

An MGB is an MGB, right ... not quite!

The MGB was introduced in September 1962 and remained in production until October 1980, during which time 512,243 cars were built – 386,961 roadsters and 125,282 GT coupés – giving credence to the claim, which is often disputed we must add, that the MGB was the best-selling sports car of all time.

As with Austin-Healeys, it is often difficult for the casual observer to pick one model MGB from the next. For expert advice, we paid a visit to Melbourne's largest 'one-stop MGB shop', the aptly titled MG Workshops in East Bentleigh where most MGB models can be seen at any one time. Genial proprietor Andrew McDowell told us that MGBs can be loosely divided into about eight or nine main model groups, described below.

Development

The first MGBs (retrospectively called the Mark I) carried body prefix G-GH3 and were fitted with a 1798cc engine with three-main-bearing crankshaft, engine number prefix 'G' or 'GA'. The three-bearing cars had pull-out door handles, a mechanical Jaeger tachometer and Jaeger instruments as key distinguishing features.

To identify a Mark I, check the spacing between the front indicator lights and grille – there should be a gap of about 50mm, but don't be fooled as many cars have been fitted with replacement later guards. MkIs had a Bendix starter, and overdrive was an option from 1963. From June 1963, a fibreglass hardtop was an available option, while in August the detachable soft top was replaced by a less fussy folding model.

From October 1964 (car number 48766) a five-bearing engine with 'GB' prefix was fitted. At the same time, Smiths instruments, including an electronic tacho, became standard. Push-button door handles were introduced from car number 57986. The first GT (the 2+2 hatchback) model was introduced in September 1965.

Introduced in December 1967, the Mark II models looked almost identical, most of the model changes being under the bonnet. Externally, the spacing between front indicator lights and grille decreased to only about 20mm and the Mark II was fitted with twin reversing lamps. Gearbox now had synchromesh on first, with a Borg-Warner Type 35 three-speed automatic gearbox offered as an option. New recessed interior door handles were fitted. Wing nuts on wire wheels were replaced by an octagonal nut (implemented earlier for US market).





Not so obvious was that Mark IIs had a quieter, more reliable pre-engaged starter motor. A whole host of other changes were made to cars destined for the USA, many of which are now in Australia. The BL-branded MGB was introduced in October 1969; the main changes were a recessed grille painted black, a one-piece plastic MG badge on the boot and grille, larger more angular tail light lenses, 'British Leyland' badges on the front guards, chrome trim on the

leading edge of the bonnet and Rostyle wheels. More radical changes came in September 1974 with the dreaded rubber bumpers. There were dozens of specification changes, but none quite as obvious as those big black, love 'em or hate 'em bumpers!

Australian production

A total of 9090 roadsters, including 228 automatics, were assembled in Australia between April 1963 and November 1972.



Top,
David Fogg's
Limited Edition
sports a non-
standard third
wiper, added
during the car's
conversion to
Australian
Design Rules

