

# 1955-62 MGA: Modern, Gutsy, Aerodynamic

by Joseph H. Wherry

By 1955, the MG-TF had become rather dated. MG enthusiasts the world over clamored for something more modern and faster to keep pace with the new Triumph TR-2. The MGA was Abingdon's answer.



The 1957 MGA 1500 Coupe. (Owner: Barrie Aquilino)

The last of the legendary MG T-series sports cars, the TF Midget, went out of production in March 1955. Dealers around the world and most of *The Faithful*, as MG enthusiasts were known on every continent, breathed a sigh of relief. TF sales had been slipping and competition buffs from within the MG fraternity were besieging the Abingdon factory for an up-to-date streamlined sports car that could best its rivals in stock trim. Meanwhile at Abingdon, Lt. Col. John Thornley, OBE, who had begun his long career with MG in 1931, was installed as General Manager in 1952. He spent most of his time doing a balancing act with the board of directors of British Motors Corporation, which had been formed three years earlier when the Nuffield Organization, of which MG was a part, and the Austin Company merged.

The February 1952 union came as a surprise to sports car aficionados everywhere. On the one side of the merger was Lord Nuffield, nee William Morris, who began his automotive career in Oxford in 1903 and whose Morris Garage spawned the first MG cars in the early Twenties under Cecil Kimber; on the other side stood Sir Herbert Austin. The two had been hard-nosed competitors for decades. The MG *Faithful* were soon thoroughly convinced that the Austin people had done in the Abingdon works, and indeed MG's design office was transferred to Austin's Central Design Office in Cowley. The MG engineering and design staff under Sydney Enever had been gearing up to produce a low, streamlined MG-TD replacement ever since George Phillips captured second place in the 1.5-liter class in the 1950 Le Mans.

Phillips' mount, a highly tuned TC Midget special, had been fitted with an air-cheating envelope body. That coupe was followed by another car built for Phillips for the 1951 Le Mans. It likewise sported a specially designed body mounted on a TD Mark II chassis. Inspired by Goldie Gardner's EX135, a pre-war MG experimental streamliner, the '51 racer had a top speed of nearly 120 mph. Unfortunately, the true potential of the car was not realized as engine trouble forced an early retirement from the race.

Thornley, Syd Enever, and others were nonetheless impressed with the greatly improved performance, which was due largely to better aerodynamics, and whipped up a proposed 1952 TD replacement along the lines of the Le Mans special. Because the narrow frame of the T-series chas-



sis precluded a low seating position, Enever developed a totally new frame with the longitudinal rails splayed outward to a width of approximately 45 inches. In fact, it was quite similar to the frame of EX179, a super-aerodynamic prototype. In it, Capt. George Eyston and Ken Miles (well known throughout the MG fraternity as a top sports car competitor) went on to take seven International Class F records and 28 American Class F records on the Bonneville Salt Flats in August 1954, among them 120.74 mph for twelve hours. All that from 81 bhp and 1466cc. With different gearing and a 97.5-bhp "sprint" version of the same engine, EX179 covered the flying ten mile run at 153.69 mph, knocking down international and American records in the process. As a bonus, EX179's independent front suspension, which utilized many TF components, was noted for good handling.

Two copies of the chassis for the intended TD replacement were built, one fitted with a body similar to that of Phillips' 1951 Le Mans special. The seats sat low, positioned between the transmission and the chassis side rails. Production feasibility was kept uppermost in mind, and so it was fitted with front and rear bumpers, folding windscreen, and a luggage boot containing tools and the spare wheel and tire. Only the TD suspension components and the rather tall T-series engine looked familiar, the latter requiring a clearance bulge on the bonnet. Following the MG nomenclature pattern, the new prototype became known as EX175.

By the time it was completed, Thornley already occupied the position of general manager at Abingdon. Although TD sales reports from all over the United States and the British Commonwealth were discouraging, the entire TD replacement project nonetheless ran into opposition from

the new BMC Board of Directors, which had other ideas in mind. Unknown to John Thornley and other MG loyalists, the board had already signed a contract with Donald Healey to oversee production of his latest design, the Austin-Healey. It was to be powered by an existing Austin engine, the 2.6-liter four from the Austin A90. Thus, while the Austin-Healey 100 two-seat sports car took the spotlight at the 1952 London Motor Show, a disappointed MG management and staff had to make do with the all-too-familiar TD Midget at its own stand.

It mattered not a whit to the largely Austin-controlled BMC board that the Abingdon product had consistently outsold all other sports cars in the free world; the Austin-Healey 100 had been chosen to wear the BMC sports car crown. To develop two new

sports cars simultaneously, even if one was the best-selling MG, was simply too expensive. Thus, the rumor that there would be no new MG sports car for the foreseeable future proved to be true. One could even hear talk that there might not be any more MGs at all, but word finally filtered down from the board that MG would have to be content with a facelift of the TD. The result was the TF Midget, a hurriedly prepared stopgap model (albeit a most attractive one) that would carry the MG banner from October 1953 to March 1955.

Much respected in both Abingdon and Cowley, Thornley made the most of what little influence he had with the board, and somehow managed to get permission to organize a competitions department. And by early 1955, plans were *finally* laid to introduce a new MG sports car based on



Styling of the MGA (opposite page) was smooth and aerodynamic. The body was unchanged during the entire September 1955 to June 1962 production run, although various detail changes—such as the grille, parking lights, and taillights—were made over the years. *This page:* The first MGA, the 1500 (top), was produced until May 1959, shown here as a 1957 model. (Owners: Craig and Pat Hanna) The fastest MGA, the Twin Cam (right), was built from September 1958 to April 1960. (Owner: Ron Thompson)



the experience gained from the earlier EX experimentals. Several prototypes were hurriedly built and a team of three cars was entered in the 1955 Le Mans, scheduled for June 11. A well-conceived plan called for the introduction of the new MG roadster to distributors and the automotive press a week or so before the race in order to maximize exposure and generate enthusiasm for the long-awaited new MG.

