

The Autocar road tests

M.G. MIDGET



An M.G. badge is incorporated in the radiator grille, and there is a central chromed flash on the bonnet

SINCE the new M.G. Midget was introduced at the end of June, the Chancellor's tax adjustments have increased the U.K. total price by some £20; yet it remains within the £700 bracket. At this price it is still good value as a thoroughly well-planned and soundly constructed little car, and promises to regain the popularity won by its pre-war predecessors. It is no secret that the car is in effect a luxury version of the Austin-Healey Sprite II, and is thus £30 dearer with tax.

Mechanical dissimilarities are few, and the differences in performance between the Midget and the Sprite II (which we tested on 2 June) must be attributed to variations of tune, and mileage run since new by the test cars. Throughout the speed range, the Midget accelerated slightly faster in any given gear, and showed a saving of 3sec, for example, from 60 to 80 m.p.h. in top. In acceleration from rest, some of this advantage was lost by a clutch which was not ideal

for rapid take-offs. It took up the drive rather abruptly over a small part of the long and largely ineffective pedal travel, pulling engine revs below the point of maximum torque. Attempts to slip the clutch during rapid getaways resulted in clutch spin, which also prevented the car from restarting on a 1-in-3 test gradient.

Starting was always immediate, and there was no need for the choke in mild weather. After the car has stood for more than half-an-hour or so, the engine is often a little reluctant to pull straight away; this hesitance disappears rapidly as the engine warms up in the first few hundred yards, and acceleration is then crisp and responsive.

One is immediately impressed by the smoothness of the Midget's power unit. Normally the rev counter needle is held between 2,000 and 4,000 r.p.m. on the open road, but 5,000 r.p.m. may be used without roughness or excess noise from the engine. A noticeable surge of power is felt at 2,500 r.p.m. There was a noticeable engine period between 5,000 and 5,500 r.p.m., it became smooth again up to the valve bounce speed of 6,500 r.p.m. At this speed the unit remained sweet and smooth, so that a watchful eye had to be kept on the rev counter, which is standard equipment. On this an orange warning band starts at 5,500 r.p.m. and changes to red at 6,000 r.p.m.; the calibration extends to 7,000 r.p.m.

An intelligent choice of gear ratios enables full advantage to be taken of the wide span of engine power. When making a fast getaway there is a logical progression through the gears, and after reaching peak revs in bottom and second a useful range of acceleration remains in the subsequent gear. Second is particularly useful up to 45 m.p.h. for spurting past slow-moving traffic, and allows up to 50 m.p.h. Yet the docile behaviour of the engine at low revs enables the car to pull away from a walking pace in second gear.

In third gear the most practical range extends from about 25 m.p.h. to 60 m.p.h., with a 70 m.p.h. maximum in reserve. Complementing these excellent gear ratios are the



Under-bonnet accessibility is fair, although the compartment is unusually crowded on the Midget. The dipstick is below the sparking plug leads

Large amber winking indicators blend neatly with the stop and tail lamps. The rear side-screen panel is slipped forward to give access to the interior as there are no outside handles

ease and speed with which changes can be made, for the lever can be snatched from one position to the next almost as quickly as the hand can move. For fast upward changes the synchromesh cannot always quite cope, especially if the lever is pulled smartly from bottom to second. Distinctive but unobtrusive gear whine is audible in all the indirects. The gear lever is placed conveniently only a few inches from the driver's left hand on the steering wheel, and its knob is of hard plastic, insulated with rubber.

Bearing in mind the engine's willingness to rev, top gear gives just the right combination of liveliness with high-speed cruising, the road speed being just over 60 m.p.h. at 4,000 r.p.m. The fastest speed reached with the Midget was 85 m.p.h. at 5,600 r.p.m., when the engine is nowhere near the point of "running out of revs." The theoretical maximum, based on the engine's safe rev limit, would be just short of 100 m.p.h.

Factors tending to dissuade one from taking full advantage of the car's abilities were a marked increase in noise above 70 m.p.h., accompanied on this example by vibration, apparently from the transmission. The most comfortable and restful cruising rate is around 60 m.p.h., and the fuel consumption figures at constant speeds show that 60 m.p.h. is relatively economical, for at a steady 70 m.p.h. 10 miles fewer are averaged per gallon. If faster speeds are sustained, as when the car was held at 80 m.p.h. and above for long periods on M1, the oil pressure drops rapidly from its normal 60 p.s.i. maximum to nearer 40 p.s.i. Three pints of oil were consumed in 1,037 test miles, equivalent to nearly 3,000 m.p.g. At the higher speeds also, slight final drive whine was heard.

