

ROAD TEST of the 1¼ Litre M.G. Saloon

THERE are two M.G.s. I mean, there are M.G.s of two widely different characteristics, and it is not easy to see the family resemblance between the two.

One is the TC type Midget, which is the car that most of us think of when the marque is mentioned, because it is the kind of M.G. that has attracted a lot of spectacular publicity throughout the world for its class records and its astonishing series of victories in the international classics of track and road circuit. The ordinary TC model has a great deal in common with the more specialised racing M.G.s. It has the rakish little body and purposeful mien, the comparatively close-ratio gears, the firm, rather stiff suspension, and the more direct steering, of the recognised sports or racing car. It has always had an enthusiastic following throughout the world—even in the U.S.A., where the M.G. owners' club is now a considerable institution.

The other M.G. is known as the 1¼ litre model. It has the same size engine as the TC Midget, but at first sight has little else in common with that car. It has a commodious, quite luxurious saloon body, replete with the

refinements expected in the better class of family car but seldom met with in sports car practice. Its gear ratios are chosen to suit the greater weight of this type of coachwork as compared with the open two-seater body of the TC. It employs independent, wishbone type, coil springing in front that gives a notably soft ride, and lower-geared steering of positively "finger light" ease.

I have had an opportunity of giving this car a searching road test. I still cannot find, in appearance or specification, more than a passing family resemblance between it and the Midget. But the relationship is there, and to a very marked degree. The car has to be driven for that discovery to be made.

Wide Appeal

The M.G. 1¼ litre belongs to the post-war era when fashion, even in the conservative tastes of sports-car fans, is changing, and was designed to appeal not only to the speed merchant, but to the wider public who can best appreciate a "sporting" performance

when it is accompanied by arm-chair comfort and limousine-like suspension.

Between the two of them these models offer the best of both worlds.

I took the car over one dark evening in London and drove it straight down to the coast. In town I was surprised to find that the suspension, in direct contrast to the TC type, was softer, smoother, than the office landaulet which one uses from time to time, and the small engine was happily flexible, despite the substantial coachwork it was pulling, for the car could meander comfortably in top in most of the heavier traffic, calling for a change down only when the traffic stream dropped to walking pace.

I expected to find that on the open road one would have to pay for that soft suspension with a bouncy instability at high speed, or pay, alternatively, for the

top gear flexibility with a disappointingly modest top speed.

But once out of London, on the Sutton by-pass, and beyond, on the Reigate road, the car was soon delving into the sixties without, as it were, being asked. It made so light of its work that something over 60 m.p.h. seemed to be its natural cruising speed, and one had to treat the throttle very lightly not to exceed the sixty mark.

Far from any bouncy instability, the movement of the springs was indiscernible; the car rode as though on rails, yet it was always a soft ride, and on bends I was delighted to find that one could use a lot of steering at speed without the least suggestion of heeling over.

One does not ask much more of an out-and-out sports car than that it should cruise in the sixties and give the effect of firm springing. When, at the same time, the ride can be made soft, while retaining the effect of firm springing, the combination of good control and comfort calls for special commendation.

Beyond Reigate I gave the car its head, and the car showed more and more plainly its Abingdon blood in its

liking for speed and its quite impressive road-holding.

Through the long, straight but narrow and now really bumpy road that leads to Povey Cross the 1¼ litre shot along on a three-quarter throttle opening at a steady seventy, and showed no concern at all for the bumps which have often, in cars of less modern suspension, brought my pace down to an uncomfortable forty-five.

After Povey Cross, on the fast stretch to Crawley, the throttle was opened fully, and the speedometer climbed swiftly to close on the eighty mark. The instrument had been carefully checked just before I took the car over, and at 70 m.p.h. was only about 1 per cent. fast. Its real maximum, on that stretch, was therefore, on a speedometer reading of seventy-eight, rather on the fast side of seventy-seven.

I noticed, for instance, many things only half appreciated till then. One was the extreme lightness of all the controls. One could, literally, control the steering with a crooked little finger. The clutch was effortless, and engaged with the utmost smoothness. The gear-change—with a raked back control lever that falls nicely to hand—was clean, assisted by a most effective synchromesh action, and operated up or down without the driver having to give any conscious thought to the matter. The brakes, of Lockheed hydraulic type, operating on unusually large-area drums, were immensely powerful stoppers, but progressive, fully under the driver's control, and never calling for more than the gentlest pressure of the foot.

There was ample head and leg room in the driving seat, and visibility was all that could be desired.