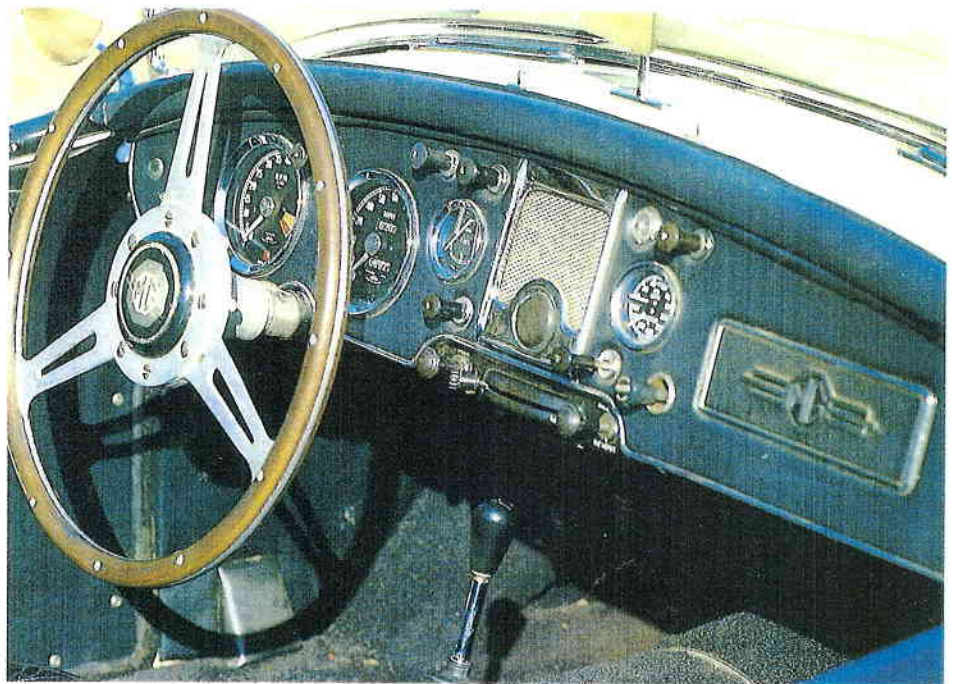
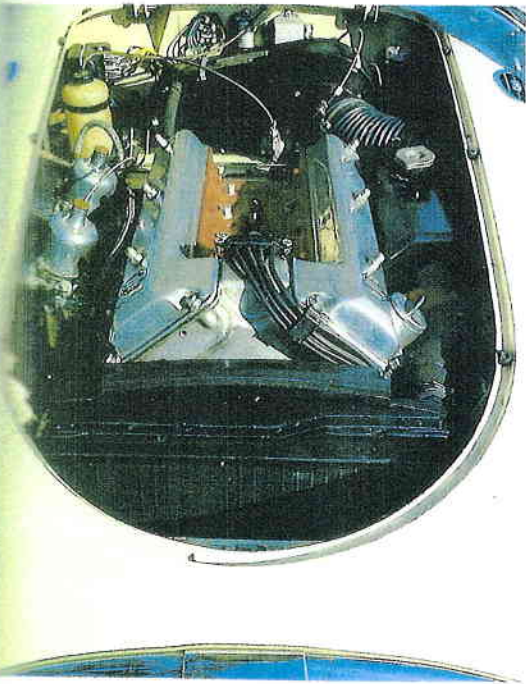
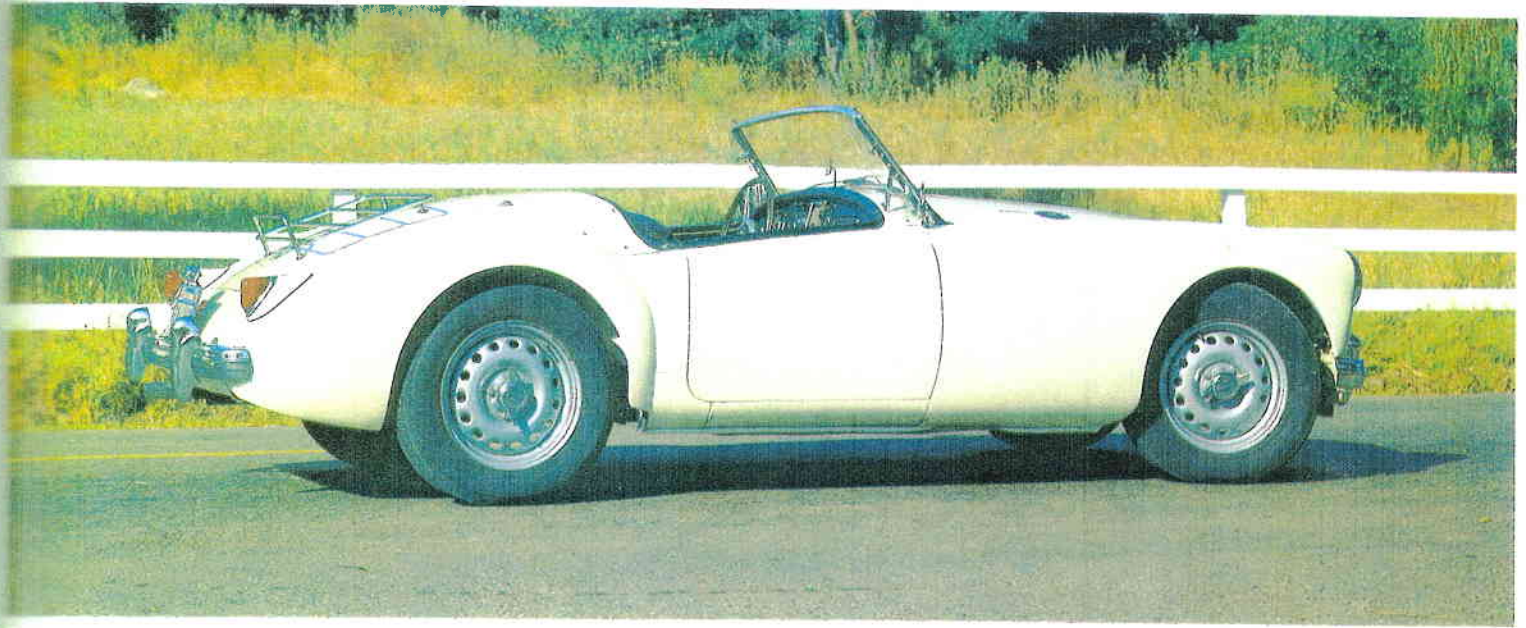
Then came trouble: body production ran into unexpected problems, causing serious delays and leaving

chassis to sit in the Abingdon works *sans* clothing. Frustrated by their inability to set an introduction date, Thornley and Enever were forced to focus publicity instead on the three Le Mans EX182 prototypes. The best they could hope for was that the TF replacement would be ready for full-scale production in time for an early autumn debut at the London Motor Show.

While publicly promising the new MG as soon as possible, Thornley duly introduced the three prototypes and sent them on to qualify for the

great event. They looked low and sleek with their special aluminum bodies and were properly adorned in British Racing Green. The MG *Faithful* were well represented in the stands and a score of correspondents for automotive enthusiast magazines from both sides of the Atlantic were on tap.

Then disaster! Early in the race, a Mercedes-Benz crashed through a barrier and flew directly into the crowd across from the pits. Many spectators were killed and scores more sustained serious injuries. As if



