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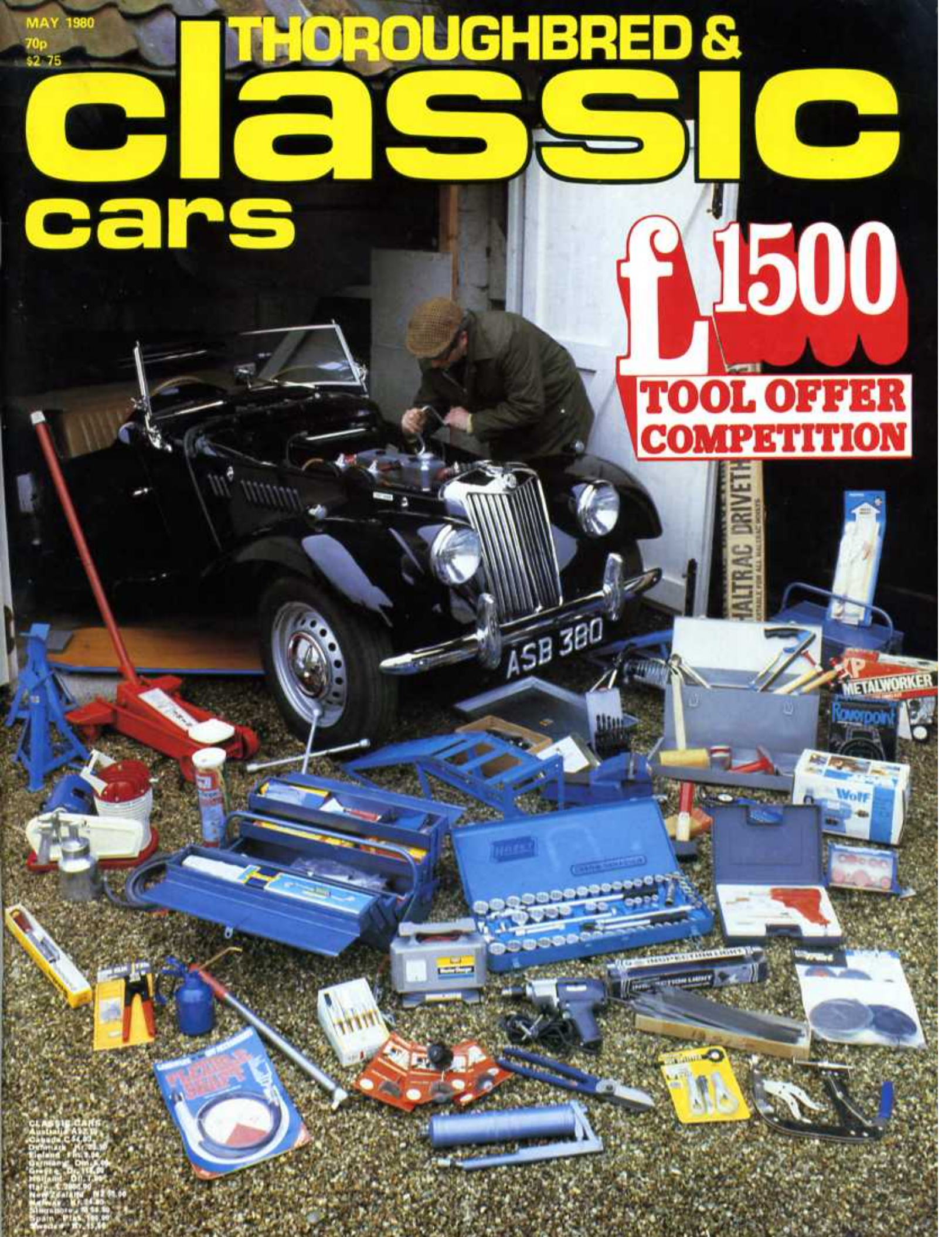
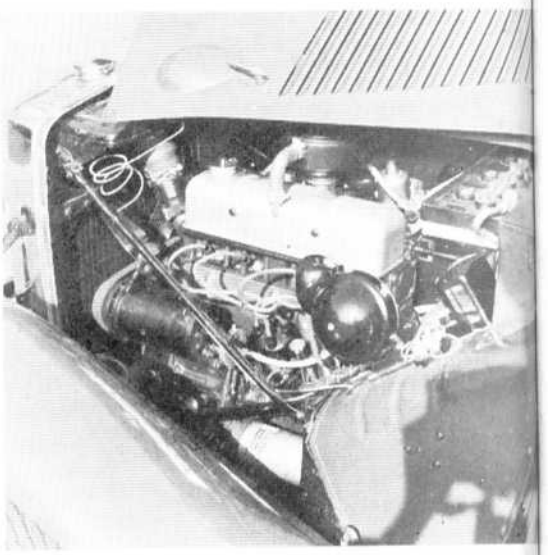


