



Doing It His

When Allen Colmer of Adelaide chose a number plate for his 1950 MG saloon, he could have had 'MY MGY'. However, he preferred '1 1/4 litre'. Not only was it more fitting to his unassuming nature, it was more accurate. While it is usual now to refer to the saloon, and the tourer which followed, as the 'Y type', after its chassis number, MG originally called it, British-fashion, the 'One and a Quarter Litre' Saloon.

It was introduced in 1947 as an 'entirely new conception of an MG car' produced 'in the atmosphere peculiar to the marque' and faithful to the outstanding characteristics of its predecessors'. It 'maintains the breed', MG said, making the point with pictures of horses, hounds and huntsmen. The example of the breed which Allen acquired would have had little appeal to the horse and hound set when he got it. It was more a candidate for pasture and eventually the knacker's yard. Its first and long-term owner had repainted it — by hand! No doubt this and other matters were intended to be rectified by



its second owner, who did have some mechanical work done, but who really preferred golf and wisely offered the little saloon to Allen.

The engine ran passably and the gearbox and rear axle weren't noisily proclaiming the need for an immediate

overhaul but the body, inside and out, presented a real challenge. Mercifully, it had little rust and water still drained off the sliding roof.

The leather upholstery, however, was 'in a shambles', Allen said, adding 'but good enough to get patterns'. The wood floor — yes, wood — was still intact and the grille complete and undamaged.

The result of Allen's rejuvenation is self-evident. He had had a lot of experience with an already impressive list of cars on his C.V. A fellow-enthusiast once said that he was the only person he knew who could buy a fully-restored car and still improve on it.

The 1 1/4 litre was a worthwhile restoration project. There aren't too many left, probably because there weren't too many to start with. At 914 pounds in Australia they were not cheap.

A new car buyer could have had a Ford V8 Super de Luxe for 648 pounds, or other big American cars, for less than

an MG saloon. On the other hand, a buyer tossing up between an MG and a Ford V8 could be said to be a buyer who really wasn't sure what kind of car he wanted.

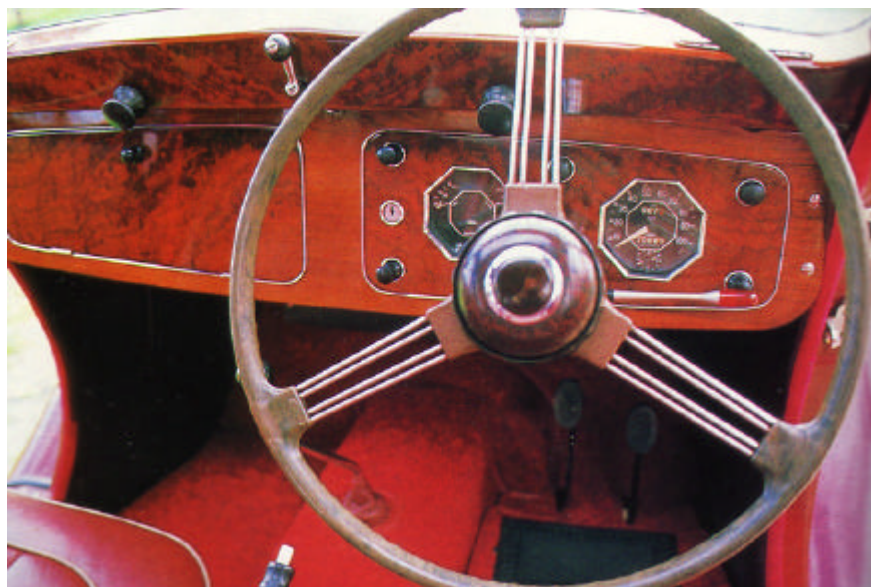
It's more useful to compare the MG with other fully-imported British saloons at the time of similar engine capacity, body size and breeding. 'Similar' is the operative word. With its 1250cc, 11 hp motor and 2525mm wheelbase, there was nothing directly comparable to the MG in the upper-middle market. It occupied its own niche.

The Jaguar 1 1/2 litre (actually 1.8 litres) was bigger. The Riley 1 1/2, the Lea-Francis and the Rover 12 Sports Saloon, both 1 1/2 litre, were longer. All of them were as much as 300 pounds dearer than the MG in the days when a pound was a pound. Closest in price and size was the Sunbeam-Talbot Ten at 995 pounds and with a 2388mm wheelbase.

In that company, though, the MG 1 1/4 held its own in performance. Top speed was 113 kph compared to the Riley 1 1/2 litres 119 kph or the Sunbeam's 110 kph.

Acceleration saw the MG the quickest from rest to 80 kph, it took 18.2 seconds

Downward hinging boot and flowing rear guards were typical of the early '50s but a feature destined to quickly fade as designs changed to flush-sided, all enveloping bodies.



Octagon instruments held by a walnut dash and a wire spoked steering wheel – traditional MG touches carried over to its "Y" Type.

with the Riley taking 19.0 seconds and the Sunbeam 23.4 seconds. The respective times from zero to 97 kph were 29.3 seconds, 31.2 seconds and 35.2 seconds.

For its time, the MG saloon was quite lively. If the Riley and the Sunbeam-Talbot could claim sportiness, the MG saloon can be justifiably described as 'a sports car in plain clothes' or, rather,

well-tailored, old-style clothes.

