

MG

—MEMORIES—

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MG



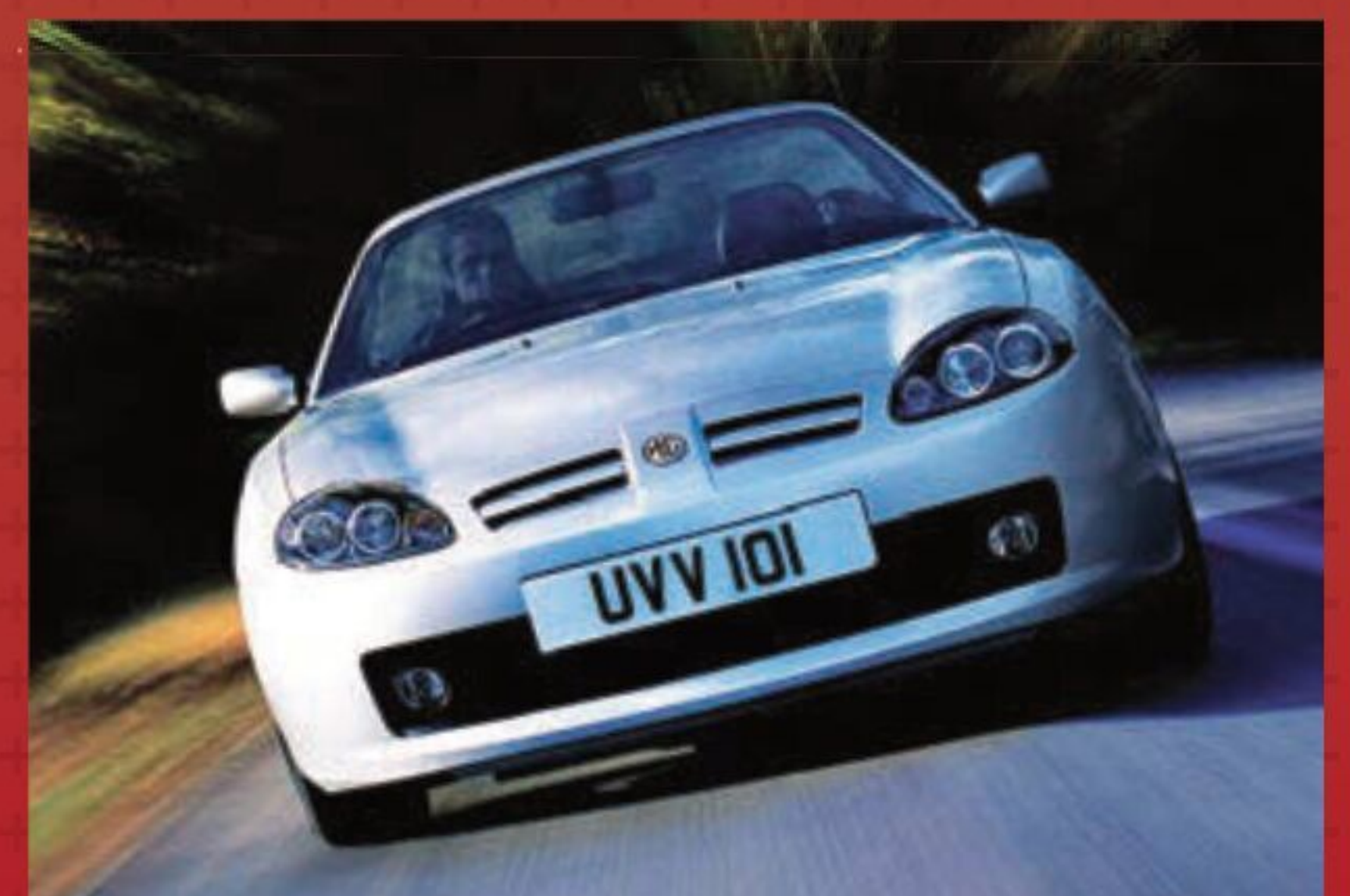
REBORN IN THE 1990s



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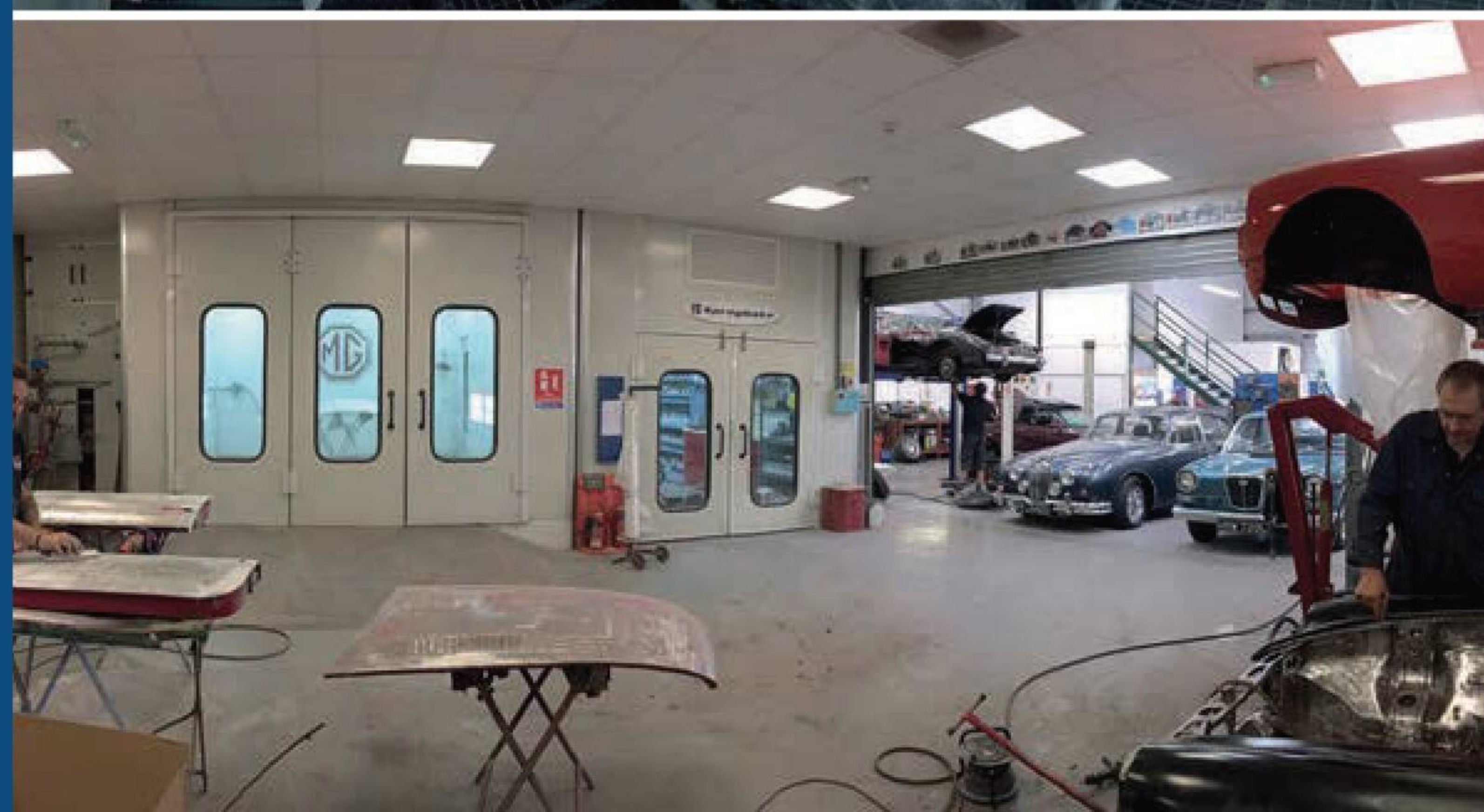
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MG IN THE 1990s



Welcome to the third issue in the MG Memories series, which explores the history of the iconic octagon badge during the 1990s – a decade which began with MG staring into the face of extinction, yet ended with the marque in rude health thanks to a newly revitalised product range.

As so often in the history of the British motor industry, the incredible revival of the MG brand was down to the talent and inventiveness of the engineering teams which created world-class products with slender resources and tiny budgets, at least by the standards of the big players in the European automotive industry.

It's also more than partly due to the undimmed enthusiasm for the marque from the legions of MG fans around the world.

After all, it was the demand from owners restoring their beloved MGBs which encouraged BMH to get complete bodyshells back into production, thus paving the way for the RV8 – which not only proved to be a much-needed stop-gap while the new generation of MG sports cars was prepared, but turned out to be a credible sports car in its own right, successfully taking the game to TVR, and making no excuses.

Of course when the new MG did arrive in the shape of the MGF, it made the world sit up and take notice, its appeal illustrated by its long life which would see it manufactured under no less than three different corporate parents and remain in production as the TF until 2011.

Even after the departure of the MGF, the MG brand remained alive, albeit appearing on a very different range of cars, yet the current MG company's emphasis on electric propulsion has seen it leap ahead of many more established players in the rush to EVs and helped MG Motor UK to become one of only two brands to post a sales increase in a pandemic-addled 2020.

It's all a far cry from the dark days of the early '90s when the Metro, Maestro and Montego looked like taking the MG brand with them when they quietly shuffled off as casualties of Rover's drive upmarket. Read on and find out how MG is one of just a handful of British car brands from the 1920s to remain in production today.

Paul Sander
Editor, MG in the 1990s

MG MEMORIES

Reborn in the 1990s

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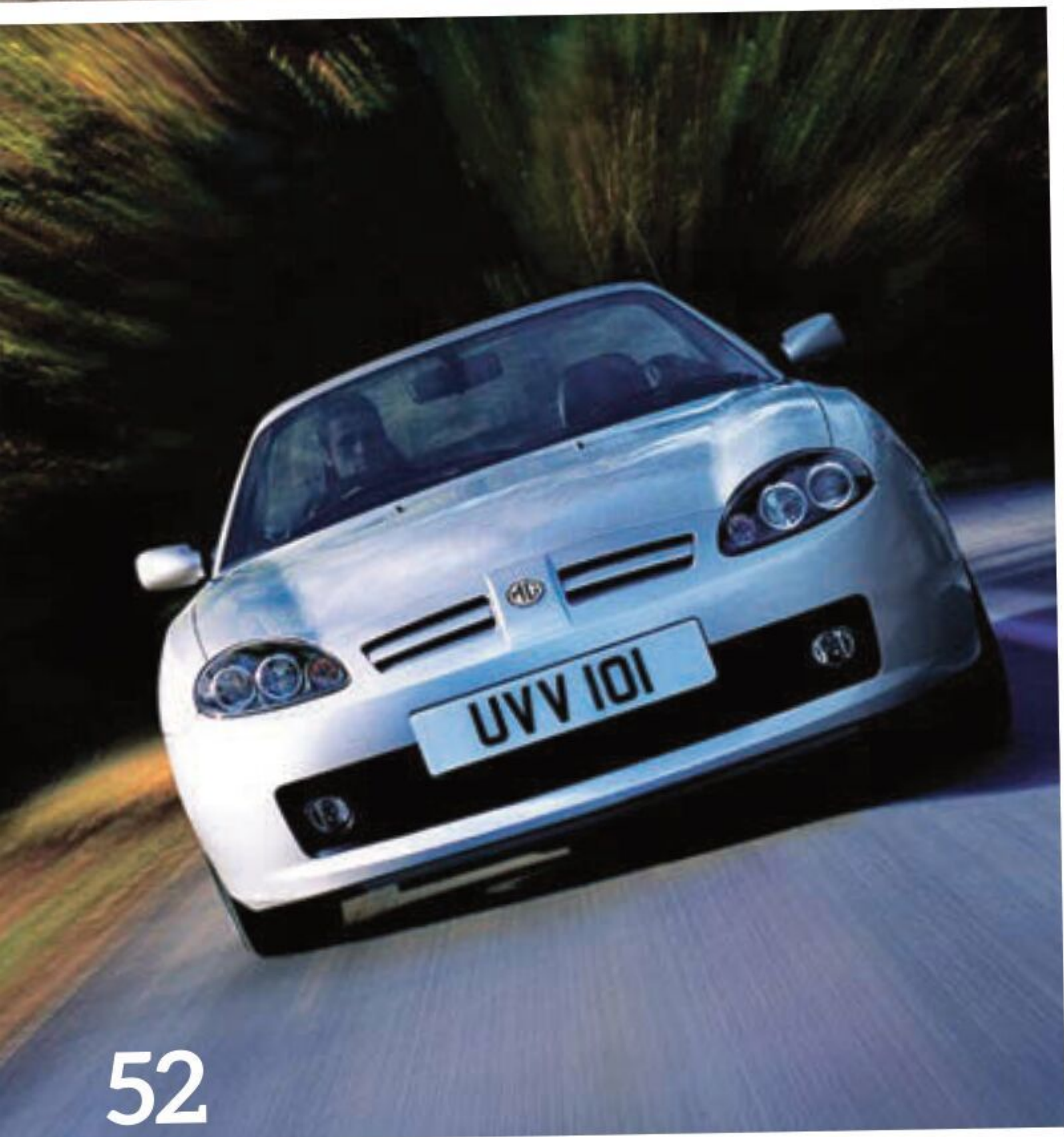




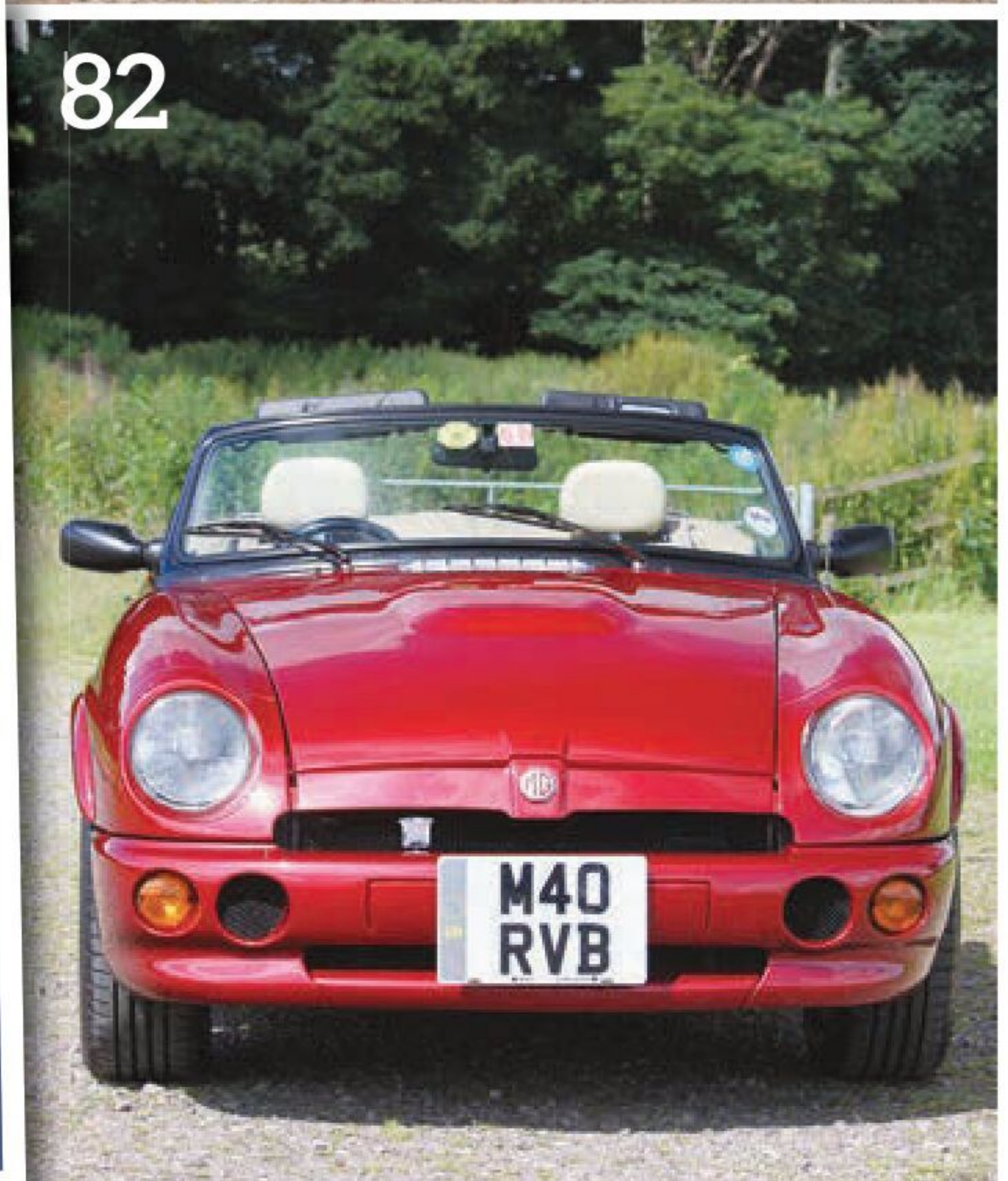
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MG MEMORIES

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START OF THE 1990s AND THE INSPIRATION



With its handy 93 bhp the Metro Turbo was the modern-day Cooper 'S'. According to DVLA the number of Turbos on the road can be counted on your fingers.



A Bleak Start

As the 1990s dawned, things couldn't have looked more bleak for the MG brand. In 1990 the MG Metro disappeared from showrooms in preparation for the reinvention of the Metro from Austin to Rover and the following year the octagon-badged Maestro and Montego would also disappear as part of Rover's drive upmarket under Graham Day which had seen the two ageing models sidelined without even a proper marque badge.

Who then would have predicted that by the end of the decade the MG badge would be flying high once again and the brand would be riding

a wave of success which would carry it on past the sale and collapse of its parent company and even under new foreign ownership?

Despite the doom-laden predictions of industry pundits and marque enthusiasts, the famous badge wouldn't lie dormant for long, but inspiration for its rebirth came not from Rover Group management or MG enthusiasts, but from the rather unlikely direction of Hiroshima, Japan: the home city of Mazda Motor Corporation.

Until 1989, Mazda had been something of a bit player in the European market, notorious mainly



START OF THE 1990s AND THE INSPIRATION

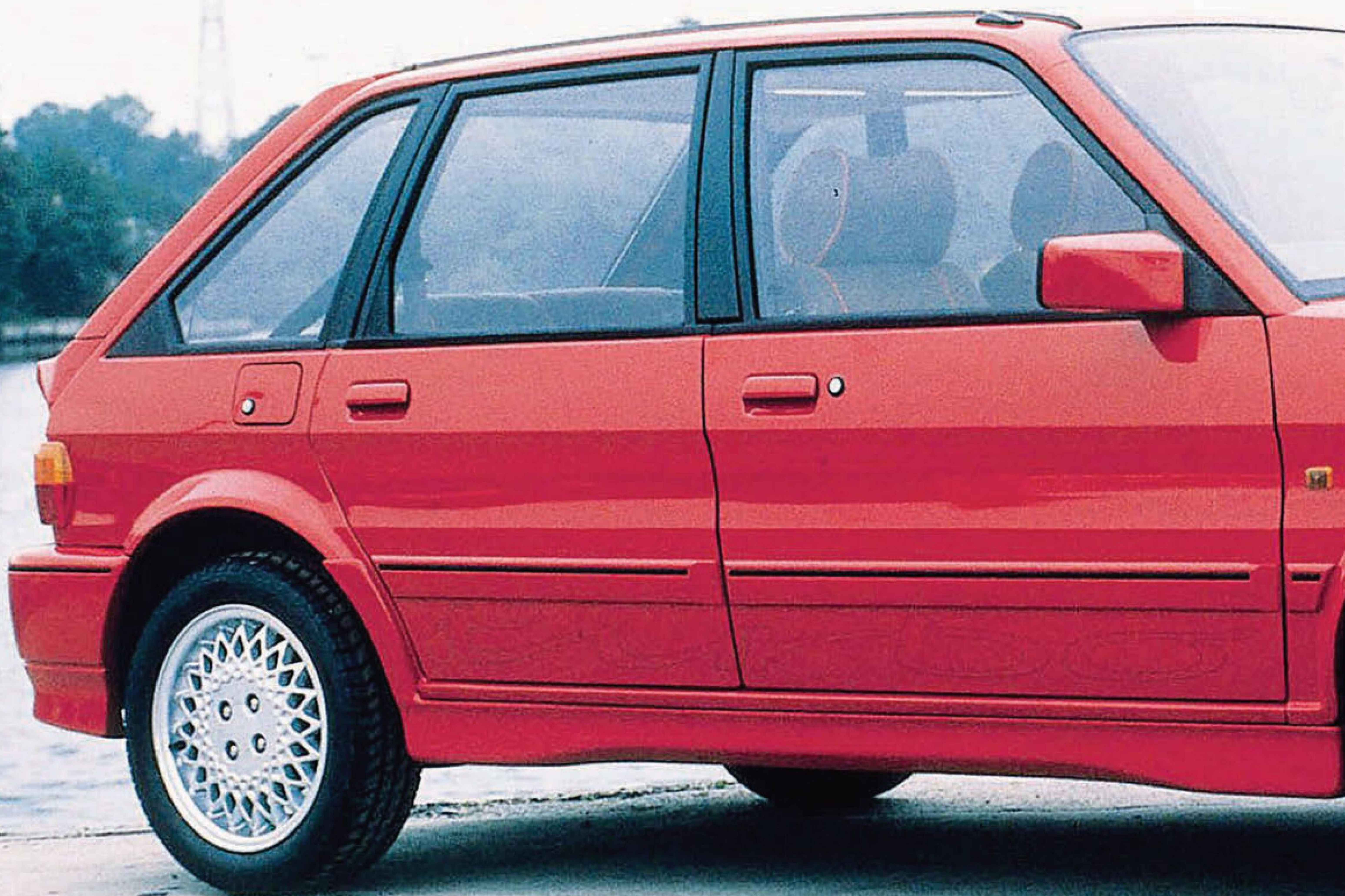
Fitting the 2-litre injected O-Series engine to the Maestro suddenly gave it pace to rival the VW Golf GTi.





START OF THE 1990s AND THE INSPIRATION

With its 152 bhp turbocharged engine, chunky Tickford bodykit, the Maestro was good for 128 mph and 0-60 in 6.8 seconds. Unfortunately, they may have rivalled the GTi for performance, but precious few MG Maestros and Montegos survive today and finding one can be quite a task.



The Garrett blower turned the Montego from a humdrum repper into a hooligan.



for its brave championing of the Wankel rotary engine in the RX-7 coupe, but otherwise known as a maker of competent if rather anonymous saloons.

That all changed with the development of the MX-5, a car which owed its very existence to the gap in the lucrative US car market left by the disappearance of the traditional British sports cars. Clearly, MG's loss was Mazda's gain and encouragement by

American car magazine editor Bob Hall coincided with Mazda's desire to revitalise its lacklustre product range.

The recipe which created the car was one which had served MG so well for so long, essentially combining an attractive two-seat sports car body with running gear plucked from the saloon range and marketed at an affordable price point. Needless to say, the car was a massive success for Mazda, not only in the crucial US market but also across Europe and especially here in the UK where we are a particularly enthusiastic market for open cars.

