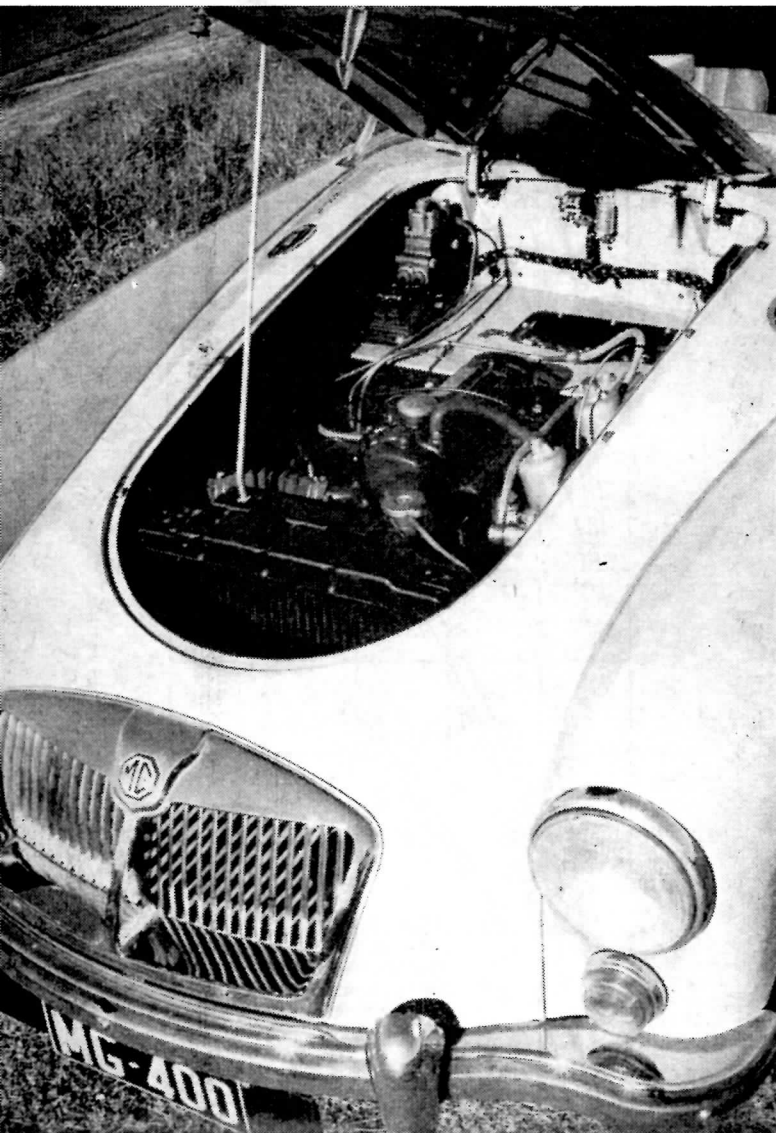


SCW ROAD TESTS:

MG's NEW MGA

1600 Mk II

"New" look, more power for the world's most popular two-seater sports car.



Bigger — 1622 cc — engine comes as a result of increasing the bore. There is a gain in bhp and torque, but compression remains as before at 8.3 to 1.

NO popular, mass produced sports car has ever stood the test of time quite so well as the M.G. Car Company's MG-MGA. For seven years now it has been selling steadily, making new friends the world over from Sydney to Singapore, Naples to Nebraska, Montreal to Melbourne—in fact anywhere where people know the meaning of the words "sports car". While the new 1600 Mk II is the fourth A-type model in this period, it has the same body as the first A, which was introduced in 1955. Thus the MGA has had a far longer life than any of its predecessors, as the 1250 cc and 1500 cc TF had a lifetime of two years, the TD three years and the illustrious TC four years. In prewar days, of course, there were a whole host of open two-seater "midgets" in the decade from 1930 to 1940.

It is a tribute to the original design that the pleasant styling of the A-type is still far from outmoded — indeed I feel sure that if there was room for improvement it would have been effected long before now — and the energies of the company have been directed towards the engine and chassis. Whereas the first MGA had a 1498 cc "B" series BMC motor and drum brakes the 1600 Mk II has a 1622 cc engine and disc brakes at the front to control top speeds probably 10 mph higher than its 1955 forerunner.

