

BRIEF TEST

MGB

At this stage in its career no one is going to suggest that there's anything basically wrong with the MG B. It's a best seller with no pretensions: while it doesn't set the highest or latest standards of performance, or cornering power, it is the kind of car that people buy because it is reliable, good value for money, and fun to own.

Some sports car enthusiasts in Britain might argue with conviction that the Twin Cam version of the Lotus Europa is a fine example of what Britain has to offer in modern, reasonably priced sports cars, but the faithful old B remains our ambassador overseas. British Leyland have made no major changes to the concept since it first came out, but the detail improvements to the design we have periodically reported. Once again the MG B has undergone a minor facelift, so here is our up-to-date assessment (the last full test appeared in *Motor*, December 27, 1969, by the way).

To all intents and purposes the B is the same as ever but in its latest form the distinctive raucous exhaust note has been reduced so that the noise it makes is now anonymous. The most obvious change is on the dashboard where there are now rocker switches and fresh-air ventilation. These and other moves are aimed at keeping the B abreast of the times but the essential character of the car betrays its age: the shallow screen, short screen wipers, and enormous steering wheel are basic enough features, the overall effect of which might tend to cloud any fresh thoughts on a car that has been in production so long. Presumably the development team working on the B must have been similarly stultified as the long-awaited simple modification to the pedals to facilitate heel-and-toe downchanges remains undone, while the much-criticized A60-style rotary heater controls have also been left untouched.

We were disappointed to find that these faults, which to us would seem both important and easy to correct, are still ignored by MG; yet despite these minor irritations the car remains an old friend. The

plenty of torque for instant response from fairly low revs.

The performance of the car we have just tested matched up well with those we have driven in the past. The first B we drove had a top speed of 106.5 mph at MIRA, a later model managed only 105 mph, and the current example was back at 106.2 mph. All these differences are of a kind to be expected with varying weather conditions.

As for standing starts, the 0-60 mph times on the three cars we have tested over the years have been 12.6sec., 11.0sec., and 11.5sec respectively. The first gain was due to an improved second gear ratio, while the slight drop in acceleration now may be due to the fact that the B has put on a little weight since 1969. Both the most recent figures were taken in slightly damp conditions: we would not expect any significant improvement in dry weather as axle tramp, never a problem under normal conditions, is a slight hindrance in proper racing style starts, so a fairly soft touch is demanded. We assume that a slight flat spot on this car at 2000 rpm was peculiar to this vehicle.

The current gearbox was introduced in 1967, when first gear was given synchromesh. There seemed to be a little clutch drag on our car, causing a lot of baulking in the selection of first gear from rest. This problem, for which there should be a simple cure, should not be confused with that of basic gear selection: some drivers took some time to get the "feel" of the gear gate which is very close in the reverse, 1-2, and 3-4 planes. To select first gear easily it is important to permit the lever to find its own centre and then push it forward. Overdrive is an essential option for any driver who contemplates long trips in the MG B, otherwise its effortless cruising potential in the 80s and 90s will be lost.

Interior of the latest MGB includes fresh air vents on the fascia and new rocker switches. Old style heater controls are retained, however, and it is still not possible to heel and toe





Motor Road Test No. 4/72 MGB

Maximum speed mph

| | 85 | 100 | 105 | 110 | 115 | 120 | 125 |
|--------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Triumph TR6 | 4:11 | | | | | | |
| Triumph GT6 Mk III | 4:24 | | | | | | |
| MGB | 4:27 | | | | | | |
| Ford Capri 2000 GT | 4:38 | | | | | | |
| Ford Escort Mexico | 4:27 | | | | | | |

Acceleration sec

| | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 12 | 14 |
|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| Triumph TR6 | 0-60 30-60 in top | | | | | | |
| Triumph GT6 Mk III | | | | | | | |
| Ford Capri 2000 GT | | | | | | | |
| MGB | | | | | | | |
| Ford Escort Mexico | | | | | | | |

Fuel consumption mpg

| | 15 | 20 | 25 | 30 | 35 | 40 | 45 |
|--------------------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Triumph GT6 Mk III | Overall touring | | | | | | |
| Ford Escort Mexico | | | | | | | |
| Ford Capri 2000 GT | | | | | | | |
| MGB | | | | | | | |
| Triumph TR6 | | | | | | | |

Make: BLMC

Model: MGB

Makers: BLMC (Austin Morris Division) Abingdon, Berks.