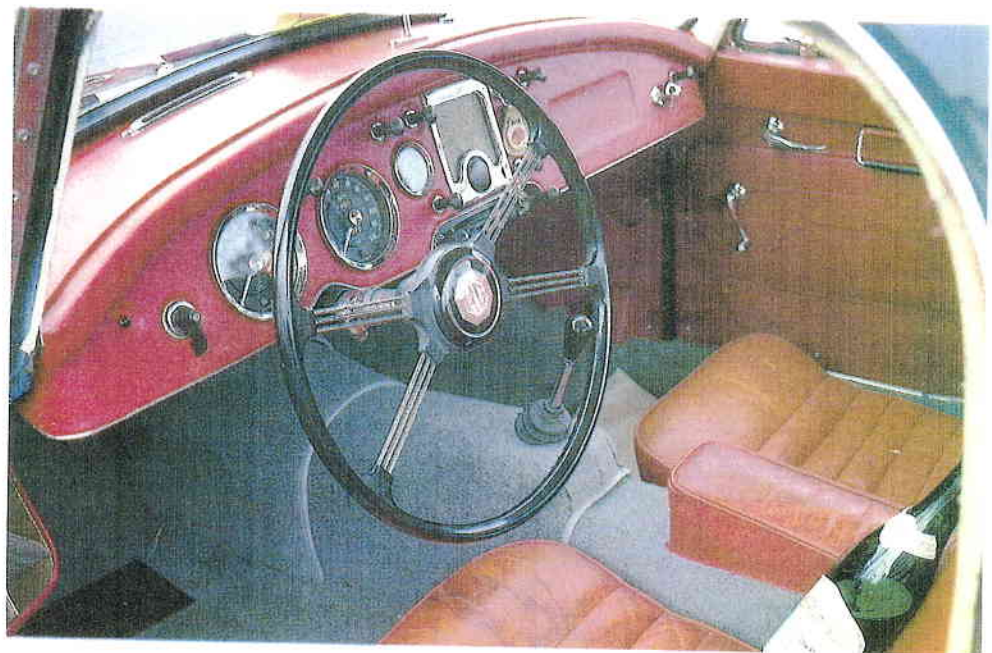
an epidemic was taking place, the MG prototype driven by Dick Jacobs, longtime MG competitor, crashed on the White House corner just as the yellow caution flags came down. He was badly injured. The race was almost called, but then continued; by the end of the event, only a third of the 60 starters had finished the course. The two surviving EX182 prototypes impressed the crowd by taking fifth and sixth places in their class, close behind a team of seasoned Porsches and an extremely quick Osca.

In his book *Maintaining the Breed*, Thornley later referred to the 248 and 230 laps completed by the prototypes at average speeds of 86.17 and 81.97 mph as a "technical success." MG enthusiasts found the results more than encouraging and dealers chomped at the bit for cars to sell. However, the new MG sports car would not appear until September. But it would be new; a radical enough departure from the T-series that, as with Henry Ford's Model T successor, it seemed appropriate to go back to the beginning of the alphabet to name it. Thus, the

*Both pages:* The MGA Twin Cam was intended strictly for the serious connoisseur. It sported Dunlop disc brakes at all four corners and center-locking vented disc wheels. The Twin Cam engine (*above left*) developed 108 bhp and 105 lbs/ft torque, enough to power the MGA to a top speed of 115 mph and from 0-60 in nine seconds flat. The dashboard (*above right*) featured a large speedometer and tach. The Twin Cam became known as troublesome and was expensive to fix, as many a driver who regularly exceeded the red line learned to his dismay. Tuning, likewise, required great precision. With careful maintenance, however, the Twin Cam served with distinction.



By the end of the first year, well over 13,000 MGA 1500s had been shipped from Abingdon—a record for MG. For enthusiasts, there were few alternatives to this Class F production sports car that could deliver a maximum of 95-plus miles per hour for only \$2500.





The 1957 MGA Coupe (*both pages*) served as the centerpiece of the MG exhibit at the London Motor Show in October 1956. It weighed about 100 pounds more than the roadster and featured a pressed-steel roof that was welded to the body, a unique semi-wraparound windshield, three-piece wraparound rear window, wind-down side windows, vent windows, and exterior door handles. Wire wheels were optional. The seats (*left*) were upholstered in leather. (Owner: Barrie Aquilino)

Ford became the Model A, the British roadster the MGA.

Five months *without* an MG sports car! Nothing approaching that sort of calamity had taken place before (other than during World War II, of course). The delay created difficulties for everyone. Dealers wrung their hands, trying their best to assure willing buyers that the new models would soon be available. Automotive

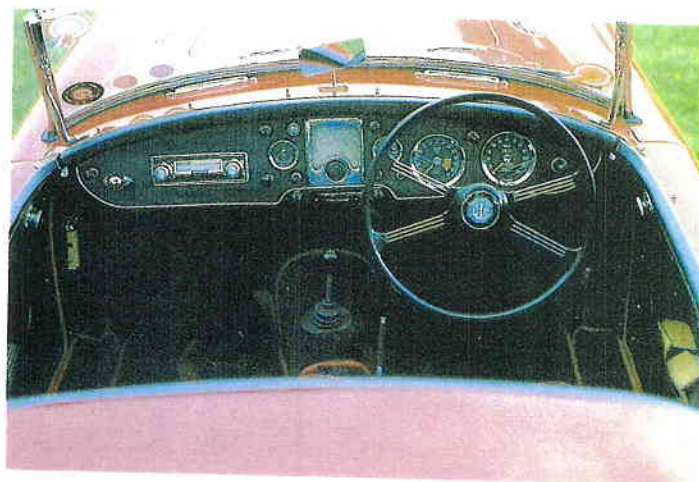
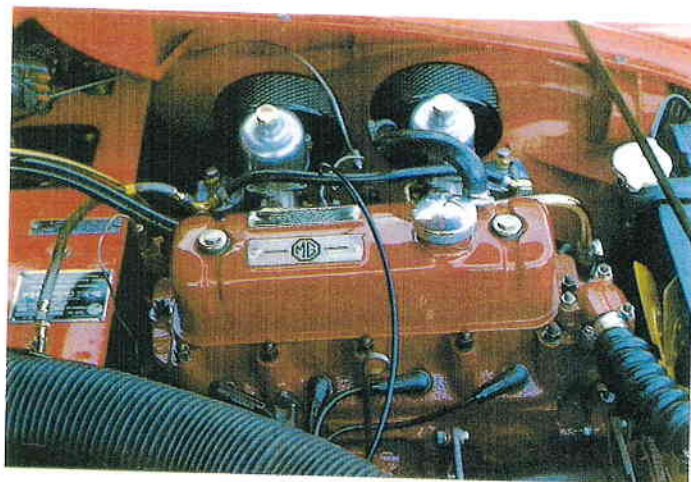
magazines found themselves besieged with letters from readers, with at least one author fit to be tied because he was starving for the promised new MG sports roadster for inclusion in a book due to be released early in 1955. The book's title was *Manual of Road Tested Sports Cars*, and the author's initials were JHW!

The annual Ulster Tourist Trials came shortly before the introduction of the MGA 1500. As in the Le Mans Twenty-Four Hour Race, the Abingdon works entered a team of three prototypes, much to the delight of *The Faithful*. One of them was powered with a standard pushrod engine, but the other two ran dual overhead camshafts—a prophetic glance into the MGA's future. Unfortunately, the dohc pair developed valve troubles, forcing them to retire early. The stan-

dard engine prototype did well, however, finishing fourth in class behind a team of Porsches, practically a repeat of the Le Mans experience.

The Ulster Trials marked the second effort under the newly organized factory sponsorship. During that event, a tragic smashup involving seven cars ended in the death of two drivers. Fortunately, not one of the prototype MGAs was involved, but the BMC board, never enthusiastic about factory-sponsored competition in the first place, suspended all further racing activity. Even the Royal Automobile Club, long a cooperative organization, decided that the old Dundrod, Northern Ireland, course was too dangerous, and so the venerable track was closed.