Above,
The MGB,
MkII's and V8's
grille treatments

Centre right,
early Mark Is
had 'pull out'
door handles

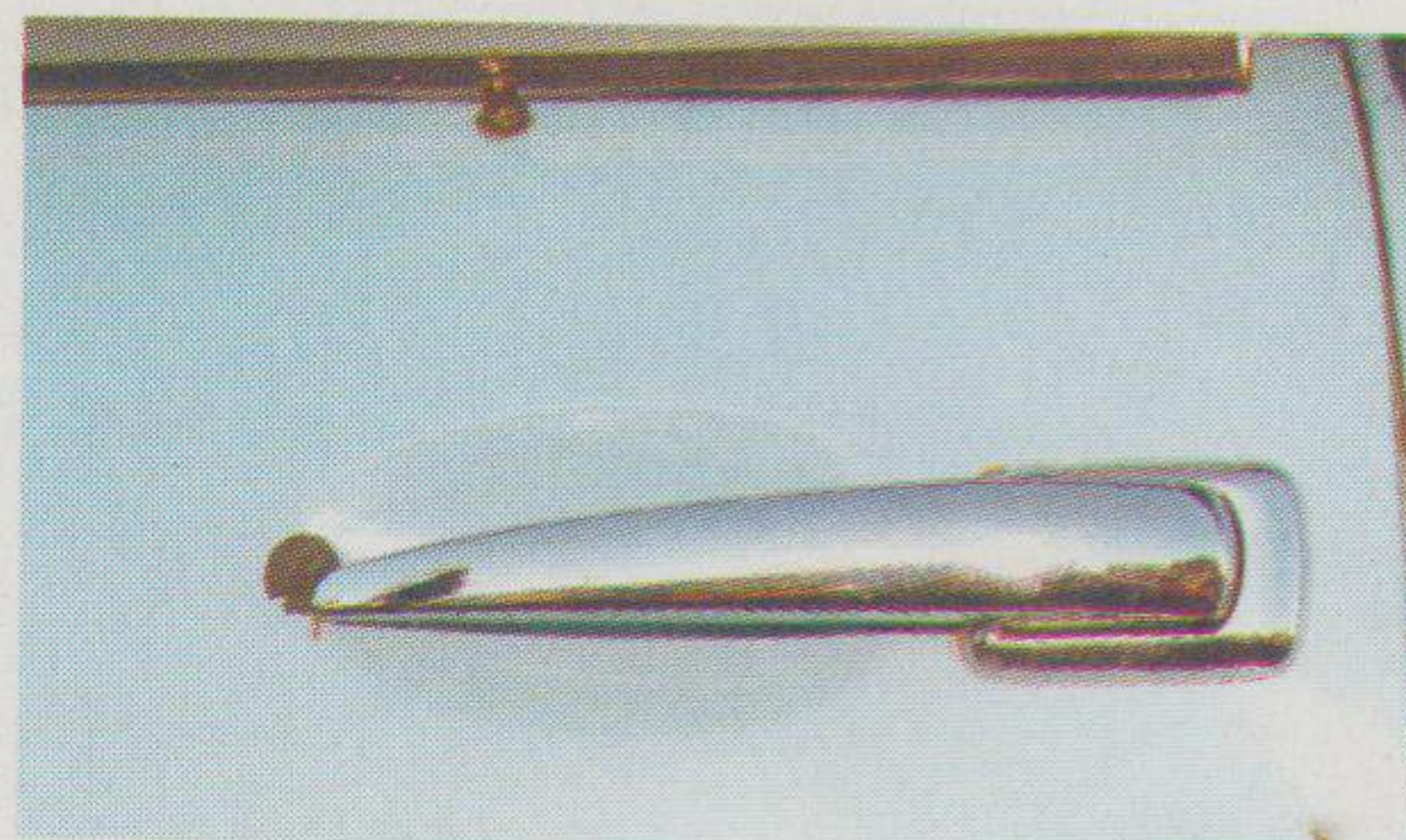
Centre left,
push button
door handles –
late MkI-on

The body number of locally assembled cars is prefixed by a letter 'Y'. Only Australian assembled cars had the 'MkII' badge on the back panel and 'Overdrive' or 'Automatic' badge on the boot. Cars for assembly in Australia were shipped in unpainted CKD kit form and painted here, using the Rotodip process at Zetland (NSW). Australian-built cars have a reputation for greater durability and better rust resistance – worth keeping in mind when shopping for a car. Following their introduction in 1965, GTs were built alongside their roadster siblings and changes in specifications occurred with both at the same time. Variations unique to the GT included subtle (and some rather unsubtle) changes to interior trim, and the style and positioning of 'MGB GT' badges on the rear door. The first MGB to be factory fitted with a 3528cc V8 engine was produced in August 1973. V8s were only available as GT cars, and discontinued in 1976.

