

# Classic choice

# MGC

**Savaged by the press and killed after two years by the failure of its fellow engine user, the MGC had an unhappy production life, but is now regarded as a pleasant fast tourer. Jonathan Wood investigates purchasing pitfalls**

It would not be unfair to describe the MGC as one of Abingdon's less successful models. For the C went into production in 1967 and lasted a mere two years by which time 8999 had been produced. By contrast around 55,000 MGBs were built over a similar period.

The inevitable demise of the Abingdon built Austin Healey 3000 at the end of 1967, resulted in a number of projects being mooted by BMC to fill the gap. The car that finally appeared in October 1967 superficially resembled the MGB though there were plenty of differences beneath the surface.

Perhaps the principal external alteration was the fact that the bonnet contained a couple of bulges indicating that unlike the four cylinder B, the C boasted a six cylinder power unit. There was a forward one indicating the shape of the engine, while a further protrusion allowed clearance for the frontal one of two SU carburettors. Although the majority of body parts, doors, wings and running gear were shared with the MGB, the car stood on 15 rather than 14 inch wheels. And to permit the intrusion of the six cylinder engine, the front suspension employed a torsion bar and wishbone independent layout, aided by telescopic shock absorbers, both features that were unique to the model.

Under the bonnet was a 2912cc six and although it shared cylinder dimensions (83 x 88mm) with the Austin Healey 3000's C type BMC power unit this was *not* the engine used in the C. This particular motor which the MG shared with the Austin 3-litre saloon announced at the same time, was based on a BMC Australia 2433cc six which was, in effect, one and a half BMC B series four cylinder units! As it was also destined for the big Austin saloon, the Corporation embarked on a major re-design which included the introduction of three extra main bearings (making seven in all) and a re-positioning of the cylinder bores that produced an engine that was 1 3/4 inches shorter than the old Austin Healey unit. Yet it produced *less* power, 145 bhp, compared with the Big Healey's 150. A new synchromesh gearbox, as used on the MGB Mark 11, was employed and this was also used on the 3-litre. However, there are a number of permutations on the ratios and these will be considered in the appropriate section. Overdrive and automatic transmission were also available as optional extras.

Although the car had a 120 mile an hour top speed, it suffered much adverse press comment, particularly relating to its handling, and the concept never really jelled. Engine shortcomings were never properly ironed out (the failure of the 3-litre saloon to sell in appreciable numbers saw to that) and the MGC ceased production in August/September 1969. Just over half the cars produced had been exported to America while the Tourer and GT versions were produced in about equal numbers.

But what are the snags and wrinkles related

to buying one of these controversial Abingdon products? To find out I went to talk to Vic Young, an enthusiastic MGC owner, who races his car and is also spares secretary of the MG Car Club.

## Bodywork

Make no mistake, the MGC has a rigid body structure, particularly around the front end. The bodywork is all steel, though unlike the B the bonnet is aluminium, so you're unlikely to experience rusting in that particular component. But items like the doors, wings and windscreen are pure MGB and the metal items tend to deteriorate in a similar way. Therefore check the rear wheel arch, particularly around its forward, lower end, a notorious rust point. Sills, as ever, are a vulnerable area. Have a look at the inners as well as the outers. Then the front wings can rust badly along their bottom edges.

The floor can also suffer. Lift the carpeting and examine underneath around the drivers and passengers seats. While many standard components were employed, as already noted, a few parts are special to the car, the cross panel which locates the radiator grille being the most notable and damage, either by rust or more likely collision, can be awkward to rectify.

## Suspension, steering and brakes

As already recounted, the MGC uses a torsion bar independent front suspension system. The bars run back to anchorage points below the front seats and, as such, give remarkably little trouble. Unfortunately the wishbones and front swivels are rather prone to wear and if a C is being used regularly then it will probably require a front end grease about once a month! So if you're contemplating a second hand one a suspension check should be high on priority lists.

The rack and pinion steering gear is peculiar to the car and shouldn't present too many problems. Providing it's lubricated regularly you should be alright but if the rubber gaiters split, or are otherwise damaged, water can get in, the unit rusts and wear soon develops.

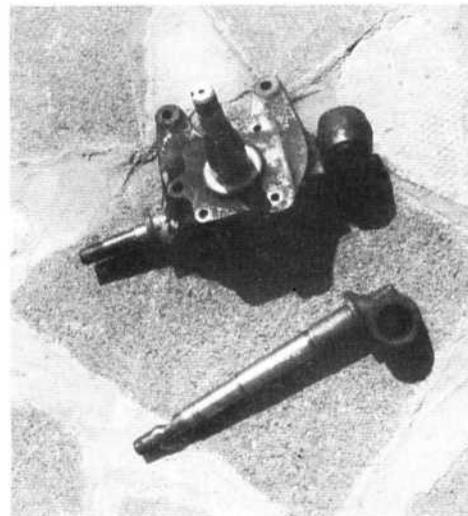
Unlike the B which used Lockheed brakes the MGC employs Girling hydraulics with 11 inch discs at the front and drums at the rear. Fortunately P16 calipers are used on the discs and these are also employed on a wide variety of other cars, including the Austin 1800, Fords and Vauxhalls. Don't forget to check disc for scoring for signs of worn pads or a seized piston. Either disc or wire wheels, were offered, the former using a five stud fixing.

