

## Classic Choice

# MGB

By BRIAN PALMER

**The Prime Minister Mr Harold Macmillan opened the amazing new underground car park at Hyde Park and an underpass relieving congestion in this famous areas was also opened. The Government published a draft report on the proposed Severn Bridge. Over in the United States Jim Clark won the Grand Prix in his Lotus 25-Climax but lost the World Championship to Graham Hill. At the Motor Show at Earls Court stars were the Ford Consul Cortina, the fast Jensen CV8, Colin Chapman's clever Elan suitably named, and Sir William Lyons new Daimler-Jag V8-250. Also announced was a successor to the MGA, named, logically, the MGB 1800. The date? 1962.**

**S**O, almost now into its seventeenth year the evergreen MGB, almost an institution, a kind of motoring "Mousetrap" goes on selling steadily. But the end must be in sight for in a recent interview with Sir Michael Edwardes in the *Sunday Telegraph* he revealed that plans were already in hand for the 1980s to have but one sports car "family." Almost inevitably, with an expanded TR7 range in the offing, that must mean the end of MG or at least placing the near sacred octagon onto the front of the "flying wedge". Whatever happens the end is nigh for the "B". So if a new "B" is your fancy perhaps you had better place an order now. . . . . But our main concern in this series is to help you find a good used car, so let's first look at the history of the highly successful MGB.

The MGB was introduced in 1962 and cost a basic £690 with a total, including purchase tax, of £949. 15s. 3d. Unlike the previous model it joined the ranks of the Sprite/Midget in its use of integral chassis and body construction. The traditional MG sports car was now dead — and yet it somehow managed to retain the very essence that is MG. The engine was the familiar 'B' series overhead valve and pushrod engine suitably bored out to give 1798cc, while a higher compression ratio than the MGA led also to an increase in output, to 95bhp, and the car gained a slightly improved speed per 1000 revs in top gear as a result of a higher final drive ratio in spite of smaller 14 inch wheels. Thus the car was more flexible than the "A", some might say more "touring" than sports, but this undoubtedly widened the cars appeal considerably. Even so the "B" could show a clean pair of heels right through

the range over the "A" while its top speed was a little higher. All this and wind up windows too!

Abingdon have, over the years, looked at a number of possible replacements but they either felt that the prototypes were just not good enough or, more probably, they just lacked the money to finance the operation, a situation which was not helped by the frequent changes to the parent company and constant course correction in corporate policy. Whatever the reasons the end result was a car which was steadily developed and improved and while certain journalists cried out for something new to try and called the B nasty names in the process, the customer got what he wanted: an honest, straight forward, rugged and reliable vehicle in which to have some fun. And why knock that?

As a guide I will list the main changes that have occurred over the years:

**1963/1965 Model Year** Laycock overdrive available as an optional extra. In Sept 64' the three bearing engine was replaced by one with five bearings. The previously optional oil cooler was standardised and an electronically operated rev-counter replaced the earlier mechanical one. MGB GT introduced October 65 — Salisbury-type rear axle adopted. Tourers used it from July '67.

**1968 Model Year** — introduction of Mk.11 model. All synchromesh gearbox adopted. (Oct '67) Optional Borg Warner Type 35 automatic transmission. Alternator fitted and car given negative-earth electrics.

**1970 Model Year** Vestigial traditional radiator replaced by recessed grille. Rostyle wheels (but wires still available). British Leyland badges on wings. Reclining seats fitted.

**1972 Model Year** — Introduction of Mk 111 models (as from May 1971). Revised fascia layout and tumbler switches. Fresh air vents. Brush nylon seat covers.

**1973 Model Year** — Improved radiator grille with chromed surround and black mesh. Leather trimmed alloy-spoked steering wheel. Radial ply tyres standardised on British market.

**1974 Model Year** — Hazard warning flashers fitted (British market only). Brake Servo standardised (ditto). Automatic transmission option removed.

**1974 (Sept)** — Ride height increased. Moulded polyurethane bumpers, notably front "cow-catcher". Twin 6-volt batteries scrapped in favour of single 12-volt battery.

**1974 (Dec)** — LH overdrive specified instead of original D-type.

**1975 (June)** — Overdrive standardised.  
**1977** — Restyled fascia including grouped instruments. Striped fabric trim. Halogen headlamps (British market). Tinted glass on MGB GT. Suspension changes including anti-roll bars front and rear. Thermostatically controlled electric cooling fan. Overdrive switch on gear lever knob.

### Engines and transmission

The 1798cc engine, bore and stroke 80.26 × 88.9mm, is of B-Series stock which dates back to an Austin unit of 1947 vintage. It has a cast-iron block and cast-iron cylinder head having siamesed inlet ports and a siamesed centre exhaust port. Up to chassis number 48765 a three bearing crank was employed and these early engines are said to be a shade more eager, though the penalty is a tendency to break the crankshaft with continual hard use. After the five bearing crank had been installed this was no longer a problem. The units are rugged and reliable and have no really serious inherent faults as a result. You should expect them to be happy for around 100,000 miles before major overhaul, and only normal checks for oil burning and funny noises need be made when looking for one to buy. The biggest bonus of all is that parts are cheap (comparatively) and plentiful should you need to do an overhaul. In short the engine is the least of your problems when purchasing an MGB — better to go for one with a clapped engine and a good body than the other way around. It may just be that as a swan-song the B will receive the new O Series engine which would be a logical development in production terms — in which case MG will have come full circle in going from a push-rod engine back to one with a single overhead camshaft.

