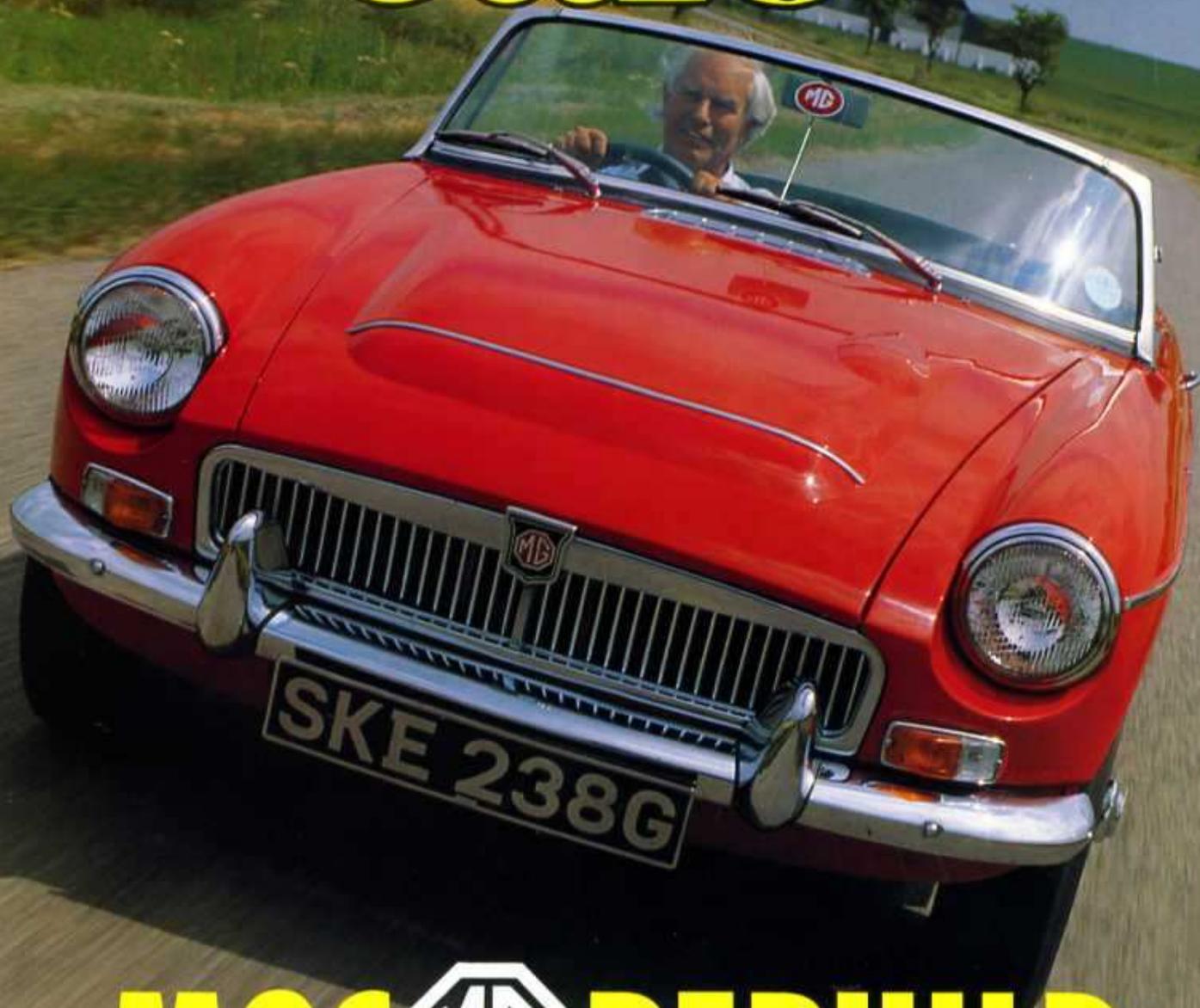


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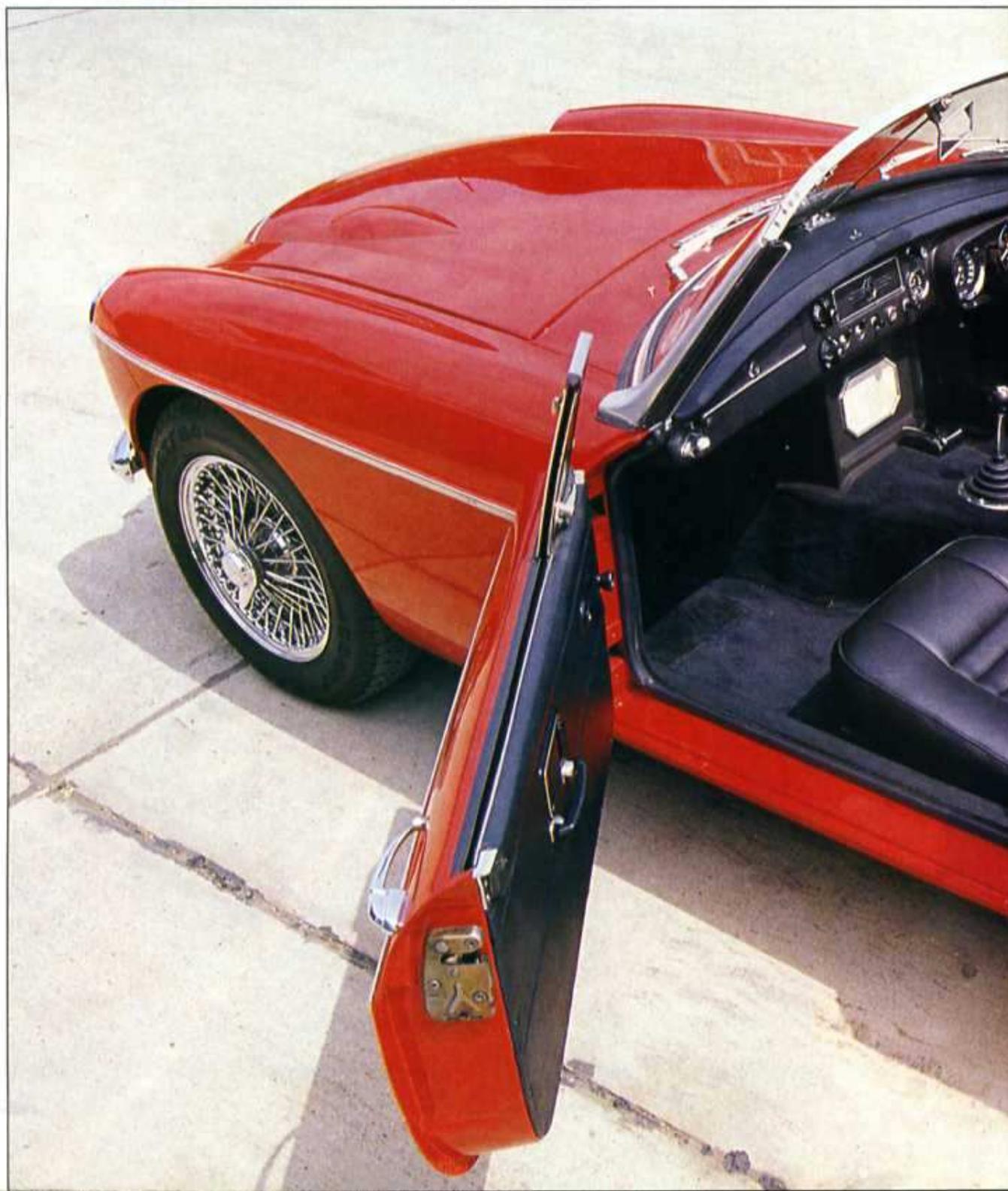




MGC

REVISITED

*A drive in a meticulously restored 1968
MGC brings back memories for Stuart Bladon*



