

1877



1977

# MGB GT

**Cheerful facelift for Leyland's veteran sports car.  
Suspension modifications restore its enjoyable handling.  
New seats and facia cannot disguise the MG's age.  
Outperformed in almost every respect by newer designs,  
it is fading quietly away in a shrinking corner of the market**



TO DESCRIBE the MGB as an "evergreen" is surely one of motor-ing's great understatements. Introduced in 1962, it has been an old favourite, or an evergreen, for going on 10 years.

In many ways it symbolises all that is best and worst about British cars. This classic sports car design is one which has sold tremendously well world wide; a credit to its designers. But, on the other hand, it has remained largely unchanged save for cosmetic or safety modifications during its life. Critics have written themselves to distraction pointing out its inadequacies, a monument to that dubious philosophy "If it sells, why bother to improve it".

At least, that seemed to be the case until last year, when much to everyone's surprise a revised MGB appeared with almost all the detailed points of criticism improved. As we said in our news headline at the time: "Facelift for MGB — at last". The 14-years-on improvements were a restyled facia, new heater controls, fabric seats, modified pedal layout, and a variety of minor mechanical changes.

These latter were mainly aimed at improving the handling and road-holding which had suffered when the B's ride height was raised to accommodate the American specification bumpers a year previously. Though the ride height remained unaltered, the open car was given a front anti-roll bar, having previously not had one, while the GT's was increased to the same thickness. Both models also gained a rear anti-roll bar for the first time. At the same time the steering wheel size was reduced to 15in. and the rack ratio increased from three to three-and-a-half turns from lock to lock.

Despite its rarely changing specification and performance that is bettered by more family saloons each year, the MGB goes on, selling in numbers that surprise even some Leyland executives. The detail changes give us reason to re-examine the MGB GT, a model that we last "re-examined" in 1971.



*Like Wimbledon, the MGB seems to have become part of the British summertime sporting tradition and it too has compromised only a little to meet changing demands. The massive, rubber faced Federal safety bumpers are virtually the only exterior styling change to the GT*

### Performance

The weight increase caused by the massive American bumpers has not helped performance, but, more significantly, during the MGB's lifetime the whole concept of what is acceptable performance has changed. The GT's acceleration must now rate as slow, even by family car standards; yet when it first appeared, back in 1965, this sort of performance was quite acceptable.

Maximum speed in direct top corresponds closely with the 5,500 rpm power peak at 99 mph, the best leg of the MIRA banking giving 101 mph. Overdrive is available on both top and third gears, gearing up top by some 20 per cent. But the car is not keen to pull the higher gearing and the overdrive maximum is very wind-dependent. With the wind slightly in its favour, the GT's one-leg best was 104 mph, but the mean was still just 99 mph.

Straight line acceleration is really very modest. The B manages 60 mph in 14 seconds, which is a second slower than the GT we tested six years ago. Power output has not changed significantly over the years, so the main reason for the lower acceleration must be that kerb weight is up from 21.2 to 21.6 cwt.

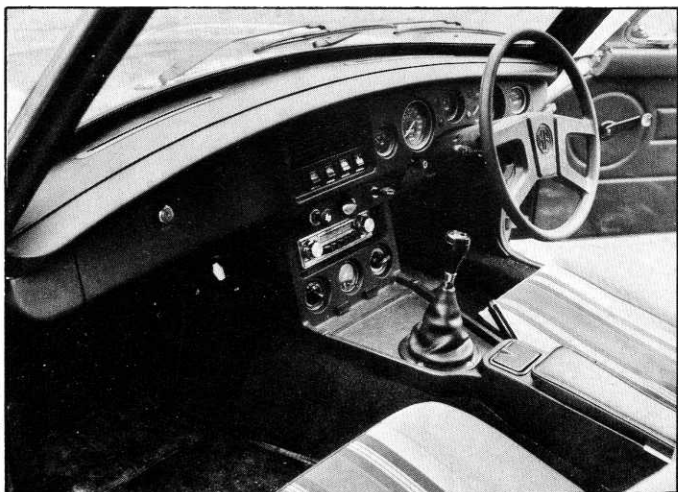
Power output is currently 84 bhp at 5,500 rpm, and maximum torque 105 lb. ft. at 2,500 rpm. The quoted figures have varied slightly during the past few years as the B-series engine has been modified for emission control regulations, and these regulations have also been responsible for the loss of some of the unit's former character.