The fair success in the '55 Le Mans, and the more than five month



drought of MG sports cars, assured large turnouts wherever the new, beautifully streamlined MGA 1500 was displayed. Looking nearly identical to the Le Mans trio, the fully enveloped two-seater utilized a rigid, box-section frame that measured 45.5 inches wide at the cockpit, permitting low seating with buckets nestled between the frame rails and the transmission hump. The happy result, of course, was a sleek profile. The 1489cc ohv engine, the well-proven BMC B-type inline four, utilized the

same 8.3:1 compression ratio as the MG Magnette ZB saloon, which debuted one month after the MGA. Fitted for the MGA with dual 1.5-inch SU semi-downdraft carburetors, it developed 68 horsepower at 5500 rpm, eight more than the Magnette. The gearbox, too, was shared with the sedan, including the four internal ratios, but the 4.3:1 final drive ratio differed. The rear suspension and brake system were also common to both cars.

The independent coil spring front

suspension came straight from the TF, as did the rack-and-pinion steering. The latter, with only 2.75 turns lock-to-lock, was noted for quick and easy response. Genuine instruments—no faddish blinking “idiot lights” here—were well placed with a large speedometer and tachometer directly in front of the driver. Legroom was abundant, and the well-positioned pedals provided more foot room around them than in the TF, although some felt the need for still more room. Once inside, the cockpit felt

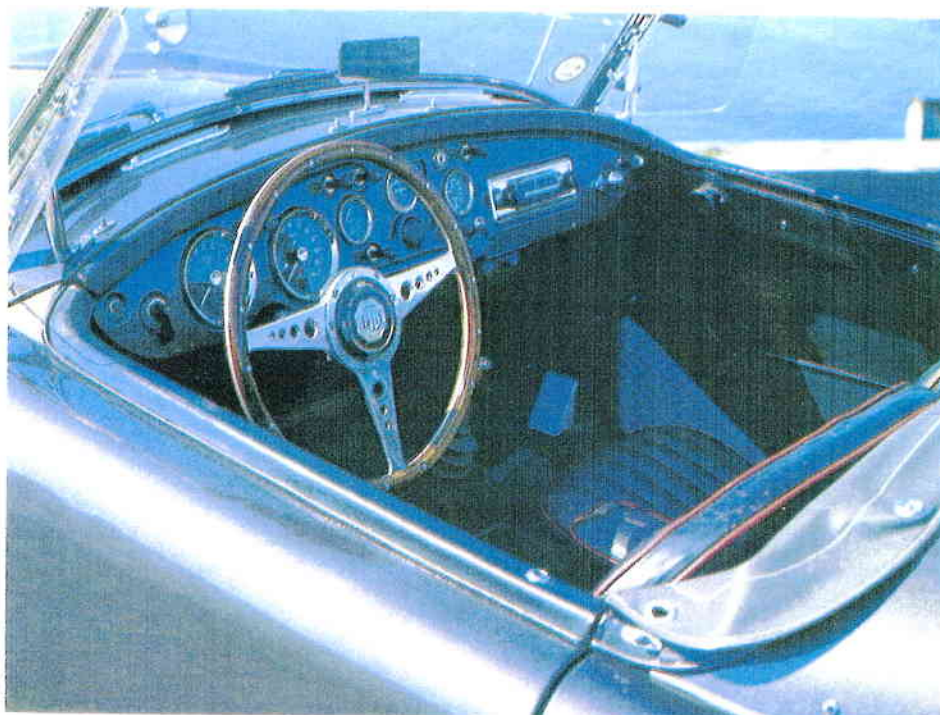


*Opposite page:* The MGA 1600 (Mark I) was in production from May 1959 to April 1961. It featured larger parking lights with amber turn signals and revised taillights (*top*) and is seen here as a 1959 model. The engine (*bottom left*) was bored to yield 1588cc and 80 horsepower at 5600 rpm and 87 lbs/ft torque at 3800 rpm. Top speed moved up to an honest 100 mph. The interior (*bottom right*) was largely unchanged. (Owner: Chris Starr)  
*This page:* Another '59 MGA, this one with disc wheels, Lucas fog lights, stone guards, wind wings, and sun visors. (Owner: Peter S. Smith)

somewhat more spacious than most small sports cars of the era, but the MGA was a bit more difficult to enter than the TF due to its lowness and the configuration of the cowl. The area behind the buckets accommodated a briefcase and small items, but luggage had to compete for space in the boot with the spare tire and wheel, tools, and the little odds and ends that every true sports car aficionado always carried.

Though more comfortable and somewhat roomier (in answer to dealer requests, mostly from America), the MGA remained very much a sports car—make no mistake about that. An easily erected hood (top) and side curtains secured the interior from all but the most violent storms, while a spring-loaded flap on the lower portion of each side curtain allowed one's hand to be extended for rally signalling or to pay tolls on the escape routes from Manhattan and other metropolitan nightmares. It also served to allow access from the outside to the horizontal pull cord beneath the inner door sill, necessary since there were no external door handles. This arrangement made it impossible to lock the cockpit of the MGA. And since the trunk lid had to be unlatched from inside the car, neither the cockpit nor the trunk were safe from vandals. An interior grab handle made it easier for passengers to disembark.

By introduction time on the East Coast, the British magazine, *The Autocar*, had already assured *The Faithful* that a true 90+ miles per hour was on tap, that 0-60 mph required but 15 seconds, that maximum speeds were 26, 44, and 70 mph in the lower gears, and that in good *stock* tune a sharp driver could achieve 98 mph with the top and side curtains fixed in place. Top gear, however, yielded only 17 mph per 1000 rpm, meaning that the



engine was spinning at a lively 4000 rpm at 68 mph. This suggested that overdrive would be a useful option, but unfortunately it was not offered. Nonetheless, cruising speeds in an MGA were pretty much what highway conditions and the law permitted.

*Road & Track* was also quick to wring out the MGA 1500 and to compare it with the TF 1500 in its October 1955 issue. *R&T* staffers found the new model superior in almost every respect. For example, both were rated at 68 horsepower, but even though the MGA carried a 100-pound-plus weight penalty and ran 4.3:1 rear gearing (versus 4.875:1), it out-accelerated the old model in every category: 0-60 mph in 14.5 seconds versus 16.3, and 19.6 seconds in the quarter mile versus 20.7. Top speed jumped to 95 mph from 85, almost totally due to the reduced air resistance of the new body—only 94 pounds of total drag at 60 mph for the MGA compared to 119 pounds for the TF, a 21 percent improvement. *R&T* also obtained significantly improved fuel economy with the MGA: 30 mpg at a 65/75 mph cruise, compared to 25 mpg.

Despite the MGA's many admirable positive virtues, objections were sometimes heard (and loudly) from hard-core MG traditionalists. They mourned the passing of the square-rigged, high-radiated classic lines, and the equally high clamshell-shaped fenders. Such noises would be heard again when the even-more-modern MGB replaced the MGA in 1962.

Within this writer's hearing at the New York City MGA introduction, one zealot was heard to observe that, "The bloody thing can be mistaken for a Siata or almost anything—except a Morgan."

"Maybe so," an American-accented chap wearing an SCCA (Sports Car Club of America) button on his lapel retorted, "but a pair of prototypes did right well at Le Mans last June."

The topper, in this writer's opinion, was another observation from a gentleman who looked like a dignified attorney: "I own a Packard Caribbean and I'll warrant that this MGA is a helluva lot more fun to drive."

