Michael Bowler track tests one of MG’s faster production cars, a 1933 K3 rebuilt to the same specification as the class-winning Eyston/Lurani Mille Miglia car (see centre spread). [Thanks to Wilson McComb and Syd Beer for their assistance on K3 history]

I t is both an advantage and disadvantage that so many MGs look so similar: it is easy to assume that something like the K3 won’t be a lot faster in its class than, say, a J2 in its. That’s the worst of a very small problem: it can make you a bit blinkered. Which is all leading up to the fact that I was very surprised and impressed after a few laps of Silverstone in Philip Harbour’s Powel K3 Mag-
ette, obviously if I were fully versed in all MG lore I wouldn’t have been surprised but I’m afraid I wasn’t.

To start with, the engine was really smooth and responsive just after the throttle in the paddle with very little flywheel effect. This car now has a Centric supercharger rather than the original Powelplus and doesn’t use its oil ‘plug’ quite so readily; the pull was quite strong from 2000 rpm onwards and 3500 rpm seemed to be the start of the usable power curve with the boost pressure soon up to 10 psi. From 3000 rpm onwards the exhaust note changed to that distinctive Brooklands slen-
cer/hall crackle breaking away in one’s left ear car to the exclusion of any other mechanical noises.

The large rev counter starts the green at 5000 rpm with the red sector from 5500 rpm onwards. Down the Club straight it was up to 4500 rpm or 5000 rpm despite the full-width screen; at the end the big drum cable brakes bits securely and pulled the speed down all square while a quick stab at the gear-change pedal and a heel hip on the throttle brought in the previously selected third gear. By the time the natural oversteer had been caught up to it was time to select four for the next change; a hundred yards on — I do like pre-selector boxes for out of town use; oversteer is the predominant characteristic whether the power is on or off but it is always graceful and easily controlled on the light-

ish and direct steering, handling that must have been ideal for the Nuvolari-style when he won the 1933 TT in a K3 — it seemed that he hardly used the brakes but let the car up in a tyre-scrubbing slide instead, just like a modern Mini racer.

Leaf springs all round a channel chassis suggests fairly vintage handling but the K3 felt pleasantly strong in the chassis which gives the impression of a chance of working as such. It shimmered a bit on the hums of Beckett’s without rattling and the vertical bouncing was definitely vintage, but the car felt solid and all of a piece.

Behind the wheel you sit in the car rather than on the seat and the long belted seats so overall length is much the same as that of contemporary racing — it is just that it seems wider from the front view than many.

The K3 had a two-cylinder engine during which 31 were built, apart from the two prototypes, and only five or six are still unaccounted for; that says a lot for the appeal of the car through the intervening years that so many have been conserved and also for its basic strength of construction — they were obviously well built for long distance races while the engine seemed to be as at home in a Mille Miglia as at 200 mph on a German autobahn.

It was more than just a pity that the last MG to bear the Magnette name should owe nothing more than an octagon or two to its more illustrious forbears; it was the last of a progressively disheartening degradation of a great name and one of the bigger insults that badge engineering has heaped upon the past. But the first Magnette was the K-series, recently developed from the overhead cam 1847cc M-type four-cylinder; the F-type Magnette used the same 57 x 83mm dimensions for their 1227cc with six cylinders. The E-type followed on with the same bore but reduced the stroke to 71mm for 1057cc, dimensions which were retained for the K-type Magnette although the K1 saloon was on the lower scale so far apart from the 21 litre at 90.

The K1 was announced in October 1952 with the suggestion that there would be a sports K2 and a supercharged K3 to follow. That the K3 took the form it did rather than the projected catalogue listing largely due to Earl Howe, who wanted to compete in the great Mille Miglia in a British car and was prepared to pay the expenses for so doing. With more than commendable speed Cecil Kimber rushed through two prototypes; the first which was a slightly stretched J-type Midget was run in the 1933 Monte Carlo Rally and finished, but made its biggest impact by taking third at the hill-climb.

