

Buying a Competition Car

by Paul Goodman photos by Mike Wray and Chris Phillips

Introduction

MG cars have been used in competition since the marque started. The earliest MGs were tuned versions of existing road cars. Since then, MGs have been used in a huge variety of competitions including racing, sprints, hillclimbs, trials, autotests and rallies. The cars used range from completely standard road cars to highly modified track cars. There were many factory-entered cars and Abingdon also gave advice and help to private owners. Many parts were supplied under the "Special Tuning" banner to enable conversion and improvement of engines and suspension. The history of MG competitions has been well documented, but what if you want to buy a competition MG today? This article is intended to help you make a purchase.

Buyer Beware

Buying a competition MG is probably even more challenging than buying a car for the road. All the normal factors have to be examined, but, in addition, such issues as competition history, quality of the parts and modifications, and compliance with regulations are important. In particular, is the car you are looking at the same as the one which last raced? Many competitors have more than one engine, gearbox, set of tyres and suspension set up. You need to be sure that what is fitted to the car is or is not the specification which last raced. It is often said that the safest way to buy a competition car is to take ownership at the event at which the car is competing. You should ask the owner for documentary proof of lap times achieved by the car and possibly arrange a test session at the track. The owner can then demonstrate the car, you can verify the performance and possibly take the wheel yourself.

The Rules and Regulations

Any competition car which is to be used in an event sanctioned by the UK's Motor Sports Association (MSA) has to be prepared to conform to their rules and regulations. These are published each year in the 'Competitors and Officials Yearbook', which is known to all as the 'Blue Book'. It is also available on the MSA website www.msauk.org. In the 2010 Blue Book, the important sections are 'J', which deals with common regulations for all vehicles,



and 'M', autotests; 'Q', circuit racing; 'R' rallying; 'S' sprints and hillclimbs; and 'T', trials. The MSA define 'Period Vehicles' in a series of age groups which are then exempt from many of the regulations. For example, there are period 'D' cars up to 1930 and period 'E' cars from 1931 to 1946.

These sections set out all the required safety rules for competition cars and the specific regulations for the various types of competition. When buying a car, it is important to check that it conforms to the Blue Book and if such features as roll cages, plumbed-in extinguishers and racing seats are fitted that they are in accordance with these specifications. If the car that you are inspecting has not been raced for several years then these checks are particularly important. Some components have a life limit. This includes seats, seat belts and fire extinguishers, so checking their age is essential. Most MSA scrutineers are happy to come with you to check the vehicle before you buy. Some may charge a fee or expenses. The list of scrutineers is in the Blue Book or online at the MSA website.

For some types of event, competition cars have to have MSA logbooks. For speed events, for example, cars with substantial modifications have to be inspected by an MSA scrutineer who gives the logbook the MSA stamp of approval. If the car that you are looking at has been used in speed events, then the logbook is a useful extra source of information.

In addition to the MSA rules, historic racing cars have to have papers issued by the 'FIA'. These show that the car conforms to the 'homologation' specification which was set down by Abingdon when the cars were new. They cover all the aspects of the car including engine, gearbox, body and suspension. There are papers for MGAs, MGBs and Midgets. Buying one of these cars is facilitated by the historical information that is provided in the papers.

All of the MGCC Race Championships are run by Co-ordinators. They have an

excellent knowledge of the history of MG competition cars. They will meet you at race meetings and introduce you to friendly competitors who will be able to give you a guided tour of their cars and help you produce a checklist to use when viewing a potential purchase.

Pre-War MG Sports Cars

The MMM cars which were manufactured before the war were used in many competitive events, indeed some were built specifically for trials, rallies and races. They competed at Brooklands, Donington Park and on trials such as the 'Lands End'. Many of these MGs have survived, and other competition versions have been created using chassis/engine combinations with new bodywork. Buying one of these cars requires the help of a specialist and the MG Car Club MMM Register is the best starting point. Cars of this age are exempt from most regulations **so are not required** to have roll cages, seat belts and other safety equipment.