As for fuel consumption, the best figure obtained was 48.5 m.p.g. on a main road run with restrained use of the



performance, but this figure dropped to 34.1 m.p.g. when the same 20-mile stretch of road was covered as fast as the car would go. In city traffic and at sustained high speeds consumption naturally increases, giving the overall figure of 33.4 m.p.g. for the entire test, but any owner in search of economy will have no difficulty in exceeding 40 m.p.g. with the Midget.

The 948 c.c. engine has a compression ratio of 9-to-1, and needs to be run on super premium grades of fuel. The lower compression ratio of 8.3-to-1 is optional to suit normal premium grades of petrol, and any increase in consumption resulting from this would probably be recovered in reduced petrol costs; performance, naturally, would be a little lower. The fuel tank holds only six gallons, so that frequent refuelling is necessary when the car is driven hard.

Directional stability of the Midget at speed is much affected by cross winds, and frequent correction is necessary to maintain a straight course. This characteristic is made less troublesome than it would be otherwise by the excellent precision of the rack-and-pinion steering. The control is completely free from lost movement, and with 2½ turns of the wheel between the extremes of acceptably wide steering locks, it requires only small or even imperceptible move-

A padded roll runs along the top of the fascia. Roomy pockets for maps and oddments are fitted to the inside of both doors. Right: Both seats tilt forward to give access to the rear compartment in which a seat cushion is an optional extra. An ashtray is also available at 7s 9d extra





M.G. Midget

With the hood in place instead of the hardtop the Midget uses the same sidescreens as are fitted to the Austin-Healey Sprite, but the car is still identifiable in this view by the full-length rubbing strip and "MG Midget" motifs on the luggage locker lid

when the hood is in position. When not in use the struts separate like tent poles at the centre and fold away into a bag for stowage in the luggage locker. At above 70 m.p.h. wind pressure causes the leading edge of the sidescreens to bow out.

A generously large luggage locker is provided with an exterior lockable

ments of the wheel to control the car on a straight road.

When cornering the basic characteristic of the car is to oversteer, as a result of the rear wheel steering effect of the back axle, which is suspended on quarter-elliptic leaf springs. A newcomer to the car may find at first that the Midget corners unexpectedly sharply, but the handling is never vicious, and in a short time he is able to throw the Midget round corners taking full advantage of the responsive steering to correct any tendency for the tail of the car to move outwards. On winding country lanes and cross-country routes this little M.G. is really at home.

During the test some increase in travel of the brake pedal was noticed, and there was always a rather dead feel to the brakes. However, they do have a good reserve of stopping power, and fade does not occur in normal use. Pedal pressures required are fairly high, but although there is room for improvement in this respect, the driver is soon reassured that if he presses hard on the pedal the car will stop rapidly. The handbrake is controlled by a chromed pull-up lever to the left of the transmission tunnel and held the car without difficulty on the 1-in-3 test hill. The pedals are well-placed and allow easy simultaneous use of the brake and throttle.

Acceptably Soft Suspension

Extremely good bump absorption is provided by the suspension, which is softer than its layout would suggest. On secondary or badly surfaced city roads the car sits down well and does not jolt its occupants. On rough *pavé* the limited vertical wheel travel begins to tell, and the rear suspension bottoms violently on bump stops which seem to be too small.

Severe humps in the road naturally result in some firm upward movement, and when tall drivers were at the wheel they found their heads were near enough to the hardtop for them to hit it as the car bounced.

The stylish and well-made, glass-fibre hardtop with plastic interior linings may be fitted or removed single-handed in a matter of minutes. However, with the hardtop, sidescreens different from those supplied with the standard hood are necessary. As the total cost of the hardtop and sidescreens is some £73, including purchase tax, when they are ordered with the new car, most owners will probably be content with the basic p.v.c. hood as all-the-year-round weather protection. Purchase tax on the hardtop kit is not payable if it is ordered after delivery of the car, and the price is then £50.

The draught-sealing with the hood in place is about as satisfactory as one may ever hope for in a car with detachable sidescreens, and a particularly good seal is made by the rubber surrounds. The sidescreens have light alloy frames with double sliding Perspex windows allowing opening for ventilation at both front and rear. The hood fit is also good, and a metal bar sewn into the leading edge ensures a perfect overlap joint at the top of the windscreen, while the strut springs can be locked, and then released

handle—an important point since the car doors do not lock. Although the spare wheel lies flat in the centre of the boot floor there is ample room around it for carefully packed luggage. At the forward end of the compartment some space is lost when the folded hood is stowed in the bag provided. The boot is held open by a swivelling prop which proved annoyingly clumsy.