SPECIFICATIONS		
	MGB (four cylinder)	MGB V8
Engine	four-cylinder, ohv 1798cc	V8 3528cc
Carburettors	Twin semi-downdraught SU	Twin horizontal SU
Bore/stroke	80.26 x 88.9mm	88.9 x 71.1mm
Max power	95bhp @ 5400rpm	137bhp @ 5000rpm
Transmission	four speed manual, with overdrive optional. Auto opt.	four-speed, opt auto
Suspension	front (both) ind coil & wishbone rear (both) semi-elliptic springs	
Brakes	all models disc front, drum rear	
Steering	all models rack and pinion	
L x width	153.25in x 59.90in	154.70in x 60in
Height	49.40in	50in
Weight	18 1/2 cwt	21 1/4 cwt
Max speed	103mph	123mph
0-60mph	12.2s (roadster) 13.2s(GT)	8.6s
Road wheels	MkI, bolt-on disc, MkII, Dunlop bolt-on, wire wheels optional, BL, Rostyle bolt-on	

PRODUCTION

Model	Roadster	GT	Total
MkI(1962-68)	115,898	21,835	137,733
MkII(1967-69)	31,767	16,943	48,710
BL	110,643	59,459	170,102
Rubber nose	128,653	27,045	155,698
Totals	386,691	125,282	512,243



Limited-edition models

Just to confuse the issue, a number of 'limited edition' models were produced, mainly as a marketing exercise in the USA. The first was a special run of 1000 MGB GT Specials in 1967, to commemorate the first anniversary of the release of the GT in USA. The second was a run of 750 Jubilee models sold in 1975 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the MG (although there is plenty of debate on whether the first 'real' MG was, in fact, built in 1925) and the third a batch of 6682 Limited Edition models sold in USA and Canada during 1979-80. Finally a LE model was produced for the home market, these cars being virtually the last 1000 MGBs ever built.

The cars in detail

Over recent years, many cars have been imported into this country from the USA and most have been expertly restored or rebuilt by reputable firms. Some importers, however, have not been quite so

meticulous and there are some pretty ordinary MGBs around, with bogged up panels and suspect chassis repairs.

Choice of a particular model, body style and colour is largely a matter of personal preference – apart from colour, other choices are fairly straightforward GT or roadster, there's no other, chrome or rubber bumper, chrome or black BL-style grille, and that's about it!

