

CLASSIC

AND SPORTSCAR

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MGA IN PROFILE



WE DRIVE THE COUNTACH

ABARTH: THE MAN AND HIS MACHINES

COUPE CHOICE: BMW 3.0 CSI OR FIAT 130?



**NEW!
SECOND ISSUE**

PROFILE

MGA 1600 Mk 11



The 1600 Mk 11 is probably the most desirable and practical of all the MGAs but a pristine Mk 1 coupé like this one, above, is almost the next best thing!

Sweet survivor

Find a respectable MGA today, and you're on to a fast-appreciating 'classic', in the true sense of the term. We examine the reasons for the model's cult following and enduring popularity

That old adage, 'racing improves the breed' could hardly be more apt than when applied to MG. Like most manufacturers post-war they spent time picking themselves up and re-adjusting to peacetime. But it took MG longer than others.

After the Second World War MG continued to make sportscars in the pre-war mould, tall and narrow with upright radiator grilles and separate flowing wings. Indeed almost as soon as hostilities finished MG dusted down their 1939 TB design, made a few discreet alterations here and there, and called it the TC.

As time marched on, the TC became the TD and later still, the TF, but although the latter pair did have different chassis to the TC, that chassis came from the pre-war designed, post-war manufactured TA saloon. It wasn't until 1955 and the MGA that the Octagon finally graced a car that did not look as if it was a throwback to a bygone era. And by 1955, the Triumph TR and the Austin-Healey 100 were already in their third year of manufacture.

In 1951, however, came the first indications that perhaps the powers-that-be at MG were not all living in the past. As he so vividly recounted in *Old Motor* (November, 1981) George Phillips had a penchant for the marke and in 1949 and '50 he raced one of his own TC Specials in the Le Mans 24 Hours. George, who by now had become *Autosport's* chief photographer, was approached by Syd Enever and Alex Hounslow from Abingdon with a view to building a more modern aerodynamically efficient body to clothe the tried and trusted TD chassis and mechanicals. Although the subsequent design - registered and known as UMG 400 or EX 172 in the works - had many, many differences to the final

production MGA, the similarities of the shape are obvious to the observer.

As George recounts, the UMG Special was quick but uncharacteristically unreliable. "Once again I opened the race. I'd been going for about four hours or so, getting the lap times down to something which I thought was respectable for the car . . . when there was a 'bang'.

"I climbed out and had a look but there was nothing obvious - no pool of oil or holes in the block or anything - so I started up again and drove slowly round to the pits. We broke all the seals and took off the rocker cover and only seven of the valves were going up and down. What had happened was the head of one of the valves had come off and punched a bloody great hole through one of the pistons."

Breed improved by racing

Its shape, however, spurred Syd Enever and the new MG general manager, John Thornley, onto greater things. If, by the simple expedient of producing a slippery shape, the top speed of the TD could be raised considerably, just think what could be done if the new body was allowed a more modern chassis . . . after all, UMG's body was simply dropped onto a typically tall TD chassis and that meant the driver was far higher than he should have been for best use of the aerodynamics. The breed was about to be improved by racing.

Inspired by its potential, and annoyed by its Le Mans failure, Enever drew up plans for a new chassis. It was to be much wider than the TD so the seats could be dropped within its massive box-section steel members . . . in pictures of UMG, it can be seen that George was sitting on, rather than in, the car. An

experimental chassis was built, a slightly revised Le Mans-type body built and the package was given the code EX175. As we shall see, the first true MGA prototype had been born.

Registered HMO 6, it featured basic TD mechanics, and was shown to Led Lord, who by 1952 was in effect running the Nuffield/Austin amalgam known as BMC. As the history books tell us, HMO 6 arrived too late, Lord having already given the go-ahead for an exciting new sportscar from Donald Healey. HMO was put back under wraps and a facelift for the TD authorised. After all the TD was still selling strongly, so why radically change a winning formula?

Again the history books relate that the end of the old-fashioned T-series was nigh and in 1954 the go-ahead was given for Abingdon to produce a new sportscar. HMO 6 was dusted off and development began in earnest.

Bearing in mind the tremendous publicity that can be generated by racing success, the car's launch was determined to be in June 1955 to coincide with Le Mans. A team of three of the new cars were going to the Sarthe, treading the path made by George Phillips those four years earlier. Development on the new car was a series of contrasts. On one hand the exciting slippery shape of EX175 was retained virtually line for line, but under the skin all sorts of changes were being made.

