

THE resurrection of the M.G. marque as a badge-engineering exercise by BL has been welcomed by the majority of enthusiasts, especially as the M.G. Metro is only the first step in the right direction (see this month's *Unwrapped* section). We feel that the once tormented spirit of Cecil Kimber will rest happy at the prospect of a new line of M.G. saloon cars and, though the great man was never one to succumb to retrospective indulgence, we are prompted to look back at the long line of saloons that began with the somewhat unsporting 14/28 Morris Oxford-based 'M.G. vee-front saloon' of early 1924 vintage.

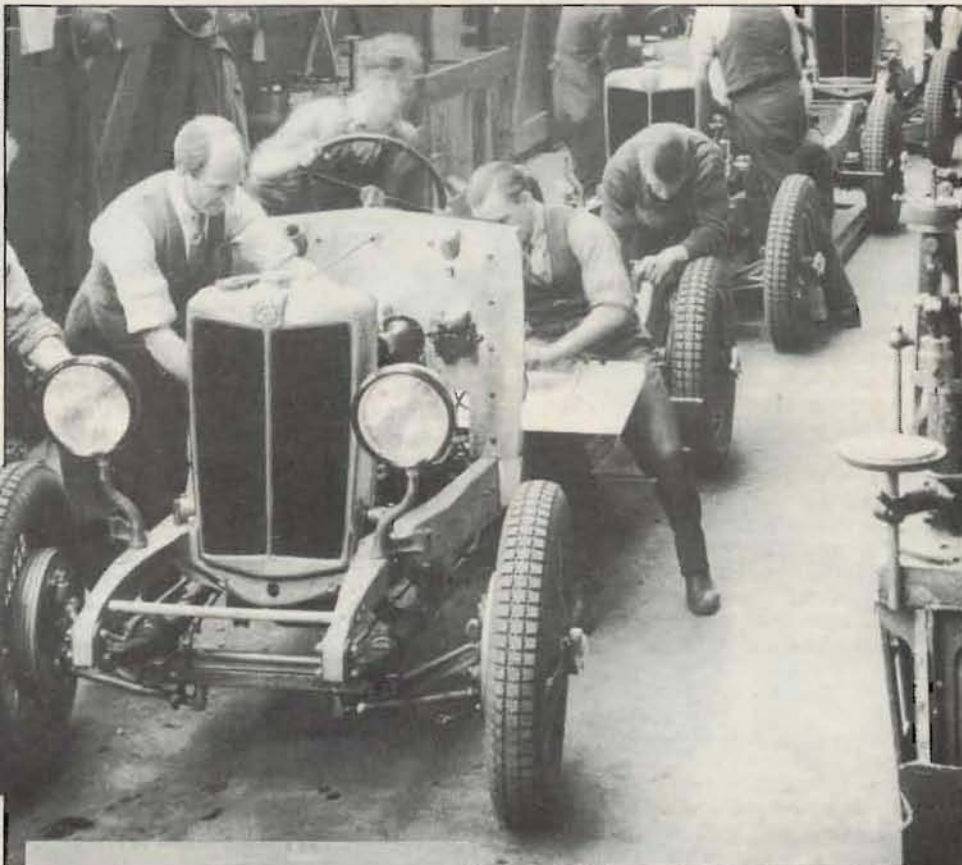
From a sales point of view as well as the sporting aspect the model was not a success, mainly because of the simultaneous announcement of Morris Motors' own cheaper Bullnose saloon. In fact the gestation of M.G. as a marque in its own right was followed by a period of increased production during which the works concentrated on sports cars. Saloon cars, some of them very interesting and desirable, were produced in tiny numbers and it was not until the second half of the next decade that M.G. saloon cars were produced in significant numbers.

A few flatnosed 14/28 saloons were built in 1926-9 and the Salonette, introduced as a ducktailed 2+2 for 1926, became available as a proper saloon car in time for the 1928 season. The original Salonette was reported in *The Motor* (July 28, 1925), the enthusiastic writer declaring that "the folding rear seat is designed to accommodate two children in comfort, although for short distances two adults could be accommodated." We have read that about a few cars since then!