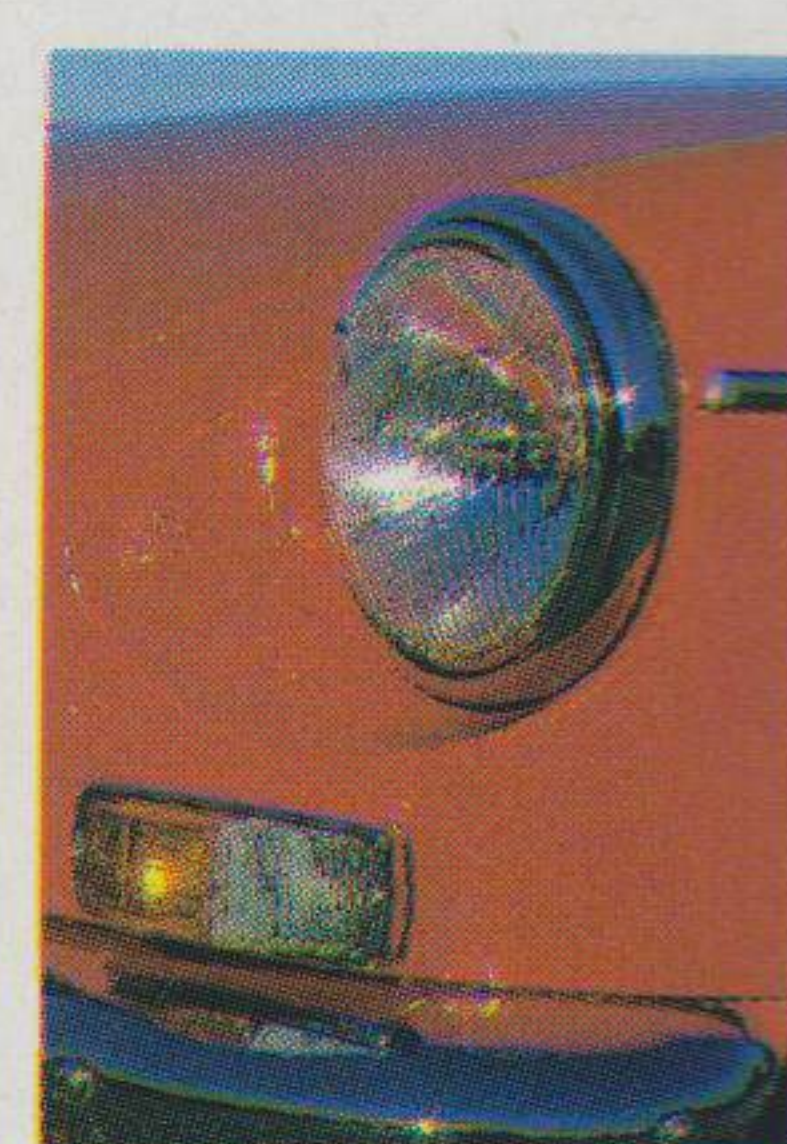
Engine

The MGB's 1.8-litre engine is a very solid and durable unit while the three-bearing crankshaft suffered from some vibration, and occasionally suffered fatigue-cracked or broken crankshafts, five-main-bearing engines overcame these problems. In good condition, the engine should run at around 180-190 degrees Centigrade with oil pressure (at speed) of 50-60psi (3.52 to 4.22 kg/cm² for later model cars with metric gauges).

All engine parts are still readily available, and the engine design itself is

PARTS PRICES

	New	Secondhand
Bonnet, aluminium	\$1,000	\$500
Bonnet, steel	\$350	\$250
Front guard complete	\$800	\$3-\$500
Front guard lower, repair (depending on size)	\$50-\$90	
Door skin	\$100	
Sill panel repair section	\$120	
Windscreen	\$250	
Rebuilt long engine (exch)	\$2,000	
Bumper (exchange)	\$225	\$175
	(reco'd)	
Rebuilt gearbox (exchange)	\$1,000	
Exhaust system steel	\$350	
Carburettors (exchange)	\$285 (reco'd)	
Brake pads and linings	\$50-\$100	
Tail light lens	\$65-\$90	\$20-\$50
Hubs	\$150	\$150
Wire wheels	\$130-\$350	\$100
Radiator grille	\$300	\$150-\$200
Shock absorbers (exchange)	\$125 ea (reco'd)	
Road springs	\$200 pair	\$75 pair
Soft top	\$550	
Tonneau cover	\$250	
Carpet set	\$300	
Replacement floor panels	\$200 pair	
King pins (exchange)	\$270 (reco'd)	
Service and tune-up	\$250	