The discs are a carryover from the MGA 1600 which first appeared in 1959 and the only external differences between this model and the Mk II are a new radiator grille in which the curved bars drop more vertically to a recessed base to give a "more traditional" appearance and larger, re-designed tail light/stoplight assemblies attached to the rear of the body. These do not conform to the general lines of the car as well as the old ones, which were mounted on the tips of the rear guards, but they do give greater illumination.

For the competition-minded the car will come as a slight disappointment. This is not to mean that it hasn't enough power but merely the fact that an increase in bore size has put it out of the under 1600 cc class in production sports car racing and pushed it up into the 2-litre class, where it faces much stiffer and somewhat unequal competition. This is not such a small point as it might seem as the under 1600 cc class has now been almost universally adopted and so many MG owners like to race their cars at some time or another.



The bigger bore — from 75.4 mm to 76.2 mm, or exactly 3 in — has lifted the overall capacity from 1588 cc to 1622 cc, but the stroke remains the same at 88.9 mm, or 3.5 in. Actually the power increase is not substantial, as the British Motor Corporation (Australia) has decreed that the compression ratio should remain at 8.3 to 1 instead of being raised to 8.9 to 1 as is the case with Mk IIs being sold overseas. This is a wise decision as our 93 octane super grade petrol just will not cope with high compression engines with cylinder heads of the non-hemispherical type. Therefore, the cars sold locally develop 84.6 bhp at 5650 rpm compared to the 90 bhp at 5500 rpm of the English and American Mk IIs. This represents an increase of some 5 bhp over the 1600, barely enough to justify the drop in differential ratio from 4.3 to 4.1 to 1.

Our test car, supplied by P. and R. Williams, was barely run in at just under 2000 miles when we collected it and seemed reluctant to rev out willingly past the 4500 mark in third and top gears. We felt more performance would come easily with more use and would like an opportunity to run a well used Mk II through its paces at a later date to confirm this observation. MG gearboxes are notoriously stiff when they're new and the one on our car was certainly no exception, first being quite impossible to engage on occasions even after using all the old tricks like jabbing the clutch lever in and out and blipping the engine. Positive rather than smooth the change action is perfectly satisfactory as long as one doesn't attempt to hurry unduly through the gears and the movements are quite short. The lever is well placed, being just forward of

Mk II is a far more modern means of transportation than that used by the first parishioners of the historic 153 year old Ebenezer Presbyterian Church — the oldest church in Australia — near Windsor, NSW. They paddled their canoes across the nearby Hawkesbury River every Sunday to attend services.

the steering wheel on the top of the rounded transmission tunnel that occupies a lot of cockpit space.

As one used to seeing the tips of the front guards, I found it annoying that the centre mounted rear vision mirror completely blocked the view of the front tip of the nearside guard. This makes accurate placement difficult in heavy traffic and it would be easy to misjudge to the extent of getting a "winged" guard. It would be advantageous to reposition the mirror at the top of the screen. The Mk II is not exactly suited to driving around town, being rather too high geared in top for constant changes of speed around 20 and 30 mph, although the additional torque assists flexibility. On the road, it pulls over most hills fairly heartily in top but if high speeds are to be maintained the high third gear should be used frequently.

This new MG is very definitely a fast car in the true sense of the word and we covered many miles with the speedometer needle flickering between 75-80-85 and 90 mph with the engine humming effortlessly away and giving absolutely no complaint. These speeds were achieved with complete safety as the car is quite stable right up to its maximum of about 105 mph and digs itself reassuringly into corners without marked understeer or oversteer. If anything, it has a

MG's NEW MGA 1600 Mk II . . . Continued

tendency to oversteer, particularly if the surface of the road is anyways rough, but it doesn't take any great amount of skill to bring it back on line.