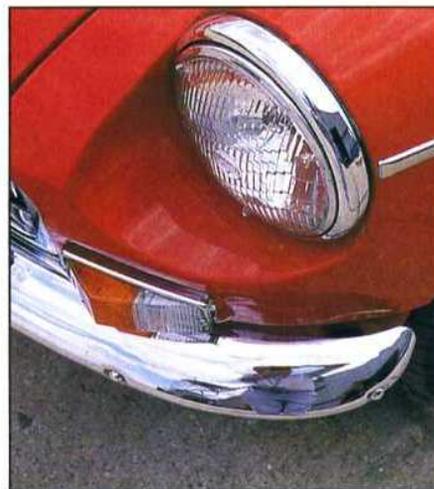
SOME new car introductions fade from the memory of a motoring writer after many years, but a few specially significant ones remain clearly remembered, such as the time 22 years ago when I went to Abingdon to be briefed for a description of the new MG. I was met by the late Wilson McComb who, as PR representative, took me out for a drive in an automatic version, and explained all the intricacies of the work that had been done to enable the big 3-litre six to be squeezed into the confined under-bonnet space of the MGB.

The suspension had been revised because the strong cross member had to be removed to make way for the engine,

so torsion bars replaced the coil springs of the MGB. The six-cylinder 2,912cc engine developed 150bhp and 174lb ft of torque, so it needed a new and larger gearbox which meant reshaping and enlarging the transmission tunnel.

This meant that automatic transmission, using the Borg Warner 35 unit, could also be offered, though this was mainly to appeal to the American

DIY stripping out and re-fitting combined with economical use of professional specialists has kept down the cost of this MGC rebuild. The result is excellent. Photography by Maurice Rowe



market; most enthusiasts would seek the standard manual transmission model, with the optional Laycock overdrive working on third and fourth gears, adding £61 to the £1,102 total price of the new MGC.

I thought the automatic MGC which was tried first seemed disappointing, with the engine sounding fussy and the clumsy transmission selector with its funny 'cotton reel' to be lifted to clear a safety stop between selector positions, and the silly 'L2' and 'L1' markings. But the MGC manual version was something quite different.

Here was the performance the MGB had always lacked, and the beefy 3-litre, although quite an old pushrod design, had been improved by redesigning it with seven main bearings, which made it impressively smoother than the old four-bearing unit in the Austin-Healey 3000. It gave terrific punch, with top speed of 120mph, and 0-60mph acceleration in 10sec – a quick time then, and not slow even by today's standards. It didn't rev very hard, but then it didn't need to.

Some aspects, though, were not so good: the steering was rather heavy due to the increase of weight at the front, the understeer greater as a result of increasing the proportion of total weight carried by the front wheels from 52.6 to 54.8 per cent, and the ride appreciably more choppy and lively with the torsion bars than in the MGB.

These impressions were recalled recently when I went to St Neots in Cambridgeshire to try the 1968 example which has been meticulously restored by Jim Baynam, with every effort to make the car as near as possible a genuine representation of how the MGC was when new. But for Jim, too, it was a case of 'MGC Revisited', since it is not the first example he had owned.

His late father indoctrinated him with the merits of six-cylinder engines, and a friend drew his attention to the existence of the MGC as the six-cylinder version of the MGB, but there seemed to be few on the market, so he tried a 'cars wanted' advert, and finished up paying 'over the odds' at £720 for a very well kept and fully equipped MGC in the summer of 1976. By the time he sold it five years later the



The aluminium bonnet, complete with distinctive bulge needed careful attention to avoid distortion during restoration

"Fortunately it was noticed that this time there was no oil pressure"

Classic cars movement was well under way, and it went for £3,250, most of which he spent on a MGB V8.

He then became involved in MG racing with a Midget. At the same time, allocation of a company car meant that V8 was deteriorating, ungaraged and little used, so he sold it. The relocation of the firm for which he worked, from London to Stevenage, resulted in a move to a house with a garage at St Neots: he began to hanker after the MGC days and started to look around in the hope of finding one.

Eventually one came up, described as 'part restored'. It had been on blocks in a small lock-up garage in Romford for nine years. The owner had 'done the easy bits of the restoration' and then run out of interest in the project. Just under two years ago, Jim Baynam bought it for £900. It was 'very tatty', full of junk, and had a seized engine; but the floor was good.

Installed in his new home at St Neots, Jim found himself very much in the centre of 'MG country', with many enthusiasts for the marque living nearby, and the MG Owners Club not far away, at Swavesey.