With the advent of BMC and the - on the whole - sensible plan to rationalise (sensible from the accounting point of view) much of the traditional MG make-up of EX182, as the first true MGA prototype was called, was replaced by components from existing BMC models. Thus it was that the MGA



Top left: One of the MGA's distinctive bonnet air vents. Top right: The attractive, and cosy, interior. Above: The MGA is a beautiful car by any standards

and later the B, came to use the venerable B-series pushrod unit that was still giving sterling service in the late seventies.

In addition to the B-series engine, MG were instructed to use the comparable gearbox and rear axle within that huge chassis. Only the front independent suspension and steering were retained from the TF (coil springs, wishbones and lever arm dampers and rack and pinion respectively) while the live rear end was suspended on semi-elliptics, damped by lever arm shock absorbers, and could also be found on the ZA Magnette saloon.

For the first time ever the MGA was only assembled at Abingdon, the chassis members and the steel and alloy body panels being supplied to the Oxford factory by outside contractors and simply put together by the MG workforce. The body was of pressed steel, while the doors, bonnet and boot lid were of aluminium alloy. To ensure that the MGA had some semblance of performance, the standard BMC offering was breathed upon by a variety of people including Harry Weslake. At its eventual September 1955 introduction, the 1489cc three-bearing ohv unit produced 68bhp which was soon upped to 72bhp at 5500rpm on twin semi-

down draught SU carburettors. Mind you it needed to produce as much bhp as possible. That chassis may have endowed the car with a rigidity that helped handling and crash resistance but at 18.25cwt it was no lightweight two-seater sports car.

Chassis and body supplies delivered late

Its launch was delayed until September because chassis and body supplies were late, but in some ways that was an unexpected bonus. The trio of works EX182 prototypes – deliberately designed to look as similar to the production car as possible – arrived at Le Mans and performed well. They did not win their class, the technically more advanced Porsche 550 had that honour, but they did beat a team of bigger engine TR2s, and that would have far greater effect on the British car buying public.

Of course, the 1955 Le Mans was a tragedy for the sport with more than 80 spectators killed following the Levegh/Mercedes accident, so good results from Le Mans were never promoted as they could have been. Still, to the enthusiast, the point had been made. If MG were unsure just how well the radically different MGA would sell, they were to be in for a pleasant surprise. In its best year (1952) nearly

10,500 TDs were sold. In 1957, only its second full year of production, the MGA nearly doubled that figure.

Although the MGA looked radically different to anything that had gone before, it was aimed at largely the same sort of buyer. In many ways BMC skimped where they could, thus items like a heater were only offered as options, and not only did the doors not lock – they did not even have outside door handles. The boot, as near as dammit, filled by the spare wheel, was also non-lockable and the plant sidescreeen had a flap for hand signals. The hood was simple in the extreme.

The first signs of growing up came a year after launch when the pretty coupé was quietly announced. No sooner had the roadster arrived, the outside manufacturers designed and made their own glass-fibre hardtops for the car, beating BMC's own example with sliding windows by months. But with the roadster came winding windows and, wait for it, door handles!

In this state the 1500 MGA was appreciated by those who drove it... although the comparative lack of performance was one area that was frequently mentioned in road tests. The car simply looked fast.

than it was. With this in mind came the Twin Cam.

Work on the Twin Cam started as early as 1954 and the engine was first seen in September 1955 when one of the Le Mans prototypes was fitted with a Twin Cam engine for the TT at Dundrod. The engine was based loosely on the existing B-Series block, though when the production version appeared it had a capacity of 1588cc. At its launch the engine developed a healthy 108bhp, but the Twin Cam was not destined to be a commercial success. A hefty price tag, performance that was merely on a par with the Triumph TR3A and an unhealthy liking for oil, combined to kill it off.

The episode did have a useful side effect, though. In the summer of 1959 came the MGA 1600 which used the Twin Cam's block, developed just short of 80bhp and turned the little car into a genuine 100mph sports car. And the performance was helped by another Twin Cam side effect, the use of disc brakes at the front. If you have extra performance, extra braking power helps, too. The 1600 continued for a couple of years, until the management realised that at 1588cc, the MGA's engine was used nowhere else within the BMC organisation and that did not make economic sense. Accordingly in that year the 1600 MkII was phased in with the block further bored out to 1622cc giving the car 86bhp.