The MGA's 94.0-inch wheelbase measured the same as for the T-type Midgets and the tread, front and rear,





Although many owners entered their MGAs in racing competition, most saw service as daily drivers, providing their owners with the pleasures of dead-accurate steering, nimble handling, and quick over-the-road performance in the "Safety Fast" tradition for which MG had become famous.



*The Faithful*, as MG's most enthusiastic fans were known, expected MGAs to be pressed into service in Class F racing events. Required changes were minimal, but included removal of the standard windshield in favor of a racing windscreen and a roll bar for driver safety. Also uppermost for serious competition was the shedding of as many excess pounds as possible, such as the bumpers. Note the chrome taillight housings on this example.



was nearly identical. So was the tire size at 5.50×15. Weight had crept up a bit, however, from 1854 to 1988 pounds, and so had the base price, from \$1995 to \$2195. The fuel tank was concealed for the first time on an MG sports car. And if one wanted to go on an extended trip, an early factory option was an efficient luggage rack that attached easily to the rear deck lid. Other options included knock-off wire wheels in place of steel discs, 4.55:1 rear axle, telescoping

steering column, and tonneau cover. And early in the production run, tough main bearings and what Abingdon called "tuning" increased the rated output from 68 to 72 bhp at 5750 rpm. All told, there were few alternatives to the MGA: a competition-worthy Class F production sports car that could deliver a maximum of 95-plus miles per hour for only \$2450 to \$2550 ready for the road.

By the end of the first full year of

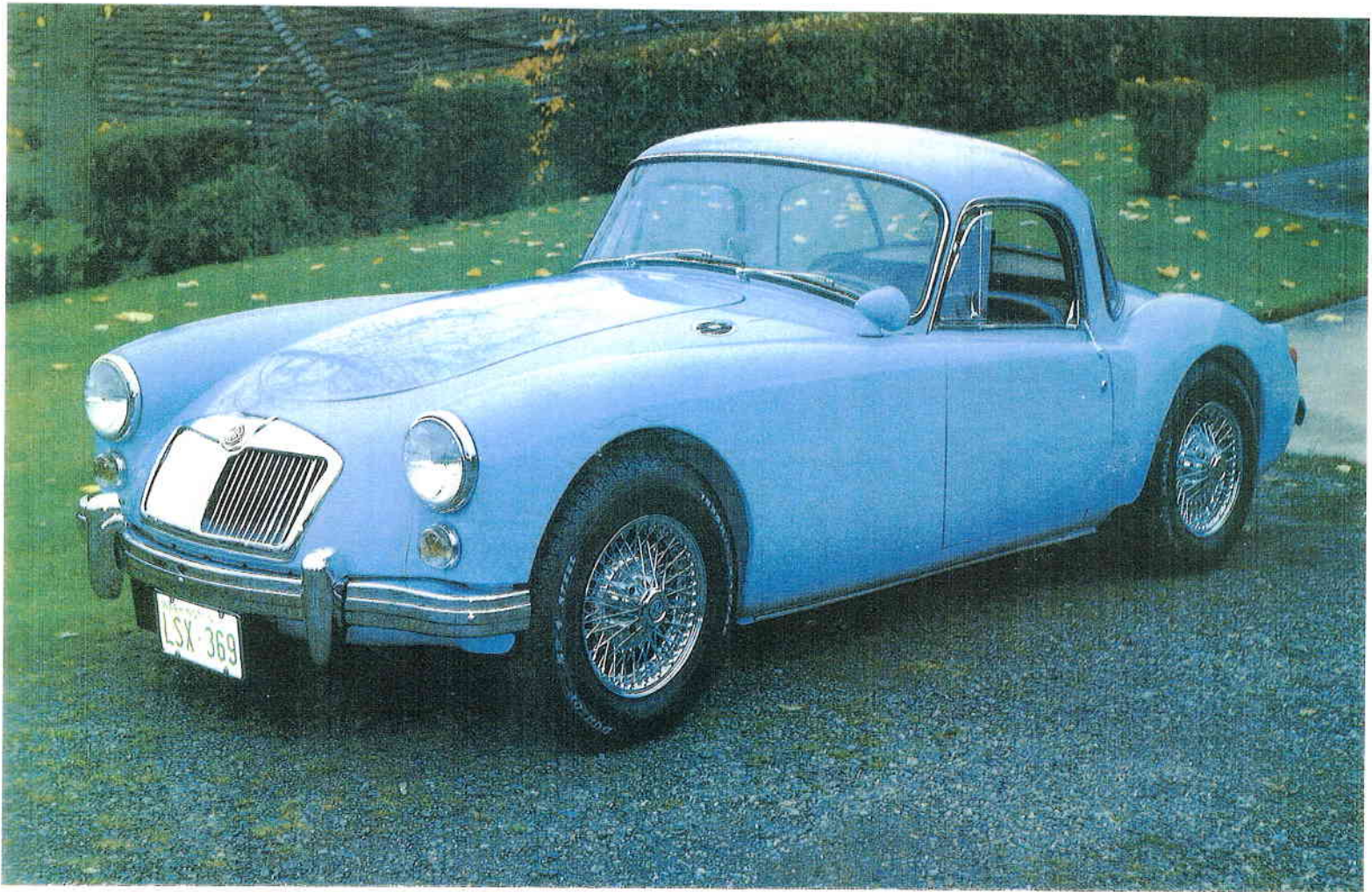
*This page:* The spare tire pretty much filled up the trunk of the MGA, so many owners installed a luggage rack on the trunk lid, as on this MGA Twin Cam. The rack made long distance travel a bit easier. *Opposite page:* By the time the MGA 1600 appeared, 58,750 MGAs had already been built. The 1600 would add another 31,501 units to that total during its two-year run. The 1600 coupe (1960 model) continued as an alternative to the roadster. (Owner: Mack McGarah)

production, well over 13,000 MGA 1500s had been shipped from Abingdon—a record for MG and within less than 1000 units of the *total* number of Austin-Healey 100s built from 1953 through 1956.

The MGA Coupe served as the centerpiece of the extensive MG exhibit at the London Motor Show in October 1956. Weighing about 100 pounds more than the roadster, it featured a pressed-steel roof that was welded to the body, unique semi-wraparound windshield, three-piece wraparound rear window, wind-down side windows, and exterior door handles. A few months earlier, MG had also begun offering a detachable fiberglass hardtop; it utilized sliding side windows. That option made it possible for MGs to run as Grand Touring cars in certain competitive events, a fact not overlooked by Abingdon. Many aftermarket hardtops were also available for the MGA, some of them in fact appearing before the factory version.

