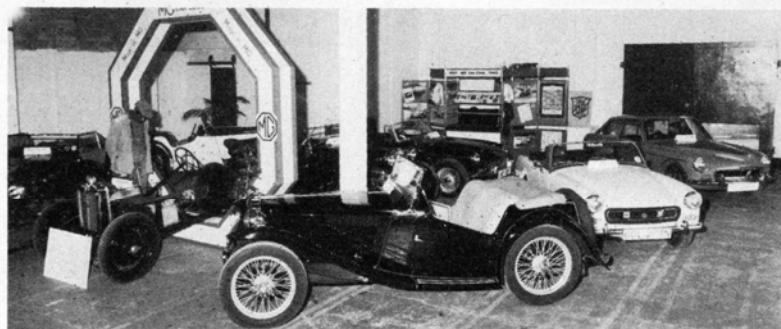


Developing the MG Breed

Graham Robson traces the development of post-war MG models.



OVER the period covered by this survey, from 1945 to date, there have really been eight distinctly different types of MG, four of which were sports car families, two of which were sports saloons, and two of which were really 'badge-engineered' BMC cars, of a type which I propose to call the 'Longbridge-MGs'. The family tree indicates how and when each type appeared, evolved, and disappeared. The lines of evolution, however, are so different that I really ought to consider each 'blood-line' in its own context. Where it is appropriate, I will cross-refer from one range to another.

It is worth noting, however, that of the cars covered, all the T-Series sports cars and the YA/YT/YB sports saloon/tourer models were 'Nuffield MGs', designed at Cowley, and that the ZA/ZB Magnette saloons were 'BMC MGs', also designed at Cowley. The MGA, Midget, and MGB family of sports cars were true 'Abingdon-MGs'. However, each and every one of the cars listed on the family tree was assembled at Abingdon. I have not included the 'Longbridge MGs' on the charts, as these were little more than badge-engineered BMC saloons.

T-Series Midgets

Although each T-Series sports car follows on logically from its predecessor, the family included two entirely different chassis layouts, two types of engine and three distinct body styles. The cars, however, were so alike in size, performance and price that they all have to be considered as one family. In fact, the TA/TB/TC cars form one group, while the TD/TF cars form the second group.

The TA of 1936 was completely different from the PBs and Magnettes which it replaced. It was the first Cowley-designed MG sports car, though continuity was assured because H.N. Charles moved from Abingdon to do the job. It had a brand-new chassis and body shell, both in the traditional MG style. The engine, however, was a tuned version of the overhead-valve Wolseley Ten, and was a member of the ubiquitous '102mm stroke' Morris family, and was matched by a gearbox and spiral bevel back axle of similar pedigree. Early TAs had non-synchromesh gearboxes, but within months a box having synchromesh

on top and third gears was standardised. There was beam axle front and rear suspension, but the hydraulic brakes were an innovation for a Midget. At the time the price was £222.

Early in 1939 the TA was replaced by the TB, really the same car except for the entirely new short-stroke 1,250cc Type XPAG engine, which was matched to a gearbox having synchromesh on top, third and second gears. Apart from the barest handful of Airline coupe bodies, the only alternative body for TAs and TBs was the Tickford drophead-coupe, which incorporated a fold away hood, a fixed windscreen, and wind-down door windows.

After the war, in 1945, the TB was not built again, but the TC took its place. This car, effectively was a TB with shackle-type leaf spring suspension, a wider cockpit, and detail reliability improvements; there were no body options, though at the end of its run a left-hand-drive version was made available. 10,000 were built before the end of 1949.

At the beginning of 1950, the TD was announced. This model had a new box-section chassis frame and coil spring independent front suspension with rack and pinion steering, all developed from the YA saloon car's layout. It had a new body shell, still traditionally styled. The TD was the first MG Midget really to sell strongly in North America, even though its performance was by no means outstanding; many TDs were built with left-hand-drive, but almost none had wire-spoke wheels.