Throughout its life the MGA was little changed externally though the most obvious external difference between the MkII and its predecessors centres on the grille, the MkII having recessed bars, while other minor changes included revised light clusters and dashboard treatment. Before its eventual demise there were a few De Luxe models that featured the 1600 pushrod engine and running gear, but mated to a Twin Cam chassis with discs all-round and a beefier chassis. The exact survival rate is not known as the model was never promoted as something special.

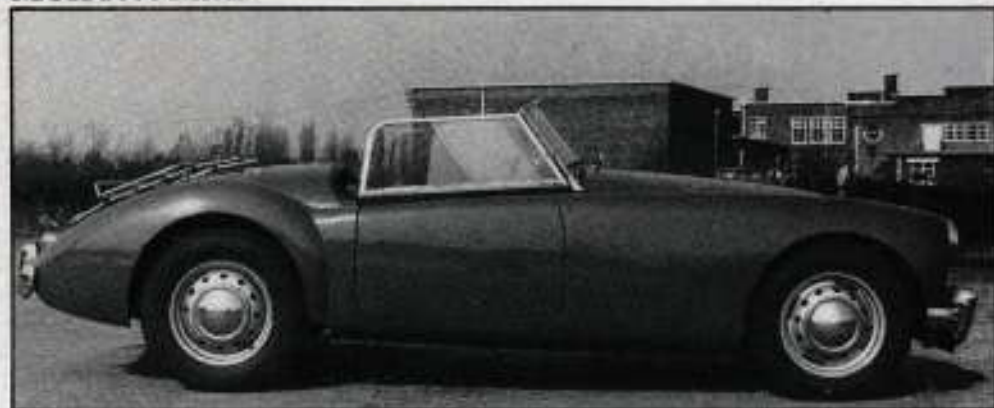
The end of the MGA came in 1962 when BMC announced the car that has become virtually the definitive British sports car, the B. With a bigger engine, and of unitary construction, the B was faster and softer than the A, but handled as well. With the B, MG had another bestseller on their hands, but it was the A that paved the way. Truly racing can improve the breed.

Production history

The first MGA, the 1500, was introduced in August 1955 and the last model, an MGA 1600 Mk II, left the Abingdon factory in July 1962. During those 83 months, a grand total of 101,081 MGAs were built but only 5815 of them stayed in the UK.

'Our' model, the 1600 Mk II lasted only a year, from June 1961 until June 1962. According to Graham Robson's exhaustive research (published in his book *The MGA, MGB and MGC, A Collector's Guide*), 5670 Mk IIs were constructed in 1961 and only 3049 the following year, to make a total of 8719 units. These figures include CKD kits for assembly

MGA 1600 Mk II



The graceful lines of an MGA roadster. The detachable sidescreens and lack of door handles betray fifties heritage

Specification		Suspension (R)	
Engine	In-line 'four'		Live axle, leaf springs, lever arm dampers
Construction	Cast iron block and head	Steering	Rack and pinion (unassisted)
Main bearings	Three	Body	Steel, separate chassis
Capacity	1622cc (98.94cu.in)	Tyres	5.60-15
Bore/stroke	76.2mm x 88.9mm (3.0in x 3.5in)	Length	13ft 0in
Valves	Overhead (pushrod)	Width	4ft 10in
Compression	8.9:1 (8.3:1 export)	Height	4ft 2in
Power	86bhp (DIN) at 5500rpm	Wheelbase	7ft 10in
Torque	97.5lb.ft (DIN) at 4000rpm	Weight	18 1/4cwt
Transmission	Four-speed manual	Performance	
Top gear	17.7mph at 1000rpm	Max. speed	101mph
Final drive	Hypoid, 4.1:1 ratio, (4.55:1 option)	0-60mph	13.6sec
Brakes	Discs front, drums rear. No servo	30-50mph in top	11.5sec
Suspension (F)	Ind. by coils, wishbones, lever arm dampers	50-70mph in top	12.6sec
		Standing 1/4 mile	19sec
		Fuel consumption	24/28mpg



in foreign countries. To break the figures down even further, 596 1600 Mk IIs were made for the home market, 6468 for America, to leave 1431 for other export countries.

