



MGA profile

Launched in 1955 as the MGA 1500, it was a modern sports car with smooth flowing bodywork and a three bearing 1,489cc "B" series engine in a tuned form developing 68bhp which was speedily improved to 72bhp. It was available as an open Roadster and later, from September 1956, as a Fixed Head Coupe version. From 1959 the MGA 1600 with 79.5bhp provided a useful 17% increase in power which was improved later with the 1600 Mk II and De Luxe 1600 Mk II with 90bhp, just under 32% more power than the 1500. The MGA bodylines were clean giving the car a pleasing appearance from all angles. It was available from the launch with either wire wheels or pressed steel disc wheels. The MGA was the last MG to have a separate chassis. The wishbone front suspension was very similar to that used for the last of the T-Types, the TF, but the entire powertrain was new. The engine, gearbox and back axle were from the ZA Magnette saloon which was then being assembled at Abingdon. Very few modifications were needed to the MGA to make it one of the best production sports cars of its time. A Factory fitted hardtop was available for the MGA but on the car it looked very clearly an accessory whereas the Fixed Head Coupe gave the car an entirely more pleasing enclosed appearance.



The MGA Twin Cam with a significantly more powerful 108bhp twin overhead cam engine was produced between April 1958 and May 1960. It was the fastest production version of the model and available in both Coupe and Roadster forms. The twin overhead cam engine filled the available space in the engine bay which made access for servicing difficult. It had Dunlop centre lock wheels with all round Dunlop disc brakes. For the driver, there was improved trim with the "De Luxe" seats and a Vynide covered fascia.

With the demise of the Twin Cam, the De Luxe became available although never advertised as such. Originally using the 1600 engine in a Twin Cam chassis, it gained the larger and more powerful Mk II engine when that model was launched.

Production of the MGA was impressive with just over a 1,000 MGAs built before the end of 1955 and in 1956 they were leaving the Factory gates at the rate of nearly 300 a week. The MGA was to go on and shatter the previous MG production records in its first full year and in both 1957 and 1959 more than 20,000 MGAs would leave Abingdon between January and December. A proud day in Abingdon's history was the 100,000th MGA, an export market specification 1600 Mk II, completed in March 1962. Production continued that year with a further 1,081 cars but another successful MG model was coming – the MGB. The first 12 production MGBs were built in May 1962 and a further batch in June before the public launch of the MGB Roadster in September 1962.

MGA – from the outset it was well received by the press and public

Syd Enever, Chief Designer of the MG Car Company, sketched the first concept of the shape that was to become the MGA as the streamlined body for an MG TD running at Le Mans in 1951. He went on to design a new low slung chassis and to build a prototype replacement for the ageing "T" Series. But in 1953, B.M.C. management chose instead to give the TD a facelift as the MG TF and to sign a deal with Donald Healey to produce Austin-Healey sports cars.

The MGA was eventually launched in 1955 under the banner "First of a New Line", a modern sports car with smooth flowing bodywork powered by the 68 bhp "B" series 1500 engine which first appeared in the Z Magnette model in 1953. Incidentally, the name MGA 1500 only came into use when the later 1600 model was introduced. Production started in May 1955 although the car's formal launch was delayed until the Frankfurt Motor show in October that year. The motoring public first noticed the newest MG when three prototypes ran in the Le Mans 24 hour Race in June 1955. Designated EX182 machines, two of the cars finished the race in 12th and 17th positions; the other car crashed injuring its driver.

From the outset the model was well received by the press and public. Motoring journalist John Bolster wrote in "Autocar" that "Its appearance excited universal admiration wherever I went and the more discerning were quick to remark that it was beautifully made. This is a jolly good little sports car; if you want one, hurry up and get in the queue!" The price including purchase tax (then charged at 50%!) was £844 0s 10d. Despite a general warm welcome for the newcomer, some MG enthusiasts felt that MGA was a step too far away from the traditional "square rigger" that they had loved for so many years.

A fixed head coupe version was added to the MGA family in September 1956 offering a pleasing enclosed appearance with more attention to interior comfort. Both variants continued in production virtually unchanged until 1959 when the engine was increased to 1600cc and front disc brakes introduced. The third and final derivative, the MGA 1600 MK II, came along in 1961 to help boost falling sales in the USA. By this time the car had more than 30% power over the 1500 and now coupled to a higher ratio back axle, MGA was a true Grand Touring car.

