TESTS: JAGUAR XK-E, MG-A MK II, RAMBLER

ROAD & TRACK

THE MOTOR ENTHUSIASTS' MAGAZINE

September 1961
Fifty Cents

Competition: Grand Prix of Monaco and Holland; Indianapolis 500
Jim Hall: his new Chevy-powered race car Mercedes 300-SL Salon

Richie Ginther in the new Ferrari V-6, leads Tony Brooks' BRM at Monaco

MG-A 1600 MK II

Made in Abingdon on Thames by water sprites

MOST SPORTS CAR enthusiasts have an impression that MG doesn't change models very often. We had the same feeling until the new 1600 Mark II version came along and we began checking back. Actually, this new car is the ninth model in the past 14 years. In case you've forgotten, here is the list:

Year	Model	Remarks	Date tested
1947	TC	1250 cc, 54.4 bhp	Oct. 1956
1950	TD	1250 cc, first i.f.s.	Apr. 1951
1953	TD-Mk II	60 bhp option	Feb. 1953
1954	TF	1250 cc, 60 bhp	March 1954
1954	TF-1500	1466 cc, 65 bhp	Dec. 1954
1955	A	1489 cc, 68/72 bhp	Dec. 1955
1958	A-TC	twin-cam, 1588-cc	Nov. 1958
1959	A-1600	1588 cc, 79.5 bhp	Oct. 1959
1961	A-Mk II	1624 cc, 90 bhp	

Of course, these nine models involve only four bodies, and the new Mark II version uses the same body as when the first A-type was introduced late in 1955. Identification at the front is easy, as the grille bars are now indented or recessed a little over 2 in. at the bottom. At the rear, new taillights provide easy identification.

The principal mechanical changes are a larger and more powerful engine and a drop in axle ratio from 4.30 to 4.10. The cylinder bore has been increased by a thirty-second of an inch, bringing it up to the nice, round figure of 3.00 in. The stroke remains 3.5 in., so the new displacement is 99.086 cu in., or 1624.3 cc. The unit's output is 90 bhp, an increase of 13%, most of which comes from a change in compression ratio; raised from 8.3 to 8.9:1 and requiring premium fuel. The new torque figure was not available to us, but we estimate it to be 100 lb-ft at 3500 rpm.

The drop in axle ratio, though not terribly significant, still means 4.5% fewer revolutions per mile, the exact figures being 3480 on the previous model and 3320 on the Mark II.

Our test car had 4 miles on the odometer when we took it over from well-known MG exponent Gus Ehrman, now manager of Hambro's Los Angeles division. After 1000 miles and a check-up, we took it directly to the test strip for the acceleration tests.

As would be expected, the extra "inches" more than offset the lowered axle ratio; performance figures average about 5% better than we recorded for the MG-A 1600 in October of 1959. Likewise, the Tapley pull readings show a similar improvement, indicative of faster acceleration in each gear as well as improved hill-climbing powers. The drag factor of combined wind and rolling resistance hasn't changed, so the top speed should be well over an honest 100 mph. We did not try a timed high speed run, because we felt that sustained full throttle would be asking too much from an engine with barely 1000 miles of running on it. However, there is no doubt that the extra power and the new gear ratio, which is more favorable than before for best possible top speed, should produce an honest 105 mph at 5700-5800 rpm, depending on tire pressure and the expansion factor. Incidentally, the speedometer error proved to be modest, with the greatest optimism at 60 mph (5%). Higher speeds showed less error; an indicated 90 mph being a true 87.0, for example.

Fuel consumption is about the same as before, despite the increased power and performance. In fact, under certain circumstances it is slightly improved; we averaged 30.8 mpg during the break-in, in which the last 500 miles were run at 65-75 mph much of the time.

During the past 12 years there has always been an MG on the R&T staff, sometimes as many as three. Therefore we feel well qualified to point out that, though the Austin-Healey Sprite is lower priced, the MG remains our choice as the best all-around sports car for the money and one particularly well suited for this market, primarily because both its size and performance are well above the miniature or minimum category.