The steering itself is the well-tried and proven rack-and-pinion unit used on all MGs since the TD. It has no play and feels quite dead at low speeds, but transmits any unevenness in the road. It is a little heavy to use but instils confidence with its accuracy and with 2.7 turns lock to lock gives a turning circle of just over 30 ft, which isn't bad for a sports car. The brakes — 11 in Lockheed discs at the front and 10 in drums at the rear—are fully commensurate with the performance, seem free from fade, and pull up the car swiftly and surely. We twice tried the simple braking test of stopping suddenly from 60 to 30 mph against the stopwatch and recorded 2.3 sec both times, which proves their adequacy for an emergency. Pedal pressures are light to the point where it is possible to hold the car in traffic with the tip of the foot resting on the pedal.

Some criticism has been levelled at the M.G. Car Company for not improving the ride of the A-type over the years. Personally, I did not find it too harsh — perhaps I'm too accustomed to the almost non-existent riding qualities of the

"squarerigger" MGs! Certainly the same firm feel of the first A is still there but its compensations are far more important than having the comfort of a modern saloon car ride. Sports cars have already conceded too much to modernity, so let's stop the rot before it goes *too far*.

No alterations have been made to the cockpit and fascia, which is understandable enough as despite the fact that the seating position is too close to the wheel for most people's liking, any attempt to remedy it would mean extending the cockpit, probably from the scuttle forward. This wouldn't do anything for the styling. The car is extremely comfortable on long journeys and the padded seats give good support to the back and thighs. I have always maintained that the MGA is one of the most delightfully snug open cars on the road and our test, made with the hood down on a bleak late autumn day, produced no discomfort whatsoever as the air-stream circulates at the back rather than the front of the head and positively encourages fresh-air motoring — even on cold days. This factor alone is the reason why we see so many owners commuting along happily with the top down when other motorists wrapped in overcoats and with all the windows wound up against chill blasts are labelling them as "insane".

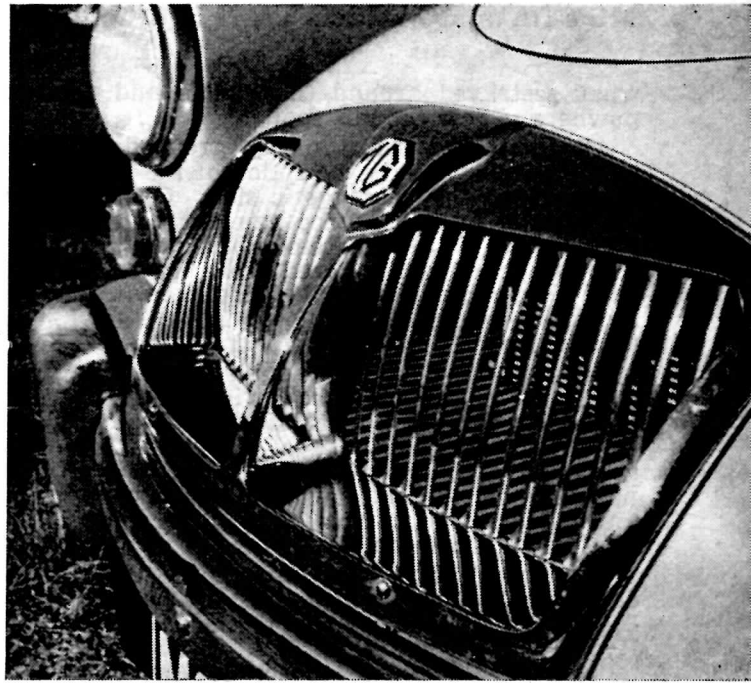
On the other hand, the arrangement for raising and lowering the hood is amazingly complicated and just wouldn't do in a thunderstorm



MGA is well protected against bumps and with the hood up there is good rear vision through the large window.

as it takes fully five minutes to carry out all the actions of erecting it. The hood is reached after folding the seats forward, unclipping the vinyl cover and removing the two sliding-window sidescreens from their compartment. It then has to be stretched out and a bar secured on to two alligator clips on the body. From there it pulls down over two posts on top of the windscreen and there is also a safety latch in the centre of the screen.