There were no changes to the 1600 Mk II's specification during its short production run, the car being available as a two-seater sports roadster or fixed head coupé, thus following previous MGA tradition. The main differences between a Mk I and Mk II MGA 1600 can be summarised as follows: larger (1622cc) engine, new radiator grille, leathercloth facia, horizontal tail light clusters (mounted on the body) and new badging on the scuttle and boot lid. Optional extras were much as before and included wire wheels, a detachable hard-top, competition windscreen, 4.55:1 rear axle, anti-roll bar, four-wheel Dunlop disc brake kit with centre lock wheels, heater, radiator blind, radio and on on.

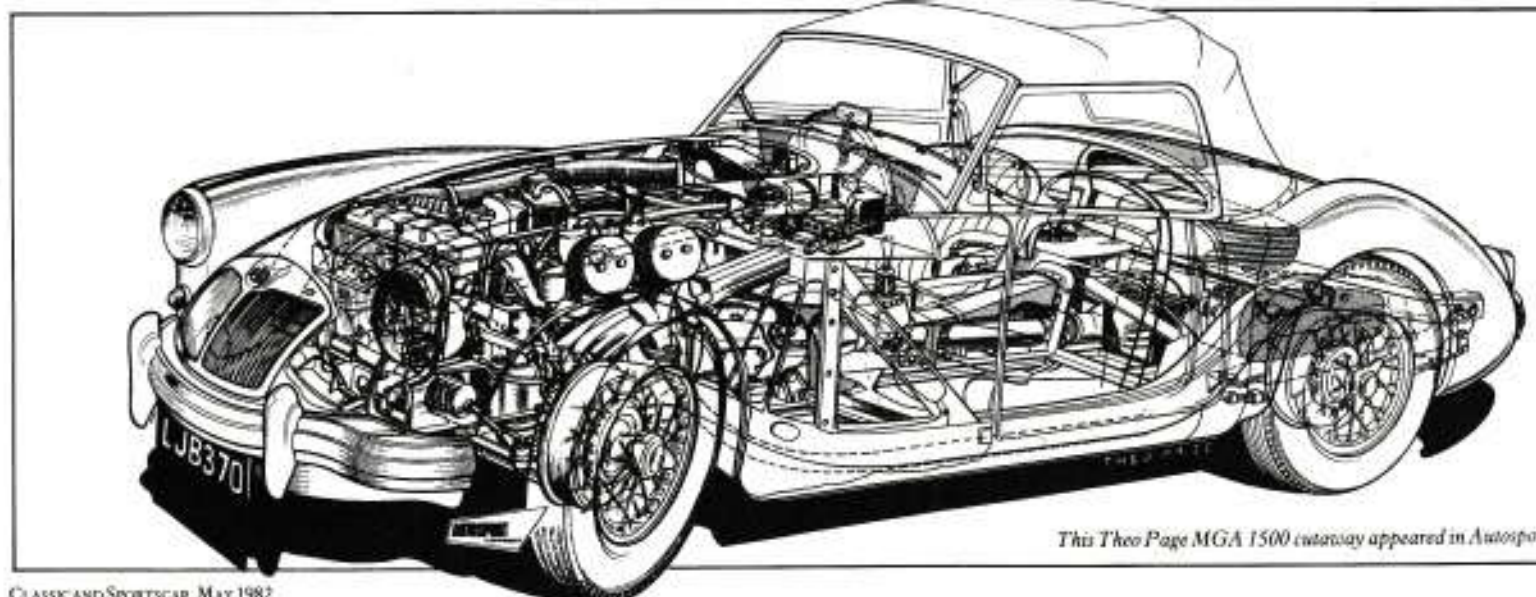
To confuse matters slightly, MG built 312 MGA 1600 Mk II De Luxe models between 1961/1962; these cars were basically Twin Cams powered with

86bhp 1622cc engines taken from the 1600 Mk II models. If you find one today, it would make sense to buy it (if you can afford it, that is) since survivors are extremely rare.

Buyers spot check

To use a popular phrase, first the good MGA news. From a mechanical point of view, the car has a good record for reliability. Furthermore, the spares availability is excellent (one source maintains the supply of spares is currently superior to that when the car was in production). The bad MGA news concerns the price of it all, for MGAs - the cars, the spares and the specialist attention available - do not come cheap at all.