Visibility is particularly good, and the driver sits high enough to see over the steering wheel and scuttle without difficulty, and with both front wings and the bonnet in sight. The windscreen pillars are slender and offer little or no obstruction to visibility even when the car is closed. To the rear of the windscreens with the hood in place, vision is better than when the hardtop is fitted, as rear quarter windows are incorporated in the hood.

Self-parking wipers have blades as long as allowed by the depth of the windscreen, but a large portion is left unswept at both ends. The interior mirror is mounted too low and vibrates; for safety's sake we added a suction-fitting interior mirror to the screen of the test car.

Well-upholstered seats are adjustable fore-and-aft, and covered in black p.v.c. with a red-painted car. The cushion is comfortable and the backrest provides good lateral support, but it is too firm at the top, and tends to make the occupants slump forward; more support is needed in the small of the back. The occasional rear seat fitted to the test car costs £4 5s, and is adequate for two children if the adults have their seats well forward to provide rear legroom. The floor and gearbox housing are covered with dark moulded rubber flecked with red. Carpet is used behind the seats and, for protection, on the lower portions of the folding seat backrests. Both front floor mats are readily removable.

A plain but functional instrument layout is provided, with the main rev counter and speedometer on either side of the steering column. A fuel gauge is on the right, and a combined oil pressure gauge and coolant thermometer is fitted on the left, where it is partly masked by the driver's left hand on the steering wheel. Provision of a trip mileometer in the speedometer is particularly welcome. The steering wheel and column surround adjoining the fascia are of yellowy



The toolkit comprises a side-lifting jack, a wheelbrace, and a socket spanner for the sparking plugs. Storage bags are provided for the hood

plastic material somewhat out of keeping with the character of the rest of the car.

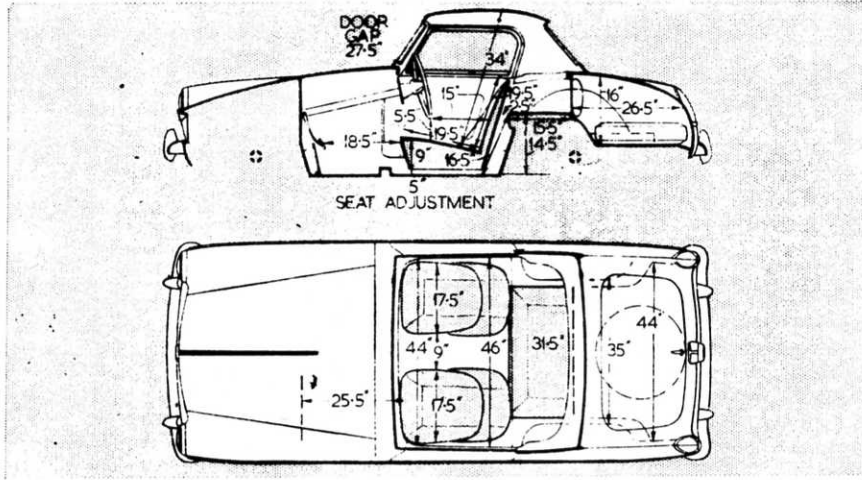
Tumbler switches are used for the wipers and for the lamps, which are the latest sealed-reflector and filament pattern. They give ample main beam illumination for the speed potential of the Midget, and have a generously long reach on dipped beam without dazzling oncoming drivers. A switch similar to that for the lamps is mounted centrally on the fascia to control the winking indicators. They are not self-cancelling, but a bright warning lamp is fitted above the steering wheel boss.

Twin windtone horns fitted to the test car are a specially desirable extra, priced at £1 12s 1d including tax. A fresh-

air heater is another practically essential optional fitting, and costs £17 10s with tax. This was also among the £116 worth of accessories on the Midget tested, and gave a good flow of air through inlets with cut-off flaps to either side of the engine bulkhead. An overriding air control is fitted on the fascia, and a tap on the engine allows the hot water supply to be turned off for the summer. There is no provision for a reversing lamp to be fitted. Twelve grease points require attention every 1,000 miles.

This new M.G. is an endearing little car with a remarkable capacity for nipping about among heavy traffic. It is easy and safe to drive, and certainly is approaching the ideal for the market which it is intended to serve.

M.G. MIDGET



Scale 1/4 in. to 1 ft. Driving seat in central position. Cushions uncompressed.

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION TIMES (mean):			
Speed range, m.p.h.	Gear Ratios	Time in Sec.	
to 1	to 1	to 1	to 1
10-30	4.22	5.73	8.09
20-40	13.3	8.6	6.2
30-50	14.1	9.5	7.1
40-60	15.7	11.2	—
50-70	17.9	16.5	—
60-80	28.6	—	—

From rest through gears to:		
30 m.p.h.	40 "	50 "
6.3 sec.	9.4 "	14.4 "
20.2 "	32.8 "	56.8 "

Standing quarter mile 21.9 sec.

