

Still a

By

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IT took the mind back over several years, flicking the dust off a certain chromium-plated radiator surmounted by an octagonal cap. The car it belonged to was due to go back to its birthplace the next morning. I remembered doing the same thing, and checking over the oil level, topping-up the radiator, and having a last look round many of its predecessors on similar occasions, and then often starting back to the factory with them early on a summer morning just such as we have had during this sadly troubled June.

Still, I start at the wrong end of the story. The car, of course, was an M.G., one of the last of the current series TB Midgets to come out of the factory before car production had to dry up, for the present, in favour of more urgent calls upon the resources.

Unless you are lucky enough to find one in stock somewhere you cannot now just order an M.G., but there is interest from the road-behaviour angle, and some day these representatives of the British sports car will be in production once again on the old or even a bigger scale.

There is something about the modern M.G. that "gets you," just as perhaps years ago, as in my own case, the earlier models "got" you. An open body always helps, for it is more than a die-hard attitude of mind to consider that open-car motoring has that something in its "fresh-airiness" and maximum visibility that no closed body can provide—no, not even a closed M.G. (There is a drop-head coupé Midget model.) One must always qualify this opinion with the proviso—in the right sort of weather.

I will be honest and say I was unusually fortunate with the weather on this recent test run. The petrol position being what it is, there is now none of the opportunity of other days of piling large mileages into a short time, so I took the Midget over for quite a spell, and motored as I could, running it in from practically brand new. It was a fortnight before I had to put up the hood, and as the car was on the road on every day of the fortnight, if sometimes only covering eight or ten miles, it was exceptionally lucky for this country.

But there is more than the appeal of the open car. An

unroadworthy M.G. has never been put out—they have always built into these cars an inherent stability, accuracy of steering and power of stopping which make them safe to drive fast. The familiar slogan has more point than most of its kind.

The Series T Midget instituted a new type of Midget, it will be remembered, back in 1936, and the smallest M.G. then became a 10 h.p.-rated machine instead of an 8 h.p. The latest of all, the TB, has a slightly *smaller* engine capacity than the first of the Ts—strictly the type TA. The bore was increased from 63.5 to 66.5 mm., and the stroke shortened from 102 to 90 (1,250 c.c. against 1,292 previously), giving a more nearly "square" engine, and, in conjunction with a slightly lower final-drive ratio, correspondingly more zip for low-speed acceleration.

Keeping to 3,000 r.p.m.

Owing to the running-in process I kept the engine speed on this occasion within 3,000 r.p.m. until the speedometer showed between 800 and 900 miles total. This allowed rather less than 45 m.p.h. on top gear and thirtyish on third. Yet it was not irksome driving, largely because the car handled well and allowed the corners to be taken without slackening appreciably below the self-imposed limit. Again, the clearer roads help, for if, as is now possible on even main-road routes, 40 to 45 m.p.h. can be maintained steadily it seems a respectable pace and gets you over the ground.

Once, without exceeding 43 m.p.h., I covered 36 miles in an hour, yet it seemed—and was—leisurely motoring, and because of the rev limit adopted on all gears there was no question of gaining anything by rapid bursts of acceleration or fast climbing.

With the mileage eventually approaching the 1,000 mark I began to give the engine some throttle. It was pleasant to go briefly up to the 60 mark and to use second and third more as they are intended to be used. The engine never felt really stiff from the first, but there was that slightly hot smell of new paint after a run, and its freedom after

Midget

*M, 12, P, PB, T, and Now TB—M.G.'s
Have Run Through the Alphabet! : The
Latest Model on the Road in Wartime*

1,000 miles or so was distinctly noticeable in contrast with the earlier stages.

During the last two days before the final scene with which this account opens I discovered something of what the Midget could do, though never in these times does one feel justified in holding full throttle for any appreciable distance when 45 or 50 will do just as well. There was, however, a rather joyous mile or two of by-pass, a perfect surface, clear of traffic, and with a beautifully radiused right-hand bend that you can take hard over to the right-hand kerb since it is a twin-track road. For that short time and one other brief section the M.G. came to life for the first time in its career, which I hope will be a satisfactory one, and never allow it to be said that this was a car that was "beaten" when it was young! My conscience is clear.

There is no sideways "give" when cornering fast, and the steering, though light, is nicely accurate and firm, but the springing is a great improvement for comfort over the old types. You notice the difference between various kinds of surfaces, and feel fairly appreciable movement over the less good, but never real shock.