Never noted for its free-revving liveliness, the B-series engine was always a solid, durable unit with a broad spread of power and a complete absence of fussiness. Unfortunately, the emission-inspired changes have seen the delightful low

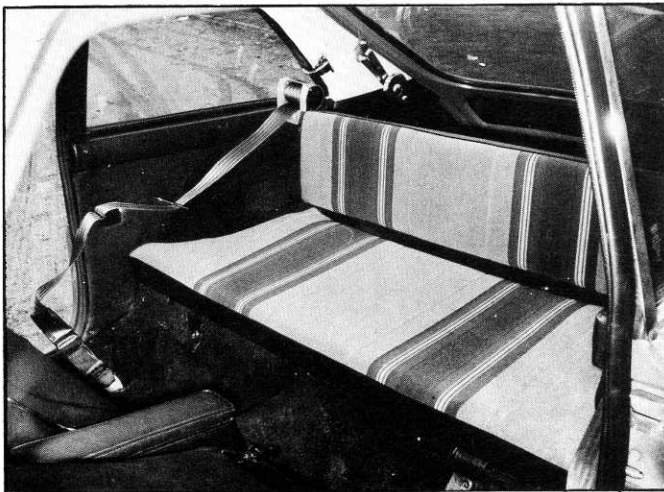
speed torque replaced by a succession of flat spots. Our test engine was also seriously guilty of running on, a not uncommon B-series problem, and prone under load — fairly familiar problems with some emission modified engines.

The B's gearchange is one of its most characteristic features, and one which has not been spoiled by the advancing years. It is the true sports car shift; a short, gaitered lever, ready to hand and offering notchy, firm, yet very precise movements through its accurate gate. Overdrive is, of course, standard, and one of the improvements on the latest car has been to re-locate the operating switch away from the facia and onto the gear-lever knob. For the first time, an MGB driver can now change gear and operate the overdrive without taking both hands off the wheel!

Gear ratios are unchanged and so the rather low second gear remains



*More dramatic changes inside where the scattered dashboard has been re-fashioned and the seats given a new deckchair striped cloth facing*



*The rear bench is really a nominal plus-two, being flat and hard with very limited head and legroom for all but the smallest children*

## MGB GT

— even holding on to 6,000 rpm only gives a maximum of 50 mph. On the other hand, overdrive third, allowing up to 95 mph, is a superb ratio and the car can be driven over give-and-take routes for miles, flicking between third and overdrive third.

### Economy

The B-series engine is inherently an economical unit, and even in MGB tune it returns impressive consumption figures. Of course, overdrive is a great asset in the pursuit of good fuel consumption. Our steady-speed fuel consumption figures show what sort of difference it makes — around 14 per cent at 70 and 80 mph, the sort of speeds at which it is most likely to be used. Indeed, overdrive makes 30 mpg motorway cruising a ready possibility, as the figures show, and our own journeys confirmed this. While our overall consumption dropped to 25.7 mpg, journeys with a large element of motorway all hovered near the 30 mpg mark.

### Handling

The 1½ in. increase in ride height needed to meet American bumper regulations had quite disastrous effects on the handling and roadholding of the B which was formerly a well-balanced, eminently driveable sports car. Instead, the open version which we tested shortly after the change was found to have heavy roll oversteer and a very twitchy response.

Thankfully, the anti-roll bar modifications have now largely cleared up the problem — though it must remain a mystery why Leyland did not provide them from the start. With the changes, the car has now reverted a good way back to its original levels of handling and roadholding.

The B has never been the sort of sports car to set standards in roadholding; its crude lever arm dampers and basic, leaf-spring rear axle see to that. Rather the pleasure of driving it has come from its taut and predictable reactions. An initial modest understeer gives way, as cornering speeds build up, to readily controllable oversteer. Ultimate levels of roadholding are not high, but the car's controllability makes it fun to drive.

The lower-geared rack has made the steering significantly lighter, its heaviness being a noticeable feature of past MGs. Though the steering wheel is a little smaller, it is still too large for some tastes, and certainly its rim is too thin.

Brakes are first class, with servo assistance allowing near 1g stops with only 60lb pedal effort. The 10-stop fade test showed up no problems.

### Ride and noise

Once again, the B has been overtaken by later designs in the handling/ride compromise. Newer cars have managed to combine good handling with a higher all-round level

of ride comfort than the MG's. Its ride is quite firm — hard if compared with saloons of similar performance — and would once have been thought typically sports car-ish if more recent cars had not proved otherwise. The harshness is especially noticeable on rougher roads, when the lever arm dampers and leaf springs get caught out from time to time over successions of bumps.