START OF THE 1990s AND THE INSPIRATION



Rover executives sanctioned the Montego to receive a turbocharger, to much aplomb by the motoring press at the time. With 152 bhp going to the front wheels, the car was transformed into rowdy torque-steering monster, which soon gained a cult following who loved its brutal performance in a package that was slightly different to anything else.





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The Seeds of Recovery



One can only imagine the fury at Longbridge when top brass realised – with not a few red faces – that the Japanese roadster was now cleaning up in a market sector the firm had every historical right to consider its own.

In short order, the decision was taken that a new MG would be

developed to counter the MX-5, but with the Abingdon MG facility having been axed a decade before and no new sports concepts in development, Rover was starting from scratch and the new car would take time to develop.

This didn't stop Rover's MD Graham Morris commenting

somewhat enigmatically to *Car* magazine at the 1990 Detroit show that the firm was indeed considering a new sports car but that it "wouldn't be a Miata [MX-5] challenger." With the benefit of hindsight it's also possible to see that what at the time appeared to be a no-brainer wasn't in fact as clear-cut: as Rover director John



Towers (later one of the disgraced Phoenix Four) pointed out at the time, the public's perception that Rover/MG had thrown away a massive and lucrative business opportunity was a somewhat romanticised view; in hard business terms and compared to the volume Rover cars and Land Rover business, it was comparatively tiny.

Regardless, having committed to a new sports car, Rover needed a means of keeping the MG badge alive in the public consciousness until the proposed new model was at least sufficiently progressed to a stage where it could be teased with concepts or spy shots.

The solution was Project Adder,

which was operated under the auspices of Rover's 'skunkworks' department, Rover Special Projects which had already given the world the reborn Mini Cooper.

Rather usefully, the market research for the project which would later become the MGF had shown a potential demand for the idea of a

MG RV8

traditional V8-powered, rear-wheel drive MG in the TVR style and it was this which suggested itself as a likely candidate for the stop-gap car.

Fortuitously, British Motor Heritage – originally established as BL Heritage – had only recently put the MGB bodyshell back into production and it was this which presented a relatively low-cost route to getting a low-volume reborn MG model back into production. BMH had also been investigating the idea of creating an updated MGB but had ultimately decided that getting into the car manufacturing game was a leap it didn't want to take.

At the time, TVR was creating headlines with the giant-killing grunt of its Rover V8-powered cars and the fact that the MGB had already been factory-fitted at one point with the same Rover V8 engine meant that this could be used to power the car. Crucially it was still in production for Land Rover models and as such had been updated incrementally to keep abreast of emissions legislation.

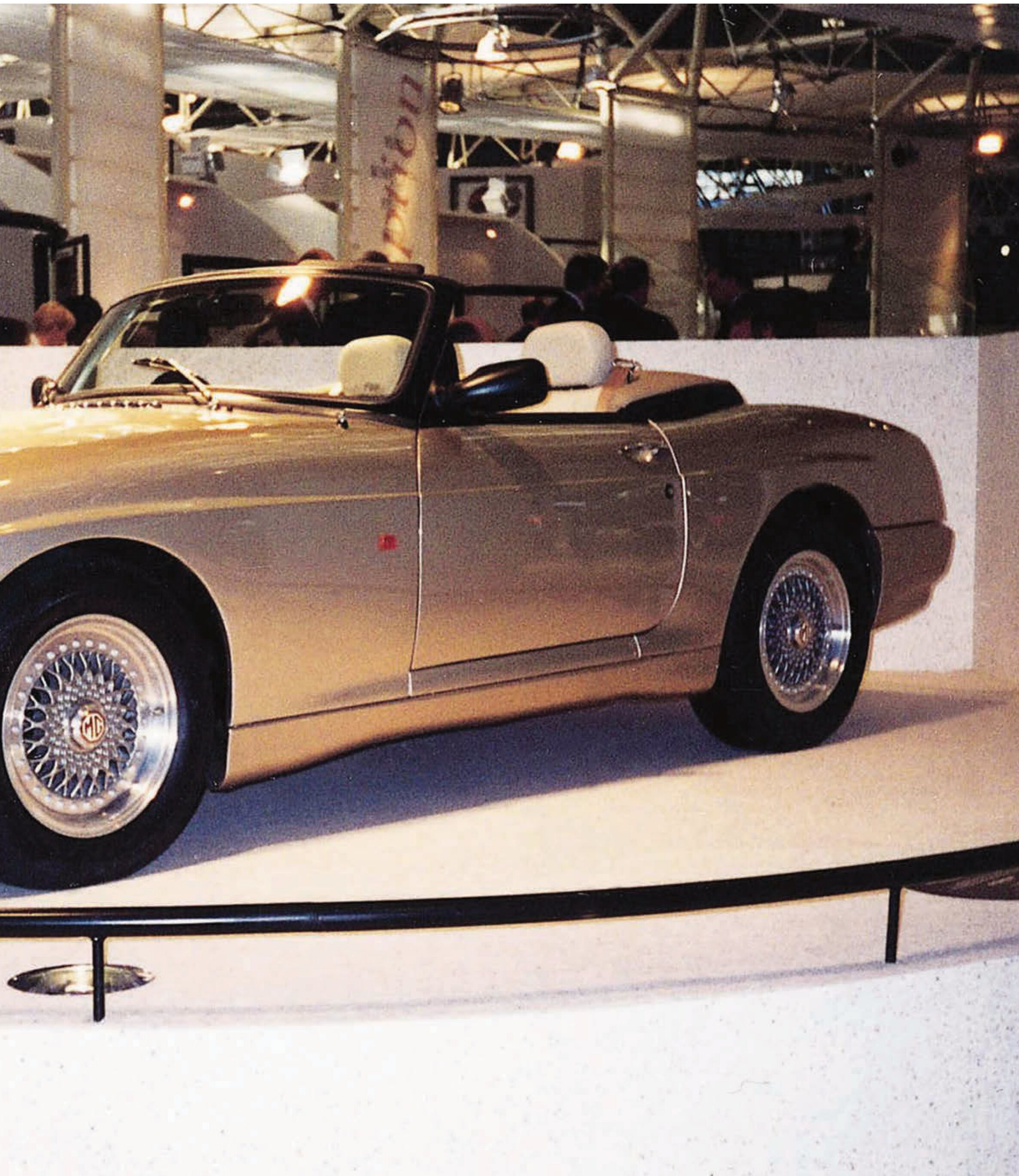
The philosophy behind the car was to create the MGB which could have existed had it continued in production and been suitably updated, while that Adder project name was apparently chosen as a smaller version of the legendary Cobra.

Early prototypes were created using late-model rubber-bumper MGB bodyshells with crude riveted-on plastic arch extensions and prominent bonnet bulge to clear the larger plenum chamber of the injected V8. There was more to it than that, of course: one of the criticisms of the MGB late in its life had been the archaic suspension with its lever arm dampers and although the budget didn't extend to re-engineering the car to replace the leaf springs with coils, the archaic lever arm dampers were at least upgraded to telescopics.

The rear axle location was also dramatically improved courtesy of anti-tramp rods running from the forward spring hangers to the bottom of the axle.

More involved changes were required at the front, since the traditional MG suspension used the





MG RV8





MG RV8

lever arm dampers as the upper suspension link, the solution being to employ new aluminium castings to provide an upper location, while balljoints were employed to secure the hub carrier to the wishbones, thus eliminating the need for greasing of the old kingpin set-up.

Meanwhile, the steering rack was updated using a mixture of Discovery and MGB componentry, although space was so tight that power steering couldn't be offered even as an option. Indeed, as it was the air conditioning option required for the Japanese market saw the evaporator located in the passenger footwell.

Further measures to cope with

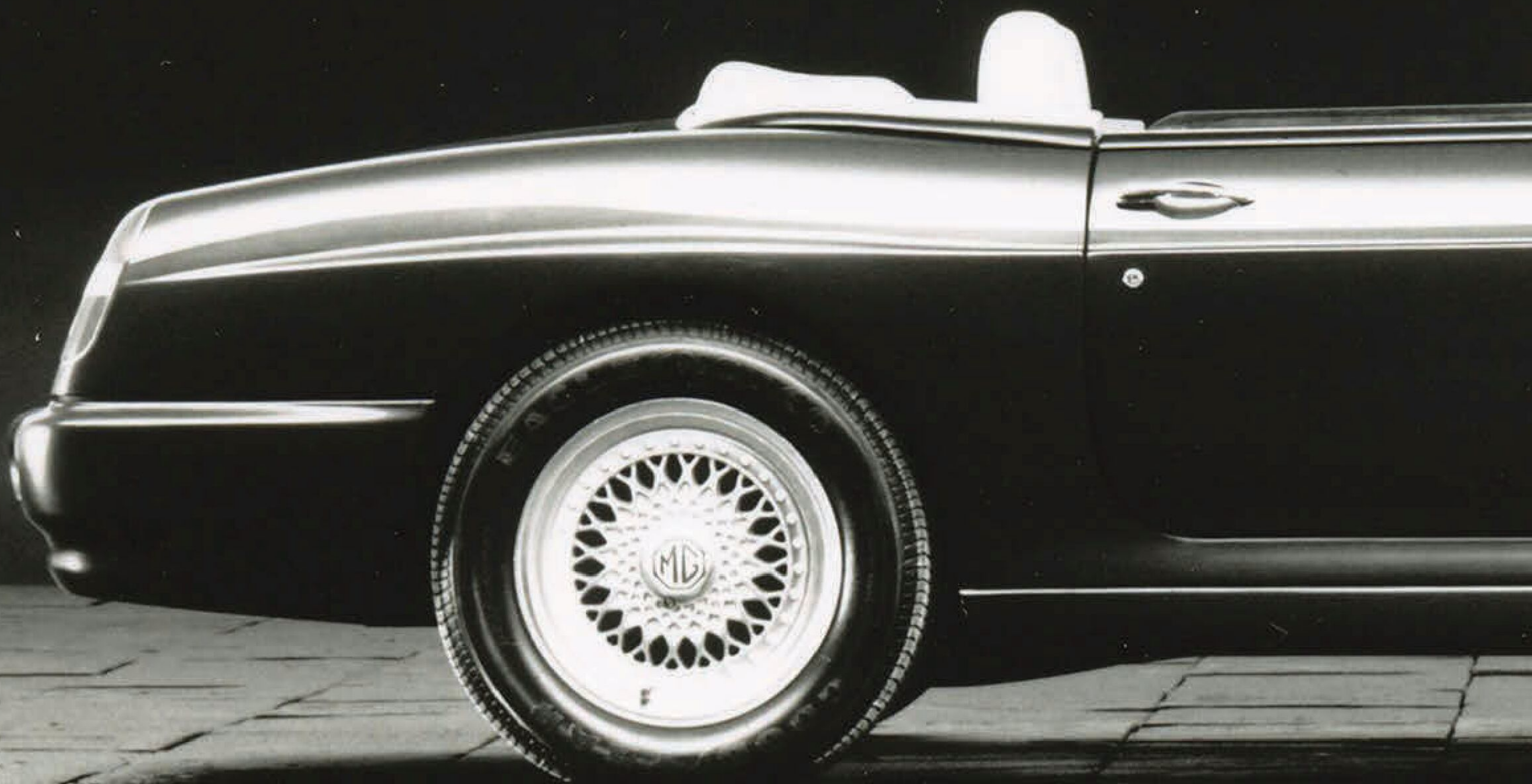
the V8's power included bigger vented front discs with four-pot callipers and although the rear retained a drum set-up, it was deemed sufficient to stop the car and certainly road tests of the day were complimentary about its stopping power.

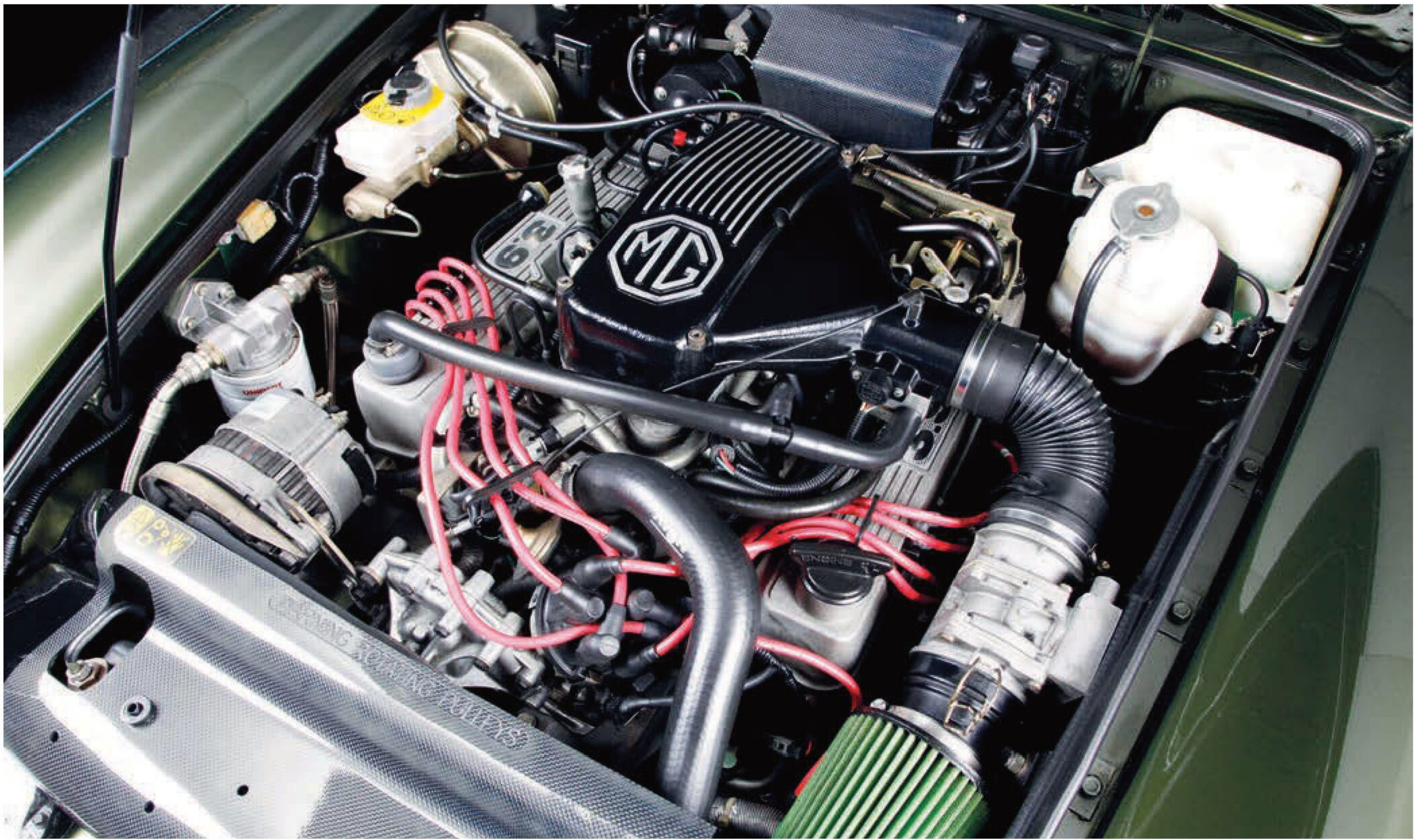
Meanwhile, at the projected sales price of £26,500 Rover knew the rubber bumper MGB shape would need updating and this was done really very neatly by changing just a few crucial outside panels. Restyled front and rear ends were created to evoke the rubber bumper style but in a more modern, body-coloured form, while widened arches front and rear

were provided by Abbey Panels in Coventry to cover the 15-inch wheels and 205/65 rubber. Initially the headlights were tried with a faired-in style before settling on the Porsche 996 lamps used for production.

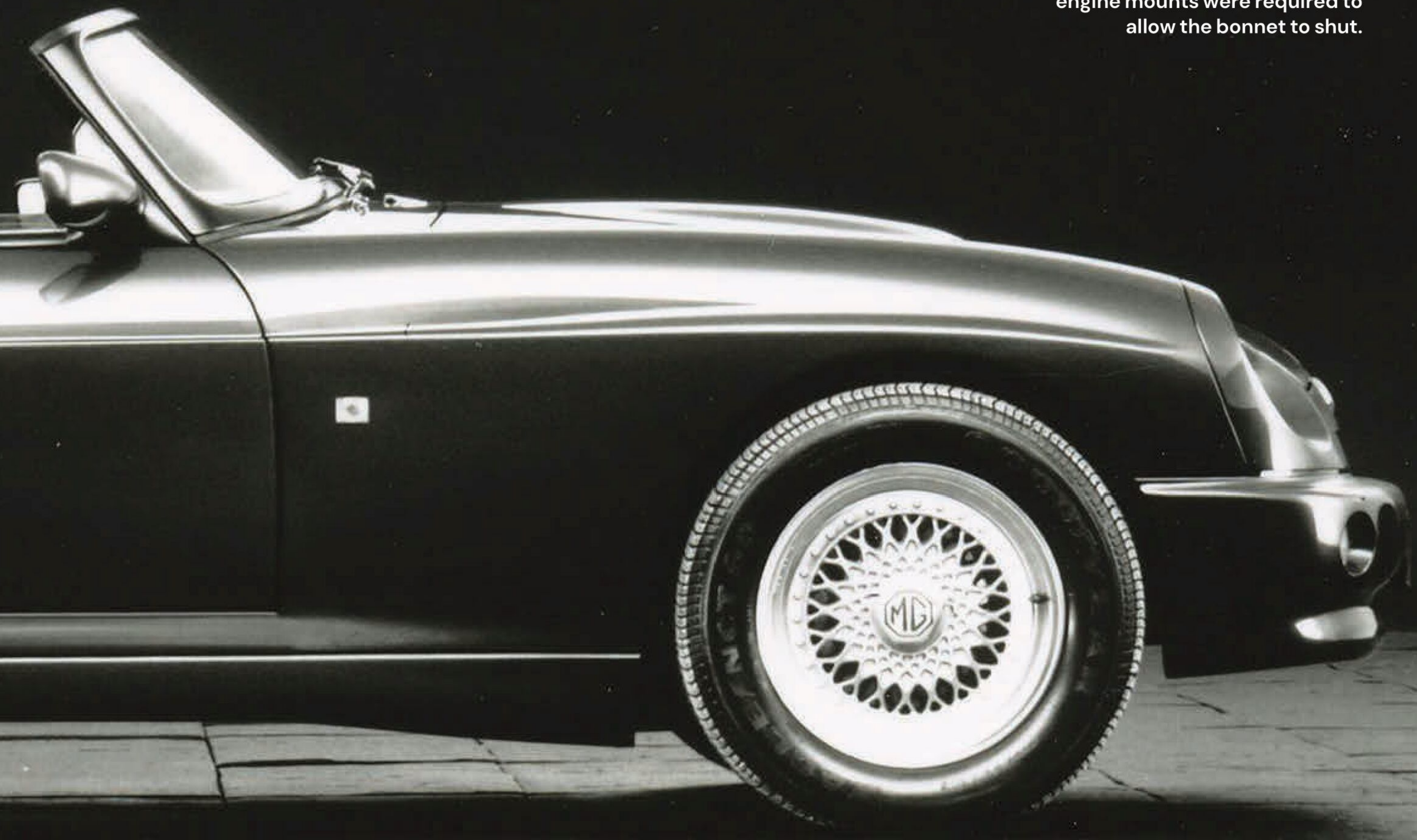
The rear lights, meanwhile, were proportionally one of the most expensive parts of the project with the tooling costing £280,000 and needing a special sign-off from the accountants. One project member at the time recounted that the team tried every suitable lamp from other cars both old and new before realising that the only solution was a bespoke part.

The underlying structure of the bodyshell was largely unchanged





Revised induction and special engine mounts were required to allow the bonnet to shut.



MG RV8



In just two-and-a-half years and with sales of less than a couple of thousand cars, the RV8 had re-established MG

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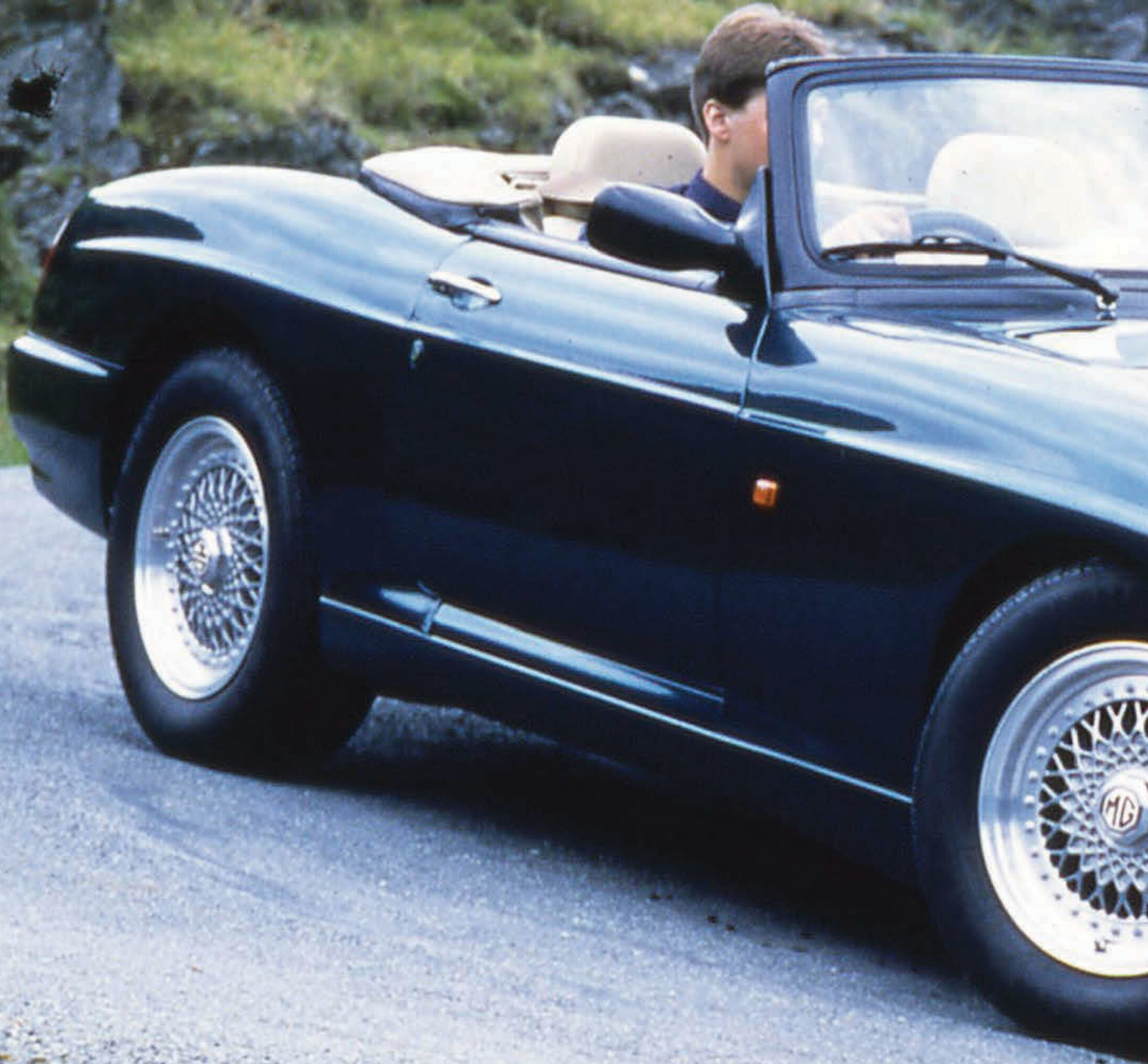
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MG RV8





MG RV8





from the MGB, except for the crucial addition of holes in the inner wings to accommodate the exhaust manifolds. The original MGB V8 had used 'block hugger' manifolds to clear the bodywork but the power loss from their narrow-bore pipework was deemed unacceptable for the RV8. The screen surround was also changed from the aluminium casting of original MGB roadsters to a pressed steel version and although the doors were MGB panels, the old-fashioned quarter light windows were lost in favour of one-piece glass.