The second prototype was finished shortly before the Monte and had the longer 7ft 10in wheelbase with an unique radiator arrangement — the bottom sloped forward to dust-iron level. No sooner was that finished that it was driven out to Italy with Howe and Thomas to practise for the coming race — Lurani, Eyston and Birkin were waiting with their test runs too to compete in the great Mille Miglia in a British car and was prepared to pay the expenses for so doing. With more than commendable speed Cecil Kimber rushed through two prototypes; the first which was a slightly stretched J-type Midget was run in the 1933 Monte Carlo Rally and finished, but made its biggest impact by taking third at the hill-climb.

That second prototype spent five weeks away from Abingdon thrashing round the Mille Miglia course, as a result of which the gear ratios were changed and hubs and wheels redesigned. The bad weather saved the brake drums which were to split in official practise a few weeks later; new ones were sent out from England before the event.

By 11 March, three “production” K3s had been built and these were shipped out to Genoa for the Mille Miglia together with the refurbished No 2 which was again to be used as a practice hack. In the event Birkin/Rubin won too as fast as possible to break the 11000 Maresi, which was successfully achieved by one third distance. Birkin had averaged nearly 88 mph from Brescia to Bologna but by Sydney the engine had dropped a valve and they had to retire; however by this time Eyston/Lurani were comfortably leading the 1100 class from Howe/Hamilton and a Fiat special. The Fiat put closer than should have happened because the K3s were consuming plugs at an appalling rate — the supercharger lubrication was set on the generous side to avoid seizure which cost the plugs on the overrun and in towns, to the extent that Eyston/Lurani apparently changed something over 150 plugs during the race.

However the two remaining cars finished first and second in the 1100 class, 11 minutes apart at 56.9mph. I have recounted the background to the 1933 Mille Miglia and the birth of the K3 in a fairly bald matter of fact way, but I find the scale of the whole exercise quite incredible, particularly given the slower rate of communication of those days. That Kimber could show a long wheelbase saloon K1 in October with only a sketchy idea of the subsequent sports derivative, build one car that could finish a Monte Carlo rally in January, another that could withstand five weeks Mille Miglia testing over the same period and then build three more by the beginning of March was a tremendous achievement, not forgetting the redesign of front axle, brakes and hubs. That those three cars could then go out, challenge and beat the established 1100cc opposition on their own doorstep only three months after the first prototype was built, is almost unbelievable.

One can begin to explain it by saying that the various aspects of the design were tried and proven already, but a new assembly of tried components which haven’t彼此 met each other is not guaranteed to work. The chassis was a typical
open-channel frame with tubular cross members and cruciform bracing under the seats; although obviously shorter than the K-type it is also some three inches narrower. Presumably by this time the MG men had a good idea of the right spring rates for given weight distribution and desired handling, so there wasn't too much that was new in that department.

However the power output was going to be considerably greater than MG had transmitted before with around 120hp at 6000rpm, although the red sector started at 5500rpm; the Wilson pre-selector had shown itself capable of taking the output but the new axle survived the Monte Carlo rally and the Mille Miglia and it wasn't until the Mannin Beg that the differential needed a redesign due to the twisty nature of that circuit.

Then the engine had to be capable of withstand- ing the output - a longish stroke of 71mm with bore 57mm whirling round at over 6000rpm was quite a novelty. The Powerplus 9 eccentric vane supercharger was driven at 75 per cent engine speed from the nose of the crankshaft to deliver around 12psi; MG were used to Powerplus 6 blowers on the front of the 13/4 engines but to get it right first time on the extended version of the blower engine, give or take a slight lubrication problem, was a very good achievement with over 100hp/litre in 1933 from what was basically a production engine. The crank is in fact an L-type Magna one with standard rods although later ones were fitted with rods developed for the R-type; K3s had a larger sump than standard K-types both of which were used in the Rootes-type Marshall 87 blowers to develop the same power with greater reliability and reduced appetite for plug changes.

In fact Syd Beer tells me that the MG men would have been developing blown versions in the L-type Magna days but I still think the development programme to produce a strong, fast, well-balanced and successful car is remarkably short, although Syd says that the NE Magneto was of course used for at least three months.