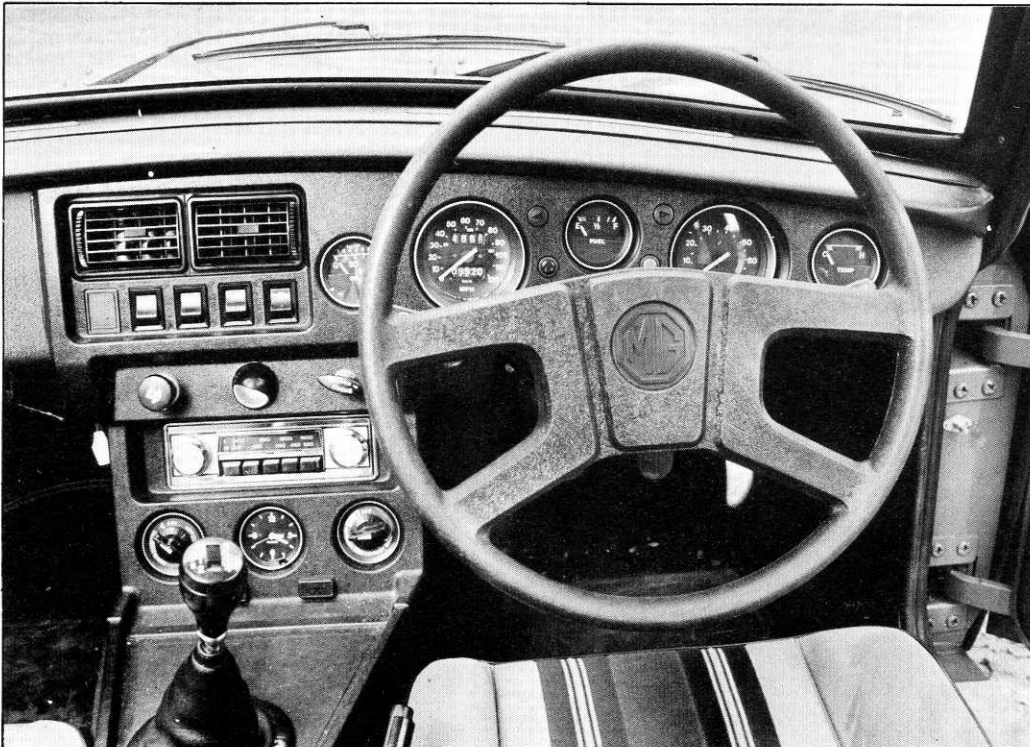
However, worst aspect of overall driving comfort is the noise level inside the GT. The door window sealing is very poor and at any speed above 60 mph the roar of wind completely drowns conversation or radio. It is a long-standing problem, yet appears to have received no attention. The engine is also surprisingly noisy; despite now having an electric fan it still suffers from just the sort of noise one would expect from a big, belt-driven fan.

### Behind the wheel

The MG has the sort of cockpit that marks it out as a sports car of the traditional school; seats are set close to the floor and legs stretch out horizontally along the sides of the large central tunnel. The facia and steering wheel dominate the small cabin.

The new facia is certainly a pleasant change, even if it has been a long time coming. The dashboard shape is unchanged, as is the material, but its black crackle finish has been toned down to a more restrained grey. It is the instrumen-

*The new facia is a considerable improvement, though the new shape steering wheel masks the smaller dials and the piano key switches can be confusing. Speedometer and rev counter face the driver with a fuel gauge between and oil pressure, water temperature to the left and right. The left stalk operates wipers/washers and the right lights and indicators, while a small flip switch by this is the lights master control. The ignition key is hidden awkwardly forward and below these. Below the central piano key switches for heated rear screen, map light, fan and hazard flashers are the manual choke, map light and rotary heater controls*