Clearly the old vinyl seats and crackle-finish dashboard wouldn't have been up to the mark at this level, so the interior was thoroughly revised with plusher door cards, revised leather seats and also a repositioned steering column, complete with Rover stalks. The roof, meanwhile, was a double-layered affair provided by Tickford and a big improvement over the thin vinyl offering on original MGBs.

The project received official sign-off in July 1991 and the RV8 would be launched at the British Motor Show in autumn 1993, with production beginning in March. All told, the project had been completed on a budget of just £5m which even by early '90s standards was a slender amount and Rover claimed at the time that just 5% of the car's content was lifted straight from MGB, with 20% modified or retooled and 75% brand new or taken from other Rover models.

With 190bhp on tap, the RV8 had the performance to compete with the likes of TVR and even if the detailing was still old fashioned compared to the likes of Porsche, the car proved competitive in the marketplace. It also built on Rover and MG's resurgence in Japan, a market which had driven the development of the reborn Mini Cooper and which would eventually swallow up some 80 per cent of RV8 production during the car's three years on sale.

MG RV8 CLASSIC ROAD TEST





English heritage

The RV8 kept the MG badge alive while the MGF was under development but was so much more than just a hastily developed stop gap.

The car in these pictures is unusual being just the sixth off the production line and an original UK-supplied car too: most RV8s went to Japan, although many have since been repatriated. The giveaway of a Japanese car is the big bulge in the passenger footwell for the air conditioning.

On the road, the RV8 is both strangely familiar yet completely different. There are hints of MGB here and there but in practice it really doesn't feel like the older car – more like a product from a low-volume sports car maker in the mould of Lotus or TVR, yet without the fibreglass bodywork and mix'n'match interior fittings which usually go with them.

You sit higher in the RV8 than in the B, especially when you take into account the timeworn nature of the average B driver's seat... and as a result the driving position feels different. The modern plastic steering

column is closer to your knees than the B's bare column and of course there's the modern Rover key and immobiliser fob.

All the MGB V8 roadsters we've driven have been by definition conversions and they do tend to have shouty aftermarket exhausts, while the factory-issue RV8 sounds very civilised: more Range Rover than TVR.

The light clutch and LT77 gearbox make low-speed driving easy, although the lack of power steering can make the car feel cumbersome at parking speeds.

Response from the injected V8 is superb, with the modern fuelling meaning that even from stone cold the car drives predictably. It's no Elise but by today's standards the RV8 isn't a heavy car, weighing in at just 1280kg which gives it the power-to-weight ratio of some much more exotic machinery – as proved by the searing 0-60 time of 5.9 seconds



The RV8 is an appealing blend of old and new, but taller drivers will want to lower the seat.

MG RV8 CLASSIC ROAD TEST

The injected 3.9-litre Land Rover motor was good for 190 bhp and gave the RV8 credible pace.



and a top speed of 135 mph which really is plenty to be getting on with.

In reality though, getting an RV8 to 60 in under six seconds isn't a nice way to treat one of these: the V8 will rev freely enough if you want to, but the strong mid range is its strength and an RV8 can be made to cover ground very quickly without thrashing it to the redline.

Thanks to the high driving position, taller drivers amongst us may find the top of their heads sitting sufficiently into the wind to be uncomfortable at higher speeds, which is all the encouragement you need not to go mad. After all, the RV8 is best enjoyed at moderate speeds sweeping through country lanes rather than white-knuckled opposite-lock antics. They do feel so much more precise than the B, with less of the skipping from the rear over rutted tarmac.

The RSP engineers did a good job of taming the B's rear end in its transformation to RV8 but one benefit of the relatively unsophisticated set-up is that its ultimately lower grip levels do mean you get some warning if you're in danger of overcooking things.

Whenever we drive an RV8 we're always struck by just what an impressive achievement it was to create something which could credibly compete in the market against the likes of Lotus, TVR and even Porsche using nothing more than a 1960s bodyshell and a Land Rover engine, all on a tiny development budget. As ever with BL and Rover Group creations, it all makes you wonder just what kind of world beater Rover Special Products could have come up with, given just a bit more time and money...





The RV8 is much more than a wide-arched 'B' bodyshell: little details abound, from the one-piece door windows to the reshaped bumpers and lights.

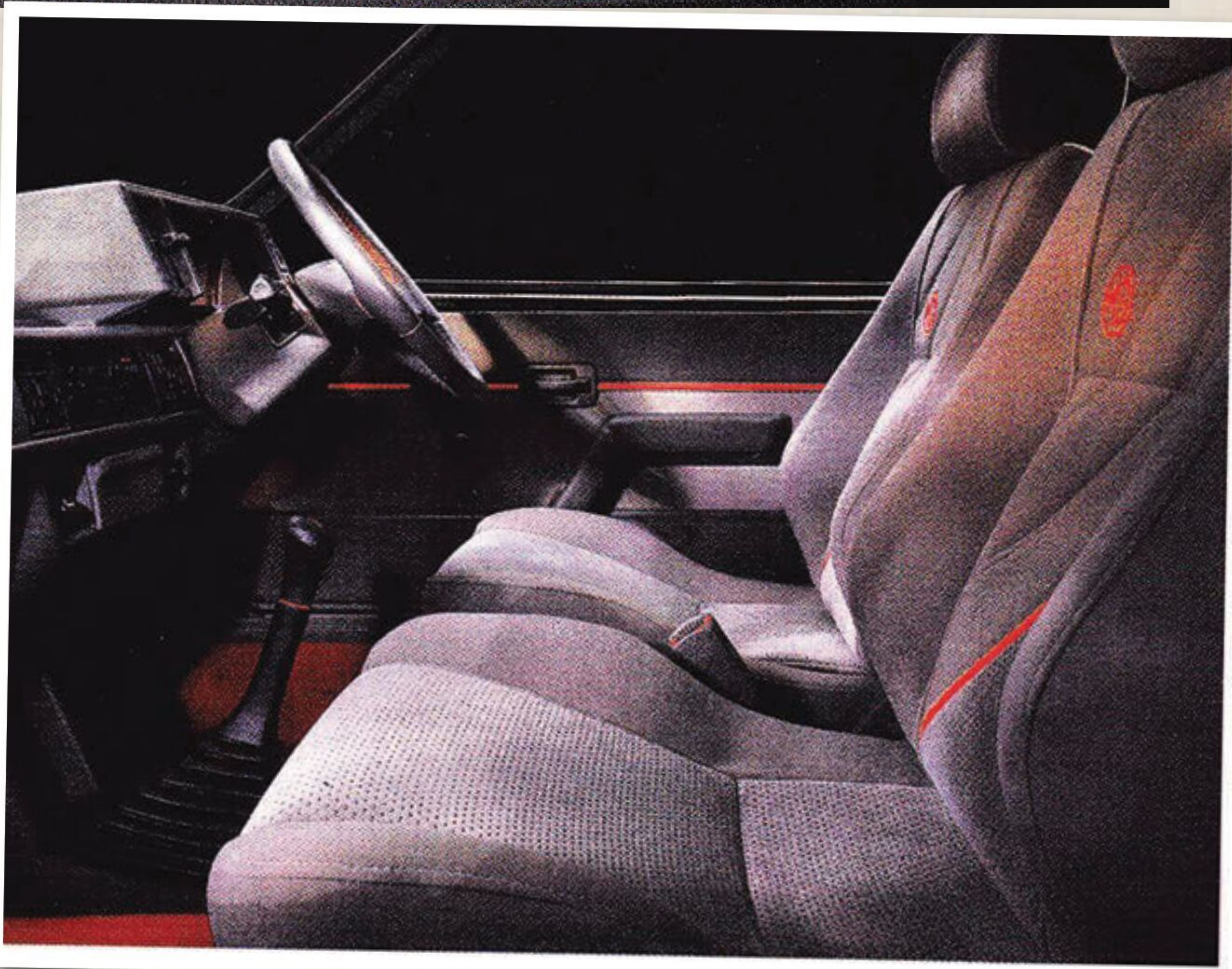
1990s MG advertising



Goodbye to the MG Metro

When Rover Group issued its latest all-model catalogue in January 1990, it was designed to last four months in the company's showrooms, running through until the end of April that year. Why? Because a number of important changes would be announced in May 1990, particularly to the Metro line-up. And sadly, that would mean the end of the MG Metro.

The Metro was to be restyled and re-engineered, treated to a more modern front end and a choice of 1.1- and 1.4-litre K-series engines to replace the old A-series. But there was deemed to be no room in the new range for an MG version, making this particular brochure the last one to feature the MG Metro (or MG 1300 as it was known by then). For eight years, the MG Metro had entertained buyers, but it was about to disappear forever, despite Rover Group's rather poignant boast: 'Drive an MG and you'd better get used to being noticed.'



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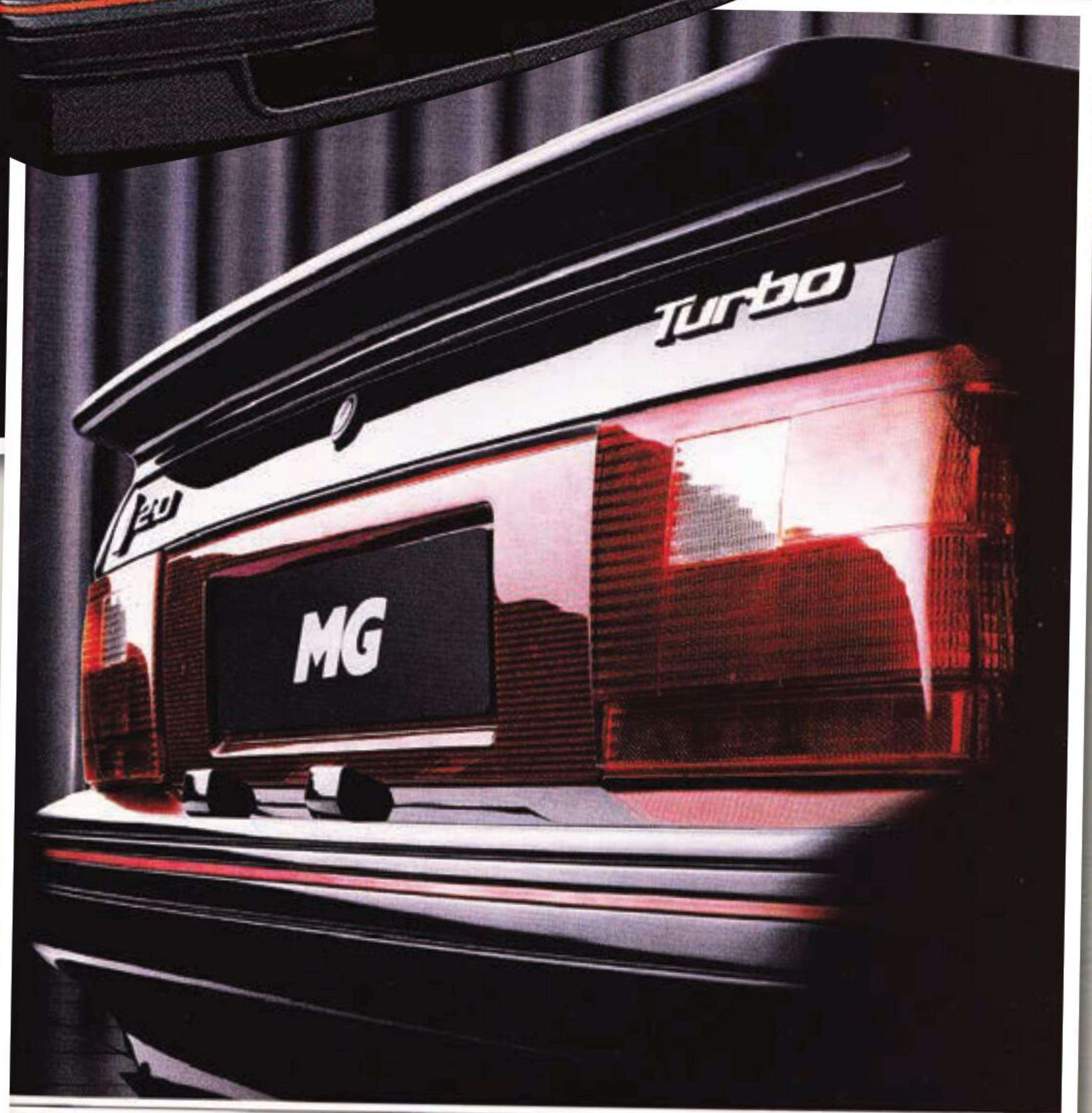
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Final Flourish

Even in its penultimate year of production, the MG Montego was still a force to be reckoned with thanks to its combination of strong performance, family-friendly spaciousness and decent value for money. And, of course, it was the 2.0 Turbo that was the most desirable version thanks to its 152bhp output, its top speed of 126mph and its 0-60mph sprint time of just 7.3 seconds. Equally good news was the value for money on offer, with the MG Montego Turbo costing just £14,161 in 1990.

That made the range-topping MG usefully cheaper than other sports saloons, including the Audi 80 Sport (£15,092), Lancia Dedra 2.0ie SE (£15,395), BMW 320i (£15,510) and Saab 900S 16v (£14,595) – each of which came with less power and inferior performance. It might have been an oldie but the MG Montego was still a competitive machine.



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Drop the Maestro!

The all-model Rover Cars brochure covering the first four months of 1990 made much of the MG Maestro, despite the fact that the only five-door MG of the time was about to bid farewell. Intriguingly though, Rover failed to mention the word Maestro anywhere in the MG section, preferring instead to refer to the normally-aspirated version simply as the MG 2.0i.

The regular Maestro had been around for a whole seven

years and had a fairly dowdy image at the time, so perhaps this simpler badging for the MG versions made sense? The MG was certainly a world away from the more mainstream Maestro models of 1990, both in terms of power (115bhp) and looks: 'With all-body colour coachwork. Gleaming 15in alloy wheels. Front and rear spoilers. It looks powerful, fast, agile. And it is'.

The early F

We recently came across this old press shot from the launch of the MGF, showing both the 1.8i and 1.8i VVC photographed at speed. And with both cars bearing the N-registration plates of the time, it got us thinking: how often do you see MGFs on the road these days from those early months of production?

The MGF got off to a flying start sales-wise, and remained the best-selling two-seater sports car in Britain throughout its life. But with a combination of head gasket problems and low secondhand values condemning so many examples to the scrap yard, it's now unusual to come across an N-registration MGF in regular use.

If you've got one you're proud of, make sure you send us a photograph or two...







Hardtop Heaven

When Austin Rover released the official press photographs of its exciting new MGF on March 7th, 1995, it made sure there were plenty of images of the new mid-engined two-seater with its hood down. This, after all, was a sports car; and open-top motoring is what it was all about.

With the photographs having been taken during the tail end of the winter months, however, it was also appropriate

to show the MGF as an all-weather car, which helps to explain why these two shots of the 1.8i VVC flagship showed it with its optional hardtop in place – which, we have to say, was quite a handsome item. Yes, by specifying the extra-cost hardtop when you ordered your new MGF, you could be as snug as if you were driving a regular saloon. It's just that you'd be having a lot more fun along the way.



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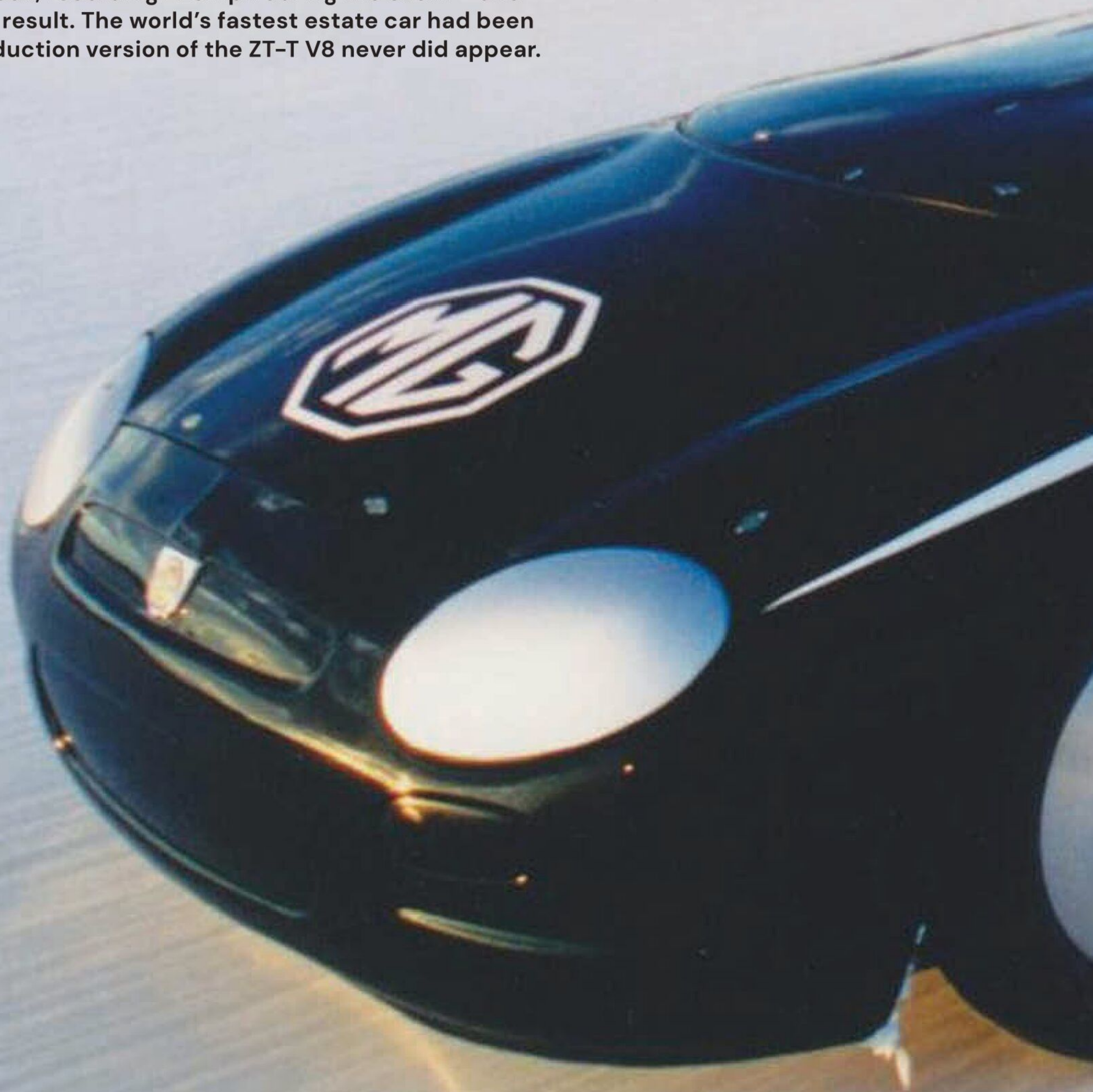
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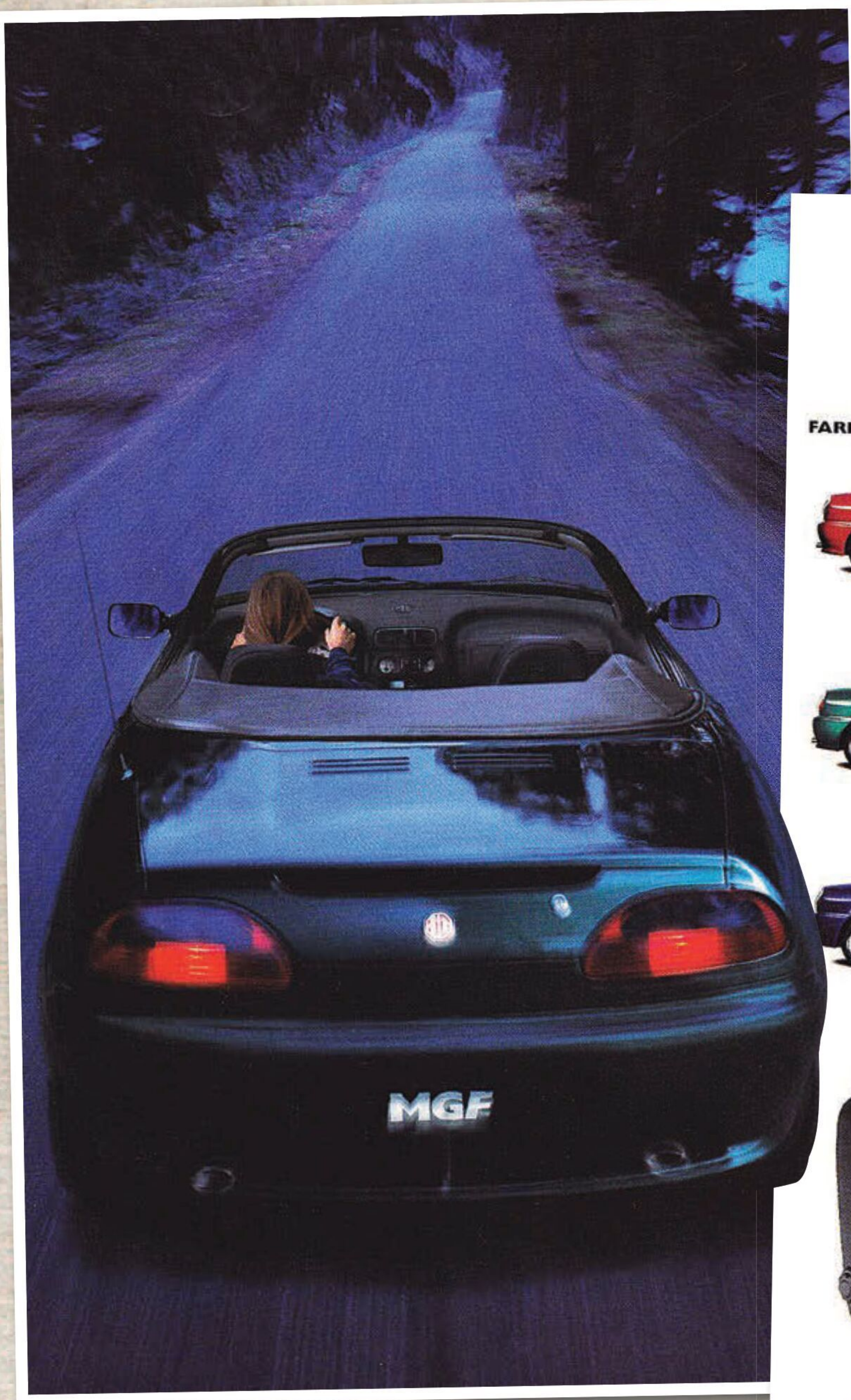
What do these two promotional photographs have in common? Firstly, they were both shot at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, USA. And secondly, each one showed an MG achieving an impressive top speed.

