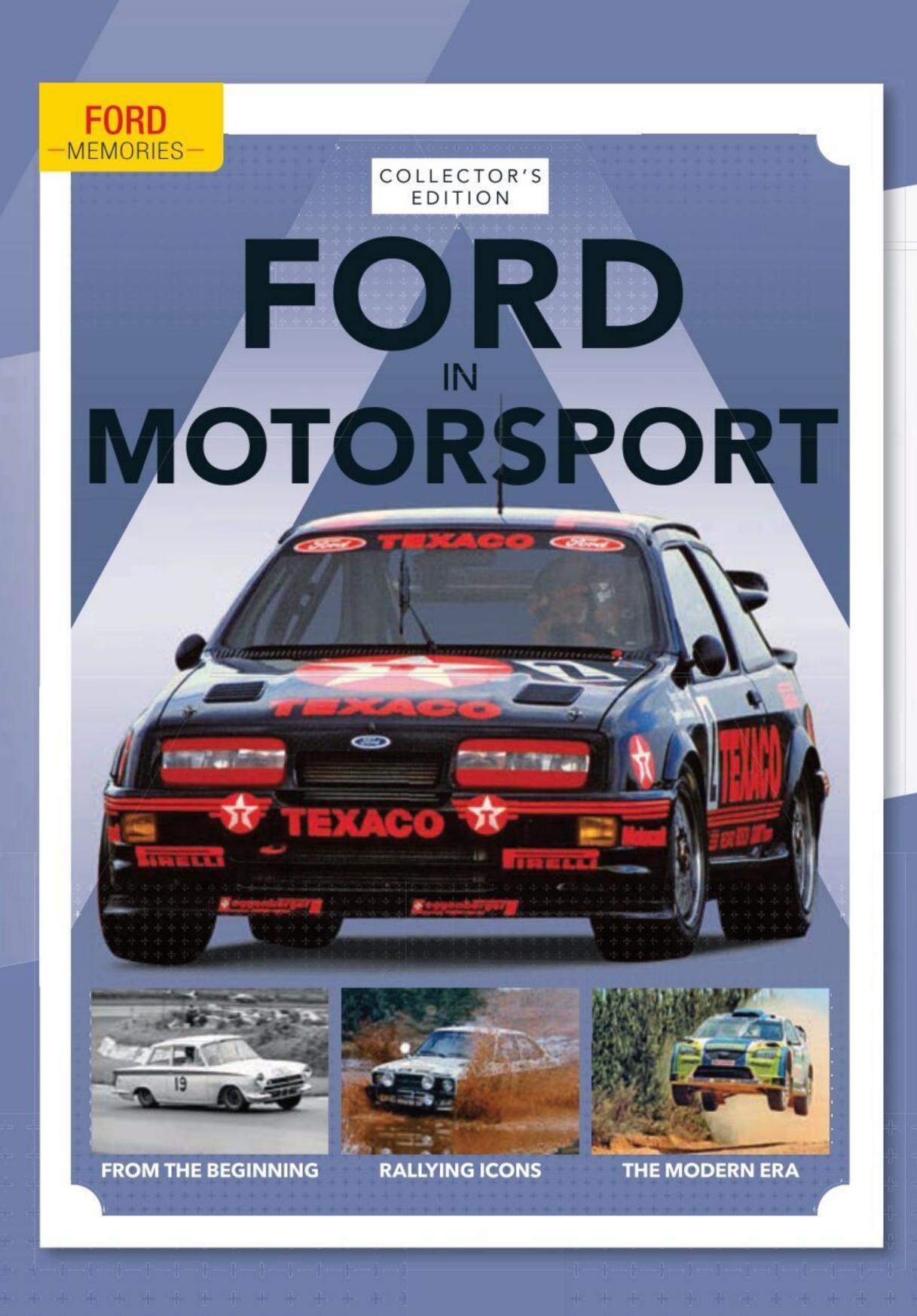




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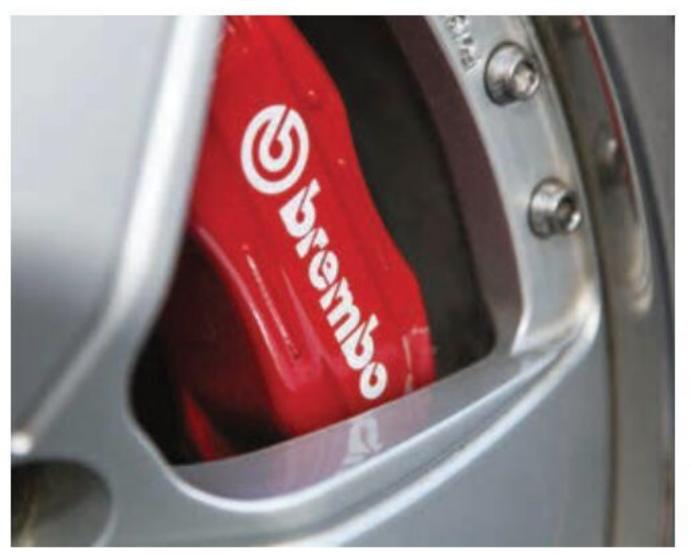
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#### MG SV-R











## Red hot lady ned

Cars, boats, planes and all manner of other machinery are regularly referred to as 'she' rather than 'it.' Sometimes it is hard to see why, but the SVR is one car that fully deserves its feminine epithet. Words: Andrew Starkey

on referring to inanimate objects as feminine? Boats, planes, trains and cars all get the 'she' treatment. 'She's a real beauty,' we say when gazing at the lines of an expensive or rare motor car. It's a lot of metal, plastic, rubber and maybe carbon fibre, but to many it is most certainly female. I have my own theory about the romance of ownership and how the marketing gurus fill us with a desire that makes us feel the way we do about our cars, and after visiting Stan Alexandorwicz I know exactly why he considers his SVR to be a lady.

I met Stan recently at his place of work near his home in Walsall, to see in the flesh for the first time an MG SVR. After a little chat in the office, Stan took me through to the back of his industrial unit and said with

particular pride: 'There she is.' And he was right, there SHE was. I understood completely in that second why we use the feminine term when talking cars. Build number 152 and one of only four righthand drive versions in this colour, this SVR is staggeringly attractive, to me at any rate. It made my heart leap a little, and then almost go into full cardiac arrest when Stan turned the key.

The car pushes all those blokey buttons, you see. There are beautiful curves, a long bonnet and a big, lusty 5-litre V8 sending 385 horses through to the rear wheels. And there's the noise, a gorgeous rib cage rattling rumble that turns into a more than impressive baneful howl at the press of the pedal. Plenty of cars have this recipe, but the SVR seemed to have a little extra something. I felt a sense of patriotic pride, as you do when you think of a Battle of Britain Spitfire or Concorde perhaps. You



see, this car represents what the chaps at MG were capable of. OK, I know the chassis is Italian and the engine is American, but to me it's so British and proves that we can make great heart thumping stuff, cars that have, well, soul.

So, let's return to Stan's Red Hot Lady (Red Hot is the colour by the way). This was the first time I'd actually got hands-on with an SVR, and I wasn't disappointed. The carbon fibre body is very, very pretty indeed and far better looking than the De Tomaso Bigua and Qvale Mangusta from which the SVs are descended. I felt there were some aspects of the design that seemed a tad familiar. Did that front end remind me of a Vauxhall Monaro? And is there a hint of TVR in the rear too? Who cares? It, sorry, 'she' looks great and Stan is justifiably proud to own such a car.

He actually saw this car advertised back in June 2012. 'The seller wanted way too much for her,' Stan explains. 'I didn't even go to view the car at that time; I knew it was just too much money.' Stan was already the

owner of two MGs, a V8 MGB and an MG RV8. I'm sure you can see a trend developing here? 'I love MGs and V8s,' he admits. Really Stan? I wouldn't have guessed! 'It's just the combination of complete Britishness and the V8 sound track,' he adds.

Six months after dismissing the SVR ad, Stan received a phone call asking if he was still interested in it. Stan's retort was succinct: 'I am, but not at that price.' The caller didn't hang up, and so after a bit of pre-sale bartering Stan agreed to view the car a week or so later. Now, I don't know if you believe in omens or divine intervention, but during that week Stan paid a visit to a local Birmingham-based car hi-fi specialist looking for technical help on one of his cars. During the idle banter that all car nuts get into and at which our wives just frown, talk of MG SVs entered the conversation. By coincidence the hi-fi chap had just sold his silver SV, but had retained the private plate.

Stan snapped the plate up in the hope he would soon have the right car to put it on. Somebody or

something was telling Stan the SVR was soon to be his - and it was. The viewing a week later resulted in a deal being struck. Stan's wife (obviously a very tolerant lady) suggested he go home first to think the deal through. What she didn't know was that Stan had come prepared with a handsome deposit. She soon cottoned on to that fact however, when he said: 'Too late chuck, the deal's done.' Nothing like keeping your other half in the loop, is there? Nothing like it at all...

After the shock, she did however insist that one of his other MGs must depart for pastures new to make room for Stan's latest acquisition. 'I sold the RV8 begrudgingly,' says Stan. 'Diane was right though, I was showing signs of becoming a little too avid a collector of expensive toys."

Back to our photoshoot and I had stood there in awe for a while. Now it was time to look a little closer at this car. A peek under the titchy bonnet revealed the all-alloy Ford V8 32-valve engine. It looked a little tight in there, but I'm told that the whole front can be removed with relative ease. The V8 sits just behind the centreline of





The profile is near perfect, but Andrew wonders if bigger wheels would help complete the package.

the front wheels, just where it should be to assist in a better handling and weight distribution.

Further back, the cockpit was proof that us Brits can create a good looking, practical and comfortable driving environment. It was well appointed, and the fit and finish was of a very high standard. The half leather Sparco seats adjusted in all



he SV got Ford's 4.6-litre V8, but the SVR got the bigger 5-litre version that pushes out 385bhp.

directions, which is just as well as I'm a proper short arse when it comes to sports cars. There wasn't a clue to the fact that there was a built-in roll bar as part of the chassis because it was all very well disguised behind wellfitted trim. The knobs, buttons and switches have a welcome familiarity to them as they are MG derived. That might have disappointed somebody paying £83,000 for a brand new SVR, but personally I could see nothing wrong with it at all.