Now on to the transmission which is not quite so straight forward. As introduced the MGB shared exactly the same gearbox as the last of the MGAs with the exception of the remote gearchange extension. With the introduction of the MK 11 came the all-synchromesh gearbox which used some components used in the MGC and the Austin 3-litre. This gearbox is still in use on the "B" and also Leyland light commercial vehicles employing the B-Series engine. Over the years ratios have been changed and I will merely list the important dates rather than give chapter and verse: 1967 — 1974; 1975 — 6; 1977 to date.

Overdrive became available in 1963 using the old-type gearbox and was again featured on the later-type gearbox, finally to be standardised in 1975. The switch was on the fascia to the extreme right (other side for 1hd) until 1977 model year when it moved to the top of the gearlever knob like the Triumph Stag and others. Most pundits will tell you to shun a non-overdrive model but these have their protagonists too — non overdrive models have a slightly higher rear axle ratio at 4.1 compared to 3.9 on overdrive models. Certainly there are people around who do not like overdrive — some will say it is a crude way of avoiding having a gearbox with properly chosen ratios (probably five) in the first place and they do not like all the flicking in and out that it involves. And of course it is something else to go wrong, especially as it is electrically activated. Replacement solenoids are about £20 incidentally!

Finally as most scribes tell you to avoid them there is just the chance that you might pick one up at a slightly lower price. Alongside the introduction of the MK11 all-synchromesh gearbox came an automatic option which less than 4,000 people saw fit to request, so it was quietly dropped at the end of the 1973 model year. As a parting shot on the overdrive front it is vital that additives are not poured into a gearbox with overdrive fitted as this will cause big problems. The manufacturers of these products should be consulted if you are in favour of additives as they will be able to supply you with a special type suitable for the task.

Now to the back of the car: two rear axle types have been used. Once again the early cars share components virtually identical to the MGAs built from 1955 to 1962. With the introduction of the MGB GT a new more robust Salisbury-type axle was used in preference to the earlier

banjo type. Also certain changes to the body were necessary to accommodate the later larger axle, and there were additional changes in the region of the toe board and gearbox tunnel on the MK 11s.

An odd and annoying feature of later type MGBs with manual gearboxes is the noise that emanates from the gearlever and which can lead the unwary into thinking that there is wear in the 'box. However a more likely cause is the knob itself for it is made of plastic and seems to respond to resonance at certain frequencies. A cure can be effected by replacing the knob with an earlier one with a soft rubber insert or by drilling out the existing one and fitting this rubber bush.

#### Suspension, steering and brakes

Once again the front wishbone and coil spring suspension is a recognisable development of the MGA and even the TF and TD before it. There are differences

but these are slight, though the spring and dampers are certainly softer than the A. Because the B was a monocoque a special detachable front cross-member was added to support the entire front suspension and steering units. It is a pretty trouble free form of suspension and only the parts you would expect to wear need attention every so often ie dampers, springs and bushes. The outer bushes on the wishbone arms tend to perish before the inner bushes and usually on the bit that shows before the rest inside the wishbone eye. Nevertheless it is as well to replace them if they have reached this stage, and anyway a sharp MoT man may not pass a car showing these symptoms. Most of these jobs can be tackled without major stripping down, but if you decide to carry out a complete suspension overhaul, the cross-member will have to come out and the brake hydraulics will be disturbed in the process.

The back of the car could not be more straight forward as good old fashioned leaf springs lurk there. A hearty sigh of relief, therefore, that the original design ideas of having an independent set-up never materialised.

The disc and drum braking system is also a straight forward affair, and parts are easily available. Occasionally trouble may be experienced with the handbrake not operating properly, but these are often matters of adjustment, and easily remedied.

The steering too, being rack and pinion, is not especially prone to trouble, but if you are checking it there should be very little free movement at the steering wheel. Also the rack gaiters must not be split around the convolutions otherwise they will be failed by an MoT examiner.

#### Bodywork

And now the crunch! Like all monocoques the body is the drawback when looking for a classic to buy. The MGB is no exception to the rule, and as I said earlier it is a sound idea to go for a car with a good body even if the mechanics are not up to scratch rather than the other way around. However, that said, MG fanciers are luckier than most in that spares, including body panels, are easily available through the comprehensive services of the MG Owners Club and through various trade outlets not least of which the MG Agents of BL Cars. Alternatively if you've always promised yourself a "B" you can still order one new from the manufacturers — while if you do it through the aforementioned MG Owners Club a 12½% discount can be yours.