This Mark II version, though perhaps not as exciting as a completely new model, is a very definite improvement over any previous MG and retains all the well known virtues of the marque.

Among these virtues, good handling and steering rank first. This is not saying that the MG is the best cornering sports car in the world, or that it has perfect steering. But the car has no vices, and a novice or a veteran can get into the MG and put it through its paces without getting into trouble. The steering is very nearly neutral, yet an oversteer-tail-out attitude can be provoked and held with no great worry over "losing" the rear end and

spinning out. The steering may feel strange at first because it's so unlike what you're used to. The rack and pinion has a slight frictional effect and, more important, absolutely no play or back-lash. There's no need to move the steering wheel back and forth a few degrees to hold a straight line down the highway. You just set the wheel where you want it and move it occasionally in the direction you want, with no see-sawing. Parking effort is moderate (perhaps a little heavy for the ladies) and the turning circle isn't too good for a 94-in. wheelbase. There is occasional road-shock transmission to the rim but almost no cowl shake, thanks to a very well designed separate frame and body structure.

The riding qualities of the MG haven't changed by any noticcable amount since i.f.s. (independent front suspension) was adopted in 1950. Here we feel some criticism is warranted, as most other cars have shown some gradual improvement over the past 11 years. In other words, the MG of 1950 was one of the best riding sports cars on the market; today it ranks among the poorest, excluding the pure competition machines, which are invariably very harsh indeed. A considerable improvement in ride can be had by putting the tires at the rather low recommended pressures (17 to 20 psi), but we much preferred 5 psi more than this for our own driving, as well as for the good of the tires.

Disc brakes in front, drums at the rear were made standard equipment with the previous model and are continued without change. No booster is fitted, nor is one needed. In driving the car no one would notice anything different or unusual about the brakes, and though the disc units are slightly heavier than drums, they certainly do avoid any sign of fade.

In piling up miles on the Mark II, we got an impression that the engine isn't quite as smooth or as quiet as before. Certainly, a higher compression ratio often means rougher running, but we believe most of our impression was caused by a fairly loud exhaust note. The

CONTINUED 41

engine has no noticeable vibration period but, as with any four, there is a trace of rumble when decelerating. At low rpm the engine feels as though it's being abused, yet it actually will lug in 4th gear at 1000 rpm and full throttle gives smooth, reaction-free response. You might say, as a slight exaggeration, that the unit is a small tractor engine in this respect. At the other end of the scale, the tachometer has a yellow zone from 5500 to 6000 rpm, with red to 7000. The unit goes readily to 6000 rpm, but no one in his right mind would ever go beyond this, even momentarily.

The transmission ratios are unchanged and, as with earlier models, the synchromesh on 2nd, 3rd and 4th is very positive and effective. First gear is somewhat noisy, but starts can be effected easily in 2nd if the car is just rolling. We found the shift control extremely stiff and considered installing an extension lever to obviate sore palms during the break-in.

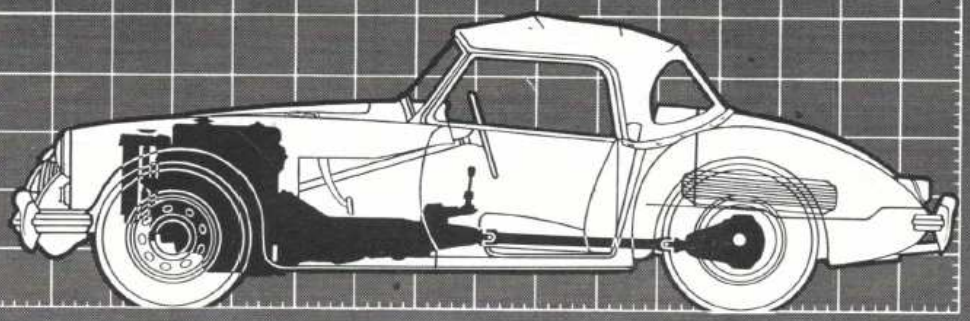
A perennial complaint with the MG is still with us—insufficient room for the feet. A new dimmer switch location is a real improvement, but 10.5 in. between the switch and the accelerator (measured just under the two pedals) are not enough, unless you wear ballet slippers. A pull-type starter switch is also an anachronism that can only lead to broken ignition keys when the car is left in a parking lot.