On the move, the car reminds you in no uncertain terms that there is a lot of power available. The torque is every bit as tremendous as you'd hope from a big V8. It is delivered by the shovel full from very low down the rev range, and it just keeps coming. Stan often finds pulling away in second in the wet can save the embarrassment of sitting there with the wheels spinning! The clutch is quite heavy and the gearbox requires a definite and precise action - I can see why Jeremy Clarkson managed to miss third gear when driving one on Top Gear. I'm sure it's something you become accustomed to though, and what does he know about driving anyway...? The speed is a little deceptive, too. The engine induction note is nothing short of symphonic



Andrew was well impressed with the design, fit and finish of the interior. He wasn't even bothered by the presence of some switchgear borrowed from slightly more mundane models, but then again he wasn't paying £83,000 for a new SVR!

and the exhausts accompany this masterful music with their own baritone chorus. All this, coupled with very little wind noise, means you can easily become speed trap fodder helping to fund the next speed bump to disfigure our roads. You really do have to keep an eye on the speedo.

Some experts (and I'm not one, I can assure you) may cast derision on the ride quality. I found it taught but not track stiff, confident but with a little body roll. My impression was that the SVR has more a Grand Tourer feel to it than a bone shaking race bred track monster, and I think that's OK. Stan does too. 'She's just too rare to take on the track anyway,' he says, 'but I'm planning a nice road trip through France in a year or so.' That's more like it, and those seats would let you do it too.

The steering is quick and responsive with respectable feedback. You can of course help your choice of direction by prodding the throttle a little harder for some instant tail out, hooliganised over-steer. Not that I'd be an advocate of such tomfoolery of course. However, I do have just one issue. It's only an opinion and I'm



happy for you to disagree, but it's the wheels. They are the proper OZ split rims, 8in wide at the front and 10in at the back. They're 18in diameter, and yet they seem a little small under those beefy arches and, dare I say, just a little dated. Like I say, it's just my impression and I guess the car would lose some of its originality if they were changed. Besides, they did look better moving than when stood still.

All in all Mr Stevens, the designer, has done a pretty darn good job at producing something quite special, made even more so by the fact that production was cut short when the rug wasn't just pulled from under the group, but torn up and thrown back in their faces. I'm not going to go into all the political and legal shenanigans and shameful short sightedness that led to the demise of MG-Rover, followed by Will Riley's misguided attempts at keeping the SV project alive, but it is fair to say that the idea of the SV range being the halo model for MG was a good one, albeit just too late. I only wish the Chinese owners shared this sentiment, and thought that 'she' - or some lady like her was worthy of a second chance.





### FRONTLINE DEVELOPMENT'S 'B'





Can John-Joe Vollans's predisposition against the MGB be cured by a liberal dose of LE50? Thankfully Frontline Development's 'B' illustrates just how good this venerable old sports car can really be.

pack of pipe tobacco on the dash top alongside a pair of driving gloves. Parking up to view some cricket on the village green. Pottering to church on Sunday followed by a trip to the local antiques centre. You'd be forgiven for thinking of these as the trappings of the life of the MG driver. Stereotypical yes, but like all conventions, bred out of a seed of truth and cultivated by MG in its advertising of yore.

MG has always been a remarkably safe and diluted sports car brand

> that has provided its customers with tame cars of sporting pretension since before the War. Putting myself 'in period' back in 1962 (when the MGB first broke cover), I would have lamented the loss of the raw feeling of the car's superb predecessor the MGA, but I still would have lined-up with the rest of the ranks

The MGB has always been a pretty car and not everyone wanted to drive at the limit on every trip to the shops, or indeed had the talent to do so. The MGB was therefore a sedate and attainable little piece of 'Sixties exotica for the common can, a breath of fresh air for the baby-boomer generation who was approaching the legal driving age just as the 'B' became the British automotive pinup of choice.

of admirers.

The problem I have always had with the B is that it remained cutting edge and fresh for all of about 15 minutes and by its long overdue demise in 1980, it was about as up to date as

me penning this article in red ochre on the walls of a cave... But hang on, if this is my view of this British institution then why am I dedicating so many column inches of this fine magazine to an article on said automotive dinosaur? Well, like any Englishman I love an underdog and through the smoke screen of derision, I wish that the MGB was given more of a chance... Thankfully just like the geneticists in a certain Jurassicbased Michael Crichton novel, this slice of automotive prehistory has been resurrected from its ancient DNA... and this time it's got some bite!

### **NEW LEASE**

A car that went out of production 33 years ago and was first introduced over 50 years ago; why bring it back? That was the question posed to Ed Braclik at Frontline Developments, the company behind the 2012 resurrection of the B, now known as the LE50 (limited edition 50). "We wanted to mark the MGB's half century with something special. The thought gradually dawned on us that if we combined all of our uprated MGB components into a brand new British Motor Heritage MGB hull, we would have that something special."

What Ed and his team have put together is certainly special. This MGB sports a 214bhp 2.0-litre Mazda twin-cam engine firing the LE50 up to 60mph in 5 seconds and climbing to a top speed of 160mph - all achieved by manually swapping cogs through a six-speed gearbox. Not content with just performance to match modern expectations, Frontline went the whole hog and

### FRONTLINE DEVELOPMENT'S 'B'



The 2.0-litre Mazda twin-cam engine puts out 214bhp and fires the LE50 up to 60mph in 5 seconds, topping out at 160mph!

re-trimmed the LE50s in Alcantara (Connolly leather optional) to an exceptionally high standard. The B's rear bench, which was useless even to a Hobbit, has been ditched and there's now a rear deck reminiscent of a SIII E-type.

Thankfully the 'feel' of an early MGB in the cabin has been retained. There's plenty of chrome and period switchgear to get all misty-eyed about, but in a stroke of genius, the original Smiths gauges have been remade to suit the modern age. There's a digital trip meter in the bottom half of the speedo and the tachometer now scoffs at the old B-series redline mark of 5000rpm, and instead soars to a screeching 7800rpm. Hand stitching everywhere and an uprated sound system, including an iPod ready CD deck from JL audio completes the premium package.

Taking a moment to admire some of the most iconic body lines ever committed to steel is highly advisable here. An early MGB GT with chrome bumpers would always have been my ideal choice of model for resurrection and it seems Frontline agrees. Our LE50 for the afternoon is just such an evocation and as if to compound that 'baby Aston' comparison of old, this LE50 is finished in Sage Green, the Newport Pagnell firm's racing shade.

In spite of adorning such titans of motorsport folklore as the DBR1, the famous hue suits the MGB, especially when twinned with the Dunlop racing wheels, complete with centre 'knock off' spinners.

So it looks the part, but does the LE50 live up to its racing looks? To find out, we booked a Cold War airfield for the afternoon and gave the LE50 a thorough going over.

### 'B' FLAT

The first thing that strikes you as you fire the LE50 into life (via a button in the centre of the dash) is how remarkably 'authentic' the engine note and exhaust are. The rasp and crackle are still there from the original B, albeit with a lot more grunt evident even at idle. There's a deeper note of power that clearly comes from the greater displacement and the wider bore of the exhaust. So as to keep some charming induction roar, Frontline fitted 45mm throttle bodies and direct injection, which goes a long way to recreating and surpassing the soundtrack of an old twin-SU equipped B-Series. My worst fears were therefore averted as soon as the engine burst into life, nothing would have spoilt the occasion more than the dull whir of a modern engine idling.



I'm sure many an MG purist will baulk at the idea of using a Japanese engine in this MGB update (ironic considering the company's 'Eighties links with Honda and current Asian owners) but there simply aren't enough British highperformance engines with the same ideal blend of availability, reliability and power. The K-series would have been an obvious choice were it not for the fact it's an obsolete engine, and the prospect of stripping and rebuilding unknown condition second-hand engines unsurprisingly didn't appeal to Frontline. The Mazda unit comes as stock with Teflon-coated forged and skirted pistons and a billeted crankshaft and con-rods. Oh and let's not forget that this VVC-equipped, 2.0-litre engine makes 214bhp (so 107.5bhp per litre) without the use of any forced induction, which therefore equips the LE50 with an eye watering 230bhp per tonne.









That's three times the power to weight ratio of the original MGB.

Boosting the bhp is the easy bit though, controlling all that power needs some thought. Thankfully the chassis has had the same attention to detail and focus on usability as the rest of the LE50. The BMH hull (produced from ex-MG Rover jigs) has been strengthened in key areas such as the sills, floors and rear quarters, mainly to cope with the forces transferred by the new suspension system. That's right no more archaic leaf springs, instead the LE50 gets a set of fully adjustable coilovers and dampers matched to a multi-link rear axle. Just when you're thinking this all sounds a bit too safe and modern, there's still a live rear axle, and to get the most control when the rear does break traction, (which it can do easily if provoked) there's a limited slip differential.

### FRONTLINE DEVELOPMENT'S 'B'

### **CIRCUIT TRAINING**

Our choice of Bruntingthorpe's 'Sprint' circuit was based on the Leicestershire airfield's perfect mix of corners and huge straights, which are ideally suited to test overall performance. There's a selection of corners of varying speeds and a straight which incorporates the main 2-mile runway. Bruntingthorpe used to be home to Britain's last V-bomber, the Vulcan. As such there's plenty of distance off the final corner and onto the runway straight to get up to some decent speeds.

The first few laps are spent acclimatising to the feel of the LE5O. It's familiar to anyone who has piloted an MGB before, and with the suspension on its 'road' setting, there's a lovely suppleness to the damping. The body does roll a little but it's not excessive and doesn't impede direction changes too much. Of course with fully adjustable settings, you could happily spend two minutes altering the suspension to tighten things up.