MGB PRICE GUIDE

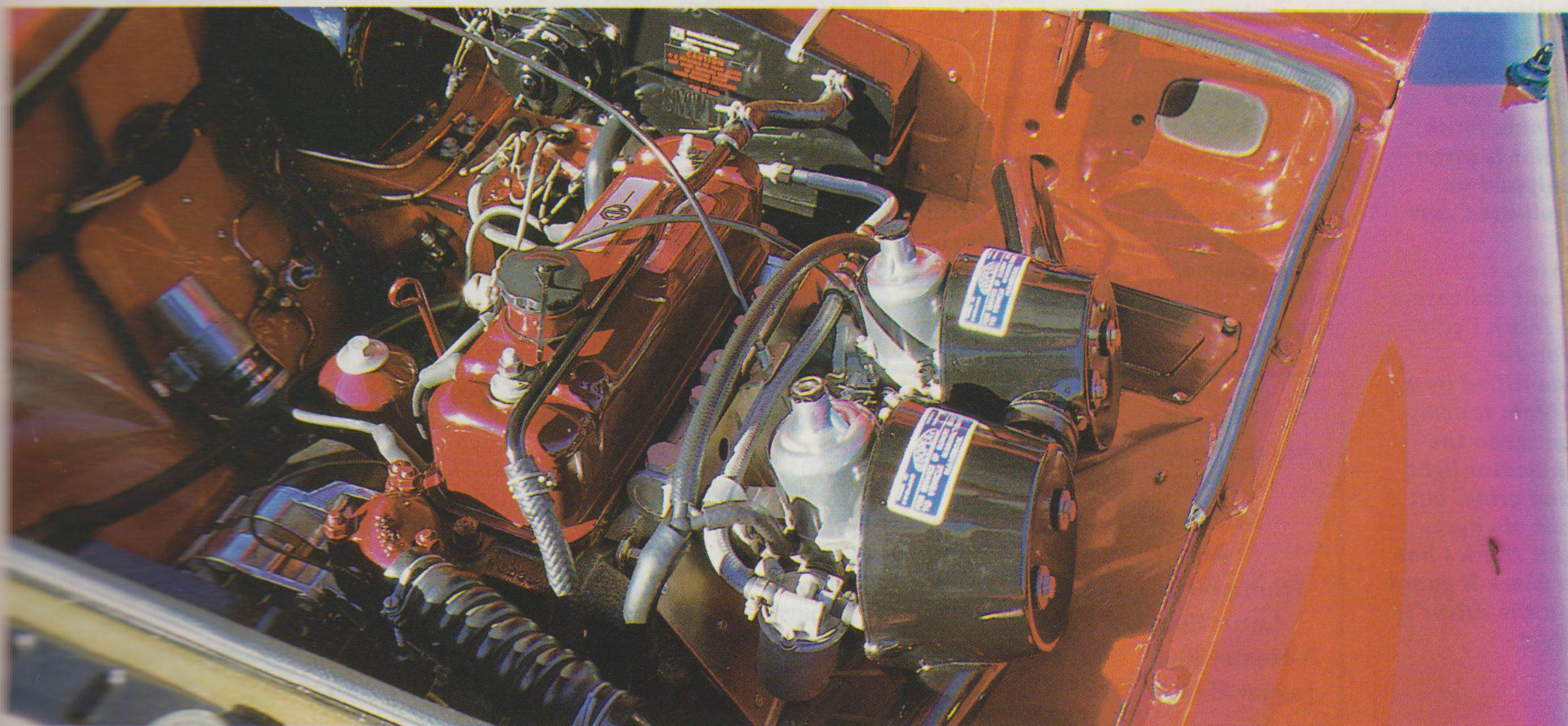
Condition	Roadsters	MGB GT	MGB GT V8
Concours	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$45,000
Excellent	\$20,000	\$18,000	\$35,000
Average	\$16,000	\$14,000	\$25,000
Restorable	\$5000	\$4000	\$15,000

Top,
'MK II' badge
was unique to
Australian
MGBs

Above,
owner Alan
Walsh with his

concours MGB
MkII. Like many
cars, this was in
good condition
when bought
but had several
fittings from
other series
MGBs

Below,
absolutely
conventional
engine holds
fears for
mechanical
newcomers but
it has plenty of
tuning potential





Above, folding hood stows very neatly on the MGB. On very early cars, the hood fabric is removed completely and stowed

Above right, it's actually possible to buy a stereo speaker to fit behind the grille in the centre console, as an alternative to cutting speaker holes in the door panels. Dashboard crinkle finish paint is often chipped on well-used cars

Inset, front indicators – Mark I cars can be identified by a 50mm spacing between the indicator light and grille, but not always ... this Mark I has a Mark II guard on the driver's side!