August 20, 1997 saw Rover Group sending an MGF to Bonneville, forty years after Stirling Moss drove at 245.64mph in the MG EX181. This particular MGF featured a longer tail and no windscreen, with obvious high-speed benefits – and ended up managing an amazing 217.4mph, making it the fastest ever production MG back then.

A few years later, the now British-owned MG Rover Group sent a custom-built MG ZT-T V8 to the Bonneville Speed Week, recording 225mph during the event – and grabbing headlines worldwide as a result. The world's fastest estate car had been unleashed – although, sadly, a production version of the ZT-T V8 never did appear.







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Charcoal Black



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Volcano Orange



Fusion



n/Leder



Farben und polster

You don't need much of a grasp of German to know that 'farben und polster' simply means 'colours and upholstery' in English. In the case of this particular brochure, the wording appears above images of different-coloured MGs, below which are various upholstery options, which kind of gives the game away. If, however, you still haven't guessed, we're talking here about a brochure for the German-spec MGF – albeit a very early one, dated August 1995.

Considering that the entire brochure was written in German, it perhaps seems odd that the colour choices remained in English – which explains the inclusion of such hues as White Diamond and Volcano Orange. Surely, though, German buyers would have been happier being offered Weißen Diamanten and Vulkan Orange? Then again, maybe not.



Were you there?

How many MG Memories readers remember the first birthday celebrations of the MGF, a large event that saw hundreds of cars (and their owners) heading to the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon in September 1996? Maybe you were one of those proud owners of the new MGF and simply had to be there to help celebrate the first truly modern two-seater MG in a very long time.

This press photograph was taken at that event, showing the neat and tidy rows of all those nearly-new MGFs, split into separate sections according to their colours. Sixteen years on, it makes you realise just how strong a start the MGF enjoyed in its career – much to the delight of MG fans everywhere.

MGF hold-all

Who says a two-seater MG can't double-up as a useful hold-all? Certainly not Rover Deutschland, who featured this series of photographs in its 1995 brochure for the new MGF.

All you had to do was tick some options boxes when ordering an MGF from your friendly German dealer and you'd soon be hauling extra suitcases or even a set of skis around with you. Handy, eh?



Die offene Version.



Das Hochglanz-Hardtop (schwarz).

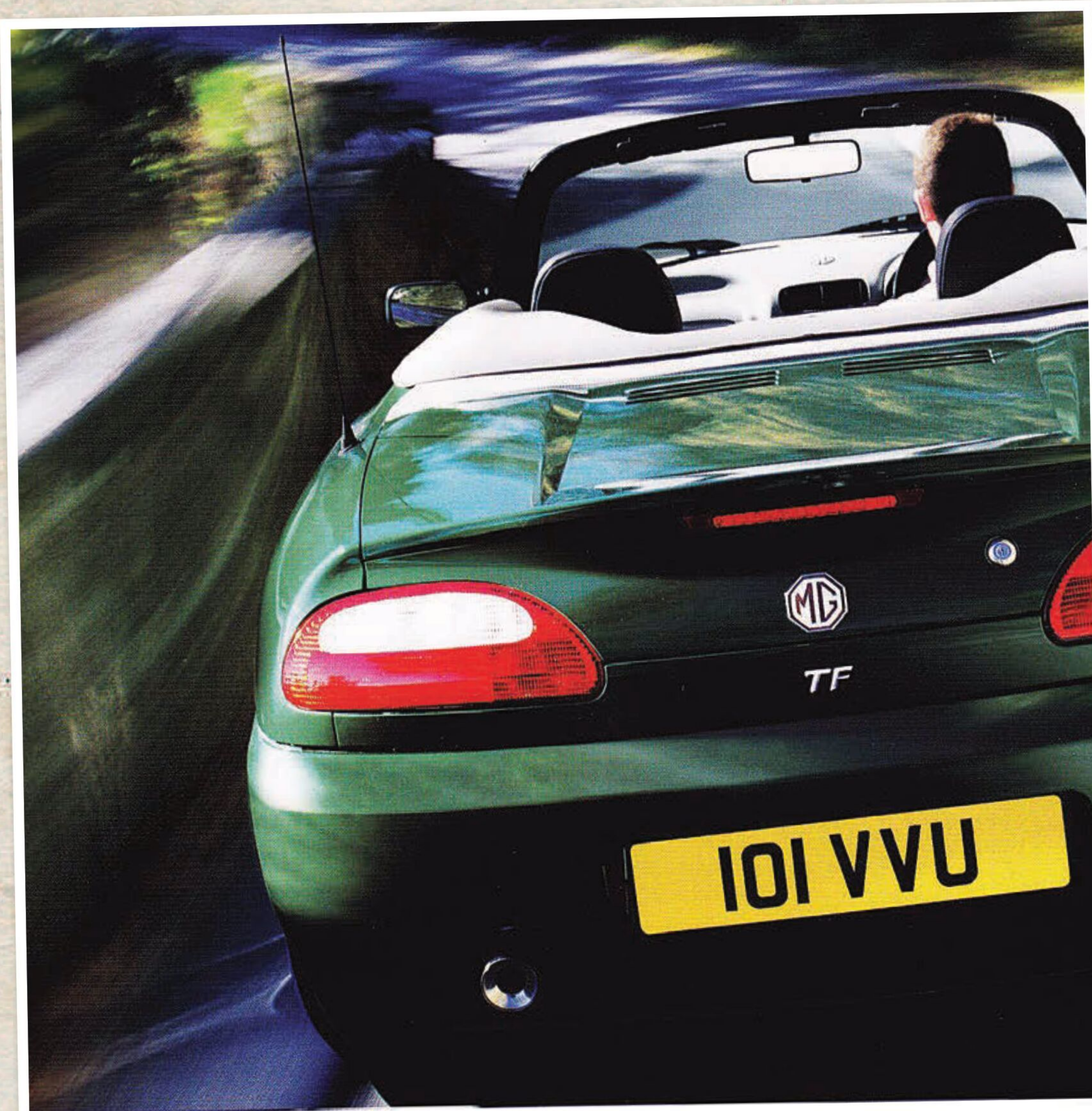


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MG TF 120 Stepspeed **Cambie su actitud ante la vida.**

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Stepspeed es una revolucionaria transmisión de seis velocidades que le permite seleccionar las marchas secuencialmente desde los interruptores del volante al estilo de los coches de Fórmula 1.

Spanish Sun

Just as MG Rover was about to hit rock bottom, going into administration in April 2005, it issued this smart 40-page brochure for the Spanish market, extolling the virtues of the latest TF.

'Disfrutar de la vida en una curva,' suggested the front cover, showing the TF powering its way along a twisty road. And that was appropriate, given the claim that TF drivers enjoyed life with curves.

MG Rover seemed particularly proud of the latest TF 120

Stepspeed, boasting of its Formula 1-style approach to gear changes and the fact that it was 'una revolucionara transmisión de seis velocidades' – which, as you've probably already guessed, merely meant it was a revolutionary six-speed set-up.

One of MG Rover's biggest European export markets was Spain, even if most Spanish buyers preferred the air-conditioned comfort of an MG 'Z' car to the open-air sunburned effect created by the TF.

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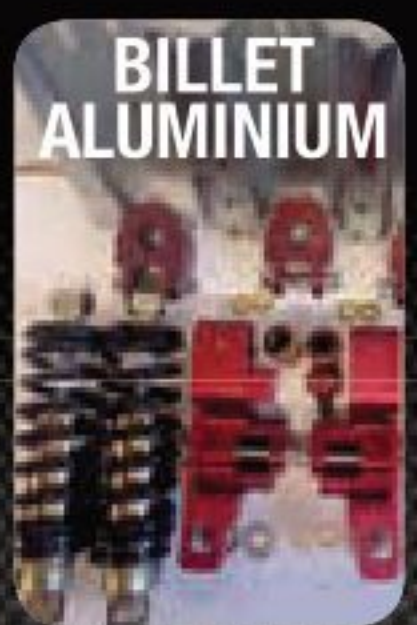


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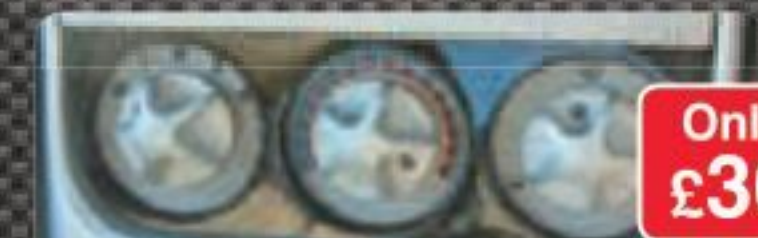
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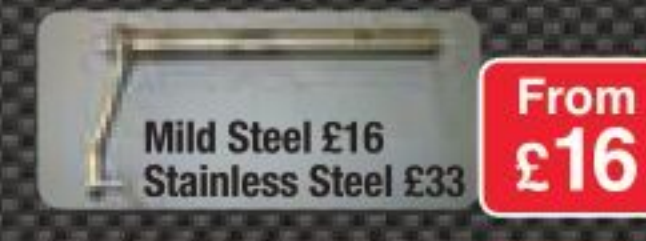
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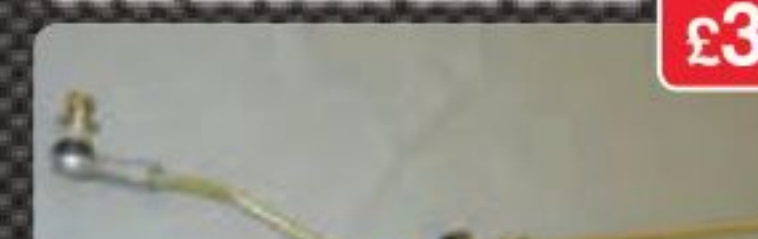
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BIRTH OF THE MGF





A Modern MG

Meanwhile, alongside Project Adder, the proposed all-new MG sports car was also taking shape under the name Project Phoenix and made the reborn MGB look like a simple task.

The first hurdle was to decide on the car's basic layout, which was far from clear-cut. Much of the press speculation in the early '90s suggested MG would launch a car based on the front-drive Rover 200 platform but Rover was exploring several different options and – with the project too small for the mainstream new model development process – had commissioned three outside contractors to produce

designs for a smaller MG. Each was given a fibreglass copy of a concept design by Rover designer Gerry McGovern known as 'F16' and each came up with very different results.

The first was 'PR1', developed by Motor Panels and using a metal copy of the fibreglass F16 concept. Based on a Maestro floorpan shortened behind the seats by 2.75 inches, it was powered by a front-mounted 2-litre M16 engine and used Maestro-derived MacPherson strut front suspension and front-wheel drive.

Concept 'PR2' meanwhile was developed by Reliant and used a lengthened version of its own Scimitar chassis with a front-mounted 3.9-litre



Metro-based development mule can be seen in the Collections Centre at the British Motor Museum.

BIRTH OF THE MGF

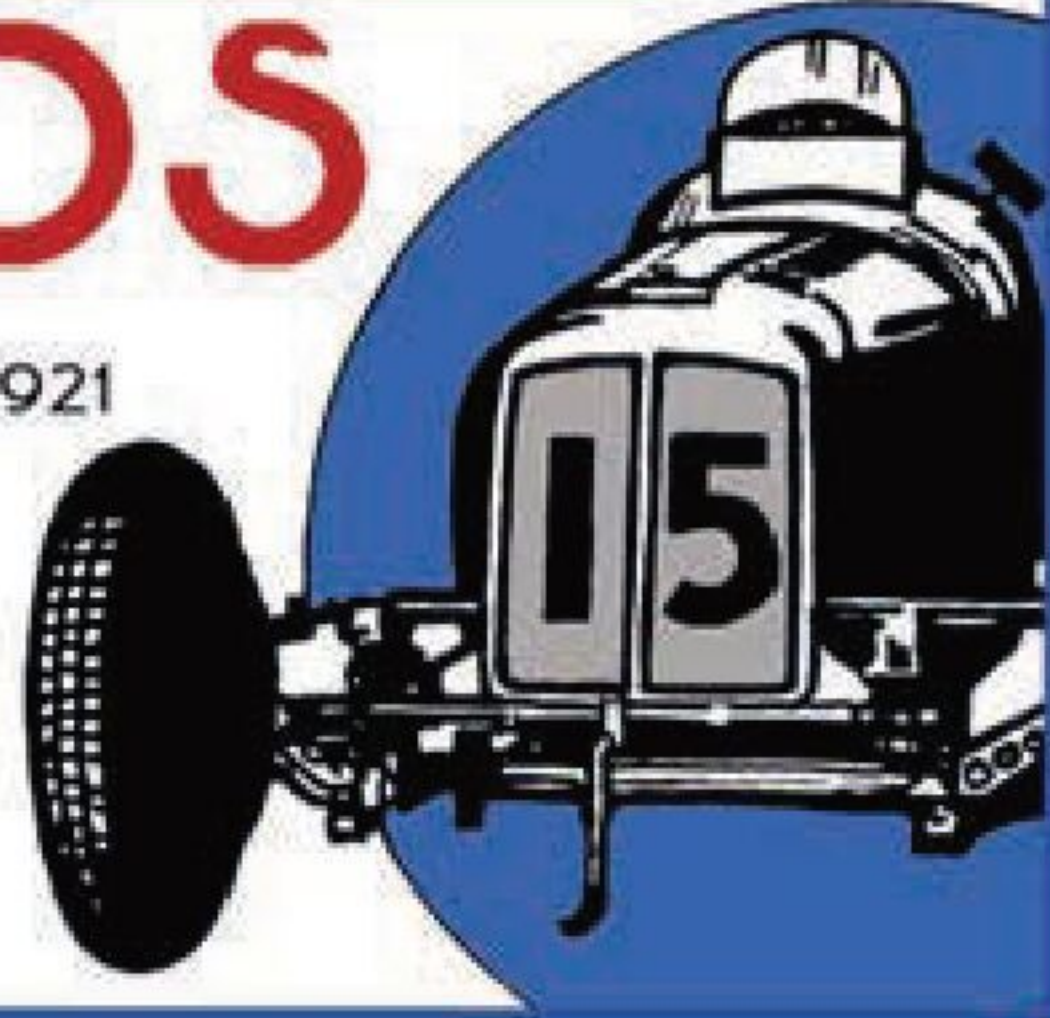


“The MGF boasts greater torsional stiffness than the first generation Mazda MX-5”

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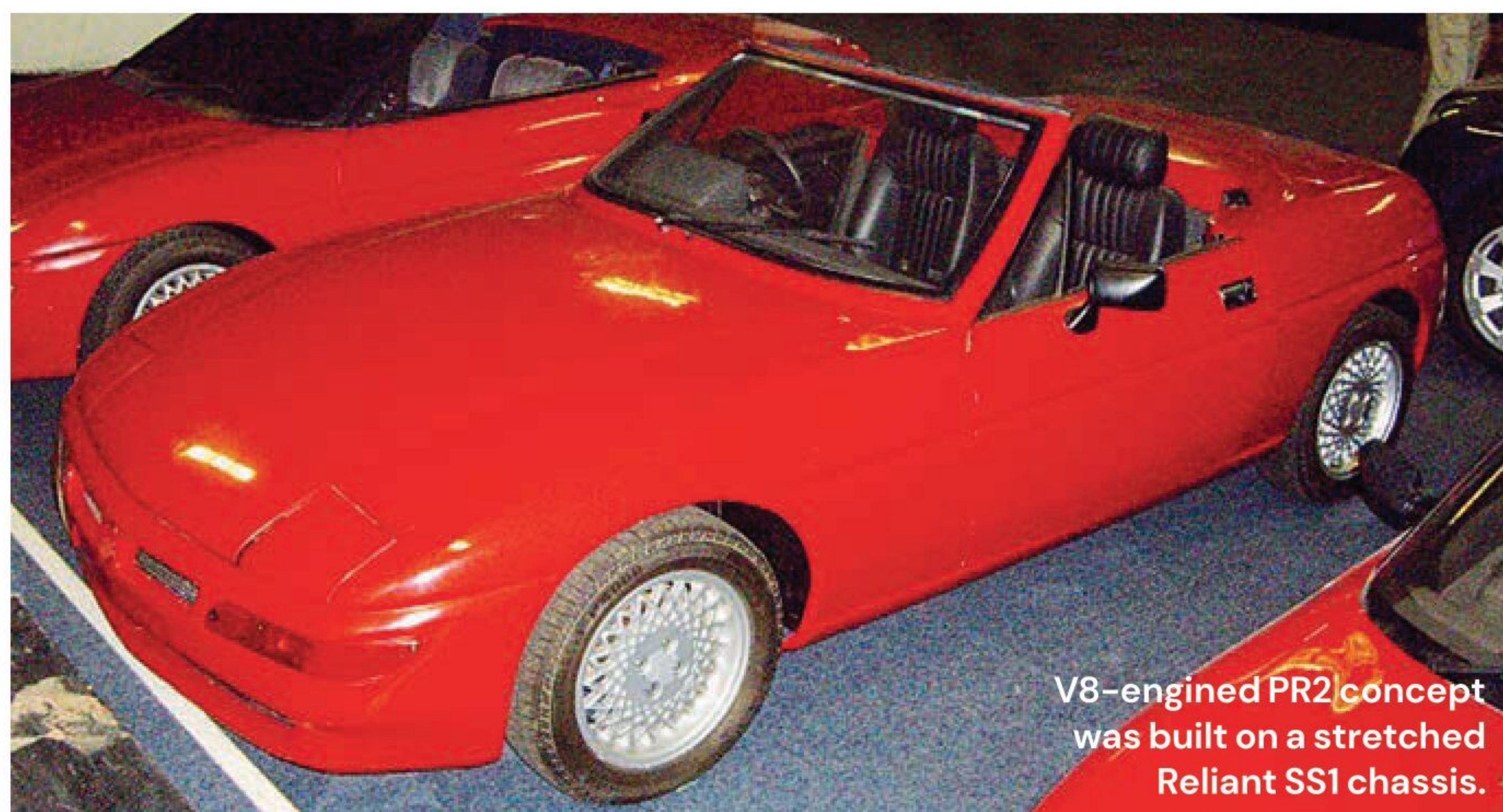
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BIRTH OF THE MGF



Rover V8 and again, modified Maestro front suspension. McGovern's concept design formed the basis of the car's style but had been stretched to create an altogether longer car with classic proportions.

The third option, 'PR3' was produced by ADC in Luton and was an innovative approach, smaller than the other two and using a mid-mounted transverse engine right behind the seats. To create a running prototype, ADC had simply taken a

Rover Metro front subframe with its K-Series engine, turned it round and stuck it in the rear. A modified Metro floorpan formed the basis of the centre section with a second Metro subframe minus running gear at the front. It might sound like something which was done purely to create a running prototype mule but in reality it proved to be surprisingly close to the production reality. As Ian Adcock recalls in his well-researched book Project Phoenix

– the birth of the MGF, the cars all impressed for different reasons during management assessment exercises but the one which created the most enthusiasm from drivers was the mid-engined PR3.

The front-drive car was felt to be a safe option but in marketing terms was questioned: the public might have bought front-drive MG Metros, Maestros and Montegos, but would they accept a 'proper' sports car from MG using front-wheel drive?



And would the press harp on about those less-than-glamorous Maestro underpinnings?

The Reliant-based car was judged to be a proper rough-and-ready sports car in the Austin-Healey mould and its V8 powerplant would no doubt endear it to the US market, but in 1991 thinking suddenly changed when it was announced that after the poor performance of its Sterling brand, Rover would be withdrawing from the North American market once again.



The mid-engined PR3 concept was the closest to the eventual production car.

BIRTH OF THE MGF

With thirsty rear-drive V8 cars far less popular in Europe, this left the mid-engined car as the favourite for a reborn MG and development began in earnest in 1990.

Early development of the PR3 concept into what would become the MGF centred around modified Metros, with some of these cars simply Metro rolling shells with the roof cut off and an engine block

mounted in the rear which were used for early crash testing. Others were built into running prototypes and to disguise the vehicles for on-road testing, the mid-engined Metros were styled to look like Metro vans, with the complete rear bodywork in fact being removable.

Today one of these is available for viewing in the new Collections Centre at the British Motor Museum in Gaydon

and gives a fascinating insight into the development process. It was these cars which allowed the team to tailor the handling to suit the mainstream buyer who may have been attracted to the mid-engined idea but who really didn't want the often sudden handling the design can often produce.

It was at this time that the project was deemed to be sufficiently mainstream to move from Rover



Special Products to the mainstream engineering development departments, leaving RSP free to concentrate on getting the RV8 into production.

The styling was moved in-house too, with design chief Gordon Sked's team modifying elements including the rear deck height to emphasise the mid-engined nature of the car and differentiate it from the MX-5.

McGovern then softened the angular design of the PR3 into the softer shape dictated by then-current trends, the idea being to retain the 'tautness' and modernity of the original.

Being smaller than other mid-engined sports cars like the Ferrari Mondial, the MGF concept threw up some tricky packaging problems, one of which was the hood arrangement: the MGF was novel in

having its folded roof sitting right above the engine which posed a challenge in avoiding an unsightly lump with it lowered. Meanwhile, driveshaft angles and other technical issues prevented the engine being lowered to solve the problem.

Other issues included cooling problems with the early prototypes which mounted a radiator immediately in front of the engine,



BIRTH OF THE MGF



Early MGF's can be identified by orange front indicator lenses and a black painted windscreen surround. These cars's Metro-based Hydrogas suspension system gives first generation 'Fs a limpet-like grip and, according to some fans, provided far better handling characteristics than later TFs fitted with conventional coil springs.



something which was solved when the radiator was moved to the front. The Japanese importer – likely to be an important market for the new car – also insisted that it be offered with power steering which posed another packaging issue. In the end an electric system was used which varied the level of assistance to offer light steering at parking speeds and virtually no assistance over 60 mph. It also had the useful side-effect of allowing wider wheels and tyres to be fitted for improved handling.

As part of this, extensive customer clinics arrived at a product brief which required the

new car to offer more power than the concept's 1.4-litre K-Series offered and suggested it should offer GTi-style performance with 0-60 in 8.5 seconds and a 120 mph top speed.

Various solutions were employed, many of them centred around forced induction of the 1.4-litre K-Series which apparently resulted in some intriguing prototypes.

