

## FEATURE ARTICLE

The T type was in production in different guises from the mid 1930s until the mid 1950s. With its classic looks and swept wings it's easy to see why it is a very popular car, but not very practical as an every day car.



## So you want to buy an MG?

If you are reading this article and have just joined the Club, but do not yet own an MG, you might be looking for some guidance in buying an example of the world's favourite sports car. In which case congratulations and welcome to the MG Car Club, you have made two excellent decisions that will have a positive influence on your lifestyle. You may of course be reading this article as an existing member with a modern MG who is thinking of buying a pre-war model or vice versa. Whatever the reason, this has been written as a general guide for those seeking to buy an MG and in what way the Club can be used to find help for each model.

The wide spectrum of cars in the MG range means that this article can only offer a general guide to the prospective buyer. The editorial team however are planning to follow it up with a series of articles over the coming months which cover each model type in more detail.

MGs have been sold since the 1920s and continued in production until MG Rover collapsed in April 2005 and the diversity of the range can be judged by looking at the MG Model Guide published in *MG Enthusiast* each month. What is surprising to the uninitiated is that large numbers of cars have survived from each decade compared with the relatively small number produced by a specialist sports car manufacturer selling to a niche market. The model made in the largest numbers is the much-loved MGB, but even that only reached half a million cars produced from

1963 to 1980 when the factory at Abingdon was closed. Although this was an impressive output for a small operation, it hardly compares with the millions of sports cars being manufactured by the great carmakers of the world. One could ask the question, "Why has such a small manufacturer commanded such a faithful following for so many years?" In order to answer this question it is important to understand a little about MG History.

### MG History

In the last eighty years MG production has taken place in three locations, namely Oxford, Abingdon and Longbridge. In 1925, MG cars were no more than special Bullnose Morris cars made in the back room of a car agency in Oxford called Morris Garages. The General Manager, Cecil Kimber recognised there was a market niche in the Oxford area for a vehicle to suit gentlemen seeking an affordable sporting car. Interest in these sporty Morris cars rapidly increased and they became known as Morris Garage Specials, later shortened to "MG." By 1929, production of MGs was growing rapidly and the fledgling MG Car Company moved the factory from Oxford to Abingdon where it stayed for nearly fifty years until the then owners, British Leyland, closed the plant. A new range of cars were then produced at what was the original Austin works in Longbridge near Birmingham starting with modified Mini Metros, Maestros and Montegos, and the rebirth

of the sports car with the manufacture of the RV8 in the early 90s. After these in 1995 came an all-new two-seater called the MGF, then five years later, sportier re-engineered versions of the Rover 25, 45 and 75 called the ZR, ZS and ZT.

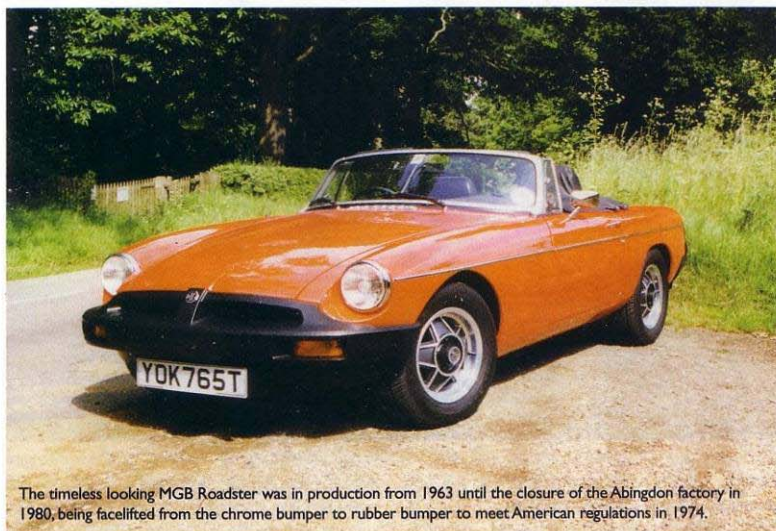
### Why are MGs so Popular?

The MG name is a worldwide brand recognised by enthusiasts for cars that offer affordable and fun motoring. They are unpretentious sporting cars and their long production history means that at some time or other one of your relatives or someone you meet will have owned an MG. This has built up a long-term affection for the cars across generations of enthusiasts that other manufacturers can only dream about.