MG had always recognised the market potential for a road going sports car capable of competing successfully in circuit racing without further modification. The project to develop the Twin Cam version of the MGA with four wheel disc brakes began in 1955 just as the model was first in production. Two designs for the overhead cam engine were commissioned, one from Austin and the other from Morris Engines. The Morris design chosen for development produced 108bhp when launched in 1959. Based on the 1600 "B" series cylinder block, the Twin Cam was different in every respect. Drive to the camshafts is in two stages, by gears then a duplex roller chain. Compression ratio is 9.9 :1 with minimal tolerance between valves and piston. The correct valve clearances in the alloy cylinder head are achieved through the use of bucket-type tappets fitted with shims.

Buyers from around the world queued up to get hold of a "Twinky". But as fast as new customers came into the showrooms to purchase their Twin Cam, many warranty claims were being received in the service bays of MG dealers. The biggest issue was oil consumption, one press reviewer reported using "five pints of oil over an 800 mile journey". Not good news in a car where the dip stick was almost impossible to reach! As sales volumes increased, more Twin Cam cars were in the hands of owners who were filling them with low octane petrol and not paying attention to the ignition timing. The result was pistons burning and yet more

warranty claims. Development Department at Abingdon tried to rectify the reliability issues with new pistons and a new distributor, and finally conceded to the lowering of the compression ratio to 8.3: 1 with a loss of 8 bhp. By the beginning of 1960, Twin Cam production had dropped to less than 20 per month before it was withdrawn in May. Ironically, a Twin Cam MGA with factory support won its class at Le Mans just four weeks later.

MG was contracted with Dunlop to take their centre lock wheels, tyres and all round disc brakes for the now discontinued Twin Cam. The answer was the "Competition" or De Luxe MGA. Built to special order in the first instance and never advertised as such, this variant has a standard pushrod engine (1600 or 1622cc) fitted to the Twin Cam chassis and running gear. Surviving examples of De Luxe cars command top money whenever they come onto the market.

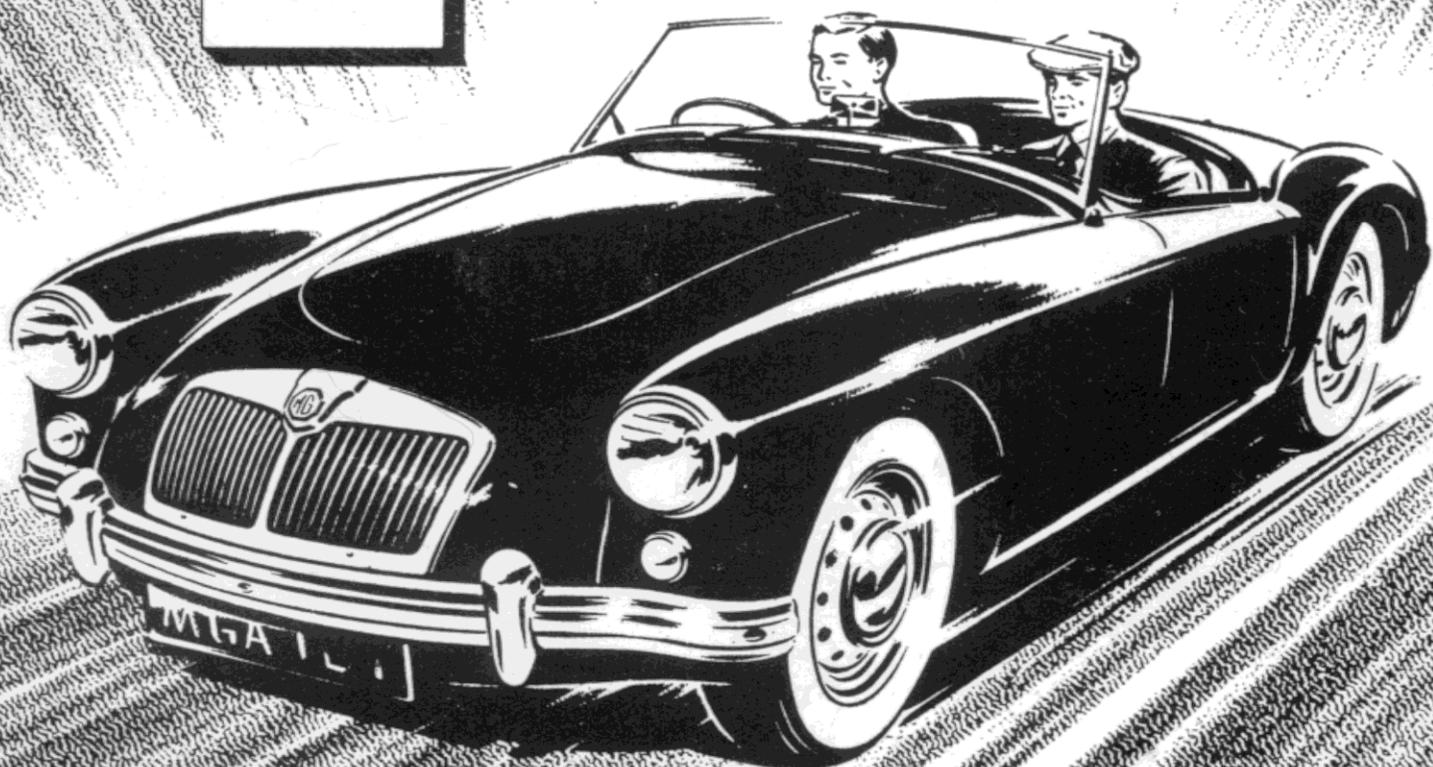
When the MGA gave way to the MGB in 1962 more than 100,000 units had been built. Of these, around 80% went to the USA making it the biggest selling sports car at that time and a serious contributor to Britain's export trade. Moving on forty years, the junkyards of California hold a goldmine of rust free MGAs just waiting for restorers to bring them back to the UK where they now enjoy a second life as true classic cars.