To satisfy requests for a higher performance model for serious competition, the Twin Cam model was announced in April 1958. Never intended for volume production, it was available through April 1960, by which time just 2111 had been built. Among the rarest of all MGAs, the Twin Cam listed at \$3110 in roadster form, while the coupe sold for \$3329 at West Coast ports-of-entry. Eagerly sought when in production, the MGA Twin Cam is even more avidly pursued today as a prime collectible. An enlarged cylinder bore upped displacement to 1588cc, while chain-driven dual overhead camshafts, higher 9.9:1 compression ratio, aluminum cylinder head with 1.75-inch dual SU carburetors, and cross-flow induction all helped to push output to 108 bhp at 6700 rpm. Four-wheel Dunlop disc brakes and center-locking vented disc wheels also set

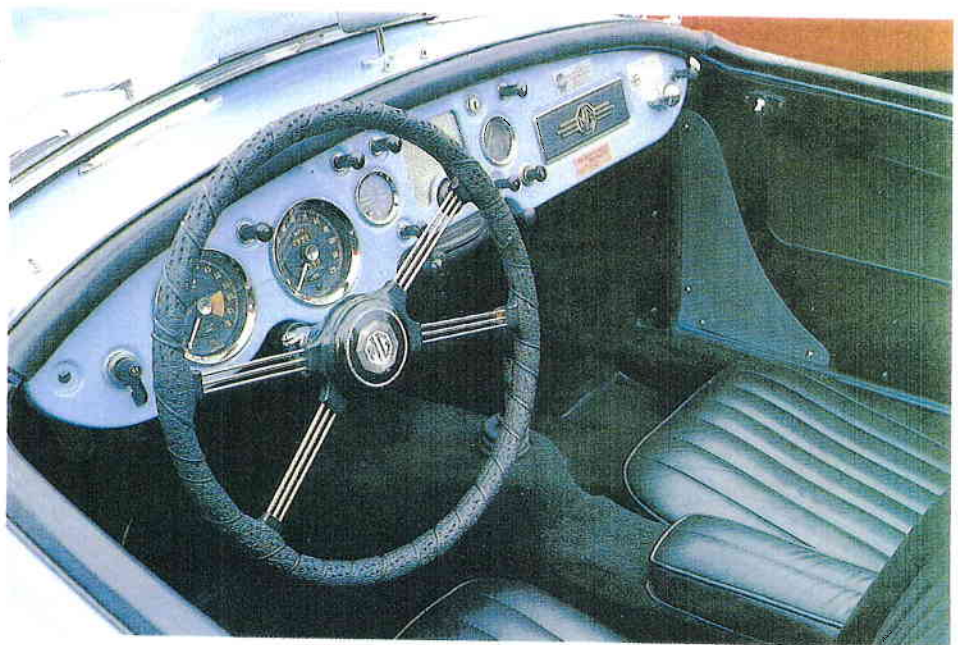
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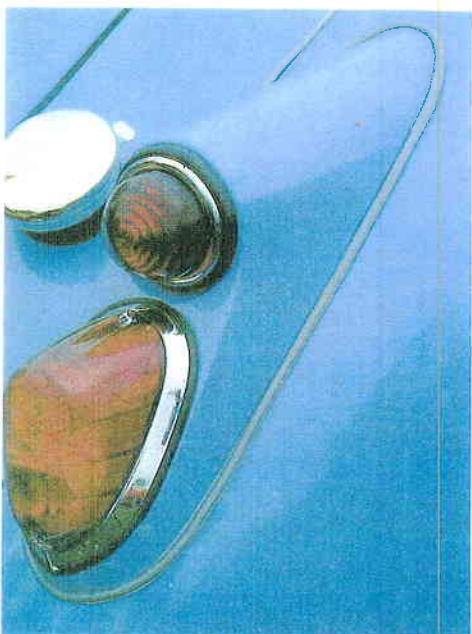




The MGA 1600 continued the basic MG formula, that of a nimble, fun-to-drive, inexpensive sports car. Front disc brakes made it stop quicker, and 10 percent more power made it even more responsive.

*Both pages:* The MGA 1600, here a 1961 model, utilized the 1588cc engine block from the Twin Cam, but borrowed compression ratio, valve timing, and carburetion from the 1500. The taillights with two lenses (*far right*) quickly identify the 1600. (Owners: Jose and LeAnne Compean)





the Twin Cam apart from lesser MGAs.

Tuning the MGA Twin Cam required great precision and, as the factory reminded inquirers, this higher performance model was intended strictly for the serious connoisseur, not the average daily commuter who occasionally entered into a weekend rally or gymkhana. A sprint from 0-60 mph could be covered in nine seconds flat and maximum speed came in at about 115 mph in touring trim, assuming the use of 100 octane fuel and proper maintenance. With a small racing windscreen and the bumpers removed and the tonneau cover fastened in place, careful tuning produced considerably more than 115 mph. In clumsy hands and driven by hot-rod types who seldom listened to the engine and never looked at the

tachometer, however, the Twin Cam proved troublesome and expensive to fix, as many a driver who regularly exceeded the red-line discovered. Such problems were more common in the United States than elsewhere, reflecting perhaps the lax attitude of Americans toward car care and maintenance.

Likely, the Twin Cam would have remained in production a bit longer if a negative development (for Abingdon, at least) had not occurred in 1957. BMC management decreed that the Austin-Healey would, henceforth, be produced alongside the MGA rather than in the traditional Austin works in Longbridge. As a matter of fact, this hindrance to producing MGAs in numbers sufficient to satisfy demand seriously stifled engineering developments, which

further frustrated Thornley, Enever, and their dedicated workers. Obviously, the BMC board had become aware that the MG works, in spite of being smaller and less mechanized, was more efficient than the factories on the Austin side of the merger.

When the MGA 1500 series gave way in May 1959 to the improved MGA 1600 (unofficially called the Mark I by many), production stood at 58,750—more than any other continuously produced sports car up to that time. Initially, output of the 1600 overlapped that of the Twin Cam. Interestingly enough, the new model's powerplant was a pushrod version of the 1588cc engine, but borrowed compression ratio, carburetion, and valve timing from the 1500. The larger 75.414 mm bore, though, boosted horsepower to 80 at 5600 rpm. Lockheed disc brakes became standard up front, and the transmission and pro-

peller shaft benefitted from Twin Cam development.