Classic choice MG TC/D/F

Jonathan Wood tells you what to look for if you're thinking of buying a T series MG.

TCs in America; cars pictured at a 1949 trans-Atlantic gathering.



Above, the XPAG 1250cc engine of the TD, the basic unit that also powered the TC and TF.

Below, members of the Derbyshire police collecting TCs from Abingdon in 1946.

THE T series MG is for many the personification of the marque. Yet ironically the first of the line, the TA of 1936, symbolised a fresh and less refined approach, the result of Morris rather than MG thinking. For up until 1935 practically all the products of the Abingdon factory were powered by Wolseley based single overhead camshaft engines but in that year William Morris sold the MG Car Company to his mighty Morris Motors. The overhead camshaft engines were replaced by pushrod Wolseley and Morris based designs and although the diehards didn't like it up went MG production and profits.

The TA package was the familiar two door two seater body with full length wings, first offered on the 1933/4 J2. The chassis differed little in layout from the Midgets that preceeded it though it was altogether larger. A partly boxed channel section chassis, underslung at the rear, was employed. Under the bonnet was a 1292cc Wolseley Ten based engine, a pushrod four with white metal bearings and cork faced clutch which in the traditional Morris manner ran in engine oil. Costing £222 the TA remained available until early 1939 when it was replaced by the TB. Though externally similar, it was powered by a new engine, being a Morris Ten derived 1250cc pushrod four with dry plate clutch and a new close ratio gearbox. Before the TB got into its stride, output was abruptly halted by the outbreak of the Second World War and afterwards it went into production, late in 1945, as MGs only model being renamed the TC. Modifications included the replacement of the sliding trunnion suspension, a feature which dated back to the C-type Midget of 1931, conventional shackles taking their place. New shock absorbers were also fitted and the body widened four inches across the cockpit. So what was an already anachronistic design was perpetuated by Britain's urgent post war need for foreign currency. Of the 10,000 TCs built between 1945 and 1949 no less than 6592 were exported and of these only 2001 went to America. Yet its impact in that Continent was enormous.

In 1947 the T type was joined by the Y saloon, another pre-war design with box section chassis and coil and wishbone independent front suspension the latter designed by none other than Alec Issigonis. (It is still going strong on the MGB incidentally). The TC replacement was the TD of 1950. This was based on a shortened version of the Y type chassis though overslung rather than underslung at the rear, employing that model's independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering. But the independent layout meant disc wheels and the bodywork was four inches wider than the TC that made the car look noticeably different from its predecessor. The TD was even more popular than the TC, about three times as many being produced between 1949 and 1953.

Things then got complicated with the creation of BMC in 1952. Len Lord the new Corporation's head asked Abingdon, amongst others, to produce a prototype sports car and EX 175, with up to date full width bodywork, was the result. Unfortunately for MG, Lord chose the Healey 100 which went into production with an Austin prefix in 1953 and the prototype was therefore sidelined. All MG could do was to face lift what was an already archaic design and the outcome was the TF of 1954. The TD lines were, in retrospect, much improved, the bonnet line being lowered and a sloping radiator grill with imitation cap replaced the original radiator. Seats were now bucket and wire wheels were offered as an option, while the TF's rear end also sloped to compliment the front of the car. Power was provided by a mildly tuned version of the TD Mark 11 a competition version that offered a few more bhp than the standard. In its final form for 1955 the model appeared with a 1499cc version of the existing engine, the designation altering from XPAG to XPEG. This was achieved by shuffling the bores, the front two and rear two being siamesed. Production lasted until 1955 when the model was dropped to make way for a BMC B series engined version of EX 175; what we all now know as the MGA.