However, back to 1933, another three cars had been built by the time the Mille Miglia cars returned and four of the six competed at the International Trophy Race; Eddie Hall finished second to Brian Lewis' Alfa-Romeo in one new one. Manby-Colgrave didn't finish in the other while Elise Wisdom came third in the Eyston car with Howe fourth. At the British Empire Trophy Manby-Colgrave came third at 106-9mph while fourth was Ron Horton in the off-set single-seater K3 including a fastest lap at 115-5mph, an impressive speed for 1100cc.

At the Mannin Beg race all six K3s retired, three of them with differential failure already mentioned and Eyston's with vertical drive failure. The Eyston car was less seriously affected and was driven by Sammy Davis for the Autocar when the cutaway of the 1933 K3 was first published. It had the intermediate 4 speed final drive - 5.7 and 4.3 were other choices - and lapped Brooklands in Mannin Beg form at 104.8mph with an estimated maximum around 110mph; most impressive though was the 0-75mph figure of 14.6sec. The car had had a rather skimpy body installed before this possibly as a result of an incident on the way to Shelsley Walsh, because it was in this form that Nuvolari drove it at the TT. Nuvolari had obviously seen how well the cars went in the Mille Miglia, but it was probably Whitney Straight's victory at Pescara against the Maseratis that convinced him of the car's suitability for the TT. In fact it was Straight's TT entry that Nuvolari took over and according to the results Straight received the £600 as entrant of the winning car, although it was nominally the Eyston factory car. A comparison with the Eyston car as tested by Sammy Davis and the Nuvolari TT car and a process of elimination on available K3s suggests that it was one and the same.

Anyway, the TT story has often been told but it was of course a handicap event with scratch cars doing 35 laps of the 13-mile Ards circuit; blown...
MG

750cc cars like the J4 MGs were much fancied with three laps start: union 1100cc received two laps and in fact started 13 seconds before the J4s; blown 1100cc and 1150cc had a nominal lap and started 1m 35s behind the 1100cc; and the scratch cars were 5m 39s after the 1100cc; thus there were fractions of a lap involved all worked out by the RAC Committee.

Soon it was obvious that it was going to be a race between Hugh Hamilton in the J4, Nuvolari in the K3, the trio of Brian Lewis, Lord Howe and Rose Richards, Dixon's Riley 1100 and Hall's K3. In practice Hamilton had lapped at 75mph and Nuvolari 78mph: the Italian was adapted to the K3 and its pre-selector very quickly and was reveling in the handling, throwing the car around with very little recourse to brakes. He was going faster and faster reducing the lap record regularly but so was Hamilton; Lewis was leading the Atlas but suffered transmission trouble. After around one third distance, Hamilton was still ahead with Dixon second from Nuvolari and Hall on K3s, and Rose Richards in the Alfetta.

Nuvolari's style reduced one rear tyre to the canvas after 13 laps which prompted a stop; they refueled as well and were away in 3m 9s. Hamilton was still circulating and broke the 700 record at 77.7mph but his pit stop was a disaster and every-

thing seemed to go wrong - the jack didn't work, fuel was spill and then the mechanic's clothes caught fire when the starter failed and he had to complete the circuit with a spanner: this was remedied but the stop took 7m 1s and the lead was badly reduced. Hall, Dixon and Howe all changed wheels and took on fuel in around four minutes. After this Nuvolari had gained considerably on the Midget, the Alfetta had slipped back and then Dixon's car had trouble with its exhaust system. It was an MG battle.

Nuvolari's laps were getting faster - 80.22, 80.35, 80.48, 80.88 and then 81.05mph - but so were Hamilton's - 76, 77, 79mph - while Rose Richards had earned the fastest lap of the race with 80.06mph. Both MG pits were signalting flat out and fuel was being consumed at an unprecedented rate, so much so that the J4 had to stop at the end of its penalitice lap for 20 seconds and Nuvolari went by and leading to the main supply of 281 gallons run out about 4 miles from the end and require the 2 gallon reserve - they had to refuse before completing the necessary tour of honour.