<b>ENGINE</b>	
Cylinders	Front; rear drive
Main bearings	4-in-line
Cooling	5
Fan	water
Bore, mm (in.)	Electric
Stroke, mm (in.)	80.26 (3.16)
Capacity,	88.90 (3.50)
c.c. (in <sup>3</sup> )	1,798 c.c. (109.7)
Valve gear	Ohv
Camshaft drive	Chain
Compression	
ratio	9.0-to-1
Octane rating	97 RM
Carburetors	Twin SU HIF4
Max power	84 bhp (DIN) at
	5,500 rpm
Max torque	105 lb. ft. at 2,500 rpm
<b>TRANSMISSION</b>	
Type four-speed, all synchromesh, o/drive on 3rd and 4th	
Gear	Ratio
O/d Top	0.820
Top	1.000
O/d 3rd	1.133
3rd	1.382
2nd	2.167
1st	3.036
Final drive gear	Hypoid level
Ratio	3.909-to-1
<b>SUSPENSION</b>	
Front—location	Double wishbones
—springs	Coil
—dampers	Lever
—anti-roll bar	Yes
Rear—location	Live axle
—springs	Leaf
—dampers	Lever
—anti-roll bar	Yes
<b>STEERING</b>	
Type	Rack and pinion
Power assistance	No
Wheel diameter	15.0 in.
<b>BRAKES</b>	
Front	10.75 in. dia disc
Rear	10.00 in. dia drum
Servo	Yes
<b>WHEELS</b>	
Type	Steel
Rim width	5J
Tyres—make	Pirelli Cinturato
—type	Radial ply
—size	165SR14
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>	
Battery	12 volt 66 Ah
Alternator	45 amp 18 ACR
Headlamps	55-55 watt halogen
Reversing lamp	Standard
Hazard warning	Standard
Screen wipers	Two-speed and flick wipe
Screen washer	Electric
Interior heater	Water valve
Interior trim	Fabric seats, pvc headlining
Floor covering	Carpet
Jack	Pillar
Jacking points	4
Windscreen	Laminated
Underbody protection	Bitumastic
<b>MAINTENANCE</b>	
Fuel tank	11 Imp gal (50 litres)
Cooling system	12 pints (inc heater)
Engine sump	6 pints SAE 20w/50
Gearbox	6 pints SAE 20w/50
Final drive	1½ pints SAE 90
Grease	7 pints
Valve clearance	Inlet 0.013 in. (hot)
	Exhaust 0.013 in. (not)
Contact breaker	0.014-0.016 in. gap
Ignition timing	10 deg BTDC (stroboscopic at 1,000 rpm)
Spark plug	
—type	Champion N9Y
—gap	0.025 in.
Tyre pressures	F21, R24 psi (normal driving)
Max payload	394 lb (179 kg)



## MGB GT

tation and switchgear that has been most thoroughly revised and improved.

Speedometer and rev counter still sit in front of the driver, viewed through the steering wheel, with its new four-spoke design, but the oil pressure and water temperature gauges are now separated and lie to the outside of the main dials. The fuel gauge sits in the centre, between the two main instruments. Though the dials are crisply numbered and easily read, unfortunately the oil and water gauges are hidden by the driver's hands.

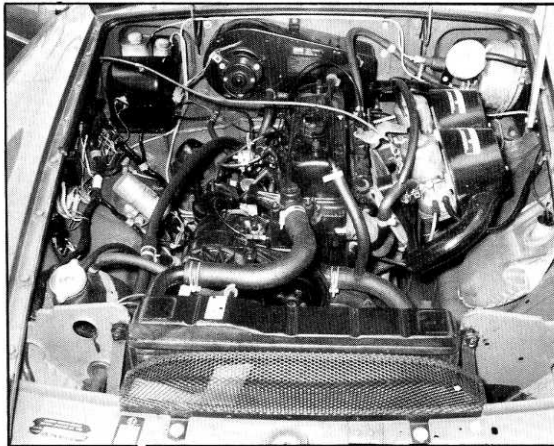
The formerly chaotic muddle of switches has also been rationalized into a tidy row under the central pair of fresh-air vents, operating heated rear screen, map light, heater fan, and hazard flashers. The piano-key switches are all clearly labelled but pose the problem common to this sort of layout, in that it is easy to flip the wrong one until touch-familiar with their location. Stalk controls operate wipers and indicators together with light dipping and flashing. The lights master switch sits to the right of the steering wheel at the base of the column. Near it is the ignition switch, which is fiddly and awkward to use, buried deep in the column and having a tiny tab to release the key from the lock.

The map light is now a small, rotateable affair, mounted on top of the centre console between the cigarette lighter and choke lever. Below is space for the optional radio and ranged below that again are the heater controls, with a clock set between them. The heater is the same old water-valve unit, which means that the temperature is awkward to regulate accurately. But the controls have been usefully improved and now comprise two clearly-marked circular knobs, for attempted temperature regulation and distribution. The two fresh-air vents give a good airflow, but extraction is improved by opening a rear-quarter window.

A very visible improvement to the MGB is the new seating material, a vivid deckchair-striped nylon cloth that faces the wearing surfaces. Our test car was trimmed in discreet shades of grey, but there are other, much more lurid trim colours available. The material looks very chic, just the sort of thing for the market the car is aimed at, and is certainly a lot more comfortable than the old vinyl.