An MGA in 1600 Mk II form is constructed in an inherently simple fashion so there should be few worries on the mechanical side. The 1622cc four-cylinder engine is based around the renowned BMC B-series block so expect a hardy motor that can take plenty of punishment. Make sure, though, that the oil pressure remains around the 60/65psi point when



This Theo Page MGA 1500 cutaway appeared in *Autosport*



The MGA engine has a good reputation but a professional rebuild will not be cheap. The redundant space at the back of the engine bay often houses the optional heater

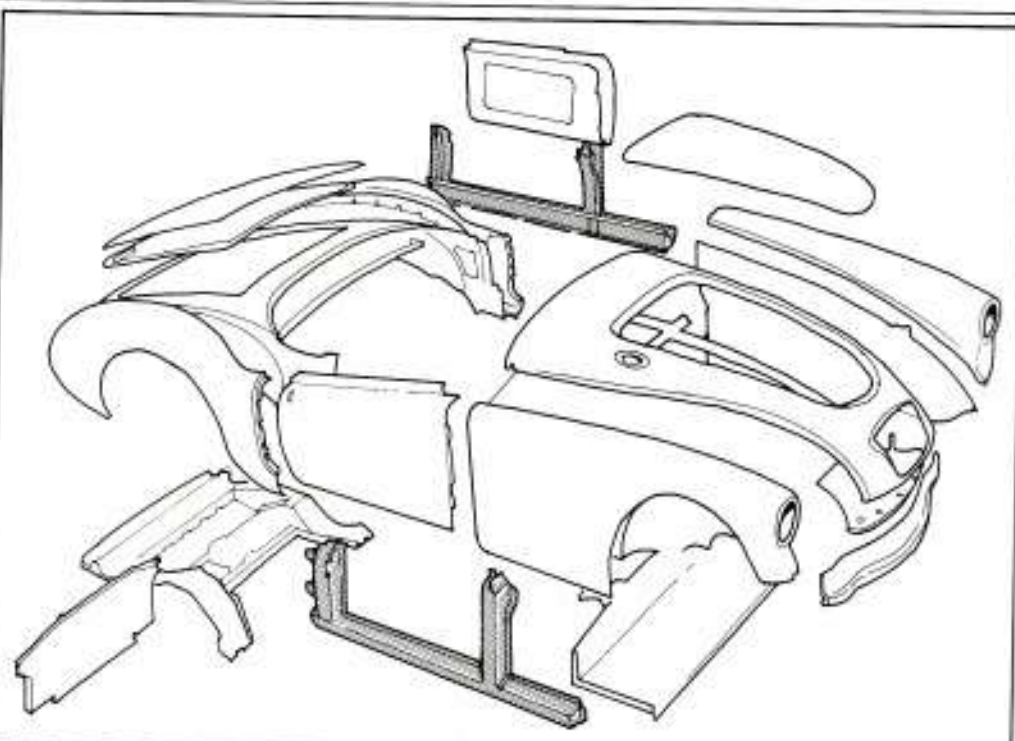
hot and that the tappets are not too noisy. With regular care and attention these engines can almost go on indefinitely – some have been known to run satisfactorily even when worn. The position is much the same with regards to the transmission; apart from normal wear and tear, you should experience no particular problems with the gearbox or the differential. Similarly, the Lockheed brakes (discs at the front, drums at the rear) should be trouble-free.

The problems start, naturally enough, with the body. There should be no corrosion around the doors, boot lid or bonnet for these panels are made of aluminium but the condition of the front wings and the surrounding metal is all-important. If the splash panels at the rear of the wheel arches are rotten, the inner sills and the F-shaped body sections that support the doors will be exposed to road dirt. These F-sections are awkward and expensive to replace, incidentally. Perhaps the simplest test is to feel along the bottom edge of each front wing in turn, continuing all the way until you reach the rear wheel arch. If you can feel air, when you curl your hand up inside this section of bodywork, think twice about buying the car!

If the car is basically sound but the wings are tatty, don't despair for repair sections are now available from MG specialists. That's assuming the car has steel wings, of course – alas many don't nowadays, due to the horrendous cost of replacement panels. When examining the front wings, watch out for rust damage along the beaded edges and for bubbling around the door shut faces. The inner floorpan underneath the seats, that goes on to form part of the footwell is made of wood but it's worth checking anyway along with the boot floor which isn't wooden and does rust.

The MGA chassis has two things in its favour: it's extremely visible in quite a few places (and therefore easy to check) and serious rot in the box sections is rare. The general rule of thumb is of course to look everywhere but pay particular attention to the sections of the frame that run through the cockpit. Pull back the carpet and check the side members, especially the sections that disappear through the rear bulkhead since these are areas in which the chassis does corrode. Other chassis checkpoints include the two cross members that brace the rear section of the chassis and the two uprights that support the door assemblies.