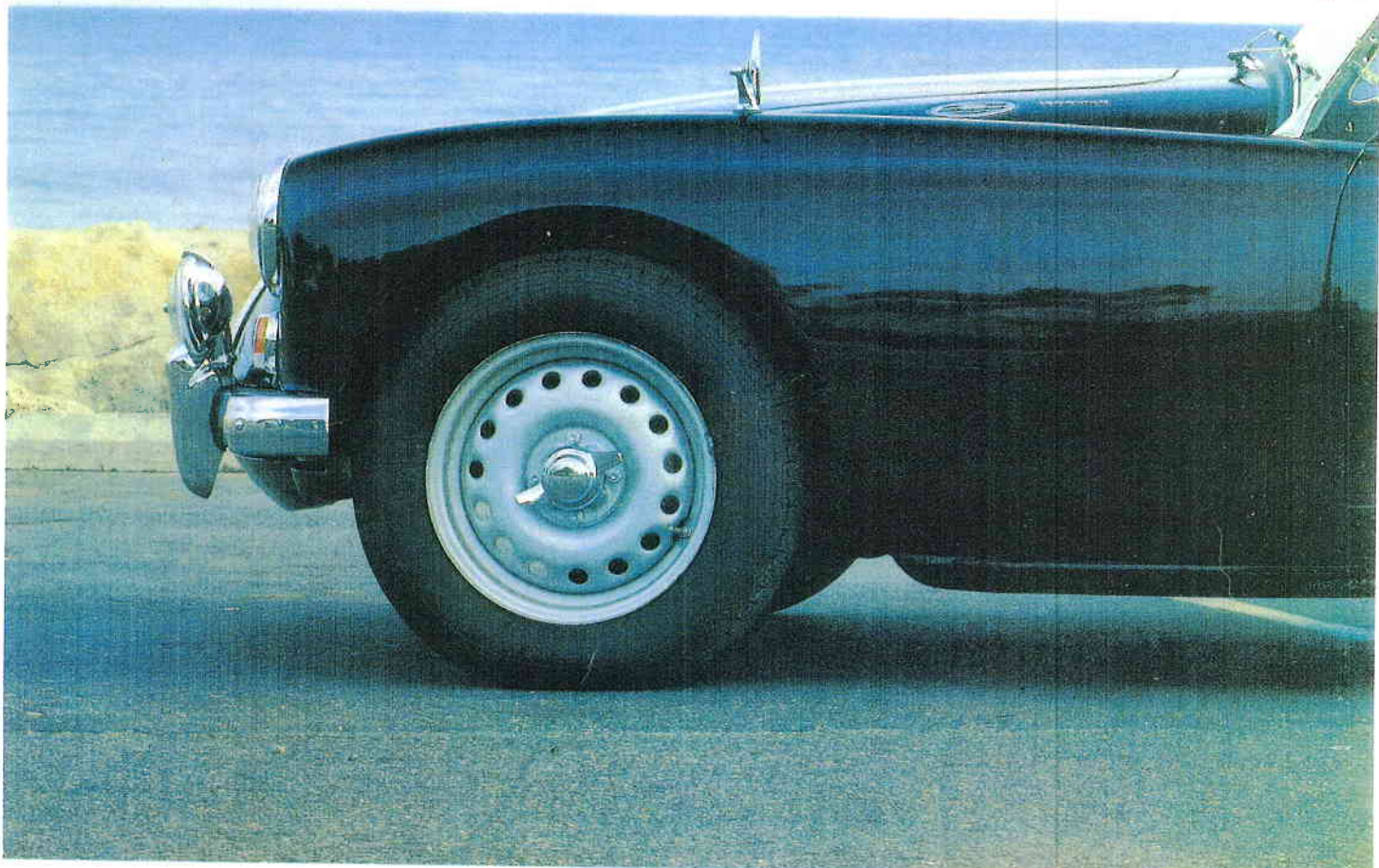
The 1600 also received some minor design changes that make it easy to distinguish from the 1500. Sliding side curtains, which had already been available on the Twin Cam, replaced the flaps on the 1500. The front end received larger, flatter parking light lenses and the taillight assemblies were modified to accept a second lens. The lighting changes came in response to U.S. regulations that required amber front turn signals and separate signals in the rear. Badges for the 1600 were placed behind the cowl vents and on the trunk lid.

Unlike the Twin Cam, the 1600—whose top speed moved up to an honest 100 mph—required only normal maintenance. Its two-year production span lasted through April 1961, with 31,501 units built, lifting total MGA production to 92,361 in

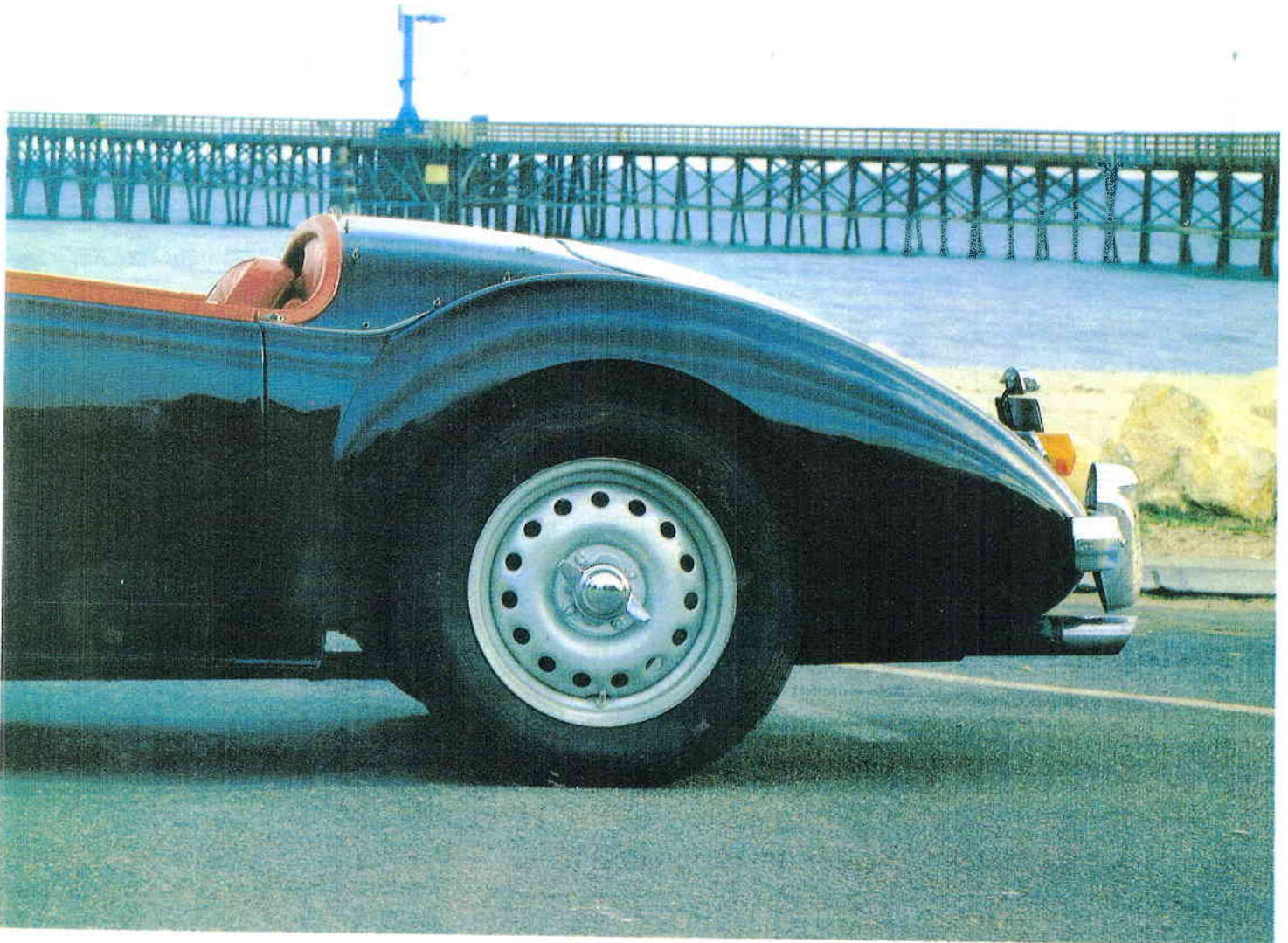
less than six years, far ahead of Austin-Healey.