With everything warmed up (including the driver) I decide to test once and for all whether I have been fair to the MGB or not. If there was ever an MGB I could get on with, then this LE50 is it and stretching the engine to the redline across



the gears produces a good shove in the back. This is swiftly followed by a grin as the lovely lever action of the stubby gearknob allows for a smooth, quick racing change and we're off towards the redline again. Third gear stretches away and the magic ton is easily reached and passed. Click into fourth and the LE5O begins to stretch its legs. By the time we reach 120mph I'm into fifth and there's just enough runway (and courage) left to see 135mph pass on the speedo. Easing off and dropping back into fourth with a





bit of heel and toe, a delightful bark emanates from the back end.

A few laps later and I begin to push to find the limit of grip and I have to say you really need to be pressing on to provoke any slides. A bit of a four-wheel drift tells me that 70mph is about as fast as the LE50 is happy to take turn three (a wide right-hander). Turn one proves the trickiest however, as it arrives after the airfield straight and with no brake indicators, it's all too easy to plough into this tightening right hand bend with too much pace and the result is





the inevitable lift-off oversteer. Sure enough one particularly enthusiastic lap does provoke the rear to slide, but the axle broadcasts its loss of traction before it happens and a little corrective opposite lock sorts it out. Now my grin has become a beaming smile and in truth I am lapping for fun now, my mind has been made up. It's clear that the LE50 isn't just decent 'for an MGB' it's a hugely enjoyable sports car by any yardstick, even a modern one!

Once I have dragged myself off the circuit to reflect on this superb take on an iconic classic sports car, the enormity of the work Frontline has undertaken on each LE50 sets in. Ok so they are a bit expensive... fifty thousand pounds expensive, but for that you are getting a handbuilt, Porsche 911-beating MGB. The elements that everyone loved about the original are here in fistfuls but all of its compromises - which for me were too many - have been

addressed. It has the pace and the chassis to finally provide some real performance and the quality and reliability of the components used have been proven again and again.

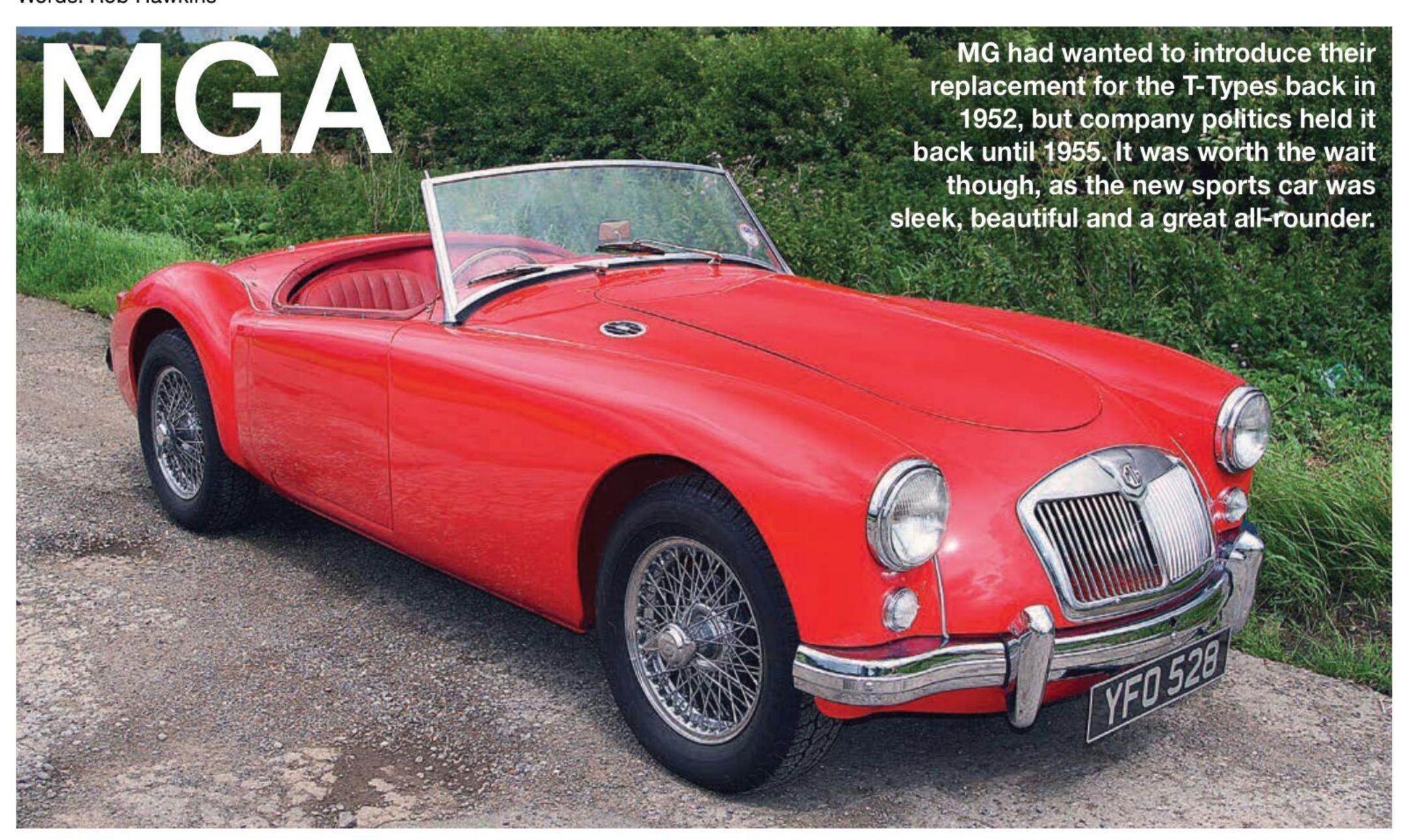
Our test LE50 is actually Frontline's final pre-production prototype and has been hurled about by journalists and customers for over a year. It has led a punishing life in which many lesser modified classic cars would have expired by now. One day this LE50 was hurled up Prescott hill climb 19 times... Its engine was tested at full throttle for 24 hours on a test bench and is none the worse for wear. In spite of all this abuse, this LE50 drives as if it were brand new and came with delivery mileage only. That's something you couldn't expect of an old MGB or even the majority of home-built projects.

The heady mix of nostalgia, retro styling and modern performance for me makes this an ideal classic plaything. It's purely indulgent and were I the type of well-heeled gent who likes to splash some cash on frivolities, I can think of few better ways than buying an LE50 and crucially, enjoying driving it hard, it will be more than up for the challenge.



# Buy, mod, drive

MG's range of post-war two-seater sports cars arguably includes the most varied assortment of delectable yet affordable cars from any manufacturer over the last seven decades. There are traditional pre-war-style roadsters such as the TD and TF right up to the modern mid-engine MGF and TF, and in between there's everything from a humble Midget to an eight-cylinder RV8. Whilst the classic car market has boomed and prices rocketed, many MGs are still affordable and a good potential investment, not to mention great fun to drive. Whether you own one of the MGs outlined over the following pages or none of them at all, the information concerning each model's history, what problems to expect and modifications that can be made should enable you to dream and speculate. Words: Rob Hawkins



he T-Types had transformed the fortunes of MG, but there was no denying that by the time the 1940s turned into the 1950s, it was beginning to lag seriously behind the new post-war designs being introduced elsewhere. On the classic scene that is all part of a T-Type's charm, but when you are trying to sell new cars, then modernity is key for everybody except Morgan. The Austin-Healey 100 had paved the way for a new design of closed-wheel rear-wheeldrive sports car with its launch at the Earls Court Motor Show in 1952, quickly followed in 1953 by the TR2 from Triumph. Leonard Lord at BMC was not willing to let MG compete with his Austin-Healey pet project though, so Abingdon had to wait

until September 1955 before they could launch their new MGA Roadster. Powered by a 68bhp 1489cc B-series engine, the MGA had drum brakes all round with coil spring suspension at the front, leaf springs at the rear and lever arm dampers at each corner. The following year, a coupé version was released which featured wind-up windows along with its roof (the Roadster had removable side screens to go with its hood).

The MGA 1500 as it was known could cope with more power, so its B-series engine was tweaked to produce 72bhp, then enlarged in 1959 to 1588cc which added an extra 6bhp to power output and 17% more torque (disc brakes were fitted at the front by this time). Known as the MGA 1600, a Mk2 version was launched

in 1961 which was powered by a 1622cc version of the B-series engine. However, the seemingly ultimate MGA appeared in 1958 with disc brakes all round and a 1588cc engine under the bonnet that had an aluminium, chain-driven, twin-cam cylinder head (as opposed to the cast iron overhead valve B-series engine that continued to be used in the other MGAs). The Twin Cam produced an impressive 108bhp at 6700rpm with 104lb.ft of torque at 4500rpm, and could hit 60mph from stationary in 9.1 seconds, going on to a top speed of 113mph; at the time of its launch, the equivalent 72bhp 1489cc B-series in the MGA 1500 had a top speed of 98mph and took 15.6 seconds to reach 60mph from a standing start.



Unfortunately, the MGA Twin Cam proved not to be as reliable as the B-series engine models (see Jobs and Costs for more details) and was axed in 1960 after only 2111 examples had been produced, 1801 of which were Roadsters. Twin Cam leftovers such as the all-round disc brakes were used up on a few hundred De Luxe 1600 models, which had the 1622cc B-series engine under the bonnet.

Sales of the MGA set a new high for the marque with many exported overseas, but the company had to move with the times and investigate going from the separate body and chassis design of the MGA to a monocoque. By 1962, such a car was launched in the form of the MGB, so the MGA was retired with sales totalling 101,081, far more than any previous MG model.

### **BUYING ADVICE**

The condition of an MGA's body is the primary driver behind its value. With a separate chassis and bodywork all constructed from steel, rust is a major problem, especially around the battery box, floor mounts (floorboards themselves are plywood), sills, door posts and door frames. There's also a large lump of sound deadening felt fitted near the front body mounting area which can become soaked with water, resulting in corrosion of any surrounding metalwork.