The TD ought to have been replaced by what we now call the MGA, but this decision was delayed by BMC. Instead, MG had to develop the TF instead. The TF was really the TD's chassis and body centre section with a newly profiled nose and tail. It was the first Midget to have semi-recessed headlamps. The TF 1250 (as it became known retrospectively) was no faster than the TD, which led to MG installing the 1,466cc XPEG engine (a bored-out XPAG) in 1954 and producing the TF 1500. Even this was not enough to sustain demand. Fortunately for MG, approval for the MGA product had now been given. TF 1500 production ended in the spring of 1955, some months before sales of the MGA could begin.

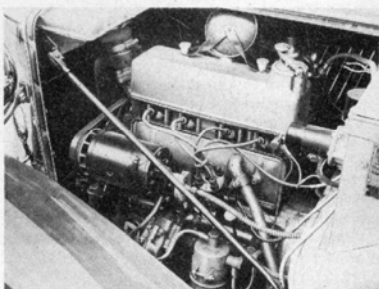
The TD was the most numerous of all

T-Series models, but it is the TF which now appears to be the most desirable in 'classic car' terms.

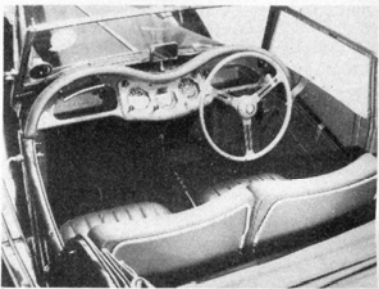
YA, YB and YT family

If it hadn't been for the Second World War, the YA saloon would have been introduced in 1940, but its launch was delayed until the spring of 1947. In engineering the YA was an amalgam of TB, Wolseley 10 and Morris Eight Series E components, all melded to a special box-section chassis frame with coil spring independent front suspension designed by Alec Issigonis. The four-door saloon body

Left, MG's, MG's everywhere. Below, postwar TC engine remained as before with only minor reliability improvements.



Above, MG's Y Model was a good looking version of Morris E Series body.



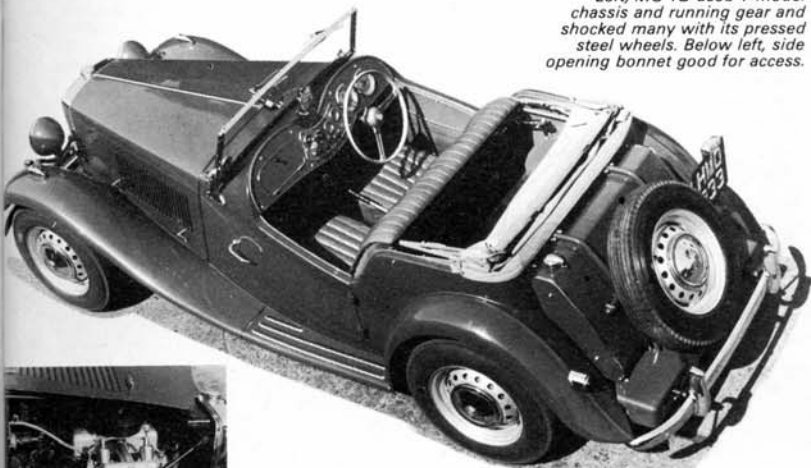
shell was a re-styled version of the Morris Eight Series E shell, with long nose and special tail.

The 1,250cc engine was a single carburettor version of the TB's unit, and produced 46 bhp, while the gearbox was related to the TB but had its own ratios, and the gearchange of the Wolseley 10 of 1939. The YA was a refined little car, but was only capable of about 70 mph, and was physically small because it was based on the smallest Morris body shell. The elements of the suspension, however, were very successful, and survive on the MGB to this day.

