

THE MG SUPERCAR



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By Jock Simpson

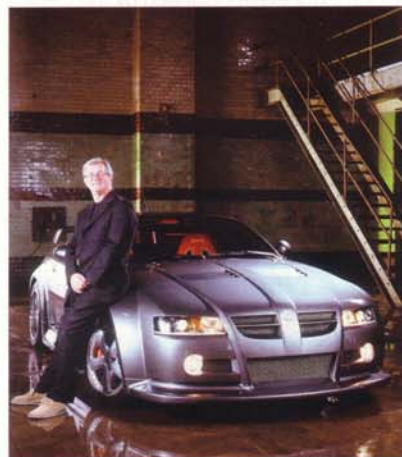
Sitting cosseted in considerable comfort behind the wheel of one of the few factory built MG SVs and gazing down the bonnet you do begin to wonder why on earth MG suddenly decided to move away from 'sensible' small sporting cars and decide to build an expensive, sophisticated 'supercar' like this? How come they reckoned that they could take on the Italians and Germans at their own, well-established high performance, game? Here was a small company in a financial vacuum with no specialised management and no historic background in building a production car, capable of achieving 200mph that would be as happy on a race track as it would be cruising down to the South of France. Fortunately for us none of this bothered The Phoenix Consortium. They saw the project as a way to launch the company into other more profitable markets and to demonstrate that MG was, once again, a technological high performance brand leader with serious racing aspirations. Did they succeed? Having now had the rare chance to drive the car we think they certainly succeeded in making a highly credible supercar that still performs well in



The first press shot of the MG X80 got the motoring journalists attention.

the company of other, more modern, machinery. Sadly we will never know if this would have been a successful GT racing car or whether it was the best way to move the MG brand forwards.

It is not generally realised but this wasn't the first expensive, top of the range Supercar MG had built. Back in 1934 they built the MG K3 Magnette. This was an out and out road racer that came fourth overall at Le Mans in 1934 and won its class in The Mille Miglia in the same year. However this was a car that only a wealthy enthusiast could buy and drive around on the public roads. He needed to be 'a wealthy enthusiast' since in today's money it would have cost in excess of £100,000!



Peter Stevens who was in charge of the project from the design to completion.

Historically MG had always been a relatively small part of the Midlands' huge motor industry. Traditionally they had produced popular, inexpensive, sporty cars that often gained a healthy reputation on the race track. But this was an industry that had systematically torn itself apart and then emerged from the ashes with yet another new name and new hope for the future.

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Over the years, despite all the changes and disruption, MG managed to carry on producing a series of very successful cars. The final act in this long-running drama started in May 2000. BMW sold Rover and MG to The Phoenix Consortium for a mere £10.00! But BMW chose to hang onto the profitable Mini and Land Rover brands. By September the Rover Group had changed its name to MG Rover Group Ltd. In February 2001 the seeds of a 'Supercar' project were taking root as car manufacturer Qvale and MG Rover were starting to talk to each other. By June of the same year a deal was completed and the MG X80 project was up and running. MG Rover now had a foothold in Modena, the traditional heartland of the Italian Supercar industry.

Once the decision had been made speed was vital, the MG XPower SV needed to go on sale as soon as possible. Yet another company was formed to look after the project, it was called MG X80 Ltd. X80 being the prototype name for the MG SV. John Towers, Nick Stephenson, Peter Beale and John Edwards, or The Phoenix Four as they had become known, went out to 'buy in' some of the best names in the business. They knew the Qvale family, they had been selling MGs in USA for years and they knew the Mangusta model (which had started life as the DeTomaso Bigua) had a superb chassis, a reliable Ford V8 power plant and the company had access to a well-established network of specialised suppliers. However it was not a stunning car to look at or for that matter particularly quick, so a simple cosmetic 'make over' was ruled out! A key feature was that the chassis had already been fully homologated in the US and Europe, thus saving MG three years of development work.

Peter Stevens was the first to join the team. He was to be solely in charge of the



The SV's first public showing at the Birmingham motorshow.

whole project from design to completion. There was no doubt he had the pedigree, after all he had designed the McLaren F1, Lotus Excel, Esprit and Elan, the Jaguar XJR15 and many others. Plus he had an excellent track record and reputation amongst the racing fraternity.

The next person to join the team was Giordano Casarini; he had worked in Ferrari's race department, then joined Masarati and worked for them in Modena for nineteen years and was finally tempted away to join DeTomaso and then Qvale. He would look after all the engineering aspects of the new car. Casarini knew all there was to know about the Mangusta chassis and the complex web of suppliers that worked in the Italian supercar industry.