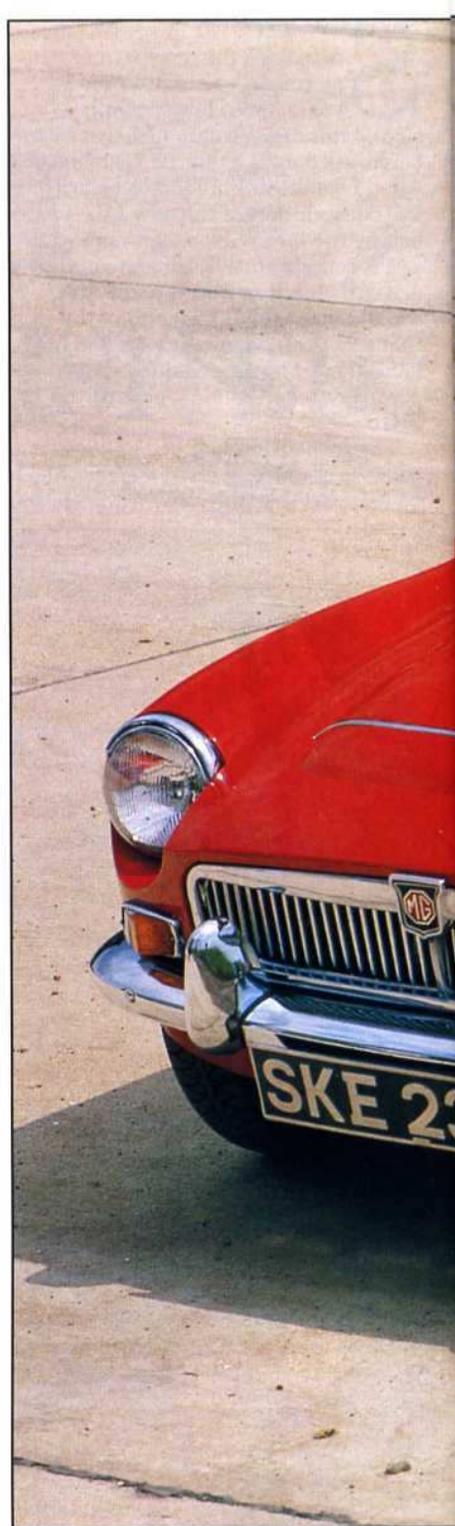
After the car had been trailered to St Neots, the engine came out and went to Oselli Engineering in Oxford, and a complete rebuild including the gearbox was completed for £1,500.

Despite its enormous weight, Jim managed to bring the engine back from Oxford in the boot of his Vauxhall Astra; and when it was started for the first time after the rebuild, it ran beautifully. It was switched off for some adjustments and started again, when fortunately it was noticed that this time there was no oil pressure. Previously, the pressure had been well up.

This led to a major strip-down with the engine in situ – exhaust off, sump off, oil pump off – to discover that the oil pump drive had failed, and leading to the question: 'Where do I get one of those?' For parts like these, components from scrapped Austin Westminsters can come to the rescue.

Fortunately, the loss of oil pressure had been detected in time to prevent any damage from being done, but it's a timely warning to all who are running an old engine for the first time after a rebuild, to keep an eye on the oil pressure gauge and remember to keep monitoring it.

While the engine and gearbox were being overhauled, the strip-down and rebuild of the body had been going steadily ahead, with most of the work being done at the Owners Club workshop at Swavesey. New front wings were fitted, and then it was decided that perhaps the doors had better be renewed as well. It was while the body was at Swavesey that it was spotted by Editor, Tony Dron, who started to take



Above, the MGC with its torsion bar suspension sits higher than the four-cylinder MGB. Rebuilding the 3-litre six-pot engine was not without drama as the oil pump drive sheared





an interest in this rebuild.

When the wings were off, inspection of the state of the sills was easy, and one of these had rusted on the outside and had to be welded. If the inner sill members have rusted, says Jim Baynam, repairs can start to get expensive.

A little credit to offset the costs was realised when he found he was able to sell the old front wings and doors.

Interior trim was supplied by Moto-Build of Hounslow, and paintwork in low-bake British Racing Green was done at Swavesey. Jim's policy was to do all the preparation, stripping out, and rebuilding himself, and to use specialists for welding, painting and trimming.