Price: £1052 plus £264.88 equals £1316.88. Overdrive £65 extra including purchase tax, total as tested £1381.88

Performance tests carried out by Motor's staff at the Motor Industry Research Association proving ground, Lindley.

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Conditions

Weather: Dull and wet
Temperature: 50-55°F
Barometer: 30.0 in. Hg.
Surface: Wet asphalt
Fuel: 98 octane (RM)
4 Star rating

Maximum Speeds

| | mph | kph |
|-------------------------|-------|-----|
| Mean lap banked circuit | 106.2 | 171 |
| Best one-way 1/2 mile | 109.7 | 176 |
| Old 3rd gear | 95 | 153 |
| 3rd gear | 76 | 122 |
| 2nd gear | 49 | 79 |
| 1st gear | 31 | 50 |

"Maximum" speed: (Timed quarter mile after 1 mile accelerating from rest)

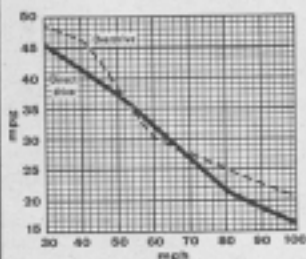
| | mph | kph |
|------|-------|-----|
| Mean | 102.2 | — |
| Best | 104.5 | — |

Acceleration Times

| mph | sec |
|-----------------------|------|
| 0-30 | 3.7 |
| 0-40 | 5.5 |
| 0-50 | 8.0 |
| 0-60 | 11.5 |
| 0-70 | 15.8 |
| 0-80 | 21.8 |
| 0-90 | 29.8 |
| Standing quarter mile | 18.5 |
| Standing kilometre | 34.3 |

| mph | O/d | | 3rd | |
|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| | Top | 3rd | Top | 3rd |
| 10-30 | — | — | — | — |
| 20-40 | 13.3 | 9.9 | 8.3 | 6.3 |
| | — | — | 3.0 | 3.1 |

| | | | | |
|-------|------|------|------|---|
| 60-80 | 15.9 | 12.4 | 10.5 | — |
| 70-90 | — | 15.5 | 14.2 | — |



Fuel Consumption

| | |
|--|------------|
| Touring (consumption midway between 30 mph and maximum less 5% allowance for acceleration) | 29.0 mpg |
| Overall | 23.5 mpg |
| (= 12.0 litres/100km) | |
| Total test distance | 1128 miles |

Speedometer

| | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 |
|-----------|----|----|----|-----|----|
| Indicated | 20 | 30 | 39 | 48 | 58 |
| True | 20 | 30 | 39 | 48 | 58 |
| Indicated | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 | |
| True | 64 | 73 | 85 | 95 | |

Distance recorder 1% fast

Weight

| | |
|--|----------|
| Kerb weight (unladen with fuel for approximately 50 miles) | 19.5cwt |
| Front/rear distribution | 53/47cwt |
| Weight laden as tested | 23.3cwt |

Engine

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Block material | Cast iron |
| Head material | Cast iron |
| Cylinders | 4 |
| Cooling system | Water, fan, thermostat |

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Main bearings | Pushrod ohv |
| Valves | 8:8:1 |
| Compression ratio | 8.8:1 |
| Carburettors | Twin SU HS4 |
| Fuel pump | SU Type HP electric |
| Oil filter | Full-flow |
| Max. power (DIN) | 95 bhp at 5400 rpm |
| Max. torque (DIN) | 110 lb. ft. at 3000 rpm |