But what are the points to look for when contemplating the purchase of the T series MG? To find out I journeyed to Baldock, Hertfordshire to talk to two T timers, Gerry Brown and Ron Gammon, who are extremely well versed in such matters and specialise in the restoration of these T series cars.

Body and chassis

We'll divide the chassis section into two distinct halves because the TA/B/C used one and the TD/F another. Let's kick off with the earlier frame. This answers to the name of a partly boxed channel section, the reinforcement beginning in the engine compartment and finishing under the front seats. Unfortunately it ends rather abruptly and the chassis can crack at these points. From about 1948 the boxing was finished off in a less punishing curve and this had the effect of curing the trouble. Apart from this you should have remarkably little difficulty with the chassis. The only other likely problem is nothing to do with its structure but you could be in for some unnecessary expense if the vehicle in question has been involved in an accident. If you go to the front of the car and get down to chassis height you can look down the length of the side members. Any shortcomings will soon show up.

By contrast the box section chassis of the TD and TF is far more vulnerable. To start with it's made of thinner gauge metal and being a box section also rots from the inside. It mostly suffers from rust about the rear. Again check for straightness. The problem with a box section chassis like this is that it is far more difficult, and expensive, to straighten than a channel section one.

Unlike the chassis, the bodywork is of basically similar construction from the TA right through to the TF though the latter used less

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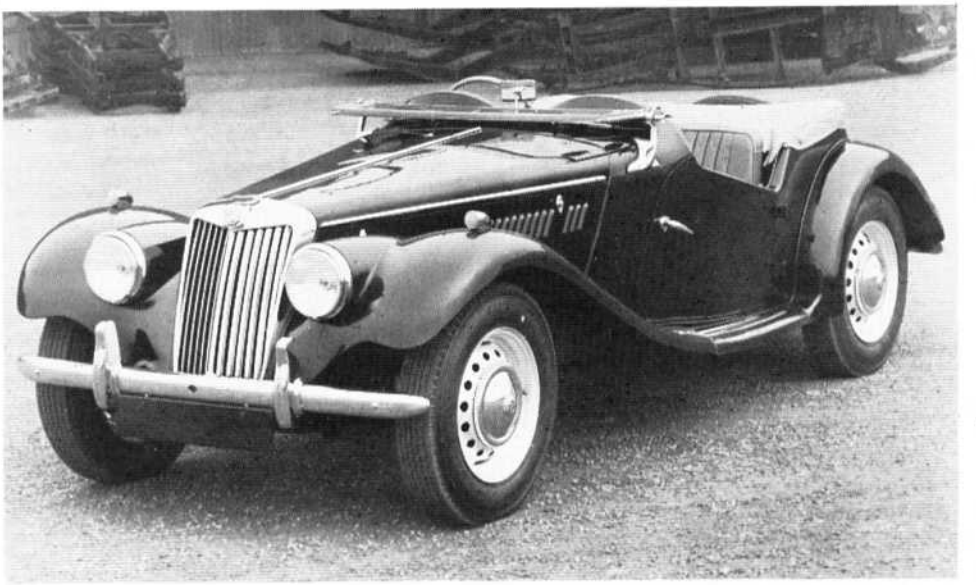
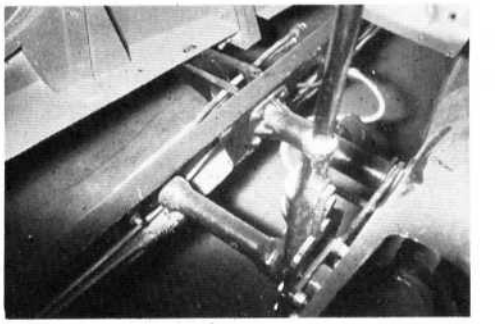
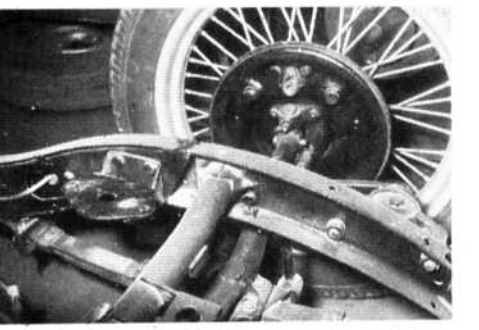
Above, TD with independent front suspension and new chassis. Below, the good looking TF.