The MG's reputation as an inexpensive sports car was built on the principle of using components from the high-volume, family cars of Morris in the 1920s and 30s, BMC in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, British Leyland in the 1970s and 80s and finally MG Rover for the later cars. This simple strategy ensured the price of components was kept low without compromising quality. Today the parts availability for most MGs is excellent because remanufacture of the wearing components is a worthwhile exercise in view of the numbers of each model that have survived. There are companies supplying new components for virtually every MG model and competition between suppliers means that the cost of maintaining your car will be surprisingly low. There



MG have made saloons from its very early Oxford manufacturing days in the 1920s. Shown right is the Midget available as a ZA or ZB from 1953-1958. Shown far right is the very practical ZS which is used as an every day car by a lot of people. It was manufactured from 2001 until the closure of the factory in 2005.



The timeless looking MGB Roadster was in production from 1963 until the closure of the Abingdon factory in 1980, being facelifted from the chrome bumper to rubber bumper to meet American regulations in 1974.



An MG Bullnose 14/28 – where it all started

'WITH SO MANY MODELS TO CHOOSE FROM, THE FIRST STEP IN THE JOURNEY TO MG OWNERSHIP IS TO HAVE SOME CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT YOU WANT AN MG FOR IN THE FIRST PLACE'

is even a company supplying new body shells for MGBs and Midgets if your car has reached the stage where its body is beyond repair!

Low running costs are a very good reason why MGs remain so popular and this is helped by a number of insurance companies who offer exceptionally good value packages to members of the MG Car Club – look for those who regularly advertise in *MG Enthusiast*.

#### Deciding on an MG Model

With so many models to choose from the first step in the journey to ownership is to have some clear idea of what you want an MG for in the first place. High on the list of the first time buyer will probably be the desire to experience open top motoring and for many it is one of the last freedoms of the road left to us in the nanny state we live in. If you have never been in a sports car however, it makes sense to get a ride from someone and experience wind-in-the-hair motoring to see if you actually like being out in the elements. The most popular misconception about open top motoring is that the changeable weather here in the UK will prevent you having the top off except for the hottest of summer days. With the later cars like the MGF the hood can be put down or up in seconds and you can therefore go topless on all but the most miserable days. This is not true however if your particular choice of MG has a pack away hood and you need ten minutes warning of rain.

The surprising thing about doing most of your motoring in a sports car is not the risk of getting wet, but of getting sunstroke! Driving in unrelenting hot sunshine with the absence of a roof over your head is at best uncomfortable and can be downright dangerous if you don't wear the appropriate headgear. Thank goodness then that MG cars also have a proud history of making sporting saloons which offer a combination of good handling, above average performance and in many cases can double as family cars in the week and hobby cars at the weekend. There should in theory be a car to suit all requirements in the total MG range.

The next big question to ask yourself is: "Why do I want to buy an MG?" It's a fair question that needs an honest answer if you are going to get what you want from the car – with so many models to choose from, the scope for error is huge. Answer the following questions honestly to decide whether you are interested in either a pre-war or post-war model.

1. Will ownership of the car be a hobby rather than provide a means of everyday transport?
2. Will it be garaged?
3. Can I carry out at least some of my own repairs and maintenance?

Unless you can say yes to all three questions, it is unlikely that you should consider buying anything pre-war and possibly no older than an MGB. In broad terms MGs made before the MGB will not take kindly to living permanently outside, where

they will deteriorate rapidly and become very unreliable. A pre-war car could be used as everyday transport for a time, but it will need a lot of maintenance and still have to be kept in a garage every night.

If you have answered "Yes" to the questions and you like the idea of owning a pre-war MG, you will need to immerse yourself in the different models to find what will suit your budget and skills. Start by looking through the *MG Enthusiast* Model Guide and follow up by reading more on the models that appeal to you in books like *The Magic of the Marque* by Mike Allison and the *MG File* by Eric Dymock. The MG Car Club can be of great assistance once you have decided on a model because we have range of Registers which exist to serve the needs of one particular group of MGs. The members of each register have a wealth of experience and knowledge and will be delighted to help you learn more about the car you choose. They can even assist you in finding a car for sale, finding a reputable restorer, spares and a recommended insurance company. The pre-war cars are generally more expensive and will probably have been restored at least once in their lifetime. You should therefore be aware that you could make an expensive mistake if you buy a particular car without guidance from an expert from the Register. A list of Register contact details is provided at the end of this article.

