

Although Britain is but a small island off the edge of Europe we accept imported products and ideas more readily than almost any other nation on earth, possibly because our history is one of being a people drawn from many roots. Our favourite restaurant meal is said to be curry and most of our cars and other manufactured goods come from outside our borders. For thousands of years we have absorbed the cultures and styles of other nations and Italian influence has been strong since the days when the Romans brought us a road system and standard of living well in advance of anything seen before. That we later chose to abandon much that was good, and return to the dark ages, also says something about our character. Italian ideas greatly influenced our architecture in recent centuries and in the twentieth century Italian car styling had a great effect on British car design, especially of some

was abandoned.

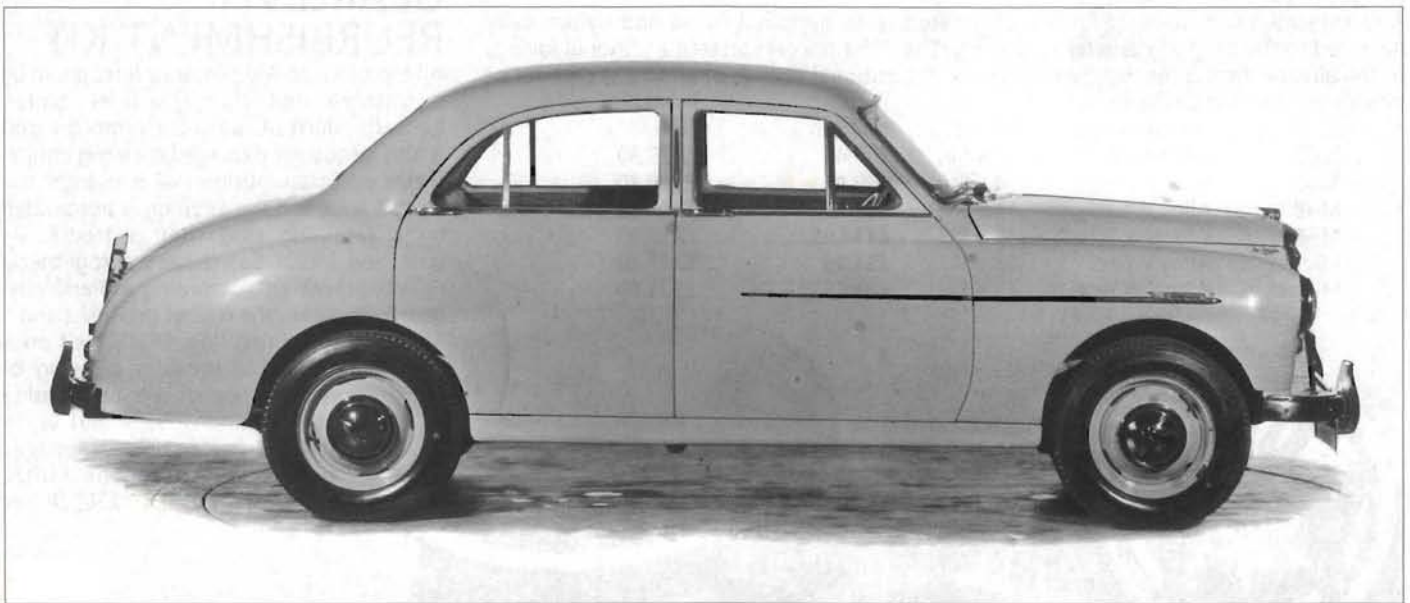
During the conflict Italian industry suffered considerable damage and when peace returned it was a while before they were fully re-established. However, despite a shortage of production capabilities, the Italian designers were actively influencing the shape of post-war cars. When British designer, Gerald Palmer was given the task of building new Wolseley, MG and Riley saloon cars for the Nuffield Group, soon to be the British Motor Corporation, he freely admits that he was greatly influenced by Italian thinking. In his autobiography he says that a visit to the 1948 Paris Salon introduced him to a Pinin Farina design for coachwork on a Bentley chassis; elements of this were in his mind when he penned the Wolseley 4/44 and MG ZA Magnette. Later, when working on his ideas for replacements for the T-series MGs, he admits being aware

smooth-sided shape. This influence crossed the Atlantic, especially with the American-owned companies like Ford and Vauxhall.