It's worthwhile examining the petrol tank and its retaining straps closely – they can be expensive and fiddly to replace – followed by the battery trays



This drawing shows the main components that make up an MGA body. The condition of the shaded panels is important; check the doors shut properly and the lower portions of these F-shaped sections are not corroded – renewing them can be frighteningly expensive. Looking on the brighter side, virtually every panel in this illustration is still available



Chassis side members do rust, so pull back the carpets (arrows) and check along each side carefully

located underneath the seats. The kingpins should be checked for wear (owners of Morris Minors will appreciate the problem!) along with the wiring loom which runs underneath the car.

In conclusion, the wise MGA buyer will buy the most original car he can find, for although an impressive range of remanufactured spares are available, the cost of buying them to aid a restoration project will be high indeed. Small items such as chromework, badging, horn buttons and especially larger items that are characteristically MG (radiator grilles, trim parts etc) are expensive, so be warned.

Our final piece of advice concerns cars that show no apparent sign of rust(!). Beneath that freshly-applied, shiny coat of new paint, a hefty dose of plastic filler could be lurking. The motto, then, is to seek expert advice from either the MG Car Club or MG Owners Club – or hurt the seller's feelings and test the dodgy bits with a magnet.

Rivals when new

A glance through any 1961/62 buyers guide to British sports cars will show that quite a few machines that are now revered as 'classics' were still available new. Besides the MGA 1600 Mk II, BMC could muster the TR3 (soon to be replaced by the TR4) and the Austin Healey 3000 Mk II. Around the corner were the Austin Healey Sprite/MG models and, of course, the MGA's successor, the MGB. When you add the Sunbeam Alpine, the Morgan Plus Four and – at a pinch – the Climax-engine Turner roadster, it is clear that the MGA was not short of competition.

Even though it had a much larger engine, the TR3 was only marginally more expensive than the MGA when new. It also had cut-down doors, sidescreens, front disc brakes and a fine competition pedigree, but could it match the gracefulness of the MGA body? Most of these observations apply equally to the Sunbeam Alpine, introduced in July 1959, when the MGA was nearing the end of its distinguished production run. The Alpine was listed until January 1968 but wasn't it more of a sporting tourer than an out-and-out sports car, such as the members of the Morgan Plus Four family?

The Big Healey was naturally faster and more expensive than the MGA when new but today shares the same crazy 'cult' following that has pushed up prices to ridiculous levels. However at the end of the day, when one considers what the MGA can offer in terms of looks, performance, reliability, economy and practicality, it's not too difficult to see why rust-free survivors make such appealing keepsakes. The question is, though, will the MGB ever attain the same heights?

Clubs, specialists and books

The MGA driver is indeed fortunate in that both the MG Car Club and MG Owners Club cater for his car. Of the two, the MGCC is probably the more MGA-orientated although the giant MGOC does make a point of covering MGA topics.

Formed in 1930, the MG Car Club currently totals around 10,000 members. Within the club, a strong MGA element exists in the form of the MGA Register, and at the time of going to press the Register knew the details on approximately 1200 surviving MGAs. To complement the main club's national *Safety First* magazine, the Register produces its own bi-monthly publication, *MG Acquisitions*; a year's subscription to this will set you back £3.50, further details from the Registrar, Brian Thompson of 4 Ottershaw Park, Cobham Road, Ottershaw, Surrey KT16 0QG. The MGCC also run a MGA Twin Cam Register, by the way, but that's really outside the scope of this feature. We can mention, though, that the club run a very successful MGA racing championship, that technical advice and parts discounts are readily available to club members and that a mind-boggling list of local, national and competitive events are arranged by the club each year. The MG Car Club's head office is 67 Wide Bargate, Boston, Lincs (tel: Boston 64301).