If you want to buy something younger like an MGB or MGF, you are presented with a different



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The MG Racing pedigree goes right back to the 1930s with cars like the number 19 K3 (photo right) through to the modern day MG TFs that run alongside the MG ZRs in the MGCC Trophy.

set of problems, but there is just as much scope for making a poor choice as with a pre-war MG. As mentioned earlier we plan to cover the popular MG models in depth in a series of articles dedicated to one model at a time, but it is worth repeating that all the Registers are able to offer a lot of advice and assistance before you take the plunge. Remember the golden rule of buying any second-hand car is "Buyer Beware", if it looks too good to be true it probably is!

### Tips for Buying an MG

There are three ways to acquire an MG: buy a new car from a dealer or buy a second-hand car from a dealer or a private buyer. The first option is rapidly disappearing as the supply of new MGs from MG Rover, which collapsed in 2005, is now almost used up. That leaves the options of buying from a dealer or from a private vendor and each offers different challenges to the unwary. The buying process can be reduced to some simple strategies which, if adhered to, can greatly increase your power as a buyer and reduce the risk of ending up with a 'dog'.

The first step before going to look at any car is to have a very clear idea of which model of MG you are looking for and your maximum budget. It is a good idea to list the specification you are seeking including colour preference, interior trim, engine size and wheel style. It is also worth listing a second and third choice for the body colour. This will help when deciding which cars to view, especially if there is a lot of choice.

The next step is to scan the Classified ads in the various magazines like *MG Enthusiast*, *Classic Cars*, *Autotrader* and *The Automobile* to find

cars for sale that meet as many of the specified points as possible on your list. Make a note of all the vendors and their contact details and their status as either private vendors or dealers. Now comes the moment of truth, you are going to have to make a decision as to which cars you are going to look at and which cars can be rejected. A few structured questions on the telephone to the vendor should help you make this decision and avoid a lot of travelling to view disappointing and inaccurately described cars.

The questions that you might like to put to a private vendor are set out here with some helpful comments on what to expect in reply.

#### 1. How long have you owned the car?

Any number in excess of five years on pre MGs means it might be worth travelling to view this particular car. It is extremely unlikely however that any MG owned by the vendor for less than say three years is worth travelling any distance to see because genuine MGs are generally owned by genuine enthusiasts who do not keep chopping and changing their cars.

#### 2. Can you describe the condition of the body, paint and interior, including any known faults?

Be ready to note everything that is offered as a reply. For instance a vague description such as, "It is not in bad repair for the year" is too weak and probably means there is much to hide. An honest car being sold by an enthusiastic owner will be described in minute detail often including any aspect where the car is not perfect.

#### 3. Is the car original or restored?

This is a really important and revealing question to ask because the older the car is, the less likely it is to be original. If it is indeed a genuine and

original car it will quite rightly command a premium price because supply of such cars outstrips supply many times over. If it is described as "original" you will need to discover exactly what the owner thinks this means. Begin by asking if the chassis number, engine number, trim and body colour conform to the build specification when the car left the factory. If the body colour has changed since it left the factory for instance it is definitely not original despite what the owner claims. Before setting out to look at the car tell the owner that you will need to see on arrival, documentary evidence in a log book or V5/V5(C) which clearly shows that all the numbers on the car match and it is the same colour as described. The reaction you receive from the vendor to this statement will speak volumes about their honesty, integrity and knowledge of the car they are selling, all without you leaving your armchair.

If on the other hand the car is restored, establish who did the work, when and to what standard. A proper and genuine restoration should be supported by a large history file of receipts which will be available for inspection with the car. It will include invoices for the work with many photographs showing the condition of parts and assemblies before and after work was carried out. The owner of a genuine car will be enthusiastic about the restoration and have intimate knowledge of the work and will be willing to send photos to corroborate the claims being made about the condition of the car. If the person was dedicated enough to spend large sums of money to return the car to 'as new' condition they will want to share the details with you. Vague answers like, "I can't remember now exactly what was





A Vintage MG.  
Summer motoring  
doesn't get any better.