Top, 1973 model year B's had a recessed grille. Left, this V8 derivative, which we do not cover in this article, shows the "normal" grille. Below, 1974 (Sept) saw the introduction of rubber bumper/grille assemblies throughout the range — MGB and MGB GT in foreground.



The roomy cockpit of the B with the hood neatly stowed away. Note reclining seats.

# MGB

If it is a second hand example you are after, these are the places to watch. Roadster doors tend to split below the  $\frac{1}{2}$  light. Filling is not generally satisfactory, leading is to be preferred. Alternatively new door skins are available through the MG Owners Club at about £12-13 each.

One of the main easily noticeable areas is the rear wheel arch and again the club can supply the parts. The bottoms of the front wings also go but these are often less easily spotted than the rears — however part repair sections can be purchased from the MG Owners Club. If the "B" you fancy is one of the older type the jacking points are worth a thorough check because they *do* corrode, and the time when you have a flat tyre miles away from anywhere in the pouring rain is not the best time to find out about it. Also on older models, particularly if its led a hard life, the floor pan under the driver and passenger can be a danger point — so lift up the carpets and have a good dig with a large screw driver. Door locks are poorly designed and often rotate without doing anything — they can be repaired but are tricky, but the MG Owners Club will tell you how.

The sills I have left to last because they are by far the most important area on the car. Naturally, being monocoque, they are structural so especial care is needed when checking these. Outers are more obvious and easier to replace but inners required rather more work — sills are somewhat expensive too. Once replaced they will last much longer and reward the expense and trouble if you inject them with a proprietary sealant.

Exhausts are readily available at £40-50 retail but MGOC members can benefit from discounts which brings the price down to £23-30. Cars made before 1974 have the dubious distinction of having two 6-volt batteries mounted beneath the parcel shelf in cradles. Thus they are exposed to all the "muck and bullets" and are generally out of sight and out of mind in the maintenance stakes — until

they go flat! Then the hapless owner is faced with a bill for around £26·60 retail, but again the MG Owners Club are able to come to the rescue with a price almost exactly half that. Additionally they can help owners with the 75/76 models, which suffer from poorer handling than most, by offering a kit to modify the suspension.

We do not have space to go into great detail in this series preferring to outline the main problem areas. However the MG Owners Club and the MGB Centre at Redditch (John Hill the Proprietor is also an MGOC Spares Secretary) can supply publications, on application, which detail procedures for restoring bodywork on MGBs. So the moral seems to be here join the MG Owners Club.

## Production figures:

	MGB MK1 Tourer	MGB MK1 GT	MGB MK11 + MK111 Tourer	MGB GT MK11 & 111
1962	4518			
1963	23308			
1964	26541			
1965	24179	524		
1966	22675	10241		
1967	14568	11067	560	329
1968	108	3	17247	8349
1969			18896	12134
1970			23866	12704
1971			22511	12169
1972			26222	13171
1973			19546	10208
1974			19713	9638
1975			19967	4609
1976			25860	3698
1977			24482	4198

## Clubs, publications, how much?

The MG Owners Club address is: 13 Church End, Over, Cambridgeshire, CB4 5NH, Tel: Swavesey (0954) 31125 and their helpful Secretary is Roche Bentley. Their main forte is on spares and technical info, and they are currently the largest one make car club in the UK with over 7,000 members.

Another club is the MG Car Club, which is predominantly social and competition minded. They can be contacted at 67 Wide Bargate, Boston, Lincs.

The MGB Centre address is 45 Prospect Hill, Redditch, Worcs, B97 4BS.

Whilst there are any number of books on the marque MG, the one which will be a must because it deals specifically with the MGA, B & C models is Graham Robson's exhaustive work in MRP's Collector's Guide Series, price £6·40 and available from Connoisseur Carbooks, 28 & 32 Devonshire Road, Chiswick, London, W4. (Tel 01-994 6783). The question of price is a more difficult one than usual partly because the model spans such a long period of time and also because it is still currently in production. Morevoer Glass' Guide etc may not be much of a help here because they do not take into consideration the collectability of these cars, which inevitably alters values. For example the condition is likely to be of greater importance to the prospective owner than the year of manufacture. However it is fair to say that a pre-66 example needing a complete rebuild (and people *are* doing this now) can be had for £100-250, while a complete MoT pass car in need of attention would fetch £350-500. For someone with £1000 to spend a fair 1971/2 car should be possible or a very good 1970 model or a poor 1973 model. While a good 1973 example might fetch £14-1550. GT's are more stable but tend to be in greater demand in the Autumn: a 1973 model might be found in a private sale for £14-1550 while a 74 would be £1700 up depending on condition. The best advice is to see as many examples as possible — there's no shortage of them, or get in touch with the MG Owners Club who advertise a good many, offer a car seeker service, and will even send you free (with a large sae) a publication called Buying MG which gives you all the whys and wherefores. Truly, never have so few served so many for so little! ●

Below, problem area on the B and how it can be rectified. The area around the rear wheel arch is particularly vulnerable. Panel is available from John Hill's MGB/C Centre.