Ian Moreton had worked with Peter Stevens in the past when he was project manager for Prodrive Subaru and deeply involved with their World Rally Championship team. He joined the X80 team as the natural choice of project manager in March 2002. He was going to have his work cut out to pull together various suppliers from UK, Italy, America and Canada.

With the well-proven Mangusta box section chassis as a template The MG X80 project rapidly evolved into a series of prototypes, XP1-XP4. XP1 was painted matt black (an urban myth suggested that blackboard paint had been used!) and developed by David Price Racing and mainly used for high speed cooling, handling, engine and gearbox development and eventually high speed stability tests at Nardo in Italy. It was quick! The watches showed that Le Mans winning driver John Nielsen hit an impressive 206mph. It used a 450bhp version of the Mustang engine. It was also packed with a variety of components that were track orientated. XP2 started life in grey primer but was then



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also painted black used for aerodynamic development and was seen at the Nurburgring on several occasions. XP3 appeared at the October 2002 Birmingham Motor Show. It was later sent to shows in Barcelona, Bologna and Amsterdam. It even put in an appearance at the glamorous Cannes film festival in 2003. It was used for occasional development work but its role was mainly as a display/demonstrator car. XP4 was the first automatic version and was painted in 'Monogram Sunspot Yellow'.

It was around this time that yet another name and company were formed to handle the production of the MG SV, it was called MG Sport and Racing Division. This also saw the arrival of the MG XPower Brand. *So now serious production could begin.*

The production process broke down into four separate parts, all of which were handled in different regions of Europe and America. The chassis was lightened, stiffened and then went into production with Vaccari and Bosi in Modena. They had been building chassis and components for Ferrari, Masarati and DeTomaso for years and were a totally safe pair of hands.

The engines and gearboxes started life with Ford in Detroit and were then shipped to either Rousch in Michigan or Sean Hyland Motorsport in Ontario. Both companies



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were top engine tuners in NASCAR and other branches of circuit. There were three power options for the car. The SV with 4.6 litre 320bhp, a top speed of 165 mph and 0-60mph in 5.3secs. The SV-R with the 5.0 litre engine producing 385bhp, a top speed of 175mph and 0-60 4.9secs. Finally the SV-S, with the two valve 4.6 litre engine and a supercharger that brought it back up to 385bhp, matching the SV-R. The SV-S was planned to replace the manual SV-R model. The differential was sourced in Australia, traditionally the home of some very powerful V8 engines and the drive trains to handle them!

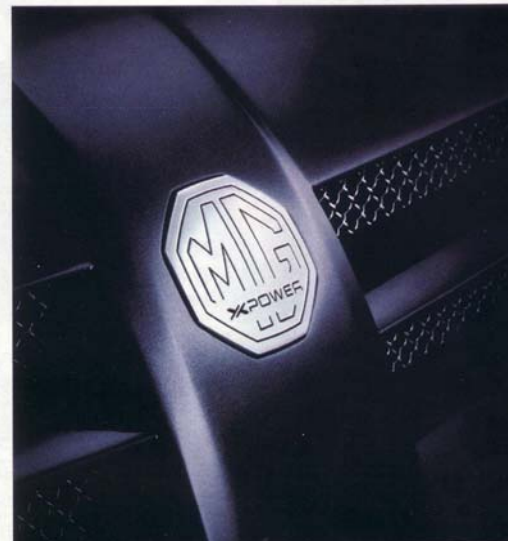
The specialised material used in the production of the carbon fibre body panels were produced in UK by SP Systems on the Isle of Wight. They had developed innovative new techniques that allowed for a mirror like paint finish that was traditionally very hard to achieve with traditional carbon fibre weaves. Each car was built up with 3,000 pieces of carbon fibre which were then chilled and shipped to Belco Avia near Turin, where they were then individually moulded into 30 body panels and then 'cured' at 130°C. The final body panel assembly was completed at OPAC, where the FIA approved integral roll over bar was installed. Finally the rolling chassis was mated with its engine and

gearbox and then shipped back to MG Sport and Racing at Longbridge in the UK for the final stages of production.

Back in the UK the interior trim, glass, seats, dashboard, instrumentation and final detailing was carried out by a small, but totally dedicated, team at MG Sport and Racing in Longbridge. Work on the design of X80 prototype was started in June 2001 and the first customer took delivery in February 2004. It had been a rapid, innovative and unconventional way to build any motor car, let alone a genuine, thoroughbred 'Supercar' but it had worked. Nobody will ever know now if the MG-SV would have found a place in the exotic supercar market, or whether it could have revitalised that famous octagonal badge for MG rover and taken the company on into the future.