A period shot of a 1929 18/80 MK I saloon  
being used during a trial.

done" are frankly unbelievable and are a big turn off. Waste no more time on this example and move on to the next.

#### 4. Do you know the car's history?

This is another very revealing question. Lack of history is not in itself a good reason to reject a car, but the right sort of history can be a very good reason to include it on the list of cars to view with some urgency. History of ownership is all very well if it includes a well-known personality, which can add thousands of pounds to the value of an otherwise dull car, but it tells you nothing about the car's current condition. Far more interesting is a file of invoices dating back many years because they can flesh out a picture of how the car has been used and cared for by its various owners. If this is accompanied by past copies of MOT certificates and service records with the current mileage recorded, one can start to work out if the mileage claimed for the car is genuine. In exceptional cases the owner or owners will have kept a log of important work and events going back many years. The existence of such a log becomes a very relevant reason to view the car because it is proof of the history of this particular car and it gives it character. If you are lucky enough to come across such an example, be prepared to move quickly because it is more than likely that the car is a genuine sale and it will soon be sold.

#### 5. Is the car always kept in garage?

Do you really want to take a 200 mile round trip to look at a car that is kept in the street all day?

#### 6. Does the car drip any oil?

This is a bit sneaky because most MGs made before 1980 leak oil to some extent. If the owner claims it does not leak without detailing what efforts he has taken to stop them, then you know something about his integrity don't you?

#### 7. Has it ever been involved in an accident?

By asking the question you are giving the vendor the opportunity to inform you of accidents that have occurred whilst the car has been in his or her care. On a twenty or thirty year old car it is likely to have been in some scrape or another; but if it has been rebuilt from a write off this may influence your enthusiasm to travel to see it.

Be aware though, the car could have had multiple owners and the current owner may genuinely be unaware of previous damage.

#### 8. How many miles a year does the car do?

If the car spends most of its time in a dry garage and is used as a hobby for Club events and the occasional run, it will travel less than 3000 miles per annum. More modern cars with high mileage are probably working cars, but if there is evidence of regular servicing they can still be an attractive proposition. The real worries start with cars that have more or less been abandoned for one or more years whether they have been stored inside or outside. Why was it taken off the road? How

much time and money must be spent recommissioning the car just to try it and then find the engine is completely worn out?

#### 9. Are you a member of the MG Car Club?

If the owner is a long-standing member of the Club this can be a good indication that the car they are selling is genuine. They may be active in the Register or known to other members.

#### 10. Why do you want to sell the car?

A good answer might be, "I have enjoyed the car for x years and now want to try another model," or "I need to sell the car to fund the restoration of another MG." These are plausible reasons to sell, but the alarm bells should start ringing if the owner claims that they have not used the car for some time and they need the space. Any MG in good, sound, usable condition is a valuable asset and it is unlikely that a genuine enthusiast would let it fall in to disuse. It is safe to assume that the car is in poor condition and you will save more money by rejecting it from your list for viewing.

What happens if you have found a dealer advertising the car you are looking for? Most MG dealers who advertise in *MG Enthusiast* have been in business for many years and have a reputation to live up to. This means you can buy with a certain amount of confidence, knowing that although you may pay a little more for a car than you would pay a private vendor it will, with some dealers, be supported by a company warranty scheme. Most dealers have a web site so that you should be able to view photos of the car and obtain a description of its general condition before travelling to see it. The dealer will inform you of any paperwork that comes with the car to describe its history and any known faults. Generally buying from a reputable dealer is a reasonably safe option, but remember the dealer is in business to make a profit and you will be pay top prices for quality cars.

#### Summary

In conclusion then, this article should have provided you with enough information to get started on buying an MG and where to go for help. Good luck in your search for the car that is just right for you and remember the two golden rules of buying any car;

- Don't just buy the first one you look at.
- Take an expert with you when you view the chosen car!

Once you have an MG, you will be made very welcome at the many events organised by the Club, whether you plan to take part in auto testing, trials, road runs or just drop in at your local natter to show off your new pride and joy.

John Day