In daylight next morning I had a good look round the car. It was obvious that the makers, who must have been at considerable pains to give the car a genuine M.G. sports performance, had gone a long way from typical sports car practice in the appointments, and refinements in equipment, of this 1¼ litre model.

The body is a six-light affair of pleasing proportions and decidedly elegant lines.

The roominess of the driving seat is matched by spacious comfort in the rear where, with the central arm-rest folded, three can sit abreast. There are side-arms, and arm-slings in the rear compartment and - except for a very narrow tunnel a few inches high, a flat

floor, heavily carpeted. The front seats are easily adjusted, and neither the hand brake nor the gear lever can incommode the front passenger in the least.

Beneath the bonnet the O.H.V. engine has a most business-like look, and fills most of the space, but is reasonably accessible.

Test Course

Later I took the car over my pet test course between the coast and Horsham, a twenty-mile run of mixed going where good road-holding, good brakes and powers of acceleration count more in making a high average than sheer speed.

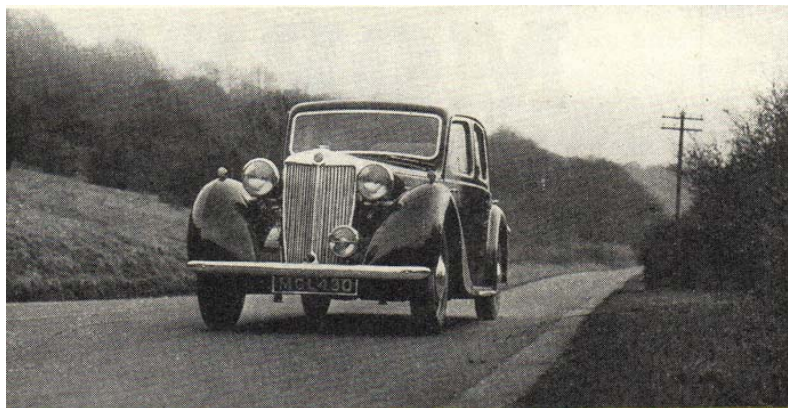
The twenty miles was covered in twenty-three minutes, averaging a shade under 52.2 mph. Mile after mile was covered with the needle hovering over the seventy-five mark, often in places where, with many another car, one would have felt unhappy at ten miles an hour less speed.

A little traffic was met, but the 50 m.p.h. third gear — indeed its

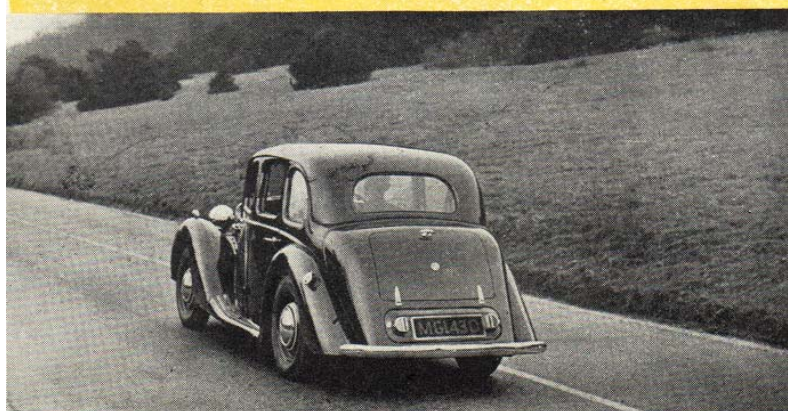


The steering column is adjustable for a 3 in. movement, and the 16in. diameter wheel is spring spoked. Steering is by rack and pinion type gear which is light and positive.

maximum was near fifty-five — rendered overtaking rapid and the car will accelerate through the gears from rest to 50 m.p.h. in a shade over sixteen seconds, and to sixty in approximately 27.75 seconds. Even at sixty there is



A family saloon of outstanding performance, this car shows its sporting ancestry in every line and feature, says W. A. McKenzie



ample reserve of power for further acceleration.

Main road hills can usually be taken without any need to change down, particularly if one is cruising at a tidy speed. I found the climb of the Long Furlong a top-gear affair, although the gradient stiffens

noticeably for the last quarter-mile to a maximum of 1 in 11 after a long pull at a lower gradient. Approaching the hill from the bottom bend at forty the car accelerated to a speedo reading of sixty-six and held that speed right into the steepest part, nearly 2,000 yards

farther on, when the reading dropped to sixty for the remainder of the climb.

Summing up, I should say that in the M.G. 1¼ litre the makers have achieved the perfect compromise between the racing-bred sports car and the stylish, family saloon.

Original publication is unknown, however it is possible that this may have been originally published in the Autosport Magazine around 1947.