Chassis corrosion often begins with floorboard supports and the area underneath the A-posts, between the inner sill and chassis rail that can fill up with road dirt. Having said that, the chassis are reasonably robust, and previous accident damage twisting it



Much more spacious than a T-Type, the driving position is still very classic.

out of true may be your bigger problem. The Twin Cam chassis is slightly different to a B-series engine chassis, but only concerning mounting brackets which are in different positions for the engine, steering rack, pedal box, brake lines and some of the body mounts.

The exterior skins of the doors, bonnet and bootlid are all made from aluminium, but have a steel framework underneath so you need to be wary of any bubbling where the two meet. These and the main steel panels are available, but they are expensive and may require fettling to fit. And if the body has to come off the chassis for repairs, then lining everything back up afterwards can be notoriously time-consuming. If you are paying a professional to do that for you, then you can replace the words 'time consuming' with 'very expensive.'

The B-series engine is much less of a concern as it is a well-proven OHV motor that requires only routine maintenance to keep it in good working order, and rebuilds are not too expensive anyway. Look for 50-60psi of oil pressure when hot, and listen out for rumbles from the bottom end. Infrequent use can result in hardened valve stem oil seals, which results in a plume of smoke from the exhaust, usually on the overrun. Oil leaks can emerge from the back of the engine, next to where it is mounted to the gearbox bellhousing. The cause of the leak is often the rear main oil scroll. A more modern lip seal can be fitted to replace the older scroll design, but the engine has to be removed to fit it and some machining is involved.

Reliability problems associated with the Twin Cam model's engine have now been resolved by a number of specialists. The MG Owners' Club reckon the Twin Cam's poor reliability was largely caused by the high compression ratio of the engine (initially 9.9:1, but later reduced to 8.3:1), which required perfect ignition timing and the use of the correct spark plugs along with top-grade fuel to avoid detonation of the pistons. Another problem was that the engine had chromed piston rings and cylinder bores, which resulted in excessive oil consumption.

MGA specialist Bob West, who agrees with the aforementioned problems, has also discovered that the valve caps on some early engines had not been hardened, so they would break and the collets would pull through. And whilst the

compression ratio of the engine can be lowered to help preserve it, he prefers to keep it a little higher at 9.5:1 by fitting forged and domed pistons that are the same as those used in the engines of the Le Mans race cars. Bear in mind that rebuilding a Twin Cam engine is nowhere near as cheap as it is for the OHV version.

The standard brakes on the B-series MGA (drums all round or discs/drums) are reliable if properly maintained. The Twin Cam model has Dunlop 10.75in diameter discs and calipers all round, with a mechanical handbrake system operating the rear discs via separate calipers and pads. The mechanical pivot for the handbrake can seize, so it must be regularly checked and lubricated.

Prices of MGAs have rocketed in recent years. Ten years ago you could have bought one of the best OHV Roadsters for around £15,000. These days that will at best get you a usable car needing work, while you'll have to pay twice as much for the best and even £5000 buys you nothing more than a total restoration project. Coupés have seen a similar rise, although they still lag behind the topless cars by a couple of grand. As for Twin Cams – if you have to ask, then you probably can't afford one with asking prices pushing at the £50,000 barrier.

### **MODIFICATIONS**

Modern upgrades are a good starting point for modifications, including an unleaded cylinder head for around £250, a high-torque starter motor for less than £200 and updating the electrics with an alternator conversion for around £260 to replace the dynamo, switching from positive earth to negative, replacing the twin six-volt batteries for a single 12-volt unit and upgrading to electronic ignition for £100 more. Switching from positive to negative earth may mean the voltage regulator can be retained, but some of the connections will need to be changed around. If a replacement SU fuel pump is fitted with a positive earth diode, the diode will need reversing, or for a single polarity fuel pump the feed and earth wires may need swapping over. Not everyone agrees these upgrades are entirely necessary, though.

Standard brake discs can be uprated with performance pads for around £70 and drilled and grooved discs for around £250. Adding braided stainless-steel



flexi-hoses for around £70 can help to maintain braking pressure, while a remote vacuum-operated servo for around £160 can reduce the amount of braking effort required when pressing the brake pedal.

Upgrades to later MGB discs and calipers are feasible on the front, but the conversion involves changing to MGB front suspension. Moss's conversion kit may require a pair of Mk2 MGA front hubs (available new), depending on what is already fitted – prices start at £400. NTG's conversion kit includes all the parts, including the hubs, for £611.80. Hoyle Suspension offer a front four-pot caliper conversion for the MGA, featuring 10.75in vented discs that fit within most 15in road wheels. Priced at £834, it requires MGB stub axles (£40–£50 each).

The standard lever arm dampers can be changed for telescopic dampers at the

rear, which are manufactured by the likes of Gaz, Spax and Koni, and cost around £200 for a conversion kit. Polyurethane bushes can replace standard rubber bushes from around a fiver each, and there's a Special Tuning anti-roll bar kit that can be fitted to the front for £220 (a chassis extension assembly for £290 must be fitted to models prior to chassis number 66574).

Hoyle Suspension has developed a number of suspension designs for the MGA. Their front double wishbone coilover conversion costs £1074, while at the rear they offer an independent setup with a Ford differential, double wishbones, coilovers and disc brakes. Prices for that start at £2382.

Engine modifications are largely applicable to the B-series. Fitting the later three main bearing 1800 from the MGB is perhaps the best starting point if you



OHV MGA engines were offered in three capacities: 1498cc, 1588cc &1622cc.



desire more performance, but they are getting very hard to find. An even later five main bearing engine can be fitted, but the cable drive for the rev-counter cannot be refitted as this engine has an electronic version (easily rectified with a new rev counter). Also, the engine mounts will need to be altered, whereas the mounts of the three main bearing engine won't. NTG point out that an 1800 engine is best fitted with a tubular exhaust manifold as the standard MGA manifold is inadequate.

Whatever B-series engine is fitted, there's plenty of tuning potential. Larger twin SU carbs or DCOE Webers are a popular starting point, with new components costing from £700 upwards. Around £1000 buys a lighter and airflowefficient aluminium crossflow cylinder head. Look for stage tuning kits that help to bring together a number of modifications (exhaust, fuelling and ignition).

A supercharger conversion is perhaps the ultimate upgrade for a B-series engine, but you do need to make sure the engine is in good condition. Moss offers such a conversion kit for £3672, which uses an Eaton MP45 supercharger and an SU HS6 carburettor to produce 40% more bhp.

Engine transplants are also popular, but do not underestimate what a major and invasive upgrade this can be. Modern twin-cams such as the Honda VTEC and the Mazda MX-5 are some examples that have been successfully fitted, and Rover V8s have been shoe-horned in too. The standard four-speed gearbox can be changed for a later Ford Type 9 five-speed unit. NTG sell a complete kit,

including the gearbox, for around £2500. Vitesse-Global also offer a conversion kit using a more modern Mazda gearbox, and the parts for that cost around £2900.

The MGA's standard rear differential has a final drive ratio of 4.3:1 in the Mk1 1500 and 1600, and a 4.1:1 ratio in the Mk2. Other diff ratios are available, and one of the most popular is the early MGB's 3.9:1 crownwheel and pinion, which provides lower revs for cruising and is more suitable when gearboxes such as the Ford Type 9 are fitted.

The MGA wasn't equipped with seat belts as standard, but it was an option on the Mk2 and seat belts can be fitted using aftermarket harnesses at around £40 each, with spreader plates costing £5 each. Leather seats were fitted as standard, and covers are still available from many specialists, but with a wider choice of finishes and colours. Expect to pay at least £500 for leather covers, or £1000 for rebuilt leather seats with new wooden seat bases.

Wire wheel conversions are available to transform a steel wheel MGA to splined hubs, and in some cases the halfshafts and brake drums have to be changed. Budget for between £550 and £700 for a conversion kit, then a further £700 for a set of painted wire wheels and another £300 for tyres. Another authentic wheel is the Dunlop steel wheel with a centre spinner, similar to those fitted to the MGA Twin Cam, which are available from Frontline Developments as an alloy and steel replica. These are available for hubs with and without centre locks. Budget for upwards of £1700 for a set of four.

### **MODIFICATIONS**



Beautiful replica Dunlop style wheels from Frontline can replace both steel and wire wheels.



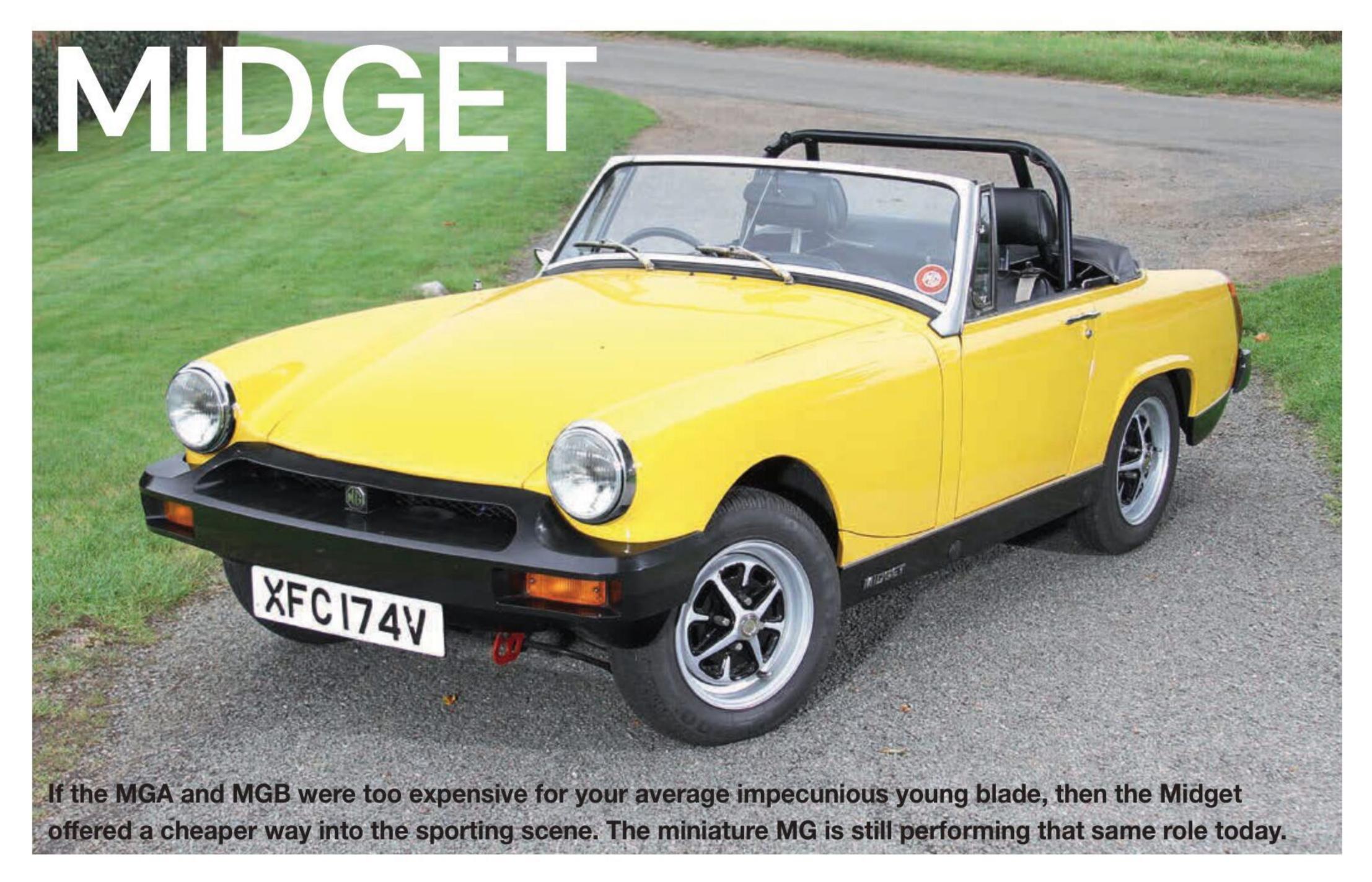
Upgrade options for the brakes are available if you feel you need more modern stopping power.