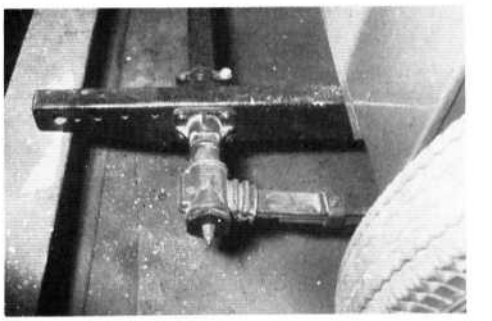




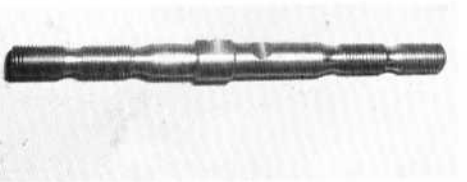
Above, the point where the boxing stops on the channel section chassis, below the front seats. A vital check point.

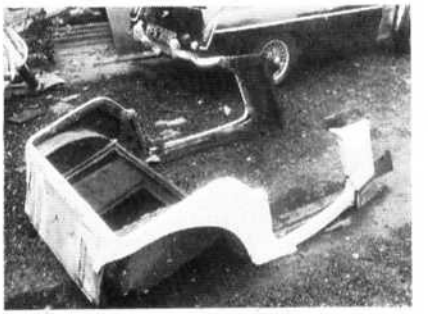


At the other end it finishes just short of the front axle but it is less prone to trouble at this point.



The sliding trunnion rear suspension on the TA/B. A bad wear point.





Top, clockwise, replica parts, the front suspension link of the TD/F; the state that the wooden frame can get in; they really can deteriorate in this way; a replica body by Naylor Brothers; close up of rot point, note glass fibre disguise of rear bulkhead corrosion.

Classic choice

TC/D/F

wooden framing and relied more on metal for rigidity. The big snag is, of course, the ash frame which can rot to the detriment of the structure. Trouble is that it is difficult to get at as it's mostly covered by bodywork or trim though if you look under the dashboard you can find an exposed cross member. Moving outside the car check under the running board. You should be able to feel a chassis rail there and not be able to pull it out in handfulls! If you are able to find a piece of exposed ash then you shouldn't be able to make an impression with a pen knife, screwdriver and the like. Metalwork can also suffer. The wings can rust around the edges while the original beading can absorb water and rust can fester around the joint. Also rust attacks the inner rear wing arches but this one is difficult to detect. The rear bulkhead, that you'll find tucked away behind the front seats, is another place that is worth checking for rust.

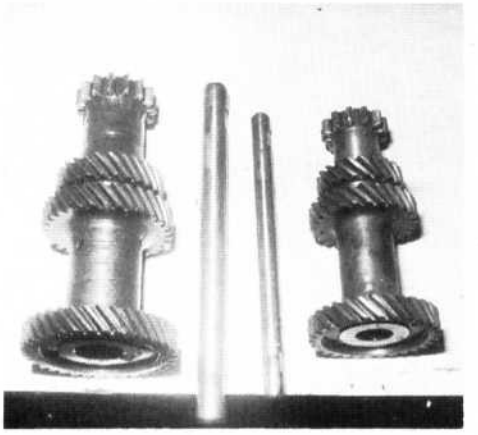
Problems may also be experienced with the bolster petrol tank. This can rust and the corrosion may be caused by the felt that is placed between the side of the tank and its false ends. This absorbs water and sets off rusting.