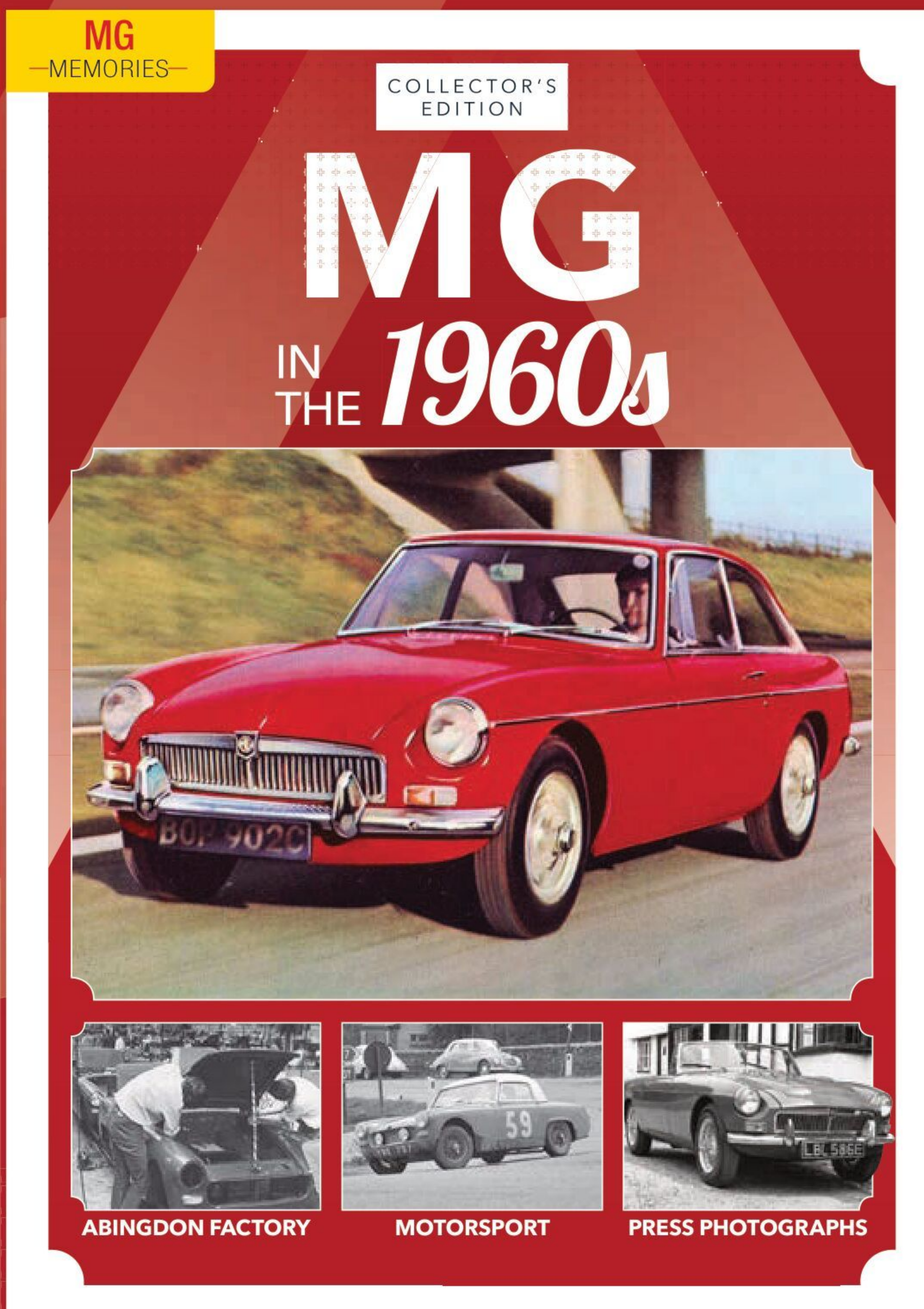
In the end the decision was taken to stretch the existing K-Series to a 1.8-litre capacity courtesy of a larger bore and increased stroke for a 1786cc result. Power outputs in this form were 120 bhp for the regular engine and 145 bhp with the variable



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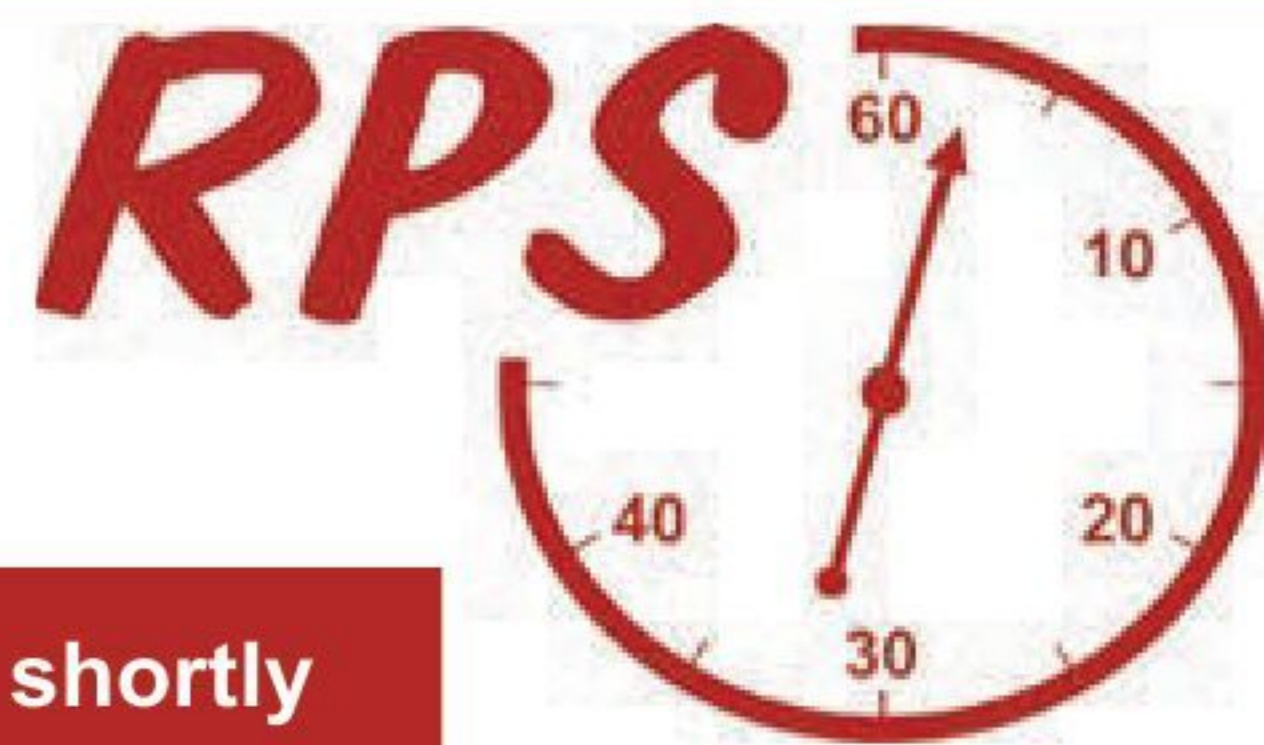
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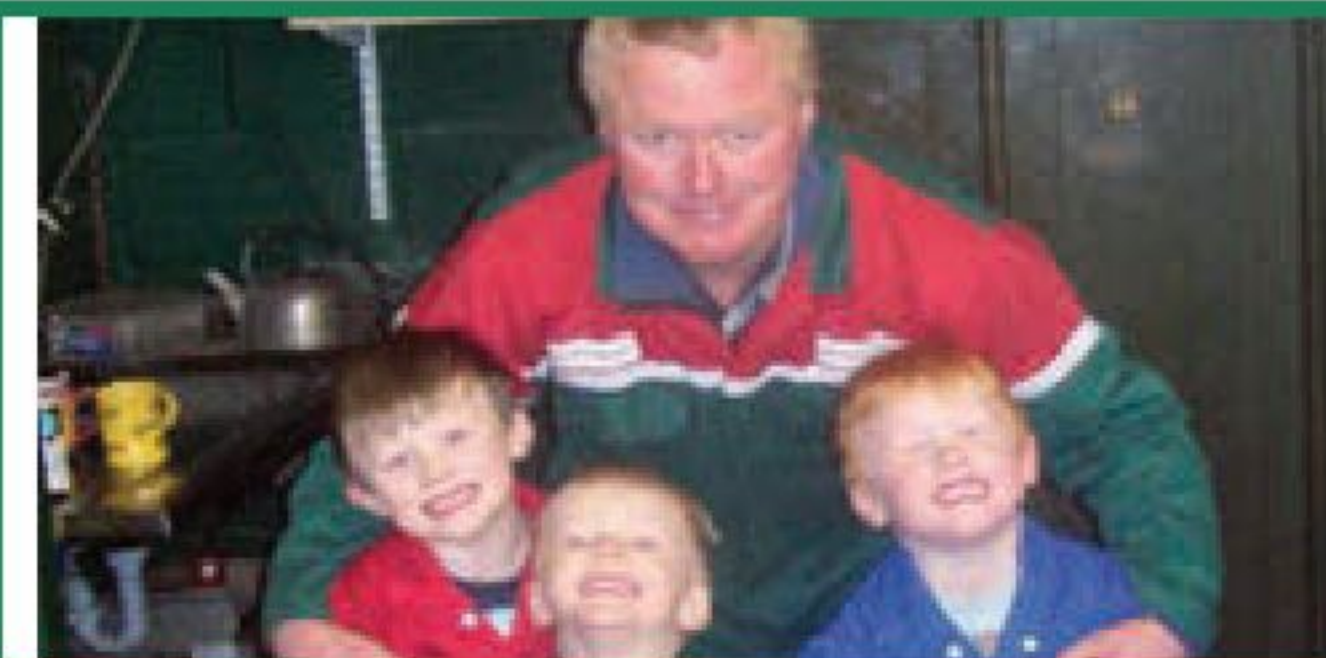
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BIRTH OF THE MGF



valve timing control developed by Rover under the tag VVC. Unlike Honda's VTEC which is very much on or off, the Rover system offered a continuously variable option without the peaky power delivery of the Japanese design.

The increased power output of the larger K-Series also required a more robust gearbox than the usual unit used with the 1.1 and 1.4 K-Series units and this was the PG1 box, a Rover-made Honda design which was converted to operate with a cable linkage rather than the rod set-up used in the front-drive cars.

Suspension retained the Hydragas set-up of the Metro which had provided its subframes for the initial concepts and it was this which gave the car its unique place in the market: with the Hydragas interconnected front to rear as had been done on the Rover Metro, the MGF offered a ride quality far more refined than any of the other sports cars in its class yet could also boast terrier-like grip.

Despite it being a volume product rather than a niche-market special like the RV8, the MGF would always be small fry when compared to the firm's mainstream saloon models and so the bodyshell was outsourced to Motor Panels in Coventry which financed the engineering of the bodyshell and also produced it, with Rover itself assembling the cars at Longbridge.

The MGF was leaked to the press in 1993 which generated much interest



Far left: The supercharged MGF Supersports One, also known as the EX24, was one of the stars of the 1998 Geneva Motor Show and was a concept for a weekend race car that could be driven to the track.

Main: The 160 bhp Trophy left the critics astounded by the MGF's potential.



BIRTH OF THE MGF



in the project, but in January 1994 BMW arrived on the scene with its acquisition of Rover Group and the whole project was thrown into doubt.

BMW of course had its own Z3 in development and for this reason it was thought that the MGF programme might have been terminated. In reality the cars are really very different and the BMW was made in the US with that being one of its primary markets, while the MGF of course wouldn't be offered in North America at all.

Impressively, a driving exercise was carried out at the Nürburgring where BMW's own test drivers sampled the MGF and were sufficiently impressed for the car to be approved by BMW management.

The MGF was launched in September 1995 with the 1786cc, 125 bhp K-Series, with the 145 bhp VVC version arriving in 1996 complete with a slightly lower final drive ratio to suit the higher-revving VVC engine, plus standard power steering and half-leather seats. The power steering became standard on the 1.8i in 1998.

In 1999 the MGF received its first significant changes, largely affecting trim and equipment levels:

the windscreen was now painted body colour instead of black, the front indicators were now smoked instead of orange and the seats were reshaped while the console and door trims were also restyled with alloy inserts. Elsewhere, the power steering was recalibrated, while the fuel tank was double-skinned and improvements were made to the head gasket. The instrument dials lost their cream faces and were

now silver with italic type, while an additional pair of stereo speakers was positioned behind the seats.

The CVT automatic gearbox was also introduced for the 2000 model year, complete with the manual paddle control dubbed Steptronic.

In 2000, the SE specification was introduced, available as either 1.8i or 1.8i VVC in Wedgwood Blue metallic and featuring black leather seats and 16-inch wheels.



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The Sports Car Strikes Back

From its golden age in the 1960s, the traditional sports car seemed to be killed off by the rise of the hot hatchback in the 1970s. Then the breed rose from the ashes in the 1980s to be one of the motoring hits of the 1990s. We spend the day with four seminal cars from each of those four decades to see how they compare and how they differ.

11:00AM – BEWL WATER, KENT

The first challenge of the day is actually finding the starting point – our sat nav was determined to take us to the literal middle of the reservoir, and the MGF is not amphibious. Our first approach was on the East Sussex side, and had we known where to look we could probably have seen a concerned group standing around a Volkswagen Golf and looking at their watches half a mile away on the Kent side. The brisk drive along the back roads in company with CCM staffer Matt Bell in the Mazda MX-5 to reach the meeting point was certainly a good chance to get acquainted with this particular F – a Mk1 VVC which has had its original Hydragas suspension swapped for a coil kit.

With its racy engine zinging out 143 horsepower, a nearly flat torque curve and a very easily-reached redline at 7000rpm, plus those newly-acquired sharper coil-sprung dynamics, the MG has the makings of a great sports car. Unfortunately they're hard to get at it because all the controls feel remote and inert. The electric power steering lacks feel and what weight there is is static and artificial. The brakes don't match the car's pace, the clutch has no discernible biting point and the gearchange needs a slow, steady pressure that will still lead to a baulk three times out of ten.

It's frustrating to be accelerating hard to keep up with a green MX-5 disappearing into the distance and

find yourself floundering around in neutral trying to find third. If it wasn't for the good 'seat of the pants' feel and its sheer speed this MGF would be almost boring to drive. It can cover ground, even twisty derestricted A-road ground, without breaking pace or sweat but you come to find that out by experience rather than intuition.

13:00PM – DENBIES WINE ESTATE, SURREY

Having sat out in the sun for four hours and being a black car with no sunroof the Mk1 Golf was very literally a hot hatchback when I stepped in. For a moment, encased in the finest black plastic and synthetic cloth the 1970s had to offer, I was jealous of those in the roof-down convertibles.

But that envy quickly vanished on the sprint between Bewl Water and the Denbies Wine Estate – 30 miles of dual-carriageway, old sections of the vintage A25 through the Surrey hills and then a blast round the bottom section of the M25. This is the sort of road that a first-gen hot hatch was built for. The Golf is the loudest of the quartet, with a nice gargly exhaust note. The VW's overhead cam engine was never the most exciting power unit on offer but it's punchy, smooth and feels nicely unburstable. From a modern perspective it's hard to believe that a 1.6-litre hatchback with 108bhp was ever seen as driving nirvana but the Golf is light and, much more importantly, very communicative in all the ways that the faster, more high-tech MGF was not.





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The basics are all there. With its wide wheels at each corner and front-wheel drive on hot, dry roads the Golf feels like one of those Scalextric cars with a magnet in the bottom. Even just cruising along at 50mph or so on the A25 is enjoyable because of the way the VW flows from corner to corner, letting you enjoy the way the unassisted steering (responsive but never twitchy) gradually loads up as you turn in. Sometimes you'll have to ease off as the car in front slows or turns into a junction, but that's just an excuse to drop a gear and enjoy the sound and feel of the lusty engine under the blunt bonnet.

Of course the Golf really shone on the M25 – instead of being buffeted by wind and fumigated by diesel exhaust, the VW driver can enjoy just being in what becomes an ordinary car. Albeit a rather loud one which jolts over the joints in the concrete but it's still way more refined than a traditional sports car and if the weather was more typically British, or we were travelling more than two-up, or had luggage, then the Golf's hatchback body would

come into its own. It would certainly be the car of choice if we were going to be taking home any of the produce from our first stop-over in this strange corner of Surrey which appears to have been teleported in from Provence, complete with cloudless blue skies, heat haze, rows of vines in dusty earth and avenues of plane trees lining the roads.

14:30PM – EPSOM DOWNS RACECOURSE

It was time to split the difference age-wise between the VW and the MG for the next leg (our convoy now including a red MG Midget) by getting behind the wheel of the Mk1 Mazda MX-5 – the car which proved that the sports car was not dead but merely resting. This one from Mazda's press fleet is a straightforward 1.8-litre model.

It was seven miles to our next stop, Epsom Downs, which calls itself the 'Home of British Racing' and is concerned with horsepower of a more literal sort. It was a jaunt along a bit more sweeping dual carriageway, some suburban town roads through Ashted and then a

brief but very pretty rural plunge down through Langley Vale and up onto the Downs – certainly enough to get the measure of the Mazda. The passing of the years hasn't diminished how absolutely 'right' the original MX-5 feels from the moment you let the clutch up. It is the platonic ideal of the sports car, with a fore/aft drivetrain all set nicely within the wheelbase giving perfect weight distribution, fully independent suspension and as little weight as possible. That it's much slower than the MG and barely quicker than the Golf doesn't really matter.

Even at modest speeds the MX-5 feels poised, as if in dynamic terms it's sitting on a pivot. The hot hatch and the MG felt planted and grippy but you can feel the MX-5 shifting its weight on its springs and each corner loading or unloading as you drive. It's too well resolved and docile to unexpectedly turn on you but there's a definite sense that if you pushed it hard and deliberately it could do proper classic sports car-type oversteer. This makes it very enjoyable to thread the MX-5 along



a road, especially that all-too-brief blast down Langley Vale.

The engine lacks the punch of the other two engines, really needing to be worked into its upper reaches to get the maximum performance out of the Mazda, especially on hills, but that makes it easy to exploit the full rev range and the lower gears while staying well within the legal limits – something which the tall-g geared and long-legged MGF cannot do. Even shunting along in dawdling traffic it's nice to just sit in the snug cockpit with the roof down and flick between second and third gear, the gearshift being so short and slick – designed expressly for the road rather than the track – that you really just have to flex your fingers rather than move your arm.

16:00PM – BROOKLANDS MUSEUM

It's time to travel all the way back into history with the MG Midget as we head off to the home of British motorsport at Brooklands. It was here in the 1920s that the Midget and MGF's octagon-badged ancestors won their spurs as thoroughbred sports cars before Volkswagen even



CLASSIC ROAD TEST: SPORTS CARS vs HOT HATCH



existed and when Mazda was still making artificial cork products.

I had previously been struck with how small the Golf looked in modern traffic but the Midget (as the name implies, a small car even by 1960s standards) is positively microscopic. Lowering yourself into the sparse crackle-painted cockpit with its painfully gleaming chrome dial bezels isn't the most elegant procedure but once you're in it's surprisingly comfy even if it's not spacious and, like the Mazda, the controls are all where you want them even if the steering wheel seems somewhat oversized.

You can definitely sense the spiritual link between Midget and MX-5 – Mazda was consciously trying to recreate the stripped-out, low-performance, high-fun feel of cars like the Midget and driving the two back to back you see how they succeeded. The Midget's performance stats are pointless because that's not what the MG was ever about. It's about savouring the experience of driving rather than getting it over with as quickly as possible.

The low-slung Midget, the way you're pressed against the door and the near-total lack of bodywork above chest height makes it feel much faster than it actually is, helped by the very

low gearing which means the willing 1.3-litre engine is growling away well up its rev range even at low speeds. Quick steering needs pressure more than movement in your arms once you're rolling above 10mph or so and the gear lever snicks between speeds with a lovely precision-made feel. The engine snorts under acceleration and crackles on lift-off.

Even trundling along the road between Epsom and Oxshott at 40mph the Midget feels exciting, let alone the adrenaline rush of joining the A3 when the sidewalls of lorries tower over you. The downside is that the Midget's ride, especially with

both seats filled and some baggage, is very bumpy, the actual amount of grip available is very low and the top comfortable cruising speed is no more than 60mph (which feels and sounds like 100). But for purity of the experience, the MG knocks all the others into the next county.

17:00PM – THE A1

The day comes full circle as I take the MGF back up to Peterborough, giving me a chance to rank the four driving enthusiast's cars from four decades. As ever, it comes down to the divide in personal taste between performance and involvement.





In VVC form the MGF defies its critics and is impressively capable.

Let's work chronologically. The Midget has character and charm bursting from every body seam, and if your idea of a sports car is one with chrome bumpers and carburettors then it's the only choice. It's the one that requires the most effort to drive and therefore is also the most rewarding. But it also makes the fewest compromises – it's a toy with no concessions to comfort or practicality. It's cramped, it's slow, it's bouncy and it's certainly not that fast. You may tire of continually being outrun by delivery vans. But it's the car that's the most outright fun for all those objective flaws.

The Golf GTI is thrown into sharper relief by the comparison with the Midget, because it offers much of the same experience but in a larger, faster and more practical package. To say it's not as engaging as the Midget is unfair because by any other standard it's a hugely enjoyable car to drive and unlike the little MG it can happily do the daily grind when it's being just a regular hatchback rather than a hot one.

The GTI is actually quick rather than merely giving the illusion of it and you can easily see why the hot hatch became the equipment of choice for driving enthusiasts tired

of the traditional offerings with their mechanical parts taken from 1950s saloon cars.

The MX-5 combines the feel and fun of the Midget with the reliability and refinement of the Golf. It lacks the VW's practicality, of course but here is a machine which manages to sand the rough edges off the classic sports car experience without detracting too much from the essential character. It's hard to say any more than that because that has always been the key to the MX-5's unique success – it is a classic sports car with no downsides. With twice as much power as the Midget and more sophisticated suspension the MX-5 offers genuine, but still very usable, performance to go with its well-sorted dynamics and haptic controls.

The MGF is a sports car for the Playstation generation, with its electric power steering and mid-mounted engine with clever valve timing. There is no complaining about the MG's performance, which is astonishingly good, especially in VVC form where the 145bhp is combined with a kerb weight of just 1070kg.

The superb traction afforded by that mid-mounted engine creates a car which will leave the GTI for dead in a straight line, clocking up 60mph in just seven seconds dead and topping out at 130mph.

The seating position and the feel of the controls may be more saloon car than traditional sports car, but don't let the gentle ride of the Hydragas fool you: the MGF is genuinely capable and indeed one of the reasons it was allowed to continue in development was that in the hands of BMW's own test drivers MGF prototypes managed to beat its own Z3 around the Nordschliefe.

Some may happily sacrifice that extra pace for the added tactility of the Mazda, but equally there will be others who judge the MGF's blend of easygoing demeanour and flat-out pace to be just what the MG brand is all about.



PHOENIX AND THE EVOLUTION FROM MGF TO TF



The new TF replaced the successful MGF after its seven year run, with a restyled front end and conventional coil-sprung suspension.



Evolution of the MGF

The year 2000 however was to bring bigger issues for MG and Rover when BMW finally admitted defeat in its quest to drag Rover's volume cars business back to profitability and in May 2000 sold the car-making business to Phoenix Venture Holdings. Meanwhile Land Rover was sold to Ford Motor Company and BMW kept the Cowley site for reasons which would later become very clear when its own reborn Mini was launched.

The 'Phoenix Four' as the consortium was popularly known were John Towers, Nick Stephenson, Peter Beale and John Edwards who acquired the car making business and Longbridge site as well as the rights to use the Rover name for a nominal £10.