Engine transplants may change the character of an MGA, but you still get those beautiful curves!



A Hoyle independent rear suspension is highly regarded and will transform the handling of an A.



hen the MG Midget first appeared in 1961, it was essentially a badge engineered Austin-Healey Sprite - the Mk1 'Frogeye' Sprite had been launched in 1958, and the Mk2 Sprite was identical to the new MG Midget except for having less brightwork and alternative badges. By contrast to the MGA, the Midget or Sprite (collectively known as the Spridget) offered a cheaper, more basic route into sports car ownership. The early cars had drum brakes all round, a 948cc A-series engine under the bonnet that drove the rear wheels via a four-speed gearbox and a live axle. There were no wind-up windows, just sidescreens and a stowaway hood and associated framework.

A year after the Midget's launch, the A-series engine was enlarged to 1098cc, and front disc brakes were introduced a year on again in 1963. Despite these changes, the Midget remained in Mk1 guise until 1964, when the Mk2 was launched with wind-up windows, lockable doors and optional wire wheels. This was replaced by the Mk3 two years later in 1966, which saw the A-series engine stretched to the maximum at 1275cc to produce 65bhp at the flywheel. A foldable hood was now



fitted, which was easier to operate than the previous removable assembly.

The Sprite ceased production in 1972, by which time it had lost the Healey tag and was badged simply as an Austin, but the Midget continued on. Round rear wheelarches were introduced in that year on what many people regard as the prettiest of the Midget bodies, replacing

the flatter designs of previous models. Two years later, the Midget 1500 was launched, which saw the 1275cc A-series replaced by a larger 1493cc OHV unit taken from its deadly in-house rival, the Triumph Spitfire. The rear wheelarches also reverted to their former profile after it was found these were stronger in the event of a rear end shunt, and the



chrome bumpers were replaced with large, black impact-absorbing items commonly known as rubber bumpers. This altered not only the aesthetics, but also the handling as the steel girders behind them added a hefty dose of weight at the little car's extremities. The ride height was also raised, making it easier to get in and out but further blunting its original nimbleness. It was a more leisurely cruiser though, and at last a genuine 100mph car. In this guise, the model lasted until 1979.

The front suspension features kingpins with coil springs, lever arm dampers, upper and lower arms (the lower arm forms the seat for the coil spring) and an anti-roll bar on later models. At the rear,

a live axle is located with leaf springs (quarter-elliptic at first, then semi-elliptic) and lever arm dampers.

The Midget is still a tempting DIY project, so if you want a cheap way into ownership and are prepared to get stuck into a restoration, abandoned examples cost around £1000, whereas tatty reliable runners with lots of issues may cost twice this amount. However, a thorough restoration is probably going to cost over £5000, in which case, buying a completed project may be cheaper at £6000 or more.

### **MODIFICATIONS**

The Midget has always been a magnet for body modifications, from GT hard tops

Getting in is rarely graceful, but once achieved, the driving position is good.

to droop snoot noses all the way up to a total transformation into something like the Arkley SS. This trend is continuing, and we've got a few of the options overleaf. So right now, we'll concentrate on the running gear mods.

Mechanically, the suspension's lever arm dampers can be changed for more modern telescopic units for around £1000 (including mounting bracketry). Experimenting with front coil springs, rear leaf springs and suspension bushes (eg. upgrading from rubber to polyurethane) can help to improve the ride quality and handling of the Midget, but some owners are perfectly happy to stick with standard, so try before you decide to splash the cash. As discussed later, there is a noticeable difference between driving a lighter and more responsive early Midget and a heavier rubber bumper 1500, so you want to make sure you get the one that suits your driving style before automatically assuming it has to be modified.

If the engine has been uprated, then the suspension may suffer from tramping under hard acceleration when setting off. This happens when the rear leaf springs wind up as the rear axle puts the power down, then they let go, resulting in the car hopping or tramping. Fitting anti-tramp bars between the front and mid-mounting points for the leaf springs can help to remove the risk of tramping and help to control the vertical movement of the axle. Expect to pay around £200 for an antitramp kit, but be aware that fitting this may result in a harsher ride quality.

Brake upgrades include fitting a remote servo to reduce the amount of braking effort applied to the pedal (this doesn't make the brakes perform any better, they just require less effort on the brake pedal). Budget for £70-£150 for a singlecircuit servo, and £300 for a later dualcircuit system.

Performance discs and pads are a good starting point for upgrading the brakes, with drilled discs and Mintex M1144 pads costing around £140. A full set of braided stainless-steel flexi-hoses will help to maintain braking pressure (less ballooning than standard rubber flexi-hoses) and cost around £100 a set. Frontline have developed a number of brake upgrade kits, including four-pot front calipers with discs and pads for just over £900, and a rear disc conversion from £1175.



Engine modifications are well-catered for thanks to the A-series being shared with the likes of the Mini and the 1500's engine being used in the Triumph Spitfire. Larger carburettors, wilder camshafts, performance rocker gear and performance free-flowing exhaust manifolds and systems are some of the popular upgrades. The engines can be over-bored, with popular displacements for the 1275 A-series being 1293, 1310, 1340 and 1380cc. The cast iron, five-port A-series cylinder head can be changed for more ports (eg. eight-port crossflow), aluminium or even a twin-cam from the BMW K100 motorbike. And that is before you even start on conversions such as the K-series or Ford Zetec.

Talking of Ford, the Type 9 five-speed gearbox can be mated to the Midget's standard range of engines. Expect to pay around £1000 for a conversion kit from the likes of Frontline, and up to £1000 for an overhauled gearbox.

### **BODY BEAUTIFUL**

In this feature we have talked almost exclusively about the MG Midget, though we did mention at the outset how this was a badge-engineered version of the Austin-Healey Sprite. The MG's arrival coincided with the adoption of more conventional styling for the front and back of the Sprite, which had started out as what everybody now calls the Frogeye. That nickname was because of

the headlight pods on the bonnet, fitted not for styling purposes but because the desired pop-up lights were too expensive. Together with a radiator grille that turns up at the corners, these give the Frogeye a very definite and very happy face that is instantly endearing.

That has inspired others to recreate the Frogeye look. One was the Healey Frogeye, created by Keith Brading who set up the Frogeye Car Company on the Isle of Wight in 1986. With the approval of Donald and Geoffrey Healey, he produced finished cars, and also sold assembly kits that would enable owners of an original Frogeye to rebuild a wreck, and for owners of later Spridgets to restore

them with the Frogeye look using rust-free GRP bodywork on a rust-free galvanised chassis. The rebuilt cars used enough of the essential components to retain their original registration numbers.

More recently, Tifosi put together a package of GRP panels that could be grafted onto any Sprite or Midget to recreate the Frogeye look. Called the Rana, this kit is now produced and sold by MG specialist, Hall's Garage. They also produce the Tifosi SS, a faithful reproduction of the original Sebring Sprites that were campaigned by John Sprinzel in the 1950s and 1960s, and very recently introduced their beautiful J.E.M. a coupé inspired by the Jacobs Midgets.



It is easy to dismiss the rubber bumper Midgets without giving them a go, but they are still huge fun, and when they look this good, who could say no?



A more extreme conversion is the Westfield XI, which uses Midget running gear to recreate the Lotus Eleven racer. This is still produced in small batches, and at the time of writing a new batch was

about to be produced with a retail price of £11,499. Such a radical reworking of the Midget is hardly new, as John Britten's garage created the Arkley SS in the early 1970s to rebody rusty Spridgets using a

new nose, wings and tail but reusing the original structure and doors.