Whereas the MGCC tends to attract the more traditional MG driver, the membership of the nine-



This late-model MGA 1600 shows off its revised tail lights and vinyl-covered hardtop



Jack Sears testing his Mk II Coupé in preparation for the 1962 Sebring 12 Hour race



Ken Wharton sits in one of the EX 182 Le Mans cars which paved the way for the MGA

year-old MG Owners Club is made up largely of more youthful, slightly less serious enthusiasts. The MGOC MGA expert is Peter Wood of Westwood Portway Group, Portway Road, Twyford, Bucks (tel: 029 673 310). Membership of the MGOC entitles you to 12 copies a year of their useful *Enjoying MG* magazine which contains innumerable names and addresses of MG specialists and local club contacts together with plenty of practical, down-to-earth information on how to run your MG, have fun – and save money in the process. The MG Owners Club is run efficiently by Roche Bentley and his team, who can be found at 13 Church End, Over, Cambs (tel: 0954 31125/30661).

Simon Robinson's MGA Centre (Cleveland Street, Darlington. Tel: Darlington 281343) is probably Mecca for the majority of MGA followers, since Simon makes a living out of buying, selling, repairing and restoring MGAs of all descriptions. Following on, we come to Moto-Build Ltd of 128 High Street, Hounslow, Middx (tel: 01 570 5342), Toulmin Motors of 103 Windmill Road, Brentford, Middlesex (tel: 01 560 1722/2228), Brown & Gammons Ltd of Roes Maltings of 18 High Street, Baldock, Herts (tel: 0462 893914), the aforementioned Peter Woods of Westwood Portway Group and Vic Ellis of Trussley Road, Hammersmith. All these companies specialise in MGs of one sort or another and all can provide considerable MGA expertise.

There are at least ten books in print that offer

general reading material on the MGA. Of these we would strongly recommend *The MGA, MGB, and MGC* by Graham Robson (Motor Racing Publications) as it sets out in a clear, readable fashion the exact history of the car and *MGA: A History and Restoration Guide* by Robert P. Vitrikas (Aztec, but available from Patrick Stephens in the UK) which tells the MGA owner everything he would need to know about rebuilding an A. It's an American book and slightly pricey at that, but the excellent illustrations and authoritative text make it well worth the money, in our opinion.

Another book which deals specifically with the MGA is *MGA 1955-1962*, one of the latest titles in the Brooklands Books reprint series (two of their other MG titles, *MG Cars 1957-1959* and *MG Cars 1959-1962* also cover the model). *MGA 1955-1962* is nicely produced, has a colour cover and is reasonably priced but of course all the material contained therein has been seen before. Much the same can be said of *MG Sports: the 4-cylinder thoroughbreds from Abingdon*, a recent soft cover work that reprints relevant articles taken from the pages of *Autocar*.

At the other end of the scale, there's Chris Harvey's *MG A,B,C* which comes across as being somewhat a lavish, self-indulgent look at the cars in question. *MG* by Wilson McComb and *MG 1911-1978* by Peter Filby (Haynes) are both general histories of the company, yet it's McComb's book that is acknowledged as being perhaps the best-all-round look at the company as a whole. Finally, A.F.

Rivers-Fletcher remembers with affection the MGA he has owned in *MG Past and Present* (Gentry), and a bewildering (but welcome) range of reprinted MGA manuals, handbooks, and other literature exists to the benefit of d-i-y enthusiasts.

Prices

In the UK, MGAs have always been pretty thin on the ground, so if you are thinking of buying one today, you may have to pay out much more than you think for a sound car in good overall condition.

We're told that it's still possible to pick up MGAs of the non twin cam variety for between £500/£1000 but any car in that price bracket will almost certainly need a great deal of (expensive) work to make it presentable. In this day and age, a £500 MGA would be fit only for spares or a complete rebuild. 'Average' cars are priced today between £1000 and £2000 and for that kind of money you can expect a roadworthy car that may be slightly scruffy around the edges. 'Clean' all-steel MGAs have now crept up to the £2000/£3000 bracket and you'll have to part with more than £3000 for a first class example with all original parts intact. Concours winners, on the one hand, may go as high as £6000/£7000...

From the foregoing, it should be self-evident that the business of buying, repairing and (if necessary) restoring an MGA has now become very expensive. Due to the model's relative scarcity – records show that only 5815 MGAs stayed in the UK – anything MGA is now worth money, and lots of it.

NEW MGA 1600

Mk II



with More power to your safety

A 1961 ad for the 1600 Mk II, emphasizing the increased number of horses under the bonnet



The MG Car Club, above, runs an MGA race series. The MG Owners Club also caters for its

OWNER'S VIEW

Crispin Schlaefli tells of his consuming passion for MGAs

Ten years ago this month, Crispin Schlaefli bought his pride and joy, a 1961 Tartan Red MGA 1600 Mk II roadster. Having fallen by then for the car's sleek shape and beautiful lines, he had made up his mind that he had to have one.