In the early post-war years the Italian coachbuilding industry was struggling to re-establish itself in a market that was rapidly changing. Like their counterparts in the rest of Europe, and particularly in Britain, the old companies who had managed to survive the reduction in demand for bespoke coachwork during the 1930s were faced with the virtual disappearance of cars with separate chassis frames. MG had thus far bucked the trend towards unitary construction as TD/TF and Y-type rolling chassis were still available from the factory and various companies used these as a basis for their own sporting cars. Import restrictions also played their part as efforts made by various governments to support their own industries saw higher import duties imposed

# Italian Influence *Part 1*

Malcolm Green



In his autobiography Gerald Palmer admits that elements of a Pinin Farina design for coachwork on a Bentley chassis were in his mind when he penned the Wolseley this 4/44 and the MG ZA Magnette

sporting cars.

Prior to the Second World War, Italy produced some stunning cars, full of style and technical innovation. Think of Lancia with a monocoque chassis/body and independent front suspension for the 1928 Lambda and all-independent suspension for the 1937 Aprilia. One British manufacturer, Triumph, went as far as to have Donald Healey design a close copy of the Italian Alfa-Romeo straight-eight engine, this destined for the Dolomite two-seater sports car that had Alfa-like bodywork. However, this car proved to be so expensive to build for the struggling company that only a handful were completed before the project

of current thinking by Bertone in considering a more modern shape for the MG sports cars.

Given this common thinking, it is hardly surprising that the styling of the Z-Magnette closely resembles that of the Bertone-bodied TD, the Arnolt. That is not to say that either is a copy of the other, merely that the two designers were working along similar lines. Fashion trends in cars are worldwide and, in addition to the Italian influence, both cars owe something to American thinking at the time. 1940s and early 1950s American cars were slowly moving from having separately-defined wings and running boards to a more integrated,

on complete cars than on components. Examples being Switzerland and Australia, in both cases a number of MGs were imported in chassis form and fitted with locally built bodies.

However, the purpose of this feature is to look at where the Italian design and coachbuilding industry was involved with MGs. In 1948 Roger Barlow, President of International Motors of Los Angeles, laid plans to sell YA saloon chassis fitted with bodies built in Italy. He visited the factory at Abingdon, and a number of Italian coachbuilders, with the result that he decided to offer cars with various different styles of body. A press report in *The Autocar*



Gerald Palmer was influenced by Italian stylists when he designed this replacement for the T-series cars for BMC

be optional, and the engine was to be tuned to TC specification, like that fitted to the YT tourer, and possibly even supercharged. Also MG was to supply extra instrumentation. Despite all these plans only a couple of cars seem to have been built. One of these was a closed coupe of rather odd design, called the Panoramica, which was built by Zagato.

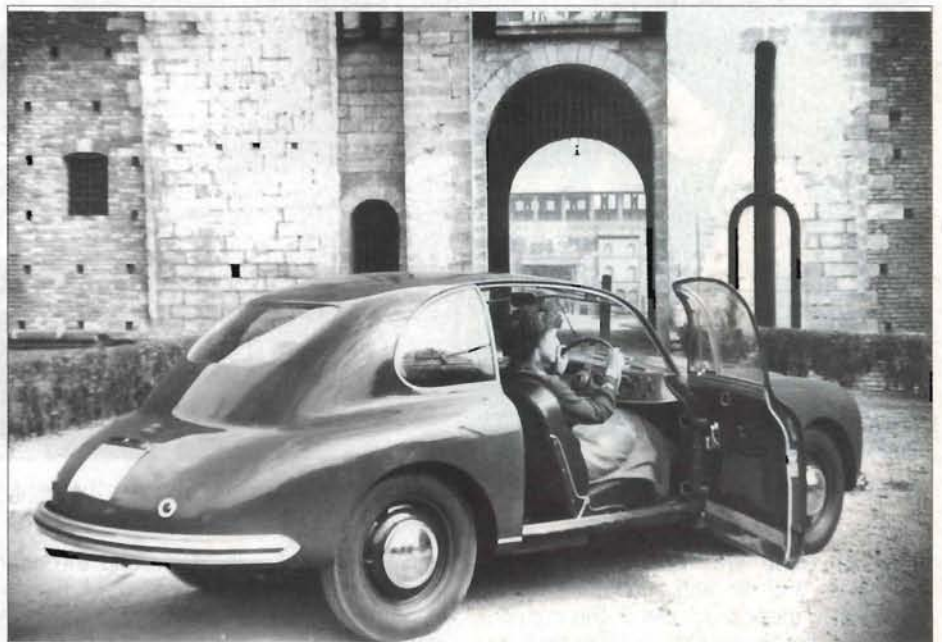
Ugo Zagato established this company in Milan in 1919 and prior to the war they built attractive bodies for a wide range of cars. During the conflict the factory was destroyed, but production continued elsewhere and by then Elio Zagato had joined his father in the business. When the war was finally over Zagato had a new factory constructed in Via Giorgini in the north of Milan. To keep ahead of rivals in the difficult post-war period, the company experimented with advanced designs and techniques.