Transmission

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Clutch | 8in. sdp |
| Internal gear box ratios | |
| Top gear | 1.00:1 |
| Overdrive top | 0.80:1 |
| 3rd gear | 1.38:1 |
| Overdrive third | 1.12:1 |
| 2nd gear | 2.17:1 |
| 1st gear | 3.44:1 |
| Reverse | 3.10:1 |
| Synchromesh | All forward ratios |
| Overdrive type | Laycock de Normanville |
| Final drive | 3.91:1 |
| Mph at 1000 rpm in:— | |
| o/d top gear | 21.9 |
| top gear | 17.6 |
| o/d 3rd gear | 15.8 |
| 3rd gear | 2.7 |
| second gear | 8.1 |
| 1st gear | 5.1 |

Chassis and body

| | |
|--------------|---------|
| Construction | Unitary |
|--------------|---------|

Brakes

| | |
|------------|---|
| Type | Discs front/drums rear |
| Dimensions | 10.75in. dia. front; 10in. dia. rear |

Suspension and Steering

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Front | Independent by unequal length wishbones, coil springs, and an anti-roll bar |
| Rear | Live axle on leaf springs |
| Shock absorbers: | |
| Front and rear: | Armstrong lever |
| Steering type | Rack and pinion |
| Tires | 155 x 14 Dunlop SP68 (optional); 8.80 x 14 Dunlop C43 (standard) |

Another virtue of the MGB is its handling. The car was not long in production before the front anti-roll bar became standard equipment, so cutting down the excessive understeer that spoilt the original model. This unusual remedy for understeer was presumably effective because in this case a good camber angle was more important than weight transfer considerations. The B still has pretty soft springs and, for a sports car, rolls quite a lot: despite the very large steering wheel the steering is quite heavy due to the high castor angle, but even so it is a pleasant and reassuring car to drive at speed.

As age creeps up on the B its ride seems to be rather poor by modern standards, a fault that may be due to the strong damping at the rear which no doubt helps to keep the axle in line. Likewise, while road noise is generally low, a degree of tyre roar is apparent and, in the wet, all sorts of splashing noises come up from the back, probably via the unpadded boot. The hood, however, while it remains a fair job to erect or tuck away, was beautifully taut and as noise-free as ever. It also managed to keep the rain out in bad weather, but some water did get in elsewhere to drip onto the driver's left ankle. To be fair, it was raining extremely hard on that occasion.

Most of the time the B is a comfortable touring car with good seats, legroom, and headroom so that drivers of all shapes and sizes can sit happily for long periods behind the wheel. Apart from the large wheel and impossibility of heel/toe changes the other major controls are well placed.

As for the dash layout, the recent facelift seems pretty half-hearted. The speedometer and tachometer have always been easy to see, the overdrive switch is conveniently placed at fingertip reach, and the substitution of rocker switches for the lights, heater fan, and wipers is no bad thing. The fresh air system, with outputs placed high on the centre of the fascia, is excellent. Yet it is still hard to read the other instruments and there are still no sun visors: the awkward old rotary heater knobs do not provide much effective adjustment between full heat and none. Why couldn't the Marina wash/wipe stalk go into B? It would be so much better than the manually operated washers and separate wiper switch. The indicator/flasher stalk, mounted on the right, is good except that it also works the horn: we have always campaigned for horn buttons or rings on steering wheels to avoid confusion in an emergency. The small glovebox must still be opened each time with a key, but this is excusable in a soft-top car. The ignition/starter key has been moved to the steering column to enable a column lock to be fitted.

You can get quite a lot of luggage behind the seats but if you want to make the most of the boot, which now seems full with a spare wheel, it's best to pack your gear in a holdall rather than a rigid suitcase.

To conclude, we still like the well-mannered B as do a large number of satisfied customers. But we feel that with a little bit more attention to a few details it could be better. The opportunity has been missed again in many respects, even though all the latest improvements have been