When the MGA 1600 Mark II debuted in June of '61, *The Faithful* were immediately impressed, for here was a 105-mph machine that could accelerate from 0-60 mph in 13.7 seconds. Bolt-on disc wheels were recommended in lieu of the still optional wires because of their greater strength. The 1622cc engine, with 8.9:1 compression, developed 93 bhp at 5500 rpm. The Mark I's braking

Rarest of all MGAs was the 1600 Mark II DeLuxe (right and below). Only 395 were built in 1961-62. DeLuxes used the Twin Cam chassis with four-wheel Dunlop disc brakes and Dunlop center-lock disc wheels, but used the 93-bhp engine from the regular 1600 Mark II. The 1962 model shown sports competition seats, close-ratio transmission, Judson supercharger, and factory hardtop, fog lights, and oil cooler. (Owner: Kenneth Palmer)







## Clubs for MGA Enthusiasts

North American MGA Register  
76 Blossom Lane  
Mooresville, IN 46158

*Membership:* 2000. *Founded:* 1975.  
Bimonthly publication. Recognizes all MGAs 1955-62 and other makes using the MGA drivetrain. Regular membership open to owners of MGAs, associate membership available to others.

Midwest MGA Club  
11731 West 101st Street  
Overland Park, KS 66214  
Telephone: (913) 888-0338

*Membership:* 70. *Founded:* 1980.  
Monthly newsletter: *MGA Newsletter*.  
Recognizes 1955-62 MGAs and Midgets. Ownership of marque not

required. Sponsors regional events, rallies, tours, and swap meets. Co-sponsor of the Kansas City All British Car & Cycle Show.

MG Car Club  
P.O. Box 0251  
Studley, Warwickshire  
England, B80 7AT

*Membership:* 10,000, plus 10,000 in affiliated clubs. Monthly publication: *Safety Fast*. Recognizes all MGs; ownership of marque not a requirement. Sponsors national and regional shows, rallies, social events, swap meets.

MG Club of Central Florida  
P.O. Box 5039  
Winter Park, FL 32793

*Membership:* 100. *Founded:* 1984.  
Monthly publication: *Newsletter*.  
Recognizes all MGs. Ownership not required. Sponsors car shows, rallies, autocrosses, technical sessions, social events.

Bluegrass MG  
1400A Browns Lane  
Louisville, KY 40207  
Telephone: (502) 499-8800

*Membership:* 100. *Founded:* 1982.  
Quarterly publication: *Bluegrass MG*.  
Recognizes all postwar MGs and related products. Ownership of car not required. Sponsors various local events and serves as technical and information source for Kentucky MG enthusiasts.

system was continued, but a higher 4.10:1 final drive ratio marked the first such change since the MGA 1500. Oil coolers were standardized on all Mark IIs exported to America to better accommodate higher sustained cruising speeds and the North American climate. The Mark II also received two easily overlooked styling changes. The first involved moving the vertical grille bars back about 2.5 inches at the bottom. The second, done mainly to meet rear lighting regulations of various countries, resulted in the installation of Austin Mini taillights mounted horizontally. Also, the dash and scuttle were covered in Nuvon plastic, which reduced reflections, and seat belt anchors were provided (but *not* seat belts).

By now, the auto enthusiast press occasionally complained about the MG's "old-fashioned" side screens and choppy ride and wished for still more acceleration. Nonetheless, the 1600 Mark II was well respected worldwide; *Road & Track*, for instance, paid it the ultimate compliment: "In our opinion, this is truly the 'universal' sports car." Production of the Mark II, which lasted from June 1961 to June 1962, came in at 8719 units, including both roadsters and coupes.

During the period of 1600 Mark II production, the rarest and least known MGA model was built in very limited numbers: the MGA 1600 Mark II DeLuxe. Only 395 of the now much-sought-after DeLuxes were

produced, although reliable sources indicate that the first 82 were actually Mark Is. The DeLuxe utilized leftover Twin Cam chassis, which, of course, featured disc brakes on all four corners and knock-off disc wheels. Engines, however, were the standard 1622cc units and the structural improvements of the Mark II were also incorporated into the DeLuxe.

MGA production ended in June of

1962, but not before the factory celebrated the production of the 100,000th MGA. That record-breaking event occurred on May 16, 1962, when a gold export model with gold wire wheels and creme interior—and "100,000" badging—rolled down the assembly line. The following month, number 101,476 was built—the last MGA. That, too, was an upbeat occasion, for the MGB was on *its* way.

## MGA Specifications and Production

Series	Production Period	Bore × Stroke (mm)	Valves	Displacement	Compression Ratio	bhp @ rpm
MGA 1500	Sept. 1955- May 1959	73.025 × 88.90	ohv	1489cc	8.3:1	68 @ 5500 72 @ 5750
MGA Twin Cam	Sept. 1958- April 1960	75.414 × 88.90	dohc	1588cc	9.9:1	108 @ 6700
MGA 1600	May 1959- April 1961	75.414 × 88.90	ohv	1588cc	8.3:1	80 @ 5600
MGA 1600 Mark II	June 1961- June 1962	76.20 × 88.90	ohv	1622cc	8.9:1	93 @ 5500
MGA 1600 Mark II DeLuxe	Jan. 1961(?) - June 1962	76.20 × 88.90	ohv	1622cc	8.9:1	93 @ 5500

All series: Wheelbase, 94.0 in.; Length, 156.0 in.; Tread, front/rear, 47.875/48.75 in.; Carburetion, Twin SU.

1. Special competition ratios optional
2. Some sources indicate 82 units were 1600 models



As related, the odds against the MGA were great. John Thornley, Syd Enever, and associates of the caliber of Reg Jackson, Gordon Phillips, and many others carried on the innovative tradition established by the late Cecil

Kimber back in the days of the Morris Garage in Oxford. Their problems were prophetic of more to come during the MGB era: another merger, nationalization, and the abortive scuttling of the MGB on October 27, 1980,

after more than a half million of that great series had been built. MG's demise created a furor in England and sensitized even the British Parliament.

But the closing of Abingdon was *not* the end of the road for MG. Today, the MG badge is attached to high performance models — some turbocharged — of the little Metro and the somewhat larger Maestro and Montego models from the Austin-Rover Group (the Austin name was being phased out during 1987). Rumors persist that a true sports car bearing an MG badge is on the horizon, likely a top-down adaptation of a Honda model, the Civic CRX.

Whatever the fate of current efforts to revive the MG name and even to reintroduce an MG sports car, the MGA remains unaffected. After all, the MGA — the world's most popular sports car during its lifetime — earned a revered place in automotive history long ago.

The MGA 1600 Mark II DeLuxe remained in production until MGA output ceased in June 1962. By then, a total of 101,476 MGAs had been built. The 100,000th MGA rolled off the line on May 16, 1962, making it the world's most popular sports car up to that time. (Owner: Mike Walsh)

Torque @ rpm	Gear Ratio <sup>1</sup>	Rear Axle Ratio <sup>1</sup>	Tires	Brakes Front/Rear	Production
77 @ 3500 80 @ 3850	All:	4.30:1	5.60 × 15	Drum/Drum	58,750
105 @ 4500	1.000 1.374	4.30:1	5.90 × 15	Disc/Disc	2,111
87 @ 3800	2.214 3.460	4.30:1	5.60 × 15	Disc/Drum	31,501
97 @ 4000		4.10:1	5.60 × 15	Disc/Drum	8,719
97 @ 4000		4.10:1	5.60 × 15	Disc/Drum	<u>395<sup>2</sup></u>
					101,476