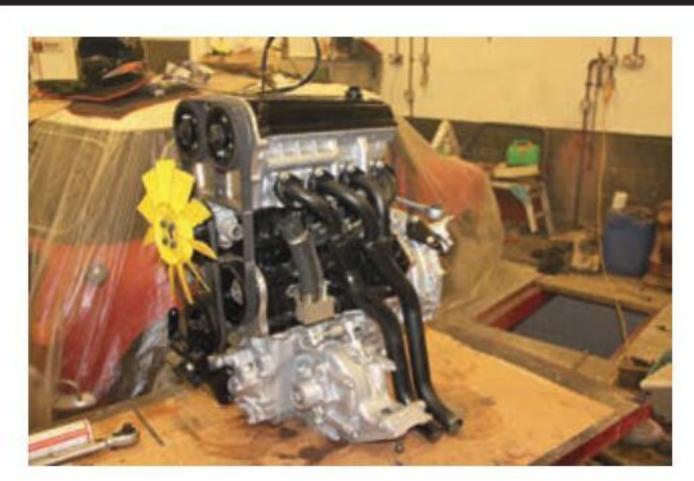
Rather more glamorous was a creation from Italy, the Innocenti Spider and later a Coupé. These had been conceived initially when the Frogeye was in production because many people at the time thought that car's styling was odd rather than endearing, and the idea was to combine Italian styling flair with the robust and simple British running gear. Unfortunately the result was expensive, and none too quick once all the extra bodywork and luxury touches had been added. Sadly just 6857 Spiders and 794 Coupés were built by the time production ended in 1968.

This is by no means a definitive guide to all the Midget-based options, but does give a flavour of how versatile the baby MG has been.



Above and top inset: The Tifosi J.E.M. coupé is the latest Midget-based conversion to be offered, but the Westfield XI may be the most extreme.

### **MODIFICATIONS**







Left to right: Strange but true – the twin cam head from a BMW motorbike can be made to fit the A-series; the modified front suspension from Frontline; rear disc conversions are available for cars that have been heavily modified.



he MGB is in many people's opinion the most successful sports car MG have made to date, pre- or post-war. Its production life spans three decades from when it was launched in September 1962 to when MG ceased production in 1980. Throughout this time, the majority of models were powered by the cast iron 84-95bhp 1798cc four-cylinder OHV B-series engine. However, the 2912cc straight-six C-series engine was used to create the MGC, which was produced between 1967 and 1969. Not strictly in the MGB camp, this shared most of the B's body, the only external distinguishing characteristic being bulges in the bonnet, though there was also a new torsion bar front suspension and revised sheet metal under that familiar skin. The only other engine option offered by the factory was the Rover 3526cc V8. This created the BGT V8, which was produced between 1973 and 1976. In one of those painful twists of fate this was just in time for the world to enter a fuel crisis and sales were never good. (The O-series OHC unit was planned, but progress was delayed for so long that the Abingdon factory had closed before this came to fruition.)

Initially launched as a Roadster, the BGT came along in 1965 with 2+2 seating being an option until 1968, after which

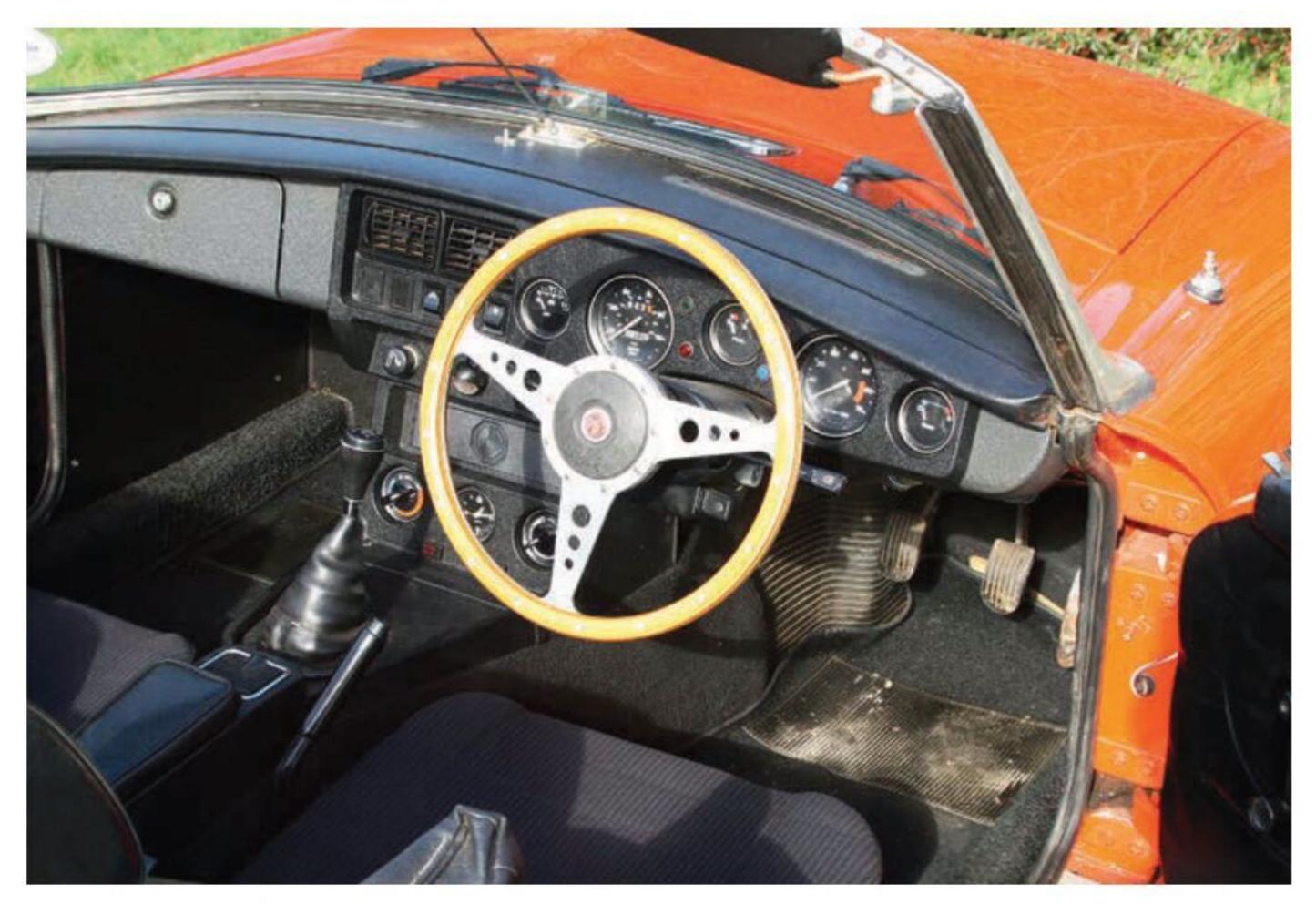
it became standard. The MGC was also offered as both a Roadster and a GT, though the factory only ever offered the B V8 in GT form. In 1975, the chrome bumper exterior was changed to large impactabsorbing 'rubber' buffers to comply with US legislation, the ride height being raised at the same time and for the same reason, with handling suffering as a result.

Over half a million MGBs were produced during its lifetime, along with 8999 MGCs and 2591 MGB GTV8s. The cheapest way into owning any of these models is to buy

a rubber bumper GT, but prices of even this entry level model have been pulled along with the rest of the classic car market in recent years, so expect to pay around £4000 or more for a seemingly reliable daily driver that needs looking after. £1000-£2000 only buys abandoned basket cases these day, or cars which may be on the road but will likely need sill replacement and other work in the near future.

Chrome bumper Roadsters are always the most popular and now appear to be selling for £10,000 or more. If you're looking





The is a late-model dash, but changes from earlier cars were fairly minor.

for a genuine BGT V8 or an MGC, then £15,000-£20,000 seems to be the starting price for something halfway decent.

### **MODIFICATIONS**

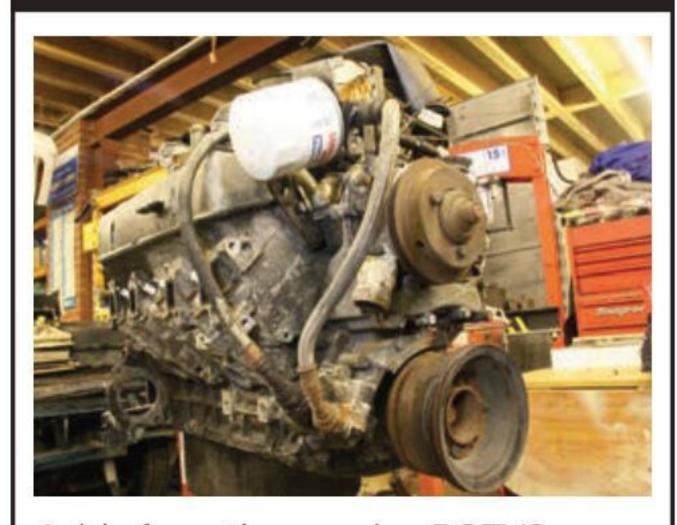
Several subtle modern upgrades are available for all engines in the B, including electronic ignition from £65, a sports coil from £20, performance silicone HT leads from £30, an alternator upgrade (early models used a dynamo) for £150 (including converting the rev counter) and changing from the twin 6v batteries fitted in the chrome bumper cars to a single 12v unit as fitted to rubber bumper models. If the cylinder head hasn't been converted to run on unleaded fuel, budget for around £250 (£600 for the MGC, and

£595 for the two heads of the Rover V8 by RPI Engineering) for the machine work and extra for removal and fitting.