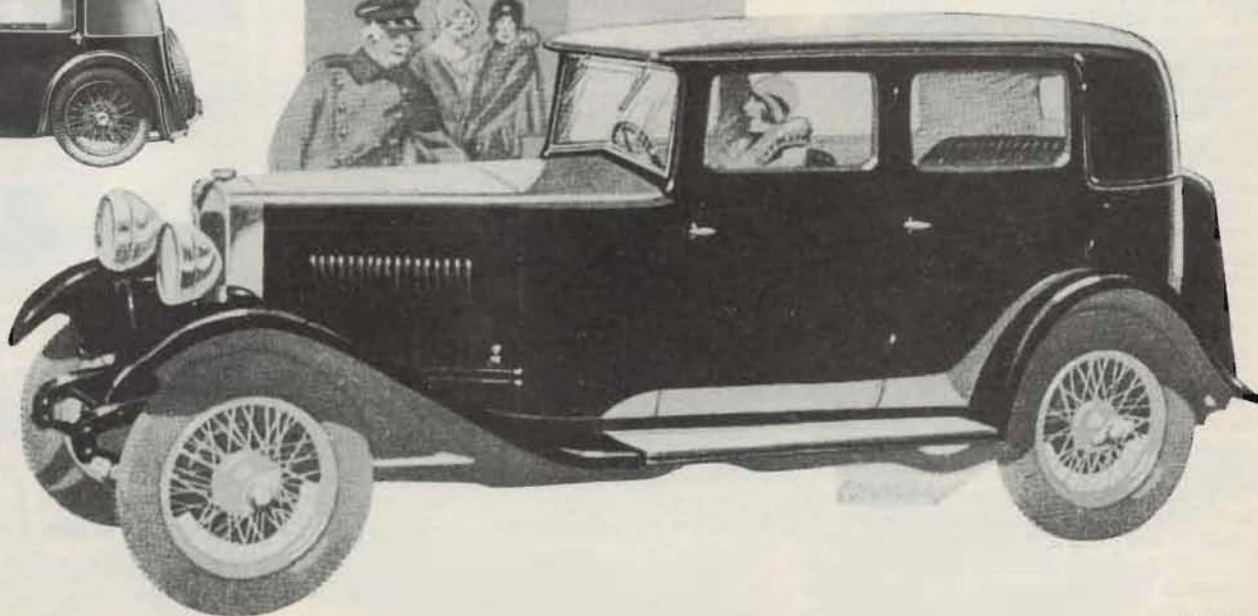
Four years later, the 18/80 M.G. Six Sports Saloon was written up in the same publication as "A fascinating car with a speed range of 5mph to 78mph on top gear". At a first glance this car, which gave Kimber the status of a manufacturer rather than a special builder, might be thought a little cramped to be considered a proper saloon car, but thanks to deep footwells sunk each side of the propeller shaft, extending under the front seats, rear seat passengers were comfortable on long journeys. One of these M.G. Six saloons, probably a Mark II, was entered in the 1932 Monte Carlo Rally

M.G. Saloons 1924 to 1982

M.G. saloons have always been overshadowed by their sporting brothers, but with BL's resurrection of the M.G. name on the M.G. Metro, the marque now survives only as a saloon. To set the record straight, Tony Dron looks back at other saloons that have sported the legendary octagon.



Above right, 18/80 Sixes on the M.G. line, and, right, fully bodied. The Six was made between 1928-33. Above, 12/70 Magna Salonette from 1931 Motor Show.



MG Saloons

by a sporting gentleman, one H. H. Stisted, starting from Urnea in Scandinavia with his passenger, Miss Graham, bravely taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the new age of liberation for bright young ladies.

It is sad to relate that they retired from the rally before reaching Stockholm: the appallingly bad weather conditions of a freak winter claimed many retirements and that stretch of road, by all contemporary accounts, was like a greasy pole — a raised, steeply-crowned carriageway covered in ice with deep ditches on each side.

The 2468cc M.G. Six is mentioned too in a contemporary reference to circuit racing, albeit motorcycling. *The Motor* correspondent recording that Mr T. W. Loughborough, Secretary of the A.C.U., lapped the Motorcycle T.T. course on the Isle of Man in 42 minutes, including two stops to pick up passengers! This car continued in production until 1933, latterly produced alongside the K-type Magnette. (The J1 Midget closed four-seater cannot really be considered a saloon car). The engine for the entirely new Magnette built for the 1933 sales drive was a high efficiency ohc 1086cc six-cylinder incorporating the latest cylinder head technology derived from racing practice. Many motor manufacturers never recovered from the investment needed to develop a small six, such a design being the then fashionable path to engine smoothness. M.G. Cars Ltd, of Pavlova Works, Abingdon-on-Thames, weathered the storm well, their sports cars by this time selling strongly by Vintage standards but the pillarless Magnette saloon was produced in comparatively tiny numbers, even though the press regarded it as being of outstanding interest. Other attempts to market closed M.G. cars, giving the Magnette a larger 1287cc engine (and even producing two-seater Continental Coupés and fashionably 'streamlined' Airline Coupés) met with little success.

Only 201 KN Magnettes were sold in over 12 months production which ended at around Motor Show time in 1935. From this point on, with the introduction of the new SA model, M.G. saloon sales really took off, and were going well when the Second World War brought car production to a halt in late 1939.