T and Y Types

T Types (and sometimes Ys) were also used as competition cars from the day that they were released from Abingdon. As with MMM cars, competition T Types are a specialist subject. The MGCC T Register can advise on the history and specification of cars. You will find that some T Types are fitted with modern safety equipment such as a rollover bar, seat belts and fire extinguishers. Non-original body panels are common and the XPAG engines are often highly tuned. In addition, there was a move in the 1950s to build special-bodied XPAG-engined cars. These are now highly desirable and usually to be seen at such events as the Goodwood Revival and MG Live.

MGA

The MGAs were the last of the MGs with chassis frames. They were raced and rallied



by the factory and keen private owners. Some MGAs have 'FIA' papers, but there are also many other competition MGAs which are modified in a freelance manner. These usually have rollover protection, tuned engines and competition wheels and tyres. The MGCC MGA Register can provide advice on purchase. These cars race in the MGCC Thoroughbred Sports Car Championship who can also give advice.

MGB

The most numerous competition MGs are the MGBs. As with the MGA, the cars were raced and rallied by the Abingdon works and so there are 'FIA' MGBs which have been built to the same specification as the cars which were raced by the factory. There are also many other competition MGBs. If buying one, then the integrity of the structure of the car is the starting point for your assessment. It is essential that the bodyshell is in first-class condition with no corrosion and that if repairs have been made, then the three-part sill structure has been correctly replaced. Expect to find body panels such as wings, bonnets, boot lids and possibly doors to



be made of fibreglass. If a roll bar or cage is fitted, then make sure that the mounting points have been plated. Engines range from the standard B series with a capacity of 1840 cc to V8s with a capacity of in excess of 4,000 cc. Many competition MGBs don't have highly modified suspension because the standard set up does a good job, but look for modified bushes, extra links, telescopic shock absorbers and competition lever arm units.

Midget

Midgets are also very popular competition cars. Once again, integrity of the steel body shell is the most significant factor. The Midget shell is vulnerable in the areas of the sills, spring mountings, floors and door pillars. Many cars have fibreglass outer panels including one-piece fronts, boot lids, door skins and rear wings. Again, check that any roll cage fitted has strengthening plates fitted where it attaches to the body tub. In the most extreme cases, the rear body may have been replaced by a network of tubes. Most competition Midgets have tuned versions of the A series engine, but a few cars use the later Triumph 1500 cc engine. There are many different suspension modifications available for Midgets so you can expect to find a whole range of front telescopic conversions and rear linkages for the back axle.

Metro

On its first release, the MG Metro and Turbo were promoted with a racing championship at national race meetings – the 1993 BRDC Roversport Club Metro Challenge. When Rover ceased sponsoring the challenge, the MG Car Club stepped in and the MG Car Club Metro Championship was formed. This is still one of the cheapest ways to go motor racing and, again, all cars have to be fitted with full roll cages and all the other safety gear. The Championship has expanded over the years to include all



models of MG and Rover Metros and the standard MG ZR and engines are a mixture of A and K series to a maximum capacity of 1400cc. If you are interested in buying a Metro to race, then the Championship website is the best place to start.

MGF/TF

Racing was also used to promote the MGF to the British car buyer. The Abingdon Trophy was a series of race and speed events for relatively standard cars. This was followed by the MGF Cup for which special highly modified cars were built. Sadly, very few cars have survived from these series, but sometimes one comes onto the market. These cars should not have a rust problem, but have complicated suspension, engine and gearbox arrangements which need expert assessment when buying. Most recently, several new MGFs have been built for racing. The best source of advice if buying a racing F is the Championship Co-ordinator of the MG Trophy Championship in which the remaining cars are raced. Road specification MGFs are popular cars for use in hillclimbs and sprints. If buying one of these, then the things to watch out for are the same as buying a car for the road.

Modern MG Saloons

The commonest MG saloon in competition is the ZR. Like the MGF, there are factory-built cars which now compete in the Trophy Championship. These have similar complexity to the Fs. Less modified ZRs 160s are also used in the Trophy Championship in Class C. Elsewhere, some standard road cars have been used in speed events, again, the same considerations as buying a road car come into play.