Hamilton was second, Rose Richards third, but Dixon was excluded after his exhaust system came apart which gave fourth to Hall from Hamilton's 1100 Riley and Manby-Colgrave seventh in another K3. Nuvolari's average speed was 78.65mph while the third place Alfetta recorded 78.71mph, a remarkable tribute to man and machine.

Magnetets continued after this, of course, to gain many achievements, including the Magic Magette which was to attain over 200mph with Goldie Gardner as EX135, many of them were converted to single-seaters and they suffered from considerable interference which makes it very difficult to be certain of the history of any subsequent registration plate.

The car whose history I have so far recounted was K3003 originally registered for the road as JB 1475; both numbers belonging to the Eyston 1933 car; the probability is strong that it was the same one that Nuvolari drove to win that TT. After that the Nuvolari car was sold to a German named Theodor Folk by which time it had been restored to more normal K3 looks with another body: Folk complained and wanted the actual TT body which he received. He wasn't very happy about the condition of the car as received, as it had suffered damage in shipping including a cracked radiator and block because water was left in it, this was obviously repaired since he used the car to compete in the Mille Miglia and on various other events.

This was the definite progress of the Nuvolari car which was K3003; however, in the last month K3003 has reappeared in Germany and the JB 1475 plates are still with it, although it was registered in Germany with two K3s which have been seen in the same hands for some years which will explain its non-appearance.

The following history of Philip Bayne Powell's car came direct from files of dates from this present day but it leaves an uncomfortable gap in the middle which we would like to close if any reader can help. We have to go back to the Ron Phelan/Dick Dallow single-seater which was very considerably developed into a successful Brooklands track car; without an offset prop shaft the only way to sit lower was to sit alongside it and that's how it looked in the layout with the rotating shaft. Goldie Gardner acquired this to attack the 1100cc records in 1937 when he fitted it with under 150mph with the ex-Euston off-track system. EX135; Gardner had the chance to sit even lower and thus was born the Railton-bodied Magic Magette using Horton's engine.

Come 1939 and one, Mick Jennings, was viewing the remaining bits and bought a collection which included the Horton chassis K3007, the original EX135 engine and radiator in a jumble form and shipped them out to Singapore where a local body was built up on it. At some stage shortly after this the car was dismantled and the bits scattered around against it becoming a spoil of war, subsequently Mike Hawke set about the task of gathering the bits together again but could only find half the chassis, the other half having been used for a car and never the other, so that it was sold again.

However, the body was apparently offered for sale separately and was bought by Sykes and Robinson who advertised the car as the Horton single-seater body on "K33" - I haven't actually seen this advert. Now whether K33 is the wrong version of K3003, a number attached to a spare chassis, or what, is very much open to question. I have also heard that they were involved in selling that collection plus a spare two-seater body.

The car appeared at Toulmin's post-war, still with the single seater body, but this was removed and replaced by the one that looked very like an aerodynamic HRG; the dummy-chassis number was ground off and TM1 stamped over the top - Toulmin Motors 1 - and the car registered PML 469 in 1950. At this point it had had the blown engine of the car was next unearthed in 1956 it was bodiless and wearing triple $US; it was found at a local scrapyard by Toulmin employee Tom Davis. He sold it to Mike Ellman Broome who initiated forensic research into the number under TM1 - X-rays can reveal what was originally stamped by the engine alone - underneath this came a name in K3003 which certainly suggested K3003 and the rebuild has continued with subsequent owners on that, the engine had been rebuilt by Hoffman and Burrows before Philip Bayne Powel became the present owner; he completed the restoration to the Mille Miglia form; Len Goff from Poulterbury built the wood frame to match the usa - a haven of K3s - and Wakefield of West Ryplee did the metal panelwork.

Whether the car is the Mille Miglia TT car or not doesn't matter a great deal; it is now an extremely nice 1933 K3 Magette which goes as well as they did in the days of Eyston and Nuvolari.