"I'd seen quite a few 'As around and I knew this one was for sale; it wasn't immaculate but it was solid. In the end I waited four months until the owner decided to sell, and then I bought it for £300, MGAs ranging between £200 and £500 in those days (*Sob!* - Ed.). The car turned out to be reasonably sound mechanically but nevertheless I then started a gradual programme of renovation."

Even in those days MGAs were at a premium, for by all accounts you could then pick up a sound useable MGB for under £100. Crispin admits that he couldn't really afford the MGA - he had to borrow money and work on a building site to pay for it - but he now regards the car as part of his family's life. "I couldn't really imagine life without it, my wife and I have been everywhere in it. You could say that we've gained many of our friends from owning the A."

Imagine his desolation, then, when in 1979 his cherished MGA was stolen from outside his house in broad daylight. "It turned out that the car was spotted the same day by a fellow MGCC member, running on false number plates but that was the last time it was seen for six months. I was really distraught, especially when the insurance company offered me a derisory sum in settlement. So I placed a whole series of ads in *Exchange & Mart* and *Safety Fast* saying that the car had been stolen; I also made up a sheet describing the car down to the last detail, and sent a copy to every single MG garage and specialist in the country. In desperation we even drove around the streets looking for the car, but after six months of this, and going to MG Car Club meetings, MG garages and the like, examining every single MGA I came across, I had all but given up hope.

"Then, out of the blue, I received a phone call from Malcolm Green of the MGCC. He'd bought my

car from a local garage! He'd had trouble registering it with Swansea which made him suspicious, but when he saw my ad in *Safety Fast*, he checked chassis numbers and found the two cars to be the same. At this point, the car had been through three or four garages - the one he had bought it from was certainly not to blame - and it is only due to Malcolm's honesty that I got the car back at all. All credit to him."

'... welcome reliability'

In Crispin's tenure, 3311 DD has covered 80/100,000 miles and its owner has high praise for its welcome reliability. "Up until it was stolen, I had used the car every day - and in all that time, I only failed to get home in it once, and that was when the water pump seized outside the MG factory in 1977! Unfortunately, I had to be 'relayed' back to London. On another occasion, the car's close-ratio gearbox broke (the lay gear needle bearing failed) but I managed to drive home in fourth gear. I changed the 'box myself with a secondhand one I bought for £10. That was in 1974. To underline the car's reliability still further, the front suspension king pin top link sheared one day but even then I was able to drive home with a temporary repair.

A front brake overhaul is currently top of the 'jobs to do' list, to be followed by the fitment of a replacement steering rack. Then there's a secondhand close-ratio gearbox to go in and possibly some engine work, as well. Sad to relate, the redoubtable 1622cc 'four' under 3311 DD's bonnet is currently not in so fine a tune as it was, which Crispin puts down to misuse while the car was out of his hands. "Still," he adds succinctly, "you can easily spend £700 on an MGA engine to bring it up to scratch with no trouble at all, but I don't think I'll be spending quite that much just yet."

3311 DD has had four owners in its lifetime and it's fair to say that it stands at present as an original car that has had a respray. The paint work was carried out back in 1977 by Jack Edney, a specialist well-known in MGCC circles. He took the body right



The MGA's delightfully evocative cockpit

down to bare metal and gave the shell two coats of red oxide primer before applying the top coats, which goes some way to explaining the MGA's remarkable rust-free appearance in 1982. Despite having covered close on 150,000 miles and only being garaged for a short part of its life, this MGA is solid, dependable, original and in Crispin's eyes, quite valuable. To be more accurate, he regards it as being almost priceless but the car's not for sale by any means.

So what's the appeal of the MGA? Crispin, the Treasurer of the MGA Register for the MG Car Club sums it up thus: "I think it's the most attractive sports car ever made. It's absolutely fantastic to drive and a lot of fun. The handling is very precise and forgiving - you can throw it into a corner with complete confidence. In fact it's difficult to do anything wrong with an A. But really it's nostalgia and character isn't it? Look at today's cars and then look at the lovely lines of the A. What is there that can begin to compete with it?"



'Four careful owners, 150,000 miles, must be seen' - MGCC official Crispin Schlaefli at the wheel of his cherished 1600 Mk II MGA roadster. 'The car is now part of my life' he says