Praise for the Hydraulic Brakes

I liked the Lockheed hydraulic brakes a lot. All through the run the linings must have been bedding down from the new condition, but the brakes did not become soft and always had a reserve. In the last fifty miles a quick stop was necessary at traffic lights on a de-restricted road that I had not been watching closely enough, and the M.G. pulled up right on the line, dead straight. The hand brake is still the fly-off pattern, that you pull on to release without touching the knob, always the best kind when restarting on a gradient. The synchromesh gives really nice "slicing" changes up and down, and covers the useful second gear. The steering wheel is telescopically adjustable over a useful range.

The car came to me first of all with all the side screens in position but the hood down, and though I think I have never previously driven an open car for more than an hour or two in this rig I found it a good one—and one's wife appreciates it! It stops nearly all draught. These particular screens are metal-framed, with a big clear area, and if securely clamped on to their clips do not rattle.

There is a flap in the right-hand one for signalling, but its use I found a little irksome. As a matter of fact, I got into the habit of watching the useful external mirror more even than usually and gave up signalling except on the most obviously important occasions! I do not necessarily advocate the plan and never felt really easy about it, but it brings home to you how much of the signal-flapping and hand-waving is strictly superfluous. The hood is an easy enough one-man affair and is neat when down, besides allowing plenty of head-room when up. There is handy luggage space beneath the "tonneau" cover, of leather material rubberised on the inside, which conceals it.

The "Thirtelite" that M.G.s have had for a long while proved a blessing. Consisting of a small green lamp in front of the driver, it was set to light up at 20 m.p.h. and go out at 30. Thus, when driving slowly at night, striving for a level 20, you know that if there is no green tell-tale you are O.K., and that in 30 m.p.h. stretches if there is a green light you are below 30 m.p.h. Altogether an excellent thing, now doubly useful, though for driving on really dark nights I should experiment with a view to somewhat reducing the brightness of the green illumination.

In the practical M.G. style a rev counter is fitted, and the red line on its dial is placed at 4,800 r.p.m. In the later stages of the run I found that this gave 72 or 73 by speedometer, but that it could be exceeded without apparent distress. Limit recommended revs mean a comfortable 50 on third, but 60 can be seen by winding things up.

When you come to driving it fast you realise what a reserve the car possesses, and it can obviously hold 55 or thereabouts all day on a suitable road without fussing itself. Shades of the past and hopes for the future!

Highly Satisfactory M.P.G. Figures

A 13½-gallon tank is a grand feature of the Midget—if you can legitimately get it filled these days. For driving in the wartime manner, but by no means crawling about, a full tank means a mileage approaching 500. I made a number of successive tests by quart tank over different routes and the average of six checks worked out at 37.6 m.p.g. The conditions included 20 and 30 m.p.h. driving in town areas, steady 30 m.p.h. runs for a specific purpose, and 50 to 60 m.p.h. work with fair use of the gears, but always taking advantage of coasting possibilities without letting the speed come down so much as seriously to slow the general rate of progress.

I should regard the all-round average as being 36 m.p.g. in normal conditions. At 30 m.p.h. steadily held the figure was 39.6 m.p.g. I devoted one quart of petrol to a test in the full-throttle style of driving that has been forgotten for the moment—pedal hard down wherever possible, second and third gear used at roundabouts on a by-pass and for accelerating away from them, and generally reverting to pre-war style when in a hurry. Even then the Midget gave 30.4 m.p.g., which is remarkable. All this was done as part of necessary journeys, not as special test runs.

It would be difficult to find a car of similar liveliness and all-round performance—interesting performance—that would be as economical, and this was with a barely run-in engine that had not had any special settings. I came to agree with the makers' policy on the Midget of fitting a reserve petrol tap, but not a gauge. There is the big tank to start with, and the reserve system traps the exceptional quantity of three gallons. The control tap is on the instrument board, right in front of the driver. You can go a long way—several days of running around—without having to think about petrol, and then when the S.U. pump begins to "tick" you turn over to reserve and have 90-110 miles in hand.

Especially on a car that has as good a consumption as the Midget's I would personally sooner have the reserve supply and no gauge, than a gauge and no reserve. I found one other thing about this arrangement, that it avoided the plaguey gauge-watching habit one has got into since a gallon of petrol came to mean so much—a practice which does no good in any case, and is irritating, yet almost impossible to avoid nowadays.

This engine proved to be another example of the fairly high compression sports type that takes no violent exception to the present-day petrol. A certain amount of pinking occurred when accelerating, but never excessively. I think that the alleged evils of Pool were overrated at first, though probably it is desirable to decarbonise more frequently than in the past.