Although the Phoenix era would ultimately prove unsuccessful, the change of ownership did mark a new and rather unexpected resurgence for the MG marque. Crucially, the deal saw Phoenix acquire ownership



The evolution from MGF (right) to MGTF.

PHOENIX AND THE EVOLUTION FROM MGF TO TF



As a happy by-product of the bodyshell revisions, the shell became some 20 per cent stiffer and achieved a commendable four-star NCAP result – the only open car in its class to do so. The end result was a car which was more focused than the easy-riding MGF and closer to the uncompromising Lotus Elite in its feel.



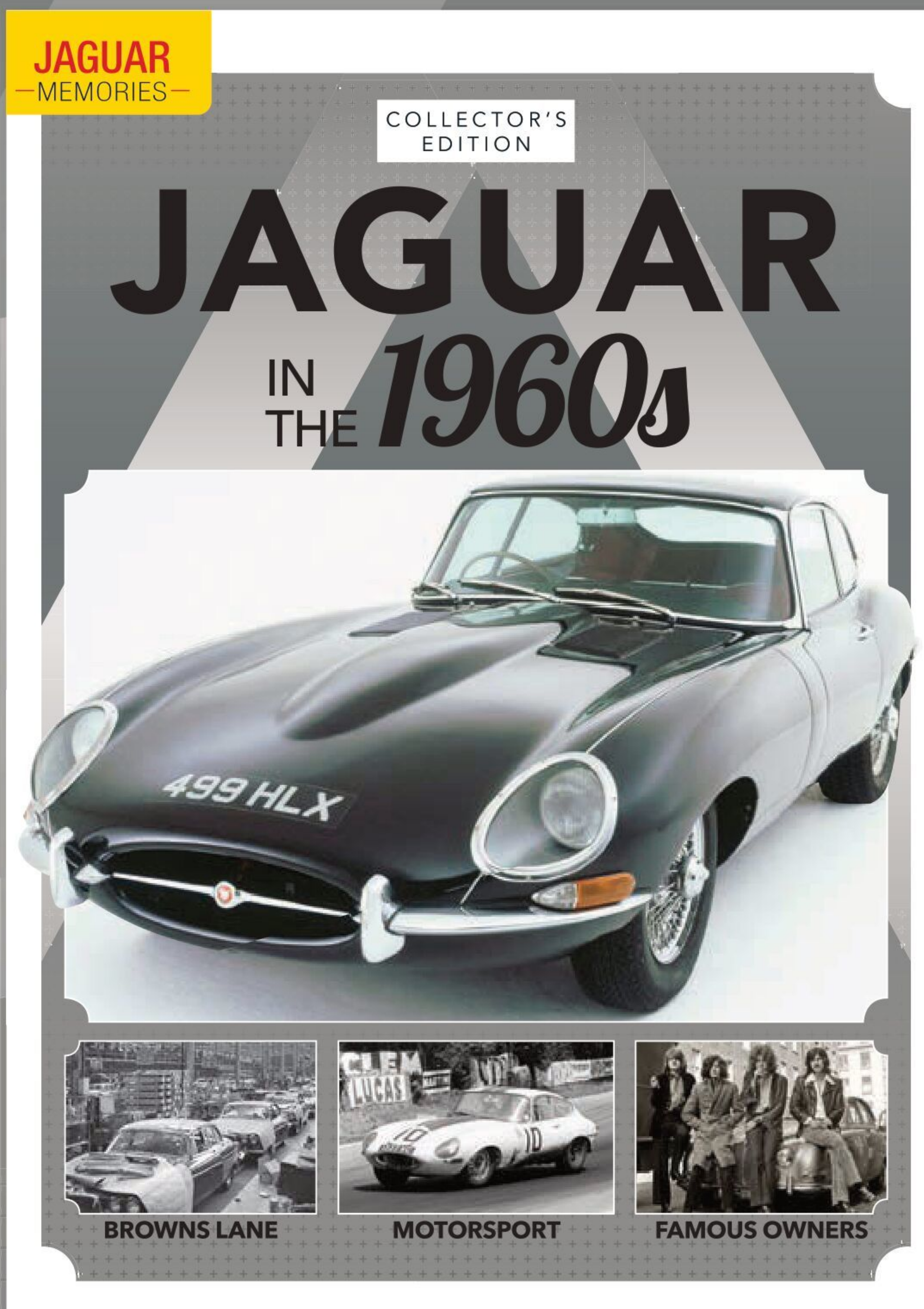
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PHOENIX AND THE EVOLUTION FROM MGF TO TF



of the MG trademark but it only granted the right to use the Rover marque under licence.

It was therefore only natural that the company under Phoenix ownership would seek to raise the prominence of the MG brand in order to safeguard it against any future development which might affect its use of the Rover trademark.

This strategy was implemented remarkably quickly, with MG-badged versions of all three current models released during 2001: the ZR, based on the Rover 25, the 45-based ZS and the ZT developed from the Rover 75.

All were developed at minimal cost, featuring more sporting engine options and chassis tuning with styling details which cleverly avoided

the expense of major alterations to the sheet metal. Perhaps the most successful was the MG version of the Rover 75 which for many buyers after a mid-sized sporting saloon offered a welcome change from the ubiquitous BMW 3-Series and was also offered in estate form, developed under BMW ownership but never released.

Alongside the MG-badged Rover

“The TF went on to sell 40,000 units in four years, until in 2005 the collapse of MG Rover forced an abrupt halt”



Firmed-up suspension makes the TF more of a serious sports car.

PHOENIX AND THE EVOLUTION FROM MGF TO TF

The TF was launched in 2002 with the K-Series updated courtesy of revised manifolding and producing 135 bhp in its basic form, with the 115 bhp and 160 bhp options remaining.





PHOENIX AND THE EVOLUTION FROM MGF TO TF



In Rover 75 form it was badged as Rover V8 and was an understated affair, but in MG ZT 260 form – denoting its 260 bhp – it was a hoot and something of a four-door TVR.



models, the MGF would continue to be a mainstay of the range, but with the Rover Metro having been discontinued, the MGF was now the only car to use the Hydragas suspension and it was too costly to manufacture for a low-volume sports car. MG Rover wanted to keep a sports car in the range to lend some credibility to the badge and the solution was to re-engineer the MGF to take conventional suspension.

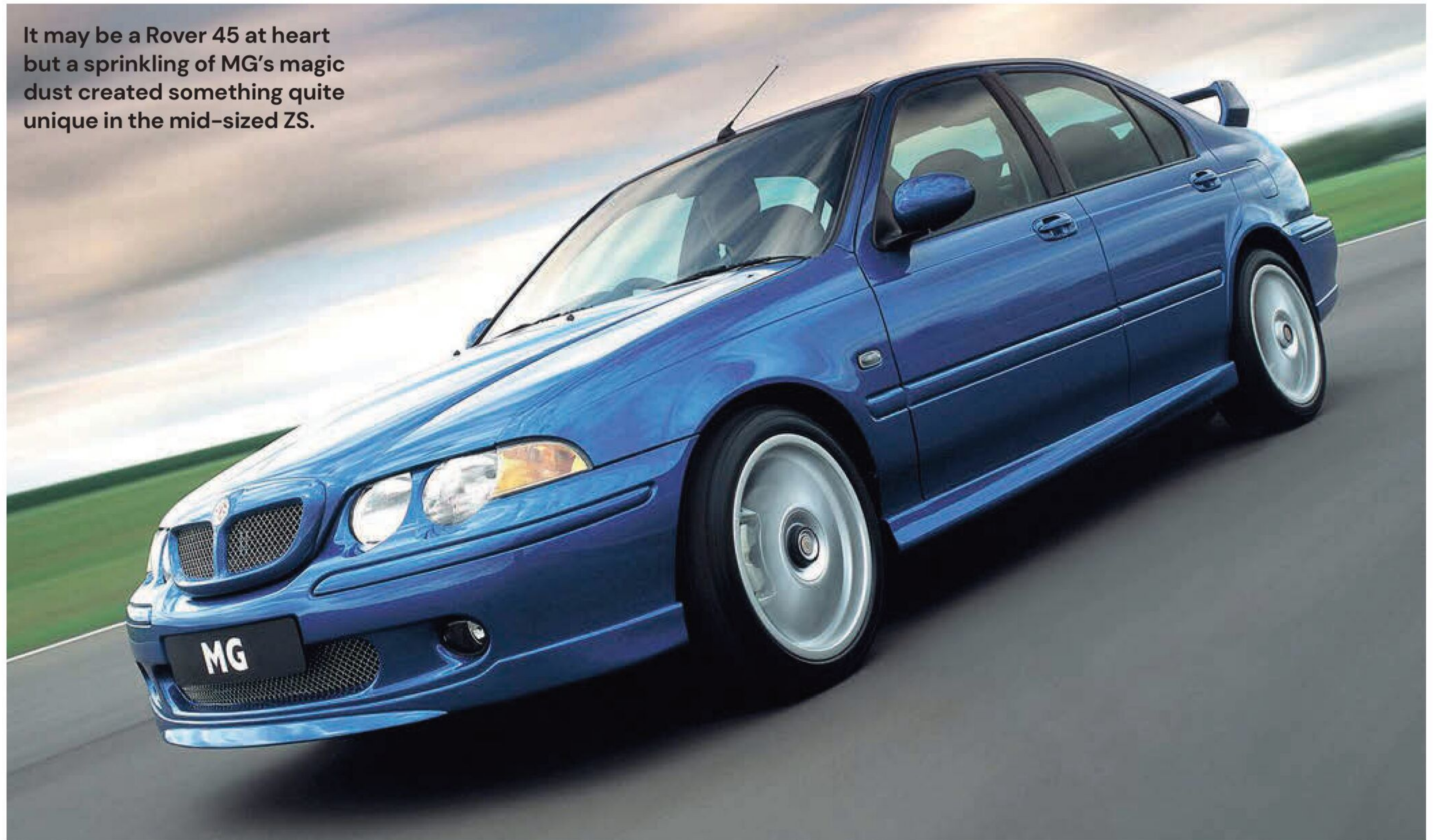
This of course was a major task and involved substantial bodyshell redesign to take the revised suspension loadings, the shell

becoming 20 per cent stiffer in the process. Peter Stevens was called in to give the exterior style a more aggressive appearance and the car gained a new name: TF, last seen on the 1930s Midget.

The changes utterly transformed the car, the new coil suspension being given an uncompromising set-up which was a world away from the saloon-car ride of the original MGF and created something of an Elise-lite. The TF was further distanced from the saloon-like driving position of the original which won it so many friends by the simple expedient



PHOENIX AND THE EVOLUTION FROM MGF TO TF



It may be a Rover 45 at heart but a sprinkling of MG's magic dust created something quite unique in the mid-sized ZS.

of making the seat base shallower, creating a lower, more traditional sports car-like seating position.

At the same time, the K-Series engine was updated with different manifolding to produce 135 bhp in its

basic form, with the 115 bhp and 160 bhp options remaining, the 160 bhp engine now doing without the VVC. The TF may be very different from the F but it's just as appealing in its own way and can provide just as much fun.

In 2005 the criticisms of the TF's uncompromising ride were answered with the introduction of comfort option offering slightly softer settings, while the roof gained a glass heated rear window.



Based on the Rover 25, the MG ZR was priced as a value proposition in the hot hatch market.

The Collapse

This ultimate development of that early PR3 concept was destined to enjoy a short life though: in 2005 Rover collapsed in spectacular style with production ending in April after 39,249 TFs.

Incredibly, the car – and the MG brand – refused to die. Following the firm's acquisition by the Chinese NAC group, production was restarted in China from 2007, with cars being assembled in Longbridge from CKD kits from 2008 and featuring detail revisions to front grille, engines and interior. First to come was the limited-edition LE500, followed by the TF135, essentially using a modified version of the previous 135 bhp K-Series engine. An 85th anniversary model was produced in 2009 with production finally ending in 2010, with a 15-year production life, not being a bad innings for a model designed purely as a means of reinvigorating the MG brand.



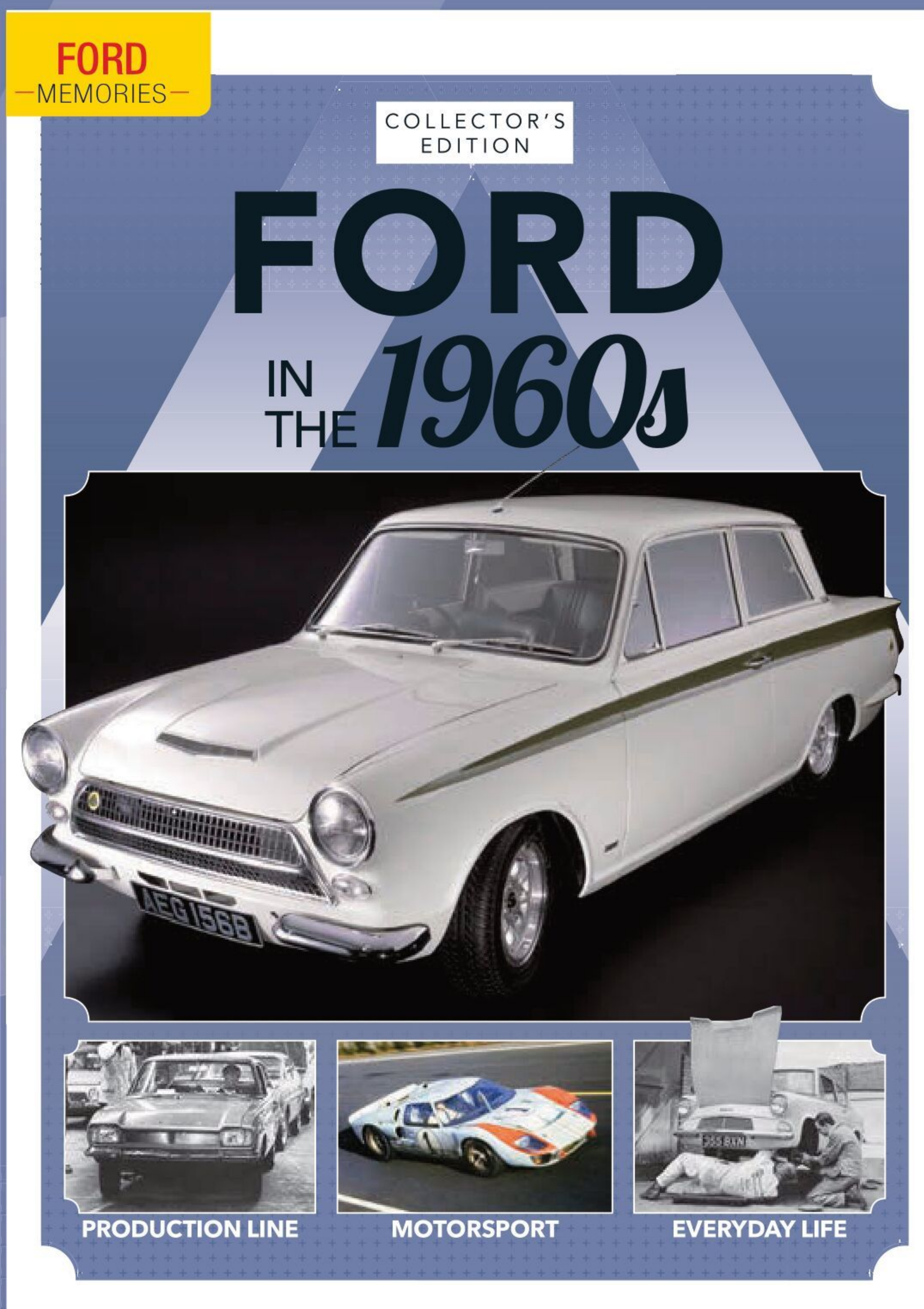
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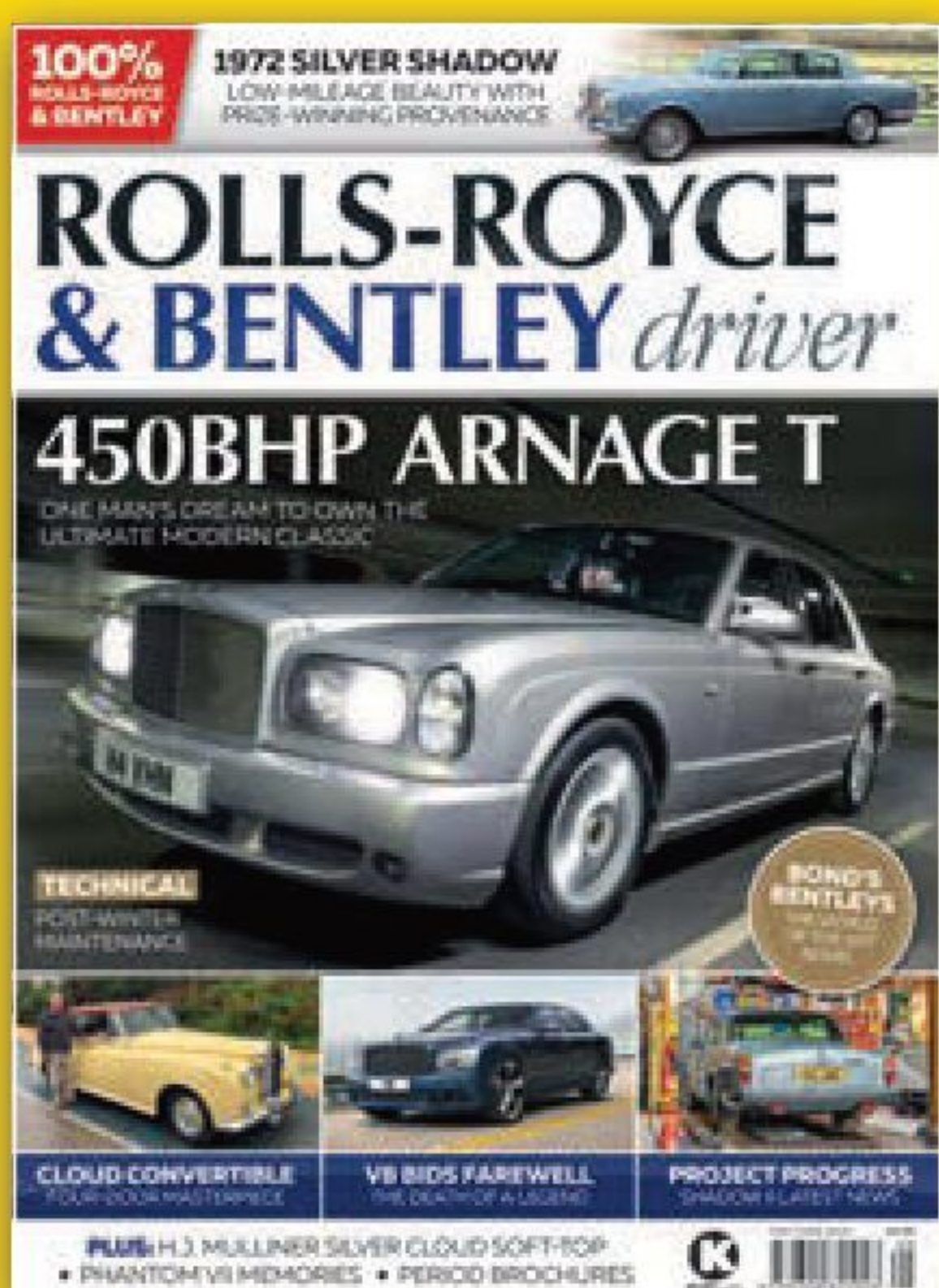
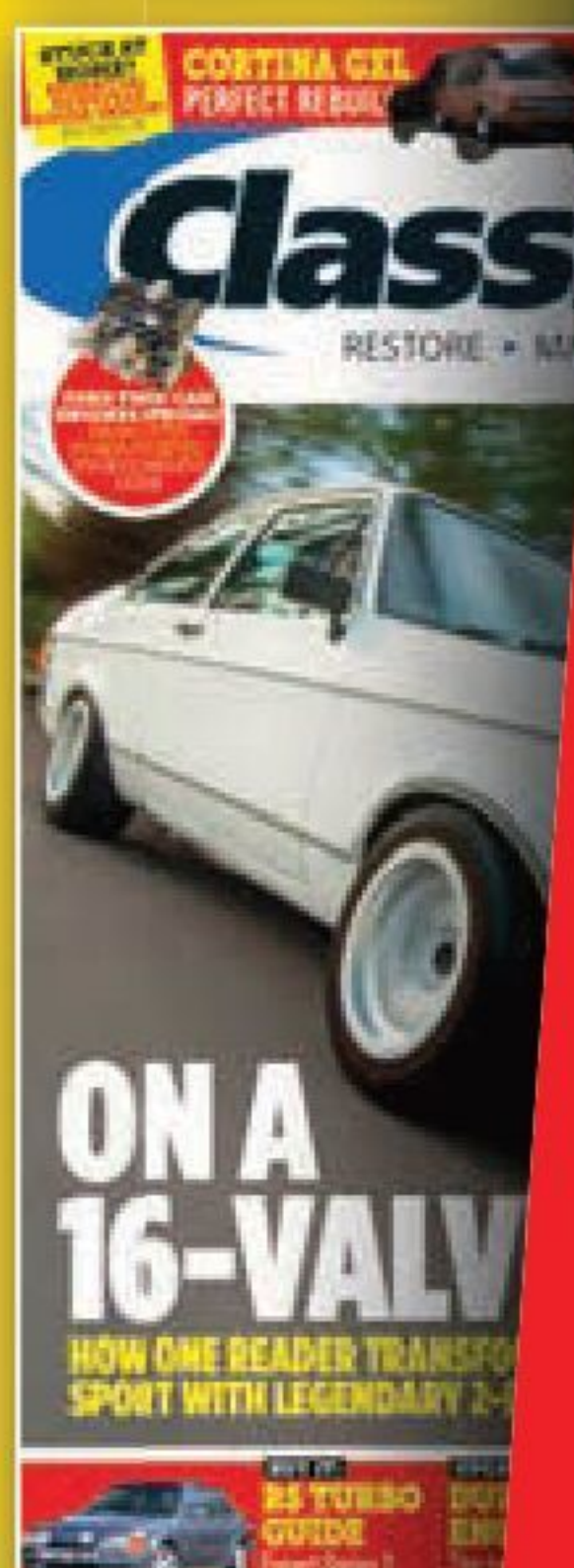
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Classic Revival

Introduced to mark the 30th anniversary of the evergreen MGB, the RV8 was built around a modified Heritage bodyshell and became the advance guard for the crucial new mid-engined MGF. We look at what can go wrong with these fast appreciating born-again classics.

The Rover Group unveiled the RV8 at the Tokyo Motor Show and by March 1993 the first cars were heading out to Japan, which turned out to be the RV8's major market. This resulted with a mere 307 RV8s being sold on the home market but over the years scores of

examples have been repatriated from the land of the rising sun and these 'grey imports' now outnumber the number of official UK sold cars. By the time the RV8 bowed out in 1995, it had reawakened MG's position as a producer of interesting sports cars and the scene was well and truly set

for the introduction of the what was probably the most talked about MG ever – the mid-engined MGF. The RV8 was an instant classic and a good one will make a very practical long-distance cruiser, so if you're tempted, here's what to look out for when viewing one of these fast appreciating sports cars.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR BODYWORK

The easiest way to tell if the example being viewed is a Japanese-spec model is to see if it is fitted with driving lamps. If these items are missing, the car is definitely a 'grey import', which isn't necessarily an issue, as



many examples were purchased by enthusiasts who did very few miles and had the car serviced by the book. Although this can be an opportunity to purchase what looks like a pampered, low mileage RV8, make sure all the service records come with the car and are up to date.