The Zagato MG built on a rolling chassis of a Y-type saloon supplied from Abingdon alongside the standard product

of 14th May 1948 spoke of him planning to offer open two-seaters and drop-head coupés with either two or four seats. The suggestion was that these were to be built by Zagato, Castagna and Farina and Barlow saw his intended buyers being Hollywood stars and film makers. He optimistically spoke of 100mph plus performance from cars weighing less than the standard MG product. Prices were quoted as ranging from \$4,250 to \$6,500, double the prices charged in America for the Abingdon-built models.

At the time there was talk of at least seventy cars being commissioned and details were given of the modifications that were to be made by the factory to the MG chassis prior to going to Italy. The steering column was to be lengthened and wheel set lower, a higher-ratio final drive was to



The curved doors are clearly seen here, as is the unusual rear shape



From the front the car had a very sleek modern look. The MG origins were retained with the grill but Zagato placed their badge prominently on the bonnet



John Thornley and M. Mazzuchelli, an MG dealer in Lugano, discuss the details of the engine of the Zagato bodied 1 1/4 litre

One of these was the use of curved Plexiglass, and the body they built for the MG chassis made much use of this material. The two flat windscreen glasses each had

curved plastic panels above and the door and side windows were also of heavily curved plastic. The result was a car with curvaceous bodywork and a large window

area, just the thing for California in the days before air conditioning was universally installed in cars.

A second MG chassis was delivered for Barlow to Carrozzeria Castagna who fitted it with two-plus-two convertible coachwork. In an article written some years later, Barlow recalls the car having twin fuel tanks mounted ahead of the scuttle and an externally mounted spare wheel; these changes being made to give reasonable space in the boot. The elegant coachwork had rounded lines and retained an MG-style radiator grille. Borrani wire wheels set off the red paintwork and the interior was lavishly trimmed in black leather. He collected and paid for the car to then find that it was not properly wired up and items like the starter, etc. were missing. As it was not drivable it travelled the first few miles on the back of a lorry.

Eventually the car was mobile and was then driven to England and shipped to America. Despite the initial claims that the stylish bodies would be lighter than the standard product, it turned out not to be the case and with the extra weight of the body, performance was poor. Back in California, Barlow had local MG Guru, Al Moss fit a supercharger. In his article published later he makes no mention of the Zagato, which had been widely exhibited and publicised during 1949. He seems to then not to have had any further involvement with the project, things going very quiet and he sent no more orders to Abingdon for rolling chassis. Although Zagato went on to have a lot of influence in the development of sports and racing cars, Carrozzeria Castagna went into receivership in 1954 and this was the last car they built.

Another, and more successful,



The car on show at Lugano in 1949. From left to right are John Thornley, M. Mazzuchelli, Heinz Keller, and Marcel Fleury

# ARNOLT - MG

**the family car  
with sports car styling  
and performance**

For those who want the fun of driving a light, fast, racy-looking sports car with more room than the usual sports car offers, there is nothing quite like the Arnolt-MG. It is simply powered and beautifully streamlined to assure sparkling performance. Its British-built 3 1/2 or 1 1/2 litre MG engine is world-renowned for fast acceleration, high brake horsepower and economy. Its luxuriously appointed, steel and aluminum body, with adjustable bucket-type front seats, genuine leather upholstery, and curved windshield, sets a new standard for smartness in aerodynamic styling. Before you buy any car, see and drive the Arnolt-MG — the distinctive family car with true continental styling.

Even before stepping into the Arnolt-MG Convertible you are struck by its pleasing graceful lines, the sparkling performance of which this car is famous. In driving the Arnolt-MG Convertible, it is certain you will always be proud to own and drive.

- MG ENGINE AND CHASSIS for Speed with Safety
- ITALIAN STYLING By Bertone
- CONVERTIBLE OR COUPE

The publicity handout for the Arnolt TDs

both looked modern and elegant compared to the standard Morris and Wolseley models ranged alongside.

Early on the opening day of the show, Bertone was surprised to be approached by an American who, when he discovered that they had constructed these special MGs, hugged him and said he wanted to buy the cars. Assuming that he only wanted the two on display he said he should speak to Franco Scaglione as they had originally intended to share the profits on the sale of the cars. However, Stanley Harold Arnolt II said that he was interested in buying not just the cars on show, but at least a hundred of each type.