Suspension, steering and brakes

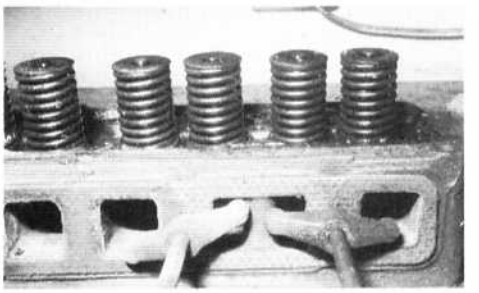
Naturally enough the suspension variation follow the different chassis types, a cart sprung layout being employed on the A, B and C variants with the D and F employing an independent front layout. You should'nt experience any special problems with the earlier system with the exception of the sliding trunnion spring mountings but these only apply to the pre-war TA and TB. The real problem is the rear set for although the phorsphor bronze bushes don't suffer too badly the steel tube that contains them certainly does and the spring slot can be enlarged to the extent that it can be dangerous. Fortunately Brown and Gammons market a repair kit for this particular piece of chassis but it is an area well worth checking if you're looking at one for the first time. The other area for scrutiny is that the axle securing bolts on the rear axle tend to pull through which could have unpleasant repercussions.

The other problem on the TA/B/C cars are the pressed steel brake drums that are liable to distort after prolonged use. This shortcoming manifests itself by juddering and pulling when the hydraulics are applied.

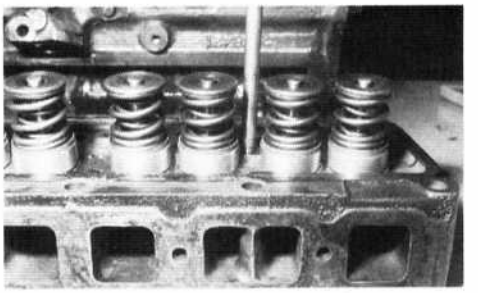
With the independent suspension TD and TF comes another set of problems. The shortcoming with this system is that the upper and lower trunnions tend to wear, even more so if the phorsphor bronze originals have been replaced by steel ones from the MGA. The best lubricant for this suspension is, incidentally, a mixture of oil and grease. On the credit side, however, you probably won't experience the same braking problems with these later models as cast iron drums are employed and tend not to distort. They are, in fact, rather difficult to remove and are integral with the hub. A further complication is the fact that the wheel cylinders are aluminium and more prone to seizure.



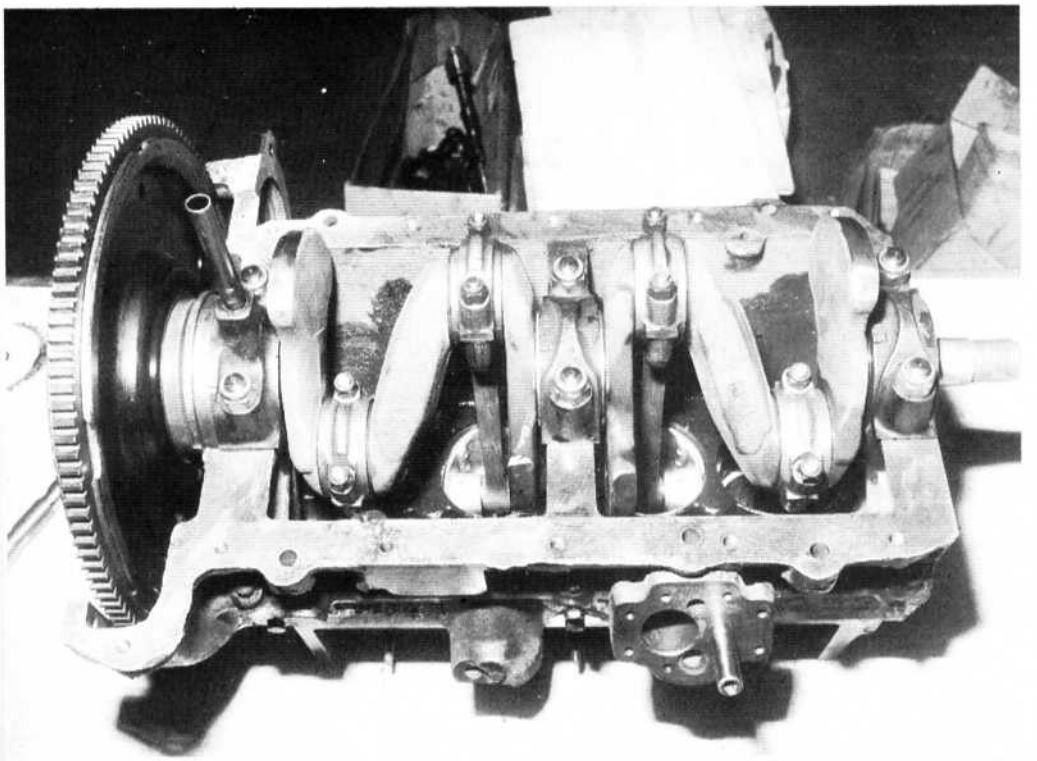
What a contrast, TC/layshaft (left) and weaker TD/F shaft (right). Not surprisingly the latter gives trouble.