The reason RV8s that ended up in Japan weren't fitted with spotlights is that these items were deleted in order to locate the radiators for the air conditioning, a feature UK bound cars didn't have as standard – but don't forget you can always drop the hood if the car doesn't have air con!... When it comes to inspecting the bodywork, look out for signs of accident damage or any poorly carried out repairs. Unfortunately, like its older sibling, the RV8 isn't immune to corrosion but having said that, the car's overall resistance to rust was greatly reduced by using zinc-coated steel for the bodywork along with a generous application of factory applied rust preservative inside all the cavities.

Probably the most important area to check on a RV8 is around the windscreen frame. If a car is showing any signs of serious rot in this area, our advice would be to walk away and view the next car on the list. However, if the car in question is competitively priced and this seems to be the

only issue, specialists, like Brown & Gammons can supply repair sections, as well as individual panels and even a complete body to re-shell an accident damaged RV8. Paintwork condition is another important factor with any RV8 purchase, as the cost of a good quality respray may render invalid any saving you make by buying a car in need of a cosmetic makeover. Finally, if the car is fitted with a hard top, take a look at the condition of all the seals and the fit around the rear deck, as any gaps will let water into the cabin.

ENGINE

When new, all RV8s came as standard with the latest 3946cc version of Rover's legendary V8, by then fitted to the Range Rover in the same larger-capacity format. It's a long-lived and reliable unit, being understressed and generally very robust. However, it's an engine that does require regular oil and filter changes (ideally every 3000 miles or annually, depending on which occurs first) as the oil passageways to the rocker shafts are prone to sludging. It's therefore important to check that any RV8 you're thinking of buying comes with proof of regular maintenance; if the engine oil looks dirty upon inspection, alarm bells should ring.

It's equally important that the compressible washer on the sump plug is renewed with every oil change. Again, any knowledgeable owner or specialist will be aware of this, so it's another good sign of a well-cared-for car. Unlike the original MGB GT V8, the RV8 tends to escape any overheating issues thanks to improved airflow through the radiator, as well as hot air escaping through the exhaust holes in the inner wings. However, it's not unknown for the plastic expansion tank for the coolant to deteriorate due to age, which can obviously result in loss of anti-freeze. It's important to regularly check the coolant level as a result.

Loss of coolant can also occur when the bolts securing the inlet manifold



The injected V8 was a tight fit even in the modified MGB shell.

BUYING GUIDE: MG RV8



Flared wings were produced by Abbey Panels and were needed to cover the 205-section rubber.

to the cylinder head work loose, which isn't uncommon. Make sure these bolts are regularly checked as part of your maintenance programme. Interestingly, every MG RV8 was fitted with a catalytic converter, although Japanese-spec cars also came with Catalyst Overheat Warning Lights in order to comply with legislation there. A rotten catalyst will obviously be an MoT failure point, although stainless steel replacements are available for around the £250 mark.

TRANSMISSION

The RV8's V8 powerplant was linked to a five-speed manual transmission, with the original Rover LT77 unit fitted to the early models replaced by the R380 gearbox from chassis number 644 onwards. The type of transmission can be identified by the position of reverse gear – up to the left on earlier cars, down to the right on later examples. Both gearboxes are strong and reliable and either unit

should be problem-free unless a car has been seriously abused or messed around with over the years.

BRAKES

The RV8's servo-assisted brakes comprise of ventilated front discs and rear drums and were adequate for their intended purpose. However, the lack of ABS was unusual for a sports car built in the early '90s with so much power at its disposal – and reinforced the fact that this was an old design brought more up to date rather than a genuinely new car.

On the plus side, this helps to make DIY maintenance a straightforward affair. There are no particular weak spots with the RV8's braking system, so it's simply a case of carrying out the usual checks and ensuring that everything is in good order. It's particularly important to check that the front discs aren't scored or damaged, as replacements can be expensive.

SUSPENSION & STEERING

To cope with the 190bhp produced by the 3.9 litre V8, the RV8 was fitted with a limited-slip differential and redesigned suspension with torque control arms between the axle and the front spring mounts. Telescopic shock absorbers replaced the MGB's lever-arm dampers, while the front featured a modified MGB crossmember. The end result was drastically improved handling compared with the original MGB GT V8; but with all that power on tap, an RV8 can still be a handful for any inexperienced driver, especially in the wet.

As a large proportion of today's RV8s have covered relatively low mileages, there's every chance that the suspension set-up will be problem-free. Carry out the usual checks for wear and leaks, but make sure the car doesn't feel unusually 'wallowy' on a test drive. Without power-assistance, a standard RV8's steering can seem heavy to anybody



Interior is a world away from even the plushiest of standard MGBs.

more used to modern vehicles, though many owners like the 'classic' feel that this provides. Some cars, however, have been retro-fitted with power-assisted steering, which helps to make the RV8 a more manageable machine round town. If the car comes with PAS, check that the conversion was carried out professionally and ask for evidence of exactly what was done.

When inspecting any RV8, make sure the steering rack mounts are checked, as there have been cases of these cracking and compromising the safety of the car. In extreme cases, the rack could actually become detached, so make sure this is part of annual service check-over too.

INTERIOR

The RV8 was the most luxurious MGB-based car ever produced, featuring deeply upholstered leather seats and high-quality elm veneer dashboard and door cappings. The leather upholstery and trim in every RV8 was finished in Stone Beige, a neutral colour that suited just about any exterior paintwork choice. Tall drivers may find that the RV8's extra deep seat squabs position their eyeline level with the top of the

windscreen frame – okay when the hood's down but a pain when the hood or hard top is in place.

Deleting the traditional quarter lights on the RV8's doors was necessary to fit internally adjustable door mirrors and also helped to bring the RV8's appearance more up to date. Beware that examples fitted with air conditioning will have restricted leg room on the passenger's side of the car. This is due to the A/C system being located at the base of the footwell, although a quite a few owners may have removed the equipment on a reimported VR8 to provide more space.

It's important to check that the leather and wood veneer inside a RV8's cabin are both in excellent condition. Although cracked leather isn't unusual, it's vital that the hide is 'feed' regularly with a leather treatment. Leather and/or veneer repairs can be carried out by a specialist repairer, but obviously this will be an expensive task. Replacing a damaged or worn hood on an RV8 is no more complicated than with most roadsters, but it can be a fairly pricey procedure if carried out by a professional.

VALUES

Some guides may price a home-market RV8s slightly higher than a re-imported car from Japan, but this isn't always the case. Values of British- and Japanese-spec MG RV8s tend to be broadly similar. A high mileage, overall condition and the level of original equipment will far more likely to affect value of a RV8 and so will the colour of the bodywork surprisingly enough. Woodcote Green was by far the most popular choice – with 1269 RV8s finished in this shade, and that's why these days an original car with a rarer and more costly paint scheme (£750 when new), such as Old English White (just five cars), Flame Red (16 cars) or Black (18 cars) will be far more expensive today than green cars.



When it comes to prices, MGB RV8's have been on the rise over the last couple of years and it will be difficult to find a decent one under £12,000, but at that price it will probably have covered a comparatively high mileage and may have various cosmetic issues to deal with. Far better to invest £15,000–£20,000 in a genuinely well cared for example with a lower mileage. Meanwhile, buyers with larger budgets will be able to afford the best (or rarest coloured) RV8s on the market. At the time of writing topflight examples are changing hands for around £22,000 plus, while a currently advertised imported 'investment opportunity' that's allegedly only covered 687 kilometres (426 miles) from new is priced at a very ambitious and wallet busting £50,000.



Bargain Roadsters

Looking for an affordable sports car to enjoy a spot of topless summer motoring? We pitch an early MX-5 against a MGF to find out which one of these now very affordable sports cars we think comes out on top.

To the uninitiated, classic motoring is often thought of as a hobby enjoyed by well-heeled enthusiasts podding out thousands of pounds on expensive motorcars that only see the light of day when the sun shines. However, anyone reading this should be a convert to the cause and realise that's simply not true, as our hobby is recognised the world over as a fantastic social leveller.

With a host of interesting and very affordable cars hovering on the cusp of classic status, there's no need to spend a fortune to become a fully paid up member of the classic motoring 'club'. For once depreciation works in the favour of the buyer and a

very tidy Mk1 MX-5 or a well cared-for MGF can be picked up for well under a couple of grand.

Okay, so it's been said a dozen times before, but the MX-5 was the car that MG really should have produced to replace the ageing MGB. When the final incarnation of the much loved B bowed out in 1980, practical front-wheel drive hot hatches had taken over the two-seat soft top's crown. Although the MGB was well past its sell-by date, its demise left a yawning gap in the marketplace.

Up to then volume open-top sports car territory had been totally dominated by British manufacturers,

so it was a massive shock to the system when Mazda stepped up to the mark in 1989 and introduced the first generation of the hugely successful and now very affordable Mk1 MX-5.

It took another six years and a massive amount of investment from BMW, MG's then new parents, before the MGF made its public debut in late 1995. This transverse mid-engined sports car was probably the most hyped up new British car for years. Despite its rather stubby appearance, the new MG was initially very well received and today these mid-engined two-seaters represent excellent value for money. So with



excellent examples of both these very capable sportscars available today costing around the same as jetting off for a fortnight's break in the sun, it's simply down to a question of which car provides more summer fun – the traditional MX-5 or a mid-engined MGF?

MGF

First unveiled to the public in 1995, the MGF was developed in house by the Rover Group on a shoestring budget and became the first 'all new' MG-badged two-seat sports car to see the light of day since the covers came off the MGB back in 1962. Following the demise of the B and the

closure of MG's ancestral Abingdon home in 1980, the MG marque was kept alive by a string of 'hot' front-wheel drive saloons and hatchbacks but what the marque's fans really wanted was an affordable octagon-badged sports car.

It was only after the unexpected success of the 1992-launched MGB RV8 that Rover's Special Products department realised it had made the correct decision to continue developing a prototype mid-engined sports car known as PR3. With Rover's in-house design facilities fully occupied, the initial styling for the new sports car was put to an outside contractor, MGA Developments. The

brief was to produce a stylish two-seat, mid-engined sports car capable of tracing its roots back to the MG E-EX concept exhibited during the Eighties at an international motor show.

Power for the new MG roadster was to come from a four-cylinder K-series engine enlarged to 1.8-litres and mated to a five-speed gearbox/transaxle transversely mounted on a subframe located directly behind the passenger cabin. This configuration provided an excellent degree of front/rear weight distribution (45/55) and combined with Rover's fully independent Hydragas suspension system, gave the MGF highly predictable roadholding characteristics.

TWIN TEST: MAZDA MX-5 vs MGF



Where the entry-level 1.6-litre MGF could put out a healthy 110bhp, more powerful options used a VVC (Variable Valve Control) K-series engine able to produce a very respectable 143bhp. In the autumn of 1999 the externally revamped Mk2 was launched, the main changes being a re-tweaked interior and the option of a 1.6-litre powerplant. The MGF continued to sell well and in 2002 it was all change again when the heavily redesigned and re-engineered MG TF was unveiled.

One of the major changes to TF-badged cars was the replacement of the earlier model's Hydragas suspension with conventional coil springs. Under the bonnet, a new air induction system and revised camshaft profiles unleashed a few extra horsepower, while external changes included revisions to the headlights, front grille, bumpers, rear deck area and side vents.

Although the mid-engined MGF handles extremely well, the electrically operated power steering tends to 'desensitise' the feel of the steering somewhat. What is good though is the MGF's Hydragas

sprung chassis. Even though this unconventional set up is virtually the same as used on the Austin Metro/Rover 100, it has proved to be a very well engineered arrangement and as a result makes oversteer very hard to induce.

This set up, along with the position of the engine, puts the MGF's handling head and shoulders above the Mazda MX-5 and when pushed hard, the MG really does feel like it's cornering on rails. That said, the rear-wheel drive Mazda handles more like

a traditional sports car, so it's really down to personal preferences and driving habits as to which car is more enjoyable to drive when pressing on.

The MGF initially utilised the 1.6 litre Rover K-Series inline-four before the 118bhp fuel-injected 1.8-litre came on the scene but the introduction of a VVC version (Variable Valve Control) really spiced things up and with 143bhp on tap, these cars are great fun to drive.

However, all this pales into insignificance when it comes to the



MG's mid-engined layout can make access awkward for anything but basic checks.



In VVC form, the MGF is a genuinely brisk car.

now very desirable MGF Trophy 160. Power for the uprated 160 came from a tuned version of the 1.8 litre VVC engine and other modifications included a lowered and stiffer suspension set-up, while AP Racing four-pot front brake calipers helped supply the stopping power.

Although the MX-5 dominated the two-seat soft-top market in just about every major market, the MGF contained just enough 'Britishness' to keep the MG name alive in this very competitive sector. The only fly in the

ointment was the long-term reliability of the K-Series engine.

Problems with blown head gaskets resulting from the engine overheating were down to the factory using plastic dowels to locate the cylinder head onto the block. Over time these dowels would move and this would eventually lead to a blown head gasket and in a worst case scenario, a scrap cylinder head due to the alloy 'cooking'.

Fitting steel dowels and a multi-layer head gasket went some way to cure the K Series engine's woes, but

properly sorted these sandwich-style constructed engines were brilliantly engineered and noted for their light weight and efficiency. If the car's history doesn't show a recent head gasket change, budget for one and get the job done as soon as possible.

That should avoid any nasty surprises later on and while the head is off, treat the engine to a new cam belt and also fit a new water pump and thermostat. The good news is that parts supply for the MGF/TF is excellent and there's an impressive network of specialist workshops, as well as the MG Car Club and MG Owners' Club on hand to offer help and advice when needed.

MAZDA MX-5

Officially recognised as the world's best selling open-topped sports car, the MX-5 was rumoured to have been Mazda's modern incarnation of the original Lotus Elan injected with a smattering of DNA extracted from British and Italian sports cars, such as the MGB and Alfa Romeo Spider. Prior to the introduction of the MX-5 in 1989, Mazda wasn't a company known for producing exciting cars. However, by the mid-1970s Mazda was seriously considering producing a sports car utilising an existing front-wheel drive train set-up taken from the corporate parts bin.

A combination of American motoring journalist Bob Hall badgering one of his contacts at Mazda's head office together the company's special projects department's desire to develop a niche car was said to have persuaded the board to change its mind and opt for a front engine, rear-wheel drive format for the new sports car. The eventual result of this two-pronged approach was the Mazda MX-5 roadster (known as the Eunos at home and Miata in the US) perfectly filling a very important niche in the marketplace.

Just like the original Elan, the sporting Mazda featured a backbone style chassis connecting the front



Spot the Rover part: cabin isn't quite up to Japanese quality standards.

TWIN TEST: MAZDA MX-5 vs MGF

and rear subframes. Mazda called this one-piece aluminium pressing a 'Powerplant Frame', which means the MX-5's one-piece steel bodywork can be lifted clear of what in essence is a rolling chassis.

Another interesting Elan feature was the Mazda's pop up headlights and the first officially imported MX-5s landed in the UK in early 1990. Power came from a free-revving 114bhp 1.6 litre DOHC inline-four derived from the Mazda 323 mated to a five-speed gearbox. Although the choice of powerplant was a disappointment for some die-hard enthusiasts, what the MX-5 lacked in acceleration, it certainly made up for when it came to the handling stakes.

In 1994 the MX-5 received a minor facelift and a larger 1.8 litre DOHC 140bhp engine now joined the line up. The very different looking Mk2 came on stream in 1997, the most notable change being the car's revised front end now featuring fixed headlights. Although the Mk2 was slightly heavier than the model it replaced, the increased performance from the 1.8-litre engine produced a respectable zero to 60 mph time of 7.8 seconds and a top speed of 134 mph.

Further revisions produced what is now referred to as the six-speed Mk2.5 and in 2005 Mazda unveiled a heavily revised third generation. Further mechanical and styling updates resulted with the unveiling of the heavily restyled Mk4 in 2014.

The fact that the MX-5 is still in production is a testimony to the original design but despite the model's on-going success, it's the first generation MX-5 we're pitching against the MGF when it comes to comparing how these two very different cars are like to drive and own.

With its independent double-wishbone coil sprung front suspension and north-south front mounted engine driving the rear-wheels, the MX-5 offers what many enthusiasts consider a perfect compromise between ride quality



and fine high-speed handling. Anyone used to enthusiastically piloting a traditional 1960s-built British sports car will feel perfectly at home when installed behind the Mazda's wheel.

The car's low-set driving position means that all the controls fall to hand easily and the stubby gearlever slices through the five-forward ratios like a knife through hot butter. However, long legged occupants may find the Mazda's cabin rather cramped and when the canvas top is raised tall drivers will find the header rail at the top of the windscreen is directly in their eye line. This can make a long journey tiresome and the Mazda's low-down seating position will make overtaking HGVs on the motorway

more like duelling with a line of menacing monster trucks.

When compared to the MG, the Mazda offers a very different driving experience. The mid-engined F always seems to have its tyres planted deep into the tarmac when cornering hard, while the MX-5 will suddenly wag its tail if pushed to the limit. Applying a touch of opposite lock and keeping a steady right foot when the rear end starts to break away will result in the MX-5 quickly snapping back on track.

You have to be quick though, as it's very easy to miss the signs and quite a few inexperienced Mazda owners will have found themselves facing the way they came, having failed to keep a wayward rear end under



The MX-5's twin-cam engine was derived from the unit in the 323 saloon.



Both these cars offer fun behind the wheel even at modest speeds.

control. Even with the 1.6 powerplant underneath its bonnet, a MX-5 will still prove great fun to power along twisty back roads.

Quite a few grey-imported Eunos badged Mk1s will have found their way onto the UK market. These models tend to be better equipped than the officially imported cars and come with a number of desirable options, such as electric windows, auto transmission and air conditioning.

One urban myth that regularly does the rounds is that the grey-imported Japanese-market cars weren't rust proofed to the same standard as the export models. This has been proved to be false, as all MX-5, whatever badge is on the nose, all received

the same amount of factory applied body preservative.

As a weekend driver, the MX-5 does have one slight disadvantage over the MGF, and that's space to store overnight bags. The Mazda's boot is also home to the spare wheel and battery and this takes up a large chunk of space. Many owners resort to fitting a boot rack, while the MGF enjoys the luxury of having luggage space at the front, as well as a rear boot thanks to the mid-engined configuration.

Providing you buy a decent example in the first place, MX-5 ownership should be reasonably painless. Parts supply for these cars can only be described as excellent and there's also a large network of specialists to help if things do go

wrong. The first step to ownership is to join the excellent MX-5 Owners' Club and if you want to go down the modification route, the options and possibilities are almost endless.

VERDICT

It's very difficult to choose a winner between these two candidates and as we said earlier, it really does come down to personal taste. Yes, the Mazda's DOHC engine will probably be more reliable in the long term, but properly maintained the MG's punchy K-Series power unit can be equally trouble-free.

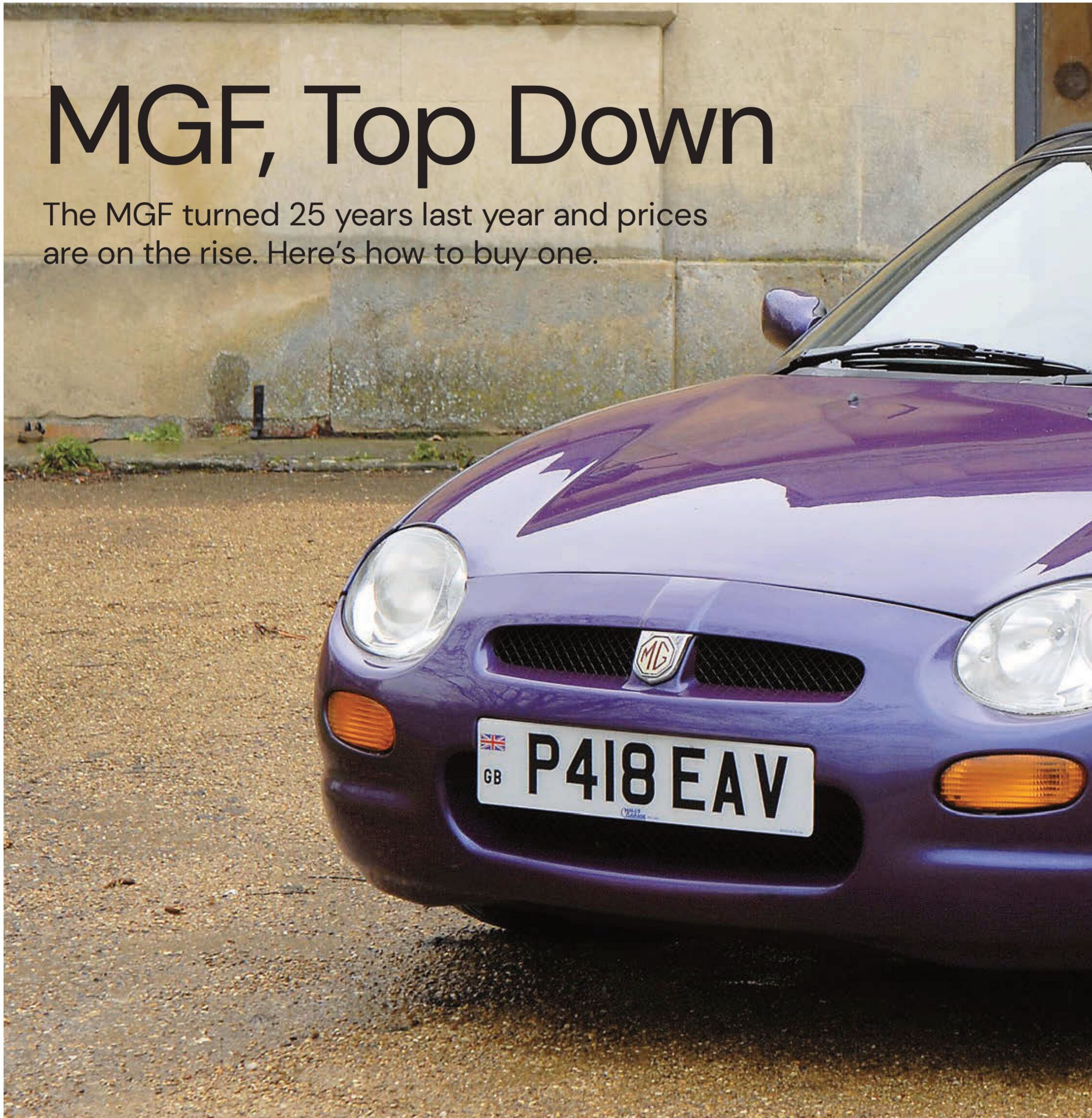
When it comes to choosing which one to buy, I'm really going to stick my neck out here and after driving hundreds of miles in several different types of MGFs and MX-5s, my vote's going on a Hydragas-sprung 1.8 VVC-equipped MGF.