Despite widespread rumour and speculation about their new saloon model, the M.G. Car Company managed to pull off a successful eve-of-the-Show surprise in late 1935 with their new Two-litre (SA). *The Autocar* were impressed, giving the significant new model a three-page descriptive article, and stated, "Possessing good lines and proportions the new M.G. is distinctly imposing and is very completely equipped." The public agreed, and 2738 of these desirable and roomy saloons were produced before the war. Announced as a 2062cc six, with twin downdraught SUs and pushrod ohv, the production versions were bored out to 2288cc and later 2322cc. An ample four-seater with a capacious boot for its day, the SA was competitively priced at £375. The company, in its advertisements, said the new car would "set a new pace to the cars of tomorrow." Its comfortable cruising gait was around 70-75mph, but it was stylish. The VA model, introduced in mid-1937, was a smaller car on the same theme, powered by a four-cylinder version of the engine (making 1548cc), and 2,407 of these were produced.

A sad case of a promising car killed off by the hostilities was the Two Point Six M.G. (or WA) which was written up in glowing terms by *The Autocar* on December 15, 1939. It shared the SA's 10ft 3in wheelbase but was wider-bodied

and wider tracked at the rear. This made for pleasant steering feel despite strong castor action. It had twin braking master cylinders and braking performance to match its luxury sports saloon image. As for performance it was "happy well past the 80 mark" but of necessity the writer was obliged to dwell on the gentle economy driving demanded by scarce Pool petrol. The bored out 2561cc six-cylinder engine produced 95.5bhp, but it was noted with regret that "in these times such a car cannot prosper as it should". Only 369 were made during its brief 1939 lifespan.

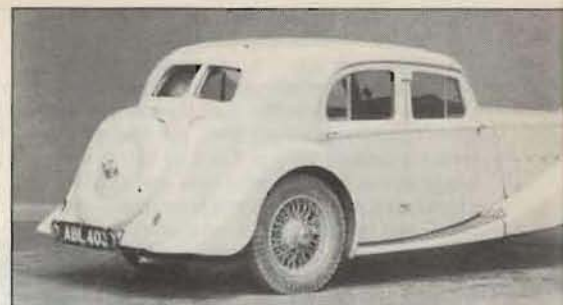
After the war, Abingdon's management reverted to Morris-based M.G. saloons, the 1947 Y-type being a production version of the 1939 M.G. Ten prototype. This, the first M.G. with ifs (by Issigonis) and rack and pinion steering, was based on the Morris 8 body and fitted with a Morris 10 engine. Nearly 7,500 of these in YA and YB form were made up to 1953. Performance was modest, the YA 1½-litre 46bhp car giving a 0-60mph time of 27.3sec and a top speed of 69mph. This was considered adequate in those days and it enjoyed some success in production saloon races. Improvements to the chassis late in 1951 (YB) made for better roadholding though the car still wanted to oversteer at the slightest provocation, a trait that was enjoyed by the enthusiastic drivers of the day.

The merger of the two traditional enemies, Austin and Morris, meant that Abingdon became a small fish in an even larger pond. They were used to external management interference, and it is surprising that the marque survived both the war and bosses who blew hot and cold. Yet out of this conflict came a new Gerald Palmer design for 1954, the new M.G. Magnette. Despite reservations, the new car, which was originally meant to be an MG but which first appeared as a Wolseley and which at the eleventh hour had the Austin B series engine thrust into it, soon won many hearts and it has now gained the status of a post war classic. The first MG without a separate chassis, the Z-series saloons had a top speed of 79.7mph and a 0-60mph time of 23.1 sec (*Motor*, January 5, 1955). They provided the ride and handling expected of a sports saloon and over 36,000 were built before production ceased in 1958. The ZB model, introduced as the Varitone (reviving the tradition of two-tone paintwork for M.G. cars) in late 1955, is distinguished from the ZA also by a larger rear window.

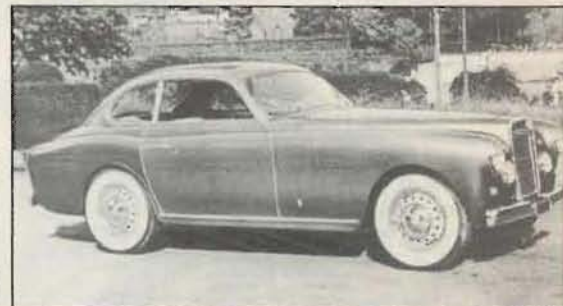
The model that followed was an M.G. by badge alone. The Farina-styled body was a reliable if uninspiring family car but BMC were really only kidding themselves by putting an M.G. badge on it. Farina Magnettes were built at Cowley until 1968, by which time demand for the aged design had fallen off to a trickle.