As the finished car began to take shape, some things went easily, such as the radiator grille, which he was able to take to pieces, clean up and rebuild, while some proved difficult, such as the quest for tyres. Because of the higher speed potential of the MGC, it graduated from 14in wheels to 15in, with Dunlop SP41 tyres as standard. Original equipment wheels were pressed steel, with painted wire wheels optional.

For SKE 238G, Jim Baynam managed to get 15 x 5in chromed wire wheels from Moto-Build, as they are in demand for Triumph TR4/5; but getting suitable tyres for them was a problem. "You can't get the original size (164-15) in high speed rating," says Jim, "and everyone tries to sell 185/70, or you can buy SR tyres because they're in demand for the London taxi, but obviously not suitable for a 120mph car." Eventually he found some TR-rated tyres in the original size, but regrets that he did not go for the 185/70 although they're a bit big for the rim.

All parts for the MGC he found to be more expensive than for an MGB, with £75-£80 per side the going rate for king pins, and £100 for a steering rack. But things seemed to be going particularly crazy when he was quoted £50 for a windscreen washer bottle!

It worried Jim that the original steering wheel had been replaced by a Mota Lita wheel, and he wanted the great big leather trimmed wheel which Sid Enever, chief designer of the MGC, had specified for the new car, but shied away on being quoted £150 for one of these. Shortly afterwards he spotted an MGC at a race meeting, also fitted with a Mota Lita 15in wheel and on asking what had happened to original one was told: "It's still hanging up in the garage; you can have it if you want."

Returning with this trophy, he fitted it, only to find that he couldn't drive the car with the original wheel on. "I just couldn't get clearance to bring my leg up to declutch," he said. So the Mota Lita had to go back on, and the redundant original wheel was returned.

Tracking down some small parts that were unavailable proved difficult. The original water valve for the heater proved unobtainable, and the heater was a non-standard item, costing £15 extra on the accessories list for MGB or

"For me this MGC seemed a faithful replica of the original"

MGC. A suitable alternative proved to be the heater valve for a Mini.

Similar difficulty came over the O-rings to seal the air filter to the SU carburettors, and a friend who worked for a company producing rubber seals agreed to help. "You're very lucky," he was told later; "I've managed to get the seals for you. They're exactly the same size as some we supply for the gun turret of a Sherman tank!"

Brake and fuel pipes, and brake discs, were replaced, and all chrome parts except for the grille were purchased new and fitted, including the individual MGC letters on the boot lid.

The bonnet - with its shapely bulges which distinguish the MGC from the B, as well as providing the necessary clearance for the taller engine and the top of its forward SU carburettor - is made of aluminium; and a replacement was not available. The original panel had to be carefully stripped to the metal, reshaped, and repainted. The top bracket for the bonnet stay had been reversed and extended so that the bonnet prop fits in a rather odd way, but as a new bracket was not available it was decided to leave this non-standard item as it is. Jim Baynam has no plans for the car as a concours entry, so such slight deviations from standard can be tolerated.

The one remaining job, to complete the MGC's restoration, is to replace the hood, and he is trying to get hold of the later hood frame which folded in the middle instead of pulling apart into separate pieces.

From start to finish, the main restoration has taken 18 months, with a lot of the time spent in the body and paint shops; and total cost including buying it has been about £6,000. The MGC is now worth, he reckons, at least twice that. Having seen it, I suspect that is a conservative estimate.

He now has a car which brings special pleasure to drive, with its wonderfully positive steering, and tidy feel on the road, recalling all the distinctive features of the MG sports such as the very close gates of the four-speed gearbox, so that there is hardly any movement across from second to third, and the neat action of the overdrive. To touch the switch with a right hand which is still holding the wheel, and experience the deliciously smooth sustained-power change up from fourth to overdrive fourth is so superior to a modern five-speed change that one realises that the introduction of five-speed instead of overdrive was done more for production economy than for driver pleasure or convenience.

For me, this MGC seemed a faithful replica of the original, with the same road behaviour, noises, reactions and feel of the controls as I remember when trying it before the launch in October 1967. ▲





Far left, owner Jim Baynam with his restored car after eighteen months' work

Left, Stuart Bladon relives memories of his first MGC drive 22 years ago

Below, rear view reveals the non-original steering wheel, retained because Jim Baynam couldn't move his knees under the correct one!