MAXIMUM SPEEDS ON GEARS:			
Gear	(mean)	m.p.h.	k.p.h.
Top	84.7	86	136
3rd	70	112	138.4
2nd	50	81	—
1st	30	48	—

TRACTIVE EFFORT (by Tapley meter):		
	Pull (lb per ton)	Equivalent gradient
Top	180	1 in 12.4
Third	240	1 in 10.8
Second	350	1 in 15.8

SPEEDOMETER CORRECTION: m.p.h.

Car speedometer	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
True speed	10	19	29	40	50	60	70	80

BRAKES (at 30 m.p.h. in neutral):		
Pedal load in lb	Retardation	Equiv. stopping distance in ft
25	0.16g	187
50	0.39g	77
75	0.92g	32.8

FUEL CONSUMPTION (at steady speeds in top gear):

30 m.p.h.	51.6 m.p.g.
40 "	54.8 "
50 "	47.2 "
60 "	43.0 "
70 "	33.8 "

Overall fuel consumption for 1,037 miles, 33.4 m.p.g. (8.4 litres per 100 km.).

Approximate normal range 32-34 m.p.g. (8.8-5.9 litres per 100 km.).

Fuel: Super Premium.

TEST CONDITIONS: Weather: dry; sunny intervals, 10 m.p.h. wind gusting to 25 m.p.h.

Air temperature, 68 deg. F.

STEERING: Turning circle:

Between kerbs, L, 30ft 0in. R, 30ft 3in.
Between walls, L, 31ft 5in. R, 31ft 8in.
Turns of steering wheel from lock to lock, 2.25.

DATA

PRICE (basic), with open two-seater body, £472.

British purchase tax, £217 11s 5d.

Total (in Great Britain), £689 11s 5d.

Extras, incl. p.t.:

Hardtop and sidescreens, £70 16s 8d; Tonneau cover, £6 11s 3d; Heater, £17 10s 0d; Fresh air unit, £5 16s 8d; Twin horns, £1 12s 1d; Cigarette lighter, £1 12s 1d; White-wall tyres, £7 9s 6d; Heavy duty tyres, £6 11s 3d; Radio, £30 5s 2d; Laminated wind-screen, £4 0s 2d; Ace Mercury wheel discs, £16 8s 1d; Luggage carrier and wing mirror, £12 15s 2d; Rear compartment cushion, £4 7s 6d.

ENGINE: Capacity, 948 c.c. (57.9 cu. in.).

Number of cylinders, 4.

Bore and stroke, 62.9 x 76.2 mm (2.48 x 3.0 in.).

Valve gear, o.h.v., pushrods and rockers.

Compression ratio, 9.0 to 1 (8.3 to 1 optional).

B.h.p. 41.6 (net) at 5,500 r.p.m. (b.h.p. per ton laden 49.3).

Torque, 53lb. ft. at 3,000 r.p.m.

M.p.h. per 1,000 r.p.m. in top gear, 15.4.

WEIGHT: (With 5 gal fuel), 13.9 cwt (1,554lb).

Weight distribution (per cent); F, 52.7; R, 47.3.

Laden as tested, 16.9 cwt. (1,890 lb).

Lb per c.c. (laden), 2.

BRAKES: Type, Lockheed hydraulic.

Drum dimensions: F and R, 7in. dia.; 1.75in. wide.

Total swept area: 110 sq. in. (131 sq. in. per ton laden).

TYRES: 5.20-13in. Dunlop Gold Seal Nylon tubeless.

Pressures (p.s.i.); F, 18; R, 20 (normal). F, 24; R, 26 (fast driving).

TANK CAPACITY: 6 Imperial gallons.

Oil sump, 6.5 pints.

Cooling system, 10 pints (including heater).

DIMENSIONS: Wheelbase, 6ft 8in.

Track: F, 3ft 8.75in.; R, 3ft 9.75in.

Length (overall), 11ft 4.25in.

Width, 4ft 5in. Height, 4ft 1.75in.

Ground clearance, 5in.

Frontal area, 12.4 sq. ft. (approx.).

Capacity of luggage space, 11.5 sq. ft. (approx.).

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM: 12-volt; 43 ampere-hour battery.

Headlamps, 60-45 watt filaments.

SUSPENSION: Front, coil springs and wishbones, lever-type dampers.

Rear, live axle, trailing quarter-elliptic leaf springs, radius arms, lever-type dampers.