The seats are unchanged in design and are as comfortable as ever, with plenty of lateral support around the thigh and back. They can be partially reclined, but by awkward-to-use levers mounted on the backrests. Adjustable headrests are also fitted. The straight-legged seating position allows drivers of most heights to find a comfortable position behind the wheel. Revised pedal positions allow heeling-and-toeing — 14 years after we complained in our road test of the then new car that this was impossible.

Behind the front seats is a candy-stripe bench which is really



*Familiar B-series engine has lost some of its sparkle through emission tuning, which has also cluttered the engine bay with pipework*



*The modest boot extends usefully in size when the rear seat back is folded and loading is easy through the deep tailgate. Below: Spare wheel and jack stow under the floor*



only suitable for small children, leg and headroom being much too restricted to carry anyone larger except perhaps a single adult sitting crosswise. The bench is crude and flat, held in place just by "lift-the-dot" style fasteners, so that it can be easily removed for access to the battery. The seat back can be unclipped and folded down on it to extend the luggage area.

The MG is, of course, much more of a pure sports car than most of its newer two-plus-two rivals, and, in consequence, its boot space is fairly modest. It does extend usefully, however, if the rear seat is folded flat. The wheel arches, which have the large inertia reels of the seat belts mounted awkwardly on top of them, do intrude to some extent, and the spare wheel is stowed along with the jack under the boot floor.

halogen headlamps are all now fitted as standard. Service interval is 6,000 miles, with an optional 3,000 mile check, and the Supercover warranty can be extended to two years for a modest charge.

### Where it fits in

Now that the V8 GT has been discontinued, there are two versions of the MGB — the open sports and the GT. The latter is considerably more expensive, at £3,576, compared with the open car which costs £2,854.

There are now a number of other sporting two-plus-tuos, some more obviously sporting than others. The Ford Capri is perhaps the most attractive, the 2000S at £3,522 being a close price rival for the MGB GT.

The Japanese also have recent rivals to offer, from Colt, the 2-litre Celeste at £3,349, and from Toyota the 2000ST liftback at £3,413. The VW Scirocco at £4,161 is perhaps a little expensive for comparison, but there are a number of other coupés that do not have hatchbacks which come into the price range — the Opel Manta 1.9SR, Lancia Beta 1600, and even the Ford Escort RS2000.

### Conclusion

The MGB is now so aged and out-paced as to be strictly a minority taste, it is easily outsold by Leyland's newer sports car, the TR7. Certainly the modifications improve it, but it is incredible to think that one has had to wait 14 years for little things like the glovebox lock alteration.

The fascia is tidier and the seating material very smart, but they are reminiscent of the facelift on an ageing film star — they cannot hide all the cracks. Presumably the MGB is now in that sort of ageing car's limbo where its sales generate enough profit to keep it in production but not sufficient to encourage the sort of substantial re-design it needs.

As it is, it remains a pleasant to drive, easy to service and maintain GT car, with classically sporting lines and predictable handling, yet very modest performance.

Access to the boot is easy through the full-depth tailgate, but the latter's remarkably strong springs send it slamming down hard at the slightest provocation. Aside from the boot, stowage space is very restricted: just the glovebox, a map bin in front of the passenger's door, and a small box under the central armrest. But, at last, the glovebox can be opened without a key (though it is still lockable) so saving the owner the irritation of having to stop and remove the ignition keys to read a map.

### In service

The MGB is a straightforward, uncomplicated car, as easy to service and maintain as it is to drive. Starting is straightforward, using the manual choke, but the car does not run happily from cold, being rather jerky and fluffy.

Under the bonnet, the once-simple B-series engine is how heavily disguised by emission plumbing. But it is still essentially a straightforward engine to service. The distributor and spark plugs are accessible, the rocker box easily removed for tappet adjustment, and items like the coil and fluid reservoirs are all to hand.

The fuel tank holds 11 gallons and fills through an unobstructed neck that has a twist-off cap. Reversing lamps, two exterior mirrors, a laminated screen, and

#### MANUFACTURER:

Leyland Cars  
Grosvenor House  
Redditch, Worcestershire

#### PRICES

Basic	£3,056.00
Special Car Tax	£254.67
VAT	£264.85
<b>Total (in GB)</b>	<b>£3,575.52</b>
Seat belts	Standard
Licence	£50.00
Delivery charge (London)	£47.50
Number plates	£7.50
<b>Total on the Road</b>	<b>£3,680.82</b>
(exc insurance)	
Insurance	Group 6
<b>EXTRAS (inc VAT)</b>	
Wire wheels	£80.84

**TOTAL AS TESTED ON THE ROAD £3,680.82**