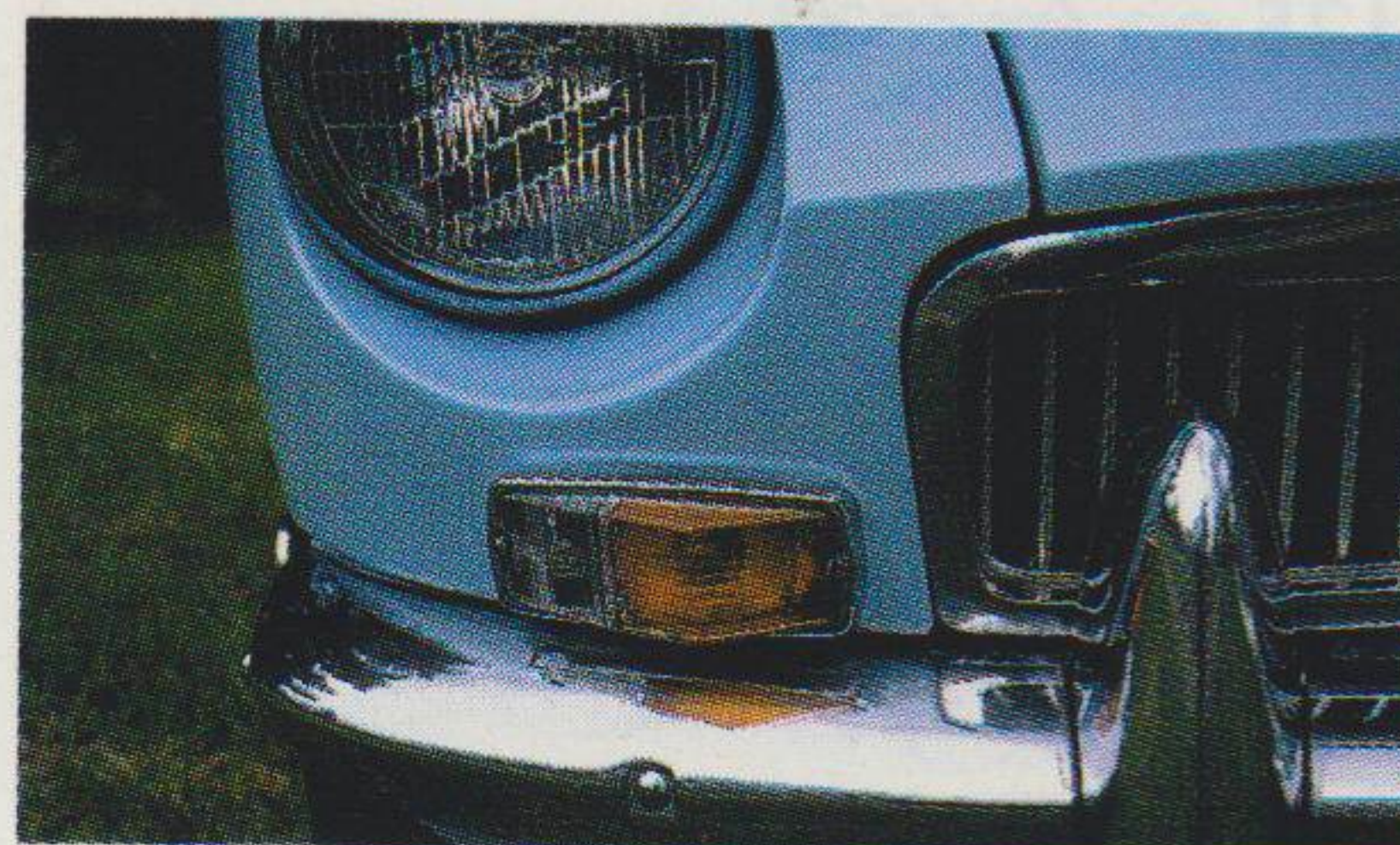
straightforward. Ancillary parts such as oil filters, spark plugs, alternators, carburettors and the like are often the same as used on other BMC products, such as the Austin 1800, and as a result many are readily interchangeable.

Transmissions

Transmissions are also very robust and will take a great deal of punishment before any major problems manifest themselves. Perhaps the weakest point in the whole transmission chain is at the very end of it – wheel/hub splines tend to wear and become loose, making a rather nasty “clonk” when changing direction of movement, accelerating or braking. Most times the noise can be minimised by tightening up the wheel nuts a smidgin but the long-term fix often requires an expensive set of new hubs and/or splines.