The revised instrument panel is very businesslike, and the cowl area under the windshield is now covered with black leatherette to avoid reflections. The bucket seats are unchanged, and are still rather upright and a little too close to the steering wheel for most drivers, regardless of their height. Other complaints included no ashtray, no glove box, no ventilation during a rain storm and almost no luggage space.

But, despite these criticisms, the MG remains one of the most desirable sports cars on the market. It is big enough to avoid being called a toy, it is nice looking without being flashy, it steers and handles impeccably, it performs extremely well, and its reputation for durability and stamina is widely acclaimed by many thousands of satisfied owners. In our opinion, this is truly the "universal" sports car

ROAD TEST

MG-A MK II



DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	94.0
Tread, f and r	47.5/48.8
Over-all length, in	156
width	58
height	50
equivalent vol, cu ft	262
Frontal area, sq ft.	16.1
Ground clearance, in.	6.0
Steering ratio, o/a	n.a.
turns, lock to lock	2.7
turning circle, ft.	31.3
Hip room, front	48
Hip room, rear	n.a.
Pedal to seat back, max.	42
Floor to ground	9.0

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	27.1
Cu ft/ton mile	81.5
Mph/1000 rpm (4th)	18.1
Engine revs/mile	3320
Piston travel, ft/mile	1935
Rpm @ 2500 ft/min	4290
equivalent mph	77.5
R&T wear index	64.2

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	$2485
Curb weight, lb.	2050
Test weight	2340
distribution, %	52/48
Tire size	5.60-15
Brake swept area	350
Engine type	4 cyl, ohv
Bore & stroke	3.0 x 3.5
Displacement, cc	1624
cu in.	99.1
Compression ratio	8.90
Bhp @ rpm	90 @ 5500
equivalent mph	99.5
Torque, lb-ft (est)	100 @ 3500
equivalent mph	63.3

GEAR RATIOS

4th (1.00)	4.10
3rd (1.37)	5.63
2nd (2.21)	9.08
1st (3.64)	14.9

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph	actual, 28.5
60 mph	57.0

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5800), mph	105
best timed run	n.a.
3rd (6000)	79
2nd (6000)	49
1st (6000)	29

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	25/31

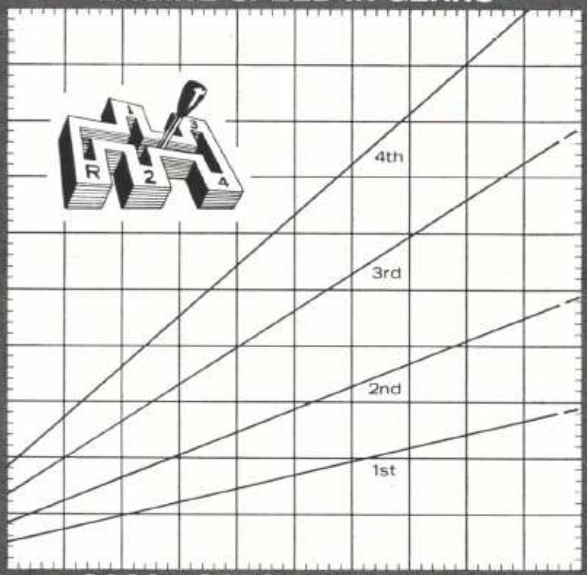
ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	4.0
0-40	6.0
0-50	9.3
0-60	12.8
0-70	18.0
0-80	25.4
0-100	
Standing ¼ mile	18.7
speed at end	71

TAPLEY DATA

4th, lb/ton @ mph	200 @ 50
3rd	290 @ 44
2nd	430 @ 35
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.	112

ENGINE SPEED IN GEARS



ACCELERATION & COASTING