With the hood up, there is considerable wind noise, but it fits well and no rain can get in. With the sidescreens in place, it is not so hard as might be imagined to give quick hand signals — certainly easier than in the Mini-Minor, which also has sliding windows, but not the cutaway doors of the MGA. Vision isn't bad in the closed form and the windscreen wipers cover quite a large area of the curved screen. Though not up to standard for 80 mph cruising at night, the lights pierce an appreciable distance on high beam. I feel a hand-operated dipper switch is preferable to one on the footboard ahead of the clutch, as there is nothing worse than groping around in the dark with your foot and occasionally catching it between the clutch pedal and the side of the transmission tunnel. Space is some-



Easiest way to identify the Mk II from the MGA 1600 is by its new grille in which the bars drop down on to a recessed base in semitransitional fashion.

Mk II has newer, bigger tail lights too, but it's doubtful whether they suit the lines of the car as well as the old ones, which attached to the mudguard peak.



MG's NEW MGA 1600 Mk II . . . Continued

what restricted around the pedals and there is nowhere to rest the left foot.

All instruments are nicely grouped in front of the driver with the exception of the fuel gauge, which is on the passenger's side. On our car it was faulty and we twice ran out of petrol because of it. I seem to remember that the first A I drove years ago suffered from the same problem! There are several pull-out switches and the inside edges of the doors have a triangular plastic guard to prevent the trim being scruffed.

Actually, they serve a double purpose, as they are extremely handy for carrying maps or sheafs of paper. The passenger's side of the fascia would be better occupied with a glovebox than with the ornamental plaque it now has, as the door-pockets are too narrow and shallow to carry much apart from a few odds and ends and certainly not a camera.

One pays the penalty of having front-hinged doors when he goes to get in and out the car—I don't think this needs any more elaboration. It is a pity that the MGA is such an ideal touring car in every respect but luggage space and the only way out is to forget suitcases and wrap your clothes in plastic bags if taking a trip. One can't have his cake and eat it too, so the saying goes . . .

Both the boot and bonnet lids are held on tubular steel stays which clip into rubber catches when not in use. Engine accessibility isn't bad and servicing of most components presents no major problem. The Lucas winking light unit on the bulkhead can be adjusted to give varying lengths of time between flashes.

This new MGA retains the old — and mystifying — A-type complaint of running on, despite the fact that there has been no increase in compression. There was no suggestion of "ping" in our car, yet the running on was so serious at times that it was almost embarrassing, as no amount of revving the engine before shutting off or opening the throttle after the key was switched off seemed to have any effect.

It was most noticeable after our acceleration tests, when admittedly the engine was being worked quite hard, but it also occurred after a fast run of some 30 miles. We tried three different brands of fuel and noticed an improvement with the last one. But it wasn't a fair test as the weather was cooler by then. Mixing Super with any of the several 100-octane "specials" offered by the oil companies should partly solve the problem. However, it does seem that there is something wrong with the design of the combustion chamber, or the grade of plugs selected for the engine.

One other new important feature which I almost forgot to mention is a small oil radiator mounted behind the grille. This is a fitting which must be thoroughly recommended. At normal cruising speeds the oil pressure remained constant at 70 lb sq in and dropped 10 lb or so at 30 or 40 mph. The car seems happiest at 4000 rpm, which gave an indicated 75 mph, but it is quite capable of being cruised at 80 mph and over whenever conditions permit. We found the Jaegar speedometer was inaccurate by some 6.5 mph at 80 mph, 5 mph at 70 mph and 4 mph at 60 mph. On the credit side, neither the tacho nor speedo suffer from needle float and in top gear they swing up around their scales in unison.

Using 4000 rpm to take-off, we experienced some wheelspin on the standing quarter-mile test, in which the car — with two-up and hood down—recorded 19.5 sec. At the end of the quarter it just touched 5500 rpm in third gear, equal to about

77 mph (indicated). As mentioned before though, the engine was still freeing-up and with just the driver aboard the Mk II should break 19 sec.

All in all, the MGA is a most desirable sports car, being one of only four *proper* open two-seaters available in Australia today and certainly the only 100 mph machine to be offered for a sane price (which, incidentally, remains at £1313). One or two people complained to me on its introduction that the MG Car Company hadn't done enough to it and that it wasn't new enough or didn't have wind-up windows. My comment is that it is expensive enough now without having an extra £100 or so tacked on for creature comforts which only seem to take the fun out of the old-fashioned conception of sports car motoring.