The standard sealed beam headlights can be changed for units with H4 halogen bulbs for around £40. If a brake servo isn't fitted, then a remote unit costs around £120, which helps to reduce braking effort but doesn't increase braking performance. Other upgrades include fitting drilled and grooved discs and performance pads, which should help to reduce the risk of brake fade. A set of braided stainless-steel flexi-hoses to reduce ballooning and maintain braking pressure costs around £35. If that's not enough, then there are a number of fourpot brake upgrade conversion kits which



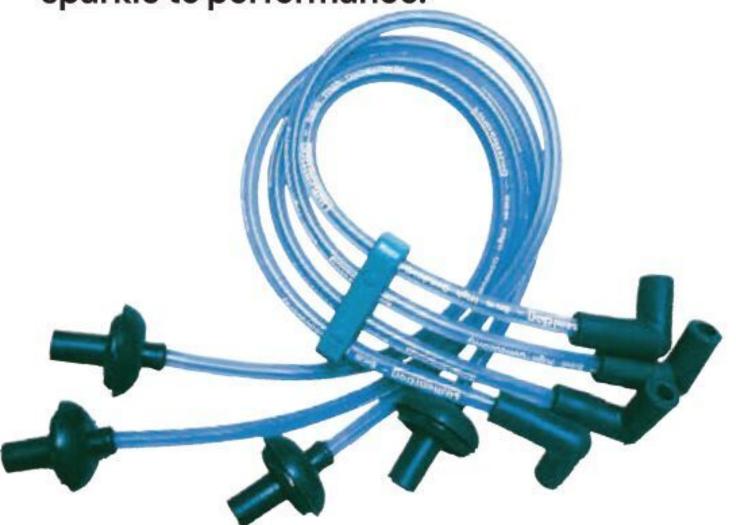
### **V8 ENGINE MODIFICATIONS**



Aside from the genuine BGTV8, there are also numerous B-series MGB Roadsters and GTs that have been converted to Rover V8 power. For these engines, many will be running on twin SU carburettors, which can be mildly tweaked with new needles and performance air filters. The torque can be altered and improved by fitting the same cam that's used in the 3.9-litre version of the Rover V8 (expect to pay around £90). If the exhaust manifolds are made from cast iron, RV8 stainlesssteel headers for around £500 can release an extra 10-15bhp (the inner wings have to be modified), and the exhaust system can be changed for around £200.



Traditional performance mods such as supercharging add a hefty dose of period sparkle to performance.



Don't neglect the basics - new and improved service items such as HT leads could transform a tired car.

cost from around £600, but these may not be compatible with wire wheels or wheel diameters less than 15in - the C came with 15in wheels, the B wore 14in rims from the factory but looks good with an extra inch.

There's a huge assortment of modifications available for the suspension. A popular starting point is to change the lever arm dampers for more modern telescopic dampers. Conversion kits for the front and rear cost around £400-£500. Most of the standard suspension components can be modernised, but the standard front coil springs, lever arm dampers and rear leaf springs can all be uprated for around £500, and that may well be enough. The ride height can be lowered by fitting shorter coil springs at the front and lowering blocks at the rear, all for less than £100. Other relatively cheap suspension modifications include fitting uprated bushes for under £100, wider 175/70xR14 tyres and uprating the front anti-roll bar for around £70.

More expensive and ambitious suspension modifications include a double wishbone conversion for the front with either a separate damper and spring or a coilover. Some kits require the front crossmember to be modified, so budget from £800. At the rear, a five-link suspension kit is available for £1500 to replace the standard components, which includes coilovers, twin trailing arms, a Panhard rod and locating brackets.

Squeezing more performance from the B-series engine is relatively straightforward, starting with changing the standard SU

Webcon's alloy head for the MGB costs a little over £1000 and should free up some horses.

carburettors to a pair of larger HS6s or a single Weber 45DCOE for around £600-£700. Add a free-flowing exhaust system for around £400 and the engine will breathe better and be more responsive. If that's not enough, the next stage is to look at the camshaft to refine the power delivery for around £120 or more, then the cylinder head. A re-worked and gas flowed head may be the answer, a modified exchange head assembled with new components costing c£700.

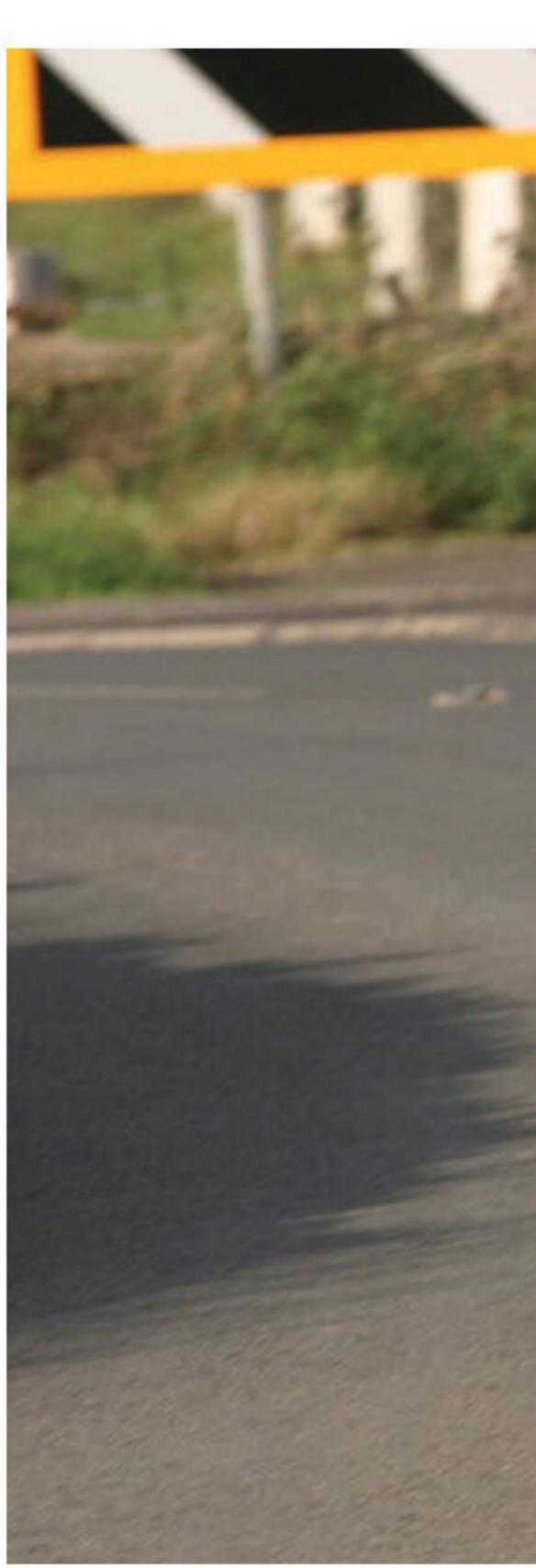
If you're happy to up the budget to just over £1000, then an aluminium crossflow cylinder head from Webcon should make a noticeable difference, but remember that it requires new manifolds for fuelling and exhaust, so the final bill will probably exceed £2000. An alternative route is to stick to the standard cylinder head, but fit a supercharger conversion from the likes of Moss for around £3500. This is arguably the most effective method of achieving a huge power gain (around 40%), but does rely on the fact that the engine is in good working order.

Power steering conversions are available for all models. Budget for around £1200 for a kit and an extra £300 for fitting.

### MGC MODIFICATIONS

The standard twin SU carburettors fitted to the MGC can be changed for a triple set of SUs, Webers or even motorbike carbs for around £1500. A good starting point is to fit a six-branch exhaust manifold and twin pipe system from around £1000. A re-profiled camshaft costs around £280 and should be equipped with Vernier timing gear for £240 to









The MGC head can benefit from porting and polishing from the likes of MG Motorsport or Colne Classics.

accurately time-up the engine. The cast iron cylinder head can be ported and gas flowed to improve performance, and specialists such as MG Motorsport and Colne Classics charge around £1000. They can also build fast road or trackday engines with prices starting at around £5820.

More performance demands better suspension and braking. The brakes can be tweaked with performance discs and pads and braided stainless-steel flexihoses, with prices similar to those for the MGB. A four-pot big brake upgrade with ventilated discs costs around £900.

Suspension modifications are similar to those outlined for the MGB, with uprated bushes, adjustable dampers at the front and a telescopic conversion at the rear for around £200. Frontline offer a Panhard rod conversion for the rear of the MGC which costs £350, and a fivelink set-up at £1900.

### **DRIVING IMPRESSIONS**

The MGB can still be regarded as a practical everyday sports car, although the hood on the Roadster is a little more time-consuming and awkward to operate than an MGF's for instance. The B-series engine is quite torquey, but needs to be worked hard to become entertaining. Having an overdrive switch in third and fourth gears on many models makes for rapid changes down the gearbox in preparation for cornering, and for more relaxed cruising on motorways.

The larger engines fitted to the MGC and BGTV8 offer more performance of course, and all of them have the potential to be tuned. However, the B-series MGB is more suited to relaxed touring in original trim, and that touring appeal – whether in the Roadster or GT – is where these cars really excel. They even have decent luggage space for two people, especially the versatile GT with its hatchback. All in all they make for very relaxed cruisers which can provide a decent turn of speed to make overtaking a relaxed affair.

The ride quality of the MGB with its front coil springs, rear leaf springs and live axle plus lever arm dampers all round is reasonably refined and positive, but do remember we are talking about a car that was introduced in 1962 so don't expect modern levels of comfort and luxury. Having said that, it is a sports car in the traditional mould, so those of a delicate disposition might find it a little choppy on rough surfaces, and the rack and pinion steering is not power assisted so it is heavy, especially at slow speeds or when manoeuvring to park the vehicle. Get beyond those issues and if an MGB fits your body shape, then it is a car that you can drive for many hours at a time and still get out feeling eager for more. Just remember that the GT has a taller screen than the Roadster, so do try both if you are tall and see which works best for you.

The braking system features solid discs and two-pot calipers on the front of all MGB models and drums at the rear, with a brake servo being an optional extra from 1970 and standard from 1973 (the MGC and GT V8 all had servo assistance). Although servo assistance doesn't provide more braking performance, it reduces the



amount of effort required on the pedal, so it's worth having.

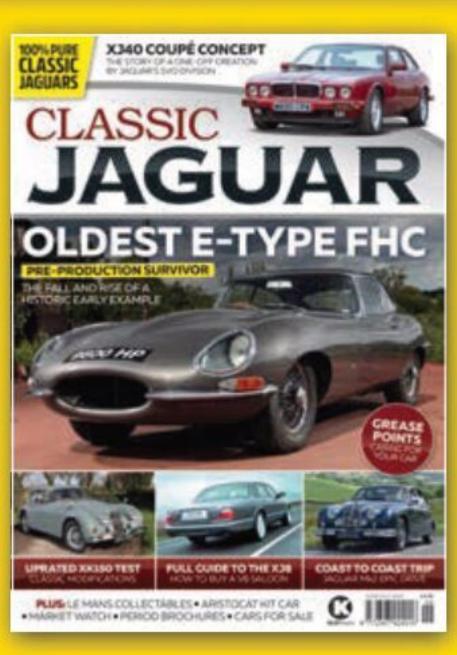
My own first taste of an MGB was when I bought an Inca Yellow rubber bumper GT in 1996 and used it as my everyday car for a year. It was a fantastic car and utterly reliable; even when the head gasket blew, the thermostat failed and the petrol tank started to leak, it never let me down and got me home, it just needed fixing. I must admit that I longed for more performance from the B-series engine, but I also appreciated its ability to drive all day long at 70mph.