## Engine, gearbox and transmission

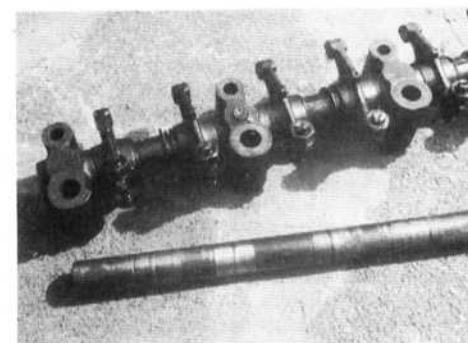
The C's engine, which in substance is shared with the Austin 3-litre saloon does have peculiarities all of its own. Items like the valves and springs, along with the sump were used only in the C and it should be pointed out that

the engine does have a reputation for eating its piston rings, and if the car you're contemplating smokes somewhat then this might well be a reason. The rocker shaft also wears badly so keep an ear open for any undue top end clatter and don't be put off by platitudes suggesting that the valves need adjusting! But on the plus side the engine is a long lived unit, remember that robust bottom end, and mileages can exceed 100,000 without major overhaul. Oil pressure should be 15 to 20 at tickover and a reading of 40 psi at 2000 rpm is about right. Be suspicious of anything lower.

Now to the gearbox. This suffers from a variety of internal ratios but it is a major weakness on the car as the unit isn't really up to the job of coping with the power produced by the engine. Consequently the layshaft bearings tend to break down, the shaft drops and puts undue pressure on the cogs. So if you have occasion to drive the C you're thinking of buying, listen out for whine on second and third gears. And what about those ratios? When the C was first announced it was offered



*Kingpins on the C are prone to wear unless greased regularly; replacements are only available from specialists now.*



*The badly scored rocker shaft leads to noisy tappets and can't be adjusted out.*



*Split steering arm gaiters let water in producing this badly pitted rack and pinion set.*

with two sets of gears. The non overdrive units employed internals shared with the all synchromesh MGB while the overdrive box used a close ratio gear cluster. But all later cars were fitted with the close ratio box, whether they used overdrive or not.

The rear axle is similar in layout to that used on the MGB (certainly the half shafts are the same) but the ratios are unique to the model. Originally a 3.07 ratio was employed on those examples not fitted with overdrive, though overdrive and automatic (Borg-Warner 35) C's used a 3.3 unit. About half way through the production run, the ratios were changed. Non overdrive and automatic used 3.3 ratios while the overdrive cars used a 3.7 one.

### Interior

The C's interior is basically the same as the MGB. The seats are upholstered in leather though the leather covered steering wheel is a departure from previous practice. Later cars can be identified by the introduction of a ash tray. A heated rear window was a standard

fitment on the GT though the interior heater was listed as an optional extra!

### Spares and how much?

Spares aren't in the main, a problem with the C, except those items that are unique to the model. This applies to such parts as steering racking, king pins and some engine components, such as that vulnerable rocker shaft. In the first instance a visit to your friendly Unipart stockist may produce some pleasant surprises but obviously the trickier spares may present some problems. Membership of a club would certainly appear to be a must and for instance, Vic Young of 75 Tollers Lane, Old Coulsdon, Surrey can organise vital spares such as front suspension, steering and engine parts. If you want to join the MG Car Club then write to the secretary, Sheila Lawrence at 67 Wide Bargate, Boston, Lincs. The MG Owners Club also welcomes these cars. Details from Roche Bentley of 13 Church End, Over, Cambridgeshire. A number of specialists can offer spares for the MGC. Just two are Toul-

min Motors of 103-105 Windmill Road, Brentford, Middlesex and another is John Hill's MGB Centre of Arthur Street, Ridditch, Worcs.

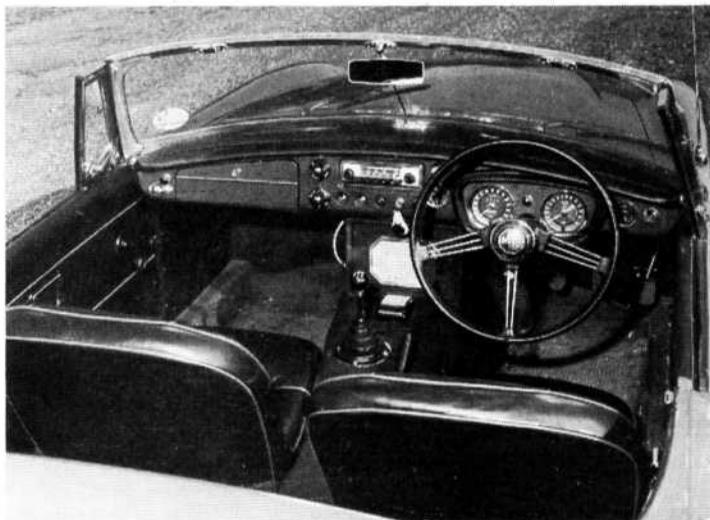
What can you expect to pay for a good C? Well, prices start at around £600 but £1500 should produce a reasonable one though concours examples have exceeded the £2000 mark. There isn't much to choose between the open and closed cars but Vic reckons that GT handles better than the Tourer. ●

### Production

Tourer 4542, GT 4457 Total 8999



Roadster version, above; Cs had 15-inch wheels. Below left, GT handled better than understeering roadster. Below, the 3-litre six never had the urgency of the big Healey unit and was quieter with fewer fan blades.



Cockpit is functional without luxury; overdrive switch is on right of fascia. Below, check inner and outer sills which are subject to corrosion.



The bead on the rear wing top is a favourite area for rust bubbles. Below, boot space on the roadster is adequate but lacks trim.