Heavens knows, there's all too few sports cars on the market today without taking them away altogether. What we would all like to see in the MGA is a little more concentration on finish. No one likes to put his hand in the door pocket and have it scratched by an ill-sized self-tapper, nor have the absorption material under the bonnet fall off into the engine! #

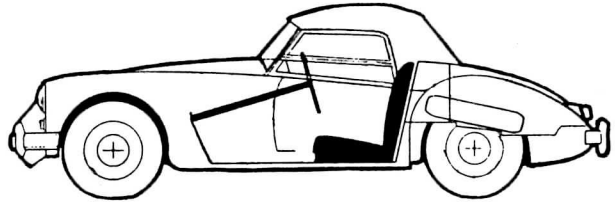
Next month's Sports Car World carries a full road test on the exciting new Triumph TR4 which recently made its introduction on the Australian market. This glamorous newcomer is the successor to the rugged TR3A, which has gathered a whole host of admirers in Australia and our report covers every aspect of the car.



Hood fits snugly, but is awkward to erect. MGA however, is an ideal open car in most weathers. Trim is not up to standard for the price — £1313.

SCW TEST No 31

MGA 1600 MK 11



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE:

Type Four-cylinder in-line, water cooled
 Valves Overhead
 Cubic capacity 1622
 Bore and stroke 76.2 mm (3 in.) x 88.9 mm (3.5 in.)
 Compression ratio 8.3 to 1
 Carburetors Twin 1½" semi-downdraught SU's
 Max. power 84.6 bhp at 5650 rpm
 Max. torque 98 lb/ft at 3450 rpm

TRANSMISSION:

Type—Four speed, synchromesh on second, third, top. Borg and Beck single-plate dry clutch with hydraulic actuation. Central remote gear change. Hardy Spicer propeller shaft with needle bearing universal joints. Three-quarter floating rear axle with hypoid final reduction.

GEAR RATIOS:

I 14.909
 II 9.079
 III 5.632
 IV 4.1
 Reverse 19.496
 Final drive 4.1 to 1

SUSPENSION:

Front—Independent by coil springs and wishbone type links controlled by telescopic shock absorbers.
 Rear—Semi-elliptic springs controlled by hydraulic dampers.

STEERING:

Type Direct rack and pinion
 Turns, lock to lock 2¼
 Turning circle 30 ft 6 in

BRAKES:

Front Lockheed 11 in discs
 Rear Lockheed 10 in drums
 Handbrake Central lever with fly-off type control

CHASSIS:

Type Braced box section frame with upswept rear

DIMENSIONS:

Length 13 ft
 Width 4 ft 10 in
 Wheelbase 7 ft 10 in
 Height (with hood erect) 4 ft 2 in
 Cockpit width 3 ft 9 in
 Weight (with fuel, oil, water) 18 cwt
 Luggage boot capacity 5¾ cu ft

PERFORMANCE

TOP SPEED:

Fastest run 102 mph
 Average of all runs 99 mph

0 to 70 mph 22.2 sec
 0 to 80 mph 33.4 sec

MAXIMUM SPEED IN GEARS (at 5500 rpm):

First 30 mph
 Second 48 mph
 Third 77 mph
 Top 102 mph

SPEEDO ERROR:

Indicated	Actual
40 mph	36.5 mph
50 mph	47.4 mph
60 mph	55.2 mph
70 mph	65.1 mph
80 mph	73.7 mph

ACCELERATION

(using maximum of 5500 rpm):

Standing Quarter Mile:
 Fastest run 19.5 sec
 Average of all runs 19.7 sec
 0 to 30 mph 4.5 sec
 0 to 40 mph 5.4 sec
 0 to 50 mph 8.0 sec
 0 to 60 mph 14.5 sec

TAPLEY READINGS:

First gear 580 ft/lb
 Second gear 470 ft/lb
 Third gear 340 ft/lb
 Top gear 135 ft/lb

BRAKING:

No fade after 10 successive stops from 60 mph.