Body and trim

The MGB was the first of the marque with a monocoque body and although it is a very sturdy design, there are a few places where it does tend to rust rather badly. The main body members are the sills and castle rail sections, and this area should be checked carefully, especially at the front, behind the rear section of



the front guard, where water and mud accumulate. Like most convertible cars, floors, including the boot floor, often rust out, especially if the hood has leaked and carpet underfelt material has been soggy for some time. There is a huge range of rust repair panels readily available, up to and including completely new body shells, which are now available in Australia but cost about \$9000. Quite expensive, but when all else fails...

Owner's view

My MGB is not one of the best examples on the road – in fact it's really a bit tatty body-wise, with some bubbles of rust now coming through beneath the filler applied as a makeshift repair by some previous owner in years past. But it has a good strong engine and gearbox, and drives very well.

It was purchased quite cheaply six or

seven years ago, with the intention of being restored 'next winter'. Unfortunately 'next winter' has come and gone at least a half dozen times and the B is no nearer the concours example that I see in my mind's eye. The reason for this state of affairs is quite simple – the car goes so well and is so much fun to drive that the prospect of being without it for a couple of years does not bear thinking about!

The B is used almost exclusively at weekends, and one of my greatest pleasures in life is a brisk, early Sunday morning run of about 50 miles through the beautiful Yarra River valley, the trademark burble of the exhaust over the left shoulder, when my mid-life crisis and the cares of the work-a-day week, including missed deadlines, don't seem to matter quite so much [*we're taking away your car keys – Ed*].

But for several months recently the B

THE MGB'S COMPETITION (c.1962)

Make/Model	Engine	Price	Weight	Top Speed	Fuel Cons.
MGB	1798cc	£949	18.5cwt	103mph	26mpg
Sunbeam	1592cc	£956	18.8cwt	99mph	26mpg
Alpine					
Triumph TR4	2138cc	£1030	19cwt	102mph	22mpg
Lotus Elite	1216cc	£1499	13.3cwt	112mph	34mpg
A-Healey3000	2912cc	£1190	22.8cwt	113mph	23mpg
Jaguar E-type	3871cc	£2177	22.5cwt	150mph	18mpg



Above,
Alan Walsh,
proud owner.
Ironically, wire
wheels were
considered old-
fashioned by the
MGB's
designers, but
it's rare to find
a car now
running on the
steel wheels
that were
standard
equipment
when new



The B handles the task with relative ease.

Suburban commuter traffic presents no special problems for the B. In good standard tune, the torquey engine is very flexible and the car is just as happy puddling along at 30kph as it is at 100kph (or a teensy bit more) on the freeway. This means that a driver does not need to contract RSI changing gears – although that is part of the joy of driving a B, its stubby little gear change lever right at hand, almost begging to be manipulated.

Driving an MGB on a daily basis does have a couple of little drawbacks. First, it is quite a small, low slung car, and in the hurly-burly of peak-hour traffic, some people obviously fail to see it. Second, at night, lights from following cars hit the B's rear vision mirror smack dab in the middle, even when on low beam. If those lights are also passing through the crinkled perspex of the soft top, the dazzling effect is even worse, and if it's wet, worse again.

But the MGB is really in its element, hood down and out on the open road on those crisp, frosty Sunday mornings in the Yarra Valley, or under the stars on a warm summer's night, or winding around the Great Ocean Road oh, roll on, next weekend!

Acknowledgments

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NEIL WAKEMAN
PHOTOS, NEIL WAKEMAN,
DARREN RAYMENT



was my only set of wheels, and it served admirably and reliably as day-to-day transport, pottering around the suburbs of Melbourne. The addition of a removable fibreglass hardtop made a big difference to its comfort and weather resistance during the winter months, eliminating chilly draughts through my car's moth-eaten soft top.

The compact cabin warms up very

quickly due to the combined efforts of the effective Smith's heater fitted as standard, and radiated heat from the exhaust system.

The car has been fitted with a towbar and is used every now and again to tow a trailer full of garden refuse, or junk from the garage, to the local garbage recycling station, or to drag home replacement rubbish from swap meets.