In amongst all the chaos and confusion that surrounded the final days of MG Rover a number of MG SVs were still on the production line, others had been completed but not sold. So we are left with a few very precious, very memorable, very rapid and very serious Supercars.

Possibly the most desirable of these cars is Chassis Number 139. This car was the star of the 2004 Motor Show at NEC and part of MG's 80th Year Celebrations. It is now the only unregistered RHD car that was



built by MG Sport and Racing Ltd which is available for sale anywhere. The colour is described as 'Dusty Blue Supertallic' and it comes with azurite blue leather/alcantara trim. The optional extras include climate control and polished carbon fibre side air vents. The recorded mileage is a remarkable 295miles. This car is now for sale by 'OnLine Tender' (for details contact Terry Madden of Wyles Hardy and Co on +44 (0) 1442 832234).



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The remaining factory built cars will be coming up for sale by Private Treaty early in the new year (For details contact Terry Madden at Wyles Hardy on +44 (0) 1442 832234). These include the MG XPower SV-S (Chassis number 111) which was a manual pre-production evaluation car that was re-powered by Roush Industries. It was fitted with a special exhaust system and a supercharged two valve 4.6 litre engine, only three SV-S specification cars and one SV-RS ever left the factory;

- Chassis number 129 was another manual SV-R. It was delivered to MG Sport and Racing's Park Lane dealership in February 2005.
- Chassis number 134, a manual SV, was registered as a demonstrator and given a large rear wing and adapted to look like an SV-R.
- Chassis number 135 was also a manual SV demonstrator; this car was delivered to EMG in Epsom but was always owned by MG Sport and Racing.

- Chassis number 136 was the EVO magazine long term loan car that was driven and evaluated by Rowan Atkinson. This was a manual MG XPower SV-R.
- Jeremy Clarkson drove chassis number 138, a manual SV-R, then wrote all about it in *Top Gear* magazine.
- Chassis number 601 was the first production left hand drive manual SV-R. It appeared at the Paris Motor Show in 2004 and then the Amsterdam Motor show in 2005.
- Chassis number 620 was a manual SV-R that had been planned to go to Italy to support the MG XPower launch there planned for May 2005. It was never delivered because MG Sport and Racing went into administration in April that year.

These cars will shortly be for sale and can be viewed, by appointment, at Wyles Hardy and Co, contact Terry Madden on 01422 832234.



MG SV-R Driving Impressions...

OK so here we are... A disused airfield, no traffic, the sun is out, the sky is blue and there is an MG SV-R burbling away beside me. Not something you get to experience everyday. Even in such a wide open space the MG SV-R has a presence about it, it is a chunky bit of machinery, at a guess about the size of the new model Ford Mustang. However since the body is made up mostly of carbon fibre it weighs in at just 1,500kgs and the 5.0 litre engine pushes out 385bhp plus 510Nm of torque, so it looks as if we do have some serious performance to deal with.

Slide into the driver's seat and everything immediately comes to hand. The seat is comfortably snug and shows its racing heritage. The full harness belts are innovative with an 'inertia' system that allows you to move about on a long journey and a locking device that allows you to stay firmly in place when pressing on. For some reason any car that starts 'on the button' is a bit classy, this is no exception. The clutch is surprisingly light for such a beefy performance car and it feeds the

power in very comfortably. This beast might even be at ease on the M25! The gearbox does not have that 'slicing through butter' feel about it but with a firm hand and the clutch fully depressed the gears tend to come up in the right order. I suspect the gearbox will ease up a bit with a bit of use.

The driving position is excellent, even for this 6' 4" ample bodied scribe. So into gear, ease the clutch and off we go. This was not the time or place to establish whether the original performance figures are accurate but I have no reason to argue with 0-60mph in 4.9secs and a top speed of 175mph. The ride over broken concrete is remarkably smooth and comfortable while the chassis feels superbly stiff. The original plan to eventually produce a racing GT version has clearly paid off. It corners perfectly flat and the Michelin Pilot Sports tyres did grumble a bit but in the dry it would be a tough car to unstick... in the wet it may be a very different proposition. We had some minor technical issues with the traction control but this was based mainly on not knowing quite how to switch it on and off!



The overall impression is that this is a true 'Grand Touring' car. It would take an easy day to waft you to the South of France (or maybe the Nurburgring) and then allow you to take it out on a track and give it some serious exercise.

On the way home I would hurl it around the back roads! Yes... I think this can legitimately be added to any list of GT 'Supercars', past or present.

Our thanks to Terry Madden of Wyles Hardy and his team for allowing us to drive one of these precious motorcars.