Arnolt had built up a company developing marine engines during the Second World War. After buying an MG TC, he went into the distribution of British cars for the American mid-west from his company's Chicago headquarters. Following the



The Castagna 2/3 seater drop-head coupé body fitted to a TD chassis for Roger Barlow. The performance was disappointing and on his return to Los Angeles he had Al Moss fit a supercharger

Turin show he shipped the two cars to the United States and showed them to the American public at the Elkhart Lake Road Races in September 1952. One of the main selling points for the American market was the ease with which the hood of the convertible was raised and the snug fit of the windows. He also claimed that owing to their steel and aluminium construction the cars weighed a mere 40 lbs extra for the coupe and 20 lbs for the roadster. The price for each model was \$3585, half as much again as a standard TD, and deliveries were expected to start in January 1953.

Never one to shirk publicity, the details released by his company gave much of the credit for conceiving the new cars to Arnolt himself, and the early brochure said that he recognised the need for greater

attempt to import special-bodied MGs into America has previously been covered in these pages. The 1952 Turin Motor Show was at first cancelled, and then reinstated following an energetic press campaign. Many of the exhibits came from the United States and Britain and the local Nuffield distributors, Fattori and Montani staged what was described in contemporary reports as 'a compact display' of Morris Wolseley, Riley and MG cars. However, the undoubted stars of the stand were largely homegrown. Bertone had fitted a pair of MG TD chassis with coachwork to designs worked out in collaboration with Franco Scaglione. There were two styles of body on offer, a coupe and a convertible, and

**ARNOLT** *Convertible* S. H. Arnolt, Inc., Chicago 11, Illinois

A contemporary post card printed by Arnolt to help sell the open version of the Bertone-built TD



Publicity pictures for the Arnolt Coupé

seating capacity in a light sports car, and called on Bertone, famous custom body builder of Turin, Italy, to collaborate with him in designing an entirely new body to be mounted on an MG model TD chassis. The Nuffield Organisation of England, builders of the MG car, also worked closely with Mr. Bertone and the Arnolt staff of engineers to create this beautiful and practical combination of family and sports car.

Although MG did produce the higher-performance TD Mark II, only the engine with the larger valve head designed for that model, and not the rest of the

enhanced specification, was incorporated in those supplied to Bertone. It would appear these were delivered as rolling chassis from MG in batches, with the MG guarantee plate bolted to the toe-board support box and the dashboard instruments and switches were packed separately. In addition to the MG chassis number, all cars carry Arnolt and Bertone numbers. As the bodies were hand made, and varied to quite a degree, each item of trim was marked with the body number. The standard TD dash panel was used, but mounted upside down. Available options included Borrani wire wheels, radio



and heater.

Constructing the body on the TD chassis was not a simple affair. Unlike the ash-framed standard body, which was bolted to outriggers, the Arnolt main steel body



This Arnolt DHC was imported into the United Kingdom in the 1990s, where it something of a rarity



The Arnolt Coupé is an elegant car and few would guess that beneath the sleek, Italian coachwork there is a standard TD chassis



One of the virtues of the Arnolt is the large boot where luggage can be stored out of sight, unlike with the standard TD

frames were permanently welded to the chassis, with the doors hinged directly onto the steel framing. Most of the body is covered with hand formed steel, but the doors, bonnet and boot have aluminium cladding. On the rolling chassis most was left unaltered, the installation of the engine and radiator was standard and the bracing bars for the radiator and toe-boards were retained. The side panels of the engine compartment had louvres for ventilation and an entirely different scuttle was fabricated.

The smooth shape of both the coupé and roadster produced less drag than the ordinary TD with its separate wings and

headlights. This helped to offset the higher overall weight and gave them a respectable cruising speed. Nevertheless many of the survivors have also been supercharged. One of the most appealing aspects of any Arnolt was the interior and the high standard of trim and equipment they carried. There is also quite a lot of room in the cabin and luggage space is far more generous than with an ordinary TD. The boot lid was released by pulling a knob behind the front passenger seat and the rear-hinged bonnet also had a cable pull, this being placed underneath the dashboard.

In the long run the two hundred cars were never built. The TF was introduced and the market for that number of cars was just not there. The final production numbers have been variously quoted as 65 coupés and 35 convertibles or 67 coupés and 33 convertibles, not including the two prototypes.

*Next Month -  
The Italian Influence Part II*



The performance of this Arnolt TD has been enhanced by the addition of a supercharger