It could certainly match the other marques in the quality of its finish and equipment, of which there was quite a list: sunroof, telescopic steering wheel with a 76 mm variation, opening windscreen, fog light, reversing light, rear window blind for night driving and permanently-fitted, hydraulically-operated four-wheel jacks, actuated manually under the bonnet. Within the carpeted interior, there were comfortable, panelled leather seats. The separate, adjustable front seats were contoured. In the rear compartment, the seats had elbow and central arm rests and the passengers had pull straps and ashtrays in the back of both front seats. It was very cosy.

Instruments included an ammeter and oil pressure gauge — but not a water temperature gauge — set in an attractive fascia finished in walnut veneer, as were the door cappings. Like everything else which could have been round — such as the external radiator filler cap and bonnet catches — instruments were octagon-shaped to create that 'atmosphere' peculiar to the marque.

Octagon-arians may well be thinking by now that all this is fine but how did the 1 1/4 compare with the REAL MG, the TC roadster?

Strictly speaking, it didn't. It wasn't meant to. It wasn't a saloon version of the TC. It was, as MG said, a new conception or, to be more honest, an effort after the War to have more in the market than just the prewar TB roadster syncromeshed into a TC.

The saloon's ohv engine, however, (66.5 x 90 mm bore and stroke), was the same as that in the TC except that it had one carburettor instead of two and a modified camshaft. Bhp was 45 at 4800 rpm as against the TC's 54 at 5200.

Here's how they compared.

Top Speed: MG 1 1/4 Saloon 113 kph; MC TC 125 kph.

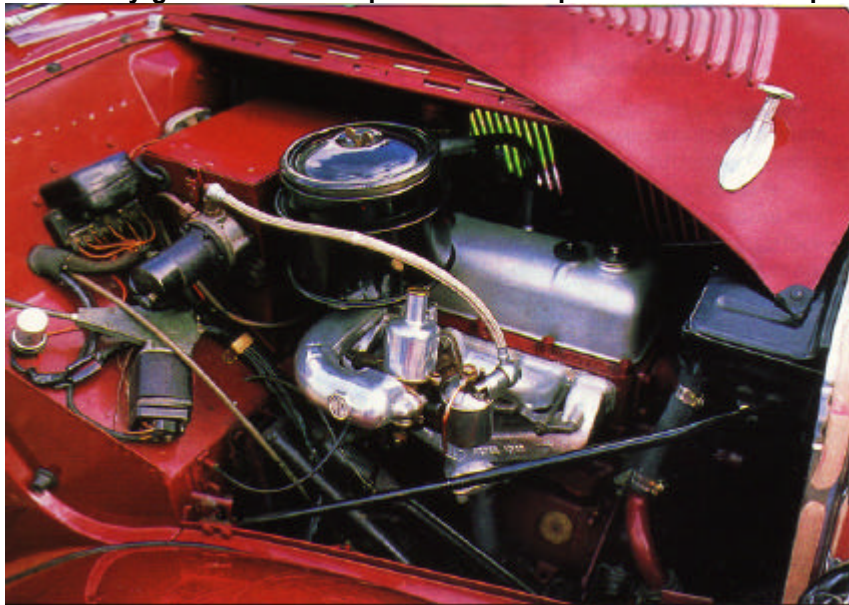
Acceleration: 0-80 kph 18.2 secs; 13.9 secs. 0-97 kph 29.3secs; 21.1 secs.

Fair to say that the 1 1/4 offered brisk performance with saloon car comfort. It also offered something that the TC did not have — coil spring independent front suspension, a rarity at the time, designed by the late Sir Alec Issigonis of Morris Minor and Mini fame.

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Good road-holding, light and positive rack and pinion steering and a comfortable cruising speed of 88-97 kph were among the saloon's characteristics, and were consistent with its antecedents. 'This new 1 1/4 Saloon,' said the company, 'provides the delights of Real Motoring'.

Easy to get at, easy to work on – MG's 1250cc four cylinder engine and ancillary gear. The motor produced 11bhp sufficient for 113kph.



The MG octagon shape theme was not just repeated on the radiator badge but carried over to items like the filler cap and bonnet catches , too.

But the world of 'Real Motoring' was changing. By 1950, when Allen's MG was made, the once-bold, flush-sided Standard Vanguard was in its third year, the Jaguar XK120 had made its sensational debut, the Morris Minor had not only arrived but its 'lowlites' by then were 'highlights', and Ford had unveiled its Consul Four and Zephyr Six.

Yet, there was the MG saloon still humming along with its pre-war, Morris-derived body, complete with running boards and valances covering imaginary dumb irons, as if the world hadn't

changed. With the addition in 1951 of an anti-roll bar, over-riders, smaller wheels and deeper fenders, it was to continue anachronistically until 1953.

At the time the 1 1/4 first appeared, British motoring writers were given to deriding the 'Transatlantic' influence on British car design. The MG saloon, one writer said, 'represents the style of car which can still be regarded as typically British, that is, before fashion dictated slab sides, faired-in lamps and radiators disguised to vanished point.' The MG was to never let him down.

And, dated though it was, the body was pleasing. In 1947, a 1 1/4 litre won the Concurso de Elegancia e Conforto in the petrol-rationed Automovel Club de Portugal's 2nd Lisbon Rally. It wasn't much of a rally but the Concurso prize was a compliment to the saloon's attractive lines.

Today, those same clean lines and nicely-swept tail are still old-fashioned but now they have taken on charm. As Allen Colmer puts it, 'its nice to look through the windscreen and see a bonnet stretching out in front of you.'

It's a sentiment with which many in the older car movement would agree.

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