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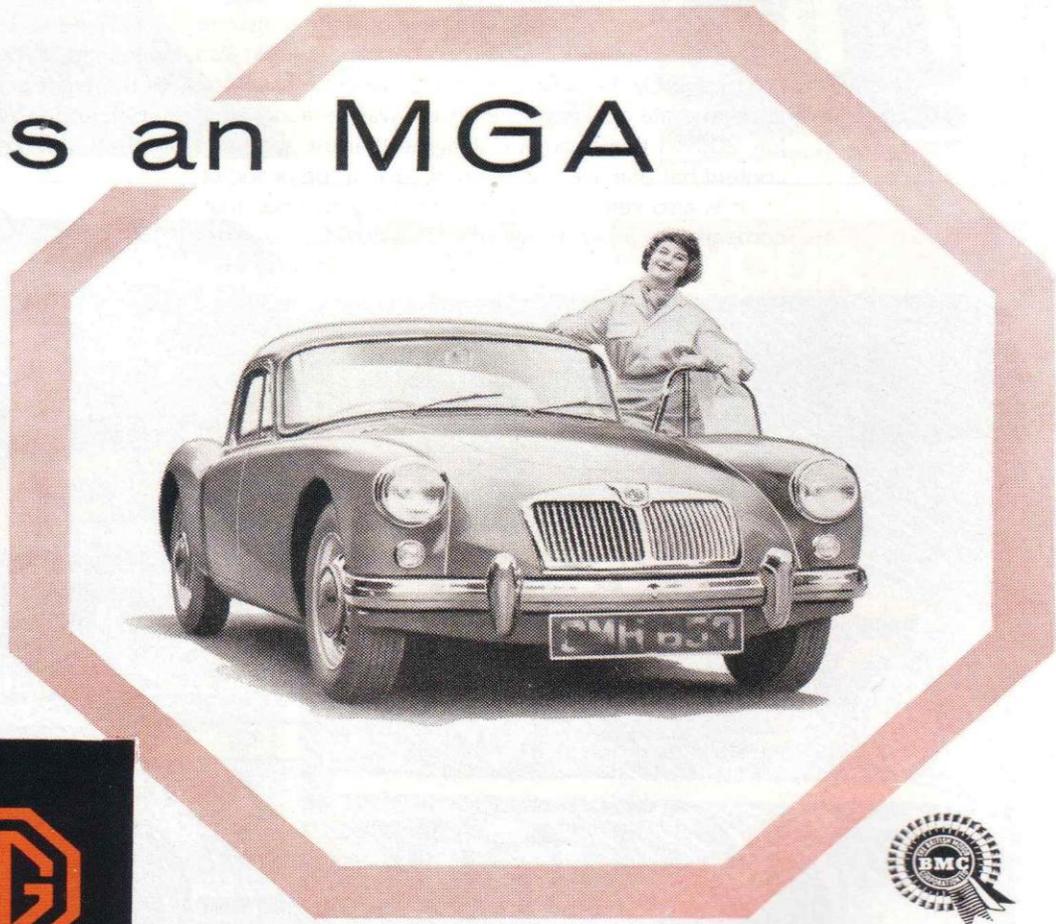


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