

AUSTRALIAN
SPORTS CAR
WORLD QUARTERLY

\$1-50*

AUGUST/OCTOBER 1977



**GIANT
MG
FEATURE:**

**THE T-TYPES
A to Z**

**CLASSIC
TEST:
MGA
TWIN CAM**

**BATHURST'S
MG DAYS**

**ACROSS
EUROPE
BY LAMBO**

**ENZO'S
WHITE
LIE**

Happy Ending for an Octagonal Ugly Duckling

THE MGA COMES IN FROM THE COLD

Like a lot of other sports cars, the MGA was regarded as unlovely and fairly ordinary during its prime. It's only now — more than 20 years after the first MGA 1500 appeared — that the car's qualities are recognised by practically everyone. The writer of this piece restored an A 1500 a couple of years ago as he "happily watched the prices climb".

IF YOU see a smug look on an MG freak these days, it is a reasonable bet that the face belongs to the owner of an MGA. Why? Because over the last couple of years, those fortunate enough to own one have had the satisfaction of seeing their cars transformed from neglected ugly ducklings of the MG family into sought-after swans.

Not so long ago, you could skim the classified ads of the Saturday press and see MGAs going for a song. The T-types had already achieved their exalted spot as *the* classic English sports cars; they were expensive and becoming more so. The B-types, with their 1798 cm³ engine, were favoured by the more affluent and the more competition-minded and although not scarce, were

also expensive. Tucked forlornly between listings of their more glamorous stablemates was usually a thin scattering of As, mostly at bargain basement prices. But to the discerning eye, the portents of a classic car were there. The Bs were many and (then) still available new in Australia. The As were relatively few, and were possessed of certain characteristics which placed them firmly in the classic tradition of their famous marque, and differentiated them quite clearly from the "modern" sports car.

They were the last MGs to be susceptible to dry rot; they had a wooden floor. They were the last MGs to have a separate chassis. The enthusiast will claim, in fact, that they

were the last true MGs, being the last to emerge from Abingdon before the absorption of the Nuffield (MG) interests first by the British Motor Corporation and ultimately by British Leyland. The first of the type, the 1500, actually had drum brakes all round, and is now classified by CAMS as a historic sports car. The 1600 and the 1600 Mark II made some concessions to modernity in having successively larger engines and front disc brakes. The Twin Cam had disc brakes all round, and with 1588 cc was capable of 185 km/h (115 mph).

The MGA was designed by Sydney Enever, and had its genesis in a TD special fitted with a streamlined body shell which was built for George Phillips



to race at Le Mans in 1951. The first MGA prototypes were built in 1952, and had works numbers Ex 175 and Ex 179. In 1954, Ex 179 was taken to Utah in the USA, where it set speed records too numerous to list here. The new model made its competitive debut at Le Mans in June 1955, the first time in twenty years that the works had officially engaged in competition. The model was introduced commercially three months later.

My A is an original 1500 roadster of the type which was produced from September 1955 to May 1959. From the chassis number I would put it around 1957 vintage. I bought it three years ago for a few hundred dollars. Although the car was registered and running, it had been abused and neglected and had obviously been through many hands in the course of a hard life. The motor was sloppy, the brakes were suspect, the radiator leaked, the trim was shabby, the rubber was poor, the perspex was opaque and the electrics could best be described as eccentric.

Nevertheless, after a few makeshift repairs, it served me well as a road car for about a year, travelling frequently at speed between Sydney and Canberra before I found the time to give it the attention it deserved. Now, after the expenditure of much blood, toil, tears, sweat, money and bad language, it is a gleaming beauty with faultless mechanicals, neat trim, impeccable road manners and loads of panache.

It again sports its original factory red (after having been successively recolored yellow, BRG and ivory) and I have pandered to my vanity and departed from originality by endowing it with chromed wires. And while this long transformation was underway, I happily watched the prices climb. Now, a good A can cost almost as much as a T and more than most Bs.

With an engine capacity of only 1489 cm³, the power/weight ratio of the 1500 is unspectacular by modern standards, although later versions were improved by boosting engine capacity. Nevertheless, for the 99.9 percent of us who are not Fangios or Brabhams, the performance is enough. Top speed is around 153 km/h. The cockpit is roomy, the driving position comfortable; rack and pinion steering, with 2½ turns from lock-to-lock, is sensitive and precise, and roadholding is excellent. The BMC B-type gearbox is virtually indestructible, apart from a tendency for the synchro to fail on second gear. In everyday use, however, I have found

TECHNICAL DATA – MGA 1500 ROADSTER

Introduced September 1955 – First chassis number 10101. Discontinued May 1959.

Engine: BMC "B" series, OHV plus push rods, 4 cylinders, 1489cm³, bore/stroke (MM) 73 x 89, compression ratio 8.3 to 1, 51 kW (68 bhp) at 5500 rpm. Twin SU carburetors.

Gear Box: 4 speed BMC "B-type" with extended casing to accept splined end of prop shaft. Gear ratios 1.00, 1.374, 2.214, 3.64.

Brakes: Lockheed hydraulic drums. Front; two leading shoes. Rear; one leading, one trailing.

Steering: Rack and pinion, 2½ turns lock-to-lock.

Running Gear: Tyres 15 x 5.60, wheelbase 2388 mm, track (front) 1204 mm (rear) 1245 mm, rear axle ratio 4.3. Wheels; discs with ventilation holes and 4 stud attachment (wire spokes with centre knock-ons as optional extra).

this inconvenience so minor that I have not yet got around to doing anything about it and doubt if I ever will.

But I can tuck my nearest and dearest in beside me and relive the great days of wind-in-the-face seat-of-the-pants motoring. On a summer day with the hood down, I can track tightly into the corners on a winding mountain road and watch the big gas gulpers fade into the rear-view mirror. I can hear the rush of air in harmony with the thrum of the tyres and the beat of the exhaust. And all this at better than 10.6 km/l (30 mpg); plague on metrics for such a staunchly British car.

If you are looking for a good classic sports car, I can thoroughly recommend an MGA. But don't expect to buy a bargain. We, the far sighted, snapped them all up years ago. □