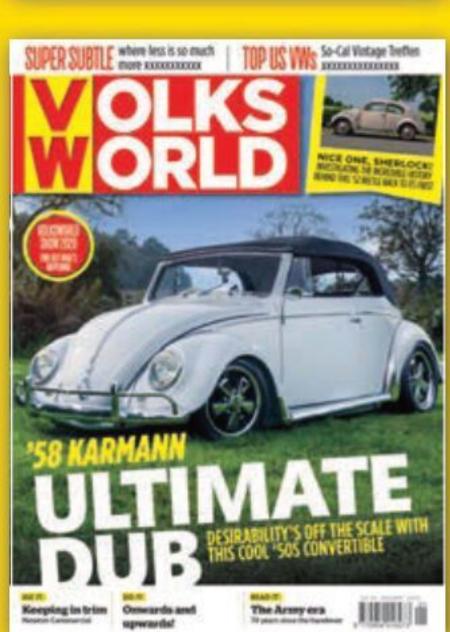
Over the years, I've driven all of the models, and will never forget a standard

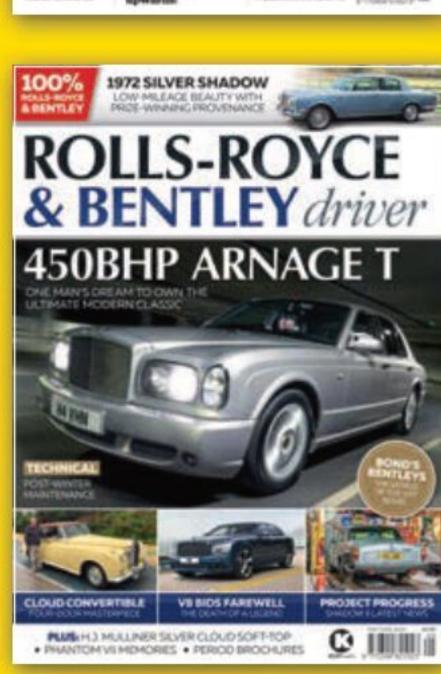
GTV8 with wallowing suspension that had an alarming amount of torque. I was also left gobsmacked by how Frontline Developments had transformed the handling of a GT with their five-link system and coilover conversion kit. MGE's MGC was the perfect candidate for a tour of the Yorkshire Dales in 2004, and I'll never forget the time I volunteered to drive a freshly built 2.1-litre Roadster all the way from CCHL's workshops in Hull to the car's customer in London; the heated seats and extra performance from the tuned B-series were a luxury. Would I have any of these again? You bet I would.



All Bs are great to drive, but the V8 is arguably the best, and is little thirstier than a four pot!

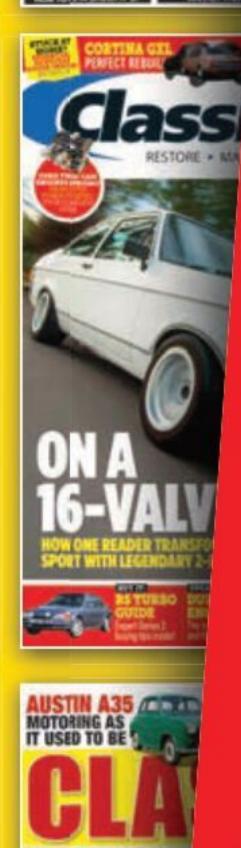






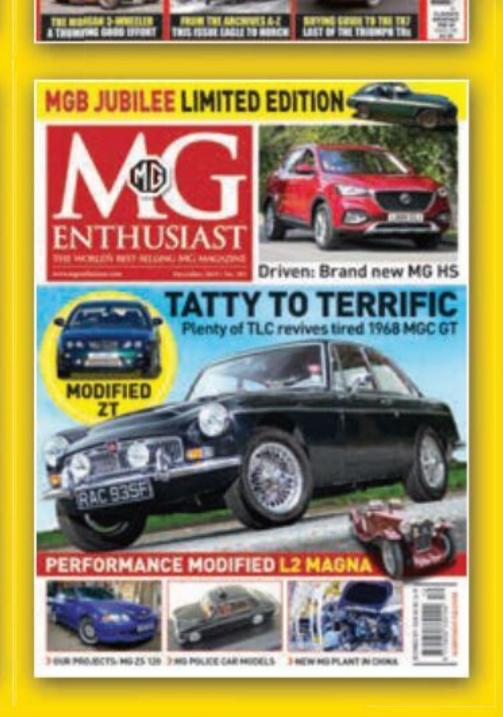


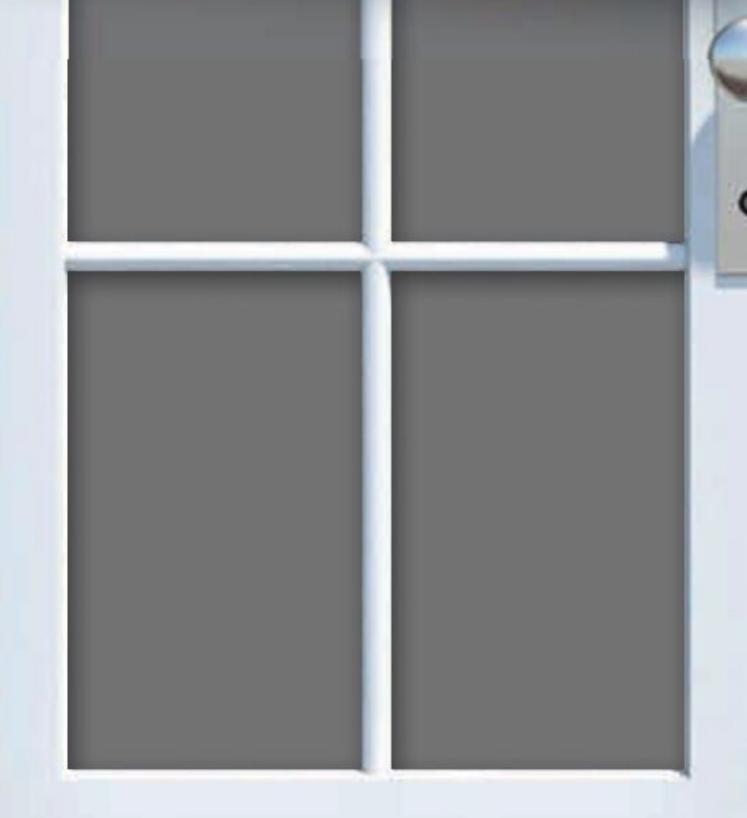






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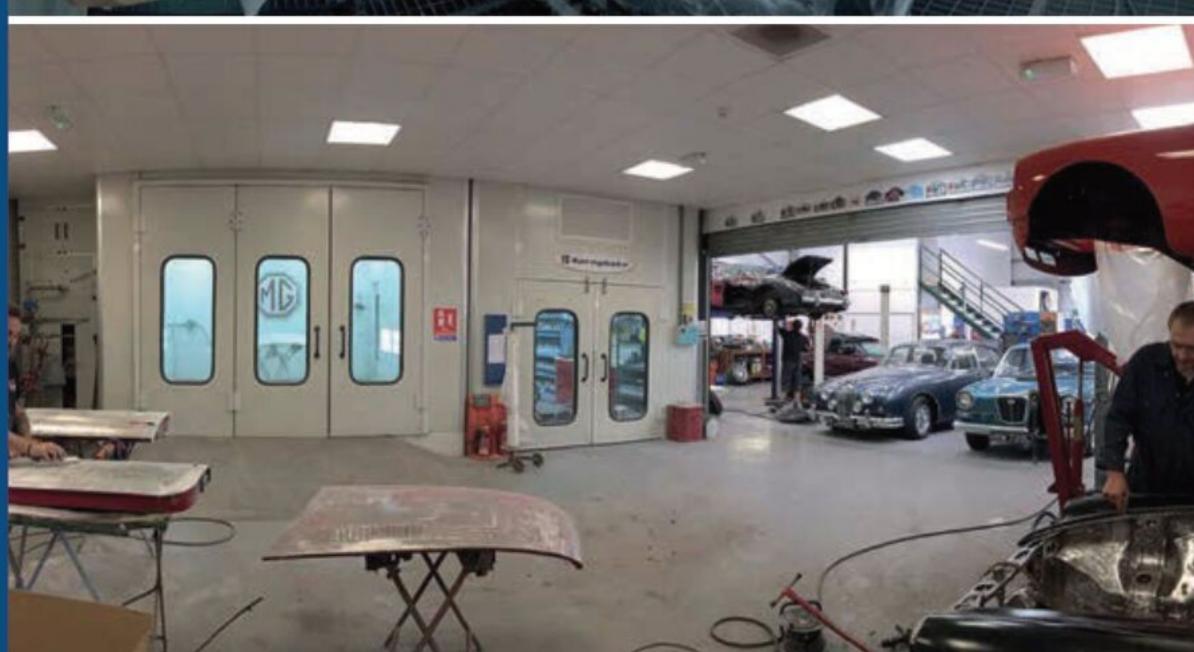
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### MG MEMORIES: THE SPORTS CARS

A look at the cars that have made MG-motoring thrilling to millions



MG Memories issue six finds itself delving into the core DNA of MG as a car maker and looks at the sports cars they brought the world for over seventy years.

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Follow our model journey from MGA, Midget and MGB, stopping off in the 1980s to sample the hot-hatch Maestro before concluding with the car that saved the MG brand, the MGF.