Better received by the press and the buying public were 1100/1300 M.G. badge cars, of which just over 143,000 were produced between 1962 and 1971. This was an early front-wheel-drive practical sports saloon which set a trend for the following decade. About one in five produced had the 1275cc 70bhp engine which gave the car a top speed of 85.6mph and 0-60mph time of 17.3sec (*Motor*, June 10, 1967). With the demise of this model, the M.G. badge disappeared from the saloon scene until last month's announcement of the new M.G. Metro. The signs are that BL intends to employ the historic octagon with care and sensitivity to produce a range of MG saloons worthy of the name in the years to come. ▲

Further reading: for the complete M.G. history don't miss 'M.G.' by McComb, published by Osprey at £9.95.

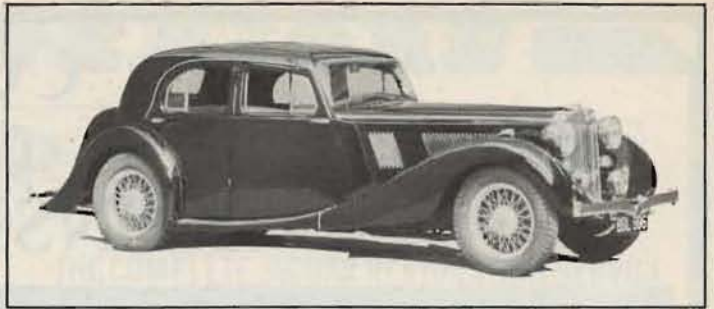
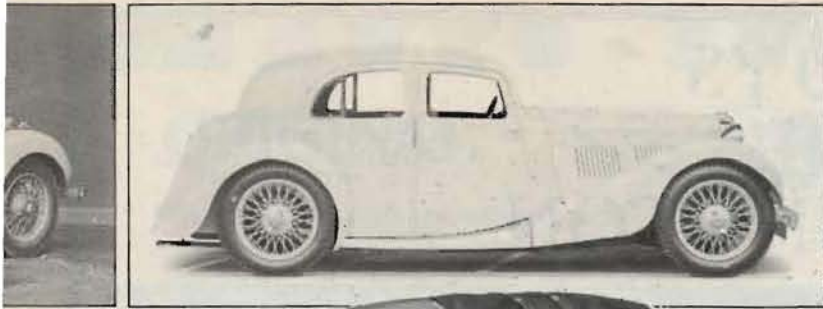


Above, the SA or 2-litre brought success in the saloon market for M.G. from late 1935. The car illustrated is a late model from 1939.

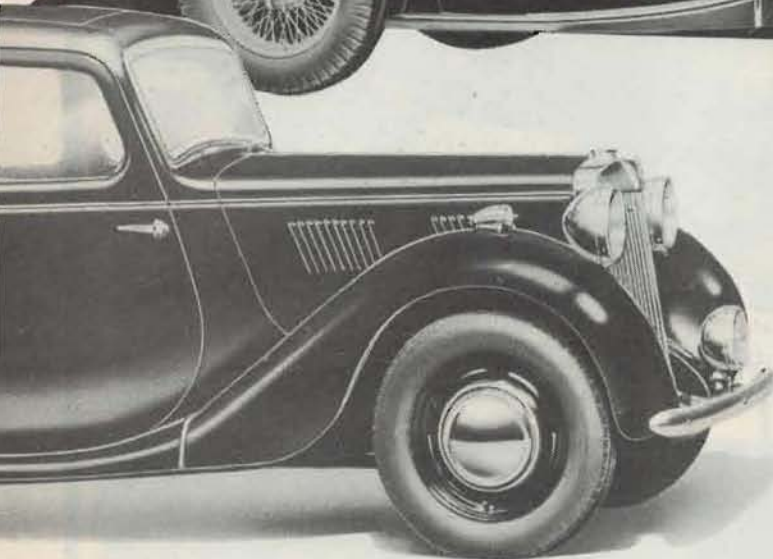


Above, post war one-off, 1952 TD by Bertone. Right, the Y-type, or 1½-litre, made from 1947 until late 1953.





Above left, 1938 VA or 1 1/2-litre. Above, the impressive WA 2.6-litre appeared in late 1938 and was killed by the war. Below, pre-war M.G. saloon styles were converted to open tourers. Can we hope for an M.G. Metro Tourer? It's not impossible.



Above, the ZA Magnette of 1953, designed by Gerald Palmer as an M.G., appeared first as a Wolseley. Right, ZB Varitone dates from 1956.



Above, the badge-engineered Magnette Mk III lacked the Abingdon touch but, left, the M.G. 1300, built until 1971, was a lively sports saloon.



Left, the M.G. Metro is the quickest ever M.G. production saloon car.