Despite the shock and horror emanating from the MX-5's corner, a well-sorted gas-sprung MGF is a great car to drive enthusiastically. Not only does it hold the road like a limpet clutching a tube of superglue, the cabin is slightly larger than the Mazda's and there's more room for weekend luggage. Okay, so the last claim could be construed as a bit limp, but the sound of a well-sorted VVC K Series snorting away behind your head is pure magic, especially when powering the car out of a tight bend.



MGF, Top Down

The MGF turned 25 years last year and prices are on the rise. Here's how to buy one.



The idea of a new sports car for MG had been floating around design studios and management desks for more than a decade before the MGF actually came out in 1995. While the MG EX-E and MG F-16 concept cars had given the public suggestions but no promises, Mazda

swept in and actually did it. They got in first with their little roadster, the MX-5. Finally, Rover Group could give an emphatic, if somewhat late, green light to the MG roadster as a production model. Following the F-16 rather closely, it kept the general profile including provision for a mid-mounted

engine but the nose was changed to something more evocative of the MGB.

On release in 1995, the MGF was available in two forms; a standard 1.8-litre, 115bhp model, and a high-performance 143bhp model that featured a clever variable valve control system allowing the Rover



K-series unit to rev to 7200rpm. Equipment levels were pretty generous, although early non-VVC models made do without standard power steering. In 1998 and 1999, two special models were introduced; the Abingdon and the 75, both offering special trim and colour options. In

late 1999, the whole MGF range was facelifted and today it's these later cars that probably appeal most to prospective buyers. These cars featured higher levels of equipment, including new seats, extended interior trim design details, and a new six speaker stereo system. The VVC

models also left the standard 15" wheels behind for newly designed 16" items, wearing wider rubber. Mechanically, all these facelifted cars also benefitted from revised electric power steering systems and cylinder head designs, two of the biggest issues identified on the early MGF.

BUYING GUIDE: MGF

Introduced in the summer of 2000, the Wedgewood SE was another desirable example of the type set by the previous special editions in offering special trim and a unique blue colour. The Freestyle was introduced in 2001 and was the most sporting of the special editions, picking up on certain exotic details seen on the options list and some even from the Trophy 160. The most focussed MGF, the Trophy 160 came out in spring 2001. This car featured a lowered and stiffer suspension, uprated brakes, special aerodynamic addenda, plus a fettled engine to bring power up to its namesake 160ps, or 158bhp. At the same time, there was a new basic version of the MGF featuring much less kit and a revvy 1.6-litre engine. For those who wanted a more relaxed MGF, an automatic, continuously variable transmission had been introduced the previous year. Available from 2000, this was called the Steptronic, perhaps pinching some of the

marketing capital earned by Porsche with its Tiptronic. In 2002, the MGF was overhauled and re-released as the MG TF.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

BODYWORK

Most MGFs still look good today, thanks to owners who are usually devoted to their upkeep and what has proven to be rather effective rust-proofing from the factory. However, there are still places to cast a careful eye over. The paint quality on MGFs is good but can hide scratches and swirls from over-eager polishers, so try to inspect the paintwork under good light. As far as rust goes, the worst areas tend to be at the leading edge of the front wings, along the sills, especially at the join with the rear wings, and on the boot lid near the number plate trim. Also look carefully at the air intakes on the side, where water and dirt can get trapped in between the bodywork and plastic mesh cover.

Underneath, things should be solid so don't be dismissive of any significant corrosion. If you see damage or rust on the front and rear subframes, it's probably worth walking away unless you're prepared to invest a good deal of time and/or money. It can also be worth checking under the front bonnet for signs of crash damage.

ENGINE

Under the rear boot lid lies the engine because of course the MGF is mid-engined. This location can present a variety of unique issues to consider. The restricted access can make replacing things like alternator belts, exhausts, and fuel delivery components that bit more time consuming.

Vents on the boot lid can let in water, often dropping directly onto the engine block itself and can cause issues with the ignition system. Early cars are the most vulnerable because they have two coil packs serving two



Main luggage area is in the tail. It may be an odd shape but it's as big as a Mk1 Mazda MX-5.

One of the original selling points of the MGF was the comfortable ride offered by the Hydragas system, but with spheres no longer available many are being converted to coil springs.



spark plugs each, with long leads, offering plenty of opportunities for water ingress. Post-facelift cars have coil packs on top of the engine and tend to be less vulnerable. Issues with the ignition system will result in difficulties in the engine starting, especially when cold, although be aware that this could also be a fuel pump on the way out.

When talking about the Rover K-series unit we of course have to mention the risk of head gasket failure. Many have since had

overhauled cooling systems and multi-layer gasket upgrades, but it's still something to be sharp on. Look at the condition of the coolant and oil for the usual signs of contamination, although beware that cars not run for a while or recently used for short trips especially in the winter months can display some milkiness on the dipstick. If unsure, it's best to try and inspect the oil cap on top of the engine, accessed beneath a bolted-on panel – bring your 10mm socket and ratchet. Another thing to watch

is the running temperature when on a test drive, both oil and water should warm up steadily and then sit at their optimum, with oil temperature subject to change if driven hard.

Listen out for running smoothness, especially once warm, as the K-series should generally be a quiet unit, only making the right noises when pressed. Any rattling could be a sign of loose cam bolts, which can break and become a nightmare to fix. VVC models can emit a rattling from the right side of the engine signifying wear in the variable valve control camshaft, another expensive thing to fix.

GEARBOX AND DRIVETRAIN

The PG1 5-speed manual gearbox used across the MGF range is well proven and generally solid. The same gearset is used across all models, with a shorter final ratio used for VVC equipped cars to keep the higher-revving engine on the boil. The change should be positive and precise, albeit with a long throw. Any signs of sloppiness could indicate worn linkages or, at worst, wear in the gearbox from wanting an oil change. Also note that both clutch and handbrake cables are sensitive to adjustment.



Mid-engined layout makes access tricky but it's vital to keep an eye on the coolant.

BUYING GUIDE: MGF



SUSPENSION

Along with the head gasket issues, one of the biggest things to watch for when buying an MGF is the suspension, namely the Hydragas system. Any system that hasn't had attention for over a decade is more often than not going to be operating at sub-optimum levels. The nitrogen gas inside leaks out of the porous rubber seals and eventually the suspension units' ability to provide a supple ride is dramatically reduced. Cars that ride stiffly and sit low (the distance between the wheel centre cap and the wheel arch should be around 35cm) will probably need a re-gas. Very few cars will have been upgraded with aftermarket units that can be re-gassed, so the options are usually like-for-like Hydragas sphere replacement or a coilover conversion, both considerably expensive.

Rear shock absorber mounts are also known weak spots, sometimes even to the point where they split. It's worth noting that stiff-riding cars with worn-out Hydragas spheres can apply serious stress onto suspension mounting points.

ELECTRICS AND ACCESSORIES

Plenty of the MGF's interior switchgear has the blessing of

Honda's detailed component engineering and development, so it generally holds up rather well. One issue is with the standard stereo system, which only provides two paltry speakers and so is pretty susceptible to abuse when compensating for roof-down wind noise. Cars with speakers behind the seat backs should have fared better.

Make sure that the wipers work too, because the linkages are known to fail and can be tricky to replace. Also check that the headlights are producing a strong beam of light, as headlight casings and reflectors often become opaque with age.

If the MGF you've gone to see has

failed power steering then you might not need to run too far, because it can be a simple fix. Usually it can just be a 40-amp fuse found under the front bonnet or, if the issue is temperamental, a faulty ECU found behind the glovebox. Neither will break the bank. If the mechanism is at fault then this will be more of a problem as it's part of the steering column and more difficult to access.

TYRES

MGFs are known to be particularly sensitive to tyre choice, as might be expected for a mid-engined car. The general wisdom is that a directional pattern and strong sidewall are



Front 'boot' doesn't offer space for much except the spare wheel.



Hydragas spheres tend to have lost their gas by now and need replacing.

essential. The Goodyear tyres originally fitted to early MGFs are no longer in production but there is a good range of options available today and even high-end tyres don't cost the earth.

Those with early cars with 15" wheels will want to look at the Yokohama Advan series, such as the Fleva V701, available in 195/50mm and 205/50mm profiles. This series of tyre was developed with Toyota's MR-2 in mind, and in fact the Japanese company's vested interest was the only thing in the way of these being fitted to the MGF when new. Later cars tend to have 16" wheels, particularly the VVC models. For these, the Toyo Proxes range has long been popular, although some will recommend BF Goodridges as better all-rounders. The larger 16" wheels were fitted with 215/40mm tyres from new, except Trophy 160 and later MGTf models which went to 195/45mm tyres on the front. Today, most enthusiasts extoll the benefits of the same size tyre front and rear as it reduces the understeer inherent in the chassis' original balance, making the most of the MGF's sporting character.

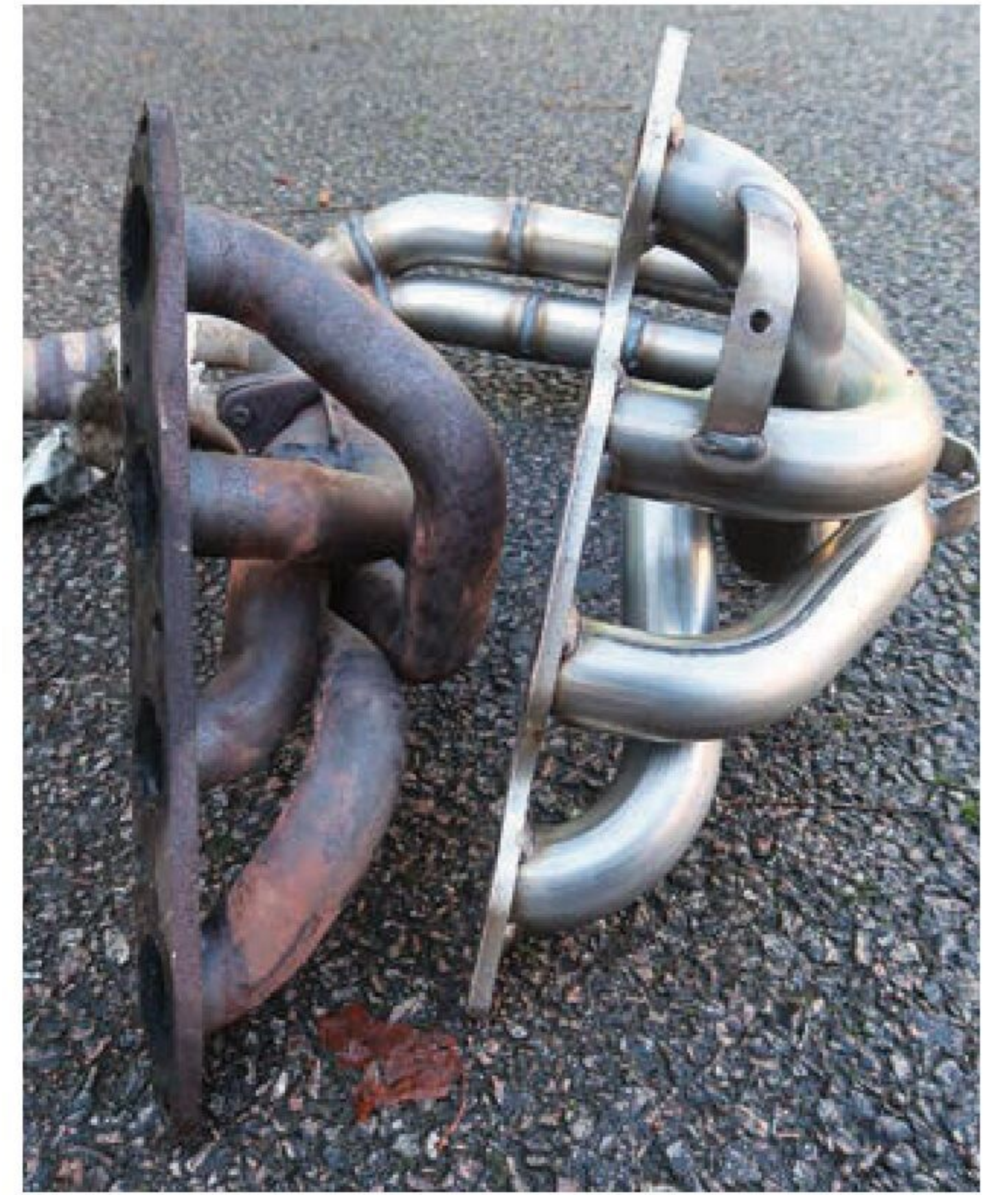
IMPROVE

The aftermarket scene for the MGF is so vast and full of options that

an entire guide could be written about it and still miss out things. As far as mechanical modifications go, there are some go-to options that the go-faster enthusiast should be particularly aware of though.

Suspension upgrades range from the newly available fully re-gassed Hydragas units to a complete coilover conversion. There are also comprehensive polyurethane bushing kits that cost a few hundred pounds but can work wonders with the car's dynamic behaviour. Replacing the rubber bushes in the suspension arms and along the anti-roll bars can dramatically sharpen the car's responses.

Increasing the go of Rover's K-series is best achieved by increasing its ability to breathe. Full induction kits are popular but are quite expensive and not as effective as imagined, especially compared with the simple panel filters from Piper Cross or K&N. Opening up the exhaust can be hugely beneficial, especially if with a 4-2-1 manifold that replaces the relatively weedy standard item. When combined with a Daytona or Trevor Taylor exhaust, it can unlock a good 10-15bhp from a VVC unit. If getting this serious, you might also consider a 52mm throttle body, as fitted to the



Larger exhaust components help K-series breathe better, like this stainless steel 4-2-1.

Trophy and later TF models, to replace the standard MGF's 48mm unit.

To stop it all, a popular upgrade is to retrofit the four-pot callipers from the MG TF160, although some specialists now offer a two-piston setup. Rimmer Bros will sell you their AP Racing big brake kit for a shade under £250, which includes the big callipers and a sizeable disc brake upgrade. Check that they'll fit early cars with 15" wheels though.

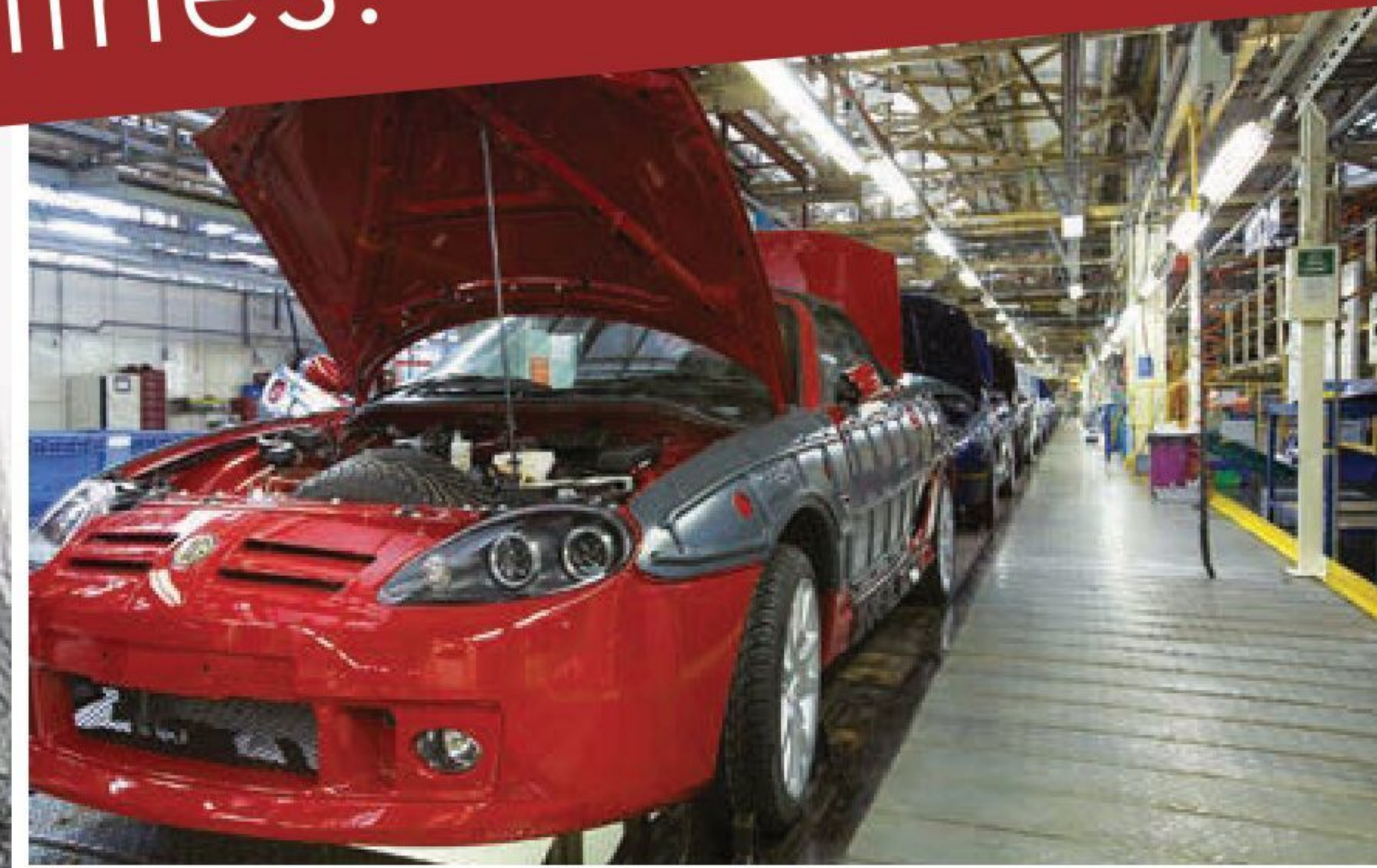
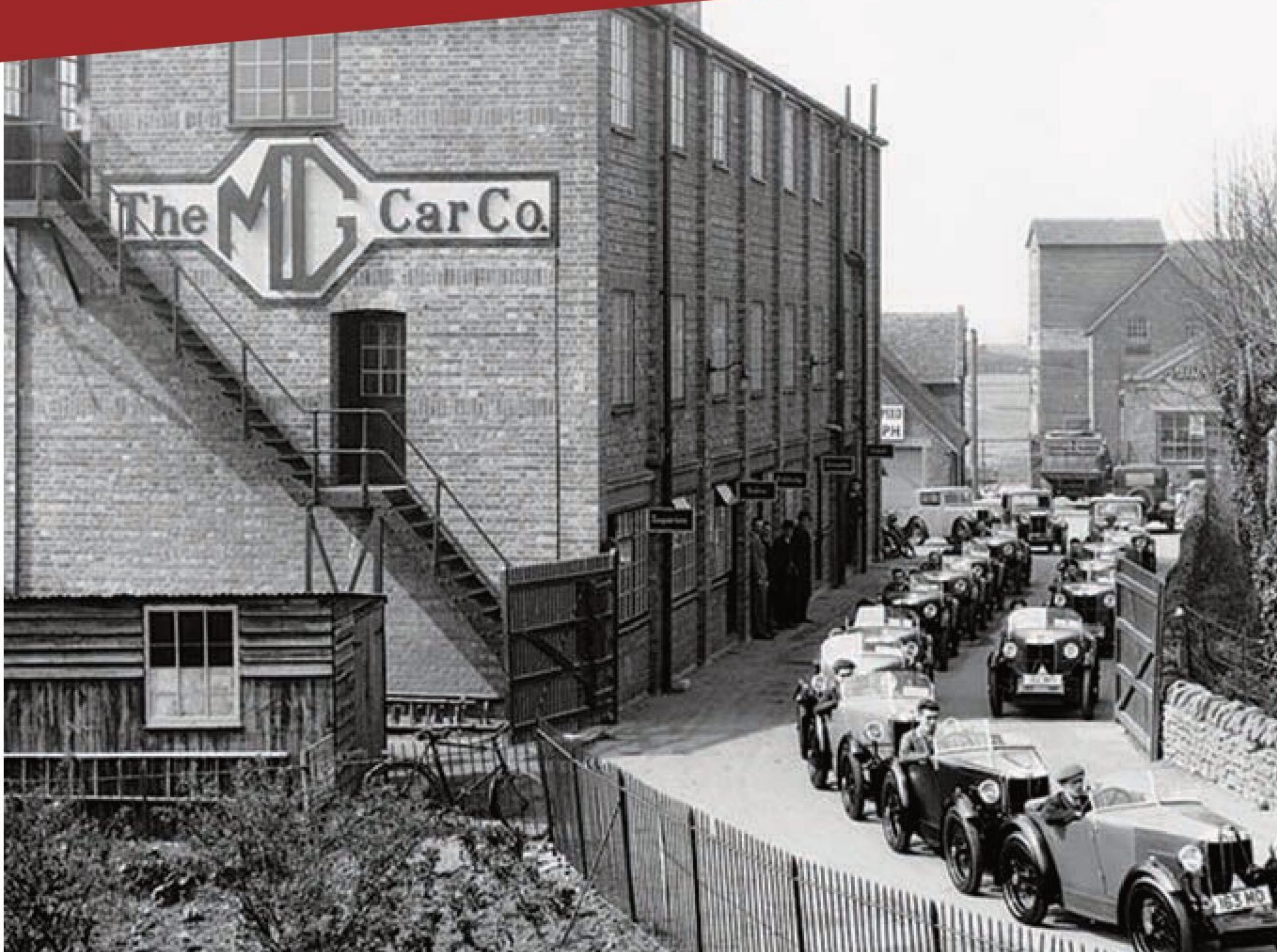
VALUES

Values are already on the rise for the MGF. While it's still possible to buy one for around £500, you're likely buying into a car that needs lots of work. At the top end of the market cars that were recently struggling to push past £5000 are now well on their way to £10,000. If you're looking for something ready to run and pile the miles onto, look out for well-cared for but nearing-100,000 mile examples. Low-mileage, special edition cars offer the best investment opportunities. For now, buying an MGF is still an affordable way to get into a mid-engined sports, with all the benefits to be gained from plenty of cars being parted out as well as an extensive and devoted enthusiast community.



THE MG FACTORIES

We look at the the history of the MG factories and production lines.



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MG MEMORIES: REBORN IN THE 1990s



This third bookazine in the MG Memories series takes a look at the rebirth of MG in the 1990s, the decade of Brit-pop, political shifts and zigga-zig-ahh!

The decade opened with the famous octagon on badge-engineered Metro, Maestro and Montego models, but with production of those cars ending MG went back to its roots and reaffirmed its presence as a sports car maker to the world in 1993 with the RV8. An open-top two-seater, with a V8 up-front and power to the rear, the RV8 captured the essence of the MGB and flew the MG flag to good effect until the ground-breaking MGF was ready for launch in 1995. Single-handedly rescuing the brand, the MGF was every bit a traditional MG – small, nimble, sporty and fantastic to drive. Such was the success of the MGF, that at the end of the '90s MG once more waved its wand over the Rover fleet and introduced the sporting ZR/ZS/ZT cars into the new millennium.

In this issue, read about the history of this journey, illustrated with pictures of the cars, prototypes and development shots, and find out what these cars are like on the road.