Above, standard valve springs and below, Brown and Gammons' conversion; softer springs give greater valve gear life and help prevent dropped valves.



Below, a TB/C/D/F bottom end. A racing unit is shown here.



Engine, gearbox and transmission

Let's take the TA engine first as it was only fitted to that particular model. The problem is that it's a bundle of trouble, with the blocks having a tendency to crack and also oil getting into the water. Also the cylinder head studs run straight into the water jacket which isn't a particularly desirable state of affairs. This engine runs at a rather high oil pressure (100 to 120psi) which may prove alarming if you're not used to it.

The TC-TF engine is by comparison a far more straightforward affair. It has shell, rather than white metal bearings, though it does have a shortcoming and that is for the crankshaft to break across the front web. The valves have a habit of dropping in on the pistons as the heads can break off and the cam followers can also wear badly. Messrs Brown and Gammon feel that all this is caused by the engine's very strong double valve springs and their re-built engines are fitted with softer springs designed to lengthen the life of the valves and valve gear. An acceptable oil pressure reading for the TB/C is 60psi while for the TD/F 50 is sufficient.

As far as gearboxes are concerned, you shouldn't experience much trouble with the earlier 'boxes up to the TC. These are strong reliable units. Unfortunately that fitted to the TD and F isn't. The gearbox is altogether smaller and the components more fragile. Consequently the gears have a limited life, are noisy and the layshaft also wears badly. Fortunately the rear axle is reliable enough. The A, B and C employ virtually the same unit though that used on the D and F is different and identical to that used on the Wolseley 4/44.

Interior

All the T series cars are upholstered in leather which is a nice touch and although vinyl material is used on the door panels, leather is employed on the top of the door pockets. The hood should be Double Duck, incidentally.

Spares

Fortunately the T series scene is fairly good, with most body and mechanical parts available from a variety of sources. Perhaps the best known are NTG Motor Services of 21 St Margets Green, Ipswich, Suffolk, Naylor Brothers, Airdale Garage, Hillins Hill, Esholt, Shipley, Yorkshire, Toulmin Motors of 103-105 Windmill Road, Brentford, Middlesex, Sports and Vintage Motors (Schrewsbury) Ltd, Upper Battlefield, Shrewsbury, Salop and the Pre-War MG Parts Centre of 1a, Albany Road of Chislehurst, Kent.

As I mentioned, my thanks to Brown and Gammons Ltd, of Roes Maltings, r/o 18 High Street, Baldock, Herts. They specialise in T types, both for restoration and as a parts source while engine re-builds are another speciality. In addition they also cater for MGBs and the V8 version. Their telephone number is Baldock 89314 or 894212.

Production figures TA 3003. TB 379. TC 10,000. TD 28,643. TD Mk 11 1022. TF 6200. TF 1500 3400. ●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