It gave rise to two derivatives. From 1948 to 1950, and for export only, there was the two-door four-seater YT Tourer (body by Morris Bodies), which also used the 54 bhp TB/TC engine tune. Only 877 of these costly little cars were built. In 1951, too, the YA gave way to the YB saloon, which looked the same, but had the 15in. road wheels, the front anti-roll bar, the leading-shoe front brakes, and the hypoid axle of the TD sports car, but with no increase in engine power. It finally went out of production in 1953, to be replaced on the Abingdon production line by the ZA Magnette.

It is worth noting that the TD Midget was

Left, MG TD used Y model chassis and running gear and shocked many with its pressed steel wheels. Below left, side opening bonnet good for access.



Left, TF adopted slant-up fascia. Right, TF was only a stop-gap then, but a firm favourite now.



Below, the MGA took a while for enthusiasts to appreciate its real worth.



Above, the Magnette saloon brought back an old name and a new modern look. Left, ZB in Varitone form was a handsome Magnette offering later on.

originally developed around a shortened version of the YA's chassis, and used its front and rear suspensions, and the rack and pinion steering.

ZA and ZB saloons

For this car, BMC brought back the famous name of 'Magnette', which was hated at first by MG traditionalists, but later accepted. Numerically these cars were the most popular MG saloons built so far, though this achievement was dwarfed in later years by the MG1100/1300 saloons. This Magnette was designed, along with its near-relation the Wolseley 4/44, by Gerald Palmer, before the BMC merger took place. It was always his idea to use MG-type engines and transmissions in both cars. He succeeded with the 4/44, which used a single-carburettor 1,250cc engine, but the Magnette was modified at BMC's insistence, to use Austin-designed engines and gearboxes.

It was the first-ever MG to have a unit-construction body shell, and looked superficially identical to the Wolseley 4/44, though the latter car had an altogether higher 'stance' and different lower pressings. Both cars shared the same suspensions and braking systems. The Magnette used a 1,489cc twin-carburettor engine and a gearbox which would later find a home in the new MGA of 1955.

The ZA Magnette became the ZB in the autumn of 1956, the main changes being improved power, a wrap-around rear window, a duo-tone colour scheme, and improved interior appointments. Twice as many ZBs were sold as ZAs, but the model was withdrawn at the end of 1958. It was the last touring car to be built at Abingdon.

MGA models

Like the TA of 1936, the MGA of 1955 was almost completely different from its predecessor. The only 'carry-over' item from the TF 1500 was the coil spring independent front suspension and the steering. The MGA of 1955-1962, however, was an enormous success, with more than 101,000 of all types built and sold. The MGA was the first MG with full-width styling, the first to use Austin (properly, BMC) engines and transmissions, and the first to be designed at Abingdon since 1935.

Its body style originated in the Le Mans special built on a TD chassis for George Phillips in 1951, and its chassis followed in 1952. MG tried for approval to put the car (with TF power train) into production then, but were rebuffed. Approval was given in 1954, on the condition that B-Series engines and transmissions were used. Light-alloy prototypes raced at Le Mans and in the Tourist Trophy in 1955, and sales began immediately afterwards.

The first MGAs had 1,489cc and four-wheel drum brakes, and were capable of nearly 100mph. In 1956 the open sports car was joined by the smart 'bubble-top' fixed head coupe, with wrap-around screen and wind-down door glasses. Both styles were built on all subsequent derivatives until 1962.

The MGA 1600 came along in 1959, replacing the original type. In basic engineering it was the same, but had an enlarged 1,588cc engine and Lockheed front-wheel disc brakes. Less than two years later, in mid 1961, it evolved once again, this time to become MGA 1600 Mk II. There was a minor re-style, including a different front grille, and the engine was enlarged to 1,622cc, which was an awkward size for competition purposes (the class limit was 1,600cc) but was done to rationalise with other BMC B-Series engines of the period. This model carried on to the summer of 1962, at which point it was replaced by the MGB.